The Grimm Truth

by GalahadsGurl

Summary

Nothing is what it seems when it comes to the Brothers Grimm, but one truth is self-evident.

Family is Everything.

(Special thanks to angelskuuipo for the name change. It's awesome. We'll keep the addendum for a couple days, then we'll make it just "The Grimm Truth". Again, thank you angelskuuipo! This was perfect!"

(In response to multiple requests for Loki as a Grimm, I feel the need to state this here. Loki as Grimm does not fit in the predetermined storyline. He is the villain, not the good guy, and he will not feature as a member of the family. Thank you for your understanding and continued love of this fic. You all are amazing.)

Notes

So I seriously have no idea what the hell this is. This utterly brilliant, if completely frustrating idea just slapped me in the face out of the blue one day and I had to write it down. I mess horribly with timelines, just a warning in advance, but quite frankly, it's hard to get them to work together seamlessly, so I don't think I'm out of the norm with having had to do this. This story isn't going to go very deeply into the movies themselves, as I prefer to focus on the relationships between the brothers as they move through the movies. And in the meantime, I hope you enjoy! Let me know what you think!

(In response to multiple requests for Loki as a Grimm, I feel the need to state this here. Loki as Grimm does not fit in the predetermined storyline. He is the villain, not the good guy, and he will not feature as a member of the family. Thank you for your understanding and continued love of this fic. You all are amazing.)
The Brothers Grimm are born
Chapter 1

Forty years ago – before there were the Brothers Grimm – there were the brothers Cahill; lab rats created in hopes of duplicating the Army’s Captain America Program. The project was funded primarily by Howard Stark, rumored among the scientists to have been a friend of the actual Captain America. The geneticist in charge, however, was one Dr. Frank Cahill, and it was he who was responsible for the creation of the brothers themselves. There were five brothers in total, born and raised in a lab under the Hoover Dam, each of them tended to and protected by a young woman known to her superiors as Mary Peters.

Project Cahill was created to breed an Alpha Team for the Army of enhanced soldiers, each born with a specific function and bred to have all the traits best able to fulfill this function. The first three of the brothers had been unequivocal successes, each shaped by minimal genetic enhancement. William Michael Cahill was born first, born to be the leader of the brothers and bred to be super intelligent, highly analytical, and a first rate officer. Barney Joshua Cahill followed two years after, born to be the questioning second in command, rebellious and insubordinate. Jason Leonard Cahill came another two years after Barney, born to be the brothers’ tech support and designed to be smart, responsible, and adaptable.

After these successes, the doctors and scientists began to get more inventive with their creations, playing God much more liberally in an attempt to make even more perfect soldiers. Kenneth James Cahill had been born to be the weapons and demolitions expert and had been bred to be physically strong, loyal and easily impressionable. Unfortunately, not a lot of time had been paid to his intelligence while they’d been manipulating his genome. As a result, the presiding authority over the project, General Thaddeus “Thunderbolt” Ross, considered him to be a failure as he failed IQ test after IQ test despite his prowess within the field he’d been born to fill. Ross ordered the boy terminated; an order that would shape the futures of the Brothers Grimm more than any other occurrence in their lives.

Clinton Francis Cahill was born next. He’d been created to be their sniper and had been bred with visual enhancements that would assist in making him the best at the job. The tinkering had improved his optical acuity a hundredfold, though it had had a negative effect upon his auditory receptors in that he was mostly deaf upon his birth. Fortunately, his aural acuity was considered expendable when the only purpose to his creation was to be able to see very long distances and to shoot things with 100% accuracy. Clint was two weeks away from his third birthday when the woman the project authorities knew only as “Mary Peters” kidnapped the brothers and escaped with them from the lab in order to save Kenneth from the extermination General Ross had in store for him.

“Mary Peters” was the pseudonym given to Marina Ivanovna Petrovka, a Soviet assassin and spy, by her handlers when they ordered her to take the position as Stark’s assistant on the project. Marina Petrovka had been taken from her family at the age of four and handed into the dubious care of the Academy. The Academy then enrolled the four year old into their Red Room Program. They enhanced her, they molded her and they trained her to be a perfect spy for Mother Russia, all of it for the sole betterment of her handlers. The assignment was her first solo mission. She was sent to spy on Stark and report on his projects; instead she fell completely in love with the children created by the program, from the very first moment Stark placed an infant William in her arms and told her to care for him and all of the other children the project would inevitably produce.

Despite the deception she perpetrated against her superiors, Marina Petrovka was the only adult who had never lied to the five young boys in her charge. She was arguably the only one within the project to love them and treat them as children. Unlike the rest of her contemporaries, she never once treated them as weapons to be molded and used. She taught them to speak Russian, offering them each a
secret language to protect their secrets from the hostile eyes that followed them everywhere. When it came to light that the youngest of the brothers had a very limited audible range, Marina insisted to her superiors that each of them should be required to learn ASL, so as to be able to communicate effectively with the hearing impaired child. Marina argued relentlessly with General Ross and Dr Cahill about allowing the children some amount of playtime, even if it had been only a slight handful of minutes that never seemed to last very long. She encouraged them in the training Ross imposed on them, held their hands through the countless physicals and exams that Dr. Cahill put them through, helped them with the simple things that children needed to learn as they grew up, tutored them in their academic studies, and practiced their hand to hand techniques with them. She was a loving, constant presence in each of their lives, and the boys were utterly devoted and fiercely loyal because of it.

At the time of their escape, William was 12, Barney was 10, Jason was eight, Kenneth was barely six years old and Clint was almost three; and yet they could barely be called children. The four oldest boys had all begun training within their fields as soon as they’d turned four years old. Only Clint had been spared the rigorous training that Ross had forced upon the project’s creations as he’d been too young at the time of their escape. The only constant they’d ever had was Marina Ivanovna Petrovka, who had spent her own childhood immersed within a government training curriculum designed to transform a precocious four year old into a remorseless killing machine. The very act of pretending to be normal children was the hardest lesson they ever had to learn.

They’d stumbled around for awhile, torn between trying to hide from the Army and trying to survive. After being on their own for a little more than a year, the six of them – each strange and unnatural in their own way – finally found refuge with Carter’s Circus. The Carters were a kindly older couple who took them in and gave them an extended, if odd, family of sorts. Marina left the name “Mary Peters” behind, effectively defecting from the KGB in all ways that mattered. Mrs. Carter, a warm and gentle woman they each came to call Babushka, teased the brothers relentlessly for their grim outlook on life, earning the brothers the last name of Grimm and the collective moniker of “The Brothers Grimm.”

The circus became their home, the closest thing any of them had ever had to one. Barney fell under the wing of a pair of side show artists named Swordsman and Trickshot, who trained him to assist the pair in their act. William used his analytical training to take over the accounting from Mr. Carter, to whom math was a bothersome and always avoidable chore. Jason became the Carters’ go-to mechanic and electrician, able to repair anything from a blown out fuse to their ancient PA system. Kenneth loved working with the animals, and even the most severe trainers adored the cheerful boy with the megawatt grin. Clint could always be found on Marina’s heels as she moved about the chores she’d been assigned by Mrs. Carter, talking in Russian at a mile a minute just so that Marina would know he was there. At the end of the day though, each of the boys remained firmly under Marina’s care and tutelage as she continued the academic tutoring and combat training the Army had implemented for them while they’d still been under the Army’s control.

It was when William turned 18 that everything changed. It was June 12, 1985, when Will walked into the tiny railcar that housed the six members of their odd little family. Marina was sitting at the table with Kenny; the two of them were working on the 11 year old’s math homework. It was no secret that Kenneth was not at the same intellectual level academically as the rest of his brothers, but he was in no way stupid. Will had kicked the asses of several of the other carnies for suggesting otherwise. Kenny looked up at the sound of the door, the wide bright grin on his lips lighting up the room at the sight of his oldest brother. “Will!”

Will chuckled, coming over to ruffle the younger boy’s blond hair. “Hey Kenny. How’s it coming?”

Marina’s smile was indulgent and fond as she caressed the 11 year old’s temple, “He’s getting it.
Slow and steady wins the race, right, solnechnyy svet?"

Kenny’s nod was so emphatic, Will thought he was going to shake his head right off his shoulders for a second. “That’s great, Kenny. I’m proud of you.” Crouching next to the table, Will looked up into Kenny’s face with a soft smile, “Can you work on the next problem while I steal Marina for a second?”

Marina’s eyes narrowed lightly, and Will gave her a sheepish smile. If Will had a best friend, he would be forced to admit that Marina was probably it. He’d never been able to lie to her, even when he’d used her to practice on, and it looked like she was already onto him. Kenny nodded again, “Okay, Will.”

“Thanks Buddy.”

Kenny was already turning his attention back to the next question on his assignment as Will stood and offered a hand to Marina to assist her from the chair. Mercifully, Marina said nothing as she accepted the hand and followed him back into the tiny broom closet she’d converted into her bedroom. The railcar only had two actual bedrooms, and the boys split them between the five of them; Will, Clint and Kenny shared one while Jason and Barney shared the other. Sitting down on her tiny cot, she looked up at him with arms crossed over her chest and a wary frown on her lips.

“All right, Misha; what are you kicking around in that brain of yours?”

Will faltered at the term; the diminutive of his middle name was Marina’s alone and he never failed to fall even more in love with her whenever she used it. He took a deep breath and sat down next to her. Reaching out, he took one of her hands and held it tightly for a moment as he tried to figure out exactly what he wanted to say to her. “Marina, I want to join the Army.”

The pretty brunette blinked once, visibly taken aback by the statement. Once it registered, her whole body relaxed and she regarded him with a steady calm that sent chills up his spine. “The Army? Surely you don’t mean the same Army that manipulated and abused you and your brothers simply for no other reason than because they created you, they owned you.”

The young man grimaced at her overly polite tone; he’d known that this conversation was not going to go over well, but he’d hoped that she would at least be able to accept the decision in the long run. “Yes, I mean that Army. Look, I’m not going to enlist as William Cahill; that would be stupid. I’d enlist as William Grimm; Mr. Stark created entire identities for us with valid social security numbers and birth certificates and documentation. And to be frank, it’s probably the last place the Army would think to look for me.”

Marina grunted, unable to deny that at least. She sat for a long moment, just watching him as she processed the request and examined every argument he could make from every angle she could find. Finally, she sighed and squeezed his hand once in reassurance, before asking, “Why, Misha? Why the Army?”

“I feel like I can do more. Despite how and why I was created, I am American and I believe that I have the potential to do more than this.”

“This?”

“This; be a carnie. I can do something to help people, to be a better person than the Army created me to be. I want to take what they spent my childhood drilling into me for their own purposes, and do something for the good of mankind.”

“What about the boys?”
“You’ll be here. I know you, Marina, you’d never leave them. And it’s not like I’ll never come back. Whenever I have leave, I’ll find the circus and I’ll be here, I promise.”

“And what are you going to tell the boys about why you’re leaving?”

“Same thing I’m telling you. I want to do more than this. I will always be grateful to Babushka and Dedushka and the crazy circus freaks we call family, but I want more.”

Marina nodded slowly, reaching up to brush a strand of blond hair from his forehead. Cupping his cheek in her palm, she brushed her thumb tenderly over his skin. “All right.”

Will’s whole being brightened at her acceptance, his body straightening and practically vibrating with his excitement. “Really?!”

“Really,” she sighed quietly, “If this is what you want, Misha, I won’t stand in your way. Just promise me you’ll be careful. They’re still hunting for you and the boys; you and I both know that. Don’t do anything that would lead them to make connections between ‘William Grimm’ and ‘William Cahill,’ okay? If they take you into custody, there’s nothing that I can do. I won’t risk the other boys, to come and rescue you.”

Will shook his head with a grin, throwing his arms around her and hugging her fiercely. “I wouldn’t expect you to. I’ll be careful, Marina, I promise.”

Marina’s voice was quiet and troubled as she held him tightly, “You’d better. Because I honestly don’t know what I’d do if anything ever happened to you. So be safe, and come home as often, and in as few pieces, as you can.”

There was a soft choke from the young man, his arms squeezing her tightly for a moment as he nodded against the curve of her temple. “I promise, Marishka; and I’ll be back before you even have time to miss me.”

Marina smiled sadly at Will’s use of the Russian endearment; Will Grimm was the straightforward sort, and this was the first time he’d ever called her by the nickname that Clint had been using since he first learned her name. Tightening her arms around him, she buried her nose in his t-shirt and inhaled him as deeply as she could, “I doubt that, Misha; I doubt that very much.”
Okay, so the Westermarck Effect was brought up with regards to Marina and Will's relationship. Marina is 23 when she's assigned to spy on Project Cahill and she's 25 when Will is born. It's like having a crush on your hot teacher when you're a kid, and then getting to date the hot teacher once you've grown up. Except that the hot teacher was genetically modified, so that she doesn't age normally and she still looks as young as you and as hot as ever. At least that's how I see it. I hope that makes sense for everyone.

Also, at the end of every chapter, I will have the translations for the Russian words and endearments that my characters use. Marina uses a different endearment for each boy, to keep them separate and identify each of them within conversation. If they are having a conversation in Russian, the translations will be in the chapter, in parentheses. If it's just a word, it'll be in the end notes. And if the Russian is wrong, blame Google Translate, because I regrettably don't speak Russian (how awesome would that be, anyway!?).
Chapter 2

By the time Jason had turned 18 and followed William’s footsteps into the Army, Will had glided effortlessly through both Officer Training and Special Forces training with flying colors, had been promoted to Captain and been given the command of his own Spec Ops squad. Within six months of joining up and finishing up his Special Forces training, Jason was assigned to Will’s squad as their tech support and communications officer. Marina would never admit it to either of them, but she was more proud of them than she could quantify. And every time they made it home on leave, she hugged them both fiercely, relieved more than she could say that they were alive and well.

Shortly after Clint turned 12, Barney’s mentor Trickshot caught sight of the boy’s unerring accuracy as he practiced throwing knives under Marina’s careful eye. Barney had always been more of Swordsman’s assistant than Trickshot’s, and the marksman was very interested in teaching Clint everything he knew. Knowing that Marina was going to be a tough cookie to crack, Clint begged and pleaded and lobbied on his position as her favorite, before finally resorting to his totally unfair cobalt-grey puppy eyes. It was the last that broke down Marina’s reticence and she agreed to allow him to learn archery. It was the first time Clint ever laid hand to a bow and arrows, and he quickly earned his own side show due to his perfect accuracy with both bow and throwing knives.

Kenny continued to struggle in his studies, though he excelled at both the combat training and the weapons handling Marina put to him. He was a natural at Krav Maga, and could put Marina on her back nine times in every ten. He was fast, strong and unfailingly loyal, in possession of a heart of gold unlike anyone else Marina had ever known. While her dorogoy was undisputedly her favorite – he was the baby of the family, after all – it was a well known fact that her solnyshko was definitely in the top two.

Will had been in the Army for eight years, and Jason had been in for five, when the unthinkable happened. Shortly after Clint turned 16, he’d caught Barney helping the Swordsman stealing money from the circus. They’d offered him the chance to come with them, but he’d refused. Though he hadn’t laid a hand on Clint, neither had Barney raised a hand to help his brother. The two men had disappeared into the night, leaving Clint unconscious on the floor in the big tent. When he hadn’t come to bed, Marina panicked and set the entire circus crew on the hunt for him. Kenny’s favorite wolfhound found Clint within an hour, the teenager bleeding and badly broken and left to die.

The following morning, after a tense night at the local hospital emergency room as the youngest Grimm underwent surgery to repair the worst of the damage and remove his spleen, they received word that Trickshot had been found dead in his trailer. He’d been murdered, impaled with some kind of blade through the heart. Though it wasn’t possible to prove it, it was accepted that the Swordsman had probably tried to recruit his partner first, and then killed him to keep him silent when the older gentleman had refused.

Marina managed to get in touch with one of Will’s superior officers. After she had explained the situation, the man pulled a few strings. Almost immediately, Will and Jason were placed on the first flight from whatever Unmentionable they were stationed at the time and flown home. They joined the rest of the family at the comatose teenager’s bedside within 24 hours of the incident. Clint was unconscious for a little over a week before he woke to the news about Trickshot. Devastated by the death of the archer, he refused to rejoin the circus and started talking about joining the Army like the rest of his brothers. After he was released, he pestered and begged and pleaded with Will and Marina to let him enlist.

By common consensus, no one spoke of Barney again. Barney Joshua Grimm was dead to the rest of the Brothers Grimm from the moment he left Clint to die under the Big Top.
It took about 6 months before Will and Marina finally believed that Clint was well enough to enlist and took him to a recruiter to begin the process. The Army recruiter had had concerns over Clint's deafness . . . and then he'd seen Clint shoot out the bullseye of a target, each shot layered over top of another. The man had ordered high definition hearing aids to be delivered to the teenage marksman, paid for on the Army's dime, and Will had signed the permission slip that allowed his youngest brother to enlist early. Marina remained with Kenny at the circus, but Kenny knew that a good portion of her heart was far away. Will sent her progress reports frequently, joking that Clint was going to outrank the entire family before long. He hadn’t even made it out of basic training, before he’d been earmarked for sniper training, officer training and Will’s Spec Ops team.

It was after Clint had sent her a long letter detailing every second of his time at officer’s training so far – as well as a passing mention of Will’s latest promotion to Lt. Colonel – that Kenny found her standing at the window to their little railcar, letter in hand as she watched the scenery pass them by. “Marishka?”

Marina turned to face him with a smile, holding out one hand to him to accept his characteristic embrace. Kenny jogged to her side and tucked himself against her as tightly as he could, trying to gather courage from her embrace to talk to her about what was rattling around in his head. “What’s up, moy solnyshko?” she asked with a fond smile as she laced her fingers through the fine, blond hair at his temples.

“I think you should enlist.”

The pretty former spy blinked in surprise; that had been that last thing she thought he’d say. “I’m sorry?”

“I . . . I think you need to enlist. You miss them.”

“Oh course I miss them, domashniy. But they’ll be back before we know it, right?”

Kenny looked up at her through his eyelashes, blue eyes sad as he watched her. “Marina . . . I know I’m not smart, but I’m not stupid either.”

Marina’s eyebrows furrowed as she frowned at him reproachfully. “Kenneth James! I have never thought you were stupid! And you know that.”

“Then you know that you need to join them. You’re Marina Ivanovna Petrovka, former Soviet spy and the KGB assassin they call Gadyuka.”

“Exactly. Even if I did enlist, moy solnyshko, the Army would lock me up and throw away the key. And if General Ross got wind of me? It wouldn’t be good for anyone.”

“But you’re the only one that I can trust to protect them for me.”

“Kenny, I hardly think your brothers need protecting.”

“Of course they do. They’re the Brothers Grimm, aren’t they?”

Marina chuckled as she pressed a tender kiss to his forehead. “Your brothers do require so much looking after.”

Kenny giggled along with her as she squeezed him tightly. They stood there for a long moment, each consumed by their own thoughts. “You really want me to do this, Kenny? It means that I’m not going to be here with you. You’ll be on your own. You sure you’re ready for that?”
The younger boy thought for a long moment, before nodding firmly. “You can’t hold my hand for my whole life, Marishka. You’re going to have to let me go eventually.”

Marina scoffed, her hand tightening around his shoulder. “Ha! That’s what you think.” Heaving a heavy sigh, she watched him carefully from the corner of her eyes. Each of the brothers was solid muscle and all of them had topped out at just under six feet tall. She was five foot five, with four inch heels on, and it amused her whenever Kenny managed to tuck himself completely into her embrace as though he wasn’t at least a half a foot taller than her. “All right, domashniy, if you’re sure.”

“I am.”

“What are you going to do? Are you going to stay here with Babushka? You know she’d love to keep you forever.”

“I know; she already offered to let me stay. But she and Dedushka are getting older. And I’m not oblivious to how hard it is to take care of me. Our next stop is in Reno, and there’s a really good state home there.”

Marina’s eyes widened in horror at the very thought, her hands on his shoulders as she pushed him away to be able to look him in the eyes. “Kenny, are you sure!? Do you understand what that is?”

Kenny’s teeth held his lower lip firmly between his teeth as he nodded emphatically. “I know what I’m doing. I need you with Will to look out for all of them. I’d join you, but I fall below the IQ requirements. I already looked into it.”

“But Kenny . . .”

“You’re not going to talk me out of this. I want to do this. Please, Marishka. Let me do this.”

Marina watched him for a long moment, seeing the utter determination and the fierce pride that shone there. “Oh sobrisky, when the hell did you grow up and how didn’t I notice?”

Kenny shrugged haplessly with a bright grin. “I love you, Marishka. I know you’ll take care of them for me. And I know you’ll all be back to visit me whenever you get leave.”

“There’s still the little matter about the fact that I am a KGB spy.”

“So call Will. Tell him what you’re planning to do. Maybe he knows something that we don’t.”

Marina frowned, running her hand back through her hair. “You’re not to do anything until we’ve spoken to Misha, agreed? No running off to surrender yourself to a state home, until Misha’s given us his opinion on this idea, all right?”

“All right.”

“You promise?”

“I promise.”

Two days later, Kenny was safely installed at Nevada’s Irwin State Home, and Will was at Marina’s side as she walked into the Pentagon and surrendered herself to the Department of Defense. True to her prediction, the DOD locked her up in a maximum security cell inside the Pentagon until they were able to debrief her and determine her intentions. Will stayed in Washington DC the whole time she was locked up, spending half the day with her and the other appealing to his commanding officers to give the former KGB spy a chance.
A month later, Marina was sitting cross legged on the cot in her cell, reading a letter from Clint about sniper training that Will had delivered to her. She was so engrossed in Clint’s hilarious retelling of the competition between him and one of his instructors, that she didn’t even notice the 4 Star General she’d been debriefing with come to a stop in front of her cell, with Will to the left and behind him until she heard someone clear their throat to gain her attention. She glanced up before shooting to a standing position, bringing herself into the half-familiar parade rest that the Academy had drilled into her when she was a child. The man’s eyes were blocks of green ice as he perused her silent form. “I have received no less than a half a dozen recommendations from various COs, who I’m assured know you only through association with my best A-Team, and Lt Colonel Grimm has assured me in three different languages that you are trustworthy. This being said, you in any way betray this country, and I will take great pleasure in having you publicly executed as a traitor. Am I understood?”

“Yes sir.”

“Good.” Pulling a packet of papers from the briefcase his aide-de-camp offered him, he held them up for her to see. “In light of your previous service with the KGB and your rather unique skill set, I have here a commission with the United States Army, offering you the rank of Major and a permanent assignment to Lt Colonel Grimm’s A-Team, codename The Brothers Grimm. All it requires is your signature. I hope this amenable.”

Marina felt her whole body wilt in relief as she risked a glance at Will’s grinning face. “It is, sir. Thank you, sir.”

“Just . . . be careful. Regardless of your most recent loyalties, you were still a Russian spy and there are many people in the upper ranks of the Army that would see you fail. Do you understand?”

“Perfectly, sir.”

“I’m glad we understand each other.” Turning to Will, he offered his subordinate officer the commission paperwork. “Get her cleaned up, suited up and I want you both back in Romania within 10 hours. You can brief her on the op your team is setting up while you’re in transit. There’ll be a C-130 on the tarmac when you arrive.”

“Yes, sir. Thank you, sir.”

The General nodded at the both, and then left the two alone. Will fumbled for a moment with the keys to her cell, before fitting the correct key into the lock and throwing open the door. The first thing Marina did was throw herself into his arms, pressing a quick, fervent kiss to his lips. Will froze for the briefest of moments, before his hands came up to lace through her hair and hold her still for the onslaught of his mouth against her own. Pulling away, he rested his forehead against her own, “If you’re going to kiss me, at least kiss me like you mean it. Because I’ve been waiting for you to do that for nearly 8 years.”

Marina giggled and looped her arms around his neck, her mouth soft and pliant against his own as she whispered against his skin, “You get me out of here, Misha, and I will show you all the different ways I mean it.”

Will groaned low in his throat, pushing her body a step away. “Get your things. We have a plane to catch and you can tell me all about these different ways while we’re up in the air.”

Marina smirked at him, snapping off a cocky, two-fingered salute. “Yes sir, Colonel sir.”

Mercurial hazel eyes narrowed as she turned away, one hand connecting sharply with her backside.
The brunette squeaked in surprise, even as she luxuriated in the slow burn of heat where his hand had connected with the thin material of her prison uniform. “More packing, less sassing. Come on, Major; we have a plane to catch.” Grabbing her arm and hauling back before she got too far away from him, he pressed a bruising kiss to the lush curve of her lips. “And we will explore that little reaction of yours a little later, samaya malen’kaya,” he teased, causing her insides to melt into warm, melted chocolate. “Hurry up.”

Chapter End Notes

moy - my
dorogoy - darling (Marina's nickname for Clint)
solnyshko - sunshine (Marina's nickname for Kenny)
domashniy - pet (an interchangeable nickname Marina uses for the two younger brothers, Kenny and Clint)
Gadyuka - Viper (the codename that Marina was assigned by the Academy and the KGB)
Babushka & Dedushka - Grandmother and Grandfather
samaya malen'kaya - my little one (Will's nickname for Marina)
Don't forget to check the end notes for the Russian translations! Can't wait to see you all again soon. And I love all of your comments. You all are awesome! I hope to hear from more of you as you continue to read. Also! See the pretty shiny!? (And if anyone can make a prettier one? That would be epic!)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
Chapter 3

By the time the two officers arrived in Romania, Clint had received his assignment to the Brothers Grimm and was waiting impatiently, as was Jason, for them at the Army safe house they were using to plan their next operation. The second the two walked through the door, the dim late evening sun glinted off the gold oak leaf on the lapel of Marina’s brand new Army dress greens. Clint, as irrepressible as ever, let out a loud whoop! and proceeded to smother the woman in a bear hug. “I knew they wouldn’t be able to resist you, Marishka! I knew it!”

Marina laughed lightly, squeezing him tightly as he swung her around the room in ever-widening circles. “Put me down, you idiot! Dorogoy, I’m serious . . . I’m getting seasick.”

As soon as Clint released her, Jason was there to sweep her into his own embrace. “I’m happy for you, Marishka. Welcome to the insanity.”

“Thank you, sladkiy,”

Will looked around, noticing the absence of a member of his team. “Where’s Gallagher?”

Jason glanced at Marina, before answering the question, “He was handed his reassignment almost the second Clint was handed his assignment. I guess the Army thinks that they only need the Brothers Grimm on this A-Team.”

Marina reached for the buttons of her coat, flipping them open as she moved toward the map on the table in the center of the room. “I’ve been read in on the operation. What do we have so far?”

Both Jason and Clint glanced at each other with sly, knowing looks as Will joined her at the table, his hand coming to rest unassumingly at the small of her back. The new couple exchanged a shy, telling look before Will glanced back at his younger brothers. He narrowed his eyes at their smug looks, before rolling his eyes. “Come on svyat; let’s get this show on the road.”

Clint smirked as he strode to join them, “So am I right to assume that this little chore of ours is going to be your first date?”

Marina’s voice was distracted as she answered, “No, dorogoy. After this little chore of ours, is going to be our first date.”

Clint and Jason high-fived over the woman’s bent head, both announcing, “I totally called that!”

Will rolled his eyes with a groan, letting his brothers get their mini-celebration out of their systems. After a mirthful moment, the two settled down and got back to work. And after the success of their “little chore,” as Clint called it, Marina and Will did go on their first date. It was pretty well accepted by the both of them, that there was no way it could have been any more disastrous; not after the homemade bomb Marina slapped together to give them an exit from the restaurant after a mafia hitman barged into the diner where they were eating and most definitely not after the impromptu shoot out that left half a dozen mafia men dead in the streets and Will bleeding from a through and through to the left shoulder. All in all, it was the worst first date in the history of first dates. And as was typical, Jason and Clint vowed to laugh at them about it for at least the rest of their lives.

The Brothers Grimm had been a fully functioning, if incomplete, team for about six months when the last piece of their team started to slot into place. Marina and Will were bent over the map of their next objective, mapping out how they were going to get their team in play and their sniper into position to take out their mark. Jason was fiddling with a pile of electronics, splicing together a hasty tracer that
they would be using to better track their almost invisible target. The youngest Grimm was on watch, perched comfortably on the top of a filing cabinet a few feet from the door, every entrance and window into the room lying within his line of sight, his sniper rifle lying next to him as he cleaned his sidearm. There was static from their comm unit as a call came through on the apparatus. *A-Team Grimm, this is Command. Come in. Over.*

Jason frowned as he lifted his head from his work, pushing the welding goggles up onto his forehead. Huffing at the interruption, he got up from his seat and wiped his hands on a greasy rag as he moved to answer the call. Everyone’s eyes were on the young man as he took a seat at the unit and brought the radio to his mouth, “Command, this is A-Team Grimm. Go ahead. Over.”

*Is Colonel Grimm available for a private call? Over.*

Jason twisted in his chair to look at their oldest brother, watching Will’s eyes narrow as he tried to piece together what little intelligence they’d been given. “Will?”

The oldest Grimm nodded and stepped to his brother’s side, hand stretched out to accept the radio. “Command, this is Colonel Grimm. Over.”

*Colonel, I have a Sgt Nathan Matthews on the line for you. He’s an Army recruiter in Reno, NV. He said it’s about your brother? Over.*

Marina’s eyes flashed wide as she all but lunged to Will’s side. Will smiled at her, one hand coming out to stroke over the skin of her arm in reassurance. “Patch it through, Command. Over.”

*Patching the call through, sir. Sgt Matthews, Colonel Grimm is on the line.*

There was a brief moment of static before a gruff voice came from the radio. *Colonel Grimm, my name is Sgt Nathan Matthews. I’m calling about your brother, Kenneth Grimm, sir. Over.*

“How is Kenny, Sergeant? Over.”

*He seems well enough. He’s expressed an interest in joining the Army, sir, and I would sincerely like to accommodate him. However, you are listed as his power of attorney for as long as he is a resident of Irwin State Home. Over.*

“This is not the first time he has expressed an interest in the Army. However, I was under the impression that Kenny didn’t meet the minimum IQ requirements to enlist, Sergeant. Over.”

*I have tested him, Colonel, and though you’re right about the IQ requirements, he has passed all of his weapons and tactical evaluations with flying colors. I’m willing to fudge the paperwork, with your permission, sir. Over.*

Marina practically beamed at the information, looking almost smug as her pride in the second youngest Grimm flooded through her system. “That’s my boy,” she crowed as she punched Will lightly in the shoulder.

Will chuckled, relieved to see her more relaxed now that she knew Kenny was all right. “Hold for a moment, Sergeant. I just need a minute to confer with my XO. Over.”

*Of course, sir. I’m in no rush. Over.*

Will’s lips quirked lightly as he muttered, “I’ll just bet.” Looking up at Marina, he passed the radio silently to Jason as he watched Marina go over all the scenarios and possibilities. “What do you think, Marishka?”
“Kenny wants to be a soldier so badly, Misha, I know that. But I’d still feel better about giving permission if I was able to talk to him face to face about it. I don’t want someone attempting to manipulate him just to meet a quota.”

Jason rolled his eyes as he slouched back in his chair. “You know that’s what Sgt Matthews is trying to do, Marishka.”

“I know that, but Kenny does want to be a soldier. We did discuss it when he convinced me to enlist with you guys. I say we hold off on giving Sgt Matthews what he wants for right now. Misha and I can hop the next transport to Nellis, pop over to Reno and find out what Kenny wants to do. If this is his own idea, and it’s what he wants then I say we give him permission and we pull every single string we can to get him assigned to the Brothers Grimm. If not, well then no harm, no foul.”

Will thought for a moment, before nodding his agreement. Taking back the radio, he brought it up to his lips, “Are you still there, Sgt Matthews? Over.”

I’m here, Colonel. Over.

“My XO and I are going to catch a flight to Nevada. ETA will be about 21 hours. We’ll discuss this with Kenny and reevaluate at that time. I hope that won’t be a problem for you. Over.”

The man sounded vaguely disgruntled at being made to wait, even as he replied, No sir. As I said, I’m in no hurry. Over.

“All right then, we’ll see you in approximately 21 hours. Colonel Grimm, over and out,” Will replied to the man, fighting hard to contain the mirthless smirk that wanted to come out. Handing back the radio, Will spoke quietly, “Jay, I need you to arrange a transport to Nevada. As quickly as you can.”

Jason nodded once with a brisk, “Yes sir.” Turning back to the comm unit, Jason brought the radio to his mouth and proceeded to call the Army airfield to request a transport.

Will turned to Clint then. “I hate to do this to you, Clint, but I need eyes on that target until we get back. Take enough provisions to last you a few days. I want you to report in to Jason at least twice a day, agreed?”

Clint nodded once, his gray eyes going cold and emotionless as he slipped effortlessly into his sniper mindset. His eyes were distant as he snapped out a brisk salute. “Yes sir. Anything else sir?”

“Be careful, Clint. That goes for you too, Jay.”

Jason glanced back over his shoulder with a small smile, before returning his attention to the conversation he was having with an air traffic controller. Will turned to see Marina standing at the door, two packed duffel bags at her feet and her eyes calm as she watched him. “Ready to go, Major?”

“Whenever you are, Colonel.”

Clint snickered, slipping out of sniper mode for a second. “You two have a weird idea of foreplay.”

Marina’s snarky reply caused Jason and Will to crow in laughter as she shot back, “You just wish you were getting foreplay, Clint. Come on, Misha; let’s get this show in the air.”

“Right behind you, Marishka. Boys, behave yourselves. We’ll be back in a couple of days.”

Both brothers nodded, crowding the doorway as they watched the two disappear into the Army Jeep
parked behind their safe house. For a second, the night was still and quiet before the Jeep roared to life and Will gunned it as they rocketed to the airstrip to catch their impromptu flight. Clint glanced at Jason, before turning to grab his rifle and his gear. “I’ll radio my coordinates, as soon as I’ve found a nest.”

“Be careful, Clint. Promise?”

Clint’s grin was careless as he disappeared into the night. “Hey it’s me.”

Jason huffed fondly; noticing belatedly that the mobile comm unit he’d modified to accommodate Clint’s deafness was missing from its charger. “That’s kinda why I mentioned it, you little thief.”

When the couple arrived at Nevada’s Irwin State Home, they found Kenny sitting in what could only be a library, bent over a workbook for the ASVAB (Armed Services Vocational and Aptitude Battery) and visibly struggling with it. Marina smiled softly, stepping to his side and resting her hands on his shoulders as she reminded him, “Slow and steady wins the race, right Kenny?”

Kenny’s grin was huge as he whirled at the sound of her voice. “Marina! Will! You came!”

Marina’s smile was as unrestrained as his as he bolted from his chair and wrapped his arms around her tightly. She buried her nose in the crook of his neck, squeezing him tightly before releasing him to let Will get his own embrace in. Will hugged his little brother tightly, before clapping him firmly on the back and pushing him a step away. “Of course we came, little brother. You make it sound as though we wouldn’t have.”

The former Russian spy reached out and laced her fingers in Kenny’s, guiding him to the sofa against the wall. Dropping into the cushions and pulling him down next to her, she gestured Will in the direction of the overstuffed armchair. “Kenny, we got a call from Sgt Matthews. He said he’s willing to fudge the ASVAB results so that you can enlist. But Misha and I both need to hear it from you that this is truly what you want.”

Kenny’s head bobbed. “I want to be out there with you guys. I want to be doing something more than this.”

Will reached out and drew his brother’s attention. “Don’t believe anything you’ve seen in the movies, Kenny.”

Kenny frowned and opened his mouth to protest, but Will shook his head to cut off his objection. “It’s not glamorous, Kenny. People don’t die heroically; sometimes they linger for days before they move on. There is very little true reward and people get hurt, whether they plan to or not. I need you to really think about this, Kenny. If this is what you want, Marina and I will take you to your recruiter and sign all the paperwork you need to enlist. But if it’s what the recruiter says you want . . . well, let’s just say that you’re going to be getting a lot more acquainted with this place.”

Kenny sat back, eyebrows furrowed as he thought hard about what he wanted. Marina and Will glanced at each other solemnly, the corner of Marina’s lips twitching into a small, reassuring smile before she turned her attention back on her second youngest charge. It was a long time, before Kenny nodded once emphatically. “I want to enlist, Will. I want to be with you and Marina and Clint and Jason. I want to do something with my life. I want to be more than a stupid kid.”

“You are not stupid!” Marina hissed, a deep frown contorting her face angrily. “And when I found out who convinced you that you are, I’m going to murder them. Slowly and with the kind of porochnogo udovol’stviya I haven’t enjoyed since I still killed for the KGB.”
“I’m not exactly smart, Marishka.”

“Says who? I don’t know many stupid people who are trilingual, solnyshko. Or have you forgotten than you speak Russian and American Sign Language, in addition to English? I don’t know many stupid people who know how to strip, dismantle and reconstruct any weapon placed into their keeping. Just because you’re not book smart, does not mean that you are stupid. Do you hear me!? If I ever hear you say anything of the sort ever again, I swear to Boge that I will turn you over my knee like I haven’t since you were six and I will zagar skryt until you remember it. Vy menya ponimayete (Do you understand me)?”

Will chuckled at the dazed look on Kenny’s face. “I think he got the message, nasedka. Pull it together before you scare the kid.”

Marina scowled at her lover as she argued ferociously, “I want him ispuganney! I’m sick of this putting himself down der’mo! If you’re going to be more than this place, solnyshko, you’re going to need to be the one to believe that, not us. And if you can’t, then there’s really no point in trying because you will never give yourself a real opportunity.”

Kenny blinked at her for a moment, blue eyes very wide as he took her words to heart. Then, very slowly as though he wasn’t sure how she’d react, he leaned over and practically buried himself into her embrace. “You’re like the best sestra ever,” he murmured quietly, as he tucked his head under her chin.

“Chert voz’mi ya (Damn right I am),” she joked, feeling the tension relaxing from both of their bodies as they just enjoyed each other’s closeness for a moment. Squeezing him for a brief moment longer, she pushed him away and cupped his cheek fondly, forcing him to meet her eyes. “What do you want, Kenny?”

There was no hesitation. “I want to join the Army.”

Marina nodded once firmly. “All right then. Let’s go get that paperwork taken care of then, huh?”

Chapter End Notes

dorogoy - darling (Marina's nickname for Clint)
sladkiy - honey (Marina's nickname for Jason)
svaty - matchmakers
porochnogo udovol’stiya - vicious pleasure
solnyshko - sun (Marina's nickname for Kenneth)
Boge - God
zagar skryt - tan your hide
Vy menya ponimayete - Do you understand me?
nasedka - mother hen
ispuganney - scared
der’mo - shit
sestra - sister
Chert voz’mi ya - Damn right I am.
Okay, so, today we get the first real instance of Clint and his family using ASL. The best way to determine when that happens is this: it's in italics, it's obviously someone speaking to someone else; but there aren't any quotation marks. Also, don't forget to check the end notes for the Russian translations! Thank you all for the awesome comments. I love you all fiercely and you're amazing! Thank you again!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
The Grimm Truth

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Chapter 4

Three months later, Clint and Marina were sitting on the couch watching Jason argue with Will about the ethicalness of the bug he’d placed on the favorite car of their target’s favorite daughter as they passed the standard Army issue popcorn (otherwise known as MRE M&Ms) between them. “We’re not going to use children or the innocent to achieve our directives, Jason! Otherwise, we become no better than them!” Will scolded, hazel eyes storming through colors as his temper fluctuated.

Jason scoffed with an eye roll. “She’s *hardly* a child; she’s 23 and we’ve confirmed that not only is she her father’s right hand man in their arms dealing, but her hands are not exactly clean either. Last count, the body count was at what again? Seven? Eight? I would hardly call her innocent, Will!”

One second, the two combatants were glaring angrily at each other; the next second, all four occupants of the room whirled, guns in hand, to face the opening door. Kenneth stood there in his Army greens, a sheepish grin on his lips and his duffle bag over his shoulder. Lifting empty hands, he joked, “Nice to see you too, *sestra . . . brat’ya*. Don’t shoot?”

“Kenny!” Marina’s chocolate eyes widened in glee, quickly handing off her gun to Clint as she moved to throw her arms around him.

The newly arrived Kenny dropped his duffle bag with only seconds to spare as he caught her lunging body. The two were giggling together as they hugged tightly, Kenny lifting her clear off her feet and squeezing her tightly. Will stood back, watching as both Jason and Clint stepped forward to get their own hugs from their brother. Jason smiled at the younger brother, clapping him on the shoulder briefly, before Clint shoved past him for his turn. “Kenny!” Clint cheered, diving at his older brother and wrapping his arms around his waist to haul him several inches off the floor. “Dude! Why didn’t you tell us you were coming?? Man . . . we almost shot you! And you know I don’t miss!”

Kenny chuckled as he shook his head. “Yeah, I was trying to surprise you. See if I ever do that again.” Ruffling the younger’s hair, he teased, “Do you ever just slow down?”

“Bogee, no! Tell him, Marishka!”

Marina rolled her eyes as she cracked, “Clint doesn’t drink his coffee like a normal person; his is intravenously injected into his body. It doesn’t wake him up any more efficiently than drinking it normally; just means that he’s caffeine crazed a little faster and a little longer than everyone else.”

The older brothers all laughed as Clint gave the woman a face, looking as though he were still the irrepresible five year old who had insisted on the injustice of having to take a bath while all the other kids on the circus grounds got to watch the elephants perform. Clint’s hands moved sharply as he signed in agitation, a deep pout on his lips as he sulked, *You’re being a meanie-butt, Marina.*

Marina wrapped her arms around his shoulders, tucking him into her side. “I know, *dorogoy*, I’m sorry. You just make it too easy to pick on you.” Dodging with a laugh as he swiped at her, she danced out of his reach as she continued to tease him, “It’s like there’s this giant door, and you never quite shut it all the way. It makes things so much easier when I want to . . . AHH!” Yelping as he finally tackled her to the floor, she was well and truly trapped as he proceeded to tickle the life out of her. True to form, if nothing else, Jason and Will started laughing as Kenny lunged to help Clint tickle their honorary sister and longtime caretaker.

Marina lay under their combined weight, squealing with laughter and giggles as she writhed under
their joint assault on her most sensitive places. Jason glanced at Will, both agreeing silently to stay out of the battle unfolding in front of them. Each of them knew that it would only be a matter of time before Marina got her body back under her own control and turned the tables on the youngest two Brothers Grimm; and there was no way either of them were looking to get into the middle of that battle. Nudging his brother lightly with an elbow, Jason waited for Will to take his eyes off Marina’s still giggling form and focus on him. “You are a schastlivchik. You know that right?”

Will’s lips curved upwards into a small grin as he nodded his head once. “Oh, Jay; you have no idea.”

Right about that time, Marina managed to get a pair of well placed fingers into Kenny’s weak spot, and the boy collapsed to the side in a fit of helpless giggles. Clint’s eyes went wide at the loss of his partner in crime, before Marina got her leg around his hip and flipped the both of them so that he ended up on the bottom of their dog pile and was completely at her mercy. Clint was strong and a skilled grappler; but Marina had been the one to train him. It wasn’t long before she had his legs pinned with her knees and his hands trapped over his head with her left hand, the fingers of her right hand buried deeply in the vulnerable hollow of his armpit. Both Jason and Will were content to let Marina get her revenge, though Jason did leap forward to rescue Clint’s hearing aids when they fell out from Clint’s thrashing.

“Say uncle,” Marina encouraged, voice louder than normal to accommodate Clint’s deafness, shifting her fingers a half an inch and causing a whole new round of breathless laughter. “Say it, or I’m not going to let you up.”

“N-N-No-o-o,” Clint gasped, his body bucking helplessly under her grip as he tried to free himself. “Say it, dorogoy; I’m serious, I’m not going to let you up until you confess that I am the greatest in the world.”

Clint thrashed furiously, throwing as much of his weight as his laughter would allow into the motion as he tried to dislodge her from her seat. Marina, however, had been trained in hand to hand combat since she was a child, and simply shifted her body along with him. Finally, he sagged back and begged, “All right! Uncle! You’re the greatest sestra in the world, and the best spy and the best everything, just . . . Marina . . . UNCLE!”

Instantaneously, Marina released him. “That’s right, dorogoy. You just remember this moment, the next time you think you’re going to try something like this. What’s that phrase that kids use?”

Looking up, she grinned at her boyfriend with a healthy amount of vindictive glee before looking back down at him. “Come on, Clint. What is it? If you don’t know, I’m sure someone can help you out.”

Clint glared petulantly, allowing Jason to pipe up cheerfully. “You just got served.”

“Da, chert voz’mi (Damn right)! she crowed, before she sprang to her feet and backed away from the panting form of her youngest charge. “You okay, Clint?”

Rolling onto his elbows, Clint coughed as he fought to steady out his breathing. Glaring up at her through floppy blond fringe, Clint gasped, “I hate you.”

“I know you do, domashniy. I love you too,” she cackled loudly, letting Will loop his arm around her waist and pull her close to him.

Kenny was still lying sprawled on the floor where he’d fallen, having been reluctant to rejoin the battle. Clint flopped over onto his back once again and turned his head to face his brother, his hands
flying through the ASL as he demanded, *Thanks a lot, Kenny. Bailing at the first sign of trouble? What kind of brother are you, anyway?*

*The kind that firmly believes in ‘every man for himself’ when it comes to Marina and tickling,* the slightly older brother announced with a bright grin as he replied in kind.

Jason chuckled at the two of them, coming over to offer both a hand and haul them up off the floor. Clint allowed it for as long as it took before he was back on his feet, before shoving Jason away with a rough push to his shoulder. *And where the hell were you?* Clint demanded furiously, his hands flying emphatically through the phrase as he let his anger at being bested get the better of him.

*Safely out of the way,* Jason teased, knowing better than to take Clint’s blustering personally. *Some of us are smart enough not to take on Marishka in a tickle war. We always lose, Clint; we always have, we always will.*

*One day, I will preserve.*

*And I will gladly join the battle at your side when that day comes. But today was not that day and tomorrow is not looking very promising either,* Jason joked, offering his little brother his open palm and the hearing aids that sat there.

Clint glowered and snatched his hearing aids back, his movements deft as he reasserted the apparatuses into his ears. Pouting as though he was still five years old, Clint turned on his heel and sulked away. Marina moved over to Kenny’s side and hugged him. “Welcome to the Insanity that is the Brothers Grimm, Kenny. We may not be the sanest people around, but we sure have a lot of fun.”

Kenny shrugged, “Sometimes just a little crazy can be more productive than all the sanity in the world.”

Recognizing the phrase as one of her favorites, she laugh, “Now where on earth did you hear something crazy like that?”

“Eh,” he grunted with a haphazard shrug, “I knew this girl once. She was always spouting off cock-eyed things like that.”

“She sounds pretty awesome,” Will teased, hauling Marina to him and nibbling lightly on the curve of her jaw.

Kenny’s head ducked as he blushed, “Yeah . . . she really is.”

Marina grinned at him, reaching out to cup Kenny’s jaw fondly. “Thank you, solnyshko. Go talk to Clint for me, huh? You’re his best friend; he’ll listen to you.”

Nodding, the young man turned and headed off in the direction that Clint had stormed when he’d left the main room of the safe house. Jason wisely disappeared down a hallway, leaving the couple alone in the living room. Will nuzzled further into the soft skin of Marina’s throat, murmuring against the skin there, “You are pretty amazing. Kenny’s right about that, *samaya malen’kaya.* There’s no one else in the world quite like you.”

Marina turned to face him, her arms coming up to drape lazily over his shoulders. “You’re my boyfriend; you’re supposed to say stuff like that. Besides, the world couldn’t handle more than one of me at a time, Misha. It would probably implode first.”

Caught off guard, Will snorted. “Amen to that.”
Chapter End Notes

sestra - sister
brat'ya - brothers (brat'ya is actually the plural form; braht is singular)
Boge - God
schastlivchik - lucky bastard
dorogoy - darling (Marina's nickname for Clint)
Da, chert voz'mi - Damn right!
domashniy - pet (an interchangeable nickname Marina uses for Kenny and Clint)
solnyshko - sun (Marina's nickname for Kenny)
samaya malen'kaya - my little one (Will's nickname for Marina)
Chapter 5

*Two Years Later:*
*December 24, 1995*
*Croatia*
*NATO Operation IFOR*

“*Boge,* I hate Yugoslavia,” came the bitter grunt over the comms.

Marina’s chuckle was grim as she replied, her eyes glued to her own scope. “It’s not Yugoslavia anymore, *Yastreb.* It’s Croatia now.”

“I don’t care what the hell it is, *Sova,* it’s hotter than hell and even more boring than watching chickens scratch dirt.”
Marina’s voice was amused as she replied, “I believe my former mentor at the Academy used to call it Satan’s shithouse.”

Chocolate eyes glanced toward the roof of the building angled to her left. She couldn’t see anything, but she knew their A-Team’s sniper was there; well hidden in his nest and keeping a careful eye on the evacuations NATO was assisting with in the tiny village they’d been called into. Another voice broke into the comms, Will’s voice gruff and angry, “Sova . . . Yastreb . . . what part of radio silence do you not understand?”

Clint’s growl came through the comm audibly, but both Marina and Will ignored it. He’d been forced to take his hearing aids out, so that he could use the comm he’d been issued – base tech nearly losing its mind at the very idea that Jason had both designed and then created an unsanctioned mobile comm unit he could use with them – and he likely didn’t realize how loud the sound had been. “Orel, please tell me that I’m gonna get to shoot something. If you promise that I get to shoot something, I swear I’ll shut my mouth and maintain radio silence.”

Their tech specialist spoke up then, “Brat’ya Mrachnyy, this is Krechet. Keep your eyes peeled on the south by southeast entrance to the village. We have a reported incoming. Presumed to be hostile. Do not engage unless engaged upon.”

“Slava Bogu!” Clint breathed as he quickly gathered his gear and shifted his nest to track the incoming hostiles.

Marina turned her attention back down on the evacuations taking place below her. “Orel, the humanitarian aid workers still have maybe another 50 people to move out. What is Command advising us to do?”

“Continue with the evac, and get as many out as you can, as quickly as you can. But, unless we are engaged, we do not engage, Sova.”

“That’s a crap order, Orel,” Clint reminded their superior officer.

Will’s sigh was heavy and knowing as he spoke, “Agreed, but it’s the one we’ve been given. Krechet, do you have an ETA on that incoming?”

“ETA in five, Orel.”

Marina could tell he’d switched to the general channel, when he spoke again. “All right people, let’s speed up the evacuations. We have hostiles coming in, and I will not risk the safety of my team for a handful of civilians who should have evacuated weeks ago.”

Clint spoke up then, “I have a visual on our incoming, guys, and they’re packing some serious heat. I don’t know why they’re coming here, but they mean business.”

Will’s voice was concerned but steady as he transferred their comms back to their own private line. “Sokol, you in position?”

Kenny’s voice was a welcome calm as he hummed an incommunicative affirmative. “Krechet, try to hail our guests. Let’s see what they’re doing here, huh?”

“Yes sir,” was Jason’s monotone reply before he started scrambling signals to try and get a lock on the convoy’s channel. “Incoming convoy, this is A-Team Mark Tango 2. Please state your destination and primary objective.”

There was a long pause, before the cannon mount swung toward the village and Clint suddenly
swore as he caught a glimpse of the insignia displayed on the front of the mount, “Der’mo! Will! They’re Serbian insurgents!”

Will’s voice was strained as he replied as calmly as he could, “Yastreb, tag incoming. Krechet, kindly inform them that they are about to fire on United States military personnel. Inform them that should they chose to engage us, we are prepared to fire back.”

Jay’s voice was an insistent hum in the background as Clint lowered his eye to his sight and prepared to take the shot that would “paint” the target. His body was utterly motionless, even as the sniper rifle bucked in his grip. It was hard, but Marina just barely managed to keep her scope trained on the silver transmitter that flew straight at the incoming convoy’s lead tank. It lodged in the only weak spot available in the tank’s armored plating and bobbed harmlessly, a red light at its tip coming on to indicate the success of its lock on. “Incoming tagged.”

Marina glanced at the reader resting on the lip to her left and nodded once, “Signal’s coming in strong, Orel.”

There was a brief pause as they waited for any kind of response from the convoy’s communications officer. Moments later they received their answer; Marina screamed as she ducked her head to avoid the fired rocket. It flew over her head and landed in the building structure behind her. Wrapping her arms around her head to protect herself from falling debris, she gasped as a heavy piece of cinderblock landed heavily on her left leg. “Sova!” came the unified cry from all four of the brothers, each demanding a status report.

“Sych! Are you all right!? Will demanded, his voice hinting at the sheer level of panic that was threatening to choke him completely.

“I’m fine!” she insisted, before adding on a virulent string of oaths as an afterthought. “I’m all right. I caught some debris to the back of the leg, but for the most part, the worst of it missed me entirely.”

Clint’s voice was dry as he asked, “So can we safely assume that this means we’ve been engaged upon?”

There was a relieved pause before Will called it. “Blow ‘em to hell, Sokol.”

“Yes, sir,” came the expected reply, before there was a low boom! as the M198 cannon set up on the street below literally shook the building below Marina’s sprawled form.

The lead tank was instantaneously engulfed in flames, halting the tank and causing a crash as the one directly at its bumper crashed into it. Another boom! reverberated through the building below her as Kenny sent off another volley. The rest of the convoy screeched to a halt and reversed back the way they came, barely managing to avoid the next volley of cannon fire as Kenny prepped for another strike. Will’s voice was soft and satisfied as he spoke into his mic, “Sokol . . . Krechet . . . I want to know who they are and what they’re doing here. Yastreb, provide cover. Sova, where are you?”

Marina was already on her way down the stairwell, limping significantly but still moving under her own power. “I’m on my way to rendezvous with Sokol and Krechet.”

“Negative. Stay put. Medical is on its way to your location.”

The brunette rolled her eyes with a huff, continuing on her way. “I’m sorry, Orel, I didn’t catch that. You’re cutting out. I think my comm unit is fitzing out. I’ll see you back on base. Sova, over and out.”
The last thing she heard was Will’s angry call of her name as she removed the comm unit from her ear and stepped from the building. Both Jason and Kenny were standing outside the building, obviously waiting for her. Jason cocked an eyebrow at her, “You know he’s going to have your ass, right?”

“Just because I’m a woman and his girlfriend, does not mean that I can’t still kick his ass. And I will do it too, unless he remembers who exactly it is he’s talking to.”

Kenny’s face was eloquent with disapproval as he watched her. “Marishka, he’s just worried about you. I mean, we don’t have the best luck with people who actually care about us.”

The twinge of guilt in her chest nearly derailed her plans, but she pushed it down and away. “Are we gonna keep standing here, flapping our jaws? Cause I was pretty sure we had a job that needs getting done.”

The two brothers glanced at each other, before Jason just shrugged. “Can I just have this go on record as a bad idea? And if he comes after us for letting you tag along, I just want it clarified that I tried to talk you out of this. Deal?”

“Deal,” the woman agreed, hefting her gun and forcing herself to ignore the pain in her leg. “Come on. We have work to do.”

Neither of the brothers protested any further, just lifting their own guns and following her to where the two disabled tanks continued to burn and smoke. Clint’s voice was a low hum in her discarded comm unit, obviously calling out observations to both Kenny and Jason. The three approached the scene cautiously, rifles up and at the ready, none of them willing to take any chances. There was a body lying in the dirt and Marina approached it carefully. Reaching out for the corpse’s shoulders, she moved the body onto its back. At the sight of the face, her eyes flew wide and she lunged backward. Kenny was at her side in a second as she fumbled for her earpiece. Shoving it into her ear, she spoke up, “Orel, this is Sova. We have a serious problem.”

Will’s silence was telling and the hair on the back of Marina’s neck began to stand up for more than one reason. “Oh really, and what problem might that be?”

“These aren’t Serbian insurgents . . . they’re Red Room operatives.” Looking over at the wide eyes of the dead woman lying on the ground, she spoke again, “They were here for me.”

Chapter End Notes

Russian Translations:
Boge - God
Yastreb - Hawk (Clint's Army Spec Op code name)
Sova - Owl (Marina's Army Spec Op code name)
Orel - Eagle (Will's Army Spec Op code name)
Brat'ya Mrachnyy - Brothers Grimm
Krechet - Merlin (Jason's Army Spec Op code name)
Slava Bogu! - Thank God!
Der'mo - shit
Sokol - Falcon (Kenneth's Army Spec Op code name)
Sych - Little Owl (Will's secondary code name for Marina)
Chapter Notes

There aren't any new Russian words in this chapter, so I'm going to forgo the Russian translations this time. I continue to adore your comments and I look forward to continuing to hear from you about your thoughts. This one is kinda short, because where I go from here is going to need more than just the last few pages of a short chapter.

Chapter 6

Clint joined the three at the site within minutes. Kenny had an arm around Marina’s waist, while Jason was scrounging through the pockets of the dead women in and around the tank. Marina was as pale as paper, chocolate eyes wide as she continued to stare at the dead body of the blond woman at her feet. “Marishka!? You okay?” Clint demanded, reaching out to grip her shoulder.

Marina shook herself free from whatever thoughts were streaming through her mind. Seeing the barely concealed panic in the grey eyes of their usually unflappable sniper, she shook herself from her thoughts and reached up to squeeze the hand that rested on her shoulder. “I’m all right, dorogoy. Just a little shaken.”

Jason stood with a pile of passports in his hands. He shuffled through them, rubbing his thumb over the State Insignia of the Russian Federation which was emblazoned across the front of each. “Well,
they’re definitely Russian all right. What do you want us to do, Orel?”

“How is the evacuation coming along, Lt. Banks? Over.”

“Evacuation complete, Colonel. We’re on our way to the refugee camp now. Over.”

“Glad to hear it, Lieutenant. We’ll see you back in the camp soon. Krechet, you and Sova head back to base. Sova, please report immediately to Medical to get your leg checked out. Krechet, I want to know everything you can find out about each of these women and I want the files in my hand within the hour. Yastreb, I’m sending a clean up crew to mop up the bodies. Sokol, there’s a team coming to hitch the M198 to the Humvee. All of you, be safe, and I’ll see you back on base shortly.”

All four glanced at each other warily, hearing the angry undertone in his voice, before Jason replied, “Yes sir. Brat’ya Mrachnyy, over and out.”

“Command, over and out,” came the curt reply, before there was an audible click that indicated Will had left the conversation permanently.

Jason huffed lightly, “So . . . Will’s pissed.”

Clint glanced askance at a devastated Marina, squeezing her shoulder as he tried to ease the tension. “He spends his life wrangling us. Of course he’s pissed.”

“The question is, at whom? The Red Room assassins who randomly crash landed into a top secret operation? Or me, who disobeyed orders and making an already difficult mission even more difficult?” Marina whispered quietly.

Kenny hugged her tightly, tucking her tightly between him and Clint as they closed ranks around her. “First of all, you are not to blame for this. Second of all, Will can’t stay mad at you, Marishka. He’s gonna bluster a bit, but he won’t be mad.”

“Bluster a bit’?” Clint teased with a grin. “Sure you don’t want to join the rest of us in the 20th Century, Ken?”

“Shut up, Clint,” Kenny laughed, taking a playful swipe at his head. “At least I don’t have to baby-sit the dead, blown up bodies.”

Clint’s glee deflated and he slumped scowling. “You blew them up . . . why don’t you have to baby-sit? Thanks for that, Kenny.”

“No problem, little brother. Happy to be of assistance,” the second youngest Grimm teased, reaching out to ruffle the other’s hair fondly.

The youngest of the Brothers Grimm grunted, the two brothers rough housing for a moment before Jason’s quiet question brought them both to a standstill. “How did you know she was a Red Room operative, Marina?”

Marina visibly shuddered at the question, glancing quickly at the corpse lying mere feet away. “Her name is Nastia Ilianovna Dmitriyeva. We were in the same year at the Academy. If you’d asked me before this, I would have said that we were maybe friends.”

Jason snorted lightly, but it was Clint who said what was floating around through all of the brothers’ minds. “Wow . . . some friend.”

The brunette shook her head, sinking slowly to the floor. “To be honest, I’m not surprised. I haven’t
seen any of those women since before Will was born.”

“Really?”

“I was 23 when I took the assignment to be Howard Stark’s assistant on the Project Cahill. And when Stark laid Will in my arms for the first time, I made my choice. I disobeyed my directives; I misled the KGB; I misinformed them about everything that came out of the Project. And when Kenny was six, and Ross was going to have him terminated, I did what I did to protect you all. I stole every shred of medical information the Project had on you, and I destroyed everything else. When I took you and hid you, I effectively defected from the KGB and the Academy. To those women who had once been my friends, I was now a traitor. I had betrayed my country, my people, my handlers, my directives. And if there’s one thing the Red Room beat into each and every one of us, it’s that friendship is nothing when weighed against loyalty to Mother Russia.”

“So the women who were your friends, are now your enemies?” Jason asked, flipping effortlessly through the passports.

Marina’s arms came around herself as though she was trying to hold her emotions inside of herself and keep herself in one piece. “So it would seem.”

Freezing at the sound of engines, Clint looked around to see who was incoming. Seeing the incoming NATO Humvees, he waved a hand over his head to redirect them. “Jay . . . I would hide those passports if I was you.”

“Done and done,” Jason agreed as he tucked them into one of his fatigue pockets.

Both Clint and Kenny crouched down beside Marina, Clint reaching to tug up her pant leg to see her injury. “How you feeling, Sova? You feeling it yet?”

There was only a small nod, the woman’s whole body just deflating as the adrenaline began to drain from her body. The three brothers exchanged worried looks, before Jason crouched in front of Marina and placed his hands on her shoulders. “Marishka . . . you still with us? Marina!”

There was no response as chocolate eyes rolled back into her head and she slumped toward the floor. Kenny and Jason caught her easily, as Clint stood and ran to get a medic from the incoming convoy. It seemed like forever before the medics arrived and loaded Marina up for the trip back to base. It was only as the Humvee with Marina inside was speeding away that Clint spoke up, “Who wants to be the one to tell Will?”

“Not it!” came the simultaneous calls from all three brothers.
Chapter Notes

So, this time the Russian translations are a little different. They're actually in the chapter, and you'll see why when you get to that point. Thanks again to everyone who continues to review and send kudos. I appreciate them so much. We learn a little bit more about Marina's background today, setting up for the shit to hit the fan shortly. I hope you all continue to read and enjoy. Thank you again!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter 7

When Marina floated from the depths of unconsciousness, she knew at once that she had not truly woken. It should have been illogical to automatically assume that she was dreaming, even more so as she had not yet opened her eyes. But she knew; she knew that were she to open her eyes, she would see a long destroyed home, still beloved and unchanged from her fondest memories. It was the scent in the air that alerted her to the dream, her father's prized Siberian Irises. Their distinctive perfume had been absent from her life since her papa was killed when she was 4 years old. The Academy had come for her and they had taken her . . . silencing her father's protests permanently.

Kind, familiar fingers brushed tenderly over her cheek. She moaned through a sob, eyes firmly closed as she turned into the half-forgotten caress. The sound of her father's laughter broke her heart as he teased her fondly. "Eto vremya, chtoby prosnut'sya, dorogaya devochka. (It's time to wake up,
“Net Papy. Pozvol’te mne spat’ vtoraye bol’she, (No Daddy. Let me sleep a second more,)” she begged unwilling to give up these few moments she had with him, dream or not.

“No eto prekrasnyy den’, milaya devushka. A vashi mal’chiki budut volnovat’ sya. (But it is a beautiful day, dear girl. And your boys will be worried)"

Startled that he knew about “her boys,” Marina’s eyes flew open, her hands pushing her body upwards into a sitting position. Ivan Antonovich Petrov smiled down at her, eyes as dark as she remembered and as wise. “Krasnaya Komnata izmenila menya, Papy. Ya ne vasha dorogaya devochka. (The Red Room changed me, Daddy. I am not your darling girl anymore.)”

Ivan’s hands were steady as he cupped her cheeks and solemnly looked her in the eyes. “Vy vsegda budete moya dorogaya devochka, Marishka. (You will always be my darling girl, little Marina.)”

Ducking herself into his arms, she shook her head firmly to negate his words. “Ya sdelal slishkom mnogo, Papa. U menya krov mnogikh synovey na moikh rukakh. Kak ya mogu byt’ proshcheny za to, chto ya sdelal v imya Rossii? (I have done too much, Papa. I have the blood of many sons on my hands. How can I ever be forgiven for what I have done in Russia’s name?)”

“Vy dolzhny prostit’ sebya. A vashi mal’chiki lyubyat vas. Doveryat’im. Oni budut zashchishchat’ vas, kak vy vsegda zashchishchal ikh. (You must forgive yourself. Your boys love you. Trust them. They will protect you, as you have always protected them.)”

Marina felt a warm hand take her own then and knew she could stay no longer. She knew that hand; every callus, every ridge . . . its touch written indelibly onto her very soul. The sensation was vague and far away, but it drew her inexorably, pulling her lovingly from her dream. “Samaya malen’kaya,” whispered the beloved voice, familiar and welcoming . . . one she would always follow, no matter where it led her.

“Misha . . .” she murmured, torn between returning to the man she loved and staying with her father. She yearned for Will with every fiber of her soul, but could not make herself surrender her dream easily.

Other voices joined the first; each one soft, broken and frightened. “Marishka, come back to us. Wherever you are, please . . . come back.”

“Clint . . . Kenny . . . Jason,” she whispered, naming each voice as each of the brothers pleaded with her to return to them.

Her father’s fingers were fading in their caress as he released her at last. “K ikh docheri. Ya lyublyu vas, no vashe mesto teper’ mini. Pust’ proshloye lozh’. Ona ne derzhit no tebya. (Go to them, daughter. I love you, but your place is with them now. Let the past lie. It has no hold on you anymore.)”

“Ya lyublyu tebya, Papy. (I love you, Daddy.)”

“I ya lyublyu tebya, moy dorogaya lyubimaya devushka. Bud’te schastlivy I lyubite khorosho. (And I love you, my dearest darling girl. Be happy and love well.)”

Marina came to slowly and with a soft sigh, knowing now that she was truly awake. There was a machine at the head of her bed, beeping quietly in time with her heartbeat. Her eyes blinked open lazily, aware of only the comforting weight of a familiar hand holding her own. Will sat in the chair at her bedside, her hand held firmly between both of his own. He lifted their hands and pressed a
firm kiss to her knuckles, his tri-colored eyes locked firmly on her own. He smiled at her gently, murmuring, “Hi.”

Squeezing his hand in tender reply, she whispered fondly, “Hi.”

He stood and bent to kiss her forehead lovingly, fingers of one hand brushing a strand of her hair off her face. “Welcome back.”

Narrowing her eyes at him, she took a moment to really look at him. His fatigues were rumpled and unkempt as though he had spent a considerable amount of time sleeping in them. There was a distinct five o’clock shadow covering his jaw line and dark bags were etched deeply under his eyes. His hair was longer than she’d seen it since he’d enlisted and he had obviously been running his hands through it constantly, whether out of worry or frustration, she wasn’t sure.

In short, Lt. Colonel William Michael Grimm looked like hell . . . and he was the most beautiful thing she’d ever seen.

Her lips curved into a fond smile, one hand coming up to cup his cheek. Tracing her fingers over his features, she whispered, “Ya lyublyu tebya. (I love you.)”

Will nearly choked on a sob as he reached up to trap her hand to his face. “Boge, ya lyublyu tebya. Nikogda ne delatʹ, chto mne snova. (God, I love you. Don’t ever do that to me again.)”

Marina hummed, parting her lips for his kiss as the both of them simply took comfort in each other for a moment. “I make no promises, Misha.”

“Can you at least promise to do as you’re told next time I tell you to wait for Medical?”

The brunette only grinned tiredly, before glancing around. “Where’re the boys?”

“Sleeping off the last few days. You’ve been unconscious for almost three days, Marishka.”

“What happened?”

“When you got hit by the debris from the building, it caused a pretty massive contusion across the entire back of your leg. The bruise put pressure on the blood vessels in your leg, slowing the flow of blood to your muscles. The doctors called it ‘compartment syndrome’ or something. It was all a lot of jargon that went over my head. Clint said you got dizzy; you had to sit down. Finally, you passed out and Medical brought you back here. The doctors were a little worried they wouldn’t be able to save your leg,” Will explained, with a wry smile and an arched eyebrow. Recognizing the silent admonishment for what it was, Marina at least had the good grace to look abashed.

“Try not to hurt yourself for awhile. The doctors put you on Coumadin® to try and combat the bruising.”

“Anything else, Colonel?” she breathed tiredly, feeling her whole body begin to shut down even as she snarked at him.

Will smiled, watching her yawn. “Nothing that can’t wait, Major. Get some more sleep. The boys will be here by the time you wake up again, and you’re going to need all the energy you can get for them.”

Marina chuckled, unable to deny that claim. The Brothers Grimm were unfailingly energetic on a good day, and down right spastic – at least in Clint’s case – on almost any other. “Okay. Love you, Misha.”

“Love you too, samaya malen’kaya.”
Tugging on his hand briefly, Marina tried to coax him into bed with her. Will resisted for all of a moment, before he toed off his combat boots and shucked his over shirt, leaving him in only his khaki t-shirt and fatigue pants as he slid into bed beside her. It was as they laid there – her head on his chest and his fingers in her hair – that she spoke again. “I dreamt about my father.”

Will’s fingers froze for a second as he processed that, before resuming their caress as though they’d never stopped. “Oh?”

She hummed a wordless affirmative, burrowing closer to him. “He said he loved me.”

Her boyfriend stiffened below her at the words, struggling to understand why that had been important to her. After a breathless moment, he got it. His hands pulled her closer to him, his lips fond against her skin as he murmured, “Oh Marishka . . . of course he does.”

Marina shook her head to negate the forgiveness lying in wait within his voice. “I’m not a good person, Misha. I’ve killed, and lied, and stolen, and cheated.”

“That’s true, but you also gave five kids a chance at a real life. One they never would have gotten from any of the rest of their caretakers. I’m sure that that, at the very least, makes up for whatever sins you’re still carrying around with you. Sleep, Marishka. I’ll be right here when you wake up.”

“You won’t leave?” she asked, voice quiet and plaintive and nothing like the Marina he’d spent so many years falling hard for.

“Not now . . . not ever,” came the quiet vow, the firm promise all the release Marina needed to fall asleep once more.

It was a promise he intended to keep. Come hell or high water.

When Marina woke again, it was a slower and more obscure experience, allowing her to take in her surroundings one sensation at a time. Will’s body was still strong and solid in the bed beside her, but another hand, this one callused and firm, held one hand in their own. Clint. She knew this hand too,

a small smile twitching across her lips as she tuned into the conversation happening around her.

“How is she, Will?” came another well-beloved voice. Kenny.

Will’s answer was delayed for a moment, letting her know that he knew she was awake. He was allowing her the opportunity to take stock of her own body and make her own report. Shifting, she answered Kenny’s question, “I’m all right, Kenny.”

It took a moment, before the two youngest brothers realized that the answer had come from Marina and not Will. “Marishka!” they cheered, both moving to crowd the bed.

Kenny reached out to take the hand opposite of the one that Clint still held, giving Marina the opportunity to squeeze both of their hands firmly. A small grin curved her lips as Will slipped from the bed and reached for the bed controls. Glaring at him fondly, she nevertheless permitted Will to elevate the head of the bed. “Hello dorogoy . . . solnyshko.”

The blue eyes of her second youngest charge were wide and frightened as he watched her for any sign of a lie. “You’re sure you’re okay, Marishka?”

“I’m sure, Kenny. My leg hurts, but what doesn’t kill you makes you stronger.”

The brunette jumped in surprise when Jason’s voice sounded from the doorway, “It’s good to see you awake, Marishka.” The second oldest remaining Brother Grimm stood just inside the doorjamb, a stack of file folders in his arms.
“It’s good to be awake, sladkiy. You look like you have news for us.”

Jason nodded solemnly and held up the file folders. “I have dossiers on each of our dead Red Room operatives. I was kinda hoping that you wouldn’t be awake yet.”

The former spy smiled sadly, knowing why he’d said that. “It’s all right, Jay. I think it’s about time that I told you all what I remember of the Red Room, and everyone I grew up with within the Academy. If they’re sending operatives after me, they’re going to continue sending more until I am dead. You all have trusted me all these years to protect you. I think it’s time that I start to trust you all to protect me too.”

Will’s smile was small as he reached out to squeeze her shoulder. “It’s about time, samaya malen’kaya.”

Marina took a deep breath and steeled her nerves. “I’m done running, Misha. It’s about time that I start facing what I’ve tried so hard to escape.”

Chapter End Notes

*runs like hell* Love you! I'll let you guess what happens next. See you all soon!
Sorry about the long wait. I've been struggling with timelines, but I've finally managed to kick its ass!! Yeah! So here's the next chapter. Last chapter on Marina's backstory, and the beginning of where we start to merge all five timelines into one cohesive behemoth. I hope you enjoy. I do love to read all of your reviews, so I hope to get more of them. Thank you again and I will see you again soon.

Chapter 8

It took some finagling but eventually Marina had been installed in a hospital conference room, her boys sprawled around the table. Jason watched her carefully, the files still firmly in his custody. “Are you sure, Marishka? You don’t have to do this,” he insisted, not surprised when she shook her head stubbornly.

“I need to do this, sladkiy. The past will have no hold over me anymore.”

Jason’s eyes flicked toward Will for a moment, deferring to the eldest brother almost as an afterthought. Marina may be the oldest seated at the table, but she’d handed over her role as de facto leader to Will long ago; except for Marina, none of The Brothers Grimm would dare flout a direct order. Heaving a heavy sigh at the elder brother’s solemn nod, he reached out to hand her the files. He watched her carefully as she reached slowly to take them, and knew that despite her
determination to see it through, she was not looking forward to sorting through the files of dead operatives that she at least still counted as friends. Flipping open a notebook in front of him, Jason prepared to keep meticulous notes on each of the names she read. He knew Marina, and knew that she would want to do something to commemorate each fallen former comrade once they’d returned stateside. Nevermind the fact that they’d come to Croatia to kill her.

Each name passed her lips in a reverent whisper as she paged through the files, her face paling further with each face she flipped past. “Nastia Ilianyovna Dmitriyeva. Florentina Germanovna Gurkovskaya. Rozalina Abramovna Yeltsina. Zoya Konstantinovna Yanayeva. Katya Vasiliyevna Azarova.”

Finally, her whole demeanor broke and her face crumbled into real, heartbreaking grief as she found a name that she not only knew, but called beloved. “O Bozhe, net. Ne Valya.” (Oh God, no. Not Valya.)

Jason scribbled the name in the notebook open in front of him, making sure to place a large star beside the name so that he would know that this name was special. Will’s voice was gentle as he spoke, “Valya? Kto Valya, samaya malen’kaya? (Who is Valya, my little one?)”

Marina bowed her head over the file, fingers tender and loving over the picture of a stone faced blond with steel cold grey eyes. “Valentina Sergeyevna Obolenskaya. We were born in same village in Sibir’, in Kemerovo. Our mothers were friends. After my mother died, her mother used to watch me while my papa was away. She was my best friend; no matter what the Gospozha did to try to make us betray one another, we remained loyal to each other. I can’t . . . why would she . . . I don’t understand.”

Seeing her start to crumble, Will stood from his chair and moved to crouch beside her. “Marishka, eto ne vasha vina. Vy zheli samy skazali, vy predali Rossiyu, kogda ty ukral nas v storonu, chtoby zashchitit’ nas. Ty predatel’ ikh seychas. Valya sdelala svoy vybor, yest’ ne chto inoye, vy mogli by sdelat’ (Marishka, this is not your fault. You said yourself, you betrayed Russia when you took us away to protect us. You’re a traitor to them now. Valya made her choice; there is nothing else you could have done.)”

“No, Misha, ona mertva. Potomu chto ona byla poslana, chtoby ubit’ menya, i my ubili yeye v pervuyu ochered’ Kak eto ne moya vina? (But, Misha, she’s dead. Because she was sent to kill me and we killed her first. How is that not my fault?)”

Will pressed his lips to her forehead, murmuring against her skin. “Ona sdelala svoy vybor. Vy sdelali vash. Tol’ko odin vinovat v lyubom iz eto Akademiya. (She made her choice. You made yours. The only one to blame for any of it is The Academy.)”

The couple sat there for a long moment, with the other three boys looking on before Will finally moved back. “Marishka . . . samaya malen’kaya . . . tell us about the Red Room.”

Marina looked up at him with red rimmed brown eyes, before taking a deep breath and making a conscious effort to straighten her spine and regain composure before nodding her agreement. “I was born January 31, 1941, in Kemerovo, Siberia, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. My mother died with I was only a year old and I don’t really remember her very well. My Papy was a soldier for Materi Rossii, and he had been a part of the Revolution that overthrew the Tsar. I was four when my father received notification that I had been selected, based on his loyal service, to become a part of a elite corps of children and that they would be coming for me. My father protested; I was all he had left, and he would not give me up so easily. The Akademiya came for me in June; my father tried to fight and they put him down like a sobaka. I remember screaming as I watched them kill him, fighting with the
woman who was holding onto me and trying to get to him. I didn’t get the chance to say goodbye; I
didn’t get the chance to do anything except watch as my father’s body fell to the floor of our little
home and the soldiers set it ablaze.”

Here she took a breath, looking up to see the looks of horror on the faces of her boys. She reached
out and squeezed Kenny’s hand, seeing that the gentlest of them all was nearly in tears. “It wasn’t so
bad. Valya was taken with me. And life in Sibir’ was hard, even for those who were in the good
graces of Materi Rossi i yeve Suprugi. The Akademiya offered three full meals a day, and we were
never cold or ill-clothed. It was hard and the Gospozha was cruel, but all of us girls had each other.
Gospozha tried so hard to break us of our humanity, turn us into remorseless automatons, who served
only Rossiya and cared little for morals or ethics. Some of us capitulated; others only grew stronger
for being able to retain that small part of ourselves.

“I still remember the day I took my first kill, and was given my codename. Gadyuka. The Viper. He
was an upper level diplomat; they had evidence he was collaborating with the SSHA (USA). It was
the height of the Kholodnaya Voyna and that was treason of the worst kind in the SSSR. I seduced
him and then killed him while he lay sleeping in the bed beside me; I was 15 and he was probably
50. He was the first of the men whom I have killed, but he was not the last.”

Clint leaned forward, eyebrows furrowed. “How many girls were there?”

Marina shrugged lightly. “I don’t know, not truly. They called it ‘The Akademiya’ only because they
passed it off as a boarding school for special, talented girls. There was always a new class coming in
and another class going out. I was there officially as a singer, ‘training’ to be a classical singer for the
Soviet Opera. I actually sang in Prokofiev’s Maddalena in 1955. I was 14 and the papers who
reviewed the opera said that I had a voice like a Botticelli angel.”

“How many were in your class?”

Marina was quiet for a moment as she thought, before answering in a tired whisper, “There were
eighteen of us who made it through to graduation.”

“Made it through?”

“Those of us who couldn’t,” there was a pause as Marina stumbled over her thought, asking, “How
do you say it, Clint? When someone can’t succeed at something?”

Clint swallowed, “Hack it. They couldn’t hack it.”

“Those of us who couldn’t ‘hack it’ disappeared, and we never saw them again. There were a couple
girls who slit their own wrists. We started out with around 45 of us, and eighteen of us graduated.”

“Yebet,” Jason swore softly, his eyes dropping closed as he considered what she was saying.

“And these women? The ones who died today?”

“They were all in my class. They were my friends, and I never would have wished them dead.”

Will took a deep breath, laying a hand over her hand. “Marishka . . . I need to know . . . who else
was in your class?”

Marina cocked her head at him for a moment, trying to understand the source of that question, before
her eyes widened and she choked. “No, Misha.”

“Samaya malen’kaya, if they come for you again, I want to know who it is we’re going to kill. Tell
us; who else was in your class?”

The brunette bit down on her lip, looking between the four men at the table and seeing the cold determination in each of their eyes. “Promise me, Misha. No matter what happens, you’ll offer them a better chance. And if you can’t, or they won’t, it’ll be a clean kill.”

Each of them nodded immediately, though Will was the only one to speak, “We promise.”


Seeing the devastated tears in her eyes, Will got up and moved to her side. Lifting her carefully from her seat, he sat and settled her against his chest. For the first time in her life, Marina took the opportunity she was being offered and began to sob. She cried for her murdered father, her destroyed childhood, her lost innocence and for the lives of the women she had once known and called family. One by one, each of the brothers got up from their chairs and gathered around her, laying a hand on her and offering her the same love and support she had always given them freely.

It was a long time before she stopped crying.

Jason was right, and as soon as they were back stateside, Marina insisted on a memorial for the women who had died in Croatia. Will and Marina had always planned to buy a place together in New York City, and it was in a little cemetery outside the city that Marina purchased a small plot with enough space for a dozen tombstones. In the center of the little plot stood a single statue of a homely girl with a deformed right hand, whom Marina referred to simply as The Saint. It took Jason about an hour to link the statue of the woman with Saint Germaine Cousin, the patron saint of abused children and young women. Each woman who had died in Croatia was given a marker there, with flowers placed on each headstone every Christmas and Easter. Marina cared for the little plot tenderly, refusing to allow anyone else to do so, choosing to remember the women as the girls they were before the Academy transformed them into assassins.

Over the next year, the Brothers Grimm encountered several other Red Room assassins while they were on assignments. Some were women she had known, and others were not. Each time Will kept his promise. If he could, he offered them the chance to defect, to do something different with their lives. Many took the offer, each knowing that soon Russia would have no more use for them and there would be little to stop their handlers from turning on them. They took their newfound freedom and simply disappeared, taking what they had learned and hiding from any who sought them out. Others refused Will’s offer, and it was for those women that Will would hear Marina weep late at night, after their headstones were erected in her plot and they were alone in their quarters.

The Brothers Grimm were deployed Bangui, Central African Republic, in May of 1996, when everything changed again the day Three Star General Nicholas Fury showed up and demanded a meeting with the by now notorious Major Marina Petrovka, former KGB spy and current officer in the United States Army.

Nineteen year old Capt Clint Grimm leaned up against the wall and frowned as he watched Marina change from her fatigues into her dress greens. Her 29 year old Lt. Colonel was overseeing an bombing operation, in which 25 year old Capt Jason Grimm was in charge of communications and 21 year old PFC Kenneth Grimm was manning one of the heavy guns. The order to report had come while all three were unavailable, and Clint was certain that there was a rat. “Marina, you can’t seriously be meeting with this guy.”
Marina glanced back over her shoulder with a wry grin as she stripped off her soiled khaki tanks and hauled on a clean white undershirt. After living in the same quarters for so long, none of the Brothers Grimm were squeamish about their modesty around each other, and Marina was in too much of a hurry to even pretend any. “Dorogoy, he’s a General and he wants to see me. I can hardly refuse a superior officer.”

Clint pouted, slouching backward against the wall and folding his arms petulantly across his chest. “I don’t like it, Marishka.”

Marina hurriedly buttoned up her uniform shirt and began to tuck it into her pants. “I know you don’t, dorogoy. And admittedly, I’m not asking you to. I’m asking you to trust me.”

“I trust you fine. It’s him I don’t trust.”

The brunette pulled on the drab green coat and fumbled nervously with her necktie, before Clint stepped forward to swat her hands away and fasten it for her. “You’re nervous.”

“Of course I’m nervous. The only time the brass ever wants to see me is if they have some new question about my loyalties. I’ve never met this one; and I don’t know how to approach the interview.”

Clint nodded calmly, fingers nimble on the buttons of her coat as Marina fidgeted helplessly. “Do you want me to call Will? Screw the mission; you know he’d ditch it in a heartbeat if you were in trouble.”

“No!” Marina squeaked, eyes flashing wide. “Don’t tell Will. You’ll only freak him out. I don’t worry as much about you guys when he’s the voice on comms. We don’t know that there’s any reason to worry yet. Just . . . let me meet with General Fury, and then we’ll figure out what to do from there.”

The teenager’s hands were warm and familiar on her shoulders as he held them firmly, his steely grey eyes staring calmly into her slightly more panicked chocolate brown. “You’re sure?”

“No, but it’s the only plan I’ve got.”

Clint chuckled, wrapping his arms around her shoulders as he hugged her lightly. “It’ll be okay, Marishka. He threatens you, we’ll kick his ass. Simple as that.”

The pretty brunette laughed outright at the thought of the Brothers Grimm beating up a three star general for her, even as she acknowledged that they would totally do it if they thought the man was trying to upset her in any way. “Thank you, dorogoy. I needed to hear that.”

Marina snapped off a cocky salute, getting an equally sarcastic one in return, before she took a deep breath and left the barracks behind. She was led by a stone faced gentleman in a suit to a conference room inside Base Command, the other man speaking only once they were stopped at the door.

“General Fury is not a man who appreciates being kept waiting.”

Her lip curled angrily at the implied threat. “And I’m not a woman who appreciates being coerced. I have a twitchy trigger finger, and you’re not Army. So I would keep that in mind, Suit,” she snarled, before turning to the door and essentially ignoring the man’s existence.

Moving inside the conference room, she stopped just inside the door, her body ramrod straight and
her eyes on the wall over the man’s head as she snapped off as respectful a salute as she felt was necessary. “Major Marina Petrovka reporting, as requested, sir.”

The tall black man hummed an absent agreement, flicking away her salute with a careless disregard for protocol and gesturing toward the empty chair across from him. “Shut the door, Major, and come sit with me. I have a proposal for you.”

Marina’s eyes narrowed suspiciously, as she remained standing where she was. “What kind of proposal, General Fury sir?”

Fury flashed her a shark’s grin, his one visible eye twinkling with amusement as he gestured once again to the chair across the table from him. “Come sit, Major.”

Unable to see any way to avoid it, Marina moved cautiously toward the chair. Sitting down, she only just noticed the files laid out on the table in front of the man. They were separated into two stacks, one of the piles containing an extra file that was much thicker than any of the other files on the table. The man reached across the table, offering her his hand. “I think we got off on the wrong foot, Major Petrovka. My name is Director Nick Fury. While I was once a general in the Army, I have been retired for some years now. Currently, I head up the Strategic Homeland Intervention Enforcement and Logistics Division.”

“The what!”

“We prefer the moniker S.H.I.E.L.D., Major Petrovka. I would assume you’ve met my subordinate, Agent Coulson.”

“Is he the blank faced govnoyed who brought me here?”

Fury laughed with a nod. “I think you’d probably like him, Major, under different circumstances. I get the feeling that you both take the same extreme care with those charges you call your own.”

Marina’s eyes narrowed at the use of the word, her voice a low growl as she asked, “Charges?”

There was that shark’s grin again as Fury flipped open one of the files on the table and tossed it in front of her. Taped to the inside cover was a picture of a 12 year old William Cahill and Marina felt her eyes widen as her heart stopped in her chest. “Why, the Brothers Cahill, of course, Major Petrovka. Or should I say, Miss Peters?”

Chapter End Notes

Here are the Russian translations for the chapter:

Sladkiy - Honey (Marina's nickname for Jason)
Samaya Malen’kaya - My Little One (Will's nickname for Marina)
Valya - an intimate diminutive of Valentina used by family and friends
Kto . . . - who is . . .
Sibir' - Siberia
Кемерово - Cryllic for Kemerovo, a city in Siberia
Gospozha - the Madam (of the Academy)
Soyuz Sovetskikh Sotsialisticheskikh Republik - Union of Soviet Socialist Republics or U.S.S.R.
Papy - Daddy
Materi Rossii - Mother Russia
Akademiya - The Academy
sobaka - dog
Materi Rossii i yeye Suprugi - Mother Russia and her Consorts (leaders)
Gadyuka - Viper
SSHA (Soyedinennyye Shtaty Ameriki)- USA (United States of America)
Kholodnaya Voyna - the Cold War (espionage war between USA and Soviet Union)
Yebet - Fuck
Misha - intimate diminutive for Michael (Will's middle name)
Dorogoy - Darling (Marina's nickname for Clint)
Govnoyed - Bastard

So, yeah, that's a cliffhanger . . . *runs like hell*
Deal With A Devil

Chapter Notes

So there's no Russian translations for this chapter, as all the words have already been defined. I hope you enjoy and I look forward to hearing what you all think. Thanks for the continued support and I love you all fiercely. Also, I have updated my tags for this story. That being said, I hope I'm not giving away any secrets by doing so. Suffice it to say, everybody already knows this story is chock full of Rennery goodness . . . how can one go wrong with just a bit more awesome.

Chapter 9

Marina gaped at him for a long moment, her eyes wide in horror as she stared at him. The file with Will’s 12 year old face lay forgotten between them as her mind raced to try and figure out how much the man in front of her knew. Finally, realizing that she was giving away a lot more than she should be, she clamped her jaw shut, slouched back in her chair and gave him a very bored look. “Major Petrovka will be fine.”

Fury smirked at her, “I’m sure. So, is the Army aware of your past as ‘Mary Peters’? Or are they as clueless to your true loyalties as your Russian compatriots?”

“Former Russian compatriots,” Marina corrected, with a brittle smile. “And the Army is aware of my time with the KGB.”
“I notice that you don’t deny the fact that your actual loyalties aren’t to the US Army,” he remarked, that shark’s grin still on his lips as he watched her.

The smallest corner of Marina’s lips curved upward as she slouched back in her chair and stared at him innocently. “I neither confirm nor deny. However, in the interest of protecting my charges, yes, I did neglect to tell the Brass about my time impersonating Mary Peters.”

Fury linked his fingers under his chin and watched her for a long moment, before asking, “I wonder what the Brass would do if someone were to inform them that the offspring from the Cahill project are directly under their noses? What do you think they’d do?”

Marina’s eyes narrowed and her nose flared angrily as she surged to her feet. Bracing her hands on the table, she leaned over into the man’s face, putting them nose to nose. “Do not threaten me, Director Fury. I assure you; I can make your life a lot more miserable than you can make mine. I do not appreciate being manipulated or coerced, and I will not allow you to exploit those boys in any way. They’ve dealt with enough der’mo from opportunistic people in their lives. I will destroy you and everyone else who comes calling, before I allow anybody to mistreat them again.”

“Major Petrovka, I assure you . . . I have no interest in having the Army discover that the synthetic jewels they created are directly under their noses. We both know what would happen, if the Brass were to find out who your Brothers Grimm truly were.”

“They’d lock them up, and this time there wouldn’t be shit I could do to protect them. The Army would execute me as a Russian spy, in a heartbeat.”

“And having them locked up – and you executed – is of no use to me whatsoever. I have no use for the science that created them, seeing as I have no interest in replicating them. That which is unique is highly prized only because it is the only one of its kind. I am, however, very interested in their specialized skill sets.”

Her voice was flat and wry as she parroted, “Their skill sets.”

“Yes, their skill sets.” Turning his attention to the files in front of him, Fury picked one at random and flipped it open. “Grimm, Jason Leonard, 25 years old. Captain, United States Army. Technical support and communications.” Looking up at her, he smirked, “Captain Grimm’s reputation precedes him, you know. I have never seen anyone do what he can with a welding torch and a box of scrap metal. I have a few eggheads in my R&D department who would sincerely like to pick his brain with regards to our comm units and their limited range. Is it true he created a mobile comm unit, that your sniper can use with his hearing aids?”

Marina’s eyes remained wary as she settled back into her seat, watching him cautiously even as she nodded once in agreement. Seeing that that was the only answer he was going to get, Fury reached for another and flipped it open atop the first file. “Grimm, Clinton Francis, 19 years old. Captain, United States Army. Long range sniper and tactical support. I’ve heard he’s profoundly deaf, in addition to being a damn good shot.”

“I believe the terminology is bilateral hearing loss,” Marina corrected lightly, with a brittle smirk. “Dr. Cahill and General Ross were of the opinion that his better than perfect eyesight more than made up for it.”

“And he has binaural hearing aids?”

“Yes. Currently he switches between in-the-ear aids while in the field and behind-the-ear aids while on base. The BTEs make it easier for him to ignore people when he doesn’t want to listen to
anyone,” Marina snarked, a wicked grin on her face. She was surprised when Fury returned it, the same wicked pleasure evident in his own eyes. “What?”

“I wonder how he’d like aids that were completely hidden within his ear canal. I have a scientist affiliated with my Division, that could do that . . . if I put him to the assignment.” Fury remarked casually, flipping over a page and flicking his eyes over the text on the second page. “Speaks fluent Russian, in addition to English and American Sign Language. In fact, all of your charges are trilingual. Is that right?”

The pretty Major was still blinking in response to the backhanded bribe she’d just heard, before she forced herself to pay attention once again. “Da . . . I mean, yes, that’s right. All five of them were taught ASL when it came back that Clint had significant hearing loss. And I’ve been speaking to them in Russian since they were all babies in my arms. And of course, English was the language their Army tutors taught them when they were all still on the base.”

There was a noncommittal hum as he picked up another file, opening the front flap and looking down at the picture of Kenneth there. “Grimm, Kenneth James, 21 years old. Private First Class, United States Army. His recruiter added . . . what was it? Fourteen points to his IQ to just barely make the minimum for recruitment?”

Marina could hear her teeth grinding as she corrected angrily, “Twelve points.”

“Ah . . . and yet he graduated from basic training with top marks in marksmanship, weapons handling, hand to hand combat, and demolitions. That’s . . . very impressive.”

“You say that as though you didn’t think he was capable of it.”

“Most people with his IQ aren’t capable of tying their own shoes, let alone completely dismantling, thoroughly cleaning, then accurately reassembling a gun in 60 seconds. Therefore, I’m fairly certain my reticence is somewhat justified.”

“My boy may not be book smart, like the rest of your der’mo for brains agents, but he’s not stupid,” Marina hissed, once again feeling her hackles rise as she snarled out her defense of her second youngest charge once again. Kenneth was very dear to her, and she’d defended him more times that she could count; she would defend him until the very last breath was ripped from her body.

“No . . . no he is not,” Fury agreed with a dry hum as he continued flipping through Kenny’s file. “In fact, he is probably equally as remarkable as the rest of your boys, if not more so for what he’s had to overcome to get to where he is.”

Marina felt her whole body flush with pride, a small smirk curving her lips as she nodded once in agreement. “I’m glad you think so.”

Fury reached for another folder, flipping it open in front of him next. “Grimm, William Michael, 29 years old. Lt. Colonel, United States Army. Recently recommended for yet another promotion to Full Bird.” Pursing his lips, he nodded once solemnly, “Very impressive for a soldier so young. You must be very proud.”

The small smirk on her lips morphed into a full blown grin as she shrugged nonchalantly, “It’s what he was built for, after all.”

“As young Barney Grimm has attested, Major Petrovka, sometimes what we were built for does not always equal out with what we become.”

The pretty brunette flinched at the name, glancing down at the table. “Barney just . . . he got lost.
He’ll get his head back on straight again eventually. I know he will.”

Fury grinned, “You might be surprised, Major Petrovka, by the fact that he is making a sincere effort at it.” Turning his attention back onto the folder and away from the shock on Marina’s face, he mused absenty, “Your William is a much more successful officer than many others who have been around for a lot longer than he. His tactical and analytical skills are unlike anything I’ve ever seen before. He would be an ideal asset to almost any covert agency; I’m hoping I can seduce him to join my own. Top scores in leadership, marksmanship, as well as top marks in improvisation and resourcefulness. He really is quite extraordinary.”

Marina arched an eyebrow, “So you get your highly specialized tactical team, and the Army gets what?”

“The same thing it always had; an exceptional A-Team. There is really no change to the status of the Brothers Grimm with regards to the Army. The Brothers Grimm will still be soldiers with the United States Army, and the Army would still have primary jurisdiction. If the Brass needed the Brothers Grimm on an assignment somewhere, then they would be well within their rights to send them there. However if S.H.I.E.L.D. requires their services, then primary operational control reverts to us. At the end of the mission, you are all reverted back to the Army.”

“And who all is going to know about the Brothers Cahill?”

“You . . . your charges . . . and me. I have no intention of anyone knowing about my ace in the hole, if you will. All of your identities will be classified at the very highest levels.” Gesturing to the unopened files at his elbow, containing the information on the Project Cahill, he chuckled, “These files will be remanded into your custody and you have my permission to do whatever you like with them. You may even burn them, if you like. No one will ever know that your boys are the Brothers Cahill, and no one at S.H.I.E.L.D. will ever know anything about you or the Brothers Grimm, other than that you exist. Names, ranks, all of it will be kept completely secret . . . all of you will be relegated to a position of completely Eyes Only.”

“All of you’? You’re including me in your little plan for world domination?”

“Major Petrovka, you’re the lynchpin in all of this. You have been their handler since their births. I am hoping that you will continue to handle them for S.H.I.E.L.D. I don’t think I have anyone who has the mental stability to handle all four of them at once.”

“Okay. So I know what you and S.H.I.E.L.D. get out of this arrangement. And I know what the Army gets out of this. But what do the brothers get out of this?”

Fury sat back in his chair and watched her for a long moment. “What do you want to get out of it?”

“I don’t want anything from you or your flunkies. There’s nothing you have that I would want. However, I do have a request on behalf of the boys.”

“What’s that?”

“When he was very young, Clint asked me why they all look identical. Even real, biological brothers have some physical differences. With this in mind, I figured out a long time ago that they were essentially cloned . . . each of them created using the same base genetic coding.”

“And you want me to do . . . what exactly?”

“I want you to find out what the code is. And when you know what it is, I want to know who it is.”
“And what do you intend to do with that information?”

“I’ll cross that bridge when we get to it,” she answered with a careless shrug. “For right now, I just want to know who it is. My boys deserve to know where they come from, if nothing else.”

Fury folded his hands on top of the only unopened file in front of him with a nod. “I don’t have that information with me. I do have access to that information; it’s recorded in the Cahill files that I have encrypted at my home base of operations. So while I can’t give you that information right now, I will definitely do what I can to find out and let you know what I find out.” Looking down at the folder under his hands, he picked it up and held it out to her. “However, allow me to make at least some gesture of my good will.”

Marina narrowed her eyes and reached to take the folder, ignoring the fact that Fury was already standing to leave. Glancing at the name on the folder, she cocked an eyebrow. “Brian Gamble. What the hell do I care about some guy named ‘Brian Gamble’?”

Fury looked back at her from doorway, a small smirk on his lips. “Believe me, Major Petrovka. You care very much,” he insisted, before he turned and was gone.

Frowning, Marina set the folder aside and reached out to gather the Project Cahill files on her boys together and tuck them into the seat next to her. Then, she returned her attention back to the file folder before her. Flipping it open, she gaped at the picture stapled there. A slim blond haired man smirked at the camera, the man’s body kitted out in the standard issue uniform for a SWAT unit officer. But it was the cleverness in dark brown eyes that drew her attention; she knew those eyes. Tracing her fingers tenderly over the familiar curve of cheekbone, she couldn’t stop the whimper of a single name.

“Barney.”
Eventually, she pulled herself away from the file, gathered them all to her and headed back toward the tiny house she shared with the rest of the Brothers Grimm. She arrived home to an empty house, though it was hardly surprising. Will had probably called Clint in to provide surveillance on their bombing target. She could still hear the cannons on the base booming their steady cadence, and she knew that it could be late before any of her boys came home. Setting the stack on the dining table, she resolved to step away from her meeting with Fury for ten minutes, make dinner and then reevaluate from there. No one ever achieved anything by forcing a hasty decision when there were other options on the table.

There were chicken enchiladas keeping warm in the oven and a stack of plates on the counter when her boys finally returned home. Both Jason and Will still wore headsets, Will’s eyes distracted as he continued to keep tabs on whatever mission they’d left behind. Clint cheered at the smell of cooked chicken in the air, the younger three boys rushing to the kitchen to dish up. Marina smiled fondly at them, sighing happily as Will’s hands came to rest on her arms and he bent to press a
loving, if absentminded, kiss to the bared skin of her shoulder. Looking up, he caught sight of Barney’s picture in the open file in front of her and immediately snapped to attention. Frowning, he reached out and pulled the picture from the file. “Marina . . . where did you get this?”

Marina shook her head once, “Go dish up, Misha. I refuse to explain this more than once.”

Clint’s mouth was full of cheesy chicken when he loped back to the table and asked, “How was your meeting with General Fury, Marishka?”

Will’s eyebrows shot up to his hairline at the mention of Marina’s heretofore unknown meeting, even as Marina frowned disapprovingly at her youngest charge. “Since when has it been okay to speak with your mouth full, Clinton Francis?” she scolded fondly, watching as he gulped down his mouthful and bent to kiss her cheek in an obvious ploy for forgiveness.

“Izvinite, Marishka,” he announced, looking utterly unapologetic and earning an exasperated, if fond, sigh from their longtime handler.

Spinning the chair around that was situated across from her, Jason straddled the back, a questioning look on his face as he asked, “What meeting?”

“What General!?” Will demanded, obviously forgetting Marina’s admonition to dish up before she began to answer questions.

“Misha . . . food . . . now. And then I’ll explain everything, I promise.”

Kenny joined them now, a sharp frown on his lips as his eyes snagged on the picture of Barney in Will’s hand. “Is that Barney!?”

Marina sighed, dropping her head onto the table and banging it there once before she looked back up. Reaching up, she snatched the picture from Will and tucked it tenderly back into the file folder. Snapping it shut in a definitive manner, she folded her hands over the top and looked between the four with a fierce frown and determined eyes. “Okay, first of all, I’m serious. Misha needs to dish up before I say a damned word. Secondly, if you’ll all be very patient, I will tell you everything that’s happened in the last twelve hours since this bombing assignment began. Agreed?”

Each of the brothers was quiet for a moment as they examined her concession, before nodding one by one. Will bent and kissed her quickly, before traipsing into the kitchen and dishing up his plate. Setting it aside, he quickly repacked the leftovers into a Tupperware and placed it into the fridge and cleared the counters into a sinkful of soapy water. Marina cocked an eyebrow at him in question as he returned to the dining room table and took a seat at her right. Will shrugged, reaching out to tap a single finger against the now-closed file containing Barney’s face. “I have a feeling that this explanation is going to take awhile. Better to clean up now, while things are still relatively malleable as opposed to later when the cheese has hardened and is a suka to get off.”

Marina thought about that for a moment before they examined her concession, before nodding one by one. Will bent and kissed her quickly, before traipsing into the kitchen and dishing up his plate. Setting it aside, he quickly repacked the leftovers into a Tupperware and placed it into the fridge and cleared the counters into a sinkful of soapy water. Marina cocked an eyebrow at him in question as he returned to the dining room table and took a seat at her right. Will shrugged, reaching out to tap a single finger against the now-closed file containing Barney’s face. “I have a feeling that this explanation is going to take awhile. Better to clean up now, while things are still relatively malleable as opposed to later when the cheese has hardened and is a suka to get off.”

Marina thought about that for a moment before nodding in agreement. “All right, now that everyone’s got food in front of them, I’m expecting no interruptions as I try and get this out as succinctly as possible. Understood?”

The four boys nodded once again, and even Jason reached up to remove the headset from his ear, knowing that Will would tell him if something came up over the comms that required his specific attention. Will reached up and turned down the volume on his own, but as the mission CO he couldn’t actually turn it completely off. Clint spoke up first, “All right, first things first. The meeting with General Fury . . . how did it go?”
Marina took a deep breath and proceeded to hand out the Project Cahill files Fury had given her, each file going to the man whom the file was about. “He knows. And he wanted me to know that he knows. Both about Project Cahill and my assignment to spy on the Project as ‘Mary Peters’ for the KGB.”

Will stared in horror at the picture of his 12 year old face. Jason was the one who demanded the answer that everyone was dying to ask, “What does he intend to do with that knowledge?”

Kenneth spoke up next, “Do we need to run again? Cause I kinda like being a Grimm.”

Marina reached out and squeezed the young man’s hand with a small smile. “No, solnyshko, we don’t need to run again. General, or should I say ‘Director’, Fury has no intention of doing anything with the information. Or so I’ve been assured.”

Will’s eyes narrowed as he read between the lines to the words she wasn’t saying. “Which means that he does have some other intention for the information.”

Marina took a deep breath. “He wants the Brothers Grimm to become a joint taskforce between the Department of Defense and the Strategic Homeland Intervention, Enforcement and Logistics Division.”

“There’s a mouthful,” Jason snarked with an eyeroll.

She chuckled with a rueful grin, “He told me they answer most commonly to the name ‘S.H.I.E.L.D.’”

“So this Director Fury? Can we trust him? And who else knows about us and Project Cahill? What would we be doing for S.H.I.E.L.D.? What the hell do we get out of it? How did he even manage to track us down? We’ve always been so careful to make sure there’s no connection between the Brothers Grimm and the Brothers Cahill.” Will demanded, his eyes flashing like flashfire over the words within the file in front of him.

“Misha, breathe, please. We all need to stay as calm as possible about this.” Marina insisted, reaching out and laid a gentle hand on his forearm. “I don’t know if we can trust him, Misha. However, I do believe him when he says he has no desire for anyone else to discover the connection between you boys and the Project Cahill. He wants the lot of you rather exclusively for his own. He’s even going so far as to guarantee me that, should we decide to go forward, no one at S.H.I.E.L.D. will know a damn thing about any of you, except that you exist. Your names, ranks, affiliation with the Army, everything will be classified at strictly Eyes Only; the only people who will ever know about Project Cahill – and that you five are its offspring – are those of us in this room and Director Fury.”

“But what will we be doing for S.H.I.E.L.D.? Or didn’t he say?”

“As far as I can see, our responsibilities for S.H.I.E.L.D. would be very much like our current responsibilities for the DOD. Whenever there’s some problem that needs our special brand of handling, we go and handle it. The only difference would be that operational control of us would transfer between the DOD and S.H.I.E.L.D., depending on who had deployed us to handle the problem.”

Jason hummed in response to the answer, obviously itching to find an active internet connection and start digging around. “Did he tell you anything about how he connected us to the Project?”

“He did not. He didn’t tell me how he found us, and to be frank I get the impression it’s probably not very important how he managed to make the connection.”
“So S.H.I.E.L.D. and the DOD get an already successful and ready made tactical team. What do we get out of this deal, other than continued stress resulting from our past as the Brothers Cahill?” Will asked, fiddling with his file folder and his eyes glued firmly to Barney’s untouched file in the middle of the table.

“Well . . . _eto sovsem drugoy chaynik ryby_, (that’s a whole other kettle of fish,)” Marina hedged, her eyes flicking sideways in avoidance of the question.

Each of the brothers frowned; Marina was notorious for lacking a brain-to-mouth filter. She had no compunction about announcing exactly what was on her mind at any given moment, usually driving people nuts with her brutally accurate assessments and lack of due respect for what others continued to be sensitive subjects. Anything she tried actively to avoid, was generally accepted to fall within pretty dire circumstances. “Samaya malen’kaya,” Will growled, unwilling to allow her to avoid the answer for long.

Marina sighed and ran a hand back through unruly brunette locks. “Clint, you asked me once where you came from. Do you remember?”

The grey eyed sniper nodded once, eyes going unfocused and vague as he turned his thoughts to the memory in question. “Yeah, I remember. We all have. What does that have to do with anything?”

Marina took a deep breath to steady herself, before speaking again, “I told Fury that I believed you boys deserved to know who your base genetic code came from.”

“Our base genetic code?” Jason asked.

“Yes; I’ve long suspected that five of you are clones, each based on a singular genetic code, with your individual DNAs enhanced and manipulated from there. That would mean that you are each based on a single person; and I want you to know who that person is. At the very least, you deserve to know where you come from.”

Will’s lips pursed as he inquired, “And Director Fury has access to the kind of information that would mean he can tell us that?”

“Apparently, it’s in the original Cahill files. He has copies of all that information at his base of operations. He was going to dig it up, and then get it back to me. I told him I didn’t know what we’d do with that information once we got it; I’m going to leave that decision entirely up to the lot of you. He’s your predecessor . . . you get the choice to ambush him with your existences or not.” Holding up Barney’s SWAT file, she chuckled, “He gave me this as a more immediate ‘gesture of good will’. He knows where is Barney, and from the information contained in this file he’s been monitoring him for some time.”

Every eye turned to Clint, wondering how the youngest brother would take the news that Barney had been found and was doing well for himself. Clint took a deep breath and let it out slowly. “I forgave Barney awhile ago. We were stupid kids; stupid kids make stupid mistakes. He’s our brother, just as much as member of the Brat’ya Mrachnyy as the rest of us. Isn’t it past time to _ubiraysya k chertu nad nim_ (get the hell over it)?”

Will nodded once in agreement to the question, reaching out to take the file from Marina. “Gamble, Brian Joshua, 27 years old. Police Officer Third Grade, Los Angeles Police Department. Member of their Special Weapons and Tactics team for the last three years. Has a reputation for being hot-headed, but is also, quote, ‘arguably the best point man the team has ever had’.”

Jason chuckled, “That sounds like the Barney we used know.”
Marina grinned her agreement, glancing at Will as he flicked through the pages, stopping occasionally to read some notation that struck him as interesting. “Huh . . . he was recently recommended for a Medal of Valor by a Captain Fuller. Something to do with a counter-terrorism situation that he and his partner, Officer James Street, managed to put down a month ago or so ago. Maybe he’s not entirely like the Barney we used to know.”

Each of the brothers took a second to ruminate on that, before Marina folded her hands onto the table in front of her and questioned, “So . . . what do you boys want to do? I’ll support any decision you make.”

Each of the boys did a double take, before Jason spoke up, “You mean we have a choice about this?”

“Fury didn’t make any overtures that would imply he meant to force you to comply.”

Clint had been uncharacteristically quiet throughout the discussion, but his quiet question instantly captured everyone’s attention. “What about you, Marishka? If we do this . . . what happens to you?”

“According to Fury, he’s not sure he has anyone with the mental stability to be able to handle the four of you all at once. I’m fairly certain that the only reason I’m able to handle you all at once without completely losing my mind, is because I’ve had 29 years of practice at corralling vosumashli idiotov (you crazy idiots),” she teased, earning the reluctant chuckle from her charges that she was looking for. Shrugging lazily, she continued, “This being said, he wants me to essentially remain at my current post as your handler, though it would admittedly be a more formal position as opposed to a mostly unspoken one.”

“So you’d be there with us?” Kenny asked in a quiet tone that betrayed his uncertainty.

“Every step of the way, solnechnyy svet. So, I reiterate . . . what do we want to do now?”

The four brothers glanced at each other, before Will spoke up. “What do you think we should do?”

Marina bit down on her lower lip, as she thought. “Fury is a textbook definition of ‘badass motherfucker’. He can protect you. And more importantly, he will protect you and quite possibly better than I ever could. I think you should take the offer.”

Will nodded, even as Clint got up and wrapped his arms around her shoulders. Pressing a fond kiss to her temple, he teased, “No one could have ever protected us better, Marishka. There’s no one in the world more BAMF than you . . . not even Ol’ Eyepatch.”

Marina narrowed her eyes at him at the almost confession, earning an unrepentant grin in reply. “Vy nemnogo proniknut’! (You little sneak!) You couldn’t have known Director Fury had an eyepatch, unless you were spying on us!”

“Ya plokho sebya vesti, (I aim to misbehave,)” he agreed, earning a half-hearted slap and an eyeroll. “Seriously, Sova, we’ve got your back and we know that you have ours. At the end of the day, it doesn’t matter what choice we make with regards to S.H.I.E.L.D.; each of us knows that you will always be in our corner.”

Feeling her heart swell, she stamped down on her overactive emotions and cupped his cheek fondly. “Thank you, dorogoy.”

Clint grinned brightly, winking slyly, “So . . . does that sappy speech get me out of trouble?”

“Ne shans v adu. (Not a chance in hell.)”
Chapter End Notes

I forgot one translation:

Suka - bitch
So yeah. Here’s another chapter! And thank you all again for the awesome reviews. They mean so much to me. I can’t even begin to tell you how much they mean to me. The Russian translations, except for all endearments, are in the text this chapter. Either way, I look forward to hearing what you think.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter 11

It quickly became apparent that no final decision was going to be made that night, and so the brothers split up into their usual nightly activities. Convinced that Jason had cheated the night before – which was admittedly very likely – Clint challenged the older brother and tech specialist to a rematch and another round of Super Mario 64. Kenny grabbed the book Marina had assigned him a book report on, and hunkered down in an armchair in the living room with his brothers. And Will... Will headed up the stairs to bed, every line of his body screaming his exhaustion.

Marina watched him go from where she was finishing the dishes in the kitchen. Clint and Jason traipsed into the kitchen only moments later to gather the prerequisite supplies for a long night of Nintendo 64® and glanced at each other once they noticed Marina’s preoccupation. Clint wrapped his arms around her waist and rested his chin on her shoulder. “I’ll finish the dishes, Marishka; go after him.”
That jarred Marina from her thoughts and she cocked an eyebrow at him. “That’s a first. You’re actually offering to do the dishes? What did you do, dorogoy?”

Clint grinned brightly, “I’ll never tell.”

Jason chuckled and bent to drop a fond kiss on the woman’s cheek. “You’re obviously worried about him. We’ve got this; go.”

“You’re sure?”

Both brothers nodded, even as Clint shifted her physically toward the exit to the kitchen. Marina smiled at them both, getting in her usual evening hugs and goodnights. “Ya lyublyu vas oboikh. (I love you both.)”

“Tozhe tebya lyublyu, (Love you too,)” they both called after her as she moved to the living room to check on Kenny.

“How’s it coming, Ken?”

Kenny grinned up at her, tilting up his cheek for her kiss. “I’m almost finished.”

“That’s great, solnyshko. I’m gonna head up to bed, but the boys’ll be awake if you need any help, okay?”

“Uh-huh,” he agreed, arms coming up to hug her tightly. “Lyublyu tebya, Marishka. (Love you, Marishka.)”

“I ya lyublyu tebya, sochny svet. Sladkikh snov, (And I love you, sunshine. Sweet dreams,)” she whispered into his hair before she headed up the stairs after Will.

Either she was very predictable, or Will just knew her entirely too well, but when she entered the bedroom they shared, Will was sitting with his back against the headboard and obviously waiting for her. She smiled at him, admonishing fondly, “I thought we agreed no fatigues in bed.”

Will chuckled, reaching out and grabbing her arm. Marina went willingly, settling comfortably on the bed between his spread legs. “Rubl’ za tvoi mysli? (Ruble for your thoughts?)” she murmured in a quiet hum, fingers dancing lazily across the fatigue covered thigh next to her.

“Ne uveren, chto oni stoyat tak mnogo, (Not sure they’re worth that much,)” he admitted with a helpless laugh.

Reaching for his hand, she played contently with his fingers as she hummed. “Try me.”

He was quiet for a very long time, before he spoke. “I’m somebody’s clone. Am I him? Or am I me? How much of me is him, and how much of me is me?”

Marina frowned, twisting in his arms to face him. “Misha . . . you were cloned; that doesn’t mean you’re someone’s clone. You are very much your own person. All of you are.”

“Are you sure you’re not just saying that to make me feel better?”

“No, I’m not. Think about it. Except for your faces, none of you boys have a damn thing in common. If you were each simply the same person, I wouldn’t love you each so very differently.”

“Marishka . . . samaya malen’kaya . . . I hate to be the bearer of bad news, but you do not love us
differently."

Marina narrowed her eyes at him, her entire demeanor dropping into subzero temperatures. “So you think that I’m desperately and completely head over heels for the rest of the boys? And I’m just settling for you, because you’re the eldest?”

Will grimaced at the icy tone of her voice, at least having the grace to look abashed. “No, I don’t think that. But, you treat all of my brothers exactly the same.”

"No I don't."

"Prove it."

Marina smirked, even as she rolled her eyes at his petulant insistence. “All right. We'll start with Kenny. He is my angel boy, my little boy in all the ways that matter. He’s good and sweet and loyal, and I love him with a maternal fondness that I truly have no right to. I will defend him to my very last breath, and I will murder anyone who makes him feel that he is not just as awesome and special as any of the rest of you. Up to and including Fury, which he found out when I was in his face when I thought he didn’t think Kenny was an amazing young man, considering the hand he’d been dealt by the Project.

“Clint is my favorite, that has never been a secret to anyone. But he doesn’t need me like Kenny does. He’s always been self-sufficient, ever since he was old enough to start doing things for himself. He’s sarcastic, funny, utterly irreverent, and he doesn’t give a damn about anything outside of this family. He prefers the isolation that comes from being a sniper, but he loves being in the thick of the insanity that is this family. He needs it, a touchstone to come back to so that he remembers what’s important. So my love for him is just as fierce, but more hands off. I’m content to let him live his life, only stepping in to help when he asks for it.

“And if I say that Clint is self-sufficient, consider what I mean when I say that Clint has nothing on Jason. Jason doesn’t need a damn thing in this world. He has his computers, his training, and his technical skill set. He’s devoted to this family, don’t get me wrong, but he doesn’t need us like Kenny and even Clint do. He’s got his job, and – if something were to happen to take us away from him – that job would be enough for him. He’d miss us if we were gone, but it wouldn’t destroy him. While I love him, there will always be a distance in that emotion so that he doesn’t feel overwhelmed and smothered by it."

Will chuckled, forced to concede the point. “He is an inglorious bastard.”

“Jason is his own person, just like Clint and Kenny. And I love each of them very differently. And I love you even more differently than I love the rest of them.”

“Oh really? And how do you love me, Major Petrovka, that sets me apart from the rest?”

“You are the sun that rises every day,” Marina stated. “I would follow you to the end of this world and back, if you asked me to. There is not, and never could be, anyone for me but you.”

He bit down on his lower lip as he watched her. “Don’t get mad.”

Marina jerked backward, narrowing her eyes at him at the incongruous statement. “I don’t want to know why, do I? Okay . . . I’ll bite . . . why?”

“What do we do about Barney?”

The brunette took a deep breath in at the question. Turning back around, she cuddled into him once
again, “I don’t know. I don’t know what we do about Barney . . . or Brian . . . or whatever the hell his name is now.”

Will’s arms tightened fractionally as he spoke, his tone angry and seething, “I want to hate him. Clint nearly died! But he’s our brother. And I don’t have any right to be angry, if Clint has already forgiven him for what happened. Do I?”

Marina squeezed his hand, turning her head into his to nuzzle fondly at his cheek. “I’m still angry too, Misha. I know Clint has let it go, but knowing that doesn’t immediately negate the emotion. But Clint’s right. It’s time to let it go. He’s just as much a part of the Brothers Grimm as any of the rest of us. Maybe it’ll take awhile for him to earn back our trust, but at least he should be given the opportunity to try.”

“Do we go after him?”

“If we do, I don’t think you should be the one to go.”

“Why not? I’m the eldest.”

“And Clint is the one that Barney needs forgiveness from. If anyone should go, it should be Clint.”

“If Clint goes, you’re going with him.”

Marina smirked, rolling her eyes fondly. “Of course. Clint and Barney alone in LA? Think of the property damage they could get up to.”

For a brief moment, it seemed like there would be no reaction. Will stared at her with wide, if solemn eyes, obviously caught off guard by the joke. Finally, a smile flirted briefly with the corner of his lips. At long last, he began to quietly chuckle and only moments later, those chuckles had morphed into outright laughter. His whole body shuddered with them, and his arms fell lax from her waist as he collapsed backward onto the bed under their weight. Marina stayed sitting up between his legs, arms around her knees and her head turned back over her shoulder to watch him laugh. “Better?” she asked once the giggles had finally started to die down and he lay panting for air.

Will lay helpless on the mattress, trying to get his breath back. Finally, he quieted and reached up to pull her down on top of him, their bodies pressed together from hip to toes. “Better. I needed that.”

“I know,” Marina agreed, folding her arms on top of his chest and resting her chin there to put his face at a more advantageous angle to her own.

They were silent for a long moment, simply enjoying their closeness and the ability to simply be alone together for a moment. It seemed like they never had the opportunity to just be; they were constantly in the company of Will’s younger brothers, or on an top secret assignment for the Army, or they were on leave from active deployment and surrounded by the crazy circus freaks they still considered to be family. Now that the opportunity had arisen, neither one was looking to spurn it recklessly.

It was a long time, before Will spoke up again. “So . . . what do we do about Barney?”

“What do you think we do?” Marina asked, with a resigned tone in her voice, “We go after him, of course.”

Nearly a week later, Marina and Clint strode confidently into LAPD headquarters as though they owned the place. Clint wore a hooded leather jacket, with a pair of aviator sunglasses obscuring his face, conscious to keep his head down so that no one mistook him for his long absent brother.
Marina wore a black pencil skirt with a smart white button-down shirt, her shiny black pumps clicking sharply on the linoleum floor as she led Clint between desks and past staring police officers toward the glass walled office at the back of the bullpen. Her eyes flicked briefly toward where Barney stood with his partner, Officer Street, both of them staring in shock and - at least in Barney’s case - a healthy dose of fear, before turning her eyes forward again and gathering her resolve to her once again. Without a care in the world, she shoved open the glass door and plopped carelessly into the upholstered chair in front of Captain Thomas Fuller’s desk. Clint took up a position against the only plaster wall, arms folded over his chest and head still bowed enough to obscure his features, but not his view of the exits or the bullpen through the glass walls.

Fuller was literally gawking at Marina as she sat back in the chair, her arms resting casually on the armrests and one knee coming up over the other. She watched the captain stare at her, visibly patient as she waited for him to get his scattered and awestruck thoughts in order. Finally, he spoke. “Who the hell are you?”

“My name is Major Marina Petrovka. And you have someone here I want.”

Chapter End Notes

So yeah, I really like cliffhangers. Love you all! *runs like hell to escape the mob*
Reunion

Chapter Notes

As always, Russian translations are at the end of the chapters! Thank you for all of your reviews. I love them fiercely. OH! And new banner, complete with all of the couples in this story. Let me know what you think, huh? Love you guys!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter 12

Capt Thomas Fuller was a lot of things, but he was not a patient man. If you asked either Brian Gamble or Jim Street, both would agree that he was a brown-nosing son-of-a-bitch; an opinion that Fuller knew most of his department agreed with, though would never admit to out loud. But he was also a good police captain. He’d done his dues on the beat, and he’d paid his time as a detective. He’d earned his spot and, regardless of the erroneous opinions of others, he was a damn good captain. To be honest, he could put up with a lot of things.
The one thing he’d never had to put up with before was an overly entitled Army officer storming into his office and taking over like they owned the damn place. It put a stone in his craw like nothing else in the world; he would even willingly admit – though never aloud – that Gamble and his fat mouth was preferable to this. The fact that it was some woman only made the whole situation worse.

“Woman . . .” he started, jolting as the hulking man against the wall spoke up, “Her name is Marina Petrovka. And it’s Major Petrovka to you, mudak.”

The familiar voice made him twitch and his eyes flicked unconsciously to check that Gamble was still out in the bullpen with Street. The woman smirked viciously as she noted the action, folding her hands primly in her lap. “Having a bit of déjà vu, Captain Fuller?”

Fuller’s teeth clenched angrily as he glowered at her, “What exactly is it that you want? I’m a very busy man, and I don’t really have time to babysit the Army.”

“I hardly think I’m of an age where I need to be babysat. And, as I’ve already stated, you have someone here that I want. So it’s not really a matter of what, but more of a matter of whom?”

Marina’s lips curved further as he closed his eyes and visibly began to count backwards from 100 to calm down. Finally, sometime around number 23, he opened his eyes again. “All right, Major Petrovka whom exactly is it that you want?”

“We want Officer Gamble,” answered the voice from the wall, once again the too familiar tone sending a foreboding shiver up the back of Fuller’s neck.

Fuller’s eyes narrowed as he glared between the two. “What the hell does the Army want with that jackass?”

Marina rolled her eyes with a quiet mutter, “More than you think.” A soft snicker sounded from the wall, before Marina spoke up again, “I want to speak to Officer Brian Gamble. Why I want to speak with him . . . is really none of your business.”

The man spoke up then, “Gamble was just awarded a Medal of Valor, wasn’t he? For his handling of a sensitive terrorist situation? Let’s just say; it caught the attention of the Brass.”

“Thank you, Capt Grimm,” Marina demurred, thanking whatever god was listening for Clint’s ability to think plausibly on his feet. Her body twitched minutely as she struggled to repress her laughter when Fuller’s eyes shot open in shock at Clint’s explanation. Clearly he hadn’t thought that the receipt of the LAPD’s highest honor would ever be of interest to the Army’s Top Brass. Of course, it usually wasn’t but this wasn’t an Army recruiting trip; this trip was strictly personal. But what Fuller didn’t know just might get her what she wanted. “Now, can I please speak to Officer Gamble?”

Fuller stood, grinning brightly as he began to look forward toward a dazzling future in which his department’s greatest troublemaker was no longer his problem. “Of course, Major Petrovka.”

Glancing through the glass walls, he spotted Gamble standing alone near the coffee maker before returning his attention to the woman seated in his chair. “Let me go and get him for you.”

“Thank you, Captain Fuller,” Marina sighed, a strange smirk curving the corner of her lips. Fuller cocked his head slightly, unable to recognize the elusive emotion behind the expression before leaving his office.

Moving toward where he had last seen Gamble, his forehead furrowed to see that the blond SWAT sniper was no longer standing there. In fact, as he looked around the bullpen, it came to his attention that the man was noticeably absent from the room in general. Taking a deep breath, he began to grumble under his breath, “Fucking Gamble, always trying to be a damned ninja. At least he won’t
Looking up from his vitriolic dissertation at his shoes, he jumped a mile into the air at the sight of Brian Gamble already in his office . . . hugging Major Petrovka . . . and receiving a hug in return, a pair of affectionate smiles on each of their lips as though they knew one another already and had known one another for a long time. “What the . . . damn it, Gamble, stop sneaking around my bullpen!”

“I see you haven’t gotten too rusty after all, Barney,” the hooded man by the wall joked, an all too familiar grin curving his lips, the only part of his face that was readily visible under his hood and aviators.

“First of all, it’s Brian now, Clint. And secondly, I got nothing on you, little brother, but I do try to keep up on a few things,” Brian joked with a smirk and wicked wink at Captain Fuller. “Cap just makes it easy for me.”

“Man’s kinda a mudak, isn’t he?” Clint asked wryly, and Fuller got the distinct impression that the man was rolling his eyes at him from under his sunglasses. If Brian and this “Clint” were brothers, he could almost guarantee it; Brian would have been.

“You have no idea, little brother,” the older brother agreed, reaching out to loop one arm around the other man’s neck and haul him forward. Clint yelped indignantly as Brian’s knuckles rubbed furiously over the top of his head. “Ba . . . Brian! Knock it off!”

Soon, Clint had managed to twist free and the two brothers began to wrestle playfully. Fuller’s eyes flew wide at exactly the moment the hood fell back and the sunglasses went flying toward the opposite corner. TWO Brian Gambles? Fuck his life! Marina sighed heavily as they crashed to the floor, upending Fuller’s chair, knocking into his desk and throwing some of his knick knacks onto the floor. “You see this? This is why we get property damage if we leave you two idiocy alone. Get up the both of you. You’re embarrassing me,” she scolded, her face set sternly and her arms folded firmly over her chest.

Brian bounded to his feet and launched himself at Marina, throwing his arms around her and lifting her clear off her feet. “You missed me, Marishka. Don’t lie.”

“I neither confirm nor deny,” Marina groused, even as she wrapped her arms around his neck and hugged him fiercely. “Get your gear. We need to talk.”

The young man grimaced, “Dreaded last words.”

Marina’s eyes were sad even as she smiled at him. “You knew we were going to need to talk, Brian.”

“I know. I just . . .”

Clint reached out and squeezed his brother’s shoulder firmly. “Don’t worry about it, Brian. It’s already been forgiven and forgotten. Come on . . . I’m starving; let’s eat.”

The three left Fuller’s office then, leaving Fuller staring after them in horror as Brian tossed back his head and laughed. “Clint . . . you’re always starving.”

“Hey! I’m a growing boy!” Clint protested, scampering back into the office to retrieve his sunglasses before rejoining them at Brian’s desk as he gathered his things to leave for the day.

Jim Street, Brian’s SWAT partner and good friend, and another officer named TJ McCabe
approached the three warily. “Bri? What’s going on?” Jim asked warily, as he glanced between Brian and Clint’s face.

“Jimbo! TJ!” Brian boomed, reaching out to pull Marina closer with an arm around the waist. “I’d like you to meet a couple people! Marina . . . Clint, this is my partner, James Street, and a friend of ours, TJ McCabe.”

Marina smiled at the visibly puzzled officer, reaching out to offer him her hand. “Major Marina Petrovka, US Army. It’s nice to meet you both.”

Clint grinned, offering his own hand as Jim shook Marina’s hand dazedly. “Captain Clint Grimm, US Army; I’m that idiot’s little brother.”

The officers shook Clint’s offered hand, before Jim rounded back on Brian. “Bri . . . I didn’t know you had a brother.”

“I have four brothers, Jim. Look . . . we’ll talk later okay? I have to book outta here before Fuller regains his senses and realizes that I’m cutting out early. Okay? I’ll meet you tonight? The bar?”

McCabe stared at Marina for a long second, obviously appreciating the view. He jerked when Clint piped up, “Stop staring at her.”

“Dude . . . no harm, no foul. Besides, she don’t mind; do ya, beautiful?” he asked, reaching up to catch a lock of Marina’s hair.

Clint moved so fast, he blurred, his hands capturing McCabe’s arms and twisting them painfully behind his back. “I told you . . . stop staring at her. Don’t touch her, don’t look at her . . . hell don’t ever think of her again.”

“Dorogoy, let him go. The kolot’ doesn’t know any better; he’s never met Misha.”

Brian frowned, “Misha? You mean Will? What the hell does Will have to do with anything?”

Clint shoved the officer hard, sending him stumbling away and clutching at his strained left shoulder. “Dude, you have missed a lot.” Hooking his arm up over the shoulders of both Marina and Brian, he started to steer the two to the doors. “Allow me to be the first to inform you, that Marina and Will are A Thing.”

“A Thing?” Brian asked skeptically, cocking an eyebrow at Marina from around Clint’s head. “Like a ‘have sexytimes and bump uglies’ Thing?”

The last thing anyone in the bullpen heard before the three disappeared through the door was a delicate, feminine snort as Marina Petrovka insisted, “Oh, my dear dikiy rebenok, that is none of your damn business. And even if it was . . . I’m pretty sure I wouldn’t tell you.”

Ten minutes later, the brothers and Marina were seated together at a table on the patio of a little café Brian knew that Marina would love. The pretty brunette took a long pull from her IBC Root Beer bottle, listening fondly to the sounds of the brothers teasing each other from across the table. Marina was no fool, and had placed herself between them to prevent any smacking, lunging or wrestling type shenanigans, but the two of them had never needed to get physical to pull the flesh from each others’ bones.

“Boys . . . I rather think it’s time to pay attention to the matters at hand, yes?”

Brian immediately slouched in his chair, his head ducking between his shoulders. “Will hates me,
doesn’t he?”

Marina frowned, laying a tender hand on the forearm exposed by the shoved-up sleeve of his black long sleeve. “You’re gonna have to take that up with Misha, dikiy rebenok. We came because we found out where you were and there were things that needed to be said between the three of us. Of everyone in this family, Brian, you needed our forgiveness most.”

“You have no idea how much I hated myself for what happened after the Swordsman and I left the circus. We traveled the country together for weeks, thieving and pulling cons. And the guilt . . . it was a living thing. I finally woke up in our hotel in San Bernadino, and he’d left me behind. I guess he didn’t want to deal with my moping any more,” Brian whispered, his head still ducked over his hands.

“All is forgiven, Brian. You’re gonna need to work to earn back the trust you broke when you left, but the slate is clean and it’s time to move forward from here. With this in mind . . . how would you like to come to New York City and work with us, as apart of S.H.I.E.L.D.’s joint taskforce with the DOD?”

“S.H.I.E.L.D.?”

“The Strategic Homeland Intervention, Enforcement and Logistics Division. It’s a covert alphabet agency that protects the people of this country from terrorists of . . . unusual origins.”

“I’m not really Army material, Marina. I would never fit in there.”

“I know, but I have a job offer for you from Director Nicholas Fury himself. You’d be installed within S.H.I.E.L.D. as a propationary agent for the space of 6 months; of course, you’d join us on all of our S.H.I.E.L.D. deployments. However, while we switch between working for the DOD and S.H.I.E.L.D., your contract would be only with S.H.I.E.L.D.”

“And they don’t mind the fact that I have a not so sterling past as Barney Grimm?”

“All of that would be expunged from Barney Grimm’s record. You can even keep the name Brian, if you like. Personally, I kinda like it. Either way, The Brothers Grimm are classified at Eyes Only, so your involvement with us wouldn’t be something you could ever talk about.”

“And Jason? He’s not going to appreciate me just waltzing back in to take up the second in command spot that I was born for.”

Clint snorted, “Jason’s tech support, Brian, that’s all. Marina’s second in command; and there isn’t a damn thing that you will ever be able to say that will make Will change his mind about that.”

Marina folded her arms and watched Brian process all of the information he’d been given. “There’s also one more thing that you should know, before you agree.”

“What’s that?”

“Director Fury? He knows about Project Cahill, and what each of our roles were within it. It’s the primary reason he’s offering you this job. Either way, the decision is yours. Neither I nor S.H.I.E.L.D. are going to force you.”

“So what are my options, realistically?”

Marina held out the file folder containing the offer Director Fury had put together for her, letting him reach for it on his own time. “You can refuse the offer, of course, and go back to the LAPD and
SWAT. Or, you can take the offer, join S.H.I.E.L.D., take the training the Army gave you and do something worthwhile with it.”

Brian flipped idly through the paperwork, reading every sentence as though his entire future was on the line. Finally, he snapped the file closed and set it on the table beside his plate. “All right then. When do I start?”

Chapter End Notes

Russian Translations:

mudak - asshole
idioty - idiots (plural)
kolot' - prick
dikiy rebenok - wild child
Chapter 13

That night, while Brian went out to see Jim Street for the last time as “Brian Gamble,” Marina and Clint crashed into their bedrolls on Brian’s living room floor in an ill-fated attempt to sleep off their 36 hour trip that had taken them from Bangui to Djibouti to London to New York City and finally to Los Angeles. Marina lay curled on her side, watching Clint stare at the ceiling quietly. “Rubl’ za vashi mysl? (Ruble for your thoughts?)”

Clint’s head rolled to watch her, grey eyes calm as he spoke, “Will’s gonna flip his shit. Isn’t he.”
Only someone who had known for Clint as long as she had would have ever known that that wasn’t a question.

Marina sighed, closing her eyes and burrowing deeper into her bedroll. “Bozhе, nadeyus’, net. (God, I hope not.)”

It took less than a day for Marina to pack up Brian’s tiny apartment into the single duffel bag he owned. His circus upbringing had ingrained in him the need to keep only the bare essentials, and he didn’t have much. He’d rented the apartment fully furnished and hadn’t really decorated it with any more than a couple pictures of his brothers and Marina on the walls. Marina smiled softly as she wrapped each of them into newspaper before packing them into his duffle; she recognized them as pictures that had gone missing right around the time everything had fallen out and Brian had disappeared into the night. She could admit to herself at least, that the thought had never crossed her mind that he’d taken them.

While Marina packed, Clint and Brian could often be found out on the balcony of Brian’s apartment, having a beer and trying to repair the relationship between them that had been damaged so badly all those years ago. Marina was content to allow them the time, knowing that Will was not going to make the prodigal son’s homecoming easy for Brian; he would need an ally in his corner.

It seemed hardly any time at all, before Brian was saying goodbye to Los Angeles and joining Clint and Marina in the belly of the C-130 that was going to fly them to New York City. Both Army officers had spent more than their fair share of time in a troop transport, and both took the time to laugh at him as he fumbled with his seat harness. Finally, Marina took pity and moved to assist him in latching it around himself securely. Brian glared at the both of them, vowing loud and violent revenge on them both. It was only when they got up into the air that Brian went as silent as the grave.

Clint glanced at Marina, murmuring in an undertone meant only for her ears, “You think he’s okay?”

“I don’t know, dorogoy. I do know that if I was in his position, I would be more than a little nervous of what awaits him in New York.”

“You mean Will.”

Marina’s lips compressed as she nodded once. “Misha is not going to make this easy for him, Clint. He’ll eventually ease up on Brian, but it’s gonna be difficult for awhile until that happens.”

“You think Will will ever trust him again?”

“Eventually. It won’t be easy and Brian is going to have a time of it; but once he has Misha’s trust again, I think he’ll find that it was worth it.”

Clint hummed a noncommittal agreement, shifting in his harness to rest his head against Marina’s shoulder. Turning her head, she pressed a fond kiss to his forehead. “You should sleep while you can. We’ll probably have to be debriefed once we get to New York.”

The youngest Grimm yawned widely with an agreeable nod. “Okay. Lyublyu tebya, Marishka.”

“Lyublyu tebya, dorogoy.”

The rest of the flight was silent as Marina worked on some paperwork for Fury while Clint slept against her shoulder and Brian fidgeted nervously in his seat across from her. They arrived in New York early in the morning, the dawn of a new day just barely starting to lighten the sky. The pilot, a young second lieutenant who looked barely older than Clint, scampered down into the hold and
threw himself to attention. “You have a message from Colonel Grimm, Major.”

Marina sighed, reaching up to rub one hand over her face even as Clint sat up with a wide stretch and a yawn. “Of course I do, Lieutenant. All right . . . let’s hear it.” Clint grinned at her resigned tone, unlatching his harness and getting up to help Brian untangle himself from his own.

“Colonel Grimm is on base, ma’am. He and the rest of your unit are waiting for you and Capt Grimm on the tarmac.”

Brian paled to about the color of paper as Marina nodded. “Thank you, Lieutenant. Shut her down, and open the cargo bay doors. We’ll grab our gear as we disembark.”

“Yes, ma’am,” the boy barked, shooting off a sharp salute and then dashing back up to the cockpit to flip the switches that would let them out of the belly of the beast.

Marina set to work on her harness, pushing herself to her feet and brushing down the skirt of her dress uniform. She and Clint had both elected to wear their Greens, knowing that they would be hauled in to be debriefed on their new positions with S.H.I.E.L.D. as soon the C-130 touched the ground. Brian wore civvies, as he’d had to return his SWAT uniform once he’d quit, but Marina was fairly certain she’d see him in a new uniform with the S.H.I.E.L.D. hawk on his left breast before the day was out.

Reaching out, she touched his arm lightly. “You ready for this, dikiy rebenok?”

“He’s gonna punch me, isn’t he?”

It didn’t take much to guess who Brian was talking about and Marina couldn’t stop herself from hesitating slightly. Brian flinched at the silent confirmation, eyes directed toward the floor once again. His eyes closed and Marina recognized the words of a Russian prayer on his lips as he whispered under his breath. Finally, he took a deep breath in and straightened up, his brown eyes staring into hers with determined stubbornness and not a little fear. “All right . . . let’s do this.”

“Let me go first, all right? I know you just want to get this over with, but it may just save your face. Understood?”

Brian nodded in agreement, before he and Clint fell into step behind Marina as she led the way out of the plane. William Michael Grimm was a scary son of a bitch when he wanted to be, and even Marina felt a shiver race down her spine at the stony set of his usually gregarious features. He stood on the tarmac, flanked by Kenneth and Jason on each side, all three dressed in their formal uniforms. Behind them, she could just barely make out Director Fury waiting beside an all black SUV with blacked out and, unless she missed her guess, bulletproof windows. Taking a deep breath, she smiled brightly and walked crisply to Will’s side. “Hello moy vozlyublennyy,” she greeted him fondly, her eyes sparkling.

He gave her a soft smile, his eyes warming at her apparent happiness. Marina knew that he was upset about Brian, but was relieved that his anger at Brian did not affect his love for her at all. Moving into his space, she tilted up her chin and closed her eyes as he bent to meet her halfway. Their lips were the only parts of their bodies to touch, each uncomfortable with displaying their affection in public and ever conscious of the code of acceptable behavior that came with their uniforms. “Samaya malen’kaya . . . I trust your trip was worthwhile?”

“Very,” she agreed, moving away from him and turning to face Kenneth. The younger Grimm was practically vibrating where he stood at Will’s left shoulder, and Marina reached out to him fondly. “Idi syuda, solnyshko. (Come here, sunshine.)”
Kenny lunged forward, wrapping his arms around her and lifting her completely off her feet as he hugged her tightly. Marina giggled as he began a running commentary of everything that had happened in the 12 hours since the three members of the Brothers Grimm had arrived at S.H.I.E.L.D.’s New York base the night before. She made all the appropriate noises in all the right places, even as Kenny set her down and Jason leaned forward to press a fond kiss to her cheek. “Hello, sladkiy; sit rep?”

“We’ve been installed in base housing. Our things are there. We’re expected to report for debrief at 0900 hours. Fury’s here to go over some last minute protocols before we get to base.”

She hummed absently; very suddenly aware that Will’s attention had shifted from her and his brothers and onto a fidgeting Brian. Turning, she looked between the two elder brothers in their little family and waited to see what her lyubimomu would do next. Brian flinched under the weight of Will’s gaze, the older brother’s eyes as green as his uniform and as cold as the icecaps. “So . . . the prodigal son has returned,” he remarked tightly, his tone glacial and his arms coming up to fold over his chest Sternly.

Brian closed his eyes at the older man’s tone, before straightening his shoulders and forcing himself to meet his brother’s eyes. “Hello Will. Long time no see.”

“And whose fault is that?” Will shot back, fury blazing hotly in his eyes for a second, before he forced himself to calm and the fury in his eyes mellowed into coals once again. “What do we call you?”

The former SWAT sniper glanced at Marina quickly, causing Will to bark, “I didn’t ask her . . . I asked you. What do we call you now?”

“Brian . . . I answer to Brian.”

Will was silent for a long moment, hot eyes watching Brian as though the younger man was a bug under a microscope. Finally, Will took a deep breath and extended his hand. “Welcome to the Brothers Grimm, Brian.”

“Will?” Brian asked in confusion, forehead furrowing as he tried to figure out his angle.

The oldest brother shook his head and waved away the question, explaining quietly, “Sorry about that. My brother, Barney, nearly got my youngest brother, Clint, killed almost four years ago now. You look a hell of a lot like him, but you said your name was Brian. So obviously you can’t be him. I don’t trust you yet; you’re an unknown entity and I won’t risk my team or my family. But I’m sure I will; there’s plenty of time for us to learn to trust each other.” Will’s eyes pierced Brian through the heart as he finished his thought, “I do want to make one thing very clear, though. I don’t ever want to see Barney Grimm again, Brian. If I do . . . I’ll kill him. I hope we understand each other.”

Unable to believe that he’d earned forgiveness so easily, Brian swallowed down hard on the tightness in his throat as he fought to hide his tears. “We do,” he agreed, reaching to shake Will’s hand.

“Good. Then I don’t forsee any problems.” Turning to Marina, he gave her a small smile and offered her his hand. “Shall we, Major?”

Marina’s return grin was brilliant and relieved as she chirped, “We shall indeed, Colonel.”

Linking her hand into his, she couldn’t resist the opportunity to pull him down and press a grateful kiss to his cheek. Resting her forehead against his cheekbone, she whispered into his ear, “Spasido,
Will only smiled, lifting her hand to press a fond kiss to the back. “Come on; we need to get going or we’re going to be late.”

And for the first time since that night under the Carter’s Circus Big Top, the Brothers Grimm walked into the future together as a family once again.

Chapter End Notes

Russian Translations:

dorogoy - darling (Marina's nickname for Clint)
dikiy rebenok - wild child (Marina's nickname for Brian)
moy vozlyublennyy - my beloved (Marina's nickname for Will)
samaya malen'kaya - my little one (Will's nickname for Marina)
idi syuda - come here
solnyshko - sunshine (Marina's nickname for Kenneth)
sladkiy - honey (Marina's nickname for Jason)
lyubimomu - beloved
Spasido - Thank you
Dear Old Dad & Sweet Aunt Gretel

Chapter Notes

Okay, so this is the last chapter until about Sunday afternoon. I am going to be out of town on vacation for a birthday party, and I desperately need a break from life. That being said, I hope you enjoy this chapter and I look forward to reading your reviews! See you all next Sunday. As always, Russian translations are at the bottom of the chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter 14

Fury watched patiently as Brothers Grimm approached, exchanging a warm, if small, smile with Marina as she approached. “Major Petrovka, I see you once again have a full deck.”

“I do,” she agreed, glancing back over her shoulder at Brian with a warm grin. “Director Fury, I would like to introduce you to the Brothers Grimm. This is William Michael, Brian Joshua, Jason
Leonard, Kenneth James and Clinton Francis. Boys, I’d like you to meet Director Nicholas Fury.”

Fury grinned that shark’s grin of his, leaning forward to shake Will’s offered hand. “I must say, Colonel Grimm, I have been looking forward to this day for quite some time.”

Will cocked an eyebrow at him, Army green eyes narrowing as he contemplated that. “I’m afraid you have the advantage of me, sir, in that I was unaware this day was a special one for you.”

“The reputation of your team precedes you, Colonel, as I’m sure you well know. And if you do not . . . let me just say that I have been very impressed by the Brothers Grimm for some time.” Gesturing toward the SUV behind him, Fury continued, “Shall we be on our way? I believe we have some final details to attend to before we get to the formal part of this afternoon’s debriefing.”

Jason, Clint and Kenneth climbed in first, heading toward the very back seat, allowing Brian to take shotgun, and Will & Marina to take the middle seat. The pretty Major smiled up at her longtime lover, as he rested one hand on the small of her back and gripped her elbow with the other as he assisted her into her seat. “Thank you, Colonel Grimm,” she murmured fondly, before sliding across the bench seat to the opposite side of the truck.

Will climbed up into the truck and leaned over to kiss the soft skin below her ear, whispering into its shell, “You’re very welcome, Major Petrovka.”

Inside the truck, Clint choked loudly on air as he mock-gagged. “Eww . . . can the pseudo-parental units kindly have eye-sex elsewhere? You realize this is enclosed space? All the sexual tension is turning this thing into a sauna.”

Marina gave him a vicious glare over her shoulder, before she scooted closer to Will and cuddled as close to him as her uniform and personal sense of propriety allowed. Will chuckled at her attempt to stick it to the youngest Grimm and wrapped his arm around her shoulder fondly. He pressed a long, emotional kiss to her exposed temple and smiled against the skin when Clint groaned as though he was dying. “Come on, guys! Can those of us who are getting some, spare those of us who aren’t all the gooey mushiness of ‘molodoy lyubov’?” he griped, earning exasperated, if exorbitantly fond, eyerolls from the uncharacteristically affectionate couple.

“What’s the matter, Clinton Francis? You jealous?” Marina teased, gleefully rubbing the youngest Grimm’s nose in the fact that he had never had a girlfriend . . . let alone lost his v-card. Granted, neither had Kenny, but that was an entirely different kettle of fish.

Clint pouted viciously and flounced backwards in his seat, his arms over his chest and a fierce scowl on his lips. “Ah, what’s the matter, kotenok? Did you get your nose scratched?” Jason teased, laughing as he only just barely managed to dodge Clint’s first punch, hampered by the lack of space in the backseat and Kenny’s presence between them. “Ow!” he yelped painfully as Clint’s second punch landed firmly in the muscle of his bicep, causing a riot of sensation up and down his arm. “Vy chlen! You gave me a dead arm!”

Sensing that the brothers’ playfulness was about to degenerate into a full-fledged fist fight, with poor Kenny stuck in the middle, Marina hardened her tone and barked, “Rebyata, khvaitit!”

Clint whined petulantly, “But he started it!”

“And I’m ending it. I said that’s enough.

Marina turned back forward, catching Fury’s eyes in the rearview mirror. She knew she would never get him to admit it, but he had actually been enjoying the bickering between the brothers. “And now
I remember why it is that I insisted you become their handler.”

The brunette’s eyes narrowed, even as her lips turned upwards in an amused smirk. “Something about your agents having a lack of mental stability to be able to handle my boys.”

Fury chuckled, grinning slyly, “Something like that.”

Will squeezed Marina’s shoulder in a silent admonition to be still, before speaking up, “You said you had something for us, Director?”

“Yes, I did,” he agreed, pulling into the parking lot out of S.H.I.E.L.D.’s New York headquarters and rotating around in his seat to face his passengers. “All right, before we get inside, I believe I owe you all some information.”

Marina sat forward, her eyes intent as she stared at the manila folder that had suddenly appeared in Fury’s hand. “Is that what I think it is?” she demanded, pretty brown eyes widening in response to Fury’s simple nod.

“In this folder, I have the information about the owner of the base genetic code the Brothers Cahill were built on. However, I’m afraid it’s not going to do any of you any good as it stands now.”

Will frowned even as his girlfriend lunged forward to snatch the file from Fury. “How do you mean?”

“This can’t be right,” Marina muttered, beginning to flip anxiously through the folder to find evidence of what could only be a practical joke. Looking up at the man who could only be described as her new boss, she spoke again, “Director Fury, there’s no way this can be right.”

“I’m afraid, Major Petrovka, that the data in the file is accurate. Every file I could find on the brothers genetic coding says the same thing. Hansel Kuhn was the base genetic code for the Brothers Cahill.”

“This file says that Hansel Kuhn was born in Freiburg, Germany,” Marina argued, eyes narrowing in disbelief, “in October of 1796.”

Clint leaned over the back of the Marina’s seat, trying to read the file over her shoulder. “You’re saying that we were cloned from some guy who should have been dead two centuries ago?” The youngest Grimm waited for Fury’s confirming nod, before cheering excitedly, “Far! Out!”

Marina twisted in her seat and cocked an unimpressed eyebrow at her youngest charge, before returning her attention back to the file in her hands. Fury on the other hand, was speaking in reply of Clint’s question. “According to local legends in the area, Capt Grimm, Hansel Kuhn and his sister, Gretel, were struck by a wayward curse and they’ve been in comas ever since. They were both in the custody of the German government until very recently, when Hansel’s body was abducted. They believe the theft was perpetrated by HYDRA, though the German government really has no idea where they might have taken a comatose man in his early thirties. I’m told that random bodies go missing rather frequently in Germany.”

Kenneth scooted up so that he was leaning against the back of the seat next to Clint. “Really?” he asked innocently, looking between Clint and Marina in order to get an honest answer to his question.

Clint grinned at his older brother slash best friend and shook his head. “Nah, Ken, not really. Fury’s just trying to pull your leg.”

Marina smiled back at her youngest boys, as proud as ever of Clint’s adoring concern about Kenny and just as relieved that Clint could always be counted on to give his brother a quick, accurate
answer whenever Kenny needed it, no matter what else was going on at the time. Turning back to the file folder, she nibbled on her lower lip distractedly as she scoured the paperwork for some kind of clue. Will, on the other hand, was watching Fury. “You know where he is.”

It wasn’t a question, and Fury confirmed the answer as the eldest Grimm suspected he would when he nodded in agreement. “I believe I do. One of my agents radioed in a few days ago. He found a HYDRA base, in Nunavit Territory, Canada. It’s on Ellesmere Island, and it’s reportedly pretty new.”

“And you think Hansel Kuhn is there?”

“My agent managed to infiltrate the base and found it set up very much like a hospital. There was only one patient . . . and he looked very much like the five of you.”

Jason spoke up quietly, “So if Kuhn has been in what is essentially a coma all of this time, he never consented to being cloned.”

“Due to his . . . condition, Kuhn was unable to give consent to anything the German government did to his body. Regrettably, they have sold his and his sister’s DNA to several governments over the years. The United States was not the only, or even the first, to come knocking.”

“What do HYDRA want with him?”

“I would assume that they want him for the same reason the United States government did; to be the progenitor of a race of super-soldiers. Only, in addition to being superior physically and mentally, they also want their soldiers to have his immortality.”

“You mean there could be more of us out in the world?”

“I highly doubt that. Cloning is highly sensitive business, and only a handful of scientists in the world are capable of the performing the procedure perfectly. Most of those are in the employ of the United States and are under around the clock supervision, whether they are aware of that or not.”

Shaking his head to brush away the tangent, Fury continued on with his original thought, “Besides, no one else in the world has been able to successfully duplicate Dr. Erskine’s work. The United States government hasn’t even been able to duplicate the program; the Army’s Project Cahill was the closest anyone has ever gotten to the ‘Captain America’ program since Dr. Erskine’s assassination in 1943.”

“But what makes Hansel so special?”

“Hansel and Gretel Kuhn are special for one reason alone; they’re still alive. The Germans have had their best scientists on it for years, trying to determine whether he was born immortal or whether the alleged curse he and his sister fell victim to caused his immortality. Neither of them die, they don’t age . . . they simply remain, as young and as flawless as they were in 1828 when they reportedly fell victim to a witch’s curse.”

“A witch?” Brian asked, deadpan. “You’re telling me, dear old dad got suka khlopnil by a witch, and that’s why he’s stuck playing Sleeping Beauty? What is this, a Grimm Brothers fairy tale?”

Marina snorted hard at the question, feeling her whole body jerk with the effort it took to restrain her giggles. Clint, on the other hand, felt no such compunction, speaking up jovially from the back seat, “Welcome to Story Time with the Brothers Grimm. First up, the fairy tale, Sleeping Beauty. Complete with evil witches, five very handsome princes – if I do say so myself – and a cursed . . .”

here Clint paused, cocking his head as he questioned curiously, “can he even be a damsel in distress,
if he’s not a chick?"

Will rolled his eyes, remarking, “There is a damsel in distress already, remember? He has a sister.”

“Yeah, but come on; you know that Aunt Gretel is gonna be a nadrat’ zadnitsu chick. There’s no way she could be the damsel in this story.”

“When exactly did they become Dad and Aunt Gretel?”

"Right about the time dear old dad's DNA made it's way into our little baby test tubes," Jason commented, his computer already out as he hacked an internet connection and starting researching Hansel and Gretel Kuhn.

Marina mused, still flipping absently through the file folder Fury had given to her. "Did anyone else notice that their names are Hansel and Gretel?"

“Like from the fairy tale? The ACTUAL fairy tale?” Brian stared at Marina in horror as she nodded once with a wicked grin, before throwing his arm over his eyes dramatically and wailing, "Yebe... how is this our life!?"

Kenneth spoke up quietly then, speaking just loud enough for Marina to hear, "I think it would be cool if we were descended from a fairy tale character. Cause then maybe happy endings really do come true."

Marina smiled, smoothing her fingers back through his hair, "Of course they do, solnyshko. And there isn't a soul in this world who deserves a happy ending more than you."

Chapter End Notes

Russian Translations:

molodoy lyubov' - young love
kotenok - kitten
Vy chlen! - You prick!
Rebyata, khvatit! - Boys, that's enough!
suka khlopnul - bitch slapped
nadrat' zadnitsu - kick ass
yebet - fuck
solnyshko - sunshine (Marina's nickname for Kenny)

Enjoy! See you next Sunday!
Hey guys! I'm back from my vacation and with a new chapter! I hope you enjoy! As always, Russian translations are at the end of the chapter! Thanks for your patience with me and I hope you continue to read and enjoy this story! I promise we're going to start getting into the movies here soon. SWAT's up first, then we're going to see how Jason Grimm became Jason Walsh. I hope you guys can continue to hang with me. I promise, it will be worth the price of admission. Let me know what you think! Love you all!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 15

It was while Fury was finishing up their recruitment paperwork that the question Marina and Will had been waiting for was finally asked. “So what are we going to do about Hansel Kuhn?” Kenny asked quietly, watching Marina with wide, guileless eyes.
“What do you think we should do, domashniy?”

“Go after him. No one should spend their life subject to someone’s...” here her charge paused, obviously unsure of the appropriate vocabulary.

Will spoke up with a gentle smile, “Someone else’s whim?”

Kenny grinned at his brother, with an emphatic nod. “Yes. No one should have to spend their life subject to someone else’s whim. Thanks, Will.”

“Priglashayem vas, Druz’ya. (You’re welcome, Buddy.)”

Clint slouched backwards in his chair, every line of his body eloquent with an utterly uncaring disregard for his uniform. “While I agree with you, Ken; what do we know about curse victims? And more specifically, comatose curse victims?”

“Admittedly, not much. But we do know rather a lot about search and rescue operations,” Will said, glancing at Marina out of the corner of his eye. Marina noticed the glance and shook her head slightly once, resolutely keeping her own counsel on the matter.

“And I can do some research to find out how to break the curse; most legends have some basis in truth,” Jason agreed with a hapless shrug.

“Okay, so we go and rescue him from HYDRA – whoever the hell they are – then what? Where are we going to keep a comatose man in his thirties, suffering from no apparent illnesses or injuries, where a lot of nosy doctors aren’t going to ask a bunch of uncomfortable questions?” Brian asked dryly, having noticed the interchange between Will and Marina.

Fury folded his hands on the table in front of him, watching each of them as they worked out the kinks. “May I suggest S.H.I.E.L.D. as a safe place for him after you’ve rescued him?”

“And what exactly does S.H.I.E.L.D. get out of that arrangement?” Marina asked suspiciously. The Brothers Grimm had not managed to successfully hide from their Army creators while directly under their noses, by trusting easily.

“Consider it just another example of my good will and desire to earn, if not your trust, then at least your whole-hearted cooperation in future S.H.I.E.L.D. operations.”

Will folded his hands and rested his chin on top, steely hazel eyes watching Fury carefully. “You seem to be offering us a lot as a ‘gesture of good will’ with nothing for yourself; protection from the Army, Brian’s whereabouts, a place for our comatose progenitor. What exactly do you get out of arrangement, Director Fury? And I would really appreciate it, if you did not to fignya me.”

Fury grinned his shark’s grin and Marina was once again reminded of why she’d trusted him so easily. “I get unrestricted access to the best Special Operations team I have ever had the privilege of observing,” the S.H.I.E.L.D. director replied promptly. “I was not jesting when I said that I have been looking forward to meeting your team for quite some time. October 31, 1994, to be specific, Colonel Grimm.”

Will frowned as he catalogued back through the assignments the Brat’ya Mrachnyy had been deployed on together. “The hostage situation in New Delhi, India? That was one of the first assignments the five of us were deployed on together.”

“The five of you had been a complete unit for a hundred and seven days... and yet, you were flawless. Every member of your unit had a job to do, and every member did their job. I had agents on
the ground, and one of my agents was a hostage. Their reports on your team’s execution of the
situation was . . . definitely eye-opening. I found Officer Gamble rather by accident some five
months later. It was around then that I started to make connections between the five Brothers Grimm
and the five Brothers Cahill. The sporadic appearances of known associates of one ‘Mary Peters’
pretty well tied up the connection. I started collecting what little data I could find on the Project
Cahill and . . . well, the rest is irrelevant.”

Will hummed in agreement, slouching backwards into his chair. Sensing that Will’s questioning had
yielded the answer he was looking for, Jason turned to face Marina, the one and future spy having
been uncharacteristically silent throughout the conversation. “What are you thinking, Marishka?”

“So now that we’ve established why Fury wants us around . . . what have we decided to do about
the Kuhn situation?”

The brothers glanced at each other around the table, before each sounded off on it one at a time. Clint
sighed, even as he spoke up, “I’m in. Let’s go rescue dear old dad.”

Kenny grinned at his brother, nodding in agreement. “Rescue him.”

Brian shook his head, even as he grimaced, “I think that any decision we make is going to be a bad
idea, but I’ll go along with whatever we decide to do.”

Jason shrugged, “If you can give me a day to get as much information on him as I can hack from the
Germans, I think we should go after him. Ken’s right; no one should have to live that way.
Regardless of the fact that he’s sleeping, and completely unaware of what’s going on around him.
And after we get dear old dad back, I say we go after Aunt Gretel next. Neither HYDRA nor the
German government has the right to use them against their will.”

Marina turned to her lover, watching him for a long moment before asking, “And what about you,
Misha? What do you think?”

Will smirked at her, inquiring lazily, “Do you honestly need to ask that?”

Clint perked up then, a bright grin on his face as he asked, “Does that mean I get to fly the chopper?”

“NO!” came the unanimous agreement from the rest of his Army unit.

Marina chuckled, “You’re never going to fly again; not until you can prove that you’re not going to
crash every helicopter we give you to fly.”

“That was totally not my fault! There was a missile on our asses!”

“So you decided to crash the helicopter?!” Jason deadpanned.

“It was either crash the chopper and walk away in mostly one piece, or let the missile hit us and get
blown up! I chose the lesser of two evils.”

It was less than 24 hours later, that the Brothers Grimm found themselves in position outside of the
temporary base HYDRA had set up on Ellesmere Island. The surrounding area was rocky and
mountainous. Barbeau Peak rose behind them and Will knew that Clint was in his nest, perched
precariously against the cliffwall, keeping an eye on the entrances to the base. The forecast was
threatening snow, but so far the weather was holding out. The eldest Grimm wasn’t holding his
breath for that much longer, though; with any luck, they would be able to get in and get out before
the deluge came down.
As their resident spymaster, Marina had been selected to take point. Utilizing her Academy trained skill set, she had undertaken the responsibility of slipping into a lightly populated area of the base and setting up a diversion. Jason was monitoring their comms and the rest of the unit was waiting for Marina’s signal. “Yastreb, any sign of Sova?”

“Not yet, Orel.”

Will turned to look at their tech specialist, “Krechet?”

Jason looked up at his brother and shook his head once. “Nothing yet on comms, Orel.”

Just then, Marina’s voice broke through the static, “Orel, this is Sova. I’ve located target. Diversion in play. Timer set for 20 seconds.”

“Sova, this is Orel. What is the target status?”

“Vitals are reading within normal levels.”

Kenny spoke up then, asking, “Sova? What does he look like?”

There was a long pause as Marina considered the question, before she spoke, “Like you, Sokol. He looks very much like you and the rest of your brothers.”

Jason spoke up then, “Ten seconds till the timer runs out, Orel.”

Will nodded once in agreement, “Brat’ya Mrachnyy, prepare to move out.”

Each of the brothers hefted their gear, splitting up from each other and moving to their assigned entry points. “Countdown commences now; five . . . four . . . three . . . two . . . one . . .”

The explosion in the southernmost building rocked the ground under Will’s feet, before he ordered, “Yastreb, you’re my eyes in the sky. Keep me apprised of any incoming targets.”

“Copy that, Orel. I’ll keep the skies clear for you.”

“Brat’ya Mrachnyy, move in. Acquire target and meet back at rendezvous point,” Will ordered, waiting for a moment to hear the affirmatives before busting in the door and moving confidently through the hallways.

There was a brutally fast and furious firefight before the Brothers Grimm met up with Marina. She had been laying charges to blow the base skyhigh. The monitoring equipment on their target had been disengaged, and a portable gurney stood ready to take their target out of the base. “Sova, report.”

“Charges have been laid. All that’s left to do is to wrap up the package and blow this place to kingdom come, Orel.”

“All right then; let’s get on that huh?”

Five minutes later, the Brothers Grimm and their package were in the helicopter. Despite the protests from his brothers and Marina, Clint was at the helm and they were in the air. “Sokol . . . blow this place to hell,” Will ordered, his whole body leaning out of the helicopter as he kept an eye on the base they were leaving behind.

“Yes sir.”
Brian joined his brother at the door as one by one the explosives in the building detonated and the entire structure was engulfed in flame. Clapping his older brother on his shoulder, Brian joked, “The explosions are going to be so much bigger now that I’m hanging with you guys again, huh?”

“Clint will tell you that bigger is always better when it comes to blowing shit up.”

“He was always a smart kid.”

“He has his moments. The rest of the time . . . he just likes it when shit blows up.” Turning back to his girlfriend, he inquired, “And how’s our party guest?”

Marina checked the vitals on the portable unit they’d stolen along with Hansel's body and replied, “Resting comfortably. He’s exhibiting no adverse signs from being moved.”

It was Brian who asked the question on everyone’s mind. “So . . . now that we have him . . . how do we wake him up?”

Chapter End Notes

Russian translation:

domashniy - pet (an interchangeable nickname Marina uses for Kenny and Clint)
Priglashayem vas, Druz’ya - You're welcome, Buddy
fignya - bullshit
Brat’ya Mrachnyy - Brothers Grimm
Yastreb - Hawk (Clint's Spec Op codename)
Sova - Owl (Marina's Spec Op codename)
Orel - Eagle (Will's Spec Op codename)
Krechet - Merlin (Jason's Spec Op codename)
Sokol - Falcon (Kenny's Spec Op codename)
Chapter 16

Less that thirty six hours later, Will and Marina stood in the observation room adjacent to the room in Medical where Fury had arranged for Hansel Kuhn to be installed until such time as they could wake him up. The Brothers Grimm had been assigned quarters on base, and the rest of the brothers were sleeping off their successfully completed assignment. Will’s arm rested carelessly on the jut of Marina’s hip as he watched the man who was essentially his father sleep through the window. “So,
normally I hate to agree that Brian might be right, but he has a point. How are we going to wake him up?"

Marina shrugged with a wicked smirk, “Well, there’s always the idea that Clint was onto something and he really is a Sleeping Beauty.”

Will’s arm tightened around her waist as he growled, “Sushchestvuyet nemaleyshego shansa, chto vy sobirayetesʹ potselovatʹ yego. (There is no chance in hell that you’re going to kiss him.)”

The brunette laughed at the disgruntled tone in her boyfriend’s voice, shaking her head firmly to negate his fears. “I was actually thinking of Agent Hill; she was watching Hansel when he was ushered in, and the regard was not a distant one.”

“You mean the brunette that’s always at Fury’s left hand?”

“That’s the one.”

Will chuckled, shaking his head firmly. “The man’s not even awake yet, and already you’re playing matchmaker.”

“He’s been asleep for a long time; and there’s nothing quite like poluchenie i trakh to reaffirm your connection to the living.”

There was a low hum as Will agreed with her, before remarking, “I hope you’ve brushed up on your German. He was born in Germany and he’s been asleep since the early nineteenth century; his knowledge of English is going to be extremely limited, at best.”

Marina made a moue of distaste, even as she nodded, “I’m a little out of practice, but what I remember should still be functional enough to communicate with him.” Rolling her eyes, she muttered lightly, “A Russian speaking German . . . what the hell is this world coming to?”

“I thought the Russians and the Germans were allies, once upon a time.”

“Being someone’s ally does not make them your friend,” Marina reminded him, before turning her attention back to the window. “This isn’t going to be easy for anyone, Misha. He’s going to undergo culture shock unlike anything we’ve ever seen before.”

“First, let’s worry about getting him awake. Then we’ll worry about the ramifications of him waking.”

The couple remained there for at least another hour, before Marina caught the muffled sound of Will’s yawn over her head. “Misha . . . go to sleep. You’re exhausted.”

“What about you? It’s been kind of a nonstop roller coaster the last few days for you too. First Fury, then flying to LA, getting Brian, back to New York, then to Ellesmere Island and one more time back to New York? You’ve gotta be just as tired as I am, if not more so.”

“I was enhanced with the potential for minimal sleep taken into account. I cannot say the same for you. You were absolutely created to be physically superior to Red Room agents, but that was also taking into account a regular, eight hour sleep schedule and optimal nutrition habits. I’m fine; you, on the other hand, need at least another eight hours of sleep before you’re back to prime operating conditions. You can head to bed; I’ll keep watch for awhile.”

Will yawned once more, before inquiring, “You’re sure?”
“Yeah. I’ll stay here till my relief comes and then I’ll join you in bed. Deal?”

The Brothers Grimm commander glanced at his watch, taking note of the fact that Brian was supposed to be coming to relieve them within the hour before nodding once in agreement. “All right. But as soon as Brian comes to take over, I want your simpatichnyye malenʹkiye zadnitsy back in our room and in our bed. Deal?”

“Please; you’re so exhausted, you won’t even notice when I finally climb into bed,” Marina chuckled, going up on tiptoes to kiss the undercurve of his jaw. “Ya lyublyu tebya, Misha. (I love you, Misha.)”

“Ya lyublyu tebya, Marishka. Ne lozhitʹ sya spatʹ slishkom pozdno. (I love you, Marishka. Don’t stay up too late.)”

“Ya ne budu. Spokojnoy nochʹi. (I won’t. Goodnight.)”

“Spokojnoy nochʹi, (Goodnight,)” he agreed with a wide yawn, pressing a chaste kiss to the apple of her cheek, before leaving the observation room behind.

Marina waited for a moment, before she spoke into the silent room, “You can come out now, Agent Hill.”

It took a second, but finally the brunette haired S.H.I.E.L.D. agent materialized from a well hidden corner of the room. Marina folded her arms over her chest and smirked at the woman; Marina would have sworn the woman was blushing, except for the fact that her cheeks were still pale and clear of any red. The woman tugged at her uniform lightly, inquiring, “How did you know I was there?”

“I was raised to be an exceptional spy, Agent Hill. It wasn’t hard. You’re just lucky that Misha was so tired; he would not have been nearly amused by your little game of hide-and-seek as I am. What can I help you with?”

It was routinely rumored through the halls of S.H.I.E.L.D. that Maria Hill was the left hand of God – if God was the one-eyed magnificent bastard known as Nick Fury – but the former Soviet spy could have sworn that there was almost an echo of the little girl in her as Maria turned her attention to the observation window. Hansel Kuhn was the only occupant of the room, lying motionless on starched white sheets with leads and wires attached to every exposed inch of his body. “You really think this is just a matter of fairy tale come to life?” Maria asked, curious about the other woman’s opinion on the matter.

“Frankly, Agent Hill, I wouldn’t be surprised. The man would appear to be a character in a storybook; it wouldn’t surprise me in the slightest if something as ridiculous as a kiss was what broke him out of his coma. There’s nothing wrong with him; the docs say that he’s completely healthy and there’s no sign of any former trauma that could explain his continued unconsciousness. Which leads me to believe, that no matter how ludicrous it sounds, the legend about a witch and a wayward curse is probably exactly what happened to him.” Snorting, she continued dryly, “Considering what I know about the boys I call my family, I’m not sure why that even surprises me.”

“But . . . why is he still so young? I’ve heard the rumors. S.H.I.E.L.D. agents are legendary for their gossiping; he was born in the eighteenth century and should therefore be dead.”

“As to his apparent immortality, I don’t have a damned clue why that is. Honestly, though, I’ve seen stranger things than an immortal witch hunter from a child’s fairy tale.” Maria snorted in amusement, joking quietly, “So Hansel and Gretel have become Sleeping Beauties,
to wake only at love’s first kiss. Will wonders never cease?"

“Most likely not. Why are you so intrigued by him, Agent Hill?”

“I don’t know. I feel some kind of . . . connection to him, I guess. I could never explain it in a million years. But there is something about him that draws me to him. I’ve seen your boys; I know they each wear his face.” Maria’s hands flew up in supplication as Marina’s focus was suddenly laser sharp and terrifying on her face, clarifying hurriedly, “I mean them no harm; I trust the Director to know what he’s doing. I know he’s made them Eyes Only and I will do nothing to violate that.” Maria sighed heavily as they each turned their attention back onto the comatose man in the other room. “Either way, there is just something that . . .” here she trailed off, finally seeming to understand what she was saying and who she was saying it to.

Marina hummed, remarking nonchalantly, “Did you know that some cultures believe that a kiss is the most powerful thing a person may bestow on another? And yet other cultures believe that a kiss means nothing. Neither my Misha nor I put much stock in the power of a kiss; it is an expression of sentiment, and a lovely one to be sure, but no one kiss can ever truly express all of our love for the other. Personally, I believe that a kiss is a small, simple thing. And yet, small, simple things are typically the best answers to life’s biggest, most complicated problems.”

The brunette S.H.I.E.L.D. agent glanced at the former Russian spy, blue eyes cool and assessing as the two women watched each other. They were the best women in their fields, the left hands of the two most powerful men they each knew. There was a respect there, one that no other woman outside of their fields could ever truly understand. Finally, Maria took a deep breath and turned her attention onto Hansel Kuhn once more. “Well then . . . nothing ventured, nothing gained, right?”

“So they say,” Marina agreed lazily, watching with a soft smirk as Maria took a deep breath to steady her nerves. Then, the woman turned on her heel toward the entrance to the hospital room where Hansel Kuhn lay, unaware of the conversation that had just happened under his very nose. Maria strode purposefully to the edge of his bed and looked down on his peaceful face for a moment. Glancing back at the window, she took another deep breath, bent and pressed a chaste kiss to the still curve of his mouth.

There was a long pause, before Hansel’s whole body reacted, his body taking in a deep, if shaky, breath. Long eyelashes fluttered sleepily, before bright blue eyes opened and caught Maria’s gaze in their own. Maria’s eyes flew wide as she backstepped from the bed quickly, one hand coming to cover her mouth. “Oh my God, it actually worked.”

The man’s eyebrows furrowed in confusion, his lips parting as he tried to utter his first words in nearly a two centuries. He coughed hard, the attempt grating uncomfortably on long unused vocal chords. Marina was at the side of the bed in a heartbeat, offering a glass of water and a firm hand at the base of his neck. “Du bist in Ordnung, Herr Kuhn. Willkommen zurück in das Land der Lebenden, (You’re all right, Mr. Kuhn. Welcome back to the Land of the Living,)” she murmured, trying to channel the soothing nature she used with her two youngest boys whenever they woke in the middle of the night after a particularly nasty nightmare.

A strong hand came up to rest over her own as he gulped down the water, resisting Marina’s attempt to pull away. “Einfach, Herr Kuhn, Sie machen sich krank, wenn man zu viel zu schnell trinken. (Easy, Mr. Kuhn, you’ll make yourself sick if you drink too much too fast.)”

“Hansel . . . mein Name ist Hansel, (Hansel . . . my name is Hansel,)” he gasped, as he released her and flopped backwards onto the bed.

“Alle Rechte Hansel. Mein Name ist Marina Petrovka und das ist Maria Hill. (All right, Hansel. My
name is Marina Petrovka and this is Maria Hill.)

“Sie sind Russen. (You are Russian.)”

“Ich bin. Aber Sie haben mein Wort; du bist hier sicher. (I am. But you have my word; you’re safe here.)”

Steel blue eyes watched her for a long moment, looking for any indication of evasion or lie. Finally, he seemed satisfied with whatever he was seeing in her eyes. “Verzeihen Sie mir. Ich fürchte, ich bin nicht an meinem besten. (Forgive me. I fear I am not at my best.)”

Marina nodded once in silent agreement, before turning once again to a still shell-shocked Maria. “Agent Hill, if you would kindly go inform Director Fury that our guest is awake, I would be greatly appreciative.”

The brunette nodded frantically, one hand still over her mouth and her eyes still glued to Hansel’s face, before she shook herself free of her confusion and bolted for the door. Hansel frowned and looked up again at Marina, accepting the proffered glass with a grateful nod. “Habe ich in irgendeiner Weise die Frau beleidigen? (Did I in some way offend the woman?)”

“Nein, sie hatte nicht erwartet, Sie aufwachen, wenn Sie getan haben. Ich denke eher, sie küsste sie im Scherz und ohne ernsthafte Erwartung, dass es funktionieren würde. (No. She was not expecting you to wake up when you did. I rather think she kissed you in jest and with no serious expectation that it would work.)”

Hansel choked on the water he’d been drinking, coughing harshly to try and clear his throat. Marina slapped his back hard, clearing the rest of it from his airway and allowing him to try and regain the equanimity he’d lost. Taking another sip of water, he inquired, “Sie küsste mich? (She kissed me?)”

“Sie tat es. (She did.)”

He nodded firmly once, before taking another sip of his water. “Das ist . . . interessant. Und meine Schwester? Wo ist Gretel? (That is . . . interesting. And my sister? Where is Gretel?)”

“Wenn wir Sie erholt hatte, war sie nicht mit Ihnen. Wir haben Menschen verfolgen sie unten jetzt. Wir sollten bald wissen. (When we recovered you, she was not with you. We have people tracking her down now. We should know soon.)”

Hansel frowned fiercely, his eyes scanning around the room as he took in Marina’s Army uniform, the medical equipment in the room, and the other unfamiliar items in the room. “Wie lange habe ich geschlafen? (How long have I been asleep?)”

“Das Jahr ist 1996. Du warst bewusstlos 168 Jahre. (The year is 1996. You’ve been unconscious for 168 years.)”

The man’s eyes closed at her answer, and Marina could read the tired acceptance in his face. “So ist meine Schwester gegangen und ich habe länger als ich gelebt habe geschlafen. Ich glaube, ich möchte allein sein jetzt. (So, my sister is gone and I have slept for longer than I have lived. I think I should like to be alone now.)”

Marina could only nod her agreement, one hand reaching out to squeeze his own. Grasping the call button in her hand, she placed it in his own, instructing him calmly, “Wenn Sie etwas brauchen, drücken Sie einfach auf diese Schaltfläche. Egal was passiert, wird jemand kommen. Hansel. . . Sie haben mein tiefstes Beileid für die Zeit, die Sie verloren haben. Und wir werden Gretel zurück, Sie haben mein Wort. (If you need anything, just press this button. No matter what, someone will come.
Hansel... you have my deepest condolences for the time that you have lost. And we will get Gretel back; you have my word.)”

“Danke,” he murmured, before his eyes slipped closed and he turned his head away.

The former spy watched him for a long moment, before she exited the room. She wasn’t surprised to see Nick Fury at the observation window, waiting patiently for her. Forcing her tired body to attention, she waited for him to speak. “How is our guest, Major?”

One hand came up to rub over her face as she sighed, “He is on his own in a world he does not remember. I would imagine that he is feeling very alone right now.”

Fury nodded in agreement, turning his one-eyed gaze on Marina firmly. “You look exhausted, Major Petrovka. You are relieved of watch; get some rack time. That’s an order.”

Marina snapped off a formal salute with a sharp, “Yes sir.”

“Dismissed, Major,” the man insisted, watching her carefully as she turned on one heel and strode out the door. Left alone in the observation room, Fury returned his attention onto the occupant of the bed and simply waited for Marina’s relief to join him.

It was almost ten minutes later before Marina crawled into bed beside her boyfriend. Will’s body moved as he shifted to accommodate her, his arms reaching out to haul her frame into his own. “That was fast,” he murmured sleepily. “Brian come relieve you early?”

“Something like that,” she agreed, nuzzling her nose into his chest.

Will purred into her hair, muttering lazily, “You’re thinking very loudly. Everything okay?”

“Kuhn’s awake.”

Will’s eyebrows furrowed sleepily as he leaned back to look into her face. “That’s... unexpected. How did he seem?”

“He’s reeling, which is understandable. I didn’t tell him about you or the boys. I thought that might be better seen and not heard.”

There was a grunt, as Will acknowledged that for the truth it was. “Is there anything else you can do about him tonight?”

“No; he asked to be left alone.”

“Then get some sleep, Major. I have a feeling it’s going to be a long day tomorrow,” he yawned, his arms tightening around her as he burrowed his nose deeper into the soft place behind her ear.

It wasn’t long before Will’s breathing evened out into the slow, steady rhythm of sleep. And still, Marina remained awake, her eyes fixed on the ceiling as she waited for morning to come. It was a long time before sleep caught her up in its embrace and dragged her under its insistent waves. And even then, rest did not come easily.

Meanwhile, across the base, a young man lay alone in a cold, sterile room. Hansel Kuhn was a pragmatist; had been given no other choice than to face the cold realities of the world when his father had left him and his younger sister in the forest at his step-mother’s behest, leading to their incarceration by a witch and their subsequent lifelong quest to rid their homeland of other witches. No matter what life had thrown at him though, he had always had his sister at his side, the one
presence in his life he could always count on. They’d been through a hell of a lot together, and now she was gone. There was a world he didn’t know and could never hope to fully understand just inches away from him, and Gretel wasn’t there to share the discovery with. Looking down at the bracelet around his wrist, the only item that was at all familiar to him in this room, he vowed to find her and to bring her home.

Once Gretel was once again at his side, however, there was a whole world to unveil. And one Maria Hill to discover as well; he had known many warriors in his life and her resolute soul called to him. She was not a woman who would require a man in her life; however, he would sincerely like to fight at her side anyway. And perhaps . . . one day, there could be more between them.

After all, she had kissed him.

Chapter End Notes

Russian Translations:

polucheniye trakhal - getting fucked
Simpatichnyye malen’kiye zadnitsy - cute little ass
Ya lyublyu tebya - I love you
Spokoynoy nochi - Goodnight
Chapter 17

Dawn broke slowly over the horizon the following morning, bringing with it a new day and a sense of impending change. The rest of the world would herald it as a chance for new beginnings. For Marina Ivanovna Petrovka, the dawn would only show more of the boulders littering the already rocky road her boys had spent their lives on.

Will Grimm was a warm, familiar presence in the bed at her back when she finally crept to consciousness, one well muscled arm resting comfortably over the curve of her hip. Marina hummed unhappily as she snuggled backwards into his body in an attempt to get some more sleep. He
chuckled lightly, nuzzling fondly into the skin behind her ear. “Good morning, samaya malen’kaya,” he murmured.

Marina grunted, rolling over and burying her face in the curve of his neck. “Mind telling me what’s so good about it?” she grumbled, her eyes firmly closed as she fought what she knew to be a doomed battle with her body.

The blond haired colonel laughed, “Come on, Marishka. You’ll feel better after some coffee and breakfast.”

She pouted at being denied the chance to sleep the morning away, even as she rolled onto her back and stretched widely. “Fine. So long as Jason doesn’t cook.”

It was a well known fact amongst the Brothers Grimm, that Jason Grimm could not cook. Admittedly, he tried but to date nothing he’d made came out the way it was supposed to. Usually, when it was his turn to cook, someone else got stealthy and took over the responsibility before he had the chance to step foot into whatever passed as their kitchen. “What . . . you don’t want Jason to make you a stack of warm, gooey, Fruit Loop waffles?”

“Ne shans v adu (Not a chance in hell),” she muttered, rolling deliberately over the edge of the bed and setting herself up on her hands and toes.

Will watched the way her body moved as she began to force it into her usual morning wake-up routine of 100 push-ups and 200 crunches. “So . . . do I want to know what you did to wake up Kuhn?” he asked, flopping back onto the bed and waiting for Marina to finish.

“I didn’t do a damn thing. Agent Hill on the other hand . . .” she argued, grunting through the last of her push up before rolling over and starting her crunches.

Will threw one arm over his eyes as different scenarios played out behind his eyes, each one more terrifying and ridiculous than the last. “Bozhe moy, do I even want to know?”

Marina chuckled, as she shook her head. “Probably not. In case you do, though, let’s just say that Clint was right.”

“Are you seriously trying to tell me that Hansel Kuhn was a Sleeping Beauty? No shit, there I was . . . an actual Sleeping Beauty. Agent Hill just randomly kissed a man who had been comatose for a hundred and seventy years, and he woke up like it was no big deal. So what does that mean? Agent Hill is his one true love?”

“I have no idea. But if she is, it should be interesting to watch him try and win her over.”

Rolling to her feet, Marina flopped onto the bed on top of him, her knees straddled over his hips and her hands clutching the sheets at each side of his head. Will leaned up and captured her lips quickly, muttering, “Then God bless America, because I have a really bad feeling that that will in no way end well for anyone.”

"You never know; Maria may actually be okay with the idea of being swept off her feet.”

Will cocked an eyebrow as he commented dryly, “We are talking about the same Agent Hill, right?” Stroking his fingers lazily through her hair, he suddenly realized something. “Wait . . . since when did ‘Agent Hill’ become ‘Maria’?”

“Every girl needs a girlfriend, Misha.”
Will’s head thunked backwards as he groaned, “O Boge. Don’t ever say that again. I don’t think I can handle you being friends with Agent Hill. I don’t think the world can handle you being friends with Agent Hill. That would be utterly catastrophic on every level there is.”

Marina’s eyes sparkled and her nose crinkled adorably as she joked, “You’re just afraid we’d take over the world.”

“Isn’t that in your contract? I could have sworn I read something that said you’re not allowed to take over the world.”

“No, the Brothers Grimm aren’t allowed to take over the world. Nowhere in my contract did it say anything about me taking over the world with Maria.”

“It should have,” he grunted with an eyeroll, as he imagined all the crazy antics his Russian, former spymaster girlfriend and the woman referred to mostly commonly as the "left hand of God" could get up to as friends. "And here I thought that leaving Brian and Clint alone was a bad idea."

“Leaving Brian and Clint alone and unsupervised is always a bad idea. It’s just that letting Maria and me take over the world together is probably an even worse idea,” she laughed, pressing a quick kiss to the downturned curve of his lip. “Come on, Colonel. Up and at ‘em. We have places to go and people to meet.”

Will groaned as Marina stood and grabbed onto his hand, hauling him inexorably to his feet. “You realize that Clint is never going to let us forget the fact that he was right about this. Right?”

“The thought had occurred to me. Why?”

“I’m just letting you know in advance that if I kill him . . . he probably deserved it.”

Marina was still laughing as the couple exited their bedroom and made their way to the dining room where the rest of the Brothers Grimm sat at the table and stared blurrily into their coffee. “Dobroye utro, moi mal’chi, (Good morning, my boys,)” Marina chirped as she moved about the table and pressed fond kisses to each of their topknots. “Spi spokoyno? (Sleep well?)”

Jason grunted tiredly, burrowing his face further into the corner of his elbow as Clint rotated to bury his face in the soft warmth of Marina’s belly. “It’s too early, Marishka,” the youngest Grimm whimpered plaintively, nuzzling deeper as Marina’s left hand came up to play idly with the short blond strands.

“I know, dorogoy. But we’ll get used to the time change soon, same as we always do. Has everyone already had breakfast? Or do I need to make something?”

“It’s Jason’s turn to cook,” came Kenny’s quiet explanation.

Marina made a face, patting Clint’s head affectionately before slipping out from his embrace and moving into the kitchen. Pausing next to Kenny’s chair, she hugged the second youngest tightly and planted a fond kiss to his forehead, before moving into the kitchen. Turning to the last of the brothers, she smiled. Brian was seated at the bar and seemed to be the only one of the brothers capable of coherency. “Good morning, dikiy rebenok. How is our guest this morning?”

“When I left, he was just starting to fall back to sleep. He did not have an easy time of it last night; he was having some pretty brutal nightmares. On a scale of Jason's nightmares to Will's, I’d say they were probably in comparison to Clint's.”

Clint perked up slightly, “Wait? You mean dear old dad’s awake?”
The former Soviet spy nodded as she began to gather the ingredients she would need for omelettes. “He woke up last night, while I was on watch.”

“How? Do you know?”

Marina and Will glanced at each other, before Marina sighed heavily and bit the bullet. “Agent Hill kissed him.”

Suddenly wide awake and grinning like a loon, their sniper leaped from his chair with a whoop! “I told you! Didn’t I tell you!? I told you he was a Sleeping Beauty! So when do we get to meet him?”

“No one is going to be meeting him. Not right now, anyway. He’s been asleep for 168 years, Clinton Francis. He’s already going to be experiencing culture shock. Let’s not add to that, the mild heart attack that people usually get when meeting you five for the first time.”

Clint pouted, dropping into his chair and slouching despondently. “But I wanna meet him!”

“And you will. Just not right now. First, I have to tell him that you exist. Secondly, I have to tell him how you exist. And lastly, I have to convince him not to kill you. Frankly, I think you can afford to be a little patient for me.”

“But I don’t wanna be patient! I wanna meet him now!”

“And since when has whining about something, ever gotten you what you wanted, Clinton Francis?” Marina scolded, even as she acknowledged within her own head that whining about something usually always got Clint what he wanted.

Fortunately, Clint was not in the frame of mind where this fact occurred to him. He huffed glumly and resumed his admittedly adorable pouting. Marina chuckled at the petulant expression, before setting his omelette in front of him. “I don’t want it,” Clint insisted sullenly.

“But it’s your favorite,” she wheedled, nudging it closer to him. “It’s got steak, and ham, and bacon, and green peppers, and tomatoes . . .” She waited, knowing that the way to forgiveness from Clint Grimm usually passed through his stomach.

Clint perked up a little bit and asked, “And cheese?”

“Four different kinds,” she agreed with a soft smile.

He took a deep breath, resolutely ignoring the indulgent smirks on each of his brothers’ faces as he replied. “All right. I guess I can be patient. But only a little.” Picking up his fork, he dug happily into his food even as he insisted, “I do wanna meet him though, Marishka. He’s the closest thing we’ve probably ever had to a father.”

“I know, dorogoy. And you will meet him, I promise. First I just gotta figure out how.”

It was less than an hour later that Marina was standing with Will in the observation room of the hospital. Marina could tell that Hansel was awake, despite his closed eyes and slack hands. Will rested his chin on one shoulder as he watched the man, knowing that Marina was still tossing things around in the filing cabinet she called her head. “Okay, so I’m assuming that you have some kind of plan, right? I mean, I understand why you didn’t want us all to congregate on him at once, but how is this going to work?”

“I would imagine that to an 18th Century witch hunter, science and witchcraft are rather a lot alike. Project Cahill basically stole his essence and created five living weapons with it. You each resemble
him, that fact cannot be denied even by a blind man. But each of you is much more dangerous than he is, because you were bred that way.” Folding her arms over her chest, she stared through the observation window as she sighed, “I’m having a hard time finding any scenario in which the introduction of ‘dear old dad’ to his biologically engineered sons is going to end well for anyone.”

Will came up behind her and rubbed his hands briskly over the outside of her sweater covered arms. “How about we focus on the more immediate problems at hand. He’s going to have questions. He deserves answers to them. We’ll worry about all the rest of it when the debris has settled and things are a little more clear to him.”

Marina nodded and tilted her chin up to accept his kiss, before moving to enter Hansel’s room. “Hänsel? Bist du wach? (Are you awake?)”

“Ja,” he agreed, robin’s egg blue eyes sliding open and finding her immediately. “Vielleicht haben Sie einige Fragen haben. Ich weiß nicht, wie viel ich antworten kann, aber ich kann mein Bestes tun, um Ihnen zu sagen, was ich weiß, (I thought you might have some questions. I don’t know how much I can answer, but I can do my best to tell you what I know,)” she insisted, pulling a chair to his bedside and propping her feet up on the edge of the bed. “Sie haben keine Angst vor mir? (You are not afraid of me?)”

“Sollte ich? (Should I be?)” Marina asked caustically, folding her arms over her chest and watching him carefully. She had been informed of his interactions with several of his nurses; despite knowing very little English and only passable French, he had managed to make at least two of them cry and a third run screaming from the room in terror. What he’d done was still up in the air, but whatever he had done all three of the women had refused to come near the witch hunter again.

Realizing that he was only trying to feel her out, she gave him a shark’s grin and continued, “Ehrlich gesagt, Hansel, ist meine Geliebte im Nebenzimmer mit Beruhigungsmitteln, die take down einen ausgewachsenen Elefanten in einer zweiten Wohnung wird bewaffnet. Du bist der zumindest meiner Ängste gerade jetzt. (Frankly, Hansel, my lover is in the next room armed with tranquilizers that will take down a fully grown elephant in a second flat. You are the very least of my fears right now.)”

Hansel nodded a solemn agreement, before asking his first question, “Warum jetzt? Wenn ich so lange geschlafen, wie Sie sagen, warum bin ich jetzt wach? (Why now? If I have been sleeping for as long as you say, why am I awake now?)”

Marina sighed, muttering under her breath, “Of course he’d go for the most difficult question first.” Shifting upwards onto her left butt cheek, she reached into her right back pocket and pulled out her wallet. Flipping it open, she tenderly removed the picture she’d kept hidden within the inside pocket since shortly before Clint turned 16. It was the last picture all five of the brothers had been in before Barney had done what he’d done and disappeared into the night with the Swordsman. Stroking her thumb over each of their smiling faces, she took a deep breath and held it out to him, offering it in answer to all the questions he didn’t even know to ask. “Da von ihnen. Dies sind die Brüder Grimm. Sie sind für alle Absichten und Zwecke, deine Söhne. (Because of them. These are the Brothers Grimm. They are, for all intents and purposes, your sons.)”

Hansel shook his head, even as his eyes remained glued to the identical faces within the photograph, faces that he knew intimately only because he knew his own. “Aber ich hatte keine Kinder, die Liebe war ein Luxus, ein, wie ich konnte kaum leisten. Wie ist so etwas möglich? (But I had no children; love was a luxury one such as I could ill afford. How is such a thing possible?)”

“Es heißt Klonen. Wobei jemand ein Teil von dir - was sie DNA nennen - und es verwenden, um
eine physikalische Kopie zu erstellen. Die DNA von Ihnen und Ihrer Schwester war sehr begehrt. Die deutsche Regierung verkaufte es recht häufig zu wem war bereit, zu zahlen bereit war. (It's called cloning. Wherein someone takes a part of you - what they call DNA - and use it to create a physical copy. The DNA of you and your sister was highly sought after. The German government sold it rather frequently to whomever was willing to pay.)

Visibly startled, Hansel’s head snapped up and he glared at her viciously, his disbelief and horror evident on his face. “Du lügst! (You lie!)”

Marina had expected his reaction and simply shook her head calmly. “Ich nicht. (I do not.)”

“Wie wird eine solche Zaubern getan? Welche Art von Hexe kann so etwas tun? (How is such spell casting done? What manner of witch can do such a thing?)”

“Hexerei ist nicht das, was du einmal wusste, dass es zu sein. Magie geht Hand in Hand mit der Wissenschaft jetzt. Was ihr Hexen nennen, nennen wir Wissenschaftler. (Witchcraft is not what you once knew it to be. Magic walks hand in hand with science now. What you call witches, we call scientists.)”

“And diese Jungs? My . . . Söhne? Sie wurden aus solchen Zauber geboren? (And these boys? My . . . sons? They were born from such magic?)”

“They were.”

Falling backwards against his pillows, he stroked hesitant fingers over each of the brothers’ faces. Marina could tell that he was looking for differences between their faces and his own. Having spent 29 years watching their faces change as they grew, she knew for a fact that none of the boys was his exact copy. They had their variations, both from him and from each other; each with a different eye color and a distinct build best suited to the positions they had been created to fill.

Clint was slight and wiry, with narrow shoulders and hips, suitable for slipping into unseen spaces and hiding within plain sight. Kenneth was stocky and solid, with broad shoulders and strong, square hands, made to efficiently handle any weapon and build any bomb. Jason was lithe and compact, his long fingers and slender hands appropriate for manipulating electronics and delicate wiring. Brian and Will had both been created from the same mold, the kind of handsome that people took notice of once, but not twice, though their eyes were different and helped people tell the two apart.

“Aber warum? Warum sollte jemand so etwas tun? Welchen Zweck könnten sie gehabt haben? (But why? Why would anyone do such a thing? What purpose could they have had?)”

Here, Marina paused. She had always known why her boys had been created. Their purpose had been ingrained into them from the time they were born; even having escaped Project Cahill, their experiences within the project had shaped their lives. She had thought it would be easy, to tell him the truth of their existence and let him make of it what he would. The reality of the matter, however, was an entirely different subject altogether. “Um echte lebende Waffen zu schaffen. Wissenschaftler erstellt eure Söhne zur perfekten Soldaten zu sein. Und möge Gott vergib uns für sie, aber sie sind. Sie sind wirklich perfekt Soldaten. Sie waren immer. (To create true living weapons. Scientists created your sons to be perfect soldiers. And may God forgive us for it, but they are. They are truly perfect soldiers. They always have been.)”

Chapter End Notes
See you next time!
Chapter Notes

No German this chapter, and the Russian translations are in the chapter, except for those that are at the end of the chapter. I continue to adore your reviews and I hope you continue to read and enjoy! Thank you so much for your awesome support.

Also, I'm going to be stepping away from Hansel and Marina for a few chapters, and I'm going to be exploring the each of the brothers individually; their thoughts on where they've come from and the effect that they think Hansel is going to change their lives. I hope that's okay; with the arrival of Daddy Dearest, I rather think the boys would take a second to reflect on their lives thus far and how their lives are going to be different in the future.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
Chapter 18

Every story Brian had ever heard began with the phrase “Once upon a time.” Whether that was just Marina’s prerogative or not was debatable, but the fact remained. Every story she’d ever told when he and his brothers were children had begun with the same phrase. So it made sense that the story of Brian Gamble began the only way he’d ever known.

Once upon a time, Brian Gamble had answered to Barney Grimm. His family had been dysfunctional, to be sure, but they had still been a family. He’d spent his life in their back pockets, mutually supportive and codependent in a way that most families could never even hope of being. His brothers had had his back always, and he’d always had theirs too. There had never been even a second of doubt that he and his brothers could take over the world one day, if they so chose.

Then he did what he did, and Barney Grimm had disappeared like a ghost into the night. He’d wandered for awhile, drowning in the guilt of his sins, slowly becoming disillusioned with what he’d been promised would be “the adventure of a lifetime.” Barney had been gone for years, leaving his family reeling and struggling to rebuild their foundations without him. Even still, he thought they’d done very well for themselves. If the awe he’d heard from S.H.I.E.L.D. agents around base as they whispered the moniker “Brat’ya Mrachnyy” was any indication, it wasn’t just Director Fury with a man-crush on his brothers. The four steadfast Brothers Grimm would have been just fine without the wayward son crashing the party.

Still, there was some part of him that was relieved Marina and Clint had come for him. To hear Clint tell it, Marina had insisted they come for him as soon as she’d learned where he was hiding out. The former Red Room assassin had dragged him relentlessly into her life once again without pause or recrimination, and Brian could admit to himself that he was all the more devoted to her for it. Of his brothers, Clint had probably been the one he had needed forgiveness from most of all. As a result, Clint’s complete nonchalance about his past transgressions was so unexpected and yet so like his youngest brother, that Brian could only shake his head in stunned disbelief at the thought that he had spent all those years doubting Clint’s proclivity towards forgiveness.

As for Will, their first meeting in four years had been nothing like he thought it would be and everything he had hoped for. Will had counted Marina as his best friend from the time he was fourteen or so, but Will had been Brian’s best friend since Brian was old enough to toddle after him. It was with no little relief that Brian had realized their recent rescue mission had begun to knit together the fractured ends of their tattered friendship. Brian knew that he had a long way to go in regaining Will’s unwavering trust, but he was willing to work for it. There wasn’t a chance in hell that he was going to squander the second chance he’d been given to be apart of their highly impractical family.

But that still left his relationships with two of his brothers up in the air. Neither Jason nor Kenny had been particularly forthcoming in the last few days. Both had obviously accepted Will’s lead on the matter, ever the dutiful soldiers, but neither had made any overtures beyond that. Of course, his relationships with them had always been much more hands off than his relationships with either Will or Clint, but that didn’t mean their rejection didn’t still sting. Will had been his best friend, hands down and Clint was the most irresistible and irrepressible of the brothers. But Jason and Kenny were his brothers too, and they refused to even speak to him.

Granted, Jason had always been content to be left alone with his computers and whatever crazy electronics he could invent with whatever scrap parts he could find lying around the circus grounds. Brian had always comforted himself with the fact that even Marina was pretty hands off with Jason, though her adoration for him had always been evident in the nickname she used for no one else and the loving way she’d guide him to bed when he’d fall asleep over his boyhood engineering projects.
Jason’s devotion to the family was obvious to even the most dispassionate observer, but Jason was probably the one only of them who had never lost himself completely to the insanity that was the Brothers Grimm.

Which brought him to Kenny, sweet devoted Kenny who – as far as Brian could tell – hadn’t changed a single bit from the adored and adoring boy he’d been when Brian had left the circus behind him. Sure, the confident way he could handle the weaponry his brothers kept around was new, and more than a little terrifying, but at the core, Kenny was essentially the same boy who had made even the most cantankerous carnie fall over heels for him. The former SWAT sniper loved his baby brother with the same fierce protectiveness as the rest of his brothers and would quite happily murder anyone who hurt Kenny in any way. However, even as he said that, Brian acknowledged that he’d never been able to connect with the second youngest Grimm like he had with any of the others, even Jason. There had always been some kind of disconnect between them.

Whatever the reason, both brothers were resolutely keeping their distance. And Brian was determined to close that distance; if not today, then tomorrow at the very latest.

Marina and Will had left the quarters the brothers had been assigned in S.H.I.E.L.D.’s base housing about an hour ago, to see Hansel Kuhn and try to soften him toward the idea of sons that he hadn’t had a personal hand in creating. Jason had immediately gone to his computer to check on the hack he’d started the night before. Brian was pretty sure most people would probably balk at hacking top secret government files, especially if those files belonged to the German government. But then again, Jason wasn’t most people. Brian was willing to bet that by the time Jason got the information he needed on where the Germans were holding Gretel Kuhn’s body, the German servers would be completely inside out. The German computer programmers would be so busy unscrambling their files, they would never even notice that a couple of them were missing.

Kenny, meanwhile, had turned his attention to the veritable armory the Brothers Grimm kept on hand wherever they went. He and Clint were busily dismantling their arsenal, preparing to check each piece for wear and clean each weapon thoroughly for what could be an extended storage time. Brian was not an idiot; he knew what Kenny had been built for. He’d seen the Cahill files Marina thought she’d hidden sufficiently enough to never be found. (Then again, he’d known Marina his whole life. No one else would have ever thought to look for top secret files in a safe, exactly where they belonged. He was fairly certain that most civilians thought spies hid top secret files in places like the cookie jar or under the mattress or something equally ridiculous.) And yet even knowing that he’d been designed to be their gunner, he was still reluctantly surprised at how effortlessly the gentlest of the brothers handled their guns. And how competent he was when it came to using them.

Brian remained where he’d first sat down after coming in from his shift at Hansel’s hospital room. He could feel the smirk on his lips, an intimidation technique he’d developed in Los Angeles that he was having a hard time repressing. Street used to tell him that it made people nervous; of course, Jim had never met all of his brothers, all at once. There was nothing quite like the combined might of the Brothers Grimm, each laser-focused on your destruction. That? That made people nervous.

Finally, he got tired of the silence. “So, are you two just going to refuse to talk to me for the rest of your lives?”

Jason’s only response was a quick glance over the top of his computer, before the screen once again had his full attention. Brian rolled his eyes slightly; he really should have expected that. He couldn’t remember a single time when Jason’s attention had shifted from his computer when there was something on it that he thought was more interesting than whatever current family drama was going down.
Kenny, though; Kenny jumped nearly a mile high. Clint chuckled under his breath, one hand reaching out to touch his brother’s shoulder in an attempt to steady him. Kenny nodded his thanks, before carefully laying down the pieces of the VKS/VSSK Vychlop sniper rifle he’d been taking apart. The Russian made rifle was Marina’s favorite weapon and only Clint, Will and Kenny had ever been allowed to touch it, let alone clean it. Rubbing a well-oiled cloth over it, he wiped away his fingerprints before setting the cloth aside and turning his full attention onto his older brother.

“And why exactly do you think I should have anything to say to you?”

“Ken . . . I’m sorry, okay? I don’t know how many times I can say I’m sorry.”

Kenny bolted to his feet, angry clouding his usually cheerful features as his chair flew back and toppled to the ground. “But you didn’t say sorry! You said sorry to Clint and to Will and to Marina. But you never said sorry to me! Or to Jason! You just waltzed back in like you always do and we’re just supposed to be okay with it! It’s not fair, Brian . . . we’re your brothers too! Shouldn’t we get an apology?”

Brian drew back sharply, the words impacting as though they had been a physical blow. Mentally reviewing every interaction he’d had with his brothers since Marina and Clint had led him off of a C-130 and onto the tarmac, he realized with a kind of sick horror that Kenny was right. He’d been so terrified of Will’s reaction to his reappearance, and relieved by Clint and Marina’s forgiveness, that he hadn’t taken the time to catch up with the two other brothers privately and apologize to them as well. His actions, though not against them directly, had affected them too. “Iisus Khristos, Kenni, mne tak zhal’. Ya dazhe ne ponimayu. (Jesus Christ, Kenny, I’m so sorry. I didn’t even realize.)”

Kenny sighed, his shoulders bowing forward despondently as he shrugged. “Ya znayu. Vy obychno ne delayut. Dzheyson i ya ne pochut’ stol’ zhe vsykom na ‘ty menya pugayesh’ spisok, kak i ostal’nye nashi sem’i. (I know. You usually don’t. Jason and I aren’t nearly as high on your ‘you scare me’ list as the rest of our family.)”

Clint and Jason both laughed as Brian chuckled his agreement, “Uil’yam chertovski strashno, yesli vy sprosite menya. Marina ne daleko pozadi, libo. (Will is pretty fucking terrifying, if you ask me. Marina’s not far behind him, either.)”

Kenny chuckled lightly, unable to deny that point, “Svoyego roda ne v etom, Brayan. (Kinda not the point, Brian.)”

“I’ll make it up to you, Kenny. You and Jason. I promise. No matter what; I’m going to do whatever I can to fix this.”

The second youngest Grimm nodded once, “Ya sdelayu eto do vas, Kenni. Vy i Dzheyson. Nezavisimo ot togo, chto ya sobirayus’ sdelat’ vse, chto mogu, chtoby ispravit’ eto. (I’ll make it up to you, Kenny. You and Jason. I promise. No matter what; I’m going to do whatever I can to fix this.)”

Sensing that it would be okay to touch him now, Brian reached out and hauled his little brother to him for a hard hug. Kenny ducked his head into his shoulder, arms coming up to wrap around him hard. “Welcome back, Brian. I missed you.”

Brian reached up to thread one hand through the blond strands on the back of Kenny’s head. “I missed you too, detka. I’m not going anywhere. Not ever again.”

“Don’t make promises you can’t keep, Brian,” Jason warned lightly, glancing up from his computer once again. “You’ve always been cursed with insatiable wanderlust. And maybe you won’t betray us like you did before; but that doesn’t mean that you’ll always be around.”
Clint spoke up as Brian moved to protest. “Jay’s right, Bri. Let it go.”

The four brothers were quiet for a long time, before Brian spoke up again, “So Hansel Kuhn? Thoughts?”

Jason chuckled wryly, as he replied, “Marina’s afraid he’s going to want to kill us. Paternal filicide much? Seriously . . . *dobro pozhalovat’ v sem yu, Papa.* (welcome to the family, Dad.)”

“Marina’s not going to let him kill us, Jay,” Clint reminded the older brother, returning his attention to the barrel of the Glock 19 he was cleaning out. “Besides . . . I’m not sure that sometimes Will doesn’t want to kill us. But Marina hasn’t let him murder us yet.”

“Of course, Will wants to kill us. We make his life much harder than it could be. And Marina protects us from his wrath because for some crazy reason, she actually likes us. *Bog znayet, pochemu,* (God only knows why,)” Jason joked, standing from his chair and moving into the kitchen to get something to drink, reaching out to ruffle Kenny’s hair as he passed.

Brian snorted, watching as Kenny pouted after Jason, hands coming up to flatten his hair back down once again. “Not cool, Jay,” he called after the retreating brother.

Clint’s eyes were super glued to the gun in his hands, and Brian just knew that the youngest Grimm was kicking something around in his head. “All right, Clint. What’re you kicking around in that head of yours?”

“So, when we do finally meet him . . . Hansel, I mean . . . what do you think he’s going to be like?”

The oldest of the Grimms in the room hummed as he dropped backwards into his chair. His feet came up to rest on the table as he contemplated the question, earning a disgruntled face from Kenny. “Marina doesn’t like it when we put our boots on the table, Brian. She’ll get mad if she comes back and sees you.”

“What Marina doesn’t know won’t hurt me,” Brian insisted, even as he kicked his feet off the table and onto Jason’s recently vacated chair. “I can actually see him being a lot like Will. No nonsense and straightforward, but with that wicked sense of humor that you would only know he has if you know him really well.”

“I think he’ll be a little like Jason too. Cool and calm . . . a steady head in a crisis. Someone who always knows how to find their way out of a bad situation,” Kenny insisted, his arms coming up to hug his knees to his chest as he grinned up at the older Grimm brother.

Jason smiled down at his brother fondly, even as he shoved Brian’s feet blindly to the floor. Brian nearly overbalanced at the sudden motion, scowling at Jason as the 25 year old plopped comfortably into his chair and crossed his arms over his chest as he contributed his own two cents worth, “I think he’ll be a lot like you too, Bri; kick ass and someone who doesn’t do well with being ordered to do something that clashes with his personal moral code.”

“I don’t have a moral code, Jay,” Brian joked, earning a small smile as Jason argued fondly, “Yes you do. You would just prefer if no one knew about it.”

Sensing that the conversation was about to take turn for a dreaded chick flick moment, the second eldest Grimm was quick to change the subject. “So . . . Marina said he was scaring his nurses last night. I wonder why?”

“He’s in new surroundings, a world he doesn’t know. He’s testing his limits. I know I would be. Everything’ll settle down once he realizes that this world is not so different from the one he grew up
in; it’s just maybe a bit more high tech than he remembers."

“You think Director Fury will recruit him?” Kenny asked innocently, resting his chin casually on his fist as he watched Brian think.

“I rather think that’s up to Director Fury, don’t you, detka?”

“I think Director Fury should recruit him. Then Marina really will have a full deck.”

Brian chuckled, nodding his head in agreement. “You know what, you’re right. And one day . . . the six of us are going to conquer the world. What do you think about that?”

Jason’s tone was dry as he insisted, “How about we worry about conquering dinner first? It sounded like Will and Marina might be at Medical for awhile, and I know no one wants to eat my cooking.”

“Damn straight,” came the simultaneous agreement from each of the brothers.

It was a long time, before the youngest Grimm stopped laughing long enough to shove himself to his feet. "All right. What does everyone want for dinner?"

“Anything edible,” Kenny announced with a bright grin, causing Clint to chuckle.

“All right then . . . Spaghetti-Os it is. Come on, Jay, you can help. I'm not sure even you could screw up Spaghetti-Os,” Clint joked, grabbing his brother by the arm and dragging him into the kitchen to help.

Half an hour later, Jason managed to prove Clint wrong.

Chapter End Notes

Russian Translations:

detka - kiddo
Chapter 19

Clinton Francis Grimm was the luckiest son of a bitch in the world... if he said so himself.

He was the youngest, maybe a tiny bit spoiled, member of the best damned special operations team the Army had ever created. He had a job he genuinely enjoyed; surrounded by people he enjoyed doing it with. His best friend in the whole wide world was his favorite older brother ever! And he had even managed to trump Will in Marina’s heart as her favorite among the Brothers Grimm.
Really, he lived a pretty charmed life.

Granted, there were things about his life that sosal korolevskoy sharov. Whenever one of Marina’s former friends from the Red Room dropped by to try and kill her usually ranked somewhere near the top of his “Eto Otstoy!” list. The devastation she always tried so hard to hide from him and his brothers broke his heart every time. His older brother, Barney, standing by and watching as a guy nearly beat him to death was pretty up there too. And of course, the nightmares were the worst; while they were nowhere near anything Will fell victim to, they weren’t exactly a cakewalk either.

Considering how they’d been created, Clint knew that the Brothers Grimm were lucky to have the lives they did. If their original creators had had it their way, they would have spent their entire lives surrounded by overly self-important stariki who only ever saw them as very expensive, highly trained but still ultimately expendable weapons. Having Marina steal them away had probably saved all their lives. And Clint was luckier than the rest of his brothers; he’d been too young when they escaped the Hoover base to really have been scarred by what happened there.

The elder Grimms had in no way been so fortunate. Will struggled constantly with nightmares about the things he’d seen and done while still in the Army’s custody. Jason never talked about what had happened to him at the Hoover base, but Clint had seen the scars that littered his back and shoulders . . . the kind of marks that could only have been made by an adult with a ruler and a heavy hand. Everyone knew that Barney had gone quietly crazy while in the Army’s keeping, his anger and rebellious nature all the more prevalent in the last days before Marina had taken them away and escalating steadily until the days before he’d disappeared from their lives like a bad dream. Poor Kenny lived every day with the knowledge that some bigshot had ordered his execution, simply because the idiotskiy mudak didn’t think that the second youngest of the Project Cahill offspring passed muster intellectually; never mind the fact that Kenny had never met a gun he couldn’t shoot or a bomb he couldn’t fabricate.

Then there were the little things the Army had taken from the Brothers Cahill. Things like Clint’s hearing, a loss the scientists in charge of the project had deemed “an acceptable sacrifice” so long as he had better vision than anyone else in the world. It was fortunate for him that his deafness had been considered a tolerable defect; the alternative was something he tried really hard not to think about. And even still, he’d undergone seven surgeries before he was six months old to try and reverse it, prior to the scientists simply acknowledging it as a permanent flaw in the design and moving on to other, more important things.

As a result of his profound hearing loss, Clint had had hearing aids since before he could remember. Marina had told him once that he’d been fitted with his first pair before he was a year old. No one had ever given a child as young as he was a pair of hearing aids before, and they’d been specially made for him by none other than Howard Stark, who had been the primary project authority and technically Marina’s boss at the time. Clint didn’t remember much about them, only that he’d had them until he was five when they finally got too small for his ears.

Stark had been replaced by General Thaddeus “Thunderbolt” Ross as the program authority shortly before Clint turned one and, when they’d needed a place to hide right after they’d escaped, Marina had taken the brothers to him. He’d helped her create their identities, and had visited them frequently after they’d joined Carter’s Circus, just to check in and make sure that the six of them had everything they needed. One of those things had been Clint’s hearing aids; Stark had always made sure that the youngest Grimm was supplied with a new pair whenever he outgrew the last set.

With his aids, Clint had been able to start mimicking the sounds his brothers made and the words they said around the time he was 10 months old. As soon as that happened, Ross had thrown a whole menagerie of specialists at him to compensate for what Ross considered his only major defect;
a flaw the rest of his handlers considered a reasonable deficiency. Clint had spent the next two years surrounded by speech therapists, language therapists, audiologists, a whole team of otolaryngologists, sign language teachers, sign language interpreters, speech and language pathologists (who were not the same as his therapists) and psychiatrists. Marina had been a lifesaver that year; teaching him Russian so that he had some control over his life, sitting with him through all of his lessons and meetings and consultations, and practicing his ASL with him when he got frustrated and angry with how hard it was to learn. Marina had never once expected him to be anything more than he was; if he’d taken his aids out once they’d left the Hoover base and he’d decided just to speak ASL for the rest of his life, Marina would have let him do it and never said a word about it.

The need for all of these specialists had only reinforced what Clint had always known. The irrefutable fact that he and Kenny were the only ones the Project Cahill had messed up; the biggest freaks in a family of freaks. While the three eldest brothers were damn near perfect in comparison.

Will was strong and smart, the ideal soldier; while also being the most self-effacing person that Clint had ever met. It was like Will didn’t even realize how awesome he was most of the time; he’d been bred to be the way he was . . . it wasn’t something he’d earned, except that not even the Project Cahill scientists and behaviorists could have ever created someone so amazing. Clint would never tell him, but Will was his hero. He was the role model Clint had looked up to his whole life, and a rather large part of Clint still wanted to be exactly like his big brother.

Brian was as badass as a single person could get without the world spontaneously combusting from all the awesome. He was also fucking crazy, and pretty much anyone who had ever even met Brian knew it. Barney had moved through life as though it owed him something, and he was going to collect what he felt he was owed. Then Barney had died and Brian had been born from his ashes. Brian was different than Barney had been; the angry gleam that had been in Barney's eyes for as long as Clint could remember was calmer now; as though Brian had finally found the muzzle that kept it under control, only letting it out when a little rage was the best solution to whatever problem Brian was dealing with at any given moment. Not that Brian didn’t still scare the shit out of him but at the end of the day, Clint was glad he was on their side.

Jason was at least as smart as Will and nearly as crazy as Brian. The things he could do with a box of scrap metal didn’t even bear quantifying. Clint couldn’t remember ever seeing Jason more than an arm’s length away from a welding iron and some half-cocked invention that Jason swore up and down was going to save their asses in the field. (And the most ridiculous thing about those bizarre gadgets was that it usually did.) He could be cold and aloof one minute and the biggest prankster among them the next. His computer was an extension of his soul and Clint was pretty sure that one day, the Brothers Grimm were going to wake up and find that Jason had become his computer. He was the family's voice of reason when Marina’s failed, and he may be the only member of the family who could walk away and never look back.

Kenny was his best friend. Had always been his best friend. They’d shared their shoebox bedrooms, whether on the railcar or in base housing, since they’d joined the circus and they’d shared each other’s secrets for longer than that. Clint was the only one in the family who knew how much Kenny would willingly give up, just to be as smart as everyone else. And yeah, Clint had always known that Kenny wasn’t as bright as the rest of them, but Kenny still knew a hell of a lot about guns and explosives. Not even Will or Marina knew half the shit that Kenny could pull out of thin air. Some of Clint’s favorite memories were from when they were kids at the circus. They used to sit at the edge of the empty railcars, legs swinging over the moving ground, and just talk about all the places they wanted to see and the things they wanted to do. They’d seen a lot of those places while with the Army, and one day Clint intended to drag Kenny back to most of them and see them all again just for the hell of it.
All in all, the Brothers Grimm – and by extension, Clint – had pretty fucking awesome lives!

Which was why the subsequent arrival and awakening of Hansel Kuhn was threatening to throw his entire life into a complete tailspin. The Brothers Grimm had never had a father figure; even the thought of Dr. Cahill or General Ross in that role made Clint want to gag. Howard Stark had probably been the closest thing they’d ever had, in that – up until his death – he’d done what he could to provide them with the essentials they needed that they couldn’t get for themselves. Fortunately, Clint was fairly certain that only Marina had noticed something was bothering him. Mostly, because he cracked just enough inappropriate jokes to keep his brothers off his tail. Although, if Marina knew then Will either already knew or would find out a lot sooner than Clint wanted him to. (Sometimes, having her know him as well as she did was kind of a pain in the ass.)

After dinner – speaking of which, seriously Jason! Since when did peanut M&M’s go in Spaghetti-Os? – Clint retreated to the highest point he could find in the little house they’d been given on base. He sat on the edge of the roof, legs dangling out over open air . . . and waited.

It was only a couple of minutes before Clint heard the sash go up in the attic window and the second youngest Grimm climbed out onto the roof to join him. Clint rotated with a grin, “Sup Ken?”

Kenny returned the grin, picking his way carefully over the sloped tiles before plopping down gracelessly on the edge next to his brother. The older brother nudged Clint affectionately with his shoulder, the two brothers exchanging wide grins, their bodies perfect mirrors of each other as they sat and watched the sun start to settle down for her nightly rest. They were quiet for a long time, both wondering who would be the first to break the silence. Finally, as the last of the sun’s rays disappeared from the sky, Kenny spoke. “You’ve been awfully quiet lately. What’s bugging you?”

Clint swore lightly under his breath; apparently, Marina was not the only one who had realized something was bothering him. If he was going to work for a secret government agency and essentially be a spy, he was really going to have to start paying attention in his ninja classes. Glancing at his brother, he contemplated lying for all of a second, before the expectant, trusting look on Kenny’s face changed his mind for him. Sighing heavily, he kicked his feet lightly and watched them swing as he tried to gather his fractious thoughts into something at least resembling coherent.

“What if he doesn’t like us?”

Kenny frowned, cocking his head as he examined the question. “You mean Kuhn? What if Kuhn doesn’t like us?”

The youngest brother nodded once, frowning fiercely as he contemplated the upheaval that had taken over their lives since they’d found their 216 year old “father” in what basically amounted to cold storage in Canada. “Yeah. I mean, what if we meet him and he doesn’t like us? What happens then?”

There was a long silence, before Kenny gave the only answer there was to give. “Then he doesn’t like us. And life goes on as it always has.”

“Won’t that bother you though? I mean, I know the whole ‘dear old dad’ thing is kinda just a joke. But Hansel Kuhn’s DNA flows through our veins; his genome created us. He is basically our father is all the ways that matter.”

“I don’t think it would bother me. We’ve never had a father, so truthfully I don’t know how to miss having one. I’m sure it’ll hurt, at least a little, but at the end of it I’ll still have you and Marina and Will and Jason and Brian. That’s always been enough for me up to this point; why wouldn’t it be enough after?”

Clint nodded, nibbling lightly on his lower lip as he thought about that. Kenny reached out and
flicked his mouth, “You shouldn’t do that. It’s cold here . . . your lips will crack.”

“Nasedka,” Clint teased, earning himself a soft punch in the point of his shoulder.

“Shut up,” Kenny laughed, “At least I’m not a proskurnyak like Marina.”

“First of all, Marina is only comprised of marshmallowy goodness on the inside; the rest of her is tempered steel. Secondly, I’m totally telling her you said that.”

“You are not.”

“I totally am. Oooh . . . you’re gonna be in so much trouble,” the youngest laughed, utterly confident despite his precarious seat even as Kenny shoved him away playfully.

“You agreed with me!”

“Yeah, but what Marina doesn’t know won’t hurt me,” Clint joked, stealing Brian’s phrase from earlier in the afternoon.

Kenny rolled his eyes, “Whatever you say . . . Amur.”

“Hey, I am at least 100 times cooler than Cupid, Ken. I’m like a . . . a hawk or something.”

“So that’s why we call you ‘Yastreb,’” Kenny teased, dodging his own incoming punch this time. “Huh, I hadn’t ever made that connection before.”

“Shut up, Ken.”

“After you, Clint.”

There was silence again, as the brothers settled down once more. It was late, nearly midnight, when the two finally saw Will and Marina walking down the sidewalk together on their way back home from spending the day in Medical with Hansel Kuhn. The two brothers watched the couple, each reveling in the little bit of normalcy that the familiar relationship bestowed. Will had his arm resting low on Marina’s waist, the fingers of his hand tucked carelessly in the back pocket of her jeans. Marina’s own arms were around Will’s waist, their heads bent together as they spoke too low to be heard by anyone but themselves.

It was only after the couple disappeared through the door below that Kenny spoke again. “You know what, Clint?”

“What Ken?”

“He’ll like us. I know he will.”

“Yeah. How do you know?”

“Because we’re his family; and having a family that loves you will always be better than being alone. Always.” There was a pause before Kenny snorted, “Even if they are hopelessly dysfunctional.”

Chapter End Notes

Russian Translations:
sosal korolevskoy sharov - sucked royal balls
Eto Otstoy! - That sucks!
idiotskiy mudak - moronic asshole
nasedka - mother hen
proskurnyak - marshmallow
Amur - Cupid
Yastreb - Hawk (Clint's Spec Ops codename)
stariki - old men
As usual, the Russian translations are at the end. Also, I have rehashed the conversation between Kenny and Clint from Kenny's perspective. I think you'll enjoy it, even if the dialogue is the same. I hope you continue to enjoy this story. I love reading all of your reviews. Enjoy!

Chapter 20

Back when the Brothers Grimm were still the Brothers Cahill, Marina had said that when practice became habit, the things you thought were hard usually got easier. So Kenny made it a habit to remember everything.

He didn’t think any of his brothers knew, but Kenny remembered the base under the Hoover Dam. Deep underground and solid concrete, Kenny had always felt small within its walls. He remembered
being “Project 4” to the scientists who made him; he had never been “Kenny” or even “Kenneth” like he was with Marina and his brothers. He remembered how General Ross had always looked so mean whenever Ross had seen him. He remembered Dr. Cahill and the chill that had followed him everywhere.

He remembered how Marina had smiled while they’d been there; the expression tight and angry and nothing like the real, bright grins she flashed around now. He remembered the scared defiance in Will’s eyes early every morning when Ross came to take him away and the horror that had replaced it by the time he returned late every night. He remembered the way Jason had cringed from his handler, a tall man with dark eyes and big hands, and the way his older brother would come home from his lessons limp and bloody. He remembered the way Barney had been there . . . usually, he shied away from those memories; he had one too many bad dreams about Barney already. He remembered Marina’s dread when Clint’s hearing tests had come back bad, and he remembered Clint’s anger at the doctors who had followed him around after he started learning to talk.

He still remembered the day Marina had panicked when Clint hadn’t come home for bed on time. He remembered the scary hour they’d spent looking for the sixteen year old and Kenny remembered the sound of barking wolfhounds that had led him to his baby brother, lying broken under the Carter’s Circus Big Top. He remembered how terrified he’d been to see him like that; Clint had been his best friend his whole life. And of course he definitely remembered the awful month he’d sat at Clint’s bedside in the hospital, begging his brother to wake up and come back to him. He remembered being angry with the Swordsman for nearly killing his best friend and being angry with Barney for letting it happen. Mostly he remembered how much he wished he could forget.

He knew he had a pretty good memory, considering, but he was also not oblivious to the fact that he fell far below his brothers when it came to brains. No one would ever say Kenny was the sharpest tool in the shed, not while Will was the smartest person he knew with Jason and Marina only half a step behind him. Marina had always worked with Kenny on his schoolwork, both at the base and after they’d joined the circus. It used to make him so mad when he’d sit for hours, struggling to get the answers right, while the rest of his brothers spent a much shorter amount of time and got the same results he did. He’d gotten lucky that his brothers had never tortured him for it, unlike some of the other circus kids had once they’d found out how hard it was for him just to do simple math. He was even luckier that his brothers had defended him to every one of those kids growing up, coming to blows more than once.

But if he wasn’t book smart, at least there were other things he knew more about than anyone else in the world. Building bombs and shooting guns weren’t really important in the circus, but being good at it had helped him get into the Army with the rest of his brothers when he shouldn’t even have been allowed to enlist. They’d gotten him onto Will’s special operations team with the Army’s Special Forces and earned him the status as the best weapons specialist in Spec Ops. He’d overheard Will and Marina talking once about how hard it was to keep him with them, because other teams kept putting in requests to have him moved to their own teams. Luckily, Will and Marina had friends in high places – the four-star general who had once locked Marina up and then gave her the rank of major anyway was one of the few friends Will and Marina had outside of the family – and so with the Brat’ya Mrachnyny he remained.

The Army had been everything Will had warned him it would be. It wasn’t like the movies, where people died with some sense of pride in what they were dying for. Soldiers just died. If they were lucky, they died fast and painlessly. If they weren’t . . . well, Kenny prayed to whatever god looked after human science projects that when he died, he would be one of the lucky ones.

The Army was also everything Kenny had hoped it would be. It took him to places he had only ever dreamed about when he and Clint used to sit on the edges of railcars and watch the world pass them
by. Of course, there was a big difference in seeing the African Sahara from the back of an Army Jeep and going on safari like he’d always dreamed. But for the most part, Kenny wouldn’t trade his time with the Army for anything. He had Marina and his brothers, and he was doing something he was good at – what else could he have wished for?

Kenny knew he was lucky. He knew that General Ross was going to have him killed, and that’s why Marina had made the decision to finally betray everything she’d been raised to believe. She had loved him and his brothers more than she’d loved the life she would be leaving behind, vowing to protect them and keep them safe no matter what. And she had to have known the cost of her actions that night she’d led them all from their beds, slipped them into the airvents and took them away. He owed Marina his life; and only Clint knew that he’d willingly spend the rest of his life without her if it meant he could be as smart as she was. It was a fact of his life that Clint was really the only one who officially knew a lot of his secrets. Kenny acknowledged that Marina probably knew most of his secrets anyway, but she’d never tell a soul – not even him – what she knew. It was the downside of having been raised by someone whose back pocket you spent your life living in.

So yeah, Kenny remembered things. Some of those things were good and others were bad. Some things haunted his dreams under the cover of darkness and others were ghosts in the corners of his eyes in broad daylight. He dreaded the day the Brothers Grimm ran into General Ross again; he was fairly certain the general would have at least as good a memory as him.

That night, as he watched Clint yell at Jason for the peanut M&Ms he’d added to the Spaghetti-Os, he knew that he would need to remember this night. Clint thought he was being clever, behaving just normally enough that he didn’t think anyone would notice that something was wrong. But Kenny had always been able to tell how Clint was feeling; the kid was not usually subtle, though this latest attempt at it was better than usual.

So it was that when Clint disappeared from the kitchen and up to the roof, Kenny waited for just long enough not to cause concern and went after him. He could hear Brian and Jason poking fun at each other in the kitchen as they cleared the dishes, the familiar sounds growing more muffled as he headed up the stairs and into the attic. Just as he’d thought, the back of Clint’s head was just barely visible through the window. Shoving up the sash, he stepped out onto the roof and smiled when Clint turned to look at him. He could tell just by the tone of Clint’s, “Sup Ken?” that Clint had been waiting for him to show up.

Kenny returned his brother’s grin, picking his way carefully over the sloped tiles before plopping down next to the younger Grimm. Knowing that Clint was upset, the older of the two brothers rocked sideways and knocked fondly into Clint’s shoulder, providing the tactile comfort that he knew Clint needed but would never ask for in a million years. Content with that gesture of love Kenny leaned back on his hands easily, willing to be quiet and watch the sun go down. Finally, he couldn’t bear the silence any more and spoke, “You’ve been awfully quiet lately. What’s bugging you?”

He smirked at the sound of the Russian expletive Clint muttered, even as he remained quiet, letting Clint work out what he wanted to say in his own time. Clint sighed heavily, the younger brother watching his feet kick as he asked miserably, “What if he doesn’t like us?”

Kenny frowned; that had been the last thing he’d thought Clint was worried about. Clint had seemed like he was okay with the arrival of Hansel Kuhn into their lives and what that meant for them . . . which probably should have been Kenny’s first clue that Clint was NOT okay with it. “You mean Kuhn? What if Kuhn doesn’t like us?”

The youngest brother nodded once, a frown on his face as he continued to watch his feet. “Yeah. I
mean, what if we meet him and he doesn’t like us? What happens then?”

Knowing that Clint wouldn’t appreciate a pat answer, Kenny took the time to really think about it. Even still, there was really only one answer that Kenny could give him. “Then he doesn’t like us. And life goes on as it always has.”

Clint’s foot kicked out viciously as he grunted. When he spoke again, his voice was almost angry, though Kenny knew that Clint wasn’t angry, just lost. “Won’t that bother you though? I mean, I know the whole ‘dear old dad’ thing is kinda just a joke. But Hansel Kuhn’s DNA flows through our veins; his genome created us. He is basically our father is all the ways that matter.”

Here again, Kenny knew that a pat answer was not what Clint wanted to hear. So he took care to really think about what he was saying before he spoke. Kenny didn’t know what a father was, or what one did. So it was hard to think about what it would mean if the man Clint wanted to assign to that role didn’t want it. “I don’t think it would bother me. We’ve never had a father, so truthfully I don’t know how to miss having one.”

He remembered Howard Stark, who had always come to the Circus with things they needed and sometimes for no other reason than just to make sure they were okay; he remembered Dr. Cahill, who had been so cold that Kenny had always imagined that he would freeze if the scientist touched him for a second too long; he remembered General Ross, who had made no bones about his unhappiness with him. Each of them had shaped his life, but none of them would have fit as their dad. Shrugging, he continued, “I’m sure it’ll hurt, at least a little, but at the end of it I’ll still have you and Marina and Will and Jason and Brian. That’s always been enough for me up to this point; why wouldn’t it be enough after?”

Clint nodded, nibbling lightly on his lower lip as he made of that what he would. Worried that Clint would hurt himself if he kept on gnawing at his lips like he was, Kenny reached out and flicked his index finger against his mouth. “You shouldn’t do that. It’s cold here . . . your lips will crack.”

Clint rolled his eyes, teasing fondly, “Nasedka.”

Kenny scoffed, throwing a half-hearted, obligatory punch at his brother that Clint dodged effortlessly. “Shut up. At least I’m not a proskurnyak like Marina,” he joked with a laugh.

“First of all, Marina is only comprised of marshmallowy goodness on the inside; the rest of her is tempered steel. Secondly, I’m totally telling her you said that.”

Kenny felt his face blank in horror at the idea of what Marina would say if she found out, “You are not.”

“I totally am. Oooh . . . you’re gonna be in so much trouble,” the youngest laughed, rocking slightly in his seat as Kenny reached out and shoved him.

“You agreed with me!”

“Yeah, but what Marina doesn’t know won’t hurt me.”

Kenny rolled his eyes, feeling victorious as he fired back with the best weapon he had, “Whatever you say . . . Amur.”

The look on Clint’s face was hilarious as he fumbled for an appropriate protest. Clint had always hated being compared to the mythical archer, even though the two shared the same fondness for as old-fashioned a weapon as a bow and arrows. “Hey, I am at least 100 times cooler than Cupid, Ken. I’m like a . . . a hawk or something.”
Kenny literally crowed at Clint’s protest, teasing, “So that’s why we call you ‘Yastreb.’ Huh, I hadn’t ever made that connection before.” Laughing, he barely managed to dodge another punch without unseating himself off the edge of the roof.

The youngest Grimm had his “you killed my puppy” pout on as he slouched, sulking with a petulant, “Shut up, Ken.”

“After you, Clint,” Kenny joked, before settling down into silence once more.

It was late, nearly midnight, when Kenny finally looked up and saw Will walking down the sidewalk with Marina. Both of them looked tired; it had obviously not been a good day at Medical for either one of them. Kenny was aware that Clint was watching them too; each of them grateful for what Will and Marina’s relationship offered the family in terms of normality and safety. Kenny leaned back on both hands as he watched his oldest brother with his girlfriend. Will had one arm looped around Marina’s waist, his fingers in the back pocket of her jeans, holding her close to him as though he was trying to protect her from something Kenny couldn’t see. Marina’s own arms were around Will, her body tucked into his as though he was the only thing keeping her standing at that point. Both of them spoke too low to be heard, though from the look on Marina’s face it was probably not a nice chat. Deep in Kenny’s heart, a thread tightened painfully as he glanced at Clint and realized that the younger brother hadn’t realized anything was wrong with the picture below them. Making a point to remember this moment, so that he could talk to Marina about it tomorrow, he watched as the couple moved slowly toward the house.

It was only after the couple disappeared through the door below that Kenny suddenly knew the answer to Clint’s earlier question. “You know what, Clint?”

Clint jumped a little, having obviously not expected Kenny to speak again, “What Ken?”

“He’ll like us. I know he will.” In fact, Kenny was almost positive Hansel Kuhn would like the Brothers Grimm, for one reason if not for any others.

“Yeah. How do you know?”

“Because we’re his family; and having a family that loves you will always be better than being alone. Always.” Realizing what he’d just said, Kenny snorted as he continued, “Even if they are hopelessly dysfunctional.”

Chapter End Notes

Russian Translation:

Brat'ya Mrachnyy - Brothers Grimm
nasedka - mother hen
proskurnyak - marshmallow
Amur - Cupid
Yastreby - Hawk (Clint's Spec Ops codename)
Chapter 21

Jason knew that most people thought he was some kind of mystery; but really, it wasn’t that at all. Jason had been trained to hack when he was 4 years old, and had spent four years under the brutal tutelage of a man for whom failure was not an option. He’d been trained to rout out every secret a mark had – every defect, every flaw, everything people didn’t want anyone else to know – then use those secrets to destroy their mark. Was it really that hard to believe that Jason would have learned to keep his own so close to the vest?

To be honest, if anyone was the “Master Secret Keeper” within the Brothers Grimm, the title would probably be claimed by either Will or Marina. Marina had been a Russian spy and she had somehow
made friends with S.H.I.E.L.D.’s Chief Spymaster; if she hadn’t practically breathed secrets before, she would now. But Will had somehow managed to keep secrets from Marina, who had always been more to Will than just his girlfriend. The eldest Grimm treated his secrets as though they were classified documents, filed behind an open smile with just enough information released to make you think you knew what he was hiding. In comparison to his brother and his brother’s girlfriend, Jason was downright talkative.

He had hated it, at the Hoover Base. The first four years of those years hadn’t been so bad with Marina as his only handler; she’d taken care of him and loved him, and he would never be able to thank her enough for being there. But once he’d turned 4 years old, and he’d started his lessons, the Hoover base had become his own personal hell. His teacher had been Maj. Timothy Davis, a retired Marine and genuine hard ass. Davis had been military intelligence, with a specialization in computer technology and communications. He’d had no compunction against beating a small child for any perceived failure and Jason had the scars to prove it. As a result, Jason had become very skilled at absorbing everything Davis had to teach him and learning it as fast as possible.

The first time Jason had successfully built a functional signal jammer, it was four months after his fourth birthday. Davis had taken it and used during an operation; the operative hadn’t even turned it on but had claimed it was faulty. Jason had spent a week in the medical wing, recovering from the beating that Davis had doled out. It was the first time Jason had ever found out what it felt like to hate someone; and he loathed Davis with everything he had.

Things had gotten better once Marina had helped him and his brothers escape. Jason had been eight years old when they’d left the Hoover base; Marina had said they were going to play a game and to an 8 year old, crawling through airvents had been an awesome game. Clint had been 2 at the time, sleeping comfortably in a sling across Marina’s back as Jason, Kenny, Will and Barney had followed the former Russian spy through the airvents and outside the walls of the base for the first time in their entire lives.

And then they’d arrived at Howard Stark’s home, and as far as Jason had been concerned, Christmas had come early forever! Stark’s house had been the kind of cool that a kid with his proclivities and talents could only have ever dreamed about. The Brothers Cahill had had to stay hidden during daylight hours, for obvious reasons, but Stark had been really cool about letting the Army-bred child-engineer snoop through his shops after his son, Anthony, had gone to bed. He’d patiently answered every single one of Jason’s half a million questions, demonstrating the uses of tools Jason had never seen and even letting him fiddle with one of his official Stark Industries projects . . . JUST BECAUSE HE COULD!

Whenever Stark had come to the circus, he’d always brought some kind of new gadget for Jason to fiddle with. Sometimes they’d been tools for Jason and other times it had been some cool project that Stark Industries had scrapped for whatever reason and Jason could now take apart and put back together as many times as he liked. As far as Jason was concerned, Howard Stark had been the coolest person ever. The middle Grimm had been devastated when he’d found out that Stark had passed away and he couldn’t even attend the man’s funeral, because no one was supposed to know that Jason even existed.

Some part of him had been relieved when he’d followed Will into the Army. The carnies at the circus were family, there was no doubt about that; Babushka and Dedushka had taken the ragtag children into their home and their hearts and Jason would never be able to repay them for it. But except for repairs on the electrical systems and the inventions he came up with just for fun, there hadn’t really been any challenge for his skills. But the Army? The Army had given him the opportunity to take what he’d been forcefed as a child, and not only use it but use it to do something
good.

The Army had also offered a kind of anonymity. Yeah, everything was relentlessly recorded and there was so much medical information on them running around that it was hard to believe the Brothers Grimm hadn’t gotten caught yet, at least by someone other than Fury who had no interest in them as anything more than a Spec Op team. But when you really got down to it, soldiers were faceless and nameless to their superiors; as long as they performed within the capacities they had been assigned, most COs didn’t look too closely.

Jason knew that it took DNA, from a man and a woman, to make a baby. Considering where he’d been born, he’d never really had any interest in who that DNA had come from; he’d always assumed that he’d been conceived in some test tube and grown in some random woman’s body until he’d been born and handed over into Marina’s keeping. The specifics had never been important. Then he’d found out that he was a clone; and not only was he a clone, but the man he’d been cloned from had been unconscious through both world wars and another hundred years before that.

And he always thought that the Brothers Cahill had gotten the shit end of the stick. They had nothing on Hansel Kuhn.

He couldn’t even imagine how the man was feeling now that Kuhn was woken up from seventeen decades worth of sleep. Gretel Kuhn was gone, maybe for a long time, and the world had gone through so many changes since then, it must have been like waking up in one of the science fiction novels that Jason loved to read – the god awful Kildar series was his favorite as well as one he would never admit to reading in a million years. Even still, he enjoyed the guilty pleasure of an hour with it under his covers of his bed once everyone else in the house was asleep. Not to mention, the only reason he was even awake was because Maria Hill – rumored around S.H.I.E.L.D.’s base to be one scary ass chick – had kissed him as a joke. Talk about an obshchaya cherta uma.

Will and Marina had disappeared to Medical that morning, to talk to Kuhn and try to help him with the transition. Jason had a sneaking suspicion that no amount of help was going to help Hansel Kuhn adjust though. Only something familiar was going to do that; and Jason could only make his program go so fast. The tracer hunting down Gretel Kuhn was still running on his laptop, tearing through German top secret government files as it sucked up every inch of information it could find on both of the Kuhn siblings.

So far, it had been a pretty eventful night, even without the introduction of Hansel Kuhn into their lives. Kenny had blown up at Brian, which had been equal parts awesome and scary because Kenny wasn’t the type of person who got upset at a fly, let alone one of his brothers. Then Clint had yelled at him about the M&M’s in the Spaghetti-Os. And seriously, what was up with that? Chocolate and tomatoes totally went together! Right? Finally the two youngest Grimms had disappeared up the stairs – probably to the roof, unless Jason missed his guess – leaving him and Brian with the dishes. Little brats, the both of them; the cook didn’t clean up, it was a rule. (Granted, Clint had done most of the cooking with Jason’s only real contribution being the M&M’s. But still; it was the principle of the thing!)

Brian was chuckling from the sink, where he was washing the dishes as Jason dried, the younger brother grumbling under his breath. “Let it go, Jay. Technically Clint cooked, which means that you get to clean up.”

“But I helped!” Jason protested, even as he acknowledged the truth for what it was.

“You put M&M’s in Spaghetti-Os, Jay. You didn’t help do anything.”

“It tasted good, right?”
Brian conceded the point, even as he laughed, “Kinda not the point, Jay.”

Jason pouted, finishing up the last dishes before hanging up the dishtowel to dry – Marina would kill him if he just left it on the counter again – before returning to his laptop to check on his program. Brian grabbed one of Will’s books from the living room and for a long time, the two brothers sat together in companionable silence as they engaged in their individual activities.

Around midnight, Jason heard the front door open and nearly silent footsteps head towards the kitchen. His gun was up and pointed at the door in seconds, just as Will pushed the swinging door open and guided Marina inside. The couple froze, Marina’s eyes wide in startled surprise, as everyone just stared at each other. There was a long, awkward pause, before Jason reengaged the safety and returned the gun back into the holster under his arms. “Sorry Marishka. How is Kuhn?”

Marina plopped down tiredly in a chair, as Will moved to the fridge to put something together for them to eat. “He’s... adjusting, I think. He actually knows pretty passable English – something about six months in London hunting some kind of carnivorous fairy or fae or... something – and he asked us to use it when we speak to him so that he can practice. I think he just wants me to stop speaking German; apparently, my accent is horrible.”

“You’re Russian,” Brian remarked, as though that was all the answer required.

“That’s what he said,” she chuckled, nodding her thanks to Will as the oldest Grimm set half an apple and a bowl of leftover Spaghetti-Os in front of her.

Both Brian and Jason moved to tell them what Jason had included to it, but neither member of the couple seemed awake enough to care. They spooned food into their mouths in that absent way that the truly exhausted did, neither tasting nor even seeing their food as it disappeared from their bowls. “So, did he say what he was going to do next?”

“He wants to go after Gretel as soon as we know where she is and he’s well enough to go. Other than that, Fury came in to offer him a position with S.H.I.E.L.D. as a consultant; he said he’d think about it, though I think he’ll take it. He’s pretty fascinated with Agent Hill.”

“Have they even met? I mean, except for the whole Princess Charming wakes Sleeping Ugly with a kiss?” Brian asked dryly, his lips quirked at his own joke.

“She came to visit him today, actually,” the eldest Grimm chuckled in weary amusement. “Apparently, she feels as though there’s some kind of connection between the two of them. She told Marina and me later, after Kuhn had fallen asleep for the night that it was like she couldn’t stay away from him now that he was awake.”

Marina finished her dinner first and shoved the bowl away, folding her arms on top of the table and resting her head there as she waited for Will to finish up. “It should be interesting to see how that relationship unfolds once he’s been released from Medical and the two of them can actually... spend time together. I kinda think Maria likes him.”

“Maria’? Since when is Agent Hill, ‘Maria’?” Jason inquired, eyes narrowed as the couple grinned, obviously sharing some kind of inside joke with each other on the subject.

Will shoved himself to his feet, taking the bowls to the sink and making quick work of them. Returning to Marina’s chair, he rested one hand on her shoulder as he helped guide her from the chair and towards the door to the kitchen once again. “Didn’t you hear? Apparently, Marina and Agent Hill are plotting to take over the world.”
Marina scowled at her boyfriend, slapping ineffectually at his chest as she protested sullenly, “We are not; we totally could, but we are not. We’re just girlfriends.”

Brian’s eyebrows flew into his hairline as Jason asked the question plowing through both of their heads, “You’re girlfriends with the Left Hand of God?”

“Are you insane!?” Brian blurted, unable to stop imagining all the ways the two women could make life difficult for the men in their lives if they really put their minds to it.

Will chuckled, bending to press a fond kiss to her cheek, “I told you, samaya malen’kaya.”

“Whatever. It’s too late for this. I’m going to bed. Misha, you can either continue to gloat and sleep on the couch, or you can join me.” Marina grunted halfheartedly. “Good night boys.”

“Good night, Marishka!” they returned with grins as she moved to pass around her usual goodnight hugs and kisses to the two younger Brothers Grimm.

Yawning widely, she stretched up onto her toes aware of the way the hem of her baby tee inched up to a couple inches over the waistband of her jeans. Glancing coyly back over her shoulder and knowing exactly what she was doing to her gobsmacked boyfriend, she turned away and practically sashayed from the kitchen once again. “Coming Will?” she asked over her shoulder, before disappearing completely from sight.

Jason and Brian exchanged sly smirks as Will’s eyes zeroed in on that narrow strip of flesh as though it was some kind of homing beacon. Catching the expressions, Will glared at the both of them lightly, with a sharp, “Not one word, either of you.” Scratching the back of his head with a yawn of his own, Will moved to follow his girlfriend. Stopping, he propped himself up against the doorjamb as he leaned back into the kitchen, “We’re heading over to Medical early tomorrow to introduce you guys to Hansel, so don’t stay up too late. Where are Clint and Kenny? Did they hit their racks already?”

“I think they’re up on the roof,” Brian announced, earning a confirming nod from Jason at the reply.

“All right; if you see them when they come down, let them know it’s going to be an early morning, huh? It’s been a long day, and our bed is calling us.”

“We got this, Will. Get some sleep, huh? You look dead on your feet.”

“That just about covers it,” Will muttered with an eyeroll. “Good night guys. See you in the morning.”

“See ya in the morning, Will!” the two brothers called after him, as the eldest pushed away from the doorjamb and followed his girlfriend further into the house, up the stairs and to bed.

Jason got up to dry the bowls Will had rinsed and put them back in the cabinets. Brian was still smirking as Jason returned to his laptop to check the tracer’s progress one last time before bed.

“What?” he asked, eyes narrowed as he imagined what kind of trouble Brian was planning on causing.

“Marina is the best friend of the Left Hand of God. Thank she can get us VIP passes through the pearly gates?”

The middle brother’s head fell back as he laughed, shaking his head. “Sorry, Brian, but I’m pretty sure that not even Marina is that awesome.”

“Bummer.”
Russian Translations:

Babushka and Dedushka - Grandmother and Grandfather
obshchaya cherta uma - total mind fuck
samaya malen'kaya - my little one (Will's nickname for Marina)
Chapter Notes

Okay, so this chapter is going to hurt... a lot. I warn you all in advance. Russian translations are at the end, as always. Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter 22

Some part of Will knew that he was dreaming. He’d gone to sleep a 29 year old man, with his beautiful Russian girlfriend in the bed beside him, and had woken up a seven year old child. He recognized his surroundings; the concrete walls and floor, the single bulb – unshaded – that hung from the ceiling, and the long, inclined plank in the center of the circle of light. Every cell in his body seized up as he realized what memory his nightmares were planning on afflicting him with that night.

The first time he’d ever been trained to resist torture; namely, waterboarding.
General Thaddeus Ross was standing behind him. He could hear the man’s body shifting in his uniform and could feel the man’s eyes on his back. His seven year old mind was confused by what was happening, though Will knew what was coming next and so he mentally braced himself.

Next thing he knew, he was being grabbed by two men in ski masked, their hands bruising around his upper arms as they dragged him further into the room. They strapped him down to the plank, his tiny body thrashing and struggling but in the end no match for them. The towel came over his face and he started to panic. It wasn’t until the water started to soak through, though, that he started to cry. He screamed and sobbed and choked, fighting the restraints and begging in broken Russian for someone to come and rescue him.

Then, he heard it . . . the questions he was being asked as the water disappeared and he hauled in what little air there was through the towel glued to his face. “What’s your name?” the voice demanded in a cold, hard tone. Will didn’t recognize the voice as anyone he’d ever seen on base before.

Remembering the answer to this question, Will’s voice was quiet as he recited, “Project 1, Echo Delta Charlie 1.”

“What’s your name?”

“Project 1, Echo Delta Charlie 1.”

There was silence, before the water came once again. Will struggled, unable to prevent himself from inhaling the water in place of the air his body desperately needed. “What is your name, soldier?” the voice demanded again as the water stopped and Will could once again haul in air through the plastered cloth.

Will’s voice was quieter than before, though the answer was the same. “Project 1, Echo Delta Charlie 1.”

Will wasn’t sure how long it went on for, knew only the single question that was demanded of him and the long, intermittent stretches of slowly drowning. Finally, the questions stopped and Will gasped through his sobs as General Ross spoke, a touch to his bare feet the only comfort he received as the general praised him, “Well done, One.” There was a pause, before he spoke once more, “Again.”

Will snapped awake sharply, forcing his body to remain motionless so as not to wake Marina even as the scream of the child he had been rang through his ears. Pushing himself to a sitting position, he ducked his head onto his knees and forced himself to take deep breaths. There was a rustle of the bedclothes behind him, and then a long toned arm came up and over his shoulder, tapered fingers rubbing soothingly against the bare skin of his belly. Marina’s sleep warmed weight was a familiar comfort as she plastered herself to his back with a soft murmur, “Another nightmare?”

Will’s hand came up to grip her hand, pressing the palm down firmly into his skin and taking comfort in the warmth of her against him. He nodded once, though said nothing about the dream itself. Used to his silence on the subject, Marina said nothing, willing to allow him his secrets as he had always allowed her her own. They sat there unmoving for a long time, Marina’s steady calm a direct counterpoint to Will’s wrecked disquiet. Turning his head, he rested his temple against her own as he murmured, “Spasido, Marishka.”

“Priglashayem vas, Misha,” she whispered in reply, pressing a kiss to the curve of his jaw. Her fingers were warm and strong as they moved from his stomach to his cheek, Marina’s chocolate eyes watching him carefully as he pressed into her for another moment before disentangling himself from
“I’m gonna go downstairs to get something to drink. You want anything?” he asked over his shoulder, careful not to look at her as he tossed the blankets off and got out of bed.

Watching him locate a t-shirt in their dresser, Marina’s lips quirked unhappily as she shook her head, “No, Misha. I’m all right.”

Smiling at her, he hauled the shirt over his head and then leaned onto the mattress, hands braced firmly as he caught her lips in his own for a kiss. Marina’s hands came up to cup his cheeks, holding him to her for just that extra moment before releasing him so that he could pull away. Surprisingly, he stayed close for another moment, nuzzling fondly into the skin beside her nose as he murmured, “Ya lyublyu tebya, samaya malen’kaya. (I love you, my little one.)”

“Ya tak lyublyu tebya, lyubimyy, (I love you so much, beloved,)” she replied, her eyes closing as she returned the affectionate snuggling with her own. “Come back to bed soon, okay? Don’t spend the whole night watching Nick at Nite® on the couch. Promise?”

Will’s lips quirked, both maddened and touched by how well she knew him. Kissing her again, he turned away as he promised, “I’ll try. Go to sleep. It was a long day. I’ll be back soon.”

Marina hummed quietly, the only opinion she could give that wouldn’t start a fight, watching as Will opened the door and disappeared silently from sight. Flopping back onto the bed, she burrowed into the covers and settled down to wait for him to return to bed.

Meanwhile, the eldest Grimm disappeared on silent feet down the stairs and into the kitchen. Heading directly to the cabinet over the sink, he grabbed out the bottle of Glenlivet Whiskey and poured a healthy splash into a highball before throwing it back without even tasting it. Setting it down, he braced his hands on the counter and swore viciously, “Yebet!”

Grabbing up the bottle, he moved into the living room and dropped gracelessly onto the couch. Pouring another generous three fingers into the glass, Will slammed it back again as he turned his thoughts back to the Hoover base and the things he’d done there.

William Michael Cahill had been born to be a soldier and had been trained for it since before he could really remember. As soon as he’d turned three years old, he’d been taken out from under Marina’s care and placed squarely in the care of General Ross. He slept in the same bed he’d always had, but he barely, if ever, saw his brothers before Ross would collect him for his lessons and he only saw Marina in the middle of the night, when he’d wake her with his screams. From five am to sometimes as late as ten pm, Ross was in full and complete command of Will’s whole day.

His brothers were lucky. Yeah, Jason had had a brutal time of it with Maj. Davis and Barney had gone crazy in his own officers training classes and Kenny had been despised by Ross for what Ross believed were his shortcomings, but they’d had Marina to come home to for meals and Marina’s shoulders to cry on when they were hurt or scared. Will had had none of that and what they’d gone through had paled in comparison to what Ross had put Will through every day for eight years. Will had been tortured, interrogated, beaten, whipped, shocked, electrocuted, waterboarded; and that was in addition to his regular officers training and his academic lessons. He attended more classes in those long years than most college students would have had to take for three different degrees; statistics and analysis, algebra, geometry, trigonometry, calculus, European history, American history, government, economics, composition, reading, writing, English, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Russian, German, Italian, and Arabic – and those were just the ones that Ross had thought were the most important ones.
He'd tried to be defiant, to be strong and resilient in the face of what those men did. But he had been a child and there was only so much a child could take before they broke. And Ross broke him, completely and utterly. It had taken a long time before he’d started to heal. And really, it was only very recently that Marina and his brothers had started to find the very biggest pieces of his shattered soul and put him back together again. Will could still feel the empty places, where the pieces hadn’t quite fit back together right and there were gaps between the shards. But for the most part, Will was starting to heal.

He’d never told Marina any of what had happened to him: not in the three years they’d been together; not in the eight years he’d been deployed in the Army, with only Jason as a companion; and most definitely not in the six years between when they’d escaped and he’d enlisted. He never told her what his nightmares were about and, after the way he’d blown up at her the first time, she’d never asked again. He knew his girlfriend though; if Marina had known what Ross had done to him at the Hoover base, she never would have let him join up. She never would have let him take the risk that Ross would find him and drag him back into that underground base to break him all over again.

The Army had been a blessing; which was ironic in that it was the Army that had wrecked him in the first place. He was a good soldier, a good officer – he’d been bred to be – and the Army let him prove it. Before the Brat’ya Mrachnyy, he’d led countless teams on successful missions and most of the time, managed to get all of his men back to base in one piece. He’d grieved for the ones that hadn’t made it, but when you were deployed you didn’t get the chance to make a big deal about the deaths of your men. You acknowledged the loss, you knocked back a drink in their honor and you moved forward to the next fire fight.

Will had lived that way for eight years, the first three alone and the last five with Jason, before Clint, Kenny and Marina had joined him at the front. And if the Army had been a blessing before, it was his family at his side that made the Army his lifesaver.

So he hoarded his nightmares close and never told a soul of the things that he feared. He lived a great deal of his life in fear; fear of getting caught, fear of General Ross finding him, fear of losing his brothers, fear of losing Marina. However, they say that courage was not the absence of fear . . . it is being scared and doing it anyway. So even if he was scared, he would never let anyone know it. Because it was his leadership that kept his brothers alive and his voice that steadied Marina’s own fears for their family.

With a sigh, he knocked back another drink, returned the bottle to the kitchen and headed up the stairs. Crawling into bed with Marina, he let her wrap her arms around him and rest her head against his shoulder. His arm came up around her body, and his free hand tangled in her hair. And once she was asleep and he was still awake, staring at the ceiling as he counted mental sheep, he made another vow to her. He would go to hell and stay there to protect his family. So never let it be said, that Lt. Colonel William Michael Grimm had ever let his loved ones down. And if you did, you had better run like hell; because he would find you and then . . . then he would kill you.

Chapter End Notes

Russian Translations:

Spasido - Thank you
priglashayem vas - You're Welcome
yebet - fuck
Brat'ya Mrachnyy - Brothers Grimm
Chapter Notes

So all German and most of the Russian translations are in the chapter. Those that aren't, are at the end of the chapter as always. I did use Google translate on the German, so if it's wrong, kindly take it up with them. I hope you enjoy. Marina faces the morning after Will's nightmare; and Hansel and the Brothers Grimm meet for the first time.

Chapter 23

The next morning, Marina woke early. In the bed next to her, Will continued to sleep, his back to her and his body moving slowly as he breathed. Sleep had come slowly to the eldest Grimm once he’d come back to bed and Marina was loath to wake him. Moving slowly so as not to wake him, she pressed a kiss to the bare skin at the back of his shoulder. “Ya lyublyu tebya,” she murmured softly against the skin, before rolling to the edge of the bed.
Will murmured an incoherent reply, rolling towards the center of the bed but did not wake. Marina stood slowly, lifting her robe from the back of the chair next to the door. Easing the door open, she checked on her boyfriend once more, before slipping through the door and closing it softly behind her.

Jason was already awake, sitting at his computer with a cup of coffee at his elbow. He smiled up at her fondly as she rested her hands on his shoulders and leaned over to kiss his temple. “Morning, sladkiy. Just you so far?”

“So far.” There was a long pause as Marina moved into the kitchen to start breakfast. Her first stop was the coffeemaker; Jason preferred quick and dirty instant coffee, while the rest of his brothers liked the taste of a slowly brewed pot. It was usually the responsibility of whomever was making breakfast to start the coffeepot.

Jason watched her move through the familiar motions, taking a slow sip of his coffee before speaking. “How’s Will?”

Marina froze for all of half a second, body pausing for only an instant in the act of adding the coffee grounds to the filter. To anyone who hadn’t known her as long as Jason, it would have been completely unnoticeable. But Marina had raised him, and trained him to be observant and to catch the nuances of what people did and compare that to the things that they said. “Marishka . . . how is he?”

“It was a bad night, sladkiy, and I would appreciate it if you would keep that between us,” Marina said, a sad smile on her lips as she spoke.

“No problem,” Jason agreed, with a firm nod. “What can I do to help?”

“Sit right there, and find Gretel Kuhn,” she teased with a fond laugh.

“I can cook you know.”

“Yeah; just not anything that most people want to eat. So you do what you do best, and I will make breakfast.”

Jason chuckled, taking another sip of coffee before returning his attention back to the program still running on his computer. “How much longer do you think you have until you find her?”

“Not much longer. She’s starting to be mentioned more frequently in the documents that I’m cracking the encryptions on now. I just found the documentation covering Hansel Kuhn’s abduction; I’m sure her whereabouts are not far away now.”

Marina nodded, pressing the button on the machine and starting the coffee brewing before moving to the refrigerator. “Since you’re awake first, what do you want for breakfast?”

There is no hesitation as Jason answers, “French Toast stuffed with orange cream.”

Chocolate brown eyes narrowed suspiciously, as she reminded him, “Not exactly your favorite food there, Jay.”

“No . . . but Will’s favorite comfort food is Stuffed French Toast with raspberry syrup.” Marina’s face softened at the obvious affection, causing Jason to scowl and shrug nonchalantly, “He could probably use a little comfort right about now.” Looking up at her with devastating green eyes, he asked, “Couldn’t he?”
“Yeah, sladkiy . . . he probably could.”

The French Toast was in the oven and the smell was permeating through the kitchen when Will finally tripped down the stairs. The rest of the brothers had already made their way from their beds and were interspersed around the downstairs, each engaged in their own activities. Kenny was reading another book report assignment in the living room, while Clint & Brian played video games. Jason was absorbed in his computer; no doubt Clint had refused to play with him unless he’d promised not to cheat, which Jason would never agree to in a million years.

But Marina . . . she was in the kitchen, singing a half-familiar song in Russian under her breath as she put together a fruit salad. Her body swayed back and forth as she sang, lost within the music of her own head. Will propped his shoulder up against the wall at the entrance to the kitchen, his arms coming up to cross over his chest as he watched her. Recognizing the song as a Russian lullaby she used to sing to Clint when he was a baby, he waited patiently for her to finish the verse.

* Spi mladyenets, moy prekrasny, (Sleep, good boy, my beautiful)
* bayushki bayu,
* Tikho smotrit myesyats yasn, (Quietly the moon is looking)
* f kolybyel tvayu (into your cradle)
* stana skazyvat ya skazki, (I will tell you fairy tales)
* pyesenki spayu, (And sing you little songs,)
* ty-zh dremli, zakryvshi glazki, (But you must slumber, with your little eyes closed)
* bayushki bayu.

She fell silent then, seeming to sense that someone was watching her. Her shoulders were tense and her body was locked and ready for a fight; it never ceased to amaze Will how vigilant his girlfriend and his brothers were at all times, even in what could arguably be the safety of their own home. Granted, it was actually base housing, so it wasn’t actually theirs but they had made it as defensible as it was likely to get. The memory of Jason holding a gun on them as Will and Marina had walked into the kitchen was not one that would fade quickly.

Glancing back over her shoulder, Will was relieved to see her body relax once more into a state of attentive calm. “Hi,” she said, a bright smile on her lips to see him standing there.

“Hi,” he returned, remaining where he was for a moment as he took a second to simply admire her. She wore a pair of silk pajama pants the color of freshly bloomed orchids under a tight black tank top. Over her shoulders, she wore a purple robe hanging open at the front. Her hair had been piled messily up onto the top of her head, held there by a pair of what looked like chopsticks – probably left over from the Chinese takeout Clint had ordered the night they’d gotten back from Canada.

Even as unkempt and rumpled as she was, Marina Petrovka was without a doubt the most beautiful woman William Grimm had ever seen.

Moving away from what she was doing, she turned toward him, opening up her frame and showing him with that simple gesture how much she trusted him. Using the shoulder he was propped on, he pushed away from the wall and came into the kitchen. His hands came up to rest on the jut of her hips, backing her steadily into the counter. The muscles in his arms flexed as he boosted her up onto the counter, moving between her legs and trapping her there against him. Bending his face into the sweet curve of her throat, he breathed against the sensitive skin, “What’s for breakfast?”

“Well . . .” she gasped, arching her neck and offering him more area to worship, “I made Orange Stuffed French Toast . . . but somehow I don’t think you’re very interested at the moment.”

Startled by the mention of his favorite breakfast food, he drew away, eyes locking on her with
furrowed eyebrows. “What?”

Marina gave him a small teasing smile, one hand coming up to smooth through his head of rumpled hair. “You should thank Jason; it was his idea. All I did was make it.”

Will’s eyes slipped closed as he leaned into the affectionate touch, before glancing over at where Jason was typing furiously as he glared at his laptop. Turning back to her, he pressed a piercing kiss to her lips, his hands cupping her cheeks as he held her to him. “Ya lyublyu tebya,” he breathed, hazel eyes locked on her own chocolate.

“I ya tebya lyublyu,” she replied, fingers tender on firm curve of his cheekbone. Glancing back over her shoulder, she noted the time left on the timer. “Breakfast is only a minute away. Go on.”

He smiled, nuzzling his nose against her own before lifting her off the counter once again and moving to his brother. Jason didn’t even flinch as Will’s hands came down on his shoulders, squeezing firmly. “How’s it coming, Jay?”

“I almost have her. I need another twenty minutes,” Jason insisted, his fingers flying over the keyboard as he worked to crack the encryption on the file he needed.

“Marina and I are taking you boys to meet Hansel this morning; you think you’ll have it by then?”

Jason grinned at his screen, with a firm nod. “I will have this suka in the bag, Will. Twenty minutes . . . tops.”

Will nodded, leaving his hands where they were as he watched his brother work. Finally, when Jason paused to take a sip of his coffee, Will spoke again, “Thanks Jay.”

Jason did flinch then, twisting in his chair to look up at his oldest brother. Seeing the sincerity in Will’s eyes, Jason shrugged. “Just because you don’t tell us, Will, don’t mean that we don’t know when something’s up with you. We all have nightmares; you’re just the only one who never talks to anyone about them. You looked like you could use some cheering up last night; asking Marishka to make your favorite breakfast is kinda a small thing in comparison.”

“It may be a small thing, but it meant a hell of a lot. I’m serious . . . thank you.”

The tech specialist gave his brother a rueful grin, “Marishka wasn’t supposed to tell you why I asked. But you’re welcome.”

“Breakfast is only a couple minutes away, so finish up as much as you can before then. I’m gonna go get everyone else.”

Jason nodded, taking a swig of coffee before setting his hands to the keyboard once again and continue to hack away at the encryption on his screen. Will smiled, ruffling his hair fondly for a moment before moving toward the living room. Bracing his hands on each side of the doorframe, he leaned it, “Guys . . . breakfast’s almost ready. Turn off the game and get cleaned up. We’re heading over to Medical to meet Hansel Kuhn this morning.”

Clint cheered, both he and Kenny tossing aside what they’d been doing and rushing to the kitchen to wash their hands. Marina was setting the table, smiling as both of her youngest charges caught her unawares, one at each side as they pressed sloppy kisses to her cheeks. “Dobroye utro, Marishka, (Good morning, Marishka,)” they sang out simultaneously.

“Dobroye utro, domashniye zhivotnyye, (Good morning, pets,)” she replied, hands on each of their cheeks as she handed out kisses to each of them. “Go on; get cleaned up. Breakfast is only a couple
“I’m almost . . . done,” he insisted, the tip of his tongue caught between his teeth as he fought to crack the very last bit.

“Jay,” Marina warned, a soft frown on her lips as she propped her hands up on her hips, “breakfast.”

“One more minute; I’ve almost . . .” here Jason paused, sitting back and lifting hands from the keyboard. “Svyatoye der’mo. . . Ya nashel yeye. (Holy shit . . . I found her.)”

An hour later, Marina entered Hansel Kuhn’s room. Her boys were waiting anxiously in the observation room, but Marina had insisted on going in first . . . alone. Even knowing how he felt about her atrocious accent, she chose to use German as Will was the only one of her boys who knew the language very well. “Guten Morgen, Hänsel. (Good morning, Hansel.)”

He cocked an eyebrow at her use of his native tongue, though he greeted her in the same language. “Guten Morgen, Major Petrovka. (Good morning, Major Petrovka.)”

“Ich hoffe, Sie haben gut geschlafen? (I trust you slept well?)”

“Ja, gut genug. Danke. (Yes, well enough. Thank you.)”

Marina watched him, seeing the wariness in his eyes and knowing inherently that he didn’t trust her. Which was fine by her; she didn’t trust him either. Not yet and maybe, if he in any way hurt her boys, not ever. “Zuerst fand Jason Gretel. (First, Jason found Gretel.)”

He launched upwards, eyes intent on her face as he searched for some trace of a lie. “Wie geht es ihr? Ist sie in Ordnung? (How is she? Is she alright?)”

“Soweit wir das sagen können, sie ist in Ordnung. (As far as we can tell, she’s fine.)” Steepling her hands in front of her, she watched him, letting him see all the nuances of her body that shifted from open and friendly into cold and harsh. He was a hunter; he would be able to tell the subtle difference. “Nun, auf Grund, warum ich hier bin. Ihre Söhne sind außerhalb dieser Tür. Ihre jüngsten Söhne, Clint und Kenny? Sie sind so aufgeregt, um Sie zu treffen. . . , einen Vater zu haben. Das heißt, Sie verletzen und ich werde euch zu beenden. Ich werde dich in mehr Stücke als Sie sich jemals träumen würde der menschliche Körper in geteilt werden kann rippen und dann werde ich Ihre Überreste in den Marianengraben Dump wo niemand in der Lage sein, um Sie immer wieder zu finden. Verstehen wir einander? (Now, onto why I’m here. Your sons are outside that door. Your youngest sons, Clint and Kenny? They’re so excited to meet you . . . to have a father. That said, you hurt them and I will end you. I will rip you into more pieces than you would ever dream the human body can be divided into and then I will dump your remains into the Mariana Trench where no one will ever be able to find you ever again. Do we understand each other?)”

There was a new respect there in his robin’s egg eyes as he sat back against his pillows. His hands folded in his lap as he watched her, now understanding why she had chosen to use a language she was obviously uncomfortable with as opposed to a language that she knew much better. Marina’s eyes were steady as she met his own, refusing to give an inch under the weight of his regard. It seemed like forever before he finally spoke, “Wir tun. (We do.)”

A small smile curved her lips, the gesture brittle and cold even as it transformed her face from that of just a pretty girl into that of a cold-blooded killer. “Dann sehe ich keine Probleme. (Then I foresee no problems.)” Standing, she straightened her top and gestured toward the doors. The sudden switch to English obviously jarred him if the way he flinched was any indication, but Marina could hardly bring herself to care. “If you’ll excuse me, Hansel? I’ll go and get your sons.”
The man nodded, watching her solemnly as she moved toward the door to the observation room. Twisting the handle, she shoved it open and gestured to people just out of sight. “All right, boys. Come on in.”

Suddenly faced with the imminent prospect of meeting these sons who had been created using his essence and built to be soldiers, Hansel felt his breath catch in his throat. The shadowy appearance of the first in the doorway, features shaded but the solemn hazel eyes practically glowing in the dim light, felt like a punch in the solar plexus. As the man stepped forward into the room, followed by four others almost identical to the first, the sensation only got worse. “*Mein Gott im Himmel,* (My God in Heaven,)” he breathed, eyes wide as he stared in awe and no little fear.

Marina stood a little ways away from them, her eyes triumphant and fond as she gazed over the five young men who had just entered his room. Smirking, she spoke, “Hansel Kuhn . . . I’d like you to meet the Brothers Grimm.”

Chapter End Notes

Russian Translations:

*sladkiy* - honey (Marina's nickname for Jason)
Ya lyublyu tebya - I love you
I ya tebya lyublyu - And I love you
suka -bitch

So yeah, I really like cliffhangers. *runs like hell from the advancing mob*
So if you haven't read Amerou's I Don't Believe in Fairy Tales (But I believe in you and me), you need to. It's about the Hansel Kuhn and Maria Hill and their relationship in this verse. It's two chapters long, and really good, and I LOVE IT! She is writing it with my permission and cooperation, so I do encourage you all to go and read!

That said, the Russian translations are either in the chapter, or have been used so much even I know their translations by now. I look forward to your reviews. I hope you all have awesome Rennery dreams!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter 24

“Hansel Kuhn . . . I’d like you to meet the Brothers Grimm.”
The words rang in his ears as he stared, unable to help the sharp stab of awe and fear and overwhelming disquiet. He’d seen their picture, of course, but he had known that picture was old. Petrovka had touched each face with reverence and with a bittersweetness born from bad memories and recently forgiven anger. Suddenly faced with each of them in the flesh, as it were, one thing was very clear.

That picture was **very** old.

One of the young men spoke, a sly smirk on his lips as he quipped, “Sup Pops?”

Hansel jerked in surprise at the unfamiliar colloquial phrase, demanding, “**Vas!**”

While Hansel struggled to understand the question he’d been asked, Petrovka smacked the boy briskly up the back of the head while three of the other Brothers Grimm laughed. “*Klinton Frensis . . . vesti sebya, (Clinton Francis . . . behave yourself,)*” she ordered firmly, the stern tone in her voice belied entirely by the amused twinkle in her eyes and the subtle tilt to her lips.

“Come on, Marishka . . . he’s staring at us like we’re rabid dogs,” the young man she addressed as “Clinton Francis” scoffed, waving a vague hand in Hansel’s direction. “It’s not like we’re going to bite him or anything.”

Another of the brothers, only a little older than the first, shifted his body weight even as he nodded meekly. “He does look a little scared of us. What do you think, Will?”

For a long moment, there was no movement, absolutely no sound to indicate which of the young men was Will. Then the young man with the glowing eyes spoke, arms coming up to cross over his chest. “He’s just having the usual heart attack,” the young man assured his brother, before turning those blazing eyes, now a haunting grey, back onto Hansel. “I assure you, Herr Kuhn; we’re not going to hurt you.”

Sensing that this brother was in complete and total command over the others, Hansel watched him; taking stock of his mannerisms and making what assumptions about the young officer that he could. His son’s eyes were mercurial, shifting even as Hansel watched from that eerie, steely grey to a pair of dusky green to match the drab oliver uniform he was wearing to a hazy blue the color of the sky in Germany after a storm. He stood with his shoulders back and his spine ramrod straight, watching Hansel with steady if haunted eyes. The German had the distinct feeling that he was being weighed by the young man just as Hansel was weighing him, one warrior to another.

Finally, the boy’s shoulders loosened as he seemed to find what he was looking for. Hansel hadn’t realized how tense he was, until he lazed backwards and put all his weight on one leg. “You must forgive Clint; he usually speaks first and thinks after.”

“Clint” was quite clearly the youngest of the brothers, if the way that he pouted and sulked in Petrovka’s direction at his brother’s words was any indication. Will smiled softly; obviously listening with half an ear to the undertoned conversation in Russian the two were having, before turning back to Hansel once more.

Hansel nodded once, swallowing past a very dry throat before he spoke for the first time. “He reminds me of my sister . . . Gretel. She was – is – the same way.”

Will moved to the end of the bed, placing his hands on the footboard and watching Hansel solemnly. Hansel noted the fact that despite the boy’s proximity, he still managed to maintain a certain amount of distance. “Jason found her; as soon as your doctors feel that you’re ready, we’ll go after her. You have my word.” Offering his hand to the former witch hunter, his son continued, “My name is Col.
William Grimm. These are my younger brothers. This is Brian . . .,” moving back from the bed, he gestured to the only brother in the room with facial hair on his chin and not wearing drab green fatigues.

Brian Grimm’s brown eyes were steady as he nodded hello, crossing his arms over the chest of his black uniform – because it was a uniform, though for what Hansel didn’t know. There was a stylized hawk on the left breast of the tight-fitting top, one that he had become very familiar with over the last few days; he’d seen it on the badges that each of his nurses - always tending him two by two since he’d terrified the first set - wore around their necks. It was with a certain amount of displeasure that Hansel realized that Brian Grimm worked for the same organization that was keeping him prisoner in this room.

Then he glanced between the two brothers and felt the air leaving his chest again; of the five brothers, Brian and the Colonel probably looked the most like him. Brian even had the same blank look on his face that Gretel used to joke that Hansel scared people with. Though it was William that he could have passed for, with the flaming blue eyes and pervading presence of patient command and authority. (Making a mental note to practice Will’s accent, the plan that had been formulating in his thoughts for the last several days took firm hold and Hansel could barely contain his smirk at the prospect that soon . . . he would be free of his prison.)

“A pleasure,” Brian said, keeping his tone gruff and noncommittal. He refused to offer his hand, and some part of Hansel acknowledged that Brian didn’t trust him.

“Kenny” was quiet and shy, as he nodded his hello once Will introduced him. “Hi,” he whispered, shifting closer to Petrovka who reached out to pet his arm fondly. The boy – he couldn’t have been older than 21, if that – was wearing a military uniform like the rest of the brothers, a small insignia at his lapels. Petrovka’s threat had been explicit enough that Hansel would never say anything out loud but he got the impression the boy was a bit simple, though the callouses on his hands indicated that he was proficient with some form of weaponry and, from the thickness of them, very good at his whatever job he did with them.

“Next, we have Jason. He’s the one that managed to find Gretel,” the Colonel continued, gesturing toward the boy straddling the chair next to the bed. There was a pair of double gold bars at his lapels, as well as a strange looking motif on a patch at his shoulder.

“Hyu found Gretel?” Hansel asked, watching the young man with grateful eyes.

Jason shrugged haplessly, as though locating his only familiar touchstone in this world had been no big deal. “Yes; she’s being held in a lab outside of Rotterdam. Like Will said, as soon as the doctors say you’re ready to go . . . we’ll go.”

“And the men hoo ‘ave her . . . they will not find out that hyu know where she is?”

“I scrambled their computers so bad, they won’t even know how to find their own asses,” Jason gloated, a wicked smirk glinting in his icy green eyes.

Hansel must have looked confused, because Jason spoke again in an attempt to clarify, “I’m a tech specialist. My job is find people’s secrets; my computer lets me do that. Really; computers are machines and viciously complicated if you don’t know what they are. When you get out of here, I’ll show you. They’re pretty cool, but they do allow you to make more mistakes faster than any other inventions in history.”

Here Brian spoke, a teasing tilt to his lips as he poked playfully at his brother’s favorite passion. “Other than tequila and handguns.”
Jason glared, lifting the empty paper cup from Hansel’s bedside table and throwing it at his brother’s face. Hansel watched, surprised by the feeling of what he could only call paternal amusement as they two started a playful wrestling match with each other, poking and shoving at each other as they tried to prove the other the most vulnerable. Petrovka sighed from where she stood in the corner of the room. “Rebyata, khavatit! (Boys, that's enough!)”

The self proclaimed “tech specialist” – whatever the hell that was – jabbed a vicious finger in his brother’s direction as he protested, “Why am I in trouble? He started it.”

“And I am ending it. If you didn’t react to his teasing, Jay, he wouldn’t poke at you like he does,” she admonished fondly, one hand coming out to ruffle his hand fondly, thumb swiping absently over the exposed temple before she reached out and smacked Brian’s shoulder lightly. “Leave your brother alone, Bri.”

“Ma’am, yes, ma’am,” he replied with a cheeky grin and a sly wink.

Will’s lips were quirked into a small smile, seeming to enjoy the interplay. It wasn’t until the youngest boy shifted that Will reached out and pulled Clint to the edge of the bed. Hansel was very curious about this one; of the five, Clint alone had shown no wariness at all about him, only acceptance and interest. (Though, they would be having a conversation about the word “Pops” and the use of the word in correlation with Hansel himself; that at least, the witch hunter would guarantee.) “And this troublemaker is our youngest, Clint. He’s spoiled and Marina’s favorite, and really . . . can’t do nothing with him,” the older brother teased, just barely managing to dodge Clint’s half-hearted punch that the kid had aimed at his exposed shoulder.

“Will!” Clint protested in mortification, crossing his arms over his uniform clad chest and glaring at the elder brother.

The Colonel laughed, his eyes brightening and less haunted as he continued, “Actually, Clint’s our sniper. He’s a hell of a shot. Can hit a pinhole from a 100 yards out, and he has never missed.”

Hansel smirked, “Hyu may be good, young Clinton, but I will bet I am better.”

Clint’s lips quirked, mirroring Hansel’s expression perfectly. “Whatever you say, Pops. But there isn’t a single person in whole of the United States Army who is a better shot than me. I’m the World’s Greatest Marksman . . . three years running.”

The Colonel smiled fondly at his little brother, and Hansel was relieved to see that there was real affection between these brothers – these so-called “perfect soldiers.” The interaction between Jason and Brian had been filled with playfulness and fun; neither brother had said anything to the other with the intent to cause mental harm or wounded feelings. Even Petrovka, standing at the door and seemingly aloof, was not separate from their affection. Each of them had turned to see her at some point; the Major was obviously more than just a friend to these boys . . . she was family.

Turning back to Hansel, Will smirked, “He is very very good, Herr Kuhn. Maybe, once your doctors release you, the two of you can go shooting at the range together.”

Clint practically bounced, grey eyes going wide as he nodded in excitement. “That would be so awesome! You’ll go with me right?”

Unable to repress the small smile Hansel could feel blossoming in his heart, he nodded once in agreement. “I look forward to it, young Clinton; I look forward to it very much.”
German Translation:

Vas? - What?
Chapter 25

It really shouldn’t have surprised Marina when, three days after the boys and Hansel had met, she received a phone call from the nurse in charge that Hansel Kuhn had gone missing. Marina’s eyebrows rose into her hairline, listening in disbelief as the woman explained the circumstances of what had happened and that none of her nurses were responsible for any harm the man came to while not in their care. Finally, the woman’s chattering became too much for Marina’s nerves and she spoke up sharply, “Wait a minute. Are you seriously trying to tell me that a man with an uncanny resemblance to Lt. Col. Grimm is wandering around base, without any supervision whatsoever? And on top of that, his disappearance is in no way the fault of you or your nurses so you cannot be held
responsible for whatever trouble he gets up to?!”

The woman’s voice lost some of its confidence at the quivering rage in Marina’s voice, as she replied in the affirmative. Marina’s temper finally exploded, earning the attention of Will where he sat at his desk, scanning over the few reports leftover from their raid of the HYDRA base and subsequent rescue of Hansel Kuhn. “Do you have any idea the kind of SECURITY RISK he presents!? I’ll have each and every single one of your clearances for this!” she barked, slamming the phone down sharply onto the cradle. Staring at it for a second, she picked it up and slammed it down again several times before she was satisfied she had vented her fury enough.

Finally leaving the phone in its cradle, she straightened and hauled in a deep breath. Gradually, she became aware of the presence of each of her four younger boys in the doorway, staring at her. Clint’s voice was awed as he singsonged, “Someone’s gonna get their ass chewed. And for once . . . it isn’t me.”

Will spoke up calmly, the chair already turned to face her though his body was slouched backwards as though he had not a single care in the world, “What happened?”

Throwing her hands back through her hair, she snapped, “Hansel Kuhn is gone. He slipped his nurses and his guards. They don’t have a damned idea where he is; he could be anywhere on base. I don’t think I have to tell you, Misha, how much of a bad idea that is.”

Humming an affirmative, Will shoved himself to his feet. “Jason, you’re coming with us to run comms. Marina, you’ll need to call Agent Hill. Let her know that the situation and that we’re heading over to Command. ETA is 2 minutes. The rest of you stay here. The last thing we need is for the facial recognition scans on base to mistake one of you for Kuhn.”

Marina nodded in agreement, stalling Clint’s protest in its tracks. “We’ll be back soon. And I promise; we’ll let Jason hack the security feeds so you can watch what happened.”

Clint subsided, willing to be stationary as long as he got to watch the aftermath in the long run. Jason materialized back in the front room, laptop bag over his shoulder as he joined them. Together, the three took their leave of the house and climbed into the Army Jeep they’d been given. Mere minutes later, they were meeting up with AD Maria Hill at the door to Command. Marina cocked an eyebrow at the prompt welcome, though Maria’s smile was vague in reply, “We caught you coming in on the security feed. Now . . . what happened? I could have sworn I heard you say that Hansel Kuhn had escaped from his room in Medical.”

Marina’s eye roll was exasperated as she replied, “That’s because I did say that Hansel Kuhn had escaped from his room in Medical.”

Absently, Will acknowledged that the Assistant Director’s vocabulary was rather . . . foul when she was truly vexed about something. She would fit in right in with half of the sailors and corpsman that Will had known during his time in the Army. Marina reached out and touched her friend’s shoulder, squeezing firmly. “Maria . . . we can get pissed about it later. People probably think he’s Misha; there’s no way that he wouldn’t have been challenged and landed his ass in the brig by now if they didn’t.”

Jason shifted in his place at the back of the foursome, asking quietly, “Where’s your security console? I can cross reference the feeds with the most likely routes. I may be able to give the cameras a better starting place than if they just start scanning.”

Maria took a deep breath, “You’re right, Marina.” Pointing at a computer to their left, she directed Jason toward it. “That’s our security computer. It’s pretty old.”
The tech specialist smirked, “Remind me to give it a facelift after we’ve found dear old dad, huh?”

“A facelift?”

“I can increase the RAM space; boost the output; and probably even condense your storage usage. Give me an hour; I’ll see what I can do.”

The assistant director looked as though she wanted to protest, before remembering the content of Jason’s file. “Fine. After . . . let’s just find our wayward German guest first.”

Jason nodded, once more stone-faced as he moved to the console. It took him a moment to link his laptop with the console, before his fingers were flying over the keyboard and his eyes were flashing over the screen as he ran a series of algorithms to try and pinpoint Kuhn’s most likely location. It seemed like an eternity, but was probably only a minute, before he spoke up. “Got him.”

Surprise flickered over Maria’s features, before she schooled her face into impassivity once again. Moving to check the monitor, she leaned down to read the screen alongside Jason. “That was . . . fast.”

“I told you . . . most likely routes. It looks like he’s . . .”

If it was even possible, Maria’s face hardened even further into stone as she turned to face the military couple behind her. “I’m going to have that man’s ass! And I can’t even believe I’m not talking about Kuhn!!”

Marina cocked an eyebrow, leaning over Jason’s shoulder to read the screen. “Jay, I need you to monitor his location. You see him even flinch . . . we want to know about it.”

“Yes ma’am,” he agreed.

Turning back, she smiled to see that Will was offering her a mobile comm unit with another already installed in the shell of his ear. “Where are we going, samaya malen’kaya?” he asked, even as he and Marina moved to follow the AD from Command.

Marina’s voice was a curious mixture of amused and resigned as she sighed, “Somehow, he managed to find the gun range.”

Will’s lips quirked into a sly grin as he joked, “Huh . . . maybe he is our father after all.”

Five minutes later, Marina felt a grim satisfaction as she watched the rangemaster’s face pale in abject horror at the sight of Will approaching, herself and Maria flanking him on either side. The man glanced back toward the range, where the sound of a shotgun being fired was audible, and then again toward Will. Unable to resist, she snarked, “Having a moment of déjà vu there, Sergeant Morrison?”

The man was well acquainted with the Grimm brothers; Will, Clint and Kenny especially had been to the range at least four times in the week since they’d arrived on base. “Colonel, sir . . . I didn’t . . .”

“Shut up, Morrison,” Will snapped, causing the man to snap to attention and offer a brisk salute.

“Sir yes sir.”

“Do you understand why there are security protocols in place for this range, Sgt Morrison? It’s so that people unfriendly to the United States Army don’t gain unlimited access to the armory this
building houses. What if that man had been an enemy of the state, huh? And you just left him alone in a room with a fully stocked arsenal and countless boxes of ammunition? We would have a lot of dead people on base, and their deaths would be squarely on your head because you were an idiot,” Will barked loudly, though his overall tone was very polite and all the more terrifying for it.

There was another shotgun blast from behind the doors and Will sighed, reaching up to pinch the bridge of his nose. “You . . . don’t move. I’ll deal with you in a second.” Turning to the two women with him, he spoke up, “Maria . . . you’re up.”

Marina frowned lightly, as she protested, “Misha, you and I are the ones who speak German here.”

“Yes, but I have a new asshole to chew.”

“Okay; then explain to me why exactly I’m not the one going into that range.”

“Because I forbid it.”

“You forbid it,” Marina growled, eyes darkening angrily at the term.

Will’s mouth firmed as he snarled, “Yes, I forbid it. There is an armed man in that room, with apparently more than working knowledge of the firearm he’s using, who has made very little bones about the fact that he doesn’t trust you. Despite the friction in their past two encounters, Kuhn and Agent Hill have built at least some semblance of a rapport. You said so yourself; you were fairly certain he liked her. Ergo, Maria is probably the safest and smartest choice of the three of us to go in after him.”

Marina glared at him, recognizing that it wasn’t her boyfriend standing in front of her but her commanding officer. The two men physically inhabited the same body, but they were not the same man by any stretch of the imagination. Finally, she allowed her frame to relax and her weight to redistribute into a more non-threatening posture. “You and I will discuss this later, William.”

The Colonel just barely managed to hold in a wince; Marina hadn’t called him William – or even Will – in a very long time. “Agreed.” Turning to Maria, he spoke, “Can you handle him?”

Maria smirked, her eyes twinkling with a malicious intent as she nodded. “I can handle an old man with a gun and a grudge. It wouldn’t be the first time.”

“He may technically be old, Maria, but his physical body is still only about 35. He’s fast, and he’s strong, and as evidenced by this little escapade he’s very smart. It would not be in your best interests to underestimate him,” Marina admonished, her eyes firmly on the back of the witch hunter as he lowered the shotgun and began to methodically reload the weapon. “He’s unpredictable, which makes him dangerous. Keep your guard up.”

Maria nodded, setting her features sternly and then turning to march into the gun range. The military couple watched her go, before the door shut behind her and any sound coming from the room became too muffled to hear once again. Will returned his attention onto the upbraiding he was doing, though Marina moved to the door to try and hear what little of the conversation the heavy, bulletproof glass in the door allowed. It was hard to hear, Will’s voice steadily raising in volume as he barked in that tone of his that he’d learned at the Hoover base. That tone made even Clint snap into line whenever Will used it; and Clint had been exposed to it since he was 3 years old. Clint was 19; from there the math was pretty self-explanatory.

Even still, Marina could catch some of what Hansel was saying. The teasing “Sprechen Sie Deutsch” caused her to smirk; she lived with five boys and was well acquainted with the need to pull the hair
of the girl you liked. Hansel’s eyes flicked toward her, acknowledging her amusement and – unless she missed her guess – accepting her meddling in the matter. Marina would never tell Will, mostly because Will would never believe her, but she had conceded the disagreement about who would go into the firing range for one reason; Maria liked him. And she could tell that Hansel liked Maria in return; their interactions were usually short and snappish, but there was always a look of regret and guilt on his features when his short-temper drove her away.

Will’s voice suddenly dropped an octave or so, triggering her hind brain and sending a shiver down her spine. She knew this tone too; the one he only used when he was so angry that unless you gave him a really good reason, he was going to drop your ass into the brig and let you rot there. None of the Brothers Grimm had ever fallen onto the wrong side of it, but there had been other unfortunate soldiers – NCOs, enlisted, and even junior officers – that had run afoul of that tone and paid the price for it until Marina could convince Will to have them released. Glancing at Sgt Morrison and seeing his exceptionally pasty complexion and ever-widening eyes, Marina sighed and accepted that she should probably step in to save him . . . even if he was a total idiot.

Turning away from the standoff in the room – and what she wouldn’t give to know what had been said to cause that angry, bitter look on Hansel’s face – she returned to Will’s side and touched his shoulder. “Misha . . . you’re causing him premature heart failure,” she scolded in a low undertone. Turning to face the sergeant, she spoke, “Who is your CO, Sergeant?”

“Lt. Matthews, ma’am,” he squeaked, eyes like saucers as he continued to stare at Will as though the Colonel was some kind of avenging angel come to steal his soul.

“All right; we will be reporting this incident to him. It will be up to Lt. Matthews to determine the full extent of the discipline to be taken here. I, personally, will be making the recommendation that after you spend some time reevaluating the protocols and safeguards of this base in the brig, you be reassigned to either housing or latrine duty, until such time as you remember that your post here at this range depends on your vigilance and due diligence to keep every man, woman and child on this base alive and well.” Glancing at Will, she continued, “And you’re lucky that it will be me making this suggestion, Sgt Matthews, and not Colonel Grimm. Otherwise, your ass would be occupying a cell in the brig for potentially the rest of your career. As it is, your stint there will not be brief.” At the sound of the door to the range opening, Marina glanced back at Maria and Hansel. The witch hunter had the shotgun slung carelessly over his shoulder, handling the weapon easily as though he had been born with a weapon to hand. Turning back to the rangemaster, she ordered brusquely, “You are relieved of duty, Sgt Matthews. Return to quarters and await the MPs. They’ll be there to collect you shortly. Do not make them chase you or I will return the decision over to Col. Grimm and he will be the one to make the recommendation for your punishment. Am I understood?”

Morrison snapped off a salute, with a barked, “Ma’am yes ma’am.”

The remaining foursome waited for Morrison to vacate the room before Will reached up to trigger the comm in his ear. “Krechet, do you copy?”

“I copy, Orel. The MPs are already in route to Sgt Morrison’s barracks. Assuming he goes straight there, they should get there at about the same time.”

“Thank you, Krechet,” Will sighed, reaching up to pinch hard at the bridge of his nose.

There was a pause from the technical specialist, before he spoke up again, unable to resist the chance to tease either his brother or his brother’s girlfriend. “That was a very impressive performance, by the way, you two. You had everyone in Command cowering in awe.”

Marina smirked, glancing up at Will for a moment, before turning to face Hansel. “You have fun?”
she asked, eyes deceptively wide and her tone intentionally sarcastic.

The man smirked, a single nod of his head her only answer. Rolling her eyes at how much like Brian this man could be, she continued, “So . . . how would you like to go home?”

Hansel cocked an eyebrow, allowing Marina to step forward to remove the shotgun from his possession. The former Russian spy’s hands flew as she dismantled the gun in seconds, cleaning it effortlessly, before reassembling it and returned it to its rack. If Hansel was impressed by the display, he gave no sign. “Home? Hyu are not going to send me back to my prison?”

Will sighed, crossing his arms over his chest as he answered in Marina’s stead. “Well, it’s been fairly well established that Medical isn’t going to hold you any longer. You’re still not cleared for the mission to retrieve Gretel; you need some endurance training and some technical training before we get to that. But you’re more than welcome to come home with Marina and me. We live in base housing with the rest of my brothers; it isn’t much, but we have an extra room and more than enough space.”

Marina chuckled as she eyed his fatigues, before continuing in the same vein of thought, “And we’ll stop by the BX to get you some clothes and other necessities. Not even we wear fatigues every day.”

The Colonel rubbed his eyes with two fingers as he sighed, “Just do me a favor. No more sneaking off? I don’t appreciate sending my people to the brig, just because they made what is arguably an understandable mistake. You want to go out, go to the range, walk around, fine. Just take one of us with you and don’t steal any more access cards.”

“And with that thought in mind . . . I’ll take the card you stole,” Marina scolded, holding out one hand and taking the card back from the smirking hunter. Glancing at the name, she made a mental note to haul “Beatrice Randall, RN” into Command and give her the same dressing down Will had just put poor Sgt Morrison through. “Now that that’s taken care of . . . what say we go home?”

Hansel nodded once, his eyes grave as he watched her, “I would like that very much. Thank hyu.”

Marina’s eyes sparkled as she smiled, “You’re welcome.”

Chapter End Notes

German Translations:

Sprechen Sie Deutsch? - Do you speak German?

Russian Translations:

samaya malen’kaya - my little one (Will's nickname for Marina)
Krechet - Merlin (Jason’s Spec Ops codename)
Orel - Eagle (Will's Spec Ops Codename)
Enjoy the second chapter of the night! Russian translations are the same as always, so I'm not going to worry about putting them up. If you have any questions or because I missed one that I should have posted, let me know. Love you all! Enjoy!

Chapter 26

Marina led the way into the house and total chaos. What with the stop at the base exchange for additional groceries and things for Hansel, it was a lot later getting home than either Will or Marina had thought it would be. Jason had beaten them home and was recounting the tale of his brother’s dressing down of Sgt Morrison to the roaring approval of the rest of their brothers. Will rolled his eyes, brushing past Marina’s shoulder and intentionally making contact as he moved to get Jason into a headlock. “It was not that impressive, Jay,” Will insisted with an eyeroll, knuckles brutal as they dug into his skull.
Jason squirmed fruitlessly, knowing that he would only be released from captivity when Will allowed it. “It was hella impressive, Will. Don’t sell yourself short.” Will released him with a fond if exasperated huff, allowing Jason to retake his seat and take a drink. The younger brother suddenly started giggling as he recounted, “My favorite part was when you threatened to string the poor bastard up by his ballsack and let Clint use him for target practice if he ever even thought about letting anyone into the range without checking for appropriate ID ever again.”

Marina smacked the younger brother hard on the back as he spewed soda from his nose, laughing even as he choked and gagged on the liquid he had inhaled. “If you vomit all over the floor, sladkiy, I’m not cleaning it up. Just keep that in mind. Hansel, if you wouldn’t mind following me, you can set the groceries in the kitchen. Then I’ll take you up to your room.”

Clint and Kenny glanced at each other, the wide and mischievous grin on Clint’s face a direct counterpoint to the small smile that curved Kenny’s lips. “So, Pops . . . you gonna be crashing with us for the foreseeable future?”

Hansel frowned at the young man, narrowing his eyes as he insisted, “Hyu and I need to discuss this word, ‘Pops,’ young Clinton. I am no so sure I like it.”

Clint slouched backward, eyes sparkling. “It’s just another term for ‘dad’. You’ll get used to it.”

The German witch hunter froze for all of a half step as he took in Clint’s words. “Dad? Why would you use such a vord for me?”

And just like that, Marina felt the whole mood in the room plummet. Clint frowned as he dropped his feet to the floor from the chair they had been propped on. “You’re practically the closest thing that any of us have ever had to a father. Why wouldn’t we call you ‘Dad’?”

Hansel frowned at the information he had been given, tucking the information away and resolving to unveil the weight of its secrets later. “I ‘ave never been a father; I am afraid I will disappoint hyu.”

Clint shrugged with a sharp grin on his lips as he joked brittlely, “Well . . . it’s never too late to learn.”

Nodding, Hansel vowed to learn . . . and learn quickly. Even having only been their father for mere days, he could truly say that he never wished to see that level of heartbroken disappointment in the eyes of the two youngest Grimms ever again.

The next few months passed slowly, and before any knew it, December was starting to come to a close and Christmas drawing ever nearer. Hansel felt his sister’s absence keenly; Christmas had not been a very big holiday when they were children, but it had been a chance to be a family for a little while. The Brothers Grimm, however, hardly seemed to notice. They didn’t decorate or do anything special; it seemed as though to them it was only one more day. The brothers were often in and out on assignment, while Marina was frequently tucked away in meetings with Maria Hill about something or another regarding her charges. Hansel had to admit – grudgingly, but still admit – that she was a very impressive woman, and a good match for his stoic eldest son. It had taken him longer than it should have considering, mostly because they were not particularly demonstrative with one another; but two days into joining his sons in their home he had accidentally discovered that Will and Marina were lovers.

Will had managed to capture the pretty brunette in the kitchen as she was making breakfast, plying her lips with gentle kisses that caused a soft hum to purr from her throat. Apparently, it was a common thing because none of the other brothers were surprised by the affection; only Hansel. After that, he took to watching them while they were together and was horribly ashamed that it had taken
him so long to realize the truth of their relationship. The two were not very affectionate while in the company of others, but they were both very attached to touching one another. A touch of a single finger over the back of a hand; the caress of a hand through the hair at the nape of a neck; the subtle brush of one body against the others. Each touch was unique and laden with subtext, causing a peaceful smile on his son’s face that Hansel had never dreamed the Colonel was capable of.

It was five days before Christmas, and the day found Clint standing at the window to the living room and staring at the rain coming down outside. It was usually a pretty special day; it usually wasn’t celebrated by anyone outside of the family but Clint had been looking forward to it. It seemed however that it had been forgotten in the insanity that Hansel had caused by waking up and getting him trained up to go rescue Gretel with them; Clint was kinda bummed out about it. The man himself was sitting on the couch, going through a file Will had put together for him about some things that had happened since 1828. Marina, for once, was at home. She was curled up in the overstuffed armchair, with what Hansel guessed was a novel in her hands as she enjoyed a moment to relax.

“What are you reading?” the German witch hunter inquired, squinting slightly to try and get a better look at the title.

“Anna Karenina. It’s about a Russian girl, torn between two men. I had always intended to read it, but I have never find it in the original Russian since I came to the states.”

“And hyu ’ave such a copy now?”

Marina’s smile was small and affectionate as she nodded, explaining sotto voce, “Misha bought it for me for my birthday last year and I’m finally taking the time to read it.”

Just then, Clint released a heavy sigh at the words, dropping his head onto the glass panes with a heavy thunk. Marina chuckled at the gesture, knowing that the youngest of her charges had had his feelings hurt but was trying not to let anyone know. “What’s wrong, Clint?”

“I’m bored!” their resident hawk whined, thunking his head against the glass again. “I wanna do something!”

“Why don’t you take Hansel and go to the range? It’s the perfect kind of day for it.”

“I shoot guns every day, Marina; I’m sick of them.”

Marina flipped the next page in her book with an affirming hum, waiting for Clint to sigh again. “Then it’s probably a good thing that I got your bow overnighted to us then, huh?”

Clint whirled, his eyes wide and sparkling to match the exuberant grin on his lips. “You mean it!?"

She chuckled, slipping her finger between the pages to mark her place as she looked up at Clint. “I mean it. It’s in the case, in the front linen closet. There should be several flights included with the bow as well. I called Babushka and she had Tiny make you a whole new series of arrows, with bright purple fletchings just like you like, because your old ones were starting to get a bit ragged.”

The Army sniper whooped with excitement, bounding over from the window to collapse in the chair on top of Marina with his arms coming tightly around her shoulders. “You’re the best sister ever!” he exclaimed, bending over to press a hard kiss to her cheek. Then, bounding to his feet in a display of the inexhaustible energy that Marina was used to, he dashed toward the front linen closet. Bolting out the door, he only missed colliding with Will because the older brother managed to jump out of the way with only seconds to spare. Coming over to Marina’s chair, he perched on the arm as he bent to press a kiss to the top of her head. “Let me guess. You told him about the bow?”
Marina only smiled, watching Clint as he rifled through the closet and hauled out the long matte black case that held Clint’s favorite weapon of all time. Will chuckled, tangling several strands of brunette hair around his fingers as the couple watched indulgently while the young sniper reverently stroked the closed case. Bowing, he rested his head against the cool matte, whispering to it in a tone too low to be heard. Finally, he reached and unclasped the case, hauling the top up and off.

There, lying on a bed of shiny red satin, was a shiny black recurve bow. The bow was assembled using of glossy black walnut, rich cherry and supple maple woods, with a high tech sight mounted to the front and a leather wrapped grip just below the arrow rest. “This is NOT my bow,” Clint gasped, his eyes flying wide as he stared in shock at the bow as though it was the Holy Grail of Bows. “This is a PSE Mustang Recurve Bow.” Looking up at Marina and Will, he gaped at them, tears standing clearly in his eyes. “This is the best bow on the market.”

Will’s lips were curved in a warm smile as he nodded, “Happy Birthday, Clint.”

Stroking reverent hands over the wood, Clint stared for a long moment. Finally, he lunged to his feet and practically threw himself into the arms of his brother and Marina. “You guys are the awesomest of awesomest people in the world! I totally thought you’d forgotten!”

Marina chuckled, cupping his cheek lightly as she teased, “I have never forgotten your birthday, dorogoy; it’s not a trend I intend to start now. December 20, 1976, you came screaming into the world and you haven’t stopped making racket ever since.”

Jason, Brian and Kenny appeared in the living room then, each carrying some small gift for the youngest of their brood. “Happy birthday, Clint!” they each said, handing him the admittedly small boxes they each carried.

Hansel glanced at Marina with a frown. “I was unaware it was his birthday. I vish you had told me.”

The former Russian spy shrugged, “We don’t usually make a big deal about Christmases or anything else like that, so birthdays are kinda the only big deal we celebrate. And even then, whoever’s birthday it is gets only a couple small gifts and a cupcake cake. Besides, the fact that you’re here means a lot more to him than anything else he’ll get today.”

Will chuckled, “Except for maybe that bow. Because Clint may be a hell of a shot with a gun, but his aim with a bow is impossible to believe if you haven’t seen it for yourself.”

When the presents were opened – Brian had gotten Clint a clump of raw beeswax for the string of his bow (which he refused to divulge where he’d managed to get it from), Kenny had bought him a new album that Clint had been looking forward to but would never confess to wanting in a million years, and Jason gave him a new shooting glove and arm guard – Clint returned to the hallway and ran caressing hands over the bow. Looking up at Marina and Will, he begged, “Can I go shoot it? Please!!?”

Marina smiled fondly, pushing herself from her chair and moving to crouch beside him. “Absolutely. Will and I had one of the lanes at the northside range modified to accommodate using the bow. It’s a 50 yard lane, and there are a bunch of targets for you to choose from.” Glancing back at Hansel, who was watching her interact with his youngest son, she jerked her head back at him. “Take your dad; I bet he could maybe teach even you a few things.”

Clint grinned, closing the case deferentially and snapping the locks meticulously. Leaning forward, he wrapped his arms around her and hugged her tightly, burying his face in her shoulder. “Thank you, Marina. This is the best birthday present ever.”
“You’re welcome. Don’t forget to thank Will too, all right?”

The sniper shook his head, standing to hug his brother as well. “Thanks Will. I love it.”

“You’re welcome.” Glancing at the window and noticing that the rain had let up for a moment, Will nudged him toward the door. “Go on; the rain’s stopped for a bit. You may get all the way to the range if you hurry.”

“You comin’, Pops?” Clint called, as he turned to face the German hunter.

Hansel didn’t even hesitate, moving into the entryway of the small house with a nod. “I vould not miss this for the world, Clinton. Lead on and I shall be right behind.”

Clint bent and lifted the case carefully, making sure not to bump it into anything. “Don’t forget your coat, dorogoy; it would really suck to get sick on your birthday,” Marina admonished, watching as Clint reached into the closet and dragged out his uniform overcoat.

“Lyublyu tebya, Marishka! Lyublyu tebya, Will! Thank you!” Clint called over his shoulder as he left the house, Hansel right on his heels.

Marina waved after him, calling, “You’re welcome! Dinner should be at 6, so don’t stay at the range too late!”

“I won’t!” was the last thing she heard before he disappeared from view.

Will’s hands came up to rest on her shoulders as she glanced upward uncertainly at the flashes of lightning and low rumble of thunder. “He’ll be all right. Hansel’s pretty fond of him; he won’t let anything happen to him.”

The pretty Russian spy smiled, chuckling, “And I think that may be the best birthday present that Clint has ever gotten.”

“What’s that?”

“A father.”
Okay, so that title is a little more tongue-in-cheek than usual. *giggles*

Anywhoo! The translations are at the end of the chapter, as always. This is the range scene from Clint's perspective. I hope you enjoy.

Chapter 27

“Lyublyu tebya, Marishka! Lyublyu tebya, Will! Thank you!” the exuberant sniper called over his shoulder as he booked it from the house, excited to try out his new bow, his newfound dad only steps behind him.

Clint would never admit it in a million years, but he loved Marina more than maybe anyone else in the world. She’d been his erstwhile protector his whole life, and he owed her for making sure that he
at least was reasonably well-adjusted unlike some of his brothers (*cough cough* Will *cough cough*). She stood in the open door now, waving after them as she chided fondly, “You’re welcome! Dinner should be at 6, so don’t stay at the range too late!”

Glancing back over his shoulder at her, he waved one hand and called, “I won’t!”

Turning his attention to Hansel, he jerked his head in the direction they needed to go. “Come on, Pops . . . the range is this way.” Shoving his hands in his pocket with a nod, the witch hunter followed the archer as they hurried through the base to get to the range before the rain started up once again.

Clint was a spectator in life; he knew why it was that he was such a good sniper. He saw better from far away; he always had and probably always would. He could tell you what kind of person someone was just by the way they walked and what kind of clothes they wore. He could tell you if a couple was in an actual relationship, or if they were just chert priyateley, or if one was about to break up with the other. He watched people and paid attention to the little things that no one else thought was important. Except for maybe a certain older brother of his, Clint could read the notoriously aloof Major Petrovka better than anyone else.

That ability to read her was why Clint was fairly certain that he was one of only four people in the world who knew that Marina Ivanovna Petrovka and Hansel Frederick Kuhn would probably NEVER be friends; they didn’t trust each other and hell, half the time only barely liked each other. It actually kinda sucked; Clint was not just Marina’s favorite Grimm, that relationship swung both ways, and Hansel was quite possibly the most badass dad in the history of the world. He didn’t want to have to choose between them, even as he knew that Marina would never let it get to that point. Still, the fact remained that they didn’t trust each other and that sosal korolevskoy sharov.

Leading the way into the range, Clint was hyperaware of Hansel at his heels, both of them ducking inside with mere seconds to spare. As soon as the door swung shut behind them, there was a loud boom of thunder overhead and the steady drum of rain on the roof filled the expansive space. The new rangemaster – Sgt Morrison having been replaced after the debacle of all those months ago – stood as they walked in, carefully checking all of Clint’s clearances and Hansel’s visitor’s ID before pointing the young archer in the direction of the lane Marina and Will had cordoned off for archery and archery alone.

Hansel took up a spot against the sidewall as Clint laid his things down and started to set up. First, he chose a heavy target, attaching it to the gantry and sending it the full 50 yards out. Then, he slid his left hand into the archery glove Jason had given him for his birthday, stretching and flexing his fingers to settle the worked leather comfortably, before slipping the armguard on and tightening it snugly around his right forearm. Hauling his quiver up and over his shoulder, he settled it across his back and loaded it over his shoulder with all of his arrows. (Usually, he’d keep only a flight or two in the quiver, but he didn’t want to have to recall the target after every 12 arrows. He wanted to shoot until he couldn’t shoot anymore arrows, then shoot a few more.)

Unlatching the case once more, Clint ran a reverent finger over the deep red of the cherrywood set into the glossy black walnut. It was the most gorgeous bow he’d ever seen in his life; he’d been keeping an eye on an older, battered one at a secondhand store outside of Roswell, NM, while the Brat’ya Mrachnyy had been stationed there a year or so ago. Then they’d been reassigned, and Clint had resolved to forget about the bow altogether. Apparently, Will and Marina had noticed his interest and done something about it. Making a mental note to be a model little brother for awhile – picking up his and Kenny’s room without being told or at least before Marina had to ask him a dozen times; make dinner when it was his turn without complaining and essentially turning into such a whiny brat that Marina ended up doing it for him; keep his ammunition and weapons maintenance kits off the
kitchen table; pick up his boots – he lifted the recurve from the case and drew it to him.

Turning to the target, Clint set himself into his stance, pulled an arrow out of his quiver, nocked the arrow against the string and pulled the arrow up and back toward him. The strain on his muscles was delicious and Clint nearly moaned aloud at the half-forgotten feeling. Returning his attention to the weapon at hand, he breathed in, sighted his target, breathed out and released. The arrow flew, straight and true, imbedding perfectly within the spider in the center of the bull’s eyes.

Hansel huffed out a laugh. “Excellent shot, Falki.”

Clint glanced back over his shoulder, reaching back at the same time to pull another arrow and set up for his next shot. “Falki? What does that mean?”

The German smiled, the expression almost fond as he replied, “Little hawk. I heard your brother call you ‘Yastreb’. While I have never been fond of any of the Russians I have ever met, I am familiar enough with the language to know what that word means.” Nodding once, he continued, “The title suits you well.”

The youngest Grimm absolutely refused to blush at what could only have been a compliment, turning his attention back to the familiar rhythm of nocking, setting, drawing and releasing. Finally, the question he’d been dying to ask for months blurted from his lips. “How did you do it?”

“Do what?”

“Manage to sneak past half of base security, without tripping a single alarm in the process? I’m dying to know how you did it.”

“I walked as though I belonged where I was,” came the unexpected reply, and Clint snorted hard at the answer as he nocked another arrow against his string.

“So that’s the secret?” he laughed, unable to believe that it was as simple as that. By now, half a dozen arrows were lodged in the target, but simply pulled back on the string and flung yet another arrow down range. ”You just -“ here he faltered, gesturing wildly with his gloved hand before pressing forward with his thought, ”walk tall and that's it, all of a sudden you can walk past half of base security like it's nothing?”

"If hyu believe that hyu belong there, the ones around hyu will believe it, too." Hansel was standing behind and three feet to the left of the sniper, leaving Clint just enough room to draw without interfering in anyway. His reluctant father was smiling as he leaned back against the wall of the lane, but Clint could tell that he was upset about something. His posture was tense and he couldn’t seem to relax the way he obviously wanted to.

The newly-minted 20 year old had never been through what Hansel had, so could never hope to understand, not really. But at the same time, Clint knew that if he himself had suddenly woken up 200 years after he fell asleep to be confronted with five fully grown men wearing his face, he would not have taken it nearly so well as Hansel was currently. Clint had seen him watching them sometimes, his eyes warm with pride and stunned affection as he and his brothers goofed off. He hadn’t ever joined them as the Grimms roughhoused, teased and played together, but Clint was fairly certain that that day wasn’t long in coming.

Turning back to the target, Clint dropped back into his shooting stance. "Mind hyur back foot, Falki," the older man admonished, reaching out with a toe to nudge Clint’s ankle back into alignment.
Knowing what the term meant, Clint felt obligated to make a face, a soft frown of disapproval, just for that sake of appearances. Inside though; inside his chest was another matter entirely. He felt as though his heart was practically glowing with pleasure, a warm, golden feeling that filled his whole being with happiness. The only nickname he had ever been gifted with from a member of his family was Marina’s dorogoy; he was the only one she called that name and she was the only one he would allow to use it. But “Falki” was different; Marina was his sister for all intents and purposes, but Hansel was his father in all the ways that mattered. His father had just given him a nickname all his own. As someone who had never had a father, and had never dreamed he’d ever obtain one, the feeling was unfamiliar, welcome and more than a little surreal.

Shaking off the glow, he persisted in his earlier line of question in order to try and regain some control over his emotions. "It can’t be that simple," he argued, drawing another arrow from the quiver, and nocked it against the string absently, the practice familiar and comforting. "That might get you through a door or two, but it can't possibly last for long."

Another arrow raced downrange, a quickfire grin flashing across his lips as his new bow creaking agreeably under the strength required to draw it back. Hansel paused, waiting until the arrow thudded into the target along with its fellows, before continuing, "Sometimes a door or two is all you need. Sometimes all you need are a few seconds, a few minutes. A little distance. A witch is at her most dangerous in close."

Though Clint noticed the strange comment, he neglected to pay it any attention; he was fairly certain he didn’t really want to know anyway. Kinda like he didn’t want to know about what it was that Will dreamed about that always sent him for the bottle of Glenfiddich in the cabinet over the sink and to the couch to watch all-night Nick-at-Nite reruns sometimes. With a careless shrug, he drew back on the bow again and insisted, "Eh, I see better at a distance anyway."

Clint knew he was probably overdoing it. Sweat shone on his arms and his brow and he was really starting to feel the ache in the long unused muscles of his arms, but the endorphins were buoying him towards the moon. His face felt as though it would crack with the size of his grin and he couldn’t stop shooting, not until the bow was truly broken in and he was satisfied by what she could do.

There was small smile on his father’s face as he asked, "You watch things?"

"All the time," Clint agreed, releasing another arrow and watching it split another perfectly down the center. Punching the air, he whooped, "A Robin Hood, hell yes. Now you're officially broken in, baby." Bringing the bow to his lips, he pressed a fervent, tender kiss to the grain.

"And do you watch people as well?" Hansel inquired, the tone gentle, almost too gentle.

Clint could tell that his dad was leading him toward something, but simply shrugged in that carefree way he always did. “Of course,” he grinned, nevertheless eager to impress his dad with the observational skills the Army had built into him and he’d spent a lifetime honing. Recalling the gantry, he noted with smug pride that his arrows were tightly clustered around the first spidered shot, the solid target swinging like a pendulum as it approached him. "I can tell you six things about a man by the way he walks, and four more by how he dresses. It's pretty easy, once you know what to look for." Knowing that proper care of his arrows was important if he didn’t want to shatter any in the future, Clint tugged his arrows tenderly from the target and inspected each of them thoroughly, moving efficiently from the head to the bolt, the flight, the nock, each motion quick and practiced. He piled them with care on the counter of the stall at his side, continuing to talk even as he examined each and set it tenderly aside. "Sometimes when I'm bored I'll go sit in the mess hall and just watch people, you know, how they act around each other. It's like As The World Turns, but you make up your own dialogue."
Really, Clint shouldn’t have been surprised when Hansel looked blank at the analogy, but he still kinda was. Rubbing one hand over the back of his head he dropped his head back to study the ceiling, searching for something to use for clarification that Hansel could relate to. "It's, um. Shit, how do I explain soap operas to someone born in the eighteen-hundreds? Wait, that's it, opera," says Clint, snapping his fingers and grinning. "It's like watching an opera, but you can't hear what they're saying, so you have to figure it out on context. Who sits with who, why is she mad at him, those two are totally having sex, that kind of thing."

The hunter was noding, obviously understanding the metaphor. Looking down at his hands, he spoke up, "When we hunt the witches, Gretel and I, she is always the one to stand in front of the crowd, to draw their attention. And I watch their faces, to see who does not act the way they should, who is not surprised or not scared. On a good day, I can spot a witch in the crowd, before she can take any more of the children."

The question is out of Clint's mouth before he can bite it back: "Did you save the ones that got taken?"

Hansel lifted a long, slim hand to rub at the bridge of his nose, pressing his finger and thumb into the corners of his closed eyes. "Nein. Not always. Not even often."

Clint could see the pain there in his features, and regretted asking the question. Content to study him for a moment, he watched as Hansel’s features fluttered through emotions; fear, anger, pride, sorrow, upset, pain. It was fascinating to watch and Clint wondered what he was thinking about that caused such a gamut of emotions. It was when pain paused on his face and remained there, that Clint spoke up again. "Pops?" he inquired anxiously, feeling his eyebrows furrow in concern as he watched Hansel's haunted robin’s egg eyes fluttered open. Studying him for a second and no doubt seeing more than his father wanted him to, he spoke again, "Are you okay?"

"Ja, I... I am fine." Hansel shook his head firmly, like Will did when he was trying to shake himself free of a bad memory, as if such a physical motion would allow him to move away from the memories of the past, the ghosts that lay piled around them, collateral damage of the way they lived their lives up to that point, each one struggling to drag them down into the abyss with their damned souls. They weren’t cobwebs to be so easily swept away, nor thoughts to be easily ignored. They were tangible, frightening things once they were dredged from the depths of memory and into the forefront of their thoughts.

So, doing what he did so well, Clint deflected. "Thinking about Aunt Gretel?"

Though they both know it for a patent falsehood, Hansel’s grateful nod of his head told the youngest Grimm everything he needed to know about the thoughts his father had been besieged by. Forcing his usual smile onto his lips as he ran his hands over his bow, Clint checked for cracks and strains in the wood. "Would you tell me about her?" he asked shyly, smoothing his fingers down the length of the string and earning a small smile in return at last.

"How about I make hyu a bargain?" asked Hansel, earning the sniper’s immediate interest. "I will tell hyu about Gretel, if hyu will tell me about someone in return. Just between us, of course."

Packing away the arrows in their quiver and the bow in its shiny black case, Clint smirked in amusement at the suggestion of a game. "Oh ho, a mysterious bargain and an even more mysterious someone? Do I get to know who it is before I agree?"

"And where would be the fun in that?" Hansel grinned back, shrugging one shoulder in such an exaggerated manner that Clint knew it was contrived to look unimpressed, though the way his lips kept twitching upwards into a smile ruined the attempt. "Though, if hyu are not interested...."
"Okay, okay, you got me," insisted Clint with a grin, hauling the bow case up over his shoulder and bracing it with one arm, as he hefted the overfull quiver of arrows with his other hand. "I agree to your terms, now tell me who you want to know about so badly."

"Fraulein Hill."

"Fra -" Here Clint started to laugh, the two men moving in tandem toward the entrance to the range, a sly grin impossibly wide on his face. Agent Maria Hill was Marina’s shiny new best friend, and – though Marina had claimed it was Agent Hill’s kiss that had released Hansel from curse’s hold – the reality of the matter was that she was one of the two scariest women Clint knew.

Frankly, Hansel had bigger balls than Clint had originally thought. "Oh, man, you are a sneaky sneaker who sneaks, you know that?"

"In der Liebe und im Krieg ist alles erlaubt," agreed Hansel quietly, peering through the windows to judge the distance of their run through the rain, the strength of the wind and the pelting of the storm against the sides of the building.

Clint frowned making a mental note to have Will start teaching him German. "What's that mean?"

"I will tell hyu when hyu are older," the hunter joked lightly, his tone as haughty as any king’s, causing Clint to make a face and push him playfully, the both of them laughing at the good-natured teasing. They are just about to make the sprint back to the Grimms' base housing when Clint realized something. Speaking up, as last-second as he could possibly get, he asked nonchalantly, "Oh hey, um, Pops?"

Hansel turned to look at him with an indulgent smile, "Ja?"

Clint winced, well able to imagine the aftermath if his brothers found out the truth of his only real guilty pleasure. "Don’t mention to my brothers that I watch soap operas, okay?"

Grinning at him, he shook his head, “I would not dare.” Turning back to the door, he spoke over his shoulder, “On the other hand, I believe that hyur Marina at least should know.”

The newly-turned twenty year old groaned, his eyes slipping closed as Hansel dashed from cover before the youngest Grimm could formulate some kind of reply. Pulling his overcoat closer around his body, Clint ducked his head and darted into the rain after him. “Yebet.”

Chapter End Notes

Russian & German Translations:

Ya lyublyu tebya (Russian) - I love you
chert priyateley (Russian) - fuck buddies
sosal korolevskoy sharov (Russian) - sucked royal balls
Falki (German) - little hawk (diminuitive term/affectionate)
dorogoy - darling (Marina's nickname for Clint)
Ja/Nein (German) - Yes/No
In der Liebe und im Krieg ist alles erlaubt (German) - All is fair in love and War.
Yebet (Russian) - Fuck
Chapter 28

It was several days later, that S.H.I.E.L.D. Assistant Director Maria Hill appeared on the doorstep of the home of the Brothers Grimm. (Petrovka had informed him that the title was not to be used by anyone outside of the family; something about Eyes Only and classified and “for their safety.”) Teal eyes watched him calmly, a small smirk just tilting the left of her mouth, as he stood there in the doorway gauping at her as though he was some kind of big-mouthed bass. “Fraulein Hill.”

She nodded in reply, her tone devoid of any emotion as she replied in kind, “Guten Morgen, Herr Kuhn.”
Shaking himself free from his daze, he glanced behind him for a second to confirm to himself that, except for Marina, he was alone in the house. “My sons are not here. Are you here to see Petr . . . I mean, Marina?”

“I will definitely be back to see Marina a bit later; we’re going to have a movie night. But no; right now, I’m here for you. My boss, Director Fury, would like to meet with you.” She looked him up and down, taking in the ratty overlong pajama pants – they were a hand-me-down from Will, because Hansel had insisted that he didn’t need pajamas while at the store but discovered that the soft material was wonderful for lounging around the house – and his AC/DC t-shirt. Noticing that her eyes lingered for just a second too long on the small strip of skin between the waistband of his pants and his shirt, he bit down hard on his lip; he really was not looking forward to getting shot that day. “You may want to change. Just a thought.”

“Right. Of course. Let me . . . go change.” Trying to remember what Clint and Kenny had tried to teach him about when someone came to call at the house, he backstepped and gestured for her to come inside. “Please.”

Maria smiled and moved further into the house. Petrovka was sprawled in her usual armchair in the living room, once again absorbed in her book. Looking up at the sight of Maria in the doorway to the room, she set her book aside with a smile. “Maria!” Glancing at the clock, she frowned, “I thought we weren’t meeting until six tonight?”

“We’re not. Director Fury would like to meet Hansel. He sent me to retrieve him.”

Petrovka nodded, standing and turning her attention on the watchful German behind her. Taking in his attire and the slight confusion in his eyes that he was trying like hell to hide, she smiled kindly, “I think the black pants we bought at the BX for you, along with that light blue sweater should be sufficient, Hansel. It’s nice enough for a meeting between you and the Director, but casual enough that you can still wear your boots with it.”

Despite being disgruntled at being instructed on clothing as though he was a child, Hansel was also relieved for the suggestion; he was still trying to sort out what half of the clothing they had purchased was, not to mention where it was appropriate to wear it, and it was nice to have had the decision taken out of his own hands by someone who knew better. “Thank hyu. If hyu vould both excuse me.”

When he returned downstairs, Hansel was unexpectedly surprised to see Maria seated with Petrovka in the living room, the two women laughing with each other. They were sharing the couch, each with a drink of some kind in their hands. Their mannerisms were easy and comfortable; boasting a familiarity that usually only came from close, old friends. Hansel had known that the two women were associates – Clint had taken vicious pleasure in informing him of that detail – but had been unaware that they were so close, as they had only met for the first time shortly before he woke up from the curse. The two women had looked over as he stepped into the doorway, two pairs of eyes, one brown and the other teal, watching him solemnly.

Maria stood then, setting down her glass and brushing her hands down the front of her navy blue uniform. “Marina . . . I will see you tonight? Six, right?”

“I’m looking forward to it,” Petrovka agreed with a warm smile, shoving herself to her feet as well. The two women embraced briefly, before Maria turned toward the former witch hunter and gestured toward the door. “Shall we, Herr Kuhn?”

It was a brief walk from the Grimm brothers’ housing to the command center, but it seemed much longer. They had spoken frequently since he’d slipped from Medical and found himself at the gun
range, sometimes while he was resting between training sessions and sometimes when he went to the mess hall because there was no one at home and no reason to cook. (She had joined him once and he had mentioned that he would kill for some decent brochen and schnitzel. The next time he had gone to the base mess, he had been delighted to find both as options on the menu; he had been even more thrilled to learn that it was actually very good.) But even considering their previous interactions the two were still trying to learn each other, feel each other out, and uncover the switch that caused their souls to twitch. She insisted on calling him “Herr Kuhn,” even though everyone else called him either Hansel (Petrovka), Dad (his sons) or – at least in Clint’s case – Pops.

“How are you settling in, Herr Kuhn? You’ve been wake for how long now? Three months or so?” she inquired, her tone friendly and conversational, not at all like her usual brusque and biting attitude.

Hansel nodded, glancing at her out of the corner of his eye, seeing genuine curiosity in her eyes as he watched her. Smiling as he remembered the kind of sporadic tour he’d been getting from Kenny and Clint for at least the last two months, he shrugged. They’d been trying to get to the end of it since just about the time he’d woken up, but something or another kept calling the boys away and pausing their tour in its tracks. Chuckling, he nodded in reply. “I’m settling in well. Clint and Kenny have taken to showing me around, and the rest of my sons have been very helpful as well.”

“And Marina? How are you and Marina getting on?”

Robin’s egg eyes shot toward her sharply, gauging the look on her face at her question. “I fear Major Petrovka and I will never particularly like one another. I feel sorry for Will because of it, too; I have seen how fiercely he cares for her.”

The two spoke for the rest of the walk, shifting between conversations about his sons, her job, S.H.I.E.L.D. and other fluff and sundry things that didn’t amount to much of anything really. But he relished their talk, getting to see her as a young woman who loved her job as opposed to the hard-nosed assistant director she spent all her time portraying. About ten minutes later, they arrived at Base Command. Maria led him inside and all the way to a closed door, the plaque next to the frame reading,

“General Nicholas L. Fury
Director of S.H.I.E.L.D.,
Strategic Homeland Intervention,
Enforcement and Logistics Division.”

“Here we are,” she insisted, gesturing toward the door. “Director Fury should be waiting for you inside.”

Hansel smiled at her, lifting his hand to knock on the door. Maria suddenly reached out, her hand flashing out like a flash, grabbing his wrist only seconds before he could connect to the wood. The witch hunter frowned, turning to look at her. His eyes flickered over her face, noting the uncertain gleam in her eyes and the way she was biting down on her lower lip. “Fraulein Hill . . . what is it?”

“About Marina . . . you should talk to Director Fury about her.” There was rueful smile tilting her lips as she shook her head. “You may find you have more in common with her, than you think.”

Releasing him, she smiled and then turned smartly on one heel and walked away. Hansel watched her retreat in confusion, before turning back to the door. Pondering her words, Hansel reached out and knocked on the door firmly. A strong voice came through the door, as he called, “Come!”

Pushing open the door, Hansel stepped through and into the room. Fury looked up from the file folder on his desk, giving him a sharp-edged grin as he stood and gestured to one of the chairs
opposite him at his desk. “Please, have a seat. It’s very good to meet you, Herr Kuhn.”

This was definitely an encounter that Hansel felt ill-ready for. He’d hunted witches, wasted evil fae, tracked werewolves, and battled demons. But looking across the expanse of mahogany, Hansel Frederick Kuhn was faced with an entirely different form of foe than he’d ever faced. Everything about the man in front of him – the eye patch, the sharp grin, the lean face – screamed one word . . . the man was a viper, coiled tightly and waiting for the perfect opportunity to strike. The German only hoped that once the cobra struck, he would have enough time to dodge.

Hansel approached the tall black man warily, offering him a hand to shake. “Director Fury . . . I’ve heard rather a lot about you.”

A single eyebrow arched, even as the grin tilted crookedly. “Let me guess; Major Petrovka has been telling tales.”

Hansel smirked, shaking his head, “My sons, actually. My youngest talks about you like you’re some kind of god and my eldest is convinced that you’re a magnificent bastard. Surprisingly, Major Petrovka may be the only one who hasn’t yet given me an opinion.”

Fury’s eyebrow furrowed slightly at the information, grabbing up a pen and scratching a note to himself on a pad of paper to his right. “That hardly seems like her. Capt. Grimm described her once as lacking in a civility filter; she says everything she thinks, whether you’re going to like it or not.”

The witch hunter grimaced, one hand coming up to scratch at the back of his head. “That may have rather a lot less to do with a sudden shoring up of her ability to keep her own counsel, and more to do with me.”

The man’s single eye locked on the German with intense focus, and suddenly Hansel understood how it was that this man ran S.H.I.E.L.D. so effectively. He was 200 years old, damn it; he would not squirm like a schoolboy being reprimanded by his headmaster. “Oh?” the man asked, face smoothing and tone glacial.

Humming a noncommittal agreement, Hansel looked down at his hands. “Major Petrovka and I are not what you would call friends.”

“Calling her by her first name would be a good start on the way to fixing that,” Fury advised, standing from his chair and moving to a large, very beautiful portrait. The woman was obviously Mediterranean; beautiful, almost stately, if not regal, watching you from the canvas as though she knew a secret that you did not. Swinging the frame from the wall – treating the painting as carefully as a young man would a lover – Fury revealed a rather large safe set into the wall behind it. Dialing in a combination, the wheel spinning so fast and with such practiced ease, that Hansel knew it was a combination the S.H.I.E.L.D. director knew intimately.

Hansel watched, confused, as Fury reached in and pulled out a stack of manila file folders, as well as a small black box that the witch hunter vaguely recognized as what his sons called a VHS tape. Setting the stack of files on his desk, Fury sealed the safe and spun the wheel, before closing the portrait over it once again. Holding up the VHS tape, he spoke, “Before we get to why I asked you here, I have something that I think you need to see.”

Nodding, the hunter watched as the director inserted the tape into a tape player mounted in his office and turned on the television attached to it. For a second, there was static, and then a picture materialized. A young woman sat in a rocking chair, a very young baby in her arms, as she hummed a wordless lullaby to him softly. She looked disconcertingly familiar, though her face was bowed over the child and there was only a vague sense of a profile as they rocked together. There was a
date listed in the corner – May 6, 1979 – but no matter how hard Hansel stared, the girl’s name would not come.

“The baby is your youngest son, Clint. He’s only 5 months old here,” Fury said, only seconds before the humming stopped and the woman looked up directly into the camera, tears in brown eyes and a prayer on her lips. Hansel gasped in shock, horror and surprise as Fury used the remote in his hand to pause the screen. “The woman . . . is Marina Ivanovna Petrovka.”

“How is such a thing possible!?” Hansel demanded furiously even as he launched himself to his feet, stalking closer to the screen as though that would somehow change the picture, change the evidence before his eyes. “She cannot be any older than 25 . . . 30 at the oldest.”

“As a matter of fact, she will be 55 years old next month.” Fury leaned against his desk, his arms folded over his chest as he watched the hunter stare with his one remaining eye. “Did you never wonder why your youngest boys defer to her so completely? Did you never wonder why they are so loyal? She was all they had in that hellhole where they were created; she raised them, loved them, cradled them, comforted them. Except for your eldest, Colonel Grimm, Marina Petrovka was solely responsible for every moment of their life that was not directly tied to the studies the Army put to them.”

“I did not know. I still do not understand; how is this possible? What manner of sorcery is this?”

“It’s not sorcery; it’s science. She was enhanced to remain unaging by the government who created her. She gave up everything to protect your boys; rescue them from that place.” Turning off the television, Fury rounded the desk once more and picked up the stack of files he’d removed from the safe. Holding them out of the witch hunter, he gestured for the other man to take them. “This is everything I have been able to collect about your sons and Marina. Their files from Project Cahill; the personnel file on Marina’s pseudonym within the project, ‘Mary Peters’; her files with the KGB; the action records of every assignment the brothers have ever been deployed on with the Army; Brian’s service record with the Los Angeles Police Department and their Special Weapons and Tactics squad; everything.” There was a dry smirk on the director’s face as he remarked sardonically, “t should make for some very interesting reading for you, I think, Herr Kuhn. Make of it what you will.” Settling himself into his chair, Fury flipped open the file he’d been perusing when Hansel had entered and looked up at him with his one remaining eye. “Now . . . what say we get down to the business of why I called you, hmm?”

Looking back on it later, Hansel could admit that the rest of the meeting was kind of a blur. He knew he’d been offered a position as a consultant within S.H.I.E.L.D., a chance to be able to take the skills he’d spent his life honing and do something good with them. He remembered shaking Fury’s hand as he accepted the position and the feel of the black leather coat he lifted effortlessly from the back of Fury’s chair as they shook hands over the desk.

But later, as he shrugged into his new coat and attempted to recall the meeting more clearly, all that would come to mind as he walked towards home was the sound of Fury’s voice as he replied smugly, “Welcome to S.H.I.E.L.D., Herr Kuhn. I hope you come to enjoy it here.”

Chapter End Notes

German translations:
Guten Morgen - Good Morning
Herr - Mister
It took Hansel the better part of a week to get through the files that Fury had given him. He kept
them tucked carefully out of sight, remembering how diligently Fury had kept them safe and
unwilling to do anything less. He worked his way steadily through the reports of Will’s torture at
the hands of men who had never showed an ounce of compassion for the young boy; the
offhanded notations of Jason’s beatings at the hands of a Maj. T. Davis; Kenny’s subpar IQ tests, one
right after another and each comment in accompaniment more contemptuous than the last; the
increasingly erratic behavior of a boy named Barney, a boy that Hansel could almost recognize as a
much younger Brian; the doctor’s reports on Clint and his deafness, the protocols and treatments
that had
been used to try and reverse it. Rage bubbled hot and furious in his chest with each report; if he had doubted that these boys were his sons before, there was no doubt of it now. Only a father could be so enraged by how they had been treated; and it was their father who vowed that, as soon as he could get his hands on each of the Hurensöhne listed, each man would learn a new meaning of pain. Only one name had stood out in each file as having shown any kindness to the boys at all, each notation of her name underscored with contempt; that name had been “Mary Peters.”

Hansel had sucked in a sharp breath the first time he opened the personnel file labeled, “Mary Peters.” Marina’s face had gazed out at him, eyes solemn and features maybe just a little younger; in the time since the program had begun, she had remained mostly unchanged. She had been assigned to be the primary caregiver of the offspring for the program, a task she had undertaken with all the untamed ferocity of a mother bear protecting her cubs and the gentle tenderness of a lioness with her kittens. She’d raised them to the age of 4, the children her only responsibility, until their fourth birthdays and they were placed with the appropriate trainers for their fields. Even then, she had nurtured them, protected them and loved them; despite all of the threats for reassignment her superiors had thrown at her way, she had remained resolute in her mission to care for them as well as their surroundings allowed. And when those surroundings had grown too dangerous for them to remain, she had stolen them away and disappeared into the ether, the children with her.

It took a few days for Hansel to process all of the information he had read, and he had had every intention of pulling Marina away from her boys for a quiet talk, just between the two of them. But, as Gretel was so fond of saying, if you want to make God laugh, tell him your plans.

It shouldn’t have surprised anyone but even still, it was so unexpected that not even Marina was fully prepared for the onset. One night, Clint went to bed happy and laughing, him and Kenny joking and shoving all the way up to their room and – from the ruckus Marina could hear from their room – long into the night. The next morning, he woke up irritable and cranky, rubbing with the heel of hand at his right ear and lightly flushed from the fever that ran through his system.

Hansel watched as the young woman bided her time, chocolate eyes on Clint as the 20 year old moved through the house wretchedly. Each of his brothers was conciliatory as they attempted to navigate his foul temper, while equally as intent on returning the young man back to bed; but Clint was having none of it. Finally, after Clint had nearly taken off Kenny’s head with a vicious string of vitriolic language that would have made a sailor blush, Marina approached him and laid a hand on his shoulder. “All right, dorogoy, that’s quite enough. Sit down and let’s see what’s wrong, shall we?”

The witch hunter was surprised when, instead of fighting her on it, the youngest Grimm only sagged into a chair, obviously knowing better than to argue. Turning into her body, Clint laid his head against her belly, allowing himself to be soothed by the touch of her hand stroking soft circles just under the curve of his ear. “What hurts, domashniy?” she soothed, crouching on the floor in front of him as she looked up at him affectionately.

The placement was not lost on any of the remaining brothers who came in the kitchen; by placing herself lower than Clint, Marina had effectively given over the illusion of control to Clint while still demanding the same respect she’d always received from him. Clint pouted, his hand coming up to rub hard on his earlobe as he shook his head slowly. The motion was deliberate – careful and calculated – as though any movement caused him excruciating pain. “My ear hurts. And my head feels full.”

Marina’s fingers scratched lightly through his hair as she tilted his head down gently to turn off and disengage his hearing aids. Removing them tenderly from his ears, she laid them on the table beside them and then lifted her hands, signing in a slow, easy manner, Sit here for a second, dorogoy; I
The sniper nodded miserably, folding his arms on the armrest and laying his head down on top of them. Sometime in the last few minutes, Will had gone to fetch their ancient glass thermometer and a hot water bottle wrapped in a terry cloth. Marina smiled at him as she reached to take the items, before returning her attention to Clint. Offering the hot water bottle with the kind of demeanor that implied she would not be refused, she smiled as he lifted his head complacently and allowed her to position his head so that his sore ear was resting atop the hot water bottle. Shaking out the thermometer, she guided it under his tongue before turning to the rest of her charges. “Will, I need you to call Medical; see if they have an on-site ENT specialist. If not, we need to find one. Kenny, could you go upstairs and turn down the bed? I want to get Clint lying down as soon as possible to try and alleviate some of the pain. Jason, head to the BX and pick up some painkillers for me; the strongest they have. Brian... once Kenny’s gotten the room take care of I’m going to need you to help me get him up the stairs to bed.” Each boy nodded as they were assigned their job, disappearing from the kitchen as soon as she had moved on to the next brother.

Hansel stepped forward, noticing that she had not assigned him a job, “What can I do?”

Marina’s eyes flickered slightly, before she returned her attention back to her charge as the boy whimpered pitifully from where he was still resting against the table. “If you could help Brian get him upstairs, I’d appreciate it. I need to put together some things down here,” she murmured, careful to keep her tone low in deference of Clint’s headache, even though she knew he could not hear her. The man nodded, moving to his son’s side. Crouching, he smiled to see Clint’s eyes peek at him through slitted eyelids. “Pops,” the boy whimpered, the tone too loud and jumbled awkwardly as though Clint was unaware of how the word sounded as he spoke, one strong, pale hand reaching out for his father to take.

Hansel gripped the hand firmly, leaning up to press a tender kiss to the boy’s forehead. Even knowing that Clint could not hear him, the man whispered against overheated skin, “Ruhe, kleiner Falki, hat dein Vater dich jetzt. (Rest, little hawk, your papa has you now.)” Shifting his weight, Hansel slipped his arms around his son – one arm behind his back and the other under his knees – lifting him effortlessly from his chair and moving to the stairwell and the room that Clint and Kenny had claimed within their home. If he had turned, he would have seen the serene smile on Marina’s face as she watched him carry her charge from the room; but he did not, so he did not.

The doctor came and went; hemming and hawing as he peered into the blocked passages of the 20 year old’s ears. He offered the diagnosis of a middle ear infection and ordered Clint to remain in bed and to keep his hearing aids out of his ears until the doctor was able to come back and reassess his condition. Needless to say, it was a long few days, with Marina a constant fixture at Clint’s bedside. Kenny had been kicked from the room he shared with his brother, sleeping in his bedroll at the foot of Jason’s bed and every muscle of his body eloquent with concern for his baby brother and best friend. The youngest Grimm was in horrible, constant pain that despite the painkillers and the eardrops Marina instilled in his ears faithfully as prescribed never seemed to lessen at all. He did not sleep well, and as a result Marina did not sleep at all.

Will came to retrieve her several times during those days, attempting to cajole her from his brother’s bedside, offering her all manners of promises if only she would seek her own bed for just a moment’s rest. Each time, Marina sent her lover away, refusing to relinquish her spot at Clint’s side. Hansel, banished from the room for the simple reason that he had never had a sinus infection and no one was sure how it would affect his 18th Century physiology, watched from just beyond the doorway, plotting and making his own plans.
Finally, Hansel could be patient no more. The former Russian assassin was pale, nearly translucent, dark circles under her eyes from lack of sleep. Clint was sleeping peacefully for the first time in days and Hansel knew it was time to act before Marina could gather enough of her reserves to fend off the attack. Calling his eldest son to assist him, Hansel gathered his arguments and went to do battle with the young woman.

Will was a silent shadow as he followed his father into the sickroom, a deep frown on his lips as he watched his girlfriend doze fitfully in a chair beside the bed. Crouching beside the bed, Hansel shook her shoulder lightly. He said nothing, trying not to wake Clint; even still, Marina snapped to attention quickly, a wicked looking blade in her hand before she was even fully coherent. Will caught the hand instantaneously, confiscating the blade and admonishing her fondly, “What have we said about taking knives to bed?”

Marina smiled sheepishly for a brief moment, before stretching with a wide yawn. “Is everything all right?” she asked sleepily, before horror set into her face and she whirled to check on her patient. It was a long second, before she recognized the slow, rhythmic up-and-down of Clint’s chest as he breathed easily and slept calmly. Marina’s whole body sagged in worried relief as she slouched backward in her chair. “Slava Bogu,” she whimpered, every line of her body eloquent with her exhaustion.

Refusing to give her a choice, Hansel stood and took the girl by the shoulders. Lifting her inexorably from her seat, he pushed her firmly into Will’s arms, causing his son to wrap his arms around her and hold her to him firmly. “I vill tend him from here; hyu must rest. Hyu are running hyurself down: if hyu become ill as well, hyu vill be of no good to him at all.”

“But . . .” she protested, eyes wide as she stared at him. “What if he needs me?”

“I vill be here with him; hyu have my word, Marina.”

Both Marina and Will stared, one in surprise and one in curiosity, at the hunter’s usage of Marina’s full name. Hansel only smiled, an enigmatic tilt to his lips that somehow managed to ease Marina’s fears. “Are you sure? I can stay; I’m all right, really . . .” she insisted, attempting to wrestle free from her lover and move back to her self-assigned position at Clint’s bedside.

Hansel’s hands were firm but paternal on her cheeks as he captured her face between them. “Be still, Tochter,” he insisted, watching as Marina’s face froze and her eyes welled up at the man calling her, “Daughter.” Smiling at her, he insisted, “I shall not leave his side. Hyu must sleep; I vill tell you the instant anything changes.”

“You promise?” she begged, nearly ready to give up the fight and seek her bed.

“I promise. Rest; he vill need hyu when he wakes.”

Marina finally sagged back into her lover’s arms, letting him turn her toward the door and guide her away. They were only just out the door when Marina paused, turning back to peer into the room once more. She watched as Hansel seated himself on the edge of Clint’s bed, fingers tender and soothing as he wiped a soft cloth over the furrowed and sweat-beaded forehead. Clint shifted into the cool touch, eyes flicking open in confusion. One finger came to rest against his lips, whispering soundlessly, “Hyu are safe, mein Falki. Ruhe jetzt. (You are safe, my little hawk. Rest now.)”

Will’s chin came to rest on her shoulder and his arms about her waist as she watched the two – newly-minted father with his adored and adoring son – before the eldest Grimm whispered tenderly into her ear, “Clint’s all right, samaya malen’kaya. Dad will take good care of him; let me take care of you.”
It was a long second, before Marina nodded her agreement. “All right.” Looking up at Will, she gave him a soft, bemused smile, “I think I could use a nap. Care to join me?”

Will chuckled, leaning down to capture her lips with his own, fingers coming up to smooth back the ratted, unwashed strands of her hair. Shifting back once more, he swept her up into his arms and carried her toward their room, teasing, “The Lady’s wish, is my command.”

Chapter End Notes

Translations:

Hurensöhne - German - sons of bitches
dorogoy - Russian - darling (Marina's nickname for Clint)
domashniy - Russian - pet (an interchangeable nickname Marina uses for Clint and Kenny)
Slava Bogu - Russian - Thank God
Tochter - German - daughter
samaya malen'kaya - my little one (Will's nickname for Marina)
Chapter 30: Family and Forgiveness

When Marina woke up, she knew instantly that she had slept for a long time. Will’s side of their bed was empty and cold, and the sun was getting ready to set in their window. Seeing as it had been after dark when Hansel and Will had finally coaxed her from Clint’s bedside, it was a pretty good guess that she had slept through the night and the following day. Sitting up, she stretched widely, feeling her bones and muscles creak and strain after the hours of inactivity.

Throwing back the covers, Marina moved into the bathroom to change, putting on a clean set of
jeans and one of Will’s t-shirts. Throwing a brush through her hair to tame the bedhead, she brushed her teeth and left the bedroom. At the bottom of the stairs, she paused, arms coming up to fold over her chest as she smiled at the view before her. Someone had dragged one of the armchairs from the living room into the dining room attached to the kitchen and Clint was curled up there, bundled up in blankets and pajamas, looking much better than he had the night before. Kenny was sitting on the floor at his feet, the two best friends laughing happily as they watched the shenanigans in the kitchen.

Hansel and Will were making dinner, with Brian and Jason sitting on the counters across from the stove as they watched. Narrowing her eyes to get a better look at what they were making, she giggled slightly at the sight of Will doing any cooking at all; he was better than Jason definitely, but due to his duties on base, he rarely spent any time in the kitchen. It was cute. At the sound, everyone turned to look. “First of all, Brian Joshua and Jason Leonard, since when has it been okay to sit on my counters? Get your butts off of them before I make you scour them with bleach and toothbrushes,” she scolded fiercely, all the while knowing she’d been caught out.

Both boys leaped to the floor, each knowing better than to think her threat was idle. Clint, seeing his brothers scramble off the counters but unable to hear her come in as he was still forbidden from using his hearing aids, twisted in his chair. “Marishka!” he cheered just a touch too loudly, a wide grin on his still slightly-flushed face.

Coming to his side, she cupped his cheeks in her palms and pressed a fond kiss to his forehead, using the gesture to gauge his temperature. There was an inaudible puff of air in relief at the noticeably cooler feel to his skin. Clint smirked at her as she drew away, knowing exactly what she had done.

Smiling at him, she ruffled his hair before signing, **Good evening dorogoy. Are you feeling better tonight?**

He nodded, hands flying as he replied, **Much better, Marishka. Did you sleep okay?**

*I slept very well domashniy. I’m just glad that you’re feeling better.* Turning away from her youngest, she smiled affectionately at her lover, teasing, “I think I should be a little worried. Hasn’t anyone ever heard the expression ‘too many cooks spoiled the pot’?”

Will’s mercurial eyes were visibly relieved at the sight of her, his smile calm and serene, as she came to stand beside him. He watched as she came to his side, tilting up her chin with a wicked smile. He returned the grin, bending slightly to press a warm kiss to her lips, his hands still holding the spatula and pan so that it didn’t shift and burn either of them. As usual, Clint gagged behind them, causing the couple to smile in amusement as they pulled away from each other. Peering into the pan, she asked, “So what are we having?”

Hansel smiled at her, “Knoedel with Jägerschnitzel.”

“Jägerschnitzel?” she asked in surprise, “Where on base were you able to find veal!”?

To her surprise, the witch hunter blushed lightly, his ears turning a definite shade of pink. “Fraulein Hill helped me find a store off post for it,” he replied, giving her almost a defiant look as though he was daring her to say anything about it.

Unable to resist the opportunity to tease him and ruffle his feathers a bit, she drawled, “Ah, I see . . . Fraulein Hill. She’s pretty . . . helpful that way, I guess.”

If anything, Hansel’s ears only reddened, though his eyes narrowed as he glared at her. “Hyu are not as cute as hyu think you are, *Tochter.*”

“Nah . . . I’m cuter,” she joked, with a fiendish grin.
Out of the corner of her eyes, she watched as Hansel cocked an eyebrow at his eldest son and her lover nod once in silent reply. Though she would kill to know what private message the two men had just passed between them, the gesture nevertheless filled Marina with pride in her sweetheart and his father. It was good to see father and son finally begining to build their relationship with each other.

Though Brian had been the more reticent of the two upon their first meeting, Marina had known that it had been Will Hansel was the most afraid of being unable to connect with. Marina knew why that was, of course; Will was so reserved, unwilling to trust anyone easily. Knowing what she knew – though admittedly, not even she knew everything – it was easy to guess why that was and work around it. However, to anyone that didn’t know the truth of Will’s childhood, it did make getting to know him a lot harder in the long run.

Of course, there had been the difficult relationship between herself and Hansel to take into account as well. Though to this day, she was unsure of what she had done to deserve such devotion, she knew that Will was incredibly loyal to her. If she didn’t love him so damned much and wasn’t equally as loyal, she probably would have worried about what kind of psychological damage his creators had done to cause it. As it was, she was willing to let Will set the pace of his recovery, knowing that he would tell her if anything became too hard for him to handle on his own.

Slinging an arm low around her boyfriend’s waist, she dropped her head back and asked in a teasing voice, “I think we should invite Maria to dinner. What do you think?”

Hansel’s cheeks practically flamed, causing Marina to cackle wickedly as Will chuckled. “Ya dumayu, chto vy znakomstv raz, (I think you’re matchmaking again,)” he teased in Russian, trying to spare his father a little of his girlfriend’s plans.

“Nu, konechno, ya. Ona khorosta dlya nego, (Well of course I am. She’s good for him,)” she scoffed with a blatant roll of her eyes.

“Postaraytes’ ne obzhech’ya na sobstvennykh ognya , da? (Try not to get burned by your own fire, huh?)” Will chuckled, bending to kiss her sweetly before releasing her to skip toward the phone.

“She is not going to actually call the Fraulein, is she?” Hansel asked, eyes widening slightly as he watched her lift the receiver and dial rapidly.

“I believe she is,” the eldest of his sons laughed, a small smile tilting the left corner of his lips as he looked between his lover and his father.

Laughter rang through the kitchen from each of the brothers as a string of German curse words flew from Hansel Kuhn’s lips in reply. “She is a woman with a mind of her own, isn’t she, Will?”

Will’s smile was affectionate as he looked over to where she was on the phone, talking and laughing animatedly with her friend. “Dad . . . you have no idea.”

For a long moment, the two men were content to simply enjoy the closeness of their family. Brian and Jason had turned their attentions onto Kenny and were teasing him about something or another – quite possibly the pretty little brunette who had been following the young man around on base; the girl was about Kenny’s age and had obviously developed an attachment to him – causing the second youngest brother to blush bright red and threaten them with all manner of bodily harm if they didn’t shut up. Clint had finally succumbed to the excitement of the last few hours, curled up and asleep in the armchair, a small smile on his face as he dozed. Marina’s cheerful, teasing voice was a welcome background hum to the cacophony. “Welcome to the family, Dad,” Will said, as he locked eyes with him, a wry grin on his lips.
Hansel smiled at him, clapping a hand to his shoulder. “Thank you, Will.” Glancing over at Marina, he frowned slightly, “I would like to speak to her before dinner, just the two of us. About how long do you think I have?”

Looking down at the food laid out before him, Will did some quick calculations in his head before answering. “If you want to take her for a walk around the block, it should be ready about the time you get back. And, seeing as it looks like Marina is inviting Agent Hill to dinner, we’ll have to wait for her to get here. I’d say we have about another half an hour.”

Hansel nodded once in agreement, squeezing the younger man’s shoulder fondly once before moving toward where Marina was saying her goodbyes and hanging up the phone. Lying a hand on her shoulder, he smiled at the resigned look on her face. “We have some things to say to each other, you and I, yes?”

Glancing over her shoulder to check on her boys, she felt her heart glow at the warm smile and small nod Will sent her way. A small smile on her lips, she turned back to him with a nod. “Yes . . . I believe we do.”

“Would you care to join me for a walk? Will has assured me that we have the time.”

Smiling, she nodded once. “I’d like that. Let me get my coat.”

Before long, the two were walking along the sidewalk together. Both were quiet, each trying to figure out what they wanted to say to the other. Marina’s head was bowed, watching their feet as they walked, though she watched him out of the corner of her eyes. Hansel’s hands were in the pockets of his jeans as they walked, robin’s egg eyes scanning the surrounding area for any sign of a threat.

Smiling at the gesture, Marina sighed and spoke first, “I believe I owe you an apology. I never should have threatened you that day you first met your sons; it was unkind and I am sorry for it.”

Hansel was visibly startled by the statement, his head whipping around to face her. “No, Tochter, I believe it is I who owe you the apology. The first time we met; do you remember?”

“No, Tochter, I believe it is I who owe you the apology. The first time we met; do you remember?”

“Of course; right after Maria kissed you. I gave you water.”

The witch hunter hummed in agreement, bowing his head as he continued, “My past experiences have taught me not to trust; my sister was the only one I have ever let in close to me, strictly because she is the only one who has been there through everything that has happened. Our father left us in the center of the Black Forest one night when we were very young. I was barely thirteen and Gretel was not quite twelve. He told us he would be back for us . . . But he never returned. By the time Gretel and I realized that and resolved to return home, it was very dark and we quickly became lost. We learned many years later that they had abandoned us to protect us; our mother was burned as a witch that night and they hung our father in front of her pyre for good measure.

“We found ourselves at the entrance to a small home in the forest. It was a wonderful little house, at least to a child, with real gingerbread walls and candy windows. We were so hungry we started to eat little pieces to fill our bellies. A blind old witch lived there; she chained Gretel up and used her to preform chores around the little house. Me she locked in a cage and tried to fatten me up so that she could eat me. We managed to trick her for a year. I was 15 before we finally killed her and managed to escape. After that, Gretel and I spent all those years chasing witches . . . trying to rescue the children they abducted and put them down . . . permanently. It was not a position that led well to trusting women.”
Marina nodded, seeing him glance at her from the corner of his eyes. “Of course, then there was the curse and the first thing I see upon waking is Maria Hill. And there you were, trying to be as unassuming and nonthreatening as possible. The whole ‘being locked in’ situation, requiring an escort to walk around the base, the threat you made the first day I met my sons; I made unkind assumptions about you based on these things, and you were only trying to protect them and their reputations from me.” Turning to face her head on, he gave her a self-deprecating smile, “I’ve never said thank you for your care of them.”

Laying a hand on his sleeve, she smiled kindly, “You never have to thank me for that. Those boys are the greatest loves of my life; I will do anything and kill anyone to protect them.”

“I know.” Glancing at her slightly, he continued, “I have read the file.”

Marina froze for all of a half-step, her face blanking in shock and horror. Then she seemed to recover herself, playing down her reaction as inconsequential. “The file?”

“On the Project Cahill? Director Fury gave them to me; I think he thought that I needed a little education on all that you have done and sacrificed for my family. He and Fraulein Hill seem most invested in making sure we make friends with one another.”

Marina snickered, “I think that’s more to keep your sons happy than anything else. Your sons are highly sought after around here; their reputation has quite literally followed them all over the world. If your sons are happy, S.H.I.E.L.D. is happy.”

Hansel reached out and touched her cheek fondly, a soft smile on his lips as he watched her, “I think you underestimate their regard for you too, Tochter. Both of them are quite fond of you. I can tell.”

The former Russian spy blushed lightly, ducking her head at the praise. “If you say so.”

“I do,” he insisted, squeezing her lightly. “Now . . . about Gretel.”

“The plan for rescuing your sister is set. As soon as Clint gets cleared by the doc, we will be in route to retrieve her.”

The man nodded once in agreement, before speaking again. “While I am relieved that you and Will are men and women of your word, my question for you is not regarding her rescue.”

“Oh?” Marina asked, eyebrows furrowed in confusion at the news.

“What shall we do once we’ve got her? I awoke due only to Fraulein Hill’s kiss; how is it that we shall wake Gretel from this curse next?”

Marina sighed, having been kicking this very problem around in her head. “I don’t know. Maria felt a connection to you the first time she saw you; with any luck, someone will feel such a connection to Gretel and will break the curse on her just as easily.”

“And if that man is a long time in coming?”

Her mouth twisted, knowing that her answer would be the truth . . . though not the one he wanted to hear. “Then I hope you are prepared to be patient. Because I don’t have any other ideas.”
German Translation:

Tochter - Daughter (Hansel's nickname for Marina)
Dinner and A Show

Chapter Notes

Translations at the end, as always.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter 31: Dinner and a Show

When the two arrived back at the house, they entered to find Maria had already arrived. The S.H.I.E.L.D. AD wore a pair of dark blue jeans and a soft knit sweater, the white fabric nearly drowning her trim frame. Marina grinned at her friend, hurrying forward to embrace her. “Maria . . . I wasn’t expecting you to be here for at least another 20 minutes.”

“I was relieved early,” Maria laughed, hugging her friend tightly. “Thank you for inviting me to dinner, Marishka.”

“You are very welcome, Vorobey,” came the delighted giggle. “You remember Herr Kuhn?”
Maria blushed lightly as she turned to smile at the witch hunter, who was still standing frozen in the doorway. “Good evening, Herr Kuhn. I trust I find you well.”

Hansel’s smile was soft as he nodded once, robin’s egg eyes scanning her up and down for a brief moment. “Hyu do, Fraulein. And hyu?”

There was pause as the two watched each other for a long moment. Marina felt her lips curl into a smug smile. Teal eyes locked on robin’s egg blue, as Maria nodded once lightly, “I am well, Herr Kuhn. Danke.”

Glancing between the two, Marina noticed the way the color in both of their cheeks continued to rise. Reading the slightly desperate look in Hansel’s eyes, she stepped forward and looped her arm into Maria’s. “I hope you’re hungry, Vorobey; Will is the one cooking tonight.”

Allowing herself to be led away, Maria glanced quickly once over shoulder, before going where she was led. “I thought you said that Will didn’t cook.”

“He doesn’t usually,” Marina agreed with a hapless shrug, “But when he does . . . it is utterly worth the wait. He’s making Jaggerschnitzel tonight; I haven’t had veal since I was in Berlin for a few days when I was 16 years old or so.”

Will leaned out of the kitchen then; “All right, that’s enough chitchat. Dinner’s on the table; let’s eat.” There was a cheer from the brothers, each scurrying toward the kitchen to find their usual seats. And if Marina manipulated the usual seating chart to place Hansel and Maria next to each other, seated just close enough to brush with every movement, well that was a secret Marina intended to take gleefully to her grave.

Three days later, the Brothers Grimm, Hansel and Marina were in the belly of a C-130 as they flew over the Atlantic towards a little town outside of Berlin. It was a small village, rustic and aged, at least on the surface; the catacombs and labs underground below were an entirely different story altogether. Marina and Will sat close together, going over the map, each arguing with the other in quiet Russian as they tried to hash out a plan that would be safest for all involved, while providing the best possible outcome to the mission.

Hansel sat with Clint and Kenny, the older man watching his youngest sons sit and prepare for the assignment. “So, tell me again. While we’re deployed, hyu are going to call me what?”

“Volk,” Kenny replied, hands flying over the complicated looking weapon he was assembling and disassembling over and over again.

Clint grinned sidelong at his brother, before speaking up, “Volk is Russian for ‘wolf’. I’m Yastreb; Kenny is Sokol; Marina is either Sova or Sych, but only Will can get away with calling her Sych; Will is Orel; Jason is Krechet; and Brian is Skopa.”

Hansel nodded in response to each of the names, commiting them to memory. “Wolf, Hawk, Falcon, Owl, Eagle, Merlin and Osprey; all of these animals are predators, creatures who hunt their prey to ground.”

“That’s because that’s what we do. We track our marks relentlessly, hunting out every little secret part of their lives that they try to hide, hoping to exploit some kind of weakness. And then, once we know every nuance of their lives, we clean up the mess and restore order back to whatever cosmos we have been sent to realign.”

“And none of hyu find any moral morass in such a work?”
“Someone’s gotta do it; and it’s not like we’re killing people just for the giggles of it. These are people who are torturing their people, just because they can; wiping out whole villages, just to watch them burn; who bury their living, to hide their secrets, and hide their dead, to keep their secrets close,” Clint insisted with a shrug, his hands resting behind his head to cushion his skull from the metal bulkhead.

Hansel nodded, glancing over at his oldest son and his partner. “They’re pretty good at this, aren’t they?”

Kenny nodded, “We’ve talked to other teams, where their CO and XO can’t stand each other and don’t trust each other worth a damn.”

Jason snorted from the otherside of the plane, his nose buried in his laptop as he tried to hack the German servers one more time to get them a more up to date map of the interior of the underground bunker and the surrounding areas. “Most members of those teams are buried with honors in Arlington right now. I’ll take Will and Marina over their SOs any day of the week.”

Humming a noncommittal agreement, Hansel continued to watch the couple work together. Will seemed adamant about a point; though Marina’s features were set neutrally, Hansel could tell that she disagreed with him about his summarization of the situation. That belief was confirmed, when Marina shook her head firmly, stabbing her finger at the map and speaking rapidly to try and emphasize her point. “What are they arguing about?”

Brian answered, his eyes closed as he slouched in his harness, looking for all the world as though he was sleeping despite his moving lips. “Marina wants you and her both to take point. Will thinks it would be smarter to send in just her. She used to be a spy; point is kinda her thing.”

“Why does she want me to go in with her? I don’t have the same kind of training she does for infiltration work.”

Clint looked up from where he was fiddling with the tension of his bowstring, replying carefully, “Because Gretel is your sister. And you should be there with Marishka, when she finally manages to track her down in there.”

Touched that Marina had gone to the effort to consider his feelings in the matter, nevertheless Hansel protested, “Even if that means that I potentially slow her down, and possibly get her injured, captured or worse?”

“Marina’s a ninja,” Kenny protested virulently, his face contorted into a fierce glare as though Hansel had offended him personally by doubting Marina’s unique skill set. “No one’s going to even touch her.”

Two hours after touch down, Marina and Hansel crept into the Medical section of the facility. There was a single room occupied on the whole floor, two bored looking guards posted at the door. Straightening his stolen uniform, Hansel gestured for Marina to stay put and out of sight before approaching them. Disgruntled at being left behind, but knowing that he was the better chance of fooling the guards, Marina hunkered down against the wall and watched the scene unfolding through her miniature hacking kit, disguised cleverly by Jason in one of her old make-up compacts.

“Entschuldigen Sie mich? Können Sie mir zeigen auf die Toilette? (Excuse me? Can you point me in the direction of the bathroom?)” the witch hunter asked affably, a wide smile on his face and his whole demeanor giving the impression that he was exactly where he was supposed to be.

Confused by his sudden appearance, the two guards glanced at each other and that’s when Hansel struck. Marina watched in awe as he took both men down quickly, his hands poetry in motion as
they struck with brutal efficiency. Marina joined him seconds later, as he was dragging the bodies out of the way. Snatching up a badge from one of the unconscious men on the floor, Marina moved quickly to the card swipe. Inserting her hack kit into the output in the box, the former Russian spy swiped the card quickly and smirked as the green light blinked on the door, indicating that the door was now unlocked.

Hansel shoved it open, striding into the room and freezing at the sight of his sister. Gretel lay motionless on a hospital bed, not so very dissimilar to the one he had woken in at S.H.I.E.L.D. Her dark hair fanned across her pillows, her long lashes dusting delicately across the skin over her cheeks. Her hands rested at her sides, fingers curled naturally toward her palms. Her face was still and serene, and Hansel felt love blossom brightly from his chest. “Gretel,” he whispered, moving swiftly to the bed and reaching to touch her hair.

Bowing his head, he rested his forehead against hers and simply relished the moment of being with her once again, even considering the fact that she continued slumbering on. Dimly, he was aware of Marina pushing on a button on the tiny comm in her ear and speaking rapidly into the device. “Orel, this is Sova. We’ve found the package; I repeat, we’ve found the package.”

Unprepared for his son’s voice in his head, Hansel jumped though he refused to moved more than that small inch. Will’s voice was brusque and in control as he ordered sternly, “Good work, Sova. We’re on our way to you. ETA: 2 minutes. Prepare the package for transport. Yastreb, prepare the chopper. I want to be wheels up in five.”

“Roger that, Orel,” the two rejoined, before Clint continued on, “Wheels up in five. Meet you on the tarmac. Yastreb, out.”

“Sova, out,” Marina remarked absently, eyes scanning the room for all of the data and information they would need to take with them on Gretel’s overall condition.

Will’s reply was a steady calm in her ear, and Marina remembered to take a deep breath to calm down for just a moment. “Orel, out.”

Turning back to Hansel, Marina touched his shoulder fondly. “Volk . . . we’re going to be wheels up in five. We gotta get busy.” Smiling at the tears in Hansel’s eyes as he lifted his head to look at her. “Come on, Vati . . . let’s get her home.”

Chapter End Notes

German & Russian Translations:

(R) Vorobey - Sparrow (Maria Hill's code name given to her by Marina and, later, the Brothers Grimm)
(R) Volk - Wolf (Hansel's code name)
(R) Sova - Owl (Marina's code name)
(R) Sych - Little Owl (Will's code name for Marina)
(R) Yastreb - Hawk (Clint's code name)
(R) Sokol - Falcon (Kenny's code name)
(R) Krechet - Merlin (Jason's code name)
(R) Orel - Eagle (Will's code name)
(R) Skopa - Osprey (Brian's code name)
(G) Vati - Dad (Marina's name for Hansel)
Chapter Notes

So, I'm not going to worry about a lot of the translations. Most of them are ones that have been used a lot so far. This is the last chapter of exposition. The next chapter gets into Jason's murdered girlfriend, before we get to the events of SWAT. (Yes, I will be going into SWAT. All I ask, is that you trust me.) There is a link at the end of the chapter, for a picture of what is discussed in the chapter! Enjoy! I love your reviews and look forward to reading your thoughts about this chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter 32:

“Well . . . this feels familiar,” Marina joked from where she was stationed once again at the window of the observation room, arms folded over her chest as she watched Hansel sit in the chair at his comatose sister’s bedside and tell her slumbering body about everything that had happened to him since he’d woken up.
Will chuckled from where he was seated at the table behind her, flipping through the reports to be filed with S.H.I.E.L.D. about the rescue mission for the Brothers Grimm. “You know, this is our first official S.H.I.E.L.D. assignment? It felt good to get back out into the field again.”

Marina grinned, twisting to look back over her shoulder. “We were not made to be idle creatures, you and I, moy vozlyublennyy.”

Will’s grin was impressively wicked as his hazel eyes scanned up and down her uniform-clad body. “No, I imagine we weren’t.”

“Eyes on the Prize, Colonel Grimm,” she scolded sternly, even as she shot him a sassy wink. “I rather think we have other things to be concerned about than releasing some of your battlelust.”

The mock affront on Will’s face caused a girlish giggle from Marina as he set his files aside. Rising from his chair, he approached her and backed her firmly against the wall, his hands coming up to skim over the dark navy fabric of her S.H.I.E.L.D. uniform skirt as it clung to her hips. “Slander and calumny, Major Petrovka. I was simply admiring the cut of your new uniform.”

“Liar,” she scoffed, with a roll of her pretty chocolate eyes.

He grinned at her wolfishly, not even bothering to deny her accusation. Warmth blossomed in her chest, even as she glared at him, smacking ineffectually at his shoulder, before turning back to the scene inside the room. “I think we need to consider code names.”

Will frowned, drawing back slightly at the words. “We have code names. We use them on every assignment.”

“I know; but with Fury making you and the other boys ‘Eyes Only,’ I think there needs to be an added layer of separation between the Grimm brothers of the Army’s Brat’ya Mrachnyy and S.H.I.E.L.D.’s tactical team, the Brothers Grimm.”

“And you think code names would help with that?”

“Well, maybe not code names so much as alternate aliases.”

“You mean, like different last names?!” Will asked, eyes flashing wide in surprise at the very idea. “You don’t think we’ve had enough aliases in our lifetimes; we need to add one more?”

Marina glared at him, obviously not impressed by his tone. “I don’t think it would hurt, William.”

Will winced, knowing that he’d once again managed to trigger her temper. It was going to take more than sweet talking her to dig himself out of this hole; he could already see a diamond pendant in her future. “Marina, we’ve just barely managed to make something of ourselves as Grimms. Why would we want to throw all of that away, and take on all new identities again?”

“I never said we’d throw away the Grimm name; it just wouldn’t be a name we’d use at S.H.I.E.L.D.; we’d still use Grimm while under the Army’s purview.”

Grinning at her sheepishly, he stroked tender fingers over the fabric at her lower back. Hanging his head, he looked up at her through his eyelashes with a pair of puppy eyes that she’d spent years trying to resist; and was still no more successful at resisting than she had been when she first tried. “I think we need to talk about that with the boys before we make any kind of decision about the matter, samaya malen’kaya.”

Marina sighed, knowing already that she’d forgive him so long as he gave her that hang dog look
and used that nickname. Though, that didn’t mean that she wouldn’t be looking forward to whatever expensive bauble he was going to try and bribe her with. “I’m not saying we have to make a decision now, Misha; I’m just saying that it would probably not be a bad idea to consider it sometime soon in the future.”

The Colonel nodded, looking up at the sight of movement in his peripheral vision. Hansel was standing from his chair, bending over his sister and pressing an adoring kiss to her forehead. His father whispered something too low to be heard against the pale skin of her temple, before moving away from the bed and toward the door. The couple both turned to face the door, ready to assess Hansel’s mood and take the appropriate steps from there. The hunter moved from the room, glancing back longingly once more before closing the door firmly behind him. “You okay, Dad?” Will asked, moving to lay a supportive hand on the older man’s shoulder.

“I would like very much to go home, mein Adler.”

“Would you like me to stay with her, Vati?” Marina asked, reaching out to touch his shoulder lightly.

Hansel gave her a small smile, his hand lifting to hold her hand against him. “No, Tochter; let us go home. It has been a long day, and I would like to spend what remains of it with what family I have left to me.”

Marina took a single step closer, resting her forehead against him, her eyes level with their intertwined hands on his shoulder. “She’ll wake up, Vati . . . you did.”

Leaning over, Hansel pressed a paternal kiss to the curve of her brow with a heavy sigh. “Yes, I did; I have only to be patience and wait for her to return to me, ja?”

Will smiled at his father, “I know we’re not her, but we’ll be here for as long as you’ll have us, Dad. And when she does wake up, she’ll have a family here waiting for her.”

Hansel’s hand was firm and strong against the curve of his son’s cheek as he cupped the other man’s cheek in an uncharacteristic display of fatherly affection. “Thank hyu, Adler.”

Turning to the door leading from the observation room, Hansel led the way from the room. Glancing back at the comatose woman in the bed through the window just before he exited the room, Will sighed heavily, “God . . . I hope you wake up soon.”

The next day was a lazy day, as it usually was after a major deployment. Marina, Kenny and Clint were sprawled on the living room floor, Marina and Clint losing miserably to Kenny in a rousing game of Taboo®. Hansel was reading through the files on Gretel that they had confiscated from the Germans. Brian was sprawled out on the couch, reading over some paperwork he’d been falling behind on, while Jason sat on the floor with his back to the couch, working intently on something on his laptop – if Marina had to make a guess, she’d probably speculate that he was trying to hack the Pentagon again and best his previous time.

Will had left the house several hours ago to run some mysterious errand and had been gone for about three hours. All the brothers could tell that Marina was starting to get worried, as the frown at the corner of her lips grew deeper and she started to glance at her watch every few seconds to check the time. After the fiftieth time, Kenny reached out to lay a hand over her watchface. “Marishka . . . he’s fine. He probably just got caught in traffic or something.”

Just then, there was the sound of keys in the lock and the door swung open to reveal Will. He was carrying a small black bag in one hand, setting it onto the entryway table as he shed his coat and gloves, and dropped his keys into the bowl there for exactly that reason. Marina’s whole body
slumped into relief as she looked him over for any injury that would explain his lateness and found none. He gave her a small smile, hands busy unwrapping his scarf and hanging it on the coat hook in the foyer. “Sorry I took so long; I had to go offpost for this.”

Pushing herself to her feet, she nodded as he extracted something from the bag and approached her, the item hidden behind his back and an enigmatic smile on his lips. “Turn around, samaya malen’kaya.”

Marina nodded, turning to face away from him. There was a long pause, before his hands came up and over her head, a silver chain stretched between them. Reaching back to move her hair, she looked down at the charm and felt her eyes widen in surprise. The charm looked like a small, silver key, with the head of the key shaped like a heart and two smaller, diamond-encrusted hearts inside. There were two stones, one just below the heart and the other at the bottom of the stem, both the dark red that was consistent with garnets, the birthstone of her birth month, January. “Oh Misha . . . .” she gasped, reaching up to touch it reverentially, “. . . it’s so beautiful. Thank you.”

Will’s hands came to rest on her shoulders, his lips pressing a soft kiss to the bared flesh just visible at the neck of her shirt. “I’m sorry for yesterday, Marishka. You’re right; it’s a good idea. This isn’t the Army, where we can skate under the radar like we always have. This is S.H.I.E.L.D., where each and every agent has been trained in espionage and observation. Having aliases we can use while in the employ of S.H.I.E.L.D. will keep Project Cahill – and our roles in it – a secret for just that much longer.”

The former Russian spy looked up at him, gentle fingers skimming over the charm. Chocolate eyes searched burning hazel, reading the sincere apology there. With a smile, she cupped his cheek in her palm and lifted herself onto her tiptoes, pressing a sweet kiss to his lips. “Ya lyublyu tebya, Misha.”

“Ya lyublyu tebya, samaya malen’kaya.” Rubbing his hands briskly over her upper arms, he looked up to see that the couple had the attention of everyone in the room. “Guys . . . we need to talk.”

“Dreaded last words,” Clint muttered with an eyeroll.

“Clint . . . this is serious, okay? We need new aliases?”

“Another alias!?” Jason blurted, shooting upward into an upright, seated position. “Don’t we have enough of those?”

“These aliases are to keep the Army’s Grimm brothers and their Brat’ya Mrachnyy, separate from S.H.I.E.L.D.’s taskforce The Brothers Grimm. So far, no one has made the correlation; I would really like to make sure it stays that way,” Marina explained, her fingers fiddling with her charm as she watched the boys take in the idea.

Brian shrugged, “I can just go back to being Brian Gamble, instead of Brian Grimm. That’s no big deal for me. All the paperwork is legal. I used it while I was with the LAPD; with any luck, no one’s going to connect it to us.”

“I don’t know if I can pick a name that easily, Marishka,” Kenny spoke up quietly, blue eyes very wide as he stared up at her in concern.

“I know, solnechnyy svet. We’re not asking you too; take some time, think about it, and then we’ll get it onto the S.H.I.E.L.D. paperwork. None of your Brothers Grimm files will have your real names or your pictures anywhere in them. There will be no way for anyone to find out who is what name, unless we tell them.”
“So only the paperwork will have our aliases in them?”

“Pretty much. While we’re working for S.H.I.E.L.D., we’ll use the aliases you’ve chosen. While we’re deployed for the Army, we’ll still use the Grimm name,” Will answered, with a nod. “Look . . . everyone just take a few days to think about it and get back to us, okay? There isn’t any rush; we’ve got time to figure it out. All right?” Each of the brothers nodded, dispersing one by one to do some research and see what kind of names they could come up with.

By the end of the week, the official personnel files for the joint S.H.I.E.L.D. and DOD taskforce first appeared on the desk in Director Fury’s office. There were six files in all, with an additional file for the handler assigned to the taskforce. Each file offered very little actual information about the agents involved, a couple pieces of official paperwork at most, with a good majority of it redacted in black anyway. Every file had the words “Eyes Only” stamped on the front, and each had only one thing in common; listed under handler was the name “Agent Marina Ivanovna Petrovka.” Those six files were labeled as follows: Agent Brandt, William Michael; Agent Gamble, Brian Joshua; Agent Walsh, Jason Leonard; Agent Kitsom, Kenneth James; Agent Barton, Clinton Francis; and Specialist Kuhn, Hansel Frederick.

As Fury put them away that first time, he stared at them for a long second with a sigh. “And so . . . it begins.”

Chapter End Notes


Just copy and paste. Enjoy!!!

German Translation:
Adler - Eagle (Hansel's nickname for Will)
Chapter 33: You Never Know What You Have . . . Until You’ve Lost It All

Time passed slowly as time so often does, and before anyone knew it, the Brothers Grimm had earned the title of the most successful team within the ranks of S.H.I.E.L.D. in addition to the Brat’ya Mrachnyy being the most successful Spec Ops squad in the Army. Clint was sent on a solo sniper assignment for the DOD, with a handler he didn’t know and who didn’t trust him to make the right call like Marina or Will would have. The man in charge was a long time officer, who was of the opinion that his opinion was the only one that mattered. He refused to listen to Clint about the danger the site presented. As a result, Clint not only nearly lost the target but also nearly lost his life. He
came home in more pieces than he left in, but the target was dead and the mission was a technical success.

Clint received a promotion to Major, as compensation for nearly getting killed, and a new callsign – “Hawkeye”. The callsign was given to him by Fury himself; the S.H.I.E.L.D. spymaster had laughed when he’d heard about the young sniper’s incredible accuracy even as he’d been falling from the edge of the building. Fury clapped the younger man on the shoulder, announcing to everyone within hearing range that Clint could be his “Eye in the Sky” anytime. Marina had smiled indulgently as her youngest charge had strutted around the base like a hawk that knew it was the most badass bird in the sky, buoyed by the success of his mission and the unexpected praise. Which – Marina had to concede – Clint really kinda was.

It was three years later before Marina realized that the Brat’ya Mrachnyy had been placed on semi-permanent loan from the DOD to S.H.I.E.L.D. Frankly, it made Marina breath just that little bit easier; the missions and assignments that the Brothers Grimm attended to for S.H.I.E.L.D. caused her enough grey hairs; she didn’t need the Army throwing it’s own chaos into the mix.

Everything was going very well; the Brothers Grimm had managed to remain completely under the radar, the brothers’ aliases working out much better than even Marina had expected. Marina continued to watch Maria and Hansel dance around and flirt with each other; although Marina did count it as a win when they started to move away from family dinners with the brothers and toward semi-romantic dinners on their own. She and Will were still going strong, happier together than either of them had ever dared to dream during their equally turbulent childhoods.

All in all, Marina had very little to complain about. This would, of course, be about the time she realized that something was going on with Jason. She was pretty sure it had something to do with a girl; after all, didn’t everything in the life of a twenty-eight year old single male? To his credit, the middle Grimm was being very careful about keeping the secret close to his vest; no one had even overheard anything about what it was Jason did every weekday afternoon from two o’clock to four when he’d leave the house in civvies instead of his uniform and disappear offpost.

Finally fed up with having to be patient and wait for him to come to her, Marina resolved to follow him. Fortunately, Marina had not be raised a spy for nothing; trailing prey was as close to second-nature to her as anything came. She waited in the living room of their base housing, reading a book and waiting for Jason to come down the stairs from his room at precisely 1:55 in the afternoon. Of course, the young tech specialist did not disappoint. He didn’t even look twice at Marina, completely absorbed in his own thoughts as he yanked on a jacket – Marina was pretty sure it was Will’s, but was loathe to tell him so in case he realized she was onto him – and wrapped a dark green scarf around his neck.

It was then that Marina realized he’d dressed up; he looked very nice, as though he was consciously trying to impress someone. He wore a pair of black loafers, dark jeans and a soft grey cashmere sweater, his hair styled carefully and his cheeks completely stubble free. Checking his pockets quickly for his wallet, keys and phone, Jason disappeared from the house . . . not even realizing he was being watched.

Marina waited just long enough to make it look as though she was leaving the house on a completely unrelated errand, and followed him. Jason led her all the way to a small coffeehouse offpost, never once looking back or even around him to locate a tail – and if Marina wasn’t going to have his ass for that, then she really was getting soft in her old age. A beautiful young blonde, 25 years old or so, was sitting at a table in the corner of the patio, obviously waiting for someone. Catching sight of Jason, her whole face lit up with love and happiness, and Marina knew instantly that she was no longer the only woman in Jason’s life.
Taking a seat at a table out of Jason’s direct line of sight, where she could still watch the two interact, Marina waited patiently for what was obviously a date to come to a close. Finally, the two stood. The blonde hugged Jason, the two exchanging a brief, but passionate, kiss with one another, before she strode from the coffeehouse. Still unaware of Marina’s presence in the café, Jason retook his seat and watched her fondly as she turned to wave at him, before climbing into a waiting taxi and disappearing from view. Part of Marina was devastated; she had always thought that when this finally happened (and she had known it would; they were fully grown young men. Eventually they would want companionship that wasn’t their brothers and would seek it out in the world around them), that her boys would tell her. Instead, Jason was sneaking around behind all of their backs.

Standing, she made her way to the table and dropped down lightly in the chair the young woman had just vacated. Jason’s eyes flashed wide, swearing softly, “Der’mo.”

Marina’s lips curved lightly as she acknowledged that statement with a smirk. “She’s very pretty. What’s her name?”

“Sarah,” Jason replied, glancing in the direction she had disappeared to. “Sarah Fitzgerald.”


“I haven’t told her anything. She thinks my name is Jason Walsh.” Biting down viciously on his lip, he pouted into his coffee. “Are you going to warn me that this is a stupid idea?” he asked bitterly, fiddling unhappily with the stir straw in his coffee.

“You’re a very smart young man, sladkiy. Might I suggest that I don’t have to be the one to tell you that? You know the risks and the dangers; if you think you can manage that, all the more power to you. I have only ever wanted you to be happy, you know that,” Marina scolded fondly, leaning back in her chair and watching him silently. Folding her hands in her lap, she asked, “My only concerns would be this; what are you going to do? You know you can’t tell her anything about S.H.I.E.L.D. What does she even think you do for a living?”

Jason blushed, ducking his head shamefaced. “I told her I’m an athlete.”

Marina chuckled, a definite snicker in her tone as she conceded with morbid amusement, “Well... you are very good with a bat.” Cocking her head at him, she considered him silently for a long time. “Is this what you want, sladkiy?”

The young man’s nod was short and fervent, longing written on every crease of his face. With a heavy sigh, Marina insisted, “You’re going to need to be the one to tell Will and the boys that you’re quitting. I’m not going to do that for you.”

Jason’s head shot up, surprise on his face as he stared. “You knew?”

“I am a spy, Jay. I make my living reading people’s facial expressions and body language to figure out all the little secrets that they don’t want me to know. It was pretty easy to guess.”

“Do you think I’m being stupid?”

“I think that you’re in love; and love will make even the smartest of men stupid. Just remember; she doesn’t know what you’ve done, she can’t know about the Brothers Cahill, and she should probably not ever meet your brothers or your father. Are you prepared for that kind of isolation from them?”

“I want to be with her, Marishka. I’ll accept whatever consequences I have to to make that happen.”
There was a sharp inward breath, causing Jason to wince as he tried to backpedal, “I didn’t mean it that way, Marishka. Honest.”

“I know.” Standing, she bent and pressed an adoring kiss to the center of his forehead. “I love you, sladkiy and I want only for you to be happy. If this will make you happy, you have my undying love and devotion as well as my blessing.”

Jason stood and wrapped his arms around her tightly, burying his face in her neck, “Thank you, Marishka.”

“You’re welcome, sladkiy. Come on; best to get it over and done with.”

Needless to say, the announcement that Jason was going to be leaving S.H.I.E.L.D. was not well met. Neither Will nor Marina said a single word following his announcement, though the clamor from the rest more than made up for their silence. Clint was beyond furious that he’d been right and Jason could just leave them as though they meant nothing; Kenny was more hurt than anything else; and Brian was mostly concerned about what Jason thought was going to happen if he just quit S.H.I.E.L.D.

When the fight that ensued was all said and done, Jason had packed his gear and stormed out of the house; it would not have been a stretch to say that the youngest brother and the middle brother had parted on very bad terms. Marina had simply been relieved to know that while Jason had asked to be removed from active duty with the Army and placed into the Army Reserves, he had all but retired from life as an agent for S.H.I.E.L.D. It would not make Sarah safer – hell it wouldn’t even make Jason safer – but it would definitely make things a little easier.

The relationship between the two had begun as a whirlwind. And, as most whirlwind relationships often do, it began quickly and, ten months later, it ended bloody. Jason had been drafted to play first base by the New York Yankees – he and his brothers had always played when they had downtime and Marina had not been joking when she’d said that he was very good with a bat – which gave him what he wanted in that he didn’t have to lie to Sarah about what he did and why. However, it also put him in a position that everyone knew and recognized his face; Kenny had every single one of his brother’s baseball cards, each carefully preserved and tucked away in a special binder devoted to their keeping. And it was just that sort of easy access that Don Diego Delgado had been waiting for.

Delgado had been the last mark Agent J. Walsh had ever undertaken solo before his retirement from S.H.I.E.L.D. Jason had used his technical skills to lay the man’s entire smuggling and sex trafficking empire to waste. Delgado had been indicted by International Court of Justice on numerous counts of child endangerment, trafficking in women for sexual exploitation, sexual slavery, the intent to solicit prostitution and a myriad of other crimes against humanity. He’d had to flee when the news had come that he was broke and a fugitive; he had vowed bitter revenge on the agent that had destroyed him ever since.

That revenge came in the form of the kidnap and torture of one Sarah Michelle Fitzgerald. The Brothers Grimm had rushed to their brother’s aid at the news that she was being held by Delgado, and even Clint had never said a single word to imply that he had known something like this would happen. When the brothers had finally found her, Sarah was holding on, but only just barely. She’d been brutalized horribly by the men in Delgado’s employ; she was bruised, bloody and growing weaker by the second. But it was the devastated look on her face as she looked up at Jason while he sliced the ropes from her wrists that had destroyed the middle Grimm completely; her breathless, broken voice demanding furiously, “Who the hell are you? And what the hell have you done with my boyfriend?”

Those words haunted the technical specialist all through the Sarah’s initial examination at the
emergency room and long after the doctor had gone in to speak to the increasingly fragile young woman. It wasn’t long before the news drifted quietly to the boyfriend waiting in the ER waiting room with his brothers, his father and his almost-sister; Sarah was going to die. She had sustained massive trauma to her body and organs; as a result, her body was slowly shutting down. Unfortunately, there was nothing the doctors could do; the length of her captivity had deprived her of the critical medical intervention that would have saved her life. If the Brothers Grimm had been just a little faster, had arrived only an hour earlier . . . as it was, there was nothing to do but wait and watch.

Jason sat at her bedside for a week, insistent on accepting the penance that came from watching Sarah literally fade before his eyes. Never in his life, had he been more grateful for the love and support of his brothers. Each of them knew that he wanted to be alone with her, to relish in what little time he had left; but Jason knew they were there, keeping watch over the both of them from just outside his peripheral vision.

On the very last night before she died, Sarah slipped quietly into a coma, one that everyone knew she would not wake from. Jason had begged helplessly for her forgiveness, devastated that she would pay the price for the lie he had told about his past. But no matter how wretchedly he pleaded with her, Sarah withheld absolution from him; she would take her disappointment, fury and distrust of him to her grave. Devastated that all he could do now was wait for The Angel of Death to come for her, he found himself remembering her question from the room where he and his brothers had found her. Knowing that he owed her, and unsure if she could even hear him, Jason nevertheless took her hand in his, rested his chin against her knuckles and began to tell her everything he could remember about Jason Leonard Cahill.

The next morning, Sarah Fitzgerald was gone. And what was left of Jason Grimm’s heart blackened and charred in the fires of the Unforgiven, his very soul turned to ash. And from those ashes, Jason L. Walsh was born.

Chapter End Notes

Russian Translations:

Brat'ya Mrachnyy - Brothers Grimm
Der'mo - Shit
Hansel Kuhn stood at the doorway to his middle son’s bedroom. Ever since his girlfriend’s death, the boy had simply shut down. Understandably worried, Marina and Will had made the decision not to allow Jason to go back to the tiny, hole-in-the-wall apartment he had shared with Sarah Fitzgerald alone. Jason had offered no argument, no response, barely any reaction at all as Marina and Will had bundled him into their car and driven him back to the house they still lived in on base. Jason had said nothing at the sight of the familiar house, simply walked inside, up the stairs and into his old room. He’d climbed into the bed fully clothed, pulling the blue down comforter over his head and had started to quietly cry. Hansel had followed him to his room and taken up residence against the wall; it was only just recently that the broken hearted sobs had quieted and Jason had fallen into restless
sleep.

Downstairs, Hansel knew that Marina and Will were putting together the arrangements for Sarah’s funeral. The girl had been an orphan and – except for Jason – completely alone in the world, having never developed a particularly close relationship with any of her former foster families. She had had a life insurance policy, which would be used to pay for the memorial service, but the presiding couple of the family had agreed to pay for the remaining costs out of their own pockets. Sarah was to be interred in the little burial plot Marina owned and maintained outside of the city, considering her importance to Jason. Both agreed that Jason would have final say, but neither was quite sure when exactly Jason would be ready for that conversation.

It seemed the whole family was waiting for Jason to pull himself out of his daze and decide what path to take next. Hansel, however, was simmering angrily, a red haze lingering on the edges of his gaze as he considered the last week. Yes, Jason had made a mistake in that he hadn’t been honest with Sarah about who he was, what he’d done, where he’d come from; but he’d loved her. He’d given up everything he’d ever known to give her the kind of life that she and Jason had both only ever dreamed of. The witch hunter understood that pain and hurt could blind you to a lot of things about a person, same as being in love could. However, considering the girl had claimed to be in love with his son, Hansel was having a hard time believing it.

Maybe it was because he was a distrusting bastard by nature; maybe it was because, except for a few ill-fated and ill-advised dalliances, he had never been in love before Maria. Maybe it was because he was simply a pessimist at his core. Either way, Hansel was sure that the girl could not truly have loved his middle son. Not when she had seen how deeply he was hurting over what had happened to her, and she had still kept her forgiveness from him. Hansel was firmly of the opinion that one should never speak ill of the dead; however in the case of Sarah Fitzgerald, Hansel was willing to make an exception.

Regardless of her anger at Jason’s secrets, her distrust in Jason’s honesty, her desperation at the coming end of her life, and the loss of knowing she would not do all that she had planned, she should have forgiven him. Jason had done what he’d done to protect the young woman from Jason’s bloodied past. The regrettable thing about it was that it hadn’t worked. If Sarah Fitzgerald had ever truly loved Jason Walsh, she would have forgiven him. And because she had not, Hansel knew that she did not.

Getting Jason to understand and believe that for himself, would be a much more difficult undertaking.

The witch hunter knew that Jason believed he deserved to carry the sole responsibility for Sarah’s death for the rest of his life . . . his penance for the information he’d hidden and the lies he’d told to keep the secrets he’d been forced to bury. Mostly, he felt that he deserved to suffer her loss, because he had not been able to protect her from Delgado, when Delgado had only come after Sarah because Sarah was important to him. But Hansel knew better; Jason had made mistakes, but he was only human. No one deserved to live for the rest of their lives weighed down by the knowledge that you had been weighed by someone you loved . . . and found wanting by that same person.

It was soft movement on the carpet behind him that drew Hansel attention away from the Jason shaped lump under the covers. There were two different pairs of feet, both light and nearly silent as they approached. A small smile curved his lips, even as the owners of those steps came finally into view. Marina and Maria; the two women were rumored around S.H.I.E.L.D. to be “Fury’s Angels” though it seemed to be a phrase no one said aloud anywhere either of the women could hear. (The last man to say so, had been dispatched to someplace ending in -STAN and was no doubt currently scrubbing latrines with a tiny toothbrush.)
Marina moved forward, leaning one shoulder against the opposite side of the frame. “How is he?” she asked, her voice low in deference to Jason’s agitated slumber and her face eloquent with her love and concern for the young man.

“He sleeps. I do not know what to do, Tochter. Except for Gretel, I have never lost anyone like this. And to be fair, I have not truly lost Gretel. I do not know how to comfort mein eigener Sohn,” he murmured in despair, glancing down at Maria as she moved to his side. There was a scant inch between their bodies, but he could feel the heat of her warming him from the inside out with her very presence.

The former Russian spy nodded once, arms coming up to cross over her chest. “Jason is resilient, and strong. He’ll be all right, in the end.”

“But how long is it . . . until the end?” Maria asked of her best friend, dropping her temple to rest nonchalantly on the curve of Hansel’s left shoulder.

Marina’s face was heavy with grief as she gazed into the room, “I don’t know, Vorobey. I just don’t know. This is not something anyone would rebound from easily.”

“Do you think he will return to S.H.I.E.L.D., now that she is gone? His family and everything he’s ever known is here. Surely he’ll want some kind of familiarity, people who love him and who will listen to him close at hand,” Maria asked, teal eyes flicking restless between Hansel and Marina.

Shaking her head, the spy sighed heavily. “Actually, I would not be surprised if Jason walks away from S.H.I.E.L.D. and seeks some other way to make restitution.”

“Restitution? To whom on this earth does he need to make restitution to?” Hansel demanded in a low, furious tone.

“No one; even still, the only one that Jason would have accepted absolution from is dead.” Looking into the room, Marina dropped her head onto the frame and felt pain fill her heart at the picture presented there, “And I know my boy; he’s desperately wishing he was too.”

The day of the funeral dawned dark and grey, a fitting scene for the sorrowful mood of the day. Jason had insisted that, while he would not be returning to the apartment he had shared with Sarah, he would not be staying on base either. Marina and Will had viciously put down all protests from the remaining brothers on the matter, simply accepting his edict and putting together the plans that would allow Jason to remain independent of them. The couple would be taking him to his new home after the funeral was over; his things had been packed and transferred over already, with Sarah’s things placed in storage until Jason could decide what to do with them.

It was a crowded plot as the five Grimms, Hansel, Maria, Marina, a few of Sarah’s work friends and the priest who had presided over Sarah’s church since she was a little girl crowded around the newest grave. The whole of it passed in a blur for the technical specialist, his eyes staring blankly at the coffin resting over the empty grave. It was only as the coffin began to lower into the ground that Jason seemed to become aware of his surroundings. Turning his head to face his oldest brother and Marina, the couple situated at his left, Jason spoke, “I can’t go back to S.H.I.E.L.D.; there’s too many memories of her death connected with it now. But I want to use what I’ve been taught to make this world a better place.” Taking a deep breath, he voiced for the first time the thought he’d been kicking around since Sarah’s death. “I want to become a detective for the NYPD.”

Will smiled, reaching inside his duster and drawing out a manila file folder. “If that’s what you want, you’re going to need this.”
Jason frowned, reaching to take the file. Vaguely, he was aware that he and his family were the only attendees who remained at the little plot. “What is this?”

“It’s a letter of recommendation, by no less than three of our SOs over the years, urging the New York Police Academy to accept your application.” Brushing back a stand of his little brother’s dark blond hair with a small smile, Will continued, “You report to the Academy first thing Monday.”

“But . . . how did you . . .?”

Will smiled fondly, tucking one arm around Marina’s waist and the one hand in the pocket of his jacket. “I called in a few favors. They were able to pull a few strings on their ends and get you a place at the Academy. Keep in mind; if you want to become a detective, Jason you’re gonna have to work hard for it. All detectives do their time as a beat cop, not even I can change that. After all, even Brian was a beat cop before he was a SWAT officer.”

Marina moved forward, her arms coming around Jason tightly. “I know you want to distance yourself from S.H.I.E.L.D., sladkiy, and I can understand that. However, we are your family and I refuse to allow you to disappear into the night like some kind of wraith. All I ask is that you stay in touch with us; pick up a phone and call us every so often. And maybe, we all get together off base every Sunday night for a family dinner. Deal?”

Jason nodded, his throat working hard as he struggled to get his emotions back under control. “Deal.” Looking between the two, he fought to give them both a small smile. “Thank you both . . . so much.”

“We’re your family, Jay. We only want you to be happy,” Will reminded him fondly, before gesturing toward the gates to the little plot. “Come on; it’s late and I’m sure you want to see your new place.”

The middle Grimm nodded once, watching as the youngest Grimms headed toward a nondescript black Chevy and drove away, while Hansel, Marina and Will led Jason back to their Army Jeep. The drive was silent, and before long Will stopped the Jeep in front of a ramshackle building. Parking the car, the four climbed out and approached a small glass door. The windows of the place were boarded up and it was obvious that no one had lived there, or even maintained it, for quite some time. Reaching up, Will and Hansel each took a side of one of the boards and yanked, dropping it off to the side.

There, underneath where the planks had been, were two words; Stage Restaurant. “It’s an old diner; there’s an apartment in the back. It doesn’t have a kitchen, so you’ll have to use the diner for that. It’s pretty rundown, but it’s the kind of project you have always enjoyed getting your hands dirty with. We bought the diner outright, but he wouldn’t sell the apartment; however, the place is small and the rent is super cheap.”

Feeling a little off center, and realizing again for the one millionth time how much his brothers and Marina loved him, Jason wrapped his arms around his older brother, buried his face in his neck and whispered against the skin there, “Thank you, Will.”

Placing one hand on the back of his neck and squeezing fondly, Will’s voice was an affectionate hum as he replied, “You’re welcome, Jason. Just . . . do us one favor.”

“What’s that?”

Marina’s voice answered in her boyfriend’s stead. “Be happy. At the very least, try.”
There was a long pause as the couple watched Jason consider this last request. Finally, with a slow nod, Jason spoke, “I’ll try.”

Chapter End Notes

German Translation:

mein eigener Sohn - my own son
Chapter 35:

After awhile, Jason’s absence from the family fold grew easier to accept. The Sunday night dinners became a family tradition, to which everyone in the family – and occasionally Maria – was expected
to attend. There were a few instances where one or another of the brothers was unable to make it due to an assignment that took them out of town; however, for the most part, everyone was able to be there.

One day, some two and a half years after Jason laid Sarah to rest in her little cemetery plot, Marina sat in her office at S.H.I.E.L.D. and took stock of the last years. Unsurprisingly, Jason had flourished in the Police Academy and had graduated at the top of his class. There had been more than a few murmurs as to where he had learned his proficiency with a gun. Someone had spread a rumor that he was a veteran of the United States Army, with potential ties to Special Forces, and people had finally just stopped asking him. Occasionally, the Army did recall him back for some deployment or another with his brothers but once they were over he rarely lingered, preferring the new purpose he’d found with the NYPD. Currently, he was a beat cop for the Second Precinct. He always brought such interesting stories of the things that happened in that precinct to their family dinners that Marina knew letting him go his own way had been the right thing to do for him.

As for the brothers still associated with S.H.I.E.L.D. and their father, there lives continued much in the same vein they always had. Hansel had been placed in charge of a weapons class, in which he trained incoming agents on what commonplace items could be used as a practical weapon, as well as how to construct a serviceable firearm from things just lying around their immediate surroundings; he would never admit it, but his favorite classes were the days that Maria would sneak in to watch him teach. He made it a point to visit Gretel’s hospital room at least four times a week, though there continued to be no change in his sister’s condition; whoever it was that was supposed to wake Gretel from her sleep . . . S.H.I.E.L.D. hadn’t found him yet. As for Maria herself, she was still Marina’s best friend, while continuing to flirt subconsciously with Hansel and run the day to day details of S.H.I.E.L.D. as Fury’s AD.

Somehow, Will’s analytical skills had been leaked and were now in high demand among the various alphabet agencies; Fury had found himself loaning the Colonel out to many of them over the last few years on assorted, short-term assignments. Clint had fallen headlong and with intense enthusiasm into the role of “Hawkeye,” the young man continuously dispatched all over the world on various surveillance and security assignments. There were always the prerequisite assassinations of rival spies, drug cartel leaders, mob kingpins and other big bads in the queue for S.H.I.E.L.D.’s best sniper, of course, but for the most part Clint’s ops tended towards surveillance and security. Brian had blown through a grand total of 25 partners, his sly sarcasm and brutal intensity usually chasing them off before they even took the opportunity to get to know who he was under all the snark and craziness that Brian carried with him everywhere.

Of course, as it always happened, it was only when people thought everything was going well that the shit started to hit the fan. It was August of 2003 when Fury called Marina and Brian into his office for a mission debrief. The two arrived, to see Fury swearing a blue streak at whatever poor child had drawn the short straw and was acting as his PA that week. Catching sight of the two, he glared at the young woman and roared, “Out! And find me Agent Coulson!”

The poor girl was nearly in tears as she nodded frantically, rounded on her heel and dashed for the door as though there were hellhounds on her tail. Marina sighed lightly, cocking an eyebrow at her boss. “If you didn’t scare them so badly, Nick, you may actually be able to keep one around permanently.”

Nick Fury rolled his eyes at the woman who was quite possibly his best handler – though what else did he expect from the woman who spent her time keeping tabs on the Brothers Grimm for a living? – and the only agent he had who could get away with using his first name. “But if I didn’t scare them, Marina, I wouldn’t have nearly as much fun.” he joked, before gesturing to the chairs opposite of him and put on his war face. “Marina . . . Agent Gamble . . . thank you for coming.”
Both agents nodded, their faces set and eyes focused on their boss as they waited for him to explain why he’d called them in. Pulling two files from the elbow high stack at his left, he handed them across the desk. “We have a situation in Los Angeles. And I need you to get a cap on it, Agent Gamble.”

Brian looked up at the man through his eyelashes, the file open in front of him. “Me, sir?”

“Yes, Brian, you. The LAPD SWAT squad has in their custody an international fugitive and drug boss, Alexander Montel. I believe you still have ties within SWAT, Brian?”

The second oldest Grimm nodded, eyes glued to his file as he spoke, “My former partner, Jim Street, is still with SWAT. We’re still in touch, though not as frequently as I would like.” Looking up, he gave Fury a lopsided grin, “S.H.I.E.L.D. keeps me too busy to make friends.”

“As well we should. You and your brothers get up to enough trouble on my time; I’m hardly going to allow you to go and make trouble on your own time too,” Fury fired back, a small smirk on his lips as the two men stared at each other.

Used to this sort of posturing between the two, Marina only rolled her eyes and spoke up, “What is S.H.I.E.L.D.’s interest in Mr. Montel, Nick?”

“He’s wanted for rather a lot of things, Marina. And S.H.I.E.L.D. would like to make sure he gets the opportunity to answer for those crimes. However, there have been whisperings that members of the SWAT team responsible for his transfer are actually working for the other side.”

Brian tensed, a muscle jumping angrily in his cheek as he argued, “With all due respect, sir, that’s not possible.”

Marina reached out and laid a calming hand on his forearm, her eyes still on Fury as she watched his expression carefully for any clues he may have on the situation. “Do we have any evidence or motive for why this is?”

“Mr. Montel has offered a bounty of 100 million dollars to whomever can break him out of federal custody.” There was a wry smirk on his face as he continued, “SWAT will have the easiest access to him, and the knowledge to be able to flaut the system. If someone’s going to be breaking him out, they’d need that information. And 100 million dollars is a lot of money to a cop.”

Marina hummed lightly, her pen scratching lightly over her notepad as she scribbled a note to herself. “Do you need the Brothers Grimm on this sir?”

“No; for the moment, I’m only sending Agent Gamble to be my eyes and ears on the prison transfer. Should someone break Montel from custody, we’ll reassess at that time.” Glancing at Brian, Fury spoke up gruffly, “I do not believe I need to tell you, Brian, that this is will be an active assignment and not an invitation to catch up with old friends. Wheels up in twenty and good hunting. Dismissed.”

Brian nodded firmly, slapping the folder shut and pushing himself to his feet. Snapping off a sharp salute, he barked sharply, “Yes sir and thank you sir.”

Once the former SWAT sniper was gone from the room, the former Russian spy lounged back in her chair. “Should I recall the rest of the boys, just in case?”

“Do you think it’s going to be necessary?”

Marina shrugged nonchalantly, as she replied, “I think that a lot of people would do a lot of glupoye
der'mo for the chance at 100 million dollars.”

The grand master spy for S.H.I.E.L.D. frowned as he recalled the locations of the Brothers Grimm at that moment. “Remind me; where are the rest of your boys at this time?”

The woman’s eyes slipped closed a half an inch as she began to recite through the names with such ease she may as well have been reading them from a list. “Jason’s with the NYPD now; Clint’s on standby as he recovers from a minor injury from a previous assignment; Brian just left for Los Angeles; the IMF has borrowed Will for a bit to act as a consultant during an analysis on a mark they’re chasing; and Kenny has been trying to refine the mixture for one of his explosive materials. Hansel is teaching incoming agents; though, admittedly, I don’t think this is a mission in which he would be a great deal of help.”

The man nodded once at her assessment, continuing to contemplate her earlier question. “Call them in; make sure they know they’re not being deployed as yet, but that it’s a precautionary measure in the event that all that ‘glupoye der’mo’ you were talking about hits the fan.”

Marina pushed herself to her feet, with a nod. “We’ll handle this for you, Nick.”

“I know you will, Agent Petrovka; your boys are my best for a reason,” Fury agreed, before waving her away. “You’re dismissed, Marina.”

“Yes, sir,” Marina agreed, before turning smartly on her heel and striding from the room. Pausing briefly at the door, she turned back for a second with a fierce frown. “Get some sleep, Nick; you look tired.”

Fury gave her one of his shark’s grins as he spoke, “I’ll sleep when I’m dead, Marina. Go on; I’m sure your department has collapsed in your absence.”

Reminded of her rather inept PA, Stanley Ipswich, Marina sighed heavily. “I was only gone for ten minutes. How much trouble could Stanley have gotten up to in ten minutes?”

As it turned out . . . the answer to that question was, “quite a lot”.

It was 10 hours later, when the S.H.I.E.L.D. jet carrying Brian touched down on the tarmac outside of the LAPD hanger at LAX. A black SUV sat waiting for him, a familiar dark haired man leaning back against the siding as he waited. Brian grinned, scooping up his gear and jogging easily down the stairs. “Heya, Jimbo. Fuller sent you to collect little ole me? Ah . . . I knew he missed me.”

Officer James Street smirked, straightening up from his slouch and approached his former partner and good friend. “Nah; I just decided that I had to see this happen for myself. Brian Gamble . . . back in LA. Will wonders never cease?” he joked, offering his hand to the other man.

Brian took it, the two hauling each other in for a one-armed, back-slapping, arm-wrestling, and generally rowdy hug. After a second of roughhousing, the two men stepped back from each other. Jim slapped Brian on the shoulder. “You have a place to stay?”

“I’m sure S.H.I.E.L.D. is setting me up in super nice digs; they always do,” Brian replied with a shrug.

“Does it have a bar?”

“It’s a nice hotel that’s not a Marriot; of course it does.”

Jim smirked, “Then how bout you buy me a drink, and tell me all about what’s happened since the
last time we talked.”

Brian cackled, bumping his shoulder into the other man’s. “Come on, Jim; when have I ever been that easy? You gotta at least buy me dinner first.”

It was about three hours later and the two friends were well on their way to a truly miserable morning. Jim tossed back the last of his fourth beer, before glancing over at Brian. The former SWAT sniper had done a line of four Red Headed Sluts in a row, and was now nursing his second beer. Leaning his chin on his hand, Jim swished his beer bottle back and forth before asking nonchalantly, “So, Bri . . . you have brothers, right?”

Brian’s head whipped to face him, his face stone sober and without a single indication that he’d probably drunk far too much. “Yeah, I’ve got four of them. You met Clint; he’s the youngest. Then there’s the oldest, Will; then me; then Jason; and then there’s Kenny, who’s older than Clint but younger than Jason. Why?”

“What do I ever get to meet them?”

There was a bark of laughter as Brian shook his head. “Dude . . . trust me . . . you do not want to meet my brothers.”

“Yes I do. I totally want to meet your brothers.”

“Jim . . . my brothers are the people the Army sends in because somebody fucked up and left a mess all over the carpet. And take my word for it; you do not want to be the one who fucked up because they scare people.”

“You have the scariest face of anyone I’ve ever known; and I’m still friends with you,” Jim joked with a blatant eyeroll.

“Jim . . . they all have my face,” Brian replied with all seriousness, glancing at his friend out of the corner of his eye to gauge the other man’s reaction.

Jim gaped at him, his lips flapping open and closed. “Wait . . . what!? Really!?”

“Yeah, really.”

“Shit,” he breathed, eyes wide as the younger man imagined the implications of five men all with his friend’s face together in one room. “Dude . . . can you imagine Fuller’s face? He’d stroke out!”

Cocking an eyebrow, Brian laughed, “Now that? Would be hilarious. We’ve caused a few heart attacks for some people who weren’t expecting us all together in one room.” Leaning forward, the S.H.I.E.L.D. agent lowered his voice conspiratorially, “It gets even funnier when people see the five of us with our dad. Then we really get to fuck with people.”

“Wait . . . your dad looks like you too?”

“Yes,” Brian agreed, popping the “p” with his lips lazily.

“Dude, someone needs to. Fuck. Up. Cause I gotta see this,” Jim breathed, his eyes wide as he began to imagine all the different ways he could fuck with Fuller and the new SWAT commander, Hondo, and basically the rest of the SWAT squad with the appearance of Brian’s brothers.

Less than 10 hours later, Jim Street got his wish. And the Brothers Grimm – Will, Jason, Kenny, Clint and Marina – were dispatched to Los Angeles to clean up the mess left behind by the LAPD
SWAT squad’s own, Officer T.J. McCabe.

Chapter End Notes

Russian Translations:

glupoye der’mo - stupid shit
Chapter Notes

Most of the Russian Translations are in the chapter, the rest are in the end notes. Enjoy!!! Today, the brothers find out what brought them to LA. Tomorrow, the boys take care of business.

Chapter 36: S.W.A.T.

Brian sat in the locker room of the LAPD’s elite Special Weapons and Tactics team, staring at the blood on his hands. There was a bloody gash in his forehead and his S.H.I.E.L.D. uniform was a mess. He could feel the weight of Jim’s eyes as the younger man sat on the bench across from him. “Bri . . . this wasn’t your fault,” came the quiet reassurance.

Suddenly furious, Brian shot to his feet with a roar. A strong kick sent the trash can next to him flying across the room. “Ето синсука! Ya poruchilsya za nego! V FURY, iz vsekh sumasshedshikh
glupo. . . (That son of a bitch! I vouched for him! To FURY, of all the crazy, stupid . . .)” he hissed, bitterly.

“Dude, I got no idea what the hell you just said. Since when you do speak Russian, anyway?” Jim remarked, cocking an eyebrow at him.

Caught off guard by the words, Brian whisked to stare at Jim. “I’ve always spoken Russian.”

“I have never heard you speak Russian.”

Brian dropped back onto the bench, his whole body slouching downward as he rested his weight on his elbows where they were perched on his knees. “Russian was one of the first languages I ever learned to speak. My sister taught me.”

“How did your sister learn Russian?”

“His sister IS Russian,” came the unexpected reply, the voice familiar but quite obviously not Brian’s.

Jim shot to his feet and whisked, staring wide eyed at the five individuals in the doorway. Brian had told him his brothers all looked like him, but the physical proof was an entirely different matter altogether. “Holy shit.”

Brian, meanwhile, hadn’t looked up from where he was once again picking at the blood on his hands. “Hey Will,” he murmured despondently, before lifting his head to look at his brothers.

Marina’s chocolate eyes flashed wide at the sight of the gash on his face, dodging around her lover and dashing into the room. Dropping to her knees in front of him, she cupped his chin and tilted his head to get a better look at it. “Milyy, chto sluchilosʹ? (Dear heart, what happened?)”

“Ya oblazhalsya, Marishka. Ya doveryal T.J. i Boxer byl zastrelen, (I fucked up, Marishka. I trusted T.J. and Boxer got shot,)” he answered, despondently.

“Have you had this looked at yet?” she asked, gently pulling strands of blond hair from the bloody mess. Brian went to speak, causing Marina to glare at him before he ever managed to say a word. “The truth, dikiy rebenok, or I’ll have you reassigned to somewhere exceptionally unpleasant for a few months as soon as we get home.”

Brian’s jaw snapped shut with an audible click, causing Jim to chuckle behind her. Marina sighed and turned back to the doorway, “Solnyshko, the first aid kit? Could you bring it to me?”

Kenny disappeared briefly from the doorway, before bring what looked like a large fishing box into the locker room. Crouching next to Marina, the two set to work on cleaning out the gash to get a better look. “It’s going to need stitches,” the brunette warned, causing a slow nod from the tired young man.

Taking that for the permission it was, Marina rooted through the box and pulled out the small kit they used for sutures while on assignment. As the two snapped on gloves and got to work, Will meanwhile was watching Jim Street. The SWAT officer was staring in morbid fascination as Marina prepared to close the gash, before flinching away the second the needle slipped through the skin. “And you are?” Will asked brusquely, his arms coming up to fold over his Army fatigues.

Used to answering that tone of command, Jim reeled off the answer before he’d even taken a second to consider its source. “Officer James Street, Third Class. Bri and I used to be partners.”
Nearly identical smirks flit across four nearly identical faces and Jim felt a chill go up his spine. Suddenly he understood what Brian meant when he said that his brothers scared people. “So you actually managed to put up with him? We can’t find single agent who can handle being his partner; I think the longest one lasted a week.”

Jim smirked, knowing he had a leg up there. “We were partners for four years before he got the offer from the Army.” Glancing between their faces, he suddenly frowned, “So . . . besides Brian’s brothers, what the hell do I call you?”

A single eyebrow cocked upward as Will took in that question. “My name is Colonel William Grimm, of the United States Army. You can call me Colonel or Col. Grimm; I’ll answer to either.” Turning, he gestured to each of his brothers in turn, “These are my brothers, Captain Jason Grimm and PFC Kenneth Grimm.” Nodding toward Marina, he continued, “I believe you’ve already met Lt. Colonel Marina Petrovka and Major Clint Grimm.”

Jim glanced back over his shoulder to where the woman was finishing up Brian’s stitches, wincing hard in agreement. “Yeah; we’ve met. T.J. tried to hit on her; your boy, Clint, turned his shoulder inside out.”

Will smirked lightly, noticing the way that Marina’s shoulders hunched at the reminder, and Clint noticeably glanced away. Neither of them had told him about the incident, so it was probably not important; however the uncomfortable looks on their faces indicated that Jim was probably not joking when he commented on the damage T.J. McCabe had suffered at the hands of his youngest brother. “You’ll find that we are all very protective of Marina, Officer Street.”

“Please . . . call me Jim.”

“All right, Jim; can you tell me what happened? I caught the tail end of Brian’s temper tantrum, and I could really use a calmer recounting of events.”

Brian glared at his older brother from where he remained motionless under Marina’s hands, causing the typically stoic oldest Grimm to snicker at his expense. “Very funny, Will,” he groused.

“Brian, stop moving. Misha, don’t bait him,” Marina scolded, glancing back at him with a single cocked eyebrow.

The nickname twinged in Jim’s memory, though he didn’t remember why. Brows furrowed, he went digging for it for a moment before Will’s voice spoke up again. “So, Jim; what happened out there?”

Resolving to figure it out later, Jim shook his head to clear it and began to recount the events of the last 24 hours. “Alexander Montel is a drug cartel boss; he just took over the cartel from his uncle. Apparently, he murdered the poor bastard and then went for a drive in his car; a pair of uniforms pulled him over for a broken taillight. They arrested him for his uncle’s murder.” Rubbing his hands over his face, he continued, “Shortly after that, the Sheriff’s department ran his passport and found his wanted poster from INTERPOL. SWAT was called in to escort him to the city jail until we could get him to the federal super max where he would be staying in the greatest comfort until trial or someone else came to take him off our hands. There were reporters and he shouted into the cameras that he would pay someone 100 million dollars to break him out of custody. We tried to get him to the supermax by helicopter, but it was shot down by someone.”

Clint’s forehead furrowed as he demanded, “Someone shot down a helicopter? Was it In the air?” Jim nodded, causing Clint to bark sharply, “How?”

“Hondo said it was a high powered rifle, possibly a 50 cal. Took it out at the rotor from at least a
mile away."

The sniper turned to look at his brother, eyes wide as he shook his head. “That’s an insane shot, Will, especially because the bird was in the air. Maybe five snipers in the world could make that shot; and even still, it would be bloody hard to be 100% accurate from that far away, even for me.”

Knowing Clint was the best sniper at S.H.I.E.L.D. and had in fact won the title of the Army’s Greatest Marksman several years in a row, Will accepted his brother’s assessment with a firm nodded, mentally tagging the information with the importance Clint had given it. “What happened next?”

“Next, we created a decoy convoy and there was an unsuccessful attempt to extract him then as well.”

Will cocked an eyebrow. “Who was responsible for that attempt? Do you know?”

“Several different LA gangs, actually. It was a clusterfuck from start to finish. The squads ended up getting trapped between two semi-trucks. The place was flooded with gas and grenades and thugs with fully automatic weapons. It was pretty well thought out; they managed to get to the decoy car before anyone could stop them. It was only because it was a decoy that he was still in custody.”

Brian spoke up then, “Apparently, that’s when someone called in for help and S.H.I.E.L.D. called me in; to be eyes and ears on the transfer . . . make sure he got to where he was supposed to go.”

Jason spoke up then, “So what happened next?”

“Last night, we were transferring him to the other prison when T.J., who was driving the SUV, pulled over.”

Brian’s voice was tight and angry as he continued, “It was an ambush. There were guys waiting there for us and one of them shot Boxer, one of the SWAT guys, through the window. T.J. had sold us out; he took Montel and took off. Last I saw, from where I was trying to stop the bleeding, Jim and Honda had followed them into the subway.”

Marina smoothed a bandage over the newly stitched gash, before peeling off the gloves and pushing herself to her feet. “Am I to assume that they have hostages? I mean, if they got on a train . . .?”

“No hostages; they abandoned the train between stations and disappeared into the subways. They were ready for us though; we caught the trap the laid, but by the time we caught up, they’d placed a heavy padlock on the exit gate and disappeared. Based on the tire tracks, two trucks . . . probably sitting there for awhile.”

“And now Montel is in the wind,” Will said, watching Brian twitch furiously at the knowledge.

Sensing that it wasn’t a question, Jim nodded anyway. “Yes sir. We almost managed to cut him off at the airport, but we got there too late.”

Brian lunged to his feet then, his fists flying as he began to punch the hell out of the locker behind Marina. To her credit, the former Russian spy and current S.H.I.E.L.D. handler didn’t even flinch. Will watched him for a long moment, willing to let him relieve some fury so that it didn’t get him killed in the long run. Finally, Brian went still, his forehead dropping to rest against the badly dented locker and his bloody hands lifting to rest next to his head. When he was ready, he pushed away and turned to face his brothers.

Each of the brothers was able to see the two incarnations of their brother warring visibly for control
of his body and each turned to Will, remembering his edict about Barney when Brian had arrived in his place. Understanding the source of the power struggle between Brian and Barney, Will only cocked an eyebrow at the younger brother and asked, “You done?”

Taking a deep breath to steady himself, Brian consciously wrested control of himself from Barney. Once he was firmly back in control, and Barney was gone once again, Brian nodded once briskly, “Yes, sir.”

A small smirk curved Will’s lips as he nodded in reply, “All right then. Suit up, both of you; we’ve got work to do.”

Chapter End Notes

Russian Translations:

dikiy rebenok - wild child (Marina's nickname for Brian)
solnyshko - sunshine (Marina's nickname for Kenny)
Chapter 37: Chtoby poymat’ pauka

“Benjamin Poindexter,” was first thing out of Jason’s mouth some four hours later.

Will turned away from where he was watching Brian, with Marina a silent, familiar presence at his left. The former SWAT sniper was still obviously struggling to keep control of Barney, while simultaneously working hard with his former partner to try and ferret out the landing pad of the plane Montel’s rescuers had hijacked the night before. It was a short-range plane, so it would have to land somewhere close by considering the hole that Brian had punched into its gas tank shortly after take off the night before. Blinking at the middle brother, Will muttered, “I’m sorry?”
“Our sniper? His name is Benjamin Poindexter,” Jason insisted, handing Will the file folder with all the information he’d been able to dig up.

Neither Will nor Marina missed the way Clint’s hawk eyes suddenly zeroed in on the conversation from where he sat perched on top of the filing cabinet behind Marina, each of the bullpen’s exits easily in the agent’s line of sight. Will flipped open the file, flipping quickly through the folder as his eyes skimmed the paperwork quickly. “How do we know?”

“Clint’s right; only about five snipers in the world can make that shot. This guy is one of them; and is the only one not accounted for at the time the chopper was shot down.”

Marina’s voice was quiet as she spoke up, “And how were each of them accounted for?”

“Marine Corps Scout sniper, Bob Lee Swagger, has spent the last six months on assignment in southern Africa. Lt. Colonel Clay confirmed that Sgt Carlos ‘Cougar’ Alvarez has spent the last 2 weeks in the brig; something about a prank on the officer’s mess with his teammate, Cpt. Jensen. Former Marine Scout sniper, Leroy Jethro Gibbs, works for the Marine Corps’ NCIS department in Washington D.C. now; Director Shepherd was able to vouch for his whereabouts for me. And Clint has spent the last two weeks under Marina’s careful eye as he recovers from the injury he sustained on his last assignment. Ergo, Benjamin Poindexter it is.”

Will nodded at the explanation, before turning to face his youngest brother. “You know this guy,” he said, carefully. It wasn’t a question, though only one of Will’s brothers or Marina would have been able to tell.

“If it’s who I think it is, they call him ‘Bullseye’,” Clint agreed, hopping down from the file cabinet and approaching the trio.

Marina’s eyes narrowed, “Bullseye? You mean that mudak who was parading around, pretending to be you not that long ago?”

Clint nodded firmly, “That would be the one.”

“Pretending to be you,” Will asked dryly, cocking an eyebrow in silent question as to why he had not been informed of the incident.

“The situation was resolved; and the only people who knew about it were Clint, Fury and me. We didn’t want to make it a big deal, so we buried the incident,” Marina explained, accepting the folder from her boyfriend as he handed it to her next. “The man’s a very good shot; almost as good as Clint.”

“He’s also letuchaya mysh’der’mo sumasshedshiy,” Clint snorted with an eyeroll. “That, in addition to being wicked smart, makes him very dangerous.”

Will crossed his arms over his chest as he gave his brother a dark frown, “I’m still stuck on the part where some sumasshedshiy syn suka was masquerading as my baby brother, and I didn’t know about it.”

Marina sighed heavily, rolling her eyes blatantly, “Colonel, let’s get back on track here. You can yell at us about it later.” Turning her attention back to the file, she mused, “He had an accomplice, right? A woman?”

“They call her the Black Widow,” Clint replied with a small smirk.

At the name, the former Russian spy froze for a moment, eyes flashing wide briefly in ill-concealed
surprise. Neither Will nor Clint, however, missed the expression. “Marishka? What’s wrong?”

“If the woman in question is the same Black Widow I once knew, the correct terminology for her would be the Chernaya Vdova. The Vdova aka Natalya Alianovna Romanova is a Red Room Operative and former Trainee, like me. She graduated a few years ahead of me. Her last recorded affiliation was still with the FSB, as an assassin and spy.”

Will frowned as he contemplated that information. “You think she’s playing him?”

The pretty brunette shook her head firmly, “I don’t know. Bullseye doesn’t really fall within the parameters for her usual subset of lackeys. He’s unpredictable; there’s no way to manipulate him effectively. More likely, she’s getting something out of the alliance. What that is, I don’t have the slightest idea.”

“So what do we do with them?”

“I don’t know. I need to call Fury.” Turning, she called to Brian, “What do we have on that plane?”

Brian’s attention was intent on the screen in front of him, before he lunged upwards with a whoop! “I got it. It’s about a half-a-klick south of here. A couple called their local sheriff’s department about half an hour ago, to a very low altitude plane flying over their farm. About ten minutes later, they said it crashed in their fields.”

“It’s only half-a-klick? Really?” Will asked, eyes narrowed as he considered how long had passed between the night before and the report. “They must have landed somewhere else to try and patch the hole.” Turning to Marina, he questioned, “How long do you need?”

“Get the boys in route; I’ll call Fury and find out what he wants me to do with the Vdova. As soon as I have a directive, I’ll call you on the comms.”

Will nodded in agreement, “From this point forward, this bullpen is Command. Jason . . . you stay here and run comms with Marina. Clint . . . Brian, you’re on point. You see a shot on Bullseye or Montel, you take it. Am I understood?”

“Yes, sir,” came the expected replies.

“All right then. Saddle up and get going. Kenny, you and I are going to see if we can pick up wherever our puddle-jumper landed previously. I’ll bet we have some stranded people along the side of the road somewhere, unless I miss my guess.”

Jim spoke up, “What about me?”

Will stopped and watched him for a second. “Brian has chased off everyone in S.H.I.E.L.D.. You think you’re such a good partner for him; prove it. You’re with Clint and Brian.” Backing up so that he could see his squad, he looked between each of them with a fierce frown. “Listen up, people. We got an international fugitive running around the countryside, with an unlimited source of money. I want him in handcuffs or a body bag within the next 24 hours. Am I understood?”

Each voice was strong and firm as they called back, “Yes, sir!”

“Dismissed and good hunting.”

It was shortly after they arrived at the crash site that Marina’s voice cackled over the comm in Clint’s ear. The young sniper was lying in the tall grass next to the crash site, his scope pressed to his eyes and pointed towards the wreck. He had a bead on a red headed woman sitting sprawled on the
ground outside the plane, her face contorting uncomfortably as she tied a makeshift bandage around her thigh. “Yastreb, this is Sova. Do you copy?”

“Yeah, Sova I copy.”

“Fury gave the order to eliminate her. You get a shot . . . you take it. Any sign of the Vdova, Bullseye or Montel?”

“No sign of Bullseye, or Montel. I have a bead on the Vdova; she’s injured. I think the other two may have abandoned her,” Clint replied into his comm, continuing to watch the red-haired assassin as she attempted to stand. She succeeded for all of two seconds, before crumpling back to the ground. “She’s injured; severe laceration to her upper left thigh, as well as a myriad of other cuts and contusions. Most likely, a result of the crash.”

“Will picked up our hostages from the side of the road about a mile north of you, so there should be no civilians in the vicinity,” his handler recited, sounding distracted as though she was listening to more than one conversation at a time. “You have the shot?”

Clint closed his eyes, dropping his forehead briefly onto the scope of his rifle. “I have the shot.”

“Then call it, Hawkeye. We don’t have all day; we still gotta track down the other two.”

“Yes ma’am,” the youngest Grimm sighed, returning his eye to the site. His finger moved to cover the trigger and he took a deep breath in preparation to take the shot.

Brian settled into a crouch about two feet to his left, eyes flitting between the injured woman and his little brother. Clint remained motionless for about five minutes, finger tensed on the trigger. Finally he sighed, moving his finger from the trigger and dropping his forehead into the dirt. “Sova, this is Yastreb. Do you trust me?”

Marina’s reply was immediate as she spoke, “Absolutely.”

Laying down his rifle, Clint drew his sidearm and nodded to Brian. “Stand by, Sova. We’ll radio back when the situation is contained.”

There was a noticeable pause as the S.H.I.E.L.D. handler examined the phrase, before she spoke warily, “I copy, Hawkeye. Just be careful.”

“Yes ma’am,” came Clint’s voice through the radio briefly, before the comms broke out into static and the boys went silent.

It was a tense couple of minutes while Marina waited for either Clint or Brian to get back on comms. Finally, Clint’s voice broke through her earpiece, accompanied by a burst of static. “Sova, situation is contained. Skapa and I are on our way back.”

Two hours later, Marina stood in an observation room of LAPD headquarters with Clint, staring in shock and horror at the red headed woman on the other side of the glass. “Clinton Francis . . . what have you done?”

Chapter End Notes

Russian Translations:
Chtoby poymat’pauka - To Catch a Spider
mudak - asshole
letuchaya mysh’ der’mo sumasshedshiy - batshit crazy
sumasshedshiy syn suka - crazy son of a bitch
Chernaya Vdova - Black Widow
Vdova - Widow
Yastreb - Hawk (Clint's Spec Op code name)
Sova - Owl (Marina's Spec Op code name)
Skopa - Osprey (Brian's SHIELD code name)
Chapter 38: *Gadyuka i Chernaya Vdova*

Clint slouched backward against the wall, shrugging helplessly. “You said you trusted me, Marina.”

“I trust you, dorogoy,” she reminded her youngest charge, waving a harsh hand at the woman through the window, “It’s her I don’t trust! She’s a Red Room assassin! What on God’s green Earth possessed you to bring her in? Fury gave the order to get rid of her.”

“And I made a different call,” Clint replied, one foot scuffing against the floor miserably.

Nodding, she muttered, “Yeah . . . I can see that.” Holding up a hand as an indication for the young
man to hold on for a second, she moved to the door and leaned out. “Jay!”

Jason lifted his nose from the computer screens in front of him, a questioning look on his face. “Yeah, Marina?” he called back curiously.

“I need everything you can find on Natalya Alionovna Romanova. As quickly as you can, sladkiy. In my hand within the hour, okay?”

“I’m on it,” he agreed with a nod before returning his attention back to his computers once more.

Coming back into the room, Marina took a deep breath and reached up with one hand to pinch the bridge of her nose. “All right . . . walk me through it. Why did you make this specific call?”

“She’s obviously no longer affiliated with the FSB, if she’s in the company of Bullseye. She’s injured; maybe if we show her a little compassion, she can be swayed to work for us instead.”

“That’s a big maybe, Clint. She was in the company of a known criminal and terrorist. That’s not exactly an indication of a desire to work for the good guys.” Turning back to the window, Marina folded her arms over her chest and stared through the window at the redhead. “She’s a Russian assassin, Clint.”

“So were you. You defected; why can’t she?”

“I had a reason to leave. What reason do you plan to offer her?”

Clint shrugged again, a small pout on his lips as he scuffed his toe of his combat boot against the floor again. “I don’t know. I just . . . you didn’t see her out there; she could hardly move and I just . . . it didn’t feel right to kill her.”

Taking that in, Marina both blessed and cursed Clint’s golden heart; his compassion and inherent kindness were going to get him killed one day. She only hoped that when it happened, she was already dead because otherwise it would break her heart. Turning to Brian, she scowled at the wicked smirk on his lips. “And you!? What the hell, Bri!? Why didn’t you convince him to take the shot?”

“She’s hot. Do I need another reason?” the former SWAT officer snarked, brown eyes twinkling with repressed amusement as Marina scowled and rolled her eyes.

“As a rule, Brian Joshua, S.H.I.E.L.D. does not generally release rogue foreign assassins based purely on physical attractiveness,” Marina snapped back, before throwing up her hands in exasperation; sometimes, there was just no reasoning with Brian Grimm. “Please tell me, that in the midst of this mess, you managed to get some lead on Montel and Bullseye?”

“They stole the farmer’s car,” Brian answered, folding his arms over his chest.

“And that’s good for us . . . why? There are at least a million cars on the road at any given time.”

“Yes, but this specific car has LoJack. They gave us all the information we need to get locate it.”

“And what have we done with this information?”

“Jimbo’s contacting the operator of the system; he’ll let me know as soon as he has something.”

Cocking an eyebrow, Marina rolled her eyes toward the ceiling and begged to whichever god was listening, “Gospodi, ya znayu, chto vse, chto vy delayete eto dlya moyey lichnoy vygody. Tem ne
meneye, ya proshu tebya. Pozhaluysta, ne delayte mne prikhoditsya imet’ delo s etimi dvumya, iikh
makhinatsii v lyubom ofitsial’nom kachestve. Ne seychas. . . . nikogda ne. (Lord, I know that
everything you do is for my personal benefit. However, I’m begging you. Please don’t make me
have to deal with those two and their shenanigans in any official capacity. Not now . . . not ever.)”

Just then, a mousy young secretary stuck her head into the room. “Major Petrovka?”

Marina sighed, rubbing her fingers over her eyes. “Yes?”

“Colonel Grimm would like to speak with you in private.”

“Of course he would. Let him know I’ll be right there.” Turning to Clint, she placed her hands on
her hips and watched him for a long second. “I’ll see what I can do for her, Clint. I’m going to vouch
for you for this. But she is YOUR responsibility. Anything she does from this moment forward, until
I get some kind of resolution on it from Fury comes back on you. Do you understand?”

“Yes, ma’am,” Clint agreed, a wide grin on his face.

“Don’t get too excited; they may decide to just execute her anyway. Her hands aren’t exactly clean,
and she’s spent the last months in the company of a known terrorist for reasons unknown. Just . . .
keep an eye on her.”

Rounding on her heel, she left the observation room and headed towards where she could see Will
standing in Fuller’s glass-walled office. Needless to say, the overly self-important police captain had
been pissed when Will had commandeered the space for himself. Stepping into the room, she came
to parade rest just behind Will’s shoulder as the oldest Grimm stared out into the busy bullpen. “Want
to tell me why I have a rogue Russian spy cooling her heels in one of the interrogation rooms? I
thought Fury gave the order to kill her.”

“He did. Clint made a different call; he thinks we can flip her. Damn his soft heart.”

“And you? What do you think?”

Marina took a deep breath, considering the statement for a long moment before she spoke. “She’s
already taken the first step, in that she’s left the Red Room and the FSB on her own. The Chernaya
Vdova was always very interested keeping to her personal code; no women and no children.
However, her hands are dripping in the blood of men who were only guilty because her handlers told
her so. I’ve had time to come to terms with my sins; maybe we should offer her the chance at the
same.”

“You think you’re going to get Fury to sign off on that?” Will asked, with an indulgent smile.

“Never know if we don’t ask him.”

“First, I want you to talk to her. Let’s find out if she’s even going to be worth the effort. Then, we’ll
send in Brian to clean her up. Besides you, he has the most extensive medical training of us; and he
obviously thinks she’s worth the effort if he didn’t take the kill himself. Maybe he can foster some
good will between her and S.H.I.E.L.D.”

Marina nodded once in agreement. “Yes, sir.”

Jason arrived at the door then, pushing it open and offering Marina a file folder. “Here’s everything I
managed to hack from the Russians. It’s a . . . entertaining read, at the very least.”

The former Russian spy nodded, already flipping through the file. “Thank you, sladkiy. Could you
have Brian start assessing our guest and make a guess at what we’re going to need to patch her up? However, please impress the need that under no circumstances is he to make contact with her yet.”

“Yes ma’am,” he agreed, with a nod, before leaving the office again.

Marina’s eyes flashed over the file, aware that Will was watching her face for any reaction. “So?”

“It’s an interesting read.” Turning to the door, she looked back over her shoulder. “Anything else, Colonel?”

“Let me know what you think, Major,” was all the eldest Grimm said, earning a nod from his girlfriend as she went to go do battle with their resident wayward spy.

Marina entered the small interrogation room, her nose firmly in the file as she nudged out the empty chair with her toe and settled into it calmly. She could feel the redhead’s eyes boring into the top of her skull, though she continued to ignore the other woman until she spoke. Finally, a soft husky voice, was just a faint tinge of accent left on it, spoke up, “Vy Gadyuka. (You are the Viper.)”

It was not a question.

Marina set the file down on the table and folded her hands over the top. “Chernaya Vdova . . . Davno ne videlis’. (Black Widow . . . Long time, no see.)”

“Dolgoye vremya, deystvitel’no, Gadyuka. Tak vot gde vy proveli vse svoye vremya skryval’sya? (A long time indeed, Gadyuka. So this is where you have spent all your time hiding out?)”

“Net,” Marina disagreed with small shake of her head, that pleasant smile still on her lips as she watched the Black Widow try to figure out the quickest way out of the room she was being held in. “Ya ne skryvayu, Chernaya Vdova. Ya prosto sdelal zhizn’ diya sebya za predelami KGB i Akademiyu. Vy naydete, vdova, chto ya ne sklonen byt’ dobrym, kogda odin ugrozhayet zhizni i sredstv k sushchestvovaniyu svoikh blizkikh. (I was not hiding, Black Widow. I simply made a life for myself outside of the KGB and the Academy. You will find, Widow, that I am not a woman inclined to be kind, when you threaten the life and the livelihood of my loved ones.)”

“No ya ne pereyekhala iz etoy komnaty. Komu ya ugrozhal? (But I have not moved from this room. Who have I threatened?)”

“Chelovek, kotoryy spas vashu russkaya zadnitsa, eto chelovek neset otvetstvennost’ za vas i vashi deystviya. Vy vyvar’ sya iz etoy komnaty, ya budu imet’, chtoby privlech’ yego na sbory. I ya deystvitel’no ne khochu, chtoby eto sdelat’. Mogu li ya ponyala? (The man who saved your Russian ass, is the man solely responsible for you and your actions. You break out of this room, I’m going to have to draw him up on charges. And I REALLY don’t want to do that. Am I understood?)”

Staring at the other woman for a long moment, Marina watched as the need to pay back the debt she owed the young man who had rescued her and brought her here warred with the fierce need to be independent and on her own. Finally, Natalya looked up at her. “Da . . . Ya ponimayu. (Yes . . . I understand.)”

“Khorosho. Itak . . . Davayte nachnem s togo, pochemu vy nakhodites’ v gosudarstvakh , Baryshnya Romanova. A imenno, kakogo cherta ty delayesh’ na sluzhbumet’ , kak Bendzhamin Poyndekster, inache Bullseye . (Good. Now then . . . let’s start with why you’re in the states, Miss Romanova. And specifically, what the hell you’re doing in the employ of an asshole like Benjamin Poindexter, aka Bullseye.)”

Natalya Alianovna Romanova stared at the younger woman for a long moment, green eyes piercing
as she watched the other woman sit across the table. The Gadyuka was calm and collected: Marina Petrovka was firmly in control of their interview and she knew it. Finally, Natalya folded her hands on the front of the table in front of her and spoke, “Moye imya... Natasha. (My name... is Natasha.)
So this one's a little short, but it worked for an ending. I hope you continue to enjoy. Russian translations are in the chapter. Love you and your reviews!! Keep them coming; they're my whole reason for continuing to write this crazy idea down onto paper when it spends so much of its time trying to suck out my brain.

Chapter 39: Second Sight

“Мое имя… Natasha. (My name… is Natasha.)”

Marina cocked her head, narrowing her eyes at the woman across from her. Green eyes gazed back, only a little fear lingering at the edges of her gaze. Finally seeing whatever it was she was looking for, the brunette nodded in agreement. “Ладно, Natasha, давайте начнем с того, что делал с Bullseye. (All right, Natasha, let’s start with what you were doing with Bullseye.)”
The redhead bit down on her lower lip, trying to look as unassuming as possible. Having been trained in the exact same technique, Marina only cocked a single eyebrow at the other woman. Accepting it for a lost cause, Romanova dropped the expression with a wry shrug. “Vy ne mozhet vinit devushku za popytu. (You cannot blame a girl for trying.)” Settling backwards in her chair, Natasha stared directly at the younger woman as she replied, “Bulseye chto-to mne nuzhno. . . chto-to, chto pomozhet mne bezhat’. (Bulseye has something that I need . . . something that will help me escape.)”

“Pobeg ot kogo? (Escape from who?)”


Folding her hands in front of her, Marina watched the woman for any sign of a lie. Seeing none, she pulled a pen from her bun and scribbled quickly on the inside of the file folder in front of her. “I my dolzhny dat’ vam to, chto vam nuzhno bezhat’, chto vy gotovy sdelat’ dlya nas? (And should we give you what you need to escape, what are you willing to do for us?)”

“I to, chto ty mogla mne predlozhit’? Ty predatel’ v nashu stranu, nashi ubiytsy okhotyatsya za vami i po sey den’. (And what could you possibly offer me? You are a traitor to our country; our assassins hunt you to this very day.)”

Marina’s lips curved into a brittle, amused smile. “Da . . . No ya na sluzhbeochen’ niyy chelovek. I zdes’ yest’ lyudi, kotoryye ubili by menya zashchitit’. Mozhet li vi skazar’ to zhe samoye, Vdova? (Yes . . . but I am in the employ of a very powerful man. And there are people here who would kill to protect me. Can you say the same, Widow?)”

Natasha’s green eyes were wary as she watched her. “Yesli ya skazhu vam, kuda oni idut . . . Vy zashchitat’ menya ot Krasnaya Komnata? Predlozhit’ mne zhe shchit, kotoryy vy nesete? (If I tell you where they are going . . . you will protect me from the "Red Room? Offer me the same shield that you carry?)”

The former Russian spy’s smile settled into something softer and more welcoming. “U vas yest’ moye slovo. Eto ne mnogo, no eto vse chto ya mogu predlozhit’ vam v eto vremya. S.H.I.E.L.D. budet delat’ vse vozmozhnoye, chtoby zashchitit’ vas. (You have my word. It isn't much, but it is all I can offer you at this time. S.H.I.E.L.D. will do what it can to protect you.)”

There was a long pause as the assassin contemplated the offer, before she nodded in agreement. “Togda ya prinimayu vashe predlozheniye. (Then I accept your offer.)”

“Khoroshiy vybor, (Good choice.)” Marina advised with a smile. “Y poshlyu v kom-to, chtoby posmotret’ na vashi rany. Posle, my budem govorit’ bol’she o Bullseye. Soglasny? (I'll send in someone to see to your wounds. After, we'll talk more about Bullseye. Agreed?)”

“Da . . . spasido. (Yes . . . thank you.)”

Marina looked back from where she stood at the door with one hand on the doorknob, a small smirk on her lips. “Ya ne tot, kem eto ty dolzhen blagodarit’, Vdova. (I am not who it is you should be thanking, Widow.)”

Clearly torn, Natasha bit down on her lower lip. Sensing the nature of her question, the S.H.I.E.L.D. handler folded her arms over her chest, an indulgent smirk on her lips. “Vy mozhet sprosit’. (You may ask.)”
Mal’čik? Kto spas menya? Kak yego zovut? (The boy? Who saved me? What is his name?)

Brown eyes turned as hard as diamonds as Marina answered the question, “Eto Klint. I yesli vy yemu bol’no, Natasha . . . Ya ub’yu tebya. (It’s Clint. And if you hurt him, Natasha . . . I’ll kill you.)”

Turning on her heel, Marina left the room and closed the door firmly behind her.

Brian stood against the opposite wall, the medkit Marina had stitched him up with resting innoculously at his feet. “So . . . I get the feeling that went well.”

Marina smirked in amusement, reaching up to sock the second Grimm lightly in the arm. “We won’t know that until I’ve spoken to Fury. In the meantime, you’re up. Make friends, huh? Try not to drive her crazy too soon.”

“I would never!” Brian gasped in mock affront, a pretty pout curving his lips downwards and his hand coming up to rest delicately against his breastbone.

“I have known you for far too long, Brian, if that pout no longer works on me,” the former spy laughed over her shoulder as she walked away.

“Just means I’m gonna need to find a new way to get myself out of trouble,” he called after her with a sly grin.

“You work on that. In the meantime, you have a patient, Agent Gamble . . . kindly move your ass.”

Reaching down, Brian lifted the first aid kit and walked confidently into the interrogation room. Natasha looked up at him with a frown and narrowed eyes, demanding, “Kto vy? (Who are you?)”

Brian smirked, setting the kit on the table and beginning to lay out what he needed. “Please, Miss Romanova . . . let’s not delude ourselves into thinking that you don’t speak perfectly fluent English. We both know that Agent Petrovka was only indulging you,” he scolded playfully, crouching next to her and reaching to unwrap the crude bandage around her thigh.

She continued to regard him with narrowed eyes, watching him critically as he set to work on increasing the size of the rip in her jeans, his hands gripping the fabric on both sides and giving a gentle yank. The material yielded easily, and Natasha only barely managed to hide a wince as her body jostled lightly under the action. Finally, once he had cotton balls and hydrogen peroxide in hand, she spoke in heavily accented English, “How did you know?”

“You and Marina were Soviet spies before you were Russian ones; of course you were trained to infiltrate the beds of American businessmen and politicians. I wasn’t built to be stupid, Miss Romanova.”

“My name is Natasha.”

Brian looked up at her with a wide smirk and a roguish wink, “Yeah . . . I heard.”

For a long moment, there was silence, before Natasha prodded insistently, “And you are?”

“My name is Agent Gamble. You can call me Agent or Gamble or just Agent Gamble. Hell, I’ll even answer to mudak or even chertov mudak (fucking asshole). Just don’t call me Daisy.”

Natasha’s lips curved into a ruthless grin as she replied, “It is a pleasure, Daisy. Truly.”

Brian saluted her mockingly with two fingers, “I live to serve. Hold still; this is going to sting a little.”
The woman gripped the edges of the chair as Brian set to cleaning out the injury, his attention intent on the wound under his care. He worked in silence, his hands firm but gentle against her skin as he tended to each of her wounds. Finally, he stood and began to repack the kit. “You’re good.”

Reaching out, Natasha touched his forearm, her fingers warm against the bare skin just visible between his black, fingerless gloves and the pushed up sleeves of his S.H.I.E.L.D. jacket. “Can she do as she says?”

Brian frowned, turning to lean against the edge of the table and thanking whatever god would listen that the thing was bolted to the floor or he would have already been on his ass. “Who . . . Marina?”

“Da.”

Crossing one ankle over the other and bringing his arms up to fold over his chest, Brian watched the former assassin for a long second. “I know you used to be Red Room; that the Academy trained you and Marina both. Did you ever meet each other then . . . when you were both still molodoy i glupyy i loyal’nykh k matushke Rossii? (young and dumb and loyal to Mother Russia?)”

“Net. I was several years ahead of her, though her reputation among her classmates was a . . . formidable one. It’s said that she and the girl they called Valya were the only students to ever successfully manage to sneak up and startled the Gospozha.”

“Marina raised me and my younger brothers. When we were very little she promised to protect us, from anyone or anything that could hurt us; she keeps her promises, no matter what the cost to her. She promised my baby brother Clint that she would do what she could for you – Clint’s her favorite; she won’t let him down. Have a little faith in people; not everyone is out to stab you in the back.”

“I’m afraid my experiences with people don’t lead me to trust easily.”

“Neither do mine, but eventually even you have to learn to trust someone to have your back. If you don’t, it won’t take long before there’s a knife buried in it. Not even Russian spies and fearless assassins have eyes in the backs of their heads.”

Natasha nodded, looking down at the clean white bandage wrapping around her thigh. Reaching out to pick at a dangling thread, she seemed to be concentrating hard on the dressing, though Brian could see the thoughts whirring quickly behind her eyes. He remained where he was, continuing to lean back lazily against the table as he watched her think. Finally, the woman looked back up at him. Green eyes met brown as she asked, her tone quiet and plaintive, “You trust her to watch your back?”

Brian’s smile was uncharacteristically soft, fondness and affection for the brunette who had thrown away her former life to give him a brand new one filling him from head to toe. “Natasha . . . I will kill for her. I have killed for her. She and my brothers are the only people in this world I trust.”

Bending, he placed his hands on the arms of her chair and looked directly into her eyes in an effort to impart the seriousness of what he would say. “She will do what she can for you, Natasha. And if you can’t take her word for it, take mine. I trust her with my life; you should too.”
Chapter Notes

No translations this time. Enjoy! I love your reviews! You make the insanity worth it.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter 40: The Fury of God

“YOU DID WHAT!?” Fury roared over their connection, his single eye piercing across the distance as he glared at Marina from 2,500 miles away.

To her credit, Marina didn’t even flinch. She remained standing calmly at parade rest, her face blank of all emotion, eyes straight ahead and hands behind her back as she listened to her boss’ tirade. Fury’s image was large and imposing on the screen in front of her, though she was alone in the office. Finally, the man stopped yelling and took a deep breath. Scowling at his best handler, he folded his arms over his chest and barked, “Explain, Marina.”
Marina’s head dipped once, before she began to speak. “I am aware of your orders, Nick. However, Agent Barton made a call that he believes will be more beneficial to S.H.I.E.L.D. in the long run. Having spoken to the woman in question, I am of a similar opinion.”

“And you think she can be an asset to us . . . a **reliable, trustworthy** asset? She’s a Russian spy, Marina.”

The woman’s smile was small as she met Fury’s accusation with calm. “So was I. Have I ever given you any reason to doubt my judgment or my decisions?”

“The difference between you and the Black Widow, is that your loyalty has never been to me or this organization; a fact I knew when I pulled the lot of you into S.H.I.E.L.D. So long as your boys are loyal to S.H.I.E.L.D., so too shall you be. The Black Widow on the other hand, has no loyalty to anyone other than herself, and the last thing we need is a rogue-spy-turned-mercenary roaming our halls.”

“The loyalty of the *Chernaya Vdova* can be bought, Nick; you simply need to find the right currency. She wants freedom from the Red Room . . . giving her that will offer us all of her skills and abilities.”

“And what happens when she stabs us in the back and runs back to her handlers, hm?”

“She left them of her own volition, Nick; I’m fairly certain that means she’s serious about trying to escape from the Red Room.” Cocking her head at him, she gave him her most innocent look, her tone taking on a beguiling tone as she continued, “Don’t make me lie to my little boy, Nick.”

Fury scoffed at the affectation of an innocent young woman, waving away the act with the brush of a hand. “Your little boy is the best shot I’ve ever seen; the last thing I’m going to do is let you alienate him.”

Marina chuckled with a hapless shrug at the truth there. “I’m not saying we make her a Level 7 agent right away . . . hell, I’m not even saying we make her a Level 1 agent. I’m saying, we make her a probationary agent until such time as we can determine her loyalty and guarantee her allegiance to S.H.I.E.L.D. Keep her close to base, and put her under constant supervision by one of our other senior handlers – Agent Coulson comes to mind – and make sure any assignments she undertakes are in the accompaniment of an agent that we **DO** trust.”

“So you’re suggesting we keep your boy’s new pet spider, with the understanding that occasionally we turn her free to nest outside of our playground,” he deadpanned, causing a small smirk from Marina. “Black Widows are one of the most dangerous kinds of spiders, Marina, in that they kill their mates after they’d served their purpose.”

The brunette’s smirk was more than a little wicked as she cocked one hip and folded her arms over her chest. “So don’t think of it in terms of a Raven Protocol. Spiders make webs, don’t they? Let’s see what kind of disgusting insects she can catch for us.”

Fury contemplated her for a long moment, before heaving a heavy sigh. “All right. I’ll fax over the paperwork this afternoon. However, one of your boys is going to be her supervisory agent for the foreseeable future; I want it made very clear that they are to stick to her like glue. Pick whichever one you think she won’t murder in their sleep and report back to me.”

Marina nodded sharply, snapping formally to attention and shooting off a brisk salute, “Yes, sir, General Fury.”
“Don’t salute me, Marina. It makes me nervous,” he teased with a roll of his eyes. “Fury, over and out.”

“Petrovka, over and out,” Marina agreed, watching as the screen went black. She waited for a few moments following the black screen, before she sighed out the breath she felt she’d been holding through the whole interview and sagged backwards into the desk chair behind her. Dropping her head to rest on the backrest, she stared in breathless relief at the ceiling as she struggled to regain her composure and calm.

Only seconds later, she was on her feet, with her gun pointed at the door and the safety off, as it creaked open, earning a smirk and a cocked eyebrow from Will as he moved inside and shut it behind him. The two stood for a long moment, evaluating each other from across the room, before Marina reengaged the safety on her Magnum and dropped back into the chair. Sensing her mood, Will approached with a smile, “So . . . it went well then.”

“So far, so good,” the former spy agreed with a smirk as she allowed her eyes to slip closed.

She released a soft moan as Will’s hands came to rest on her shoulders and began to knead the tensed muscles there. “Bozhe moi, Misha . . . don’t stop,” she begged, arching her body back into his ministrations.

Will’s chuckle was quiet as he dug the thumbs of both hands into a particularly stubborn knot of muscle under her shoulder blade. “So, you said it went well, but I would be very surprised if the situation is not without strings attached.”

“One of the boys is going to have to act as her supervisory agent; at least until we can guarantee that she’s loyal and she’s not going to stab S.H.I.E.L.D. in the back.”

“Like a handler?”

“No; more like, he’s there on all of her assignments to keep tabs on her and make sure she keeps within mission parameters. Fury’s not just going to send her on missions without guaranteeing that she’s not furthering her own agenda at the same time.”

“All right; and who do you have in mind for this little chore?”

Marina’s smirk was positively evil as she replied immediately, “Clint.”

“Why? Besides a deep seated need to punish him for making your life that much harder.”

“That is a perfectly valid reason, Misha. Although, I actually chose him because she believes she owes him a debt. And the Chernaya Vdova always pays back on her debts; usually with interest. She’ll listen to him, and obey any directives he passes down with regards to their missions.”

“And you think that Clint needs assistance on his security and surveillance assignments?”

“No; I’m sure this will cause him to be reassigned temporarily to a more hands-on status until we’ve gotten her vetted and cleared. But for the most part, I think he’s our best choice.”

“I’m actually a little surprised you didn’t decide to use Brian. They seem to be fairly well matched with each other.”

Marina’s brown eyes were steady as they looked into the shifting shades of her lover’s. “I’m fairly certain you’ve noticed, Misha, but this assignment is severely screwing with Brian’s control over Barney. I’m not sure putting two equally volatile and unpredictable components into one partnership
is the smartest plan right now. I need Brian to regain some control; we’ll reevaluate the partnership once that happens. I’m actually seriously considering suggesting Officer Street to S.H.I.E.L.D. as a recruit; he seems to have a calming effect on Brian . . . and from the action reports, always has. They’re good friends; I think it would be good for Brian to have him around on a more full time, hands-on basis.”

Will nodded once, “As always, I defer to your judgment where my brothers are concerned. You know them better than anyone else in the world.”

“Chert voz’mi ya delayu, (Damn right I do,)” she snickered, a wide grin on her lips and her head falling back to look up at her lover happily.

Coming around to the front of the chair, Will braced his hands on the armrests and bent to kiss his girlfriend. Marina’s hands came up to cup his cheeks, allowing herself to indulge for a moment, regardless of the drab green Army uniforms the both of them were currently wearing. Pulling away, he smirked and whispered against her lips, “You should probably tell Clint about his new babysitting gig.”

Marina giggled like a schoolgirl, her eyes sparkling happily as she looked up at him. “He’s going to kill me.”

“Quite possibly. But, at the end of the day, the look on his face will be totally worth it.”

Ten minutes later, Clint and Marina stood together once again in the interrogation room, watching the Black Widow pace the edges of the room restlessly. “And somehow . . . I’m supposed to babysit THAT!? Marina, the woman looks as though she hasn’t smiled since God made dirt! I’m always laughing; at the very least, I’m going to find some sai or throwing knife or dirk lodged firmly in my back.”

“I’m sure that when she kills you, Clint, she’ll use something at least a little bit more classy than a dirk . . . a Remington 870 shotgun maybe, or a Winchester 62A rifle, or – failing either of those options – a Smith & Wesson Model 10 revolver.”

"Really feeling the love here, Marishka. Thanks for that," Clint scoffed with a blatant eyeroll, slouching haplessly with a childish pout that nearly derailed Marina’s teasing – as her youngest charge had no doubt intended it to; he knew she was a sucker for the pout.

Gathering herself together and visibly ignoring the expression on her youngest’s face, she smirked at the disgruntled look on his face as he realized that his pouting wasn’t working on her this time. “You’re most welcome, Agent Barton,” she teased, reaching out to ruffle his hair fondly. “Quit stalling; you are going to have to talk to her eventually. At the very least, she’s going to want to thank you for saving her life, don’t you think?”

“I swear to God, Marishka . . . you have a heart of stone,” he muttered, before taking a deep breath and moving toward the doorway to the interrogation room. “Wish me luck.”

“Good luck,” she insisted, her smirk softening into an affectionate smile. “You’ll be fine, Clint. Just be yourself; you’ve managed to charm the pants off of everyone you’ve ever met. What’s one more Russian spy compared to that record?”

Clint gave her a small smile over his shoulder, before taking a deep breath, opening the door and stepping into the room. Natasha turned to look at him, as he shut the door softly behind him. For a very long time, the two spies stared at each other; ferocious green eyes clashing violently with long-sighted grey. Finally, Clint spoke up, “Hi. So, I don’t really know how this whole thing works,
seeing as about four hours ago, I tried to kill you, before randomly changing my mind.” Smirking lightly, he stepped forward and offered her his hand, “I’m Clint Barton. It’s nice to meet you, when you’re not trying to shoot my head off.”

The woman remained quiet and motionless, continuing to watch him. It was an uncomfortable second, before she stepped forward and shook the offered hand. It was another couple seconds before she spoke. “I am Natalya Alianovna Romanova. “You may call me Natasha.”

Clint’s grin flashed wide and bright as he collapsed haphazardly into one of the chairs at the table, kicking his feet up onto the tabletop and folding his hands over his belly. “Sweet. I feel as though I should apologize in advance. You’re stuck with me for awhile, Nat. I hope you don’t mind crazy people; cause my family is full of ‘em.”

A slim eyebrow lifted toward her hairline as she questioned acidly, “Nat?”

“Do you prefer Tasha? Cause I can do Tasha. You just kinda look like Nat; all butch and badass and totally able to kill any man with one of your exceptionally well manicured pinky nails,” Clint rambled with a broad grin, his eyes sparkling at her as he watched her color start to rise.

She stared at him, her arms folded over her chest, her face solemn and flat as she glared. Clint continued to ramble on about various topics, switching between football to his bow to his favorite rifles to how lumpy his mattress was to the dog he always wanted, before Natasha interrupted him caustically, “How has no one sewn your mouth shut yet?”

Clint’s grin was wide as he joked, “Many have tried . . . all have failed.”

“And why is that?”

“Cause everyone who has ever had the thought . . . is too scared of Marishka to actually do it.”

Natasha's eyes narrowed, as she growled, “Your Marishka does not scare me.”

The boy's grin morphed into a sly smirk, his eyes glinting with the knowledge of a secret only he knew, as he insisted quietly, ”Yet.”

Chapter End Notes

On a related note, a Raven Protocol is when an asset is seduced by an agent or spy to seduce an asset; either to kill them, flip them or otherwise take them out of the equation. I hope that answered any questions that pop up from that phrase. Again . . . enjoy!!!
Chapter 41: A Bull’s Eye for Hawkeye

Several hours later, Marina entered the interrogation room. Natasha had evidently decided that it was fruitless to resist the young man, and was allowing Clint to engage her in a conversation about Bullseye’s psychosis and her reasons for tagging along with the man. Clint rotated in his chair and grinned up at his almost-sister. “Agent Petrovka,” he greeted with a bright grin.

“Agent Barton,” she replied with a soft smile, “Go ahead and suit up. We’ve got Bullseye’s location. We’re heading out in 10.”
“Yes ma’am,” he agreed, giving her a cocky salute as he strode toward the door. It was only when he got to the doorframe, that he stopped with a frown on his lips as he turned back to face the two Russian spies. “What about Miss Romanova?”

“We’re leaving her here, dorogoy,” Marina answered, her arms crossing over her chest.

“But Fury told me to stick to her like glue.”

“Yes. But we’re on assignment; I need you in the field and I don’t trust her enough yet to bring her along for the ride.”

Clint watched her for a long second, before turning his attention onto Natasha. “You’re not going to stab us in the back, are you, Tasha? Because I don’t really want to be the one to have to hunt you down and finish what I started, okay?”

Natasha’s eyes were steady as she shook her head once. “I will remain here; I shall not move from this spot until you return, Agent Barton.”

“Fabulous,” the young sniper cheered lightly, before nodding once at both women and leaving the room.

Marina turned back to the former Russian assassin, arms folded over her chest. “You don’t honestly think I’m going to trust you to stay here, without some kind of guarantee do you?”

“You may cuff me to the table. I will not run.”

The brunette nodded once, reaching into her back pocket and pulling out the heavy steel cuffs she had tucked into it. Stepping forward, she cuffed both of the other woman’s wrists around the table leg, making sure to remove anything that the former spy could use to pick the locks. “Why is that?” she asked as she rattled the chain quickly to test their hold.

“I have red in my ledger; Agent Barton is offering me a chance to wipe it out. Because of that, I owe him a debt . . . a debt I will never be able to truly repay.”

“We all have red in our ledgers, Natasha . . . the difference between the good guys and the bad guys, is that the good guys seek to atone for theirs,” Marina reminded her, before she straightened and moved toward the door. “We’ll be back in a few hours. And if you escape from here, Clint won’t be the only one to hunt you down . . . understand?”

“I understand,” came the quiet reply.

“Good. Don’t make me kill you, Natasha; not after all the trouble I went through to secure your position within S.H.I.E.L.D.,” Marina admonished, before she turned on her heel and left the room once again.

It seemed like very little time, before they arrived in Imperial Beach, CA. It was here that people crossed the border between the United States and Mexico. Fortunately, because they were trying not to attract attention, Montel and Bullseye had simply driven to the border and were waiting in the same line as everyone else. However, S.H.I.E.L.D. had access to the most up to date technology, and their chopper arrived at the border long before their stolen vehicle ever got close to the crossing.

As soon as they arrived, the six members of the brothers Grimm took up their positions. Jason and Will took over the Command station at the crossing, Jason hacking the computers and camera systems so he could take over complete control of the area. Clint grabbed his rifle and climbed the toll booths, picking out a nice comfy nest on top of the crossing to be able to keep an eye on
everyone that came and went through his scope. Finally, Jim Street, Kenny, Brian and Marina would be on point and would be responsible for tracking down and arresting Montel and Bullseye.

All in all, it was a pretty quick undertaking. Clint picked out the stolen car almost instantly, and called it out to Marina. “Sova, I have your TANGO.”

“I copy, Yastreb. Can you point me in its general direction?”

“About five cars back from where you are, and two rows to your left. Frenchie seems to be sleeping, while Psycho is . . . um . . . well, he seems to be enjoying himself, whatever he’s doing.”

“Thank you, Yastreb. Orel, did you copy that?”

“I copy, Sova. As soon as your team has eyes on TANGO, let me know.”

“Yes sir,” came the cheerful reply, as Marina signaled her team to split up and move carefully toward the car Clint had pointed out.

Moving silently, the quartet crept forward in an attempt to remain unseen as they tried to surround the car. For a long moment, it seemed like they would succeed in being able to get close and take down the car before either of its occupants noticed. However, as soon as Marina had the thought, Bullseye had stuck his arm out of the driver’s side wide and was shooting wildly at them. “Down!” Marina shouted into her comm, barely managing to dodge behind a car as Poindexter repeatedly pulled the trigger. “Sokol . . . Skopa . . . you boys all right?” she barked, one hand coming up to press on her comm.

Both of her charges replied in the affirmative, causing Marina to breathe a sigh of relief. “Street . . . how about you? You good?”

“I’m good,” he replied with a small laugh. “Life is certainly never dull with you guys around. Geez, and I thought working with Gamble all that time was a life threatening experience; he’s got nothing on the lot of you all at once.”

“We do so love living dangerously,” Marina chuckled, shifting her weight to try and peek around the car she was hiding behind to get a better look at their surroundings, as well as pinpoint the location of their primary targets.

She quickly learned the mistake in that idea. The second she moved even an inch from cover a bullet whizzed by her head, forcing her to duck back again. “Damn . . . this guy is all over us. Orel, we are pinned down . . . I repeat, the Alpha Team is pinned down. Requesting back up and extraction.”

“Sova, I copy. Assistance en route.” There was a pause, before Will spoke again. “Yastreb, do you have clear line of sight?”

“Yes, sir, Orel.”

There was no hesitation as Will gave the order, “Take the shot. Kill shot only; put him down, Hawkeye.”

“Your wish . . .” here there was a pause, as he brought his rifle to bear on Bullseye as the psychopathic killer climbed from the car and began stalking toward where Marina crouched, “. . . is my command.”

There was a sharp bark! as the rifle fired, striking the rival sniper square between the eyes and dropping him to the concrete like a bad habit. “Done and done, Orel. Psycho is neutralized.”
“Nice shooting, Yastreb. Does anyone have eyes on Frenchie?”

There were a few seconds of general chaos as each of the Brothers Grimm tried to get eyes on Montel, before Kenny spoke up through the comms. “I have Frenchie. TANGO is secured and ready for transport.”

“All right, boys; nice work. Pack it in; I’d really like to hand this панк задницу немногого суки (punk ass little bitch) over to the Feds, and call it a day. My bed is calling me,” Will groaned through the comms; each of them could imagine the way he ran his hands back haphazardly through his hair as he breathed out hard to try and release some tension.

Meanwhile, Marina was weaving through the cars and the throng of frightened people, her sidearm up and at the ready as she approached the motionless body of Benjamin Poindexter, aka Bullseye. Crouching slowly, she kept her gun on him with one hand as she reached with her other to lay two fingers to his carotid artery. The shot was clean and perfect . . . there was no doubt that the man was dead; however, protocol was protocol and in place for a reason. Clint’s voice was teasing in her ear as he joked, “So how’d I do?”

The former Russian spy’s lips curved into a wicked smirk as she taunted, “You’re about ½ an inch off the very bridge of his nose. But it was a decent shot, your aim notwithstanding.”

Clint’s scoff came clearly through the comm as he argued ferociously, “I was not off the mark; I hit him square between the eyes. And you know it, Marishka.”

Unable to resist the opportunity to contine to ruffle the Hawk’s feathers, Marina joked lightly, “I think you need to spend some more time on the range, Hawkeye; your aim is get shaky in your old age.”

The youngest Grimm sputtered, before Will’s voice broke into the conversation, his chiding tone tinged lightly with amusement; looking between each of her charges, however, Marina knew that she was the only one who was able to tell just from his voice alone. “Sych, leave the Hawk alone. Yastreb, call it.”

“Yes sir,” Clint agreed, before the comms went silent on his end. It was a long, agonizing second, before the sniper spoke again. “Site’s clean. We’re good.”

“Yes we are. Brat’ya Mrachnyy, back to the chopper. We’re gonna deliver this мудак into federal custody, pick up Clint’s new pet spider, and head home. Sound like a plan?”

“I want my own bed,” Kenny agreed with a longing moan.

“You’re not the only one, солнышко; I know exactly how you feel. Boys . . . let’s pack up. Monsieur Montel has new accommodations with his name on them, just waiting for him to come and visit,” Marina ordered, causing the team to corrall Montel and climb up into the chopper.

Finally, 24 hours later, the Brat’ya Mrachnyy were in the S.H.I.E.L.D. Quinjet and were on their way home, one complacent Black Widow in tow. Though, if Marina had it her way? She would be back in Los Angeles very soon, with formal recruitment papers and an offer of employment for one James Thomas Street.
Ask anyone; Hansel Kuhn was a heartless, insensitive, merciless son of a bitch. He was the one teacher that his students couldn’t stand – which admittedly, he was okay with . . . they weren’t supposed to like him. There were of course exceptions to the rule; and while his sister Gretel and AD Maria Hill were definitely among them, it was usually his sons and his pseudo-adopted daughter who first came to his mind.

When Hansel had woken up, he had been fully prepared to be alone in the world; hell, it was a well known fact that he and Marina had gotten along about as well as oil in water. But it was hard to resist
the Grimms, especially the youngest one. Currently, it was Clinton Francis who was laying heavily on his mind now. The brothers and their handler had gone to Los Angeles a few days ago, to try and track down an escaped fugitive. In the process of their mission, the 24 year old sniper had managed to somehow adopt a dangerous pet in the form of one of Marina’s fellow Red Room graduates. To hear Fury tell it, the boy had gone against orders to do so . . . which was not like Clint at all. Needless to say, Hansel was more than a little worried.

“What kind of a name is Black Widow?” Hansel muttered, too low to be heard by anyone except for Fury and Maria, both of whom were standing on the tarmac with him as they waited for the C-130 to land.

“It’s a code name; kind of like when people call Clint ‘Hawkeye’,” Maria answered, the sly smirk on her lips a clear indication she already knew that she had not in fact answered his question.

The German cocked an eyebrow at the woman, a clearly unimpressed look on his face. “A black widow is one of the most dangerous and most poisonous spiders in the world. They call her Black Widow; what does that say about her, exactly?”

“That she’s very dangerous,” Fury replied, single eye squinting as a large troop transport started to appear on the horizon. “Here they come.”

Turning back over his shoulder, the S.H.I.E.L.D. commander started to shout to the agents behind him. “We have an incoming hostile, as well as a highly classified team flying in. Everyone who has not been read in on their identities, please step into the hangar until they and their handler are safely in the SUVs and en route back to base.”

“What about the hostile, sir?” came the call from one of the agents, a tall young man who continued to stand stock still . . . even as the rest of his colleagues moved to enter the hangar until they were called.

“The hostile has been secured within the transport; she’ll keep until the team is away,” Maria informed him coldly, her pretty teal eyes narrowing as she glared at the young agent. “Harrison . . . get your ass in the hanger before I allow Agent Petrovka to hand it to you.”

The agent scoffed lightly, too quietly for either of the top S.H.I.E.L.D. leaders to catch, though evident in his demeanor. “With all due respect to Agent Petrovka . . . she’s not as scary as everyone makes her out to be. She’s not even an agent . . . just a handler.”

Hansel’s eyes burned, and Maria was struck by how much the eldest of the Grimm Clan looked like his oldest son, Will, when the Colonel was in a temper. “Either hyu ‘ave never actually met Agent Petrovka, or hyu are just a dumme kleine Scheißer (stupid little shit),” the German muttered low under his breath.

Maria smirked up at her reluctant paramour, both very aware of the C-130 coasting in behind them for a landing. Sensing that things were about to get terribly out of hand, Fury spoke up, “I can assure you, Agent Harrison; if you don’t get into that hangar, you will find out exactly why Agent Petrovka is one of the most feared and highly respected agents within S.H.I.E.L.D.”

Turning her attention back on the disobedient agent, as she frowned ferociously and barked angrily, “The safety and anonymity of these agents is more important to S.H.I.E.L.D. than you, Harrison. And if you don’t get your scrawny ass in that hangar, I will have you thrown into the brig so fast that your head will spin like Regan MacNeil’s did in The Exorcist.”

Another voice chimed in then, this one glacial in its tone, as Marina Ivanovna Petrovka strode briskly
down the ramp with a snarl, “And that’s only after I turn your insides into your outsides.”

Maria stomped down on her initial gleeful reaction as she turned to face her best friend, aware that
now was not the time to turn into the teenage girl that Marina always seemed to bring out of her.
“Agent Petrovka, it’s good to have you back. Any casualties or injuries to report for your team?”

Hansel watched as Marina barely acknowledged the question with more than a nod as she marched
to the wayward agent, grabbed him by the lapels and shoved him backward viciously. The man,
easily a foot taller than the 5 foot 2 inch handler, went flying onto his backside. Staring up at her with
wide eyes, he scrambled on his hands and knees toward the hangar as Marina advanced on him
menacingly. He just barely managed to get to his feet before Marina planted a firm, brutal kick to his
ass as he was bolting away.

The German grinned at her as she turned back toward them, brushing off her hands. “And to think
that he had doubts about the fact that hyu are a beängstigend Schlampe (scary bitch).”

“Obviously, we’ve never met. And after this meeting, I’m not thinking we ever will again,” Marina
smirked, stepping easily into Hansel’s open arms for a brief hug. “Hello, Vati. Did we miss anything
fun while we were gone?”

“Only the minor heart attack Fury caused when he told me about Clint’s new pet spider,” the man
chided, cocking a single eyebrow at her in question. “Why did Clint decide to adopt another
Russian assassin?”

“Because she was injured, he has a marshmallowy center, and he decided she could be of use to us,”
she sighed with an eyeroll, one slim hand reaching up to push back through her hair. Taking a deep
breath, she turned to her best friend with a grin, “Heya Maria! Movie night at our place tonight?”

Maria chuckled, nodding firmly, “Sounds good. After debrief?”

“Sounds like a plan. I don’t know how long Jason will stay, but I may be able to beg him to stay for
the night. Will and I can take him back to his place tomorrow morning; frankly, I’m beat and not in
the mood to drive anywhere tonight.”

“Well then, you’re in luck. Herr Kuhn and I are here to drive you back to base. Fury brought a few
agents along to take our new Black Widow into custody; we’re going to lock her up while we
debrief her and get her vetted by the Security Council.”

“And how is the Hot Air Head Panel? They gotten in their usual level of douchebaggery today?”
Marina cracked, turning to watch as her boys disembarked from the plane.

The S.H.I.E.L.D. Assistant Director smirked as she joked, “Managed to meet their usual quota and
then some.”

Hansel turned as Clint came off the plane last, his bow case in one hand and his rifle case in the
other. The youngest Grimm looked up with a sheepish grin, obviously able to sense that he was in
trouble with his father. “Sup Pops,” he greeted quietly, setting the cases down and stepping forward
to receive his obligatory hug (Hansel may be upset at the boy, but he would never withhold an
embrace from his tactile youngest son).

“Hyu and I are going to need to have a long discussion about adopting dangerous Russian spies.
You know how I feel about dangerous Russians,” Hansel scolded, releasing his son but keeping him
close by the grip he held on the young man’s upper arms.
Clint’s grin was obviously forced as he quipped, “Well, the first one didn’t turn out too badly. I thought I’d try my hand at a second.”

“I am serious, Clinton Francis . . . she could have killed hyu. And what would that have done to the rest of hyur family? Marina would have been devastated; and that’s not even mentioning how the rest of hyur brothers would feel. You must take more care with what risks hyu take, Falki. I only just became hyur vater; I do not wish to lose hyu so soon.”

“Yes sir,” Clint replied, lowering his head and scuffing his feet lightly against the tarred concrete underfoot.

Sensing that his son had already received this lecture, Hansel only sighed and pulled the boy back in for a longer embrace. “We vill discuss this later. Get hyur gear; it is time to return home.”

Each of the brothers moved forward to receive their own embrace from their father, before they each gathered their gear and headed with Hansel and Maria toward the SUV that sat waiting for them a little ways away. One by one, the Brothers Grimm disappeared into the depths of the SUV. At last, only Will remained outside the car; he wasn’t sure who, but he could feel someone’s eyes on his back. Someone was watching him – who it was, he didn’t know. But whoever it was, Will was determined to protect his brothers and Marina from any harm that could come to them.

Marina’s head poked from the car, a warm smile on her lips as she admonished fondly, “Misha . . . let’s go home.”

A wide grin curved the Colonel’s lips as he nodded, “As you wish, samaya malen’kaya . . . as you wish.”

That night at the Grimm’s house on base was disordered chaos. The younger Grimm brothers bustled about as they each unpacked their gear and loaded their laundry into the laundry room to be done later. Marina was in the kitchen with Maria, the two women throwing together a quick meal to eat together. Jason had indeed relented to staying on base for the night, and Marina was preparing his favorite food as a result. Hansel was with Will, in the master suite the eldest Grimm brother shared with his Marishka, the two men discussing Brian and the need to keep an eye on the increasingly volatile agent for a little while; at least, until Brian had gained some distance from this last assignment and Barney was once more under Brian’s complete control.

Once dinner was ready, the eight of them carried their food into the living room, turned on “Hot Shots! Part Deux” and settled down to unwind from the night. Seated together on the couch, Hansel and Maria watched with fond smiles, as one by one the brothers finished their dinners, took their dishes into the kitchen, settled comfortably on the floor and proceeded to pass out. Barely 45 minutes into the movie, they were the only two awake. Hansel smiled, amused by their unit solidarity, even in something like this, before pressing a fond kiss to Maria’s temple and standing. “I know where Marina keeps the extra blankets; let me go get them. I shall return shortly.”

“Let me help,” Maria agreed, the two moving to the downstairs linen closet.

Moving quietly, they spread the blankets out over the top of each of them, with two lying over the intertwined forms of Will and Marina. Finally, they turned off the television and retreated to the doorframe. For a long moment, they stood silent, just watching Hansel’s family sleep. Finally, the German spoke, “It is good to ‘ave them home.”

Maria’s voice was a low hum as she agreed solemnly, “Yes . . . yes, it really is.”

Meanwhile, Fury was staring at a solemn Natalya Alianovna Romanova from across the table of the
interrogation room where they had placed her for the time being. “I am assured that you speak English.”

Natasha’s head dipped once in silent answer, as she replied in heavily accented English, “I do.”

“All right then, Miss Romanova; then let me get something very straight with you. I don’t trust you; frankly, I would rather your corpse was rotting in an airplane crash like I had ordered my sniper to do. However, Agent Barton sees something worth saving in you and I do like to make a habit of listening to that family; they’re my best agents and their instincts are topnotch.” Folding his hands over the file folder of information he’d collected on his new asset, he leaned forward and growled, “That being said; you betray S.H.I.E.L.D., I will take great pleasure in dropping you, gift wrapped and tied with a bright red bow, on the steps of the Academy that spawned you. Do we understand each other, Miss Romanova?”

Her reply when it came was a single word, “Romanoff.”

“Excuse me?!” he demanded, single eye glaring at her in surprise.

“This is the start of a new life for me, Director Fury. Therefore, I shall have a new name to go along with it; Natasha Romanoff.”

Fury leaned back in his chair, watching her for a long second for any hint of deception or a lie. Seeing none, he stood and offered her a hand, “Welcome to S.H.I.E.L.D., Agent Romanoff. Try not to waste too much of my time.”
Chapter 43: Brotherly Love

It was several days later and Marina was on her second trip home from Los Angeles, CA. She had met with SWAT Officer James Street and offered him a position within S.H.I.E.L.D. Both she and Will had gone to Fury to pitch the idea, citing the need to have someone who could take on Brian without subsequently losing their minds; a talent that Street had already shown an aptitude for.

Looking back on it, Marina now wondered what the hell they had been thinking. When she had offered Jim the position, he had gotten this strange grin on his face and Marina had realized why it was that Brian got along with him so well. Jim was at least as crazy, if not more so, than Brian . . . he just managed to hide it better under logic and common sense. Whereas Brian didn’t give a shit what
you thought about him and did what he wanted, whether you liked it or not.

Looking over the paperwork, Marina let out a soft sigh, “Oh well . . . nothing to do for it now. Street is officially Coulson’s problem.”

Meanwhile, back at the base in New York City, Clint was getting into trouble . . . as usual. And, as was typical, his partner-in-crime was one Kenny Grimm. “Come on, Ken!” Clint called, rotating in mid-step to watch his older brother bound after him. “You gotta see this!”

Kenny only chuckled at his baby brother’s overly exuberant nature, his head shaking ruefully as he quickened his pace to pull even with the 24 year old sniper. “I’m not going to like this, am I? We’re not spying on Dad and Maria again, are we?”

Clint shuddered, well remembering the last time they’d had that idea; it had not ended well for the two youngest Grimms . . . and frankly that was enough said on the issue. “Not a chance in hell. If Pops doesn’t kill us this time, Maria will.”

Rolling his eyes, the second youngest of the Grimm Clan let Clint lead the way across base and up the stairwell of an old air control tower. “What are we doing here?” he asked, as he jogged up the stairs behind his brother.

Jimmying the handle on the door, Clint grinned over his shoulder. “The view from up here is awesome. You gotta see this.”

“Are we even allowed to be up here?”

“I don’t think so, but seriously . . . the place is abandoned. Who’s gonna know?”

“Will . . . Marina . . . Dad . . . or have you somehow managed to forget all the times they’ve caught us doing something you swore we wouldn’t get caught doing?”

“Come on, Ken . . . I just wanna talk. We haven’t really had the chance to talk for awhile; I miss you,” the youngest Grimm pouted, scuffing the floor with his combat boot.

Kenny smirked, reaching over to ruffle the younger boy’s hair fondly. “That pout only works on Marina. All right then. At least tell me that you remembered to bring snacks or drinks or something?”

The face Kenny earned at the question was classic Clint, twisted and petulant. “Oh ye of little faith. I managed to sneak a whole picnic up here. Marina’s not gonna be back from California until late; I think Will’s stuck in a meeting with the Brass tonight; Jason’s on duty at the Second; and Fury asked Brian to assist in debriefing Natasha. No one’s going to come looking for us for awhile yet.”

Watching his brother quietly, it was a long moment before Kenny finally nodded. Clint cheered, rounding away and heading towards the basket sitting on the floor against the opposite wall. “I managed to sneak a few things out of the mess hall. I got fried chicken drumsticks and mashed potatoes and cole slaw and rolls and chocolate brownies and beer.” Digging into the basket, Clint pulled out a drink and rotated to offer it to the younger brother. “Guinness?”

Several hours later, the two brothers were sitting on the railings of the tower, their legs dangling out over open space and beers in their hands as they watched the sun go down. Glancing at the younger brother out of the corner of his eyes, Kenny finally realized what was going on. The privacy, the seclusion, the need for some time together; all of it was a clear indication that Clint was worried or upset about something. Setting down his beer, Kenny braced his hands beside him on the railing and asked, “All right, little brother; what are you kicking around in that tiny Hawk brain of yours?”
“Hey!” Clint protested indignantly, offended more at the perceived insult to his feathered namesake than he was at the joke itself. “Hawk’s are some of the smartest birds in the world.”

Kenny cocked an eyebrow, decidedly unimpressed. “Come on, Clint. You can bullshit anyone else on this base, and make them believe you own oceanfront property in Arizona, but not me. I know you better than that. What’s wrong?”

“Life is going really good for us right now.”

“And somehow you’ve convinced yourself that that’s a bad thing,” Kenny deadpanned, rolling his eyes.

There was a long pause, as Clint gnawed restlessly on his lower lip. Sensing that his jest had been taken to heart, Kenny backpedaled and nudged Clint with his shoulder. “Come on, Clint . . . just fess up already. You’ll be happier once you’ve gotten to tell someone; I’ll be happier because I’ll know what’s going on with you; and Marina will be happy, because her favorite Grimm isn’t moping when she gets home tonight.”

“Whenever things are going really good for this family, Ken, really bad shit happens. I just . . . I get the feeling that we’re headed towards something. And it’s not a good something.”

“Like what?”

Clint’s shoulders rose and fell quickly in a hapless shrug as he announced, “I don’t know; that’s what worries me.”

Kenny hummed a quiet agreement, lifting his beer to his lips and taking a long pull on it as he tried to gather his thoughts. The two subsided into silence once more as they continued to watch the sky darken, though the sun had long since disappeared over the horizon. Finally, the two brothers came to the unspoken agreement that it was time to head home. Marina would be home soon from Los Angeles, and though she’d only been gone for a couple days, both of the youngest Grimms had felt her absence keenly and were anxiously waiting for her return home. Though no one was probably more restless for Marina’s return home than Will; but neither Kenny nor Clint were very eager to delve very deeply into why that was, even within the sanctity of their own minds.

It was after they had cleaned up their mess and were headed toward the stairs that Kenny reached out to grab Clint’s shoulder and stop his brother in his tracks. “No matter what happens, Clint, we’ll get through it . . . as a family. Uncle Nick will continue to protect our secret from the Army. Brian will burn the world before he lets anyone harm us. Jason would leave no stone unturned and no computer would be safe from his vengeance. Will is the scariest son of a bitch I know, in addition to being the coolest big brother ever. Maria is awesome and scary and so badass, her picture is in the dictionary. And that’s not even considering what Dad and Marina will do. You know as well as I do, that neither of them would rest until whoever hurt us had been wiped from the face of the earth. They’re not going to let anything happen to us.”

“In addition to being Army Special Forces, Ken . . . we’re spies. Bad shit happens to spies all the time; seriously, do you not ever pay attention when we’re watching James Bond movies?”

Kenny chuckled, collaring his brother with his elbow and rubbing his knuckles firmly over the curve of his head. “Nerd.”

“Dork,” Clint laughed, wrestling free from his brother’s grip and shoving the older boy away playfully.
“Geek.”

“Jackass.”

“Fanboy,” Kenny shot back at last, causing a gasp and a look of mock affront from the youngest.

“Low blow, Kenny!”

Kenny shrugged haphazardly, as he grinned, “Worked though, didn’t it?”

Clint pouted, letting Kenny scoop up the picnic basket and lead the way from the air control tower. The trek home was a quick one, the two brothers jostling each other and laughing with each other, as they teased and shoved. Arriving home, both were surprised to see Marina’s Jeep sitting in the driveway. Glancing at each other, with big grins on their faces, they picked up speed until they were practically dashing for the door. “Marishka!” Kenny cheered, just barely managing to beat Clint inside.

Marina whirled towards them from where she was standing at the base of the stairs. At the sight of them, a wide grin broke across her face as she held open her arms for her boys. “Solnyshko . . . Dorogoy, getting into trouble again, are we?”

“It was his idea!” Kenny tattle-taled as he bolted into her arms for the first hug, getting a fond scowl from the younger brother as he hissed, “Traitor.”

The former Russian spy only laughed, wrapping her arms around Kenny’s neck as he lifted her clear off her feet in a warm hug. “Hello solnechnyy svet . . . how are you?”

“I’m good. How was your trip?”

“Successful, to say the least. Officer Street has signed the paperwork and has accepted the offer from S.H.I.E.L.D. I have no doubt that Brian will be thrilled; which is why you both are forbidden from telling him.”

“Ahh!” they whined, as Kenny stepped back and let Clint crowd in for an embrace from their long time handler.

After a long second, Clint stepped back from the hug and Marina cupped both of their cheeks in her hands, smiling at them fondly. She was silent for a long moment, before she drew them close to her once again. “Ya lyublyu vas oboikh tak uzh mnogo. (I love you both so very much.)”

“Love you too, Marishka,” they chimed, both watching her in concern as they noticed the sadness lingering behind her eyes. “You okay, Marina?”

Marina’s lips curved slightly as she nodded firmly, “I just can’t believe you both are all grown up already. It doesn’t seem like that long ago, when you were both babies in my arms.”

“Everyone’s gotta grow up eventually, Marishka,” Clint joked, his nose wrinkling as he teased her playfully.

“So they do.” Kissing each of their cheeks fondly, Marina giggled, “Now then . . . who’s hungry?”

“I am!” they both cheered, eyes going wide at the prospect of Marina’s cooking.

Two months later, in November of 2003, the Brat’ya Mrachnyy were deployed to Iraq. Before the deployment was over, one of them would be critically wounded, one would be dead and the rest
would be in mourning for the brother they lost.

Chapter End Notes

So that's a cliffhanger . . . *runs like hell*
Chapter 44:

The first thing Will was aware of when he came to was the smoke; black and thick, it billowed from the overturned and smoking remnants of their Humvees. Next thing he heard was the sound of distant yelling, as someone repeatedly called his name. A sharp slap to his face sharpened his attention and he blinked several times. Marina Ivanovna Petrovka was kneeling over him, tears streaking through the black grit on her face. “Misha! Wake up! Please . . . for the love of God, wake up!” she begged, her free hand gripping the lapels of his fatigues.
There was a secondary round of explosions and Marina screamed, reaching up to shield her head. Will flinched widely at the sound, his arms coming up to haul her into his body even as he rolled her under him to better protect her body. For a long moment, the two were motionless as they waited for the world to balance out again. Finally, Will pushed himself off of his second in command and rotated his body into a crouch. Mercurial eyes were fierce as they scanned the surrounding area, flashing back to Marina as she laid a hand on his arm. Her lips moved, though the words were a muffled haze as she spoke. Will shook his head, lifting his hands to sign rapidly, My ears are ringing. I can’t hear you.

Marina nodded, lifting her own hands, Comms are out. I haven’t been able to get ahold of the other boys.

Will nodded, reaching out to grab her hand. It’s gonna be okay. Come on; we need to find the other boys.

Keep an eye out for Clint; if the explosions messed with your hearing . . . they most certainly screwed with his.

How bad do you think it would have been?

Best case scenario . . . his ears are ringing like yours. Worst case scenario . . . his eardrums burst and he’s at a pretty substantial risk of losing what little hearing he still has left.

The oldest Grimm’s lips twitched into a frown as he signed emphatically, Let’s hear it for the best case scenario. You hurt or anything?

The former Russian spy shook her head firmly, lips compressed tightly as she pulled her sidearm from the holster at her thigh. I’m all right. I’m more worried about the boys. We should have heard something from them by now.

Will nodded, pushing himself shakily to his feet and reaching down to assist Marina to her feet as well. Together, the two moved through the wreckage of what had once been an Army convoy comprised of three Humvees. Each held their guns at the ready in front of them, their eyes scanning through the ruins as they searched for any sign of the rest of their team. Will and Marina had been in the first Humvee, with Clint, Kenny and Jason in the one directly behind them. The third had been members of a different strike team who were supplying the Brat’ya Mrachnyy with the necessary back-up and ground support their mission required.

It was Marina who saw the splayed hand . . . and the familiar finger guards covering the three middle fingers. Bolting, she screamed at the top of her lungs, “CLINT!”

**Two Days Earlier**

S.H.I.E.L.D. base
New York City, NY, USA
November 15, 2003

“Iraq,” Marina deadpanned, cocking an eyebrow over the file Fury had handed her almost the second she’d walked into the room. “What the hell does S.H.I.E.L.D. need the Brothers Grimm to do in Iraq?”

Fury scoffed as he growled, “I’m afraid this has nothing to do with the Brothers Grimm and everything to do with the Brat’ya Mrachnyy; as such it is entirely out of my hands. The Army has received an anonymous tip from an American sympathizer that a high profile Iraqi general is sequestered in a tiny town north of Baghdad. It has demanded the use of its most successful A-Team
... seeing as you all still technically still work for the Army, I don’t exactly have the right to tell the Brass to fuck themselves into a ditch and die there.”

Marina smirked, teasing, “Are you sure? Cause I think I’d pay good money to hear you say it, Nick.”

Fury rolled his one remaining eye, even as his lips twitched into an amused smirk, the man slouching backwards further into his chair. “You understand what that means, right?”

“Jason needs to be called back onto active duty and Brian isn’t coming with us; neither are Hansel, Natasha or Jim. This is simply a Brat’ya Mrachnyy deployment, not a Brothers Grimm assignment.”

“And you’ll be completely without S.H.I.E.L.D. resources.”

“Misha lasted 12 years and Jason survived eight years in the Army without S.H.I.E.L.D. resources; the rest of us managed to get through another three before S.H.I.E.L.D. crash landed into our lives. I think we’ll be all right.”

Standing, she tucked the folder under her arm and watched Fury quietly, “Is that all you have for me, Nick?”

Fury watched her, his hands coming up to steeple under his chin, “Marina . . .”

The woman’s brows furrowed as she watched Fury frown furiously. “What is it, Nick? Is everything okay?”

“Just . . . be careful, all right? We’ve been picking up a lot of chatter about the Grimms. There’s rather a lot of people in the world who would either like to see you dead or on their side.” Seeing the way Marina’s lips pursed at the information, he continued, “You understand what I’m trying to say?”

There was a slow nod as she answered, “Stay close to each other and don’t trust anyone.”

“Good hunting, Marina. Get your boys home in as few pieces as possible, okay?”

“I’ll do my best. See you in a couple days, Nick.”

“You too.”

Marina arrived home to find her boys playing a game of Five Card Stud with their father and Maria Hill. As usual, Clint was fleecing the lot of them; someone had obviously accused him of cheating, because he’d been stripped of his shirt and was sitting at the table bare chested, bare foot and clad only in a worn pair of fatigue pants. Smirking, he laid down a Full House to a chorus of groans.

Crowing, the youngest Grimm reached in and pulled the pile toward him. Cocking an eyebrow at the wide variety of treasures littering the middle of the table, she came to stand at Will’s side. “Do I even need to ask who’s winning?” she asked rhetorically, smiling down at her paramour as he leaned back in his chair and lifted his chin for a “hello!” kiss.”

Will’s voice was dry as he joked, “You mean, you can’t tell?”

Kenny looked up at Marina with a shy grin as he asked, “What did Uncle Nick want, Marishka?”

“We’re being deployed to Iraq at first light.”

Brian frowned, “What the hell does S.H.I.E.L.D. need us in Iraq for?”

“Not S.H.I.E.L.D., the Army. I have to call Jason; he’ll need to be on base tonight to be able to make
“If it’s the Army, what does that mean for me?” the second oldest Grimm asked, folding his hand and crossing his arms over his chair as he watched Marina carefully.

“You’ll be remaining here on base, with Jim, Natasha and your dad. This is strictly the Brat’ya Mrachnyy, Bri.”

“That’s bullshit,” the notoriously hotheaded agent burst out, throwing his cards onto the table in a fit of temper, “We’re the best team S.H.I.E.L.D. has!”

“I know. And I hate to say it, but we were the best team the Army had long before you came back into the fold,” Marina reminded him gently, her eyes sad but fond as she watched him process the information.

Brian’s ears burned lightly, acknowledging the truth for what it was even as the shame of that time period burned a bitter path through him. Sensing that this conversation was going nowhere, Will spoke up, “We have always worked for the Army first, and S.H.I.E.L.D. second. There isn’t much anyone can do about it, when the Army decides to lay stake to their claim.”

Clint smirked as he rearranged his new cards, inquiring lightly, “Am I gonna get to shoot something?”

“Don’t you usually get to shoot something?” Kenny teased, reaching over to ruffle the younger brother’s hair fondly.

The young sniper crinkled his nose at his older brother, reaching out to shove him playfully in his chair. “Shut up, Kenny!” he whined petulantly, pouting as he slouched backwards into his chair.

Kenny’s eyes sparkled as he shoved back, mocking lightly, “Make me, Hawkeye.”

There was a brief scuffle between the two, that ended with Clint flat on his back on the tile floor with Kenny straddled over his belly, the older boy’s fingers unerring in finding all of Clint’s most ticklish places. The youngest of Marina’s charges was writhing across the floor, choking on air as he giggled. The rest of the family laughed as Clint squirmed, unable to break free without hurting his brother and therefore remaining where he was under him.

Finally, Marina took pity and moved to touch Kenny’s shoulder. “All right, solnyshko, that’s enough. Let him up.”

Clint remained where he’d been left once Kenny had been coaxed up from his seat. His arms flopped to the sides as he dragged in whole lungfuls of air. Marina’s smile was indulgent as she crouched beside him, “You okay there, dorogoy?”

One hand came up, thumb up as Clint wheezed, “I’m good.”

20 miles outside of Baghdad, Iraq
Operation Iraqi Freedom
Present Day

Will’s eyes continued to scan the area as he followed Marina to where Clint lay half-buried under the ruins of one of the Humvees. It was hard to believe that it had only been two days ago, that Kenny and Clint were joking around and Clint was cheating at poker (cause even if Will couldn’t prove it, it didn’t in any way change the fact of the matter).
Marina dropped to her knees beside the hand, reaching out to take the motionless appendage in both of her own and pressing a fervent kiss to the back of it. Continuing to hold on to the hand, she bent over and peered into the depths of the Humvee that the hand had emerged from, shouting desperately, “Clint! Kenny! Jason! You three okay in there?”

There was a low groan, before a breathless voice spoke up, “Marishka?”

Recognizing that voice, Marina bent further and was relieved to see Jason further back in the vehicle. “Sladkiy! Are you all right!? Are you hurt? Talk to me, Jay.”

Jason’s voice was thready as he spoke again, “I think I’m in trouble, Marina.”

“Why is that, Jay?” Will asked patiently, as he moved to crouch beside Marina in the debris.

There was a long pause, and for a heart-stopping moment, both had been afraid the tech specialist had passed out. Then, the voice came again, with news that neither of them wanted to hear, “Will . . . Marina . . . I can’t move my legs.”

Chapter End Notes

And that’s a cliffhanger! Apparently . . . I really like those. *runs like hell*
News From the Front

Chapter Notes

So, Russian and German translations are at the end of the chapter, as usual. I hope you all enjoy!! And today we find out what happened to the boys. Thank you all for your reviews. I adored each and every one of them.

By the way, edited with new banner!! Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter 45: News From the Front

All in all, it had started out as a pretty ordinary day.

Brian and Natasha were in the gym, the two agents sparring with one another under Coulson’s critical eye, as the senior agent and handler tried to get an idea of where Natasha fell training-wise. Hansel was in his classroom, once again teaching a snot-nosed group of self-important agents what
they could use for a weapon to keep themselves alive, no matter what the situation. And Maria?

Maria was running like hell for Hansel’s classroom, struggling to breathe as her heart continue to shatter within her chest.

The entire classroom whipped around to face the door as Maria barged inside. Hansel frowned at the sight of her, robin’s egg blue eye narrowing as he took in her heaving chest and the tears standing unshed in her wide, teal eyes. “Fraulein Hill?” he asked calmly, conscious to address her with respect in front of his students, even as he felt his heart begin to hammer in his chest. There was not much that could cause such terror in those eyes, though the rest of her seemed perfectly at rest. “How may I help hyu?”

The woman opened her mouth to speak, before shaking her head to try and clear her thoughts. “Herr Kuhn . . . there’s been an accident.”

Hansel’s whole body seized at the statement, his tone brusque as he demanded, “What kind of accident?”

A flick of teal eyes toward his students and Hansel rounded toward them, barking savagely, “Class dismissed!”

There was a second of complete stillness, his students unsure of whether to take him seriously or not. Finally the German lost his temper and roared, “DISMISSED!!!”

And just like that, each and every one of his students were up and out of their seats, gathering their things and lunging for the doorway. It was universally established that though Herr Kuhn was a hard taskmaster in class and generally kind of a badass, he rarely shouted and was never cruel or unnecessarily abrupt with his students. If he was shouting, something bad had happened.

Once the classroom was empty, Hansel strode to Maria’s side, his hands coming up to grip her arms just above her elbow. “Fraulein Hill . . . Maria . . . tell me.”

“The boys and Marina were involved in an ambush in Iraq. Our people on the ground are fairly certain that the whole thing was premeditated, with them in mind.”

“What kind of ambush?”

“Someone had laid explosives along the road; they waited until the Grimms convoy drove through and then detonated it by remote. I was told that the transmitter was fairly short-ranged; they would have needed to be within 10 yards at the most.”

“My boys? And Marina? Are they all right?”

Here Maria’s whole face crumpled as she looked up at her reluctant paramour, her head shaking slowly. “Hansel, Kenny . . . he didn’t make it. He’s gone.”

Hansel felt his whole body turn very light and it was only lightning fast reflexes that allowed him to grab the corner of his desk and prevented him from landing on the floor. He stared at her, distress and alarm filling every corner of his heart as his gut turned over while his body fought to process that statement. “Tell me everything.”

“He . . . um . . . he had bleeding, in his brain. The doctors tried to go in and repair it, but the damage was too extensive. They lost him on the operating table. Hansel . . . I’m so sorry,” Maria whimpered, her eyes squeezing closed as she felt her tears finally trickle down her cheeks.
Pushing past the grief and vowing to grieve later, Hansel shook her lightly to draw her attention back on him. “Will . . . Jason . . . Clint . . . Marina? Do they live?”

Grateful for the action, Maria nodded, her hands coming up to brush at her eyes. “Yes. Will is okay, though his hearing is kinda shaky; he and Marina were in the front Humvee. My agent said the second Humvee took the worst of the explosion. Jason was in the second Humvee and he got pinned under his console; his legs were trapped. He was fortunate . . . except for some tingling as the bloodflow comes back and a couple pretty vicious bruises on his legs, he’ll be all right.” Her face cracked slightly as she continued, “Clint . . . he was in the second Humvee with Jason and Kenny. He . . . um . . . he’s not doing so well. He had some pretty serious internal bleeding as well as a traumatic brain injury; they managed to stop the bleeding but they nearly lost him a couple times. He’s in a coma . . . and the doctors still aren’t sure whether or not he’s gonna wake up.”

“And Marina? How is Meine Tochter?”

Maria’s head shook as her eyes squeezed closed, “How do you think she is? Her solnyshko is dead and her dorogoy could be dying. Will told me she hasn’t moved from Kenny’s hospital room since before the orderlies took his body away. She hasn’t cried or anything; she just sits there.”

Hansel’s eyes squeezed closed; his two youngest sons were dead or at death’s door, and he was at least an eight hour flight away from the rest of his grieving family. “I need to be there.”

“There’s a Quinjet already fueling at the airstrip. It will be wheels up as soon as you and Brian are on board.”

Reaching out, he took Maria’s arm firmly above the elbow as he moved through the doorway of his classroom, towing her along gently beside him. “Where is Brian?”

Uncharacteristically unprotesting as he pulled her along beside him, Maria only answered, “He’s with Natasha in the gym. Her handler, Coulson, is assessing her skill sets so that he can start sending her out with Clint on some assignments offpost.” Glancing at him out of her eyes, she shifted her arm from his grip and took his hand instead, “I haven’t told him yet.”

The former witch hunter nodded firmly, gripping her hand tightly within his own as the two walked as quickly as they could to the base gymnasium. They entered the sparring room, just in time to see Natasha throw Brian head over heels and flat onto his back on the mats. There was a vicious curse word from his son’s lips as he flipped effortlessly onto his feet and squared off with her once again. “Again,” his son barked, though Hansel was amused to note that Natasha was looking just as bruised as Brian.

His son had been trained by the Army almost from his infancy to fight. Marina, however, had taught him that in a hand-to-hand fight, pretty was never the objective. She’d trained all of his sons in hand to hand, her only rule being “hit hard, hit fast, and fight dirty.” This had apparently not occurred to Coulson and it was evidently more of a fair fight than Coulson had been expecting, at least if the handler’s impressed look was anything to go by – Hansel may be the man of only one expression, but Coulson was readily accepted as the man of no expression. That fact was proven only moments later, when Brian upended Natasha and her body slammed hard onto the mat below them.

Brian’s lips curled into a vicious grin as she mirrored his earlier move and rocked back onto her shoulders to flip herself onto her feet once more. Taking a stance across from her, he ordered, “Again.”

Sensing that this fight had been ongoing for awhile, and would continue to go until someone halted it, Hansel strode forward, calling, “Hold!”
Surprised at the call, both Brian and Natasha whipped around, with their hands up and ready for an ambush. Hansel smirked lightly at the display, proud of their reflexes even as his heart tightened harshly in his chest. Brian frowned, his whole body relaxing as he watched his father approach. “Dad!? What are you doing here? I thought you had a class today?”

“I did,” the man agreed, coming over and resting his hands on his son’s shoulders.

Hansel watched Brian’s brown eyes turn wary as horror started to creep in, even as Brian watched his father’s face flicker through a catalogue of emotions. “No!” Brian argued, seeming to know what had happened without his father ever telling him. “No no no no no!!”

“Bri . . . I am sorry. But there was an ambush.”

Brian’s mouth worked as tears welled into his eyes and began to leak down his cheeks. “Who is it?”

“Kenny did not make it. Clint is in a coma. And Marina . . .”

“Oh God, she’s not hurt or anything is she? Will would never . . . he couldn’t handle it if something happened to her.”

“No, as far as has been reported to me, she is not hurt. But that does not mean she is not hurting.”

There was a sad quirk of his lips as Brian reminded the older man quietly, “Kenny and Clint have always been her favorites.” Closing his eyes to visibly regain control over his emotions, the second oldest Grimm demanded, “When do we leave?”

“As soon as you’re ready.”

“I’m ready now. Let’s go.”

Natasha stepped forward then, having been standing just inside earshot. “I would like to go with you.”

The former carnie shook his head firmly as he argued, “No; all due respect, Natasha, but this is family.”

“And you said Agent Barton was injured, da? He spared my life . . . the least I can do for him is be there as he fights for his own.”

Brian glanced sidelong at Hansel, giving the decision over to him. “It’s your call, Dad.”

Looking over at the redheaded spy, it was easy to see the concern and hesitant affection the former Russian assassin held for the youngest of the Brothers Grimm. Nodding once, he agreed. “Hyu are welcome, Witwe.”

Looking down at Maria, he cocked a silent eyebrow in question. S.H.I.E.L.D.’s Assistant Director only hardened her expression, her arms coming up to fold her chest, as she snapped, “Don’t even think you’re leaving me behind. Marina’s my best friend.”

A small smile curved his lips as he shook his head; that was the warrior woman he knew. Tears and sadness did not suit her well at all. “All right then. I believe we have a plane to catch.”

It was the longest flight of Hansel’s life, though it could admittedly have been longer. The Army had moved the Brothers Grimm to Landstuhl Regional Medical Hospital in Germany immediately following triage to give their top A-Team their best chance, and Maria had managed to arrange for
one of S.H.I.E.L.D.’s Quinjets, which were much faster than a C-130. So what could easily have been a 14 hour flight was cut down to about five. Even still, Hansel had never been on a longer flight; and that included the one after he and his sons had rescued Gretel and he’d stared at his sister’s comatose form the whole way home.

The first thing Hansel saw as he came through the door was the sight of Will sitting alone in the waiting room, his torso bent over his knees and his head in his hands. There was pain there; etched into every line of his eldest son’s body as he reeled from the passing of his baby brother. Hansel had always known that Will took extraordinary responsibility for his family; to know that Kenny had been lost on his watch was no doubt destroying the young Colonel from the inside out. “Adler,” he called quietly, watching as Will’s head snapped up and the boy seemed to break under the weight of his father’s gaze.

“Dad,” he gasped, shoving himself up and throwing himself into Hansel’s arms.

Surprised at the gesture, Hansel nevertheless wrapped his arms around his son and held on as tightly as he could for as long as Will would let him. The German was conscious of Brian’s presence at his left and the hand he laid upon his brother’s shoulder. The three stood there for a long second, before Will sniffed hard and drew away. Maria stepped forward, her eyes worried as she took in the absence of the family’s resident Russian. “Will . . . where’s Marina?”

“She’s still sitting in Kenny’s room. I’m worried about her; she hasn’t moved since the doctors called time of death.”

Hansel nodded, pulling his son to him once more before releasing him. “Take me to her.”

Will nodded shakily, pulling himself free and leading the way down the hallway. Gesturing towards a closed door to one of the rooms, Will announced, “She’s in there.”

Hansel nodded, reaching to lay a tender hand on Maria’s arm. “I know you want to help her, Spatzi, but in this, I must go alone.”

Maria nodded, her eyes worried as she stared at the closed door. “Take care of her, Hans; this family is going to need her soon enough.”

The former witch hunter nodded in agreement, before pushing the door open and slipping inside, the panel falling closed behind him. Marina Ivanovna Petrovka sat motionless in the chair beside the empty bed, her eyes dry as she stared at the messy, bloody sheets. Her uniform was dirty and stained, and it was apparent that she had not taken any time to clean up as Will had since the ambush had occurred. At the sound of the door, she spoke quietly, “Leave me alone, Misha.”

Hansel frowned at the heart broken words, coming to the side of her chair and crouching beside her. Reaching out, he brushed a wayward strand of dirty brown hair back behind her ear. Once she turned to look at him and he knew he had her attention, he said only, “Meine Tochter.”

Marina’s mouth contorted at the words, the true extent of her grief starting to imprint itself on the curves of her face. “Vati,” she gasped, tears beginning to well in her eyes.

“I am here, Tochter. It is all right now. Hyu do not have to be strong any more.”

There was a long second, before Marina’s whole demeanor cracked and she let out a truly inconsolable wail. Hansel reached out and pulled her to him, holding her tightly as the girl screamed and sobbed, the loss of her solnyshko robbing her of her usual strength and leaving behind a young girl who had lost too much in her life. It was a long time, before Marina’s sobs subsided and she
quieted in his arms. Waiting until he felt she was ready, he took her by the upper arms and pushed her a little ways away. Reaching up, he framed her face in his hands as he whispered, “We shall grieve for him, Tochter. But for now, those still living need hyu. Clint needs hyu.”

Marina’s chocolate eyes drifted closed for a second, before she nodded firmly and pushed herself free. Reaching up, she brushed her tears away and visibly gathered her emotional armor about her. Looking up at him, she was silent for a long moment, before she vowed, “I’m going to kill whoever took him from us.”

There was a long second as Hansel took that in, before he spoke, “We shall hunt them down together.”

Chapter End Notes

Translations:

Meine Tochter (German) - my daughter (Hansel's term for Marina)
dorogoy - (Russian) - darling (Marina's nickname for Clint)
solnyshko - (Russian) - sunshine (Marina's nickname for Kenny)
da - (Russian) - yes
Witwe - (German) - Widow
Adler - (German) - Eagle (Hansel's nickname for Will)
Spatz - (German) - Little Sparrow (Hansel's nickname for Maria)
Vati - (German) - Dad (Marina's nickname for Hansel)
The Birth of Aaron Cross

Chapter Notes

No translations in this chapter. Also, this is a very short chapter. Byer is hard for me, as I don't understand his motivation, so I was really struggling with this chapter. This is about as good as I could get it to go . . . all things considered. However, with this in mind, I hope you enjoy this chapter!! I do so adore your reviews and I look forward to getting to read more of them.

Chapter 46:

Hours later
Training Center
Operations Treadstone, Blackbriar, Outcome

Retired Colonel Eric Byer of the United States Air Force had known Army General, Thaddeus
“Thunderbolt” Ross for years. They had met at several joint military functions, as well as a few command meetings in their day. Frankly, Byer thought Ross was a little bit of a kook, always talking about Russian spies and the Project Cahill and the 5 young boys – no names recorded for them other than Projects One through Five – that the Army had created to be perfect soldiers.

At least he had . . . until he’d heard about PFC Kenneth J. Grimm of the United States Army. Not to put too fine a point on it, but the boy was as dumb as a box of rocks. And yet, his heavy artillery and weapon’s tactics scores were through the roof. They’d gotten him into the Army, when technically his IQ should have kept him benched for life. Not to mention, he was allegedly a member of the Brat’ya Mrachnyy, a top secret and highly classified Special Forces squad. Except for the Brass way above his paygrade, no one knew who the members of the Brat’ya Mrachnyy were. For someone who hadn’t even managed to make the minimum IQ requirement, that was a pretty damned impressive feat.

Byer was surprised the Army hadn’t figured it out for themselves yet; there was a 99% chance that Kenneth J. Grimm was one of the so-called Brothers Cahill. With that assumption in hand, he’d put out feelers and demanded to be told if anything happened to the young man.

When he’d been given the information about the ambush on the Brat’ya Mrachnyy in Iraq, Byer could have danced a jig. The added bonus in the knowledge that Kenneth Grimm was in serious condition, though he was expected to make a full recovery, had been like all of his birthdays come early. He had immediately called the doctors at Landstuhl and told them to lie to the commanding demanding status updates in the waiting room. The Colonel in question, name unknown, had referred to Grimm as his brother and had been demanding a status report for several hours. Fairly certain that the man was not Grimm’s brother, and was instead only a brother in arms, Byer had given the order to fake Grimm’s death. Byer had plans in the works for a special group of soldiers for the DOD . . . plans into which the young soldier would fit quite nicely.

Shortly after the doctors had reported Grimm dead to his unit commander, the boy’s body had been placed on a C-130, a veritable army of doctors accompanying him, as the USAF flew him to New York City . . . and the training center there. Grimm would be a perfect match for the program, assuming that Byer could find the perfect trigger to make him loyal.

Former USAF Captain, Dita Mandy – the only woman in the world Byer could ever claim to truly love . . . though she’d slaughter him if he ever told her – stood at his side, the two watching the young man sleep. Dita frowned, her arms folded across her chest as she watched the soldier toss and turn. “You sure you know what you’re doing, Ric? All reports indicate that the Brat’ya Mrachnyy are extremely close knit and very loyal to each other. He’s gonna need a really good reason to leave their ranks and not want to go back.”

Byer nodded, already kicking this problem around in his head. “This boy is special, Dita. He’s going to be Outcome’s greatest achievement . . . I can feel it.”

“That still doesn’t answer the question of what you’re going to do to suspend his loyalty to his unit and tie his loyalty to us.”

Byer frowned, looking back down at the file in his hands about the ambush. And as the events leading up to the ambush began to fill in within his mind, Byer got his answer. “One of Grimm’s squadmates was seriously wounded in the ambush. The doctors at Landstuhl aren’t sure he’s going to make it; he’s our in. Grimm was driving the Humvee when it was hit. We can use the other man’s death to flip Grimm to our side.”

“But we don’t know that soldier is dead,” Dita reminded him, with a crook of a well-trimmed eyebrow.
“No . . . but Grimm doesn’t know that. And what he doesn’t know . . . will help us.”

Dita grimaced, even as she acknowledged the merits of the plan. “So you’re going to tell him that this nameless soldier is dead and what? He’d want to attend the funeral. What part of ‘extremely close knit’ do you not understand, Ric?”

“So we tell him that his other squadmates blame him for the death and have walked away from him as a result; we tell him that we can help him avenge this ‘dead’ man. Ross says Project 4 was created to be easily impressionable; Grimm is the same age Project 4 would be right now. We can use that personality trait, to convince him of any lies we need him to believe for this to work.”

The woman frowned, watching as bright blue eyes snapped open and began to scan the room quickly. “And that’s another thing. How do you know this specific kid is one of the Brothers Cahill?”

Watching the young man push himself into a sitting position and survey the room with dazed, frightened eyes, Byer smirked, “Call it a hunch.”

She rolled her eyes at him, accepting the file he handed her as he moved toward the door to the room. “And if he doesn’t believe you?”

“We put him down. And no one is ever the wiser for it,” Byer announced heartlessly, before he disappeared into the room.

Stopping just inside the doorframe, Byer stared at the young man as he stiffened reflexively. The two men watched each other carefully, before Kenneth Grimm spoke. “Can I help you, sir?”

“How do you feel, Private? That was a hell of an explosion; you boys took quite the beating out there.”

Blue eyes widened in horror as he whipped around in search of another body. “Where is he? Is he okay?”

“Where is who, Private?”

There was a pause as Kenneth considered the question, before he replied slowly, “Clint; he was in the Humvee with me.” There was a small hesitation, before Kenny continued, “He’s my best friend.”

Byer felt his lips begin to twitch; that little tidbit of information just made his job that much easier to accomplish. “I am sorry, Private Grimm; Clint is dead.”

The boy paled in horror, tears welling quickly in the bright blue of his eyes. “You’re lying. I want to see Marina.”

Making a mental note of that name, Byer pressed on relentlessly. “Marina doesn’t want to see you. She blames you. They all do; you were driving . . . it’s your fault this happened to him. Because of you, Clint is dead.”

“No! You’re lying!” Grimm shouted, reaching over and hurling the glass from the bedside table at Byer’s head.

Impressed at the aim as well as his instinctive play for a weapon, however unreliable, Byer continued with his charade. Curling up his lip in a sneer, he demanded of the young man, “Then where is she? Where is the rest of your team? Everyone talks about how close you all are. If they
don’t blame you for this, then where are they?”

One second Grimm was angry and defiant . . . the next, he sagged backwards with a soft cry. “No! Oh God, no . . . not Clint. You’re right . . . Marina would never forgive me for getting him killed. He’s always been her favorite.”

Sitting in the chair, Byer continued, “I can help you avenge him. I can give you all the resources you need to bring these people to God’s justice.”

Blue eyes were contemplative as they watched him. Finally, the young man spoke, “And what do you want in return?”

Byer’s grin was small as he insisted, “Your loyalty.”

There was a long pause, before Grimm spoke again, “You have it.”

A smirk tilted Byer's lips as he offered the young man his hand, "On that note . . . Welcome to Operation Outcome.”
Chapter 47:

Marina Petrovka was not scared of many things. She had done a lot while she was a spy for Russia, and very little had ever truly phased her. She had snuck five young children from an underground base, all the while knowing what the men in charge would have done to her if she had been caught. While she was still a KGB assassin, she had taken down some of the most evil and terrifying men she could ever have imagined. Currently, she had been on countless successful operations alongside the Brat’ya Mrachnyy and had stared down death more than a few times.

However, there was nothing more frightening than the prospect of what she would see on the other
It was one thing to know something intellectually, and quite another to see the truth of it for yourself. She knew that Clint was badly banged up and in a coma. She just wasn’t sure she was ready to see the evidence of that for herself, not while she was still reeling from the loss of her solnyshko.

Will’s hands were warm and comforting on her shoulders as he waited for her to prepare herself mentally and emotionally for what she would see. Will had seen the youngest Grimm and knew the extent of his injuries; it would not be easy for her to see, but Marina had never let Clint down yet. The Colonel had every faith she would not fail him now, either. Finally, the young woman closed her eyes, took a deep breath and moved from under Will’s hands, reaching for the door handle and pushing open the door. At the first sight of him, Marina let out a soft moan of distress, “O, Bozhe, moy malen’kiy malchik. (Oh God, my little boy.)”

Moving swiftly into the room, Marina strode quickly to the young boy’s bedside. Clint’s face was black and blue, and there was a wide white bandage taped to the curve of his head, just above his left ear. Reaching out slowly, Marina rested her fingertips tenderly against the lobe, one of the only places on his head that was not as badly bruised. “Moy dorogoy mal’chik. . . kak eto moglo sluchit’ya? (My darling boy . . . how could this have happened?)”

Bending slowly, she pressed a warm kiss to the boy’s forehead, relieved to know that –though he was in for the fight of his life – Clint was still alive and, for that reason alone, still had a chance. Reaching back, she hooked the chair with her foot and dragged it to her. Settling into it, she took his hand in both of her own and leaned her elbow against the mattress. Stroking careful fingers over the bruised flesh, she watched him sleep for a long moment before at last she began to sing.

It was a familiar Russian lullaby, and Marina had sung it to each of her boys frequently while they were in their infancy, and more than a few times since. Will’s presence was quiet, but she could sense him watching her from the doorframe. Hansel and Maria had gone to check on Jason, and get his discharge papers in order. Brian and Natasha had gone to the cafeteria to get coffee, knowing that it was going to be a long night for everyone. Knowing where each of her boys were was comforting, and at last Marina bowed her head and allowed herself to beg the god she had never truly believed in for the life of her youngest child. She spoke in quiet Russian, her eyes slipping closed as she rested her forehead against the back of Clint’s hand.

“Our Father who art in Heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy Kingdom come, thy Work be done . . . on Earth as it is in Heaven,” here the young assassin faltered, unsure what to say to this god she did not believe in but was willing to beg for a life, “I know that I have often been faithless, in that I had never truly believed in your work or your glory. However, I come to you now, a penitent supplicant and beg you for a boon.”

Swallowing hard at the reminder of Kenny’s death, she whispered, “I am trying, Lord, to understand your will in this. You took Kenny from us, a bright young life that did not deserve to go so soon. And while some accept your hand in all things, I am angry that your angels have stolen him from us without the chance to tell him goodbye. But mostly, I am angry that we could not tell him how very much we loved him.” A soft sob escaped her as she bowed her head further with a desperate plea, “I hope you have awarded him all the finest treasures of Heaven. There is no one more deserving. “Lord . . . I know that I am possessed of a blackened soul. I am an assassin and I have taken many lives at the behest of mortal men; this is a fact I dare not deny. As such, I have no right to come before you and beg you for this blessing. Please, do not take this boy from his family. The loss of one is hard, but the loss of two would devastate us. Allow him the opportunity to avenge his brother’s death and to grow strong and wise in his absence, that he will always be a credit to his
brother’s example.”

Here she paused, swallowing hard as she forced herself to acknowledge and accept the possibility that she could lose both of her boys. Pressing Clint’s hand to her lips, she whispered quietly against the skin, “However, if you must take this boy to join his brother, please . . . fold them both within your bosom. They deserve the very best of all things. Shelter them and comfort them, and above all, make sure they know to be patient. Because while it may not be soon, we shall come for them one day.”

Kenny came to mind then, filling Marina’s thoughts with the image of his face. Each face was different from the last, as Kenny laughed, cried, smiled, yelled and loved. The thought of the two youngest boys never again joking and laughing with one another sent a vicious pang through her heart as she sat there, struggling to accept one brother’s death and begging for the life of another. “Please, Lord, make sure Kenny knows how much I love him . . . how much we all love him. We will mourn for him, every day for the rest of our lives.

Reaching up, she crossed herself slowly, as she had not done since she was still a very small girl, kneeling at the alter beside her praying father. “In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost . . . Amen.”

There was a long moment as Marina remained unmoving, her eyes closed as she sought some acknowledgement that her plea had been accepted. For a long moment, it seemed as though she would never receive confirmation of her prayer but still the former spy waited. Finally, there was affirmation, though it was not in sentiment or emotion nor was it in still, small words within her mind.

When it came, it came as a small squeeze from the hand within her own and accompanied by the soft whisper of her name. “. . . Marishka . . .”

Marina’s head snapped up, eyes wide as she stared at Clint’s face. Heavy lidded grey eyes watched her quietly, with pale, bloodless lips curved into a tired grin. The point of a tongue flicked out to moisten his lips, before he joked in a broken, breathless voice, “. . . Vy pokhozhí na ad . . . ( . . . You look like hell . . .)”

A surprised puff of laughter escaped from her, before she launched to her feet and bent over him, resting her forehead against his. “Govóri za sebya , malenʹkiy yastreby. (Speak for yourself, little hawk.)”

A familiar hand entered her line of sight, as Will reached to lay one hand over where she gripped Clint’s hand as his other hand dropped to rest on her lower back. “Welcome back, Hawkeye.”

“My head hurts,” he whimpered quietly, allowing himself to sag backwards into his pillows.

“There was some bleeding and swelling in your brain, so your head’s probably going to hurt for awhile. Hold on; I’ll go try and flag down a nurse to get you something for the pain,” Will agreed, squeezing their intertwined hands before disappearing from the room again.

Fluttering his eyes open once more, Clint’s head rolled slowly to look up at his longtime handler and the closest thing he had ever had to a mother. “Marishka . . . what happened?”

“There was an explosion; your Humvee flipped.”

“Jay? Kenny?”

Marina choked on her tears as she answered, “Jason’s fine. He got pinned by his console so he’s
going to have some brutal bruises, but he’s going to be okay.” Reaching up, she stroked her fingers through blond fringe as she avoided his second inquiry. “Your dad, Maria Hill and Brian are here. Even Natasha came . . . she wanted to offer you her support. I think she kinda likes you.”

“She likes Bri too. Besides,” Clint grinned, a quiet joke causing Marina to laugh in spite of her surroundings, “she’s bad for my life expectancy.”

“Very likely,” she agreed with a wicked smirk.

Clint’s face smoothed then, and Marina knew that she could no longer avoid the question. “Marina . . . what happened to Kenny?”

Tears slipped from Marina’s eyes as she bowed her head over their joined hands. A knot at the back of her throat made her swallow hard, before she finally was able to reply. “Clint . . . I’m so sorry. Kenny . . . dorogoy, he didn’t make it.”

Grey eyes watched her for a long time as he took that in. “That’s a lie.”

Marina jerked, her eyebrows furrowing at the response. “The doctors told us he died on the operating table, dorogoy. They called time of death about six hours ago.”

The young sniper’s head rolled back and forth slowly, before he spoke again, “Kenny’s not dead.” Lifting his free hand, he rested it cautiously over his chest, “I would be able to feel it . . . if Kenny was dead.” Releasing a heavy breath, Clint began to fade into sleep once again. “I would know, Marishka. Kenny’s alive.”
Chapter 48: Questions and Lies

It seemed like only hours after Byer left his room, that a group of stone-faced young men came to Kenny’s sequestered hospital room. Very blue eyes took them in quietly as he watched one of them roll a rickety old wheelchair into the room. His eyes flicked between the two as he watched them, before asking quietly, “Can I help you?”

“I’m Agent Maxwell and this is Agent Laramie.”

Kenny nodded in reply, turning his attention to the wheelchair. “Are we going somewhere?”

“Dr. Hirsch wants to speak to you,” came the brusque reply, a firm scowl on Laramie’s face.
No one was going to accuse Kenny of being a brain, but there were some things that he knew better than anyone else. He knew how to read people; to see the truth of a person, just by talking with them. And there was one truth that Laramie was trying very hard to hide from him; he was jealous as hell of Kenny. This of course was confusing because seriously, why would anyone be jealous of him? His best friend was dead... it was his fault Clint was dead... and Marina – his sister in all but blood and one of the few people he loved in life – blamed him for it and wanted nothing to do with him ever again.

There was absolutely no reason to be jealous of him at all.

Bowing his head, Kenny forced himself to remain physically submissive. People would tell you anything you wanted to know, as long as they thought you were offering them the respect they thought they deserved. “Who is Dr. Hirsch?”

There was a snort in response from Laramie, though the answer he wanted came from Maxwell. “He’s the training coordinator for Operation Outcome. You’ll be answering to him while you’re stationed here for training.”

“What kind of training?”

Laramie glared, snarling, “What the hell do you care? You’re not gonna last long here, stupid.”

Kenny’s head lifted at the term, his heart pinging his chest at the remembrance of each of his brothers rushing to his defense anytime anyone had ever insulted him that way. There was a long second as Kenny stared at the man, before the man started to squirm under the weight. At that point, Kenny smiled... a cool, brittle smile that he’d learned from Marina. She only used it when she was dealing with people she didn’t like and if there was ever a more appropriate time to trot it out, it was then. “Mozhet byt’, net, pridurok, no ya mogu garantirovat’, ya budu zdes’ bol’ she, chem vy. (Maybe not, dickhead, but I can guarantee I’ll be here longer than you will.)”

The man blinked, visibly surprised to hear flawless Russian come from the lips of a man he deemed to be intellectually beneath him. Russian was a complicated language; not even he knew Russian. Kenny suppressed the urge to smirk, watching the man with self-satisfied eyes and very aware of the amusement Maxwell was trying to hide from his partner. Coming to the side of the bed, Maxwell smiled. “I know you’re probably hurting, but we need to get you into the chair. You think you can walk?”

Kenny frowned as he turned his attention onto the signals his body was giving him, taking private stock as he attempted to answer that question. It was a long moment, before at last he nodded. “Yeah... I think so.”

“I can help, if you’d like.”

Blue eyes met brown for a second, before Kenny shook his head firmly. “No. I don’t need your help.”

Reaching down, the young private tossed back his covers and rotated his legs carefully over the edge of the bed. Maxwell’s hands came to rest on the handles of the chair as Kenny pushed himself up and over the edge of the mattress. He hissed as agony shot through his battered body, his muscles locking up in an attempt to shield himself from it. Kenny closed his eyes and gritted his teeth, before shouldering past the pain and taking the two small steps to the wheelchair.

A grim smile curved the corners of his lips as he eased down into the seat. Maxwell leaned over to unlock the wheels, his voice a low hum in Kenny’s ear as he murmured, “Well done. And ignore
Laramie; he’s just a first class dick.”

The small smile became a true grin as Kenny twisted carefully to look up at him. “Thank you.”

There was a small shrug, before Maxwell straightened. “Come on; you don’t want to be late for your first meeting with God.”

There was a brief stab deep in Kenny’s chest as a picture of Fury – as tall and stern as he’d been the last time Kenny had seen him – flashed across his eyes. And close on the heels of that picture came thoughts of Will & Marina, Brian, Jason, his dad, and most vividly Clint. Bowing his head to try and hide his tears, he gasped quietly, “No . . . I guess not.”

The trek through the building was quiet, before at last they arrived at a small room. It was bare from top to bottom, blinding in its whiteness. Maxwell parked him and his IV in the center of the room, across from a single table, before squeezing his shoulder. “Good luck.”

Kenny nodded, before he was left alone again. It seemed like a long time that he sat there in that room alone. Taking that time to think, he closed his eyes, sagged back in his chair and drifted.

The first thing that came to mind was Marina and the lullaby she would sing sometimes in the kitchen when she was cooking . . . the one she used to sing to him and Clint when they were little. Closing his eyes harder, he reached back in his thoughts and drew the words to him. He hummed the first verse softly, trying to remember the look in her eyes as she sung to them. Finally, he began to sing the second verse in inaudible Russian, choking occasionally on the tears that threatened to consume him.

Sim uznayesh, budit vremya, (The time will come, then you will learn)
branoye zhityo, (The pugnacious life,)
smyelo vdenish nogu f stremya (Boldly you’ll stem your foot in the stirrup)
I vazmyosh ruzhyo. (And take the gun.)
Ya sedeltse boyevoye (The saddle-cloth for your battle horse)
sholkom razoshyu (I will sew you from silk.)
Spi, ditya mayo radnoye (Sleep now, my dear little child.)
Bayushki bayu.

The sound of an unfamiliar voice broke into the room and Kenneth jumped, having not heard the door open across from him. “That’s an interesting song. Where did you learn it?”

Kenny’s lips sealed as he watched an older gentleman with deceptively kind eyes and graying hair take a seat in the chair at the table across from him. He watched the man for a long second, adopting his meek and submissive manner once again. Finally, he answered, “I don’t know.”

The man watched him for a long moment, before he folded his hands on the table in front of him. “My name is Dr. Hirsch. I have some questions for you, if that’s okay?” Without waiting for an answer, Hirsch returned his attention to the pad of paper before him. “Are you comfortable?”

Licking his lips, Kenny forced himself to remember what Marina and Will had taught him about interrogation; if it will keep you safe, give your interrogator exactly what they want. Do not answer any more or any less than they ask for. Lie to them, if you can, but remember to stay close enough to the truth that you can remember it later if they ask you again. And above all, let them think that they are in control; they’ll be a lot less likely to hurt you, if they think that they own you.

Blinking away the voices in his head, Kenny cautiously slumped his frame and rose his eyes timidly with a quiet reply of, “Yes, sir.”
There was a small smirk as Hirsch announced, “You don’t look comfortable.”

Kenny’s head shook minutely, careful to play up the charade. “No, sir.”

Glancing down at his pad, Hirsch demanded, “What’s your name?”

Stammering for a second, Kenny debated the merits of answering him honestly. Finally, he settled with the name that he’d always had, no matter what incarnation he was acting as at the time. “Kenneth James.”

The man seemed to sense that that was not the whole of it as he pressed insistently, a firm scowl pulling the corners of his mouth downwards in an ugly frown, “Full name, Private.”

Muttering to himself to lend credence to the illusion that he was exceptionally slow on the uptake, Kenny took the time his stalling gave him and watched his interviewer. The man was reluctantly indulgent with his hemming and hawing; however, he seemed to have no idea who Kenny was or how he’d been recruited. There was something cold in his eyes and Kenny knew that this man was going to hurt him. Whether that was physically, emotionally, mentally or a brutal combination of the three, Kenny didn’t know, but he did know that at the end of it, he was not going to like this man one damned bit. “Kenneth . . . James . . .”

Shifting his eyes as though he was struggling to find his last name within the scattered confines of his own head, Kenny debated the names he could give the man. Col Byer was not in attendance, and had given no impression that he would be involved in Kenny’s training at all. It was entirely possible, that Kenny had been labeled as a number, which would explain why Hirsch did not know his name. If that was the case, it was entirely likely no one in the damn building had any idea of his affiliation with the Army’s legendary Brat’ya Mrachnyy.

That being said, his best hope of protecting Marina and his brothers from what he would no doubt be asked to do with regards to this program was to give his trainers the only name he had that no one else knew . . . his S.H.I.E.L.D. code name. It would put at least some degree of separation between him and the Brothers Grimm . . . just as it had been intended to when he’d originally taken it. Finally, he bit out the last name hesitantly, whispering, “Kitsom.”

“Where are you from?”

Kenny barely managed to hold in his smirk as he asked, “Um . . . when?”

Hirsch’s smile was patronizing, as though he thought he was humoring Kenny instead of the other way around. “Before you enlisted.”

A slow nod as Kenny ducked his head a little bit, answering succinctly, “Irwin.”

Hirsch frowned, his forehead furrowing as he asked, “Is that . . . a town?”

“Irwin . . . it’s a state home,” the young weapons specialist allowed, knowing that his records with Irwin had been buried by S.H.I.E.L.D. when Fury had recruited him. There would be nothing for this man – or any one else – to find should they go looking.

Scribbling that down on his pad, Hirsch muttered under his breath, his tone bitter as though he was suffering through such an ungainly interrogation willingly, as opposed to against his will. Kenny may not be the brightest tool in the shed, but Dr. Hirsch’s opinion of him was as a complete waste of his time. Rallying himself in retaliation, Kenny firmcd his lips subtly and dipped his chin a little further in defiance-hidden-as-submission. Hirsch sighed heavily, before he continued patiently, “What state?”
“In . . . Reno.” Pausing, Kenny bit down on his lower lip as he looked up through his lashes. Marina had taught him this technique; she’d said once that it gave anyone conducting an interview the impression that you were scared of them and were ultimately willing to do anything they asked of you, so long as they didn’t hurt you in order to get it. “Is this a test?” he whimpered, a small frown on his lips as he played the role he’d chosen for himself.

There was a small smirk as though the man was amused by the simplicity of the question, “Yes . . . it is.”

Here Kenny took a deep breath, trying to convince the other man that the very idea of a test unnerved him. Looking up at him through his eyelashes, he tried to project as pathetic an exterior as he could manage as he begged, “If I pass, can I stay here?”

The other man’s whole demeanor lit up and Kenny could barely hold in his grin; he’d found the other man’s weak spot and would do all he could to exploit it in the months to come. “Do you want to stay?”

Kenny adopted an earnest, eager mien as he nodded vigorously, “Yes, sir.”

“That’s good to know,” the other man rumbled, an approving warmth on his face as he watched the young man for a long second before beginning to scribble on his tablet once more.

Leaning back in his wheelchair, Kenny allowed a small smile to crease his lips. He may not be the smartest person in the world, but there was one thing he’d been trained to do better than almost anyone else in the world.

And that . . . was lie.
Chapter 49:

It was a couple days before Clint was deemed well enough by his doctors to return stateside. He wouldn’t be moving under his own power, but Clint was satisfied with going home at least. Marina was a constant presence at his side, the Russian uncharacteristically quiet as she continued to ponder what he’d told her after he’d woken up. He didn’t have any idea as to what her thought process was; for once, the notoriously brash Lt. Colonel was keeping her own council.

To be frank, it was driving the S.H.I.E.L.D. security specialist out of his mind.

He simmered as he sat through the small memorial service Marina insisted on, sitting in a wheelchair.
beside his father and his older brothers as Marina tearfully smoothed tender fingers over Kenny’s name etched in stone and laid flowers at its base. The wound Kenny’s absence left festered sullenly as the sniper watched his brothers begin to quietly move forward. Even as he accepted that it was irrational, Clint’s fury with his brothers’ quiet complacency at Kenny’s absence grew by exponential leaps and bounds.

Clint listened around corners as an exhausted and increasingly frustrated Will called in favors from his various contacts, trying to track down the source of the bomb that had ambushed them. Marina ghosted through her usual routine, her eyes hollow and her lips downturned as she offered what support the eldest Grimm would allow. Jason was around a lot those first few weeks, having taken a few weeks off from the police department and spending the nights in his old room at the house the family shared on base; none of them wanted to be alone with their grief right now. Brian sparred with Natasha, the two spies beating the ever living tar out of each other as Brian struggled to make sense of what had happened. And Hansel was mourning the loss of a son; yet another member of his family he had been unable to save.

Finally, his temper got the best of him. It had been two weeks since the bombing and the eldest Grimm had spent another evening on the phone, trying to locate some kind of information that could help them. Finally, after yet another pointless phone call, Will slammed down the phone obviously aggravated by the lack of answers he was getting. Marina jumped slightly, turning her attention on him from where she sat on the couch beside Hansel and across from where Clint perched in the armchair. “Everything okay?” she asked quietly.

“I can’t get a single lead on who was behind the bombing that killed Kenny,” he growled bitterly, reaching over for his file and scribbling another note in the margins.

“He’s not dead,” Clint muttered angrily, a fierce frown on his lips as he forced his attention on the bow in his hands.

Will sighed heavily, reaching up to rub his face with both hands. “Clint, I miss him too. But for what possible reason would the doctors have lied to us? You have no proof... you can’t make accusations like that.”

“I’m not making an accusation. I’m telling the truth.”

“A truth based on a feeling, Clint. You have NO hard proof,” Will insisted, leaning back in his chair and watching the youngest brother. Clint had been angry and sullen since Iraq, and it seemed that the eldest Grimm would finally find out what the hell was eating at the 24 year old.

Clint grit his teeth, rounding on Marina. “You believe me, don’t you?”

Marina’s eyes flashed open, understandably surprised that she was getting drawn into the disagreement. Chocolate eyes flicked between the two of them, before she closed her book and faced the two. “I think Will has a point.”

Rage flashed sharp and hot in the sniper as he yelled, “You always take HIS side! Why can’t you ever take MY side!!?”

“Clint... that’s not fair,” Marina protested with a wounded frown.

Ignoring the former Russian spy, Clint rounded on his brother and accused viciously, “And you don’t give a damn about anything but the damned Army!! They took Kenny away from us! And you don’t even care!”
“Clinton Francis!” Marina gasped in horror, gaping at the brutal accusation.

Though Clint regretted the words the moment they were spoken, he refused to take them back. Will’s mercurial hazel eyes were blazing as he stood from his chair. “Clinton Francis . . . you need to go cool off . . . right now, before either of us says anything else we might regret,” came the brittle, icy tone Will had never before used on one of his brothers.

Clint glared at the eldest, before rounding on his heel and storming from the living room. Snatching his bow and quiver from the hall linen closet, the sniper slung them over his shoulders and stomped from the house, slamming the door behind him. It was a tense second between the remaining three, before Will released a sharp breath and sagged back into his chair. His hands dragged helplessly through his hair as he bent over, as though he was trying to contain his emotions. Torn between going after her youngest charge and offering her boyfriend what little comfort he would accept from her, Marina set her book aside and moved to Will’s side.

Resting one hand on his shoulder, she crouched at his side and reminded him quietly, “Misha . . . he didn’t mean it. He’s just hurting.”

For a long time, the man was motionless before he stood and shook her off of him. “Stop making excuses for him, Marishka . . . he’s not a child anymore,” he hissed, eyes distant and cold as he turned from her and stormed from the room in the opposite direction as Clint.

Feeling rather adrift, Marina remained where she’d been left. There was a rustle of fabric behind her as her almost-father-in-law stood from the couch and came to her side. Squeezing her shoulders, the German witch-hunter pressed a soft kiss against her temple. “I’ll take mein Adler to the gym and let him beat the hell out of something, Tochter. You go after mein Falki; he’ll listen to you best.”

Marina nodded in silent agreement, watching as the Grimm Family patriarch followed his son from the room and out of sight. Taking a deep breath, she followed after Clint.

The steady draw and release of the bow was soothing and Clint felt his anger begin to ebb with the repetition. And as the anger fled, shame flooded in to take its place. He should never had said what he’d said to his brother; if he was very lucky, Marina would only tan his ass for him. Bowing his head for a moment, Clint drew another arrow from his quiver and nocked it on the string.

It was only about five minutes, before Clint became aware of the absence of the usual noise that typically filled the range. Releasing the tension on the string, he relaxed his grip and lowered the bow. There were only a few people Clint knew who could vacate the range without raising their voice. Will was one – though Will would probably never speak to him again, after what Clint had accused him of – and Marina was the other. “Hey, Marishka.”

“Don’t you ‘Hey, Marishka’ me, Clinton Francis Grimm. I am very disappointed in you,” she snapped, causing Clint to flinch at the glacial tone of her voice. “Give me the bow . . . as of right now you are grounded from the range for a week!”

“You can’t do that!” Clint protested, whirling to stare at her petulantly.

“Two weeks,” came the new sentence, causing a high whine from Clint’s throat. He hadn’t gone that long without firing his bow since he’d gotten it back.

“But Marina!”

Marina’s chocolate eyes were flint as she demanded, “You really want to make it three!?”

“That’s not fair! I’m not a little kid anymore!” the sniper argued sullenly.
“Then stop acting like one! You’re behaving like a little boy who didn’t get what he asked for at Christmas,” she barked, coming closer to him and holding out her hand for the bow. “Three weeks, Clint. Give me the bow; I am NOT kidding with you right now.”

Seeing the fury and displeasure in her eyes, Clint hugged the bow tightly for a second before holding it out to her. Marina cocked a single eyebrow, her arms coming up to fold over her chest. “Is that how you take care of that bow?”

“No, ma’am,” Clint insisted, eyes wide at the question.

“Then put it away properly and give it to me.”

Clint’s hands fairly flew as he unstrung the bow, laid it delicately in its case and closed the lid securely. Recalling the gantry, he withdrew each of his arrows from the target, examining each thoroughly before tucking them into the quiver. Hefting both items from the table, he offered them to her silently. Marina took the bow and quiver from him, resting them against the wall behind her. “I cannot even believe how utterly disappointed I am in you right now, Clinton Francis. How dare you say that to your brother!?”

Ducking his head, his cheeks blazing red with shame, the youngest Grimm didn’t dare to say a single word. His eyes watched Marina’s boots stride past through the fan of his lashes as the Russian paced back and forth. “If you weren’t entirely too old for it, Clint, I would drag you over my knee and lay stripes across your ass. I haven’t spanked you since you were 15, but that doesn’t mean that I’m not still of half a mind to do it anyway.” Stopping in front of him, she hissed, “Do you have any idea how guilty Will feels about losing Kenny? He was in command; Kenny was taken from us on his watch. Will is never going to forgive himself for that. He does not need your help to make him feel like losing Kenny is all his fault.”

“But why won’t he acknowledge that?!”

“Because you have no proof!! And if you had just listened to your brother, instead of flying off half-cocked, we wouldn’t even be having this conversation right now!” Marina roared, throwing her arms up into the air. “Misha and I both believe you, dorogoy. You and Kenny have always been in tune with each other. That does not mean, however, that you can just go accusing the Army of essentially kidnapping a young man for their own purposes. You make waves like that and you’ll be the one with a target on your back. The Army will start sending you on solo missions with that mudak who nearly got you killed last time; and they’ll keep sending you, until you’re dead. Dead men tell no tales, Clint.” Sagging suddenly under the weight of the grief Clint could see in her eyes, Marina whispered wretchedly, “I just lost Kenny . . . I can’t lose you too.”

Scuffing his foot against the floor, Clint gnawed helplessly on his lower lip. “So what am I supposed to do?”

There was a heavy sigh as Marina ran a hand back through her hair. “What do you think you’re supposed to do? You find proof. And once you’ve found it, you keep finding it . . . until there’s no way for them to deny what you’ve found. And then . . . when you have enough to bury them . . . you destroy them with it.”

“I’m sorry, Marina.”

“I am not the one you need to be apologizing too, Clinton Francis. And you will be apologizing to your brother.” Contemplating the young man as he stood before her, she continued doling out his punishment. “In addition to that, as soon as the doctors release you, you’re going to be running double PT. Every day.”
“What!?” Clint squeaked, his head snapping up and his eyes wide as he stared at her. PT was shorthand for the Army’s physical training regimen. It was grueling enough the three times a week it was required, but to increase it to every day was going to be hell. And then to double the amount of PT to do per day!? Suddenly Clint was remembering why it was that the Brothers Grimm so rarely disobeyed Marina when they were children.

“Also, I think it’s about time you started doing your job. You’re Natasha’s supervisory agent; it’s about time you take the reins back from Brian and start supervising. I’ll arrange for several missions for the both of you, to be undertaken as soon as your doctors clear you. Regrettably Natasha is going to get hit with the consequences of your actions today, but frankly I’m too angry to care.” Folding her arms over her chest, she glared at him, “Both of these disciplinary actions will continue until I am satisfied that you have learned your lesson about holding your tongue and respecting your elders. Am I understood?”

“Yes ma’am,” Clint muttered, dropping his head and staring back at the floor.

“Look at me, Major!” Marina snapped, the tone causing a knee jerk reaction from deep inside Clint’s gut. His whole body snapped into parade rest, his eyes coming up to look her in the face. “I said, am I understood, Major Grimm?”

“Ma’am, yes, ma’am,” he agreed briskly, his eyes never wavering from her face. Biting down on his lower lip, he whispered, “I miss him.”

“We all miss him, dorogoy.” Marina agreed, reaching out to brush a strand of hair back behind his ear. “I believe you’re grounded from the range, Clinton Francis.”

“Yes ma’am. Three weeks, ma’am.”

“Then I’m sure you have somewhere else to be, don’t you?”

Clint nodded, his shoulders slumping as he turned toward the door of the range. “And Clint?”

Pausing, he turned back to look at her. “Yeah?”

“If you don’t want a red butt and the inability to sit down for the next few days, I would grovel at Will’s feet. Your dad took him to the gym, and I’m sure that’s not helping calm his desire to beat your ass with his belt. Understand?”

Clint cringed, well remembering the few times that Will had spanked him when he was younger. The experiences had been plenty memorable; and what’s more, he was not looking to repeat them. Nodding once, the young sniper agreed, “I understand.”

“Good. Then by the time I get home, you should already be in your room waiting for Will to get home. Right?”

“Yes ma’am,” came the reply, before Clint ducked through the door and walked as quickly as his injuries allowed towards home.

Needless to say, when Will got home that night, Clint was a model little brother; by bedtime that night, all was forgiven and forgotten between the two. And by the following morning, Marina was in possession of a beautiful new diamond tennis bracelet. The former Russian spy clasped the bracelet around her wrist and smiled; she hated it whenever she and Misha fought.

However, the making up was her favorite part.
Chapter End Notes

German Translations:

mein Adler - my Eagle (Hansel's nickname for Will)
Tochter - Daughter (Hansel's nickname for Marina)
mein Falki - my little Hawk (Hansel's nickname for Clint)
The Losers

Chapter Notes

Russian translations are both in the chapter and at the end, though there's only one of those. I introduce the Losers for just this chapter, though they will probably be making another appearance later on in the story. Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter 50: The Losers

The doctors cleared Clint a week later, and the day after that, he was in the gym with Brian, as he began his two-a-day PT schedule. Brian started him out slow, neither one of them unable to deny the fact that just because Clint had been cleared for duty . . . did not mean that he was back to full strength. He swam, ran sprints, lifted weights, did push ups and pull ups, jumped rope and then performed a three mile run in just under 40 minutes. He did it again in the afternoon, and from there his daily regimen only got harder.
Of course, interspersed in that were his new assignments with Natasha. Which was fine . . . he liked Natasha. It’s just that sometimes? He wasn’t so sure Natasha liked him. Case in point? Their very first assignment to Bolivia, to assist and recruit the so-called “Losers” into S.H.I.E.L.D. So far Clint’s only consolation was the fact that Natasha seemed to dislike Jake Jensen’s motormouth more than she disliked his.

The blond hacker was sitting in front of his laptop, his mouth rambling at a mile a minute as he attempted to hack the harddrive they’d stolen from Max’s hired gun, Wade. Natasha was standing across from him, one elegant eyebrow arched upwards into her chaotic red curls, as Clint crouched atop the highest point he could find, bow in hand and quiver on his back as he kept his eyes on each of the entrances to their little hidey hole. The woman called Aisha was still tied up, trying to convince Clay to listen to her, while Colonel Franklin Clay alternated between glaring at her and pacing back and forth in front of her. Linwood “Pooch” Porteous was bemoaning the bullet holes in his brand new helicopter as the hulking black man they had introduced only as “Roque” was sulked over the fact that he hadn’t been allowed to kill Aisha yet. Cougar Alvarez was currently keeping watch over the front gate, leaving Hawkeye a bit disgruntled at being unable to keep eyes on the whole team. He didn’t trust the Losers any further than he could throw them, but it was what it was.

“Tasha, yesli vy blikov na nego nemnogo tyazheleye, on sobirayetsya plameni iz, (Tasha, if you glare at him any harder, he’s going to flame out,)” Clint admonished in amused Russian, a wicked smirk on his lips as he watched her glare at the blond.

Rolling her eyes at the now persistent nickname, Natasha cocked her head in question and replied acerbically, “Kak vy dumayete, yesli ya polozhil ruku na sheyu i szhal, on, nakonets, zatnesh’ya? (Do you think that if I put my hand around his neck and squeezed, he would finally shut up?)”

“Ya ochen’ somnevayus’ v etom. Khotya eto bylo by smeshno smotret’, kak ty poprobovat’. Idi, Tasha . . . Smeyu vas. (I highly doubt it. Though it would be funny to watch you try. Go on, Tasha . . . I dare you.)”

There was a long second where Clint could see the wheels behind her eyes crank as she considered the idea, before she released a heavy sigh. “Ochen’ zhal’, chto ni vasha sestra , ni direktor Fury by nayti yego smerti pochti tak zhe zabavno , kak vy ili ya by (It is unfortunate that neither your sister nor Director Fury would find his death nearly as amusing as you or I would.)”

“Potomu chto eto nikogda ne meshalo mne ran’ she, (Cause that’s ever stopped me before,)” the sniper cracked with a wicked smirk.

“Napomnite mne yeshche raz, kak dolgo vy zastryali delat’ dvoynymy PT snova? (Remind me how long you’re stuck doing double PT again?)” Natasha sassed back with a smirk.

Clint slumped with a pout as he muttered, “Udar nizhe poyasa, Nat. Ty ne veselo. (Low blow, Nat. You’re no fun at all.)”

Natasha’s lips curled into an amused smirk, as she teased, “Vy imeyete v vidu vy ne veselo? Khm . . . YA veselo . . . ochen’ veselo na samom dele. (You mean you’re not having fun? Huh . . . I’m having fun . . . I’m having lots of it.)”

The young sniper rolled his eyes, before both of them snapped around to stare at the sudden altercation taking place between Clay and Roque over what to do with Aisha. Pushing himself to his feet, Clint nocked an arrow as he watched the fight go down. His eyes narrowed at the anger on Roque’s face, a healthy dose of dread and worry pressing down on his heart as the man stormed away. Glancing over at Natasha, she cocked a single eyebrow before nodding once in agreement at his silent question.
Jumping onto the roof from his perch, the agent called Hawkeye padded on silent feet over the rooftop after the soldier. The team’s XO lead the sniper on a merry chase through the city, glowering at anyone who came within 10 feet and kicking stones from his path as he muttered bitterly to himself. Finally, the man took a seat at a table in a crowded café and pulled out a cell phone. Setting it on the placemat in front of him, he stared at it for a long second. Roque seemed to be contemplating a course of action, the two sides of the argument weighing on him heavily as he continued to watch the phone.

It seemed like an eternity, but was probably only a few seconds before Roque lifted the phone and dialed a number quickly. Pressing the flipphone to his ear, he waited impatiently for someone to answer the line. Deciding to take the risk of missing a portion of the call, in favor of getting to a better vantage point, Hawkeye leaped from his position on the roof to the street below. He parkoured up the side of café and onto the ledge over Roque’s location, crouching down small once again and listening intently to the conversation taking place below him. “If I give you Clay and his team . . . you’ll expunge my record and hire me back on, right, Max?” the hulking creep demanded, causing Clint’s blood to boil in his veins.

After what had happened when Clint was sixteen, a lot had happened . . . not the least of which being Barney’s disappearing act into the ghosts of the night and the subsequent creation of Brian Gamble. But, while Barney had essentially betrayed the family by what he’d done, he had never turned his back so far that it couldn’t be redeemed once again. What Roque was doing, was worse in that he was acting the part of the proverbial Judas. He was willingly handing over his unit – men he’d fought and bled with, Radi Boga – to the men who had tried and failed to kill them several times before.

Clint’s fingers flinched on his bow, forcing himself to be patient and wait patiently for the conversation to be over, so that he would have all the facts to report to Natasha and the other Losers once he got back. Clint remained where he was until Roque hung up the phone and turned his attention onto the food he’d ordered for himself. Making sure to remain silent and unseen, the hawk returned to his original nest and settled down to watch him. Reaching up, he pressed on Jason’s modified comm unit tucked into his ear. “Vdova . . . eto Yastreb yest’. Ty menya slyshish ’? (Widow . . . this is Hawk. Do you copy?)”

“Da, kopirovat’,” came the smooth tones of agreement as the redheaded former spy spoke into her comm. “Chto vy slyshite, Yastreb? (What do you hear, Hawk?)”

“Tam v predatel’stve po vetru. (There’s betrayal on the wind.)” Clint insisted, eyes narrowed as he continued to stare at Roque. “Kley vtoroy, tol ko chto prodal yego, chtoby Maks. (Clay’s second, just sold him out to Max.)”

There was a long pause, as Natasha obviously contemplated this assessment of the situation. “Hawkeye . . . Derzhite glaz na Roke. Vyvasnite, yest’ li on delayat ili poluchayet dal’neysheye ulitsami telefona. Ya budu zhdat’ vas obratno v mashinu. My budem sveryat’ to (Hawkeye . . . Keep eyes on Roque. Find out if he makes or receives any further phone calles. I’ll meet you back here at the clearing. We’ll compare notes then,)”

“Yastreb, iz, (Hawk, out,)” the young sniper agreed, before hunkering down in effort to get comfortable.

Three hours later, Roque finally moved from his seat at the café. Seeing him head in the direction of where he’d left the team, Clint grit his teeth and bolted across the rooftops to get back first. He arrived with mere minutes to spare, leaping down into his original position and causing everyone in the area to jump in surprise at the clatter. The youngest Grimm gave them a shark’s grin, before
watching Roque reenter the room. He was appropriately ingratiating as he apologized, causing Clint to huff quietly under his breath.

Natasha turned back to look at him, cocking a single eyebrow. Her voice was a low, almost inaudible hum in his ear as she muttered, “Ty shpion, Yastreb, pozhaluysta, deystvovatʹ kak on. Polozhite kryshku na vashi emotsii i davayte cherez eto s minimalʹnym krovoprolitʹyem naskolʹko eto vozmozhno. (You’re a spy, Hawk; kindly act like it. Put a lid on your emotions and let's get through this with as little bloodshed as possible.)”

Clint could feel his teeth grinding as he gave a low growl, before nodding once in silent agreement.

It was hardly a surprise to either of S.H.I.E.L.D.’s agents when 24 hours later, Natasha and Clint were bailing the Losers out of a bind. Roque had gift wrapped them in shiny Christmas paper, and handed them all over to Max on a silver platter. Not giving in to the urge to put an arrow in the dirty CIA agent’s eyesocket was probably the hardest thing the young sniper had ever done. But Clay had made the call to allow the smarmy mudak to live, and so Max walked away scot-free.

After it was all over, Clint reached out and clapped Cougar Alvarez on the shoulder, a genuinely impressed smile on his lips. “That was a hell of a shot, Sgt. Alvarez.”

“Thank you, Major Grimm,” the other sniper acknowledged, tone quiet as he stepped from under the hand.

Smirking at the skittish behavior, Clint nevertheless clapped his hands together in amusement before announcing, “So . . . who’s ready to go back to their lives?”

Pooch was the first to jump on that, announcing, “Take me home, Major . . . my baby mama awaits.”

Jensen’s lips curled in amusement as he snarked, “Your baby mama awaits your execution. She’s gonna massacre you man.”

Rolling his eyes, the driver insisted, “As long as I make it back before the baby’s born, she may leave all of my essential pieces intact.”

Clint’s smirk was positively evil as he remarked, “Sometimes, it’s the unessential ones you miss the most once they’re gone. Because while I don’t claim to know a damn thing about any woman except for my brother’s girlfriend, I am fairly certain that your dick isn’t something she considers essential right about now.”

At the crack, the remaining Losers roared with laughter, Jake Jensen practically falling over from the force of his giggles. Pooch grumbled angrily, a small pout on his lips as he stomped up the stairs of the plane S.H.I.E.L.D. had sent to retrieve its agents. Needless to say, the ribbing lasted throughout the flight and long into the next day.

Chapter End Notes

Russian Translations:

Radi Boga - for God's sake
Chapter 51

The room was dark, black and empty of everything. At least, Kenny was pretty sure it was; he couldn’t remember whether or not he’d opened his eyes. It took a long time, before he became aware of voices and sounds in the room with him. Brusque fingers pried open his eyelid and Kenny flinched away sharply at the sudden flash of light directly into his eyes. “Synsuka,” he hissed viciously, one hand coming up and batting away the flashlight sharply.

“Ah . . . Private Kitsom . . . welcome back,” came the sharp tones of a white haired doctor. “My
name is Dr. Dan Hillcott. I was the supervising authority during your surgery earlier this afternoon.”

Kenny frowned, closing his eyes and flashing back quickly over the events of the last day or so. Due to the extent of his injuries, he had been unable to submit to the surgical treatments required by the program immediately. He had had to wait until he was healthy enough, before the doctor supervising his case – obviously, this Dr. Hillcott – cleared him to undergo the operation. Finally, after what had felt like a damned eternity, he’d been cleared and put under the knife.

Using the heels of his hands, Kenny forced himself up into a more stable sitting position. Looking around, he noticed several things immediately; he was starving, he was restless and (unless he missed his guess) there was a definite level of higher attention within his gaze. Whirling to face his doctor, he stared with wide eyes in thrilled excitement. “It worked,” he breathed, barely able to contain his happiness with the obvious success of the procedure.

“Well . . . almost. There are a few little kinks to work out, but once we get your chem dosage right . . . yes, Private Kitsom; I do believe it worked.”

Kenny could hardly contain himself, and his first inclination was to run and tell Marina. As the picture of her flashed through his mind, he suddenly frowned and remembered why it was he couldn’t tell her about what was going on. Slumping backwards against the bed, he closed his eyes and once again begged silent forgiveness from the closest person he had to a sister.

Quiet and complacent, he let the doctors and nurses fuss around him while he took in the changes in his perceptions. Everything seemed to be much more in focus, and Kenny could barely contain himself. There was a whole world to see with brand new eyes; the second youngest Grimm could hardly wait to explore it all.

And almost as soon as he had the thought, nausea caught him broadside and he lunged over the edge of the bed to hurl all over the floor.

He hung there miserably for several moments, feeling very isolated and alone as he vomited. After what felt like an eternity, a small warm hand came to rest on his back, slim fingers just brushing skin through the slit in the back of his hospital gown. “It’s all right, Private Kitsom . . . just get it all up. You’ll feel better for it, I promise,” came the soft voice, the very faint tinge of a very familiar foreign accent causing bittersweet warmth to flood through Kenny’s heart.

A soft moan filtered from him as he closed his eyes hard on the mental picture of Marina laughing happily, the sound of her voice as she called him “solnyshko” and “solnechnyy svet”. He missed her so much he could hardly breathe around the pain of it; if it was the last thing he ever did, he’d earn her forgiveness. Pausing the mental picture, he reached out mentally to caress the familiar curve of her cheek before shunting her picture into the darkest recesses of his heart once again.

Turning his attention back onto the swirling of his gut and the pounding in his head, he took a deep breath and forced himself to lean back against his pillows once again. “Why am I so sick?” he whimpered, feeling the nausea start to subside a little bit.

“Your body is just struggling to catch up with the changes we’ve kickstarted. It’s normal,” she assured him. “We have you on Zofran and Cyclobenzaprine in your IV, to help with the nausea and the muscle aches as your body adapts to the genomic alterations.”

The young man moaned miserably, before he upheaved more bile onto the floor. It seemed to go on forever, before at last it eased as she guided him back against hid pillows. Giving himself a few moments of blessed darkness as he tried to steady himself, it was a long time before he opened his eyes and took the time to look at the woman. To put it bluntly, she was an Amazon. Tall, blond and
gorgeous, with a pair of fierce emerald eyes and a truly wicked curve to her mouth, he could easily imagine her leading the Amazon Army into battle back in Ancient Greece. She watched him carefully, her ivy eyes very dark in her pale face. “Feeling better?”

“Yes . . . thank you,” he agreed with a small nod.

Her smile was kind, softening her features as she nodded in reply. “You’re very welcome. My name is June Monroe; I’ll be the nurse in charge of your primary care.”

Watching the way she moved, Kenny picked up almost immediately on the lie in her words. There was enough of the truth, that she was confident in her delivery. However, there was some almost unconscious reminder behind her eyes of her cover story. As a man who had lived with countless cover stories, he knew the look of someone trying to remember their own. “And how long will that take?” he demanded carefully, eyes narrowed as he watched her move cautiously around the room.

“I guess that depends on how long it takes for the side effects of the procedure to stage out of your system,” she answered, seeming to understand that he wanted to know the details of everything that was happening to him at that point.

“How long has it taken for everyone else?” he asked, lowering his eyes to the blanket and deliberately adopting an uninterested mien, as he fished for any information she could give him on the other program participants.

Her gaze flashed to him sharply, her eyes narrowed as she took in his posture and body language. June was silent for a long moment, before she shook her head and turned her body towards the monitors around his bed. Knowing that he was only going to alienate her as a potential future ally if he continued to push her, Kenny fell silent and pulled his blankets up over himself.

It was a long night. Kenny alternated between utterly debilitating nausea and an almost dizzying appetite. June brought him as much food as he could eat, and held his head as he inevitably lost it all again only hours after. She promised him it was normal; the enhancements had increased his metabolism exponentially, while his body continued to struggle with the new augmentations made to his genetic code. So while he tried to eat as much as he could to keep up with his body’s dietary needs, it was simply too difficult to keep it all down. He slept as much as he could, desperate for the relief sleep offered his wrecked body.

Finally, after what felt like an eternity, the nausea began to subside. For a little while after the nausea faded, keeping food down continued to be difficult though at least it no longer felt as though he was going to turn himself inside out with the vomiting. Of course, once the nausea was gone completely, Kenny began to eat everything.

June was a constant presence at his side, and Kenny got the impression she actually lived wherever they were. If he needed her in the middle of the night, after she’d been relieved for the night, it was hardly a matter of five minutes before she was at his bedside once again. Every warning bell in his head went off when she was near, though he could not help the feeling of familiarity he felt with her. He was fairly certain it was because of the miniscule leftovers from what he was fairly certain had once been a strong Russian accent. Having grown up with Marina, he was well aware of how that particular accent sounded once someone had lived in the United States for as long as he suspected she had.

He knew she wasn’t telling him the whole story. Frankly, he didn’t think he wanted to know what her story was nor did he particularly care to try to pry it out of her. She was someone to talk to, truthfully one of the only ones there who didn’t want anything from him other than for him to get healthy again. It was refreshing and Kenny was truly grateful for it.
Except for their surroundings, and what he was being fine-tuned for, he could possibly have called her his friend. The only one he had, now that Clint had been killed in Iraq and Marina refused to speak to him. As it was, she was still fun to talk to and easy to laugh with. Once she found out about his obsession with increasing his intelligence, she would bring him encyclopedias, dictionaries and novels of all kinds to read while he was stuck in bed. He devoured everything he could get his hands on. Nothing was safe from his hunt for as much information as he could cram into his head in as little time as humanly possible.

It eventually got to the point where Kenny thought that his doctors were never going to release him to begin his preliminary training for the program. He’d been stuck on bedrest for 3 weeks, kept sequestered from the rest of the world except for June and the things she would bring him. Though he’d never tested it to be sure, he knew without a shadow of a doubt that the door into the hallway was locked. And though it would have been a small thing to pick the lock, he was not in any way willing to jeopardize his potential place within the program.

It was at the end of those three weeks that he was granted absolution. Dr. Hillcott came into his room for one last final exam, humming to himself as he scribbled notes in his chart. Finally, the plastic slapped shut and Hillcott looked up at the anxious young man with a small smile. “All right then, Private . . . I think you’re all set to go. You’ll report to the practice yard tomorrow morning at 0500 hours. Understood?”

“Sir, yes, sir!” Kenny agreed readily, jumping from the bed and offering the man a formal salute, heedless of the way that open gown hung down and barely covered the more discrete areas of his body.

Hillcott’s smile was amused as he nodded, “Good luck, Private. You’re going to need it.”

Kenny managed to hold in his glee until after the man was gone, with June following closely on the doctor’s heels. Finally, after the door had been shut and locked behind them, a wide grin broke across the young man’s face. Leaping into the air, he cheered, “All right! Woohoo!! About damned time!”

The next morning, he reported to his personal training at the yards to begin his physical and skill instruction. Before the end of the day, having been pushed to the very limits of his endurance and then beyond them, he knew that no matter what had happened to bring him there, he was where he was supposed to be.
Chapter 52: In Pursuit of Peace

And to think; it was supposed to be a relatively easy day.

Director Nicholas Fury stared up at the young Colonel who had just barged into his office, without so much as a “by your leave, sir.” The young man’s words were ringing through the office and in his ears. William Grimm stared at him, mercurial eyes burning brightly as they flashed through colors,
while he waited for a response from the man who was both his and his girlfriend’s boss for all intents and purposes. Fury laid his pen down atop his paperwork, resolving to return his attention to it once the conversation was over. “Hello to you, too, Colonel. Yes, it is a beautiful day today.” he snarked, carrying on a brief dialogue with himself. Folding his arms, he insisted, “You wanna say that again.”

It was not a question.

There was a flash of fury through those eyes, before Will Grimm got his expression once again under his own control. “You’re giving Marina two weeks off, starting tomorrow.”

The eyebrow over his patch rose as Fury commented dryly, “That didn’t sound much like a request, Agent Brandt.”

“That’s because it wasn’t one, Director Fury,” Will snarled, mouth twisting angrily at the way the director was toying with him.

“Colonel, I’m going to give you a piece of advice. Have you ever heard the phrase, ‘You catch more flies with honey than with vinegar’?”

Will’s tone was perfectly polite as he insisted, “I frankly don’t give a letyushchiye krysy zadnitsu (flying rat’s ass) about your delicate sensibilities, Director Fury. I do, however, care about Marishka and this sinking depression she thinks she’s managing to hide from everyone. Hell, not even Clint has noticed yet. And, to be frank, I’d like to keep it that way.”

Fury’s head snapped up at this information, demanding worriedly, “Is she all right?”

“Physically, she’s fine. Emotionally, she’s struggling. She believes Clint; she believes that Kenny is still alive. We both do. But that leaves her in the awkward position where she isn’t sure whether she’s supposed to grieve for Kenny or to hope that he comes back, and it’s tearing her apart.”

Bracing his hands on the desk, Will’s voice was soft and imploring as he begged, “I know you are fond of her, Director Fury. Please, let me get her away from here and see if a little distance will bring her some peace.”

“And how do you plan to do that? Where do you plan to go?”

There was a pause, before Will sighed heavily, “Christmas on the Gregorian Calendar, as celebrated by the Russian Orthodox Church, is January the Seventh. I plan for the two of us to celebrate it this year.”

Fury’s single remaining eye narrowed as he noticed Will’s evasion of the second question. “And where do you plan to celebrate this holiday?”

Will bit down on the inside of his cheek as he watched Fury, obviously gauging his mood and his tone. Finally, Will flopped down into the chair across from the desk. “St. Petersburg, by way of Moscow. With a side trip planned for Кемерово, Sibir’.”

Fury’s eye flashed open wide at the confession. He’d suspected that he wasn’t going to like the answer; the truth of the matter, of course, was worse than he’d even suspected. “You’re going to take your girlfriend – a formerly Russian spy who, I might remind you, defected from the Russian KGB almost 20 years ago – into the very backyard of the very government that spends quite a bit of its resources trying to hunt her down and put as many bullets into her as they think will put her down? Are you insane!?”

“I found her father’s grave,” was Will’s quiet announcement, the softly spoken words pausing Fury’s
tirade in its tracks.

At the knowledge, Fury’s eyes slipped closed in reluctant acceptance. Seeing that the man was beginning to waver, Will pressed forward with his advantage. “She isn’t even sure that there is a gravemarker for him; the last thing she remembers was their house going up in flame with her father’s body still inside. She’s his only child; of anyone else in this world, Marina should be able to lay flowers at her father’s grave. I would never let anything happen to her, Director Fury. I love her too much to do anything less than protect her with my life.” Bringing up his linked fingers, Will entreated, “I will keep her safe . . . I promise.”

Fury sighed, slouching backwards into his chair. He already knew his answer; he’d known it since Will had insisted on the time off. “If anyone can, it would probably be you.” Blinking for a long moment, Fury nodded, “All right; you have your two weeks. With the agreement, that if it gets dicey, you find a country that did NOT used to be a former Soviet republic to spend the rest of your vacation in. Agreed?”

Will’s smile was relieved as he nodded firmly, “Agreed, sir. Thank you, sir.”

“Don’t thank me yet. How do you think you’re going to get Marina to agree to leave?”

The young man’s eyes shone as he smirked, “That . . . is already taken care of. When in doubt of success . . . make Dad do it.”

Meanwhile, Hansel Kuhn was standing in the doorway, smirking with amusement as he watched best friends, Maria Hill and Marina Petrovka, do battle. Both he and Maria were in on Will’s plan to take his Tochter away and both supported the plan wholeheartedly; Marina had been struggling since the Army doctors had told her Kenny was dead. On the one hand, he could understand why neither Marina nor any of the other brothers had left the Army behind after Kenny had vanished. Sometimes the safest place to hide was directly within the line of sight of what you were hiding from. But for Marina, it had always been more than that; the Army, along with her boys, had always been Marina’s opportunity to atone for the men she had murdered and the things she had done while she was still in the employ of Russia’s Academy and their Red Room Program. To learn that the Army she had served so faithfully had backstabbed the Brat’ya Mrachnyy had sent the young lieutenant colonel and spy spinning helplessly into the wind.

So, Maria Hill had arrived at the house that afternoon, grabbed Marina by the hand and dragged her up the stairs to the master suite she shared with his son in the house they shared on S.H.I.E.L.D.’s New York City base. Maria had shoved Marina to sit on the bed and hauled her dufflebag out from the closet. Then, she’d started to pack. That was about the time that Marina started to protest. Currently, they were toe to toe, Marina’s heavy winter jacket the rope by which they played their game of tug-a-war with.

Finally, Maria yanked hard, managing to dislodge it from the pretty young spy’s grip. “Marishka . . . seriously, you’d think we were sending you to Timbuktu to hunt for a Purple People Eater, or something,” Maria huffed with an eyeroll, turning and shoving the jacket deep into the recesses of the dufflebag.

“That’s just it; Voroby, how do I know you’re not? You haven’t said a damn thing about what you’re doing, or why!”

Hansel came into the room then, waving Maria on with her task and resting his hands on Marina’s shoulders as she moved to stop the S.H.I.E.L.D. assistant director once again. “Tochter, do hyu trust mein Adler?”
Marina’s voice was a breathless sigh as she agreed, “With my life.”

“Then, hyu must have the faith in him that he has always had in hyu. He is worried about hyu; we all are. Trust him to take care of hyu. If not hyur own sake, than for his. My son is not a man easily given to idleness when he feels that there is something he can do to help.”

The pretty brunette smirked as she recited quietly, “We were not made to be idle creatures, he and I.”

Hansel’s lips curved into an amused smirk as he bent to press a fond kiss to her forehead, “Indeed.”

Pressing her to sit on the edge of the bed once more, he smiled as she seemed to deflate quietly. Maria shoved the stack of heavy sweaters into Hansel’s chest in a clear indication to pack them, before she took a seat beside her best friend. “Marishka . . . everything’s going to be fine. Promise.”

“How do you know that? What if something happens to Jason, while he’s on his beat, and we’re not here with him? Or Clint and Natasha get sent on an assignment, and there’s no one willing to take over as their handler; I know how most of the handlers in the pool feel about working with Clint.”

Here, she snorted tiredly, a tired smirk on her lips as she recounted, “Half of them think Clint is intentionally difficult and the other half of them think he’s deliberately willful; every single one of them thinks that he doesn’t take a damn thing seriously. Which is admittedly true, of course; but if they’d let him call his own shots instead of trying to micromanage him, he’d be a lot easier for other handlers to work with.”

There was a pause, before Marina threw up her hands in frustration, “And what about Brian and Jim!? If they don’t have a handler willing to take the hardline with them, they’ll walk over their handler.”

Maria reached over and wrapped an arm around her best friend’s shoulder, pulling the other woman close to her for an uncharacteristically fond hug. “Marina . . . they’ll be fine. I’ll keep them all grounded to base, until you and Will get back. I promise.”

Marina’s head tilted over to rest against Maria’s shoulder as she sighed despairingly. “Don’t do that. Clint would never forgive me if I had him confined to base when he could be out in the world, shooting bad guys and blowing shit up.”

Maria smirked as she joked dryly, “I’m sure he’ll live just this once. Just . . .” here the woman paused as she considered her words, “. . . try to enjoy yourself, Marina. You need a break; we all think so . . . even Clint.”

The former Russian spy nodded, watching as Hansel shoved the last of the items Maria had laid out into the dufflebag and pulled the zip closed. “So . . . when do Misha and I leave? Did he say?”

Will’s voice was a warm, fond hum as he questioned from the door. “How does now work for you?”

Exhaustion was clear in the worn smile she gave him over her shoulder. “So soon? Wherever are we going, Colonel?”

“You’ll see, Major. You all set to go?” he teased, watching as her skin flushed prettily at his persistent usage of her former rank. She’d been a lieutenant colonel for nearly a year now, but the former rank – the one that was distinctly deferential to Will’s own – coming from Will’s lips never failed to cause a blush in her cheeks and naughty thoughts in her eyes.

Maria nodded firmly, “I packed everything she’s going to need while you’re there, Will, just like you asked me too.” Turning to Marina, the two women hugged firmly “Don’t you worry about anything here, Marina. Herr Kuhn and I can handle anything that comes up. Enjoy your vacation and we’ll see you both in two weeks.”
Will stepped into the room, hefting her dufflebag over his shoulder and grabbing up his own bag from the closet floor. When the two women finally drew apart, Maria turned her around and pushed her lightly into Hansel’s arms. The German’s embrace was warm and restorative, giving Marina the extra energy she needed to move forward. His head bent and he whispered warmly into her ear, “*Seien Sie gut, meine Tochter.* (Be well, my daughter.)”

Finally, Marina stepped to Will’s side and took his hand in both of hers. The smile on his face was small but adoring as he bent to kiss her temple. “Ready?”

She was silent for a long moment, as she looked up into the eyes of the man she lived her life for. She didn’t know what she’d done to earn his love and trust and she most certainly didn’t deserve him. But at the end of the day, she would never be willing to give him up. Nodding firmly, she agreed, “You lead, Colonel, and I shall follow.”

Though she stopped there, both of them heard the unspoken words that followed. “As I always have.”

Chapter End Notes

Russian Translations:

Кемерово, Сibir’ - Kemerovo, Siberia (Marina's birthplace in Russia)
Vorobey - Sparrow (Marina's nickname for Maria Hill)

German Translations:

Tochter - Daughter (Hansel's nickname for Marina)
mein Adler - my Eagle (Hansel's nickname for Will)
Hey guys, I am so sorry about the silence of the last two days. I had a major midterm and I have spent the last two days, studying like mad. However, I will once again begin posting a chapter a night. And of course, Amerou has her new chapter up. If you haven't read it yet, check it out. It's adorable!

Russian Translations are both in the chapter and at the end of the chapter. Also, there's a fun little scene at the end. Fear not; we will go back and explore it in the next chapter. Also, JULOREAN IS BACK!! YAY!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter 53: To Russia, In Love

The customs agent at the international arrivals check-in in Moscow’s Domoderovo Airport looked up at Marina and demanded, “Imya?”
“Veronika Victorovna Obolenskaya,” Marina replied promptly, feeling a small twinge within her heart though she barely blinked at the name Will had appropriated for her passport.

Veronika Stanislavovna Belinskaya, Viktoriya Viktorovna Dubrovskaya and Valentina Segeyevna Obolenskaya had been her three very best friends while they’d all been together at the Academy. Of the three of them, Valya was dead while Vika and Nika were unaccounted for; neither of the two had popped back up over the years that Red Room assassins had been trying to kill her.

The agent examined the falsified passport, before handing it back to her with smile, “Dobro pozhalovat’ obratno v Rossiyu, khozyayka doma Obolenskaya. (Welcome back to Russia, Mistress Obolenskaya.)”

The dark red cover of her passport closed, before he extended her paperwork back to her. The brunette’s smile was blinding, as she replied cheerfully, “Eto khorosho, chtoby byt’ doma. (It is good to be home.)”

And because of that look on his girlfriend’s face, Will knew without a shadow of a doubt that he’d done the right thing by taking Marina to Russia. Shifting slightly, he offered the agent his own passport as he pressed a fond kiss to her temple, “Imya?”

“Valdimir Abramovich Obolensky,” he replied, hardly batting an eye as he declared himself her husband. His accent was so perfect, even Marina – who knew better – was hard pressed to believe that he had not been born and raised within the borders of Materi v Rossii.

The former Russian spy stood impatiently past the booth as she waited for Will’s passport to be scanned and stamped. Finally, the agent handed him back his passport and Will came to stand at her side. “Gotovy?”

“Da,” she agreed, tucking herself into his body and cuddling close.

Stepping outside, Marina’s eyes filled with tears as the familiar city filled her view. “Oh Misha . . .” she breathed, in long-forgotten awe, “. . . I had forgotten how beautiful the city is. Isn’t the view gorgeous?”

Will’s eyes were firmly on her as she spun in a delighted circle. Her dark hair flaring out behind her and her face tilted upwards into the patchy sunlight, eyes closed and a radiant smile on her lips. “The most beautiful view I’ve ever seen,” he agreed solemnly.

Pausing at the tone in his voice, Marina’s cheeks flamed as she realized that he wasn’t talking about the city. Ducking her head, she tucked herself back into his body. Her fingers reached up to play lightly with the silver buttons on the front of his coat. “Misha . . . spasido.”

His smile was soft and affectionate as he reached to tuck her hair behind her ear. Cupping her cheek in his palm, he bent to press his lips to hers. They kissed for a long moment, content to breathe in the other’s air. Drawing away, Will whispered against her lip, “Pozhaluysta. (You’re welcome.)”

Tucking her hand into the crook of his elbow, Will leaned over and kissed her temple, “Poydem. Yesli my ne potoropimsya, my budem skuchat’ po nashemu poyezdu. (Come on. If we don’t hurry, we’re going to miss our train.)”

Bending, he scooped up their bags and then tugged her gently along beside him. They boarded the Kuzbass train with only about an hour to spare, Will leading her to one of the first class cabins at the front of the train. Marina’s eyes were wide as she looked around the luxurious train car. Will pressed a tender kiss to the skin visible at the neck of her sweater, joking, “Not quite like the circus railcars,
“Are they?”

“Net,” she breathed, trying to take in everything at once. “Where are we going, Misha?”

Will busied himself with stashing their bags into the tiny closet over the bed and setting up the bed. Finally, he sat down on the end and reached over to pull Marina onto the bed beside him. The two lay there for a long time, Marina’s lithe frame cuddled comfortably into the curves of Will’s hardened body. Blunt fingers carded through his hair, the pretty spy’s question echoing unheard through the air, as Will tried to find the words. Finally, he sighed and turned his head to whispered against the skin of her temple, “Кемерово.”

Marina stiffened in surprise, her whole body tensing as she tried to sit up. Will’s arm was implacable about her waist, however, and eventually she gave up the fight. She stared at the wall beside them as she tried to take in that answer, “Why are we going to Кемерово, Misha? There is nothing there for me anymore.”

Cupping the back of her head in his palm, he tilted her head up to meet his eyes. “Marishka . . . samaya malen’kaya . . . do you trust me?”

The answer was immediate. “Da, s moyey zhiznʹyu. (Yes, with my life.)”

“Togda ne zadavayte mne voprosov, i ya skazhu tebe net lžhi. Buďte terpelivy. Vse budet dan otvet v srok. (Then ask me no questions, and I’ll tell you no lies. Be patient. All will be answered in time.)”

There was a moment of silence as Marina took in that answer, before at last her body relaxed once more into complacent silence. Finally, she spoke, “Ya lyublyu tebya, Misha. Spasido . . . za vse. (I love you, Misha. Thank you . . . for everything.)”

Will’s voice was quiet and fond as he replied, “Vy vsegda stoit, Marishka. (You are always worth it, Marishka.)”

It was three days before the train pulled into the station at their destination. As they disembarked, Marina froze. She had not been back to her birthplace since her father was murdered, and the sight of it now – snow-capped and essentially unchanged – left her head swimming and her knees weak. Will’s hand at the small of her back brought out a soft whimper as she struggled to maintain her composure. Turning into him, she clutched the lapels of his coat as she whispered into the coarse wool fabric, “Misha . . . ya ne mogu etogo sdelatʹ. (Misha . . . I can’t do this.)”

“Da, možhno. Vy mozhet’ sdelat’ vse, moya lyubovʹ;” (Yes you can. You can do anything, my love.)” Pushing her tenderly forward, he spoke in a soft, soothing tone as he cajoled her forward. “Takim obrazom, samaya malenʹkaya. Sushchestvuyet to, chto vam nuzhno sdelatʹ, v to vremya kak my zdesʹ. (This way, my little one. There is something you need to do while we are here.)”

Marina clutched tightly to the crook of his elbow as he guided her to the sole inn in the little Siberian town. He checked them in, deposited their bags in their room and then guided her to the nearest flower shop. Stepping inside, he guided a halting Marina to the counter. “Allo? Yest’ li zdesʹ? (Hello? Is anyone here?)” he called, free hand reaching out to ring the bell resting on the counter.

An old man, stooped and frail, came from the back room just then. “Da . . . Da . . . YA iду. (Yes . . . yes . . . I’m coming.)” Looking up, he stared at Marina as though he’d seen a ghost. Marina, however, had recognized him immediately; the man was much younger in her memory of course, but Comrade Yeltsin was hard to mistake for any other man in the village. Her father had purchased the seedlings illegally for his prized Irises from Comrade Yeltsin every year; flowers and gardening were
considered a waste of time by the kommunisticheskii government and the two men could have been in a lot of trouble had they been caught at it. Biting her lip, she waited to see what he would say. Finally, he shook his head to clear it of its thoughts and spoke, “Chto ya mogu sdelat’ dlya vas, molodyye lyudi segodnya? (What can I do for you young people today?)”

“My ishchembuket iz sibirskikh irisov? Yest’ li u vas? (We are looking for a bouquet of Siberian Irises? Do you have any?)” Will inquired calmly, though the shifting colors of his eyes was a clear indication to Marina at least that her lover could sense the tension in the room between the two.

The man’s rheumy eyes shifted onto Marina’s face for a long moment, causing the normally unflappable spy to fidget in place. There was a long pause where Marina thought that both she and Will were in very real danger of being killed or worse, should this man realize who she was and the bounty the Russian government had placed upon her head. Then the man reached out to take one of Marina’s hand, squeezing it firmly, as he replied fondly, “Dlya docheri Ivana? Vsegda. (For Ivan’s daughter? Always.)”

At the confirmation that he knew who she was, Marina gasped and struggled briefly against the old man’s grip. He did not release her though, only tugged her closer to rest a gnarled hand to her cheek, “Ne bespokoytes’, Marishka. Vy nakhodites’ sredi druzey. (Do not distress yourself, Marishka. You are among friends here.)”

Turning, he gathered together an armful of the fragrant irises. Laying them on his bench, he made quick work of trimming them and binding them together. Wrapping the freshly cut stems in a damp cloth, he wrapped them in crackling paper and handed them to Marina. “Dayte vashemu ottsu privet, dorogaya devochka. I prishel snova, prezhde chem uyekhat’. Vy vsegda mozhetes’ tsvetami vashego papy. (Give your father my regards, dear girl. And come again before you leave. You are always welcome to your papa’s flowers.)”

With a tearful smile, Marina handed the bouquet to Misha so as to be able to bend over the workbench. Bracing herself, she pressed a warm kiss to the man’s withered cheek. “Spasibo, dedushka, (Thank you, grandfather.)”

The man smiled lightly, before he waved her away impatiently. “Idti . . . Idti . . . Vy oba yest’ chto skazat’ drug drugu, ya dumayu. (Go . . . Go . . . You both have much to say to each other, I think.)”

Marina waved over her shoulder as Will thanked the man warmly and led her from the shop. It was a short walk, before at last Will led her to a mid-sized marble marker situated near the edge of the town’s tiny graveyard. She choked to see her father’s name etched diligently into the black marble, her knees going watery under her as she sank to the ground before it. Trembling fingers reached to caress the letters, before she bowed forward, forehead against the damp grass that had overgrown the grave as she whispered, “Papa. . . Mne tak zhal’. (Papa . . . I am so sorry.)”

Will crouched at her back, reaching to lay the bouquet at the base of the stone. “Marina, I need you to listen to me for a second, okay?”

The former spy was motionless for a long moment as she wrestled with her composure, before at last she sat up once more and nodded. Brushing at her eyes, she looked over at Will and agreed, “I’m listening.”

“Do you believe Clint . . . about Kenny being alive? There’s no one here but us, and no one’s feelings to spare if you don’t. Just be honest. Do you believe him?”

There was no hesitation as Marina nodded, “Da.”
“Then I need you to hear me. I don’t know why Kenny has made his choice to stay away. I don’t know what to do to bring him back. But I do know, that no matter what . . . he WILL come back to us. He loves you and Clint; you are both his whole world.” Cupping her cheek in his palm, he continued, “I know it hurts that he’s gone and I know how much you just want to grieve for his loss. But Marishka . . . there are others still here who need you: Clint, who’s wrestling with the same loss; Dad, who just lost a son; Jason . . . Brian . . . Maria . . .” Here there was a long pause, as Will’s eyes slipped closed on his own grief and he swallowed hard. “. . . me. While Kenny was the heart of this family, you have always been its iron spirit. Don’t give up on us. Not when we still need you.”

Chocolate brown eyes were steady as they locked on changeable hazel blue. Reaching out slowly, she cupped her palm against his cheek, a small smile on her lips as she watched him lean into the embrace of the hand. They were silent for a long moment, as they watched each other. Finally, Marina bent to kiss him, the embrace poignant and filled with sorrow. It was an endless second and a momentary eternity before they drew away and Marina whispered in the hazy cloud of their combined breath. “I’m still here, Misha . . . never further from you than this.”

Reaching into his pocket, he drew out a small black box. Marina gasped at the sight, knowing instinctively what was inside even as Will prevaricated in opening it, twisting and turning it about in his grasp. “I bought this when I was 20; I saw it in a little shop in Paris and instantly thought of you.” Flicking open the top, he watched as Marina’s eyes flew wider still, her hands coming up to cover her mouth as she stared at the glistening platinum ring topped in a large, flawless blue-mosaic opal. “I know you’re not a fan of diamonds, and quite frankly, neither of us is the marrying kind. But Marina . . . I love you . . . so much it hurts to breathe some days. And you would make me the happiest man in the whole world if you would consent, before God and your father, to be my partner for the rest of our lives.”

There were tears welling in her eyes as Marina nodded frantically, her hands still pressed to her lips as she stared at him. “Da . . . I mean yes . . . a million times, yes!”

Drawing it carefully from its velvet bed, Will slipped the ring onto her wedding finger before hauling her close to him for a fierce embrace, his lips bruising against her own as they kissed. Marina’s hands came up to cup his cheeks, holding him to her until both of them were breathless with it. “Ya lyublyu tebya, Misha. (I love you, Misha.)”

Will’s lips quirked in adoring relief as he replied, “I ya tebya lyublyu, Marishka. (And I love you, Marishka.)”

It was two weeks later, that a pair of high heels clicked sharply on the concrete floors of the bases’ brig. The three men and one woman seated in their cells looked up, dread etched clearly on the faces of at least two as they waited for the owner to appear. Finally, Marina appeared in the hallway between their cells, resplendent in her S.H.I.E.L.D. uniform and her hands braced threatening on her hips. She turned her attention first to Clint and Natasha, seated together in the cell to her left, before turning her attention onto Brian and Jim, who were sharing the cell across from the first. Her left hand lifted to pinch the bridge of her nose, causing both Clint and Brian to lunge for the celldoors at the sight of the ring on her wedding finger. Finally, she sighed and chuckled in tired amusement, “I don’t even want to know, do I?”

Brian’s smirk was telling as Clint replied, “In our own defense . . . the guy totally deserved it.”

There was a small smile curving the very corners of her lips as she laughed, “Don’t they usually, dorogoy? All right then, let’s get the lot of you out of your cells. You can tell me all about what happened once we get home.”
Chapter End Notes

Russian Translations:

imya - name
gotovy - ready
da/net - yes/no
Materi v Rossii - Mother Russia
kommunisticheskiy - Communist
Chapter 54: The Prank War

Two Weeks Previous

Clint dropped onto the sparring mat with a wrenching groan, sprawled gracelessly and puffing hard as his father rested his hands on his knees and laughed. “Come on, Falki; surely hyu cannot be so out of shape.”

The youngest Grimm snapped up onto his elbows, glaring at the German witch hunter. “Not funny, Pops. You try doing two-a-day physical training regimens in a day, and then tell me that you’re not exhausted. Especially since Brian has me running Army Ranger training, as opposed to a standard
Hansel chuckled, plopping down to sit on the edge of the mat beside his son. Clint sighed heavily, before propelling himself upright. “Man, Marina is still kicking my ass for the fight I started with Will.”

The older man smirked, taking a long draw from his water bottle, before he offered, “Or maybe she is simply trying to teach hyu something, Falki.”

“Like what?”

“Patience. Perseverance.” Glancing at Clint, Hansel chuckled, “Subtlety and discretion come to mind as well.”

“I’m subtle!” the young sniper protested petulantly, a soft pout curving the corners of his lips downwards as he glared at his father.

“Unless hyu are actively tracking something, Clint, hyu are about as subtle as a witch in church,” Hansel admonished fondly.

Clint grunted, flopping backwards against the mat again. He muttered grumpily under his breath for a moment, before rocking back onto his shoulders androcketing himself to his feet once again. Bouncing on his toes for a second to get his blood flowing again, he moved toward the pull-up bar situated on the wall across from his father’s seat.

It was then that he heard it; the small, snide tones of an idiot. And not just any idiot – an idiot who had just called his German father a Nazi. His eyes flashed sideways as he tried to trace the faint words back to their owner. One of the great downfalls of being as deaf as Clint, was that sometimes despite the hearing aids, it was hard to pinpoint someone’s exact locations using hearing alone. However, the idiot in question had found a group of people who were clearly uncomfortable with his opinion. Each of them kept turning their attentions toward Hansel, which Clint was quick to pick up on.

Looking the man over, Clint made sure to take careful stock of him so that he would be able to tell Brian about the incident later. Glancing back at his dad, Clint was relieved to note that either Hansel hadn’t heard the comment or he was unaware that he was the subject of the comment. For a long second, the youngest Grimm stood motionless, trying to determine whether or not to continue on as though he hadn’t noticed the conversation or to march over to the man and beat the ever loving shit out of him. Although, that kind of assault – deserved or not – would probably earn him a three-a-day PT schedule and he was barely managing to keep up with the two-a-day PT schedule. Grumbling under his breath, he turned back toward his dad. “Come on, Pops. Let’s get out of here.”

“What about the rest of hyur PT?” Hansel asked, even as he scooped up his towel and water bottle to follow Clint from the gym.

“Eh . . . Marina’s on vacation. What she doesn’t know won’t hurt me.”

The two men were quiet as they left the gym, walking in companionable silence back toward the house the Brothers Grimm, with the notable exception of Jason, all still shared on base. Clint’s thoughts were racing as he considered what had just happened; probie agents were always slinging mud at Marina. The woman was Russian to her core, and her accent was still noticeable enough that people could tell where she was from. They also noticed how high she had risen within the hierarchy of S.H.I.E.L.D. And that wasn’t even counting her familiar, friendly relationships with Nick Fury and Maria Hill.
However, Marina was Russian. Stupidity tended not to bother her much; also, a well placed word could destroy an agent’s career just as quickly as physical revenge. She’d made the brothers promise – with Will forced to promise twice – that they would never fight her battles for her. She would handle the stupidity and jealousy of those beneath her in her own way. So far, three agents had been sent to a godforsaken dirt trap ending in -STAN, and yet another five had quit after being assigned as Fury’s PA for a week.

Except this wasn’t Marina. This was his father, who had spent the Third Reich in a coma. Hansel Kuhn was about as likely to be a Nazi as a newborn kitten.

Forcing himself to calm, one corner of Clint’s lips curved as he considered the mental picture of the man’s face once more. He couldn’t wait to tell Brian; the two brothers had some revenge to plan.

At first, it was little stuff. Brian managed to follow the man into the locker room one day before his scheduled PT. The agent removed the padlock from his locker, grabbed out his towel and the left the rest of his things in the locker itself. Brian sprinkled generous layers of itching powder over the insides of his clothes, both exercise and regular. Then, the two brothers found a quiet place and watched the man go crazy from the itch. They didn’t stick around long enough to be implicated in the act; due to the locker rooms lacking security cameras completely, they got away with it scot-free.

Next, the two brothers attached saran wrap to the outside of the man’s quarters, stretched tightly and utterly unnoticeable until the man himself ran into it and bounced backwards onto his ass again. Due to the snow in the air, the probie couldn’t get a good grip on the wrap with his gloved hands and both Brian and Clint laughed to watch him struggle to tear it down.

After that, things got a little more involved. Natasha was recruited by the two brothers to help with the next prank, due to the man’s overwhelming crush on her. First she invited the probie to have dinner with her at her quarters; though when he arrived, he must have been horrified to realize that Natasha’s quarters were next to organic gardens.

(Natasha’s quarters were actually nowhere near the rooms in question, but the look on the man’s face was hilarious as they watched him run screaming from the room, after the crash of the door opening released a swarm of angry bees.

And things only got worse and more volatile from there.

About three days before Will and Marina were supposed to return home from their vacation, it seemed as though Fury had caught on to the shenanigans of the two Brothers Grimm. He called both young men into his office, sat them down in the chairs across from his desk and announced in no uncertain terms, “I don’t know what this idiot did, and frankly I don’t care. Just don’t blow anything up.”

“Are we in trouble sir?” Brian asked, a sly smirk curving the corners of his lips as he watched the man get up from his chair and stride to the window.

“No . . . I don’t have any real, hard proof as to who might be making Harrison’s life a living hell. All I have is supposition and a fairly accurate guess. However, should anything on my base blow up? You two clowns are the first on my list of suspects; and your usual two accomplices will be occupying cells right along with you. Do I make myself clear?”

“You do sir,” the two agents recited, fully planning not to blow up anything.

“Good. Then get the hell out of my office,” he insisted, waving them away impatiently as he returned his attention back to the stack of paperwork occupying the corner of his desk.

The next prank should have been the crowning glory of the whole lot. Clint had attached suction
cups to the ends of a few arrow shafts, and the brothers had dipped the suction cups in a mixture of superglue and food coloring. The four – Clint, Natasha, Brian and Jim – each collected a handful and spent a whole day flinging the arrows at the man. By the end of the evening, he had about 20 arrows super glued to his body somewhere. It was commonly accepted by all four, that Natasha had the best shot of the event in that she managed to nail the man in the crotch with one of her arrows. The inscription on the arrowshaft there had read simply, “Do you know where your dick has been, Jack?”

However, something had gone wrong. One of Clint’s actual arrows had ended up in their quivers and that arrow had found its way into one of the experiments S.H.I.E.L.D.’s R&D department was cooking up. The reaction had been instantaneous; the explosion had nearly taken out the whole floor, though it was fortunate in that no one had been seriously hurt.

Of course, this explained why Marina and Will came home from vacation to see only Maria and Hansel on the tarmac, a sly smirk on Hansel’s face and a grim frown on Maria’s. Marina had only sighed, rolling her eyes, “What did they do this time?”

“You know how you always say that Clint and Brian left alone and unsupervised causes property damage?” Maria asked dryly.

With a heavy groan, both spies agreed simultaneously, “Yes.”

“Well . . . if Fury and I weren’t so damn amused by the whole thing, they’d been spending a lot of time on their hands and knees, scraping up the debris with a spoon.”

Will had crowed with laughter to hear the circumstances of the incident, his face turning red as he giggled so hard he could barely walk a straight line from the plane to their own car. Though Marina had wanted to follow his example, she was obligated to be professional seeing as both Clint and Brian were her agents. Turning to Hansel, she laid a hand on his arm. “Are you okay, Vati?”

“I am fine, Tochter. I don’t know what a Nazi is. And even if I did, I don’t think anything I could have done would have topped the kind of revenge Clint and Brian had done.”

“Wait . . . someone called you a Nazi?” Will demanded, his eyes blazing furiously as he contemplated all the different ways he was going to make the punkass bitch pay for insulting his father.

Marina’s eyes narrowed at the word as well, though she forced the fury away just long enough to turn to Maria. “Are they in trouble for this?”

The assistant director’s smirk spoke volumes as she shrugged lazily, “I don’t have substantial proof to charge them with anything. It’s all supposition at this point. We only threw them in the brig, because Fury said that he would if anything blew up. Shit blew up . . . the Brothers Grimm are in the brig.”

There was a long second before Marina began to chuckle. “And what has Fury decided to do about the probie in question?”

“Let’s just say, that I don’t think Mr. Harrison will be with us much longer.”

Meanwhile, at that exact second, Fury looked up at the young probie with what Marina referred to as his “shark’s grin” from his place behind his desk. The probational agent was literally sweating bullets as he stared at the one-eyed man behind the desk, waiting for his orders. Neither of them spoke for a long time, before at last Fury lifted a haphazard stack of paperwork off the corner of his desk. “This
is the last 20 years of requisition reports, Probie. I need them all filed; chronologically, alphabetically, and any other –ically I can come up with before the day is over.”

“Will that be all for you today sir?”

“Harrison . . . you are my PA for the foreseeable future. And I can assure you; field assignments are cakewalks compared to this. I would get used to discomfort if I were you; your life just got a lot more difficult.”

Chapter End Notes

German Translations:

Falki - little hawk (Hansel's nickname for Clint)
Chapter 55: Family Ties

It was about another 20 minutes, before the four troublemakers were released from their cells and had joined Marina in the main lobby of the brig. Within seconds of seeing her, Clint lunged at her, grabbing onto her left hand and holding it up. “What is this?”

The former Russian spy cocked an eyebrow at the question, turning her head to examine her hand before turning back to face him once more. “That would be my hand, Clinton Francis. And, as far as I’m aware, it’s been there for a while.”

The sniper glared at her, even as Brian stepped in, “I think Clint’s talking about your new bling, Marishka.”
Marina’s eyes went wide with feigned innocence as she whispered, “Oh. It’s pretty, isn’t it?”

There was an expectant pause as the two younger Grimm brothers waited for the explanation, each of them visibly surprised to see Marina turn on her heel and stride towards the door. Brian and Clint watched their sister walk from the building, Brian’s arms coming up over his chest. “I think we may have better luck in getting a straight answer about this from Will.”

Snorting hard at the comment, Clint moved to dash after Marina, even as he rolled his eyes in horrified amusement. “Ya think?!”

Natasha’s eyes were solemn as she stepped quickly to walk alongside Brian. “I do not understand. I thought you both liked Marina?”

Brian smiled at the assassin, reaching out to pull a wayward strand of red hair from where it had caught in her lashes. “See, that’s the thing. We adore Marina. We just want to make sure that this is what she wants; and not what she thinks is expected of her. Will’s been in love with her since he was 17, and they’ve been together since he was 26. At this point, the idea of the two of them NOT being together is weird. But that doesn’t mean that she didn’t accept his ring for all the wrong reasons, either.”

“But what could be those wrong reasons? I have seen the way they look at each other; I have never seen that kind of love before,” she insisted, her tone about as wistful as the Chernaya Vdova was ever likely to get. “I might have wished for that kind of love once. Truthfully, I no longer remember.”

Brian smirked sadly, as he squeezed her shoulder fondly. “You’re not so old that you can’t wish for that again, Natasha. Everyone deserves to be truly loved.”

“Love is for children. And besides, I highly doubt love was intended for people like me; people with unclean hands and blood in our ledgers.”

There was a soft huff as Brian shook his head, “You mean people like us. My hands have not been clean since Clint was 16 years old, and I left him to die for the sake of an imaginary adventure.”

“But you have made your amends. Clint and your brothers have forgiven you.”

“There is more to forgiveness than simply being forgiven, Nat; it’s also being willing to forgive yourself,” Brian insisted, shoving his hands deeply into the pants pockets of his S.H.I.E.L.D. uniform. “And I’m still working on that.”

There was a soft hum from the woman at his side as they walked, her head nodding once in agreement. Neither touched the whole way back to the house the Brothers Grimm shared on base, but both were intensely aware of each other. Natasha would probably never believe in fairy tales and the existence of true love, but she believed in Brian and the innate goodness of his heart. And while Brian would probably never be particularly demonstrative or even very affectionate to anyone outside of his inner circle, he knew that one day he would find someone who not only knew that, but also understood his reasons.

And maybe, if he was very lucky, that someone would be the beautiful red-haired assassin walking at his left.

Before either of them even realized it, they had arrived at the house. Exchanging rueful smiles with each other, the two assassins walked inside and directly into the heart of chaos. Jason was sitting on the counter in the kitchen, still wearing his NYPD uniform; apparently, he’d gotten tired of the kind
of wacko crazy the 2nd Precinct offered its beat cops and decided to immerse himself in the familiar crazy that the Brothers Grimm lived for. Clint had managed to corner the eldest Grimm in the kitchen, and was using the same technique that had always worked for him up until that point; pester and annoy like a five year old on a sugar high until the person you’re pestering finally spills their guts if only to make you shut up.

Marina was nowhere to be seen, though Brian could hear her cheerful voice coming from the living room. There was a husky chuckle through the doorway that Brian could tell belonged to his dad, and an uncharacteristic giggle that Brian would bet his LIVER belonged to Maria Hill (not that he’d ever want to find out; he liked his liver where it was, thank you very much). Natasha smiled shyly up at Brian, before pushing through the swinging door into the other room. Brian watched her go quietly, his usually frenetic and frenzied thoughts calm and steady as he considered her . . . and the place she was slowly capturing within his heart.

“Come on, Will!” the youngest Grimm whined petulantly, shuffling his feet with a pout. “You didn’t even tell us you were going to propose to Marina. We’re your brothers! We totally should have been the first ones to know.”

“First of all, why would I have told you anything? You have never been able to keep a secret from Marina in your life,” the Colonel teased the younger brother, a pleased sparkle in his eyes as he joked. “And secondly, I didn’t propose to Marina.”

Jason frowned, his eyebrows furrowing as he popped a cherry tomato into his mouth, “The big fat rock on her left ring finger would seem to suggest differently, Will.”

The older brother side-stepped around Clint on his way to the cabinets, one hand reaching out to nudge Jason off the kitchen counter with that scolding look in his eyes that each of his brothers knew inherently to obey. Jason jumped from the counter with a grin, watching as Will reached up into the cabinet over the sink to grab out the bottle of wine someone had gifted the Brothers Grimm with several years ago. There was a healthy layer of dust on the bottle and Will coughed as he took up a rag and wiped it clean. Locating the corkscrew, the oldest brother set to work removing the cork even while he glanced up at Brian. “Do you really think Marina is the kind of woman who would tie herself to a man, take his name and be a good little wife?”

Each of the brothers choked on the mental image, their eyes going wide in horror. There was a long moment of silence, before Brian insisted fiercely, “Not a chance in hell.”

There was a chuckle, as Will tipped the bottle in silent salute. “And that is why I didn’t ask Marina to marry me.”

Meanwhile, Marina and Maria sat together on the couch. Natasha took a silent seat in Marina’s usual armchair, while Hansel watched over the two women with an indulgent smile from his place leaning against the doorjamb. Feeling very much like a teenager at a slumber party, Maria oohed and aahed over the ring, turning Marina’s hand back and forth under the lamp beside them in order to see the stone from every side. “It’s so beautiful, Marina.” Winking playfully at her best friend, Marina teased, “Will did good.”

Marina’s smile was soft and heartbreaking as she held up her hand into the lamplight, watching the play of light scatter across the face of the mosaic opal. “He really did, didn’t he?”

It struck Hansel then that the young spy seemed calmer now; the frenetic need to move, to act, had faded from her eyes. Instead, he saw a curious mix of relief, joy and sadness in her eyes as she studied the ring. Knowing where those emotions came from, he asked, “Are you happy, Tochter?”
Marina’s eyes were shining with unshed tears as she looked up at him with a beaming smile. “I am, Vati . . . I only wish that Kenny was here. He would have loved to have been here for this.”

Maria’s arms came around her friend’s shoulder, pulling her close in an uncharacteristic hug. Hansel’s hand was tender and familiar on the curve of her opposite shoulder, letting Marina rest her temple against Maria’s own as the three sat and grieved for a moment more for the Grimm who was gone from them. No one in the family was sure how long he would be absent from their lives; all they could do was pray that he was happy and healthy . . . wherever he was.

Just then, Will pushed open the kitchen door, each of the men following carrying a pair of wine glasses. Brian approached Natasha, handing her one of the glasses he carried before perching easily on the armrest of her chair. Maria glared at Will, refusing silently to give up her seat next to her best friend, earning a fond chuckle as Will handed the two women their glasses before turning to accept his own from Clint. Jason handed his spare glass to Hansel, father and son leaning casually back against the wall as they watched the eldest brother take his place in the center of the room. Holding up his glass, Will announced, “I’d like to make a toast. To this family . . . we may stray from each other and we may drift along separate paths . . . but at the end of it all, the love we have for each other will always guide each of us home again.”

Marina smiled and offered up in a quiet voice, “And to Kenny . . . though he may be apart from us right now, we each know that our thoughts and prayers are always with him. I hope he knows how much we love and miss him and that he comes home to us safely, having gained everything he ever wanted in life.”

Clint’s voice was uncharacteristically quiet as he agreed, “Hear hear. To Kenny.”

The call was taken up by each member of the family, before each sipped pensively on their wine. And in everyone’s thoughts was the laughing and habitually sunny features of the young man that Marina had always called “solnyshko.” He was to remain absent from their lives for the foreseeable future, but no matter what, his presence would continue on within their hearts. He had always been, and would always be, the heartbeat of their family.

As long as their family remained, Kenny lived. And for now . . . that was enough.
Chapter 56: Meeting the Doc

Kenny was not a fan of doctors; never had been . . . never would be. The doctors that had created Kenny and his brothers had been the root of the second youngest Grimm’s deep and pervading distrust of anyone possessed of a doctorate and very little ethical scruples. Those men – and even a few women – had played God with the Brothers Cahill, for no other reason that they could. Though he was grateful to be alive, his gratitude in no way meant Kenny forgave them for it.

They had warped each of the brothers in some way. Will had suffered from debilitating nightmares
since before Kenny was even born. Brian was letuchaya mysh ‘der’mo sumasshedshiyi, though admittedly that had been a more subtle slip from sanity as opposed to Will’s sudden realization that there were monsters under the bed. Jason had been heavily scarred, in more ways than one, the secrets he’d gained haunting him behind his green eyes. And Clint . . . before his death, Clint had been the only well-adjusted one of the five, by sole virtue of his age when they’d escaped the Army’s grasp.

Frankly, if he never had to see another scientist in his life, he would consider himself fortunate.

And yet . . . here he sat in the medical examination room at the Sterisyn Morlanta building where Maxwell had taken him, waiting somewhat impatiently for the arrival of whatever over-eager bloodsucker was going to poke and prod at him in the name of science next. He’d been order to strip naked, except for the flimsy paper gown they’d given him to cover himself with; though he’d been ordered to remove it, his chem. kit continued to hang from around his neck. The little pills inside were as precious to him as solid gold now; they alone could keep him running at the intellectual level he found himself at now.

Some part of him was horrified to realize that the pills were essentially a leash; he would never be able to escape the program, unless he found himself willing to regress back to his previous state. Training had been pretty explanatory about how many kinds of a bad idea that was, and frankly – having come from that far – Kenny was in no way willing to give up his brain now. Objectively, he knew that his brother, Will, still far outstripped him in terms of intelligence, but he was at least at the same level as Brian and Clint now. And there was no way in hell, that Kenny was going to go back to being the dumb kid that his brothers had always had to defend when someone called him stupid.

Fiddling with the case between his fingers, Kenny allowed his thoughts to drift. He was no closer to figuring out June’s secret; he was, however, comfortable with referring to her as his friend. June reminded him so much of Marina: the accent that was occasionally very strongly Russian; the sly quirk to her lips that Marina always used to have when she knew more than she was telling; the haunted look in blue eyes that he could remember in brown, the one that spoke of hard times and childhood trauma. If he was honest with himself, Kenny would invariably be forced to admit that he liked her because she reminded him of Marina.

On the other hand though, he could genuinely say that he liked her for herself too. She had never done anything to indicate that she was spying on him for his DOD handlers, and their relationship had continued past his release from his room in the medical ward of the training center. It was not uncommon for one or the other to sneak into the other’s quarters in the middle of the night, to enjoy a simple dinner together and take comfort in uncomplicated human companionship. Both knew the potential consequences should they be caught, but both had decided that the gains far outweighed the risks.

Just then, there was a beep from the door as someone typed in the code that granted them access into the room. Wrenching his thoughts away, Kenny hopped from the bed and dropped into rigid attention, the paper gown draped strategically over his front, as a pretty young dark-haired doctor entered the room. She was around his age, young and gangly with it. There was a pair of black block framed glasses perched adorably on the end of her nose, and brown eyes were nearly frantic with surprise as she looked up at him. Her fingers shook a little bit as she reached up to push her glasses back up the bridge of her nose.

Kenny smiled at her, giving her the sunny grin that Marina had always said could melt even the meanest carney’s granite heart. At the expression, she visibly startled, fumbling with her folders. There was a soft curse as a couple tumbled to the floor, causing an honest smile from Kenny as he moved to help her pick them up. “Calm down, Doc . . .” he insisted, deliberately projecting his voice
into a quiet, soothing tone. Offering the folder to her, he made sure to keep space between them as he insisted, “I’m not gonna hurt you.”

She watched him with wide eyes for a long second, before she seemed to collect herself. “I apologize. I realize I’m running behind today and I will be with you in just a moment. My name is Dr. Marta Shearing.” Taking a deep breath, she gestured calmly toward the bed. “Please . . . take a seat and we’ll get started with our examination shortly.”

Kenny nodded, stepped backwards and hopping once again onto the bed. The sway of the chain around his neck caught her attention and she frowned slightly. “You’re going to need to take that off,” she insisted, pointing imperiously at the case bumping lightly against his chest.

The young man bit his lip, reaching up to lift the chain up over his head in order to remove the case. Dr. Shearing extended her hand, a kind smile on her face at his obvious reluctance. “I promise to take good care of it,” she vowed gently.

Dark brown eyes watched him fiddle with the chain for a long moment, letting him move at his own pace. Finally, he wadded up the chain in his hands and leaned forward to drop it carefully into her outstretched hand. Once he had sat back once again, she gathered the loose bits of chain into her palm and turned back to her paperwork. She did something out of his line of sight and before long Kenny felt his body start to drift uncomfortably. “You drugged me,” he accused, his words slurring as the glared at her angrily.

She smiled at him softly, an apologetic tilt to her lips as she came back to stand beside him. “We need to get some base panels. You’ll be more comfortable during them if you’re asleep.”

“You could have just asked,” he admonished petulantly, feeling the room start to sway back and forth as the drugs began to take affect.

She jerked slightly, as though she had not even considered the idea of asking his permission. There was a long second, before he felt himself sway to the left at an alarming angle. Dr. Shearing lunged to his side, one gloved hand curving familiarly over the curve of his skull as she instructed, “I need you to count backwards from 100.”

Looking up at her with a fierce frown, he allowed her to ease him over onto his back as he began to count down in Russian. “Сто . . . девяносто девяносто девять . . . девяносто восемь . . . девяносто семь . . . девяносто шесть . . . девяносто пять . . . девяносто четыре . . . девяносто три . . . девяносто два . . . девяносто один . . . девяносто ”

By the time he’d reached девяносто-шесть, he was out cold.

It was several hours later that he woke up. Blue eyes fluttered hazily as he fought his way free of the drugs that had taken him under with them. The room looked like the one he’d been a guest of while he was in medical before the beginning of his training. With this thought in mind, he turned his head to the left and blinked hazily at the young woman sitting quietly there. Recognizing her finally, he gave her a wide, goofy grin as he slurred, “Hi.”

June shook her head at him even as she pushed herself to her feet to check his vitals. “Hi. So here’s a little note for you to keep in your mental filing cabinet. Valium is not a sedative for you to use . . . ever.”

“What happened?”

June’s eyes narrowed at him as her hands came up to rest on her hips in a scolding manner, the pose causing a flash of lightning through his heart. He could remember Marina adopting the same exact
stance during his childhood, after he or his brothers had done something to get themselves into trouble. “You had a reaction to the medication. Apparently . . . you’re allergic to benzodiazepines. A convenient little detail you neglected to tell us.”

“What are benzodiazepines?”

June narrowed her eyes at him for a long second, before she sighed at the sincerity lingering there. “Benzodiazepines are psychoactive sedatives. Medications like Ativan, Xanax, Valium, Klonopin, Rohypnol, Halcion and Restoril.”

“Psychoactive sedatives?!” Kenny snarled, putting emphasis on the first word so as to express his displeasure.

“They’re designed to trigger the serotonin receptors in the brain to calm and relax a patient in times of high stress or anxiety. They have nothing to do with intellect or comprehension.”

“You promise?”

June’s smile was small but genuine as she reached out to squeeze his wrist fondly. “I promise.”

There was a long silence, as June scribbled quickly into his medical file. “Your tests all came back clear; your performance levels are slowly improving and your intellectual gains are racing forward. Pretty soon, we’re going to be able to recommend you for actual missions.”

“Awesome!” Kenny cheered, punching the air exuberantly with one fist. Looking up at her with a beguiling smile, he insisted, “We should celebrate.”

June bit down on her lip, glancing back at the partially cracked door and then down at the bulky silver watch she wore around one wrist. Checking the time, she moved to assist Kenny in sitting up and stepping into his clothes once more. Leaning in close to his ear, she murmured too low for the cameras to hear, “Your place or mine?”

Mine’s closer,” he agreed in a soft hum, eyes flicking past her hair and up into the corner of the room where the blinking red light on the camera indicated that it was recording. Shrugging that off, he allowed her to steady him while he stepped into his jeans. Bending his head as though he was watching his own hands, he whispered quietly, “Does seven work for you?”

Glancing quickly at her watch once more, June gave a barely perceptible nod. “I’ll meet you at quarters at seven.” Stepping away once the jeans were in place and he was buttoning them closed, she spoke in a normal tone of voice. “If you feel any further side effects from the valium, please call us and let us know, Operative. Otherwise, you’re all set to go, sir.”

“Thank you, Miss Monroe. Enjoy your evening.”

There was a warm, genuine smile on her face as she insisted, “I will, Operative. Have a good night.”

It was only once Kenny was seated on the steps of the medical unit, waiting for Maxwell to pick him up that he agreed, “Oh, I’m sure I will.”

Chapter End Notes

Russian Translations:
letuchaya mysh’ der’mo sumasshedshiy - batshit crazy
devyanosto-shest’ - ninety-six
The Sun Rises On June

Chapter Notes

The Russian Translations are in parentheses in the chapter. I hope you enjoy the chapter, though it is going to be a different one to read. This is only the first of the chapters I have planned for today. The next chapter will be later this evening, at the usual time. Enjoy!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 57: The Sun Rises on June

It was nearly seven months later, on August 15th of 2004, when Kenny was called into the lead trainer's office at the training center. He stalled in going, trying to make his work out drag on as he tried to come with some reason why the man wanted to see him. Kenny had never even met the lead trainer, let alone had some reason to talk to him before. And the only reason he could come up with was that his handlers had found out about him and June.
It was his first relationship, even if it was kept completely secret from anyone but the two of them. He’d lost his virginity to the woman, the memory of her smile beautiful as she taught him how to bring a woman pleasure and how to bring himself the same. Kenny acknowledged that he was technically probably using her for less than noble reasons, although he was nearly 100 percent certain that she was using him for the same. Either way, he cared about her and the relationship was probably the most stable thing he’d had since he’d been told Clint had been killed in Iraq.

Finally, he could stall no longer. He dressed in the uniform he’d been issued once he started training and moved toward the man’s office. Ret. Capt. Marcus Fenix had been a special operations soldier for the Army for twenty years before he’d been offered the post at the DOD’s top secret training facility. He was a hardass to everyone, but Kenny knew that he was the man’s favorite trainee; thanks to the training he’d received both from the Army as a child and from Marina growing up, he had been the best trained recruit coming into the project. That had given his trainers the opportunity to put him through even more in depth instruction than any of the other trainees.

Pausing at the door, Kenny stared at the plaque for a moment before taking a deep breath and knocking firmly on the door. “Come!” came the imperious call.

A small shiver ran up Kenny’s back at the man’s brusque tone, as he entered the room. Stepping into the room, he snapped off a brisk salute before dropping back into the parade rest Will had taught him when he was a child. Capt Fenix looked up at him with scowl, before returning his attention back on the file open in front of him. “Do you know why I called you here, Kitsom?”

“No, sir.”

“I like you, Kitsom. You’re a good soldier and one of the best trainees I’ve ever turned out of this center. But there are somethings that I cannot overlook. And this . . . this is one of them.” Flipping the folder back to the front page, the captain turned it around and tossed it onto the desk across from Kenny. And there, in Technicolor, was the damning proof of Kenny’s relationship with June Monroe, RN. The two lay sprawled in June’s bed – Kenny could tell by the fluorescent green bedspread – their arms around each other as they laughed. “You wanna tell me why you’re sleeping with a damned Russian spy?” his superior demanded.

At the question, Kenny swayed. One hand flashed out to catch the back of the chair in front of him. The confusion on his face was real as he questioned, “I’m sorry, sir?”

Black eyes watched the younger man, taking in the paling features and the stark mystification on his face. “You didn’t know she was a Russian spy.”

It wasn’t a question.

Kenny shook his head to clear the cobwebs from his brain, insisting, “Miss Monroe was my nurse in Medical, sir. We began a relationship almost seven months ago. She has never given me any indication that she was a double agent.”

“And you think you could have spotted those clues?”

“Oh course, sir. All trainees attend classes devoted to spotting rival agents and potential assets. And as you know, sir, I am currently passing all of my classes with top marks.”

Fenix grunted, waving away the comment. “I am aware of your prowess in your lessons, Kitsom.” Taking back the folder, he continued to flip through the paper work.

Kenny squirmed, trying to bite down on his lips and keep back the questions that he wanted answers
to. Finally, Fenix glowered up at him. “Well speak, Kitsom, if you have something to say. I’m a busy man; I don’t have the time for your prevaricating.”

“If I can ask, sir; what has happened to Miss Monroe?”

“Dubrovskaya,” came the reply, causing a blink from Kenny.

“I’m sorry, sir. I don’t understand.”

“Her name is Dubrovskaya . . . Viktoriya Viktorovna Dubrovskaya,” Capt Fenix elaborated, folding his hands over the folder as black eyes took in his operative and the stone cold expression on the young man’s face.

Kenny blinked again at the name, recognizing it from what Marina had told the Brat’ya Mrachnyy about regarding her time enrolled in Russia’s Akademiya. He remembered sitting at the conference table on a NATO base in Croatia, after several Red Room assassins had come to kill their family’s resident Russian spy. He remembered the names of the women that Marina had known at the Academy; the names of the ones still living that she had dreaded one day being forced to kill.

Viktoriya Dubrovskaya had been one of Marina Ivanovna Petrovka’s best and dearest friends from the Red Room project; they had been in the same class together. There had been three women Marina had claimed kinship with in total among her class of 18 graduating trainees; Valentina Sergeyevna Obolenskaya aka “Valya” had died in Croatia all those years ago, but Nika “Nikita” Stanislavovna Belinskaya and Viktoriya “Vika” Viktorovna Dubrovskaya had always been unaccounted for simply because they had never been among the Red Room killers that Russia had sent after its wayward assassin.

Licking his lips, Kenny’s thoughts turned back to what was happening to the woman who was easily his best friend within the program. “What happened to Miss Dubrovskaya, sir?”

“She’s a Russian spy,” came the answer, the other man’s tone indicating that her fate should be obvious to the DOD trainee. “As of about twenty minutes ago, she had been taken into custody by the MPs. She will be interrogated as to what information about this program she has relayed back to her handlers.”

Kenny bit down on his lower lip; he knew what it meant when the DOD “interrogated” anyone. Marina had been fortunate; she’d been willing to cooperate and had told the DOD everything they’d wanted to know while simultaneously needing no coercion. If he was right, Viktoriya would not be so forthcoming about the information his handlers wanted from her or about the directives she had been given. The captain continued, obviously not noticing or not caring about Kenny’s concern over the woman. “After we have vetted the intel she’s given us, she’ll be executed . . .” there was a noticeable pause, before Capt Fenix offered Kenny the file folder, “. . . by you.”

The young man jerked at the information, frowning fiercely. “Sir?!”

“You were the one she cuckolded; therefore your execution of her will therefore prove your loyalty to the program while offering you the chance to get a little bit of your honor back.” Gesturing at the folder, he insisted, “The first folder is the information you will need on your new cover, Aaron K. Cross. Once we’ve finished questioning her, you will take her to the location outlined within the second folder you have and take her out. The mission will be your first solo assignment, Cross; after which, you’ll be put on a plane to Budapest, Hungary, where you will infiltrate a gun running scheme based there. Do not fuck either of these assignments up, Cross.”

Part of Kenny’s soul soared with the knowledge that he had at last earned his new cover and his
place in the project outside of the training center. He was graduating; he was going to begin his life as an Outcome operative. Another part of Kenny was devastated that he would be the hand on the gun that was going to kill yet another of Marina’s best friends.

Clasping the folder in his hand, he shot off a quick salute. “I understand sir.”

“Good. She’s being held in Cell Block C, Cell C4. You have permission to participate in her interrogation, if you like; I imagine that if I was in your position, I would want to know why she chose me to screw over. You’re dismissed, Cross.”

“Yes sir. Thank you sir,” Kenny - now Aaron - agreed, gripping the folders tightly as he turned on his heel and left the office behind him.

Flipping open the second folder, Aaron traced the stony curve of Viktoria’s face in her Academy profile. Taking a deep breath, he turned toward the brig, questions building in his heart. He arrived at the interrogation room just in time to hear Viktoria scream in pain, the sound seizing his heart within his chest. Testing the door handle discreetly, he shoved open the door and looked around.

He recognized Viktoria’s interrogator as one of the trainees from a different program housed within the training center, the one everyone called Operation Blackbriar. The Blackbriar trainee spun away from his work, glowering at Aaron as the younger man came further into the room. “What the hell are you doing here!? I’m working!”

“I have been given authorization to interrogate her. Get out,” Aaron ordered, his voice cold and his eyes hard as he locked eyes with the other trainee.

There was a long moment where Aaron thought the other man would refuse, before at last he shoved himself to his feet and wiped his bloody hands on a rag. “Good luck with that one. She’s a stubborn one; all she’s done so far is tell lies.”

Aaron squashed the urge to flinch viciously, watching dispassionately as the other man left before turning his attention onto June for the first time. Her face was a bloody mess, with a deep gash curving along the arch of her left cheekbone and her left eye swollen almost completely shut. She was bound to the chair, her wrists lashed tightly to the arms and her ankles secured just as firmly to the legs. Her blond hair was rusty with still fresh blood and her statuesque frame almost seemed to sink in on itself as she slumped within her bonds, her face slack with unconsciousness. Reaching over, he grabbed the extra chair and brought it around so he could sit in front of her. One hand reached out and shook her knee as gently as he could. His tone was too low for the cameras to pick up, as he ordered in quiet Russian, “Vika... prosnis’. (Vika... wake up.)”

She stirred at the sound of her mother tongue, her eyes fluttering for a moment before she dragged herself back to consciousness. Shaking her head to clear it, she forced her head up and looked Aaron full in the face. Her accent was much stronger now as she breathed, “Kenny.”

Aaron shook his head, still consciously keeping his volume low. “V to vremya kak my govorim, menya zovut Sokol. Kak tebya zovut? (While we’re in here, my name is Falcon. What is your name?)”

Seeming to understand what he was asking her, she licked her lips to wet them before answering in kind, “Akademiya nazvala menya Rys’. (The Academy called me Lynx.)”

“Rys, znayete li vy, kogo oni nazyvayut Gadyuka? (Lynx, do you know the one they call Viper?)”

“Da,” came the quiet reply, “Ona byla moim luchshim drugom. Tigritsa i ya pokinul Krasnaya
Aaron hummed at the unknown call sign, taking a guess that “Tigritsa” was probably the last of Marina and Viktorya’s best friends still living, Nikita Belinskaya. “Pochemu? (Why?)” Aaron demanded firmly, reaching out to grab her chin and shake her gently when it looked as though she was about to pass out once more.

Here Viktorya lifted her head and stared at Aaron with bloodshot blue eyes. “Potomu chto ona byla svobodna. (Because she was free.)”

“Gde Tigritsa seychas? Znayete li vy? (Where is Tigress now? Do you know?)”

“Da. Ona slyshala slukhi, chto Gadyuka byli zamecheny v Novoy Shotlandii. Ona ostavila okolo vos’i mesyatsev nazad. Ona pozvonila mne tri dnya nazad, i ona u neye na obratnom puti. (She heard a rumor that the Viper had been seen in Nova Scotia. She left about eight months ago. She called me about three days ago; she's on her way back.)”

“Kak ya mogu poluchit’ shutka o ney? Kak ya mogu svyazat’sya s ney? Mozhete li vy skazat’ mne? (How can I get ahold of her? How can I reach her? Can you tell me?)”

“Vy ne prichinit’ ye bol’? (You won’t hurt her?)”

Aaron shook his head firmly, “Net.”

“Tam v ozhoga telefon pod matrasom. Tigritsa yavlyayetsya yedinstvennym chislom v nem. (There is a burn phone under my mattress. Tigress is the only number in it.)”

Sensing that Viktorya was beginning to fade, Aaron offered her a glass of water and let her drink her fill. Finally, he set the glass aside, forcibly resisting the urge to smooth his hands over her hair. “Kogda vy pokidayete Krasnaya Komnata, Rys’? (When did you leave the Red Room, Lynx?)”

“Desyat’ let nazad, (Ten years ago,)” was the last she could manage before the pain of her injuries became too much for her to bear and she passed into unconsciousness once again.

Taking a deep breath to steady his nerves, Aaron stood from his chair. Bending, he consciously tried to project the image of a spurned lover as he pressed a bittersweet kiss into the matted hair at the crown of her head. Whispering into the strands, he vowed, “Spokoyny, Rys’. Ya sdelayu vse, chto smogu, chtoby spasti vas. (Rest easy, Lynx. I will do what I can to save you.)”

Turning away from her, he strode quickly from the room. He had plans to make and a burn phone to find. With any luck, Gadyuka, Rys’ and Tigritsa would be reunited with one another once again very soon.

Chapter End Notes

Russian Translations:

Sokol - Falcon (Kenny/Aaron's Army Spec Ops code name)
Rys’ - Lynx (The code name of Viktorya Viktorovna Dubrovskaya, given to "Vika" by the KGB and the Academy's Red Room Program)
Gadyuka - Viper (The code name of Marina Ivanovna Petrovka, given to "Marishka"
by the KGB and the Academy's Red Room Program)
Tigritsa - Tigress (The code name of Nika Stanislavovna Belinskaya, given to "Nikita"
by the KGB and the Academy's Red Room Program)
Chapter Notes

Russian translations are in the chapter, as well as at the end. This is the second chapter of the day. I hope you enjoy it.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter 58: Sokol i Tigritsa (The Falcon and the Tiger)

Fortunately, Aaron had been at Viktoriya’s – well, technically, Kenny had been at June’s – apartment a lot in the last few months so it wasn’t hard to convince one of the little old women who shared the building with the Russian spy slash registered nurse to buzz him into the house. He explained to Mrs. Canterson of Apt 14B that “June” had called him from her cell phone; she’d slipped in the shower and was pretty sure she’d broken her leg so could he please come over and help her get to the hospital. Kenny Kitsom had always been a favorite of the elderly women in the building, and it was no surprise at all when she buzzed him in immediately.
Aaron called his “thank you”s before yanking open the door and jogging up the stairs to the loft that June had shared with her absent roommate. Considering what he now knew about the woman he’d spent the last 7 months in a relationship with, the likelihood that that roommate was Nika Stanislavovna Belinskaya was very high. Viktorya-as-June had told him that her roommate was on a road trip, trying to track down an old friend of theirs. Aaron would bet his left arm that that “friend” was one Marina Ivanovna Petrovka. The irony in Nika’s sojourn to Canada was that Marina lived on an Army base less than 20 miles from the apartment the two ex-spies shared.

Stopping at the front door to June’s apartment, he glanced both ways before crouching in front of the door knob and quickly picking the lock. There was a soft smirk on his lips as he heard the tumbler fall over, fingertips cautious on the door as he pushed open the door all while keeping his body crouched low to the floor just in case Nika had come home from her trip earlier than expected. It was a long moment, before Aaron had reassured himself that the apartment was empty and would remain so for at least a little bit of time after that.

Pushing himself to his feet, he nevertheless drew his sidearm as he entered the loft space. He pushed the door closed carefully behind him, keeping his back to the wall and his eyes facing forward towards the living room at the end of the hallway. “Hello?” he called cautiously, even as he acknowledged that a well-trained spy would never give away their tactical position to someone they didn’t trust. Adopting the Kitsom persona once again, Aaron called out, “My name is Kenny Kitsom; June’s my girlfriend! Is there anyone here?”

Only silence reverberated back to him, giving him the confidence to move deeper into the apartment. He took care to clear the rooms, before tucking his pistol back into the holster at the small of his back. Turning toward the room Kenny and June had frequently shared over the last months, he moved immediately to the bed and tossed the mattress out of the way. And there, tucked carefully into a hole in the frame, was the burn phone Viktorya had told him about. Plucking it from its niche, Aaron opened the contact list and saw one unmarked number listed. Taking a deep breath, he wrestled with his decision for a mere moment before he pressed the button to dial the tiny flip phone.

There was a second of silence as the phone connected . . . before a teeny ringing blared from the doorway behind him. Aaron whirled, gun out and pointed steadily between the eyes of the young woman standing there, the spy’s own weapon leveled at his head. “Nu vot . . . eto ves’na zatrudnitel’nom polozhenii togda. (Well now . . . this is quite the predicament then.)”

“Kto vy? A chto ty delayesh’ v moyem dome? (Who are you? And what are you doing in my house?)” the woman demanded, her grip unwavering on the grip as she continued to hold the weapon at such an angle that Aaron could see clearly down the barrel.

Aaron was silent, taking in the view of the woman behind the gun. Black hair was coiled tightly against the back of her head, the size of the twisting bun a clear indication that her hair was long. It shone in the meager light of the apartment, a bluish sheen lingering at where the light fell hardest. Her eyes were so grey they were nearly silver, framed by sweeping black lashes the length of which Aaron could truly say he’d never seen in equal length. Her ease with the firearm was evident in her stance, the long ropes of her muscles stretching and flexing under her skin as she moved further into the bedroom.

It seemed like an eternity, before Aaron broke the impasse between them by dropping the gun in such a manner that it hung limply from the trigger guard he’d hooked onto his left pinky. “Menya zovut Aaront. Ya zdes’, chtoby pomoch’. (My name is Aaron. I’m here to help.)”

“Pomogite kto? Gde Vika? (Help who!? Where’s Vika?)”

There was a long second as Aaron watched her stalk backwards in time with every step Aaron took.
forward. “Ministerstvo Obrony nayet, kto Vika, ona nakhoditsya v ikh rasporyazhenii. Yesli vy khotite, chtoby vypolnit’ yeye zarusskiy shpion i predatel’, ya predlagayu vam vyslushat’ menya. (The DOD knows who Vika is; she’s in their custody. Unless you want them to execute her for a Russian spy and a traitor, I suggest you listen to me.)”

Nika Stanislavovna Belinskaya watched him for a long time, the muzzle of her gun never wavering from where she continued to point it dead center between his eyes. Finally, she seemed to see whatever she was looking for in his eyes. Lowering the gun, she reengaged the safety and tucked it carefully back into the holster at her thigh. Nika’s posture relaxed abruptly at whatever next big revelation she was waiting for next, her eyes wary as she continued to stand half a room away from him.

It felt like an eternity, but was probably only about 5 minutes, before Nika spoke to him. She nibbled lightly at her bottom lip, before she spoke in heavily accented English, “All right . . . I am listening.”

For a long second, Aaron watched her to try and guage her sincerity. Seeing something in her eyes that eased his concerns, Aaron tucked his own gun away slowly. Folding his arms across his chest, the DOD spy remarked, “So . . . you speak English?”

“Da,” she agreed with a wicked smirk, silver eyes shining with mischief. “Get to the point. Who are you and what are you doing here?”

Offering her one hand, the blue eyes spy remained where he stood, letting her come to him for a handshake or a brief embrace. “My name is Aaron Cross. Vika may have told you about her boyfriend? Kenneth Kitsom?”

Nika’s voice was low as she agreed, “Yeah. Kenny was the first boyfriend she got to choose for herself. She’s fairly certain that he’s not the one for her, but she enjoys his company. And based on the gossip she tells me over the telephone, the sex is fantastic.”

Aaron could feel his ears burning at the woman’s unconscious praise. Forcing the emotion away, Aaron gestured to himself with the muttered confession, “I am Kenny. I am one of the assets at the training center where Vika works.”

“But she doesn’t use ‘Vika’ when she’s at work; she uses her cover, ‘June Monroe’,” Nika gasped, suddenly seeming to understand the importance of what was happening in front of her. “What happened?! Is she okay?!”

“Somehow, her cover got blown. She’s in custody and being interrogated now. I have been ordered to execute her; a way to prove my loyalty to the program.”

And just like that, Nika’s body moved. She shifted from her position so quickly, she practically blurred as she moved onto the offensive. It was only the training that Marina had given him with respect to the specific talents of Red Room assassins that allowed Aaron to move out of her path while simultaneously slamming her hard into the wall, her hands pinned to the drywall behind her. Nika’s teeth snapped at him, causing him to jerk back while somehow managing to keep her pinned. It was a bitter struggle for a long moment, before at last Nika subsided back against the wall, hissing, “You touch her and I’ll kill you!”

Aaron shook her firmly, his voice a low growl in his throat as he snarled, “I am not going to hurt her.” Here he paused briefly, as he considered how much to tell her about his relationship with Marina. Finally, he continued, “I know the Gadyuka. I can get you and Vika to her.” The thrashing woman froze beneath him at the codename that only a Russian agent and handler, or a close friend of Marina herself, could have ever known. Aaron smirked, leaning close to her as he inquired, “You
“interested yet?”

Nika’s lips curled up into a snarl, before suddenly Aaron found himself flat on his back with Nika standing commandingly over him. Instinctively, Aaron kicked out with his right foot, connecting sharply with Nika’s left knee and sending the woman buckling to the hard wood underfoot. There was a bitter fight between the two, before at last they found themselves in the exact same position they had begun in; guns out and pointed squarely between the other’s eyes. “You know the Gadyuka? Prove it then,” Nika demanded angrily, thumb flicking easily over the safety as she disengaged it and used that same thumb to pull back on the hammer. “And be very sure you don’t lie to me, Cross; because if you do, not even the fact that you’re Vika’s boyfriend is going to prevent a bullet hole in somewhere in your body.”

“The real name of the Gadyuka is Marina Ivanovna Petrovka. She was born on January 31, 1941, in the little village of Кемерово, Sibir’. (Kemerovo, Siberia.) Her father was murdered by the Academy when they came to take her away. She had three best friends at the Academy, three girls who were all in her class; Nika Stanislavovna Belinskaya, Viktoriya Viktorovna Dubrovskaya and Valentina Sergeyevna Obolenskaya. She used to call them ‘Nikita’, ‘Vika’, and ‘Valya’. She grew up with Valya in Кемерово; their mothers were friends and Valya’s mother would watch Marishka after her mother died in childbirth when Marina was only a year or so old,” Aaron recited, listing every intimate detail that someone would only know about his sister if someone knew her personally, regardless of whether that relationship had in the past or in the present. “Satisfied?”

There was a long pause, before Nika lowered her weapon again. Allowing her eyes to slip closed as the news about Viktoriya’s fate at last caught up with her. “Bozhe moi,” she breathed, looking up at Aaron with tears standing brightly in her eyes. “Are they hurting her?”

Aaron saw no point in lying. “Da. They want to know what she told her handlers. Vika told me that you both left the Krasnaya Komnata ten years ago; they’re not going to believe that, though. Therefore any plans we come up with are going to need to take into account the fact that she’s going to be a mess by the time they finally hand her over to me to dispose of.”

Nika took a deep breath in through her nose at the blunt assessment, though there was grudging respect in her eyes as she watched him. “If that’s the case, then we’d better get started. We don’t know how long we have until they get bored with the truths she’s telling them.”

Nearly 72 hours later, Marina Ivanovna Petrovka leaned over to answer the phone in the living room, before the ringing woke up Will who was sound asleep with his head in her lap. “Hello?” she asked quietly, trying not to wake him. The Colonel had had a rough night of it so far, and she was loathe to wake him for any reason. If it was Nick, she fully intended to tell him that whatever crisis he needed Will for or whichever of the alphabet agencies needed to borrow him could wait until morning.

There was a long pause, before a timid, broken voice sounded in her ear. “Gadyuka?”

Marina jerked forward at the familiar voice, jolting Will and bringing him to reluctant wakefulness. His question was slurred in time with the voice on the other end of the line, as he inquired sleepily, “. . . Marishka . . .”

The pretty Lt. Colonel whimpered pitifully, gaining Will’s immediate attention as he sat up and reached to cup her palm in his hand. “Samaya malen’kaya,” he murmured, seeing the tears starting to shine over the surface of her eyes.

There was a quiet commotion on the other end of the line indicating that possession of the phone had passed, before another heartbreakingly familiar voice sang in her ear, “Gadyuka, it’s me . . . Tigritsa.”
There was a long second as Marina struggled to reconcile the callsign with the voice she never thought she’d ever hear speak her fondly again, before at last Marina whispered, “Nikita? Is it really you?”

There was a smile in the voice as it hummed an affirmative. “Yeah, Marishka . . . it’s me. Can you come to the front gate of your base? Vika’s been hurt bad and we can’t go back to our apartment.”

“How did you know where to find me?”

There was a long pause, before Nika’s answer tilted Marina’s world back onto its axis once more. “Nemnogo Sokol mne skazal. (A little Falcon told me.)”

And just like that, sunshine came blazing through Marina Ivanovna Petrovka’s skies once more.

Chapter End Notes

Russian Translations:

Da/Net - Yes/No
Gadyuka - Viper (Marina's code name, given to her by the KGB)
Rys - Lynx (Viktoriya's code name, given to her by the KGB)
Tigrissa - Tigress (Nika's code name, given to her by the KGB)
Sokol - Falcon (Kenny/Aaron's Army Spec Ops code name)
Аарон - Cryllic for Aaron
Bozhe Moi - Oh my God
Krasnaya Komnata - Red Room
Кемерово, Sibir’ - Kemerovo, Siberia (Marina's birthplace in Russia)
Chapter 59: Sisterhood and Friendships

There was a breathless second before Marina’s reeling mind hit the brakes and started to put together the plans she would need in order to get the two women installed at S.H.I.E.L.D. “Nika . . . where are you, right now?”

“We’re sitting in our car outside the gates of the base where you are,” Nika replied, a soft rustling coming through the phone as she shifted on the other end of the line.
Will’s eyes were solemn as he listened patiently to Marina’s side of the conversation. Marina smiled down at him, bending in half to press a warm kiss to his lips before nudging him gently from her lap. “Hold your position, Nikita. I’m on my way to you. No matter what happens, I need you to trust me. Can you do that?”

There wasn’t even a pause as Nika confirmed, “Always. Tigrītsa, zaversheniye i vykhod. (Tigress, over and out.)”

Marina pressed the button to hang up the phone, before instantly speed-dialing Maria Hill. “Marishka,” Will prompted gently, watching as Marina stood and began to pace the length of the room. “What’s going on, samaya malen’kaya?”

“My sisters, Nikita and Vika, are outside the base gates.”

“Nikita and Vika?” Will recited, eyebrows furrowed as he searched his memory for why those names seemed so familiar to him. It was mere seconds before the answer hit him like a ton of bricks. “Wait . . . Nika Stanislavovna Belinskaya and Viktoriya Viktorovna Dubrovskaya!? You can’t be serious!”

Marina’s eyes were shining with unshed tears, a tremulous smile on her lips, as she looked over at Will. “As a heart attack.”

Just then, Maria answered the phone with an abrupt, “Hill.”

“Vorobey . . . it’s me, Marishka. I need a huge favor. Normally, I would go straight to Nick; however, he’s at that summit with the Hot Air Head Panel which means that I need your help, seeing as you are the Acting Director.”

Maria was notably surprised at the explanation, even as she contemplated that unintentional tidbit of information. Usually, any favor Marina required of S.H.I.E.L.D., she could bring directly to Maria and, as the Assistant Director, Maria would take care of it; the kind of favor that required the actual Director to sign off on was either going to end miserably or fantastically. Taking a deep breath, she asked anyway, “What do you need, Marishka?”

“I need your help getting two women vetted and through the gates as soon as you can swing it.”

“All right. Who am I checking up on?”

Marina took a deep breath before blurting out the truth in a rush. “Nika Stanislavovna Belinskaya and Viktoriya Viktorovna Dubrovskaya.”

There was a stunned moment where AD Hill processed that information, before Maria spoke again, frantic worry very evident in her voice. “Your sisters? From the Red Room? How did they find you? Are they hostile? Do I need to call out the MPs? Talk to me, Marina!”

Marina’s voice was pleading as she interrupted her best friend, “Vorobey, I know as much as you do right now.” Biting down on her lip, she contemplated how much she should say before blurting out, “Kenny told them where to find me.”

On the other end of the phone, Maria was frozen. She’s known that the Brothers Grimm – and their father, her almost-boyfriend, Hansel Kuhn – didn’t believe that Kenny was truly dead; a belief introduced and maintained by an atypically indomitable Clint. However, to hear the proof that the second youngest Grimm was still alive, was a whole different can of worms altogether. Swallowing down hard on the lump in her throat, Maria forced herself to play devil’s advocate; Marina had been searching so long for these two women, and Maria would do anything to protect her best friend from
getting both herself and her feelings hurt if they had only come to betray her like the rest.

“Our Kenny?” Maria asked, utterly deadpan, even as she accepted that her tone was going to cause some thin ice under her feet. “You’re sure that Kenny told them where to find you? What if they’re just here to kill you, Marina . . . just like every single one of the other Red Room assassins that have come hunting you down over the last five years? And they’re using Kenny’s name and your love for him, to get close enough to you to do it? You’re my best friend, Marishka; I don’t want to see you get hurt . . . not when there’s something I can do to protect you.”

Marina’s eyes slipped closed at the blunt assessment, acknowledging the possibility even as she didn’t want to. “I need you to vet them for me, Maria,” the former Russian spy insisted, one hand coming up to pinch the bridge of her nose. “I know what these women are capable and for that very reason alone, I am in no way planning to just invite them on base and give them full rein of the place. I fully intend to bring them in in exactly the same fashion we brought in Natasha. If they are here for the right reasons, neither of them should have any problem with that.”

Biting her lip, Marina dragged her fingers back through her hair, fully aware of the weight of Will’s mercurial eyes as he watched her and waited for the perfect moment to get his own questions in. “Please, Maria . . . you’re my best friend. And I’m begging you as my best friend; please do this for me . . .” here there was a long pause before Marina whimpered, “. . . they’re my sisters.”

Maria was silent on her end of the line for a long moment, before at last she spoke, “What do I need to know?”

Marina literally cheered, the squeal uncharacteristically childish, as the S.H.I.E.L.D. handler jumped upwards for a moment in pure joy. “Thank you, Vorobey! You are the very best friend ever!!”

There was a heavy sigh, “I hope that’s still the case in a couple of days.”

The former Russian spy froze at the desolate tone in Maria’s voice, her head cocking to the side as she considered what her best friend meant by that. It took her a moment, but eventually she understood. “Maria . . . I haven’t seen either of these two women since I was 23 years old; and I am currently somewhere in my middle aged years . . . a woman never tells her real age,” she joked with a grin, her heart warming as she heard Maria chuckle against her will. That smile reflected in Marina’s voice as she continued, “Nikita and Vika are my sisters in all ways but blood; the three of us grew up together . . . we bled together . . . we fought together . . . we laughed and we cried together . . . we survived together.”

Marina’s voice softened as she continued, “But you, Maria? You are my very best friend in the whole wide world. You were the first person I told after Will gave me the ring, a phone call we both know was not cheap regardless of the fact that it was on S.H.I.E.L.D.’s dime. You are the first person I call when I’m having a shitty day and I just need to indulge in a good fight with someone; you never take it personally when I don’t pull my punches and I hit a little too hard. You’re the first person I think to call when I just want to sit back with vodka and a chick flick, and hang out for awhile. No one could ever replace you. Not even two former Russian spies that I grew up with, long ago in a half-remembered nightmare.”

Maria huffed lightly, and the handler knew instantly that the AD didn’t believe her. With a heavy sigh, Marina dropped onto the couch next to Will and leaned over to rest her temple against his shoulder. Pinching the bridge of her nose, Marina made a mental note to turn Hansel loose on her best friend within the next day or so. Maybe the German agent could get through to Maria about how fiercely Marina adored her.
The Colonel smiled down at her, turning his head to press a fond kiss to her forehead. The brunette’s lips twitched upwards for a brief moment, before she answered Maria’s earlier question. “Nika said that Viktoria is pretty badly injured; we’re probably going to need medical staff on hand. Also, let’s call out the MPs; regardless of whether they’re here to kill me or not, we’re going to have to take them into custody. There’s no way we can get around the protocol.”

“Anything else?” Maria asked, her cool, confident Assistant Director mask on in an effort to gain some distance from Marina and the Russian spy’s heartfelt confession.

“Make sure our MPs know not to engage . . . I’ll meet them out front and I’ll be the first to engage Nikita. If Vika is as badly hurt as Nikita made it sound like she was, Nika is not going to go quietly into custody without the presence of someone she knows there to encourage her to do it.”

There was a pause, the faint scratching sound in the background strong evidence that Maria was taking her usual meticulous notes on the situation. “All right; I’ll pass along the message to the MP commander. Are you on your way to the gates?”

Marina lifted her head to press a firm kiss to Will’s lips, before pulling back to sign one hand, I need to get to the gates.

Will nodded his agreement, reaching over to grab his discarded boots and haul them on. In no time at all, Will stood from the couch and offered her his hand. With a tender smile, Marina’s fingers intertwined with Will’s as she followed behind him towards the Army Jeep that was parked in their driveway. Squeezing fondly, Marina announced firmly, “ETA is five minutes.”

“We’ll see you there, Agent Petrovka. AD Hill, out,” came the farewell, the tone unusually brisk and sharp, before the dialtone sang like a funeral dirge in Marina’s ear.

With a heavy sigh, Marina tucked the cell phone comfortably into the cargo pocket of her tactical pants. “I think Maria’s mad at me.”

Will cocked an incredulous eyebrow at her, pulling open the passenger side door and lifting her into the Jeep effortlessly. Marina twisted fully into the seat, clicking the seatbelt into place as Will rounded the hood of the vehicle. The Colonel frowned as he considered her words, before insisting, “It is impossible for Maria to be mad at you, Marina. You two will work it out; you always do.”

Linking her hand in his, Marina leaned over the center console and rested her temple against the point of his shoulder for a second time. “I hope so.” Nibbling on her lower lip, she continued, “I mean, I’m glad my sisters are safe and sound, and that they were able to find me. But Maria is my best friend; come hell or high water . . . that at least is never going to change.”

Unable to say anything that would ease her concerns, Will only hummed a quiet agreement to her statement. Tilting his head slightly, he pressed an adoring kiss to her forehead before the gates to the base came into view. Pulling immediately through the gates, he waved his hand at the MP on duty. Off to the side of the thoroughfare, a small black MINI Cooper sat parked. At the sight of the car, Marina took a deep breath and straightened her shoulders. “Remember what you promised me, Misha. If they’re here to kill me . . .”

Will grumbled at the reminder of his promise to Marina about her Red Room-trained former friends. “I have to give them a different chance, before I kill them. I know . . . I haven’t forgotten.”

Marina’s teasing smile was blinding as she bent to press an adoring kiss to the apple of his cheek. “Just checking.” Turning back, she let out a heavy sigh before speaking, “All right then; let’s get this party started.”
Will chuckled as the two pushed open the doors of their Jeep, admonishing fondly, “We really need to work on your definition of ‘party’, samaya malen’kaya. I get the distinct impression that Brian and Clint would be appalled.”

Marina snickered at the joke, before she stepped to the front of the Jeep with Will taking up his usual position at her left. Holding up her hands from her sides to show that they were empty and she was unarmed, she glanced quickly over at the MPs with a firm nod. The MP commander was already under orders from the Acting Director to follow Marina’s lead while also protecting the pretty spy at all costs – even at the expense of the other two women’s lives, if the circumstances required it. He nodded in reply to her silent statement, before watching solemnly as Marina approached the MINI.

“All right?” Marina called once she was about 5 feet away from the car.

There was a long second where the world was frozen in breathless anticipation, before at last the door popped open and the black haired former spy stepped from the depths of the car. Marina’s breath caught in her throat, her eyes scanning the other woman frantically for any sign of a weapon, before she broke from her own reserve and lunged at the woman hard. There was a harried second as the MPs in attendance lifted their weapons and prepared to shoot the black haired assassin if she made any sudden moments; each of them were astonished when all she did was brace herself to catch Marina’s overly exuberant embrace.

Fastening Marina was in her arms and the two women were wrapped up in each other’s arms tightly... the first embrace they’d shared with each other in nearly 37 years. Pushing Marina back a step, Nika’s black eyes scanned her up and down for a second before hauling her back in for another hug. Used to the behavior, Marina only tightened her grip just that much tighter. Finally, they broke apart, their hands still wrapped around each other’s shoulders. Nika was the first to speak through the tears in their eyes as the two women reached up to brush at each other’s tear-stained faces. “Gadyuka, vyzaglyaden’ye. (Viper, you are a sight for sore eyes.)”

Marina laughed outright, cupping the other woman’s cheeks warmly as she teased, “Govori za sebya, Tigritsa. (Speak for yourself, Tigress.)” Looking around for the other one of the two women she’d spoken to on the phone, Marina frowned worriedly, “Nikita... where’s Vika?”

Nika bit down hard on her lower lip, before leading Marina to the passenger side of the MINI. Marina bent to peer into the back windows and promptly gasped; Vika was curled up tightly on the backseat of the car, her whole body wracked with shivering brought on by the onset of a vicious fever. Her face was no longer bloody, though it was black and blue and only just barely recognizable. Whirling, Marina bellowed, “I need Medical! And I need it right now!”

The combat medics Maria had put on call for this exact purpose lunged forward from their places, each of them recognizing the frantic tone as the sounds of a superior officer reacting to the serious trauma sustained by one of their operatives. Pulling Nika back from the car to allow the men and women to do their jobs, Marina rested her hands firmly on the other woman’s shoulders and forced the only slightly younger spy to look at her. “Nikita... I have to place you into custody; you’re a spy, you had to have known that was a possibility.” Marina took a breath here, reading Nika’s acceptance of the circumstances in her fathomless black eyes. Squeezing lightly, Marina continued, “Until S.H.I.E.L.D. can have you vetted, you’re going to have to be a guest of our brig. I promise, I’ll make sure Vika gets the best care possible. No matter what; I’m going to make sure they take care of her, okay? Do you trust me?”

Nika nodded slightly, a small smile on her lips as she acknowledged that. “I trust you, Marishka.”

Looking up, Marina waved over a pair of MPs. Nika stood docile and unthreatening, allowing them to pull her arms behind her and clasp the heavy steel cuffs around her wrists. The brunette
S.H.I.E.L.D. handler squeezed her shoulder lightly, insisting, “Don’t talk to anyone but me. I’ll be there soon.”

Nika nodded, before following the MPs as they led her away from the MINI and toward their own cars. Soon enough, Vika was removed from the car and laid carefully on a portable gurney, one wrist shackled to the bars next to her as they loaded her into a base ambulance. Will came up to stand at his girlfriend’s back as she watched the proceedings silently. It was only when the ambulance was gone and the MPs were driving away with Nika in the backseat of their cruiser that Will spoke up again. “So . . . now what?”

“Now . . . we wait until Maria has finished getting them properly vetted. Then, we get some answers.”
So Many Questions, With So Few Answers

Chapter Notes

Very few translations. The ones that are present, are at the end, as always. I do apologize for my two days off. My daughter and I went on vacation to a Renaissance Faire in Houston. It was just what I needed after going to work and school full time, while being a single mother to boot. It was rejuvenating and I can't tell you how much I loved it.

Anyway, thank you to all of you who continue to read this. I hope you enjoy this chapter!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
Chapter 60: So Many Questions, with So Few Answers

It seemed like several hours later before Marina was sitting across the table from Nika Belinskaya. Nika was dressed in the same prison uniform Marina remembered from her own stay in the Pentagon’s on-site cells all those years ago. Other than that, the younger of the two sisters looked at ease and comfortable in her bleak surroundings. Reaching out, Marina offered the other woman her hands, the two women smiling as they linked hands familiarly. The black haired beauty smiled at her sister, squeezing her hands fondly. “It’s good to see you, Marishka.” Twisting their hands to make
the grip more comfortable for the two women, she continued, “How’s Vika?”

Marina frowned fiercely, as she remembered the battered face and form of her blond sister. “The doctors are still looking her over; they think she may lose her spleen.” There was a fierce frown as she used her wrist to brush away a strand of hair from her eyes. “S.H.I.E.L.D. holds the contracts for more than a few of the best doctors in the world. Vika is in exceptional hands.”

Black eyes slipped from view as Nika breathed out a relieved sigh, “Slava Bogu. To be honest, I didn’t think she was going to make it here. I mean, we weren’t that far away initially. But then Aaron had to take her so far away . . .”

Marina broke in then, her eyebrows furrowing deeply as she inquired, “Aaron? Who’s Aaron? I thought you said that Kenny sent you.”

A single corner of Nika’s lips twitched upwards in a sad smile as she squeezed the other woman’s hands. “Marishka, Kenny is Aaron . . . he goes by Aaron Cross now. He’s received his permanent cover now that he’s graduated from the training center.”

“Training center? What training center?”

“There’s a training center in downtown New York City; it currently houses several classified DOD and CIA programs. Aaron is an agents with one of those programs.”

“He’s in New York City?!” Marina gasped, her heart leaping into her throat at the sharp swell of hope at the news. Biting down hard on her lower lip, she allowed herself to grow distant as she started making plans to go and get Kenny, and bring him back into the family’s fold.

Rosy lips compressed as Nika shook her head firmly. “He was.”

And just like that, hope gave way to despair as Marina sagged back into her chair once again. “What do you mean, ‘he was’?”

Nika’s eyes were desolate on her sister’s behalf, Marina’s agony at being so close and yet so far evident in her features. “He’s been reassigned.”

“Reassigned to where? Where is he, Nika?”

“I don’t know. He refused to tell me. All I know is that it’s his second solo assignment; his first was to take Vika into the middle of nowhere after they were finished interrogating her and kill her. As evidenced by the fact that she’s currently alive and kicking, your boy fucked up his first assignment; frankly, that doesn’t bode well for his future success rate.”

Rolling her eyes at Nika’s good humored smart-assery, Marina frowned, “Why was he supposed to kill Vika? What does Kenny have to do with Vika?!?”

Nika’s lips curved into a smirk as she remarked casually, “Well, for starters . . . he was the boyfriend she loved climbing like a jungle gym. Secondly, she’s a former Russian spy that they thought was passing on their secrets to her handler.”

There was a long pause as Marina gawked at her sister, trying to reconcile what she’d been told about Aaron with what she knew about Kenny. “So . . . my sister and my solnyshko, were trakalis’ kak kroliki.”

“That’s what Vika told me . . . she also told me the sex was amazing,” Nika drawled, watching the way that Marina’s eyes flashed as she considered that.
“Well . . . that’s a little . . . actually, that is so much more than I wanted to know about my little boy,” Marina drawled in a deadpan tone, reaching up to pinch the bridge of her nose. “I just . . . how did they even meet!?”

“She was working as a nurse at the training center. He was her patient right after he joined the program, immediately after the explosion; after he was released from doctor’s care, they became friends.”

“You know about the explosion?”

“Yeah, Vika told me about it.” Biting down on her lower lip, Nika took both of Marina’s hands once more and squeezed hard, “Marishka . . . this next part is going to be hard for you to hear and I am sorry to have to say it, but you need to hear it. He thinks you hate him.”

Chocolate eyes flashed wide in shock at the words, jerking backward as she stared in horror at her once-and-future best friend. “He what!?”

“He thinks you hate him. I can see that that’s not the case, but I thought you should know why he joined whatever program he’s so committed to. Vika told me that he joined to try to make amends to you for something.”

“For what!? There isn’t a damn thing in this world that Kenny owes me an apology for . . . except for letting us think he was dead for all these months. But that’s a sovsem drugoy chaynik ryby.”

“I don’t know why; Vika never told me. I get the impression that she knows . . . she’s just keeping his confidence. Vika said that they were good friends, before they got together. Even after all of this, she still trusts him.”

“As well she should; from the sounds of it, he managed to save her life when they DOD was pretty bound and determined to destroy it.” Taking a deep breath, Marina shook off her questions and asked firmly, “Nikita . . . tell me what happened. How did you both get free of the DOD?”

Nika chuckled as she shook her head, “It’s all your boy’s fault. He came up with the whole plan.”

48 Hours Earlier

Aaron Cross had been scouring the details of the folder containing the elimination protocol the DOD had in place for Viktoriya Viktorovna Dubrovskaya. The plan he’d been given was to take Viktoriya to a small, out of the way inlet beside the water in Queens. He had been ordered to put three bullets in her, two in the chest and one in the forehead, and take pictures as proof of death. Then, he was supposed to weight the body down with chains and a concrete block, drive out into the water and sink her to the bottom of the ocean.

Fortunately, there were ways around proof of death, wherein it wasn’t necessary for a victim to actually be dead as long as they looked dead. And that was exactly what Aaron planned to do. He’d given Nika the coordinates to a rendezvous spot as well as given her a list of things that they would need in order to pull off the deception. Closing his eyes once again, he sent up a fervent prayer both for forgiveness and to beg for a little more time to finish up the arrangements.

The girls’ getaway car was chosen carefully; a flashy, fast car that people would stop to admire but not hang around to stare at. The subtle MINI Cooper ended up being the best choice on the used car lot, though Aaron suspected that it wouldn’t do much more than get them to base before it died completely. Fortunately, his brother, Jason, was one hell of a miracle worker-slash-mechanic; assuming that neither Viktoriya or Nika were shot on sight at the gates, Jason should be able to get
the car up and running once again.

Delivering the keys to the safehouse where Nika was hiding out – the two spies having determined that the apartment she and Viktoriya had shared was no longer safe – Aaron gave her the details on where he had been ordered to take Viktoriya in order to dispose of the body. From there, it was a waiting game.

Finally, 36 hours after Capt Fenix had hauled the young operative into his office, the men questioning Viktoriya called Aaron into the tiny office off the interrogation room. Aaron barely held in a cringe as he entered the little room and watched one of the men nonchalantly wiping the Russian woman’s blood from his hands onto a rust-streaked length of fabric. Aaron snapped off a quick salute, before dropping into parade rest. “Operative Aaron Cross, reporting as ordered, sir.”

Fenix looked over at him with a sly smile, “You ready to get to work, Cross?”

“Sir yes sir,” Aaron barked, his eyes glued straight ahead in an effort not to lose his temper and beat the ever loving piece of shit that was cleaning his hands of his former-girlfriend’s blood and smirking at the young agent as though he’d just won the lottery for life.

“Miss Dubrovskaya has reached the end of her usefulness.”

“Was she of any use to us, sir?” Aaron inquired, for appearances sake. Frankling, Aaron did not see any point in what the DOD had done to Viktoriya. Beating her within an inch of her life to get the answers to questions she had no answers for was a waste of manpower and valuable resources.

His CO rolled his eyes as he shook his head. “As far as we can tell, she has lied to us for three straight days regarding her role in Russia’s spy organization. And if we can’t flip her, the Russians can’t have her back.” Gesturing toward the door that led into the interrogation room, Fenix snorted, “Get her out of my building, before I put a slug between her eyes myself.”

Aaron snapped back to attention once again, before entering the room. In no time at all, Aaron had Viktoriya bundled up in the backseat of his car. Driving down the freeway, he deliberately slowed down at the side of a red MINI parked along the side of the room. Aaron didn’t stop; glancing back in his rearview, he was relieved to see that the red MINI Cooper was right on his back bumper.

In the backseat, Viktoriya whimpered and moaned at each pothole in the road, causing real pain in Aaron’s chest with each small sound. Finally, the agent began to actively try to avoid them so as not to compound the pain the young Amazon was feeling at that moment. It seemed like forever, but was probably only about 15 minutes before Aaron pulled off the main road and onto the dirt road that would take him to the drop spot the DOD had chosen.

Both cars parked at the edge of the ocean, the two drivers climbing out within seconds of each other. Nika’s black eyes were very wide as she looked around. “Here!? You’re supposed to kill Vika, my sister in all the ways that matter, in such a place as this?” There was a pause before Nika snorted quickly, “Seriously, Cross . . . what is this place?”

“Our drop spot. Hurry up, Belinskaya. We don’t have time to be lolly-gagging. I have to be on a plane out of the country within the next five hours. And lines at the airports are always shit on a Monday midmorning,” Aaron scolded, easing Viktoriya out of the backseat carefully. “Get over here and fix her make-up, while I set up the props.”

It was a half an hour of set-up and positioning before at last Aaron was satisfied with how the site looked. He posed Viktoriya carefully, making sure that her eyes were closed and her face was twisted convincingly in shock and fear, before stepping backwards. Leveling a wary eye on the
scene, Aaron at last nodded. “Perfect. Give me a second to grab the digital camera.”

Another hour later, Aaron was guiding Viktoriya into the backseat of the MINI Cooper. Viktoriya’s eyes were very wide as she grabbed the lapel of his jacket and pulled him into a tentative hug. One arm looped up over his shoulders and around his neck as she tugged him close. Placing swollen and bruised lips to the skin in front of his ear, Viktoriya took a deep, pained breath and whispered, “Thank you, Kenny.”

Aaron smiled at her as he pulled back, one hand coming up to cup her cheek fondly. “You are very welcome, Viktoriya. Don’t worry about a thing, okay? Just lay down and get some rest. You’ll see Marina soon, I promise.”

Viktoriya nodded tiredly, allowing her eyes to slip closed in exhaustion, before she let him guide her back down to the seat and ease backwards from the seat. Pausing before he closed the door, Aaron watched his girlfriend – now his ex-girlfriend, if he was being technical – settle into as comfortable a position as her battered body would allow and attempt to get some sleep. Once he’d drunk his fill of the curves of her face, Aaron shut the door and approached Nika. Pulling a burn phone out of his pocket, he offered it to her. “You need to abandon the phones you both had before; they’ve been used enough that the DOD will absolutely use them to find you both. This is a clean phone; the number to Marina’s cell phone and the house are programmed into it. Only use it for emergencies.”

“Wait . . . you’re not coming with us?” Nika demanded, lunging forward to capture his sleeve. Aaron froze at that question, his back to her as images of his family flashed through his mind quickly. “No . . . Marina doesn’t want to see me right now. I have some penance to do first.”

“What do you mean, Marina doesn’t want to see you? She betrayed the KGB . . . she left the Vika, Valya and me behind in Moscow because she loved you! Of course she wants to see you!!”

The smile on the agent’s face was sad as he shook his head, “No . . . she hates me and she should. I can never earn for forgiveness for what I’ve done. Which means that I need to start somewhere.”

“But where will you go? Surely you’re not going back to the training center in New York?”

“No, I’ve been reassigned.”

Nika’s head cocked slightly as she questioned, “Reassigned where?”

Aaron’s blue eyes were amused as they watched her for a long moment without speaking. Finally, he bent to press a soft kiss to her forehead too. Squeezing her shoulder with a sad smile, he insisted, “Take care of her for me, Nika. And get to Marina as soon as you can; I know how happy she’s going to be to see you. She’s been looking for you both for a very long time.”

“But Aaron . . .” the former spy protested, even as she was forced to watch Aaron walk away toward his own car. The blond turned to face her before he climbed inside, raising one hand in farewell, before dropping into the driver’s seat and gunning the engine. There was a loud roar as he drove away from the site, taking with him the DOD’s “proof of death” and enough memories to haunt him for the rest of his life. Nika watched him go until she couldn’t see the car anymore. “Good luck, Aaron Cross. And thank you for my sister’s life; someday, I’ll make it up to you.”

Chapter End Notes
Russian Translations:

Slava Bogu - Thank God
solnyshko - sunshine (Marina's nickname for Kenny)
trakhalis' kak kroliki - fucking like rabbits
sovsem drugoy chaynik ryby - whole other kettle of fish
Grimm Tidings of Great Joy

Chapter Notes

Russian and German translations are at the end of the chapter!

Chapter one of two for today!

Enjoy all!!

Chapter 61: Grimm Tidings of Great Joy

Clint was sitting at the kitchen table, his unstrung bow laid out in front of him as he oiled the wood tenderly. Jason had the night off and was tinkering with Marina’s laptop across from the youngest Grimm; the computer had downloaded a virus from somewhere that was fucking up the processing speed and Jason had promised he’d clean up the harddrive for his favorite handler. Brian and Jim were off goofing around somewhere on post with Natasha, the two best friends taking the time to
show the Russian spy all the best places to hide while still getting into trouble. Hansel was in kitchen, having taken over Marina’s spot in the dinner rotation once it had become clear that she wasn’t going to be home in time to cook. Maria was at a meeting with Director Fury that she couldn’t get out of, though she had seemed very reserved, even more so than usual, when she had given Hansel the excuse.

Only Will and Marina were completely unaccounted for. They had been missing in action all day, and the family’s collective worry for them was starting to fill the house with tension.

It wasn’t until sometime around seven o’clock, when they were all sitting at the table for dinner that the front door creaked open and everyone’s collective attention was pulled from their plates. Jason cocked his head slightly, but it was Brian who stated the answer everyone was waiting for. “It’s Will; from the sounds of it, Marina’s not with him.”

Hansel frowned at this news, pushing himself to his feet and moving towards the swinging door to the living room, only to watch from the doorway as his eldest son moved slowly through the room and fell face down onto the couch, his whole body lax and listless. For a long moment, Will remained that way, before he pushed himself to his feet once again and began to divest himself of his jacket and weaponry. Hansel had been expecting the sidearm at his hip; the other weapons the Colonel pulled from their hiding places on his body the German had not been anticipating at all. There was a Glock 17 handgun that he pulled from a shoulder holster previously hidden under his jacket, as well as a M9 tucked into a holster at the small of his back. The three identical knives Will unstrapped from the inside of his left forearm were another surprise to the witch hunter, as was the short machete-like blade he pulled from inside his right boot. Once the Colonel was stripped down to fatigue pants and khaki undershirt, Will flopped backwards onto the couch, once again motionless.

Through all of this, Hansel had been silent. He knew that Will knew he was there, but his son seemed to have no interest in engaging the older man just yet. As Will brought his right arm up to cover his eyes, Hansel stepped further into the room and allowed the door to swing shut behind him. “Adler? Bist du in Ordnung? (Eagle? Are you alright?)” he asked, coming closer and taking a seat in the armchair placed kitty-corner to the couch.

Will’s lips quirked grimly as he chuckled at the question, replying in bitter German, “Nein, nicht wirklich. (No, not really.)”

Hansel hummed lightly, leaning forward to rest his elbows on his thighs. There was a second as Hansel contemplated that, before inquiring, “Wollen Sie darüber reden? (Do you want to talk about it?)”

Silence was Hansel’s only answer as he considered the question. Finally, Will groaned and dropped the arm from his face, ever-changing hazel eyes stared dismally at the ceiling as the younger man tried to gather his thoughts. When the young commander did finally speak, the unexpected sound of his voice startled the witch hunter. “Kenny’s alive.”

Hansel frowned as he considered his son’s words. “But hyu already knew that.”

Will chuckled morosely, as he nodded his agreement. “You’re right; I did know that already. Clint has been insisting Kenny’s alive for months; and where Kenny is concerned, I will always take Clint’s word over the word of some pizda of a doctor.”

“Then I guess I do not see the problem. What do hyu mean, mein Adler?”

Dark eyebrows lifted on the man’s forehead as he answered solemnly, “As of last night, S.H.I.E.L.D. has inarguable proof that Kenneth James Grimm is alive and well.”
The words were so unexpected that Hansel literally gaped at his son. Sensing the shock in his father’s silence, Will’s head rolled to face him. It was then that Hansel noticed how bloodshot and red-rimmed Will’s eyes were; his son had been crying recently and – from the looks of it – for quite some time. At the pain swimming in those quicksilver depths, Hansel pushed himself from the armchair and dropped to sit at his son’s hip. “Will . . . what has happened?”

Will’s smile was tremulous as he replied, “Marina’s sisters, Nikita and Vika, arrived on base last night; Kenny sent them.”

Hansel frowned as he questioned, “I thought Marina was an only child.”

“Biologically, yes, Marina is an only child. But while she was at the Academy as a child, she was close to three other girls in her class – Valentina Sergeyevna Obolenskaya, Nika Stanislavovna Belinskaya and Viktoriya Viktorovna Dubrovskaya – and they were best friends . . . as dear to each other as sisters. One of them is dead; we killed her in ’96 when the Russians sent her to Croatia to kill Marina. The other two have been unaccounted for until now.”

“But then, this is good, yes? Her so-called sisters can tell Marina where we can find Sonnenstrahl.”

Will snorted hard with an eyeroll, before he set about disabusing his father of the notion. “It is good, in that we now have proof that Kenny is alive. It’s bad, in that not only do we NOT know where to find Kenny, but we also know a lot more about the circumstances that took Kenny away from us than I think Marina wanted to know.”

“And what circumstances are these?”

“Kenny thinks that Marina hates him. He was told something – what that is I won’t know until Viktoriya Dubrovskaya is coherent enough to be able to answer our questions – that convinced him that Marina hates him.” Reaching up, Will pinched the bridge of his nose as he whispered, “And now, we’re back at the same place we were all those months ago. Marina’s absolutely devastated.”

Hansel frowned, well remembering the desolation that had haunted the young Russian’s footsteps for months until Will had taken her home to Кемерово to try and regain some peace of mind. “Adler, where is mein Tochter?”

Licking his lips, Will took a deep breath. “Viktoriya Dubrovskaya is really beat to hell; she was Kenny’s girlfriend for about seven months, before the DOD found out that she was a Russian spy. Her doctors said she should make a full recovery, though they’re not sure how long it will take for her to heal up completely. I will give the DOD credit for one thing; their interrogators are very good at their jobs.” Rubbing the heels of his hands over his eyes hard, Will continued, “Marina’s spending the night with her sister in Medical. She doesn’t want Viktoriya to wake up alone.”

“Where is the other one that she cannot spend the time with Viktoriya in Medical so that Marina may come home? Hyu said her name was ‘Nina’?”

“Her name is ‘Nika’. She’s in solitary confinement at the brig until AD Hill can finish vetting her.”

Hansel frowned as Maria’s name came into the conversation. “Does Fraulein Hill know about the place these two women hold in Marina’s life?”

“Da,” was Will’s reply in absent-minded Russian. “Both of the women are distraught to say the least, though admittedly for very different reasons. Agent Hill thinks that she’s being replaced and Marina thinks that the AD is just going to pull away from her until eventually she just won’t be around anymore.” There was a pause, as Will gnawed restlessly on his lower lip before he spoke up in a
quiet tone. “Agent Hill is Marina’s best friend, Dad. I would really appreciate it if you would talk to her; try and convince her that Marina isn’t going to abandon her just because her sister’s are back in her life.”

“Why does Marina not do this?”

“She did; Hill didn’t believe her. I’m hoping . . . WE are hoping that she’ll listen to you, since she won’t listen to Marina.”

Hansel took a deep breath, nodding once in solemn agreement. “I vill talk to her.” Glancing back over his shoulders, Hansel watched the closed door to the kitchen for a long moment. “What are you going to tell your brothers?”

At the question, Will laughed, the first sign of mirth Hansel had seen since Will had returned home. When he spoke again, his tone was playful. “Who says I have to tell them anything?” Will’s chin tilted up as he called lightly, “The little sneaks have been eavesdropping on our entire conversation!”

At the words, Clint burst into the living room, a wide grin on his face as he lunged at Will. “It’s true!! I was right!?”

Will groaned at his brother’s exuberant nature, reaching back to shove himself into a seated position. “Yes, Clint, you were right. Kenny’s alive; the proof arrived at the base this morning.”

“So what does that mean? What are we going to do about the Army?” Jason asked quietly, dropping into his father’s abandoned armchair.

The eldest brother frowned as he shook his head firmly. “Nothing . . . we’re going to do nothing.” Clint’s eyebrows furrowed as he opened his mouth to protest, causing Will to cut him off before he could speak, “Clint, I don’t like it any more than you do. But right now, we cannot make waves. The DOD has Kenny under their complete control, and I don’t know what leverage they’re holding over his head to get him to comply with their directives. Until we know more, we are not going to do anything that could put Kenny in danger. Am I understood?”

Clint slumped slightly with a frown, watching the pain in Will’s eyes ratchet up in response to his silence. Not for the first time, Clint regretted blowing up at his brother and accusing him of caring about the Army more than Will cared about his family, all those months ago. It seemed that the memory of those words would haunt the oldest Grimm for the rest of his life. Nodding once, Clint agreed firmly, “I understand. I’m still going to keep looking into it though.”

Jason nodded firmly as he chimed in, “Me too!”

“Please do, the both of you. If we want to burn these programs to the ground after we locate him, we’re going to need as much fuel as we can find.” Taking a deep breath, Will braced his hands on his thighs and shoved himself to his feet. “I smell pork. What’s for dinner?”

“Schweinsbraten with Dampfnudel,” Hansel announced, standing and clapping his son on the shoulder. “Come; there is plenty. I imagine that hyu are hungry.”

Will’s smile was small but genuine as he agreed, “Famished.”

Behind them, the two eldest members of the family heard Clint boast to Jason boisterously, “See!? Told you Kenny was still alive.”

Jason’s only response was a deadpan, “Yay, you were right about something. I wonder when that’s going to start becoming a habit instead of a fluke.”
Hearing that, both Hansel and Will dissolved into laughter, glancing back over their shoulders to see the look on Clint’s face as he stared wide-eyed at his brother. Jason’s lips were curved into an amused smirk, one eyebrow cocked upwards as he watched Clint gawp at him, mouth open and eyes wide. Finally, Clint slouched with a pout, a petulant muttered, “Skuperdyay,” causing even more laughter from his father and brothers.

It was a long second, before Jason took pity and looped his arm up over his brother’s shoulders, tugging him close for a brief hug. “Sorry, little brother. You just make it so easy sometimes.”

There was a pause as Clint continued to glare, before a smile broke across his lips. Reaching out, he shoved Jason lightly, causing the middle brother to rock lightly on his heels. “Whatever. This is war, Jay.”

Jason’s grin was wide as he reached out and ruffled the younger brother’s hair. “Bring it on, little brother. Just be prepared to lose.”

“Ha!” came the rejoinder as Clint rolled his eyes. “Skills, Jay; I has them.”

“And yet, you lack a basic grasp on the language you’ve been speaking since infancy. How is that?!” Jason joked, barely step-siding the incoming punch as he dodged Clint’s lunge at him. Narrowly avoiding the sniper’s grab, Jason twisted out of his reach and dashed for the door to the backyard on the other side of the kitchen, an enthusiastic whoop! filling the tiny room as he ducked around the table and lunged for the door.

Clint was laughing, hot on his brother’s heels as he dashed after him. “I’m gonna kill you, Krechet!”

“Gotta catch me first, Yastreb!”

Moving to the doorway, Hansel and Will watched the two younger brothers roughhouse with each other. Hansel’s hand was warm on Will’s shoulder as he insisted, “We’ll find him, mein Adler. No matter what; we will bring Kenny home again.”

“Aaron,” was Will’s cryptic reply to his father’s assurances.

“Vas?” Hansel demanded, thrown off by his son’s use of a name he did not know.

Will’s quicksilver eyes burned blue as he tracked his brothers’ progress around the yard for a long moment, before he spoke again, “His name is Aaron now . . . Aaron Cross.”

Hansel hummed lightly at that information, before remarked lightly, “That’ll take some getting used to.”

There was a smirk, before Will agreed, “You have no idea.”

Chapter End Notes

Translations:

(R) pizda - cunt
(G) mein Adler - my Eagle (Hansel's nickname for Will)
(G) Sonnenstrahl - Sunbeam (Hansel's nickname for Kenny/Aaron)
(G) mein Tochter - my daughter (Hansel's nickname for Marina)
(R) Кемерово - Kemerovo, Siberia (Marina's birthplace in Russia)
(R) Da/net - Yes/no
(G) Schweinsbraten - broiled pork roast in a crunchy crust
(G) Dampfnudel - white, yeast bread
(R) Skuperdyay - meanie
(R) Krechet - Merlin (Jason's Army Spec Ops code name)
(R) Yastreb - Hawk (Clint's Army Spec Ops code name)
(G) Vas? - What?
Hansel waited until he could be sure that Will had gone to sleep before he pulled his cell phone from his pocket and dialed the number that would connect him to Maria’s office. Her voice was tired and very sad as she answered the phone, “Hill.”

The German frowned, concerned about the desolate tone in her voice. Scuffing his foot lightly against the carpet underfoot, he insisted, “We must speak, Fraulein.”

The sharp intake of breath was clear indication that Maria knew exactly who was calling her from the other end of the phone. Maria’s frown carried easily through the phone as she spoke, “Not tonight. I’m not in the mood to talk, Agent Kuhn.”
“I know hyu are not and I know why that is. Which is why we need to talk, Fraulein,” Hansel insisted firmly. There was a pause as Maria contemplated that thought, before he spoke up again. “Maria . . . please. Meet me somewhere.”

Maria sighed, the sound heavy laden through the phone, before at last she spoke, “All right. Where do you want to meet?”

“Where is easiest for hyu? I know hyu had a meeting with the Director this evening.”

There was a soft hum of agreement, before Maria huffed lightly, “Meet me at the gym? I could use a sparring partner who can actually provide some kind of challenge tonight.”

“I shall meet hyu there within the hour, all right?”

Maria’s side of the phone was quiet for an agonizing second, before at last she spoke once more. “All right. I’ll see you there.”

Hansel hummed in agreement, continuing to hold the phone to his ear even as the dialtone sounded. Clicking off the cell phone, he tucked it back into his phone and turned toward the door of the living room. He jumped slightly to see his youngest son standing there, arms folded over his chest as he watched his father. Clint’s head was tilted slightly . . . a mannerism Hansel knew meant that Clint was assessing a target. Slightly miffed at being one of his son’s marks, he pushed past the impulse to lose his temper and instead cocked an eyebrow at him. “What are hyu thinking, Falki?”

“That was AD Hill . . . wasn’t it.”

Only someone who knew Clint well would have been able to tell that Clint’s assessment was more of a statement than a question. Hansel smiled at his son’s propensity for watching people, and discerning the truths about them that they didn’t want anyone to know. “Ja,” the witch hunter agreed, as he moved toward his own room to change.

Hansel smirked at the sound of Clint’s footsteps on the hardwood behind him. It was a well known fact among the Brothers Grimm – and Hansel did in fact include Marina with the rest, seeing as she was just as shameless as the rest of them – that modesty was not their strong suit. They had grown up in close quarters as children and that lack of privacy was never more obvious than when they were suiting up for some assignment off post together. However, as someone whose only constant companion had been his sister – who had insisted on separate rooms from the time they were 5 – the lack of any semblance of privacy had taken some getting used to. It was only just recently, that Hansel stopped jumping every time someone walked into his bedroom, without any regard whatsoever for what he might have been doing behind closed doors.

Clint leaned back against the wall, studying the swirl of the carpet as Hansel disappeared into his closet to pull on a pair of loose sweatpants and a grey t-shirt with the S.H.I.E.L.D. eagle on the pocket over the left breast. “What’s on hyur mind, Falki?”

“You like her right? I mean, like really like her.”

The former witch hunter frowned at the question, nodding slowly as he tried to determined where the trap could be in the question. “Ja. She is a warrior woman; it is a trait I do not see often in women. Except for Fraulein Hill, my sister and Marina are the only other women who come to mind.” Narrowing his eyes at his youngest son, Hansel drawled out a question of his own. “Vhy do you ask?”

One corner of Clint’s lips curved upwards as he inquired, “If you like her and I know she likes you –
I can tell – then what the hell is taking the two of you so long?”

It was a question that echoed in Hansel’s mind the whole walk to gym where Maria was no doubt beating the hell out of a sandbag as she waited for him to join her. Hands in his pockets, he considered all the different answers he could have given as he drew ever closer to her. There was no doubt that he had a special relationship with AD Maria Hill. She was a hell of a woman and it was no secret that he admired her ability to browbeat the men in her command into doing what she wanted them to.

Every piece of him yearned to be with her; to say “fuck you” to the regs and just take what he wanted. The memory of their kisses, both brief but memorable haunted his dreams and every waking moment of their lives. The remembrance of her lying cold and bleeding on the floor of that helicopter all those years ago, was the source material for more than a few of his nightmares over the years. However, it seemed like there was always something in their way.

The first obstacle was the most obvious as well; the fraternization policy S.H.I.E.L.D. had in place forbidding their handlers from building romantic relationships with their assets. Maria was his handler and he her asset; to pursue a relationship of any kind would be in direct violation of that policy. Hansel knew – though he didn’t think Maria remembered telling him in the midst of her fevered dreams – about Fury’s admonition to his AD about the policy in question. Though the German didn’t like the policy, he could understand where it came from. At least until he considered the fact that Marina and the Colonel blew the whole policy sky high and then some; they had been together long before they had joined S.H.I.E.L.D. which was probably the only reason that no one said a damn thing about a commander co-habitating with his XO.

Of course, there was also the fact that Maria did not trust easily. Fortunately, it was a trait that she and Hansel held in common, thereby allowing them both the opportunity to take things slow and not rush into anything that could hurt either of them unnecessarily. He had faith in her, knowing that the decisions she made were for the good of everyone, not just herself or S.H.I.E.L.D. That faith had been shaken briefly, when she had tried to manipulate him into one too many ops which resulted in Hansel blowing up at her. It had been restored once more when Maria had promised not manipulate him so long as Hansel promised to tell her if he was uncomfortable with the assignments she deployed him on. So far, the arrangement was working out for both of them.

Lastly, he was forced to be honest about the fact that he was quite frankly uncomfortable with emotional attachment to anyone, let alone a woman who held his life in her hands every day. Gretel had been the only person in his whole life for so long; it was still taking some getting used to, being surrounded by people he loved on all sides who loved him in return. His sons were easy to love; regardless of the nature of his relationship with them, each of them had proven hard to resist over the years since he had woken to see Maria Hill hovering over him. Even Marina – who he had once been convinced he could not trust, let alone love as the daughter he had claimed her as – had her eccentricities that made her hard to defend against; traits that had earned her the love and respect of his sons, the loyalty and adoration of the Colonel, the pride and the friendship of Nick Fury and lastly the sisterhood and kinship of Maria Hill.

But Maria . . . Maria was unlike any person – any woman – he had ever known. And he would be damned if he knew what it was that he was going to do with her.

The gym was uncharacteristically empty as Hansel entered the yawning space, catching sight of Maria Hill as she punched the hell out a sandbag in the corner. Dropping his bag quietly onto the concrete by the door, Hansel toed of his boots and stripped off his shirt. Padding silently into the middle of the mat, Hansel indulged in a few quick stretches before calling out a challenge, “Why don’t hyu pick on someone who can fight back for awhile, Agent Hill, and leave the sandbags
alone?"

Maria’s eyes were stark into terrible sadness and overwhelming grief as she rounded to snarl at him. “You really think that you can handle me right now, Herr Kuhn? You think so?”

Sensing that he would require something to capture her attention and entice her into the ring with him, he thought for a moment before tripping over the perfect lure. Smirking at the idea, he dropped into a careless pose with his arms folded over his chest as he insisted, “I shall make hyu a deal, Fraulein. Winner of each set is allowed to demand the answer to any question they desire. Deal?”

Teal eyes were wary as she watched him. “What’s the catch?”

“No catch; it can be any question you desire. The only stipulation is that hyu cannot refuse to answer the question put to hyu. Do you agree to these terms, Fraulein Hill?”

Maria watched him for a long moment, before she nodded silently and came to join him in the middle of the ring. Hansel watched her, vibrant blues steady on vivid teal. “Are you ready, Fraulein Hill?”

There was no verbal reply; Maria simply attacked. It was a vicious fight, Hansel being sure to allow her a few good hits in on several non-vital places to allow a sense of victory to seep through her fury. Then, he saw his chance and stepped into a blow that connected solidly with his left eye. Momentarily blinded – he had not been anticipating her fist to have quite so much power behind it – he dropped to the mat, cradling his eye cautiously. Maria’s face was etched in peculiar mix of awestruck horror at hurting him and smug pride at being able to drop him to the mat.

Blinking rapidly, Hansel shoved himself to his feet and asked, “Alright, Fraulein; what is your question?”

Maria watched him carefully for a moment, before her voice whispered cautiously, “Besides Gretel, did you have any friends back where you were from? Was there anyone that was important to you?”

Hansel’s lips compressed at the question as he shook his head, “Nein. I had... you would call them colleagues, I guess, but we were not friends. We fought the same fight, and that made us useful to one another at best. How does Marishka say it, when she talks about the Russians and the Germans?”

Maria smirked as she recalled the resigned phrase the S.H.I.E.L.D. handler was so fond of when referring to the 1950’s relationship between the Soviet Union and the conquered German Republic. “Being someone’s ally does not make you their friend.”

“Ja, that’s it.”

“So you were alone? For all that time?”

Hansel smiled at her as he admonished carefully, “That is two questions. If you would like the answer, you must win once again, Fraulein.” Lifting his hands into position before him, he inquired, “Are you ready?”

Maria blinked at him, before dropping back into her stance and nodding firmly. Smirking at him, she insisted, “Ja.”

Hansel smiled at her usage of what little of his native language she knew. Grinning, he just barely managed to fend off her attack as she lunged at him once more. This question and answer session went on for some time; Hansel usually found a way to lose, though there were a few times that Maria did legitimately wipe the floor with him before he could find the opportunity to do so.
Finally, some 45 minutes after the fight began, Hansel had had enough. Lashing out viciously, he caught Maria completely offguard with a complicated combo that slipped effortlessly past her guard and dropped her firmly on her back. The witch hunter fell after her, knees on each side of her thighs and her hands pinned firmly to the mat. Maria watched him for a long moment, seeming to sense that something deep within Hansel had changed . . . that there had been a change to the rules that she had been unaware of until this very moment.

Struggling briefly, she tried to avoid the question she knew was coming, before at last Hansel’s voice filled the gymnasium. “Who left you, Maria, that you cannot even trust your best and truest friend to stay with you, come Höllé oder Hochwasser? (hell or high water?)”

At the question, Maria began to buck in earnest as she sought to avoid answering. “This fight is over. I don’t have to tell you shit!”

Hansel frowned at her, tightening his grip slightly and pinning her more firmly to the mats. “Yes you do. You agreed to the terms; no one coerced you into them.” Shifting his body along with her struggles, he let her fight him for a moment before at last she subsided under him, tears shining in her cheeks and rolling unchecked down her cheeks. Bending, he released her wrists and wiped tenderly at the teartracks. Dropping his forehead to her own, he begged softly, “Tell me, Maria . . . who hurt hyu so deeply, that hyu cannot take the love hyu are offered and cherish it without looking for some reason it will leave hyu behind? Tell me who it was, so that I may kill him . . . so that hyu can be free of whatever hold he still keeps over hyu.” Blue eyes locked with teal, as he continued, “All I wish for, is hyu to love me, Spatzi . . . because I am so desperately in love with hyu.”

Maria’s eyes widened in surprise, scanning him features for some hint of a lie. There was a long second, before at last Maria replied. Wordlessly, she lifted her head from the mat and pressed her lips firmly to his own. Neither of them closed their eyes at the initial contact, both needing that connection to reaffirm that this was truly happening. Then, once they had been reassured of the matter, they allowed their eyes to slip closed and revel in the embrace of each other.

Two hours later, Marina looked up from where she was reading a book of Russian fairy tales aloud to her unconscious sister, the former spy seated in the chair beside Viktoriya’s bed. Seeing her best friend standing there, she paused in surprise, her voice disappearing into silence at the sight.

“Vorobey?”

Maria’s lips trembled as she came into the room. Coming to her best friend’s side, the assistant director dropped onto her knees and threw her arms around Marina’s neck. “I’m sorry, Marishka. You are my best friend, and no matter what position you still want me to have in your life now that your sisters are returned, that will never change. I promise.”

The former Russian spy’s eyes were wet as she shook her head. “They are my sisters, Maria; choice and consequence has made them so. But you are my best friend; the other part of my fractured soul, that I had not truly realized was missing until I met you. They are my sisters, and I love them; but they will never and could never replace you.”

“Promise?” Maria asked meekly, looking up at her best friend from where she still knelt beside the Russian’s chair.

There was a small smile on the older woman’s face as Marina cupped her cheeks within her palms and swore lightly, “I promise.”

The smile on Maria’s face could have powered a small country as she beamed up at Marina, the two women embracing fiercely as they strengthened their loyalties to one another once more and reaffirmed their friendship as well. Then, once they had drawn away from each other, Maria settled
more comfortably onto the floor beside Marina and rested her head on her knee. Marina’s fingers were tender in the other woman’s black hair as they combed through it affectionately, chocolate eyes returning back to her book as Marina began to read once more.

“Many years ago, in a certain village lived an old couple, who had just one daughter, named Vassilisa. They lived in quite a small cottage, but there were comfortably off. Yes trouble came to them too, for the mother fell ill, and she realized that she was near to death. So she called her daughter to her and gave her a small doll. ‘Listen, my dear daughter,’ she said. ‘Take great care of this little doll, and never let anyone else see her. If you ever get into trouble, give her something to eat and ask her advice. She will eat the food and help you in your trouble.’”

Looking up at the doorframe, Marina continued to recite the Russian version of the fairy tale, Cinderella, even as she grinned up at Hansel and mouthed quickly, “Thank you.”

He smiled at her fondly, before turning his attention back down onto Maria. Looking back up at his adopted-daughter, Hansel mouthed back, “You are welcome, meine Tochter.”
Ghosts and Answers

Chapter Notes

So I am mostly half asleep right now, but I did want to get the new chapter posted before I went to find my bed. There are translations, but they are ones that have been used very frequently in this story up to now. I hope you all continue to enjoy and I look forward to reading your thoughts as always.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
Chapter 62: Ghosts and Answers

It was several weeks before Viktoriya Dubrovskaya was well enough to be weaned off of the heavy pain medications that turned her memory into Swiss cheese while simultaneously keeping her drowsy and out of it. Marina spent a great deal of her time at Medical, leaving Viktoriya alone in the care of her nurses only when there was something Marina could not find someway to get out of. Surprisingly, Maria joined her there frequently, the two women coaxing Viktoriya to eat and drink what she could before she fell back into the depths of unconsciousness. The dark haired Russian
would never admit it in a million years, but the sight of her best friend engaging her sister so effortlessly made her heart swell in ways that she hadn’t known for many years.

At last, though, the time came for Viktordiya to answer the questions that had been burning deep in Will’s gut since she and Nika Belinskaya had arrived at the base all those weeks before. It was a beautiful day, and once again, Marina was seated in the chair beside her sister’s bed; however, today, she was clad in her full S.H.I.E.L.D. uniform and carrying the tablet she usually used to take notes with during debriefings. “Vika . . . I know this is a lot of take in. But there’s someone here who needs to talk to you.”

Viktordiya’s blue eyes were fierce as she watched the other woman carefully. “About what?”

Marina’s lips compressed as she bowed her head, chocolate eyes slipping closed sadly as she whispered, “Kenny.” Looking up at her once again, Marina insisted, “Vika . . . I need to know everything you can tell me about what is going on with Kenny?”

There was a long pause as the two sisters watched each other carefully, each employing the tricks of the trade they had learned from the Academy to seek gaps in each other’s armor. Seeming to find what she was looking for, Viktordiya gave Marina a sad smirk as she spoke at last. “Kenny thinks you hate him.”

Marina bit down hard on her lower lip, bowing her head and squeezing her eyes closed at the confirmation of that once again. “I don’t hate him, Vika. He is my solnyshko, my little boy . . . my son in all the ways that matter to a mother.” Leaning forward, she grasped Viktordiya’s hand and lifted it to squeeze tightly. “Nikita said that you may know why he thinks I hate him. And I’m begging you, Vika; I must know what he was told . . . what lies he believes that could ever have made him doubt our love – my love! – for him.”

Just then, there was a brief knock of knuckles against the doorjamb behind them both. Will and Clint both stood there, bodies posed to be deliberately careless while at the same time, both men were laser-focused on the conversation taking place between the two. Will smiled at his girlfriend, watching the matching smile creep onto Marina’s face, before at last turned his attention onto Viktordiya.

Coming in the room, the Colonel offered the blond his hand to shake. Viktordiya’s features were understandably wary and concerned, even as she reached to accept Will’s hand. Her eyes were narrowed and contemplative as she remarked lightly, “Kenny told me you all looked alike; that it was kind of like looking in a mirror that wasn’t angled quite right. I think he may have been understating it a little.”

Marina giggled as she brushed a strand of hair back over her shoulder. “After awhile, you start to get used to it. Eventually, it even becomes easier to tell them apart.”

Viktordiya’s nose crinkled as she pouted at her sister, “You’re a rotten liar.”

“I’m not lying,” Marina singsonged, even as she vacated her seat and offered it to the young officer. “The floor is yours, Colonel.”

“Thank you, Lt. Colonel Petrovka . . .” Turning back to Viktordiya, he smiled, “I don’t think we’ve officially met. My name is Colonel William Grimm; you may call me Colonel Grimm or just Colonel; I answer to either.”

Viktordiya’s lips curved as she considered his words, before remarking calmly, “I prefer Vika.”
Will nodded once in agreement to the concession, leaning back casually in his chair as he flipped open the file on his knees and prepared to take meticulous notes in the file in his lap. “Nika Belinskaya said that you and Kenny were in a relationship.”

Despite the bruising still yellowed and healing in her face, Viktoriya’s eyes shown like sapphires as she smirked. “Yes; but quite frankly, I don’t think you really want to know about my relationship with Kenny.”

The officer smirked at the woman’s astute assumption, slouching back haphazardly in his chair and watching her with a sly grin. “All right then, Miss Dubrovskaya. Why don’t you tell me why I wanted to speak to you?”

“You want me to tell you why Kenny thinks that Marina hates him . . . and why he won’t come home.”

Clint spoke up from the door frame then, uncharacteristically quiet throughout the verbal chess game that Viktoriya and Will had been engaging in up to this point. “Kenny’s my best friend; I just want to know that he’s safe, and that he’s at least happy. I know how much Marina means to you; if you were in my shoes and I was in yours, wouldn’t you want to know the truth of what happened to her?”

Viktoriya frowned as she considered the young sniper quietly. “I do not believe we have been introduced, young one. You must be Jason?”

The young sniper glanced at Will, looking for some directive on how to proceed from there. The eldest Grimm nodded once in answer to Clint’s unspoken question, eyes on Viktoriya as she took in the young man’s face. Marina’s hand was gentle on the curve of Clint’s shoulder as she shook her head in answer to her sister’s question, “No, Vika. Jason is at work; he may swing by tomorrow or the day after, depending on when his next day off is.”

“But Brian has facial hair . . . and quite frankly, you don’t seem the type. You’re obviously a Grimm; but I don’t know which one of them you could be.”

Clint frowned, feeling a sharp pain in his chest as he insisted, “Kenny never talked about me?”

The Russian’s blue eyes were wide with confusion as she shrugged, shaking her head slowly at the question. Clint glanced at Marina, before allowing his eyes to slip closed as he answered, “I’m Clint.”

Each of the three members of the Brothers Grimm watched in surprise as Viktoriya drew back sharply, her hand flying as she crossed herself vehemently. “Bud’le net, prizrakov. Vy ne naydete zdes’ mir, (Be gone, ghost. You will find no peace here.)”

Clint frowned, stepping forward at the words causing her to shove herself backwards as far from him as she could. Stopping at the behavior, Clint turned to look at Marina in confusion. “What the hell is she talking about, Marina? Why is she calling me a ghost?”

Marina’s chocolate eyes were alight with horrible understanding as she stared at her sister. Instead it was Will who answered Clint’s question for him. “You mean you can’t guess for yourself, Yastreb? Kenny thinks you’re dead; he thinks you are dead and that’s why he thinks Marina hates him.”

“That’s ridiculous!” Clint burst out, throwing his arms into the air. “First of all, I’m not dead. Second of all, even if I was, that doesn’t mean Marina would hate him. If I died, it would be during a deployment; it wouldn’t have caused Marina to hate him.”
“Yes, but he may not realize that. Kenny has always been easily impressionable; if someone discovered the right buttons to push and the right lies to tell, it would not be hard to convince Kenny that you’re dead and that Marina blames Kenny for your death.”

Clint stared at his brother’s calm assessment of the situation. Finally, the young sniper spoke, “That’s sick. Who the hell would do something so horrible?”

Unable to answer that question, Will turned his attention back onto Vika in hopes of an answer. “Mistress Dubrovskaya? Can you shed any light on that question?”

“Net; Kenny never told me who it was that recruited him into the program. I never knew what program he was apart of or who his CO was; I’m fairly certain that there were times not even Kenny knew who was pulling his strings.”

“How did the DOD find out you were a Russian spy? From the records we’ve been able to dig up, you’d been working under their noses for quite some time without detection. What changed?”

Viktoriya shook her head, short blond curls catching in her eyelashes and her lips as it bobbed around her. “I don’t know. They never told me how they found out; all they ever did was hurt me and ask me questions. It seemed like they were never very interested in the answers I was telling them, though, which led me to believe that they would not have been very interested in the questions I had for them too.”

Marina’s voice was quiet . . . straining against the distress as she inquired as calmly as she could manage, “What answers did you give them?”

“They wanted to know what I had told my handler about their precious programs, both the classified ones housed at the training center and the offsite programs based in Maryland. Nika and I left the Red Room, the Academy and the FSB nearly 10 years ago, which I told them many times; I didn’t have a handler to share their secrets with.”

“Why did you leave the Red Room?”

“Nikita and I wanted to find Marishka; she was free of Materii Rossi. Rossiya is my home, but I had not held any particular loyalty to it since Gadyuka was sent to Amerika on assignment. Then, she defected and disappeared. The idea that you could leave had never crossed any of our minds; Valya joined the rest of our classmates in labeling Marina a traitor to be executed at all costs. But the idea of freedom captured both Nikita and I as though we were flies tangled in a spider’s web; the lure of it called to us and several years later, the two of us had put together enough resources that we were able to escape without ever having to really look back ever again.”

There was silence as Will finished scribbling the last of his notes in his margins, before he pushed himself to his feet once again. “Thank you, Mistress Dubrovskaya. You have been most helpful.”

Viktoriya’s eyes were haunted as long fingers picked at the loose threads in her blanket. “For what it’s worth, he seemed content . . . maybe even happy . . . while we were together. I don’t know if that was just because he wasn’t alone or because he knew I was his friend.” Biting down on her lower lip, she looked up at Clint with wide, sad eyes. “He missed you . . . every day. I would hear him talking to you sometimes, little exasperated comments he would make when something happened that reminded him of you.” Here she paused as she chuckled, “And everything reminded him of you.”

Clint’s eyes shining suspiciously as he nodded firmly in her direction. “Thank you, Vika . . . I cannot even begin to tell you how much that means to me.”
Viktoriya nodded in silent agreement, sky blue eyes meshing warmly with steel grey. “I hope it brings you some peace.”

Clint’s smile was sad, even as he bent and pressed a warm kiss to the apple of her cheek. Pulling back a mere inch, he whispered into her ear, “Thank you for protecting him when we could not, Vika. If for no other reason, for that alone I will be within your debt forever.”

Knowing the weight that oath held, Viktoriya felt her throat close up at the swell of emotion that overtook her. “Eto bylo moye udovol’stviye. (It was my pleasure.)”

Smiling at her once more, Clint turned on his heel and strode from the room. Will smiled at the young Russian woman once more, offering her a brisk salute and a warm, “Thank you, Viktoriya,” before he left the room after his brother, eyes molten silver as he considered the information he had gained that day about his missing little brother.

As for Marina, she retook her usual chair and reached to grasp her sister’s hand. Squeezing tightly, she allowed chocolate brown to ensnare sapphire blue. “Vika . . . I must know.”

The younger of the sisters watched as Marina bowed her head and tried to compose her thoughts into some semblance of coherency. Desperate to do something to ease the other woman’s pain, Viktoriya nodded once. “Ask and I will tell you what I can.”

There was a long pause, before Marina took a deep breath and begged, “Was he happy? Truly?”

Instead of jumping on the answer, Viktoriya considered each of the memories she had of Kenny. Finally, after what must have felt like an eternity to the anxious former spy – but was truly only mere moments – Viktoriya spoke again. “Yes, Marishka . . . yes, I do believe he was.”

Chapter End Notes

Russian Translations:

Materii Rossii - Mother Russia
Rossiya - Russia
Gadyuka - Viper (Marina's callsign given to her by the KGB and the Academy)
Америка - America in Cryllic
Chapter Notes

Most of the Russian translations are in the chapter, and the rest are at the end of the chapter as always. I hope you enjoy! This one is pretty steamy between Will/Marina. If that squicks you, then this isn't the chapter for you. XD

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter 63: Circle of Love

If there was one thing that Will Grimm had learned about dating a spy, it was that you are always at a disadvantage. Will was a soldier; he preferred things to be straightforward and simple, to face his problems head-on . . . or as Marina always joked, with blunt-force-trauma to the face. However, spies are a different breed of human, and female spies were in a whole other category after that. Dating a spy, especially a high-ranking one like Marina meant that it was always impossibly easy for her to fabricate a legitimate excuse to avoid him. The only time he’d even seen her since they’d found out about Kenny, was at night, when they went to bed.
It was nearly a week before Will was able to corner Marina alone. Clint and Natasha had been dispatched to some sandtrap in the Middle East, for some reason or another – keeping track of their S.H.I.E.L.D. operations was Marina’s job, not Will’s . . . Slava Bogu. Brian and Jim were cross-training in Georgia, no doubt driving their temporary handlers out of their minds and earning themselves a laundry list of notations in their permanent files. Hansel was out to dinner with Maria, and Will knew better than to expect him home until late. Jason was working a 48-hour shift, and it was entirely likely that they wouldn’t see him until the usual Sunday dinner. Viktoria had been released from the Medical wing the day before, and installed in the brig; both she and Nika would be guests there at least for another week, unless Will missed his guess.

All of this together meant one very simple thing; Will and Marina were alone in the house . . . and would be for the foreseeable future.

Marina was sitting in his study, hunched over the stack of file folders spread over his desk, a comm in her ear as she kept track of the operation her assets were deployed on. Occasionally, she’d make a comment to whatever had been said, usually in Russian and always said with a small smirk.

Will took the opportunity offered by her preoccupation and set to work on implementing his plan. Moving into the kitchen, he pulled out the steak from the refrigerator and set to chopping it into uneven cubes for the *shashlyk*, before turning his attention onto the steak *solyanka* he already had boiling on the stove. Keeping an ear out for the sound of Marina’s near soundless footsteps, the Colonel prepared their dinner as quickly as he could. Once the *solyanka* was simmering, the *shashlyk* was grilling slowly and the *yabluchnyk* was baking in the oven, Will turned his attention to setting the table. Tapered candles provided the only light in the cramped dining room, flickering off the walls and lingering on the silverware.

At long last, he decided that he had done all he could to make the dinner as romantic as he could make it without having to endure the hassle of taking her out to a formal restaurant. Neither of them were very comfortable with broadcasting their relationship in a public setting, and usually dinner out created more tension that it was worth. Fussing with the place settings one last time, Will moved toward his study.

Marina was in a heated discussion with Natasha, from the sounds of it, the two women arguing over the appropriate actions to take regarding a mark. The sound of the door cut Marina off mid-sentence as her head snapped up to watch the door. Will leaned one shoulder against the doorjamb, a small smile on his face as he watched her watch him. Quicksilver eyes shone with amusement as chocolate eyes narrowed in speculation. “Vdova, I have to go. I trust the both of you to make the right call. However . . . that being said. Yastreb, if you bring home another spy, you are going to be in for a very unpleasant discussion with your father and me about adopting strange pets. Am I understood?” she asked, her eyes never wavering from Will’s as she listened for the reply.

A small smirk curved her lips as Clint no doubt mouthed off, earning a soft giggle. “I don’t particularly care about your alleged track record, Clinton Francis. I’ll see you both on deck tomorrow night. Call me if there are any problems. Sova, over and out.”

She waited to hear the acknowledgment from the two, before removing the headset and smiling softly up at Will. “Finally managed to catch me, Colonel?”

Will smirked, coming into the room and bracing his hands on the corners as he leaned over the desk. “You are a very difficult woman to corral, Major. You have no appointments – and no excuses – tonight, Marina; I checked your schedule with Fury this afternoon. We have both been far too busy worrying about everyone else in this family; and that includes the ones that are no longer with us,” he scolded fondly, tapping one finger teasingly to the tip of her nose. “Therefore we are going to take
some time for just us tonight.” Straightening, he rounded the edge of the desk and offered her his hand. “Come on . . . dinner’s ready.”

Marina’s lips curved upwards in soft amusement, “You, the great Colonel Grimm, made me dinner?”

“Da. There’s solyanka, with steak shashlyk. Also, there’s yabluchnyk for dessert,” he replied, his free hand coming up to brush away a strand of her hair that had fallen into her eyes.

“All of my favorites,” Marina whispered, her eyes very wide as she looked up at him adoringly. Placing her hand in his, she allowed him to pull her to her feet and guide her out from behind the desk.

“I know,” the Colonel agreed, tucking her hand into the crook of his elbow and guiding her into the dining room with him. “After dinner, there’s dancing . . . and then some calisthenics,” Marina nearly burst into a giggle at the wicked smirk on Will’s face, the rest of his face completely straight as he said that, before continuing, “if you’re up for it.”

Marina’s eyes were laughing as she nodded solemnly, “I am always up for a little calisthenics.”

“Good to hear,” Will teased, leaning over to nuzzle his nose into the soft skin below her ear. The pretty Russian moaned at the sensation, her eyes slipping closed as she rolled her head to the side to offer him more of her neck and allow him more room to maneuver. Her free hand came up to thread through his hair, her fingers curling lightly against the curve of his scalp as he nosed upwards along the skin. “Misha . . .” she whimpered, feeling every delicious second as her body warmed, melting her bones and leaving her utterly pliant in his arms.

“Samaya malen’kaya?” Will questioned softly in return, the puffs of air from his words ticklish against the skin of her throat.

“Zachem . . .” here she gasped as sharp teeth nipped sharply at the tendon along her throat. Her eyes fluttered and her knees went weak for a moment, before she dragged herself back to consciousness. “Zachem ty eto delayesh ’vse eto dlya menya? Uzhin. . . tantsy. . . ? (Why are you doing all of this for me? Dinner . . . dancing . . . ?)”

Will straightened to the accompaniment of a low whine, his hands warm and familiar on her hips as he turned her to face him. Capturing her chin between thumb and forefinger, he tilted her face up to his own. Bending his head, he pressed an adoring kiss to the apples of her cheeks, the tip of her nose and finally to both of her heavy lidded eyes. “Potomu chto vy tratite tak mnogo vremen’ zabote o vsekh ostal’nykh. I inogda, vam nuzhen kto-to, chtoby zabotit’sya o vas tozhe. (Because you spend so much time taking care of everyone else. And occasionally, you need someone to take care of you too.)”

Lifting his head, he stroked his thumb tenderly over the curve of her cheek. He waited patiently as Marina got her emotions and her body firmly back under her own control, a small smile on his lips as he watched her struggle to regain her composure. Finally, after what seemed like an eternity, Marina looked up at him with sober, if lustful, chocolate eyes. Nuzzling his nose alongside her own, he whispered into her skin, “I to, chto ya zdes’, yesli ne zabotit’ sya o vas, kogda vam nuzhno, chtoby ya? (And what am I here for, if not to take care of you when you need me to?)”

A smile unlike any Will had seen since Kenny’s disappearance broke across her face then, her eyes sparkling with love and happiness and pure joy. “You know . . . we could forget about dinner & dancing, and skip straight to the calisthenics,” she suggested, eyes wide with faux innocence as she played lightly with the buttons on his dark green button-down. “We have a warming drawer; dinner
will keep.”

Will growled at the implications of that statement, hauling her up to maul her mouth. Their lips met hotly, each trying to both conquer and surrender within the same breath. Marina had always said that there could be great strength in total surrender; it was here – with this woman and in this moment – that Will could see how complete submission to another could give oneself absolute power. Ripping himself away from her, Will grabbed onto his control with both hands and pulled it to himself sharply. “Oh no you don’t, moya sumasshedshaya devushka . . . I have plans for you. And those plans do not include the warming drawer.”

Marina giggled, a soft blush turning her cheeks a pretty pink as she tossed her head back and let the tangled mane of her hair dance across her shoulders. Stars shone in her eyes as she laughed, a wicked look on her face as she shrugged, the gesture as nonchalant as she could manage. “Ne mogu vinit’devushku za popytku. (Can’t blame a girl for trying.)”

Pressing a sharp kiss to the bow of her lips once more, Will turned her once again toward the table. Pulling out her chair, he waited patiently as she seated herself and allowed him to push her chair in for her. Bending, he pressed a soft, adoring kiss to his favorite place on her whole body; the oft-hidden strip of flesh just barely peeking out from below her clothing, the spot at the base of her throat where her heartbeat pulsed against the skin. Marina sighed lightly at the familiar gesture, reaching back to brush her fingers lightly through his hair. Lifting his head, he whispered into her ear, “Poprobuyte slozhneye. (Try harder.)”

At the tease, Marina’s head fell back and she laughed. “Oh Misha . . . kak ya lyublyu tebya. (. . . how I love you.)”

“I ya lyublyu tebya, Marishka, (And I love you, Marishka,)” the Colonel agreed, before moving into the kitchen get dinner.

Hours later, after they had eaten dinner and danced to some of their favorite songs, Marina lay sprawled across Will’s chest. Sweat on bare skin glued them to each other firmly, their chests heaving slightly as they tried to catch their breaths. The Colonel’s fingers were tangled in the silky molasses-colored curls as he watched the ceiling and listened to her try and catch her breath. “So . . . are you glad we didn’t skip straight to dessert?”

Marina giggled against her will, ducking her head into the smooth skin of his chest as she pinched his nipple sharply in admonishment. “Ow!” he protested laughingly, jerking away from her briefly at the mild punishment.

The Russian beauty’s fingers came up to caress the abused nub lightly, causing Will to moan at the sensation, his head tossing back and his body arching up into the contact. A wicked grin slipped across her lips as she maneuvered her body astride his own, her thighs bracketing his hips and her hands braced firmly on his abdomen as her body bowed forward to mouth lazily at the smooth skin of his chest. Her fingers were teasing as they rubbed circles on his belly, even as she shifted her body to be able to catch a flat, brown nipple between gentle teeth. Will’s breath caught, squeezing his eyes closed hard at the pleasurable pain in the action.

Marina smirked as he began to stir below her, her hips moving in unconscious circles as she coax him to readiness once again. “Ready for round two already, Misha?”

Will’s fingers clawed long, red furrows down the flawless skin of her back as he shifted slightly and watched her body arch forward as he slipped between her folds once more. “God, Marishka . . . you are going to be the death of me.”
“Maybe . . . but what a way to go,” she agreed, pushing herself upwards as she sat down firmly over his cock and took him deep inside of her. “Hold on, moy vozlyublenny . . . this is going to be one hell of a ride.”

Will’s reply was breathless as he teased, “Promises, promises, samaya malen’kaya. How about you put your money where your mouth is?”

Marina’s grin was positively filthy as she bent to kiss him briefly, before whispered against his lips, “Yes sir, Colonel, sir.”

As usual, Marina’s usage of his rank in bed caused the dominant part of him to soar to the forefront and he roared as he rolled, pinning the spy’s body beneath him and began to stroke in and out of her. “Bozhe moi, (Oh my God,)” the pretty brunette gasped, arching her neck and offering herself to him in a display of willful obeisance. “Don’t stop, Misha.”

Panting for air, Will ducked his head and captured her lips with his sharply. “Ne shans v adu, Marishka . . . ne shans v adu. (Not a chance in hell, Marishka . . . not a chance in hell.)”

Finally both laid quiet and still once again, Will sprawled over her body and Marina’s face buried in the curve of his throat. They laid still once more, trying to catch their breaths and enjoying the feel of skin against skin. Finally, just before sleep came to claim the young officer, a soft voice whispered directly in his ear, “Spasibo, Misha. Ya lyublyu tebya.”

Will’s lips curved into a small smile as he replied, “I ya lyublyu tebya, Marishka . . . bol’she, chem vse ostal’noye v etom mire. (And I love you, Marishka . . . more than anything else in this world.)”

Mere moments later, the power couple of the Brothers Grimm fell asleep, wrapped up in each other and once again reassured of their places within each other’s crazy lives. Marina held Will’s heart beating in her palms, and Will held Marina’s; it was a trust neither took lightly . . . and it was a duty they would each treasure for the rest of their lives.

Chapter End Notes

Russian Translations:

Slava Bogu - Thank God
shashlyk - Russian shish kebabs
solyanka - Russian meat soup
yabluchnyk - a kind of Ukrainian apple cake
Vdova - Widow (short of Natasha's code name, Chernaya Vdova or Black Widow)
Yastreb - Hawk (Clint's Army Spec Ops code name)
Sova - Owl (Marina's Army Spec Ops code name)
samaya malen’kaya - my little one (Will's nickname for Marina)
Zachem - Why?
moy vozlyublenny - my beloved (one of Marina's terms of endearment for Will)
moya sumashchedshaya devushka - my crazy girl (one of Will's terms of endearment for Marina)
Chapter Notes

Russian translations are in the chapter, except for the ones that I've used so often, I've started using them in everyday life. :D

Also, I had a request for more Brian. I promise, there is more Brian coming up soon. I'm just trying to get there first. He's going to make a major appearance in either tomorrow's chapter or the chapter after that! Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
Chapter 64: Alive and Kicking, If Only Barely

It was a half past six the next morning, when Marina’s S.H.I.E.L.D. phone began to ring from her bedside table. The pretty Russian groaned at the clamor, snuggling back into the chest at her back and pulling Will’s arm tighter around her waist. “Net telefon, . . . plokhoy telefon, . . . ZATKNIS’ telefon! (No phone . . . bad phone . . . SHUT UP, phone!) she muttered grumpily, before picking up the cellphone up and throwing it at the wall.

The phone cut off midring as it smashed into pieces, causing a relieved sigh from Marina as she
rolled over and burrowed back into her boyfriend. The Colonel chuckled as he pressed a sleepy kiss to her forehead, before looping both arms around her body and pulling her close. “Good morning, Marishka.”

Marina nuzzled further into his bare chest, muttering something uncomplimentary in Russian against his skin. Pressing an adoring kiss to her forehead, he prompted lightly, “Just because your phone is in pieces, Marishka, does not mean that my phone isn’t going to ring in a minute once they realize you’re not answering your phone.”

“Don’t say that!” the once-and-future spy whined, dropping her head back to pout up at him. “You’ll jinx it, Misha!”

“Sorry,” he laughed, pulling her tightly him once more. “My mistake.”

Purring lightly at his capitulation, she snuggled back into him once more. However, mere moments later, Will’s S.H.I.E.L.D.-issued cell began to buzz against the hard wood of his own nightstand. Will chuckled as Marina flopped onto her back, a string of virulent Russian curses streaming from her lips. Kissing her quickly to stem the tide, he rolled and grabbed the phone. “Brandt,” he greeted sternly, rolling onto his back to let Marina cuddle back into his side, her nose lodged firmly in indentations of his ribs.

“Agent Brandt, is there a problem with Agent Petrovka’s phone?” came the overly pleasant tones of S.H.I.E.L.D.’s director.

“There is, sir,” Will agreed, struggling to squash down his desire to laugh.

“Oh, and what is that?”

“She smashed it, sir.”

There was a rueful chuckle as Fury acknowledged that. “I see. Is she available?”

“Available? Yes. Willing to speak to you? Most likely not.”

“Agent Brandt, please put my best handler on the phone. We’re going to be wheels up in an hour, and she has not been briefed on the situation at hand.”

Will frowned, easing Marina back onto the bed and pushing himself into a sitting position. “Wheels up? You didn’t say anything about a trip yesterday, Nick.”

“That would be because there wasn’t one yesterday. There is a Summit in London in 26 hours; I have been ordered by my superiors to be there, along with the rest of S.H.I.E.L.D.’s top officers. AD Hill and Agent Coulson have already been briefed . . . Agent Petrovka is the last on my list of people to speak to before we leave.”

There was a long pause as Will considered that before rotating and shaking Marina’s shoulder lightly. “Marishka . . . you need to wake up.”

“No,” she groaned, rolling away from him. “It’s my day off; tell Fury to take a dolgo khodit’ skorotkimi pirs. (long walk off a short pier).”

“Correction; it was your day off, samaya malen’kaya. Apparently, you need to be wheels up in an hour. Come on; wake up. You talk to Fury . . . I’ll pack your bag for you.”

Marina frowned fiercely at the news as she pushed herself into a seated position, the sheets sliding to
puddle around her waist. Will stared for a long moment at the expanse of bare skin, before shaking himself firmly and offering her the phone. The Russian temptress smirked at the effect she was having on her boyfriend, before taking the proffered phone. “This is Petrovka . . . damn it, Nick, this had better be important.”

Will leaned forward and pressed a sweet kiss to her forehead before standing from the bed. Marina’s eyes zeroed in on the curve of his bare ass for a moment as he moved to the dresser and selected a pair of tight-fitting jeans. Pulling them up over his hips, he buttoned them up and then rummaged for a t-shirt. Marina forced herself to close her eyes, pinching the bridge of her nose as she forced her attention back onto her boss who was shouting her name to try and regain her attention. “Yes, Nick, I’m here. It’s early . . . sue me. What’s the deal with this Summit anyway?”

“I got the order to attend directly from the Council at 0300 hours this morning; frankly, I’m not happy about it either,” Fury growled, his voice rumbling down through the phone as he spoke.

“When do we leave?”

“The jet leaves the tarmac within the hour, with you, Agent Hill, Agent Coulson, me and our personal assistants inside.”

Marina’s eyes narrowed at the list of those attending. “Forgive the imposition, Nick, but it seems unwise to place what is effectively the ranking leadership of S.H.I.E.L.D. all in the same plane en route to the same location.”

“I said the same thing, Marina; I was overruled.” A harsh sound came through the phone, the sound of a man breathing out forcefully through his nose. “Your PA will be waiting on the tarmac for you. I’ll see you at the plane within the hour.”

“Yes sir,” she agreed, clicking the phone off and tossing it onto the bed. Scrubbing her hands over her face, she grunted bitterly before throwing back the covers and moving naked into the bathroom. Twenty-five minutes later, she was dressed in her uniform and drying her hair with a blow-dryer, when Will reentered the room with a mug of hot, sugary-sweet coffee and a Jimmy Dean breakfast sandwich. Making grabby hands at the mug, she groaned in bliss at the familiar scald over her tongue. “You are my hero,” she breathed, tilting her chin up to receive his kiss.

“Your bag is packed and waiting for you by the door. I thought I’d drive you to the airstrip, if you didn’t mind.”

Marina’s smile was soft as she shook her head, capturing his lips lightly once more. “I will never mind your company. How’s Vati?”

“Dad’s a little worried about Maria; he’s getting a weird vibe from this whole thing.”

“Me too. Let’s just hope Vati and I are just being overly paranoid.”

“Paranoia has kept the both of you alive up to this point,” Will reminded her lightly, brushing back a strand of hair from her eyes. “You about ready to go?”

Grabbing a hair band, Marina yanked her hair back into a ponytail and snapped the elastic around it hastily. “Yep. Let’s go.”

Taking the hand not holding her coffee, Will pressed the breakfast sandwich into it. “Eat that,” he ordered firmly, before he placed his hand on the small of her back and guided her from their room. “What are you going to tell Clint? He and Natasha are supposed to be getting back to base this afternoon,” Marina asked, once they were in their Jeep and racing through the base toward the small
“The truth; you were deployed out this morning and you should be back in a couple days,” Will declared with a shrug, one hand firmly on the wheel and the other shifting confidently as he weaved haphazardly through base traffic.

Marina hummed in agreement, her left hand coming over to lay over top of his own on the gearshift. “Don’t stress out too badly while I’m gone. Agreed? Go to the gym with your dad, to the range with Clint, and keep tabs on Brian’s shenanigans in Georgia . . . just don’t sit by the phone the whole time I’m overseas, waiting for bad news. Promise?”

“You drive a hard bargain, Colonel Petrovka.”

“Chert voz’mi ya delayu, Colonel Grimm. (Damn right I do, Colonel Grimm)” she agreed with a soft smile.

The Jeep jerked to a halt at the airstrip, Will yanking the brake and rotating in his seat to look at her. “Marina, promise me you’ll be safe over there. This is an international meeting, from the sounds of it. The last thing we need is some Russian national recognizing you from some old Soviet file and calling out a hit on you. All right?”

“You do know that one of the Hot Air Head Panel is Russian, right?”

“Don’t remind me; I’m going to have enough trouble sleeping while you’re gone, I don’t need any more reasons to worry.”

Marina chuckled, lifting her chin for his kiss. “Just remember, the Ambien is in the top drawer of your nightstand if you need it. Okay?”

Will rolled his eyes, even as he nodded in agreement. “Just be careful. And I’ll self-medicate if I have to.”

“That’s all I ask,” she teased, her fingers tender in his as she took in his beloved face. “Ya lyublyu tebya.”

“Ya lyublyu tebya,” he breathed in reply, resting his forehead against her own for a long moment, before he at last had to let her go.

The Russian spy stole one more kiss, before exiting the Jeep. Grabbing her back from the back, she strode quickly toward the waiting Quinjet. A tall, very familiar blond was standing at the bottom of the ramp, clad in a black pencil skirt and a fitted white button down, a file folder in her hands as she waited for Marina to join her. Marina’s head cocked at the sight of her. “Vika!? What are you doing here?”

“I’m your new PA. Fury offered me a field agent position, but I never enjoyed field work like you, Nikita and Valya. I have always been administration savvy; from the sounds of it, your last PA was not so much.”

“I refuse to speak ill of Stanley . . . even if he was, without a doubt, the worst personal assistant in the history of personal assistants,” Marina chuckled, reaching out to hug the Amazonian blond. “Where’s Nikita?”

“She’s been released from the brig, and she’s on probationary status. She’s been grounded to base while you’re out of the country, though; but I’m sure we’ll see her when we get back.”
Turning back, Marina waved over her head at where Will was still sitting in the Jeep, watching her. Tilting her head, she yelled, “Bye, Misha... lyublyu tebya!”

“Have fun! Try not to max the credit card, Marishka!” he teased back, waving at her briefly before yanking the Jeep into a U-Turn and driving back toward the base once again.

Agent Phil Coulson approached then, carrying a briefcase and trailed by the R&D agent that Marina vaguely recognized as Jasper Sitwell. “Agent Petrovka,” he greeted, his tone as warm as Coulson was as likely to get.

“Agent Coulson,” she replied, a slow nod in Sitwell’s direction her only greeting to the junior agent.

Coulson turned his attention onto the statuesque blond at Marina’s left and spoke, “I don’t believe we’ve been introduced yet. Phil Coulson.”

“Viktoriya Dubrovskaya... I’m Marina’s sister and her new PA,” Vika announced, offering him her hand with a bright smile.

Marina bit down fiercely on her smirk at the awestruck look on the normally stoic agent’s face. Gesturing toward the hatchway behind her, she inquired lightly, “Shall we?”

Coulson’s lips twitched lightly as he gestured for Viktoriya to precede them into the belly of the plane. Marina’s voice was low as she followed her sister, speaking just loudly enough for Coulson to hear. “Just to let you know, she’s single. But if you hurt her... I will leave you in pieces on the floor. Understand?”

The man’s tone was reverent as he watched Viktoriya disappear into the belly of the Quinjet. “Perfectly.”

Marina’s smile was amused, if brittle, as she disappeared into the plane. “I’m so glad we comprehend one another.”

At the sight of her best friend and her sister sitting together, with an open seat between them, the pretty handler grinned and made her way over. “Hello, Maria,” she greeted in a sing-song manner as she plopped easily into the open chair. “Hansel was out late last night.”

Maria blushed, even as her eyes narrowed into an evil glare. “Marina Ivanovna Petrovka... you shut your mouth!”

A small smirk curved the corners of Marina’s lips as she fluttered her hand at her breast bone. “Ooh, all three names again... I must be in trouble. Seriously, Maria... would you just put us all out of our misery already? Blue balls cannot be good for a man.”

“I’m not sure how you would even know that; it’s not like the Colonel goes without very often... if ever. How you two manage to make every look between you a sexual innuendo more suited to a hot tub full of horny 20-somethings than a pair of Army officers in uniform still boggles the mind.”

“Don’t worry, Maria...” the brunette teased, bumping shoulders with her fondly, “... you and Vati will get there eventually. And when that happens... we’ll just see whose exploits end up sexier than a frat house during Greek Week. Vati seems like the kind of man that would be a god in bed.”

“Marishka!” Maria yelped, her eyes wide in scandalized amusement, while both Viktoriya and Marina dissolved into giggles beside her. “Kindly keep your assumptions to yourself! Unless you want us to start speculating on Will’s prowess in bed.”
“Oh, no need to speculate. Misha IS a god in bed,” Marina announced softly, effectively taking all of the wind out of Maria’s sails.

S.H.I.E.L.D.’s Assistant Director gawked at her best friend for a long moment, jaw hanging loose at the woman, before she shrieked, “MARINA!!”

Sixteen hours later, the four top members of S.H.I.E.L.D.’s hierarchy were climbing from the cars sent to retrieve them from the airport. Marina’s eyes flashed over their surroundings, trying to take in everything and feeling Viktoriya doing the same beside her. The spy was mere steps behind her boss, when her caught sight of a small red dot centered perfectly in Fury’s back. Without even taking the time to think, Marina reacted. “Sniper! Down!” she shouted, lunging forward and ramming into Fury’s back hard.

White hot pain ripped through her chest as time seemed to crawl to a stop. It seemed like Marina hung there in the air for a long time, her indrawn breath caught deep in her throat as she struggled to breathe around whatever it was that was pressing on her lungs. Finally, she hit the ground, a harsh scream ripped from her throat as the rough landing jarred her body hard. Her body danced to the tune of the pain in her blood, as she felt warmth start to leech from her fingers and toes, bleeding from her body rapidly. The black veil of unconsciousness lingered at the edges of her vision, and she was only dimly aware when two faces – one blond and one brunette – appeared within her line of sight.

Some part of her knew that the two women were calling her name, but there was only the ringing in her ears. It seemed like a long time, as oblivion hooked itself into her awareness and began to drag her down. The last sound she heard before she slipped away was crystal clear, ringing in her mind long after she’d lost her grip on the waking world. The last thought she had, was how similar and yet so very different it sounded to the same word shouted not even a day ago, by the very same woman. 

“MARINA!!”

Chapter End Notes

Translations:

(R) samaya malen'kaya - my little one (Will's nickname for Marina)
(G) Vati - dad (Marina's nickname for Hansel Kuhn)
(R) (Ya) lyublyu tebya! - (I) love you!
Chapter Notes

Hey, no translations today. I'm not really happy with this chapter, but I hope you all enjoy!

It's the people you love, who will always guide you.

Chapter 66: Grimm News

Ten Hours Earlier
S.H.I.E.L.D. Base
New York City

It was commonly accepted that one handler in all of S.H.I.E.L.D.’s handler pool was best able to handle Brian Gamble, his partner Jim Street, and their special brand of crazy . . . and she was not in Georgia. Her absence could therefore explain why Brian and Jim had been sent back to NYC and had just reentered the house where the Grimm brothers lived on S.H.I.E.L.D.’s New York City base. “‘Allo the house!” Brian boomed, dropping his gear onto the floor inside the door and moving
“Bri!” Clint laughed, the young man suddenly sliding sideways down the banister and lunging at his older brother. “What are you doing home already? I thought you were supposed to be in Georgia for at least another week!!”

“Eh . . . they couldn’t handle my charming personality,” Brian joked, twirling out of Clint’s hug and throwing an arm around his neck to rub knuckles deep into his skull, causing a squawk from the youngest Grimm.

The two brothers wrestled briefly, as Clint attempted to get free, before there was a delicate snort from the top of the stairs, causing Brian’s head to snap upwards. His eyes widened to see Natasha leaning one hip against the banister, with her arms crossed over her chest and with a small smile curving up the corner of her lips. His arm loosened as he returned her smile, “Hey Tasha.”

“Brian . . . welcome home,” Natasha greeted, moving to come down the stairs. Brian’s distraction served Clint well, as he managed to twist free and turn the tables over on his brother.

For a long moment, the two brothers wrestled playfully, shoving and insulting each other as Jim and Natasha lingered on the periphery. It was nearly ten minutes later that Will came in through the front door, dressed much more casually than his brothers were used to in jeans and a t-shirt. Clint was currently pinned under Brian, but looked up at Will’s incredulous, “What the hell is going on in here?”

“And where the hell have you and Marina been?” Clint demanded grumpily, steamrolling over his brother’s question as though it was unimportant. “Nat and I had to find a ride home from the airstrip this morning.”

Will’s eyes clenched closed as he groaned. “Jesus, Clint . . . I’m sorry. I completely forgot.”

“Even if you forgot, Will, Marina would have been there to pick us up. So what crazy shenanigans did you drag her into on your days off?”

The oldest Grimm’s frowned, his lips twitching sadly. “Marina is in London.”

Brian’s head snapped up as he stared at his brother. “What the hell is Marina doing in London?! She didn’t have any overseas assignments on the books this week.”

“Fury called this morning at about six-thirty and she was in the air less than an hour later. I’ve been at the Base Exchange with Dad; he’s trying to pick out a suit for the Officer’s Ball coming up in December.”

Clint’s head cocked as he considered that, before asking, “Pops is going to the Officer’s Ball? Since when?”

Hansel’s voice, dry and amused, caused his sons jump. “Since I was invited by Fraulein Hill to act as her escort.”

The sniper vaulted to his feet, a wide grin on his face as he joked, “Is Agent Hill gonna be our new step-mother, Pops?”

The German’s eyes narrowed as he watched his youngest son, before turning his attention to his second son. “It’s good to see you, Brian. Aren’t you supposed to be in Georgia?”

Jim chuckled, watching as Brian blushed lightly, one hand coming up to scratch at the back of his
head. Will smirked to watch the usually brash second oldest Grimm scuff his feet, before he took pity. “Hey Brian . . . give me a hand in the kitchen? I think it’s about time for dinner.”

Brian grinned and practically leaped at the offer, “Sure, Will. What we having?”

Will’s smirk was amused as he continued, “Whatever I feel like making.”

It was well known that neither Marina nor Will slept very well when they were separated from each other; Marina had once famously stayed awake for 72 hours while Will was in Washington D.C. being debriefed after an Army op. Therefore, when Will had announced his intention to do some reading for an upcoming operation, the rest of his family had unanimously decided to keep him company. Currently, he was sitting in the living room at three in the morning, completely ignoring the work he’d planned to do, in favor of laughing at the insults his brothers were throwing at each other. Brian and Clint were engaged in an epic video game battle, while Hansel read a novel in Marina’s favorite armchair. Natasha sat curled up on the couch behind Brian, one hand resting lightly on his shoulder as he pounded on the controller with his thumbs. Jim had received a phone call from his handler, and he had taken his leave of them several hours before.

Each of their heads whirled at the sudden sound of the kitchen phone ringing. Will frowned, even as Clint spoke up with the thought they all were having. “Who the hell is calling at three o’clock in the morning?”

“Whoever it is, it can’t be good,” Brian answered, watching as Will pushed himself to his feet and moved toward the phone.

Will reached out and hauled the cordless off its charger, checking the caller ID almost as an afterthought. At the international number on the screen, Will smirked. “It’s a London number; it’s probably Marina calling from the hotel.”

“Isn’t it awful late for her to be calling us, isn’t it?”

“It’s actually early evening over there,” Clint argued lightly, with a careless shrug before turning his attention back to his game. “Come on, Bri . . . I was totally in the middle of kicking your ass.”

“In your dreams!” Brian protested, whirling back just in time for Clint to hit the pause button and restart the game.

Hansel smiled at his younger sons, before turning to where Will was coming back into the living room, thumbing the talk button on the cordless. “Hey Marina . . . how’s London?” his eldest son asked, a wide smile on his face as he reentered the living room.

The former witch hunter knew something was wrong instantly, as Will froze in his tracks, a fierce frown on his lips. Crossing his arms, Will ran a hand back through his hair as he answered a question from the other side of the line. “Yes, this is Will Grimm. How can I help you, Ms Maxwell?”

At the unfamiliar name, Clint stabbed the pause button and rounded to face the eldest Grimm. Hansel frowned and closed his book, leaning forward to see his son better. “Will? Adler, what is it?”

It was about then that all of the color leached completely from Will’s face and his knees buckled under him. Shocked at the action, the entire room froze as Will spoke, his voice tremulous and broken, as he asked, “I’m sorry . . . say that again please?”

Each of Will’s brothers strained to hear whatever the woman on the other end of the line was saying, but all they could hear was the sound of Will’s panicked breathing. Finally, Will spoke, sounding frantic, “Yes . . . yes, you have permission to operate. Do whatever you need to do to save her life.
I’ll be there as soon as I can.”

Fumbling the phone off, the Colonel sat frozen, staring at the phone in a mix of surreal horror and terrified concern. It was a long second, before he looked up at his father, tears standing brightly in his eyes. “Mein Adler, who was that?” Hansel asked, reaching out to grip his son’s shoulder fondly.

“That was St. Ann’s hospital, in London.”

“What did they want? Operate on who?” Brian asked, sensing that the answer was not going to be one any of them liked.

“There was an assassination attempt made on Nick Fury today; Marina managed to take the bullet intended for Fury. According to the nurse who just called, the bullet missed her heart by three-quarters of an inch.” Closing his eyes tightly to try and regain his control, Will forced back the panic threatening to close his throat. “Because I’m listed as Marina’s next of kin, they needed my permission to be able to go in and extract it.”

“Why can’t they just operate?”

“Because, it’s an extremely dangerous surgery; it could kill her,” came the horrifying explanation.

“What!” came the unanimous outcry from the brothers, each of their eyes wide as they stared at a stone-faced Will Grimm. It was a long second, before Will returned his attention back onto the phone in his hand. “I’m going to call Jason to let him know. If you want to come to London with me, you have the time it takes for Jason to get here and then I’m gone. Understand?”

“Yes sir!”

Mere seconds later, the living room was empty except for Will and Hansel. The eldest member of the family reached out and took the phone, watching as Will stared sightlessly at a spot on the floor. “Adler, I’ll call Jay . . . just go upstairs and pack. All right?”

The Colonel nodded in dazed agreement, before he turned toward the stairwell. The German watched him go, knowing that as soon as the haze of terror, panic and concern wore off, he was going to have his hands full with an enraged, vengeful son. Dialing his middle son’s cell phone, Hansel muttered under his breath, “Mein Gott in Himmel, what has this family done to deserve your vengeance so?”

It was a long minute, listening to the ringtone of the other end of the line. At last, there was a click and Jason’s voice came through the phone. “Hello?”

“Jay . . . it’s your dad. I have some bad news.”

His middle son’s voice was understandably wary as he inquired, “What kind of bad news? How bad? Is everyone okay?”

“No . . . everyone’s not okay. Jay . . . Marina’s been shot.”

Sitting there on his end of the phone, Hansel could completely understand the total silence that greeted his declaration. Finally, after what felt like an eternity of waiting for Jason’s reaction, Hansel heard Jason’s reply. “Give me ten minutes . . . I’m on my way.” There was a brief pause, before he continued, “How’s Will?”

“Just get here, Jay . . . I’m gonna need all the help I can get.”
Chapter Notes

Russian Translations are at the end of the chapter as always. I hope you enjoy!!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
Chapter 67: Zimniy Soldat

When Colonel William Grimm entered St. Ann’s Hospital, his face set into an icy mask, people literally scrambled to get out of his way. If he hadn’t been struggling to keep hold of his temper and his panic, he would probably have found the whole scene hilarious as doctors, nurses and patients literally ran to get out of his way. He was vaguely aware of his brothers and his father hovering behind him, each of them ready to catch him in case he crumbled under the weight of his fear for the one person in his life that kept him sane.
He barely flinched as Maria was suddenly at his side, walking in step with him toward the desk. “Sit rep,” he demanded in a gravelly voice, barely sparing her any more attention than a single flick of his eyes in her direction. If she was anyone else in the world, he would have probably gotten the dressing down of his life for his borderline insubordination to a superior officer. However, Will had the feeling that if anyone could understand how terrified he was under the stony exterior, it would be the equally cucumber-cool Assistant Director.

“She’s out of surgery. They have her in a medically induced coma; they want to keep her as still as possible for as long as possible, to try to prevent the wound from ripping open again.”

“Prognosis?” he asked, turning a hot glare onto a young orderly who had stepped into his path.

Some sick sense of satisfaction burned in his chest at the terror on the young man’s face as he darted to get out of the way. Maria shook her head, “She got lucky . . .”

“Lucky?” Will roared, his whole body whirling to confront her, every muscle in him locked and ready for a fight. “SHE NEARLY DIED! How the hell is that ‘LUCKY’?!”

“She’s lucky because the asshole missed, Will!” Maria snapped, her face set and her body leaning forward; if Will wanted a fight, Maria was more than willing to give him one. “She’s not out of the woods yet, . . . she has a hell of a fight ahead of her. But she’s alive. From where I’m standing, that’s a hell of a good start.” Stepping forward, the Assistant Director hissed, “And if you don’t calm the fuck down, Colonel Grimm, and be the man she needs to get her through this . . . I swear to GOD! We are going to go rounds.”

Seeing the deadly seriousness in her eyes, the Colonel lifted his chin and closed his eyes, taking a deep breath in and forcing himself to calm down. It was a terse moment as Will took the time needed to count backwards from 1,000 in Arabic. Finally, he opened a pair of steely silver eyes and pulled his face to completely neutral. “Can I see her?”

Teal eyes scanned him quickly, obviously trying to gauge the hold he had on his temper. Satisfied that he had himself under control, Maria nodded firmly. “Yeah . . . come with me. Viktoriya’s with her; we didn’t want her to be alone.”

Will nodded, falling in step with his boss as she led him back through the doors and into the bustling hallways of the hospital. They arrived at the ICU in barely a blink, with Maria leading the way through the curtained off sections toward a room near the end of the hallway. Two men stood at the entrance, Will’s trained eyes labeling them immediately as S.H.I.E.L.D. agents. Looking over at Maria, he frowned, “Bodyguards?”

“I hate to say it, Will, but they may be necessary.”

“Why?” he asked, a sharp frown on his lips as he slowed minutely.

Maria’s eyes were solemn as she looked up at him, before shaking her head. “You need to ask Viktoriya to answer that.”

Molten silver eyes narrowed at her, as she reached to pull the curtain back and gesture him through. Any thoughts of asking anyone anything died a quick death at the sight of his beloved Marina lying motionless in the hospital bed. Maria stared at her best friend for a long second, before looking back up at Will; “I’ll leave you alone with her for awhile, and then I’ll send in a doctor to talk to you. You’ve got complete power of attorney, Will; it’s what she wanted.”

Will nodded in a daze, suddenly at the side of the bed without even being aware he had moved.
Marina lay elevated against the bed, a thick guaze pad peeking from the neck of her blue paper gown. Her chocolate eyes were closed lightly, except for the dark bruises ringing them, he could almost have convinced himself that she was only sleeping. There was a breathing tube taped to the corners of her mouth, distorting her beloved face into that of a virtual stranger’s. Her hair was matted and gnarled, lying in tangled strands beside her. Her hands were slack at her sides and Will felt his heart leap into his throat at the absence of the ring he’d placed on her finger mere months before.

A soft voice from the opposite side of the bed made him jump and his head whipped around to stare at Viktoria Dubrovskaya where she sat in the chair beside the bed. Her hand was extended outwards toward him, as she offered him something. Will shook himself and forced himself to ask, “I’m sorry; what did you say?”

“Her ring; they had to take it off during surgery. I kept it for you . . . I thought you would want to be the one to put it back on her finger,” Viktoria explained, a wretched kind of beauty deep in the wells of her eyes as she watched him.

Will could feel the strong façade he’d erected start to crack and forced himself to swallow down the pain threatening to swell into his throat. Extending his hand, he took the proffered ring with a breathless, “Spasibo, Vika.”

Viktoria’s smile was devastating as she nodded. “Ne stoit blagodarnosti. (Don’t mention it.)”

Lifting Marina’s left hand gently, Will bent and pressed a fervent kiss to the back of it, choking on a sob at the limpness he found there. He could feel tears dripping down his cheeks as he carefully slipped the mosaic opal back onto her wedding finger. He stood there for a long moment, comforted by the soft, familiar heartbeat pulsing under his fingers at her wrist. Then, he gathered his composure to himself once more and looked up at Viktoria with hard eyes. “Will . . . Director Fury and Marina were facing the same way. She was shot before she ever reached Fury. She knocked into him as she was falling; she didn’t even get a single step before the bullet caught her.”

And just then, a lightbulb clicked on in the back of Will’s mind as what his girlfriend’s sister was trying to tell him processed through his grief and fear. “Are you telling me that Marina, NOT Fury, was the target of this shooting?”

“Da.”

“And what proof do you have to substantiate that claim?” Will asked, getting a grip on his panic and shoving it deeply into himself. Will was a military man; as much as he wanted to fall apart at his girlfriend’s bedside, he had a sniper to catch and a shooting to solve. He could break down later, when Marina was safely at home once again and they were locked alone together behind the closed
doors of their own bedroom.

Viktoriya winced as she bit down on the inside of her lower lip, obviously trying to gauge how she should tell him. Finally, she closed her eyes and blurted, “I know who shot her. And I know for a fact, that the sniper missed; they didn’t want to kill her, just make it look like they had.”

There was a brief pause, before Will roared in a tone loud enough to wake the dead, “WHAT!?” Distantly, the young man was surprised Marina when didn’t even flinch at the sound.

“Nikita and I are no longer affiliated with the Red Room or the FSB; however, we both still have friends within each organization. We were passed a rumor a couple days ago; a high-ranking someone in the Russian military had working knowledge of Marina’s future whereabouts. So the Red Room did what it does best and dispatched an asset to eliminate her; their best assassin.”

“Who is she?”

“Not she . . . he. Not every asset created by the Red Room was female . . . only the most recent of them.”

Will felt his temper starting to rise, stomping down on it viciously as he grabbed onto his control and wrenched it back to him once more. “Who is he, Vika?”

“He is called by many names . . . the most common is Zimniy Soldat.”

Will frowned, translating that instantly. “What’s his story?”

“He was a Soviet assassin and spy.” Here Viktoriya shrugged haplessly, her face twisted helplessly, “Beyond that, no one really knows; the man is a myth and a legend made flesh. There are stories, but nothing to confirm them as fact or fiction.”

Grabbing a chair, Will hauled it to the edge of the bed, spun it around and straddled the back, Marina’s hand a warm weight in his palm the whole time. “What kind of stories?”

“They say that he was found at the bottom of a ravine in Germany during the last World War. No one knows how long he laid there; only that his hand was so badly frostbitten that there was no way to save it.”

Eagle sharp eyes narrowed at the information, a half-familiar dossier starting to replay in the back of his head. “When did they find him? Do you know?”

“Nineteen forty-five? I think. Near the end of World War II, but that is all I know for sure.”

“What else do they say about him?”

“Not very tall . . . dark hair. I don’t remember, not really. All I really remember are his eyes; they were blue. So very blue . . . and so cold . . . I used to think the ice he’d lain in at the bottom of the ravine had seeped into his soul and frozen his heart. He was a heartless bastard, at best, Will. You could see the things he’d done in his eyes; he terrified all of us.”

The Colonel’s eyes slipped closed, seeing a picture from his own Project Cahill file. It was of a pair of young men; one was tall and broad-shouldered, golden as a god . . . the ultimate goal of the Project Cahill. But the other man was shorter and dark-haired . . . with mischievous blue eyes, somehow cold and steady, haunted by the things he’d seen and done. “What else do they say about him?”
“The Gospozha? She used to threaten us with him; he was the . . . uh . . . what is he; the monster that American parents use to frighten their children into behaving?”

“The Boogeyman,” Will replied with a sad smirk; he’d never believed in the Boogeyman . . . he’d been facing much more horrifying monsters since before he could even remember.

“Da, he was the Boogeyman. We were all terrified of him . . . except for one girl in my class. He made her his protégé; trained her to be the best.” A brief smile curved her lips. “He always had a soft spot for her; he’d sneak her candies even though they were forbidden by the Gospozha and after the first time, he always made sure there were enough for all of us girls so that Marina would actually get one. That’s why I think he missed; he wanted the Red Room to think she was dead, but he didn’t want to kill her.”

Biting down on her lower lip at the growing fury in Will’s eyes, Viktoriya debated continuing. “I think he wanted to save her life, Will; I know it doesn’t seem like it, but he did. If the Red Room believes she’s dead, they won’t send anymore assassins after her and Marina can finally live her life in peace, without having to always look back over her shoulder. She wasn’t scared of him . . . and I think he kind of adored her for it.”

Even as he struggled with the desire to kick the ever-loving shit out of the bastard who had shot his beloved girlfriend, Will couldn’t stop the smirk that curved his lips; it wasn’t hard for him to imagine his Marina fearless in front of a man who terrified the rest of her classmates. “Is there anyone in this chertovskiy world Marina can’t charm into loving her?”

Viktoriya’s smile was warm, even as her voice was bitter as she inquired, “Why do you think they recruited her? It is much easier to assassinate someone powerful from in close and make it look like an unfortunate accident or a fatal stroke, than from far away where there is no mistaking the intent or the cause of death. Marina is highly skilled at making people like her; it’s a useful talent to have when your assignments consist of seducing old men into your bed to murder them in their sleep.”

Scrubbing his hands over his face, Will huffed out a soft laugh. “Vika, I really don’t want to remember all the men that my girlfriend slept with to make them fall in love with her so she could kill them. Thanks; but I could go without that knowledge.”

Viktoriya cocked an eyebrow at him, “Does it really matter to you?”

Will’s single cocked eyebrow was answer enough, causing a broad grin from Viktoriya as she reached across her sister’s motionless body and squeezed Will’s hand where it rested on the bed, still holding Marina’s. “If it makes you feel better, Will . . . you were the first she chose for herself . . . the first she wanted for no other reason that because she loved you.”

Will cocked his head to watch Marina, absently counting the number of breaths the machine forced her to take in a minute. Finally, he looked over at Viktoriya with a soft smile, asking, “That was Kenny for you, wasn’t it?”

“Da; Kenny was the first man I had the choice to take into my bed. There were no ulterior motives . . . no hidden directives; I will be grateful to him for that, and for saving my life, for the rest of my life.”

“What else do you know about him? The Zimniy Soldat?”

“He doesn’t remember who he is; he has no memories from before he woke up in a Soviet medical center, with a metal arm and a crowd of eager handlers to guide his rifle. I heard the Gospozha call him ‘Yasha’ once.” Shrugging haphazardly, Viktoriya continued, “He was the best assassin the Red Room and the KGB had to hand; there are reasons Marina’s exploits at the Akademiya are
legendary, Colonel, and not the least of them because she was trained by the best to be the best. The Gadyuka and the Chernaya Vdova are the best assets to ever come out of the Akademiya, hands down.”

Closing his eyes, Will threw a leading question into the room, even while knowing without a shadow of doubt who the man Viktoriya was describing was. “He was Russian, I assume?”

Viktoriya looked surprised at the question, her head shaking slowly, “Net. He was American.”

Will gave the former Russian spy a small, tight smile. Bending his head, he pressed a soft kiss to Marina’s hand before lifting it to cup his cheek in her palm. “I’ll be right back, samaya malen’kaya. But I have something I need to do.” Laying her hand reverently atop the bed, Will’s eyes burned into the pretty blond. “You’ll stay with her.”

Viktoriya seemed to sense that this request wasn’t so much a question, as an order. Nevertheless, she nodded firmly. “She will not be alone, William. You have my word.”

A curt nod was the only reply Viktoriya received, before Will exited the room once again. Will’s presence in the waiting room, tightly controlled rage and tightly wound fury, was a shock to his brothers as Will barked, “Jason . . . how quickly can you to hack the Kremlin and the Pentagon?”

Jason blinked as he calculated quickly in his head. “Last time I hacked the Pentagon, it took me about an hour and a half . . . and I can usually crack the Kremlin in about two? Why?”

“I need you to find everything you can on our sniper for me.”

“You know who he is?” Brian demanded, struggling to keep Barney in his cage and carefully hidden behind enraged brown eyes.

“The Russians call him the Zimniy Soldat.”

Hansel frowned, “My Russian is a little shaky. What does that mean exactly?”

“The Russian isn’t important. What’s important is the fact that the Americans used to call him James Buchanan Barnes.”

Clint blinked as the familiar name of his favorite WWII hero crossed his oldest brother’s lips. “Bucky Barnes? You’re fucking kidding me.”

The look on Will’s face was honestly terrifying as he gave each of them an evil-looking smirk. “Forget everything Marina ever told you about bringing home another dangerous pet, Clint, because I want this one . . . dead or alive. Alive is preferable. Dead . . . is better.”

Chapter End Notes

Russian translations:

spasibo - thank you
da/net - yes/no
Gospozha - the Madam (the headmistress of the Red Room's Academy)
Akademiya - The Academy
chertovskiy - damned
Gadyuka - Viper (Marina's code name given to her by the Academy and the KGB)
Chernaya Vdova - Black Widow (Natasha's code name given to her by the Academy and the KGB)
samaya malen'kaya - my little one
Chapter Notes

Russian Translations at the end of the chapter, except for the ones that are pretty common by now. First of THREE for today, because I promised Amerou that if she finished HER chapter, I would post three of mine. Enjoy!!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 68: Control and Paperwork

If there was one thing that the Brothers Grimm excelled at, it was succeeding at the kind of things that other people found impossible. Marina had been heard to say on more than one occasion, that the Grimms did their best work when they had a specific goal to achieve. And currently, the one goal that each of the brothers wanted more than anything, was the apprehension of Marina’s shooter.

Jason was glued to his computer, with his eyes fixated on the code before him as his fingers practically flew over the keyboard in search of the answers he wanted. Brian was a tightly coiled
weapon, his body vibrating with the need for a target to unleash himself on. Natasha Romanov and Nika Belinskaya were en route to London aboard the fastest Quinjet S.H.I.E.L.D. had access to, both women combing their memories for every little detail they could remember about the Winter Soldier. Clint had snatched a handful of the S.H.I.E.L.D. agents Maria had left at the hospital, and dragged them back to the site of the shooting to try to get a read on the surroundings and hopefully find a few clues . . . Hansel knew that Will was hoping Clint would be able to pinpoint their sniper’s staging point; S.H.I.E.L.D. did not call him “Hawkeye” for just his deadly accuracy after all.

Viktoriya sat in the waiting room, staring into a cup of lukewarm coffee under the watchful, curious eyes of one Agent Phil Coulson. Maria was with Fury at the Summit, the top members of S.H.I.E.L.D.’s hierarchy stuck in endless meetings for the foreseeable future, even while their minds replayed the sight of Marina’s body crumpling to the ground with blood blossoming from her chest like a morbid rosebud over and over again.

Everyone had somewhere to be and a job to be doing. Everyone except Hansel.

Hansel had only one job; protecting his son from the rage that was threatening to shake him apart from the inside out. Currently, the Grimm family patriarch was standing just outside the room where his daughter lay, watching his eldest son talk to her in the softest of whispers. As soon as Will had passed out his marching orders, he had returned to Marina’s tiny cubicle, kicked Viktoriya from its confines and taken his place at her bedside. And now he sat, Marina’s lifeless left hand held tightly between both his own as he just talked to her; he didn’t seem to be focusing on any particular topic, but Hansel had never seen his son ramble on without some objective in mind. Usually, Marina would be Hansel’s go-to for answers on the way his overly-analytical son’s mind worked; things being what they were though, he made a mental note to ask her later, when she was awake again.

And she would wake; it was only a matter of when . . . not if. His son would not allow any other outcome; Will would go to hell himself to drag her back if he had to, but she would come back, one way or another.

Logically, Hansel could see the prudence in Will refusing to allow his brothers to see the woman they each identified as their sister, until after they had found this Winter Soldier . . . the man Clint called “Bucky Barnes”. He could even appreciate the ruthless wisdom in the decision; by denying them the ability to see her, Will had heartlessly managed to manipulate his brothers into the highly successful strike team they had always been.

Emotionally, however, was a whole different kettle of fish, as Marina was so fond of saying. It was one thing to know that Will was definitely his son, both in temperament and tactics; it was another thing completely to see the proof of that for himself. Hansel was well aware that he was a heartless bastard; ask anyone who knew him . . . hell, ask his sons. Each of them would tell you that Hansel was a creature who ran on cold logic and complete emotional detachment from his purpose; emotion had its place . . . the middle of a deep cover, high risk operation was not it.

That being said, the ability to be both cruel and unforgiving was not something Hansel had ever wanted to know his eldest son was capable of.

Finally, Hansel entered the room, one hand coming to rest cautiously on his son’s shoulder. “Adler?”

Will’s voice was completely devoid of emotion as he replied, “What is it, Dad?”

“When was the last time hyu ate, mein Adler?” the man asked, trying for what Clint would call a softball question to test the waters a little.

“I’m not hungry,” was the expected reply, his son’s tone brusque and clipped, as though he was
struggling to hold onto his temper.

Hansel’s eyes narrowed, sensing that the release his son needed was just a step away. “That did not answer my question, William.”

And just like that, Hansel had pulled trigger and was suddenly toe to toe with an enraged and furiously bloodthirsty William Michael Grimm, Colonel in the United States Army and Level 07 Field Agent for S.H.I.E.L.D.; not somewhere most sane people would want to be. Even as he accepted the necessity of Will’s reaction, as a way to release his pent-up fury and regain his control, there was a small part of Hansel that longed to counter his son’s violent reaction with his own; an open-handed blow to the trachea or a sharp punch to the solar plexus would teach his son a lesson or two about respecting his elders.

Then he remembered his own tightly wound fury after his sons and daughter had found Gretel and brought her home. He well remembered the way he had lashed out; at his sons, at Marina . . . even Maria had suffered the weight of his wrath – though she at least had left bruises of her own, both literally and figuratively. No one had been safe from his wrath during that fraught months and more than a once, the former witch hunter had said something he continued to regret to this day. But more importantly, he remembered the island of quiet calm that Will had provided; his son’s insistent presence and his easy acceptance of the vitriolic bad temper his father had displayed so easily. It was Hansel’s turn to provide that same calm to his son, especially since he was probably the only one who knew that Will’s anger was not because of the shooting . . . but because of his own helplessness in its aftermath.

Will’s eyes were flashing through colors faster than Hansel could track, morphing from molten silver to icy blue to verdant green and back again. The vein in his neck pulsed with the beat of his racing heart, drawing the hunter’s eyes briefly before moving on. Will’s hands were clenched tightly at his sides, the muscles of his biceps bulging and vibrating with the restraint needed not to hit something. Finally, Will spoke, his voice hard like gravel as he growled, “I don’t give a damn about food right now, Dad!” Will’s mouth twisted into an ugly sneer as he continued, “I don’t give a damn about anything, but the fact that my partner – the woman I have relied on to keep me sane since I was 14 years old – is lying in that bed, fighting for her life! And quite frankly, I won’t give a damn about anything until she opens her eyes again and says my name! Okay? I’m sure you have other sons to pester about whether or not they’re chertov hungry. So kindly go coddle someone else, because quite frankly . . . I don’t need it and what’s more, I don’t WANT it!”

Hansel smiled at his son at the end of his diatribe, arms coming up to cross over his chest as he watched Will breathe heavily to try and pull his fury back under his usual ironclad control. It was a long second as the two men stared each other down, before the German finally inquired, “Feel better?”

Taking a long breath in through his nose, Will took stock of himself before flopping bonelessly back into the chair beside the bed. “Yeah. Thanks, Dad.”

“Hyu are welcome. I am going to go get hyu some coffee and something to eat . . . and hyu vill eat it, mein Adler. Am I understood?”

Will’s eyes drifted closed as he nodded in resigned acceptance. “Yes sir.”

“Gut.” Watching his son lean forward to take Marina’s hand once more, pressing his lips fervently there as he stared helplessly into her motionless face, Hansel was moved by an impulse he had never felt before with regards to his eldest son. Stepping to the young Colonel’s side, he rested one hand on Will’s shoulder and bent, pressing a fervent kiss into the close-cropped hair at the crown of his son’s
head.

He could feel Will’s sharp intake of breath at the gesture, both men allowing the moment to pass by unremarked upon. “Ich liebe dich, mein Adler.”

It was only as Hansel was one foot out the door that he heard the quiet reply, “Ich liebe dich auch, Vati.”

Meanwhile, Viktoria was sitting off to the side of the waiting room, noticeably separate from the rest of the Grimms as she stared despondently into the steaming cup of coffee in her hands. They had given no indication that she wasn’t welcome among them; hell, Jason had scooted over on the couch to make room for her after Will had kicked her from her sister’s room. Right now, though, she needed space . . . space to think and to plan.

Some part of her was aware of the eyes that watched her, their attention soft and curious as opposed to the hard and calculating eyes she had expected from the S.H.I.E.L.D. agents posted at each entrance to the waiting room. Truth be told, the thought that they were there to keep eyes on her stung a little; subjectively, however, she knew that the agents in question had been posted at the hospital to protect her sister, should her shooter try to make finish what he had started.

Viktoria felt no remorse in telling Will Grimm about the Winter Soldier; even as she acknowledged Marina’s devastation should she wake and find her mentor dead or worse at the hands of these boys she loved. The Soviet assassin had been a larger-than-life figure in her childhood, and – with the notable exception of Marina – Viktoria had not known a single girl in her class who didn’t flee at the first sign of him.

So deeply immersed in her thoughts, she jumped as a heavy suit jacket came to rest over her shoulders. Looking up with wild blue eyes, she found herself held captive by a pair of solemn grey eyes. Drawing back a little, she watched a small smile soften the hard eyes and smooth the hard features. Sensing he was waiting for her to make the first move, she reached up and pulled the wool tighter around her shoulders. “Spasibo,” she murmured.

“You’re welcome. You looked like you were getting a little cold; I seem to recall you leaving your suit jacket in the SUV.”

Viktoria’s smile surprised her as she laughed lightly, “A decision I can assure you I regret. Is London always so cold?”

“Regrettably,” he agreed with a slightly wider grin. “It does just kind of seep into the bones, doesn’t it?”

Nodding, she watched him for a long second, before offering him her hand. “Viktoria Viktorovna Dubrovskaya; most people just call me Viktoria.”

“Agent Philip Coulson; most people just call me Coulson,” he replied, taking her hand and shaking it firmly.

Smiling, she insisted, “It’s nice to meet you, Philip.”

He chuckled at her grin, before correcting her wryly. “It’s just Phil actually; Philip is technically my grandfather.”

At the dry response, Viktoria felt an honest laugh bubble up from somewhere deep in her gut. “All right then, Phil . . . it’s nice to meet you.”
“The pleasure is all mine, Ms. Dubrovskaya.”

Giggling a little at the formal address, Viktoriya cocked her head slightly and watched him stand nervously in front of the loveseat. Shifting slightly toward one corner, Viktoriya gestured to the empty seat beside her. “Would you like to sit down?”

There was a pause as Coulson’s eyes widened in honest surprise, before he nodded at her, the hints of a smile lurking in the corners of his eyes. “I would love to.”

At the reverent undercurrent in his voice, Viktoriya blushed lightly. As he took the seat beside her, the pretty blond watched him out of the corner of her eyes. The last thought she had before engaging him in a rousing conversation about the insufficient system S.H.I.E.L.D. had in place regarding its paperwork, was a mental note to remember to tell Marina as soon as she woke up again.

Chapter End Notes

Translations:

mein Adler - my Eagle (Hansel's nickname for Will)
chertov - fucking
gut - good
Ich liebe dich - I love you
Spasibo - thank you
Chapter 69: Interrogation

An hour later, Jason appeared in the doorway to Marina’s room, his laptop in hand as he leaned in just far enough to see both his brother and his father. Smiling at the elder of the two men, he turned his attention on his brother with a small frown. “Will? I got it.”

Taking a deep breath, Will bent his head to kiss the back of her hand once again. “Lyblyu tebya, Marishka,” he murmured, before standing and following his brother from the room. Stopping at the door, he looked back in at Hansel. “You’ll stay with her?”

“I will not leave her, Will. Hyu have my word.”
A small nod was Will’s only thank you before he turned to face the agents guarding the door. Slipping effortlessly into his Colonel mask, Will ordered brusquely, “I want to know the second anything changes. Understood?”

“Yes sir, Colonel, sir,” the two agents barked, snapping off sharp salutes to the superior officer.

Nodding sharply, Will turned back toward the waiting room with Jason falling beside him without a second thought. “What did you find?”

“I think I may know where he’s hiding.”

“How?”

“The Winter Soldier maintains a temporary safehouse in London; something about an ongoing operation. I didn’t read a lot into it; what I did skim over didn’t seem relevant.”

Will dodged around an incoming nurse sightlessly, his eyes fixed on his younger brother as they strode down the hallway. “Any reason to believe that he wouldn’t already be on his way back to Russia by this point?”

Jason’s eyes widened slightly as he shrugged. “Nothing concrete; if I was him, I’d already be scrubbing the place down of all evidence I was in residence and booking it for the nearest hole to hide myself in. But if Vika’s right and he does actually care about Marina even a little bit, he may be staying closeby to make sure she’s really okay.”

“But if he was sent to eliminate her, wouldn’t the lack of immediate check-in trigger red flags to his superiors?”

“Not really; according to his file, the Winter Soldier is for the most part completely autonomous. He almost never reports directly to his superiors; they send him his order via special courier to every safehouse he maintains . . . they very rarely ever know where he is at any given time.”

“So how does he tell his superiors about the hit?”

“Well, all he’d really need is access to some kind of internet server to be able to email the proof of death to his superiors.”

Will frowned, dodging around an incoming stretcher as he inquired, “I realize this is a stupid question, but can we track that?”

“Sure . . . in like 200 years,” Jason replied dryly with a roll of his bright green eyes. “Do you have any idea how many servers there are in London? It would be insane to try and chase just one . . . even for me, that’s not possible.”

Will took a deep breath, pausing briefly in the doorway of the waiting room. “So we take a chance on the idea that he’s hiding out at this safehouse?”

“I think it’s our best bet at this point.”

Taking a deep breath, the Colonel entered the waiting room. “All right. We have a possible location for our mark. Clint, get the location from Jason and get high. I want eyes on that apartment he’s using as soon as you can. Brian, you and Natasha are my point squad; do NOT kill him. I want this bastard alive.”

Brian groaned, miserably, his head dropping back. “Do I have to keep him alive?”
“Yes, Bri . . . I want to know how much the Russians know about Marina.”

There was a pause as Brian considered that, before an evil smirk curved his lips and he inquired, “Can I shoot him?”

Will’s eyebrows furrowed as he considered that, before he nodded. “So long as he can still talk when it’s over, I don’t care how many bullets you put into him.”

“Awesome,” Brian drawled, earning a roll of the eyes from the pretty redhead standing next to him. Her voice was soft as she insisted, “Kindly remember that Colonel Grimm did say to keep him alive.”

“He’ll be alive, Tash . . . just not very happy about it,” Brian protested lightly, brown eyes dancing in time to the wicked grin on his lips.

There was a small smirk at the curve of Will’s mouth as he watched the two move toward the door, still bickering over the finer points of torture and the perfect implement with which to go about it.

Finally, it was just Will and Jason, the younger man watching his brother carefully. “What do you want me to do, Will?”

“You’re with me . . .” Will insisted, turning towards the door after the rest of his brothers. Jason followed dutifully, checking the magazine on his offduty weapon. It was as they stepped into the sunshine that Jason heard the second part of Will’s thought, almost too low for anyone else to hear, “. . . I’m going to need you to make sure I don’t kill the govnroyed once we finally lock him down.”

If it was anyone else, Jason probably would have laughed. As it was, Jason knew just how serious his brother was.

Of course, that led them to now, with the man once called Bucky Barnes on his knees in front of William Grimm, the Colonel’s hands completely steady as he leveled an M9 at the older man’s left eye. Brian had taken Will seriously, and blood leaked slowly from three bullet wounds in the man’s body – left shoulder, right knee and right wrist. Brian was standing back against the wall, his gun leveled at the back of the man’s head. Clint was crouched in the windsill, his bow lying easily across his knees, with an arrow already nocked and the string pulled to about half his usual firing draw. Jason was standing at Will’s back, the only truly calm presence in the chaos as he waited to see what his brother would do next.

Natasha was crouched behind the assassin, binding his wrists firmly to the small of his back. And if she was a little harsher than she could have been as she yanked on the wounded left shoulder, well . . . it would take a better man than Will to reprimand her for it. Looping a length of cord through the bonds and into the belt loop at the back of the man’s pants, Natasha yanked the knots firm. Standing, she moved opposite of Brian, the two spies holding their guns on the back of the Winter Soldier’s head.

Icy blue eyes stared up at the Colonel, causing a soft sneer as Will demanded, “Give me one good reason I shouldn’t blow your fucking head off.”

There was a pause, before the man on his knees asked in a soft tone, “Is she all right?”

Before he’d even realized he’d done it, Will hauled back and punched the man full in the mouth. His fists flew as he poured all of his frustration into beating the ever loving snot out of the Soviet spy. Jason watched for a long moment, before he called his brother’s name. “Will.”

Taking a deep breath, Will stepped back, his knuckles ripped to hell and the other man’s blood
dripping onto the formerly pristine carpet of the spy’s safehouse. “In what world do you possibly
think that you have the right to ask that question?”

Barnes was curled up on his side as he panted for breath, before whispering, “I was just trying to
protect her.”

“Well don’t! Protecting her is my damned job, not yours. If that bullet had been any closer to her
heart, it would have killed her. Do you understand that? It would have KILLED her. So don’t try to
protect her; you suck at it.” Bending down, Will grabbed him by the hair and dragged him back
upwards onto his knees. The man winced heavily, though he didn’t protest the treatment. Crouching,
Will got face to face with the man, his pistol hanging casually between them. “Who gave you your
orders? Who called out the hit?”

“Gregor Petrovich Baryshnikov,” was the quiet answer, eyes scanning Will’s face rapidly as the two
men stared at each other.

Will frowned at the name. “The Russian Councilman from the World Security Council?”

“Da,” came the soft question, the Russian flawless from his lips.

“Was there a Summit? Or was it a ploy to get Marina to London and away from us?”

“There is a Summit, though the presence of S.H.I.E.L.D. was ultimately unnecessary,” the Winter
Soldier announced, shaking his head slightly to clear the cobwebs from it. “However, the
opportunity to have the Gadyuka in a known position was considered an opportunity worth
exploiting. Thus the order for your Director Fury to attend was handed down, to be accompanied
with his top three agents.”

“Do the Russians know you took the shot? What have you told them?”

“I called in my kill confirmation an hour ago. I was just scrubbing the place down when you
arrived.”

Will’s eyes narrowed as he took that in, before accusing softly, “Liar. You were trying to stay close,
so you could find out about Marina.”

Barnes jerked, eyes flashing to meet Will’s in carefully concealed surprise. The Colonel smirked,
resting his elbows on his knees. “You took the shot nearly 28 hours ago. Anyone else would have
already cleared out and been in the wind by now. But here you are, dawdling . . . for all intents and
purposes.”

“I do not expect you to understand; but this was the best I could do for her.”

“You’re right. I don’t understand. But if you’re right, and you ultimately saved her life . . . I will be
in your debt forever. For the moment, however, you shot my girlfriend. And that kinda pisses me
off.”

Straightening, Will tossed over his shoulder. “Clint? Contact S.H.I.E.L.D. Have them send an
extraction team. We’re going to take the Winter Soldier into custody; Nick and Maria can figure out
what to do with him after this point.”

“Sure thing, Will,” Clint agreed with a bright grin as he jumped down from the windowsill.

“Brian . . . Natasha, I want to know as much as you can learn. You have until the extraction team
shows up, so get on it.”
Brian grinned over at Natasha, with a sarcastic wink. “Care to find out who’s right with regards to torture? I’ll let you take the knife as long as I get to use my fists.”

Natasha rolled her eyes, even as she drew a shiny silver blade from a hidden sheath at her back. At the sight, Brian’s eyes went flinty as he cracked his knuckles, his smile going evil as he drawled lazily, “Awesome.”

“Don’t kill him Brian,” was Will’s final admonition before he and Jason left the room.

Chocolate eyes glinted wickedly as he agreed, “I’m not gonna kill him . . . I’m just gonna maim him a little.” Crouching in front of Barnes, he cocked his head with wide faux-innocent eyes. “You don’t mind, right?” Leaning close, Brian lowered his voice, “You realize she’s my sister? And I can assure you . . . I don’t have a conscience; my hands are too bloody for that. But we’re gonna have some fun, okay? Although, maybe that’s just me.”

And with that, Brian punched him hard, causing Barnes to go rocking sideways at the force of the blow. And for the next twenty minutes, the room was completely silent except for the sound of the Soldier’s pained grunts and soft groans. It wasn’t until the extraction team called out their arrival, that Natasha stepped forward to lay a restraining hand on Brian’s shoulder. “Brian . . .” she murmured, watching the Soviet spy lie curled up on the floor, panting through his moans to try and regain his composure.

Once the couple had left the room, Clint approached the spy. His hands were carelessly gentle as they guided him upwards. “I know you’re not okay, so I’m not going to ask.”

There was a soft whimper as Clint’s hands guided the spy’s chin upward, before Barnes bit down on his lower lip to hold in the sound. “It’s okay. I think Bri got the basics of the point across. I’m not going to hurt you anymore.”

Panting to try and catch his breath, there was a long second before Barnes asked in a wretched whisper, “So what happens now?”

“Now, you’re going to get real familiar with the inside of a S.H.I.E.L.D. cell. But I wouldn’t worry too much about it; if you behave yourself, eventually we’ll let you out again. Just . . . cooperate with anyone who comes to talk to you and don’t piss off my brother again.”

“Can I see her?”

Clint snorted as he shook his head. “That will be entirely up to Will for the foreseeable future. I wouldn’t hold your breath too hard. But as soon as she wakes up, I’ll tell her we have you in custody. Not even Will can say no to Marina.” Reaching out to steady the swaying young man, Clint smiled softly, “I’m sure you’ll be seeing her sooner than you expect.”

At the sound of footsteps on the stairs, Clint turned his head toward the door. Straightening, he took a step backwards. “And later, once you’ve been debriefed, you’re gonna need to tell me what kind of weapons system you were running during the War. Because some of the shots you made . . . I don’t know many people who could make them with the weapons systems we have now.”

Barnes’ smile was decidedly bloody as he whispered, “I look forward to educating you on true shooting.”

Surprised at the joke, Clint dropped his head back and laughed. “All right then . . . it’s a date. And we’ll talk soon. Promise.”

The door opened and the team swarmed in, guns pointed firmly in the Russian sniper’s direction,
though neither man hardly noticed. And as the team hauled the badly beaten man away, Clint
couldn’t help the thought that – in a different world – he and Bucky Barnes probably would have
been really good friends. However, even in this world . . . it was still a really good possibility.
Chapter Notes

Chapter three of three! There is a sentence in here that I TOTES stole from Amerou, and she was kind enough to let me have it. Also, translations are at the end of the chapter, as always. Enjoy

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 70

It had been the longest three days of Will’s life to date; and that was including anything that happened while he was still a child at the Hoover Base. Fortunately, the touchpoint of his life remained the same, waking or sleeping, and he was still unmoving from her bedside. That morning, Marina had been downgraded to a step-down unit and taken off of the drugs that were keeping her in a coma and Will began to start the countdown to when she was awake and aware once again. The young Colonel was vaguely aware of the rest of his brothers, his father, Maria and Viktoria cycling through the room, each taking their places in the opposite chair, but even as they changed, Will’s attention remained fixated on her face.

It was Hansel sitting in the chair opposite when the days of catnaps and sleep deprivation finally caught up with him and he yawned. The German smiled fondly at his son, folding his arms over his chest as he watched him. "Hyu need sleep, Adler."

Will’s free hand came up to rub briskly at his face, even as he protested, “I’m not tired.”

Hansel’s eyes slipped closed at the response, his mouth opening to protest. However, anything he might have said was interrupted by the sound of a soft, heavily accented, voice inquiring lightly, “What does that have to do with the price of eggs in China?”

The Colonel’s head snapped up from where he’d rested it against the mattress, eyes wide at the sound of a familiar voice he’d been praying to hear for days now. Chocolate eyes peeked out from under heavy-lidded eyes, a small smile curving a pair of pale chapped lips. “Marina?” he breathed, hope swelling in his chest as his free hand reached out to touch her cheek.

Marina’s eyes closed lightly, her head rolling slightly to lean more fully against the backs of his fingers. She rested there for a long moment, during which Will thought she might have passed out once more, before she took a deep breath and straightened up to look at him again. “Hi . . .” she whispered, her voice low and scratchy from the breathing tube the doctors had removed that morning.

“Jesus!” And just like that, Will was out of his chair and bent over her, his lips pressing to hers gently as he took comfort in simply breathing her air. Finally, the words she’s said filtered through the shock in his brain, and he chuckled against the skin of her temple. “Really, Marishka? Firefly!”

Marina laughed weakly, the sound barely more than a puff of air as she grinned tiredly. “I blame Clint.”

Will giggled, the sound manic even to his own ears; all the while, he could feel relieved tears
dripping down his cheeks. “Nerd!” he accused fondly, the sound a bizarre cross between a laugh and a sob.

The young woman gave him a quiet smile, her eyes starting to get heavy again. “Sorry . . .” she whispered, “. . . so tired.”

“It’s all right . . . go back to sleep. I’ll still be here when you wake up.”

“No!” Marina protested, forcing her eyes open and glaring at him as hard as she could manage in her exhausted state. “Sleep, Misha . . . you look like der’mo.”

Will huffed in exasperation, even as he felt his heart swell once again; if Marina was taking the time to fuss at him about his health, she was definitely going to be just fine. “Thanks for that, samaya malen’kaya. Really.”

Though, if Will was being truly honest with himself, he couldn’t argue too loudly with her assessment. He hadn’t shaved in a week, his hair was getting to be the kind of unruly that only Brian could manage to pull off, and he was fairly certain he had bags under his eyes big enough to haul around land mines. All in all, she probably wasn’t too far off the mark. Marina smirked at him, watching his thoughts track through his eyes with a small smile. “Misha . . . I’m going to be just fine. Find Clint and send him in to babysit if you have to . . . then find a bed and go to sleep. Let someone else look after me for awhile.”

Will sniffed hard as he struggled to get a handle on his emotions, collapsing tiredly to sit on the edge of the bed next to her hip, reaching up to brush at his tears as unobtrusively as he could manage. “But I’m the boyfriend . . . it’s my job to look after you.”

“And occasionally, even the boyfriend needs to let the little brother take up the mantle,” Marina scolded, with the fiercest scowl she could manage in her half-asleep state. “Ten hours, Misha . . . and da pomozhet van Bog if you come back before then. Vy menya ponimayete?”

Laughing at her stern frown, Misha held up his hands in reluctant surrender. “All right! All right! I can take a hint. Ten hours . . . I got it.”

Even Marina knew that all the power in her scowl was lost then as she yawned, muttering bitterly, “And so Morpheus comes.”

“Just remember to take the little blue pill when he offers it; it’ll bring you home again, okay?” Will teased with a soft smile.

Marina giggled tiredly, feeling herself start to slide the last inches into unconsciousness. “Now who’s the nerd?” she joked quietly, even as her eyes slipped closed and she lost the battle to stay awake.

Lifting her hand to his lips for one last fervent kiss, Will stood from the edge of the bed and stretched high over his head. Bending, he kissed her forehead tenderly once more before turning to face his father. “I’m going to go find Clint and then have Jason take me back to the hotel. Marina’s right; I could use at least ten hours of rack time and a shave . . . I don’t know how Brian can stand to have hair on his face like this.”

Hansel nodded, watching his son scratched irritably at the scruff on his cheeks and chin. “Welcome back to the Land of the Living, Adler. I vill stay with her until mein Falki arrives. Then I believe I vill join hyu, if hyu have no objections.”

“No objections here; just be aware, I’m not going to be very good company . . . I full intend to shower and then pass out.”
There was an amused smirk on the German’s face as he nodded once, “Gut.”

Several hours later, Marina came slowly back to consciousness, aware of the gentle hand on her ankle, shaking it as a familiar voice called her name. “Marina . . . come on, Sova . . . wake up!”

With a disgruntled hum, Marina tossed her head and muttered, “I’m awake, Clinton Francis . . . chto za chert?!” Opening her eyes, she smirked to see her youngest charge perched on the foot rest at the end of the bed, balanced there on the balls of his feet, as though he truly was the creature from which he earned his code name.

“Izvinite, Marishka, but Nat took Brian down the cafeteria to get coffee and I need to tell you this before they get back,” Clint insisted, glancing quickly back.

At the worried, low tone in her boy’s voice, Marina blinked hard and forced herself to open her eyes. The concern and worry in Clint’s grey gaze warred fiercely with whatever secret he was preparing to confess to her, causing Marina to attempt to force herself into a seated position. Bracing her hands on the bed on either side of her caused a stabbing pain and a low cry, even as she continued to muscle through the agony as she always had. Finally, after a lot of pain and even more swearing, she managed to sit herself up against the pile of pillows behind her. Clint was watching her carefully, his head cocked and his eyes narrowed as he took in the sheen of sweat at her brow and the tense way she held her body. “That was stupid, Marishka.”

Marina smirked, nodding once in acknowledgement of the assessment, before speaking up quietly. “Quite possibly. What is it, dorogoy? What did you need to tell me?”

“Has anyone told you about the shooting?”

“No, though I did manage to figure out for myself that the target-sight was a decoy. Why? What isn’t Misha telling me?”

“It was the Winter Soldier, Marina. I’m sorry; Vika told Will that you used to be fond of him.”

“Still am, to be honest. More than a few of the things he had to teach me, have kept me alive all of these years.” Chuckling slightly, Marina’s eyes slipped closed as she considered what she was just been told. When she spoke again, the words caused Clint to gawk at her in shock. “Either his hands are getting shaky in his old age . . . or he wasn’t really trying. And I’m going to bet it was probably the Option Number 2.”

“Why do you say that?”

“The Zimniy Soldat is a really good shot, dorogoy. Maybe not as good as you are . . . but nearly as good as Kenny and at least as good as Brian. He has never missed. If I’m not dead, it’s because he wasn’t trying to kill me.” Picking at the coverlet for a minute, she considered that before looking up to meet Clint’s eyes again. “Where is he? Do you know?”

“That’s what I wanted to talk to you about. We found him; he’s currently in a S.H.I.E.L.D. cell on the London base.”

Marina’s lips curved upwards as she speculated, “Let me guess . . . I would assume that Misha made sure their first meeting would be a memorable one.”

“That’s putting it mildly. Will beat the shit out of him, Marisha . . . you should have seen it!” the young sniper gushed, bouncing slightly until Marina cocked a single brown eyebrow in his direction. “Sorry.”
“It’s all right, Clint . . . what happened? I know Misha; he would have kept his cool during an interrogation, unless something was said to piss him off. He would have hated it, but he wouldn’t have hit him unless he had a really good reason.”

Clint smirked, a wicked gleam in his grey eyes as he replied, “The Soldier asked if you were all right.”

Marina visibly winced, easily able to guess how well Will would have taken such a request. “Yeah . . . that would do it.”

“So he’s in custody?” the pretty Russian inquired, her eyes slipping closed as she scrolled through the memories she had of the Winter Soldier.

If you didn’t know him, it was easy to find the mental picture of a Soviet spy offering a young girl a hard candy and a warm smile a little unnerving; but Marina only remembered how powerful she had felt that day that she stood toe to toe with him . . . fearless and unmoving as she demanded that he teach her everything he knew. Marina knew that he could have snapped her neck; she knew the stories that floated around the Academy that he had done worse things for even less reason.

“Yeah; he wants to see you. I told him that right now, Will is probably in charge of all final decisions about that. But that you’d make the final call once you were awake again.” Watching the point woman’s face, the sniper was a little hesitant to mention the next part. To his credit, however, he caved quickly under Marina’s firm glare. “He’s pretty messed up Marina; once Will was done with him, Brian and Natasha took a turn at him.”

Marina’s lips compressed, even as she acknowledged that it was probably the best scenario she could have come up with. At this point, she was relieved that at least her childhood mentor wasn’t dead. Smiling up at her youngest charge, and feeling unconsciousness start to creep back up on her once again, Marina watched as Clint jumped lightly from the footrest and came to rest at the edge of the bed as Marina proceeded to melt into her pillows. “Idi syuda, dorogoy.”

Clint grinned wide, scampering up onto the bed at her side as he tried to find a position that would allow him to curl as tightly into her as her bullet wound and his body armor would allow. Finally, they came to rest in a position comfortable for both of them; Clint’s head rested lightly on her outstretched right arm, his fingers light and practiced on the small white bandage that concealed the damage the bullet had done to her otherwise flawlessly perfect skin. “What are you going to do, Marishka?”

“Right now? Right now, I’m going to sleep . . . with my vozlyublennyy dorogoy. And then, when Misha’s back from the hotel, I’m going to demand that he take me to see the Winter Soldier.” Her lip trembled slightly as she wrestled with the reality of what her former teacher had done, in the pursuit of protecting her. “And then . . . I’m going to take him home with me. And from there; well, we’ll see how the rest of it goes.”

Hansel spoke from where he was standing in the doorjamb. “Marina . . . mein Tochter . . . he is not a pet.”

Clint remained motionless in his place curled up beside his sister, as he cracked back, “No . . . he’s just another defecting Russian. I’m pretty sure we know how to handle those by now.”

“Defective Russians are not cats, Clint, hyu cannot feed them and let them come home, covered in fleas,” the German protested, folding his arms over his chest as he scowled in reaction to Clint’s statement.
Marina frowned, though Clint’s grin was amused as he joked, “There are so many things wrong with that sentence, Pops, I don’t even know where to start.”

“How about you start with this? He tried to kill her. Missed intentionally or not, she nearly **died** due to a bullet he shot from his rifle. Neither I nor your brother are going to forgive him for that easily. And if he’s the one to wake Gretel . . . so help him God.”

It was about then that both of the Grimms realized that Marina had checked out of the conversation; her head was resting peacefully on Clint's shoulder as she breathed in and out slowly in time with the even cadence of her heartbeat. The two men smirked at each other, though Hansel could tell that there wasn’t a snowball’s chance in hell that Hansel would be able to remove Clint from his place in the bed at Marina's side. Finally, throwing up his hands in exasperation, he ordered fondly, “Just remember to get up, in case a doctor or a nurse comes in, all right, **mein Falki**?” Hansel admonished, slapping lightly at the base of Clint’s foot.

The blinding nature of Clint’s grin could have powered a small country, considering the way it beamed brightly at his father. “Thanks Pops.”

Hansel shook his head lightly, as he retook his seat. “Just . . . don’t tell your brother.”

Chapter End Notes

Translations:

(R) der’mo - shit
(R) samaya malen'kaya - my little one (Will's nickname for Marina)
(R) da pomozhet vam Bog - so help you God
(R) vy menya ponimayete? - do you understand me?
(R) Sova - Owl (Marina's Army Spec Ops code name)
(R) chto za chert?! - what the hell?!
(R) izvinite - sorry
(R) Zimniy Soldat - The Winter Soldier
(R) dorogoy - darling (Marina's nickname for Clint)
(R) Idi syuda - Come here
(R) vozlyublenny dorogoy - beloved darling
(G) Adler - Eagle (Hansel's nickname for Will)
(G) gut - good
(G) mein Falki - my little Hawk (Hansel's nickname for Clint)
(G) mein Tochter - my daughter (Hansel's nickname for Marina)
Chapter 71: Going Home

Nearly a week later, the doctor stood at the foot of Marina’s bed, flipping through her chart with a wide-eyed look that clearly indicated he couldn’t believe what he was seeing. The pretty Russian cocked an eyebrow at him, though it was Will who said the thought she was having aloud. “Why do you look like you just stumbled over a miracle?”
The man gaped at him for a long moment, before he snapped his jaw closed and shook his head. “I . . . I apologize, Colonel Grimm . . . I just . . . this is incredible. I have never seen **ANYONE** recover from this level of damage so quickly before. It’s . . . to be frank, Colonel Petrovka, it’s nothing short of extraordinary.”

Reluctantly thanking the Red Room for the enhancements it had imposed on her - let's hear it for accelerated healing - Marina couldn't resist the urge to roll her eyes as she threw back the covers and swung her legs carelessly over the side. “While I’m sure that’s something awesome for you, Dr. Yang, I would just like to take a moment to remind you of the nondisclosure agreement you signed when I was admitted into your hospital,” she insisted, her tone cold and very much like the tone she used on bumbling new recruits that had managed to piss her off in one way or another.

Lazing back in the armchair beside the bed, Will smirked to watch the man’s mouth work in indignation; he had apparently not considered the fact that he would not be allowed to publish anything regarding his “extraordinary” patient. Flicking his eyes to his girlfriend, Will breathed a deep sigh of relief, once again saying a prayer of thanks that Marina was once again back to being the bad-ass mother-fucking chick he knew and loved. Reaching for the hem of the tanktop she had insisted on changing into shortly after she woke from her coma, the pretty handler cocked a single eyebrow at the man. “Dr. Yang, I realize you’ve seen rather a lot of me over the last week. Things being as they are, however, I rather think you’ve overstayed your welcome at this point.”

“Oh!” he gasped, snapping her chart closed with a firm nod. “Of course, Colonel. I’ll leave you to get dressed. A nurse will be in with a wheelchair and your discharge paperwork shortly.”

Marina nodded, barely restraining the urge to roll her eyes at him as one hand came up to wave him away imperiously. It was only after the man was gone that she muttered, “Wheelchair my ass.”

“Marishka . . . **samaya malen’kaya . . . moya sumasshedshaya devushka** . . . don’t you think you might be overdoing it a little bit? I mean twelve days ago, you took a bullet so close to your heart, that they had to call me for permission before they could operate, lest I sue if you died in their care,” Will admonished fondly, even while acknowledging that his words were falling on mostly deaf ears.

Sure enough, Marina smirked at him as she whipped her tanktop up and over her head. “Misha, **moy vozlyublenny**, I feel fine. Honest. I’m still in some pain; but I’m ready to get back to my life again. Okay? I don’t need a wheelchair . . . what I need is to get the hell out of this hospital and go home with you and my boys.”

There was a long pause, before Will brought up the elephant in the room the longtime couple had been dancing around since Clint had told his sister about the man’s arrival back into her life. “And the Winter Soldier?”

“I’m not kidding about taking him home with me, William,” Marina insisted, her voice low and determined as she shimmied into the tight fitting navy blue sweater of her S.H.I.E.L.D. uniform.

Will groaned at the usage of his full first name, both hands coming up to scrub at his face. “Marishka . . . he’s a killer.”

“So am I, or have you forgotten the men I’ve **trakhal** then killed over the years?”

Rolling his eyes at the argument, Will shifted gears and attempted a different tack. “He nearly killed you! Why aren’t you at least upset with him for **THAT**?”

Will blinked at her quiet reply of, “Who said I wasn’t?”
Dropping his head back to stare at the ceiling, he muttered under his breath, “Well that’s the first sensible thing I’ve heard you say in days.”

Marina rotated over her shoulder, her eyes narrowed slightly as she glared at him, though her lips were quirked in reluctant amusement. Rolling her eyes, she bent slowly – ever conscious of the lingering pain in her chest – to step into her skirt and wiggle it up her legs and over her hips. “Sensible or not, I’m still taking him home with me, Misha. You can argue with me until you’re blue in the face, but that isn’t going to change.”

Throwing up his hands in defeat, he shoved himself from his chair before approaching her to zip up the back of her uniform skirt. “Dad doesn’t like him . . . and Brian would like to kill him and I . . . well, I’m in his debt for offering you permanent protection from the Russians, but I still hate his guts. The only two people in this family who actually don’t want to maim him bodily are you and Clint.”

Folding his arms, he continued dryly, “And you want to take him into our home?”

There was no hesitation as Marina nodded firmly, “Yes.”

And just like that, Will hit his final wall. With Marina aware of the repercussions, there were no other arguments he could throw at her. So, whether he liked it or not, it looked as though the Winter Soldier, aka Bucky Barnes, would be going home with the Brothers Grimm . . . at least until Marina could find him alternate quarters on base. Staring at her as she seated herself in a chair and pushed her feet into her knee high black boots, he found himself wondering if this was how normal husbands felt when faced with an obstinate and exceptionally strong-willed wife . . . or if he was just special. (And suddenly, he could remember each and every one of the reasons he hadn’t asked her to marry him.)

The zippers on the side of her boots were the only sound in the rooms for a long moment as both processed and regrouped, before at last Will chuckled, “You really are a sumaishedshaya devushka. My crazy girl, but still a crazy girl.” Shaking his head, he lifted his hand to pinch the bridge of his nose as he tried to figure out the logistics. “You realize that he is going to last a week before either Dad or Brian kills him; you know that right?”

“I am aware, yes.”

“Good; I just want to make sure that that gets put on the record somewhere.”

Marina chuckled, her hips swaying seductively as she approached him and lifted her arms to loop around his neck. Her smile was wide and mischievous as she tilted back her chin and looked up into his eyes. “Ya lyublyu tebya, Misha.”

Will sighed heavily, his hands reaching out to grab her hips and haul her into his body. The feeling of her curves molding into his angles was so familiar that he could barely hold in the moan of relief. “Boge, you make me crazy.”

Her head dropped back as she laughed, wrinkling her nose at him as she teased, with a complete and utter lack of remorse, “I know.”

Shaking his head, Will lifted his hand to her face and cupped her cheek in his palm. Quicksilver eyes pinned her in place, as his thumb stroked tenderly over the apple of her cheek. Bending to her height, he pressed his lips to hers, the action calm and leisurely for the first time since the day she left for London. His hands kneaded at the supple flesh of her hips, the alpha male in him reveling in the strength and endurance of his chosen mate. “Nikogda ne sdelat’eto so mnoy snova, (Do not ever do that to me again,)” he finally whispered as he pulled himself from her lips.
A small, sad smile curved her lips as she shook her head. “Kak obychno, Misha, ya ne dayu obeshchaniy. (As usual, Misha, I make no promises.)”

Huffing out a frustrated breath, he nevertheless leaned forward to kiss her once more. “All right; let’s go pick up your new pet so we can go home. My bed is calling me; the hotel bed was comfortable, but no bed is ever good enough unless you're in it next to me.”

Marina’s smile was soft and adoring as she hummed in wordless agreement. Reaching over, Will stuffed her track pants and tank into her bag, yanked the zip into place, took her hand in his and left the hospital room, with her following close on his heels. (And if there was a small thought in his head that if he ever saw St. Ann’s Hospital again, he’d scream . . . well, that was no one else’s business but his own.)

When they arrived at S.H.I.E.L.D.’s London base, Marina and Will were surprised when they were immediately waved through the gates. “That was strange,” Will muttered, as he guided the Jeep towards Central Command.

Marina hummed as she perused the file folder S.H.I.E.L.D. had been compiling on James B. Barnes since his apprehension. “Or Maria told them to expect us.”

“Either way, they should have checked out ID.”

Glancing up at him through her eyelashes, she shook her head. “Just remember, Colonel; you can’t go off on guardsman here . . . not to mention, last I heard, Sgt. Morrison is still in therapy after your dressing down.”

“That was years ago; you’d think he’d be over it by now,” Will muttered quietly with an eyeroll, as he pulled into a parking space and hauled on the parking brake before turning off the car and pulling the key from the ignition. Turning to face her, he braced his arm across the top of her seat once more and watched her, as she studiously ignored his attention to focus intently on the folder. “Marishka . . . samaya malen’kaya . . . you can’t avoid this forever.”

“No . . . but not for lack of sincere effort,” she joked, turning her head to grin at him playfully.

Reaching over, he pinched her quickly in one of the few ticklish places on her body he could reach, a quick thrill going through her as she writhed with a girlish giggle at the half-hearted attack. “Last chance to change your mind, Marishka. Are you sure about this?”

Marina turned to look at him quietly, her eyes steady and calm as they locked onto his own. Finally, she took a deep breath and nodded once. “Yes, Misha . . . I want to take him home with us.”

Will’s mouth compressed slightly, before he nodded in agreement. “All right then; let’s go get him. I want to be wheels up within the hour.”

The spy’s lips curved into a deliciously wicked grin as she tossed him a cocky, half-assed salute, “Yes sir, Colonel, sir.”

Narrowing his eyes at her, he watched as the color rose in Marina’s face. “I’m going to get you for that, moya devushka . . . you just wait and see.”

“Promises promises, Misha,” she singsonged, as she yanked on the lever and let herself out of the Jeep. “Come on; I want to go home.”

And sure enough, not even an hour later, Marina, the Brothers Grimm and the rest of their loved ones were aboard a S.H.I.E.L.D. Quinjet on their way back to base in New York City . . . with the
Winter Soldier in silent attendance.

Chapter End Notes

Russian Translations:

samaya malen'kaya - my little one (Will's nickname for Marina)
moya sumasshedshaya devushka - my crazy girl (one of Will's terms of endearments for Marina)
moy vozlyublennyy - my beloved (one of Marina's terms of endearments for Will)
trakhal - fucked
Ya lyublyu tebya - I love you
Boge - God
moya devushka - my girl (one of Will's terms of endearments for Marina)
Chapter Notes

So apparently I lied. Happy Thanksgiving! And enjoy all! Translations at the end of the chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter 72: The Annual Army-Air Force Game

It should have been a surprise to Marina but somehow it just wasn’t, when the Quinjet set down on base and a DOD delegation – complete with sour-faced MPs – was waiting on the tarmac to meet them. Will’s face was stony as he watched the officer in charge through the window in the side of the plane. “Ten to one, they’re here for Barnes.”

If it was possible, the former Soviet assassin paled under the green and yellow bruises on his face. His hands twisted in the cuffs around them, fingers locking together and squeezing tight enough his knuckles went white. Marina’s lips compressed at the sight, one hand coming to rest on her mentor’s
shoulder and squeezing lightly. Her tone was gentle and fond as she insisted, “It’s all right, Zima . . . they probably just have questions. Cooperate and I’ll be there to pick you up again soon.”

Brian scowled at his sister’s kindness to the sniper, though a quelling glare from the gorgeous redhead at his right kept him silent. Clint smirked at Natasha, guessing that there was more to the situation than the redhead was telling, before turning back to his brother. “So what happens now? We can’t get off this plane for as long as they are out there; we’re all still classified at Eyes Only.”

Marina took a deep breath, closing her eyes, even as she acknowledged that she was the only one with the authorization to leave the plane in the presence of any one not specifically cleared. “I’ll take him to them.”

Reaching out, she cupped the Soldier’s elbow in her palm and assisted him to his feet. “Come on, Tvorets. The sooner we get this over with, the sooner we all can go home.”

At the term, each of the Brothers Grimm’s head whipped to face her. “Father?” Brian seethed in a low tone that would have made a banshee shiver. “Architect, actually,” Marina corrected, her tone equally as cold as she glared at her charge. “Now is really not the time, dikiy rebenok. We’ll discuss this later.”

“Why not now?”

“Cause the last thing I want is for someone to come storming onto this plane, thinking that we’re stalling and blowing each of your covers. So sit down, shut up and I will deal with you later,” Marina snapped, chocolate eyes blazing in her face as she glared at him.

Brian’s lips curled slightly, even as he obeyed. Reaching out, she touched Clint’s elbow lightly. The two locked eyes for a brief moment, obviously holding a conversation that only they were privy to, before Clint nodded and Marina moved toward the back hatch of the plane, the Winter Soldier at her side. It was as they started to exit the plane that the Soldier spoke for the first time, “Why are you helping me, Uchashchiysya?”

Marina was quiet for a second, before she tilted her head back to look up into his face. “Because you and I both know what it’s like to be someone else’s weapon, Zima . . . and I know what it feels like when someone finally looks at you like you’re a human being, instead of the means to an end.” Glancing back over her shoulder at the just shadowy outlines of her charges, she quirked a small grin, “It’s why I didn’t really fuss when Clint hauled in Natasha, instead of taking her out. He saw her as a woman, instead of the living weapon her handlers had always seen her as. And she deserved the chance to prove him right.”

One corner of his lips cocked upward slightly, before he gave her a single nod of understanding. “I am sorry that I have caused tension between you and your mal’chik.”

“Eh, don’t worry about Brian. All he needs is a little vacation to Afghanistan. A couple months in the Sandbox chasing terrorists will straighten him out,” Marina insisted dryly, rolling her eyes lightly. “Spasibo, Marishka.”

Her smile was sad as she squeezed his elbow lightly, “Pozhaluysta. (You’re welcome.)”

The two stopped in front of the officer in charge, though Marina was pleased to note that the insignia at his throat indicating he was only a lieutenant. She had never been more grateful for the silver oak leaf her rank entitled her to – the pendant itself displaying her rank hanging from the belt of her S.H.I.E.L.D. uniform – as she was then. “Lieutenant,” was her only greeting, her brittle tone causing
the man to visibly blanch.

The junior officer gawped at her for a moment, before snapping to attention and throwing off a brisk salute. “Lt. Colonel Petrovka, ma’am.”

Returning the salute, the pretty spy consciously resisted the urge to roll her eyes. “At ease, Lieutenant. Care to tell me why you’re here, when my Spec Ops squad just wants to deplane and go home?”

“I apologize, ma’am, but I was led to believe that Colonel Grimm would be accompanying the prisoner.”

Marina’s smirk was amused as she insisted callously, “Colonel Grimm has more important concerns than you, Lieutenant. And that did not actually answer my question.”

“I was ordered to retrieve Sgt Barnes and commit him into the custody of the Army.”

“On what grounds?” she asked, one eyebrow cocking upwards in question.

His eyes widened at her question, obviously not having expected to have to defend his position. “Well . . . I . . . uh . . .”

Another voice from behind him broke into the conversation, “Come now, Colonel; you know as well as I do that Sgt Barnes falls under the jurisdiction of the Department of Defense. At the time of his untimely . . . disappearance . . . he was on active duty with the United States Army. S.H.I.E.L.D. has no grounds to hold him.”

Marina cocked an eyebrow at the new face, as a man in a well pressed suit stepped from his hiding place behind the lieutenant. “And you are?”

A shark’s grin not unlike Fury’s creased his lips, though unlike Fury’s . . . this gesture brought her no comfort. “Colonel Eric Byer, US Air Force.”

Chocolate eyes scanned him up and down, taking in every facet of him. There was a light hum as Marina smirked, “You don’t really look the part, Colonel.”

There was a return smirk as he dipped his head in an acknowledging nod. “I’m retired.”

“I see,” she agreed, with a narrow eyed look, suspicion rising like a tide in her heart. She watched him for a long minute before turning to look up at her mentor. “You gonna be okay?”

His lips were bloodless in his bruised face as he offered her a slight smile. “Just cooperate, right?”

“Tell them what they want to know; I’ll talk to Fury and get you transferred as soon as possible, all right?”

The Winter Soldier nodded, his eyes calm as he watched her. “I’ll see you soon then, Uchashchisya.”

“You too, Tovrets,” she agreed, watching quietly as the lieutenant stepped forward and grabbed the former assassin by the wrist and yanked him several steps away from Marina.

“Sergeant James Buchanan Barnes, you are hereby placed under arrest, by the authority of the United States Department of Defense. You shall stand trial for your crimes, as mandated by the Department of Justice. Anything you say, can and will be used in a court of law.”
Barnes paused for only a moment to look back at her, as he was led roughly toward the armored van awaiting him. Marina could only nod once in silent encouragement, before he disappeared into the van and out of view. Finally, she returned her attention to Byer, her eyes hard as she watched him watch her. It was a tense minute, before he inquired, “What is your connection to the sergeant, Colonel? I find it hard to believe that you would be friends with a Russian spy.”

Marina’s lips quirked into a smug smile as she folded her arms over her chest, one hip cocking outward insolently as she watched him. When she spoke, her native Russian accent was obvious as she drawled, “Yesli vy tak govorite, Polknik Bayyer. (If you say so, Colonel Byer.)” Turning on her heel, she strode away, calling over her shoulder, “I’m sure I’ll be seeing you again . . . very soon.”

Byer watched her walk away with narrowed eyes, before she disappeared into the belly of the Quinjet once again. “Sooner than you realize, I think.”

Seventy-two hours later, Four Star General David Perron looked up to see Ret. Col. Eric Byer slam into his office, trailed by his protesting secretary. Sighing heavily, he set down his pen and closed the file folder he was working in. “It’s all right, Corporal Hennings,” he soothed, standing and ushering the sputtering young woman back out to her desk. “If you wouldn’t mind making us some coffee, Corporal? I would appreciate it.”

“Of course, sir,” she agreed, even as she continued to give the colonel an evil glare.

The General shut the door as she left and turned back to face his unexpected guest. “What is it, Ric?”

“I met an interesting character the other day; I think you know her? And every time I try to report her for misconduct, I’m told that she’s above reproach. And why is she above reproach you ask? Because she’s the handler for your pet project.”

“Ah . . . you must be talking about Lt. Colonel Petrovka. What are you trying to report her for?”

“Are you aware that she claims close associations with Russian spies?!”

“I believe the correct terminology is former Russian spies. However it’s hardly surprising considering the fact she used to BE a Russian spy.”

Byer blinked at the information, surprised that the General was offering up the information so easily. “I beg your pardon, sir?”

“Marina Ivanovna Petrovka used to be a spy for the KGB; she turned herself over to the DOD in ’96 and has been an exemplary officer ever since. If you’re here to accuse her of misconduct, I would suggest that you have airtight proof of it. Cause otherwise, I just don’t give a damn.” Looking down at the paperwork in front of him, he inquired acidly, “And just what were you doing at the Barnes pick up anyway?”

“The DOD ordered him remanded into the custody of my office, for debrief.”

Perron looked up at him over the tops of his reading glasses, with a soft noncommittal hum. “A word of warning, Byer? I’ve already received the paperwork from S.H.I.E.L.D.’s Director Fury to have Barnes transferred permanently under their jurisdiction and am seriously considering granting it; Fury can probably utilize his unique skill set better than any other program or agency in the US. Therefore, I would suggest you handle the man with kid gloves; I was given the impression that his continued wellbeing were of upmost importance to them.”

“Why?”
“I would assume that they intend to put him to work, Byer. Now . . . are we done?”

Perron smirked into his paperwork; he could practically hear Byer’s teeth grinding as he hissed out a near insubordinate, “Yes sir.”

“Good. Then get out of my damned office.” Just then, the door opened again and Corporal Hennings entered carrying two cups of coffee. “Ah, Hennings, thank you. If you could make sure Colonel Byer gets his to go; he has somewhere else to be.”

“Of course sir,” she agreed with a fond grin, before shoving the paper cup roughly at Byer with a fierce scowl, completely heedless of the coffee sloshing at the sides. “Your coffee.”

A wicked smirk tilted Perron’s lips as he watched her flounce back out the door, completely neglecting the proper address of a superior officer. Frankly, he approved. Byer’s jaw worked, as though he was considering reprimanding her, before he gave it up for a bad job and stormed from the room like there was a fire on his ass. Once Perron was certain he was gone, he called, “Janette?”

The woman appeared in the doorway almost instantly, a look of fond concern on her face as she inquired, “Yes sir?”

“Is he gone?”

“Yes sir.”

“Then get me Colonel William Grimm on the line; there’s a fire coming his way and I’d like to make he knows about it before it burns the Brat’ya Mrachnyy down.”

“Of course sir. Anything else, sir? A sandwich or something from the mess maybe?” she inquired with an arched eyebrow.

Smiling at her usual attempt to smother him, he shook his head. “No; thank you, Janette.”

She continued to glare at him with narrow eyes for a long moment, before she nodded briskly. “I’ll get Colonel Grimm on the phone right away, sir.”

It was less than five minutes later that Perron picked up the phone to hear a familiar voice inquire, “You needed to speak to me, sir?”

“This isn’t a formal call, Will; this is just a call between friends.”

There was a long pause as the other man considered that, before he inquired warily, “What’s happened, Dave?”

“I think Marina’s made a friend, if you know what I mean.”

There was a long pause, before Will agreed with a soft sigh, “Yeah, I do. Who?”

“Colonel Eric Byer. He’s retired Air Force, but he currently heads up the National Research Assay Group. Keep an eye out, Will; Ric isn’t the kind to let what he thinks is a problem remain a problem for very long.”

Will’s grunt was hard and borderline homicidal as he considered that. Finally, he got himself back under control, asking, “He’s the guy who was there to pick up Barnes right?”

“Yes.”
“What the hell does the NRAG want with Bucky Barnes?”

“That’s a damn good question; however, your guess is regrettably as good as mine. All black ops and programs go through that office; even I would need a higher clearance to get the dirt on what the hell they want with Barnes.”

“Thanks for the heads up, Dave.”

“You’re welcome. Tell Marina I’m glad to hear that she’s okay . . . and not to piss off any more superior officers, huh?”

Will laughed, as he agreed, “I’ll let her know. Have a good day, Dave.”

“You too, Will. Denise and I will see you and Marina at the Officer’s Ball, right?”

“Like you would let me miss it,” was Will’s dry rejoinder, well aware that if he tried, he’d receive an order from his CO to report to the Officer’s Ball and have fun or else. The two men took a moment to share a laugh about it, before they said their goodbyes and hung up.

Settling the phone into its cradle, Perron heaved a sigh of relief. Will was now aware of the situation and would take the appropriate steps to protect and insulate his XO. From this point on, the mess was out of his hands.

Chapter End Notes

Russian Translations

Zima - Winter (nickname for the Winter Soldier)
Tvorets - Architect (or Creator) (one of Marina's nicknames for the Winter Soldier, in deference to the fact that he was her mentor)
dikiy rebenok - wild child (Marina's nickname for Brian)
uchashchiysya - scholar (or student) (one of the Winter Soldier's nicknames for Marina, in deference to that she used to be his protege)
mal'chik - boy
spasibo - thank you
Rescuing Winter

Chapter Notes

Russian Translations at the end of the chapter. I don't think I'll be able to post tomorrow, as I'll be in the car all day. But we'll see.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
Chapter 73: Rescuing Winter

It had been five days since the DOD had taken the Winter Soldier into custody, when Marina Petrovka – flanked on each side by Nika Belinskaya and Natasha Romanov – walked into the central office of the National Research Assay Group. A charming smile on her lips, she was perfectly aware of the picture the three women made to the lowly grunts running the front desk. Her heels clicked efficiently against the linoleum floor as she pushed through the security door as though she owned the place. “You can’t do that!” the guard insisted.
At the shout, Marina smirked over her shoulder as she waved an official looking file over her head. “Stand down, Private; I assure you I can. Do me a favor and call Colonel Byer for me? I need to talk to him. That’s a good kid.”

“And who shall I tell him is asking?” he called after her, though she only continued on her way.

Nika’s smile was downright predatory, decidedly reminiscent of the tiger from which she took her name, as she answered, “Her name is Lt. Colonel Marina Petrovka, malysh, and I’m pretty sure she just gave you a direct order.”

The trio hadn’t gone maybe more than one hundred feet down the hallway, before they were met with a fully armed squad of soldiers. “Halt, or you will be shot!” came the order from one of the grunts, the three women barely pausing as they continued forward.

One of the men raised his gun and aimed in their direction, though each of the women could tell that he was taking aim at a spot on the floor in front of them. Each of the three S.H.I.E.L.D. agents glanced at each other and grinned, before launching into action. Between the three of them they managed to decimate the entire squad and leaving them groaning on the ground, before continuing on their ways. Finally, Marina reached the set of double doors marked, “E. Byer.” Reaching out, she twisted the handles and threw both doors open, pausing only briefly to assess the interior. “Colonel Byer . . . I told you we’d be seeing each other again soon.”

Byer whirled from where he was watching a large window in his wall, his eyes wide as he stared. “What the . . . you’re not supposed to be in here!”

Marina held up the file folder in her hands and slapped it down onto the table between them. “I’ll take my asset back now, Byer.”

The man’s jaw worked angrily as he glared at her. “I’m not finished debriefing him.”

Natasha’s voice was deadly quiet as she remarked, “Of course you’re not. How could you be, when you’re not even questioning him at all?”

The brunette handler whipped her head around to face the redhead, noticing that Natasha was watching something happening just beyond Byer’s head. Marina’s eyes hardened and she strode forward through the room to look through the window. The Winter Soldier was beyond the window, huddled as small as he could manage in one corner of the room. His face was contorted in a scream, his hands pressed down hard over his ears. He wore the pants part of a prison uniform, though his chest and feet were bare. Even from where she stood, Marina could make out the goosebumps bubbling on his skin.

Whirling back to face Byer, Marina was aware that she probably looked like a pissed off mother bear as she hissed, “You’re torturing him!?”

“He’s withholding information relevant to the circumstances of his disappearance. He’s somehow made himself immune to sodium pentathol and has been extremely resistant to all other attempts at coercing the information from him.”

“You realize he can’t remember a damn thing from before he woke up in a Russian medical center, right?” Marina asked acerbically, feeling a small thrill at the abashed look that crossed Byer’s face for a brief moment before it was gone again.

“Be that as it may, Sgt Barnes is a traitor to this country,” he insisted – though she’d never admit it, Natasha was kind of impressed that the mudak managed to remain unflinching at Marina’s enraged,
“He was BRAINWASHED!” – before he continued, “Quite frankly, I can do what I like with him.”

Grabbing up the file folder and throwing it in his face, she hissed, “Not according to this, you can’t.”

Rounding on the doorway, she shoved down the handle and yanked the door open so hard the door handle lodged in the wall opposite and stuck. Byer’s eyebrows furrowed furiously as he roared, “What the hell do you think you’re doing?"

“Sgt James B. Barnes is no longer your problem, Colonel Byer. That being said, I’m taking him out of your custody.” Stepping forward, she got right in the other man’s face and sneered, “And let me assure you, Colonel, you ever even think of laying a finger on him again, I will turn you inside out.”

Rounding on her heel, she stormed through the doorway and flinched at the piercing noise coming from the speakers overhead. Closing her eyes briefly to get her bearings, she muscled through the impulse to run in the other direction and crossed directly to where her mentor crouched. Even that short walk caused goose flesh to form across the exposed skin of her arms and Marina clenched her jaw hard to stop her teeth from chattering. Even knowing that any new sensation was going to cause him to lash out in an effort to protect himself, she reached out and took his wrists in her hands. Just barely managing to dodge his frantic punch, she took his wrists again and forced them to cross over his chest. Shaking him once, she watched as his eyes fluttered open in shock at the action. Blinking against the blinding light, he stared at her for a long second.

Though she couldn’t hear the sound of his voice over the sound of the sirens, the sight of her name on his lips was just familiar enough that she nodded. Squeezing his wrists, she released them carefully. Using the visual code they’d developed when she was a child, she informed him she was going to help him stand up. He nodded slowly, squeezing his eyes sharply as the sirens overhead changed pitch and brought a different level of pain to the migraine he was already no doubt suffering from. Marina’s lips compressed as she brought his hands back up to his ears, pressing lightly in a silent order for him to cover his ears while she did the majority of the work. Barnes’ eyes were still squeezed closed as he nodded, allowing Marina to lever him to his feet effortlessly.

Wrapping one arm around his waist, she moved him as quickly as he could manage through the doorway. Vaguely aware of the fact that Natasha’s gun was leveled calmly between Byer’s eyes, she continued to guide him forward through the room. The former assassin huddled as small as he could against her, as she hustled him steadily through the building toward the front door all the while knowing that the other two girls were close on their heels. None of the three women spoke to him, each inherently knowing that he wouldn’t be able to hear them until the ringing in his ears had stopped.

Their entire trek toward the door, only one person moved to stop them. Nika made quick work of the single soldier, leaving him in a pile on the floor. Finally, they were outside and striding quickly toward the helicopter sitting patiently in the center of the building’s parking lot. As soon as they were clear of the front doors, the hatch slid open and Clint hopped down out of the interior, eyebrows furrowed as he took in the other sniper. Signing quickly, he asked, Torture?

Marina’s nod was perhaps more terse than necessary as she allowed Clint to come forward and take the majority of the Soldier’s weight. The other man jerked at the new touch, eyes wild as they flashed open to try to take in his surroundings. Clint smirked at him, looping one arm up over his shoulder as the youngest Grimm helped the weak man up into the chopper. Reaching out a hand, he handed each of the girls inside in as well, before taking his place in the pilot’s seat once more. Natasha slipped into the co-pilot’s seat, the two working in perfect tandem to start the pre-flight checks and get into the air as quickly as possible.
Meanwhile, Marina was digging through the tactical kit she’d brought along. As soon as her hand brushed fabric, she latched on and hauled out the emergency blanket. Shaking it out, she whirled it around the Soldier’s body and tucked it in tightly against his chest. The Soldier gripped its edges and pulled it close around him even as he sent a miserable little smile her way.

Marina smiled was fond as she squeezed his shoulder lightly. Turning her attention back to Clint as the helicopter lifted off from the ground, she spoke quietly into her headset. “Dorogoy, contact S.H.I.E.L.D. Let them know we’re going to need Medical to meet us at the helipad.”

“Yes ma’am,” he agreed, before toggling a switch to flip the radio to an outgoing frequency. “S.H.I.E.L.D. Command, this is Alpha 0731129. Do you copy?”

There was a pause as Command verified the handle before a condescending voice came through the headset. “We copy, Hawkeye. What do you need?”

“Command, we’re going to need a medical team to meet us on the helipad. Our incoming package was handled a little more roughly than was strictly necessary by the DOD.”

“Patching through to Medical, Hawkeye. Stand by.”

“Standing by,” he replied, glancing back quickly over his shoulder as he waited for the dispatcher to transfer him. “Everyone okay back there?”

Marina was watching the Winter Soldier with narrowed eyes, chocolate eyes unable to miss the way he shivered and shook under the blanket. Glancing over at her youngest charge, she shook her head. “We’ll live, dorogoy, but the sooner you can get us home, the better off the Soldier will be.”

Clint nodded, rotating back to the front as Medical answered the line. “Hawkeye, this is Medical. You said we had incoming?”

“Yes ma’am.”

“What can you tell me?”

“He’s . . .” here there was a pause, before Clint shrugged and plowed through. “Your incoming is a Caucasian male approximately 30 years old. He’s about 5 foot 10 inches tall and maybe 180 pounds of solid muscle. He was injected with sodium pentathol, as well as tortured while in the custody of the Department of Defense. Outward symptoms include uncontrollable shivering, diminished hearing and an acute sensitivity to light. For any further details, you’ll need to ask Lt. Colonel Petrovka upon touchdown.”

“What’s your ETA, Hawkeye?”

Hawkeye glanced down at his readout, before replying confidently, “I’d say probably twenty minutes tops, Medical.”

“Will my patient require a stretcher?”

Twisting back in his seat, Clint’s eyes flicked quickly over the assassin’s body before cocking an eyebrow at Marina. The brunette nodded once in silent agreement, causing the sniper to face forward once again as he answered, “Affirmative, Medical. A stretcher probably wouldn’t go amiss.”

“All right. A team will meet you at the helipad in 20 minutes. And if Colonel Petrovka would kindly make herself available to my team, I would appreciate it. Medical, over and out.”
Meanwhile, Eric Byer was flipping through the information his officer had managed to procure from the Winter Soldier. Coming across a prominent name within the report, he stared at it for a long moment, before reaching for his office phone. Dialing his secretary, he waited for the woman to speak, before ordering, “Olivia, I need you to patch me through to the Secretary of Defense. Then call Captain Fenix and ask him if Outcome-5 is available for deployment . . . Five would be perfect for this operation. If Five is unavailable, have Fenix send me the best of who he has left.”

“Yes sir,” Olivia agreed with a cheerful chirp, before the dialtone sang in Byer’s ear.

Mere minutes later, Byer’s phone rang through with the Secretary of Defense on the other line. “Mr. Secretary, this is Eric Byer.”

“Yes, Colonel Byer. How can I be of service to you?”

“I believe we have an imminent risk within the World Security Council; the Russian Councilman, Gregor Petrovich Baryshnikov, called out an assassination attempt on a Russian national working for the State Department.”

“We have a Russian national working for the State Department?” came the incredulous question, causing a smirk from Byer.

“Yes sir.”

“Who is it?”

“Marina Ivanovna Petrovka, sir; she’s a high-ranking handler within the Strategic Homeland Intervention, Enforcement and Logistics Division.”

“Ah yes, one of General Fury’s golden girls,” came the amused reply. “Colonel Petrovka and I have met on several occasions. In addition to running S.H.I.E.L.D.’s Brothers Grimm, she is also the XO for the Army’s Brat’ya Mrachnyy.”

At the name, Byer stiffened in surprise. “Did you say the Brat’ya Mrachnyy, sir?”

“I did. I was unaware you were acquainted with the Brat’ya Mrachnyy, Byer.”

Byer’s smile was cold as he agreed, “My best operative from Operation Outcome was recruited from the Brat’ya Mrachnyy. By all reports, he is notoriously tight-lipped about anything to do with them.”

“The Brat’ya Mrachnyy are classified at Eyes Only, Byer; if he’s not talking, it’s because his tongue has been tied by a gag order.” Taking a deep breath, the Secretary brushed past the conversation and refocused. “You said something about Councilman Baryshnikov?”

“Councilman Baryshnikov authorized the assassination of Colonel Petrovka. However, if he is willing to order an assassination on our own shores, what’s to stop him from attempting a more high profile American target?”

“So what do you suggest we do, Colonel Byer?”

“I have an operative who is highly skilled in long range elimination. It is my official recommendation that we have the Councilman assassinated . . . then we can maneuver one of our own into the vacancy on the World Security Council.”

“So what’s stopping you, Ric?”
“All I need is your go ahead, Mr Secretary.”

There was a long pause as the other man considered the situation as well as the repercussions. Finally, a heavy sigh sounded from the other side of the phone. “You have the green light, Colonel Byer. However, I need you to do me a favor.”

“What’s that, Mr. Secretary?”

“Don’t get caught,” was all the man said, before the dial tone sang in Byer’s ear.

The retired colonel sighed as he dropped the phone back into its cradle. Reaching up, he dropped his face into his hands as he considered his options. It seemed like an eternity later, but was really only a few minutes, before Olivia stepped through the door of his office. “Colonel Byer? Your operative is here.”

“Thank you, Olivia. Send him in.”

It was a second, before Aaron Cross stepped through the door and dropped into a lazy parade rest. “Outcome-5 reporting, as ordered.”

“Agent Cross, have you been pulled from any high priority assignments?”

“No sir.”

“Good because I have an assignment for you.” Offering him a file folder, he waited until Cross stepped forward to take it and flip it open to peruse its contents. “Are you aware of the existence of the World Security Council, Agent Cross?”

There was a minute pause, Cross’ eyes flickering slightly, before he shook his head slightly. “No sir. I am not.”

Byer’s eyes narrowed at him, though was unable to see any indications of a lie. “Suffice it to say, that the World Security Council is responsible for the combined national security of several countries among our allies. That being said, a member of the Security Council authorized an assassination order against a high-ranking member of the Army. Regardless of her former affiliations, she has proven to be an invaluable member of our Armed Forces. I believe you’re familiar with Lt. Colonel Petrovka?”

Cross’ head snapped up, eyes wide and wild as he stepped forward, demanding furiously, “Is she okay?”

The man’s eyes narrowed at the first indication Cross had ever offered regarding his associations within the Army. Nevertheless, the retired colonel was obligated to answer honestly, “She was here earlier today, and seemed no worse for wear from her shooting.”

The young man flinched widely, eyes screwing closed in genuine pain at the news. It was then that Byer made the connection. “Lt. Colonel Petrovka is your Marina . . . the one you said couldn’t forgive you for your comrade’s death.”

A distinct tightening of the jaw gave away the operative’s anguish over the reminder, though Cross offered only a tight nod in agreement. A small smirk crossed Byer’s face as he cross his arms over the top of his desk and leaned his weight forward. “How would you like to be the one responsible for eliminating the threat to her safety?”

There was only a brief moment, before Cross nodded firmly. “Just tell me who I need to kill, sir.”
“Councilman Gregor Petrovich Baryshnikov of the World Security Council,” Byer answered, a small smile on his face as he continued, “He will be attending the Officer’s Ball in December; you have until then to plan out the logistics.”

“You can count on me to handle it, sir.”

Byer looked into the other man’s blazing baby blues; there was restrained violence in Cross’ eyes and Byer knew without a shadow of a doubt that he’d assigned the right operative to the job. “I know you will, Cross . . . I know you will.”

Chapter End Notes

Russian Translations:

malysh - kiddo
mudak - asshole
dorogoy - darling (Marina's nickname for Clint)
Brat'ya Mrachnyy - Brothers Grimm
Chapter Notes

Russian translations at the end of the chapter. Enjoy guys! Tomorrow, my vacation is officially over. Bummer.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter 74: The Birth of the Sniper Bros

When the Winter Soldier woke in Medical, he stared at the ceiling for a long moment. He had been the Soviet Union’s go-to assassin for as long as he could remember. He was still trying to wrap his head around the fact that he was no longer beholden to his former handlers. The sudden sound of a voice didn’t surprise him; the owner of the voice, however, did. “So I guess I don’t really see why it is so many people are scared of you. You’re really not that scary,” Clint Grimm announced from where he sprawled in the chair beside the bed. “Also I’m a little confused; what exactly am I supposed to call you? Cause Marina’s got a whole bunch of names for you, but I really don’t think I
should use any of them.”

A low hum was Clint’s only answer for a long second, before the Soldier spoke, “I don’t know. I haven’t really had a name of my own in a long time.”

Clint shrugged, his body slouching backwards into his chair. “Well, I guess I can call you ‘Winter Soldier’ if you want me too. But it just seems kind of impersonal, ya know? And I mean, if I’m going to use a not inconsiderable amount of breath defending you to my dad and my brothers, I would really like to call you by something a little easier to say.”

A small smirk crossed the man’s face, causing a small thrill deep in Clint’s gut. To hear Marina tell it, the Winter Soldier was not a man given to jokes and laughter. “What would you prefer to call me?”

The young sniper cocked an eyebrow at the older man, questioning curiously, “It’s your name. Don’t you think that you should be the one to make that call?”

The Soldier hummed as he mulled that over, before asking, “The man assigned to debrief me?”

Clint frowned, considering who that was, before asking tentatively, “You mean Colonel Byer? Tall, kinda skinny with a thin face, mean eyes and dark hair?”

There was a soft chuckle, causing another thrill at his success – even if it was the last thing he did, Clint was determined to turn the Winter Soldier into real boy once again. Reaching up with his metal hand, the man rubbed briskly over his face. Clint frowned to see it again; he’d noticed the bizarre appendage in the helicopter, but it hadn’t seemed appropriate at the time to comment on it. However, the other sniper’s reply brought Clint back to the conversation at hand.

“Da, that would be him. He kept calling me ‘Barnes’. Is that the man I was once?”

Lips compressed at the question, Clint nodded slowly in agreement. “Sgt James Buchanan Barnes. Your friends used to call you ‘Bucky’. You were Captain America’s best friend and one of his Howling Commandos.”

“Howling Commandos?”

Clint shrugged lightly as he quirked his lips, “I don’t get it either. I mean, what kind of Commandos howled? That’s the last thing any spec ops squad worth their salt would ever do. Talk about tactically unsound.”

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There was a pause, before the Winter Soldier commented in an abstract tone, a distinct Brooklyn accent audible at the edges. “We were never very subtle about it. We had a specific function during the War; there really wasn’t any point in trying to sugarcoat the facts of the matter.”

Surprised at the comment, Clint felt a grin crease his lips as he leaned forward. “Hey! You remembered something! That’s awesome!”

“I don’t really think that qualifies. It’s just a single memory; I have a whole life I don’t remember.”

“Yeah, but if you can remember one memory, then you have the ability to remember the rest. It means that the Red Room didn’t erase your memories, they just buried them.” Biting down on his lower lip, he mused, “You should talk to Natasha; she’s pretty good at the whole meditating thing. Maybe it would help?”

“Natasha?”
“Yeah . . . red hair, green eyes, super scary,” Clint deadpanned as he rolled his eyes.

And just like that, a small light went on behind the assassin’s blue eyes. “Ah . . . you mean Natalya.”

Clint’s hawk eyes sharpened as he watched the Soldier settle deeper into his mattress. “You know Natasha?”

“We are . . .” here there was a pause as the former assassin contemplated the right answer to give, “. . . acquainted.”

Clint crowed at the evasion, his arms coming around his waist as he laughed. “Dude, if you want to live past the telling, please do not tell my brother Brian that you’ve knocked boots with Natasha. He already doesn’t like you . . . he doesn’t really need too many reasons to kill you.”

“Knocked boots . . .” came the blank query.

“Yeah; did you not understand that one? Cause I have others; rolled in the hay, did the nasty, performed the horizontal mambo, gotten laid, had sex.”

“I understood what you meant, Clint. Which one is Brian?”

A sly smirk creased Clint’s lips as he drawled, “The hot tempered one.”

“Ah, the one Marina calls dikiy rebenok.”

“That’s him. He and Natasha are . . . well, they’re kinda . . .” Frowning, the archer considered for a moment before giving it up as a bad job. “Well, to put it simply, Brian and Natasha are seriously complicated, but either way Brian has totally called dibs.” After considering what he’s just said, he snorted, “He’s the only one I know crazy enough to even dare.”

“I have no intention of discussing my past with your brothers, Yastreb.”

Clint narrowed his eyes at the Winter Soldier, “How do you know my Army call sign?”

“I heard them call you ‘Hawkeye’; it is an apt name. I had not realized that you already answered to it.”

Shrugging, the youngest Grimm grinned, “It’s been my call-sign since ‘96; Marina gave it to me. Which leads us back full circle; what do you want me to call you?”

Dropping his head back to stare at the ceiling, he inquired, “How about James? It was my name once, right?”

“Yep.”

“Then maybe it’s time I started answering to it once more.”

“What about ‘Bucky’? By all reports, people usually called you ‘Bucky’.”

“The people who called me ‘Bucky’ were my friends; I don’t have many of those here.”

“Well, no; but you have me and Marina. That’s a fairly good start. And once Will gets over the whole thing where you shot Marina, I’m pretty sure you’ll be able to get him on your side too.”

Barnes hummed lightly, his eyes narrowed as he considered the younger man. When he spoke again, the question was so surprising that Clint could only blink at him. “Your Will . . . does he love her?”
“Love who?” Clint asked in confusion, contemplating that for a moment before he got it. Eyes flashing wide, he blurted, “You mean Marina? Does he love Marina?!”

“Da. Does he love her?”

Clint continued to gawk for a moment, before shaking himself free of his shock. “You mean you couldn’t tell from his beating your ass? I’m not kidding when I say this, James, but sometimes? Marina is Will’s whole reason for getting out of bed in the morning; she keeps him sane and he loves her more than anything else in the world. He asked her to spend the rest of her life with him and that takes a lot for Will, trust me. He’s not really the emotional, touchy-feely type . . . unless it’s Marina, and quite frankly that’s a thought I don’t like to dwell on too often. Seriously? Ew.”

There was a small smile, before James nodded once in relief. “Good.”

Folding his arms on the edge of the bed, Clint cocked his head as he studied the other sniper. “All right, I have a question. Why did you want to know?”

“Marina is a good spy; she is without a doubt one of the best that the Academy ever graduated. However, she is not suited to the isolation that comes from such a life. Even at the Red Room, she thrived when she had someone to protect . . . a cause to defend.” A small, sad smile crossed the sniper’s mouth as he dropped his head back against his pillows, “I am grateful that she found a family who genuinely adores her . . . and a man who loves her for exactly who she is.”

“Marina raised most of us; she’s the closest thing to a mom I’ve ever had,” the blond insisted with a helpless shrug. “I’d do anything for her.”

Light flashed across the shiny metal of the former assassin’s arm as he reached to grab the glass sitting on the table beside his bed. Clint’s eyes zeroed in on it, his head cocking as he examined it. Barnes noticed his attention and smiled into his glass, before setting the glass aside. “You can ask.”

“Ask what?”

“You obviously have questions, Grimm . . . your curiosity is not exactly subtle.”

Now that he’d been given what essentially amounted to permission, Clint reached out to trace gentle fingers over the metal. “What happened?”

“I don’t really know. I’ve had it ever since I first woke up. The doctors at the medical center told me that I’d lost my arm to a pretty severe case of frostbite. They had tried, but they couldn’t save it; this was the best they could do.”

“It goes all the way up to your shoulder, right?”

“Da,” the Winter Soldier agreed, reaching to push up the sleeve of the paper gown to show the younger man the extensive scarring that painted the skin where the metal appendage joined with his flesh and blood body.

“How does it work? I mean, it doesn’t move like any other prosthetic I’ve ever seen. And I’m Army; I’ve seen a few.”

The man shrugged lightly as he released the gown to fall over his shoulder again. “I don’t know. They never told me. I just know that I can flex it and move it at least as well as I could my real arm.”

Just then, both sniper turned to face the door as it creaked open. Marina stood there with a small smile on her face. “All right, dorogoy, that’s it for the day. It’s late and Zima needs his rest.”
Barnes frowned as he considered that. “I do?”

“Yes, you do. You have a skills test in the morning.”

“A skills test?” he asked incredulously, eyes wide in surprise at the statement.

“Yes; you and I have a date with a sparring mat in the morning.”

Clint chuckled as the man visibly winced, chagrin evident on his face as he asked, “I’m not going to enjoy this, am I, Marishka?”

Marina’s small smile was wicked as she nodded her head once in acquiescence. “I sincerely hope not, Zima. Say good night Clint.”

Clint grinned at the other man, sending him a cocky, two-fingered salute. “Night, James! Sleep well!”

It was as the two were leaving that they head his muttered reply, “Ne shans v adu. (Not a chance in hell.)”

Glancing at each other, the two struggled to hold in their amusement until they were out of earshot. Once they’d exited Medical, they each collapsed against one another under the force of their giggles. They continued to chuckle all the way home, with random snickers continuing to erupt throughout their entire night at home. And though each of the members of the house knew who Clint had been to see that day neither Clint nor Marina would explain the cause of their laughter. It wasn’t until Marina and Will were in bed, that Marina told him the reason for her amusement. (And if Will laughed so hard, Marina had to cover his mouth with her hands so he didn’t wake anyone else, well that was no one else’s business but their own.)

Chapter End Notes

Russian Translations:

Da - yes
dikiy rebenok - wild child (Marina’s nickname for Brian)
Yastreb - Hawk (Clint’s Army Spec Ops code name)
dorogoy - darling (Marina’s nickname for Clint)
Zima - Winter (one of Marina’s nicknames for the Winter Soldier)
The next morning, William Grimm sat with AD Maria Hill, Agent Phil Coulson and Director Fury as they tried to figure out what to do about the Winter Soldier. “Agent Brandt, what do you think?” Fury asked, single eye pinning the young man inexorably to his chair.

Will’s hand came up to rub at his face as he considered the question. “Marina trusts him. So does Clint. Neither of them is an agent given to trusting easily. I say we confine him to base while he’s being extensively debriefed. Run him through his paces and as many skills tests as S.H.I.E.L.D. would be willing to test him on. Then, once we see how he does, we’ll figure it out from there.”
“Do you have a recommendation for his handler?” Maria asked cautiously.

A single eyebrow cocked upwards at the question, though whatever Will had been about to say was interrupted as Clint came skidding into the room, shouting, “Will! Will, you gotta come see this!!”

The oldest Grimm sighed at the interruption, before rotating in his seat to smile indulgently at his overly-exuberant youngest brother. “What is it, Clint?”

“Marina’s kicking the Winter Soldier’s ass!” Clint laughed, before spinning on one heel and racing back out again.

At the information, Will pushed himself to his feet and turned toward the door. Pausing briefly at the door, he inquired, “Are you coming?”

Maria laughed at the question, pushing her chair back with a firm nod. “I don’t think I’d miss this for the world.”

Neither Coulson nor Fury could deny their own curiosity, so it wasn’t very long before the four were following close on Clint’s heels as the sniper led them toward the sparring mats in the main training facility. They walked into the facility, just in time to watch Marina dump the Winter Soldier flat on his back on the mat. Will smirked at the sight of his girl kicking ass, relieved that her injury had caused her no serious or permanent side effects.

Marina was watching the man climb to his feet, her body clad in a pair of black yoga pants and a navy blue sports bra emblazoned with the S.H.I.E.L.D. eagle on the left breast. Wavy brown hair was tied back in an efficient ponytail and Will could see her eyes sparkling with mischief even from where he was standing. She was bouncing lightly on her toes, her hands already up in her preferred fighting stance as she waited for her opponent to regain his feet once again. James Barnes was wearing only a pair of S.H.I.E.L.D.-issued training pants, bare foot and shirtless; giving everyone in attendance a good look at his metal arm and the horrendous scarring that marked the place where it connected to his shoulder socket.

Fury frowned at the scarring, before glancing askance at Hansel as the former witch hunter came to stand beside Maria at the doorway. Maria smiled at her boyfriend brightly, tilting her chin up to receive a brief, chaste kiss from the German. Resolutely ignoring the display –frankly, that relationship had been a long time coming – Fury inquired, “How’s the contest been?”

Hansel’s hand was lazy on the curve of Maria’s waist as he answered, “So far, it’s been pretty evenly matched. Marina is not making it easy for the Hurensohn.”

“You don’t like him, do you Herr Kuhn?” Fury asked, watching as the Soldier propelled himself to his feet and the combatants began again.

Hansel’s lips compressed as he shook his head sharply. “I do not. But I think hyu knew this already, Director Fury.”

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“We are trying to determine what to do with him. What would you recommend?”

“If it were up to me, Director Fury, I would put him down like the rabid dog he is. However, I do not believe that such a choice would earn me the love of either mein Sohn or meine Tochter. Mein Falki is happier than he’s been since Kenny left us, and Marina seems relieved to have der Soldat back in her life again.”

“And you disapprove? Based upon the report Agent Petrovka gave me when she requested Barnes be transferred to S.H.I.E.L.D., I get the impression he saved her life. She is merely offering him the
same chance he gave her; most people would call that commendable.”

“I do not care what his reasoning is, Director Fury; shooting meine Tochter in the chest is not how hyu save her life.”

Fury was silent for a long moment, as he watched the Soldier dodge Marina’s roundhouse, before dropping her to the mat by taking out her leg. Each of them watched Marina roll with her fall to quickly regain her feet, the fight continuing on as though it had not been interrupted at all. When he did speak, it was absently as though he was remembering something from a book he’d read once a long time ago, “The instance in question is actually several years before any of your sons were even born, Herr Kuhn. Marina was still a student at The Academy.”

“Vas?” Hansel demanded, his eyes blinking in surprise at the statement.

“Her teachers were disappointed because she was stubbornly refusing to set aside her compassion. She had received several warnings, but in the end they were preparing to retire her.”

“Retire her?” Maria asked in horror, even as some part of her acknowledged that the meaning of the horrible phrase.

“She was going to be killed, just like the rest of the girls that couldn’t keep up with the program.” Fury explained, cocking an eyebrow at his Assistant Director. Turning back to the fight, he continued, “But Marina got lucky. The Winter Soldier saw her get into a fight with a group of older girls who were tormenting her friend, Valentina Obolenskaya and win. The next day, she was transferred under his direct tutelage. Apparently, he’d convinced his handlers that he could train her into being the best graduate The Academy had ever seen. She got her first solo assignment a month later and went on to graduate at the top of her class.”

Glancing over at the German, Fury continued lazily. “I do not believe I need to tell you how very different things would have been, should he not have stepped in and saved her from retirement. For one thing, your son Kenny would have been executed as a child and the rest of your sons would be either soulless automatons or dead by this point. Knowing General Ross as I do, I can assure you it would have been the latter.” Narrowing his single remaining eye at the former witch hunter, he drawled, “And you, Herr Kuhn, would still be in a cursed coma, with your sons none the wiser about your existence.”

“What are hyu suggesting, Director Fury?”

“I am suggesting, Herr Kuhn, that instead of hating him, you might even thank him.”

The five of them watched the fight continue for at least another twenty minutes, before at last Marina launched a blistering offensive that finally dropped the Winter Soldier onto his back. The man bounced on the springy mat, before he fell still. For a long second, the training hall held its breath, wondering if he would rise again. However, his metal hand reached out and tapped hollowly against the mat. And just like that Marina’s whole body slouched into lazy victory. “Giving up so soon, Zima? That’s not like you,” she drawled, accent heavy on her words as she smirked.

He chuckled under his breath, launching himself to his feet. “You’ve made your point, Marishka.” Smiling at her, he bowed low, “I’m sorry for shooting you, Uchashchiysya.”

“Blin vy pravy, (Damn right you are,)” she laughed, offering him a hand to shake. Looking over toward the doorway, her face brightened at the sight of her boyfriend. “Misha!” she cheered happily before lunging from the mat and into his arms.
Will’s grin was proud as he gathered her up in his arms. His fingers toyed with a strand of her hair as he leaned to kiss her. Marina’s eyes were bright as she allowed him to tease her, before bouncing excitedly on her toes. “So? How did I do?”

“You were amazing, *samaya malen’kaya* . . . as though you ever had any doubt.”

Marina’s teeth bit down lightly on her lower lip as she held up her fingers to only an inch apart, her eyes limpid and innocent as she insisted lightly, “Well . . . maybe a little.”

Hauling her to him, he kissed her again, before accusing against her lips, “Liar.”

Her head dropping back as she laughed, she wrapped her arms around her boyfriend’s neck and reveled in the feel of him against her. Going up on her very tip toes, she nuzzled against his chin as she murmured, “I’ll never tell.”

Fury glanced at Marina, before inquiring, “So now that his hand to hand evaluation is over, I’m assuming it’s safe to send your pet project off with our top sniper for his firearms evaluation?”

Marina snuggled into Will, as she looked up at her boss with a lazy shrug. “Frankly, I don’t think he needs one. But if you say so, Nick.”

Nodding firmly, Fury turned towards where Clint and the Winter Soldier were laughing together as the Soldier wiped the sweat away from his body. “Agent Barton?” he called, drawing Clint’s attention towards him.

“Yes sir?”

“Take Sgt Barnes to the range and see what he can do, all right? I expect a full report on my desk by 0900 tomorrow morning.”

“Yes sir!” Clint agreed with a bright grin. Turning back to Barnes, he clapped the older man on the shoulder. “Come on, James.” Marina sniggered lightly against Will’s shoulder as she heard Clint boast on their way out the door, “Twenty bucks and a round of beer says I’m the better shot.”

The smile on the former assassin’s face was the first real smile Marina had seen since he’d been her mentor, as he agreed, “You’re on.”

Feeling her heart swell with honest pleasure at the sight, Marina closed her eyes in a fervent prayer of thanks to whatever god looked over human science projects. Her *dorogoy* had finally found a new friend; no one would ever replace Kenny – or Aaron, as the case may be – and Marina had no doubt that the two brothers would pick up as though he’d never been gone once Aaron returned home to them. But for now, there was someone Clint could go to, to share a beer with or show a new vantage point around base; someone who would understand why those things were important to Clint. And because of that, Marina could rest a little easier.

Watching the door the two men had disappeared through, Marina considered the memory of her mentor smiling; a true, honest smile . . . offered freely and with no ulterior motives. And then said a prayer of thanksgiving for that as well.

(And when she woke to a phone call at 2 am from the base MPs instructing her to come and pick up the pair of drunken idiots, she couldn’t even find it in herself to be upset about it. At least until she got the bill for the tab. Add on the fact that Clint puked all over her new rug, and well, it would be safe to assume that she was pissed.)
Chapter End Notes

Translations:

(G) Hurensohn - son of a bitch (Hansel referring to the Winter Soldier)
(G) mein Sohn - my son
(G) meine Tochter - my daughter
(G) mein Falki - my Little Hawk (Hansel's nickname for Clint)
(G) der Soldat - the Soldier (Hansel referring to the Winter Soldier)
(G) Vas? - what?
(R) Zima - Winter (one of Marina's nicknames for the Winter Soldier)
(R) Uchashchiysya - pupil (also student) (one of the Winter Soldier's terms for Marina)
(R) samaya malen'kaya - my little one (Will's nickname for Marina)
(R) dorogoy - darling (Marina's nickname for Clint)
Chapter 76: Best Friends Forever

October bled easily into November, a lazy transition that brought about changes the Grimms had no idea would eventually effect their way of life. Somewhere in the Black Sea, a fishing boat fished an unconscious man from the water, three bullet wounds marring his back and a bank account number...
in his hip. His reentrance into the land of the living – as a nameless, faceless man answering only to Jason Bourne – caused small ripples in the lives of the Brothers Grimm, none of them realizing that it would not be long before those tiny swells became the tidal wave that would force them together once again.

Shortly after that, Clint and Natasha were dispatched to Abidjan, the capital of the Republic of Cote d’Ivoire, to reinforce S.H.I.E.L.D.’s presence on the ground following a series of airstrikes against French soldiers in Bouaké that left nine soldiers dead. A series of vicious riots broke out after the French retaliated, and both spies spent a majority of their time assisting in the evacuation of several high-profile French nationals. It was over within days, bringing them home without any significant injury to either.

Finally November gave way to December, with the Annual Officer’s Ball approaching ever more quickly. Finally, the Ball was within days . . . at which time, Marina learned that her best friend was intending to wear her S.H.I.E.L.D. jumpsuit to the Ball. Suffice it to say, the Russian resolved to put the cabash on that plan with all speed.

When AD Maria Hill opened the door of her quarters to find a smirking Marina Petrovka there, dressed casually in a flowy circle skirt and playful peasant top, she knew it was going to be a long day. “No, Marina,” she insisted, folding her arms over her chest and giving her best friend the same firm glare that sent the rest of her underlings cowering in fear.

And if the Russian had been anyone other than her best friend, it probably would have worked. However, Marina Petrovka was not anyone else. In addition to being one of S.H.I.E.L.D.’s top spies, Marina had grown up under the tutelage of the Winter Soldier, currently spent her life wrangling the notoriously chaotic Brothers Grimm AND was the longtime girlfriend and XO of the brutally calculating Colonel William Grimm; a little thing like a glare from Maria Hill wasn’t going to phase her at all. Indeed, Marina only cocked one hip and gave Maria her best grin. “Maria . . . Maria . . . Maria . . . it never ceases to amuse me that you still think that glare is going to work,” Marina teased, her eyes sparkling with mischief.

Muscling her way through the door, the pretty handler herded her best friend back through her house towards her bedroom. “Come on; I’m not going out with you dressed like a bum, so hurry up and get changed.”

“Marina . . . it’s my day off!” the Assistant Director whined, even as she allowed herself to be ushered along like chattel.

“I know; which is why I made you an appointment with my favorite seamstress for this afternoon.” Glancing at her watch, she completely ignored Maria’s squawk of outrage, before she finished, “Which is in precisely one hour. So mush, Agent Hill! We don’t have a lot of time to get there.”

“A seamstress?” Maria asked, planting her feet and refusing to budge for anything even as Marina moved to gather up Maria’s keys and wallet before darting into Maria’s room to hunt down the only pair of high heeled shoes Maria owned. “What the hell do I need a seamstress for?”

“Maria . . . you are NOT attending the Officer’s Ball in your uniform. And, for that matter, you’re not attending the Officer’s Ball with Hansel in your uniform.”

“Hansel’s seen me in my uniform before; it’s not like he’s going to care.”

The way Marina rolled her eyes should have been a clue as to her own obliviousness, but Maria resolved to simply push past in her protest. “Yes, Maria . . . Vati has seen you in your uniform. And now it’s time for him to see you in something other than your uniform and your usual sparring attire.
This is your first date . . .”

“Not true! We go to dinner all the time!” Maria protested indignantly.

Marina’s eyes narrowed at her as she repeated firmly, “This is your first REAL date as boyfriend and girlfriend, and _chert poberi_, Maria . . . you will look nice for him!” Mouth quirking downwards, Marina took her friend’s arms in her hands and looked her straight in the eye. “Allow me to give you a little advice, Vorobey. If a man truly loves you, he will always see the beauty in you, no matter what you wear. But no matter what a man says, they will _always_ appreciate the sight of their woman in something attractive . . . something out of the norm. By occasionally showing him that you enjoy taking the time to look gorgeous for him, you show him how much you care for and appreciate him too. Okay?”

Maria nodded, biting down on her lip as she considered that. “I don’t have anything sexy, Marina.”

The pretty Russian offered the Assistant Director a small smile as she squeezed Maria’s shoulder lightly. “I know; which is why I contacted my seamstress and she is going to design you something so glorious, it is going to knock _Vati_ right out of his socks, okay?” Glancing at her watch again, she tsked under her breath and turned her best friend to face her bedroom door. “Now hurry up. That pretty white angora sweater with a pair of jeans and flats will do nicely. Mush, Maria . . . we’re on a schedule.”

Feeling an unfamiliar feeling of true sentiment well up in her heart, Maria caught them both off guard when she threw her arms around her best friend’s shoulders and hugged her tightly. Marina squeaked a little bit in surprise, before returning the hug fondly. “You’re welcome,” she laughed, before shoving her away gently.

The Assistant Director smiled at her best friend for another second, before she turned and ran towards her bedroom, stripping off her S.H.I.E.L.D. hoodie as she went. Marina only chuckled, and resumed setting the room to rights; one would never know it, but within the sanctity of her own home, Maria Hill was kind of a slob. Seeing as the rest of her life was ordered down to the way she was required to style her hair, it didn’t seem that impossible to believe that – at least here in her own home – the Assistant Director allowed herself the ability to lose her rigid control. Finally throwing away the last empty pizza box, Marina gathered her things and checked her watch again. “How’s it coming, Vorobey?”

“Ready!” Maria announced breathlessly, as she reappeared at the mouth of the hallway, dressed in the suggested outfit.

“Good . . . let’s go. We’re running a little behind schedule.”

“We have a schedule?”

“Yes; after the seamstress’, we have an appointment with a jeweler to pick out something to go along with your gown and then we have to find the perfect shoes to go with it as well. Not to mention, we need to meet with my hairdresser and his beautician so that they can test out a few things; it saves time in the long run because then they know how you’re supposed to look the night of,” Marina insisted, as she hustled her gobsmacked best friend from the house and locked the door behind them.

“Have I suddenly become a human Barbie doll, and I just didn’t know it?” Maria asked acidly, pouting at her best friend as Marina pushed her toward the ancient Army surplus Jeep she had shared with the eldest Grimm brother for what seemed like forever.

Marina’s reply was a succinct, “Don’t be ridiculous, Maria; you’re hardly a plastic doll. Think of
yourself as Cinderella and I am your erstwhile, if long-suffering, fairy godmother. Once the clock strikes midnight after the Ball, your coach and horsemen will return to a pumpkin and mice, and the Belle of the Ball will once again be the AD of S.H.I.E.L.D.” Smiling at her best friend as she climbed behind the wheel, she reached out and squeezed Maria’s hand lightly. “I promise, Maria; the look on Hansel’s face when he sees you for the first time, will make all of the hassle worth it.”

The other woman watched the Russian as Marina swung into traffic and raced toward the base exit gates. “You’re kinda scary . . . at least when you have your mind set on something,” Maria scolded, as she watched Marina waved back at the guard who waved her through the gate.

Marina smirked as she glanced sidewards, her hands steady on the steering wheel as she weaved effortlessly through traffic. “Ask Misha sometime how I manage to boss around his brothers; Fury didn’t assign me to be their handler because I’m sugar and spice and everything nice.”

“Somehow, I’m having a hard time as seeing you as a sweet young girl.” Wrinkling her nose, Maria couldn’t resist teasing, “It could be because you’re being a bossy bitch.”

The Russian’s smile was amused even as she shrugged lazily, “Eh . . . I’ve been called worse.”

“I’m sure,” Maria muttered under her breath, crossing her arms over her chest as she slouched with a half-hearted pout.

Finally, Marina pulled to a stop in front of an elegant little shop with several manikins in the front window, each one arrayed in a gorgeous gown with matching accessories. Marina waited patiently on the sidewalk as her best friend gawked at the bare shoulders and thigh high slits on the gowns the manikins wore. Finally, Maria stepped forward, her cheeks a dull red, though whether that was in embarrassment or discomfort, the former Russian spy wasn’t entirely sure. “Marina . . . this isn’t . . . surely that can’t be . . . well, appropriate? . . . I mean, is it?”

Scrutinizing the gowns with a critical eye, Marina shrugged lightly. “Actually, they’re almost modest, compared to some of the gowns I’ve seen over the years. But don’t worry; we’re going to find you something tasteful and elegant. And it can even be S.H.I.E.L.D. blue, if you’d like.”

Maria’s smile was so relieved at the assurance that Marina had to turn away to hide her grin. Linking their arms together, Marina towed her best friend inside. “Just remember to breathe, relax and have fun. Okay?”

Taking a deep breath to steady her nerves, Maria gave a firm nod. “Let’s do this.”

The Russian’s smile was blinding as she wrapped an arm around the assistant director’s shoulder and squeezed lightly. “That’s my girl.”

Ushering her inside and into a backroom sectioned off from the store, Marina grinned at the sight of the elderly woman seated at a sewing machine, humming cheerfully as she worked. “Dobryy den’, Babushka, (Good afternoon, Grandmother,)” she chirped, stepping to hug the fragile old woman fondly.

“Marishka, moi kukly. I have your gown nearly ready for you, moya dorogaya devochka; are you here for your final fitting?”

“Not today. Katenka, I’d like you to meet my best friend, Maria Hill. Maria, this is Sudarynya Yekaterina Vasilievna Federova. She is my dear friend, and she is going to make you look fabulous.”

Maria’s eyes were huge as she looked around the shop, overwhelmed by the different colors, fabrics,
patterns and half-finished gowns lying around. Sensing that Marina was losing her best friend, the Russian stepped back to her side and gripped her upper arms firmly just above her elbows. “Maria . . . Vorobey . . . have I ever deliberately misled you?”

“No,” came the instantaneous answer from the younger woman.

“All right then. I promise, by the time Katenka gets through with you, you’re going to be absolutely gorgeous. Okay?”

Another series of deep breaths steadied Maria once again, before she looked over at the elderly woman and greeted her with a small smile. “Hello. I’m sorry about that.”

“That’s quite all right, milaya. Come with me, detskaya; I have the perfect gown for you.”

Following where she was led, Maria waited patiently as the woman unearthed a garment bag hanging on a rack against the far back wall. The zipper snicked quietly as it was lowered, before she drew the gown from the depths of the bag. At the sight of the newly revealed dress, Maria’s whole face lit up. Reaching out, she fingered the soft jersey reverently as she considered it. “It’s so beautiful.” Nibbling on her lower lip, she contemplated it for a moment before nodding, “I want this one.”

Yekaterina nodded firmly, reaching out to touch the other woman’s cheek lightly. “Yes . . . I thought it would speak to you best. Come . . . it is a pretty to be sure . . . but that is not enough this time. Beauty is no timeless thing and such a flimsy notion is undeserving of you.”

“It is?” Maria inquired, furrowing her eyes at her best friend.

“Of course, detskaya.” Cupping her cheek in her palm, Yekaterina smoothed back a wayward strand of hair, “This gown was not designed to show everyone that you are pretty . . . this gown was designed to show everyone that you, Maria Hill, are glorious.”

Chapter End Notes

Russian Translations:

Vati (German) - Dad (Marina's nickname for Hansel Kuhn)
chert poberi - damn it
Vorobey - Sparrow (Marina's nickname for Maria Hill)
moi kukly - my doll
moya dorogaya devochka - my darling girl
Sudarynya - Madam
milaya - dear girl
detskaya - child (specifically a girl-child)
Chapter 77: The Grimms Are Going to the Ball

It had been two months since Marina Petrovka had been shot by a Russian assassin in London . . . two months that Aaron Cross had been planning his revenge on the man who had given the order to kill her. He had done everything he could to make sure that the Russian Councilman of the World Security Council would not escape the vengeance that was coming for him.
Of course there was the fact that this would be the first time Aaron would actually see Marina since the mission in Iraq that had killed Clint and exiled him from his family. Granted, there would be several hundred feet between them, but Aaron would take what he could get. Byer had said she was fine, but the spy who had been the second youngest of her charges would not believe it until he had seen her for himself . . . seen her laughing on Will’s arm, with her familiar smile lighting her beautiful face like the sun.

That year’s Officer’s Ball would be held at the Cloisters, a part of Manhattan’s Metropolitan Museum of Art. The Cloisters was dedicated to medieval art and architecture. It encompassed a sprawling four acre spread while simultaneously incorporating elements of several medieval-era convents . . . complete with tiled roofs, gabled rooms and – most importantly – a single, square tower structure perched on top. It was within the confines of this tower that Aaron set up his gear and settled down to await his prey.

The guests of the Ball would include government officials and prominent, commissioned officers from the five major Armed Forces, in addition to several foreign dignitaries. It was expected that nearly 350 men and women would be in attendance, roaming around the grounds and taking in the breathtaking gardens. Frankly, Aaron could not have planned a better setting for this assignment. It offered him the high ground – what Clint would have called his “nest” or “perch” – as well as the opportunity for a quick getaway through the hills and wooded area surrounding the main structures. It would take at least 20 minutes to get K-9s on site . . . and another 10 minutes to follow Aaron’s scent back to the supplies he had stashed at the river. By then, Aaron had every intention of being in the Hudson and swimming towards New Jersey, effectively washing away his scent and making him impossible to trace.

Kneeling on the concrete floor of the tower, Aaron watched the comings and goings of the museum employees as they put the final touches on the preparations for the Ball that night. But even as he took in the staff scurrying to and fro like ants, his mind was very far away as he considered which members of his family would be in attendance. His eldest brother was a Full Bird Colonel with the Army and Marina was both a Lt. Colonel and a high-ranking spy within S.H.I.E.L.D.; both would undoubtedly put in an appearance. If his dad and Maria Hill had finally gotten their heads out their asses, Hansel would probably be there as well to escort Maria . . . assuming Marina could browbeat her best friend into ACTUALLY attending that year.

Jason was only a Captain but he was also Grimm . . . which tended to carry a lot of weight among the Brass, so it was entirely likely he would be there too. Brian had never been in the Armed Forces and was only a spy for S.H.I.E.L.D., so his absence was to be expected. Clint had been a Major before his death, so he would have been in attendance; that was one absence Aaron could already feel tearing at his careful control. Ducking his head, he rubbed his tearing eyes briskly against the coarse material of his sweater before returning his attention back to his scope. Sniffing hard, he shoved the thought of his murdered brother from his mind and forced his head back into the game. He had a Russian govnoyed to assassinate; and unlike the assassin the man had sent to kill Marina, HE wouldn’t miss.

S.H.I.E.L.D. Base
Grimm House

Hansel Kuhn was not a man who liked surprises. To be frank, he had never come across a surprise that ended well for him. That being said, all of the secrecy surrounding Maria’s dress to the Officer’s Ball was driving him verdammt verrückt. And of course, because he was looking forward to the evening in question, the final days remaining only seemed to drag intermittently on.

Finally, the day of the Officer’s Ball arrived. It had snowed the night before and the base was
blanketed in a thin sheen of perfect white powder. The entire world looked as though it had been
whitewashed, given a clean slate and the chance to start over new.

Marina had rushed from the house fairly early in the day, heading over to Yekaterina Federova’s shop to pick up their newly completed
dresses. After which, they would head over to Marina’s usual hairdresser for the final touches before
the ball. Hansel considered himself a patient man – his dislike for surprises not withstanding – but the
warning Marina had given on her way out the door still rankled a bit. She had glared at him, before
turning to his eldest son and insisting, “Under no circumstances whatsoever Misha, is your father to
track us like the wolf he is. Keep him distracted. Understand?”

Will had only laughed, his hands coming to curl around her hips as he pulled her to him. “I’ll keep
him busy, Marishka. You two have fun and we’ll see you tonight before the Ball.”

“Are we meeting back here at 5:30?”

“That’s the plan,” he had agreed, bending to kiss her once more before shooing her towards the door.
“Be careful; I haven’t had the chance to put the snow tires on yet.”

The Russian had smiled lightly, her face alight with her adoration for his son when she reached out
to cup his cheek in her palm. “You old softie.”

Will’s nose had wrinkled in amusement as he joked, “Don’t tell the boys; I’d never live it down.”

Marina’s laughter had followed her out the door as she agreed, before the Jeep’s roar had filled the
air and she was gone. It was about then, that Will had turned on his father with a laundry list of
things from Marina’s “Honey-Do List” that he had been putting off for just this reason. “Come on, Dad; the gutters need cleaning and I could use some help fixing the planking in the ceiling of the
porch.”

That had been several hours ago and he still hadn’t managed to shake his son; say what you wanted
about Hansel, but Will was definitely his father’s son. If Marina thought Hansel was part wolf, then
Will was part bloodhound. Hansel had managed to sneak away several times, but the freedom was
fleeting at best as Will would inevitably stroll into whatever hidey-hole Hansel was preparing himself
to go out in and drag him along on some new chore that needed doing.

Currently, it was five o’clock and Hansel was fighting with the bowtie that had come with his
tuxedo. Clint and Will were both in their own rooms, the two officers getting dressed in their Army
dress greens. Finally, after mangling the little strip of silk for the fifth time, he ripped it from around
his neck and flung it across the room with a virulent stream of German curses. Will’s voice was
amused from the doorway as he insisted, “I’m pretty sure that your tie isn’t the offspring of an ugly
cow and a horse’s ass, Dad.”

Turning to face his eldest, he watched Will straighten the cuffs of his shirt under the drab green
jacket. Huffing, he very nearly resorting to whining like his youngest as he demanded, “Can I not
just wear my coat?”

Will moved gracefully across the room, stooping to pick up the fabric and smooth it out in his hands,
as he replied, “We’ve been over this already, Dad. This is an Officer’s Ball, a Formal Affair of
State.”

“So? I have been to formal balls before, wearing a coat that was very similar to this one actually.”

Will’s fingers came up to pinch at the bridge of his nose as he sighed, “Again, Dad; crashing a ball to
cut the head off of a baron’s wife because she’s a witch who eats little kids doesn’t count!”

Hansel grunted, turning from the mirror to appraise his son critically. The German had always known that his oldest son was a soldier through and through. However, there was a difference between knowing something and seeing the evidence of it before your very eyes. Seeing him dressed in his full uniform now, Hansel was taken by surprise by the fact that Will had never seemed more like a soldier than he did now. Of course, not only was his son a soldier, he was an officer – and by all reports a very good one – that his younger brothers followed into war zones and battle-situations without question.

The olive drab jacket and trousers were perfectly tailored to fit Will’s lean and rangy frame. There was a tiny eagle stitched into each of the epaulets at the jacket’s shoulders, a symbol of Will’s rank within the Army he served. His tie was a precise four-in-hand, smoothed down into the jacket and with nary a wrinkle to see. The last name “GRIMM” was stark against the black nametage over his right jacket pocket, with a pin Hansel didn’t recognize attached to the pocket itself. On each side of the collar of his jacket, there was a pair of crossed gold arrows – Hansel had seen them on each of his sons’ dress uniforms and was aware that they were given only to those soldiers who had passed the Army’s Special Forces Qualifications – with a small silver pin signifying Will’s fifteen years in the Service situated on his right lapel. Following the seam of his left sleeve, a curved had been painstakingly stitched on, the words “Special Forces” flat black against the olive drab.

The left breast of the jacket was littered with a plethora of medals and tiny plaques that meant very little to Hansel. (Marina would explain to him later that the tiny plaques were actually called “ribbons.” Each denoted an operation Will had been a part of, a commendation he’d earned or a location he’d been deployed to. Armed with this information, Hansel had actually found himself stopping to count them; he’d lost count sometime around 30.) But there was one medal that caught Hansel’s eye; he’d heard people around base talking about them, but to date he hadn’t ever seen one.

“Adler, what is that medal for?”

Will looked up from where he was fiddling with a button. “Which one, Dad?”

“That lavender-looking one, with the face in the middle.”

The younger man’s fingers were reverent as it stroked over the front of it. “It’s a Purple Heart.”

“But I had thought that such a medal was only given . . .”

“. . . To those wounded in combat, yeah. Most Spec Ops soldiers have one . . . at least they do if they’ve seen heavy action. The little silver star attached to it, means that technically I have two. Clint and Jason both have one; Kenny had one awarded to him ‘posthumously’ . . . Marina keeps it in a case in my study.” Glancing back over his shoulder at the sound of familiar voices, he smirked at the sound of familiar voices. “Sounds like the girls are home.”

Turning back to his father, he smiled kindly at the look in his father’s eyes. “Don’t worry about it, Dad. This is what we do . . . we made the choice and we knew what we were getting into. You should ask Clint what the tab for the ‘President’s Hundred’ on his left sleeve means. You’d be proud of him for it.”

A lilting shout of Will’s name brought his attention back around again as he called happily, “Coming, Marishka!” Reaching up, Will tied his father’s bowtie, hands flashing as he pulled the fabric into a flawless knot. Taking a step back to look him over for a second, Will nodded once in approval before clasping his father on the shoulder and forcibly turning him towards the door.

“Come on, Dad . . . let’s go see how the girls look.”
And just like that, Hansel’s nerves were back. He had never seen Maria in anything other than sparring attire, her S.H.I.E.L.D. uniform or a pair of ratty jeans with a sweater. If he could manage at least to hold on to his composure, he would call the evening a win to start. Following after Will, he trooped along behind his son as they moved toward the stairwell.

Marina was a bright flash of color in the living, the flowing skirt of her gown swishing about her legs as Will strode to join her. The fabric was siren red, the kind of color that conjured the thought of candied apples and fresh blood. The high neck concealed the ugly scar still left over from her shooting, while the cinched waist and ruched bodice drew attention to how very tiny the diminutive Russian truly was.

Blinded as he was by Marina’s customary brilliance, it took a moment for Hansel to see Maria. She was half-hiding behind her best friend, just barely peeking past the reunited couple as Will bent to press a sweet kiss to his girlfriend’s painted lips. Then, the couple moved and Maria was out in the open for the first time . . . and time stood still. The witch hunter wondered briefly if she had bewitched him, feeling the air in his lungs freeze in awe as robin’s egg eyes swept her body slowly . . . struggling to take in the vision before him. He could feel himself gaping at her, his mouth moving in an attempt to speak.

The royal blue of the gown was only a half a shade off from her S.H.I.E.L.D. uniform; but that was where the similarities between the AD Hill he was used to and the Maria Hill standing before him ended. The dress draped beautifully over her curves, a thin slit in the bodice (he learned later that it was called a keyhole; frankly he didn’t care what it was called . . . whoever had thought it up was a genius!) showing off a rare – and utterly tantalizing – strip of skin at her chest. She shifted then and Hansel’s eyes flashed wide at the flash of knee and thigh that appeared through the slit in the skirt; it came up to about two inches over her knee to offer him a teasing view of his girlfriend’s skin that he had never seen before.

The rosy color in her cheeks rose steadily as he continued to stare, thunderstruck; his reaction causing a small smile from Marina as the pretty handler teased her best friend, “See!? I told you that dress would knock his socks off.”

Maria’s eyes narrowed at her friend, a flush of crimson sweeping delicately over her face as she blushed hard. Turning back to him, she watched him watch her for a long moment. Hansel groaned at the sight of her small, white teeth biting down on her lower lip as he considered him; the German was not ashamed to admit that he was imagining all of the different ways he could get her alone in a dark corner (or his bedroom, he wasn’t picky), strip the clinging fabric from her body and ravish her until long past dawn. Finally, her voice broke his reverie as she begged, “Hans . . . say something.”

Robin’s egg blue ensnared timid teal; awestruck, Hansel finally blurted, “Mein Gott im Himmel . . . Ich habe noch nie etwas so exquisites in meinem Leben gesehen. (My God in Heaven . . . I have never seen anything so exquisite in my life.)”

(At the words, Marina crowed in victory . . . but – as wrapped up in each other as they were – neither Hansel nor Maria even noticed.)

Chapter End Notes

Translations:
(R) govnoyed - bastard
verdammt verrückt - fucking crazy

(G) Adler - Eagle (Hansel's nickname for Will)

The dresses can be found at these URLs:


Also, the President's Hundred is a shooting contest held by the President, for members of the Armed Forces. The 100 servicemen and women who score highest, are given special honors. Needless to say, when Clint says that he wins the contest every year for the title of the Army's Greatest Marksmen . . . he's kinda not kidding.
Revenge . . . Served Cold

Chapter Notes

No translations this chapter. It's short, but it's Aaron.

Also, I will be starting A UALP Advent Calendar for this story, in honor of the season, on the December 1st. If you have requests for cute little Christmas things you'd like to see, go ahead and post them in your review and I will make sure I include them in one manner or another. The Calendar will run from the first to Christmas Day. It will NOT affect the posting of this story, and I will continue to post with my usual speed and timeliness. The Calendar will include banners, art, playlists, and more. All stories will take place several years into the future, the first Christmas after Avengers. (Which means some of my plot surprises will be revealed, which is part of my Christmas present to all of you.) I look forward to hearing your ideas.

Enjoy this chapter and I look forward to hearing all of your thoughts.
Chapter 78: Revenge . . . Served Cold

Aaron’s POV

The lights in the courtyard had brightened slowly as the sun had begun to slip below the horizon, seeking its nightly rest. Aaron remained huddled behind the stone wall, his eye pressed to his sight as he watched his target – a tall, reedy wisp of a man with lazy eyes and a frowning mouth – move effortlessly through the crowd. He paused to speak to several of the guests, each cluster comprised of rigid Army green or lazy, polished black. Even the women, in their fine gowns, wore dark, sedate colors that blended into the night’s sky like wraiths.

And then he heard it . . . careless laughter so dear to him, he could identify its owner in his sleep. Swiveling the sight in that direction, his heart leapt into his throat at the sight of her. Reaching up to adjust his settings, he allowed himself a moment to zoom in closer. It was no surprise to see Will and Marina in the midst of the crowd, standing side by side as they always had, their youth and beauty obvious against the backdrop of graying politicians and aging generals. It was a surprise to see June Monroe – Viktoriya Dubrovskaya his brain supplied, causing a roll of his eyes – with them, one delicate hand looped through that of a compact man standing at her left.

The man in question wore a well-cut, tailored suit, his hands in plain view with Vika’s hand tucked solicitously in his elbow. The two sisters were chatting exuberantly, earning a familiar look of indulgence from Will. However, it was the look of adoration on the face of the other man as he watched Vika laugh that caused a small smile on Aaron’s face. While the DOD spy didn’t regret their relationship and had been genuinely grieved to see it end, he was glad that Vika had found someone who clearly worshipped her as she deserved.

Turning his attention back on Marina, he took her in from head to toe, wanting to see for himself that she was alive and well. As was typical, the Russian stood out from the crowd around her, the blood red gown a beacon within the darkness of the night. Aaron smirked, scanning the courtyard briefly; with Marina in her daring, cardinal dress and Will in his full uniform the pair of them were easily the most striking couple in attendance.

The pretty handler stood close to Will, laughing at something Vika was saying, the notoriously private couple brushing shoulders but – as was their norm – not overtly demonstrative. Looking up into his brother’s face as she laughed, Aaron’s breath caught as the motion brought Marina’s features directly into the line of his scope. She looked happy despite the lingering sadness that lurked within the shadows of her eyes . . . as though she struggled with the pain of some loss, even while the world moved her inexorably forward. Will’s eyes were alight with tenderness as he lifted two fingers to toy lazily with a loose thread of her hair. Seeing them still strong and resolute in each other’s love, brought a small smile to Aaron’s lips even as he blinked away the bitter tears he could feel gathering in his eyes due to his loss of them.

Turning away, he caught sight of Jason. His older brother was sitting at a table with another man, leaning close and speaking in low tones around sips of imported beer from long-necked bottles. At one point Jason’s head tilted back, bringing the gold oak leafs at his epaulets into stark relief. Aaron smiled, sending a silent congratulations to the older man; he’d finally been promoted to Major . . . it was about damned time. Seeing the empty chair to Jason’s right, Aaron’s eyes closed hard at the knowledge of whose chair it should have been.

Bowing his head against his arm, he allowed himself a moment to grieve for Clint once again, the tears leaking from his eyes and soaking a wet patch into the sleeve of his sweater. Once he had lifted his head, his eyes were dry and focused once more on his target.

He did not look at his family again that night.
The party was beginning to wind down, when Aaron finally had the opportunity to take his shot. Dusk had faded into twilight, which had in turn ushered in ink-black midnight. The Russian Councilman, Baryshnikov, was sitting with several of his Russian compatriots, the three men drunk as skunks and loud within their cups. Slinging his rucksack off his shoulder Aaron laid out his kit and went through the final checks over his rifle.

The Nemesis Arms Vanquish had always been his favorite weapon, even while he’d still been part of the Brat’ya Mrachnyy. For a basically utilitarian, if high-powered, rifle, it was beautifully made. The barrel was double threaded, making it one of the most accurate rifles ever made. The muzzle brake was 100% machined, reducing recoil significantly and allowing the gun to be more efficient. Removing the pod and tucking it reverently into the kit, he lifted the gun effortlessly with his cheek braced against the rest. His eye to his display, he drew a bead on his target.

He could imagine the way that the Councilman’s heart beat within his chest, slow and steady, barely even a stutter as he unknowingly waited to die. The sound of Aaron’s own heart beat even more slowly in his chest as he took a deep breath. He pulled the trigger three times, each report loud within the enclosed space . . . two to the heart, one between the eyes. His hands moved quickly, methodically, as he dismantled the rifle and tucked it away before swinging the kit over his shoulders.

It was as he climbing from the tower and running across the roof that he heard the first screams. There had been shouting, of course; the man’s friends were spattered in the gore of him, but neither of them had really been able to process his death. Leaping from the edge of the roof, he tucked and rolled as he hit the dirt path leading into the surrounding foliage hard. He thought he heard the sound of his name . . . a familiar voice that brought tears to his eyes once more. Shoving his brother’s ghost away, he shook his head sharply and bolted towards the trees. Plunging into the shadowy depths, he lengthened his stride and ran, knowing that he had scant minutes before his pursuers would be on him.

Behind him, he could hear the sounds of rhythmic footsteps and the swish of silken fabric. Their breathing was hardly labored, elevated but still easy, as they kept pace about fifty yards behind him. Ducking his head, he lengthened his stride further in an attempt to leave his tail behind. The distance grew between them, but still the footsteps came.

Finally, the Hudson River appeared at the edge of his horizon, a glittering expanse that promised him freedom. Glancing quickly over his shoulder, he scanned the trees before dropping his kit and quickly stripping himself down to the wetsuit he wore beneath his clothes. Shoving his clothing into his kit, he zipped it firmly and engaged the watertight seal; the gun would survive if it got wet, but the ammo and spare magazines would not. Slinging the bag across his back, he froze at the sound of a voice. “Aaron! Wait! Please!”

Whirling, he stared with wide blue eyes in the direction of the voice. His sister emerged from the pathway, her red dress torn and stained by the branches she had not bothered to move aside, her eyes bright with unshed tears. For a long moment, they stared at one another, before the sound of another body crashing heavily through the woods behind the pretty handler jarred the assassin back into the appropriate mindset. He flinched and made to turn away from her, freezing once again at the ruined sound of her voice. “Aaron, please.” Here she paused and the young man’s eyes slipped closed at the pain in her voice. When she spoke again, she said only one word . . .

“That word broke something within him. It sent him running for the river, his body stretched out to its fullest extent as he dived into the river without a second thought. It was only as he was swimming
away that he considered the sound she had made right behind he’d disappeared under the water.

She had screamed, a wretched denial as he ran . . . a broken sound of pain and distress, with the flounce of silk and tulle an accompanying whisper as she crumpled into the dirt pathway. The haunting memory of that scream echoed in his mind with every stroke . . . it stayed with him for weeks, months, years. And by the time he’d become accustomed to it, he knew that the sound of it would haunt him for the rest of his days.
Chapter 79: In Love and Loss

Marina’s POV

At the sound of a throat clearing behind them, Marina and Will turned away from where they had been speaking to her sister and Phil Coulson. (Will had been surprised when Coulson had asked the
beautiful blond Russian to accompany him to the event. Marina had not.) An older couple stood there; he wore a uniform very similar to Will’s – though with admittedly more ribbons and quite a few more medals – while she wore a modest forest green gown with long sleeves and a shallow neckline. Both of their faces lit up as Marina lunged forward with an excited squeal. “Denise! You look absolutely ravishing!”

“Thank you, dear. I must say, Marina, sometimes I wish I had your daring. That color looks fantastic on you,” Denise Perron insisted, her hands around her upper arms as she scanned the young woman up and down.

“Thank you, Denise,” Marina replied with a wide smile. “And may I just say that you look particularly beautiful yourself this evening.”

General David Perron leaned over and pressed an adoring kiss to the apple of his wife’s cheek. “That’s what I keep telling her.”

Will and the General shook hands firmly, before Will gestured to the other couple in their group. “Dave . . . Denise, I’d like to introduce you to Marina’s sister, Viktoriya Dubrovskaya, and her date, Agent Phil Coulson.”

“Coulson . . . I know that name.”

“Currently Agent Coulson is one of the Top Four within S.H.I.E.L.D., General,” Viktoriya said, a proud smile on her lips as she glanced over at her date. “That is very impressive, Agent Coulson . . . congratulations,” Perron agreed, reaching out to shake the man’s hand.

“Thank you. It’s a privilege to be able to work with Director Fury, Assistant Director Hill and Agent Petrovka; each of them is the best within their fields. The work we’re doing is very important, and I am honored to be counted among their number,” Coulson replied modestly, his grip firm as he shook the general’s hand.

After a moment, Denise once again turned to face Marina. “So, I saw your youngest boy, Marina, but I haven’t seen Jason. Surely he didn’t stay home; he’s an officer and the Brat’ya Mrachnyy are always welcome at the Officer’s Ball.”

Will’s smile was small as he shook his head. “Actually, Jason had to work tonight, Mrs. Perron. Apparently, December is kind of crazy for a cop so he couldn’t get the time off. I’ll make sure to let him know that you inquired after him though.”

“Please do; he’s such a nice young man. I have designs on him for my grand-niece. Her name is Casey and I think she’d be rather good for him.”

“Denise,” her husband scolded fondly, “Casey is barely 20 years old. Captain Grimm is nearly thirty.”

The woman shrugged nonchalantly. “Personally, I think the two would suit very well. Age does not always hold as much stock in a relationship as one would otherwise think; don’t you agree, William?”

Will’s eyes sparkled as he looked down into Marina’s eyes, the two smiling at their shared secret, before he agreed softly, “Indeed, Denise; age difference doesn’t mean fuckall. Excuse my French.”

Denise rolled her eyes at the apology, one hand waving it away carelessly. “Eh; my husband has
been Army since before you were born, dear; I’m sure I’ve heard a lot worse than that over the years.” Turning her head at the sound of her husband’s name, she sighed heavily. “Damn it, Davie . . . it’s that insufferable Dick.”

Perron’s mouth twisted into wry amusement as he corrected lightly, “General ‘Richard’ Andrews is a highly respected officer, my love.”

“I much prefer to call it as I see it; the man’s a dick and so Dick he shall be,” Denise muttered with a roll of her eyes. Leaning forward, the two women hugged once again. “Take care of yourself and your boys, Marina. And do tell Jason I said hello. I was looking forward to seeing him here.”

“I’ll tell him. I promise.”

“Thank you, dear. I hope I’ll see you both again before the night is over.”

“More than likely,” Marina agreed with a fond smile.

“And don’t forget to get your lady on that dance floor, Will. Your two left feet will survive just this once. Don’t think I won’t find out if you don’t; I’m sure my husband can arrange from some unpleasant overseas assignment for a month or two.”

“Yes ma’am,” Will laughed, bending to buss a warm kiss to her cheek.

Taking a deep breath and straightening her shoulder as though she was a warrior headed into battle, she set her face into a neutral smile and insisted, “All right; let’s get this over with, Davie.”

“Your wish is my command, Denise. We’ll see you both later, I’m sure,” Perry told the couple, before guiding his wife on their ways with a gentle hand to the small of her back.

Watching them go a moment, Will turned to face Viktoriya and Coulson. “Would you excuse us, Vika?”

“Of course,” Viktoriya agreed with a small smile.

“Where are we going, Misha?”

“You heard the General’s wife; I have to get you on the dance floor or else. Quite frankly, Mrs. Perron scares me.”

Marina’s head fell back as she laughed happily. “Denise terrifies everyone; how else do you think she keeps the General in line?”

Chuckling at the joke, Will bowed low and offered his partner his hand. “Shall we, my love?”

“Shall we indeed?” Marina agreed, reaching over to take his hand and allow him to lead her through the courtyard and into the ballroom off the side of the path.

It was nearly midnight when the first terrified scream filled the otherwise still air of the Cloisters. Marina and Will glanced at each other in confusion, before they rushed in the direction of the sound. They found the Russian Councilman, Gregor Petrovich Baryshnikov lying slumped over his table; grimacing lightly at the task and in spite of the two bullets in his chest and the third hole between his eyes, Marina laid her fingers gingerly against his carotid artery. Waiting for a moment, she shook her head up at Will. “He’s dead, Colonel.”

“All right. Fan out. I want to know who did this and why. Move it people; we don’t have long
before he bugs out. Anyone well trained enough for this shot, knows that he has a limited amount of
time before someone’s on him like hotcakes,” Will ordered, looking around at the assembled corps of
various junior officers.

It was as Marina was moving to do as told, that Clint appeared soundlessly at her elbow. “Marishka .
. . I’m pretty sure our shooter is Aaron.”

Marina froze for a mere second, her eyes flashing to meet his. “Are you sure?”

“Ninety-five percent; I think I saw him in the tower.”

“Is he still there?”

Clint’s head dropped back as he looked up toward the tower. Squinting for a second, he nodded. “I
think so . . . but it looks like he’s packing up. Once he’s got his rifle in his kit, he’ll be gone like
wind.”

“How do you know?”

“Cause it’s what I would do,” Clint argued, just as the shooter leaped over the parapet separating the
tower from the roof. There was a long breathless moment, before Clint nodded tersely, “It’s Kenny .
. . I recognize the kind of kit; it’s Kenny’s preferred carry-all for his weaponry.”

“Call him, Clint. Maybe he’ll stop if he hears you,” Marina begged, one hand wrapping firmly
around his wrist.

Dropping his head back, Clint bellowed loudly, “Aaron!” When the man didn’t even pause, he tried
again.

“KENNY!”

Here there was a brief falter, before Aaron shook his head firmly – to do what, Marina wasn’t sure
but she was determined to find out – and plunged into the foliage. Lifting her skirts and kicking off
her heels, Marina prepared to go after him. “Clint . . . find Will and your father. Tell them I’m going
after him, okay, and have them hurry up!”

“Yes ma’am,” Clint agreed with a sharp salute, before he turned tail and ran like hell, bellowing at
the top of his lungs, “Pops! Will! Come quick! I think it’s Aaron!”

Turning away, satisfied that the three Grimms would be on her heels shortly, Marina raced into the
trees after her second youngest charge. Aaron was fast . . . much faster than she remembered and
there were several moments that she thought she was going to lose him in the trees. But then there
would be a flash of his white shirt, or a glimpse of his khaki carryall and the chase would be on
again.

Before long, Aaron had led her straight to the banks of the Hudson River. He was clad in a black
wetsuit and slinging his bag over his shoulder when Marina finally burst through the trees. Seeing
that she was mere moment from losing him again, Marina lunged forward, shouting, “Aaron! Wait!
Please!”

He whirled to face her, blue eyes wide as he stared at her. She knew how she must look as she took
the last steps from the shade of the path, her red dress torn and stained by the branches she had only
barely pushed away as she ran. Her vision swam lightly and she knew that there were tears standing
unshed in her eyes. Aaron seemed frozen at the sight of her and Marina took the opportunity to look
him over as they stared at each other. He was bulkier . . . thinner . . . and there was a gleam of
ruthless intelligence in his eyes that she didn’t remember. Except, behind that, she could still see her little boy. Her solnyshko had been hidden deeply under this new incarnation, shoved so deeply inside of him that Marina knew he was trying to pretend Kenny Grimm didn’t exist any more. The sound of another body crashing heavily through the woods behind her seemed to bring Aaron back to the present.

The young sniper visibly flinched, turning away from her toward the water once again. Marina darted a few steps forward, her voice wrecked by tears and grief even to her own ears as she begged, “Aaron, please.”

Aaron paused for a briefest of moments, almost as though he was hesitating from disappearing once again. Taking that as a good sign, Marina moved forward, trying to get close enough to touch him. When she did finally speak again, she forced herself to speak only one word; the only word she knew to convey all of her love and adoration for him . . .

“Solnyshko.”

Marina was horrified when instead of bringing him back into her arms, it sent him diving quickly into the river as though there had been no second thought about it. As she watched, she broke. She sunk to the dirt pathway in a puddle of silk and ruined tulle, a wretched scream breaking from the very core of her. She watched, tears streaming in agonized trails, down her face as she watched him swim away from her. A pair of warm, familiar hands came to rest on her shoulders as a body crouched down behind her. Turning her head, she buried her face in Will’s neck, taking the opportunity to mourn the loss of her lyubimyy mal’chik once more. “Did you see?” she whispered into his skin, her voice destroyed by tears and pain.

Will said nothing, unable to speak past the lump in his throat. Marina could feel his Adam’s apple bobbing hard as he swallowed down his own tears, a small nod against her temple causing another torrent of tears. For a long moment they stood there, trying to accept Kenny’s loss once more and come to terms with the fact that he had actively RAN from them. At long last, Hansel’s hands came to rest on their shoulders. “Adler . . . Tochter . . . come; we must go back.”

“No,” Marina begged, shaking her head in helpless denial.

“Yes, Tochter. I know it hurts; I saw him make the choice to run away too. It causes a hole, in mein Herz, but we must brave through it . . . be strong and try to make it through the rest of this cursed night.”

The Russian wept against her partner’s shoulder, the feeling of Will’s hand in her hair a welcome ground as she insisted through her sobs, “I can’t.”

Hansel’s grip was inarguable as he pulled her from Will and turned her to face him. A small shake brought her full attention to him as he insisted, “You must, Marishka! We must give them no indication that we know the shooter; the Russians will be demanding the head of the assassin. It would serve Kenny ill for them to think that we know anything more than they do.”

Sniffing hard, Marina allowed herself one more moment to grieve, before she allowed Will and Hansel to assist her to her feet. Clint stood just within the treeline, eyes horrified as he stared at the edge of the cliff Aaron had leaped from for his swandive into the water. Brushing at her tears, Marina went to his side, linking her hand in his and leaning against him in the only suggestion of comfort she could offer her youngest charge at that moment. “He just . . .” Clint whimpered, grey eyes wide as he turned his attention down onto her face.

“I know,” Marina agreed, her voice just as low and wrecked.
“Why would he do that? Why would he run from us? He heard me, Marishka! I know he did.”

Marina’s lips compressed as she shook her head. “I don’t know why he ran, dorogoy. But when we get him back . . . I intend to ask him.”
Okay, so apparently I hit the save without post button on accident (in my own defense, it was like 2 in the morning, so you know . . . reasons!). It was called to my attention by a friend and I am fixing the error now. I hope you continue to enjoy this chapter!

Russian and German translations are few and far between, but at posted at the end of the chapter as always.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
tried to locate both him and her best friend. Steering both son and daughter toward an out of the way alcove, Hansel hurried in her direction with a soft call of her name, “Spatzi, ve are here!”

Maria whirled at the sound of his voice, eyes wide as she located him within the crowd. “Hans!” she shouted, dodging around people as she hurried to his side. “What is going on? I went to the restroom for a minute . . . I come back, all of you are gone and I heard someone say something about a murder!”

“The Russian councilman from the World Security Council vas assassinated tonight, Spatzi.”

The woman’s eyes flashed wide, just then catching sight of her sobbing best friend past Hansel’s shoulder. “Oh please, Hansel . . . tell me the shooter isn’t who I think it is.”

Hansel’s robin egg eyes flashed around the scene, before he cupped her elbow in his palm and began to steer her toward the edge of the crowd. His voice was a low hum, his tone too low for anyone but her to hear. “Ja, it vas mein Sonnenstrahl. Mein Falki saw him fleeing from the scene. Marina went after him, but he dived off into the river. Marina . . . she is not handling it well.”

Maria gave him a truly unimpressed look, before rushing around him toward her best friend. “Marina!” she cried, skidding a little in her high heeled shoes as she pulled herself to a stop. Kicking them off impatiently, Maria crouched in front of her and rested her hands on the Russian’s knees. “Oh Marishka . . . I’m so sorry.”

Marina’s smile was tremulous in the direction of her best friend, before she allowed Maria to gather her close and began to cry once again. And deep within their unconscious minds, the three guardians of Marina’s tears vowed silent vengeance against the son of a bitch who had broken their beloved Marishka’s heart.

It shouldn’t have been a surprise to see Jason and his beat partner with the NYPD arrive at the Museum following the 911 call, but Marina still choked at the sight of him. (Later, when she could think straight, the pretty handler would come to the realization that he had not been there by coincidence but rather Will had requested the middle brother’s presence specifically. Even though he was still only a beat cop, Jason was highly respected amongst his peers; Marina had been hearing rumors of a promotion to detective in his future for months. He would do what he could to keep Aaron’s involvement under wraps.)

At the time he arrived, however, none of this was on Marina’s mind. Breaking into fresh tears at the sight of him, the handler gathered her skirts and ran full force into his arms. “Whoa!” he cried, both of them rocking backwards dangerously before Jason managed to regain his balance and straighten them out again.

Jason’s arms came around her as she started to sob once more, her face pressed into the curve of his shoulder. Tender fingers came up to stroke through her hair, looking up as Will approached the two of them. (And if a wicked smirk crossed his lips at the sound of his rookie partner choking behind him at the sight of his brother, who could blame him for it? The kid was a pain in his ass on a good day.) “Will, what the hell happened?”

“Can we talk?” Will asked in reply, mercurial eyes flashing towards where his partner gawked at them. “Privately.”

“Of course. Hey Rook . . . you go and see if you can find General Perron. He’s going to be the highest ranked officer here, so we’ll make him our liaison.”

The other officer, Mathis by name, nodded in a daze before heading off through the throng of
people. Satisfied that he was out of earshot, Jason tightened one arm around Marina’s shoulders while sweeping her up off her feet with the other. “Lead on, Will.”

The older brother nodded, turning back and jerking his head at the other members of the family already in attendance. The family cop narrowed his eyes at the sight of both Brian and Natasha standing with everyone else; whatever had happened, it was bad if Will was closing ranks. Soon enough, they were clustered together in a little side gallery off the main ballroom. The Colonel looked around the area, before closing the door firmly behind him.

Jason settled into a chair, his sister still crying in his arms. Judging by the water stains on the shoulders of both Clint and Will’s jackets and Maria's dress, Marina had been crying for awhile (though there was a similar stain on the shoulder of Marina’s own dress, so she hadn’t been the only one). Pulling her to him tighter, he looked up at Will and demanded, “What the hell happened?”

“Aaron assassinated the Russian councilmember for the World Security Council tonight,” Will answered solemnly, quicksilver eyes flashing through colors as he watched Jason take that in.

Jason hummed lightly, already knowing what he was going to be asked to do. “You need me to cover it up.”

“As much as you can. We’ve already talked to David Perron,” here Jason nodded at the name of Will’s closest friend among the Brass, well guessing how that conversation had gone, “he’s going to do what he can on his end to try to deflect the blame elsewhere.”

The technical specialist bit down on his lip as he inquired hesitantly, “How do you know it was Aaron?”

Clint’s voice was wrecked and soft as he replied, “Marina and I saw him. We chased him through the woods behind the museum. Marina managed to catch up with him before he managed to escape into the river.”

“Into the river?! The only way to the river from here is over the edge of the cliffs!” Jason blurted, eyes flashing wide at the thought.

Their father’s nod was terse as he answered his son, “He jumped . . . vell, more like he dived off of the cliff and into the river.”

“Do I even need to ask whether or not I’m going to need to have divers dredge the river?”

“No; we could see him swimming away,” Will insisted, one hand coming up to rub firmly over his face with a sigh. “From the looks of it, he was fine.”

“Why the hell would Aaron assassinate a foreign security council member? That doesn’t make sense.”

“If I had to lay odds, I’d say it probably has something to do with Marina’s shooting in London in October,” Maria explained from where she was leaning against Hansel near the door. With Hansel’s unnaturally good hearing, it was an unspoken supposition that Hansel would be responsible for “watching” the door, as it were. “Most likely, whatever handlers are holding Kenny’s strings decided that a foreign official willing to execute a high-ranking government agent of an American spy organization was a bad thing . . . despite the fact that the agent herself is not an American.”

“They would need permission for something like that, Maria,” Will argued lightly, arms coming up to cross over his chest as he watched her. “No alphabet agency is going to knowingly eliminate a foreign target without going through some higher authority. There would have to be an ungodly
amount of red tape and a back-up ‘Hail Mary’ just in case the assassin failed.”

“And who’s to say that they didn’t have all those things already in place?” the woman insisted, head cocked in question. “It’s entirely possible that they had authorization to take them out, with the stipulation that under no circumstances was the American government to be implicated in the elimination.”

“Cause that was ever going to happen . . . we were able to catch up to Aaron easy!” Clint blurted, eyes furrowed in alarm.

Maria shook her head at the youngest Grimm as she insisted calmly, “We were only able to catch up to him because of YOU, Clint. Your eyesight is uncanny; I can guarantee you that if you hadn’t been here, no one would have seen him and Aaron would have disappeared completely unchallenged.”

Will hummed a wordless agreement as he bowed his head over his arms. “I have to agree with Maria, Clint; neither Marina nor I saw him until you pointed him out. And even then, the only reason you knew for sure that it was Aaron is because you recognized his kit. That’s insider intel that only someone from this family would have had.” Huffing out a breath, he ran his hands back through his hair in frustration. “Why didn’t he come to us? More importantly, why would he run from us?”

It was a long second before Marina took a deep breath, her grip around Jason’s neck loosening and her body flowing to her feet. Wiping at her eyes, she visibly pulled the fractured ends of her nerves back together again and moved to her lover’s side. Linking her fingers with his, she whispered quietly, “We’re high level security officers, Misha, for a highly clandestine agency. Maybe he is just trying to protect us from whatever fallout he knows about that we don’t.”

“We’re his family! He should NEVER have to run from us!”

Her tears had created a broken beauty in Marina’s face that made Will flinch. Her fingers were tender on the planes of his face as she forced herself to smile up at him. “We’re gonna find him, Misha. And then we’re going to lay waste to whatever asshole lied to him and made him believe that we could not love him for something that could never have been his fault.”

Behind Marina, Clint’s grin was cold as he nodded, “I’m good with this plan.”

The other brothers nodded in silent agreement, before Maria stepped forward to touch Will’s arm. “We just need to stick to the plan, Will. Make it through tonight without anyone the wiser about Aaron.” Looking up at her boyfriend as Hansel’s fingers trailed a strand of hair down the side of her neck, Maria’s face set into pitiless stone as she hissed, “Tomorrow, we hit the ground running . . . gather as much information as we can discretely, tap every resource and every asset we have, break through every encryption, every code, every failsafe, every firewall.”

Marina’s voice was equally cold as she continued the thought, “And when we have the fuel for the fire . . . we will burn their playhouse down.”

The firm Amens that ricocheted around the circle may as well have been flames. The Grimms didn’t know who it was playing Aaron like a puppet, or even why they’d snatched Aaron away from them in the first place. All they knew was that whoever was pulling Aaron’s strings was quickly going to regret the day they ever fucked with the Brothers Grimm. Fuck with one, fuck with them all. And, as any one of their former marks would tell you . . .

You did not want to fuck with the Brothers Grimm.
Translations:

dorogoy - darling (Marina's nickname for Clint)
mein Sonnenstrahl - my Sunbeam (Hansel's nickname for Kenny/Aaron)
mein Falki - my Little Hawk (Hansel's nickname for Clint)
It took some time for things to return to normal. The memory of Aaron actively running away from Marina haunted each of the Grimms who had seen it happen, and the pretty Russian suffered from the vision more than the rest. For the first couple of days, she regressed to the quiet, hurting young woman she’d been when Aaron had first disappeared. She locked herself into her room and didn’t come out, forgoing sleep, meals and other basic needs. Both Will and James Barnes were a surprisingly unified pair in defending her solitude; Will took over most of her S.H.I.E.L.D. duties,
while Barnes literally played bodyguard outside her room.

Then, 56 hours after she went in, the door opened and Marina came out. She was attired flawlessly in her S.H.I.E.L.D. uniform, her eyes maybe a little red-tinged but still steady as she came down the stairs, the heels on her kneehigh boots clicking sharply on the stairwell. Coming into the kitchen where the rest of the boys were hanging out, she stopped in the doorway and crossed her arms.

Will was the first to see her, looking up with a fond smile. “Ready to kick some ass, moya sumasshedshaya devushka?”

Her only reply was a cold grin, chocolate eyes alight with the need for a little destruction. Cocking her head, she drawled lazily, “You tell me who, Misha, and I’ll make them wish they’d never been born.”

Standing, he approached her slowly, his hands coming up to capture her wrists gently. “That’s my girl.”

It was April when Jason Grimm arrived at the house on base where his family still lived, practically vibrating with his good news. Using the key his brothers had insisted he keep, he let himself in. “Marina!” he called excitedly, as soon as he was inside the foyer. Lunging for the living room, Jason shouted again, “Marishka! Where are you? It’s Jason!”

At long last, Marina stuck her head out of the kitchen, her eyebrows furrowed at the sound of his voice. “Sladkiy? I’m in the kitchen!”

Rounding on his heel, Jason literally dodged around Will and Clint who had come to investigate the shouting. At the sight of the Russian, Jason lunged at her. Throwing his arms around her waist, he lifted her clear off her feet in an overly exuberant hug and started to spin them both in place. Marina squeaked in surprise, throwing her arms around his waist to try and catch her balance. The two were laughing and more than a little dizzy when Jason finally dropped her lightly onto her feet.

“Sladkiy, what the hell has gotten in to you?” Marina asked, her hand twined firmly in the lapel of his coat.

“I did it, Marina.”

“Did what, Jay?” Will asked, an amused smile on his lips as he watched the two of them.

“Will!” Jason cheered, lunging to throw his arms around his brother’s shoulders next.

The eldest Grimm laughed, catching them both as Jason’s enthusiasm nearly knocked them over and onto the floor. “Thank you so much, Will. I couldn’t have done this without you and Marina,” Jason murmured into the column of his brother’s throat.

Sensing the seriousness in the declaration, the Colonel’s hand came up to rest on the back of his head. For a long second, the two brothers stood there, before Clint’s impatient demand of, “What the hell is happening?” broke them apart.

Marina’s smile was fond as she wiped her hands on a dishtowel, “I will confess to being more than a little curious as well, sladkiy. What happened?”

“I did it. The Sarge hauled me into his office today. I’ve been promoted. I’m a detective!”

The Russian’s eyes widened in surprise, before a bright grin crept across her face. “Jay! That’s great! Congratulations!” she squealed, lunging at him to hug him tightly once more.
Hansel’s voice at the back of the pack filled Jason with pride as the German insisted, “You have done well, Schalki. Congratulations.”

“Thanks Dad,” the young man insisted around the swell of emotion in his throat, as Hansel came forward to pull him into a warm hug.

Clint bounced excitedly in place, his eyes bright as he announced, “We should totally go out and celebrate!”

The Colonel’s smile was amused as he inquired, “And who is going to be footing that bill, exactly?”

“I have some money; I loaned the rights to one of my scopes to one of the Army’s munitions manufacturers,” Clint insisted with a small pout. “I made a killing on it.”

Dropping his head back as he laughed, Will clapped a hand to his brother’s shoulder fondly, “Clint, I was joking. Marina and I will take care of the bill. But I think that sounds like a good idea. What does everyone else think?”

Brian’s grin was feral as he announced, “I totally think we should go paintballing!”

Marina’s head shook sharply as she argued, “Smut’yan, we go paintballing everyday . . . with real bullets even.”

The S.H.E.I.L.D. agent pouted, even as Clint piped up, “What about karaoke? Beer, food; and the added bonus of being able to acknowledge the stupidity of humanity, without having to overthrow any governments.”

The Russian’s giggle was amused as she cocked her head at Will, “Sounds good to me. What do you think, Colonel?”

“I’m in. What about everyone else?”

This, of course, is how the Brothers Grimm arrived at a karaoke bar off base with a good time – and not a little mayhem – in mind. Will and Brian veered off immediately towards the bar, to set up the tab and get the first round of drinks, Marina disappearing with them to order some appetizers and snacks for the brothers to enjoy while they drank. Clint dragged Bucky towards the jockey’s booth, to go flipping through the available songs. Hansel, Maria and Jason found a booth off to the side of the bar, all three glaring at anyone that came to claim it for themselves.

Finally, the whole family was gathered around the table as Will and Brian passed out glasses of Guinness with small shots of Jagermeister. “Sweet! Car bombs!” Clint cheered excitedly, getting his hand smacked as he reached for his.

“Patience, dorogoy. I have a feeling your brother is going to make a toast with those,” Marina announced with a small smile, accepting her trio of tequila shots with a small nod in the direction of her partner.

“A toast with a Jager Bomb?” Maria asked, incredulously, before she thought about it for a second. “On second thought, that does seem kinda like a thing a Grimm would do.”

“Why bother getting prissy wine, when Jager will do the same thing?” Brian cracked, slamming back the first of the three tequila shots lined up in front of him.

Each of the family laughed as Brian jumped to his feet, with his hands up over his head, and shouted at the top of his lungs, “I am the king of the world!”
“Yeah yeah yeah, Your Majesty. Sit down and shut up,” Will joked, shoving his brother back into his chair. Lifting his glass, he looked around the table with a smile. “First of all, I just want to say congratulations to Jason. He’s put in a lot of hard work these last couple of years to be able to get to where he is now.” Resting his hand on his brother’s shoulder, Will continued, “Jay, I hope you know how proud Marina and I are of you. You took a hell of a blow when Sarah was killed; but you got back up, took that experience and have done a lot of good because of it. You deserve this.”

Jason’s ears turned a little red at the praise; Will wasn’t particularly demonstrative and it always made his brothers glow with pride when he handed out commendations. Turning back to the rest of his brothers, Will continued, “I know we’ve suffered from some heavy losses over the last couple of years, with losing Kenny. But I want you to know; Marina and I are very proud of each of you. You have each grown into exceptional young men and I am honored to be able to call you my brothers.” Rolling his eyes at his own speech, he joked, “All right . . . enough with this sentimental crap. Now it’s time to get drunk!”

That earned a resounding cheer from each of the brothers, each brother combining their shots with their beer and chugging the frothy mess. Marina smirked behind her whiskey, shaking her head in amusement. “Just remember; you break it, you bought it. Otherwise, have fun and try not to cause too much property damage. S.H.I.E.L.D. and I will thank you for it.”

The next morning, Will woke in his own bed with very little memory of what happened the night before. The sound of the curtains was loud on their rod as Marina threw them wide, a splash of sunlight hitting her partner in the face and earning her a miserable sounding groan. Grabbing for the blankets, he dragged them up over his head. Marina’s voice was amused as she teased, “You will be pleased, I’m sure, to know that you do not suffer from whiskey dick.”

Another groan emerged from under the covers as Will took in that statement through the haze of his hang over. “Ugh . . . what did we do last night?”

Marina’s voice was amused as she sat down on the edge of the bed and started to wrestle the covers from him. “Do you want that alphabetically or chronologically?”

“That bad, huh?”

“Well, let’s just say Maria has more than enough blackmail on her phone to keep you and the boys under her thumb for at least the next thirty years. Most of those pictures involve the words ‘table’, ‘dance’ and ‘shirtless’. You had all of the female patrons, and a good portion of the males too, suffering from apoplexy when the five of you got up on the bar and did your best Coyote Ugly. Also? There may be a video of Brian on my cell singing a stirring rendition of Celine Dion’s ‘My Heart Will Go On’. It was moving . . . really.” Shaking her head at him as his face finally came into view, Marina remarked dryly, “And, Clint may have given some poor girl a lap dance. I think she died from lack of oxygen. Or she passed out; either way, she didn’t appear to be breathing for awhile.”

“Did we break anything?”

“You just found out that you will literally be suffering from humiliation forever, and you’re worried if you broke anything?”

“I want to know how much money we’re going to owe the bartender to fix his bar.”

Marina shook her head lightly, “Surprisingly, nothing is broken and he has been well compensated for the fact that you drank three quarters of what he had in stock. However, no one is dead, dying or injured; everyone had fun; and the world didn’t end in the process. All in all, I think we can call last
night a success.”

“That’s great . . . I’m going back to bed,” he groaned, hauling the blankets over his head.

“Oh no, you’re not. **WE** can call last night a success . . . Nick has quite a bit of a different word for it.”

Tossing the covers back down again, he stared at her in confusion. “What about Fury now?”

“**FURY** isn’t calling last night a success, but I think you can wait to deal with that until you’ve had your first cup of coffee, Colonel.”

Will’s answering groan was pitiful, causing a delighted giggle from Marina as she bent to kiss his sweetly. “Good morning, Colonel . . . isn’t it a beautiful day?”

“You are a **sadistskim suka**, and I hate you.”

“I know you do . . . I love you too. Come on, Misha; Fury isn’t going to wait all day.”

Chapter End Notes

Translations:

(R) moya sumasheshchaya devushka - my crazy girl (one of Will's nicknames for Marina)
(R) sladkiy - Jason (Marina's nickname for Jason)
(G) Schalki - little mischief (literally prankster or joker) (Hansel's nickname for Jason)
(R) smut'yan - troublemaker (one of Marina's nicknames for Brian)
(R) dorogoy - darling (Marina's nickname for Clint)
(R) sadistskim suka - sadistic bitch
Of Hangovers and Hickeys

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the long wait on this one. The Advent and Finals have been taking over my life. Fortunately, Finals are over on Monday, so then it'll just be the Advent and a return to our regularly scheduled program. Translations are at the end of the chapter, as always. Enjoy!

Edit: Okay first of all, blatant steal From Amerou cause she's epic awesome. Also, I'm also done with the shipper shit. I don't care how you feel about Bucky/Darcy/Clint, and the fact that I haven't mentioned it till now. I haven't mentioned who wakes Gretel either, but I'm sure I won't hear complaints about THAT pairing. If I get another anon comment who tries to shame me into shipping THEIR ship, I'm going to delete the comment and spam you for good measure. I love Clint/Darcy (Clint/Bucky too for that matter), they're one of my favorite ships. But I enjoy Clint/Darcy/Bucky too; I will not be made to feel ashamed of that. Thank you to everyone who continues to read despite their dislike of the ships; I love you all so fucking fiercely. I am sorry I got up on this soapbox but I thought it was deserved at this point.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter 82: Of Hangovers and Hickeys

There was a grandstand band beating on the sides of his brain. Or dwarves with miniature jackhammers. Either way, it was a pretty good indication that the night before had been fucking epic AWESOME! The feeling of a full bed caused a grin, and Brian flopped over to see . . . “Marina!”
The Russian leaned back against the headboard next to him, her arms folded over her chest and her eyes boring into him. “Good morning, smut’yan. Expecting someone else?”

Brian’s eyes narrowed at her for a moment, before he lifted the sheet and looked down at himself. As he’d suspected, he was naked and Marina should have been the voluptuous body of the redheaded spy he knew he’d coaxed into his bed the night before. “What did you do with Tasha, Marishka?”

“I didn’t do anything to her, except ask her very nicely to sneak me into your room so that we could talk this morning.” A small smirk crossed her lips as she continued her thought, “I’m sure she’s probably in the kitchen making some coffee. Based on the shenanigans from last night, the lot of you are going to be desperate for the pick me up.”

Shoving himself into a seated position, he meticulously tucked the blanket around his lower half and wrapped his arms around his knees. “All right, Marishka. You have my attention. What’s up?”

Marina pulled her cell phone from her pocket, and pressed a button on the screen. Turning it to face him, she watched as he stared in horror at the sight of himself at the karaoke bar the night before. He was regaling the crowd with a beautiful rendition of Celine Dion’s “My Heart Will Go On,” and Brian could already feel his street cred shriveling at the sight of it.

Taking a deep breath, he rubbed at his face with one hand before sighing heavily. “All right, Marina. What is it going to cost me to keep this quiet?”

The young woman’s smile was knowing as she insisted, “Let’s just say, that you’re going to owe me a gigantic favor, to be redeemed at my discretion. Are we agreed?”

Brian’s chocolate eyes narrowed at his sister, seeing some secret hiding behind her eyes. “I’m not going to like this, am I?”

“Probably not,” she acknowledged, waving the cell phone at him lightly, “Either way, thanks for this video, I own your soul. So, do we have a deal?”

There was a heavy sigh as the second oldest Grimm ran his fingers back through his hair. “Yeah . . . we have a deal. In exchange for that video never making it out into the world, I will owe you one – count them, Marina, ONE! – favor.”

“I’m so glad we were able to come to an agreement on the subject, Bri,” Marina replied graciously, as she pushed herself up from the mattress and moved toward the doorway. “Oh, and just in case you managed to delete this copy off of my phone, I should tell you that any attempt to renege on our deal will result in its immediate release into the public. Also, this is only one copy. I have stashed another copy with someone you can’t buy, so there will ALWAYS be another copy lying in wait. Understand?”

“You don’t play fair, Marishka.”

“Seriously, dikiy rebenok, when have you ever known me to play fair?” she laughed, pulling the door open and stepping through into the hallway. Leaning back in with a fond smile, she encouraged lightly, “Best get up and get ready for the day, Brian. Nick isn’t amused by you boys’ night out last night, and he has quite a bit to say about it. Misha is already up and getting ready for the meeting; you should probably get a move on to.”

With a miserable groan, Brian flopped backwards onto the bed. The door opened again another ten minutes later, and a beautiful redheaded face appeared over him, a sly smirk curving her lips as she leaned over him. “Morning, lyubovnik. Sleep well?”
Brian’s arms came up around her waist, and hauled her into the bed beside him. Rolling over her, he trapped her under him with a scowl. “If I ever wake up with my sister in my bed again, when it should have been you, Natasha . . . that adorable little ass of yours is mine. Ponimayete?”

Natasha’s grin was wicked as her arms came up around his neck to pull him down to her as she arched up into his body. “I have no idea what you’re talking about, Brian.”

Reaching up to capture her wrists, he pinned them down over her head as he bent to take her mouth with his own. “How long until our meeting with Fury this morning?”

“You and your brothers have an appointment with Fury this morning at 0900,” Natasha replied, her hips undulating against his own.

Growling at her low in his throat, Brian tightened his grip on her wrists and ground his body into hers. “What time is it now?”

“0730?”

“Plenty of time for some exercise . . . don’t you think so?”

Natasha’s eyes slipped to half mast, a sharp moan escaping her as Brian attached his mouth to the tendon in her throat and nipped at it sharply. “Fuck you, Brian . . .”

“That’s the plan,” he agreed, grabbing the front of the dress shirt she was wearing and yanking. Buttons flew and all of her skin from collarbone to knees was laid bare to him, without a stitch of fabric hiding her from him.

“Brian, that was a nice shirt.”

“It was MY shirt. And frankly, I’m more than willing to sacrifice it in the name of seeing you like this.” Bending to her chest, he captured a nipple between his teeth and nibbled delicately. Natasha thrashed under his ministrations, struggling to free her wrists from his ironclad grasp, before finally submitting to his dominance. Smirking against her skin, Brian whispered approvingly, “That’s my girl. Now . . . just lie back and relax; we’re going to be here for awhile.”

And for at least the next hour, Brian proceeded to show her all the different positions with which he could keep his word. Best cure for a hangover, ever.

Meanwhile, Bucky was seated at the kitchen table, sipping lazily on his third cup of coffee. Hansel Kuhn was at the stove, humming lightly under his breath as he prepared something for his son’s to eat. Marina’s heels clicked on the floor as she strode into the room, headed straight for the coffee pot – no doubt to take her lover a mug of the life-giving elixir. Smirking at the Grimm family patriarch, she teased, “You were out late last night, Vati. I didn’t hear you come in until just before dawn and I’m fairly certain that those are the same clothes you wore when we went out last night.”

Hansel’s grin was sly as he cocked his head slightly to the side. “I’m sure if you ask Maria, Tochter, she will be much more willing to tell you all about it.”

Marina’s grin was wicked as she crawled lazily, “Oh, I will. Trust me.” Turning to face the former Soviet spy, she greeted him brightly, “Dubroye utro, Tovrets.”

“Dubroye utro, uchashchiysya,” he replied with a small smile, taking a small sip of his coffee.

Marina’s eyes were warm as she considered her mentor. “You hurt my little boy, Bucky . . . I will chop off your cock and puree it, ponimayete?”
Bucky choked at the statement, his eyes flashing wide as his whole body jerked in surprise. Staring at her in horror, he took in the smirk on her lips and groaned, “You saw.”

“It was kinda hard to miss,” Marina agreed with a laugh.

Dropping his head onto the table, Bucky closed his eyes and thought back to the night before.

The Previous Night

Bucky laughed as he watched a very drunk Clint give some poor co-ed a lapdance, his heart warming at the sight of the young man having so much fun. Finally, after the girl was limp with a curious combination of giggles and sexual frustration, Clint got up and kissed her cheek with a noisy smacking sound. “Have a good night, gorgeous.”

“Oh-huh,” she gasped, waving at him as he sauntered back toward the mostly empty booth where Bucky was sitting alone and nursing his beer.

Clint slid into his seat, shifting as close as to Bucky as he could without sitting in the other man’s lap. “Hey Buck,” he breathed, dropping his head to rest against the former Soviet spy’s shoulder.

The sniper shifted his body slightly to allow Clint’s head to rest more comfortably there. “Hey Clint. Are you having fun?”

The younger man’s grin practically lit up the entire room as he nodded emphatically. “Totally. We haven’t really gone out to have any fun since Aaron left. It’s good to see Will cutting loose and having some fun, though he’s totally going to have the hangover from hell when he wakes up in the morning.”

“And you won’t?”

“Oh no, Buck . . . I’m trashed. But Will’s always so in control, that seeing him out of control is always a hilarious experience.” Nuzzling into the other man’s neck, he hummed against the skin he found here. “You smell nice.”

Bucky felt his body stir at the breathy, unconsciously seductive note in Clint’s voice. “Uh . . . thanks?”

The touch of Clint’s lips against his throat caused Bucky to jump a little bit, his brain audibly whirring in his ears as he struggled to process what was happening. “Yastreb? Clint, wha . . . what are you doing?”

“I’m going to eat you up like you’re birthday cake and ice cream,” Clint informed him, continuing to nibble, kiss and nuzzle against the skin under Bucky’s chin.

“Oookay?” Bucky asked in confusion, moaning as Clint’s lips found a particularly sensitive patch of skin. “Not that I’m complaining, but why?”

Clint’s cheeks flushed with a soft blush as he ducked his head. Fiddling with the buttons on Bucky’s shirt, like he’d seen Marina do to Will when she was being coy, he replied softly, “I kinda like ya, Buck.”

Bucky’s eyes widened at the information, feeling more than a little in awe as he stared at the young man for a moment. It was only when Clint began to look uncomfortable that Bucky realized he hadn’t said anything yet. Ducking his head, he murmured against Clint’s ear, “I kinda like you too, Clint.”
Clint’s responding grin was blinding, prompting Bucky to lift one hand to his neck and stroke his thumb tenderly over the curve of his jawline. “Awesome,” the younger of the two men whispered, before Bucky leaned forward and captured Clint’s mouth with his own once again. It had been the single most romantic kiss of Bucky’s life; at least until Clint had proceeded to yawn in his face and then pass out against his shoulder. The former Soviet sniper chuckled lightly, wrapping his arms around Clint’s waist and cradling him close to his body until it was time to head home.

Present

Looking up at Marina, he grimaced lightly, “I really do like him, Marina. I don’t want to hurt him. I promise.”

“I know you don’t. I’m just saying; he’s my favorite and as much as I like you, I will not hesitate to destroy you if you make him cry, okay?”

Bucky’s nod was silent as the subject of their conversation entered the kitchen. “Man . . . what the hell did I do last night?” Clint groaned, as he collapsed into the seat next to Bucky and crashed his head onto the table.

“You don’t remember anything from last night?” Bucky asked, some part of his battered heart shriveling a little at the knowledge.

“Bits and pieces,” Clint confessed with a hapless shrug, before shoving himself back up and grabbing a mug from the cabinet. Marina was fairly certain that she was the only one that noticed the way Bucky deflated at the information that Clint didn’t remember their kiss, reaching over to squeeze her mentor’s shoulder fondly. Completely unaware of the interaction between his sister and his friend, Clint turned to face his father and grinned brightly, “Sup Pops!”

Hansel turned to face his son, causing Clint’s eyes to fly open wide and the mug to go crashing onto the floor. It shattered into pieces amidst the sound of Marina’s startled cry of, “Clint!”

Clint moved forward, grabbing the edge of his father’s collar and yanking it out of his line of sight. There, vivid against the base of the man’s throat, was a dark purple blotch. Reaching out, he poked it warily, causing Hansel to flinch slightly with a soft grunt. “Holy shit . . . that’s a hickey,” Clint announced in a quiet undertone. Seeing the beginnings of a blush turn the former witch hunter’s ears bright red, he literally crowed with delight, “You have a hickey! Pops, you totally got LAID!”

Will’s voice was a low growl as he snapped, “Clint! Unless the world is ending, there is no reason to be shouting so chertov early.”

“Will! Pops got LAID!”

A roll of quicksilver eyes was Will’s only response as he grunted and accepted his coffee from Marina. “Yay for Dad. Are you ready for our meeting this morning?”

Clint’s eyes almost literally bugged from his face as he stared, “Dude! Pops? He got laid . . . by Agent Hill . . . after spending the last eight years as a monk. And you’re worried about a meeting!? Can’t you show a little enthusiasm?”

Brian’s question was confused as he and Natasha entered the kitchen, their hands swinging lightly between them. “Wait, what happened?”

Will took a sip of his coffee, before replying, “Dad and Agent Hill fucked.”

“Dude! Dad . . . about damned time! Up top, man!”
Hansel’s eyes rolled as he drawled, “Hyur interest in my love life is mildly disconcerting, mein Falki. Thank you, Will, for your disinterest.”

“Never said I wasn’t interested, Dad . . . just don’t care enough to get excited about it right now. We have a meeting with Nick Fury in twenty minutes, and we’re going to be late if we don’t go now. So, if it’s just the same with you, I’ll just say congratulations and move on.”

Shaking his head at his oldest son’s usual pragmatism, Hansel chuckled, “Thank you, Adler.”

“You’re welcome,” Will agreed with a chuckle, before starting to corral his younger brothers and Bucky towards the door. Pausing beside Marina, he bussed an absent kiss to her cheek, before following the rest of them outside and closing the doors behind him. “I’ll see you later this afternoon? Lunch? Two o’clock?”

“Sounds good,” Marina agreed, capturing his cheeks in her palms to pull him in for a real kiss. “Good luck with Nick, Misha.”

The oldest Grimm smiled at her, before disappearing from the kitchen and pulling the door closed behind him. For a long moment, Hansel and Marina remained silent and motionless in the kitchen, before a single glance at each other dissolved them into laughter. Finally, the Russian got herself under control enough to gather her keys and her purse. “Congratulations, Vati. Now, if you don’t mind . . . I’m pretty sure that Maria and I have an appointment with some vodka and a box of chocolates.”

Hansel’s groan was wretched as it followed her from the kitchen, earning only laughter from the former Russian spy as she left the house and climbed onto the back of her motorcycle. There was Girl Talk to be had.

Chapter End Notes

Translations:

(R) smut'yan - troublemaker (one of Marina's two nicknames for Brian)
(R) dikiy rebenok - wild child (one of Marina's two nicknames for Brian)
(R) lyubovnik - lover
(R) ponimayete? - understand?
(G) Vati - Dad (Marina's nickname for Hansel)
(G) Tochter - Daughter (Hansel's nickname for Marina)
(R) Dubroye utro - Good morning
(R) Tovrets - Architect (also creator, teacher; Marina's nickname for the Winter Soldier)
(R) uchashchiysya - Scholar (also student, pupil; the Winter Soldier's nickname for Marina)
(R) Yastreb - Hawk (Bucky's nickname for Clint; also Clint's Army Spec Ops Codename)
chertov - fucking
Wow I have been really lax on this story. The Advent has quite frankly stolen my soul; however, Finals are over so I am going to try and get back into posting a chapter a day on each of the stories. At least until Christmas, after which we'll go back to a chapter a day on the UALP. If it doesn't work out the way I want, I hope you can forgive me for it.

Surprisingly, the only translations are for this chapter, are in the text. So enjoy and let me know what you think. The next Advent should be up sometime tomorrow morning.

Enjoy!!!
speak. “Agent Brandt, do you understand the concept of a clandestine tactical team?”

“Of course sir,” Will answered, every inch the perfect soldier with his shoulders back and his hands clasped firmly behind his back.

“Then could you kindly explain to me why there are several pictures of S.H.I.E.L.D.’s best tactical squad out on the town last night? I’ve had several agents cleaning up the mess since early this morning, when the first report even came in,” Fury scolded, his tone cold as he watched the young man.

“My little brother, Jason, was promoted to detective, sir . . . with the Second Precinct. We wanted to celebrate with him,” the eldest Grimm answered, turning a narrowed eye on Brian to stall whatever the second oldest brother had been about to say.

“And celebrating means that you and your brothers were required to take your clothes off while standing atop a bar, ‘getting your groove on’ as they say? I’m fairly certain the kind of dirty dancing you and your brothers did last night is better suited to strippers than to commissioned officers of this country’s armed forces.”

“With all due respect, sir . . . I don’t think that removing our shirts qualifies as ‘taking our clothes’ off,” Clint replied meekly, even as his shoulders lifted up around his ears at the acidic look the Director aimed his way.

“When I want your opinion, Agent Barton . . . I will give it to you. Am I understood?”

“Yes sir,” the youngest Grimm murmured quietly, ducking his head.

Frowning at the younger man’s dejection, the Winter Soldier shifted slightly and bumped Clint with his hip. When Clint looked up at him, Bucky grinned and said quietly, “Ne obrashchayte vnimaniya na staroye vedro suyety, malo Yastreb. On prosto sumashshedshiy, on ne dobiralsya, chtoby pouchastovat ’vesel’y e. (Ignore the old fuss bucket, little Hawk. He’s just mad he didn’t get to join in on the fun.)”

Amused by the statement, Clint bit down hard on his lower lip in an attempt to smother his laughter, before his older brother’s question brought his attention back to the conversation at hand. The Colonel narrowed his eyes at the Director, speculating lightly, “Are we in trouble sir?”

Here Fury sighed, one hand coming up to pinch the bridge of his nose. “No, Agent Brandt, you are not in trouble. There is nothing in S.H.I.E.L.D.’s manuals that prevent its agents from going out and having fun. However, in the future, may I request a little more circumspection as to what activities you undertake in the pursuit of fun?”

“Understood,” Will agreed shortly, turning to face his brothers. “Go ahead and head out, guys.”

“Anytime, anywhere, Will,” the youngest brother agreed cheekily.

“Go on . . . I’ll catch up.”

Before long, Will and Fury were the only two left in Fury’s office. The Director cocked an eyebrow
at the Colonel, inquiring sharply, “Can I help you with something, Agent Brandt?”

Will’s lips curved upwards into the brittle smile he only used when he was angry, his words punching out of him bitterly. “Let me just state for the record right now that I know you’re my boss . . . but frankly I don’t give a damn about insubordination right now. You ever treat Clint like that again, Nick . . . and we will go rounds. He did not deserve that. You want to lash out at someone over my team’s personal conduct, you come to me and leave my brothers the hell out of it.”

“I think you’ve forgotten who you work for, Colonel.”

“That’s right . . . Colonel. I don’t work for you; if I decided to pull my team from your little organization and rejoin the Army full time, there wouldn’t be jackshit you could do about it,” Will growled, quicksilver eyes blazing as he glared at the director.

“And what about your brother, Brian, and your father?”

“Natasha and Jim would keep Brian in line just fine without us around. And nothing in this fucking world is going to keep Dad from Maria’s side, so you’re shit out of luck there. Bucky would sneak out as soon as Marina wasn’t here to make him stay. And I can guarantee you that Clint would leave S.H.I.E.L.D. in a second if Marina and I expressed a desire to return to the Army. And you would be out an Eye in the Sky.”

“I don’t appreciate being threatened, Agent Brandt,” Fury rumbled under his breath, glaring at the younger man.

“And I don’t appreciate people fucking with my brothers. You want to keep your tactical team, you consider who you’re talking to when you tell my baby brother to essentially shut the fuck up,” Will snapped, before rounding on his heel and storming from the office.

Fury slumped back in his chair, one visible eye slipping closed as he groaned under his breath.

“Damn the Grimms to an unpleasant hell.”

Meanwhile, Maria opened the door to see her best friend standing there, with a cheeky grin on her face, two bottles of wine dangling by the necks in one hand and a tray of steaming hot coffee in the other. Marina’s sharp eyes trailed up and down the other woman’s body, taking in her overall rumpled appearance. The assistant director wrapped her robe a little tighter around her body as she glared, “Not one word, Marina.”

“Come on, Maria . . . would I say anything that remotely sounded like congratulations on finally pinning that man into bed?” Marina teased, her nose wrinkling in amusement as Maria groaned at the bad pun.

“God, you are horrible. How long did it take you to come up with that joke?”

“At least half the ride here from the BX; the Grimms are not a wine drinking family, so I had to go and get some.”

“Marishka, it is nine o’clock in the morning. Surely it’s a little early to get drunk.”

“Who said anything about getting drunk? You and Hansel fucked last night; at the very least, that deserves a ‘good for you, Maria!’ toast.”

There was a low groan from the AD, before Maria flung open the door with a flourish. “Get in here, would you? I’m freezing my ass off.”
Marina chuckled, offering the coffee tray with a grin. “I got you your favorite . . .” she wheedled, shifting the tray lightly under Maria’s nose. “A half-caf café mocha with an chocolate shavings.”

Unable to resist the marvelous nectar that was coffee, Maria glared at her best friend as she plucked the drink from the tray. Taking a luxurious sip, the pretty assistant director sighed happily at the warmth that pooled in her belly. Then, realizing that she was softening, she glared at the Russian, “This does not mean that I forgive you.”

“Of course not,” the handler agreed with a fond laugh as she reached out and hugged her best friend fondly. Hands on both of the other woman’s shoulders, Marina pushed her back a step to be able to look into her face. Scanning over her features – eyes catching on the bright red blotch at the collar of Maria’s robe that was remarkably similar in size and placement to Hansel’s own – the Russian smirked as she inquired, “So . . . do I have to pester it out of you, or are you just going to confess all the delicious details?”

Maria rolled her eyes with a heavy sigh, whining lightly, “Do I actually have a choice?”

A single eyebrow cocked upward as the Russian watched her best friend, “Do you really need an answer to that?”

There was a wrenching groan from the woman as the Russian crowded her into her home. “So . . . how was he?”

“One of these days, we are going to have a talk about your obsession with getting Hansel and I into bed together.”

“Oh please . . . like it wasn’t everything you’ve been fantasizing it would be for months,” the former Red Room assassin snorted, with a roll of her eyes. Catching sight of the creep of color flooding up Maria’s neck, she crowed in amusement, “So you HAVE been fantasizing about him! I knew it! All right; start with those, and we’ll work our way up to the real deal.”

Maria flopped bonelessly onto her couch where she was pushed, lifting her coffee to her mouth as Marina sank cross-legged opposite corner of the couch. “Is this a two-way conversation?”

“If you really want to know the kinky things that Will and I do in bed, Maria, I will be more than happy to share; hey, you may even learn a few things. First, let me tell you that there are so many more positions than missionary; may I personally suggest getting a Kama Sutra? There are pictures and it is actually VERY informative.”

Maria’s lips flapped at her for a moment, as the assistant director gaped in shock, before Maria finally managed to gather her composure back together again and squeal indignantly, “MARINA!!!”
Chapter Notes

So now that the Advent is over, and I have recovered from the family insanity, we can get back to our regularly scheduled program. Enjoy!

Translations at the end of the chapter, as always.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter 84: Girl Talk

The former Russian spy giggled as she popped the cork on the wine and poured a couple glasses for her and her best friend. Passing one of them to Maria, she watched as the other woman took a few bracing gulps. Lifting her own goblet to her lips, chocolate eyes scanned the room as she took in the trashed living room. “So . . . it looks like you both had fun at least.”

Maria sighed as she looked around at her destroyed furniture. “Hansel is a bit . . . stronger . . . than I
“Remind me to take you shopping for some new furniture,” Marina mused lightly as she took a sip of her wine. “I know a few things about buying furniture to withstand the Grimms. I’ll give you a few pointers.”

Maria shook her head as she sighed, “Marishka, I love you, but I know better than to go shopping with you.”

“Hey! What is that supposed to mean?”

“If I got furniture shopping with you, I’m going to end up with a titanium-reinforced sex dungeon in my spare office,” Maria teased, watching as Marina rolled her eyes with a heavy sigh.

“Seriously, Maria . . . you shouldn’t believe everything you hear in the S.H.I.E.L.D. gossip mill.”

“I don’t know. I’m fairly certain I’ve seen that swing.”

“You can’t have seen that swing. We haven’t set it up yet,” the Russian muttered with a roll of her eyes. “Honestly . . . you buy one sex swing and suddenly you’re a dominatrix. I’m going to let you in on a secret, Maria; Misha is not really the type to be dominated.”

Maria’s eyes narrowed as she cocked her head at her best friend. “Are you telling me what I think you’re telling me?”

There was a coy smirk on the handler’s face as she winked at her best friend. “I guess that depends on what you think I’m telling you.”

“You’re the submissive one in the relationship? That is the most absurd thing I have ever heard!” the Assistant Director of S.H.I.E.L.D. insisted, her eyes going wide with surprise.

“I’m not sure why that’s surprising to you. I haven’t been a Major in three years but Misha still calls me ‘Major’. And every time he does, I spend a lot of the rest of my day thinking about all the different ways I can get him into bed as quickly as possible,” Marina commented, her head cocking as she watched Maria take in the new information. “Misha is kinda all about the control. He’s not usually very willing to give it up.”

“But . . . you’re so in control. I mean, you’re the first one anyone even sees in your relationship. The Colonel is so . . . passive.”

“I guess we technically switch hit. I take the reins in social outings; he’s the lead on missions and in bed. For the most part, it works for us.” Pausing, Marina suddenly realized what her best friend had done and rounded on the woman with a cocked eyebrow. “Oh, that’s cute . . . you think you’re distracting me.”

Maria groaned as she dropped her head back against the back of the couch. “I had hoped. Damn.”

The Russian sniggered as she watched Maria mope over the failed attempt, before settling more comfortably into her corner of the couch. “So . . . get to the dirty details, Vorobey. We all saw the bite you took out of his neck; did you nibble anywhere else a little more inappropriate?”

Maria squeaked at the question, eyes wide as she stared at her best friend. “You didn’t seriously just ask me that?!”

“Maria . . . you just got fucked. I think the time for propriety is long over,” Marina reminded her with
a lazy sip of her wine. Leaning over, the Russian traced a tender finger over the hickey at her friend’s neck. “So, did you mutually decide to mark your territory, or was it kind of an accident?”

The Assistant Director’s hand slapped over the top of the hickey as she demanded, “I don’t have any idea what you’re talking about.”

“Of course you don’t, because that bruise on the side of Hansel’s neck isn’t impressive looking at all. I gotta tell you, Maria; if you thought that people were gossiping before? That beauty on your own neck is going to make you reevaluate.”

Marina smirked as Maria suddenly turned scarlet down to the roots of her hair. Groping blindly for a pillow, the woman pressed it hard to her face with a heavy groan. “Oh fuck,” she whimpered, causing the former Red Room assassin to laugh.

“I would like to take this moment to remind you that I did tell you, you’d had too much to drink,” Marina teased, her nose wrinkling adorably as she chuckled.

“You’re not helping, Gadyuka.”

“I wasn’t aware that I was supposed to be helping, Vorobey.”

“What am I going to do?” the assistant director wailed, her eyes wide with horror as she watched her best friend giggle. “I can’t be seen to make mistakes!”

Marina cocked a single eyebrow at the phrase; she remembered a very similar conversation that had taken place many years ago, and her response now was the same it had been then, “Do you think last night was a mistake?”

Biting down hard on her lower lip, Maria ducked her head into her hands with a groan. There was a long second, as she contemplated her answer before shaking her head. “No, I don’t think last night was a mistake.”

“That at this point, there’s only one thing to do now.”

Maria’s eyebrow cocked upward as she considered her best friend’s words. When she did speak, she was understandably wary. “And what is that?”

“Be happy and enjoy him.”

Chapter End Notes

Translations:

Vorobey - sparrow (Marina's nickname for Maria)
Gadyuka - viper (Marina's former code name given to her by the KGB and the Academy's Red Room Program)
Strength in Submission

Chapter Notes

Okay, I apologize for how long this took. But I am VERY bad at smut and I struggled hard with this chapter. It is rough, but my betas approved, so I would offer it to you anyway. Only one translation this chapter.

So this chapter contains some light, consensual D/s play.

Enjoy it, okay?

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter 85: Strength In Submission

It was almost half past one in the afternoon when Will looked up from the stack of paperwork he was hacking away at, to see his personal assistant fidgeting nervously in the doorframe. Smothering his sigh, he glanced at his watch before looking up at her. “This had better be very important, Betty. Agent Petrovka and I have plans at two.”

“General Perron is on the phone for you, Agent Brandt . . . he said it had something to do with General Ross.”

Will’s eyes slipped closed as he groaned, his head falling against the backrest of his desk chair. “What line is he on?”

“Line two, sir,” she informed him, before backing cautiously from the room and pulling the door closed behind her.
Reaching forward, Will yanked the headset from its cradle and punched the button for the appropriate line. Tucking the phone in the crook of his neck, he growled, “Dave . . . I don’t mean to be rude, but I actually managed to convince Marina to go OUT to lunch with me, so make it quick. What the hell did Ross do now?”

There was a quiet hum as the other man considered that. Then, David Perron spoke . . . and Will’s heart stopped, “You ever heard of the Brothers Cahill?”

It was about twenty minutes after the hour that Will finally bolted into the little café where Marina had agreed to meet him for lunch. The Russian was sitting alone at a little table, sipping on a glass of wine and flipping through files on her tablet as she waited. Waving the little maitre d’ away, he weaved his way through the tables to her side. Placing his hands on the seat back, he bent and kiss the spot at the base of her throat, murmuring, “Sorry I’m late,” against the skin he found there.

Marina’s voice was fond as she teased, “So, what matter of national security are you going to use as your excuse this time, Misha?”

The Colonel could feel the strain in the edges of his smile, and it was no surprise to him that his partner picked up on it immediately. Her smile eased away as she watched him, eyes steady as he took his seat and ordered a double whiskey, hold the ice. Lifting her goblet to her lips once again, she watched him over the rim as he closed his eyes and dropped his head back. Sensing that he didn’t want to talk about it at that moment, she forced herself to laugh, “So, Maria needs new furniture.”

There was relieved amusement in her partner’s eyes as he smirked. “Oh really?”

“Apparently, Hansel is a little destructive during sex.”

Will snorted hard, chuckles jerking his shoulders as he nodded his thanks to the waitress who brought him his drink. “So did Maria cough up all the details?”

Marina grinned, a broad wink causing Will to laugh. “I have been sworn to secrecy. However, I have been duly informed that Black Forest cake is officially Maria Hill’s new favorite treat . . . to be enjoyed before and after every meal.”

The Russian squealed with laughter as her boyfriend choked on his whiskey, his eyes going wide as he stared at her. “Marina, that’s my dad . . . and quite frankly more than I ever wanted to know about his sex life.”

“Don’t ask questions you don’t actually want the answers too, Misha,” the handler teased, her nose crinkling at him.

Shaking his head, he smirked at the smug look on her face. “Do I even want to know who won the office pool?”

Reminded of the office pool she’d started, regarding how long it would take the notoriously slow-moving couple to finally get their acts together, Marina giggled. “Actually, it was Fury.”

Eyes widening, Will chuckled lightly, “You have got to be shitting me?”

Marina’s head shook as she chirped, “Nope.”

“So how much did you manage to make off with?”

“Seeing as I set up the pool, I made off with about twenty five percent of the pot. Which is just about
enough to spend either a week in the Hamptons or two days in the Bahamas. So what do you think, Misha? Wanna take a vacation, just the two of us? There will be sand, sun, fun, and me in a teeny tiny bikini,” she drawled, batting her eyes at him lightly.

“Let’s be honest, Marina, you don’t actually want to go on vacation . . . you just want to avoid Maria’s vengeance when she finds out you set up the pool.”

“I don’t think you understand the part where Maria is going to kill me when she finds out. If there’s one thing that every spy knows, it’s when to lie low . . . this would be a good time. And if I happen to get laze on a sunny beach somewhere and get a tan, all the better,” the Russian laughed, with a wicked smirk and a haphazard shrug. “You don’t have to come, if you don’t want.”

“Like hell I’m going to miss out on the chance to see you in as little clothing as possible, as often as possible.”

Marina’s nose crinkled as she teased, “Deviant.”

Will smirked as he saluted her with his glass. “You love it.”

There was a sigh as Marina slouched backwards bonelessly in her chair, sighing happily, “I do.”

Taking a sip of his whiskey, Will watched as Marina drifted off into her submissive headspace. “I think we have a swing to set up, right?”

“Mmhm,” Marina hummed, chin dipping lightly in a lazy nod.

“What do you say we set it up this afternoon and try it out?”

The Russian giggled as she teased, “I thought you and Clint had a rematch scheduled for this afternoon.”

Will shrugged indifferently, reminding her fondly, “Clint and I will always have a rematch scheduled. He will always be a more accurate shot than I am.” Taking a sip of his whiskey, he remarked lightly, “So, how about setting up that swing this afternoon?”

There was a wicked smirk as Marina agreed lazily, “I think I can take the rest of the afternoon off. Vika can take care of anything pressing that comes up.”

Two hours later, Marina stood in the doorframe of hers and Will’s bedroom, watching Will unpack the box. Shirtless and barefoot, he wore only a pair of soft jeans that sat low on his hips and showed off the flawless cut of his pelvis. There was also the added bonus that every time he bent over, it clung to the curves of his ass and sent delicious shivers down her spine. “Looking good, Misha.”

He grinned at her over his shoulder, setting everything aside to come over and haul her into his body. The sensation of being skin to skin with him was heady and she dropped her head back, offering him her throat with a soft moan. His fingers were tender as they pressed into the flesh just below the hem of her sports bra, his belly warm where it pressed against her own abdomen. The tiny jogging shorts she wore caused a sting of frustration, even as she reveled in the rub of his jeans against the material. Almost against her will, her hips undulated against his own, causing a low growl in her partner’s throat and the instinctive tightening of his hands on her pelvis. “You’re looking a little flushed, samaya malen’kaya . . . are you feeling warm?” he teased in a husky undertone, his body bowing forward over her own, his lips nibbling deliciously on her earlobe.

“Sometimes your obliviousness to your own hotness is exasperating,” Marina muttered lightly, circling one of her fingernails slowly over a brown, flat nipple.
Smirking at her, he kissed her firmly, before turning her toward the door and slapping her ass firmly, “Go on . . . you’re being very distracting and pretty soon I’m going to just say screw the swing and take you up against the wall.”

“And in what world does that sound like a bad idea?” she laughed, squealing happily as he lunged after her with a growl. Dashing away, she giggled the whole way down the stairs and into the study to hide.

It seemed like an eternity, before she heard her boyfriend bellow, “Marishka! Where the hell is the studfinder?!!”

Getting up from where she was reading a book in her armchair, she moved into the garage and got it down from the wall. Jogging quickly up the stairs, she entered their bedroom. Catching sight of him bent over and rifling through his toolbox, an idea flit through her head and she smirked. “If I hold this up to you, will it beep do you think?”

Will cocked an eyebrow at her. “What are you talking about?”

“Well it’s a studfinder, isn’t it?” she asked, coming forward to pass it lightly over the skin of his chest. When it did nothing, she pouted, demanding, “Why isn’t this thing working?”

Will’s hand came up to wrap around her own, stripping the little piece of equipment from her fingers. “Wrong kind of stud, Marina.”

“There’s more than one kind of stud?” she asked guilelessly, the faux innocence in her wide eyes directly at odds with the wicked smirk on her lips.

“Only one kind of stud you’re going to need to concern yourself with, Marina,” he agreed, a smoldering look in his quicksilver eyes as they raked up and down her petite frame.

“And what kind of stud is that?” she asked, squeaking in surprise as Will’s hand shot out and dragged her to him.

There was a breathless moment before Marina found herself bent over his forearm and his hand coming down briskly against her backside in a flurry of stinging spanks. A lovely heat radiated from the spot and Marina arched backwards into the sensation with a moan. Finally, he hauled her upright and turned her toward the corner. “Nose in the corner, hands on the wall. Do not move,” he ordered firmly, a sharp smack causing a squeak as she bolted into position. His body came up behind hers, his hands bracing over hers and his arms bracketing around her to trap her in place. “Behave yourself, and there’ll be more where that came from. Am I understood, Major?”

“Yes sir,” Marina whimpered, unconsciously shifting her body back into the curve of his own.

Another spank jolted her straight and she bowed her head submissively, earning an approving hum from her partner. “Good girl,” he murmured into her hair, before the warmth of his body was gone and there was the sound of movement behind her again.

To Marina, it seemed like she was banished to that corner for forever. The delicious heat in her ass was distracting, and it was all that Marina could do to leave her hands beside her head. Will had been very particular about how he wanted her; and she knew what would happen if she reached to soothe her backside. At the thought, she let out a soft moan as she considered both the drawbacks and the benefits of disobedience. Obviously, rubbing the infamed skin would offer some kind of relief. At least until Will yanked her over his knee and punished her for it . . . which would offer its own pleasures as well.
Marina knew her lover, and knew his habits. Will had not truly spanked her; had only warmed her backside a little to give her some distraction from her amorous intentions. Marina knew that if and when he did spank her that afternoon – because he would; she had been trying to provoke him into it for days – she would be bent over his lap as he dealt out the welcome pain, crying and begging for it to end with her hands tied into the small of her back. The Russian had not been lying when she told her best friend that Will was very much the dominant lover in their relationship. She submitted to him both because she wanted to and because he needed her to.

It was no secret to anyone that the Colonel suffered at the hands of his demons. The torture he was forced to undergo as a child had left him with the need to hold complete control over his own life. He lived with his brothers’ lives in the palm of his hands every day. And as much as he would like it to be otherwise, there was no way to control how each day would end. There was no way to determine how a deployment would end, no way to guarantee that everyone would come back alive and whole. There was no control to be found out in the field.

However, complete control could be found in one’s own bed, assuming of course that your partner was willing. And Marina was willing. It was in the sanctity of their bedroom that Marina allowed her control to be taken from her and sacrificed on the altar of Will’s passion.

Finally, just as Marina began to contemplate the risks of drawing her lover’s attention, a pair of hands came to rest on the bare flesh at her sides. Rough, blunt fingers drummed lightly against her belly, causing gooseflesh to bubble across her skin. There was a rough groan as Will tilted her hips backwards to angle her away from the wall. Lips pressed against the back of her neck, as he murmured, “You were such a good girl. I’m so proud of you, Major.”

The Russian whimpered, as his thumbs slipped under the waistband of her shorts and began to ease them down her hips. There was an approving hum as he took in the pink tinge to her backside. “How does your bottom feel?” he teased, smoothing one hand over the skin.

Marina arched her back, pressing her ass into the curve of his hands. “Permission to speak freely, sir?”

“Granted,” he agreed, his grin obvious in his tone.

“I think you’re getting a little lax, sir.”

There was a dark chuckle from her lover, his voice low and gravelly as he murmured, “Oh really? Well then . . . let’s see what we can do to change that.”

In seconds, she found herself over his lap and his hand came down hard over the bare skin of her rump. There was a reedy cry as she arched backward, his free hand resting firmly between her shoulder blades. There was pain, of course; but above all, there was triumph and the pleasure to be found in it. If there was one thing that the Academy had taught her, it was that there was strength in surrender; and even thought she was the submissive here, it was she who held the power.

Hours later, when there were bruises in the curve of her bottom and Will between her thighs, she reveled in the knowledge that it was she alone who had broken his control.

Chapter End Notes

Translations:
samaya malen'kaya - my little one (one of Will's nicknames for Marina)
Chapter Notes

Translations at the end of the chapter, as always. Just some lighthearted fun between Hansel and his sons! Enjoy!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter 86: The Grimm Inquisition

It was late that evening when Will woke to the sound of voices and laughter in the kitchen. Marina stirred lightly in the bed beside him, before settling as Will’s hand came to rest on her shoulder. “Who is it?” she slurred, eyes blurry with sleep as she blinked up at him.

There was a frown, as he concentrated before rolling his eyes. “Sounds like Dad and the boys.” Leaning over, the Colonel pressed a gentle kiss to the bare curve of her shoulder. “I’ll handle it, Marishka . . . go back to sleep.”
The Russian hummed deep in her throat, her head tilting upwards to catch his kiss against the apple of her cheek. “Hurry back . . . it’s supposed to get cold tonight,” she murmured, rolling over and tucking her pillow under her cheek again.

Will smirked against her skin, before tossing back the covers and grabbing up his jeans from the floor. Easing them up over his hips, he left them unbuttoned before bending to kiss her temple. “Ya lyublyu tebya, Marishka,” he whispered against her skin.

“Lyublyu tebya, Mishka,” she murmured lazily, as her breathing slowed as she slipped again into sleep.

There was a fond smile on his face, as he eased off the bed. He crossed to the dresser and hauled out one of his t-shirts, pulling it on over his head. Padding from the room on bare feet, he moved quickly down the stairwell. “Guys . . . I don’t know what the hell is going on down here, but could you keep it down please?”

Clint looked back at his brother, a wide grin glittering on his lips as he joked, “Will! We’re trying to get Dad to give up the deets from last night!”

The Colonel glanced over at his father, the two men rolling their eyes at the youngest Grimm’s characteristic exuberance. Striding into the kitchen, Will’s body moved through the motions of setting up the coffee machine and starting a fresh pot, glancing sidelong through his lashes at Jason, who was once again seated on the counter. The middle Grimm blushed sheepishly, jumping easily off the counter before moving to take a seat at the table with Brian, Clint and Hansel.

There was a long silence, each of the brothers obviously waiting for Will to be appropriately caffeinated – and therefore in a more accommodating mood – before they continued with their interrogation. Finally, he added a healthy spoonful of sugar to his mug, a soft sigh escaping him as he took a bracing sip of the brew. Turning back to the four, he continued to sip on his coffee as he took each of them in. “All right . . . now what’s all this about deets?”

“Will . . . Dad got laid. Remember?”

“I remember; Marina told me that there’s a hickey matching Dad’s on AD Hill’s neck too. Marishka is particularly pleased with herself because of it,” the Colonel chuckled, setting the mug aside and crossing his arms over his chest.

Clint’s face lit up at the same time that Hansel let out a wretched groan, both of them responding to the agent’s words with decidedly different reactions. “I knew it!” Clint crowed, with a wide grin. “Proper analysis insists that we must have all of the evidence in order to make an accurate hypothesis of the events of last night. Therefore . . . Pops, I’m going to need you to remove your shirt.”

A single eyebrow cocked upward at the declaration, robin’s egg eyes amused as he watched his youngest son. “And why the hell should I do that, Falki?”

“Cause there is obviously more evidence hidden beneath it. Like I said, we need all the evidence for a thorough analysis. Tell him, Will; you’re an analyst.”

Will snorted as he shook his head, “Oh no . . . you are on your own, Clint. Leave me the hell out of this.”

Clint pouted at his brother, before turning his attention back onto his father. Reaching for the hem, he insisted, “Come on, Pops . . . take off your shirt.”

Hansel’s hands smacked at Clint’s own as he fended off the sniper’s intentions. “Clinton Francis
Grimm . . . you are not analyzing my sex life.”

At the words, Clint crowed excitedly, “Aha! So you do have a sex life?”

The German groaned at his son’s excitement, waving an insistent arm at Will. “Why do hyu not analyze hyur brother’s sex life?”

“A . . . because Marina would kill me and B . . . because Will would kill me. Not to mention, there are somethings that I don’t need to know . . . and what the two of them get up to in bed is only one of those things.”

The Colonel smirked as he saluted his little brother with his coffee mug, “And Marina and I thank you for that discretion, Clint.”

Turning his attention back onto his father, Clint once again reached for the hem of his father’s t-shirt. Brian grinned as the two men did battle, teasing lazily, “What’s the matter Dad? Something embarrassing you don’t want us to see under those clothes?”

“I vill thank hyu not to encourage hyur Bruder, Brian Joshua,” Hansel scolded, finally managing to twist Clint’s arm up behind his back and get his forearm around his son’s throat. “Behave, mein Falki,” came the stern rumble, the witch hunter giving his son a brief shake to emphasize his admonition.

Brian grinned and leaned over, getting a good grip on the hem of their father’s shirt and starting to draw it upwards while Hansel focused his attention on containing the archer’s wriggling. It was only when a waft of air brushed over bare skin that Hansel realized what his son was doing, and released Clint to turn his attention onto Brian.

Brian was struggling to pull the shirt over his father’s head, with Clint’s help, when a blurry-eyed and grumpy Marina stumbled into the kitchen. Slamming to a stop at the sight before her, she took in the sheepish grins on the two boys’ faces with a sleep frown. “You know, if I didn’t know you boys so well . . . this would seem a little strange. After all, it’s not every day I walk in to see my boys trying to rip their father’s clothes off.”

“But his clothes . . . just his shirt,” Brian insisted, giving Marina a sly wink before returning his attention to the job at hand.

Marina frowned at the information, looking over at her lover as he reached out to grasp her wrist, drawing her towards him and out of the line of fire. There was a wide yawn from the young Russian as she settled comfortably in Will’s lap, a small whimper of pleasure slipping quietly from her lips as her rear came in contact with his thigh. Turning into him, she tucked her head under his chin and wiggled her rump against his leg a little bit to get the most out of the feeling.

Will’s eyebrow rose at her, his free hand coming to tap lightly on her bottom as he brought his mug to his lips. “Bud’po-prezhnemu,” he instructed her in a low undertone, a smirk on his lips as she stilled obediently.

Pressing a kiss to her forehead, the Colonel let his partner tuck herself under his chin and close her eyes even as he returned his attention onto the conversation happening between father and sons. “So, why are we so interested in Dad’s love life, anyway? I don’t know about you, but I’m pretty sure we ALL knew that him falling into bed with Agent Hill was inevitable.”

“Just because something is inevitable, does not automatically make it boring. There are matching hickeys; more happened last night than just ‘falling into bed with Agent Hill’.”
Hansel snorted at the insistence, rolling his eyes as he countered, “And even if that vere true, I fail to see how that is any of hyur business.”

“You’re our dad . . . Maria is our boss . . . she dumps you . . . suddenly we’re the ones getting fucked,” Brian insisted, with a roll of his eyes.

“It took us eight years to get to this point, Bri . . . I believe I can assure hyu that neither of Spatzi nor I are willing to squander it so soon.”

Marina’s voice was a deadly, if sleepy, hum as she insisted, “It is about now, that I feel as though I should remind you, Vati . . . you break my best friend’s heart and I will break your neck. Ponimayete?”

Hansel’s smile was fond as he watched her yawn widely, her fingers coming up to tangle lazily in the neck of his oldest’s shirt. “Ja, meine Tochter . . . I believe we understand each other perfectly.”

Another yawn caught the young handler off guard, before she murmured, “Good.” Looking up at her paramour with half-mast eyes, she insisted, “I’m going back to bed. Are you going to join me or stay down here with the idioty?”

The Colonel smirked down at her, as he bent his head to nibble teasingly at her lips. “Go on up, Marishka . . . I’ll be right behind you.”

“Da,” she agreed with a slow blink, her body flowing off Will’s knee. The woman’s exhaustion was evident in the way her frame drifted through the air, pausing briefly to hug each of her boys goodnight and bestow gentle kisses to their temples. “Spokoynoy nochi, moi mal’chiki, (Good night, my boys,)” she murmured, before she wafted from the room like a wayward breeze once more.

It was about then, that the Colonel finished his coffee and got up from his chair to set the mug in the sink. Turning back to his brothers, he smoothed his features into his face. “If you’re going to insist on pestering Dad, keep it down. Because if you wake either me or Marina again . . . let’s just say, the night is going to end on a painful note. Agreed?”

“Yes sir!” the three brothers chirped, blatantly angelic looks on their face as they grinned at him.

Will rolled his eyes and turned away, heading back up the stairs. And if the sound of his brothers laughing and carousing was much quieter than it would have otherwise been, Will never did remember to thank them for it.

Chapter End Notes

Translations:
(R) Ya lyublyu tebya - I love you
(G) Falki - Little Hawk (Hansel's nickname for Clint)
(G) Bruder - brother
(R) Bud’ po-prezhnemu - Be still
(G) Spatzi - Little Sparrow (Hansel's nickname for Maria)
(R) Ponimayete
(G) Ja/Nein - Yes/No
(G) meine Tochter - my Daughter (Hansel's nickname for Marina)
(R) idiocy - idiots
(R) Da/Net - Yes/No
Chapter Notes

Sorry about not posting last night. There has been a lot going on at home, and it's hard to get into a regular rhythm when there's family and chaos all over the place. Today, three's rumors of Budapest. Enjoy!

Translations, as always, are at the end of the chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
Chapter 87: Secrets and Ties

Clint Grimm was a lot of things; prankster, enthusiastic, deaf, a secret agent, a sniper, an officer... a total brat. But there was one thing he was better at than anyone else in the world. He had some of the best instincts that S.H.I.E.L.D. had ever laid claim to. So when Marina came storming into the kitchen early one morning in February, Clint knew that someone was in trouble. And judging by the way that the Russian was glaring at his oldest brother, Will... it was fortunately not him.

Will’s eyes were warm, if understandably wary, as he grinned up at his longtime partner over the rim
of his coffee mug. “Good morning, Marishka . . . to what do I owe the pleasure of such a formidable
 Gloria?”

“Don’t you ‘Marishka’ me, William Michael Grimm. I just got off the phone with Denise. Anything
you forgot to mention in the last month or so?”

There was a resigned sigh, before the Colonel inquired, “Do I even want to know how it is that
Denise has access to her husband’s top secret files?”

“It could be because some people don’t keep secrets from their partners . . . unlike a certain someone
I know.”

“It’s a rumor, Marina. I didn’t want to get your hopes up, until there was something more
substantial.”

“A rumor about a Cahill!” the handler snapped, immediately drawing the attention of the entire
room.

Will took a deep breath to calm his temper, a small frown on his lips as he reminded her sharply,
“Cahill is not an uncommon name. I don’t know anything about the person in question other than the
fact that it is a man; all I know is that there is an American using the name Cahill in Budapest.”

“What are we doing to substantiate those rumors?” the woman demanded, her arms coming up to
cross over her chest as she watched her lover. “You’ve known about this for a month! It could be
Aaron and we could have already lost him!”

Will’s mouth opened as he moved to protest, before Brian spoke up from where he and Natasha
were sitting opposite Will at the table. “Can I butt in here for a second?”

The couple both turned to the second oldest Grimm and snapped simultaneously, “What!?”

“I think there are some of us in the room who are a little lost. Could someone please tell us what the
hell is going on?”

Marina’s eyes blazed, even as she forced a smile and turned to face her second oldest charge.
“Apparently, General Perron called Misha last month. Someone has been working undercover for
the DOD in Budapest, answering to the name Cahill. There’s an order in the system that everything
with the name ‘Cahill’ attached is to be routed to Misha’s desk.”

“It’s probably nothing. Marishka . . . they would have vetted this guy up and down. I highly doubt
it’s Aaron.”

“How do you know that? Are there agents on the ground? Have you sent anyone to look into it?”

Will sighed as he shook his head, “No, there are no agents on the ground; I requested a small team be
sent to Budapest to look into it. S.H.I.E.L.D. denied the request; Fury didn’t see the point in wasting
manpower on something that was probably a ghost anyway.”

At the words, Marina dropped bonelessly into a chair. There was a sheen of unshed tears in her eyes
as she stared at her hands, while her lover sat back in his chair and watched her think. Finally, the
Russian sniffed hard, one hand coming up to brush at her eyes before she returned his attention onto
her partner. “What about a volunteer team? Completely off books and off record; could we send a
volunteer squad?”

“Theoretically, yes we could. But who do you know that would be willing to give up their time for
an assignment which will be highly dangerous and entirely unpaid?”

Natasha was watching the couple, slanting her eyes in Brian’s direction at Will’s mostly rhetorical question. Brian was already watching her, both of them sharing the same thought before Will had even finished speaking. Brian leaned sideways and rested his chin on the redhead’s shoulder, speaking lowly into her hair. “What do you think? Care to take a Hungarian vacation with me?”

Natasha grinned up at him, as she affected a passable Southern accent, “Why Mr. Grimm . . . I thought you would never ask.”

Brian leered at her, a lewd wink causing her to giggle, before he pressed a fond kiss to her cheek. Turning to his brother and de facto sister-in-law, he spoke up, “Natasha and I can go.”

Both officers turned to look at him at the statement, Will’s eyes serious while Marina was frowning in concern. “Are you sure, dikiy rebenok? You both would be completely without S.H.I.E.L.D. resources; Misha and I will bankroll the operation, of course, but you’ll be on your own once you get there.”

“Nothing quite like a suicide mission in the morning to start the day, don’t you think, Tasha?”

“I think you’re a crazy bastard,” Natasha teased, a fond grin on her lips as she wrinkled her nose at him.

“Ah, Tasha . . . but you do say the sweetest things,” Brian laughed, one wrist coming up to press against his temple in a mock-swoon, his body collapsing to rest against her shoulder.

Marina snorted at the lighthearted teasing between the complicated couple, turning her attention onto Clint and Bucky, the two snipers chuckling as they watched Brian wind Natasha up for his own amusement. “And what about you two; are you in? If things go pear-shaped, I’ll need to be able to send someone in to recover both of them.”

Grinning, Clint nodded firmly. “Sounds like a plan, Marishka. Bucky thinks so too; huh Buck?”

Bucky’s smile was small and pained as he turned his attention onto his Grimm counterpart, before looking up at his protégé with a small nod. Marina frowned, glancing quickly between the two men, before asking in a soft tone, “Are you sure, Zima? You just got home from Columbia.”

“Da,” he agreed quietly, pushing himself into a standing position and reaching out to squeeze her shoulder. “I’m in, uchashchiysya.”

A fond smile tilted up the corners of her lips as she stretched on tiptoes to wrap her arms around the older man’s shoulders. “Thank you, Tovrets.”

He ruffled her hair fondly, before pushing her back a step and stepping away from his chair. “You are welcome, uchenyy.” His arms stretched out wide as he yawned, arching backwards and into a graceful curve. “It was a long flight home, so I think I am going to head to bed. Wake me when you need me; I’ll be ready.”

Marina nodded, eyes flickering towards Clint as the youngest Grimm grinned up at the older man when he ruffled his hair fondly. “Sleep well, Bucky,” the young sniper chirped, a dull flush creeping up his neck as Bucky’s hand lingered for a second more than was strictly necessary on the curve at the back of his head.

“Thank you, Yastreb; I will try my best.”
Ducking her head, the Russian withheld her giggles purely by strength of will at the awestruck look on Clint’s face as the older sniper disappeared from the kitchen and up the stairs toward the room he shared with Hawkeye. Her youngest watched the former Commando move through the house for as long as he could, before he got up and made some flimsy excuse before following.

Marina chuckled as she watched her youngest go; it was no secret, to her at least, that Clint was harboring a pretty big crush on the former Soviet spy. Of course, there was also the part where Bucky was carrying a torch for the youngest Grimm as well. It was regrettable, but there were times that she seriously asked herself when she had become the family matchmaker.

First Maria and Hansel . . . now Clint and Bucky. It was a good thing she was happily “engaged”; otherwise, all the young love in the air could make a woman sick. Turning back to Brian and Natasha, she insisted, “Let me make the arrangements and handle a few details. As soon as I have an itinerary for you, I’ll let you guys know.”

Hansel spoke from the doorway, causing most of the room to jump in ill-concealed surprise. “What are you going to do about S.H.I.E.L.D.? Maria will not be pleased that you are arranging this behind her back.”

Marina’s smile was small as she shrugged, “I’ll tell Maria; she won’t stop me. It’s on our own time, and on our own dime. She won’t bother getting upset about the op, until it becomes her problem to fix.”

Twenty four hours later, a small, unmarked plane landed on a private airstrip in Budapest, carrying two very attractive tourists. The man was obviously American, with his companion pegged as either Russian or Ukranian at first glance. His blond hair was only a shade darker than the scruff on his chin and a tough, calloused hand came up to slip his glasses down his nose as he took in his surroundings. The woman’s hand nestled comfortably in his elbow, her scarlet curls flying carelessly in the wind as they strolled indolently down the stairs together.

Finally, the woman spoke up, her accent surprisingly American as she laughed, “Toto . . . I don’t think we’re in Kansas anymore.”

He grinned in reply, bending slightly to kiss her cheek fondly. Stroking his thumb over the shiny gold ring on her left wedding finger, he inquired lightly, “Shall we go cause some mischief and create some mayhem, Mrs. Gamble?”

There was a grin, as Natasha Romanoff transitioned flawlessly into Natalie Gamble, Natalie’s Midwest intonation a comfortable drawl as she replied, “Shall we indeed, Mr. Gamble.”

Chapter End Notes

Translations:

dikiy rebenok - wild child (one of Marina's nicknames for Brian)
Zima - Winter (one of Marina's nicknames for Bucky Barnes)
Da/Net - Yes/No
uchashchiysya - scholar (one of Bucky's nicknames for Marina)
Tovrets - Architect (one of Marina's nicknames for Bucky Barnes)
Uchenyy - Student (one of Bucky's nicknames for Marina)
Yastreb - Hawk (Bucky's nickname for Clint; also Clint's Spec Ops code name)
Okay, so I am SOOOOOOOOO sorry about the lateness of this post. I have had NO INTERNET for like a week now, and before that, I was still trying to get everything in order for the new semester, and pack away Christmas decorations, and essentially get my life back into SOME semblance of order. So, I heartily apologize for how long this took. With any luck, there will be another chapter tonight and we'll be back to our regularly scheduled program tomorrow, with a chapter a day. *cross fingers and prays really hard*

Translations are at the end of the chapter, as always. Enjoy!!

Chapter Notes

Chapter 88: Love and Budapest

The rooftop of the little house the Brothers Grimm shared on base was Clint Grimm’s very favorite place in the whole world. He and his older brother Kenny had come up here all the time before the older of the two Grimms had disappeared in the flame of an explosion and reemerged as Aaron Cross. They’d bring a six pack of beer, sit on the very edge of the roof and just watch the world. Kenny would work on his memory – reciting all of the things they’d seen the last time they’d been on the roof – and Clint would unload about whatever mission he’d recently come home from. It had been Their Spot . . . and now it was just Clint’s.

Sitting on the edge of the roof, his legs swinging out over open space and sipping on a bottle of beer, Clint felt very alone. He never missed his brother – his best friend – more than when he sat in this exact spot. And if there was ever a time he needed his best friend’s – his brother’s – advice, it was
Finally, a very familiar voice spoke from the attic window behind him. “I thought I would find you up here. I’ve been looking for you.”

A small sad smile curved his lips as he twisted in place to look back at his sister. The Russian was smiling at him fondly, as he took her in. She wore a pair of ratty, ripped jeans under a tight-fitting black tank top. Wavy dark hair was pulled back off her face by a plain back headband, the strands blowing chaotically in the wind. She was barefoot, toes pointed as she stepped through the window and out onto the roof. Reaching out, he offered her a hand, bracing her as she came to sit beside him.

Once she was seated and had cracked open a bottle from the six-pack beside him, Clint shuffled closer to her and rested his head against her shoulder. Marina giggled lightly, her free arm coming up to wrap around his shoulders and pull him that small inch closer. Far-sighted grey eyes slipped closed at the familiar touch of her lips on his forehead, earning a soft sigh.

There was a long minute of silence where the two just enjoyed each other’s company. Finally, Clint whispered reverently, “I’ve missed this. Spending time together, just the two of us.”

The pretty handler smiled as she nodded, dropping her forehead to rest against his temple. “Me too, *dorogoy.*” Slender fingers lifted to trail back through his hair as she asked fondly, “Missing Kenny?”

Clint hummed an affirmative as he nodded, turning his face into the curve of her neck and letting her mother him for a minute. He could feel her sad smile against his skin as she sighed, “I miss him too.”

The feel of Marina’s fingers in his hair was familiar, and the sniper reveled in them for a long moment as he rested against her. “I wish he was here right now.”

There was a soft hum, before the Russian commented, “You want to talk to him about your crush on Bucky.”

The youngest Grimm’s eyes flashed wide and he jolted away from her, staring at her in surprise. “You know!?”

Marina giggled at the horror in his features, cupping his cheek in her palm as she reminded him lightly, “I have raised you since you were in diapers, *dorogoy.* You are pretty much an open book at this point.”

There was a wretched groan from the archer as he sunk down to lay his head in her lap. Marina leaned back a little bit, giving him more of her lap to rest on as he curled up on the edge of the roof like a child. If it had been anyone else, the Russian probably would have been a little worried about the two story drop looming only inches away from her boy’s body. But Clint had always been most comfortable in high places; rooftops and high rises were his go-to comfort zones. Bracing herself on one hand, she threaded her fingers through his hair and let him be the first to speak.

“I’ve kissed him, you know,” was the first thing Clint said, his voice muffled by the fact that his face was still buried in her belly.

“So you *do* remember the kiss that night,” she mused lightly, before continuing, “I know; I saw. I’ve already given Bucky the shovel talk. He is my friend, but you are my son. I will not hesitate to bury him if he hurts you.”

Clint’s voice was teasing as he asked innocently, “So if I’m your son . . . what does that make Will?”

Marina’s fingers were punishing as she pinched him firmly in the fleshy part of his stomach. Even
still, her voice was wry and amused as she replied, “Complicated.”

The young man snorted at the reply, quiet giggles reverberating through his body. Finally, he forced his giggles under control and asked, “So what do I do about Bucky?”

“Well, I guess that depends on what you want from Bucky. If you’re looking for a one-night and no-strings-attached arrangement, I’m going to advise against it; if only because he really likes you and it wouldn’t be fair to use his feelings against him for your own gain.”

There was the subtle flush of a blush flowing up his neck as he inquired quietly, “You really think he likes me?”

“I know he does, dorogoy, which is why I’m going to insist that you be fair to him. That you don’t get involved, unless you’re willing to put a hundred percent into the relationship.”

“I want with him what you and Will have with each other.”

“Then you have to tell him that’s what you want. You’re much younger than him, and utterly inexperienced; he won’t make a move until you do.” There was a pause as she considered, before speaking again, “Also, if you decide to pursue him, take the relationship as it is. Don’t put limits on your relationship, based on what you see in the relationships around you. What works for Misha and I . . . what works for Brian and Natasha . . . isn’t necessarily going to work for you and Zima. If you want a relationship, you both have to build it into what works for YOU. Understand?”

Clint nodded in agreement, a small frown on his face as he cuddled deeper into her. “I understand.”

There was a long silence, as the two considered the conversation. Finally, Marina’s body shifted under Clint’s head, letting the sniper know that there was something on her mind. “What’s wrong, Marina?” he asked, craning his neck back to look up at her.

“When you and Bucky do start this relationship, I want you to take it slowly. All right?”

The sniper frowned as he twisted his head to look up at her, eyebrows fret over grey eyes and confusion on his features. “Why?”

The Russian’s face was sober, though her eyes were alight with adoring fondness as she bent to brush her nose against his in an Eskimo kiss, warmth going through her as the boy reciprocated the gesture with a bright grin. Settling back again, she answered his question, “I understand that you want what Misha and I have. But Misha and I are deeply in love with each other; we’re committed to making our relationship work, come hell or high water. But you . . . you’re young. Romantic love is a very new concept for you. It’s entirely possibly that what you think is a forever love with Bucky, is really only a first love with Bucky.”

“So you don’t think I should tell him how I feel?”

“I didn’t say that. Every relationship starts out with puppy love, Clint; but sometimes, relationships don’t last, regardless of how much we would like them too. And that’s okay. Not every relationship is meant to be forever. So just . . . take it slow.” There was a smile on her face as she caressed her fingers over his cheeks. “Be honest with him and yourself; and most of all, don’t lose yourself in him. Be willing to walk away, if it’s the right thing for the both of you.”

Clint frowned, visibly upset by his sister’s advice, his voice small as he requested, “That sounds hard.”
“It is hard. Doing the right thing is never easy, Clint. That doesn’t make it any less right,” Marina reminded him fondly, a soft smile on her lips as she watched her boy consider that.

There was a long pause as the archer considered that, before his head tilted back and he looked up at her with terrified eyes. “Could you walk away from Will? If it was the right thing to do for him?”

Marina would never deny the way her heart seized in her chest at the question; how every part of her rebelled at the very thought. But even as she acknowledged the violent denial, she was forced to admit the truth. “If leaving Misha would mean that he would be happier in the long run . . . yes, *dorogoy*, I could leave him.” Biting down hard on her lip, she continued with her confession, “But that doesn’t mean my heart wouldn’t break with every step I took away from him.”

Clint snorted, asking miserably, “Love kinda sucks, huh?”

Here the handler couldn’t help her laughter at the young man’s response, head falling back as she giggled. “Yes, *moy lyubimyy mal’chik* . . . sometimes, love most definitely sucks. But if it’s with the right person, in the end love is absolutely worth it.”

“Good to hear,” came the familiar sound of Clint’s oldest brother from behind them.

Marina jerked in surprise, a string of Russian curses under her breath causing the youngest Grimm to collapse into helpless giggles and the oldest Grimm to grin wickedly. Twisting to glare at him over her shoulder, she scolded, “*Ty napugal menya do polusmerti, pridurok.* (You scared me half to death, you jerk.)”

Will’s grin was completely unapologetic, even as he replied, “*Izvinite, samaya malen’kaya.* (Sorry, my little one.)”

“*Vrun,*” the Russian accused, eyes narrowed over a fond grin.

There was a lazy shrug in reply, though to his credit the Colonel didn’t deny the charge. Offering his partner a hand, he announced, “Dinner’s ready . . . if you’re interested.”

The handler’s narrowed at him, as she asked, “Who cooked? And what did they make?”

“I felt like Chinese tonight, so there’s Chicken Lo Mein, Moo Goo Gai Pan, homemade egg rolls and egg drop soup.”

Marina’s whole face lit up, her eyes glowing as she cheered, “Are you telling me that you cooked?”

“Yes ma’am. So are you going to join us . . . or stay out on the roof?”

There didn’t seem to be any need to actually answer that question, as both of them clambered to their feet and scurried cautiously toward the attic window. Will’s smile was adoring, as he offered his hand to brace his Russian counterpart as she climbed back inside. Clint grinned as he watched his brother tuck her into his frame, the two exchanging a lazy kiss as they moved towards the attic door. Shoving his hands into his pockets, the archer followed after them as the couple strode from the room.

Twisting back over her shoulder as they reached the top of the stairs, Marina smiled fondly at her youngest charge. “By the way, *dorogoy*, Bucky thinks you don’t remember that kiss. If I was you, I would probably try and disabuse him of that notion as soon as possible.”

A bright grin lit up the young man’s face, a smirk on his face as he offered her a cocky salute. “Ma’am, yes ma’am.” Turning his attention onto his brother, the youngest Grimm inquired, “Is the
Will frowned as he thought, before nodding. “I think so. I haven’t seen him all day, and I know he hasn’t left the house.”

If it was possible, Clint’s grin grew another inch and a half before he turned on his heel and dashed toward the room he shared with the former Soviet assassin, calling, “Thanks Will!” back over his shoulder.

Will’s eyes rolled fondly as he replied, “You’re welcome!” Turning his attention back on the snickering young woman in his arms, he cocked an eyebrow and asked, “What was that all about?”

Marina giggled, shaking her head in amusement. Going up on tiptoes, she threw her arms around his neck and dragged him down to her height for a long kiss. “Oh Misha . . . sometimes, you take oblivious to new heights.”

The Colonel frowned, watching as Marina disengaged and practically floated down the stairs. “And what exactly does that mean?” he demanded, running down the stairs in pursuit.

Clint burst into his room like a whirlwind, only just remembering to dodge the first of the knives Bucky kept under his pillow. “Whoa! Buck! It’s me . . . Clint!” he cried, ducking back outside again before Bucky could dig up the next one.

There was a pause, before Bucky spoke from inside the room, “What have we said about barging into rooms without announcing yourself, khishchnik?”

“Don’t do it?” Clint joked cheerfully, as he peeked back into the room, the Winter Soldier’s eyes rolling at the half-grin he could see on the other man’s face.

Standing, the former assassin wrenched his blade from the wall and clucked his tongue at the gouge the knife had made in the doorframe. “Marina’s going to kill me for that,” he muttered, before returning his attention back onto his roommate. “What’s up, Clint?”

“So, I need to talk to you about something.”

Bucky’s eyes narrowed for a moment at the declaration, scanning the other man’s face. Seeing no reason to be worried, he nodded once in agreement. “All right . . . what did you need to talk to me about?”

“We remember back in April, when we were all out because Jason had gotten promoted?”

There was an affirming hum as the older man considered the archer calmly, “Yes, I remember. Why?”

Clint moved closer to Bucky, watching the other man’s face closely as he reached out to twine their fingers together. The former assassin looked down, watching as Clint played tenderly with his hand before lacing their fingers together. Looking back up the couple inches difference in their heights, he gave the older man a tremulous smile, “So I’ve been kind of an idiot.”

The other man smirked, ocean eyes sparkling as he drawled, “Color me surprised.”

The archer glared half-heartedly at the former Soviet spy, though there was amusement in his eyes that he was visibly trying to repress. “Very funny. I’m trying to confess something to you here, Buck. The least you can do is not mock me for it.”
Bucky’s face visibly smoothed into placidity, eyes still shining, as he nodded graciously, “Of course . . . my apologies. You were saying?”

There was a considerable amount of consternation on Clint’s face, thoughts flickering through his eyes as though he was debating with himself. Finally, his features firmed and he looked up at Bucky with determined eyes. “Chert voz’mi,” he swore, lifting his free hand to Bucky’s shirt and dragging him down for a sweet kiss.

For a long moment, the man who had once been called Zomniy Soldat stood frozen, surprised by the gesture. At the lack of response, Clint moaned miserably and moved to back away. Registering the sound and the intent, it was hardly a moment before Bucky’s free arm came around the archer’s back and hauled him closer. Tilting his head, he slotted his mouth more firmly against Clint’s and proceeded to kiss the hell out of him.

It was only the sound of Marina’s voice, heavy and troubled, that broke the two apart. “I hate to interrupt you two, but we have trouble.”

Bucky was the first to disengage from the kiss, a small smile on his face as he promised tenderly, “We will finish this discussion later.”

Clint blushed prettily, a sense of loss stealing through him as the spy released him so the sniper could turn to look at his sister. At the sight of her, Clint immediately frowned in concern. There was terror and outrage warring in the Russian’s eyes, causing the archer to step to her side. “Marina? What’s wrong?”

“Brian and Natasha have been made, and Brian is in the custody of the Hungarian government.” Looking between the two men, she returned her attention back onto Clint, “Pack up, Yastreb . . . you’re on the next flight to Budapest.”

Chapter End Notes

Translations:

dorogoy - darling (Marina’s nickname for Clint)
Zima - Winter (one of Marina’s nicknames for Bucky Barnes)
moy lyubimyy mal’chik - my beloved boy
vrun - liar
khishchnik - hawk (literally bird of prey; one of Bucky's nicknames for Clint)
Chert voz’mi - fucking hell
Zomniy Soldat - Winter Soldier (KGB codename for Bucky Barnes)
Yastreb - Hawk (Clint's Army Spec Ops codename)
Chapter 89: Flirting With Fire

Marina’s voice in Clint’s ear was familiar and comforting as he stepped from the small passenger plane and disappeared instantly into the crowd at the airport. “Try to keep your head down, Yastreb. It’s a pretty safe bet that if the government has Skopa in custody, they’re going to be on the lookout for anyone coming to break him out.”
“Of course, there’s the fact that I look like him,” Clint muttered, grey eyes sharp as he took in the faces in the crowd around him. “What is S.H.I.E.L.D. doing about Skopa?”

“Regrettable S.H.I.E.L.D.’s hands are tied,” was his sister’s reply, expected but no less frustrating. “Because both Skopa and the Vdova are technically on ‘holiday’, there’s nothing that S.H.I.E.L.D. can do officially.”

“And unofficially?” the archer asked, ducking deftly past a security guard’s line of sight.

“Let’s just say, I wouldn’t want to be the poor Hungarian liason that Vorobey is ripping a new zadnitsa.”

“God, I love Maria . . . if she wasn’t Pops’ girl, I would be all over that.”

“No, you wouldn’t,” Marina argued knowingly, a smile buried deeply in her tone, “she scares you.”

“Unfortunately, I am stupidly attracted to women who scare me,” the youngest Grimm reminded her, seeing his escape from the airport’s scrutiny and moving quickly to slip from the area. “Héja elhagyta az épületet! (Hawk has left the building!)” he cheered in jubilant – if badly accented – Hungarian, earning a snort from his handler.

“At least you’re smart enough not to pursue them,” was the Russian’s dry reply, Clint grinning at the familiar sound of her “I’m rolling my eyes at you” tone. “Does that proclivity to scary women extend to your men as well?”

“First of all, if I had pursued Tasha, Brian would have turned me inside out. Second of all, no one in this world had a chance with Maria except Pops. And thirdly, the Zomny Soldat doesn’t scare me, so I guess not.”

“I’ll make sure you tell Zima you said that.”

Dodging around a young mother and her wailing child, Clint caught sight of a lowhanging parapet and launched himself upwards, parkouring up the side of the building and making his way across the roof. “Has there been any contact with Vdova since her initial distress call?”

“She’s reported in every hour, on the hour, as ordered. Hold for a moment, Hawkeye; I’m going to hail her on comms.”

“Understood, Sova,” the archer called Hawkeye agreed, moving to stand on the edge of the roof to get a lay of the land. When his eyes fell on what he wanted, he smirked; the building across the way had a perfect hiding place . . . and a place to shed the mantle of Major Clinton Grimm and pull on the shroud of Agent Clint Barton.

The leap over open space was easily made, allowing the sniper the opportunity to pause in the shadows of an overhang. Deft fingers worked quickly to strip himself of his civilian attire, pulling on the plain black S.H.I.E.L.D. uniform in record time. He took extra care on each buckle and each strap, yanking the laces of his combat boots as tightly as was comfortable. Finally, he slung his quiver across his back, a small smirk curving his lips at the comforting sound of the metal drum snapping solidly into place. Finally, reverent fingers eased open the traveling case for his collapsible bow, snapping his S.H.I.E.L.D.-issued bow to full-size.

Finally, Marina’s voice came through Clint’s earpiece, “Yastreb, I have the Vdova on comms. I’m going to step back and let you two plan this out; keep me posted. Vdova, every hour on the hour as previously agreed, ponimayete?”
Natasha’s reply with a subdued, “Da.”

“Udachnoy okhoty, vas oboikh, (Happy hunting, the both of you,)” was the last thing Marina said before her comm went silent.

The Black Widow sounded different, her tone low and worried as she inquired, “Hawkeye, do you copy?”

The spy’s tone was uncharacteristically disquieting, earning a deep frown. The young man lifted one hand to the comm even as storm grey eyes continued to take in the surrounding city. “This is Yastreb; I copy, Vdova. Sit rep?”

“I’m a little beat up, but alive and well for the most part. Where are you?”

The archer’s eyes scanned the surrounding area, rattling names off the street signs below as well as the sign on the building across from where he stood. There was an affirming nod from the Russian spy, before she spoke again, “Stand by; I’m coming to your location.”

“I copy. Standing by,” Clint agreed, dropping into a comfortable crouch to wait for the woman his older brother loved to join him.

Half an hour later, the hair on the back of Clint’s neck pricked and he spun, arrow already nocked and bow pulled to half its usual draw as he prepared to take out the threat. The sight of Natasha, red hair flying and hands open at shoulder height was a relief. Narrowing his eyes at her, he allowed himself a moment to take in her bedraggled and battered appearance.

There was a long gash in the curve of her cheekbone, three butterfly bandages holding the edges together. She was her S.H.I.E.L.D.-issued catsuit, though there was a sizeable rip in one sleeve and the rest was covered in a fine layer of dust. Deep bags under her eyes drew his attention to the fatigue lining her features, as well as the desperate fear for her lover lying almost hidden within the emerald wells of her eyes. Clint allowed himself a small grin as he teased her lightly, “You look like shit.”

The red-haired spy rolled her eyes, even as a small smile creased her lips and seemed to lighten the heavy burden she bore on her shoulders. “If that’s how you speak to a pretty girl who’s having a bad hair day, malen’kiy devstvennik, it’s no wonder you’ve never had a girlfriend.”

Clint rolled his eyes in response to the taunt, refusing to rise to the bait as he moved to draw her into his arms. Despite her prickly demeanor, the gorgeous spy nearly melted into the sniper’s embrace. His lips breathed warm air over her scalp as he bent his head and murmured against her skin, “Are you all right, Tasha?”

“I’m worried about Skopa. They think he’s a spy; they won’t treat him kindly,” she whimpered, her arms coming around his waist and squeezing him tightly.

A shiver of fear trailed its icy fingers down the column of Clint’s spine, even as he forced himself to smile at her brightly. Chucking her fondly under the chin, he grinned and insisted, “Skopa is probably taking names and stomping ass. It’s going to take more than some Hungarian to set Skopa back on his heels.” Resting his forehead against his best friend’s temple, he continued lightly, “Besides, he is here on vacation. They’re not going to find anything that is going to implicate him in any kind of espionage . . . nothing that they can actually hold him on.”

“This is Hungary, tupitsa . . . the Hungarian’s don’t believe in needing a reason to hold him. It’s something they learned from the Soviets.”
“All right then, Ms Former Soviet Assassin . . . what does that mean we do next?”

“What do we do next?” Natasha asked in surprise, her eyes wide as she took in Clint’s curious mein. Seeing that he was truly willing to let her take point, she allowed her shoulders to settle and her body to relax. “Next . . . my szhigayem ikh der’mo vniz i poluchit’yego k chertu. (. . . we burn their shit down and get him the hell out.)”

The twisted smirk on Clint’s lips was sly and wicked, a direct counterpoint to the mayhem building in his eyes as he drawled, “Zdorovo.”

It was a long forty-eight hours, before Natasha knelt at her lover’s side, trying to clean the blood from his face. The youngest Grimm was performing a quick triage on his brother, all three of them very aware of the limited time they had to get out again. Brian’s chocolate eyes had not left Natasha’s face since she’d come barging into his cell, and he gave her gory grin now, his voice thready and breathless as he inquired, “Tasha moya lyubov’ . . . can I take you to dinner once we get home?”

One delicate eyebrow arched upward as she gently held his head motionless while Clint checked his airway. “You want to take me to dinner?” There was a pause, before Natasha continued in an incredulous tone, “Like on a date?!?”

“Yes, Tasha . . . like on a date,” the second oldest Grimm agreed, his eyes rolling slightly though his winced mid-motion as the action aggravated his headache.

“You want to date me,” the redhead demanded, her tone a clear indication that she was no actually asking him a question, regardless of her personal confusion.

“You’re the most amazing woman I know, Tasha . . . yes I want to date you.”

There was a frown, before she asked curiously, “So what have we been doing, if we haven’t been dating?”

Brian’s reply was succinct, blunt and brutally to the point as he answered, “Fucking.”

The spy slouched backwards on her heels a bit as she hummed out a contemplative, “Oh.” Looking back down at him, she looked into his eyes and saw all the fierce loyalty he had for her. A small smile curved her lips, the tiny gesture springing across her face like unexpected sunshine. “Yes, Brian . . . I would love to go to dinner with you.”

Despite the obvious pain the gesture cost him, Brian grinned about as wide as his possibly fractured jaw would allow, before turning his attention onto his baby brother. “See? I told you I could get her to agree to go out with me.”

Clint rolled his eyes, wrapping a quick bandage around a wide gash in his left bicep. His rejoinder was audibly caustic as he mocked, “Sure Bri . . . I mean, you’ve spent the last 72 hours under heavy torture and you are in very real danger of bleeding out. But hey! At least you got the girl, right?”

Chocolate eyes were glowing as he creeped one hand into Natasha’s own, a small smile on his face as he insisted, “All that matters, Clint, is getting the girl. The rest is just extra shit to deal with.”

“Fuck . . . I hope that date is worth it,” the archer snapped, as he reached out and roughly hauled his brother into a seated position to be able to check out the wounds on his back.

Brian’s voice was a low growl from the pain, but his facial features were practically alight with adoration as he reached slowly to take Natasha’s hand and press an adoring kiss to the back. “It
could never have been anything but.”

The Russian spy’s grin was wide as she adopted a shy demeanor and singsonged a reply in her Midwestern accent, “Why, Mr. Gamble . . . you do know how to make a girl feel special.”

“Oh, only you, my dear Ms Romanoff . . . only you,” he replied, with a wide grin, the whites of his teeth only now starting to lose their bloody tinge as time slipped by them.

The archer had been watching the two flirt with unbelieving eyes. “You two do realize that we have maybe ten minutes before we’re going to have to shoot our way out of here, in addition to having had to shoot our way in. Right?”

His brother’s reply was bold as he insisted, “Let them come . . . at this moment, I could take them all on.”

“Uh-huh. And probably die in a very romantic hail of bullets too, I’d wager.” Rolling his eyes, the sniper reminded Brian, “At which time, Marina would murder me dead. And quite frankly, I have no desire to umeret’ devstvennikom.”

“We all die sometime, little brother. The point is to take as many sons of bitches as we can when we go.”

“You are a crazy son of a bitch. You know that, right, Bri?”

Here, there was a lazy shrug as Natasha assisted him to his feet. Brian’s hand clapped Clint firmly on the shoulder as he laughed, “You say that as though you didn’t already know.”

Chapter End Notes

Translations:

Yastreb - Hawk (Clint's Army Spec Ops codename)
Skopa - Osprey (Brian's SHIELD codename)
Vdova - Widow (a shortened form of Natasha's codename Chernaya Vdova or Black Widow, given to her by the KGB and the Academy's Red Room Program)
Vorobey - Sparrow (Maria's nickname for Maria Hill)
zadnitsa -arseshole (literally)
Zomnyi Soldat - Winter Soldier (codename given to Bucky Barnes by the KGB and the Academy's Red Room Program)
Zima - Winter (one of Marina's nicknames for Bucky Barnes)
Sova - Owl (Maria's Army Spec Ops codename)
Ponimayete? - Do you understand?
Da/Net - Yes/No
malen'kiy devstvennik - little virgin
tupitsa - dumbass
zdorovo - awesome
moya lyubov' - my love (one of Brian's rarely used terms of endearments for Natasha)
umeret' devstvennikom - die a virgin
“So, after everything that’s happened today, I now understand why you said that people are terrified of your Marina,” was the first thing out of Natasha’s mouth that night once the three S.H.I.E.L.D. agents had managed to successfully escape and secret themselves away. Green eyes were wide and awed as she gazed around the impromptu safehouse. “Her contact list is . . .” here the woman paused, obviously uncertain about the appropriate description to use, “. . . impressive.”
“Let’s be honest, Nat; the sheer number of people who owe Will and Marina favors could potentially give those two command of a small army, if they wished it,” Clint laughed, looking back at her from where he sat perched on the porch railing. “And even if someone doesn’t owe her any favors, they’re still terrified enough of what she’ll do to them if they say no, so they just do as they’re told anyway with no questions asked.”

The redhead grinned, glancing back through the windows at the placid brunette seated on the couch in her own living room. There was something familiar about her, but where they’d met was eluding the S.H.I.E.L.D. spy. “I recognize that woman, I think.”

There was an affirming hum as the archer nodded silently. “She’s one of the girls who graduated with Marina’s class from the Red Room; I’m pretty sure this one is Galina Igorovna Yuryeva. Will and Marina helped her disappear after she tried to kill Marishka in February of 1996.” Glancing at the former Russian assassin, grey eyes sparkled as he joked, “Nice place they found her, huh?”

“Conveniently located too,” Natasha laughed, leaning against the railing and looking out at the city of Osijek, Croatia. “One hundred and thirty five kilometers from Budapest is close enough that we didn’t have to take Brian very far while also being far enough away that we’ll be long gone before the Hungarians think to look here.”

Natasha didn’t fail to notice that even though Clint nodded in agreement, there was a fierce frown on his face as he looked out over the sprawling city center. “It’s certainly big enough to get lost in.”

Putting her back to the railing, the Black Widow folded her arms over her chest and scowled at her best friend. “All right, Hawkeye . . . out with it. You’ve been twitchy and grumpy since we got here. What the hell is your problem?”

A bitter smirk curved the sniper’s lips, evidence of some inside joke that Natasha wasn’t privy to, before Clint replied dryly, “I hate Yugoslavia.”

The woman frowned a the phrase, cocking her head at him as she insisted, “Crotia hasn’t been a part of Yugoslavia since June of ’91.”

Clint chuckled, a small smirk on his lips as he shook his head. “Inside joke, Nat. Ask Marina sometime; she’ll probably tell you.” Taking in a deep breath, he released it on a heavy sigh. “The point is that I really hate Croatia. Bad shit happens to the Brothers Grimm in Croatia.”

“You’ve actually been to Croatia,” was the Black Widow’s incredulous statement. “And when the hell was this?”

The archer’s tone was whimsical as he agreed, “A long time ago.” For a long time, he was silent as he considered the events of that long ago deployment, where Valentina Obolenskaya – one of the three women Marina considered her sisters – led a team of Red Room-trained assassins to murder one Major Marina Petrovka. Shaking his head to clear his thoughts, he returned his attention back onto Natasha. “How’s Brian?”

There was an aggravated huff as Natasha rolled her eyes, tone vitriolic as she muttered, “He’s a real charmer when he’s laid up, did you know that? You’d think he’d gotten kicked in the balls by a mule or something.”

“He’s not the kind of person who appreciates staying still,” the archer agreed with a genuine laugh, before the murderous look on Natasha’s face caused him to try and suppress his amusement. Grey eyes sparkled and broad shoulders trembled as he forced himself to quit giggling at his best girl friend’s expense. Shifting, he bumped his shoulder against hers as he teased, “Just think, you’ve
earned a reprieve from his frequently amorous attentions.”

“Clint . . . I **enjoy** his amorous attentions. He does this thing with his tongue that makes a girl’s insides melt like butter.”

The sniper shuddered at the words, his face a mask of horror as he insisted, “*Bozhe moi! TMI, Natasha! Iisis Khrisitos!*” Punching her lightly in the shoulder, he demanded, “Haven’t you ever heard of this little thing called ‘Too Much Information’?”

Green eyes were wide and dripping with faux innocence as the pretty spy batted her eyes at him adorably. “Oh, I’m sorry, Clint. Did I say too much?”

There was a glower on the younger man’s face as he slouched forward, muttering belligerently, “God, where the hell is that chopper?”

“I’m going to warn you, Nat, if I ever hear you talk about your sex life with Brian again, I’m going to hurl all over your favorite Jimmy Choos. *Ponimayete?*” was Clint’s overly-pleasant threat, his face bright and cheerful as he gave her a shark’s grin.

Natasha’s face darkened as she vowed, “And I’m going to warn you now that if your vomit ever comes any where **near** my Jimmy Choos, I’m going to turn your intestines into a new scarf. *Ponimayete?*”

“You don’t talk about Brian’s prowess in bed, and I don’t puke on your shoes. Deal?” he asked, offering her an arched eyebrow and an extended hand.

“*Da . . . deal,*” she agreed, reaching out to shake his hand firmly.

Turning back to face the city, the two spies were silent for a long time. As the day shortened and the shadows lengthened, Natasha struggled with the question she was desperate to ask her counterpart and former S.H.I.E.L.D. partner. Finally, she could no longer hold in her curiosity as she inquired quietly, “Are you really dating the Zomniy Soldat?”

Clint jerked in surprise, a fierce frown curving his lips as he turned to look at her. The redhead was nibbling worriedly on her lower lip, eyebrows furrowed as she watched him. Shaking his head slowly, he replied, “No . . . not yet.”

“Not yet?” Natasha echoed, frowning, “So you do **intend** to date him.”

It wasn’t a question, and Clint knew it. “If he’ll have me.” Turning back to the city below, he watched her cautiously from the corner of his eyes. “Why do you ask?”

Again the assassin took to chewing on her lip as she considered the best and most tactful way to state her thoughts. “Clint . . . *knofecta . . . the Zomniy Soldat* is not a nice man. He’s a killer, and a good one. He has done things that would make even the most hardened criminals on America’s streets weep with fear of him.”

The archer rolled his eyes as he drawled, “And yet, you’ve slept with him.”

“To maintain our cover not because I wanted to!” was the immediate protest, her eyes wide with horror – though whether the horror was because she’d slept with him or because Clint **knew** she’d slept with him, was an entirely different question all together. “*Knofecta, just be careful, da? I don’t**
want you to get hurt, because you let yourself get attached to an idea of him, this Bucky Barnes you idolize so much, and then the Soldat doesn’t measure up to the expectations you have of him. Khorosho?”

Clint’s nod was slow and thoughtful as he agreed to the Black Widow’s terms, his mind already far away on the former Soviet spy in question. “Da,” he agreed absently, even as the thought crossed his mind that it may already be too late for caution where the man formerly known as the Winter Soldier was concerned.

An hour later, their ride – a Sikorsky with an unknown S.H.I.E.L.D. agent at the helm and Bucky Barnes as co-pilot and navigator – appeared in the night sky overhead. The two jumped from where they sat on the porch, Clint going out into the open yard to hail the helicopter and Natasha moving to retrieve Brian from where he was sleeping off the pain medication in one of the upstairs rooms. The blades continued to spin, even as Bucky leapt from the interior and came jogging, hunched over as he ran. “Clint!” came the relieved cry, the youngest Grimm just barely able to brace himself before the older man crashed into him and just about swept him off his feet.

Clint let himself be smothered for the moment; he knew his sister and would bet his left kidney that Marina had demanded a full sit rep from the former Soviet assassin. Bucky’s hands were warm and thorough as they skimmed over every inch of his body they could reach before hauling him in for a sweet, if short, kiss. The archer fought the immediate impulse to melt into the embrace, warmth suffusing his body even as his eyes fluttered blissfully for a moment. After that second, he forced himself to straighten up and disengage, attempting to step backwards and away from the older spy.

Bucky didn’t let him go very far, powerful hands gripping firmly on the wings of Clint’s hips as narrowed ocean eyes stared firmly into his eyes. Finally, a small grin crept across the man’s mouth, obviously satisfied by whatever it was he saw in Clint’s eyes. Pulling him back the inches the archer had managed to put between them, he lifted one hand to the archer’s face and smoothed his thumb over the curve of his cheekbone. His eyes were warm and adoring as he ducked his head to rest his forehead against Clint’s own, his breath a warm puff of air against Clint’s lips as Bucky murmured, “Hi.”

The youngest Grimm could feel the goofy grin spreading across his face at the reverent look on Bucky’s face and the tender touch of his hand. Tilting his head, he nuzzled his nose alongside the former assassin’s in an indulgent gesture of admiration. Then, he dropped his head back and gave the older man a cocky smirk, teasing, “You’re late.”

The former Soviet sniper’s smile morphed into a full fledged grin as he shrugged and replied flippantly, “Yes dear.” Clint’s glare was half-hearted at best, his shoulders trembling slightly with his laughter, before he twisted to look back over his shoulder quickly. Seeming to understand that the archer didn’t want to get caught by his brother, Bucky bent for one last brief kiss before stepping back to put several feet between their bodies. “You ready to head home, khishchnik?”

Clint’s reply caused both of them to jolt in surprise, and Clint to turn as red as a tomato. “Take me home to bed, or lose me forever.”

For a long moment, Bucky stared at him as he contemplated the statement that had obviously been intended as a joke, before he nodded firmly once. “As you wish.”

(It was many years later before Clint at last learned what Bucky was actually saying, when he said those words. Once he did, he came to realize that the sentiment was returned at least a hundredfold.)

Chapter End Notes
Translations:

Bozhe moi - Oh my God
Iisis Khristos - Jesus Christ
Ponimayete? - Do you understand? or Understood?
da/net - yes/no
Zomniy Soldat - Winter Soldier (the codename given to Bucky Barnes by the Academy's Red Room and the KGB)
knofecta - sweetie (Natasha's reluctant term of endearment for Clint)
khorosho? - okay? or all right?
Soldat - Soldier (shortened term of address for the Winter Soldier or Zomniy Soldat)
khishchnik - hawk (literally bird of prey = Bucky's term of address for Clint)
Hey guys! Except for a very few, the majority of the Russian is in the chapter. Again, I apologize for the lateness of this post. School starts Wednesday; it will get easier to write at that point. Enjoy this chapter! I love you all and adore your continued support. Thank you all so much!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
Chapter 91: Coming Home

Will leaned back against the wall of hanger bay, arms folded across his chest as he watched his partner pace back and forth in front of him. “Marishka, you got the same update I did. The boys are fine,” he soothed, coming forward to stall her in her tracks. His arms reached out to pull her close, his free hand coming up to thread through the hair at her nape.

Unable to escape his embrace, Marina exhaled a soft huff even as she melted into the beloved comfort of his arms. Resting her head against his chest, she took a deep breath. The familiar scent of
his cologne filled her sinuses as he smoothed strong hands up and down the column of her spine. “I
know Natasha said Brian was okay; but Clint gave me a pretty in depth recounting of his injuries.
My little boy was hurt, because I sent him on an assignment, without the necessary backup.”

Will’s chin came to rest on her head, a low humming forcing the Russian’s muscles to relax just that
little bit more. “I don’t know who it was that taught you to blame yourself for things you have no
hand in, but moya sumasshedshaya devushka . . . Brian getting hurt was not your fault. He and
Natasha volunteered to go; they knew the risks and were willing to accept them. Ponimayete?”

There was a long silence, before Marina sighed heavily. Nodding once, she agreed reluctantly, “Da.”

The Colonel grinned at the grudging tone, rubbing his hands briskly over her arms as she cuddled
into him. The low rumbling of airplane engines filled the air, drawing his eyes toward the horizon.
The Quinjet was coming in fast and loose, causing a heavy sigh from the eldest Grimm as he nudged
his partner lightly. There was a teasing tone in his voice as he informed her, “We should probably
have Clint go through his pilot’s certification again. Because I think he’s getting worse.”

Marina chuckled, shaking her head at her lover’s teasing. “He is not.”

Will’s eyes rolled as he muttered under his breath, “Well, he’s certainly not getting any better.”

The Russian giggled, watching as the ‘jet coasted to a stop on the airstrip. The cargo bay door
opened slowly, revealing Natasha and Clint with a badly beaten Brian hanging between them. At the
sight of his black and blue face, Marina squeaked and dashed forward. Brian grimaced to see her
coming, carefully shaking his arm free of Clint’s embrace. “Marina . . . don’t fuss,” he slurred, his
own unswollen eye narrow in a visible glare. “I’m fine, proklyataya zefir.”

At the admonition, Marina hit the brakes so fast, it looked as though she’d run into some invisible
wall. Glaring at him, she braced her feet shoulder width apart and slammed her hands down onto her
hips before proceeding to yell at him in agitated Russian, “Ne govorite mne ‘ne suyetit’sya’ yy glupy,
vysokomernyy CHELOVEK! Ya chertovski khorosho suyetit’ sya, yesli ya, chert voz’ mi, khochu! Ne
suyetit’ sya, kha! (Don’t you tell me 'don't fuss' you stupid, arrogant MAN! I will damn well fuss if I
damn well want to! Don't fuss, ha!)

The sound of Will’s snickers was easily heard over the sound of Marina’s ranting, causing a dark
glare from his younger brother. “Zatknis’, Uil’ yam, (Shut up, William,)” Brian growled, a heavy
wince twisting his face as Marina stabbed one finger sharply into his solar plexus to redirect his
attention back onto her.

Rounding on the older woman, Brian’s bitterness immediately cowed at the sight of the look on
Marina’s face. It was a well known fact that Marina adored the hell out of her boys; it was a much
lesser known fact that no one pissed Marina off quite as much AS her boys. The tiny Russian was
literally turning red; Will would bet his left arm, that if it was possible there would literally be steam
coming out of her ears. Her voice was gravel as she hissed furiously, “U vas svidaniye s
meditinskoy. I yesli ya uznayu, chto vy dažhe vzdrognul ot vashey krovati, prezhde chem vy
vypustili, ya klyanusi’ vsem, chto svyatoo i khorosho v etom mire, Brayan . . . Ya budu razoryat’ vas
na chasti. Mogu li ya khorosho ponyal? (You have a date with Medical. And if I find out you even
flinched from your bed before you are released, I swear on all that is holy and good in this world,
Brian . . . I will flay you to pieces. Am I well understood?)”

Clint and Natasha, the two members of the family to suffer through Brian’s foul temper over the last
12 hours, glanced at each other out of the corners of their eyes and visibly struggled to suppress their
amusement. Brian’s eyes were wide as he stared at the woman he commonly referred to as his sister,
nodding silently as he stammered out a tentative, “Da, mem. (Yes, ma’am.)”
“Ladno, dvigat’sya, chto zadnitsa,” she growled, one long finger jabbing sharply in the direction of the ambulance idling on the tarmac. Rounding on Clint and Natasha, she watched with a sense of sick satisfaction as both of them jumped to attention. “You both are to report to Command at 1400 for debriefing. If you’re even a second late, I will find you somewhere very uncomfortable to spend the next six months. Ponimayete?”

“Da!” the three spies barked out immediately in simultaneous agreement, both Clint and Bucky tensing against the urge to salute a superior officer.

There was a momentary calm as Marina waved two medics over to take custody of Brian from his lover, the Russian striding quickly after the gurney and climbing into the ambulance before the doors slapped shut. Will waited until his partner was out of earshot, before turning back to look at the three operatives. “All right, go home, get cleaned up, get some sleep, and we’ll see you at Command later this afternoon. Dismissed.”

Clint immediately snapped into attention, watching Bucky follow suit out of the corner of his right eye. Natasha, however, only nodded regally from where she stood at Clint’s left. The Colonel grinned at the two Army officers, snapping off a brisk salute that should have looked ridiculous considering his jeans and green polo but still managed to look perfectly professional. Chuckling, he kicked lightly in his brother’s direction. “Get outta here, the lot of you. I’ll see you at Command at two o’clock. And if I can manage to convince Marina that it’s been a long 84 hours, I’ll call you to tell you the new time for your debriefing.”

The sniper grinned as he dodged his brother’s kick deftly, giggling. “Good to see you too, Will.” Batting his eyes at him adorably, he inquired, “Did you miss me?”

Will grinned, folding his arms over his chest as he announced jovially, “Not a bit. Your flying still sucks.”

At the statement, the younger man whined, “It does not! I’m telling Marina!”

Reaching out, he collared the younger brother and rubbed brutal knuckles over the short strands at the top of his head. “Come on, Clint . . . I’m sure Dad is wondering what’s keeping us.”

True to form if nothing else, Will did manage to convince Marina to cut Natasha a break on the time for her debrief. It had been a long several days and the spy deserved sleep if nothing else. Clint, however, was not excused from his two in the afternoon debriefing, reporting there ten minutes early, even though he knew that Marina’s threat had been an empty one . . . mostly. Fortunately, his debrief was short because he hadn’t joined the mission until after Brian’s arrest. Unfortunately, he had joined the mission after Brian’s arrest so he had no idea why it was that Brian had been arrested at all. That information would remain unknown until Natasha was debriefed the next day; at least, that was the hope of the matter.

It was surprising to no one when Marina did not return home that night, preferring to spend the evening at Brian’s bedside. And when Will took a stack of paperwork into his office, with no intention of sleeping, the brothers said nothing. They took their accustomed places, joining him in his vigil.

The next day, Natasha entered the conference room where Director Nick Fury and AD Maria Hill sat with Agents Phil Coulson and Marina Petrovka. Taking her seat, she folded her hands in her lap and waited for the first question. Glancing at Marina out of the corner of his eye, Fury turned his attention onto the redheaded Russian and demanded firmly, “Agent Romanoff, if you know what is good for you . . . you will tell me what the hell happened in Budapest.”
The woman’s lips compressed, her eyes drifting closed in visible pain. Finally, she lifted her chin and looked Marina square in the face. “I have no proof. However, based on information that came to light just prior to Agent Gamble’s capture and incarceration, there is sufficient evidence to support the supposition that the Cahill in question is none other than DOD Operative Aaron Cross . . . otherwise known as Staff Sergeant Kenneth J. Grimm.”

Chapter End Notes

Translations:

moya sumashshaya devushka - my crazy girl (one of Will's terms of endearment for Marina)
ponimayete? - do you understand?
da/net - yes/no
proklyataya zefir - damned marshmallow
Debrief

Chapter Notes

Hi all! Okay, first things first. Amerou wrote an amazing Hansel and Gretel story called "He Ain't Heavy, He's My Brother". It is canon compliant with both UALP and Fairy Tales. However it can also be read as a standalone. Either way, it is done and it is amazing. I highly recommend you check it out.

Next, in Hungary, the surnames (last names) come BEFORE the given names (first names). So when I talk about Kovacs and Jozsef, I'm actually using their last names, not their first names. It was confusing for me too, and I hope that helps explains things a little bit.

There are both Russian AND Hungarian translations today. Most of the Russian AND Hungarian translations are in the chapter. The Russian ones that aren't, are at the end as always. (Best way to tell the difference; if Natasha and Brian are talking, it's Russian. If Brian and Kovacs are talking, it's Hungarian.)

Also? I SAW HANSEL AND GRETEL: WITCH HUNTERS!!! AHHHH! IT WAS AMAZING! All right, that is all. Also, based on the movie, my Hansel is not really AU at all. I will be incorporating parts of the movie into both Hansel and Gretel's characters, but for the most part everything is as it should be. Yay! That's always awesome!

Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
Chapter 92: Debrief

No one in that room missed the way Marina’s whole body flinched at the news, though they at least offered her the courtesy of pretending that they hadn’t noticed. Only Maria made any outward gesture to her best friend, one hand reaching out under the table to take the Russian’s hand and squeeze as tightly as she could manage. There was no visible reaction from the handler, though the vice grip on Maria’s hand was a good indication – to the Assistant Director at least – that Marina was floundering under the deluge that revelation had caused.

Marina took a deep breath, her eyes slipping closed for a moment before she pinned her gaze once again on the red-haired former Russian spy. “Are you telling me, Agent Romanoff, that Staff Sergeant Grimm had something to do with the injuries Agent Gamble sustained in Budapest?”

“No ma’am . . . only that I have sufficient reason to believe that the Cahill we were sent to research was in fact the Staff Sergeant.”

Feeling her heart break for her best friend, Maria’s voice was perhaps sharper than strictly necessary as she demanded, “Explain.”

Natasha took a deep breath and folded her hands in her lap, the apology in her eyes directed solely at Marina. “It would probably be easier just to tell you what happened right after Brian and I arrived in
Marina’s features were formal and stern, demeanor distant as she gave the former spy a nod. Seeing the trust in the woman’s eyes, Natasha attempted a small smile before beginning. “Things started going wrong from almost the moment we got off the plane.”

Coulson’s face was calm as he inquired curiously, “Going wrong how?”

“It was fairly obvious that people recognized Brian . . . and they weren’t exactly happy to see him.”

*Flashback*
*Budapest, Hungary*
*Three Days Ago*

Looking around the marketplace, Natasha could feel the muscle of Brian’s forearm tightening. “Brayan? Ty v poryadke? (Brian? Are you okay?)”

Brian’s voice was a low growl as he replied, “Net.”

“Chto ne tak? (What’s wrong?)” she asked, reaching out to stir the sparkling contents of a woven basket sitting on the table to her left.

“U nas bylo khvosta za posledniye polchasa. Temnyye volosy, dovol’no nevzrachnyy, solntsezashchitnye ochki, legko zabyvayetsya. . . Ya by postavil levuyu ruku, on Vengerskiye i on ni voyennykh, ni Sekretnaya Sluzhba, (We've had a tail for the last half an hour. Dark hair, fairly nondescript, sunglasses, easily forgettable . . . I would bet my left arm, he's Hungarian and either military or Secret Service,)” Brian murmured, guiding her into a warm hug and giving her the opportunity to examine the crowd behind him over his shoulder.

Natasha’s answering hum was bland, though Brian could feel her grip tighten as she took in the man’s demeanor. “Om smotrit na tebya, a ne menya. (He is staring at you, not me.)”

“Da, ya zametil. (Yes, I noticed.)”

Giving him a bright grin, Natasha trailed her fingers down his arms and backed her way into an alleyway, giving every indication of being a young newlywed hauling her husband into an out of the way locale for a little amorous attention. Her fingernails were familiar in the short hairs at the base of his neck as she nuzzled into his cheek. “Brayan, pochemu my dolzhnykhvost? (Brian, why do we have a tail?)”

One arm came up to wrap around her neck, as he murmured into her ear “Bog, Tasha, yesli by ya znala. (God, Tasha, I wish I knew.)”

*End Flashback*

Marina frowned as Natasha fell silent, the woman fiddling anxiously with her fingers. Every inch of her screamed to demand more information, but she forced herself to remain calm and wait for the other woman to continue. Finally, the redhead looked up and smiled meekly at her lover’s sister. “It was about six hours later, that we found out the identity of our tail.”

“Who was he, Agent Romanoff?” Fury rumbled, his one visible eye narrowed at her as he demanded her answer.

“His name was Kovács Imre; he was former military but at the time, was in the employ of József Tamás.”
Maria’s eyebrows furrowed lightly, as she questioned, “The gun runner, József Tamás?”

“Yes. It came to our attention early that József primarily runs his empire out of his mansion on the outskirts of Budapest.” Folding her hands in her lap, Natasha sighed heavily. “Apparently, József had recently discovered a spy in his organization, a DOD operative who answered to the name ‘Cahill’.”

Fury frowned at the name, eye flashing briefly to Marina in an effort to assess the Russian’s reaction to the name. The handler was stone-faced, as she inquired, “And what led you to believe that this ‘Cahill’ is Staff Sergeant Grimm?”

There was a sad grin from the other woman, as she insisted, “Because when Kovács caught up with us, he called Brian ‘Cahill’. I know a grand total of four men who could be easily mistaken for Brian . . . and only one of them wasn’t accounted for during the time in question.”

*Flashback*

*Budapest, Hungary*

*Three Days Ago*

Brian’s chocolate eyes were blazing as he watched the Hungarian in front of him. He and Natasha were very outnumbered, but neither of them were willing to concede defeat to the crowd of Dumb Thugs standing around them. “Mi a fenét követ minket? (Why the hell are you following us?)” he demanded in heavily accented Hungarian,

“Mintha még nem tudom, Cahill, (As though you don’t know, Cahill,)” sneered the man who had been following them. He had introduced himself as Kovács Imre and was obviously the leader of the men surrounding them.

Natasha’s eyes flashed to Brian at the low growl that left his lips at the name. The Russian was not stupid – she knew that there was something not quite normal about the Brothers Grimm. They were each exceptionally talented, and more than one had been heard to make an offhanded reference to being “built”. The assassin didn’t know the specifics; she knew better than to demand answers that neither Brian nor Clint was willing to give, but whatever the truth of the matter was, it was painfully obvious that the name “Cahill” was a livewire. At least where Brian was concerned; he was livid, eyes narrowed and nostrils flared as he struggled to keep control of Barney Grimm, his alter ego visibly raging behind blazing brown eyes.

Natasha had never met Barney Grimm and quite frankly it wasn’t anything she had any plans to do either. She’d heard the stories of the man who inhabited part of Brian’s mind, and knew enough of what he’d done to understand why it was that Clint was terrified of him and the Colonel had a “Shoot on Sight, Shoot to Kill” order against him. She knew that Brian deeply regretted the things that Barney had done, and that Brian had shut that side of himself off as much as he could have. Brian had even changed his name and then joined the LAPD in an attempt to atone for Barney’s sins.

To see Barney so close to the surface of Brian’s control now, Natasha felt a fissure of unfamiliar fear deep in her blackened soul. She would never tell him but the assassin knew for a fact that if Barney made himself known now, she would never be able to look at Brian the same way.

The second eldest Grimm’s voice was a deep growl as he hissed, “Azt hiszem, a rossz srác haver. A nevem nem Cahill. (I think you’ve got the wrong guy, dude. My name isn’t Cahill.)”

The man laughed, before baring his teeth at the S.H.I.E.L.D. agent and displaying a mouthful of brilliantly white teeth. “Őn egy vices ember, Cahill. De miután bámult a ronda bögre az elmúlt hat
Brian gave him a bright grin, a bitter twinkle in his eye as he announced, “Ók mondják mindenkinek van egy iker valahol. (They do say that everybody’s got a twin out there somewhere.)”

The couple had only a moment of surprise, before the two were in a shootout for their very lives. They made it out by the skin of their teeth, managing to slip into the underground of the sprawling city to hide from whatever retribution József was going to throw at them for the death of his right hand man and more than a dozen of his hired thugs.

The irony of escaping from Kovács and his men was Brian being arrested by the Hungarian’s government the very next morning, after he’d left their hidey hole for supplies to get them out of the city.

End Flashback

Natasha sighed, her hands coming up to rake back through her curls. “I found out after Brian was arrested, that a prominent Hungarian politician by the name of Szabó Benedek had been assassinated the day before. Brian was arrested, because a man matching his description was seen leaving the man’s mansion around the time of the assassination.”

Marina’s whimper was quiet, though the name she breathed was audible to everyone. “Aaron.”

The spy nodded slowly as she agreed quietly, “Da. It wasn’t until I arrived at Szabó’s mansion that I realized that both Szabó and József shared the same address.”

“That József Tamás was the pseudonym that Szabó Benedeck used to cover up his illegal gun running. As soon as I realized this, I put in a call for back up to Agent Brandt and Agent Petrovka. Agent Barton joined me in Budapest the very next day. Two days later, we had recovered Agent Gamble from the custody of the Hungarians and were on our way to Osijek, Croatia, to a safehouse set up for us by Agent Petrovka.” There was a small shrug as she concluded, “We were not there for very long, before a S.H.I.E.L.D. helicopter arrived to extract us with Agent Daniels piloting and Agent Barnes as co-pilot.”

“Agent Barton mentioned that you had to shoot your way in to the detention center. Is this true?”

“Yes sir.”

Coulson frowned at the answer, though Maria asked the question he was obviously dying for an answer to. “Did Agent Barton leave any calling cards behind that would lead the Hungarians to believe that S.H.I.E.L.D., and by extension, the American government had authorized resources to storm one of their prisons?”

“No ma’am. Agent Barton did not use his bow, his service pistol or S.H.I.E.L.D.-issued side arm. It looked as though the handgun itself was Russian made, an older model that even I would be hard
pressed to name off the top of my head seeing as I did not take the opportunity to get a closer look at it.”

Fury cocked an eyebrow at the comment that the weapon had been Russian made and turned a small smirk on Marina, earning a smug grin and a slight tilt of her head. “Agent Petrovka . . . you wouldn’t happen to have any light to shed on this weapon, would you?”

The Russian’s eyes were gleaming with undisguised glee, even as she gave her boss the most innocent look she could manage. “I am afraid, Director Fury, that just because a weapon is Russian made does not mean that I had anything to do with either its procurement or its use.”

The Director rolled his eyes, his unimpressed hum a clear indication as to what he thought about her answer. “I see,” he drawled, pinning her with a significant look that only caused her smirk to grow. Turning his attention back onto the redhead, Fury inquired, “Is there anything else that you can think of that might be important to this inquest, Agent Romanoff?”

“Yes . . . I think I saw him . . . Staff Sergeant Grimm. Though, I could have been imagining it; there was a lot of smoke and it was hard to see after the grenade went off after we had rescued Agent Gamble.”

Marina’s lips quirked lightly as she sighed. Her voice was a curious mix of fond and amused as she inquired, “Are you sure it was a grenade, Agent Romanoff?”

“Frankly, ma’am, I don’t know what it was. All I know is that the Hungarians were just as surprised by it going off as Agent Barton, Agent Gamble and I were. And if the Hungarians didn’t set it off, then I can only assume that whoever did, was a friend. As it was, the timing of the blast more than likely saved our lives.”

Sensing that her best friend was at least at peace with this new information about Kenny Grimm, Maria gave the assassin a firm nod. “Thank you, Agent Romanoff. You are dismissed. If we have any further questions, we do expect that you will make yourself available. Is that understood?”

“Yes ma’am. Thank you, ma’am.”

Marina stood from her chair and came to Natasha’s side, reaching out to lay a familiar hand on the other woman’s shoulder. “I know someone who has been dying to see you. Go on home and change. You’re on his visitor list, so you won’t have any trouble getting in to see him.”

“Spasido, Marina.”

“Dobro pozhalovat’, Natalya.”

After Natasha was gone, Maria and Marina made the trek together to Marina’s office. The two women were silent on the walk through the corridors, brushing shoulders comfortably and each consumed by their own thoughts. Once they were behind closed doors, Maria perched comfortably on the corner of Marina’s desk and asked, “So now what do we do?”

“We add another pin to the map and we keep looking. Eventually, we’re going to get ahead of him. We just have to be patient until we get there.”

“What about our spy in the DOD? Has he come up with anything yet?”

There was a soft hum as Marina shook her head slowly. “Not a damned thing so far. But I have every faith that as soon as he knows something . . . I will know something. I just have to be patient.”
Maria chuckled as she teased her best friend fondly, “Patience is not one of your virtues, Marishka.”

The Russian’s grin was wicked as she shrugged, “I know . . . that’s what I have Misha for.”

Chapter End Notes

Russian Translations:

Da/Net - Yes/No
Spasido - Thank you
Dobro pozhalovat - You're welcome
Chapter Notes

Translations at the end. Aaron was all over the board today, so I apologize if he seems a little scattered. He had a lot to say, and no one to say it to. *grins* Downside of solo assignments, I guess. Enjoy this chapter everyone! Love you all and your reviews. I can't wait to read what you have to think about this chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 93: James Cahill

Budapest, Hungary
Five Days Before

Aaron Cross had a job to do, but all he could think about was that it was chertov cold on the rooftop of Szabó’s mansion outside of Budapest. He lay sprawled on the tiles, staring through his sight as he attempted to get a lock on the location of one Szabó Benedek. The DOD operative had been on this case for nearly nine months – with only one short leave, during which he executed the Russian Councilman to the World Security Council, saw Marina and nearly forgot all the reasons he’d joined Outcome just to go home with her – trying to infiltrate the gun runner’s inner circle and gather enough evidence so that his superiors were able to justify the kill order to their superiors.

He knew he’d been made that night when he’d stolen into Szabó’s private home office to steal the latest invoices on the shipment that Szabó was putting together for the scattered Taliban. At the time, Szabo was supposed to be at a state dinner with several visiting dignitaries, but he’d come home early and caught Aaron rifling through his private files. There had been a firefight, but Aaron had made it out without a scratch AND with the incriminating invoices. Within ten minutes of sending
the evidence via email, Colonel Byer had ordered the man’s assassination.

Which led to why Aaron was lying on the roof, freezing his ass off and praying in every language he knew for some sighting of Szabó to verify that he was in residence, so that he could get inside the mansion, take the guy out and find somewhere warm to thaw out.

Some part of Aaron was worried that his choice of the name “Cahill” for his alias was going to raise a few red flags, especially now that he’d been made. The operative would never put it past his older brother to put a tag on the name, so that the Grimms could keep one step ahead of any shit that could hit the fan due to their previous lives as Cahills. Granted, it was entirely possible that Will had known about the alias since day one and was sitting on it to spare Marina any unnecessary pain; he was kind of protective of the Russian like that and it would not be the first time that the Colonel had kept sensitive information from his partner in order to keep her safe. Getting made, though . . . Aaron just knew that was going to come back to bite him in the ass.

It wasn’t until some time after midnight that Szabó finally put in his first appearance of the evening. The man was on a cell phone, face twisted in anger as he yelled at whomever it was on the other side of the phone. Aaron would bet his sister’s favorite diamond pendant that the gun runner slash politician was yelling at his right hand goon, Kovács; the former special operations soldier had been suspiciously absent from the mansion over the last few days.

Scaling the wall to the ground level was a matter as simple as leaping off the edge of the building, barely remembering to utilize Clint’s long ago lessons on falling gradually so as not to break his damned neck as he plummeted toward the ground. The spy slipped silently into the mansion, bypassing the security cameras with ease, fingers flashing as he screwed a silencer onto the muzzle of his pistol. Creeping silently through the house, he followed the sound of Szabó’s voice as the politician screamed obscenities into his phone. From there it was a matter of minutes, before Aaron was on his way out again, both the Hungarian councilman and smuggling ring dead in his wake.

It was as he was packing his things to disappear that he received a call from his Outcome handler. To say that he was surprised to see Byer’s name on the screen was an understatement; Byer only ever contacted him on-mission when something went so shit wrong that there was nothing else to do but put his head down and hope to Boge that it didn’t get blown off. There was a certain level of trepidation as he thumbed the call button, answering curtly, “Da?”

“Cross, thank God,” was the relieved exhalation, causing Aaron to remove the phone from his ear and stare at the name on the screen to remind himself that yes, it was Ric Byer on the other end of the line. Satisfied that he hadn’t misread the screen, the operative put the phone back to his ear and asked, “Sir, objective accomplished. Did you need me to do something else before I left Hungary?”

“No, Cross; there was a report coming out of Budapest that James Cahill was arrested early this morning. We just wanted to make sure that you were still in play.”

Admittedly, Aaron didn’t hear much past “James Cahill was arrested”. “Vot der’mo,” he breathed, a cold stab of fear slicing through his chest. There were only three reasons someone could have been mistaken for “James Cahill” and all of them led to the same answer; one of his brothers was in Budapest and had been arrested in Aaron’s place. The DOD assassin launched into motion immediately at the realization, speaking curtly into the phone, “Where are they holding him?”

Byer had been in the middle of his extraction instructions and stammered to a surprised stop at the question. “Where are they holding who?”
“James Cahill . . . where are they holding him?”

“Do you really think I care, Cross? This means you’re off the hook . . . now get the hell out of Budapest.”

“Negative, sir. There’s still something I need to do in Budapest.”

“Cross, I forbid you from going after whoever this person is, do you understand me? That is a direct order,” Byer barked, causing a smirk from his operative at the cold fury in his voice.

Aaron’s voice was appropriately flippant as he replied, “Then I guess you’re going to have to court-martial me, sir. Cross out.”

Clicking the phone off, he snapped it into pieces and destroyed the SIM card. Gathering his gear, he slipped soundlessly from the room and went in search of the closest internet café. It was a matter of ten minutes on the computer before he had the arrest report and the location where they were holding the so-called “James Cahill”. The file printed out quickly, and Aaron groaned at the sight of manic brown eyes on the face in front of him. “Der’mo.” Some part of him felt pity for the Hungarians. Brian was a handful, even for S.H.I.E.L.D. and Brian actually liked S.H.I.E.L.D. The Hungarians, however, were not on Brian’s Christmas list and were probably wishing they’d managed to take the second eldest Grimm into custody in a body bag instead of alive and kicking . . . no doubt literally.

Still, there was a tiny part of Aaron that was filled with warmth; Will or Marina – or both, which was more likely – had sent someone after what could barely be called a rumor. And Aaron knew that they’d sent Brian in the hopes that the source of the rumor was Aaron himself. Of that the spy had little doubt. And in the back of his mind, the shadow of doubt that had hunted him since the moment Byer had walked into his hospital room all those years ago flared to life once again. Like a seed, the thought that he’d been duped and lied to took root in his psyche and began to spread.

Clint had always teased him that the older of the two brothers had never paid attention during their bi-weekly Spy Movie Nights; James Bond had always been Clint’s hero. However, what Clint didn’t know was that Aaron-as-Kenny had memorized every moment of those old movies. He’d loved them as much, if not more, than Clint had. And if there was one thing that joining Outcome had taught him about spies, it was that the hijinks and high-octane stunts that defined James Bond were very out of the ordinary in the real world.

Being a good spy was more than just explosions and shoot outs. It was also about being patient and canny; biding your time and allowing the perfect opportunity to come to you. So he did what he always did in these situations . . . he found somewhere to hide and kept his ear to the ground, where the gossip was always the most informative. The rumors of the redhead with a mean right hook and unerring aim had brought a grin to his lips; where Brian led, Natasha usually followed.

But it was her newly arrived companion that brought a flurry of whispers to his ears, each new story more incredible and outrageous than the one before. Some whispered that he carried a specialized bow – which had caused a sharp pang deep in his chest – while others claimed he used a fully customized Pistolet Makarova. Everyone insisted that he was young and handsome in the light of day, while being ruthless and cold in the black of night.

It was these rumors that led Aaron to the firefight the night Natasha and her companion broke Brian out of his Hungarian prison. The homemade pipe bombs were heavy in his pack, as he crept silently through the dark. The dead, dying and wounded lay in bloody huddles all around the courtyard, the blood painting the stone pathways black. The sounds of gunshots and general chaos erupted from inside the building; and Aaron’s homemade grenades didn’t help the situation for the Hungarians. At one point, he was sure that Natasha had seen him standing amid the smoke, watching Brian as he
staggered his way from captivity. She didn't call out to him or go after him when he ran, though, so with the any luck he'd only imagined it.

Upon his arrival home, Byer had him confined to base for three days as punishment for his jaunt off Byer's leash. It was the worst three days of his life, leaving him bored and at odds with his usual levels of activity. But even as he griped about it, he knew that he would have done it anyway, to help his brother. Brian would have done the same for him.

He settled into the restrictions quickly though and at the end of those three days, Aaron was once again deemed to be the perfect little soldier and returned to active duty. Under the condition, that he undergo a full physical at Sterrisyn Morlanta. And when the Dr. Marta Shearing stepped into the room, with a shy smile and bright eyes, Aaron couldn’t even find it in himself to be upset about it. Brian, Natasha and their companion had returned home safely; Aaron got to feast his eyes on the beauty of his doctor and life had gone back to the way it should be.

It was a good day.

Chapter End Notes

Translations:

chertov - fucking
Boge - God
da/net - yes/no
Vot der'mo - Oh shit
der'mo - shit
Chapter 94: Hating the Grimms

The flutter of red hair outside his door caused a small smile on Brian’s face where he lay in bed. His doctor was doling out the marching orders for after his release from Medical, while his nurses puttered around while simultaneously never getting within arm’s reach of his bedside. It was a well known fact that the nurses in Medical hated the Brothers Grimm – and their father – because of the
scare Hansel had given them when Maria had first woke him from his coma.

To date it hadn’t caused any problems, seeing as the Grimms had the constitution of pack horses and were very rarely, if ever, residents of Medical. None of them had ever been injured enough to spend more than an hour or two in the dubious care of S.H.I.E.L.D.’s doctors. Even Brian, despite Clint’s fussing about bleeding to death, had walked away from Budapest with only a map of new scars and an actual date with his favorite redheaded spy. At this point, he was calling Budapest a win.

The question of course remained; would his Tasha honor the promise she’d made when she thought he was dying? Seeing the fond grin and the warmth in her eyes as she at last made her way into the room, he was going to bet the answer was yes.

Meanwhile, Jason Walsh was having the worst week of his life since he’d become Jason Walsh. His whole goal for joining the NYPD was to become a detective and try to make a difference, to make amends to the world for what had happened to Sarah. After years of walking the beat and taking shit, he’d become a detective and he could finally start doing some real penance. Except being a detective came with two assholes attached: Commander Ben Shaw and Detective Bertram Kowalski.

Shaw had been a problem even when he was a beat cop, always yanking his chain and pissing him off. The commander had had it in for him, not that Jason knew the particulars about why. Now that he was a detective, it had only seemed to get that much worse. Shaw took credit for his collars, deliberately misled him on cases and was basically an all around asshole.

The worst part though wasn’t Shaw, it was Kowalski. Unlike Shaw, who had never given any indication that he would ever have any other feeling for Jason than utter loathing, Kowalski seemed as though he was just trying to like him, which truthfully was almost worse than having his partner just hate him. Kowalski pushed and he bullied and he genuinely made Jason’s life hell; but under all of that, Jason got the sense that if he could just find the man’s weak spot, he would no longer be on the outs with his partner. Of course finding that weak spot was easier said than done; the man was solid stone, heart included.

However, if there was one thing that Jason had learned growing up a Grimm – and learned well – it was the “Art of Pranking and Not Getting Caught.” And if there was one thing he knew better than anyone in the Second Precinct, it was computers. Which could explain why Commander Ben Shaw was smacking at his computer monitor, cursing as it streamed the words “I Eat Cock” across his screen over and over again. The entire room was in stitches, with Jason’s sides burning with the force of his giggles as he watched Shaw try and turn off the screen.

It was about then that he flinched at the sound of a pair of high heeled boots approaching him from behind. The voice, when it came, was distressingly familiar and her tone was one that usually meant that he was about to get his ass chewed. “Dzheyson, sladkiy, chto ty sdelal? (Jason, honey, what have you done?)”

Putting on his widest grin, Jason spun his chair to face his sister. Marina was clad in her Army uniform, though she wore a small S.H.I.E.L.D. pin at her lapel, meaning that she was at the Second on S.H.I.E.L.D.’s behalf, though operating under the mantle of her cover. “Marishka!” he cheered with a bright grin, his tone low as he continued, “Kak moy lyubimyy Polkovnik? (How’s my favorite Colonel?)”

Marina’s chocolate eyes narrowed at him, as she folded her arms over her chest. “Don’t try to butter me up, Jason Leonard. What are you up to?”

Jason adopted a wounded, innocent demeanor; Marina had been seeing through this look since he was a child, but it never hurt to pull it out and try to get out of trouble just a little bit. “Me? Nothing! I
didn’t do it, I swear.”

The Russian let out a delicate snort as she rolled her eyes, muttering under her breath just loud enough for him to hear, “Ya schitayu, CHTO kogda svinʹi letayut! (I’ll believe THAT when pigs fly!”

There was a roguish wink from her charge, before he inquired, “So what brings my favorite sister in the world to the Second?” His nose wrinkled as he teased lightly, “Did you not get your daily dose of crazy today? Had to come borrow some of ours instead?”

“First of all, I’m your only sister in the world. Secondly, I live with crazy in case you’ve forgotten; I’m sure this place is probably a walk in the park compared to riding herd on the Brothers Grimm. And lastly, I have a job offer for you . . . from Nick Fury himself,” she announced, holding up the file that Jason had only just noticed in her right hand. “You interested?”

Jason’s eyes were glued to the file, even as he considered the question. “I guess that depends on the job.”

“It’s just a private contracting gig for S.H.I.E.L.D. The Helicarrier is almost up and completely operational; we have someone doing the main wiring. However, Nick would prefer to have someone he trusts implicitly doing the hardwiring and the programming for his personal console on the bridge, as well as set up the encryption key for his office.” Wrinkling her nose, she teased, “I figured that you were the next best thing.”

“Haha, very funny,” he grouched, eyes fixed on the file as she waved it back and forth as she spoke. “Private contracting gig, huh? What’s that gonna run S.H.I.E.L.D.?!”

“Guess you’ll have to look to find out,” she laughed, offering him the file only to pull it out of his reach when he made a grab for it. “You know, you used to be better at this game. You’re getting slow in your old age, Jay.”

“Yeah?” he snapped, leaning forward and snatching the file from her. “If I’m old, what does that make you?”

Marina’s tone was dry as she replied, “Drevniy. And may I remind you, it is hardly polite to remind a lady of her age. I know I taught you better manners than that sladkiy; I would appreciate it, if you would at least pretend to get some use out of them.”

Jason’s eyes scanned over the job offer as he snarked, “Cops don’t have much use for manners, Marishka.”

“Net, but officers in the United States Army do,” she hissed, noticing the way that her charge stiffened and immediately scanned the room for anyone who might be eavesdropping on their conversation. Narrowing her eyes, she dropped onto the corner of his desk and demanded in quiet Russian, “S kakikh eto por stydno vashe uchastiye v Armiyu? (Since when are you ashamed of your involvement in the Army?)”

Jason frowned as he replied, “I have enough problems with the new job; the last thing I need is someone to find out that I am reserv Spetsnaza.”

The younger of the two winced almost the second the words were out of his mouth, Marina’s features sharpening and a low hiss coming from her lips as she demanded, “What kind of problems?!”
“Eto nichevo! (It’s nothing!)” he insisted, reaching out to take her hand and squeeze it quickly. “I’m the new guy; it’s normal ‘new kid’ stuff that everyone goes through. Eventually, they’re be someone else who’s newer than me and I’ll be the veteran. Don’t worry about it.”

“Jay, you’re my boy. Don’t tell me not to worry.”

There was a fond curve to his smirk as he reminded her lovingly, “You can’t kill everyone who makes me cry, Marina. I’m not a little kid anymore.”

“Maybe not, but I can damned well try.”

"Ya lyublyu tebya, Marishka."

Marina's smile was small as she sighed, her fingers warm on his cheek as she cupped his face in her palm. "Ya lyublyu tebya, sladkiy. You'll tell me if anything falls out badly, right?"

Jason's grin was amused as he teased, "I'll think about it."

The Russian grunted at the answer, even as she knew that it was the best she was going to get from this particular Grimm. Jason had always been wildly independent; although that didn’t usually mean that she couldn’t help him out a little bit without tipping her hand too far. Sweeping her eyes over the bullpen, Marina smirked at the sight of the man beating up his computer monitor as he tried to restart his malfunctioning computer. “Very impressive, sladkiy,” she murmured, ruffling his hair lightly as she stood.

“He deserves it,” Jason grunted, a hard look in his eyes as he glared at the other officer.

There was a low hum, before Marina commented lazily, “He looks like he’s a big eater. A three cheeseburgers at a time kinda guy?”

Jason’s eyes narrowed as he drawled, “Why? You gonna invite him to Sunday dinner?”

A truly evil grin creased her lips as she shook her head. Folding her arms over his chest, she mused lightly, “Did you know it’s impossible to drink a gallon of milk in an hour?”

Jason’s eyes narrowed, bottle green eyes calculating as he tried to figure out her angle. “What the hell does that have to do with the price of eggs in China?”

There was a sigh as she giggled, “Ah, Firefly . . . your memory will not be forgotten and your quotes will never get old.” Glancing at him with a shrug, she insisted, “Nothing . . . except that anyone who tried would spend much of the next hours trying to mop up their own puke.”

There was a second before a lightbulb switched on behind her boy’s eyes and a wide grin curved his lips. Bending, he sketched a quick kiss across the apple of her cheek. “Ty luchshaya sestra nikogda! (You’re the best sister ever!)”

“I know,” she replied with a wink. “Have fun and try to stay out of the blast radius, huh? I don’t do your laundry anymore; and all that dairy coming back up again is going to be rancid.”

“Yes ma’am,” he agreed, watching as she sashayed her way back toward the bullpen door. She was almost out of sight when Jason rounded on Shaw and challenged, “I dare you to a milk drinking contest!”

Shaw’s eyes were narrowed as he rounded on Jason, “A milk drinking contest. For what?”
“A shiny trophy . . . and the rights to stay with the Second. Winner get the trophy and gets to stay at the Second . . . loser gets transferred. Deal?”

“And when is this contest going to be?”

“Well, it’ll take me a couple days to get a trophy made. Do you work on Monday?” The other man’s solemn nod caused a brilliant grin on Jason’s face as he announced, “All right then; Monday afternoon, after the end of shift.”

Shaw growled as he got into Jason’s face, “You’re going down, little man.”

“Whatever you say, Shaw. I hear the Fifteenth is a nice hole to hide your shame in this time of year.”

“I won’t be the one having to hide from the shame, Walsh; I’d pack your bags if I was you. That transfer has your name on it already.”

Monday evening, Jason took his seat at his desk admiring the shiny new trophy perched there on the corner. Shaw was grumbling in the background about the rookie detective having cheated and that he deserved the trophy fair and square, even as he packed up his desk in preparation for his transfer to the Fifteenth Precinct. Kowalski grinned at him from across their desks, before tossing him a file folder. “You ready to get some work done, Walsh?”

Seeing as this was the first time Kowalski hadn’t called him “Rookie” or “Rook”, Jason knew that things were finally looking up. Though it wasn’t Kowalski’s weak spot, the younger detective had definitely earned a little respect from his partner. All things considered, he’d call the day a win . . . even if he did have a little bit of an upset stomach from all the milk he’d drunk.

Even still, there was a crooked smile on his lips as the younger man agreed, “Let’s get this show on the road.”

Chapter End Notes

Translations:

drevniy - ancient
reserv spetsnaza - reserve Special Forces (Jason is a Spec Ops soldier with the Army)
ya lyublyu tebya - I love you
sladkiy - honey (Marina's nickname for Jason)
Sorry this is a little late! So the foreseeable future of the story proceeds as follows. We're going to go through the Unusuals, which means Jason meeting the lovely Casey Schraeger; then move to the Bourne Legacy, which introduces Marta Schearing more permanently; then we have the IMF, and the introduction of Ethan Hunt into Will Brandt's life. After that is the Avengers. Of course, there will continue to be some outside interludes. I love the Grimms too much, not to look at their lives outside the movies.

Either way, I hope you enjoy this chapter! Translations are at the end as always.

It was several weeks later when Jason and Kowalski caught a case. There had been a series of
murders and attacks perpetrated against deaf and hard-of-hearing young adults. Most of them were students, or had once been students, at the nearby New York School for the Deaf. A couple of the murdered victims had been around his youngest brother’s age, which caused a mix of fear and fury to shiver down Jason’s spine every time. Except for the fact that Clint had been deaf since he was a baby, Jason probably could have compartmentalized the case as he had so many others. But seeing deaf kids his baby brother’s age lying battered and broken in the streets was testing Jason’s hold on his control.

It was late one night after a long ten hour shift before Jason finally broke down and called Will, just to check in on Clint. The eldest Grimm answered the phone with a terse, “Brandt,” causing a small grin from the younger brother.

“Hey Will . . . it's Jason.”

The Colonel’s voice was noticeably warmer down the line as he chuckled, “It’s a little late for a social call, isn’t it Jay? To what do I owe the pleasure?”

Jason glanced down at his watch and winced to see the numbers “3:48 AM” flash back at him. “Ah hell, Will. I’m sorry; I just got off shift and didn’t even look at the time. I didn’t wake you did I?”

“Nah . . . Marina’s at some international summit on espionage in Prague for the next two days with Vika. And you know me . . .”

The detective’s smile was rueful as he continued, “. . . Marina’s gone and you don’t sleep. I know. Are you the only one at the house tonight?”

There was a soft hum as Will considered that question, a rustling indicating that the Colonel had set his paperwork aside and was taking the opportunity to stretch out his muscles. “Not anymore. Dad is at Maria’s tonight. Brian and Natasha got home from their first official date about an hour ago. Clint and Bucky played video games until about one when I sent them up to bed; Clint was falling asleep over the controls.”

“Nat and Bri went on their first date? How did that go?” Jason asked, collapsing onto his bed and grinning into the phone as he caught up on all the latest Grimm Family gossip.

“Well, I haven’t heard any reports of any outrageously expensive property damage yet, but I’m not finished holding my breath just yet.” There was pause, before Will chuckled and insisted, “All right, Jay . . . subtlety is not your strong suit. Out with it; why are you calling at four o’clock in the morning on a Tuesday?”

“I’m working this case; the victims have all been deaf kids around Clint’s age. I just wanted to check on him . . . make sure he’s okay.”

The sound of almost inaudible footsteps through the line brought a small smile to Jason’s face, It was not hard to picture Will slipping soundlessly up the stairs to go check on the youngest Grimm just for his own peace of mind; part of him acknowledged the fierce rush of jealousy about being unable to do the same. There was a soft creak of door hinges and the sound of quiet swearing, before the older brother breathed a sigh of relief. “He’s all right; he’s asleep, safe and sound in his bed.”

It was surprising the relief that Jason felt wash through him at the information; the worry for his brother had apparently been more consuming than he had originally thought. “Slava Bogu.”

Will’s voice was a dry hum as he replied, “Deystvītel’no.” There was a moment as the Colonel considered their little brother, before insisting, “You won’t have to worry about Clint, Jay. I’ll have
him and Barnes sent on assignment somewhere foreign; I hear Paris is nice this time of year.”

Jason snickered, once again amused by the lengths that the Brothers Grimm would go to in order to protect their youngest. “Hey Will? Do you think we worry too much? About Clint?” Shaking his head, he muttered dryly, “I mean the kid’s 26 years old. Surely he’s gotta be old enough to take care of himself by now, right?”

The older man’s chuckling was comforting, as Will replied, “I think if we didn’t worry so much, Clint would find himself neck deep in all kinds of trouble. And if there was even a strand of hair out of place on his head once the smoke cleared, Marina would then murder us all dead.” Huffing out an amused sigh, the Colonel continued, “Therefore, I probably worry too much.”

“Man, it’s gotta be hard being Marina’s favorite. Always wrapped up in cotton wool,” the detective laughed as he rubbed his hands over his eyes.

“Clint doesn’t seem to suffer any hardship from the position,” was the laughing reply.

Jason’s eyes rolled as he deadpanned, “No kidding.”

The sudden yawn that ripped through Jason was an unexpected one, causing a small hum from the Colonel through the phone. “Tired?” came the quiet question, the knowing tone a clear indication that the older brother already knew the answer but wanted to hear it from Jason himself.

There was a low groan as the technical specialist muttered, “I am exhausted. This case is killing me, Will.”

“What time do you go back to work in the morning?”

“Technically I’m on call. If we get another vic or something comes up on the case, I could be called in right now.”

“Then may I recommend that you get what sleep you can? You have plenty of practice at it.”

“First thing they teach you in Spec Ops training . . .” Jason agreed, a grin on his face as Will continued the thought with a chuckle, “. . . Sleep while you can, before shit goes to hell in a hand-basket. Good night, Jay.”

“Night, Will. See you Sunday?”

The Colonel’s tone was perfectly cheerful as he threatened, “If you flake, I’ll kick your ass.”

“Yes sir, Colonel sir,” the younger brother snarked, before the two exchanged their goodbyes and Jason hung up his cell.

Stripping off his suit, he set out a new one on the desk just in case he had to make a mad dash into work and then stretched out on his belly on top of his covers, a delicious shiver running down the back of his neck at the small draft of air teasing the skin only just covered by his boxer shorts. Tucking his pillow under his head, Jason let out a quiet sigh and dropping instantly into sleep.

It was 6:52 when Jason’s phone began to scream at him from the nightstand. Jason groaned, recognizing the ringtone as the phone all of his NYPD calls came in on. (He would never admit it to Marina, but her insistence that he keep his S.H.I.E.L.D.-issued phone had been a relief. It had all of his old S.H.I.E.L.D. contacts in it, and provided him with a safety blanket that he’d taken advantage of more than once.) Rolling toward the edge of the mattress, Jason dug up the phone and flicked it open roughly, grunting, “Walsh.”
“Out of bed, Walsh. We gotta another victim,” came the rough rumble of Kowalski’s voice.

Immediately, Jason was wide awake and lunged toward the suit he’d laid out – Jesus, was it only three hours ago? Yebat! – cursing, “Der’mo. Where?”

There was a pause as Kowalski took in the foreign language, before replying, “Surprisingly, this one’s still alive. She even managed to fight off her attacker.”

A surge of hope swelled through Jason, as he practically begged, “Please tell me she scratched him!”

There was a chuckle and a big grin in his partner’s voice as he agreed, “We got trace.”

The younger of the two detectives cheered, punching the air sharply in exhilaration. “I’ll be at the station in ten.”

“Eh, take your time. We still have to wait for an interpreter.”

Jason chuckled, as he insisted, “Cancel the interpreter. I know ASL.” There was a surprised sputter at that information, earning a wicked grin, before the Spec Ops soldier teased, “Ten minutes, Bert. Don’t be late.”

Snapping the phone closed, he shoved his feet into his boots and did up the laces quickly. Lunging through the front of the diner, he snatched his coat from the coat hook and dashed toward where he’d parked his car down the street. He arrived at the Second Precinct in exactly eight minutes, boots thudding dully against the concrete as he booked it into the station house. The uniform at the desk looked up in surprise, a small smile creasing his lips as he greeted the detective. “Hello Detective Walsh. How can I help you?”

“I got a call from Detective Kowalski . . . we have a new victim in our case?”

“Ah yeah . . . the deaf chick,” came the derisive sneer, causing Jason’s control over his temper to fracture a little as he struggled not to punch the man in his smug mouth. Finally, all control was gone as the uniform sneered, “I wouldn’t expect too much out of her; she’s not too bright. I mean she doesn’t even talk.”

All Jason could see was red as he hauled off and punched the man square in the face. Grabbing the uniform by the lapels, Jason hauled him up so that they were nose to nose. “She’s deaf, tupitsa. Fortunately for her, that means she can’t hear the stupid coming out of your mouth. Unfortunately for you, I can. And unless you want me to hit you again, I would seriously consider keeping your mouth shut. Cause frankly, I don’t have a problem with cooling my heels in a cell after beating you bloody. You will have deserved it, dong ma?”

Jason was aware of Kowalski standing at his back, and had expected the arched eyebrow after he’d shoved the idiot back to the floor. “What the hell happened?” Kowalski demanded, eyes narrowing as he took in the red flush on Jason’s cheeks and the barely contained rage in his eyes.

The younger detective shrugged nonchalantly as he moved after the man, replying, “He was running his mouth. I was just shutting it for him. Where’s our vic?”

“She’s in an interview room. She’s not talking, man, to anyone. The interpreter got here right after I hung up with you, and she hasn’t even so much as made a single sound.”

“Of course she hasn’t . . . she’s deaf!” Turning away, Jason rolled his eyes as he muttered, “Bozhe, spasi menya ot glupykh lyudey. (God, save me from stupid people.)”
Kowalski reached out and grabbed his elbow, yanking him to a stop as he demanded, “What the hell is that!? That’s the second time you’ve said something that I don’t understand. And since WHEN do you know ASL!?”

“First of all, my baby brother is deaf so I’ve been signing since he was old enough to know how. Second of all, the woman who raised me was Russian; I’ve been speaking Russian since I was old enough to speak. Third of all, not that you asked, but my father was born in Freiburg, Germany, so I am fluent in German, as well as having a fairly decent grasp on Spanish, passable knowledge of French and some patchy Chinese as well.” Wrenching his elbow free, Jason locked his jaw and growled, “Now, how about we get back to doing our jobs instead of just standing around here jawing like idiots, huh?”

Spinning on his heel, Jason stormed through the bullpen towards the interview room. If he’d waited just a moment, he would have seen the calculating look in Kowalski’s eyes as he contemplated his new partner’s back. Following after the younger man, he muttered under his breath, “You were a baseball player, my ass, Walsh. What the hell is your secret?”

Chapter End Notes

Translations:

Slava Bogu - Thank God
Deystvitel’no - Indeed
Yebat - fuck
Der’mo - Shit
tupitsa - dumb ass
dong ma? - Understand me? (Seeing as the Grimms are big fans of Firefly - and for any big Firefly fans, I think Jason would know this phrase and know what it means.)
Chapter 96: Amelia Bedelia

Jason walked into the interview room and immediately noticed two things. One, Chert, but she was young. And two, her eyes were a steely grey . . . just like Clint’s. Instantly, he could feel his protective nature well up over him; there was no way in hell that anyone was going to hurt this girl on his watch.

Pulling a genuine smile from the very innermost corner of him, the one that held all of his memories of his family, he watched as the girl relaxed and returned the smile tentatively. Lifting his hands, he greeted her cheerfully, Hi, I’m Detective Walsh. I’m fairly certain I should apologize for my partner, the uniforms in the building and anyone else who has given you a hard time so far this morning.

She giggled, her hands coming up to reply, I’m Amy. You speak ASL very well, Detective Walsh.

My baby brother is deaf. I’ve been speaking ASL since I was 5 or so, he explained, gesturing at the chair situated across the table from her and the translator. Do you mind if I sit?

A wide grin on her face, she shook her head lightly. There was a shine of irony in her eyes, and Jason winked; both knew that she hadn’t really had a choice in the matter, but his Marina had raised him right. Never let it be said that Jason Walsh didn’t know how to treat a lady. So do you have any
questions about what is going to happen now? Anything you want to ask me before we get started? A drink or something to eat or anything?

I would kill for a coffee, she begged, clasping her hands together pleadingly as soon as the question was out.

He chuckled, teasing, A woman after my own heart. Let me send one of the uniforms for some coffees, and we’ll get started. Does that sound okay to you? Seeing her nod, he turned his attention onto the translator and asked in sign, How about you? Would you like a coffee or anything to drink, Ms. Henderson?

I would love one, thank you Detective Walsh.

Nodding, he turned in his chair and looked back at the observation room where he knew that his partner and his CO, Sergeant Brown, would both be watching the interview. “Could I have someone run and grab three coffees for us, please? Bert? Thank you.”

Turning back, he winked at Amy. We’ll have those coffees as soon as my partner finishes plotting my murder for turning him into my errand boy.

There was a peal of real giggles then, too loud and a little uncomfortable as though she was aware that she couldn’t hear herself and probably didn’t laugh much in mixed company. Reminded of the way that Clint sounded when he didn’t have his hearing aids in, Jason couldn’t resist the opportunity to chuckle along with her. I’m glad this is amusing to you. Friendly fire is totally an option right now. My sister will kill him if I die, but Detective Kowalski has never met my sister and so doesn’t realize that he should be terrified of her. And that’s not including what my brothers would do to him; the kind of retribution that Brian alone could enact . . . it doesn’t bear thinking on.

Tell me about them, she asked, attempting to smother her giggles.

How about this? I’ll ask you a question about what happened here, and then you can ask me a question about my brothers. Sound fair?

She nodded excitedly, a bright grin on her lips and her eyes sparkling happily. You have a deal, Detective Walsh.

Please, call me Jason.

All right, Jason, what’s your first question?

Let’s start with some easy questions. Full name please?

Amelia Joanne Wilkinson.

Amelia!? Like Amelia Bedelia, from the children’s books!?

So you see why I go by Amy, she deadpanned, rolling her eyes in a clear sign of frustration.

Chuckling, he nodded in agreement as he scribbled it down in the file, Completely understandable. My sister . . . she named me; I thanked God everyday that she hadn’t named me something ridiculous like Leonard. And then I found out that my middle name was Leonard. It was without a doubt the worst day of my life.

Leonard is a pretty unfortunate name.
Oh, it gets better. My youngest brother, the one who’s deaf? He’s her favorite and she named him Clinton Francis, Jason laughed, grinning as she burst into genuine giggles again, Personally, I think I got the better end of the deal. Date of birth?

December 29th, 1978. Jason frowned at the date, noting that the date was nine days after Clint’s birthday. Flipping back through the folders and seeking out the dates of birth for each of his victims, only the translator clearing her throat drew his head back up and his attention back onto the question. Blinking once, he realized that he had forgotten his side of the deal. I apologize, Amy. I got distracted; what was your question?

What are the names of your brothers and sister?

Marina Ivanovna Petrovka, William Michael Brandt, Brian Joshua Gamble, Kenneth James Kitsom and Clinton Francis Barton. Will and Brian are older than me, and Kenny and Clint are younger than me; Marina is older than all of us. There was a quick shrug as Jason gave her a small grin. It’s not much, but it’s home. Amy, can you tell me what happened tonight? Did you see your attacker?

The rest of the interview continued much in this same vein, with the two continuing to exchange questions and answers back and forth between them. And with each answer she gave, the niggling feeling that something was seriously wrong flicked through the back of Jason’s mind. The description of her attacker was familiar and the similarities in the profiles, now that he was really looking for them, were eerily similar to his baby brother. If Jason was a betting man –and he was Spec Ops, so take that for what it was worth – he’d say that this case had nothing to do with the NYPD and deaf kids, and everything to do with S.H.I.E.L.D. and the profoundly deaf sniper known best as Hawkeye. The only question left was why . . . and Jason had a sinking feeling that only Marina and S.H.I.E.L.D. would know the answer to that.

Finally, at the end of the interview, Amy asked the question that Jason had been dreading since he’d first mentioned Marina’s role in their lives. If you don’t mind me asking, why did your sister raise you?

Jason flinched slightly, causing a small frown from the young woman as she realized that she had stepped on a sensitive subject to the detective in front of her. Taking a deep breath, he considered for a moment, before asking, Can you keep a secret?

Of course.

There was a twinge of guilt at lying to her, but it was the only answer that Jason could give that would answer the question without telling her anything about the Project Cahill and everything that that entailed. My parents gave me up to an orphanage when I was a baby; I don’t know who they were. My brothers aren’t actually my brothers and my sister isn’t really my sister. Grimacing, he reminded himself that he wasn’t actually lying; technically, the Brothers Grimm were actually the same person. You know how people say that your family isn’t the one you’re born into, it’s the one you make for yourself?

I’ve heard it said once or twice, yes.

Well, that’s basically what happened. We became a family. And when she aged out, my sister took us away from there. We’ve been a fucked up, dysfunctional family ever since.

I’m sorry, Detective Walsh. I didn’t mean to remind you of anything painful in your life.

It actually wasn’t as bad as it could have been. Marina, my sister . . . she’s kind of amazing; she made our childhoods as fun as they could have been. My baby brothers, Kenny and Clint . . . she’s
the closest thing they have to a mother. They adore her. She and my oldest brother fell in love, and they’ve been together for about 11 years.

Amy grinned, So it all worked out the way it should have in the long run?

Certainly looks that way, anyway, he agreed, with a lopsided grin. Flipping his folders closed, he took a deep breath. So, here’s what’s going to happen next, Amy. I’m going have a couple of officers place you into protective custody. We’ll set you up in a nice apartment and keep you safe until I catch this guy. Once I have him, I may need you to identify him. And when it goes to trial, I’ll need you to testify. Do you understand?

She nodded slowly, biting down briefly on her lower lip. I understand. Thank you, Jason . . . you have been very kind.

The detective gave her a small smile, before nodding a curt farewell to the translator. It was about five minutes, before he watched a uniformed officer hand her up into an official SUV. She waved at him briefly, before the doors shut and the truck pulled away. As soon as she was gone, Jason dug in his pocket for his cell phone. Pressing a button on his speed dial, the middle Grimm walked briskly toward his car as he waited impatiently for his call to be answered. It was a moment, before his brother’s voice announced, “Brandt,” into his ear.

“Will, it’s Jay. Clint out of the country yet?”

The Colonel’s tone was understandably confused as he replied, “Yeah; I put him and Barnes on a plane to Paris at 0630 this morning. Why?”

“Because I think we got a problem.”

The dread in Will’s voice was obvious as he demanded, “What kind of problem?”

“I think my killer . . . is hunting Hawkeye.”

Chapter End Notes

Translation:

Chert - Damn it!
Chapter 97: In Paris, In Love

Bucky leaned against the balcony of their private suite at the Royal Saint Michel Hotel, looking out over the skyline of Paris laid out in front of him. The Eiffel Tower was the easiest of Paris’ landmarks to see; Bucky frowned slightly as a fragmented memory flit through his thoughts of the Eiffel Tower, great pillars of smoke making the wrought iron sculpture shimmer in and out of view as the city burned around them.

A warm pair of arms coming around his waist jolted him out of his thoughts, and he smirked as a stubble-laden cheek came to rest against the bare skin of his back. “Kobeyka za vashi mysli? (Ruble for your thoughts?)” the younger sniper murmured, locking his hands together low over Bucky’s belly.

“Paris looks a lot different than I remember it,” was the only reply, earning a soft hum from the younger man.

Clint came to lean against the balcony beside him, bare skin of his chest glowing in the dim sunlight as he crossed his arms over his chest and watched Bucky look out over their surroundings. “I haven’t been to Paris since I was about 17; I was with Marina and my brothers. It was a waystation for an assignment in Nice. I don’t remember much, except for a lot of gunfire and a couple people in
handcuffs getting yelled at by Marina; Kenny had gotten hurt and she was pissed.”

Bucky’s head dropped back as he laughed, well imagining his former protégé on a tear because one of her precious boys had been injured. “Marina in full overprotective mode is a truly terrifying thing to behold. I have been gifted with the sight once or twice before.” There was a maudlin sigh as he murmured, “Did I ever tell you what happened the last time I was in Paris with the Howling Commandos? I thought we were going to lose Dum Dum. Did I tell you that?”

Realizing that he’d lost Bucky once again, Clint rolled his eyes and huffed impatiently, “At least a dozen times.”

Still lost in thought, Bucky barely realized that Clint’s temper was fraying. The two men had been held up in the hotel for three days, and so far all the former assassin had done was stare at the skyline and sigh. Getting fed up with the situation, Clint finally rolled his eyes and went to dig his S.H.I.E.L.D. issued phone out of his duffle bag. Flipping open the phone, he depressed the speed dial code that would connect him to Will, grabbing a zip-up hoodie and stormed from the hotel room.

He was pacing the hallway in bare feet when Will’s voice came over the line with a terse, “Brandt.”

“Will, it’s Clint. You gotta get me outta here, man. I’m going nuts.”

There was silence for a long moment while Will considered that, before asking curiously, “You’re in Paris with your boyfriend. You should be having all kinds of fun.”

“He’s not my boyfriend . . . I don’t think. I don’t know. Whatever; my point is, can you please send a Quinjet to come and extract me? I can’t handle the sighing and the depression and the ‘Oh poor me’ for another minute. Surely there’s someone I can be killing right now.”

Will chuckled in amusement at the characteristic whining, though his tone was firm and nonnegotiable as he insisted, “Izvinite malysh (Sorry, kiddo) . . . I need you to stay in France for right now.”

The sniper frowned realizing that something was happening that his brothers weren’t telling him. “Will . . . what’s going on? What aren’t you telling me?”

“Let’s just say that it’s safer for you right now in Paris, so I need you to stay in Paris until either I or Marina come and get you to bring you both home.”

The tone was firm and the one that Clint had been trained from infancy to obey instantly, causing Clint to only nod in rueful acceptance of the edict. Of course, if he couldn’t go home, that didn’t necessarily mean that he couldn’t go somewhere else. “But Will!” the younger brother whined, his whole body slumping as he realized that he was probably not going to get his way. “Can’t I go to Prague and see Marina, if I can’t come home?”

“You’re not going to go bug Marina at an international summit; she doesn’t have the time to be playing babysitter for you right now. For once in your life, Clint, you’re going to do as you’re told and stay in Paris with Barnes. Vy menya ponimayete? (Do you understand?)”

There was an audible huff as Clint pouted, earning a small sigh from his brother. “Clint, what do you remember about Croatia?”

“That I hate it there?” the archer snarked with a roll of his eyes.

“Does Bucky hate it there?”
“No.”

“Why not?”

There was a wince as Clint finally clued in to the point his brother was trying to make. “Because he doesn’t have the same memories that I do?”

“Exactly. Marina and I have been to Paris more than a few times, and we love it there. Brian hates it, because one of his first partners with S.H.I.E.L.D. chickened out and nearly got him killed. It’s the same place, but the emotions associated are different. Barnes cares about you; but excluding the assignments as the Winter Soldier, the last time he was there, there was a war on and he was with men he didn’t think he’d see the next morning, let alone survive the end of the war with.” There was a rueful chuckle as Will teased, “If he’s stuck in past, bring him into the present. Take him out, make new memories and let him talk about the ones he already has, okay?”

“Yeah. Thanks Will.”

“That’s what big brothers are for. Now, go back inside and harass your boyfriend into taking you to dinner and the Eiffel Tower. You’ll both have more fun, I promise. *Ya lyublyu tebya, mladshiy braht.*”

“*Ya lyublyu tebya, bol’shoy braht.*”

“I’ll see you in a couple of days,” Will promised, before there was a click and the dialtone sang in his ears.

Clicking the phone shut, Clint took a deep breath and went back into the hotel room. Bucky hadn’t moved from his place, and it was entirely possible that he didn’t realize that he’d even moved. Squaring his shoulders, Clint rejoined the other man on the balcony and reached out to grab Bucky’s shoulder, spinning him around to face him. The archer’s eyes narrowed at Bucky, before he sighed. “Buck . . . I want you to do me favor. Can you do that?”

The former Soviet assassin’s eyes narrowed as he watched the younger man warily. “I guess that depends on what the favor is.”

“We’re in Paris . . . the City of Love and Light. There’s no assignment, there’s no objective and no one to kill. Could you please, for my sake, enjoy it for a minute?” Clint snarked, though there was seriousness in his eyes as he watched the other man sulk at the changes he found in a city that he hadn’t seen in 60 some odd years . . . at least as Bucky Barnes. Clint wasn’t quite sure how long it had been since the *Zomniy Soldat* had been to Paris and quite frankly he was smart enough to know not to ask.

Chuckling as he realized that his poor boyfriend – was that the right term for the man he loved, but hadn’t yet taken out on a date? – was getting a little fed up with his maudlin demeanor, Bucky willingly turned away from the view and reached out to loop one arm around the Army sniper’s waist and haul him close. “I’m sorry khishchnik.” His hands traced lightly over heated skin, both hands causing very different sensations; the metal fingers were like ice while fingers made of flesh and blood trailed like fire. Clint shuddered, eyes rolling back slightly as he luxuriated in the feeling. “What do you want to do first? You’re right; we’re in Paris with nothing to do. We should enjoy it while we can, right?”

There was a sly smirk as Clint teased, “Frankly, as long as we’re doing something, I’m good with the plan.”
Half an hour later, the archer was a bundle of irrepressible energy as they rode the elevator to the restaurant, Le 58 Tour Eiffel, located on the bottommost terrace of the great wrought iron structure. Bucky had called Marina, and somehow Clint’s sister had managed to work her usual magic – from Prague! Seriously, how many souls did Marina own anyway? – and procured them a reservation at the notoriously packed eatery. Both snipers were attired in nice slacks, though Clint had opted for a purple button down with grey tie as opposed to Bucky’s suit jacket and navy blue mockneck shirt.

“Tell me again how Marina managed to score us a reservation here?”

Bucky chuckled, shaking his head fondly as he squeezed Clint’s hand where he held it in his metal one. “It’s probably best if I don’t tell you, actually.”

Clint’s eyes narrowed as he questioned, “This is kind of like Will’s Big Damn Rolodex of Big Damn Favors, isn’t it?”

A wide grin split the older man’s face as Bucky lifted the archer’s hand to his lips to press a sweet kiss to the back. “Probably. I’m sure between the two of them, they could own and operate a small country by now if they were so inclined.”

The S.H.I.E.L.D. sniper snorted as he laughed, “What makes you think that they don’t? Last I heard, Latveria was looking for someone to take over for Dr. Doom.”

Rolling his eyes, the former assassin muttered under his breath, “Latveria is always looking for someone to take over for Doom. They’ve been trying to kick him out since I was still working for the Russians.”

“And yet, he remains. Why is that, I wonder?”

“I don’t know and quite frankly I can’t really bring myself to care.”

Just then, the doors opened to the restaurant and Clint was once again bouncing on his toes in excitement. The maitre’d, a congenial elderly gentleman, gave the exuberant young man a small smile and bowed regally, “Messieurs, we’ve been expecting you. Madame Vipère has arranged for the best view in the house, as well as a bottle of our best vintage. If you would follow me?”

Clint frowned at the term, leaning over to whisper to Bucky, “My French is a little rusty. What did he call Marina?”

“Madame Viper,” Bucky murmured back, the two men exchanging a telling look between them.

Madame Viper was the new leader of HYDRA; Marina would laugh herself stupid when she found out. Will, on the other hand, would probably have a convulsion fit or an apoplexy, whichever would make Marina stop laughing fastest. Clint smirked, ducking his head to hide his laughter as the two men followed the elderly host back to a small table by one of the windows.

It was after they were seated that Bucky rested his elbows on the table and rested his chin on his hands, watching Clint with curious blue eyes. The archer cocked an eyebrow at him, lifting his water to his lips to take a sip. Setting the glass down, he teased, “Take a picture, Bucky; it’ll last longer.”

Bucky’s features never twitched, continuing to watch him seriously before asking, “Doesn’t it bother you?”

There was a long silence as Clint considered that, followed by an eloquent, “Huh?”

The other man’s face was twisted in confusion and Bucky chuckled, teasing, “This is good look for you.”
“Shut up!” Clint growled, before slouching backwards in his chair. “You’re going to need to be a little more specific Buck. Because last I checked, we were about to have a very romantic dinner at one of the most exclusive restaurants in Paris. So doesn’t **what** bother me?”

“I’ve killed people, Clint, who were only deserving of killing because someone else told me they were. I never cared if they had a family, if they had a wife, or any motivation for why they did what they did. I had my orders and I executed them. So, I’m asking you, doesn’t that bother you?”

“Wow, Buck, we need to have a talk about appropriate conversations to have on first dates and what usually needs to wait until the least the third. Usually, the confession of murder – regardless of whether I already know about it or not – is usually a conversation you have later on in the relationship,” Clint snarked, rolling his eyes.

Bucky looked abashed, causing the archer to chuckle. Leaning forward, Clint reached for his partner’s hand and squeezed. “I’ve killed people, for S.H.I.E.L.D. If your kills should bother me, shouldn’t mine then bother you?”

Whatever the former Soviet assassin had been about to say was interrupted by the arrival of their waitress. She was a petite little thing with a wide, exuberant grin as she literally bounced to the table and cheered, **“Bonjour messieurs, m’appelle Danielle. Je crois que vous avez une bouteille de notre meilleur millésime de l’ordre, oui?** (Hello sirs, my name is Danielle. I believe you have a bottle of our finest vintage on order, yes?)”

Clint’s grin was charming as he replied in careful French, **“Oui, merci Danielle.”**

**“Avez-vous regardé notre menu aperitif? (Have you looked at our appetizer menu yet?)”**

**“Pourquoi ne pas nous surprendre, Danielle? Vous choisissez ce que vous recommandez, nous vous serions très reconnaissants. (Why don’t you surprise us, Danielle? You pick what you would recommend; we would be most grateful.)”**

She grinned at the younger of the two men, giving him a sweet wink as she gathered up the menus and turned away. **“Oui monsieur. Je vais devoir que, sur la droite. (Yes sir. I’ll have that right out for you.)”**

Clint watched her go, turning back to Bucky. Reaching out, he laid one hand over his companion’s hand with a small smile. “How about we table this conversation, until we’re back at the hotel? I’m sure there are a lot of tourists in this restaurant who speak perfectly acceptable English, and the last thing we want is for anyone to overhear and make uncomfortable assumptions, right?”

Bucky’s grin was sheepish as he nodded in agreement. Returning the smile, Clint leaned over the top of the table and pressed a sweet kiss to the other man’s lips, using just a hint of teeth to nibble at the former assassin’s lips. Looking deeply into the former assassin’s eyes, the archer whispered against soft lips, “For the record, it doesn’t bother me . . . and it never has.”

Dinner was a lighthearted affair, the two laughing and exchanging stories. By unspoken consensus, Bucky didn’t talk about the Howling Commandos or his time as the Winter Soldier, and Clint didn’t talk about the Army or his assignments with S.H.I.E.L.D. They left the restaurant in high spirits, hands swinging lightly between them as they walked through the streets back to their hotel. Once they were back in their room, Bucky shifted his grip on Clint’s hand and swung him quickly into his arms. “You are kind of amazing, you know that? I have only met one person in my whole life who was as warm and generous and giving as you. And seeing as he wasn’t waiting for me to reappear from the dead, he’s gone from my life forever.”
Clint tucked himself into the other man’s chest, ear pressed against the former Soviet spy’s chest as he listened to his heartbeat. There was a rush of irrational jealousy, but Clint crushed it ruthlessly, unwilling to be resentful of Bucky’s feelings for a dead man. “Did you love him?”

There was a soft chuckle at the question, Bucky’s arms tightening just that fraction more to reassure the young Grimm in his arms. “I could have spent the rest of my life at his side, even if he didn’t know how I felt. He was always a runt, getting into fights that he had to have known he couldn’t win. It was a battle just to keep him alive sometimes, never mind healthy. But then he got strong and suddenly he was this big man with an even bigger heart, who still didn’t know how to run away from a fight.” Shaking his head, he continued ruefully, “He was a paragon of goodness during the war, but someone had to do the dirty work. And as it had been when we were kids, it ended up being me. He’d be horrified at the blood on my hands . . . by what I’ve done. By you know what it’s like to give yourself to something you believe to be right and noble, and to be willing to get your hands dirty in order to protect the ones you love.”

Clint blushed sheepishly, eyes flashing wide as Bucky bowed his head to whisper into his ear, “I love you.”

His head snapped up and grey eyes stared into ocean blue. “You mean it?” he breathed, looking awed by the very idea.

Bucky’s nod was silent, causing a wide grin as Clint lunged up to press his lips hard against the other man’s. Marina’s voice wafted through the back of Clint’s mind, advising patience and counseling baby steps, but all Clint could think of was the man in front of him, whispering “I love you” against every part of Clint’s body that he could reach. Closing his eyes, Clint replied breathlessly, “Ya lyublyu tebya,” and let himself get swept away by the tide.
Chapter 98: The First Time

For a long moment, the two men allowed themselves to float on the haze that their embrace created. But eventually, Bucky groaned and forced himself to back away from the other man’s lips. Clint whimpered, visibly distressed by the distance as he whispered, “Don’t stop.”

Bucky’s fingers were reverent in the strands of hair at the archer’s temples, lifting him to his lips for a quick, sweet kiss. “I’m not stopping, khishchnik. I’m just slowing us down for a second. If we’re going to do this, we’re going to do it right.” Petting tenderly over Clint’s cheeks, the former assassin asked firmly, “Before we do anything, I need to hear you say it. Do you want to do this, or are you only going along with it because I told you I love you?” The archer bit his lip at the question, earning
a small chuckle from Bucky as he insisted, “No matter what happens between us tonight, the fact that I love you will not change, okay? So don’t do anything that you’re not one hundred percent sure you want, just to make me happy okay?”

Leaning forward, Clint rested his forehead against Bucky’s chin as he murmured, “I want this, Bucky. I want you.”

Guiding the younger man to the bed, Bucky pushed him lightly to sit on the edge and seated himself beside. “Have you ever done this before? With a girl or a boy?”

Clint’s cheeks flamed at the question, ducking his head in embarrassment even as he shook his head firmly from side to side in mortified answer. “Ya pryamogonnyy, (I’m a virgin,)” he whispered, closing his eyes tightly to avoid seeing Bucky’s reaction to the information.

Feeling a rush of guilt and honor at the knowledge that he was about to become this amazing young man’s first sexual experience, Bucky ducked his head to press a tender kiss to his cheek. “Vse v porядке. Я буду забо́титься о тебе. (It’s all right. I’m going to take good care of you.)” Taking a deep breath, he ran his fingers tenderly through Clint’s hair, trying to soothe his embarrassment and ease him into their next conversation. “That being said, what do you know about sex between men?”

If it was possible, Clint’s cheeks grew that much brighter in response as he whispered, “Just what I’ve read.”

Bucky chuckled at the tiny whisper, turning Clint’s face to his with a gentle finger and pressing an adoring kiss to his lips. Pulling away before it got too out of hand, Bucky teased, “Don’t believe anything you’ve read. Forget it all. I’m going to take care of you, Clint; no matter how this plays out, this is going to be a night that you never forget.”

The archer blushed as he considered the other man, before asking quietly, “Have you done it before? Had sex with a guy?”

The assassin chuckled as he nodded, “This isn’t my first trip to the rodeo.” Brushing a strand of hair back out of the archer’s face, he inquired lightly, “Seeing as this is your first time, you’re going to top me . . . okay?” Clint’s eyes flashed wide at the question, an unspoken terror shining brightly in his eyes and giving Bucky his answer. Leaning over with a small smile, Bucky pressed his lips to the younger man’s lips and coaxed him to relax, small nibbling kisses that caused Clint to sigh and melt into the older man once again. Petting tenderly through the hair at his temples, Bucky insisted, “Calm down, khishchnik. It’s going to be good for both of us, I promise.”

“But I’ve never done this before . . . what if I hurt you?”

“You’re not going to hurt me,” Bucky insisted with a gentle smile, “We’re going to go really slow and I’m going to talk you through it all.” Ocean blue eyes were tender and adoring as a calloused thumb smoothed tenderly over the other man’s stubbled cheek. “I love you, khishchnik . . . I won’t let you hurt me, I promise.”

Nodding resolutely, Clint leaned forward and pressed his lips to Bucky’s, ready to move to the next part of their night together. Bucky’s hands were firm as they tugged on Clint’s tie, loosening it quickly and stripping it from around his neck sharply. Once the length of silk had been discarded to the side, the former assassin slowed the pace again, his fingers teasing knowingly on the buttons of the archer’s dress shirt. It quickly became apparent to the S.H.I.E.L.D. agent that if he didn’t take matters into his own hands, he was going to die of old age before the other man even got his shirt unbuttoned.
Leaning backwards from the kiss, Clint let loose a string of Russian obscenities as he ripped the buttons from the holes and stripped the shirt deftly from his shoulders. Bucky’s eyes flashed wide at the sudden expanse of skin presented to him, earning a soft huff from the sniper. “Seriously Bucky... I’m a professional assassin and S.H.I.E.L.D. field agent. I’m not made of chertov glass.”

The man formerly known as the Zimniy Soldat chuckled at the admonition, drawling insolently, “Good to know.”

Reaching for the hem of his own shirt, the older man stripped it off over his head with the black undershirt following its course only moments after. A sly smirk crept across Clint’s lips as he reached out and stroked reverent fingers over Bucky’s skin. Bucky grinned at his boyfriend – considering what they were about to do, Bucky was pretty sure he could call Clint his boyfriend and not be in the wrong – and reached out to haul him closer, laying back on the bed and dragging the younger man over him. Clint groaned at the feeling of Bucky’s erection brushing up against his own, the two of them separated only by a very thin layer of clothing. Lifting his hands to cup the other man’s cheeks, Clint pressed his lips to Bucky’s sharply. “I want to see you naked,” he whispered, steel grey eyes wide open as he stared into the other man’s eyes.

The resulting grin was wolfish as Bucky leaned up briefly to press a kiss to Clint’s lips before shoving him over onto the bed beside him. Hands skimmed down skin and made quick work of the button, the zipper snicking quietly as it was lowered past the needy flesh. Clint was only a little surprised by the absence of underwear, a wicked grin curving his lips as Bucky arched his back and kicked the rest of his clothing to the floor beside the bed. Lowering his hands to his own pants, Clint quickly divested himself of his last remaining articles of clothing.

“What the hell, Buck?”

Bucky shrugged lazily as he reached out to run reverent fingers over the exposed skin, carefully skirting the erect cock standing at attention between Clint’s thighs. “I just want to look at you for a second.”

In response, Clint’s cheeks flamed a brilliant red, once again uncharacteristically shy even as he continued to stand firm under Bucky’s thorough examination. Rolling onto his knees, Bucky crawled slowly toward the edge, reaching out to trace gentle fingers along every ridge of muscle. Running his fingers through the curls at the base of Clint’s cock caused a shudder, and Clint pleaded, “Buck... please.”

Reaching out to hook his hands behind Clint’s neck, Bucky interlocked his fingers and pulled him down on top of him once again. His legs spread unconsciously, cradling Clint between his thighs and bringing their erections into perfect alignment. Clint grunted at the sensation, shifting his hips slightly to increase the friction before beginning to move their bodies together in earnest. The former spy allowed it for a moment, before a warm hand on the small of the archer’s back brought the motion to a standstill. Leaning up, Bucky pressed his lips against Clint’s own. Drawing back, he looked deeply into the young man’s eyes as he whispered a firm order against them, “Yebat menya, khishchnik.”

Clint’s eyes fluttered as he groaned out a breathless, “Da ser.”
Bucky strained sideways, pulling the drawer of the bedside table open and rooting around inside its confines awkwardly. Finally locating the lube and condoms, Bucky extracted them from the drawer and offered them to Clint with a warm grin. “You’re going to need these.”

Clint bit down on his lower lip, as he sat up a little and accepted the items from the other man. Settling the strip of condoms aside, he flicked open the cap of the lube and squirted a little into his palm. Shivering a little at the temperature, he murmured, “It’s cold.”

Bucky grinned lightly, “It’ll warm up, I promise. Get your fingers really wet; it’s going to help.”

The archer’s face twisted into a delicate moue of distress as he obeyed, even as he protested, “It’s really oily.”

The spy’s head dropped back in amusement, genuine laughter erupting from his throat at the statement. Squeezing Clint’s knee with one hand, Bucky nodded in agreement, “It is . . . but you’re going to be grateful for it in a minute, honest.”

Finally, Clint’s fingers were deemed to be coated sufficiently enough in the slippery substance and Bucky took his wrist gently in his own hand. Curling Clint’s fingers into a fist with only his index finger pointing outwards, he lowered Clint’s hand to the soft place directly behind his balls. The archer’s eyes widened slightly as Bucky helped him pet at the skin there gently, eyelids slipping languidly over ocean blues as the spike of pleasure stabbed viciously through his body. Arching his back a little, Bucky released Clint’s hand and locked his fingers in the bedspread, luxuriating in the sensation as the younger sniper continued to stroke tenderly against the small strip of skin.

Once Bucky had relaxed completely into the sensation, he reached down to guide Clint’s fingers a little further under his body. Clint’s first clumsy brush over the puckered entrance caused a harsh gasp from the man under him, Bucky’s hips jerking upwards in search of more stimulation. The archer’s eyebrows furrowed, attempting to draw his hands back in concern. Only Bucky’s tight grip on his wrist kept his hands exactly where the older assassin wanted them. “Buck . . . did I hurt you?”

Bucky chuckled lazily, his head rolling back and forth slightly on the pillow. “Net, khishchnik. You absolutely did not hurt me . . . that was a good gasp.” Firming his grip, the sniper shifted Clint’s finger back to his entrance and began to push it inwards. The archer’s eyes were wide and fascinated as he watched his finger breach Bucky’s body and sink into the depths of him. Clint’s voice was a reverent whisper as he breathed, “Bozhe moi . . . Buck . . . you’re so tight.”

Bucky’s grin was strained as he rocked his hips on Clint’s fingers, “It’s been awhile. This is where we have to go slow, da?”

Clint swallowed hard as he nodded silently, starting to pump that single finger into Bucky’s body without any coaxing. The former spy twisted under the sensation, his hands once again locked into the bedspread beneath him as the feeling of being stretched and filled once more became familiar. He hadn’t been lying when he’d told his partner that it had been awhile, and the last thing he wanted was to ruin Clint’s first time because something inside of him tore and called a halt to the festivities. Finally, Bucky panted breathlessly, “Add another.”

The archer bit down on his lip hard, visibly unsure at the prompt. His boyfriend reached out and smacked away Clint’s stilled fingers, sinking two of his own fingers into his body. He arched upward, a low groan reverberating through the room as his free hand came up to wrap around his cock and stroke quickly. The archer stared at the older man in awe, as he manipulated his own body to ready himself. Finally, Clint snapped himself out of it and grabbed the wrist of the hand Bucky was pumping into himself, stilling it and pulling it away. He grinned at Bucky’s muttered swearing, before slamming two fingers back into Bucky’s ass to the accompaniment of a harsh scream as the
sniper bucked almost completely off the bed.

Fighting to get himself under control, Bucky gasped, “Turn your hand.”

Clint frowned at the instruction, inquiring curiously, “What?”

“Turn your hand so that your palm is facing downwards and push in as far as you can,” Bucky repeated, panting hard as he struggled to remain coherent through the internal stimulation.

Frowning, Clint did as told, connecting brutally with a small, spongy spot inside his partner. He watched in fascination as Bucky’s whole body jerked as though he’d touched a live wire, writhing under the stimulation as he gasped, “Now, put your other hand on the strip of skin behind my balls and massage it a little; don’t be afraid to push a little rougher than you think you should okay?”

Obeying the order, Clint massaged the small strip of skin behind Bucky’s balls roughly, while continuing to stimulate the little nub inside of his boyfriend. Bucky literally went wild, a shout erupting from his throat as his cock twitched sharply and pearly white liquid gushed from the slit at the top. The archer moved to remove his hands, but the sniper jerked upwards with the admonition. “Don’t stop!”

It was a long few minutes with Bucky shuddering at every pass, Clint staring in wonder at the frantic, sexy image his boyfriend presented. Finally, the sensation became too much and the sniper begged, “All right . . . you can stop . . . please. I don’t want to be too sensitive to enjoy the feeling of your khuy in my zadnitsa.”

Clint rolled his eyes fondly at the other man, snorting lightly as he teased, “You watch too much bad Russian porn. You are hereby banned from the internet forever.”

Bucky’s growl should not have been as hot as it was, causing Clint’s arousal to kick up a notch, voice rumbling low in his chest as he ordered brusquely, “Shut up and fuck me, khishchnik, or you can make yourself a bed on the floor.”

The archer’s grin was appropriately cheeky as he gave the older man a cocky salute and a cheerful, “Yes sir!”

Shifting forward slightly, he reached for a condom and tore it open with slippery fingers. Once the package was open, Bucky reached to take the small circle and rolled it expertly around Clint’s cock, stroking once . . . twice . . . three times before gently tugging him closer and spreading his legs that much wider. Resting the mushroom head against his hole, Bucky reached out with his free hand and gripped Clint’s hip to guide him forward. For a moment it seemed as though he wouldn’t fit, despite the prep, before the head pushed past the muscle and Clint nearly lost his hold on his control. Dropping over Bucky’s body, braced upwards by his hands, he panted hard as the older man grinned and continued to pull the youngest Grimm further into his body. “You still with me?”

“God, Buck . . . you’re so tight. I can’t . . . I’m gonna come.”

Bucky arched his back a little, inviting Clint’s cock further into his body as he admonished lightly, “Hold on . . . just hang on for another minute. I’m almost there . . . just hold on for just a second longer, okay? Can you do that for me?”

Clint gritted his teeth as he bottomed out, groaning as he began to piston his hips, the muscles around the Bucky’s entrance squeezing him tightly as he rocked in and out. Bucky’s hand wrapped tightly around his own cock, one leg coming up to curl over the top of Clint’s shoulder and his other leg splaying out as widely as he could. For a long moment, there was only the slick sound of skin against
skin and frantic pants as sensation threatened to crest over and consume them completely. The archer groaned as he felt his balls draw tightly to his body, his hips slammed against Bucky’s backside as he chased his orgasm. “God, Buck . . . I hope you’re with me here, because I can’t hold on anymore.”

Bucky’s groan was filthy as he insisted, “Bozhe moi . . . almost there . . . just shift a little bit to the left . . .” There was a howl as Clint obeyed, causing another spurt of liquid to spread between the two of them and Bucky’s muscles to clench down hard on Clint’s cock. At the sensation, Clint lost his grip on his control and slammed as deeply into his partner as he could and felt his orgasm take over him in breathless waves.

Collapsing onto Bucky’s chest, he burrowed close as the other man smoothed tender fingers through the sweat pooled on Clint’s back. It was a few minutes before Clint got his breath back enough to inquire, “When can we do that again?”

The feeling of Bucky laughing while Clint was still inside of him was a novel one, and Clint groaned as he felt himself growing hard once again. Pressing an adoring kiss to the top of Clint’s head, Bucky teased, “Oh to be so young again.” Shifting his hips a little as the other man’s cock began to swell once again where it was still nestled within the Soviet assassin’s body, he insisted, “Give me a minute to recover and we can go again. I’m not as young as you are.”

“Well hurry it up, old man,” Clint laughed, dropping his back to wink at his boyfriend. “I’ve got plans for you . . . and being lazy in bed isn’t one of them.”

Bucky chuckled as he shook his head, “You’re going to be one of the insatiable ones, aren’t you?”

“Probably,” Clint cheered, bouncing slightly in place . . . which caused a grunt as his cock slid along the sensitive nerve endings in Bucky’s ass again. At the stimulation, Bucky felt himself growing half-hard and knew that a full erection was not that far from his reach once again. Feeling the hardening beneath him, Clint grinned and began to rock his hips teasingly, shallow thrusts that caused Bucky’s skin to flush and sharp gasps to punch from his lungs with every motion. “Hold on, Bucky . . . this could get a little bumpy.”

From there, the two began to engage in a long slow fuck, drawing out the pleasure and earning sharp gasps from each man. Clint rocked into him slowly for at least ten minutes, watching as Bucky’s body writhed beneath him, his body overwhelmed by the continuous stimulation and overtaxed by the constant pounding to his prostate. It was as Bucky was climbing the cliff to another orgasm that there was a sharp knock at the door. Clint frowned and paused, causing Bucky to scrabble frantically at his arms. “Ignore it . . . it’s probably just a guest or housekeeping or something. Don’t you dare fucking stop.”

There was silence for a moment, before there was another prolonged pounding at the door. Clint continued to fuck Bucky through the sound, before he froze at the sound of his sister’s voice through the door, “Clint! I can hear you in there! Open this damned door now!”

Almost as one, Bucky and Clint both breathed out, “Chert voz’mi!”

Chapter End Notes

Translations:

khishchnik - little hawk (Bucky’s nickname for Clint)
chertov - fucking
Zimniy Soldat - Winter Soldier
Yebat menya - fuck me
Da/net - Yes/no
ser - sir
Bozhe moi - Oh my God
khuy - cock
zadnitsa - ass
Chert voz'mi - fucking hell
Chapter 99: Hawk Hunting

There was silence for a moment, the two rocking together lazily, before there was another prolonged pounding at the door. Clint continued to fuck Bucky through the sound, before he froze at the sound of his sister’s voice through the door, “Clint! I can hear you in there! Open this damned door now!”

Almost as one, Bucky and Clint both breathed out, “Chert voz’mi!”
Bucky groaned in discomfort as Clint nearly yanked himself free from the other man’s embrace. Clint grimaced at the sound, leaning forward to kiss him sweetly in apology before grabbing up the coverlet and throwing it over the other man’s body. Snatching a robe from the inside of the closet, he winced at the sound of Marina’s pounding impatiently on the door once again. “I’m coming!” he shouted, pulling the robe around himself and tying it closed firmly – Marina had seen him naked of course, but the last time had been when he was 3 years old and frankly he’d like to keep it that way.

Storming toward the door, he wrenched it open with a growl. “What the hell, Marina!?”

A single elegant eyebrow cocked upwards as chocolate eyes swept up the youngest Grimm’s body, taking in the rumpled hair, the dried sweat in the pocket of his exposed collarbones and the bare legs peaking from under the robe. A small smirk tilted up one corner of her lips as she teased, “Well, at least someone’s been having fun on their European vacation.” Leaning around him to peak into the room, she grinned at the sight of Bucky sprawled, limp and shirtless on the bed, coverlet thrown haphazardly atop him. “Hello, Zima . . . have fun?”

“Shut up, uchenyy,” he growled, though there was no heat in the scold, causing a round of cackling laughter from the S.H.I.E.L.D. handler.

Turning back to Clint, she grinned up at him, the gesture warm and adoring as she went up on tiptoe to hug her boy firmly. Turning her head to whisper in his ear, she murmured just low enough for only him to hear, “Congratulations, dorogoy. I hope he makes you happy.”

Clint’s answering grin was wide as he nodded in silent agreement, arms wrapping around her briefly to reciprocate her embrace. Releasing her, he looked her up and down, only just realizing that she was wearing her Army dress greens as opposed to her navy blue S.H.I.E.L.D. uniform. Frowning, he reached out to wrap a hand around her upper arm lightly. “Marina, what’s wrong?”

As though that question was a switch, the Russian’s body straightened and she frowned fiercely. Looking between the two of them, she ordered quietly, “Get cleaned up and packed; there’s a situation in New York.”

“A situation in New York?” Bucky inquired, even as he moved to the edge of the bed.

Clint was the first to connect the dots, blurtting out, “Fuck me! After all of that, Will never did tell me why I had to stay in Paris. What the hell, Marina!? What’s going on?”

The Russian spy sighed as she gestured toward the bathroom. “Get cleaned up and I’ll tell you as much as I know, dorogoy. We’re wheels up in fifteen minutes, so make it fast.”

There was a fierce frown from the archer at the information, though he nodded obediently and moved toward the bathroom to clean up a little bit. Shutting the door of the room, Marina turned to face the door to allow Bucky to get out of bed as well as give the two men some privacy as they prepare to leave Paris behind them. Projecting her voice to be able to be heard, Marina began to recount the events of the last few days. “About a week ago, Jason and his partner were assigned to a case. There has been a series of hate crimes against deaf young adults. Most of the victims did not survive the attack, but a couple managed to make it out alive though most have been unconscious and therefore in no position to talk. Jason was worried about you, Clint; you’re deaf and you were around the same age as the rest of the victims. He called Will and Will had the two of you on a plane out of the country the next morning to keep you safe.” There was a sigh as Marina lifted one hand to rub at the bridge of her nose, “Three hours after talking to Will, Jason caught a break in the case. Her name was Amelia Wilkinson; she’d managed to fight off her attacker and gotten a good look at him. As Jason was questioning her about the attack, some patterns began to show up. The attackers were not just hate crimes against random deaf kids; our killer is hunting you.”
There was a crash and a shout from the bathroom as Clint bolted into the main room, dressed in tactical pants and his sleeveless Under Armour shirt. “I’m sorry . . . say that again?”

Marina’s head was resting against the door as she chuckled, “I’m sorry, that’s not entirely true. Jason’s killer isn’t hunting you, particularly; he’s actually hunting Hawkeye.”

Bucky’s hands were busy at his throat as he exited the bathroom, yanking his uniform tie into submission as he insisted, “But Clint IS Hawkeye.”

“We’re fairly certain that our killer doesn’t know that. He knows Hawkeye’s approximate age and that he’s deaf, but he doesn’t know Hawkeye’s exact identity.” Dropping her head back, she asked sarcastically, “Can I turn around now?”

Clint chuckled as he teased, “You can look; we’re decent enough.”

Marina turned back, arms coming up to fold over her chest as she looked between the two men. “I have my department back on base going through all of your case files, but I could really use your help Clint. There has to be something that I’m missing . . . some clue that I’m overlooking that helped Jason’s killer make the leap between S.H.I.E.L.D. sniper to deaf young adult in New York.”

Frowning, Clint ran a hand back through his hair, vaguely aware of Bucky throwing all of their things back into their luggage; neither had really had the time to unpack, so it didn’t take long to be ready to head home once again. “I don’t know how I can help, Marina. I really don’t.”

The Russian handler gave him a tight smile, reaching out to squeeze his arm fondly as she soothed, “It’s okay, dorogoy. We’ll figure it out, I promise. We’re going to stop this guy before he hurts anyone else. I promise.”

Bucky hauled his duffel bag over his shoulder, watching as Clint did the same before the two men followed the handler from the room. “You said Ms. Wilkinson managed to fight off her attacker? Did she manage to get anything that could help us identify him, except for a description? A fistful of hair, skin under her fingernails, blood on her shirt? Anything?”

“Misha told me that they’d managed to collect ‘trace’ from her. But I don’t know what the hell that even means,” Marina huffed as she rolled her eyes.

Clint grinned as he explained, “‘Trace’ is what Jason calls DNA that can help identify a suspect. Apparently it’s a cop thing.”

Marina’s whole demeanor cheered at the information, visibly relieved by the news. “That’s good. If we can get a hit back from the DNA, we can narrow down your caseload to try to figure out a motive.”

The trio arrived at the front of the hotel, the S.H.I.E.L.D. agent who had been assigned as Marina’s driver obvious in the room as he scanned the foyer for any potential threats. He was about as green as an agent could get, seeing as how easy it was to pick him out of the rest of the besuited and sunglasses-wearing crowd of businessmen. Shaking his head, Bucky grinned at his former protégé as he teased, “You may want to talk to Nick about getting a new bodyguard. This one’s ridiculously obvious.”

“Oh, he’s not the bodyguard. He’s my driver. Technically, Nika and Vika are the agents on the books as my official bodyguards . . .” there was a roll of her eyes here as she muttered under her breath, “. . . not that I need a bodyguard at all, but like anyone actually listens to me. Damn Misha to an unpleasant hell anyway.”
Clint chuckled at the now-familiar griping; ever since her shooting in London, his brother had become even more protective of the former Russian spy. The fact that her two sisters agreed with him – and were more than willing to play bodyguard when Will thought she needed one – was just the proverbial icing on the cake. It never failed to amuse the younger Brothers Grimm, though none of them were crazy enough to ever tell their sister that. Looping one arm around her shoulders, he pulled her close to him and pressed a warm kiss to her temple. “Lyublyu tebya, Marishka,” he teased, nose crinkling as he barely managed to dodge her playful slap.

“You shut up!” she ordered playfully, laughing eyes narrowed in mock-affront. “Seriously, every last one of you is just as bad as Misha.” Throwing her hands up in the air in exasperation, she muttered under her breath in vicious Russian as she slid soundlessly into the car.

Two hours later, the plane was in the air and both Marina and Clint were going over several of his mission files that Vika had sent to her tablet. The sound of the in-flight phone caused Marina to jump, even as Bucky leaned back to lift it from its receiver. Bringing it to his ear, he greeted the caller with a brusque, “Da?” Looking up at Marina, he frowned slightly before grunting an affirmative and handing the phone to the handler. “It’s for you.”

Marina’s eyebrows furrowed as she handed off the tablet to the archer before accepting the call. “This is Petrovka.”

“Marishka . . . it’s Will.”

If it was possible, Marina’s frown deepened at the concern in her lover’s voice. “Misha? What’s wrong? What’s happened? Has there been another victim?”

There was a morbid relief in his tone as he replied, “Net.”

For a moment, the Russian sagged in relief at the news, until she realized that Will was even more reticent than usual. One hand lifted to her mouth, sharp white teeth nibbling worriedly on her thumbnail as she waited for whatever news her partner had called to impart. For a long moment there was silence on the other end of the line, before a ragged sigh came through the receiver and ratcheted Marina’s worry up that much further. Her tone was pleading as she begged, “Mishka . . . moy vozlyublennyy . . . what’s happened?”

“We got a hit back on the trace that Ms. Wilkinson had under her fingernails.”

Every part of Marina wanted to be excited about the news, even as she acknowledged that her partner’s tone did not necessarily mean that this was in fact good news. Therefore, her tone was understandably wary as she inquired, “I’m not going to like this, am I?”

There was rueful chuckle as Will groaned, “I highly doubt it.”

Biting down on her lips, Marina insisted quietly, “If you say it very fast, maybe it won’t hurt as much.”

Will’s voice was desolate as he replied, “I highly doubt that too.” There was a moment pause as the Colonel gathered his nerve before announcing, “Our killer is one Jared Porter.”

Marina’s eyes flashed wide at the name, her tone cold as she demanded, “MY Jared Porter!?"

“Da . . . the same man that is currently rifling through Hawkeye’s mission files, trying to find some mention of himself at this very moment.” There was an rueful chuckle as he announced, “I think it’s safe to say that we have a problem.”
The Russian’s lips worked in horror as she considered the fact that one of her most trusted aides was the man responsible for trying to track down her youngest charge and kill him. Finally, her spine straightened and her eyes went cold, before she replied coldly, “Or this could be the best thing that ever happened to this case. Call Jason; the both of you meet me at the tarmac. I think I have an idea on how to catch our killer red-handed.”

Chapter End Notes

Translations:

Zima - Winter (Marina's nickname for Bucky)
Uchenyy - Scholar (Bucky's nickname for Marina)
Dorogoy - Darling (Marina's nickname for Clint)
Lyublyu tebya - Love you
Da/net - yes/no
moy vozlyublenyy - my beloved (One of Marina's nicknames for Will)
The Centennial

Chapter Notes

So I apologize SOOO MUCH for the lateness of this chapter. However, I have been planning something really special for this, the 100TH CHAPTER OF UALP!!!! And in celebration of that, there is a Will/Marina video posted up on YouTube. Just copy and paste this link (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HQwlAWTat_U) into your browser window and enjoy! I hope that you continue to read and enjoy. Thanks for all of your wonderful comments. I adore each and every one of them.

As always, pertinent translations are at the end.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter 100: The Centennial

Bert Kowalski was not a stupid man. He’s been a cop for twenty years and for fourteen years of it, he’d been a detective. Sure, he wasn’t usually very by the book, and he had been written up more
than a few times for mouthing off to the sergeant and his overall bad attitude. Either way, his instincts were good and he usually had a good idea when shit was going to do down.

That being said, Walsh was fidgeting in his seat, constantly looking up towards the door as though he was expecting someone. Kowalski’s Spidey senses were tingling; something big was happening and he was not happy about being out of the loop. Glaring at his partner, he kicked his chair and demanded, “What the hell is up with you?”

Walsh frowned, green eyes narrowed as he snapped back, “Nothing. What the hell, Kowalski?”

“You’re as nervous as a cat in a room full of rocking chairs. Something’s up . . . and I want to know what it is.”

‘A room full of rocking chairs?’ Walsh asked, with a smug smirk. “It’s the 21st Century, Bert . . . would you care to join the rest of us in it?”

Kowalski’s eyes narrowed, watching as green eyes flicked again toward the door. Whatever was there caused a flinch, bringing the detective’s own attention to the door. His eyes went wide at the sight of a second Walsh standing in the door. He was slightly older, a few more wrinkles around his eyes and crow’s feet in the corners. But it was the uniform that drew Kowalski’s full attention; the man wore a US Army Class B officer’s uniform, under a zipped-up black windbreaker. His hat was tucked under his arm and quicksilver eyes were cold as he scanned through the room.

When they landed on Walsh, those eyes warmed and the detective watched in surprise as they morphed into a vibrant green. A small smile curved his lips as he greeted the younger man, “Hello Jay.”

“Colonel,” was the amused reply from Kowalski’s partner. “To what do I owe the pleasure? You’ve never come to see me at the precinct before.”

That small smile creased into a wide grin as the man addressed as “Colonel” chuckled, “No, I usually have Marina do the checking up on you boys. You all are a lot more willing to let her.”

Whoever Marina was, her name was apparently enough to kill the smirk on Walsh’s face. “Are they back from Paris already?”

“They’re making their final descent; touchdown in fifteen, considering the way that Clint pilots a damned plane. If we leave now, we’ll make the tarmac just as they deplane.”

There was a certain amount of surprise in Walsh’s voice was he asked, “You’ve already talked to the sergeant?!”

That grin slipped into a wide smirk as the Colonel shrugged, “The early bird captures the worm, Jay. I’ve been saying that for years.”

Walsh rolled his eyes as he replied dryly, “And for those of us who actually like our sleep, that phrase has never made a lick of sense.”

The comment was one the Colonel was obviously familiar with as he shrugged, that small smirk still twisting at his lips. “Gather up the casefile. I want to get on this from the second they step off the plane.”

The younger detective nodded, suddenly all business as he stood and began to gather together the files on pertaining to the case that they’d been banging their heads on for the last week. It wasn’t until Walsh reached over to grab the file lying open in front of Kowalski that the man realized what
was going on. Slamming his palm down hard on the file, he stopped its removal sharply and glared at the older Walsh. “Who the hell do you think you are? This case is under the jurisdiction of the New York Police Department!” he barked angrily, forehead furrowed as he glared at the two brothers – damn Walsh to hell for not telling him that he had a brother, especially a brother who looked exactly like him – standing in front of him.

It was a well-known fact in the Second Precinct that Detective Jason L. Walsh was not particularly tall nor very imposing. He was a prankster and a joker and some of his antics in house had become the stuff of legends. The elder of the brothers had maybe a half an inch on the younger brother, but even still he wasn’t a very tall man either. This, of course, did nothing to explain why Kowalski found himself shrinking back from him as he suddenly loomed over the detective with cold, colorless eyes narrowed by icy rage.

Vaguely, Kowalski could hear Walsh sniggering in the background, though wide blue eyes continued to stare up into those pale eyes. The small part of his mind that was still capable of being a badass made a mental note to kick the little punk’s ass when all of this was over and done with. The rest of his mind, however, was suitably terrified and focused completely on trying to put as much space between himself and the Colonel as he could.

The Colonel’s lips curved into the barest hint of a smile, the gesture unsympathetic and in no way reassuring. “This case was under the jurisdiction of the NYPD. However, seeing as the killer is hunting my asset, this case has been turned over to the Strategic Homeland Intervention, Enforcement and Logistics Division.” Holding up a hand to forestall the question he could see forming on the older man’s lips, the man sighed and continued, “Before you ask, we answer to S.H.I.E.L.D. Regardless of what we’re called, however, from this moment, you have no further say in this case.” Leaning back, the Colonel straightened from his stance and rolled his shoulders back slightly to try and loosen some tension. “You have a good day, Detective Kowalski.” Glancing at Walsh, the man insisted, “Get the files, Jay. We’re going to be late.”

“Yes sir,” came the taciturn reply from Kowalski’s young partner, the brisk nod somber and completely at odds with everything that the detective had thought he’d known about the man. Reaching over, Walsh grabbed up the files again and tucked them into a messenger bag. Tossing them up and over his back, he moved to follow the Colonel from the room.

“Wait!” Kowalski barked, causing both men to stop and turn back to him once again. “Why the hell does Walsh get to continue on with the case?”

“Seeing as the asset in question is our younger brother, I rather think Detective Walsh has some interest in the outcome of this case, don’t you?” the Colonel asked rhetorically, before turning back on his heel and moving toward the door again. Turning his head to look at Walsh, he asked curiously, “Is he always that much of a dick?”

“Pretty much,” was Walsh’s cheerful reply, earning a sigh from the older man. The last thing Kowalski heard before the two men disappeared from sight was the Colonel’s deadpan instruction, “Don’t tell Marina.”

Kowalski could literally feel himself gaping at the empty door, once again feeling as though there was a whole side of his partner that he didn’t know. Spinning his chair back towards his desk, he used his computer to pull up Walsh’s records. Everything was in place, and practically perfect in its completeness. Setting his jaw, he reached out and snatched up his phone. Dialing quickly, he waited impatiently for someone to pick up on the other end of the line. Finally, there was an inquisitive, “Hello?”
“Danny-boy, it’s Bert . . . I need a favor. I need everything you can pull on a Jason L. Walsh, a detective with the New York Police Department. I can smell a dead rat, and I want to find out where it died.”

It was about fifteen minutes later that Marina stepped from the confines of S.H.I.E.L.D.’s Quinjet, her chocolate eyes hard as they scoured the area for the adored features of her lover. Seeing him there with the wind ruffling his short cropped hair brought a sense of peace to her soul and she knew that everything was going to be okay; no matter what happened next, her vozlyublennyy would protect their family as he had always done. Picking up her pace just a little bit, she practically trotted into Will Grimm’s arms, face pressed tightly against his windbreaker and arms wrapped firmly around his neck. It was a relief to feel the pressure of his arms around her waist, his grip just as tight as her own. “Ya skuchal po tebe, (I missed you,)” she murmured into his clothing, feeling the familiar brush of his lips press warmly against her forehead.

His lips quirked upward into a small smile against her skin, his reply equally reverent, “I missed you too, samaya malen’kaya.”

Vaguely aware of the chaos going on around her, Marina simply relished the single moment she had allowed herself to take comfort in her partner. Soon enough, there would distance and careful touches . . . but for right now, there was a warm, strong embrace to chase away the fear and the uncertainty. It seemed like an eternity and a moment before at last Will’s arms tightened fractionally around her and then began to drop away.

A soft sigh escaped her even as she took a small step back and put their usual inch of separation between them. Will’s eyes were the color of sapphires, a sad smile shining deep in their depths as the tips of his fingers lingered against the bared flesh of her forearm for just that second more. Both had known what they were in for when they’d joined the Army . . . both had known the distance that would be required. That they were both inclined towards propriety didn’t help when sometimes all they wanted was just to get lost in each other for a little while.

Jason’s cheerful teasing drew both of their attentions, as he poked sharply into Clint’s chest. “You got laid, little brother.”

Rolling his eyes, Clint muttered under his breath, “So what if I did?”

The middle brother crowed in amusement, his nose wrinkling teasingly as he dodged Clint’s half-hearted punch. “I knew it! Baby brother got his cherry popped!”

“Shut up, Jay!” the younger sniper hissed, all narrowed eyes and clenched fists as he glared at the older of the two brothers.

“Make me,” Jason taunted, sidestepping quickly to avoid his brother’s lunge. The mischief in the technical specialist’s eyes was visible even from where Marina stood, earning a small groan from the young handler. She knew her boys; whatever teasing her boy had planned, it wasn’t going to end well for anyone. “Sladkiy, leave your brother alone.”

Slouching backwards slightly, Jason pouted lightly. Reaching out, he wrapped an arm around her neck and pulled her into a sideways hug. “Marina, has anyone ever told you that you take the fun out of everything?”

Marina chuckled, “I only put a halt on the crazy things you do that could cause property damage.”

“But that’s the only way to have any fun,” the detective whined, earning a soft laugh from his sister. “And seriously how long has it been since I caused any real property damage?”
Will’s voice was a low rumble against Marina’s back as he teased, “Does the karaoke bar on Second Street ring any bells?”

Jason’s eyes went wide in mock affront, insisting, “Okay, now that wasn’t entirely my fault. And I paid for the damages; no harm no foul.”

“I’m sure the owner thinks differently,” the Russian teased, as she pushed herself up onto tiptoes to kiss his cheek. “Come on. Let’s get to work. I think we all want this guy in a body bag before the end of the day.”

About half an hour later, the Grimms were situated at a table in a small café not far from the Second Precinct’s station house. Collecting their coffee cups with a small nod to the barrista, Will returned to table and dropped into the chair beside Marina, handing her the steaming mug. Both their father, Hansel Kuhn, and Marina’s sister, Viktoriya Dubrovskaya, had met them at the little dinner, the files pertaining to Hawkeye’s most recent missions spread helter-skelter across the tabletop. “All right, let’s get real for a second. Is there anyway conceivable way that Porter could be aware of Hawkeye’s true identity at this point in time?”

Almost immediately, both Marina and Vika’s head began to shake in answer. Vika’s eyes were hard as she elaborated, “All of the official files list Agent Barton by his callsign; there’s no record of his name, his agent number or any other information that could potentially identify him to anyone outside of those of us at this table, Director Fury and Assistant Director Hill.”

Hansel’s voice was a low rumble as he spoke up then, “Speaking of Maria, vere is the Fraulein now? I vould ‘ave thought that she vould be in attendance.”

Marina’s answering smile was amused as she nodded, “Maria’s on her way. She was putting together some more intel about what my aides have so far found that may help us pin down a feasible motive for his killing spree.”

Jason’s elbows came to rest on the table as he growled, “Who cares what his motives are? He’s hunting a Grimm. His head needed to be on a platter yesterday. I have twelve dead kids who paid the price for his so called motive.”

The German frowned at his son, cautioning lightly, “Last I checked, Schalki, you were an officer of the law. Which means that you cannot take that law into hyur own hands. He will be punished, and we will see him handed in to the appropriate authorities. But we will not mete out our own justice, even if we have means and the right.”

“That’s rich, coming from a man who used to kill witches and claim the bounties on their heads for a living,” was Jason’s incredulous reply.

Hansel’s smile was small as he smoothed one hand over Jason’s hair as though he was smoothing ruffled feathers. “Show me that this man is a witch and I will kill him myself, Schalki. Until you can provide me with that proof, you shall abide by the law that you swore to uphold.”

Sensing the impending temper tantrum, the Colonel’s voice was a low hum as he interrupted the conversation. “Dad’s right, Jay; we’ll take care of Porter, but we’ll go about it the right way. What I want to know is why he was hunting both boys and girls. What could have been the rationale for that?”

His partner’s voice was tired as she growled, “Bishop.”

The communications officer’s voice was confused as he repeated questioningly, “Bishop? What the
hell is Bishop?"

Clint’s voice was amused as he answered, “Not a what . . . a who. Agent Katherine Bishop, junior class.”

“She was going around S.H.I.E.L.D. right after she was recruited and boasting that she was the real Hawkeye. That there wasn’t a single agent in S.H.I.E.L.D. who was a better shot than she was,” Bucky continued, with a small smile.

Jason’s eyebrows were in his hairline as he watched his younger brother’s smirk. “And you let her?!”

“I was on assignment at the time. Needless to say, as soon as I got home, I shut her up in short order.”

“So where is Agent Bishop now?”

There was a wicked grin on Marina’s lips as she took a small sip of her cup before replying lazily, “Last I checked, she was running surveillance on a small station in Antarctica.”

There was a wink from the family archer as Clint teased his sister, “I don’t know if you could tell, but Marina didn’t like her much.”

“She was trumped up and full of herself. She had an abysmal lack of respect for authority. And as far as she was concerned, she was God’s Gift to S.H.I.E.L.D. I know God’s Gift to S.H.I.E.L.D. and she was not it,” Marina defended with a frown, watching as Will traced the words in one file with a speculative frown. Waving away whatever Jason had been about to say, she narrowed her eyes at her lover and inquired, “I know that look, Misha . . . what are you planning?”

Will’s eyes were a fierce green as he gave her a shark’s grin. “Mr. Porter is looking for Hawkeye right?”

“Yes,” was the drawled, uncertain reply, Marina’s posture suggesting that she was unsure where he was going with this train of thought.

“So, if he wants Hawkeye . . . let’s help him find him.”

Chapter End Notes

Translations:

vozlyublenny - beloved (one of Marina's nicknames for Will)
samaya malenkaya - my little one (one of Will's nicknames for Marina)
Sladkiy - honey (Marina's nickname for Jason)
Schalki - little mischief (jokester or prankster) (Hansel's nickname for Jason)
The Bishop Takes the Board

Chapter Notes

Translations are in the chapter. Enjoy!
Chapter 101: The Bishop Takes the Board

It wasn’t very long before Will had ushered his brothers and father from the diner, the four men already plotting out the details of the trap they were going to lay. Bucky and Viktoria both remained seated across from Marina at the table, the handler having excused herself from the plan entirely. She’d trusted Porter; his betrayal was a deeper burn in her gut than she was currently willing to attest to.

Ocean blue eyes were steady over the rim of his coffee cup, as Bucky watched Viktoria pull a file from her bag labeled “Top Secret”. “Do I need to excuse myself from this conversation?” he inquired, with a single eyebrow cocked upwards.

Marina’s reply was a surprise, causing Bucky’s eyebrows to fly up into his hairline. “Setogo momenta vpered, ves’ etot razgovor dolzhenn byt’ na russkom yazyke. Mogu li ya ponyala? (From this moment forward, this entire conversation is going to be in Russian. Am I understood?)”

Bucky frowned at the question and the accompanying seriousness is Marina’s eyes, before answering warily, “Da, ya ponimayu. (Yes, I understand.)”

Folding her hands over it, Marina gave her former mentor a small smile and teased, “Tak, nedavno ya byl proinformirovan, chto vy obsuzhdali vozmozhnost’ stat’ obrabotchik Agent Koulson. (So, I have recently been informed that you are discussing the possibility of becoming a handler with Agent Coulson.)”

Glaring at Viktoria, Bucky growled, “Tvoy paren dolzhenn nauchit’ yazyk za zubami. (Your boyfriend needs to learn to keep his mouth shut.)”

The blond Russian sniffed at him with a careless shrug, “Moy zhenikh znal, chto luchshiy chelovek dlya vas, chtoby uznat’ byl pod Marina. Ona doverayet vam i pozvolit vam svobodu, chtoby zapustit’ svoy sobstvennyy OPS, ne polzayet v gorlo, ne mnogiye drugiye obrabotchiki by tak gotovy, uchityvayushche pristralistyakh, Soldat. (My fiancé knew that the best person for you to learn under was Marina. She trusts you and would allow you the freedom to run your own ops without crawling down your throat; not many other primary handlers would be so willing, considering your previous allegiances, Soldier.)”

Marina spoke up then before the discussion could devolve into an argument between her sister and her mentor, while simultaneously making a mental note of her sister’s terminology with regards to Phil Coulson. Raising her voice, she insisted with a harsh glare, “If we could get back to business, please!?” Satisfied that she’d regained both of their attentions, she continued in a lower tone, “Imeya eto v vidu, ya delayu vam obrabotchik Agenta Yepiskopa po etomu delu. Vy budete imet’ pervichnyy kontrol’, odnako ya budu imet’ operativnyy kontrol’. Dumayte ob etom kak probnomu progonu, yesli vy reshit’, chto khotite prodolzhat’ etot put’ so shchitom daleye posle zaversheniya etogo dela, ya polozhu v khorosheye slovo s Nikom o tom, kak vy crosstrainedobrabotchik. (With this in mind, I’m making you Agent Bishop’s handler on this case. You will have primary control, however I will have operational oversight. Think of it as a trial run; if you decide you want to pursue this avenue with S.H.I.E.L.D. further after the conclusion of this case, I’ll put in a good word with Nick about having you crosstraining as a handler.)” Bucky’s eyes were wide with barely concealed excitement, earning a small grin. “Ya ponimayu, chto eto priyatnoye dlya vas? (I take it, this is agreeable to you?)”

“Da mem, (Yes ma’am,)” he agreed forcing himself to straighten up in his chair and turn his whole attention on the file.

“Ladno. Kak vy budete prinimat’ po etomu delu, mne nuzhno pereyti na Intel SHIELD imeyet na
fayl otnositel’no novogo ‘bossa’ Yepiskopa. To, chto ya sobirayus’ rasskazat’ vam, vy chtoby ne Klint. Ni pri kakikh obstoyatel’stvakh vy takoy, chtoby skazat’ yemu ob etom pozhe. Vy ponimayete? (All right then. As you’re going to be taking over this case, I need to go over the intel S.H.I.E.L.D. has on file regarding Bishop’s new ‘boss’. What I’m going to tell you, you are to keep from Clint. Under no circumstance are you to tell him about it later. Do you understand?)” Marina insisted with a stern frown, turning the file around and pushing it to sit in front of the former Soviet assassin.

Bucky’s eyebrows furrowed at the information, even as he flipped open the file and rifled through the pages inside. “Ya ne lyublyu khranit’ sekrety ot moyego druga, Marina. Eto ne ochen’ khoroshiy sposob, chtoby nachat’ otnosheniya. (I don’t like keeping secrets from my boyfriend, Marina. It’s not a good way to start a relationship.)”

“I khotya ya soglasen s etoy filosofiyey, Zima, yesli vy stanete obrabotchik polnyy rabochiy den’, yest’ veshchi, kotoryye ya ne mogu skazat’ Misha, i to chto Misha ne mozhet skazat’ mne, ves’ fokus v tom, chtoby sokhranit’ vashiy profesional’nyy i vashiy lichnyy otdel’. Probnyy pusk, pomnish’? (And while I agree with that philosophy, Winter, if you become a handler full time, there are things that you are not going to be able to tell him. There are things I can’t tell Misha, and things that Misha can’t tell me; the trick is to remember to keep your professional and your personal lives separate. Trial run, remember?)”

Taking a deep breath, the man who was formerly known as the Zimniy Soldat considered that before nodding briefly once, “All right, I promise. I won’t tell Clint.” Running one finger over the picture of Kate gracing the front cover, he inquired, “Imeyet Keyt bylo sdelano? (Has Kate been made?)”

“Net; AgentaYepiskopa isklyuchitel’no khorosha na to, chtoby sama smes’ yeye okruzheniyem i derzha yeye golovu vniz, odnovremennelye sloody za vse, chto proiskhodit vokrug neye. Eto pryamoy rezultat yeye vospitaniya. Vot pochemu ya khol, chtoby ona dlya etogo sluchaya, ona dlya etogo sluchaya. (No; Agent Bishop is exceptionally good at making herself blend in with her surroundings and keeping her head down, while simultaneously keeping an eye on everything taking place around her. It’s a direct result of her upbringing. It’s why I wanted her for this case.)” Folding her hands over the top of the file folder in front of her, Marina took a deep breath. “Zima, chto vy znayete o Barni Grimm i Fekhtoval’shchik? (Winter, what do you know about Barney Grimm and the Swordsman?)”

The assassin blinked at the question, eyes narrowing as he considered the question honestly. “Ya znayu, chto Barni Grimm bylo Brayan Grimm, i chto yest’ zakaz na ubiistvo Barni, dolzhno Brayan nikogda ne teryat’ kontrol’ nad nim. Ya znayu, chto Klint ne khol, chtoby ona dlya etogo sluchaya. (I know that Barney Grimm was Brian Grimm, and that there’s a kill order on Barney, should Brian ever lose control of him. I know that Clint doesn’t like to talk about him, and that he’s quite frankly terrified of Barney. But the Swordsman . . . that’s a new name to me.)”

“Vy znayete, chto, kogda ya vpervyye vzval mal’chika ot bazy Hoover, my byli prinaty vbrodyachiy tsirk, da? (You know that when I first took the boys away from the Hoover Base, we were taken in by a traveling circus, right?)”


“Sushchestvoval’akte, v vedenii dvukh muzhchin, kotoryye ovetili na Trickshot i Fekhtoval’shchik. Trickshot byl ubit svoim partnerom, kogda on otkazalsya ukrast’ u Carters, i Fekhtoval’shchik pochti bit’ya dorogoy k smerti prezhde, chem on i Barni snyal v noch’i ne bylo slyshno do nedavnego
vremeni. (There was an act there, run by two men who answered to Trickshot and Swordsman. Trickshot was murdered by his partner when he refused to steal from the Carters, and Swordsman nearly beat my dorogoy to death before he and Barney took off into the night and were not heard from again until recently.)

Bucky’s finger stabbed into the masked face on the page in front of him. “Vy pytayetes’ skazat’ mne, chto my govorim o ZHE Fekhtoval’shchik?! (Are you trying to tell me that we’re talking about the SAME Swordsman?!)”

“S.H.I.E.L.D. yest’ osnovaniya polagat’, chto da. (S.H.I.E.L.D. has reason to believe so, yes.)”

“Eto ob’yasnyayet, pochemu ya ne mogu skazat’ Klint, (Which explains why I can’t tell Clint,)” the man muttered under his breath.

Marina’s smile was small as she nodded in agreement. “Ya ne khochu yego rasstraiavit’, on oplakival Trickshot, kogda on uznal o yego smerti, no on otkazalsya govorit’ o tom, chto proizoshlo, ili vernut’ sya v tsirk, kak Udivitel’nyye Hawkeye. On dazhe ne zdhat’, chtoby byt’ vypisan iz bol’nicy, prezhdye chem on stal umolyat’ Misha i ya o vstuplenii v armiyu. On byl’ tak opredel’ny, chto my, nakonets, pozvolit’ yemu zaregistrirovat’ sya v 16 let, prosto tak, chto Misha mog sledit’ za nim, vmenst’ togo, yemu ubezhat’ i zaruchit’ sya bez nashego vedomo i poteryat’ yego. (I don’t want to upset him; he mourned for Trickshot when he found out about his death, but he refused to talk about what happened or go back to the circus as The Amazing Hawkeye. He didn’t even wait to be released from the hospital before he began to beg Misha and I about joining the Army. He was so determined that we finally let him sign up at 16, just so that Misha could keep an eye on him instead of having him run off and enlist without us knowing and losing him.)”

“Tak pochemu zhe my otpravlyayem Keyt v lager’ Fekhtoval’shchik togda? (So why did we send Kate into Swordsman’s camp then?)”

“S.H.I.E.L.D. byli filding slukhov v techeniye neskol’kikh mesyatsev, chto Fekhtoval’shchik yavlyayetsya podgotovkaarmii i planirovanii krupnoye nastupleniye. U nas yest’ osnovaniya polagat’, chto on mozhit’ priyti v nabore S.H.I.E.L.D. My khoteli, chtoby kto-to, kogo my doverili byt’ pervym na rabotu, chtoby my mogli sledit’, kto yesche mog by prisoedinit’ sya iz nashikh ryadov. My znali, chto mechnik ne sobirayetsya doverit’ ‘yey, yesli netprichin dlya nego. Poterya perestrelka posle togo, ubezhdlen, chto ona byla luchshe, osobennno yesli eto ostrelivat’ ‘byl’ s molodoy, svetlyy luchnik pod nazvaniem ‘Hawkeye’, sobirayetsya sdelat’ Agentu Yeiskopu slishkom zheletel’no pruty v verkh po Fekhtoval’shchik. (S.H.I.E.L.D. has been fielding rumors for months that the Swordsman is training an army and planning a major offensive. We have reason to believe that he may come recruiting within S.H.I.E.L.D. We wanted someone we trusted to be the first recruit, so that we could keep tabs on who else might join from our ranks. We knew that Swordsman wasn’t going to trust her, unless there was a reason for him to. Losing a shoot-off after being convinced that she was better, especially if that shoot off was with a young, blond archer called ‘Hawkeye’, was going to make Agent Bishop an asset too desirable to pass up for the Swordsman.)”

Bucky frowned as he traced the girl’s face, before inquiring, “Znayete li vy inzhenerom padeniya Keyt ot blagodati? (Did you engineer Kate’s fall from grace?)”

“Da, kak s Agentom Bartonom i polnoye znaniye Agentu Yeiskopa i sotrudnichestva. (Yes, with both Agent Barton and Agent Bishop’s full knowledge and cooperation.)”

“Klint byl’ na nem? (Clint was in on it?)”

“Ne sovsem, on znal, chto ona byla sozdayutsya pod prikrytiiyem vosobo opasnykh organizatsii, no
“Ye know, this organizatsiya i pochemu. (Not entirely; he knew that she was being set up to go undercover within a highly dangerous organization, but he didn’t know whose organization or why.)”

Sharp white teeth nibbled furiously on his lower lip as he continued to read through the file before him. “Tak chto mne nuzhno znat’ ob etom sluchnay? (So what do I need to know about this case?)”

“Vazhno pomnit’, chto prodolzheniyi bezopasnosti Agenta Yepiskopa eto zavisiit nikto v S.H.I.E.L.D. uznat’ pravdu o yeye ‘greekhopadeneiya’, kak vy govorite, i imenno poetomu my ne imeyushchiye etogo brifinga eto bryinga na baze. Ona dolzha prodolzhat’ byt’ opal’nym v glazakhdrugikh agentov, i kinologov. Ona ofitsial’no na uchete vnablyudatel’noy stantsii v Antarktike; komandir na etoy dolzhnosti dolzhen mne odolzheniye i posylayet mne ochen’ obschestvennogo obnovleniya na ‘progress’ Agenta Yepiskopa na bazu. (The important thing to remember is that Agent Bishop’s continued safety is contingent upon no one at S.H.I.E.L.D. learning the truth of her ‘fall from grace’, as you say, which is why we are not having this briefing on base. She must continue to be disgraced in the eyes of the other agents and handlers. She is officially on the books at an observational station in Antarctica; the commander at that post owes me a favor and sends me very public updates on Agent Bishop’s ‘progress’ at the base.)”

Reaching out to squeeze his hand, she insisted, “Eto yavlyayetsya vashej osnovnoy rabotoy. Vasha rabota ne na mikrourovne yeye, poruchit’ yey o tom, kak sdelat’ yeye rabota; vasha rabota, chtoby zashchitit’ yeye . . . obrabatvat’ informatsiyu, kotoruyu ona Rele nazad i pokryt’ yeye sledy, kogda ona nuzhdayetsya v vas. To yest’, k sozhali eniyu, pervoye, chtoby kazhdyy pervyy obrobotchik vremya zabyvayet, kogda prikhodit vremya, chtoby delat’ svoyu rabotu. S.H.I.E.L.D. aktivy vybran потomu, chto oni luchshiye, chto oni delat’ svoyu rabotu. Im ne nuzhno, chtoby yu rasskazal im, kak delat’ svoyu rabotu, oni nuzhdayutsya v vas, chtoby sdelat’ vashu sobstvennuyu. (That is your primary job. Your job isn’t to micromanage her, to instruct her on how to do her job; your job is to protect her . . . to handle the information she relays back and cover her tracks when she needs you to. That is, unfortunately, the first thing that every first time handler forgets when it comes time to do their jobs. S.H.I.E.L.D. assets are chosen because they are the best at what they do. They don’t need you to tell them how to do their jobs; they need you to do your own.)”

Folding her hands in front of her, Marina watched her mentor for a long moment. “You think you can do this, Zimniy Soldat?”

The use of his former title snapped Bucky’s attention back from where he was perusing the mission file. Looking at Marina, he nodded firmly once. “You can count on me.”

Marina’s voice was appropriately flippant as she insisted, “I knew I could.” Turning on her sister, she frowned and snapped, “And now you. ‘Fiancé’!? Since when?!”

Viktoriya gave her a sister a small smile as she reached into her purse and pulled out a velvet wrapped box. “I was trying to wait until I could get both you and Veronika in the same place, at the same time, before I told you. However, that happens about once in a blue moon, so I guess now is as good a time as any.”

Flipping open the lid of the box, she fished out the ring nestled there and slipped it onto her left wedding finger. “I was trying to wait until I could get both you and Veronika in the same place, at the same time, before I told you. However, that happens about once in a blue moon, so I guess now is as good a time as any.”

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Viktoriya’s alabaster cheeks glowed with a soft blush as she ducked her head in the face of her sister’s excitement. “Spasibo, Marishka. Phil and I would be most grateful.”

Getting up from her chair, Marina spun in an excited circle, before snatching Viktoriya’s hand and pulling her from her chair. “Come on. We have to go find Nika; she’s never going to forgive me for knowing first!”

Bucky chuckled as he gathered their things together into Marina’s bag, before following after the happily chattering women. He caught up with them just as they were climbing up into Marina’s ancient Army Jeep. Reaching out, he took Viktoriya’s shoulder gently and leaned to press a sweet kiss to the apple of her cheek. “Congratulations, Viktoriya.”

Visibly startled, Viktoriya nevertheless managed a brilliant grin at the man whose visage had terrified her as a child. “Thank you, Soldat.” Bumping him lightly with her hip, she teased lightly, “You know, you’re not nearly as scary as I always thought you were.”

“I can imagine that I must have been terrifying to a child. The stories attributed to my name are enough to cause even me nightmares.”

Grinning over at Marina, Viktoriya teased, “Well, you weren’t terrifying to every child.”

Marina shrugged with a lopsided grin as she inserted the keys and started the ignition, causing the engine to roar pleasantly. “Eh, it’s been established that I’m not quite right. I just wasn’t smart enough to know that I should have been scared.”

Bucky leaned forward to press a kiss to the brunette’s cheek next as he insisted, “And I have been grateful for your fearlessness since we first met. Come on; I’m sure that there’s a black haired Russian driving some poor agent crazy at the gym; I hope you know that Veronika is going to scream loud enough to raise the dead when she finds out about that ring, Viktoriya.”

Viktoriya’s blush deepened as the reminder set Marina’s teasing off again. It was as they were driving through the gates that Marina sighed, “I can’t even begin to tell you how happy I am that at least one of the couples I was rooting for, didn’t need me to play matchmaker for them. Seriously, how do I always get stuck with that job?”

“Just lucky I guess,” Bucky laughed, earning a glare in the rearview mirror as the pretty handler reminded him dryly, “As if you have room to talk, Zima; you’re a member of one of those couples I had to nearly kick in the pants to get either of you to do anything.”

“And look how well it worked out for you,” Viktoriya reminded her sister, counting off each instance on her fingers, “Brian is happily bumping uglies with the Chernaya Vdova and managing not to die a bloody death in the process; Clint is in his first relationship with your former mentor and good friend; one of your sisters is happily engaged; and your Vati and best friend are finally getting their act together. I would think that you’d been well pleased with yourself.”

Marina’s smile was sly as she chuckled, before reminding them both, “And while that may be true, I still have one sister and two of my boys to pair up.”

“Love will come with time; first they must be ready for it.”

Unbeknownst to the occupants of that car, a beautiful auburn haired cop was taking the first steps on the path that would bring her into the orbit of one Jason Walsh. On the other side of the city, a newly transferred Casey Beatrice Schraeger was given her first Vice assignment with the New York Police Department.
Jason Grimm wasn’t going to know what hit him.
Here's the new chapter! And I have actual time off this week, so I actually may get back to the whole one chapter a day . . . but don't quote me on that. XD I hope you all are still enjoying this story!

There's a new banner, of my BAMF boys, so enjoy that too.

Translations are at the end, as always.

Love you!

See the end of the chapter for more notes
Chapter 102: Laying the Trap for A Killer

Green eyes were incredulous as the middle Grimm stared at his older brother. “You want to do what to whom for how many cookies?” he deadpanned, earning a soft snicker from Clint at his brother’s question.

Even Hansel and Will were chuckling, Will’s nose wrinkling upwards as he teased his little brother, “I think you’ve been spending too much time with Detective Beaumont, Jason. You’re starting to sound like her.”
To the surprise of everyone there, Jason’s head ducked down and his cheeks turned a rosy color. Will said nothing, only cocked an eyebrow upwards, stepping in to cut off Clint’s teasing before it derailed their planning session. “Clint . . . you can harass him later. Right now, we have something more important to do.”

“This isn’t over,” Clint warned the older brother with a grin, getting a shove from Jason in reply.

The Colonel chuckled at the interplay, before gesturing to the file folder sitting in the middle of his desk. “The plan is relatively simple, Jay. I’m going to deliver this to Porter. In it I have fabricated agent information about our fictitious Hawkeye, including the location of his ‘quarters’ on base. Dad, Clint and you are going to head over and wait for Porter to show. You’re going to play Hawkeye; Dad and Clint are going to cover you.”

“See that’s the part I’m having a problem with,” the detective muttered with a frown.

“What part?” Will asked patiently, a small smirk on his lips as he watched Jason fidget in his seat.

Hansel’s tone was amused as he asked, “I believe mein Schalki is concerned about the part where he will be posing as mein Falki, Adler.”

Jason’s tone was appropriately deadpan as he snarked, “You think?! This guy is trying to kill Hawkeye! And you’re telling me that I’m going to be pretending to BE Hawkeye!”

“And I’m going to cover you,” Clint reminded him with a giggle, “Don’t you trust me?”

“Not as far as I can throw you,” the middle brother teased, barely managing to dodge the resulting punch. “But, it’s not like I actually have a choice. Do I?”

Will’s tone was final as he replied, “No.”

“Yebat,” Jason groaned, dropping his head hard onto Will’s desk. There was a frown on his face as he straightened up, rubbing briefly at the spot with his fingers. “Ouch. That hurt.”

“You’re the one who slammed your face into the table,” the Colonel reminded him pitilessly.

Gathering the file, the oldest Grimm stretched in his desk chair before checking his watch and insisting, “I’ll take this file to Porter in about ten minutes, which should give you about an hour to get into place at the house. I’ll meet you there.”

“Aye aye Colonel,” the family sniper laughed, sending a cocky salute his brother’s way and earning a fond roll of quicksilver eyes in response.

“You’re not as cute as you think you are, Barton,” Will insisted.

There was a sigh as Clint grinned brightly, his tone laughing as he sallied, “Why don’t we ask Marina how cute I am, Agent Brandt? I bet she thinks differently.”

“Marina’s not here right now, so her opinion doesn’t count,” Jason teased, reaching out to loop one arm around his brother’s neck and rub his knuckles roughly over the top of Clint’s head.

The two younger brothers jostled each other playfully, slinging insults and jokes back and forth as they followed Hansel from Will’s office. Watching them go, the Colonel chuckled at his brothers’ familiar antics as he reached to pull a stack of paperwork from his inbox. It was going to be a long wait if all he did was stare at the wall, counting down the seconds; at least he could be productive in the interim. About ten minutes later, he picked up the file and moved toward Marina’s department.
It was a well known fact that S.H.I.E.L.D.’s handler-pool was a well oiled machine, with each of its cogs polished into perfection. It was also a well known fact that the handler-pool had not always run so smoothly; its newfound efficiency was due in large part to the combined powers of Agent Marina Petrovka and Agent Phillip Coulson. Both agents had rightfully earned the reputation of being terrifying, and some of the stories that lingered around the water cooler had morphed them into legendary figures.

But what a lot of the other agents didn’t realize is that the main support staff of each agent had a huge hand in the running of their departments as well. Both staffs held a lot of claim to the success of both Marina and Coulson; they’d been handpicked and specially chosen to be apart of these two teams. Which was probably why Jared Porter’s betrayal had caused Marina such pain. She’d trusted him, though not nearly as much as she’d trusted Viktoriya, and he’d handled more than a few mission files that Marina had been unable to attend to personally. It had also been assumed by most of the upper echelon within S.H.I.E.L.D. that if Marina was deployed on a temporary assignment with the Army, Viktoriya Dubrovskaya would have taken over the department as Acting Head with Porter as her second-in-command.

Therefore, to see Porter stand when Will came into the room with the file in hand, it was hard for Will to maintain his control over his temper and not beat the ever-loving shit out of the little bastard. Though he hadn’t told Marina yet – and was frankly unsure of whether she was aware of it – Will was fairly certain that there would be repercussions due to Porter’s prominent place on her staff. With any luck, the Colonel would be able to take his partner away to avoid the worst of the gossip, but if not . . . it was probably going to be an uncomfortable few weeks for the former Russian spy as her loyalties were once again called into question and scrutinized.

The fifty year old, long time S.H.I.E.L.D. handler smiled at the younger man as Will came to a studied pause just inside the doorway. Though the two had never been particularly demonstrative towards each other within the confines of their relationship, S.H.I.E.L.D.’s top analyst had been by the handler pool to drop off casefiles for Marina often enough that all of the support staff knew him on sight.

Stamping down viciously on his anger at the other man, the Colonel forced himself to act normally as Porter approached him with a hand outstretched in greeting. “Agent Brandt . . . how can I help you today?”

Accepting the offered hand, Will shook it briefly before letting go and stepping back a pace. Holding up the manila envelope in his left hand, he asked calmly, “I have a new Hawkeye file for Agent Petrovka. Is she in?”

Porter frowned as he shook his head; it was only because Will was looking for it that he even noticed the way that Porter’s whole body nearly quivered with excitement at the explanation. “No, I apologize, she is not. She had an urgent lunch meeting today with one of her classified assets.”

Checking his watch in a practiced attempt at nonchalance, the handler shrugged lightly. “I don’t know when she’ll be back. If you’d like, I can take the file and make sure that it’s returned to her as soon as she gets back.”

Will cringed at the offer, even as he was cheering at how easily the man had taken the bait. “That’s kind of you, Agent Porter, but I’m afraid this file has highly sensitive information inside. It’s not supposed to leave my custody until I can hand it personally into Agent Petrovka’s care. It’s classified at Clearance Alpha and contains personal details about the asset.”

The Colonel watched the wheels behind the other man’s eyes clock as he tried to figure out the best way to get ahold of the file before Marina had returned to work and took custody of it without him
ever looking inside. Finally, Porter turned to his desk and pulled out a heavy duty classified sticker. “I’m sure you have other things to be doing than waiting around for Agent Petrovka to return, so may I suggest an alternative? Seal the file with this sticker, and I’ll make sure it’s hand delivered to the agent, with seal intact, once she gets back in from her meeting.”

Will hemmed and hawed for a moment, before finally heaving a heavy, resigned sigh. Porter gave him a grim smile, handing the seal to Will and watching intently as Will sealed the file securely. Handing it over, the analyst ordered firmly, “Under no circumstances is this file to leave your sight or to be opened by anyone until Agent Petrovka arrives, am I understood?”

“Yes sir,” the double agent agreed solemnly, accepting the file and tucking it firmly under his arm.

There was a firm nod from the young analyst, before he rounded on his heel and left the department. Waiting just long enough for Porter to think that he was gone, Will reached into his pocket and pulled out his cellphone. Fingers flew over the screen as he typed out a rapidfire text to Jason. Porter has file. OMW! All set?

Gathering his things from his office, Will moved as quickly as he dared down the hallway to the parking lot where he’d parked his NSX. It was as he was climbing into the driver’s seat of the sports car that his phone pinged at him, letting me know of a reply. All set. Did the fish take the bait?

Hook line and sinker.

There was a pause before Will received another reply, the words there earning a sidelong grin at the middle brother’s quirky sense of humor. I love the smell of sushi in the morning, don’t you?

Smirking at his own reply, Will typed out quickly, Jason, if you ever get sushi that actually smells like fish, do us all a favor and DON’T EAT IT.

It was as Will was pulling out of the parking lot that Jason’s reply came through, accompanied by a picture of a decidedly unimpressed Jason Walsh. Hardy-har-har, Will. :P Shut the fuck up and get here already.

Twenty minutes later, Hansel was pulling open the front door of the quarters on base that Will had “assigned” their fictitious Hawkeye, a small smile on his face as he shook his head at his son. “Hyur ability to rile hyur brothers without even being in attendance is only funny to those who are not directly affected by its aftermath.”

Will’s grin was amused as he inquired, “Is Jason throwing a temper tantrum?”

“That would be putting it mildly, mein Adler.”

The Colonel snickered as he stepped further into the house, calling out, “Come on, Jay . . . all those years with Marina and you can’t come up with a suitable revenge? You’re getting rusty in your old age!”

“Just you wait, Harry Higgins . . . just you wait. I’ll get you and your little Marina too!” Jason cackled, causing Clint to snort his soda up his nose.

The youngest Grimm sniggered lightly as he teased, “Since when do you watch old musicals, Jay? I hope you’re getting something out of Detective Beaumont in exchange for the ‘perfect boyfriend’ makeover she’s putting you through.”

Jason’s sally was acerbic as he taunted, “And what’s your excuse, Clint? You’re the one who knew they were old musicals.”
The Army sniper shrugged as he replied, “Marina, Kenny and I used to watch a lot of classic films after you and Will had enlisted and Marina couldn’t sleep.”

Will reached out and caught the youngest brother in the crook of his elbow, rubbing his knuckles over his head. Clint grunted under the treatment as Will talked over his head to the former agent. “Marina insists that it’ll help him sweep the girl of his dreams of her feet . . . but so far I haven’t seen a girl, only a Bucky.”

“Man of my dreams,” Clint replied lightly, even as he struggled to get out from under Will’s roughhousing. Finally, Clint twisted free of his brother’s grip and lunged towards a chuckling Hansel, begging, “Pops! Help!”

“Hyu’re on hyur own this time, Falki,” the family patriarch insisted, with a fond smile at the youngest Grimm as the sniper pouted in reply. For a long moment, Will and Hansel were content to watch Jason and Clint roughhouse together like they used to before Jason had lost Sarah and Kenny was taken from them. The moment was cut short when both of their S.H.I.E.L.D.-issued cellphones pinged at them.

Looking down at the face of the phone, Will sighed at the words there while Hansel reached to grab his youngest son’s elbow. Effectively ending their playfulness, the German guided his young hawk toward the nest he’d made for himself in the ceiling. “According to Maria, Agent Porter has just left Marina’s department. That being said, we should probably be ready to intercept him once he had arrived, ja?”

The brisk nods from each of his three sons should not have warmed his heart, but Hansel was a hunter to his core. While he would have preferred to keep his sons from such a life, it was a relief to know that they were well-equipped to handle it - they had inherited the instincts that would keep them alive. If nothing else went right with this op, at least his sons would make it to the following morning still breathing.

Half an hour later, the trap was laid and the four men were motionless at their stations around the room. Clint was perched in the ceiling, the muzzle of his rifle completely invisible through the small hole they’d made in the tiles. Hansel was waiting calmly in the room across the hall from where Jason sat in the desk chair with his back to the door as he stared out the picture window behind the desk. Will was crouched in the closet barely a foot to Jason’s left, and every so often he could see a flash of green as the middle brother’s eyes tracked to the closet door to reassure himself of his brother’s closeness. Both Brian and Natasha were on Marina duty, discretely keeping tabs on the Russian to make sure that she remained safely out of the way while the rest of them took Porter down.

The nearly silent creak of the backdoor leading into the small house brought each of them into hyperawareness. Even from where he was crouched, Will could hear Jason take a deep, calming breath as the nervousness of being unable to see his attacker swelled up and closed up his throat once again. Will’s voice was barely above a whisper as he murmured just loudly enough for Jason to hear, “Uspokoytes’, Dzhey . . . my pryamo zdes’. (Calm down, Jay . . . we’re right here.)”

Eyes flicking toward the closet door once again, Jason took one more deep breath, each of them hearing the sound of the near-silent footsteps tiptoeing along the floor. The door eased open soundlessly, and Porter stepped into the room with his gun up and already pointed at the back of the desk chair. His voice was very loud in the room as he spoke, “Turn around, you son of a bitch. I’m going to look you in the face when I kill you.”

Jason’s eyes flickered toward Will once again, body motionless as he waited for the signal. Will’s finger lifted and pressed several times against the comm in his ear, causing noticeable breaks in the
The rifle barked sharply, causing a cry from Porter as the slug tore through his shooting hand and forced him to drop his gun. It was only then that Will stepped from the closet, gun up and pointed unwaveringly at the point between Porter’s eyes, Jason standing from the chair to face the double agent with gun in hand.

At the sight of the two, Porter’s eyes widened in horror, causing the handler to spin on one heel as he sought to escape. Only the presence of Hansel – and the steady aim of Hansel’s shotgun at his bellybutton – stalled that maneuver in its tracks. Will’s hands were perfectly steady as he pressed the muzzle of his gun at the vulnerable point just below the point where Porter’s jaw connected with his head. Porter’s whimper was almost too quiet to be heard, though each of the four men could hear the words in the silence of the room. “Please kill me . . . don’t take me in. I beg you.”

Will’s voice was cold as he insisted firmly, “The only reason I’m not going to kill you, is because your confession is going to go a long way in clearing the name of samaya malen’kaya. Otherwise, I would leave your body to rot in a ditch somewhere.” Pushing the man forward with the muzzle of his gun, the Colonel ordered roughly, “Move.”

Chapter End Notes

Translations:
(G) mein Schalki - diminutive form of "my mischief" (literally "my little mischief" and Hansel's nickname for Jason)
(G) mein Falki - diminutive form of "my hawk" (literally "my little hawk" and Hansel's nickname for Clint)
(G) mein Adler - eagle (Hansel's nickname for Will)
(R) yebat - fuck
(G) ja - yes
(R) samaya malen'kaya - my little one (one of Will's nicknames for Marina)
Chapter 103: Consequences

Jared M. Porter had joined S.H.I.E.L.D. long before Nick Fury had been appointed Director. He’d been a recruit under Director Phillips and had been a long established handler by the time Three Star General Nicholas Fury of the United States Army had become Director Nick Fury of S.H.I.E.L.D. Though talented, he had lacked the steely core exhibited by Maria Hill, Phil Coulson and Marina Petrovka; this had caused him to be passed over repeatedly for a spot among the upper echelon of the organization.

However, despite his shortcomings, Porter WAS a talented handler. And when it had come time to gut and reestablish the handler corps, it had actually been Fury who had suggested adding Porter to a
support staff. Whose support staff, however, had been a matter for Coulson and Marina to battle out between them. Marina had won the debate, only because Coulson had a go-to right hand in Jasper Sitwell, whereas Marina did not, despite Viktoria’s talents with administration. That decision, however, was currently making Fury grind his teeth. Because of his suggestion . . . one of his best was probably going to lose everything she’d ever worked for; her honor, her career and the trust of those around her.

Looking up at the former witch hunter in front of him, Fury insisted, “I am aware of your particular . . . talents, Herr Kuhn. Therefore, I am assigning you to Porter’s interrogation.” Folding his hands in front of his chin, he allowed his voice to drop an octave as he growled, “I want to know everything he knows. I don’t care how you get that information and I most certainly don’t care what condition you leave him in. Just get me a confession, so I know how deep this infection goes.”

Hansel’s smile was grim and vicious as his chin dropped in a short nod. “Yes sir.” Turning on his heel, the German’s leather coat flared behind him before he disappeared as though he’d never been in attendance at all.

Ask any of S.H.I.E.L.D.’s impressionable young recruits which of their instructors terrified them most, and almost every single one would tell you that they had nightmares about Herr Kuhn ripping out their spleens with his teeth or using their guts for his belt. It was a reputation that Hansel had actually done very little to earn. Of course, that in no way meant that Hansel’s reputation as a scary BAMF was in any way fabricated or unjustifiable. Ask any one of the nurses who were there after he woke in Medical; their fear of both him and his sons was a living, breathing thing. If one was a hundred percent honest, a grand majority of the rumors circling S.H.I.E.L.D.’s watercooler about Herr Kuhn had been started in Medical.

Regrettably, as had already been established, Jared Porter had joined S.H.I.E.L.D. long before the Brothers Grimm had even joined the Army . . . and eons before Maria Hill had planted a whimsical kiss on comatose lips that brought a German witch hunter back from the dead. Therefore the instinctive fear of Hansel Kuhn was missing as the man entered the small interrogation room where they were holding Porter, a khaki holdall slung carelessly over his shoulder. It was to Porter’s chagrin, however, that that fear would not stay absent for long.

The man was as silent as the grave as he set the holdall on the table to the side of the room, across from where Porter sat handcuffed to a bolted down metal chair in the middle of the room. Dextrous fingers flashed as they unbuckled the straps, before unrolling the bag over the tabletop. Fussing with a few things that Porter couldn’t see, he finally turned to face the prisoner.

Porter’s chin tilted upwards, a cocky smirk on his lips as he snarled, “So this is what Fury sends to learn my secrets? A toy soldier with more muscles than brains?”

Hansel’s smile was cold as he crossed his arms over his chest silently. It didn’t take long for Porter to start fidgetting under that icy regard, his face twisting into a snarl as he barked, “Well go on! Get on with it! What are you waiting for?”

That smile tilted upwards a fraction more, the German accent coloring his words as Hansel insisted, “I do not think hyu understand who I am. And what that means for hyur life expectancy going forward, Herr Porter.”

“And who are you, that I should be so worried?”

There was a long moment of silence, before the other man spoke. Though it was only four short words, the sound of them filled the room, causing alarm to settle in Porter’s gut like lead. If he made it out of this room alive, it would be a miracle. Even after the man turned his back and selected a set
of brass knuckles from the implements laid out on the table, those four words continued to ring in the disgraced agent’s ears.

“Hawkeye is my son.”

From her place in the observation room, on the other side of one way glass, Maria Hill watched the scene impassively. The couple had argued bitterly about whether or not Maria would join him in the room to take her own turn at making the man pay for the lives he’d taken, and for the taint he’d painted across her best friend’s record at the same time. In the end, Hansel had won out; Marina Petrovka may be the Assistant Director’s best friend, but Clint Grimm was Hansel’s youngest son. After all, the stain on an otherwise spotless career would eventually be forgotten, whereas death was a permanent affliction. Hansel was determined to make Porter wish he’d never been born, and potentially send a message that the Brothers Grimm were off limits to anyone who sought to harm them.

And if Maria found herself squirming with inappropriate arousal at the sight of her lover coercing a confession from Porter’s broken body . . . well that was no one else’s business but her own. Even considering the fact that Hansel would invariably reap the benefits.

It was several hours later, that Hansel Kuhn exited the tiny cell. There were splatters of blood on his face and hands, and to say that his shirt was soaked in it was an understatement of the most grotesque kind. Maria leaned against the wall on the opposite side of the hallway, her arms crossed over her chest as she stared at him. “Is he still alive?”

Hansel’s grin was suitably forbidding as he agreed, “Ja . . . though I am certain he is wishing that he was not.”

“Good,” was all Maria said, pushing herself away from the wall and taking the two steps that separated them quickly. One slender hand curled in his collar, clenching tightly before rounding on her heel and practically dragging him into a supply closet a short ways down the hallway.

Yanking the door open, she shoved Hansel into the dark confines, looked around to be sure that no one had noticed them before stepping into the room after her boyfriend. The door shut behind them, only seconds before Hansel’s mouth was slanted hard over her own, bloodied hands reaching to spear through her hair and undo her bun, moaning at the feeling of Maria’s hands yanking sharply at the button of his tactical pants.

The closet was not spacious by any stretch of the imagination and both of them were cursing as they moved against each other, elbows knocking into brooms and mops. There was a half-full mop-bucket of murky water just behind Hansel’s body, filling the room with the noxious smell of mildew and moldy fabric. Something new bumped to the floor with each shift of their bodies, causing a round of lurid cursing in both English and German, before Hansel finally stepped forward and pinned her back against the hardwood door behind her.

His free hand lowered to the zipper on the front of her catsuit, the metal snicking together as the fabric spread open over her torso and revealed an expanse of scarred, milky skin. The skin glowed even in the near pitch black darkness of the closet. His smirk was appropriately wolfish as he speared his hand into the fabric and drove two fingers into the tight cotton panties she habitually wore under her uniform. Maria’s head dropped back with groan as those blunt, skilled fingers plunged deep into her core, the callouses on his thumb delicious as they batted tenderly at the bundle of nerves hidden within her folds.

Her voice was a low growl as she finally succeeded in getting his pants undone, shoving both them and his underwear down past the curve of his ass. Wiggling herself out of the top of her uniform,
Maria hitched one thigh over the curve of his hip and sighed as he lifted her feet from the floor to wrap her legs around his waist. The press of his flesh into her own caused a grunt, before Maria settled her weight more fully back against the door and rolled her hips shallowly against his own. “Well, what the hell are you waiting for, soldier?” she taunted breathlessly, “Fuck me.”

Hansel’s eyes darkened to nearly black, and Maria felt a lustful shiver run down the column of her spine. The last words either of them spoke for a long time were growled at an octave that caused the Assistant Director’s hindbrain to sit up and take notice of the proceedings. “Yes ma’am.”

The next morning, Maria sat behind her desk with her best friend seated across from her, prim and proper in her uniform. Marina’s eyes were resigned and cheerless, causing Maria to reach across the table and take her hands in both of her own and squeezed. “Marishka . . . I’m sorry. But you know what is going to happen next, right?”

There was a single sad smile as the Russian’s chin dipped into a shallow nod. “I’m being placed on administrative leave without pay while S.H.I.E.L.D. undergoes a full investigation into my department, my assets and my interactions with Jared M. Porter.”

“With pay, but yes to the rest. Effective immediately. Please hand over your duty weapon, access card, security clearances and all classified files.”

Standing from her chair, the handler’s face slipped into impassive lines as she began to strip all the marks of her office from her pockets and clothing. Once it was all in a small pile on the table between them, the former Russian spy dropped into parade rest with her eyes fixed firmly on the wall over the Assistant Director’s head. “Will there be anything else, Agent Hill?”

Maria’s heart cracked a little at the formal tone her best friend was taking with her, even as she acknowledged that the distance was probably the only thing preventing the other woman from breaking down into tears in her office. “No, Agent Petrovka, that is all. Dismissed.”

Marina’s body snapped effortlessly back into attention, snapping off a brisk salute, before rounding on her heel and leaving the office behind her without a single look back. Left to stare at the pile of items on her desk, Maria folded her hands under her chin and rested her forehead there. Her voice was wretched and miserable as she whispered, “Fuck me.”
So this is going to be the last we see of Marina and Will for awhile, so enjoy them while you can. Next we’re going to jump into the Unusuals.

As always, translations are at the end.
there would be repercussions, he’d hoped that whatever they were, they would not destroy his
sumasshedshaya devushka.

Stepping further into the foyer, he placed himself where she would see him as soon as she turned
away from the door. Marina’s shoulders tightened briefly at the soft pad of his bare feet against the
hardwood floor, causing the Colonel’s heart to twist painfully in his chest. Padding to stand at her
back, he reached to close his hand gently around her arms just over her elbows. Tugging her tenderly
back against him, he buried his face against the curve of her neck and whispered against the skin
there, “Marishka . . . samaya malen’kaya . . . talk to me.”

Marina’s voice was devoid of any noticeable emotion as she obeyed, “I’ve been placed on
administrative leave until S.H.I.E.L.D. has completed their investigation into my actions, and that of
my department.”

Will winced slightly, once again forcibly reminded of all the times the Brass had hauled Marina
before them to reexamine her loyalties. He’d tried to protect her as much as he could, but he was
only a Colonel, Full Bird not withstanding, and there was truthfully very little that he could do to
shield her from scrutiny. Fortunately, General Perron was a good friend and had always stepped up
to the plate for her. Biting down on his lower lip, Will made a mental note to call Dave and see if
there was anything he could offer them that would take them away from the source of Marina’s
humiliation. “So what did Fury say?”

There was a long pause, before Marina spoke again, “Fury made Maria do it.”

Pure unadulterated rage flared through Will’s chest at the pain that had caused her. It was no secret
that Will and Maria did not always see eye to eye on things – there had been several instances back
when Hansel had first woken when Will had wanted to shake her until her teeth had rattled for
manipulating his father – but the Assistant Director was his partner’s best friend. Maria’s opinion
meant a lot to his Marishka, and vice versa. Even knowing that Maria had been ordered by her own
superior to impart the news, Will couldn’t help hating her for the pain she’d caused his lover.

Pressing a warm, adoring kiss to the hidden place just below the line of her collar, Will tightened his
arms around her waist and waited for the fallout. Marina stood stock still for what seemed like an
eternity, before at last she spoke again, her voice a wretched whisper as she inquired, “So are the
boys avoiding me too?”

Will’s head shook firmly against her skin as he replied softly, “I sent them away. It’s just us tonight,
Marishka.”

At the knowledge that they were alone, Marina’s hands came up to cover her face. Her whole body
trembled in his arms as she struggled to hold in her tears purely by strength of will. The Colonel’s
lips pressed tenderly against the curve of her jaw as he whispered against her skin, “I’m here,
zhemchuzhina . . . I can carry the weight for awhile.”

As though she’d simply been waiting for that reassurance, the Russian’s whole body collapsed
backwards into his as she let out a devastated wail. Will caught her effortlessly, allowing her to turn
into his chest and scream against his t-shirt. Shifting his grip, he swept her up into his arms and
carried her effortlessly to the couch. Settling her into his lap, he wrapped both arms around her as
tightly as he could and simply held her while she cried.

They sat there for a moment and an eternity, Will’s voice a constant backdrop to the sound of
Marina’s sobs as he whispered Russian endearments into the tangles mess of her hair. His fingers
drew designs over her arms and upper back, trying to offer her all the comfort he could give. The
touch of Marina’s lips against his own nearly an hour later was a surprise, but the Colonel said
nothing, content to follow her lead. One hand came up to thread carefully through her hair, holding
her to him affectionately as he soothed her frantic kisses with his own languid ones.

It seemed like a long time, before Marina’s tears calmed into quiet sniffles now and again. Her hands
lifted to cup Will’s cheeks, tilting her head slightly in order to slant her mouth more firmly over his
own. The Colonel’s hands were warm and firm as they stroked over her body, offering comfort and
giving her complete control over their embrace. Her partner watched her closely as she drew back,
the tears in her eyes making them shine like diamonds, as she moved her fingers lightly over the
curves of his face. Finally she offered him a broken smile and murmured, “Ya lyublyu tebya,
Mishka.”

Bowing his head to hers again, he captured her mouth in a tender kiss. Pulling away, he stroked his
fingers through the strands of her hair and brushed them sweetly behind her ears, as he replied, “Ya
lyublyu tebya, samaya malen’kaya. Anything you need, Marishka, it’s yours.”

There was a sly curve on Marina’s lips as she teased, “Anything huh?”

Relieved that she was willing to tease him, Will replied flippantly, “Well, you can use me like a
jungle jim, if you want. I mean, it’s a hard job, but someone’s gotta do it.”

The Russian’s giggle caused a warm glow in his heart, the Colonel giving her a bright grin. Shaking
her head at him, she insisted, “I may take you up on that later, but for right now, I just want to you to
hold me. Is that okay?”

Will’s hands came up to caress her cheeks, his eyes warm as he insisted, “That is always okay with
me.”

Standing from the couch, he offered her his hand and waited patiently for her to take it. The handler
gave him a small smile, placing her hand in his and letting him pull her gently from the couch. Once
she was standing, she squeaked slightly as he swept her up into his arms effortlessly, before giving
him a bright grin and looping her arms around his shoulders familiarly. Laying her head against his
chest, she took comfort in the steady beat of his heart as he took the stairs two at a time and turned
down the hallways toward their room.

William Grimm and Marina Petrovka had been together for thirteen years. They had come face to
face with both the best and the worst of what life could throw at them, and come out stronger in the
end. But Marina had never loved him more than this moment; than the moment her longtime partner
set her on her feet at the foot of their bed and proceeded to worship her as he had never worshiped
her before. Kneeling at her feet, he bent his head to the task of unzipping her boots and easing them
from her feet. His fingers moved like magic against the skin of her feet and ankles as he traced
whimsical patterns over her skin as he moved up her body. Kneeling up, he reached for the zipper of
her skirt next, looking up at her with a small smile as she speared her hands through his hair. His
hands were steady as they ushered the material on its way to the floor, leaving her in her stockings,
panties and garter belt. Toying with the garter belt, he cocked a silent eyebrow in her direction before
deft fingers set to work on removing it all. Pressing a sweet kiss to each of her thighs, he pushed
himself to his feet next, sliding his hands under the top of her uniform and guiding it lazily over her
head.

Dropping the sweater to the floor with the rest of her uniform, he bent to press adoring kisses to
every exposed of skin he could reach. Finally, his hands tightened slightly on her hips in a silent
admonition to stay still, before he strode quickly to their dresser and pulled her favorite nightgown –
a soft, comfortable satin gown trimmed in Belgian lace that Will had bought for her in Bruges years
ago to celebrate their fifth anniversary – from the top drawer. He dressed her reverently, placing
random kisses over every part of her body he could reach. Then, sweeping her back up into his arms,
he laid her carefully in the center of the bed. He ripped his own t-shirt over his head, leaving him in a pair of soft track pants before crawling into the bed after her.

Turning her back to him, Marina smiled at the feeling of him press full-length against her back, one hand reaching to the foot of the bed to pull their covers up and over the top of them. That arm was implacable around her waist as he pulled her into him, burying his nose into the hair just behind the curve of her jaw as he whispered “I love you” into her ear in every language he knew.

Tears sprang to her eyes once again as she whispered, “What did I do to deserve you?”

She could feel his lips curve into a smile against her skin as he replied, “You loved me.”

Pulling his arm up around her neck, she bent her head into it and once again began to cry. Will’s voice was a soothing hum in her ear long into the night, only falling silent when at last she had cried herself to sleep.

Tightening his arm around her waist, he held her as close to him as he could for an hour until he was sure that she was asleep. Carefully, he extricated himself from her and eased from the bed. She stirred with a slight whimper, before rolling over into the warmth he’d left behind and drifting away into sleep again. He smiled lightly, bending to press a loving kiss to her forehead, before he retrieved his shirt from the floor and left the bedroom behind, easing the door closed behind him.

Moving into the kitchen, he set to work on making her favorite foods, *shashlyk* and steak *solyanka* with *yabluchnyk* for dessert. As he worked, he held the family’s house phone pinned between chin and shoulder, listening to the ringing sound on the other end of the line. Finally, a familiar voice answered the call with a brusque, “Perron.”

“Dave, it’s Will. I need a favor.”

There was audible surprise on the other end of the line, before the General spoke, “Will . . . it’s always good to hear from you. What can I do for you?”

Bracing his hands on the counter, Will closed his eyes, said a brief prayer to a god he’d never believed in and plowed forward, “Marina and I need a new posting for a couple months. You know of any off the top of your head you could send our way?”

Dave’s voice was thoughtful and wary as he replied, “I know of a few. None of them are going to be fun or particularly prestigious. What’s going on, Will?”

“One of Marina’s staff members got into some serious trouble, so Marina is on administrative leave until they sort it out. I need to get her out of here for awhile.” Rubbing his eyes with one hand, he pleaded, “Dave, please . . . I’m begging here.”

“Give me a day or two. I’ll see what I can do. In the meantime, why don’t you pack her up and bring her out to the beach house? I know Denise would love to see her.”

Bowing his head as the swell of relief made his knees weak, Will braced his hand on the counter to hold himself up. “Thank you, Dave.”

“You and Marina are good people. She’s going to be fine; but I understand the need to protect her from the gossip. We’ll see you in a day or so, I presume?”

“Soon as I can get her packed up and the boys squared away we’ll be there.”

“Then we’ll see you soon. Keep your head up, Will; everything’s going to fall out just fine.”
The two men exchanged their goodbyes before Will hung up the phone. Now all he had to do was convince Marina that there was nothing keeping her on base. Which Will knew from previous experience was going to be a much harder proposition that it sounded. Oh well, he did at least have one wildcard up his sleeve.

When in doubt of success, make Dad do it.

Chapter End Notes

Translations:

sumasshedshaya devushka - crazy girl (one of Will's nicknames for Marina)
samaya malen'kaya - my little one (one of Will's nicknames for Marina)
zhemchuzhina - pearl (one of Will's lesser used nicknames for Marina)
Mishka - an intimate diminutive of "Mikhail" or "Misha" (one of Marina's nicknames for Will)
ya lyublyu tebya - I love you
shashlyk - Russian shish kebabs
solyanka - Russian meat soup
yabluchnyk - a kind of Ukrainian apple cake
Chapter Notes

I hope you enjoy this chapter. At last we're starting to get back into a chapter a day, FINALLY! I can't believe that it's taken me this long.

Amerou helped me sooo much with the Maria dialogue so credit definitely goes to her for the Maria-ness of Maria. XD Enjoy!

Translations, as usual, are at the end of the chapter. Enjoy everyone!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
Less than twenty four hours later, Will and Marina took off for Tybee Island, Georgia. They’d spend a week or two there with Dave and Denise Perron, before packing off to Budingen, Germany, to take over command of Coleman Kaserne while the base was being decommissioned. They’d be at the overseas post for the next year, after which time things would probably go back to normal at S.H.I.E.L.D. The gossip would be old news and Marina would be spared the worst of the rumors.

That being said, the boys were still out of the loop about what exactly had happened. They knew that Porter had been one of Marina’s handlers and that he’d killed a baker’s dozen kids in the attempt to
kill Hawkeye. One day, they had the asshole in custody and the next day the Power Couple of the family was taking an Army posting far from S.H.I.E.L.D.

Which could explain why Maria called Marina’s three boys into her office the afternoon after the two Colonels had left base. Even Jason was asked to attend the meeting, leaving each of them wondering what the hell was going on. When they arrived at Command, they were directed to a private conference room to prevent the ears in S.H.I.E.L.D.’s watercooler from overhearing the discussion.

When the three boys stepped into the room, it was to the sight of Maria sitting ramrod straight in her chair. Hansel’s presence at the end of the table, kitty-corner from Maria, caused Clint to slam to a stop in his tracks. Long-sighted grey eyes narrowed as they shifted back and forth between the two. “Okay . . . what the hell is going on, Pops?”

There was a slight crease of amusement at the corners of Hansel’s eyes, but only someone who knew him well would be able to discern the smile there. “Patience is a virtue, mein Falki. If hyu seet down, ve vill tell hyu.”

The German’s heavy accent caused each of his sons to stiffen in alarm; the only time the former witch hunter’s accent was that noticeable was if he was distressed or worried. Each of the boys glanced at each other warily, before they took their seats in the chairs situated across the table from Maria. Jason sprawled back lazily, his arms coming up to fold over his chest as he stared between his father and his former boss. “All right . . . how about we cut the bullshit? Chto za khren ’is going on?”

Brian’s lips quirked lightly as he lifted his feet onto the table, crossing them at the ankles as he kicked his chair back onto its back legs. “Whatever is going on, I don’t think we’re going to like it.”

“Ya think?” Clint remarked lazily, with a roll of his eyes.

Teal eyes were disdainful as Maria cocked an eyebrow at Brian’s feet. Reaching across the table, she shoved them sharply and overbalanced the agent’s chair completely. The man’s arms pinwheeled frantically as he sought to prevent himself from toppling over, before he fell backwards with a crash. Both Jason and Clint burst into laughter at the lurid language falling from Brian’s lips, before Maria cleared her throat sharply and drew their attentions back onto her. “So what’s the sitch, Boss Lady?” Clint asked, slouching backwards in his chair with an insolent grin.

Dusting her hands off from their contact with Brian’s combat boots, Maria folded them together over the top of the folder resting before her. “Is there anything else you boys would like to address before we get to the part where you start to behave like fully functional adults?” There was a pause as she examined each in turn, before questioning once more, “No? Are you sure?”

Sensing that she was quickly losing their temper with them, the three boys canned the shenanigans and shook their heads. “No ma’am.”

Sending a sharp glare at her boyfriend in response to the German’s wide grin at his sons’ antics, she rolled her eyes toward the ceiling in an obvious ploy for patience. Turning back to them she nodded sharply and insisted, “All right then; shall we get started?”

Taking a deep breath, Maria lifted one hand to her eyes and pushed at the beginnings of the headache she could feel building behind her eyes as she muttered too low to be heard, “And now I understand why Fury always insists no one else can handle you boys. Dear God, give me the strength, wisdom and, most of all, the patience not to choke these three idiots until they lose consciousness.”

Clint’s eyes narrowed as he reminded her sharply, “You remember that I read lips, right? I’m deaf . . .
Maria glared at him for a moment, before sighing heavily. “Boys, there’s no easy way to tell you this, so I’m not going to try to sugar coat it for you.” Taking a deep breath, the Assistant Director continued, “Marina has been placed on administrative leave, pending investigation of her actions, and those of her department, concerning Jared M. Porter.”

The outcry following the announcement was furious as each of the three shot to their feet in outraged protest. Hansel’s voice was low but thunderous as he insisted, “PLATZ!”

Even as he glowered, Clint slammed down into his chair with a fierce frown, followed only moments later by Jason. Reaching up, both brothers hauled Brian into his seat last of all. Jason’s tone was bitter as he insisted, “We’re not dogs, Dad.”

The family sniper, however, didn’t care so much about the meaning of the word. Clint’s tone was accusing as he hissed at Maria, “Is that why she and Will took off for a random bullshit base in Germany this morning?”

“The whereabouts of Lt Colonel Petrovka and Colonel Grimm are not the concern of S.H.I.E.L.D., and their posting was not one of our making. You would do well to take that question up with your superiors.”

Brian’s tone was cold as he reminded her, “You are my superior.”

Teal eyes were flaming as she reminded him sharply, “You’re also not a member of this country’s Armed Forces the last time I checked, Agent Gamble. I believe I was talking to Major Grimm and Captain Grimm . . . not to you.”

Sensing that his wildcard son was about to say something that would get him, at the very least, throw into the brig for at least the next six months, Hansel’s tone was a low growl as he insisted, “Brian . . . shut up.”

Brian’s lip curled lightly, even as he obeyed the older man’s order and subsided backwards against the backrest of his chair. Satisfied that the eldest Grimm had his son in hand, she spoke again. “As I was saying, before I was interrupting, Marina has been placed on administrative leave.”

Jason’s tone was as respectful as he could manage as he inquired, “And what does that mean for Clint, Brian, Bucky and Natasha?”

“Aren’t you concerned about that means for you, Detective Walsh?”

Jason shrugged lightly as he insisted, “I don’t work for S.H.I.E.L.D. anymore. Except for the two empty seats at the dinner table during Sunday night dinners, their absence won’t affect me much at all. However, those four are handled by Marina personally; that means they have a much more personal stake in her banishment.”

Maria sighed, rubbing more firmly at the bridge between her eyes. “Marina was not banished.”

“Oh really? And what would you call it? She’s fled halfway across the world because of this; she’s obviously embarrassed by whatever this is. And that fact is only reinforced by the fact that Will didn’t even wait two days before he’d whisked her away to safety.”

“You’ll have to ask the Colonel about that one, but if I were in his position, I’d want to take my humiliated lover somewhere away from the gossip mill. You really think Marina would run from . . . it’s one of my primary means of communication.”
There was an audible sneer in Clint’s voice as he reminded her snidely, “She didn’t actually fight very hard to stay.”

Hansel’s tone was calm as he interrupted whatever Maria had been about to say. “That would be because I guilted her into letting mein Adler take her away.”

Jason waved away Clint’s response, eyes still pinned on Maria as he reminded her, “You didn’t answer my question, Agent Hill. How does this affect my brothers and their partners?”

Maria took a deep breath, eyes flashing toward Hansel for a moment, before dropping the bombshell. “Agents Romanov, Barton, Gamble and Barnes are being reassigned to a temporary handler from Agent Coulson’s handler pool.”

This time Brian said nothing, only stood from his seat and stormed silently from the room. Maria frowned fiercely, only the shake of Jason’s head pausing her in her tracks. “Let him go, Agent Hill. I’ll fill him in on the details later. Strong emotions are not good for Brian’s control, and I can assure you, Agent Hill... you do not want to meet Barney.”

Clint folded his arms over his chest and asked, “And who is this new handler?”

“Regrettably, there will be four handlers, one for each you. In addition, each of you will be assigned new temporary partners as well.”

Even Hansel started at that, having obviously been unaware of that caveat. “Why is that?”

“With Marina’s loyalties called into question, eyes are going to be scrutinizing everything the Grimms do for at least the foreseeable future.”

“Why? I have heard nothing that implies my sons are under investigation.”

“They’re not officially under investigation, no. But everyone knows that they are intensely loyal to Marina Petrovka. If her loyalties are no longer to S.H.I.E.L.D., can the loyalties of her top agents still be with S.H.I.E.L.D.?”

“Because Marina’s loyalties have ever been to S.H.I.E.L.D. Even Fury knows that Marina’s only loyalties are to us; so long as we stay loyal, she’ll be loyal.”

“Yes, but the World Security Council does not know that. If it was up to Fury, there would be a discrete investigation headed by Agent Coulson and all of this would disappear. However, the Hot Air Head Panel has taken it upon themselves to poke their noses where it doesn’t belong once again.”

Rubbing her fingers once more over her forehead, she insisted, “It’s just a temporary measure. Once things cool off, we can go back to the way things really work, but in the meantime you will act like poster boys for the S.H.I.E.L.D. model agent lineup. Or so help me God I will let the Colonel take you apart piece by piece for ruining all of Marina’s hard work.” Glaring at Jason, she insisted, “And that includes you, Detective Walsh. No hacking the Kremlin or playing cyberpranks on the White House until Marina’s name is cleared. Don’t make me have yet another National Security Talk with you. I can assure you, it won’t be pleasant for either of us. There will be pie charts and dolls with all of the no-no places clearly labeled.”

At the threat, Jason gave her a cheeky grin. “Maria... I just want to ask you when the last time you caught me hacking into the Kremlin... and you can’t prove that I was the one who pranked the
Maria’s tone was deadpan as she reminded him, “Someone programmed the President’s computer to display the Brothers Grimm fairy tale ‘Little Red Riding Hood’ on constant repeat. They had to bring in the NSA to reformat the servers. Who else could it have been?”

The NYPD detective shrugged lazily, a sharp twinkle in his eyes as he insisted, “All I’m going to say is that if it had been me, it would have been ‘Hansel & Gretel’ . . . in German and with sound effects.”

Hansel was chuckling, even as Maria bowed her head in dismay. “That is not comforting, Jay.”

Sitting back in her chair, she glowered at both of the Grimms before shaking her head. “I don’t know how Marina deals with you.”

Simultaneously, both of them announced, “Practice.”

Maria snorted lightly, before waving both hands at them sharply. “Get out of here, the both of you, before I lock the lot of you in the brig and conveniently ‘misplace’ the keys.”

In no time at all, both of the boys had dashed from the room, leaving Hansel and Marina alone in the room. Maria sighed and slumped back into her chair. Her paramour stood from his own, moving to take a seat on the table in front of her. “They are good kids,” he promised her with a small smile.

“Yeah? I would really like to know where you get that supposition?”

Hansel smiled at her, reaching to squeeze her shoulder. “Maria, hyu ‘ave attended Sunday dinners with the family for years. Hyu and Marina have had countless movie nights at our home. Hyu know they are good kids. They are angry on Marina’s behalf, and they are pissed off about the World Security Council seeking to pin this whole thing on Marina. This has all been kind of sprung on them from out of the blue; I do not think any of them thought the Porter situation was going to fall out the way it did. Give them a couple days to come to grips, to calm down, and they will be able to handle this better.”

“If any of your sons set even a toe out of line, Hans, I AM going to throw the whole lot of them into the brig. I hope you manage to get that through their heads, because I will not accept this level of disrespect from them again.”

Hansel’s mouth pinched slightly, a firm nod the only indication that he was upset about the declaration. “I will talk to them. Vill that be all, Fraulein Hill?”

Frowning at the formal address, Maria glared at him lightly before throwing up her hands with a heavy sigh. “That will be all, Herr Kuhn. I’ll see you tonight?”

His grin was small as he shook his head, “Regrettably, Maria, I believe I ‘ave a few young men in need of mein company heute Abend.”

Maria’s smile was sad as she shook her head. “All right . . . tomorrow for lunch then?”

Leaning over, he pressed a gentle kiss to the apple of her cheek. “Shall I save our usual table in the mess hall, Fraulein Hill?”

“Sounds good,” she agreed, tilting her chin upwards to receive her usual farewell kiss.

The German’s finger trailed lightly over her cheek, before he stood from the table and strode from the room. Maria remained where she’d been left, saying a small prayer to whatever god there was
that she would survive the next year without Marina to run herd on her boys.

Chapter End Notes

Translations:

(G) mein Falki - diminutive of my Hawk (literally "my little Hawk" & Hansel's nickname for Clint)
(R) Chto za khren' - What the fuck
(G) platz! - down! (an order given to dogs to make them sit)
(G) heute Abend - this evening
Adjustments

Chapter Notes

Enjoy all! Translations at the end of the chapter, as always!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
Chapter 106: Adjustments

Brian Joshua Grimm

Brian Grimm was aware of the things people said about him, and the things that people thought about him. He knew that even his own younger brothers occasionally found him terrifying, especially when he was pissed off and grappling with his control over his alter ego. So it was no surprise whatsoever that every junior agent he came across as he stormed from Command practically leaped to get out of his way.

It should have not been surprising, however, to see Natasha standing quiet and complacent in the foyer of the house the Grimm Clan had shared on base since the Brothers Grimm and their beloved Marishka had joined S.H.I.E.L.D. Evergreen eyes were calm and calculating as she watched him, her arms folded across her chest and her head cocked an inch to left. She made no move to come closer, remaining almost frozen in her place and leaving the responsibility for whatever happened next squarely in Brian’s hands.

He tried to give her his trademark grin, but even he could tell that the gesture fell flat when he could only muster up the barest hint of a smirk. Shoving his hands in his pockets, he chuckled bitterly and insisted, “Tasha, moya devushka, you are a sight for sore eyes.”

Natasha’s eyes warmed fractionally as she gave him an understanding smile. Finally, she spoke, her tone curious but unassuming. “What to go beat the shit out of the newbies?”

“God, yes,” he breathed, Brian’s eyes rolling back slightly at the thought, caught off guard as always by the relief at how well she knew him.

Stepping forward she glided past him without ever moving to touch him, leaving the ball squarely in Brian’s court. The second oldest Grimm smirked slightly, moving to fall into step beside her. Reaching up as they left the house, he twisted a blood-red curl around his fingers and tugged fondly on it. “Spasido, Natalya,” he breathed, even as he held his breath at his usage of the practically forbidden first name.

The spy glared at him lightly at the name, though green eyes were warm and sparkling like chipped green glass. He wasn’t in trouble, and she knew that he knew that. It wasn’t until the former sniper’s fingers trailed down her arm to tangle with her own that Natasha spoke again, “Vsegda pozhaluysta.”

And if the two of them cut a path of destruction through the new recruits that Brian’s father was training, well . . . that really only added to their legend.

Jason Leonard Grimm

It was ridiculously late by the time Jason Grimm arrived back at the tiny apartment Will and Marina had gotten for him right after Sarah was murdered. He paused in the doorway of the diner, one shoulder resting against the doorframe as bottle-green eyes swept carefully over the interior. Will hadn’t been kidding when the eldest Grimm had told his younger brother that the place would require a makeover. Makeover was an understatement for the mess the tiny restaurant had been when it had come into his possession.

The walls were a bland yellow color, which usually gave the tiny room a cheery, if not particularly upbeat, appearance. The bar was tidy and clean, shining dully in the half-light coming from the street lamps outside. Each of the stools was upholstered in red leather, a whimsical nod to a half-formed thought he’d once had about how an old Sixties era diner would have looked. It was a good place, somewhere he could be himself, and he was proud to call the tiny space his own. He’d worked hard
to rebuild her from the ground up, and yet there wasn’t a single square inch of her that wasn’t metaphorically stained by the blood on his hands.

Sarah would have loved it, laughing as she cooked at the griddle and guarded their food from his attempts at helping. After all, it wasn’t as if Jason hadn’t earned his reputation of being a notoriously bad cook. Sarah had always teased him that growing up in a houseful of boys, it was no wonder he couldn’t cook. That’s what a woman was for; and if Marina ever heard him repeat Sarah’s philosophy on “A Woman’s Place” . . . well, quite frankly, the consequences of such an action were too terrifying to even think about.

But Sarah was gone, murdered long before it should have been her time to go. He missed her every damned day, carrying the weight of her loss within his heart every day of his life. The work helped him forget for awhile, knowing that he was helping to clean up their city and make the world just that little bit safer. But her disdain and her disgust hung over every arrest and every success, tainting them with a shade of disappointment and disapproval that he couldn’t shake.

A soft voice, silken and seductive, spoke from the shadowed hallway on the other side of the diner, earning a filthy grin. “Are you just going to stand in the doorway all night . . . or are you going to make the trip worth my while?”

Jason smirked at her, watching as his fellow detective slipped into the residual light. Allison Beaumont was a delicious temptation, her call a siren song that hooked him in all the right places and encouraged him to bury himself in her. As she stepped into a thready patch of light, Jason’s breath caught in his chest; the gorgeous Latina wore a silver chain around her neck . . . and not a damned thing else. A low growl emerged from his throat, as he all but lunged at her, sweeping her up into his arms and stalking toward the bedroom. Dumping her onto his bed amidst a flurry of giggles, he pounced onto the bed after and proceeded to lose himself in her for awhile.

It was a long time before either of them could be bothered to surface from the haze of endorphins and lust again.

When they finally emerged from the latest round of debauchery that had been their relationship up to this point, Beaumont harrumphed at the sight of Jason flopping onto his back and breathing hard. “If that was enough to wear you out, Walsh, you’re getting old.”

Baleful green eyes glared at her, as he lifted one arm up to rest against his forehead. “I’m barely 30 years old, Beaumont. Kindly fuck off.”

Her voice was a low purr as she sidled closer to him, “Isn’t that what we just did?”

The condescension inherent in the single arch of Jason’s eyebrow was answer enough, causing the curvy Latina to huff and flop back again. “Seriously, Walsh . . . sometimes I don’t know whether to strangle you or to kiss you when you get into your moods.”

Walsh grunted, watching lazily as his lover moved to stand from his bed, hugging the coversheet to her chest modestly as though he hadn’t just had his lips all over the delectable mounds. “If I can offer you a bit of advice? Never make promises that you don’t intend to keep.”

The woman rolled her eyes, bending over slightly to grab up her clothes from where she’d folded them neatly on his desk chair. “I don’t know what I’m doing wrong, Walsh. I mean, sometimes it’s fun and we flirt and laugh and just enjoy each other’s company. And then other times, you get into these horrible black moods and I start wasting entirely too much of my time wondering who the hell pissed in your Wheaties.” Narrowing her eyes at him, she scolded cattily, “I shouldn’t have to walk on eggshells around my boyfriend?”
“Boyfriend?” Jason sneered, as he pushed himself into a seated position, “What are we? Twelve?”

Throwing her hands up into the air in exasperation, the woman snapped viciously, “You’re an ass.”

Jason shrugged lightly, even as guilt swamped him at the knowledge that she was right. But he’d learned his lesson the first time; it wasn’t safe or smart to get too close or too attached to people. The Grimms were a dangerous group to throw your lot in with; the few that they admitted into their inner circle could handle it. They’d been trained, practically from infancy in at least four cases, to keep their heads down and their wits about them. Beaumont was a detective and a good one; but she was a lot like Sarah had been. He was only trying to protect her from himself . . . and praying that one day, he’d find someone he didn’t have to.

Allison tugged her t-shirt over her body, forgoing the rest of her clothes as she moved to crawl back onto the bed. “You’re just lucky you’re so good in bed . . . otherwise I wouldn’t put up with your shit, Walsh.”

Jason’s grin felt like a lie as he hauled her lips back to his own and growled against them, “You’re a rotten liar.”

Clinton Francis Grimm

Bucky Barnes was not a stupid man; he’d known exactly what was happening as soon as Marina had hugged him tightly, begging in an unheard whisper to take care of Clint for her. Not that that was a hardship. Yeah, Clint was a headstrong, too-smart-for-his-britches-sometimes-kid and sometimes Bucky just wanted to beat his ass for some of the stupid stunts Clint pulled just because he could, but Bucky loved the smart-mouthed sniper. And if Marina wasn’t going to be around to protect him, then he would gladly shoulder that responsibility for her.

Of course, then there were times like now. The times when the former assassin couldn’t decide if he wanted to belt the brat until he couldn’t sit for a week or just hug the hell out of his Hawk until he broke down into sobs.

Clint had been uncharacteristically, and uncomfortably, quiet since he returned home from his meeting with Assistant Director Maria Hill. And if there was one thing that Bucky had learned early, it was that a quiet Clint was never a good thing. Quiet Clint was always a prelude to something reckless, dangerous, ill-advised or all of the above.

When Clint suddenly hefted the papier-mâché paperweight he’d made Marina when he was 6 and threw it against the wall hard enough to noticeably dent the fragile artwork, Bucky knew things were about to fall into the “all of the above” category. Letting out a furious scream, Clint proceeded to rip through the living room like a tornado; nothing was untouched as Clint overturned the furniture, swept a stack of Will’s neatly put away books to the floor, and tore a few of Marina’s throw pillows into feathers and useless fabric. It wasn’t until he made a grab for the Russian-made Matroyshka Doll that the Zimniy Soldat had given his protégé for her birthday the year she was 12 that Bucky finally stepped in to prevent its destruction.

Grabbing Clint’s arm firmly just above his elbow, Bucky lifted one foot onto the coffee table, bent the younger man forcibly over his knee and began to layer sharp, stinging slaps over the boy’s ass. For a moment, the younger sniper remained motionless where he’d been laid, shocked that he was being spanked like a child by his boyfriend. As soon as that thought flit through his head, however, Clint began to struggle. “What the hell do you think you’re doing!?” was the incredulous question, as Clint attempted to wiggle himself free of the other man’s grip.

“If you’re going to behave like a child, I will treat you like a child, khishchnik,” Bucky scolded,
even as he released the younger man and let him scramble away.

The former spy would never tell him, but the pout on Clint’s face as he bounced lightly on his toes and rubbed firmly at the warmth of his backside was the most adorable thing Bucky had ever seen. The whine in Clint’s voice, however, was not as he muttered, “That hurt, Buck.”

Bucky’s eyes rolled as he snapped, “Punishments are supposed to hurt.”

Clint’s eyes flared slightly as he inquired meekly, “Punishment?”

“Yes, khishchnik . . . punishment.” Reaching out again, he took Clint’s arm much gentler than the first time and turned him to face the destroyed room. “Look at this mess. Marina would be horribly disappointed in you.”

As he’d thought it would, the admonition sucked all of the defiance right out of the young man. Turning into Bucky’s arms, Clint wrapped his arms around the other man’s waist, ducked his head into his boyfriend’s neck and began to cry. And just like that, the former assassin was putty in his lover’s hands as the metal hand came up to stroke tenderly through Clint’s hair while the other pulled him that much closer.

Bucky bowed his head, his nose fitting perfectly into the spot behind Clint’s jaw. “What’s happened, malysh? What’s wrong?”

“I miss them,” the youngest Grimm whimpered, sniffing hard. “We’ve never been apart, not really. Will’s always been here to ruffle my hair when he’s proud of me and scold me for my pranks. And Marina’s always been here to call me her dorogoy and to sing me to sleep when I wake up with nightmares.” There was a quiet whimper before Clint whispered, “I miss them so much.”

The former Russian spy hummed lightly under his breath, holding his boyfriend just that much closer. “They’re going to be back before you know it. And they have their cell phones; I know that Marina will always answer the phone when you call. Not to mention, there are these great things called ‘webcams’ that let you talk to each other through a computer; we’ll talk to Jason tomorrow and see if he can help pick out the one that’s the best quality, okay?”

There was a sniffle as Clint leaned back slightly to brush tiredly at his eyes. “You promise?”

“I promise.” Squeezing his shoulder lightly, he turned him towards the stairwell. “It’s been a long few days. Why don’t you head upstairs and get some rest? I’ll be up as soon as I set the room to rights.”

Clint’s voice was very small as he murmured, “Will would never let me go take a nap after a tantrum like this. He’d make me clean up my mess and then apologize to Marina for destroying her stuff.”

Bucky ruffled the young man’s hair fondly as he reminded him lightly, “I’m not the Colonel . . . and you can apologize to Marina for destroying her things once we get a webcam, how does that sound?”

Clint’s only reply was a slow nod, before he turned toward the stairs and moved toward the room the two shared at the end of the hallway. Turning back at the topmost landing, the Army sniper called softly, “Hey Bucky?”

Bucky looked up from where he was gathering the torn fabric of Marina’s pillows with a small smile, “What is it, khishchnik?”

“I love you.”
A genuine smile curved the older man’s lips as he chuckled fondly, replying honestly, “I love you too. I’ll be up soon.”

“And then sexytimes?” Clint asked hopefully, a bright sparkle in his grey-slate eyes.

A single eyebrow cocked upwards as Bucky scanned the disaster zone that was the living room, once again earning a deep blush from Clint at the reminder. “We’ll see.” Watching Clint’s shoulders slump at the declaration, Bucky chuckled and reminded him, “If you get everything set up, we’ll see about sexytimes, okay?”

A wide grin creased Clint’s face as he cheered, before he turned on his heel and dashed toward their bedroom. Rolling his eyes fondly, the man who was once the Winter Soldier muttered, “What the hell have I gotten myself into?”

Chapter End Notes

Translations:

(R) moya devushka - my girl
(R) spasido - thank you
(R) vsegda pozhaluysta - you’re welcome
(R) Zimniy Soldat - Winter Soldier (the code name the Red Room gave to Bucky Barnes after they reprogrammed him)
(R) khishchnik - little hawk (literally "little bird of prey" and one of Bucky's nicknames for Clint)
(R) malysh - kiddo or baby (terms of endearment)
(R) dorogoy - darling (Marina's nickname for Clint)
Chapter Notes

So I am now better after spending the last three days puking up my guts, preluded only by my daughter puking up her guts. Either way, here is new chapter. I hope you enjoy.

Translations, as always, are at the end of the chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes
Chapter 107: A Father's Tough Love

The first few months were a bit of an adjustment for everyone. Even Clint admitted that he kind of, sort of, maybe, “but don’t tell anyone ever” missed walking in on Will and Marina necking in the kitchen, instead of making breakfast. As time passed on, eventually their absences became almost normal and the ache of missing them was no longer so sharp or so brutal. It helped that Marina called every week to check up on her boys, and that Hansel had insisted on keeping up with the weekly Sunday Night family dinners.

It was nearly five months later that the Russian called Hansel’s S.H.I.E.L.D. issued cell phone.
Hansel was grading essays from his weapons class and flipped open the mobile almost absently, “Ja?”

“Guten Tag, Vati,” came the cheerful greeting, the German words tainted by the noticeable Russian accent.

Glancing at the clock and seeing that it read exactly 12:01 pm, Hansel chuckled and set his paperwork aside, leaning back comfortably in his chair. “Guten Tag, Tochter. What time is it there? The time changes still confuse me a little.”

Marina’s laugh was light as she accused fondly, “You are a horrible liar, Vati.”

Chuckling, he grinned though he did not deny the point. “To what do I owe the pleasure? It must be important if you are willing to give up what little time you have with mein Adler before your shift begins at seven o’clock.”

There was a soft hum through the phone, and Marina’s tone was sober as she replied, “I’m worried about Jason.”

Reminded of his middle son’s sullen behavior at their last Sunday dinner, Hansel hummed agreeably. “As am I. He has been in a foul mood since you and mein Adler left for Germany. I do not know how to help him, if he will not talk to me.”

A mournful sigh drifted through the phone as she replied, “I think it’s about Sarah.”

“It has been eight years, Tochter. How long is he going to hold on to her memory?”

“As long as we’ll let him, I think. Would you speak with him? Both Will and I have tried, but he just brushes us off and tells us we worry too much. Which is admittedly true, but also justifiably not the point,” she muttered with an exasperated huff.

Hansel chuckled, well acquainted with the sound of Marina’s “I’m rolling my eyes at you, idiot” tone. God knows that her boys had earned its usage on more than a couple occasions. Shaking his head, he sighed at the thought of his son’s overly-independent nature; it was much too easy to imagine Jason brushing off both his brother’s and Marina’s concerns with a shrug and a too-bright laugh. “I will speak to him. Do not worry, Tochter; he will be all right.”

Marina’s tone was a noticeably warmer as she insisted, “Thank you, Vati, I appreciate it.”

“How is mein Adler?”

Marina’s tone was an interesting combination of amused and weary as she chuckled, “Busy. The base is being decommissioned, so things are a little crazy right now. There’s transfers to complete, buildings to tear down, equipment to ship out. He’s remarkably comfortable in this role though; he’s in his element and it’s nice to see him so happy.” There was a sigh as she continued, “As you know we have opposing shifts, so I don’t get to see him as much as I like. But that’s the job. As it is, I’m going to be a little late to our usual dinner if I don’t head out the door here soon.”

“Tell him that we all miss him for us, all right?”

Marina chuckled lightly as she promised, “I’ll tell him.” There was a pause, before she sighed, “I really am going to be late, so I have to go. Enjoy the rest of your afternoon, Vatti.”

“I will take care of things here at home. You take care of mein Adler, agreed?”
Marina’s relief was audible through the phone as she chuckled, “Agreed. Please tell everyone we love them and that we miss them for us, Vati?”

“I will, and remember that we love and miss you too, Tochter. Be well,” he insisted, listening to the click on the other end of the line as Marina hung up the phone.

Turning his attention back onto his grading, he attempted to focus on the essay before him. The thought of his technically minded son and his recent mood shift, however, kept stealing his attention away from the page. Finally, after he’d read the same sentence three different times, he accepted that he wasn’t going to be able to focus. Tossing his pen onto his papers, he sprawled back in his chair with a frown as he considered what to do. If Will was here, he’d probably ask the eldest of his sons for advice on how to handle the middle brother. Based on what Marina had just told him however, Will had more than enough to worry about; adding one more concern to his plate, especially a concern he could do nothing about, would only be heartlessly cruel.

Pushing himself up from Will’s desk chair, he straightened up his papers and stashed them in the lockable desk drawer that Will had cleared out for him to use while they were gone. Turning the key, he slipped the chain around his neck and left his son’s study. Clint and Bucky were in the kitchen, jostling each other fondly as they prepared lunch for the family. The red-haired assassin his second oldest son loved was seated at the bar, an affectionate smile on her face as she watched her best friend flirt casually with his boyfriend. (It was no secret that Hansel had not liked her when she had first come into S.H.I.E.L.D., but eventually the assassin he now secretly referred to as Rotkäppchen had grown on him, especially after he’d seen how fiercely she loved his Arger and the gentle way she adored his Falki.)

Coming to rest his hands gently on the slope of her shoulder, he pressed an uncharacteristically fond kiss to the apple of her cheek before turning his attention on his youngest son. “Where is hyur Bruder, mein Falki?”

Natasha giggled girlishly as she answered in Clint’s stead, “Brian may have been the casualty of a badly thrown spoonful of mushroom sauce. He’s upstairs changing his shirt.”

“Why? What’s up, Pops?” Clint asked with that speculative tilt to his head that was indicative of Clint slipping into what Kenny used to call “sneaky-super-spy” mode.

“Hyr sister is worried about Jason. I promised her I vould speak with him.”

Bucky’s tone was low but warm as he inquired, “Are you going to miss lunch then? We made brochen and Jäger-Schnitzel.”

Hansel’s heart warmed at the thought that had taken place in choosing his favorite German dinner for that afternoon’s meal, reflected in the slight creasing at the corner of his eyes. “Thank you, Grauchen, but yes I will be missing lunch today.”

Bucky’s actions stuttered to a startled stop at the usage of the nickname he’d been given. It was well known fact that Hansel was taciturn and borderline brutish outside of the home. It was a much more closely guarded secret that Hansel Kuhn was not a man who was comfortable telling the people he loved “I love you”, so he gave them nicknames instead. Clint had been the first of Hansel’s sons to get a nickname, Hansel’s “Little Hawk” or “Falki”. Even the long absent Kenny had a nickname “Sonnenstrahl”, by which Hansel still referred to his missing son. Hell, the Assistant Director would probably cut out the tongue of anyone who even dared to insinuate differently, but even she had been given the nickname “Spatzi” or “Little Sparrow”.

Bucky knew that Hansel had been angry and disappointed that Marina had made the decision to
bring the Winter Soldier home with her. In addition to dating the man’s beloved youngest son, Bucky had been fairly certain that he was going to be either “Barnes” or “Soldat” in the man’s mind for the rest of their admittedly long and prolonged lives. To have earned a nickname from the tacit head of the Grimm family was the highest honor Hansel Kuhn could bestow and some part of Bucky choked back tears at the acceptance that was implied within it. “Why ‘Little Grey’?” he asked, trying to ignore the way his voice sounded coming from the small space left around where his heart was lodged in his throat.

Hansel’s tone was light as he replied, “Because of hyur arm. I had thought it would suit. If hyu do not like it . . .”

Wide-eyed, Bucky blurted out, “No! I . . . I like it. Thank you.”

“Hyu are welcome, Grauchen. As for Jason, I thought I would treat my son to lunch, as I am sure he has not eaten yet. It would fill his mouth with something so that I can say what I would have him hear without interruption.”

The entire room chuckled as they considered Jason’s tendency to ignore what everyone else said in favor of his own opinions. Clint hopped up onto the counter with a smirk, as he insisted, “Good luck, Pops. You’re gonna need it.”

Hansel cocked an eyebrow at his son, earning only a cheeky smile from his youngest. “Hyu know Marina does not like it when hyu sit on her counters, Falki.”

“Yeah, but Marina’s not here. And what Marina doesn’t know isn’t going to hurt me.”

Bucky’s tone was calm but steely as he insisted, “Maybe not, but what I do will.”

Clint pouted lightly, though he jumped down obediently in favor of leaning back against the cabinets. “You’re no fun, Buck.”

“If I let you do whatever you want, khishchnik, Marina’s going to come back to anarchy. This is still her home, even if she isn’t currently in residence. And her rules still stand.” Holding out a knife and a stalk of lettuce, Bucky insisted, “I need a salad made. Why don’t you get started on that for me?”

Still grumbling under his breath, Clint took the items from his boyfriend and began to move toward the other counter. Bucky smirked at the muttered grumbling, reaching out to loop one arm around the other man’s waist and haul him back into his body. Nibbling lightly against Clint’s jaw, he whispered an unheard promise in his ear causing a refreshing burst of laughter from the young archer. “You’re on,” Clint insisted, leaning back for a more proper kiss before moving to the other counter, with a grin and a cheerful whistle.

Hansel’s small was small and approving as he nodded once at Bucky, silently applauding his handling of the situation. Squeezing Natasha’s shoulders tenderly once more, he moved to get his coat from the front hallway. “If you would save me some Schnitzel, I would have some for dinner tonight.”

“Sure thing Pops,” Clint chirped with a grin, his body bouncing to the tune playing in his head.

“Behave yourself, mein Falki,” Hansel insisted sternly, even as he hid his grin in the act of shrugging into his coat.

Clint’s grumble was adorable as he muttered, “Yes sir.” Bucky’s metal hand reached back and pinched him lightly in the hip, causing Clint to jump and perk up as he called, “Love you, Pops!”
“Hyu too, mein Falki,” Hansel chuckled, shaking his head in amusement as he left the house. At least Clint had someone to keep him in line; Hansel shuddered to think the antics he would have gotten up to with Marina gone, if Bucky wasn’t around to ride herd on the notorious troublemaker.

It was just past one o’clock when the cab Hansel had called dropped him off in front of the Second Precinct. Fumbling briefly with the bills in the battered old wallet Will had given him years ago, Hansel handed the man his pay and then stepped from the interior of the car. Taking a deep breath, he shoved his hands deep into the pockets of his coat and stared up the front of the building. The former witch hunter was under no illusions that this conversation was going to be easy for either of them, but it was long past time that Jason accepted the truth of the matter.

Walking slowly up the stairs, Hansel’s thoughts turned back to the memory of his middle son curled up in his childhood bed, comforter drawn over his head as he sobbed after the woman had finally died. When he’d first begun hunting down witches as a young man, Hansel Kuhn had made it a rule never to speak ill of the dead; witches and Sarah Fitzgerald were the only exceptions to that ironclad rule. It was his opinion that the pretty blond had been a selfish girl, who had only loved the Jason she had been given. When she had been introduced to Hansel’s Jason, she had cast him away as unimportant, devastating the man who had loved her and continued to love her to this day. The way she had looked at Jason in the week before she had died had been undeserved; accusing, angry and disappointed. It was that mistrust and hatred of him that his middle son remembered every night as the detective closed his eyes before bed.

As far as Hansel knew, Sarah Fitzgerald had passed completely through the Veil. He had encountered a few ghosts in his admittedly checkered past, each of them ugly and embittered by their deaths; he was more than certain that her soul had not lingered. But even still, the girl’s memory haunted Jason as surely as a ghost.

Approaching the front desk, Hansel smiled at the flustered young woman seated there. She was staring at him with wide eyes and open mouth, obviously flabbergasted at his appearance. Robin’s egg eyes took her in in quick flashes, catching the name on her nametage as well as the brilliant diamond on her left wedding finger. “Fräiu Morgan, I would speak with my son, Detective Walsh. Would hyu be so kind as to direct me to where I might find him?”

Her voice was weak and unsteady in the face of his uncharacteristic smile, a glitter in her eyes a clear hint that she might have been married but she was not opposed to carrying a lit torch for another man as long as nothing came of it. “Detective Walsh’s desk is on the second floor, third door to the left. Would you like me to show you where?”

“No, Dankeschön, Fräiu Morgan; hyu look busy. I vill manage,” he promised with a small nod. “Thank hyu again.”

Heading towards the stairs the woman directed him towards, Hansel wasted no time in jogging up the stairs two at at time, leather coat flaring out behind him. Several people stopped to stare at him, causing the witch hunter to chuckle at the thoughts that must undoubtedly be wandering through their minds. Dodging the people loitering in the hallways was effortless, before Hansel was at last standing in the doorway of the room where the secretary had told him he could find his son.

Sure enough, Jason was seated at a desk with his back to the door, a nearly full pitcher of coffee on the desk at his elbow as he sipped from a travel mug. His computer was off, causing Hansel to frown, as he flipped through a stack of papers piled in front of him. Leaning one shoulder against the doorframe, Hansel allowed himself a few moments to examine what little of his son’s profile he could see. Jason’s hands were shaking finely, the motion so slight that only someone who had known Jason for as long as he had – or was actively looking for it – would have ever noticed. His
shoulders were hunched slightly, as though he was simply too tired to straighten himself up. His father heartily suspected that when he could see his son’s face, there would be fine line at the corners and deep circles under his eyes carefully hidden by years of watching Marina do the same.

Taking only a single step into the room, Hansel spoke softly to try and avoid startling his son. “Hyu look like hell, mein Schalki.”

Jason’s whole body jerked upwards as he swore in vicious Russian. Whirling his chair around, he stared at his father with wide eyes, “Jesus Dad, what the hell do you think you’re doing, sneaking up on me like that!? If we’d been at home . . .”

“Hyu would have shot me . . . I know. I am well informed about the proclivity for pulling hyur guns first and asking questions after, hyu share with hyur brothers. It is an impulse hyu all have come by honestly, remember?” Hansel reminded his son, his arms coming up to fold over his chest as he took in his son’s appearance. The younger man looked as though he had not slept for days, only proving the S.H.I.E.L.D. instructor’s point. “I retract my previous statement . . . Hell is much kinder in appearance than hyu, mein Sohn.”

Jason’s eyeroll was dry as he muttered, “Gee, thanks for that, Dad.”

Dropping his posture, Hansel gestured with one hand to the door. “Come . . . I vill buy hyu lunch. Hyu look as though hyu could use it.”

“Dad . . . I can’t . . . there’s this case. And Kowalski is really riding my ass today and I . . .”

Hansel interrupted gently, even as he filed away the name to ask Marina about later. “This is not a request, Schalki . . . come.”

Seeing that his father was not going to take no for an answer, Jason sighed and stood from his chair. Picking up a pen from his desk, he threw it at a tall and mustached man at the desk in the back corner. “Hey Eddie!” he called, causing the other man to look up with a fierce frown. “Could you tell Kowalski that I went to lunch with my dad? I’ll be back in an hour.”

“He’s not going to like that.”

“No offense to Kowalski intended, Eddie, but Dad is scarier than he is,” Jason insisted, as he pulled on his coat and followed after his father as they left the room.

Glancing around the hallway, Jason chuckled at the sight of several of his female coworkers from the various other departments in the Second lingering in the doorframes of their own offices and giggling quietly amongst themselves. “Congratulations, Dad, you have officially made every female member of the Second Squad fall in love with you.”

“Vas?” Hansel asked in confusion as he dodged effortlessly around a uniformed officer and the handcuffed perp he was corralling towards holding.

Jason chuckled, “I wonder if Maria knows that she has competition? Seriously, you can’t be that oblivious to the fact that every women in this building is staring at you like you’re a hot, juicy steak there for the taking.”

The former witch hunter shrugged, “I have no desire to seek a meal anywhere but the table where I am already invited, Schalki. Mein Spatzi is my perfect match; she suits me and I have no desire to look elsewhere.” Looking around, Hansel chuckled, before concluding, “Also, I am fairly certain that Maria could decimate your entire Second Squad with only a pinky finger.”
“Well that’s a given. I really don’t want to know what would happen if by some crazy happenstance, the Merry Murderesses or Fury’s Angels were let loose in the Second Precinct. I have a really bad feeling that everyone would be dead inside of a minute, and that regrettably includes the men.” Shoving his hands in his pockets, he scuffed his feet sheepishly as he insisted, “Hey Dad . . . don’t tell Marina about Kowalski, okay? I don’t want any trouble.”

Hansel hummed agreeably, though Jason sighed when he made no such promises. It wasn’t until they’d gotten a table at the Apolo that Jason leaned forward on his elbows and cocked an eyebrow at his dad. “All right, Dad . . . I highly doubt you showed up to work just to take me to lunch. What’s up?”

Knowing that Jason was not going respond well to skirting around the issue, Hansel took a deep breath and stepped immediately into the heart of the matter. “Are hyu still dreaming about Sarah?”

Jason flinched sharply, causing their water glasses to slosh as the action jarred through his elbows and into the rickety tabletop. Watching as Jason pulled back with a sharp frown, Hansel was not surprised to see every one of Jason’s defensive walls come crashing down behind his eyes. “What the hell does that have to do with anything?”

“Watch hyur tone,” Hansel growled, letting his son see the heat rise in his eyes at Jason’s insolent attitude. Jason visibly blanched, his body relaxing into a more submissive posture as he ducked his head slightly under the weight of his father’s anger. “It is a valid question, Schalki and I am going to insist that hyu answer it.”

Jason’s voice was very small as he answered, “Yes.”

Nodding in response to the answer, Hansel continued, “Hyur sister is very worried about hyu, Jay. She says hyu vill not talk to her . . . that hyu insist she worries too much for hyu.”

“She does worry too much, Dad. Even you can’t argue that point,” Jason insisted flippantly.

“She worries about hyu because she loves hyu, and hyu would do well to remember that. Love is a fragile and wonderful thing, and not everyone is as blessed by its presence as hyu ’ave been, Jason Leonard,” Hansel reminded the middle Grimm sharply. Seeing that his son was suitably ashamed of himself, Hansel gentled his tone and insisted, “It has been long enough, Jason; you must let her rest.”

“I don’t want to let her go . . . I love Sarah.”

Hansel frowned, knowing that his next words were going to hurt his son and also knowing that it was long past time he accepted them. “And she is dead.”

Jason flinched widely again, this time sending water splashing across the table. Holding up a hand to forestall the waitress as she approached to mop up, Hansel waved her away imperiously. All the while, his eyes remained glued on his son’s face as he watched Jason take that in. “I am sorry that this fact hurts hyu, Schalki, but it is long past time that hyu let her go. She is not coming back . . . and hyu do not deserve to bear the sole responsibility for her death any longer.”

“It’s my fault she’s dead, Dad,” Jason whispered, staring down at his hands as he fiddled with his fingers.

“No . . . it is not. It is the fault of the men who killed her. It is the fault of the man who swore revenge and hired them to hurt her. Did hyu lie to her to hurt her?”

“No!” Jason insisted, horrified. “I was only trying to protect her.”
“And hyu did the best hyu could,” Hansel insisted, reaching out to run a fond hand over his son’s short hair. “There is nothing else hyu could have done, Jay. Hyu must let her go . . . for hyur own sake. Holding on to her is not healthy . . . not for hyu and not for the people who love hyu.” Cupping his cheek, Hansel made sure that Jason was looking at him as he continued, “Someday hyu will find someone who is strong enough to handle the danger . . . someone who vill stand at hyur side as hyu face the darkness. Sarah was not that person . . . and that is all right.”

Jason leaned slightly into his father’s hand as he whimpered, “I miss her.”

“I know hyu do, mein Schalki. Eventually, the hurt vill pass . . . but first hyu must be willing to let it.”

Leaning back in his chair, he gestured the tiny Asian waitress to their and handed her their menus as he gave her their order quickly. She scribbled quickly, glancing discretely at the quietly crying man in the other chair. One hand fluttered in his direction; the entirety of the Second Precinct was well known at the Apolo and Detective Jason Walsh was one of the more well liked officers. Hansel could tell that she desperately wished to offer him some comfort. Finally, she leaned down and wrapped her arms around the man briefly, before scrambling away in acute embarrassment.

Hansel chuckled slightly. “All right then. Dry hyur eyes, Schalki. Hyu will eat and tonight hyu will sleep . . . and do not think I vill not find out if hyu do not. I may not be Will to simply look at hyu and know all of hyur lies, but I have my own spies. Then, in the morning, hyu should call Marina. She is worried about hyu, and I know that she would love to hear from hyu, ja?”

Jason pushed sharply at his tears with the heels of his hands, lifting his water glass to try and wash down the lump in his throat. “Yeah, Dad.”

“Good,” Hansel grunted, smiling up at the young woman as she set their meals in front of them. Looking down at it, he poked lightly at the meat with his fork. “Now . . . if hyu would be so kind . . . could hyu please tell me what in hell I ‘ave ordered? It looks like a horse’s ballsack.”

The laugh that burst from his son following that statement filled his father’s heart with warmth. No matter what happened next, Hansel knew that his son would be all right.

Chapter End Notes

Translations:

ja - yes
Guten Tag - Good Afternoon
Vati - Dad (Marina's nickname for Hansel)
Tochter - Daughter (Hansel's nickname for Marina)
mein - my
Adler - Eagle (Hansel's nickname for Will)
Rotkäppchen - Little Red Riding Hood (Hansel's as-yet unspoken nickname for Natasha)
Falki - little hawk (Hansel's nickname for Clint)
Arger - anger (Hansel's nickname for Brian)
Sonnenstrahl - sunbeam (Hansel's nickname for Kenny/Aaron)
Grauchen - little grey (Hansel's nickname for Bucky)
khischnik - little hawk (Literally "little bird of prey"; Bucky's nickname for Clint)
Frau - Mrs. (Terminology for a married woman)
Dankeshon - Thank you very much
Schalki - little mischief (Hansel's nickname for Jason)
Sohn - son
Vas? - What?
Spatzi - little sparrow (Hansel's nickname for Maria Hill)
Chapter Notes

So it has come to my attention that I no longer have the time to post everyday. That being said, I will now begin posting every other day - primarily Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, as well as Saturdays and Sundays on the weekends that I am not on rotation. I hope that continues to work for everyone. Either way, I have missed all of your reviews. I hope you are continuing to read and enjoy.

Only one translation this time.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter 108: The Sins of the Innocent

The opportunity to remake oneself comes along very rarely, and as such the metamorphosis is considered to be more precious than the most priceless diamond by those that have managed it successfully. The loss of such a reinvention can cause panic, distress and rash action. Most who have felt the need to undergo such a transformation hold it so dear that they will do nearly anything to protect the still wet paint . . . even fall back on old habits that they swore to turn their backs on.

Detective Henry Cole had once been Navan Granger, a down-on-his-luck sinner and philanderer until a stick of dynamite threw an armored car into a quarry and shined God’s light onto the mess that he had made of his life. It was at that moment that Navan had shed his immoral past and pulled on the façade of Henry Cole. The role of Henry Cole had felt right like nothing else had in his admittedly very short life. He’d cast Navan aside completely, fled La Grange, and made his way into a new life in New York City.
When Henry Cole had arrived in NYC, he’d made a promise to himself and to God that he would be a righteous son, that he would never again indulge in the iniquities of his youth and that he would wear the mantle of God in every waking moment of his life. He joined the police academy and became a police officer before at last making detective with the homicide squad at the Second Precinct. He had built a good life for himself in the time since he was that dumb 18 year old who had once stolen an armored car with his friends for fun. He had a beautiful fiancée, Amy Burch, who he waited for with all the breathless anticipation of one deeply in love. He had a good friendship with his partner, Allison Beaumont, with whom he place his full and complete trust. He wanted for nothing more in his life.

Of course, if you want to make God laugh, all you have to do is tell him your plans. Which could explain why the path to Henry Cole upon which God had placed the lawless Navan was slowly crumbling around him. There was a well of helpless panic at the very core of Detective Henry Cole, as he stared wide-eyed into the icy glare of the older man practically looming over him. Subjectively he knew his stammering was not helping his case; he and Allison had caught more than a few of their perps in a lie to some halfhearted stuttering.

Bertram Kowalski was the bully of the Second Precinct. Even his partner Jason Walsh, who Kowalski apparently liked, was known to have a hard time of it with the nosy, hard-boiled detective. Everyone feared him, with good reason, and of the few who were willing to stand up to him, Cole had never been listed among their number. Finally, the damning words the detective was saying fell silent and he waited impatiently for Cole to make some reply. The tall blond fiddled with his fingers, before pleading quietly, “Please don’t tell the Sergeant, Kowalski . . . I’m not that dumb kid anymore.” Clasping his hands in front of him, he appealed to Kowalski’s human side (and if he prayed diligently that Delahoy wasn’t right that Kowalski didn’t have a human side, that was for him to know and no one else.) “Doesn’t everyone deserve a chance to improve themselves from the sinners they were to the men they might be?”

Kowalski sneered at the question, leaning close as he hissed, “All men are sinners, Granger. And anyone who tells you differently is selling you something.” Smacking the slighter man brutally on the shoulder, his tone turned friendly, though the underlying threat was audible as he insisted, “You tell the Sergeant . . . or I will.”

Rounding on his heel, the big detective moved away from the shaking younger man. For a moment, Henry stood where he’d been left, shaking like a leaf and terrified of losing his new life. Finally, his knees gave out on him and he sank bonelessly into a chair as he fished out his cell phone. Flipping through his contact list, he stared at the number he swore he would never use again. Feeling lost and cut off from God’s grace, he closed his eyes and depressed the button. The ringing on the other end of the line sounded like a death knell and when the familiar voice asked, “Hello?” through the phone, Cole nearly hung up.

Gathering his courage, the man who had once been the boy Navan Granger, closed his eyes and spoke, “Frank? It’s Navan . . .” Taking a deep breath, he dropped his forehead into his palm and nearly sobbed, “Frank, I think I’m in trouble.”

The heavily accented voice came through the phone, and even as Cole gave him the details of what had happened, he knew. There was no way in which this phone call would end well for him.

It had been ten years since Henry Cole had last seen Frank Lutz. And even with all that time gone past, Frank did not look any differently than he had the last time Cole had seen him. The wide, toothy grin and sharp, wicked eyes brought a well of guilt and fear swelling up in the detective’s gut. Already he regretted his actions, though from the look in Frank’s eyes Cole knew that there would be no avoiding the outcome that seemed fated to occur.
Cole frowned, even as he approached the older man. “It’s Cole now, Frank. You have to call me either ‘Henry’ or ‘Cole’.”

“And what the hell is wrong with Navan? I like Navan.”

Frank chuckled that manic laugh of his, both hands coming up in amused surrender. “Whatever you say, Navan . . .” there was a noticeable pause before Frank chuckled and drawled, “Sorry, I mean Cole.” Making a face at the name, Frank rolled his eyes and muttered dryly, “What the hell kind of name is ‘Cole’ anyway?”

Cole could feel his temper rise slightly, forcing him to get a firm hold on it and remember that his new life as one of God’s Children demanded patience and calm. “It’s my name, Frank, and I would appreciate it if you would remember that . . . okay?”

“Yeah sure, whatever. But I stand by my original statement. It’s a stupid name. Navan is a much better name if you ask me.”

Rolling his eyes at the other man’s insistence, Cole rotated on his heel and began to walk away toward where he’d parked his car. He could hear Frank chuckling behind him as he jogged to catch up, whistling a jaunty tune as he strolled lazily along behind. “Is there anywhere you can play chess around here?” came the unexpected question once they were finally secluded in Cole’s car.

Cole blinked once at the question, before shrugging slightly, “There’s always games you can join at the park. But you’re not staying long, right Frank.”

Despite the phrasing, it was easy to determine that this was in fact not a question. Cole was stating a fact, and reminding his former friend about the details of their arrangement. “But what if I like it here?” Frank asked, slouching backwards in his chair as he linked his hands behind his head.

“That’s just too bad, Frank, but you’re not staying. I need your help and after you’ve helped, you’re leaving. That was the deal you agreed to when I asked you to come, and it’s the deal that I’m holding you to once everything is over.”

Grumbling under his breath, the disgruntled Texan huffed in mild annoyance before straightening up in his chair. “Well all right then. Better get started on the details then, huh, if I ain’t staying very long.”

Objectively, Cole knew how Frank was going to solve his Kowalski Problem. Even still, that didn’t pause the horror and panic he felt when he opened the door of his apartment to see Frank standing there with that shit-eating grin and mischievous spark in his eyes three days later. There was a momentary pause as the two former friends assessed each other, before Frank dug for something in his back pocket before offering it to Cole with a smirk. “You should probably find somewhere to hide those. They’re going to help you pin this whole thing on Wu.”

Cole’s eyes were wide and horrified as he stared at the gun and badge in his hands. “Where did you get these?!” he demanded with a hiss, recognizing the badge number. “Frank . . . what the hell have you done?”

Frank’s eyes narrowed, though his tone was still light as he replied sarcastically, “‘Thank you
Frank.’ Oh you’re welcome, Buddy. It’s nothing I wouldn’t do for a good friend.” Turning away, Frank waved back over his shoulder, “You have a good night now, Navan.”

Dropping his head into his hands, Cole could feel the way the number on Kowalski’s badge pressed into his face. “Oh Sweet Jesus . . . what have I done?” he whispered, knowing that every step he took from this point would be stained with the blood of Detective Bertram Kowalski.

Meanwhile, Jason had just been informed of his partner’s murder. One look at the badge and gun sitting on the counter chased his only customer of the day from his diner, before he grabbed at his jacket and fled from the diner. Vaguely, he coule hear Sergeant Brown speaking to him, insisting, “This is Detective Casey Schraeger. Walsh, I’m assigning her to you!”

There was only a cursory glance at the tall young woman before he shoved through the door. Even still, the picture floated behind his eyes as he stormed away, taunting him with the skintight dress and the alluring peek of lacy red bra under the lowcut neckline. The spiked heels caused a dramatic rise in his blood pressure, though he resolved to shove the thought away. He was with Beaumont, and trying to make things work with her. Hansel was right; it was time that he let Sarah go and focused on the living. The last thing he needed was another gorgeous, ball-busting woman taking up his attention. And svaytoy yebat’ . . . gorgeous was not a strong enough word for her; she was exactly his type. Fuck him running.

Glancing at her again as she raced after him with the remark, “I’m sorry . . . about Kowalski.”

“I’m not,” Jason snorted in a tone too low to be heard, even as guilt overwhelmed him at the uncharitable thought. Regardless of his personal feelings and the indisputable fact that they hadn’t particularly liked each other most of the time, Kowalski had been his partner and he still owed it to the man to protect his interests. This meant that the least he could do was offer the man’s wife, Hannah, some kind of closure . . . and protect her from the disaster that was her husband’s work life. “Tell me what happened.”

“They found him perforated in Central Park. Both his badge and his gun were gone. Where are we going?”

“To clean up a mess,” the detective insisted, glancing at her and feeling his mouth water at the delicious expanse of bare thigh. Shaking his thoughts free, he reminded himself that he was with Beaumont, tossing her his jacket in an attempt to cover her up at least a little bit as he asked, “Do you always dress like that?”

“Hey!” she protested goodnaturedly, “I was a hooker up until about 10 minutes ago.”

And if Jason hadn’t been preoccupied with his newfound and highly inappropriate attraction to her before that point, he was now. The whole ride to the precinct, Jason focused on ignoring the thought now playing on repeat through his head, “Hookers wear thongs . . . she’s wearing a thong . . . fuck me sideways till I cry.”

Chapter End Notes

Translations:

svaytoy yebat - holy fuck
Cleaning Up A Mess

Chapter Notes

Enjoy this chapter. Not many translations this chapter, but what there is is at the bottom as always. Thank you for your reviews. They truly do make this story worth writing some times. Love you all! Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
Chapter 109: Cleaning Up a Mess

If Jason had thought that he was preoccupied to see her in a hooker’s attire, the first time he saw her in a pant suit – white button-down, fitted jacket and perfectly tailored suit pants – took the proverbial cake. She’d obviously gone home at some point to change clothes, while he was nose to the ground looking for some sign of Kowalski’s killer. And черт возмi, the change of clothes suited her tall, trim frame. Currently, he was rifling through the drawers of Kowalski’s desk, looking for some clue as to what other secrets the man had been hiding from him; seriously, sometimes Kowalski could make even Will and Marina look talkative. (And if he kept glancing over to where she sat working
diligently at her desk, well that was his problem and no one else’s.)

Finally, he pulled a pamphlet from the depths of Kowalski’s top drawer. Frowning at the name on the front, he flipped it open to see a receipt paid through the end of the month and a small key looped on a ring in the pamphlet. “What the hell is a guy from the Bronx doing with a storage locker in Brooklyn?” he muttered, flipping the pamphlet closed and shoving it into his pocket as he stood from the chair.

It was only years of knowing Clint and dealing with his proclivity for just randomly popping up somewhere that he wasn’t expected, that kept him from flinching when Casey Schraeger was suddenly just there at his elbow. Cocking an eyebrow at her, he waited for her explanation. “Did you find something?” she asked expectantly, her features set into an expression that Jason used to see on his brother, Will’s, face when Clint and his partner-in-crime-of-the-moment would come back to the house from whatever mischievous fun they’d unleashed their talents on.

Eyes scanning briskly over her face in search of some ulterior motive, he nodded once at the knowledge that she was just as invested in solving the case as he was. Taking the pamphlet out of his pocket, he waved it in front of himself briefly before returning it to his pocket between anyone—namely Eddie Alvarez—caught sight of it and proceeded to make his life hell in order to get it. “Apparently, Kowalski had a storage locker in Brooklyn.”

“Shouldn’t you tell the Sergeant?”

“Do you want to tattle to Daddy like a two year old or do you want to go to Brooklyn?” Jason asked caustically, rolling his eyes lightly. She was new; eventually, she’d learn that sometimes Sgt. Brown just didn’t want to know. It was just a matter of whether she’d learn the hard way or the easy way. Considering the way he’d learned—definitely the hard way—he was hoping he could steer her towards the easy way and spare her a little unnecessary grief.

“Let’s go to Brooklyn,” she agreed, eyes sparkling lightly at his tone.

It didn’t take long for Jason to understand what they’d found in Kowalski’s storage locker . . . or to have the bottom of his stomach fall out at the realization that what they found held the potential to see him well and truly fucked. Hearing Schraeger confirm the magnitude of what they’d found with the grim statement, “Kowalski was keeping files on cops,” only made the feeling worse. Fortunately, she was a rookie and knew not to argue with him when he shut down her suggestion of calling CSU; this kind of potential disaster was going to require a bit more careful handling than the guys at the crime scene unit . . . none of whom he knew or trusted.

It was almost a relief when Schraeger turned to him with grimace, her body language practically screaming “Look at me! I’m uncomfortable!” as she hung up her cell phone. “So . . . that was my mom, and I have to go.”

Jason cocked an eyebrow at her, even as he continued to rifle through the charred remains of the wreckage to try and find his own file . . . see what Kowalski had managed to dig up on him. With any luck at all—and he was a Grimm, which meant that historically, his luck sucked—Kowalski had only found the details that Will had put into place about his alias “Jason Walsh” and the two identities he most wanted to protect—“Jason Grimm” and “Jason Cahill”—were still safe. “Do you have a curfew or something?” he asked sarcastically, returning his attention to the file box on the floor in front of him.

Schraeger shifted uncomfortably and he got the sense that she was about to, if not lie to him, then at least deliberately mislead him. “No . . . it’s kind of my dad’s birthday today and I’m missing the party and my mom is about to have my head on a platter if I don’t show up. So . . . I have to go.”
Jason grinned at her with a small wink. “Then go. Far be it from me to stop you.”

If it was possible, her features twisted further as she inquired, “You don’t mind?”

“Nah. I can finish up here. Go . . . I’ll let you know if I find anything worth reporting,” he vowed, even as he knew that unless he found a dead body hidden among the ash, he wasn’t going to tell her anything of the sort.

“Are you sure?” she asked one last time, causing a deep sigh as Jason allowed the destroyed files to fall from his hands and look up at her with a frown. “I am a grown man, and a trained detective. Unless you know something that I don’t, I think I can handle the piles of ash we currently find ourselves in.”

“You’re the best partner ever!” she breathed in distracted relief, reaching out to squeeze his shoulder lightly as she dashed past him.

The accidental brush of her finger against the skin of his neck as she moved past sent a shiver down his spine, causing parts of Jason to sit up and take notice of her . . . her perfume, the click of her heels, the sway of her hips. Determined not to let on to her about his feelings, the technical specialist only grunted, watching as she fled from the scene at a run. It was a long ten seconds, until the detective determined that she was truly gone and fished his cell phone from his jacket pocket. Staring at the screen, he automatically calculated the time difference and then depressed the number on his speed-dial that would immediately connect him to his older brother.

There was a moment of breathless anticipation, before the sound of a well beloved voice spoke into the phone. “This is Grimm.”

The tone was low and growling, indicating a bone-deep exhaustion that Jason knew had a lot to do with the opposing shifts the Power Couple of the family currently worked while on base. “Hey . . . Will, it’s Jason. I’m in trouble, man.”

There was an audible frown in Will’s voice as he demanded, “Trouble? What kind of trouble?”

“My partner, Kowalski? Do you remember him?”

“Yeah . . . the asshole. What about him?”

“He was murdered last night.” The sound of Will’s breath punching forcibly from his chest made Jason wince, even as he spoke up again, “But that’s not even the best part, Will.”

“You mean this gets better?” came the sarcastic drawl, causing a tired grin from Jason at his brother’s sardonic tone.

“Yeah. Apparently, Kowalski’s been keeping files on cops.” Taking a deep breath, the detective shoved his hand back through his hair. “And his file on me?” Glancing at the large stack of charred papers on the floor beside him, Jason continued, “Let’s just say that it’s extensive.”

“How extensive?” Will demanded angrily, causing a flinch from the younger brother even as he acknowledged that Will wasn’t angry at him and was only angry at himself for some perceived failure to protect him.

“He knew about S.H.I.E.L.D., although from the looks of it, he didn’t know everything. He knew about Sarah, but he didn’t know the truth about Diego or how she really died. There’s a notation about you commenting on the fact that you’re my brother and that we look alike, but he doesn’t have any concrete Intel about you or any of the others. He didn’t know anything about the Brat’ya
Just then a crash sounded through the phone, causing Jason to flinch at the unexpected sound. “Will? What just happened?” the communications officer demanded, trying to make sure that his brother was all right. When all he got was silence, he shouted, “WILL!”

There was another second, before Will spoke, “I’m here. I’m all right. I just . . . I knocked over my computer.” There was another pause, before Will remarked forlornly, “This is my fault. If I hadn’t barked at him . . .”

Shaking his head at his brother’s self-sacrificing nature, Jason chuckled bitterly. “No, Will . . . you can’t take the blame for this, not this time. When I left S.H.I.E.L.D., I got careless . . . I let some things slip that I shouldn’t have. Kowalski’s curiosity is my fault and it’s his curiosity that got him killed.”

Will’s voice was a low growl as he insisted, “Do NOT tell Marina about the files. She will only worry about you . . . and she does enough of that already.”

“So what am I supposed to do about them? We can’t just leave this information out in the wind. God, Kowalski was bad enough . . . I know a couple perps that would literally kill to have this kind of Intel on me just conveniently lying around.”

“Call Maria Hill,” Will ordered, his tone dry as he teased, “. . . I’m sure you still have her office number. Tell her everything. She’ll send a Cleaner . . . in fact, have her send Owen. He owes me a favor or two, and he knows how to be discrete.”

“A Cleaner?” Jason stammered, surprised by the term. Everyone at S.H.I.E.L.D. knew what Cleaners were, the ones that mopped up the messes that slapdash missions left behind. Usually their particular specialties ran to staging scenes and erasing bodies; Jason had no idea that sweeping classified documents under the rug was also within their catalog of talents.

“Owen will take care of the documents. He’ll clean the scene . . . and leave enough behind to imply that nothing is missing in the mess,” the oldest Grimm insisted, his tone distant and distracted, the sound of keys tapping on a keyboard coming through the phone clearly. “According to the GPS on his phone, he’s currently on base so he’ll be available. Do it now.”

“And what are we going to tell everyone else?”

The Colonel’s answer was immediate and brooked no argument. “Nothing. Jay . . . you’re not going to mention this to anyone. You’re not going to tell Dad, Marina, Clint, or Brian . . . you’re going to call Maria and tell her what happened. And then you’re going to forget you ever found this cache.”

Jason winced, his voice very small as he confessed, “I had my partner with me . . . when I found it.”

Will swore in vicious Russian under his breath, before wrestling back his control once again. “Maria will handle everything. Call her and let her handle things from here, okay? You keep your nose clean and stay out of trouble. I’ll be in touch, Jay, okay? Be careful.”

The detective hummed a reluctant agreement, before commenting lightly, “You sound tired Will. You should get some rest.”

“I don’t sleep well if Marina’s not in bed with me.”

“Will . . . you can’t just not sleep. It’s not healthy, for either of you.”
“It’s only for another few months, Jay.” There was a sigh, before Will inquired lightly, “Have you talked to Clint or Dad lately?”

“Dad came to the precinct a few days ago, and dragged me to lunch. I have a feeling it was on Marina’s orders; but no, he didn’t say anything about the investigation. Do you want me to ask Maria when I call her?”

“Just see if she can tell you anything about when it will be safe to bring Marina back to base. I’m hoping everything will be over with by the time that this base closes down, so I can just take Marina home. But you know what they say about the best laid plans of mice and men . . .”

The younger brother’s tone was amused as he chirped, “That they suck?”

“Ha ha ha,” the Colonel deadpanned, the roll of his eyes audible in his tone. “Call Maria, okay? And don’t argue with her methods; just because we don’t like them, doesn’t mean that they aren’t the right thing to do.”

The detective’s hum was a clear affirmative, allowing Will to chuckle lightly. “Have a good night. We love you.”

“Love you guys too. At least try to get some rest, okay? Please?”

“I’ll see what I can do. Call me if you need anything else.”

“Will do. Bye Will.”

“Night Jay,” was the last thing his brother said before there was a click and the phone went dead in his hand.

Pressing the phone tighter to his ear for a minute more, as though he could somehow keep his brother close, he wished desperately for a time machine to roll time forward several months. Dropping his phone to his side, he stared at the buttons on the screen before typing in Maria’s number before he could talk himself out of it. Maria’s tone was cold and harsh as she barked into the receiver, “What the hell did you do, Agent Walsh?”

Jason’s eyes narrowed as he reminded her sharply, “First of all, I don’t work for you anymore. Secondly, I haven’t been an Agent of S.H.I.E.L.D. in nearly 8 years. And third of all, I’m in some trouble and Will told me to call you . . . that you could help. Was he lying or not?”

Air whistled through Jason’s teeth as he tried to regroup and get a hold on his temper. Finally, he felt as though his emotions were under control and he spoke in a calm, modulated tone. “My former partner was keeping files on cops. And his file on me implicates S.H.I.E.L.D . . . as well as includes a few details on some of the things that I have done for S.H.I.E.L.D. Can you help me now?”

Maria’s tone was wary as she replied, “You have my attention. What did Will say?”

“That I should ask you to send the Cleaner – I think he called him Owen? – to my location.”

“All right. I’ll contact Owen and have him meet me at the helipad. We’ll be wheels up in twenty. Stay put and don’t tell anyone about these files. Can we at least agree on that?”
“Yes, but my new partner, Casey Schraeger? She was with me when I found the storage locker. I had no idea what was going to be in it, so I brought her along with me.”

“All right. We will handle Detective Schraeger at a later date. First, let’s get these files cleaned up and out of sight.” There was a dark bitterness to her tone as she muttered, “Marina will kill me if one of her boys gets assassinated on my watch.”

Jason chuckled despondently as he acknowledged the truth in that statement. “Thank you, Maria.”

“I’m not doing this for you, Jason. Or for the Colonel . . . for Hansel. Hell, I’m not even doing this for Marina. The harm that those files could do if they ended up in the wrong hands . . . it doesn’t bear thinking on. This is damage control, from here on out.”

The detective’s voice was appropriately reverential as he insisted, “Even still. Thank you.”

Maria’s tone was dry as she replied, “You’re welcome. And don’t even think that we won’t be discussing this later.”

The young man grimaced, even as he acknowledged that he probably deserved the censure he could hear in her voice. “Yeah . . . I know. I’ll see you in twenty.”

Chapter End Notes

Translations:

chert voz’mi - fucking hell
No translations this chapter. I hope you continue to read and enjoy this story. And I do love to read your reviews, so please . . . throw a couple my way. Thank you all. And yes, JC, Owen is THAT Owen. :D

Also, huge thanks goes to Amerou for helping me with this chapter. She's the best of the best.

Enjoy!

Jason was leaning against the wall when Maria approached with a broad shouldered blond, who could only be Owen, the Cleaner Will had told him to ask Maria for. Owen was taller than Jason, around Will’s height if not maybe a half inch taller. His eyes were cornflower blue, visible even...
from half the length of the hallway. He moved with the kind of casual but deadly grace that most Spec Ops soldiers did, coiled and ready to react to even the smallest offensive.

The detective’s eyes narrowed at the niggling feeling that the two men had met before; though where that had been, the tech specialist was drawing a complete blank. Maria’s features were set as she paused in front of him, teal colored eyes flicking toward the smoke-damaged door of the storage locker. “Has anyone else been inside?”

Jason shook his head in answer, though his eyes were glued to the other man as he tried to trigger the memory of where they’d met before. Owen’s smile was small as he waited for Jason to speak, his hands finding homes in the pockets of his black tactical pants. Finally, the communications officer held out a hand. “You look really familiar. But damned if I know from where.”

Owen reached out with a genuine grin, shaking the detective’s hand firmly as he replied, “Your brother, the Colonel, was my CO about 15 years ago. I was on the first Spec Ops squad he ever commanded for the Army.” When Jason still looked blank, Owen continued with a chuckle, “Your brother used to call me ‘Lucky’ because it was only sheer luck that allowed the Colonel to get to me before I ended up as target practice for an AK-47 in Somalia.”

Maria’s tone was dry as she remarked, “Well at least now I know why you were so quick to jump on the assignment when I mentioned that the Colonel’s little brother needed your help.” Owen grinned at her, as she continued, “Remind me to have Will be the one asking whenever I have need of your services. Cause you’re not usually so accommodating when I’m the one passing out the assignments.”

And just like that, the memory flooded back. Jason’s fingers snapped sharply as he yelped, “Wait . . . you’re Sgt Owen ELLIOT! My brother saved your ass in Somalia, during that firefight in Dhahar!”

“Well, it’s Sergeant Major now. But yeah, that would be me,” Owen agreed with a nod. “I owe Will my life, several times over . . . and it’s a debt I’m still trying to repay.”

Maria stepped back into the hallway, interrupting the scene with a sharp, “I brought you here to do a job, not to catch up on the Grimms. Get to it, Elliot.”

“Yes ma’am,” Owen agreed, his eyes going cold as he stepped away from the detective.

Jason reached out and snagged his jacket before he got too far away, “Hey, after this is over . . . let me buy you a drink?”

Owen’s grin was genuine if self-deprecating as he shook his head, “Nah, thanks man. But they discourage that in therapy.”

Though he nodded, Jason’s confusion was evident on his face as he let the other man move into the storage locker to do his job. Turning to Maria, the detective inquired, “That doesn’t sound like anything I was ever warned against during my psych evals at S.H.I.E.L.D. And Will is entirely too fond of his whiskey for that to have a warning he got either.”

“True. However, you are not a recovering addict, either,” the Assistant Director reminded him, before sealing her lips and turning her attention elsewhere. The dismissal was obvious enough that Jason knew that that was the last she was going to say on the matter.

It was about an hour later, before Owen stepped from the storage locker again, several manila files stuffed full of charred paper in his hands. Offering it to Maria, he remarked, “I managed to erase everything that has to do with S.H.I.E.L.D. or anything that indicates Detective Walsh may have a
connection with S.H.I.E.L.D. I left enough basic information behind that no one would think that anything was tampered with.” Turning to Jason, he insisted, “I also destroyed everything that had anything to do with the Colonel in relation to you. I didn’t think you wanted your brothers to come up in any search engines either.”

“No, not particularly,” he agreed with a wry smile. Offering his hand, he insisted, “Thank you, Owen. I owe you one . . . and I’d still like to do something to repay you. How about a coffee or something, sometime?”

Cornflower eyes sparkled as he shook the hand, laughing, “I don’t swing that way, Detective.”

“Very funny,” Jason growled, even as he chuckled. He had totally walked into that one. The tease was his own fault; seriously, he should know better considering who his brothers were.

Rolling her eyes, Maria muttered no doubt unsavory and unkind things under her breath. Finally, she brought her hand to her forehead and sighed, “I wish I could say that this conversation surprises me.” Turning to Owen, she insisted, “Detective Walsh and I have to head back to the precinct; we have to handle the situation with his partner.”

Owen’s eyes narrowed speculatively as he inquired, “Am I going to have to clean up after that conversation?”

Jason’s eyes widened in horror as he insisted, “NO! Jesus, Owen . . . she’s been my partner for all of a DAY!”

Maria chuckled at the tech specialist’s reaction, before shaking her head. “I don’t think that’s going to be necessary, Agent Elliot. Take the helicopter back to base. I’ll contact you if I need any more of your assistance.”

“Yes ma’am,” the Cleaner agreed, giving Jason a grin. “Coffee sounds good. Have Will give you my number.”

The detective chuckled with a grin, offering the other man his hand once again. “Sounds good. It was nice to meet you, Owen.”

Owen’s grip was firm as he agreed, “You too, Jason.”

Twenty minutes later, Jason led Maria into the Second Precinct. Glancing at her out of the corner of his eye, he commented, “Could you perhaps look a little less like the Assistant Director of a secret government agency? I mean, even Marina managed to look mostly normal when she stopped by.”

“I’m not wearing any insignia on my uniform. I made the effort at least to be discreet.”

“If this is what you call an effort at fitting in, Marina would be horrified. Seriously, Maria, Casual Fridays are not going to bite you,” Jason teased, rolling his eyes.

Maria glared at him lightly, teal eyes taking in her surroundings as she took in the sheer number of people assembled in the hallways. “Is there anywhere private that I can talk to Detective Shraeger? Somewhere that we’re not going to be overheard.”

“You mean somewhere no one can hear her scream?” he muttered wryly with an eyeroll as he considered the question, before nodding slowly. “Yeah . . . we have a couple of interview rooms that don’t have the standard observation rooms. They’re on the very top floor, and they’re far enough away from the squad rooms that no one would accidently come tripping by.”
The Assistant Director’s eyes narrowed slightly, frustrated no doubt by both his statement and the situation in generally, before insisting, “Get me one at the end of the hall, as far from the stairwell as you can. I’m taking no chances, not with something like this.”

Jason nodded briskly, recognizing the tone as the one Will used when he expected to be obeyed and was taking no arguments from anyone . . . even Marina. “I think there’s one available like that. Top of the stairs, turn right and it’s the last door on the left.”

“Wonderful. You go get Detective Shraeger. I will meet you there.”

Nodding, the middle Grimm brother moved down the hallway toward where he hoped his partner was waiting for him at her desk. Maria watched him go for a moment, before turning to glare at the stairwell. “Four stories and no elevator. Thank God I go running every morning,” she muttered as she stalked up the stairs, causing people to scatter out of her way in the face of her fierce glower.

Jason entered the squad room, Shraeger’s vibrant auburn hair catching his eyes immediately. Coming quickly to her desk, he placed on hand on the back of her chair and one hand on her desk, bending to whisper into her ear. “I need you to come with me, right now.”

“What’s with the cloak and dagger?” she snarked, even as she kept her tone low and stood from her chair.

Green eyes pierced into his partner’s hazel, though he said nothing as he placed his hand on the base of her spine and pushed her inexorably into the hallway. Guiding her quickly through the hallways and up the stairs, he paused in front of the interview room door. The only sound coming from inside the room was the sound of Maria’s breathing, and Jason felt a shiver of . . . fear, anticipation, adrenaline, something pass down his spine. Turning to Shraeger, he insisted, “I need you to trust me, okay? Listen to her . . . and if you have any questions after she’s spoken to you, I’ll answer what I can. All right?”

Shraeger’s eyes narrowed suspiciously as she demanded, “What the hell is going on, Walsh?”

“Just . . . listen to her,” he insisted, before he shoved the door open and guided Casey inside.

Seated on the opposite side of the desk, Maria allowed a small, cool smile to curve her lips as she gestured to the chair opposite of her. There was a tablet sitting on the desk in front of her, only inches away from the tips of her clasped fingers. “Take a seat Detective Shraeger. We have much to discuss.” Turning to Jason, she insisted, “Captain . . . you are dismissed. Close the door behind you.”

At the usage of his Army rank, Jason could feel himself snapping into a brisk salute as he replied, “Yes ma’am.” As he turned toward the door, he offered Casey a small smile and stepped back through the door again, pulling it shut as he went.

Maria could see the shock on Jason’s partner’s face at how easily he’d capitulated to her demand; considering what she knew about Jason’s typical “Devil May Care”, “I’m only in trouble if I get caught” attitude, she would have been surprised too, if she didn’t know the exact trigger to make Jason comply. There were reasons that the Colonel was so successful. A large part of it was his ability to snap his unit – read, his brothers – into the appropriate mindset with just the right phrasing.

The younger woman rounded on her then, demanding, “Who the hell do you think you are!? And what the hell do you think you’re doing here, giving orders where you have no right to be!?”

Seeing the fire in the woman’s eyes, Maria forcibly had to repress a smile as she took in the woman’s demeanor. It was apparent, at least to Maria, that Casey Shraeger was a little bit of a rebel; she
wouldn’t appreciate having someone she didn’t know come in and expect her to obey orders. Personally, Maria was of the opinion that Jason deserved her; God knew that no one else could get him to do anything he didn’t want to do. It would serve him right to be partnered up with someone exactly like him.

Taking in the woman’s widespread stance and her apparent reluctance to take the seat offered her, Maria sighed and gestured to the chair once again, making sure to project the right amount of concern and censure into her tone as she answered, “Detective Shraeger, please . . . sit down. This could very well be a matter of life and death for your partner, and I am obligated to take it very seriously.”

Shraeger’s whole face devolved into confusion as she demanded, “My partner!? You mean, Walsh?!”

“Unless your partner is someone other than Jason Leonard Walsh . . . yes, I mean Detective Walsh. Please . . . sit,” Maria insisted, allowing her tone to slip into the no-nonsense tones that scared the rest of her underlings into obeying her.

Clearly reluctant, but willing to play along, Casey sunk slowly into the seat across the table from the other woman. “What’s going on? Better yet, who are you?”

Deciding that sometimes the truth, even an almost, half-truth, was better than an outright lie, Maria took a deep breath and replied, “I am one of the Captain’s superior officers. My name is Commander Hill, and I’m here on behalf of the Department of Homeland Security regarding what you and Captain Walsh found in that locker.”

“The Department of Homeland Security?! What the hell does the Department of Homeland Security have to do with Walsh . . . he’s just a cop. And why the hell do you keep calling him ‘Captain’? He’s just a detective.”

“I am afraid, Detective Shraeger, that Jason Walsh is quite a bit more than just a detective for the NYPD Unusuals Division.” Folding her hands in front of her, Maria watched the other woman take in that information for a moment, before continuing, “How much do you know about Captain Walsh’s affiliation with the United States Army, Detective Schraeger?”

The redhead cocked a single eyebrow, before she remarked snidely, “Walsh and I have been partners for a day. If Walsh is military, I haven’t heard about it. And considering that police stations are the biggest gossip magnets in the world, if I haven’t heard about it, it’s because it’s not true.”

Maria chuckled at that, insisted, “Police stations have nothing on military bases, I assure you, Detective. And just because you don’t hear rumors about a man’s secrets, doesn’t mean that they’re not real. It just means that he’s better at not flapping his lips than other people.” Taking up her tablet, she toggled it on and flipped quickly through a series of files before pushing it to sit in front of the other woman. “Captain Walsh is Special Operations, so unfortunately this file is not complete. However, it is enough to be able to prove that I am telling you the truth.”

“So why isn’t he stationed on some base somewhere? Why is he working as a cop?”

“He was given the option about eight years ago to move from Active Duty to the Reserves and he chose to take it. He can be recalled whenever we have need of his particular talents, but for the most part, he lives his life just like any other civilian . . . which means a home offbase and a job.” There was a careless shrug, before Maria continued, “He took what he knew, and from what I can tell, he became an exceptional cop.”

Hazel eyes were very dark as she reached out and took the tablet from Maria. There on the screen
was a picture of her partner, attired in what was clearly the full dress uniform of an officer in the
United States Army. His features were set, cold and hard as he practically glared at the camera lens.
Paging the tablet down, she read through the basics, noting as she did so that a good portion of the
text was hidden by thick black bars. “What does that mean?” she asked, pointing at a whole
paragraph that had been blacked out.

“It means that section was redacted; it was a classified operation of some kind that has not, as yet,
been declassified. I told you, Captain Walsh was Special Operations and very good at his job. Those
files in that storage locker you found today? If anyone finds out about those files . . . let’s just say the
consequences are too disastrous to contemplate.”

“Do me a favor and don’t treat me like I’m five. I want to know the details, and I don’t want you to
sugarcoat it for me,” the female detective insisted calmly, wanting to know the full extent of what
kind of playground she’d stumbled onto.

Maria’s jaw tightened as she hissed, “If any of the wrong kind of people got a hold of the
information contained in those files, Captain Walsh and the rest of his unit could and would quite
possibly end up dead. Is that blunt enough for you?”

Taken aback by the Commander’s direct phrasing, Casey could only blink in surprise. Finally, she
asked, “And you’re sure that Kowalski’s files are a potential threat to Walsh?”

“As soon as the Captain called me, I went to meet him at the locker. I took the files that are the most
dangerous to Captain Walsh, but if anyone were to learn how easy it was for a police detective to dig
up the information those files contained . . . yes, I am certain that those files could be highly
detrimental to Captain Walsh’s continued welfare.”

Casey took a deep breath, before nodding firmly, “I won’t say anything to anyone, you have my
word.” There was a pause, before she smiled lightly, “After all, Walsh has only been my partner for
a day. I think I’d like to keep him around for at least a little while longer.”

Maria’s tone was appropriate dry as she sighed, “Don’t count on it. It is my experience that Captain
Walsh is an irreverent pain in my ass, but maybe you’ll have better luck with him.” Standing, she
gathered her things together and offered her hand to the detective. “Thank you, Detective Schraeger;
I value your discretion.”

“Can Walsh tell me anything?”

“Walsh is aware of what is classified and what is not; if he chooses to, he may tell you what he can.
But I would not count on even that being very much; most Special Operations soldiers can never tell
you anything about what they’ve done, and the very successful ones don’t usually live long enough
to get to the telling, if they can.” Smiling grimly at the younger woman, Maria insisted, “You have a
good day, Detective. And thank you for your time.”

Turning, Maria strode from the room, leaving the detective behind to contemplate what she’d seen.
Jason was leaning against the far wall, arms folded over his chest as he waited to hear the outcome of
the meeting. At the sight of his father’s girlfriend, he inquired, “So what’s the situation looking like?”

Glancing back over her shoulder, Maria replied, “Defused, for right now. But she’ll have questions .
. . if they’re questions you can answer, I would. If for no other reason, than you’re partners and
partners should trust each other.”

“Yes ma’am,” he agreed, before gesturing toward the stairwell. “Come on . . . I’ll walk you out.”
Maria was heading out the front door of the precinct, leaving Jason standing alone in the hallway when Eric Delahoy, one of the detective’s on Jason’s squad, approached with a low, appreciative whistle. “Daaamn! Look at her! I’d love to give her a run for that uniform.”

Jason smirked at the statement, his tone idle as he replied, “Trust me, Eric, you don’t want to do that. Her boyfriend carries a shotgun . . . in public.”

Delahoy blanched at the information, backing away slowly as he recanted, “You know what? Maybe I’ll just settle for watching that ass move in that uniform . . . from a larger distance than this. I’ll see you back at the squad room, Walsh.”

The detective grinned as he watched the man flee back towards their desks, before his face went flat at the sight of Casey coming slowly down the stairs. Her forehead was furrowed and she almost plowed right into him, her mind obviously very far away. Reaching out to steady her, he questioned, “Shraeger? You okay?”

Looking up into concerned green eyes, Casey saw the determination and the goodness in the man across from her and nodded firmly. “Yeah . . . I’m okay. But I have questions, Walsh; and you WILL answer them. Agreed?”

A relieved smile on his face, Jason nodded, “Agreed.”
Chapter 111: Background Check

It was several hours later, before Jason and Casey had the opportunity to flee the chaos of the Second Precinct. Standing outside, Jason turned to his partner and asked, “My apartment is closer, if you’d like to come over. I’ll make you dinner?”

Casey’s eyes narrowed as she watched him lightly, before nodding once in agreement. “All right. But I want an omelet.”

The older detective grinned at her, wondering if she was going to react the same way his brothers
and Marina always did when he cooked for them. When he’d still been living at home, his sister had always managed to confiscate the kitchen before he could take his turn at cooking and Clint was still giving him shit about the time he’d put M&Ms in the Spaghetti-Os, back in 1996. S.H.I.E.L.D.’s commanders had actually petitioned for, and received, an official injunction that forbid him from getting anywhere within 100 meters of the base kitchens. Even Sarah, his darling Sarah, had insisted on being the only cook in their relationship, if only to prevent him from burning the apartment down.

Chuckling under his breath, he gave a mental shrug. If she managed to survive his cooking, she was a keeper for sure. “I think I can do omelets,” he agreed with a lopsided smirk in her direction. Gesturing towards where he’d parked his squad car, he inquired, “Shall we?”

“Shall we indeed,” she agreed with a small smile, moving into lockstep alongside him as he led the way to his car.

When they arrived at the diner, Casey’s eyebrows flew upwards into her hair. “You mean you LIVE here? I thought you just worked here . . . like a part time job or something.”

“Nope, I live here. Is that a problem?” he asked skeptically, fishing out his keys and fitting it into the lock.

Casey’s head shook, her eyes contemplative as she took in everything around the tiny diner. Her eyes lingered briefly on a pair of pictures on the back wall; her partner was a prominent figure in both photos, but the women in each of the pictures was different. Jason stood behind the woman in the first picture, his chin resting on the top of her head and his arms looped around her shoulders as they both laughed at the camera. Her brown curls were all over the place and her chocolate eyes sparkled, one hand around Jason’s wrists and the other obviously reaching to remove the camera from her face.

The second picture was of a beautiful young blond, perched precariously in Jason’s lap, one arm around his shoulders. Walsh looked younger in the picture, lighter and carefree, his features adoring as one hand pulled a strand of blond hair from the woman’s eyelashes. Unlike the first picture, Casey got the sense that this woman had been a lover, whereas the first woman was probably a good friend or something.

Nodding her head in the direction of the photos, she asked, “Who are they?”

Jason glanced over, a warm smile curving up the corner of his lips as he caught sight of the photos she was talking about. “The brunette is my older sister, Marina, and the blond was my girlfriend, Sarah.”

“‘Was’? Most guys take down the pictures of the ex once the break-up becomes official,” she remarked caustically, taking note of the miniscule flinch in Jason’s features.

“We didn’t break up. She died,” Jason replied, tone distant as he shed his coats and moved behind the counter to fire up the grill.

Casey grimaced at the information, muttering to herself bitterly, “Good job, Casey . . . just go ahead and alienate your new partner one day into your working relationship. Brilliant.”

Jason chuckled softly as he turned to face her, “It’s all right, Shraeger. It was years ago . . . I miss her, but she’s gone.”

“Still, I could probably be a little more sensitive. I have no brain to mouth filter.”

“Probably what makes you a good cop,” he insisted, pulling open his fridge and hauling out the
things he would need for omelets.

Humming lightly, Casey continued to scope out the inside of the room even as she took a seat on the bar across from the grill. At the grill, Jason was doing something to their omelets, a crunching sound causing Casey’s eyebrows to quirk slightly as she tried to figure out what exactly you could put into an omelet that crunched. “So you own this diner?”

“Yeah. I live in the apartment in the back . . . the rent’s cheap,” he chuckled, shaking his head at how that sounded. It had been more than eight years since Will and Marina had purchased the small diner from the owner, with the understanding that he would have to pay rent to the old man for the apartment. Rolling his eyes, he muttered uncharitably in Russian as he once again made a mental note to petition the owner for the opportunity to buy the small apartment outright. He’d tried every year for the last eight . . . here’s hoping that nine was lucky.

Just then, his cell phone began to ring, causing him to wipe his hands and go hunting for it. Fortunately, it wasn’t his S.H.I.E.L.D. phone – talk about a lesson in fast talking if THAT phone had gone off – and Jason smirked as he announced, “It’s Alvarez.”

Casey watched in amusement as Jason continued to lead the self-righteous detective on a merry goose chase throughout the city, before he clicked the cell phone shut. Shaking her head, she considered the best way to start off the conversation that they were going to need to have. Then, remembering the baseball card with his face on the cover, she decided to start with a relatively easy question. “So, how does a guy go from being a baseball player to a New York City police officer?”

Jason took a bite of his omelet, before straightening. He knew that this conversation was inevitable, but that didn’t mean he was looking forward to it. And anything to do with the life he’d lived with Sarah . . . well, that just wasn’t anything she needed to know. “Here’s the difference between you and me. You think that people shouldn’t keep secrets. I think . . . that we are our secrets.”

Casey’s face twisted as she insisted, “I have secrets.”

The detective’s grin was bitter as he insisted, “The vibrator in your bedside table isn’t a secret.”

The woman snorted at the deflection, shaking her head slightly, before insisting, “You promised me answers, Walsh.”

“Yes, I did . . . I promised to tell you what I can. I’m going to warn you now, there’s going to be a big wall between what I can tell you and what you want me to tell you. Let’s call it the ‘CLASSIFIED’ wall, and leave it there. I’ll tell you as much as I can, but if I don’t answer your question, it’s because I can’t. Deal?”

His partner didn’t like it, he could tell by the look on her face, but she nodded anyway. “Deal.”

Nibbling on her lower lip, she considered what questions she could ask, and then ranked on the likelihood that he could answer them. “All right, let’s try this one instead. Do you have any family? I mean, besides your sister.”

There was a pause, green eyes speculative as he considered the question from all sides. “Yes . . . there’s my dad, my sister and my four brothers . . . two older and two younger.”

“Are they military?”

Deciding that a simple answer wouldn’t hurt, Jason nodded in agreement, “Yes.”

“How did you get involved in the military?”
Jason cocked an eyebrow at the question, being deliberately obtuse as he replied, “I enlisted in the Army when I was 18.”

Hazel eyes narrowed at the obvious evasion, though she only continued with her questioning, “Are you an officer?”

“I completed my officer’s training when I was 19. As Commander Hill no doubt told you, my current rank is Captain. Seeing as I’m in the Army Reserves, I probably won’t get any higher than that.”

Casey frowned at the reminder that he’d taken the option to join the Reserves voluntarily. “Why did you join the Reserves?” The sight of the man’s jaw locking shut on his answer was a huge clue that Jason either couldn’t tell her or wouldn’t tell her . . . and based on the pictures of the two women on the wall, Casey was betting it was the latter of the two. “Was it because of them?”

Jason only smiled at her, shoveling more of his omelet into his mouth as he waited for her next question. Having tasted the pretzel omelet for herself, Casey grimaced at the sight of him visibly enjoying it. The older detective chuckled, the two partners immovable as they each waited for the other to capitulate. Content to be patient, the redhead leaned back on her barstool with her arms folded across her chest and visibly waited. Finally, Walsh sighed and shook his head, “Yes and no. And that’s all I’m saying about it.”

She nodded in agreement, insisting, “I can accept that.”

Glaring at her lightly, he reminded her, “We made a deal, Shraeger . . . if I don’t answer, you don’t push.”

“I didn’t push!” she insisted, even as she flushed lightly at being caught out. The single arched eyebrow caused a small shrug as she promised, “All right . . . no more pushing the issue. I promise.”

The brisk, brittle nod and uncomfortable grimace filled Casey with shame as she pulled back out of his space and leaned back in her chair again, trying to find a question that wouldn’t increase the already obvious tension in the room. “So what countries have you been to? Or is that something you can’t tell me?”

“I can tell you about the ones where I was stationed at a permanent base or the ones I went to on leave, but most of them I can’t. Either way, do you want them alphabetically or chronologically?”

“You’ve been to that many?”

Jason’s grin was wicked as he teased, “France, Britain, Spain, Portugal, Brazil, India, Korea, Hong Kong, the Central African Republic, Afghanistan, Iraq and Pakistan. And that’s just the ones I can tell you about.”

“Do you speak any other languages?”

He nodded silently, taking another bite of his omelet. Eyebrows furrowing, she asked lightly, “Let me guess . . . you can’t tell me what they are.”

“No, I can. I just choose not to. I don’t have to tell you everything, Shraeger,” he teased, his nose wrinkling adorably as he chomped down on the forkful of food he held in his hand with gusto.

Casey’s nose wrinkled as she asked, “How the hell can you eat that? Omelets should NOT crunch, Walsh.”
Jason chuckled, as he shrugged. “My sister was the primary cook in the family, though my brothers were decent enough to get by when she wasn’t around. My reputation for being an abysmal cook is approaching legendary status at this point.”

Poking miserably at the food on her plate, her reply was suitably dry as she muttered, “I can see why.”

Just then Jason’s phone rang again, causing him to reach out and flip it open. “Walsh,” he drawled, giving her a wide smirk as she rolled her eyes. Whoever was on the other end of the line was obviously deserving of his attention though, because he sobered up quick, insisting, “Yeah . . . I remember him . . . we’re on our way.” Flicking the phone shut, he insisted, “Duty calls. We got a lead on the person who’s been calling Kowalski’s house and hanging up. They’re from a low level drug dealer named Malcolm Nix. Kid couldn’t be more than sixteen.”

Casey sighed as she pushed herself up from the bar, gathering her things and moving toward the door. “I’ll meet you at the car.”

Jason nodded, turning to the grill as he started to do a quick clean up so that he wouldn’t be scraping egg off of his griddle top for the foreseeable future. Just then his S.H.I.E.L.D. phone buzzed from where it sat hidden on top of his fridge. Frowning, he reached out and flipped it open. “You owe me, Grimm. And if this phone isn’t on vibrate, I’m going to kill you. – M.H.”

Finger flying over the keys, he replied, “I’m not that stupid, Maria. – J.G.”

“That remains to be seen. – M.H.” was the stinging rejoinder, earning a bark of laughter from the middle Grimm.

“You’re right though, I owe you one. Thank you again. – J.G.”

It was only a second, before Maria replied, “Damn right you do. Be careful, Jay; Marina, the Colonel and I can’t always rush in to bail you out. Take care of yourself and see you at dinner Sunday. – M.H.”

Chuckling to himself, he closed the phone and hid it out of sight once again. Grabbing up his coats, he slung them on as he strode through the door, pausing to lock it behind him. Casey’s voice rang through the street as she shouted, “Hurry up already! I’m freezing my ass off out here!”

“And what a fine ass it is,” he muttered under his breath, giving her a brilliant grin as he joined her at the car. “Ready to go?”

Hazel eyes narrowed at him suspiciously, though she said nothing. Nodding, she insisted, “So what the hell is a teenage drug dealer doing making hang up calls to a cop?”

Fumbling open his door, Jason shrugged, “I have no idea. What do you say we go ask him?”
It was a long day, and at the end of it, Casey Shraeger had taken her first door and had shot her first perp. Delahoy had been shot at point blank, with a double barreled shotgun and still managed to walk away as though nothing had happened. Cole had found Kowalski’s badge and gun in the wall of the guy’s rundown apartment, bringing a certain level of relief to Jason’s soul at their return; it hadn’t felt as though Kowalski could truly be at rest if those had remained missing.

And if there was anything Jason wanted most, it was for Kowalski to be at rest and this whole chapter of his career to be at an end.

Casey was seated on the bench outside the apartment building, and only someone who had gone head to head with death as frequently as Jason and come out still breathing on the other side would have ever seen the way her skin shivered. Taking the seat next to her, he reached out and patted her knee comfortingly. “So Cole found Kowalski’s badge and gun in a hole in the wall . . . we got the right guy, all right? So no feeling guilty or wondering what else you could have done.”

Casey chuckled weakly at the words, leaning over to bump her shoulder lightly against his own. “That’s sweet, Walsh . . . really. You know just what to say to make a woman feel better.”

Jason chuckled, shaking his head. “Nah . . . that’s my older brother Will.” Pausing he considered the sometimes antagonistic relationship between Will and Maria Hill. “Or maybe it’s just Will with Marina.”

Casey’s eyebrow cocked upwards, asking, “Your sister, Marina?”

Jason squirmed slightly, as he shrugged, “Marina’s not really my sister. It’s just easier than trying to explain what her real role is in our family.”
“Oh really? And what role is that?”

“She’s Will’s domestic partner. Then there’s the little detail where she also raised me and my other brothers.”

Casey’s face twisted slightly in ill-concealed consternation and Jason immediately felt the need to defend the only steady parental relationship he’d ever had. Biting down on his lip, he forced himself to keep his opinion to himself. “How much older is Will than you?” Casey asked, still obviously confused by his brother’s relationship with Marina.

“Five years, give or take a month,” Jason replied with a nonchalant shrug. “Let’s just say that Will’s not the one robbing the cradle, and leave it there.”

Fortunately, Casey said nothing, though the arch of her eyebrows clearly indicated that there was a lot she could say. Jason smiled tightly and bumped her shoulder lightly once again, “You gonna be okay?”

“Yeah . . . you’re right, there’s nothing else I could have done. I just . . . I just reacted. I didn’t even take the time to think.”

Jason squeezed her knee once more and promised, “And that is what’s going to be the difference between you being a good cop and being a bad cop. You make the right decision, even when it’s the hard decision.”

Casey smiled at him, nodding once in agreement. “Thank you, Walsh.”

“You’re welcome. I’m gonna head home and get some sleep; you need a ride?”

“Nah. I’ll be just fine. But thank you anyway.”

Jason shoved himself to his feet, suppressing the groan that fought its way upwards. It had been four years since he’d gotten pinned in a Humvee in Iraq, but occasionally that left leg still gave him all sorts of problems. “You’re welcome, Shraeger. I’ll see you tomorrow night, okay? Get some rest . . . you look like hell.”

Casey gave him a lopsided grin and an eyeroll, drawling, “You’re an ass.”

Jason only winked her way, before turning his back to the bench and moving towards where Sergeant Brown was giving orders to a group of other detectives and uniforms. He thought he saw a glimpse of Catherine Chandler and her partner, Tess Vargas, and then shook his head to clear the thought; they were with Special Crimes. There was no reason that the Sarge would have dragged Special Crimes in on a Unusuals case . . . especially considering the fact that this case had been personal from start to finish.

He checked in with Brown and then took off towards home, knowing without looking that his woman was probably only seconds behind him. He arrived at the diner and immediately started up the griddle, waiting for Beaumont to catch up with him. As he cooked, he considered the relationship. He’d been genuinely trying to make it work with Allison, since Hansel had dragged him to lunch and set his mind straight where Sarah was concerned. Looking at the relationship now, he could acknowledge the fact that to date, he hadn’t treated Beaumont very well. He’d spent the three months of their relationship subconsciously holding her up to Sarah and always finding her lacking. It wasn’t fair to her . . . but it wasn’t fair to himself either.

When he’d first asked Beaumont out, he’d done it because she was ballsy and badass. She’s reminded him a little bit of the women he’d known in S.H.I.E.L.D., and he’d thought that she would
be able to handle the risk that came with dating a Grimm. They did have fun together, both in bed and out of it, so at least there was that. But lately, trying to keep the relationship going seemed too much like work and not like fun. He could tell that Beaumont felt the same way, seeing as they seemed to spend more time fighting then anything else anymore.

And then there was the fact that she saw the world only in black and white. There was no grey with her . . . something that would be imperative if he did decide to make her a more permanent part of the Grimm clan’s lives.

Bracing his hands on the counter, he bowed his head as he considered his fading feelings for Beaumont in terms of his growing feelings for his new partner Shraeger. It wouldn’t be fair to either of them if he was just jumping from one relationship into another without considering the consequences. Not to mention, Marina would well and truly kick his ass if she thought he was treating either of the women with anything less than the respect they deserved. And frankly, getting his ass kicked by Marina ONCE was one time too many.

Groaning, he banged his head against the counter. A ad. . . On byl tak chertovski trakhal. (Ah hell . . . he was so fucking fucked.)

Beaumont’s voice behind him was amused as she teased, “If you need a migraine, Walsh . . . I think I can accommodate you.”

Jason snorted lightly as he straightened and turned to look at her. She stood there in a pair of scandalously skintight black slacks and a tight-fitting red blouse. The color was sin itself against the dark of her skin and Jason felt himself smile at her, “If I let you give me a migraine, Beaumont, I’d wake up in a hospital somewhere trying to recall my own name.”

Her shrug was nonchalant as she grinned wickedly at him, “Semantics. Besides, you have a notoriously hard head . . . I think you’d be okay.”

Jason chuckled as he shook his head, “I don’t think my ‘notoriously hard head’ would agree with you.”

“Last I checked, your ‘hard head’ has never had any complaints about the things I do to you.”

Jason chuckled as he acknowledged that for the truth it was. “You are a brutal woman.”

“You love it,” she taunted, with a flirty wink.

Shaking his head, he came around the counter and reached for her hand. Taking a seat on the barstool, he pulled her down onto the seat next to him. Reaching up to brush a strand of her hair behind her ear, he pressed a quick kiss to her cheek. “Al . . . we need to talk.”

Beaumont’s eyes narrowed as she insisted, “Dreaded last words.”

A small smile quirked one corner of Jason’s lips as he nodded, “Be that as it may, we do need to talk.”

Disengaging her hand from his, she leaned back slightly as she demanded, “Are you breaking up with me?”

Jason’s hands came up to run through his hair as he released a heavy sigh. “I don’t know.”

Throwing her hands up in the air in frustration, she snapped bitterly, “Walsh, has anyone ever told you that you suck with women?”
There was a sad chuckle as he considered Sarah’s last opinion of him, her hatred and mistrust of him in that last week before she died. Nodding once pitifully, he agreed, “I’ve been told . . . once or twice.”

Dragging her hands back through her hair, she demanded, “What do you mean, you don’t know if you’re breaking up with me or not? Shouldn’t that be something you know, going into a conversation like this?”

“I hadn’t intended for this conversation to become this conversation. I just . . . this isn’t fun for either of us anymore. And don’t deny it . . . you know I’m right,” he insisted, watching her move to protest. “It hasn’t been fun for awhile. And if neither of us is willing to work on this, then we need to know that now and spare ourselves a lot of grief in the future.”

Beaumont’s eyes narrowed suspiciously as she challenged, “Is this about Shraeger?”

Jason’s answer was immediate as he insisted, “No. This is not about Shraeger . . . this is about us.” Meeting her eyes calmly, he inquired, “Aren’t you the one that said that except for the fact that I’m good in bed, you wouldn’t put up with my shit?”

Beaumont grimaced as he quoted her own words back to her, leaving her no real ground to stand on. “You were in a bad mood and I was just pissy. I didn’t really mean it.”

Jason’s smile was indulgent as he shook his head at her, “Yes you did. Look, there is a lot in my life that I can’t tell you. And right now, I think we both need to come to terms with that . . . and what that means for us in the long run. That’s why I said, I don’t know if we’re breaking up. That is entirely up to you.”

“What kind of things can’t you tell me? Walsh . . . you can tell me anything.”

Before she was even finished speaking, Jason was shaking his head in negation of her statement. “No, Beaumont, I really can’t. And I need to know if you’re okay with that. And if you’re not, I need to know that too.”

The two stared at each other for a long time before Beaumont stood from her chair. “I’ve got secrets, Walsh . . . you’re not the only one with secrets.”

Watching as she strode out the door and disappeared into the night, Jason dropped his head into his hands and murmured, “I highly doubt you have secrets like these.”
Chapter 113: The Pros and Cons of Relationships

It was stupid late and Jason was still awake. Beaumont had left hours ago, leaving Jason beating his head against a proverbial wall. He’d cleaned the entire diner from top to bottom, even going so far as to scrub out the exhaust vent for the grill in an attempt to distract himself from the thoughts playing in his head. When that didn’t work, he attempted to get some sleep but the only thing he could see when he closed his eyes was Beaumont’s angry face as he insisted that they needed to talk.

It was almost one when Jason gave it up for a bad job. After tossing and turning for an hour, at least, the middle Grimm had finally come the conclusion that he needed to talk to someone, get a second opinion on the situation. Maybe talking to someone would provide him with some kind of peace, at least enough to be able to get some sleep before his shift the following morning. The only question was, who should Jason call?

Brian had no sense of normal; the man’s opinion of a perfect date was interrogating some poor bastard with Natasha. The only almost-relationship Dad had ever had before Maria had ended because the girl got shot and died, not because they broke up. Clint was just a bad idea all around, because any advice Clint could give would inevitably involve Bucky. And asking Bucky was out, because if there was one thing he would never do, it was ask his baby brother’s boyfriend for advice on his sex life. He could call Will, but frankly Jason was always calling his older brother to bail him out of trouble; cleaning up the storage locker debacle was going to be the last favor he asked of the
Colonel for awhile.

Which left Marina, who the eldest Grimm would probably have insisted that Jason call anyway. Might as well skip the middle man altogether. Glancing at his watch, the detective mentally calculated the time difference; the last thing he wanted to do was call her during the middle of her shift. Fortunately, if it was one o’clock in New York City, it was almost six o’clock in Budingen, Germany . . . which meant that the Russian had just gotten off shift. Taking a deep breath, he prayed that his sister wouldn’t want to murder him for cutting into the time she could spend with Will before the Colonel’s own shift later in the morning.

Digging in his pocket for his cell phone, he dialed Marina’s number, said a little prayer and pressed send. With any luck, his sister would know what to do.

It had been a long night, and all Marina wanted to do was crawl into bed with her partner for an hour or two. She’d just gotten off her shift and was already counting down the meager hours until Will’s shift began at eleven. She had just walked through the door of their shared quarters when her S.H.I.E.L.D.-issued cell phone began to ring. She groaned as she reached into her pocket to dig the thing out, groaning again at the sight of Jason’s name on the screen.

On the one hand, she could ignore the call, let it go to voicemail and call him back when Will had left for the day, thereby giving her some time with her lover. Or she could sacrifice her time with Will, in favor of answering the call and offering whatever help the middle Grimm needed of her. Even as she attempted to debate with herself, she was already swiping her thumb over the slide to answer the call. “Hello sladkiy. To what do I owe the pleasure?”

Jason’s tone was bleak as he replied, “Hey Marishka . . . I could really use some advice, if you have a minute.”

Swerving towards the living room, Marina kicked off her uniform pumps and settled comfortably into an armchair. “I always have time for you, Jay. What’s wrong?”

There was a huff of air through the phone, causing Marina to chuckle at his obvious reluctance. Finally, Jason spoke, “So . . . there’s this girl . . .”

Unable to resist the opportunity to tease him, Marina teased, “Ooooh . . . a girl, huh? Whatever will you do?”

“That’s what I keep asking myself,” he replied in a dry tone, the sound instantly causing Marina’s maternal instincts to perk up and take notice. “Cause technically, there’s two girls . . . and I don’t want to hurt either of them. And yet, I don’t think I can avoid that at this point.”

The Russian sighed as she considered the waiting space in her bed, before she settled more permanently into her chair. “All right, sladkiy. Tell me everything.” Jason sighed, obviously reluctant to say anything and yet equally desperate for any assistance she could offer him. Marina’s smile was sad as she insisted, “You can tell me anything, Jason . . . no judging. I promise.”

That seemed to be the prod he needed, seeing as seconds later he insisted, “So I’m with this girl . . . and she’s great. But at the same time, I don’t think that the relationship is really working out for either of us. I don’t want to hurt her . . . but I just got this new partner. And Casey . . . she met Maria and didn’t wig out.”

Marina’s tone was suitably impressed as she replied, “Oh really? I can count on one hand the number of people who aren’t intimidated by Maria.”
Jason’s tone was dry as he recited, “You . . . Dad . . . Will . . . and Casey. The rest of us are scared shitless of her.”

“With good reason . . . Maria’s expended a lot of time and energy transforming herself into a scary badass. She would be horrified if none of us were terrified of her.”

The technical specialist chuckled as he acknowledged that point, before his tone went bleak as he asked, “What am I supposed to do, Marina? I don’t want to hurt anyone.”

“Sometimes, Jay, no matter how deeply we don’t want to hurt anyone . . . we can’t avoid it. So instead of worrying about whether or not you’re going to hurt someone, because that sounds unavoidable at this point, maybe you should concern yourself with what you want next.”

“What do you mean?”

“Who do you want? Who do you see yourself committing to long term, with the understanding that this is ultimately going to be the person you see yourself happiest? Once you have that answer, you’re going to know what to do next.”

There was an overly exaggerated huff as Jason sighed, “So . . . no advice whatsoever on which one I should chose?”

“I can’t make that choice for you, Jay; I’ve never met either of these women. The only advice I can give is that you need to take a step back and try to find out that answer for yourself.”

Jason’s tone was fondly accusing as he insisted, “You are absolutely no help whatsoever.”

“You called me, sladkiy,” she reminded him with a fond giggle. “You can always do what your brother does and make a ‘Pro vs Con’ list. It seemed to work for him when it came to asking me out, FINALLY.”

There were a few dull thuds through the phone as Jason no doubt beat his head against the wall. Marina chuckled at the sound, before insisting, “All right. I’m going to leave you to stew on that for a bit. I just got off my shift and Will’s shift starts in four and a half hours, so I’m going to go spend some time with your brother. Is there anything else you need from me, domashniy?”

“No . . . thank you, Marina. You really did help.”

“Good . . . I’m glad. Ya lyublyu tebya, sladkiy.”

“Ya lyublyu tebya, Marishka. We’ll see you soon, right?”

“It’s only a couple more months,” Marina promised, before the two exchanged their goodbyes and Jason hung up the phone.

Jason stared at the phone for a long moment, considering Marina’s advice. “A ‘Pro vs Con’ list, huh? Fuck it . . . why not? I’ve tried everything else.”

Turning towards his meager apartment, Jason moved to rummage in his desk space and pulled out two legal pads and a couple pens. Moving back into the diner, he poured himself a cup of coffee and settled onto a barstool. Splitting the front pages of each pad into two columns, he labeled one page “Casey Shraeger” and the other “Allison Beaumont”. Tapping his pen lightly on the countertop, he scribbled in the “Pro” column for Casey, “Knows some of my secrets” while automatically scribbling “Though what she knows isn’t the whole truth” in the “Con” column.
Turning to Beaumont’s pad, he sighed as he wrote in the “Con” column, “Can’t tell her all of my secrets” followed quickly by “Inc capable of seeing situations in anything but black and white”. He traced his pen over the words for a moment, before adding, “We have fun together sometimes” in the “Pro” column. Sighing, he continued his thought in the “Con” column, “And those sometimes are coming fewer and far between.”

“ Ballsy” and “Badass” went into both of their “Pro” columns, causing him to shake his head as he acknowledged that since Sarah, he had fallen in with a specific type of woman. Most of the women he found attractive could probably break him with their pinky fingers. (At least he wasn’t Clint, where the only women he was attracted to were the ones that scared him shitless. He had a feeling that his Dad would not approve. Hansel already had his hands full with the family Hawkeye.)

The hours seemed to fly by as he continued to scribble in his lists, all while trying to deny the reality of what the lists were trying to tell him. Finally, he pushed the two pads away and stared at them. Neither woman had come out ahead, though the fact that Beaumont hadn’t won out should probably tell him something. Dropping his head against the countertop, he stacked the pads together and resolved to wait until Beaumont gave him her answer. Glancing at the two lists one last time, he sighed as he accepted that he had an answer . . . even if he didn’t like it.

It seemed like he’d hardly gotten to sleep at all before Jason’s cell phone began to buzz from the bedside table. Jason groaned, fumbling with the lightswitch on his watch to check the time. Swearing under his breath when he realized that his watch read 8:30 in the morning, he grabbed the phone and flipped it open, growling, “If this isn’t an insanely beautiful woman, I’m hanging up.”

Beaumont’s voice was subdued as she insisted, “I’m out front. Open the door, Walsh.”

Surprised, Jason nevertheless threw the covers back and fumbled on the ground for his pants. He yanked them haphazardly into place, running his fingers back through his hair as he jogged through the apartment and toward the front door of the diner. Flicking open the lock, he shoved the door open and gestured her inside. “Hey . . . I wasn’t expecting to see you this morning,” he confessed, bending over to kiss her cheek lightly.

Encouraged when she allowed it, he felt his heart sink through the floor at the sight of her troubled eyes. She gave him a meek smile, gesturing mutely toward the barstools behind him. “Can we sit?”

“Of course,” he agreed, backing up to allow her into the diner’s front room. “Do you want a coffee or something?”

Beaumont’s smile was sad as she shook her head, “No thank you, Walsh. Please . . . come sit with me.”

Understandably wary, Jason took a seat on the barstool beside her. Allison’s eyes were shimmering as she reached out to take his hand. “I think you’re an amazing man, Walsh. But, if you can’t trust me with the secrets you have, then I don’t think that this relationship is going to work.”

“It’s not that I don’t trust you, Al,” Jason promised with a lopsided smile.

“Maybe not, but you won’t tell me either,” Beaumont shot back bitterly, her dark eyes even darker with her tears.

The technical specialist could feel his temper start to simmer as he insisted, “People’s lives depend on the secrets that I keep . . . on whether or not I can keep my damned mouth shut about the things I know.” A terrible frown pulled at the corners of his mouth as he vowed, “I won’t risk the lives of people I care about, because my girlfriend insists on knowing secrets that aren’t mine to tell.”
Standing from her chair, she glared at him furiously as she snapped, “Well that shouldn’t be a problem, seeing as you no longer have a girlfriend.” Spinning on her heel, she turned and stormed away.

Jason watched her go sadly, knowing that even if they could somehow come to terms with each other, any relationship they would have with each other would be twisted and bitter. Dropping his head onto the counter, he chuckled cynically, “Well . . . at least that problem is solved. Yebat!”

Chapter End Notes

Russian Translations:

sladkiy - honey (Marina's nickname for Jason)
domashniy - pet (an interchangeable nickname Marina uses for her youngest boys)
ya lyublyu tebya - I love you
yebat - fuck
One Step Closer

Chapter Notes

Translations at the end of the chapter! Enjoy! We get closer to the truth!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
Chapter 114: One Step Closer

Jason should have known that shit was about to blow up in his face when he walked in on Casey arguing lightly with a tall, well-dressed preppy. He was handsome, though Jason would bet his left arm – *Boże*, he hoped Bucky never found out he used that analogy – that the man had never done a day of hard labor in his life. He was soft where Jason was hard, and when they shook hands, some smug part of Jason noted that where Jason had callouses from handling a gun and a keyboard, the other man’s hands were as soft as flower petals.

And then Casey introduced him as her lover . . . and Jason’s whole world hit a pause.

Though he hadn’t planned on immediately jumping into a relationship with Casey, he had hoped to bring her around to the idea of hanging out together socially. Then in a couple of months asking her to have dinner with him. But if she had a boyfriend, someone she was comfortable enough with to introduce as her “lover” . . . well, that plan was tanked.

Jason had nodded firmly, taking the man in before turning to Casey. “We’ve got a lead on that case Sarge handed up this morning . . . you coming?”

“Yep!” she chirped, whirling to throw her arms around the tall man – frankly, Jason couldn’t remember the man’s name and had henceforth christened him “Tall Man” – muttering something in his ear that Jason couldn’t hear. The tone was vicious though and Jason reminded himself once again not to piss off this particular woman.

Before long, Jason and Casey had earned the reputation of being the most successful partnership within the Unusuals Division of the Second Precinct. Though Beaumont was ever polite on the job, occasionally Jason could hear a snide remark about his partner from his ex-girlfriend’s corner of the squad room. He never said anything, preferring not to make a big deal out of the break-up. It was obvious Casey could hear the insults slung her way, but she seemed content to take a page from Jason’s playbook and ignore them.

Of course, it’s only when things are going well that shit really goes down.

It had been nearly a week since the incident with the “Crime Slut” – and seriously, what was Jason’s life when that phrase was an actual descriptor? – when James Buchanan Barnes came walking into Jason’s squad room. Looking up from the stack of paperwork at the sound of his name, Jason frowned at the former Winter Soldier standing in the doorway and scuffing his feet.

“Bucky? What the hell are you doing here?”

Ocean eyes swept the room quickly, before settling back onto Jason restlessly. “Can we talk? Privately?”

“Of course,” the detective agreed, turning towards where Casey was seated at her desk across from his own. “Hey, I’ll be right back. Cover for me?”

Casey nodded agreeably, “Sure.”

“Thanks,” he insisted, before turning towards the door and gesturing for Bucky to follow him.

Ushering the older man up the stairs, he took him into the same interview room Jason had given Maria to use less than a month before. Perching on the edge of the table, Jason frowned at the former assassin and asked, “So what brings you here, Bucky?”

“You heard from your brother at all this morning?” was the first question out of the former assassin’s mouth.
Jason’s reply of “No,” was a long drawl, eyebrows up as he considered the man’s face. “Should I have heard from him this morning?”

Bucky’s hands came up to run back through his hair, the metal one glinting dully in the low lighting. “No, I guess not. Could you do me a favor?”

“I guess that depends on the favor.”

“Could you hack S.H.I.E.L.D.’s Command server and find out if they’ve sent him out on assignment?”

Jason’s eyebrows shot upwards at the question, obviously surprised by the question. “Dude . . . Clint would have told you if he was being sent out on assignment. Even if he couldn’t tell you anything about it, he would have told you he was leaving.” Frowning, the detective settled more comfortably and asked, “Start at the beginning and tell me everything.”

The man once known as the Winter Soldier sank bonelessly into a chair with a heavy sigh, before nodding resolutely. “Late last night, probably around four in the morning, Clint got a phone call on his S.H.I.E.L.D.-issued cell. He seemed surprised by whoever was on the other end of the line; he even got out of bed and went into the living room to take the call.”

“Did he tell you who called?”

“No . . . when he came back to bed, he told me the call wasn’t important and to go back to sleep.”

Jason chuckled, “Let me guess, he was sufficiently distracting enough to take your mind off the phone call.”

“Say what you will, Jay, but your baby brother can be very distracting when he’s of a mind to be.”

Jason’s hands were already flapping in an attempt to stave off the rest of that statement, groaning wretchedly as he insisted, “TMI! Chert voz’mi, Bucky! I do NOT need to hear about that kind of stuff! Bozhe moi!” Rubbing the heels of his hands firmly against his ears as though he was trying to scrub the sound from his head, Jason shook his head sharply. Pouting lightly, he gestured for Bucky to continue. “Okay, so you went back to sleep after . . . shenanigans. What happened next?”

“I woke up this morning, and Clint wasn’t in bed.”

Jason’s head cocked slightly as he inquired, “That’s it? Bucky, you need more than the fact that your boyfriend woke up before you did, to warrant asking me to hack S.H.I.E.L.D.’s Command servers.” Jason paused for a moment, before musing lightly, “Even if it is exorbitantly out of character for Clint to wake up before noon if he doesn’t have to.”

Ocean blue eyes glowered at the younger man fondly, their owner insisting, “That’s not why I’m asking you to hack S.H.I.E.L.D.”

“Then why are you asking me to hack S.H.I.E.L.D.?”

“Both Clint’s sniper kit and his bow case are gone. His duffel bag and some of his clothes are missing – the ones that are tactical enough to be useful on assignment but not obviously stamped with anything that could trace back to either the Army or S.H.I.E.L.D.,” Bucky recounted with a dry tone. “Now what does that sound like to you?”

Jason sighed heavily, muttering lightly, “Like Clint’s on assignment . . . the long time undercover and highly top secret kind . . . damn. So why didn’t you go to Dad or Brian?”
“Because if he’s just on a top secret assignment, then I don’t want to alarm your father or your brother. But if he’s not on assignment . . .”

“Then you don’t want to make Marina worry either, because if Clint goes missing for no reason, Dad will definitely call Marina,” Jason agreed, nodding in agreement with the other man’s thought process. “All right. First, let me see if I can hack Clint’s phone records and get us a phone number for the person who called so late last night. If that doesn’t turn anything up, we’ll see what S.H.I.E.L.D. Command has to tell us. Deal?”

“Thank you, Jason.”

“You’re welcome. Clint’s my baby brother . . . I’m well acquainted with his fondness for getting himself into trouble.”

Leading the way back downstairs, Jason reached into the bottom drawer of his desk and pulled out his personal laptop. Turning it on, he connected to the internet and, after glancing around the room, quickly set to work. “And you’re sure it was Clint’s S.H.I.E.L.D.-issued phone?” Jason asked, looking up at Bucky with a frown.

Bucky nodded firmly, “Clint made the ringtone ‘Cold, Hard Bitch’ by Jet in honor of AD Hill.”

Jason chuckled lightly as his fingers practically flew over the keyboard, remarking lightly, “Dude, does Dad know?”

“I think your father actually approves of the song in terms of AD Hill. I know that Marina does; she says it suits the Assistant Director very well. And this is coming from the woman who is the Assistant Director’s best friend.”

Hearing the flurry of keystrokes, Casey stood and came around the edge of their desks. “Walsh . . . what the hell are you doing?”

Jason glanced briefly at Bucky, before insisting, “Remember those things that I can’t tell you?”

“Yeah?”

“This is one of them.”

Casey rolled her eyes with a huff, though to her credit, she didn’t push for a better answer. Turning to Bucky, she offered him her hand with a small smile, “Casey Shraeger . . . I’m this idiot’s partner.”

Grinning at her, he shook her hand firmly. “James Barnes . . . I’m this idiot’s moronic brother’s boyfriend.”

Casey frowned, turning back to her partner. “You didn’t tell me your brother was gay.”

“First of all, it wasn’t relevant. And secondly, neither Clint nor Bucky are gay. They’re . . . flexible.”

“Flexible? What does that mean?”

Bucky grinned cheekily as Jason whirled to glare up at him, “NO! You and Clint promised that you would never speak of Chile ever again! You swore an oath, Barnes!”

“What happened in Chile?”

Both men replied at the same time, Bucky sounding smug while Jason was merely resigned, “There was a flamenco dancer.”
The older man shrugged with a grin, “She was bendy . . . and thought that fucking two men at the same time was **muy caliente**.”

Jason flared at him, snarking, “Your Spanish is terrible.”

The reply was accompanied by a cheeky grin as Bucky teased, “Got the point across though, didn’t it?”

Casey’s eyebrow cocked upwards as Jason began to mutter in disgruntled Russian under his breath. The **Soldat** winked at her, before chuckling at one of the insults Jason flung his way, replying in cheerful Russian, “**Ty prosto zaviduyesh, bratishka.**”

Jason only grunted in acknowledgment, before his hands came in the universal sign of “touchdown”. “Success!” Glancing back at Bucky, he insisted, “Remind me I have to get the AD to update the servers.”

“You know they’re going to ask you to update their servers, so why bother?”

Jason shrugged agreeably, “True.” Turning his attention back to the phone records in front of him, he skimmed through the recent calls. “Ah, here it is . . . Clint got a phone call this morning at 4:15.” Crackling his knuckles, he joked, “Let’s see who our mystery caller is, huh?”

Setting his fingers back to the keyboard, he proceeded to trace the phone number back to the carrier. Frowning as it came up, he grunted, “Huh . . . that’s weird.”

Casey’s eyebrow’s shot up as she sassed, “You’re only just **NOW** finding this weird.”

“Eh . . . this is pretty much par for the course, actually,” came the simultaneous reply from both men again, before Jason continued with his thought. “It’s a burner.”

Frowning, Casey demanded, “What the hell is a burner, besides the thing on the top of a stove?”

Bucky smiled at her as he replied, “It’s a phone that someone would use if they didn’t want to be traced.” Turning his attention back to Jason, he asked, “Can you find out who it’s assigned to?”

“No, but with any luck I can try to find out where the last phone call came from.” Jason’s fingers flew over the keys as he worked his magic, before announcing, “The last call was the one made to Clint’s cell. It was roughly a fifteen minute phone call, which means that I can trace it to what cell towers it bounced off of. From the looks of it, it pinged off a cell tower about twenty miles outside of Bethesda, MD.”

Bucky frowned, as he grabbed Jason’s shoulder, “Bethesda, MD? Isn’t that where that . . .”

Jason’s voice was horrified as he completed the thought, “. . . the mass shooting at that lab. What was that lab called?” he asked, already bringing up a new search engine.

“Sterisyn Morlanta. There was only one survivor from that shooting, remember?”

“Yeah I remember . . . Marta Shearing,” Jason agreed.

Casey leaned her hip against the desk beside Jason, looking between the two men carefully. “So here’s a question. Why is the sole survivor of a laboratory shooting calling your brother?”

“Says here, that Sterisyn Morlanta was contracted with the DOD . . . they were involved in more than a few Defense projects.” A couple keystrokes and Jason’s voice was quiet as he continued,
“Also, Marta Shearing was just announced dead in a fire at her home this afternoon.” Leaning back in his chair, he insisted, “Am I the only one smelling a cover-up?”

“Speaking as someone who has instigated more than a few cover-ups, these incidents are too closely spaced together. Sounds like someone went to get rid of her, and someone else got there first . . .”

Casey’s hands came up to scrub at her face as she reiterated, “So whoever rescued Ms Shearing . . .”

“Dr. Shearing. She’s a viralologist; she graduated with her doctorates from Culver University in Willowdale, West Virginia in 2004,” Jason corrected with a sheepish grin.

Casey glared at him, before continuing her thought, “. . . Is the one calling your brother.”

Jason bowed his head into his hands as he groaned. “And I would lay odds I even know who it is. Fuck me sideways . . . Marina is going to flip out.”

Bucky’s eyes were cold as he insisted, “Which is why we’re not going to tell Marina . . . we have no solid proof. And until we have it, we’re not going to go and get her hopes up. We’re going to keep an eye on Clint’s phone – I know he took it with him, because I couldn’t find it this morning – and hopefully whoever he’s meeting calls again with a more up to date location.”

Casey’s tone was quiet as she inquired, “Then what?”

“Hopefully we catch up to them before they disappear off the grid all together. If not, we call the Colonel . . . at that point, it’s out of our hands.”

Chapter End Notes

Translations:

(R) chert voz’mi - fucking hell
(R) Bozhe moi - Oh my God!
(S) muy caliente - very hot
(R) Soldat - Soldier
(R) Ty prosto zaviduyesh - You’re just jealous
(R) bratishka - little brother
Crossing Paths

Chapter Notes

So I got this one finished too, so I thought I would gift it to you early. Enjoy! Most of the dialogue between Aaron and Marta is from the Bourne Legacy movie, so I obviously don't own it.

Translations are at the end, as always.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
Chapter 115: Crossing Paths

What the fuck was his life?

Historically, his luck sosal korolevskoy sharov. That had been proven when more than ten kids and six women had been accidental collateral damage on Aaron’s last mission. The worst part had been chertov Byer showing up to feed him some horseshit about being a “sineater” and “absolutely necessary” in order to keep their cause pure. Which he probably would have bought, hook line and sinker, if he’d still thought their cause was pure. But doubts had been clawing at the back of his mind for years, at least since Budapest if not longer than that. The hapless killing of innocents, accidental
or not, had been the final straw.

He’d felt absolutely no remorse when he’d only barely made his flight to Yemen, and skipped every required check-in while he’d been there. Not even Byer’s blood red face when he’d stepped back off the plane on American soil had made him reconsider his actions.

Not even having to dive into a freezing cold river, jump off mountains or being pursued by wolves made a dent in his determination to piss Byer off. But all that was just a lead-up to only nearly getting blown up in a cabin in Nowhere, Alaska . . . frankly, Aaron had never been more grateful for defying Byer in his life.

Currently, he was crouched in the woods outside the home of Dr Marta Shearing. The huge house was in the middle of nowhere, and almost completely defenseless; frankly, if they survived the next few days, they were going to need to talk about safety protocols and the need for a defensible space. That was the first lesson he’d ever learned at Marina’s knee, and it would be the first he taught Marta on the run . . . assuming she wasn’t already dead.

It was no secret to Aaron, and quite possibly to his handlers as well, that he’d always had a distinct fondness for her. He liked to think that she was fond of him as well, because she had an adorable habit of fussing with her hair when she walked in to see him on her examination table as well as the near constant blush that always painted her cheeks a rosy pink. Bringing one hand up, he scratched sheepishly at the back of his neck as he considered the best way to tell her that there were people coming to kill her.

It was about then that a trio of SUV’s came rumbling into the front yard of the house. It took all of a second before the woman and the three men with her stepped from their cars for Aaron to recognize them for what they were; a strike team, there to eliminate the Doc and bury whatever secrets she knew with her. Growling under his breath when the slender brunette came out to greet them, he watched as she led them inside her home. Seconds after they disappeared from sight, Aaron slipped from his place in the trees and ran full out towards the house.

It was over in a matter of minutes. Almost before he’d really taken the time to think about what he was doing, there were dead bodies all over the house and he was standing toe to toe with Dr. Shearing. She looked frazzled and scared, but resolute, as though she was only now coming to understand what was happening to her. He was determined to help her – maybe Marina and Will could protect her, if he could only get her to them – but first things first . . . “Are there chems in this house . . . program medication . . .”

“Are they all dead?” she asked, her eyes wide at the sight of the dead agent at the base of the stairwell.

“Yes, they’re all dead. Look at me . . .” he insisted, watching as she turned away from the body. “. . . look at me. Do you have program medication here?”

Marta stared at him with wide brown eyes, visibly startled by the question. “What!?"

“Program medication . . . greens . . . blue . . . do you have them here?”

The scientist’s eyes slipped closed as she began to stammer, “No . . . no . . . here?! No . . .”

“Where then? Where do you have them? Where do you keep the chems?”

Marta’s eyes were wide and horrified as she gasped, “I don’t know.”

“Dr Shearing . . . where are the chems? I need those chems!” he shouted, feeling panic and
frustration and desperation welling up in his chest as he shook her lightly.

One of her hands came up in an effort to placate him, “I know . . . I understand, but I don’t know. I . . . I . . . we do neurology and controls so all of that happens . . .” Her hand made a soft slapping sound against her thigh as she looked up at him sadly, “We don’t have medication. If I had any I would give it to you.”

Aaron’s mouth firmed as he grabbed her by the cheeks and lifted her eyes to meet his. Her eyes were very wide as she stared at him, though she seemed content to remain still and let him look his fill. Blue searched brown for a long moment, before he was satisfied that she wasn’t lying to him. A steady stream of increasingly vulgar Russian swears were playing in the back of his mind as he dropped his hands and turned to the next problem to take care of.

It was as they were in the car, driving away that Aaron got the next surprise of his life. Dividing his attention between the road and his passenger, he stared in horror as he demanded, “Wait . . . you don’t know my name!?” Mouth working in shock, he considered for a moment before continuing, “So what do you call me? What do you put on my bloodwork?”

Her voice was very small as she replied, “Five.”

And with that single word, Aaron Cross was demoted to once again being worthless and hapless “Project Four” of the Project Cahill . . . deemed to be so stupid that there was nothing else to do but scrap the first model and rebuild a second. He could feel the rage building in his gut as he snapped, “Five . . . like the number ‘five’?”

She nodded briefly, obviously uncomfortable with the knowledge that she didn’t know the name of her rescuer. Chuckling bitterly over the fact that he’d been stupid in love with her for years and she didn’t even know his name, he challenged, “Do you know how many times we’ve met? Thirteen . . . 13 exams over the last four years . . . and that’s all I was to you, a number.”

The conversation devolved from there, before at last he swerved to the side of the rode when she tearfully begged him to let her out of the car. Slamming to a stop, he shoved the gearshift into park and shifted to face her. “You wanna get out . . . get out. You don’t have any chems and you don’t know where they are . . . you don’t know anything, so you know what, just get out.”

There was a pause as he waited for her to take in what he was saying, before attempting once again to save her life. “But you’ve got a plan, right?” Without waiting for her to speak, he continued, “Of course you do, you’re a doctor. You’ve got it all worked out.”

From the corner of his eye, he watched as her features paled with every word from his mouth. She visibly flinched when he insisted, “I have a plan and it’s really not that hard. I’m going to wait for the next person to show up to kill you; and maybe they’ll be able to help me.” Reaching out, he almost felt guilty over the fear on her features as he punched the lock button, “So go for it.”

Allowing his eyes to slide closed, he sent up a silent prayer to whatever god watched over human science experiments that Marina never found out about this conversation . . . because otherwise, she was going to kill him. At least she would, if the DOD didn’t beat her to it.

It was a long hour, as both said probably more and less than they wanted to, before they were back in the car and Aaron was operating on a new plan. After driving around in a series of ever shrinking concentric circles, Aaron finally pulled into the parking lot for a convenience store. Turning to her, he handed her a wad of cash and insisted, “I need you to go inside and get your passport picture taken, okay? Try to look as calm and as normal as possible. I’ll wait in the car.”
Nodding firmly, she took the money and then strode briskly into the store. It was a matter of maybe fifteen minutes before she was once again in the passenger’s seat, the tiny photo envelope in hand. “What are we going to do with this?”

“You can’t use your passport . . . they’ll have the name and ID number flagged.”

“So how am I going to get a passport? I’m going to need one if we’re going to Manila.”

“I’m going to use that picture and I’m going to make you one.”

Marta blinked at him in surprise, earning a small smile from her fellow fugitive as he reached to squeeze her hand gently as he promised, “Trust me . . . everything’s going to work out just fine. We’ll find a place to lie low for the night, and then we’ll drive up to New York early tomorrow morning for our flight. I don’t want to hang out in the airport for too long, so we want to try and time our arrival there as close to takeoff as we can.”

“Why aren’t we going to go to New York tonight? Why are we staying outside of Bethesda?”

“Because when someone is pursuing you, for some reason they never think to look right underneath their own noses.”

“How do you know that?”

His smile was enigmatic as he replied lightly, “Lots and lots of experience.”

It wasn’t long before they were standing together in a single-bed motel room, checked in under the names James and June Monroe. He was fiddling with Viktoriya’s old wallet, watching Marta fiddle with a towel in the bathroom. “You can’t call anyone . . . there are people that care about you that think you’re dead and there’s nothing you can do about it. Anyone you contact becomes a target, so you need to put aside any normal emotional response you’re having. The only edge we’ve got right now is they think we’re both gone. All right?”

The research scientist’s voice was resigned and heartbroken as she sighed, “Fine.”

Smiling at her sadly, he offered her the old wallet as he insisted, “So . . . you’re going to want to go through this.” Turning from the mirror, she took the offered wallet and fiddled with the catch for a moment. It was obvious to the DOD operative that she knew that once she opened the wallet, her life as Marta Shearing was over. Looking up at him, her eyes were desolate as he shrugged. “You know, just be familiar with what’s in it.”

Marta watched him for another second, before flipping open the catch and turning the cards to face her. There was a small tilt to her lips as she read the name “June Monroe” under her breath. Looking up at him, she asked, “Who is June Monroe?”

Aaron reached out and squeezed her free hand lightly as he replied, “You are.”

Flipping through the cards in the wallet, she looked up with a small smile. “Do you know her?”

Aaron returned the small gesture sadly, images of an Amazon playing across his eyes. Flawless skin sprawled across on plaid, flannel sheets with short blond curls tumbled across matching pillows . . . giggles that sounded like windchimes and laughter that filled a room . . . a kind word when he needed one and a gentle touch after a nightmare . . . bloody features and bruised face . . . a staged scene so he could take back proof of death back to his employers . . . hand in hand with an older man who adored her, as she glowed in a gorgeous silver dress. Shaking his head to clear the memories from his mind, he answered honestly, “Not anymore.”
She watched him quietly as he moved back into the main room, before the question she’d been fighting to keep unspoken all day burst from her lips. “Why do you have to stay enhanced?” He rounded on her, visibly surprised by the question. Emboldened by his reaction, she pressed forward, “Why is it so important to you?”

He stood there contemplating her for a long time, before seeming to come to some internal decision. Pulling up a website on their meager laptop, he waited for her to take her seat beside him before pushing the computer in her direction. Marta’s eyes widened as she stared at the picture of the man seated beside her, listed on the Army’s “Fallen Heroes” page. “What is this?”

“This was me,” he answered, a soft snort escaping him as he stared at the picture. “My army recruiter was looking to make his quota. He added twelve points to my IQ. Twelve points just to make the minimum.” Glancing at her sidelong, he inquired, “You ever seen a cognitive degrade? Pulled someone’s blues and watched them drop off their meds?”

Marta looked horrified by the very suggestion, her “No” firm and insistent.

He gave her a small smile as he replied, “Well, they painted a pretty graphic picture in training. It’s a hell of a long way to fall.” Turning back to stare at the photograph of the man he used to be, he sighed. “If I can’t keep it together, we’re not going to make it.”

Shortly after that, Aaron insisted that Marta take the bed and get some rest. He planned on staying up to finish her new passport, and it wouldn’t do for her to look out of the ordinary once they arrived at the airport and were forced to separate. Her protests were feeble and half-hearted, before at last she curled up on the mattress and allowed herself to trust him enough to protect her.

Aaron worked late into the night, the words he’d told Marta playing on constant repeat in his head. If I can’t keep it together, we won’t make it. Setting aside the finished passport, he shoved his hands through his hair in frustration. He’d fucked up, and the last thing he wanted to do was drag his brothers or Marina into the clusterfuck that Outcome was turning out to be. He’d kept their names clear of Operation Outcome for years – the last thing he wanted to do was call up any of them and let them talk him into accepting their assistance.

But at the same time, he owed Marina a goodbye. She was the closest thing he’d ever had to a mother, and even if Byer was right and she hated him, the sound of her agonized scream as he dove over the edge of the cliff that night had haunted him, both sleeping and waking, every day since. He didn’t want to call her cell phone, on the off chance that she actually answered, but there was one phone that he knew she carried that no longer belonged to anyone.

Clint had been Marina’s favorite; she would have kept his S.H.I.E.L.D.-issued phone, with its quirky Clint-style voicemail message, just in case she ever needed to hear his brother’s voice. Fiddling with his own cell, he dialed the phone number by heart, reasoning that he’d leave his goodbye on the voicemail for her to find eventually. It could be weeks before she’d check the phone; with any luck, he’d be dead or impossible to find by then.

Debating with himself for one last brief moment, he pressed SEND and raised the phone to his ear. The phone rang twice, before there was a click and a groggy, “Whoever the hell this is, you’d better be dead. Or I’m gonna take my bow and riddle you full of holes! Do you have any fucking idea what time it is?”

The voice was tired but heartbreakingly familiar. He’d listened to that voice – in his head, in his earpiece, under his bed, in Maria’s airvents, over comm lines – everyday for 24 years; that voice was as near, dear and recognizable to him as Marina’s laughter. As the truth sunk in, Aaron could literally feel his knees giving out beneath him. “Wha . . . CLINT??”
There was a long pause before the reply came, “It’s about damn time you called me, big brother.”

“But they . . . Byer told me you were dead!”

There was a rustling of covers and a low murmuring through the phone, causing Clint’s voice to reply tenderly, “It’s all right, Buck . . . I just gotta take this call. I’ll be right back.”

There was the familiar creak of the doorhinges – that top one had always squeaked, which was the only reason neither of them had killed each other sometimes – before a soft thud echoed through the phone and Clint insisted, “Rumors of my demise have been greatly exaggerated . . . and if you’d just chertov called, you’d know that already. Idiot.”

Aaron’s chuckle was bitter as he rubbed his hands over his face, “Bozhe moi, you’re alive.”

Clint’s voice was cheerful as he chirped, “Yep. Now tell me where you are, so I can come and get you.”

Eyes slipping closed, Aaron shook his head as he insisted, “Clint . . . I can’t. I’m in trouble and I don’t think I’m coming home.”

The archer’s reply was immediate. “Fuck that shit. Tell me everything and then tell me where to meet you.” There was a pause, before the younger brother swore, “We’ll fix this, Ken . . . I promise.”

Chapter End Notes

Translations:

(R) sosal korolevskoy sharov - sucked royal balls
(R) chertov - fucking
(R) Bozhe Moi - Oh my God
Chapter 116: Step One – Sneaking Out of the House

John. F. Kennedy airport was without a doubt, one of the busiest airports in the world. It was easy to get lost in the crowd, which was the sole reason Clint had chosen it. He’d already used the automated teller to get their tickets, knowing that his brother would be arriving at the airport at the very last possible second, his lady doctor in tow. Clint wore his dress greens, with Aaron’s old uniform in the garment bag at his feet; if there was one thing that airport security never thought to check twice, it was a soldier on their way to a new posting.

Closing his eyes, he dropped his head back against the wall behind the bench and went through the plan again. Aaron had wanted the three of them to travel separately, but Clint knew that if the DOD was still looking for them, they’d be looking for a party of two or a single individual; they’d never be looking for a group of three to be traveling together. One of the diamond rings Marina had left behind was nestled in a velvet box in his pocket, and would be posing as Marta’s engagement ring
until they arrived in Manila. The cover story was that he and Aaron were brothers being transferred overseas, so the three of them were taking one last family vacation before going their separate ways.

Just then he heard a soft call of his name, bringing his head up and his eyes open. Striding toward him was his brother, a beautiful brunette’s hand firmly in his hands. Clint popped to his feet, cheering, “Aaron!”

The two brothers collided together hard, slapping each other’s back and discretely brushing tears from their eyes. Leaning back, Clint gripped Aaron’s shoulders and took in his features. “It’s good to see you.” Stepping back, the younger brother smacked the older firmly up the back of the head. “And that’s for being an idiot.”

Ducking his head under the blow, nevertheless Aaron’s face cracked into a real smile as he agreed, “It’s good to see you too, little brother.”

Looking down at his watch, Clint grimaced lightly. “We’re cutting it close, Aaron . . . you still need to go change.”

Aaron nodded as he took the offered garment bag and slung it over his shoulder. Reaching back, the DOD operative took the woman’s hand and pulled her the last few steps to join the two brothers. “Clint, I’d like you to meet Marta Shearing. Doc, this is my baby brother, Clint Grimm.”

Clint grinned, offering her a shallow bow and a cheeky kiss to the back of her hand. “It’s a pleasure, Doc.”

Marta’s eyes were wide in shock as she stared between the two men. “Wha . . . How do you two look so alike?”

The Major grinned at her as he shook his head, “Sorry Doc, but no time. I’m not kidding . . . Aaron needs to go get changed or this whole ruse is up in smoke.” Shooing Aaron towards the bathroom, Clint took the woman’s hand and tucked it into the crook of his elbow. “I promise . . . we’ll explain as much as we can on the plane.”

Her eyes were still wide as she looked up at him, though she appeared to calm as she searched his face to any sign that he was lying to her. Finally, she dropped her eyes and nodded, “All right . . . but I’m holding you to that.”

He grinned at her and led her along the wall toward the bathroom, keeping a careful eye out for the cameras placed on the wall above their heads. “Okay, so here’s the deal. You’re going to be pretending to be Aaron’s fiancée . . .” he explained, reaching into his pocket and pulling out the ring.

Offering it to her, he watched as she snapped the box open and gasped at the ring inside. “I can’t use this! Where did you get this!”

Aaron stepped from the bathroom then, smoothing his uniform tie under his jacket and buttoning up the front. At the sight of the ring, he smirked, “I know that ring. That’s the one Marina got for the ‘Ireland Argument of ’99’.”

“Yes,” Clint agreed as he turned to Marta and insisted, “It’s fine. It belongs to our sister, Marina . . . she left it behind when she and our brother Will went to take over command of a base in Germany.”

The older Grimm jerked at the intel, asking, “Marina’s in Germany?”

“Yes . . . I’ll explain later,” the archer insisted, waving the question away. Turning back to Marta, he watched as Aaron plucked the ring from the box and slid it on to the scientist’s fingers while the
younger brother continued to explain the plan. “Aaron’s going to keep you tucked against him; keep your head down and let your hair cover as much of your face as it can. Don’t stop for anything . . . okay? I took a look around for cameras, so I can avoid most of them, but it’s better to be safe that sorry. Right?”

“Agreed,” Aaron replied, reaching out to loop one arm around Marta’s shoulders and pulling her into his side. Looking down at her, there was a fond smile on his face as he asked, “You okay, Doc?”

The woman nodded shakily, one hand coming up to grip the lapel of Aaron’s uniform. He squeezed her lightly, pressing a fond kiss to her temple, vowing in a low undertone, “We’re going to take good care of you, Doc, I promise.”

Looking up as Clint took up position on the other side of her, he watched as Clint checked his watchface once again. “We gotta go, Ken . . . or we’re going to miss our flight. We want to be hours ahead of these motherfuckers, right?”

“Right. Lead on little brother,” he agreed as he reached to take the airplane tickets and manila envelope the younger brother offered him.

Marta’s eyes were fixed on the name tag in front of her eyes, her thumb coming up to stroke over it reverently, “Is this your name? You don’t look like a ‘Barnes’.”

Aaron glanced down in surprise, only just noticing the switched out nameplaque. Cocking an eyebrow at his little brother, he asked, “‘Barnes’? That was the absolute best you could do?”

“First of all, I happen to like the name ‘Barnes’ . . . and secondly, both Maria and Marina will have my balls in a sling if I use our real names and passports.” Shrugging lightly, he insisted, “It was the only name I could think of that was common enough it wouldn’t raise any red flags.”

The DOD operative rolled his eyes as he thumbed open the passport in the envelope, reading the name on it aloud. “Aaron Kenneth Barnes . . . that’s . . . reasonably generic.”

The archer’s grin was flashfire as he replied, “Exactly.”

Before long, the trio was seated together in First Class, the seats purchased with the unlimited power of Will’s Amex Black account . . . which reminded Clint that he was going to need to tell the older brother so that the Colonel didn’t freak out that someone had phished the numbers on Clint’s card somewhere . . . again. Will was paranoid enough, without his own brothers fucking with him. Granted, Will’s Amex Black account was kind of the Family-Free-For-All credit card – Clint still remembered Will’s nonchalant resignation to finding out that their father had charged 500 Deutchmarks worth of alcohol to the account while he’d been in Austria in ‘97 – but Will usually liked to know what purchases each of his brothers were using their cards for before he had to explain away the charges to the American Express lady when she called. Her name was Carolyn, and Clint was pretty sure that by now she was used to strange purchases that showed up on the card every so often.

Although, Brian’s undercover assignments usually prompted raised eyebrows even from Carolyn. (There was an incident in Boston about three years ago, where Brian was posing as some thug named Jem Coughlin. Will had nearly had a conniption fit when he’d seen the cost for the explosives and ammunition Brian had charged to his own card. Before the end of that assignment, it quickly became apparent that that would be the closest the Grimms would probably ever come to seeing Barney again.) Explaining those charges away almost always put the Colonel is a foul mood.

The brothers had arranged themselves with the best view of the plane and the best opportunity to
protect Marta. She was by the window, with Aaron in the aisle seat next to her and Clint in the first seat across the aisle from them. It wasn’t long before the rest of the plane had bedded down for the night, to try and sleep through the flight. Turning to Marta, Aaron bent his head and whispered into her ear, “Why don’t you get some sleep? You didn’t really sleep at all last night.”

Marta’s eyes were halflidded already as she looked up at him, before she nodded in silent agreement. “Yeah . . . I think I will. Wake me up when we get there?”

“Of course,” he agreed, smiling as she lifted his arm around her own shoulders and cuddled close to his ribs. The diamond on her left ring finger flickered in the low light as she brought that hand up to grip his lapel, causing his breath to catch painfully in his chest as he considered the idea that one day it would be HIS ring on that finger.

Clint’s voice was quiet and amused as he insisted, “I’m of the opinion that Marina intends for most of her diamond rings to become engagement rings for us.”

Aaron’s eyes were narrow as he whipped his head to glare at his little brother. Conscious of Marta against his ribs, he lifted his hand from her shoulders and signed emphatically, *You can keep your opinions to yourself, Clinton Francis.*

The archer’s eyes rolled fondly as his own hands came up, his grin lazy as he insisted, *Come on, Kenny . . . only an idiot wouldn’t be able to tell that you have really strong feelings for her. And, despite what everyone says to the contrary, I am not an idiot.*

*Says who?* the older brother teased, nose wrinkling at the face his baby brother made.

*Very funny. Jerk.*

*Pest.*

*Dork.*

*Fanboy.*

Clint’s jaw dropped in shock at the statement, before his face devolved into a whining expression as he protested, *Come on, that is still a low blow!*

*Clint, your love for James Bond is comparable to a teenage girl’s love for her cell phone. It always has been, and always will be.*

Pouting, the archer slumped back in his chair with his arms folded petulantly over his chest for all of a second, before signing viciously. *I’m telling Marina you’re picking on me.*

Caught offguard by the statement, it took a moment before Aaron started to laugh. Threatening to tell Marina had always been the best way Clint knew to get his brothers to stop teasing him; Marina Petrovka was a fearsome creature when it came to her *dorogoy* and almost everyone learned quick that you didn’t want her to find out that Clint thought you were being unnecessarily mean to him. *Still hiding behind Mama’s skirts, huh?* Aaron quipped with a wink.

*Why change something that works?* was Clint’s nonchalant reply, accompanied by a lazy shrug. *It’s good to be the favorite.* Glancing over at Aaron, he watched the older of the two brothers stroking tender fingers through the sleeping scientist’s brunette curls. *Seriously, though . . . come on, Aaron. Just be honest. You have a thing for her. Nothing to be ashamed of . . . hell, I think Marina’s going to like her.* Cocking his head, he took the woman in before signing carefully, *She seems kinda sweet.*
Yeah, cause she was as sweet as pie when she was bleeding me and poking me with things and scraping at me and taking tissue samples.

The archer’s eyes were knowing as he reminded his brother fondly, *Looking at you now, you don’t exactly seem to be holding a grudge.*

Aaron’s eyes narrowed lightly at his brother as he growled, “What did I say about your opinions?”

Clint shrugged, reclining his chair back and settling comfortably. Closing his eyes, he insisted, “Just . . . think about it, Aaron. Don’t be so stubborn, you miss out on a good thing. Okay?”

The DOD operative sighed as he watched his younger brother almost immediately drop off to sleep, taking advantage of their Army-trained ability to fall asleep quickly and anywhere. Snuggling that single inch closer to Marta, Aaron muttered into her hair, “He always was too nosy for his own good.”
So I apologize for the lack of chapter on Monday. I was really sick and at the doctor's office and/or passed out all day. So there will be two chapters today to make up for the lack. Here's the first. Enjoy!

Translations, as always are at the end of the chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
Unspoken consent between the two partners meant that both Jason and Casey were treating Clint Grimm’s disappearance as a missing person’s case. They’d cleared the case through Sergeant Brown, before turning their whole attentions on the case. Jason had insisted that putting out a BOLO would do absolutely no good in locating him, though Jason only knew that because he’d hacked his older brother’s American Express account and discovered that Clint had purchased three tickets on his card ridiculously early that morning.
Currently, he was trying to locate the tickets in question. However, none of either Clint – or even any of Kenny’s – usual S.H.I.E.L.D. aliases had gotten a hit during Jason’s search. And not knowing what name either of the brothers would have chosen for their companion meant that searching for her was yet another dead end. Lifting his hands from his keyboard, Jason smacked his head lightly against his desk with a muttered string of Russian curses.

Looking up at Casey, he asked, “I really wish my sister hadn’t trained us in the ability to hide from the authorities quite so thoroughly.”

“Your sister? You mean Marina?”

Jason groaned as he realized what he’d said, waving a hand lazily in the air. “Pretend I didn’t tell you that. Bozhe moi, I have got to get a lock for my mouth.”

Casey giggled girlishly, shrugging lightly, “I won’t tell Commander Hill. Promise.”

The detective gave his partner a lackluster smile in thanks, before his cell phone rang. Fumbling for it, he finally managed to flip it open and put it to his ear, answering, “Walsh.”

“My name plaques are gone,” was the first thing out of Bucky’s mouth, the former Russian assassin sounding frustrated.

Setting the phone onto his desktop, Jason waved Casey over from her desk and turned the phone on speaker, the volume too low for anyone else in the precinct to hear. Folding his arms on top of his desk, he glanced up at his partner before replying cheerfully, “Hi Bucky, how are you? You wanna say that again? Your what are gone?”

“The name plaques for my dress greens; two of them, to be specific.” Jason groaned at the explanation, causing Bucky to chuckle as he answered the unspoken question. “Yeah, I checked our closet as soon as I noticed they were gone . . . Clint took his dress uniform. Aaron’s is gone too; it’s not hanging up in Marina’s closet.”


“Well, that explains why I wasn’t getting any hits on Clint’s usual aliases. What first name do you think he’d use with ‘Barnes’?”

There was no hesitation as Bucky answered, “Try ‘Clinton Francis Barnes’.”

The tech specialist blinked at the answer, before blurting in surprise, “You’re not serious.”

“Like a heart attack,” the former Winter Soldier sighed, tone resigned.

Jason chuckled, even as he entered the new data into the computer. “There is going to be so much teasing headed your way as soon as we manage to catch up with both of the idiots.”

Bucky groaned in mock-exasperation before he chuckled, “Bozhe moi, he makes me crazy.”

“You love it.”

There was a long pause, as the former assassin considered that before snorting lightly, “Yeah . . . I really do. Although, he and I are going to have a long discussion about just disappearing without telling anyone. And if he can sit at the end of it, I will be shocked.”

Casey burst out laughing at the twisted look on her partner’s face at the statement, earning the
bemused attention of the rest of the squad room. Waving away the attentions of the rest of their coworkers, Jason glared at her fiercely, before insisting, “TMI, Buck! Come on, man.”

Just then Jason’s computer pinged lightly with a hit, causing the detective’s eyes to flash wide in surprise. “Holy shit . . . it worked. I have a Clinton Francis Barnes traveling with an Aaron Kenneth Barnes and a June Elizabeth Monroe to Manila, The Philippines. Their plane left this morning at six.” Flipping through the information on the computer, he checked his watch before continuing, “Their plane lands at Ninoy Aquino International Airport in about forty five minutes from now.”

Bucky hummed in agreement, before asking, “June Monroe? Why is that name familiar?”

The detective grinned as he replied cheekily, “Think Viktorya Dubrovskaya.”

“Ah right . . . duh. Well, that makes sense. Vika did say that Aaron kept that alias’ wallet and identification. All of that information would still be valid, and our good Dr. Shearing wouldn’t even need a matching driver’s license because . . .”

Jason groaned as he realized where his brother’s boyfriend was going with the thought, finishing the statement resignedly, “Aaron would have made her a passport.”

“Here’s a question though; what the hell is in Manila?”

“And why does whatever it is justify potentially getting caught by the DOD? Because I’m assuming that they’re running from the DOD; they’re the ones that faked Kenny’s death and told us he was dead . . . they have to be the ones that have been yanking on his chain for the last four years.”

Neither of them had an answer, causing Casey to sigh. “Guess you’ll just have to ask them when they get home.”

Bucky’s tone was dark as he hissed, “Oh trust me. I will.”

The redhead watched her partner frown at the screen, moved by some impulse she didn’t understand to rest her hand on his shoulder and squeeze lightly in comfort. Jason looked up at her with a weak grin, before turning his attention to the phone again. “So, do we call Will and Marina now?”

There was a heavy sigh through the phone as Bucky considered that question. “Yeah . . . I think we have to. Don’t worry about it; I’ll do it.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yeah; Marina asked me to look out for Clint and I fucked it up. It’s my responsibility to tell them that I lost him.”

“You wanna know a trick to telling Will bad news? Start with the good news first . . . he won’t be as likely to beat your ass for whatever the bad news is following.”

“I highly doubt your brother is going to spank me,” Bucky reminded Jason, a smile audible in his tone.

“Lucky you; the rest of us have all gotten our asses beaten by Will before,” Jason reminded the other man, shuddering at the memory of the last time his oldest brother had whipped his ass with his belt, “and trust me, it’s not an occurrence that we liked to repeat too often.”

Casey folded her arms as she inquired, “So was Will like your dad or something?”
Jason shrugged at the question, “Or something. He was 12 when Marina took us away, but we all worshipped him. As far as we were concerned, disappointing Will was right up there with disappointing Marina; we didn’t do it very often.”

Bucky chuckled, “While this little trip down Memory Lane is stirring, I have to go figure out what I’m going to say to Marina and the Colonel. I’ll talk to you later, Jay.”

“You too, Buck. And keep your chin up; Clint would never do anything too astronomically stupid.”

“That qualifier is only a little comforting, Jason,” the S.H.I.E.L.D. asset drawled dryly, before the three said their goodbyes and Jason’s cell phone clicked off.

Casey folded her arms over her chest and watched Jason as he flipped the phone closed and tucked it back into his jacket pocket. Seeing the frustration at being unable to do anything further, Casey punched him lightly in the shoulder. “Come on; you’ve been staring at this computer all day. You skipped breakfast and didn’t even touch your lunch; we’re going to the Apolo and you’re not getting out of it.”

The detective glared at his partner as she tugged him inexorably from his chair, even as he was chuckling at her forcefulness. Throwing an arm over her shoulder, he tugged her to him lightly and pressed a fond kiss to her cheek. “Thanks Case . . . you didn’t have to drop everything to help me with this.”

“You’re my partner and partners stick together,” the pretty redhead insisted, before nudging him lightly. “Come on. Food and sunshine. You look like death warmed over. Wouldn’t want you to lose that pretty boy façade of yours.”

“Has anyone ever told you that you are a consummate charmer, Shraeger? Because if not, they should. Seriously . . . you always say the nicest things to me.”

Casey scoffed, with a roll of her eyes. “If you think that’s nice, just wait till I really get going. You’ll be drowning in my backhanded compliments.”

The sound of Jason’s laughter followed them from the squad room as the two left, leaving the rest of the room smirking at their backs. Delahoy was the first to say what the rest of the room was thinking, turning to his own partner Leo Banks and insisted, “Twenty bucks says they’re doing the nasty by this time next week.”

“You’re on . . . Shraeger’s too classy to give it up to Walsh so quickly . . . by next month definitely.”

The rest of the room began to throw in their own wagers, laughter filling the room. Beaumont and Cole walked in then, Beaumont dragging their collar along beside them. Cole frowned at the raucous atmosphere inquiring, “What’s going on, guys?”

Delahoy looked over then, noticing the tight pinch of Beaumont’s lips as she practically threw her perp into holding and the confused tilt of Cole’s head. It was the Second’s worst kept secret that Walsh and Beaumont had been a thing for about ten months, and that it had recently ended very badly. Beaumont was badass scary; and personally Delahoy didn’t want to be on the receiving end of her fury. Sobering, he kicked Banks lightly under the desk, he waited until his partner had stilled before shaking his head. “Making bets on tomorrow’s Mets game. Banks over here thinks that the Yankees are going to take it; the rest of us were just taking the opportunity to win his money.”

As expected Beaumont huffed at the mustached man’s typical behavior as Cole frowned, reminding his co-workers sternly, “Gambling is a sin, Eric.”
“But it’s too much fun to give it up,” was the smirking reply, causing a shake of Cole’s head as the younger detective insisted, “I’ll say a prayer for you.”

Delahoy’s grin was shameless as he cheered, “Thanks Cole. Though I wouldn’t worry about it; my soul’s pretty much long past saving.”

Meanwhile, Bucky was staring at his S.H.I.E.L.D. cell phone as he considered what he was going to say to his uchenyy and the Colonel. He jumped nearly a mile when the phone rang, a grimace creasing his lips as the word “The Colonel” displayed itself on the screen. Taking a deep breath, he picked up the phone and swiped his thumb over the answer button. “Will . . . what’s up?”

The Colonel’s tone was just a half-step up from a growl as he replied carefully, “Want to tell me why I just got a call from Carolyn telling me that my baby brother purchased three international tickets to Manila this morning?”

Bucky grimaced lightly, before dropping lightly onto the edge of the bed he shared with Clint “troublemaker-extraordinaire” Grimm. “Well, that’s a funny story actually. It all started with Clint getting a phone call obscenely early this morning . . .”

Will’s voice was resigned as he interrupted then, “Clint went after Aaron . . . didn’t he?”

Bucky sighed heavily, “Yes sir.”

“Is Jason doing surveillance?”

“Yes sir.”

“Good. Tell him to keep me posted and to be careful. We don’t want anything to backlash onto him.”

“Yes sir.”

Will chuckled as he reminded the other man, “I’m not your CO, Bucky. You don’t have to call me ‘sir’.”

“All due respect sir, yes you are. You run this family and I’m a part of this family. That makes you my CO.”

“While I appreciate the sentiment, you still don’t have to call me sir.” There was a pause, before Will spoke again, Bucky recognizing this tone as the one he used when he was giving orders and expected to be obeyed without question or protest. “I need you to keep an eye on Jason. Brian’s with S.H.I.E.L.D., Clint’s with Aaron and I’m in Germany; but Jason’s vulnerable. If whoever is behind this ‘Spring Cleaning’ finds out about Jay, they may try to use him as leverage against Aaron. That could get messy, especially if and when Marina found out.”

Bucky grimaced as he considered the kind of mayhem his former protégé would unleash if the DOD threatened her middle boy, before reminding the oldest Grimm, “Jason will not thank me for playing babysitter. Or you for asking me to.”

“I’m not asking you to play babysitter. I’m asking you to keep an eye out. If he gets tagged by the DOD, I want you to let me know immediately. Jason would never tell us anything that he thinks may put the rest of the family in danger, but frankly I would prefer to have that call taken out of his hands. Understand?”

“Yes sir.” There was a pause before the former assassin asked, “What about Marishka? What are you
going to tell her?”

“The truth. I have a feeling that Clint will bring Aaron here, so she’ll find out sooner or later. Just keep an eye on everyone at home. The last day this base is open is four days from now; we’ll see you then.”

“Sounds good. See you soon,” Bucky agreed before clicking off the phone. Turning to the frame on the dresser, he smiled at the picture of him and Clint there. They’d taken it at a street vendor while they were in Paris, and it was one of Bucky’s favorite pictures of the two of them. Shaking his head, he asked the picture, “Damn it, Clint . . . what the hell am I going to do with you?”

Chapter End Notes

Translations:

Bozhe moi - Oh my God
yebat menya - fuck me
krome shutok - no kidding
uchenyy - student or scholar (one of Bucky's nicknames for Marina)
Part Two - Getting Past the Parents

Chapter Notes

Chapter two of two. Enjoy! (Damn Byer!)
Translations at the end of the chapter, as always.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
Chapter 118: Part Two – Get Past the Parents

Clint and Aaron kept their heads down, and Marta tucked tightly in between them as they exited the plane and headed into the crowded airport. “All right, so here’s the plan. After we get checked in at customs, you two are going to head over to SteriPacific and get all the science done. I’m going to get things set up for tonight; if you’re going to get as sick as you say, then we’re going to need a place to crash at least until tomorrow morning.”

“You have your phone?” Aaron asked, eyes narrowed as he watched his brother steer them effortlessly through camera blind spots around the area.
Clint grinned as he waved the smartphone at his brother. “Never go anywhere without it.” Thumbing it on, he watched the screen come up with a cocky smirk. A message popped up almost immediately, causing Clint’s smirk to slip from his lips.

Noticing that his brother had gone quiet, Aaron turned his head to look up at the younger brother with a frown. “Clint . . . you okay?”

Looking up from where he was tracing the message on the screen, Clint flashed the family’s explosives expert a quickfire grin. “Of course.” Shaking his head firmly to rid himself of whatever thoughts were tracking through his brain, the sniper flicked the phone off again and looked back up at the other two. “Okay. While I’m out tonight, I’m also going to head down to the docks to try and score us a ride out of town. We’re not going to be able to use the airports again, so it’s going to have to be a boat of some kind. Some place close enough to the hideaway that we won’t have to go very far to get there.”

Marta’s voice was quiet and curious as she inquired, “Is there a reason we can’t stay here in Manila until Aaron’s fully recovered?”

“The DOD is going to be all over us, once they’ve managed to pin you down. We messed things up for them, because they think they’re looking for just you, so they’re going to be hours behind us. But I would prefer to have several hundred miles between us and Manila before Aaron’s gatekeepers get too much closer to us.”

“You think we’ve managed to keep them off our tails that long?”

“No, but like Marina always says . . . the power of wishful thinking,” Clint reminded his brother, with a careless shrug.

The three stood quietly in the line for customs, Aaron and Marta in front with Clint only a half-step behind. Seeing that the two were talking about the facility, Clint pulled his cell phone out of his pocket once again. There on the screen was a text message from his boyfriend. “We WILL discuss this, Clinton Francis Grimm . . . and I can promise that your ass isn’t going to enjoy it.”

Wincing at the words, Clint closed his eyes and bowed his head over his phone. On the one hand, he should have told Bucky where he was going; but on the other hand, if Bucky didn’t know anything, he couldn’t be implicated should anything go sideways. Either way, his ass was grass; and if there was one thing that Clint knew, it was that James Buchanan Barnes did NOT make idle threats. Considering the temper tantrum he’d thrown to deserve getting spanked last time, it was a pretty good guess that this time he was in for the ass-whipping of his life.

Just then, Aaron kissed Marta’s temple and stepped back to join Clint. Reaching out, he gripped his brother’s shoulder and squeezed. “Clint, can we talk?”

Clint flicked the phone off again and slipped it into his pocket, before looking up at his brother with a grin. “Of course. What’s up?”

“It’s been four years; isn’t there anything you want to say to me?”

“You mean like the fact that I’m fucking pissed off at you? That I can’t believe you would do that to me or Marina? Or how about the fact that Marina was devastated when you died? Or the fact that Will and I got into a huge fight, because I was insistent that you hadn’t died and I thought he was giving up on getting you back?” Clint asked, steel grey eyes a direct counterpoint to the cheerful note in his voice.
Aaron winced, dropping his hand from his brother’s shoulder. “Yeah. Something like that.”

Clint took a deep breath, releasing it with a small sigh. “Aaron, you’re my brother and you have always been my very best friend. No matter what, I will always forgive you. And you’re right, we do need to talk. But I don’t really think that now is the best time for that, do you?”

The DOD operative shook his head as he considered the question, “No, probably not.” Looking up at Clint, he brought his hand up to the other man’s shoulder once more and squeezed firmly. “But we will talk, right?”

“Yeah, we’ll talk. As soon as we get to Germany and I know that we’re safe, we’ll talk. But for right now, let’s just focus on getting out of this whole mess alive, okay?”

Aaron frowned at the statement, cocking his head slightly as he reiterated, “We’re going to Germany?”

“Yeah. If there’s anyone in the world that can get you two back to the States without causing any unnecessary attention, it’s Will and Marina. Not to mention, if I come anywhere within the same hemisphere as Marina with you in tow, and I don’t take you to her, she’ll kill me . . . favorite or not.” Shrugging, he grinned, “And personally, I like being alive. It works for me.”

Aaron grinned as he chuckled, “Yeah . . . works for me too.”

Four hours later, the National Research Assay Group realized that their perfectly put together plan had gone completely to hell. Eric Byer did not like surprises. Historically, they tended to blow up in his face; the whole Jason Bourne fiasco was only the most recent example. But this . . . this was a Chernobyl-sized disaster just waiting to happen.

Two nearly identical pictures were on the screen in front of him, one of the men blue eyed and the other man with long-sighted grey. “I need the support staff to vacate the room,” Byer called, still staring at the two pictures as a laundry list of information began to align itself in his mind. Looking around, he noticed that no one had moved from their seats, instead staring at him in shock. Losing his precarious temper, he demanded, “Get up and walk!”

He could hear Mark Turso’s confusion through the fog in his head, the retired Admiral demanding answers. “Who the hell are they?”

“The blue eyed one is an Outcome agent. That’s Outcome Five. I don’t know who the grey eyed one is.” Turning to Zev, he demanded, “Get on it. I want a name yesterday.”

Terry’s tone was dismayed as he insisted, “He’s not dead? I thought they were all dead!”

Byer’s eyes slipped closed as he sighed, “Yeah, he’s supposed to be dead.”

“Then what is he doing in Manila?” Mark asked, eyes cold as they watched Byer for any hint of a lie.

“I don’t know.”

Zev’s fingers were flashing over the keyboard as he insisted, “He’s looking for meds. That’s where the chems come from; what else would he be doing?”

The Admiral seemed to process that for a moment, before asking, “Are the meds he’s looking for there?”
Byer’s head shook lightly before turning to look at the DOD’s pet pharmaceutical vice president. “Terry?”

“No, we haven’t run a batch in sixteen weeks. And even if we had, we don’t keep the pills on site. It’s basically a kitchen; we tweak the recipe and we bake up a batch when we need it.”

“Then what the hell are they doing?!”

Zev’s hands came up to brace on the back of his neck as he explained, “The stems are there.” Arthur nodded in agreement as he continued, “She’s going to try to viral him out.”

As if Byer hadn’t already been having a bad week. Rubbing his hands over his face, he turned to his computer specialist, “What about the other one? Do we have anything on him yet?”

“No. I’m running facial recognition on all known associates of Outcome Five, but I’m not seeing anything. From the looks of it, Cross never had any contact with this man during any mission we’ve sent him on, which means that he’s from before we recruited Cross to Operation Outcome.”

Dita’s mouth twisted lightly as she looked up at Byer, “Didn’t you tell me that you thought Cross was a Cahill? If you were right, then that man’s probably another Cahill and quite possibly one of the men from Cross’ original Spec Ops unit with the Army.”

Byer’s words were muttered as he insisted, “The Brat’ya Mrachnyy.”

Zev’s eyebrows furrowed as he demanded, “What did you just say?”

“The Brat’ya Mrachnyy? It’s the codename for the unit Cross used to be a part of while he was with Special Operations in the Army.”

“Do you know what that means?”

“I don’t speak gibberish,” Byer replied caustically.

The bald computer technical shook his head as he insisted, “It’s not gibberish . . . it’s Russian. It means ‘The Brothers Grimm’.”

Byer’s eyebrows furrowed at the name, before remarked, “When I first met Cross, he was Sergeant Kenneth J Grimm of the United States Army.” Looking at Zev, he barked, “Run through everything. I want to know everyone with the last name ‘Grimm’ currently or formerly working for the United States Army. The Brat’ya Mrachnyy may be classified, but there has to be other things they’ve done that are not.”

It took about an hour, before two more pictures joined the first on the screen. Byer’s eyes were wide as he stared in shock and horror, taking in the near identical features of each of them as well as the ranks that each had managed to achieve. “Holy shit. Who are they?”

“Meet the Grimm brothers, all of whom are currently either active duty or reservists in the United States Army. The one with Outcome Five is the youngest brother, Major Clinton F. Grimm; he’s won the President’s Hundred a record thirteen straight times. The oldest brother is Colonel William M. Grimm; he’s currently the Commandant at Coleman Kaserne in Budingen, Germany. Next is Captain Jason L. Grimm; he was their technical support and communications officer. His file is littered with the kind of crazy engineering feats that the Starks are famous for. Currently he works as a police detective in New York City.”

Looking them over, Eric shook his head. “There were five Cahills; either we’re missing one or these
aren’t the Cahills.”

There was a flurry of typing, before one last picture came up to join the rest. “Meet Police Officer Third Grade Brian J. Gamble. He used to be Barney Grimm, but he changed his name nearly fifteen years ago. I don’t have a current employment history for him; though there’s a note in his police file that his reason for quitting was that he’d been offered a position with the Army. Enlistment history is coming back negative, so whoever enlisted him . . . it wasn’t the DOD.” Flipping through the paperwork, Zev sighed, "The ages fit; Colonel Grimm was born in 1967 and the brothers are all about two years apart and change."

Staring at the pictures on the screen, Byer felt a rush of euphoria not unlike the kind most teenage girls felt when face to face with their favorite boyband or actor. “The Cahills . . . holy shit . . . I am going to enjoy holding this one over Ross.”

“Ross? You mean, General Ross, sir?”

Byer grinned as he nodded, “Not now, of course. I’m going to savor this for a bit. Once I have them all back within DOD custody, then I’ll gloat to Ross.” Turning back to Zev, he insisted, “You said that Captain Grimm was a comms officer; is it possible that he’s tracking Major Grimm?”

“I don’t know, but it’s possible. I can try to locate his IP address; see if it’s online.”

“Do it. And then go ahead and ping his location. With any luck, he’ll lead me right to the rest of them.”

“Ping his location, sir? If we do that, we’re going to give ourselves away too.”

“I’m a lot less worried about that than I am about letting Outcome Five slip through our fingers. Terry, get ahold of your facility. I want to know if they’ve tried to get in and, if they have, whether or not they’re still there.”

It was the matter of a ten minute phone call before Terry looked up from the speaker phone as his plant manager, Mackey, replied from the other end of the line. “Yeah, they were here. They left about half an hour ago.”

Chapter End Notes

Translations:

Brat'ya Mrachnyy - the Brothers Grimm (The codename for the boys' Spec Ops squad for the Army)
Fairy Tales and Science Projects

Chapter Notes

So my laptop has died . . . at least until the replacement part I ordered arrives. That being said, I am still going to try to keep up with posting on time. I apologize for Friday, I was on rotation this weekend, and could find no time to be able to work on this chapter while I was working. However, we are now back to my regularly scheduled program . . . er schedule. Um . . . yeah. :D

Enjoy this chapter, and let me know what you think? Love all of your review so much.

No translations this chapter.
Chapter 119: Fairy Tales and Science Projects

There was no way in hell that Clint was going to let his brother slip through his fingers again; so it shouldn’t have been a surprise when he suddenly appeared at Aaron and Marta’s side as they exited SteriPacific. His brother’s pretty scientist nearly jumped out of her skin, but Aaron’s lips only curved into a small grin at the action. “Still sneaking up on people, little brother?”

“Always,” Clint agreed with a grin and a wink, reaching out to steady the older Grimm unconsciously as Aaron’s eyes slipped closed and he swayed slightly. “Ken, you okay?”
Marta’s tone was brisk and controlled as she explained, “The virus is taking hold; we need to get him horizontal and fast. Pretty soon, he’s going to be too sick to move.”

The S.H.I.E.L.D. sniper nodded firmly in agreement, hauling Aaron’s arm up and over his shoulder as he insisted, “I found a place not far from here . . . just hang on, Ken, all right?”

Hazy blue eyes slipped closed as the DOD operative insisted breathlessly, “I can make it.”

“Good to hear . . . but I’m going to warn you, if I have to carry you like a girl, I’m going to tell Brian that you swooned like a fairytale princess,” the S.H.I.E.L.D archer teased, nose crinkling like a teenager as he bumped his brother’s hip with his own.

“You will not,” Aaron argued, tone sounding just a little stronger at the indignity implied in the threat.

“I totally will. And you know Brian . . . he’ll never let you live it down. So I guess you’d better not make me carry you, huh?” Clint teased, with a sly wink in Marta’s direction.

The scientist giggled softly as she watched the taunt have the desired effect on the older of the two brothers. Though there was a noticeable sheen of sweat on his skin and he still leaned heavily on the younger and smaller of the two, Aaron was most definitely moving under his own power. Able to take the opportunity to really watch the both of them, it was only now that she noticed the truth; though they appeared identical at first glance, the two men were actually anything but.

Clint was more slender though no less muscled than his brother, his frame narrow through both shoulders and hips. Aaron on the other hand was built solid, with wide, strong shoulders and broad square hands, strong enough to defend her one moment and gentle enough to cradle her close the next. Clint’s eyes were an eerie dark grey while Aaron’s eyes were as blue as any perfect summer sky. Having run his examinations for the last four years, Marta knew better than anyone that Aaron’s aural acuity was better than good, while the dark shadows in the younger brother’s ears hinted at some kind of hearing apparatus. It was obvious they cared for each other deeply, though there was an undercurrent of some unknown tension between them that she didn’t dare probe too deeply into; no doubt they’d sort it out without any help from her. Even still, the trust between them was total; there was no way that Aaron would give up control of even a second of planning to his brother if it hadn’t been. They were a study, and she felt beyond privileged to be able to watch them together in this unguarded moment.

Before long, the trio had arrived at a quaint, if rundown, little hotel about a twenty minute walk from the docks. The hostess was dourfaced and forbidding, but the walls were clean and the floors were as close to sparkling as they could get. Clint’s Filipino was broken but understandable, as he thanked the woman and gestured the other two down the hallway towards their room. By this point, it was evident that Aaron was on his feet due only to sheer stubbornness and their arms around his waist, his head hanging tiredly as he shivered between his two companions.

As they entered the tiny room, Clint took the whole of Aaron’s weight as he nodded Marta toward the door. “Lock the door, Doc . . . and get that chair under the handle. It won’t hold for very long if someone really wants in, but it’ll give us a second or two of warning.”

Her eyes very wide, the pretty scientist whirled to do as told while the archer lowered his brother onto the bed. The DOD operative swayed slightly, eyes slipping closed in exhaustion as the younger brother began to manhandle his t-shirt and jacket from his overheated body. The very corner of Aaron’s lip quirked in a brief smirk as he teased, “When did you get so good at stripping off clothes?”
The younger brother’s only answer was a wink, before he eased his brother gently back onto the mattress. Laying a tender hand to Aaron’s forehead, Clint swore briefly. “Shit, Ken . . . you’re burning up.”

Aaron’s head tossed on the pillow as he confessed, “I nearly died the first time.”

Slender blond brows flew into his hairline as Clint echoed, “First time?” Turning to Marta, he demanded angrily, “What FIRST TIME!?”

Marta took a deep breath in as she sunk onto the bed beside her protector’s hip, reaching to take his hand and hold it between both of her own. Blue eyes smiled at her warmly, despite the fact that their owner looked like death warmed over. Squeezing the appendage in an attempt at comfort, Marta answered the young sniper honestly, “Your brother’s enhancements are due to a minor fine tuning in his chromosomes; the chems he was taking made sure that the enhancements remained in his body. However, the chems only offered temporary adhesion, which was why it was important that he continued taking them.”

Grey eyes as cool and hard as steel bored into her as he grit out, “That part I get . . . what does he mean that he nearly died?”

“The program authorities viraled all of the program participants off of physical medication about eight months ago. Because the enhancements are implemented using a virus, in order to remove the dependence on the medication, it was necessary to inject them with live virus in order to make the enhancements permanent.”

“So you got him sick . . . on purpose. What the hell gives you the damned right?!?” Clint snapped jaw tight as he glared at her.

Having already gone down this road with Aaron, Marta did the only thing she could and shut her mouth. If Clint was anything like the older brother – and there was considerable evidence to suggest that they were in fact a lot alike – there wasn’t anything she was going to be able to say that would ease his anger. For a long minute, the archer loomed over her before at last he sagged in on himself with a resigned sigh.

Crouching beside his brother’s bed, he laid a gentle hand on his brother’s forehead as he asked, “What the hell is it with the Cahills and scientists, huh, big brother?”

Aaron’s laughter was a wheeze as he shrugged, “Just lucky, I guess.”

Sensing that this conversation was just between the brothers, and that they would tell her the details if and when they felt like it, Marta only focused her attention onto Aaron. Every inch of his skin was shining with a heavy sheen of sweat, his eyes dangerously fever-bright. “How do you feel, Aaron?”

“I’m not dying yet,” he replied with a small wink.

“You’re not going to die,” Clint insisted, pushing himself to his feet and moving towards the door. “There’s an ice machine in the lobby. I’m gonna go get a few things to help with his fever; do not leave this room. Understand, Doc?”

Nodding firmly, she watched as he moved the chair and strode from the room, the door closing behind him. Turning back to Aaron, she chuckled lightly, “I don’t think that ended as well as it could have.”

There was a tired smile on his face as Aaron shook his head, “Don’t worry about Clint. He’s all fuss;
a lot of it is because of what happened when we were kids. It’s not personal, I promise.”

Marta bit down on her lower lip, the name “Cahill” tugging firmly at a thread in the back of her mind. “You’re a Project Cahill child . . . aren’t you?”

Aaron blinked at her in surprise, his tone low as he demanded, “What do you know about Project Cahill?”

The scientist’s eyes went very wide as she realized that he was frightened, her hands flying out to caress his face as she sought to reassure him. “I don’t know much, Aaron, I swear. I only know what little was in the research files.”

“Research files?”

“Mm-hm. Back in the 1940’s, there was a program called . . .”

There was a genuine smirk as Aaron chuckled, “Project Rebirth. I know. It had only one successful outcome, Captain America.” Shaking his head against his pillow, he remarked dryly, “Project Cahill was created to try and replace him. But we escaped the base where they created us when we were still practically babies; my brother, Will, was the oldest and he was only 12. Clint wasn’t even three years old yet.”

“So you are a Cahill child?”

There was a long pause, before Aaron replied, “Yes. So is Clint. It’s why we look so much alike. The man we call our father was the genetic donor when they cloned us. There were five of us; and we all look identical.”

Marta chuckled as she shook her head, “Not identical. They’re subtle, but there are differences.”

Chuckling slightly, Aaron replied, “You know, the only one who’s ever been able to tell us apart with our backs turned is my sister, Marina.”

“Marina? I don’t remember there being any female Cahills.”

Clint’s voice from the doorway made Marta jump, though Aaron only grinned at his brother’s tendency to scare the bejesus out of people. “You may know her better by the name ‘Mary’.”

Eyes wide at the name, she breathed in awe, “Mary Peters. She disappeared at the same time as the Cahills. There are notes that imply General Ross attempted to hunt her down with the intent to execute her for treason.”

“That sounds about right,” Clint agreed, holding out the bucket of supplies he’d gotten in the lobby. Taking the bucket, Marta soaked one of the rags in the cool water and draped it across Aaron’s burning forehead before hurriedly putting together makeshift icepacks. Working quickly and efficiently, Marta stripped the older brother of his jeans. Ignoring Aaron’s cry, she tucked the packs into the hollows of his armpits, between his thighs and under the back of his neck, while Clint continued explaining, “Her name is actually Marina Ivanovna Petrovka; she was a Russian spy sent to infiltrate Project Cahill and report her findings back to her handlers. They assigned her to be the caretaker for the children that Cahill created and she fell completely in love with us.”

“So why did she finally decide to leave the program and take you with her?”

Aaron’s voice filled the room as he replied in Clint’s stead, “When I was 5 years old, General Ross was going to have me put down, because I wasn’t performing up to the standard he’d set for me.
They’d create a new model and hopefully this time they’d get my specifications right. Marina couldn’t bear to have anything happen to me, so she took us away.”

Marta’s eyebrows furrowed, as she asked, “But then why didn’t they just make a new batch when you disappeared? I mean, they had all the material to replace you all right?”

The archer’s grin was wicked as he slouched back against the wall, “Nope. Marina torched it all.”

The older brother nodded as he picked up the story from there, “All they had left were the preliminary files on us; the genetic material, our examination results, everything else was destroyed. They’d already spent twelve years on the program; Ross couldn’t convince his superiors that devoting another 18 years into building a new crop of Cahills was worth it. So Project Cahill got scrapped and Ross instead devoted his attention onto trying to hunt us down.”

Marta’s tone was appropriately deadpan as she reminded him dryly, “And even knowing that he was hunting you down, you joined the Army.”

Clint’s grin was wide as he shrugged, “It seemed like a good idea at the time. And it’s worked out well for this family so far; the Brass doesn’t really look at its soldiers too closely unless they’re fucking up.”

Suddenly reminded of what Aaron had said about staying in Bethesda, Marta cocked an eyebrow at her protector and teased, “Plenty of experience at hiding in plain sight, huh?”

“Hey, it worked didn’t it?” the munitions expert reminded her with a tired grin. His eyes slipped closed then as he let out a heavy breath, “Jesus, I don’t remember being so tired last time.”

“According to your files, last time you slept the whole time,” Marta reminded him, her hand coming out to brush through his hair. “Close your eyes, Aaron . . . we’re safe here.”

“But . . . if they find us . . .”

“Don’t you trust Clint to protect us while you rest?”

“Of course, but . . .”

Sensing that Aaron was battling with his need for sleep, Clint moved to his backpack and pulled out an e-reader. He fiddled with it for a minute, before offering it to her. Marta frowned as she looked down at the tiny tablet, the title of “The Ugly Duckling” glaring up at her from the screen. Looking up at him, she deadpanned, “A fairy tale. What exactly am I supposed to do with this?”

“When we were kids at the base and we’d gotten hurt or there was some exam or we’d just had a bad day, Marina used to climb into our beds with us and read us stories. My older brother Brian loved anything from the ‘Arabian Nights’, though his favorite was ‘Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves’. Jason was a big fan of ‘The Five Chinese Brothers’. I loved ‘Little Red Riding Hood’, ‘Snow White & Red Rose’ and ‘Rumpelstiltskin’ and pretty much any of the other stories the Brothers Grimm used to write down.” There was a pause and snicker, before he continued, “And now my favorite is ‘Hansel and Gretel’, but don’t tell my father I told you so.” Aaron chuckled at his brother, the two obviously sharing in the joke. It was only a moment before Clint sobered and continued, “Aaron loved fairytales the best though; ‘Cinderella’, ‘The Frog Prince’, and ‘The Ugly Duckling’ were his favorites.”

Her fingers moved tenderly through Aaron’s hair as his head tossed restlessly, her voice quiet as she asked, “Why?”
Aaron’s voice was sad and quiet as he answered, “Because in each of them, the hero or heroine transforms into something better than they were at the beginning.”

Looking back down at Aaron, horror filling her heart at the implications there, Marta trailed her free hand down the curves of his arm before entwining her fingers with his. Squeezing lightly, she turned her attention to the tablet in her lap and began to read. “Once upon a time down on an old farm, lived a duck family . . .”

It was a long time before Marta stopped reading, Aaron’s breathing slow and steady in sleep beside her. Looking up to where Clint sat perched in the windowsill, his eyes glued to the streets below and a sleek black rifle draped across his thighs, she asked, “What about your oldest brother? I think Aaron called him Will?”

Clint frowned as he turned to look at her, head cocking curiously. “Will? What about Will?”

“What stories did Marina read to your brother, Will?”

There was a deep sadness on his features as the archer shook his head slowly, “She didn’t.”
Homeward Bound

Chapter Notes

Yay early. There WILL still be a chapter tomorrow as well, never fear. Enjoy. Only one translation today. Also, Amerou and I have combined everything into one series, "The Project Cahill". If you haven't had the opportunity to read her contribution to this verse, follow the link at the top. Enjoy!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes
Chapter 120: Homeward Bound

Clint was only seconds off Aaron’s heels as the two dashed along the rooftops, chasing Marta and her pursuers through the streets of Manila. She’d left their room that morning to get some aspirin to help manage the lingering fever Aaron was suffering with, leaving Clint to watch over the still sleeping Grimm, and her scream had been the saving grace to alert the two brothers to the presence of the Manila Police outside their hotel. Finally, they slid to a stop over an alleyway, looking down to see Marta trapped between two policemen. The looks between them was eloquent, before they allowed themselves to free fall into the alley and on top of the two officers.
“Down,” Aaron ordered the doctor, even as the two brothers made due with the tiny space and took their pursuers down. Looking down at Marta, he asked, “You okay?”

Her eyes were aglow with relief and adoration as she nodded, “Yeah.”

“Good. Come on,” he insisted, reaching out to take her hand and assisting her to her feet.

The three moved to the street, Clint already trying to locate the dock in relation to where they were now. “Okay, the harbor is about a thirty minute walk that way if you take the roads,” the younger brother announced, pointing back through the buildings. “It’s only about five minutes away if you use the rooftops.”

“I don’t think that Marta knows how to parkour across the roofs, little brother,” Aaron reminded him dryly.

“Which is why I’m going to take the high road and head that way. You and Marta take the streets and I’ll meet you there.”

Marta’s brown eyes were wide and frightened as she asked, “But how will we find you once we get there?”

“Don’t worry about that. I’ll find you before you find me,” Clint promised with a tight smile in her direction. Turning his attention onto his brother, he insisted, “Don’t keep me waiting, okay? They’re pretty determined to get to us, and I am not relishing the idea of telling Will and Marina that their first meeting with you in five years is going to be from the inside of a Filipino prison. Deal?”

Aaron nodded solemnly, tightening his hold on Marta’s hand as he promised, “We’ll meet you there. I’m going to try to find something a little faster than hoofing it. Less than half an hour, promise.”

The younger brother nodded firmly, the two embracing briefly before Clint turned and scaled the side of the building behind him like it was a stairwell. Marta’s jaw dropped a little, before the archer disappeared from sight and the DOD operative was pulling her along beside him. The next half an hour was nerve-wracking to say the least. Neither had been aware that they were being hunted by more than just the police. The arrival of an asset with a stern face was almost more than they could successfully manage. It had seemed for a moment that Aaron wasn’t going to be able to hang on to consciousness, which had left the task of getting the assassin to Marta; it would be much later before she had the opportunity to really consider the action she’d taken when she kicked him from the motorcycle and into the pole. But at the time all she could think of at the time was that Aaron was possibly bleeding to death and it was her responsibility to protect him this time.

The two lay on the concrete at the dock for a long moment, trying to catch their breath and gather enough strength to move. Aaron was bleeding sluggishly from both thigh and shoulder, but as soon as he could take in enough air, he rolled to face her and link their hands together. “Are you okay?” he breathed, eyes heavy-lidded as he fought to focus through the numbing haze of high fever and bone-deep exhaustion.

Her eyes were wide as she nodded mutely, the synapses in her brain firing rapidly as she caught sight of the still, mangled body only a stone’s throw away from them. Aaron’s smile was small as he squeezed her hand, dropping his head back against the concrete again, hands still linked firmly. “You did good, Doc.”

“I killed that man Aaron,” she breathed, her free hand coming up to press against her mouth.

Clint’s voice behind her was approving as he insisted, “And saved both of your lives. You did
good.”

Marta whirled to face him, taking in the black tactical clothing – the kind she had only ever seen in spy movies – with that black rifle slung across his back. He winked at her reassuringly as he came to crouch beside them. “Clint . . .” she gasped, feeling as though her throat was closing up.

Seeming to understand what she couldn’t say, Clint reached to squeeze her shoulder lightly. “It’s okay, Doc. You and Aaron are safe now . . . you have my word.” Turning to his brother, dark grey eyes locked on to sky blue, the two brothers taking stock of each other. Finally Clint asked, “You good?”

Grunting as he forced himself to a seated position, Aaron muttered miserably, “I’m going to assume that question is rhetorical. And therefore not kick your ass for it.”

The S.H.I.E.L.D sniper grinned at the older brother, and shifted to haul the other man’s arm over his shoulders. “As if you could. Come on, whiner . . . our ride’s here.”

There was a long pause while Marta moved to slip under Aaron’s other arm to lighten the weight on Clint. Finally, as they began to move from the crash scene, the older brother’s voice – quiet and thready – filled the empty space with the question of, “Now what?”

Clint’s only reply was a soft grunt as he guided the two towards a nondescript old fishing boat. Between the two of them, they managed to get Aaron aboard the boat and into the Captain’s cabin, the blue eyed Grimm letting out a relieved sigh as he was lowered onto the blessedly, if incongruously, thick mattress. Handing Marta a tackle box filled with medical supplies, he glanced out the window as he headed toward the door. “I’m gonna let you get him patched up. That wreck left quite a mess and we should be long gone before anyone starts asking too many questions.”

Marta nodded her understanding, watching as the younger man all but prowled from the compartment. Turning to Aaron, she took in his exhausted features as he dozed on the bed, twin spots of color at the apples of his cheeks a clear indication that his fever was once again rising. The corner of her lips turned up in adoration as she trailed her fingers through his hair. “No matter what happens next, Aaron, I’m with you. Always.”

It wasn’t long before the old boat’s practically ancient engine roared to fragile life, seeming to be as eager as its pilot to be gone from the harbor that had been its home and final resting place for much too long. Though she shouldn’t have been, nevertheless, Marta found herself surprised when the boat moved easily under Clint’s guidance toward the mouth of the harbor. Seeming to sense her shock, even with his eyes closed, Aaron smirked. “Clint is a spoiled brat.”

One eyebrow cocked upwards in confusion as Marta asked, “I’m sorry?”

“One eyebrow cocked upwards in confusion as Marta asked, “I’m sorry?”

“Clint is a spoiled brat. He’s Marina’s favorite, the baby of the family, so she spoiled him. When he was fifteen, he decided he wanted to grow up and be a sailor; so Marina bought him a little sailboat.”

One eye cocked up to smile up at her, “As I said . . . spoiled brat.”

Marta chuckled reaching into the tackle box for a stack of gauze pads and a bottle of hydrogen peroxide. “If you’re well enough to be poking fun at your brother, I think you’ll live, Agent Cross.”

There was a long pause as the DOD operative considered the term of address, before pushing himself into a seated position. Marta glared at him in silent admonishment, before sighing despairingly at the stubborn grin he gave her in return. Turning her attention onto the bullet wound in his thigh, she bent her head to her task silently. Finally he spoke, causing Marta to jump in surprise from where she was cleaning out the wound in his shoulder. “Grimm.”
Feeling as though she’d missed something important, and feeling a little like a mimic bird, she repeated, “I’m sorry?”

“My name? It’s Sergeant Kenneth James Grimm,” he confessed, both eyes open as he turned to watch her reaction.

Sensing that she had just been gifted with something infinitely precious, the pretty scientist watched him for a long moment before she bent and pressed her lips tenderly to his own. “I think I like Aaron Kenneth Grimm much better.”

Though it felt like an eternity while she waited for the munitions expert’s brain to catch up with the change in dynamic between them, it really was only seconds before Aaron’s hands were tangled in her hair and his mouth was slanting over her’s passionately. Not even Peter had made her feel like this; like she was flying and grounded all at the same time. It was only the sound of her whimper that tore the two of them apart, both breathing hard as they stared at each other.

To Marta, it seemed as though time stood still until at last Aaron smiled at her adoringly, fingers of his uninjured right hand coming up to brush a strand of hair out of her face. “When we have the time, we’re going to talk about this. Okay?”

Blushing to what felt like the roots of her hair, Marta ducked her head with a nod and a quiet, “Okay.”

Kissing her again, Aaron shoved himself to his feet unsteadily, waving her away as she moved to assist him. “Come on. Clint is being deliberately vague about what happens next. Take it from me, that’s never a good thing.”

They found Clint in the pilothouse, bent over a navigation table as he plotted a course to what looked like Hong Kong. Aaron frowned as he took in the antiquated equipment and calculated the distance in his head. “Is this rust bucket going to make it to Hong Kong?”

Clint looked up with a fond glare as he scolded, “Do not knock on Petunia. She has easily hurt feelings. Either way, in answer to your question, yes. She’ll get us there; the old girl’s got a lot of life in her yet.”

Aaron braced one hip against the table across from his brother and tugged Marta into his arms, his forearm resting low on her hip. “Clint, why are we going to Hong Kong? I thought you said we were going to Germany, to see Will and Marina . . . so that they can sneak the Doc and I back into the country.”

“We are. But we can’t exactly take Petunia over land, can we?”

“That doesn’t explain Hong Kong.”

“Doesn’t it? There’s an S.H.I.E.L.D. base Hong Kong. One whose commander owes me a favor . . . a favor which I intend to collect on.”

“You’re going to have S.H.I.E.L.D. fly us to Germany!? S.H.I.E.L.D. is part of the Department of Homeland Security. DHS works closely with the DOD!”

Clint cocked an eyebrow at his brother, folding his arms on the tabletop and leaning against them. “Please Ken . . . give me a little credit. I’m just going to borrow a Quinjet, and he’s not going to notice it’s missing for a few hours. I’ve already cleared it with him and we made a deal; he asks me no questions and I’ll tell him no lies.” Shrugging haphazardly, the archer returned his attention to his charts. “Seriously, when did you go all, ‘O Ye of Little Faith’ on me, huh? Have I let you down
yet?”

Sensing that Clint’s feelings were truly hurt, Aaron grimaced slightly and shifted from under Marta. Coming to his brother’s side, he leaned forward onto his elbows next to his brother. “Sorry, little brother. Outcome made me paranoid; I trust you, no question.”

The sly look on Clint’s face then immediately made Aaron reconsider. After all, it hadn’t been Aaron who had come up with the fantastically stupid idea to spy on Dad and Maria back in ’98. Drawing back warily, the older of the two brothers demanded, “Why do I have the feeling that I am NOT going to like this?”

If anything, Clint’s grin only widened as he asked, “Hey Aaron . . . how do you think you look in a dress?”

Aaron’s smile was feral looking as he hissed, “Not a chance in hell, little brother.”

Clint pouted, though his eyes were still twinkling with teasing mirth. “Spoilsport,” he joked, barely managing to avoid the punch his brother threw his way.

Eighteen hours later, Col. William Michael Grimm was bolting to their front door, to try and stop the jackass on the doorstep from punching the doorbell. Marina was asleep, trying to get some rest before she had to wake up to help Will pack up their little house on base. Flinging open the door, the Colonel caught the wrist just as it moved to push the bell again, growling, “I heard the bell the first time.” Looking up from the hand, Will froze for a second at the sight of Clint on the doorstep. “Clint!? What are you doing here?”

Clint’s grin was bright and wide as he reached for something out of sight with the reply, “I brought you something.”

If Will had been surprised to see Clint, the sight of Kenny stepping into view nearly stopped his heart. Kenny’s smile was broken and unsure as he scuffed his uniform shoes against the ground. “Hey, big brother. It’s good to see you.”

It was all of a moment before Will was taking those few steps separating them and throwing his arms firmly around his little brother’s neck. For a startled second, Kenny stood motionless, having not expected quite this reaction from the notoriously stoic Will Grimm. Then, a sob breaking free from deep in his chest, he threw his arms around his big brother’s waist, burying his face against his neck and starting to quietly cry. The warm weight of the Colonel’s hand on the back of his neck was familiar as Will buried his face in the younger brother’s hair and murmured, “Welcome home, malysh . . . welcome home.”

Chapter End Notes

Translation:

malysh - kiddo
Chapter 121: Homecoming and Reunions

Marta Shearing knew the basic details about the Project Cahill, and at least a little bit about the children that the program had created. Most of what she’d learned about them had been learned from Clint and Aaron in that little motel room in Manila. The former DOD operative had told her that there were five of them and Marta had figured out for herself that none of them were perfectly identical, though the resemblance was uncanny . . . to put it mildly. Knowing that subjectively and seeing the evidence of it right in front of her face were two different things though.

Seeing Aaron crying in the arms of an older version of himself was unsettling to say the least.
Shifting an inch closer to Clint, she watched as the oldest Grimm zeroed onto the action like a heat-seeking missile. The man his brothers called “the Colonel” lifted his head and turned to look at her, quicksilver eyes flashing through colors so fast that Marta couldn’t keep up with them all. A small furrow manifested between his eyebrows, features stern as he took her in. Patting the back of Aaron’s head once more, Will released him and took a step back, his eyes flashing along the street in search of any witnesses to the homecoming. “Come inside; there is enough gossip going around base about Marina and me without consciously adding more to it.”

Aaron’s smile was warm and comforting as he reached back to offer her his hand, while the Colonel reentered the tiny two bedroom house the couple had been assigned on base. Marta looked up at her erstwhile protector with wide eyes, murmuring, “He doesn’t like me, does he?”

Clint grinned at her as he squeezed her shoulder, “Don’t worry about it. Will doesn’t like anyone the first time he meets them. He’s a little overprotective that way.”

“It’s the only complaint Marina really has about him,” the second youngest Grimm chuckled, as he tugged her into his side and guided her through the front door. “Otherwise, they’re very happy together.”

Marta’s head cocked at the statement, her mind flashing back to the conversation they’d had only days before about the fact that Marina Ivanovna Petrovka had for all intents and purposes raised the Cahill children. “Happy together? What do you mean?”

“Will and Marina have been together for about fourteen years,” the archer replied, before he disappeared into the interior of the house.

The scientist froze at the answer, her eyes flashing wide as she looked up at Aaron. “I thought Marina raised you? Isn’t that a little . . . Westermarck Effect . . . ish?”

Just like had been in Clint’s eyes when he’d told her Marina had never read to Will, there was a deep sadness in Aaron’s eyes as he shook his head. “Marina didn’t raise Will; they took him away from us when he was only three years old. He was usually up and gone before we woke up, and he didn’t get home from training until long after we’d gone to bed.”

Marta bit down on her lower lip, feeling compassion and horror fill her heart at the information. “Your poor brother.”

“Don’t let him hear you say that. He’s pretty happy with how everything turned out in the long run,” the munitions expert laughed, pulling her close enough to press a sweet kiss to her temple.

The two entered the living room, to see Will kneeling by a box on the floor and Clint perched hawk-like on the armrest of a Lazyboy. Reaching over, Aaron shoved his brother sprawling into the armchair, getting a startled squawk from the younger man. The Colonel was focused on the object he was wrapping in newspaper, though there was a small smirk on his lips at the sound. “So . . . it’s good to see that some thing’s never change.”

Aaron’s grin was sly as he wrinkled his nose at the youngest brother, “Yeah, like Clint’s shitty balance.”

“Fuck you very much, Kenny,” Clint quipped cheerfully, wiggling himself into a more comfortable position in the chair.

With his free hand, Aaron gestured to his female companion. “Will, I’d like you to meet Dr. Marta Shearing . . . Marta, this is my oldest brother, Colonel William Grimm.”
“It’s a pleasure to meet you, Colonel sir,” Marta insisted meekly, as she nodded her head in his direction.

Quicksilver eyes were assessing as he watched her, before nodding once in agreement. “Same. Please, take a seat. I’m just doing some packing up; the base closes up tomorrow and neither Marishka nor I want to say even a second longer than we have to.”

Clint’s eyes swept what little of the downstairs was visible from where he sat, taking in the boxes and the noticeable absence of his older brother’s adored and adoring Russian, before turning back to the oldest Grimm. “Where’s Marina?”

“Marishka is upstairs, asleep. She worked her last shift last night; she was relieved about an hour ago, so I’m trying to let her get some rest before we get lost in the business of packing up and moving on.”

Aaron settled into the loveseat comfortably and pulled Marta down with him, as the archer frowned, “You’re coming home, right? You’re not taking another post? The whole clusterfuck at S.H.I.E.L.D. is over and Marina was completely cleared of any wrongdoing.”

The Colonel chuckled as he smiled fondly at his brother, “No, we’re not taking a new posting. Marina is looking forward to going home. Vika’s wedding is the day after we get in, and even if it wasn’t, Marina’s missed you boys like hell.”

Marta’s voice was quiet and meek as she inquired, “Vika?”

“Marina’s older sister, Viktoriya Dubrovskaya,” Will answered kindly, before smiling at Aaron, “She’ll be glad to hear that you’re all right, Aaron. She called Marina in a panic when the Treadstone scandal hit S.H.I.E.L.D.”


“Apparently, NRAG is making accusations against S.H.I.E.L.D. about harboring Treadstone fugitives within their ranks,” the Colonel replied, eyes on Clint as he cocked his head slightly in Marta’s direction. “NRAG demanded personnel files, looking for anyone by the name of Grimm on the payroll.”

Clint’s grin was flippant as he snarked, “Good thing there aren’t any Grimms on S.H.I.E.L.D.’s payroll then, huh? Didn’t Marina say those aliases would come in handy?”

Meanwhile, Aaron’s eyes were wide with pure horror, his body bolting forward as he demanded, “Wait . . . the DOD knows about the Grimms?”

“Jason hacked the Pentagon’s servers; apparently, the DOD is pretty in the dark about NRAG’s accusations. From the looks of things, they’re trying to keep their spectacular fuck-up pretty well under wraps.” Will turned his attention back onto Marta, eyes a dark green as he considered her. “Could someone please explain why you’re all so willing to talk about this in front of her?”

“She knows about the Cahills,” Clint answered, before Aaron finished the reply, “And she knows that we are the Cahills.”

Will’s eyes widened a half a fraction, before he looped his wrists around his knees and allowed his wrists to hold his weight as he leaned back slightly. “And how exactly did she find out about that particular bit of intel?”
Aaron blushed lightly, ducking his head under the censure implied in Will’s gaze as he confessed, “I told her.”

Will’s lips compressed slightly, the look of disappointment on his features causing Aaron to duck his head in embarrassment. “I see. We’ll discuss that later.” Turning to Clint, the Colonel cocked an eyebrow, “Speaking of actions in need of discussion, your boyfriend is pissed off as hell about your little disappearing act. And Marina’s not exactly thrilled about it either; fortunately, Jason was able to keep tabs on you through your phone, so the two of them at least knew where you were and that you were okay.”

Clint’s meek, “I know,” was nearly buried under the sound of Aaron’s shocked, “Boyfriend!?”

Will cocked an eyebrow at the second youngest Grimm, before turning his attention back onto the S.H.I.E.L.D. sniper, “You didn’t tell him about Bucky?”

“In my own defense, there wasn’t really any time, what with the whole ‘running for our lives’ thing,” Clint insisted with a hapless shrug. “I was going to tell him. You just beat me to it.”

Rounding on his baby brother, the munitions expert blurted, “Wait, you’re gay?”

Clint’s face twisted at the question, before he shook his head, “No, just flexible.”

Aaron’s eyebrows disappeared into his hairline as he repeated, “Flexible!? What the hell does that mean?”

Will’s tone was appropriately deadpan as he replied, “There was a flamenco dancer in Chile. Don’t ask.”

“A flamenco dancer,” Marta giggled, her nose wrinkling at the information. “Did you have fun?”

“I think she probably had more fun that we did; threesomes are not as awesome as porn would have you believe,” the archer insisted, with a roll of his eyes.

The entire room could see the color rising in Aaron’s cheeks as he practically blushed to the roots of his hair. “Wait, let me make sure I have this right. You and your boyfriend – Bozhe moi that’s going to take some getting used to – had a threesome with a flamenco dancer in Chile. How fucking long was I gone?”

The entire room froze at the question, before Aaron’s hand shoved back through his hair as he begged, “Can we just forget I asked that?”

Will’s smile was sad but understanding as he nodded once in agreement, silver eyes sharp as they pinned Clint to his chair and forestalled whatever snide comment he’d been about to make. The conversation was saved from further awkwardness by the sound of a female voice upstairs. “Misha? Where are you? You had better not be packing already; you promised you’d wake me up first.”

Chuckling at the scold, the Colonel pushed himself to his feet and moved to the entrance of the living room. “Marishka, samaya malen’kaya, come downstairs. I have a surprise for you.”

The sound of light, skipping steps down the stairs caused Aaron to panic, his head starting to shake frantically from side to side as he sought an exit route from the room that didn’t put him directly into Marina’s line of sight. Clint shook his head with a sigh, gesturing in his brother’s direction as the sniper begged the beautiful doctor, “Marta, do me a favor and sit on him.”
Chuckling at the instruction, the virologist nevertheless did as she was told, plopping down onto Aaron’s lap and effectively pinning him onto the loveseat. Then, she turned to look toward where Will was waiting for his partner to join him, an adoring smile on his face as he watched her come down the stairwell. A graceful, long-fingered hand threading through the hair at the back of the man’s head, a mosaic opal on the ring finger, was her first impression of the woman, along with a cloud of chaotic brunette curls as the Colonel bent to kiss her good morning. Her tone was teasing as she laughed, “You don’t think we have enough to haul home with us? You had to get me something else to try and pack?”

“Not that kind of surprise,” Will insisted, stepping out of her line of sight and bringing Aaron, Clint and Marta into view at last.

Upon first sight, the only thought that Marta could process was this; Marina Ivanovna Petrovka was a plain kind of pretty. Based on the adoration each of her men had for her, Marta had been expecting someone a little more awe-inspiring. She wasn’t gorgeous or even beautiful; she was slender and petite, possessed of homely but pleasant features and a striking pair of hot chocolate eyes.

It was about then that the pretty scientist noticed the look on the woman’s face as she stared at the former DOD operative she had not seen in five years. Watching the joyous smile break across her face, Marta suddenly understood exactly why her men adored her; her love was unconditional and enduring. It would stand true through any test, even through one such as this. Currently, she was staring at Aaron as though he was some kind of answer to a prayer. Marta stood from her perch as Aaron pushed himself to his feet, his head ducking as he greeted her fondly, “Hey Marina.”

Marina practically floated to stand before him, her hands coming up to cup his cheeks. For a long moment the two stared at each other, the only physical contact between them Marina’s fingers on his face. Bowing his head, Aaron begged wretchedly, “Marina... moya sestra... say something. Please?”

When she finally spoke, Marta nearly jumped out of her skin. “I don’t care who you are now... I don’t care what name you answer to. I want you to listen to me, and most importantly, I want you to hear me as well.” Her fingertips were caressing against the curves of his cheeks as she stared into his eyes. “There is no WORLD, no dimension, no galaxy in which I don’t love you. There is no sin you could commit that would make me cast you aside. You are my son in all the ways that matter to a mother. In every world, every dimension and every galaxy, you are mine... and I will never give you up. Ty menya ponimayesh, solnyshko? (Do you understand me, Sunshine?)”

And unlike Aaron’s breakdown against his brother’s shoulder, this time Aaron nearly folded in on himself as he choked out a breathless reply, “Da.”

Marina’s eyes slipped closed as her son’s forehead came to rest against her own. “Ya lyubyu tebya, solynshko... Always.”

Chapter End Notes

Translations:

Bozhe moi - Oh my God
Samaya malen’kaya - my little one (Will's nickname for Marina)
Ya lyublyu tebya - I love you
Solnyshko - sunshine (Marina's nickname for Kenny)
Moya sestra - my sister
Chapter 122: Coming to Terms

The two stood for a long moment, before Marina squeezed Aaron’s shoulders lightly and the munitions expert flinched widely. Jolting backwards, chocolate eyes narrowed suspiciously as she watched Aaron make an aborted grab for his left shoulder. “What happened?”
Clint piped up cheerfully from behind her, “He got shot in Manila.”

The Russian’s flashed wide, before she ordered firmly, “Kitchen . . . now. And that uniform shirt had better be off by the time I get there.”

Knowing better than to argue with her, Aaron only ducked his head to kiss her cheek before heading toward the kitchen, his fingers already at work on his uniform jacket and the khaki colored shirt underneath it. Turning to the only unknown in the room, Marina’s eyes narrowed for a moment as she took her in. Marta blushed, head ducking and her hands coming to clasp in front of her, bringing the diamond ring she still wore into clear view. At the sight of it, Marina visibly relaxed and smiled. “The Ireland Argument . . . I remember that ring. My boy must trust you, if he gave you that ring.”

Only just remembering that she was standing in front of the owner of the ring in question, the scientist jolted and moved to remove it. “Oh, I’m so sorry. I’ve just gotten used to wearing it,” the woman apologized sincerely, offering the brunette the ring.

Marina took the ring reverently, smiling fondly as the diamond caught the light and glowed in her palm. Turning to look back over her shoulder, she chuckled, “Do you remember this ring?” she asked her paramour, holding it over her shoulder to show him.

Will’s eyes narrowed as he came forward to get a better look at it. Taking it from her fingers gently, he examined it for a moment before chuckling and offering it back to her, “I still maintain that I was right.”

Marina’s snort was amused as she teased, “You would.”

Grinning at her, Will bent to kiss her cheek. “Love you, Marishka, even if you were wrong.”

“I was not . . . I have the diamond to prove it,” she taunted, nose wrinkling fondly as she skipped past him, giggling as she barely evaded his grab for her.

Will was still chuckling as she disappeared from view, turning to look at Marta. “Do you have any other clothes? Those are pretty well destroyed at this point.”

Marta looked down at her tattered clothing, shaking her head. “We lost the majority of our things when the police caught up to us in Manila. This is all I have left.”

“What about Aaron? Does he have anything other than his uniform?”

“He has one change of clothes, but they’re pretty destroyed too, Will. There’s faint bloodstains that we can’t get out and there’s bullet holes in the fabric too,” Clint replied, reaching up to scratch at the back of his head.

Taking a deep breath, the Colonel nodded lightly. “All right. I’ll go grab a few things for both you and Aaron, Dr. Shearing. You’re taller than Marina, so we’ll have to head to the BX to get you some new clothes, but I think she has some track shorts and a t-shirt that should fit you for right now. In the meantime, why don’t you come with me? You look like you could use a shower and some rest in a real bed. We haven’t packed up the guest room yet, so there should be clean sheets on the foldout.”

Marta’s small smile was relieved as she nodded, “That sounds wonderful, Colonel Grimm, thank you.” Turning her attention toward the kitchen, she nibbled on her lower lip for a moment. “Although . . . I should probably check on Aaron. He still had a very mild fever this morning because of the procedure.”

Clint shook his head, placing his hands on her shoulders and steering her toward the door. “Don’t
worry about him . . . Marina’ll fuss over him for an hour, before sending him up to take a shower and a nap too. He’ll be just fine, promise.

The young scientist was clearly conflicted, nibbling her lower lip as she stared towards where Aaron had disappeared only minutes before. “I don’t know . . .” she hummed, lifting her hand up to her mouth as she nibbled on her thumbnail.

Sensing that this girl did truly care about his little brother, Will huffed out a soft breath as he muttered to himself, “What is it with this family and bringing home stray pets?” Stepping to her side, he wrapped his arm around her shoulders and began to literally herd her towards the stairwell. She protested for all of a second, before realizing that there would be no escaping the Colonel’s implacable grip. “Aaron is going to be just fine . . . Marina will take very good care of him. As for you, Aaron would want us to take care of you. Therefore, you and I are going to go upstairs. I’m going to show you to the guestroom, get you some of Marina’s clothes to change into and then you’re going to lay down on the foldout and get some rest. If there is anything in that that you do not understand, tell me now. Otherwise . . .”

Marta looked up at the Colonel with wide brown eye, a bright sheen lingering that clued Will into the fact that she was only seconds away from a good cry. Giving her an understanding smile, Will squeezed her shoulder lightly and promised, “The shower head in the guest bathroom is ridiculously loud. If you know what I mean . . .”

Lower lip trembling, the pretty scientist nodded meekly. “Thank you.”

There was a small smile from the Colonel, reaching to push open a door in the upstairs hallway. “Here you are, Dr. Shearing. I’ll leave the clothes outside the door. Clint and I are going to head to the BX, so if you need anything just ask Marina. All right?”

She nodded, slipping from under his arm and moving into the bathroom. Will waited for her to close the door before moving into the master bedroom and gathering a few of Marina’s clothes, as well as a pair of jeans and an old t-shirt for Aaron to change into after his own shower. Setting the track shorts and tank top outside the bathroom, the oldest Grimm knocked briefly on the door before moving toward the stairs.

Aaron was sitting obediently on a barstool, letting Marina examine his injured shoulder. Clint was leaning back in the corner of the counters, munching contentedly on an apple as he and his brother slung good-natured insults at each other. Leaning his shoulder against the wall, Will watched his partner fuss for a bit, before speaking up. “So? Will the patient live?”

Marina’s lips were a thin line as she nodded silently, wrapping the plastic sheeting tightly around the newly bandaged shoulder. Narrowing his eyes at her, Will allowed her a moment to compose herself before turning his attention onto Aaron, offering the younger brother the clothes. “Dr. Shearing is in the upstairs guest bathroom taking a shower. I would suggest that you shower and get some rest of your own.”

Aaron accepted the neatly folded stack with a smile, nodding in reply. “Thanks Will.”

“That’s what big brothers are for, detka. Go on.”

Aaron nodded, standing from his chair and bending to press a quick kiss to his sister’s cheek. “Thank you, Marishka.”

The Russian gave him a bright smile, her fingers light on his face as she patted his cheek. “You’re welcome, solnyshko. Get some rest . . . I’ll have Will pick up some hamburger meat from the BX and
we’ll make Blue Cheese Burgers for dinner. How does that sound?”

A flash fire grin slipped across his face at the mention of his favorite food. Bright blue eyes searched her face briefly, obviously looking for something in her eyes, before he gave her a sheepish smile. “Sounds awesome, Marina. I’ll see you in a bit?”

“We’ll be here,” she replied with a firm nod and a small smile.

She watched him go, her lower lip between her teeth as she nibbled at the fragile skin. Reaching out, Will ran a gentle thumb over her lip, earning a mostly genuine grin and a wink. Chuckling, the Colonel turned to Clint, cocking an eyebrow at the ever-familiar sight of the sniper smirking at them. “You’re coming with me to the BX, Clint, so go get changed into something other than your dress greens.”

Clint glanced quickly at Marina, who had turned her back to the room and was probably scrubbing flesh from her hands with the furious way she was washing Aaron’s blood from her skin. Nodding in silent agreement, he pushed away from the counters and headed toward the stairwell. The oldest Grimm waited until he heard Clint pound up the stairs, before stepping to wrap his arms around his partner’s waist. “Are you all right?” he whispered into her hair, the fingers of his left hand drawing absent designs against the strip of flesh between her tank and her jeans.

Her head dipped in a silent nod, using the back of one hand to brush at her eyes. Her other hand came up to weave her fingers with his own, turning her head to rest her forehead against his temple. “I’m just glad he’s home.”

Hearing all the things that she wasn’t saying, the soldier only nodded. “So am I,” he agreed, hoping that she understood that she wasn’t the one struggling with Aaron’s reappearance in their lives. “I’m gonna take Clint to the BX to get our stowaways some new clothes, as well as pick up a few things for dinner. Are you going to be okay?”

“I’ll manage,” she promised, dropping her head back and giving him a tremulous smile. “Don’t worry about me, Misha. I’ve been the finger on the trigger of the gun that killed women I considered my sisters; having my boy come home is a piece of cake in comparison. I just need a good, long cry and I’ll be as right as rain.”

Cupping her cheeks in his palms, he bent his head and took her mouth, letting all of his love and adoration flow into her through that contact. “Ya lyublyu tebya, samaya malen’kaya.”

“Ya lyublyu tebya, Mishka,” she replied with a grin. “Go on. I don’t need you hovering . . . I just need a couple minutes alone to try and process everything.”

Smiling at her, the Colonel kissed her again just because he could, before striding from the kitchen as he bellowed up the stairs. “Hurry up, mal’chik! We don’t have all day!”

“Says who?” Clint chirped, as he slid playfully down the banister, causing a cocked eyebrow and a sigh from his brother.

“How many times have we told you not to slide down the banister, Clinton Francis?” Will asked resignedly, as he preceded the archer from the front door.

“A million,” was the cheerful reply, before the door shut behind them and the house fell silent except for the sound of the showers running upstairs.

It was the first time Marina had been alone since her boy had come back into the fold. Nearly every part of her was screaming with joy, but there was that one tiny voice in the very back of her head that
was demanding answers . . . desperate to know why he’d left them behind in the first place and why he’d run from her all those years ago. Closing her eyes, she dropped heavily onto Aaron’s vacated barstool, placed her face in her palms and proceeded to have a very thorough breakdown.

For about ten minutes, all she could hear was the sound of her own muffled sobs. Then, she heard a broken voice speak, “Marina . . .?”

Looking up, bloodshot brown snared on heartbroken blue. Feeling her heart tremble in her chest, she clasped her hands in her lap and begged, “Why? Aaron, why? I just . . . I don’t understand, solnyshko. I love you so much; how could you think that I could ever hate you? Was it something I did?”

Shaking his head, Aaron came over and literally fell to his knees in front of her chair. Reaching out, he took her hands in both of his own and dropped his forehead onto their joined hands. “No! Marina, you were the best part of my entire life. But Clint was your favorite . . . he always had been. And when they told me that he was dead, and that it was my fault . . . I was drugged and scared and in pain . . . it made sense to me at the time that you could blame me, hate me for his death. And by the time I started to really question it, I was so completely entrenched within the program and they put me on chems . . . and as much as I wanted to leave, I couldn’t risk losing them. They made me feel normal, like I actually belonged in this family.”

“You have always belonged with this family, domashniy. Do you know that Fury said once that you were the most remarkable of all the Brothers Grimm, because you had excelled beyond any of Ross’ wildest dreams, despite the limitations you struggled with everyday? You were exceptional . . . I never had a moment that I wished you were anything more than moy lyubimov mal’chik . . . moy solnyshko.”

Nodding, Aaron bowed his head over their hands. “I know . . . I just . . . I wasn’t smart. And yeah, none of you ever made me feel like I was stupid, but I knew what I was. I wasn’t even close to being on par with the rest of you. Outcome offered me the chance to reach that point, to make you proud of me.” Shaking his head, he chuckled bitterly, “I don’t know . . . I honestly didn’t think that you would miss me all that much. I mean, you had Clint and Will . . . why would you ever waste your time with me?”

Marina’s face hardened angrily, as she took his face in her palms and forced him to look into her face. “You are just as much my baby as Clint. He’s my dorogoy but you’re my solnyshko . . . and to me, THAT has always been just as important.” Using her thumbs, she brushed his tears from his cheeks. “Don’t ever do that to me again, Aaron, please . . . my heart can’t handle it.”

Lifting one hand to trap her palm against his cheek, he nodded in silent agreement. “I promise . . . you’re stuck with me forever.”

Sniffling hard, the Russian nodded emphatically, “Good.” Leaning forward, she pressed a lingering kiss to his forehead. Settling back against her chair, she tossed her head lightly as she used her fingers to brush at her own tears. “All right. I need a salad made for dinner . . . would you mind?”

“Absolutely not,” he replied, watching her push herself to her feet with a wide grin. “Can I put raspberries in it?”

Chuckling, she nodded, “Of course.” Looking toward the pantry, she frowned, “Actually, I don’t know if I have any raspberries. Quick; call your brother. If he’s still at the BX he can pick some up before he comes home.” Waving one hand toward the living room, she insisted, “My phone’s on the coffee table.”
Aaron practically bounced on his toes, bounding over to lift her off her feet in an overly exuberant hug as he pressed a smacking kiss to her cheek, before dashing from the kitchen. Shaking her head at the familiar antics, Marina laughed as she pushed away the last of her tears. All of her boys were home again; tears had no place in her life now.

Standing, she moved to the fridge to get out the ingredients she was going to need for her boy’s favorite dinner that night. Behind her, she could hear Aaron reenter the kitchen and start working on the green salad she’d asked for. For a couple minutes, the two worked in silence until Aaron’s voice began to sing quietly behind her.

“Some folks like to get away, take a holiday from the neighborhood.” His voice was low and gravelly, with just a touch of homesickness. “Hop a flight to Miami Beach or to Hollywood.”

Here Marina joined in, singing the next part alone, “But I’m taking a Greyhound on the Hudson River Line.”

The two of them glanced at each other, wide grins on their faces, Marina bumping her hip against Aaron’s own as they sang together, “I’m in a New York state of mind.”

When the Colonel and Clint arrived home – with raspberries in hand, among other things – it was to the sound of Aaron and Marina laughing as they rocked out to the Classic 60’s CD that Marina had been listening to in the stereo for the last month. Will waved Clint away with an indulgent smile, watching him bound away up the stairs to give Marta her new clothes, before going to stand in the doorframe of kitchen. Leaning against the jamb, the eldest Grimm folded his arms around his chest and watched his little brother spin the Russian around the floor to the sound of Chuck Berry’s “Brown Eyed Handsome Man”. Marina was giggling happily, a wide smile breaking across her face as she sang along soundlessly to the words of the song. As the song ended, Aaron dropped her into an elaborate dip, earning a delighted squeal. Will could feel the grin on his face, as their second youngest straightened her out, the two leaning against each other as they laughed. Grinning at them, the Colonel cleared his throat pointedly, earning their immediate attentions.

Marina’s face was split wide open by her smile as she grinned, “Misha! Come dance with us!”

Shaking his head, Will remained where he was as he asked, “So, everything all good between you two again?”

There was no hesitation as the two answered simultaneously, “Absolutely.”

It was hours later that Will and Marina lay sprawled on their couch, really the only piece of furniture that they didn’t have to take apart. Marina lay with her head in her partner’s lap as she watched “The Forbidden Kingdom”, the Colonel’s fingers stroking a comforting rhythm through her hair. Will’s eyes were closed as he attempted to catch up on his sleep, though his beloved Russian was absorbed in the film.

The man grinned as Marina mused absently, “Liu Yifei is hot. I would totally do her.”

Chuckling, Will joked, “Can I watch?”

“Of course. I’ll even let you take pictures to show all your friends,” Marina deadpanned with a roll of her eyes. “But if you ever have to seduce like Channing Tatum or Ryan Gosling or something for an assignment, I totally want video. Deal?”

Whatever reply Will had been about to offer was interrupted when his S.H.I.E.L.D.-issued phone rang from where it sat on the end table at Marina’s feet. Huffing, the handler shoved herself forward
to retrieve it, frowning at the name on the display. “It’s Maria.”

“Then answer it,” he teased, watching as she stuck her tongue out at him playfully and received the same in return.

Shifting her position, Marina put her back against his ribs and flicked the phone on, keying up the speakerphone. “Vorobey, my dearest, what can we do for you?” the Russian purred, hoping to fluster her friend.

The Assistant Director’s tone was stern and no nonsense as she spoke, clearly indicating that she was in no mood for games. “We have a situation.”

Will frowned, immediately attentive as he demanded, “What kind of situation?”

“A terrorist has taken hostages in downtown New York.”

Marina’s eyes narrowed as she drawled, “Okay. Misha and I aren’t in New York. We’re not even supposed to technically leave base till tomorrow.”

There was a long pause as Maria waited for one of them to ask the pertinent question. The Colonel glanced at Marina, before asking, “Who is the terrorist in question? How many hostages has he taken? And why do you think that we care?”

“The terrorist is Don Diego Delgado and he’s taken the entire NYPD Second Precinct hostage. Including one Jason Leonard Grimm, who happened to be on duty that day.”

Marina gasped, bolting upright and dashing for the stairwell, shouting for her boys to get out of bed and get ready to leave. Will, however, remained where he was on the couch. Pushing his hand back through his hair, he asked, “What are the demands he’s asking for?”

“He’ll release his hostages . . . in exchange for the Brothers Cahill.”

Chapter End Notes

Translations:

detka - kiddo
solnyshko - sunshine (Marina's nickname for Kenny/Aaron)
Ya lyublyu tebya - I love you
samaya malen’kaya - my little one (Will's nickname for Marina)
Mishka - an intimate diminutive of Mikhail or Misha (one of Marina's lesser used nicknames for Will)
mal'chik - baby boy or kiddo
domashniy - pet (an interchangeable nickname Marina uses for her youngest boys)
moy lyubimov mal'chik - my beloved boy
dorogoy - darling (Marina's nickname for Clint)
Vorobey - sparrow (Marina's nickname for Maria Hill)
Chapter Notes

Hello all! I loved reading all of your reviews, and I hope to continue reading them as we go along. Enjoy this chapter, it's going to be a whopper. Jason's going to have a hell of a bad day. XD

Also Amerou is a huge help with Maria as always. We should worship her Maria as the Left Hand of God that she is. Xd

Translations at the end, as always.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
When the ping hit Jason’s computer, the technical specialist’s hands stilled in shock on the keys. Having grown used to the sound of Jason’s fingers tapping on his keys, it took a moment for his partner to realize that the sound had stopped. The redhead looked up with a frown, her eyebrows fret over hazel eyes at the nervous look on Jason’s face. “Walsh? You okay?”

The sound of her voice made the detective look at her, his eyes still wide in shock. “I just got pinged.”

If it was possible, Casey’s eyebrows furrowed even further. “Pinged?” Watching with a smile as Jason opened his mouth to explain, she interrupted fondly, “Remember to explain it in layman’s terms; not all of us are computer geniuses.”

Even as he grinned sheepishly, Jason’s eyes flashed around the squad room at the statement; he had been about to explain what it meant to be pinged the way it had been explained to him. Though Casey had learned quick to keep her voice down when referring to the things he could do, it always made the detective nervous when they spoke about it at the squad room. Folding his arms on his desktop, the communications officer nibbled on the inside of his cheek as he considered the best way to explain what had just happened to his not-nearly-as tech savvy partner. “Basically, a ping is kinda like an electrical radar signal. Someone sends out a ping over internet lines in order to try and find whoever is at the end of the signal.” Frowning, his hands came back to his keyboard and began to type furiously as he gritted out angrily, “Only downside, is that you give away your own location.”

Standing from her chair, Casey came to his side and leaned down alongside him as she watched him type. “Can you find out who it was?”

“I’m already on it,” he replied, before he fell silent as he worked to track the signal back to its origins.

The two were silent for a long time, before Jason’s fingers paused. “Shit . . . it’s NRAG.”

The redhead frowned, “NRAG? What is that?”

Jason looked up at her in surprise before remembering that she had never been a member of the country’s armed forces and had never had the pleasure of wanting to beat the shit out of Retired Col. Eric Byer. “NRAG is the National Research Assay Group; they’re in charge of a lot of special operations and black op programs for the CIA, the DOD, and others.”

Both of them pondered that for a moment, before Casey inquired, “So why did they ping you?”

Jason’s hands came up to fold in front of him, his fingers bracing against his lips. “They’re looking for someone in particular. And if they’re pinging me . . . that means that they think they found them.”

“But who are they looking for?”

There was a long moment as Jason considered that question, and the answer that was screaming to be heard in his head. Shoving his hands back through his hair, he stared at the computer for a moment before announcing, “The Cahills.”

“What are the Cahills?” she asked, though Jason’s head was already shaking before she’d even gotten the first word out. Bracing one hip against his desk, she folded her arms over her chest and sighed, “Why are you shaking your head at me?”

“This is one of those things that I can’t talk to you about, Casey . . . a lot of people’s lives depend on the identity of the Cahills remaining completely anonymous.”
Taking a deep breath, Casey considered that before nodding, “All right. Can you at least tell me if they found who they were looking for?”

“That really doesn’t matter. They think they did, and that’s all that matters to them.”

Putting his hands back onto his keyboard, he began to type quickly, earning a frown from his partner. “What are you doing?”

“Crashing their central server,” Jason replied, in the kind of nonchalant tone that implied he’d done it before. “They already know where I am; they found that out as soon as their ping hit my computer. However, if I can scramble their servers, it’ll take them awhile to start over again.”

“How do you crash a server?” was the only question the redhead could manage through her shock.

Jason chuckled as he typed, asking rhetorically, “Have you ever gotten a virus on your computer, Shraeger?”

“Well yeah. Hasn’t everyone?”

Grinning, Jason chuckled, “What happened to your computer?”

Casey snorted as she snarked, “It crashed.” Straightening as she considered what she just said, she stared at him with wide eyes. “You’re going to give a government computer a VIRUS?!”

“Viruses are amazing pieces of technology. I know they genuinely suck for people who don’t know anything about a computer except how to use them, but they are. And a specially coded virus can do a lot of damage; they’re labors of love to the people who make them, even if they use them for nefarious purposes.”

“Walsh . . . couldn’t you get in trouble for that? That’s government property!” she hissed, looking around her as to make sure that no one was paying attention to their conversation.

“The only way I’ll get in trouble is if I get caught . . . and I have no intention of getting caught. Unlike a lot of other hackers, I don’t sign my viruses so there’s no way to link it back to me. They’ll have a hard enough time trying to put their servers back together, without trying to track me down.”

The red-haired rookie nibbled nervously on her thumbnail, even as she watched in fascination while Jason typed three separate lines of code into what she could only describe as “The Matrix”. Leaning forward, she watched the lines of Zeros and Ones fly past the page, frowning as she inquired, “What is that?”

“That? That’s their central server.”

“How can you tell?”

“It’s pretty easy to read . . . if you know how.” Tapping the enter key twice, he hit a seriously complicated keystrokes before the screen shut down and the webpage for Google.com was glaring up at her again. “There . . . come on. I have to call Commander Hill. She’s going to kill me for this, but I don’t care how much she yells . . . I refuse to regret this.”

As soon as they arrived in the upstairs conference room, Casey stood guard at the door as Jason pulled out his phone and called his father’s girlfriend and his brothers’ boss. Her tone was hard as she answered brusquely, “Hill.”

“So you’re going to be mad.”
There was a pause, before she inquired, “Why?”

“Cause I just downloaded three viruses into NRAG’s central server.”

“What!” she screeched furiously, before calming enough to start muttering under her breath.

Jason bit his lip hard to stifle his giggles at the kinds of punishments she was planning to threaten him with. “All right. Why did you do that? And it had better be an exceptionally good reason, or I’m going to lock you in a room covered in Faraday panels, and make sure you never get another internet signal ever again. And that’s only after I make you explain to the Director why you crashed a government server.”

“They pinged me. And if they pinged me at the same time that they’re chasing Aaron, that can really only mean one thing . . . and you know as well as I do what that is.”

There was a long moment of silence, before Maria began to swear viciously in every language she knew. Finally, she sighed heavily, muttering, “Marina is going to owe me a lifetime supply of migraine medication and a pass to the very best day spa in the world . . . forever.” There was another sigh, before Marina asked, “So it’s a safe bet that they know where you are?”

“Well, they know where I work, yes. I wasn’t at home when the ping hit.”

“Okay . . . don’t go home. Find somewhere else to stay for a few days. Either rent a hotel room and have them bill S.H.I.E.L.D. for the expense or better yet, move back into your room at your brothers’ house on base. That’ll offer you the best protection until we can see what they intend to do with the information they managed to gain from the ping. Do you have a go-bag?”

“Marina didn’t raise an idiot, Maria. Yes, it’s in my trunk.”

There was a pause as Maria obviously attempted to get a handle on her temper, before speaking up again. “Then I would suggest that you don’t go home at all. Understand?”

Sighing heavily, Jason brought one hand up to rub at the insides of his eyes as he replied, “Yeah . . . I understand.”

“Good. Call me if anything changes,” was the last thing she said before the phone clicked dead in his hand.

Dropping heavily into his chair, he banged his head hard against the table top. There was an audible smirk on Casey’s voice as she spoke, “That bad, huh?”

“Surprisingly not as bad as I thought it would be. But even still, every year I make a resolution to be nicer to the Commander and not intentionally provoke her. And every year, I barely make it through May before I pick a fight. She’s my father’s girlfriend and my sister’s best friend and my brothers’ superior.” Chuckling dryly, he pushed his hands back through his hair, “My brother, Will, would never put up with the shit I put her through. I mean, seriously, I would spend months in the brig if I spoke to the Colonel the way I speak to the Commander. And she is at least as scary as he is.”

“Can I just say that one day, it’s probably going to come back to bite you in the ass?”

Jason’s tone was deadpan as he replied, “Duh . . . especially if I ever draw her in the sparring lottery. Then I really am fucked . . . and not in a good way.”

Jason spent that night on Casey’s couch, every part of him rebelling at the idea of going back to base housing or getting a hotel room on S.H.I.E.L.D.’s dime. He spent most of that night staring at the blinking light on the map indicating the location of Clint’s S.H.I.E.L.D. issued cell phone. It had
tracked Clint, Kenny and their companion, Dr. Shearing, across the Pacific Ocean ad through Hong Kong. Currently, they seemed to be headed for Budingen, Germany. Jason and Casey drove to work together the next morning, Jason’s thoughts squarely on his computer . . . and the ping from the day before. It was around ten in the morning when the tracker arrived at Cameron Kaserne and stayed there. Heaving a sigh of relief, the detective practically puddled in his chair. Leaning forward, he grabbed for his phone and immediately called Bucky Barnes.

The ringtone sang in Jason’s ears for a moment, before at last the former Soviet spy answered the phone with a tired, “This is Barnes.”

“Hey, Buck. I have news about the Wayward One.”

There was an exhausted snort, “Am I the only one who thinks that’s ridiculously appropriate? Where is he?”

Jason’s grin caused Casey to roll her eyes in amusement, as Jason chirped, “Most definitely not the only one to think that. Either way, he’s in Budingen, Germany . . . ten to one, he took them to Will and Marina.”

“Thank God,” was the relieved reply.

Jason could hear the intake of breath through the line that implied Bucky was about to say something else. However whatever he’d been about to say was interrupted by the sound of an explosion below Jason’s feet. The former Spec Ops soldier reacted instinctively, diving out of his chair and dragging Casey down with him as the rest of the room hit the floor. Bucky’s voice was frantic through the speaker of the phone that Jason still held in his hands, calling the younger man’s name. “Jay! Chert poberi! Answer me!”

Forcing the adrenaline-fueled trembling in his hands to calm, Jason brought the cell back to his ear. “Bucky?”

“I heard it,” was the man’s reply, the heavy thud of boots on concrete ringing in the background. “Can you get to the door, seeing if you can figure out what it was? I’m going to feel like an idiot if I tell Maria that there was an explosion at the Second Precinct, and all that happened was the water heater overheated.”

Chuckling, Jason pushed himself to his feet and ran in a crouch to the door, slamming his back against the doorjamb. Leaning sideways, the detective turned his attention to trying to hear what was going on downstairs. The sound of automatic gunfire, however, pretty well cleared up the idea that the sound had been an accidental discharge or an overheated water heater. “There’s gunfire downstairs. Automatic. Unless I miss my guess, it’s a Beretta, though it doesn’t sound like either the AR70 or the AR90, and I’ve had my way with both so I know how they sound.”

“Fucking Italians. It’s probably their new ARX-160.” There was a skidding sound through the phone as Bucky remarked, “Whoever managed to get their hands on that rifle is a seriously major player, Jay. That rifle isn’t even supposed to be in active distribution yet.” Pausing, Bucky grunted at the same time a door slammed open as he continued, “I’m on my way to tell the Director and the Assistant Director what’s going on. Keep your head down, okay? The only thing that anyone would want at the Second is you. We’ll get you out, promise.”

Taking a deep breath, Jason’s eyes swept the area. “Don’t worry about me. I’ll see you guys soon. And Buck? Try not to let Marina get too bloody; I really don’t want her to freak Casey out the first time they meet.”
Bucky chuckled, asking dryly, “You really think that’s going to happen?”

Groaning at the reply, the detective rolled his eyes resignedly, “No, but it’s worth the request anyway.” Glancing around he calculated quickly how long it would take to make a small, defensible space around the room’s small holding cell. Then he moved quickly, reaching down to haul Casey to her feet and push her towards the corner of the room. “All right. I’m going to let you go and hide this phone. The last thing I want is to lose my only connection to the outside world if it comes down to a hostage situation.”

“Jason, I’m serious. Marina is going to cut a swath of destruction through the Second if something happens to you, so be smart.”

“Don’t stress, Bucky; lesson one growing up? How to make defensible space. We’ll be fine. Just hurry up, huh?”

“I’m on it,” the other man agreed, before the phone clicked off in his hand.

“Walsh, what the hell is going on?” Beaumont demanded, her eyes narrowed in on where Jason was holding Casey’s arm and the way that Casey’s wrist was twisted to wrap her own hand around his elbow.

“Someone’s downstairs with an automatic assault rifle. From the sounds of it, someone’s looking to take the Second and hold it.”

Banks’ chocolate skin paled sharply, before he demanded, “What does that mean?”

“It means that we are about to be hostages. Who they plan to barter for us with, I don’t know. But we just have to remember everything we’ve ever been trained for and do exactly as they say, and we’re all going to be okay. Understand? No crazy heroics and no mouthing off.”

Casey’s grip tightened slightly as she asked, “What about your cell? They’re going to confiscate all phones.”

“I have to hide it somewhere, but I want it to be able to get to it quickly if I need to,” Jason agreed, eyes scanning the room before falling on the thick pole in the corner that housed the main power lines . . . and the access hatch that allowed visiting electricians to access them.

Breaking away from Casey, he strode quickly across the room and jerked open the door. Silencing the phone, he reached into the pole and tangled the phone deep into the wiring in front of him. Slamming the hatch shut, he returned back to Casey’s side only seconds before five men with automatic rifles in hand and ski-masks on their faces appeared in the doorways. “Everybody hands up! Don’t do anything stupid, and you all may make it out of here alive!” came the expected order, every single one of the detectives in the room immediately following the order and raising their hands. Once they had been stripped of their phones and guns, one of the thugs called out the all clear.

Jason froze at the sight of the man who walked into the room then, his face twisting into righteous fury as he hissed, “Delgado!”

The man – a handsome older gentleman with greying temples and vicious brown eyes – grinned at the sight of Jason. “Ah . . . this is a pleasant surprise. So you remember me then?”

The technical specialist’s voice was a low hiss as he growled, “You were the one who tortured my girlfriend.”
There was a wicked smirk on his lips as he drawled, “Yes . . . and she screamed so prettily.”

Only Casey’s grip on her partner’s arm prevented Jason from lunging at the man. “NO!” she cried, reaching out with her other hand to get another grip on him. Pressing up full length against his side, she whispered furiously for his ears alone, “No, Walsh, he’s not worth it. No matter how it all fell out between the two of you, Sarah wouldn’t want this. I have to believe that she wouldn’t be so heartless that she’d want you to kill yourself for no reason.”

Don Diego Delgado – the last mark Agent J.L. Walsh ever had for S.H.I.E.L.D. and the reason Sarah Fitzgerald was dead and gone from Jason’s life – grinned as he replied, “You can die later or you can die now; either way, I will have my revenge. You have escaped me for far too long, Agent Walsh . . .” there was a long pause, in which Jason could clearly hear Beaumont’s surprised gasp, before Delgado continued with a grin, “. . . Or should I say, Cahill Three.” Chuckling, he made an imaginary checkmark in the air as he taunted cheerfully, “One down . . . four to go.”

Chapter End Notes

Translations:

Chert poberi! - Damn it!
New Chapter! A whole day early, even. <3 Enjoy!

Translations at the end as always.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
Chapter 124: Be Careful What You Wish For

Jason cocked an eyebrow at the man, drawling, “Who the hell is Cahill Three? Pretty sure you got the wrong guy, Don Diego.”

“According to the agency who hired me, no . . . I really don’t,” the Spaniard gloated, holding up a manila envelope. “Would you care to guess what it is that I have in here, Agent Walsh?”

The detective rolled his eyes, allowing himself to be manhandled as Delgado gave the signal to his
men to cuff him. “Former Agent Walsh, actually . . . really, Diego . . . where have you been the last nine years?” he snarked, a sly smirk on his face as he watched the rage build in Delgado’s features. “Oh that’s right, I remember. How are Spanish prisons nowadays? I’m told they haven’t improved much in the last hundred years.”

It was no surprise when Delgado backhanded him, the tech specialist’s head flinging to the side. Straightening, Jason cracked his neck before taunting, “Seriously? My sister hits harder than you.”

“You have no sister, only four brothers. And my employers have a very elaborate cage in mind for all of you.”

Allowing his body to slouch insolently, the detective allowed a sly smirk to cross his lips. “You only wish I didn’t have a sister, Diego. And trust me; you may get all of the Cahills into one place, but it’s not going to end the way either you or your employer are hoping it will.”

“We shall see about that,” the man hissed, before jerking his head at one of his underlings. “Get him out of here.”

Casey lunged forward with a shout, “NO!”

Seeing the butt of the rifle aimed in her direction, Jason reacted, stepping between her and it with hardly a second thought. He grunted as the rifle butt connected brutally with his shoulder, his body rotating on one foot as he planted his heel in the thug’s gut and put him on the ground. Knowing he only had seconds, he whirled back to face Casey. “Listen to me . . . you’re going to be a perfect angel, no matter what the hell happens to me. Understand, Shraeger?”

“What are they going to do to you?” she demanded, her hands coming up to wrap in his lapels.

Bending, he braced his forehead against her own. “Nothing that hasn’t happened before today. Spec Ops, remember? I’ll be fine. Keep your head down and I’ll see you soon. Promise.”

Nodding, she allowed the thugs to wrestle him away from her, her face twisted in barely concealed panic as the man he’d knocked down pistol-whipped him hard across the face and caused Jason to see stars. Shaking his head sharply to clear his vision, he went where he was led and didn’t even blink when he was dragged to one of the empty interview rooms down the hallway. The chair he was thrown into rocked dangerously on two legs as his weight caused it to nearly overbalance, before he leaned his weight forward and settled the chair on all four legs once again.

Diego leaned back against the opposite wall, as he watched his goons haul Jason’s arms forward and secure them firmly to the arms of the chair. “You destroyed my life, Agent Walsh. More than a decade of hard work and sweat down the drain because of you. And for what!? The only outcome to come from it, is that you will forfeit your life in payment.”

“What about your employer’s elaborate cage?”

“I’m sure they will not be too disappointed if they end up one Cahill short. Four of five isn’t bad.” Leaning forward so that his face was directly in Jason’s own, he allowed a cruel smile to curve his lips as he taunted, “But first . . . you will suffer as I suffered.”

Turning towards the door, he paused for a moment next to a hulking man beside the door. “Break his fingers.”

Casey was sitting in the very corner of the squad room next to the holding cell when the first scream came, tears springing instantly to her eyes as she bowed her face into her knees. It was a long time before the screams stopped, and longer still before Jason was practically dragged back into the squad.
room. Hauling open the door to the holding cell, the two hired thugs threw him into the cell causing a
soft whimper as Jason reached out instinctively to catch himself with his hands. The door was nearly
closed when Casey pushed off with her feet and landed on the floor next to him, glaring up at the
two defiantly as the door clanged shut.

“You little bitch!” one of the men snarled, moving to unlock the cell again.

The second reached out and grabbed the first man’s arm. “Leave her. We have orders; not much she
can do in there.”

Casey waited for the two men to go, before scrambling to her knees and rolling her partner onto his
back. “Walsh?” she asked, her eyes scanning him for a moment before she gasped at the sight of his
mangled hands.

Already black and blue, it was discernibly apparent that some of the fingers had been dislocated or
badly broken. One of the finger bones had cut the skin, gleaming white bone clearly visible against
the blood, causing Casey to swallow down bile as she fought not to gag. “Jesus, Jason,” she
whispered, reaching up to shuck off her jacket and rip the lining from the inside. Wrapping it
gingerly around the worst of the mess, she grimaced when she jarred the bone and Jason moaned
breathlessly. “Sorry . . . I’m sorry . . . Shit, I’m sorry,” she promised, even as she continued to wrap
the appendage as tightly as she dared.

Green eyes were hazy with pain as they looked up at her, a small smile on his lips as he whispered.
“I’m all right. Trust me . . . they could have done a lot worse.” His eyes slipped closed for a moment,
before he murmured, “Everything’s gonna be fine; my brothers will come.”

Casey frowned as she bent, “But isn’t that what Delgado wants?”

“Yes . . . but you should always be careful what you ask for. And he doesn’t know about Marina,”
he reminded her, an amused chuckle shaking his shoulders as he continued, “and as scary as my
brothers are . . . they’ve got nothing on Marina.”

Fortunately, Leo was a paranoid bastard – if there was one good thing to come out of his whole “I’m
going to die at the age of 42” panic it was that he refused to use anything that he didn’t specifically
buy for himself – and he had bottles of extra strength Tylenol and Motrin, as well as a giant bottle of
Germ-X. The sound Jason made when the hand sanitizer connected with the broken skin caused a
shiver up Casey’s spine, but she resolutely ignored it in favor of cleaning as much of the skin as she
could to prevent too serious an infection; she was fairly certain that that at least was unavoidable, but
she would do what she could.

She forced two Tylenol down his throat, alternating that with ibuprofen every two hours, the single
bottle of water Leo was hoarding under his desk being sacrificed to the task of getting the pills down
the injured detective’s throat. For the next twenty four hours, not much changed. Jason and Casey
remained locked up in the holding cell, while the rest of their squad sat huddled together against the
opposite wall. The guards Delgado placed at the doors to the squad room rotated out every four
hours and so far Casey had counted at least six different teams of three; meaning that despite Jason’s
utter confidence in his brothers and sister, the so-called Cahills were going to be seriously
outnumbered.

Jason finally managed to fall asleep around one o’clock the next afternoon, curled up on his side on
the threadbare mattress, his head resting casually against Casey’s thigh. Her fingers trailed lazily
through the strands of his hair, her head resting back against the wall behind her as she counted
ceiling tiles. He’d only been asleep for about an hour before she noticed two of the tiles move, lifting
upwards and out of sight soundlessly. She blinked at the sight of two heads clad in black balaclavas
lowering through the holes, their arms bulging as they rotated themselves silently out of the ceiling and dropped nimbly onto their feet behind the guards’ backs. One of them gestured silently, before the one reached behind himself – and it was only then that Casey noticed the quiver strapped across one of their backs – and pulled something free from the side of the quiver, his wrist snapping sharply as it popped into a full sized compound bow.

Staring in fascination, she reached down to shake Jason’s shoulder as the man reached back and drew two arrows, nocking the first competently against the string before turning to look at his compatriot. The second man nodded, stepping forward only seconds after the archer took aim and sent his arrow through one of the guards’ jugulars, another dropping only seconds after the first. Meanwhile, the unarmed man sprang forward soundlessly, wrapping his arm tightly around the man and jerking his elbow, the guard’s neck breaking with an audible snap.

Jason’s eyes blinked open, just as the two men hauled the doors closed and jammed two straight-backed chairs firmly under the handles. Reaching up, they hauled off their face coverings, causing the entire room to stare as the faces of Agent Clint Barton and Agent Aaron Cross came into view.

Grinning weakly, Jason’s mangled hands lifted as he attempted to sign, his injuries forcing him to slow down and making the usually crisp signs uncharacteristically sloppy, Took you guys fucking long enough.

Clint winked, his hands flashing in reply, Eh . . . got stuck in traffic. Gesturing Aaron to the door of the cell, he came to stand at the bars as his eyes took his brother in. You okay?

I’ll live. Don’t tell Marina.

The archer grinned, as their brother stuffed a small wad of grey putty into the lock, easing a small electrical device into the putty last of all. Your funeral. Get into the corner and pull the mattress over your heads. This stuff isn’t going to make a big bang, but it’s going to cause a bit of a mess.

Grinning at Aaron as the blue eyed brother pulled the remote from one of the pockets in his tactical pants, Jason’s nose wrinkled as he teased, Home recipe?

And mostly untested, Aaron agreed with a wink. Mostly. Hang tight. We’ll get you out of there in a flash.

Literally, Clint snarked, with a roll of his eyes, chuckling quietly as he earned a punch in the shoulder from the second youngest Grimm.

Pushing himself into a seated position, Jason wrapped his elbow around Casey’s neck and pulled her ear up against his lips, keeping his tone too low to be heard by anyone but the two of them. “We need to get into the corner and get the mattress over us. Aaron’s going to blow the door.”

“Which one is Aaron?” she asked in a strangled whisper, earning a wide grin as Jason replied, “The blue eyed one. The grey eyed one is Clint. Come on; I’m going to need your help moving the mattress.”

She nodded silently, standing from the bed and assisting Jason in getting up and into the corner, before wrestling the mattress over the two of them. It was only a couple seconds, before there was a low thump! and the lock on the cell door turned into molten slag. Clint grinned at the sight, turning to jump into the hole in the ceiling while Aaron moved to wrench the door open with a muted groan. At the sound, the redhead detective had shoved the mattress out of the way, assisting Jason to his feet without a second thought. Aaron’s foot scuffed against the floor as he gave his brother a sheepish grin, “Sup big brother?”
The older brother threw his arms around Aaron’s neck, ignoring the pain in his hands completely as he patted the back of his head lightly. “It’s good to see you.” Cupping the former DOD operative’s cheeks into his palms, he ordered, “You do that again, I’m going to kick your ass. You understand me?”

“Yes sir,” Aaron agreed with a wide grin, before Clint reappeared with a large duffel bag in hand.

Turning to look at the youngest Grimm, Jason glowered at him, “You seen your boyfriend yet?”

Clint’s grin was wicked as he glanced back over his shoulder from where he was crouched, wrestling what looked like a camera tripod out of the duffel bag. “Briefly. Orla lyubimyy sumasshedshaya devushka is kinda on a warpath . . . and Big Brother is totally entrenched in his persona of super scary Agent Brandt, so he isn’t far behind her. I’ve been assured that my ass is grass, but he still loves me . . . which I’m going to take as confirmation that Bucky isn’t actually going to kill me once this is all over.” Shifting to a standing position, he paused for a moment, before grinning, “Oh yeah. I almost forgot! Here . . . I brought you a toy!”

Reaching into his pocket, he pulled out what looked like a small earplug and offered it to his brother in the palm of his hand. Jason’s eyebrow quirked in amusement, as he lifted his hands. “What good is that going to do me? I can’t put it in, little brother.”

Rolling his eyes, the archer stepped to his brother’s side and slipped it firmly into Jason’s left ear before tapping on it firmly once. “It should be on. Test it.”

“Orel, this is Krechet. You copy?”

There was a moment of static, before Will’s voice came through the receiver. “Krechet, it’s good to hear your voice. You okay?”

“I’ll live. Where’s Sova?”

There was a chuckle, before Will insisted, “Have Yastreb tell you the plan. I have a couple last minute things to coordinate before we get going. We’ll see you soon.”

“You too.”

Turning back to his brother, and being very careful with his mangled hands, Jason folded his arms over his chest and ordered firmly, “You may outrank me, Clint, but I’m older. I have kicked your ass before, I will do it again. Talk.”

“Give me a second,” was his grunted reply, as he struggled to get the machine free. Standing, Clint hefted the tripod-looking thing and moved to stand in front of the window, watching the opposite wall as he moved between them. Glancing at his watch, Clint grimaced as he reminded his brother, “We only have a few more minutes before all hell breaks lose downstairs. And I need to get this thing set up before it does.”

“Thing? What thing? And what kind of hell!??” Jason asked, his eyes narrowing as he watched Aaron move to grab a drill from the bag, as Clint get the machine set up in the windowsill, setting the nose very gently against the glass.

The archer grinned at him as he insisted cheerfully, “Trust me, Jay . . . this is going to be awesome. Orel has outdone himself this time.”

“That didn’t answer the question,” Jason reminded his baby brother dryly, as their brother started up the drill and set to work on getting the tripod anchored securely into the wall.
The S.H.I.E.L.D. sniper sighed heavily as dropped his hands out of Aaron’s way and checked his watch again. “The Murderesses are going to be coming through the front door in about seventy-five seconds. When that happens, we’re going to blow the window.”

Beaumont’s voice was strained as she demanded, “Murderesses?! Who the hell are the Murderesses?”

“Former Russian assassins,” was the prompt response from all three of the brothers, before Aaron spoke up from where he was fighting to keep the drill in position. “The eleven of us came in a Quinjet, which is currently parked on the roof. Hill is at street level, running mobile Command and coordinating between us and the other station houses that have shown up to assist. Kuhn, Gamble and Brandt are on the roof. Barnes is in a room in the building directly across the street; he’s going to cover this room. Once we blow the glass, the three on the roof are going to rappel down the building and get inside through the window. Either way, this room is going to be the gathering point for the civilians.”

“They’re cops, Aaron, not civilians.”

Clint’s tone was amused as he questioned, “Are they S.H.I.E.L.D.?”

“Then they’re civilians,” the youngest Grimm insisted, his eyes glued to his watch face as he counted down the minutes. “All right. Almost go time. Aaron, how’s the screws?”

There was a second, as Aaron set the drill aside and then yanked as hard as he could to see if he could dislodge the tripod. The machine stood firm, causing a swift nod from the former operative as he turned to face his brothers. “All set here.”

“Good. Because we’re on in five . . . four . . . three . . . two . . . one.”

Even knowing what was going to happen, Jason still flinched at the sound of small explosion going off downstairs. Clint’s grin was wicked as he punched out the window a mere nanosecond after the explosion went off, the one hiding the sound of the other effortlessly. It was a matter of a second for the machine to be removed from the tripod and the arms of the tripod itself extending to create a kind of landing brace for the rest of their team. Reaching out, Clint tapped on his com as he announced, “Orel, you’re a go. Window’s clear.”

“Good. Start rounding up the civilians and get them isolated. We’re on our way down.”

“Yes sir.” Turning to Jason, Clint reached behind his back and pulled his Pistolet Makarova from the holster at the small of his back, offering it to Jason with a grimace. “Okay, this is the Makarova Marina gave me before Budapest.” Yanking it back when the detective reached to take it, the archer continued speaking, “This is my favorite gun in the history of guns – keep in mind that I don’t even like guns! – and if you break it, I’ll kill you. Da?”

“Da. Hand it over, bratishka,” the detective insisted, taking it gingerly and grimacing as he tried to force his hands to close around it. “Chert voz’mi . . . that hurts.”

Stepping forward immediately, Casey plucked the gun from his grip as she vowed, “I’ve got this.” Her hands were quick and efficient as she chambered a round, before stepping closer to her partner, insisting, "I'll stay with Walsh.’”

It was at then that a zipping sound filled the room, two booted feet swinging easily through the window and into the squad room. The newly arrived man straightened, his features causing a
muffled wisecrack from Banks. Ignoring it, Jason watched as quicksilver eyes surveyed the scene, forestalling whatever protest Clint had been about to make. Finally, he asked, “These all the civilians?”

“No, there’s another two squads across the hall,” Jason reported briskly, earning a sharp nod from his brother.

“Yastreb . . . Sokol, get them here. Move,” the Colonel ordered, watching them head for the door before turning his attention onto the middle brother.

Jason could hear Delahoy muttering behind them, “Just how many identical twins does Walsh fucking have?”

Rolling his eyes, the technical specialist looked up at his older brother with a frown. “I’m fine.”

“Uh-huh. We’ll see about that when Sova shows up to kick your butt for being stupid,” Clint muttered dryly with an eyeroll, as he and Aaron left the room.

If it was possible, Will’s frown deepened at their little brother’s assessment, but he didn’t say anything as Brian swung into the room followed by Hansel Kuhn only seconds later. At the sight of the detective, the German took two strides and had his son in his arms in a second flat. “Mein Schalki, Gott sei Dank. Are hyu all right? Hyu look like hell.”

“Thanks, Dad . . . really,” Jason drawled, even as he took a measure of comfort in his father’s firm grip and warm embrace. “I’ll be all right. I’ve had worse, promise.”

“That is not comforting, Schalki,” the S.H.I.E.L.D. instructor insisted, as he released his son and then reached over his shoulder for the shotgun slung across his back. Turning to his eldest son, he asked, “All right, mein Adler, how long until mein Tochter joins us with our quarry’s head on a pike?”

Will’s smile was small as he shook his head. “Sych won’t kill him. She’s going to main him, of course, but Jason’s name is all over that execution . . .” Turning to Jason, he gave his younger brother a genuine smile, “. . . if he wants it.”

The technical specialist’s face hardened as he nodded firmly once. “I want him.”

“All right then, that’s settled.” Shifting to look at Jason’s partner, he offered her his hand with a sly smirk. “Will Brandt . . . it’s a pleasure to meet you. I’m sorry it wasn’t under better circumstances.”

“Casey Shraeger . . . likewise. I’m not leaving him.”

Chuckling at the response, the Colonel nodded once in acquiescence. “Far be it from me to make someone do what they do not wish to do. Not to mention that at this point, Jason is going to require some looking after.” Jason moved to protest, but a single quelling look from his brother made him subside with a grumble. “From the looks of his hands, he can’t hold a gun and I refuse to leave him vulnerable. I appreciate your willingness to be his protector for me.”

It was about then that three very bloody women entered the squad room, one blond, one redheaded and one black-haired. Each wore the standard issue navy blue S.H.I.E.L.D cat-suit, and each was literally dripping in weaponry. The redhead even had a pair of gauntlets around her wrists that flashed sparks of electricity every time she moved her hands a certain way. Will grinned at them, nodding his head in greeting, “Murderesses.”

“Agent Brandt,” came the drawling reply from the redhead, green eyes fierce as she scanned the crowd in front of her. Turning to Brian, she gave him a vicious grin. “There’s some heads that need
busting downstairs, Skopa . . . care to join me?"

“Vdova, I thought you would never ask,” he agreed, stepping to her side and bending to capture her mouth in a hot kiss before the two nearly bolted from the room.

Chuckling lightly, Will turned to the two remaining women and inquired, “Do I want to know where my Sych has gotten off to?”

“Probably not,” the black haired woman agreed, her arms coming up to fold over her chest. “If you want to go help Sokol and Yastreb get the civilians together, Rys’ and I would be just fine with playing guarddog for a bit.”

The Colonel smirked at her, teasing, “You’re a saint, Tigritsa.”

“But if it means I get to kill something,” she laughed, taking up a casual position just inside one door.

Will reached to grip her shoulder fondly, before both he and Hansel moved quickly from the room to help gather up the civilians. It would be easier to create a defensible space, if the noncombatants were all in one place. Once they were gone, the blond leaped lightly atop one of the desk, blue eyes eerily calm as she scanned the occupants of the room. Jason frowned at her, inquiring lightly, “Aren’t you getting married today, Rys’?”

“At 1900 Zulu, yes. And if I’m late for my own wedding, I’m probably going to hurt someone. And that’s only after Phil tazes this bastard in the balls.”

Casey frowned as she came to her partner’s side, brown eyes serious as she looked the two women over. “Hello?”

“Hello malen’kaya kardinal,” the blond teased, watching the black haired woman tense slightly at the sound of harried footsteps from the hallway before relaxing as three uniformed women came scrambling into the room, clinging to each other tightly. “And who might you be?”

The unfamiliar words stumbled from Casey’s lips as she repeated them back, before looking up at her partner. “What did she call me, Walsh?”

“‘Little Cardinal.’ It’s a compliment. Promise. Vika . . . Nika, I’d like you to meet my partner, Casey Shraeger. Casey, these are Marina’s sisters, Viktoriya Viktorovna Dubrovskaya and Veronika Stanislavovna Belinskaya.” Turning back to Veronika, Jason scolded in Russian, “Nika . . . byt’ khoroshim. Mne nravitsya eto. (Nika . . . be nice. I like this one.)”

The woman rolled her eyes sulkily as she replied, “Prekrasno. Net spravedlivym. (Fine. No fair.)”

Vika’s nose wrinkled as she teased, “If you were nicer to people, Nika, he wouldn’t need to supply you with the instruction.”

“I’m a spy and an assassin, Vika. Nice isn’t in the job description,” she taunted, before turning back as more of the hostages flooded into the squad room. Checking her watch, she muttered, “The Gadyuka has been absent for a bit. Should we go check on her yet?”

“She hasn’t called for backup yet. And until she calls for backup, we do as we’re told and we stay. Guarddog for the civvies, remember?” Sensing that Veronika was about to whine, Viktoriya piped up, “You volunteered us for the job, remember?”

Grumbling, Veronika subsided against the wall once more. Soon enough, the three members of the
Brat’ya Mrachnyy and their father herded a last group of noncombatants into the room. Will was standing in the hallway, one hand on his pistol butt as he watched for any unexpected visitors. The sight of one of Delgado’s goons rushing at him with a battle cry caused a sigh, before the Colonel pulled the Beretta from under his arm and put three bullets in him, one neatly between the eyes and two squarely to the chest. Detective Catherine Chandler had still been standing in the hall, gasping at the sight of the man going down, hands flying to cover her mouth as she stared in shock. “What did you do that for?”

Will’s grip was gentle around her elbow as he pushed her forward, though his tone was cold, as he explained, “Sometimes, detective, it’s either kill or be killed. I have a lot to live for, and I see no reason to give up my place on this planet to make room for him. Let’s hurry it up a little bit; I don’t know how many more there are and I’d prefer not to have anyone out in the open should another hostile show up to cause trouble.”

She nodded, scurrying as quickly as she dared into the room and rushing straight into her partner, Tess Vargas’ arms, babbling quietly about what she’d just seen. Clint’s eyes narrowed as he read the girl’s lips, turning to his brother with a grin. His hands flashed as he signed, You shot someone, assassin style, in front of a New York City cop?

Will rolled his eyes as he signed in reply, She’s a cop. Frankly, I’m sure she’s seen worse.

Considering that statement, Clint’s nodded with a careless shrug. The movement of his hands were sharp as he agreed, Very true. Glancing down at his watch, Clint frowned before looking up at Will again, his hands flashing as he insisted, Sova’s still off the grid. Should we go looking for her?

There was a second of momentary indecision, before the Colonel shook his head firmly. If she needs us, she’ll call us. She knows we all have coms.

It was a long twenty minutes, before at last a familiar woman’s voice spoke from the doorjamb. “Hey, look at what I found, Misha.” There was a heavy thud as Don Diego Delgado came flying through the door and landed hard on the concrete floor. Looking up, the entire Second Precinct stared at the sight of the blood-spattered brunette as she appeared in the doorway, flanked on each side by Owen Elliot and James Buchanan Barnes. “I found a rat. I think we should kill it.”

Will’s lips curved upwards as he bent to haul the man unwillingly to his feet and throw him carelessly into a chair. “Barnes, if you would tie him up for me. Lucky, I have a mess I need you to clean up . . . if you would be so kind.”

Both men nodded silently, before each moved to fulfill their own task. At the same time, the Colonel approached his partner with a soft grin, his hands coming up to rest casually on her hips. “We can’t kill the rat, samaya malen’kaya. First, we need answers about who hired him. And then, Jason gets to kill the rat.”

Marina’s smirk was deadly as she drawled, Klassno. Turning to her sisters, Marina ordered, “Get him somewhere no one can hear him scream. I have some questions, and he’s going to give me my answers . . . whether he likes it or not.”

Delgado struggled fiercely against the ropes that tied him to the chair, glaring at the two women as
they each grabbed one of the armrests to drag the chair away. “You can’t hurt me! I am a Spanish citizen; you Americans have no right to me.”

Marina smirked, even as she almost looked sorry for him for a brief moment. “Oh honey . . . I’m Russian. We murdered our own Czar. Trust me; torture, murder and mayhem are old friends.” Waving her hand, she watched as her sister dragged the chair from the room.

Will grinned at her, as he folded his arms over his chest. “So just in case you were curious . . . someone’s hands are seriously messed up.”

Jason’s jaw dropped before he shouted indignantly, “WILL!”

The Colonel shrugged lightly, as his partner whirled to face the detective. “She’s going to find out eventually, Jay; might as well as be sooner than later.”

Gone was the Lady of War as she practically scurried to Jason’s side, her hands gentle as they lifted the mangled appendages carefully. Jason gasped lightly at the soft touch, causing Marina’s eyebrows to furrow lightly, before she gripped his elbow and guided him to a chair. “Sit down, sladkiy,” she instructed fondly, one hand coming up to cup his cheek. Bending, she pressed a quick kiss to his cheek. “It’s good to see you.”

“Good to see you too, Marishka. Remind me that I have someone I want you to meet.”

“Deal,” she promised, as she moved to unwrap the haphazard bandaging around his hands.

Jason bit down lightly on his lip to hold in his wince as the Russian laid the mangled hand bare. She glanced up at the sight of movement in her peripheral vision, seeing as redheaded woman come to Jason’s side, the hand not holding Clint’s Pistolet Makarova coming to squeeze the detective’s shoulder in a show of solidarity. Seeing the fond smiles exchanged between the two of them, Marina ducked her head over her grin, sobering at the sight of the bone gleaming through the skin.

Twisting back over her shoulder, she looked up at Aaron. “Solnyshko, if you would go and get Marta for me. This isn’t something that I feel comfortable with; we could use a medical professional for this.”

“I’m on it,” Aaron agreed, turning and running from the squad room.

Jason’s eyebrow cocked upwards as he questioned, “Marta?”

Both Will and Clint deadpanned simultaneously, “Aaron’s girlfriend.”

Marina shook her head in exasperation as she scolded them, “Marta isn’t his girlfriend. She’s a friend . . . for now, at least.”

“He’s kissed her, Marina . . . I was there,” Clint reminded her.

“But he hasn’t asked her to change their relationship yet. Which means, for right now, they’re just friends.”

Jason chuckled around a gasp as Marina ran her fingers tenderly along the length of his fingers, popping the dislocated fingers back into place even as she avoided the broken fingers entirely. “If he kissed her, she’s his girlfriend, Marishka.”

Marina rolled her eyes in exasperation, before turning her attention onto Jason’s companion. Aware that she was covered in blood and probably not looking her best, Marina pushed herself to her feet
and offered the woman her hand. “Marina Ivanovna Petrovka. It’s nice to meet you.”

“Casey Shraeger . . . I’ve heard a lot abut you,” she announced, with a sheepish grin.

“Only the good things, I hope.”

The red-haired detective’s grin was sly as she replied, “Mostly good things anyway.”

The entire room laughed at the sound of Jason’s indignant squawk, earning a soft giggle from Marina. “Well, at least it was mostly good things.”

Chapter End Notes

Translations:

(R) Orla lyubimyy sumasheshhaya devushka - The Eagle's beloved crazy girl (Clint is referring to both Will and Marina here)
(R) Orel - Eagle (Will's Spec Ops code name)
(R) Krechet - Merlin (Jason's Spec Ops code name)
(R) Sova - Owl (Marina's Spec Ops code name)
(R) Yastreb - Hawk (Clint's Spec Ops code name)
(R) bratishka - little brother
(R) Chert voz’mi - fucking hell
(R) Sokol - Falcon (Kenny/Aaron's Spec Ops code name)
(G) Mein Schalki - My Little Mischief (Hansel's nickname for Jason)
(G) Gott sei Dank - Thank God
(G) mein Adler - my Eagle (Hansel's nickname for Will)
(G) mein Tochter - my Daughter (Hansel's nickname for Marina)
(R) Sych - little owl (one of Marina's Spec Ops code names, though only Will is allowed to use it)
(R) Skopa - Osprey (Brian's S.H.I.E.L.D. callsign)
(R) Vdova - Widow (a short form of the codename, "Chernaya Vdova" or "Black Widow", given to Natasha Romanoff by the Academy and the Red Room Program)
(R) Rys' - Lynx (the code name given to Viktoriya Dubrovskaya by the Academy and the Red Room Program)
(R) Tigritsa - Tigress (the code name given to Veronika Belinskaya by the Academy and the Red Room Program)
(R) Gabdyuka - Viper (the code name given to Marina Petrovka by the Academy and the Red Room Program)
(R) Brat'ya Mrachnyy - the Brothers Grimm (the name of the Army's Spec Ops squad manned by the Grimm brothers)
(R) samaya malen'kaya - my little one (one of Will's nicknames for Marina)
(R) Klassno - awesome
(R) sladkiy - honey (Marina's nickname for Jason)
(R) solnyshko - sunshine (Marina's nickname for Kenny/Aaron)
Chapter 125: Elaborate Lies

It was about this time that Assistant Director Maria Hill came striding into the room, her features set into severe lines and a stack of paperwork in her right hand. Catching sight of her out of the corner of her eye, Marina grinned and turned to face her best friend with a cheer, “Vorobey!”
“You owe me a lifetime supply of migraine medication and a pass to the world’s best day spa, forever. And, Colonel, you are never allowed to leave your brothers behind again. Ungodly terrors, the lot of them,” Maria ranted, even as she accepted her best friend’s hug and returned the embrace just as fiercely.

Both Marina and Will grinned, announcing simultaneously, “Done.”

Glancing at his brothers, Will cocked his eyebrow at the immediately sheepish looks on all three of his brothers’ faces, “So which of the three idiocy was the worst trouble?”

“Surprisingly, Jason. I’m still trying to come up with a plausible explanation for why he downloaded a virus into NRAG’s central servers and crashed their entire network. The only thing I’ve been able to come up with is that they deserved it, which isn’t really an answer the Director wants to hear.”

Crossing his arms over his chest, Will glowered at his brother as he demanded, “Explain.”

“They pinged me. And we both know what that means.”

The Power Couple of the family glanced at each other, Marina’s features set into hard lines as she demanded, “When?”

Glancing between the two of them, Jason’s shoulders hunched upwards toward his ears as he replied meekly, “Almost two days ago.”

“And you conveniently neglected to tell us this, why?!” the Colonel demanded, quicksilver eyes flashing through colors before finally settling on a furious Army green.

“I told Maria!” Jason protested hotly, before blanching slightly under his brother’s glare. Staring down at his butchered fingers, he continued speaking too quietly for anyone else but his brother and Marina to hear, ‘Delgado knew I was a Cahill . . . and he knew I was Three.”

If it was possible, the oldest Grimm’s face managed to harden still further. With a heavy sigh, the Russian reached out to lay a conciliatory hand on her partner’s shoulder, admonishing fondly, “Misha, glaring at him isn’t going to change anything. What’s done is done . . . all we can do now is figure out what to do next.”

“You know what that means, right? That Delgado knew Jason was a Cahill?” Will demanded in a low hiss, turning blazing green eyes on his longtime second.

Marina’s tone was appropriately soothing and subservient as she replied, “Yes . . . it means that there’s a very good chance that NRAG was the one to hire Delgado. However, there’s no proof of that yet, not until I can talk to Delgado about it.”

It was about then that Aaron came back into the squad room, a pretty brunette wearing thick black frames gripping his hand firmly. The former DOD operative was carrying what looked like a fishing tackle box in one hand, as he guided the woman further into the room. Marina smiled at her warmly, a significant look at the Colonel a clear indication that they would table their current conversation until a later date. “Marta, I’d like you to meet Aaron’s older brother, Jason. Jason, this is Dr. Marta Shearing.” Cocking a single eyebrow at her boy, she continued cheerfully, “Be nice to her . . . or Aaron will probably break all of your fingers all over again.”

Jason grinned at the pretty brunette as she came to take a seat in a chair Aaron dragged opposite of him. “Sup Doc? It’s nice to meet you. Welcome to the Family Crazy.”

Marta giggled lightly, as she accepted the greeting with a single nod. “It’s been an experience, I’ll
give it that,” she laughed, glancing at where Will was handing out orders to his remaining brothers, Owen Elliot and Bucky Barnes. “Has anyone ever told your brother that he’s a scary son of a bitch?”

Jason chuckled through his wince as she began to trail her fingers along his own, cataloguing each break and dislocation methodically. “Will knows he’s a scary son of a bitch . . . he just doesn’t care. It keeps us in line and his subordinates obedient; generally, that’s a win-win in his book.”

It was about then that Jason’s NYPD co-worker, Detective Eric Delahoy, spoke up. “Is it just me, or is this whole thing surreal? What the fuck, Walsh!?”

Leo Banks’ frowned at the vulgarity, though he was nodding before Delahoy had even completed his whole thought. “I’ll agree with that. What the hell just happened?”

Beaumont’s features were twisted furiously as she demanded, “What the hell is going on, Walsh? Is this the secret you were guarding so fiercely that we broke up?!” Glancing at his redhead partner, who was still standing calmly at Jason’s side, Beaumont jabbed her finger in the other woman’s direction, “And you could tell Shraeger, but not me!? I was your girlfriend!”

Marina’s eyes canted to her boy, asking in a low undertone, “Made your choice then, huh?”

Jason’s lips curved into a small, sad smile as he replied in the same tone. “It wasn’t a hard one in the end; I just needed someone to talk me out of my own head.”

The Russian’s fingers were gentle and comfortably familiar through his hair as she replied fondly, “That’s what big sister’s are good for.”

Maria sighed as suddenly the entire room erupted into chaos. Looking down as Hansel offered her a steadying hand, she grinned up at him before accepting the hand and climbing up onto the desk beside her. “Everybody shut the fuck up!” she shouted, immediately earning the attention of the entire room. “I’m only going to say this once. My name is Commander Hill; I have a stack of nondisclosure agreements for all you to sign, as well as copies of a federal gag order for you all to read. The events of this situation have since been classified at the Department of Homeland Security’s security clearance level, Alpha. If you have any questions . . . well, usually you can take it up with your congressman, but not even they will have the details of the last 24 hours.”

Teal colored eyes were fierce as she took in each detective of the Second Precinct and ordered, “Anyone caught divulging details about any aspect of this hostage situation, will be arrested and tried for treason. Do I make myself abundantly clear?” Glaring at Delahoy as he opened his mouth, no doubt to smart off, she continued, “There will be no talking with the press. There will be no tell-all books. There will be no movie deals. There will a cold, dark jail cell in the deepest, scariest pit I can find. The rest of the world will have forgotten you, by the time I let you see the light of day again. Am I understood?”

Leo’s features were twisted as he snapped, “We have rights.”

Maria’s smile was cold as she countered, “Not when the lives of good men and women are at stake. Men and women who have served this country in our Armed Forces for the last fifteen years and asked for nothing else in return except for the right to live their lives. I can assure you, I value the lives of my Special Operations squads more highly than I do your life, Detective Banks, so keep that in mind as you go forward from there.”

Cole was looking back and forth between his partner and Jason Walsh, noting the visible tension there between the two of them. When he spoke, his voice was quiet but strong as he asked, “Could someone at least explain to me what happened here? Who is Cahill Three?”
Before anyone could even come up with a lie, Maria stepped forward. “Everyone in this damn room is going to sign this document stating that you will never discuss this with anyone else, even each other, ever again. Or I am going to make you wish that you had never been born. Am I understood?”

Jason winced as Delahoy mouthed off behind him, “And in what world am I afraid of you?”

Hansel chuckled briefly as Maria was suddenly a blur of movement. Mere seconds later, Delahoy was facedown on the floor, with one of Maria’s knees in the small of his back and both arms twisted uncomfortably behind him. “I don’t think you truly understand the levels to which I could destroy you, Detective Delahoy. I don’t even have to lock you up to prove a point; give me the word, and I will completely mangle your credit rating and have your entire sexual deviant history downloaded into CODIS within five minutes. I don’t give a shit about whether or not you’re afraid of me; you will, however, offer me the respect that my title and rank deserve. Am I understood or am I going to have to start breaking bones?”

Except for the Brothers Grimm, Marina and Hansel, the entire room was shellshocked by the words the woman was saying. Leo Banks was literally standing less than a foot away, his eyes wide as he watched Maria Hill manhandled his notoriously smart-mouthed partner into complete submission. “And here I thought that I was the one with the deathwish.”

Hansel was still sniggering as he offered a hand to his girlfriend, “All right, mein Spatzi, I do believe hyu ‘ave sufficiently made hyur point.”

Will’s lips were curved into a smirk, arms folded over his chest as he chimed in, “Are you sure, Dad? Because I gotta tell you . . . this is hilarious.”

Maria glared at the two men, accepting Hansel’s hand and allowing him to assist her to her feet. Turning back to the room, she began to hand out the NDAs to each of the detectives in the room. “I need you all to read these over very carefully and sign on the dotted lines. After which, I need everyone on Detective Walsh’s squad to head upstairs to the conference room at the end of the hall.”

Turning her attention onto Casey, she gave the other woman a brittle smile, “Detective Shraeger, I believe you know the one.”

Casey nodded agreeably, before turning her attention onto her partner. “You gonna be okay?”

“Yeah. I’ll be right behind you,” he promised with a lopsided smile, flinching widely as Marta began to tug firmly on the compounded fracture in an attempt to pull the bone back under the skin.

The redhead detective nodded with a small smile, squeezing his shoulder once again and leading her squad mates out of the room. Maria waited patiently to collect the rest of the nondisclosure agreements, each detective and uniform handing them in quietly. Finally, it was just Maria with the Brothers Grimm, Hansel and Bucky Barnes left in the Second Precinct’s Unusuals squad room. Will and Marina were leaning back against Jason’s desk, hips just barely brushing as they watched Maria silently. “So what’s the official story?” Brian asked, lounging lazily back against the wall with Natasha tucked comfortably against the curve of his ribs.

“The same story I told Detective Shraeger. However, I am going to have to explain that the Black Ops squad’s code name is ‘Cahill’.”

Will exploded off the desk at that information, demanding, “Hell no! In what world does it sound like a good idea to attach the Cahill name to the Brat’ya Mrachnyy? I have spent nearly two decades making sure there was no discernible correlation there at all!”

Maria’s lips were a thin line as she shook her head, “I don’t like it any more than you do, Colonel.
But I see no other way. We have to explain away the Cahills; and the only way to do that is explain that they’re classified. Due to signing their NDAs, none of these detectives are ever allowed to speak of the events that happened here again. And I have no intention of going into any real details about any of you. It’s a very calculated risk, but a risk we are going to have to take. I am assuming that all of you stuck to your S.H.I.E.L.D. aliases?”

Clint was the first to nod, with an agreeable, “Da. It sounded like a good idea at the time.”

“There isn’t anything to connect any of you to the Brat’ya Mrachnyy or the Army’s Grimm brothers.” There was a pause before Maria rounded on Jason, eyes narrowed in an exasperated glare. “As for you, I’ve of half a mind to insist that you be reassigned back to base. Because seriously . . . I’ve had more trouble with you since you left S.H.I.E.L.D. than I have with any other retired agent, ever.”

“I’m not going back to base. I’m a cop . . . I like being a cop. I like my partner and I don’t want to go back.”

Maria rolled her eyes, “God, Jay, we can transfer your girlfriend too.”

The technical specialist narrowed his eyes at his former commander officer, growling, “Casey isn’t my girlfriend.”

Marina was giggling quietly from her place beside Will, even as Maria arched one eyebrow upwards and drawled insolently, “Uh huh.”

Whatever Jason was about to say was interrupted when Marina spoke up wistfully, “It would be nice to have all of my boys home and in one place . . . even if it’s just for a little while.”

Jason rounded on his sister, glaring at her lightly before sighing resignedly. “I’m not saying yes . . . but I’ll think about it. Okay?”

The Russian nodded as she moved to wrap her arms around her boy’s neck. “Thank you, Jason.”

“Yeah yeah yeah,” he grumbled, yelping slightly as the bone finally slipped back under the skin and slid into place. “Yebat’! That chertov hurt, Marta!”

Marta’s smile was sympathetic as she looked up at him through her eyelashes. “How does it feel now?”

Staring down at the finger, Jason blinked slightly as he realized that the stabbing pain he had been experiencing had dropped back into a kind of dull throb. “Better. Thanks Doc.”

“You’re welcome,” she replied fondly, reaching up to squeeze his wrist lightly before allowing Aaron to assist her to her feet. “I’ve done what I can for right now. But I need X-Rays and quick set plaster for the worst of it.”

Immediately the middle Grimm moved to protest, Marina’s eyes stern if understanding as she stepped forward. “I promise, Jay . . . you won’t have to stay in Medical. But I do want you to get checked out. All right? Two hours, I promise.”

“Fifteen minutes,” Jason bartered back, pouting slightly.

Crossing her arms over her chest, the Russian considered her boy before conceding, “One hour . . . not a minute less. Final offer.”
His pout growing just that more pronounced, Jason slouched backwards as he muttered, “Fine. One hour and then I walk.”

“That’s the deal,” was the fond agreement, chocolate eyes looking up to meet her second youngest charge’s eyes with a shallow nod. "Solnyshko, if you and Marta would take your brother to Medical, I would appreciate it.”

The nod was returned, Aaron fitting his hand comfortably under his brother’s bicep and levering him carefully to his feet. “Come on, big brother. The sooner we get there, the sooner you get to leave.”

Marina stepped forward to wrap her arms around her boy’s shoulder tightly once he was on his feet. “Ya lyublyu tebya, sladkiy. We’ll see you soon.”

The tech specialist’s eyes were warm and adoring as he tucked his chin over the curve of her shoulder and returned the sentiment earnestly, “Ya lyublyu tebya, Marishka. I’ll see you at Vika’s wedding?”

“Of course . . . and I’ll see if I can get Detective Shraeger to come,” the handler teased, nose wrinkling at the petulant face Jason made in reply.

“She’s not my girlfriend,” he insisted, glaring at her as Marina sallied in reply, “Yet.”

Looking down at her watch, the former assassin sighed heavily. “All right. Vika’s wedding is in two hours. And I still have a terrorist to torture and a confession to coerce.” Going up on tiptoes she pressed a quick kiss to Will’s lips, “Do me a favor and send Owen to clean up my mess in about an hour?”

Will chuckled with a nod. “Deal.”

Nodding in return, Marina turned to leave the room before pausing briefly at Hansel Kuhn’s side. The Grimm Clan’s patriarch was standing rigidly in the doorway, watching her with steady robin’s egg eyes. Smirking at him fondly, she asked, “You coming, Vati?”

If his students would have seen the grin on their instructor’s face, every single one of them would have ran in terror. As it was, the smile on Hansel Kuhn’s face was vengeful as he replied, “I thought hyu vould never ask, mein Tochter.”

Chapter End Notes

Translations:

(R) Vorobey - Sparrow (Marina's nickname for her best friend, Maria Hill)
(R) idiots - idiots
(G) mein Spatzi - my little sparrow (Hansel's nickname for his girlfriend, Maria Hill)
(R) Brat'ya Mrachnyy - Brothers Grimm (the official code name of the Army's Spec Ops squad)
(R) Da/Net - Yes/No
(R) Yebat' - Fuck
(R) chertov - fucking
(R) Ya lyublyu tebya - I love you
(R) sladkiy - honey (Marina's nickname for Jason)
(R) solnyshko - sunshine (Marina's nickname for Aaron/Kenny)
(G) Vati - Dad (Marina's nickname for Hansel)
(G) mein Tochter - my daughter (Hansel's nickname for Marina)
Torture and Interrogation

Chapter Notes

Enjoy. Amerou is awesome and deserves a medal. Enjoy! Translations are at the end.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter 126: Torture and Interrogation

Natasha Alianovna Romanova had seen both the worst of men – the Akademiya and its pet Krasnaya Komnata – as well as the best of them – The Brothers Grimm... the fierce love in the eyes of her beloved, if batshit crazy, Brian – but only in one woman had she ever seen the best and worst together. The first time she’d ever heard of Marina Ivanovna Petrovka, she hadn’t even known her true name; the only thing she’d known was that the “Gadyuka” had become the protégé of the legitimately legendary, and legitimately feared, “Zimnyi Soldat”, simultaneously earning the reputation of being fearless and crazy. The second time, she still hadn’t known her name, only that the Gadyuka had defected, had been labelled a traitor and was to be eliminated with all prejudice.
Then Major Clint Grimm made a different call and gave a Black Widow a chance at a different life. And she’d finally learned the name of the woman known to her up until that point only as Gadyuka. She hadn’t been afraid of her then, though she probably should have been seeing as the former Russian assassin had held the power of life or death within the palm of her delicate hand. Even to this day, she didn’t fear the former assassin; Natasha respected her of course – her training, her abilities, the connections she’d made, the alliances she’d created – but she didn’t fear Marina personally. Anyone who could inspire such loyalty from S.H.I.E.L.D.’s Brothers Grimm and such adoration from the Red Room’s favorite assassin was definitely deserving of her respect.

The funny thing about it was that Marina was one of the warmest, kindest, gregarious and most outgoing people Natasha knew. She wasn’t exactly the poster child for heartless assassin or vengeful killer . . . at least not until one of her boys – Bucky Barnes included – was threatened. The first time that Natasha caught a glimpse at the well of hatred Marina was capable of, Kenneth Grimm had been reported dead and Will Grimm’s Russian counterpart was methodically planning all the different ways she would take her boy’s murderer apart. The vicious and single-minded manner in which she’d taken NRAG apart to retrieve Bucky Barnes; the systematic destruction of a drug smuggler’s camp after Will was shot while the two were on brief Army deployment together in Peru; the pile of dead bodies she’d left in the front foyer of the Second Precinct comprised of men whose only crime was standing between her and a captive Jason Grimm. All of these things had reinforced that respect; any of S.H.I.E.L.D.’s newbies would claim Natasha Romanoff as the deadliest agent within the division, but – under certain circumstances – Natasha knew better.

This was probably why Natasha looked up at her lover and asked cheerfully, “So, am I the only one who thinks that someone should initiate Detective Shraeger in the vengeful ways of the Family Russian?”

The Colonel – another man whom Natasha had learned to fear – chuckled at the question, even as Brian cocked an eyebrow at her curiously. “Detective Shraeger? I think I missed something.”

The Chernaya Vdova rolled her eyes quickly at Brian’s cluelessness, before teasing, “Marina’s right; the lot of you can be chertov oblivious to your brothers’ love lives.”

“Well hold on a second; it is impossible to be oblivious to Will’s love life. In fact, it’s pretty damn hard to miss,” her lover protested, with a wide grin at his brother’s expense. Yelping, the brown eyed Grimm only barely dodged the punch his older brother threw in his direction, the fist glancing hard off his bicep and causing a riot of sensation along his nerves. “Der’mo! Thanks a lot, mudak; you gave me a chertovskiy dead arm.”

One of Natasha’s eyebrows arched upwards when Will’s only response to the profanity laden accusation was a sly smirk and a lazy shrug, before the Widow continued her thought, “Even though he won’t admit it, Jason clearly has deep feelings for Detective Shraeger. And based on the way she stood guard over him like an English bulldog, it is very likely she has the same feelings for him. That being said, it’s probably a good idea that the detective finds out what she’s in for sooner rather than later, right?”

Clint chuckled from where he was perched atop the filing cabinet, the Winter Soldier leaning back against the cabinet directly below him. “It’s probably not a bad idea. Marina can be a little much to take for the uninitiated.”

Folding his arms over his chest, the eldest Grimm cocked his eyebrow at the two best friends. “Are you seriously suggesting that we take Detective Shraeger to watch Marina torture Delgado? Cause there is no way that conversation between them isn’t going to end bloody.”

The two friends smirked, announcing simultaneously, “Exactly.”
Leaning back against the desk, Will crossed his arms over his chest as he contemplated the
suggestion seriously. Finally, he nodded briefly, “All right . . . just try to keep her away from
the really gory stuff? Fury gave the order for ‘No Quarter’ so Marina’s not going to care if he’s a little . . .
destroyed . . . when she’s done with him. We don’t want to scare the poor girl so badly she runs for
the hills, before she and Jason ever get together.”

Brian grinned at the permission, assuring his brother, “We’ll try not to scar the poor girl for life.”

The Colonel’s eyes rolled as he drawled, “Somehow, that’s not comforting.”

Offering his girlfriend his elbow, Brian asked, “Shall we, Agent Romanoff?”

“Shall we indeed,” she replied, looping her hand in the crook of his elbow and allowing him to lead
the way from the room.

The couple arrived at the conference room just in time to hear Maria growl at an insolent Delahoy,
“Detective Delahoy, you are trying my last nerve.” Reaching up, she rubbed at the headache
building between her eyes. “There are two ways that we put this behind us. There is the easy way,
and that is very very easy. You sign the NDAs and never speak of this again. And then there’s the
hard way . . . and you don’t have the security clearance high enough to even know about the hard
way.”

Brian’s snicker from the doorway drew the attention of the entire room, earning him a glare from
Maria and an elbow in the gut from Natasha. Turning forward once again, the redhead spy grinned
at her superior. “Is there anyway that Agent Gamble and I could borrow Detective Shraeger? There’s
something we need her help with.”

“I’m in the middle of my debriefing, Agent Romanoff.” Sighing at the sheepish grin on Natasha’s
face, and the outright smirk on Brian’s, Maria shook her head resignedly. “All right. Fortunately, it’s
nothing that the detective and I haven’t already discussed.”

Brian grinned brightly as he stepped forward to pull the auburn haired detective to her feet.
“Awesome. Come on, Detective Shraeger . . . there’s something we need to show you.”

The woman’s eyebrows furrowed in confusion as she asked, “Show me? What is it?”

The grin on Natasha’s face would have sent more than a few of the junior agents back at the base
running in terror, as she shrugged lightly, “You’ll see.”

Meanwhile, Marina and Hansel arrived at the basement level interview rooms. The area was empty
of anyone except for Marina’s two sisters and Delgado. Gesturing for Hansel to set up his gear inside
the room where Delgado sat tied to a chair, the handler moved to stand beside her sisters. “Vika . . .
your wedding is in two hours. Go with Nika and get ready.”

Viktoriya shook her head firmly as she insisted, “I can wait.”

“No, starshaya sestra, you cannot. It’s your wedding day and you deserve to be the most beautiful
thing in the world today of all days. Go home . . . I’ll meet you at the house soon.”

Veronika frowned as she inquired with narrowed eyes, “And what about you? We are her
bridesmaids . . . she needs us to look amazing. And Marishka . . . you have blood in your hair.”

Marina smirked, even as she shook her head firmly. “I have something to finish before I can call this
done.” Reaching out, she took her sisters’ hands in both of her own. “I promise, this wedding is
going to be perfect and no one is going to have any blood in their hair. You have my word.”
The blond haired Amazon nibbled lightly on her lower lip as she watched the pretty handler shift her attention between the two women and the scene unfolding inside the cell. “Be careful, Gadyuka, promise?”

There was a firm nod in agreement, before the youngest sister wrapped her arms around the oldest’s shoulders fondly. “I promise. Go on . . . I’ll see you both soon.”

Despite being visibly reluctant to abandon their younger sister, both spies nodded their agreement. Exchanging strong hugs and adoring farewells, the two women turned towards the stairwell and left the basement level behind. Watching them go for a moment, Marina finally took a deep breath and entered the basement level interrogation room, smirking lightly at the scene that met her there. Hansel had been hard at work since he’d entered the room, his left hand – and the brass knuckles he clutched in it – covered in the blood that streamed down Delgado’s battered face. Her arms came up to fold over her chest as she teased, “Leave some for the rest of us, Vati.”

Hansel’s shoulders heaved as he stepped back from his work, hands hanging loosely at his side. “There will be plenty leftover for hyu and mein Schalki, Tochter.”

Delgado moaned lightly as he shifted, earning a derisive snort from the former hunter as he snarled, “Pussy! I’ve seen Austrian housewives put up with more punishment that that.”

Wrinkling her nose at her de facto father-in-law, she strode further into the room and drew the second chair from its place under the table. Spinning the chair around, she straddled the back and folded her arms over the chair back. For a long moment, she simply contemplated the man, taking in the gasping breaths, the bloody features, the fear in his eyes when he looked at the Grimm Family Patriarch.

It was about then that Natasha and Brian led Casey Shraeger into the observation room. Natasha gestured toward the window, where the trio inside the interrogation room was clear as day. Brian’s grin was sly as he insisted, ”Jason adores you. And if for no other reason than that, you’re going to need to understand what you’re getting into . . . both as his partner and his girlfriend.”

Casey moved immediately to protest, stammering to make herself heard as she insisted, “I’m not his girlfriend. We’re partners . . . that’s all. I . . . I don’t think of Walsh that way . . . besides, I already have a boyfriend.”

The redheaded spy rolled her eyes, slapping ineffectually at his arm, before turning to the other woman. “Are you married?”

Shraeger’s eyebrows furrowed as she cocked her head slightly, her reply a slow drawl as she insisted, “No.”

“Then your relationship isn’t exactly written in stone. And even then, everything is negotiable.” Nodding in the direction of the interrogation, the spy insisted, “The most important thing to remember is that Marina Ivanovna Petrovka may be sweet and gentle and kind with her boys . . . but, except for maybe Hansel Kuhn, she’s by far the deadliest member of that family. Okay?”

Casey’s eyes were wide, causing Brian to take pity as he looped one arm around her shoulder and squeezed lightly. “Just watch.”

Inside the interrogation room, Marina sat up and braced her hands on her thighs. “Hello Delgado. I don’t think we met, the last time you crashlanded into my boy’s life like a meteor. My name is Marina Petrovka.”
Delgado turned his head and expectorated a bloody wad of spit onto the floor to his left. “So what, you think if you play ‘Good Cop, Bad Cop’ I’m going to be more willing to tell you what I know? Like hell . . . I’ll never tell you a damned thing.”

The Russian’s smile was brittle and sharp-edged as she insisted, “Frankly, I hope you don’t confess easily. My boy has six dislocations and at least 10 fractures in his hands; and I am looking forward to paying you back for them . . . in triplicate. This isn’t ‘Good Cop, Bad Cop’, Delgado . . . this is more like ‘Bad Cop, Worse Cop’.”

Folding her arms over the chair back in front of her, the handler cocked her head at him slightly and insisted, “There are two ways this is going to go, Delgado, though the end result will be the same no matter how we end up at that point.” Lifting one finger, she recited, “Number one; you’re going to answer my questions, tell me what I want to know and I’m going to kill you . . . quick, clean and as painless as possible.” There was a vicious smile on her face as she allowed that to sink in before holding up a second finger, “Number two; you don’t answer my questions, you don’t tell me what I want to know, and I peel every inch of skin from your body, one inch at a time, after which I will carve you open until I hold your still beating heart in the palm of my hand while making sure that you are conscious enough to feel every painful second. After which, you will tell me what I want to know, you will answer my questions and I will kill you.”

Smirking she shrugged lightly as she insisted, “Either way, you die. The manner in which you die is up to you . . . but frankly, I’m holding out for the hard way. I’ll enjoy it more.”

“You’re bluffing. Your government would never allow you to kill me.”

The woman let out an amused chuckle as she shrugged, “My boss was the one who gave the order for ‘No Quarter’.” Seeing the blank look on the man’s face, Marina cocked an eyebrow upwards. “You’ve never been military, have you?” Without waiting for an answer, she continued, “Allow me to explain. ‘No Quarter’ is what happens when the winning side announces that it will take no prisoners. Everyone from the officers to the peons dies . . . no exceptions.”

Delgado leaned as far forward as his bonds would allow, insisting in a low hiss, “I will never tell you what I know.”

Marina’s lips curved upwards as she leaned forward and replied in the same low tone, “That’s what you think. Eventually, everybody talks . . . it’s just a matter of finding the right incentive.

It was about then that Delgado turned to look at Hansel, obviously expecting some kind of help from the former witch hunter. Hansel’s grin was only a flash of teeth as the Russian informed him lightly, “I can assure you, you’ll find no quarter there. That is Agent Walsh’s father; he’s only here to make sure that I don’t kill you too quickly. Frankly, he’s more likely to pin you down while I carve you open than offer you any help whatsoever.”

Standing from the chair, Marina moved to where Hansel had laid out his carryall, selecting a wicked-looking blade from the implements laid out there. Spinning the blade against the tip of her finger, the Russian cocked her head and inquired, “So, what’s it going to be, Delgado? The easy way? Or the hard way?” Smirking, she drawled, “Please say the hard way . . . I’ve been looking forward to the hard way all day.”

Delgado was silent for a moment, before finally he spit a bloody wad of saliva into Marina’s face. The woman barely flinched as it landed against her cheek, sliding slickly down the skin, as her smirk morphed into a truly evil grin. “All right then . . . the hard way it is.”

Casey’s eyes were glued to the scene as Marina made the first cut, a thin slice that pealed the top
layer of skin from Delgado’s left cheek. The auburn haired woman flinched widely as Marina took the flesh between steel pincers and began to pull it steadily from the muscle below, earning a torrid scream from her victim. Every second of the scene inside that room was a battle between Casey and her roiling stomach. The detective had always considered herself to have ironclad control over her gag reflex; the bloody meat Delgado was being reduced to in the other room was sorely testing her resolve.

The first loud crack of bone breaking as the Russian snapped Delago’s pinky finger, however, was where Casey was forced to draw the line. Lunging for the small trashcan in the corner, the detective heaved up her guts into the plastic lined can. Deft hands gathered her hair at the nape of her neck, holding it out of the way as she puked. Natasha’s voice was surprisingly fond as she sighed, “You can’t say we didn’t warn you. And to be honest, this is surprisingly tame compared to what she’s been trained for, what I know she’s capable of.”

“You mean it could get worse!?” the woman choked with wide horrified eyes.

It was Brian who answered that question after a low pause. “Detective Shraeger, when it comes to what Marina will do to protect this family, it can always get worse.”

Chapter End Notes

Translations:

(R) Akademiya - The Academy
(R) Krasnaya Komnata - The Red Room
(R) Zimniy Soldat - Winter Soldier (code name given to Bucky Barnes by the KGB and the Red Room)
(R) Gadyuka - Viper (code name given to Marina Petrovka by the KGB and the Red Room)
(R) Chernaya Vdova - Black Widow (code name given to Natalya Romanova by the KGB and the Red Room)
(R) chertov - fucking
(R) Der’mo! - Shit!
(R) mudak - asshole
(R) chertovskiy - damned
(R) starshaya sestra - big sister
(G) Vati - Dad (Marina's nickname for Hansel Kuhn)
(G) mein Schalki - my little mischief (Hansel's nickname for Jason; kinda like little prankster or little jester)
(G) Tochter - daughter (Hansel's nickname for Marina Petrovka)
Chapter 127: Answers and Questions

Brian reached over and turned off the speaker, cutting off the sounds of the interrogation going on in the room next door, and for a long time, only the sound of Casey retching filled the room. Finally, the auburn haired detective regained control over her stomach and sat back from where she’d sat hunched over the wastebasket. A shaky hand came up to push back a lank strand of hair as she looked up at the two spies. Surprisingly, Natasha’s blank face was more comforting than Brian’s own; the sight of him reminded her too much of her partner and how little she truly knew about the man she had learned to trust so completely. “Why are you showing me this?”

Natasha frowned, turning her attention to her lover before turning back to face Casey once again. Green eyes were solemn and a little sad as she gave the other woman a small smile, arms coming up to fold over her chest. “To protect Jason.”

Casey jerked in surprise, as that had been the last thing she’d thought the spy would say. “Protect Walsh? From what?! I would never hurt him . . . he’s my partner!”

The mahogany-eyed agent gave her a feeble smile as he shook his head, replying gently, “Maybe you wouldn’t mean to. I don’t think Sarah ever thought she would hurt him either, but he still hasn’t forgiven himself for what happened to her.” Lifting his hands, Brian rubbed hard over his face, before shoving his hands deeply into the pockets of his tactical pants. “We never met Sarah, not until the end . . . not until she was dying.” There was a heavy sigh as the agent closed his eyes, before
continuing his thought, “Jason kept all of this from her – Marina, the Army, our brothers, our dad, Spec Ops – to try and protect her. He joined the Reserves, he retired from full time work with Special Operations . . . he did everything he could think to keep her safe. Then Delgado took her, in revenge for what Jason had done to his empire. The way she looked at him, the day we rescued her . . . it destroyed him. He hasn’t been the same since.”

Natasha’s fingers were tender as they stroked over her lover’s shoulder. “I never met her; I didn’t come into their lives until after she was killed. But even I could see the signs that Jason wasn’t quite . . . whole after her death. There were indications in the way that the Gadyuka hovered at the periphery of his space, trying to stay close in case he needed her while trying not to smother him with her concern for him. The way that the Colonel would watch him some times, eyes careful and calculating. Little things that Clint or Brian would say, that painted a picture of a very different Jason than the one I know.”

Crouching in front of Shraeger, Brian braced his hands on her knees and looked intently into her eyes. “This is what we are capable of. This is what Jason is capable of.” There was a dry smirk on his lips as he muttered, “It’s hard enough to find a girl you want to be with, without having to watch her run away the second she sees the truth about who you are.” The smirk turned teasing as he continued, “There are, after all, only so many former Russian assassins in the world with a fondness for Cahills. So far, Marina, Natasha and Bucky make three; Vika is marrying Coulson who is badass awesome but not really family; and Nika is . . . well, Marina has had ‘Property of Jim Street’ stamped across Nika’s forehead for months.” Rolling his eyes, he muttered under his breath, “Not that either one of them knows that. Poor Jim; if I didn’t think she suited him, I’d try to protect him from Marina’s matchmaking a little better.”

“You would not,” the Russian spy retorted, rolled her eyes before reminding her lover lightly, “Also, the Zimniy Soldat is technically American . . .”

Brian’s eyes narrowed fondly as he taunted, “. . . who has been in the service of the Russians for far longer than he has ever been an American.”

“Technically, he was only active for about eight years. They froze him the rest of the time.”

Brian smirked as he teased, “Does that count the thirteen years he was training Marina?”

Natasha rolled her eyes, “Since when does thirteen fit into eight? How exactly did you survive your math classes?”

“I had Will to do it for me,” he taunted, sidestepping the fond slap that his girlfriend aimed his way.

Watching the two as they devolved into fond bickering, Casey glanced toward the window of the observation room. From her position on the floor, she couldn’t see anything and with the speaker turned off, Delgado’s screams were so muffled that she could pretend she hadn’t heard them at all. Finally, she asked the question that had been hammering against her skull since Brian had mentioned it. “What do you mean ‘this is what Jason is capable of’?”

That quiet question brought the two to a stand still, before Brian glanced at Natasha. Turning back to Casey, he shrugged nonchalantly. “We’re Special Operations, Detective Shraeger. We’ve done worse things, just because someone higher on the food chain told us to.” Reaching out to squeeze her shoulder lightly, he concluded, “The question therefore is not what can Jason do, but can you accept him in spite of it? And the only one that can answer that is you.”

Standing from his crouched position, Brian turned to look at Natasha. “I’m going to go see if I can help with the clean up. You two going to be okay down here?”
His girlfriend gave him a small smile, the expression little more than a crinkling at the corners of her eyes and a slight upturn at the corners of her mouth. “We’ll be fine. I imagine that as soon as Jason has been released from Medical, Agent Brandt will send him down here to finish off Delgado.”

Brian checked his watch, doing the mental calculations as he muttered, “Ninety-five minutes to Vika’s wedding; you think we’re going to make it?”

Glancing through the glass to the interrogation, she watched Marina’s casual perch on the corner of the table and Hansel’s relaxed pose in the chair, both S.H.I.E.L.D. handler and instructor intent on the brutally beaten Delgado. “I think he’s singing like a canary, so yeah . . . we should be good.”

Casey’s head flashed up, “He’s talking?”

The couple glanced at each other lightly, before Brian bussed a brief kiss to Natasha’s cheek and strode from the room. The small smile morphed into a real smirk as the remaining assassin shrugged lazily, “People will insist until they are blue in the face that they’ll never tell you anything, but there comes a point when even the threat of pain is enough to make someone spill their guts. Usually, we would ease them into the idea that we can hurt them and increase the threshold as time went on; obviously Marina kinda skipped a few steps and went straight for the hard-hitting. We’re kind of on a tight schedule and so there wasn’t really any time to pussyfoot around.”

There was a long moment of silence, as Casey considered that before continuing with her thought, “So what is Jason going to do . . . I mean, do you really think he’ll kill him?”

“His brother stopped him last time; made him take the high road and allow the Spanish to lock him up in one of their prisons. But considering what’s happened over the last few days, and the order for no quarter? Yeah, I think Jason will kill him and I don’t think I know of a single person who will fault him for snapping his neck like a twig . . . not even Agent Brandt.”

Casey blinked in surprise at the statement, echoing carefully, “Snapping his neck? Why wouldn’t he just shoot him? I mean, I’ve seen Jason on the range here at the precinct; he’s a really good shot.”

“Yeah, but Jason’s hands are pretty messed up. He’s not going to be holding a gun for a long time. Snapping his neck will be easier for him . . .” there was a brief pause, before Natasha confessed lightly, “. . . and probably a lot more satisfying too.”

There was a fierce frown from the auburn haired woman as she considered that, before shifting to lean back against the wall beside the doorway. It was a long time before Jason came bursting into the observation room, two of his brothers – Casey was pretty sure they were Clint and Aaron, though it was admittedly pretty hard to tell – hot on his heels. Dropping to his knees in front of his partner, Jason brought wrapped hands up to shoulders. Casey stared wide-eyed at the white bandaging, feeling her heart catch in her chest at the sight, before looking up into his eyes as he shook her gently. “Casey . . . come on, Shraeger. Talk to me.”

Hazel eyes were a little shell-shocked as she whispered, “Are you okay?”

“Am I okay?” Jason stammered in shock, his forehead furrowing for a moment, before he rounded on his brother’s girlfriend and S.H.I.E.L.D. partner. “What the hell did you do, Romanoff? Letting her watch Marina work!? Are you trying to scare her away!?”

Natasha cocked an eyebrow upwards at his tone though whatever she was going to say was interrupted as Casey brought her hands up to Jason’s cheeks and forced him to look at her. Green eyes were understandably wary, and inexplicably adoring, as he allowed her to direct him where she wanted him. Blunt fingers tightened fractionally on her shoulders, the resulting wince hidden behind
what Casey was only just coming to understand was Jason’s exceptional poker face and characteristic stoicism.

It was only then that the detective saw what Jason had been trying to hide from her for months; the fierce loyalty and complete adoration he had for her. It was freeing to know that Jason wanted her exactly as she was; to know that he didn’t want to change her in any way. Her parents constantly despaired of her lifestyle choices and even Davis, her boyfriend, didn’t understand why she’d chosen to be a cop and completely push away the money and power that she’d been born into. But Jason – dorky, fun-loving, smart-mouthed and loyal Jason – didn’t give a single damn about any of those things . . . he only cared about her. The words the detective had wanted to say dried up in her mouth and without really knowing what she was doing, she pushed herself up onto her knees and pressed her mouth against his own.

Keeping her eyes open allowed her to watch the way that Jason’s eyes flashed open in honest surprise at the action. For a long moment, neither of them moved, before a low groan reverberated through her partner’s chest and his bandaged hands came up to haul her closer. One arm came up to brace against the small of her back and hip, while the other elbow hooked tenderly around her neck as he tilted his head and proceeded to kiss the hell out of her. Casey’s eyes fluttered closed as warmth flooded her body, the firmness of his arms around her waist causing her heart to stammer in her chest and a low moan to slip from her lips.

Whatever would have happened next was lost in the sound of an amused voice behind him, “Well if she wasn’t your girlfriend before, Jason, I do hope you intend to make an honest woman of her now,” came the light teasing from where his sister stood in the doorframe behind them.

Jason groaned again, but forced himself to back away from Casey’s embrace and twist gingerly to look up at the smirking Russian. “Very funny, Marina.”

The Russian was leaning one hip leisurely against the doorframe, wiping her bloody hands on an already bloody cloth as chocolate eyes took in the tableau before her. There were tight lines in the corners of her eyes and her jaw was locked tightly, a clear indication that she was pissed off about whatever she had just learned. Frowning at the picture she made, Jason asked carefully, “Marishka . . . you okay?”

Forcing a smile, Marina allowed her head to dip once in a nod. “Peachy keen, jelly bean.” Gesturing back the way she’d come, she insisted, “He’s all yours . . . if you still want him.”

Jason looked down at Casey uncertainly, visibly concerned by her reaction to everything that she had seen in the last hour. Casey smiled at him fondly, her hands tightening fractionally on his cheeks once more. “No matter what happens between us next, Walsh, you are my partner. And I accept everything about you . . . that will never change, I promise.”

The look of utter relief and awe that flooded over Walsh’s face caused a painful twinge in Casey’s chest at the knowledge that he hadn’t believed she would stay at his side. Bending, he kissed her once again, before accepting Clint’s help to his feet and following Marina from the room. Casey stood from the chair, moving to the window and watching dispassionately as Jason and Marina entered the room. The sight of Delgado’s bloodied features and mangled body prompted only a strange disinterest as she watched her partner’s sister wave him further into the room.

Walsh moved to sit on the edge of the table in front of Delgado, bending to whisper quietly into the man’s ear. Whatever he said caused the former drug trafficker to struggle briefly, before the detective stood and moved behind him. Wrapping one arm firmly around Delgado’s neck, he braced his other wrist against the back of his head. There was a moment of complete stillness before Jason simultaneously jerked his elbow and shoved with his wrist, resulting in a sickening pop that
reverberated throughout the room.

Despite having watching Jason kill a man with his bare hands, Casey couldn’t find it in herself to be frightened of him. While she was sure there was more to him than just what he and Commander Hill had told her, Casey was at least sure of three things; one, that Jason Walsh was a good man, a better man than even some of the men she’d known growing up; two, that he loved her and would do everything in his power to make sure that he never hurt her; and three, that she was falling for him hard. Watching as Jason stepped back to allow his father to check the dead’s man’s artery, Casey knew that no matter what other secrets she discovered about her partner, she would always stand firmly in his corner.
Chapter Notes

You are cordially invited to the chaos leading up to the wedding of Viktoriya Viktorovna Dubrovskaya and Philip Justus Coulson. Please buckle your seatbelts and keep your hands & feet inside the ride. It's going to be a hell of a bumpy ride. Tomorrow's the actual wedding and the reception, but I hope you still enjoy this part anyway. Love you guys, and your wonderful reviews. Keep them coming, please! <3

As always, Amerou's Maria is badass and awesome. Many kudos to her for helping me once again her Maria's voice right.

Translations, as always, at the end.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
Chapter 128: Pushing Time

When Jason and Marina reentered the squad room, it was to the sight of Will practically slouching against the edge of Jason’s desk, arms folded over his chest as he listened to a report from one of the junior agents that S.H.I.E.L.D. had lent the brothers. Casey and Natasha came in behind, giving the detective the opportunity to watch the reunion between the two lovers. Casey had not forgotten what Jason had told her, about Marina raising him and his brothers; as a result, the relationship between the merciless killer she’d seen at work downstairs and the calm, composed agent she’d met earlier intrigued her.
The sight of movement near the doorway brought the agent’s head around, one hand coming up to cut his subordinate off midsentence at the sight of his partner. “Marishka . . . samaya malen’kaya . . .” here he paused, quicksilver eyes taking her in from head to toe. When he spoke again, it was in a dry, amused tone, “How did you manage to get more blood in your hair, sumasshedshaya devushka?”

Casey watched Jason’s shoulders jerk with his quiet snort, earning a sidelong glare and a cocked eyebrow from his older sister. Turning back to her lover, the woman snarked brightly, “Don’t even start, Misha . . . I seem to remember you getting pretty oblazhalsya after the Barnes interrogation.”

A small smirk curved up one corner of the oldest brother’s lips as he nodded once in concession, “So I did.” Silver eyes, with a wide green ring around the iris, swept her up and down once again. Neither spoke for a long moment, before Will asked solemnly, “It’s bad . . . isn’t it.”

One hand came up to push back a stray curl as the Russian sighed heavily, “Worse, actually.” Rubbing her hands briskly over her face, she looked down at her watch and sighed once again, “I’m going to be late to my sister’s wedding.”

Standing from his place against the desk, William Brandt came to his partner’s side, fingers tender as he brushed back the same wayward strand she had tried to tame mere moments earlier. “Maybe a little. Do you want to talk about it?”

Taking a deep breath, the pretty handler shook her head firmly. “No, right now I just want to make it through the wedding.” Her eyes were tortured as she wrapped her hands in the straps of his tactical vest and dropped her head back to look up at him. “Can we do that? Just forget all about this klastera-yebat’ until after the wedding?”

The smile on his lips was small as he cupped her cheeks in his palms, nodding in agreement, “Yeah . . . it can wait until we debrief tomorrow.” There was pause, before he grinned slyly, “Frankly, I don’t want to see what the ninja known as Coulson will do to us if the Maid of Honor is late to her sister’s wedding. He might challenge you to a fight to the death to avenge his fiancée’s honor or something.”

Her head dropped back as Marina let out an honest peal of giggles, “Like Coulson would be so blatant about it. My luck? He’d set up a series of booby traps in my office, wipe my hard drive twice just because he could, then proceed to quietly make my first day back hell on earth.”

Natasha spoke up from where she was standing at the doorframe then, tone amused as she insisted, “Well, if we want to avoid the Wrath of Coulson, we should probably start by getting the blood out of your hair, Marina.”

Both Maria Hill and Hansel Kuhn entered the squad room together, just as Marina nodded. “Yeah . . . that’s going to be a bitch and a half.” Stepping forward to join Natasha at the door, Marina leaned over and snatched her best friend away from her boyfriend. “Come on, Vorobey . . . time to go get pretty for the wedding.”

Maria balked at the statement, her argument floating back to the squad room as she protested, “But that’ll take hours. Do you remember how long it took me to get ready for the Officer’s Ball?! We only have forty-five minutes left.”

“Then we’re going to have to hurry aren’t we? You’re not wearing your uniform to a wedding, Maria. It WILL NOT kill you to wear something pretty every once in a while . . . and I know for a fact that Vati would probably appreciate the effort every once in a while.”
“But . . .,” here the assistant director foundered, obviously searching for some excuse to avoid the combined beautification efforts of both former Red Room assassins. “. . . I don’t have the boobs to hide my gun in that dress you picked out.”

The Russian’s tone was bored and long-suffering as she drawled, “Then go without a gun.”

There was a second of shocked silence, the brothers filling it with good-natured laughter, before Maria sputtered indignantly, “Go without a gun!? Marina, have you MET me!?"

Turning to his brothers and father, Will sighed. “Well, now that that’s settled . . . I believe Jason has something he would like to say to his partner.”

Jason narrowed his eyes at his brother, snarking lightly, “Smooth, big brother; real smooth.”

Will checked his watch as he shrugged nonchalantly. “Seriously, Jay, we’re on a timetable here. Either ask the girl or let’s go; Maria may not be allowed to wear her uniform, but the rest of us have been specifically requested to attend the wedding in dress greens. So chop chop . . . we don’t have all day.”

Narrowed green eyes vowed violent revenge on his brother, before Jason sighed heavily and turned to face Casey. “So I know this is a little last minute, and you probably don’t have a dress, but would you like to go to a wedding with me?”

Looking up at him in surprise, it was only a moment before Casey could literally feel her cheeks stretching to accommodate the width of her grin. “I would love to attend your sister’s sister’s wedding with you.” Hip-checking him playfully, she teased, “I may even have an old dress or two I could dig up to wear.” There was a moment, before her face twisted slightly in disgust, “But first, I need to brush my teeth. Regurgitated stomach acid tastes like feet and smells worse.”

Jason made a face at the statement, a small shudder fluttering through his shoulders as he insisted, “Okay . . . I didn’t need to know that.”

“I’m surprised you don’t already know that. You were the one who kissed me after I spent at least twenty minutes turning my guts inside out.”

Rolling his eyes, he sallied back, “In all fairness, you kissed me first. And while I may not exactly be a pearl before swine, I do know that you don’t push away a girl you really like when she’s the one who kissed you first.”

Clint’s tone was teasing as he sing-songed from where he remained perched atop the filing cabinet, “Jason and Casey, sitting in a tree, K-I-S-S-I-N-G . . . first comes love, then comes marriage . . .” Whatever the sniper would have said next was interrupted when Jason cut him off in an equally singsong tone, “. . . then comes Clint’s balls in a blender if he doesn’t zatkins’."

Aaron chuckled from where he stood against the wall with Marta tucked under one arm, his voice appropriately mellow as he teased, “Someone’s awfully touchy. He must really like this girl, Clint.”

The youngest Grimm gasped in mock-surprise, before he asked rhetorically, “You mean . . . he likes likes her?!”

Gingerly, Jason scooped a pencil can off the nearest desk and chucked it at his second youngest brother, earning a laugh as Aaron dragged Marta out of the line of fire, before turning to Bucky, “Unless you want your boyfriend in pieces, Barnes, I would get him to shut up.”
Bucky’s lips were curved in a small grin as he replied, “Clint’s in enough trouble with me; he’s not exactly worried about making it any worse. Though he probably should be.”

The archer grimaced at the reminder, grey eyes narrowing down at the back of the former assassin’s head. “How much trouble? On a scale of one to ten, ten being ‘so much trouble I should just run away back to the circus’?”

The older man’s voice was amused as he replied, “Thirteen.”

There was a sharp wince, the older brothers laughing at their youngest’s expense. “Damn . . . I’m not going to be sitting down for a week, am I?”

“At least khishchnick,” the sniper agreed dryly, glancing down at his watch.

Will chuckled at the interplay between the two, relieved that at least someone was finally taking Clint in hand. He was a good agent, one of the best at his job; but he had also been spoiled for years and not just by Marina. Even Will had to admit that he’d played a large part in indulging Clint since they managed to escape the Hoover Base. Bucky clearly adored the youngest Grimm – that at least was apparent to anyone with eyes – but he had been born into a different time, and would have no problem with enforcing the rules and implementing a little discipline by beating Clint’s ass everyday should the archer step even a toe outside the line in the sand. If that task had been left in the hands of Marina or Will or even their father, Clint would be a spoiled brat into his fifties.

Of course, a little discipline in no way meant that Clint was ever going to give up being a Marina’s favorite or even a little immature. The playfulness and lightheartedness of Clint’s personality was large part of who he was, and growing up a bit would simply relegate those two traits to making their appearances at the appropriate times . . . maybe. Either way, acting his age every once in a while would make him a better agent and a better man in the long run. Frankly, Will was relieved that Bucky had undertaken the task himself; it would have been awkward as hell if Will had had to ask the former Soviet assassin to assume the responsibility.

Glancing at his watch, the Colonel grimaced at the time displayed there. “Okay, Marina’s right. We’re going to be late.” Turning to find one of the junior agents, he spotted Jenkins guarding the squad room door. Face hardening, he barked, “Jenkins!”

The young man nearly jumped out of his skin, whirling to face his SO as he replied briskly, “Yes sir!?”

“You’re in charge. I want hourly reports via either text or email. You have the number. Agent Elliot has a handle on the clean-up, so just stay out of his way. Make sure that none of the detective speak with the press and inform any of the reporters who come asking questions that there will be an official release tomorrow from the office of Homeland Security. Understand?”

“Sir, yes, sir,” he announced immediately, eyes wide at the knowledge that he was being left behind to handle the particulars of the assignment.

“Dismissed,” Will barked, watching as the young agent scrambled back to his post. Smirking at Jason as he strode past, he muttered too low for anyone other than the technical specialist to hear, “God, I love this job.”

Jason chuckled, as he offered Casey his arm. Grinning as she looped her hand in his elbow, the two brought up the rear of the group as Clint, Bucky, Hansel, Aaron, Marta and Brian fell in behind the analyst. “I knew it. You terrify them on purpose!”
The Colonel’s grin was visible even over his shoulder as he twisted back to look at his younger brother. “Of course. You want some grunt work done? Scare someone into doing it for you. Officer’s Training 101, little brother; you should know that.”

“All due respect, Colonel . . . you’ve always been my CO and so I’m usually the one getting scared into doing something.”

The man rolled his eyes with a scoff as he replied, “I only scare the people I don’t like, Jay . . . and most of the time, I like you.”

Rolling his eyes at his brother, Jason muttered under his breath, “Thanks a lot big brother. You’re a pal, really.”

The sound of Will’s boisterous laughter filled the hallway, as he led the way toward the roof access stairwell where the S.H.I.E.L.D. Quinjet had been parked. Catching sight of Owen Elliot, Will glanced at his watch briefly before leaning over the banister. “Yo! Lucky!”

Owen whirled away from the body he was methodically dismantling, eyebrows furrowed as he searched for his once-and-future CO. Looking up, he grinned at the sight of his old friend. Nose crinkling in amusement, the former Spec Ops soldier shouted up the stairs, “What’dya want?”

Will’s grin was visible as he called back, “You get finished here and you come to the wedding. Understand?”

“Yes sir!” Owen chirped, eyes scanning the carnage around him, before he looked back up again. “Give me about another half an hour. Also, kindly give your lady my regards; this is impressive, even for a Russian.”

A lopsided smirk curved the Colonel’s lips as he snarked back, “I’ll be sure to tell her you said that!”

“Don’t do that! I like my head right where it is . . . namely attached to my body.”

The uncharacteristically lighthearted laughter followed the analyst as he waved down at his friend before leading the way onto the roof. Glancing down at his watch again, he was still chuckling even as he sighed, “Coulson . . . is going to kill us.”

Clint plopped comfortably into the driver’s seat, hands flashing through preflight as he announced, “Give me two minutes; we’ll get there on time. Promise.”

His brothers all glanced at each other warily, before announcing simultaneously, “Do not crash, Clint!” as they herded the women into their seats and buckled their harnesses before finding seats of their own.

Growling lightly, the archer’s hands were deft on the controls as he muttered under his breath, “You crash a Black Hawk to save your brothers from an incoming missile one time, and they never let you live it down! Sheesh!”

Bucky, seated in the co-pilot’s chair, leaned over to press an adoring kiss to his boyfriend’s cheek. “Eventually, they’ll let it go. But I wouldn’t expect to be any younger than eighty and long without your pilot’s license before that happens.”

Clint’s tone was a soft whine as he muttered, “Not comforting, Bucky.”

“Just think . . . your ass is going to be so sore by the end of tonight, you won’t even be thinking about your brothers’ teasing,” came the quiet reply, causing Clint to fidget in his seat.
Glancing at Bucky sidelong, the archer murmured, “Tonight?”

“Might as well get it over with. Once the wedding’s over, we’ll head to my quarters on base. Once it’s done, it’s done. That’s the rules and conditions that you agreed to, remember?”

“Yeah . . . but spankings hurt,” Clint informed the former WWII sharpshooter in a hiss.

Bucky’s glance was unamused as he reminded him dryly, “They’re supposed to. And whining about that fact has never made them hurt any less, so you might as well save your breath and focus on your flying.”

When the Quinjet touched down behind the church, the brothers were met with a grim faced Coulson. Glancing down at his watch, the man sighed, “You’re late.”

Will frowned and glanced down at his watch, “We have ten minutes.”

“And you’re not dressed,” the man argued.

“But we’re not late . . . and we have ten minutes. Just point us in the direction of the dressing rooms; we dropped our uniforms off earlier this morning.”

Coulson sighed, frowning at the two women who trailed off the Quinjet last behind the six Grimms. One hand lifted to pinch the place between his eyes, before rounding on his heel and led the way into the church. Knocking on a closed door, he smiled lightly at the sound of Veronika shouting through the door, “If that’s the groom, go away! It’s bad luck to see the bride before the ceremony!”

“There are two more women to place at your tender mercies, Veronika.”

There was a pause, before the door opened and a black haired woman – Casey vaguely remembered her being introduced as Marina’s older sister Veronika Belinskaya – leaned out and grabbed the two women by the elbows. “Come along, ladies. We’re just about done with the Assistant Director, so if you hurry up I may be able to make you both fabulous too. Hustle; seriously, my grandmother – God rest her – walked faster than you two!” the woman clucked, ushering the two into the dressing room and slamming the door behind her, all the while keeping Coulson from getting a good look at his giggling fiancée. “Go away, Coulson! Bad luck!”

Will chuckled at the despairing sigh from the shorter man, one hand coming up to clap him on the shoulder familiarly. Glancing at his watch, the Colonel squeezed the appendage lightly as he prodded gently, “Dressing rooms?”

“At the . . . this way.”

Coulson sat down on a chair inside the dressing room as the six men moved to strip themselves of their tactical gear and get dressed. His eyes were directed at the ceiling, as he inquired, “So do I want to know why you were late to our wedding?”

“Not late; we still have four minutes,” Will insisted, causing a chuckle from Clint as the archer replied, “We were dealing with a hostage situation in downtown New York City.”

“You were almost late to our wedding because of a HOSTAGE SITUATION!?” Sighing, he asked resignedly, “Is that why Marina had blood in her hair when she finally showed up forty-five minutes ago?”

The Colonel grinned, his fingers flashing over the buttons of his coat as he insisted, “You don’t want to know, Coulson. Knowing means paperwork.”
Phil groaned at the knowledge, waving away whatever the man was about to say next. “You’re right . . . I don’t want to know. Don’t tell me. I am not filling out paperwork when I should be on my honeymoon.”

Clint snickered as he brushed Aaron’s hands away from his tie, tying the knot effortlessly. “Has Vika told you where Marina’s sending you two yet?”

“The woman is Fort Knox. She packed our luggage and wouldn’t let me see a damn thing she packed, so I don’t even know climate!”

“Welcome to life married to one of the Family Russians. It only goes downhill from here, promise,” Will insisted, fiddling with his cuffs for a moment before patting him on the back. “All right . . . let’s get this show on the road.”

Chapter End Notes

Translations:

(R) samaya malen'kaya - my little one (one of Will’s nicknames for Marina)
(R) sumasshedshaya devushka - crazy girl (one of Will’s nicknames for Marina)
(R) oblazhalsya - fucked up
(R) klastera-yebat’ - clusterfuck
(R) Vorobey - sparrow (Marina's nickname for Maria Hill)
(G) Vati - Dad (Marina's nickname for Hansel Kuhn)
(R) zatknis' - shut the fuck up
(R) khishchnik - hawk (literally bird of prey; one of Bucky's nicknames for Clint)
Here Comes The Bride

Chapter Notes

Sorry, this is soooooo late. But I was really struggling with this chapter. With any luck, the next chapter will be up tomorrow night. This is Part 2 of 3 for the wedding. I hope you continue to read and enjoy. Thank you all for your wonderful reviews. They mean so much to me.

Also, Amerou wrote a short story in universe called "Macedonian Shenanigans" starring our very own Clint Grimm and Bucky Barnes. You should all read it; it's adorable . . . and porn, so you know . . . PORN! It's awesome. Promise.

Translations at the end, as always. Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
Chapter 129: Here Comes the Bride

It was a strange thing to be two men at once, but it was a state of being that the man once known as Kenneth James Grimm was only just allowing himself to settle into. He was standing with Clint and his boyfriend, Bucky Barnes – and where did that name sound familiar from? – when his sister came sailing in from stage left, grabbing him gently by the arm and towing him along without so much as a “By your leave.”

He blinked in surprise, his shock allowing Marina to pull him along beside her towards the Bride’s
Dressing Room. It was only as the Russian moved to open the door that Aaron jolted to a halt, dragging Marina to a stop beside him. “Solnyshko, this is not the time. We’re already running behind,” she scolded, her hands coming up to brace on her hips.

“What are we doing?”

“Vika wants to talk to you,” was the only explanation, before she twisted the doorknob and shoved him into the room.

Aaron frowned, following her willingly into the room. He faltered at the sight of Marta seated in front of the mirror, while a surprisingly maternal Natasha fussed over her hair. The pretty scientist was attired in a sky blue sundress the same color as a summer sky, with dainty white sandals dangling haphazardly from her feet. Catching sight of him in the mirror, Natasha grinned and whirled the chair around so the two could see each other. The operative’s jaw noticeably dropped as he got a better look at her than the distortion of the mirror allowed, causing Marta’s cheeks to turn the color of strawberries and her head to duck behind her hair. “Wow . . . you look . . .” he stammered, trying to force himself to say something coherent when all he could think of was how stunning she looked.

If it was even possible, the scientist blushed even harder as she lifted one hand to brush back a wayward curl. “Thank you,” she murmured, her eyes peering up at him shyly over the tops of her glasses.

The sound of fingers snapping impatiently drew both of their attentions away from each other and towards where Viktoria sat before her own mirror, Marina’s fingers flashing as she nestled the tiara attached to her veil into the elaborate coronet the youngest Russian had braided into her hair. Aaron flashed a quick smile in Marta’s direction, before turning his attention onto the bride.

Marina had spared no expense for her beloved sister’s wedding; and Viktoria’s wedding gown was by far the best example. The undergown was silvery-white velvet that clung to every inch of Viktoria’s slender frame, delicate silver roses embroidered sporadically across the fabric. The overgown had been fashioned in luxurious velvet, the vibrant green of newly awakened spring, with a train that was easily ten feet in length. There was matching silver roses decorating both hem and collar of the overdress, silver stitching designed like chainlinks looping from one to the next beautifully. The veil was the same silvery velvet of the undergown, hanging almost all the way to the ground behind her.

Biting his lip, Aaron glanced at Marina, before inquiring, “I think your train is too long. Someone’s going to trip over it at some point tonight.”

Viktoria chuckled, waving the statement away with a giggle. “After the ceremony, we’ll pull the train into a bustle for the reception. It’ll be more manageable then.” Reaching out to squeeze her ex-boyfriend’s hand, she winked, “I promise, no one’s going to trip over my dress.”

Aaron hummed agreeably, one hand coming up to scratch at the back of his head as he looked around awkwardly. Finally, he cleared his throat and asked, “Marina said you wanted to talk to me?”

“Yes, I did,” she agreed, biting her lip nervously, before taking a deep breath and blurting, “Aaron, I’d like you to walk me down the aisle.”

The DOD operative blinked at the statement, sure that he’d misheard her. Seeing that she was waiting expectantly for his reply, he reminded her, “Vika . . . we’ve fucked.”

At the statement, Marta gasped, though the four Russians only dissolved into a pile of giggles. Viktoria waved her hand in front of her face as she sought to bring her laughter under control,
before chuckling, “I am aware. I would still like you to walk me down the aisle.”

Aaron’s jaw worked as he considered what to say, before continuing, “You don’t think your boyfriend might be a little perturbed by your ex-lover walking you down the aisle to marry him?”

“Phil is aware of my position in the matter and is willing to concede to my whims. Also, I am the bride . . . it is my day . . . and no one is going to tell me ‘no’.” Reaching out, she took the man’s hands and smiled at him fondly. “We’re friends, right, Kenny?”

Nodding in agreement, Aaron squeezed her hands fondly. “Right. Okay . . . if that’s what you want, Vika, far be it from me to tell you no.”

“Fantastic. Now . . . you must introduce me to your lady. She’s very beautiful.”

Aaron grinned, reaching out to take Marta’s hand and tug her gently to his side. Seeing the flabbergasted look deep in her eyes, the munitions expert lifted her hand to his lips and pressed a reverent kiss to her knuckles, promising in a low undertone, “I’ll explain later.” Turning back to Viktoriya, he grinned as he announced, “June Monroe, I’d like you to meet June Monroe.”

Marta’s eyes flashed wide in shock, though Viktoriya only grinned at the introduction, “It’s a pleasure to meet you, Miss Monroe. I do hope we become great friends. Kenny is a good man; you couldn’t do any better.” Offering the stunned scientist her hand, the Russian insisted, “My name is Viktoriya Viktorovna Dubrovskaya . . . but my friends call me Vika.”

“Marta Shearing . . . it’s nice to meet you.” Looking up at Aaron for a moment, she returned her attention onto the woman and smiled. “Congratulations on your wedding.”

Viktoriya grinned widely at the phrase, before waving Marina away as the younger sister continued to fuss and standing from her chair. Wrapping her arms around the younger woman, Viktoriya wrinkled her nose at the scientist and insisted, “We’re going to be great friends . . . I can tell.”

Veronika came bolting into the dressing room then, squeaking, “Marina! Your boy is outside! Stop him! No boys allowed!” Slamming to a stop at the sight of Aaron, the black-haired Russian narrowed her eyes at him and demanded, “What are you doing here!?”

Aaron’s hands came up in unspoken surrender, insisting, “I’m just following orders.”

Marina chuckled as Veronika scowled, before calling fondly through the closed door, “We’ll be right out, Misha. We’re just finalizing details.”

Will’s tone was jovial and teasing as he called through the door, “Are you ladies about done in here? There’s an overwrought fiancé in the other room, quietly losing his mind and pulling out what little hair he still has.”

Viktoriya squawked in righteous outrage as she shouted through the door, “You hold your tongue, William Grimm! You hear me!”

There was a snort, before Will called back, “As the bride says. Hurry up, ladies; your adoring crowd awaits!”

The oldest Russian turned back to her mirror, shucking the white dressing gown from her shoulders as she examined herself critically one last time in the mirror. For a moment, she looked almost serene, before her eyes flashed wide and she whirled with a shout, “Colonel!?”

There was a pause, before Will inquired, “Yes, Vika?”
“You have the rings?”

“And the crowns. Everything’s all set. We’re just waiting on you.”

Taking a deep breath, the woman turned to look at her companions. Maria Hill had been asked to stand up with Phil as one of his attendants – no doubt causing a stir, though Vika honestly couldn’t have imagined her among her own entourage – and had fled the dressing room nearly half an hour before to help settle up the final details while they waited for the rest of the bridal party to finish up the unpleasant business at the Second Precinct.

Casey Shraeger had refused to borrow a dress, forcing Veronika to settle for changing out her no-nonsense button down shirt with a frilly peasant top under an open short-jacket. She’d slipped from the room unseen, though Viktoriya was fairly certain that she’d found her way to the side of the family’s injured communications officer. The auburn haired detective had fussed the whole time she’d been subjected to Veronika’s tender mercies, noticeably worried about her partner; Vika wondered how long it would take for her to realize that the kiss they’d shared was only going to be the first of many.

Marta was tucked comfortably into Aaron’s side, the two exchanging quiet whispers with each other as the scientist attempted to unravel his sticky past with the blushing bride. Viktoriya would never deny that Kenny was the first of her lovers to treat her like a woman and not a pretty plaything; it made her heart soar to see him so happy and so obviously besotted with the young woman standing at his side. The affection was not one sided either, as evidenced by the adoration in the eyes of the pretty scientist; she was just as besotted with the munitions expert as he was with her.

Lastly, Viktoriya turned to her sisters. Veronika, Natasha and Marina were all attired in velvet sarafans a half a shade darker than the spring green of Viktoriya’s wedding dress, with underdresses made from the same silver-white velvet as the bride’s own. The traditional Russian dresses were trimmed simply in silver ribbon, providing a beautiful backdrop to the bouquets of white roses they each held in their hands. Though Natasha had come to their trio late, the Chernaya Vdova was just as dear to Vika as any of her sisters. Though Natalya would never take the place of the long departed Valya, she had nevertheless carved out a permanent place among the three women.

At the sight of the joyful tears in their sister’s eyes, both Marina and Veronika cried out in alarm. Marina snatched up a tissue as Veronika insisted, “Vika! You’re ruin your make-up!”

Chuckling tearfully at the statement, Viktoriya allowed Marina to dab gently at the mascara tracks on her cheeks before giving her three sisters a bright grin. The youngest sister reached out and squeezed her sister’s hand tightly, asking fondly, “Are you ready?”

Taking a deep breath in, she nodded firmly. “I’m ready.”

As far as he was concerned, Philip Justus Coulson was convinced that he was the luckiest son of a bitch on the planet. Of that he was more than certain. After all, who could have ever asked for more than this?

William Grimm strode briskly down the aisle, a small smile on his face as he approached the visibly flustered groom. “They’re coming. They were just finishing up when I checked on them.”

Phil frowned as he looked down at his watch, before insisting, “We’re twenty minutes behind schedule.”

Will chuckled as he reached out to straighten Phil’s tie, fingers quick and deft as he set to rights the damage the handler’s fidgeting had done. “Vika is the bride; she can be late to her own wedding if
Nodding, the younger man allowed the Colonel to fix his tuxedo. When he’d asked the chief analyst to stand up with him as his best man, he’d been genuinely shocked when Will had agreed. Admittedly, the handler didn’t exactly have many friends and very few members of his family were cleared high enough to even know what he did for a living. At the time Phil had asked Will, the only interaction between the two men was during various assignments, as they puzzled out more than a few cases together over cold coffee and too little data. Phil trusted the other man to be thorough and relentless in his search for detail, a trait the Colonel had carried over to the wedding planning. Though they still weren’t bosom buddies, Phil was intensely proud to call the other man “friend”.

Biting on his lip, Phil tugged restlessly on his cuffs as he asked, “You have the rings?”

“Yes. And the crowns are next to you. And Marina has the candles.” Smirking, he clapped the groom on the shoulders. “Relax. Everything’s going to be fine.”

It was about then that the organ began to play behind them. Will grinned and asked, “You ready for this?”

The sight of Sitwell’s daughter, Emma, in her flowergirl dress, scattering white rose petals down the aisle caused a well of calm to flood through Phil’s heart. “Yeah.”

Nodding once, Will stepped back to take his place at Phil’s side, the two men watching the procession enter the chapel through the back doors. Natasha & Brian followed immediately Emma, leading first Veronika & Sitwell and lastly Marina & Clint down the aisle. After the three couples had made their way to the front of the church, taking their places at the front of the church, the opening chords of “Here Comes the Bride” belted from the organ.

And as Viktorya Viktorovna Dubrovskaya made her way into view on Aaron Grimm’s arm, Philip Justus Coulson quite simply forgot to breathe.

Chapter End Notes

Translations:

solnyshko - sunshine (Marina's nickname for Kenny/Aaron)
Chernaya Vdova - Black Widow (Natasha's code name given to her by the KGB and the Red Room)
The Reception

Chapter Notes

To the readers:

So I apologize for the lateness of this chapter. I've been really having a problem with this. Weddings and I don't like each other, combined with some crap falling around my ears in real life, means that this chapter was really hard to write. Next chapter is the honeymoon... and it's going to be epic.

I love you guys. Thank you so much for your reviews. I've been rereading them frequently to remind me that there are people out there who care about this story. It was a huge help. Thank you all so much.

Either way, enjoy this chapter! Translations are at the end of the chapter as usual.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
Chapter 130: The Reception

To say that the wedding ceremony had been a memorable blur for Viktornia was understating it a little bit. From the moment she’d stepped into the room on Aaron’s arm, she’d been blissfully unaware of anything except the awed look on Phil’s face. She remembered watching Will lean forward to remind Phil to breathe; she remembered the way Phil had never taken his eyes off of her face as the priest led them through their vows; she remembered saying “I do”; she remembered the way her heart had twisted ecstatically in her chest when the priest had announced, “I now pronounce
you husband and wife. You may kiss the bride.”

Most importantly, she remembered the reverent manner in which Phil had held her close, his fingers absent and caressing on the skin of her cheeks as the two indulged in a slow, ardent kiss before their guests. It was without a doubt the most perfect moment of her entire life.

They’d arrived at the reception to fanfare and riotous cheers from the Grimms, causing a blush from Viktoria as she ducked her head into her new husband’s shoulder. Marina and Natasha were once again in the arms of their paramours, watching the newlyweds enter the banquet hall with indulgent grins. Veronika and Jim Street were standing practically across the room from one another, Jim beside Brian and Veronika next to Marina, but in her joy and desire for everyone in the world to be as happy as she was, Viktoria couldn’t help noticing the way the two stole quick looks at each other. Exchanging a conspiratorial look with Marina, Viktoria turned her attention back onto her party. It was going to be an amazing night.

It was about two hours later that the newlyweds finally had the opportunity to sit down with their loved ones. All of the Grimms, their girlfriends (or not-girlfriends, in Jason’s case; honestly that insistence was getting a little old, especially considering the heat in their first kiss) and Maria Hill were seated either at the small round table near the bar at the back of the room or at the bar itself. Marina was rolling her eyes as she teased her best friend about something or another, her head whipping around to face Viktoria as she teased her best friend about something or another, her head longing to catch the blond plopping tiredly into the seat next to her and dropping her head to rest against her sister’s shoulder. Pressing an adoring kiss to the older sister’s forehead, she asked fondly, “Getting tired?”

“Who the hell knew that getting married was such hard work?” Viktoria complained fondly, watching as an uncharacteristically relaxed Will reached out to offer Phil a drink as the S.H.I.E.L.D. handler took a seat at the bar between Hansel and Will. (It never failed to amuse Viktoria that Will Grimm and Hansel Kuhn were the hardest drinkers in the family, or that Will had snuck outside no less than three times to sneak a cigarette. It’s always the quiet ones.)

Marina chuckled lightly, her arm coming up to squeeze the older woman, before turning back to her best friend as the assistant director insisted, “I apologize for almost being late to your wedding, Vika. We would have been on time, but Marina insisted that I was not allowed to wear my uniform.”

Viktoria grinned in amusement as Marina grumbled wretchedly, “Seriously, Maria, it will not kill you to wear something pretty every once in awhile. And I happen to know for a fact that Vati would appreciate the view.” Rolling her eyes, she muttered, “Honestly it would have saved a lot of time if you’d just agreed to wear your dress to the Second.”

“It was a hostage situation! Blood doesn’t come out of taffeta, Marina.”

“Yes, it does. It just takes time and a lot of patience.”

Huffing, Maria growled petulantly, “I still can’t believe you told me to go without a gun.” The AD’s eyes slouched, her arms coming up to fold over her chest as she insisted, “Seriously, Marishka, asking me to go without a gun is like asking Hansel not to take his shot gun into the field, asking Jason to ditch his laptop, or Clint leaving behind his bow.”

“Don’t slouch,” the youngest Russian scolded, before continuing on with her argument, “Honestly, Maria, you are a Black Belt in Jiu Jitsu and your hands are registered as lethal weapons; act like it. Besides, you were the one who said that you didn’t have anywhere to hide your gun. Which is ridiculous; you have more than enough cleavage in that dress to hide a gun there. And even if you were right, that just means you need to find a smaller gun or a better place to hide it.”
Ignoring the comment about a smaller gun, the brunette eyed the lowcut neckline of her best friend’s bridesmaid’s dress as she accused, “And where are you hiding yours?”

Marina’s fingers were a tracing a soothing rhythm in her sister’s hair as she cocked an eyebrow at the assistant director and asked, “Who said I needed to hide mine?”

“If a band of terrorists shows up and you’re the only one unarmed, do not come whining to me for a gun.”

There was a wicked grin on the handler’s lips as she laughed. “First of all, it’s not as though Misha doesn’t carry a small armory on him at all times; if I really need a gun, I can steal one from him. Best part is getting to a cop a feel; I mean, have you even **SEEN** that ass? Secondly . . .” she drawled, swishing back the sweeping skirt of her gown and displaying the compact pistol strapped to the outside of her left thigh as well as the sheath on the inside of the same calf. “. . . who said I was unarmed? I am just well versed in the art of accessorizing. Seriously, Maria, accessories are the most important part of any outfit.”

“What is that, a Derringer? That is not a gun, Marishka,” the assistant director insisted, pulling the Ruger SR9 from the holster strapped to her own calf. “**This** is a gun.”

“It’s a P380, actually.”

“A Crimson Trace Kahr Arms P380?! That’s like taking a knife to a gunfight, Marishka . . . why bother?” Rolling her eyes, Maria muttered, “Will needs to stop buying you diamonds and start buying you ordinance. Because that’s just sad.”

“Will only buys me diamonds when he’s trouble,” Marina reminded her best friend with a smirk before continuing, “He’ll only buy me ordinance when he’s well and truly fucked up. And a P380 is a perfectly acceptable gun, thank you very much. It even has a lasersight, unlike your little peashooter.”

The blond Russian groaned lightly even as she teased, “Ladies, I love you both . . . but could you kindly not compare the size of your testicles at my wedding?”

The entire table burst into laughter, as Hansel spoke up from behind them at the bar, “I am not drunk enough for this conversation. Pour me another, Herr Barkeep.”

Maria’s eyes were narrowed at the bride, though there was a small smile tugging at the corner of her lips as she insisted, “Vika, I will have you know that I have the biggest balls in all of S.H.I.E.L.D. In fact, Jason made me the trophy.”

Jason chuckled as he nodded in agreement from where he sat beside Casey, “That’s true. It sits next to the one Marina had made that declares her ‘Most Badass Bitch from Hell’.”

Winking at a visibly shocked Marta, the Russian teased, “And both of those trophies are well deserved. Ask anyone.”

There was a groan as Hansel insisted, “Herr Barkeep, just hand me der **verdammt**en bottle. *Ja . . . guter Mann.*”

Will chuckled as he clapped his father’s shoulder from where the Colonel sat on other side of Phil. “And just think. You waited eight years just to get that woman into bed.”

Hansel’s robin egg eyes narrowed as he sallied in reply, “It may have taken us eight years to get there, but I promise hyu that **mein Spatzi** could not walk a straight line the day after.”
Maria choked on her drink at the statement, while Aaron and Jason both shouted “TMI, Dad!” at the tops of their lungs. As for the youngest Grimm, Clint was laughing so hard that he literally fell from his chair, sprawled on the floor as he struggled to get a hold of his giggles while his boyfriend watched him indulgently from his own chair. The brown-haired Russian however, was smirking as she joked, “Oh I am aware. I saw her the next morning . . . the total level of destruction was impressive.”

The assistant director glared at her best friend, though whatever she’d been about to say was interrupted as Hansel continued his thought, “And I am not so sure hyu are one to talk, mein Sohn, when you yourself pined for the woman you desired for nine.”

Phil’s grin was amused as Brian drawled from where he sat at the table, his arm over Natasha’s shoulders, “Dad’s got you there, Will.”

Viktoriya giggled at the light blush creeping up Will’s cheeks, before the sound of a microphone giving off feedback earned everyone’s immediate attention. The entire table flinched at the sound, turning to look at where the DJ was standing on the little stage set up against one wall. “Ladies and gentlemen, my name is Mark Kennedy and I will be your MC for the night. If the bride and groom would kindly join me here at the dance floor, it’s time for the traditional first dance.”

Smiling as she watched her husband stand from his barstool, Viktoriya accepted the hand he offered her with an adoring smile, allowing Phil to assist her from her chair tenderly. Behind them, Viktoriya could hear Marina push herself to her feet as she moved to join the MC onto the stage; though the couple had initially disagreed about what song to choose for their first dance together, both of them had been adamant about the fact that they wanted Viktoriya’s youngest sister to sing it at the reception. As a result, it had been the brunette handler who had come up with the ideal song for them; it was so perfect that it had quickly become Vika’s favorite song. Whenever she heard it, Phil was almost instantly the first thought that came to mind.

Phil’s arms were warm and familiar around her waist as he swung her gracefully into his embrace, one strong hand clasping her own at shoulder height. There was an adoring smile on his face as he bent to kiss her quickly, murmuring, “I love you,” against her lips.

As the music began to play from the speakers, Viktoriya could feel her smile burst across her face like a fireworks. “Ya tozhe lyublyu tebya, Fil.”

Bowing her head to rest against his shoulder, the blond closed her eyes and relished in both Phil’s closeness and the words of their song as Marina began to sing. Her sister’s voice was soft and reverent as she sang, the lyrics resonating with every couple in the room. Outside of these two things, however, nothing else existed for Viktoriya Viktorovna Dubrovskaya-Coulson.

“The first time ever I saw your face,
I thought the sun rose in your eyes.
And the moon and stars were the gifts you gave
To the night and the empty skies, my love,
To the night and the empty skies.

“The first time ever I kissed your mouth,
I felt the earth turn in my hand.
Like the trembling heart of a captive bird
That was there at thy command, my love,
That was there at thy command.

“The first time ever I lay with you,
And felt your heart beat close to mine.
I thought our joy would fill the earth
And last 'till the end of time, my love,
And last 'till the end of time.

“The first time ever I saw your face,
I thought the sun rose in your eyes.
And the moon and the stars were the gifts you gave
To the night and the empty skies, my love,
To the night and the empty skies.”

As the song came to a close, Phil bent and murmured into his wife’s ear, “You want to get out of here?”

Catching sight of Veronika standing alone against the wall, and the ardent manner in which Jim Street continued to stare at her from his own place across the room, Viktoriya nodded firmly.

“Absolutely. But first, I have one last thing Marina and I need to take care of.”

Chuckling, Phil lifted one hand to brush back a wayward strand of hair. “As the lady wishes.”

Taking a single step backwards, the S.H.I.E.L.D. agent watched as his giggling bride practically pounced on her youngest sister, bright and dark heads bent close together as they conspired together briefly. As Viktoriya spoke, Marina’s lips curved into a wicked smirk, before she nodded firmly into agreement. The two sisters rounded on the black-haired member of their trio then, striding forward to loop their elbows through hers and tow her inexorably across the dance floor.

Veronika’s eyes grew comically wide as she realized where her sisters were dragging her, her head shaking as she pleaded for mercy in rapidfire Russian. Marina’s tone was a soft hush as she planted one hand firmly on the small of her back and shoved her forcefully into a stunned Jim Street’s arms. “Seriously, this dance is getting old. Have fun and don’t do anything I wouldn’t do,” she ordered fondly, a small smile on her face as she watched the two blush.

The blond chuckled at the statement, as she agreed, “And considering that this is Marina, take that for what it’s worth.” Grinning at her, Vika reached out and tucked her bouquet tenderly into Veronika’s embrace. “Here, Nika, I think that this belongs to you.”

Veronika stared in shock at the bouquet that Viktoriya had planned to toss, stammering, “But what about the bouquet toss?”

Viktoriya’s nose wrinkled fondly as she insisted, “That bouquet is exactly where it belongs. Be happy, sestrenka . . . you deserve it just as much as the rest of us.”

The two woman kissed her cheeks, before moving away to join their own partners. The blond practically sailed into her new husband’s arms as she dropped her head back and insisted, “All right . . . let’s get out of here.”

Phil grinned as he bent to kiss her firmly, “I thought you’d never ask.”

Meanwhile, Marina stood off to the side, her eyes glued to the newlyweds as they whispered to each other on the dance floor. Strong, familiar arms came around her waist, pulling her back into a steady embrace. The Russian grinned and melted back against him fondly as she hummed, asking, “Misha . . . moy vozlyublenny . . . to what do I owe the pleasure?”

Bowing his head, the Colonel pressed an adoring kiss to his favorite place at the juncture of her neck.
and her shoulder. “Vy snitrute skavnogo, (You look glorious,)” he whispered against her skin reverently.

The woman’s tone was amused as she accused fondly, “L’stets.”

Marina could practically hear his eyes roll at her usual deflection, the two falling silent as they watch the newlyweds work one last circuit around the room as they said their goodbyes. Phil’s hand was tender at the small of Viktoria’s back, his eyes drifting from her rarely and even then only briefly. The bride herself was radiant in her joy, her eyes shining as she chattered happily with her guests.

Sensing that Marina’s were very far away, Will tightened his arms around her waist and whispered into the fall of her hair, “Kopeyka za tvoi myshi? (Penny for your thoughts?)”

Marina hummed lightly as she replied, “They look so happy together.”

Remembering the look on her face during the ceremony, Will buried his face against her throat and whispered against the skin, “Having second thoughts?”

Her surprise at the question was evident in the full body flinch that ran through her. There was a heart-stopping second where the Colonel was unsure of her answer, before a soft chuckle reverberating through her body. Turning her head to nuzzled her nose against his cheek, she promised lightly, “Not a chance. I like us . . . I’m happy with us . . . just the way we are.”

There was a rush of air against her skin as her beloved Misha released the breath he’d been holding, “Slava Bogu,” was his heartfelt reply, the tone only half-joking.

Marina giggled lightly, knowing the source of his relief. She had no doubt that, if they married, Will would be a good husband to her, but it would not have been a role that sat easily on his shoulders. After all, whoever said commitment could only be found on paper? Paper burned . . . tore . . . rotted . . . withered . . . blackened; paper was temporary.

Watching the newlyweds say the last of their goodbyes and leave the reception area arm in arm, she allowed herself to lean more fully back into her lover. Love though . . .

Love was forever.

Chapter End Notes

Translations:

(G) Vati - Dad (Marina’s nickname for Hansel)
(G) verdammten - damned
(G) Ja/Nein - Yes/No
(G) guter Mann - good man
(G) mein Spatzi - my little sparrow (Hansel's nickname for Maria Hill)
(G) mein Sohn - my son
(R) Ya tozhe lyublyu tebya, Fil - I love you too, Phil
(R) sestrenka - little sister
(R) moy vozlyublennyy - my beloved (one of Marina's pet names for Will)
(R) l'stets - flatterer
(R) Slava Bogu - Thank God
Chapter Notes

So it was my birthday not that long ago, and I have family in town (my sister is here for the new few weeks), and my hours have increased at work. However, I have not forgotten this story!!!

There is Bucky/Clint spanking in the middle of this chapter. If you don't like, don't read. Otherwise, there is reception cuteness at the front and Vika/Phil at the back. Enjoy!

Translations as always at the end.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
Chapter 131: Confession, Punishment & A Cherry Red Corvette

James Buchanan Barnes was born February 14, 1922. Brooklyn was still recovering from the so-called Great War and had not yet begun to feel the effects of the Great Depression. Orphaned young, he grew up in an orphanage with Steven Grant Rogers, a skinny, pale-skinned asthmatic who would always claim the role of Bucky’s best friend . . . no matter how long Steven had been dead & gone or little Bucky actually remembered about him. Then there was World War II; after Steve was all “Capified” – Bucky still remembered the irreverent grin on Clint’s face when he’d made the joke –
and Steve had rescued him from Dr. Zola, it had been a never-ending rollercoaster. They’d fought together, survived together, fought together and saved each other.

James Buchanan Barnes died on March 15, 1945. And from his ashes was born the Zimniy Soldat. The assassin had more than earned his reputation, leaving a trail of death, blood and mayhem behind him at the behest of his Soviet handlers. Even after three years, there were still junior agents who saw his face and tried to earn cool points by bringing his head to Fury. Most of them believed fervently in the statement, “dead or alive” with dead being the much more preferable option. More often than not the intervention of Marina or Clint was all that saved his neck.

Both of these incarnations had helped shape him into the Bucky Barnes he was now. Both were solid building blocks laid into his foundation. At the end of it all though, the true architect of his new life was strangely enough the son of the woman who called him “Architect.”

Shortly after Viktoria and Phil had left their reception, Bucky turned his head to seek out Marina. A small smile curved his lips at the sight of her held tenderly in the Colonel’s embrace, before turning his attention back to his boyfriend as Clint’s voice broke the silence. “Buck? You okay?”

The smile that curved Bucky’s lips was unspeakably fond, reserved solely for his beloved archer. “Yes, khishchnik, I’m fine.” Glancing at his watch, he noted the time before standing from his seat. “Say good night, Clint; it’s time to go home.”

The youngest Grimm bit down lightly on his lower lip, even as he stood from his own chair obediently. Moving to his brother’s side, Clint reached out to clasp the older man on the shoulder. “Meet me at the control tower tomorrow? Do you remember the one?”

Aaron gave the archer a sidelong grin as he nodded, “I remember. What time?”

Glancing up at Bucky, Clint considered for a moment before replying, “How about we say two o’clock? If I need to meet with you later, I’ll call you and let you know.”

Nodding once in agreement, the two brothers hug tightly before Clint stepped to Marta’s side as she stood from her own chair. Scooping her up, he swung her in a tight circle before dropping her lightly back to her feet. “Welcome to the Crazy, Marta. Don’t forget to enjoy it.”

Marta’s eyes were warm as she nodded in agreement, though Clint couldn’t help noticing the way her attention kept drifting towards where Will and Marina were sitting at the table across the room, talking with Brian and Natasha. Leaning forward, he whispered too low for anyone to hear, “Tread carefully with Will, Marta . . . he doesn’t usually appreciate it when people pry into things that aren’t any of their business.” Chuckling, he muttered dryly, “Twelve midnight, after a highball of two of whiskey is usually a good time to ask questions. Just make sure you can handle the answers.”

The pretty scientist giggled lightly, nodding her agreement. “I’ll keep that in mind.”

The archer’s lips curved into a sly smirk, before he stepped back and linked his hand in Bucky’s. The former Soviet assassin was watching him steadily, seeing the uncertainty buried deeply in his eyes. Squeezing his hand lightly, Bucky tugged him close and kissed his cheeks fondly. “You ready to go?”

Clint nodded briskly, letting Bucky pull him across the room. The two men were mere seconds away when Owen Elliot finally arrived at the wedding. The tall blond swooped in from the left and reached over to swing Marina up and out of her seat jovially. Marina squealed in surprise, before dissolving into giggles as Owen swung her around in a wide circle. Though she was slightly dizzy when at the Cleaner at last set her on her feet, she nevertheless gave the younger man a brilliant grin.
“Hello Owen. Up to no good again, I see.”

Giving her a sassy wink, he inquired, “Sup, Boss-lady?” before bending to press a warm, fond kiss to her cheek, earning a low growl from a visibly fuming Will.

Will’s quicksilver eyes were emerald green with jealous fury as he hissed, “Lucky, you bastard, get your lips off my woman.”

Owen’s grin was wide as he cracked, “Yes, Boss.” Winking down at Marina, he asked in a puckish undertone, “He still complaining about two left feet?”

Marina’s grin was wide and genuine as she smacked at the Cleaner affectionately, “Behave yourself, Owen.”

There was a mischievous tilt to his smile as he asked, “Is that a yes, then?”

Will rolled his eyes, reaching out to grab Marina’s wrist and pull her firmly into his lap. The Russian chuckled, wiggling slightly to get comfortable before slouching back against his chest. Glancing at his watch, the Colonel reminded his subordinate, “You’re late.”

“In my own defense, the Boss-lady left a lot of body parts just lying around.” Rounding on the handler, he shook his finger at her playfully, “Didn’t anyone ever tell you to pick up your toys after you’ve played with them?”

Marina only gave the Cleaner a demure smile as she replied, “But if I did that, what would I need you for?”

Even Will crowed at the flabbergasted look on Owen’s face as the young agent gawked at her. Pouting playfully, the man folded his arms over his chest and insisted, “And you were my favorite handler too. Ha! See if I love you best anymore.”

The Colonel rounded on his partner as Marina moved to reply, one elegant eyebrow arched upwards as he insisted playfully, “Not one word, Marishka. Maybe we’ll finally be rid of him.”

Owen flopped gracelessly into a chair with a scoff, accepting a cup of coffee from Jason with a grin as he taunted, “You’d miss me too much, Boss.”

Will’s eyes rolled as he snarked, “Like a cankersore.”

Marina was giggling as she smacked lightly at her lover’s shoulder. “You’d miss him, Misha, and you know it.”

The oldest Grimm’s reply was absent as he caught sight of Aaron glancing down at his watch, before pushing himself to her feet. Giving his pretty scientist a brief kiss on the cheek, he murmured something too low for Will to hear and moved towards the hallway bathroom. Glancing down at his own watch, the Colonel noted the time carefully. “Five o’clock, just like clockwork.”

His partner and former unit-mate were still bantering playfully together, though Will’s comment drew Marina’s attention immediately. “What’s wrong, Misha?”

Will grinned at her fondly, one finger trailing tenderly over her cheek as he bent to kiss her. “Maybe nothing. It’s possible I worry too much.” Urging her up off his lap, he stood from his chair and guided her back into it. “Even still, it never hurts to be a little paranoid.”

“Paranoia can never be a bad thing, for a spy,” Marina reminded her lover, tilting her cheek upwards.
to catch his absent kiss before watching as he strode away. Frowning lightly as she watched him follow the same path as Aaron, it was only Jason’s voice that called her back from her thoughts. “So be honest, Marina; where did you send the newlyweds?”

Drawn back into the conversation, the Russian grinned as she winked at her middle charge. “Who said I sent them anywhere? The honeymoon was all Vika’s idea . . . I just made sure that it would be perfect.” Looking up at Bucky and Clint, she cocked an eyebrow at them, “Are you two going home already?”

Bucky’s smile was fond as he shrugged, “Thinking about it.”

“Well don’t. The night is still young. There’ll be plenty of time for sex and indulging in a good kink . . .” she insisted, with a sly wink, before continuing her thought almost whimsically, “Personally, I’m looking forward to a little something kinky myself tonight.”

The wretched groans from her boys caused a peal of honest giggles as she took a long drink from her cocktail. “God, I have missed that sound. It’s not nearly as fun to neck in the kitchen without Clint making gagging sounds in the background and at least one of you telling us to get a room.”

Almost as one, Clint, Brian and Jason all declared together, “Get a room!”

Meanwhile Will had followed Aaron into the bathroom down the hallway. Stepping into the room, he could honestly admit to being surprised by the sight of Aaron sitting on one of the room’s armchairs, a single blue pill sitting innocently in his palm as the Outcome operative stared it. At the sound of the door, Aaron jerked guiltily, closing his hand around the pill and attempting to push past his brother again. It was only the narrowing of the Colonel’s eyes and the imperious finger pointing back to the chair that made Aaron sit back down again.

“All right, Aaron; what’s going on? What the hell is that little pill you think you’re hiding from me?”

“An ibuprofen,” the younger brother replied honestly, offering it up to the older sheepishly.

Will plucked the pill from the younger’s palm deftly, reading the side to confirm that it was a generic brand ibuprofen. Shoving it into his uniform pocket, Will leaned one hip against the counter and folded his arms over his chest as he demanded, “If it was just an ibuprofen, why did you feel the need to hide it from me? Is your shoulder still bothering you? Considering our accelerated healing levels, it should be completely healed by now; if it’s not, we can have one of the doctors back at Medical take a look at it tomorrow.”

Aaron blushed sheepishly as he lifted one hand to rub at the back of his neck as he insisted, “It’s not my shoulder. That’s all healed up; barely even a scar there anymore.”

The Colonel’s eyes narrowed further as he insisted, “Then why? I’ve never known you to take painkillers for no reason.”

“I just . . .” the younger brother started, before seeing the arched eyebrow that was Will’s usual, silent admonishment not to lie to him. Heaving a sigh, Aaron slumped before confessing, “I need it.”

Silver eyes flashed wide in surprise before Will demanded, “What do you mean, you need it?”

Shoving his hands back through his hair, Aaron confessed, “I’ve spent the last four years, conditioned to believe that if I didn’t take my pills that I’d be back to being stupid. And I know I don’t need them anymore – that I was viralled off both medications and the changes are permanent – but that compulsion is still there.”
Will’s lips compressed lightly as he considered what Aaron was saying, before nodding, “You’re addicted. Not to the drug itself, but to the routine of them.”

“Yeah, I guess.” Looking up at his brother pleadingly, Aaron begged, “I don’t know how to stop, Will. Make me stop. Please.”

The sight of the Colonel biting on the inside of his cheek was not one Aaron had ever seen before, and for a moment Aaron was reminded that even though he’d always considered his older brother to be some kind of superman, Will was in fact very human. Finally, Will took a deep breath and nodded firmly. “All right. First thing tomorrow morning, we’re going to enroll you in counseling on base and get you started with a recovery plan to help you break this habit.” Narrowing his eyes, he cocked his head before continuing, “In the meantime, though . . . there’s someone that I think you should meet.”

Clasping his brother on the shoulder, the Colonel towed him inexorably back into the main reception area. Catching sight of Owen dancing with Marina, his overly exuberant nature making her laugh, he called sternly, “Damn it, Lucky! Get your own damned woman!”

“Whatever you say, Boss!” Owen called back, spinning Marina under one arm and sending her whirling across the floor and back into Will’s arms.

Marina was still giggling as she tumbled headlong into her partner’s embrace, her eyes sparkling as she dropped her head back to look at him. “Dance with me, Misha? Please?”

With a heavy sigh, and an amused quirk of his lips, Will pinched her chin between his thumb and forefinger. Bending, he pressed a languid kiss to the curve of her lips as he promised, “Anything you want, zhemchuzhina. First things first though . . . Lucky! Get over here!”

“Coming Boss,” the man agreed, jogging comfortably across the dance floor and stopping next to the trio. “What can I do you for, Colonel?”

“Lucky, I’d like you to meet my little brother, Aaron Kenneth Grimm. Aaron, this is Owen Elliot . . . he’s a recovering drug addict,” Will clarified, causing Marina to gasp in shock and Owen to go stone faced. Owen’s former affiliation with the Division and his usage of what Division had called “The Regimen” was one of the worst kept secrets at S.H.I.E.L.D. but it wasn’t something that Owen was comfortable having people know. For Will to just publicize it like that . . . it wasn’t going to sit well with the Cleaner. The two were so shocked by the announcement, they nearly missed the end of Will’s statement, “. . . like you.”

The Cleaner’s whole body relaxed as understanding flooded through him. Giving the Colonel a brief glare, the man forced a normal looking grin on his face as he offered the other man a hand. “You can call me Elliot. It’s a pleasure to meet you, Aaron.”

There was naked relief on Aaron’s face as he accepted the hand firmly. “You have no idea.”

Clasping the man on the shoulder, Owen chuckled, “You may be surprised. Let’s talk; there’s never a better time to quit than right now.”

It was only after the two men walked off that Marina whirled and punched Will hard in the bicep. The Colonel flinched with a yelp, grabbing for the appendage. “Ow! What the hell, Marishka!?”

“What the hell indeed, Misha? You should have warned him first,” Marina scolded, even as she acknowledged that in some things, Will’s social skills were sorely lacking. Rolling her eyes in exasperation, she muttered lightly under her breath, “Sometimes I wonder why I ever let you speak to people in public.”
The Colonel chuckled, looping his arm around her waist and hauling her back into his chest. Bending, he whispered against her lips, “You love me . . . admit it, samaya malen’kaya.”

“Not really the point, Mishka,” the Russian insisted, even as she fought to hide the adoring smile on her face.

About that time, Bucky and Clint joined the two as they continued to bicker good naturedly with each other. Clint gagged at the two, earning a quiet giggle from the handler as she insisted, “I can’t believe I’m saying this, but I have truly missed that sound.” Giving her youngest a warm smile, she inquired, “So leaving after all?”

Her former mentor nodded firmly, squeezing his boyfriend’s hand tenderly as he insisted, “We have something to take care of. And the sooner it’s done, the sooner the situation can be laid to rest.”

The Power Couple of the family glanced at each other, both looks eloquent with some secret only they knew, before turning back to the lovers. “As you wish,” Marina agreed, the Russian’s eyes knowing as went up on tiptoes to squeeze her youngest charge fondly. Going up on tiptoes, she murmured directly into his ear, “Behave yourself, moy dorogoy, and no matter what . . . trust Zima to know your limits.”

The S.H.I.E.L.D. sniper made a face as he muttered too low for anyone but her to hear, “I think I should be worried about the fact that my sister knows my boyfriend is about to beat the hell out of my ass.”

Her only reply was an amused chuckle as she released him back into Bucky’s care. Narrowing her eyes at the former assassin, she insisted, “Bud’te ostorożny s nim, Zima.”

“Da, mem,” the other man agreed, tugging inexorably on Clint’s hand. “Don’t wait up; we’re going to spend the night at my quarters.”

“Agreed,” Will replied, his arm slipping around Marina’s waist as the handler came back to his side. “Have fun you two.”

Clint made a face at the request, causing both Will and Marina to laugh, before Bucky tugged on his hand once more, “Come along, khishchnik.”

The youngest Grimm nodded in agreement, before following him from the reception. They arrived at Bucky’s quarters on base. It followed the same standard as any other rooms given to a S.H.I.E.L.D. senior agent. Bucky spent most of his time at the Grimm home, leaving the room as sparsely furnished as it had been when it had been assigned to him. Its only benefits were that it was private and there was a King-sized bed dominating the very center of the room. Sitting on the end of the bed, there was a decent sized wooden box with sturdy brass hinges and two solid handles at each end.

Stepping into the room, Bucky guided Clint out of the way of the door before shutting and locking it securely. Laying one hand over the palm reader, he used a voice command to seal the door completely. Turning back to Clint, he watched as the younger man fidgeted where he’d been left. Offering his boyfriend his hand, he waited for the archer to make the choice to come to him, a smile curving his lips as the other man stepped to his side with no hesitation. Tugging lightly, Bucky insisted, “Come sit with me on the bed, khishchnik.”

Nodding, Clint took a seat next to his boyfriend, his whole demeanor uncharacteristically subdued. Wrapping one arm around the younger man’s waist, Bucky pulled him into his side and pressed an adoring kiss to his temple. “Talk to me, Clint. Tell me what you’re thinking.”
There was a pause, before Clint whined lightly, “This is going to hurt . . . isn’t it?”

Bucky chuckled as he nodded, “That’s kinda the point.” There was a pause as the former Soviet assassin considered, before running his fingers through the other man’s short blond hair. “Of course, there’s always the chance that you enjoy it.”

Clint made a face in disbelief, as he muttered, “Who the hell could enjoy something like this?”

The assassin shrugged lazily as he replied, “I do. Both spanking and being spanked. It’s all a matter of personal preference.” Tugging briefly on his boyfriend’s hair, he watched Clint’s eyes roll back into his head in pleasure. “And you seem to have a thing for pain.”

The embarrassed blush that spread across Clint’s face was a little bit of a surprise, as he ducked his head, “Sometimes, a little pain feels good.”

“And that is why I think you would usually enjoy being spanked,” Bucky reminded him, before allowing his voice to turn stern. “That being said, I want you to remember this experience as a lesson, not as a pleasure.”

At the censure in his boyfriend’s voice, the archer ducked his head as his blush darkened. “I am sorry, Bucky.”

“I know you are. But you scared the hell out of me when you just disappeared like that. And I understand that you were trying to bring your brother home, but you should have told me what was going on.”

“I didn’t want you to be implicated, if anything went wrong. I was just trying to protect you.”

“Khishchnik, I don’t need you to protect me. I’ve been around the block a time or two.” Tightening his grip on his boyfriend’s wrist lightly, he took a deep breath. “Do you have any questions about what’s going to happen?”

Clint shook his head forlornly, as he reminded his boyfriend, “You’ve spanked me before, Buck.”

“Not like this, I haven’t. Last time, I went pretty easy on you. This time, I’m not.”

The archer bit his lower lip as he asked, “What do you mean?”

“I’m going to bend you over my lap and spank you. You’re probably going to cry and yell and kick, and I’m not going to stop.” There was a long pause as he waited for Clint to take that in, before he insisted, “All right, khishchnik, no more stalling. Let’s get this over with.”

It wasn’t until Clint was bent over Bucky’s lap, his boyfriend’s metal hand steady against the small of his back and the other landing the first stinging slap into the curve of his bare ass that Clint understood exactly how stupid he’d been. And as Bucky got to work warming his backside for him, the archer silently vowed never to be that stupid again . . . if only to spare himself the agony that accompanied it.

It seemed like an eternity before at last both of Bucky’s hands came to rest against his back, Clint’s face buried in the comforter as he sobbed. Bucky’s voice was a low, soothing hum as he trailed tender fingers over the bare skin of the archer’s lower back. “It’s all right, khishchnik, it’s over . . . you’re all right.”

Tilting the archer back upright, Bucky wrapped his arms around him tightly and ran his fingers lightly through his hair. Clint buried his face in the curve of his boyfriend’s throat, feeling his bum
burn hotly against Bucky’s jeans and causing him to sob all the more fiercely against him. Bucky’s voice was gentle as he whispered into Clint’s hair, “I love you, Clint; no matter what, that is never going to change. But it’s long past time to grow up. All right?”

“I’m sorry Buck,” Clint whimpered, his arms coming up to hug the former Soviet assassin to him tightly.

“I know you are, khishchnik,” Bucky promised, one hand coming up to threat through Clint’s hair as he began to rock the younger man back and forth. There was a heavy sigh as the sharpshooter kissed the sniper’s forehead, “I forgive you.”

“I’ll never run off without telling you where I’m going again, I promise.”

“I believe you, Clint.” Holding him tightly in his arms, Bucky just let the youngest Grimm cry for a long time, Clint’s tears absolving himself of his own guilt. Finally, the sobs faded away and there were only soft hiccups as the archer got himself under control. When at last Clint fell silent, Bucky used one crooked finger to lift his chin up to his own. “I love you, Clint; I just want to keep you safe.”

Clint’s grey eyes were like diamonds as he vowed, “I love you too, Bucky. Always.”

Bucky’s ocean blue eyes sparkled warmly as he bowed his head and took Clint’s mouth with his own. Despite the pain in his backside, the archer was as eager as ever and leaned heavily into the embrace, his lips moving hungrily against the former assassin’s own. Drawing back an inch, the sharpshooter gave his lover a sly grin as he whispered, “Shall we go to bed, moy lyubov’?”

Those eyes were wicked as he drawled lazily, “Bucky, you big stud, take me to bed . . . or lose me forever.”

The return reply was awed and adoring as Bucky replied, “Just show me the way home, khishchnik.”

Meanwhile, across town, Phil Coulson heard the sounds of his bride calling to him from their home on base. “Phil! Could you come in here please?” her tilting voice singsonged, earning a wide, genuine smile from the agent typically regarded as a Life Model Decoy by the junior handlers on his staff.

“Vika? Where are you?” he called, eyes alert as he attempted to follow the sound of her voice through the house.

“In the garage!” she replied, before going completely silent once more.

Phil frowned as he considered that; Vika had insisted that they’d spend their wedding night at home and that they’d leave for their honeymoon the next morning. Which Phil was completely all right with, seeing as he had every intention of christening every flat surface in his home with his newly wedded wife. In fact, the only place he hadn’t planned on christening was their garage. And as he was barefoot and shirtless, the agent was more than ready to get to the part where he took his wife to the stars and watched her come apart at the seams.

Sighing mournfully, he turned to look back at the California King sized bed just waiting for them, before padding down the stairwell in search of his wife. The door to the garage was slightly ajar, a dull glow becoming discernable along the edges of the door as he grew closer. Pulling his gun from the holster at the small of his back, he flicked off the safety as he reached with his free hand to pull open the door a little wider as he called, “Vika?”

Vika’s tone was amused as she admonished, “Put away the gun, Fil. There’s no one else here but
me.”

Phil shook his head at the tease, marveling at how well his Amazon knew him; he couldn’t see her around the edge of the door frame which meant that she hadn’t been able to see him – or the drawn gun – either. Tucking his gun back into its holster, he moved to reply as he stepped into the garage . . . and promptly froze, completely tongue-tied.

Viktoriya Coulson was seated on the hood of a 1950’s cherry red, fully restored, and individually customized Chevy Corvette. But even though the car was utterly gorgeous – and it was without a doubt, the sexiest car he’d ever seen – the best part of the scene before him was his wife’s attire.

Nothing but the unbound glory of her golden curls, playful emerald eyes and a positively delicious smirk.

One hand, fingertips blood red and delicate on the stem of her champagne flute, lifted to salute him as she insisted, “Happy wedding day.” Lazing back on one hand, she gestured with her glass, “Do you like it? I had a friend of mine restore it for you; and of course, I had Jason Grimm add a surprise or two.”

Phil could feel his whole body loosening as he practically prowled into the room. “A surprise or two? Should I be worried?”

Viktoriya grinned as she tossed her head, her spine elongating as he stepped between her legs and slipped one hand into her hair. “I think you’ll like these things. After all, thanks to Jason, I’m fairly certain that you own the only 1950’s Corvette that can fly.”

Hazel eyes went wide as he redirected his now gleeful attention onto the car, demanding, “She flies!?”

One blond eyebrow went up as his wife lifted a hand to her husband’s cheek. “Fil, moy vozlyublenny, do you want to play with your new flying car or would you perhaps like to enjoy your very naked, very horny wife?”

Phil’s grin was filthy as he dragged her to him, earning a breathy moan as he set his teeth against her pulse point and murmured against the milky skin, “Is there any reason I can’t do both?”

If Viktoriya’s heartfelt moan was any indication, she had no further complaints about that. And as the agent set his mouth to her breasts, he vowed to make sure that she never did.

Chapter End Notes

Translations:

(R) Zimniy Soldat - Winter Soldier
(R) khishchnik - little hawk (literally ”little bird of prey”; Bucky's nickname for Clint)
(R) zhchemzhushina - pearl (one of Will's lesser used nicknames for Marina)
(R) samaya malen'kaya - my little one (the more common of Will's nicknames for Marina)
(R) moy dorogoy - my darling (Marina's nickname for Clint)
(R) Zima - Winter (one of Marina's nicknames for Bucky Barnes)
(R) Bud'te ostorozhny s nim - Take care with him
(R) Da, mem - Yes, ma'am
(R) moy lyubov' - my love
(R) Fil - Russian spelling/pronunciation of Phil
(R) moy vozlyublennyy - my beloved
GrimmWarnings

Chapter Notes

So I am soooooo sorry. My sister has been in town while she heals from a very bad break in her foot. Also, I have been TO a wedding, been IN a wedding and am now PLANNING a wedding. Also, there has been a renewed struggle from my ex-fiance about paternity of our daughter (she's his, he just won't man up and admit it) as well as a battle over child support, so that's been fun. Plus, the full time job at Walgreens, and the one that comes from raising a very adventurous, very curious and exceptionally exuberant two year old.

It's been a very busy month, though I realize that that is no excuse. I have no intention of abandoning this story, and am fortunately getting caught back up. I hope you all continue to read and enjoy this. It makes me so happy to hear all of your comments.

Translations, as always, are at the end of the chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes
Chapter 132: Grimm Warnings

Getting everyone settled in the Grimm Family house was a welcome ordeal . . . even if Marina could help but notice that Will fled into his office mere seconds after they walked through the door. Fortunately for the ordeal itself, Jason’s room was, for the most part, as he’d left it and Hansel had all but moved in with his Maria, leaving Jason, Aaron and their respective companions places to sleep for the foreseeable future. Though the Russian would never admit it aloud to either of them, having both of her long absent boys under her roof once more was like walking on clouds; there was a joyous thrill in her heart that she didn’t think would be leaving any time soon.

After setting the downstairs to rights, and giving her boys enough time to get themselves situated in the half-familiar surroundings, the handler headed up the stairs and turned toward Jason’s room first. Knocking on the doorframe, she waited to hear the responding, “Come in!” before pushing open the door and poking her head around the edge. She smiling at the sight of Casey and Jason cuddling against the headboard, their heads bent together familiarly as they talked in low undertones. Cocking an eyebrow at the scene, she couldn’t resist the chance to tease. “And you’re sure she’s not your girlfriend?”

Casey’s cheeks blazed to about the same color as her hair, as she hauled the covers over her head in embarrassment. Jason, considerably more used to his sister’s good-natured meddling, only growled at her, “Shut up, Marishka,” earning little more than a laugh and wink from the brunette. “What do you need, Marina?”

“Nothing; just making sure that every is settled for the night, before I head into the study and try to wrestle Misha away from what is no doubt a massive backlog of paperwork and casefiles.”

Jason chuckled as he watched chocolate eyes roll in fond exasperation, joking, “Good luck with that.”

“Thank you . . . I’m going to need it, I’m sure,” the Russian agreed dryly. “Go ahead and feel free to sleep in tomorrow. I’m going to try to keep your brother in bed for as long as possible.”

“Ew,” Jason drawled, even as he nodded in agreement, “though warranted; Will looks kinda like death warmed over. And that’s being very kind.”

Shaking her head, the pretty handler turned to go with a wave over her shoulder, “Good night, Jay. Sleep well.”

“You too Marina. Ya lyublyu tebya.”

Pausing at the doorway, Marina turned back with an adoring smiled and replied, “Ya lyublyu tebya, sladkiy. Sladkikh snov.”

It was just before the door clicked shut that the former Cahill caretaker heard Casey ask in genuine surprise, “She really does love you guys, doesn’t she?”

“You didn’t think that was obvious from the torture and the dead bodies?” Jason asked mildly; Marina could just imagine the way his eyebrow ticked up over one piercing green eye at the question.

“Very funny. I mean, if you four are her boys, then why is Will so different?”

Hovering for a moment to be able to hear the middle Grimm’s reply, Marina took in the thoughtful pause before Jason answered, “Because some people are just destined for each other. Will and Marina are two of those people; they just . . . fit, like jigsaw pieces in a two person puzzle. No one
else could have loved and understood Will like Marina can, and vice versa. They belong together . . . they always have and they always will.”

The only reply from the red-haired detective was a contemplative hum, allowing Marina to smile and move toward Hansel’s bedroom next, to check on her second youngest and his scientist. Aaron and Marta had been installed into the room by the German himself, the former witch hunter announcing at the wedding that he would be moving into his girlfriend’s place for the foreseeable future . . . or at least until other arrangements could be made for the former Outcome operative and his virologist.

Repeating the same procedure, Marina smiled to see Aaron tucking a passed out Marta under the covers when she pushed open the door. “Everyone okay in here?” she asked quietly, her eyes fond as she watched the second youngest Grimm run a soft hand over Marta’s tangled strands.

Aaron nodded with a grin, straightening from his position beside the bed and moving to remove his uniform jacket. “Yeah, she’s just tired. I think it’s because of everything that comes with being a fugitive and on the run, as it were.”

Reaching out as he shed the coat from his shoulders, Marina squeezed his bicep firmly. “We’ll fix this, solnyshko. No matter what, Misha and I will get you both your lives back.”

“I know. I trust you,” the munitions specialist agreed with a small, sad smile. “I just hope she decides to stay once she has the option to go.”

“I don’t think you have anything to worry about, Aaron. She’s pretty gone on you.”

The grin that crossed Aaron’s face then was like a lightbulb in darkness, brightening his features like sunrise over the ocean. “You really think so?”

His sister laughed softly, ruffling his hair familiarly. “Oh, I know so. Get some sleep, domashniy. Misha and I are sleeping in tomorrow, so feel free to follow our example.”

“Sounds good to me. Ya lyublyu tebya, Marishka.”

“Ya lyublyu tebya, solnyshko. Spat’ khorosho.”

“You too,” he agreed softly, watching her silently until the door shut behind her. The murmuring, indistinct sounds of Marta’s voice brought his head around and he smiled to see her staring at him blearily. “It’s all right, Doc. Go back to sleep. We’re safe here.”

Snuggling back into the pillows, she murmured a quiet affirmative, before falling easily into the arms of Morpheus once more. It didn’t take long before Aaron had shed the remainder of his uniform and hung it proudly in the closet, his fingers reverent as they adjusted a crease in the sleeve. Turning back to Marta, he pulled on a pair of pajama pants and crawled carefully into bed beside the scientist. Drawing her body into his arms, Aaron closed his eyes and prepared to sleep without fear or dreams for the first time in years.

Meanwhile, Marina stood in the doorframe of Will’s study, watching him sort through a truly impressive, and slightly frightening, stack of files on his desk. She could see the crease between his brows and knew instinctively that his thoughts were not on the cases before him. Allowing herself a small smile at the beloved countenance, she stepped further into her lover’s sanctuary and pulled the door shut behind her. The minute tightening in his shoulders was a clear indication that he knew she was there and was only waiting for her to strike the first blow.

The corner of her lips ticked up slightly in amusement, before she fell effortlessly into parade rest and prepared to give her report. “His name is Colonel Eric Byer. He’s retired Air Force and he currently
holds a prominent place on NRAG’s rather extensive payroll.”

Will’s forehead furrowed further – which seriously, how was that even possible? – even as he waved her deeper into the room and towards the overstuffed armchair across from his desk. She took the two steps and practically fell into its comfort, watching her Colonel process that information. “Byer . . . Byer . . . Byer . . . Isn’t he the same mudak that had Bucky when we first apprehended him in London?”

“One and the same,” Marina agreed with a small nod.

Nodding slowly, the oldest Grimm hummed agreeable, those mercurial eyes turning downward onto his files once again. Settling comfortably into her armchair, his Russian folded her hands over her stomach and closed her eyes, waiting for him to make the call on the situation. The silence was heavy but companionable and familiar as the man continued to look through the files and stack them into three large piles according to priority.

Finally, the sound of the grandfather clock in the foyer clanged midnight and the S.H.I.E.L.D. handler cracked open one eye to take in her lover’s mood. Each of the three piles was currently being glared at so heatedly that the illogical part of Marina was half-afraid the pages would catch fire. Waving her hand to encompass them, the Russian taunted lightly, “Is there a method to the madness, moy vozlyublenny, or are you just glaring at the poor piles of defenseless paper for no reason?”

Caught offguard by the question, Will looked up at her with a small smirk, gesturing to each of the three piles in turn. “Trash . . . high priority . . . desperately overdue . . . which leads me to think that my relief did jackshit while we were at Cameron Kaserne.” Leaning forward, he folded his hands atop the middle stack, eyes verdant green as he watched his partner groan in true sympathy. “So . . . you feel up to a road trip, samaya malen’kaya?”

“Road trip? Misha, we just got home,” she teased with a wink. “The boys would miss us.”

The smirk on his lips widened then into a wicked grin as he shrugged, “Who said the boys weren’t coming with us? Hell, let’s even bring Dad along; we wouldn’t want him to miss out on any of the fun.”

Shoving herself lazily from her chair, Marina rounded the desk and slid sensuously into her partner’s lap, his hands trailing indolently around her hips as she came to rest. Trailing her own fingers up along his throat to cradle the curve of his jaw, she leaned forward to press a brief but heated kiss to his lips, murmuring adoringly, “Ah, Mishka, but you are a man after my own heart.”

A sly wink and a slightly wider grin was her only reply, causing a delighted giggle as he began to pepper delicious kisses along the long curve of her neck. “Marishka . . . moya zhemchuzhina?”

Her answering, “Da?” was breathless as she allowed her head to fall back to offer him as much skin as he could reach.

Hot air brushed over the bell of her ear as he whispered, “Adoro te.”

Reminded of their one night in Rome many years ago, Marina’s eyes pricked with tears as she replied, “Adoro te amica mea.”

Kissing her once more, he brushed a wayward strand of hair from her eyelashes as he murmured, “Let’s go to bed. Shall we?”

“You read my mind,” she agreed tenderly, squealing joyously as he lunged to his feet, strong arms implacable behind her shoulders and under her knees. Her hands were indulgent on the planes of his
cheeks as she sighed, staring up at him affectionately as he carried her up the stairs, two and three steps at a time.

Though her boys would never admit it in a million years, the sound of her laughter filling the tiny house on base had always made the simple base housing a home. The sound of it filling the house once more filled the house with a sense of peace that none of them had realized was missing since she and Will had left. It was only when the door to the master suite closed and the peals of laughter muted to quiet chuckles that Aaron, Brian and Jason were each able to truly close their eyes and sleep soundly for the first time in a long time.

Meanwhile, in a tidy brownstone in the suburbs of Washington D.C., Eric Byer stirred from restless slumber to the sound of persistent hammering on his front door. Dita Mandy, his partner and longtime companion – arguably the Great Love of his Life, though she’d castrate him if he ever told her that – rolled to look up at him blearily as he moved to get out from under the sheets. “What is it, Ric?”

“Some asshole is banging on the door,” Byer replied in a low grumble. Bending, he kissed her cheek quickly as he insisted, “Go back to sleep; it’s probably just some punk kids playing a prank.”

“Mkay,” she hummed agreeably, snuggling back down into her pillows as he pushed himself from the bed.

Swearing a blue streak under his breath, the retired Air Force colonel yanked on a t-shirt and a pair of plaid pajama pants, before storming down the stairs to deal with whoever was knocking on the door. Twisting the knob, he flung the door open viciously, demanding, “What the fuck!?”

Former Three Star General and current Director of S.H.I.E.L.D., Nicholas L. Fury, stood outside, the familiar leather trench blending in perfectly with the pitch blackness of the evening. “Hello, Byer; if that’s how you greet your colleagues, it’s no wonder you never make any friends.”

Scowling at the man, Byer folded his arms over his chest and demanded angrily, “Damn it, Fury. Do you have idea what time it is? What the hell are you doing here anyway? Did you break your new flying fortress already?”

“The Iliad is fully operational, thank you for asking, and if she wasn’t I can assure you that it would not be you that I would be coming to see; I have people on speed dial for that. As for the lateness of the hour, I would apologize but I find myself surprisingly apathetic to the inconvenience.”

Byer’s eyes rolled as he muttered, “Megalomaniac.”

“I believe the phrase you were looking for is ‘magnificent bastard’. I’ve been told it’s a term of endearment uniquely suited, and coined specifically, for me.” The man’s one eyes was baleful as he continued, “As for why I’m here, I came to offer you a warning, colleague to colleague.”

Distrustful blue eyes narrowed skeptically as the younger man challenged, “Warning? What kind of warning?”

A dark chuckle filled the area as Fury inquired, “You truly have no idea what kind of tarpit you’ve jumped into, do you?”

“What is it with S.H.I.E.L.D. directors and their inability to speak in anything but riddles?” Byer hissed petulantly, “First Colonel Phillips, then Director Carter and now you; just speak plain, Fury, so I can go back to sleep.”
“You want it bluntly, fine. You have officially pissed off the wrong people. They are coming for you, and no force on earth is going to be able to stop them.”

Cocking his eyebrow at the statement, Byer lifted his hand to rub at the bridge of his nose in pointed frustration. “Is this about Cross and that pet scientist of his? Because I’m really not too worried about any repercussions on that front; they fell off the grid five days ago. Last confirmed sighting was on the docks in Manila; if they’re smart, they’re in some no extradition, third world country by now,” Byer sneered, with a blatant roll of his eyes.

A small smile toyed at the corners of Fury’s mouth as he fired back, “Wrong. As a matter of fact, both Agent Cross and Dr. Shearing are on a S.H.I.E.L.D. base in New York City. And while I don’t think that Agent Cross will be causing any big problems for you personally, I can assure that it is his father and his four brothers that you should be on the lookout for. The Brat’ya Mrachnyy are not people to fuck around with; they take care of their own and don’t really care about the collateral damage that may occur on either side. You took Cross, and you arranged for a hostage situation that ended in the critical injury of another of the brothers. Believe me when I say, they ARE coming for you.” Considering the warning he’d given, Fury began to chuckle as he continued, “And if the brothers themselves don’t scare you . . . the older sister should.”

“Oh really . . . and why is that?” Byer scoffed, as he cross his arms belligerently over his chest.

“But the Black Widow is not the only master assassin that the Russians created . . . and this one happens to be a little overprotective of the Brothers Grimm.” Shrugging, Fury insisted, “I’ve done my duty. If you don’t heed the warning . . . what comes next . . . is on you.”

Chapter End Notes

Translations:

Ya lyublyu tebya - I love you
sladkiiy - honey (Marina's nickname for Jason)
sladkikh snow - sweet dreams
solnyshko - sunshine (Marina's nickname for Aaron/Kenny)
domashniy - pet (an interchangeable nickname Marina uses for each of her younger boys)
spat' khorosho - sleep well
mudak - asshole
moy vozlyublennyy - my beloved (one of Marina's nicknames for Will)
samaya malen'kaya - my little once (one of Will's nicknames for Marina)
moya zhemchuzhina - my pearl (one of Will's seldom used nicknames for Marina)
Da/net - yes/no
Adoro te - I adore you (in Latin)
Adoro te amica mea - I adore you, my love (in Latin)
Chapter 133:

When the boys woke the next morning, it was to the familiar sight of Will and Marina already in the kitchen. The Colonel was seated at the table, sipping complacently on a mug of coffee as he read the newspaper, while Marina hummed cheerfully as she danced around the kitchen making breakfast. Jason grinned at the sight, nudging Aaron lightly with his elbow, teasing the family’s Power Couple. “Some things never change, huh little brother?”

Aaron’s grin was huge as he nodded in relieved agreement, his tone only half-joking as he replied, “Thank God for that.”

The family Russian glared at them, amusement shining in her eyes, as she scolded, “You both can shut up now.”

Brian’s grin was wide as he clapped Will on the shoulder fondly. “At least they’re not necking against the fridge again.”
Will’s tone was dry, eyes still on his paper, as he replied, “We’re waiting for Clint to be home for that. It’s not nearly as fun without hearing the Hawk gagging in the background.” Marina’s hand connected sharply with the skin left bare by his muscle tank, earning a surprised, “Ow! Marishka! What the hell was that for!?” as he grabbed for the abused bicep.

His partner bent to press a sweet kiss to his temple, placing the plate of Orange Stuffed French Toast in front of him as she straightened. “Be nice, Mishka... they just woke up and they haven’t even eaten breakfast yet. I did not slave away over the stove, just for them to lose their appetites so early.”

The Colonel’s opinion on that was eloquent in the way he rolled his eyes, though he said nothing as he folded his newspaper and set it to the side of his plate. Brian, however, snickered as he reminded his sister, “Because that’s ever stopped us, Marishka.”

Picking up his fork, the oldest Grimm eyed his younger brother through his eyelashes balefully as Marina began to set out plates. “And where might each of your women be?”

The answers were varied as the three spoke simultaneously – “Taking a shower.” “Still asleep.” “Calling her sister.” – causing another roll of the eyes from their brother as he waved the replies away impatiently. “Whatever... don’t care... sit down and eat. We’ve got work to do this morning.”

At the brisk tone, Brian cheered excitedly, his butt landing in his usual chair with an audible sound. “What happened? Who do I need to kill? I do get to kill something right? Come on, Will... it’s been weeks since I got to kill something.”

“No one is killing anyone,” Will scolded, though Marina’s tone was cheerful as she interrupted, “at least not yet.”

The Colonel cocked a disapproving eyebrow at his partner, the Russian’s cheeky wink in response causing only a heavily put-upon sigh and another exasperated roll of his eyes. Jason took a seat next, a small smile curving his lips at the sight of his breakfast cut up into bite-sized, easily handled chunks on his plate. Giving his sister a grateful grin, and earning a fond ruffling of his hair in response, the tech officer turned his attention back onto Will next. “So if we don’t have to kill anyone yet, what’s going on?”

“Don Diego Delgado told our beloved Marina who hired him; the seven of us are going to go and pay him a visit.”

“Seven?” Jason echoed, at the same time that Aaron demanded, “Who was it?”

Will’s mercurial eyes were flashing through colors as he replied gravely, “Eric Byer, rom the National Research Assay Group.” There was a pause as the eldest brother took in the horrified look on the face of the family Outcome agent. “I believe you and he are acquainted.”

The words jolted the agent out of his horror, sky blue eyes narrowing as he growled, “He was my handler at Outcome... he recruited me to the program... he was the one who told me that Clint was dead and that you all blamed me for it.”

Marina’s tone was low and murderous as she hissed, “Now I really do want to kill him.”

Clint’s voice was a surprise, though no less vengeful, as he insisted, “You’ll have to take a number.”

Will’s eyes finally settled on a vibrant green – a sure sign that though he was calm for the moment, it was only a momentary reprieve for whatever had pissed him off – as he took in the stony features of the family’s two best snipers where they stood in the door of the kitchen. “No one is killing anyone. I
have a team doing some discreet surveillance today. Dad has classes until 5:30; I have a vicious backlog of paperwork; Marina needs to check in with the handler pool, if for no other reason than Vika and Coulson just left for their honeymoon; and I’m sure the rest of you have reports to finish and file due to the situation at the Second Precinct. Everything needs to be finished before evening. I want to head out no later than tomorrow morning. Am I understood?"

“Yes sir!” was the immediate agreement from the four brothers, Marina and Bucky.

“Good; finish your breakfasts before they get cold. Marina’s been up for entirely too long cooking this morning.”

The four younger brothers glanced at each other conspiratorially, before Brian drawled teasingly, “Didn’t get up to anything kinky last night after all then?”

His sister’s eyebrow cocked at the question, replying bemusedly, “I don’t know . . . does ‘Carousel’ from the Kama Sutra count as kinky?”

As one, the brothers all groaned wretchedly, “Marina!!! TMI!!!”

The grin on the Russian’s face was wicked as she tossed her head back and let out the first full-bodied laugh she’d had in months. Twenty minutes later, when Natasha Romanoff came into the kitchen – followed by the two new initiates into the “Family Crazy” – it was to the sight of Marina still laughing as she dodged food being flung at her by her young charges. The redhead’s lips curled into a smirk as she took her usual seat in Brian’s lap, wiggling back into his chest as his arm came up across her lap. Reaching out, she snagged his offered coffee mug and took a long sip, eyes fixed on Marina’s as one chocolate eye slipped closed in a sly wink. Green eyes were sparkling as she teased, “Having fun, Gadyuka?”

“Teasing them about our sex life never gets old, Vdova,” was the cackling reply, earning another series of miserable and utterly pitiful groans.

The two former assassins smiled at each other fondly, relaxing back comfortably in their respective seats as the boys moved their attentions away from their sister and turned their teasing onto their eldest. Granted, the Colonel had not become a successful officer because his feathers ruffled easily. Huffing lightly, Will did little more than lift his newspaper and snap it open, letting the good-natured insults flow past him uninterrupted.

Finally Marin spoke up, her tone fond and indulgent as she scolded them tenderly. “All right boys, that’s enough. Leave your brother alone. Finish your breakfasts . . . you’ve all got work to do before tomorrow.”

“Yes ma’am,” they each agreed obediently, turning their focus once more back onto their rapidly cooling breakfasts.

With everyone looking elsewhere, it was no surprise that there was then only one witness to the following interaction between the Colonel and his Russian. Marta watched in fascination as Will smiled in devoted affection and undisguised gratitude at the woman who reached to brush her fingertips over the exposed nape of his neck. The moment was little more than a second long, but was still sufficient enough to add one more question to the virologist’s undying curiosity. Lifting her mug to her lips, she took a sip, as she continued to watch the couple move through what looked to be a normal routine.

As each of the boys finished eating, they each stood from their chairs and moved to press adoring kisses to their sister’s cheeks. It wasn’t until Marina stood and began stacking empty plates on top of
one another, than Will’s voice sounded from behind his newspaper. “I seem to remember a rule
somewhere that says that the cook does not clean up her own mess, unless –by some miracle – I’m
remembering it wrong.”

Both Casey and Marta stared in shock as each of the boys ducked their head in embarrassment at
their brother’s mild reminder. Clint scuffed his bare foot against the floor as he confessed sheepishly,
“Sorry Will . . . I don’t even remember who’s on clean up duty today.”

Bucky chuckled at his lover, standing from his seat to press a fervent kiss to the archer’s mouth,
before turning to take the stack from Marina. “It’s all right, uchenyy . . . it’s my turn to do the dishes
today.”

“Thank you, Zima,” Marina breathed in relief. “I have to go check on the handler pool before too
much chaos ensues.”

Dropping an adoring kiss to Will’s upturned cheek, she moved quickly from the room and just like
that, the brothers were once again back in motion. Aaron moved to press a sweet kiss to the corner of
Marta’s mouth, before he went to get ready for his morning appointment with Nick Fury about his
future with S.H.I.E.L.D., as well as whatever provisions S.H.I.E.L.D. was willing to make for Marta
and her safety. Clint practically bounded toward the hallway closet, snatching out his bow case and
his quiver and all but dashing from the house and towards the range. At the exuberant action, the
Colonel looked up at the former Winter Soldier with a cocked eyebrow, earning a grin and a shrug,
“It’s a work in progress.”

“So I see,” he drawled in amusement, before folding his newspaper and standing from his chair. “I
have to go yell at some people today, so I’ll be in my office putting together my disciplinary reports.”

“Can do. You have fun with that,” Jason agreed with a grin, his arms folded gingerly on the tabletop,
ducking his head under his brother’s hand as the eldest reached out to ruffle it fondly.

“Oh yeah . . . loads. Shut up, Jay,” Will growled fondly over his shoulder as he left the kitchen.

As for Casey, she sat quietly at the table, watching Jason fumble briefly with his bandaged hands,
trying to figure out how to push himself to his feet without jostling them. Though he winced a few
times if he bumped them against the hardwood, he was surprisingly quiet about how much pain he
was in. Shaking her head at his stubborn independence, it was a few minutes before she stood and
gripped him firmly around the bicep to lever him from his chair. Jason grinned at her gratefully,
wrapping a tentative arm around her shoulders. “Thanks Shraeger.”

“Has anyone ever told you that you are stupidly independent?”

Jason chuckled as he nodded ruefully, “I’ve been told once or twice.”

Huffing out an exasperated sigh, she muttered lightly, “You’re an idiot.”

Natasha was giggling from her seat as she watched Casey herd her partner towards his room, before
snuggling back into Brian again. “We have hand-to-hand training duty today. You up for beating up
the freshies?”

Brian’s grin was wicked and more than a little evil as he replied, “Bring it on.”

All too soon, Marta was the only one sitting at the table, sipping on her coffee mug as she considered
the family that Aaron had pulled her into . . . and the way they’d enfolded her into their masses
without question. Finishing her coffee, she stood from her chair and moved deeper into the house,
listening for the man she most wanted to see at the moment. Finally, she froze in the doorway of the
Colonel’s study, biting on her lip as she watched him working at his desk. The silence was comfortable but expectant as Will moved effortlessly through the papers on his desk.

When he finally spoke, the pretty brunette jumped a mile high in surprise. “You obviously have something on your mind, Dr. Shearing. I would appreciate it if you would just say what you need to say, instead of staring at me. Despite my brothers’ claims to the contrary, I am not in fact a mind reader.”

Marta could feel her cheeks flaming as she ducked self-consciously back behind the wall like a scolded child. Finally looking up from his paperwork, the man cocked an eyebrow at her and waited for her to speak. The virologist could feel the heat in her cheeks rising as she stammered, “I am sorry, sir, I just . . . I have so many questions.”

Smirking in agreement, Will nodded in understanding agreement. “Depending on the question, I will do my best to give you what answers I can.”

At the blanket allowance, Marta bit down on her lower lip as she considered what it was she wanted to know. Finally she blurted out, “What didn’t Marina read to you . . . when you were a child?”

Almost as soon as the question was out in the open, she slapped her hands over her mouth in horrified embarrassment. The Colonel, though visibly surprised by her reaction, did not seem to be angered or uncomfortable by the question, only shifting back against his backrest and watching her steadily. The two stared at each other for a long moment, before the scientist began to stammer out a chaotic apology. “I am so sorry, Colonel, I didn’t . . . that wasn’t the question I intended to ask . . . Oh God, me and my big mouth . . . I can’t believe I asked that . . . Oh God . . .”

Finally, Marta’s head snapped up and her diatribe fell silent at the sound of Will’s voice. Clicking her jaw shrug, she waited a moment to see if he would elaborate, before inquiring once again, “I beg your pardon.”

Will gave her a small smile, nodding once. “I didn’t need her to,” came the same answer, his tone calm and infinitely patient, “and I never asked her to. She had enough to concern herself with, especially because my brothers were so young.” He allowed a small smile to curve his lips as he continued, “There were more important . . . both to me and to her. We have always agreed on that point.”

The virologist frowned slightly at the answer, taking that in. For a moment, she was silent, before Will gave her a soft smile and a nod. “You may ask . . . I don’t mind.”

It was almost as if all she’d need was his permission. Almost immediately she leaned forward and asked gently, “Why Marina? Out of all the women, in all the world, why her?”

The smile faded slightly into something heartbreakingly adoring and his eyes got very far away as the Colonel bowed his head in reverence, “Because she is my perfect match. Of all the woman in all the world, she is the only woman who could have been.”

Chapter End Notes

Translations:

(R) uchenyy - student (or scholar. Bucky's nickname for Marina, his former protégé)
(R) Zima - Winter (one of Marina's nicknames for Bucky Barnes aka the Winter Soldier)

LOVE YOU GUYS SOOOOOOOO MUCH!!!
Chapter Notes

Translations are in the chapter, as well as at the end. Enjoy this one!! I love all of your reviews, as always, and I can't wait to hear what you all think of this chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
Chapter 134: Setting Things Right

If there was one irrefutable fact about Clint Grimm, it was this; he had always loved high places. Even perched atop a filing cabinet could count, as long as it put him at a taller vantage point than the rest of the room. So it wasn’t a surprise to his best friend that when he couldn’t find the archer at the range or on the roof of their house, the abandoned air traffic control tower was the next best place to look.

Aaron smiled at the sight of Clint perched haphazardly on the railing, balancing perfectly on the backs of his knees. “How’s your ass, little brother?”
Clint twisted with a grin as he replied, “Sore as hell, but quite frankly . . . I kinda like it.”

“TMI, little brother,” the older of the two drawled with a roll of his eyes, earning a cheeky wink and a teasing, “Prude.” There was a pause as the Army sniper considered his answer, before continuing, “Remind me never to chase you across the world without telling the boyfriend first, though, okay?”

Snickering the Outcome operative nodded, “Deal.” Hopping up onto the railing beside his brother, Aaron looked out over the familiar landscape as he asked, “So can I assume that the nametags were his?”

Grinning sheepishly – and with a telltale blush to his cheeks – Clint glanced over at his favorite brother as he nodded. “Yeah . . . best I could do on short notice. I didn’t think we’d be able to pass quite as easily as Petrovkas, or I would have stolen a few of Marina’s.”

Nodding in silent agreement, Aaron braced his weight on his hands as he enjoyed their surroundings. There was a long moment of silent between the two brothers, both seated comfortably on the railing and just savoring each other’s closeness. They were each aware of the elephant between them, and the eventual need to address it, but neither was willing to confront that moment yet. Finally, Clint shifted slightly, inquiring, “How was your meeting with Uncle Nick?”

Aaron chuckled, replying with a haphazard shrug, “Well, at least I still have a job, if I want it. And he’s willing to give Doc a laboratory of her own here at S.H.I.E.L.D., to continue the research she was working on at Sterrisyn Morlanta.”

“You mean the research that made you?”

“No, the viral research that was the reason she was called into the DOD project. She was forced to abandon it, when she took the position on that project.”

Clint’s only answer was a soft hum, as he turned his attention back to the horizon. Aaron could see his brother’s skin practically humming and he shifted his weight to make himself more comfortable as he waited for his brother to just spit out whatever was bothering him. Fortunately, Clint had never been blessed with an overabundance of patience and it wasn’t long before Clint spoke up again. “Why did you run, Kenny? She had you, almost in arm’s length, and you ran. Why Ken? Why couldn’t you just let her bring you home?”

There was silence for a long minute before Aaron finally whispered, “I couldn’t, Clint . . . I just couldn’t.”

The archer stared at his brother for a long time, obviously expecting some kind of clarification for that particular answer. When it became apparent that that was all the former DOD operative was going to say, the sniper twisted his legs back over the rail and stormed a few steps away. Finally, he whirled angrily, accusing bitterly, “Bullshit! That’s a bullshit answer, Kenneth James, and you know it! I was there that night . . . I screamed your name, begged for you to stop . . . I watched you make the decision to leap over the edge of the cliff. There was a reason for it, Ken, and you owe it to me, to Marina and to this entire family to be honest with me about it was it.”

Aaron stayed silent, blue eyes grave as he watched his little brother fume, before at last Clint lost his temper and bellowed, “Tell me!”

There was a heartbeat’s pause, before Aaron whispered, “She called me solnyshko.”

Cocking a single eyebrow, Clint tried to see how that was an answer before reminding his brother,
“She has always called you solnyshko. What’s your point?”

“What right did I have to be her solnyshko when you would never again be her dorogoy? What right did I have to her forgiveness and her love when I had taken you away from her? When I had been the one who killed you, intentionally or not?” the older brother asked tearfully, features desolate as he begged his baby brother – his lifelong best friend – for understanding.

The Army sniper stared at his brother in shock before allowing his eyes to slip closed as he sighed. Stepping to his brother’s side, he reached out to grip the fabric of his t-shirt and used the other to turn Aaron’s attention towards him. “Kenny, listen to me, okay? There is nothing that you could have been blamed for in Iraq, okay? Even if I had died that day, it would never have been your fault.”

“I’m supposed to be the munitions expert, remember? Munitions and demolitions; it’s my job to identify, defuse and dispose of any and all active explosives.”

“Ken, we were ambushed,” was Clint’s only reply, eyes sympathetic as he watched the older Grimm process the information.

Aaron’s only outward response was a slow blink, before he drawled uncertainly, “Huh?”

Clint snorted in amusement, an unsubtle roll of his eyes earning a grin from the older of the two brothers. “Are you really going to make me repeat myself? You couldn’t have avoided what happened in Iraq, none of us could have. They were waiting for us to show up, trigger in hand. Even if you had seen the bomb and tried to defuse it, all it would have taken was a push of a button and we would have lost you for good, okay?” Reaching out, Clint punched Aaron firmly in the point of his shoulder, “So can the guilt already. Geez. Not even Will is as angsty as you are right now, and Will is kind of the ‘Colonel of Angst’.”

Aaron’s shoulders jerked as he snorted out of laugh with a roll of his eyes. “First of all, I’m going to tell Will said that.”

The look of mock horror on Clint’s face caused more laughter as the younger brother insisted dramatically, “Don’t do that . . . I like my head right where it is, namely attached to me.”

“Second of all, it’s not as if that little speech didn’t make me feel guilty for at least 20 different things now.”

The archer blew out an exasperated raspberry through his lips as he sighed, “That was not the point, Kenny, Bozhe moi.”

Looping one arm around his little brother’s neck, the former Outcome operative relished his surprised squeak as he rubbed his knuckles exuberantly over the sunny strands. “Love you too, bratishka.”

Shoving his brother a step away, Clint grinned as the two tussled together like old times. Dodging a blatant, and obviously telegraphed, swipe at the back of his head, the younger brother laughed, “You’re getting slow in your old age, pravitel.”

“Zatknis’!” the elder of the two growled, getting his arm around Clint and pinning him to the floor effortlessly. Rubbing his face into the dirt – literally—Aaron crowed, “You were saying?”

Clint grunted, twisting to try and free himself. Finally he went, muttering viciously, “Otstan’ ot menya, mudak! (Get off of me, asshole!”

Chuckling, Aaron shoved himself to his feet and moved to lean against the railing once more. The Army sniper’s tone was malicious as he muttered a string of increasingly vile Russian insults under
his breath. The former DOD assassin kept his back to his brother, allowing him the opportunity to rant. Even still, it was mere minutes before the younger two Grimms stood shoulder to shoulder at the railing once more.

The silence was length but comfortable . . . familiar, the way it had been before Kenny had become Aaron and Clint had learned to live his life without the second half of his soul at his side. It was a long time before Clint nudged his brother with his shoulder, “You know I missed you right?”

Aaron turned to look at his brother with a grin, knowing that he’d just earned forgiveness, “Yeah . . . I missed you too.” There was a pause, before Aaron’s grin turned wicked as he continued, “So . . . the Winter Solider huh? How the hell did that happen?”

Clint’s cheeks flamed with a blush as he punched his brother’s shoulder again, muttering, “Mind your own damn business, Jerk.”

“Bitch.”

“Asshole.”

“Fanboy.”

“Hey! Come on . . . that is still NOT cool!”

The next day, Eric Byer sat at his desk considering the mess Outcome had made. Frankly, Byer considered himself to be an intelligent man. He made choices based on logic, fact and deductive reasoning. He made decisions that effected the country he served every day. He had never doubted himself, or the things he had done . . . not once in his twenty year career with the Air Force or the ten years since he’d come to head up NRAG.

Until now.

The Department of Defense files on Aaron Cross – and those of his alterego, Sgt Kenneth J. Grimm, and those of Sgt Grimm’s four brothers – were lying open on his desk before him. As he skimmed over what little text hadn’t been redacted, Nick Fury’s warning played on constant repeat in the back of his mind. The files were undoubtedly impressive; the renown and awe that followed the legend of the *Brat’ya Mrachnyy* had at least been earned honestly.

If he’d ever seen a colder pair of eyes than the icy silvery-blue-green possessed by Col. William M. Grimm, though . . . he’d eat every medal he’d ever earned while in the service of his country. It was those eyes that gave more credence to Fury’s warning that Byer would have ever otherwise admitted to. Even in a picture, they vowed bloody revenge on anyone who fucked with his squad . . . his unit . . . his family.

Shuddering lightly at the unsettling sensation of someone having walked over his grave, the NRAG executive slapped the file closed on Colonel Grimm’s face with relish. Rubbing his hand briskly over his face, he sighed before gathering everything together and slipping all of the files into his briefcase.

For the moment, the Grimms – and their past lives as members of the Project Cahill – were his little secret. It wouldn’t do for someone to accidently find his leverage against them just lying around where anyone could find it.

Byer arrived back at his home several hours later, moving to his home office to hide his files in his safe. Pushing open the door, he froze at the sight before him. There was a woman seated, cross-legged, on the corner of his desk, a Glock 9mm held effortlessly in her lap. And in his desk chair, as cool as you please, sat Colonel William Michael Grimm, quicksilver eyes gleaming in the low light.
His shock lasted for all of a moment before he roared, “Who the hell do you think you are?!” as he moved to charge full force into the room.

He froze again as the muzzles of two pistols immediately came to rest against the hollows under his jaw. Glancing quickly to the right and then to the left, he took in the icy blue and manic brown eyes watching him coldly. Cross’ face was stone, but there was a wicked smile on the lips of his older brother, as he taunted, “Unless you want a big mess all over your carpet, I wouldn’t move if I was you.”

The woman’s chin lifted imperiously, though the smirk on her lips was still readily apparent. As for this unit’s CO, there was a brief flicker of amusement in his eyes before his face smoothed into impassivity again. The Colonel watched his adversary for a long moment, before gesturing emphatically toward one of the hard backed chairs across from Byer’s desk . . . the ones meant for guests and assets and rivals, not Byer himself. The executive’s jaw clenched at the implied insult, causing a true grin to slip across the Spec Ops soldier’s face. “Have a seat, Colonel Byer . . . you and I need to talk.”

Chapter End Notes

Translations:
Solnyshko (R) - sunshine (Marina's nickname for Kenny/Aaron)
Dorogoy (R) - darling (Marina's nickname for Clint)
Bozhe moi (R) - Oh my God
bratishka (R) - little brother
pravitel' (R) - big brother
Zatknis' (R) - shut up!
Brat'ya Mrachnyy (R) - The Brothers Grimm (the Collective codename for the Army's Spec Ops squad of which Will, Marina, Jason, Aaron and Clint are the sole members.)
Grimm Retribution

Chapter Notes

I'm trying to get back into a regular pattern, though it's been difficult while I deal with all of this Real World crap. I hope you can continue to forgive me. I love your reviews, so please keep them coming.

Byer gets what's coming to him. Woot!!

Translations, as always, are at the end of the chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
Chapter 135: Grimm Retribution

For a moment, Byer contemplated staying where he was; it was the only act of defiance he considered possible with two guns pointed at his head from point blank range. That idea was quickly discarded as the muzzle of the pistol to his right – the one held by a still ice-cold Cross – shoved hard. “Knowing my brother as well as I do, I can assure you . . . that wasn’t a request.”

Byer’s lip curled furiously, before he moved grudgingly toward the chair across from the oldest Grimm. Before he took more than two steps however, another of the brothers – the grey eyed one, the youngest one – slid between the two. “Arms up . . . hands interlocked at the back of your head,”
he ordered brusquely, a flash of bitter triumph in silver eyes at the fury building in Byer’s eyes.

The man patted him down efficiently, stripping him of his service pistol, two knives and his standard issue panic button. Handing it off to the green-eyed one – the middle brother, the comm officer – they all watched as once-nimble fingers fumbled with the tiny piece of tech before setting it down gingerly. “It’s safe. No fail safes and no way to activate it remotely. As long as the button isn’t pushed, it’s harmless.”

The woman lifted it from the desk and handed it to the Colonel, who then dropped it carefully into one of the desk drawers. “Wouldn’t want any unwelcome interruptions to our little chat, now would we?” he asked rhetorically. Once the drawer was shut again, and the button was out of sight, the grey-eyed one insisted, “Sit,” as he shoved Byer down harshly into the chair.

Colonel Grimm folded his hands on top of the desk, watching Byer’s face in amusement as the grey-eyed one turned and leaped straight up to land effortlessly on top of his filing cabinet, eyes shining silver as he crouched there easily. The Colonel’s voice was only a nuance away from laughter as he insisted, “That’s Clint . . . S.H.I.E.L.D. calls him ‘Hawkeye’.”

Allowing a chuckle to cross his lips at the shocked look in his adversary’s face, he leaned forward in his chair and steepled his fingers in front of him calmly. “How about some introductions, hm? It might make this whole ordeal just that bit easier for all of us. I am Will Grimm and I believe you’ve already met the gorgeous assassin seated here to my left. In case you’ve forgotten her, however, I’d like you to meet my partner, Marina Petrovka.” There was a pause, before the Colonel smirked viciously, “Did you know that Russian Red Room assassins undergo thorough training from the time that they are children in order to become perfect spies and killers for their handlers? Marina graduated at the top of her class, so make of that what you will.”

Byer cringed backwards when Petrovka shifted her weight slightly, gifting him a sincerely charming smile. Will chuckled at the other man’s reaction, before gesturing to the green-eyed man still leaning against the wall behind his right shoulder. “This is my brother, Jason. My brother Brian is the brown-eyed one to your right and, of course, you and Aaron are already acquainted.”

“You’ll never get away with this. When Dita gets here . . .” Byer vowed viciously, head tilted upwards haughtily. Whatever threat he’d been able to throw at them was interrupted by the arrival of two more men into the room. The older of the two was obviously the genetic donor for the Cahills, as he looked too much like the Colonel to be anyone other than family, and all of the Colonel’s brothers had already been accounted for. The second of the two was showing off a left arm made entirely of metal, the bicep emblazoned with a scarlet star; Byer’s eyes narrowed, trying and failing to place where he remembered the man from. The Colonel exchanged solemn nods with the two men, before turning back to Byer with a wide smirk. “I am afraid that Captain Mandy will be unable to join us this evening. She has just recently fallen prey to a rather serious accident.”

True concern and real fear for his lover passed swiftly across Byer’s face; both of these emotions were followed shortly thereafter by all consuming rage. “What did you do to her!?” he roared, sharp pressure from Brian Grimm’s gun the only thing keeping him in his chair.

Grimm scoffed, mercurial eyes rolling at his temperamental display. “Oh relax; we didn’t kill her. She’s fine, though her reputation will probably in tatters once the toxicology report comes out.”

Flipping open a manila folder in front of him, the Colonel tsked lightly under his breath. “As I’m sure you’re aware, the DOD has never looked kindly on anyone performing their duties while under the influence.” Looking up at Byer through his eyelashes, he continued, “Says here that her blood alcohol level was at a point-two-one, which I’m fairly certain is way past the legal level. And that’s
no including the cocaine or the various prescription narcotics . . . it’s not really a surprise that she crashed at all, is it?”

“Dita doesn’t use narcotics,” Byer hissed under his breath, glowering at the younger man.

“That’s not what the report says . . . or at least not what it will say once this report makes its way into the hands of her superiors. And when it does . . . I rather think her career at NRAG is over, don’t you?”

The threat in the Colonel’s voice was implicit, causing the retired Air Force colonel to see red, lunging forward as he screamed, “You bastard!”

To her credit, Byer never saw Grimm’s partner move. One minute, she was seated complacently on the corner of the desk. The next, her left fist was buried in his gut with her right hand coming up to pistol whip him across the jaw. His shock at suddenly being on the ground was only further compounded by looking up to see the business end of her Glock less than three inches from his left eye. She wasn’t even breathing hard. Petrovka’s eyes were blazing with icy fire as she cocked the gun and demanded in a low undertone, “Try that again . . . I dare you.”

For a long moment, the two combatants glared at each other, locked in a stalemate that both refused to lose. Glancing around, the NRAG executive was surprised to see that only Petrovka was holding him at gunpoint. The other man’s voice was a low hum as he insisted, “You’ll find, Byer, that this family has no fiercer protector than Marina Petrovka. If you would like to live to see tomorrow morning, I would suggest that you sit down and shut up.”

Immediately, two hands landed on his upper arms and dragged him upwards, dumping him carelessly into his recently vacated chair. Byer locked his jaw and glared at the oldest Grimm, gritting out through clenched teeth, “What do you want?”

“Personally? I would very much like to see you dead. Professionally, however, the last thing I need is to have you blood on my hands. It wouldn’t look good for an American colonel to have killed another American colonel . . . even if the reason behind it was easily justified.” Gesturing to the older version of himself, he smirked, “My father however . . .”

Petrovka’s grin was appropriately bloodthirsty as their father insisted, “I ‘ave no such qualms. My name is Hansel Kuhn and hyu kidnapped mein Sohn.”

“I didn’t kidnap him,” the man protested hotly, “Cross joined the program of his own volition.”

“He joined your program because you fed him false information that left him feeling as though he had no other choice,” the family’s sniper hissed furiously, grey eyes piercing even in the gloom.

It was clear that the fury in the man’s face was alarming to the metal-armed man, causing him to reach out and pet his thigh soothingly. “Easy khishchnik . . . Aaron’s home now and he’s not going to leave this family again.”

It was about then that Byer realized where the man looked so familiar. Eyes narrowing, he hissed, “Bucky Barnes.”

Ocean-blue eyes gleamed as he agreed cheerfully, “One and the same.”

Whirling to glare at the oldest Grimm brother, Byer demanded, “The damned Winter Soldier works for YOU!!?”

“As a matter of fact, the Zimniy Soldat has become an invaluable asset to S.H.I.E.L.D. There aren’t
many people in the world with his particular skillset. And then there’s the fact that he’s utterly ruthless when people have upset his lover; all in all, his talents and loyalties work to S.H.I.E.L.D.’s grateful advantage.”

“Knowing what I know now, I can only imagine what plans you had for him,” Petrovka sneered, well remembering the sight of her mentor curled up in an interrogation room as NRAG tortured him all those years ago.

Clearing his throat pointedly, Will waited until he had his partner’s attention once more before shifting to look at Byer once more. “Let’s get back to business, shall we? Frankly, I think we all would like to have this unpleasant business concluded.”

Forced to concede that the other man held all of the cards, Byer grunted in reluctant acquiescence. “I’m listening.”

Holding up the file with the doctored toxicology report, the Colonel watched Byer’s eyes latch onto it like a dog watching a toy about to be tossed. “This report could make or break your lover’s career. Your next choice decides whether or not this file gets turned over to NRAG or filed in an incinerator. Do you understand?”

“Yes,” was the reluctant answer, earning a vicious growl from the former Russian assassin. “Prosto day mne povod, mudak. (Just give me a reason, asshole.)”

Quicksilver eyes twinkled as the Colonel waved his partner back to her seat. “Heel samaya malen’kaya . . . I don’t want him dead yet. Da?”

“Da,” was the livid agreement, as she once again took her seat on the corner of the desk, chocolate eyes blazing as she glowered at Byer.

“Here’s what’s going to happen Byer. You’re going to call off all of your goons, from every program you have that’s still operation; LARX, any TREADSTONE operatives that are still viable, BLACKBRIAR, all of them. You’re going to inform NRAG – as well as any other interested parties, of course – that Operation Outcome is officially closed. S.H.I.E.L.D. got both Cross and Shearing first, and as a result Cross is dead and Shearing is untouchable. There are no other survivors to the project; all assets were neutralized and all pertinent information is to be immediately scrubbed from all official record. You are going to clear Dr. Shearing’s name, and make sure that the media knows she is innocent of all wrongdoing; the story about the pathogens was a horrible misunderstanding and a thorough bio-hazard scan of the area has proven that she did not take any of her materials home with her.” Glancing at Aaron, Will continued, “Aaron Cross . . . Outcome 5 . . . is dead; which means that there should never be a reason we look over our shoulders and see one of your lackeys.”

Shrugging haphazardly, the Colonel insisted, “If you agree to these terms, Captain Mandy will still have a career by the end of the night . . . as well as a clean toxicology report. If you don’t agree to these terms . . . well, I hope Captain Mandy has other marketable skills. Either way, the scandal will probably be worse than the humiliation in the unemployment line. Do we understand each other?”

Narrowing his eyes, Byer examined the offer for a moment, before clarifying, “So let me get this straight. If I kill Cross and resurrect Dr. Shearing’s good name . . . you’ll leave Dita alone.”

Will nodded firmly, vowing solemnly, “You have my word. And unlike you, Byer, honoring the promises I’ve made means something to me.”

Locking his jaw, Byer allowed the backhanded insult to slide past, before he reached out and
accepted his cell phone back from Jason Grimm. Dark eyes bored into Will’s as he pressed the code on his speed dial that would connect him to Mark Turso. There were three rings before a stern voice came through the line, “This is Turso.”

“Mark, it’s Ric. I just got confirmation from a S.H.I.E.L.D. asset in Bangladesh; Cross is dead and Shearing is in the custody of Director Fury of S.H.I.E.L.D. As of this moment, Outcome is closed.”

“Well at least Cross is disposed of, but why isn’t she? Loose lips sink ships, Ric,” was the other man’s argument.

“She’s agreed to honor her nondisclosure agreement; she won’t talk about what she knows, so long as we leave her alone. As for her contract, S.H.I.E.L.D. has laid claim to it; she’s untouchable by anyone from this moment forward. We wash our hands of her and forget she ever existed. Just be grateful that they took the Cross problem off our hands.”

“What about Landy? She’s still a problem.”

“Landy is not our problem. Let the Senate committee decide what to do with her,” Byer argued, watching the Russian woman shift to face Clint, her hands flashing sharply.

The archer nodded in silent agreement, jumping from his perch and digging his cell phone from a pocket in his tactical pants as left the room. The only thing that Byer heard before the door closed behind him was, “Sir, we have a Coulson problem.”

Turning his attention back to his own conversation, Byer wrapped up the particulars and disconnected the call. The phone call to Terry, followed by the phone call to the New York Times, pertaining to the amended press release about Marta Shearing and her involvement were both short and to the point. Handing the cell back into the expectant custody of Jason Grimm, Byer glowered at the CO of the Brat’ya Mrachnyy. “Are you satisfied? I did as you asked.”

“You did. Thank you.”

“So . . . are we good? Is Mandy’s career safe?”

In answer, the younger man stood slowly from his chair. Dropping the file into the wastebasket, he lit a match and dropped it into the aluminum can, watching as the brittle pages easily fell prey to the flame. “As I promised; Captain Mandy’s reputation is safe.”

There was a long moment of stillness, as Byer watched the flames consume the damning paperwork. Finally, Will leaned forward onto his palms, his face turned to stone as the Colonel insisted, “As for the Cahills, you will forget they ever existed. If I find out that you even mentioned the name ‘Cahill’ – whether it’s related, pertinent or otherwise – I will destroy NRAG. I will take it apart, brick by brick, until all that’s left is a scandal that will haunt your career forever. You’ll never get another intelligence position again; you’ll be lucky if you don’t spend the rest of your life in a 6 by 6 foot cell.”

Holding out a hand, he demanded, “Give me the Cahills files. I know you have them, and I know you have them on you. Give them to me.”

Byer’s face hardened, eyes flicking unconsciously to the briefcase that still sat on the floor by the doorframe. Will caught the glance and snapped his fingers at his younger brother, accepting the briefcase despite Byer’s protest when Brian offered it to him. A sharp blow to the back of his head kept the former colonel in his chair, eyes hot as he watched Colonel Grimm rifle through his files and toss the Cahill folders into the inferno still consuming the fake toxicology report. “I’m sure you’re
aware, but Jason crashed NRAG’s central processor; all the DOD files on the Cahills have been completely corrupted. Your grand coup is over before it’s begun, Byer.”

Seeing that Byer at least understood his warning, Will nodded briskly and glanced down at his watch. Noting the time absently, he turned his attention to gathering his things into his messenger bag. Hefting it over one shoulder, he came to Marina’s side and laid an adoring hand on the small of her back. Bending, he pressed an adoring kiss to her cheek even as he admonished her, “Have fun Marishka . . . just don’t kill him. Ponimayete?”

Byer stared in horror as she grinned wickedly, “Da, I understand.”

“Good. Call Owen when you’re done; Lucky will clean up for you.”

“Thank you, Misha,” she purred, both turning to look at the other man as Byer sputtered incredulously. “Wait! What about me!? You said . . .”

Will interrupted the man’s ranting coldly, “I said that Captain Mandy’s reputation would be safe . . . and it is. I never said anything about you, or changing your own fate. I am a man of my word, Colonel Byer; you should pay more attention to the contracts you agree to.” Giving him an evil grin, Will tipped his head in a mocking bow, “Enjoy your evening . . . Marina’s been looking forward to this little one-on-one for quick some time now.” Chuckling, he mused idly, “I daresay, she’s had this evening’s itinerary planned since she was first told Kenny was dead. And five years offers a lot of time to clarify the details.”

Turning, Will moved to exit the room, with Aaron, Bucky and Jason following closely on his heels. Reaching back for the door handle, he watched his father pull a pair of silver pliers from one of his pockets, laying the tool along Byer’s tightly clenched jaw. When Hansel finally spoke, Will could hear how thick his native German accent was and how darkly it painted the words with pure and righteous rage. “Hyu ‘ave much to answer for . . . and I intend to see that hyu suffer for every moment mein Sonnenstrahl vas kept from us these last five years.” Grinning wickedly, he mused, “I should tell hyu; I vas a witch hunter and I ‘ave killed more than my fair share of men and witches.”

Byer’s eyes were wide as he whispered, “Define witch hunter.”

“I hunted evil, and burned witches at the stake, for daring to harm the innocent. My Kenny vas innocent and hyu took ‘im from us.” Winking, Kuhn drawled lazily, “It ‘as regrettably been a long time since I ‘ave been on a witch hunt. However, I do not think the talents that one learns as a Jäger ever truly leave hyu. We shall ‘ave to see what I still remember, ja?” Nodding to his son, Hansel insisted, “Brian . . . hold him still for me, hm?”

“Sure thing, Dad,” Brian agreed with a vicious grin, stepping forward to grab Byer’s face and pry his jaw open wide as Marina chuckled darkly in the background.

Content with the scene before him, Will pulled the door closed behind him and led the rest of his family toward the cars waiting out front to take them to their hotel. It wasn’t even a minute later that the first garbled scream ripped through the air.

The next morning, long before dawn crept over the horizon, Will sat on the end of the bed in his hotel room as he watched the news. Marina’s voice drifted cheerfully through the room from where she stood singing in the shower. And on the screen, the newscaster was reporting that sometime during the previous evening, Eric Byer – retired Colonel with the United States Air Force and current head of the National Research Assay Group – had been found, tortured and unconscious, in his home by his long time girlfriend, Captain Dita Mandy. The foreign terrorist organization, HYDRA, was laying claim to the assault, citing the attack as an attempt to undercut interference of
both NRAG and the CIA in their affairs.

Will grinned as a brief snippet of the interview with NRAG’s chief Press liaison came across the screen. “This latest attack, committed on American soil and in Colonel Byer’s own home, is yet one more example of why our government and our people must stay the course. These terrorists must not get away with this; we shall avenge this attack, as we have avenged those that came before. These men will not go unpunished.”

Strong familiar arms came around his shoulders as Marina leaned her weight against her lover’s bare back, chilled wet skin warming at the contact. “So?”

The Colonel’s hand came up to grip both of her own, a grin on his face as he chuckled, “I knew I kept Lucky around for a reason.”

“Oh? And why is that?”

“He managed to kill two birds with one stone. He used the attack to get the government to agree to hunt down H.Y.D.R.A. and covered up our involvement in the attack last night at the same time.”

“I told you he’d be an asset to S.H.I.E.L.D.,” the Russian teased, her nose crinkling in amusement, “Now aren’t you glad that I insisted we steal him back from Division?”

Rounding on her, he protested, “You insisted!? I think you have your facts mixed up. I was the one who insisted that we rescue him from Division, and that we get him off the Regimen.”

Marina’s grin was seductive as she drew him down with her onto the bed. “Are you sure? I think you’re going to have to convince me.”

Quicksilver eyes gleamed as he followed her down, setting his teeth into the bared curve of her shoulder. Her gasp at the action was sharp and satisfied, as chocolate eyes rolled back in her head. “I seem to recall that it usually takes forever to convince you of anything.”

Her nose wrinkled as she goaded him playfully, “Let’s hope you have the stamina for it then.”

Will’s tone was a low rumble as he growled, “We’ll just see who’s lacking in stamina, samaya malen’kaya . . . prepare to see the error of your ways.”

“Promises promises,” she gasped out breathlessly, her body bucking upwards into his own as his hands began to play across the hypersensitive contours of her frame. It was mere seconds before her lover’s lips connected seductively with the strip of skin between her pelvis and her bellybutton, and already Marina was giving up the battle. “Bozhe moi, Misha . . . don’t stop.”

Looking up at her from his place, his eyes gleamed in the light as he murmured against her skin, “Who said anything about stopping?”

Chapter End Notes

Translations:
(G) mein Sohn - my son
(R) khishchnik - hawk (literally "little bird of prey"; Bucky's nickname for Clint)
(R) Zimniy Solday - Winter Soldier
(R) samaya malen'kaya - my little one (one of Will's nicknames for Marina)
(R) Da/Net - Yes/No
(R) Brat'ya Mrachnyy - The Brothers Grimm (the codename for the Army's Spec Ops squad)
(R) Ponimayete? - Do you understand me?
(G) mein Sonnenstrahl - my sunbeam (Hansel's nickname for Kenny/Aaron)
(G) Jäger - hunter
(G) ja - yes
(R) Bozhe moi - Oh my God
(R) Misha - an intimate diminuitive of Mikhail/Michael (Will's middle name is Michael, and Misha is Marina's favorite nickname for him)
Chapter Notes

Translations are in the chapter this time. And those that aren't, all mean the same thing.

There was a question about Gretel and when she's waking up. I DO have that plotted out in my timeline. I'm just waiting for her Prince Charming to make his appearance. Soon, I promise. Gretel will cause more than a few shenanigans, but it all has to come in its own due time.

I hope you continue to enjoy this story. Your reviews make my day every time.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
long unseen friend; both were reluctant to break it. The ever steady thump of her lover’s heart was a familiar beat below her ear and Marina instinctively cuddled closer with a contented sigh.

In response to the sound, Will’s arms tightened reflexively, drawing her that scant inch closer to him, the fingers of his dominant left hand tangled in her hair casually. “Kopeyka za tvoyi mysli? (Penny for your thoughts?)” he murmured against the sweat-damp skin at her hairline.

The Russian purred lightly and nuzzled into the bare skin of his pectoral muscle. “Ya lyublyu tebya, (I love you,)” she replied readily, hearing his silent chuckle reverberate under her ear.

“Vrun, (Liar,)” he teased fondly, teeth closing tenderly over the topmost corner of her ear, earning a delighted giggle.

“Kto skazal? (Says who?)” she taunted cheerfully, a single quicksilver eyes narrowing slightly in her direction. Pouting, she jabbed lightly into his ribs with her index finger as she scolded, “Net spravedlivym. Vy znayete, vse moi sekrety. (No fair. You know all my secrets.)”

Rolling slightly, Will pinned her underneath him, mercurial eyes glowing a warm, adoring blue as they searched somber chocolate ones. “Marishka... samaya malen’kaya... what is it?”

Looking up at him, she bit her lip at the tenderness and concern she saw deep within those gorgeous depths. Lifting her hand, she used the very tips of her fingers to trace the familiar contours of his face. “It’s a little silly. But... do you ever wonder what kind of parents we would be?”

The Colonel’s surprise at the question was brief but still apparent in the way he just blinked at her. Seeing the sincere curiosity in her eyes, he settled his weight more firmly against her as he considered. Finally, he allowed a sad smile to crease his lips. “Kids are a dream that I try not to dwell on too frequently. The idea that they’re only a dream is too painful.”

Shifting to make herself more comfortable under her lover’s familiar weight, Marina cocked her head in question. “But you have thought about it.

Only someone who had known her as long as her partner would have known that it wasn’t a question.

Watching her for a long moment, he felt a deep peace settle over him at her earnest expression. Smiling, he bent his head to kiss her lightly. “Every damned day since God or science brought you into my heart. Every day of my life that I’ve loved you.”

“Tell me about them. Please Misha?”

“A couple little girls... at least one boy... chocolate curls... hazel eyes... smart... beautiful... a whole lot of you and maybe a little bit of me.” Going up onto his elbows, he smoothed back her hair as he asked, “Why do you ask? What brought this on?”

Cupping one hand over his cheek, Marina watched him silently for a momentary eternity, before she announced, “I want a baby, Misha... I want us to have a baby.”

He blinked again at her bald announcement, reaching up to twist one curl around his index finger. “Are you sure, Marishka?”

“Yes... I want to have your daughters... I want to carry your son... I want that with you, more than I’ve ever wanted anything else in my life.”

He blinked again, before a slow smile curved up one corner of his lips. Bending, to nuzzle his nose
against hers, he whispered, "All right then . . . let’s have a baby."

Her eyes went wide in excitement as she grinned up at him, “You mean it?”

Bending, he pressed a piercing kiss to her lips, “I want a baby with you, Marishka; more than anything else in the world.”

The Russian’s eyes swelled with unshed tears as she bent her whole body upwards to press a series of delighted kisses to his lips. “Thank you . . .” she murmured, over and over again as she peppered him with affection. “I love you so much.”

Threaded his fingers back through the hair at her temples, he captured her and slanted his mouth more firmly over hers. Grasping blindly for the covers, he drew them up and over the both of them, cocooning them in their warmth. “What do you say we get started on our kroshka right now? We’ve got nowhere to be and nothing more important to do than this?”

Chocolate eyes were adoring as she looked up into his own peacefully, “Have I told you lately how very much I love you?”

“You have . . .,” he laughed, bending his head to press a chaste kiss to the tip of her nose, “. . . but I never get tired of hearing it.”

Her smile was beautific as she breathed, “I love you . . . ya lyublyu tebya . . . te amo . . . Je t’aime . . . Te adoro . . . Ich liebe dich . . .”

Will’s voice was reverent as he breathed, “Forever and ever and always,” before the two lost themselves in each other once more.

And if they ignored the ringing of their phones, and the persistent knocking on their door . . . they had more important things on their minds. Like the beautiful twin girls they each saw in their dreams . . . the girls they each knew they would one day hold in their arms and their hearts.

Typically, dealing with the family members of his agents left Nick Fury in an extraordinarily bad mood. Fortunately, there are always exceptions to every rule; both of his exceptions at least had the security clearance that allowed him not to lie. Not that Nick usually ever had a problem with a well told lie; but lying to an agent’s family required having to consistently retell that lie, which meant having to remember what lie he’d told in the first place. It was always a nightmare.

The Grimms were his favorite exception; though he’d deny it if ever confronted about it. The whole damned family worked for S.H.I.E.L.D. in some capacity, or at least still maintained their S.H.I.E.L.D. security clearance. Lying to them was a moot point, as they’d just have Jason look up the truth for themselves anyway. And getting caught in a lie was never a good leadership model . . . ask anyone.

The other exception was one Pamela Grace Landy, the recently embattled Deputy Director of the United States Central Intelligence Agency. She was a ballsy, brassy, competetent woman; Fury was more than convinced that she had placed on this Earth just to steal his ice-cold heart . . . except for the part where she was the adored and adoring older half-sister of one Agent Philip Justus Coulson. And Nick knew better than most what kind of damage his “One Good Eye” was capable of when he was feeling protective of her.

Of course it wasn’t Cheese on his mind as he watched the newsreels from the Senate hearing that day. Landy looked composed, but there was a flustered kind of fear deep in the depths of her eyes as
she was hounded by a veritable army of reporters the whole walk to her car. That expression, and the
phone call he’d received from his Hawk the night before, was all he could think of at the time.

It was a little known fact, but Nick had been in love before. The warrior woman known most
commonly as “La Contessa” had been a formidable woman in her own right, with opinions to spare
and a “take no prisoners” attitude that had appealed to the young soldier. They’d spent every moment
together, loving and serving together for four glorious years, before the same accident that had taken
Nick’s eye took Valentina Allegra de Fontaine too. He missed her every damned day, though she
would have killed him a hundred times over to think that he was living his life devoted to a ghost.

It had taken Phil introducing him to Pam to shake him free of the reverie that Val’s death had trapped
him in. Fury had been besotted with the blond almost instantly, a fact that he could never and would
never deny, no matter how fiercely he sometimes wanted to. To see her battling for her reputation
and her livelihood gutted him completely.

However, no matter how fond of her he was, the Treadstone scandal had caused Fury no end of
headaches. Fortunately, the Grimm’s personnel files revealed little about their true identities, but there
had been a mad scramble to be absolutely sure of that when NRAG had barged in with their
warrants and started making demands. Treadstone, Blackbriar and the CIA had caused him enough
grief. Despite his initial desire to rush in and rescue her, he’d ultimately decided to be patient and let
the Senate case play out without any input from him.

The phone call he’d gotten from Clint Grimm had nearly stopped his heart. And had subsequently
changed his mind. Cheese would kill him if Fury didn’t do something to protect his sister while he
was out of reach and out of touch.

So it was that the next morning found him in Director Landy’s office at the CIA, seated in her
visitor’s chair as he waited for her to arrive for the day. It was very early, and so he allowed his eyes
to scan her office leisurely. The space was utilitarian with very little to set it apart from the other
offices just like it. It was very clearly a work space; which meant that, even though she was loyal and
devoted to her career, it had a set place that was not meant to encroach on the rest of her life.

When she finally arrived, looking harried and pissed off, she barely even noticed him as she stormed
into the glass-paned office and started throwing her things into their places. Nick smirked as he
watched her, waiting for the perfect opportunity to draw her attention. Finally, she took her seat at
her desk and nearly jumped out of her chair as Fury greeted her calmly, “Good morning, Pamela.”

Her eyes were wide and startled as her hand flew to press against her racing heart. “Nick! Don’t do
that!? Hasn’t anyone ever told you that the ninja routine is going to cause an inconvenient someone a
heart attack one of these days?”

“Your brother has, once or twice. However, I have a rather long list of ‘inconvenient someones’ that
I’m hoping I can get to drop dead one of these days. Besides, there’s also the part where I should be
keeping up appearances and all that. People think I’m a scary badass . . . I would like them to keep
thinking that.”

Pamela rolled her eyes in exasperation, slouching backwards in her chair as she frowned at him,
muttering petulantly, “You don’t need to try quite so hard.”

Fury grinned at her fondly, teasing lightly, “It’s always nice to see you, Pam.”

Narrowing her eyes at him, she scoffed, “I wish I could say the same.”

The skin around the eyepatch crinkled slightly, as he waved away the comment. “We missed you at
your brother’s wedding.”

“I figured Phil had enough things to worry about on the happiest day of his life, than his scandal-ridden sister in attendance with her unwanted retinue of reporters.

“Cheese wouldn’t have cared and you know it,” he scolded lightly, narrowing his one visible eye at her.

“I know. I didn’t want to take away from his day. I had been really looking forward to meeting Viktoria and her family. It wouldn’t have been fair to him.” Taking a deep breath, she scrubbed her hands briskly over her face, before turning her attention onto him once again. “All right. I know you didn’t come all this way to scold me for missing Phil’s wedding. What do you want, Nick?”

He could feel himself straightsn slightly, his hands clasping calmly in front of him. “I’m here to offer you a job.”

An elegant eyebrow cocked upwards at the statement, as she replied acerbically, “I have a job.”

“Yes, I know . . . and currently it’s trying to hang you. I’m trying to rescue you from the gallows this job is corralling you towards.”

Cocking her head at him, she insisted, “In what world have I ever struck you as the kind of woman who needed rescuing, Director Fury?”

The eyebrow over the patch ticked upwards as he watched her calmly. The two stared at each other for a long moment, before Fury asked, “So what do you want me to tell your brother, when he comes to me to ask why I didn’t do what I could to protect you and I tell him that I tried but you wouldn’t let me? That you were too proud and too obstinate to let someone save you for once in your life?”

There was a long moment where the S.H.I.E.L.D. director did sincerely think she was going to throw her pencil holder at his head; Landy looked furious, the kind of furious that almost always ended in someone becoming fertilizer. He remained motionless for a long moment, waiting for her to make her own choice. Finally, she sighed and sagged forwards onto her elbows. “I enjoy my job, Nick; I worked hard to get it. Not to mention, your upper echelon is full at S.H.I.E.L.D. And that’s not even including the rule that Phil and I have about working together; it has never worked out well for anyone.”

“So what do you need?”

“I need information. I need a little bit of breathing room, or this hearing is going to bury me.”

Nick’s lips curved upwards as he nodded once in acquiescence. “You name it and it’s yours.”

The woman’s eyes sparkled fondly as she leaned forward to grasp his hand where it sat on the desk. “Thank you, Nick . . . I do appreciate the gesture.”

The director squeezed her hand firmly as he nodded, “No matter what, you can always come to Cheese and me. And if you change your mind . . . the offer is always available to you, agreed?”

Nodding once in firm acknowledgement, she murmured, “Agreed.”

“So . . . about that information? Who do you need dirt on? And how much do you need?”

There was no hesitation as she replied desperately, “Noah Vosen . . . and as much as you can get
me.”

There was a brief pause, before Nick gave her what Marina called his “shark’s grin”. “Consider it done.”

Chapter End Notes

Translations:

(R) samaya malen'kaya - my little one (Will's most common nickname for Marina)
(R) kroshka - baby (a sweet, petnamish term for an infant or toddler)
Chapter Notes

It's short, but it's awesome!!!

Translations at the end as always.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
Chapter 137: Family Legacy

Will and Marina finally emerged from their hotel room at sometime late in the afternoon, arriving at the restaurant just in time for join the rest of the family for dinner. His brothers were all smirk as the two took their seat at their table, though Hansel’s features were only very indulgent at the obvious peace in his eldest’s eyes. “Welcome back to the Land of the Living,” Brian teased, laughing as he dodged Will’s swipe at the back of his head.

The look on his face when he inadvertently moved directly into Marina’s own line of fire was classic and Clint nearly collapsed from his chair with the force of his giggles. Pouting, the second oldest
Grimm reached up to rub at the back of his head. Glaring at his sister, he growled, “Ow! That hurt!”

Marina said nothing in reply, simply cocking an eyebrow at him as she reached primly for her water glass. The Colonel snickered lightly at the action, slouching backwards in his chair with his arm coming up over the back of her chair. I’m sure you’ll live, Bri . . . you have the hardest head of anyone I know.”

Scowling, Brian snarked, “Kinda not the point, Will-E-Uhm. Still chertov hurt.”

“Frankly, hyu should know better than to provoke hyur sister, mein Arger,” Hansel reminded his son with a wide grin.

“Danke, Vati,” the Russian chirped cheerfully, before turning her attention onto her middle boy.

“How are your hands, Jay? Do they feel any better, sladkiy?”

“Da,” he replied with a small smile. “They don’t really hurt so much anymore . . . just kind of ache now and then.”

Hot chocolate eyes narrowed speculatively as she noted the sheepish blush creeping up his cheeks.

“You’ve been pushing yourself too hard, and ignoring your physical therapist again. Haven’t you?”

“If I refuse to answer that question, can she still yet at me?” Jason asked his oldest brother rhetorically, a small grin lingering at the corner of his lips, even as he winced at his sister’s exasperated sigh and the subsequent muttered swearing.

“Do you need an answer to that?” was his brother’s sardonic response, before his partner snapped, “How do you expect to heal if you persist in hurting yourself more?”

Will’s tone was teasing as he soothed his partner, “Easy, nasedka . . . we’ve always been blessed with quick healing. And Jay has never been into masochism.”

“As far as you know,” Aaron joked, causing Jason to blush crimson and throw his dinner roll at the younger brother.

Marina blinked in surprise at the reaction, though it was all the Grimms and their father could do to choke down their laughter. Dropping her forehead into her palm, she groaned. “You know what? That I didn’t need to know,” she insisted with a suppressed shudder.

“Now you know how we feel when you and Will get sappy,” Clint chimed in petulantly.

Aaron’s ears burned red as he argued, “Actually . . . I kinda like it . . . when they get affectionate, I mean. It’s nice to know that even human science projects can get a happy ending, instead of just everybody else.”

Remembering a similar conversation from nearly 10 years before, when Aaron was still Kenny and Operation Outcome was still years in the future, Marina felt her heart swell with emotion and her throat close against tears. Reaching out, she ran her fingers through his hair, exactly as she had then, and insisted once again, “Of course they can, solnyshko. And there isn’t a soul in this world who deserves a happy ending more than you.”

Aaron blushed lightly, ducking his head under the familiar phrase. Laying her head over his, the family Russian turned her attention back onto the rest. “Okay, so Misha and I were talking this morning . . .”

“You mean, you did actually come up for air at some point today?” Brian teased with a wink.
The Colonel threw his wadded up napkin at the younger brother, as the S.H.I.E.L.D. handler continued as though she hadn’t been interrupted – though the cocked eyebrow and the narrowed eyes she aimed in the agent’s direction promised dire retribution at some point in the not too distant future – “We decided that in honor of Aaron coming home to us, we should do something to celebrate.”

“Like what?” Hansel asked warily, obviously well remembering the last time the Grimms had gone out to celebrate . . . and the shirtless bar-dance that had resulted.

Shifting in his seat, the Colonel dug into his pocket and pulled out a folded up piece of paper. The brittle paper crinkled slightly as he laid it flat, tossing it into the middle of the table. The witch hunter’s eyes went wide at the image there, fingers hesitant as he reached to pick up the page. “The Kuhn Family Crest,” he murmured in reverent awe. Looking up at his eldest son, he inquired quietly, “Vas do hyu intent to do mit this?”

Will smiled at the emotion evident in the evidence of the thick, choked sound of his father’s native accent. “Get tattoos.”

The family tattoo enthusiast, Brian, cheered at the explanation, while Aaron was a little more leery as he asked, “Tattoos?”

Marina’s smile was fond and indulgent as she replied, “Da, tattoos.”

Leaning forward on his elbows, Will clarified. “We don’t carry Dad’s name; we didn’t even know we were members of the Kuhn family until long after we could have easily changed our names. But we ARE Kuhns and even if we can’t bear the name on the paperwork, we can at least carry the relationship on our bodies.”

Jason chuckled as he asked, “So, it’s basically just one more way that people aren’t going to be able to tell us apart?”

The Colonel grinned wickedly, even as their father groaned at the question. “Except for the fact that we are already identical, I can only imagine the reaction of mein Spatzi. As it stands, I am going to hear about this.”

Marina snickered at her best friend’s expense, before continuing, “That’s why we’re also going to get our ranks on the insides of our right wrists. That way there is at least one way for people to tell us apart.”

“What about Brian?” Clint asked curiously, at the same time Jason inquired, “We? You’re getting a tattoo too, Marishka?”

The Colonel’s fingers were adoring as they trailed tenderly through his partner’s curls, insisting, “Marina is just as much Dad’s daughter, as we are his sons.”

Hansel smiled as he dipped his head in implicit agreement, replying fondly, “Mein Tochter.”

“As for Brian, I thought he might like the S.H.I.E.L.D. eagle instead of a rank,” Will answered with a small shrug. “His call . . . the ‘GAMBLE’ running down his forearm is a pretty big clue to which one he is too.”

Marina snorted at her lover’s suggestion, muttering, “I can hear Vorobey’s shit fit from here.”

Brian grinned wickedly, as he slouched backwards in his chair. “I’ve been meaning to get a couple of new tattoos. Getting one that will make Maria lose her temper is just a bonus.”
Hansel chuckled in amusement, shaking his head in fond exasperation. “I will never understand the delight you five take in irritating mein Spatzi.”

Jason grinned as Clint shrugged nonchalantly, “Eh . . . it’s a hobby.”

“If she didn’t react, Dad, it wouldn’t be nearly as fun,” Brian pointed out with a sly wink.

Marina rolled her eyes. “How about something different instead? A seven-pointed star with a stylized ‘07’ for his Level 07 status? Or maybe a phoenix that alludes to the S.H.I.E.L.D. eagle without being the S.H.I.E.L.D. eagle? Either option is much less likely to cause a total Maria meltdown.”

Brian pouted in disappointment for all of a single second before sighing in put-upon resignation. “Fine, but I still think it would have been awesome.”

Cocking an eyebrow, his sister questioned dryly, “You do like undercover work, right, smut’yan?”

“Yeah,” he drawled, giving her a look as though she’d suddenly lost her mind. “It’s the best part of the whole job.”

“Then don’t get a S.H.I.E.L.D. eagle somewhere that’s it’s impossible to cover up or you’ll never see another undercover assignment again. Da?”

Blowing a raspberry at her, he muttered in reluctant agreement, “Da.”

“Now that that’s settled,” Marina muttered, turning to smack her lover up the back of the head. “As for you, Mishka, moy vozlyublennyy . . . do not encourage him.”

Will’s grin was unrepentant even as he reached up to rub the back of his head where she’d connected. “Love you, samaya malen’kaya.”

“Then stop causing my best friend premature heart failure . . . and landing ME, your loving girlfriend, in the middle of your inexplicable feud.”

Smirking at her, the Colonel reminded her fondly, “Most of the time, Maria and I get along just fine.”

“Yes, but it’s the rest of the time that I’m currently more concerned with,” she scoldedferociously, even as she allowed him to press a sweet kiss to her cheek. “You are just as incorrigible as the rest of the idiocy, Misha.”

“We love you too, Marina,” Jason laughed, only narrowly managing to dodge the chunk of roll she chucked at him.

Hansel chuckled as he watched his daughter fume, before leaning forward on his elbows. “Well, I do hope that you five can find some way to get along with her, because I intend to make the Assistant Director my wife . . . sooner rather than later.”

Each of his sons blinked at him in startled shock, though Marina’s reaction was probably the most appropriate. Throwing up her arms, she cheered, “It’s about chertov time!!!”

Chapter End Notes

Translations:
(R) chertov - fucking
(G) mein Arger - my anger (Hansel's nickname for Brian)
(G) Danke - thank you
(G) Vati - Dad (Marina's nickname for Hansel)
(R) Da/net - Yes/no
(R) nasedka - motherhen
(R) sladkiy - honey (Marina's nickname for Jason)
(R) solnyshko - sunshine (Marina's nickname for Aaron/Kenny)
(G) mein Spatzi - my little sparrow (Hansel's nickname for Maria Hill)
(G) mein Tochter - my daughter (Hansel's nickname for Marina)
(R) Vorobey - sparrow (Marina's nickname for her best friend, Maria Hill)
(R) smut'yan - troublemaker (one of Marina's nicknames for Brian)
(R) moy vozlyublennyy - my beloved (one of Marina's nicknames for Will)
(R) samaya malen'kaya - my little one (one of Will's nicknames for Marina)
(R) idiots - idiots
Chapter Notes

Wow that was fast. :D Enjoy!

The words in the phoenix are actually in Renglish - which is basically writing English words with the Cyrillic alphabet. It reads "Левел Севен" which is Renglish for "Level Seven". I hope that helps.

Translations at the end as always!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter 138: Partners

The morning following Viktoriya Coulson’s wedding, Casey had woken early, eaten breakfast with the Grimms, bullied her partner into taking a nap and then had hightailed it back towards home like there was a fire on her ass. Taking advantage of the mandatory time off she’d been given, she hid in her apartment for her entire three days off before emerging from her thoughts entirely too early in the morning before work. Despite knowing that Jason wasn’t going to be there, she still stopped by the diner, hoping to talk to her partner about “The Kiss” and everything she’d learned from the assault on the Second Precinct.

Frowning at the sight of it locked up and utterly dark, she sighed at the knowledge that Walsh hadn’t been home in a few days. Shrugging, she dug out the spare key Walsh had given her and entered the diner. Heading through the diner and into the apartment situated behind it, she dug in his closet for the duffel bag he’d told her once was his “go bag”. (Apparently it was a bad habit left over from what he called his “baseball days”; Casey would bet her left ass cheek that he’d actually picked it up
There had been a couple of times in the course of their partnership that he’d sent her to pick it up, usually when they’d been working a case late and neither of them had had time to head home. She’d never tell him, but she’d started the same habit; it had come in handy a couple of times after a long over-night shift. Though she didn’t think that his brothers and sister wouldn’t have brought him home to pick up a few things while he convalesced at the family home, the familiar routine was comforting for the red-haired detective.

Shouldering the bag, she made her way to the precinct, hoping that, by some miracle, her partner had decided to come in to visit for the day. Setting the bag on the top of Walsh’s desk, so that it would be the first thing he saw when he came in, she moved to sit at her desk and confront the paperwork she hadn’t finished before Don Diego Delgado had taken the precinct hostage. It was just past seven, when Casey looked up to see Walsh stride past the door of the bullpen. He was wearing a dark grey, linen suit that had obviously been tailored to fit his lean, trim form . . . one she’d never seen him wear before. Launching herself toward the door, she shouted at him just before he disappeared around the corner. “Walsh! Wait!”

The man paused briefly, turning to look at her for a moment. Casey frowned at the sight of his face; the eyes were all wrong for this man to be Walsh. This man’s eyes were nearly the same color blue as the navy tie he wore at his throat; this was either the eldest Grimm or the one that Jason called Aaron. Jason had green eyes; she should know, she’d spent a lot of time over the last three days dreaming about those eyes and the emotions she’d seen in them right before “The Kiss”. She frowned as she came further into the hallway, “You’re not Jason.”

The man chuckled, his hands slipping easily into his pockets as he turned completely to face her. “No, Detective Shraeger, I’m not.”

Casey’s eyes narrowed, head cocking as she examined the man’s face, before finally losing her patience. Throwing her arms up over her head, she demanded mildly, “Which one are you?”

There was a flash of bright white teeth as the man laughed, nodding his head once in acknowledgement of her confusion. “Forgive me; I always seem to forget that most people can’t tell us apart. I’m Will. And you’re Casey.” Folding his arms over his chest, he chuckled as he leaned forward, whispering conspiratorially, “You know, Jason speaks very highly of you; says you’re a good cop and that you have the potential to be an even better detective. And Jay isn’t exactly given to idle praise.”

The detective blushed at the compliment, ducking her hair so that her red hair fell to hide her flaming cheeks even as she tucked the nickname away for future reference. “Thank you. That’s very kind of him to say.”

Shrugging nonchalantly, Will reminded her dryly, “As I said, Jason isn’t really given to idle praise. If he said it, he meant it. And I try not to make a habit of underestimating my brothers’ instincts, either. It’s kept one or the other of us alive on more than one occasion.” Glancing back over his shoulder at the sound of his name, he nodded in response to where Sergeant Brown was waiting for him in the doorway of his office. “I have a meeting with your sergeant about placing Jason on medical leave right now, but is there anything you would like me to tell Jason, when I see him this morning?”

Casey frowned as she considered the information she’d been given, before jerking a thumb to the bullpen behind her. “I stopped at his diner this morning. It was pretty obvious that he didn’t go home last night, so I picked up his go bag for him. It’s in the bullpen; I’m sure he’ll want some clean clothes.”
Will chuckled, nodding in amusement agreement, “Marina brought him back a couple days ago, before we went to DC, but I’m sure he’ll appreciate the gesture. Thank you, Detective Shraeger.” Watching her bite nervously on her lower lip, Will smiled kindly and asked, “Is there anything else you’d like me to ask him?”

“Could you have him call me? Walsh . . . I mean, Jason is a good friend, and I just want to make sure he’s okay.”

Will smiled at her fondly, offering her his hand to shake. “I’ll have him call you; you have my word. It was a pleasure to see you again, Detective. I’ll pick up his bag after my meeting. And with any luck, we’ll see you at the house again soon. I know Marina was looking forward to getting to know you better.”

The woman nodded, the two shaking hands amiably, before the Colonel released her hand and strode once again around the corner. Casey remained where she’d been left, wondering what had just happened. She returned to her desk, running the conversation over and over again in her head, focused on the doorway and wondering – not for the first time – what kind of parallel universe she’d just dived head first into this time.

Beaumont was just arriving and headed to her desk when Will entered the bullpen and strode to the duffel bag on top of Walsh’s desk. Beaumont froze, obviously noticing the same differences between this man and Walsh that Casey had. “You’re not Walsh; where’s Walsh?”

Will chuckled once again, “No, I’m not Jason . . . Jason is officially on medical leave starting today. As soon as his physical therapists are content with the recovery of his hands, I have no doubt that he will be back to work. In the meantime, he is at home . . . no doubt eating my Marishka’s cooking and being spoiled within an inch of his life.” Turning his attention back on Casey, he gestured to the bag on the desk. “Is this Jason’s bag?”

Casey nodded, watching as Will unzipped it and rifled through it briefly. Casey’s eyes widened to their widest proportions as he drew out an unfamiliar weapon, disengaging the magazine almost as an afterthought. Checking the rounds, he nodded approvingly before slamming the magazine home again and chambering a round absently. Tucking the gun back into the bag, he continued to rifle through it. Obviously satisfied with its contents, he muttered almost too low to be heard, “It’s nice to know that he still remembers how Marina taught him to pack a go bag.” Pulling the zip closed, he turned back to Casey again, “Thank you, Detective. And I’ll make sure to have Jason call you, as agreed.”

“Thank you, Will.”

“You’re very welcome. Now, if you’ll excuse me. I should probably be getting home.” Lifting the bag, he slung it effortlessly over his shoulder and turned for the exit. Pausing at the doorway, he looked back at her again. “Detective Shraeger?”

“Yes, sir?”

“It has long been my belief that our secrets make us who we are, a belief I have passed on to each of my brothers in their own time. This family has been unfortunately gifted with much more than its fair share of them. Should Jason choose to tell you his secrets – the secrets he has never trusted to anyone except for this family – I would ask that you keep an open mind. Can you do that for me?”

Casey gawped at him, her mouth flapping at him as she tried to find an appropriate answer for him. Will’s smile was small and amused as he nodded in her direction, “Just think about it.” Before she had the opportunity to even nod, the man was gone and once again Casey was left wondering what
else she didn’t know about her partner and the man she spent a lot of her time fantasizing about.

When Jason finally woke up from his nap later that morning, it was to the sound of the squeaking door hinges of the front door. Momentarily unfamiliar with his surroundings, he blinked his eyes as he tried to come to terms with his surroundings and the low level pain in his broken, mangled fingers. He could hear Marina still in the kitchen, her bare feet padding nearly soundlessly on the tile as she moved to see who had come home for the day. The sight of her tired, beleaguered partner caused a small, adoring smile to crease her lips fondly. “Misha!” Marina purred, moving at nearly light-speed to put herself into the arms of Jason’s oldest brother.

Will dropped an all-too-familiar duffel bag to the floor just inside the door, even as he caught her deftly in the cradle of his arms. She frowned slightly, as she reached up to trace the bags beneath his eyes, scolding fondly, “Mishka, moy lyubimov, I would like to see you as an old man. But not quite so soon.”

“Marishka, samaya malen’kaya,” the S.H.I.E.L.D analyst murmured in tired Russian, his fingers caressing over her features as he attempted to take all of her in at once, “You worry too much.”

Jason rubbed his eyes with the heels of his battered hands, before pushing himself up from the embrace of the couch. “So tired . . . need coffee,” he muttered, moving to shuffle past them out the door.

Will’s fingers were a familiar comfort in the hair on the back of his neck as he tugged Jason into a brief embrace around Marina’s body. Will held them both there for a second, before pressing his fingers lightly against the back of his brother’s head. “It’s good to have you home, Jay, even if you don’t intend to stay.”

The technical specialist grinned sheepishly as he ducked his head familiarly into the curve of his brother’s throat. “It’s good to be home.”

Ruffling his hair, the older brother released him. “I stopped by the precinct this morning, to talk to your sergeant about getting your medical leave approved. Apparently your partner picked up your go bag for you. It’s by the door.”

Jason nodded, smiling at his brother, before lifting the bag gingerly from the floor and disappearing into the hallway. Turning back to say something to his brother, Jason chuckled under his breath at the sight of Will leaning to capture Marina’s mouth in a soft, almost chaste kiss. He arrived back at the room dressed in clean clothes nearly five minutes later, two mugs of piping hot coffee held precariously in his hands. He found Will and Marina folded together in one of the armchairs as Marina scolded Will in fond – if exasperated – Russian, fussing about the bags under his eyes. Will was smiling at her adoringly, his arm slung low and comfortable across her hips, as she turned his head this way and that as she sought out more evidence of his sleepless habits.

Lifting his coffee to his lips, offered his brother the other mug over Marina’s head. “How are you, Will?”

The oldest of the brothers smiled at him, the gesture flirting with his eyes though Will was obviously too tired for it to quite make it there. “The last week has been a whirlwind, what with the situation at the Second, Vika & Phil’s wedding, dealing with Byer, setting my department back to rights. At this point, I’m just glad to be home,” he replied honestly, taking a bracing sip of the steaming hot drink. “So, as I said, I saw Detective Shraeger today. She asked me, to tell you, to call her.”

Jason’s cheeks flushed brightly at the dry tone, knowing it was his brother’s own special brand of teasing. “Yeah? What did she say?”
“Just that she’s madly in love with you and that she can’t wait to see you again and that she wants to rip all of your clothes off and have crazy, awesome, monkey sex with you,” Brian joked, as he strolled into the living room with Natasha.

“Shut the fuck up, asshole,” Jason groaned, slouching backwards into the couch. “You weren’t even there.”

Brian snickered as he bent to kiss their sister’s cheek, before teasing, “How do you know?”

“Because Will knows better than to take you anywhere,” the middle brother taunted, giggling uncharacteristically as he dodged the older brother’s slap to the back of his head.

Marina’s smile was quiet and amused, even as she scolded fondly, “That’s enough boys. Brian, leave your brother alone. Jason, if you didn’t react . . . he wouldn’t tease you like he does.”

The brown-eyed S.H.I.E.L.D. agent looked scandalized by the suggestion as he demanded, “Says who!”

Marina’s eyes narrowed at him at the question, earning a wide grin and a cheeky wink. “Zatknis’ dikiy rebenok, unless you’d like me to reassign Natasha to a different partner while you attend to some unfinished paperwork.”

“You wouldn’t dare!” the second oldest Grimm gasped in real horror, earning a single cocked eyebrow from his sister, as she sallied, “Oh wouldn’t I?”

Jason chuckled at the scandalized look on his brother’s face, as he pushed himself to his feet slowly. “I’m gonna go call Shraeger. How long until dinner?”

“At least another hour, sladkiy; take as long as you like,” the Russian teased, with a sly wink.

Green eyes rolled in fond exasperation, before he left the living room – and his bantering siblings – behind him. Sprawling out of his bed – and well remembering the feeling of Casey’s body against his own the single night she’d shared it with him – Jason grabbed for his cellphone and dialed.

Casey’s voice was a welcome distraction from the chaos that was about to erupt in his life as she came on the line, her dull monotone resonating with boredom, “Shraeger.”

“Hey Casey . . . it’s Jason.”

Back in the bullpen, Casey Shraeger jolted upwards in her chair at the sound of her partner’s voice. “Walsh!? Are you okay? How are your hands?” she demanded, instantly earning the attention of the entire bullpen. She waved them all to silence impatiently, as they each started clamoring for information at once.

The detective’s warm tone was familiar in her ear as he agreed, “I’m fine. My hands are doing really good; the doc at Medical on base says that I should be back to work in the next couple of weeks. As for the rest . . . it’s crazy, but it’s good to be back with the family. I hadn’t realized how much I’d missed living in the same house with everyone.”

Casey chuckled with a rueful grin. “You don’t have to tell me about crazy family situations; my family wrote the book on it.”

“If they did, they stole all the best parts from mine,” Jason sallied with a rare, genuine laugh.

The redhead chuckled at her partner’s familiar teasing, kicking her feet up onto her desktop as she glared at her temporary partner. “By the way, Brown’s assigned me to Alvarez while you’re gone.
You’re going to owe me so many favors by the time you get back, you’ll be wondering where I’m going to make you hide all the bodies.”

There was a dry chuckle through the phone. “Just means I’m gonna have to heal up and get back to work ASAP, huh?”

“Damn straight.” Leaning back, she nibbled on her thumbnail as she listened to him breathe on the other side of the call. “How is your family? I saw Will, but he didn’t really say anything about the rest of the family.”

“Will’s not really into show and tell,” the technical support officer agreed with a soft chuckle. “Marina’s good; she’s practically dancing on clouds having everybody home again. Aaron and Marta are driving up to Toronto today, to see Marta’s sister; they’ll probably be gone for at least a week. Bucky and Clint decided to take a vacation to Miami…” there was a pause and Casey could almost hear his eyes rolling as he drawled fondly, “I’m sure they’ll come back with some story about some celebrity they hooked up with in a cabana by the beach.” The woman giggled at the resignation in his tone, even as he continued to speak, “Brian’s downstairs, up to no good as usual. Dad and his girlfriend are at her place, packing for the trip they’re taking to Augsburg, Germany; Dad and Aunt Gretel were born in Freiburg, but they grew up near there, and Dad hasn’t been back in years.”

Chuckling at the rollcall, Casey bit down lightly on her thumbnail as she just listened to him breathe on the other end of the line. For a long moment, neither of them said anything as they just enjoyed the closeness implied in the silence. Finally, she spoke, tone quiet and just between them. “You okay, Jason?”

“Yeah, I’m all right.” There was a sigh, and Casey could just imagine the way he scrubbed one hand briskly over his face in exhaustion, “We just got back from a quick trip out of state, and we’re all a little rundown.”

“You guys went out of town? Why?”

“I can’t really tell you anything, Casey. Let’s just say, my brothers and I had something we needed to take care of and it had to be us. It’s classified at the highest security clearance, and I can’t really talk about it.”

Casey frowned at the information. She knew that Jason had been Special Operations but she also knew that he was injured and supposedly no longer on active duty. There was a sigh from the other side of the phone. “This is a secret I’ve been keeping for a really long time, Casey. When I come back to work, I’ll tell you as much as I can. But for right now, I need you to trust me. Do you trust me?”

“With my life,” she confessed in a sincere undertone.

Walsh’s responding chuckle was relieved. “Same here. Look, I gotta go. But I’ll call you again as soon as I can. I promise.”

“Jason… be careful.”

“I will, Casey. And when I get back, we’ll talk. Just the two of us, okay?”

“I’m gonna hold you to that.”

“I know you will. Don’t worry about me. I heal fast and this isn’t my first injury in the line of duty. I’ll see you before you even have time to miss me.”
The detective’s voice was soft as she protested, “I doubt that very much, Jason. I miss you already.”

Walsh’s voice was filled with quiet as he replied, “I miss you too. But I’ll see you soon.”

“Okay. I’ll see you soon.”

There was a pause on the other end of the phone, as though there was something else that the middle Grimm wanted to say. Casey waited anxiously for whatever it was, deflating slightly as the man’s voice finally whispered, “Bye, Casey,” before the dial tone rang in her ear.

She closed her eyes for a moment, holding the phone to her ear just to pretend to be closer to him for a moment. “Bye Jason,” she whispered, dropping the phone again into the cradle.

Beaumont nearly attacked her as soon as the phone hit the cradle. “Well? What did he say? What’s going on, Shraeger?”

Casey shook her head once. “He’s as good as can be expected. He’s enjoying his medical leave and he said that he’d be back soon.”

The look on Beaumont’s face was a clear indication that she thought Casey was feeding her a line of bullshit. “Come on, Shraeger. Tell us what’s going on. You got a little too quiet, to just be talking about his health.”

Rolling her eyes, the younger woman insisted, “There is something going on, but he told me that he couldn’t talk about it, so I didn’t push him for anything. You know how Walsh is about keeping his secrets.”

Henry Cole, Beaumont’s partner and de facto best friend, reached out to grab her arm when it looked as though Beaumont was about to get physical with the rookie detective. “Allison . . . if Detective Shraeger says she doesn’t know, she doesn’t know.”

Beaumont glared at her partner for a moment in mild betrayal, before rounding back on Casey. “As soon as you know something, you’d better be prepared to spill it. Got it Shraeger?”

The redhead nodded meekly, even as she mentally crossed her fingers behind her back. She knew that Jason and Beaumont had been a thing -- everyone knew that Walsh and Beaumont had been a Thing -- but sometimes Allison forgot that she didn’t have the right to demand answers from her ex-boyfriend anymore. Times like now, when anything Casey said would just cause the pretty Latina to lose her precarious temper.

As for Walsh, he would tell the redhead whatever secret he was keeping – he’d promised her and, say what you want him, Walsh always kept his promises – but his partner herself had no intention of betraying his trust . . . not now, not ever. Beaumont huffed angrily, before rounding on her heel and storming back to her desk. Cole glanced at Casey apologetically, earning a timid smile from the redhead detective, before focusing his attention once more on the paperwork in front of him. With a heavy sigh, the former VICE detective reached for a file sitting on the corner of her desk that Sergeant Brown had left there for her, and flipped it open to begin reading.

She remained at her desk for the rest of the day, though admittedly her mind was far from the words on the files in front of her.
Translations:

(R) moy lyubimov - my love
(R) samaya malen'kaya - my little one (Will's most common nickname for Marina)
(R) Zatknis - shut up
(R) dikiy rebenok - wild child (one of Marina's nicknames for Brian)
(R) sladkiy - honey (Marina's nickname for Jason)
Chapter Notes

Marta/Aaron dominate this chapter, so no translations except for a couple. Kenta is SO cute. I hope you continue to enjoy this series. Thanks again to everyone who continues to review. You always make my day!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 139: Back to Basics

It had been a peaceful drive and Marta had been watching Aaron drive for hours, pure joy and honest glee shining from his grinning face as he moved confidently through traffic. Aaron had been like a little kid in a candy store when he’d seen Clint pull up in front of the house in the forest green 1958 GMC Longbed Pick-up. The classic had been sitting in an offsite storage unit since Aaron had disappeared, lovingly maintained by Jason, who was reputedly the family mechanic and had “helped” his younger brother rebuild the car back when Will and Marina had brought home the beaten up clunker for the then-21 year old sergeant. (Aaron had confessed sheepishly that really all he had done was keep the older brother company and stay out of Jason’s way, except to hand him the tools he asked for.) His excitement and relief at seeing what was arguably his most prized possession had only increased when he’d been informed that all of his things were sitting in the attic, waiting for him to come home again.

Marina’s motorcycle – the Kawasaki Ninja ZX-6R 636 that Will had bought her in 2003 for their tenth anniversary (Apparently, neither of them gave a damn about traditional anniversary presents. At
least, Marta was pretty sure that a motorcycle wasn’t traditional, but what did she know about anniversary presents for couples that lasted that long? – had been loaded into the truck bed, so that the new couple would be able to enjoy a ride or two, while they were in Toronto. The Russian had promised “dire consequences” if Aaron crashed her “dragotseenny”, and based on the way he’d paled drastically at the cheerful threat, she had more then likely been serious.

After several hours of staring at him, she’d finally surrendered to the exhaustion that had dragged at her bones since the shooting at Sterisyn Morlanta. After what felt like too short a nap, Marta stirred sleepily at the by now familiar touch of a hand to her wrist. “Doc . . . I know you’re tired, Doc, but I need you to wake up.”

Yawning as she straightened from where she’d slumped against the window, she turned to blink blurrily at her companion. Aaron smiled at her tenderly, the gesture evident in more than just the sparkle of his eyes. “We’re almost at the border crossing, Doc; you’re gonna need to get out your passport.”

Stretching widely, she rubbed her hands briskly over her face as she hummed an absent agreement. The former DOD assassin looked calmer and more relaxed than Marta could ever remember seeing him, even before the whole mess with Byer and the now-burnt Operation Outcome. Whatever had happened during those two days that his brothers, sister and father had whisked him away, it had at least given him peace. His hands beat a steady rhythm in time with the music blaring from the radio and the scientist narrowed her eyes as she watched. Finally, the shifting of his hands to different spots on the wheel made sense and she spoke, “You play the drums . . . don’t you?”

Blue eyes gleamed, even as he blushed. “Yeah . . . how’d you guess?”

“You’re using the steering wheel like a drum kit . . . each spot a different sound. Like a drummer would on a set of drums.”

Lifting his hand off the shifter, he scratched self-consciously at the back of his head as he chuckled, “I’d bet good money that Will and Marina kept my kit. It’s probably in the attic . . .” there was a pause, before he huffed lightly in amusement, “. . . along with all the rest of my crap that Marina couldn’t bear to throw out when I went MIA.”

“Where did you learn to play?” she asked in genuine curiosity, making a face as she continued her thought, “I mean, it doesn’t really sound like something the Army would be very interested in teaching its human scientist projects.”

Aaron shook his head in agreement as he replied, “No, that’s true.” Glancing at her out of the corner of his eye, he blushed again as he confessed, “No, actually I learned in the circus.”

THAT Marta had not been expecting and for a long second, she gaped at him in shock before stammering, “The circus!?”

“Yeah, Carter’s Circus. Deda i Baba took us in after Marishka took us away from the Hoover Base. It was a good place to hide; no one really noticed the family full of freaks amongst all the other freaks.” Shrugging, he continued tightly, “Not to mention, we were always on the move and we were never in one place for very long. None of them ever asked us any questions, and we did our best not to tell too many lies. After awhile, we just became apart of the family.”

Marta nodded, scooting over easily to cuddle up against his bicep, careful not to jostle him too much as he shifted through the gears. Noticing that they were coming up to the front of the line, she asked curiously, “So which passport?”
“Use the ‘June Monroe’ passport just to be safe. I don’t think we’d have any trouble using our real passports, but it’s better to be safe than sorry,” the S.H.I.E.L.D. agent insisted with a grin and a sly wink.

“Agreed,” the pretty scientist giggled, moving to rifle in the side pocket of her purse for the passport that Aaron had made her. “I don’t have a ring this time, though.”

“It’s at the jewelers, getting cleaned,” Aaron supplied with a haphazard shrug. “They’re not even going to ask anyway.”

Sure enough, the truck got to the front of the line, Aaron handed over their documents (one for Kenneth James Grimm and the second for June Elizabeth Monroe), waiting for them to be stamped and handed back before they were waved through without a single question being asked. Handing them back over to her, he grinned, “See? Told you.”

“Yeah yeah yeah . . . know it all,” Marta teased with a fond roll of her eyes.

Letting her lean back into him for another minute, the two were silent for a long time before Aaron noticed that she was starting to drift off again. “Hey Doc? As much as I love you leaning up against me like this, I can’t have you sleeping on me while I’m driving. If you want to get some sleep, that’s fine . . . we still have a few more hours until we get to Toronto, but I have to ask you to curl up against the door.”

“But you’re so much more comfortable,” she whined lightly, pouting at him adorably.

“Which isn’t going to mean a damn thing, when we crashed because the car stalled out when I couldn’t shift in time and some dickhead rear ends us,” he counted matter-of-factly. “This truck is a tank; it can take a lot of damage. But Marina’s Ninja is in the back and she will kill me if there’s so much as a scratch in the paint when we get home.”

Muttering lightly under her breath, Marta huffed petulantly, “Fine.”

Pulling her close for a brief moment to press a sweet kiss to her lips, he murmured lightly against them, “I’ll make it up to you when we get to Toronto.”

“You promise?”

“Scout’s honor.”

“You were a boy scout?” she asked incredulously.

Pausing, he wagged his hand from side to side in the universal sign for “kinda sorta maybe but not really”. “Well, no, but I am Special Operations and Marina’s solnyshko. I know a thing or two about keeping a promise, come hell or high water.”

Marta smirked as she shifted over against the door, her eyes slipping closed as she muttered sarcastically, “I can just tell that this weekend is going to be awesome. You and Gregory are going to get along famously.”

One eyebrow cocked upwards at the comment, glancing at her quickly, before he questioned, “Do I even want to know what you mean by that?”

The pretty scientist’s mouth twisted as she considered, before sighing heavily. “My sister’s husband . . . his name is General Gregory Braddock . . . they call him ‘General Badass’ in the field and ‘Sir’ at home. He’s kinda . . . much for the uninitiated.”
The corner of his mouth twisted in amusement as he teased, “You have met my family, right?”

Snorting, she laughed, “Good point.”

They drove in silence for another few minutes before Aaron spoke up again, “So you know pretty much everything there is to know about my family . . . except for the classified shit I’d have to kill you for . . . but I don’t think you’ve told me anything about yours. I mean I know you have a sister, but that’s kinda it. Where are your parents?”

“They died . . . when I was 13.”

Grimacing, he marveled at his ability to stick his foot in his mouth. “Der’mo . . . Doc, I’m sorry.”

“Oh, it’s okay. It was a long time ago. They were in their early fifties when I was born . . . I mean my sister was nearly 21 and already engaged to be married.”

“So a late baby, huh?”

“Yeah, I definitely wasn’t planned . . . I think they refer to how I was conceived as ‘an accident’. I mean, my parents loved me, but I’m sure it was hard for them to have to deal with a newborn all over again, at such a late time in their lives.”

“So what happened after they died?”

“Diana and Gregory took me in. Their oldest son was only a few years younger than I was, and their daughters weren’t that much younger than he was. For a while, it seemed as though it would work out for everyone.” Looking down, she fiddled with her fingers as she withheld a flinch at the memories assaulting her now. “Then Amy was killed.”

“What happened?”

“She and Sam were on the way to the park. The car was speeding; it jumped the curb and hit her. Sam said it knocked her clear out of her shoes. The poor kid was completely devastated; he and Amy were always really close. I don’t think the General ever forgave him for it . . . he was always really hard on Sam after that. Around the time Sam turned 18, Gregory told him he was joining the military, and Sam said ‘Yes Sir’ just like he always does.”

There was a long moment of silence before Aaron confessed quietly, “I’m just going to warn you now . . . my biggest pet peeve is asshole officers. Maybe I’m just biased but I’ve had my share of superiors. My brothers, Marina and General Perron are my opinion of the perfect officer. And I can tell you that in Will’s case, I’m not the only one.”

“I can’t believe that I am the only person that thinks Will is terrifying.”

“Doc, sometimes I think Will is terrifying, but he is never unnecessarily cruel to his underlings, and his guys have always loved him for it. Owen and Will used to be in the same Spec Ops squad; the second Owen had the opportunity to get back under Will’s command, he took it. And I know of a couple other guys that Will’s commanded that would still drop everything to follow him to the end of the Earth if he asked it of them.” Glancing at her out of the corner of his eyes, he shrugged haphazardly, “You don’t have to belittle your people to make them follow you; give them the respect they deserve and they will give you the same respect. Marina taught me that.”

Marta’s eyes were shining with adoration as she reached out to squeeze the hand that sat on the stick shift. “You’re kind of amazing you know that?”
She watched, fascinated, as the tips of his ears turned a blush pink, even as she watched him shake his head in negation. “No I’m not.”

“Yes you are. All of the shit that’s happened in the last five years and you’re still a good person.”

Aaron barked with laughter as he insisted, “If I was a good man, I wouldn’t have left Byer to my vengeful father and exceptionally pissed-off sister. I would have done something to stop them.”

Marta frowned as she considered that; she knew that Byer had been attacked in his own home, but as far as she’d known before this moment, HYDRA had been responsible for that attack. Finally, seeing the tension in Aaron’s shoulders, she spoke, “I didn’t know you had anything to do with that.”

Shrugging lightly, he replied, “Technically, I didn’t. I was there to keep the peace while Will did what he does to give us our lives back. But for the actual torture . . . well, I walked out with Will before they ever got started. The most I saw was Marina pistol whip him to the floor when Byer made a lunge for my brother’s throat.”

Grimacing at the mental image, Marta chuckled, “I can see how that would piss your sister off.”

“You don’t touch Will with the intent to hurt him. If you do . . . let’s just say that your first meeting with his partner will never end well for you. I sincerely pity the poor soul who ever tries to kidnap him because the retribution will make what Marina did to the hit-squad at the Second Precinct look like a child’s tantrum.”

“That bad huh?”

“Take what she did there . . . and multiply it by a thousand.” There was a pause as he let her take that in before continuing, “And I noticed that once again we are talking about my family. I thought we had agreed you were going to tell me about your family.”

Marta huffed lightly as he caught on to her ploy, before taking a deep breath. “I just . . . I don’t get along with Gregory at all. My sister and I have very little in common, because of how far apart we are; to this day, she still thinks that I need a mother to remind me to breathe. I miss Amy like hell and I adore Natalie, but my nephew, Sam, is without question my favorite of my sister’s children.”

“Why?”

“Because he is their forgotten child. He’s a good kid, a good soldier, but ever since Amy . . . I am ashamed to admit, that I’m not sure whether or not my sister still loves him,” Marta confessed with a frown, slouching into her corner as she stared out the window. “She didn’t say anything to stop the General when he threw Sam into the military without even asking the kid whether he wanted to enlist or not.”

“That sounds like a shitty childhood,” Aaron chuckled bitterly, his hand coming off the shifter to rub over his face.

“All due respect, Aaron, I rather think that you and your brothers wrote the book on shitty childhoods. How can what Sam went through possibly compare?”

One corner of his lips tilted upwards as he glanced at her briefly, “I at least knew that Marina, Will and the rest of my brothers loved me. I remember when I was a kid, Will beat the hell out of one of the carnies. I must have been about eight, which means Will was probably 16 or so. The guy was older and real mean . . . he was at least twice Will’s size but Will didn’t even flinch. The guy was
pushing me around . . . called me a useless idiot.” Taking a deep breath through his nose, Aaron frowned, “I have never seen Will so angry in my life, and frankly, I hope never to see him that angry again. You think he’s scary now? You should have seen him back then, before he learned to channel all of his rage into the military and his job. Will was the epitome of ‘angry teenager’, to put it mildly.”

Marta grinned as she pictured the Colonel as a teenager, nodding in silent agreement. “It’s obvious how much your brother loves you. I bet he’d do it again and wouldn’t regret a second of it.”

Aaron glanced at her with a sidelong grin, shrugging nonchalantly, “At least now I can help him kick their asses, instead of having to watch as he had all the fun.”

Three hours later, the truck pulled up in front of the Braddock home on the base outside of Toronto. A blond haired young man was sitting on the curb, rolling a basketball between his palms as he stared at a spot on the asphalt between his sneakers. Marta frowned at the sight, waiting until the car stopped moving before she pushed open the passenger side door. “Sammy? You okay?”

Aaron climbed out of the truck seconds before Master Corporal Sam Braddock looked up, tears shining in one cobalt blue eye and a ring of purple around the other. The former DOD operative’s jaw tightened at the sight, turning his head to look at Marta as he practically hissed, “Oh yeah . . . your brother-in-law and I are going to get along famously.”

Marta frowned at the statement, before sighing lightly in resignation, “Can you at least promise me that you won’t kill anyone?”

Sam’s eyes widened as Aaron immediately replied, “I never make any promises that forbid me from killing someone who really deserves it. And someone hitting their own kid? That kind of man deserves it.”

Chapter End Notes

Translations:
(R) dragotsennyy - precious (Marina's term for her motorcycle)
(R) Deda I Baba - Gramps and Gran (shortened terms for Grandpa and Grandma)
(R) solnyshko - sunshine (Marina's nickname for Aaron/Kenny)
(R) Der’mo - shit
Chapter 140: Confessions of Guilt

Rolling her eyes as she conceded that that was the best she was likely to get, Marta turned back to her nephew. Crouching on the street in front of him, she reached up to cup his chin in her palm, tilting his face into the light. “How long ago did this happen?”

“About half an hour ago,” Sam confessed quietly, his eyes continuing to flash between his aunt and the unknown man she’d arrived with. “Who’s he?”

“Sam, this is Aaron Grimm . . . Aaron, this my nephew Sam Braddock,” Marta replied briskly, before pressing lightly on the edge of the bruise in order to determine how deep the damage went. “Do I want to know what happened to bring this on?”

Sam’s head ducked as he whispered wretchedly, “I told Dad I wanted a discharge. Needless to say, he wasn’t exactly happy about it.”

Marta blinked in surprise at his confession, a flashfire frown tugging at her lips, before she set it aside to talk about later. And they would talk; if the guilt and pain in Sam’s eyes had a thing to do with his
black eye, Marta would eat her medical certifications. “All right . . . let’s go inside. If we get some ice on it now, we may be able to stave off the worst of the bruising.”

The young man – Aaron guessed that he was probably 27 years old at the very oldest, seeing as Marta had said Sam had been a few years younger than her and she was just barely pushing thirty – nodded in silent agreement, letting her pull him up off the curb and usher him toward the front door. Aaron reached into the truck bed to haul out his duffel bag and her suitcase, before jogging quickly to catch up.

The former DOD assassin entered the house just in time to watch Marta shove her nephew into the kitchen and start yelling at an older woman who could only be her sister, Diana Braddock. “What the hell, Di? Since when do we let our fists do the talking in this family!? I haven’t been gone THAT long, have I?”

“First of all Marta, do not presume to tell me how to raise my child. Secondly, I’ve already spoken to Gregory about it . . . I have his word he won’t ever raise a hand to my children again.”

“So it took a punch from your husband before you remembered that Sam was your son? I should have had Gregory punch him years ago!” the younger sister hissed, causing a wry grin from Aaron.

“Damn it, Doc . . . but you are a helluva woman,” the second youngest Grimm announced, immediately drawing both women’s attentions.

“Who the hell are you?” Diana Braddock demanded, with a fierce frown.

“Sergeant Major Aaron Grimm, United States Army, ma’am. Doc’s my girlfriend,” he replied with a cheeky grin.

“Wait . . . we’re dating?” Marta asked in awe, eyes wide with adoration as she bit her lower lip.

“We’ve kissed, Doc, yes we’re dating. Marina raised me better than that.”

Bouncing slightly on her toes, Marta squealed under her breath. “Oh my God, we’re dating! How did I miss that?”

Aaron’s hand came to rest on the small of her back as he pressed a sweet kiss to her temple. “You do tend to be a little oblivious, Doc. I mean, I asked you to Vika’s wedding with me, and have subjected you to the crazy that is my family. As far as the Grimms are concerned, you’re not going anywhere anytime soon.”

Diana held up a hand to forestall Marta’s response, her tone biting as she snapped at her sister, “A Jarhead, Marta . . . really? How is that an improvement on Peter? He at least was a doctor.”

Cocking his head at her, the soldier announced, ‘I’m Spec Ops for the Army ma’am . . . I’m not a Marine. If anything, I’m a ‘Trigger Puller’. So while there is nothing wrong with being a Marine, seeing as my entire family is Army I would appreciate if you didn’t insult our impeccable service records by getting it wrong.”

Marta sniggered at her boyfriend’s snarky tone, enjoying the look of outrage on her sister’s face as she glared at the former DOD operative. Patting Aaron’s shoulder, she turned on her heel and turned toward the kitchen where Sam was no doubt wondering where she was. Cold blue eyes pinned the older woman in place, before the second youngest Grimm followed after her. Leaning back against the wall, with his arms folded over his chest, Aaron watched as Marta guided her nephew into a chair and moved to rifle through the freezer for a bag of frozen vegetables. “What’s going on, Sammy? Why do you want a discharge? I thought you loved JTF2?”
Sam’s eyes flickered over at Aaron briefly before turning back to his aunt once again. Marta glanced over at her boyfriend and sighed, teasing fondly, “Are you just going to stand there like some kind of living statue? Because I already think your biceps are impressive . . . I don’t need any further evidence of the matter.”

The answering grin was flashfire quick as one blue eye closed in a cheeky wink. “You say the sweetest things, Doc.”

His grin widened at the sight of Marta’s cheeks turning cherry red, which in turn earned a genuine laugh from her nephew. “I like this guy, Aunt Marty . . . he knows how to make you smile.”

Aaron’s questioning, “Marty?” was overlapped by Marta’s squawk of protest, “Sam! What have we said about that name?”

“Only in the presence of family . . . doesn’t he count? I mean, he is your new boyfriend, right?”

Blue eyes were dancing as Marta’s cheeks flamed even brighter, swatting at Sam’s shoulder fondly, “That is absolutely not the point, Samuel Wayne Braddock.”

“Wayne?” Aaron asked with a chuckle. “Who did you piss off to get stuck with that as a middle name?”

“Mom thought it went with ‘Sam’,” was the dry reply, the accompanying roll of his eyes a clear indication that the young man was not in agreement with his mother.

“Eh . . . a couple of my brothers have embarrassing middle names too. Jason’s middle name is Leonard and Clint’s middle name is Francis . . . and if you ever tell them I told you that, I will be forced to kill you. Agreed?”

Sam snorted in amusement even as he nodded in agreement, “Who named them that?! Geez, I thought Wayne was bad. I mean, at least I can claim that my parents named me after Batman or something.”

“First of all, Marvel is better. Second of all, If you have to read DC Comics, Superman is better. Thirdly, my sister named my brothers and me when we were babies.”

“Did she not like your brothers or something?” the younger man joked, just barely withholding his wince as Marta pressed the bag of frozen corn to his swollen eye.

Aaron chuckled, as Marta answered lightly, “Actually, all indications point to Clint being her favorite of the Brothers Grimm.”

“And let me just tell you now, you may be JTF2 but Marina makes full-grown Spec Ops soldiers shit themselves, so watch what you say about my sister,” Aaron continued, a sly smirk on his lips.

“I didn’t know they let women into the American Special Operations corps.”

“They don’t usually, but . . . well, Marina’s kind of a special case. She used to be a Russian spy.”

Sam’s eyes flashed open in shock at the nonchalance in the other man’s tone. “A Russian spy!”

“Yeah . . . she defected about 14 years ago, September 6, 1993.”

“Why? What made her switch sides?”
Aaron glanced at Marta, a small smile on her face as she watched him recount the familiar tale. “To be honest, there were a lot of reasons. But the most prominent of them was that she fell in love with my oldest brother, Will.”

“But you said, she was your sister,” Sam reminded him, the gears spinning visibly behind blue eyes.

Leaning forward against the table, Aaron shrugged haphazardly, “She’s been a part of our lives for so long, she might as well be. She was there when we were all born. She taught us to walk, to talk, to speak Russian, sat with us during doctor’s appointments, kept us safe at night when we had nightmares . . . she saved our lives.” There was a wry grin on the DOD assassin’s lips as he continued, “As far as we’re concerned, she’s family. Even Dad calls her ‘Tochter’.”

“Tochter? What does that mean?”

“It’s German . . . it means ‘daughter’,” the pretty scientist replied, her eyes narrowed as she pulled the impromptu icepack from the soldier’s eye. “Quit stalling, Sammy, and answer the question.”

The look on Sam Braddock’s face was pure innocence as he looked up at his aunt with wide, guileless blue eyes. “What question?”

Narrowing her eyes at him, Marta braced one hip against the counter and folded her arms over her chest, resolving to wait him out. Seeing that she wasn’t falling for his bullshit, Sam slouched backwards in the chair, his hand coming up to take the icepack and hold it to his own face. “Do you remember Ben?” he whispered wretchedly, eyes directing downwards to where he was picking at a hole in the knee of his jeans.

Caught offguard by the name of his best friend, and the gut-wrenching guilt that colored the word, Marta frowned fiercely. “Of course I do. You two have been thick as thieves since high school. Why?” Suddenly a shiver went down her spine as Sam flinched and she dropped to her knees, steady hands coming up to still his own restless ones. “Sammy . . . baby, what happened?”

There was a long moment of silence, before Sam blurted. “I killed him.”

Marta jerked in surprise, though Aaron’s voice was calm and soothing as he asked, “How?”

Sam let the pack drop onto the table, as he shoved his hands back through his hair desperately. “He wasn’t supposed to be there, Aunt Marty, honest to God. I was cleared to fire . . . I didn’t mean to kill him, I swear . . . he wasn’t supposed to be there . . . I was cleared.”

“Sh,” the scientist murmured, trying to calm the frantic desperation in his eyes as she brushed his bangs out of his eyes. “I believe you Sammy.”

Sam snorted lightly, as he replied bitterly, “You’re just about the only one. His father threatened to shoot me on sight, and his sister, Ronnie, won’t even speak to me. I just . . . I can’t do it anymore. I don’t want to be the trigger guy anymore . . . I have to make this better . . . make it right.”

Complete silence reigned for several eternal moments, before at last the former DOD assassin – the man who knew a thing or two about the guilt that came from killing your best friend – spoke up quietly, “You can’t fix it . . . and you can’t make it right. And all the atonement in the world isn’t going to bring him back.”

“How the hell do you know that?” Sam roared, eyes blazing with righteous fury as he glared at the older man.

Aaron’s grin was sad as he replied, “Because for five years, I lived with the knowledge that I had
killed my baby brother . . . the man I had considered my best friend and confidant since the day he was born. I ran away from home . . . I tried to atone for it, to fix it. Nothing I did made it better . . . it actually made it worse.”

The desolation in Sam’s eyes broke Marta’s heart, the pain of it searing up into her throat and making it hard to breathe as the 25 year old former soldier looked down at the broken form of her boyfriend in horror. “What are you saying?”

“That the pain will get easier, with time . . . but the only thing you can do is forgive yourself for what happened. Easier said than done, I know. But it’s all you can do.”

Slumping down into his chair and sinking in on himself, Sam bowed over his knees and shoved his hands into his hair, a loud sob catching in his throat. “What am I supposed to do now?”

“That’s up to you . . . but whatever you decide to do, if you keep him in your thoughts and in your heart, he’ll always be with you. Lean on the people who love you; they’ll be there if you let them.”

“Do you still miss him?”

Aaron smiled sadly, as he shrugged, “I actually got lucky. I was lied to; I hadn’t killed my brother. And if I’d only stayed and faced what I thought I’d done, I would have known that. Instead, I lost five years I could have spent with my family. They’ve forgiven me for it . . . but it’s taking a bit for me to forgive myself.” Reaching out, he squeezed the younger man’s shoulder lightly. “So I’m going to assume that if you’re JTF2, you have extensive hand to hand training?”

Sam’s face twisted slightly in confusion as he nodded, “Yeah? So?”

A small smile on twisted for spy’s lips as he shoved himself to his feet, “Seeing as this is an army base, I would assume there’s a gymnasium somewhere?”

“Yeah . . . it’s on the other side of the base.”

“All right then . . . how about you and I go spar for awhile? My sister used to say that sometimes the best way to clear your head, is just to beat the hell out of something.”

Marta snorted as she folded her arms over her chest, “That actually explains a lot about Marina.”

Aaron grinned, one hand coming back to scratch sheepishly at the back of his head. “She may not be the most conventional of mother figures, but she was the best any of us could have asked for.”

Turning to face Sam, he asked, “So? What do you think?”

Sam’s grin was real as he nodded in agreement, “Actually . . . that sounds awesome. When do you want to go?”

“How about now? No time like the present, after all.”

“Sure . . . let me go change into some gym clothes.”

The former DOD operative nodded in agreement, watching as the younger man disappeared from the kitchen. Marta moved to loop her arms around her boyfriend’s waist and look up into his face, an adoring smile on her lips. “Thank you.”

A small smirk crossed Aaron’s lips as he shrugged, his arms coming around her shoulders. Leaning forward, he captured her lips with his own, coaxing her into a leisurely kiss. “Anything for you, Doc. Besides, I like Sam . . . and to be honest, I have no problem with taking him home with us. It’s pretty
obvious he’s not going to get the support he needs here, and he clearly adores you, so keeping him where you are for awhile as he processes everything is only going to be to his advantage.”

“You think Will and Marina will go for that?”

“Well, Clint brought home the Black Widow and Marina brought home the Winter Soldier. A former JTF2 soldier is kinda anticlimactic after that,” he teased, blue eyes sparkling as he bent to indulge himself in an Eskimo kiss with his gorgeous girlfriend. “And if I know Marina, and I do, then she’s going to adopt the kid within about a second.”

“I know you went through this, and I know the circumstances are very different to what he’s dealing with, but do you think he’s going to get through this?”

“It’s gonna be hard for awhile. He has to grieve, and be angry, and feel sad. But once he’s processed and he’s willing to let go . . . yeah, he’s gonna be fine.” Bending, he whispered against her lips, “I promise.”
Chapter 141: Toronto

Marta stood off the side of the boxing ring, watching as Aaron stretched. Sam was still in the locker room, fielding a phone call from one of his high school friends who had heard he was back on base for a little while. Folding her arms on top of the rope, she smiled up at her boyfriend as he bounced lightly in place on his toes. “You aren’t going to break him, are you?”

Aaron barked out a reluctant laugh at the question, dropping onto his haunches across from her as he teased, “What kind of question is that?”

“You forget, Aaron; I’ve met Marina. And I am under no illusions about who it was that first taught you to fight. So I’m asking, just for my own peace of mind . . . you’re not going to break my nephew, are you?”

Draping his wrists on each side of her own, he chuckled, “I don’t intend to. My brothers and I have worked with JTF2 before . . . those guys are pretty hardcore. Granted, he’s a trigger man, so he may not be nearly as well-trained in hand to hand as the rest of them, but I’ll bet he’s still going to give me a run for my money.”
Rolling her eyes at him, she sighed heavily, “I guess that’s as good as I’m going to get then.”

Leaning forward, he captured her lips lightly with his own, murmuring against them, “I promise . . . any damage to your nephew will be minimal and, for the most part, educational.”

“Educational?!” she asked in surprise, her eyes flashing wide, “Should I be worried?”

“I don’t think so. I just think that if we’re going to be family, I may as well pass along a few of Marina’s tricks of the trade.”

“So you are going to break him.”

Pushing himself to his feet as Sam made his way toward the ring, Aaron smirked at his girlfriend and replied, “I guess we’ll have to see.” Looking up, he smiled at the younger man as he climbed between the ropes. “You ready?”

“As I’ll ever be,” Sam agreed with a shy smile.

“Good. Don’t pull your punches okay? You’re not going to hurt me; hit hard, hit fast and get as dirty as you want, okay? I promise . . . you won’t hurt my feelings.”

Sam grinned, and took up position across from him, causing a wicked smile on Aaron’s face. The two nodded at each other and in almost three seconds flat, Sam was on his back and clutching at his chest where Aaron had landed a sharp blow to his solar plexus. Crouching beside him, Aaron braced his weight on his knees, as he laughed, “All right . . . I may have been overestimating your hand to hand ability.”

Marta’s tone was dry as she snarked, “That is woefully apparent.”

There was a wheezing chuckle, before he continued his thought, “Although, I had thought that I was better than that.”

“Don’t feel bad; I’ve had Marina Petrovka – badass Russian spy extraordinare – as a teacher from the time I was 6 years old. I’m kind of on a higher grading scale than JTF2.”

There was a distinct rasp in Sam’s voice as he replied breathlessly, “In my own defense, I spend more time at the range than at the gym.”

“Unfortunately, that’s really not a good excuse. You never know when the ability to kick someone’s ass with your bare hands is going to save your life . . . and the only way it’s going to save your life, is if your skill level is higher than the other guy’s. Get your breath back and let’s try again. We’ll make you a fighter before you know it.”

“I doubt it. There was a reason that I was the sniper; I’ve always been better with a rifle in my hands.”

Aaron grinned, clasping his hand and hauling him to his feet. “Just be grateful it’s me and not Marina, Brian or Natasha. The baby agents back home live in fear of the days they lead the class for hand-to-hand combat training.” There was a shudder as he considered the thought, before continuing, “Having been Marina’s student, I should feel bad for them, but frankly I can’t stand the baby agents.”

Squeezing his shoulder, he stepped to stand parallel to the former JTF2 soldier. “All right . . . let’s start with the basics and go from there. Sound good?”
Sam’s smile was grateful, even as he nodded, “Sounds good.”

“Good . . . let’s get started.”

From there, it was something of a surprise to Marta when Aaron and Sam proceeded to hit it off instantly. Apparently there was something to be said for kicking the trash out of each other, and before long the two soldiers were bonding over the places they had been deployed and bragging about how many classified ops they had been on. (It did not escape her notice that neither of them ever said anything about the ops themselves, just made vague references that the other man seemed easily able to interpret. She, on the other hand, had been lost from the word “Go”.)

Considering how the bout had started, the fact that her boyfriend won more often than her nephew was pretty expected. Marta vividly remembered the first time she’d seen what Marina Petrovka would and could do to protect her family; that she’d passed those same skills on to her boys wasn’t surprising in the least. What had surprised her was the way that Aaron had always guided Sam back to his feet with sincere praise, before teaching him how to defend against whatever Aaron had done to beat him.

By the time they had been at the gym from two or three hours, Sam was winning at least more frequently, even if he wasn’t winning a lot.

It was about 6:30 that night when Marta felt her phone buzz in her pocket, earning a deep sigh at the accompanying ringtone. Pulling the smartphone from her pocket, she thumbed the button and spoke as cheerfully as she could manage, “What’s up, Diana?”

Her sister’s tone was caustic and weary as she snapped, “It’s time for dinner, Marta. Surely, you and Soldier Boy can at least attempt to respect the routine of this house.”

“His name is Aaron, Di,” the younger sister sighed, wincing lightly as Aaron dumped a nearly giggling Sam onto his back, the young man bouncing against the floor as he laughed. “All right . . . I’ll get the boys cleaned up and we’ll be back at the house soon.”

“Thank you . . . Gregory is kind of in a mood tonight, so if you could convince your boytoy to show the proper respect to a superior officer, I would be appreciative.”

Marta moved to protest, but the phone going dead in her hand stopped her reply in its tracks. Muttering under her breath, she turned to the mat and promptly burst into laughter at the sight of the two all-out wrestling with one another. Aaron had Sam pretty well pinned, but the younger man was in no way making it easy for him. “What are you two doing?”

“Having fun,” Aaron grunted in reply, grinning at his girlfriend brightly, fingers rubbing briskly over Sam’s blond locks and earning an indignant squawk.

“Yeah . . . looks like. Diana called; Gregory is in a mood and it’s time for dinner. We should probably head back before the General has a full scale meltdown.”

Immediately, Sam’s face drained of color, his black eye suddenly very stark against his white face. Catching sight of the reaction out of the corner of his eye, Aaron reached out and looped an arm around his neck. “Don’t worry, malysh . . . we’ll take care of you. Everything’s going to be just fine.”

Sam’s tone was resigned as he replied, “You’ve never met my dad when he’s in a mood.”

Aaron’s arm tightened lightly, before he clapped the boy on the shoulder and steered him towards the
locker room. “Come on, Sammy . . . we better get cleaned up and fast . . . don’t want to set off the General if we can help it.”

“Amen to that,” Sam agreed quietly.

By the time Marta sat down at the table for dinner, the lines in the sand had been very clearly drawn. Aaron at the corner of the table, to her left, leaving the left-handed sergeant major enough mobility to be able to eat. Sam sat directly across from Aaron and to his mother’s right, his eyes fixed on his plate and his mouth closed so as to not draw attention to himself. Natalie sat to the left of her brother, next to their father, the pretty blond chattering happily as she recounted to her father her adventures of the day.

There was a brief lull as Natalie paused to take a breath, during which Gregory Braddock announced, “I’ve found you a place on the Strategic Response Unit in Toronto, Samuel . . . seeing as you no longer intend to do your duty with the JTF2. You report on the 27th. Am I understood?”

Marta’s eyes flashed wide in shock, Aaron’s blue eyes solemn as he watched Sam nod once with a quiet reply of, “Yes sir.”

Diana, for once in shock at her husband’s proclamation, glanced at her acquiescent son, before turning on the General. “Surely he doesn’t need to report so soon. He’s only been home for three days.”

The family virologist’s tone was snide as she hissed under her breath, “Because you’ve even been interested in keeping him at home before.”

“Marta . . . hold your tongue!” Gregory snapped, even as Sam pleaded quietly, “It’s all right, Aunt Marty . . . leave it alone, please?”

The brunette shifted in her seat to glare at her brother-in-law, before subsiding at the touch of Aaron’s palm on her rigid shoulder. The sergeant’s voice was soft and calm as he insisted, “Sam said to leave it, Doc . . . best to do as he asks, huh?”

The woman looked furious, her eyes still blazing in her brother-in-law’s direction, before she shrugged from under her boyfriend’s tender hold and stormed from the table. The blond settled back in his chair, his head tilted slightly as he tracked her angry progress through the house by the sound of her shoes against the hardwood. The door to the portico slammed loudly, causing a small flinch from both of the General’s children.

Wiping his mouth with his napkin, Aaron stood from his chair, careful to keep his features set neutrally. “I apologize for disrupting your meal. It’s been a stressful week.”

“I should say so. I believe she owes us an apology for her deplorable behavior,” the General demanded hotly.

Aaron could feel the rage crawling up the back of his neck, though he forced himself to remain as still as possible. His smile was cold and heartless as he replied sharply, “Seeing as she nearly died no less than three times this last week, I do believe she is entitled to her behavior. That being said, I wouldn’t hold your breath waiting for that apology.”

Turning sharply on his heel, the man followed his girlfriend’s path from the house, with only a second’s pause to rest his palm on Sam’s shoulder. “Give her an hour, okay, malysh? She’ll want to talk to you once she’s a little calmer.”
Nodding in silent agreement, the younger man watched as the sergeant major left the room. Sensing his father’s angry gaze, he turned his attention back onto his own dinner and didn’t say a word. Glancing at her brother in concern, Natalie frowned lightly, before beginning to chatter once again and effectively drawing her father’s attention from his son once more.

Aaron smiled to see Marta pacing angrily back and forth across the portico as she ranted bitterly to the sky. Leaning against the doorjamb, arms folded over his chest, he watched her for a long time. Finally, he asked, “You okay, Doc?”

Her lips compressed angrily for a moment, before she slumped onto the bench situated against the wall. “They just make me so angry! He’s hurting and they’re just shipping him off again . . . just like they always do. It’s like Gregory doesn’t even care what the does to his son! And now DI is acting all concerned, as she though she has any right to be worried about him when she never has been before.”

The man moved to sit next to her, his arm coming up over her shoulders and pulling her into the curve of his frame. For a long time, he said nothing, just tracing absent designs over her skin as he waited for her to calm down. Finally, he murmured, “Your brother-in-law wants an apology.”

An unladylike snort ripped from the pretty brunette as she insisted, “Not gonna happen.”

Chuckling, he agreed,0 “Yeah, I told him not to hold his breath.” Squeezing her lightly, he asked, “Why did we come here, Doc? You’re obviously not happy to be here . . . so why did we come?”

Marta’s moved in an unconscious shrug. “To be honest, I don’t know. My sister makes me crazy. And I can’t stand Gregory. But they’re still my family. I nearly died . . . at Sterisyn Morlanta . . . at the house in Maryland . . . in Manila . . . and I thought I was going to be a fugitive for the rest of my life. I guess I just thought that . . . I just thought that once I was free of it all, that I should come and see the only family that I still have left.” Dropping her temple against her boyfriend’s shoulder, she sighed, “It wasn’t until I got here that I remembered all the reasons that I don’t come home anymore.”

“I’m sure I’d agree with more than a few of your reasons. But Sam is awesome . . . and so far, Natalie’s not so bad. But even still, Doc, I wasn’t kidding. As far as my father, my brothers and Marina are concerned . . . you’re family. You don’t ever have to deal with either your sister or your brother-in-law ever again if you don’t want to. You will always have a place with us . . .” Aaron insisted, the very tips of his ears turning red as he continued in a quieter tone, “. . . with me.”

The woman’s own cheeks turned rosy at the statement, her fingers coming up to brush a strand of hair behind her ear. “You think so?”

“I don’t know how anyone couldn’t,” he replied candidly. “You’re pretty awesome yourself, Doc.”

There was a silent moment, before Marta ducked her head into his shoulder and chuckled, “I remember the first time we met. You called me ‘Doc’ even then. Some part of me wanted to be furious with you . . . but the rest of me just kind of melted every time you said it.”

Grinning against her temple, Aaron pressed a tender kiss to her temple. “So here’s an idea. Why don’t we turn around and go home . . . take Sam with us. He doesn’t have to report to his new unit until the 27th. That’s almost two weeks away.” The man grinned with a nonchalant shrug, as he continued at her incredulous smile, “What!? I’m totally not kidding; Marina is going to adopt him in like a second flat. She has a weakness for damaged young men . . . why do you think she’s always been so fond of us?”
Giggling at the twisted look on her boyfriend’s face, she nodded in firm agreement. “That sounds like a fantastic idea.” Suddenly remembering his appointment for the next day, she frowned, “Don’t you have to get that tattoo tomorrow? I thought Will said that you shouldn’t all get them at the same place; something about attracting too much attention.”

“I have an appointment for tomorrow, yeah. So we’ll stay through the end of my appointment and then we’ll grab up Sammy-boy and head home.”

“And if Sam doesn’t want to go?”

Aaron chuckled, “I don’t think you’ll actually hear too much complaining from him on the subject. You can drive the truck and I’ll take the bike; we’re not all going to fit in the cab.”

“Why don’t you and I take the bike and Sam drive the truck?”

A slow, sly grin crept across his face at the flirtatious look in her eyes. “A chance to have every inch of you pressed up against me? Not gonna have to twist my arm to convince me.” Winking at her roguishly, he teased, “Sure we can’t leave today?”

“I’m sure we could, if you really want to. But I know we have that room at the hotel on base... and we can get up-close and personal there too...” she drawled before winking quickly, “...and wearing considerably less clothes.”

Aaron’s eyes flashed wide at the statement, before he lunged from his chair. “So, are we all done with dinner then? Cause suddenly, I am exhausted. Man that drive... it’s a killer. I think we should call it a night; what do you think?”

Pushing herself from her own seat, she lifted her hand up to cup his cheek in her palm and tugged him down to her height for a sweet kiss. “Sounds like you and I are in agreement on the matter. Let me go tell my sister and Sam that we’re leaving, okay? Then we’ll go.”

The next morning, Aaron arrived at the Braddock house before most of the house was awake. Seated on the back of Marina’s bike, he watched the General move through the front room, sipping on a cup of coffee as he took a seat on the couch. Swinging his leg over the back of the bike, Aaron stripped off the helmet and moved towards the door. Knocking firmly on the wood, he smirked to hear the other man cursing steadily as his footsteps came closer. The door creaked open and the former DOD assassin’s face went cold as General Gregory Braddock came into view. “General... you and I should talk.”

The man’s eyes narrowed speculatively, before he stepped back and gestured toward the inside of the house. The younger man shook his head as he moved out of the doorway. “It would be better if we spoke out here. What I’m going to say, you’re not going to like and I don’t want to disrupt the rest of the house.”

If it was possible the General’s face went colder still, even as he stepped out onto the front porch and shut the door behind him. “All right, Sergeant Grimm, I’m listening.”

Aaron’s lips curved upwards into a heartless smirk before he announced, “All I’m going to say is this... you sir are the biggest govnoyed I have ever had the displeasure to meet and I’ve met more than my fair share. If you don’t start treating your son better, you’re going to lose him. And trust me when I say... if you don’t want him, I know more than a few people who will quite happily take him off of your hands.”

The man gawked at him for a moment, before roaring furiously, “How dare you come in here and
speak this way to me!? This is my house!”

The S.H.I.E.L.D. asset shrugged haphazardly, one hand in his pocket and the other holding his helmet by the front. “I call it as I see it. You’re not going to realize what you’ve lost until he’s gone. At that point, he’s gone and he won’t ever come back. Think about it; if you care about your son at all, you’ll try. If you don’t . . . then don’t be surprised when you turn around to find him one day and he’s not there.”

Turning sharply on his heel, Aaron moved off the porch and pulled on his helmet. His last sight of the General was in his rearview mirror as the man remained standing on the porch, his jaw hanging in shock as he continued to stare after him.

The two men never saw each other again.

Chapter End Notes

Translations:
(R) malysh - kiddo
(R) govnoyed - bastard
Hello all! I'm hoping to start getting back to more chapters in a shorter amount of time. Things are steadying out, and so writing is going to be the new order of the day here soon! Yay!

Translations are at the end of the chapter, as always. I love your reviews; please keep them coming. They make my day. Enjoy this one! It's so much fun!

(Some of this is taken from a conversation between Amerou and I. I hope you she doesn't mind. The last line is hers verbatim. I LOVE YOU AMEROU!!!! XD)

EDIT: I changed the banner. The last one was really bland and boring. I like this one better, especially in light of where this happens.

Chapter 142: Girl Talk & Germany

Marina blinked at her best friend, her hand – and the piece of popcorn in it – frozen mere inches from her lips. Maria Hill had arrived in a panic nearly twenty minutes before, practically throwing Will from the house and herding the Russian into her living room to talk. And now, having learned why that was, Marina was literally in shock. “Say that again,” she demanded, her hand falling back into her lap once again.
“I think Hans is going to ask me to marry him,” Maria repeated, her cheeks flaming in mortification even as she ducked her face into her palms.

Narrowing her eyes at S.H.I.E.L.D.’s assistant director, Marina commented lightly, “I fail to see the problem here, Vorobey. You and Vati have been together for nearly nine years at this point.”

“How can you NOT see the problem here, Marina?! He wants to marry ME!!”

“And usually when a couple has been together for as long as the two of have been, that’s the logical next step.”

Maria’s eyes narrowed into a fierce glare as she hissed, “Then why haven’t you and Will gotten married yet?”

There was a scoff from the other woman as she reminded her best friend in a brittle tone, “Neither of us are quite that crazy. Nor are we particularly enamored of the practice.”

Flopping backwards into her chair, Maria groaned wretchedly. The Grimm Family Russian watched her best friend for a long moment, before asking, “All right . . . out with it. It’s not the idea of getting married that has your tail in knots, so it must be something else. So let’s just cut through the bullshit and you skip right to the part where you fess up already.”

There was a moment of silence, as the AD considered that before sighing heavily, her head rolling along the back of the couch to glower half-heartedly at her only real girlfriend. Finally, she huffed at the unimpressed look on Marina’s face before asking miserably, “What if I suck at it?”

“Normally I would say something sarcastic like ‘everybody sucks at it . . . why else would the divorce rate be so high?’ But that’s not entirely true either, because there are people are capable of staying happily married for long periods of time.”

“Most of those people are not members of covert government agencies or other law enforcement agencies,” Maria retorted bitterly.

“True enough. It’s Jason’s worst fear, since he and Casey started . . . whatever it is they’ve started. But seriously, Maria . . . I have never known you not to succeed at anything that you attempted.”

Reaching out to catch her best friend’s hand in her own, she clasped it between both of hers. “Vorobey, look at me.” She waited until steady chocolate eyes were locked on vibrant teal, before asking, “Maria . . . do you love him? And be honest . . . don’t deflect and don’t prevaricate. Just answer the question. Do you love mein Vati?”

Maria nibbled on her lower lip for a long moment, before nodding sharply once. “Yes . . . yes, I love him.”

“Then you have absolutely nothing to worry about. Because I can promise you that Vati loves you just as much as you love him.”

“You think so?”

There was a conspiratorial twinkle in Marina’s eyes as she winked brightly, “Trust me, Vorobey . . . you have nothing to worry about.”

Squeezing Marina’s hand fiercely, Maria brooded for a moment, “Me . . . married. Will wonders never cease?”

“Highly unlikely,” the handler giggled, leaning over to press her shoulder up against Maria’s own.
“So, are we good? You’re not going to spend the entire flight to Germany volnovalis’, right?”

Taking a deep breath, Maria nodded once firmly, “Right.” Content with the conclusion of their conversation, both women turned their attentions back onto the movie they’d chosen when Maria had first arrived, the 2006 version of “Tristan and Isolde”. It was just getting to the part when King Marke was about to discover the lovers’ secret affair, and Marina nearly groaned as suddenly Maria let out a thoughtful grunt. “Really?! You couldn’t have waited to have whatever revelation you just had another two minutes?! This is the best part.”

“You think every part of this movie is the best part,” Maria teased, dodging the incoming throw pillow on instinct. Catching it, she threw it back into her best friend’s face, before settling into her own corner of the couch again. Sighing heavily, Marina paused the movie again, before cocking an eyebrow at her best friend. “What’s wrong?”

“What am I going to do about your boys?”

Marina’s eyebrows furrowed as she cocked her head in question. “What do you mean?”

“Well, it’s not like your boys and I get along all that fantastically.”

“Don’t worry about that . . . I will handle them. They like you, Maria, honest. And they like you with Hansel; they just think that you’re too straight-laced and so they try to get you to relax every so often. And most of the time that means teasing you within an inch of your life.”

Grunting, Maria rolled her eyes as she muttered, “Wonderful.”

“If you didn’t react, they wouldn’t have nearly as much fun yanking your chain. Honest.”

Snorting, the S.H.I.E.L.D. assistant director muttered, “I’ll try to remember that.”

Marina looped one arm around her best friend’s shoulders and squeezed lightly. “Unfortunately, it’s going to be the only thing that keeps you sane, once you and Vati get married.”

Maria rolled her eyes as she drawled sardonically, “Has anyone ever told you that you suck at the whole ‘inspirational pep talk’ thing?”

The resulting smile was sly as the Russian replied, “There is a reason that Will is CO and I am XO; he does all the hard work and I just shoot shit.”

“Except for the fact that Will is even worse than you at giving pep talks.”

“That’s not entirely true . . . he wouldn’t have so many loyal minions if he wasn’t gifted at making people follow him to hell and back,” the handler insisted, with a wink. “Either way, don’t worry about the boys. They just want Hansel to be happy, and they know he’s happy with you. Everything after that is kind of water under the bridge.”

“So just to clarify, the boys are going to make my life miserable, unless I learn to ignore them.”

Lifting her glass of wine, Marina grinned broadly, “Congratulations; you’ve just learned the first lesson in Dealing with the Brothers Grimm 101.” Clinking glasses, Marina took a sip while waving her free hand in Maria’s direction hurriedly, “Now shut up . . . seriously, this is the best part.”

The AD chuckled lightly, swatting her best friend with the throw pillow once more before turning her attention back onto the movie as Marina started the film once again. The two watched for a long moment, before Maria scooted over and rested her temple against the other woman’s shoulder. “So
you’re kinda awesome, you know?”

Marina grinned, jostling her shoulder fondly as she replied, “Right back at ya, Vorobey.”

It was a long time before there was a hesitant knock at the door, earning a frustrated, “What!?” from Marina as it once again interrupted their movie.

Hansel’s head slipped around the doorframe as he asked, “Is it safe to come in? I heard from mein Adler that he was run out of his own home by a crazy woman.”

Maria glowered at the comment, though Marina’s tone was lilting as she reminded her best friend lightly, “Ignore it . . . or you will never have any peace.”

Huffing lightly, Maria rolled her eyes even as she smirked up at her paramour. “Hello Hans . . . what’s up?”

Smiling down at his girlfriend, Hansel bent to press a sweet kiss to her cheek. “Our plane leaves within the hour, Spatzi . . . are you ready to go?”

Sighing heavily, the S.H.I.E.L.D. agent nodded in agreement, “As I’ll ever be.”

Grinning at her weary expression, Hansel perched comfortably on the armrest of the chair, as he replied, “Gut.” Settling back against the couch, he watched as King Marke confronted both Tristan and Isolde about their infidelity before making the choice to set them free, at which time his nose wrinkled in distaste, “Vat trash is this? No man could forgive such a transgression . . . not from someone they once loved and trusted. She was his wife and he was his trusted second . . . such behavior is inexcusable.”

Marina’s reply was a low hiss as she snarled, “Nekul’turnyye svin’i. It’s Tristan and Isolde; the story is older even than you, Vati.”

Maria chuckled at her best friend’s indignation, before patting her boyfriend’s knee. “It’s one of Marina’s favorite movies, Hans. It’s based off an old Celtic legend from nearly a thousand years before you were born. It’s supposed to be a romantic tragedy.”

“My argument still stands,” Hansel replied, smirking at his adoptive daughter as she muttered in increasingly vindictive Russian. Turning his attention back down at Maria, he inquired lightly, “By the way, is there a reason that you chased my son from his home this afternoon?”

The blush that tinted Maria’s cheeks would only been discernible to someone who was looking for it, and it was practically a beacon to Hansel as he watched her turn a charmingly rosy color. Turning her nose up in the air, she replied haughtily, “I needed some ‘girl talk’ time, and I didn’t really want any witnesses.”

Grinning at her, he teased lightly, “I see.” Glancing up at the clock on the wall over the television, he noted the time as he pushed himself to his feet. “If we’re going to make our flight, we should go, meine Spatzi.”

The assistant director’s answering frown was momentarily, before she nodded resolutely and pushed herself to her feet. Turning to her best friend, the two women hugged fiercely for a long moment as Maria murmured into her ear, “Thanks Marina.”

“You’re welcome, Maria.” Drawing away, she winked cheekily, “I want to know everything, okay? And don’t even think about forgetting anything.”
“Aye aye, mon capitaine,” Maria snarked, chuckling as she dodged Marina’s playful smack to her shoulder. “I’ll text you once we get there.”

“Deal. Have fun. It’s been a long time since you went on a vacation; enjoy it for awhile, huh?”

The younger woman nodded, linking her fingers in with Hansel’s as she waved back over her shoulder before following the German from her best friend’s house and into her own Hummer.

Twelve hours later, Maria’s eyes narrowed as she stared at what looked like the remnants of an honest to God candy house situated in the middle of the Black Forest. Folding her arms over her chest, she cocked an eyebrow and insisted, “This is not as romantic as you think it is, Hans.”

Hansel’s chuckle was low and husky behind her as he agreed, “No, probably not. But it needed to be here. This is where my life nearly ended and it is where I wanted my life to start again.”

Cocking her head at the strange statement, Maria turned to face him, arms still folded over her chest. Seeing him on one knee behind her was not the most alarming part; seeing what he was holding, however, was. In his hands was what greatly appeared to be an antique Chinese dádāo, dating from the middle Qing Dynasty, maybe mid-1800’s, unless she missed her guess. Her eyes flashed wide and her hands flew to cover her mouth, before she blurted in shock, “Who the hell did you steal that from!?”

There was a touch of exasperation in her boyfriend’s eyes – and the subtle tinge of a mortified blush – as he scowled at her, “Even if I told hyu that I came by this honestly, hyu vould not believe me, vould hyu?”

Maria’s answer was an immediate, “Not a chance in hell!” though her grin was wide as she continued, “Though, I don’t really think I care even if you didn’t. Oh my God . . . where did you find this?”

Hansel’s smile was crooked as he winked at her, “I think that shall be my own little secret for the time being.” Taking a deep breath, he tightened his hands on the scabbard for a moment, before looking up into her face decisively. “Meine Spatzi . . . I love hyu. Hyu are my perfect match in all things. And hyu vould do me a great honor, if hyu vould consent to be my bride.”

There was a long moment of silence, as Maria stared at her boyfriend in a perplexing mixture of shock and elation. Finally, a bright smile began to creep across her lips as she asked teasingly, “If I say yes . . . do I get to keep the sword?”

An answering smile flashed across Hansel’s lips, before he was on his feet and Maria was in his arms, his lips practically devouring hers. And all the while, Maria murmured against his skin, “Yes . . . yes . . . yes . . . yes.”

It was some time later, long after Hansel had taken his beloved Sparrow to bed and proceeded to celebrate their impending nuptials that he received a phone call from his aggrieved son. Will’s tone was dry and very tired as he inquired through the phone, “Dad, I’m going to give you one chance to explain to me why Chinese Foreign Affairs is on my other line, asking about a missing antique sword.”

The pause was just noticeable enough for Will to groan soundlessly, before his father replied, "Mein Adler, I am afraid that I have no idea what hyu are talking about."

Will’s grunt was exasperated, if a more than a little amused, as he replied fondly, "Of course you don’t Dad. Sorry about interrupting your vacation. Have fun and tell Maria congratulations for me."
“I shall, mein Adler. I would not worry about the blade, if I was hyu. I am certain that it has simply been misplaced and will make its own way back into the right hands soon enough.”

The Colonel chuckled as he teased, “Those hands wouldn’t happen to belong to a five feet eight inch tall S.H.I.E.L.D. assistant director, would they?”

Hansel chuckled, before replying, “Indeed, they just might. Good night, Adler. Give Marishka our love.”

“Will do,” the younger man agreed, breaking into chuckles as the dialtone immediately sounded in his ear. “Oh Dad . . . what fools will do for love, huh?”

Chapter End Notes

Translations:

(Russian) Vorobey - Sparrow (Marina's nickname for Maria Hill)
(German) mein/meine - my (masculine and feminine gender forms)
(German) Vati - Dad (Marina's nickname for Hansel Kuhn)
(Russian) volnovalis' - freaking out
(German) Adler - Eagle (Hansel's nickname for Will Grimm; inspired by his callsign "Orel" or Eagle)
(German) Spatzi - Little Sparrow (Hansel's nickname for Maria Hill; a pet name form of the word "Spatz" or Sparrow)
(Russian) Nekul'turnyye svin'i -Uncultured swine
(French) mon capitaine - my captain
(Pinyin/Latinized Chinese) dàdāo - literally means "Big Knife"; it's one of the varieties of the Chinese sword called the "Dao" (It's been around FOREVER!)
Welcome to Miami!

Chapter Notes

Woot! There is sexy Bucky/Clint, but not explicit. And there's a surprise at the end of the chapter as well! Enjoy!

Translations at the end as always!

Chapter 143: Welcome to Miami!

Clint let out a playful “WHOOP!” as he dashed towards their private, rooftop pool, landing in the water with a loud splash and completely drenching his lounging boyfriend.

The Winter Soldier bucked upwards with a shocked gasp at the cold water, shouting, “CLINT!”

Clint lunged upwards, shaking water out of his hair as he laughed. “Come on, Buck . . . lighten up . . . we’re on vacation. At least TRY to have some fun, huh?”

Sighing heavily, Bucky smirked as the archer slipped back under the sparkling water and proceeded to nearly drown himself. Rolling his eyes, the older man slipped his sunglasses back onto his nose and slouched backwards again. There was a long silence, before Clint rocketed himself to the surface, shouting at the top of his lungs, “THIS PLACE IS AWESOME!!”

Bucky’s snort was audible even from the pool as he replied dryly, “At four thousand dollars a night, I sincerely hope so.”

Unable to resist the urge, Clint stuck his tongue out at the other man, earning a similar gesture in
return. “You picked it . . . I just agreed to come along. Any problems with price or location are all on you, James Barnes.”

A single eyebrow cocked upwards as Bucky considered that argument before shrugging nonchalantly. “Eh . . . details.”

Clint chuckled, his biceps bulging as he forced himself out of the pool, earning a lewd look from his partner and lover. “Looking good, Hawkeye,” Bucky teased, ocean blue eyes warm and adoring as he took in the archer’s trunk-clad form.

Padding to his boyfriend’s lounger, Clint grinned before he shook himself hard, flinging water droplets everywhere. Bucky laughed, one hand up to shield himself from the onslaught before he released a low “Oomph!” as 165 pounds of 28 year old S.H.I.E.L.D. agent suddenly landed on his chest. Cobalt grey eyes glowed as he teased, “Not looking too shabby yourself, Soldier.”

The assassin’s nose wrinkled slightly as he picked his damp shirt away from his skin, remarking dryly – his native Brooklyn accent just starting to slip into his speech and causing Clint to grin wider at the obvious indication of returning memory – “How can you tell? I look like a drowned rat.”

“Maybe, but you’re MY drowned rat,” the sniper teased, lowering himself to capture the man’s lips with his own.

Almost against his will, one of Bucky’s hands came up to cup the curve of Clint’s neck, keeping him close and devouring his lips with his own. “Have I told you today that you’re incorrigible and I love you?”

Grey eyes narrowed speculatively as he considered the question for a moment, before he shook his head firmly. “I think so . . . but I wouldn’t mind hearing it again.”

Bucky glared at his boyfriend fondly, accusing tenderly, “Chertenok.”

Clint’s nose wrinkled teasingly, before he lunged back upwards and leaped with another “WHOOOP!” into the crystalline waters. Sighing, Bucky shook his head as he stood from the lounger and hauled off his shirt over his head. Waiting for Clint to surface, he performed an elegant swan dive into the deep end of the pool. Almost before he came up for air, he had an armful of overly affectionate archer. Those long-sighted eyes were sparkling as he pressed a series of lingering kisses along Bucky’s cheeks. “It’s good to see that you’re FINALLY getting into the spirit of vacation.”

Bucky’s hands were implacable on the curve of his jaw as he proceeded to devour his boyfriend whole, the two men treading water in order to stay afloat as they kissed. “Not as though I really had a choice, khishchnick,” the older man teased, halting whatever protest Clint had been about to make with another lengthy kiss.

Even still, the comment earned a weak slap to the bare, wet skin of his shoulder and Bucky laughed even as he flinched backward from the sting. Clint pouted for a moment, before releasing Bucky and sinking effortlessly under the water. Smirking at the reaction, the Winter Soldier took a deep breath and followed him down. He managed to capture his boyfriend against the pool wall, both still under the water, as they wrestled for dominance in the embrace.

After what seemed like a breathless eternity, the two came up for air, gasping against each other’s skin as Bucky crowded Clint from the pool and into the penthouse towards the large, California King-sized bed that was practically singing their names. The archer landed in an indelicate sprawl across the mattress, grinning up at his boyfriend as the man stood dripping at the end of the bed, ocean blue eyes wide and awed as he took him in. Holding out one hand, S.H.I.E.L.D.’s top
marksman reached out an open hand and begged, “Bucky . . . come to bed.”

Reaching out with his flesh-and-blood hand, Bucky entwined his fingers with Clint’s own as he allowed himself to be drawn to be bed beside his lover. The fingers of his metal hand were chilled against Clint’s damp skin as they traced silent designs on his face. His tone was low and reverent as he murmured, “Bog, ya tebya obozhayu.”

Clint’s lips curved into an adoring smile, as he reached up to trace tender fingers over the familiar curves of his boyfriend’s face. “And I you,” he agreed, his eyes slipping closed as Bucky leaned up and pressed their lips together.

The two spent the rest of that night reveling in one another, before at last slipping into sleep sometime before dawn. It was nearly noon when a ray of sunlight caught Clint full in the face, earning a sharp flinch as he tried to escape it. The quiet groan reverberating under his ear garnered a sleepy grin as the archer rolled and buried his nose between the indentations of the other man’s collarbone. “Mmm . . . you make a very good pillow . . .” Clint teased, before frowning playfully, “Though, last time I checked, pillows don’t snore.”

The sharp jab of Bucky’s forefinger caused a giggle as Clint wiggled to be free of him, the older man rolling slightly to pin him underneath. “Hush you,” was the stern admonishment, Bucky’s head coming to rest on Clint’s chest under his chin, “You know as well as I do, that I don’t snore.”

Dexterous fingers were light in the Soldier’s hair as the marksman played tenderly with the longish brunet strands. Humming lightly at the treatment, Bucky nuzzled closer and closed his eyes once more. The two were silent for a long time, as they simply took the time to enjoy each other’s company. Finally, Clint murmured softly, “I thought I saw her last night.”

Bucky shifted, his arm coming up over his boyfriend’s waist as he took that in. He knew who had been on Clint’s mind for so long, but he needed to hear Clint say it out loud. “Who?”

“The girl . . . the one I gave a lap dance to, the night we celebrated Jason’s promotion. It wasn’t here . . . but for a moment, I thought it was.”

“Where was she?”

“At Cameo . . . I thought I saw her sitting at the bar, with another girl. Same long brown hair, same deliciously stacked frame, just about the same height.” Bowing his head, he pressed an affectionate kiss to the assassin’s forehead. “But it wasn’t her . . . this girl didn’t have those adorkable glasses she was wearing that night and her eyes were the wrong color.”

“She could have been wearing contacts,” Bucky argued pragmatically, purring low in the back of his throat as Clint flexed his fingers over the sensitive skin behind his earlobe.

The archer chuckled as he hummed a negative. “No, it wasn’t her; my pereshmeshnika was dynamic . . . sassy . . . sarcastic as hell . . . totally awesome. This girl was just drunk and boring.”

Twisting to sprawl over the top of Clint, Bucky rested his chin on his folded hands as he commented lightly, “You don’t even know her name Clint, but she’s been on your mind a lot lately.” Biting down lightly on his lower lip, the older man murmured miserably, “Do you want to be with her, instead of me?”

Grey eyes flashed wide in shock at the question, his arms locking the former Winter Soldier to his body tightly. “I will never give you up, Buck . . . not for all the women in the world. I love you and that will never change.” At the relief on his lover’s face, Clint gave him a twisted grin, “But that
doesn’t mean that I don’t still wonder about who she is . . . what’s she’s doing right now.” Butting
his nose against Bucky’s he murmured against the other man’s lips, “You would have liked her . . .
she was just your style.”

Bucky chuckled as he rolled his eyes, “You think you know what that is, do you?”

There was a delicious smirk on Clint’s lips as he teased, “Pretty sure I have a good idea.”

“All right then, Mr. Know-It-All . . . what’s my style?”

“Dynamic, sassy, sarcastic and awesome . . . after all, you’re dating me.”

Pinching his lover in the ribs earned Bucky a peal of delighted giggles, as Bucky laughed, “Your
modesty never fails to amaze.”

“Why fake modesty when we both know I’m right?” Clint laughed, his eyes twinkling with roguish
playfulness. Undulating his hips minutely against Bucky’s own, he watched as ocean blue eyes went
hazy and lustful. “Bucky . . . moy lyubimov . . . make love to me. I’m ready.”

Bucky reared backwards in surprise, though Clint’s implacable grip around his shoulders didn’t
allow him to get very far. It had been a little more than a year since the first time the two had made
love, and to date, Bucky had always bottomed. Not that he minded; Clint had been a virgin the first
time and Bucky had been around the block a time or two. Not to mention, with Clint’s unerring aim
– which the Soldier had discovered was not confined just to weaponry of all kinds – the experience
was always mind-blowing. Bucky couldn’t remember a single time they’d been together, when he
hadn’t cum just from the act itself; even with his forays with men back in the old days, that hadn’t
happened before.

To hear Clint confess to finally being ready to shift positions, Bucky was admittedly thrown. “Are
you sure? Because, khishchnick, once we get started . . . I don’t know if I can stop. I have wanted
this for too long, to be able to hold it off now.”

Those eyes were warm and adoring as Clint arched upwards off the bed to press a warm kiss to his
lips. “I love you . . . I want you, I want this . . . make love to me.”

The archer grinned as those ocean eyes glazed slightly, before there was suddenly a flurry of motion
and Clint let out a soft “oomph!” as Bucky was suddenly devouring his mouth with his own. The
assassin was babbling softly in disjointed Russian, though the words themselves were too low for
Clint to make out. The first cautious touch of Bucky’s fingertip to his entrance caused him to jump,
before he closed his eyes and consciously relaxed his whole body. The air in Bucky’s lungs punched
out of him at the response, causing him to promise, “I’m going to make this so good for you,
khishchnick, I promise.”

Eyes went wide as that single finger began to breach him, leaving Clint’s response much more
breathless in reply, “I know. Ya lyublyu tebya, Yasha.”

Meanwhile, nearly two thousand miles away, hazel eyes hidden behind a pair of black block frames
stared up at the stars and sighed. In her hand, she held her acceptance letter to the master’s program
at Culver University. But the letter wasn’t on her mind at the time; her thoughts were consumed by a
pair of sparkling grey eyes and a charming grin . . . the man who had once given her a lap dance and
called her beautiful. It had been years, but those eyes continued to consume her thoughts. She
wondered where he was . . . if he was happy . . . and if that gorgeous brunet who had stared at them
from the booth had finally managed to get him into bed.
(God she hoped so, because she would totes kill for a piece of that!)

A soft knock on the door behind her earned another soft sigh, before she called, “Come in, Blainers.”

Her brother – her dopey, curly-haired, baby brother who she loved and adored above all other men – peered around the edge of the door as he asked, “You okay, Crazy Chick?”

Darcy Anderson-Lewis smiled at the sincere concern in his voice, even as she nodded firmly, “Yeah . . . I’m ready to get out of here.” Taking a seat on her window seat, she patted the cushion next to her and grinned as Blaine practically lunged to take the seat. “What about you? You ready for Westerville? I heard Dalton has an amazing Glee Club.”

Blaine Anderson shrugged, fiddling with his fingers nervously, before looking up at her. The worst of the bruising from the “Sadie Hawkins Incident” had only just begun to fade, leaving a sickly greenish-yellow ring around one eye and across one whole side of his face. “I guess . . . I feel like I’m running away. Like I should stay and fight.”

Her mouth twisted as she reached up to smooth back a curl from where it had fallen across his forehead, “You tried that, Blainers, and you were in the hospital for two weeks.” Looping her arm around his shoulders, she reminded him gently, “I’m not going to be here anymore to protect you. I’ll feel better knowing that you’re safe at Dalton.”

Taking a deep breath, he nodded in agreement. “All right. But I’ll miss you.”

Hazel eyes sparkled as she teased, “Of course you’ll miss me . . . I’m your kickass, totally awesome big sister. You will totes miss me.” Winking at him fondly, she continued, “And I’ll miss you too . . . but that’s what Facebook and Skype are for. We’ll talk so much, you won’t even have time to miss me. I promise.”
Translations;
(R) Chertenok - imp  
(R) khishchnick - little hawk (literally "little bird of prey"; Bucky's nickname for Clint) 
(R) Bog, ya tebya obozhayu. - God, I adore you.  
(R) pereshmeshnika - mockingbird  
(R) moy lyubimov - my love  
(R) Ya lyublyu tebya - I love you  
(R) Yasha - the Russian form of "James"
I would like to apologize for how long it has taken me to finish this. It's the end of semester, and my professor dropped seven assignments on us in three weeks. (If there's anything I hate more than procrastinating partners, it's procrastinating professors.) But semester is almost over, and all I have to do now is study for the final. Which is kind of a relief, because I do really well on tests. *wipes forehead* phew!

Either way, I do apologize for the lateness of this chapter. I hope you enjoy this chapter and I do look forward to reading your reviews.

Translations at the end, same as always.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
Chapter 144: Family Ties Take 2

It was a rare thing for Marina Ivanovna Petrovka to be truly angry. To date, it was commonly accepted – at least among those who knew of her more than checkered past – that the only people who had ever been able to achieve the emotion were the Brothers Grimm – who she loved with a tender fierceness and who had the ability to make her lose her temper faster than anyone else in the world – followed closely by Ric Byer, the Krasnaya Komnata and a group of long dead drug runners in Peru who had put a series of bullets into her lover and paid the ultimate price for the offense.

But currently, that was exactly what she was; she was obozlenyy pokinut’. She came storming into the S.H.I.E.L.D. training center and headed straight towards the cluster of people standing around one of the training mats. Her lover was in the middle of the mat, stripped of his shoes, the S.H.I.E.L.D. embossed track pants clinging to the sculpted muscles of his thighs and plain muscle tee soaked in sweat. One arm was held tightly across his chest, the hump of his joint clearly out of place, while the other hand was up in front of his face as he watched his opponents advance. Despite his dislocated shoulder, his face was mostly unmarred though there would probably be portions of his torso mottled into bruising before much longer.

There were three junior agents arrayed in front of him, each of them watching S.H.I.E.L.D.’s senior analyst with predatory eyes. It was clear that they each thought his injury was going to be the end of him and the fight in general; despite the overwhelming sense of protectiveness in her gut, she almost wanted to see the three of them on the ground as her beloved Colonel wiped the floor with their asses, one handed or not.

Stepping forward to stop the fight, her mouth opening to yell out, she was waylaid only by the sudden appearance of Brian Grimm at her left, his hand gripping the curve of her elbow hard.

“Don’t,” he insisted quietly.

Marina glowered at her charge for a moment, before turning her attention back onto the fight. The four combatants were still sizing each other up, Will Grimm’s sides heaving as he sucked in as much air as he could manage as they waited. One of the baby agents grinned as he noticed, taunting the older man loudly, “What’s the matter, old man . . . getting too old for this?”

The Russian’s jaw clenched furiously and it was all Brian could do to keep her stationary at his side. It was only a few moments before Natasha joined him, both agents struggling to keep her from izbiyeniye der’mo out of the insolent little punk. Somehow, the Colonel saw her out of the corner of his eye and spoke quietly, the tone low but insistent, “Marishka . . . stay out of this, dong ma?”

At the name, all three spun with wide, terrified eyes to face the woman. “Agent Petrovka!” the one squeaked, earning a chilling grin from the Russian.

“Pay attention, mudak,” she hissed, settling back on one heel comfortably. Despite her need to protect her lover, there was no way in hell that she was going to step in to stop this fight. She was going to watch her partner wipe the floor with them . . . and then yell at the stubborn idiot until he was deaf.

Will’s grin slipped across his lips like flashfire, before he whistled sharply and drew the reluctant attention of the three junior agents. “You heard the woman . . . pay attention, kids. Wouldn’t want to give the ‘old man’ an unfair advantage now would we?”

Eyes flashing back and forth between Marina and Will, it wasn’t hard to see the one training agent swallow hard. The fact that the two were lovers wasn’t exactly common knowledge, but it was still very heavily implied. They had definitely picked the wrong person to pick a fight with . . . and both
of them were determined to make sure that they remembered it.

It was immediately obvious the second that the three morons decided to take their defeat like men. Their backs lengthened, their shoulders straightened and they refocused once again on the Colonel. They glanced at each other briefly, before launching what would have been a successful attack if Will hadn’t been waiting for it. The rest of the room was in awe as Will moved like a well-oiled machine, his one hand blocking punches while his feet found vulnerable places in their defenses.

The whole fight took maybe five minutes, and when it was over, Will stood over the prone bodies of his opponents. His shoulders heaved as he dragged in air, though his face was completely unreadable as he stared down at them. Brian chuckled as he leaped up onto the mat next to his brother, clapping him gently on his uninjured shoulder, before turning to face his training class. “So who wants to take a guess at what these idiots did wrong?”

There was a long moment of silence, before someone spoke up quietly from the middle of the pack. “Tried to win a fight against Agent Brandt?” was the sarcastic question, causing a round of nervous twitters from the rest of the trainees and another reply of, “Pissed off Agent Petrovka?” This prompted the shouted question of, “Is there only one right answer to this question?”

Natasha laughed softly from where she still stood next to Marina, her arms folding over her chest. “How about assuming that an injury was going to weaken their opponent? Or not pressing their advantage when they had the chance . . . giving him the chance to regroup and remount his defenses?”

As the class began to throw out theories, Marina turned to Natasha and cocked an eyebrow in question. The redhead grinned in response, waving a hand in Will’s direction. Now that the fight was over, the adrenaline was starting to fade and the eldest Grimm was starting to weave on his feet. Shoving her way through the crowd, the Russian leaped effortlessly onto the mat and came to loop one arm gingerly around her partner’s waist. Lifting his head he gave her a tired grin, asking, “So how’d I do?”

“Oh Mishka . . . vy debil,” she scolded fondly, shaking her head as she braced him up and helped guide him out of the training center. It was only when they were nearly at the door that Marina paused and called back over her shoulder, “Moreau . . . Simon . . . and Ward . . . I expect to see you all in my office by 8 am tomorrow morning. Do I make myself clear?”

The groans from the three trainees were silent but nevertheless still audible as each replied promptly, “Yes ma’am.”

It was a silent walk out to the car, the indentations from Marina’s teeth getting deeper in her lower lip as she guided her lover to their practically ancient Army Jeep. Settling him in the passenger seat was a little tricky in that each of them was being a little more careful with the dislocated shoulder than was probably strictly necessary. But eventually, Marina hoisted herself into the driver’s seat and turned the engine over. Glancing at her partner out of the corner of one eye as she shifted gears, she asked calmly, “Do you need Medical?”

When Will’s only reply was, “I’ve had worse . . . take me home,” Marina literally felt herself sag with relief.

If she was being honest about it, she would be forced to admit that she felt sick to know that it was a relief when such a serious injury was not so serious that he hadn’t suffered through a more serious injury in the past. Nodding resolutely, Marina reached out to smooth her fingers back through the short strands at his temples before turning towards home. When they arrived, it was to the sight of Marina’s motorcycle and Aaron’s truck parked in the driveway.
Will frowned at the sight, grunting as he heaved himself from the car with his one good hand. “That was a short trip.”

The Russian’s eyes narrowed as she contemplated the two vehicles. The motorcycle was parked in the driveway itself, instead of still strapped down in the bed of Aaron’s truck. And seeing as Jason had gone back to his apartment after being cleared for duty, they’d just left Brian at the training center, Hansel was in Germany and both Bucky & Clint were still in Miami that could only mean one thing . . . “They brought someone home with them.”

The Colonel frowned at the information, though his eyes were smiling as she braced herself under his good arm as they started up the walkway towards the house. “How do you know?”

“Aaron drove the bike home . . . it’s the only way the bike wouldn’t be in the truckbed. Aaron’s strong, but even he would have needed help getting it out of the bed.”

Humming in quiet agreement, Will watched as the front door swung inwards and Marta appeared in the doorway. The virologist grinned at them both, though her face froze at the sight of Will’s battered torso and obviously dislocated shoulder. “Oh my God . . . Aaron get out here! Colonel, what happened!”

Will’s reply was a pained grunt as Aaron slipped around his girlfriend and came out to help Marina get him inside. “Training accident. It happens.”

Marina’s smile was fond as she winked at Aaron, the two easing Will down onto the living room couch. They’d barely gotten him settled before Marta was shoving them aside to be able to perform a preliminary medical examination on the bruised and battered Grimm. “Considering how frequently they happen in this family, though, it was really nice of you to fall for a doctor, Kenny,” the S.H.I.E.L.D. handler teased, even as she was tilting up her cheek to accept his kiss.

“Eh . . . I figured it was my turn to take one for the team,” he laughed, winking at Marta to take the sting out of the tease.

“Ha ha, very funny,” she snarked, her eyes narrowing at him for a moment, before a sharp wince from her patient drew her full attention once again.

Reaching out to take Aaron’s forearm and tug him gently out of Marta’s line of fire, the two watched for a long moment before Marina finally asked, “So who is the stray you brought home with you this time?”

Aaron grinned, cheeks coloring sheepishly. “How did you know?”

“I have known you for a long time. Not to mention, you couldn’t have gotten the bike out of the truck bed by yourself. And Marta’s too delicate to be able to handle that kind of weight. I’m going to guess that you had too many people coming home with you, to be able to fit them all in the cab of the truck comfortably.” Folding her arms over her chest, she grinned up at him with a wink as she asked again, “So . . . who is it? Another Russian assassin? A mad scientist? A long-forgotten war hero?”

Grimacing lightly, he asked rhetorically, “Can it be a kind of fucked up version of the last one?”

Will’s eyes narrowed at the question, his tone low and suspicious as he asked, “And what, exactly, is that supposed to mean?”

Holding up a hand to signal his brother to wait, Aaron turned towards the stairs and called quietly, “All right, Sam . . . you can stop hiding on the stairs now!”
At the familiarity and the fondness in Aaron’s voice, Marina’s eyebrows furrowed in question. When a young blond man, with one eye circled in a horrific bruise, appeared on the stairwell, the expression in his eyes yanked viciously on her heartstrings. She had seen that shattered, broken look in the eyes of more than one of her own boys – Bucky and Owen included – over the years. Scanning her eyes up and down his frame, she took in how desperately thin he was as well as the half-faded bruises encircling one wrist. The boy stopped at the base of the steps, blue eyes watching the occupants of the room warily, his eyes constantly trailing back to Marta and Aaron for reassurance.

Glancing at Aaron, the S.H.I.E.L.D. handler smiled at her solnyshko before moving slowly towards the boy. Making sure to keep her hands where he could see them, she spoke soothingly, “Hello Sam . . . my name is Marina . . . Aaron is one of my boys. It’s nice to meet you.”

Sam’s eyes narrowed slightly at the statement, causing Aaron to explain from behind her, “Remember what I told you about my sister? Marina has raised me since I was a baby. You can trust her . . . promise.”

Folding her hands in front of her, she gave the young man a sunny smile and asked, “You look starving . . . I think I have some homemade chicken pot pie in the fridge. Would you like some?”

Glancing at his aunt, comforted by the smile and nod he received, he looked back down at the diminutive woman in front of him. “I could eat.”

A genuinely maternal smile broke across her face then and she took his hand tenderly, her free hand patting the back gently. “Well then . . . come with me and we shall get thee fed, hm?”

Instantly set at ease by both the woman’s genuine affection and the obvious trust in Aaron’s eyes, Sam nodded once in acquiescence, letting her lead him towards her kitchen and the promised meal. It was only when Will was certain that they were both out of earshot that he chuckled, drawling, “I had wondered how THAT tradition would continue.”

“What tradition?” Marta asked frowning at him, her fingers deft on his shoulder for a moment before a sharp wrench popped the Colonel’s shoulder back into place. The man grimaced briefly, even as he nodded his thanks, his shoulder rotating around the joint to loosen the lingering tightness.

“Well, it’s not so much a tradition as an unspoken fact of life,” Will conceded with a smile, the expression turning mischievous and knowing as he chuckled, “Marina’s Home for Misfit Boys.”

Chapter End Notes

Translations:
(Russian) Krasnaya Komnata - The Red Room
(Russian) obozlennyy pokinut' - pissed off
(Russian) izbiyeniye der’mo - beating the shit
(Chinese) dong ma? - understand?
(Russian) mudak - asshole
(Russian) vy debil - you moron
(Russian) solnyshko - sunshine (Marina’s nickname for Aaron/Kenny)
Chapter 145: The Island of Misfit Toys

Aaron chuckled in understanding, even as Marta asked incredulously, “‘Misfit Boys’? I don’t understand.”

The Colonel smiled as he shrugged lightly, “I realize you haven’t been apart of this family for all that long, but Marina has always been happiest when she has someone to take care of.” Pushing himself gingerly to his feet, he moved cautiously into the kitchen, the injured arm braced unconsciously against his chest. “Unfortunately, her first group of boys are all grown up and don’t really need her to take care of them anymore.”

Aaron’s arms came looping around Marina’s shoulder as he teased, “Don’t let her appearance fool you . . . Marina’s really a little old Russian grandmother.”

Marina glowered at her second youngest charge, punching him lightly in the shoulder as she snapped, “And when exactly did I turn 60?”

Will’s tone was matter-of-fact as he replied, “Five years ago.”

Rounding on her lover, she jabbed him sharply in the solar plexus, growling, “Hush you . . . or you can make up the fold out for yourself tonight.”

Looping his arms around her waist, he hauled her to him as he pressed a fervent kiss to his favorite place on her throat, murmuring into the shell of her ear, “You are the sexiest 65 year old I have ever seen, and I can’t wait to get you into bed tonight just so I can prove it to you.”
The Russian’s chocolate eyes were contemplative, completely ignoring the sound of Aaron’s gagging in the background. The weight of Sam’s eyes on her back was obvious as she twisted to press a warm kiss to her partner’s lips, whispering against the skin, “I’m looking forward to it.”

Grinning at her slyly, the Colonel pressed a sharp kiss to her lips, before moving towards the kitchen cupboard to fish out the whiskey and the ibuprofen, throwing back four of the little pills with a highball of Glenfiddich. Marina’s eyes narrowed at the action, though she said nothing. Whatever Marta had been about to say was halted by Aaron’s hand coming around her forearm and a firm shake of the DOD assassin’s head. Therefore, it was a surprise when Sam’s voice spoke up timidly from where Marina had placed him with a heaping plate of potpie and one of Bucky’s long untouched beers. “Don’t they recommend that you don’t take ibuprofen with alcohol?”

Will turned from where he was putting the bottle back in the cabinet, the half-full highball swirling easily in one hand as he leaned back against the sink. Mercurial eyes were a warm gray as he nodded in agreement, laughing, “Written on the bottle and everything.”

The question was clear in Sam’s eyes as he asked, “Then why?”

Marina snickered as the Colonel laughed, clapping him on the shoulder fondly, “Because I can assure you, Sam . . . it isn’t going to be an alcohol-ibuprofen interaction that’s going to kill me.”

The Russian’s eyes rolled as she snarked, “He’s entirely too stubborn for that . . . heights though . . . heights may be the killer.”

At the very suggestion, Will shuddered sharply in revulsion. “There is a reason we don’t stay at the Burj Khalifa when we go to Dubai. God, I hate heights.”

Aaron snickered, as he teased, “Wait until I tell Clint that you’re scared of his favorite places.”

The oldest Grimm cocked an eyebrow at his little brother, reminding him dryly, “May I remind you of all the times I used to drag Clint down from somewhere high to beat his ass for something stupid he’d done? Just because I dislike high places, does not mean that I am scared of them . . . or that you and Clint are safe in them.”

Blue eyes were twinkling with familiar mischief, as the younger Grimm took a seat across from Sam at the table and kicked his feet up onto the tabletop. Marina cocked an eyebrow at the action, her arms folding over her chest as she cocked one hip. “What the hell do you think you’re doing? Since when are tabletops footrests?” Reaching out to smack his ankle hard, pointedly ignoring his pained yelp, she snapped, “Except for the fact that I know better, I could swear that the lot of you were raised in a barn. I know I taught you manners, Aaron Kenneth James . . . kindly use them.”

“Aaron Kenneth James?” Sam asked curiously, his eyes narrowing as he took in the new information about the man he’d come to call “friend”.

“Once upon a time, I used to be Kenneth James Grimm,” Aaron confessed with a sheepish smile, dropping his feet to the floor and rubbing ruefully at the throbbing spot on his ankle. “But then Kenneth died, and Aaron Kenneth was born in his place.”

“At least that’s what he thinks,” Marina snarked, one chocolate eye slipping closed into a sly wink, “I think it just gives me more middle names to scold him with.

Aaron’s nose wrinkled as he stuck his tongue out at his sister, earning the same gesture in reply. Will’s tone was teasing as he insisted, “Now children . . . play nice.”

Flashing her lover a wide grin, Marina twirled on her toes towards the living room. “You love me!”
she called in a singsong tone over her shoulder, her feet skipping along as she waltzed to the music in her head.

The Colonel chuckled as he shouted in light-hearted reply, “Not the point, moya sumasshedshaya devushka.”

Her tone was knowing as she disappeared up the stairwell, “Isn’t it though?”

Sam was a little embarrassed by his genuine fascination with the relationship between Will Grimm and Marina Petrovka. Their open flirting, and frank affection, was shocking to him, considering the staid relationship between his own parents. Sam had been living in the shadow of General “Badass” Braddock since the first second he’d enlisted, and it had taken him a long time to find a niche where his father’s name didn’t mean anything. He’d never seen his mother and his father interact with each other so casually, and with such honest love. He hadn’t even seen the General kiss his mother’s cheek since shortly after Natalie was born . . . long before Amy died.

When Sam had met Aaron, he hadn’t realized that Aaron Grimm was a Grimm or that he was the once-and-future demolitions expert for the Brat’ya Mrachnyy. Even across borders, the Legend of the Brat’ya Mrachnyy was a formidable one. Though the former soldier hadn’t been on the deployment in question, the American squad had been deployed on one assignment with the JTF2 and had left a long lasting impression. To this day, guys who had been on that assignment referred to the CO and the XO as “The Colonel” and “The Russian”.

So when the former DOD operative had been telling him about his brother, a lowly Colonel with the United States States Army’s Special Forces Unit, and his brother’s badass girlfriend, Marina Petrovka, he hadn’t realized that they were the two in question. And having met them, he found himself struggling to reconcile the mental picture of a destructive twosome based on his buddies’ stories and the sweet, charming couple he’d just met.

Eyebrows furrowing over his frown, he forked a mouthful of chicken pot pie into his mouth. Temporarily distracted by the flavor exploding on his tongue, the groan low in his throat was born of pure bliss. “Oh God, that’s good,” he moaned, eyes slipping closed to savor it better.

Aaron grinned, stealing the younger man’s fork and scooping a heaping bite into his mouth. “Marina is the best cook I know . . . it’s a miracle that we all aren’t disgustingly fat,” he insisted, despite his mouth being full of the cheesy chicken.

Will rolled his eyes, scolding his brother fondly, “You were raised in a damn barn. Manners, Aaron . . . for crying out loud. No one here wants ‘see-food’.”

Grinning at his brother, Aaron stuck his tongue out with a loud, “Blah!” sound.

Marta rolled her eyes at her boyfriend, bending to snatch a stolen kiss from him, before moving to the fridge to dish up food for them. “Heathen,” she laughed, one hand reaching out to ruffle her nephew’s blond mop. “As for you, Sam, you need a haircut. You’re looking a little shaggier that usual.”

Sam pouted, one hand coming up to smooth down his hair, as he insisted, “I just left the military. Can’t I have my hair be a little too long right now? Just for a little while? I’ve never gotten to have long hair.”

The Colonel grunted at the comment, reaching up one hand to scratch at the bristle of short scruff under his chin. “It’s not quite all it’s cracked up to be, I promise. You’ll be begging for a haircut before long, trust me.” Itching at the skin on the back of his neck, he frowned, “Speaking of haircuts,
I’m just about due for one. Ugh . . . I don’t know how Brian can stand to have hair on his chin.”

Aaron snickered, as he leaned forward on his elbows. “Remember that god awful ponytail he had back when we were kids? He started growing it out when he was 14 . . . it must have been halfway down his back when . . .” here there was a minute stammer, before he continued carefully, “. . . when he left.”

Will laughed, a genuine grin on his face as he crowed at the ceiling. “Oh God . . . Marina hated that thing. I don’t even remember how many times she threatened to chop it off. He started growing the goatee at the same time; thank God, it was the only style choice that remained. Because I don’t think the ponytail would have cut it at S.H.I.E.L.D.”

Just then, the front door opened and everyone turned to look at the familiar shout of, “Marina! I’m home!”

There was a squeal as the Russian came flying down the stairs, throwing her arms around her youngest Grimm. Clint, sunburnt and grinning, laughed as he scooped his sister up off her feet and spun them both around the foyer. Bucky’s entrance was a little more sedate, though he was chuckling as he watched them chatter back and forth in excited Russian, Clint’s arm around her waist as they moved deeper into the house.

Squeezing her dorogoy once more, Marina pushed him a step away. “I recognize that look . . . there’s chicken pot pie and your brothers in the kitchen. Go on . . .”

Clint whooped, announcing exuberantly, “You’re the best sister ever!”

She was still laughing as she snarked, “Chertovski prav ya . . . and Clint, be careful with Sam!”

The archer was already in the kitchen, when the reply of, “Who the yebat’ is Sam!?” came floating back to her. There was a skidding sound and Will’s voice shouting, “CLINTON FRANCIS, BE CAREFUL!” before Clint answered his own question. “Oh . . . so you must be Sam.”

Turning to Bucky with a grin, she watched her former mentor set their luggage down out of the way of the door, arms open for her customary embrace. “How are you, Zima?”

The once-and-future assassin chuckled, as he replied dryly, “How is it possible to go on vacation and come back more tired than you left?”

Marina’s tone was teasing as she laughed, “You do remember that you went with Clint, right? He could exhaust the saints, even if he didn’t set his mind to it.”

The older man looped one arm around Marina’s shoulders, resting his temple against the crown of her head as he sighed. “Remind me to see about getting him some Ritalin or something. That kind of constant energy level can’t be healthy . . . and even if it is, it isn’t good for my own sanity.”

The two moved into the kitchen, earning the attention of Will and Aaron, who nodded in greeting to the older man. Meanwhile, Marina snickered, poking playfully at his left arm, the metal exposed by his sleeveless tank and gleaming dully in the meager light coming through the shaded windows. “So . . . were you at least able to work on your tan at all? I mean . . . that arm still looks grey.”

It was about that time that Sam looked up, blue eyes snagging on the metal arm. Those eyes went wide in honest terror as he scrambled backwards out of his chair, knocking it over in his haste to put his back against the wall and space between himself and the newcomer. Clint frowned, before demanding around a mouthful of food, “What the hell is your malfunction?”
Sam’s tone was a curious mix of fear and awe as he replied, “It’s the Winter Soldier.”

Clint snorted as he returned his attention to his plate, waving his fork nonchalantly, “Oh yeah. Sam . . . meet my boyfriend.”

The younger man’s eyes flashed to stare at the archer, his voice a squeak as he demanded, “Your boyfriend?!?”

There was a wicked smile on the Army sniper’s lips as he replied, “Yeah . . . I like to live dangerously.”

It was about then that Brian and Natasha, the two members of the family most reknown for suddenly appearing where they weren’t expected – unlike Clint, who was the most reknown for sneaking up on people and scaring the *der’mo* out of them – appeared in the doorway to the kitchen. Sam jumped at their abrupt arrival, his eyes growing wider as he took in Brian’s features. Brian barely noticed the new arrival, striding across the kitchen to fish out two beers, keeping one for himself and handing one off to Natasha.

Startled blue eyes flashed from face to face, his heart starting to pound in his chest as Sam finally began to take in the facial features of each of the Grimm men. Dropping abruptly back into his chair, he found himself gasping for air. “Oh my God.”

At the breathless sound of her nephew’s voice, Marta sprang to his side, her hands moving quickly as she tried to figure out what was wrong. “Sammy . . . what’s wrong? Are you okay?”

“But Marty . . . they’re identical. **WHY** are they identical?!” he demanded, earning a smirk from Brian, as the second oldest joked, “So . . . he must be new.”

Will chuckled, bumping fists with his younger brother, before turning to face Sam. “And just think . . . you haven’t met my brother, Jason yet.”

“And if you think you’re having a heart attack now, just wait till Dad gets home,” Aaron agreed, leaning forward onto his elbows. “Then things **really** get interesting.”

The former soldier’s eyes were very wide as he stared at his aunt’s boyfriend, before finally announcing, “Welcome to the Twilight Zone.”

And almost as one, the brothers agreed, “Here here!”

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Chapter End Notes

Translations:

- (R) *moya sumashshedshaya devushka* - my crazy girl (one of Will’s nicknames for Marina)
- (R) *Brat’ya Mrachnyy* - Brothers Grimm (Code name for the Army’s Special Operations squad, of which Will, Marina, Jason, Aaron and Clint are the sole members)
- (R) *Brat'ya* - Brothers (shortened form of the Code name)
- (R) *dorogoy* - darling (Marina’s nickname for Clint)
- (R) *Chertovski prav ya* - Damn right I am
- (R) *yebat’* - fuck
(R) Zima - Winter (one of Marina's nicknames for Bucky)
(R) der'mo - shit
Chapter 146: First Date

Casey nibbled on her lower lip as she stared at herself in the mirror. Tonight was her first date with Jason and she couldn’t find a damned thing to wear. “Get a grip, Shraeger . . . it’s not as though you haven’t had dinner at his diner at least a million times already,” she scolded her reflection, glowering at the pale, panicking woman in the mirror.

And though she heard her own words, a small voice in the back of her head sing-songed cheerfully, “But it’s never been a date before, either.”
“Shut up!” she screeched, collapsing backwards onto her bed. Dragging her pillow over her face, she screamed as loud as she could into its dubious comfort.

Groaning wretchedly, she regretted – and not for the first time – her reluctance to make friends of her own gender. Beaumont was out of the question, for obvious reasons and most of her former high school girlfriends would have a coronary to learn that Casey was worried about what to wear to dinner with a cop. Which left her with a grand total of one option . . . and wasn’t that a terrifying thought that Marina Petrovka was the only friend – in the loosest sense of the word – that she could think of to ask for advice on what to wear on a day with, for all intents and purposes, her son.

Letting loose a string of obscenities around another groan, she reached for the phone and dialed the Grimm’s landline. Maybe she’d get lucky and the Russian wouldn’t be home. The phone rang twice, before a gruff voice answered the phone, “Grimm.”

Casey’s jaw dropped, before she blurted in shock, “THAT’S how you answer your phone!? Jesus, aren’t there like five of you!?”

There was a moment of startled silence, before the man began to chuckle. “Good afternoon, Detective Shraeger. No one ever calls this line, unless they’re looking for me. After awhile, I just became accustomed to being the only one answering it.”

It was about then that Casey realized who she was speaking to. “Oh shit . . . you’re the Colonel.”

Dry chuckling accompanied his agreement. “I am . . . I think Jason’s at his apartment. You’ll probably have better luck getting ahold of him on his cell phone.”

“No . . . I mean, I know . . . I’m just . . .” Sighing, she resigned herself to having made an idiot of herself. “I actually need to speak to Agent Petrovka.”

“Marina?” he asked in surprise, before humming lightly. “Of course. Let me get her on the line for you.” A rustle over the receiver barely muffled the shout of, “Marishka, moya zhemchuzhina . . . someone’s on the phone for you!”

There was a sunny reply, the words indistinct due to the distance, before the woman’s voice chirped cheerfully through the phone. “Zdravstvuyte . . . this is Lt. Colonel Petrovka.”

“Hello ma’am . . . it’s Casey Shraeger,” was the detective’s timid reply, the redhead wincing at her own tone.

“Oh . . . Allo Detective. Please call me Marina. What can I do for you?”

“Well . . .” she stalled, dropping her forehead into her palm. It took her a long moment to work up her courage, before she muttered bitterly, “Oh God . . . this is embarrassing.”

The woman’s laughter was friendly and familiar as she insisted, “No need to be embarrassed. It’s just us girls here.” There was a brief pause, before she inquired kindly, “Can I assume that this has something to do with my Jason?”

Relieved that she didn’t have to try to force it out, Casey grunted as she flopped backwards on the bed again. “Ugh! It’s our first date and I have nothing to wear. Which is ridiculous . . . he’s my partner and we’re eating at his diner! He didn’t suddenly become a different person overnight. He still thinks pretzels are perfectly acceptable in omelets and he still makes absolutely terrible jokes and he’s still freaky good with computers. He’s still just Jason.”

“And yet everything’s changed, hasn’t it?” Marina asked, her tone both amused and surprisingly
maternal. “May I offer you some advice, Detective Shraeger?”

“Please, call me Casey . . . and God, yes! I’m desperate!”

“Jay cares for you very deeply; we’ve have more than a few conversations about you. At the time however, you had a boyfriend, which left Jason reluctant to say anything about his feelings for you. Of course, I’m sure that is a situation that has since been resolved, da?”

“Davis and I broke up shortly after the hostage situation at the Second,” Casey agreed sheepishly, thoughts of the kiss that had prompted the break up flashing like lightning across her vision.

“Good. Then I’m going to say this exactly once. He will never do anything that you don’t ask him for. So do yourself, and him, a favor and figure out what you want to have happen tonight. Then stick to it. Ponimayete?”

Casey frowned at the Russian terminology, before replying to the context of the question. “Yes ma’am.”

“Good girl.” Giggling lightly, Marina continued, “That being said, anything you wear will be fine. Jason already knows what kind of woman you are and he likes you just as you are. He won’t appreciate any extra fussing on your part . . . it won’t impress him. Just be the woman that he fell for and you’ll do just fine.”

“You’re sure?”

A husky chuckle rang in her ear as the former KGB assassin agreed, “I know my boy, Casey . . . I’m sure. Just . . . think about what I said and enjoy your night together. All right?”

“Thank you, Marina . . . I do appreciate the advice.”

“Well . . . it seems that this sort of thing is my niche. I should probably just embrace it,” she replied in a dry, sarcastic tone. Casey laughed, easily able to imagine the other woman rolling her eyes in exasperation. There was a pause before the Russian spoke up again, “Oh and Casey?”

Startled by the sudden question, the detective questioned, “Yes?”

“Don’t worry about dinner . . . I had it delivered.”

When Marina hung up five minutes later, Casey was still laughing.

The entire drive to Jason’s diner, the redhead cop wrestled with her own inner voices. She knew that she had never been as overwhelmed by a kiss as she had been when Jason had kissed her . . . or at least when he’d kissed her back. Honestly, she wanted more . . . much more . . . she wanted everything she could get. But at the same time, she wasn’t willing to sacrifice her self-respect – or Jason’s respect for her – to satisfy an itch.

It wasn’t until she arrived at the diner and looked through the window to see Jason unpacking the meal Marina had ordered for them, that she really made up her mind. He wore a pair of old, faded blue jeans, the material clinging to his luscious backside and sitting scandalously low on his hips. His blue-checked button-down looked homey and comfortable, sleeves rolled up carelessly to just below his elbows. One hand was still in a brace, with a couple of his fingers still taped for added stability. But for the most part, he looked . . . normal. Like the Jason Walsh she had fallen hard for without even realizing it.

Looking up at the sound of the bell over the door, Jason grinned at her, the expression warm and
real. “Hey . . . so apparently Marina really doesn’t want me to fuck this up. She ordered our dinner from Del Posto . . . I hope you like Italian.”

He hadn’t even come out completely from behind the bar – and God, even his bare feet were adorable!! – before Casey was in his arms. Her momentum propelled him back against his fridge, pinning her there as she pressed her lips to his own.

There was a moment where Jason didn’t move, his hands held out to the sides as he watched her through wide eyes. Finally, seeing something in her eyes that reassured him, his hands came up to grip at her hips and haul her that small inch closer. Wrenching his lips away from her own, he began to lay a trail of kisses along the flesh of her throat. Murmuring against the skin there, he teased, “So, dessert first . . . dinner after?”

Gasping for air as he began to nibble at her collarbone, she refused to deign that with a reply. Hands clutching tightly to the back of his neck, she demanded breathlessly, “Bed . . . now.”

There was amusement in Jason’s voice as he replied, “Yes ma’am.” Biting lightly at her lips, he teased, “I promise, I’ll still respect you in the morning.”

Hopping up to wrap her legs around his waist, she panted, “I really don’t give a damn if you do or don’t . . . right now all I care about is getting naked, as fast as possible. You think you can manage that?”

There was a delicious smirk on his lips as he carried her back towards his bedroom, “Yeah . . . I think I can manage that.”

Hours later, Casey’s voice filled the tiny apartment. Her tone was low and sated, a bone deep contentment easily apparent in the sound. “God . . . I make excellent life choices.”

Jason’s chuckles were fond as he agreed, “Yes you do . . . would you care to make a few more?”

Girlish giggles filled the dark, along with the familiar rustling of the comforter as she purred, “Just a few more? Giving up so soon, Detective Walsh?”

There was a deep growl before a feminine squeal filled the room, the sound quickly lowering into a pleased whimper. “No fair,” she panted, strands of his hair slipping like silk through her fingers.

“All’s fair, Casey . . .” he teased, voice low and seductive where it came from between her legs. “I’d hold on if I were you . . . it’s not even midnight yet. We have hours before dawn . . . and I intend to map out every square inch of your body before then.”

Her tone was breathless as she insisted, “Promises promises, Walsh.”

Her wail filled the room as he paused, before his voice filled the room again. “Jason . . . I think it’s about time you called me Jason.”

Her smile was warm and awed as she whispered, “Really?”

There was the soft sound of skin on cotton as he crawled up her body, his lips warm against her own as he replied, “Yeah . . . I mean, my name isn’t really Walsh. And I think if anyone should call me by my real name, it should be my woman . . . don’t you think?”

A girlish grin unlike anything Casey had worn since middle school broke across her face as she reached up to cup his cheeks in her palms. “Your woman huh?”
She could practically hear his eyes rolling as he insisted, “This isn’t high school, Case. You’re my woman and I’m your man. Sound good?”

Wrapping her arms around his neck, she hauled him back down to her again. Murmuring against his lips, she promised, “Sounds perfect.”

Twelve hours later, everything went to shit.

Chapter End Notes

Translations:

(R) moya zhemchuzhina - my pearl (one of Will's rarely used nicknames for Marina)
(R) Zdravstvuyte - Hello?
(R) Allo - Hello!
(R) Da/net - yes/no
(R) Ponimayete? - Understand?
Queen's Gambit

Chapter Notes

Merry Christmas!! And enjoy this one. No translations this time.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
It was very late that night when the need for food finally overrode the need to discover every inch of each other. Lazing back on the bed, the auburn-haired beauty watched her lover throw back the covers and swing his legs over the edge of the mattress. Grinning at his toned backside, she watched as he bent to rifle for his boxer briefs that she had thrown carelessly to the floor in her haste to get him naked.

As he straightened, she cocked her head at the sight of a dark shadow decorating the skin of his back. The design was situated directly over his right shoulder blade. In the dark, she couldn’t see it clearly but from what she could see it was huge. Forcing herself up onto her elbow, she reached out to trace questioning fingers over the mark. “What is this? It’s too big to be a scar, but I can’t really see what it is.”

Jason chuckled lightly, twisting to look back over his shoulder. “No, it’s not a scar. It’s a tattoo of my father’s family crest. All of my brothers, my sister Marina, my dad and I all have one.” Holding up his left arm, he showed her the inside of his wrist. There, where his watch face usually sat, was another, smaller, tattoo. “This one helps people keep me apart from my brothers.”

Rolling onto her stomach, she rested her chin on her hands and frowned. “But isn’t it a tactical advantage, if people can’t tell you all apart?”

Grinning at her proudly, he leaned to kiss her quickly. “Hold that thought... I am starving.”

Wrinkling her nose at him, she nodded, kicking her feet in the air as she watched him head toward the diner to retrieve their – by now – very cold Italian feast. There was some banging around as Jason reheated the plates, before carrying them back to the bed along with two bottles of ice-cold beer. “Five-Star Italian and generic brand beer... my mother would be horrified,” Casey teased, eagerly accepting the plate and bottle.

Running one hand reverently over the exposed length of her back and bare left leg, he leaned to kiss the back of her bared shoulder. Reaching out, he flipped on the overhead light before taking a seat on the bed, his back to the wall. “I’m an Army brat and a circus kid... Marina did the best she could with me, but most of that hoity-toity fancy stuff went in one ear and out the other.”

Shaking her head, she laughed, “Somehow, I get the impression that she didn’t actually try very hard.”

Jason grinned, one hand flashing as he spun the top off the bottle. One shoulder shrugged lazily as he replied, “Probably not. The basics were mandatory, of course – Will and the Army made sure of that – but the rest was really only important if I was on assignment.” There was a flash of something bitter in his eyes as he continued, “Gotta be able to blend in with the rest of the high society snobs, if I want to get the information I needed without have to seduce or kill someone.”

One corner of her lips twitched upwards at his tone, before Casey teased, “So basically what you’re saying is that my mother is going to love you and I will have failed once again at pissing her off about my life choices.”

Leaning forward to tangle his lips with her own, he murmured, “I thought we had already agreed that you make excellent life choices.”

The detective thought about that for a second, before conceding cheerfully with a firm nod, “You are very right... we did.”
Jason’s left hand came up to brush back a strand of hair from her eyes and the dark blotch on the inside of his wrist once again caught her eyes. “All right . . . you were going to explain the tattoos. At least, I thought you were.”

Nodding, Jason shifted on the bed so that his back was to her. In the brightness of the overhead light, the dark blotch resolved itself into a gorgeous tattoo. Even Casey could tell that the design was old, the cadet blues of the feathers – at least, she thought they were feathers but they didn’t really look like feathers – and the austere black outlines left a very nondescript but powerful feel to the picture painted on his skin. Two banners scrolled at the top and the bottom of the design, the words stark against the flesh-tone; KUHN and DEUTSCHLAND. Tracing the design with reverent fingers, Casey breathed, “It’s beautiful, Jason.”

“It’s probably the only piece of our heritage that any of us have. It’s a long story, but we didn’t even know who our father was until about eight years ago,” he agreed, turning back and offering her his forearm again. The tattoo there was only about the size of a half dollar, the two double bars that matched his Captain’s bars a sharp silver against the cream at the inside of his wrist. Frowning, the redhead traced them in question. “What are these?”

“These are my rank; Captain in the United States Army with Special Operations. I’m pretty damned proud of them.”

Nodding, Casey leaned onto her elbows, watching him as he reached out for his beer. “So what’s the deal then? Why get your rank tattooed on the inside of your wrist, where no one can even see it?”

“Because you’re right. Having people in a constant state of shock with regards to my brothers and me is to our distinct tactical advantage. Which is why this tattoo, and my brothers’ own tattoos just like it, are always kept covered. Clint wears his arm guard, Brian has his wrist cuff, Will’s watch, Aaron’s watch, my watch, Marina’s mother’s bracelet, and Dad’s bracers. No one except for us, you and the tattoo artists who inked them know that they exist.”

“So why even get it if no one’s ever going to see it?”

Frowning at the question, the middle Grimm thought for a moment before replying, “Just for the sake of a terrible example, say Will and Clint were on an assignment together. They get ambushed and both of them are killed in action.” Reaching out, he rapped sharply several times on the side of his solid oak dresser, “Knock on wood . . . There would need to be something so that whoever recovered them could identify their bodies, right?”

Green eyes were stone cold sober as they watched her take that thought in. When understanding came at last, the woman bit down on the inside of her lip hard. “But I thought that wasn’t a concern for you anymore. I mean, I thought you weren’t active duty.”

“You’re right. I’m not active duty anymore, but I can still be recalled at anytime. Not to mention, I wouldn’t be able to trust some other dickhead with my brothers on a deployment. Hell, I may go back on active duty someday. I just . . . have to find a good reason for it.”

There was a long silence, before her quiet answer filled the room, “You mean like Sarah.”

His smile was devastating even as he nodded in silent agreement. “Yeah . . . like Sarah. I don’t think I ever told you this, but Sarah Michelle Fitzgerald was the reason I left. I wanted to keep her safe. The irony of it is that she probably would have been safer if I had just stayed.”

The forlorn tone in his voice cut her to the core, and she watched him sadly as he fought to keep his emotions under control. Reaching out, his partner ran her fingernails back through the hair at his
temples. “I’m sorry you lost her, Jason. Your brother, Brian? He told me that you’ve never really been the same since she died.”

Jason chuckled quietly, the sound rich with bitterness. “Guilt is a terrible thing, Case . . . it will destroy you if you let it. I hope you never have to experience that kind of pain.”

Casey’s eyebrows furrowed as she shifted to cuddle closer to him. “What on earth could you possibly feel guilty for? It’s not like you killed her.” There was a pause, before she continued, “Right?”

The long silence from Jason made her frown fiercely. Finally, he murmured, “No . . . I didn’t kill her . . . not technically.”

“Jason . . . whatever else we are, we’re partners. Please . . . just trust me.” Tender fingers smoothed over his stubbled cheek as she pressed quietly, “No matter what, Jason, I’m with you, remember? Always. I promised then and I promise now and I will promise forever.”

Watching the green-eyed detective bite down on his lower lip, she murmured, “You said that Delgado tortured Sarah . . . and he called you ‘Agent’ when he took the Second hostage. You both seemed to know each other. Did you used to work for the FBI or something?”

Jason snorted hard at the question, giving her a look that clearly indicated his opinion that she needed her head examined. “Or something. And let me just say that I am deeply offended that you think I would work for the pansy-asses at the Bureau! Come on Shraeger . . . be serious.”

Rolling her eyes, she punched him sharply in the shoulder. “It was an example, Walsh.”

He scoffed lightly, “Yeah . . . a terrible one.”

“Bite me,” she scolded, a moment of stillness filling the room before he leaned over and sets his teeth into the fleshy part of her shoulder, earning a ticklish squeal.

After that, everything else fell to the wayside. Any other questions she may have had were forgotten as she once again lost herself in her new lover’s embrace. It was very late – or very early – when they finally dropped into the Land of Morpheus. It was around ten o’clock that morning when they both finally began to stir awake. Content to laze the day away in his arms, Casey remained tucked against him until Jason yawned widely against her shoulder. “Mmmm . . . morning,” she greeted sleepily, as Jason stretched widely behind her.

Kissing her shoulder, Jason rolled away and climbed out of bed. “Morning . . . go ahead and take your time. I’m just gonna start the coffee and get started on breakfast,” he murmured, bending over the bed to press another sweet kiss to her lips.

“Mkay,” she agreed muzzily, her hands on his cheeks as she allowed the kiss to linger for a few moments more than Jason had originally intended.

Finally, Jason moved into the diner, unlocking the diner door and flipping on the “OPEN” sign in the front window. Wrapping his apron around his waist, he set about to making the only thing he had ever been able to make successfully, pancakes. He was halfway through the first batch when the bell over the door dinged and a man came into the tiny diner. The technical specialist looked up and immediately felt his hackles rise. The man’s smile was too slick . . . too confident and he could feel his Spidey-senses tingling. “Good morning,” he greeted warily, watching man leg up onto a barstool. “Anywhere you like.”
“What’s good today?”

“Well, we got pancakes and we got goulash,” Jason replied honestly, turning his back as he continued to stir the pancake batter, though he watched the man drum the counter in the shiny surface of his griddle.

“Oooh, pancakes. The other one sounds like a shoe.” Even Jason had to agree with that, acknowledging that it probably *did* taste like a shoe; he’d never been able to make goulash like Marina did, and every attempt he tried somehow came out worse than the last.

“Hey . . . you play chess?” the man drawled, the accent distinctly southern to Jason’s ears. The last time he’d heard a twang like that, Carter’s Circus had been deep in the heart of Texas, as they say.

Chuckling reluctantly, the middle Grimm replied, “No, I prefer a game of impact.”

“No I hear ya . . . I hear ya. Mix it up a little . . . a couple scrapes, a few bruises. What about hunting? You do any hunting?”

“Yeah . . . I do some hunting. People mostly.”

The man laughed as though he’d just heard the funniest joke in his life and Jason felt his unease ratchet up another few degrees. Emerald eyes narrowed fractionally, plating the pancakes as the other man began to ramble on about a Jean Claude Van Damme movie; vaguely, Jason seemed to recall the movie in question being one of Brian’s favorites. It wasn’t until the man picked up his fork and knife and remarked, “Mm . . . last meal,” that Jason knew things were about to get ugly. Wiping his hands on his towel, he watched the man for a moment, before he asked, “Do you have any iced tea?”

“Yes,” Jason agreed, moving away to get the tea out of the fridge. It wasn’t until his back was turned completely that the man asked, “Hey . . . you’re a cop right?”

And that was when every mental alarm Will had ever installed in his younger brothers began to clamor at the top of its lungs. Clearing his throat, he forced himself to speak calmly, “Yeah . . . why do you ask?”

“Oh . . . you just got that look about you. Been around a few cops in my life.”

Turning back around, Jason glanced to make sure that his shotgun was still anchored to the bottom of the counter before moving to place the glass next to his customer’s plate. “Here you go.” Pausing, hands going to his hips, he asked, “So, do I know you?”

“Nah . . . I don’t think so. I got one of those faces though . . . familiar . . . like somebody you dream about.” Pointing to a place just past Jason’s shoulder, he asked, “Hey . . . you mind grabbing me one of them syrups?” Though reluctant to turn his back again, he watched him suspiciously until the man reminded him in a drawling tone, “It’s just not pancakes without syrup, right?”

Jason remained motionless for a moment, a voice sounding very much like Marina’s ordering him firmly *NOT* to turn around, before replying, “Of course.”

Next thing he knew, he was watching the guy pull a gun from the back of his pants in the shine of his counters. Whirling, he managed to catch the guy’s arm and slam it onto the counter, a few shots going off as the man’s fingers tightened reflexively. Lunging away, he got to his shot gun and pulled off a few shots as the man fired wildly behind him on his way out the front door. Standing, Jason was about to go after him when Casey’s voice screamed through the diner, “Jason!”
Merry Christmas!! *runs like a bat out of hell from the pitchfork wielding people*
Chapter 148: Crazy Town

Lunging around the counter top, Jason went dashing for Casey, nearly sliding into where she had propped herself up against one wall. Her hand was pressed firmly to a spot high over her ribs, causing a flash of panic at the placement. Seeing it in his eyes, Casey gave him a weak smile. “I’m pretty sure it just nicked me . . . I think . . . but it still feels like I got kicked by a horse,” she assured him breathlessly.
Jason was already on his phone, nodding in absent agreement to her assessment, his hands gentle as he eased her down to the floor. “The bullet probably skidded off a rib on its way past. It can happen.”

Casey smirked at him as he began to bark at the poor sap who had the misfortune to answer the 911 call. Reaching out carefully, she cupped his cheek in her palm. “Jason . . . this is not your fault. Understand?”

Biting down on his lower lip, he shook his head resolutely. “It might be . . . he was targeting me. It felt personal, but I swear I’ve never seen that guy before in my life.”

Scowling at him playfully, she scolded fondly, “Do not change the subject, Jason Grimm.”

Chuckling at the appearance of her usual fiery nature, he bent to press a firm kiss to her forehead as he teased, “No ma’am.”

“And don’t sass me either.”

“No ma’am.”

Rolling her eyes, she growled, “How on earth does your sister put up with you?”

“You are not the first to ask and will probably not be the last either. Ask Marina . . . I’m sure she’ll be more than happy to give you some pointers in surviving the Brothers Grimm,” he replied with a grin, before turning his attention onto the dispatch officer on the phone to relay the necessary information.

Casey dropped her head to lay back against the wall, the dull pain in her side throbbing with every beat of her heart. Her free hand was pressed lightly to Jason’s cheek as she watched him speak to the operator. Once he’d finally hung up the phone, he immediately pressed a button on the keypad and pressed the phone to his ear again. It was a moment, before his sister’s voice spoke up through the phone, “This is Petrovka.”

“Hey Marina . . . it’s Jay. I need your help . . . Casey’s been shot.”

“What!?” she demanded in the same no-nonsense tone that had always snapped him and his brothers into instant obedience as a child.

“I had a customer come in this morning . . . he pulled a gun . . . he managed to get off a couple of shots and Casey got nicked.”

There was a moment’s pause, before Marina sighed, “Please tell me that you don’t actually subject poor and unsuspecting fools to the misery that is your cooking.”

“Marina!” Jason demanded, even as he fought a grin at her dry assessment of the situation.

“All right . . . I’m sending Clint and Aaron your way. And sladkiy, brace yourself . . . there is no way in hell that Clint is going to let you live that down.”

Groaning, he muttered fondly, “I hate you all.”

“We know you do,” his sister chirped cheerfully, earning an amused giggle from Casey at the twisted face Jason made. “I’ll follow your lead up to a point, but Jay, I will make all final calls on this case. And if I say that I’m taking it out of your hands, I’m not going to put up with any arguments about it. Ponimayete?”
The detective bit down hard on the inside of his cheek, before glancing up to see the pinched look on Casey’s face. Taking a deep breath, he agreed quietly, “Da.”

“Good. I’ll be in touch . . . and do NOT leave without your brothers. I am not bailing you out of jail because some poor schmuck decided to pick a fight with you at the absolute worst time in the world.”

“I think I should be offended, but I just don’t have the energy right now.”

“That’s what happens when you stay up all night sexing your new girlfriend,” was Marina’s parting reply, before the dial tone filled her boy’s ear.

Jason snorted hard at the mortified look on Casey’s face, his hand squeezing hers lightly as he teased, “At least you know she likes you.”

“I’m not sure that makes me feel better about the situation at all,” she huffed miserably, just as the front door to the restaurant banged open and a team of paramedics rushed down the aisle towards the back apartment. And right behind them was the familiar sound of two pairs of heavy combat boots. Lifting her hand to his lips, he pressed a fervent kiss to the back before moving to join his newly arrived younger brothers at the doorway.

Clint’s grin was sly as he jostled the older brother fondly, “Dude, how have you not gotten a health code violation yet? Seriously . . . you actually COOK for people and they haven’t reported you yet!!?”

“Shut up,” he snapped lightly, shoving his brother back though his eyes were firmly glued to where Casey was being loaded gingerly onto a gurney.

Aaron’s smirk was small as he joined in on the distracting teasing, “Talk about a new definition for a cast iron stomach.”

The younger of the two snipers snorted as he argued, “Or maybe they’ve died of vicious food poisoning and just didn’t get the opportunity to complain before they died. I mean, this IS the guy who thought that peanut M&Ms went in Spaghetti-Os, for crying out loud!”

“First of all, that was TEN years ago!”

“And you still do it, don’t you?” Clint teased, smirking as Jason pointedly ignored the question.

Smacking at his younger brother lightly, the detective growled, “And secondly . . . you both suck monkey balls.” Stepping forward to grab his partner’s hand as the paramedics began to wheel her past, Jason bent to press a sweet kiss to Casey's knuckles. “I’ll see you soon okay? I’m gonna get this guy, and then I’ll be there.”

The redhead gave him a small smile. “Because that’s not going to freak out the poor, unsuspecting nursing staff or anything.”

Blue eyes narrowed lightly as Aaron remarked cautiously, “I didn’t think we’d told her any of our horror stories from Medical yet.”

The woman’s eyes flashed wide as she whipped her head around to glare at her new lover, demanding, “Explain.”

“The nurses at Medical are pretty well convinced that my father, my brothers and I are demon spawn, specifically created to scare them half to death,” he replied sheepishly, before putting on an
audibly fake cheerful tone, “But think about it this way . . . you’re not going to Medical! The nurses at the medical center have absolutely no reason to be scared of me.”

Grabbing him by the collar of his shirt, the pretty redhead yanked him down so that they were nose to nose as she ordered, “Make sure that that remains the case, understand, Walsh?”

“Yes ma’am,” he agreed with a sweet kiss to the pursed bow of her lips.

Whatever she’d been about to say was effectively cut off when the paramedics shoved the gurney into the back of the ambulance and climbed in after her. Jason remained on the sidewalk, flanked on each side by his brothers, watching the flurry of activity inside the bus before the driver slammed the doors shut and turned towards the driver’s side door.

Clint’s hand came to rest lightly on his shoulder, squeezing quickly, before insisting, “Come on, big brother . . . let’s get this asshole.”

Aaron snorted as he replied, “And after we do that, let’s discuss the impossible task of actually getting you IN to the hospital. Cause I think that’ll probably be the harder task of the two.”

Green eyes narrowed viciously as the detective drawled lazily, “By the way, just in case you think you came home funny . . . you didn’t.”

The younger brothers snickered lightly, before trailing after Jason back into his diner. The family sniper was the first to shake himself free of the lethargy that came from the sight of the holes in the wall. “So . . . you were behind the counter and he was seated where?”

Taking a deep breath, and ignoring the sudden influx of CSI technicians, Jason began to walk his brothers through what had happened. He was vaguely aware of the arrival of his sergeant, though his attention was firmly fixed on Aaron as the second youngest Grimm sketched out the incident on a paper napkin. “What kind of gun was it? Fairly decent caliber if it went through the wall, right?”

Jason snorted hard at the question, throwing his hands up in frustration, “These walls are cardboard . . . seriously, I could probably punch my index finger through without really even trying.”

Clint frowned at the hysterical note in his brother’s voice, insisting firmly, “Jay . . . take a walk.”

Caught off guard, the middle Grimm noticed the concern in both pairs of eyes and nodded in silent agreement. Moving towards the back apartment, he left his brothers to face the wrath of Sergeant Brown. Flopping carelessly onto the still rumpled sheets of his bed, he strained his ears to make out the irate condemnation he knew his sergeant had in store for him. “He should have told me he was starting an intimate relationship with Shraeger before it happened. She’s his PARTNER. Shit . . . what am I going to tell her father?”

“That sounds like a personal problem,” was Clint’s irreverent response, and even Jason could see him rolling his eyes. “Look . . . I frankly don’t care about your house or the shit going down in it. What I do care about is that this is the second time my brother has had a girlfriend in the hospital, and I’m really hoping this time ends differently than the first time.”

Aaron’s answering hum of agreement was quiet against Brown’s demanding inquiry. “Can you fix this?”

“She got shot . . . but she’ll heal, same as she would with any other injury she got on the job. From what I saw, it was a clean through and through . . . no vital organs were involved. She’s going to be fine . . . hurting like hell but fine,” Clint insisted, before Aaron continued, “As for whether or not
we’re going to find the son of a bitch that did this . . . yes, that’s kind of our primary goal right now. Our sister is sending over a sketch artist now. Once we have a workable sketch to go on, running this mudak to ground will be our first, last and only priority. Say what you want about the agency we work for, Sergeant Brown, but the Grimms do not take kindly to people fucking with our own. People have ended up dead for less.”

Brown’s eyes narrowed lightly as he replied in a cool tone, “That is not in the least bit comforting.”

The smirk on the youngest Grimm’s face was sly as he replied, “Who said it was supposed to be?”

*************************************************************************************************************************************************************

So, I’ve been tossing around the idea of writing a few outtakes of when the Grimms were young, after Will left for the Army but before Clint joined the Army, while Clint and Kenny were still kids at the circus. Let me know what you think!

The Misadventures of Clint & Kenny Grimm

Eight year old Clint Grimm was pissed . . . though it was entirely possible he was confusing deep sorrow for pure rage. The departure of his hero – and big brother – was certainly a cause for both. “But why does he have to go away, Marishka!?” he whined, feet drumming a petulant beat against the bottom of his brother’s bed frame.

Marina Petrovka, his big sister and the most badass woman ever, barely looked up from where she was folding stacks of Will’s newly laundered clothing into a drab green carryall. “He needs to do this, dorogoy and we must love him enough to let him.”

Pouting ferociously at the answer, Clint fumed for a moment before surging to his feet and throwing all of the neatly folded clothes to the floor. “No! He can’t go!”

Snatching him firmly by the arm before he was able to dash away, Marina bent him forward and layered a series of sharp swats to his backside. “That will be quite enough of THAT, Clinton Francis,” the Russian scolded firmly.

The boy was soon wailing in pain, before the woman let him up again. Seeing the tears in his eyes, she sighed and pulled him into a hard hug. Kneeling in front of him, his elbows held firmly in her hands, she sighed heavily. “I know you’re going to miss him, dorogoy. I will too. But Misha needs us to be brave for him, okay? Even if it feels as though our hearts are breaking. Vse v poryadke? (All right?)”

A voice from the door broke into their thoughts then. “Guys? Everything okay in here?”

The Russian looked up to see 18 year old William Grimm, already dressed in his fatigues, at the door. Those quicksilver eyes of his took in the open knapsack, as well as the clothing strewn across the floor, and seemed to know instantly what had happened. Reaching out, he took Clint’s shoulder gently. “Why don’t you go play with Kenny? I’ll help Marina finish up.” He waited until the younger brother nodded in forlorn agreement, before reaching out to ruffle his bright blond locks. “And Clint? No more tantrums, ponimayete?”

“Yes sir,” the younger brother muttered.

“Thank you, malysh. Go on; I’m pretty sure Ken’s out with elephants today.”

Nodding, Clint dashed toward the door, only looking back once. Marina was still on her knees, gathering the clothes up from the floor, prompting Will to kneel down and rest his hand on her
shoulder. Whatever they said to each other was too low for Clint to hear, but he watched his sister
give the eldest Grimm a small smile, laying her palm over the one still resting on her shoulder.
Frowning again, the boy clamped down on his anger and tore from the railcar like a whirlwind.

Kenny was at the elephant enclosure, helping one of the hands give the newborn elephant, Rosie, a
bath. Clint hopped up onto the fence and slumped, arms folded and pout on his face. Catching sight
of his brother – and the storm cloud brewing over his head – Kenny handed off the sponge and
trotted over. “What’s up, little brother?” he teased, always willing to poke Clint about the two and a
half years difference in their ages.

The youngest Grimm grunted miserably, watching his brother step up on the bottom-most rung of the
fence and rest his chin on his folded arms. “He can’t leave us.”

Kenny’s eyes narrowed for a moment, before his features cleared in understanding. “Why not?”

Seemingly fumble with a suitable answer to that, Clint switched tactics. “It’s like Marina doesn’t
even care that he’s leaving.”

The older brother’s face twisted light as he scolded, “Don’t be stupid. Of course she does.”

“Then why is she so willing to let him go? Everything she says is all ‘We have to let him go’ and ‘I
know you’ll miss him but he has to do this’ and ‘He needs to do this’. I hate it.”

“Maybe it’s cause she sees something in Will that we don’t.” Fiddling with his fingers, he shrugged
lightly. “He’s never been able to lie to her, not even when he’s trying to.”

“But why does he want to go? Doesn’t he love us?”

Frowning, the older of the two tried to remember something that Marina had told him right after the
eldest brother had announced his intention to join the army. “Sometimes people don’t leave because
they don’t love you anymore . . . sometimes they leave because they love you too much,” he quoted,
eyes half-closed as he recited the statement verbatim. The memory of Marina’s sadness, however,
continued to linger even after his eyes were open again.

Clint however wasn’t buying it. “That’s dumb.”

Kenny punched him lightly, insisting, “You’re dumb.”

Squawking, Clint lunged at his brother, the two wrestling around in the dirt. Finally, a voice stilled
them in their antics. “Clint! Kenny! Come on! It’s time to go!”

Chapter End Notes

Translations:

(R)sladkiy - honey (Marina’s nickname for Jason)
(R) Ponimayete? - Understand?
(R) mudak

Translations for Snippet:

(R) dorogoy - darling (Marina’s nickname for Clint)
(R) Vse v poryadke? - all right?
(R) malysh - kiddo
(R) ponimayete - understand
Chapter Notes

Enjoy this chapter! I am currently back in school, so I will continue to post as often as I can, but things are going to be getting busy here soon. That being said, the response for the Misadventures was so positive that I will posting that as soon as I get more than just a few chapters done. Keep an eye for it.

In the meantime, I hope that this chapter is enjoyable to everyone. The translations, as always, are at the end.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 149: Smiling Revenge

Marina’s morning had started simply. She’d woken to the sound of her partner groaning as he pushed himself from their bed, trying to sneak past without her knowing that he was hurting. Propping herself up onto her elbow, she teased, “Whatcha doing?”
Jolting in surprise, he grunted as the action strained his shoulder. Settling back on the bed, Will looked back over his shoulder at his Russian. “That hurt.”

Her smile was amused as she laughed, “Good . . . maybe it’ll teach you that I don’t like it when you hide from me.”

Tossing back the covers, Marina maneuvered herself onto her knees and crawled over to lay her hand on his injured shoulder. The skin was overly warm, but the bruising was at least starting to settle. “How does your shoulder feel?”

“It hurts like a suka, but I think I’ll live,” the Colonel promised, learning over to press a sweet kiss to her frustrated frown. “Marishka . . . samaya malen’kaya, I’m all right. Honest.”

Nodding, she lifted her hands to his face and held him still as she captured his mouth with her own and kissed him at her leisure. Content just to kiss, it was a long moment before Will groaned in frustration. Resting his forehead against hers, he murmured against her lips, “I have a meeting in half an hour.”

Glancing towards the clock, Marina frowned at the time. “Ugh . . . how is it 6:30 already?”

Will’s eyes were sparkling as he teased, “Time flies when you’re having fun.”

Kissing her once more, he pushed himself slowly from their bed. Marina’s head cocked playfully as she examined his backside when he bent to grab his pajama pants from the floor. Scampering forward, she smacked his bare butt sharply, causing a surprised yelp. Giggling, she grabbed up her robe and scurried toward the door. Will’s voice followed her as he called after her, “I’m gonna get you for that, Marina!”

Her laughter was genuine as she called back, “I’m looking forward to it.”

Coming into the kitchen, she smiled to see Aaron and Sam seated at the table, eyes half-lidded as they nursed their coffees. “Good morning boys,” she cheered, coming over to press a warm kiss first to Aaron’s cheek then Sam’s. The look of surprise on the younger boy’s face at the action broke her heart, causing her to lean over and give him another one. “How did you sleep, Sammy?”

His smile was small but genuine as he insisted quietly, “I slept all right, thank you, Colonel Petrovka.”

Her fingers were fond in the blond strands as she insisted, “It’s just Marina, Sammy-honey. The Colonel has a meeting this morning, and I have a disciplinary meeting with the three baby-agent-idiots from training yesterday morning, so we won’t be around for very long this morning.”

Aaron grinned at his sister, teasing her fondly, “Never a dull moment in the life, is there?”

“Thank God . . . neither Misha nor I were exactly made for being idle,” she agreed lightly. “Any requests for breakfast, Sam?”

Shaking his head lightly, he shrugged, “Anything sounds good to me.”

“All right . . . cinnamon apple pancakes with hash-browns and bacon it is.”

Sam’s eyes flashed wide at the mention of his favorite breakfast food. The Russian squeezed his shoulder as she chuckled, “Your aunt and I spent rather a lot of time talking about you last night, after you boys had gone to play video games in the living room.”
Ducking his head between his shoulders, he asked timidly, “How much did she tell you?”

Hugging him briefly around the shoulders, Marina replied, “Let’s just say that if I ever meet your father, I cannot be held responsible for my actions.”

The former DOD operative snorted into his coffee as he insisted, “You’ll have to wait in line. I’m pretty sure, that having met the guy, Marta and I hold first claim.”

Marina rolled her eyes as she waved away that comment casually, “Uh-huh. Whatever you say, solnyshko. But I can promise you that I am much scarier than either one of you.”

Chuckling, the second youngest Grimm conceded, “Can’t argue with that.”

Fifteen minutes later, Marina was waiting in the foyer as her lover came tearing down the stairs, shrugging to settle his sling better as he searched his pockets for his cell phone. “Marishka, have you seen my . . .” he trailed off as Marina held up his S.H.I.E.L.D. issued phone and briefcase in one hand, a travel mug of coffee and a breakfast sandwich in the other, “. . . briefcase?”

Giving her a sheepish grin, he watched as Marina set his things on the table by the door. Reaching out, she adjusted his sling deftly and slipped in cell phone into his inner jacket pocket. “Thanks Marina.”

“You’re welcome,” she sing-songed, handing him his breakfast sandwich. “Eat that,” she ordered, scooping up the rest of their things. “I know how much of a control freak you are about driving, but I think I’ll drive today.”

Winking, he teased, “Aren’t you just a little dictator today?”

Sticking her tongue out at him playfully, she called back into the house, “We’re out guys! Aaron . . . please make sure the dishes get done!”

“Can do! Have fun!” he called back.

The couple arrived at the Command Center about five minutes later, Will pressing a quick kiss to his Russian’s cheek before he literally bolted towards the main conference room. “Love you!” he shouted over his shoulder, before he disappeared from view.

Chuckling, she murmured, “Love you too, Mishka.”

Turning towards the handler pool, she hummed lightly as she strode through the halls. The sight of her sister seated at her desk was a wonderful surprise and she cheered happily. “Vika! You’re back!”

Viktoriya Coulson looked up at her youngest sister and grinned, “Marishka . . . it’s good to see you!”

The two women hugged fiercely, before Marina ushered her sister into her office. “So how was honeymoon!? Tell me everything!”

The blond giggled lightly, teasing lightly, “I’m pretty sure that the five of us are going to have to meet up for lunch or something, because the other girls would never forgive me if I didn’t tell everyone.”

“Good point,” Marina giggled, looking up at a timid knock on the door. “Come in!”

Grant Ward stood there, a leery look on his face. Marina turned to glance at her clock, eyebrows up as she noticed the time. “Agent Ward . . . you’re early.”
“Yes ma’am, although that’s kind of a secondary reason for why I’m here.”

Vika chuckled, hugging her sister again as she insisted, “I’ll leave you to it. I’ll call the other girls and schedule a lunch meeting for later today.”

“Sounds good. Thank you, starshaya sestra.” Turning to the young man, she ushered him inside, “Take a seat, Ward . . . what’s wrong?”

Ward bit down on his lower lip, before blurting, “Agent Coulson is freaking everyone out.”

Caught off guard, she laughed, “Excuse me?”

“He’s making the rest of the trainees really nervous. I mean, it’s weird. He keeps . . .” there was a pause as he tried to find a word that would best explain, before finally giving it up as a bad job, “. . . smiling.”

Shaking her head, Marina scribbled quickly on her notepad, before folding his hands in front of him. “I’ll take care of Agent Coulson’s . . . facial expression, I guess. In the meantime, let’s talk about yesterday.”

The training agent grimaced at the reminder of the training exercise the day before. “It will never happen again, Agent Petrovka. And I am sorry.”

The Russian’s lips quirked lightly as she insisted, “Not you’re not . . . not yet . . . but you will be.”

An hour later, Marina knocked lightly on the door frame of Coulson’s office, a small grin on her lips as she poked her head inside the door. “Hey Phil. Welcome back.”

Philip Coulson was practically grinning as he looked up at her, watching as she moved to leaned against the doorjamb with her arms folded over her chest. “Good morning, Marina. I’m assuming you’ve seen your sister this morning.”

“Yes . . . it wouldn’t have looked good for Vika Coulson to miss her first day of work, you know.”

“You know she isn’t going to use the name while on duty.”

“I know, which brings me to why I’m here. You’re freaking out the baby agents,” she teased, winking slyly.

“What?”

“The smiling? It’s freaking them out. Frankly, I think they need a little fear in their daily lives . . . but apparently the staff psychiatrists don’t agree with me. So I’m going to have to ask you to stop scaring everyone. You need to stop grinning like an idiot.”

Phil’s ears reddened slightly as he ducked his head, “I’ve never been this happy in my life. I don’t think I could stop smiling if I tried.”

Marina nodded in agreement, “I know the feeling, Phil, honest. Still, if the smiling is cause a dip in morale, you’re probably going to have to do something about that.”

His eyebrows furrowed for a moment, before he proposed cheerfully, “How about I ‘grin like an idiot’ in my office, but when I leave, I’m still the same emotionless badass everyone knows.”

“That sounds good to me,” she laughed, straightening up. “Vika and I are planning to get all the girls together at some point today, so if you can’t get a hold of your wife, that’s probably why.”
“I’ll keep that in mind,” he drawled lightly. Winking slyly, he adopted a formal mein as he inquired, “Anything else I can help you with, Agent Petrovka? Or do you think we can go over the mission files from while I was gone?”

“No sir, Agent Coulson . . . let’s get some work done, huh?”

An hour later, she got the phone call from Jason. From there, any of her former plans for the day were on hold and her family became her sole priority. Reaching for her intercom, she ordered brusquely, “Vika . . . get me Agent Gamble and the Black Widow. And make sure that are that this is a Priority One call. I want them in front of my desk ASAP.”

It was a widely accepted fact of life that Brian Gamble and Natasha Romanov were two of the most – if not the most – violent, and therefore frightening, of S.H.I.E.L.D.’s senior agents. So when Marina Petrovka called them into her office immediately after getting off the phone with Jason, everyone in the handler pool knew that whatever had happened was bad. And not just bad but the kind of catastrophic usually characterized by screams of “Holy shit the sky is falling”. (Of course, anything that had to do with an immediate threat to the Grimms usually was, but that was neither here nor there.)

It was maybe twenty minutes before the duo arrived at the Russian’s office, but tensions were already high by the time the tactical agent came strolling into her office, his curly-haired redhead right behind him. Dropping carelessly into a chair across from her desk, one knee hooked over the armrest as he slouched, manic brown eyes were beaming at her as he asked cheerfully, “So . . . who do we get to kill?”

Marina’s smile was fond as she shook her head. “For the moment . . . no one. However, I do have a potential target for you in the near future.”

Natasha’s smirk was warm as she asked, “What happened?”

Taking a deep breath, Marina folded her hands in front of her and announced, “Someone tried to kill Jason this morning, at his restaurant.”

She immediately had their attention, as evidenced by the fact that even Brian was suddenly sitting ramrod straight in his chair. His tone was a low, vicious growl as he hissed, “Someone did what!?"

“Apparently, Jason actually utilizes the diner as a diner. The man came in early this morning, posing as a customer. There was a brief altercation, in which he managed to get off a few shots before fleeing on foot from the scene. Jason’s partner, Detective Shraeger, ended up getting caught in the crossfire. The injury was minor, nicked her at most, but she is currently enroute to Susan N. Ogu Medical Center downtown. Clint and Aaron are with Jay now, both to walk him through what happened and to keep him out of the crosshairs of any other glupyye lokhi of a mind to put a bullet through moy sladkiy.”

Both agents watched as the former assassin closed her eyes and took a second to count down from fifty. Shaking her head to clear her thoughts, she opened her eyes once again with a heavy sigh. “I have a sketch artist enroute to the diner as well, after which I’m going to pick Jason’s brain for a bit and then bully him into actually going inside the hospital to be with Casey. This is of course where the two of you come in. The moment I have that sketch in my hands, I want you two to track this asshole down. If he’s not in a body bag by the end of the day, he’d better be in some endless pit where no one will ever hear him scream instead. Ponimayete?”

The answering replies were immediate, and both of the Merry Murderesses present could see Barney starting to pound on the wall of his cell behind Brian’s eyes. Cocking her head at him, Marina
inquired lightly, “Brian . . . are we going to have a problem?”

Brian’s eyes were burning with righteous fury as he growled, “We are not. Whoever the yebet took a shot at my kid brother on the other hand, is going to get some first hand intel on why Barney Grimm is so universally feared.”

Chocolate brown eyes narrowed lightly at the statement, before she sighed. Reaching up to pinch the bridge of her nose, she insisted firmly, “Just don’t let your brother catch Barney out of his cage, dong ma? Because I can promise you, Misha will not hesitate to kill him.”

“No ma’am.” Brian agreed, as Natasha spoke up, “I’ll keep Barney under control, Marina, I promise.”

A thankful smile creased the handler’s lips as she breathed a relieved, “Thank you, Tasha. Misha and I both thank you for it.” Looking back over at Brian, she continued, “Let me know if I’m going to need to call out Owen . . . he usually needs at least some kind of heads up before he’s called out into the field.”

Natasha smirked as she insisted, “Regrettably, this is probably going to be more covert and subtle than Barney is currently wanting.”

Nodding in silent agreement, Marina watched the couple exchange a telling look between them, before straightening her shoulders. “That’s all I have for the moment. I’ll read you in as soon as I know more. In the meantime, you both are dismissed.”

The two agents nodded briskly, standing from their chairs and heading towards the door. Pausing briefly at the door, Brian insisted firmly, “If you get any new intel . . .”

The Russian’s smile was fond as she agreed warmly, “. . . you’ll know as soon as I know. I promise. Dismissed.”

Slipping from the room, the Vdova paused to watch Brian pull the door closed with exaggerated calm. “Bri . . . you okay?”

Brian’s chocolate eyes were chaotic with a wide spectrum of manic emotions as he looked up into his girlfriend’s eyes and ground out, “I know we don’t know who this bastard is yet, but I want him dead . . . and I want him dead now.”

Green eyes gleamed as a wicked smirk crept across her face. Reaching out to cup his cheek, she insisted, “Come on, Brian . . . I think I know how to take your mind off of everything until we get the call from Marina.”

“Yeah, how’s that?”

One eye slipped closed in a sly wink as she drawled, “How do you feel about storage closets? Private, secluded, lockable storage closets?”

There was a lecherous grin on his face as he hauled her up against him by the hand on the back of her neck, “Natasha . . . you are a woman after my own heart. Lead the way.”

Linking her fingers with his, she gave him a seductive grin before leading him away to try and take his mind off of what had happened to his younger brother that morning. Well, at least until there was something they could do about it. And which time, all bets were off and all hell broke loose.

The poor bastard didn’t even know what he was in for.
Except for the fact that she didn’t feel any sympathy for the mudak whatsoever, Natasha would almost feel sorry for him. Either way, he’d dug his own grave. All that was left to do was to put him in it.

Chapter End Notes

Translations:

(R) suka - bitch
(R) samaya malen’kaya - my little one (Will's most common nickname for Marina)
(R) solnyshko - sunshine (Marina’s nickname for Aaron/Kenny)
(R) starshaya sestra - big sister
(R) glupyye lohki - stupid fuckers
(R) moy sladkiy - my honey (Marina's nickname for Jason is sladkiy which means honey)
(R) Ponimayete - understand
(R) yebet - fuck
(R) Vdova - Widow (shortened version of Natasha Romanov's callsign Chernaya Vdova/Black Widow)
(R) mudak - asshole
Chapters 150: Hell Hath No Fury Like a Pissed Off Grimm

Mei-Zhen Chang had worked for S.H.I.E.L.D. for a lot of years; primarily as a sketch artist and – if that particular skill wasn’t needed – then as a profiler. More importantly, she had worked on more than a few assignments alongside the Brothers Grimm, and within both capacities. So when Agent Marina Petrovka called her into her office to explain the assignment before her now, she had more than understood the seriousness of what she was being asked for.

Positive ID on a target . . . a target the Brothers Grimm intended to kill.
By the time she managed to catch up to Agents Barton and Cross, they had managed to get their older brother – the former Agent Walsh – as far as the front entrance of the Susan N. Ogu Medical Center. Grinning at the detective’s typical reticence about entering the building, she called out in teasing Mandarin, “ Háishi hàipà dà huài nánrén zài kēpà de báisè dàiǐ, Walsh? (Still scared of the big, bad men in the scary white coats, Walsh?)”

Walsh’s response was a growled, “Nǐ tā mā de fēicháng duō, Méi-Zhēn! (Fuck you very much, Mei-Zhen!)”

Reaching out to clasp him fondly on the shoulder, she asked gently, “How is she?”

“She’s still in surgery,” he replied forlornly. “My brothers have been running in and out for me.”

“We keep trying to remind him that it’s just a building, but he won’t listen to us. Seriously, Jay, it can’t hurt you,” Agent Barton insisted, watching his brother carefully, sighing heavily as the older Grimm began to shake his head before he’d even finished speaking. Running a hand over the spikes of his hair, he jumped from where he was perched on the roof of the car and clapped Agent Cross on the shoulder. “Come on, Kenny; let’s go keep an eye on Casey and let Mei-Zhen do her thing with Jay.”

The blue-eyed brother smiled at the older brother, promising, “We’ll call if anything changes okay?”

“Thanks Kenny.”

“You’re welcome. Mei . . . keep an eye on him for us?”

Her head dipped in a regal nod, as she agreed, “Of course.” The two watched in silence until the two S.H.I.E.L.D. agents disappeared into the medical center, before Mei spoke up. “So . . . shall we get started then?”

At Detective Walsh’s nod, she hopped up to sit cross-legged on the hood his car, her sketch pad open in her lap. She knew that Walsh wouldn’t be looking at her, so it seemed best to stay out of his line of sight so that he could focus on remembering the man whose face she needed to sketch. “Whenever you’re ready,” she prompted, before falling silent and waiting.

There was a long moment when she thought he might not have heard her, before at last he took a deep breath and began to describe his attacker. She was putting the finishing touches on the sketch when Walsh looked up at the sound of his name. A tall man with a Latina woman were approaching, trailed by a man with a Tom Selleck ’stashe and a black man wearing a bulletproof vest under his jacket. The detective stopped speaking, nodding in greeting, “Cole . . . Banks . . . Delahoy . . .” there was a noticeable pause, before he at last nodded at the woman, “. . . Allison . . . thank you for coming.”

The woman’s mouth twisted slightly in distaste, though she said nothing when her partner reached out to touch her hand. “She’s one of us . . . of course we were going to be here for her. How is she?"

“Last anyone told me, she was still in surgery.” Gesturing vaguely toward the doors, Walsh insisted, “My brothers are inside; they’ll call if anything changes.”

Mei cleared her throat then, holding out the sketch pad to the detective. “Walsh? What do you think?”

Smirking at the way he obviously startled, it wasn’t hard to guess that the middle Grimm had forgotten she was there. “Jesus, Mei . . . you scared the hell out of me.”
“I’ve been here for quite a bit longer than they have,” she teased, shaking the sketch pad in his direction once more. “Seriously . . . how does it look?”

There was suspicion in dark chocolate eyes, though the female detective said nothing as Walsh reached to take the pad. Frowning slightly, he considered it for a moment as he compared it with his own memories, before nodding. “Yeah . . . that’s him.”

Looking up, Walsh’s eyes narrowed at the horrified look etched in his co-workers eyes. Turning the pad towards him, he demanded carefully, “Cole . . . you know him?”

Walsh watched the six foot tall detective flinch at the question, grey-blue eyes startled as they darted up into the older detective’s own. “No . . .” was the uncharacteristic squeak, before Cole cleared his throat and spoke again, “No . . . I’ve never seen him before.”

Green eyes still narrowed in suspicion, the former field agent insisted, “Are you sure?”

Anything Cole might have said was interrupted as Beaumont leapt to the defense of her partner. “Shove off, Walsh . . . he said he didn’t know him.”

The former couple glared at each other for a moment, before at last Mei-Zhen finally spoke up. “And on that note . . . anything I should tell your sister when I take this sketch to her?”

It was obvious that Walsh was considering the likelihood of Marina Ivanovna Petrovka leaving one of her boys on his own during a crisis. Sighing as he came to the same conclusion she did, he gave in to the inevitable. “Tell her I’ll see her later. And no . . . I haven’t shot, maimed, punched or killed anyone yet.”

Mei’s tone was dry and amused as she drawled, “I’m sure she’ll be thrilled to hear it. Stay safe, Jay. Agent Petrovka is not known for her temperance where you and your brothers are concerned.”

Caught off guard by the statement, Walsh couldn’t hold in the derisive snort. “I think that is the worst understatement I have ever heard.”

Grinning in silent acknowledge, the pretty Chinese artist gathered her material and hopped from the hood of the detective’s car. She wasn’t even out of earshot before the furious Latina demanded, “And who the fuck is she!?" Snorting derisively, she rolled her eyes as she dropped into her car seat. “Frankly, I think I’d prefer to be shark bait that stuck in the middle of those two.”

An hour later, the criminal file and all records existing for one “Franklin Alexander Lutz” were staring up at Marina from her desktop. Reaching out blindly, she dialed Jason’s cell phone as she continued to read. There was one ring . . . two . . . before the technical specialist answered cheerfully, “Wow . . . that was fast. Your minions must be working on overdrive today.”

Marina smirked as she replied, “‘I cannot abide useless people.”

Rolling his eyes at the Firefly quote – and it was a quote . . . episode four, the one called “Shindig” – he sallied his own quote in reply, “‘You know, you aren’t quite right.’”
“‘That’s the popular theory’,” she snorted, struggling to contain her laughter. “So things could be getting interesting here soon.”

The Russian could almost hear Jason’s frown as he demanded, “Define interesting.”

Unable to resist the opening, the handler snorted before quoting deadpan, “‘Oh God. Oh God. We’re all going to die.’”

Jason groaned at the response, before muttering, “Shit . . . I walked right into that one. Seriously, Marishka . . . that Firefly obsession of yours is getting a little out of control.”

“Remember what you said about ‘not quite right’, Jay? It’s not just a quote,” she reminded him lightly. “Not the point . . . does the name ‘Franklin Lutz’ mean anything to you?”

There was a long silence as the middle Grimm considered the name, before replying carefully, “No . . . I can’t say that it does.”

Glancing at the second file on her desk, she mused, “What about the name ‘Navan Granger’?”

The startled pause was answer enough, though Jason’s response was a low, vicious growl anyway. “What the hell does that name have to do with anything?”

“Nothing concrete yet, but they did pop up as possible associates. Why?”

“Navan Granger is Henry Cole . . . Cole changed his name when he came to New York City, to give himself a chance to start over . . . and Cole knows that I know that.”

“Hmm . . . sounds like a hell of a coincidence if you ask me. All right . . . I’ll turn Brian and Natasha loose on it.” Gathering the file together, she scribbled a note to her two agents on the front and then moved to the door of her office. “Vika?”

“Yeah, Marishka?” the pretty Amazon inquired, as she looked up from the stack of requisitions she was sorting through on her desk. “What’s up?”

“Could you get these files to Agents Gamble and Romanov? All the information they need is in there . . . and tell them ‘Good hunting’ for me. After, you can take your lunch. I might be headed downtown for a bit here soon.”

“Sounds good.” Smiling at her sister, she took the file and inquired, “You gonna be able to make dinner tonight or should I call the girls and reschedule?”

Biting down on her lower lip, Marina considered the circumstances and shook her head. “Ask me again in a couple hours. We’ll see how much of this Brian and Natasha get taken care of and then we’ll reevaluate.”

Viktoriya nodded in agreement, before turning to her phone to have their sister and Marina’s boy paged. Turning back into her office, Marina seated herself at her desk again and leaned forward on her elbows as she watched the phone continue to count the seconds of the call. “Jay? You still there?”

“Yeah . . . I’m here.”

She was quiet for a long moment, before asking cautiously, “You been inside yet?”

Again, his pause was telling in and of itself, but Jason still replied anyway, “No.”
“Sladkiy . . . the hospital is not going to bite you. The white coats won’t hurt you and I promise, there are no ‘two by two . . . hands of blue’ inside.”

“Another Firefly reference!? Marina!”

Rolling her eyes lazily, Marina replied nonchalantly, “Misha and I had a marathon last night. I make no apologies.”

“Of course you wouldn’t,” he sighed in frustration. Marina could clearly picture him running his hands back through his hair. “It’s just . . . this is the hospital where Sarah died? What if she’s still here? What if she’s haunting this place . . . just waiting for me to come back and care about someone inside so that she can hurt them?”

“First of all, your father is very certain that Sarah has passed on completely, sladkiy. Secondly, even if she was still inside, she can’t hurt you or Casey unless you let her.”

“Are you sure about that? Because I seem to recall a few of Dad’s stories suggesting differently.”

Rolling her eyes, the Russian S.H.I.E.L.D. agent huffed, “No more horror films before bed, Jason Leonard, seriously. Casey is your partner . . . and your brand-new girlfriend. She deserves your support, if nothing else.”

“I know that! I just . . . I’m scared! What if I lose her too?”

“All the more reason to be with her now,” his sister reminded him gently. “She loves you . . . she wants you with her. Trust me.”

There was a long moment of silence as Jason considered that before confessing, “I don’t think I can go in there by myself.”

Chuckling, Marina stood from her chair and began to gather her things. “I’m ten minutes away.”

Not even fifteen minutes later, Marina strode easily into the room where Casey was recovering from her minor surgery, Jason lingering uneasily just outside the doorframe. The redhaired detective’s eyes widened in surprise, lifting one hand to her matted hair, “Agent Petrovka . . . I didn’t expect to see you,” she confessed sheepishly, obviously concerned by her disheveled appearance.

“It’s just Marina, devushka . . . and I brought you a present of sorts. Look who managed to make it through the front door!” she cheered, reaching back and pulling Jason the rest of the way into the room.

The sight of him lit up Casey’s whole face. “Jason . . . you’re here.”

Giving her a rueful smile, he came to the edge of the bed cautiously. Taking her hand in both of his, he bent his head to press a sweet kiss to the palm of her hand. “Sorry it took me so long.”

Casey’s eyes were brilliant as she promised, “It doesn’t matter . . . you’re here. THAT is all that matters to me. I mean . . . I know how much hospitals freak you out.”

Clint’s voice spoke up then from behind Marina at the door, “Wo de ma he ta de feng kuang de wai sheng dou. (Holy mother of god and all her wacky nephews.)”

At the phrase – yet another quote from Firefly . . . der’mo his whole chertov family was obsessed – Jason groaned in dismay, as Marina proceeded to thoroughly crack up. Aaron and Clint were both grinning, though admittedly both were a little bemused as to why; though it was Casey that finally
collapsed the whole room into a fit of helpless giggles. “My thoughts exactly, Clint.”

Meanwhile, Cole was just arriving home at his modest apartment. The events of the day were weighing heavily on his mind, and every part of him was trying to sort out what to do about Frank. He’d brought the chess player to New York . . . it was going to be up to him to get rid of him.

There was a small rustle from behind him just then and Cole froze. His fiancée was with her parents that afternoon . . . the apartment should be empty. Turning slowly, his swallowed hard to see the barrel of a gun pointed firmly between his eyes. Lifting his eyes from the dark hollow, his eyes flashed wide at the sight of a pair of blazing green eyes set in a beautiful, pale face crowned in brilliant red curls. Another muzzle came to rest just under the curve of his jaw and a gravelly voice murmured almost gently in his ear, “Hello Mr. Granger . . . I think we three should talk.”

Flicking his eyes slowly to the side, he felt his stomach fall through the floor at the pair of frenzied brown eyes set in Jason Walsh’s face. “Agent Gamble . . . to what do I owe the pleasure?”

“I hear you’re a God-fearing man, Mr. Granger. Is that true?”

Cole nodded in silent agreement, stumbling as the man shoved him down hard into an armchair. “Well then, I guess you could call us your very own guardian angels, here to pass down a warning about what happens when good little Christian boys get involved with a crazy syn suka like Frank Lutz.”

Natasha Romanov’s smile was as gentle as a knife’s razor edge as she insisted, “May I suggest, Navan, that that’s stupid . . . very, very stupid.”

“Tell us where we can find him, Navan . . . or I can promise you that your pretty little fiancée won’t be getting much a man to meet her at the end of the aisle. Dong le ma?”

Looking up between the two of them, both so deadly and full of righteous vengeance, Cole could easily imagine them as two of God’s archangels sent to Earth to right great wrongs. Relieved that God had heard his prayers and sent someone to help him, he leaned forward on his elbows and vowed, “I’ll tell you anything you want to know.”

Chapter End Notes

Translations:
(R) Chernaya Vdova I Skopa - The Black Widow and The Osprey (call signs for Natasha Romanov and Brian Gamble)
(R) Sladky - honey (Marina’s nickname for Jason)
(R) devushka - dear girl (a nickname Marina gives to Casey and Marta interchangeably)
(R) der’mo - shit
(R) chertov - puck
(R) syn suka - son of a bitch
(R) dong le ma - are we clear?
Yad Luchshi Drug Devushki

Chapter Notes

Please let me know what you guys think; I missed a lot of your reviews for the last chapter. To those that did review - Julorean, Alek Walker and CatLea - thank you so much. Your thoughts mean the world to me.

Translations are at the end of the chapter as always.

Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter 151: Yad Yavlyayetsya Luchsim Drugom Devushka

Natalya Alianovna Romanova was NOT Marina Ivanovna Petrovka.

She did not feel the need to be the least bit protective of the Grimm brothers, as they were fully
grown men who had proven themselves capable – well, mostly capable – of taking care of themselves. Her need to protect Clint from himself was because he was her best friend and the words “hyperactive, overly-affectionate puppy” had never suited anyone more. And of course, Aaron was too sweet for words and Jason was usually as oblivious as a brick when he was glued to his computer screen and Brian was the love of her life . . . maybe. (Personally, she subscribed to the theory that love was for children. However, if there had to be a man in the world for the job, Brian Joshua Grimm was probably the one she’d choose.) Either way, she wasn’t protective. It’s just that occasionally she needed to check in on them . . . just to make sure they were all right . . . for her sister’s sake . . . really.

Okay, so fine . . . maybe she was a little protective; so sue her, they were family. She adored each and every one of them. And Natasha had always done what she could to protect those she loved.

Which could be why the sight of Frank Lutz, shooting the breeze in the middle of the day with a group of coked-out whores, set her blood on fire. Brian’s own form beside her was tense, muscles drawn tighter than a rubber band stretched to its limit. Reaching out without looking, she laid her hand on the jumping muscles of his bicep in silent admonition. The red-haired S.H.I.E.L.D. agent knew that her lover and partner had been struggling with Barney, trying to contain the monster the alter-ego became when free.

Their lovemaking as they waited for orders had been nearly animalistic. Brian had danced chaotically on the edge of too rough, though Natasha had said nothing. The lingering ache would leave her limping – if she felt like garnering a little unwarranted sympathy from her sisters and the other Grimm women – but the peace in him at completion had ultimately been worth it. Even if the very sight of Lutz had quickly destroyed it once again.

Taking a deep breath, he looked down at her with careful features. Lifting his hand to rest atop her own, he squeezed fondly. “You up for this?”

“Let me at ‘em,” she replied.

“All right then . . . you’re up. Good luck. And Tasha? Leave at least a tiny morsel for me, huh? I really want a chance to rip this guy apart.”

Going up on tiptoes to bit playfully at his lips, she promised, “You got it.”

Turning on her heels, she left her partner leaning back against the wall, coffee-colored eyes laser sharp as he nursed his beer. She could feel the way they burned through her clothes as they watched her saunter towards where the yeldak was practically molesting his shlyukhi on the other side of the club.

Adding a little extra sway to her strut for Brian’s benefit – she knew how much he loved to watch her hips move – she concentrated on getting into the right mindset for the job. Dropping effortlessly into Lutz’ lap, she forced her native accent as thick as she could make it as she drewled seductively, “Get lost, suki. Mr Lutz’s time has already been bought and paid for.”

The outcry from the rest of the women was immediate, though Lutz only waved them to silence with a gesture of his hand. His frown was tinged with too much alcohol to be truly suspicious even as he demanded, “By who?”

”Your friend, Mr Granger, has engaged my services for you . . . to repay you for everything you’ve done.”

The gleam in Frank Lutz’ eyes yanked at Natasha’s gag reflex as those beady eyes raked up and
down over her frame. “Well now . . . that’s a good man then.” Grinning at Natasha, he spread his hand across the bared skin of her thigh in a proprietary manner. “I guess I’m going to have change my opinion of the goody-two-shoes after this . . . gonna have to trust that Navan will always do right by a friend.”

Natasha’s smile was small and secretive as she considered how Henry Cole had “done right” by his so-called friend. It was unfortunate that Frank Lutz would go to his death without truly understanding that Henry Cole was a good man at the core of him . . . the kind of good man who would sell out a former friend to save lives and set things right.

Leaning forward, she murmured into the shell of his ear, “How about you and I get out of here . . . find somewhere with a little more . . . uyedimeniye, shall we say?”

There was a lustful greed in those eyes as he drawled, “God . . . that’s hot. What language is that?”

There was a seductive purr in her tone as she replied, “Russkiy . . . Ya iz Санкт-Петербурге.”

Natasha felt her skin crawl at the sound of his shameless groan as he humped his hips up against the back of her thighs. “God . . . it sounds so dirty. I heard Russian girls are kinky . . . are you kinky, sweetheart?”

Her smile was more of a smirk as she slid gracefully off his lap and offered him a hand up. “I guess you’re going to have to come with me to find out.” Bending to grip his lapel, very aware of how much cleavage her garment was flashing, she whimpered quietly, “Let’s go . . . I can’t wait to get you alone somewhere.”

Gifting her with a lecherous grin, he agreed, “Well then . . . show me the way home, honey.”

Turning her back to him, she led him away by the hand as she mused silently, “Bozhe moi . . . the sooner we get somewhere private so I can kill this govnoyed, the sooner I can take a shower. I wonder if I can talk Brian to making me a sandpaper loufa?”

Biting down on her lip at the thought of her lover, she looked up through her eyelashes to see Brian watching the pair carefully. His head dipped in a small smile, acknowledging the plan that they had laid out together, one eye slipping closed in a quick wink. Her smile in return was just on the fluffy side of adoring before she pulled their quarry past him and he was out of her line of sight.

He took her back to the apartment Cole had told her he was paying for, which was quite obviously on the rough side of town. His furniture consisted of a rickety bed, an meager entertainment center and a ramshackle armchair. Shoving him into it, she moved to straddle him, her hands coming up to capture his face as he moved to kiss her. “I don’t kiss on the first date, Mr. Lutz . . . no offense, but how do I know where you’ve been.”

The grin on his face was shameless as his hands trailed down her sides to grip at her hips. “God . . . ya are a hot one.” Just about then, his eyebrows furrowed and he asked, “What’s yer name, pretty girl? I don’t think you ever told me.”

Natasha smirked as she replied easily, “People call me Chernaya Vdova.”

“That’s an interesting name.”

“My handler picked it for me.” Winking at him lightly, she laughed, “It suits . . . I promise.”

His hands were tight on her hips as she used her fingers to build his arousal carefully. Twisting her ring around her finger, she engaged the needle on the underside with her thumb. Careful to keep it
from her own skin, she stroked her hands seductively over his shirt-clad biceps. “Take this off,” she ordered as she affected a breathless mien, giggling as his hands flew to fiddle with the buttons.

It was once he was shirtless and hauling her into his body that he demanded playfully, “So your name . . . what does it mean?”

Leaning forward, she scratched him with the poisoned needle on the ring as she whispered into his ear, “It means ‘Black Widow’.”

The paralytic on the ring was a fast acting one, and before he’d even processed the meaning of the name, his basic motor functions were already starting to shut down. His features were beginning to sag as the solution moved rapidly through his veins and left him without conscious control of his muscles. Shoving herself off of his lap, she moved to straighten her clothing briskly, at almost the same moment that Brian let himself into the tiny apartment behind her.

The agent offered his lover a trench coat, smirking at Lutz as Natasha wrenched it on and tied it tightly around her waist. Their mark was making grunting noises as he tried to say something, promptly the redhead to smirk. “I wouldn’t try to talk . . . I’ve dosed you with a poison called curare. It’s a powerful paralytic . . . and unless someone comes along with an antidote for you in the not too distant future, you will die of asphyxiation.”

Brian’s grin was vicious as he continued, “It’s just too bad that the doxy Detective Cole acquired for you left just before you suffered a fatal heart attack.”

At the name, realization dawned in Lutz’s eyes before he released a garbled howl of betrayal. Laughing cruelly, Brian crouched in front of the armchair as he explained, “That’s right, asshole; your friend set you up. And I can guarantee you that he will not lose a bit of sleep over it tonight.” His face twisted angrily as he hissed, “The detective you took a shot at? That was my little brother . . . and no matter my sins, there is one thing I will not allow . . . people fucking with my family. So enjoy what little remains of your pathetic life . . . no one is coming to save you.”

Standing, he placed a tender hand to the small of Natasha’s back. Brown eyes were soft and warm as they looked into disgusted green ones, asking gently, “Are you okay?”

“Yeah . . . nothing happened. But I need a scalding hot shower and at least a dozen deep-cleansing treatments. I feel like it’ll take me at least ten years to exfoliate enough skin from my body to lose the feel of his hands.” Shuddering, she moved to wrap herself into his arms. “Let’s just go . . . please? I just need to get out of here.”

Brian chuckled as he bent to press an adoring kiss to the curve of her temple. “How does a bubble bath with a handful of Epsom salts sound? And a massage . . . with maybe a little inappropriate touching? How does that sound?”

Natasha’s eyes were shining as she purred in response, “Only a little inappropriate touching? Why Brian . . . I think you may just be losing your touch.”

The growl he released pinged every single kink she had as he replied in a low rumble, “I’ll show you ‘losing my touch’ . . . I’ll ‘lose my touch’ all over the glorious backside of yours, Natalya . . . and when your ass is the color of my favorite of those red lipsticks that you wear, we’ll see whether or not you still think I’ve lost my touch.”

She groaned deep in her throat, her eyes rolling back in her head as she considered the picture he was painting. Smirking, she sashayed towards the door as she teased, “Promises promises, Agent Gamble. Let’s see you put your money where your mouth is.”
Brian grinned at the taunt, tossing a mocking farewell to the man dying behind him, “See ya around, Frankie-boy . . . enjoy that fire-and-brimstone in hell, huh? Cause I sure as hell don’t think you’re going anywhere else.” Waving over one shoulder, he laughed, “I’ll meet you there in another half-dozen decades or so; don’t wait up.”

Chapter End Notes

Translations:

(R) 'Yad Luchshiy Drug Devushki - Poison Is a Girl's Best Friend
(R) yeldak - horse's ball sack
(R) shlyukhi - whores
(R) suki - bitches
(R) uyedineniye - privacy, seclusion, solitude
(R) Russkiy - Russian
(R) Ya iz Санкт-Петербурге - I am from St. Petersburg (in both Romanized Russian and Cyrillic)
(R) Bozhe moi - Oh my God
(R) govnoyed - bastard
(R) Chernaya Vdova - Black Widow
Chapter Notes

Yay!!! New chapter is early!

Enjoy! Translations at the bottom.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter 152: Gossip & Zagreb

Having received confirmation that Brian and Natasha had eliminated their little problem, Marina had spread the word that “Girls Night In” was ON. Sappy movies were mandatory and salacious gossip was absolutely encouraged. There would be wine, beer and a myriad of other alcoholic refreshments, as well as chocolate by the boatload.
The Grimm men had been summarily banished from the house, a frenetic Will Grimm and shy newcomer Sam Braddock included. The eldest Grimm had protested, seeing as his own home office was much more comfortable than his office within Command; a sweet, knife-edged smile combined with a vicious glare from his partner had effectively chased the Colonel from the house. Bucky had abducted Clint to his own quarters; Brian had retreated to the shooting range; and Hansel had taken both Aaron and Sam back to the base housing he now shared with AD Maria Hill.

Satisfied with the state of affairs, Marina flopped gracelessly into her favorite armchair and grinned. “This meeting of the Grimm Family Women is now in session.” Waving her vodka at her sister, she teased fondly, “All right, Vika, take it away.”

The newly-minted Viktoriya Coulson blushed at the immediate attention of the other women, head ducking as Veronika piped up, “Please tell me that you have at least trakhal on that car you bought him?”

If the blond had been rosy before, she was practically scarlet now. Dropping her face into her palms, she confessed quietly, “On the hood . . . the night we got married.”

Each of the girls oohed and aahed, before Natasha asked teasingly, “And how does it handle?”

Maria snorted in question, “Are we still talking about the car? Or Phil?”

Each of the Russians – Vika included – announced simultaneously, “Both.” Waving away the answer, the red-haired spy demanded, “So!? Answer the question!”

“The car flies beautifully and he named her ‘Lola’, after some movie, ‘Run Lola Run’. Frankly I don’t get the joke.” Turning to Marina, Vika reached to touch her knee, “He said to tell Jason thank you for the modifications.”

“I’ll pass along the message; having just gotten moy sladkiy into his girlfriend’s room at the hospital, I have no desire to distract him out of it again.”

Marta’s tone was quiet, her awe at being included obvious, as she inquired, “How is Detective Shraeger? Did anyone tell you anything about her prognosis?”

“She’s gonna be fine. The bullet did bounce off a rib, so she’s feeling every breath she takes right now. But she’s all right . . . Jay is just feeling the need to smother her within an inch of her life.”

“Good for him . . . it’s about time that he let Sarah go,” Maria remarked, one of the only two women present in the room who had seen how bad he was hurting after her death.

“Amen to that,” was the quiet agreement from all of the women in the room, even those who hadn’t been there back then.

There was a silence for a long moment, before Nika snarked, “I still want an answer to Natalya’s question. How does Phil handle?”

“THAT is none of your business,” the blond Russian squeaked, horrified.

“Come on, Vika . . . what exactly did you think we were going to gossip about?” Natasha teased, lifting her own vodka to her lips as she winked slyly.

“Why can’t we talk about something else?”

“Because you are married . . . and the first of US to get married. We want details,” Nika laughed.
“Not to mention, I need to know if I’m supposed to threaten him or something,” Marina drawled lazily, swirling her drink within the confines of her glass.

The Amazon looked horrified, squealing indignantly, “Marishka!!!”

“What?! I like Phil . . . and he almost deserves you.” Glowering at the continuation of her scandalized look, the brunette protested, “I am your sister! It is my job to be judgmental of your man! And let’s be honest, you’re all judgmental of Misha!”

Maria smirked in agreement, though Vika protested vehemently, “We are NOT!”

“The Colonel is perfect!” the black-haired assassin agreed insistently.

A burst of laughter erupted from Maria, even as Marina’s lips twisted in dismayed amusement. “First of all, Misha is NOT perfect . . . I have the diamonds to prove it. Second of all, don’t tell him you think that . . . I don’t want to deal with the teasing from his brothers as a result.”

“Don’t you mean you don’t want to deal with Will’s ego as a result?”

“No. Will has an ego the size of a gnat. A legitimate boost would actually be helpful.”

S.H.I.E.L.D.’s Assistant Director rolled her eyes as she snorted, “I don’t understand the Colonel. He is easily one of the smartest men in the world and yet he persists in being the most self-effacing man I know. God, even Hans is in possession of one of the most obnoxious egos I know of when he’s good at something and he knows it.”

“That is because in Vati’s opinion, he is an ultra badass. And that is true . . . he is. However, in Misha’s opinion, he was built to be the way he is; he feels no pride in anything he had no hand in and didn’t directly earn. Hell, it took me years to convince him to be proud of his rank!” Knocking back her drink in one shot, Marina sighed, “He doesn’t even understand why moy dorogoy moy solnyshko look up to him. When someone mentions it, you can literally read the scrolling script across his forehead. ‘Does not compute’ . . . ‘Does not compute’ . . . It’s so chertov frustrating.”

“So why would his brothers tease him for something like that?”

“For exactly that reason; if you were to tell him you thought he was perfect, it would be another ‘does not compute’ moment. Send him into what I call ‘Super Agent/Hyperactive Analyst’ mode. And quite frankly, I hate it. His sleep cycle gets even more fucked up than usual.”

Maria chuckled wryly at the disgruntled scowl on her best friend’s face. “I’ve seen him stuck in SA/HA mode. He suddenly gets even more efficient and very punch-drunk. The practical jokes and pranks his brothers play on him get even more hilarious by the end.”

“Either way, I spend the next three months freaking out about his health, force feeding him Ambien and glucose tablets. So let’s not and say we did. Okay?” she asked rhetorically, before chirping cheerfully, “Okay!”

The virologist’s tone was timid – Marina’s eyes narrowed as she considered the younger woman, making a mental note to do something about that debilitating shyness of hers – as she insisted, “I like the Colonel. He’s a good man and Aaron adores him.”

“All of his brothers adore him. Getting Misha to accept that is a whole other kettle of fish.”

The AD chuckled as she commented lightly, “You know that’s why his guys would follow him anywhere, right? He’s a good officer because of his unwillingness to be a conceited asshole.”
The S.H.I.E.L.D. handler’s smile was small but very, very proud as she replied, “Yeah . . . I know.”

Meanwhile, Director Nicholas Fury was having a **VERY** bad day.

Currently, he was glaring at the two men seated across from his desk. The Secretary of Defense and IMF Mission Commander Swandeck seemed unmoved by his visible displeasure, prompting a low growl from the man. “To what do I owe the annoyance, gentlemen? I have an agency to run and no time for bureaucrats.”

“We are here regarding a top secret assignment for one of your top agents. We have need of his particular skills, heading up a task force in Croatia.”

“And why the hell would I give any of my agents over to head one of your task-forces? After all, Ethan Hunt may be a moron, but he is still one of your best agents . . . and yet you **continue** to disavow him every time he turns around.”

The Secretary of Defense frowned at the statement, removing his glasses and wiping the lenses clean. Replacing them, he replied arrogantly, “Frankly, you have no choice, Director Fury. Agent Brandt is not just one of your agents . . . he is also a Colonel in the United States Army. And as such, is under the direct supervision of the Department of Defense. I am here as a courtesy, Director. I do not need your acquiescence; I can compel him with or without your compliance.”

Fury withheld a growl only by sheer willpower, before sighing heavily. “All right . . . I shall inform Agent Brandt to assemble his team . . . “

Swandeck interrupted brusquely, “We have no need of any of your agents except Agent Brandt. We have a team already assembled, waiting for him to take command.”

Bursting into uncontrolled laughter, the one-eyed man smirked at the over-confident mission commander. “I don’t think I understand. Are you telling me that you’re taking just the commander of my best squad and leaving the rest of them here!? They are my **best** for a reason.”

Neither of the other two men were laughing, however, and Fury could already hear the rant that would result when Marina found out that Will Grimm was being deployed without her. Lifting one hand to his face, he pinched the bridge of his nose viciously as he muttered under his breath, “Oh fuck . . . this is going to end well.”

Everyone knew the minute that Marina Petrovka was informed of her partner’s solo assignment. It was hard not to know; the whole base heard her reaction to the news. Fury was still bracing himself when the Russian whirlwind came ripping into his office, demanding furiously, “There is no fucking way that Misha is going anywhere NEAR Croatia without me!! Are you kidding me⁉️”

“Marina . . . my hands are tied.”

“Then untie them . . . it’s Croatia!! Nothing good happens to Grimms in **Croatia**!!”

Smiling sadly at the woman, Fury shook his head. “I am, in fact, aware of the superstition that you and your boys subscribe to concerning the country. However, this isn’t S.H.I.E.L.D.’s call; this came down from the SecDef himself. The DOD is hauling Will there, on behalf of the Impossible Missions Force.”

The Russian’s eyes narrowed angrily as she hissed, “The IMF⁉️ You’re letting the DOD poach my lover for the IMF⁉️ Oh sure . . . let’s just get Misha killed while we’re at it! Or worse, **DISAVOWED**!”
The former General’s one visible eye crinkled in amusement as he teased, “I’m sure there is a Harry Potter joke in there somewhere.”

The woman’s glare could have melted icecaps, as she hissed, “Do I look like I’m in a joking mood, Nick?”

There was a heavy sigh as the man conceded heavily, “No, you do not.” Shaking his head, he railroaded over whatever she would have said next. “That, however, does not change the fact of the matter. Agent Brandt is being temporarily reassigned. There is nothing you, nor I, can do about it. The best thing to do for the moment is to spend what time you can with him before he’s deployed then beat the ever-living shit out of the baby agents while you wait to hear news.” Standing from his chair, he came to wrap his hands gently around her biceps as he swore, “I tried to get you deployed with him, Marina, I swear it. I know how protective you are of Will and I would never have let him go alone if I could have avoided it. Unfortunately the Secretary is not being particularly sympathetic to my argument.”

The director could almost hear the handler’s jaw grinding as she hissed furiously, “God I hate the IMF.”

Smirking lightly in acknowledgment, Nick agreed, “Join the club.”

Chocolate eyes slipped closed as Marina began to take deep breaths to try and calm the rage building like a cancer in her heart. When they opened again, they were flashing like lightning as she vowed, “If anything happens to him, Nick . . . I will not be held responsible for my actions. Understood?”

One corner of his mouth tilted upwards in unspoken agreement, before the man referred to most frequently as “God” watched her round on her heel and storm out again. Chuckling heavily, he took a moment to feel sorry for the junior agents that would be forced to accommodate her wrath, before allowing himself the opportunity to enjoy the thought. “Poor bastards . . . they have no idea what kind of hell is about to rain down on their heads.”

A long, torturous week later, Marina Ivanovna Petrovka’s fearsome legend had expanded through word of mouth . . . and Croatia had become the closest thing to hell in a hand basket for one William Michael Grimm.

Chapter End Notes

Translations:

(R) trakhal - fucked (as in fucked like bunnies)
(R) moy sladkiy - my honey (sladkiy is Marina's nickname for Jason Grimm)
(G) Vati - Dad (Marina's nickname for Hansel)
(R) moy dorogoy i moy solnyshko - my darling and my sunshine (Marina is referring to Clint and Aaron Grimm respectively.
(R) chertov - fucking (as in fuckity, fuck fuck fuck :D)
Partners First . . . Partners Always

Chapter Notes

Hey! Lookit this! New Chapter ALREADY!!! Enjoy!

Translations at the bottom, as always.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter 153: Partners First . . . Partners Always

When Marina finally received some kind of news about her lover, she was in the middle of beating a snot-nosed baby agent into the training mat. Four of her Misfits – Bucky, Sam, Clint and Aaron – were standing off to the side, with Sam’s eyes wide with awe as the other three cheered her on in exuberant Russian. The former Howling Commando had been given possession of her phone, with orders to inform her if it so much as beeped. So when the phone began to ring, it was with concern
that the ocean-eyed man pulled it from his pocket with a low call of her name.

Spinning on her heel, she put the heel of her other foot low into the boy’s gut and dropped him wheezing onto the mat. Holding stance for another moment to make sure he stayed down, the Russian accepted the towel Aaron tossed her way as she moved to take the cell from her mentor. Eyes narrowing at the display, she considered what it could mean that Nick Fury was calling her cell less than a week after Will had been dispatched, without any backup whatsoever, to Croatia. Taking a deep breath, she swiped her thumb over the display and answered briskly, “This is Petrovka.”

“Agent Petrovka . . . pack your shit. There’s a Quinjet waiting on the tarmac to take you to Zagreb.”

“Zagreb? But I thought SecDef . . .” she questioned in confusion, jaw tightening as Nick interrupted forcibly, “I don’t give a damn about SecDef right now . . . Brandt needs you there, so you’re going. You have a problem with that?”

Her eyes narrowed at the harried tone under his calm and she knew instantly that whatever had happened to her partner was bad. “No sir . . . ETA with the airport is five minutes.”

“Good . . . call me when you hit the ground. And Marina?”

“Yeah Nick?”

There was a pause, before he spoke again. “If something were to happen to SecDef once you and Brandt were back on American soil, I don’t think I would particularly mourn for him.”

And it was about then that Marina knew that whatever had happened wasn’t just bad . . . it was fucking worse. Her eyes hardened as she glared at the wall, growling out, “Understood sir.” Hanging up the phone, already moving to the door of the gym, she muttered under her breath, “Slava Bogu for go-bags.”

The six hours it took the Quinjet to get to Zagreb, Croatia, were agonizing, though the five minute drive by taxi to the hotel was almost worse. She arrived to see the place crawling with DOD assests and American Special Forces. Striding to the desk, she gave the cowed young man a brilliant smile as she greeted, “Hi . . . I’m looking for a William Brandt? I believe he has a room at this hotel?”

He stammered awkwardly for a moment, before finally managing to spit out in halting English, “I am sorry, gospođa, I am not authorized to give out that information to anyone who is not already a patron here.”

Drawing her sidearm and laying it carefully on the counter in front of her, she could feel her smile turn to a vicious smirk as she watched his eyes widen in fright at the sight of it. “Maybe I didn’t make myself clear. I am his wife and I need to know what room he is in. Right now.”

Blinking a couple of times, obviously debating internally on whether to take her at her word or not, he took one more look at the gun and rattled off the room number. Holstering her weapon once again, she nodded briskly with a chirped, “Thank you!”

Fortunately, the hotel was old and decrepit and picking the lock was kind of like taking candy from a very inept child. She walked cautiously into the room, fully expecting to have her partner’s gun in her face in less than a second. Instead, she found Will seated on the edge of the bed, attired in a dirty pair of fatigue pants and a very thin white undershirt, with his head in his hands. His hair was standing on end as though he had spent more than a few of the last days shoving his fingers through it, his shoulders hunched under some terrible weight that hadn’t been there the day he’d left her arms less than a week ago.
Taking a deep breath, she was encouraged to see that the sound finally garnered a reaction; almost immediately, she was staring down the barrel of a Glock 9mm pistol, her lover’s eyes widening imperceptibly as the sight of her registered. “Samaya malen’kaya?”

She said nothing for a long moment, before announcing into the silence of the room, “You look like you could use a cigarette, a stiff drink and a good fuck . . . in that order.”

His laughter was dark and bitter as it barked from him unwillingly. “Are you offering to do something about that?”

Setting down her overnight bag on the table, she pulled a pack of Lucky Strikes and a lighter from the side pocket, offering them to him silently. When he took them, she went back to rummage through her bag for an unopened bottle of Glenfiddich whiskey and a pair of highball glasses. Pouring at least four fingers of whiskey into the bottom of the glass, she turned to offer it to him. He was still staring at the pack, thumb rubbing reverently over the brand name on the front of the cardboard. “You can’t get ‘Strikes in the States anymore. They’re my favorite brand.”

Her smile was sad at the awed tone of his voice, replying lightly, “I know . . . that’s why I picked up a pack at the airport. Nick made it sound like whatever had happened was bad.”

His snort was brittle and wounded, as he muttered viciously, “Understatement of the century.”

Gesturing towards him with the glass, she ordered firmly, “Drink this.”

He took it from her, knocking back at least half, before setting it aside to fish out a cigarette and light it easily. He took several deep drags before holding the smoke in his lungs for a long moment, as he watched his beloved Marishka shed her trench coat to the floor. The scarlet color of the wrap-dress she wore complimented her pale skin tone perfectly, though the Colonel didn’t really get to admire the contrast for very long. Marina reached for the knot at her hip, pulling it lose so that it too fell open around her, sliding down her arms to puddle on the floor. Now half-naked, she at last stood before him in only a pair of crimson side-tie panties with a matching bra that was little more than a large bow over her breasts. Blowing out the lungful of smoke, he gave her a more genuine smile as he insisted, “God . . . it’s good to see you.”

Moving to straddle his lap, she cupped his cheeks in her palms as she breathed against his lips, “I know.”

His eyes slipped half-closed at her nearness, reveling in the scent of her familiar perfume and the well-known silk of her skin. Ducking his forehead against her lips, he murmured wretchedly, “Marina, I . . .”

Pressing one finger to his lips, she shook her head firmly. “Later. First, you need some sleep . . . you look like hell, moy lyubimov.”

“Hold on a second . . . I got my cigarette and my stiff drink. What about my good fuck?” he asked dryly.

Chuckling, and more than a little relieved that he was able to tease her, she laughed, “Frankly Mishka, I don’t think you could stay awake long enough to make it worth my while. Come on . . . sleep first, fantastic sex later.”

“You promise?” he asked, as she busied her fingers with stripping him efficiently of his clothes.

Chocolate eyes were adoring as she vowed, “I promise.”
Those multi-colored eyes of his were a dark grey, tortured by what he had seen and whatever it was that had happened since he’d been gone. Marina pretended not to see, bustling about the room as she prepared them both for sleep. Finally, once he was bare to the skin and tucked comfortably into bed, Marina turned to toss his filthy fatigues into the fireplace. Will jackknifed upwards as he protested, “Wait!”

Marina only glanced back over her shoulder as she tossed the matches in, the fabric catching like tinder as the fire blazed merrily. “Those clothes are filthy and utterly destroyed. I brought you spares; you can manage without these.”

The Colonel’s lips curved upwards slightly as he shook his head in bemusement. The Russian waited for him to speak, before tossing in a few logs to keep the blaze burning brightly and pushing herself to her feet. Crossing to her bag, she rummaged in its depths once more in pursuit of one last bit to ease Will into whatever kind of sleep he could manage. Finally, her fingers brushed against fragile pages and a heavy leather spine, digits closing around it reflexively as she pulled it from the depths. The analyst frowned at the sight of the familiar tome as she carried the book back to the bed, sliding under the covers beside him and letting him curl up against her side. “That’s your fairy tale book . . . the one you used to read to the boys.”

Marina’s only reply was an affirming hum as she began to flip pages in search of one in specific. Seeing that she had no intentions of answering him, he reached up to lay his hand over one page to pause her in her efforts. “Marina . . . I don’t have a story in that book. I never have.”

One corner of her lips curved upward sadly as she looked down at where he lay cuddled up against her ribs, the absent fingers of her free hand delicate in the wisps of his hair as she drew designs against his scalp. There was confusion in his eyes as he looked up at her, promptly her to smile at him fondly and bend awkwardly to capture his mouth in a sweet but piercing kiss. “Just because I have never read to you from this book, Misha, does not mean that there is not a story for you in it. Now hush . . . close your eyes and get some rest . . . I’ll still be here when you wake up.”

The deep breath he took then moved her at least as easily as it moved him, before he nodded against her abdomen and cuddled just that little bit closer. Returning her attention back to the book, she continued to sketch her fingers across his topknot as she read the title aloud in a calm and soothing tone. “The Steadfast Tin Soldier . . . by Hans Christian Anderson.

“There were once five-and-twenty tin soldiers. They were all brothers, born of the same old tin spoon. They shouldered their muskets and looked straight ahead of them, splendid in their uniforms, all red and blue. The very first thing in the world that they heard was, ‘Tin soldiers!’ A small boy had shouted it and clapped his hands as the lid was lifted off their box on his birthday. The boy immediately set them up on the table. All the soldiers looked exactly alike . . . except one. He looked a little different as he had been cast last of all. The tin was short, so he had only one leg. But there he stood, as steady on one leg as any of the other soldiers on their two. But just you wait and see; he will be the most remarkable one.”

Initially caught off guard at the story, it was a moment before a feeling of lightness stole over the Colonel and he could feel a corresponding smile began to tug at his lips. Allowing his eyes to fall closed, he pressed his nose between the indentations of her ribs and just listened to her read. Almost before he even realized it, he was asleep.

Marina knew the moment he’d fallen asleep, as his body suddenly became dead-weight against her. Continuing to read quietly, she flipped through the story of the resilient little soldier who fell in love with a beautiful paper ballerina. His adventures were vivid in detail, as he left his familiar world and experiences the cruelties of the outside, before at last being reunited with his beloved. The tale ended...
tragically, with both toys being lost at the hands of fire and careless children.

When the story was over, the Russian handler stretched carefully to lay the book on the nightstand and turn off the light. Her fingers continued to stroke through her lover’s hair, as she prepared to spend a wakeful night chasing nightmares. Allowing her eyes to slip closed, she tilted her head to rest her chin upon his temple and began to whisper a silent prayer against his skin, once again appealing for the grace of a god she found it hard to believe in. The words she spoke were in quiet Russian, her whole frame hopeful that her partner could hear and would be comforted by them.

“Our Father who art in Heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy Kingdom come, thy Work be done . . . on Earth as it is in Heaven. I know that I am not one who has any right to your grace or your favor; my hands are unclean and I hold the weight of lives on my conscience. But once again, I come to you a penitent supplicant and beg of you my heart’s purest desire . . . true peace and dreamless rest for the man I love best in this world.”

Taking a deep breath, the former assassin considered her wish silently, before picking up the plea again. “Misha is a good man . . . the very best of men and better than a killer like me will ever deserve. Therefore, it is my fervent wish that I can find the words to ease his heartache over what has happened here. Please, help me to know what to say to help him heal. Help me to find the strength to be strong while he is weakened by his fear. Help me to combat his grief with both truth and stillness.”

Bending her head further, she rested her cheek against his hair as she murmured one last request, “Help me to love him enough to stay when he tries to send me from him . . . no matter what prison his pain creates. I love him dearly and would not give him up for the world. Give me serenity in the face of his anger and forgiveness in the face of unkind rage.”

Breathing slowly, she considered the content of her plea and knew that there was nothing else she could request. The absence of each of those things would be the best case scenario; and Marina Ivanovna Petrovka had learned long ago to never expect the best case scenario. Reaching up carefully she crossed herself slowly, as she continued to lay flat on her back beside her lover, her tone a reverent whisper as she closed her prayer, “In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost . . . Amen.”

Will’s voice was a quiet, sleepy reply of, “Amen.”

Rolling her eyes lightly, she smirked fondly as she admonished quietly, “Sleep, moy vozlyublenny . . . our problems, as well as our joys, will still be here when you wake.”

“I better get my good fuck,” he scolded quietly, already three-quarters of the way back into Morpheus’ Land of Dreams.

Chuckling at his persistenrence, she vowed firmly, “You will . . . I swear it.”

“Good . . .” he purred sleepily, nuzzling his nose into her briefly, before insisting, “It’s late, Marishka . . . go to sleep.”

Shaking her head, Marina insisted quietly, “I can’t . . . who else is going to watch over you, if I fall asleep?”

A Will-style smirk lifted his lips lazily as he drawled, “That sounds vaguely creepy. Should I be worried that you intend to molest me in my sleep?”

“I promise you, Mishka . . . if I’m going to be molesting you, you’re going to be awake, participating
and enjoying every second.”

A true grin stretched the corners of his smirk as he teased, quoting Firefly lazily, “Are you always this sentimental?”

“I had a good day.”

“What’s so good about it?”

“I’m with you.”

“That’s not much.”

Bowing her head, she whispered in his ear as he tripped further towards sleep, “It’s always been enough for me. Spi spokoyno, lyubov’ moya . . . we’ll talk when you wake up.”

Of course, she would have been much happier if the first thing out of his mouth the next morning was something other than what it was. He woke up, clear-eyed and solemn, eyes fixed on the wall opposite, prompting Marina to roll towards him and look him firmly in the eyes. Neither of them said nothing – no good mornings, no I love yous, only the silent intermingling of breaths as they watched each other – before at last the S.H.I.E.L.D. handler broke the stillness with a desperate plea. “Misha . . . tell me.”

He stared at her, eyes shading from haunted grey to icy blue, before announcing brutally, “Our civilian . . . the asset’s wife we were protecting . . . she’s dead . . .” here he paused again, eyes slipping closed wretchedly as he continued, “. . . and I’m responsible.”

Chapter End Notes

Translations:
(Russian) Slava Bogu - Thank God
(Croatian) gospođa - ma'am
(Russian) samaya malen'kaya - my little one (Will's most common nickname for Marina)
(Russian) Misha, a dimunitive form of Mikhail/Michael (Marina's most common nickname for Will)
(Russian) moy lyubimov - my love
(Russian) moy vozlyublennyy - my beloved (one of Marina's nicknames for Will)
(Russian) Spi spokoyno, lyubov’ moy - Sleep well, my love

(Also, the lingerie set that Marina is wearing is a thing. BlueBella Tatiana Open Cup Bra with Matching Side Tie Panties. Feel free to paste the link and take a look. They're very pretty and totally sexy. http://m.figleaves.com/uk/product/BBA-23117/Tatiana-Open-Cup-Bra-And-Tie-Side-Brief-Set/?productColourId=729799 )
Chapter Notes

Sorry guys, this chapter was heartbreaking for me. I rewrote it like three times, before Will finally got to say what he wanted to say, the way he wanted it said. I hope you enjoy this . . . it's a good chapter.

As always, translations are at the end of the chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter 154: The Thing About Croatia . . .

Marina frowned at his declaration, protesting instantly, “Misha . . . you are not singularly responsible for every thing that goes wrong on every op ever. Regardless of what General Ross and the rest of the ublyudki at the Hoover Base expected of you, you are not perfect . . . you are every bit as human

Partners, Lovers, Soulmates . . .

To the world you may be only one person, but to one person, you may be the world.
- Heather Cortez
as the rest of the men and women inhabiting this oblazhalsya mir.”

Flopping backwards onto his back, he glared at the ceiling as he insisted tightly, “I was built to be better than human . . . I don’t have the luxury of saying, ‘It’s okay, I’m human’, when I fuck up.”

Biting down on her lip for a moment, she watched him for a moment, before murmuring fondly, “Misha . . . that reasoning is a path of destruction . . . the only place it will lead you is to pain and heartache. Please . . . don’t let Ross get into your head like that. He’s not worth your self-recrimination.”

Throwing himself from the bed, he barked viciously, “And what about the man whose wife is dead on my watch!? Is HE worth my so-called self-recrimination!?”

Sitting up, she watched him pace back and forth and seemed to know that the true cause of his distress was not the death of the civilian woman he had been assigned to protect; there was too much guilt in his demeanor for that to be the case. Will Grimm was a lifelong soldier, and both of them had seen more than their fair share of colossal cluster-fucks in their careers. Sometimes people died, and sometimes they weren’t always just soldiers; civilian casualties happened . . . rarely, but the fact remained. She had never seen the death of a civilian throw him this far off of his equilibrium, however. And it was that foreknowledge that she came to the realization that his pain came from a much deeper place. Taking a guess at it, and knowing the rage she was risking if she guessed wrong, she prodded lightly at the newly festering wound. “If you could have done even one thing differently . . . would you have?”

Bowing his head into his hands, he sagged in on himself as he replied, “Yes . . .” There wasn’t even a second’s pause, before he shook his head and insisted, “. . . no . . . maybe? . . . I don’t know . . .”

Holding out one hand to him, she coaxed him tenderly back onto the bed beside her. “Come sit with me, moy vozlyublennyy . . . start at the beginning . . . tell me everything.”

Staring at her for a long moment, he finally moved to sit beside her on the bed, his hand clasped around hers in a death grip. Taking a deep breath to calm his raging emotions, he lifted their hands to his lips and pressed a fervent kiss to the inside of his partner’s wrist. Finally, he straightened and began to speak. “It should have been the easiest assignment in the history of the world. I mean seriously, I had done just this sort of mission a million times with no problems whatsoever. And usually, it’s cake. But this time . . . well, to be honest, things starting going wrong from the moment I stepped off the plane. The IMF had debriefed me en route. It was pretty straightforward; a protection detail, nothing that I hadn’t done before. I have a certain amount of luck with these kinds of assignments, so when the IMF approached SecDef about it, I was the first person on his short list.

“I had just arrived on base and deplaned . . . I wasn’t even past the first five minutes of being on the ground. It literally took me five minutes to walk into the hanger bay where I was supposed to meet the team SecDef had put together and I walked headlong into a full out brawl between two of my team. Apparently, there was some lingering resentment over some chick they’d both fucked at some point in the last fifteen years and the bad blood had yet to flush out of either of them.” There was a self-deprecating huff of air as he reached up to rub at the back of his neck, before continuing “I got a little bruised breaking it up, but nothing serious . . . still, usually that’s when I know an assignment is going to give me a shitload of gray hair by the end. I have never lost it at a team like that. By the time I had finished ranting about decorum and discipline and exactly what I would do to them if they fucked up on my watch, I was fairly certain that they could at least be professional if nothing else.”

“Please tell me there were threats of massive amounts of blood and pain. Because seriously? In-fighting over a woman while on mission? What the literal hell? Talk about unprofessional!” Marina
interrupted furiously, a fierce scowl on her face. Will could practically see the gears turning behind her eyes as his partner pondered the kind of mayhem she personally would have unleashed if she’d been the one to walk into the situation he had.

As it was, the Colonel only smiled at her fury as he promised, “I may have threatened to send the Chernaya Vdova and the Skopa after them if they didn’t shape the fuck up. Apparently, Brian and Natasha’s reputations are well known and widely feared enough that this was sufficient.”

“Good . . . chetovy pridurki.”

Rolling his eyes at her ferocity, the Colonel only patted her clenched hand fondly and continued to recount what had happened. “Anyway, considering my first impression of this so-called ‘crack team’, I knew better than to expect great things from them. Fortunately, I had a day to organize and get everything settled before our targets arrived.” Snorting lightly, he insisted, “It took 24 hours for each and every one of those pricks to hate my guts. I have never run a team to ground like that before. But at least their thoughts of petty jealousy were crushed by their exhaustion by the time we really got to work.”

Marina’s tone was exasperated and long suffering as she insisted callously, “As it should be!”

Will’s lips curved into a small smile as he scolded fondly, “Marishka . . .” The woman’s only response was a careless shrug as she waved him on with his story. “Anyway, a couple days in, I received intel from IMF’s counter-terrorism unit that a Serbian hit squad was zeroing in the male asset. According to what I was told, he’s some kind of Super-Agent for the IMF; hence, why the two require covert security when they take a vacation. Apparently, the hit squad had it in for him and they were planning some kind of retribution for an operation he had been on recently. At least that was my guess . . . everything Ops could tell me was vague and a whole lot convoluted.”

“Well that’s damnably comforting,” the Russian muttered caustically, before ducking her head under her lover’s glare. “All right . . . I’m shutting up! You were saying . . .”

“They say that forewarned is forearmed, right? Obviously I knew what was coming so I made adjustments to compensate. I rearranged watch schedules . . . switched partners around . . . made sure that I had all the bases covered. There was no reason to believe that this new intel would in anyway negatively affect our mission.”

Flopping backwards on the bed, Will was quiet for a long moment, before he muttered bitterly, “At least it shouldn’t have.” Seeing the guilt building under his stoic façade once more, Marina sprawled out besides him and cuddled close, her head tucked under his chin familiarly. For a moment, he was motionless, before his arms came up to wrap around her and hold her close to him for a long moment. “Marishka . . . I don’t know why, but that intel . . . it nagged at me. It didn’t matter what I tried, I couldn’t let it go . . . some part of me just kept going back to it.” Pressing his lips to her forehead, the analyst paused again, before continued, “I just kept thinking that I should find someway to tell him what I knew . . . someway to tell him what was coming for him. And even as I struggled with how to tell him, I knew I couldn’t tell him. Orders are orders . . . and I had orders not to break cover no matter what the reason was.”

The two were silent for a long time, Marina’s fingers drawing absently over the indentations of his abdomen as they laid there together. When her lover spoke again, the guilt had once again consumed him as he choked out his next words, “I should have found someway to warn him . . . I should have done something to let him know . . .”

At that confession, Marina vaulted upwards, rounding on him furiously, “Done what?! Break protocol? Disobey orders?! Mishka, you know as well as I do that the Brass . . . the IMF . . . hell
anyone with any stake at all in this op would have hauled you up before a review board so fast your head would still be swimming by the time you turned 80.” Shaking her head furiously, she insisted vehemently, “No way . . . when in doubt, we follow protocol. Every soldier learns that in basic training. Hell, YOU learned that before you were even old enough to talk!”

Will’s lifeless eyes were locked on the ceiling, his tone completely emotionless as he replied, “And because I was so busy following protocol, that woman is dead.”

Marina grabbed his shoulder and shook him hard, forcing him to look at her. “People die in this business, Misha, everyday . . . through no fault of yours. It sucks, but it happens. Their deaths are NOT your fault. No matter how much we want to, we can’t save everyone.”

Will rolled his eyes as he slumped against the wall, as he muttered petulantly, “You have to say that, because you’re my girlfriend.”

The Russian’s lips pursed as she reminded him dryly, “No . . . I actually ‘have to say that’, because you are currently being irrational and I am your XO; that’s my job.” Folding her arms over her chest, she continued, “Being your girlfriend is not really as important as that right now.”

It was a credit to Will’s good sense that he said nothing in response and simply continued recounting the events of the last week. “About three days later, the man finally left their hotel room. Prior to that moment, the assignment since the targets had arrived was a cakewalk. The couple spent the majority of their time in their hotel room . . . they received their meals through room service . . . housekeeping delivered fresh towels . . . the concierge arranged for anything that they wanted. Frankly, except for the fact that I had read their files, I would have insisted that they were honeymooners.” Rolling his head back to stare up at the ceiling once again, he sighed heavily as he confessed, “When he left his room, I was on watch . . . along with the two idiocy that were fighting that very first day.”

“You’d partnered them together?”

“I have always said that the easiest way to work out differences is proximity and accessibility. To date, it’s worked out to my benefit. I think this is the first time that that theory has ever come back to bite me in the ass. Though, not through any fault of their own.” Blowing air through his lips, he rubbed tiredly at his eyes as he recounted, “He was dressed to go running, and I had already planned to leave the surveillance work to the two of them and go for a run myself so I was already dressed for it. Besides as team leader, it was my responsibility to follow the asset. I left the other two to keep an eye on the wife, with a few well-placed threats to remind them of what I would do to their individual careers if I found out that they spent the time focusing on their ‘girl problems’ and not on their jobs.

“Even now, I can’t say if leaving them to watch over her was a good idea or if it was a bad idea. Either the man is a machine, or I need to get out from behind my desk more often.”

“Mishka, moy vozlyublennyy, you’re neither fat nor slow, so I’m going to go with him being a machine,” she teased, her nose wrinkling and earning the first real laugh she’d heard since she’d arrived.

“’L’stets, (Flatterer,)” he replied in kind, throwing the pillow at her fondly. The action earned a playful scowl and a saucy wink, as she caught the missile and threw it back at him once again. “Do you want to hear this or not?”

Rolling her eyes, she sighed heavily as she confessed, “Frankly, I prefer the sound of your laughter. It has been noticeably absent for the last twelve hours.” Will’s cheeks went rosy at the comment, before she sighed and continued with her thought, “However, that being said, yes I do want to hear this. Go on.”
He snorted, lips curving upwards into a smirk, before he frowned once again. “You know as well as I do, the Cahills were genetically enhanced to be physically superior over the average human being. Even field agents at S.H.I.E.L.D don’t usually have the kind of speed or endurance my brothers and I have at long distances. After a certain point, though, even I was having a hard time keeping up with him. He would have left the two of them in the dust without even breaking a sweat. However, if they had been following him then I would have been watching over her and maybe things would have ended differently. As it was, we were gone from the hotel for a little over an hour.”

The S.H.I.E.L.D. handler frowned at the information, holding up one hand to stall whatever he had been about to say next. “An hour long run? That’s excessive . . . even for a field agent. I wonder what he was trying to avoid?”

“Disagreement with the wife? Phone call with the in-laws? Cramp from too much sex?” here Marina smirked a little, before Will shrugged carelessly, “To be honest, I have no idea. All I know is that I didn’t realize anything was wrong when we first arrived back at the hotel. Not until I found my guys unconscious where I’d left them and the agent’s wife gone.” Slumping onto the edge of the bed, Will shoved his fingers back through his hair, shuddering at something only he could hear, “The sound that man made when he realized that someone had taken his wife? That sound will haunt me for the rest of my life, Marishka . . . I have never heard a sound like that one before. And I hope to God that I will never hear it again.” Taking a deep breath, he dropped his face into his hands. When he spoke again, his voice was muffled as he confessed, “They found what was left of her body three days after she disappeared. And yesterday, I was being debriefed by the Secretary of Defense when he received the phone call that the agent, whose wife I had failed to protect, had been arrested for killing six Serbian nationals in cold blood . . . an unsanctioned hit. I don’t think I need to tell you that he was immediately disavowed. He will spend the rest of his life in a foreign prison, and no one will even care.”

Dropping to her knees in front of him, Marina’s hands came up to cup around his own, their fingers threading in the short strands of hair at his temples. Lifting her chin, she nuzzled against him affectionately, tangling her lips easily with his. After a momentary eternity, she pulled back and asked him again, “If you could have done even one thing different, Misha . . . would you have done it?”

His eyes were already closed, but Marina could see the muscle around them squeezing them just that little bit tighter as he considered the question. Finally, he breathed in a broken voice, “No . . . God, Marina, even knowing what I know, I wouldn’t have done anything differently. What kind of person does that make me?”

Marina’s arms came around his neck as she pulled him into her body, feeling him bury his face into the curve of her throat as he once again began to sob. Her fingers were tender in the strands of his hair as she replied honestly, “The person I love . . . come hell or high water . . . no matter what, I will always love you.”

Chapter End Notes

Translations:

(R) ublyudki - bastards
(R) oblozhalsya mir - fucked-up world
(R) moy vozlyublenny - my beloved (one of Marina's more common nicknames for
Will
(E) SecDef - shorthand/slang term referring to the Secretary of Defense
(R) Chernaya Vdova - Black Widow (the codename for Natasha Romanoff, given to her by the Red Room and the KGB)
(R) Skopa - Osprey (Brian Grimm's S.H.I.E.L.D. codename)
(R) chertovy pridurki - fucking assholes
(R) Misha/MIshka - diminutive version of Michael/Mikhail (Marina's most common nickname for Will; his middle name is Michael and Marina is the only one who uses this nickname)
(R) idiots - plural for idiots
(R) L'stets - flatterer (commonly used by both Will and Marina, as neither is very good at taking compliments)
Chapter 155: Decisions

If you asked him, Owen Elliot would swear that he knew his former CO better than almost anyone . . . the obvious exception of Marina Ivanovna Petrovka not withstanding. After all, Colonel William Grimm had been more than his commanding officer; they had been colleagues and friends for years. Based on the way the Spec Ops soldier clung to his partner’s hand and kept those quicksilver eyes of his eyes on the ground as the two strode from the inside of the Quinjet that Director Fury had sent to collect them from Zagreb, Croatia . . . whatever had happened, it was bad. And whenever things got that bad before, there had always been only one thing to do; get well and truly drunk.

Marina’s eyes were confused then relieved as she caught sight of Owen seated behind the wheel of their ancient Army Jeep. Smiling at her relief, he nodded in answer to her silent question. Watching as she tugged an unresisting Will along beside her, she greeted the former Division asset cheerfully, “Up to no good again, Lucky?”

He gave her a cheeky grin, cornflower eyes firmly locked on his friend’s pale features. “Always, Boss-Lady.” Turning his attention onto the other man, he greeted calmly, “How are you, Boss?”

The Colonel’s smile was tired as he replied, “You know.”

It wasn’t a question and Owen refused to treat it like one. Shrugging one shoulder lazily, he agreed casually, “I know enough. So I reiterate . . . how are you, Boss?”

Those eyes slipped closed as he took a deep breath, taking the offer of a chance to evaluate, before answering honestly, “It’s been a long week, Luck.” Looking around, he finally took notice of the obvious absence of his brothers and inquired, “Where’s the boys?”

“They’re at home . . . I figured that the best thing to do for you right now was not to let them
smother you . . . though I’m gonna be honest, it was almost a near thing with your Dad. That man is stubborn when he’s of a mind to be. He’s worried about you though . . . they all are.”

One corner of his lips curved upwards as he promised, “I’ll be all right. I need some sleep, in my own bed, and I still haven’t gotten my good fuck, but I’ll be all right.”

Owen chuckled at the look on Marina’s face, her lips quirked into an amused frown, “Priorities, Misha . . . SecDef has never been a particularly patient man.”

Almost in one voice, all three of the Spec Ops soldiers –current and former – muttered viciously, “Asshole.”

Offering his partner a hand into the backseat of the Jeep, Will waited for her to situate herself comfortably before hauling himself into the passenger seat. Dropping his head back against the seat rest, he could feel Owen and Marina’s eyes on him, both waiting for orders from the man who had been their commanding officer for as long as either of them had been soldiers. There was a long pause, before he smirked and insisted, “Let’s go get drunk.”

Owen’s grin was there and gone again before he agreed cheerfully, “Whatever you want, Boss-man.”

The younger man gunned the engine and tore off the tarmac, manipulating the Jeep into a recklessly high speed effortlessly. The wind – and the base gate – rushing past caused a burst of joyous laughter from Marina, the woman pushing herself to stand against the crossbeam, arms out behind her and face tilted into the wind. The Cleaner watched in the rearview as the Colonel reached up to thread a finger in one of her belt loops, his own laughter mixing with his partner’s comfortably. Shifting gears, Owen manipulated the car effortlessly through the increasingly heavy traffic, trying to get as far from the base as was possible.

It wasn’t long before he pulled up outside what was clearly a roadhouse-style dive bar. Parking efficiently, he swung out from the driver’s seat with a grin. “The best place to get trashed in the area. Promise.”

Will chuckled as he clapped the younger man on the shoulder, his other arm slung comfortably over Marina’s shoulders. “I think I should be worried that you know that. I’m fairly certain that you’re not supposed to drink.”

“I’m pretty sure that today is a good reason for an exception,” Owen reminded him lightly, reaching to haul open the door and usher the other two inside.

Stepping into the resulting gloom, Marina had to blink a few times in order to reconcile her eyes with what she was seeing. There were plank tables scattered haphazardly across the floor, with tacky neon signs decorating every available inch of wall. “Damn . . . what the hell is this place?”

“It’s called ‘homey’, Boss-lady. Personally, I like it . . . it’s my kind of place.”

The Russian snorted lightly, eyes rolling as she muttered, “Of course it is . . . it’s about as classless as bars get.”

Will chuckled lightly, insisting, “Frankly I don’t care what the hell it is. As long as the whiskey is good and the beers keep coming.”

Cornflower blue locked on chocolate brown, the two junior officers making a silent vow to keep an eye on their CO that night. Accepting Will’s offered AmEx Black card, Owen gestured the couple
towards a table in the corner, before moving quickly to the bar. Tossing the card onto the counter, he waved the bartender over. “I need a round of your local drafts, with a pair of whiskeys, neat. Glenfiddich if you have it, and if not your best Bourbon.”

The young man cocked an eyebrow, before turning to check the wall of alcohols he had in stock. “I don’t have Glenfiddich, but I have Yellow Rose Outlaw. It’s expensive, but it’s worth it. Caramel and vanilla . . . sweet and rich . . . tastes kinda like a really good dessert.”

Glancing over his shoulder at where the Power Couple of the Brothers Grimm were sitting, he considered Will’s slumped shoulders and Marina’s worried frown before turning back and nodding. “Two shots, make them both doubles. Go ahead and set up a tab on the card; we’re gonna be here awhile.”

It took a bit of maneuvering, before Owen was moving to join the other two. Setting a glass of beer and both shots in front of Will, he offered Marina her own glass of beer and kept one for himself. “So, are we going to toast to the lost?”

Will’s smile was sad and whimsical as he replied, “Don’t we usually?”

Marina reached out to lay her free hand over her lover’s, smiling as his hand twisted in her grasp to squeeze her hand tightly. “So, to Mrs. Julia Meade-Hunt . . . may she rest forever within God’s embrace, blessed always with peace and grace.”

“To Mrs. Hunt,” the two men intoned, raising their glasses in silent salute. The moment was sober for a long moment, before Will tossed back the first of his two shots sharply. Marina’s lips quirked as she teased, “Did you even taste it?”

“I don’t particularly care about what it tastes like, as long as I am well and truly trashed before the end of the night.”

Owen smirked, nudging the other glass forward, “The bartender says it tastes a little like dessert. But if you’re only interested in getting well and truly trashed tonight, I’ll make sure that I just get you the cheap stuff from now on.”

“With any luck, the cheap stuff will get me just as drunk as the expensive stuff.”

“I’m pretty sure that’s the way it works,” Marina laughed, cutting her eyes towards the stage that graced one wall of the bar. Taking in the set-up around the stage, she mused lightly, “I wonder if they do karaoke here or if they only do live music.”

Will’s grin was almost real as he inquired, “Why? You planning to sing tonight?”

The Russian batted her eyes at him, as she purred, “Why? Do you want me to sing tonight?”

Picking up his beer, Will took a quick sip, eyes brilliant blue over the rim as he stared at her. Setting the glass down, he gave his partner a small smile as he reminded her, “You know how much I love to hear you sing, samaya malen’kaya.”

Owen chuckled, rolling his eyes at the familiar flirting between the two people in the world he actually considered his friends. (Well, he considered Nikita a friend too, but he was pretty sure that Nikita just thought he was annoying. But they never really had seen eye to eye about anything. It wouldn’t surprise him to learn that they didn’t see eye to eye on their relationship either.) Taking a drink of his beer, he snorted lightly as Marina gave her partner a saucy wink and strode toward the bar. Will’s eyes were burning in their sockets as he nursed his beer, his eyes firmly fixed on her hips as she fairly strutted across the room. Shaking his head in amusement, Owen insisted lightly, “You
are a lucky bastard, Boss.”

“I’m fairly certain I’ve heard that said before,” Will agreed fondly, one corner of his lips curving upwards as his Russian proceeded to convince the bartender to turn on the sound system on the stage. The woman reached up to rake a hand back through her curls, twisting to look back over her shoulder at him. Sending him a wink, she turned back to her conversation. “God . . . she’s beautiful. What the hell did I do to deserve her?”

S.H.I.E.L.D.’s best Cleaner chuckled even as he shrugged an answer. “Hell if I know, Boss. But whatever it was, you did good. She worships you.”

At the statement, Will broke into honest laughter, doubling over with the force of it. “You have obviously never seen her mad at me. There have been a couple times I thought she was going to turn me into sludge.”

“Like when?”

“When she found out about the Cahill in Budapest, and that I had known about him for a month without doing anything. Admittedly, not all my fault, as I tried to send a team and was refused. Even still, she was pissed . . . not for very long, but I had a moment where I really thought I was going to be sleeping on the couch for the foreseeable future.”

The blond snorted as he muttered, “Sure . . . if the foreseeable future was like a minute. I’ve heard all about how you two don’t sleep well if you’re not sleeping together.”

Just then, a squeal of feedback from the stage speakers echoed through the bar, causing everyone within hearing distance to flinch from the sound. Then Marina’s voice came out through speakers, clear and smooth. “Okay . . . that wasn’t supposed to happen. Sorry!”

Turning away, she practically skipped toward the soundboard and fiddled for a moment before moving back to the microphone. “Testing . . . testing . . . one, two, three . . . Hey! It works!” Wrapping one hand around the microphone, she adjusted it slightly as she took a deep breath. “So I know it’s not karaoke night or anything, but there is man here that I love who loves to hear me sing. And since there is all this wonderful sound equipment and no one to use it currently . . . I am borrowing it for at least the next couple of minutes. If you have a problem with that . . . that is the door.”

After nodding once towards the young man manning the soundboard for her, she turned her attention onto Will’s face. The opening strains filled the massive room, the melody one that Will didn’t recognize though it must have been one Marina was familiar with as there was no screen with the words displayed in front of her. Those chocolate-brown eyes were affectionate and warm, before they drifted to half mast as she began to sing.

"I Surrender"

There’s so much life I’ve left to live
And this fire is burning still
When I watch you look at me
I think I could find the will
To stand for every dream
And forsake this solid ground
And give up this fear within
Of what would happen if they ever knew
I'm in love with you
'Cause I'd surrender everything
To feel the chance to live again
I reach to you
I know you can feel it too
We'd make it through
A thousand dreams I still believe
I'd make you give them all to me
I'd hold you in my arms and never let go
I surrender

I know I can't survive
Another night away from you
You're the reason I go on
And now I need to live the truth
Right now, there's no better time
From this fear I will break free
And I'll live again with love
And no they can't take that away from me
And they will see...

I'd surrender everything
To feel the chance to live again
I reach to you
I know you can feel it too
We'd make it through
A thousand dreams I still believe
I'd make you give them all to me
I'd hold you in my arms and never let go
I surrender

Every night's getting longer
And this fire is getting stronger, baby
I'll swallow my pride and I'll be alive
Can't you hear my call
I surrender all

I'd surrender everything
To feel the chance to live again
I reach to you
I know you can feel it too
We'll make it through
A thousand dreams I still believe
I'll make you give them all to me
I'll hold you in my arms and never let go
I surrender

Right here, right now
I give my life to live again
I'll break free, take me
My everything, I surrender all to you

Right now
I give my life to live again
I'll break free, take me
My everything, I surrender all to you.”

Out of the corner of his eyes, Owen could see that where there had previously been disinterest from the other patrons, people’s heads were now beginning to turn to watch her sing. However, the majority of his concentration was on the couple. Marina’s full attention was on her lover, the sweetness in the words resonating in her voice, her mood both earnest and adoring. Those chocolate eyes were mirrors, reflecting everything she was feeling in that moment. And if she was fixated on Will, then the Colonel was equally fixated on her.

Sitting back in his chair, the S.H.I.E.L.D. agent watched them watch each other and knew his best friend was going to heal. What had happened sucked – and Owen did know more about what had happened than he knew the Boss would ever feel comfortable telling – and the healing process was going to take time. At the end of it all, though; after the grief, and the guilt and the desolation had passed, Will would be okay. Marina would sacrifice every inch of her own happiness to make sure of it.

When at last the song was over, and the final note was still ringing through the room, Marina said nothing. The crowd, even as small as it was, had erupted into applause but she didn’t even notice them. The Russian simply stepped off the stage and strode to stand before her lover, her hands coming up to cup his cheeks as she bent to press her lips lightly against his own. The words they spoke were quiet and just between them, meaning that he would never dream of eavesdropping, but even still, it wasn’t hard to hear the Colonel whisper, “I love you.”

Hiding his smile in his beer, Owen waited for Marina to retake her seat, before teasing, “I think you were a little flat on that last note, Boss-lady.”

“Bite me, Lucky,” she replied brightly, her nose wrinkling at him.

Will only laughed, shaking his head as he took another drink of his whiskey. “You two are incorrigible together. I don’t know why I ever thought that you should be friends.”

“Too late . . . any damage done is officially your fault. Besides, who else would you go drinking with after a cluster fuck like Croatia?” Owen asked, his tone serious. Will only hummed in solemn agreement, earning Owen a fierce scowl from the man’s worried partner. Taking a deep breath, the younger man shook the thoughts of Croatia away and nudged the nearly full glass of beer in the Colonel’s direction. “Drink up, Boss-man. The night is young and we are not even close to being drunk yet.”

After that, it was an unspoken agreement that they would not speak of Croatia again until Will spoke of it first. Neither Owen nor Marina missed the fact that from that moment, they did a majority of the talking. For the most part, the Colonel was silent as he knocked back drink after drink, his eyes turned inwards as he clearly wrestled with some decision only he could make. When he did finally speak, he drew both of their immediate attentions, not that either one of them thought they’d heard him right anyone. “I beg your pardon?” Marina inquired, her eyes wide at the words she thought she’d heard from him.

Will took another drink, before setting it down and leaning forward on his elbows. “I’ve decided to leave the field. I can’t do this again; I can’t handle having to make that kind of decision again.”

To be honest, the Cleaner wasn’t surprised by the declaration, but based on the look on Marina’s face, she was. Jolting forward, she laid one hand over his and insisted, “But what about your brothers?”
“What about them? They’re big boys . . . they don’t need me.”

“Yes they do. You’re their brother, their CO . . . the only one they’ve ever had. They trust you, in
the field and out of it. You can’t just leave them without a commanding officer.”

“So you can take my place.”

“There isn’t a single member of the Brass who would ever give me that job. I’m not CO material,
Misha and you know it. My job has always been to go where I’m led and unleash hell where I’m
told.” Squeezing his hand tightly as she watched him move to protest, she continued, “I will support
you, no matter what choice you make. If you want to leave the field, I won’t try to stop you. All I
ask, is that before you make any permanent decisions, just think about your brothers and whether or
not you could leave them with someone who would only exploit them in the field. Okay?”

Giving her a small smile, he turned his hand upwards to lace their fingers together. “Okay. I’ll think
about it. But I am going to have to talk to Fury sooner rather than later. He’s going to know what
happened and he’s going to want to know what happens next.”

“He’s the Magnificent Bastard, Mishka . . . he’ll wait for your answer for as long as it takes for him
to get the one he wants,” Marina reminded him with a fond roll of her eyes. It was no secret that
Marina and Nick Fury were good friends, closer than some siblings – a thought that tended to terrify
everyone who knew them. “Just take some time to think it over. No one is expecting you to have all
of the answers right now.”

Nodding once, he leaned forward to kiss her briefly, before lifting his newly replenished glass of
whiskey and tossing the double shot back. From there, things got a little hazy.

He woke up the next morning in a bed at the base hotel, there was a legion of tiny men beating on
the sides of his skull and Marina tucked comfortably under his chin as she slept beside him. Looking
around with a frown, he caught sight of a slip of paper on the nightstand beside him and reached
carefully to pick it up. Owen’s handwriting had always been sloppy and the constant reports he was
forced to fill out for S.H.I.E.L.D. really hadn’t done much to change that. Squinting, it took a
moment before the Colonel was able to force his vision to clear enough to read it.

“Boss, I know you need some space, so we made the decision to put you both up here for awhile.
The Boss-lady talked to your father and your brothers. Like I said, they’re worried about you, but
they understand that you need some time to sort through your thoughts. Just remember to call your
father; if my son had gone through something like this, I would want to hear his voice for myself.
But after that, take your time. There’s no rush. If you need to talk, I’ll be around. – Lucky.”

Smiling with relief, Will’s eyes slipped closed as he muttered under his breath, “Thank God for good
friends.”

Marina’s tone was seductive as she stretched along his body as she purred, “Indeed. So . . . how
about that good fuck, Colonel?”

Pinning her effortlessly to the mattress, he growled into the shell of her ear, “About damned time,
Major.”

At the usage of her former rank, Marina’s whole body melted and Will proceeded to make the next
several hours worth her while. It would be a long time before she would be able to move without
feeling the delicious ache in her body, but by the end it had been absolutely worth it.

It was a full week later before Will found the answers he himself was looking for. And once he had
them, he found himself in Director Nicholas L. Fury’s office, standing at parade rest across the way from his desk and his eyes fixed on a spot over the man’s left shoulder. Fury seemed to know that no matter what he analyst said, Will wasn’t going to change his mind and SecDef probably wasn’t going to like it. “So . . . what do you want to do, Agent Brandt?”

“I’ll go into the field for S.H.I.E.L.D. I’ll remain the CO of the Brat’ya Mrachnyy. But I won’t go back to the IMF; I don’t want to consult for them in any capacity whatsoever, whether it’s as a field agent or as an analyst. I’m done with the IMF; there is no power on this earth that will ever force me back there. Agreed?”

Nick’s grin was honest as he nodded once, “Agreed. And Agent Brandt . . . I’m glad you’ve decided to stay with S.H.I.E.L.D. We need you.”

Once delivering his decision, Will had been on his way out. Fury’s declaration paused him halfway through the doorway. Turning back, he clutched the doorframe as he insisted tightly, “I’m not staying for you.”

It was only after the door closed that Fury sat back in his chair and smiled solemnly, “I didn’t think you were.”

Chapter End Notes

Translations:

samaya malen’kaya - my little one (Will's most common nickname for Marina)
Misha/Mishka - diminutive of Mikhail, the Russian form of Michael (Marina's most common nickname for Will; Will's middle name is Michael)
Brat'ya Mrachnyy - The Brothers Grimm (The code name for the Army's Spec Ops unit, of which Will, Marina, Jason, Aaron and Clint are the sole members)
Chapter 156: Family Life

Sam Braddock had seen the best and the worst of men; nearly ten years with the JTF2 will do that to you. The shadows that haunted the Colonel’s eyes when the couple finally returned home were reminiscent of the same ones he saw in his own eyes when he looked in the mirror . . . the same ones he saw in Aaron’s eyes, Clint’s eyes, even Brian’s eyes. So when no one said anything about what had happened on Will’s solo assignment, Sam simply followed suit and let himself get swept up in the tide.

He’d enjoyed the last few weeks in New York, but as the 27th got closer and closer the entire family could see the sunny-haired young man starting to shut himself off. Finally, desperate for a problem he could fix, Will stepped in. He found the younger man sitting on the front porch, summer blue eyes watching the cars passing by lazily. “Sam? You okay?”

Blinking in surprise – clearly, the former sniper hadn’t heard the Colonel coming up behind him – Sam twisted to look up at the family’s commanding officer. Seeing the genuine concern in his eyes, Sam forced a half-hearted smile. “Yeah . . . I guess.”

Dropping easily onto the porch next to him, Will leaned back on his hands and tilted his face into the sun. “You wanna talk about it?” he asked, eyes at half-mast as he enjoyed the peace and quiet of the day.

“It’s almost the 27th . . . I have to be in Toronto on the 27th. I guess I just don’t want to go.”

There was a soft snort in response, before Will replied, “Didn’t Aaron tell you?”
Sam’s eyes narrowed slightly as he asked, “Tell me what?”

“I have some friends in Toronto; your new Commander Hollaran, for example. I called in a few outstanding favors. You don’t have to report for another few months. You don’t have to, of course, but we’d like you to consider staying with us. Marina is concerned that you’re too skinny, and she’d like the chance to fatten you up a bit. And I know Marta would like you to stay for awhile . . . be with the family.” Glancing at him out of the corner of his eyes, he asked, “And, if you’re interested, Marina and I both think you’d be a hell of an asset to S.H.I.E.L.D.”

Sam’s jaw dropped at the endorsement. He’d never admit it in a million years, but he’d been curious about a career with S.H.I.E.L.D. ever since Aaron and Marta had dragged him along with them to New York. “But what about the Strategic Response Unit? I can’t just blow them off, can I?”

“Actually, your appointment to the SRU would be of considerable use to S.H.I.E.L.D. We’ve been trying to get an agent into their ranks for at least the last ten years.” Leaning forward on his elbows, Will glanced at the younger man out of the corner of his eye. Seeing the small, excited smile, he chuckled, “You’d have to go through all the same basic training, of course, but Marina and I could tutor you. We’ll get you fast-tracked out in time for you to head off to Toronto.”

“Why does S.H.I.E.L.D. care about a police unit?”

“The SRU is more than a police unit. They’re SWAT and hostage negotiators and peacekeepers all in one heavily armed package. They have their fingers on the pulse of the entire city . . . and S.H.I.E.L.D. wants someone on the inside, because there are a lot of situations that the SRU handles that are of considerable interest to S.H.I.E.L.D.” Seeing the question on his face, he shrugged lazily, “Terrorist attacks by groups on S.H.I.E.L.D.’s watch list . . . hostage negotiations – we try to collect as many good mediators as we can . . . they’re very useful – and of course, the displaced soldier or two who need a place to help them feel useful again.”

Sam’s eyebrow cocked at the comment as he joked dryly, “Are you trying to say something?”

Chuckling at the tease, Will shrugged nonchalantly, “Actually no . . . though I guess it does apply to current company, doesn’t it?”

The two men sat quietly for a long moment, Sam nibbling restlessly on the inside of his lip, as he considered the offer he was being given. “You don’t think I’m not suited for it? I mean, I killed my own best friend.”

“Yeah, about that . . . I’ve been making some inquiries into the incident. It wasn’t your fault.”

“What do you mean? I put a 50 caliber bullet through his skull from 2 kilometers away.”

“Yes, you did. But he had been briefed about your assignment, and he knew the exact parameters of your kill zone.” Turning to look at Sam, he asked calmly, “So he knew that by being there, he was probably gonna get killed. And yet he was there anyway. The question, of course, is why?”

Sam’s eyes were wide, his tone horrified as he breathed, “No one told me that he knew. Why wouldn’t they tell me?”

“I don’t know. But I’ve put enough pressure on a few friends that they’ve opened an inquest into it. I’m sure there’s a perfectly legitimate reason for why he was there; the inquest will make sure we find out what it was.” Reaching out to squeeze his shoulder briefly, he insisted, “But in the meantime, know this . . . it wasn’t your fault. He knew where you were going to be shooting and you didn’t know he was going to be there. It’s no one’s fault. As much as it sucks that your best
friend is dead, it’s no one’s fault. All right?”

The look of confusion on the younger man’s face broke Will’s heart, causing him to reach out and pull him into an uncharacteristic one-armed hug . . . just like he would for any of his younger brothers. “You’re a good soldier, Sam . . . an exceptional sniper and I would be proud to have you covering my back anytime. If you want the place at S.H.I.E.L.D., it’s yours . . . you just say the word.”

Though Sam could still feel the guilt deep in his chest, it no longer felt as though it was going to choke him every time he took a breath. Leaning unconsciously into the embrace, the blond nodded once, “I’d like that.”

“All right then. Meet me at my office tomorrow morning and we’ll get your recruitment file put together and a few required signatures. You can join the rest of the junior agents in their classes tomorrow afternoon. Sound good?”

“Yeah . . . thank you, Colonel.”

Will chuckled at the response, squeezing the boy’s shoulder as he teased, “Sam, you’re family. I think you can call me Will.”

The two were silent for a long moment, before Marina’s voice drifted through the house. Her tone was liltting and cheerful as she called, “Boys . . . wash up for dinner! We’re about five minutes away!”

Twisting to look back through the screen door, the Colonel called in a laughing voice, “Marishka . . . they’re not five years old anymore. You remember that, right?”

Marina’s tone was caustic as she snapped back, “You have met your brothers, right? Get that delectable ass in here, Colonel . . . just for that, you have been elected to make the salad.”

“You love my ass!” he laughed, winking at Sam as the two men moved into the house and toward the kitchen together.

“Of course I do . . . and I’m fairly certain that I am not the only one with lascivious designs on it.”

Trapping the diminutive Russian in the corner, Will bent to whisper against her throat, “Maybe not, but yours are the only designs I plan on entertaining.”

The woman’s eyes narrowed, even as she fought to suppress a playful smirk. “That’s because you are a smart man . . . and you know how many ways I can kill you with my pinky finger.”

Chuckling, Will murmured against her lips, “Promises promises, Marishka.”

“Bite me, William Michael,” she snapped briskly, though there was no heat behind the statement, earning a flash-fire grin from the Colonel as he saluted in reply, “Just tell me where, devochka.”

Whatever she had been about to say in reply was cut off by the sound of Clint’s gagging from the doorjamb. “Guys . . . we eat what comes out of this kitchen. Come on!”

Sam was grinning as he turned towards where Aaron and Marta were gathering dishes for the table. “Are they always like this?”

“Worse . . . this is actually pretty tame all things considered. They’re pretending to be well behaved because we have company . . . just wait until they get used to having you around. That’s when all
bets are off and you should probably invest in a good blindfold and some decent earplugs.”

Marina’s scowl was fond as she ducked out from under her partner, snapping a tea towel in the operative’s direction. “Hush you . . . no commentary from the peanut gallery.”

“Love you, Marishka,” he teased, dodging out of the way deftly.

“Shut up . . . set the table already. I can hear your stomachs growling from here. Geez . . . you’d think I didn’t feed you or something. Sam . . . do me a favor and set out the silverware. Marta has the plates and, if Aaron will stop laughing at me, he has the glasses. All we need is the silverware.”

“Sure thing, Ms. Petrovka.”

“It’s Lt. Colonel Petrovka or Agent Petrovka. But family usually just calls me Marishka. You should probably get used to it.”

Ducking his head at the acceptance inherent in the kindhearted tease, Sam blushed lightly as he agreed, “I can do that.”

“Good . . . silverware . . . march. And Clinton Francis, don’t you even think about putting those filthy arrowheads on my nice tablecloth! I would swear you were raised in a barn, if I didn’t know better!”

Clint gave her a wicked grin as he insisted, “I blame all undesirable characters flaws on the circus.”

Chocolate eyes rolled as she muttered in a long-suffering tone, “You would.”

Quicksilver eyes were shining in amusement as he rested his palms against her shoulders, a quick kiss to her temple soothing her temper effortlessly. “Where’s Dad, Clint? And Bucky?”

“Pops is still washing up and Bucky was just getting out of the shower; apparently there was an incident with a baby agent and a bucket of something sticky on the way back from the shooting range.”

Marina’s jaw tightened at the insinuation as she hissed, “Is he still having problems with the baby agents? Who’s ass am I going to have to kick to get it through their heads that he’s an ALLY now?! For crying out loud, he’s a Level 7 agent!”

Will’s hands tightened slightly, preventing the woman from storming off in search of some retribution, as he soothed, “Ass kicking later . . . dinner first. Take a seat, Marina; Bucky can take care of himself. If he needs us to step in, he’ll ask us to, okay? Deep breaths, samaya malen’kaya.”

The woman humphed in disappointment, even as she allowed her lover to pull out a chair and steer her into it. Looking at the rest of the family currently assembled, he gestured around the table, “Sit down, guys, before dinner goes cold. Dad and Bucky will be down as soon as they’re done washing up.”

From there, dinner was a harmonious racket as everyone got seated and began to pass the food around. It wasn’t long before Hansel and Bucky both arrived in the dining room, Hansel taking the empty seat on the other side of Natasha and Bucky slipping into the seat beside his boyfriend, after pressing a sweet kiss into his hair. As for Sam, he was forcibly seated between Marina and his aunt, the two women conspiring to load his plate with more food than he could ever imagine eating at a single sitting. When he tried to protest, the Russian only shushed him fondly, as she scolded, “You’re entirely too thin, Sammy-honey. If you’re going to be an agent with S.H.I.E.L.D., you’re going to need some more meat on your bones. Now hush and eat your dinner.”
Amused by her tendency to mother everyone she loved, and touched that he was included, he simply nodded in agreement, “Yes ma’am.”

“Good boy. And for dessert, I made blackberry tarts from scratch.”

Clint cheered in excitement, earning an exasperated chorus of his name from the entire table. “What!? I love blackberry tarts . . . and it’s not even my birthday!”

At which point, the whole table dissolved into laughter. And, to Sam's surprise, that laughter didn't stop for the rest of the night.

Chapter End Notes

Translations:

devochka - girlie
samaya malen'kaya - my little one (Will's most common nickname for Marina)
Chapter Notes

New chapter! Yay! Not many translations today, except the usual ones. Enjoy!

On a side note, I have an artist sketching and painting some real art for the UALP instead of just my lame banners. I hope you'll enjoy them once she's finished with them. I'm see the first drafts for the first and it is beyond lovely!

Either way, guys, enjoy! Thanks again to everyone who reviewed the last chapter. It always means so much to me. Love you guys! You are the best of all time!

Last thing and then I'm done, thanks be to Amerou who came up with the Indiana Jones Drinking Game, as well as what they should drink for! Thanks Amerou! We love and miss you so much! If you guys haven't read her Hansel/Maria story within this verse (written with permission and input from me) you're missing out. Check it out! Link at the bottom of the page!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter 157: Come What May

Hansel was trying not to smother his eldest son. He was, but there was a wounded look in Will’s eyes, where usually there was calm and stoicism. And despite his desire to fix it, the fierce look in Marina’s eyes whenever someone came too close to mentioning the “Clusterfuck That Shall Not Be Named” was enough to dissuade even the most idiotic of men. And say what you want, but
Johannes Frederick Kuhn was not stupid.

For the moment, if for no other reason than to ease his overprotective paternal instincts, both Hansel and Maria had taken up a temporary residence in Hansel’s former room. Marta had been assigned quarters on base, and she, Sam and Aaron had decamped there for at least a little while, so that Hansel could smother is son, without actually smothering him. Because Marina was small, but she was deadly, especially when it was her lover she was protecting.

It was late, and once again he found himself sharing the couch with his bleary eyed eldest as they each sipped on their poisons of choice. The television was on and turned to Will’s preferred Nick At Nite reruns, though whether the Colonel could see them through his exhausted daze was up for debate. “Adler, hyu need sleep, mein Sohn. I am sure that Marishka is keeping the bed warm for hyu . . . go and join her in it.”

Before he’d even finished speaking, Will was shaking his head. “I can’t sleep . . . I don’t want to close my eyes right now. I just . . . I keep seeing what happened.”

“Do hyu vish to speak of it mit me?”

Will’s smile was a shadow of his usual one, even as he shook his head, “No . . . not right now. I just want to try to forget for a little bit . . . please?”

Grunting in agreement, Hansel returned his attention back to the television, and for a long time the two men were silent. At long last, only a handful of hours before the sun rose, his son finally returned to his bed and the sleepless woman who awaited him there.

The next day found Will up and out of the house at his usual time, a cup of exceptionally strong coffee in one hand and his briefcase in the other. Hansel could see the strain and the tension in his adoptive Tochter, though the Russian said nothing as she went up on tiptoes to kiss her lover and send him out the door to work. It was only after Will was gone, that Hansel stepped forward and wrapped one arm around her shoulders. “Come . . . Spatzi is waiting for us both at our home . . . there is alcohol and there is company . . . it vill do hyu good.”

It looked as though Marina would protest of a moment, before catching sight of the stern look on Hansel’s face. Sagging in on herself, she gave him a meager grin as she agreed, “That sounds fantastic.”

Squeezing her shoulders tightly, he grabbed her coat and forcibly herded her towards the door. Knowing better than to argue, Marina only gave a small smile and allowed herself to be guided along. The sight of her best friend, offering a triple shot of vodka, was a balm and Marina could feel her heart lightening for this first time in days. “Hello, Vorobyey.”

“Marishka . . . you look like shit,” the Assistant Director announced, earning a twisted smirk from the other woman. “Thanks, Maria . . . you are a balm to a troubled soul . . . really.”

Chuckling at the deadpan delivery, Maria deposited the drink into Marina’s outstretched hand and looped her elbow through Marina’s own. “Come on you . . . I’ve got all three of the Indiana Jones movies that count queued up on the DVR and a whole lot more vodka where this came from.” Dropping her forehead to rest against Marina’s own, she vowed, “No matter what, Marishka . . . Hansel and I are here whenever you or Will needs us.”

Caught off guard by the sentiment, Marina could feel her throat closing around where her heart had lodged. Marina had not cried since seeing the damage to her partner’s soul as much as she would have liked to; Will had needed her to be strong and detached, a stalwart shelter from the storm of his
own emotions. To have a shelter of her own . . . it meant more to her than she could ever truly express. Mindful of the alcohol she held, she lifted her arm up and pulled her best friend into a firm hug, burying her face into the curve of Maria’s S.H.I.E.L.D. uniform. “Thank you,” she managed to choke out, feeling the tears starting to sting at the corners of her eyes.

“You’re welcome,” was the whispered reply, the AD’s arms just as fierce and tight around her best friend’s waist.

There was a warm smile on Hansel’s face as his arms came up to encircle both of his favorite women, a fond kiss to Marina’s forehead and a passionate one to Maria’s lips his own comment on the situation. “Come . . . I think now is a very good time to get very drunk.”

Snorting, Marina lifted a hand to wipe at her face. Nodding in agreement, she laughed, “I am absolutely down with that plan.”

The three settled onto Maria’s couch, which was miraculously free of discarded clothing, both clean or otherwise . . . a state of affairs that Marina was pretty sure was Hansel’s doing. After all, the Russian had seen the chaos that was Maria’s quarters when she lived alone; it would have put a frat house to shame. Unable to resist the chance to tease the two, Marina laughed, “So what’s it like having a live-in neat freak?”

Maria grumbled good-naturedly as she pouted. “Just because the house was always a mess, doesn’t mean I didn’t know where everything was. Now, it takes me hours just to find my keys!”

“Hyur keys are in the bowl by the door, where they always are. If hyu cannot find them, meine Spatzi, that is the fault of no one but hyu,” Hansel sallied, a broad wink and a grin a clear indication to Marina that this was not the first time the couple had engaged in this conversation.

Sticking her tongue out at her fiancé in a very un-Maria-like manner, the former military intelligence officer stood from the couch and headed towards the kitchen. Hansel only chuckled, and got up to grab the remotes and begin the first movie. Marina sunk into the overstuffed comfort of the armchair, leaving the couch for the other two, sipping contentedly on her alcohol.

Maria came in, three bottles of alcohol held in one hand and two glasses in the other, as she insisted, “So, if we’re going to watch Indiana Jones, we are going to play an Indiana Jones drinking game.”

Grinning, Marina chimed in, “Double shot every time Indy loses his hat!”

Toasting the suggestion, the AD cheered, “That’s the spirit. Also, a shot every time the theme song plays. And every time someone makes a reference that Hans doesn’t understand.”

“Done!” the Russian laughed, at the same second the German protested petulantly, “HEY!”

The two women collapsed into giggles, just as the screen came to life and the opening sequence began to play, along with the theme song. “Cheers!” Marina cried, toasting the room and the television, before knocking back her first drink, with both Hansel and Maria following suit shortly after. Snuggling back into her chair, she allowed herself to get comfortable and spend some time with two of the people she loved best. “Thanks guys . . . I needed this.”

Maria reached out and squeezed her hand warmly, winking, “We know. Fucking Croatia.”

“I’ll drink to that!” the S.H.I.E.L.D handler laughed in agreement, knocking back yet another drink. "Fucking Croatia should fucking fuck itself, fuckers!"

It was halfway through the second movie, Temple of Doom, that Marina caught sight of Hansel and
Maria indulging in a heavy make-out on the couch. “Oh wow . . . so that’s actually a thing.”

Teal eyes blinked up at her best friend, eyes sheened with a lustful haze, as she inquired, “Huh?”

“I’ve always known that you two engage in ill-advised, sexy things when you’re wasted, Vorobey, but this is more than I needed to see of you two.” Pushing herself from her chair, she was pleased to discover that she was only a little unsteady on her feet, tossing the couple a cheerful salute. “I’m going to go shoot some targets for awhile, but really, thank you. I needed this.” Waving at them to stall Maria as she moved to stand, the Russian insisted, “No . . . it’s okay. I can see myself out. You two have fun! Don’t do anything I wouldn’t do.”

Maria laughed, unable to resist the chance to tease her best friend. “It’s you, Marishka, so I’ll take that for what’s it’s worth.”

As Marina was shutting the door, she was pretty sure that she heard Hansel complaining in groaned German that he did not need the mental image of Will and Marina engaging in THOSE kinds of activity. Glancing back, she watched as her best friend laid a finger over those lips and husked sexily, “Hush now, this is a sexy times only zone. Leave all other thoughts at the door.”

There was another growl from her Vati, the context informing Marina that unless she wanted an eyeful, it was time she got gone. Grinning, she turned away and headed towards her own home to get her favorite gun to take with her to the range. Maybe one of her boys would be willing to go with her; tempers were high at the Grimm house . . . a little shooting practice probably wouldn’t go amiss. Maybe some knife throwing to round things out; hands-on was always much better for pounding out whatever issue was stringing them along. Or maybe Bucky wouldn’t mind heading to the gym for some one-on-one on the sparring mats. Her mentor was always up for a chance to reeducate her on a few things.

Shaking her head at her own thoughts, she went into the house and gathered her things. Glancing at the group spread out in the living room, each engaged in their thing, Marina turned towards the door and left again. Maybe what she really needed was time to be alone with her own thoughts, the opportunity to evaluate the upcoming weeks. She had a feeling that things were going to get worse before they got better, and she could use all the calm she could steal.

Setting up in her usual lane, she pulled muffs over her head, loaded her favorite gun and took aim at the target. The resistance on the trigger, the sound, the recoil . . . perfect.

Chapter End Notes

Translations:

(G) Adler - Eagle (Hansel's nickname for Will)
(G) mein Sohn - my son
(G) Tochter - Daughter (Hansel's nickname for Marina)
(G) Spatzi - Little Sparrow (Hansel's nickname for Maria Hill)
(R) Vorobey - Sparrow (Marina's nickname for Maria Hill)
(G) Vati - Dad (Marina's nickname for Hansel)
So I have a thousand excuses for why this chapter is sooooo late. It's the end of semester, so things are starting to get super crazy around here. I also purchased my first house for my daughter and I, so we've been working on closing and cleaning and packing and getting ready to move it. In addition to that fun stuff, I've also had essays and tests and my cousin's wedding (if I even READ about another wedding in the next year, I WILL scream. This makes six in six months. Ugh. I don't even LIKE weddings!) and all kinds of crap to deal with in the month or so since I've posted.

NOT TO MENTION, THIS ENTIRE CHAPTER SOMEHOW GOT FREAKING DELETED AND I JUST ABOUT HAD A HEART ATTACK TRYING TO RECREATE IT. Fortunately, I usually send pics of everything through my text function on my phone to my betas, chunks at a time for ideas/help. (In case anyone was wondering, iPhone screens are really small and very hard to transcribe from. If I didn't already have glasses, I'd need them now.)

However, I do have a new chapter here and I have the next chapter half way written as it is, so it should be up much quicker than this one was.

That being said, I also have another seven days off from school until summer semester begins once again so I do intend to do some heavy duty writing while I can. With any luck, I'll be able to get caught up, as well as start working on the Misadventures again, which has been shoved to the side as well while I freak out about the next month of my life.

Also, there is gorgeous art from stereowire, of Will and Marina. Do not take it as I will be viciously displeased. The portrait was commissioned specifically for the UALP and I will be sad if I see it elsewhere. Ponimayete?! Thank you! Le sigh. Either way, here's the chapter. I apologize again for it's lateness. And I will definitely do better to make sure that I do not get so far removed from this fic again.

(Also, I have a Tumblr now. It's under galahadsgurl. If anyone wants to look me up, I would love to follow you!)

No translations this chapter. Just brains. :D

Edit: It was pointed out to me that the introduction of Doyle is confusing, as the name that Amerou and I have chosen for him is James. That being said, the only Sgt James Doyle in existence, is actually a character in the video game "Call of Duty". I apologize for any confusion, however this is the Doyle character played by Jeremy Renner in the movie, 28 Weeks Later. Please let me know if there are any other questions regarding the character. Thank you!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
When forced to be honest, even Nicholas L. Fury would be forced to admit that there wasn't much about the Grimms and their resident Russians (plural intended) that failed to impress. And their fortitude in the face of the mess that had just happened, was just one more thing.

Also, never let it be said that Nick Fury was incapable of being a very patient man. Granted, patience was only when the person or situation suited him... and he had found that circumstances so rarely suited him. Still, he did not think he had ever been more anxious for any agent within S.H.I.E.L.D.’s ranks to return to work than he currently was for one William Michael Brandt nee Grimm.

It had been a tense few weeks since the mess in Croatia. Will had retreated almost entirely into his department, allowing himself to be nearly buried under his responsibilities as S.H.I.E.L.D.’s Chief Analyst and thereby easily able to avoid the director himself. By all reports, his sleeping habits became even more sporadic – leaving the bags already under his eyes that much more pronounced – and his eating habits reduced to nearly nothing as the Colonel proceeded to drop weight hand over fist. Marina did the best she could to force the issue, but there were more than a few meals where the agent only pushed food around his plate without actually tasting it.

Fortunately, Marina had full operational control over the rest of her boys or loss of temper would have probably derailed the whole family in their tracks. The Russian had allowed both Will's brothers and his father to hover for all of 36 hours before kicking them forcibly back into their own lives. Hansel and Maria were strongly urged to return to their home, with Aaron ordered to remain at Marta's until further notice. Jason was sent back to his own apartment, following a promise from his sister that she would keep him apprised of developments as they arose. Both Natasha and Brian were sent to South America, into a suspected terrorist cell with orders to dismantle it if sufficient evident was found to support S.H.I.E.L.D.’s suspicions.

Clint Barton and Bucky Barnes were similarly dispatched out of the country, to a highly secluded HYDRA base in Macedonia with orders to blow it sky high. The mission itself was a complete success, no thanks to the deplorably slow buffering on their trigger mechanism. (Fury made a mental note to remind himself to talk to Jason Grimm about coming back to S.H.I.E.L.D. The R&D department was getting a little lax about their newfangled gadgets; at least when Jason had been there part time, things had damned well WORKED when his agents needed them to.) What was regrettable about the situation had been their decision to “celebrate” early. Apparently, the audio file of their sex-scapades had made a complete tour of both locker rooms. To date, Nick still didn't know what the Gadyuka had done to the unfortunate comm technician making money off the file, but whatever it was, the man still flinched whenever he saw the Russian.

As for the Grimm Family Russian herself, her days typically started early and ended later. Fortunately, the youngest Grimm remained a terrible liar and was more than willing to report on his sister's most recent habits. She woke early, often before anyone else, to start the coffeemaker and start on breakfast – usually one of her partner's favorites in the hope that she could coax him into eating. Then she'd put together a lunch for him to eat in his office, and see him off to Command with a warm kiss and as genuine a smile as she could manage.

From this point, Marina Petrovka could be found in one of three places; her office at the handler pool, the sparring mats in the gym or at the shooting range... and usually in the company of her new protege, Sam Braddock. As luck would have it, at least for the other junior agents, Marina had taken a personal interest in the former JTF2 soldier. Otherwise, Nick was fairly certain that more than a few of his agents would have found themselves in Medical with busted skulls, broken ribs or some other spread of serious injury. Say what you would about nepotism, but at least the handler didn't seem to want to break Braddock and Braddock himself seemed more than willing to let her boss him
around during his training. (Fury would never tell either of them, but Samuel W. Braddock was going to make a hell of an agent.)

Of course, after training was over and it was time to go home, Marina would fix another feast for her fasting lover. After pretending to eat, he would retreat to his office where he would remain for several hours before Marina finally managed to convince Will to come to bed with her. From there, the time she fell asleep generally relied on how long it took her lover to fall asleep first. And even if he fell asleep quickly, there was never a guarantee that he'd actually sleep through the night.

Frankly the whole situation was a clusterfuck. And if Fury ever saw either of the two bastards responsible, he'd personally string them up from whatever was handy at the moment.

Currently, however, it was not the Grimms or their Russian causing him considerable indigestion. Blinking in shock at his assistant director, he repeated blankly, “Hill . . . I am going to need you to say that again. What the hell did you just say?!”

Maria Hill smirked slightly at the uncharacteristic expression on her boss' face, before repeating slyly, “There are reports of zombies in Georgia, sir . . . the kind that feast on brains, blood and body parts.”

Fury snorted as he muttered, “Isn't there only one kind of zombie?” Slumping back in his chair, some part of him knew that he wasn't portraying the best facade at the moment but he couldn't seem to bring himself to care. “What the hell am I supposed to do about zombies, Hill?”

A small shrug was the woman's only reply as she drawled, “With all due respect, sir, I am fairly certain that is why you are the Director and I am not.”

“Your confidence in my abilities is only a little reassuring, Hill,” he growled, narrowing his eyes at her damn-near cheerful features. Dropping his head back to stare at the ceiling, he growled again. “Damn it . . . zombies . . . what the fuck!? Taking a deep breath, he considered his personnel before straightening and ordering “Find Sergeant Doyle and send him to me . . . Seems to me that his experience with this sort of thing is what brought him to S.H.I.E.L.D. in the first place.”

“I don't think that's a good idea, sir. Sergeant Doyle has been very emphatic over his years with us that he will not get involved in anything that even looks remotely like the London outbreak. He's more likely to tell you to 'Fuck off!' than 'Yes sir!'”

“I am aware of Doyle's sensibilities. I don't care . . . send him to me anyway. At least if he says no to the assignment personally, he can suggest someone else to go.”

Hill cocked an eyebrow, even as she nodded once in brisk agreement, “Yes sir.”

“Dismissed,” was the last thing the man said, before Hill turned on her heel and strode from the room.

Half an hour later, Sergeant James Doyle – former Delta Forces sniper and long time S.H.I.E.L.D. operations leader – stood at the Director's door, staring it down as though it was the cause of all of his problems. Which was probably accurate, considering the fact that he had not met the Director face to face since their first meeting at the hospital in London. Director Fury had shown up out of the blue in the little private room where he lay recovered from the first and second degree burns covering three-quarters of his body – and contemplating his more than likely upcoming courtmartial – and offered him a position within the ranks of the global peacekeeping organization. Not being a fool, Doyle had jumped on the offer immediately and had been leading teams for S.H.I.E.L.D.’s tactical units ever since.
But now the whole place was buzzing with rumors about zombies, leaving the small corner of Doyle's brain that still valued self-p Preservations screaming at the top of its lungs. As much as he like his job at S.H.I.E.L.D., there was no way in hell that he was going anywhere near anything to do with zombies ever again. If the clusterfuck in London, and losing his Scarlett besides, hadn't made up his mind for him, the mess at Dornroschen had. Biological outbreaks and all the crazy that erupted as a result of them was no longer a skill within his purview, not now . . . not ever.

So when the Director proposed the op to him, it took barely a half a second for Doyle to reply simply, “Fuck you very much, sir . . . not a chance in hell.”

Fortunately Director Fury was a hell of a good boss and only smirked at the insubordinate language spouting from his underling. “AD Hill warned me you might say that. That being the case, I would ask your opinion on who I should send instead.”

Those khaki green eyes narrowed lightly at the calm in the other man's tone, head tilted slightly as he examined the request from all sides. “Do you have candidates you'd like me to choose from, or do you want me to just start naming people off the top of my head?” he snarked lightly, arms coming up to fold over his chest with his head still cocked to the side as he watched the older man carefully.

(Unbeknownst to Doyle, however, the man's posture prompted an unwelcome jarring sensation somewhere below Fury's navel. He recognized that mannerism, though he had never seen it on the body before him. Clint Grimm did the same thing when he was staking out a target, cobalt grey eyes narrowed suspiciously and head cocked just that small inch to the left. It was at that moment that Fury realized what he should have known from the very first moment he met the Grimms and Doyle both. Resolving to keep his newfound intel under his hat for the moment, he forced himself to relax and refocus on the conversation at hand.)

Gesturing at the personnel files on the corner of his desk, Fury inquired lightly, “What about the Brothers Grimm?”

“I was fairly certain that the gossip around the water cooler was saying that CO of the Brothers Grimm had fallen off the wagon . . . no longer fit for active duty,” Doyle reported cautiously, eyes narrowed as he took in the suddenly thunderous expression on his superior's face.

Fury's jaw clenched as he hissed, “That is a spurious lie! William Brandt is an exceptional agent and his skills are of great importance to this agency. I need him where in Analysis right now, so that's where he has been stationed. I want to know who told you that.”

“I don't know exactly; I overhead it at the gym yesterday. I couldn't pinpoint who said it if you paid me,” Doyle admitted sheepishly with a small shrug. “Either way, if he's up for it, the Brothers Grimm are probably your best bet for a team. Their record is unparalleled and they're going to need that luck they're so famous for. Anything having to do with biological outbreak is going to be a mess.”

“You think it's biological?”

“I had never seen a zombie before the outbreak in London; I would bet my annual salary for the next twenty years that it's biological, sir.”

“Thank you, Doyle. You're input is greatly appreciated. You may go . . .” Fury insisted, watching the former Delta's back as the younger man turned towards the door. “Oh . . . and Sergeant?”

Pausing with one hand on the doorknob, the dark haired soldier turned to look back at his superior once again. “Yes sir?”
“If you happen to find out who's spreading the rumor, I would greatly appreciate the intel. Understood?”

“Yes sir. I'll keep my ears open.”

“Thank you, Sergeant. You are dismissed.”

Doyle nodded in agreement and very nearly bolted in his attempt to escape the interview before Fury could change his mind about allowing him to skip out on the assignment. He managed to keep his composure all the way back to the small apartment-style quarters he maintained on base. Fumbling with the keys through the blur of tears in his eyes, he cursed steadily under his breath as he fought to get inside and out of sight. Finally, the door swung open, spilling him clumsily into his entryway. Slamming the door, he set his back to the wood and let the tears come.

It had been nearly fifteen years since the last time he'd seen Scarlett's face . . . fifteen years since the last time he'd held her in his arms . . . fifteen years since he'd laughed at her terrible jokes and listened to her rant about her work. And despite those fifteen years, he still missed her, damn it . . . every damned day. Wrestling for his wallet, he pulled the only picture he had of her from its depths . . . the only picture of the two of them together that had survived London . . . and bowed his head once again.

Screw an AWOL charge and screw his obligations, he couldn't even bring himself to care about the consequences. If he was honest with himself, he hadn't been since the night that took her from him. Dropping his forehead against the picture, he allowed his eyes to close and the memories to come.

After all, the memories were all he really had left of her . . .

Chapter End Notes

The assignment that Clint and Bucky go on in Macedonia is written about by Amerou here in The Macedonian Shenanigans. "http://archiveofourown.org/works/805674". If you have not read it yet, I definitely recommend you do. It's steamy and funny and awesome. Amerou is an amazing author and I sincerely hope you have also checked into her Fairy Tales fic, about Hansel and Maria and the beginning of their difficult courtship.
This is from Doyle's perspective so no translations of any kind. As for whether or not Doyle is related to the Grimms? *grins* Well let's just say that that is my secret, and I'm not telling just yet.

I hope you guys continue to read and enjoy this verse. I love to read your reviews! Please, keep them coming!

So, judging by the look on the face of the hot Major in front of him, this was going to end one of three ways. Option One, he was very very drunk and should be tossed into the brig to sleep off his stupid. Option Two, he was a moron and should be tossed into the brig to sleep off his stupid. Option Three, he was a very very drunk moron and should be tossed into the brig to sleep off his stupid . . . which was quite possibly the most accurate description, seeing as only a drunk moron would have agreed to that damn bet.

All things considered, it was going to be a damned miracle if he got out of this mess without spending any time in the brig.

The woman in front of him folded her arms over her chest, a fierce frown on her face. “So let me get this straight. You and your idiotic friends were out drinking tonight. And someone decided that it would be a good idea to set you on fire.”

Doyle grimaced at the disdain in her tone; this wasn’t really as good a first impression as he would have otherwise hoped for. “Well no, not exactly. The getting set on fire part wasn’t part of the plan,” he replied, with the most charming grin he could manage. (Seeing as he had first and second degree burns running down his good side, it was probably not quite as charming as he wanted it to be.)
One elegant eyebrow cocked upwards derisively, as that dirty-sounding British accent of hers hissed out, “Uh-huh . . . so what was supposed to happen?”

Cringing slightly, he confessed sheepishly, “I don’t think I should tell you, ma’am.”

“And why is that, sergeant?”

“Cause I think that you are sexy as hell and I don’t really want to lose my only shot at getting you to go out with me.”

That eyebrow arched higher, if that was possible, as she purred, “And you don’t think that you’ve already blown that chance already? After all, this isn’t the best way to meet girls, Sergeant Doyle.”

Grinning at her and winking, he sprawled easily back against the bed. “I’m hoping you’ll think I’m charming enough to forgive me for my stupid, if I just flirt with you enough.”

Chuckling against her will, she informed him warmly, “You are a moron, sergeant.”

“Yes ma’am . . . but you still think I’m charming, don’t you?”

Her smile was wry and amused as she shrugged one uniform-clad shoulder. “Maybe . . . guess we’ll just have to wait and find out.” Stepping forward, she reached for his face, “In the meantime, let’s clean out these burns. Wouldn’t want them to mar your pretty face, now would we?”

“I knew you liked me,” he replied with a sly grin, before flinching as she touched the antiseptic to his skin.

It was a long process to clean out the burns. And when it was over and the burns were dressed, he was left alone in the room. True to form, if nothing else, there were a pair of MPs at the door five minutes later to take him to the brig. Staring for a moment in surprise, he couldn’t hold off the chuckles that bubbled up from his chest at the knowledge that he’d lost this round with the feisty Major. Jumping down from the mattress, he turned his back and stood complacently as the MPs cuffed his hands behind him.

It was as he was leaving, that the pretty doctor stepped up to stall the procession. “For the record, you are moderately charming, sergeant.”

The grin on his face was as cocky as hell as he smarmed in response, “Yeah?”

Laughing a low laugh that went straight to his gut, she slipped a small business card into the front pocket of his fatigues. “Call me when you’ve dried out, sergeant.”

“Yes ma’am. Count on it,” he agreed, twisting to watch her over his shoulder as the MPs once again began to lead him away.

End Flashback

It was another 24 hours later before the card had been returned to him and he was able to learn the name of the woman. Major Scarlett Anne Levy-Ross; lead scientist and researcher in charge of the labs on the small base set up at the site of the first outbreak. He waited a day after he was release to complete dry out, before ringing her up. They went out to dinner that evening and back to her place that night; from that moment, he was hers, no question about it.

Sergeant James Patrick Doyle was an orphan and the concept of a family had always been completely foreign to him . . . at least until that first perfect night he spent in her arms. If there was a
picture in the dictionary next to the word “badass”, Doyle was fairly certain that his Scar would be the person depicted there.

And if she wasn’t, then someone needed to complain to Webster.

Scarlett was gorgeous and real and a ballbuster unlike anyone he’d ever met before and she was all his. And except for that fucked up assignment in London, he would have never met her. For at least those 28 weeks they were together, he made it a point to thank whatever god was listening for the biological outbreak that brought them both into the same sphere of existence.

Granted, there was something creepy about a biological weapon that essentially turned people into zombies, but Scarlett was one of the scientists in charge of the project to find a cure. She was also confident that the answer was within reach. Call him a sap, but she was the brains in their relationship and he was more than okay with being the brawn. His specialty tended to lean toward shooting shit; if she said they were close, he was going to take her word for it. And technically, the infected weren’t even zombies. The RAGE virus was a nasty bitch though and without a viable cure, there was little else to do but cut the infected down before they began to literally eat people.

The last morning they had together, before everything went to hell, was perfect. He’d spent the night before worshipping every square inch of her with hands and mouth and tongue and teeth, rocketing her to bliss as many times as the night would allow. They’d been together for nearly five months at that point and their morning routine was pretty well set in stone. Doyle had woken first, made them both coffee and then returned to bed to coax her awake with kisses and caresses and teasing. She’d resisted, as always, before melting against him. They were just getting ready to be very late to work when the Code Red was called throughout the base.

Everything was a blur after that, and to this day the former Delta Forces soldier couldn’t remember whether or not he’d told her he loved her one last time. He liked to think that he had, that last morning of their lives together . . . the last time he’d ever seen her, but the thought that they had both simply been too rushed, too busy, too frantic, to say those three words to one another had haunted him every day since.

He knew what his file on the assignment said; that his injuries were his own fault, seeing as he’d been outside the containment zone when he acquired them. He knew that his former superiors and former squad-mates sneered at his decision not to turn his back on the kids. But they were kids, completely defenseless in every way; Tammy was probably 15 at the most and little Andy was only about 12. Not to mention they were immune to the virus and Doyle had been preached at by his hyper-vigilant girlfriend more than once that their immunity was the best chance at a cure for the damned RAGE virus. Again . . . not a scientist; if Scar said those kids were valuable to her research and the fate of mankind, then he was going to do what he could to protect them.

The soldier managed to get the two kids on a helicopter piloted by an old war buddy, Flynn, before turning back for Scarlett. The medical center was heavily protected, but there were RAGE virus patients quarantined inside. Having seen the kind of power the virus gave to the people it infected, Doyle had been desperate to protect her. Like a dumbass though, he’d literally tripped into a group of cleaners as he moving back towards the containment area, the men armed with massive flame throwers designed to burn the bodies of the infected after the hosts were deceased, so as to protect the living from the virus.

He hadn’t had a chance. A stupid rook with an itchy trigger finger had opened fire and his fatigues had caught without a second’s pause. It was only by the grace of god that the boy’s CO had lunged to try and put out the flames, trying to save his pathetic life. The man had succeeded, though three quarters of his body had been covered in second and third degree burns. The wounds were
excruciating and Doyle was relieved to be able to say that he couldn’t remember much of the next three weeks as he recovered.

It was nearly a month later that he finally woke, mostly lucid for the first time in weeks, to see Flynn seated where he could have sworn he’d seen Scarlett the night before.

*Flashback*  
*Paris, France*  
*May 22, 1996*

Pushing himself into a sitting position gingerly, Doyle grinned sheepishly at his old war friend. “Where’s Scarlett? Did she finally get fed up with my lazy ass and head for a bed?”

The instant shock followed by the way that Flynn’s whole face smoothed out carefully should have been the sniper’s first clue that something was seriously wrong. Leaning on his knees, the pilot frowned fiercely. “Dude . . . Scar . . . she’s not here. She’s gone, Doyle . . . I’m sorry.”

“That’s crazy . . . she was just here last night. I saw her, man.”

Flynn’s mouth twisted as his head shook firmly. “The only people who have seen you besides me, have been nurses, doctors and MPs.”

Doyle stared for a moment in horror before accusing, “You’re lying!”

“No . . . I’m not. The infected overran the Med Center. She didn’t make it out.” Running a hand back over his head, before Flynn finished firmly. “The Army bombed it nearly three weeks ago, with everyone still inside. I’m sorry, Doyle, but she’s gone.”

There was an eternal moment of complete stillness, before the sergeant threw back his sheets, announcing in a vicious growl. “Bullshit! Not my Scar.”

Flynn stared as Doyle hoisted himself carefully from the mattress and forced himself to stand for a moment to assimilate the pain back to manageable levels. Finally realizing what was happening, he lunged forward to slap the call button. “Man, what the hell do you think you’re doing!?!” he demanded, reaching to grab Doyle’s arm only to be brushed off.

“I’m going back to London. I have to find her. She’s not dead . . . I know she’s not dead.”

“And how the hell do you think you’re going to get there!? The whole place is ash! There is nothing and no one left to find. Damn it, Doyle. We’re in fucking Paris! You can barely walk and this whole place is crawling with MPs just dying for a reason to arrest you!”

“I’d like to watch them try!” the soldier hissed, limping slowly toward the lone cabinet. Every step was agony but the thought of never seeing his badass woman again was more painful still. “I have to find her, Flynn.”

“You can’t, Doyle. Okay? You can’t and I’m not going to help you. You know she’s gone . . . that no one could have survived that, not even Scar. This is the grief talking. You know that.”

Slumping against the wall at the words, Doyle nearly keened at the pain that consumed him at the knowledge that the other man was right, the agony both physical and emotional. Just then, a swarm of nurses and orderlies poured into the room, practically manhandling the stubborn sergeant back into his bed and drugs into his IV. Suddenly complacent as the sedatives took hold, the Delta Forces soldier could only sag into the mattress, tears leaking from the corners of his eyes. “What . . . what am I supposed to do, Flynn?” Turning his head into his pillow, he sobbed breathlessly, “How am I
supposed to let her go? I love her . . . there can never be anyone else.”

Flynn’s eyes were soft as he watched his friend grieve. “I don’t know, Doyle . . . I just don’t. I’m sorry.”

*End Flashback*

There had never been a moment since that Doyle didn’t regret not going back for his Major. There had never been a second, where the thought of her did not consume him. It had been an infinity since that last day with her, and it would only be time without end until he saw her again.

And that was only if his soul was not destined for an eternity in hell.
Beastly Secrets

Chapter Notes

So I have no excuses other than life is a bitch. Although, I was able to attend Philadelphia WizardCon and got several pictures with the illustrious Sebastian Stan. HE ADORED MY LITTLE GIRL AND KEPT FLIRTING WITH HER!!! At three, she didn't understand why that was awesome BUT I DO!

Either way, this was supposed to be published around Memorial Day, but things got crazy, as previously stated. I hope you enjoy this chapter guys.

Translations at the end of the chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter 160: Beastly Secrets

So admittedly? Jason didn't know Detective Catherine Chandler very well. He knew who she was of course, but other than her credentials with Special Projects, she was really just another cop on the job. But that didn't mean that he didn't know everything there was to know about the mannerisms she was currently showcasing. Deliberately evasive, shifting eyes, very very slight hesitations when answering certain questions; she was hiding something. And whatever secret she was carrying, it was a big something. Call him a snoop -- and he did use to be a spy, so take that for what's it worth -- but that secret called to him.

Unfortunately for Catherine Chandler, Marina had always used to tease that her Jay was like a dog with a bone when he wanted to know something, even worse than Colonel "I Need to Know Everything" himself. And seeing as Casey was still out on medical leave after being shot, there was no one to stop him from sticking his nose into her business. He was stuck on desk duty, with Alvarez as a partner; he was bored, frustrated and as far as he was concerned, she was now fair game.

As a result, like any good spy, he arranged to get her alone and out of anyone's hearing.

The other detective jumped a mile when the door to the interrogation room slammed shut behind her,
a smirking Jason Walsh leaning back against the wood. "Hiya Chandler," he greeted with a sly wink.

Catherine's eyes narrowed as she took in the "cat that ate the canary" look on his face, before greeting him cautiously. "Hey Walsh . . . what's going on? Reception told me that I had an interrogation in this room and that it had to be me."

"Yeah . . . actually, except interrogation would be more me asking questions and you answering them."

And if Jason didn't already know that she was hiding something, the way her back instantly went up and her whole demeanor tensed would have confirmed it for him. Her eyes narrowed at him viciously, as she demanded, "And why the hell would you need to do that?"

"Because I'm bored and you have a secret. Frankly, I do love a good secret."

"And you think that automatically makes it any of your business, because?!!"

Narrowing his own eyes, Jason watched her fume for a long moment. It was at that point that he came to the realization that Chandler wasn't protecting a what . . . she was protecting a who. And if there was anyone who understood the importance of keeping a secret to protect someone you loved, it would be a Grimm. Moving toward the chair, Jason spun it around and straddled the back, arms hanging gracelessly over the back. "Take a seat, Chandler; I'm going to tell you a true story. After you've heard it, you can make your own choice from there, okay?"

The woman looked suspicious for a moment before moving towards the empty chair on the other side of the table. Settling comfortably, she leaned forward on her elbows on the tabletop, drawling in a tone of forced calm, "I'm listening."

"Once upon a time, there was this project; it was headed by the United Stated Army and it was called 'Project Rebirth'. The project produced a single perfect soldier; the only one of his kind, though there had initially been plans to create more. Sadly, however, the scientist behind the research was assassinated very soon after the success. This soldier became known as Captain America; he was a national hero. He raised war bonds during World War Two, he traveled to bases overseas in an attempt to raise morale, he rescued more than a hundred men of the Army's 107th from the Nazis and Hydra, they wrote comic books about him for crying out loud! He was a good man and a loyal friend to those privileged enough to claim his friendship. But he was lost, following a plane crash in 1945."

Smirking bitterly, Jason reached up to scratch at the back of his head before continuing, "The Army was devastated. What were they going to do without their super soldier? Never mind that they had a legion of capable men and women in uniform who needed their support. So they tried to recreate him, countless times they tried. Finally, in the 1960's they succeeded. They called their successes 'Cahills', but they too were lost. Since then, there had been another handful of projects seeking to recreate the Army's perfect soldiers. Most of them have been total failures . . . No survivors."

Chandler's eyes were getting bigger and bigger as Jason spoke, before she finally chimed in, "How do you know all of this?"

"Come on, Chandler. My brothers and I are identical . . . how do you think I know about all of this?" he drawled, cocking a single eyebrow over an olive green eye.

"So what does any of this have to do with me?"

“Less than a year ago, the fingerprints from a long dead veteran showed up at a crime scene you were investigating. You don’t actually think that I think that’s a coincidence, do you?” Cocking his head, he leaned forward and lowered his voice carefully. “I can help him . . . if there is anyone in this
world who knows about secrets that keep you alive, it’s my brothers and me. Let us help you . . . let us help him.”

Chandler’s whole demeanor screamed wary distrust, as she watched his face with narrowed eyes. Checking his watch, Jason pushed himself to his feet with a sigh. “Let’s try this a different way. Tonight, my brother Will and his partner Marina are hosting a Memorial Day barbeque for the base. If I’m right, your secret is a veteran . . . and it’s been a long time since someone thanked him for his service.” Shrugging, he offered lightly, “You both should come.”

Knocking a knuckle against the tabletop, he pushed away towards the door. “If nothing else, come for the food. My sister is a phenomenal cook.”

There was a long pause, before Jason turned to go. He was almost out the door when Chandler spoke, “You’re gonna be there.”

The communications officer paused in the doorframe, recognizing the words for the statement they were. “Chandler, I never skip Marina’s cooking if I can help it. Casey and I are both going to be there.”

At his partner’s name, Chandler bit down on her lip. “How is Detective Shraeger?”

“Chomping at the bit to get back to work. She’s still out for another week or so, though.” Snorting, he drawled, “Can’t come fast enough in my opinion. I am bored as hell. I HATE paperwork. Not to mention, I can only take so much of Alvarez, before I start contemplating the best way to poison his gourmet lunches without getting caught.”

That earned a real smile from the other detective. “I can’t promise anything . . . but I’ll talk to him.”

Grinning, Jason winked. “You do that . . . we’ll see you both tonight.”

Chandler only nodded once, before the middle Grimm ducked from the room. Strolling back towards his desk, he chuckled, “Come on out, little Soldier. Here . . . there be explosives.”

His pathetic attempt at a Captain Jack Sparrow accent made him laugh and he was still chuckling to himself that night when he knocked on his girlfriend’s door. The redhead took in her boyfriend’s gleeful grin and cocked an eyebrow. “What did you do, Walsh?”

“Hey now! Hold on a second. On what grounds did I deserve that?!?”

“You threw me into a garbage pile!” she reminded him briskly.

“That happened once! And my ears are still ringing from that lecture.”

“As well they should be,” she teased, moving into his arms and lifting her face for his kiss. “Hi.”

Jason’s grin widened into adoration as he replied, “Hi . . . how’re you feeling?”

Casey’s mouth twisted bitterly. “I’m fine . . . really. I wish everyone would stop asking me that!” Watching those olive green eyes of his widen in surprise, she slumped with a remorseful grimace. “I’m good . . . I’m just antsy. I just want to go back to work.”

“I WANT you back at work. Trust me. Alvarez is annoying and paperwork sucks,” he whined, shoulders slouching in a sulk.

Chuckling at his childish pout, the woman teased, “Aw . . . poor baby.”
Rolling his eyes at her, he nevertheless wrapped one arm firmly around her waist and drew her that small inch closer. “You’re hysterical.”

“I feel no sympathy. When you were out after the hostage situation, I got stuck with Alvarez too. Longest two weeks of my life!”

The middle brother gaped at her in horror, before demanding, “Is this payback!?! I had nine busted fingers.”

A quick flash of her tongue was his only answer, earning her a light pinch to the ticklish place at the top of her hip which produced a high pitched series of giggles that Jason was absolutely certain that no one else had ever heard . . . even her former, jilted lover, Tall Man. (Granted, he knew the man’s damned name was Davis, but he really couldn’t bring himself to call him that.)

Finally straightening up, Casey cuddled closed to him as she insisted, “Come on, Jason . . . your sister and her cooking awaits.”

The moan in response was practically indecent and the detective could feel her whole body warm as she considered other – more private ways – that she could induce that sound from her lover. Shaking the thoughts away, she scolded fondly, “Hush you . . . we’re about to be in public.”

His smirk was wicked as he drawled, “We could always stay home?”

“And miss Marina’s cooking!? Not a chance in hell! Move it, Captain Hotass . . . there is a plate with my name on it. I can hear the desserts calling me from here.”

Chuckling, Jason offered her a proper bow as he insisted, “As the lady insists.”

Slinging his arm over her hip possessively, he ushered her out of her apartment building and into his car, almost humming to himself as he closed her door. When he opened his own, Casey was only a little surprised to heard a smooth baritone coming from his mouth as he sang under his breath, “She thinks my ass is sexy . . . it really turns her on.”

It took a second for the tune to place, before at last Casey started laughing. “Only you would butcher a Kenny Chesney song for your own maniacal purposes.”

The horror on his face was hysterical, causing another round of giggles as he protested, “I am NOT . . .” There was a long pause, before he insisted, “Clint and Brian totally did it first.”

“Oh I see . . . when in doubt, blame your brothers.”

“Only when they’re not around to defend themselves . . . it’s a tried and true tactic, and it’s never failed me before,” he agreed with a sly wink and a laugh.

There were nearly to the base, before Casey realized that her partner had never answered her first question. Twisting gingerly to put her back against the door, he asked, “Jay . . . why were you grinning like a maniac earlier?”

A soft exhale and a quick quirk of his lips was her only answer for a long time, before he finally replied, “I’ll tell you as soon as I know whether or not it worked.”

Well remembering some of Walsh’s more ingenious – and damnably messy – pranks, she drew back slightly as she demanded warily, “If what worked?” There was an expectant pause, before she continued, “How will you know if it worked?”
“Tell me if you see Detective Chandler at the barbeque and I’ll let you know.”

Cocking an eyebrow, she inquired curiously, “Why would I see Chandler at your sister’s barbeque?”

“Because the secret she’s been hiding is a presumably dead veteran . . . and I think I’ve finally convinced her to let the cat out of the bag.”

“First of all, how did you know Chandler had a secret? And secondly, why did you go digging for it?”

Jason’s face was protesting as he insisted petulantly, “I was bored, okay?! I don’t think you realize how bad it is for me to get bored. A lot of bad things happen when I get bored; empires topple, blood sheds, lives are ruined. It made me good at my job, but it is hell on everyone else.”

Unable to resist, she teased fondly, “There was a lot of hyperbole in that statement, Captain . . . would you care to elaborate?”

“Just . . . let me know if you see Chandler with anyone, and we’ll go from there. I don’t want to make too many conjectures in case I’m wrong.”

Smirking, she joked lightly, “Probably a good idea . . . you do tend to be a wrong a lot of the time.”

“Just because you don’t agree with my brilliance, Shraeger, does not make me wrong,” he sallied in reply with a wink.

Casey’s return reply was flippant as she drawled, “You’re just lucky I make excellent life choices, Walsh. If I didn’t, then where would you be?”

Smiling at the inside joke that was quickly becoming their “Thing”, he snorted, “You’d miss me if I was gone, Shraeger.” There was a moment as he took in his girlfriend’s incredulous expression out of the corner of his eyes, before reminding her cheerfully, “Without me, you’d have Alvarez for your partner . . . permanently.”

The full body shudder in response to that was explicit with her disgust, though her glare was almost worse. Chuckling, he reached for her hand and pressed an adoring kiss to the back. “I would never do that to you. You know that.”

Fortunately, they arrived at the base then, so Casey was saved from coming up with an appropriate response to what she knew was Jason’s unspoken declaration of love. Jason maneuvered deftly through the chaos on base, before finally pulling into Will and Marina’s driveway alongside their ancient Jeep. Even knowing her opinion on chivalry, the comm tech rounded the hood quickly and opened her car door for her. Narrowing her eyes at him playfully, she announced primly, “I’m gonna let you get away with that this time, because I am still recovering from being shot. But this is your only free pass.”

“Yes ma’am,” he teased, as the front door opened and Marina appeared on the porch, wiping her hands on a dishtowel as she watched them.

Casey glared as she ordered briskly, “And that will be quite enough sass out of you, mister.”

Jason’s grin was wicked as he replied, “Yes ma’am.”

The redhead growled viciously as the Russian giggled, slapping at her middle charge with her towel as they grew closer. “All right, sladkiy, that is quite enough out of you. Your father and the rest of the boys are in the backyard, playing football.”
Green eyes blinked in surprise, as he blurted, “Even Will?!”

One brown eyebrow arched upwards as she replied, “It’s Memorial Day. Even Misha takes a day off on Memorial Day. You know that.”

The technical specialist looked sheepish at the scold in her tone, rubbing at the back of his neck. “Well yeah . . . but after Croatia, I thought . . .”

There was a sad smile as Marina nodded once, “I know what you thought. But Sam has to report to Toronto in another few weeks, so we won’t have him with us for much longer. Today’s a family day . . . always has been, always will be. And right now, Misha needs a break. He’s wearing himself too thin . . . even he knows that.”

Jason grinned, winking at his sister as he dodged past her and disappeared into the house. Rolling her eyes fondly, Marina turned to Casey with a smile and a warm hug. “Hello Casey. The women are hiding out in the kitchen, if you’d like to join us.”

“And spare myself that one’s shenanigans? Sounds like a good plan to me.”

“Then come with me. I’m sure I can find some way to put you to work,” she laughed, with a playful wink.

When Marina pushed open the door of her home, Casey blinked, visibly surprised by the number of “women” in attendance. All of Marina’s sisters, Marta Shearing, and Maria Hill, as well as a half-dozen other women that Casey didn’t know, were all bustling busily around the kitchen as they worked at their individual jobs. “All right, Casey . . . if you could get started on the break, I think we will be just about done.”

“You’re making bread by hand!?”

Marina burst into laughter, shaking her head as she gestured toward the dining room. Piled on the table were at least thirty loaves of still warm French bread. “For 250 people? Some things are better bought. Ten slices a loaf, please, Casey.”

Saluting the Russian cheerfully, Casey moved to get to work. The job was soothing and repetitive, meaning that it wasn’t long before the redhead had lost herself in the rhythm of the work.

Meanwhile, Jason had managed to corral his eldest brother in a corner of their backyard and was explaining the circumstances surrounding Catherine Chandler as best as he knew them. The Colonel frowned, nodding slowly, before offering cautiously, “About six years ago, there was a project based in Afghanistan, experimenting with the application of non-human DNA into human soldiers. The official story is that the whole unit was KIA; what really happened was that the entire unit had to be put down. The strand of DNA the experiment used was unstable and caused unpredictable side effects. If you’re right, it sounds like maybe there were survivors . . . or at least A survivor.”

Green eyes narrowed as Jason considered his brother, before inquiring cautiously, “How do you know all of this?”

Will snorted viciously as he replied bitterly, “I was the one ordered to process the KIA paperwork, and write the letters home to the families.” Growling under his breath, the Colonel closed his eyes for a moment, before continuing, “Also, Vanessa Chandler was rumored to be the MD in charge of the project; she was a friend . . . once . . . a long time ago. When she was murdered around the same time as the project getting scrapped, I had Owen do some digging around; suffice it to say that I didn’t really want to know what it is that I discovered.”
“Is there anything that you don’t know, big brother?”

“Sure . . . Ross’ reasons for being a moron and continuing to pursue a successful ‘Captain America’ project. There have been so many failures, and so many lives lost, and no real successes since us.” Rubbing a hand over his face, he muttered caustically, “At least this point, all he’s doing is ruining people’s lives.”

The scowl on Jason’s face was a near-perfect mimic of Will’s own. “The man is an ass. That’s all there is to it.”

Will snickered as his chin dipped in agreement. “No argument here.” Dragging a hand back through his hair, the eldest Grimm asked, “Do you really think that they’ll come?”

“I don’t know . . . I hope so. Chandler could use a larger support system, if nothing else. Carrying this kind of secret alone? It’s hard . . . we at least have always had each other.”

Ruffling is brother’s hair fondly, Will teased, “You’re getting soft in your old age, Jay.”

Jason shoved his brother off with a scowl, snapping, “Shut up, Mr ‘I’ll be 40 on my next birthday’.”

There was a snort from behind them, where the remaining Grimms had obviously been eavesdropping, before Clint elaborated, “That was weak!!”

Chuckling, Will watched as the middle brother lunged at their youngest, causing real giggles as the sniper just barely managed to dodge. Folding his arms, he stood off to the side and watched his brothers roughhouse with each other. Bucky, Sam and Owen stood out of the way, as Jason finally dumped the archer onto his lawn and proceeded to tickle the hell out of him, causing squeals. Of course, Brian proceeded to do his part and pinned Clint’s BFF. Even to Will, Aaron looked unamused though he didn’t fight the older brother too hard.

The squeals reaching super-sonic levels brought Marina instantly to the backdoor, eyes wide as she demanded, “Who’s dying!?”

“Marina! Help!” Clint giggled, helplessly squirming under the onslaught.

Smirking, the S.H.I.E.L.D. handler leaned against the door and called, “Save yourself, dorogoy.” Looking over at her quiescent partner, she smiled to see long-absent peace on his features. “And how are you, Misha?”

Closing his eyes, the soldier turned his face into the sun and simply stood for a minute. He could feel his lover’s eyes on him, though she said nothing. Finally he twisted to face her, offering her a hand. The Russian offered a serene smile as she gave him her hand, and allowed herself to be pulled into him, cuddling close. The sound of his heartbeat under her ear was strong and familiar as he replied, “It’s a good day.”

At the calm stillness in his tone, Marina turned her face into his shoulder. “Ya lyublyu tebya, Mishka. Vsegda.”

There was a softness in his voice as he replied, “Vsegda, samaya malen’kaya.”

The arms around her shoulders tightened, lifting her off her feet and to his lips. Their kisses were easy and languid, familiar in that way that only longtime lovers were. Neither of them even heard the backgrounds sounds of her boys gagging or her Misfits laughing. It was a good day indeed.

Soon enough, however, the house began to stir as the time for the barbeque grew more imminent.
The boys were enlisted to pull out the tables and chairs, as the women began to set out the food. Marina herself was in full-out mothering mode, as she fluttered about to make sure that everything was ready. It was during this chaos that Detective Catherine Chandler slipped through the side gate. On her heels was a tall young man, with dark hair and a ghastly scar running down his right cheek.

The younger three Grimms had been banished to a back corner of the backyard with their significant others, discussing the various reasons for why Natasha had dragged Brian into service nearly fifteen minutes. (Clint’s opinion that she had dragged him off to get busy in an empty bedroom was probably the most accurate, but no one was willing to contemplate that option too closely. Natasha had a reputation for being terrifying and lethal and terrifyingly lethal for a reason.)

Bucky was leaning against the trunk of the tree Clint was perched in, while Aaron was seated in the grass at Marta’s feet. As for the two detectives, Jason and Casey were cuddled up together in a camp chair, chatting comfortably with the other four. Everyone’s heads came around at the sound of the gate, as most of the people attending the barbeque were coming through the front of the house. At the sight of their colleague in Special Projects, Jason twisted to face his eldest brother. “Will!! They’re here!”

The Colonel turned from his conversation with Sam and Owen, following Casey’s finger to where the couple had stalled by the gate. The man’s face triggered his memory and he strode forward, offering one hand congenially. “Specialist Keller . . . I’m fairly certain that I processed your killed in action paperwork.”

His partner’s voice rang from inside the house as she scolded, “Misha!! It’s this thing called tact!! Find some!!”

Will chuckled, noticing the wariness in the other man’s as he accepted the offered hand. “My name is Will Grimm. The woman you heard is my partner, Marina Petrovka. Welcome to our barbeque. Happy Memorial Day . . . thank you for your service to this country.”

There were signs of a blush in the tinge of his ears, the smile on the former soldier’s face sheepish as he confessed, “I haven’t been a soldier for at least ten years, sir.”

“That doesn’t matter to me, Keller. You served this country faithfully and from the looks of you, whoever did this to you robbed you of the freedoms you fought and technically ‘died’ for.”

Aaron appeared at Will’s side then, one hand coming up to his brother’s shoulder. “Join the club,” he muttered, still bitter over his recent experiences with Ric Byer and NRAG. Turning to the elder, he teased, “I don’t know what you did, Colonel, but you’re in trouble. Marina is spitting nails in the kitchen.”

“I have no social skills,” was the man’s unself-conscious explanation as he turned toward the house. “I know it’s scary and keeping his secret is hard. But if you need someone to talk to, I’m here to talk anytime. I know what it’s like to have to keep the kind of secret that could mean the difference between life and death for the man I love. All the women in this family do; you’re among friends here, Chandler, I promise.”

There was a long pause as the brunette considered that, before she spoke, “Cat.”
Casey glanced at her boyfriend curiously, seeing her own confusion in his face. “I beg your pardon?”

“My friends call me ‘Cat’,” she repeated, with a small smile on her face.

“All right, Cat . . . call me Casey. And I think you already know this idiot is Walsh. Come meet the rest of the Grimm women; we don’t bite . . . mostly. I think Marta’s probably the only one I can guarantee that with. The rest of the women in this family can kill you with their pinkie fingers and a toothpick.”

Bucky chuckled as he correctly fondly, “It was a chop stick and her thumb, but the basic idea is still the same.”

Halting the two in their tracks, Jason spoke up, “Uh . . . first, let’s get you a plate. Marina is a fantastic cook and you will regret it if you don’t try her shashliki.”

Catherine frowned at the unfamiliar term and attempted to repeat it cautiously, “Sheesh-lik?”

“Shashliki,” Jason reiterated with a flawless Russian accent. “Steak kabobs. Marina’s Russian and it tends to show up in her cooking. But seriously, they are to die for and they are always the first things to go. So hurry up,” he insisted seriously, prodding the two women along. “Move it ladies . . . I’m starving!”

Casey rolled her eyes at the phrase, leaning over to inform Catherine in a stage whisper. “For the record? The Grimms are always starving when their sister is cooking, so take that for what it’s worth. Momma’s boys, the lot of them.”

Jason did little more than glare at his partner, though if Cat snickered at his expense, the detective pretended not to notice.

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Chapter End Notes

So I know that the new Beauty and the Beast did not start until 2012, but it is not 2012. It's barely 2008 in the UALP!verse. That being said, it's basically going to all have gone down the same way as it does in the show, just several years earlier. Vincent will shortly be important, so yeah. Enjoy!

Translations:
(R) sladkiy - honey (Marina's nickname for Jason)
(R) dorogoy - darling (Marina's nickname for Clint)
(R) Ya lyublyu tebya - I love you
(R) Misha/Mishka - a petname deriving from Mikhail/Michael (Marina's favorite nickname for Will whose middle name is Michael)
(R) Vsegda - Always
(R) samaya malen'kaya - my little one (Will's favorite nickname for Marina Petrovka)
(R) shashliki - steak kabobs (they are delicious! I'm not even joking)
Hey y'all! New chapter! Woot!

The picture is a commission from Philly Con, though I spent a hell of a lot of time painting it, because it was originally in only black and white. Again, it was commissioned with this fic in mind, so please don't post it elsewhere.

Thank you guys again for all the reviews. I love to read them.

Translations, the few that there are, are at the end of the chapter, as always. ENJOY!!!
Chapter 161: The RAGE

Will barely paused alongside his partner, as he led Vincent into the house. Marina was attempting to resolutely ignore her lover, amidst her best friend's teasing snickers. Capturing the Russian around the waist, the oldest Grimm hauled her to him with her back against his chest, as he began to murmur against the skin of her throat. Whatever he said earned a pair of wild eyes and a hungry growl. “Promises promises, Colonel,” she purred seductively, fingers toying playfully with the buttons at his throat.

Grinning at her, he kissed her the join of neck and shoulder sweetly before continuing on his way towards the stairwell. Vincent dipped his head with a deferential, “Ma'am,” before trailing along after him.

Once inside his office, Will took the seat behind his desk and gestured to the empty chair opposite. “Take a seat, Specialist.”

“Sir, I haven't been . . .” he protested, though the disappointment eloquent in the lines of the other man's face was enough to make Vincent fall silent.

“Keller, you were an NCO at the time of your 'death', were you not?”

“Yes, sir, I was.”

“Then, as far as I am concerned, you are entitled to the rank and everything that goes with it. Of course, the rank of 'Specialist' may not be worth much to a commissioned, but it's still a step over a private.” Leaning back in his chair, he fixed the former emergency room doctor with a pair of blazing blue eyes and inquired, “How about you tell me everything you know from the last seven years? We'll go from there.”

Nodding, Vincent Ryan Keller looked down at his hands before starting to speak. “The experiment was supposed to make us better soldiers . . . stronger, faster . . . but it just took us apart. We weren't human anymore . . . we were barely soldiers; we were rabid animals at best.”

“How did you get the scar? It's quite impressive. Another inch and you would have lost that eye.”

Keller's shoulders rose and fell as he shook his head. “I don't recall; all I can guess is that it happened when I was beasted out during my escape.” Looking sheepish as he rubbed at the back of his head, he confessed, “I don't usually have any memory of what happened during those times. I didn't have it before I beasted out and I had it after I was back to normal.”

Leaning over to pick up a pen from his pencil holder, the Colonel scribbled a note on the pad in front of him. “Beast out? Is that what you call it?”

“Well yeah . . . it seems the most accurate description for what happens to me.”

“Why?”

Keller blinked in surprise at the question, stammering for a moment as he fumbled for a good answer. Taking pity on him, Will smiled gently and asked, “Who was the first to call it that? Was it you? A unit mate? Dr. Chandler, perhaps?”

At the question, Vincent stared like a deer in headlights, before asking cautiously, “Who?”

Will frowned, leaning forward to fold his hands on his desktop. “Do you have memory lapses often,
Specialist Keller? Dr. Vanessa Chandler was the medical authority on your project; she was onsite throughout the project, to help with the side effects and help manage the effects of the rage. Don't you remember her?"

Keller seemed very far away as he replied in a soft murmur, “I didn't before this moment but I do now. How did you . . .?"

“Vanessa was a friend, once, before we had a falling out over the hypothetical application and the overall ethics about an experiment like this.” Giving the other man a small smirk, he gestured at a picture hanging over his shoulder of him, his father and his four brothers. “I'm sure you can see why that could be the case.”

“Yes sir; Cat told me a little bit about what happened at the precinct where she works . . . and why. I know that violated her nondisclosure agreement, but really, who would I tell? Technically, I'm dead.”

Will slouched backwards as he nodded in acknowledgment of the explanation. “Threaten one of my brothers and my partner will flay you alive. Succeed in actually injuring one of them and there is no safe haven for you on this earth. My Marishka is very protective of 'her boys', to put it mildly, and will not tolerate any harm to come to them.

Smiling, Vincent nodded in understanding, “Duly noted, sir.”

“Good. Back to my question. Who was the first to call it 'beasting out'?"

“My best friend, JT . . . JT Forbes . . . he's a biochemist . . . for a long time, before I met Catherine, he was the only one I trusted to keep my secret. Everyone else I've ever known – my mother, my sisters-in-law, my former fiancée – they all believe that I was killed in action.”

The Colonel's snort was amused as he replied, “I'm pretty sure that that club has its headquarters in my home.”

“I don't understand, sir.”

“My younger brother, Aaron; my brother Clint's boyfriend, Bucky; Aaron's girlfriend, Marta; my best friend, Owen; Marina's sister, Viktoria; and my father are all technically dead.” A hapless shrug was the eldest Grimm's only response to the incredulous look on Vincent's face. “We live a complicated life. Either way, you'll fit in just fine here.”

Looking down, the older man scribbled a series of notes under the first, before looking up once again. “So . . . your friend, Dr. Forbes? . . . has he been able to pinpoint anything that can help you with control?"

“He was able to synthesize a tranq dart that actually works when I become too dangerous, either to myself or to others, but that's about all. He's been working on it, but he's a chemist not a biologist.”

Nodding slowly, Will leaned forward on his elbows. “So here's what I think is going to happen next. Marta Shearing – Marta is Aaron's girlfriend – is a virologist with a knack for suped-up genetics. After the holiday, if you and Dr. Forbes would like, we can arrange a meeting of the minds as it were. See if we can get you some semblance of a normal life back.”

Keller's whole demeanor perked up as he agreed breathlessly. “That sounds amazing.”

“In the meantime, let's talk about your future. You were an MD, were you not?”
“Yes sir, I was . . . I specialized in emergency medicine in medical school. When the Towers fell, and my brothers died inside, I couldn't just do nothing. So I enlisted.”

Humming, the eldest Grimm seemed to get far away for a moment before inquiring, “Do you think you can still BE a doctor? Or would the stress 'beast you out’?”

Considering the way Keller's jaw dropped a bit in surprise, it was obviously a question that he had never considered before. Smiling the Colonel elaborated, “S.H.I.E.L.D. is always looking for a good doctor or ten for our onsite Medical facilities. If you think you're up for it, I can put you in the rotation immediately.” Snorting, he continued, “The training courses are mandatory, but you can join Sam in his accelerated courses. You both were highly trained, special forces soldiers. I'm sure that Marina won't mind taking on another Misfit.”

There was a pause, before the non-commissioned office replied, awestruck, “I don't know sir, but I would kill for a chance to find out.”

Pushing himself to his feet, Will extended a hand with a smile. “In that case, Dr. Keller, welcome to S.H.I.E.L.D.. And that will be quite enough of the 'sir' part of our conversations. You can call me Will or, if you prefer to be more formal, Brandt. Let's get you something to eat and I'll have my secretary prepare your recruitment paperwork first thing in the morning.”

“Thank you, sir . . . er . . . I mean, Agent Brandt. I can't tell you what this means to me.”

Clapping the younger man on the shoulder companionably, Will announced with a grin, “I'll bet I understand better than you think I do. Come on; Detective Chandler probably thinks I've murdered you and buried you in my flowerpots.”

“You have flower pots?”

“Marina’s idea,” he confessed with an eyeroll. “She claims they are soothing . . . I think they smell funny and take up too much room. But she's samaya malen`kaya . . . there isn't much I wouldn't tolerate for her sake. I'm sure you feel the same for Detective Chandler.”

Vincent's grin was wry and amused as he replied, “May I suggest that I know precisely how you feel? And that we should keep them apart, if at all possible. They'd probably try to take over the world together.”

“Too late for that. Marina and her best friend, Assistant Director Maria Hill, are already about ten years in on their master plan for world domination.” Chuckling, Will announced, “Individually, those two women are terrifying. Together, they are utterly unstoppable. Frankly, my father and I have learned to just roll with it. It's easier that way.”

Hansel's heavily accents voice spoke up from the doorframe as he leaned into the room then. “Ja . . . it is much safer too. Adler, mein Sohn, the Director is here to see hyu. Hyu had best come quickly.”

Will frowned, moving immediately towards the door. “What did Fury want? Did he say?”

“He said nothing . . . only that he must speak mit hyu immediately. He would say no more.”

“Dad, if you wouldn't mind directing Dr. Keller towards the backyard and the food, I will go find out what Nick wants.”

“Of course, Adler. Come along, Doktor; there will be a rush for seconds very soon and I doubt that there will be much left after.”
“Please, call me Vincent. So . . . you’re German?”

“Technically, I am Bavarian. But for the purposes of this talk, ja, I am German. Though my sons are as American as Americans come. They are good men . . . meine Tochter has raised them well.”

“Toktar?” Vincent asked hesitantly, butchering the accent terribly and causing a sharp wince from the former witch hunter.

“Marina is as close as I shall come to a daughter, I fear. She makes my Adler happy and my younger sons adore her. If hyu stick around, hyu will learn. There are many debts that I will have to repay once I am in hell; her is the largest share among them.”

The brunette Russian chirped cheerfully as she suddenly materialized at Hansel's left. “Vati, my ears are burning.”

Chuckling, Hansel looped his arm over her shoulders and pressed a tender kiss to her temple. “That is what happens when hyu eavesdrop on a private conversation, Tochter. Hyu hear things hyu should not.”

Smirking, the woman cocked her head, “I was not eavesdropping . . . I was simply waiting for a good time to interrupt. Clint told me that Nick is here and I was hoping you could point me in the direction of my lover.”

“Adler has been apprised of Fury's arrival and is with him now.” Turning, Hansel laid a paternal hand on Keller's shoulder as he continued, “Marishka, I would like to introduce hyu to Dr. Vincent Keller, Specialist, United States Army. Vincent, this is Agent Marina Petrovka . . . Will may be the senior officer, but Marina is the true ruler in this home.” Turning back to Marina, he insisted, “Vincent shall be joining hyur Sam in training, before taking a position within Medical.”

Marina's eyes went opaque with that protectiveness she was so famous for, even as she smiled and shook Keller's hand confidently, “I see. Welcome to S.H.I.E.L.D., Dr. Keller.”

“Please, call me Vincent. It's been a long time since anyone has called me 'Dr. Keller'; it's going to take some getting used to. And it's still a little strange to hear.”

Winking cheekily, her eyes warming into hot chocolate brown again, she laughed, “You should probably learn to get used to it, if you plan to work in Medical. Could get a little awkward otherwise. Just a tip.”

“I'll take that under advisement,” he agreed with a sheepish grin, before Will came blowing through the hallway like a hurricane.

Gone was the charming, if socially awkward, Colonel Will Grimm and in his place was cold and calculating Agent William Brandt. Laying a gentle hand on Marina's elbow, he insisted, “Clear all essential personnel out of the house. Get the boys inside. We have some work to do.”

Marina blinked at him in shock, protesting, “But Misha . . . the barbeque . . .”

“Now Marina,” he ordered, moving past in a brisk rush.

“Yes sir,” she agreed, even as her eyebrows rose in surprise at his tone. Turning to Vincent, she gestured back the way they'd come. “If you wouldn't mind staying? I think we’ll need Medical onsite; whatever just happened, it sounds bad.”

“Sure; what about Cat?”
Unfortunately, Detective Chandler is not S.H.I.E.L.D. She'll have to hang out downstairs for a bit; Casey can keep her company.” Glancing up at the German, she asked, “Vati, if you'd head up with him. I'll go round up the boys.”

“I would call hyur sisters if I was hyu, Tochter. I have a feeling that their unique skill sets will be of considerable use on this assignment.”

“Hmm . . . good call,” she agreed absently, before moving away.

It was probably twenty minutes later that everyone in the family with S.H.I.E.L.D. security clearance was finally congregated in Will's study on the second story of the house. Casey and Cat were both downstairs in the backyard, supervising the final stragglers to the barbeque as well as the beginning of the cleaning-up. Natasha Romanoff was sitting on the couch, with her lover sprawled across the cushions beside her, and both Nika Belinskaya & Vika Coulson perched on the coffee table in front of them. All three of the women were staring intently at their youngest sister, who was sitting cross-legged on the corner of her partner's desk, the two engaged in a terse, sharp and low-toned conversation in fluent German . . . the only language the two knew fluently that a good majority of the rest of the family did not. “Does anyone even have any idea what the hell they're saying?” Nika asked petulantly with a fierce pout.

“Not a clue,” Vika replied, prompting Natasha to nudge her lover roughly. “All right, Mr. Son-Of-A-German . . . translate.”

“The only word I'm hearing repeatedly is Untoten . . . and I have no idea what it means,” Brian answered nonchalantly, eyes still closed and hands folded over his chest, his shoulders shrugging lazily. “Whatever is going on, they both clearly intend to tell us, so chill out okay? Patience is nature's greatest virtue.”

One of Natasha's eyebrows cocked upwards at the phrase, even as she taunted, “And since when have you ever been interested in the exercise of patience?”

Brian's smirk was wicked as he tossed her a sardonic salute, “Touché!”

What the foursome might have said was interrupted as Will finally stood from his desk chair and turned to address the room. “It's been called to my attention that this mission should be on a volunteer basis only.” Reaching up to scratch at the back of his neck, he continued, “In light of what happened in Croatia, I wouldn't blame anyone who chose to stay behind.”

Before the words were even completely out of his mouth, Marina had picked up his pencil holder and thrown it squarely at his head, the canister letting out a hollow ring as it connected hard. “That is NOT why I made the suggestion, William Michael! The ZOMBIES on the other hand . . .”

“Wait, zombies? Like 'I'll eat your brains' kinda zombies?” Jason asked with an incredulously gleeful grin.

“Yeah, real, honest-to-God zombies are reportedly eating people and be overall scary in Georgia,” Marina agreed with a roll of her eyes. “So, as Misha said, this assignment is going to be strictly voluntary. You all know that I'm already in, but you'll each need to make your own choice from there. You want out, speak now or forever hold your peace.”

Each of the younger four Grimm boys looked at each other with varying degrees with excitement and, almost in one voice, announced, “Dude . . . when do we leave!?”

“Jay, you don't have to go. You're not S.H.E.I.L.D. anymore, remember? And you left for a good
reason,” Will reminded the younger brother wearily.

“Maybe not, but you can’t say that there are fucking zombies in fucking Georgia and not expect me to be all over that plan. Come on, Will, be serious . . . it’s zombies!”

Will's eyes rolled at the reply, though Marina's smile was a mix of fond exasperation and mild irritation that was unique to the Family Russian's emotions to dealing with the eccentric whims of her beloved boys sometimes. Pausing, Jason considered for a moment, before frowning fiercely, “Not to mention, no way in hell am I trusting you guys to some dumbass newbie comm tech . . . nuh-uh, not a chance in hell. . . I'm going.”

Bucky's arm tightened where it was wrapped around his boyfriend's waist, announcing immediately, “No way in hell am I letting Clint go to Georgia alone . . . god, he'd probably try to pet one . . . or worse, adopt it!”

Clint's indignant protest was immediately swallowed by his boyfriend's lips on his own, though the rest of the brothers were all chortling at the knowledge that Bucky's declaration was more than likely accurate. Pushing away from the corner he was standing in, Sam Braddock spoke up next, “I'm in. Seriously, I have to go just to see this for myself.”

Owen moved to stand beside his best friend, clapping the Colonel warmly on the shoulder, “Come hell or high water, Will, I am your man. I'm in.” Grinning at the other man, Will took the offered arm, the two clasping wrists firmly in long standing camaraderie.

Marta spoke up from where she was curled up beside of Aaron. “Are there any theories about why there are zombies in Georgia?”

“Nothing concrete . . . however, the common consensus is a biological outbreak of some kind, possibly a virus? I don't know for certain.”

Nodding quietly, she frowned for a moment before speaking up, “Sounds like you'll need a virologist onsite to help synthesize an antidote.”

Aaron burst from his chair in instant protest. “What!? Not a chance in hell are we taking my new girlfriend to zombie-infested Georgia! Come on, Will! Side with me on this!”

Will bit on his lower lip, before sighing heavily, “Thank you, Marta . . . your help is much appreciated.”

Aaron stared in horror, before rounding on his sister, “MARINA! Talk to your boyfriend!!!!!”

Marina gave her solnyshko a small smile, even as she shook her head. “Marta's made her own choice. Allow her the dignity of it.”

Vincent looked around the room, noting that the three women beside the second eldest Grimm brother were all nodding in unspoken agreement. Will turned to his father and Maria Hill, and noticed that the two were watching each other carefully, before Hansel spoke up, “Ja, I am mit hyu, mein Sohn.”

Her mouth twisting sadly, Maria shook her head, “As much as I would love to go kick zombie ass with you, Marina, someone has to stay here and mind the ship.”

Marina nodded in agreement, winking playfully as she promised, “When we get back, I'll tell you all about it.”
The new medical officer for S.H.I.E.L.D. – not even officially recruited or even an hour on the job –
took a deep breath as the Colonel and the Russian both turned to face him. “And you, Dr. Keller? You in?”

Shrugging haphazardly, he joked, “Sounds like a good way to get my feet wet, I guess. Yeah . . . I'm in too.”

Taking a deep breath, Will nodded his gratitude, before lifting a stack of file folders and beginning to pass them out. “Inside the folders are the mission specs. Head home, get packed, read up and meet back here at 1800 tonight . . . Fury wants us in Georgia yesterday.”

“Yes sir!” was the resounding chorus, the current and former Army boys among them all snapping precise salutes, before the room emptied.

Soon Marina and Will were the only two who remained. Turning to look at her lover, the Russian waited for him to speak. There was a long pause, before S.H.I.E.L.D.’s Chief Analyst finally spoke, “God help us . . .”

Marina's reply was equally reverent as she replied, “Amen.”

Chapter End Notes

Translations:

(R) samaya malen'kaya - my little one (Will's most common nickname for Marina)
(G) Ja/Net - Yes/No
(G) Adler - Eagle (Hansel's nickname for Will)
(G) mein Sohn - my son
(G) Doktor - Doctor
(G) meine Tochter - my daughter (Hansel's nickname for Marina)
(G) Vati - Dad (Marina's nickname for Hansel)
(G) Untoten - undead (technically could be used for either zombies or vampires. I checked! :D)
(R) solnyshko - sunshine (one of Marina's nicknames for Aaron/Kenny)
Chapter Notes

Lots of translations this time. Mostly names. So yeah . . . enjoy that!

Look, it wasn't a month before I posted again! Woohoo!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter 162: Crazy, Stupid, Boys

If Jason had been excited about the zombies, he was even more excited about the part where he got to jump out of a plane. Grinning at Aaron, he fastened the straps almost absentmindedly as he announced, “I think I need to rejoin the world of the living. Do you have any idea how long it's been since I got to jump out of a plane!?”

Aaron's eyes were shining in the dim light, even as his hands moved to check straps and tighten his brother's harness, before allowing Jason to do the same for him. “I can imagine it's been awhile.”

Looking across the cargo plane, the second youngest Grimm called, “Hey Will! How long has it been since YOU jumped out of a plane?”

Will's eyes rolled, though only his partner saw how pale he was under his tan. “It's been awhile,” he replied, with a barely suppressed shudder. Looking down at his Russian as she laid a hand on his forearm, he smirked lightly, “I'm all right; heights just make me a little nervous.”

Chocolate colored eyes were warm as she squeezed his arm, teasing, “Seriously, why would anyone want to jump out of a perfectly good plane?”

His eyes narrowed as he scolded fondly, “Oh please, Little Miss 'My Sisters And I Are Gonna Jump Out Of This Plane Headfirst'.”

Smirking in acknowledgment, Marina's hands moved to check the harness of his parachute, both for his peace of mind and for her own. When she was finished, she went up on tiptoes to press a sweet kiss to the underside of his chin. “We've jumped out of at least a million planes, Mishka, and nothing's ever gone wrong. So relax, okay? I'm gonna go check on the boys. We're almost at the...
drop point.”

Nodding, he began to check the pockets on his jumpsuit to make sure he had everything. Leaving him to it, Marina began to move through the group of people in the belly of the S.H.I.E.L.D.-modified troop carrier that had airlifted them out of New York at least three hours before. Bucky and Clint were off to the side, fiddling with each other’s harnesses as Bucky scolded the sniper firmly. Based on the petulant look on the younger man's face, the Winter Soldier was probably informing Hawkeye of all the things he was not allowed to do with the zombies. (Apparently, Marina wasn't the only one worried that Clint would attempt to smuggle one of the walking dead home in his rifle case or something else equally ridiculous.)

Vincent was being assisted with his harness by a surprisingly adept Hansel Kuhn, though to be honest Marina was unsure why she was surprised. Her Vati had proven on more than one occasion that his ability to adapt to the modern world he now found himself in was unparalleled. The former soldier initially looked a little nervous, but whatever Hansel said then sparked a quirky grin and a genuine laugh.

Sam was leaning back against the bulkhead, hands resting comfortably on the butt of the sniper rifle he'd slung across his chest. There were white cords hanging from his ears; considering the closed eyes and the bobbing of his head, he was listening to some music while he waited for the plane to get into position. Unable to resist this young man who was quickly becoming as dear to her as one of her own, Marina moved to brush a hand across his exposed forearm. His eyes stayed closed even as a warm smile creased his lips, his other hand coming up to squeeze hers as he promised, “I'm ready . . . just tell me when, Sova.”

Seeing no reason to reply, she squeezed once more and moved on. Aaron and Jason were still messing with each other, laughing together as Jason ran a last minute diagnostic on his tech while they waited for the order to jump. Marta stood just outside of their reach, giggling as the two brothers jostled each other fondly; more than a few times, Marina saw Aaron's eyes flash over to check on her. Owen had gotten into his gear and taken up position at Will's left shoulder, eyes sweeping the deck as though the Colonel needed protecting from their friends. Exchanging a fierce look with the Cleaner and former Division operative, Marina knew that he was just as determined to keep her lover safe from whatever was down there as she was. Not for the first time, she thanked whatever God was willing to listen to a spy and assassin, for the friendship between the two men.

As for her sisters, both Veronika and Natasha were with Brian off to the side of the plane. The two women were checking their weapons, while Brian tugged firmly on the straps on his girlfriend's parachute. Viktiriya had elected to stay at S.H.I.E.L.D., her attention solely on whatever information they would need as the mission progressed. (Marina was fairly certain the decision had actually been as a result of a certain test the golden-haired Amazon had taken a few days before. However, that secret was not hers to tell, so she kept her mouth shut . . . even if the only sound she could hear in her own head was her delighted squeals.)

Moving to take her place in the empty space at her lover's side, Marina leaned back against the wall and waited for the pilot's all clear. And if anyone noticed the way Will's weight shifted slightly in her direction, they were at least smart enough not to comment on it.

It seemed like a moment and an eternity, before the co-pilot jogged down the steps from the cockpit and announced into the cargo hold, “Agent Brandt . . . we're about five minutes from the jump zone.”

“Thank you, Lieutenant Simms . . . go ahead and tell Captain Abrams that we're ready to jump on his call.”
“Yes sir!” he agreed, with a sharp salute before dashing out of view once again.

Turning to his team, Will called out, “All right . . . huddle up!”

Instantly, he had the attention of the entire room. Everyone moved to form a half-circle in front of him, listening intently as he prepared to go over the last details of the assignment. Marina smiled as she watched Aaron hook Marta's harness onto his parachute; the scientist would be going down with her boyfriend, for both her sake and his own. Will looked around the circle and began to speak, “All right . . . so we’re five minutes from what seems destined to be the worst few days of our lives. I need a sound off of everyone, call signs only. I want to make sure everyone knows them; it's unlikely we're all going to land together so it's important that we know how to keep track of each other.”

Marina spoke first, sensing that the others were waiting for someone to start them. “Sova . . .,” there was a pause, before she grinned, “. . . or Sych, but none of you get to call me that.”

As she'd known it would, that released the ratcheting tension as the rest of the crew released a round of stiff chuckles. Bucky spoke next, “Zimny Soldat or just the Soldat.”

“Yastreb,” was Clint's answer, seconds before Aaron spoke up, “Sokol,” followed by Marta's own timid, “Vorona.”

Sam's smile was twisted with amusement as he answered, “Snayper,” the word sounding too much like “sniper” for everyone – even those who weren't fluent in Russian – to not know what it meant. In contrast, Owen's own smile was wicked as he boasted, “Ubiytsa.”

Vincent's lips fumbled with his own callsign, before Will took pity and recited, “Tselitel . . . you don't have to know how to say it, but at least remember what it sounds like so when you hear it, you know we're talking to you, okay?”

“Yes sir,” was the prompt response, before Brian chimed in next, “Skopa,” with Natasha's laughing “Chernaya Vdova” nearly overlapping his. Nika laughed, her arms stretching luxuriously as she practically purred, “Tigritsa.”

Jason spoke up then, “Krechet . . . I'm going to probably be the voice you hear most often, just as a head's up and a reminder.”

Will nodded to his father, prompting the German to announce, “Volk” before the eldest Grimm finished off with his own, “Orel. So . . . our target is a small landing strip about a mile from here. It's connected to a small research base; all reports indicate that the base is abandoned, however there are higher than expected amounts of energy coming from a place where there isn't anyone in residence. That being said, we're under the assumption that this is Ground Zero for the outbreak. We'll rendezvous about 200 meters from the base tonight, and send recon into the base tomorrow morning. Keep in mind, we are hunting zombies . . . if one engages you, kill it. Right now, I could care a less about the possibility of a cure; I care more about making sure everyone gets home. Understood?”

The rounds of “Yes sir!” was thunderous in the enclosed space. Once the sound faded, Will gestured towards his younger brother, “Krechet . . . it's your floor.”

Nodding firmly, Jason flipped open the lid of the locked box he was holding in his hands. “These are your comm units. They are specifically designed to copy and recognize the DNA of the initial wearer, making them impossible to listen in on. Once they have read you, they will only respond to you so do not lose them. Embedded in the receiver is a GPS locator, which will be able to locate you to within half a meter of where you are.” Pausing, he glared at Brian, as he muttered angrily, “I would appreciate it if you would not force me to have to use that feature, BRI.”
Brian's grin was evil as he winked, “Sure thing, little brother.”

Rolling his eyes, the middle Grimm muttered a series of unflattering insults under his breath, before speaking up once again. “I am going to warn you that they are not S.H.I.E.L.D. approved. They were a project I was working on at home while I was finishing up my medical leave, so let me know how they work, okay?”

Clint grinned as he clapped his brother on the shoulder, laughing, “It's good to see you building crazy shit again, Jay . . . I can't even tell you how much we've all missed your batshit engineering projects.”

Shrugging sheepishly, Jason confessed, “I hadn't realized how much I'd missed it until I started fiddling with my dusty old tools again.”

The look between Will and Marina was eloquent with silent understanding, and in the back of the Russian's mind, she was considering all the different ways she could manipulate Nick into recruiting Jason into S.H.I.E.L.D. once more. Or Maria; the Assistant Director was usually much better about manipulating people into getting the outcome she wanted. Whatever else might have been said was interrupted by the pilot's voice coming through the loudspeaker, “We are in the drop zone . . . I repeat, we are in the drop zone . . . good hunting, agents.”

Will turned immediately towards Owen, who rushed to slap the button to open the cargo bay doors. “All right . . . everybody keep your eyes open. Sam . . . I want you and Vincent to go first, and Aaron, I want you and Marta after them. Bucky and Clint next . . . then Owen and Jason . . . Natasha and Brian . . . Nika and Marina . . . then Dad and me . . . be careful and we'll see you on the ground.”

Two by two, the members of their team moved towards the opening doors and lunged out into open space. Before long, only Brian, Hansel, Will, and the three Russians were left. Glancing at her sisters, the red-haired assassin grinned at the gleeful look on the brunette's face. “Shall we, Murderesses?”

“Shall we indeed, Vdova,” the other two woman agreed with a sassy wink.

Reaching out for each other, both Natasha and Veronika took one of Marina's hands before the three swan-dived from the plane. Brian was cheering after them as he rushed to lean out over open space, watching the women slice through the air like a hot knife through butter. Looking back over his shoulders, he laughed, “Fury's Angels are BAMF chicks . . . and I don't even care that Marina's going to kick my ass when she finds out I said that.”

Will rolled his eyes as he watched his younger brother throw him a sarcastic salute, before whooping, “Cannonball!” and literally cannon-balling from the plane. “Sumasshedshiy ublyudok,” was the Colonel's only response to that, before glancing at his father. “You ready for this, Dad?”

“I am ready, Adler. Are hyu?”

Chuckling ruefully, the oldest Grimm admitted, “I will feel much better when I have my feet back on solid ground.”

Clapping his son on the shoulder, the German chuckled in agreement. “Shall we make that happen, mein Sohn?”

“God yes,” was the last thing Will said, before he too jumped from the plane with his father only steps off of his heels.
Meanwhile, in New York State, the sharp click of high heels on cheap linoleum floors of the diner that Jason Walsh called his home was loud in the other wise silent space. Despite the late hour, and Jason's absence, Casey Shraeger was still there, sitting up in his bed and reading a book. Looking up at the sound, the red-haired detective blinked at the sight of Maria Hill rounding the corner in her S.H.I.E.L.D. uniform and high-heeled combat boots. Blinking in surprise, Casey nevertheless set her book to the side and pushed herself to the edge of the bed. “Commander Hill . . . all due respect, what the hell are you doing here?”

The woman's face could have been steel, considering the narrow-eyed manner in which she watched the detective. After a moment, the assistant director relaxed and a small, pleased smile creased her formidable features. “Detective Shraeger . . . do you have a minute? I think we should talk.”

Chapter End Notes

Translations:
(G) Vati - Dad (Marina's nickname for Hansel Kuhn)
(R) Sova - Owl (one of Marina's call signs, first for the Army's Spec Ops Unit, the Brat'ya Mrachnyy, and second for SHIELD's Brothers Grimm task force)
(R) Sych - Little Owl (one of Marina's call signs, but Will is the only one allowed to call her that.)
(R) Zimniy Soldat - The Winter Soldier (Bucky's call sign given to him by the Krasnaya Komnata)
(R) Soldat - Soldier (a shortened form of Winter Soldier)
(R) Yastreby - Hawk (Clint's call sign, first for the Army's Spec Ops Unit, the Brat'ya Mrachnyy, and second for SHIELD's Brothers Grimm task force)
(R) Sokol - Falcon (Aaron/Kenny's call sign, first for the Army's Spec Ops Unit, the Brat'ya Mrachnyy, and second for SHIELD's Brothers Grimm task force)
(R) Vorona - Raven (Marta's civilian call sign, so the Grimms can identify her over comms without revealing her identity as Aaron Grimm's girlfriend)
(R) Snayper - Sniper (Sam Braddock's call sign for SHIELD)
(R) Ubiytsa - Assassin (Owen Elliot's call sign for SHIELD)
(R) Tselitel - Healer (Vincent Keller's call sign for SHIELD, while in the field with a deployed Medical team)
(R) Skopa - Osprey (Brian Grimm's call sign for SHIELD)
(R) Chernaya Vdova - Black Widow (Natasha Romanoff's call sign given to her by the Akademiya and their Krasnaya Komnata)
(R) Tigritsa - Tigress (Veronika Belinskaya's call sign given to her by the Akademiya and their Krasnaya Komnata)
(R) Krecht - Merlin (Jason's call sign, first for the Army's Spec Ops Unit, the Brat'ya Mrachnyy as well as previously for SHIELD's Brothers Grimm task force)
(R) Volk - Wolf (Hansel's call sign for SHIELD)
(R) Orel - Eagle (Will's call sign, first for the Army's Spec Ops Unit, the Brat'ya Mrachnyy, and second for SHIELD's Brothers Grimm task force)
(R) Sumassheshiy ublyudok - crazy fucker (an opinion of Brian shared by almost everyone he knows!)
(G) Adler - Eagle (Hansel's nickname for Will)
(G) mein Sohn - my son
Chapter Notes

New chapter! This is kind of the calm before the storm. Enjoy!

Translations at the end as always.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter 163: The Devil Went Down To Georgia

The Winter Soldier heard his partner's feet hit the ground only seconds after his own. The soft rustling of fabric and clanking of harnesses was audible in the dark as the two snipers stripped themselves instantly of their harnesses. Ocean blue eyes were fierce and steady as they surveyed the dark, ears attuned to the small sounds his lover made behind him, as Clint dug for a small penlight and the map Will had given them of the surrounding area. The tiny light barely broke through the gloom at all, before Clint announced solemnly, “We're about 250 yards from the rendezvous point. The river is about 50 yards to our left; if we head that way, we can follow the river to the rendezvous instead of trying to trek through the woods.”

Nodding, Bucky swung his rifle from where he'd strapped it across his back. “Lead the way, khishchnick . . . I'm right behind you.”

There was a muffled whispering sound as the Hawk tucked the map and light away, before unhooking his bow from where it was strapped to his gear. A sharp flick of the wrist snapped it out to full size and a soft whirring sound indicated that the archer had released the pressure seal on his S.H.I.E.L.D.-issue quiver. Coming to stand beside the Soldier, Clint felt a sharp shiver trace along his spine. “Whole place is chertov creepy, Buck. Listen; total silence . . . no birds, no animals, nothing . . . ’Morbid and creepifying, I got no problem with' but this is 'starting to damage my calm’.”

“Firefly quotes now? Really!?” the older man chuckled in undertoned bemusement. “You really think that's appropriate with zombies running all over the place?”

“There is never an inappropriate time for a good Firefly quote, Bucky,” Clint sallied back with a smart-assed smirk, “. . . never.”
“Freak,” the Soldier teased, before the sound of shuffling feet brought his attention back to their surroundings.

Clint's voice was whisper soft as he insisted, “None of our people would be shuffling their feet . . . and they are moving way too fast for it to be any of my brothers or the Murderesses.”

Bucky's nod was slow as he murmured, “Agreed. Remember what the Colonel said though; do not engage unless engaged upon.”

The Hawk's head dipped once before his whole body disappeared into the shadows. Bucky shifted as well, and before long the tiny clearing was empty and motionless. It wasn't long before a shadow at the edge of the clearing. Bucky's whole body tensed as he watched a clearly dead woman shuffle her way into the clearing, followed by others of varying levels of decomposition. Triggering his comm, he muttered in an undertone, “I know we were hunting zombies, but svyatoye der'mo . . . those are fucking zombies!”

Will's voice was stern as he insisted, “Are you two under cover?”

“Yeah . . . they haven't seen us yet.” Eyes narrowing, Bucky watched the group move past without once shifting focus from the trees on the other side of the clearing. “They don't seem particularly interested in deviating from their path either. Whatever they're after, it's obviously more appetizing than the Yastreb and me.”

Clint's tone was snarky as he retorted, “Bullshit . . . nothing is more appetizing than you!”

Marina's tone was fond and long-suffering as she teased, “You remember that your brothers, father and sister-in-laws can hear you, right, dorogoy?”

There was a moment as the archer considered this before announcing, “That is not an invitation to find out, guys! I will kill anyone who even considers it.”

Natasha's tone was amused as she replied, “Been there, done that,” to which Brian roared, “Excuse you!!! You are a dead man, Barnes!”

Will sighed as he ordered briskly, “Guys . . . focus! Back on point, please . . . there are human eating creatures who would dearly love to make us their midnight snacks so pay attention.” There was a pause, during which Natasha and Brian could be heard arguing under their breaths in Russian, before Natasha finally snapped, “Excuse you, you caveman! I appreciate the whole 'kill anyone who looks at me twice' sentiment here, but we've both had sex prior to this relationship and I do not like any implication that any man could control me. So shut the fuck up, Gamble!”

There was a moment of total silent, before the Colonel spoke up again wearily, “All right, I need a sound-off from everyone.”

It took a moment for everyone to get counted, before at last Marina spoke up again, “All right . . . so Orel, Volk, Tigritsa, Vdova, Skopa and I are about 100 yards from the rendezvous. Any idea on an ETA for the rest of you?”

Stepping into the clearing once it was clear once more, Clint glanced at his boyfriend before replying, “The Soldat and I are about 250 yards away, but we're only 50 yards from the river. We're gonna follow it instead of heading through the forest. We should be there in about fifteen minutes.”

Sam's voice was calm and strong as he replied, “Ubiytsa, Tselitel and I are also about fifteen minutes out. We'll meet you there.”
Marta's voice was timid as she piped in, “Sokol and I are on our way . . . he twisted his ankle on the landing, but he seems to be walking all right, just a little slower than usual. We'll meet you there as soon as we can.”

The Grimm Family Russian's voice was worried as she chimed in, “Solnyshko, sit rep?”

“I'm all right, Sova . . . another couple minutes and it won't be a problem. I just landed on it wrong, it happens. We'll see you all soon.”

The Colonel's tone was strong and sure as he insisted, “Good . . . everyone, try to stay radio silent as much as you can. Be that as it may, though, let us know if anything comes up, agreed?”

“Yes sir!” was the all around call, before Will replied, “Stay safe and good hunting. We'll meet you at the rendezvous point. Orel out.”

The comms went silent and Bucky glanced toward Clint, jerking his head towards the woods. “Let's get out of these woods, huh? Like you said, it's creepy in here. Also, if we're going to run into any more of the undead . . . I would like to see them coming.”

“Amen to that!” the S.H.I.E.L.D. sniper agreed with a smirk, his bow held calmly in one hand, arrow already nocked against the string. Scanning the clearing, Clint got his bearing and pointed, “River's that way. Let's go.”

The two moved silently through the woods, the sound of rushing water getting louder the closer they got. As they walked, Bucky glanced at his lover out of the corner of his eyes and once again marveled at him. Say what you wanted about Clint Grimm, but he was a hell of an agent. It was no secret that he could be immature and playful and a total fanboy, at least where James Bond was concerned. But when he was on an assignment, there was no better field asset in S.H.I.E.L.D. . . . and that did include Bucky himself and the rest of Clint's brothers. He just knew the importance of keeping the job separate from his personal life, and strove to make sure that there was a clear divide between the two.

It wasn't long before they reached the river, the sound a dull roar that only served to enhance the all encompassing strangeness of the forest around them. Moving to the edge, Clint peered into the depths and sighed at sight of fish swimming lazily in the shallows. Dipping his hand in, he waited for some indication that they would attack him, before splashing a small handful onto his overheated features. “That's a good sign,” he grunted, twisting to look up at the Winter Soldier, as the older man stood sentinel by the water's edge.

“What is?”

“Not everything in this neck of the woods is dead. The fish seem to be okay at least.”

Ocean blue eyes rolled as Bucky snarked, “Yeah . . . at least one thing we don't have to worry about eating us in our sleep.”

Baring his teeth playfully, Clint scolded fondly, “Your cynicism is not appreciated, James Buchanan Barnes.”

Cocked an eyebrow, his boyfriend snapped angrily, “And now you're suddenly my mother?”

Flinching sharply, the archer hissed, “What the hell crawled up your dick and died!? Fuck you, Bucky.”

Suddenly deflated at the genuine hurt in his partner's eyes, Bucky sighed heavily, his whole body
sagging slightly. “I'm sorry, khishchnick... honest. Like you said, this whole place is creepy and it's setting my teeth on edge.”

Clint grunted, fixing his eyes on the horizon and starting to move away, whole body turned away. “Whatever... let's just get to the rendezvous.”

Feeling genuinely guilty, Bucky protested, “Clint...”

The other man didn't even pause, just continued to move along the water's edge in the direction of the river. Releasing another sigh, Bucky hefted his rifle and followed; he was in the shit house and he totally deserved to be there.

It was a tense twenty minutes, before at last the familiar murmur of voices broke through the silence around them. Waving his boyfriend back, Clint scaled a tree and perched on one of the highest branches in order to get a better look. From his vantage point, the sheen off Jay's communications equipment – and the glowing end of Will's cigarette – was impossible to miss. Jumping from the tree, he splashed quickly through the water, calling quietly, “Will! Marina! It's Clint!”

“Clinton Francis... do you understand the meaning of covert operation?” the Russian teased fondly, ducking from the tent and letting him scoop her up in his arms, his momentum swinging her around several times. Seeing the hurt in his eyes, and the guilt on Bucky's face, however was all Marina needed to know. Humming low in her chest, Marina turned to her lover and announced, “Yastreb and I will take first watch.”

The announcement clearly jolted Will, who lifted his head from his maps and cocked an eyebrow in her direction. Marina gave him a small smile and a wink, earning a pair of narrowed green-grey eyes and a haphazard shrug. Frankly, she understood his confusion; since the beginning of their relationship, she had always shared her watch with her Mishka. But her dorogoy was upset and that was the last thing they needed on an assignment like this.

Squeezing her youngest's shoulder warmly, she coaxed, “Come on, domashniy... let's go find a perch, okay?”

Nodding briskly, he allowed himself to be led off into the underbrush. Will straightened slightly, bracing one hand on the makeshift table as the other one lifted to remove his cigarette from the corner of his mouth. The smoke circled his head in a hazy halo, before he asked cautiously, “What the hell did you do?”

There was a small, sad smile as Bucky shook his head, “I was an ass... and Marina is going to kill me.”

Chuckling dryly, Will took another drag on his cigarette as he turned his attention back onto his maps. “I wouldn't worry about her killing you because Clint's not crying... dismemberment, however, is totally up for grabs.”

Bucky's only reply was a long, drawn out groan of, “Fuck my life.”

Meanwhile, Marina and Clint found a pair of trees and set up a pair of nests to spend their watches in. Setting her comm onto mute, Marina leaned back against the trunk of the tree and watched her youngest charge balance easily on the tips of his toes not ten feet from her. “All right, mal'chik... what happened?”

Glancing at her over his shoulder, those blue-gray eyes of his were piercing in the gloom as he considered the question. Finally, his shoulders dropped as he ran one hand back through his hair.
“Don't worry about it. It's stupid.”

“If you're upset about it, dorogoy, it could never be stupid. I promise . . . just between us. I won't even tell Misha.”

That declaration earned a pair of narrowed eyes as he considered the offer. His tone was tentative as he demanded, “You promise . . . you won't tell Will.”

Nodding once in silent agreement, she swore, “I swear of my father’s grave . . . what you tell me here will go no further than us.”

Huffing out a quick breath, Clint confessed, “I let my feelings get hurt because Bucky got short with me. Like I said, it's stupid.”

“What do you mean, 'got short with' you?” Marina asked, head cocked curiously as she watched him shift his weight slightly.

“I was making some stupid observation about the fish not being zombies, and Bucky jumped down my throat. I was just joking around when I called him by his full name and he accused me of acting like his mother. He tried to apologize and explain, but I wasn't in the mood to hear it.”

The S.H.I.E.L.D. handler hummed under her breath as she considered that, before commenting, “This place has everyone on edge. I think Misha's already gone through a whole pack already . . . and he's usually pretty conservative with his cigarettes on deployment.”

One corner of the Hawk's lips twitched upwards as he tilted his head in her direction. “Like I said Marishka . . . it was stupid. I shouldn't have even let it bother me. It's just this place . . . it's not natural.”

“Jayne-level calm damage going on, huh?”

Chuckling against his will, Clint flashed her a quick wink. “Bucky doesn't seem to understand that Firefly has the best quotes for random, out of this world occurrences.”

“Since it's a show about out of this world space-cowboys, it does make a certain kind of sense,” Marina giggled, dropping her head back against the rough bark and allowing her eyes to slip to half-mast. “Are you two going to be okay? Or do I need to kill him for you?”

Clint giggled at the familiar threat, his head shaking in negation. “No, I don't need you to kill him for me. I just need to stop being such a baby and remember that Bucky is just as freaked out by this place as I am. And where I make inappropriate jokes, Bucky gets so tense, you could use him as trampoline spring.”

The Russian chuckled as she conceded that point, “You ever want any really good dirt, Clint, you let me know. I could tell you stories from when I was kid that would give you enough blackmail for at least a dozen lifetimes.”

Shaking his head, Clint laughed, “As tempting as that is, Marishka, I think I can handle Bucky on my own without your no doubt delicious blackmail.”

“Whatever you say, mal'chik. The offer is always open,” she agreed with a wide yawn, settling back more comfortably against the tree trunk. “Ugh . . . why did I agree to first watch? Mishka and I always take third watch . . . I am never going to be able to stay awake for this.”

Rolling his eyes, the S.H.I.E.L.D. sniper chucked a small chunk of bark in her direction. “Get out of
here, Sova . . . Sokol and I can handle first watch . . . we always take first watch together.”

Triggering the comm in his ear, Clint chirped cheerfully, “Isn't that right, big brother?”

Aaron's chuckle was low and familiar as he agreed, “I'm on my way. ETA thirty seconds. And Sova . . . I'd appreciate it if you and Orel would keep an eye on Vorona for me.”

“I promise,” she agreed with relief, smiling down at her blue-eyed charge as he suddenly appeared at the base of the tree below her. Grinning at Clint, she shot him a quick salute before shimmying down the tree. Wrapping her arms around Aaron in a quick hug, she whispered into his ear, “Keep an eye on him, okay? He's upset . . . he could use some 'big brother bullshit' right now.”

Aaron grinned and squeezed her lightly, assuring her warmly, “I'm all over it.”

The rest of the Misfits arrived at the rendezvous throughout the remainder of the night, and by dawn everyone was ready to move on to their objective. Bucky was relieved to see that whatever had been said between Clint and Marina the night before had soothed the Hawk's ruffled feathers, and Clint was once again standing as close to him as protocol allowed. The Colonel cocked an eyebrow at his partner's quiescent calm, before sighing at her innocent grin. “Whatever you do to Bucky . . . I would appreciate it if you waited until after we got home before maiming him. I need him in one piece for at least the next 48 hours.”

The Russian said nothing in reply, only flashed him a glimpse of eyetooth, before sauntering towards where Aaron and Marta were packing up the equipment that the virologist would need for the assignment. Turning to the Zimniy Soldat, the Colonel clapped him on the shoulder familiarly and announced, “I will pray for your soul, my friend . . . you will need all the goodwill you can get at this point.”

Snorting hard, Bucky replied, “Chert voz'mi.”

It was about then that the entire camp went on high alert, when the sound of something crashing through the underbrush about fifty feet down the river from their position. The sound of a dozen plus bullets being chambered was deafening in the instant silence. Sam was the first to speak up in a hushed tone, “What the fuck was that?”

Marina shook her head in answer, glancing at Will out of the corner of her eyes. The Colonel's face was stone, jaw locked tight, as he considered the forest in the direction of the sound. Looking back at his partner, he nodded once, “Let's go find out, shall we?”

That crazy grin of hers that he loved so fiercely slipped across her lips as she purred, “Shall we indeed.”

Chapter End Notes

Translations:

(R) khishchnick - little hawk (Bucky's nickname for Clint)
(R) chertov - fucking
(R) svyatoye der'mo - holy shit
(R) Yastreb - Hawk (Clint's call sign)
(R) dorogoy - darling (Marina's nickname for Clint)
(R) Orel - Eagle (Will's call sign)
(R) Volk - Wolf (Hansel's call sign)
(R) Tigritsa - Tigress (Veronika "Nika" Belinskaya's call sign)
(R) Vdova - Widow (short for Chernaya Vdova or Black Widow; Natasha's call sign given to her by the Krasnaya Komnata)
(R) Skopa - Osprey (Brian's call sign)
(R) Soldat - Soldier (short for the Zimniy Soldat or Winter Soldier; Brian's call sign given to him by the Krasnaya Komnata)
(R) Ubiytsa - Assassin (Owen Elliot's call sign)
(R) Tselitel - Healer (Vincent Keller's call sign)
(R) Sokol - Falcon (Aaron/Kenny's call sign)
(R) Solnyshko - sunshine (Marina's nickname for Aaron/Kenny)
(R) Sova - Owl (one of Marina's call signs)
(R) domashniy - pet (an interchangeable nickname that Marina uses with Jason, Aaron/Kenny and Clint)
(R) mal'chik - my boy (an interchangeable nickname that Marina's uses with Jason, Aaron/Kenny and Clint)
(R) Misha/Mishka - a diminutive of Mikhail/Michael (Will's middle name is Michael and Marina is the only one who call him this)
(R) Marishka - a diminutive of Marina
(R) Vorona - Raven (Marta's civilian call sign to identify her as Aaron/Kenny's girlfriend)
(R) Zimniy Soldat - Winter Soldier (Bucky's call sign given to him by the Krasnaya Komnata)
(R) Chert voz' mi - Fuck me
Chapter Notes

This is an action chapter! So tighten your seatbelts and enjoy the ride!

Translations at the end, as always.

Also, a quarrel is another name for a crossbow bolt. Just so we are all on the same page. Enjoy the chapter!

Chapter 164: How Not To Die, As Told By Daryl Dixon

The sight of a startled horse suddenly charging through the underbrush, caused the entire group to flinch in surprise. It took a half a second for Hansel to take stock of the situation and lunge at the dangling reins. “Beruhigt, mein Pferd . . . beruhigt . . .” he soothed in hushed German, stroking his palm along the mare’s forelock.

Marina cocked an eyebrow at the sight of the saddle and gear adorning the animal, but it was Bucky who voiced her thought. “She threw her rider. Whoever it was . . . they’re probably injured.”

Vincent frowned as he asked, “How do you know she wasn’t abandoned?”

Hansel's voice was a low hum as he offered the doctor an answer, “She is healthy, well-fed and comfortable around people . . . she has a home . . . we must return her to eet.”

William laid a strong palm over the mare's nose, earning a huff and a firm nudge, as the animal nickered a warm greeting. “Dad, ride on ahead . . . take Marta on the horse with you. Marina, you take Sam, Vincent and Aaron and go with him. Find the rider . . . let's see what intel we can glean from him.”

Marina nodded in agreement, gesturing her team into motion. Hansel swung up into the saddle effortlessly, leaning down to offer Marta his arm to pull her up behind him. Aaron handed his father his shotgun, a fond smile on his lips at the fearful anticipation on the girlfriend's face. “It's kinda like riding a motorcycle, Doc, just hold on around his waist. Dad'll take good care of you and I'll be right
behind you.”

She nodded in agreement, arms looping around the German's waist as she gave her boyfriend a small smile. “I'll be all right, Aaron. Look after Sam for me, okay?”

“Absolutely, Doc,” he promised, before stepping back and allowing Hansel to kick the mare into a careful walk back the way it had come.

Marina's whistle brought Aaron's attention around just in time to catch his rifle as it flew towards his face. Hands flying as he readied the weapon, he scolded his sister fondly, “Has anyone told you that you're an evil woman lately?”

“Not lately!” she chirped cheerfully, winking playfully. “You told her, you'd be right behind her, solnyshko, so let's get a move on already.” Hefting her pack over one shoulder, her rifle held carelessly in the other hand, she punched his shoulder lightly before moving towards her lover.

Will watched the four Spec Ops soldiers, both current and former, move out of the clearing, after accepting Marina's quick peck with a smile. Turning back to the rest, he ordered, “Let's pack up. I don't want us to be separated for any longer than we have to be. Bucky . . . Clint . . . find perches. If it looks dead and it's moving . . . shoot it. Killshots only.”

“Yes sir!” was the resounding reply from the group, before they each rushed to pack up the camp and move out.

Meanwhile, Daryl Dixon was cursing on his terrible luck. “Damn that horse,” he swore, groaning at the piercing pain in his side. Twisting carefully, he glared down at where one of his quarrels had impaled him, the bright orange fletching not yet stained with his blood. Growling, he forced himself to sit up and get out of the water. “Double damn that horse!”

Every movement was agony, as he used his shirtsleeves to stabilize the shaft so it wouldn't move. It wasn't until he heard rustling in the brush that he realized his crossbow was missing. The next thirty minutes were quite possibly the worst of his life; falling back down the cliff wasn't even the worst part . . . knowing that he was hallucinating his older brother as he languished in the muck after falling, however, was. He'd tried to go back to Merle but Merle had cut himself free and taken off on his own. There was only so much he could do; Sophia was a little girl and she needed someone to look for her, especially because of the zombies running around the countryside.

Taking a second to consider the thought he just had, he realized that his leg was shaking. Blinking himself free of the hallucination, he yelled in surprise at the sight of a damned walker gnawing on his boot. Kicking the undead creep with his other leg, he reached for a stout stick at his side and swung it hard, knocking the thing to the ground. Forcing himself upwards, he blinked in surprise as the zombie's head suddenly exploded in a burst of gore.

Twisting slightly, he blinked at the sight of a man sitting atop the damned horse that bucked him, robin's egg blue eyes sighting along the barrel of his shotgun. Bearing his teeth at the animal, he grunted at the man, “That's my horse.”

Startlingly white teeth flashed in a grin as he agreed amiably, an audible German accent nearly overpowering his words, “I thought it might be.”

Another growl called Daryl's attention away from the man and towards another walker shuffling quickly in their direction, his dead, hungry eyes intent on the blood staining Daryl's side. Before he even had the chance to call out, the bloodsucker went down in a short burst of automatic fire. His eyes went wide as he turned to see a petite woman step from the brush, a cocky grin on her face and
her AK-47 held at her side. Glancing back over her shoulder, she called cheerfully, “Nice shooting, Sammy-honey!”

A blond young man with eerie sky-blue eyes stalked carefully from the brush behind her, his own rifle still at the ready. Eyes flicking in her direction, he gave her a small smile, before he dashed in the direction of the dead zombie, putting another series of bullets through the walker's head just in case. A dark haired man with a horrific scar down his cheek followed him, crouching beside the newly re-dead man, eyes intent on the body and what was left of its head. Reaching out slowly, he touched the mottled skin. Whatever he found there caused a deep frown, before he pushed himself to his feet once again.

A gentle, almost timid touch on his side yanked Daryl's attention away from the trio and onto the young woman kneeling in the muck beside him. There was a stocky young man standing at her back, an assault rifle in his hands and his eyes fixed on their surroundings, his features identical to those of the man with the shotgun. Seeing that she had his attention, she gave him a small smile. “Hello . . . my name's Marta Shearing . . . I'm a doctor. Do you mind if I take a look at your wound?”

Cocking an eyebrow at her, he snarked solemnly, “Do I have a choice?”

Her smile was amused, even as her companion growled at him, replying calmly, “Not really. Might as well just sit still and suck it up.”

The other woman came over to crouch in front of the two, eyes fond as she watched Marta carefully untie the makeshift bandage and unwind it from the quarrel shaft. Speaking again, it was only then that Daryl was able to hear the Russian accent that still lingered in her tone and pronunciation. “What do you think, Marta? Is he gonna live?”

Humming under her breath, she prodded gently around the area even as she nodded. “I think so. I'd like to get some antibiotics into him, if only because this water isn't exactly the pinnacle of sanitary, but I think he should be all right. The arrow missed all major organs . . . mostly just a flesh wound.” Looking up, she grinned softly, “He should be just fine, Marina.”

Daryl's tone was gruff as he corrected her sourly, “It's a quarrel.”

Those dark eyes were surprised as she looked up into his face, confusion written on her features plainly. “I'm sorry? Who's quarreling?”

Opening his mouth to explain, he was surprised to hear the woman reply, “A quarrel is a crossbow bolt; it's a different kind of shaft than the ones Clint uses with his bow.”

“Oh.”

Patting her hand fondly, the warrior woman turned her full attention onto Daryl, chocolate eyes assessing him briskly for a moment. When she spoke, her tone was firm but warm, an almost maternal sheen in her eyes. “My name is Marina Petrovka, Lt Colonel, United States Army. The blond is Sam Braddock, Master Corporal, and the young man with the scar is Dr. Vincent Keller, Specialist. The one behind Marta is my younger brother Aaron Grimm, Staff Sergeant, and the man on your horse is Hansel Kuhn, Aaron's father.” Cocking her head at his continued silence, she prompted, “And you are?”

By now, the blood loss was making Daryl's head pound and he could already feel the fever of infection boiling under his skin. The sudden appearance of Merle over her shoulder caused a shudder and he scolded his brother bitterly, “Where the hell have you been, asshole?”
The Russian's eyebrow cocked upwards as she twisted slightly to face the younger woman. Marta's head shook, even as her hands nearly flew at his side. “I'm pretty sure he's hallucinating. He's burning up with fever, which is surprising because he can't have fallen from that horse that long ago.”

Sam's face was twisted in disgust as he suggested, “This water is disgusting, Aunt Marty . . . and considering all the blood in the water, he was lying in it for awhile at least.”

Vincent nodded in agreement, crouching on the other side of the two women. “Also, the amount of blood mixed in with the mud around him suggests he's been laying here for at least another twenty minutes after that, if not more. Frankly, its not a surprise that infection is setting in already.”

The virologist frowned as she looked up at her counterpart, insisting, “He needs those antibiotics, immediately.”

“Agreed,” the former soldier agreed solemnly, twisting his bag around the front of him and digging within its depths.

From that point, things got a little hazy and to his dying day, Daryl would swear he had no idea what happened next. One minute he was being hovered over by a group of well-trained soldiers and the next, he was lying on a warm cot in what could only be an Army tent. He was definitely clearer-headed than he had been, and the sound of both a faint Russian and a strong German accents reminded him of the last thing he remembered. Pushing himself to stand from the cot, he groaned softly at the way his head was spinning, before moving carefully towards the door.

Pushing open the flap, he was surprised to see several more versions of the two identical men he'd met before he – dare he say it? – passed out. Staring, he could only stare as everyone turned to look in his direction at the sound of him swearing, “Fuck me.”

Marina's laughter was almost familiar as the sound burst from her unwillingly, one of her hands reaching out to grasp the arm of the man she was standing with. Her giggles rang through the clearing as she bent to try and stem the tide. Marta appeared soundlessly at his side, with her ever-present shadow at her back once again, an amused grin on her lips as she inquired, “It's good to see you up and around, Mr. Dixon. When you tried to slice off the ears from the zombie, I will confess that we were a little worried about your mental health.”

One corner of his lips quirked upwards as he reminded her caustically, “I've spent the last two weeks being hunted by walkers, trying to avoid becoming their next meal. I can promise you, my mental health is nonexistent at this point.”

Her mouth twisted into a smirk as she snarked, “Clearly.”

Hansel Kuhn approached cautiously, resting his palm carefully on the bared skin of his shoulder. “How you do feel, mein Sohn?”

Narrowing his eyes at the German, Daryl growled, “What did you call me?”

There was no answer from the older man, though the man's sons – and the other five men with his face were clearly his relations, even if they weren't his children – snickered at the high pitched tone of his question. A man dressed entirely in a black tactical uniform, a cigarette hanging from the corner of his lips, stepped forward and offered him a hand. “It's a compliment, I promise, Mr. Dixon. I'm Will Grimm . . . let's talk zombies, shall we?”

Daryl's eyes narrowed as he watched the man's eyes cycle through colors like a pinwheel, before
finally settling on an almost colorless blue. Nodding once, he accepted the man's hand and agreed with the reply, "We call them walkers. We don't know where they came from or how they even exist; all we know is that two weeks ago, the world went to shit and fucking zombies were suddenly not just a character in cheesy horror flicks."

The man's eyes narrowed slightly, before the red-haired woman standing beside one of his brothers inquired cautiously, "We?"

Nodding, he jerked a thumb backwards of his shoulders in the general direction of Hershel's farm, and the camp inhabited by the other survivors. "There's about 20 of us, living at a farm about 5 miles from here."

Turning to look at Marina, Will watched as she dug in one of her cargo pockets for a map of their surroundings. Spreading it out over one of the tables, the two officers perused the area, before Will stabbed a finger at a smallish blip of color on the map. "Is this the farm you're talking about?"

Moving closer, Daryl wondered why he was even surprised to see that the "map" was actually a thermal image, consisting of a 50 miles square radius of the area. Scanning the rest of the map, he frowned slightly to see the block shaped compound outlined in dark red pen. Shaking himself free from his thoughts, he moved his eyes to follow the man's finger and nodded, "Yeah . . . that's Hershel's farm. The horse is his."

Hansel smiled, stroking a fond hand over the animal's neck, patting her gently. "Ve shall see hyu home, Kavallerie," he vowed in a low undertone, before moving away from her once again.

The officer cleared his throat and drew Daryl's attention around again, moving his finger along the image to the outlined image. "Do you know anything about this compound? Have you ever seen it before? It's about ten miles from the farm?"

Looking carefully over the map, the southerner was forced to shake his head in negation. "I don't remember seeing it before . . . and based on the image you've got, the area doesn't look familiar either."

Frowning, he leaned forward onto one hand as the other lifted to his cigarette, pulling it away from his lips as he released the smoke he'd taken in. "I don't know, samaya malen'kaya . . . we can both see it on the map, but according to Captain Abrams, he didn't see it when he flew over the area. All he saw was a small building that looked like it was falling apart; that doesn't fit the theory, that someone's using an abandoned building as a secret laboratory."

"Maybe what we're looking for is underground? Is is possible that the surface buildings are just that . . . a facade for what is underneath?" came a call from the trees, the tone questioning and its owner completely invisible to Daryl's eyes.

Chuckling, Marina called fondly, "Clinton Francis . . . you're freaking out the newbie!"

"Isn't that kind of my job, Sova?" he called back with a cackle. There was a rustle, before that same voice shouted, "We got incoming . . . shit! That's a lot of fucking zombies!"

Daryl could feel himself pale at the call, announcing, "Shit . . . it's a herd."

"A herd?" came the brusque question from Dr. Shearing's shadow, his hands around her waist as he hoisted her upwards into a pair of arms in the trees.

"It's what we call a large group of walkers . . . a herd. When they travel in large groups like that, it's bad. It means they're hungry and they smell something appetizing."
At the information, Will stomped out his cigarette and started issuing orders. “Everyone into the trees! Get as high as you can! Marina . . . you and Natasha stay with Marta. Sam . . . you and Nika are on Vincent duty.”

“Yes sir!” was the blond's response, even as he swung his rifle from his back and into his hands.

The brown haired brother crouched to the base of the same tree Aaron had lifted the doctor into, ordering sharply, “Move it, ladies!”

One at time, the two women put a foot into his hands and were practically rocketed into the tree. Clint's voice rang out in subdued panic, “Guys . . . you’ve got about 30 seconds! They're right on top of us!”

That galvanized the rest of the group into the trees, with Sam boosting both Vincent and Nika into their own tree. For a moment, it seemed like he would have enough time to get out of the way, before a walker burst into the clearing and got his arms around him. Sam's scream was agonized as the zombie sunk his teeth into the fleshy part at the back of his arm. Both Marta and Marina screamed in terror, held in place only by Will's shout, “Stay put, both of you! Clint . . . Bucky . . . Aaron . . . Owen . . . I want every single one of those bastards dead! Vincent . . . beast out and get down there!”

Vincent's answering call was concerned but resolute as he replied, “Yes sir!”

There was only a second for the rest of the group to wonder what he was talking about, before there was an animalistic roar and a transformed Vincent dropped from the trees. This was not the sweet, charming young doctor that they had been getting to know on this deployment; this was a beast . . . and he was intent on the zombie who was still gnawing on Sam's arm. Fortunately, the young blond was starting to go limp as the pain edged him further into unconsciousness.

Marina reached out and found Marta's hand, the two women practically clinging to each other as they watched Vincent tear the walker from Sam . . . leaving a gaping wound in the back of his arm as the motion ripped the teeth from the skin. It was that renewed pain that dropped Sam completely into unconsciousness, those eerie eyes rolling backwards as he dropped gracelessly to the forest floor. Glancing at each other, Marina shifted and shouted through the treetops, “Bucky!! Can you reach Sam!?”

“Yeah!” came the call, before a body dropped nimbly from the trees and crouched beside the fallen soldier. Straightening with the young man in his arms, he dodged quickly to his right as Clint's voice rang out, “Bucky! On your left!”

Almost a split second later, the walker who had been approaching went down with an arrow in his eye socket. Cradling the boy in his arms, the older man dropped fluidly into a crouch and then practically sprung straight up, disappearing into the branches once again. From there, the fight was practically anti-climactic. Vincent moved like a machine through the throng, ripping heads from bodies and limbs from torsos with his bare hands, allowing the rest of the group to dispatch the outliers easily.

Soon, there was only one zombie left and he was shuffling as quickly as he could away from the fallen bodies that had made up the herd. Daryl stared as a young man with Will and Hansel's face dropped lightly from the tree, lifted his bow and sighted, snarking, “Outrun this, asshole.”

Releasing the arrow, they all watched as the shaft sunk easily into the back of the zombie's head and he dropped like a stone, permanently dead. Daryl scrambled from the tree, fumbling for his crossbow, as Bucky dropped from the same tree as Clint, an unconscious Sam still cradled safely in
his arms. Aiming, it was only the sudden appearance of the pretty scientist shoving upwards on the 
haft that sent his last quarrel into the treetops and not into the young man's brain, with a scream of 
“No!”

“What the hell are you doing!?” he demanded furiously, “He's going to turn! Trust me; putting a 
bullet in his brain is going to be doing him a favor!”

Marta's tone was vicious and even Daryl back-stepped as she snapped, “You touch him and I'll kill 
you myself. He's going to be fine . . . he has to be fine!”

Staring at the woman who had essentially saved his life, he fumbled for something to say, before at 
last grumbling, “For your sake, I hope you're right . . . but frankly, I'm not holding my breath.”

Chapter End Notes

Translations:

Beruhigt, mein Pferd . . . beruhigt - easy, horse . . . easy
solnyshko - sunshine (Marina's nickname for Aaron/Kenny)
mein Sohn - my son (Hansel has already decided he is adopting Daryl Dixon)
samaya malen'kaya - my little one (one of Will's more common nicknames for Marina)
Sova - Owl (Marina's call sign with the Army and SHIELD)
Chapter 165: Project RAGE

Marina was kneeling next to Sam, worried chocolate eyes fixed on the work Marta and Vincent were doing on his other arm and his free hand in hers, when he jolted back into consciousness. Jerking upward, a strangled scream ripped from his throat at the renewed pain in his arm. Startled by the sudden movement, Marta floundered, grabbing for the wounded appendage, ordering briskly, “Aaron! Hold him still! If I can’t get this bandage tied on right, he’s going to bleed to death before we have to worry about killing him!”

Both Brian and Aaron rushed to pin the boy to the ground, but it was Clint who spoke next. “Marina . . . remember that lullaby you used to sing to us when we were kids?”

She looked up, fear in her eyes, as she nodded, “Of course . . . it was your favorite.”

Clint grinned sadly at the reminder, before continuing, “Sing it to him.”

“What good is that going to do?” Brian gritted out, struggling to still Sam’s frenzied, frightened thrashing. It was clear that the boy was suffering from some kind of delusions, leaving him fighting to get free.

“It used to calm us, right? Maybe it’ll work on Sam too.” Shrugging at the incredulous look on his best friend’s face, he shrugged sheepishly, “It can’t hurt, right?”

Nodding in agreement, Marina swallowed hastily to clear her throat before tightening her hold on the young man’s hand and beginning to sing.

“Spi mladyenets, moy prekrasny, (Sleep, good boy, my beautiful)
“Sim uznayesh, budit vremya, (The time will come, then you will learn)
branoye zhityo, (The pugnacious life,)
smyelo vdyenish nogu f stremya (Boldly you’ll stem your foot in the stirrup)
I vazymosh ruzhyo. (And take the gun.)
Ya sedeltse boyevoye (The saddle-cloth for your battle horse)
sholkom razoshyu (I will sew you from silk.)
Spi, ditya mayo radnoye (Sleep now, my dear little child.)
Bayushki bayu.”

The words mean absolutely nothing to Sam, who was still learning the basics of the Russian language, but the love and adoration in her tone was easily understood. Settling slightly, he turned his head towards the sound of her voice and allowed himself to relax a little bit. Marina smiled around the song, resting the palm of her hand on his temple, petting the hair there carefully. Seeing that her nephew was beginning to calm, Marta hissed under her breath, “Keep singing to him . . . it's working.”

Nodding without stopping, Marina shifted so that the sniper's head was in her lap, her fingers combing gently through the blond strands as she continued to sing and his other hand now clutching hers desperately. She must have gone through a dozen lullabies, as Marta and Vincent worked feverishly to stem the bleeding and pack the gaping hole in his arm. She was halfway through “The Sky Boat Song” when Marta finally sat back with a sigh of relief. “That's the best I can do without a hospital.”

The Russian said nothing for a moment, only continuing to sing to encourage Sam to drop the rest of the way into unconsciousness.

“Billow and breeze, islands and seas,
Mountains of rain and sun,
All that was good, all that was fair
All that was me is gone.

Sing me a song of the lad that is gone,
Say, could that lad be I?
Merry of soul he sailed on a day
Over the sea to Skye.”

Sam's head tossed when the song ended, a small whimper leaving his lips as Brian and Aaron lifted him carefully, to shift him into one of the tents that had been set up against the cliff. Zipping him into a sleeping bag, Aaron smoothed a hand over his hair as he soothed in his low, gruff voice, “Sna teper', deika. (Sleep now, kiddo.)”

Meanwhile, Marta was scrubbing her nephew's blood from her hands, tears blurring her eyes. Vincent's hand rested on her shoulder gently, promising, “We'll figure this out . . . he's going to be okay.”

Giving him a small, tremulous smile, she forced out a laugh. “I don't know anything about the project
that made you, Dr. Keller . . . but thank you. You saved Sam's life.”

“It really wasn't that big of a deal,” he insisted, his ears going rosy as he lifted his hand to rub at the back of his neck sheepishly. It was about then that she noticed the bloody mark on the backside of Vincent's rib cage. Lunging forward, she demanded, “Did you get bit!??”

Vincent frowned, craning his neck to look down at the spot. “Holy shit . . . when did that happen?”

The scientist's eyes went speculative as she began to prod at the area, inquiring, “You didn't notice?”

“No . . . I didn't even feel it.”

It was about then that Aaron recognized the look in his girlfriend's eyes. “What's are you stewing on in that brain of yours, Doc?”

Narrowing her eyes, she looked back and forth between the two bite victims. “I don't know, Vincent, do you mind if we get some of your blood and a reading of your vitals? I'm gonna need Sam's too, but let's start with you for the moment.”

Shrugging, he agreed amiably, already starting to push his sleeve up past the joint of his elbow. Turning back to her boyfriend, the virologist asked, “Aaron, do you remember how to take a blood sample?”

Nodding, he took the offered supplies and promised, “I'll get Vincent's sample . . . you go get Sam's.”

Offering him a grin, she breathed a sigh of relief. “Thank you. Vincent, you're in good hands. Aaron's really good at this.”

Turning to Will, she inquired, “Is this a good place to camp? Can we stay here for awhile?”

Looking at his partner, the two spoke in rapid-fire Russian, before the Colonel turned his attention back to Marta again. “We can stay for a little bit . . . it's got good sight-lines and decent cover. But I don't think I would feel comfortable staying here for any longer than another night. I don't want to advance on the compound until we know the final call on Sam, but I do think we'd be better off heading towards that farm first thing in the morning. You have till then to work out the specifics of whatever you're tossing around in your head.”

“Understood. Thank you, Will.”

“You're welcome, Marta.” Glancing at his watch, he calculated quickly, before insisting, “You have 12 hours. Make them count.”

Nodding, she turned to Marina, “I'm going to need your help with Sam. He's not going to understand what's happening, so if you could sing to him again while I do what I need to do, I would appreciate the help.”

“Absolutely,” she agreed solemnly, squeezing the woman's arm fondly. “Let's go . . . the sooner we get those samples, the sooner we'll be able to get the answers to whatever hypothesis you're trying to prove.”

Grinning, the virologist found herself chuckling, “How did you know?”

“You have the same look Jason used to get when he was trying to figure out how the toaster worked when he was a kid.”
Chuckling at the mental image that statement invoked, Marta took the other woman's offered hand and moved toward the tent where Sam was lying. Both women were alarmed to see him shivering drastically, his head tossing and sweat clearly glistening at his temples. Jolting forward, Marta nearly threw open her medical kit and got to work. Picking a song at random, Marina's hands were firm but gentle as she held his head still while Marta took his temperature and checked the rest of his vials. The two worked in tandem to make sure that he didn't inadvertently hurt himself as Marta took several blood samples from him. Waving the scientist away as she moved to bandage the site, the S.H.I.E.L.D. handler insisted, “Go on . . . you don't have a lot of time . . . I am more than capable of bandaging this up for him.”

“Thank you, Marina,” the virologist breathed, clutching the vials to her chest as though they were precious.

The boys had set up a portable research lab for her next to Sam's tent, so that she would be close in the event that he needed her, Aaron perched on a stack of gear boxes by the door with his rifle across his knees. Looking up at his girlfriend as she paused at the door, he smiled fondly, “Vincent's samples are on the table. I didn't unpack the scope; I figured you would want to do that yourself.”

Taking a deep breath, she eyed the open door for a moment, before turning to look at her boyfriend. “You'll be close.”

Nodding in agreement, he vowed, “I'm gonna be right here the whole time you're in there.”

Leaning down, Marta took comfort in the now-familiar press of his lips to hers. Blue eyes were warm as they looked up into fearful brown, prompting him to reach up and stroke over her cheek. Pulling her down for another kiss, he murmured against her lips, “I love you, Doc . . .”

Breaking into a startled, pleased smile, Marta stared for a moment, before confessing, “I love you too, Aaron. Thank you . . . for everything.”

“That's what I'm here for. Go on . . . I'll be here if you need me and Marina'll take good care of Sam for you.”

Nodding, she took a deep breath and disappeared into the tent for the foreseeable future. For about eight hours after that, there was a lot of muted swearing and moving around in the tent, but no calls for help or requests for anything else. Finally, she called out, “Vincent!! Could you come in here please? And Marina, could you get another vial of blood and check Sam's vitals for me again? Have someone bring them to me?”

Marina's tone was affirmative, even if the words were indistinguishable from the song she was still singing to her unconscious charge. Vincent appeared in the tent, already pushing up his sleeves and moving toward a makeshift chair of gear boxes. Marta gave him a small smile and reached for her kits once again. She was halfway through extracting another vial of blood when Clint came in, offering her the vial Marina had taken and the list of vitals she'd recorded for the younger woman.

Transferring Sam's new vitals to the page she had already all filled out with the rest of the information, she frowned as she considered the differences. Offering Vincent a cottonball to staunch the puncture wound, she gestured for him to look at the chart she'd recorded. “These are Sam's vitals as of eight hours ago and again now. These are yours then and now. Notice anything?”

Vincent's eyes were serious as he looked up at Marta, tone shocked as he announced, “Mine haven't changed.”

Shaking her head, she agreed, “No . . . they haven't. And meanwhile, Sam's temperature has jumped
at least six degrees in the last eight hours and his heartbeat is inconsistent and thready.” Turning her attention onto Clint, she asked, “Would you get Marina and the Colonel for me? I have a theory, and I think they should hear it.”

“I'm on it,” he agreed with a grin, jogging from the room.

Folding his arms over his chest, the doctor watched his companion hook up her microscope to a portable projector. “What are you thinking?”

Taking a deep breath, she looked up at him a small smile. “I think I know what strain of DNA they grafted to yours, during the project. And I think . . . Vincent . . . I think your blood is the key to what's going on here.”

Will's voice was calm, if curious, as both he and Marina entered the tent behind them. “What do you mean, Marta?”

Watching the two for a moment, she took a deep breath and released it slowly. “In London, about ten years ago, there was an outbreak of a virus. It turned an percentage of the population into zombies. They called it the RAGE virus . . . it caused aggression, superior strength, discoloring of the skin and disfigurement of the features.” Glancing at Vincent, she continued, “Sound familiar to anyone?”

It was about then that the former soldier understood. “You think I have RAGE virus!?”

“I'm looking at your samples, Vincent, both yours and Sam's. And where Sam's blood is actively fighting the infection, yours is working with it. Combined with the symptoms of one of your . . . beast moments, it fits.”

The Russian took a deep breath, folding her arms over her chest as she inquired, “And that means what for Sam?”

“It means that I can synthesize an antidote . . . using Vincent's own antibodies. And, with any luck, it means that Sam is going to be just fine.”

Glancing at Marina, the two officers held some silent conversation with each other before Will turned back and nodded in agreement. “Do it. Quickly.”

Smiling widely, she snapped off a quick salute, “Yes sir.” Turning to Vincent, she ordered, “All right, Dr. Keller, let's get to work.”
Chapter Notes

Wow . . . that's a record. Two in one day hasn't happened in awhile. :D

Translations are at the end, as always.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter 166: Big Damn Heroes

The next hours before dawn were spent trying to fabricate some kind of viable antidote. The swearing got louder and more violent, from Marta and Vincent both, though the interior of the tent was otherwise silent.

While the two medics were working on their own problem, Will and Marina were consulting with Jason, their resident engineering geek, on the best way to distribute the antidote to any of the infected. Both clearly recalled the remainder of the conversation they had had with both doctors, after Marta had explained her theory.

Flashback

“So the zombies we killed . . . they weren't dead?” Marina asked, frowning fiercely at the thought.

Vincent glanced at Marta and spoke up in answer, “While she was in here, I was doing a rudimentary autopsy on several of the bodies.” At Will's cocked eyebrow, he shrugged nonchalantly, “It wasn't my specialty, but we all take the class at some point. Anyway, some of the bodies were stone cold, suggesting that they had been dead for quite some time. Others were still marginally warm, which would make sense if their bodies were rocking a fever at least as high as Sam's, if not higher, until they do die.” Taking a breath, he considered his next words carefully. “When Marta was treating Mr. Dixon, before Sam got bitten, I checked one of the bodies then too; his temperature nearly scalded my fingers. I would bet my license that he was newly infected and still alive – as it were – at the time of his death.”

Both women grimaced at the information, before Marta insisted, “Don't tell Sam. He has enough
guilt to carry around; he doesn't need that too.”

“So how do we tell the difference from the dead zombies and the living zombies?” Will asked, reaching up to pinch the bridge of his nose. “What the hell is my life, that this is a valid question?”

Marina chuckled, squeezing his shoulder fondly, as Marta shook her head with a shrug. “There's really no one way to be sure, without getting really close and personal. And, as I'm sure you can guess, that's not a good idea. The application of an antidote, however, would drop any of the truly dead and they simply wouldn't get back up again.”

“There are a lot of infected, malyutka. Can you make enough of the antidote here for all of them?”

“No . . . I need a real lab for that. I can make enough to save Sam and possibly a vaccine to inoculate the rest of us, Mr. Dixon, and the survivors at the farm. But I need to get into a laboratory to be able to mass produce an antidote like this.”

“Even then, though, there's the question of how to administer that much antidote to that many infected, most of whom won't let you get close enough without trying to take a bite out of you,” Vincent reminded the trio with a frown.

Will smirked, “I know an engineer for that problem. Leave that to Marina and I. You two get to work on that antidote . . . How long do you think before the virus becomes fatal and the infected are un-saveable?”

Biting her lips, Marta considered the deterioration rate in the blood samples she'd taken from Sam. “Ninety-six hours . . . maybe. I don't know exactly. It could be different for everyone, depending on health and age and even body mass. I just don't know.”

“Then we're going to be working on a tight clock. That settles it; we move out to the farm at 0900 tomorrow. The antidote needs to be done, and Sam vaccinated, by then. Agreed?”

“Yes sir,” she agreed with a determined nod. “I understand.”

“Good,” he replied, before he moved towards the door to duck out of the tent.

“Wait . . . what about Vincent? You're not going to make enough of the antidote for him too?” Marina asked, pausing the Colonel in his tracks.

“I . . . to be honest, I don't know how an antidote would affect him. Because it's grafted onto his DNA . . . frankly, I'm afraid it may kill him. Again, I need a lab to be able to run the tests to find out. For the moment, he seems to be immune and I don't really want to do anything that could compromise that. So I'm going to make enough for each of us, just in case, but even that may be more than I can manage. I just don't know.” Clenching her hands, she implored desperately, “If we're really going to help these people, I NEED a lab.”

“We'll get you one as soon as we can, Marta, I promise.”

Reaching out to hug the younger woman, Marina murmured, “Good luck . . . you have our full support, no matter what.”

“Thank you, Marina.”

Smiling, the brunette followed her partner from the tent, leaving the two doctors to once again get to work.
Jason was currently fiddling with the guts and pieces of one of his handguns, muttering to himself under his breath as he considered the job ahead of him. Finally, wiping the gun oil from his fingers on a ratty rag that he tucked back into one of his innumerable pockets, he nodded once. “I can probably modify a few of our pistols into air-soft dart guns.”

“And where do you intend to get the darts, sladkiy?” Marina teased, earning a delicate moue of dismay.

“Marishka! I am devastated by your lack of faith in me. I'll make the darts . . . it's not that hard to put together a functioning dart. I used to do it all the time . . .” here Jason trailed off, realizing that he was starting to divulge long held secrets.

One of her eyebrows cocked upwards, her arms coming up to fold over her chest, as she prompted, “All the time when, Jay? When we were still at the circus? And you would swear up and down that you had nothing to do with the small projectiles that would cause the elephants to freak out on that one asshole trainer?”

Jason's mouth twisted in chagrin, glaring at his brother as Will chuckled fondly at his lover's adorable scowl. “Busted, Jay.” Clapping him on the shoulder familiarly, he urged him, “We have four hours until daylight. Get to work; if we can't get one of the dart guns into everybody's hands, at least get three done for Clint, Bucky and Aaron. Okay?”

Nodding, the technical specialist leaned over to grab one of Clint's arrows. “I can make Clint some hollow-point heads. That'll be easier than modifying the guns.”

“Sounds good, but I do still want both Bucky and Aaron armed with the darts, in addition to whatever you do with Clint's arrowheads. And if you can get enough of them done for each of us to have one, that will be even better.”

Grinning at his brother, Jason dug into one of his pockets and pulled out his favorite pair of welding goggles. “I'm on it. Be gone with you . . . I have work to do.”

Rolling her eyes, Marina stepped back and watched as Jason dove into the project as gleefully as he had a million times before. Following Will away, she murmured, “We have to get him back into S.H.I.E.L.D, at least R&D if he doesn't want to go back to being a field agent . . . the NYPD isn't going to hold his attention forever. Frankly, I'm surprised he's not already miserably bored.”

His chin dipped once in silent agreement, quicksilver eyes glancing down at his watch as he noted the time. “We're running out of time, samaya malen'kaya. Ninety-six hours . . . we've been on the ground for at least 24 at this point.”

Taking a deep breath, she gave him a rueful smile. “We'll save as many as we can, Misha . . . that's all we can do.”

Turning towards where the sky was starting to lighten into predawn, he hummed in agreement. “Let's hope that's enough then.”

It was about then that Marta finally let out an excited cry and dashed from the lab-tent, a hypodermic needle in one hand as she dashed for Sam's own tent. Aaron and Marina both bolted after her; Sam had been getting more and more restless through the night, and both of them were concerned that he'd attack her without knowing what he was doing. “Hold up a second, Doc . . . let me go in first and get the kid pinned down. The last thing we want is for him to bite you.”
“Sam's not going to bite me,” she protested in horror.

Marina's hand dropped onto her shoulders, holding her in place as she reminded the doctor gently, “Sam may not . . . but that's not really Sam in there right now, Marta. Just let Aaron got first . . . we're going to help him, I promise. But there's no reason to rush into the situation with blinders on. Okay?”

Nodding with a reluctant frown, both women waited with baited breath as Aaron eased the zipper to the tent open slowly. Fortunately, Sam had subsided into another bout of tremors and he only whimpered as Aaron moved further into the tent. Rolling the kid onto his side, his back facing the former Outcome operative, Aaron pinned him firmly with both hands. “Hurry up . . . he's docile for the moment, but there's no guarantee how long that will last.”

Both women moved in to the confines of the space, Marina already humming a song under her breath as she followed Marta into the tent. Between the three of them, they managed to get Sam's tactical pants down far enough to expose the muscle at the top of one cheek. Using her teeth to uncap the syringe, and her other hand to brace herself, she looked up at the two. “A prayer or two probably wouldn't go amiss right about now.”

Switching gears immediately, Marina began to sing an old Russian prayer under her breath, watching as the virologist stabbed the needle down into the muscle and depressed the plunger. Sam bucked slightly at the sudden pinprick of pain, but subsided once again when Aaron's hands only tightened to prevent any real thrashing. Withdrawing the needle, she eased his pants up into place and sat back on her heels. “We should know in about a half an hour if it worked.”

“So soon?”

“It's not going to be a quick fix . . . but for right now, all we need is for the fever to break. If it does, we'll know it worked. How long it'll take for it to completely set in and for him to be back to his old self, I don't know. But at least we won't have to worry about having to put a bullet through his brain because he tried to eat somebody.”

Nodding, Marina leaned over Sam's body to squeeze the woman's shoulder. “You're exhausted, Marta. I'll stay with Sam . . . you go with Aaron and get some sleep. We have a couple hours before we move out . . . take advantage of them while you can.”

“No . . . I should stay. What if he needs me?”

“I'm sure that Vincent will be able to help me with any of the medical things that may come up while you get some rest. Except for you and Aaron, the rest of us have gotten some sleep tonight. That's the beauty of taking shifts; at least someone has the opportunity to rest while someone else keeps watch.” Turning her attention onto Aaron, she hardened her tone, “Go on, Aaron . . . that's an order, understood?”

“Yes ma'am,” he agreed, pushing himself to his feet and reaching down to draw Marta to her own. “Come on, Doc . . . there's no arguing with Marina when she gets like this. Best just to do what she says. We could use the rest . . . the day's going to be here before you know it.”

Still protesting, Marta allowed herself to be herded from the tent by her boyfriend. Taking a seat on the opposite side of the tent from her charge, Marina's eyes were glued to his face as she folded her hands and waited for whatever the outcome was going to be. “Come on, Sam . . . you can do this . . . fight it.”

It was about an hour later that Marina watched him stop tossing and turning, and finally sink into the
first real sleep he'd had since he was bitten. Moving forward cautiously, she laid the back of her hand just under the curve of his jaw. Unable to hold in her relieved sob at the touch, she took a moment just to revel in the cool, clammy feeling of his skin there. “Slava Bogu,” she breathed, tucking him in just that little bit tighter, before leaving the tent in search of her partner.

Will was taking his watch just a little ways away, eyes dark and inscrutable behind his sunglasses. Turning to look at her at the rustling sound of the tent door, he asked, “So? What's the verdict?”

“The fever's broken. He's going to be okay.”

“Good . . . Looks like we got here just in the nick of time then.” Glancing back over his shoulder at her, he asked, “What does that make us', zhemchuzhina.”

Grinning, she drawled out the familiar quote joyfully, “‘Big damn heroes, sir.’”

Returning her grin, he agreed warmly, “‘Ain't . . . we . . . just.’”

Chapter End Notes

Translations:

(R) malyutka - little one (used for a young girl)
(R) sladkiy - honey (Marina's nickname for Jason)
(R) samaya malen'kaya - my little one (one of Will's more commonly used nicknames for Marina)
(R) Misha - a diminutive of Mikhail (Marina's the only one who ever calls him this; Will's middle name is Michael and Mikhail is the Russian counterpart)
(R) zhemchuzhina - pearl (one of Will's lesser used nicknames for Marina)

Also? I have been waiting to be able to use that beyond iconic quote this whole epic adventure . . . and I finally got to. I am sooooo excited!
Hey yall! New chapter! I like having a new show to prompt myself into shape. (I have a rule, I have to have at least three chapters written during the week before I'll allow myself to watch the new episode. So far . . . it's working. :D)

A couple translations in the chapter, but most are at the end as always. Enjoy!

Chapter 167: Walkers Walking

Currently, James Buchanan Barnes was on unofficial Daryl duty. Not that he minded; the man was funny as hell with a sarcastic wit to rival Will and Marina's own . . . combined. But there was something to be said for the intent way he kept staring at the people going in and out of Sam's tent. Cocky his head, Bucky considered what he knew about the younger man, before asking casually, “Why do you keep staring over there?”

Daryl frowned, glancing at the Winter Soldier before returning his attention back onto the tent where Sam was resting. “I know you all want to protect him, but I just don't see it. In the last two weeks since this zombie apocalypse happened, I've killed things that used to be people. And, as much as it sucks, that kid that they are so determined to protect is going to turn. It's not pretty and it's not fun and I am sorry for it, but the sooner they kill him, the sooner they can start grieving for him.”

Shaking his head, Bucky smirked, “I'm just going to let you know . . . Marina is very protective of the people she considers hers. And Sam is definitely hers; if there's even a chance that she can possibly save him, she's going to try. And Sam is Marta's nephew, so she's pretty protective of him too.” Looking back to where Clint was talking to Will and Marina, he smiled sadly, “Frankly, I understand it . . . the irrationality in trying to protect someone you're worried is going to die on you. Someone that you care about, more than life, whose own life seems so fragile.”

Daryl's eyes were wary as he watched the other man, noting the real pain in his eyes as he fiddled with the glove on his left hand. “Who? Your boyfriend? Because he doesn't seem very fragile to me.”
“Clint? No . . . Clint would kill me for trying to coddle and protect him. No, my best friend . . . he was always sickly. There were times I was worried I'd fall asleep, listening to the sound of his voice in his bed and wake up the next morning to total silence.”

The younger man's chin dipped downwards in a careful nod. “I'm sorry . . . what happened to him?”

Bucky's face twisted slightly, his voice little more than a whisper as he replied, “He's gone . . . he died a long time ago.”

Clapping the agent on the shoulder, Daryl nodded again but said nothing. Some pain required no words to be understood. It was about then, that Hansel legged over the tree trunk on the opposite side of the small fire and leaned forward on his elbows, robin' egg eyes watching the southerner intently. Recognizing the mannerism, Bucky's mouth twisted lightly as he teased dryly, “You should probably ask him if he wants to be adopted, before you start picking out the paint for his room, Hansel.”

“That will be quite enough out of you, Graüchen,” the former witch hunter scolded, even as he reached over to ruffle his longish hair. Returning his attention onto Daryl, he asked, “Who ist Merle? And why do you speak of him with such fond contempt?”

Daryl's eyes went wide at the question, his tone husky as he asked, “What do you know about Merle?”

“Only what you were saying when you were unconscious. You kept imagining him; I do not know what you thought he was saying to you, but whatever it was . . . it upset you greatly. So . . . I ask you again . . . who ist Merle?”

Scrubbing at the back of his head with his fingernails, Daryl grimaced lightly, “Merle's my older brother. He's a total asshole . . . but he did the best he could to protect me when our dad was drunk.”

“What about your Mutter? Where ist she?”

Shrugging haplessly, the man confessed, “She's been dead for as long as I can remember. It was just Merle and me against the old man.”

Glancing at Bucky at the term, he watched as Bucky smirked, “He means his father.”

Hansel hummed in understanding, before turning back to face the southerner once again. “Why ist he not mit you now?”

Confused, Daryl cocked his head as he asked, “I'm sorry . . . I don't understand.”

Clint plopped down then in the empty seat next to Bucky, chirped, “Pops is German . . . when he's upset, he slips back into his old habits. He asked why someone wasn't with you now? Who is someone?” Glancing at his father, he quirked an eyebrow as he asked, “So which house do you think you're going to move him into, exactly? Cause I'm pretty sure Maria may protest if you think that you're just gonna move your new kid into her guest room.”

“Mein Falki, has anyvun ever told you that you talk too much?”

“Yeah . . . Brian . . . all the time. Mostly, I do it to annoy him,” the youngest Grimm replied with a wink and wicked grin. Munching on a handful of MRE M&Ms, he offered the leftovers to Bucky as he announced, “So Marta found a cure.”

Daryl's eyes went wide in shock, before he blurted, “A what!”
“Apparently, not all of the zombies are dead . . . it's a virus and if they don't get the antidote, they
will die. However, that means that some of them can be saved. And of course, the only Infected
Marina cares about would be Sam, so yeah . . . yay cure!”

Bucky was watched the devastated look on Daryl's face spread across his features. “Why don't you
look happy about that?”

“How many people have I killed . . . that this antidote could have saved?”

Clint frowned at the suggestion, leaning forward to get a better line of sight at the tracker. “It's only
got a 96 hour window of effectiveness. After 96 hours, they're dead . . . not even the antidote would
bring them back. We only got here early yesterday morning . . . most of the infected you've killed
wouldn't be saveable at this point . . . and they probably would have killed more people along the
way.”

Rolling his eyes at his boyfriend's usual exuberance, Bucky cut in quickly, “What Clint is trying to
say, is don't feel bad. You did the right thing.”

“If she hadn't stopped me . . .” he breathed in horror, well remembering the moment he tried to put a
quarrel through Sam's brain the evening before.

Hansel reached out and gripped his forearm, admonishing firmly, “Ja . . . but she did . . . so there ist
no hyuse in crying over witches that huf not been fought yet. Ja?”

Clint's head cocked as he tried to translate that, before replying, “It's typically 'crying over spilled
milk' now, Pops.”

“Eh . . . hyu say 'toe-may-toe . . . I say 'toe-mah-toe'. Ja?”

“So wait. You can use that phrase in context, but not the one I suggested? You're fucking with me,
Pops.”

“I vould not 'fuck mit hyu', Falki . . . hyu are mein Sohn.”

Bucky snorted, his hand coming up to clap over his boyfriend's mouth. “All right . . . that is enough
trolling out of the both of you. Hush, khischenick.”

The archer grumbled slightly, even as he subsided comfortably in the older man's side. Daryl
frowned, still considering the implications of a cure. “That means, even if she was infected, you
could still save her.”

“Save who?” Clint asked, munching contentedly on another handful of M&Ms.

“A little over 64 hours ago, we got separated from one of the other survivors. She's 12 and she's out
here all alone. We've been looking for her since she got lost . . . her name is Sophia.” Reaching back,
he removed the dirty doll from where it still hung in his belt, offering to Hansel with a sigh. “This is
her's . . . I found it in the river near where you found me.”

A woman's voice, thick and warm with a nearly purring Russian accent, spoke from behind them
and made Daryl jump a mile high. “The only problem I'm seeing with that is that she got lost 64
hours ago, and we have a 96 hour window before she is truly dead. You don't know where she is . . .
she could be miles from here. And there is no guarantee that we'd even find her.”

Jerking his thumb over his shoulder, Bucky introduced the two women and the man standing there
without looking. “Daryl . . . meet Nika, Natasha and Brian. Nika would be the one with
reservations.”

Brian's grin was sly as he wrapped an arm around the redhead and nibbled on her jaw, as Natasha chimed in, “Just because we don't know where she is, doesn't mean that we shouldn't try to find her. She's a little girl, Nika.”

“I'm not saying we don't try, Tasha . . . I'm just saying that we need to be realistic. The Colonel has us all moving out tomorrow at 0900 to the farm where the rest of the survivors are. It's just past 0630 . . . that's another 2 & a half hours that we lose, plus an hour for the trek. Yeah . . . we keep our eyes open, but let's be real. We also have Sam, who is going to slow us down.”

“Sam shall ride da horse mit me. She is a good horse, strong and true . . . she can carry us both. He shall not slow us down.”

It was about then that the two commanding officers in the family joined the rest around the fire. Brian grinned at his sister and teased, “Please tell me that you got to use the BDH quote . . . in context?”

Marina's smile was wicked and smug, though she said nothing as Will cleared his throat pointedly. “As I'm sure you've heard by now, Marta was able to synthesize an antidote. That means as of this moment, kill shots are the last possible option when engaged by, what Daryl calls, a 'walker'. We're cautiously optimistic about its success, and it will not work on all of them, but we have to try.”

Natasha's eyes were worried, though her face was emotionless, as she asked, “How's Sam?”

“He's gonna be okay. His fever just broke and he's actually sleeping.” Running a hand back through her hair, she continued, “The theory is that as long as the walkers are running a significant temperature, they are still alive. Which makes sense, because this is a virus and the body's natural instinct when faced with a viral infection is to try and burn it off. If they're cold, they're dead. Only thing to do for them is to put them out of their misery and let them find what peace they can on the other side.”

Leaning forward on his elbows, Bucky asked, “How do you suggest we administer this antidote?”

“Jason is working on converting a few of our pistols into dart guns. That will provide us enough distance to avoid getting bit, as well as adequately administer the antidote to the various walkers.”

“How much of the cure do we have?”

“We have enough for three more doses . . . the portable lab equipment Marta has here is not sufficient to be able to mass produce it in viable quantities. So at best, avoid walkers at all costs.”

It was about that time that Natasha spoke up, “There's a little girl in the woods, Will . . . apparently she got separated from the rest of the survivors just under three days ago. Even if she's infected, she's saveable.”

Everyone could see the way Marina's heart swelled with concern, even as she shook her head, “We're working on a 96 hour timetable with the assumption that there are no other contributing factors.” Glancing at Will and taking in his silent nod, she turned back to the rest, “If we find her, we'll do what we can for her in the event that she was infected. But I don't want to say that its a sure thing when not even Marta knows all the details of the virus itself.”

“As it is, she was able to synthesize enough to vaccinate us against the virus in the event that any of us get bitten in the near future.” Glancing at Daryl, the Colonel continued, “She also made enough to be able to vaccinate the survivors at the farm Mr. Dixon was telling us about earlier.”
Daryl spoke up in protest, “It's just Daryl . . . Mr. Dixon was my grandfather.” Looking around the circle, he took a deep breath and looked up at Marina with a chagrined grimace. “In light of this, I'm sorry for nearly trying to kill your boy.”

Squeezing his shoulder gently, Marina nodded once in acceptance of the apology. “It's all right. Sam's going to be just fine and that's all that matters.”

Both Hansel and Will were looking down at their watches and it struck the southerner then just how striking the similarity between the younger men in the circle and their father. Hansel looked up at his eldest then and insisted, “So . . . who is going on to the compound and who is going to the farm?”

Will grinned at the question, folding his arms over his chest. “I'm actually willing to take volunteers. Sam will be going to be farm with Marina; he's too weak to make the trek without the horse and the horse belongs to whomever owns the farm. Marta and Aaron will be going to the compound, as we are still working under the assumption that this is some kind of HYDRA laboratory and, assuming it has the materials, it will probably have what she needs to replicate enough of the antidote to administer it to every walker, living or dead. Vincent will be going to the farm, in order to administer the vaccine to the survivors there. I have been assured that he will be wearing a clean shirt, and as he is still not experiencing any pain, they will not realize that he was bitten.”

“As for who else is going where, we're accepting volunteers. I'm going with Sam and Vincent because Marta cannot. Misha will be going to the compound with Marta and Aaron. Where the rest of you would like to go, is up to you. We do want to keep the teams even, so don't all decide to go to the compound,” she teased, her nose wrinkling lightly.

Bucky and Clint glanced at each other, Clint's eyebrow cocked upwards in silent question. Nodding, they turned back and Clint announced, “Bucky and I will be going to the farm with you, Marishka. You'll need sharpshooters to keep an eye out until Marta is able to meet us there with the antidote.”

Brian grinned as Natasha agreed, “Brian and I will go to the compound with Marta, Aaron and the Colonel. Brian's itching to kill something, and if it is HYDRA run . . . well, there will be killing and Brian would dearly like to be in on it.”

Nika nodded and stepped forward to join the two assassins, “I'm going to the compound . . . it's been a long time since I got kill something and my trigger fingers are itching.”

Jason joined the group around the fire, Clint's quiver over one shoulder and a trio of clearly rigged pistols in both hands. “Okay, so I'm not done, but I have the hollow arrowheads for Clint and at least three of the modified pistols. As for the darts, I'm waiting for the glue to finish drying. For the moment, they are empty due to the absence of Marta's antidote. However, they are exceptionally easy to fill, so once we have the material, we can get them locked and loaded.”

The Colonel nodded, considering his brother as the tech specialist handed the quiver to Clint and two of the pistols to Bucky and Marina, while keeping the third for Aaron. “Jay, once a couple darts are available, I need you to fill at least two with the two extra doses Marta has. Load them into Aaron and Marina's guns. And then you're going to the compound with us. That way you can load the darts with the antidote as quickly as Marta can compound it.”

“Sounds good to me,” the middle brother agreed with a nonchalant shrug and a congenial grin.

Marina frowned as she asked, “Why are you giving me a dose of the antidote?”

Turning away from where he was talked quietly with his father, Will smiled adoringly, “If you happen to see that little girl and she's saveable . . . well, at least you have a dose to use, right?”
Looping her arms around his waist as she looked up into his face with a warm grin, she teased fondly, "Ty staryy tryapka, Mishka. (You're an old softie, Mishka.)"

Lifting his hands to cup her cheeks, he agreed, "Ne govorite mal'chikov. (Don't tell the boys.)"

Bending, Will allowed himself a moment to indulge in a long kiss with his partner. Marina's body was molasses as she nearly melted into him, those hot chocolate eyes slipping closed as they took a moment to wish each other good luck and good bye. They had a plan, but both knew that most plans didn't usually work out the way they were supposed to. More to the point, they were undergoing separate objectives; if something happened to one, the other wouldn't be there as backup. It was a new sensation and both needed the moment to acclimate to it.

Finally, the two broke away and the Colonel glanced down briefly at his watch. Dropping his forehead against hers, he murmured, "It's 0700 . . . you should wake up Sam."

Sighing, she hummed an assent, before stealing one last kiss and moving away towards the young man's tent. Closing his eyes, Will took a deep breath and then turned once again to face his brothers and their unit. "All right . . . we're going to be moving up the timetable. Let's get packed up and move out no later than 0800. The sooner we get this antidote in hand, the sooner we can clear this mess up. Agreed?"

"Yes sir!" came the resounding agreement, before the eldest Grimm barked, "Dismissed!"

Instantly, the assembled group dispersed, dashing off to pack up their own gear and start getting ready to go. It was going to be an eventful day and there was no point in putting it off now that it was here.

Chapter End Notes

Translations:

(G) Graüchen - Little Grey (Hansel's nickname for Bucky Barnes, because of the color of his metal arm)
(G) Mein Falki - my little hawk (Hansel's nickname for his youngest son, Clint)
(G) Ja - yes
(G) mein Sohn - my son
(R) khishchnick - little hawk (Bucky's nickname for his boyfriend, Clint)
Chapter 168: Darwinism Is Dead

To be honest, Sam didn't remember much of the last hours. The last thing he remembered was getting bitten by a humanoid looking thing that smelled like rotted steak and had razor sharp teeth. There was a vague recollection of a half-man, half-beast who had saved his life, and a beloved voice singing to him when the pain was all he knew . . . something he could safely say his own mother had never done. Shifting slightly, he hissed as he tried to put his weight on his elbows and the right one buckled under him, dropping him gracelessly back onto the thin pallet below him.

“Easy, Sammy-honey . . . trust me, it's gonna be awhile before doing that doesn't hurt like a bitch,” came the warm voice of Marina Petrovka, bringing Sam's tear-blurred vision around to look at her.

“What the hell happened to me?” Suddenly remembering what had bitten him – and the details of every zombie movie he'd ever seen – his head snapped up as he demanded in horror, “Am I going to become one of those things?”

Moving deeper into the tent, Marina bent next to him, one hand warm on his shoulder. “No . . . it's a long story, but the short of it is that Vincent is immune and Marta was able to make an antidote out of his blood.” Reaching up to lay the back of her hand on the skin under his jaw, she breathed a sigh at the coolness there, “Slava Bogu . . . the fever's still gone.”
Sam's face twisted curiously at the phrase, before he voiced the thought he considered more important, “What exactly is Vincent immune to?”

“It's complicated, but apparently this is a biological outbreak of something called RAGE virus. All of these people have been infected with the virus.”

Nodding slowly, Sam watched as Marina pushed herself to her feet and moved to rifle through his pack. “Are we moving out?”

“Yeah . . . there's a farm of survivors about an hour's trek from here. Some of us are heading that way to vaccinate them against the virus while the rest move on to the compound.”

Pouting, Sam muttered, “Guess I know where I'm going, huh?”

Marina's features were fond and maternal as she reminded him kindly, “You can't even put weight on that arm, Sam, let alone make a mile trek through the woods. No . . . you're going to the farm with me, Vincent, Hansel, Bucky, Clint and Daryl. The rest are heading on to the compound.” Pulling out a clean pair of tactical pants, fresh socks and a new t-shirt, Marina offered them to him before turning her back. While he struggled out of his filthy clothing and into the cleaner set, the Russian continued to explain what had been decided while he was unconscious. “We're still working on the assumption that the compound is a lab . . . if it is, Marta will be able to fabricate a larger amount of the antidote. Her portable equipment is impressive, but it just isn't enough to be able to handle this kind of production.”

“Is Aaron going with her?”

The handler chuckled under her breath as she taunted, “Consider what you just said, Sam.”

Rolling his eyes at him, he conceded, “Touché.” Yanking the ties tightly on his boots, he sighed heavily, “All right . . . I'm dressed.”

“Good . . . let's get you up and outside. There's some egg sandwiches by the fire; you can get some food in you while the boys pack up the rest of the gear. You must be starving.”

“I can pull my own weight, Marina, honest.”

“Sam, you're missing a chunk of skin, muscle and flesh from the back of your right arm approximately the circumference of my fist. No one is expecting you to pull any weight at this point. Understood?” she ordered firmly, her features stern as she scowled at him.

Nodding miserably, he agreed, “Yes ma'am.”

Seeing how upset he was, and taking into consideration his reasons for leaving JTF2 in the first place, she sighed and moved to hug him fiercely. “We were all really worried about you, Sammy. Let us coddle you for a bit, if only for our own sakes, okay?”

Mouth twisting in acknowledgment, he nodded once. “Okay.”

“Thank you. Come on . . . let us get thee fed. You're barely within healthy weight limits as it is . . . you don't have the weight to lose.”

Rolling his eyes, he let her guide him from the tent as he teased, “You think that of everyone.”

“True . . . but in your case, it happens to be mostly accurate,” she scolded, cocking an eyebrow at him.
“Busted,” he breathed under his breath, pulling to a stop at the sight of his aunt dashing at him like the world was on fire. “Sam! You're okay!”

The impact of her against his chest was kinda like a cannonball and Sam wrapped his uninjured arm around her mostly out of reflex. “It's good to see you too, Aunt Marty.”

Marta glanced at the other woman, sagging slightly to see her single nod. Looking up at him, her hands flashed as she tracked over his visible vital signs. “How do you feel?”

Grimacing slightly, he confessed, “My arm hurts, but I'm told that part of it is missing so that's probably to be expected.” Lifting her slightly off the ground as he tightened his grip around her, he insisted, “For the most part, I feel okay. Honest.”

Squeezing his shoulder fondly, Marina spoke up, “Since you have him from here, Marta, I'm going to go help the boys pack up. Sam . . . food . . . I mean it.”

Nodding in agreement, both aunt and nephew watched as the warrior woman dashed towards where the rest of her boys were busy tearing down tents and packing up Marta's gear. Guiding him towards the fire, Marta watched him sit and then handed him one of the sandwiches still warming on the fireside grill. “Here . . . they're pretty good . . . apparently there really isn't anything Marina can't cook into a gourmet meal.”

The smell of warm egg and roasted sausage triggered something in Sam's brain and suddenly the young soldier was ravenous, tearing easily through four of the smallish sandwiches before he finally felt full. The virologist grinned as she watched him eat, glancing towards where Aaron was helping his brothers. “It's good to see you eating, Sam . . . I seem to remember your eating habits resembling a bird's in the past.”

Shrugging one shoulder, Sam accepted a sealed bottle of water from her. “So . . . are you going to be okay?”

Smiling at him adoringly, Marta nodded, “I'll have Aaron with me, and I think you and I both know that there is nothing Aaron wouldn't kill to keep me safe.”

The former JTF2 sniper grinned as he agreed, “He does kind of adore you.” Giving her a smirk, he teased, “Don't ask me why.”

“You hush,” she laughed, pushing him gently and causing him to rock a little bit in his seat. “Look . . . I know that you're frustrated because of your injury . . . but Aaron asked me to ask you a favor.”

“Sure . . . what's the favor?”

“Most of Marina's boys are going to the compound, including the Colonel. Therefore, Aaron would appreciate it if you would keep an eye on her. I realize that that's kind of a tall order, considering your arm . . .”

A firm shake of his head cut her off as he insisted, “I can do that. She may be deadly, but she is tiny. She fits pretty easily behind me.”

Laughing, Marta snarked dryly, “Good luck with that.”

Grinning, Sam conceded the point. “Hansel, Clint and Bucky are going to the farm with us; between the four of us, Vincent and Daryl, I think we'll be able to take good care of her.”

“Thank you. I’ll let him know.” Looking over at the sound of her boyfriend's voice, she blinked to
see that the entire camp had already been packed. “Wow . . . that was fast.”

Sam grinned as he agreed, “The first thing you learn in Special Forces? Sleep where and when you can. The second thing you learn is how to throw up camp and then tear it down quickly; don't want to get caught in a spot that'll kill you for very long, if your location ends up compromised.”

Aaron's voice rang through the small clearing again as he called, “Doc! We gotta go! Come on!”

Almost seconds later, Marina's voice called through the area, “Sam! Let's go! We're still a good forty five minutes away from that farm and we aren't getting any closer by sitting on our asses!”

Sam chuckled, as he agreed, “Coming! Let me put out the fire first!”

“Thank you!”

Pushing himself to a standing position, Sam reached to hug his aunt tightly. “Take care of each other, okay? And if anything happens to you, kindly warn your boyfriend that I'll kill him. Agreed?”

“He'll probably kill himself first, so I wouldn't worry about wasting the energy,” she laughed, before she pulled him down to kiss his cheek. “Love you, Sammy . . . be safe.”

“You too, Aunt Marty. Don't worry about me; I'll see you soon. I promise.”

Nodding, she hugged him fiercely once more, before dashing towards where Aaron and the rest were waiting for her at the edge of the clearing. Throwing another wave over her shoulder, the first group were visible for only another moment before they disappeared from sight. Bending to the task he'd assigned himself, Sam killed the fire carefully, before moving towards where Marina was seated on the horse. Moving forward, Hansel smiled at the disgruntled look on the man's face as he chuckled, “I hope hyu do not mind the ride . . . we cannot afford to stop.”

Sighing, Sam allowed a moment to curse the zombie that had bitten him and the muscle weakness he could still feel in his body, before reaching up and accepting the help. A strong, smooth pull guided him up onto the horse behind the Russian woman, before the world jolted into motion as Marina urged the horse into a careful trot. Looking back, he was surprised to see that the others in their group were right on the horse's heels, except for Daryl who was several steps behind the rest. “That's not possible.”

“I think you'll find, Sam, that a lot of things that shouldn't be possible, don't seem to make a difference in this family. If you want, you can close your eyes; we've got a bit of a trek ahead of us and you could use the rest.”

Nodding in agreement, the young blond wrapped his arms around her waist and rested his chin over the curve of her shoulder. Closing his eyes, before he even knew it, the soothing motion of the horse urged him into a light doze.

It didn't seem like very long before Marina's voice was calling his name in a low undertone. “Sam . . . Sammy . . . come on Sammy, wake up . . . we're here.”

Yawning widely, he straightened up from his slumped-over position and blinked hard to take in his surroundings. Sensing that he was approaching functional again, Marina reined the horse in to a stop, petting the mare's neck as she murmured, “There's a good girl . . . welcome home, Kavallerie.”

They waited there as the rest of the crew came to a rest beside them, the two snipers trading sight lines and perches with one another almost absently. Hansel hefted his shotgun into the crook of his arm, robin's egg eyes catching on the small camp situated in a stand of trees off to their left, before
tracking to the whitewashed house another 200 feet to their right. Glancing down at the former witch hunter, Marina asked, “What do you think?”

There was a moment, before the German answered, “There is rot here . . . I can smell it, meine Tochter.” Scanning the area, he continued, “Something is very wrong here . . . I would not like to stay for very long if it can be avoided.”

Bucky's nose scrunched as his enhanced senses caught a hint of the scent. “Hansel's right . . . there is something dead here . . . and it's been dead for awhile.”

Looking down at Daryl, the Russian woman inquired, “Do you have any idea where everyone is?”

Daryl gestured towards the RV that was set back against the trees. “That's Dale's rig.” Twisting, he pointed towards the house, “Hershel and his family live in that house. Hershel owns the place.”

Nodding in agreement, Marina considered her choices, before gesturing towards the house. “I think we should start by returning the horse . . . she is probably pretty hungry at this point, aren't you, Kavallerie?”

Looking around, Sam slid sideways off the horse and accepted a rifle from Bucky. “Am I the only one who thinks that this place is almost creepier than the woods?”

Clint shook his head with a grim frown, “No . . . you aren't.”

Eying the blond carefully, Marina rolled her eyes at the innocent look he gave her before kicking the horse into a quick walk towards the house. As they approached, it was to the sight of a large group of people standing out front. One, a tall man with a shaved head and wearing khaki cargoes, was handing out rifles and pistols to members of the angry, if clearly divided, group. Hansel frowned as he called calmly, “Marishka . . . I do not like the look of this.”

Swinging down from the horse, Marina dropped the reins to the ground so as to ground-tie the horse, before pulling a large Bowie knife from the sheath at her calf and her Beretta from its holster at the small of her back. “Vincent, you and Sam keep those bite marks hidden, understood?” At the affirming calls, Marina looked down at Daryl, “It might be best if you went first.”

Nodding, Daryl shifted his crossbow from his back and into his hands. Looking around, he caught sight of a woman with cropped short hair near the back of the group, and jogged forward with a call of her name, “Carol!!”

The woman spun, as did most of the others in the group, her face lighting up at the sight of him, “Daryl! Thank God!” Dashing forward, she nearly crashed into his chest and nearly sent him to the ground at the sudden flare of pain. “I thought you were dead when you didn't come back last night!”

“Nah, I'm all right.” Gesturing towards where the others stood, he explained, “They found me after I got hurt . . . saved my ass from being a walker snack . . . fixed me up and gave me a place to crash for the night.”

The man with the bag of guns glared as they got closer, snarling out, “And who the fuck are they?”

“We're with S.H.I.E.L.D.,” Marina replied, her eyes narrowing at his tone. “We're the clean up crew for this mess.”

His face twisted as he sneered, “Five guys and a bitch . . . some clean up crew.”

Both Clint and Bucky jolted forward at the insult, Hansel getting his hand on both of them to stall
them in their tracks. “Ruhig, meine Söhne.”

It didn’t escape the Russian's notice that she could hear Sam's jaw grinding as he moved to take up a protective position at her back, just to the left of her and giving himself more than enough space to pull up his rifle quickly if he had to. Marina's lips twisted into a bitter smile as she replied, “I really don't like you. In fact, one day I hope I get to put a bullet in you. And considering I don't even know your name, that is blin vpechatlyayet. I like to make a habit of knowing the name of the person I'm going to kill . . . it's a professional courtesy, really.”

It was about then that Daryl turned his attention back onto Carol. “What the hell is going on? I thought Rick and Hershel said no guns on the property.”

Gesturing towards the barn, Carol replied, “The barn is full of walkers.” Gesturing at the man Marina was still glaring at, she continued, “Shane wants us to put them down.”

Daryl stared for a second in shock, before coming back to his senses. Turning to Shane he announced calmly, “You can't do that. This is a virus . . . they may not be dead.”

Shane scoffed, even as a woman with short reddish hair stepped forward. “What are you talking about?”

“The walkers were created by a virus, called the RAGE virus. They're alive for 96 hours after infection, at which time they're truly dead. According to the virologist with their team, there's nothing to be done for them after that point.”

Her face crumbled, as she sunk down onto the front porch steps, gripping on to the hand on her shoulder, placed there by the young Asian man who moved to stand beside her. Marina stepped forward to crouch in front of the young woman, smiling kindly, “What can you tell me about the walkers in the barn, devochka?”

“Maggie . . . my name is Maggie.”

Smiling in acknowledgment, Marina agreed, ”Just tell me what you can, Maggie.”

"Some of them are members of my family. My father was keeping them contained, because he believed that they could be saved. Others are walkers that Otis found, that he corralled into the barn after finding them.” Taking a deep breath, she looked up with tears in her eyes, “Except for the newest one, they've all been in there for weeks.”

Looking up at Bucky, Marina ordered, “Take Clint . . . see what you can see.”

“Yes ma'am,” he agreed, gesturing Clint after him with a jerk of his head. “Come on, khishchnick. Let's take a look around, huh?”

Clint considered the barn as he moved after his partner, asking cheerfully, “Do you think I could scale that thing?”

Marina chuckled, easily able to hear Bucky's eyes rolling in his response, “I think you're not going to try!”

“You take the fun out of everything, Buck!”

Turning back to the girl, Marina took a deep breath as she considered the pain in her eyes. “I am sorry for your loss.”
Nodding, she bowed her head into her hands. Her young man took a seat next to her and pulled her into his arms, letting her cry against him. Pushing herself to her feet, Marina gestured Vincent forward. “My name is Agent Marina Petrovka. This is Dr. Vincent Keller . . . Daryl is right . . . the walkers have been infected by a virus known commonly as RAGE. We have a vaccine and Dr. Keller is going to be vaccinating everyone here. So if you don’t mind pushing up your sleeves, he will be getting that taken care of now.”

Turning to Hansel as Vincent moved to set up his things on the porch, Marina spoke in quiet German, “Er macht mir Sorgen. (He worries me.)”

Hansel's eyes were fixed on Shane as he agreed in the same language, “Ja . . . er ist nicht richtig. (Yes . . . he is not right.)”

“Andanken? (Thoughts?)”

“Ich arbeite daran. (I am working on it.)”

“Gut. (Good.)”

Turning back to the group, she watched in horror as two men suddenly emerged from the trees, corralling a pair of walkers with them. “Vot der'mo!” she swore as Shane bolted angrily in their direction.

Nodding at Sam and Hansel, the three bolted after him, hoping to stall whatever madness he was intent upon. Skidding to a stop as Shane put three bullets into one of the walkers, Marina sighed at their placement; even if she had been saveable, the bullets would have killed her anyway. Nodding to Sam, she watched as the sharpshooter grimaced slightly in pain even as he lifted his rifle and put a clean shot through her temple. The sight of the woman dropping to the ground stalled even Shane in his tracks, which was just fine for Marina as it gave her a chance to pull off a shot of her own. Letting out a cry, he dropped his gun and grabbed at his now bleeding hand. “Bitch!”

Shrugging nonchalantly, she replied, “That's the best you can do? Frankly . . . I've been called worse.” Looking at the walker still collared, she called up to where she could see the two S.H.I.E.L.D. snipers perched on the barn's roof. “Clint . . . stay up there. Bucky . . . I could use that metal hand of yours for a second!”

She could see his smirk even from where she stood as he literally leaped off the edge of the roof and landed lightly a little more than two feet from Shane. Reaching out with his bionic arm, he spun sharply and snapped the man's dominant arm at the elbow and the forearm as he stripped the weapon from him, before sweeping his legs from under him and dropped him onto his back. Turning back towards the rest of the group, the Winter Soldier started to remove his glove from the left hand as he strode towards the zombie in question. Daryl blinked in shock as the sunlight glinted off the completely metal appendage, blinking again as the zombie attempted to sink his teeth into the hand and couldn't close on it. Bucky backhanded the walker sharply, and managed to get his flesh hand on the skin under his jawline behind his ear. Stepping back with a shake of his head, he announced, “He's gone,” even as he pulled his gun and put a bullet through his left eye.

Keeping her Beretta trained on Shane, Marina spoke to the two newly arrived members of the group. “I'm going to assume that you are Rick and Hershel.”

Nodding in silent shock, they only stared at her as she proceeded to reiterate everything she had already shared with the rest. “I've been told that a good majority of the walkers in here have been locked up for some time, right?”
Hershel's features were still twisted in shock, even as he stammered out, “Yes, that's right.”

“Then I'm sorry, but the best thing you can do for them at this point is to put them down.” Glancing around at the group, she insisted, “If it would make you feel better, my team and I can take care of it for you.”

Taking a deep breath, the older man shook his head. “No . . . this is my family . . . I need to do right by them.”

“Understood.” Shifting her gaze back onto Daryl, Marina inquired, “The little girl you were looking for. What was her name?”

The woman standing just behind him - the one he'd called Carol - spoke up, fiddling with a pendant around her neck. “Sophia . . . her name is Sophia . . . she's my daughter. Why?”

Watching Bucky shed his heavy tactical jacket out of the corner of her eye, Marina smirked at the way jaws dropped when his bionic arm came into view, showcased by the sleeveless undershirt he wore. Turning back to Carol, she answered honestly, “I understand she went missing a little under three days ago? Our best guess is that there is a 96 hour window before the disease is irreversible. So we're working on the theory that, even if she was infected, she's still saveable. We'll check, of course, because we're not going to waste what antidote we do have if she's not, but we're all praying we find her and soon.” Smiling gently, she laid a hand on the other woman's shoulder and asked, “Can you tell me a little more about what she looks like?”

“She's 12 years old . . . shoulder length blond hair . . . blue eyes . . . she's too nice . . . she couldn't hurt a fly.”

Smiling kindly, Marina squeezed lightly and promised, “Thank you . . . that's a big help.”

Looking at Hansel, she jerked her head in the direction of the still writhing Shane. “Think we can use him as bait?”

“Meine Tochter . . . what would mein Adler say?”

Grinning Marina replied, “As long as I had a good reason that wasn't 'He's an asshole', Misha would say, 'Good job.'” Shrugging at the incredulous look on his face, she teased, “My partner knows me well . . . he'd never second guess a decision I made, because he'd probably make the same one in my place.” Eying the lock, she inquired, “Can you break that thing?”

Hansel snorted as he replied, “Bare handed.” Moving forward, he pulled on it carefully, testing its strength. “This thing is a Stück Scheiße.”

Glancing at Sam, she took in his pain level and asked quietly, “You okay?”

Nodding silently, he hefted the rifle and took aim at the door. Gesturing Clint from the roof, she watched fondly as he flipped off the edge, somersaulting in the air before landing easily on both feet. Bucky's tone was teasing as he ruffled his hair, “Show off.”

“Jealous!” Clint sing-songed in return, unslinging his bow from his back and nocking an arrow against the string.

Moving forward, Rick grabbed Shane under the arms and yanked him out of the way of the doors, as the rest of the survivors joined the line. Marina reached for the dart gun tucked into its holster at her thigh, checking the single round loaded there. Shoving it back into the holster, she drew a bead with her Beretta on the door and nodded once at Hansel. “Open it.”
Bicep muscles bulging, he ripped the lock from the door and flung it to the side. Grabbing onto the handles, he yanked the doors open and dodged backwards to rejoin the line. Marina lifted her gun and called, “Save the ammo . . . head shots only . . . if you don't think you can manage that on a first shot, don't shoot. Understood?”

The sharpshooters in the group – Sam, Bucky and Clint – didn't say anything, knowing that she wasn't talking to them, though she waited for the rest to agree to the order. Just then, the first walker stepped from the gloom of the barn and lumbered towards them groaning. The rotted look of his face nearly made Marina gag, even as she called, “Fire!”

Instantly, her three snipers opened fire, putting their targets down with single, precise shots. The rest of the survivors were surprised by the immediate action, but quickly joined in on the killing. Finally, the walkers were dead and on the ground. Marina's features twisted at the smell, as she turned towards Bucky and Clint. “Head out and find somewhere we can safely burn the bodies. Burying them will take too much time and I don't want to risk that decomposed releases the virus into the soil and we have another outbreak in another twenty years.”

The two nodded, before the sound of growling from inside the barn swung them around again, weapons up and ready. Marina frowned at the sound, easily able to hear that the sound was much lower to the ground than the others. “Hold fire until my call,” she ordered, drawing her dart gun and moving cautiously forward.

“Yes ma'am,” Bucky agreed on a grunt, hands tightening on the stock. “Gadyuka . . . too close.”

Waving off his concerns, she stopped at just outside the ring of bodies, peering closely into the gloom. The walker that emerged then was little more than a child, and it was only the agonized cry from Carol that warned Marina who the walker was. “Sophia!” Carol screamed, attempting to dash forward before Daryl dropped his rifle and caught her in his arms.

Bringing the dart gun to bear on the girl, the S.H.I.E.L.D. handler called over her shoulder, “Tovrets . . . check her!”

Handing the rifle to Clint, Bucky moved forward quickly. Wrapping his metal arm around the girl to hold her still, he didn't even need to touch her skin to know; he could feel the searing heat of her through his thin shirt. Looking up at his former protege, he nodded, “She's alive.”

“Thank fuck,” was all Daryl could say before Marina pulled the trigger.

Chapter End Notes

Translations:

(R) Slava Bogu - Thank God
(G) Kavallerie - horse
(G) Ruhig, meine Sohne - Easy, my sons.
(R) blin vpechatlyayet - damn impressive
(R) devochka - girl
(R) khishchnick - little hawk (Bucky's nickname for Clint)
(G) Meine Tochter - my daughter (Hansel's nickname for Marina)
(G) mein Adler - my eagle (Hansel's nickname for Will)
(G) Stück Scheiße - piece of shit
(R) Gadyuka - viper (The call sign given to Marina by the Akademiya and the Krasnaya Komnata
(R) Tovrets - architect (One of Marina's nicknames for Bucky, who used to be her mentor)
Hello! Hope you enjoy!

Just to let everyone know, I have been getting a lot of requests to finish one of my other stories. I will not be putting a pause on this one, however, I will be limited to only two chapters a week while I focus some much needed attention on this other story. It's almost finished, so it's just a matter of writing the last chapters. I hope you can understand.

Translations at the end of the chapter, as always.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
Marta growled as her foot got tangled again in a root under her feet, earning quiet chuckles from her boyfriend where he stood behind her. “Are you all right up there Doc?”

“Can we just let it be known that I hate the woods? I’m a scientist . . . the outdoors and I hate each other mutually and intensely,” she muttered viciously, yanking on a strand of her hair caught in a section of gnarly branches over her head. “Fucking tree! Let go!”

Still chuckling, Aaron shucked his pack and tossed it towards Will, who was holding out a hand for it. Stopping the increasingly frantic motions of her hands, the former Outcome operative gently untangled her hair and pulled it back into a simple knot at the back of her head. Moving in front of her, he crouched and insisted, “Hop on, Doc . . .”

“I refuse to be carried like a child,” she sputtered, blushing dark red at the thought.

“Don’t think about it that way, Doc. Think about it in terms of the fact that we’re on a tight clock and all the time you and I stand here bickering about whether or not you’re going to let me give you a piggyback ride, is drastically cutting into how many of these people you could have saved with your antidote.”

Glowering at his back, there was a pause before she climbed onto his back, muttering viciously under her breath in Quebecois French. Will chuckled as whatever Aaron said back, in the same language, caused her jaw to drop and her head to bury into the back of his neck in embarrassed fury. Her scolding, “Asshole,” however, was more than understandable to everyone else in the vicinity.

Chuckling, Will hefted the second pack over his shoulder, before turning his attention back onto where Jason was walking and working. The middle brother was fiddling intently with one of the dart guns, and paying absolutely not attention to his surroundings, leaving his older brother to do it for him. “You about done, bratishka?”

Jason’s answering hum was absent and distant as he tilted his head and focused more intently on the guts of the pistol in his hands. Brian laughed from where he and Natasha had taken point, calling back fondly, “You might as well be talking to a wall, Will.”

Snorting in agreement, the Colonel replied dryly, “Indeed.”

A burst of static in his ear turned his attention onto his comm as Owen’s voice sounded in his ear, “Orel . . . this is Ubiytsa . . . come in.”

“This is Orel . . . what do you hear, Ubiytsa?”

“This is a hell of a wind,” the former Cleaner replied, with a snort. He had been sent on to the compound, when Sam had gotten bit, so that they had some reliable reconnaissance going into the area. “Whoever said this place was abandoned, was lying through their teeth. This place is fully functional . . . and it's going nuts. Something happened and I'd bet my paycheck it's tied to this outbreak.”

“Any easy entry points?”

“Sure . . . like I said this place is going nuts. I could blow a half a dozen holes in this perimeter, and no one would even notice that they'd been breached. Something has them seriously spooked, though they do seem to be avoiding one building in the very center of the compound.”

Frowning, Will suggested cautiously, “Sounds like a loss of infrastructure.”

“That was English, Lucky,” Will snarked in reply, before explaining, “Sounds like they lost their officers. The lackeys are all going batshit, because there isn't anyone around to tell them what to do.”

“So . . . let's give them an officer,” Aaron suggested, nodding at Will's own tactical uniform. “You're the best they’re going to get right now.”

“And if I knew a damn thing about what the hell we were walking into, I would be all over that suggestion. But I don't even know who's running that compound . . . who it belongs to . . . who doesn't want anyone to know that it exists . . . I don't know enough to be able to bluff my way in. It's too risky for you guys . . . and for the others at the farm. No . . . we'll do this the old-fashioned way.”

Brian cheered in excitement at the order, as Will continued, “Owen . . . set up a series of explosions. Wait for us to get there and then blow them all. We'll throw them into even more disarray and we'll take over in stealth formation. If you are engaged, you have permission to engage with all prejudice. If they do not, less lethal only, if it can be done. Understood?”

“Yes sir!” was the all around call, before Owen called out an affirmative and left the comm again.

Reaching out cautiously, Will placed his hand on Jason's shoulder and watched the middle Grimm jumped out of his skin. “Svyatoye der'mo! Will, you scared the hell out of me!”

“Sorry, Jay . . . how's it coming?”

Smirking, Jason's hands moved rapidly for a moment, before he offered his older brother the reassembled pistol. “Viola! It's done.”

Taking the pistol, Will examined it for a moment, ejecting and reloading the magazine, before tucking it into the back of his pants. “So how many is that?”

“Marina has hers, Aaron has his, Bucky and Clint both have theirs even if they're not loaded and then that one.” Rummaging in his bag, he grunted, “I have the materials for one more but I need about 20 minutes to be able to assemble it while we're on the move.”

Smiling lightly, the Colonel announced, “You have ten.”

Huffing, the technical specialist sassed, “Do you have any idea how many miracles you've asked me for in the last 24 hours?”

“Quite a few . . . and you've delivered admirably every time.”

Pausing briefly at the comment, the younger brother stopped and stared at the older, eyes narrowed and features suspicious. “All right . . . out with it. You're obviously fishing for something.”

“Are you a hundred percent sold on staying with the NYPD forever? Is there anything that can bring you back to S.H.E.I.L.D.?”

Turning to attention to the parts in his hands, Jason considered for a moment as he manipulated the parts, before shrugging. “I had a good reason for leaving S.H.E.I.L.D., Will.”

“And I'm not saying you didn't, Jay. But Sarah's been gone for a long time, and you have Casey now . . .”

Whatever he'd been about to say next was interrupted as Jason spoke up, “Yeah, I have Casey and she's my partner.” Looking over at Will, his mouth twisted as he insisted, “We work well together. I couldn't leave her with Alvarez. For starters, she'd probably puree my ass and hand it to me on a
platter. Two, she gets me . . . I don't have to justify myself like I had to with Kowalski.”

Will’s mouth twisted slightly at the reminder of the younger brother’s former partner. He’d met Kowalski all of once, but that had been one time too many. The man had definitely made an impression, but it had not been a good one. He was truly sorry for his widow and what she’d gone through at his death, but he could honestly say that wasn't sorry the man was dead.

Shaking the thought away, Will continued, “I know you don't want to be a field agent. After what happened with Diego and to Sarah, I don't blame you. But what about a position in research and development? You loved working in R&D.”

Smiling at the reminder of the other tech geeks he'd befriended when he'd freelanced in the department, Jason ran one hand through his hair. “That still leaves Casey.”

Frowning at his stubbornness, he opened his mouth to argue, before Marina's voice called through the comm, “Orel, this is Sova. Do you read?”

Holding up a hand in a clear indication that this conversation wasn't over, Will triggered the comm in his ear, “This is Orel.”

“We found that little girl. She was infected, but, near as we can tell, the antidote worked. Kindly give Vorona my compliments.”

Marta’s tone was excited as she demanded, “Any side effects?”

“Tselitel is with her now . . . all I really know is that she dropped like a stone after I shot her. But he said her fever is at least coming down into a manageable range, so I'm going to assume that that's a good thing.”

Will hummed lightly in acknowledgment, dropping into a crouch as the compound came into view. Out of the corner of his eyes, he watched the rest of his brothers, Natasha and Veronika do the same. “How does the farm look?”

“Tselitel vaccinated everyone here, so that's at least one less problem to worry about in the long run. Also, the entire area is aggressively cleared so it does offer good sight lines . . . Snavper and I are on lookout duty with Yastreb and the Soldat . . . Vati took a few of the men to burn the bodies . . . the moron who owns the farm had a bunch of the walkers locked up in his barn. That's how we found her; they'd locked her up with the rest in the barn.”

Smirking at her tone, Will could imagine the way her eyes were rolling back into her head; Marina suffered fools not at all and had very little patience with any form of stupidity at all. “Any sign of trouble?”

“No . . . not for the moment. I get the impression this entire area here is kind of secluded from the world. Frankly, I don't think Hershel knows a damn thing about what's going on outside his farm. He knows about the walkers obviously, but not much else.” Huffing out an exasperated breath, she muttered under her breath for a moment, before speaking up again, “What about you? ‘All Quiet on the Western Front’?”

Smirking, Will teased, “Has anyone ever told you that your opinion of light reading is not exactly light reading?”

He could see her careless shrug in his head as she replied, “I'm a fan of the Classics . . . sue me. Answer the question.”
"We're at the compound now. Ubiytsa is laying charges... he said earlier that the base was going batshit and, based on what I can see from here, he's not wrong."

The Russian chuckled as she replied, "Yeah, I heard... just remember, Misha, not every one speaks the same English as you, okay?"

"Ha ha... very funny." Narrowing his eyes at something happening down the compound, he asked absently, "Vorona... you said this virus first showed up in London, right?"

Marta nodded in agreement, shooting a quick smile at her boyfriend when he reached out to tuck a loose strand of hair back into the knot at the back of her head. "About ten years ago, yes. Why?"

"Were there any survivors?"

Eyes going wide, everyone could see the way the gears in her brain started to whir as she thought. "I know that the medical center was declared a complete loss; the infected completely overran the building and the Brits ended up bombing the whole building. As for anyone else, I know that there were a couple soldiers who made it out, but not many."

Reaching out, the Colonel guided her to his side gently before pointing towards where a group of soldiers were congregating in the courtyard. In the center of the group was a pair of soldiers holding onto the arms of another. Based on build and body structure, Will could tell it was a woman and considering the way she was yanking her body around, she was not being held there willingly. "Does she look familiar to you at all?"

Eyes squinting as she tried to make out features, the scientist jumped in surprise when Aaron laid a hand on her forearm to get her attention. Smiling at the binoculars he was offering her, she leaned to press a brief, chaste kiss to his lips. "Thank you."

Nodding, the agent glanced toward his brothers, the three younger Grimms moving soundlessly down the treeline towards the compound fence. Watching him go for a moment, she shook herself free of her thoughts and brought the binoculars to her face. All dirty brown hair and frantic brown eyes, the woman was probably several inches taller than Marina though the hulking nature of the men on either side of her made her seem much smaller. Peering closer through the lenses, she watched as they shoved her to her knees. "What the hell are they doing?"

"They're going to kill her, and that I can't allow." He was already moving towards the compound as he ordered briskly, "Tasha... Nika... stay with Marta. Owen... blow it to hell."

Owen's tone was gleeful as he replied, "Whatever you say, Boss-man."

Marta jumped in surprise as the sound of several explosions, one on top of the other, ripped through the silence of the forest. Dropping the binoculars, she pressed her hands to her ears to block out the worst of the sound. Natasha's hand was a warm, gentle weight her shoulder, grounding her to a single point as the world around them proceeded to go to hell in a hand basket. Twisting to look at the two Russian women, she felt her heart settle at the small smile on the redheaded assassin's lips. "They're trained for this... Aaron's going to be just fine."

"Promise?"

Veronika grinned, black hair tied up into an efficient ponytail as she agreed, "Absolutely. Frankly, I'm a little jealous that they're the ones that get to have all the fun."

Natasha rolled her eyes at her sister's exuberance, smacking at her shoulder lightly, "Someone needs to kill something."
Nika's eyes went wide in emphasis as she blurted out, “I know!”

Some part of Marta marveled at her calm in the face of such comments, while the rest of her was infinitely grateful that the four women known most commonly as “The Merry Murderesses of S.H.I.E.L.D.” were on their side. Shifting to rest her temple on Natasha’s shoulder, Marta settled in to wait out the firefight going on below them. Natasha's arms were warm and firm as they hugged her, offering her the reassurance that the virologist needed while her lover was going head to head with the private army below them. “It might be easier if you didn't look,” Nika prompted with a small smirk.

The scientist's head shook, her eyes glued to the one she knew in her heart was Aaron, as she replied, “No . . . it wouldn't be.”

Meanwhile, Brian was cutting a bloody swatch through the soldiers between him and the woman. Fortunately, her executioner had gotten distracted when the bombs went off, allowing Brian the time to put a bullet in his brain before he could refocus his attention on the woman forced to her knees in front of him. He could hear the rest of his brothers and Owen behind him, each of them involved in their own jobs.

Putting a bullet in the hand of the asshole to her left, Brian employed one of the tactics he and Natasha had perfected on each other and dropped the man to the concrete. Barely a split second later, his partner was writhing on the floor on the other side of her. Breathing hard, Brian waited for a moment to see if either would move, before turning his attention onto the woman still kneeling behind him. Turning to her, he took in the horrified hope on her face as he offered her a hand and assisted her gently. Catching sight of the single crown on the shoulder of her ragged uniform, he frowned for a moment before his brain finally supplied the correct title. “Major? Are you all right?”

The whole time he'd been speaking, she'd been staring at his face. Reaching out, her fingers hovered just inches from his face as she nearly whimpered, “Doyle? Is that you?”

Before Brian had even a second to respond, she was in his arms and her mouth was on his. And in the back of his mind, the only thought he could hear was, “Oh fuck . . . Tasha is going to kill me.”

Chapter End Notes

Translations:

(R) bratishka - little brother
(R) Ubiytsa - assassin (Owen's call sign for SHIELD)
(R) Orel - eagle (Will's call sign for the Army's Spec Ops squad the Brat'ya Mrachnyy and for SHIELD)
(R) svyatoye der'mo - holy shit
(R) Sova - owl (Marina's call sign for the Army's Spec Ops squad the Brat'ya Mrachnyy and for SHIELD)
(R) Vorona - raven (Marta's civilian call sign for SHIELD; is also one of Aaron's nicknames for her)
(R) Tselitel - healer (Vincent's call sign for SHIELD)
(R) Snayper - sniper (Sam's call sign for SHIELD)
(R) Yastreb - hawk (Clint's call sign for the Army's Spec Ops squad the Brat'ya Mrachnyy and for SHIELD)
(R) Soldat - soldier (short for *Zimniy Soldat* or Winter Soldier; Bucky's call sign given to him by the Russian *Akademiya* and its *Krasnaya Komnata*
(R) Vati - Dad (Marina’s nickname for Hansel Kuhn)
(R)
Translations at the end as always.

If you haven't had the opportunity to read "This Trick May Chance to Scathe You", it's a Trio centric fic that I've started that takes place about 20 years from where we are now. I hope you take the opportunity to read it and let me know what you think, if you can.

Here's the newest chapter, as promised. I hope you enjoy it!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
Scarlett Ross-Levy had been living alone and in almost total isolation since the incident in London. She had lost count of how many prayers she'd said, that her lover would come to rescue her. As the years passed, she was forced to accept the fact that he believed her gone, dead at best and infected at worst. And then, for him to finally be here, having saved her from what she'd known would be her death only moments before; it was quite literally her best, most perfect dream come true.

Even if this wasn't quite how she'd imagined their reunion would play out.

His lips were still pressed to hers, however, they there was no activity behind the action. His hands, as far as she could tell with her eyes closed, were held awkwardly out to his sides, as though he was terrified just to touch her. Every muscle of his body was locked tightly into fight or flight and she could tell that if it wasn't for her death grip around his neck, he would be halfway across the courtyard already, with at least 100 feet of space between them permanently.

Finally, she dropped back onto her toes, disengaging from him and looking up at him with tears shining in her lashes. “Doyle? What's wrong?”

The man's face twisted into a grimace as he placed his hands on her shoulders and pushed her a step away from him very gently. “I'm sorry, sweetheart . . . but I'm not Doyle.”

Letting him push her away, she wrapped her arms around her midsection and frowned. “I don't understand . . . that's impossible. You have to be Doyle . . . you look just like him.”

To her surprise, the man's brown eyes rolled as he muttered, “Well, it's not like I haven't heard that before.”

She was contemplating that sentence when it finally hit her; the man's eyes were brown. Doyle's eyes were a warm, laughing sea-green that had watched her with adoration every moment they could steal together. Whoever this man was . . . he was not Sergeant James Doyle, which then forced the question . . . “Who the fuck are you?”

Drawing back from him sharply, she all but glared at him as his own shock at the question spread across his face. “Who the fuck am I!? Who the fuck are you!? Do you have any idea what my Widow is going to do to me because of that kiss!? Listen, lady, I have no desire to die today and thanks to that little stunt you just pulled, I'm going to be very lucky if she doesn't castrate me with her favorite knife and then frappe my dick in our blender, okay?”

Another voice spoke up then from behind her, causing her to whirl in surprise. Another man stood there, this one looking practically identical to the man in front of her. “Is there a problem here, Bri?” he inquired, eyebrows furrowed curiously.

The brown eyed man shook his head at his brother – because if they weren't related, she'd eat her credentials – as he ran his hands back through his hair. “Nah, Will . . . just another case of mistaken identity.”

“Wait . . . she knows Clint? Except for Dad, he's the only one not present and accounted for.”

“Nah . . . she thought I was some guy named Doyle.” Pausing, he frowned for a moment before asking, “Do we even know anybody named Doyle?”

A third brother joined the first two, laughing as he announced, “If I was you, I would be a lot more worried about the redhead storming over here like there's a fire on her ass.”

Whirling at the warning, Brian held up his hands in a placating manner and announced frantically,
“This is not what it looks like, Nat, honest.”

“Really? Cause it kinda looked like some suka was kissing you and you weren’t doing much to stop her,” came the softly accented voice, her tone calmly lethal.

Instinctively taking a step towards the nearest place to hide, Scarlett instead found herself in the green glass laser sights of the woman’s eyes. Grimacing at the barely leashed fury there, Scarlett allowed her shoulders to hunch up around her shoulders as she announced, “So . . . that might have been my fault. I thought he was someone else.”

A delicate snort was the woman's only response, earning a pair of smothered grins from Brian's two brothers. Brian, however, looked like someone had just hit him with a two-by-four. “Come on, Tasha . . . why would I ever want to stray from you? Who else is going to understand my need to kill something every once in awhile?”

Natasha’s eyes narrowed sharply at the question; it was clear to Scarlett at least that the longer she remained silent, the more nervous and uneasy her paramour became. Finally, she stepped into her lover's space, reaching up and twisting her hand in the collar of his shirt. Yanking him down to her own level, she chirped sweetly, “I hope you’re prepared for the consequences, Brian, because I can guarantee that you're not going to enjoy them.”

The way he instantly paled was visible to everyone in the vicinity, as was the way his Adam's Apple bobbed as he gulped at the threat in the sugar-sweet tone. It wasn't long before the younger of the brothers spoke up in a cheerful tone, “Hey Natasha? Where's Marta?”

“I left her with Nika; they were going to be right behind me.”

Nodding in silent agreement, the young man turned to survey the treeline Natasha had emerged from. “Apparently, they missed that part of the memo,” he chuckled, lifting his hands to cup around his mouth. “All right you two . . . you can come out now!”

A disembodied voice floated from the trees as it laughed, “Maybe we're playing hide and seek . . . did you ever consider that?”

“Hide and go seek is only fun when there's a prize at the end of the game,” was the response from yet another brother, his nose glued to what looked like a tablet computer held in one hand and a Glock 9 clutched loosely in the other. “And I can promise you, Marta, there is going to be one seriously kick ass prize at the end of the maze.”

Almost instantly, a slight woman with dark brown hair popped up out of the trees as she demanded, “Did you find my lab?”

“The solar system orbit the sun?” the tech geek scoffed with a blatant roll of his eyes, a gesture that looked a little odd if only because he never actually looked away from the tablet he was examining. “Please . . . the schematics for this place may be buried under the kind of upper level encryption that should have been on Paris Hilton's sex tape, if only to protect the rest of us from that degree of stupid, but clearly, they have never met me.” Turning to tablet around so that the rest of the group could see the blueprints displayed there, he grinned, “Easier than taking candy from a baby.”

“Yeah . . . and what about taking chocolate from Marina?” the black haired woman with Marta taunted, a smirk on her lips.

“Right . . . because that's ever going to happen. It would be easier to steal every gold brick from Fort Knox than it would be to steal chocolate from Marina. And frankly, I don't know anyone stupid
enough to try.”

Marta waved away the conversation, practically bounding over to grab the technical specialist's arm and shake him sharply. “Jason! I want my lab!”

Smirking at her, he teased, “Well well well . . . look who's getting all bossy.”

“JAY!”

“All right! Come on; let's go find this lab so that you can cook up your antidote.”

Scarlett's interest was immediately intrigued as she demanded, “Wait. You have an antidote to the virus?”

Turning, Marta frowned. “You know about the virus?”

“Yes . . . I've spent the last ten years here, being forced to turn this stupid virus into a weapon. I've tried everything I know of to create a vaccine without Them finding out, but whenever I got close . . . my captors would find out and I'd have to start all over again.” Springing forward, she latched onto Marta's arm fiercely, ignoring the startled squeak that the virologist released as a result. “Does it work? Are you sure?”

Dark brown eyes were very wide as she stared at the other scientist, prompting Aaron to step in and disengage the two women from one another. The former Outcome Operative took up a position between them, icy blue eyes glaring down at the other woman from over a pair of tightly crossed arms. Only slightly abashed at the admonishment in his features, Scarlett blushed at her exuberance before continuing forward with her questioning. “Please . . . I just want to go home. And the only way I can do that is if your antidote actually works.”

Looking up at her boyfriend, Marta stepped out slightly from behind him and nodded. “My nephew, Sam . . . he got bit. It works; no adverse effects. It even works on people who have been exposed to the virus for longer than just a few hours. Our working theory is that we have up to 96 hours before the virus kills its victim and the infected individual is no longer saveable.”

“Do you have any evidence to support your theory?”

“We split up from the rest of our party earlier this morning. A little girl had gone missing a couple days ago and when our colleagues found them, they discovered she'd been infected. They were able to introduce the antidote into her system and by all reports, the girl is recovering rather quickly, considering,” the brother Brian had called Will explained, his eyebrows narrowed as he asked. “Why can't you go home without a viable antidote?”

Blushing with mortification, Scarlett reached up with one hand to push back her hair. “You have to understand . . . this is what I was intending to do. I only wanted to get out out of here, and the only way to do that was to get rid of my captors. So I doctored one of the weaker strains of the virus samples I had access to . . .” Taking a deep breath, she confessed quietly, “I infected one of my guards. And from there it spread. I was so close to an antidote that I thought I would have more than enough time to be able to finish it before the outbreak became too widespread.”

“Wait . . . YOU were the cause of the outbreak?”

Looking down at her hands in a strange mix of shame and pride, the medical doctor nodded. “The kinds of things they used that virus for . . . it wasn't right. And to be honest, I'm not sad those bastards are in their graves. They destroyed people's lives; some of their test subjects were killed
because they introduced a virus into their DNA systems that they didn't know how to control.” Shrugging, she lifted her chin and looked the Colonel in the face, almost daring him to say anything against her. “I'm not sorry for my intentions, only the loss of life that resulted from it.”

Those quicksilver eyes flashed through a wide spectrum of colors, before finally landing on a colorless blue, almost like the wet scales of a fish. “Frankly, I'm not sure I have any right to condemn your actions; that job's for someone with a higher pay-grade. However, I can promise you that whatever tribunal you face will definitely look on you more kindly if you help us. We have a viable vaccine, and a reliable antidote; help us manufacture it in the kind of quantities we need and I will do what I can to help you.”

Nodding in agreement, the pretty scientist squared her shoulders and met Will's eyes dead on. “I will do what I can to help you, you have my word.”

“Good then let's get going. We have a steadily closing time frame and I really don't want to waste any more time,” the oldest brother agreed, turning to the middle Grimm. “Get the two of them and Aaron to the labs, Jay . . . let's get this show on the road.”

Grinning, the communications officer agreed, “Sounds like a plan.”

Watching the four go, Will turned back to the rest. “As for everybody else, if they're moving, let's find some way to restrain them just in case. As for the dead, let's get them out of the main area and find somewhere to either bury or burn the bodies . . . frankly, I'm not picky about which one we choose.”

Owen spoke up cautiously, insisting, “Burning them would be safer. Less chance of the virus spreading via an underground spring or something equally ridiculous.”

“All right; Owen, I'm putting you and Nika in charge of finding an appropriate place to get that taken care of. Brian, you and Natasha round up the still living guards. The ones that are still capable of coherency, I would like to speak to. As for the rest, I'm sure there are a sturdy rooms inside that can double as a cell for a little while.”

“Yes sir,” the four chimed in together, before each pair moved off to their individual jobs.

Remaining where he'd been left, Will reached up and triggered his comm with a series of sharp taps over the open connection. There was a moment, before Marina's voice chimed through on a private channel. “I heard.”

“Who do you think this Doyle is?”

“I don't know; but if she was that convinced that Brian was this Doyle . . . that would mean that there is another clone out there somewhere, Misha.”

“I was worried you were going to say that,” he sighed, his hands pushing down into his pockets roughly.

“I was worried I was going to have to say it,” Marina agreed with a soft chuckle. “No matter what, Misha . . . I'm right here. I promise.”

His lips quirking briefly into a relieved smirk, Will announced, “Thank God for small blessings.”

The Russian's tone was fond and adoring as she replied, “And big ones.”

“Indeed.” Rubbing his hands briskly over his face, Will pushed out a sharp breath. “All right, I love
you."

“I love you too. We’ll see you soon. Be safe. Sova out.”

“You too. Orel out.”

And if there was anything more isolating than suddenly being the only one on comms, Will didn’t want to know what it was.

Chapter End Notes

Translations:
(R) suka - bitch
(R) Misha/Mishka - a diminutive of Michael/Mikhail (Will's middle name is Michael. Marina's most common nickname for her lover and partner)
(R) Sova - Owl (Marina's call sign with the Army and SHIELD)
(R) Orel - Eagle (Will's call sign with the Army and SHIELD)
Blood and Bullshit

Chapter Notes

New Chapter! Finally!

New chapter up on "Scathe You" too! Enjoy the double helping of Grimm awesome!

Translations at the end, as always.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
Chapter 171: Blood and Bullshit

Will had said it before and he would probably say it a million times again; he was a soldier, not a spy. And as a soldier, there were some things that did not jive with his modus operandi. Chief among these things was bullshit; he had no patience for it and even less patience for the idiots who attempted it. Fortunately, the idiots stationed at this covert installation could learn. By the time he'd broken the second finger, they were more than willing to spill their guts about the kinds of things that had happened at the base as well as what they may have accidentally overheard at some point.

As he was leaving the last interrogation, wiping his hands on a rag, he heard one of his brothers call
out his name. “Will!” came the repeat call, earning Will's reply, “I'm here!”

There was a dull thud as whoever it was careened off a wall to change directions, before Jason appeared at the end of the hall, features alight with excitement. Grinning, Will stood and waited for him, offering rhetorically, “Success then?”

The technical specialist could hardly contain his eagerness as he offered the remodeled gun to his older brother. “I think these things may be the coolest toy I've ever made.”

Chuckling, Will took the weapon and replied teasingly, “I don’t know . . . I think these comms are going to get a longer duration than even these toys, Jay.”

“Yeah, but I'll probably throw a million upgrades at them through the next few years. These are a one-shot beauty, pravitel’.”

Nodding at the statement, Will holstered the weapon as he laughed, “Agreed. What about the vaccine? Are we all set?”

“Marta and Major Ross were just finishing up the last batch when I bolted.”

“All right. Nika and Natasha have confined our reluctant guests into the basement isolation cells. They should be all right there until S.H.I.E.L.D. can send someone to collect them.” Taking a deep breath, Will finished cleaning his hands before reaching up to trigger his comm. “Lucky . . . can I get a status update on the bodies?”

Owen's tone was resigned, if disgruntled, as he replied, “Can I just say that zombies stink? And that the appealing aroma of freshly dead jackasses do not improve the smell?”

Chuckling, Will replied, “You may say whatever you want . . . doesn't mean I'm going to listen to you.”

“Asshole,” the Cleaner grumbled goodnaturedly, the roll of his eyes audible in his tone.

“Takes one to know one, Luck,” the Colonel agreed cheerfully, before turning to his brother. “All right . . . let's round everyone up and get to the farm. I don't even want to attempt to undertake this mess without everyone together; there are reasons why we are so successful, and it is because we work best as a team.”

Nodding in unresistant agreement, the NYPD detective turned on his heel and bolted back the way he'd come. Opening the channel on his comm, Will spoke firmly, “All right everybody, listen up . . . the vaccine and the antidote are done as are the modifications Krechet has made. That being said, things are about to get ugly. If you are at the farm, be prepared for our arrival; I would prefer not get shot accidentally, okay?”

Marina's tone was laughing as she teased, “I make no promises.”

Narrowing his eyes at the tease, he taunted back, “Something I should know, Major?”

The indignant outcry from Clint and Aaron was immediate as Clint announced firmly, “No flirting over comms! I'm pretty sure that's a rule somewhere, and if it's not it should be!”

The Russian's laughter was amused as Will insisted, “And who said we were flirting, Yastreb?”

“You only call Sova 'Major' when you're flirting and thinking dirty thoughts,” was Aaron's response in his younger brother's place.
Rolling his eyes, Will waved the comment away, before continuing, “Sych, we will finish this conversation later.”

“Looking forward to it,” was the warm purr from his partner, earning another chorus of groans through the comms.

“As for everybody else, meet at the front gates of the base to get your piece. Be prepared to move out and move fast; we have no time to waste. Our window is closing fast and so as of this moment, our timetable is running on hyper-speed. Understood?”

“Yes sir!” was the resounding call through the comms, before Will insisted, “Over and out.”

The trip through the woods was relatively uneventful – a detail that would no doubt make Will nervous later – and as a result took very little time at all. Scarlett kept up with the rest easily, her eyes wide as she took in her surroundings; the Colonel would bet every hazard pay check he’d ever received that this was the first time she’d been outside in the world since London had fallen victim to the virus ten years ago. Before long, the farm was in sight and in that same instant, Marta was off at a run towards the farm house with Aaron only moments off her heels.

The rest moved at a more sedate pace through the grounds, branching out as they took in the lay of the land. A muffled thud sounded to Will's left as he moved past the barn and it was without any surprise that the oldest Grimm turned his head to see Marina fall into step beside him as though she had been there the whole time. “Sit rep?”

“We're good here. Vincent is in with Sophia and her mother, Carol, getting another set of vital signs from the girl. Our new friend Daryl is about as prickly as a porcupine; he's been stationed at the bedroom door with his crossbow since I shot the poor thing.”

“Any concerns I should know about?”

“Just the one; his name is Shane Walsh . . . kid's not quite right.”

Will fished in his back pocket from his cigarettes, drawing one out and lighting it quickly, inhaling a lungful of the smoke slowly. “Any reason you haven't killed him yet?”

Marina grinned at the question, replying, “I don't have a reason that's not 'the man is an asshole'. At least not yet.”

“Let me know when you do, huh?”

The Cheshire grin on his partner's face was answer enough and Will exhaled slowly, quicksilver eyes looking over the surrounding area. “Any other trouble?”

“Nah . . . for the most part, the farm is pretty isolated. Frankly, I haven't decided if that's a good thing or a bad thing yet.”

Humming in answer, Will's head came up and around at the sound of his father's voice calling for him, “Adler?”

“I'm here, Dad!” he called back, reaching to lay a hand on the small of Marina's back as he leaned to press a sweet kiss to her cheek. “Catch you later?”

“I'll be around,” she teased, with a wink before turning to rejoin Sam on watch.

Rounding the barn, the Colonel frowned at the sight of Hansel and Scarlett standing toe to toe with
one another. Approaching the two slowly, the oldest Grimm asked cautiously, “Something I should
know?”

Hansel blinked at the sound of his oldest son's voice, before announcing, “I know this woman.”

Before the statement was even out of his father's mouth, Will's eyebrows were in his hairline as he
demanded, “You what!? How the hell do you know her? You hadn't even been abducted from the
Germans yet when she was kidnapped during the London outbreak.”

The witch hunter scowled as he waved away his son's argument, “I do not know her personally,
mein Adler . . . but I huf seen her picture.”

Narrowing his eyes, the Colonel asked cautiously, “Where?”

“Do hyu remember the assignment Maria and I went on, the one where she was shot?”

“Yeah . . . Austria . . . I had my hands full trying to convince Marina that we couldn't steal a Quinjet
and fly there ourselves.” Grunting, he muttered, “I'm still not entirely sure that my Marishka forgives
you for letting her best friend get shot.”

Giving his son a wry look, Hansel huffed out a breath and continued, “My commander, Sergeant
Doyle, had a picture of her in his wallet.”

Scarlett's whole face lit up, her hands flashing out to catch hold of his sleeve. “You know Doyle!? Is
he okay? Why didn't he come for me?”

The German looked down at the woman with a frown, his hand coming up to press over her own. “I
have met Sergeant Doyle only the once, and that was many years ago. As for his state of being, he
was hale and hearty in body though he was heartsick with missing you.” Smiling at her kindly, he
continued cautiously, “At present, he believes hyu lost to him . . . he was told that hyu are dead.”

Scarlett released a sharp, horrified cry, as her hands came up to press over her mouth. Frankly
unconcerned by her distress, Will railroaded over whatever she might have said as he demanded,
“That mission in Austria was a S.H.I.E.L.D. assignment . . . you mean to tell me that Doyle works for
S.H.I.E.L.D.?!”

“Ja . . . he was a commander for one of the tactical units Maria assigned to Dornroschen. He seemed
more like a soldier than a spy, mein Sohn. Maybe that is why hyu huf never crossed paths with one
another, hm?

“Maybe. But still . . . you didn't think to tell anyone that you saw someone who looks like you in
Austria, who wasn't one of us?”

Hansel ran a hand back through his hair as he concentrated on the memory of the young man. “He
was not a clone; his likeness to hyu and hyur brothers was superficial. I remember thinking that he
shared the same competence in command as hyu do, Adler, but other than that, there was little
similarity. His eyes were khaki green and his hair was very dark. He may have been built a little like
Kenny, in that his shoulders were wide and strong, but he truthfully did not look like any of hyu. I
just assumed that I was imagining it.”

“Dad, Major Ross jumped Brian at the base, because she thought he was Doyle. That implies that it
was a little more than a superficial likeness. She was convinced that Brian was her lover,” Will
insisted, obviously riled and just as obviously at loose ends about what to do about it.

“Adler, it is a miracle to me to have hyu and hyur brothers for my sons. Mayhap I simply did not
wish to see what was before my eyes, because I did not believe that I could deserve more than what I had already been gifted.”

Pressing his eyes closed, Will borrowed one of Marina's more common habits and began to count backwards from one-hundred in Russian. One hand came up to pinch the bridge of his nose as the telltale throb of a migraine began to beat behind his eyes. “Dad . . . do me a favor? The next time you see what you think might be a miracle . . . tell someone.” Blinking, he reconsidered his father's statement and began to chuckle, “Also, I'm not really sure that any of us fit the bill as a miracle. Thank you for the compliment though.”

Resting one hand on his son's shoulder, Hansel announced firmly, “Wait until you are a father, Adler. Then you will understand; a man's children are always his miracles, no matter how flawed or imperfect they are.”

Nodding with a wry grin, the Colonel watched as Hansel turned at the sound of a shouted, “Pops! You gotta come see this!”

The two men exchanged fondly exasperated looks, before the former witch hunter shouted back, “I am coming, mein Falki. Whatever it is . . . do not touch it!”

The disappointed groan from Clint was informative enough and Hansel moved to pull his oldest into a warm, if uncharacteristic, embrace firmly. “You are a good man, Adler . . . and you are most definitely my miracle. Ja?”

Nodding in reluctant agreement, Will watched as his father nodded briskly at the scientist still standing to the side before bolting in the direction of his youngest son. As for the Colonel himself, he turned back to face Major Ross-Levy with a small smile. “Well, knowing that Doyle works for S.H.I.E.L.D. makes it a bit easier to find him. No matter what else happens, we'll get you home to him. You have my word, Major Ross.”

Her smirk was resigned as she replied, “Please . . . call me Scarlett. I have every intention of resigning my commission, just so that I don't ever have to hear someone call me 'Major' ever again.”

“Completely understandable,” Will chuckled with a grin. Glancing toward the house, he insisted, “You look tired. I'm sure there's somewhere you can lay out a bedroll and bunk down for awhile.”

Her eyes were the color of scuffed metal as she nodded, “I may just do that. Thank you, Colonel.”

“It's just Will . . . your boyfriend is probably family, of some kind, so you should probably get used to it.”

“Sounds like a plan,” she agreed with a laugh, before waving over her shoulder and heading towards the small grouping of tents where the Grimms had set up camp.

Remaining where he was left, the Colonel's eyes scanned the area, taking in each of the survivors one at a time. For the most part, they seemed to be good people, just trying to endure the end of their world as they know it. Sophia seemed to be recovering well, and as soon as he had a spare second, he had every intention of going up to check on both her and her erstwhile parents. (Granted, he knew that Daryl wasn't her biological father but you don't do what Daryl did to find her, without having a certain claim to the role. Of course, then there was the shy looks Daryl spent a lot of time exchanging with the girl's mother, Carol – Will would be his next paycheck that there was something between them, but both were too afraid to pursue it in case it disappeared along with the rest of what they'd once considered normal.)
Of course, as soon as he'd entertained the thought, Daryl emerged from the house, practically chasing after Shane Walsh . . . who appeared to be dragging the sickly and stumbling Sophia Peletier by one arm harshly. Without looking, Will ordered, “Yastreb, if he tries to hurt that girl . . .”

Clint's tone was severe as he quoted, “Bullet to the brainpan, squish’.”

Recognizing the quote for what it was, Will insisted, “Marina . . . get down here. Sam, you too.”

“Yes sir,” was the young sniper's response, though the Russian said nothing and simply appeared at his left once again as he strode toward the altercation taking place on the porch steps.

They were still several steps away when Shane shoved the pre-teen to her knees in the dirt and leveled a gun at her head. Carol screamed, lunging forward and stalled only by Daryl's arms coming around her waist. Marina's tone was cool as she asked, “Does this qualify as a better reason than 'he's an asshole’?”

“I guess we'll see, but all indications point to yes,” her lover replied in an equally calm tone, even as he insisted, “If you would relieve Mr. Walsh of his weapon . . .”

“With pleasure,” she hissed, practically lunging the few feet between them to capture Shane's wrist, bringing it down on her knee hard, the crack audible in the air as the bone fractured. The startled cry brought a grin to the assassin's lips as she whirled and kneed the man hard in the back, bringing him to his knees and allowing Carol the opportunity to break free of Daryl and scoop up her daughter into her arms. Forcing the broken appendage to bend painfully, Marina kept him curled up on his knees while her lover moved into position at his side. “Either you are a very stupid man, Mr. Walsh, or you simply have no talent for self-preservation.”

“That girl is infected! She's going to kill us all!” he insisted angrily, every line of his body coiled with tension even as he remained motionless under the Russian's hands.

Rubbing two fingers over his forehead, Will argued lightly, “She received the antidote, within the projected parameters, which means that she's no longer infected and will more than likely make a full recovery. According to Dr. Keller, she's progressing well and the signs of the virus decrease by the hour.”

“And how do you know this vaccine of yours actually works? We're just supposed to take your word that she's not going to relapse and eat us all in our sleep? The only good zombie is a dead zombie.”

Sam's tone was unimpressed as he snarked from behind the scope of his rifle, “You realize that what you just said is both asinine and redundant, right?” There was a moment's pause, before he sighed and lowered his rifle. Handing it to Will, he reached down for the hem of his shirt and pulled it off, turning his back to display the bloody bandage on the back of his arm. “As for how we know it works . . . well, I'm still standing here, aren't I?” Tucking the shirt into his belt, Sam folded his arms over his chest self-consciously as he glared down at Shane. “But enough about me; frankly, you're the one I'm not really holding out any hope for.”

Everyone could see the way the older man's jaw ground together as he hissed out, “Why not?”

“Well, it's been pretty well proven that we can cure this virus. But there ain't no cure for crazy, which kinds leaves you shit out of luck, doesn't it?”

There was a moment of silence as Shane processed the insult there, before he screamed in outrage and lunged at the sunny-haired sniper, naked blade glinting in his hand. It all happened so fast, that
not even Marina was able to move to intercept the blade, before there was a sharp report of a sniper rifl,e and Shane's head snapped back, blood and brain matter splattering from the perfect hole where his left eyes had once been. The body remained moving even as it collapsed to the floor, and Sam flinched unconsciously as he barely managed to dodge the body.

Everyone stared at the body in varying degrees of startled shock, before Will twisted slightly to look towards the barn roof. A dark blond head was just lifting from its sniper scope, one hand lifting to shoot his older brother a thumbs-up. Reaching up with one hand, eyes still tracking his baby brother, Will praised sincerely, “Nice shot, Clint.”

The flash of grin was visible, as Clint quipped, “I never miss.” Chuckling, he quoted again, the tone much more cheerful this time, “Bullet to the brainpan, squish!”

Marina giggled as she crouched to check the body, retorting, “Squish is overstating it a bit, dorogoy.”

“Eh . . . dude's dead . . . win-win for everyone involved.”

Bucky spoke up through the comms then, from where he was sprawled on the roof of the house, keeping an eye on Clint's back and the treeline behind him. “Sounds like just in time, too . . . we got company.”

“Company?” Will asked, even as he let out a piercing whistle and waved Owen over. “Get rid of the mess for me, huh, Luck?”

“Sure . . . we'll just add him to the fire with the rest of them,” Owen agreed with a half-assed salute and a grin. “Nice shooting, Hawkeye!”

“Thank you!” was the proud response from the roof.

Marina waved the banter to silence with a frown, as she called up to her former mentor. “What kind of company, Zima?”

“Single male . . . filthy as hell . . . but doesn't have any of the earmarks of the infected.” There was a pause, before the Winter Soldier continued his thought, “He's missing a hand.”

“How can you tell?”

“There's just a stump at the end of the arm; I can see enough to see the other hand, so it's not a result of the jacket being too big.”

Out of the corner of his eye, Will could see the way Daryl stiffened sharply at that information. Glancing briefly towards where Carol was soothing her sobbing daughter, the Colonel turned his attention onto the tracker. “Someone you know?”

“I don't know . . . could be,” Daryl agreed sheepishly, one hand coming up to scratch at the back of his head. “It might not be, but I don't know too many people missing a hand in this neck of the woods.”

“Well then . . . Sova, get the welcoming committee together . . . let's go say hello to our unexpected guest.”

The Russian assassin nodded sharply, before dashing off in search of Hansel, Brian and Natasha, leaving the rest to check their gear in case of a fight. Reaching out, Will clasped the redneck's shoulder calmly. “No matter what, your first priority is your family. Keep them safe and the rest will fall into place.”
Daryl frowned at the statement, reminding the older man bitterly, “I don't have any family, except for
my brother.”

Will's eyebrow cocked upwards as he turned the tracker to face where Carol and Sophia still cried
together in the dirt behind them. “Don't you?” Slapping his shoulder gently, the Colonel released him
and moved towards the barn. “Sam . . . get up on the roof with Clint. You two and Bucky are on
sniper duty.”

Sam nodded, slinging his rifle over his shoulder and dashing towards the barn. It was only another
few minutes before the other four had joined Will, waiting on the order to move out. “Daryl, you're
coming with us; if it's the person you think it is, you're the only one who would be able to tell us.”

The young man nodded, gathering Sophia into his arms and jogging into the house with Carol only a
half-step behind them. There was a brief but emphatic argument, before Daryl moved from the house
again, his crossbow held tightly in one hand. Looking at Will, he pulled the weapon up into his
hands and insisted tightly, “Let's go then.”

“Indeed. Do not engage unless engaged upon; dart guns only, unless there's imminent threat.
Understood?”

“Yes sir!” was the all around call, before they each branched out to flank Will as the older brother
turned on one heel and ran towards the treeline with Daryl to his right.

As they neared the staggering figure, Will could see Daryl's whole body tighten in shock before
melting into frustrated resignation. Frowning, the Colonel set his mind to this encounter being an
unpleasant one, even as he decided to let the younger man take the lead. Dark eyes were miserable,
as the long man looked up at the sound of footsteps, pausing in shock at the sight of the group of
people in front of him. It took a moment, before his eyes landed on Daryl and his lip curled
derisively, “You ungrateful son of a bitch! Do you see what they did to me? And you let them?”

Daryl flinched slightly, no doubt hearing the same words he'd been hearing in his own mind since
Marta and Hansel had found him wounded two days before. “I didn't let them do anything. I went
back for you and you'd already cut yourself free. So don't you dare make this out to be that I
betrayed you!”

“I have taken care of you, your whole damned life . . . ever since Mama died, you've been my
responsibility. And this is how you repay me!?”

Whatever vitriol the man had been prepared to unleash was cut short then as Hansel stepped forward
and put his fist into the younger man's face. The bald survivor crumpled under the blow, eyes rolling
back into his head without hesitation. The German rounded on the tracker and demanded, “Vy did
hyu let him speak that way to hyu!? Vy did hyu not speak up fer hyurself?”

Darly sighed heavily, both hands coming up to shove backwards through his hair miserably.
“Everybody, meet my older brother, Merle Dixon . . . the biggest asshole I know and also my
longest-standing protector.”

Chapter End Notes

Translations:
(R) pravitel - big brother
(R) Krechet - Merlin (a kind of falcon; Jason Grimm's call sign with the Army and formerly his SHIELD callsign too)
(R) Yastreb - Hawk (Clint Grimm's call sign with the Army and with SHIELD)
(R) Sova - Owl (Marina Petrovka's most common call sign with the Army and with SHIELD)
(R) Sych - Little Owl (one of Marina Petrovka's call signs with the Army and with SHIELD; Will is the only one who calls her this)
(G) Adler - Eagle (Hansel's nickname for his older son, Will Grimm)
(G) mein Adler - my Eagler
(G) Dornroschen - Sleeping Beauty (a HYDRA base in Austria; the assignment in question is outlined in Amerou's "I Don't Believe In Fairy Tales (But I Believe In You And Me))
(G) Ja - yes
(G) mein Sohn - my son
(G) mein Falki - my little Hawk (Hansel's nickname for his youngest son, Clint Grimm)
(R) dorogoy - darling (Marina's most common nickname for Clint Grimm)
(R) Zima - Winter (one of Marina's nicknames for her former mentor and one of her oldest friends)
(R)
Hey guys!

I am so sorry it has been so long. I had a specific plan designed for Merle, but there was a post on Tumblr and it quite frankly freaked me the hell out. So I had to rewrite the whole idea and it took me a little longer than I wanted to it. Not to mention, a serious distraction in the form of Bob Morley’s freckles and well . . . *shrugs*

I have also reacquainted myself with the awesome that is Auggie Anderson from Cover Affairs (which I am so pissed that the USA Network has cancelled), so expect to see him at some point in the future. :D Apparently, I live for a good cameo.

Either way, I apologize again for how long it took and I promise, it will not take that long again. Enjoy! And as always, I look forward to hearing what you think. Translations are in the note at the end, as per usual.

Chapter 172: Revelations

Merle wasn’t sure what he was expecting to see when he woke up, but he could at least safely say that it hadn’t been a blond-haired man twirling a blade against the tip of one finger, vibrant eyes vowing blue murder at him. Seeing that he was awake, the man straightened in his chair and growled, tone low and vicious, “Gut. Hyu are awake.”

The elder Dixon brother narrowed his eyes at the older man, asking cautiously, “Is there a reason I shouldn’t be?”

“To be frank, Herr Dixon, I had hoped I had killed hyu with that blow to hyur hard head.”

Blinking at the statement, Merle stared in shock for a moment before gathering his usual brashness about him like a shield. “Well fuck you, too, man.”

The man’s jaw tightened sharply, making him look as though he had been carved from diamond,
before pushing himself to his feet. “I would watch my step, if I was hyu, Herr Dixon . . . as _meine Tochter_ would say, I need but one reason and I will happily end hyur life.”.

Leaving the other man to contemplate that, Hansel turned and left the room. Will was seated at the dining room table, tracing over a series of maps with a pen when his father stormed into the room. Looking up as his father appeared, the younger man watched for a long moment as he stomped around. “So? Is he dead?”

“Nein . . . regrettably.”

The eldest Grimm smirked at the disgruntled tone, teasing fondly, “You actually sound disappointed, Dad.”

Glowering at his son, he grumbled, “He is a terrible _Bruder_.”

Slouching back in his chair, the Colonel folded his arms over his chest as he grunted, “No argument there. Still, not every family values _family_ like we do, Dad.”

“Hyu are not allowed to be so reasonable right now, understand?” Hansel growled, glaring at his son fiercely.

“_Ja_ . . . I understand,” Will chuckled with a grin.

“_Gut_.”

Cocking an eyebrow, the Colonel watched his father fume for a moment before asking, “I realize that this is something that I usually ask my Marishka, but is there a reason you haven't just shot him yet? No offense, Dad, but restraint isn't usually a virtue of yours.”

“_Mein Spatzi_ tells me that I am an Agent of S.H.I.E.L.D. and that I should behave as such.”

“Marina is an Agent of S.H.I.E.L.D. too. Name one time she's shown restraint when it was family that she was protecting.”

“Shane Walsh.”

“Not a good example. She has standing orders about civilians and good reasons. Otherwise he would have been dead from the word go,” he argued lightly, waving the answer away lazily. “Also, the second he threatened Sam, he was a dead man. Clint just got to him first. Try again.”

Narrowing his eyes at his son for a moment, the German considered what he was saying. “So . . . you're saying that I can shoot him in the foot and hyu would say nothing.”

“If shooting him in the foot is going to protect Daryl, you have my full support.”

Will's lips twitched into a small smile at the sharp intake of breath, just out of sight from the dining room. His father only chuckled, nodding once in agreement with his son's surreptitious form of adoption, as he insisted in a low whisper, “That was underhanded of you, _mein Adler_.”

Chuckling, Will shrugged lazily, “I'm a spy . . . most of my interactions with people tend to be underhanded.”

Humming in absent agreement, the German's head cocked as he listened to the soft sounds of Daryl's footsteps on the floor and then the soft slap of the screen door against the jamb. “Do you think he will be all right?”
“Yeah . . . I think Daryl's going to be just fine, Dad. There are people here who he knows care about him . . . and now he knows that there are other people here who give a damn about him as well. All in all, he's probably better off in the aftermath of the zombie apocalypse than he was before it.”

“That is a truly depressing thought, Adler.”

“But no less true.” Both men were silent for a moment, before Will grunted and leaned forward again, using his pencil to point out a spot on the map. “All right then . . . how about we get back to business?”

Grinning, Hansel stood from his own chair and joined his son. Before long, neither of them were thinking about Daryl Dixon, Merle Dixon or anything other than zombies at all.

Meanwhile, Daryl Dixon was reeling from the information he'd just overheard. The fact that he was considered of importance to the people in the other room wasn't entirely a shock; he still remembered the teasing from the day before, where the man's son-in-law had laughed about asking if Daryl even wanted to be adopted before claiming him. The fact that he wasn't actually teasing, however, was definitely a surprise.

Daryl's mother had been dead for as long as Daryl could remember. Merle was luckier; he had some memories of the beautiful if fragile woman who had brought them both into being. Frankly, Daryl was shocked at the idea that someone actually gave a shit about him. Objectively, the younger brother knew that Merle had done his best to protect him from their father; but those years were eons ago and some part of Merle's protection had been in the pursuit of his own self-preservation. Not to mention, everything had been going to hell since the beginning of the damned zombie apocalypse.

The hardest part for Daryl was the identity of the people who claimed to care about him. To claim that they were anything less than terrifying would be an extraordinary lie. Even if he only counted Will Grimm and Marina Petrovka, they alone were two badass soldiers were wore danger like cloaks and killed with the same kind of ease that most people cut butter. And that wasn't including the cantankerous German with a soft spot for his family . . . and a distinct hatred for the one protector Daryl had ever known. Of course, then there was the rest of the family, not a single one of which didn't petrify him.

Except for maybe Sam Braddock . . . but Daryl had watched even those eery blue eyes go cold and heartless in the short time since he'd woken up after getting bitten. Which, of course, only further served to prove his point.

Moving around the side of the house, Daryl put his back to the wall and dropped his hands into his palms as he tried to sort through the upheaval that had taken over his life. He was alone for a long time, before a voice drawled lazily, “You look like hell.”

Jumping in shock, his head snapped up to look at the person speaking to him. On first glance, he knew that this man was not one of Hershel's survivors; for starters, he didn't recognize him and secondly, there was no way this man wasn't a soldier. The blond's posture was lazy, but wary and though there was a cocky smirk on his lips, his eyes were sharp and focused. Frowning, he pushed himself upwards as he demanded, “Who the hell are you?”

That smirk tilted into something a little more genuine as the man chuckled, “Owen Elliot . . . and from what I hear, you're Marina's next Misfit.”

At the term, Daryl's eyes narrowed. “What the hell is a Misfit?”

Owen grinned as he turned his eyes away from the tracker and towards the barn the unit's snipers
were still on watch. “It's complicated; but at the heart of it, Marina's Misfits are those guys who
needed a place to be that was different from the place they were. Most of the people in this unit are
Misfits; we don't fit in anywhere else but here.”

“Why would anyone willingly associate with that woman? She's not exactly the poster-child for
warm hugs and motherly love.”

The blond stared in shock at the question, before throwing his head with a raucous laugh. “Dude . . .
now I've heard it all. Marina Petrovka . . . not the epitome of motherhood . . . what a laugh!!”

“She's not!”

Those eyes were hard as diamond as the laughter bit off sharply as he snapped, “If you truly think
that, then you weren't paying attention when Sam got bit.”

Daryl's mouth worked slightly, as he was forced to consider that. He still remembered the first time
he'd seen the assassin; an AK-47 clutched in one hand and a grin on her face as she congratulated
Braddock on his shooting. The way she had laughed in anticipation of kicking ass, when Daryl's
own thoughts had been consumed with the idea of getting the hell out of the way. “That woman is
dangerous.”

“Agreed. But she's also one of the warmest and most caring people I know. And trust me, my best
friend relies on 'that woman' to keep him sane and his moral code in check. So say what you want,
but don't say it about her.”

Slumping back against the wall again, Daryl watched as Owen dug into his pocket for a pack of
gum. Shoving a couple sticks in his mouth at once, the Cleaner grumbled under his breath as he
waited for the younger man to talk. “I guess I just don't see what you see in her.”

“I see the way my best friend loves her. I see the way she loves him. I see the way she would die for
him, would kill for him, and would give everything for him.”

Daryl watched as the other man growled under his breath, kicking at the side of the house viciously.
“Are you in love with her?”

“No . . . and even if I was, there is only one man in Marina's heart. She doesn't see anyone outside of
Will. Don't get me wrong . . . I adore the Boss-lady. She's badass awesome and I would follow her
and Will into hell, but she loves Will more than anything else in the world. He hung the moon and
raises the sun for her; nothing and no one could ever or would ever compete with that.”

Turning away from the other man, Daryl turned his attention towards the rest of the unit that had
descended on Hershel's farm. Sam Braddock, the first recipient of Dr. Shearing's antidote, was
sprawled on the ground in front of the porch, head resting in Marina's lap and a small grin on his lips
as the brunette Russian stroked her fingers through his hair and laughed at whatever he was telling
her. There was a sense of absent comfort and mothering ease between the two that Daryl had
previously only seen between Carol and her daughter Sophia. Whatever else the Russian woman
was . . . she did clearly have feelings for this young man.

Folding his arms, he grunted, “Well . . . maybe she's not so bad.”

Clapping him on the shoulder, Owen agreed, “No . . . she's not. And trust me, once you get to know
the Grimms, you'll understand just how lucky you are to be counted as one of them soon enough.”

It was nearly nightfall when Vincent finally approached the dining room to interrupt the planning
session between the Colonel and his father. “Hey Will. Herr Kuhn . . . is now a bad time?”

Looking up from the map, Will shook his head. “Hey Vincent . . . what's up?”

“I've completely my examination of Mr. Dixon.” Twisting his lips to one side, he insisted, “Do we know how he lost his hand?”

The Colonel frowned as he insisted, “I think you may be ahead of me here, Vincent. Are you saying that's a recent injury?”

“Very recent . . . and not a properly treated one either.” Running his hand back through his hair, the former soldier sighed, “So I'm going to assume that we don't know.”

“Daryl might; he didn't seem particularly surprised by the announcement that his older brother was missing a hand.”

“Hmm . . . then I need to go find Daryl.”

Hansel grunted as he pushed himself away from the table. “I will find him. Hyu figure out how hyu will tell him whever bad news hyu huf for him.”

Vincent blew out a frustrated breath as he muttered, “Joy.”

The German chuckled and squeezed the young doctor's shoulder once before leaving the dining room in search of the tracker. Heading up the stairwell in search of Sophia or Carol, the former witch hunter discovered the woman sitting on the bed beside her sleeping daughter but no Daryl keeping watch over them both as he had so often since Marina had administered the antidote. Leaning into the room with a small smile, he inquired softly, “How fares the child?”

Carol's eyes were adoring as she smoothed the girl's hair from her face. “She's still a little shaken up, but I think she's going to be okay. Thank you for asking.” Twisting, she gave the man a warm smile as she insisted, “Please . . . thank your son for me. He saved my baby's life.”

“I will pass along the message to mein Falki. He will be glad to hear she is doing well.” Glancing around the room, just in case he'd missed the tracker, he turned his attention back on the gray haired woman and inquired, “Have hyu seen Daryl, perchance?”

There was a small, sad smile as she chuckled, “Not lately, but I can guarantee that he's avoiding his brother. Daryl doesn't talk about Merle much, but what he says is very rarely good.” Chuckling, she winked as she prompted, “You might find him in the barn. When he's stressed out, he likes working with Hershel's horses.”

“Thank hyu, Fraulein.”

“You're welcome,” she agreed, even as she watched him go.

Stepping from the house, he found Marina and Sam still seated on the porch steps, though Sam's eyes were heavy-lidded, indicating his valiant effort to stay away. Owen, Will's best friend and loyal guard dog, was leaning against one of the support pillars, talking quietly with Marina as Sam struggled to keep from falling asleep. “Meine Tochter . . . how is the patient?”

“Tired and restless with it,” she replied, laughing at Sam's disgruntled huff. Smoothing her fingers through his hair, she looked up at her adoptive father and asked, “What's up, Vati?”

“I am looking for Daryl. Dr. Keller has some news regarding his brother . . . it is the kind of news
one should hear for themselves, I should think.”

Marina frowned at the information, though Owen was the one who spoke, “Last I saw Daryl, he was headed for the barn. I haven't seen him leave yet, so he's probably still there.”

“Thank hyu, Owen.” Cocking his head towards the other two, he consciously lowered his voice as he begged, “Keep an eye on them for me?”

Blue eyes were warm with affection for the Russian woman as they shot in her direction, “Always.”

“Good man,” he agreed, clapping the former Division operative on the shoulder before moving towards the barn in search of his quarry.

When he arrived, it was to the sight of Daryl brushing one of the horses down, the hunter humming tunelessly under his breath as he worked. Hansel stood quiet for a long moment before finally speaking into the gloom, “Hyu have been avoiding hyur Bruder, I hear.”

The tracker jumped a mile high at the unexpected voice, before twisting to give the older man a self-deprecating grin. “Has anyone ever told you that you have a knack for making a man jump outta his skin?”

Giving Daryl a shark's grin, Hansel agreed cheerfully, “Meine Spatzi has said something to that effect a time or two, ja.”

“Meine Spatzi? Who is Meine Spatzi?”

“My sparrow . . . my fiancee, Maria Hill.” Here there was a small tilt of his lips, as Hansel drawled, “Marina would say that 'she is a hell of a woman.'”

“Seems as though you know a lot of those,” Daryl muttered, returning his attention back to the horse with a shrug. “And meanwhile, I'm stuck with Merle . . . who's an ass.”

“And yet, he ist hyur Bruder. So hyu cannot help but love him.”

The young man grimaced as he argued, “Not much to love about Merle.”

“Which does not mean that it is impossible.”

“Are you sure? Because I'm sure that it is.”

“Then hyu shall not care that the doctor has news for hyu about him, no?”

Whirling in desperation, with eyes widened by fear and concern, Daryl demanded, “What kind of news!?”

“Not the good kind, I should think.” Smiling kindly, Hansel reminded him gently, “But I thought hyu could not find much to love about him.”

Glowering at the gentle reminded, the tracker turned on his heel and ran towards the house. Smirking, Hansel ran a hand down the mare's forelock, crooning, “I am sorry, Kavallerie . . . and I am certain that he vill return to hyu soon.”

When Daryl dashed past the three on the porch and banged into the house, it was to find Vincent Keller seated at the dining room table with Will, the two men conversing quietly with one another. The former soldier blinked at him as he demanded, “What the hell is wrong with my brother?”
There was a long moment of silence, before Vincent smirked lightly and inquired, “Would you like that alphabetically or phonetically?”

If it was even possible, Daryl's eyes only shot open that much wider, earning a small sigh from the Colonel as Will insisted, “How about you start at the beginning and we'll work from there.”

One corner of Keller's lips turned upwards sadly as he nodded once. Looking up at the tracker, he kicked a chair out from the table and gestured to it calmly. “You may want to sit down. This could take awhile.”

Chapter End Notes

Translations:

(G) Gut - Good
(G) meine Tochter - my daughter (Hansel's nickname for Marina)
(G) Ja/Nein - yes/no
(G) Bruder - brother (singular form)
(G) Mein Spatzi - my little sparrow (Hansel's nickname for Maria Hill)
(G) mein Adler - my Eagle (Hansel's nickname for his son, Will)
(G) mein Falki - my little Hawk (Hansel's nickname for his son, Clint)
(G) Fraulein - a term of address for an unmarried woman
(G) Vati - Dad (Marina's nickname for Hansel)
(G)
I am SOOOOOO sorry for the long wait between chapters. And in answer to a kind reader, no, I am not dead. Promise.

I just kind of wrote myself into a corner with this arc, and I got soooooooo stuck. But my beta, Julorean is amazing, and combined with having seen both Age of Ultron (which is amazing, and I am totally going to go see it again!) and the new trailer for MI5: Rogue Nation (my beloved Brandt! How do I love thee, let me count the ways!), I have once again become inspired as to this fic. (Hawkeye is the shit in AOU, in case anyone was curious. It was a Hawkeye film, without being called a Hawkeye movie! Yay!)

Anyway, here we are, as always. I hope you guys enjoy this. And as I am already half done with the next chapter, I think I can promise that it will not take this long to post the next chapter after this.

Translations at the end, as always!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
Chapter 173: Warm Bodies

Dropping heavily into the chair across from the doctor, Daryl's eyes were wide and horrified as he considered the last two things the man had said. “It's bad . . . isn’t it.”

Grimacing sharply, Vincent sighed as he insisted, “Bad may be a bit of an understatement.” Folding his hands, he watched the younger man for a moment before asking, “How did your brother lose his hand?”

Blinking at the question, the tracker gaped for a moment, before shaking himself free of his troubling
thoughts. “He cut it off with a hacksaw.” Jerking a thumb over his shoulder, he continued, “Rick handcuffed him to a pipe on a roof and left him there. When I went back for him . . . well, I don't really like to think about what I found. It still makes me sick.”

Frowning fiercely, the former Special Forces soldier demanded, sharply, “When?!”

“Uh . . . maybe a week ago . . . at the most. Why?”

Will sighed as Vincent sagged backwards in disappointment. Folding his arms on the tabletop, he asked calmly, “I'm going to assume that's not what you wanted to hear.”

“Not really,” he huffed, shoving one hand back through his hair.

“What's wrong with my brother?”

“He's suffering from septicimia.”

Hansel and Daryl both looked confused, whereas Will's whole face twisted up in sympathy at the explanation. Vincent gave the Colonel a small smirk in saddened agreement. The former witch hunter was not in the mood for the silent conversations and insisted, “I do not understand. What is septicimia?”

“At its simplest, Dad, it's blood poisoning. Really nasty, usually fatal without medical care, blood poisoning.”

Leaning forward on his elbows, Vincent picked up where S.H.E.I.L.D.'s Chief Analyst left off. “I could give him every antibiotic I have with me, and it would buy him a little bit of time. Considering the fact that we are currently in the middle of a damned zombie apocalypse, however, I really don't want to waste what supplies I do have when it's not going to be of any significant help.”

“What are you saying?”

There was a long moment of silence, before the former ER doctor replied, “I think you know.”

Whatever reaction the other three men were expecting, it was not the one they got. Instead of flying into the expected rage, Daryl only sagged into himself with his head in his hands, before bursting into frustrated, horrified tears.

Say what you wanted about the Grimms – and many had – but the Grimms took care of their own. The Colonel, though infamously uncomfortable around emotional displays that didn't involve his brothers or his partner, immediately stood from his chair and moved to rest one hand on the tracker's shoulder. His father was not so restrained; it was hardly a moment before Hansel was on his knees in front of the sobbing young man and his arms were tight around his shoulders. “Calm, Schässling. It will be all right . . . calm.”

Burying his face into the German's shoulder, Daryl allowed himself the time to grieve for the wreck his world had become, and the pending loss. “He's my brother,” the young tracker sobbed, “the only family I have left.”

Hansel made a thoroughly Gallic noise at this declaration, announcing gruffly, “I would not say that, Schässling. Hyu have Carol and Sophia. Hyu have mein Sohne and meine Tochter, if hyu wish it. And hyur Bruder is not gone yet.”

For a long moment, there was only the sound of Daryl's quiet sobs, before at last the young man sniffed hard and straightened up out of the embrace. “What do I do now?”
Surprisingly, it was Will who spoke now. “You do what needs to be done. You make your peace. And you say your goodbyes. There isn’t much else you can do.”

“Ja . . . and when it is over, hyu gather hyur loved ones close and remind them how much hyu love them,” Hansel agreed, looking up at his eldest son with a warm, significant look.

There was a small, answering smile on the Colonel's lips as he nodded once in acknowledgment at the statement. “If there's one thing I've learned from all the years I've spent in the Army, it's this. Life is too short; every moment is precious and the people we choose to share those moments with infinitely more so.”

Nodding, Daryl pushed himself to his feet. Shoving the heels of his hands into his eyes to push away his tears, he squared his shoulders and turned to face Vincent. “How long does my brother have left?”

“Considering the time since the initial injury, and how far advanced it is . . . maybe another day or so . . . two if he's really stubborn.”

Taking a deep breath, Daryl shoved his hands into his pockets and looked towards the room where Merle had been installed. “I think . . . I think I'm going to go sit with my brother, if that's okay.”

Will's lips quirked slightly as he agreed, “More than fine. We'll call you if we need you, but for right now, spend what time you can with your brother.”

“Thank you,” the younger man murmured, before turning away and disappearing down the hallway.

The three men watched him go before Will spoke, “Someone needs to call S.H.I.E.L.D. We've done our recon . . . but this is an infestation on a scale too big for us. We can deal with the smaller herds that come our way, but we're not going to be able to spread the antidote wide enough with just what we've got.”

Hansel folded his arms over his chest with a grunt, “I can call Spatzi.”

Smirking, the Army officer agreed, “Maria is gonna kick the shit out of this.”

Snorting, the former witch hunter asked, “What does that even mean!?”

Marina's voice was a curious mix of warm amusement and worried concern as she replied from the doorway, “It means, Maria's got this.” Stepping further into the room at the curious eyebrow her partner cocked in her direction, she smirked sadly and continued, “Whatever we’re going to do, we should do it fast. We got company . . . and considering the defensibility of this place, we're practically asking to become the meal at the buffet table.”

There was barely a second before Will was gone and Colonel Grimm had taken his place. Striding to meet her, accepting the offered binoculars as he passed, he demanded, “How many?”

Marina's tone was deferential, as she reported back, “Five so far . . . but I doubt that they're the last ones heading our way.”

Lifting the glasses, Will watched the five zombies go down as Clint and Bucky shot each of them with a dart containing the antidote. Handing the glasses back to his second, Will whistled sharply to draw the attention of his squad. “Everyone inside! Civilians upstairs . . . Grimms in the living room. Two minutes! Move!”

Shoving his way back through the screen door, Will moved toward his own dart gun, ordering his
father gruffly, “Call Maria . . . and let her know she might want to put a rush on things. Otherwise, S.H.I.E.L.D. should probably resign itself to kissing their tactical squad goodbye.”

Hansel nodded in grim agreement, watching as his sons and Marina’s Misfits shuffled the survivors into the house and towards the stairs. Pulling his S.H.I.E.L.D. issued phone from his back pocket, he dialed Maria's office number from memory and waited impatiently for her to answer. The sound of her stern, “Hill,” coming down the line was a relief and the German could feel a little of the tension in his shoulders release.

“Spatzi . . .”

“Hans!” was the relieved reply, her tone scolding as she barked, “I was expecting a report yesterday. Where the hell have you been?”

“It is a long story, meine Spatzi. But it believe it will suffice to say, that we are what Clint would call 'up shit creek without a paddle’. We could do with some backup.”

“Should I send medical staff with your backup?”

“Ja . . . once we have separated the dead from the living, there will be many in need of medical services. And Spatzi . . . hurry.”

S.H.I.E.L.D.’s Assistant Director seemed to recognize the rushed, almost frantic note in his tone, her reply brusque as she replied, “Understood. Your backup has been dispatched from our base in Tallahassee and is 20 minutes out. Can you hold that long?”

“We can hold, but the sooner they get here the better.”

There was a moment, as Maria hummed agreeably under her breath, obviously relaying that admonition along the lines, before she spoke again. “Be careful, Hans. And so help me God, if you die . . . I'll resurrect your German ass, kick it to hell and back, and then put as many bullets in it as I can before you die.”

“Yes ma'am,” was the quiet agreement, “Ich liebe dich sehr.”

“Don't you dare say your goodbyes, Johannes Frederick Kuhn. I'm heading for the hanger now . . . I'll see you in five hours. Don't die.”

“It will take more than the undead to kill me, Spatzi . . . I will be waiting.”

There was a moment of silence, during which Hansel thought she'd hung up, before Maria spoke up again, “And Hans . . . I love you too.”

Before he could even register the words, or say anything in reply, the dial-tone rang in his head and his betrothed was gone. “Damn . . . she is a hell of a woman.”

Clint's grin was wide as he crowed, tone teasing, “Dad and Maria . . . sitting in a tree . . . K-I-S-S-I-N-G.”

Hansel couldn't miss the small but playful smile on his eldest's face at his youngest son's good-natured teasing. Resolving to keep that smile on the too-serious Colonel's face for as long as he could, the German shot back fondly, “Clint and Bucky . . .”

The Winter Soldier's visible alarm at this reply sent Will into a burst of laughter, as the former Russian spy interrupted in a panic, “Please, for the love of God, don't finish that sentence!”
The sharp *snick!* of a bullet being chambered brought everyone's attention around to where Aaron was standing quiet with Marta and Sam. “Orders, big brother? We got incoming and they're moving fast.”

For a second, the Colonel looked disappointed to be called back to work, before his spine straightened and he set his features sternly. “Civilians are to stay upstairs; Sam, you and Vincent are in charge of guarding the stairs.”

“Yes sir,” was Sam's immediately agreement, blue eyes slanting toward his aunt, whose grip on her lover had just tightened considerably.

“Everyone else, find a vantage and get high. Marina, I want you and your sisters here with me; we need to keep them out of the house for as long as we can. Luck . . . I want you . . .”

Owen's face was set as he interrupted sharply, “The only place I'm going is right here. No way in hell am I leaving you.”

“Marina will be here. I'll be fine,” Will argued lightly, his frown bemused as he considered his best friend's refusal.

“The Boss-Lady is super badass, no argument there. But she's going to be focused on zombies, her sisters *AND* you. No way in hell, Boss . . . I ain't leaving.”

Turning toward his partner searching for support, Will was surprised to see Marina nodding in agreement. “Too many variables, Misha. I'm good . . . not superhuman. I'd feel better knowing that you had more than one pair of eyes on your during this mess.”

Grunting, Will nodded once to concede to the request from his longtime girlfriend. “Everyone in position. Be careful and good hunting.”

Five hours later, Nick Fury and Maria Hill entered the farmhouse to the sight of a well-ordered field hospital. The eldest Grimm was standing off to the side, while Marina fussed calmly over a bandage wrapped around his right hand. The look on his face was one of total contentment, full of fond adoration as the Russian scolded him half-heartedly for the obviously minor injury. Taking in the tableau before him, and noting the relative health of his best team, the Director demanded gruffly, “Damage report, Agent Brandt.”

“No civilian casualties, sir, and only minor injury to Strike Team Misfit.” Looking around, he considered their surroundings before shrugging slightly as he announced, “Situation is contained, sir.”

“And the infected?”

“The antidote is viable, but the infected mortality rate is currently at seventy-two percent and holding. Most of them have just been infected for too long.”

“Good work, Agent. Pass along my congratulations to your team. Transport home is inbound; you all should be on your way to New York within the hour.”

“Thank you, sir, but we can't leave just yet,” came the unexpected argument from the Army officer.

“And why the hell not?”

Twisting slightly, Will stared down the hallway where Merle was being made as comfortable as possible by S.H.I.E.L.D. med-techs while Daryl hovered anxiously, causing the Colonel to sigh
heavily. “I can't leave without my whole team, Nick. And one of them just isn't ready to go yet.”

“What the hell happened here, Will?” Maria asked, well remembering the burning piles of dead littering the grounds.

“Frankly, Maria . . . you don't want to know,” was the tired answer, quicksilver eyes sliding closed in bone-deep exhaustion.

Recognizing the haunted look in both Will and Marina’s eyes, the Assistance Director nodded once in silent agreement. “Understood. Get some rack time, guys, you’ve earned it. You all look exhausted.”

Clint’s tone was jovial as he snarked, “Yeah, the zombie apocalypse is not quite all it's cracked up to be. But at least we know we owned its undead ass.”

The middle Grimm didn’t even look up from the surveillance monitors in front of him, as he agreed, “We should put together a list. Things That Tried to Kill the Brothers Grimm and Failed’. Red Room assassins, zombies, 18th Century witches . . .”

“. . . Al Qaeda, Peruvian drug runners . . .” was Will's own input, earning a fond scowl from his partner as she huffed quietly, “Do you have any idea how many grey hairs I have because of you?”

Owen laughed as he looped an arm over her shoulder, wincing as he stretched his bruised ribs. Smirking, he quoted her favorite character from her favorite show. “He takes so much looking after.”

Huffing again, she folded her arms over her chest with a pout, muttering fondly, “Lucky, you have no idea.”

It was about then that they were drawn back into the conversation, just as Brian spoke up. “Let's not forget corrupt Hungarian senators and their lackeys . . .” there was a pause, before he whispered, “. . . and Barney . . .”

It didn't matter that Marina had intended to nip that thought in the bud; everything stopped as Aaron chimed in with his own list, “. . . fucking Alaskan wolves . . . Byer and NRAG . . .”

Sensing the downturn in mood, Maria rolled her eyes as she snarked, “I'm pretty sure that list already exists. In fact, I'm pretty sure that I've seen it. It was unsurprisingly extensive.”

Grinning at his father's girlfriend, Will reached out to link his fingers with his partner's. “And that's even considering the fact, that they probably don't even know about half of the shit that's tried to kill us since our creation.” Pressing a warm kiss to the Russian's temple, he sighed contentedly, “Either way, Maria's right. As of now, we're off duty. Everyone hit your bedrolls while you can; I doubt things will stay this quiet for very long.”

Almost in one voice, each Misfit spoke up, “Agreed.”

Chapter End Notes

Translations:

(G) Schässling - scion (offshoot, offspring, child of a noble house; yeah, Hansel isn’t wasting much time in adopting this one, huh?)
(G) mein Sohne - my sons
(G) meine Tochter - my daughter
(G) Bruder - brother
(G) Spatzi - my little sparrow (Hansel's nickname for Maria Hill)
(G) Ja - yes
(G) Ich liebe dich sehr - I love you so much
Sorry about the long wait everyone! I was working on an Outtake of this verse, called The Bloody Moon. If you haven't read it, it's in the Series tag. If you have, thank you for taking the time to continue exploring this verse with me.

Also, if you haven't read Amerou's fantastic "Fairy Tales" yet, you could get a little confused. Some parts of this chapter directly reference events that happened in "Fairy Tales". I totally recommend it, it's a great piece of work.

Translations, as always, are at the bottom! Enjoy and please comment!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Partners, Lovers, Soulmates...
It would be a long three days, before at last the Grimms were ready to head home.

Merle had languished at the end of his life, verbally berating and endlessly badgering his morose younger brother into all kinds of things. Even Daryl had confessed to a kind of relief when Merle had finally passed in his sleep three days after the zombie apocalypse had ended. Daryl's face had cracked as he announced that it was just like Merle to be a total ass to the very end. Shortly after that, he'd collapsed into Carol's embrace and proceeded to have a very thorough breakdown in her arms.

By that point, the aftermath of the infection – and subsequent Zombie Apocalypse: Take 2 – was pretty much under control. Maria and Fury had brought in a team to clean up the mess and they had done their work admirably. When the Grimms and their team woke the following day, the burning was done, the piles had been cleared away and S.H.I.E.L.D.'s agricultural specialists were well on their way to reseeding and rehabilitating Hershel's property.

Will and Marina had taken Maria aside covertly, to debrief her on the situation with Scarlett Levy and one James Doyle, most recently of S.H.I.E.L.D. The Assistant Director had been briefly horrified at the idea that there could potentially be other Grimms. Her best friend had snickered quietly, knowing that Maria wasn't upset so much about the fact that there could be further victims of the Thaddeus Ross and Project Cahill but more so at the fact that she could barely manage the five Grimms she already had to deal with. More would probably cause her a heart attack.

Nevertheless, Marina's files on the Cahill Project and S.H.I.E.L.D.'s file on Sgt. James Doyle were delivered by Viktoria Coulson the following morning. At that point, Will and Marina had commandeered Hershel's dining room, before herding Hansel, Maria, Fury and Viktoriya inside and sealing the door. “All right, so what are we looking for?” Fury asked, watching his top handler start flipping through one of the operations files on Cahill.

“Anything that could tell us why Sgt Doyle looks like the Cahills,” the Russian announced with a frustrated frown. “Howard had to have written something in the files . . . something that can point us in the right direction.”

Hansel frowned, remembering that his adoptive daughter had been involved with the project through the original project authority. “How long were hyu with Cahill, Tochter?”

“I was 23 when I was assigned to spy on Howard as his personal assistant; Will was born into the program two years later.”

There was a fierce frown on Maria's face as she inquired carefully, “Do you know if they made any prototypes?”

Will's head snapped up at the word, repeating cautiously, “Prototypes?”

“Hansel had been unconscious and in a coma for two centuries. Surely they would have tested the DNA . . . made sure that it was viable for use. Any of them would have been prototypes. And somehow, I don't see Ross letting them get too far away. They may have been useful later.”

The Colonel nodded slowly as he agreed, “It could explain the differences in physical appearance. I doubt they would have cloned them; they were probably born the old fashioned way.”

No one missed the sharp look that passed between Hansel and Maria, or the stricken look on the German's features. Will's eyes narrowed as he watched the two of them, demanding calmly, “What the hell was that look for?”

“Adler . . .” the witch hunter soothed, wincing as Will shoved himself back from the table with a
growl. “Don't placate me right now, Dad. What the fuck was that look for!?”

“Gretel . . . she has a son . . . he was born a few years after you. He too was born the 'old-fashioned way’.”

“Der’mo. So not only was Aunt Gretel raped, but we also have a cousin? Who is he? Where is he?” the younger man groaned wretchedly, slouching back into his chair with his face in his hands.

“I do not know. There is only one photograph and he was four years old in it. We have been looking for him since after Dornröschen.”

“Dornröschen? You mean, Austria!? In 1997!? That was almost ten years ago! You've known about him for ten years and you never bothered to say anything!?” He went quiet for a moment, before demanding, “Is that why you went all robot on us!? Because you found out about him!?”

“Adler, please . . . let me explain,” Hansel begged, reaching out to touch his son.

“Don't touch me,” was the low hiss, the Colonel dodging the outstretched hands. “Just leave me alone.”

Watching him storm from the room, Marina flinched as the door slammed closed behind him. “Well, that went well,” she groaned, eyes drifting closed as she groaned. “Vati, why didn't you tell him about this?”

“I was trying to protect him . . . to spare him the worry.”

“Misha doesn't need your protection, Hansel,” was the reply, earning a small wince at the use of his name; Marina hadn't called him anything other than Vati in nearly ten years. “He needs to know that he can trust you. This business is hell on relationships. Trust in the person next to you is all that matters.” Hot chocolate eyes slipped closed as the Russian pinched the bridge of her nose. “I'll talk to him. But this is the second time in as many days where you refrained from telling him something that he should have known. It won't be easy for him to let this go.”

“Second time?” Hansel protested, eyes wide in surprise.

“Da. First, your initial encounter with Sgt Doyle in Austria. Now, this. I promise, he's not really mad, but he is very hurt.” Turning sad eyes on her best friend, she confessed, “And he's not the only one.”

“Marina . . .” the AD protested weakly, eyes wide at the heartache she could see in the other woman's eyes.

Shaking her head sharply to cut off the excuse, Marina insisted coldly, “You should have told me, Maria.”

“Marishka . . . I'm sorry.”

The handler's smile was small and bittersweet as she promised, “I know. But that doesn't change what happened, does it?”

The rest of the contingent watched as the woman turned on her heel and followed her lover from the room. Fury's single eye rotated between the two across from him solemnly, before he sighed heavily. “Seeing as the two of you have been looking for this boy for ten years and haven't yet found him, may I suggest that we get back on track? We have only enough time for one problem at a time, and I think the Case of Sgt Doyle needs to take precedence before we return to New York and return
Major Levy back into his arms. Agreed?”

Viktoriya's eyes were shining as she agreed quietly, “Yes sir. I'm sure we would all like to know what is going on here. Not just Will and Marina.”

“Agreed,” was the subdued response from Maria, her eyes clearly showing the wall that she was rebuilding around her heart. Seeing it create itself from her fears and insecurities – they were well hidden, but they were there . . . they always had been – Hansel reached out to squeeze his fiancee's hand, promising solemnly, “It will be all right, Spatzi. Let her calm and then talk to her. Marina understands loyalty above all else; she will understand this.”

“She's my best friend. We've never even fought, Hans. Are you sure she'll forgive me for this?”

“Ja, I am sure. She will listen . . . she just will not listen now. Be patient. Hyu will know when it is time to speak to her.”

Taking a deep breath, and comfort in the thoughtless German, Maria squeezed his hand in agreement, before returning her attention back to the file. “I think we can assume that Doyle is a Cahill prototype. So let's see what we can find out about them.”

“Oh yeah . . . no one ever makes just one prototype. There's always a spare in case the first one breaks down.”

Fury's mouth twisted as he remarked caustically, “Well, that's morbid.”

“But true. And considering the mortality rate in the experimentation that created the son of the Dornröschen, there were probably many attempts and few survivors.”

“Stark was many things, but above all he was a scientist. Even if he was unhappy with the results, or did not agree with what was happening, he would have written down anything and everything to do with Project Cahill . . . including any and all prototypes, regardless of viability. Marina is right; we simply have to figure out where he hid those notes.”

Teal eyes swept the stack of paperwork in front of her with a look of horror in her eyes. “This is going to be like trying to find a needle in a haystack.”

“Then we should probably start looking; this could take awhile,” the blond Amazon sighed, reaching out to pull a stack of files to rest in front of him. “Good luck and good hunting.”

The sentiment was passed around the table in hushed tones, before at last the dining room fell silent as the four dove head first into the traumatizing past of the Brothers Grimm and their heretofore unknown older siblings.

When Marina exited the dining room, her first and only thought was for her lover. She caught sight of a familiar blond head sitting outside on the porch and made a beeline towards him. “Sammy-honey . . . have you see Misha go by this way?”

“Yeah, he went storming that way like there was hell on his heels. Owen went after him,” he promised at the concern on her face. “What happened? Is everything okay?”

“No . . . everything is not okay, but it will be.” Crouching beside him, she cupped his cheek in her palm and brushed her thumb tenderly over his jaw. “You look tired Sammy . . . go on and lay down. At this point we're just waiting on the chopper to arrive; nothing needs doing and even if it did, we
are off duty. No longer our problem.”

“Are you sure? I don't want to be a complete waste of space.”

“Malyshe, you're still recovering from getting bit, the fever, the infection . . . no one is going to blame you for getting some rest so that you can finish healing up. And anyone that does, can answer to me. I'm in the mood to kill something; I'm pretty sure that at this point I wouldn't even have any qualms about killing one of our own people.”

Chuckling, the blond wrinkled his nose at her as he teased, “Liar . . . you make not care right away but you'd feel guilty about it once you'd done it.”

Narrowing her eyes at him playfully, “Hush you.” Busing a haphazard kiss across the apple of his cheek, she straightened up once again. “Go on inside and get something to eat and then go lay down. That's an order . . . you need the food and the rest more than anyone else here.”

“Yes ma'am,” the young man agreed, pushing himself slowly to his feet and arching backwards to release the strain in his spine. “I hope Will's okay . . . whatever's wrong.”

“I'll handle Misha . . . you worry about yourself for awhile.” Squeezing his forearm, she promised, “I'll come check on you a little later, okay?”

“Sure. See you in a bit, Ma.”

Marina had already started to walk off in the direction her lover had taken, but skidded to a stop in surprise at the term. Whirling, she watched him blush to the roots of his hair as he stammered slightly, “That wasn't . . . I didn't . . . Sorry?”

“For what?” she asked gently, winking fondly, “I liked hearing it.”

Scrubbing at the back of his neck with his fingernails, Sam promised, “I liked saying it.”

“Then say it as often as you want, and we'll both be happier for it,” she insisted, blowing him a quick kiss before rotating on her heel to dash off again.

She found Owen first, concealed carefully in the trees, keeping an eye on her lover as the older man raged at the trees around him. Laying a gentle palm on the point of his shoulder, the Russian asked in a whisper, “How long has he been yelling?”

“You were, but Vati sometimes forgets that Misha is a grown man and he does not require a father in the same way that his brothers do. Misha has been father, friend, brother, and confidant for all of them since he was 12.”

“Marina . . . what happened?”

“We found out some intel that Hansel had kept hidden from us for about ten years . . . intel that could have prevented the whole confusion about Major Levy and alerted us to the presence of Sgt Doyle a decade ago.” Turning her attention back onto where her lover had stilled and stood motionlessly on the other side of the clearing, his arms folded tightly over his chest and eyes closed quietly, she sighed. “As you can see, he's not taking it well. But no matter what, we'll work it out.”

Owen’s tone was fond as he replied, “You always do. You two are a hell of a team . . . and I am
proud to be a member of your squad.” Nodding his head in the Colonel's direction, the former Guardian asked, “You want me to stick around while you talk to him? Or are you okay if I head back to camp?”

“We'll be all right. Whatever else is going on, I think this is one conversation Misha will be happier having without an audience.”

Nodding, Owen offered a fist and smirked as Marina replied with the requisite fist-bump. “Take care of him.”

“Always,” she promised, eyes glued to her lover's form as she considered how best to approach the conversation that they both clearly needed to have.

Dimly, the Russian woman was aware of the rustling of the leaves and the soft steps moving away that indicated the younger man had left the two alone. As it was, however, all of Marina's focus was on her partner . . . and she knew even without seeing his face . . . her partner needed her at that moment more than he needed any of her other alter-egos. The Gadyuka was unnecessary at the moment; as was Agent Marina Petrovka and the Lt Colonel; above all, Will needed his Marishka . . . and if there was one thing Marina excelled at, it was giving her partner exactly what he needed.

Stepping out into the clearing, the Russian watched her partner's shoulders tighten in consternation. With his back to her, any sudden movements were unexpected and cause for concern. It wouldn't take more than a quarter of a second for Will to spin and put her on the ground if he was of a mind to. Closing her eyes, Marina stepped further into the center, leaving herself open and vulnerable on all sides, consciously mirroring her partner's emotional being with her own physical being. “Mishka? Are you okay?”

There was a long moment before Will shook his head in negation of the question. “What are we gonna do, Marina? I have a cousin . . . what the fuck are we gonna do?”

“We're gonna take Scarlett home to her boyfriend . . . and then we're going to find him.”

“You promise?” he asked, accepting her arms around his waist as he dropped his head back to rest his crown against her forehead.

Based on what little Marina could see, it was apparent that Will was avoiding looking at her directly. Whether that was because he was embarrassed by his reaction to his father's news or because he was so angry he could not hold it in, even around her, it did not matter. She tightened her arms around his waist as she went up on tiptoes to press an adoring kiss to the nape of his neck. Standing there with her lips pressed to his skin, she swore fervently, “I promise.”

Chapter End Notes

Translations:

(G) Tochter - daughter (Hansel's nickname for Marina)
(G) Adler - Eagle (Hansel's nickname for his eldest son, Will)
(R) Der'mo - shit
(G) Vati - Dad (Marina's nickname for Hansel, her adoptive father)
(R) Da - yes
(G) Spatzi - little sparrow (Hansel's nickname for his fiancee, Maria Hill)
(G) Ja - yes
(R) malysh - kid(do)
(R) Gadyuka - Viper (Marina's call sign given to her by the *Krasnaya Komnata* and the *Akademiya* upon graduation)
(R)
Hello all! I hope you enjoyed your Fourth of July, regardless of where you're from. Here's a new chapter, and I hope you all continue to enjoy where this is going.

No translations this chapter. ENJOY!

Chapter 175: Bittersweet Reunions

The plane touched down on base and Jason blinked to see a familiar redhead standing next to the S.H.I.E.L.D.-issued SUV. Casey wore the typical security uniform – black tactical cargoes and black t-shirt with a pair of holstered pistols under one arm and on the other hip – and some part of Jason was having trouble reconciling the picture before him with the wounded detective and partner he'd left behind.

A thought struck him and he whirled to glare at his older brother and sister. “Since when did Casey join S.H.I.E.L.D.?”

The Russian's head snapped up from where she was resting against her lover, looking exhausted. She looked as though she had been buried in Grimms at some point in the flight. Sam was sleeping on the bench next to her, his head in her lap, as she smoothed tender fingers through sunny hair. Clint was seated on the ground in front of her, leaning back against her calves as he chatted with Aaron and Marta where they sat on the other side of the tiny cargo hold; a Quinjet the plane was not.


“As though you didn't know, Marina . . . be honest,” the tech specialist snapped angrily, eyes narrowed at his sister.

Seeing his partner's distress at the accusation, Will protested solemnly, “I can assure you, Jay, neither Marina nor I had anything to do with Casey's recruitment.”

His father's girlfriend's tone was approaching smug as she interrupted whatever Jason had been about
to say, insisting, “No . . . but I did.”

Marina's only response to that was an eyebrow cocked in question, even as Jason exploded at her furiously, “You did what!? Why the **fuck**!?”

The Assistant Director said nothing, simply leaning over to fish a manila folder out of her carry-all. Offering it to him with a smile, she explained, “I was hoping that by having Casey Shraeger with S.H.I.E.L.D., it would make it easier for you to accept our offer.”

Green eyes narrowed suspiciously, as he parroted, “Offer?”

“Yes . . . head of Research and Development.”

“Head of R&D? You mean, **Department** Head of R&D!?” he blurted, eyes flashing wide in shock as he took the folder mechanically.

“You were never officially attached to R&D. But even the freelance work you did with them was better than anything R&D has come up with since you left S.H.I.E.L.D. altogether. We would like you to come back and put the department back to rights; full benefits, contract, all the bells and whistles.”

“Wait . . . what about Daniels? He's DH of R&D.”

Maria's smirk was bitter as she replied, “Daniels is opting to take advantage of his early retirement clause in his contract.”

Will's mouth curved as he inquired lightly, “Opting to? Or being volun-told to?”

“Fury told him that he could opt out of his contract and enjoy the retirement package or he could be released without any kind of package at all. He's rather lost all patience with the man.”

Brian's chuckle was quiet and angry as he remarked, “He's not going to be missed by any of the agents I know, that I can guarantee.”

“None of the shit his guys put in circulation ever works right the first time,” Bucky sneered in agreement, well remembering the tablet that had malfunctioned in Macedonia during an assignment he and Clint had had on. (They had celebrated their success early and it had been awesome, but still, if the damn thing had just worked right, they could have celebrated in an actual bed and would probably not have been recorded through the whole damn thing.)

Jason folded his arms over his chest as he narrowed his eyes at the Assistant Director. “So why Casey?”

“Officially, she'll be your partner. Unofficially, she'll be your security. Daniels had personal security, so will you. Comes with the job.”

“Why? It's not like I really need the protection.”

Will spoke up in answer then, “All department heads have personal security. Last thing S.H.I.E.L.D. wants is a DH to fall into enemy hands, when a guard can – and typically does – prevent that.”

“Even you and Marina?”

“Marina is my security; so is Owen, if Marina’s not available. And Vika is technically security for both Marina and Phil, with Nika as back-up if both of them are out and about at the same time.”
Flipping open the folder, Jason skimmed the text curiously. “What about field work?”

“Strictly voluntary only, with the understanding that Casey or other appropriate security goes with you.”

“And I have complete discretion? Total control over my department?”

“Just don’t go in and fire everyone right off the bat. But essentially yes.”

“Awesome. I’ll give them two weeks to show me what they can do and then I’ll start laying people off that aren’t pulling their weight.”

“Does that mean you’ll accept the job?” Marina asked with wide curious eyes.

“I don’t know. I need to talk to Casey first.”

“I didn’t trick or deceive her into the job, Jason,” the AD protested with a roll of her eyes. “I promise.”

“And for the most part, I know that. I just need to be sure,” was the reply, before the engines shut down and the cargo doors began to open.

Casey’s face lit up at the sight of her boyfriend coming down the ramp, calling playfully, “Hey good looking!”

Unable to resist her goofy smile, he grinned in reply as he scooped her up and swung her around. “Hey sexy . . .” he teased, fingering one of her holsters, “. . . I like the uniform.”

Casey had worked with Jason for a months. And based on his tone, the redheaded young woman knew that they were having a totally different conversation than his words implied. Cupping his cheeks in her palms, she promised solemnly, “I do too.” Hey lips twisted slightly as she insisted, “I chose this job of my own free will. Besides, you don’t like keeping things from me.”

Jason blinked, visibly surprised that she’d managed to figure that out already. Smirking, Casey chuckled, “Now you don’t have to. We have the same security clearance.”

“But what about the Second? You became a detective to piss off your parents.”

“To the shock of absolutely no one, this job actually promotes the same levels of distaste for my life choices as my career as a detective. Yay me!”

“I thought we talked about this . . . you make excellent life choices,” he joked, a wide grin on his face in response to the smirk that crossed her lips.

Reaching up, she tangled her hands in the collar of his t-shirt and hauled him down for a fiery kiss, murmuring, “Damn right I do,” against his mouth before he wrapped her up and proceeded to devour her.

Marina and Will appeared at their sides, Will's arms slung carelessly over his partner's shoulders as he teased, “So does this mean, you're going to take the job?”

“What was the rule on fraternization again?”

“Doesn't matter if you're in an established relationship with another agent at the time of recruitment,” the Colonel replied with a grin and a squeeze to his own lover's shoulders.
"Good. Because I plan to be doing a lot of fraternizing tonight," Jason insisted with a comical leer, earning giggles from Casey and a roll of the eyes from his siblings.

"You're a dork," was Clint's laughing response, as he swung himself into one of the SUV's with Bucky climbing in right behind him.

"Shut up, Fanboy."

"James Bond is awesome! If I have to be a fanboy over someone, at least it's him!" was the petulant rejoinder, causing his brothers to laugh and roll their eyes at the usual defense.

Handing Marina into the SUV, Will turned back and offered his younger brother his hand.
"Welcome back, Jay . . . we've missed you."

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It hadn't been that long ago that Doyle was standing outside the Director's door, barely more than a week. He'd gone more than a decade without ever being called into the presence of God and now here he was again, standing at that same door, trying to figure out where the hell he'd fucked up.

Taking a deep breath and squaring his shoulders, Doyle raised his hand and knocked firmly on the wood paneling. There was a moment's pause, before Fury's voice boomed, "Come!"

Opening the door, he moved inside and dropped effortlessly into attention, inquiring calmly, "You wanted to see me, sir?"

"At ease, sergeant. You're not in trouble," the man insisted, with an amused smirk on his lips. "The team I sent to Georgia got back this morning. They had something with them that I believe belongs to you."

"Belongs to me, sir? I don't understand."

There were teeth in the corners of Fury's grin as he gestured toward the corner of the room behind him. "You can come out now, Major."

"Yes sir."

The voice that answered him felt like a blow to Doyle's solar plexus, the air leaving his lungs as he whirled to face its owner. And there she stood, the woman of his dreams. One hand lifted to trace the contours of her face, fingers moving through the air centimeters from her skin, terrified that this was just another dream and trying to touch her would make her disappear once again. He jolted as her hand came up to fold around his, shocked to his core at the touch he'd been missing for a decade.

Khaki green eyes widened as she pulled his hand to her cheek, forcing the appendage to mold along the curve. Throat suddenly very dry, he gasped out, "Scar? Are you real!?"

There were tears in her eyes as she nodded soundlessly, stammering out, "Yeah, Doyle . . . I'm real."

The sound of her voice brought everything into focus and suddenly, his hands were in the hair at her temples and he was hauling her up to his lips for their first kiss in ten years. A sob reverberated through his ears, and to be honest, he couldn't tell who had released it. All he knew was that his Scar was back in his arms and there was no way in hell he was ever going to let her go ever again.

Resting his forehead against hers, his fingers still locked in her hair, he sighed, "I love you . . . damn, I love you."

She was murmuring her own reply against his lips, burying herself in his embrace and just as clearly
unwilling to let him go. Wrapping her up in his embrace, he turned to face the director. “Thank you, sir.”

“You shouldn't thank me . . . you should thank the Colonel and his team.”

“Absolutely. Just tell me where to find him. I owe him a huge favor.”

The voice that spoke up then sent tremors down Doyle's spine as another two forms materialized from the same corner Scarlett had emerged from, the woman standing to the left and behind the speaker. “I'm right here. And I would be very interested in collecting on that favor.”

It was kind of like looking in a funhouse mirror. There was just enough distortion that they weren't identical, but there was a more than definite resemblance between the two men. The two men stood at about the same height, though the Colonel's hair was blond and Doyle's was dark. Their features were more than a little similar, enough to send a frisson of unease down Doyle's spine at the realization that in any other life, they probably could have been twins. The Colonel was a little younger than he was, maybe four or five years at the most, but that did little to diminish the confident set of his shoulders and the sense of competence in command that practically exuded from his pores. This was not a man who had any doubts about who and what he was; and some part of Doyle knew that he was about to get a crash course in the details of his own past.

“You have no idea how grateful I am to you right now. I'll do anything you want . . . anything.”

The younger man's lips quirked as he agreed, “I was hoping you'd say that. How about we start with everything you know about the Project Cahill and the children it made?”

At the name of the project his parents had been attached to before his birth, Doyle's eyes flashed wide. “How the fuck do you know about Cahill?”

The Colonel's mouth twisted bitterly for a moment, before he replied solemnly, “I would be one of its children.”

Feeling his heart stammer in his chest at the response, knowing what that meant about himself, Doyle breathed, “Fuck.”

“Indeed.”
Chapter Notes

I am on a roll! Woot!

Translations are few, but there. At the end as always.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter 176: Highway to Hell

About ten minutes later, Will settled himself into his office chair, his Marina taking her usual seat curled up on the corner of the desk while Scarlett and Doyle took their places in his guest seats. “All right, how about we do introductions first, before we get too deeply into the details?” the Russian woman asked, twisting slightly to look back at her partner with a small grin.

“Sounds like a plan,” he agreed, slouching back in his chair calmly. “My name is Will Brandt and this is my partner, Marina Petrovka. Marishka runs the handler pool with Agent Coulson and I’m Chief Analyst for S.H.I.E.L.D.”

The sniper’s mouth twisted slightly as he shrugged one shoulder, “James Doyle; I’m a sergeant for S.H.I.E.L.D.’s tactical units here. I typically lead Echo Team. Most people call me Doyle though; too many Jameses in the world.”

“Agreed,” was Marina’s laughing response, well remembering another James she knew who preferred to answer to another name. “And of course, we know Scarlett.”

“So let's get to the details,” Will insisted, leaning forward to fold his arms atop his desk. “What do you know about Cahill?”

“I don't really know a lot. The only reason I even know about it, is because my parents were involved with Cahill for awhile after I was born.”

“What did your parents do with Cahill?”

“Nothing as far as I'm aware.” Taking a deep breath, Doyle ran a hand back through his close-
cropped hair. “My parents were career military. My father was a petty officer with the Marine Corps and my mother was a CMO on his ship; that's how they met. He got hurt in a fight on deck and she was the one that patched him up. Mom used to joke that it was 'love at first brawl'."

Scarlett's lips curled upwards as she joked, “That sounds familiar.”

He cracked a smile in her direction, obviously well acquainted with whatever inside joke she was referencing. “In my own defense, I was really really drunk that night.”

“I remember,” she agreed with a roll of her eyes. “Didn't stop you from trying to flirt with me though, did it?”

“Liquid courage, Scar . . . only way I was going to have the balls to tell you how hot I thought you were.”

It was obvious to the other two in the room that they had been forgotten, earning a small smile from Marina as she glanced back over her shoulder at her lover. Will gave her a small sad grin, indicating that she was not the only one remembering their own less than conventional first time . . . which, contrary to popular belief, had not been outside her prison cell inside the Pentagon when he was 26. Returning the gesture, she reached up to fiddle with the pendant of the necklace she wore as she cleared her throat pointedly.

Visibly startled, Doyle tore his attention away from his girlfriend and back on the two senior officers in front of him. “Sorry . . . I totally just lost track of where I was.”

“Dangerous habit for a spy,” Will reminded him, earning a flash-fire grin as Doyle insisted, “Not a spy, thank God. I don't have the temperament or the patience for it. I run the tactical teams . . . I'm much more of a 'punch you in the face' kind of guy than a 'sneak up behind you and choke you to death' one.”

“Crude, but mostly accurate,” Marina chuckled, with a roll of her eyes.

Grinning at his partner, Will returned his attention back on Doyle, “How did your parents get involved with Cahill? Were they assigned?”

“No, they were having trouble conceiving. It was advertised as a fertility service for qualified members of the Armed Forces. Twelve months later, my parents had me.”

Quicksilver eyes settled on a steely-gray as the implications of that began to take form in his mind. “Do you know how many other couples there were?”

“Some. My parents made friends with a few of the other couples during the post-natal portion of the service.” His mouth twisted slightly, as he insisted, “For a fertility clinic, they had a high number of stillbirths and miscarriages. I think my parents were one of the only ones to actually conceive and bring to term.”

“How many other couples had children? Do you know?”

“Four? Maybe five . . . but I'm pretty sure it was just the four of them and my parents.”

“Do your parents know what Cahill was?”

“They found out at the very end.”

“How?”
“The clinic authority gave them an option. They could sign nondisclosure agreements and keep the rights to the kids they had, or they could forfeit their children to the Project Cahill and try to have another child at some other clinic.” Shrugging haphazardly, he concluded, “They all opted to sign, take their kids and go. I know my parents chose not to re-up when their re-enlistments came due, so whatever happened . . . they didn't like it.”

“Is there anyway you could get your parents to tell you the names of those other couples?”

Doyle blanched slightly, one hand coming up to rub at the back of his neck, as he confessed, “I don't talk to my parents much any more. They didn't approve of my joining Delta Force.”

Marina frowned at the statement, unable to imagine not being proud of any one of her boys for that kind of achievement. Delta Force wasn't exactly a walk in the park. Just being eligible to go through training was a hell of a thing to achieve, let alone actually lasting through the training itself. “I'm sorry. For what it's worth, that's awesome. Delta Force is pretty badass.”

“Thank you,” he replied, one hand coming up to trace over his forearm. His sleeve obscured the skin, but the Russian was more than sure that under the fabric he had the trademark red dagger of Delta Force inked there.

“Do you remember anything about the other families? Names? Kids' names? Anything?”

“I was really young the last time I saw any of them,” Doyle replied, mouth twisting in disappointment. “I think one couple's last name was Maitland, one was Gregor, one was James and the other was something Greek. Stephan . . . something.”

The S.H.I.E.L.D. handler twisted to look at her partner. “Is that enough to track them down?”

“Yeah. If Ross was touting it as a fertility clinic open only to couples in the Armed Forces, the clinic would have had to keep pretty meticulous records. I should be able to backtrack through the files and come up with their names.” Turning back to Doyle, Will cocked an eyebrow. “And that's it? That's all you remember?”

“Like I said, my parents found out what Cahill was and they booked it. As far as I know, they have never violated their NDA . . . ever. Either they just wanted to forget they were ever involved or the clinic authority scared the shit out of them enough to make sure that they didn't talk. Either way, they've never said much about it. The only reason I even know what happened there is because I was a nosy little shit, and I will confess to eavesdropping on my parents a lot when I was a kid.”

Marina's smirk grew as she teased, “You sure you're not interested in being a spy?”

“Yeah, pretty sure,” he chuckled, glancing over to where Scarlett Levy was watching the conversation silently. “You okay, Scar?”

“So if this was a fertility clinic . . . why do you and the Colonel look so much alike?”

Marina's mouth compressed as she wrapped her arms around her knee. “I think I can answer that one. Misha and I are fairly certain that instead of helping to implant the woman's egg with her husband's sperm, they used sperm from the same genetic donor they used to clone the Cahills. It was a test run, to make sure that the genetic material was even viable for cloning.”

“Which makes us half-brothers . . . in a weird, roundabout way,” Will announced with a frown. “So, welcome to the family, I guess?”

Doyle slumped back into his chair, arms coming up to fold over his chest. “Fuck . . . this is actually
happening, isn't it? It's not some fucked up dream.”

“Unfortunately, no . . . this is not a dream. I'm sorry.”

“Don't be. It's been awhile since I actually had a family I could tell what I do for a living.”

The Russian smirked as she considered that, teasing her lover, “I can see where that would have some appeal.”

“Yeah yeah. You hush,” he mocked with a wink.

“Am I missing something?”

“Inside joke,” Marina laughed, wrinkling her nose at her partner playfully, before jumping off the corner of the desk. “All right. I recognize that look in your eye. I've got dinner to make and you've got research to do, so I will get out of your hair.” Turning back to the other couple, she cocked an eyebrow, “Do you need quarters, Major?”

Scarlett's eyes were wide as she looked up at Doyle, clearly uncertain as to the answer to that. Doyle's head shook firmly as he wrapped his arm around her waist, insisting, “No thank you, ma'am. Scar'll be just fine with me.”

“All right. Let me know if that changes.”

“We will,” the pretty science officer promised, even as she linked her fingers in her boyfriend's and let him lead her out of Will's office.

Watching them go, Marina hummed lightly under her breath as she considered them. “I don't think they realize how hard this is going to be for them. Ten years is a long time, Misha.”

Will looked up at her with a small smile, most of his attention clearly on his laptop as he promised, “They still love each other. They'll figure it out.”

“Hm . . . is that romanticism I sense in your answer?” she teased, leaning forward over the desk, her weight resting on her palms.

“I have been known to indulge in the random romantic moment, now and again,” he reminded her with a small grin.

“Touche,” she laughed, leaning forward further to press a warm kiss to his lips. “Any requests for dinner?”

“As long as you made it, it'll be perfect.”

“I love you,” she sighed, one hand coming up to trace fondly over his jaw.

“And I love you. I'll be home soon, I promise.”

“I'm gonna hold you to that. I have designs on your ass tonight, Colonel . . . don't be late.”

“No ma'am. I'll figure out who these couples are and then I'll be home. An hour . . . tops.”

“All right. See you at home.”

Will nodded in agreement, eyes a warm and sunny blue as they watched her sashay her way from his office, before disappearing completely from his sight once passed the door frame. There was a small
smile on his lips as he turned his attention back onto his laptop.

Marina Ivanovna Petrovka was a hell of a woman and he was one lucky man.

The Russian woman would never admit it, but the sound of her front door opening a little more than an hour later caused a deep sigh of relief. Her Misha was well known for getting lost in his research; she well remembered having to drag him out of his office after a 36 hour research bender. She could hear him slipping out of his fatigue jacket and dropping his bag onto the bench beside the door, as well as the jingle of his keys as they hit the bowl next to the door. “Marishka?” he called cautiously, seeking her out audibly before going in search of her.

“In the kitchen!” she called in reply, twisting to look back at him as he moved to trap her up against the counter, his front pressed full length against her back. “Hm . . . feeling affectionate, are we?”

Bending his head, he pressed a sweet kiss to his favorite spot on her neck, a gentle hum vibrating through his lips. “Have I thanked you lately . . . for everything you did for the boys while we were stuck at the Hoover Base?”

Blinking in surprise at the question, Marina leaned over to look up into his eyes with a frown. “What brought this on?”

“I was going through those damned files, trying to pinpoint these couples, and I just . . . it was all there in black and white. Everything you did to protect my brothers when I wasn't able to. I just . . . I needed to make sure you knew how grateful I was for that.”

Lifting her hand to cup his cheek, she pulled him down for a warm kiss, forcing them both to take their time. “I would do it all over again . . . every second . . . so long as it led us right back to this moment,” he promised, pressing his forehead tightly to hers. “Te adoro.”

“Te adoro amica,” she promised, twisting in his arms to be able to embrace him fully, her chin tilted upwards to receive his kiss once again.

The familiar sound of Clint gagging broke the two apart, earning a giggle from the Russian as the second youngest Grimm joked, “At least they're not necking against the fridge again.”

“I'm not sure this doesn't count,” Jason insisted, coming further into the room as he moved to grab a beer from the refrigerator.

Chuckling, Marina turned back to her spaghetti sauce, stirring it one last time before snapping off the stove and moving toward the cupboard to retrieve a bowl. “All right . . . unless you'd like to cook for yourselves tonight, I suggest you stop cracking wise and start setting the table, huh?”

“Yes ma'am,” was the cheerful reply, as both Sam and Aaron moved to get the plates and glasses from their respective cupboards as Clint fished in the drawers for silverware.

After everyone was in their seats, Marina looked up from her plate and asked, “So . . . were you able to find them?”

“Yes. There were five couples in total; they each had a son. James Doyle, son of Petty Officer Matthew Doyle and his wife, Lt. Stephanie Doyle. Angus Maitland, son of Corporal Derek Maitland and his wife PFC Melinda Maitland. William James, son of First Lieutenant Thomas James and his wife Mary. Dillon Stephanowski, son of Master Sergeant Marcus Stephanowski and his wife Patricia. And lastly, Saul Gregor, son of Taylor Gregor and his wife, Captain Nina Gregor.”

Marina frowned at the information, though it was Aaron who spoke up first, “Do we know anything
about them?"

"Locations, mostly. Except for William James and James Doyle, none of the others ever joined the military. Maitland was a firefighter in Minnesota, before he quit and went to work in construction. Gregor's from Missouri, but I can't get any information on him that's not ten years old. Stephanowski is married and lives in Los Angeles; he works in a garage out there. Doyle's parents still live in Modesto, but Doyle lives here on base. He apparently hasn't spoken to them in a little over twelve years. And James grew up in sunny Tallahassee; he's a Sergeant First Class with the Army's bomb squads. I think this is his third consecutive tour; he's not married and not close to his parents."

"Married to the Army, huh?" Marta asked quietly, a small smile on her face as she nudged her blushing nephew.

"From the looks of things, yes. He's crazy, but he's good."

"So what do we do about them?" Jason asked cautiously, leaning forward on his forearms as he watched his brother and sister consider the question.

"From what I can tell, none of them have any idea about Cahill, except for Doyle. And even Doyle admits that the only reason he even knows is because he was a 'nosy little shit' . . . his words, not mine."

"Which means that they probably wouldn't appreciate an all new family crash-landing into their lives," Casey pointed out, around a bite of spaghetti.

Marina frowned as she fiddled with her fork. "Personally, I think we should at least check in on them. Keep our distance absolutely, but at the very least, we should see if there's anything we can do to make their lives a little easier."

Brian's nod was slow as Clint agreed, "I can agree with that."

"Marina should go . . . any of us go, and the cat's out of the bag," Aaron commented, looking over at his sister with a small frown on his lips.

"I'll agree that Marina should go, but I don't want her going alone."

"You can't leave, Misha . . . you're Chief Analyst. This could take weeks. And besides, I know that you want to find that kid Vati told you about."

Will took a deep breath, quicksilver eyes scanning the table, before suggesting, "What about Sam?"

The blond jolted upright in surprise, blue eyes flashing back and forth between the two officers. "Me!?"

"You're going to need to be in Toronto in about a month. You can go with Marina on her road trip, and she can get you settled in Toronto on her way home."

Sam's eyes were solemn as he asked, "You'd trust me to look after her? After what happened to Ben?"

"Absolutely; Aaron's right, none of us can go. And of the rest of the options I have, I trust you most. So . . . what do you think? Up for a cross-country trip?"

Sam turned his gaze onto Marina, watching the woman smile at him reassuringly. "I promise . . . it'll be fun. If you want, we can even do some touristy stuff. Los Angeles is pretty close to Hollywood . .
Biting his lips, he nodded with a sheepish grin, “Yeah . . . sounds like fun.”

“All right . . . I’ll make the arrangements. Let's plan on you two heading out within the next two days. Sound like a plan?” Will inquired, sipping on his whiskey as he looked between the two solemnly.

Marina’s sigh was heavy, even as she agreed, “Sounds like a plan.” Cocking an eyebrow, she insisted, “As long as you promise to self-medicate every once in awhile. Not even you can go a month without sleep, Mishka.”

Chuckling, the Colonel vowed, “I promise. I know where the Ambien is.”

“Good. Remember to use it while I'm gone.”

“Deal,” he laughed, leaning over to press a warm kiss to the curve of her jaw.

There was a long silence, before at last Marta chimed in, “So . . . how about the Yankees?”

Almost simultaneously there was a groan around the table, before Clint insisted, “We don't root for the Yankees.”

“You don’t?”

“We're really more into football,” Brian laughed, winking at his brother's girlfriend.

“So . . . Giants fans?”

The looks of disgust on each of the boys' faces sent Marina into a fit of giggles and for the rest of the night, Project Cahill and the upcoming road trip was forgotten.

Chapter End Notes

Translations:

(Latin) Te Adoro - I adore you
(Latin) To adoro amica - I adore you too.
See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 177: Road Trip

Marina's eyes slipped closed as she leaned back against the seat, the wind creating havoc in her hair as Sam guided the Charger off the highway at their exit. “So . . . last stop before Toronto. Beaver Creek, Minnesota, home to one Angus Maitland.”

Sam chuckled as he downshifted, rolling to a stop at a red light as he joked, “What kind of parent names their kid ‘Angus’?”

The Russian's lips twisted as she joked, “What kind of sister names her baby brother 'Francis’?”

“Last I checked, Francis was Clint's middle name . . . not his first one.”

“Eh . . . semantics,” she agreed, with a grin. Reaching under the seat, she pulled out the file folder with everything that her partner had been able to compile on the second youngest Cahill prototype and flipped it open. “All right . . . let's see what we've got. Angus Maitland, 42 years old. Used to be a firefighter before a house fire that killed an entire family. Neither his team nor his captain knows why, but something happened and he quit the next day.”

There was a soft hum as the sniper inquired, “How long had he been a firefighter?”
“Almost fifteen years. Apparently, it hadn't been their first rough call, which was why it was such a shock when he quit.”

“Which means something must have happened. There had to have been a catalyst. You don't just quit something you love doing for no reason.” The speculative look on Marina's face caused Sam to blush as he insisted, “I would know, wouldn't I?”

“Yeah . . . I guess you would at that,” she agreed with a small smile, reaching out to smooth one hand through the close-cropped blond hair. “Whatever the reason . . . he's been in therapy for the last year with Dr Carla Chuang.”

“Something definitely happened . . . he didn't say anything?”

“All he told his captain was that he couldn't do it anymore,” she replied, continuing to flip through the folder.

Turning into the lot of the little motel they'd be staying in during their stay, Sam hummed as he maneuvered the car into a space and guided the car into park. “We'll figure it out, Ma. I promise.”

Tapered fingers trailed over the face in the picture as she sighed, “I don't know why . . . but this one is getting to me. He reminds me of Misha.”

“Does that mean we're going to be hanging out for awhile?”

Grinning at him, she winked playfully, “Guess we'll find out. We've got another two weeks before you have to report to SRU HQ in Toronto. That gives us about a week and a half, before we should head out of town.”

“Sounds like more than enough time to me,” Sam agreed, as he dug their bags out of the trunk and followed Marina to the office.

“How do you figure?”

“Well . . . it took you like three seconds to adopt me,” he teased, leaning sideways to brush a quick kiss over her cheek.

“Good point,” she giggled, looping her arm through his. “Come on . . . I'm sure Misha is anxious for a sit rep.”

Eery blue eyes narrowed cautiously as he asked, “About that . . . how are you doing? It's been about three weeks since we left home.”

The Russian's mouth twisted ruefully as she confessed, “I miss him . . . and I am beyond ready to go home.” Hitching up her bag onto her shoulder, she shook her head firmly, “But, when duty calls, I know where I should be.”

Slinging his arm around her shoulders, he pressed a warm kiss to her temple. “Maybe this place will have semi-decent WiFi and we can Skype him.”

“Here's hoping. I'd like to see his face with my own eyes. It's a lot easier for him to lie to me, if I can't see how he's doing for myself.”

Squeezing her lightly, Sam moved to the check-in counter as the clerk left the office behind the desk. “Hi . . . I'm Sam Peterson . . . I believe we have a reservation here.”
The teenager popped her gum, clearly bored, even as she turned to the computer. “Sam and Mary? Yep . . . you want the honeymoon suite?”

The handler's laughter was explosive as Sam made a face. “She's my sister . . . two queens would be great. Thank you.”

“Ah . . . what's the matter, Pookie? Embarrassed to be seen with me already?” the Russian teased, crinkling her nose at him and dodging the halfhearted smack with a giggle.

“You're hilarious,” he drawled, with a roll of his eyes, as he corralled her around the neck with his elbow.

She grinned at him brightly, twisting out from under him and dashing away with her duffel bag thumping against the back of her knees. Sam growled, hauling his own bag across his chest and dashing after her. “You're dead, Petrovka!” he called in an undertone, watching her sprint across the parking lot towards their room.

“Gotta catch me first!” she taunted in reply, spinning on the balls of her feet before putting on another burst of speed at the sight of her boy catching up. “Der'mo!” she swore with a giggle, throwing herself into a backspin and just barely managing to dodge Sam's grab.

The two laughed together as they sparred playfully outside of their hotel room. Finally, Marina managed to grab hold of Sam's wrist and throw her thighs up around his neck, taking them both down with a well placed twist of her body. Thumping her heel lightly into the center of his chest, she rolled backwards over her shoulder and got to her feet. Grinning at the sight of Sam trying to catch his breath, she crouched and asked cheerfully, “Best two out of three?”

Rolling onto his side, Sam groaned as he curled up around his bruised solar plexus. “No thanks. I think I'm just going to lie here and nurse my pride for a bit.”

Leaning over to haul him up, she laughed, “There's a bed inside for that . . . I promise, it'll be a lot more comfortable than concrete.”

“How do you know? Maybe to me, concrete feels like feather pillows.”

Rolling her eyes at the uncharacteristic whining, she unlocked the motel door and then dropped him unceremoniously on the bed closest to the back wall. “Sammy-honey . . . no one thinks concrete feels like feather pillows.”

Chuckling at her maternal fussing, Sam reached over to haul the pillow under his head. Marina moved to the room's desk, hauling out the laptop Jason had modified for them and booting it up. “Hey! We've got WiFi!”

“You think Will's going to be online?”

“If I know Misha . . . and I do . . . he's been waiting for this call for awhile,” she insisted, bringing up the S.H.I.E.L.D. interface and inputting her passcodes.

Almost immediately, a picture of Will appeared on the laptop screen. Marina's lips curved happily as she joked cheerfully, “Hey handsome.” Posing playfully, she asked, “How do I look?”

Will gifted her with one of his rare soft smiles, left hand reaching out to caress gently over the curve of her cheek on his own screen, the action out of sight of the camera. “God, you're beautiful.”

“You look tired, Mishka,” she insisted with a frown, scolding fondly, “Are you even remembering to
The man's lips twisted slightly as he confessed, “I miss you.”

“I miss you too, but I'll be home soon.”

Taking a deep breath, Will forced himself lean back in his chair to put some space between himself and the screen. “All right . . . I'm assuming Sam is with you.”

Sam grunted from where he was still curled up on the bed, out of the webcam's line of sight, agreeing, “I'm right here.”

“How's the trip been? Everything going okay logistically?”

“All of the reservations have held up so far. The Charger had a small glitch, but we just took it to an Enterprise office and they swapped it out,” the blond announced from the bed.

“And what about everything else? What can you tell me about the rest of the Prototypes you've seen so far?”

“Well . . . it's been interesting,” Sam insisted, smirking at the woman as she rolled her eyes.

“Interesting is one way to put it,” she snarked, arms coming up to fold over her chest as she huffed.

Frowning at the look on his longtime girlfriend's face, the Colonel insisted, “Define interesting.”

“Oh God . . . Oh God . . . we're all going to die,” was the deadpan response as Marina quoted Wash's response without even a pause.

Will couldn't resist the urge to snort with laughter; one could always count on his Marishka to have a flare for the dramatic and an inexhaustible supply of Firefly quotes. Wrinkling his nose at her, he teased, “I doubt it's as bad as all that, samaya malen'kaya.”

“Probably not . . . but wow, this has not been an easy trip.”

Quicksilver eyes were sharp, before he turned and disappeared from the display. Seconds later, there was the sound of the door to his office closing, before he was back in his chair, watching her with calm, steady eyes. Folding his arms over his chest, and kicking the chair back onto its back legs, he demanded, “Sit rep, Major . . . now.”

“Hey . . . no fair using that title when there isn't anything I can do about it,” she pouted playfully, earning a small grin and a wink from her lover.

Sam chuckled from the bed as he teased, “And suddenly, I understand why your boys are always accusing you two of flirting. Everything you say is an innuendo.”

The Colonel's small smile morphed to a full blown grin as he taunted, “Trust me, Sammy . . . you ain't seen nothing yet.” Turning back to his partner, he insisted, “Tell me, Marishka. Start with Los Angeles.”

“Los Angeles . . . Dillon Matthew Stephanowski . . . 44 years old . . . mechanic,” she recited, recalling the file to mind as she forced herself to recall the beginning of their trip. “Dil is an interesting character.”

Will held up a hand to stall her recounting as he questioned curiously, “Dil?”
“Nickname . . . given to him in high school by his two best friends, Amy Roe – now Stephanowski – and Aaron Miles.”

“He’s married?”

“Yes. Apparently, Amy got it into her head about five years ago that she hadn't done enough with her life. So, she complicated things by getting romantically involved with both Dillon and Aaron. Dillon didn't take well to it . . . apparently he'd fallen for her hard in high school and had been holding onto a pretty hot torch ever since.”

“Sounds like it all worked out.”

“Yeah . . . they're pretty happy together. No children, but I think that's because Dil was only a mechanic at the garage where he worked.”

“Was? He quit?”

Marina's smile slipped into a proud smirk as she teased, “You should pay more attention to our finances.”

Will rolled his eyes at the statement, announcing, “We bought it for him then.”

“The owner was already looking to sell, but he didn't really want it to go to anyone but Dillon. He's worked there since high school.” Shrugging lightly, she continued, “We met his asking price, in cash, and he gave us the deed that day.”

“How did you sign it over to Dillon? No direct interaction or interference . . . we agreed, Marishka.”

“We didn't interact or interfere,” Sam replied, rolling off the bed and leaning forward into the projector's camera with a small smile. “Part of the purchase contract was that the deed was never in our name. All Stephanowski will ever know is that the deed was bought and paid for by two benefactors who prefer to remain nameless.”

“Did we keep any equity in this garage, zhemchuzhina?”

“Yes . . . five percent of all the profits will be deposited into an anonymous, offshore bank account that I had Jason set up for us, that automatically diverts into our primary account.”

“All right . . . what was your take?”

“He's a good kid,” Marina replied, wincing slightly as she referred to the 44 year old as a kid. “Sorry . . . everyone's younger than me. It's a reflex.”

“I know. It's okay,” he laughed, watching her mutter to herself in frustration. “What about his filial relationships?”

“Well, there's Amy. They're blissful together. His relationship with Aaron Miles is a little tarnished because of what happened between Aaron and Amy, but they seem like they're getting it figured out. And his relationship with his parents is pretty good. Dil and Amy live in a modest house, in a decent part of town. They're not rich but they're not poor either. Cars are older model, but in good shape. Barring anything catastrophic, I don't think we're going to need to concern ourselves much with Dillon Stephanowski. He's got it pretty well together.”

“All right . . .” was the solemn agreement. Marina grinned, able to see the way he closed that particular case in his mental filing cabinet. “You said he was interesting. Do I want to know why?”
“He’s . . . colorful?” the S.H.I.E.L.D. handler hedged, biting down on her lower lip uncertainly. “He definitely has a way with words . . . particularly the foul ones.”

“My mother would have washed my mouth out with soap, if I had said half of the things he said. And my mother didn't even really give a damn about what kind of trouble I got into after Amy died,” Sam reminded the two with a twist of his lips.

Marina's eyebrows furrowed at the reminder, glowering slightly as she once again started to plot her vengeance on the couple that had neglected her boy for so many years. Will's tone was soothing as he admonished fondly, “Marishka . . . kabluk. (Marishka . . . heel.)”

“Oni byli luchshe molit'sya ya ne vstretit'sya s nimi, Misha. Eto ne zakonchitsya khorosho dlya nikh, (They had better pray I never meet them, Misha. It will not end well for them,)” she hissed in furious Russian, hot chocolate eyes blazing viciously.

Smiling at her fondly, he promised, “Ya znayu. (I know.)”

Sam's eyes narrowed slightly at the Russian. He'd been with the family for long enough that he was starting to pick up some things, and Marina had taken to tutoring him while they were stuck in the car. Even still, between Marina's hushed tone and the rapid speed of her words, he was a little lost. “I don't want to know, do I?”

“No,” was the simultaneous answer from both the Colonel and his Russian, causing Marina to let her eyes fall close as she took a deep breath in. “Let's just say that should I ever meet your parents, Sammy, I intend to have a series of words with them that they will most definitely not like.”

Nodding in amused agreement, he saluted mockingly, “Got it.”

“Back on track please,” the Colonel insisted, knowing that if he let her, Marina would be stuck fuming for awhile and he would never find out what had happened with the other two prototypes they'd stopped to see before they'd gotten to Minnesota to check in on Angus Maitland. “What happened in Missouri? You canceled like a week on the reservation.”

Sam snorted, snarking, “Missouri was a quick stop.”

Marina cocked a disapproving eyebrow at him. “Sammy . . .”

“It was!” he protested with a shrug.

“Why was Missouri a quick stop?” the Colonel asked with a frown. “We hadn't been able to get any intel on Saul Gregor. It should have taken you more than a day to dig up something we could use to locate him.”

“Actually, it was pretty easy,” Sam sighed, running one hand back through his blond hair.

“Why?”

“There's a death record at the courthouse in Acuso. Apparently, he was executed for capital murder of a child about six years ago,” Marina sighed, mouth pressed into a firm frown as she watched her partner take that in.

“Capital murder of a child?”

“Series of unfortunate events that ended with a dead kid. Apparently, he was a gambling addict. He was deeply in debt and needed cash fast. Tried to rob a convenience store and snatched the kid as a
hostage.” Shrugging lightly, the Russian protested, “Doesn't look like he meant for anything to happen to the kid. But . . . best laid plans of mice and men.”

“Yebat’.”

“Yeah. All reports . . . he wasn't quite right at the end. I hacked the reports from the prison where he was incarcerated. Borderline sociopathic . . . but genuinely empathetic and remorseful when confronted with the kid's mother at his execution.”

Sam spoke up then, insisting, “The other inmates on death row remember him pretty well. He was quiet, kept to himself. Found religion, but couldn't seem to connect to people very well.”

“Either way . . . no longer our concern,” Marina sighed, one hand coming up to rub at the back of her neck. “Florida was pretty much a bust too.”

“Yeah . . . James is still on tour. He doesn't get downtime for another six months. And according to his CO, he's already requested to cancel his downtime and get right back onto another tour.”

Taking a deep breath, the handler chuckled as she recalled their trip to Florida. “I was able to meet some of the other techs he'd worked with. Army Sergeant JT Sanborn was still on base, as was his cousin, Senior Airman Sam Wilson of the USAF.”

Sam snorted at the reminder of the two men. “I had a Grimm Brothers moment, Will . . it was crazy.”

“What do you mean?” Will laughed, watching Sam go cross-eyed at the memory.

“The cousins are very similar in appearance. And according to Airman Wilson . . . William James is a crazy motherfucker. An opinion that is supported 100 percent by Sergeant Sanborn,” Marina laughed, snorting at the memory. Both cousins had looked horrified to learn that she was asking about the bomb specialist. Both had tried to warn her to avoid James at all costs. She could only imagine what their reactions would be to the Brothers Grimm.

“So . . . we probably want to leave him to blow himself up without interference?”

“We already have a crazy as fuck member of this family . . . I really don't think we need two,” Marina agreed with a giggle.

“All right . . . what about Angus Maitland?”

“We just got to town. Found the motel and checked in.” Glancing at the blond, she watched Sam shrug lightly, before turning back to the laptop. “We're probably going to head out to get something to eat and then see what if we can't track down his former captain. Man has to know something about Maitland.”

“What makes you think so?”

“Call it a hunch,” the former assassin replied with a frown.

“I have survived on a few of those. All right. Just remember . . . no interference and no interaction unless it's absolutely necessary. Promise?”

“I don't know if I can promise that with this one, Misha. I haven't even met the kid yet, and already he's yanking at my heartstrings.”

Sighing heavily, the Colonel teased fondly, “Nasedka.” Turning to look at the younger man, he
insisted, “Keep both eyes on her, Sammy, okay? Make sure she doesn't do anything too stupid?”

“Sure thing.”

“SHE is still sitting right here, thank you very much.”

“Marishka . . . be careful.”

“I will . . . I promise. I'll be home soon.”

“You'd better be,” the eldest Grimm insisted with a frown. “I need you home, Marina.”

Giving him a warm smile, she promised, “I solemnly swear I am up to no good . . . but nothing that's going to kill me.”

“Aiming to misbehave?”

“Always!” she giggled, winking at her partner's use of her favorite Firefly quote.

Chuckling, Will rolled his eyes as he leaned forward on the arms he had folded atop his desk.

“You're not quite right, you know that?”

Grinning at the quote, Marina fired back, “That's the popular theory.’”

“Ya lyublyu tebya, samaya malen'kaya.”

Blowing him a warm kiss in reply, she vowed, “Vsegda, Mishka.”

“I want another report tomorrow, agreed?”

“Agreed.”

Smiling at her for another moment, the Colonel took a deep breath and visibly steeled himself, before insisting, “Orel out.”

Marina barely had time to give him a small smile, before he reached forward and clicked off the camera. Blinking back tears, the Russian tossed her head slightly before spinning in her chair. “I'm starved. You hungry?”

“I could eat,” the blond agreed, pretending not to see the tears in her eyes as she brushed them away briskly.

“Good . . . that little diner we passed on the way into town looked cute. How about we try there?”

“As long as they don't have anything disgusting like liver and onions, that sounds good to me.”

“Why the hell would they have liver and onions?”

“Why wouldn't they have liver and onions?” was the return salvo, forcing Marina to consider that and shrug. “You present a good point.”

“Come on . . . you're starving remember.”

Laughing, she shoved him fondly from the room as she ordered, “Shut up.”

Chuckling, he dodged around her and slung his arm around her neck again. “Make me, Ma.”
Rolling her eyes, she ducked from under his arm and dashed towards the passenger seat. Sam tossed the keys into the air and caught them on the way down with a grin. “Still upset that you lost that bet in Oklahoma?”

“The bet only gives you exclusive driving rights for another three days, so don’t get too cocky, Sammy-honey. Eventually, you will lose those keys.”

“Yeah, but for another three days . . . driver gets to pick the music and shotgun shuts her cakehole.”

Huffing, she snarked, “Great.”

“Love you too, Ma.”

Reaching up to run her fingers back through his hair, she promised, “Love you, Sammy.”

Grinning at her as he gunned the engine, he insisted, “I know.”

Chapter End Notes

Translations:

(R) Der’mo - shit
(R) samaya malen'kaya - my little one (Will's most common nickname for his longtime partner)
(R) zhemchuzhina - pearl (one of Will's less common nicknames for his longtime partner)
(R) Yebat' - fuck
(R) nasedka - motherhen
(R) ya lyublyu tebya - I love you
(R) Vsegda - always
(R) Mishka - a diminutive of Mikhail/Michael (Will's middle name is Michael)
(R) Orel - Eagle (Will's callsign with S.H.I.E.L.D. and the Army's Bratya Mrachnyy
Chapter Notes

Very few translations, but what there are, are at the end as always.

Enjoy guys! I hope you enjoy this!

See the end of the chapter for more notes
Chapter 178: Malee

The next morning Sam poked at his pancakes, eyes glued to Marina’s face as she muttered to herself in distracted Russian. It had never failed to strike him as funny that she could swear at a grocery list as she was making it, but the sight of her scribbling down information about Angus Maitland while cussing was a bit more sobering. “Ma . . . I think you're scaring the waitress.”

Marina’s head popped up as she blinked at him, surprised by the statement. “What?”

“I get the swearing at lists, but I think it's scaring the waitress.”
“Oh . . .” she sighed, dropping her pen onto the page and reaching for her coffee. “Sorry. I'm just . . .”

“You're worried and feeling protective and maternal, so you have reverted to your default setting. I get it. Just . . . cool it on the viciousness? I haven't gotten a refill of my coffee since you started muttering,” he teased, tapping his mug with a fingernail.

“Ha ha . . . very funny.”

“Lack of coffee is **never** funny,” Sam argued, turning his brightest and most charming smile onto the teenager as she finally ventured forward to refill their coffee mugs. Winking at her with a grin, he insisted, “Thank you Mia.”

“Welcome,” she whispered with a small smile, before she bolted off again.

“See? Scaring the waitress.”

“All right . . . all right . . . I'll tone it down,” she promised, “I just don't like the picture that Captain Blanchard painted of Angus Maitland last night. It's not a flattering one,” she hissed, slouching backwards against the bench as she poked despondently at the notebook in front of her.

Softening his smile, Sam reached out to lay one hand over hers as he shoved his plate to the side and tugged the list towards himself. “So . . . what part do you want to tackle first?”

“I don't even know,” she groaned, poking miserably at her oatmeal. “Except that she can't tell us anything, I'd want to go talk to Dr Chuang.”

Sam gave her a small smile as she groaned and thunked her head against the table, one hand reaching out to pat her head lightly. At the gesture, the Russian growled, earning a grin from the blond.

“Come on . . . let's go see what we can dig up about Angus Maitland. It's a little town. Someone's sure to know something.”

Just then, a small voice chimed in from the booth behind them. “You know Gus?”

Sam whirled, his hand going reflexively to his gun and knowing that Marina had done the same behind him. The little girl sitting there rocked backwards in surprise at the action, almond eyes wide as she caught sight of the Magnum holstered to Sam's hip. “Sorry . . . I just heard you talking about Gus.”

“Gus?” Sam mimicked, a wayward thought in his mind snickering that he wasn't sure “Gus” was any better than “Angus”.

“Yeah . . . Gus Maitland,” she drawled, looking at them suspiciously. “He's my friend.”

Marina's eyebrows climbed upwards into her hair at that statement, even as she leaned forward on her elbows. “Well, I'm hoping to make friends with Gus too. My name is Mary Peterson . . . this is my brother, Sam. Sorry about the hello . . . soldiers. We don't do well with being startled.”

Sam nodded once in greeting, watching the little girl take in the maternal set of Marina's features . . . her easy posture and immediately relax. Suddenly, he could understand why Marina was typically point for the *Brat'ya Mrachnyy*; she could convince anyone that she was harmless. “So . . . how long have you known Gus?”

“About a year. He's a patient at my mother's office.” There was a distinct blush to her cheeks as she confessed, “He's super cute . . . and I have a total crush. But he said I have to wait until I'm older.”
Sam barely suppressed his snort, ducking his head over the notebook as he watched the Russian grin at the girl. “The heart always knows what it wants . . . our ages don't always match up with that,” she said, her tone a clear indication that she agreed with what she was saying on a deeply personal level.

“So . . . why are you looking for Gus?”

“It's complicated, but we want to make sure that he's doing okay.”

“Why?”

Blue eyes bounced back and forth between the two as Marina chuckled, “You're a curious kid, aren't you?”

“I just don't want you to hurt him. Gus is . . .” here the girl paused, obviously hesitant to explain too much to the two soldiers. “He's fragile and he's special and I won't let you hurt him.”

“Trust me . . . I don't want you to let us hurt him. I promise.” Grinning at the girl, she asked, “What's your name, devochka?”

“Malee . . . Malee Chuang.”

“It's nice to meet you, Malee. Gus is certainly lucky to have such a good friend like you.”

“I'm 13; you don't have to patronize me,” the girl snarked with a frown.

“Who said anything about patronizing you? I was being serious.”

Cocking an eyebrow at Sam in question, the teenager watched as the blond nodded with a small smile. “Mary's pretty good at patronizing people . . . I can assure you she's being totally serious right now.”

Mary's eyes roved over the booth where Malee was seated, noticing that there was only one place setting and it didn't look like anyone was with her . . . or would be joining her. “You eat here by yourself a lot?”

Malee huffed bitterly as she insisted, “I was supposed to meet my father here, but as you can see . . . he bailed.”

Sam's mouth twisted as he replied, “Absent, huh?”

“Yeah . . . he and my mom got separated and I haven't really seen him much since then.”

Shrugging, the teen watched as the two siblings glanced at each other, having a clear conversation before Sam turned back to face her. “You wanna eat with us? We'd love to talk to you about Gus . . . if you want.”

Biting down on her lower lip, she hedged, “My mom says I'm really not supposed to talk to strangers. How do I know you aren't going to kidnap me or bury me alive or something?”

The blond practically hooted with laughter, causing the brunette woman to snicker at the reaction. “There are so many things wrong with that statement, I don't even know where to begin.” Smirking, she teased, “You worry about kidnappings and getting buried alive a lot in Beaver Creek?”

Blushing at the teasing, Malee nevertheless lifted her chin and insisted, “I'm just being thorough.”
“I can appreciate that,” Mary cackled, winking once before gesturing for her brother to round the table and join her on the bench beside her. “Here . . . you can have that whole side to yourself. Hard to kidnap someone from the other side of a table.”

Sam leaned over with a grin and dragged his plate to rest in front of his new seat. Bumping against Marina with his elbow as he tried to eat left handed, he scowled before standing. “Switch me. I am not playing elbows with you all through breakfast.”

Rolling her eyes, Marina joked as she slid out of the booth so that he could slide in first, “Southpaws. You had to be a southpaw.”

“You'd think you'd be used to it. How many southpaws do you know?”

“Including you? Six . . . which is six too many. Can't you all be normal and right-handed like the rest of the world?” Marina joked with a grin and a wink.

“Wait . . . Grimms can be normal?” Sam gasped in mock shock, eyes going wide in reply.

“Shut. Up.” she scolded around a grin and a laugh.

“Who are the Grimms?”

Mary gave her a soft smile as she replied, “My partner and his brothers.”

“You have any pictures?”

Hot chocolate eyes went wide at the question, darting towards Sam as she scrambled for an answer. Finally, she settled for as close to the truth as she could manage. “None that I could show you.”

“Why not?”

“You know Gus.”

“What does that have to do anything?”

“Remember the part where it's complicated? This is why it's complicated.”

“What . . . your boyfriend is a member of his biological family?” Malee asked with a roll of her eyes.

Mary reared back in surprise at the question, even as Sam inquired, “Biological family?”

“Yeah . . . Gus' parents gave him up when he was like two. He shuffled through foster care pretty much until he was 18,” the girl announced, eyes darting between the two as Mary all but lunged for both the notebook and a manila file folder sitting next to Malee’s transferred plate. “That's not in the files,” the woman hissed to her brother, flipping open the folder and skimming through the paperwork tacked there.

Malee watched as Sam shook his head slowly, before speaking up cautiously, “I only found out because he doesn't have any pictures of family in his house . . . he doesn't really have any pictures at all.”

“You've been in his house?” Sam asked suspiciously, eyes narrowing. Blushing, Malee clammed up causing a blond eyebrow to cock upwards as he continued, “Not something I want to know, huh?”

“I was worried about him. I went to check on him,” she protested, still blushing furiously.
“Did anything happen?”

“I wanted it to,” she confessed petulantly as she slumped backwards against the bench and folded her arms over his chest. “Instead he called my mom. She came and got me.”

“Which was smart. Devochka . . . he's in his forties and you're still a teenager. Trust me . . . emotions are a bitch at this age and it makes people do stupid things. He did the right thing though. You may understand that when you're older and then again you may not, but he did.”

Shrugging miserably, she insisted, “I just wanted to make sure he was okay.”

“That's admirable . . . it is. But maybe not appropriate.”

“That's what my mom said.”

“Parents typically know what they're talking about when it comes to this kind of stuff,” Mary insisted with a dry grin. “How did you find out he was in foster care? Did he tell you?”

“No,” she confessed, glancing away.

“Then how did you find out?”

“I looked at his file in my mom's office. He'd told her.”

Mary's lips quirked as she joked, “You want a job?”

“Ma . . .” Sam scolded with a grin.

“What!? She's a freaking ninja . . . and she's 13!” the woman protested, with an outflung hand in the girl's direction.

“Will is going to be pissed if you show up at home with another kid. Didn't you just adopt Daryl?”

“Vati adopted Daryl . . . I just helped.”

“She's got a mom who clearly cares about her . . . let's pretend to let her have a normal life. At least for another seven years . . . then we'll talk about recruiting her.”

“Nine years . . . she needs a college degree first,” Mary reminded him with a grin, watching the girl watch them in confusion. “Don't worry about it Malee . . . just do me a favor?”

“What?”

“Become a total badass, okay? Go to college, study a language, be amazing. And in nine years . . . I'll come looking for you about that job, okay?”

Seeing the sincerity in her eyes, Malee couldn't stop the small smile that creased her lips. “Okay.”

“Awesome.” Digging in her pocket, she pulled out a small white card. Blank except for a phone number and a twelve digit alpha-numeric code, Mary offered it to the teenager with a grin. “Keep this with you . . . even if you don't use it in nine years, it could still come in handy before then.”

Nodding, Malee reached out and took the card in two fingers, before tucking it into her pocket. It was about then that a young man entered the diner, shoulders stooped and hands deep in his pockets as he shuffled inside. Seeing as the door was behind Mary and Sam, Malee saw him first and bounded to her feet on the seat, “Gus!”
Both Mary and Sam rotated to look, just as the man turned his head to find the voice calling for him. Mary's eyes went wide as his features came into view, one hand reaching up to grip Sam's shirt as she hissed, “Bozhe moi.”

Sam's hand came up to rest over hers, promising in the same tone, “I know . . . believe me, I know.”

Malee frowned as she noticed how pale Mary had gone, before rolling her eyes and jumping from the bench seat. Dashing to Gus, she threw her arms around his waist and hugged him tightly. A real smile, a small one but still real, curved his lips upwards, causing Malee to cheer inside her own head. Getting Gus to give a real smile, and not just one of the ones he used to pretend he was okay, was her goal in life. She knew she was being ridiculous; Gus was in his forties and therefore almost 30 years older than her, but she couldn't help wanting to make sure that he was happy. “Hey, Malee,” he greeted her, patting the top of her head fondly.

“You here by yourself?” she asked cheerfully, glancing backwards towards where Mary and Sam were still sitting in the chair.

“Yeah . . . guy's gotta eat right?” he agreed with a wink and a small smile.

“Right!” she agreed, remembering the time she'd brought him a picnic lunch while he'd been working at a construction site a little under a year ago. That had been right after Rudy died; a year later, she could say that she'd been a little obsessive, but she'd been faced with her first brush with death. She didn't need her mother to psychoanalyze her to know that she had latched on to Gus because she'd sensed a wounded soul much like her own. Grabbing his hand, she yanked backwards. “Come on . . . come sit with us.”

“Us?” he asked curiously, even as he allowed her to pull him along.

“Yes . . .” she insisted, pushing him onto her bench seat. Unable to do anything else, he shifted all the way over as she pushed her way onto the seat beside him. “Gus . . . this is Sam and Mary Peterson. Guys, I'd like you to meet my friend, Gus Maitland.”

He nodded at them, acknowledging them in his quiet way, before turning to look at Malee. “You know I'm going to end up elbowing you the whole time with you seated on my left.”

At the statement, Mary choked slightly, fingers curling into claws where they were still gripping Sam's sleeve. “Left handed?” she asked, clearly in shock.

Nodding once, he cocked an eyebrow at her. “Yeah . . . why?”

“Sam's left handed,” Malee announced, before continuing, “So are the Grimms.”

Unbeknownst to Gus, he asked the same question she had nearly twenty minutes before. “Who are the Grimms?”

Whatever her answer was going to be was cut off when Sam's phone lit up, vibrating its way across the table with a text message. Gus' eyes snapped wide as he stared at the picture of Sam Peterson, with a dark haired young woman and a blond man with his face. Feeling his anxiety levels crawl up the back of his throat, he shoved himself into the corner of the bench seat and demanded, “Who the fuck are you?”

Chapter End Notes
Translations:

(R) Brat'ya Mrachnyy - Brothers Grimm (code name of the Army Spec Ops tactical squad of which Will, Marina, Jason, Clint and Aaron are members of)
(R) devochka - girlie
(R) Bozhe moi - Oh my God.
(R)
Chapter Notes

Wow . . . I am on a roll! Yay!

I hope you all are continuing to enjoy this. And please, even if it's just a "Nice" or "Cool" or any single word, comments make my world go round. Please let me know what you think.

No translations this time, so enjoy this one!
Chapter 179: Gus

This was NOT how Marina had envisioned this meeting going.

Sam fumbled for his phone, shutting it up in a second, but the damage was already done. The selfie of Sam with Marta and Aaron, taken during their brief stop at customs on the way home from Toronto all those months ago, was one of her boy's favorites . . . and one of her own. It was the first time Sam had really known that just because his parents were assholes, didn't mean that he was completely without family. His personal cell phone was full of pictures that he'd taken of the family
or that the family had taken with him.

A fact that had come back to bite them in the ass, but at this point there was no help for it. “So much for no direct interaction or interference,” she muttered, even as she acknowledged that she never would have been able to stay away from Gus Maitland after what Malee had told them about his anchorless childhood.

Either way, it was clear from Gus' reaction to Aaron's face that this was going to be an uncomfortable conversation . . . no matter how it went down. Finally, Marina took a deep breath and forced herself to let go of her boy's sleeve. Sam's hand rubbed lightly at the spot where her fingernails had gouged him, before he flagged down their waitress for more coffee; both spies were fairly certain that they were going to need it.

Once the teenager had gone again, a soft blush on her face at what Marta called Sam's WOW-smile, Marina folded her hands in front of herself and greeted him as calmly as she could manage, “Hello Gus.”

“Who. The fuck. Are you?” he repeated, eyes wide as he watched her. Only Malee's seat on the edge of the bench prevented him from bolting for the door.

Glancing at Malee, she grimaced, before replying honestly. “My name is Marina Ivanovna Petrovka. My partner . . . is your half-brother.”

“I thought your name was Mary Peterson?” Malee asked carefully, reaching out to squeeze Gus' hand where it lay trembling on the table.

“Mary is an alias . . .” she confessed, running one hand back through her hair, before continuing, “. . . we didn't intend to get involved . . . we just wanted to check in . . . to make sure that you were okay.”

“What?”

Leaning forward on her elbows, Marina watched him for a long moment. It broke her heart to see him flinching away from her, as though she was going to hurt him. But underneath the fear and the trembling . . . her heart skipped into triple-time as she considered how much Gus looked like her lover. There were subtle differences. However where the mothers' DNA had created clear differences in the base genome in the other Prototypes, Gus could have been one of the actual Cahills instead of a Prototype. Confronted with her lover's veritable likeness, she suddenly longed for her Mishka more fervently than she had since she'd left home on this road trip.

He had obviously inherited Hansel's agelessness, as he looked to be about the same age as the rest of the Grimms; which was to say that he didn't look a day over 30, if that. Gus' eyes weren't the same quick changing ones she looked into every morning when she woke, but nevertheless they were shifting between variations of blue and green. He was thinner than the Colonel, though not by much, and if Marina had to guess she would say that he suffered from the same lack of consistent appetite that Marina had always attributed to a result of the trauma her Colonel had suffered as a child. There was keen intelligence in those eyes, the cogs behind them making connections and assumptions based on what she had – and hadn't – said about her partner.

But where Will kept his emotions close to the vest, Gus' own were running rampant across his features. Marina had always known how Will was feeling, and she had had more than a few things to say when past COs had used the Colonel's compassion and well-hidden kindness to manipulate him into what they wanted done. She was a large part of that stoicism; it was a lot easier to lock the pain away now when there was a guarantee of a sympathetic ear later. Her love and her submissive
nature had always kept Will on a somewhat even keel, even the Colonel admitted to that. Gus had had no one; his parents had abandoned him as a child and his childhood relationships had apparently never morphed into something concrete. There was no record of a romantic connection in the files; Malee had pretty much confirmed that when she'd confessed to her crush and Gus' admonition that she would have to wait.

This was going to be hell. And some part of her heart twisted at using the same strategies she always employed on Will. But if they were as alike as their physical appearances indicated, handling Gus the same way she would handle Will would be the most beneficial for everyone.

Running her hands back through her hair, she decided to tell him the truth. “We didn't even know you existed until about four weeks ago . . . we didn't know what kind of life you had. If you were happy. We just wanted to know . . . to see for ourselves that you were okay.”

“So where is he . . . my so-called brother?”

“He's at home . . . we weren't sure how you'd react to brothers that look like you.”

“Brothers?”

“There are five Grimms,” Marina replied, smiling at him sadly. “William Michael . . . Brian Joshua . . . Jason Leonard . . . Aaron Kenneth . . . and Clinton Francis.” Gesturing to Sam's phone, she replied, “The one in the picture was Aaron and Aaron's girlfriend Marta.”

“Why does he look like me?”

Blinking at the question, she muttered fondly, “You are so much like my Misha . . . always have to know the answers to the hardest questions first.” Chuckling mirthlessly, she continued, “Your father's name is Hansel Kuhn . . .” There was a pause as she considered how best to explain, before sighing and quoting dryly, “. . . the force is strong in that one.”

“Marina,” Sam scolded, even as he rolled his eyes at the quote.

“It's true. All of Hansel's boys take after him . . . at least in some way or another.”

When Gus' only response was “Why?”, Marina finally started to understand why toddlers could so frustrate their parents with the constant repetition of that question. Taking a deep breath, she glanced at Sam curiously. Sam shrugged slightly, seeming to understand what she was asking without speaking. Arching upwards to retrieve his wallet, Sam slid out of the booth with a small smile. “I'll go pay the bill and get them to pack up something for all of us to go. We should probably have the rest of this conversation somewhere a little more private.”

Malee bit down on her lip, twisting slightly to look at her friend. “Gus . . . you okay?”

There was a set look to his features, but he still managed to send a small smile her way. Looping one arm around her shoulders, he squeezed her lightly as he nodded. “You should probably head on home, Malee. Your mom is gonna be worried about you soon.”

“I wanna go with you,” she protested with a pout, turning a pair of narrowed suspicious eyes onto the other woman seated across the table.

“I know . . . but I think this is something that I need to do by myself.”

“Are you sure?”
“Yeah.” Glancing at Marina briefly, he twisted to look at her fully. “How about this? I'm working at the Old Smithson place this week, trying to finish up their renovations. Swing by tomorrow around lunch with a picnic and I'll tell you as much as I can.”

“Promise?”

“Promise. Go on . . . I'll see you tomorrow.”

“Kay,” she sighed with a frown, leaning over to hug him tightly, before glaring at Marina once more as she slid out of the booth. “Don't hurt him.”

“I'll try not to,” was the best the Russian could do, a sad smile on her face at the knowledge that this wasn't what Malee had wanted to hear.

Huffing in disappointment, Malee grabbed her backpack from the ground beside the bench and dashed towards the door. Before long, the two could see her peddling away down the street. “She's a good kid,” the woman insisted, eyes curious as they turned to look at Gus.

“Yeah . . . stubborn as hell though,” he agreed with a small chuckle.

“Good for her. Stubborn isn't a bad thing. Maybe a little trying when she's stubborn about something that her mother doesn't want her to be, but even still. There isn't anyone in this world that's going to be able to force her into something she doesn't want.”

Sam appeared at table then, holding a plastic bag of takeout containers as well as a thermos of hot coffee. “We ready to go?”

“I guess that depends on where it is we're going?”

“Probably someplace neutral,” the blond suggested, glancing between the two with a frown. “Any suggestions, Gus?”

Biting nervously on his lower lip, the older man announced, “You could come to my place? It's private enough, I guess. I live alone and for the most part, my neighbors tend to mind their own business.”

Cocking an eyebrow, she asked, “You sure?”

“It's as private as it's going to get.”

“All right then we're in the Charger. Did you drive or do you need a ride?”

“I walked. A ride would be great.”

“All right then. I'll take the backseat . . .” she grumbled, earning a grin and a laugh from Sam as he teased, “Backseat's the best place for shorties.”

“Watch it, Sammy. Short or not, I can still wipe the floor with your face.”

“You love this face,” he scoffed, handing the packages to the Russian as he dug in his pocket for the keys.

Rolling her eyes, the S.H.I.E.L.D. handler kicked lightly at his shin as he opened the driver's side door for her, before slipping easily into the backseat. Settling in behind him, she waited for him to sit before leaning forward and flicking fondly at his earlobe. “Ha!”
“Ouch!” he grunted, reaching up to smack her fingers away. “Evil!”

She grinned at him, before settling back against the seat again. Gus' eyes were wide as he watched the two joke with each other, before he asked, “You're not siblings . . . are you?”

Sam's blue eyes were gleaming with suppressed mirth as he glanced over at him, shifting absently as he replied, “No. Marina's pretty much my mom . . . my parents aren't exactly the most nurturing of people. Ma snapped me up in a hot second.” Rolling his eyes, he continued, “Not the first and probably won't be the last.”

Marina chuckled at the statement, agreeing lazily, “I have a few maternal instincts, so I just keep adopting people and taking them home with me.”

“A few!?” was the incredulous tease, earning another flick to the ear in retaliation. “OW! Ma!”

“Be nice to your elders, Sammy-honey,” she mocked, giggling as she lifted her calves out of the way of his reaching hand. The backs of her knees were very ticklish; a fact that Sam knew because Clint had shared that little secret in week one. “Watch the road.”

“This is not over,” he insisted with a laugh, pulling up to a red light. Glancing at Gus, he noticed the man watching them with something akin to amazement. Cocking an eyebrow, he decided not to say anything and prompted lightly, “Gonna need some directions, Gus. We've only been in town for about 12 hours, and most of that was spent sleeping at our hotel.”

“Oh yeah. Take the next left and my house is about two miles down the road.”

“You walked here from that far?”

“My therapist says the exercise is good for me. Gives me something to focus on instead of the shit that's in my head.”

Marina hummed, tilting her head slightly as she watched his ears turned red as he blushed. Will didn't typically blush but Clint did and Aaron's ears always went red when he was embarrassed. Smiling fondly, she couldn't help the way her heart made room for him to take up residence. Even as she knew that it probably wasn't smart to say anything, she couldn't stop the confession that made its way into the air then. “You remind me so much of my boys.”

Gus didn't seem to notice that part, latching on to the last bit. “Your boys? You and my brother have kids?”

Marina flinched at the reminder that she was barren; she and Will had tried everything to have a child but so far no luck. She'd hoped that because her assignment with Stark had prevented her from undergoing the “graduation ceremony” she would be exempt from the childlessness that haunted her three sisters. But, even if all of her equipment still worked, it seemed as though she would never look into the face of her partner's child and see them both in the baby's features. Tossing her head in an attempt to shake the tears away, her reply was perhaps more brusque than necessary as she insisted, “No . . . we do not.”

This time she didn't dodge the hand Sam reached back to squeeze her knee fondly, one hand coming up to lay over the top of it. “Misha's brothers are my boys. I helped him raise them.”

“Raise them? Where were their parents?”

“They have no mother. And Hansel didn't even know he had children until Misha was 29. By that point, Clint – the youngest – was already 19.” Lifting her chin defiantly, she protested in the same
way she always had when the Ross had barked at her for her consideration and maternal care of the four younger Cahills. “Someone had to raise them . . . and I loved them fiercely. It was my greatest honor to raise those boys into the men they are today. And I refuse to feel sorry for that.”

Gus stared at her in awe, meeting the challenge in the Russian’s eyes for all of a second before Marina ripped her eyes away and towards the scenery outside the tiny window to her left. There was a long moment of awkward silence, before the older man announced, “I'll bet they're amazing.”

Marina’s lips curved upwards as she considered that, nodding once as she agreed, “They are. They're my whole world.”

“My worthless carcass excluded, of course,” Sam chimed in, trying to lighten the mood and grinning as he watched Marina grin in the rearview mirror.

“Of course,” she mocked, leaning forward to wrap her arms around the seat and his shoulders, pressing a warm kiss to his cheek. “Love you, Sammy.”

Lifting his hand to wrap around her wrist, he squeezed lightly as he responded fondly, “Love you too, Ma.”

“Tell me about them?”

Turning to look at him, hot chocolate eyes searched his face, seeing the sincerity and the curiosity in his features before she smiled softly. “What do you want to know?”

“Anything you want to tell me. Everything you can tell me.”

“Oh . . . this could take awhile. Misha's going to be 40 in three weeks . . . which means Clint will be 30 just before Christmas. That's a lot of stories to tell.”

Shrugging lightly, he confessed, “It's not like I don't have the time.”

The Russian hummed as she considered that, before nodding in agreement. “All right. There will be some things I can't tell you, but I'll tell you what I can.”

“Why not?”

“We're soldiers with the Army . . . assigned with Special Operations. A lot of the things we've done are still classified, and even more of them . . . we'll never tell anyone.”
Wow!!! 10 reviews for the last chapter!! You guys made my day!!! Thank you all so much!! I can't wait to hear what you think of this chapter next! Please keep up the reviews. I can't tell you how much they mean to me.

Still no translations.

So there's a bit in here that's briefly referred to in "This Trick May Chance to Scathe You." Trust me the Tales are not over. :D

Enjoy everyone!
Chapter 180: Grimms Brothers Tales

Almost as soon as they were in the door, Gus asked, “How did you meet my brother?”

Rolling her eyes, she joked, “Remember what I said about needing to know the hardest answers first? Good grief . . . heavy hitting much?”

Stepping into the living room, she took up residence in the sole armchair. Leaning forward, she laid the food out on the shabby coffee table, before curling up in the chair with her feet tucked beneath her. Not one to miss an opportunity, Sam practically leaped at the space in front of her chair, putting
his back to it and letting Marina's fingers find their way into his hair as they always did. Gus frowned as he took his own seat on the couch, head cocked in question as he asked, “Why would that be a hard answer to give?”

“How I met Misha is classified. Ergo, I can't tell you,” she insisted, blushing slightly. The less people who knew about the Cahill Project the better. Even if Gus was technically a product of the project, he’d at least been spared the ugly details of the program. Not to mention, telling your lover's half-brother that you'd held that same brother as an infant was probably going to cause an aneurysm.

“So what can you tell me about your relationship with my brother?”

It was obvious from the curiosity in Sam's eyes, that Gus was not the only one interested in her answer. At that knowledge, she resolved to be as truthful as she could be without diving too deeply into the specifics. Frowning as she considered the question she finally decided on a heavily altered version of the truth. “I met the man I know now when he was only 12 years old.”

Those blue eyes went wide in shock, the surprised expression mirrored in Gus' own features. Biting on her lower lip, she paused before continuing, “He had been abused and mistreated . . . he was traumatized, cold, calculating and bitterly cynical. But for some unfathomable reason, he knew that he could trust me . . . that I wouldn't let anything happen to him or his brothers.”

“How did he know that?”

There was a small, infinitely sad smile on her face as she confessed, “I was the one who rescued him and his brothers from hell.” Seeing Sam blink in muted shock, she laughed, “Will is not the one robbing the cradle in this relationship, Sammy-honey. Not by a long shot.”

Gus' eyes took her in from top to bottom, intense curiosity in “How much older are you than him?”

Her lips twisted as she replied, “A lot. You can count the difference in decades.”

The blond chuckled as he laughed, “Will wasn't kidding, was he? When he told you that you were the sexiest 65 year old he knew?”

“No. I was 25 years old when Will was born.” Blushing furiously at the incredulous look on Gus' face, she shrugged. “This was not the life I had planned, and I can promise that he was not the partner I thought I would love for the rest of my life. But fate works in mysterious ways and I love Mishka more than anything else in this world. I was born for him . . . and him for me. I wouldn't change a single instant of our lives together.”

“You don't look 65,” was the half-hearted protest from Gus.

Scrubbing at the back of her neck, she lied sheepishly, “I have amazing genes.”

Feeling her son's soundless snort, she reached out to pinch the very top of his ear lightly. “You hush.”

“So . . . how did you and my brother get together?”

There was a long pause, and for a good bit of time Sam was pretty sure that Marina wasn't going to answer the question. Finally, she sighed heavily. “I want your word you don't repeat this to anyone. Not even his younger brothers know, and we would prefer to keep it that way. Both of you . . . this is important.”

The blond agent nodded firmly in agreement, a stern set to his lips as he wondered why she was
pushing for secrecy. The nine years the Colonel had spent pining after Marina was not a secret to the family. Every single one of his brothers and even Hansel Kuhn himself had managed to tease the eldest Grimm in Sam's hearing at least once since he'd come to live with them. The popular theory was that Will Grimm had the patience of a saint and the tenacity of a Scottish terrier. The way Marina was talking, however, implied that there was more to the story than Will or Marina had previously acknowledged.

The Russian waited until Gus had agreed quietly, “Who would I tell that would actually give a damn?”

A sly smirk curved one corner of her lips as she snarked, “You might be surprised.”

Cocking an eyebrow, he nodded once in agreement, “All right then. I promise.”

Taking a deep breath, Marina considered how she wanted to tell the story before beginning. “The accepted theory of our relationship was that Misha fell in love with me at 17 and then waited patiently for me to come to him until he was 26. At which point, I miraculously realized I loved him and we became a couple. And officially, that's true.”

“Officially?”

Humming an affirmative, the woman watched her fingers pet through blond strands as she crafted the story as much as she could without saying too much. “After I took the boys away, we ran away to the circus.”

“What!?” Gus blurted in surprise.

“Yeah . . . the place I took them from . . . they were pretty desperate to get them back. But that place was destroying them . . . Misha had horrible nightmares and ugly scars. And he wasn't the only one.” Running a hand back through her hair, she justified her actions briskly, “It's hard to find someone if they don't stay still long enough to be found. Carter's Circus was a perfect hiding place; we were on the road nine months out of the year and the other three the boys were in school in towns where no one would have ever thought to look for them.

“I knew that Will thought he loved me; I knew as soon as the feelings manifested. But he was 17 and I was the only woman he'd known consistently since he was still a child. He'd never dated any of the girls in his classes like Jason; he never dallied with any of the other performers' daughters like Brian; his brothers and me were the most important and only people in his life. So I did what I thought was the best thing for him; I let him down . . . very gently.”

“You refused Will?” the blond stammered, eyes wide at the very thought that the couple he knew might not have ever been a couple at all.

“Shocker of shockers, but yes. He had been my partner in raising his brothers since he was 12 . . . he'd never really been a child, not since he was four years old. And I cared for him very deeply; it was hard not to. He was always so serious, so responsible. I could see myself loving him, and to be truthful I was already more than halfway there by the time he enlisted at 18. But I didn't want him to settle when there was a possibility that there was something more out there for him.”

Twisting to cuddle up against her legs, Sam asked, “But you and Dad got together anyway.”

Marina smirked at the question, teasing, “You know that's the first time you've ever called him 'Dad’?”

“What?”
“I’ve been ‘Ma’ for three weeks, but he’s always been ‘Will’. You just called him ‘Dad’.”

Face flaming, Sam sputtered for a moment before protesting, “He's a better dad than mine's ever been. Do you think he'll care?”

“No . . . actually, I think he’ll be very honored,” she promised, leaning forward to brush a warm kiss to the crown of his head.

Gus smiled softly to see the moment between the two, before his curiosity once again overwhelmed him and he asked, “So what's the secret?”

“He’ll never tell his brothers, but one of the reasons he joined the Army was to get some space. So that he could potentially find that ‘something more out there for him’. Only he never found it . . . he didn't even really go looking for it. And by the time he came home on leave when he was 20, I was pretty well head over heels for him.” Blushing, she tucked a curl back behind her ear as she confessed, “He always wrote two letters . . . one for his brothers and one just for me. His letters to his brothers were funny, lighthearted . . . they didn't talk about the hard parts of being a soldier. They didn't talk about the blood and the death and the tears and the pain. They talked about the hilarious prank his sergeant played on him when he was promoted from lieutenant to captain. They talked about the football game that his unit played one day, shirts versus skins . . . and how he had a hell of a time convincing them all he needed to be a shirt.”

Blinking in an effort to hold back tears, she continued, “His letters to me were honest and raw. He told me about the fact that that sergeant lost a leg to an IED two weeks after playing that prank and about the hole he felt where that sergeant should have been. He told me about the guerrilla attack that took out two of the guys from that unit a month after that football game. He told me about the bullets he’d taken, and the wounds he’d suffered. I was the only person he felt he could tell . . . the only person he could count on to actually listen and to care.”

“So what happened?”

“He got sent home on medical leave just before he turned twenty-one . . . his squad had been in a fight in Syria. Half of them didn't make it and the rest were in pretty bad shape. He was totally gutted . . . he wasn't handling it well . . . and I could see how close he was to falling apart.” Scratching at the back of her neck, she hunched in on herself as she confessed, “I've been there . . . it's a dark, miserable and lonely place. In that moment, it didn't matter that I thought he needed someone his own age. It didn't matter that I thought I wasn't good enough for him . . . that my hands were too bloody to ever be anything to him. What mattered was that he needed someone to be there, to hold onto him when he shook himself apart, to remind him that there was beauty in this world . . . and I wanted to be that someone.

“I put the two younger boys to bed that night a little earlier than usual. Brian had a new girlfriend so he was off doing whatever it was that they did together. Jason was at a friend's house that night, working on a group project for school; he'd asked if he could just spend the night, since they would be in town and camp was about five miles outside the city limits. It worked out for everybody in the long run. Misha wasn't quite legal yet but he'd already discovered the numbing properties of a good whiskey; hazards of the job I guess. I found him sitting outside our railcar, sipping on a glass and just watching the whirlwind that was the camp after a show.”

Here she paused, both in the telling and in her caress of fingers through the blond's hair. Drawing his legs up to his chest, Sam leaned back to lay his head against her knees, watching her struggle against whatever emotions she was feeling. “That was the first night we ever made love; he was a 20 year old virgin who needed to lose himself in someone and I was a 45 year old former spy with more than
a few unwanted partners littering my job history. After, we talked and we both agreed that no matter what . . . his younger brothers always had to come first. That despite how he felt about me, and despite how I had realized I felt about him, we couldn't be together until they didn't need me anymore. But from that point on, whenever he needed a touchstone, I was there. And I was everything he needed me to be.” Snorting bitterly, she sighed, “Needless to say, it was a long six years.”

Rolling her eyes, she laughed sadly, “Then Clint turned 16 and Barney did what he did. Misha and I both agreed to let Clint lie about his age to enlist so that he didn't run away from home and do it himself. Kenny voluntarily admitted himself to Nevada’s Irwin State Home, a decision I didn't approve of but that he was adamant about doing. At that point, they didn't need me anymore. That same week, I turned myself in to the Pentagon, with Misha at my side, as a defected Russian spy. A month later I had been debriefed and I was given my commission as a Major in the United States Army. I was assigned to the Brat’ya Mrachnyy as the XO to one Lt. Colonel William Michael Grimm. Which, as everyone knows, is the beginning of our story.”

Gus' tone was awed as he breathed, “You gave up six years with him so that you could take care of his brothers while he was gone?”

“He trusted me to take care of them. And I loved him too much to do anything less.”

“Do you regret it?”

She smirked, eyes warm as she replied, “No. Misha and I knew where our priorities laid. But there is a reason we've never told anyone. His brothers would be horrified and devastated and furious that we had decided they were more important than us. So . . . we let them believe what they want to believe, and we know the truth that no one else does.”

Sam rested his chin on her knee as he promised, “I'm sorry, Ma.”

“I'm not . . . neither Misha nor I would change a single second of our lives together. We have no regrets. If we'd been selfish, there's nothing to say that we'd have any regrets either, but at least this was . . . we're sure we don't.”

“How long have you two been together?”

“If you include that first time, it's been about eighteen years. Officially, it's only been twelve.” Seeing the concern and the sadness in both of their eyes, Marina rolled her eyes as she chirped, “Do you want to hear about the time Misha met teenage aliens?”

“WHAT!?” Sam and Gus both blurted together, eyes wide at the question.

“Yeah . . . he and his squad were stationed in Roswell for about six months. The Circus was doing a stint there for a couple months, so he got to spend some time with us while he was on active duty. The boys were ecstatic.”

“I'll bet. Aaron worships him.”

“That hasn't changed much; both Clint and Kenny thought he hung the moon when they were kids. The sight of Misha in full uniform was pretty striking and I can't tell you how many times I used to find them playing soldier, taking turns to be 'Lt. Colonel Will Grimm.’” Rolling her eyes, she huffed. “It was adorable.”

“Okay, you said something about aliens?”
“Yes. So there were these four kids and they were seniors at Roswell High. The government had apparently decided that they were aliens, and they needed to be executed for the sake of national security.”

“You're kidding.”

“Nope. Misha's team was assigned to do it during their high school graduation. Stage a power outage and then take them out... but not a single of them could find it in themselves to do it. They were kids... eighteen years old. So, Misha went against orders. He tricked his superiors into thinking that the kids escaped and he helped them literally disappear out from under their noses.”

“But were they aliens?”

Here Marina's eyes went wide as she nodded. “Yes. They were.”

“What!?"

“Apparently, three of them were half-human and half-Antarian – Max, Isabel and Michael. Max married Liz, who was human but had alien powers. They left town with two other humans. Needless to say, Misha insists to this day that it was the strangest assignment he's ever had.”

“Does he regret it?”

“No. They were good kids. Liz was valedictorian. They all had straight-A averages. Isabel had graduated early and had married a human. The most trouble they'd ever gotten into was when Max and Liz held up a convenience store because there was an honest to god spaceship in the basement... which I'm told was not a joke. There was a spaceship in the basement.”

“Are you telling me there are aliens among us?” Sam asked, eyes wide in appalled daze.

Giggling, she teased, “Never thought you'd get the opportunity to say that did you?”

“Holy shit,” he laughed, shaking his head at the answer. “That's crazy.”

“Agreed... but no less true.”
Wow!!! 15 reviews!! And I promise, we will see Will's reaction to Sam calling him "Dad" and soon. I already have plans.

Also, I am opening commissions so that I can raise some funds to go to Chicago to see Jeremy Renner in August. I want him to sign a mock-up cover of the UALP, and as a single parent of a four year old, money is typically tight. Let me know if you would be interested! Thank you!

Translations at the end as always!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
Marina couldn't stop giggling.

The looks on the faces of the two men in front of her was simply too amusing not to completely give into it. “You both look ridiculous,” she chortled, hugging herself around the waist as she collapsed into another fit.

Throwing up her hands in front of her face, she ducked out of the way of the carrot that Gus threw at her. Sam's grin was wry as he rolled his eyes, protesting, “It's a whole new world, Ma. I mean, aliens . . . holy shit.”

Pushing himself to his feet, he stretched upwards over his head. Turning to look at Gus, he asked sheepishly, “Could I borrow a mug? I would kill for some coffee.”

Blinking at the question, Gus nodded as he pushed himself up as well and moved into his tiny kitchen. Reaching up into one of the cabinets, he pulled down a mug and offered it to the younger man with a sheepish smile. “Sorry, man. I totally didn't even realize that we didn't have anything to actually drink it with.”

Waving the apology away, Sam grabbed up the thermos from the table and poured himself a mug. “No big . . . thanks for letting us crash land into your house.”

Rubbing shyly at the back of his neck, Gus looked around at the clapboard walls and sighed. “It's nice having people here . . . I haven't had anyone over to the house since I left the station house.”

Propping up her chin on her palm, Marina hummed lightly as she asked, “Why did you leave the station house?”

The look in those eyes was like a deer in headlights and for a moment, the Russian regretted asking the question in the first place. Glancing at Sam, she could read the same concern for the former firefighter in the depths of eery blue eyes. There was an awkward second, before Sam plopped back down onto the carpet in front of her armchair and demanded, “So what other batshit things have you done, Ma?”

The question jolted Gus out of whatever fugue state he'd been lost in, and he chuckled in response to the way the woman roared with laughter. Getting down two more mugs, as well as digging out some plates and silverware, he came back into the living room in time to hear Marina joke, “Oh . . . there's a lot more where the aliens came from.” Accepting a full mug from him, she grinned up at the Cahill prototype brightly, “Thank you, Gus.”

“Welcome,” he stammered around a blush, hands fumbling over themselves as he tilted the contents of the thermos into his own mug.

Turning her attention back onto her adoptive son, she cocked an eyebrow as she taunted, “Seriously though. Are you or are you not still healing from a zombie bite? After that, aliens can't be that hard to believe, right?”

Gus' hand flew upwards as he demanded, “Wait . . . back up. Zombies!?”

Leaning forward to set his mug on the coffee table, Sam pushed himself to his feet again. Turning his back, he hauled off his t-shirt and laid bare the gruesome wound in the back of his left arm for Gus to see. “I lived through the Zombie Apocalypse and got an ugly scar to prove it,” Sam deadpanned, before pulling his shirt on once again and settling back against Marina's chair again. “It was a bitch, Gus . . . be happy you missed it.”

“So . . . did the zombie movies get anything right?”
Rolling her eyes, Marina huffed, “No. No they did not.”

Leaning back against the couch back, Gus asked calmly, “So what about my other brothers? Do you have any stories about any of them?”

“I have A LOT of stories, Gus . . . trust me, I have more blackmail on the Brothers Grimm than any of them want to acknowledge,” Marina laughed with a playful wink. “Let's see . . . I could tell you about the first time Clint picked up a bow.”

“A bow? Like a bow and arrows?”

“Like I said, the boys grew up in the circus. Clint was twelve years old that first time. Trickshot had seen him throwing knives with me, practicing his aim, and wanted to teach him to shoot.” Rolling her eyes even as she smirked fondly, “Moy dorogoy was desperate to learn. He followed me around for a week, begging and pleading and promising and wheedling.”

“Clint's her favorite. Dad says she's never told him no,” Sam joked, earning a gentle shove from the woman.

“That's not entirely true, but also not the point. Clint has always known how to get me to do what he wanted me to do. So, after a week of constant pleading, I agreed that he could learn how to shoot. Trickshot gave him an old secondhand bow and had him take his first shots that day.” Snorting lightly, she confessed, “Three shots and he'd hit the bull's eye. From that point on, he's never missed. According to both the Army and the President himself, Clint is the World's Greatest Marksman.”

“How do they figure?” was Sam's curious question, eyebrows fret at the statement.

“Every year, the President hosts a shooting contest with the best marksmen in all of the Armed Forces. Every year for the last 15 years, Clint has taken the top score.”

“Surely he doesn't use a bow during the contest . . . right?”

“No. Clint's not really a fan of guns, but he's just as proficient with them as he is with his bow. Vati has been working with him on his effectiveness with short range weapons, but because of his eyesight, Clint is always going to be more accurate at long range. Not that he's bad with a shotgun, he's just not as good as he is with his bow or his rifle.”

“He took the bow to Georgia,” Sam announced with a frown. “Didn't he?”

“Yes, he did. S.H.I.E.L.D. knows his proclivities lay with his bow, so they're willing to indulge the quirk. As long as the objective is met, they don't really care how it's met.”

Gus shook his head as he considered that, chuckling, “I'm decent with a handgun, but a bow would be a new one on me.”

“Never let it be said that my dorogoy isn't special,” Marina laughed with a smirk and a roll of her eyes. “Then of course, there's Kenny – he goes by Aaron now – who is two years older than Clint. The two of them have been as thick as thieves since Clint was born.” Smiling softly, she murmured warmly, “There's a lot I could tell you about Kenny. He was always my sunshine, my solnyshko; such a happy boy, grinning and joyful and just glad to be close to the family. Will and I were always very protective . . . not that he probably needed it, but we didn't want anyone or anything to hurt him.”

“There sounds like there's a story there?” Gus prodded, cocking his head slightly as he watched Marina’s eyes drift towards the window.
“Kenny was eight, I think, so Misha must have been about 16.” Taking a deep breath, she visibly wrestled with the words, before confessing mildly, “Kenny wasn't on par with his brothers, intellectually. He wasn't stupid . . . his intelligence just laid outside of himself whereas the rest of the boys' intelligence is very cerebral. Kenny could do all kinds of things with his hands; I remember when he was six, he heard me complaining about the lack of cabinet space in our little kitchen, so he built me a cabinet. It was a beautiful piece of work, with hand-etched flowers in the wood and working hinges. I still have it . . it's in the bedroom I share with Misha.”

“So what happened?”

“There was this one carnie . . . his name was Derek . . . he was an ass.” Snorting softly, she sighed as she settled back in her chair again. “I don't remember what happened, but Misha found him picking on Kenny. Pushing him around . . . told him he was a worthless piece of shit and that he was too stupid to realize that we would be better off if he killed himself.”

Sam sucked in air, wincing sharply as he imagined his adoptive dad's reaction to that. “What did Will do?”

“Will saw red . . . the guy wasn't eating solid food for about a year after that. Misha was an angry teenager . . . he struggled with nightmares, sleeplessness, lack of appetite. He'd compartmentalized most of the abuse, but the emotions . . . they reared their ugly heads every once in awhile and when that happened, all hell broke loose.”

“Damn,” the blond breathed, eyes wide as he considered that thought.

“Yeah . . . something like that. Misha has always been protective, but Kenny was special to him . . . he looked after Kenny much closer than he did with any of the other boys.”

“So how did Kenny become Aaron?” Gus asked with a frown, remembering that she'd mentioned Kenny was now answering to the other name.

“Classified. That's probably one story, Gus, I will never be able to tell you.”

“Has to do with how he met Aunt Marty, doesn't it?”

“Yes . . . and how his intelligence quotient spiked. There's a lot of people who would kill for that intel, and there's a lot of people who would bury anyone who knew about that intel in the deepest, darkest pit they could find. It's not that you both don't deserve to know . . . it's that I'm trying to protect you by making sure that you don't know.”

“So what about Jason? He's an engineer, right?”

“An engineer and mechanic and hacker and technical specialist and communications officer. Jason is a maverick, which isn't really a bad thing regardless of what the Army would have you believe.” Humming she mused absently, “He's going to kill me for this one.”

“What one? What happened?”

“Right after we escaped, Jason became obsessed with toasters.”

“Toasters?” Gus blurted, eyes flashing wide at the statement.

“He was desperate to know how they worked. He'd sit in the kitchen for hours . . . making toast and trying to figure out how the coils heated up and how the mechanism activated, and what triggered the discharge after the toast was done.” Rubbing two fingers over her forehead, she groaned, “He must
have taken apart four of them before he finally came bursting into my room one night. It was three o'clock in the morning, and he's bouncing on my bed and shaking my shoulders and rambling something to do with toasters. I still don't know what he was saying. I just kind of mumbled an affirmative answer, which was apparently satisfactory because he leaped off my bed and out of my room before promptly passing out on the floor outside of the room Will shared with Clint and Kenny.”

There were literal tears rolling down Sam's cheeks as he practically rolled on the floor, laughing at the mental picture. “How old was he?” Gus gasped around his own laughter.

Marina's face twisted as she calculated that before guessing, “Eight? Clint was almost four and Kenny was six, so Jason must have been eight going on nine. It was adorable . . . and frustrating as hell. I kept finding pieces of various toasters underfoot for at least the next three months.”

“Sounds like there was never a dull moment for them growing up?”

“They never wanted for love or for attention. It wasn't a conventional growing up, but all things considered, I think Misha and I did all right.”

“What about Brian?”

“He wasn't Brian then; he was Barney then. Let's just say there's a lot about Barney that we don't talk about in this family. The place they were . . . if Misha was traumatized, Barney was damaged. He cared about his brothers, but there was always a manic edge to everything. He jumped into fights every time we turned around. He picked on his brothers relentlessly, and reduced both Kenny and Clint to tears more than a few times. He spent most of his time with the Swordsman, which looking back on it was probably where most of his behavior and attitude problems came from.”

“Aaron said he left.”

“Mm-hm. Clint was sixteen and Barney let the Swordsman beat his baby brother to hell before they both left him to die. Barney Grimm died that night . . . it was a long time before Brian Grimm was born in his place.” Shaking her head ruefully, “Brian still struggles with Barney on occasion, but he's mostly got him under control.”

“You make it sound like they're two different people.”

“The things that Barney did then are so far removed from the person Brian is now that they could have been performed by two entirely different people, irregardless of the fact that the two men inhabit the same body.”

“So . . . not everything was sunshine and roses.”

“Actually, most things weren't sunshine and roses. Life at the circus was hard; everyday was a fight to put food on the table and to stay hidden as much as we could. But, we were safe there and we had each other. The good didn't usually outweigh the bad, but when things were good, they were good. The younger boys were happier than they'd ever been, and they were young enough that the trauma could start to be forgotten at least in part if not completely.”

Sam closed his eyes as her fingers once again found their way into his hair. “I wish I'd been yours. I know you said things were hard, but at least your boys knew you loved them.”

“Trust me, Sammy . . . I do too. But you're with us now and we're never going to let you go.” Glancing at the clock, her eyes went wide in shock at the time displayed there. “Holy shit, is that the
Gus twisted over his shoulder and smirked at the sight of the oven clock. “Wow . . . guess time really does fly when you're having fun.”

“Two o'clock already? No wonder I'm starving. And Misha is probably wondering where the hell I am; I was supposed to report in at noon.” Pushing Sam's head upwards gently, she insisted, “I hate to run like this Gus, but we should probably be on our way.”

“Do you have to?” he asked, pushing himself up to his own feet and shoving his hands into his pockets self-consciously. “I mean . . . I have more than enough space if you guys wanted to come stay with me while you're in town. And I'd like to talk more . . . if that's okay with you.”

Marina's eyes were wide at the statement, twisting slightly to look at where her son was still sitting on the floor beside her vacated armchair. “What do you think, Sammy-honey?”

“I don't mind staying here . . . besides I like hearing your stories.”

Biting down lightly on her lower lip, she cocked an eyebrow at Gus. “Are you sure, Gus? We have a hotel room. Our reservation is for a week and it would be just fine if you didn't want to host us here.”

“I really don't mind. It's nice not being the only person in the house anymore.”

Taking a deep breath, Marina squared her shoulders and nodded solemnly. “All right then . . . that sounds fantastic, Gus, thank you.”

“So . . . what happens now?”

“Well, if Sam wants to head to the motel to get our things, I can fix something for lunch.”

The blond grinned brightly, as he bumped his hip fondly against the woman's. “You're in for a treat, Gus . . . Ma's pretty much the best cook ever.”

“Vrun,” the Russian scolded, smacking at him half-heartedly. “You shouldn't make general statements like that, Sammy. It's a terrible habit.”

Bending to press a smacking kiss to her cheek, Sam dodged her retaliatory smack as he moved towards the door. “Love you, Ma.”

“Love you too, Sammy. Go on . . . I'll have lunch ready by the time you get back.”

“Sounds awesome. Be back soon,” he called, before he disappeared from the house with the door swinging shut behind him.

Turning on her heel to face Gus, she folded her arms over her chest and insisted, “Please tell me you have more in your fridge than expired ketchup and a primitive society in your mayonaise jar?”

“Uh, I think so.”

“Good. Then let's get started. The hotel isn't that far away; Sam'll be back before we know it.”

Chapter End Notes
Translations:

(R) moy dorogoy - my darling (Marina's nickname for Clint Grimm)
(G) Vati - Dad (Marina's nickname for Hansel Kuhn)
(R) solnyshko - sunshine (Marina's nickname for Kenny/Aaron Grimm)
(R) Vrun - liar
Chapter 182: Facing the Music

Will's tone was fond, if mildly exasperated, as he asked, “What part of ‘no direct interaction or interference’ did you have trouble understanding with this one, Marina?”

Cocking an eyebrow at the computer, she reminded him gently, “You and I both know that I wasn't going to be able to walk away from this one, Misha.”
“Knowing something intellectually and knowing it in reality are two entirely different things, Marishka,” he scolded gently, one hand coming up to pinch the bridge of his nose. “Can you just explain to me why? You were content to keep your distance from Dillon Stephanowski and you were the one who insisted on no contact altogether with William James. So why Gus Maitland?”

Biting on her lip, she braced her chin on her knuckles as she considered his picture on the laptop screen. She was sitting in the small guest room Gus had shown her and Sam after the blond had returned with their things. Currently, the two boys were watching a hockey game in the living room, and Marina was left to report in to her lover. Finally, she shrugged lightly as she confessed, “I don't know if I can explain it, Mishka.”

“I will accept any attempt you can make, samaya malen'kaya.”

Huffing lightly, she decided just to bite the bullet and insisted. “I see so much of you in him, Misha. In fact, there is a large part of me that truly believes he is you . . . without a proverbial me. And not me personally, but what I represent to you; peace, calm . . . a safe place. So where you have a safe harbor in me, he is completely adrift and alone. No family, no girlfriend and his only real friend is thirteen years old. Except for Malee, there has never been anyone in his life who cared enough to throw him a life preserver. And did I mention she was thirteen?”

Will's lips compressed at that thought, quicksilver eyes watching his partner as she gnawed restlessly on her thumbnail. When she returned her gaze to his own, she asked carefully, “We can both agree that you're a little damaged, right?”

Chuckling bitterly, the Colonel was forced to nod once in agreement. “Nothing I can say to dispute that. We all know it and to be honest, it's not something I've ever felt the need to hide.”

Rolling her eyes at the truth in that statement, Marina leaned her weight on her folded arms as she continued, “So you're damaged. Your brothers and I have both expended a lot of time and energy over the last 26 years trying to heal those fissures, to fit as many pieces back together as we could. Do you agree with that?”

“Da.”

“Okay, so consider the fact that you're irreparably broken . . . and then think about what it means when I tell you that Gus is completely shattered. And there’s no one here who even knows that there are massive pieces missing.” Her hands came up in supplication as she implored her partner fervently. “I can't just abandon him, Mishka.”

Slouching backwards in his chair, the Colonel ran a frustrated hand back through his hair. “So what do you want to do? Uproot him from his whole life and transplant him in New York?”

“No . . . I just want to be his friend. I want you to be his brother, for all of the boys to be his brothers. I want Sam to be his nephew, and Vati to be as close to his father as the both of them will allow.” Closing her eyes, she confessed, “I want him to be family. Is that such a terrible request?”

“Ah zhemchuzhina . . . you wouldn't be you, if you weren't trying to adopt the world,” Will chuckling softly, fingernails scrubbing briskly through his hair before he sat up once again. “What does he know?”

“Nothing . . . I haven't told him anything about Cahill or about how he was conceived. Frankly, I didn't think that that was intel he needed.”

“So what have you been telling him? It's nearly 6 o'clock here at home, Marishka and I know you.
You've been with him all day.”

“I've just been telling him about you and the boys. Sharing stories to help him paint a picture of who you all are.”

“What kind of stories?” the man asked, a small smirk on his lips as he watched her smirk mischievously.

“Jason's obsession with toasters, for starters.” That earned a real laugh, as Will took a moment to recall that memory and enjoy it. Smiling at the sound, Marina continued, “Our love story . . . the real one. Your need to protect Kenny when he was a kid. Clint's first time with a bow. Just . . . stories that don't really mean anything . . . but at the same time amount to everything.”

Chuckling, the Colonel inquired, “You told him about Bucharest yet?”

“You mean the 'Epic Disaster'? No, I wanted to talk to you before I shared that particular story. It was a hell of a fuck up.”

“No kidding. I still can't figure out how you agreed to stay my girlfriend after that mess,” he muttered with a huff. Listening to Marina giggle, he insisted fondly, “Just leave out the part where you blew up the cafe okay?”

“Aw . . . that's the best part,” she teased, with a wink and a cheeky grin.

Rolling his eyes at her, he folded his arms over his chest and joked, “And suddenly I understand why we only watch action movies together.”

“Ha ha, very funny. Technically, we watch a lot of Chinese action movies together . . . which are typically explosion-lite.”

“Good point,” he drawled. “So what's the plan here? Are you going to head up to Toronto early? You going to stay in Beaver Creek a few days? What do you want to do?”

“I don't know.” Running a hand back through her hair, she sighed, “It's going to take awhile to get Sammy settled. He needs a place to live . . . a car . . . furniture. It's not like I'm just going to drop him in Toronto with nothing then leave.”

“Place to live? Are we thinking an apartment or a house?”

“An apartment could be tricky. He's ex-JTF2, Special Forces trained. A lot of people close by that he doesn't know? Loud music . . . loud fighting . . . loud anything? All of it is going to be problematic.”

Cocking an eyebrow at him, she taunted, “I mean, would we have wanted to live in an apartment after getting home from a deployment?”

“I see your point. Okay, so we're going to buy him a house?”

“I think it would be the best idea, all factors considered. A quiet neighborhood. Definitely big enough to be able to have guests over; I don't intend to never drop in to see my boy, you know that. And if I'm going to be visiting, I am not staying in a hotel. Someone has to feed him every once in awhile.”

There was a fond, resigned tilt to his smile as he teased, “You're going to stock his freezer with homemade meals, aren't you?”

“That's a ridiculous question. Of course I am,” she drawled with a roll of her eyes.
Chuckling, her lover teased fondly, “You remember he's 26 years old and probably perfectly capable of feeding himself?”

“Uh-huh. Which is why he weighed in at fifteen pounds underweight at his S.H.I.E.L.D. physical. Clearly someone has to feed him. And he likes my cooking, which means that he'll actually eat my cooking.”

“Okay. So how long do you think you'll need in Toronto?”

“Two weeks . . . maybe three?”

Only someone who had known her lover as long, and as intimately, as Marina had would have seen the way his shoulders drooped dejectedly. “Oh . . . I guess that means you're going to miss my birthday huh?”

“I have no intention of missing your birthday, Mishka,” she insisted vehemently, frowning fiercely at the very thought. “Why don't you come up to Toronto a couple days before? Bring everybody . . . we can get Sam set up and celebrate the most important day in my year.”

“Most important day in your year, huh?” he laughed, his tone more than a little self-deprecating.

Tone fondly scolding, she protested gently, “The day you were born was kind of a big deal for me.”

“Yeah, I guess.”

“Mishka . . . I wish I could make you understand how very much I love you.”

Leaning forward in his chair, he insisted, “Ignore me. I'm just feeling a little maudlin.”

“Anything I can do?”

“Nah . . . I just want to be able to hold you. And since I can't do that, I will content myself with this.”

“It's only a couple more weeks. At which point, I promise, I am going to embarrass you with a massive public display of affection.”

“You know how I feel about PDA, Marishka.”

“Which is exactly why I'm going to do it.” Watching him roll his eyes at her, she couldn't resist the smile that crept across her features. “Whatcha thinking 'bout, handsome?”

“Not much . . . just how very lucky I am. And how much I love you.”

“Ya lyublyu tebya, Mishka . . . vsegda.”

“Ya lyublyu tebya, sumasshedshaya devochka.”

Grinning brightly at the long unheard nickname she teased, “Only you would accuse someone of insanity because they just professed their undying love for you.”

“You've always been crazy, Marishka . . . but at least you're my kind of crazy.”

“Flatterer,” she laughed, head dropping back as she giggled, relieved that he was once again willing to be playful with her.

About then, there was a ruckus on Will's side of the conversation, as a door flew open and Marina
could hear the youngest Grimm call cheerfully, “Is that Marina!?”

Chuckling at his brother’s usual exuberance, he nodded once. “Da.”

Clint and Aaron were almost immediately in the picture, both of them grinning at her brightly as they cheered together, “Hi Marishka!”

“All domashniy. Up to no good again?”

Clint drew back in mock-hurt, one hand coming up to press to his chest lightly. “Except for the fact that you know me better than anyone except for Kenny here, I would be deeply offended by that question. As it is . . . how’d you know?”

Shaking her head fondly, she joked, “Lucky guess. Do yourselves a favor, and don’t spy on Maria and your father again, okay?”

“Not a chance in hell!” both brothers burst out instantly, their faces contorting into sheer horror at the very thought.

“So . . . what have you two been up to since I’ve been gone?”

Aaron rolled his eyes as Clint chimed in, “Will's still giving Pops the silent treatment.”

Marina frowned at that information, able to see the way that her partner looked away at that announcement. Eyebrows furrowing lightly, she turned her attention back on Clint and insisted, “Leave it be. That has nothing to do with you.”

“But . . .!” he protested, blinking as the Russian snapped fiercely, “I'm serious, Clinton Francis. Promise me.”

Sighing heavily at the admonition, Clint slumped as he agreed, “I promise.” Blowing a raspberry, he muttered, “Of course you'd take Will's side.”

“I'm not taking anyone's side, dorogoy . . . I'm simply insisting that this is something your brother and your father need to settle between themselves. Sticking your nose into it, isn't going to fix anything. Dong le ma’?”

“Da,” was the sullen agreement from both brothers.

“All right . . . so how many things have you two blown up in the last two weeks?”

“At least a dozen,” was Will's response, a cocked eyebrow directed at Aaron as the older of the Terrible Twosome blushed all the way to his ears.

“That last one wasn't my fault,” the blue eyed Grimm protested, eyes wide in protests and earning a soft chuckle from his sister. “How was I supposed to know that the combination was volatile?”

“Research? Testing?”

“What do you think I was doing? Trial and error is a perfectly valid testing mechanism!” was Aaron's response, narrowing his eyes at his brother.

The Colonel smirked at the protest, earning a stuck-out tongue from the younger brother. Rolling his eyes, Will returned the gesture briefly, before getting up from his chair. “It's getting a little cramped in here I think. Marishka, I'll let you three talk and I'll talk to you again tomorrow.”
“Misha . . . this is not over,” she protested, knowing that her partner would read between the lines.

Leaning into the camera's sights, he gave her a small smile as he agreed, “I never dreamed it was.”

“Lyublyu tebya, moya Mishka.”

“Lyublyu tebya, samaya malen'kaya. I'll talk to you tomorrow,” he promised, blowing a brief kiss at the screen before disappearing from view. It was barely a moment later that the door to his office clicked closed behind him as he left the room.

There was a half beat of silence before Aaron spoke up quietly, “You really don't want us to get involved with this thing between Dad and Will? It's been weeks! Will isn't sleeping. He's barely eating. Honest, Marishka, I think this is the first time in three weeks, I haven't seen him glued to this thing. What is he looking for?”

“Oh solnyshko, even if I told you . . . you'd never believe me,” she sighed, sadness radiating from her eyes, Will's tired and drawn features all she could see in her mind's eye.

Chapter End Notes

Translations:

(R) samaya malen'kaya - my little one (Will's most common nickname for his longtime partner and lover Marina)
(R) Da - yes
(G) Vati - Dad (Marina's nickname for Hansel)
(R) zhemechuzhina - pearl (one of Will's less common nicknames for Marina)
(R) Ya lyublyu tebya - I love you
(R) Vsegda - always
(R) sumasshedshaya devochka - crazy girl (another of Will's less common nicknames for Marina)
(R) Allo - hello
(R) domashniy - pets (an interchangeable nickname Marina uses for Jason, Clint and Kenny/Aaron Grimm)
(R) dorogoy - darling (Marina's nickname for Clint)
(R) solnyshko - sunshine (Marina's nickname for Aaron/Kenny)
Hey guys! Still loving your comments and thoughts. I can't wait to hear what you think about this one.

Okay, so I just need to clarify here. The situation Marina and Sam go observe pretty much goes down exactly like it did in the show. (If you've never seen the show, there's a hostage situation, a Croatian guy has a woman at gunpoint, and the SRU sniper is forced to shoot him when he shows imminent threat to the team. Also, Sam doesn't make the best impression, but really . . . not entirely his fault.) I don't feel the need to go into that part, since there's no point in rehashing in fic what happened on screen. So, we skipped ahead a little bit, and Sam is still being made to suffer from that less than stellar first impression.

No translations this time. Enjoy the new banner! Sammy's a Grimm now!
Chapter 183: Going Back

It was a week later before Sam and Marina finally decided to leave Beaver Creek. It was going to be a seventeen hour drive to Toronto, and Marina wanted the sniper to have some say in the house she would be purchasing for him. So, even though she didn't want to leave the Cahill prototype, it was time for the two to leave.

Malee and Gus stood outside the house, watching together as Sam and Marina piled their things in the trunk of the Charger. “You have your passport, Sammy?”

“Yeah, it's in the glove box,” the blond replied, bending forward to rearrange the suitcases to make everything fit. “Do you?”

“I always have a passport, Sammy. Now whether it's actually mine or not is dependent on the situation,” she cackled with a wink and a grin.

Chuckling at the reply, Sam shoved hard once and watched with satisfaction as the suitcases fell into place. “Finally . . . this trunk has absolutely no space.”
“It's a sports car. What were you expecting?” she taunted fondly, dodging the pen he threw at her with a giggle. Turning to face the other two, Marina felt her heart lodge up in her throat. Coming over, she threw her arms around Gus' neck and squeezed tightly. There was a moment where the man stood frozen, obviously shocked at the action, before his shoulders loosened and he wrapped his arms around her waist firmly. “I am so happy I got to meet you, Gus. Are you sure you don't want to come with us? The boys are coming to Toronto to help Sammy move into his new place. They’d all love to meet you.”

“I don't think so . . . maybe I'll meet you up there later. Not right now.”

“All right. If you change your mind, just let me know. We would love to have you. Okay?”

He nodded with a shy smile, tightening his arms around her waist for a long moment before releasing her and taking a step back. Cupping his cheek fondly for a moment, she turned her attention on the teenager again. “I need you to look after him for me, Malee.”

“No problem,” the girl promised with a smile. “I mean, I kinda like the guy.”

Grinning at her, Marina laughed, “I do too.” Stepping forward, she wrapped her arms around the girl's shoulders and hugged her tightly. “You are going to be a hell of a woman someday, Malee Chuang. I hope you know that.”

Reaching into her pocket, Malee pulled out Marina's card. “And in nine years, I'll make sure that I'm even more awesome than you think I'll be.”

Chuckling, the Russian agreed, “I am looking forward to it.”

Bending to drop a fond kiss to the top of the girl's head, she stepped back to watch Sam take his turn at goodbyes. Offering the older man a hand, the blond insisted, “Welcome to the family, Uncle Gus.”

The former firefighter blinked at the address, before smiling softly. “Uncle, huh?”

“You're my dad's brother . . . what else am I going to call you?” he asked with a bright grin on his lips and in his eyes.

Clasping Sam's hand firmly, Gus hauled him in for a one-armed embrace. The two grunted and slapped backs for a bit, causing a roll of the eyes from both Malee and Marina at the display of typical male affection. “If you two are finished posturing, we should probably get going? I would like to beat rush hour traffic in Milwaukee.”

Rolling his eyes, Sam stepped back once again, shaking the other man's hand firmly. “Thanks for having us.”

“Thanks for coming. You'll come back right?”

“Yeah. If I know Ma, now that you're family . . . you'll never be free of her.”

“Hey!” Marina protested with a chuckle and a grin. “I don't typically hear you complaining!”

“That would be because I don't. I like being yours,” Sam agreed, digging in his pocket for the keys. He squawked in protest as nimble fingers reached out and plucked them from his fingers, tossing them into the air with a laugh. “Hey!”

“Bet's over, Sammy . . . my turn to drive.”
“Can you promise you won't listen to anything weird?”

“Driver picks the music, Sammy . . . shotgun shuts their cakehole,” Marina taunted, tongue between her teeth as she laughed at his wretched groan. “Oh it’s not that bad. I promise . . . you'll probably even like it.”

“Uh-huh,” he groaned, reaching out to hug Malee quickly before moving towards the passenger seat of the Charger. Dropping into the seat, he slammed the door and strapped himself in. Turning back to the two still standing on Gus’ driveway, he waved as he called, “Bye guys! See you around!”

“Looking forward to it!” Gus agreed, one arm around Malee's shoulders as the two waved after the car as Marina roared the engine.

“Love you both! Keep in touch!” Marina insisted, hand coming over the top of the windshield, before she shifted the car into reverse and backed out of the driveway.

“We will! Be careful!” Malee called, hopping up onto her tiptoes to continue waving after them as the car backed into the street and began to move away. Once the car was out of sight, the teenager looked up at her friend with a timid smile. “They were pretty cool.”

“Yeah . . . I'm going to miss them.”

“Me too. Hey! Wanna see what Marina left for you for lunch?”

“How about we go to the diner for lunch? Just you and me.”

“Cool,” the girl agreed, wrapping her arm around his waist and hugging him tightly. “Come on! I'm starved!”

“Oh . . . the joys of being a teenager,” Gus mocked, laughing as he dodged away from the retaliatory punch to his arm. Collaring her around the neck, he laughed as he rubbed his knuckles fondly over her hair. “Come on, squirt. My treat.”

***************************

It was nearly two days later when Sam and Marina arrived at Toronto's city limits. Sam frowned at the sight of the city where he'd spent at least some part of his childhood growing up. Glancing over at him as she shifted gears, the Russian asked carefully, “You okay?”

“Yeah. I just . . .” pausing, the blond seemed to gather his thoughts for a moment before continuing, “. . . the General and my mother are still here. I don't really think I even wanted to come back.”

“Sammy, no one is making you stay. If you don't want to be here, we'll go home. I will turn this car towards New York City and we will never look back. It's your call, malysh.”

Taking a deep breath, he watched the skyline get closer for a long time before he shook his head. “I may take you up on that at a later date. But for right now . . . I need to do this.”

“You let me know the second you change your mind. I will not have you be unhappy here, Sammy. Okay?”

Nodding once in agreement, he promised, “Okay.”

Reaching forward for the radio, Marina flicked it on and scanned through stations before finding one that was broadcasting a news report. Both glanced at the radio as the anchor reported that Toronto’s
SRU had responded to a situation in the downtown area, where a man was holding a woman hostage at gunpoint after shooting and critically wounding another. Cocking an eyebrow at him, she asked, “Wanna check it out?”

“Yeah . . . let's go see what the SRU can do.”

“Sounds like a plan,” she agreed, downshifting rapidly as she turned off the freeway and gunned it towards downtown.

********************

It wasn't long before a couple weeks had passed. Marina could tell that Sam wasn't happy, though whenever she'd question him about it he'd insist that he was F.I.N.E. – which he damn well knew that the entire family used as an acronym and not as the word was intended – and change the subject to whatever new thing she was doing with the house she'd bought for him. Finally, she stopped asking, trusting that he would come to her if he needed to.

Finally, it was three days before Will Grimm's 40th birthday. The Grimms were going to be flying in the following day to help finish the renovations and getting Sammy settled in. The blond had a shift at the SRU and Marina was juggling S.H.I.E.L.D. tele-conferences around meetings with the contractors and construction workers finishing up the last major changes to the house. That was the day that life for Samuel Wayne Braddock changed completely.

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Winnie Camden looked up at the sound of footsteps on the linoleum, watching as a pretty young woman with curly brown hair and dark eyes approached her desk with a small smile. “Welcome to the SRU. How can I help you?” the dispatched asked, eyes taking in the woman's gray-green henley, black leather jacket, heavy boots, backpack and motorcycle helmet.

“I'm looking for Sam Braddock? Is he here or is Team One out on a call?”

Unable to help her reaction, Winnie reared back slightly at the question. “Um . . . they're in the middle of a debriefing. Can I help?”

“No, but thanks. I'll just wait.”

“You sure? They could be awhile.”

The woman's smile flattened slightly as she insisted coldly, “I'll wait.”

Blinking at the hostility she could see in those eyes, Winnie nodded her agreement. “Of course. There's some benches along that wall if you'd like to sit down while you wait for him.”

“Thank you.”

“You're welcome,” the brunette replied, watching as the other women moved across the open area to take a seat against the wall.

Curling up sideways, she braced one shoulder against the concrete wall and then slumped. Cocking an eyebrow as she mentally reviewed the conversation, it was a moment before Winnie returned her attention onto her computer.

About twenty minutes later, SRU’s Team One exited the briefing room. Looking up, the woman caught sight of the blond trailing behind the others as per usual. He was looking a little beaten down,
watching his boots as he shuffled along. Granted, he hadn't made a very good first impression, but even still Winnie felt bad for him. Team One were constantly yelling at him, and there were a couple times that the dispatcher literally watched the constable go soldier, face set in stone and tone calm as he caved to whatever recriminations the Sarge, Ed, or any of the others were throwing at him.

Shaking herself free from her thoughts, she stood from her chair and called, “Hey Sam!”

Looking up curiously, it was evident from the look on his face that the youngest member of Team One was very aware of the rest of Team One’s interest in their exchange. “What’s up, Winnie?” he asked, tone tired and stressed out.

Gesturing towards the entry hall, she replied, “You have a visitor. Showed up about half an hour ago.”

Frowning, the sniper stepped around her desk so that he could see, shoulders tensing at the knowledge that his so-called Team was following his actions to get their own look at his visitor. Everyone watched as his whole body visibly brightened at the sight of the woman seated there. Striding forward eagerly, he reached out to touch her shoulder.

Team One gawked as the second his fingertips connected, she was whirling to her feet, one hand ripping a Magnum Desert Eagle from a holster at her back and bringing the muzzle to a rest inches from Sam’s face. Her eyes dark and focused, features set, her finger poised delicately over the trigger. (Ed Lane, Team One’s Team Leader, would recall this moment with a shocked kind of embarrassment. What kind of crack police force stands in shock when a tiny chick pulls a gun on one of their own?)

Surprisingly, Sam seemed to be the only one who wasn’t surprised. He showed no fear as he held up his hands slowly in a universal sign of “harmless and unarmed.” He could see by the look on her face, she wasn’t all there; whatever she’d been thinking of, he’d startled her out of a pretty thorough thought process. “Easy Marishka . . .” he soothed, hands moving into a slow shrug as he gave her a self-deprecating smile, “. . . it’s just me. It’s Sam.”

At the sound of his voice, her eyes cleared as a quiet gasp ripped from her chest, her body relaxing out of its alert readiness. Taking a shaky breath, she flicked the safety on the Magnum with her thumb and tucked the weapon away once again. One hand trembled as it came up to fold over her forehead. Forcing out a harsh breath, she gasped, “Shit . . . sorry, Sammy-honey.”

Michaelangelo Scarlatti – most commonly known as Spike – opened his mouth to crack a joke about her usage of the name. Sam had made his opinion known on his teammates using that nickname vehemently and the fact that this woman was using it so easily bred some intense curiosity. Before he could finish his thought, however, Sergeant Gregory Parker waved the bomb tech to silence. The young man in front of him was an entirely different side of the brash young sniper, one that Team One had not yet seen. Hopefully, by observing Sam with the newcomer, Parker could gain some insight into the notoriously cocky but close-mouthed young man.

Sam spoke up then, cocking his head an inch to the left as he lowered his hands. “Nah . . . that was all my fault. I know better than to startle the soldiers, spies and assassins in this family,” he promised, tone even and peaceful, reaching out to ease her into a stabilizing hug. He knew better than anyone that the adrenaline rush she was feeling was leaving her feeling a little shaky at best and like a live wire at worst. “Come on . . . sit down.”

The woman practically dropped onto the bench, the blond taking the seat next to her. “What are you doing here, Marina?”
Having flipped open his notebook, Parker was scribbling notes as he observed. The name “Marina” made it onto the page, with a single line leading to a bubble asking, “occupation?” This bubble led to three more lines, ending in bubbles labeled “spy”, “assassin” and “soldier”. Looking up, Parker watched as the woman worked to come down from her high, stammering as she tried to come up with a coherent answer.

Shrugging off his over-shirt, Sam draped it around her shoulders and wrapped both arms around her tightly. “Where are you right now?”

Fingers clutching his forearms desperately, she confessed with a shaky laugh, “A long ways from here.” Gesturing to the backpack at her feet, she forced her attention onto answering his original question. “You forgot your lunch. And I have that meeting with the contractor today . . . and the Barn is on the way . . . so I just thought I'd drop it by . . .” she rambled, forcing it out in a single breath. There was a pause as she took a lungful of air, before she continued, “I put some of those homemade power bars that you like in there. I figured you should get some before the boys showed up to devour them all tomorrow. And I made sure to add some more of those energy chews that you like; I swear, I only grabbed the orange ones. And I was bored, so I think there's steak stir-fry with sauteed shitakke mushrooms, carrots and peppers, with homemade fried rice and a couple fresh egg rolls in there.”

Eery blue eyes narrowed as she continued to ramble, shaking her gently as he demanded, “What's wrong?”

“Nothing,” was the immediate answer, her wince a clear indication that she knew she'd answered too quickly to be believed. “I'm F.I.N.E.”

Frowning at the deflection, he asked, “Freaked out, Insecure, Neurotic and Emotional?”

Chuckling at the question, she shoved one hand through her hair as she replied, “Among other things. But really. I'm okay.”

“No you're not. Come on, Ma,” he scolded, earning another bubble attached to the woman's name in Parker's book, the two letter word underlined several times to stress Parker's confusion at the terminology. “You're all over the place. You're never like this. What's wrong?”

There was a long moment of silence, the two practically glaring at each other before Marina slumped. “Aaron went dark this morning.”

Sam's eyes flashed wide, clearly the only person in the room who understood what that meant. “What!? When?”

“A little after 0900 Juliet. He's on a solo . . . it's supposed to be a milk run, picking up a dead drop. Fly down . . . collect the intel . . . come home; easy peasy. Twenty four hours, there and back. But he missed his check-in and Jason can't raise him on comms.”

“Is the comm still working?”

“Yeah . . . it's picking up a GPS location based on his DNA signature. And it's still recording and transmitting vital signs. So at least we know he's alive. But there's nothing actionable we can do about it yet.”

“Why not?”

“Technically, it's still an active op. Assets go dark all the time; the mission's not a bust until or unless he misses his extraction.”
“And when is that?”

Reaching over, Marina grabbed Sam's wrist and twisted it so that she could see his watch. “Four hours and twenty-seven minutes. At four hours and twenty-eight minutes, that plane leaves the tarmac whether he’s on it or not.”

“What happens then?”

“Officially? No exfil . . . no sanctioned exit strategy. He has to get himself out. Or at least that’s the official word that'll get passed down from ‘On High’,” Marina drawled, sarcasm tingling her words as she rolled her eyes. “But my boys won't leave him there. It wouldn't be the first time the Grimms have gone dark to recover one of their own. Probably not the last either.”

“I'm pretty sure I don't want to know . . . but where is he?” Sam asked, eyes narrowed as he read the concern and terror in Marina's posture.

There was a distinct accent as she replied, “Colombia . . . Medellin.”

“Fuck!” the blond hissed, visibly recoiling at the announcement.

“Yeah. Not somewhere you want to leave an agent unaccounted for,” she laughed, the tone bordering on hysterical as she started gasping in air to avoid the collapse into tears the woman clearly knew she was approaching.

Hauling her into him, he held her as tightly as he could manage as she took a second to smother her sobs into his shoulder. “He just came home, Sammy . . . I can't lose him again so soon,” she gasped, struggling to regain her composure.

“You're not gonna lose him. Aaron's badass . . . he's gonna be fine.” Biting down on his lower lip, he asked cautiously, “You told Aunt Marty yet?”

“No. Until there's a reason to worry, I see no point in burdening her with the concern. As far as she knows, everything's going exactly as planned.”

“Tell a spy your plans . . .” he taunted, remembering one of the jokes her sister Nika was always needling her with.

Laughing, she rolled her eyes as she finished the thought, “. . . watch them fuck it up.” Shaking her head at the statement, she reached up with both hands and rubbed briskly at her face. “I needed that.”

“I know,” he agreed, leaning over to bump his shoulder against her fondly. “You gonna be okay?”

“It's gonna be a long four and a half hours, but I'll manage. I trust Misha. He's got this.” Glancing down at Sam's watch again, she grimaced as she groaned, “And I am late.”

Leaning over, she fished out his lunch from her backpack and offered it to him with a smirk. “Remember to eat it, please?”

“Yes ma'am.”

“Sammy . . . I'm serious.”

Rolling his eyes, he took the box in one hand as he used the other to corral her around the neck and press a kiss to her temple. “I promise.”

“All right. Walk me out?”
Nodding once in agreement, he looped one arm around her shoulders while the other gripped his lunch. It was as they were heading out the door that the rest of Team One heard Sam ask, “So when is Dad getting here, anyway?”

“Tomorrow . . . same as yesterday and the day before that,” she teased, chuckling lightly as the two disappeared through the door and out of earshot.

“What the hell just happened?”

“We saw Sam connect . . . just like he would with any other subject. He negotiated her down . . . regardless of previous connection, that's exactly what we saw just happen,” Parker insisted, smiling lightly at the knowledge.

Looking up as Sam made his way back into the headquarters, Ed demanded angrily, “Who was that!”

Those eyes flashed as the blond looked up at his team leader. And for the first time that any of Team One could remember, Sam stood up to Ed and insisted, “None of your damned business.”

Ed blinked at the answer, watching in surprise as Sam brushed past and headed towards the conference room to study the materials to improve his negotiation skills and eat his lunch. Surprised by the answer, Parker turned to face Spike. “I need you to find out as much as you can about this woman. The more we learn about her . . . the more we'll learn about Sam.”

Spike nodded slowly, frowning as he took the page. “There's gotta be a million Marinas in the world, Boss. How do you suggest I narrow it down to just this one?”

“Start with border patrol. She's Russian . . . there's an accent there,” Jules Callaghan spoke up, an underlying jealous clinging to her tone. “She had to have come into the country recently. Maybe even with Sam.”

“I'll see what I can do,” the hacker promised, before he dashed off towards his laptop computer.

“Everyone else . . . barring any hot calls, we are on inventory duty.”

“What about Sam?” Lou asked, glancing back towards where the former soldier was seated at the conference room table, reading through the study materials he'd been provided diligently.

“Leave him be . . . he's where he needs to be right now,” Sarge insisted, watching Sam munch absentely on an egg roll, with a small happy grin curving up the corners of his lips.
Wow!!! The continued response to these chapters continues to warm my heart of heart! I hope you continue to read and enjoy!

Okay, so for those who haven't seen the show. The second episode is about a father who holds a hospital hostage because his dying daughter is being denied a heart that was "supposed" to go to her. Sam is still mostly soldier at this point, and makes suggestions based on THAT training set. It doesn't end well, and Ed Lane DOES in fact send him on a coffee run. So yeah. Not awesome.

Opheliamblack: As for Mrs. Braddock, she's pretty well burned her bridges, though we will see Natalie and even Sam's bio-parents again. Aaron doesn't ever see the General again, but he does regrettably make another unwelcome appearance in Sam's life soon.

Only one translation, but should be pretty self-explanatory. Enjoy! And if anyone can tell me how many Grimms are wearing SHIELD patches or pins (NOT YOU JULOREAN!), there will be a Malee short very soon. So look hard. :D
Chapter 184: Reunions

Will Grimm sat at his desk in the heart of S.H.I.E.L.D.’s Analysis Department, trying to finish up the last few items that needed to be done before the family – Owen Elliot, James Doyle, Scarlett Levy, Vincent Keller and Catherine Chandler included – flew to Toronto the following afternoon. On one corner of his desk, there was a small timer, counting down the final 94 minutes before Aaron missed his extraction and Will's much-deserved vacation was officially canceled. Glancing toward the door at the sound of a knock, he called firmly, “Come!”

The handle turned and Jason stepped through the door, wearing a dark gray, grease-stained muscle tank and a pair of black tactical cargoes. There were at least three tools shoved into the pocket at his left thigh and in his hand he carried his S.H.I.E.L.D.-issued tablet . . . that everyone knew he'd enhanced and reconfigured, even though he wasn't supposed to. “Hey big brother.”

Smiling at the middle Grimm, Will flipped closed the file he was signing off on and leaned back in his chair. “Hey Jay, Good timing . . . I was needing a break.” Leaning back in his chair, he cocked an eyebrow at the fierce frown on the younger brother's face. “Something I should know?”

“Someone's looking for information on Marina. The hack originated in Toronto.”
“You can't think it was Sam. Considering everything, that's ridiculous.”

“No, it's not Sam. Marina would tell him anything he wanted to know; he knows just to ask her,” Jason agreed with a smirk. “No, this is a sophisticated attack. And as good as Sam is with a rifle, his computer skills are severely lacking. It's definitely someone else.” Huffing out a breath as he glanced down at the tablet in his hands, he tapped out a rapid series of commands, before returning his attention back to his brother. “So far, I've managed to block every attempt the guy's made. As of now, they're not getting anything. But they're pretty determined, Will . . . and I have to sleep at some point.”

Humming in agreement, Will leaned forward in his chair to wake his computer monitor. A couple quick keystrokes and he had the dossiers for Sam's new team on the screen. Browsing quickly through each members' specialties, he reached out and tapped his pen against a picture labeled “Scarlatti, Michelangelo . . . Tech Support/Bomb Disposal.”

There was a long moment as Jason waited for the Colonel to come to whatever decision he was stewing on before quicksilver eyes looked up to catch his brother's own green ones. “Let him have what he wants, but control what information we release. Army record's okay – so long as it's not redacted or classified – but S.H.I.E.L.D. is off limits. Make sure to cut off all references to the Red Room or the Brat'ya Mrachnyy. Oh, and limit their access to her known associates. I want to be able to put a stop to the information Constable Scarlatti locates if I need to.”

“Controlled release . . . I can set up a program to do that,” Jason agreed, looking down at the tablet again as he made a few notations.

Smirking at his brother, the older teased, “You can sit down you know, Jay.”

“I know . . . but I am dead on my feet. If I sit, I'm going to crash.”

“Working on something? Or just playing with a new toy?”

Green eyes were wide with false innocence as Jason asked wickedly, “Can't it be both?”

Rolling his eyes at the non-answer, Will leaned back in his chair again. Rejoining S.H.I.E.L.D. had been good for the middle brother. There was a spring in his step that there hadn't been for awhile, and though he still picked up a couple shifts here and there at the Second Precinct with Casey, for the most part the couple seemed content to settle into their new jobs as Department Head of Research and Development and Tactical Security. If the Colonel knew his partner at all – and he did – Marina was going to be thrilled.

A quick glance at the countdown brought reality crashing back to the forefront of his mind, wincing to see the time continuing to wind down. Catching the look, the younger of the two grimaced apologetically. “Oops . . . I almost forgot. I finally managed to get a hold of Aaron.”

Will's eyes slipped closed in relief, “Thank God. He okay?”

“Apparently he was in a bit of a tight spot with a 'big fan' or two, but he managed to create a little wiggle room. He's a little battered, but no major damage. With the time he has left, he should be able to make it to his extraction,” the communications officer announced, Will's own relief clearly reflected in Jason's face. “He could have some unwanted groupies, though.”

“I'll relay that to the pilots on the ground. They'll have to clean the flight plan.”

“In that case, he's probably not going to make it back before we leave tomorrow afternoon. We're gonna need to divert the Quinjet to Toronto . . . have him meet us there.”
Biting down lightly on his lower lip, Will watched the timer continue to click down, before pushing himself to his feet. “Change of plans. We’re leaving tonight. Sam’s working at the SRU tonight; he should be getting off around 0200, barring a lengthy hot call.”

“Why the change in plans?”

“I want to talk to Sam. I don’t think he had anything to do with the hack,” the Colonel insisted, watching Jason’s eyebrows skip upwards. Glancing at a stack of SRU transcripts on his desk, those quicksilver eyes paled to nearly colorless fury as he growled, “There are a few things I want to talk to his chertov, so-called TEAM about though.”

“Like what?”

“That’s between me, Sam and Toronto’s Team One,” Will insisted, turning his attention to his watch. “Pass the word. I want to be wheels up in the next three hours. That’ll put us in Toronto about an hour before Sam gets off. We’ll arrive at the Barn about ten minutes before Marina comes to pick him up to take him home.”

“Understood. Want me to pass the word to Marina?”

Smirking, the eldest Grimm shook his head. “Nah . . . let's surprise her.”

“You know how Marishka feels about surprises, Will,” Jason reminded his brother, watching the older man’s smirk morph to a real grin.

“I know . . but I have a feeling that she’s going to like this one.”

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It was just shy of two o’clock in the morning, when a handsome man in black tactical cargo pants and a black t-shirt strode into the SRU’s “Barn”. Over the left breast pocket there was a strange looking logo of a stylized bird, under which was stenciled “W.M. Brandt”. Over it, a navy blue zip-up hoodie hung open to show off his obviously toned abdomen, the back emblazoned with the same symbol, as well as the words “Strategic Homeland Intervention Enforcement Logistics Division.”

Winnie and Jules Callaghan were standing at the dispatcher’s desk, gossiping together as they tried to kill the last five minutes of both their shifts. Jules looked over her shoulder at the sound of heavy combat boots and blinked, feeling her mouth go dry at the sight of him. “Hot damn,” Winnie insisted in an undertone, both of them staring at him as he came closer. Swallowing hard, she glanced to her friend, before addressing the newcomer. “Hi . . . welcome to the SRU. Can we help you?”

“Sam Braddock?” came the response, tone gravely and solemn as he looked between the two.

“Uh . . . he’s in the locker room,” Winnie replied, twisting to point down the hallway.

“Thank you.”

Both women cocked their heads to the side as they watched him walk away, admiring the way he filled out the seat of his cargoes. Jules frowned as she mused curiously, “You think Sam's gay? Surely a man that gorgeous can’t be gay, right? Would the world really be so cruel?”

Grinning at the question, Winnie shook her head, “No. My gaydar has an impeccable record. That man right there is 100 percent straight. Sam is too.”

Sam was bent forward into his locker, trying to find his S.H.I.E.L.D. hoodie to pull over his bare
chest. The last hot call of the day had ended messy, and had taken his last clean shirt with it, therefore necessitating the use of his hoodie. Fortunately, the team had the next three days off, so with any luck he’d be able to get some laundry done. His entire family was going to be in town, though, so even as he planned on laundry he resigned himself to having to buy a new pack of shirts to wear until the laundry got done.

Currently, the rest of the team was causing a ruckus, everyone looking forward to the break and ignoring the blond as usual. He had just located it at the back of the locker when a voice boomed through the locker room. “Sam! Front and center!”

Jolting upwards at the shout, Sam cracked his head on the shelf at the top of the locker. “Ow! Shit!” Bending down again to let the sudden attack of double vision subside, he reached up to hold his head. It took a moment before that voice placed itself in his head, at which point he jolted upwards again and only barely avoided another collision with the heavy steel. “Yes sir!”

“You don’t call me 'sir', Sam . . . I work for a living,” was the long-suffering response.

Grimacing at the disgruntled tone in the scold, Sam slammed his locker doors shut and skidded into the center of the locker room in his bare feet, hands yanking his hoodie over his shoulders haphazardly. Sliding to a stop he smiled timidly at the fondly exasperated man there. “Will! Hi! You’re early . . . does Ma know you’re early?” Just realizing that the entire locker room had gone silent around him, Sam's shoulders hunched slightly, asking meekly, “Am I in trouble?”

“No . . .” Will chuckled, turning on one booted heel and striding away. “Come with me, Sam.”

“Coming!” he agreed, bolting after him and leaving Team One staring after him.

Striding confidently towards the briefing room, Will gestured Sam into it and then slapped the button that closed the curtains. Gesturing to the chairs, the Colonel moved to the windows. Lowering himself into the chair cautiously, the blond asked, “Will . . . what's wrong?”

“You wanna tell me about the coffee run?” was all the other man said, earning a sharp wince and an uncomfortable squirm.

“I was being stupid.”

“No, you were reacting in the only way you knew how,” the Colonel corrected patiently, turning to look at the kid and folding his arms over his chest. “There’s a big difference there, Sammy. And instead of explaining that difference, your team shuffled you off like a naughty kid being sent to timeout by the teacher.”

“I made a bad situation worse when I sent that heart up.”

“Undoubtedly . . . but did anyone tell you not to? Was there any communication directed your way that would have explained why you should have kept the courier and the heart out of the way? Did any even attempt to explain to you why that was a mistake that escalated the situation? Or did they just yell at you?”

Shrugging miserably, Sam looked down at his hands as he shook his head in negation. “I didn't think so, Sammy.” Rounding the table, Will hopped up onto the table in front of him and leaned forward on his elbows. “I’m not mad at you, malysh . . . every rookie makes mistakes, regardless of whether they're SRU or S.H.I.E.L.D. or Army or anyone. I am however furious that instead of taking the time to train you . . . to teach you . . . your sergeant and your team leader couldn't even be bothered to do anything other than yell at you.”
“It's not a big deal.”

“It is to me,” the Colonel protested, reaching out to grip Sam's chin and haul his face up to be able to look into his eyes. “They do not have the right to treat you this way, Sammy. No one does . . . not ever.”

“It's not as though anyone else other than you and Ma care, Dad,” Sam sighed, using the address for the first time without even realizing it.

Will reared back at the term, causing Sam to realize what he’d said. “Oh shit . . . I didn't mean . . . I just . . .” Giving it up as a bad job and offering the older man a lopsided smile instead, Sam announced sheepishly, “Happy birthday?”

Smoothing one hand reverently through blond strands, the Colonel chuckled lightly as he asked calmly, “You sure I deserve it?”

“Well . . . you're kind of the best dad I've ever had.” There was a part of Will's heart that wrung tightly at that response, even as he continued to watch Sam speak, “If you don't want me to call you that . . .”

“No, Sammy . . . I would be honored to have you call me 'Dad',” the Colonel promised, one hand coming up to grip the back of Sam's neck and pull him into a loose embrace. Pushing him back a single step, he gripped both sides of the boy's face and shook him gently, insisting, “Any man should be proud to have you for a son . . . I know I am.”

Just then, Clint's voice rang through the curtains. “Will! We've got incoming! T-minus 60 seconds and counting!”

Chuckling, Will pushed himself upwards from the table. “Come on. I was promised an embarrassing display of public affection.”

“You're going to let her embarrass you here?”

“I don't mind public displays of affection, Sammy . . . I just prefer to be able to dictate where they happen,” he chuckled, moving into the open area in full view of the door just as his beloved Russian burst through the door with a joyful cry of “MISHA!”

Barrelling into his chest at a hundred miles an hour, Will grunted as her momentum sent them both sprawling. Hands coming up to hold her hips, he rested the back of his head against he floor as he teased, “Hi.”

Marina's eyes were shining with happy tears as she wrapped her hands in the edges of his hoodie, ordering briskly, “Kindly do something more productive with your mouth, William Michael.”

“Yes ma'am,” he murmured, one hand tightening on her waist as the other came up to entwine in her hair and haul her down to his mouth for their first kiss in a little over six weeks.

Her sob was muffled by his mouth, even as his hands pressed her to him tightly. Both were dimly aware of the groans resounding from their boys – Sam included for once – though neither could bring themselves to give a damn. Breaking away in search of air, she pushed her forehead into his temple and breathed against the skin, “I've missed you.”

“I've missed you too, samaya malen'kaya . . . so much,” he agreed, tightening his grip in her hair and hauling her down to him again. His tone was reverent as he continued to ramble on about how much he'd missed her, stopped only when Marina ordered firmly, “Less talking, more kissing.”
Of course, Will was only too happy to comply with that particular order.

“Could the parental units find a room or something? Geez . . . you're on the floor,” Clint groaned, leaping upwards to crouch easily on top of the desk and put himself above everyone else.

Breaking away from each other, they both insisted at the same time, “Shut up, Clinton Francis!”

Finally, Will pulled back and looked up at her, fingers whisper soft on her face as he took in every nuance of her. There was a long moment, before he suddenly asked, “Did you cut your hair!? Marina, no! I love your hair!”

Giggling, Marina leaned over to kiss him once more before pushing herself to her feet and reaching down to pull him to his own. “It was barely an inch, Misha. What are you doing here? You're early!”

“Yeah . . . actually, you're just in time.”

Drawing back slightly, though noticeably not far enough to have to remove herself from his embrace, she asked, “Just in time for what?”

“My meeting with Norman Holleran.”

“Norm? Why!?” Greg Parker demanded, stepping forward finally and bringing the entire room's attention onto himself.

“I'm a little disappointed in the behavior of your team, Sergeant Parker.”

“And who the hell are you?” Ed Lane demanded furiously.

There was a momentary pause, as the Colonel glanced over at the blond to gauge his reaction to the conversation, before turning back and announcing firmly, “Will Brandt . . . Sam's dad.” Narrowing his eyes, he growled, “You're Ed Lane.”

“Yes,” the Team Leader replied, though it hadn't been a question.

“You're the one who sent Sam on a coffee run, instead of trying to train him.”

“Coffee run?” Marina demanded, rearing back angrily, hot chocolate eyes starting to boil in a second flat. “What coffee run!?” Rounding on her son, Marina demanded, “What is he talking about?”

There was a pause as she took in Sam's attire, before continuing, “And where is your shirt?!?”

Sam scrubbed at the back of his head sheepishly, as he confessed, “It kinda got destroyed.”

“You know what? I don't care about the shirt; just zip up so you don't freeze to death. I DO, however, care about this coffee run? WHAT coffee run?”

“I was being stupid, and Ed sent me a coffee run to get me out of the way,” Sam announced, in a very matter of fact tone.

“I find that hard to believe. What were you doing?”

“Looking for tactical options.”

“Which is what you've spent your entire adult life being trained for!” the Russian raged, features starting to turn a mottled red as her rather legendary temper began to spill out of its usual cage. “What the fuck, Sam!? Why didn't you say anything?”
“Didn't think it was important.”

“It's damn well important to me! And to your dad! You tell us this shit, you understand me!?”

“Yes ma'am.”

“Don't call me ma'am . . . I work for a living,” Marina snapped off, unconsciously mimicking her lover from barely twenty minutes before. “When does Holleran get here?”

There was a resigned voice from behind them as he announced, “I am here. Hello Will . . . Lt Colonel Petrovka.”

“Norm . . . not the way I wanted to see you again, old friend,” Will greeted with a nod, the two men obviously acquainted with one another. Gesturing towards the briefing room, he asked, “Shall we?”

“Shall we indeed. Team One is to remain at the Barn until the completion of this meeting. Anyone caught disobeying this order will be on immediate administrative leave for the next three days while I try to decide whether or not to fire you. Is that understood?”

“Yes sir,” was the disgruntled agreement, before Holleran turned to the sergeant next. “Parker . . . you're with us.”

The doors slid shut and from that point, silence reigned.
Don't Mess With The Best

Chapter Notes

You guys are so amazing.

Also, I feel the need to post this here. Ewa told me she would like to write fic for this. And Caiti has reached out to do the same. Seriously guys, consider this my Transformative Works Statement for the UALP. If you want to make a banner, or write a ficlet based on the UALP . . . let me know. As long as I'm involved and have final say, I have no problem with publishing those kinds of things under the Cahill Project Umbrella. Just let me know!

Translations are light, and pretty self explanatory. But still at the end, as always.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
Chapter 184:

As the doors slid closed, Clint let out a low whistle. “Somebody's in trouble! And for once . . . it isn't me,” he sing-songed in an amused undertone to his boyfriend.

“Hush, khishchnick.” Bucky laughed fondly, moving to lean back against Winnie's desk and letting the younger sniper lean forward to drape himself across his shoulders.

“Poor sap . . . stuck facing the wrath of the Colonel and his pissed off Russian all by himself,” Jason grimaced, before grinning as Casey snickered, “Sucker!”

That sent a chorus of chuckles ringing through the room, Sam's own lips curving up into a small smile at the arrival of his adoptive family, and the unwavering support he was receiving every single one of them. Brian and Natasha both leaned back against the wall across from the briefing room, Brian's tone cheerful as he asked, “Think she's gonna to kill him?”

Lewis Young's eyes flashed wide as his best friend, Spike Scarlatti, yelped, “You're in a police station!”

“Clearly, he has no idea what she did at the Second Precinct,” the middle Grimm scoffed with a roll of his eyes. “It was like 27 dead or something, right?”

“Thirty-seven dead, Jay,” Casey corrected with a grin.

“Oh yeah. I always get those two messed up. Twenty-seven dead was in Peru.”

“Also, it's hard to learn from your mistakes when you're dead,” the Winter Soldier reminded the younger Grimms with a sly grin.

“Eh . . . details.”

Leaning up, Casey kissed her boyfriend's cheek before moving to join Sam where he'd seated himself on the floor equidistant from the Grimms and Team One. Sliding down the wall and taking a seat beside him, she asked, “You okay, Sammy-honey?”

“Yeah . . . I'm okay.”

“Well . . . at least he didn't say he was F.I.N.E.,” was the response to this, the voice originating from the door as Vincent Keller and Catherine Chandler led Aaron Grimm and Marta Shearing into the Barn.

At the sight of the agent, Sam lunged to his feet and across the linoleum with a cry of, “Aaron!”

Aaron chuckled, catching the younger man around the waist and hauling him up off the floor in a warm hug. “Heya Sammy.”

“Ma said you'd gone dark. You okay?”

Marta's tone was as fierce as the scowl on her face as she interrupted whatever her lover was going to say. “Don't you dare say you're okay, Aaron Kenneth!”

Dark blue eyes rolled as he insisted, “It's just a couple cracked ribs and a black eye. Seriously, it was a milk run!”

“Milk runs do not bring agents home wounded,” the virologist protested vehemently, glaring at him.
furiously.

“I'm not wounded, Doc. Wounded involves Medical, a hospital bed, and a lot of pissed off nurses. Honestly, this is nothing. It'll be gone in three days . . . four TOPS!”

The woman huffed, glowering at him even as he grinned at her brightly. Looping his arms around her waist, he pulled her into his torso, leaning forward to press a warm line of sweet kisses down the curve of her neck. “Come on, Doc . . . you aren't even a little happy to see me?” he wheedled with a charming inflection, sly grin on his lips as he used two fingers to brush a strand of brown hair behind her ears.

Melting at the affection in his tone, and the heat generating from his kisses, she glowered for another moment before giving it up. Throwing her arms up around his neck, she scolded insistently, “I really wish I could stay mad at you, you know that?”

Giving her a cheeky grin, he agreed, “I love you too, Doc.”

Smacking at his shoulder gently, she forced her boyfriend to release her and turned to her nephew. “You look good, Sam . . . Marina's clearly been feeding you.”

“Two helpings every meal, sometimes three,” he joked with a grin, wrapping his arms around her waist. “How are you, Aunt Marty?”

“I'm peachy keen. My boyfriend's not dead, my nephew looks healthy for once and I think I just created a new antivirus to treat Chimera.”

“Ew,” was Clint's response, before Jason chimed in, “Wait, that's still a thing? I thought the IMF eradicated that already?”

“Unfortunately not . . . but I was in the mood to poison someone yesterday so I figured I should avoid a Georgia Situation and create the antidote before I recreated the virus itself. Belaraphon is a bitch to get a hold of; better to have another vaccine on hand just in case.”

“Good call,” Doyle agreed, cocking an eyebrow at his own girlfriend; Scarlett had been the one to cause the Georgia Situation and the eldest of Hansel's sons was enjoying the opportunity to needle her for it every once in awhile. She smacked his shoulder lightly, insisting, “Shut up.”

Meanwhile, Aaron was frowning at his girlfriend, “Poison who?”

“Some junior agent named Harrison? He was making a mess in my lab!” she complained with a pout.

“He still has a job?” Brian blurted, eyes shooting wide as Natasha reached up to pat his chest. “I thought for sure Fury was gonna drum that one out of S.H.I.E.L.D.”

“He's trying to . . . apparently Harrison's made of sterner stuff than the others that have gone before. On the one hand it's a good thing, because he's the longest running of Fury's personal assistants so memos coming out of that office have actually been consistent for once. But on the other hand, nobody likes him so we would really be happy if he finally just cracked under Nick's personal brand of torture and left S.H.I.E.L.D. altogether,” Vika replied, reaching up to brush a strand back behind her ears as she strode into the foyer, her husband and sister on her heels. Smiling at the blond, Vika greeted him warmly, “Hi Sam.”

“Hey Vika . . . Phil . . .” Pausing, he grinned slyly at the black-haired sister and drawled, “. . . Veronika.”
“Shut it, Samuel,” Nika snarked, even as she leaped up into the kid's arms and squeezed the life out of him. “What's shaking, bacon?”

“Not much. You killed anyone recently?”

Winking at him broadly with a click of her tongue, she declined to answer the question as she hopped up onto the desk next to Clint and leaned backwards on her hands as she kicked her heels against the bottom lazily. “So . . . where's the Viper?”

“She and Will are reading some poor idiot the Riot Act,” Natasha explained, eyes closed and perfectly content to lean up against her lover.

“Has she made him cry yet?”

“Not as far as we know.”

“Bummer. She's losing her touch,” the woman snarked, cocking an eyebrow at the dispatcher as Winnie choked from her chair. “I don't think I was talking to you, Sweetcheeks. Mind your own business, da?”

“Nika . . . be nice,” Vika admonished fondly, eyes rolling at the younger sister's typical brashness.

“For me, that was nice.”

Natasha snickered as she reminded the other Russian, “She's not wrong.”

Sighing heavily, Vika threw up her hands and insisted, “I give up! Heathens, the lot of you!”

It was about then that Jason looked up from his tablet and his eyes snagged on Sam's feet . . . Sam's bare feet. “Someone's going to tell Sam he's barefoot right? Before Marina comes out of that meeting and proceeds to mother him to death.”

Casey sniggered as Sam looked down at his feet, toes wiggling on the cold floor as he grimaced. “Jay has a point, Sammy . . . you probably want to go put your boots on.”

Nodding in agreement, the blond rotated on his heel and dashed off towards the locker room. Vika's eyes narrowed after him as she inquired rhetorically, “Anyone else want to wrap him in blankets and feed him soup right now?”

“He looks tired,” Marta agreed, bumping lightly into her best friend's side as Casey moved to lean up against the wall between her boyfriend and the virologist. The redhead chimed in next, “Marina says he's been claiming to be 'F.I.N.E.' a lot lately.”

Brian frowned, but it was Natasha who asked suspiciously, “He knows that that's an acronym and not a word, right?”

“He's aware,” Aaron replied, arms coming up to fold over his chest as he frowned. “We talked about it back on the trip home from Toronto the first time.”

“We're not going to get kill anyone, are we?” Brian growled, brown eyes glowing with a kind of manic rage at the thought.

“Probably not permanently,” Clint chirped cheerfully.

“Well if we do get to kill someone, at least we have Owen here to clean up the bodies,” Jason joked,
grinning at Will's longtime best friend and S.H.I.E.L.D.'s best Cleaner.

“Cleaning up after the Boss-lady after she's broken all of her toys is no fun for anyone,” the agent retorted with a grin and a roll of his eyes. “Least of all me.”

“Guys, however this all falls out, the Colonel and uchenyy are going to figure it out. They always do,” Bucky reminded the family, hands tucked into his pockets as ocean blue eyes scanned the family sprawled and scattered around the room.

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The SRU’s top negotiator watched Sam's parents as the doors slid closed behind them. The Colonel rounded the table to take a seat, leaning back comfortably in the chair as the woman – the woman he now knew to be Marina Ivanovna Petrovka, a Russian-born Lt. Colonel in the United States Army – paced restlessly along the narrow strip of floor between her partner's chair and the windows.

Commander Norman Holleran took a chair at the head of the table, folding his hands on the tabletop and leaning forward as he looked back and forth between Parker and the Colonel. The Army officer didn't seem interested in starting the conversation, watching Parker with color-changing eyes and his arms folded over his chest. “From the sounds of it, Braddock doesn't talk about work with either of you much. So how do you know that Eddie sent Braddock on a coffee run?” the negotiator finally asked, eyes flicking up to the woman as the question earned a vicious hiss.

Automatically, his mind reverted to his training. If this was a hot call, the lieutenant colonel would have been categorized at “red” and he would be trying to deescalate her to “yellow” in the hopes that eventually the scene would calm to “green” and the situation would resolve itself without anyone dead. Resting his hands on the table, palms up and fingers open, he asked calmly, “What do you both want to have happen here?”

Will's lips curved upwards in a patronizing smile as he replied, “Are you seriously trying to negotiate me right now, Sergeant Parker?”

Blinking at the question, Parker forced himself to backtrack. Clearly, this was not someone who was unaware of the way a negotiation worked. “I just want this to end in a way that is beneficial for all of us.”

“See, that's where you and I differ. I want this to end in a way that is beneficial for Sam. Because quite frankly, I couldn't give a rat's ass about a single member of your team.”

“Seconded,” Marina hissed, finally pausing in her pacing as she leaned up against the windowsill, her arms folding over her chest.

About then, Holleran spoke up, “Okay. I have to confess I'm only just now hearing about this?”

Turning to look at Parker, Norman frowned, “Why am I only just now hearing about this?”

“It was in the transcripts,” the bald man confessed reluctantly, reaching up to rub one hand over his bald head.
Turning to look at his old friend, the SRU commander asked, “You read the transcripts?”

“I have to,” Will announced. “To you, they're transcripts. To me and S.H.I.E.L.D., they're action reports. I have to make notations and supply commentary on them just like I would have to do to any other reports given to me about an agent in the field.” Cocking an eyebrow, he prompted, “In case you've forgotten, Norm . . . Sam belongs to S.H.I.E.L.D. first and the SRU second.”

Parker leaned forward at the information, demanding, “What!”?

The woman's grin was wicked as she replied, “Sam is a Level Four asset and field agent for the Strategic Homeland Intervention Enforcement and Logistics Division. We prefer S.H.I.E.L.D.; it's not quite as much of a mouthful.”

Will's eyes were as cold as the colorless scales of a fresh caught fish. “What exactly is your team's problem with Sam?”

Parker's eyes widened at the question, clearly not expecting it. “I don't understand the question.”

“Yes you do. So what is it? Are you mad because his father assigned him to the SRU a grand total of two **days** after he was honorably discharged from JTF2 as a way to punish his son for what the General perceived as a failure? Or are you mad because **I** pulled strings to have him assigned to Team One, because I knew that this is where he was going to do the most good . . . where he was going to be able to help the most people?”

“Team One picks their people . . . we didn't pick Braddock,” the sergeant bit out angrily, jaw set and mouth pinched as he glared at the other man.

“Boohoo . . . cry me a river,” Marina mocked, falling silent as Will held up a hand to gesture her to silence. “I'm sorry you feel that I overstepped, Sergeant Parker. But that's not on Sam . . . that's on me. So if you're going to be upset about it, I'd appreciate it if you'd redirect your anger to the person who deserves it.”

“And lay. Off. My. Boy,” the Russian snarled vehemently, causing Parker to lean back a little bit so as to put space between the two.

Holleran sighed as he turned to look at the Colonel. “So what do you want to do here, Will?”

“I want Team One to understand what it means to be a soldier . . . to have to shoot to kill first, or else you're dead. I want them to know what's it like to be Sam, to be Marina, to be any one of the men and women I have watched fight and die in the service of their fellow man over the last 20 years.”

“What do you suggest?”

“At S.H.I.E.L.D., we train our tactical units on paintball courses. Teach them to shoot first and question second.” Shrugging one shoulder, Will turned his attention to Parker as he insisted, “Real time. Non-fatal wounds are just that, non-fatal. The only kills that count are the ones that **would** kill you. And even if you're mortally wounded, as long as not you're dead, you keep to the mission until you can't anymore.” Leaning forward, Will sneered, “And I can guarantee you, it takes a long time before we can't anymore.”

Turning to look at Parker, the commander asked, “Does that sound amenable to you, Greg?”

“When?”

“Tomorrow. We'll arrange everything. Meet us here at 1400 and we'll show you the difference
between the training that Sam has had drilled into him everyday since he became an adult . . . and the
training he needs to have in order to be as successful with the SRU as he was with JTF2. Agreed?"

“Agreed,” Parker replied, watching as the younger man pushed himself to his feet.

“Good to hear. We'll see you tomorrow, Sergeant Parker.” Offering his hand to his partner, he linked
fingers with Marina as he strode to the door. Slapping the button, he turned back to face the
negotiator as the doors started to roll upwards. “Oh, and before you get any ideas to the contrary,
Sam's with us tomorrow . . . not Team One.”

The couple came into the foyer then, and Brian smirked as he asked, “How'd it go?”

“Paintball, tomorrow at 1400.”

Immediately, wicked – and in some cases downright evil – grins crept across the faces of each of the
Grimms and their S.H.I.E.L.D. counterparts. Nika's head dropped back as she practically purred,
“Klassno.”

Grinning at her sister, Marina agreed, “This is gonna be awesome.”

Chapter End Notes

Translations:

(R) khishchnik - little hawk (Bucky's nickname for Clint)
(R) da - yes
(R) klassno - awesome
Chapter 186: Sam & Marina Against The World

As her boys came into view, Marina swooped in on Aaron immediately, earning a sheepish grin as the second youngest Grimm looped his arms around her waist and lifted her clear off her feet in a warm, lengthy embrace. “I'm okay, sestra... I promise,” he murmured, burying his face in the curve
of her throat as her arms tightened hard around his own neck.

It was to her credit that the Russian took him at his word without protest. “I'm just happy you're home, solnyshko.”

“Yeah . . . me too.” Glancing towards the hallway Sam had disappeared down mere minutes before, he asked, “How's the malysh?”

“Desperately unhappy, but resolved to push through it. I already suggested that we go home, but he wouldn't hear of it,” she huffed with a sharp frown.

Will spoke up then from where he was standing at the door, fiddling with a set of keys. “Guys . . . it's 0230 and I would really like to be sleeping right now.”

Clint snorted, “Sleeping . . . right! Like there's a single one of us here who actually believe that.”

“I haven't really slept in about six weeks, Clinton Francis . . . I'm not sure I'd be of much use to samaya malen'kaya at this point. So can we just get Sam and go home?”

“You said you were taking your Ambien!” the Russian protested, moving to fuss at him restlessly.

Capturing her fluttering hands in one of his own, he smirked down at her as he used the other to pull a caught curl from her eyelashes. “Unconsciousness is not the same thing as sleep, zhemchuzhina.”

Glaring him fondly, she scolded, “You need to take better care of yourself, Misha . . . for fuck's sake, how much weight have you lost since I left? And don't lie to me . . . I didn't use to be able to feel your ribs when I tackled you.”

Rolling his eyes, Will slung his arm around her shoulders and pressed a warm kiss to her temple, teasing fondly, “Nasedka.”

“That is NOT the point, William Michael,” she grumbled, even as she slung her own arm around his waist and cuddled further into him.

Tilting up her chin, she grinned into his kiss as they enjoyed a moment where they were the only two in the world. When they parted, Will pecked the end of her nose teasingly, before straightening again. Lifting his head, the Colonel boomed, “Sam! Let's go!”

The kid's boots squealed as they skidded into the foyer, his S.H.I.E.L.D. hoodie properly zipped and his duffelbag over his shoulder as he replied, “I'm here.” Looking between the family's Power Couple and the increasing storm on Ed Lane's face as he conferred angrily with Parker, the youngest Grimm asked, “Everything okay?”

“Yeah . . . we're playing paintball tomorrow . . . 'torture the baby agents' style,” Bucky announced, to which his boyfriend cheered, “This is gonna be so badass!”

Winking at Sam, the Colonel teased, “You remember how to play?”

Grinning at the question, Sam shrugged, “I seem to remember Marina and I holding the record for fastest clear.”

“You're both freaks,” Brian joked, slinging his arm around his nephew's neck and rubbing his knuckles briskly through the kid's blond hair. “And that was against baby agents. This is going to be against Team One.”
“Still think you're going to be holding that record?” Aaron asked with a grin, arms around Marta’s waist as she yawned and cuddled into him sleepily.

It took a moment for the blond to answer, twisting to look at the woman who was both his training agent and the closest thing to a mother he’d had since his baby sister Amy had died. “What do you think, Ma?”

“I think we're gonna roast 'em.”

“You should probably handicap yourselves, at least if you don’t want to actually kill them. You know that right?” Vika asked with a grin, her usually stoic husband smirking next to her. The two had been privy to some of the more . . . effective . . . ass-kickings the Grimms had handed out in their time at S.H.I.E.L.D.

“Ugh . . . who cares about fair play? This is supposed to be fun!” Clint protested with a grin and a broad wink.

“Is there a rule somewhere that says fair can't be fun?”

“Yeah . . . it's right under the rules that say 'kick all the asses' and 'don't fuck with family',” Aaron agreed with a grin.

“Actually, I'm pretty sure that rule reads, 'Don't fuck with the THIS family','” Natasha agreed with a toss of her curly red hair.

“Both are applicable. Guys . . . come on. 1400 is only eleven hours away. Can we get our heads back in the game here?” Will sighed, reaching up to pinch the bridge of his nose even as he grinned at the family's usual antics. They were the best tactical unit S.H.I.E.L.D. had . . . but they were also a collective pain in their superiors’ asses. His own included. “Seriously guys . . . fall out. It's time to head back to the house.”

Twisting to look over her shoulder, Marina grinned at the members of her son's Team One and insisted, “I can't tell you how much I'm looking forward to kicking all of your asses tomorrow.” Turning back into her lover, she cocked an eyebrow up at him, “I just realized something?”

“What's that, sumasshedshaya devushka?”

“Where's Vati? And Vorobey?”

“Maria had a meeting she couldn't miss, so they're coming this afternoon. I don't think they're going to make it before paintball though.”

“Eh . . . Vorobey likes to watch us kick ass . . . she's not so into having to deal with us while we're kicking ass.”

The next day, at just shy of 2:15 in the afternoon, Norman Holleran led Toronto's best SRU team into the the command center S.H.I.E.L.D. had erected for their best team during the course of the night. Trailing behind them were the other two off duty teams for the SRU. Will was standing in front of a bank of monitors, arms folded as he watched the action unfold on the screens. Jason's fingers were flashing over his keyboard as he tracked Marina through the scenario.

Eyes flicking towards the door at the sound of footsteps, the Colonel announced, “You're late.” Finger flashing out, he pointed, “You're gonna lose her.”
“I'm not gonna lose her . . . shut up,” Jason snapped, fingers flashing as he pulled up another set of cameras to keep the Russian on the central screen.

Will's eyes scanned through the other monitors, checking in on the second team as they hunted her down. Of Marina's partner in the scenario . . . there was no sign. “Where is he?”

“I don't know. He's found a blind spot . . . there aren't supposed to be blind spots, Will . . . I checked!” the middle Grimm swore, glaring as he tracked furiously through all of the camera angles an agent from R&D had set up the night before.

“Did he find a perch?”

“Any perches not on camera are on the roofs . . . There's no way onto the roofs.”

“Jay . . . this is Sam and Marina . . . there are absolutely ways for them to get on the roofs.”

Growling, Jason swore as he stood and grabbed up a kit. “Call a halt . . two minute hold. Everyone stationary for two minutes.” Throwing his hands up he hissed, “Why the hell did I let someone else put up these cameras!? Idiots . . if you want something done right, do it yourself. Good grief.”

Chuckling, Will leaned over a microphone as he keyed it on, tapping in to all of the comms the players were wearing. “Two minute hold. Everyone back to safe zones. Jay needs to fix the cameras and then we’ll restart the scenario. Understood?”

Aaron's voice chimed in as he hissed, “I had her, Will!”

“You only have me if I'm dead!” Marina singsonged back with a cackle.

The Colonel spoke up to interrupt whatever retort Aaron was about to give. “Actually, Aaron, you're dead. Sam tagged you just before I called the hold. Check your shirt.”

“What!? Bastard!” he roared, looking down to see a bright yellow blotch in the weak point of his vest, just above the opening to the armpit. “Damn it Sam!”

Sam said nothing, but his quiet chuckle was clearly heard through the comms. Marina's voice chimed in then, “Did Team One ever show?”

“Yeah . . . fifteen minutes late,” Will muttered, toggling the monitors as pictures of the roofs finally came on screens and Sam's perch, laid out on the northwest roof, came into view. Nodding in approval of the spot – good vantage and visibility, low risk of being seen and, as Jason claimed, no tangible way to get up there . . . unless you were a Grimm – Will made a mental note to praise the selection when the scenario was over. “Norm brought more people to play.”

“Come get dirty in our sandbox. Here we have explosives,” Nika laughed, a wide grin on her face as she looked up at the camera positioned over her head; all of the dead were gathered in a singular location so as to keep track of them and stay out of the way of any stray paintballs.

“We want to scrap this then?”

“Nah . . we'll let it play. You and Sam have already taken out Doyle, Owen, Aaron, Nika and Vika . . . once Jay's back, we'll restart and finish this game. Team One made us wait . . now they can wait.”

“Sounds good,” the Russian agreed, foot tapping as she looked up at the camera over her head. “Hey sexy?”
Chuckling at her, he asked with a grin, “Da?”

“Did I tell you today that your ass looks fantastic in those tac-pants?”

The chorus of groans ringing out from the younger Grimms earned a quiet snicker from the Russian and a broad grin from the Colonel. “Behave yourself, Major.”

“Hey! What have we said about flirting on comms!?” Clint interrupted sharply, a gagging sound causing the eldest Grimm to snicker.

“Plug your ears, dorogoy,” the S.H.I.E.L.D. handler taunted, a bright laugh erupting from her as her other boys blurted out together, “Get a room!”

“Izvinitе, домашний,” she giggled.

“Vrun!” was the unanimous response from her boys before Jason came skidding back into the command center and slid back into his chair. “Sweet!” Looking up at his brother as his fingers flew over the keyboard, he insisted, “Remind me to fire Henderson. Where the hell did he learn to hardwire a computer array?” Looking up just in time to see Marina doubling over with laughter, he twisted to look back at his brother, “What did I miss?”

“Nothing you're going to be upset about, Jay, trust me,” was Clint's dry response.

“Ohhhkay. So cameras are up, comms are going silent. Play starts again in ten . . . nine . . . eight . . .”

As Will listened to his brother count down, he watched as Marina once again took off running. Narrowing his eyes, he moved forward as he questioned, “She's running right for Clint and Bucky . . . what the hell is she doing? She knows they're there . . . she's checked that location twice.”

“You really want to know?” Jason asked, bringing up the location for the two snipers' perch on the next screen as they watched Marina move. “Look at Sam . . . he's moved.”

Glancing up at the younger sniper, he saw that Sam had indeed shifted his perch just enough that he was aiming at the rooftop across from him. “What is he aiming for?”

“I think we're about to find out.”

“Turn on their comms but mute it. I want to hear what they're saying.”

Nodding, Jason reached out and flicked switches to pull up Sam and Marina's comms onto the main speakers. The recorder was capturing everyone, though Will and Jason had elected to mute the sound while they watched so as not to be distracted from the visual. There was a pause, before Sam's voice crackled through the comm, “You sure about this Ma?”

“You in position?” she asked, not even sounding winded as she literally leaped from an upper landing to the next, seeming to float through the air as she dropped.

“Yeah . . . but two against one.”

“I can make it.”

“You sure? That's a hell of a jump.”

“Just be ready. I don't think this is going to work more than once. We need the snipers out of play. After Clint and Bucky, Brian and Natasha are the only ones left.”
His shoulders moved as he took a deep breath, before he agreed firmly, “Just give me the word. I have the shot.”

“That's my boy,” Marina praised, skidding to a stop just past where Clint and Bucky were lying in wait. Clint was sprawled at his rifle, looking through its scope as Bucky knelt next to him as spotter. “Oh boys!?” she taunted, waiting until she was sure she had their attention before rotating on her heel and dashing back towards the stairwell again.

“Turn it all on,” Will ordered, before every voice from the scenario flooded through the speakers.

Bucky's tone was sharp as he insisted, “We've got Marina! She's in the Northwest stairwell, heading for the top floor. North central building.”

Brian chimed in, “Bucky . . . she's playing you!”

“There's no way out from up there!” Natasha agreed.

Clint grunted, “Good. We'll trap her in the corner and then we'll head after Sam.”

“First we have to find Sam,” was the retort from the red-haired Merry Murderess.

“Let's just get Marina first. Then we'll worry about Sam,” Bucky insisted, the two snipers dashing up the stairwells after her. They arrived just in time to see Marina's feet disappear through the window as she climbed towards the roof. “She's heading for the roof!”

“What the hell is she doing?” Will demanded, bracing himself up on the desk beside Jason as he watched Marina run into the middle of the roof and then stop, clearly waiting for the others to catch up.

Bucky and Clint were on the roof shortly after her, earning a grin before she turned on her heel and dashed, planting her foot on the lip of the roof and then launching herself through the air. Will lunged forward, heart in his throat, watching the cameras intently as she shot out the window a floor down on the building opposite - the same building Sam was currently perched on. Her body landed hard as she rolled forward on her shoulder, using her forward momentum to propel herself to her feet as she continued to run for the stairwell. “You think she's done that on an op?” Jason asked, looking up at his brother with a small smile.

Pinching the bridge of his nose as he fought to calm his racing heart, Will sighed, “I wouldn't put it past her. Damn, but that woman is terrible for my blood pressure.”

Meanwhile, the two snipers were staring. “Holy shit!” Clint shouted, staring after her as she disappeared from view. “We're three fucking stories up!”

“What happened?”

“She made her own exit strategy,” the Winter Soldier announced, gun out as he moved cautiously towards the edge of the roof with Clint just behind and to his left.

“What does that mean?” Brian demanded.

Whatever they were going to say in answer was cut off as two paintballs exploded against the hollows of Clint and Bucky's throats, the vulnerable spot left exposed by their vests an instant kill shot. As they exploded against the skin, they left twin bright yellow blotches and effectively took the two snipers out of the game, as well as leaving Brian's question unanswered. Will leaned forward and announced into the PA system, “Clint and Bucky are dead. Brian and Natasha . . . Sam and
Marina . . . you are the only four left. Clock is ticking. Twenty minutes left on the scenario. Good hunting.”

It was about then that Will could hear Spike Scarlatti’s gasp from behind him. “Oh fuck. We're so screwed.”

Chapter End Notes

Translations:

(R) sestra - sister
(R) solnyshko - sunshine (Marina's nickname for Aaron)
(R) malysh - kiddo
(R) samaya malen'kaya - my little one (Will's most common nickname for Marina)
(R) zhemchuzhina - pearl (one of Will's less common nicknames for Marina)
(R) Nasedka - mother hen
(R) sumasshedshaya devushka - crazy girl (one of Will's less common nicknames for Marina)
(G) Vati - Dad (Marina's nickname for Hansel Kuhn)
(R) Vorobey - Sparrow (Marina's nickname for her best friend, Maria Hill)
(R) da - yes
(R) dorogoy - darling (Marina's nickname for Clint)
(R) izvinite - sorry
(R) domashniy - pets (an interchangeable nickname Marina uses for the youngest three Grimm boys)
(R) vrun - liar
(R)
Hey guys! You are all amazing. So now I need you to be even more amazing.

You'll notice at the end of the chapter that there are a couple of new pieces inspired by the UALP, by the lovely Caiti (Caitrona_3). She wrote these with my full support and input, and I strongly encourage you all to go take a look. And there's a new Family Photo in her "Photo Album" too! Let's spread the UALP LOVE, people!

Since this chapter is told in Spike's POV, there are no translations this time. Enjoy!
with combat skills, which is why all the ladies loved him”. Which would be awesome, except that the ladies didn't tend to love him; Spike was getting exactly zero love.

Really, Spike wasn't entirely sure what the problem with Sam was. The guy wasn't a exactly a negotiator or anything, but he was a solid guy. He learned pretty quick, and he seemed genuinely interested in being good at the job. But Ed and Greg, and even to a smaller extent Wordy, had been gung-ho against the guy since Holleran introduced him two weeks before.

And now, his family was in town... and holy shit, Spike didn't want to have ever found himself on that's family's bad side. Except that, here he was... on that family's shit list. And staring at the monitors over the Colonel's shoulders, that was not somewhere he particularly wanted to be.

Based on his observations, the scenario ran around Sam and his mom being targets for the rest of the group. The systematic, and downright ballsy, way the two were putting down members of their own family was both impressive and terrifying. And then, of course, Lt. Colonel Petrovka took that flying leap off the roof, and Sam cut down the two snipers for the other team and Spike knew without a doubt... Team One was well and truly fucked. “Oh fuck. We are so screwed.”

His team leader's blue eyes were wary as he twisted and cocked an eyebrow at his technical and bomb specialist. “We are not screwed,” he argued on a growl.

“Are you kidding me!? Did you see that!? And she's still moving, as though it never happened. She's gotta be hurting.”

The Colonel's tone was cold as he replied, “Marina doesn't notice pain like normal people. Trust me... she hasn't even realized yet that she's bleeding.”

Jason groaned, reaching out to flipped another switch, “Yo Doc... your favorite patient is being badass again.”

“What's she done this time?” came the deep tones of the family's medical physician.

“Pretty sure she cut herself on glass,” Will replied, head cocking as he watched Sam crawl backwards from his perch and head to the other side of the building. Laying flat, he leaned over the edge of the roof and stretched down to pull Marina up onto the roof next to him.

There was a pause, as the two laid flat for a moment, lips moving as they talked, before Sam rolled to his feet and helped Marina up too. Hands on her shoulders, he rotated her around, earning a fond grin and a visible roll of her eyes. The second Sam saw the blood, he fished in his cargo pocket for a small first aid cut and tended to the injury quickly and efficiently. Will spoke up again, insisting, “Sam's got it, Vince. You're off the hook.”

“Thank God. I don't know what it is with you Grimms, but you avoid Medical a lot better than you do injury. Not to mention, you're the worst patients ever.”

Will grinned as he grunted in acknowledgment of that statement. “No argument there. But that's mostly because the nurses hate us.”

“Which is hilarious, because half of them are crushing on the lot of you,” the former soldier scoffed with a chuckle. “Anything else?”

“Nah... go back and play with the girls. We'll call you if we need you.”

There was a dry tone in his reply as Vincent drawled, “Thank you.”
It was about then that Spike turned his attention back to the screens, where Sam and Marina were attaching lines to harnesses and preparing to rappel down the side of the building. They barely slowed as they went over the side of the building, hitting the ground hard and disengaging in seconds flat. Sam slung his rifle over his back as he pulled the modified sidearm from its holster at his thigh, while Marina had two resting lazily in her palms.

Nodding at his brother, it was only a second, before Sam and Marina's voice filled the room. “This is gonna be a bitch, you know that right?” the Russian asked calmly.

“It's Brian and Natasha, two of the most accomplished assassins S.H.I.E.L.D. can boast. Fortunately, they don't know where we are . . . but we know where they're holed up. With any luck, this'll be over quick.”

“You need a break?”

“Nah. I'm good. Let's get this done.”

“Copy that,” she agreed, eyes scanning the area in front of her, before she gestured him forward with two fingers. “Move out.”

The two moved stealthily through their surroundings, as they approached the building where Brian and Natasha had laid their own trap. Heading for the side wall, the one location where the two would be completely blind to his approach, he tossed it up and grinned as the hook caught on the lip of the roof the first time. Hooking in his line to his harness, he offered her a fist. “See you up top.”

“Remember . . . black wall, third window,” she insisted, bumping his fist with her own.

“I remember,” Sam agreed, before he started to pull himself up the rope hand over hand. “Be careful.”

“Good hunting,” she returned, slipping soundlessly into the building and heading for the stairwell.

Crouching on the landing a half a level down, she whispered into her comm, “You ready?”

“I'm in position. Give me the word.”

“Heading up. Counting down steps,” she agreed, starting to count quietly as she climbed cautiously up the stairwell. Pausing just before the top, she checked around corner carefully with her compact, before dashing silently towards the door to the room where Brian and Natasha laid in wait. “On my mark . . . three . . . two . . . one . . . mark.”

Marina leaned around the door frame then, whistling to draw their attention away from the window at their backs. Dodging back around the wall out of sight, she watched their ammunition sail past her harmlessly. There was a whirring sound, swinging her back into the building and putting two shots in nape of each of their necks as they swung around to plug Sam as he rappelled into the room behind them. “Fuck!” Brian shouted, twisting to look at his sister. “In the back!? Really?”

“Kill shot is a kill shot,” Marina replied with a grin and a wink.

Natasha growled as she glared at her sister, “I should have known better. I should have known you were the one to worry about, and that Sam was the decoy. I was convinced you were the decoy and Sam was the one to worry about.”

“That was the plan,” Marina agreed, looking up at the camera as Will's voice came through the PA system. “Sam . . . Marina . . . good job. Come on back. Let's get this thing started.”
Glaring at his team leader, Spike asked, “Still think we’re not fucked? Because I really think we’re fucked.”

The Colonel looked down at his brother, one eyebrow cocking upwards. “You think we should unleash the Murderesses on them?”

“Do you want them to die today?” was the rhetorical question in reply, as Jason saved the footage from the game to a portable hard drive and stashing it in his bag before hauling another out and setting up to store the data for the next game.

“Marina and her sisters are not that terrifying.”

“We call them the Merry Murderesses . . . they are absolutely that terrifying.”

The Grimms came into the control room then, everybody congratulating Sam for his marksmanship and ragging on Marina for her general ruthlessness. "Come on, Marishka . . . that leap was crazy,” Clint insisted, staring at his sister in horrified awe.

Bucky's hand came up to rest on the back of his boyfriend's neck, even as he addressed his former protege. “He's not wrong, uchenny . . . are you all right?”

“I'm okay. My shoulder hurts, but that's just cause I landed hard. Really, I'm okay.”

“How's your back?”

“Sam took care of it. I'm all right. Ready to go.”

“You're not human . . . you know that right?” Aaron teased with a grin and a wink.

“Pot meet kettle,” the woman scoffed with a grin, ducking under the wide swing as she tackled her second youngest around the waist and proceeded to tickle the hell out of him.

“All right all right all right . . . settle down,” Will insisted, leaning back against the desk as he watched his family roughhouse with one another. The adrenaline was coursing through them all, but especially through Sam and Marina; Will could practically see the way his partner and their son were vibrating with the excess energy they weren't burning off. “Let's talk specs. Jay, this is your show.”

“Okay, so the scenario is simple. Team One, the Grimms are your targets.” Holding up what looked like a bladeless knife, Jason continued, “This is a modified K-Bar. It is a soldier's most reliable weapon. As you may notice, there is no blade. The plastic is a sensor. If it comes close to any of the receivers in the vests, it will tag you, just like any shot for any of the guns. There are receivers in your neck, your armpits and your waist; slices across the throat, stabbing motions at the arms or the abdomen will count. Anything above the vest counts as a kill. Any questions?”

“No. How did you get all of this?”

“I built most of it,” Jason replied, twisting back in his chair and pulling up the schematics of the yard. “So, here's your playground. Boundaries are here; anyone across a boundary is dead.” Smirking, he insisted, “You can pretend there's landmines if you'd like, but the boundary is finite. There is no dodging it. It will set off the receivers and I will know you crossed.”

“What about buildings?”

“Any of the buildings are fairplay. Just be fair warned, the Grimms are going to have access to them, before you ever get in. They're going in five minutes before you, to get set and then you're in after
them. Last team standing... wins.” Spinning his chair around, he grinned, “Good hunting. And good luck... you're gonna need it.”

“You're not coming?”

“No. I'm running the monitors and the comms. Will's not going either, because with his tactical brain... you'd be dead in seconds and that's not fair.”

Marina huffed slightly, muttering in Russian and earning a series of sniggers from the Russian-speaking members of her family. “Are we doing this? Let's do this... I'm bored.”

“Grimms... get set. Team One, your countdown starts now. When the siren goes off, you're clear to enter. Take what time you can to decide your strategy... you'll need one. The park is extensive and you are outnumbered, two to one.”

Marina turned to look at her family as she ordered briskly, “All right, move out. Double time.”

There wasn't even a pause, before the room was empty and Will was turning to Jay. “Turn off the cameras until the siren. No unfair advantages.”

“Copy that,” the younger brother agreed, fingers moving fast across his fingers as he shut down the cameras just as the Grimms began to appear in the park. “Starting countdown.”

Spike had seen the competent and calm way Marina had been ordering her squad around, just before the cameras went down. Turning to his best friend, he saw his own consternation reflected on his buddy's face. “Am I the only one who has a really bad feeling about this?”

Lou's head shook once, eyes wide as he listened to Ed starting to discuss their tactical options and splitting the team up into entry groups. Lou and Spike had the black wall, while Greg and Ed would take white. Jules was assigned Sierra One; it was her job to find a perch as soon as they were in the park. Some part of Spike was worried that anywhere Jules picked, Sam would be already there – ready and waiting to take her out of play – but from the look on the woman's face, that wasn't something she wanted to hear. Wordy had been partnered with one of the members of Team Two, while the rest of Team Two had paired up amongst themselves.

Movement out of the corner of his eyes drew Spike's eyes around. Will was seated on the edge of the desk, leaning down to Jason's height and listening intently to whatever his younger brother was saying. Spike gulped slightly; the two men were eerie in their complete calm. Based on what they both had said, they agreed with Spike's assessment that Team One was well and truly fucked.

Groaning as the timer behind them began counting down the last sixty seconds to the siren blow, Spike turned on his heel and ran out of the room after the rest of his teammates. Lou and Spike were in position with an instant to spare, before the siren blew and they advanced into the park. Moving in stealth formation, they crept into the compound, eyes straight ahead and bodies alert for any sign of life. Which meant that it was a surprise, when a strong arm reached up around Spike's head, covering his mouth with one palm, as the other dragged the modified K-Bar across the exposed flesh of his jugular. Shocked at how fast it happened, Spike stared as Lou fell victim to the same fate only steps ahead of him.

Leaving him where he'd been “killed”, Aaron and Clint Grimm grinned at the two stunned SRU constables, before casting them a mock salute. “Nice knowing you boys,” Clint mocked, before the two turned away and proceeded to parkour up the side of the building next to them, without a rope and using only their hands and feet.
All in all, it was a rout. It took a grand total of seven minutes and twenty-eight seconds for the Grimms to completely decimate both of the combined SRU teams. As Spike predicted, Sam was waiting on the roof of the best perch for Jules, putting a shot into the hollow of her throat before she'd even finished clearing the lip, before taking up his sniper perch and calling out locations to the rest of the family. Ed fell victim to a well placed knife throw from the man Spike had pegged as Clint's boyfriend – though he wasn't going to ask, because if he was wrong, he had no desire to get his ass kicked – while Greg was taken out by a clean shot to the head by the youngest Grimm in his own perch on a different roof.

After it was over, the two groups switched roles. Team One took the place of the targets. It didn't end any better than it did the first time.

As the tech watched the tape after the two scenarios were over, he suddenly understood why the Colonel and his partner were so furious. It had not been hard to see the difference in tactics the two squads had employed. The SRU were obviously cops; clearly confident in their ability to clear the park without a second thought to sight lines or what was behind them. It came with the territory, he guessed. Most times when clearing a house, the person they were looking for wasn't a threat so they saw no reason to hide themselves the way the Grimms had.

The Grimms, though.

They melted into their surroundings effortlessly. Even Sam had managed to make himself completely invisible in plain sight. There was total calm and precision in every action, moving only as much as strictly necessary and employing an economy of motion that was fluid and effortless. They were beautiful and graceful and deadly.

Looking up at his sergeant with a grimace, Spike asked, “We probably need to reevaluate how we're training Sam.”

“Yeah, Spike . . . I think you might be right,” the man announced, eyes wide with shock and awe as he watched Sam joke with his two youngest uncles.
Hey guys! If you still haven't read Caiti's fics, I totally recommend them! They are awesome! And remember to review on them. Spread the love.

So this is the first of two for tonight. I hope you will let me know what you think of both chapters. I've worked really hard on these today.

Translations are at the end as always.

Chapter 188: Unwind

“All right... I need a drink,” Clint insisted, leaning back against his boyfriend subtly. “Who's with
“I guess that depends. Are you planning on getting drunk? Cause we can do that at home,” Marina teased, folding her arms over her chest as she smirked at her dorogoy. “There's plenty of alcohol back at the house.”

“Home is boring . . . bars are fun. Come on. Please, Marishka!”

“Why are you asking me?” she asked, moving to lean against the desk next to her own lover. “Ask your brother.”

“Because if you say yes, you can convince Will to say yes,” Aaron reminded his sister with a smirk, shifting at the last second to catch his girlfriend as Marta lunged into his arms.

Rolling her eyes, she scoffed, “Clearly you have a higher estimation of my influence over your brother than is reasonable.”

A soft brush against her arm brought her attention around to her partner. Will was fishing in one pocket, before drawing her opal from the depths. Offering him her left hand, she grinned as he fit the ring back in its rightful place before lifting the appendage to his lips and pressing a reverent kiss to the skin. Relieved to have it back – she never wore it on assignment, as she was terrified of losing it – she wiggled her fingers and watched the light play across the starburst shape of the deep blue stone. Humming happily, she shifted to burrow into his side, as Will looked up at his younger brothers. “Is there a particular bar you have in mind?”

“Spirits Bar and Grill,” was Jason's reply, a sly grin on his causing a flash of dread to slip past the Colonel's usual stoicism.

“It's a karaoke bar, isn't it?”

“Come on, Will . . . we haven't done karaoke since Jay got promoted,” Brian reminded the older brother, earning a small glare from the others. “You had fun last time.”

“I don't remember last time. And I seem to recall Marishka still holding some piece of blackmail over your head from that night,” the Colonel chuckled with a grin.

Scowling at the reminder, Brian thought about it for a moment and then shrugged. “Worth it.”

It was about then that four more people arrived in the room, led by none other than S.H.I.E.L.D.'s God himself. Marina grinned at the sight of him, even as she watched Team One's younger members stare in shock at the man's face . . . and the black eyepatch hiding his damaged left eye. “Fury . . . you magnificent bastard.”

“Hello Marina,” he greeted with his typical shark's grin, watching as Marina squealed at the sight of her best friend, the two women practically lunging at each other and hugging fiercely. Eyes roving over the faces of the SRU’s Team One, he turned back to Will and asked with a grin, “So? How'd it go?”

There was a small smile on the face of his Chief Analyst as he agreed, “It went. How was the trip?”

“Efficient,” he replied, using his hold on the hand of the woman beside him to pull her forward to stand beside him. “You remember Pam Landy? Pam, this is the Colonel I'm always telling you about.”

Nodding once in agreement, the Colonel greeted her warmly, “Ms. Landy.”
“Just Pam . . . I'm not afraid to tell you, Colonel, you and your family are quite the legend among intelligence circles.”

Shrugging nonchalantly, he folded his arms over his chest as he joked, “I'm sure I've heard that said a time or two.”

“You sure I can't seduce the lot of you away from S.H.I.E.L.D.? You would be a hell of a boon to the CIA.”

Quicksilver eyes flashed to his left as he replied, “No . . . I'm afraid that wouldn't work out for us.”

Following the movement, Landy gawked at the sight of Outcome 5 standing with Dr. Marta Shearing, the two watching her. Five's blue eyes were stark and resolute, though there was clear terror on the virologist's own face. Smirking slightly, she returned her attention back to the Colonel, “I can see how that would be the case.” Smiling kindly at the younger woman, she vowed solemnly, “Your secret is safe with me.”

Nodding once in silent thanks, Aaron wrapped his hand around Marta's own and pulled her gently from the room. Turning away from the retreating twosome, the blonde turned her attention on her brother, grinning brightly. “Hello Phil.”

There was a small smirk at the very corner of side of his mouth, as he replied, “You missed my wedding.”

“I know. I'm sorry.”

Shrugging one shoulder at the response – the handler was more than aware of the mess she'd been untangling at the time – he offered one hand to his wife and tucked the Amazon into him as he turned back to his sister. “Pam . . . I'd like you to meet my wife, Viktoria Viktorovna Dubrovskaya Coulson. Vika, this is my sister . . . Pamela Landy.”

“Pleasure to meet you,” the former assassin insisted with a small smile as she extended her hand to her husband's sister.

Smiling, Pamela stepped forward and wrapped her arms around the other woman familiarly. “Welcome to the family, Vika. I am very pleased to meet you.”

Hansel's eyes were solemn as they watched his oldest son visibly avoid him, eyes darting around the room. Noticing that her Vati was still standing off to the side, Marina released her best friend and turned to be able to look between the two. Narrowing her eyes at her partner, she watched as Will all but flinched at the expression. “All right . . . what's going on?”

“Nothing, samaya malen'kaya.”

Folding her arms over her chest, she watched him fidget for a moment, before rotating on her heel to look at the rest of the family. “All right. Everybody out!”

Will shifted, rocking backwards as she shoved sharply on the center of his chest. “Not you, William Michael.”

The two glared at each other for a long moment, even as she heard Clint joke to S.H.I.E.L.D.'s director, “Hey Boss . . . you met Team One yet?”

There was a pause before Fury rumbled, “How bad was it?”
Jason's tone was cackling as he replied, “They smoked 'em . . . twice.”

Whatever else was said was lost as the door closed, cutting off the family's Power Couple from the rest. Narrowing her arms at her lover, she insisted, “All right. Let's try this again . . . this time without the lie. What is going on?”

“He lied to me, Marina.”

“He was trying to protect you, Misha.”

“I don't need protection!” he roared, rocketing to his feet.

“I know . . . There are times I wish you'd accept it from me, but I know you don't need it. That doesn't explain why both Aaron and Clint said that you've been giving Hansel the silent treatment. And why you wouldn't even look at him when you both were in the same room together.”

Slumping backwards onto the desk, he sighed as he dropped his face into his hands. “My own father thinks I'm weak. What the hell does that say about me? How can I expect to continue to lead this family if my own father doesn't believe I can?”

She sighed as she came to kneel at his feet, hands coming up to brace herself on his knees. “Those we protect are not always weak, Mishka.” Reaching up to lift his chin with a crooked finger, she smiled as she asked, “Do you think Sam is weak, when I protect him? Or Clint when I protect him? Protection is just one more way we show we love someone.” Cupping his cheeks in her palms, she looked surely into his eyes as she implored him, “Please . . . do not let Ross into your head like this. You are the strongest man I know . . . no one else could have survived the kinds of things you have and still come out on the other side sane.”

Will jerked his chin out of her hand, glaring at a spot on the floor, though she dragged him back to her only a moment later. “Mishka . . . he isn't worth it. Don't let him do this to you. Please.”

Those eyes were tortured and angry and devastated, searing into her own as he took in the sincerity of her features and the honesty in her eyes. “I'm so tired, Marina,” he breathed, reaching up to trap her hand against his face.

“I know,” she promised, coming up to nuzzle her nose against his fondly. “Let me carry it for awhile . . . you don't need to be alone in this, Misha.”

She could feel fingers tangling in her hair as he hauled her up to his mouth, seeking absolution in her lips as he all but devoured her. Drawing him to her, she gave back as good as she got. She knew better than anyone how fragile he felt at that moment; they would go out with the family to the bar and attempt to get terribly drunk. And then . . . well, then she'd take him into her bed and let him bury himself in her for awhile.

Come morning, he'd be back on an even keel and maybe – just maybe – whatever damage had been wrought between Hansel and Will could begin to mend.

Finally, the two broke apart. “All right. Let's go out with the boys. I think we could use a break, don't you?” she asked, drawing tender designs on the roughened planes of his cheeks.

Nodding, he slumped down against her for a moment, just enjoying the warmth of her arms around him and the strength of her determination to protect him. After a bit, he straightened and stood from his seat. Helping her to her feet, he pulled her into him tightly, leaning on her lightly and knowing that she could take the weight. “Ya lyublyu tebya, samaya malen'kaya.”
“Lyublyu tebya, moy Mishka . . . vsegda,” she vowed, going up on tiptoes to kiss the bottom of his chin.

The two exited the room, skidding to a halt at the sight of the entire family waiting quietly for them to come out. There was a certain sense of anticipation, as the brothers looked between their commanding officer and their father, trying to guess what was going to happen next. Finally, Will moved forward and clapped his father on the shoulder companionably as he insisted, “Let's go get drunk.”

The relief was instant, even before Clint cheered, “All right! Cheap beer and shitty musicians . . . here we come!”

Marina's eyes widened slightly at the sight of Spike Scarlatti stepping forward then, followed by Lewis Young and Jules Callaghan. “You mind if we join you?”

Turning to look at her son, she watched as he moved to take up a spot next to her. Reaching up to cup his cheek, she insisted, “It's your call, Sammy-honey. You let me know what you want to do.”

Those blue eyes were curious and a little sad as they looked down at her, before turning his attention onto his teammates. There was a long pause, before at last he shrugged, “Sure . . . you can come if you want.”

“All right then . . . let's out of here,” the Colonel insisted, reaching out over Marina's head to ruffle the kid's hair fondly. “I'm going to assume you have your own transportation?”

“Yes sir.”

“Don't call me sir . . . I work for a living,” was the automatic response, before he moved away with Marina beside him. “Grimms . . . move out!”

Chapter End Notes

Translations:

(R) dorogoy - darling (Marina's nickname for Clint Grimm)
(G) Vati - Dad (Marina's nickname for Hansel Kuhn)
(R) samaya malen'kaya - my little one (Will's most common nickname for Marina Petrovka)
(R) Misha/Mishka - a diminutive of Michael (Will's middle name is Michael; Marina's most common nickname for her lover)
(R) (Ya) lyublyu tebya - (I) love you
(R) vsegda - always
Chapter 189: Demons of the Night

Marina groaned as she took in the features of her family. It was about two in the morning. And it had been a long night of drinking.

Her son was literally giggling, one arm over her Misha's shoulders as the Colonel coaxed him
tenderly into the back of the Jeep. While she was relieved to see him relatively carefree for once, there was a bigger part of her that worried about what kind of havoc the alcohol would wreck on her youngest. He already suffered from nightmares, and considering that Lou and Spike had finally managed to pester him into confessing why he'd left JTF2 – the looks of sympathetic shock on each of their faces had managed to make tiny cracks in the iron around Marina's heart – she was anticipating a short night.

“All right, Sammy-honey, into the car with you,” she scolded, climbing up onto the back wheel and leaning over to get him propped up against the side of the car and his seatbelt around him securely. Smoothing one hand over his hair, she smiled at the brilliant, if exorbitantly drunk, smile he gave her just before he let out a small hiccup. “Oh baby . . . you are going to be regretting this in the morning.”

Turning to smile at the Grimms, she chuckled to see the boys mostly sober. Seeing as it took the entire stock of the bar they'd gone to in New York to get them drunk the first time, she wasn't really surprised that none of them were currently impaired. Marta didn't drink, so she and Aaron were coaxing a very drunk Jules Callaghan into the back of the Jeep next to Sam. Marina had limited herself to a series of vodka shooters with her best friend and sisters, before consuming only a single beer after that. She would probably be feeling it in the morning, but for the moment she was okay. Her sisters . . . maybe not so much, as evidenced by the way that Hansel and Maria were practically draped all over each other, and by Natasha's lax posture as she slumped against her lover tiredly.

Taking in the other two boys that Clint and Bucky were currently stuffing into the backseat of Aaron's rental, she sighed heavily, “Okay . . . so I think it'll just be easier to take the kids back to the house. We can bed them down in the living room; they can sleep it off and leave in the morning.”

“Sounds good. We'll take Young and Scarlatti. You two gonna be okay here?”

“We'll see you back at the house,” she agreed, accepting Marta's hug warmly before chuckling as Aaron's arms came around the both of them. “Be careful going home. See you soon.”

“We'll see you there,” Aaron agreed, before handing Marta into the passenger seat of the rental. He waited patiently for a moment for her to get settled, before he pushed the door shut and rounded the car to the driver's side. Before long, the Jeep was the only Grimm car still in the parking lot.

Looking up at her lover, the Russian teased, “You ready to get out of here?”

“More than ready. How are our drunkards?”

Twisting, she grinned to see Jules already curled up in her corner and snoring, while Sam was practically sprawled against the seat and snuffling adorably in his sleep. “I think they'll be okay. Just . . . avoid the potholes or we may scramble Sam's brain.”

Reaching across the gearshift, Will took her hand and pressed a sweet kiss to the tattoo displayed on the inside of her wrist. “Let's go home.”

Smiling at him sweetly, she twisted her hands to interlace their fingers before settling back in her seat as the Colonel started the car and pulled out into the street.

Getting everyone into the house ended up being kind of a mess. Marina dropped an unsteady and still mostly sleeping Sam onto the couch, pausing there before going to get what she would need to bed down the three members of Team One in the living room. “Misha . . . bring some water!” she called, cupping Sam's cheek as she insisted, “Stay awake, Sammy . . . you need to drink some water first, okay?”
“Mm-hm,” he agreed in a sleepy hum, even as he curled up in the corner of the couch.

Shaking her head, she looked up as her lover came into the couch with a handful of water bottles. Handing them out to the other three, he took a seat on the arm next to Sam's head and nudged him gently. “Come on, malysh . . . drink some water.”

“Tired, Dad,” the boy moaned, even as he consented to Will's continued prodding.

“I know. But you'll feel better in the morning if you drink some water now. Come on . . . slow sips . . . drink the whole thing . . . good kid,” the Colonel coaxed fondly, running his fingers slowly through his son's blond hair. Looking up at his partner, he nodded, “I got this. Go get the stuff.”

Nodding briskly, Marina dashed towards the stairs and disappeared down the hall towards the linen closet in the spare bathroom. Passing out the blankets and pillows, she moved to crouch in front of her son and partner with a small smile. Reaching up to smooth her fingers over his cheek, she teased, “You're going to be miserable in the morning, baby.”

Trying to shrug, the kid nearly knocked himself onto the floor. “Worth it.”

Shaking her head, she tilted the water bottle up to force him to swallow down the rest, before tossing the empty bottle towards the kitchen where it would be out of the way. “All right, let's get you up to bed,” she soothed, standing and assisting him to his feet.

Will wrapped one arm over his shoulder, letting Marina take the other before the three made their slow, ponderous way up the stairs and towards the smaller room Sam had claimed as his own. Marina had tried to insist that he take the master bedroom, as it was his house, but he'd insisted that it was actually Will and Marina's house, and he was just taking care of it for them. Once the kid was seated on the edge of the bed, Will waved Marina away. “Go on . . . I'll get him ready for bed and join you in a minute.”

Nodding, she bent and pressed a warm kiss to her boy's forehead. “I love you, Sammy-honey.”

Grinning at her, he insisted, “Love you too, Ma. Night.”

“Good night, baby,” she soothed, running her fingers through his hair one more time before leaving him in her partner's capable hands.

By the time Will joined her under their own sheets, it had been about 45 minutes and Marina was well on her way to the Land of Morpheus. Huffing, even as she allowed him to roll her into his embrace, she yawned. “Everything okay?”

“Yeah . . . he got sick but he's all right. He's sleeping.”

“I'm worried.”

“Neither one of us is a particularly hard sleeper, Marishka . . . we'll hear him if he needs us.”

Nodding in agreement, she nuzzled into his ribcage. The two were quiet for a moment, before finally Marina could hear Will give a soft curse. “Fuck it,” he muttered, before rolling onto her, his lips muffling her giggles as he kissed her. “Think we can manage to be quiet?”

“I don't know. I think you're gonna have to gag me,” she taunted, arching her hips up into his own. His eyes slammed closed at the very thought, a low groan wrenched from deep in his chest. “Not fair.”
“Nothing is fair in love and war, Misha . . . especially not sex,” she teased, her fingers tangling in his hair and dragging him down to her again.

She'd kill anyone who wanted to know for themselves, but Marina's favorite part of sex with William Grimm was not the act itself. Not that sex with her partner wasn't a religious experience in and of itself or the best sex she'd ever had because it was and it WAS. Rather, it was the way he touched her, the way he worshiped her with fingers, lips and body. Every second was a testament to his love for her and she reveled in it.

Throwing her head back with a sharp gasp as he bit down sharply on the curve of her collarbone, she swore virulently as he proceeded to follow the bone with a series of sharp kisses and nips that took her breath away. “Misha,” she groaned, undulating against him in the hopes that she could prod him along faster.

“Patience, zhemchuzhina . . . we have all night. And I intend to exploit every second of it,” he murmured, one warm strong hand pinning her hips down to the bed as he moved away from her collarbone and down towards her navel, hands fumbling with the hem of the shirt she was wearing. “Is this my Army shirt?”

Grinning, she purred, “Da.”

Rolling his eyes, he chuckled as he insisted, “I'm going to want this back, you know.”

Whatever Marina had been about to say in response was cut off as suddenly a bloodcurdling scream ripped through the house. The couple froze, Marina's eyes flashing wide as she stared at her lover in shock. Another scream penetrated the silence and it was as though someone had flipped a switch. “Sam.”

Instantly, the two were flying from the bed and dashing down the hallway toward their son’s room. Marina barely noticed Spike sprawled against the wall in Sam's room, with Lou attempting to get a good look at the eye he was holding in one hand. Instead, she lunged past Jules and grabbed both of Sam's flailing wrists, pinning them firmly to the bed. “Sammy! Sammy . . . baby . . . wake up . . . honey, it's Mom . . . wake up,” she prodded, trying to control his frantic thrashing as he attempted to free himself from her grip.

Will moved into the room, taking in the situation with a pair of cold eyes, before insisting, “Everybody out.”

Jules balked at the order, earning a flash of the Colonel's legendary temper as he roared, “Move it!”

It was about then that Sam jolted awake throwing his body upwards as he threw Marina towards the end of the bed. She impacted the foot board hard, though she didn't stay there as she moved to pull him into her arms while he heaved in air, blue eyes taking in his surroundings deliriously. Will hauled the two men up from the floor and shoved them towards the door, hustling Jules after them before moving to the bedside. “Sammy . . . it's Dad and Mom.”

Blinking hard as he tried to clear the last vestiges of the dream, the blond struggled to focus on their faces before whimpering when Marina's fingers slipped familiarly into his hair. “Ma?”

“It's okay, baby . . . I'm right here,” she soothed, bracing herself for the sudden addition of his weight as he all but threw himself into her arms, whole body shuddering as he sobbed. “I'm sorry . . . I didn't mean to kill him . . . I didn't mean to . . . I was cleared . . . I'm sorry . . .” he rambled, gasping as he attempted to speak and sob at the same time.
“I know,” she promised, pulling him into her tightly as she speared her fingers through his hair. Pressing her lips against his forehead, she whispered against the skin calmly, “I know you were, Sammy. It wasn't your fault . . . and Ben wouldn't think it was your fault either. It was an accident, it's okay. It's all right. I'm here. You're okay. It was just a dream. You're okay.”

Will reached up and cupped the back of his head, thumb rubbing gently against the skin just behind his ear where his jaw connected with his skull. Sam shuddered hard, his rambling fading into a low keening sound. Together, the couple worked to calm the kid, conscious of the muffled sounds outside the door as the three members of Team One no doubt went head to head with Will's younger brothers about getting back into the room.

Finally, Sam ran out of tears, slumping into her chest in exhaustion. Snuffling, he nosed at her neck as he sniffled. “Sorry,” he murmured, feeling his body go limp against her.

“There is absolutely nothing to be sorry for, Sammy. Nightmares happen to all of us. It's okay,” Will insisted, cupping his chin and making sure that his son was looking at him so as to see the honesty in his eyes. “I have pretty bad ones too. I can't tell you how many times I've spent the night on our couch at home, watching Nick at Nite and drinking whiskey practically straight from the bottle. We all have our demons. You have nothing to be sorry for or ashamed of.”

Marina hummed in wordless agreement, wincing at the sound of raised voices in the hallway outside though, thankfully, Sam at least didn't seem to notice. “What do you need, Sammy?”

“Just stay . . . at least until I fall asleep,” he begged, looking up at her with liquid, devastated eyes.

“No problem,” she promised, leaning back against the headboard and letting him curl up with his head in her lap, her fingers carding gently through his hair. “You want me to sing to you?”

Nodding, he shuddered hard once before settling once again as his dad moved to sit on the edge of the bed at his back, fingers finding that spot behind his ear once more. “All right. Close your eyes,” she prompted, fingertips trailing softly down his face, pressing his eyelids closed lightly. Taking a deep breath, and linking his free hand with her partner's own free one, she began to sing, “Sing me a song of a lad that is gone . . . say could that lad be I? . . .”

She made it a half a verse more, before Sam completely slumped, finally asleep once more. Will's fingers were light on his pulse point as he counted it out, before nodding slowly once. “He's out.”

Taking a deep breath, Marina nodded in agreement. Together, the two rearranged Sam on his stomach, his head on a pillow and the covers up around his shoulders. Bracing her weight on the bed, the Russian bent to press a warm kiss to his head as she murmured, “Ya lyublyu tebya, malysh.”

Her partner repeated the action as well, before the two crept quietly from the room. The door shut as soundlessly as it could, before they turned away from the room and into a war zone. Aaron and Jules were toe to toe, Jules' whole body tensed for a fight as Aaron insisted, “This has nothing to do with us! We're his teammates!”

“And we're his family,” was Will's sharp response, causing the entire hallway to fall silent as they rotated to face the two Colonels. “Sam is asleep, and quite frankly I'm not expecting him to stay that way for long. It's going to be a hell of a night.” Rubbing one hand briskly over his face, he turned to face Spike, “How's your eye?”

“I'm fine. I just wasn't expecting him to come up swinging.”
“Never try to wake a special forces soldier in the middle of a nightmare, unless you've been trained to do so. It's very dangerous . . . he could have killed you and wouldn't have had any idea he was doing it,” Marina insisted, using two fingers on his chin to turn his face into the meager light. “That's going to be a gorgeous shade of black by morning. Clint . . . go get Constable Scarlatti an icepack, please.”

Nodding once, the youngest Grimm dashed down the stairwell without protest. “As for the rest of you, get some sleep. We're all going to need it.”

Marta bit down on her lip sharply, prompting Marina to take pity. “He's gonna be okay, Marta. I promise. Hashing it out with the two of them just brought it back. That, combined with his tendency towards nightmares and the alcohol he consumed tonight . . . I'm not surprised this happened.”

Twisting to look at the door from the circle of her boyfriend's arms, she stared at it for a long moment as though she could see the body past the wood. Taking a deep breath, she reached out to grab Marina's wrist, begging, “Take care of him?”

“We will. Get some rest. We'll see you in the morning.”

Nodding, she moved forward to accept the Russian's warm hug before allowing her boyfriend to coax her tenderly down the hallway. It wasn't long before Marina and Will were the only two left in the hallway, Will's arm was warm and comfortable as it came up around her shoulders. “Come on, samaya malen'kaya. We might as well get as what rest we can before he wakes up again. We're in for a long night.”

Nodding in agreement, she looped her arm around his waist and let him lead her back to their bed. Climbing under the covers, she waited for him to situate himself before burrowing into his offered embrace. Hot chocolate eyes slipped closed as he pressed a warm kiss to her forehead, “He's going to be okay . . . get some rest.”

Nodding, the S.H.I.E.L.D. handler forced herself to close her eyes and attempt to get some sleep. Even as she was drifting off, she was aware of a large part of herself already listening for the next scream . . . waiting for the next nightmare.

Will was right. It was going to be a very long night.

Chapter End Notes

Translations:

(R) malysh - kiddo
(R) zhemchuzhina - pearl (one of Will's lesser used nicknames for Marina Petrovka)
(R) Da - yes
(R) Ya lyublyu tebya - I love you
(R)
Okay, first, the Bucky manip is by youneedtostrut on Tumblr. It is being used with her permission. I don't know if you can read, but the box is tagged with credit as well. Basically, don't steal it . . . she worked super hard on it and it is awesome. Secondly, NEW BANNER! Yay! If anyone would like to know what the pictures say, please let me know. I can post all of the individual pictures as a separate picture in a new post.

Thirdly, we are ten chapters away from 200 chapters and less than a month from 3 YEARS! Wow, who would have ever thought!

Translations at the end, as always.

Thank you all for your continued interest in this story. Please do keep the comments coming; they are in large part the reason why I am being so productive and so quick right now. They always make my day!

Enjoy this one! After the angst of the last one, and the angst I have planned, I decided to give you all a fluffy, schmoopy chapter to read!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
Chapter 190: Sorting It Out

Sam woke twice more that night. The first time it didn't take long to settle him, just the knowledge that someone was there and a soft hum as she thread her fingers through his hair. The second he woke vomiting, sobbing and shaking as he cowered away from Will's silhouette against the wall . . . which pretty much confirmed Marina's thoughts on the extent of the abuse the General had dished out to his only son. The black eye he'd sported the first time they met wasn't the first bruise his father had given him . . . just the first readily visible one.

Guiding her son up and out of his soiled sheets, she eased him down the hallway towards the bathroom, stripping him down to his boxers and coaxing him into the shower. Once he was leaning up in the corner under the warm spray and she was sure he wasn't going to accidentally drown himself, she went back to help her partner strip the bed and remake it with clean sheets. Will looked up from where he was yanking the sheets into a bundle. “He okay?”

“Hungover, I think,” she replied with a small smile. “Fortunately, it was mostly alcohol that came up. That should help with the worst of the symptoms.”

Narrowing his eyes at her, he accepted the filthy pajamas she offered him. “You're gonna tell me what that was about, right?”
“I think the General was more abusive than we had previously thought,” she replied with a fierce scowl. “With the shock of waking . . . I think he mistook you for the General.”

The Colonel hummed in agreement, a small frown on his face as he leaned over to peck her cheek before he carted the sheets down to the laundry room to start a load. Moving into the kitchen to grab some crackers and some ginger ale out of the pantry, he was aware of the tense anticipation coming from the living room. Sighing, he turned to look at the constables and was unsurprised to see the three awake and watching him. “You do realize it's still early, right?”

“Is he okay?” Jules asked, brown eyes worried as they flicked towards the stairs.

“He's gonna be fine. The alcohol's playing tricks on his brain. Once he's sober again, the memories will be back under his own control.”

“Those are memories?” Lou asked, eyes popping wide in shock.

“Regrettably,” was the only answer, before the Colonel jogged back up the stairs.

Spike hauled his knees up, wrapping his arms around them as he listened to the activity taking place upstairs. Jules frowned from her place on the couch as she mused, “I wonder if Sam has PTSD . . .”

Lou cocked an eyebrow at the team's profiler as Spike sputtered at the statement. “Who cares if he has PTSD? How about the fact that he has memories that give him NIGHTMARES!?”

Jules gaped at the young bomb technician, before stammering, “The psych evals . . . how did he get past them if he has PTSD?”

“Does it matter?”

“What if he has a flashback on the job? And your life is in hands? Don't you think it would matter then?” Jules scolded, scowling lightly as she glared at her teammates. “Look . . . I like Sam. I'm just trying to look out for the team.”

Sensing that his best friend was on the verge of an explosion, Team One's less lethal expert chimed in calmly. “I don't think Sam has acute PTSD . . . though I'm not going to argue he doesn't have it at all. But he's focused on the job, and he feels very deeply for the people we help. I mean, yeah he obviously has nightmares about things that have happened to him and clearly he has trouble sleeping. But he's capable of emotional connection, I have never seen him anxious or jittery while he's at work, and he really doesn't seem like the type to panic for no reason. He's alert and aware of his surroundings, but I don't get the sense he's waiting for an IED on the side of the road or a sniper on the rooftops. He is aware of where he is, in every moment. He's a little depressed, but I don't think that has anything to do with what's going on right now and has everything to do with how we've been treating him for the last three weeks since he joined the team.” Scrubbing a hand over his head, he insisted, “Even if he has it, it's managed.”

The female sniper watched Spike visibly fumed, glaring at her viciously at what he felt was a slight towards his new friend. Sam and Spike had connected while out last night, and before the end of the night, whatever animosity had been between them had been pretty much gone. Conceding that point, Jules nodded in agreement. “I hope he's okay.”

“You heard the Colonel . . . he's gonna be fine,” Spike snapped, still feeling upset about the fact that she had turned against the Sam . . . however briefly.

It was about then that Marina trudged down the stairwell, a lavender-colored robe over black yoga
pants and gray Army shirt. Her hands were pulling her curly hair up into a sloppy ponytail as she trekked into the kitchen. Frowning, Spike called cautiously, “Ma'am?”

“It's Marina,” she insisted over her shoulder as she stretched up on tiptoes to reach the rack of pans over the stove. “Damn it . . . did they have to put this thing so damned high?” she grumbled viciously, before cheering adorably in victory as she managed to slip the big fry pan from its hook. “What can I help you with, Constable?”

“What are you doing?”

“Making breakfast. If we're going to be awake anyway, we might as well have something to eat,” she replied with a small, sad smile. “How are you all feeling?”

Lou made a face, aware of the nauseous tossing in his gut, though Jules only shook her head calmly. “We'll manage.”

“Good . . . then you can come and help,” the officer insisted briskly, clearly having been a drill sergeant in another life. “Spike . . . coffee. Lou, there's bacon in the fridge . . . I need it chopped up into tiny pieces. Jules . . . if you wouldn't mind making the juice; Sam needs the sugar this morning.”

Cocking an eyebrow as they gawked at her, she barked, “Now!”

Scrambling to their feet, the three bolted into the kitchen and to their assigned jobs. The three worked in silence, though Marina hummed along to whatever song was in her head as she filled a pot with water and set eggs to hard boil. Next she began to press uncooked sausage into large flat disks, prompting Spike to cock an eyebrow. “What are you making?”

“Scotch eggs. Trust me . . . it's a fool proof hangover cure. Hard boiled eggs wrapped in sausage and fried in bacon grease,” she replied, giggling quietly to see Lou turned slightly green at the gills. “I promise, they're good and you'll feel a lot better once you've had some.”

“I think I'll take your word for it,” the young black man insisted, swallowing convulsively.

“Bathroom's down the hall and around the corner,” she informed him, watching as he all but bolted away. Chuckling, she muttered lightly, “Oh boy. Poor kid.”

“Who's a poor kid?” Will asked as he moved into the kitchen, heading straight for the coffee machine. Sam crept in after him, plopping down at the kitchen table and burying his face in his arms.

“Lou . . . alcohol is not his friend this morning,” Marina chirped, pouring a glass of the pulpy orange juice and setting it front of her son. Sam groaned as the acidic scent filled his nose, nuzzling further into his arms. “Drink it, Sammy . . . you'll feel better.”

Groaning, he lifted his head and drained the glass in a total of three swallows. “Ugh,” he grunted, before dropping his head onto his arms once again.

Bending, she pressed a warm kiss to the back of his head before skipping to throw her arms around her lover. “Morning!” she chirped, pushing herself up onto her tiptoes to press a warm kiss to his lips.

“Dobroye utro, samaya malen'kaya,” he murmured, hands coming up to cup her cheeks as he trapped her for a longer kiss. His hands skimmed down the side of her neck and fiddled lightly at the collar of her shirt. “I still want this back.”

“Gonna have to take it from me,” she teased, kissing him again before skipping away with a giggle.
Before long, the eggs were being rolled in the sausage patties and carefully dropped into the bubbling bacon grease. Lou appeared back in the kitchen, considerably pale but not quite as nauseous looking. “Feeling better?” she asked, offering him a glass of juice.

“Yes . . . thank you.”

“Good,” she agreed, reaching up to squeeze his bicep lightly as she moved out of the kitchen. Pausing at the bottom of the stairs, she shouted upwards, “Grubs up!” There was silence, as she imagined the more hungover members of the family groaning and burrowing deeper into their partners. Chuckling, she continued, “I made scotch eggs!”

At which point, there was a cacophony of sound and movement as everyone moved to get down the stairs without killing each other. Aaron swung his sister up into a warm hug, Clint there a second later as he slid from the end of the banister. Rolling her eyes at the action, she hugged them both fiercely even as she scolded, “What have we said about banisters, Clinton Francis?”

“Love you, Marishka,” he replied with a grin, dashing on his brother's heels toward the kitchen.

Accepting Jason's warm hug and Brian's kiss on her cheek, she grinned at her sister as Natasha all but collapsed onto her. “I drank too much vodka,” the redhead groaned, earning a soft chuckle as Marina protested lightly, “There is no such thing as too much vodka. Go on . . . you should get some before the boys eat everything.”

Before long, the entire family had found places around the kitchen – at the table, leaning against the counters and walls, seated on the floor – as they ate. Marina perched on the arm of Will's chair, his arm slung around her waist as the two shared a single plate between them. Sam looked considerably less pale, now that there was actual food in his stomach, though he ate slowly and methodically, unaware of Jules Callaghan's curious gaze fixed on the back of his head. Looking around at this family the Grimms had built for themselves over the years, she grinned and leaned to rest her chin on her partner's shoulder. “We did good,” she murmured into his ear, earning a warm squeeze at her waist.

Quicksilver eyes roamed the faces of each person in the kitchen – pausing even on those of Lou Young, Spike Scarlatti and Jules Callaghan – as he agreed, “Yes we did.”

Somehow, someone – read Clint – managed to con the entire family into having a lazy day and watching the first Harry Potter movie. (“It's a good movie!” had been the sniper's argument, to which Brian had scoffed, “Yeah . . . if you're twelve!”) However it had happened, everyone had found a place in the combined living room/family room/parlor, watching the 90 inch LED TV that Marina had splurged on for the house.

Casey was cuddling up in Jason's lap, the two seated in the armchair, a speculative look in Jason's eyes that typically meant he was trying to figure out some complicated math problem. Or at least in this case . . .

“Am I the only one who thinks that Marina's a Hufflepuff?”

“What!?” was the astounded question from the Russian in question, back pressed to Will's ribcage and Sam sprawled out next to her with his head in her lap and his feet in his Aunt Marta's, with Aaron perched on the arm next to her. Owen had made himself comfortable on the arm next to Will, the two best friends exchanging fond grins at the incredulous sound of Marina's voice. Between the six of them, they managed to take up the entirety of one couch all to themselves.
Apparently, no one was going to respond to her question, every single one of her boys nodding in quiet agreement at the statement. “I can see that,” Brian agreed, fingers playing absently in Natasha's hair, his back pressed up against the couch and Natasha sprawled across the floor with her head in his lap.

“How?” Marina demanded, reaching over to flick the back of her boy’s ear.

“Come on, Marina . . . you may be one of the scariest agents at S.H.I.E.L.D., but you're basically a Russian grandmother. If everyone is fed and happy, you are happy,” Maria teased, giggling as she dodged the pillow her best friend threw at her head.

Clint chimed in then, “Will's a Slytherin!”

“No argument here!” was the unanimous response from every single one of his younger brothers, earning a roll of his eyes and a single nod of agreement from the eldest Grimm himself.

Lifting one hand to pause the video, Vika asked fondly, “Are we seriously doing this right now? We're going to sort the family? Into *Hogwarts* houses?”

“Why not?” the Colonel asked with a soft chuckle. “It's not the craziest thing we've ever done.”

“Okay, so Marina's a Hufflepuff and Will's a Slytherin. Are we agreed?” Clint asked cheerfully, bouncing cheerfully in place where he sat between Bucky's lap and leaning back against his chest.

“Agreed!”

“So who's next?”

“Sam,” was the announcement, causing Sam to blink out of his doze. “What?”

“It's okay, Sammy . . . Clint's trying to sort you.”

“Sort me into what?” he yawned, back arching as he stretched. “What did I miss? I fell asleep sometime after the train station.”

Running her fingers through his hair, Marina insisted, “Didn't miss much. Jason says I'm a Hufflepuff, and your uncles are pretty well convinced that your dad is a Slytherin.”

“Kay. Wait what?” he asked, blinking as what she'd said registered. After a moment, he shrugged and settled back into his spot, asking lazily, “What am I?”

“I think that's what they're trying to figure out?” she promised, watching as Clint and Aaron bickered between them. Aaron was arguing Hufflepuff, but Clint was insistent on Gryffindor, to which Will spoke up. “Except for maybe Dad and Maria . . . there isn't a single Gryffindor in this family.”

“How do you figure?” Spike asked curiously, cocking his head in question.

“The Army pretty much beat the recklessness out of us. A reckless soldier is a dead soldier, period,” was Will's answer, reaching out to grab his coffee mug from the small table next to the couch.

“He's not wrong,” Aaron agreed, leaning down to kiss his girlfriend's cheek. “I wanna say he's a Hufflepuff . . . just like his mom.”

“Why?”

“He thrives in this family, as a part of a community. He's honest to a fault, he works harder than
almost anyone and he's fair.” Shrugging, Aaron continued. “Open hearted, down to earth. Patience and stubbornness are two required qualities of being a good sniper; which, considering he took out the family's two best snipers, I'm pretty sure we can put him in that category. I'd say Hufflepuff.”

Looking down at her son, Marina asked fondly, “What do you think, Sammy?”

“At least I inherited something from you,” he teased, tilting his face upwards to catch her adoring kiss on the apple of his cheek. “I'm good with Hufflepuff.”

Will chuckled, sipping from his mug as he insisted, “Clint and Aaron are too. So is Casey.”

“How do you figure!?” Bucky burst out in shock, eyes wide as he stared at his boyfriend's brother. “Clint is the most reckless little cuss I know.”

Rolling his eyes in agreement, the Colonel lifted one hand to play with his partner's curls as he explained, “He's also loyal, hard working, patient and honest. You always know where you stand with him; there's no artifice in him, and he doesn't have a deceitful bone in his body where this family is concerned. So yeah, he's brave and reckless and definitely thrill-seeking, but those aren't at the core of who he is. They're just . . . a smaller part of what makes Clint 'Hawkeye'.”

Marta hummed as she looked up at her boyfriend, “I'll agree that Aaron is a Hufflepuff.”

The second youngest Grimm scowled as he muttered bitterly, “Kenny was a Hufflepuff . . . I am not.”

“Aaron, solnyshko, you and Kenny are not as different as you like to think you are,” his sister insisted fondly, gifting him with a brilliant smile. “You have always been kind to those who need it. Without your kindness, Sam wouldn't be a part of this family, because you never would have brought him home with you. Hell, you wouldn't have gone back for Marta, so she wouldn't be here either. There has never been a moment where we couldn't count on you to be exactly where you needed to be, to keep a secret that we needed kept. You protect Marta fiercely; I have no doubt that Pam would have been in real trouble yesterday, if she'd decided not to keep your secret.” Leaning over as far as she could, she touched the hand he had resting on Marta's shoulder as she insisted, “Above all . . . your loyalties are unquestionable. You would do anything for this family. If that doesn't sound like a Hufflepuff, I don't know what does.”

Twisting his hand upwards under hers, he squeezed her wrist lightly in thanks, before nodding once in silent agreement. Jason cleared his throat, tightening his arms around Casey's waist as he insisted, “How do we think Casey's a Hufflepuff? Cause I'm pretty sure, she can kick my ass.”

“So can Marina . . . what's that got to do with anything?” Brian taunted, dodging the handful of M&Ms Jason chucked at his brother's head. Natasha growled viciously, glaring at the younger Grimm even as she hauled her lover back into place under her head. “Easy, Vdova; we don't murder family, remember?”

Nuzzling back into his thigh, the Black Widow purred as he returned his fingers back to her hair, playing with the curls soothingly. Chuckling at her sister's uncharacteristic affection, Marina twisted to look up at her lover as she insisted, “You were the one who suggested it. You tell him.”

“Casey knew you had secrets and only once demanded to know those secrets. She even accepted that you couldn't tell her. Considering that she didn't know everything, she has still been completely loyal to you. She protected you at the Second, when you couldn't protect yourself. She's fair and probably the most level-headed person here. We entrusted her with our secrets, which means she's pretty damned trustworthy; they're not something we just tell anyone.”
Casey beamed at the endorsement from the oldest Grimm, a light blush painting her cheeks as she replied, “Thank you, Will.”

“Just calling it like I see it,” he promised, saluting her with his mug.

Wiggling back against her boyfriend, Casey insisted, “Jason’s Ravenclaw.”

“As if he could be anything else!” was the near simultaneous protest from his two younger brothers. “Eccentric, talented, intelligent, hella creative. What else could he have been?”

“Aunt Marty's a Ravenclaw. She's always been crazy smart. When we were kids . . . let's just say, I wasn't the one pulling crazy experiments in my room which usually ended in explosions.”

“That was once!” Marta protested, pinching the back of her nephew's calf in retaliation.

“It was still an explosion!” he reminded her, even as he fidgeted at she continued pinching at his most ticklish spots. “Knock it off! No tickling!”

“What about Bucky?” Clint asked, one corner of his mouth pulling downwards as he twisted to look up at his boyfriend. “I'm not sure he's as easy to sort as the rest of us.”

“Brian and Natasha are easy?” Lou asked curiously, blinking as the entire family – including Sam – announced in one voice, “Slytherin!”

“Oh.”

“Yeah, Zima is hard,” Marina agreed with a frown as she contemplated her former mentor. “He could be Slytherin. He's resourceful and ruthless, if the situation calls for it. And I remember a few assignments where that cleverness of his got both him and you out of a tight spot, Clint.”

“He could be Hufflepuff,” Aaron chimed in, watching his brother's boyfriend as the Winter Soldier ducked his face into the curve of Clint's throat, the back of his own neck going rosy as he blushed. “He's loyal and, even if the rest of the agents at S.H.I.E.L.D. don't agree with us, we know he's trustworthy.”

“Actually, Bucky may be the only other Gryffindor in this family,” Will insisted, quicksilver eyes pinning the older man in place as he looked up at him in question.

“How do you figure?”

“I've heard stories about the Howling Commandos . . . they were brave, reckless, arrogant and hella loyal. Property damage wasn't really a big concern, which is good because there was a lot of it. Granted, it was usually to HYDRA's deficit, so . . .eh,” the Colonel shrugged one shoulder as he left the rest of his thought hanging unsaid. “But, combined with his loyalty and his intelligence and his cunning, Gryffindor seems to be the best fit in my opinion.”

Smiling sheepishly up at Will, he reminded the family's CO. “I was Army too . . . once.”

“Yeah . . . but that was a different era. The Army needed a different kind of soldier in that war. Ergo . . . Captain America and his Howling Commandos.”

“I thought those were characters in a comic book,” Spike protested, leaning forward curiously.

Glancing at each other, the Grimms simultaneously burst into laughter. Even Marina was sniggering as she replied, “Oh Spike . . . you should check your history books.”
“They were real people . . . and even though we never met most of them, they have had a huge influence on the Grimms to this point,” the Colonel insisted, the bomb technician flinching slightly at the cold honesty in the other man’s eyes.

Twisting to look up at her partner's best friend, Marina grinned but said nothing, prompting the Cleaner to announce. “Yeah, Boss-lady. We all know where I've been sorted. Shut up.”

“It makes sense; you'd do anything to protect Misha,” she reminded him, with a relieved smile, clearly conveying the comfort she took in that particular character trait. “Ruthless, clever, resourceful, more than a little manipulative when the situation calls for it. I'm not sure why you're surprised that you're a Slytherin, Lucky.”

“A Slytherin?” Lou asked, eyes going wide as Owen nodded in agreement.

“My loyalties are confined to a grand total of two people . . . period. Both of whom are sitting in this room,” Owen confessed, lifting his beer to his lips as he winked at Jules who looked amused by the flirtatious gesture.

Will chuckled as he elbowed his oldest friend lightly, “I'm pretty I should report you for that, but quite frankly, I think we all already knew that.”

Maria rolled her eyes from where she was curled up with Hansel in the other armchair. “I can promise you, that's old news, Elliot.”

The Family Russian grinned at the exasperated look on her best friend's face, before she turned to take in her other two sisters, “Pretty sure Nika's Slytherin too . . . so is Jim.”

Vika grinned up at her husband, the pretty blond teasing as she insisted, “So is Phil.”

“What!?” her husband blurted in surprise, staring down at his wife in shock.

“Resourceful much? Not to mention, you scared the baby agents when we got home from our honeymoon . . . and all you did was grin at them” she taunted, giggling as his fingers dove directly into her ribs causing a squeal of laughter.

Marina sniggered as she recalled the conversation she'd had with Grant Ward that morning. “She's not wrong. Of course, Vika’s Ravenclaw. Goddess of Administration and Organization, we worship at your feet.”

“Why?” Jules asked, eyes wide as she watched Vika smirk at her sister and shrug in acceptance of her role.

“Grimms hate paperwork,” was Vika's response, earning a chorus of “Uh-huh!” and “Oh yeah!” and “Fuck paperwork!” Snickering at the vehement protests stemming from the agents in the room, the Amazon joked, “Doing it for them is pretty much job security. Not to mention, the Colonel is . . . hapless on his own.”

“Excuse you!” Will protested, earning a giggle from his partner as she replied, “You lost your cell phone . . . and it was in your pocket.”

Will's mouth opened to protest, before it closed again. “I don't even have an argument for that.”

“Of course you don't. There isn't one,” Marina giggled, leaning upwards to press a warm kiss to his chin. Catching sight of the eldest of Hansel's son, sitting off to the side of his girlfriend, she frowned as she considered him for a moment. “I don't know if I would feel comfortable sorting you at this
point, Doyle. I'm pretty sure Scarlett is a Ravenclaw, but I just haven't had enough interaction with you yet.”

Scarlett rolled her eyes as she shifted in her seat on his lap. “Doyle is a Gryffindor; a reckless idiot.”

“I love you too, Scar,” the tactical leader protested, eyebrows shooting upwards.

“You ran back into a RAGE infected area, because you were worried about me. At which point, you got blasted by a fire cannon and ended up in a hospital in France with second and third degree burns. After you woke up from your medicated coma, you had to be wrestled back into bed, because even though the medical center had been bombed and declared a total loss, you were convinced that I was still alive.”

“I wasn't wrong, was I?”

“Not the point. Second and third degree burns . . . therefore, you're an idiot.”

“I didn't even feel the third degree burns.”

“Of course you didn't! Your nerves were fried!” she scolded, the couple glaring at each other for a moment, before Marina sniggered, “Ah . . . young love.”

Scarlett's features practically burst into flame as she all but lunged to bury her face into her boyfriend's shirt, mortified that her boyfriend's newfound family had just witnessed their immature bickering. “Just kill me and put me out of my misery.”

“Why? That was adorable!” Marta laughed, smiling at her new friend. The two shared a lab at S.H.I.E.L.D., and while Casey was probably Marta's very best friend in the family to that point, Scarlett Levy was only a half a step behind her. “You both are clearly perfect for each other.”

“Sure, if by perfect you mean that half the time I want to beat the moron over the head with a medical chart . . . preferably his. It's thick enough, it would probably do some real damage.”

“Ahh . . . and now we're into the real reason for him being Gryffindor. All right, crimson and gold it is.”

Catherine Chandler was grinning at the crazy family she'd dropped into unexpectedly, leaning sideways into Vincent's body as the Russian scanned the family for anyone she'd missed. Landing on Vincent, she insisted bluntly, “Ravenclaw.”

Nodding in agreement of the assessment, he looked down at Cat and insisted, “Gryffindor.”

“I am not reckless,” the detective insisted in protest, eyes wide at the statement.

“Which explains why you've risked your badge more than once to protect me,” was the dry rejoinder, a single eyebrow cocking upwards.

“That's different.”

“How?”

“You needed to be protected. You were helping people; it wasn't fair that the rest of the world was hunting you just because they didn't understand you.”

“It was risky and unnecessary. I could have just disappeared again.”
“I don't want to imagine my world where you're not a part of it. Okay? Conversation over,” she insisted, leaning up to capture her boyfriend's lips in a fierce kiss, fingertips tracing gently over the scar on his cheek.

Sam grinned as he watched his best friend and S.H.I.E.L.D. partner literally melt under into his girlfriend's affection. Flinching as Marina pinched his ribs in silent admonition, he looked up at his mom. “I wasn't gonna say anything.”

Cocking an eyebrow, she drawled, “Uh-huh.”

Grinning, he cuddled back down into her lap and closed his eyes. Last night had sucked, there was no arguing that. But surrounded by family and other loved ones, he could honestly say . . . it was a good life.

Chapter End Notes

Translations:
(R) dobroye utro - good morning
(R) samaya malen'kaya - my little one (Will's most common nickname for Marina Petrovka)
(R) solnyshko - sunshine (Marina's nickname for Kenny/Aaron Grimm)
(R) Vdova - Widow (shortened form of Natasha's callsign, Chernaya Vdova or Black Widow)
(R) Zima - Winter (one of Marina's nicknames for Bucky Barnes, a shortened form of ZImniy Soldat or Winter Soldier)
(R)
Chapter Notes

There is another chapter following this, as this is just the pictures from the banner, with the captions more easily readable.

As I said, there is a chapter following. So stay tuned for that as well.

William Michael Grimm
Rarely concerned with his own self interests, neither is the Colonel above underhandedness or manipulation for gain. Capable of cruelty, viciousness and shrewdness, he is also driven, focused and terrifyingly intelligent. A natural and charismatic leader, Will Grimm embodies Slytherin's core principles of cunning, resourcefulness and ambition.

Marina Ivanovna Petrovka
There can be no argument that despite Marina Ivanovna Petrovka's terrifying reputation within SHIELD, she is also a Russian grandmother at her core. More concerned with the health, happiness and wellbeing of her loved ones, she is the definition of a denning mother bear. God help you if you mess with her boys, but neither does she seek out trouble. Endlessly loyal to those she considers her own, Marina embodies the Hufflepuff traits of patience, perseverance, and kindness to all who need it.

Samuel Wayne Braddock
Considering his occupation, this is no doubt a strange placement. However, Sam thrives when in the embrace of family and community. Honest to a fault, even if that honesty will hurt him in the end. Patience is the first requirement to being a good sniper and he is always eager to help, regardless of who it is asking.

Brian Joshua Grimm
A dedicated, if volatile, agent, Brian Grimm is tireless in his pursuit to atone for past crimes. Willing to manipulate and mislead in his professional life, he struggles daily with maintaining the reins of his vicious alterego in his personal one. Sneaky and resourceful, alongside his partner the Black Widow, SHIELD can always count on this talented undercover agent to bring back the goods... and a few heads besides.
vicious alterego in his personal one. Sneaky and resourceful, alongside his partner the Black Widow, SHIELD can always count on this talented undercover agent to bring back the goods . . . and a few heads besides.

Natalia "Natasha" Alianovna Romanova

As deadly - and beautiful - as the spider for which she is named, Natasha Romanoff has a reputation for perfection in the field. One of the Red Room's greatest achievements, she used her talents for sleight of hand and innuendo to promote Russian dominance until switching loyalties to a certain Hawk and SHIELD. Capable of manipulating even the God of Lies himself, she has no qualms with a good lie . . . as long as it is in the service of her loved ones. She embodies the Slytherin traits of cunning, manipulation, resourcefulness and trickery to SHIELD's ultimate advantage.

Jason Leonard Grimm
As accomplished a pianist as he is a hacker, it can be no surprise that Jason’s pace is in Ravenclaw. Always prepared with a witty joke or a crazy feat of engineering, the tech is a fount of eclectic knowledge. He best embodies the Ravenclaw traits of intelligence, eccentricity, curiosity and creativity.

Casey Beatrice Shraeger
Even without knowing her partner’s secrets - and knowing that he had secrets, Detective Casey Shraeger has been loyal to a fault. Tolerant and fair, she is dedicated to her counterpart and is deemed trustworthy enough to be gifted with the lives and secrets of those he loves. At her core, the redhead is a testament to fairness, honesty and loyalty.
Sweet and gentle Kenny was a shoe-in for Hufflepuff House. Not even his transformation to Aaron Cross changed that. Patient to a fault, Aaron is more concerned with the defense of those he loves than seeking out problems to solve. Down to earth and trustworthy, he is loyal to his family and loved ones above all else.

Marta Shearing
Intensely curious, the virologist has spent years devoted to unlocking the human genome. Capable of condescension and snobbishness with respect to her knowledge of viruses, she is nevertheless endlessly open-minded and eager to learn as much as she can.

Clinton Francis Grimm
Though it is impossible not to claim Clint as brave, reckless and more than a little thrill-seeking, these are not the Hawk's defining qualities. You will always know where you stand, as he will never have a qualm about telling you. Loyalty, hard work, patience and honesty; these traits are at the core of SHIELD's Eye in the Sky.

James Buchanan "Bucky" Barnes
In the Winter Soldier, there are arguments to be made for several different houses. Slytherin’s cunning and resourcefulness suit him, as does Hufflepuff’s loyalty and devotion to trustworthiness. However, at his core, James Buchanan Barnes is a Gryffindor, if an unlikely one. Bold, daring, loyal and a little arrogant, the former KGB assassin has come a long way from the emotionless automaton he was while still under Russian control.
A Tale of Two Fathers - Part One

Chapter Notes

I am so sorry it has been so long. I was on vacation, and trying to finish up a commission before Chicago next weekend. (Can you believe it!? CHICAGO!!! RENNER!!! NEXT WEEKEND!!!) Which reminds me, if you would like a commission of your own, this is the last call for it. After Sunday, I will not be taking any more, as I will be at work all next week before I leave Friday night for CHICAGO!! (I can't stop screaming it! I'm so excited!)

As to the commission, there is a new commission fic, within the UALP. It tells the story of how Marina and Will - and the family - reacted when they found out Marina was pregnant with the twins. I hope you read and enjoy.

Also, I am working with Caiti (and I say working, in that I'm just reading and she's the real writer) on a short ficlet entitled "Rise & Rise Again". There is a link at the bottom of the chapter. I hope you check it out and let us know what you think.

Just as a reminder, Italics without quotation marks are sign language. There are no translations this chapter, so no need to worry about that. ENJOY! And please, I adore kudos, but I love comments more. Let me know what you think! Thank you!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
Chapter 191: A Tale of Two Fathers – Part One

Sam laughed as he all but shoved his adoptive mother out the door the next morning, his chortles mixing with his Dad's quieter chuckles as the older man stood out on the lawn. The battle of wills had been going on all morning, and the Colonel enjoyed watching the two of them bicker it out. “Ma! Seriously, I'll be fine! It's Dad's birthday! Go! Have lunch, go to a movie, sight-see.” Huffing, he rubbed sleepily at one eye as he promised, “I'm going to go back to bed. Otherwise, I'm never going to make it through tonight . . . especially if there's more alcohol involved.”

“There is always alcohol involved during a Brothers Grimm birthday party,” Marina sighed with a roll of her eyes. “You're sure?”

“Yes! Go!” he insisted, succeeding in his effort to push her into his dad's arms. “I'll see you guys later this afternoon. Text me when you're on your way home, though, so that I know to get up.”

Her eyes narrowed as she scanned him before giving in. “Fine! We're going. Get some rest.”

“Yes ma'am,” he teased, stepping forward to accept the hug and kiss she offered. “Bye, Dad!”
“Sleep well, Sammy . . . we'll see you later.”

Sam stood on the porch, watching his parents climb into their ancient Jeep and drive away. Once the vehicle passed out of sight, he walked back into the house, making sure to throw the lock on the door behind him before he jogged up the stairs toward his room. His shoes went flying as he flopped face-first onto the mattress and cuddled up to his pillows.

The rest of the family had scattered off to their own diversions, and currently Sam was alone in the house. The pub crawl planned for that night was going to kick his ass if he didn't get some rest though. Closing his eyes, he yawned wide and instantly dropped off.

Sam groaned as his phone began to beep with incoming text messages. One hand pulled his pillow over his head to block the sound and began to drift back into a light doze. Then a shrill sound screeched through the air, jolting him awake and sending his hand scrabbling for the iPhone to make it stop. He blinked hard to force himself to wake up. “Yeah?”

“Sammy? Are you still asleep?” Marina’s voice held affection, but a minor irritation played along the edges. "I sent you a text half an hour ago. Your dad and I are on our way home.” Her accent deepened a hairsbreadth as she huffed and muttered. “I can't believe I'm about to say this, but traffic in Toronto is almost worse than traffic in New York. What the hell?"

The blond swung his legs over the side of the bed, yawning as he stretched out his body. “How long?”

“Not too long, I think," she considered. "Barring traffic getting worse. So get up, get showered and get dressed. Everybody's meeting at the house in about an hour.”

“Yes ma'am,” he drawled, eyes drifting as he scratched briskly at his hair. “I'll get right on that.”

“Sammy . . . do NOT go back to sleep. Get up.”

“I'm up!” He stuck his tongue out at the phone before putting it back to his ear. “I'll see you guys soon.”

“Uh-huh,” she teased, before she hung up and the phone went dead in his hand.

He pushed himself to his feet and stumbled to en-suite bathroom before stripping down. Ten minutes later, he jogged down the stairs in bare feet, eyes on the kitchen. He opened the fridge door and grinned at the pitcher of iced cappuccino sitting on a shelf. “Best Ma ever,” he chuckled as he pulled it out. He poured himself a glass and took a long drink, reveling in the shot of caffeine that ripped through his system.

As his brain began firing on all cylinders, his stomach also decided to announce itself. He moved to make himself something to eat when someone knocked on the front door. A check of his watch and a couple of quick calculations in his head drew chortles as he realized it was probably his parents . . . and his ma had already misplaced her key. He put the pitcher back in the fridge – no reason to volunteer for a Marina Petrovka lecture – before jogging for the door. The chortles exploded into laughter even as he swung open the door, a teasing lilt in his voice, “Hey, Ma, lose your keys?”

The laughter froze in his throat as he registered the familiar figure standing erect on his front porch. General Gregory Braddock's face twisted into a fierce scowl. “Last I checked, your mother didn't have a key to this dump. And why would she want to?” he demanded. “This place is a joke.”

Regret over his lack of foresight in not checking the identity of his visitor swirled through Sam’s mind as he stared in horror at his biological father. Some part of him wanted to protest – both Will
and Marina created exacting criteria when choosing the house for him – but the part of him trained to obey kept his mouth shut. Even still, he stammered as he sought an appropriate response to the General's accusation. The older man lost patience and snapped, “Move Samuel!”

“Yes, sir!” The blond jumped out of the way.

The officer stormed into the foyer and looked around as he moved into the living room. A collection of shoes piled by the shoe rack, giving evidence to a recent gathering of people. Other than that, though, Marina was a drill sergeant when it came to people picking up after themselves, so the house stayed fairly clean. Sam could see the scorn on his father’s features; the man disapproved of the minor clutter. “This is appalling. I expect better from you, Samuel.”

“Yes sir. Sorry sir.” Caution filled his voice. “No offense, sir . . . why are you here?”

“Finding out where the hell you have been! You were expected to report to the SRU months ago. Instead, I find out you've only been on the job for two and a half weeks!” One heartbeat passed and then another. Then General Braddock barked out a demand. “Answer me, soldier!”

Sam cringed away from the tone in a honed self-protective behavior. “I was recruited by . . .”

“Recruited by who!?” The interruption rang with fury.

“S.H.I.E.L.D., Sir; the Strategic Homeland Intervention Enforcement and Logistics Division.” Sam straightened as he spoke. “I’ve been in training since I left with Aunt Marta and Sergeant Grimm.”

“So the Army I've given my life to isn't good enough for you, but a government agency filled with quacks, freaks and fanatics is?! No way in hell! You will call your supervisor and turn in your resignation . . . right now, Samuel!”

Silence became palpable as the ultimatum faded. Then a low answer broke it.

“No.”

The single word seemed to startle Sam as much as – if not more than – it surprised the General. Blue eyes flashed wide in shock and he flinched, though his features set in defiance. “I'm twenty seven years old, Sir . . . I can make my own choices.”

“Did your new girlfriend tell you that?” Derision coated the older man’s tone.

“I don't have a new girlfriend . . . I haven't had a girlfriend since I enlisted.”

Wrath flooded the General’s face. “The SRU is only temporary . . . once you're over this, you'll reenlist . . . and you'll be back where you belong.” He pointed towards the cell phone sitting on the table. “Call whatever idiot recruited you and resign. Do it now . . . or so help me God.”

“So help you God, what!?” Sam demanded, his fists balling up as his body shifted into an aggressive stance. “I'm not gonna get 'over this', Sir. I shot and killed my best friend . . . and the only thing you cared about was the damn scandal.”

“You are my son . . . and regardless of what you think, I will not have you affiliated with anything other than what I say you can be affiliated with.”

“We may share DNA . . . but I am not your son,” Sam shot back, his fury overriding his instinctive obedience. “I am the son of Will Brandt and Marina Petrovka. As far as I'm concerned, you were a placeholder . . . and a shitty one at that.”
Recognition sparked in the younger man’s memory – he knew the look on his father's face as those words registered and instinct set him in motion as the punch flew. The fist clipped him, causing him to stagger, but he thanked whatever god might be listening that the reflexive movement had at least deflected the worst of the force. Sam used the General's own momentum against him by grabbing his wrist and yanking him off balance in order to gain enough time to bolt out the back door . . . and towards the expansive, forested backyard his Ma had insisted on.

Panic settled heavy in his gut as it wrapped a tight hand around his throat; that combined with the mild pain in his head caused him to stumble, disoriented and scared. The effort to right himself cost precious seconds and he paused for a moment before the tree line. He regretted it when something flat and heavy slammed into the ribs on his left side.

A cry echoed in the late afternoon sunlight as he went down.

Pain shot through his abdomen as he attempted to roll away, tearing a groan through clenched teeth. Eyes blurry with tears, he rolled onto his uninjured side and saw the General wielding a small spade Marina bought for the vegetable and herb garden she'd put on the side of the house.

Agony exploded through his head and Sam knew nothing more.

Marina spent the last twenty minutes of the drive dodging her lover's pinching, tickling fingers. She barely waited for the car to slow before she bolted from the Jeep, laughter trailing after her as she tried to outrun Will's affectionate retribution. She knew the rest of the family pulled in behind them, but her awareness halted at the edge of her mind as she used a good majority of her focus getting to the house ahead of her lover as he grabbed hold of the crossbar and swung feet first from the Jeep. He hit the ground running, racing after her. She squealed and dashed for the porch . . . only to freeze at the sight of her son's front door. The door hung ajar, a noticeable gap opening to the inside. Every bit of her training went on high alert.

More to the point – every maternal instinct compressed into her compact frame began screaming as she stared at that opening.

Will, as attuned to her moods as he was to his own, knew something had spooked her. His playful face faded into an intense focus. “Samaya malen'kaya?”

“The door.” She reached back for the gun she holstered at her back. “It's open.”

Aaron frowned as he all but shoved Marta behind him, his other hand retrieving his own weapon. “Sam wouldn't have left the door open,” he agreed, eyes beginning to scan the nearby street. “It's a quiet neighborhood . . . but he's still pretty skittish around people he doesn't know.”

Will's eyes turned dark gray as his hands began to flash through a series of silent commands in sign language. Clint . . . Bucky . . . on the roof. Aaron . . . stay here with Marta . . . keep her safe. Marina . . . you, your sisters and Vincent are with me. Brian . . . set up a perimeter around the house. No one in or out until we locate Sam.

Brisk nods answered him as everyone moved off on their given tasks. Aaron herded Marta back towards their rental car. “Aaron!” Marta’s vehement protest came out in a sharp, if quiet hiss. “He's my nephew!”

“Aaron . . . stop.” He pulled the car door open. “I know you're worried, but Will and Marina are on a knife's edge here. Let's not add to their stress levels, okay?” he begged, blue eyes earnest as he gripped her arm just above the elbow.
Her lips thinned, compressing in her concern, but she gave a reluctant nod before dropping into the passenger seat. Aaron closed the door and remained vigilant, careful to continue watching for any movement in the neighborhood even as he guarded his petulant girlfriend.

Marina glanced at her partner, knowing he could see the terror she struggled to push aside. He reached out his free hand and gave the back of her neck a warm squeeze. “Let's clear the house,” he ordered, every inch The Colonel as his eyes flickered from her to the others. “Ladies . . . top floor. Vincent, you and I downstairs.”

“Copy that.”

Marina pushed the door open, each movement slow and soundless. The four Murderesses formed a seamless unit as they crossed the foyer and moved upwards to check the second floor. Will directed Vincent towards the back of the house before he turned his attention to the three front rooms.

“Clear!” Vika's voice came from upstairs.

Marina confirmed, calling out, “Misha . . . he's not here!”

Vincent’s shout rang through the house. “The back door's open!” The whole house seemed to hold its breath before a strangled growl ripped from his throat. “Sam was scared . . . I can smell it.”

Will stalked into the kitchen and frowned at the sight of the back door nearly torn off its hinges. “He's not in the front rooms,” he informed the former soldier as he reached out to catch Marina when she dove into his embrace. His woman vibrated with maternal terror and a matching need for vicious action. “Vincent . . . track him.”

Vincent took a deep breath and let his eyes go gold, his senses reaching outwards. Parsing Sam's scent from the others took a moment, but he began moving towards the back door. He paused at the door frame, leaning close to inhale more of the scents. His brows furrowed. “There was someone here. I don't recognize the scent.”

“Would you be able to find it again?”

“Not a problem.” A dark light glittered in his eyes. “It's a pretty distinctive cologne.” His attention turned towards the backyard. His enhanced senses took in the surroundings for a moment. The backyard was one of the major draws to the house; large and secluded, it offered Sam a safe enclosure while at the same time keeping the blond from feeling trapped. Vincent could smell the family’s other two snipers on the roof over his head. No doubt Clint was using his own augmented sight to search for the kid.

At this moment, in this emergency, Vincent decided the yard was too expansive; the trees offered seclusion all right . . . and too many places for someone to remain unseen. He closed his eyes, forcing himself to ignore the sounds and smells of the family behind him as he pushed his senses outwards. Sam's scent seemed soaked in panic, and Vincent's beast gave a silent roar as he took it in. As he counted Sam as both family and friend, the fear waved like a red cape before a bull. The doctor held onto his control as he turned his attention to the strange scent, prowling after its lingering remains towards the tree line.

There! A sound! The hitching sound of pained breathing all but shrieked to his stretched out sense and Vincent rushed towards it, almost a blur in his enhanced speed. Rage, horror, and fear strangled him as he hit his knees next to Sam's broken, battered body, the blond face down in the dirt and unmoving. The doctor rotated back to face the house and bellowed, “Get Marta and Scarlett! Marina, I need you!”
The Russian broke free from her partner’s hold and bolted towards him with Will only a step or two behind her. Mother and father reached their son as Natasha raced away from her sisters to get the family’s other doctors.

Marina’s cry was strangled as she screamed, “Sammy!”

She dropped to her knees beside her son, reaching out to thread her fingers through the hair at the very top of his head, careful not to jostle him or touch the bloodied hair at the back. Some part of her recognized Vincent going through a rapid triage and even managed to know the instant Marta and Scarlett joined them. The rest of her though, the greater part of her could only focus on her boy and the guilt threatening to choke her. “Oh my baby . . . I'm so sorry . . . I never should have left,” she keened, rocking on her knees as she fought with the maternal urge to gather him into her arms and never let him go.

Vincent's firm grip on her wrist that drew watery hot chocolate eyes back to the doctor. “Marina, I need you to focus. Okay? Sam trusts you, he knows you're going to do whatever it takes to keep him safe. I need you to be his focus when he wakes up. It looks like whatever knocked him out landed a glancing blow. His skull is intact, but I'd bet my certifications that he's got a concussion and a hell of a headache. He's going to be groggy and disoriented when he wakes up, and I need you to be his touchstone, okay?” Giving her a light shake, he demanded, “Can you do that?”

A firm nod answered his question. Marina brushed at the tears and forced her attention onto keeping Sam's head still as the Doctors Three began working on the mangled ribcage near Marta's knees.

“These ribs are a mess,” Scarlett hissed, delicate fingers probing despite Sam's muted groans and unconscious attempts at escape. “What the hell did he get hit with?”

Will spoke up from just within the tree line where he glared at the gardening shovel in his hands. His outer shirt had been conscripted to avoid getting his fingerprints on the evidence. “I'm pretty sure you don't want to know.” He pulled out his phone and pressed the speed dial. “Bri . . . there are some evidence bags under the passenger seat in the Jeep. Bring me the largest one you can find. Then I need for you to arrange for a courier to pick something up to take back to S.H.I.E.L.D. I want fingerprints lifted off this yesterday.” He paused, listening to his brother. “Good idea. Have the family detectives canvas the neighborhood to see if anybody saw anything. But let them do it – they’ve got the training. I need you to get that bag.” His jaw clenched. “I need you back here. We're gonna need as many hands as we can get once the docs are done, to carry Sam back into the house.”

Chapter End Notes

Please comment! I love to hear what you think! And check out "In The Family Way" and "Rise & Rise Again" on the Cahill Project page. Let us know what you think there too. Thank you all! You are so amazing! Only 2 weeks until this series' third anniversary! Can you believe it!?
Hey all! Not quite as prompt as they have been, but not bad either.

Translations at the bottom, as always.

Let me know what you think! Your comments make my day and I love to read them, even if they're only a word or two. You're all amazing and I can't tell you how much your continued support means to me.

Also, I'm wondering if anyone has any ideas for a new title for this fic? The UALP is my baby, but it doesn't really fit on a book cover, does it? I'll be putting together a new banner for Jeremy to sign this upcoming Sunday, and I could use all of your help in deciding what the best title would be. Shoot me a comment and let me know! Thank you again for all of your continued awesome!!!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
Chapter 192: A Tale of Two Fathers, Part Two

Will Grimm loved his family. Regardless of popular opinion, that was an inarguable fact.

Granted, he was not unaware of the things that people said about him. More to the point, he was conscious of the popular theory that he was cold and unfeeling, incapable of basic human emotion. His personal favorite was the rumor that claimed he had ice in his veins and iron for a heart. Sometimes, he even believed them.

Then he'd see the way that Marina smiled at him, and the way she glowed when he loved her. The joy in his brothers' faces when he put work away and played with them like he did when they were all still kids. Most of all, the quiet pride and fierce love from his son – HIS Sammy. These were all the arguments he'd ever needed; these were his proof to the contrary.

Granted, he prided himself on his calm in a crisis. His cool head in spite of everything. And he was well aware that it was these two traits above all that earned him his reputation. But all of that was gone now.

He could feel the rage burning in his heart, searing through any attempt he would have ordinarily
made towards rationality and intelligent action. His son lay in the dirt, left for dead by whomever had done this to him. And yes, even as the Colonel put together vicious plans for gleeful revenge . . . a large part of him knew that they would never come to full fruition.

All of Sam's injuries were purposefully inflicted. There was no damage to his knuckles or, even more troubling, any defensive wounds of any kind. He had neither fought back or attempted to protect himself physically. The most he had been able to do was run, which had lead him to his resting place now. This alone spoke of years of abuse . . . a childhood spent conditioned to accept it and trained to stand still for it.

Since there was only one person capable of bringing that mentality back, Will was very certain already who had been Sam's attacker. Gritting his teeth, he closed his hand hard around the shovel and growled. The sudden tension in Vincent's back and shoulders was a clear indication that the former soldier at least had heard the sound. Fortunately, Marina was absorbed in their son; he would be safe from her rage and need for revenge for the moment. He was no shy about the fact that it would be a welcome reprieve.

At least until they could speak to Sam. Then all hell would break loose.

Brian arrived then, evidence bag in hand. “Here,” he snapped, jaw tightening as he resolutely looked away from where Sam laid. “How's the kid?”

Taking a deep breath, he shook his head. “It's not good.”

Vincent grunted angrily. “Understatement. I won't know how bad it is until he wakes up though.”

“Guess,” was the sharp suggestion from the Colonel.

“Definitely has a concussion. Its severity and what the complications of that are . . . I can't tell you until he wakes up. Broken ribs on the left side; fortunately none of them seem to be endangering his lungs for the moment.” Running a hand back through his hair, he muttered angrily, “Bruised to hell and he is definitely going to be hurting when he wakes up.”

“Prognosis?”

“He'll heal . . . but it's going to be a long and painful process.”

“Anything else you're worried could become a problem?”

“I could give you dissertations,” Vincent snarked with a huff and a roll of his eyes, “but I don't want to get too in depth.” Breathing deeply through his nose, he muttered, “I would kill for an IV, a portable X-Ray machine and a fully stocked pharmacy right now.”

“Don't worry about the pharmacy; anything you're going to need, I can promise you are in our medkit. Including everything you'd need to administer an IV. As for the X-Ray machine . . . I think I can do something about that too,” Will mused, turning to face his younger brother. “Brian, call Dr. Wong back at S.H.I.E.L.D.; remind her she owes me a dozen favors. And if she gets me everything we need to look after Sam here at home, we'll be square.”

“Dr. Wong? Patricia Wong?! S.H.I.E.L.D.'s head of Medical?” Scarlett blurted in shock. The Asian woman was a ballbuster; each of the Doctors Three tread carefully around her if for no other reason than she was terrifying.

“Yes, Patricia Wong. Get a list together, Vincent. Patty's been desperate to get out from under that debt; she'll send us anything you say we need.”
The Doctors Three stared in shock and awe for a long moment before the emergency room doctor
nodded in agreement. Standing, the former soldier went with Brian to the house, the bagged shovel
clutched in Brian's hands. Moving to kneel beside his partner and his son, the Colonel smoothed
tender fingers along the curl of the younger man's ear. “We're here, Sammy . . . stay with us,” he
begged softly, his free arm coming up around Marina and drawing her in close to him.

Scarlett grimaced as she considered the young man. No one had felt comfortable moving him too
much, and at present Sam remained sprawled face down in the dirt. “I'd kill for a backboard . . . but I
am not willing to let him lay outside in the dirt while we wait for one to get here.”

Marina frowned at the statement, offering cautiously, “The workmen left some hardwood siding on
the side of the house? They were using it for the cabinets. It's not a backboard, but it's good, sturdy
oak. A long enough piece could work, yeah?”

“Hell yes, it could!” she cheered, bolting upwards to her feet. “Where?!”

“It's on the side of the house, leaning up against the fence.”

Whooping happily, the younger woman grabbed Doyle's wrist and gleefully dragged him away.
Meanwhile, Marta had never taken her attention from her nephew’s splayed frame. Smoothing a
hand down her nephew's calf now, there were tears sparkling in her eyes as she breathed, 'The
General did this . . .”

It was not a question and Will cursed luridly in every language he knew. Marta was well acquainted
with the abusive relationship between her nephew and brother-in-law. Maybe not to the full extent –
Sam was fiercely protective of his aunt . . . he would have tried to protect her from the worst of it –
but at this point, she was smart enough to extrapolate from there. He should have realized that the
virologist would figure it out for herself.

He could feel the way that Aaron stiffened furiously behind him. However, he was more concerned
with his partner. His Russian's whole frame locked up at the announcement, rage all but vibrating
through her veins. “What did you say?” she hissed vehemently, her eyes sparking with lightening
and voice brimming with precocious vengeance.

Marta didn't seem to hear the question. “I knew their relationship was bad, but . . . I never dreamed . . .
.” Here, her eyes flashed wide and her hands flew to cover her mouth as she gasped in horror. “Di . . .
. Diana had to have known.” Turning pale and slightly green, she sank backwards against her
boyfriend as Aaron moved to take her into his arms. Ducking her head into his arm, she clutched his
forearm as she moaned, “She lied to me . . . Di looked right into my eyes and she bald-faced lied to
me.”

“This was not your fault, Marta. You couldn't have known,” Aaron promised, holding her as tightly
as he could to try to keep her from shaking herself apart.

“But if I had, I could have warned you . . . told you what to expect from Gregory.”

“Sam didn't want you to know. He tried to protect you from it,” Will insisted, smiling at the scientist
kindly. “You are not to blame, and he wouldn't want you to.”

Biting down on her lower lip, she continued, “Suddenly, so much makes sense. He used to claim he
was a such a klutz when we were kids, and he was always staying home, ill with something. But
then he joined the military, and all of the clumsiness, the sicknesses, everything was just gone. Why
didn't I see it? I could have done something . . . I could have taken him with me when I left.”
“Gregory Braddock is regrettably a very public figure. Any accusation of abuse would have dragged Sam though the same mud as his father,” Marina announced then, hot chocolate eyes still boiling but demeanor once again under her control. “I know Sammy well enough to know that he wouldn't have wanted that. It was easier to just go along and get out as soon as he could.”

“And instead, the General trapped him into a different, more brutal kind of control,” Marta hissed viciously. “I'm going to kill him.”

“No, you're not,” the Colonel insisted firmly, ignoring the betrayed look the younger couple was giving him at that moment. “No one is going to kill anyone. We're going to take care of Sam; he is our first and only priority. We're going to let the family detectives compile the evidence and build a solid case. And then we're going to hit the General exactly where it will hurt him most.”

“And how are we going to do that?” Aaron asked calmly, resigned to the course of action if for no other reason than Will looked even more livid than he had when Aaron had been Kenny . . . and a carnie had called him a worthless waste of space.

“We're going to take his control of Sammy away . . . for good. He will never be able to hurt my son again. And if he ever does . . . well, let's just say that Marina and her sisters are not called the 'Merry Murderesses' for no reason.”

Purring up at her lover, the Russian laughed, “I like the way you think, moy lyubimov.”

Will pressed a warm kiss to her temple as he teased, “I thought you might.”

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The headache pounding relentlessly against the back of Sam's eyelids was the first thing the young man noticed upon waking up. The second was the strong, familiar male voice reading to him softly in Russian.

Relaxing instantly at the knowledge that his dad was close by, Sam shifted towards the voice without thinking and instantly regretted it. Pain ricocheted up his left side as his ribs screamed their protest, clearly making themselves known. He cried out in agony, trying to curl in on himself to cradle the pain even as he knew that it was only making it worse. “Dad!” he sobbed, recognizing the calluses on the hands that gripped his arms above the elbows. Trusting those hands, he whimpered as he was eased forcibly flat once again.

“I'm here, Sammichka,” the Colonel soothed fondly, one hand coming up to fold over the sniper's forehead, the touch firm and grounding. “It's all right . . . . I'm here. Sniper breathing, Sammy. In . . . two . . . three . . . four. Out . . . two . . . three . . . four. That's good . . . again. You're all right, just calm down.”

Blue eyes squeezed closed tightly, the kid all but leaning into the Colonel's gentle hold. “Sir . . . I'm sorry,” he choked out, the old training well up through the confusion and forcing the words out. “… I'm so useless . . . I didn't even check . . . I just assumed it was you and Ma . . . I'm so sorry, sir . . . please don't throw me out . . . I'll do better, I promise.”

Some part of Will was relieved that Sam's eyes were closed, so that his son couldn't see the way his jaw tightened at the soft begging. Finally, as Sam began to gasp for air through the sobbing please, the boy's dad jolted himself free of his vengeful thoughts. Cupping the kid's face in one palm, he ordered softly, “First of all, you don't call me 'sir', Sammy, I work for a living . . . you call me Dad. Second of all, you are my son . . . I will never, ever let you go.”
Pausing, quicksilver eyes took in the young man's awed features, earning a fond grin. “Family doesn't abandon family. And you're a Grimm, through love and affection, even if not through name or blood. You are my son and I love you . . . forever. That is never going to change, no matter what happens. Got it?”

Choking down air, Sam agreed breathlessly, “Copy that.”

“Good. Deep breaths, Sammy . . . as deep as you can manage. Just go slow. We've got all the time in the world.”

Nodding, blue eyes slipped closed as the younger agent forced all of his concentration on breathing. Finally feeling the pain come under control, Sam focused again on his adoptive father. “How bad is it?”

“Well, there won't be any epic paintball battles with any baby agents for awhile,” Will joked, smoothing a hand back through sunny blond hair.

“Damn; that's the best part of being an Agent of S.H.I.E.L.D.,” Sam laughed lightly, earning a heartfelt giggle and a grin from the woman lingering in the doorway.

“I'm sure your Uncle Brian and Aunt Natasha would have a thing or two to say about that,” the Family Russian teased, coming into the room and perching on the bed next to her son. “Hello baby. I'm sorry I wasn't here when you woke up. I was getting some rest; Vincent and Will double whammied me,” she drawled, with a fond glare at her lover, who – as was typical – showed no remorse for the underhanded action. Turning her attention back to her boy, she reached up to pet through his hair, asking, “How do you feel?”

“Like hell,” he replied, leaning noticeably into the hand she had threaded through his hair.

“I'll bet,” she chuckled, bending to press an adoring kiss to his forehead. “Just rest. I'll go get Vincent. He wanted to take a better look at you once you woke up.”

Nodding slowly, Sam watched his Ma go up on tiptoes to kiss her lover sweetly before leaving the room at a near run. Discomfort shivered up his arms and he shifted, grimacing hard as he looked up at the other man. “Dad . . . what happened?”

“Frankly, Sammy, I was hoping you could tell me.” Chucking his chin tenderly at the blank and panicked look that appeared as Sam tried to recall what happened, Will promised, “We'll figure it out, Sammy. Don't worry about it now, okay?”

The former soldier strode into the room then, a small grin on his face at the sight of Sam awake. “Well well well . . . look who decided to rejoin the living. How you feeling, Sam?”

Twisting his features in answer, Sam grunted lightly, “Ugh.”

“That good, huh?”

“Better even,” he snarked, bumping fists with the other man. “Vincent . . . thanks. That's the second time you've saved my ass.”

Smirking, Vincent promised jovially, “I'm not keeping track, I promise.”

“Good to hear,” Sam chuckled, grimacing as he shifted once again in search of a more comfortable position. “Ah fuck . . . I hate broken ribs.”
Rolling his eyes, Vincent set his bag on the bed. “I don’t know anyone who doesn’t. We’ll take this as slow as we need to, okay? Keep me apprised of your pain levels and we’ll take a break if you need to. Deal?”

Nodding, Sam allowed his friend to get him out of the loose button down someone had dressed him in while he’d been unconscious. Smoothing light fingers over the vivid bruising on the blond's chest, Vincent teased, “You light up like a Christmas tree when you bruise, you know that?”

This statement earned a chuckle and a grin, Sam shrugging carefully in reply. Cocking an eyebrow at the action, the dark-haired doctor asked, “What's your pain at right now?”

Sam's eyebrows furrowed as he considered for a moment, offering cautiously, “Six . . . maybe a seven?”

“All right. Tell me if that changes. This isn't going to be comfortable for anyone.” Setting the stethoscope in his ears, Vincent announced, “Here we go.”

It was a grueling process from start to finish. They had to pause several times when the agent's pain spiked, giving him time for it to settle back into semi-manageable levels once again. The worst part of the exam came when Vincent shone a small penlight into Sam's eyes to check his pupils. Stabbing pains rebounded through his skull, causing the agent to cry out sharply and roll away, promptly sick into the basin Marina had thoughtfully placed by the bed. The vomiting jarred Sam's ribs hard and by the time the fit was over, the blond was in agonized tears. No one had the heart to insist that the doctor finish the exam. “All right . . . I think we should take a break. I wanna get some pain medications into you to take the edge off, then you should probably get some more sleep, Sam.”

“No,” the blond moaned, rolling his head to look towards where Will and Marina were perched together on the other side of his bed. “It's Dad's birthday.”

The Colonel smiled fondly, squeezing his leg gently. “It hasn't been my birthday for hours, Sammy.”

Those eyes went wide in horror as he breathed, “Did I sleep through your birthday?”

“It's just a day, malysh,” Marina promised, tightening her grip on the hand she held. “You were more important.” Cocking an eyebrow, she reminded him lightly, “You know how we feel about putting ourselves before our priorities.”

“But . . . the party!”

“We'll reschedule,” Will chuckled with a grin and a wink. “This family rarely needs a reason to go out and get very drunk. The important thing is that you are okay. “Dong le ma?”

Leaning back into his pillows, those eerie blue eyes took in the warmth and fondness on his parents' faces. There was no lie in their faces, no guile or deceit in their eyes at all. They meant every word of what they were saying. Sighing, he nodded in agreement as he replied, “Copy that.”

“Good.” Pausing at the glum look on his face, Will squeezed his leg again. “Let Vincent get some medication into you. You'll feel infinitely more comfortable.” Smiling, he promised, “If you're feeling up to it, I can open my presents in here after that, okay?”

Sam grinned brightly as he agreed. “Awesome!”

Chapter End Notes
Translations:

(R) moy lyubimov - my love
(R) Sammichka - little Sam (it's a Russian pet name based on Sam's nickname 'Sammy')
(R) malysh - kiddo
(C) Dong le ma? - do you understand? (A quote from Firefly/Serenity, which happens to be Will & Marina's favorite tv show and movie)
Hey guys! So Chicago was AWESOME!! Jeremy was so sweet and I can't tell you how much I enjoyed the trip. He FLIRTED WITH MY DAUGHTER!!! And they talked about her doll, and he told her about Ava and it was AWESOME!!

Anyway, I feel the need to make a comment about something I found last week, which really hurt my feelings. I found some really nasty and hurtful reviews left on jeremyleerenner.com about the UALP. And I understand that not everyone is going to like the story; that's a tall order to ask. But if there's something you don't like, please. Let me know. Let me at least attempt to make my story better in your eyes. Don't just post really nasty reviews in an offsite blog. I found them by accident and it practically killed the inspiration seeing Jeremy had caused. So again, your reviews mean everything to me, even the bad ones. So let me hear what you have to say.

And to those who posted such kind things, you reminded my why I write. So this chapter is definitely dedicated to you and your awesome.

There aren't many translations today, but they are at the end, as always. Enjoy!
Chapter 193: Breakdown

Over the course of her long life, Marina Ivanovna Petrovka had been many things.

Once upon a time she had been an adoring daughter, before a single bloody night had transformed her into an angry orphan. At the Akademiya, she had been an excellent student, a star trainee and a fearless protégé. The birth of the Cahills – and her subsequent defection – had taken her from trusted patriot to reviled traitor and hunted fugitive.

That same event, however, had also gifted her with still more roles to play. She was a devoted sister, loving mother and – despite her persistent protests to the contrary – an unrepentant mother hen. She was best friend, confidant and secret-keeper of the Left Hand of God, and sister-in-law to the unflappable Phil Coulson. On top of that, she still snickered at the knowledge that her close friendship with Nick Fury gave some people nightmares.

Professionally, she was an accomplished assassin, talented spy and dedicated handler. She had cultivated connections and loyalties with some of the best and brightest of S.H.I.E.L.D.’s agent pool; her own son Sam Braddock, Bobbi Morse, Grant Ward, Antoine Triplett and Sharon Carter, among others. Of course, then there were the self-proclaimed “Marina’s Misfits” – Vincent Keller, Owen
Elliot, Daryl Dixon, Bucky Barnes, her son and the rest of her beloved Grimms – who had each taken up their own places in her heart.

Shifting slightly on the bed beside her son, she frowned fiercely at Daryl's continued absence from the family gathering. Objectively, Marina could understand his need to be in Georgia for the time being. The job of cleaning up was a monumental one, which would feasibly give him time to figure out where he fit in the lives of Carol and Sophia Peletier. (Sandra Bullock had said it best in the movie “Speed”, when she'd told Keanu Reeves that relationships formed under extreme circumstances never worked out.) Even still, his absence was keenly felt and, what's more, the Russian knew that she was not the only one who prayed for a speedy return to the family's fold.

The sound of laughter then drew her attention back to the present and she smiled to see her reason for living, joking around with his best friend. Of all the roles she'd claimed or been assigned, both past and present, this one was her pride and joy. Her place as lover, partner, sanity and peace for Colonel William Michael Grimm would always be her greatest achievement.

Marina had been witness to every moment of his life, from the time he was 12 and there were still things she didn't know about him . . . things he kept from her so as to keep her safe, keep her happy. She had salved his wounds – mental, emotional and physical – when he needed her to, and just been there when he hadn't. He had given her the highest of highs and lifted her from her lowest of lows. He had taken her to breathless peaks with only a look and tormented her for hours with barely a touch. Her Misha was everything and there was nothing she wouldn't do for him. He would never believe her, but it was her Colonel who had brought her to where she was now.

Which was probably why it broke her heart to see Misha floundering so close to the edge of sanity. Being here with the family, surrounded by their love and laughter and adoration, was a welcome balm. However, it was a temporary fix . . . a band-aid at best. When everyone had gone to bed, and the cacophony had died down into snores, the festering wounds Ross had left so many decades ago would reopen and the same old fears would resurface. The loss of his confidence was tearing him – and her – apart. And she was at a total loss as to how to fix it.

Owen's joking laughter broke into her thoughts as he teased his longtime best friend, “Pretty sure I was thinking of the Boss-Lady when I bought you that, Will. Sorry.”

Will chuckled at the plastic ball-and-chain nestled in the bottom of the box in his lap. “So, does this make me the ball and chain? Or Marina?” he asked dryly, earning an arched eyebrow from his partner in question. Cocking the box towards her, he watched her eyes fly wide in startled surprise, before she smirked and rolled her eyes.

There was a pause as the Cleaner considered the question, before announcing, “Yes.”

Jason snorted hard as Marina drawled, “You know, Lucky, I just remembered this assignment I needed cleaned up. I think you'll be perfect. I hear Cameroon is nice this time of year.”


“Shut up, Boss.”

The Colonel's smirk faded as Brian tossed him his gift next. The cylindrical package clinked faintly and the elder brother sighed heavily. “Why are there handcuffs in here?”

Brian smirked at his brother as he asked innocently, “How do you know they're handcuffs?”
Another groan was accompanied by a round of laughter from the younger brothers, before the older tore into the top of the package. Reaching in, he pulled out a rolled up sheet of paper first. Cocking an eyebrow, he read solemnly, “Congratulations on your enrollment into the Beer of the Month Club.” Looking up at the undercover agent, he snarked, “I'm really more of a hard liquor guy, Bri.”

“Snob,” was the quipped rejoinder, “It wouldn't kill you to kick back with a good beer like the rest of us grunts. And this way, you'll get four a month and maybe find one that you like. And if all else fails, I'm sure the rest of us uncultured swine can take them off your hands.”

Rolling his eyes, Will reached back into the tube and rooted around for a second, before withdrawing his hand once again. Sure enough, hooked over one finger by the chain, was a pair of brilliantly hot pink handcuffs. They rattled musically as Will jostled the steel set, asking, “Is there a reason they're pink?”

“Why, big brother, didn't you know that everyone here thinks you're super pretty in pink?” Brian taunted, joining the rest of the brothers in their ritual teasing and taunting.

At that point, Marina was 1000 percent sure that she was the only one who saw it. The desperate look buried deeply in her lover's eyes. It was that desperation, that need, that switched on the light-bulb in the Russian's brain. Lack of control; Will felt as though he had lost control, professionally and personally . . . quite possibly mentally and emotionally too, though he would never confess to it. The plans came together in a flash; Brian didn't know it, but those handcuffs were gonna be a godsend.

Regardless of the accepted dynamics of power in their bed play, Marina was always the one in control despite her submissive role. Will called the shots in bed because she allowed him to. Her safe-word was final and finite. There had never been an argument, question or pause when she'd used it. The need for it was rare; to date she'd only safe-worded out three times, but each time, all play had instantly stopped.

Her Misha was feeling lost without his customary control. As unorthodox as it may be, all at once, the Russian knew exactly what she needed to do to give it back to him.

The hot pink was a little much though. Plain black would have been just as fun . . . and not nearly as ugly.

Relaxing against the headboard as her resolve swept over her, Marina smiled as Sam scooted down the bed a little, cuddling into her ribs with a sleepy purr. Chuckling, she smoothed her fingers through his hair as she teased fondly, “You should probably open Sammy's gift next, Misha . . . I think we're losing him.”

Her son's protest was instantaneous. “I'm not . . .” here, he was interrupted by a wide yawn, “. . . tired.”

“Uh-huh,” Will agreed with a roll his eyes. “We've only got a few left anyway; Aaron, Clint, Jason and Sammy's.”

The sniper grinned, blue eyes sparkling cheerfully. “Open the Uncles' next. I know what I got you.”

“Me next!” Clint insisted, bouncing in his seat as he tossed a box to his brother. Laughing at the typically exuberance, Will opened the present and stared at the coffee carafe inside . . . the bottomless coffee carafe. “What. The. Hell?”

“You're always talking about the need for a bottomless coffee pot. So I got you one! Oooh . . . and a
Cocking an eyebrow at the jaunty red button, labeled “ACME”, the Colonel sighed. “Do I want to know?”

“You know how in cartoons, there's a giant ACME button that opens a trapdoor? Well, now you have your very own ACME button to push when stupid people piss you off. You can pretend you're sending them to an alternate dimension or something.”

Honest to God giggles ripped from Will then, as he reminded the youngest brother, “I haven't watched cartoons since you were a kid, Clint, but thank you. The thought is appreciated.” Turning to Jason, the older brother cocked an eyebrow and asked, “Can you make an actual trapdoor for this button to operate?”

“Fuck yes! Just give me the word. I'll figure something out.”

Aaron's gift was a small one, revealing a pair of plain looking glasses. Cocking an eyebrow, Will snarked, “Last I checked, I wasn't so old as to need these yet.”

“Just put them on,” the bomb technician laughed, watching with a grin as Will slipped the frames onto his nose. “Now, tap the right corner where the arm connects to the front.”

Doing as told, Will blinked in shock as suddenly the entire room was reduced to skeletons and infrastructure. “Holy shit!”

“You like them?”

“Hell yeah!” Tapping them off again, Will joked, “Now I can catch Clint when he's sneaking around in my air vents.”

“Kenny! No fair! You gave him X-Ray glasses!? Why the hell would you do that!?“ Pouting, the archer slumped against his boyfriend as he grumbled, “All of my best pranks happen after I've been crawling around in the air vents.”

“Stay out of my vents, Clint, and I promise not to tell anyone else you're climbing around in theirs.”

“Promise?”

Marina straightened, “Excuse you! What about me?”

“As long as you're not in mine or Marina's vents then. I promise,”

“So that leaves Uncle Jason,” Sam laughed, yawning widely again. “This oughtta be good.”

“Oh ye of little faith, nephew. Just sit back and watch the master work,” the communications officer teased, reaching under his chair for a long flat box.

Accepting it, Will pulled of the wrapping paper cautiously, clearly expecting something to explode or worse. Once the box was open, he stared in shock. The aghast and horrified look on her partner's face should have been her first clue that she didn't want to know. However, Marina felt compelled to ask anyway. “What is it?”

Will's sigh was a curious mixture of resigned and amused as he lifted what appeared to be a book out of the box. “Jason put together a wedding album for us . . .” The Russian blinked, the obvious reminder that they had never married poised on her lips, as the Colonel continued, “Complete with
terrible Russian wedding photos.”

Turning the cover to face her, he watched as his partner choked at the sight of the photo on the cover. The four younger Grimms were sprawled around a bar, clearly drunk, with Will looking exasperated, while Marina – convincingly attired in a wedding dress and sparkling tiara – floated overhead in a bubble, carrying a magic wand in one hand and chugging vodka with the other. “Oh Jay. You shouldn't have,” she deadpanned.

Jason grinned brightly, “You're welcome.”

The Colonel laughed out loud as he flipped through the pictures, each one more horrific than the last. “No, really Jay. You shouldn't have.” Cocking his head at a depiction of a giant-sized “Will” holding a winged “Marina” in the palms of his hands, he asked, “Do I even want to know how you managed to pull these off? I can't remember any instance in which Marina has ever worn a wedding gown, let alone been photographed in so many different ones.”

“You really don't. Let's just say, this was a lot of fun. Brian, Aaron and Clint all helped though; they picked out their favorite poses for the pictures.”

“Of course they did,” Marina drawled with a resigned sigh. “Oh boys . . . what are we going to do with you?”

Unable to help himself, Will was still flipping through the pictures. There was one of Marina literally sparkling, as each of the Grimms held a corner of her skirt upwards so it made a halo around her. And another of a giant-sized Marina holding him by two fingers over the edge of a bridge. It was the last picture that sent him into another peal of uncharacteristic giggles though. “Holy shit . . . Jay, she's going to kill you.”

“I know. And I don't care . . . it was too good to pass up.”

“What!?”

“It's an ICBM,” Will replied, turning the book so she could see, “An Intercontinental Ballistic Marina.”

On the page was what should have been a picture of a rocket taking off. Instead, a wedding gown clad Marina was where the rocket should have been, smoke and flame trailing from below her dress. Narrowing her eyes at the picture, she resisted the urge to grin at both her lover's and her son’s delighted giggles. “Just you wait, Jason . . . my revenge will be ice cold and deliciously sweet.”

“Bring it on, sestra. It will be worth it.”

Of course, then Brian had to go and ruin it, by teasing, “So, basically you're revenge is going to be ice cream? I don't see how that's going to be effective.”

Rolling her eyes, she groaned, “Bri!” which only set the two off again.

It took a while for both Will and Sam to get their hilarity under control, after which the Colonel reached for the last box in the pile. Frowning lightly, the blond protested, “Do you have to open it? I feel weird about it now.”

“What?” Will asked curiously, folding his hands calmly over the top of the box.

“Everyone else got you something that made you laugh or was absolutely ridiculous. And I got you something kinda serious.”
“That doesn't mean that I want it any less,” the older man insisted fondly, reaching out to squeeze the blanketed leg stretched out on the bed beside him. “I promise, I'm going to love it no matter what, because it was from you. Okay?”

“Okay,” he agreed with a resolute nod, though Marina couldn’t help noticing that his grip around her waist tightened just that little bit as Will started to unwrap the heavy box.

Inside the wrapping paper was a duct taped crate, earning a smirk and a cocked eyebrow. Pulling his K-Bar from his boot, Will slit the tape carefully and lifted off the lid. His jaw visibly dropped at the contents only he could see and Marina could swear that there were tears shining in his eyes as he reached suddenly trembling hands into the crate. Whatever it was, he was very careful with it as he withdrew it slowly from the confines.

Once it cleared the sides, it wasn't hard for the younger Grimms to understand what had caused their brother's atypical reaction. In his hands was a square whiskey snifter, with the logo for Glenfidditch Whiskey etched beautifully onto the front, under which was inscribed “DAD”. It was stunning craftsmanship, and Sam had clearly put a lot of thought into it. The newest addition to the family had only been calling the eldest Grimm “Dad” out loud for a few days, but he'd obviously been calling him that in his head for much longer.

There was reverent awe in the Colonel's tone as he brought shining eyes up to look at his newfound son. “Sammy . . . this is gorgeous.”

“Ma told me you liked whiskey, and that you didn't really have a good whiskey set at home. So . . . I went looking for one. There should be a decanter to match in there too. And a mold for spherical ice cubes.”

“Marina's right; I don't have a set. But this is perfect. Thank you.”

“Yeah? You really like it?” the blond asked nervously, clearly self-conscious about the gift.

Will smiled gently, as he promised, “Best gift I've gotten this whole year. Aaron's X-Ray glasses included.” He set the snifter back into the crate reverently, before pushing himself to his feet. Moving to Sam's side, the Colonel bent and pressed a warm kiss to the crown of the blond's head. “Thank you.”

The rest of Marina's boys seemed to sense that this was between the three seated on the bed and pushed themselves to their feet. “Happy birthday, Will!” they each called behind them as they booked it from the room, leaving the trio alone.

Sam's hands were claws as they clutched Will's over-shirt, letting the older man cradle him close to him. “The General is an idiot, Sam. You are a hell of a man, and I am proud to call you my son. No matter what happens, between now and the day I die, that will never change.”

“But . . .”

“But nothing, Sam,” the Colonel insisted, quicksilver eyes a warm, concrete blue. “I love you . . . your Ma loves you . . . you are ours forever.” Gesturing to the gift, he insisted, “This is amazing, and I will treasure it forever. But if you're just trying to buy your way into the family, to make sure we keep you around, you can stop right now. We are never letting you go. I swear it . . . on Marina's love for me, I swear it.”

Seeing the sincerity in the older man's eyes caused Sam to choke on a sob. Before long, that single sob had devolved into a total breakdown. It became quickly apparent, however, that the blond's
crying jag was wrecking hell on his ribs. Moving seamlessly, the Family's Power Couple took their seats on the bed on each side of him and wrapped their arms around him, managing to hold him tightly enough to stabilize them.

Once it was finally over, Sam whimpered lightly as he sagged completely into Marina's shoulder. “Sorry . . . I don't know what just happened. That was a stupid reason to cry.”

The Russian smiled kindly as she pressed a warm kiss to his temple. “There is no such thing as a stupid reason to cry. Everyone needs the chance to breakdown once in awhile.”

Feeling him begin to drift, Marina looked up at her partner quietly. Will nodded in silent agreement and slipped off the bed. Before long, the two had gotten Sam laid out flat on his bed, pillows supporting his swollen wrist and enough pillows behind his head to supply a small army. “All right, Sammy-honey . . . it's time for you to get some sleep. I'm gonna go get to Vincent to get you some more meds.”

“No . . .” he moaned, tossing his head slightly, “I don't want the meds.”

“I know . . . but I don't want you to wake up in the middle of the night, unable to sleep because you didn't take them now. If you don't want the sedative, you don't have to have it, but I think you should . . . just so you can get some sleep tonight, okay?”

Swallowing as he leaned into the palm cupping his cheek, he took as deep a breath as he could manage, before nodding. “Okay.”

“That's my boy,” she praised fondly, before dashing from the room.

Before long, Vincent had administered the mild sedative and pain medication, and Marina was tucking in her son as he hovered just over the edge of unconsciousness. Brushing back blond hair from sleepy blue eyes, she pressed a warm kiss to his forehead as she whispered, “Sleep well, moy mal'chik . . . your dad and I will see you in the morning.”

“Love you, Ma.”

“Love you too, mal'ysh . . . goodnight,” she prompted once again, and watched with satisfaction as he finally allowed himself to drop off.

Accepting Will's arm around her waist, she fussed one last time with the covers, before letting him lead her towards the door of the room. At the doorframe, she paused and looked back at the stack of presents Will had opened that night. “Grab a snifter,” she ordered firmly, a brief pause filling the area as Will moved in to grab one of the glasses, before she continued, “. . . and the handcuffs.”

Will blinked at her in surprise, though he was reaching for the hot pink monstrosities even as he asked, “Oh? Are you feeling a need to be tied up tonight, sumasshedshaya devushka?”

Giving him a warm smile, she promised wickedly, “Oh no . . . they're not for me.” Winking, she insisted, “They're for you.”

Chapter End Notes

Translations:
(R) Akademiya - Academy (the training center where Marina, Natasha, Viktoriya and Veronika learned to be spies and assassins)
(R) sestra - sister
(R) moy mal'chik - my boy
(R) malysh - kiddo
(R) sumashshedshaya devushka - crazy girl
Role Reversals

Chapter Notes

Thank you all so much for your support yesterday! It meant the world to me!

Okay, so there is sex in this chapter, but not really? Um, I don't porn well. So this is more . . . yeah. If you don't want to read, that's fine, just skip to the line break. However, it's not raunchy and, as told to me by my beta, it's more "intimate and sweet" than anything else. I hope you read and enjoy and let me know what you think.

The Grimms deal with the General next chapter.

Few translations here, but what there is, is at the end as always. Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
Я люблю тебя, Михаил.
Всегда.

art by stereowire
There was an open bottle of whiskey on their dresser; Marina was hardly surprised when the first thing Will did upon arriving back in their room was pour himself a glass. Smiling at the way his throat muscles worked as he tossed back the shot, she asked, “Nervous?”

He gave her a small smile, a distinct wobble at one corner, as he reminded her, “It’s been a long time since I’ve willingly allowed someone to handcuff me. And most of those experiences rarely ended well for me.”

“I’m not going to hurt you, Misha,” the Russian vowed, stepping deeper into the room and closing the door behind her. “This isn’t going to be like that, I promise.”

“I know,” he agreed, even as he poured himself another glass. “Forgive me if my nerves are taking a little more convincing.”

“We don’t have to do this. I just thought that . . .”

Setting the snifter down, Will came forward and laced his fingers into the strands of hair at her temples. “I want to do this. You’re always telling me that there is strength in this. And I could use all the strength I can get right now.”

Smiling at him, she insisted, “This isn’t about strength, Misha. It’s about giving you back some control. Cause regardless of the role you’re about to play, you will be the one in complete control.”

Linking her fingers in his, Marina went up on tiptoes and pressed a warm kiss to the underside of his chin. Smiling as he groaned, she purred against the skin before biting down lightly. Will gasped sharply at the pleasurable pain, though his only response was to allow his head to fall backwards as he put himself completely in her hands.

She lifted her hands to his shirtfront, continuing to suck and nibble at his throat as her fingers worked to release the buttons and lay his chest bare. Will's hands were warm and familiar on her arms as he gripped her elbows, anchoring himself in the reality of the moment. “I love you,” she murmured, before drawing back as the last button popped free. Taking in the sliver of exposed flesh she could see through the gap, she took a determined step backwards and insisted, “Strip.”

There was a small tremor in his fingers, even as he nodded in agreement. Gripping the open sides of his shirt, he stripped it efficiently from his shoulders and laid the scarred expanse of his torso bare to her view. She catcalled playfully, watching his ears turn rosy with an uncharacteristic blush as he moved his hands to work at the buckle of his belt.

Soon enough, he was beautifully bare, skin and scars on full display. The Russian bit down on her lower lip hard, one hand reaching out to smooth her fingertips over the curve of his abs, tracing the faint indentations his muscles had carved into the thin layer of fat. “Bozhe moi . . . you're gorgeous.”

The man ducked his head under the praise, his blush starting to migrate down the back of his neck. “Flatterer,” he insisted self-consciously.

Closing her eyes at the typical deflection, she leaned forward to press her forehead against the curve of his collarbone. “I wish you could see yourself the way I see you, Misha. I wish you could see how insanely beautiful you are.”

Lifting his hands, he smoothed his palms soothingly over her upper arms. “I don't need to see myself that way; it's enough to me that you do. Your love is all I have ever needed, samaya malen’kaya.”
She pressed a kiss to the hollow of his throat before stepping back again. “Get on the bed,” she ordered quietly, looking up at him with luminous eyes.

Nodding in solemn agreement, Will lifted her chin and pressed a final kiss to her lips. “Ya lyublyu tebya, Marishka.”

“Ya tozhe lyublyu tebya, Mishka,” she promised, watching as he scooted backwards onto the bed and stretched out across the mattress.

There was tension in his body that tore at her heart, even as she knew it wasn't directed at her personally. She well remembered the last time Will had voluntarily submitted to handcuffs; he'd been twelve, they'd still been at the Hoover Base, and his agonized screams had rang through the base for hours. Blinking her eyes free of tears, she stripped down to just her bra and panties, crawling to kneel beside him. Those eyes were flashing through colors as he stared up at her, before slowly he lifted his arms over his head and closed his hands around the headboard.

Marina bit down hard on her lip, suddenly unsure. Surprisingly, it was Will who broke the tension. He gave her a small, terrified smile, even as he promised, “I trust you.”

Jaw tightening at the trembling evident in the words, the Russian bent forward and kissed him, her hands coming up to click the handcuffs around his wrists and secure him to the headboard. For a long time, she was content to remain where she was, their mouths working against each other familiarly. Drawing back, she smiled down into his face, her hair draping around them in such a way as to block out the rest of the world. Reaching up to touch his cheek, she insisted, “Green means 'all good', yellow means 'slow down', your safeword is 'all stop'. ” Bending to nuzzle against him, she asked, “What's your safeword?”

There was a single twitch to the corner of his lips, before he replied, “Cahill.”

Rearing back slightly, it took her a moment to consider the wisdom in it. It wasn't a phrase that either of them would willingly bring into their bed, and it was the root cause of a great deal of Will's current insecurities. Taking a deep breath through her nose, she settled comfortably on her knees as she nodded. “All right. Use it, if you need to.”

“I will,” he vowed, allowing his body to relax into the mattress as much as he could.

Seeing the discomfort of his current position, Marina reached out to rearrange him slightly. With a light, delicate touch, she maneuvered him the way she wanted him. Then she nudged his knees apart, watching with satisfaction as his thighs fell open and left him completely open to her touch. Smirking, she reached out to run a single fingernail up the sensitive curve of his shaft. Even considering the fact that he was still mostly soft, the Colonel still bucked at the tease, a desperate gasp wrung from his lips. “How does it feel?” she asked, continuing to sketch a phantom touch over the flesh as it hardened under the sensation.

“Marishka . . .” he moaned, body bucking upwards again as her fingernails sketched designs in the hollow where thigh joined hip.

“Does it feel good?” came the gentle insistence, her tone a clear indication that she expected an answer.

“Yes.”

There was a pause, before she asked, “Do you deserve to feel good?”

His reply was all but sobbed as he declared, “No.”
The press of Marina's knee into his left knee should have been an indication of what was coming. However, the series of sharp slaps the Russian applied to the inside of that thigh were completely unexpected. The tingling pain wrenched free a startled cry, prompting him to yank on his bonds as he attempted to writhe away from the brisk punishment. Finally, the stinging slaps ceased and he choked on tears as cool fingers drew figure-eights over the reddened flesh. “Let's try that again, William Michael. Do you deserve to feel good?”

Flinching at her usage of his full name, Will closed his eyes and nodded shakily. She hummed, clearly disappointed in him as she sighed. “Hmm . . . you know better than to lie to me.”

He cried out again as she started to spank the inside of his right leg, the slaps brisk and lingering. Finally, he sobbed out an answer. “Yes! Stop . . . please! Yes!”

“Yes what?”

“Yes . . . I deserve to feel good.”

“Why?”

“Because you love me, and you want me to feel good.”

A bright smile curved Marina's lips as she bent to press a warm kiss to his lips. “Good boy.”

Will whimpered at the phrase, before bucking again as Marina laid another series of sharp swats to the already abused skin. “I love you, Misha. And I am tired of watching you hurt yourself like this. So we're going to be here all night, if need be, until I believe that YOU believe the words that are coming out of your mouth.”

Sobbing, Will forced himself to lay still under Marina's chosen penalty, fingers tightening around the chain linking his hands together. The sudden cessation of pain caused him to blink, before wet heat surrounded his shaft to the root. The resulting buck at the sudden pleasure was halted even as Will yelled out. The Russian's fingers were firm as they pinned him down, preventing him from moving away from the efficiently ruthless blowjob. His partner's mouth was heaven as she dragged him screaming to the pinnacle and he begged as she pulled away a hairsbreadth from the edge. “No . . . please . . . I'm so close . . . Marishka . . . please.”

“Do you deserve to come?” she asked calmly, causing Will's whole body to writhe.

He knew the answer she wanted to hear. He also knew that she would know he was lying to her if he gave it to her. Shifting his hips on the bed, he said nothing in response. The touch of fingers between his thighs, wrapping around his balls and tugging them away from his body, earned another sob. “You'll come when you can tell me that you deserve to feel good, and you actually believe that.”

“Zhemchuzhina . . . please,” he begged, arching as she bit down lightly on a pebbled nipple.

“It's gonna be a long night, Mishka. I'd suggest you either figure out how to lie to me . . . or you start to learn your lesson, da?” His reply was lost as he cried out as she began to spank the insides of his thighs in punishment once again.

It seemed like an eternity to Will before she stopped, though it was barely ten minutes. Each breath was a keening whine, her fingers tracing tenderly over the reddened skin. Gentle kisses pressed to the flesh, earning soft sobs, before Marina pushed herself to sit up once again. His eyes were riveted as she divested herself of her remaining clothing, until she was as bare as he. “My Misha . . . how I love you,” she whispered, her body languid as she moved to straddle his hips. “I don't know how to
make you realize that you are everything. That you are perfect and wonderful and all that is good in my life.”

Fingertips reverent, she moved to trace over a faint scar that curved around his left eye. “You were five when this happened. Ross had backhanded you, and his ring left a gash. And I wanted so badly to sweep you up and make it all better; but you just squared your shoulders like a man four times your age and said 'Sorry, sir, I'll do better next time.' I knew at that point . . . you were no longer the baby that I had held in my arms and protected to that point. I was so proud of you . . . and it broke my heart.”

Pressing a warm kiss to the scar, she moved to trace another scar curving around the bend of his jaw. “You were ten . . .”

On and on it went, Marina tracing over scars and recounting the stories of how he'd come to receive them. Once she'd finished, she'd lave the mark with kisses before moving on to the next. She could feel Will's body trembling between her thighs, his hands turning white as they clutched desperately to the bars of the headboard. The pain of the spanking had nearly overwhelmed him; the love she was bathing him with was pushing him further and further to the breaking point.

It was when she finally began to trace the thin, straight scar on the inside of his right wrist, that he felt himself cracking. “You were 17 . . .” she whispered, tears pricking at her eyes at the memory. “. . . and you were so lost. And you cut yourself to feel something . . . and I felt my heart stop when I came into the bathroom to find you bleeding and unable to tend it by yourself. You were careful; it wasn't deep or life threatening, but it scared me more than any wound you had gotten to that point. Because I didn't know if this was only going to be the first attempt, or was I going wake up one morning and you were gonna be gone . . . dead at your own hand?”

Silent tears streaked down Will's cheeks as she sobbed through the end of the story. “Cahill . . . please, Marina, Cahill,” he begged, body thrashing slightly under her.

Instantly, she hit the release on the cuffs, and pulled him into her arms. Rolling onto her back, she drew him between her thighs; taking him into her body with a practiced shift of her hips, one leg hooked around his hip to press him into her. “Come on, Mishka . . . all the way in . . .” Will gasped as he rocked his hips frantically, driving for something only she could give him, even as he felt her tighten her arms around him and draw his head to rest on her shoulder. Her tone was warm and familiar and adoring as she murmured into his hair, “Misha . . . you're safe . . . you're with me . . . never further apart than this . . .” Threading her fingers through his hair, she whispered, “Let me be your safe harbor . . . nothing can ever touch you when you're inside me.”

Will spasmed at the knowledge, his orgasm catching him completely off-guard at the tender words and the implications behind them. He screamed . . . grief, terror, love and fear all combining in the sound, before it trailed off into a keening whimper as he let himself go lax against her. His physical release triggered an emotional one of Marina's own, her eyes slipping closed on tears as she felt him begin to shake uncontrollably in her arms. Lifting her hands, she trailed her fingers through his hair as she whispered, “Lay your head, my love . . . I'll take the watch for awhile.”

Burying himself into her arms, the Colonel proceeded to completely and thoroughly break down.

*******************************

The next morning, Marina woke to actual snores, something that only happened when her Colonel felt truly safe. Smiling, she rolled over to look into the beloved face, one hand coming up to trace the calm and relaxed features of her partner. Will barely stirred under the touch, nuzzling sleepily into her fingertips before snuggling unconsciously back into his pillow once again.
Relieved that the night before had been a successful one, Marina leaned forward and pressed a warm kiss to his bared shoulder. “I love you, Misha,” she murmured, before rolling away and out of bed. Standing at the foot, she watched her lover's nude frame move with his easy breathing, before she dragged out the covers from where he'd kicked them to the bottom of the bed and draped them over him carefully. “Sleep well, love . . . we have all the time in the world to rest.”

Dressing quickly in one of Will's shirts and a pair of flannel pajama pants, she crept quietly from the room. The Russian peeked into her son's room, relieved to see him still sleeping peacefully. Easing the door closed once again, she trekked down the stairs, her soul as light as her steps at the knowledge that everything – and everyone – was where they should be.

Of course, then she walked into the kitchen to start breakfast and got hit with the Grimm Inquisition. The catcalling and teasing was immediate, though it wasn't until Brian spoke that she reacted. “Didn't know Will could scream like that, Marina . . . those handcuffs were handy then?”

Eyes narrowing, Marina whirled away from the counter and drove her palm sharply into the second eldest's solar plexus. Taken by surprise, he struggled to breathe through the sudden constriction in his lungs. Distantly, the Family Russian was aware that each of the brothers had fallen silent in shock, even as she tripped the smart-mouthed agent and landed another blow to his chest that slammed him into the linoleum floor. When it was over, Brian lay wheezing on the floor while Marina stood over him, her shoulders heaving as she seethed.

“I'm only gonna say this once. If I hear even one word out of you about what happened last night, Bri, this will seem like child's play.”

“It's just a little teasing, Marishka,” Jason protested, flinching backwards as she rounded on him next.

“Will is sleeping . . . actually, honest-to-God, sleeping without the help of drugs, exhaustion or excessive amounts of alcohol, for the first time in years! And I refuse to allow you to make him feel ashamed or embarrassed about what happened between us last night, if this is the result.” Hot chocolate eyes swept her boys as she insisted, “Do I make myself perfectly clear?”

“Yes ma'am,” was the instantaneous response, each of the brothers in awe at the implications of what Marina had said.

It was a well known fact in the family that Will didn't sleep well. Hansel was not the only one who knew how many sleepless hours Will spent in front of the television late at night, drinking to forget the nightmares and praying for sleep to come again. If the sounds from last night had given their brother an easy – and uninterrupted – night's rest, there wasn't a single thing any of them would say about it.

“All right then . . . usual chores. Brian, bacon. Aaron, juice. Jason and Clint, chop up some fruit for a salad. I'd like breakfast done by the time Sam and Misha wake up, dong le ma?”

“Da,” they each agreed, moving off to their chores.

And if Will's usual easy stride was halting and uncertain as he came into the kitchen several hours later, each of the brothers knew better than to remark on it.
So embarrassed! *runs and hides in shame*

Translations:

(R) Bozhe moi - oh my God  
(R) samaya malen'kaya - my little one (Will's most common nickname for Marina)  
(R) ya lyublyu tebya - I love you  
(R) ya tozhe lyublyu tebya - I love you too  
(R) zhemchuzhina - pearl (one of Will's lesser used nicknames for Marina)  
(R) da/net - yes/no  
(C) dong le ma - do you understand? (A quote from Will & Marina's favorite show, "Firefly")
For The Love of Family

Chapter Notes

Enjoy all! Thank you so much for your support for the last chapter. It was hard for me, and even though you all said it was awesome, I still was very uncomfortable posting it.

I hope you continue to read and enjoy. Not many translations today. What there is, is pretty self-explanatory. Enjoy and thank you again! I enjoy hearing what you think of this upcoming storyline.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
Chapter 195: For the Love of Family

Once checking he was alone, Will grimaced as he eased himself down into the couch cushions, fingers of his left hand digging into the armrest at the discomfort radiating from his thighs. No stranger to pain, Will had a higher pain tolerance than most people; it wasn't even really pain he was feeling, more as though his skin had been stretched too tight over bones and musculature. Still, it was an extremely uncomfortable feeling and he knew he would be moving gingerly for a few days at the very least.

Looking up at the sound of soft steps in the hallway, he smiled to see Marina watching him from the door. There was a fond smirk on his lips as he promised, “I'm all right. Just . . . aches a bit.”

“Do you want me to get the arnica? It's in my bag,” she reminded him, nibbling self-consciously on her lower lip.

The Colonel's eyes narrowed at her, watching her fingers twist and turn a small object between them. “Maybe later . . . what is that?”

Blinking at the question, she looked down at the box she held as though surprised to find she was holding it. “Oh . . . um . . . nothing. It's nothing,” she stammered, shoving it deeply into her cargo pocket.

Quicksilver eyes narrowed at her as a brilliant blush swept up from her collarbones and splashed across her cheeks. “Uh-huh,” he drawled, one eyebrow cocking upwards and tone disbelieving. “Marishka . . . what is it?”

Biting down on her lower lip, the Russian watched Will frown at her for a moment before he began to shift as though to get up. “No! Sit down . . .” she insisted, coming further into the room. She took the seat next to him as she pulled the small box out of her pocket, one foot coming up to tuck under the opposite thigh. “It's your birthday present.”

There was laughter in his tone as he teased, “I had wondered why I didn't get one from you.”

“It wasn't really something I wanted to hear commentary on from the boys. I wanted this to just be ours,” she explained, spinning the brightly colored box between her fingers once more. Mouth twisting, she took a deep breath and handed it over. “Happy birthday.”

He accepted the gift and took his time in unwrapping it, eyes solemn as he worked at the paper. Clearly it was important to Marina, which meant – regardless of what it was – it was important to him as well. Once the paper fell away, he stared at the velveteen black box in his palm. He could see the way his fingers trembled as he reached to snap the box open. His eyes went brilliant blue at the sight of the small circlet inside. “It's beautiful, samaya malen'kaya,” he breathed, lifting it out carefully.

Colored a sedate, almost bloody, red with a dark silver line through the middle, the ring caught and held the light, highlighting other colors in the crimson. “What is it?”

“It's bloodwood and tungsten. The tungsten is more durable than platinum, so it should hold up no matter what we put it through. And the bloodwood . . . well, the color suits you.”

“You do love it when I wear red,” he teased, winking as he remembered some of the things she'd bought him in red they both had enjoyed . . . some of which were not for polite – or even impolite – company.
Her blush deepened, her thoughts clearly along the same lines as his. “Shut up,” was the fond reply, reaching out to take it from him. She offered him her palm as she inquired, “May I?”

Smiling at her, awed once again by her desire to stay with him, he offered her his left hand. “Pretty sure this is my line.”

“Pretty sure you did this already,” she laughed, wiggling her fingers so her opal flashed as it caught the light. Turning her attention back to what she was doing, she slipped the ring onto his fourth finger, grinning as it settled into place easily. "Perfect."

About then, a commotion sounded from upstairs along with a brisk pounding at the front door. “Damn it, Sam! What the fuck do you think you're doing!?” Vincent's voice boomed furiously, causing Marina to frown, even as the pounding continued on the front door. She stood quickly, eyes on her partner as she asked, “Can you get the door or should I get one of the boys to get it?”

Mouth twisting, the Colonel considered his level of discomfort before shaking his head. A sharp wince further twisted his face as he pushed himself slowly to his feet, insisting, “I'll get it. You should go make sure Vincent doesn't murder our son for being stupid.”

“Yeah,” she drawled with a roll of her eyes, before jogging towards the stairwell. He grinned as she shouted upwards, “Samuel Wayne Braddock, you had better still be in bed by the time I get up there, or so help me, you are grounded!”

“I'm 27 years old, Ma! You can't ground me!” came the shouted retort.

“You wanna make a bet!” she snapped, before disappearing out of sight down the hallway, accompanied by the blond's resigned groan.

Still chuckling as he moved slowly towards the door, Will could feel his focus pulled to the new weight on his left hand. Reaching for the door, he took a deep breath then pulled it open cautiously. His aide, Corporal Patricia Hadley, stood there, shooting into attention with a sharp salute. “Colonel Brandt, sir . . . I apologize for interrupting your vacation, sir . . . but the Director sent this to you and Colonel Petrovka, with his compliments, sir.”

Sighing at the persistent phrase, Will resolved to let it slide – he'd been trying to get Hadley to stop calling him “Sir” since her assignment as his aide and still no luck. He returned the salute then reached to accept the dispatch envelope. “Did he give you a deadline on when he needed this intel back?”

“No sir, but I was told this wasn't anything he needed a response on. And to make sure to tell you, and I quote, 'Analysis will keep. Take care of what's yours.' He was most insistent, sir.”

“Thank you, Hadley. Would you like some coffee?”

“No, but thank you, sir. Will there be anything else, sir?”

“No, Hadley, dismissed.”

“Yes sir. Thank you, sir.” she agreed with another salute, before rotating sharply on her heel and moving back to the official looking jeep idling in the street.

Shaking his head as the jeep drove away, the Colonel pushed the door closed and moved back to the couch in the living room. He slipped his thumb under the flap to open the envelope before reaching in to pull out the three stacks of paperwork inside. Two of the stacks were paper-clipped together so as to keep them separate and the third looked very official, bound in a S.H.I.E.L.D.-embossed folder.
Setting the folder to the side, Will sprawled across the cushions to read through the other two stacks of paperwork.

The first packet appeared to be the adoption paperwork both Will and Marina had contacted Legal about. As he'd reminded them just moments before, Sammy was 27 years old and technically too old to be adopted. But as far as the two officers were concerned, their son's age was hardly a reason not to wrench complete parental control away from Gregory and Diana Braddock regardless. Thick and official, there were clear tabs where Will, Marina, Sam and the two older Braddocks would need to sign to make the adoption official.

The second group of papers was the results from the fingerprints found on the shovel. As Will had suspected, the fingerprints did confirm General Gregory Braddock as the attacker who had beaten Sam with the tool and then left him in the dirt for dead. Will's hands clenched around the pages, jaw tightening hard, before he forced himself to take a deep breath through his nose.

He tossed the packet onto the coffee table upside down so he didn't have to see the words glaring off the page, then turned his attention back to the folder. A post-it note had been stuck to the front of the folder, Fury's bold handwriting spelling out a simple note; “Don't say I never gave you anything.”

Will shuffled through the pages inside the folder then started to read through the official memo that made up the front page. By the time he reached the end of the file, there was a wide grin on his lips. “Fury . . . you magnificent bastard.” Tilting his head back, he called up the stairs, “Marina! You've gotta see this!”

Meanwhile, Marina had arrived in her son's bedroom to see Vincent and Sam glaring at each other viciously. Considering the fact Sam had managed to get dressed in a loose button-down and worn jeans as well as managing to shove his feet into his boots – though he couldn't bend over yet to tie them – it didn't take a genius to figure out the blond had plans on going somewhere. As it was, the kid sat shakily on the edge of his bed, fists clutching the spread in a desperate grip. Her arms coming up to fold over her chest, the Russian demanded, “What the hell do you think you're doing, Samuel Wayne?”

Sam winced hard; to date, he had never been subjected to the full force of Marina's disappointed “Mom Face” and her pointed usage of first and middle names. “I have to go to work, Ma. Team One is back on shift today.”

“Like hell! You can't even stand up straight; how do you expect to wear all of your gear without falling over!?” Vincent exploded, hands flying upwards as he glared at his friend and S.H.I.E.L.D. partner.

“I have a job, Vincent . . . so what? I'm hurt. Doesn't mean I can just ditch out on my responsibilities.”

The dark-haired doctor opened his mouth snap off something, prompting Marina to take the initiative and step in. “Right now, Sammy . . . your only responsibility is to yourself and to your own health. Sammichka, you're already sweating and you haven't even been upright for more than ten minutes. How do you think you're going to get through a 10 hour shift? We'll call Holleran; let him know you can't come in today.”

“And if they ask why not, what are we going to tell them?”

“The truth. You were attacked, you're injured and you need to rest and to heal.”

“And when they ask why there's no police report of an attack? And no record of a hospital visit?
What then? They're not going to believe it was the General, Ma; Ed and the Sarge are going to think
it was you or Dad who did this to me. I just know it.”

“Sammy . . . it is not your job to protect us. It is our job to protect you, okay? You are S.H.I.E.L.D.
first, SRU second; ergo, S.H.I.E.L.D. would prefer to keep this in-house. We have people trained for
this; we don't need outside help.” Crouching in front of him, she lifted her hand to cup his cheek.
“We have the proof we didn't do this. And frankly, they don't scare me. They can think whatever the
hell they want. We know what happened, both as a family and as individuals.”

Sam frowned fiercely, thoughts cycling through his eyes as he tried to come up with some argument
he could use to convince her. There was a light smirk on her lips as she teased, “Don't make me get
Aaron to sit on you, Sammy-honey.”

Groaning, the blond flopped backwards carefully as he protested, “Not fair. Aaron would hit the fan
if I even suggested going to work today.”

“As well he should. Which is why I'm kind of surprised you thought you were going to be able to
sneak out of here without him noticing,” she scolded, cocking an eyebrow at the shame-faced look
creeping across his face. “We'll talk about the sneaking out later. Right now, I want you to get out of
your clothes, back into your pajamas and then let Vincent check you over.”

Sam's face twisted at the declaration even as he nodded, though he didn't even shift in order to try
and follow it. Marina frowned at the behavior, asking cautiously, “You feeling okay, Sammy?
You're pretty pale.”

“Hurts,” he grunted, accepting the hand Vincent offered and letting out a quiet yelp as the older man
carefully pulled him into a seated position. “Damn . . . this may not have been a smart idea.”

“You think?” Vincent snarked, crouching in front of his friend and reaching out to press lightly on
the battered ribs. “With any luck, you didn't accidentally puncture your lung with a rib end.”

“He can still sass you, Vincent . . . I don't think you have to worry about a punctured lung just yet,”
Marina laughed, watching as Sam stuck his tongue out at her and earned the gesture back in
response.

“Meanie,” the younger man protested, his fingers moving to fumble with the buttons on his shirt.

“Memo note to self: pain reverts Sammy to a five year old,” the Russian teased, winking at the fierce
pout her son shot in her direction. “I'm sorry, malysh . . . I can't help teasing you about it. It's
adorable.”

Slumping with a wide yawn, Sam let out a fond grumble in reply. “Revenge will be sweet.”

“Revenge typically is,” came the fearless reply, before Will's laughing call turned her head.
“Coming, Misha!”

As she turned back to the blond, Marina insisted, “You don't have to get dressed for bed if you don't
want to, Sammy, but I would suggest you get into something more comfortable than a button-down
and jeans. Da?”

“Can I at least come downstairs?” he asked plaintively, bright blue puppy eyes peering up at her. “I
just don't want to be stuck up here all by myself.”

Cocking her head at him, the Russian took a breath in through her nose and sighed. “How about we
come up here instead? Then you don't have to try to tackle the stairs, and you're not all by yourself.
Maybe we can convince your uncles to have another Game Night like we used to do.”

Sam very nearly jumped as Clint popped unexpectedly into the room. “Game Night? Awesome!” he cheered, exhibiting some of his inexhaustible energy as he bounced slightly in place. “If we play Monopoly though, someone has to handicap pravitel.”

Sam's forehead furrowed as he frowned at his buttons, frustrated the medications were complicating his ability to undo them on his own. “Pravitel?”

“Big brother' . . . Misha,” his mom supplied, moving to smack his hands away from his shirtfront and unbutton the shirt herself. Easing the fabric from his shoulders, she nodded at the sensible t-shirt he wore beneath. She stepped to the dresser to retrieve a pair of sweatpants, as she continued, “Last time they all played Monopoly, your dad wiped the floor with everyone.”

Sam grinned wide as he joked, “They didn't actually expect a different outcome, did they? Dad spits out numerical sequences, like Spike and Uncle Jason quote computer terminology.”

“Your guess is as good as mine,” she giggled, tossing the sweats onto the bed. “I didn't play; I'm smart enough to know I can't beat Misha at anything to do with numbers and money.” She twisted to look at Vincent as she asked, “Can you help him with his boots and jeans? I'm gonna go see what Misha wanted and help him get up the stairs.”

The blond gave her a fierce frown at the statement, demanding, “Is Dad okay?”

“He's a little sore,” Marina hedged with a soft smile, “Nothing to worry about.”

“What happened?!”

“No offense, malysh, but it's none of your business, da?” Marina insisted sternly, her features set firmly.

Blue eyes took in the slight blush clinging to her ears as he bit down hard on his lower lip. He came to all too easy conclusion; anything that caused his Ma to blush, he didn't want to know about. “Yes ma'am,” he agreed, one corner of his mouth curving upwards.

“Thank you,” she laughed, bending to press a sweet kiss to his forehead before moving towards the door once again. Pausing next to the youngest Grimm, she grinned as he bent forward to make it easier for her to press a warm kiss to his own cheek. “Love you, dorogoy.”

“Love you too, Marishka,” he agreed brightly, before bolting off again. “Kenny! Game Night!”

Marta's laughter through the door was soft but bright as Aaron's frustrated voice called through the door of their bedroom as he shouted, “Go away, bratishka!”

“Come on, Ken! Sammy's bored!” the younger brother protested, watching his sister giggle as she jogged down the stairwell behind him. “Let's be good uncles and amuse him, huh?”

The virologist's tone was low as she spoke to her boyfriend, earning a wretched groan from the older brother as he caved to two of the three people he loved best in the world. “Ten minutes, Clint! Jerk!”

“Bitch!” was the cheerful rejoinder, the archer all but skipping away to track down the rest of the family.

“Fanboy!”
“Shut up!”

When Marina came back into the living room, she grinned to see Will still laid out on the couch, soft laughter at the two youngest Grimms drifting from his lips. Clint and Aaron were fierce in their loyalty to one another; where Clint led, Aaron followed. But that didn't mean they didn't still bicker, tease and poke fun at each other more than any of the other Brothers Grimm combined.

Her grin faded into something quieter, as she took in the happiness and peace on his face, coming in to take a seat at his hip. “How do you feel?”

Eyes slipping closed, the Colonel took time to take full stock of his body. The most obvious ache was in his thighs, the small bruises on the insides causing a fierce itch. Fortunately, he healed fast and the bruises would fade before the end of the day though the ache and tightness would linger for several days. The handcuffs were solid steel, and there were dark bruises around his wrists where he'd struggled against them. The white line of the scar on the inside of the right one stood out in stark relief, though for once Will didn't feel ashamed at the sight of it. Any lingering guilt had healed last night, along with everything else he had been struggling with. The sense of bone deep fatigue which typically plagued him was gone as well, as he had slept straight through the night with no nightmares. If he was being truthful, despite the gentle pain in his wrists and thighs, he felt fantastic.

Comfortable with his self-assessment, he allowed himself to smile up at her as he replied, “Better. Much better.”

Bracing one hand on the armrest under his head, she grinned as she bent to kiss him. “Good.”

Caught up in the taste of her lips, Will would have been perfectly content to forget the rest of the world around them. His left hand slipped into her hair, a tender comb as it moved through the strands even as he angled her head slightly to lick deeper into her mouth. Her shattered moan vibrated through him, earning an answering groan. He grinned against her lips as she melted into him, allowing him to haul her over his body so as to trap her against the back of the couch. “Bozhe moi, I love you,” he breathed, earning a brilliant grin from her. Pressing his forehead against her own, he insisted, “Thank you.”

“For what?”

“Last night . . . the ring . . . this morning . . . every second of every day,” he replied, smirking as he watched her blush. “I don't deserve you.”

Her lips pursed into a frown and she cocked an eyebrow at him, scolding, “Do we need to have a refresher course of last night already?”

The Colonel burst out laughing even as he shook his head. “No . . . I don't think my thighs could handle it. It's just how I feel, Marishka . . . it's never going to change. Which just means I am ever more in awe of the fact you want to stay here with me.”

Her whole body arched upwards as she nuzzled against his nose, vowing solemnly, “Never further from you than this, moy Mishka.”

“Slava Bogu,” came the reverent reply, as he captured her lips once again.

They took a long moment to cuddle close and trade lazy kisses, letting the rest of the world fall away. Clint’s call for Will led Marina to push herself into a seated position once again. “We're coming, domashniy! Pick a game; we'll be up in a minute!”

An affirmative call drifted back even as Marina looked down at her lover. She ran her fingers
through the close-cropped hair and asked, “What did you need to show me, Misha?”

Will lifted the envelope from the coffee table and offered it to her with a smile. “The Magnificent Bastard sent us a few presents.”

“Presents?” she asked in surprise, twisting her legs so they draped across her partner's lap as she sat up against the back of the couch.

Will's hands came up to rest on her thighs, drawing absent designs on the denim of her jeans as she pulled out the paperwork. As he himself had done, she set the folder off to the side and began to read through the other two packets first. The adoption paperwork earned a brilliant grin, but her glare grew hot enough to set the second packet ablaze. “The General is a mudak,” she hissed, tossing the evidence on the coffee table with the air of someone desperate to put space between herself and it.

“Yeah . . . but you haven't even see the best part. Open the folder.”

Marina cocked her head at him, before doing as told. Inside she found an itinerary for a summit taking place in Toronto the following week. “A summit devoted to combining central and local intelligence agencies with military intelligence to better equip Special Operations, Special Forces and Tactical Response Units with more actionable, reliable and safe intel? Interesting.”

“Check out the guest list,” he coaxed, flipping through pages and handing it back to her.

“S.H.I.E.L.D. Chief Analyst, William M. Brandt . . . of course,” she teased, wrinkling her nose at him. “SRU Sergeant Gregory Parker and second? Unexpected, but okay.” Continuing to read through the list, she grinned at the next name she recognized, “U.S. Army General David P. Perron . . . it'll be good to see Dave and Denise. Navy Intelligence Officer, Lt. Catherine L. Rollins; I wonder if she'll bring McGarrett?”

“I thought they broke up.”

“They're always breaking up. And then they get back together again. I give up trying to track their relationship. Maria'll be thrilled; she hasn't seen Collins since Catherine left Naval Intelligence and moved with the reckless idiot to Hawai'i.” Muttering names as she went down the list, she could feel her jaw going tight as she paused on one of the last names on the list. “Canadian Army General Gregory Braddock . . . superior asshole of the JTF2.”

“Well said,” Will laughed, even as he tightened his hands on her thighs. “We've been trying to figure out how to pin him down, to get him to sign the adoption paperwork. This is the perfect opportunity.” Smirking, he teased, “There will be a lot of colleagues there . . . a lot of witnesses . . . the last thing he's going to want is for people to know what's in the file and to know what kind of man he is.”

Her eyes narrowed as she considered that, which means it took a moment for Marina to grin. “Klassno.”

Smirking, he teased, “Yeah . . . I thought you'd like that part.”

Chapter End Notes

The General will be getting his comeuppance very soon. Next chapters are devoted to it.
Sorry about the delay. This demanded to be written first.
Hey guys! Another new chapter! Woohoo! Thank you so much for your reviews and continued support on this fic. It means the world to me!!!

Only one translations, so I'll just do it here instead of at the end.
(R) malysh - kiddo (one of Marina's nicknames for Sam)

Enjoy and let me know what you think!!!! Thank you again!

Chapter 196: A Whole New World

Sam was pissed.
The Sarge had showed up at the house that day and all but manhandled him into the car. He'd known that he was going to acting as Parker's Second during this summit, but there was a brusqueness there that Sam hadn't been expecting. The prodding had hurt and currently, he was shifting carefully in his assigned seat, trying to get comfortable while his ribs screamed at him.

He wasn't sure why he hadn't been allowed to arrive at the summit with his parents, but Parker had vetoed that idea the moment he'd suggested it when he was assigned to the position. Fortunately, Will and Marina hadn't seen the rough way Parker had handled him; they'd been on a teleconference with Director Fury and Deputy Director Landy about some intel the two felt was relevant. Aaron and Marta, though; both of them had been sitting on the front porch. Aaron had moved to protest, though Sam had pulled his most pleading face and waved him to silence as he was hauled around.

Either way, Sam was now forty-five minutes early to the damn thing and his ribs hurt like hell. It was not starting out to be a good day.

After about five minutes, the Sarge came back with two water bottles and took the seat next to him. Blue eyes narrowed suspiciously, even as he accepted the proffered bottle, watching warily as Parker took the seat next to him and twisted to face him. “Who did this to you, Sam?” he demanded, eyes hard and narrowed as he watched Sam closely for a lie. “Was it your parents? Agent Brandt and Colonel Petrovka? Did they do this to you!??”

“No!” Sam snapped, furious on his parents behalf. “Dad and Ma have never laid a hand on me, they never would. They found me, when the asshole who did this left me for dead in my own backyard. They took care of me, when I could barely move because it hurt just to breathe. Dad was there when I woke up, reading to me, so that I wouldn't be scared or alone.” Leaning forward with a pained hiss, he snarled, “They're my real parents; they're nothing like the ones who spawned me. They actually give a damn about me. You want to know who did this? You should be looking at the man who gave me his name.”

“No!” Sam snapped, furious on his parents behalf. “Dad and Ma have never laid a hand on me, they never would. They found me, when the asshole who did this left me for dead in my own backyard. They took care of me, when I could barely move because it hurt just to breathe. Dad was there when I woke up, reading to me, so that I wouldn't be scared or alone.” Leaning forward with a pained hiss, he snarled, “They're my real parents; they're nothing like the ones who spawned me. They actually give a damn about me. You want to know who did this? You should be looking at the man who gave me his name.”

“Your father is a general, Sam. Not only that, he's one of the most well respected men in the entire military. I've been reading up; his guys love him.” Here Sam scoffed bitterly, well aware of the persona his father put forward so that no one would know what happened in the privacy of their own home. “Meanwhile, Will Brandt's underlings are terrified of him. And Colonel Petrovka? Well . . . we all saw what she was capable of.”

Sam was grinding his jaw, pissed off on the couple's behalf. “I don't give a damn what you think you know. You don't know shit . . . I know who hurt me . . . my parents know who hurt me.”

“Then tell me why there was no hospital visit, Sam. No police report. Just help me make sense of what happened. That sounds like someone trying to cover something up . . . not two parents giving a damn about their kid.”

“I'm S.H.I.E.L.D., Sarge. S.H.I.E.L.D. takes care of its own. They have a complete file of what happened; with investigative reports, crime scene findings, medical reports, witness accounts. So why would they call the cops?”

“Because it's what you do.”

“Not if you're not a civilian. If I was still military, this would have a matter for the MPs, not the cops. If I was CSIS, they wouldn't have called the cops either.” Leaning forward, a small hiss slipping through his clenched teeth as he compressed his ribs, he snapped, “The only reason you're upset about my parents not calling the cops, is you want a reason to hate them. And you'll never find one . . . not here, not like this.”
Parker went to protest, but stopped when Sam suddenly froze in his chair. Blue eyes went wide and terrified, his body literally shrinking backwards in the chair as though he was trying to make himself smaller. However, a small shift caused a soft cry, and he flinched when the man Parker now recognized as General Gregory Braddock arrived at the table. “Samuel,” was the cold tone, icy blue eyes sweeping his son from head to toe.

Flinching again at the glacial tone, Sam sank inward as he replied meekly, “Hello Sir.”

“I didn't know you would be attending.”

“Medical leave, sir . . . Commander Holleran thought I would be able to handle it, seeing as it's a lot of sitting around and listening.” His eyes flashed bitterly as he sassed lightly, “Kinda like high school; easy to hide injuries when you don't move around a lot.”

Parker blinked in shock at the rage that flashed like fire over the General's face then, before he schooled his features into smooth impassivity once more. “Good to see you're earning your keep then. Sergeant Parker, is he pulling his own weight? Not fucking around or slacking off?”

The older man glanced at his guy, watching the shame and embarrassment flare across his features, though surprisingly, Sam said nothing. It was uncharacteristic of the cocky young man Greg had thought he knew. It was the barely hidden terror in his eyes that prompted him to answer firmly, “No . . . Sam is a great asset. He still has some things to learn, but he's going to be a valuable member of the team. I can tell.”

Clearly that had not been what the General expected to hear – wanted to hear? – and Parker watched as he made a small face before forcing a small smile at his oldest child. “Your mother misses you; you should come by the house, now that you're back in town.”

Sam said nothing, eyes cast aside as the man turned and walked away. It was only when the General was out of earshot that the blond muttered viciously, “Sure . . . so you can finish the job you started? Not fucking likely.”

His superior watched Sam shudder, a sharp wince crossing his face as the reflexive movement caught his ribs and caused pain. “So . . . your dad, huh?”

“There's a big difference between a father and a dad. Will is my dad. The General is my father. I think you can guess which of the two I like more,” Sam snarled, eyes narrowed slightly before he forced himself to shift away and stare at the tablecloth.

“For what it's worth, Sam, I am sorry. I shouldn't have made assumptions.”

“No . . . you shouldn't have;” was all the younger man said, as he continued to glare at the tabletop.

About then Will and Marina arrived, with an unobtrusive Owen Elliot trailing behind. Sam all but lit up at the sound of his Ma calling his name cheerfully, putting an end to the last of Parker's concerns. “Sammy-honey!” she laughed, jogging effortlessly in her high heeled boots towards them. As she got closer, she zeroed in on the lingering fear in Sam's eyes and the pallor that still clung to his features. “What happened? You're so pale, malysh! Are you okay? Are you in pain?” She paused for a moment, clearly seeking an answer before protesting as he remained silent. “Sammy!”

“I'm fine, Ma, I promise. Just . . . a run-in with the General.”

Marina's jaw tightened sharply and Parker stared in awe as she transformed into an overprotective mother bear before his eyes. “I'll kill that bastard. What the hell does he think he's doing, coming anywhere near you after what he did?” she snarled furiously, calming only when her partner
appeared at her side and placed one hand on the back of her neck. “Marina . . . heel. We're not killing him, remember?”

“Why not?”

“Because Sam asked us not to,” he reminded her, turning sharp green eyes on his son. “Are you okay?”

“Yeah. Just . . . embarrassed I guess. I let him get to me.”

“Despite all that he's done, Sammy, he is still your father.”

“Maybe, but that doesn't mean I want anything to do with him ever again.”

Will smirked, folding his arms over his chest as he cocked an eyebrow. “Would you like to make that official?”

“Official? Dad, I'm twenty-seven.”

“I remember how old you are, Sammy. That's not what I asked.” Gesturing to his partner, he watched as she dug into her bag and handed the adoption paperwork across the table. “Just . . . think about it, okay? Read it over . . . let me know what you think.”

Sam was still staring in awe at the paperwork, the large letters at the top of the first page causing him to choke up. “Petition for Adoption?” he breathed, blue eyes turning upwards, “Are you serious?”

“Deadly,” Marina promised with a small smile, before turning around at a call of her name. “Oh, Denise!” she cheered, bending to press a warm kiss to the crown of her son's head before dashing off to embrace her friend.

Moving to crouch beside Sam's chair, Will looked up at his son solemnly. “Now that your Ma's gone, be honest. Are you in any pain?”

Shifting slightly, Sam shrugged, “A little, but I'll manage.”

“You don't have to 'manage', Sam. I brought some of your meds, if you want them.” Holding up a hand to stall Sam's expected protest, he promised, “Not the narcotics, just the ibuprofens. It'd help to take the edge off.”

Taking a deep breath, Sam nodded once, “I could use a pill to take the edge off.”

“All right. You got some water?” Sam held up the bottle, allowed Will to ask, “What about something to eat? You're not supposed to take them on an empty stomach.”

“I don't have anything. But there's a buffet table. I could grab something really quick.”

“No, I'll get it. Just stay put. Keller is already super pissed that you're out and about, and not still in bed.”

“Vincent's just a big kitty cat.”

“I'm going to tell him you said that,” Will teased, getting up and ruffling Sam's hair gently, careful to avoid the still tender bump on the back of his head.

Sam made a face at the joke, scoffing, “Great . . . now Vince is gonna kill me.”
“Nah . . . he kinda likes ya,” Will laughed, before turning away towards the buffet.

Parker smirked as he watched Sam settle more comfortably in his chair, a lightness in his demeanor and an easiness in his frame that hadn't been there just moments ago. “You trust them, don't you?”

Sam's smile was small and quiet as he reached gingerly across the table for one of the pens piled in the middle. Finding the tabs with his name on them, Sam began to scrawl his signature on each line. “With my life.”

“So . . . are we going to need to change the name on your locker and your uniform to Grimm?”

Sam shrugged, biting lightly on his lower lip. “I don't know. I guess I'll have to talk about it with Ma and Dad. I've been 'Sam Braddock’ for so long, I don't think I'd remember to answer if someone called me 'Sam Grimm'. But, just knowing that I AM a Grimm would mean the world to me.”

It was about then that Marina descended on the table with Denise Perron from one side, while Will reappeared from the other with David Perron. Will chuckled at something his old friend and superior said, even as he offered Sam the banana bread with butter and apple. “Eat that,” he ordered fondly.

“Copy that,” Sam agreed with a small smile. Bringing the apple to his mouth, he took a big bite with a grin. “Hi Ma.”

“Hello baby,” she replied fondly, reaching out to brush her fingers through his hair. “Sammy-honey, I'd like you to meet a dear old friend. Denise, this is my son, Sam Braddock and his sergeant from Team One, Gregory Parker.”

David spoke up, holding up a hand to forestall any further introductions. “When did the two of you start adopting?”

Sam's grin bloomed further as he held up the paperwork, laughing, “Just now.”

Marina all but lunged for the paperwork, flipping through to see Sam's signature on every line it was needed. Her eyes were shining as she breathed, “Really?”

“Like I told Dad . . .you both are much better parents than I've ever had. It wasn't a hard decision to make.”

Will chuckled as he bumped his hip against his partner's. “And now comes Marina's favorite part . . .”

The Russian grinned wickedly as she replied, “. . . scaring the shit out of your father.”

Denise laughed at her friend's gleeful grin. Pinching her arm lightly, she asked, “How do you have so many handsome boys, Marina?”

The former assassin chuckled with a shrug as she watched her boy blush rosy. “Just lucky, I guess.”

Turning a matchmaker's eye on the young blond, Denise questioned, “You single, Sam? I don't see how that could be, as cute as you are, but stranger things have happened.”

“Yes, ma'am, I am,” Sam replied warily, narrowing eerie blue eyes suspiciously in the direction of the General's sassy wife.

“Oh good . . . I have a few granddaughters I'd like to introduce you to then,” she cackled with a grin.

Laughing outright at the aghast look on Sam's face, Marina teased her friend, “You have already
married into this family, Denise . . . you leave my Sammy alone.”

“Well of all, I am not married into this family . . .”

“. . . yet . . .” was Marina’s interjection, which earned a chortle from both of their men and a fond glare from Denise.

“. . . and second of all, I had nothing to do with my niece hooking a Grimm,” Denise protested, even as she flashed a wink.

“You had designs on Jason and Casey before they ever even met. You had everything to do with your niece hooking one of my boys,” the Russian scolded fondly, nose scrunching as she laughed.

It was then that Sam realized who it was that was teasing him. “You're Denise Perron.”

“Guilty as charged. Don't believe anything this one tells you . . . it's all lies,” the woman joked with a broad grin.

“Even the part where you're one of Ma's best, dearest and oldest friends?” he asked, with one of the megawatt smiles that typically turned women from 9 to 90 into total puddles at his feet.

“Oh he is a doll, Marina,” Denise laughed. “As for the rest, the old part is true.”

Marina chuckled, resting one hand on her son's shoulder as she gestured to the other two. “Sammy- honey, this is Denise and her husband, General David Perron, United States Army. Misha, Dave, Denise and I have been friends for a long time.”

“Almost thirteen years,” Dave chuckled, rubbing self-consciously at the back of his neck. “Did I ever apologize for that?”

“Got me what I wanted . . . no apology needed.”

“Apologize for what?” Parker asked curiously.

“When I defected from the KGB and the Russian security service, Dave was my interrogator at the Pentagon. He had me locked up in a cell for a month,” Marina explained, with a small smirk in the general's direction. “It's okay though. He's proven to be a good friend to the both of us over the years.”

Will chuckled, before shifting backwards as Owen leaned forward to speak into his ear quietly. Frowning briefly, he turned back to the assembly. “I apologize . . . I have to go take care of something.”

“Misha?”

A fond smile on his lips, he captured her elbow in his palm and pressed a warm kiss to her cheek. “It's all right. I'll be right back.”

Nodding in agreement, Marina watched the two men go without protest. Sam looked up at her, asking, “What was that about?”

“I have no idea,” the Russian confessed, hot chocolate eyes eagle sharp as she watched them disappear from the room.

The two men strode confidently through the mingling crowd, Will's fingers tight around the paperwork he clutched in his left hand. At the door to the bathroom, Will insisted, “Guard this door .
“You got it, Boss,” was the other man's solemn response, cornflower eyes cold as he watched his long time friend disappear into the bathroom. Turning away from the door, Owen folded his arms over his chest and proceeded to glare at everyone.

Will strode into the bathroom, his mouth tightening at the sight of Gregory Braddock washing his hands at the middle sink. Quicksilver eyes swept the room, taking note of the fact that none of the stalls were closed and all of the urinals were empty. Reaching back, he threw the lock, the sharp click bringing the General's head up sharply. Cold, colorless eyes glared at the older man as the Colonel announced calmly, “You and I should talk.”

Braddock's mouth twisted hard as he ordered briskly, “Get the hell out of my way! Who do you think you are, talking to me like that!?”

Will's face was stone as he replied calmly, “I'm the man who scrubbed your son's blood from under his nails for two straight days after you left him to die in our backyard. I would be the man he calls 'Dad'.”

“Brandt,” came the responding hiss, eyes narrowed in anger as he glared.

A cold smile accompanied his only answer, “Braddock.”

The Colonel folded his arms over his chest, projecting a sense of calm rage and icy control. The S.H.I.E.L.D. logo was prominent on the upper arm of his uniform sweater, and he could feel the tiny prick of the pin displaying his Army rank even through the cotton of his dress shirt. One hand clutched the dispatch envelope Fury had sent, the paperwork Sam had signed already tucked away inside. “You should feel fortunate . . . my partner would rather like to rip you limb from limb. However, I have no desire to be visiting her in prison for the next twenty years. Ergo, the decision to be civilized about this.”

“Like she could.”

“They call her Viper. I assure you . . . it would be very easy.” There was anger in Will's eyes as he compressed his lips hard, all but snarling at the superior officer. “And just because I've decided not to let her rip you to pieces, doesn't mean that I don't want her to rip you to pieces. Forcing me to find my son, bloody and broken, in his own home was not the first impression of yourself you wanted to make with me.”

“You can't prove it.”

“Can't I?” he asked, reaching into the envelope and pulling out the crime scene report. A loud crack rang through the small room as the stack slapped against the marble counters. “There's copies, just so you know. S.H.I.E.L.D. takes the safety of its agents and assets very seriously. And, seeing as you left the weapon in question, it wasn't hard to pull your fingerprints.”

“It's still my word against Sam's.”

“You don't know about the witness, I take it. Someone saw you enter my home . . . saw how scared Sam was when he realized who was on the porch. And their security cameras have a very clear picture of your car . . . and your license plate.” A lazy shrug met Braddock's horrified features. “You may not value Sam, but I value my son very highly.”

“He's my son.”
Holding up the second stack of paperwork, he flipped it open to the first of Sam's signatures he could find. “Not for long. I don't need you or Mrs. Braddock to sign this. Just Sam . . . and he's already done it. As soon as I turn this into my lawyers, Sam will be mine . . . mine and Marina’s, and you will never be able to lay another hand on him without facing the kind of charges I would dearly like to bring you up on now.”

“So why don't you? Why all the cloak and dagger?”

“Because Sam asked us not to. He didn't want to make a big scene about it . . . he just wanted to move on with his life. I am respecting that. And considering what you did to him, you are going to respect that too. You're going to sign the paperwork, next to every tab with your name on it. And then you're going to walk away and never even glance at MY son ever again.” Leaning forward, Will smirked to see the older man visibly recoil. “If you don't . . . well, let's just say things are going to get a great deal less 'civilized'.”

Twenty minutes later, Will slipped into the empty seat beside Marina with the satisfied air of a man who had achieved the impossible. The Russian cocked an eyebrow at him, hissing, “Where have you been?”

Pulling the adoption paperwork from the envelope he'd returned it to, he handed it to his lover with a grin. “Congratulations, Marina . . . it's a boy.”

Marina's eyes went wide at the declaration, grabbing the offered packet and thumbing through each page systematically. She choked on tears at the sight of both her partner's and Gregory Braddock’s signatures on each of the necessary lines. Snatching a pen from the middle of table, she quickly scrawled her own signature to the correct places. Then, not even caring that the majordomo for the summit was getting ready to start speaking at the podium, she shrieked with glee and lunged at her son. Sam caught her with a grunt, her happy squeals earning bright laughter from him. Hugging her tightly around the middle, he asked, “What did I miss?”

The Colonel knew his partner was going to be incapable of anything resembling coherent thought for a minute and tossed the paperwork across the table. “Welcome to the family, Sammy . . . you're a Grimm now.”
Leaning into her lover, Marina sighed as the speaker continued to drone on at the podium. She'd expected the speech to be boring – what else could one expect when the speech was entitled “Tactical Solutions in Civilian Settings” – but the monotone was a little much. Her partner's fingers were playing tenderly with her own, a clear indication he wasn't paying attention either; though on her other side, Sam was riveted. She understood his interest on some level, but this wasn't Marina's
typical purview. She had been point for the *Brat'ya Mrachnyy* for more than a decade; she went where she was led and wreaked havoc where she was told. Figuring out tactical solutions was Will and Clint's job.

One hand came up to stifle a yawn before she grunted miserably, “I don't know how people aren't asleep right now.”

“Who said people aren't asleep right now?” Will teased into the curve of her ear, his arm coming up over her shoulders for a brief squeeze. After a moment, the hand shifted over to thread fingers through the blond hair at the back of their son's head. Despite his interest in the topic, the near constant pain in Sam's ribs was tiring him out and he'd moved to rest his temple against his Ma's shoulder. “How you holding up, Sammy?”

“Tired,” he replied absently, eyes fixated on the speaker as he continued to absorb the information like a sponge.

Blinking hard, Marina shifted slightly to look up into smiling quicksilver eyes. “If I don't get up and move, I'm going to pass out. Ergo, I'm going to head to the ladies room.”

Will chuckled as Sam grumbled lightly in response to losing his pillow, looking up to give Marina a small smile in reply. Once Marina stood, the older man glided effortlessly into the vacated seat and let Sam lean up against him instead. Tilting up his chin, he teased, “Hurry back.”

The Russian shot him a playful wink and all but sauntered out of the converted ballroom. Glancing down at his watch, the eldest Grimm began to count down. A wink like that meant Marina was bored and looking for some one-on-one attention from her favorite playmate. And considering the fact they had spent a large majority of the last months separated . . . Will could honestly say he was looking forward to a little amorous attention himself.

Of course when a large group of people stormed into the room five minutes later, carrying automatic weapons and shouting orders to the assembled guests, it quickly became apparent that this particular plan was shot to hell. Groaning, Will listened to the orders being yelled and carefully drew his son towards the wall.

Sam's eyes were wide and very blue, staring up at the hostage takers in shock. “What the . . .?”

Whatever question the younger man had been about to ask was cut off as one of the thugs slammed the butt of his rifle into Sam's temple with a rough shout of, “Shut up!!”

The Colonel's jaw went tight as Sam immediately reeled. Considering the concussion he was already suffering from, the blow to the head was only going to make the pain in his head worse. Fortunately, Will was saved from acting on his paternal rage, as Owen glided easily between him and the asshole. “Come on, Boss . . . let's get the kid on the floor,” his friend insisted.

Sam's head was lolling on his neck, and it was only Will's arm around his waist keeping him upright. Weak-kneed and nauseous, the blond whimpered as Owen took up the other side and, between the two of them, managed to get him laid out in recovery on the floor. Reaching out to grab Owen's arm, the Colonel hissed vehemently, “No matter what happens, Lucky . . . you watch out for Sam. That's an order.”

“Copy that,” was the agreement, the two friends working to get Sam as comfortable as they could. Glancing back over his shoulder to check the whereabouts of the man Will was now calling “The Asshole”, the Cleaner asked in a whisper, “Where's the Boss-lady?”
“She stepped out to the restroom,” Will breathed quietly, quicksilver eyes watching the terrorists spread out to cover the whole room. “She's not the one I'm worried about right now. Marishka can take care of herself.”

Parker frowned from where he sat on the other side of Will, hissing, “Isn’t she your partner? Aren’t you a little worried?”

Quicksilver eyes swept around to check their surroundings, the Grimm shaking his head with a firm frown. “I always worry. But worrying isn’t going to protect her or keep her safe. So, I'm going to be a good boyfriend and trust her to do what needs doing.” Smoothing his fingers tenderly over the growing lump on Sam's head, he grimaced at the soft sob the blond let out as he pressed against the injury as carefully as he could to determine the extent of the damage. “And quite frankly, Sergeant Parker, Sam needs my attention more at the moment. So unless you want to get both of our asses handed to us by these assholes, I'd suggest you shut up.”

Opening his mouth to protest, Parker froze as a shadow passed by and stalled that idea in its tracks. Quicksilver eyes narrowed at him, before one eyebrow cocked upwards in silent question. Still want to argue with me?

With a fierce frown on his lips, Parker settled back against the wall in silence. For Sam's sake, he'd keep the peace. But he could guarantee . . . this conversation was NOT over.

It was about then a masked man moved up onto the stage and put three bullets into the ceiling. There was an instant outcry, before the entire ballroom silenced in fear. “Frankly, ladies and gentlemen, I'm not here for most of you. Give me what I want and I'll be out of your hair very soon.”

Looking around at the officers assembled, he demanded, “I want the highest ranking officer here . . . the one with the highest security clearances.”

Parker watched as the S.H.I.E.L.D. analyst all but froze, both Sam and Elliot looking up at him at the announcement. Fortunately, the three were saved from speaking when General Braddock stepped forward, sneering, “I'm Gregory Braddock, commanding officer for the JTF2. I'm fairly certain I have the highest clearances here.”

The man narrowed his eyes as the General, gesturing to one of his guys. “Check his chest . . . tell me if he has it.”

Recoiling as the thug reached for him, Braddock snapped, “Get your hands off me!”

Twice the officer's size, it wasn't difficult for the man to subdue him and rip open his shirt to check his chest . . . his unmarked chest. Giving the General an angry, if amused, grin, the leader chuckled, “Clearly someone has a higher estimation of himself than he should.” Gesturing sharply, he ordered briskly, “Shut him up.”

Will grimaced and shifted to block the blond's view as the thug put his fist into the General's face. Resting his hand on Sam's cheek, he insisted, “Close your eyes, Sammy. Don't look.”

The younger agent didn't even protest, just did as he was told, attempting to curl closer to his adoptive father. Will's fingers were warm and familiar in his hair as he smoothed through the strands gently, trying to soothe him. There was a sharp flinch as the leader announced, “That's enough. We don't want the asshole dead.” There was a pause as he evaluated the room, before speaking again. “Let's try this again. I want the highest ranking officer in here, the one with the highest security clearances . . . and the tattoo of a family crest on his chest. You have 60 seconds to step forward, or I'm going to start killing hostages.”
At the clarification, terrified blue eyes shot open and zeroed in on the left side of Will's chest. Parker watched as the man's own hand twitched toward the same spot, before he marshaled himself back under control and cupped Sam's cheek with a small, sad smile. “Dad . . . no,” Sam protested in a whisper, the pain and the fear causing tears to build in his eyes.

“It's okay Sammy,” the Colonel promised. “Everything's going to be just fine. I promise.”

Owen leaned forward, hissing furiously, “Don't you even dare, Boss.”

“You . . . your only priority is Sam, understood? It was an order then and it's still an order now.”

“**You** are my priority too, Boss . . . I have orders from Fury.”

“Fury will deal. Marina will come for me . . . Sam needs you more than I do.” Seeing the blond gearing up for a fight, Will's hand flashed out and grabbed hold of his arm tightly, “Lucky . . . please. Protect my son.”

Owen's jaw tightened hard, even as he nodded in agreement. “I really don't want to be one of the toys people clean up after the Boss-lady has swept through here, so if you don't mind? Don't get dead.”

“I don't plan on it,” Will agreed with a small smile, before turning his attention back to his son. Sam's eyes were bright with tears, one hand gripping onto the older man's wrist fiercely. “Sammy . . .”

“No! Dad, no . . . don't leave me, please.”

“I'm not leaving you . . . I'm protecting you . . . that's what dads do, okay? Lucky's gonna take good care of you and Marina's going to be here very soon. I'm going to be just fine.”

“Promise,” Sam demanded, tightening his grip as he locked eyes with S.H.I.E.L.D.'s Chief Analyst.

“Fifteen seconds!” came the sudden shout, earning a sharp flinch from the Colonel even as he swore, “I love you.”

Lifting the hand to press a warm kiss to the back, Will disentangled himself and pulled off his S.H.I.E.L.D. sweater. Folding it, he tucked it under Sam's head and then stood. Turning to face the room, his fingers worked at his buttons as he announced, “I'm the one you want. Don't hurt anyone.”

Grabbing the lapel, Will pulled the shirt back to display the Kuhn family crest – in all of its vibrant blues and yellows – tattooed directly over his left pectoral. The leader grinned, gesturing toward two of his men, both of them advancing on the Colonel with menacing grins. “I'm so glad to hear you can be reasonable, Mr . . .”

“Colonel . . . Colonel William Michael Brandt, Chief Analyst for the Strategic Homeland Intervention Enforcement and Logistics Division.” Quicksilver eyes were hard and cold as they glared at him, “What the hell do you want?”

“Colonel Brandt . . . it's a pleasure. We have a lot to talk about,” the younger man smarmed with a sick grin.

One of the thugs grabbed Will's arm and the Colonel reacted without thought. His body was smooth and practiced as he put the first man and then the second on the ground, both completely incapacitated and moaning in pain. He turned his attention back to the leader, fingers shifting to his buttons as he fastened his shirt, insisting, “Don't touch me.”
Shocked by the calm take down, and the practiced nature of the act, Parker stared. He'd seen what Brandt's partner could do and had no doubts the woman was scary competent and fiercely protective. Brandt, however, had always seemed much less . . . capable. For crying out loud, he was an analyst; he should have spent his days pushing papers and sitting at a desk. Clearly, this was not the case.

The leader stared at the two men on the ground, grinding out, “Those were my two best guys.”

“They could use a remedial lesson or two, in what not to do when going head to head with a career soldier and special operations officer.” Lips quirked into a sarcastic grin, as Will snarked, “Just a tip.”

The leader's jaw tightened hard as he jumped from the stage and stalked towards him. His pace faltered as the officer insisted, “Just because you're in control here, doesn't mean I won't put you on the ground with your friends if you even think about touching me. Fair warning.”

Glowering, the man jammed a finger in Will's face – careful not to touch him – and insisted, “You will tell me what I want to know . . . and I don't give a damn about your dislike for being touched.”

Quicksilver eyes flashed through colors as he stared the man down, before a small smile creased his lips. “S.H.I.E.L.D. doesn't negotiate with terrorists, asshole. Do your worst . . . I'll never tell you anything.”

There was a noticeable cock to the man's head as he laughed, the sound sharp and brittle. “You actually believe that? Everyone talks eventually . . . you'll be no different.”

“More capable men than you have tortured me for the intel they wanted. They didn't get anything except an early grave. I can assure you, your fate will be the same if you don't get your guys and get the hell out of here.”

“You have codes I want . . . that I need. And no one is leaving here until I get them. So flash what bravado you think will save you; you will give me what I want.”

“So be it . . . it's your funeral. And in case you're wondering? The name on your death certificate will be Viper. Enjoy what time you have remaining to you . . . you won't see sunset.”

The two men stood for a long moment, in a clear standoff Will was just as obviously winning. Finally, the man barked, “I don't care how you do it . . . get him out of here.”

And when two guns leveled at Will's head from several arms lengths away, he nodded to concede the first round and went where he was lead.

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Marina Petrovka – aka Gadyuka aka Viper – was pissed.

Yes, she'd wanted a respite from the boredom and who could blame her for that; monotone can only hold someone's attention for so long. But honestly, this was ridiculous. “What the hell, Jay!? Can't you go any faster?”

Jason grimaced at the snap, glancing towards where Spike was seated next to him, the two men working to gain control of the cameras. “Marishka . . . I know you want to rip some heads off right now, but Spike and I are going as fast as we can. They're monitoring the cameras; the last thing we want to do is tip our hand so soon in the game.”

Just then, Team One's tech specialist cheered, “I got it!”
Marina lunged to lean over his shoulder, eyes taking in the real-time picture being provided from the security cameras inside of the hotel. The glimpse of blond hair drew her attention and she felt rage scream through her body at the sight of her son lying on the floor, resting in recovery position. Owen was sitting next to the younger man, one hand on his shoulder and his eyes taking in every nuance of what was happening around them. “Where's Misha?” she demanded, glancing at the younger Grimm for answers.

Clint's announcement came from behind her, his finger tapping the screen, “There. They're separating him from the rest of the hostages.”

Jason nodded absently, eyes taking in the terrorist leader. “I recognize that guy.”

“What?”

“He's on a file, sitting on my desk back home. Matthew Conrad . . . he's a militant pacifist.”

“A pacifist?! This doesn't look like a peaceful organization to me, Jay,” Brian snarked from where he and Natasha stood against the wall out of the way, one eyebrow cocking upwards at his little brother while Natasha kept a close eye on her younger sister's rage level.

“Militant pacifist. They released a manifesto about a year ago, declaring that their goal was to force the world to accept peace. And that they would give up themselves and their guns, as soon as the world's governments did the same.”

“I'll bet that went over famously,” Maria snarked from the wall, her arms folded over her chest. Worried teal eyes were watching her best friend steadily, taking in the way Marina's eyes tracked her lover across the screens.

“Yeah . . . you could say that. They used to have a hacker . . . a pretty talented one.”

“Used to?” Marina asked, tuning back into the conversation with concern.

The communications specialist bit down on his lower lip hard as he looked up at his sister. “He got busted for trying to hack the Pentagon for nuclear codes. He's doing a couple life sentences right now; military justice doesn't fuck around . . . you know that.”

“Shit,” Marina breathed, forcing her fingers through her hair as she turned away from the screens.

Aaron spoke up then from where he stood near the door of the command truck with Kevin “Wordy” Wordsmith. “Uh, guys? How's this for a shit-fest? Who do we know with top secret security codes . . . including passcodes to weapons silos . . . in that room, right now?”

Clint bolted up from the wall, eyes wide in horror. “That's why they're separating him from the others.”

Maria's tone was horrified as she hissed, “They intend to torture him for those codes.”

“Not gonna happen,” Marina hissed, spinning on her heel and headed towards the door. “Clint, find a perch. Take Bucky and Constable Lane with you. Aaron, you and Brian are in charge of finding Misha. Natasha, you and I are taking out the terrorists in the ballroom and rescuing my son. Jason . . . get us in there without being seen. And call Marta and Vincent . . . get them here. I want Medical on-site and Sam seen to as soon as the scene is clear.”

“Yes ma'am,” the tech officer agreed, eyes wide as he watched his sister and two brothers leave the truck, with the three snipers close on their heels. Closing his eyes, he reached for a prayer Marina
had taught him as a child, but he rarely called upon. “Our Father who art in Heaven, hallowed be thy
name. Thy will be done, on Earth as it is in Heaven. Protect this family from all enemies both foreign
and domestic. And keep Will safe . . . Marina doesn't need more blood on her hands. In the name of
the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, Amen.”

“Amen,” was the unanimous agreement from the rest of the family through the comms, before they
slipped into battle mode.

Jason glanced at Spike, insisting, “Don’t take your eyes off the ballroom. I’ve gotta figure out a way
to get everyone inside without being noticed.”

“Copy that,” Spike agreed with a small nod, turning his attention back to where Sam was still
sprawled on the floor. The sight of his own Boss sitting on the other side of the former soldier was a
relief and he sighed quietly. “You think Sam's unconscious?”

“No . . . but he probably took another hit to the head or the ribs. Will would have put him in recovery
just be safe. But he's making small movements, and Owen is clearly responding to him. Out of it,
groggy and in pain . . . absolutely. Unconscious, no I don't think so.” Glancing at him out of the
corner of his eye, Jason took in the worry and concern on the other man's face. “Hey . . . Sam's
gonna be fine. Marina takes names and kicks ass . . . she's gonna get him back.”

“I know. I just . . . he's my friend.”

“I don't think you know how much your friendship means to Sam,” Jason replied, with a small grin
as he turned back to the screen. “Trust me, Spike. It took five minutes for the Grimms to take out
Team One because they were playing. And right now? Neither Marina or Aaron are fucking around.
Sam's gonna be fine . . . I promise.”
Chapter 198: Prep and Landing

Owen could feel his comm all but burning a hole in his head. He'd been skeptical when Jason had handed them out before the Georgia Mission. In less than three months, though, he had discovered how hard it was to live without them. He wore his near constantly, as did the rest of the Misfits and all of the Grimms. Having it close was like a security blanket; even when it wasn't transmitting, the fact that it was close by if he needed help was a weight off his shoulders that he hadn't realized was there.
After taking over S.H.I.E.L.D.'s R&D department, Jason had put the lot of them through an extensive upgrade to smooth out a few bugs that only the tech genius had been able to see. Currently, the node was flesh colored and all but undetectable to the naked eye. Comfortable for long term wear, they were also easy to use without a one hundred page manual.

Glancing down at Sam, he watched in concern as the kid drifted in and out of focus. How the blond was conscious remained a mystery, though Owen didn't think he'd be conscious for much longer. Unable to force himself still any longer, the Cleaner reached up and double tapped the small device. The closest thug was at least 10 yards away, giving Owen the confidence to whisper, “Sova . . . it's Ubiytsa. Do you copy?”

There was a startled silence, before his best friend's woman breathed a sigh of relief. “Lucky . . . thank God. Are you okay? Is it safe to talk?”

“For the moment, yes. I have to be quiet though, so if I drop off the comm, I'm still here just can't talk.”

“Understood.” Marina agreed. There was a pause, before Marina and Aaron both demanded together, “How's Snayper?”

Lane's question of, “Who's Snayper?” was completely ignored as Owen prepared to give an uncomfortable report. Fingers trailed gently over the massive bruise on Sam's face, causing blue eyes to snap into pained focus for a wild moment before he slipped away again. “He's still conscious, but barely. He took another hit to the head.” He paused as he considered the younger man, before snorting quietly. “You sure Sam isn't your kid, Marina? The kid's head is granite; I can't figure out how he's still conscious.”

“That's my boy,” Marina announced, tone colored with exasperated fondness. “He gets it from Misha. As stubborn as a box of rocks, the both of them. Makes me absolutely crazy.”

Aaron spoke up next, interrupting his sister's muttered rant about stupid boys and serious injury. “Can you get his comm on, Ubiytsa?”

“If he has it in,” Owen agreed, peering cautiously down at Sam.

“He does . . . he never takes it out,” came Marina's affirmative reply.

Grunting, Owen shifted to touch the young man's shoulder. “Sam?”

A soft exhale was Sam's only indication that he was still conscious. It was several minutes before he breathed quietly, “What?”

“I need you to turn on your comm. Your Ma and your Uncle Aaron are worried about you.”

Sam's eyes slipped closed for a moment, and for a long moment the agent was worried that the kid had finally passed out. Then he shifted slightly, left hand coming up to brush shakily at his ear, index finger double tapping the comm sluggishly. He took a deep breath, holding it for a few seconds, before letting it out on a single word, “Ma?”

“Sammy . . . it's okay, malysh, I'm coming for you.”

“No . . . you have to get Dad. They took Dad.”

“I know, but you and I both know which of the two of you Misha would think was the priority.”
Blue eyes squeezed closed as he blew out a frustrated breath. “That's a stupid rule.”

“Maybe, but it's the rule that's kept this family alive for this long,” the Russian chuckled, clearly relieved her son was aware enough to scold her. “How's your head, Sammy?”

“Hurts. Took a rifle butt to the left temple.” Lips quirked at the sound of Marina's hissed intake of breath, a clear indication that she was pissed and people were definitely going to die. “Dad checked; my skull's intact.”

“Thank God for small favors,” Aaron grunted, heavy thuds coming through the comm as he took his frustration out on something – or someone – unsuspecting.

Jason chimed in then, “Guys, Medical is on site. I repeat, Tselitel and Vorona are on site.”

Vincent's voice brooked no argument as he demanded, “Sitrep, Sam.”

“I'm fine,” the blond insisted, wincing a second later as he realized he had just given the worst answer possible.

“That is not a word,” Natasha scolded fiercely, a growl in her voice Sam only heard when she was well and truly pissed off.

“Sorry . . . I'm okay. My head hurts, my ribs are on fire and I think I'm going to be taking a nap soon. But I'm okay.”

“Don't you dare take a nap right now, Sam,” Marta demanded, a clear mix of fear and concern in her voice. “You shouldn't sleep after the kind of head trauma you've sustained.”

“I don't think I'm gonna have a choice, Aunt Marty,” the blond promised, eyes fluttering as he took a deep, if shaky, breath. “I'm trying.”

Whatever the rest of the family had been about to say was interrupted as Jason spoke up, “Sova . . . I've found you and the Vdova a way in. It's hella risky, but it's completely clandestine and all but guaranteed to surprise the hell out of these svolochi.”

“How?”

“There's a vent in the ceiling of the ballroom. Only problem is that it's about two stories up . . . you'll need something to rappel down on.”

Natasha snorted hard as she argued, “Since when have we ever needed anything to drop out of a ceiling?”

“That's a crazy drop, Nat,” Clint protested, tone ice cool and detached; everyone knew from his tone that he was locked in on something with his scope, though he had yet to tell anyone what he was seeing.

Brian laughed as he teased the two women, “Fury's Angels . . . BAMF chicks.”

The red-haired Russian let out a familiar chuckle even as Marina groaned, “I'm not even going to bother threatening to kick your ass, Bri, because at this moment in time . . . you are not wrong.”

“Guys, I got eyes on Orel . . . these guys aren't fucking around.”

“How bad is it?”
“Well, they haven’t started using anything except their fists yet. All things considered, it could be worse,” the family’s best sniper replied.

“Yastreb, guide Sokol and Skopa to him. Guys, get him out before it does get worse.”

“Yes ma’am,” was the simultaneous agreement.

“Krechet, can you get me and Vdova to the vent?”

Jason’s eyes rolling was all but audible as he snarked, “I’m going to pretend you didn’t ask that question.”

Owen smirked at the laughter that came across the comms, ducking his head slightly so that the expression wasn’t noticed by the thugs wandering the ballroom. “Hey Boss-lady, do you want some good news?”

“I guess that depends on what the news is,” Marina snarked lightly.

“The General got his ass kicked.”

An uncharacteristic squeal erupted through the comms, causing Owen to cringe at the pitch. “Couldn’t have happened to a nicer asshole!”

“Agreed,” the Cleaner chuckled. Glancing down at Sam to see how he’d taken the sound, he frowned to see the younger man’s eyes closed and his features lax. “Jay, can you get vital readings on Sam?”

There was a flurry of clicking as Jason brought up the app for his comms, before reporting solemnly, “Blood pressure looks good . . . no fever . . . O2 levels are good . . . and brain activity is consistent with sleep . . . looks like he's finally lost consciousness.”

There was concern in Vincent’s tone as he insisted, “Owen, you gotta keep an eye on him. You don’t have to wake him up, just see if you can get him to respond to stimulus every once in awhile.”

Aaron’s voice was cautious as he announced, “Rub hard over his sternum every ten minutes or so.”

“Can do. I’ll keep an eye on the kid . . . you guys just do what you do, and get us the hell out of here, yeah?”

“Working on it, Lucky,” Marina agreed with a huff, a clanking sound a clear indication that she and Natasha had found the entry point to the vent system and were getting ready to get into position. “Vdova and I could be in and out. The vents are aluminum. Bri . . . you're in charge until I get back.”

“Copy that,” the second eldest Grimm agreed, his tone uncharacteristically serious and stern. “Be careful . . . both of you.”

Natasha’s tone was amused as she teased her lover, “Hey . . . it’s us.”

“Yeah . . . that's kind of what I’m talking about.”

Marina snorted as her sister joked, “What is it they say about the pot calling the kettle black?”

“Well yeah, but usually I'm around to watch your back. So just humor your poor pathetic boyfriend and be careful.”

The Black Widow’s tone was dry and sarcastic as she snarked, “The day I have a pathetic boyfriend,
Bri, is the day I am going to beg you to kill him, to put him out of my misery. Okay?”

“Deal. Good hunting.”

“You too.”

“And Skopa? Take care of Orel for me when you find him, okay?”

“Can do, Sova,” the agent agreed, to which Marina replied, “Sova out.”

“All right, Grimms . . . time to get this party started.” Brian's laughter was maniacal through the comm as he all but cackled, “Let's kick some pacifist ass.”

Chapter End Notes

Translations:

(R) Sova - Owl (Marina's callsign)
(R) Ubiytsa - Assassin (Owen Elliot's callsign)
(R) Snayper - Sniper (Sam's callsign)
(R) malysh - kiddo
(R) Tselitel - Healer (Vincent's callsign)
(R) Vorona - Raven (Marta's callsign)
(R) Vdova - Widow (Natasha's callsign)
(R) sovolchi - bastards
(R) Orel - Eagle (Will's callsign)
(R) Yastreb - Hawk (Clint's callsign)
(R) Sokol - Falcon (Aaron/Kenny's callsign)
(R) Skopa - Osprey (Brian's callsign)
(R) Krechet - Merlin (Jason's callsign)
Hey guys, this is all in the General's POV. Seeing as he doesn't know the truth about the Grimms - or that they ARE Grimms - there's a lot of description to describe characters, as opposed to names. And he tends to use last names when referring to people too.

I hope you enjoy this chapter. It was a little difficult to get into the General's head, but it was a fun chapter to write.

Even considering this is in the General's POV, there are surprisingly still translations. So enjoy! I can't wait to hear what you think.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
Chapter 199: Through Broken Eyes

General Gregory Braddock, superior officer for Canada's Joint Task Force, was fuming as he glared towards the door through which Brandt had been herded ten minutes before. It made no sense! How could a lowly colonel have a higher security clearance than he did? Apparently, there was more to Brandt than he had first realized. There was a small part of him that was grudgingly impressed by the fact, but the larger part of him was livid. First the asshole took his son, then his pride and lastly his superiority. One didn't get to the rank of general without considerable intelligence. He was going to
unravel the enigma that was William Michael Brandt . . . even if it killed him.

Glancing over to where his former son lay, he glowered at the sight of Sam passed out on the floor, a massive bruise spreading across his face and into his hair. The reminder that Sam was no longer a Braddock caused rage to burn in his chest; his own son had turned his back on the Braddock name and legacy for some upstart Colonel and his bitch. Who the hell did Sam think he was? What could have ever possessed a Braddock to sign those papers?

There was a snort as he considered his thought. But then, Sam wasn't a Braddock any more. Sam was now a Brandt; maybe the analyst would have better luck turning Sam into a decent soldier. God knew he'd been a rebellious and insubordinate little shit since he was nine . . . since Amy . . .

It was as he stared Braddock realized the blond next to Sam was shifting the fucking brat closer to the wall. Hot black eyes zeroed in on the action, narrowing further at the way the soldier was shielding Sam's head. “What the hell is he . . .?”

Whatever he'd been about to say was cut off by a sudden clang from overhead. An aluminum vent fell from the ceiling, sending armed guards scattering in surprise, before it crashed against the ground with a sound like thunder. The entire room jumped at the sound, and all eyes flew upwards. Just in time to see two figures drop out one after another from the vent.

Both had free flying curls of hair, though the matte black guns they held in each of their hands proved to be their defining characteristic. The terrorists holding the room were struck dumb at the sight of them. The second's hesitation became their most costly mistake.

The General scrambled backwards as the women opened fire on the assembled terrorists, dropping men left and right. The dark haired one landed on her toes and rolled forward over her shoulder, on her feet and moving only seconds before the red haired woman landed behind her. Together, they were Death . . . beautiful, ruthless and glorious in their vengeance, cutting a bloody path through the assembled men.

The dark haired one finally stepped from the pile of bodies she had created and advanced on the now cowering terrorist leader. There was blood trailing down the curve of her cheek, though it was clear it was not her blood. A single curl hung trapped in it, the tacky substance gluing the strand to her cheek and creating a jarring reality of the kind of killer this woman was. Muddy brown hair hung around a face set with plain features and muted brown eyes. She was in no way remarkable . . . and yet, there was something about her that struck a chord deep within him. Her demeanor was leonine and predatory, eyes fixed on her prey as she prowled forward . . . stalking the asshole who had ordered him beaten.

Every inch of Braddock's body cringed away from the woman as she passed, his sense of self-preservation roaring to the forefront of his mind. This woman was a formidable one; she alone had laid waste to half of the terrorists in the room, with the redhead easily taking down the other half. There was no world in which the General wished to earn these two women as enemies.

Of course then she spoke.

“What the hell do you want with my lover?” she demanded, finger twitching against the trigger as she brought it to bear between the man's eyes.

The man stammered as he backed away, eyes wide and suddenly looking very young. “Your lover? I don't want anything from your lover!”

“Which would explain why you took this entire summit hostage, just so you could capture and then
torture him,” the red haired woman snarked, arms coming up to fold over her chest as she sneered at the man. “I suggest you tell us. I can assure you the Gadyuka has a twitchy trigger finger and she is absolutely losing patience with you.”

“Gadyuka?” he asked, eyes flashing between the two women.

“They call me Viper . . . and I am about to shoot you between the eyes if you don't start talking, Conrad,” the brunette snapped, thumb shifting to snap off the safety of her pistol. “Now.”

“He has weapons codes . . . he knows the top secret locations of almost every covert operative currently in play for the United States government . . . he has access codes to weapons depots . . . information useful to me! Why wouldn't I try to take it from him?”

“Wrong answer,” was all she said, before her gun spat fire and Conrad's head snapped back, blood spattering across the velvet curtains at the back of the stage to the accompaniment of terrified screams from a collection of the hostages in the room.

The body hadn't even crumpled to the floor before the gun was stowed and the woman was dashing towards where Sam was silent and still on the floor. There was terror and concern and love in her features now, a stark contrast to the ferocious Lady of War who had stood in her place only seconds before. “Sammy!” she cried, hitting her knees next to his body. “Sammy-honey, it's Ma. Wake up, baby.”

“He's all right, Marina; he's just unconscious,” the blond promised, reaching out to squeeze her shoulder gently in reassurance.

Those eyes dropped closed in relief, before she bent to press a warm kiss to the center of the bruise on his temple. “I love you, Sammy,” she breathed, brushing tender fingers over the curve of his ear before she straightened once again. “Marta and Vincent should be here in a bit. I need to go after Misha . . . watch over him for us?”

“Yes ma'am,” he agreed, tone reverent and deferential as he watched her cup the boy's cheek in her palm. “I've got the watch. You go get the Boss.”

“I plan on it,” she growled, eyes going hard and cold once again.

She rolled fluidly to her feet, one hand coming up to touch the man's shoulder, before she strode towards the door to the ballroom. Braddock blinked as her arm came into view and the patch on her bicep resolved itself into the standard issue patch for S.H.I.E.L.D. Command. It was the combination of her name, her claim of Brandt as her lover and her ease with a gun, which finally gave Braddock his answer as to who she was. His tone was both awed and terrified as he breathed, “Marina Ivanovna Petrovka . . . holy shit, it's The Russian.”

Parker's head flashed to look towards him, as he demanded, “The Russian?”

“About five years ago, an American squad – codenamed the Brat'ya Mrachnyy – joined up with a unit of the JTF2 for a single assignment. They were headed up by a Colonel; his XO was a woman . . . to this day the unit refers to her as 'The Russian'. By all reports, they were terrifying together. Destructive, efficient, effective . . . their guys followed them into hell without question. And before the end of the mission, even the JTF2 guys were more than willing to fall in when they said jump.”

Twisting gingerly to look back towards where Sam laid, he breathed, “My God . . . my son was adopted by The Russian.”

“What does that mean?”
There was a certain resignation in his tone as he sighed out an answer, “It means I am very lucky to be breathing . . . and very lucky Brandt decided to be civilized with regards to the paperwork.”

Just then, members of S.H.I.E.L.D.’s Medical department swarmed into the room, led by three doctors who instantly took in the tableau before them. One of them was Dr. Marta Shearing and Gregory watched as her eyes skittered to a stop on his face. For a long second, the General thought his sister-in-law was going to storm over to punch him in the mouth. Her face turned red and her body language tightened up like a spring, her fists squeezing hard at her side.

The man with the scarred face came up to stand at her right shoulder while another woman with mousy brown hair and pleasant features stood at her left. “Marta? You okay?”

“It's the General, Vincent . . . I can't decide if I want to ignore him or punch him in the face,” she announced on a growl, one hand coming up to fold over where the man took her arm just above the elbow.

Vincent turned to look at him, and the General recoiled to see his nostrils flare and his eyes flash yellow. “I know that cologne. It was in the kitchen, after Sam was attacked.”

Seeming to sense there was about to be bloodshed, the older woman stepped between her colleagues and the man they both hated. “I am going to insist you and Vincent head over to look after Sam. I'll handle the General,” she promised, her tone suggesting she viewed this to be an imperative sacrifice to be made on her friends' behalf.

“Thank you, Scar,” Marta insisted, gifting the other doctor with a small smile before she turned her back on her brother-in-law and jogged towards where Sam was just starting to stir himself awake.

The dark haired woman came towards him, her features set sternly as she knelt beside him. “My name is Dr. Scarlett Ross . . . where are you hurt?”

“Hello, Doctor; you're a friend of Mar. . . .” the question was interrupted as Scarlett snapped with a brisk British accent, “Yes, which means I am all too aware of who you are. You're the one who beat up our boy Sam with a shovel and left him for dead in the backyard. Thank God Vincent is what he is, or we may not have found him in time.

Leaning forward, she hissed, “Do not mistake me, General Braddock. I am a doctor, and I took an oath which forbids me from refusing medical care to someone in need of it. Doesn't mean I wouldn't like to see you dead . . . food for carrion and scavengers. I'm only here because Vincent or Marta would kill you . . . and I am entirely too fond of them both to let them rot for your miserable sake.” Flashing him her gritted teeth, she snapped, “I hope we understand one another.”

The General could see the firm resolve in her eyes, and nodded firmly. “We do.”

“Good . . . then I suggest you don't talk, unless you're giving me information about your injuries.”

“Yes ma'am.”

Her hands were brusque and quick as they roamed over his body, taking in his injuries with a detached manner than made the General wince. When she spoke he jumped, surprised she was addressing him directly. “Do you have any idea how many broken ribs Sam has? Not cracked, not fractured . . . broken.” Her hands yanked on the edge of a bandage as she hissed, “What kind of a father could harm his own child? Especially a child as amazing as Sam?” Her features twisted as she hissed, “You make me sick.”
“Take a walk, Scar,” came the order from behind them, causing the woman's head to come up. Brandt stood behind her with Petrovka; his face was badly bruised, one eye was swollen closed and it was clear the arm over her shoulders was more for his sake than Petrovka's. The two officers were silent as they took in both doctor and patient. Dr. Ross balked at the suggestion, her desire to do right by her oaths clashing with her fury at the man she was treated. Seeing the hesitation, Brandt's lips compressed as he insisted, “That's an order, Major.”

“Yes sir,” was all she said, gathering up her supplies and storming away to the next hostage in need of her help.

Petrovka's eyes were blazing in her face as she stared at the General; clearly, she needed no introduction and no explanation for the doctor's anger. Brandt's fingers visibly tightened on her shoulder as he insisted, “No killing, Marishka.”

“Copy that,” she promised, even as her eyes glared daggers in his direction.

Braddock glanced towards where Scarlett was kneeling beside another hostage, an easy smile on her face as she tended to a wound in the man's head. “She's a major?”

“She wants to be retired,” the Colonel snarked with a wry grin, glancing at the woman with a fond smile. “It's a long story, and she wouldn't thank me for telling you.”

“How do you know her?”

“She's my half-brother's girlfriend,” was all the younger man would say, his arms folding over his chest. “And in terms of her field, she's one of the best there is. She and Marta are very good friends; add in Vincent Keller and we have a Trifecta of Awesome who terrifies even the Magnificent Bastard himself.”

About then, the tall man with the scar down his cheek glanced up from where he and Marta had been bent over Sam. Dark eyes went wide as they took in Brandt's face, one hand come over to rest on Marta's shoulder and nodding in his direction when the virologist looked up. “Will!” Marta gasped, the reaction spurring the man into motion.

Brandt allowed a small smile, one hand coming up to stall the man's advance as he promised, “I'm okay, Vincent. I've had worse.”

“Not comforting,” Vincent insisted, reaching out to tilt the black eye into the light. “That's a nasty shiner. You sure you're okay?”

The analyst waved the question away indifferently, nodding towards his son. “How's Sam?”

“All things considered, he's fine. Agent Elliot is not wrong; his head might as well be granite.” Running a hand back through his hair, he huffed, “His new bruise seems to be the worst of it.”

Hot chocolate eyes slipped closed in relief as Petrovka breathed, “Slava Bogu.”

“I still want a CT scan, and some X-rays. But the skull seems to be intact and he's reacting normally to stimulus. He's gonna be fine.”

It was about then a younger version of Brandt came storming into the ballroom, two men trailing at his back. “Yo Keller!” he shouted, features set into a scowl.

The young man turned in question, eyes furrowed as he inquired, “What happened?”
“Bucky got chertov shot! Kindly convince him to get looked at please!”

Petrovka stepped forward in concern at the announcement, though Braddock couldn't help noticing she kept one hand wrapped around Brandt's body. “Tovrets'? Are you okay?”

There was a small, strange smile on the face of the man named Bucky as he replied confidently, “Yes, uchenny, I'm okay.”

The younger Brandt barked viciously, “There is a bullet in his arm. He is not okay!”

Vincent's eyes narrowed as he took in the so-called injured party. “Which arm?”

There was a deep breath in through the nose before he replied, “The left one.”

Reaching up to his ear, Brandt spoke in a brisk tone, “Krechet it's Orel; you're gonna need to get to the ballroom right now.” There was a pause as this “Krechet” replied, before Brandt continued, “The Soldat has been shot and it's in the left arm.”

Whatever was said clearly didn't need to be repeated as Bucky groaned miserably and took a seat in one of the few chairs still intact. “Sometimes, Barton, I'd like to duct tape your mouth,” he growled, glaring up at the younger man fondly.

Braddock had a moment to question the name – why the hell was the kid answering to “Barton” when he was clearly Brandt's brother? – before Barton snapped viciously, “Maybe if you would give a damn about yourself, I wouldn't be forced to tattle on you like a kid.”

“Both of you, knock it off,” Petrovka ordered firmly, features set in disapproval as those eyes swept between them. Surprisingly, there was a touch of dismay and shame in both of their faces as they looked down and away at the declaration. “How's the arm?”

“Functional,” was the only reply, the tone curt and to the point.

A whirlwind of pissed off sarcasm blasted into the room, already shouting, “Damn it, Barnes! I just gave that damn arm an upgrade! Two weeks ago! Could you please take care of it, even if you don't intend to take care of yourself! Jeez!” Glaring at the heavy uniform jacket, he ordered, “Get that thing off so I can see what I'm doing!”

Barton stepped forward to help Barnes get the jacket off, fingers confident as between the two of them they got the jacket off and tossed up onto the table. Braddock's reaction was immediate; the glint off the metal arm earned a gut reaction and the General scrambled backwards in an effort to get away from the killer known as the Winter Soldier. Brandt's eyebrow cocked upwards as he snarked, “And suddenly, I understand where Sam's reaction came from.”

“Do you know who that is?” Braddock hissed viciously, unsure where to turn the glare as his eyes rotated between the Soldier, Brandt and Petrovka . . . before landing Sam, who apparently had known who this man was and no longer had any fear of him.

“James Buchanan Barnes, war hero.” Cocking his head, Barton snarked, “You thinking something different?”

The tone was clear indication they knew exactly who Barnes was, and what he had done. And it was just as apparent they didn't give a damn. Drawing himself up as tall as his injuries could make him, Braddock hissed, “That's the Winter Soldier . . . the deadliest assassin in the world.”

“One of them, yes. S.H.I.E.L.D. lays claim to all of the world's best assassins, actually,” Brandt
agreed, earning shocked looks from both Parker and Braddock in turn. Rolling his eyes, the analyst asked dryly, “Would the family assassins please make themselves known?”

Braddock choked as Petrovka, Barton, Elliot and Barnes all put their hands up, as well as the redhead who had dropped in with Petrovka and yet another of Brandt's brothers who stood at her side. “And that's not including my younger brother Aaron or Marina and Natasha's sisters, Viktorya Coulson and Veronika Belinskaya. S.H.I.E.L.D. refers to the four of them as the Merry Murderesses, so take that for what it's worth.” Crouching slowly in front of the General, Brandt offered a ghastly smirk as he insisted, “We get our hands filthy so the rest of the world can stay clean. Whatever else Barnes has done, he has proven his loyalties. And I will hear no more about it. Understood?”

Braddock glared, as he hissed, “I'm not one of your soldiers.”

“Thank God. I'd have you in the stockade every time you took a breath.” Eyes narrowed in question, before glancing over at Sam. “I just had a thought.”

“What's that, Misha?”

“Sam had a sister.”

There was an affirmative hum, before the woman supplied a name, “Natalie.”

Turning back to the General, Brandt lowered his tone to just between the two men. “You know what kind of power I now hold. The kind of resources I have access to. So let me make something very clear. I've taken Sam from you, and you'll never lay hand on him again. But if I ever find out you've laid a hand on your wife or your daughter . . .” One hand gestured toward Barnes who was glaring at the general despite the tech's examination of the metal arm. “. . . let's just say, Barnes hasn't forgotten how to make a death appear to be an accident in his time with S.H.I.E.L.D.” There was a pause, before the analyst insisted, “I hope we understand each other.”

Braddock hissed even as he replied, “We do.”

“Good.” Glancing back over his shoulder, he ordered, “Scarlett, if you would be so kind as to retrieve the paramedics. The good General should be on his way to the hospital for his injuries.”

“Copy that,” the doctor agreed, dashing across the room towards where the paramedics were waiting for the signal the scene was cleared and safe to enter.

Bracing his hands on his knees, Brandt moved to push himself up once again. He was nearly vertical when he staggered; Braddock blinked as Petrovka was at his side in a second flat. She slipped herself under his arm to stabilize him on his feet, her tone warm and concerned as she asked, “Misha?”

“I'm all right,” he insisted, eyes slipping closed for a second as he fought to regain his equilibrium.

Vincent moved forward rest a warm hand on the man's shoulder, eyes pensive as they scanned the Colonel. “All right, Boss . . . everyone else has been tended to. Your turn.”

“I said I'm okay.”

“Then you won't mind letting me take a look at you to make sure of it.”

“Come on, Misha . . . come sit with me,” Petrovka coaxed, looping her arm around his waist more fully and guiding him to a chair. Brandt sunk into it slowly, eyes still closed as he tried to force the world to stop spinning. The woman crouched in front of him, her eyes terrified as she insisted,
“Misha... look at me.” It took a moment, but eventually dark gray eyes opened to meet her own.
“What did they hit you with? Where do you hurt?”

“Theirs fists, mostly.” When he stopped without going further, his Russian cocked an eyebrow to prompt him to elaborate on his answer, “One of them hit me in the face with his gun, but they spent most of their time pummeling my abdomen with their fists.”

“Why didn't you say anything?”

“It didn't hurt until just a minute ago. As soon as I crouched, my stomach let me know it wasn't happy about the position.”

“You are so stubborn,” she hissed viciously, even as she knelt up to press a warm kiss to his lips. “And just so you're aware, you're going to be sharing a room with Sam at the hospital.”

“No,” was the immediate denial, those eyes all but glaring at his partner as she glowered at him.

“Yes. You need the rest, Misha; and if a hospital stay is the only way that's going to happen, I will lay you out myself right here... right now.” When no further protest was forthcoming, Petrovka rounded on Keller. “Make it happen, Vincent.”

A small smile on his lips, Vincent nodded briskly, as he replied, “Yes ma'am.”

The Russian watched the doctor move to retrieve a gurney, before she rounded back on her partner. Brandt sat slumped in the chair, watching her with tired eyes. Forcing a smile, she vowed, “I love you, Misha.” Running her fingers over his face, she vowed, “I have the watch. You can rest.”

His hand was warm and familiar on the curve of her cheek as he watched her. Finally, he gave her a small smile as he promised, “Ya lyublyu tebya, samaya malen'kaya, vsegda.”

She all but beamed up at him as she replied, “I know.”

Forgotten by all of them, Gregory Braddock sat on the floor of the demolished ballroom, watching these two people love one another... and surprised to discover he was grieving for what he himself had had and had subsequently lost. Amy's death had ripped a hole in the fabric of who he was; in his grief, he had laid blame where it wasn't deserved. And now, almost 20 years later, he could see what that choice had wrought for him. His son was lost to him, adored by and adoring of true parents who deeply loved him. His daughter feared him, though she tried never to let him see. And his wife... his beautiful wife whom he had once loved with all the ferocity of a thousands suns... his wife had lied, and cheated, and broken, and bent to protect him and not their son.

As two separate pairs of paramedics descended on the General and the Colonel both, Gregory Braddock made a vow. He would be better... and maybe, one day, his son would call him “Father” once again.

It was about then Spike Scarlatti bolted into the room, shouting, “We have a problem.”

Chapter End Notes

Another cliffhanger? I have a bad feeling I am about to die!

Translations:
(R) Gadyuka - Viper (Marina's code name given to her by the Akademiya and the Krasnaya Komnata
(R) Brat'ya Mrachnyy - Brothers Grimm (code name for the Brothers Grimm tactical team for the Army)
(R) Slava Bogu - thank God
(R) chertov - fucking
(R) Tovrets - Architect (one of Marina's nicknames for Bucky Barnes, her mentor and oldest friend)
(R) Uchenny - Scholar (Bucky Barnes' nickname for his protégé and friend, Marina Petrovka)
(R) Krechet - Merlin (Jason Grimm's codename with SHIELD and the Army)
(R) Orel - Eagle (Will Grimm's codename with SHIELD and the Army)
(R) Soldat - Soldier (short for the Zimniy Soldat or the Winter Soldier; codename for Bucky Barnes)
(R) Ya lyublyu tebya - I love you
(R) Misha - a diminutive of Mikhail/Michael (Will's middle name is Michael; Marina's most common nickname for her longtime partner and lover)
(R) Vsegda - always
Hey guys, no cliffie today! Woohoo!

Enjoy this one! We meet Rene, and learn a few secrets about our Power Couple.

Translations at the end as always.

Chapter 200: Pleasant Surprises

Marina groaned as her Colonel brushed away the paramedics, demanding, “What kind of problem?”

Cocking an eyebrow at Team One’s tech nerd, she scolded, “Your timing sucks. Ten more minutes, Spike, and he would have been in the ambulance and on his way to the hospital.” Huffing in frustration, she sighed, “You might as well as tell him, or I'll never hear the end of it.”

“We have a kid barricaded in one of the rooms with a gun.”

Marina's eyes sharpened at the announcement, causing her lover to groan this time. “Marishka . . . no.”

“What!?” was the immediate protest, eyes wide and innocent as she rounded on her partner indignantly.

“I know you, Marina. You can't adopt the kid. He probably has parents.”

Hot chocolate eyes narrowed slightly as she considered before proposing cautiously, “If he doesn't, then can I adopt him?”

“Why are we assuming it's a boy?”

“It's my destiny in life to surround myself with darling boys who make me both batshit crazy and deliriously happy.” Smirking, she teased, “How do you think I got stuck with you?”
“That's a longer story than anyone has time to hear,” he joked with a roll of his eyes. Watching his partner for a long time, he sighed and pushed himself slowly to his feet. “Why do I feel like I'm going to be needing a bigger house?”

When her only answer was a brilliant grin, the Colonel heaved a sigh of resignation. Looking up at Spike, he insisted, “Take us to him.”

Momentarily uncertain, Spike bit down on his lower lip as a pair of paramedics appeared with a currently occupied gurney, Sam still curled up on his side under the straps. Marina reached out as it passed, smoothing her fingers tenderly through sleeping her son's hair, before she watched the gurney disappear from the ballroom. Owen touched her shoulder in understanding, before he bolted after the gurney. Reminded of her adoration for her adopted son, the bomb tech couldn't see a reason why she wouldn't be able to reach out to the terrified boy he'd found in an upstairs conference room. Gesturing back the way he'd come, he insisted, “Follow me.”

Considering the Colonel's injuries, Spike was surprised to see him jogging easily alongside his partner as they bolted up the stairwell two and three at a time. Expect for the bruising on his face, he would have never known the Colonel had been injured. Finally, he paused at the door to the conference room, nodding towards the crack in the door with a frown. “He's in there. Every time anyone gets too close, he opens fire.”

Quicksilver eyes turned silver as he demanded sharply, “At what?”

“I don't know. So far no one's been hurt. So whatever he's aiming for . . . it's not the door.”

Marina scoffed at the supposition, before inquiring, “How old, do you think?”

“Young teen at the oldest . . . probably closer to eleven or twelve. Why?”

“What kind of gun is it?”

“Judging by the bang and the holes in the plaster, it's at least a 9mm.”

“And I bet he can't even reach his hands around the grip,” was the Russian's response to this announcement, a small smile on her face as she stepped closer to the door. “Do we have a name?”

“Not yet . . . kid's not talking. I was hoping Boss would make some headway.” He grimaced as he confessed, “I'm not very good with kids. No brain to mouth filter.”

Marina smirked at the announcement, before she began to disarm right there in the hallway. By the time she'd removed all of her weaponry, she was down to just a black muscle tank, black tactical pants and black boots. Grinning up at her partner, she joked, “Wish me luck.”

Rolling his eyes, the Colonel snarked, “Just don't break a leg . . . or get shot, okay?”

“Yes sir,” she chirped, before approaching the door. “Allo, malchik . . . my name is Marina.” There was an expectant pause, as the Russian waited to see what kind of reaction the boy would have to the call. Some time passed before she spoke again. “Do you mind if I come in? I promise, I'm not here to hurt you . . . I just want to help.”

“You can't help,” was the sobbing reply, the heartbreak in his voice causing Marina's own heart to clench in her chest. “Nobody can help.”

She hummed a response, before continuing, “Do you mind if I come in, kid? It's hard to talk around doors.”
There were tears in hot chocolate eyes as she twisted to look back at her lover, both of them clearly hoping the boy would invite her to join him in the room. When he sniffled hard and announced, “Come in,” both released a relieved sigh neither had realized they were holding on to.

Sliding cautiously through the crack in the door, she slipped into the room. Her first impression of the boy was how small he was; Bozhe moi, he was a child. Cocking her head, she took him in solemnly. There was clear evidence of physical abuse in the bruises marring his face and tiny wrists, in addition to indications the child had spent a great portion of his life underfed. He had the same small and frail look to him she remembered a 12 year old Will having immediately following their flight from the Hoover Base. Eyes slipping closed as she clamped down on her temper, she took a moment to luridly curse Thaddeus Ross’ name to calm herself.

Once assured she was calmer, she allowed her eyes to slip open once again and, for the first time, saw the gun the child was holding. More accurately speaking, trying to hold. A Ruger SR9C, the 9mm was huge in the tiny child’s hands. Gifting the child with a small grin, she moved towards him cautiously. “I know you’re scared . . . I would be too. But guns make everything scarier, don’t you think?”

“My father gave it to me. Said to shoot whatever came through the door,” the boy replied, eyes focused as he attempted to adjust his grip once more.

Nodding in agreement, Marina continued to move towards him, asking, “Looks like you’re having a hard time holding it. Want me to show you how?”

“I know how!” he protested vehemently, before he sighed, “It's just too big.” Marina forced herself to stifle a grin at the small pout and glare the kid aimed at the weapon, as though it was personally responsible for its size.

“SR9Cs are built big. You would have probably been better off with a LCP 380. They’re about the half the size and a fraction of the weight, but with all the accuracy of the SR9C.” Coming to his side, she knelt slowly and reached out cautiously. “I don't think you want to hurt anyone, kid. So how about you give me the gun, okay?”

He watched her hands reach for the gun, a relieved sigh slipping from his lips quietly as she laid her hand over the barrel and flicked on the safety, before extracting it from his hands easily. She checked the weapon briefly, before slipping it into her waistband at her back. Then, with a wide grin, she plopped down Indian-style in front of the kid. “That's better.” Reaching out, she tilted his face into the meager light coming from the window as she tutted under her breath, “That bruise looks like it hurts.”

A lackluster shrug was the child’s only reply, as he jerked his chin away from her hand and turned his face away towards the wall. Once upon a time, Marina had been used to recalcitrant and wounded boys, and she drew on those memories now. Putting her hands back in her own lap, she continued, “My name's Marina . . . what's yours?”

“Enjolras,” came the response, tone dead and seething with resentment.

“That's quite an auspicious name,” the Russian informed him. “He was my favorite character in Les Miserables.”

“He died.”

Considering the book was commonly referred to as “The Brick” and was a hell of a read for even an adult, Marina felt she could be forgiven for the incredulity in her tone as she questioned, “You've
read Les Mis?"

“No . . . my mother hoped by naming me that, I'd follow his example.”

Eyebrows shot upwards into her hair at the explanation, before she breathed, “Your mother's a bitch.” His expression was startled as his little face jerked around to face her. A small smirk creased her lips at the surprise in his face. “I'm going to assume you don't hear that opinion of her often, huh?”

“Her boyfriends seem to like her.”

“I'll bet they do,” she sneered, easily able to picture why that was. Placing one hand on the bony shoulder, she questioned, “Where is your mother?”

“My father killed her this morning. He left me here and went downstairs a couple hours ago.”

Recognizing certain facial features, she asked, “Your father? Is he Matthew Conrad?”

A single nod earned a small grimace, Marina well remembering the way Conrad's head had snapped back as she put a bullet between his eyes and dropped him dead to the floor. Reaching out to place a hand on his shoulder, she squeezed lightly. “I'm sorry, Enjolras . . . your father is dead.”

Another shrug before the boy replied, “He's not a good person.”

Surprised by the declaration, even still the Russian was forced to agree with the assessment. “No, he wasn't.” Reaching out, she ran her fingers through the boy's hair gently. “So I get the feeling you don't like your name.”

“Would you? If you knew the only reason you got it is because your own mother wished you dead?”

“No, probably not. But there's a reason I said Enjolras was an auspicious name. Yes, he died, but why he died is the more important part.”

He looked up at her curiously, “Really?”

“Yeah.” Shifting to settle against the wall, she cocked her head at him and asked, “Would you like to hear the story?”

“Don't have anything better to do.”

Snorting hard, Marina joked, “Oh you're going to get along famously with my son. The sass is strong in this one.”

There was interest on his face at the announcement, even as he asked, “So why did Enjolras die?”

“Enjolras was a patriot. He believed in equality and fairness for everyone, regardless of their social station, their wealth, their birth. He believed in these things so fiercely, he created a society with some friends, called the 'Amis d'ABC.'”

“The Friends of ABC?”

“Well, it was a play on words. ABC was actually a stand-in for the 'Abased' . . . the downtrodden and the looked-down-upon. He sought to improve the lives of the Abased. And he and his friends staged a rebellion to overtake the government, so they could bring about these changes. They thought the people they were trying to help would rise up to help them, but when dawn broke . . . they were the only ones there. And instead of surrender, instead of accepting defeat . . . Enjolras and
his friends believed so fiercely in their cause they went willingly to their own deaths.” Nudging him lightly, she informed him, “It's based on real events, The June Rebellion of 1832. It lasted two days, June fifth and sixth.”

“So he didn't die for no reason?”

“No, he died for the best reason. Because he believed in helping others, and took that belief to his death.”

“Still doesn't take away from the fact my mother named me 'Enjolras' because she wished I would die.”

“No, unfortunately it doesn't. But it does mean the name is worth much more than just his death.”

Smiling at him, she relented and asked, “So what do your friends call you?”

“I don't have friends. My mother and her friends call me Enjolras.”

“What about your middle name?”

“My middle name's Rene.”

“All right then, Rene it is.” Moving slowly, she looped her arm around his shoulders. When he didn't immediately shrug her off, she pulled him into her side gently. “I'm sorry about your parents. Regardless of what kind of people they were, they were still your parents.”

“Guess I'm stuck with foster care now, huh?”

The Russian frowned at the resignation in the question, looking up to see her lover leaning in the door frame of the room, his arms folded over his chest as he watched them. There must have been some question in her eyes as they looked at each other, because Will nodded in agreement. Pressing a warm kiss to the child's hair, Marina asked, “Maybe not. How would you like to come live with me and my partner?”

Another shrug earned a scoff from her, as she joked, “I'd forgotten how nonverbal teenagers can be.”

At the disgust on his face, Marina burst into laughter, his tone indignant as he protested, “I'm eleven. I'm not a teenager.”

Sniggering, she agreed cheerfully, “My apologies.” Squeezing him once more, she pushed herself to her feet and offered him a hand. “It's not a perfect life, but you'll never lack for affection or for love. I promise.”

“You mean it? You really want me to come home with you?”

“I mean it. But if you have somewhere else you'd prefer to go . . .”

“NO!” was the instant protest, as the boy all but lunged back into her arms. “I want to go with you.”

“All right. We'll make it happen,” she insisted, grinning at her partner's resigned roll of his eyes. “Won't we, Mishka?”

“I'll call Legal . . . get the paperwork drawn up.” Watching the boy flinch, Will consciously kept his distance as he reported, “My name's Will. It's nice to meet you, Rene. Marina's my partner.”

Interest warred with distrust as the boy asked suspiciously, “You're not married?”
“No, but after 12 years together, neither of us are going anywhere. I'm not the kind of boyfriend to
Marina your mother's boyfriends were to her. Frankly, she'd murder me where I stood, if I tried to
treat her that way.”

Marina's tone was vicious as she muttered under her breath, “Bitch.”

“You shouldn't swear in front of the kid, Marishka.”

“The *malchik* has seen his mother murdered and knows his father is a bad man. I think swearing in
front of him is probably the least of his problems.”

“Touche,” he laughed, leaning forward carefully to press a warm peck to her lips.

Marina's eyes narrowed as a wince flashed across his face when he straightened up again. “Do I
have to say it? Or can you guess?”

“I'm sure I can guess. Besides, the paramedics are probably still waiting downstairs for me. And of
course, far be it from me to disobey the formidable Marina Ivanovna Petrovka.”

“Your sarcasm is not appreciated,” she drawled with a roll of her eyes, before reaching out to give
him a careful push towards the elevator. “Move it, handsome. You need X-Rays and a CT scan and
about a week's worth of sleep. March.”

Grinning at the sound of Marina's inner officer slipping free, Will threw a crisp salute as he replied
teasingly, “Yes ma'am.”

Knowing he was trying to make her laugh, she huffed around a stifled giggle. “You're incorrigible.”

Smirking, he quoted, “I aim to misbehave.”

The Firefly quote earned a small grin, at which point Marina was helpless to suppress her giggles.
“*Ya lyublyu tebya, moy vozlyublenny.*”

“*Ya tozhe lyublyu tebya, samaya malen'kaya,*” he returned, looping arm around her shoulders and
pressing a warm kiss to her mouth.

Rene and Spike were both watching the couple, Rene still tucked under Marina's opposite arm and
Spike holding the elevator open a few feet away. The eleven year old glanced towards the SRU
officer and asked curiously, “Is that how most people love each other?”

“No, but their son tells me the Colonels are special. So I doubt they do anything you would expect
normal people to.”

Huffing lightly, Marina looked up at her lover and snarked, “Remind me to have a talk with your
son.”

“Why is he my son? You adopted him first.”

“He's trying my patience . . . a character flaw he clearly picked up from you.”

Will's body jolted slightly as he chuckled under his breath, a deep groan reverberating through his
chest even as he teased, “I rather think we're even in that respect. Or do you not remember leaping
off the roof of a two-story building and hoping you'd judged the distance right?”

“I take years off of your life, Mishka . . . not the same thing,” she bickered, even as her eyes shone
with concern. One hand reached out to wrap around his waist, stabilizing him slightly on his feet as
the elevator began to descend to the ground floor. “Where's your pain?”

“About a seven . . . I'll manage. Let's get the kid to the medics; I'd like Marta to look him over.”

“As long as you let Vincent whisk you before that.”

“I don't think I'm going to have much of a choice,” he agreed, fingers tightening on her shoulders lightly.

“That's the first time I think I've ever heard you admit to it before.”

“Well, they say there's a first time for everything.”

“Not the kind of first time I had wanted you to have,” she protested, guiding him from the elevator and out into the main foyer. Catching sight of Vincent standing with Marta, Scarlett and a pair of paramedics, she called, “Keller! Over here!”

Head snapping around, the doctor gestured to the paramedics before the three jogged towards them. The former soldier cocked an eyebrow at the kid, teasing, “Adopting again?”

“You hush,” she scolded, even as she hugged the boy a little bit closer. She was clearly reluctant to release her lover, eyes worried as she watched the paramedics guide him up and onto the gurney.

“Take care of him, Vincent.”

“You got it, Marina,” he promised, reaching out to squeeze her arm fondly before waving the paramedics off. “Move out guys . . . let's go.”

Rene's eyes were very blue as he looked up at her. “Is he gonna be okay?”

The Russian gave the boy a small smile as she squeezed him fondly, promising, “Yeah . . . he's gonna be just fine.”

An hour later found Sam Grimm nee Braddock curled up in his hospital bed, blankets to his chin keeping him warm and IV drugs keeping the pain in his head all but nonexistent. Though he would have liked to have disappeared from the hospital already, his S.H.I.E.L.D. partner had immediately put a stop to all ideas of escape. Groaning wretchedly, he flopped over so his back was to the empty bed on the other side of the room.

Fortunately, it was about then he was rescued from utter boredom by the exuberant arrival of his friends, Spike Scarlatti and Lewis Young, from the SRU. “Samtastic! What the hell man!? That was insane!” Spike cheered as he all but bounced into the room, a wide grin on his face as he watched the blond haired sniper perk up at the sight of them.

“Yeah . . . Ma doesn't fuck around.”

“So I gotta ask. She was just screwing with us during the paintball fight huh? If she'd really wanted to rip us a new one . . .” Lou asked, trailing off expectantly.

Sam grinned as he continued, “. . . it wouldn't have taken five minutes. More like two, maybe two and a half.”

Lou groaned at the knowledge, heading dropping back to stare at the ceiling. “You know what, your ma is hella scary and totally badass.”

“She can be,” the blond agreed as he pushed himself up into a seated position. “What are you guys
“So I have a confession to make,” Spike reported with a grimace, body language clearly nervous about whatever this so-called confession entailed.

“So I have a confession to make,” Spike reported with a grimace, body language clearly nervous about whatever this so-called confession entailed.

“Okay,” Sam drawled in confusion, glancing at Lou only to see the black man shrug in confusion. It was clear Lou was just as in the dark as Sam himself was. “Confession about what?”

Biting down on his lip, Spike hesitated for a moment before blurting, “I hacked your mom.”

“What!” Sam demanded, lightning flashing through normally icy blue eyes.

“Sarge asked me to, right after she came to HQ the first time. I hadn't met her yet . . . I didn't realize how awesome she was. So, I did it. Didn't get much, but I did find out something really cool about your parents.”

Based on the stony look on the sniper's face, whatever it was didn't really matter; Sam was pissed. “I can't believe you would betray my trust like that.”

“You're not exactly very forthcoming about yourself, Sammy.”

“Don't call me Sammy,” was the instantaneous protest, a fierce glare on his face at Lou's use of the nickname.

“See! That right there! The Colonels call you Sammy all the time; so does the rest of your family.”

“Yeah, it's a family thing,” Sam explained. “Okay, you remember my granddad?”

“Hansel Kuhn? Yeah . . . he's hard to miss,” Spike announced, eyes wide as a mental picture the Family Patriarch came to mind. “What about him?”

“He and Dad aren't exactly the epitome of affectionate or demonstrative. Granddad's given everyone in the family a nickname, and that's how he tells you he loves you. Same with Ma; everyone has a nickname and it's hers and she's the only one who can call them that.” Shrugging, he confessed, “Sammy-honey is mine . . . that and Sammichka.”

Spike snorted at the Russian diminutive, joking, “I think I prefer Samtastic.”

“Yeah, and you're the only one who calls me that,” Sam reminded him with a grin. “I don't know; it's my Ma's name for me. It's special, because she was the first one to use a name that wasn't Sam or Samuel.”

“I can respect that,” Lou agreed with a grin. “No using Sammy . . . got it.”

“Whatever; really cool thing about your parents, remember!?” Spike protested, waving away the conversation as though it was unimportant.

Smirking at the typical exuberance, Sam agreed, “All right. I'm listening. What's the really cool thing you learned about my parents?”

“Did you know your parents grew up in the circus?” the bomb tech blurted, eyes wide with excitement.

Of course Spike's excitement faded when Sam nodded in agreement. “Yeah. My ma didn't grow up at the circus, but my dad and my uncles did. When Ma took them away from the people hurting them, they joined the circus. Dad was like 12 and Uncle Clint was only 2.” Cocking an eyebrow, he
asked, “How'd you know?”

“It came up when I hacked Marina's background.”

“Okay. But I already knew that.”

“Yeah, no kidding. Steal my thunder, why don't you?” the brunette pouted, as he slumped.

Lou chuckled, nudging his best friend with his elbow. “All right, Spike, Sam's sorry he ruined your surprise. Tell him the rest.”

“The rest? There's more?”

“Oh yeah,” he agreed with a wicked grin. Diving for the bag he'd set at the foot of Sam's bed, he rummaged around in the depths before pulling out a long, rolled up sheet of paper. Spike rolled the rubber band from the tube and then slipped it around his wrist for safe keeping. “Wait until you see this.”

With a dramatic flick of his wrist, Spike whipped the page open. For a second, Sam couldn't understand what he was seeing, before all at once the picture resolved itself. It was a poster for a marquee announcing the expected arrival of Carter's Circus to Prescott Valley, Arizona in October of 1987, with expected show dates running from the 12th to the 24th. And there, in vivid color was a stunning portrait of two trapeze artists. The man wore only black pants with black athletic tape around both wrists, while the woman wore a skin-tight leotard made of several different shades of green and flashy sequins.

The picture had been taken during a portion of their act, with the man hanging from the bar, ropes wrapped around his ankles and his hands locked at the back of his partner's neck. As for his partner, she held nothing, her arms stretched out to her sides and utterly trusting that his grip behind her neck would keep her safe. The pose was intrinsically romantic, the two appearing only moments away from indulging in a kiss. There was just enough of their profile for Sam to make out who they were.

Fingers tracing reverently over their faces, he breathed in shock, “Holy shit! It's my parents!”

Chapter End Notes

So, there is a circus outtake currently written, which addresses this picture and what was happening around the time it was taken. If you're interested in reading it, let me know and I'll post Part One tomorrow. It is completed, so Part Two would be up the day after that. Let me know.

Translations:

(R) Allo - hello
(R) malchik - boy/kiddo
(R) Bozhe moi - Oh my God
(R) ya (tozhe) lyublyu tebya - I love you (too)
(R) moy vozlyublenny - my beloved
(R) samaya malen'kaya - my little one (Will's most common nickname for his longtime partner, girlfriend and XO, Marina Petrovka)
(R) Sammichka - diminutive of Sam (ie Sammy)
Chapter Notes

Hey guys! The circus outtake, both parts, is posted for everyone who hasn't had the chance to see it yet. As for those of you, who have reviewed, you are all amazing! The part at the beginning in italics, is the last few paragraphs from the last chapter.

My next plan for an outtake, is actually that Malee outtake I've been kicking around in my head for awhile.

Enjoy this chapter! Just the boys, hanging out. Translations at the end, as always.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
Chapter 201:

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A familiar voice came from the doorway, Aaron's eyebrows furrowed as he came into the room, questioning, “What's your parents?”

“Did you know about this!?" Sam demanded, shoving the poster in his uncle's direction.

A startled blink was the operative's only answer, hands reaching out to take the page with a frown. Blue eyes caught on the date at the corner, earning a pair of narrowed eyes as he looked up at Sam. “This is like eighteen years old.”

“Yeah . . . and look who's in the picture!” the blond protested, stabbing his finger gently towards the couple in the photo.

Turning his attention back to the couple, it was only a moment before Sam could clearly see Aaron fade into the background and Kenny step into the forefront of the man's consciousness. Smirking, he trailed tender fingers over what little of Marina's face could be seen. “To this day, I am shocked that none of us figured it out.”

Spike frowned as he demanded, “Figured what out?”

There was a derisive snort, as the wisp that was Kenny dissipated and Aaron took over once again. “How desperately in love with each other they were.” Running a hand back through his hair, he grimaced lightly, “King and Queen of Self-Denial . . . Will and Marina in a nutshell.”

“Ma told me once they knew where their priorities laid. They have no regrets.”

Taking a deep breath in through his nose, the assassin joked, “That doesn't make me feel any better about it.”

Sam's head came back to rest on his pillow, quietly contemplative, as Spike leaned forward, “So this is them.”

“Yeah . . . Will wasn't quite 21? He'd come home on leave, with Lucky.” Those eyes narrowed in thought, before he mused, “I was twelve, I think. Clint was almost eleven, Jason was fifteen and Barney was eighteen? Will and Barney butted heads that whole leave; can't tell you how many times Will thrashed him before he left again.”

“Thrashed him?”

“Yeah, this was the eighties. Spare the rod, spoil the child? And when you're trying to ride herd on four boys . . . it was effective.”

Lou's features were curious as he settled into a chair, clearly interested in the details surrounding the picture. “They look like they've done this before.”
“Oh yeah . . . Will and Marina got up on the bars together for the first time just after Will turned fifteen. By the time he enlisted . . . they were good. If they weren't close before that, they were after it.”

“You said he was on leave.”

“Yeah, he got hurt on an assignment in Syria . . . ambushed. He took three bullets meant for his best friend. He was on leave for like six months while he recuperated.”

“Looks pretty damn healthy here,” Lou drawled with a cocked eyebrow.

“Grimms heal fast. We're never down for long,” was the nonchalant reply. There was a pause, before he smirked, “We're already taking bets on how long it's going to be before Will manages to manipulate Marina into letting him out of here.”

Sam bit down on his lower lip, recognizing the diversion and well acquainted with the reasons the Brothers Grimm were “never down for long”. For all that Cahill had been a fucked up mess from the word “Go!”, it had its upsides. Forcing himself to nonchalance, he smirked, “How come I didn't know we were taking bets?”

Aaron's nose crinkled lightly as he teased, “We weren't sure whether or not we could trust your judgment. Ever heard of getting your bell rung, malysh?”

“Haha, very funny.” Sam huffed with a roll of his eyes that immediately earned a sharp wince. One hand came up to cradle his suddenly aching head as he muttered petulantly, “Ouch. That hurt.”

“Case in point,” was all the former NRAG assassin said with a small smirk.

It was about then that the Italian chimed in curiously. “Do they still perform together?”

“I doubt it . . . we haven't been back to Carter's Circus since Clint was sixteen. Whether they still practice together, I don't know. But again . . . I doubt it.”

Sam frowned at the thought, turning his attention back onto the poster. “They look so young.”

“They were,” Aaron agreed solemnly, though none of the other three could get him to elaborate on the subject.

It was about then, that the door to the room swung open to admit the rest of Sam's uncles and their significant others. Clint and Bucky were bickering with each other in fond Russian, while Brian was all but draped across Natasha's shoulders. Jason and Casey were last in the room, the technical specialist uncharacteristically quiet as his girlfriend cuddled close to him. Looking away from his boyfriend, Clint caught sight of his best friend and cheered, “Kenny! Dude, you missed it!”

“Missed what?”

Jason spoke up, “Will and Marina's epic smackdown.”

“They got into a fight?!” Aaron blurted in shock, eyes going wide at the very thought.

Brian's features twisted at the thought, as he insisted, “Fuck no! Diana Braddock showed up. Let's just say, the kinds of things Marina called her should never be repeated in polite company.” There was a pause, before he mused absently, “The kid's cute though.”

There was a puzzled twist between the blond's brows as he asked, “Kid? What kid?”
“Rene . . . Sister Dearest is adopting again,” Natasha explained with a grin and a wink. “He's eleven; his father was the leader of the terrorists who took the summit hostage.”

Aaron's tone was suitably dry as he drawled, “Welcome to the Island of Misfit Toys.” Narrowing his eyes at Clint, he asked, “Marta okay?”

“Yeah . . . she's with the kid. It's almost too bad that Conrad's already dead. I rather think Marina would like to kill him again . . . and this time make him suffer.”

“The kid okay?”

“Bruised, battered, underfed . . . he'll live. You know Marishka . . . feed 'em and wrap 'em in blankets . . . the Marina Petrovka Steps to Adoption.” Wrinkling his nose, the sniper teased, “Ain't that right, Sammy-boy?”

“Shut up, Clint,” Sam laughed with a grin, as he threw one of his pillows at his youngest uncle.

For a long moment, there was laughter from the three Grimms at their nephew's expense, before Aaron's voice broke through the mirth. “I'm gonna ask her to marry me.”

The room went silent so fast that Sam felt as though he was suddenly underwater. Finally, Clint blurted, “Say what!?”

“Marta . . . I'm gonna ask her to marry me.”

Brian cocked an eyebrow at the statement, intensely curious, “You don't think it's a little soon for that? I mean, Aaron, you've known each other for awhile yeah, but she hasn't known your real name for all that long.”

“I know your opinion on love, Bri . . . forgive me if you're not the first person I think of asking for advice on my love life.”

“Love is for children. I've never hidden my opinion on that. Devotion, trust and loyalty . . . those are what make a relationship work. Look at Will and Marina.”

“I do . . . and I see how much they love each other. I have never felt this way about anyone, Brian. Not Vika, not anyone.” There was a pause, before Aaron confessed, “I'm only half a man without her. I don't intend to ever let her go.”

Sam grinned as he insisted, “By all means, marry my aunt and make her deliriously happy. I'm okay with this.”

“I'm not asking permission.”

“Thank God! She'd kill us both; you for even considering that she needed permission and me for going along with that crazy talk,” Sam joked with a smirk, though the terrified shudder that ran through him was clearly not faked. “Seriously . . . you make her happy. And that is all I have ever wanted for Aunt Marty.”

Whatever Aaron would have said was interrupted as Marina guided a sleepy young boy into the room and towards the couch against the wall. Her tone was warm and maternal as she coaxed the boy along in fluent French. Before long, the child was stretched out on the cushions and sleeping the sleep of the dead. Grabbing a blanket off the end of the empty bed, Marina tucked the boy in tenderly. Tapered fingers trailed through sunny strands, before she turned her attention back onto her boys. “Allo, mal'chikov.”
“Hi Ma,” was Sam's response, echoed by his uncles' own, “Allo, Marishka.”

Blue eyes were intensely curious as they took in the sleeping child's face. There were ghastly bruises on his face, and the one wrist Sam could see had a deep purple ring around it that could have only come from a man's hand. “Is that Rene?”

“Da . . . he's a little skittish, but his exhaustion is currently overriding his nervousness. Not to mention, Marta gave him something to calm him. Your mother nearly gave him a heart attack.”

“She has that effect on some people,” Sam agreed with a huff. Diana Braddock was many things, and one of them was expert drama queen. The SRU constable couldn't even count how many times Diana had thrown an impassioned fit designed to trigger every guilty thought her only son had ever had. “What did she do?”

There was a droll tilt to Marina's lips as she sighed heavily, “I don't even want to talk it. How you came out of that house as well adjusted as you are, Sammy . . . it boggles the mind.”

Sam snickered at the answer, shifting over on his bed to give his adoptive mother a place to sit down. Marina sunk onto the mattress with relief, sinking into the open arms her son offered with a sigh. “I'm so tired,” she breathed, eyes slipping closed as Sam reached up to thread his fingers through her own curls for once.

“How's Dad?”

“There's a small laceration to his kidney; they've got him in the ER so that they can monitor him. If it doesn't resolve itself, they may have to go in to close it up. Owen and Vincent are with him. He kicked me out; Rene was starting to weave on his feet and needed to be horizontal ASAP.”

Her son rested his chin against her temple, nodding against her head slowly as she yawned. Of course, it was about then that she caught sight of the rolled-up poster. No one even thought to react before the poster was in her hands and she was unrolling it. Her first look at the picture wrung a startled gasp from her chest, and she breathed out brokenly, “Bozhe moi.”

Spike grimaced as she twisted to look at him with hot chocolate eyes shining with tears. “Where did you get this?”

“It's kind of a long story.” Glancing at the poster once again, the Italian turned back to look at the woman and asked, “That's you. And the Colonel. Isn't it?”

One corner of her lips curled upwards as she snorted quietly. “He wasn't the Colonel then . . . just a Captain.” Looking up at the bomb tech, she begged quietly, “Can I keep this?”

“Yeah, absolutely. It's yours.”

Fingers trailed over the picture as she explained, “I always wished I had a picture of this moment. It was the moment I knew without a shade of doubt that this man I loved, this man who had me in his arms, was my forever.”

Chapter End Notes

I am a sappy sap who saps. *rolls eyes at self*
Translations:

(R) malysh - kiddo (one of Sam's nicknames from the Brothers Grimm)
(R) Allo - hello
(R) mal'chikov - boys
(R) Da/net - yes/no
(R) Bozhe moi - Oh my God
Chapter Notes

Hi all! No translations in this one. Enjoy! Still more mushy stuff, but now with Will and Hansel!

Enjoy!
The Grimm Truth

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Chapter 203: Awkward Introductions

About three hours later, Sam looked up to see his dad moving slowly into the room, leaning heavily on a cane in one hand with Owen hovering solicitously behind him. Cornflower blue eyes were narrowed as they watched his best friend navigate into the room; the second the older man stumbled, the blond was there to brace him up. “This is a stupid idea, Boss,” he scolded, rolling his eyes when Will merely waved him to silence.

“This is not my first trip to this rodeo, Lucky,” the Colonel reminded his friend, smiling at the sight of both Marina and Rene curled up in their places, eyes closed and sleeping peacefully.

“I'm going to remind you of this moment, when the Boss-lady reams your ass.”

“They said to get up and walk . . . I'm up and walking. Now shut up . . . you'll wake Marina.”

Jason's features were stone as he snapped, “And last thing you want is for your girlfriend to see you up and walking around.”

At the tone, Will cocked an eyebrow at his younger brother. “Did I do something to piss you off today?”

“What the hell were you thinking? Just giving yourself up!” the tech snapped, glaring at his older brother.

“They were threatening to kill hostages. Would you have done any differently?” was the response, mercurial eyes watching his longtime Second calmly.

“That's beside the point. I'm not the central point of this family; you are . . . you and Marina both. It was stupid and it was reckless . . . there's no way you could have known we'd get there as fast as we did. What the hell were you thinking?”

Knowing his brother was more terrified than angry, Will attempted to ease his fears, protesting gently, “Jay . . .”

“No, I need to be mad at you right now, Will. So just shut up.”

Nodding in agreement, the eldest Grimm agreed, “Shutting up.”

Sam cocked an eyebrow at his uncle, before shifting to look at his adoptive father. “You okay, Dad? Ma said there was some damage to your liver?”

“Small laceration to my kidney but I'm fine. They really did tell me to get up and walk; I couldn't be alone and I needed help,” Gesturing at Owen and the cane in turn, he continued, “Ergo, I have company and help.” Taking in his son's bruised features, he asked, “How are you?”

“My head hurts, but I'm told that's normal for the kind of damage my brain has taken in the last two weeks.”

Brian snorted as he joked, “I'm getting the kid a helmet.” Of course, this prompted a wicked grin from Clint as he teased, “Make sure it's blue . . . it'll bring out those pretty blue eyes of his.”

Narrowing those so-called “pretty blue eyes” Sam growled, “Don't make me throw my other pillow at you.”
“Don't wake Marina, I'm serious. Today was a hell of an adrenaline rush; let her rest.”

Aaron frowned as he watched his sister sleep. “I remember how long she slept after Peru.”

“Yeah . . . when she crashes, she's down hard,” Will agreed, gifting Bucky with a small smile as the former killer maneuvered an armchair through the doorway and next to the bed. “Thanks, Buck.”

“You're welcome. Sit down before you fall down,” was the order from the sergeant, ocean blue eyes calm as they watched the family's CO settle gingerly into the chair.

“How's your arm?”

“I'm fine,” was the standard response, causing Jason to snort. “I'm gonna need to put it through an upgrade . . . and we gotta do something about the structural weaknesses. Those plates are a disaster waiting to happen; he got lucky. If something had really gotten lodged in there, it could have been a real mess.”

“If anyone can make it work, Jay, it'll be you,” Will promised with a small, sad smile as he watched the technical specialist fume at the both of them. Sighing as Jason's eyes narrowed in his direction, he insisted, “Would you just get it out so we can move on? I'm tired and I feel like shit.”

“You promised . . .” was all the middle brother said, causing a genuine wince to slip across the Colonel's face with a soft grunt.

“That was eighteen years ago.”

“I know . . . but you still promised. No unnecessary risks.”

“It wasn't a risk.” At the resulting protest, Will held up a hand to stall the argument in his tracks. “Jay, in all the time you've been at my side, have you ever let me down when I needed you?”

“No.”

“Has Marina?”

“Of course not.”

“Then there was no risk. I knew you were coming for me. And I knew Marina was gonna raise hell until I was back at her side where I belonged.” Reaching out to lay his hand on his brother's shoulder, he promised, “You came through, just like you always do. Okay? Don't worry about me. I'm fine . . . all this will be gone in a day or two.”

His son's eyebrows furrowed as he questioned carefully, “Am I missing something?”

Will smirked at the curiosity, before explaining, “Jay has been living in my back pocket for longer than any of the others except Marina. Jason enlisted before anyone else did; it was just the two of us for three years before the rest showed up. We were close at the circus . . . Army made us closer.”

“When he got hurt in Syria and he came home . . . I was so mad at him. He nearly died and he was so good at hiding how he felt from us; it was like he didn't even care.” Running a hand back through his hair, dark green eyes slipped closed as Jason recalled the day in question. “It was the night before he and Owen had to go back. I made him promise he'd come home . . . that he wouldn't take any unnecessary risks.” A fond glare on his face, the middle brother considered the older man for a moment, before heaving a sigh. “This is the first time in eighteen years he's broken that promise. I don't care what you say about the fact it wasn't a risk, Will . . . you got lucky.”
A self-deprecating twist marred Will's smile as he agreed lightly, “No argument here.”

Aaron leaned forward and laid a hand on his eldest brother's wrist. “Be honest, Will . . . are you okay?”

Seeming to understand this was one time his brothers wouldn't appreciate his obfuscating the truth, the Colonel nodded a sober agreement. “I'm gonna be sore for a few days. And I really don't feel like playing basketball, or baseball, or football, or whatever other contact sport we were planning on. But I'm gonna be fine.”

Grey eyes were uncharacteristically solemn, as the family's archer insisted, “Swear it.”

Taking a deep breath, quicksilver eyes shifted to take in the sight of Marina still sleeping peacefully in their son's arms. “I swear it . . . on Marina's life and happiness, I swear it.”

Both Spike and Lou seemed to understand the gravity such a vow was imbued with. Neither spoke as they watched the rest of the Brothers Grimm sag in unspoken relief. For a long moment, the room was quiet, before Brian snarked, “And on that morbid note . . . where's Dad?”

The entire room jumped as a German accented voice spoke from the doorway. “I am here, Arger.” There was an amused crease at the corner of robin's egg eyes as Hansel Kuhn moved into the room followed by his oldest son, James Doyle. “Honestly . . . I leave hyu alone for 12 hours, mein Adler, and I come back to find vas? Hyu beaten, Sam injured . . . again, mein Tochter with blood in her hair and another new grandson. Vas did I miss?”

Jason rolled his eyes as he snarked, “Do you want that alphabetically or chronologically, Dad?”

“Hyu are not as funny as hyu think hyu are, Schalki,” was the dry tone, as the former witch hunter moved out the doorway and a painfully familiar figure came into the room behind him.

The five Grimm brothers stared at yet another person with their face, though Sam's only reaction was a bright grin as he all but cheered, “Uncle Gus!”

Gus Maitland smiled at his sunny-haired nephew, pointedly ignoring the elephant in the room, as he came to the edge of the bed and rubbed a gentle hand over the kid's hair. “Malee said hi and she hopes you get well soon.”

“Tell her I said hi and thank you,” the blond agreed with a grin. “So . . . introductions are probably in order, yeah?”

“That would be helpful, yeah.” There was an achingly fond look in Gus' eyes as he looked down at the brunette sharing Sam's mattress. Bending, he pressed a warm kiss to her forehead, before taking up a cautious position at the head of the bed. “All right . . . introductions.”

Will's eyes were narrowed and curious in response to the action; internally, he sighed. The day Marina didn't garner complete adoration from the men in her life, was the day the world was coming to an end. Frankly, the Colonel hoped the day would never come. Pushing himself to a standing position, Will leaned forward carefully to offer his older half-brother his hand. “Will Brandt . . . nice to meet you, Gus.”

Gus' eyebrows furrowed curiously, the two men taking each other in and both intimately aware of the eerie similarities to be found in their physical features and outward demeanor. “You're Marina's partner.”

“Guilty,” he agreed with a possessive grin.
“She told me a lot about you. Apparently, we're a lot alike.”

There was a haunted sadness in Will's eyes as he agreed, “I don't doubt it.” A sharp blink shook the sadness away, as the Colonel turned towards the rest of his brothers. “These are my brothers – your half-brothers – Brian Joshua . . . Jason Leonard . . . Clinton Francis . . . and Aaron Kenneth James.” Grinning at the second youngest Grimm, he teased, “Don't be surprised if you hear someone call him Kenny; occasionally, he still answers to it.”

Gus' grin held a sly twist as he replied, “Marina mentioned the story was classified.”

Every instinct the Colonel had locked up as Will's eyes narrowed at the statement. It was a moment before he forced himself to relax once again. Marina was notorious for having no brain-to-mouth filter but she'd never spilled Grimm secrets before. The Colonel highly doubted she would be starting any time soon. “Something like that.” There was a curious undertone, as he questioned, “So what brings you up to Toronto?”

“I'm told it was your birthday a couple days ago. Sam and Marina invited me up, but I turned them down at the time.” Gesturing towards where Hansel had taken up a position behind and to the left of Will, he continued, “Then Herr Kuhn and Sergeant Doyle showed up and my curiosity overrode my trepidation. Then I found out Sam got hurt. From there, it wasn't hard to make the decision to come up. I threw a few things in an overnight bag and didn't look back.”

Brian laughed as he joked, “Welcome to the Family Crazy. We're not right, but at least we have fun!”

Almost in one voice, his brothers announced, “Speak for yourself, Bri!”
Hey all! Sorry about the long wait. I got a bunch of requests to see the Marina & Will smackdown of Diana Braddock, so I had to rearrange a little bit.

I sincerely hope you all enjoy this!!

No new translations, so I'm not going to put any up today. Enjoy!!!
Chapter 203: Tying Up Loose Ends

Four Hours Previous

Marta was not having a good night. Her nephew was lying in a hospital bed, eyes closed and blankets pulled over his head petulantly, as he recovered from yet another brutal blow to the head. Eyes flickering towards the tiny cubicle, Marta allowed a small smile at the sight; besides the drab hospital sheets, all she could see of Sam was a curled up lump and a tuft of sunny hair peeking out over the edges.

As for her future sister-in-law, Marina was pacing back and forth like an avenging dragon. All she'd need was smoke coming out of her nose. To this point in time, the virologist had only seen the Family Russian lose her temper once . . . it had been more than memorable. Currently, she was doing everything she could to keep Marina away from her boiling point. A low simmer was fine, but anything more was likely to cause further bloodshed.

For the moment, Marina had enough blood in her hair.

Then there was the child currently under her hands. Enjolras Rene Conrad was a surprisingly stoic child, especially considering the fact he was not frightened of the Russian. The bruises on his face and body should have caused him to flinch away from her raging. Instead, the sight of Marina's potent fury seemed to be a comfort to the boy.

Marta blinked as suddenly Marina was there, pausing next to Rene's bed with a small – but real – smile on her face as she smoothed her fingers through his hair. “How are you, Rene?”

“I'm all right. It doesn't hurt,” he promised, with a grin. Of course, his insistence was promptly negated when Marta hit a particularly sensitive bruise and he flinched widely, a sharp wince creasing his features. “Ow,” he murmured petulantly, a small pout on his lips as he glared up at the two women.

“Sorry, Rene,” Marta promised sincerely, a small smirk on her lips. “You sure you don't want something for the pain?”

A lazy shrug was Rene's answer as he replied, “I've had worse.”

Instantly the virologist's eyes darted to look at the Russian as Marina's jaw locked tight, her tone vicious as she began to swear in her native language under her breath. Though Marta didn't know the language personally, she recognized several of the words and phrases as things Aaron would say when he was thoroughly pissed off and cursing at something . . . or someone. Forcing herself to calm just long enough to press a warm kiss to the child's forehead, Marina once again began pacing the hallway between Rene's cubicle and Sam's.

Marina paused briefly at her adoptive son's bedside, bending to whisper something to the S.H.I.E.L.D. agent. Whatever Sam said in reply amused his mother, because she broke into startled laughter even as she pressed a warm kiss to what little she could see of his head. Straightening, the Russian pet his hair for another moment, before resuming her impatient pacing.

It was times like this Marta realized what a good pair the Colonel and his Russian made. She would never tell the other woman, but she always had this mental image of Marina as a disgruntled kitten. Cute, cuddly and wildly affectionate, until you did something to piss her off. At which point, watch out! It wasn't hard to take her seriously once she started ripping the flesh from your bones with her bare hands.
The Colonel was definitely the more levelheaded of the couple. It was not hard to see he held what little leash Marina would allow, though Marta was pretty sure Will would argue against the need for a “leash” at all. For the most part, Marina knew when to draw the line between patience and violence. At times like this when she was teetering on a knife's edge, however, at least her lover was there to pull her back from falling over.

Even as she focused on the Russian, the presence of her brother-in-law in a cubicle down the way was like a spider crawling up Marta's neck. Her skin prickled and her stomach churned; there was a large part of her wanting to rip into the General's cubicle and read him the riot act. Several times she'd been only seconds from doing just that, before she'd see Marina glance his way, tighten her jaw and take another rotation. Which only furthered Marta's own resolve to steer clear; if Sam's mother could keep her temper, surely Marta could do no less.

Of course, then Diana showed up. And all bets were off.

Marina's whole body locked up at the sight of her, hot chocolate eyes reaching a steady boiling point. Unless Marta missed her guess, there was actually a soft growling sound coming from the woman's throat as well. Seeming to sense his mother's disquiet, Sam stuck his head from under his covers and asked in a tone deferential to his headache, “Ma? You okay?”

The Russian gifted her son with a small smile, insisting, “I'm fine, Sammy-honey. Go back to sleep.”

There wasn't even a second's hesitation from her sister at the confirmation of who was in the room. Diana sailed past her oldest child's room, without even a glance toward the young man in the bed. Flinging herself at her husband, the older woman exclaimed loudly, “Oh Greg! I was so worried!” Her fingers reached up to caress over the bruises on the General's face, crooning gently, “Your poor face!”

It was like lighting a match to an active explosive. The reaction was all but immediate as Marina snapped viciously, “You bitch!”

Diana Braddock's features were twisted into careful horror as she rounded on the seething Russian. There was maternal censure in her tone as she scolded, “Watch your tongue! There are children present!”

“My child . . . I'm aware,” was the hissed reply, body tense and straining against the need to do physical damage to the woman in front of her. Jabbing a finger sharply into the woman's collarbone, she barked, “What about your son's face!? Your son's ribs!? The child you brought into this world that your 'poor' husband bruised and battered and left for dead!? Your poor husband!? How dare you! What about your son!?”

Marta's eyes were wide and curious, even as she slipped between the furious Viper and her sister. “Marina . . .” she coaxed, wrapping one hand around the Russian's wrist. “The hospital won't appreciate you starting a fight.”

“I'm not starting a fight. I'm asking her to pull her head out of her ass and give a damn about the child she has all but abandoned.”

Diana's lips curved into a sick smile as she turned her attention on her younger sister. “Marta . . . I didn't know you were here. How's Gregory? Will he be all right?”

The virologist clamped down on her own fury, knowing someone needed to keep Marina in check until the Colonel was able to take up the responsibility once again. “Frankly, Di, I don't know. I'm not his doctor . . . and considering everything, you don't want me to be.”
“Why wouldn't I want you to be his doctor, Marta . . . you're family.”

“We're not anything,” was the cold reply. “You looked into my face and you lied to me, Di! You swore to me the day I came home; Gregory would never lay another hand on Sam and he'd never laid a hand on him prior to that point. And I believed you! Like an idiot!”

Diana's eyes rolled as she huffed, “Oh please, Marta . . . you're hardly an idiot.”

“That's not the point!” was the anguished cry, eyes wide and horrified at the disdainful look in her sister's eyes. “Your husband beat your SON with a shovel, Diana . . . a shovel! Sam could have died, if we hadn't found him in time.”

It was about then a pair of orderlies arrived, interrupting whatever the elder Shearing sister would have said. “Dr. Shearing, we've got Constable Braddock's room set up. Can we take him up?”

Nodding once in agreement, Marta glared at her sister for a moment in clear warning, before moving to Sam's side. “Sammy?”

“Yeah, Aunt Marty?” he asked quietly, eerie blue eyes flickering towards where both of his mothers were glaring at each other savagely. Except for the Colonel's rule about killing civilians, Sam would have been worried his adoptive mother was going to snap his mother's neck.

“We're gonna move you upstairs for overnight observation.”

Eyes flickering again, he asked quietly, “Are they going to kill each other?”

There was a real smile on Marta's face as she promised, “I'll make sure Marina doesn't wring her neck.” Laying a hand over his, she insisted, “Take it easy. We'll be up to see you soon, okay?”

“Kay.”

Once the bed had cleared the doorway, Marina stepped to his bedside, laying a gentle hand over his. “I'll be right behind you, okay?”

“Thanks, Ma.”

“You're welcome,” she replied with a small grin, leaning over and pressing a warm kiss to his cheek. “Get some rest.”

“Yes ma'am,” he teased, twisting his hand under hers to squeeze her wrist for a moment before the orderlies took the bed away.

Diana's silence was palpable, and Marina's jaw was locked tight as the elevator doors slid closed with no acknowledgment from the woman to her injured son. “What the hell is wrong with you? That was your son! And you couldn't even be bothered to say hello!”

There was a long moment of silence, before the Generals' wife declared, “I have no son.”

Marina flinched at the announcement, before she rolled her eyes. “Technically, he's your son until the paperwork is filed. So yes . . . you have a son.”

“No . . . I don't.”

Marta's eyebrows furrowed at the calm confidence in her sister's features, one hand reaching out to stall Marina's furious diatribe in its tracks. “What are you talking about?”
“We found Sam on our doorstep when he was two days old. Just a baby wrapped in a blanket, left behind with a knock at the door and a note with his name,” Diana explained, tone deadly serious. “We were desperate for a child . . . we couldn't conceive. And there he was, a child of our own.”

The virologist's chin lifted as suddenly pieces began to fall into place. “Then you got pregnant with Amy.”

“She was our miracle child . . . our dream come true. She was perfect. And then Sam got her killed.”

Marina lunged forward, barking, “It wasn't Sam's fault! He was 9 years old and he was doing everything right! The driver was drunk and he jumped the curb . . . there was nothing Sam could have done.”

The look on Diana's face was cold and absolute as she snapped in reply, “He could have taken her place. He could have died instead of her.”

Needless to say, Marina was pissed and determined to make sure both Diana and Gregory Braddock knew it.

Brian and Natasha materialized in the hallway first, drawn by their sister's rage, with Casey, Jason, Clint and Bucky drifting in barely moments later. As they wheedled the story from Marta, they began to cheer their beloved Russian on. Even Marta was rooting for her, a wide grin on the younger sister's face at the terror slowly stealing across Diana's sneering features.

By the time Marta saw Owen pushing Will's wheelchair back into the emergency room, Marina had been yelling at the other woman for twenty minutes. As near as the virologist could guess, there had been ten different languages, at least a dozen different swear words in each language, and more than once one of Marina's boys had had to prevent her from snapping the woman's neck with her bare hands.

The pain from his injuries was clear on the Colonel's face even as he boomed, “Stand down, Colonel!”

Marina's training caught up in less than a second, and her jaw practically clicked as it snapped shut. The sudden silence was deafening, Will's eyes blazing colorless gray as he looked from his brothers to his partner to the Braddocks. Finally, he turned to Marta and demanded, “What the hell is going on in here!?”

Glancing toward Marina and seeing the woman was more than arm's reach from her sister, Marta took a deep breath and confessed, “Diana was informing Marina that it should have been Sam who died all those years ago, not Amy.” A sheepish grin curved the scientist's lips as she drawled casually, “Marina was making her opinion known on the matter.”

There was a soft snort of laughter from the Colonel as he snarked, “Loudly and forcefully, I see.”

“That about covers it,” Marta agreed.

Those eyes shifted to Marina's face. Whatever passed between them was unspoken, the Russian's body softening submissively as she moved to take her place at his right shoulder. Her left hand, with its glittering mosaic opal, lifted to fold over the point of his shoulder, these two guardians of their son's happiness clearly united in their disdain for the woman before them. Marina's thumb moved absently against the t-shirt clad shoulder as Will took her in. “So . . . you're Diana Braddock. I would say it's nice to meet you, but I lie to people for a living. I try to avoid it outside of work if I can manage to.”
Diana blinked at him, clearly surprised by the statement. She blustered for a moment, before clicking her jaw shut up with an audible click. “And who are you to speak to me so disrespectfully?”

One corner of Will's lips quirked upwards as he replied, “According to the paperwork your husband signed this morning, Sam's dad.”

Scoffing, she huffed, “I wish you luck with him. Insolent, disrespectful... you'll regret the decision to take him as your own. Trust me.”

Marina's jaw tightened as she prepared to leap to her adoptive son's defense. Surprisingly, it was Rene's voice which rang through the room. “You're a terrible mother.”

The General's wife stared at the resolute child in shock, before snapping, “I beg your pardon? This is an adult conversation, you little brat. I would suggest you keep your mouth closed around your betters.”

The Colonel could all but see the steam coming out of Marina's ears, a small smirk on his lips as his partner geared up to rip into the woman once again. That smirk burst into a full out grin as Rene dashed up to her, kicking the woman square in the shin before bolting behind Marina for safety. Diana screeched at the action, her eyes blazing as she made an aborted lunge for him. The Russian's features were implacable and murderous as she placed herself between them. “I would seriously rethink that action, if I was you.”

Seeming to realize the assassin was not an adversary to tangle with physically, the other woman changed tactics. Her tone was a vicious hiss as she hissed, “Watch yourself child. I can have you thrown into the nearest group home so fast your head would spin.”

Rene's blue eyes widened in horror at the statement, body recoiling backwards away from the General's wife. Marina's arm came around him immediately, locking his trembling frame to her hip, as her lover roared, “You heinous bitch! How dare you!?”

Will's eyes were blazing as he shoved himself onto his feet, stalking up to her. “There is no world in which you would ever get close enough to try. And if you ever make a threat like that towards a member of my family again, I promise you... you won't like what happens next.”

Behind him, he could hear the plaintive question as Rene appealed for reassurance. “Can she do that? Can she take me away from you?”

Marina's tone was firm and warm as she smoothed her fingers through his hair. “She could try... but Misha and I will never let you go. You're ours now, I promise.”

The Colonel was barely paying attention of the General or his wife, attention firmly attuned to the soft sobs that had overcome the child behind him as Marina tried to soothe him. There was silver fire in his eyes as he rounded on the woman, causing her to scramble backwards in response. Just out of arm's reach, Will was acutely aware of his brother's girlfriend watching the confrontation between her sister and her chosen family. Glancing at the virologist, he gifted her with a tight smile. “Can you give him something to calm him down?”

Nodding, she choked out, “Absolutely. I can give him a mild sedative, if you want me to.”

There was a sharp nod in her direction as he gave his permission, before he turned back to where Marina had sunk to the ground and pulled Rene into her lap, humming to him softly as she stroked her fingers through his hair. The child was clutching at Marina's shirt desperately, his pleas quiet whimpers as he begged, “Don't let them take me. I don't wanna go. I wanna stay with you.”
Dropping carefully to his knees, Will reached out to cup the child's cheek and drew his attention away from where Marta was approaching with the sedative. “We're not going to let them take you, Rene. You're gonna stay with us.”

“Promise?” he demanded tearfully, flinching as the needle made its way into his skinny arm.

“I promise. We're going to keep you forever.” The couple sat for a long moment together, easing Rene down from his panic. Once he was calmer, and nearly on the verge of sleep, Will grinned up at his partner. “You're probably going to want to get him horizontal pretty quickly.”

Her lips quirked as she agreed, “And preferably before he passes out, yeah?”

“He's little, but I think even you would have a hard time carrying him up to Sam's room by yourself.”

Her face twisted into a look of mock affront as she protested fondly, “I'll have you know I am badass awesome. I could totally carry the kid by myself.” There was a pause as her lover grinned at her, before she huffed and admitted grudgingly, “But doesn't mean I want to.”

Leaning forward, he cupped her cheek in his palm as he pressed a warm kiss to her pouting mouth. “I love you.”

“Of course you do . . . you are a smart man,” she teased, her fingers tracing over his features fondly. “Are you coming up with us?”

Vincent spoke up from where he was standing with Marta, mouth twisted slightly as he gave them the bad news. “Actually, the Colonel is gonna be hanging out with us down here for a bit longer.”

Marina's eyes went sharp instantly as she straightened, focus firmly on the doctor's face. Her tone was scared and brittle as she demanded, “What's wrong with him?”

“The MRI shows a small tear in his kidney. It's probably nothing, but I want to keep an eye on it for a little bit. In a couple hours, we'll go get another MRI and see how it looks. If it gets worse, we'll need to go in and seal it up. But I'm hopeful it won't be necessary.”

The indecision was clear on her face; Marina was torn between her newfound son and her longtime partner . . . both needed her, but she could only be in one place at a time. Fortunately, her lover made it easy for her. Two fingers came up and beckoned Owen over to them, the Colonel accepting the hand the Cleaner offered and the steady pull to his feet. “Rene needs you right now, and I know you wanna go check on Sam. I'll be fine. Vincent's going to take good care of me, and I'll have Lucky here if I need anything.”

“Misha . . .” she protested quietly, even as her arms tightened around the sleepy child in her arms.

“I will be just fine, Marishka. Go . . . take care of our sons.”

Nodding, Marina accepted Owen's assistance to her feet, the two steadying Rene as the child leaned heavily against his new foster mother. “Are you gonna be okay getting to Sam's room by yourself?” was the concerned question from her partner's best friend.

“I'll be just fine, Lucky.” Twisting to look at Will over her shoulder, she promised, “We'll be waiting for you in Sam's room.”

“I'll see you there,” the man promised, letting the two doctors fuss him into a bed and under the covers.
Leaning Rene against Owen for a moment, Marina dashed to his bedside. Cupping his cheeks between her palms, she bent to press a long, passionate kiss to his lips. When at last they parted, both were breathing hard. Quicksilver eyes searched hot chocolate ones for a momentary eternity, before the Russian gifted him with a brilliant smile, promising, “Lyublyu tebya, Mishka.”

“Vsegda, samaya malen’kaya,” he promised in return, smoothing a strand of hair away from her eyes. Nudging her away, he insisted, “I'll be fine. Go . . . I'll see you soon.”

“You'd better,” she insisted with a worried frown, before returning to retake Rene from the Cleaner. Gripping the man's arm, she begged, “Take care of him.”

“Always,” he promised, something intimate and knowing passing between these two. Both loved the Colonel and both had sworn eternal loyalty; only one would ever have Will Grimm's love in return and they both knew it.

Smiling at him, she squeezed his wrist briefly, before coaxing Rene away from the emergency room, her partner and the Braddocks. She was anxious to check on Sam, to verify for herself he was all right. Hopefully, the pain medications would have started their work and her older son would be more coherent when she arrived in his room. Also, Rene was getting increasingly languid by the moment, leaning against her more and more. The sooner he was horizontal, the better off they both would be.

Both the Colonel and his best friend watched her go, before Will rounded to face the Braddocks once again. The two had been watching the interaction between the two Colonels curiously, and Diana couldn't help her flinch as the man leveled his fiercest glare on her countenance again. “I am only going to stay this once. Stay away from my family. Sam is ours now. Rene is ours now. Marta is ours now. You threaten my family . . . you harm my family . . . you ever lay another hand on my family . . . and I'll drop you both into the deepest pit I can find and rejoice in your screams as I leave you there to rot.”

Diana protested indignantly, “I never laid a hand on Sam!”

“No. you just let your husband do it for you,” was the snarling reply from Vincent, those eyes flashing beast yellow as the doctor fought to keep his temper.

Glancing at Owen in a clear admonition to get the doctor away, Will turned back again. “Do not test me, Diana . . . I assure you. I am not a good man. And I don't give a damn about what sins you have or have not committed. All I care about is the safety and the happiness of my sons, my partner, my brothers and my family. Your miserable, worthless carcasses mean jackshit to me.’’ The smile he gave her was cold and brittle as he inquired casually, “Do we understand each other?’’

Gregory's eyes were wide as he caught his wife's gaze, the two clearly exchanging some thought between them. Turning back, the General agreed, “We do.”

“Good . . . then I hope you'll understand I mean no offense when I say, I sincerely hope we never meet again.”
Chapter Notes

Enjoy! We're heading towards a time jump soon, so this arc will soon be over. In the meantime, enjoy this one! It's meltingly adorable. :D

No translations this time, surprisingly.

Chapter 204: Romance is Subjective

Sam's hospital room was chaos. The arrival of Gus Maitland had sent Will's younger brothers into a tizzy, and all four of them were quizzing the older man about his life to that point. Tired and sore, for once the Colonel let them have their heads, unwilling to step in and mitigate the boys' excitement and enthusiasm. After performing the introductions, a suddenly tired Sam had hunkered down in the lumpy bed with Marina, mother and son curled up together like tadpoles as they dreamed. Rene was as still as death on the couch, still soundly asleep; his waking was not looking likely any time soon.

Owen was leaning up against the wall behind his best friend, keeping a steady eye on his boss and his boss' brothers. Even the appearance of yet another Grimm didn't phase him; he'd known the Grimms for entirely too long to be shocked anymore. There was a vivid memory of Will running through his brain, one of a much younger Captain hobbling around on a cane, with a bullet fragment moving around behind his knee and pint-sized brothers demanding every second of his attention. Some things at least hadn't changed; Clint and Kenny were older, but there was no mistaking the clear adoration, or the worried concern, on their faces when they thought Will might not be looking.
For his part, Gus seemed to be holding his own against the combined might of the younger four Brothers Grimm, a monumental undertaking to be sure. He visibly shied away from any questions pertaining to his life as firefighter, but had ready answers about anything else they asked. The look on Casey's face when Jason asked about Malee, and was told that the “teenager was sorry she hadn't been allowed to come”, was beyond priceless and Will snorted hard on a laugh. She sent him a withering glare that barely phased him. Huffing, she rolled her eyes as she conceded that the Colonel had probably stared down much worse that a paltry glare from her, including his own pissed off reflection; his resting bitch face was not for the faint of heart.

Finally, everything froze as a soft murmur escaped from the woman stirring on the bed beside Sam. Will moved to get up, before Owen's hand landed heavily onto his shoulder and kept him seated. Frustrated that such a simple thing had laid him low, the Colonel leaned back in his chair and watched as Marina came slowly awake. Those hot chocolate eyes blinked open, a small smile curving up her lips at the sight of her oldest son quiet and peaceful next to her, before she pushed herself up carefully. There was an endearing fuzziness to her gaze as she looked around, before landing on her lover's face. Immediately, the Russian was on the move, crawling from the bed and into his lap, cuddling up under his chin and purring as she burrowed into him.

Marta's voice was amused from the door as she laughed, “Well, if I didn’t think that Marina was just a big kitten before, I do now.”

Will's fingers were warm and soothing in his partner's curls as she nuzzled her nose into the hollow of his throat. “Maybe, but even so, she's no house cat. This kitty's got claws . . . big ones.”

“I can hear you, you know,” she growled, before hunkering back down with another long purr as Will scritchted fondly at the soft skin behind her ear. Giving up the argument before it had even really begun, Marina melted into her lover's embrace, conceding with a quiet, “Meow.”

Clint's grin was huge as he teased his sister, “Could you just pick an animal and stick to it? Mother hen, scary kitty, deadly viper, wise owl . . . geez, Marina . . . greedy greedy.”

Giggling at the joke, she swiped at him fondly with soft fingers, mimicking a kitten's playfulness. Marta and Vincent came into the room then, Catherine wrapped up in Vincent's free arm as Marta came over to take her accustomed place on Aaron's knee. “So, the gang's all here, I see,” Cat joked, eyes widening slightly at the sight of yet another Grimm, though she said nothing about Gus' unexpected arrival.

Vincent shook his head, even as Hansel spoke up, “No . . . we are missing three.”

“Who?”

“Daryl . . . Daryl, Carol and Sophia,” was the solemn response from Jason.

At the names of the missing, Marina withdrew slightly from her lover's arms and twisted in his lap to take in the room. Unconsciously, she began to count her boys, before blinking as she realized that she had counted one too many. Eyebrows furrowing, she went back and started to check eye colors instead, before her eyes flashed wide in surprise. “Gus!”

“Hi Marina,” he greeted her, watching as the woman sprang to her feet and all but leaped to hug him.

The embrace was awkward but warm, Gus patting her fondly on the head as she squeezed him for a moment. When she finally released him, she was practically vibrating with happiness. “I didn't know you'd come. When did you get here?”
“Hansel and Doyle came to get me; then I found out Sam got hurt and I agreed to come back with them.” Shrugging sheepishly, he explained, “Besides, it was Will's birthday and he is my kid brother, right?”

“One of many,” Marina agreed with a grin. “And that's going to take some getting used to; Misha having brothers who are older than him.”

Doyle grinned from where he was sitting on the floor between Scarlett's knees. “I don't think much is going to change there. He's Boss . . . he outranks my ass several times over. And frankly, half the time, I can't remember what I had for breakfast let alone how to manage a family like this one.”

“Agreed,” Gus laughed, rubbing his fingers sheepishly over the back of his head. “Although, I haven't had a rank since I left the station house.”

Marina's eyes narrowed at the statement; the sight of her all but biting her tongue was one seen by everyone in the room. There was a tense second as everyone waited to see what would happen next, before the Russian waved the statement away and asked the more important question. “Where’s Malee?”

“At home. Her mother wouldn't let her come.”

Unable to hold in her curiosity for a second more, Casey burst out, “Who the hell is Malee?! Is she your daughter!?”

Gus burst into laughter at the question, his head shaking firmly as he replied, “She's a friend.”

“You're friends with a teenager?”

“Almost teenager. She's not quite 13,” Marina explained with a grin. “She's a sweet girl. As soon as she's got a college degree, I am going to hire her so fast her head will spin.”

The youngest Prototype grinned as he was suddenly reminded of something the girl had made him promise to tell the Russian when he'd left. “I almost forgot. She's making her mother teach her Chinese.”

“Her mother? Wasn't it her father that she got her Asian genes from?”

“Yeah, but apparently her mother studied abroad in Beijing in college; that's where she met Malee's father.”

Grinning broadly, Marina let out a soft cheer at the news. “Well, I did tell her to learn a couple languages and become a total badass.”

“She is already counting down the days until she can call you. I'm not even kidding.”

There was a wry chuckle drifting from the Russian as she agreed, “I don't doubt it.” Winking, she teased, “She adores you, you know.”

“I am aware of her crush,” Gus sighed, running a hand back through his hair. “She's a little young for me, don't you think?”

“Age is just a number. For some, it doesn't even matter,” Marina reminded him, twisting to look up at her lover pointedly before turning back to the former firefighter. “She's been through a lot, and she knows her own mind.” There was a small shrug, as she insisted, “She'll probably grow out of it, but in the meantime, don't crush it. Okay?”
“She's my only friend . . . I'd never do anything to hurt her.”

Whatever Marina had been about to say about that was interrupted, as Aaron spoke up then. “Marta, I've been doing some thinking.”

His girlfriend's features twisted at the statement, her body shifting a little bit so as to bring his face into view. “About what, Aaron?”

“Us.” There was a pause, before he stated calmly, “Marry me.”

Marta's eyes practically popped out of her head at the statement, her whole body going still with joyous shock. Clint's tone was acerbic as he muttered to his own boyfriend, “Clearly, Kenny needs some remedial lessons in romance.”

The family bomb tech smirked at the statement, even as he replied, “I may not be overly romantic, but I know Marta. She's not a fan of roses, or diamonds, or flowery speeches, or candlelit dinners.”

The woman's features softened as she took him in, leaning into his fingers as they came up to trace hearts over the skin of her cheeks. “She much prefers facts, hypotheses, tangible evidence. And that's what I'm offering.”

Looking up at her, blue eyes caught dark brown, as he cupped her cheeks in his palms. “The facts are this. We're good together. And I love you. I would therefore hypothesize that our marriage would be a happy and fulfilling one for the both of us, filled with love and laughter and children and more family than we know what to do with. And what more tangible evidence of our devotion to each other do we need? We've been hunted by the government we swore to serve, we've rescued each other time and again, you protected me from my worst fear and I protected you when you needed me most. I would do anything for you, and you will never want for love, for affection, for anything. I swear it.”

Finally, there was a small half-smile in the corner of his mouth. “Marta Ann Shearing . . . love of my life . . .” pausing, bright blue eyes searched hers for a mere moment, before he implored her once again, “. . . marry me.”

The entire room waited on pins and needles for the virologist's response, watching her watch her boyfriend steadily. When at last she spoke, they had been listening so hard for the response, they nearly missed it. A soft, shy smile curved her lips as she brought her hands up to hold his own against her face, her tone a mere breath as she replied, “Aaron Kenneth James Grimm . . . yes, I will marry you.” Grinning against his mouth as he suddenly kissed her, she shifted her hands to his own face and gave back as good as she got. When at last they broke for air, she rested her forehead against his and vowed, “I'm yours . . . forever.”
Hey guys, I am soooo sorry about the long wait. I'm building a dollhouse for my 4 year old little girl for Christmas. And I gotta tell you, Christmas is creeping up on me a lot faster than I would like. But here's a new chapter, and I'm working hard with my betas to get the details sorted out for the next one.

Credit goes to Julorean for bashing my head on right with the Fury appearance. He is a Magnificent Bastard and refused to go quietly onto the page. Her little snippet was a big help, as it allowed me to revised it and build it into what i needed it to be. Thank you Jules! For more than one reason (you know why! XD XD)

Enjoy this. No real translations, except for the usual ones. Please leave a comment and let me know what you think.

Also, I am opening commissions once again. So if you would like a ficlet - in or out of this universe- let me know via email. Brittanymoody1275@yahoo.com

Enjoy!
The Grimm Truth

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Chapter 205: The End of Vacation

As a rule, Nick Fury preferred not to interfere in the personal lives of his agents, assets and soldiers. Involvement was inevitably messy and not a little chaotic. There were exceptions, of course, but they were few and far between. And even the exceptions required a damned good reason.

Preventing the World's Deadliest Viper and her long time co-conspirator, the Left Hand of God, from enacting their decade's long plan for world domination, just so the Gadyuka could wipe two civilians from its face? That was a Damned. Good. Reason.

Sam Grimm nee Braddock was a hell of an asset, a good sniper and a better man than most. His devotion to the Grimms –specifically Will and Marina – was more than admirable, and Fury at the very least could admit to himself, Sam was a good son to his adoptive parents. It was a shame neither of the Braddocks appreciated the gift they had been given.

Braddock really shouldn’t be so full of himself, Nickolas Fury thought as he picked the lock on the general’s home. The electronic skeleton key had already deactivated the security system, of course. SHIELD had devices for dealing with regular locks too, but sometimes you just wanted to do it yourself.

Fury was a shadow among shadows, moving soundlessly through the house as he made his way inside. A particularly robust cabinet in the Braddocks' living room earned his attention and he smiled at to know he had more than enough time to enjoy a drink before the Braddocks themselves returned home from the hospital.

Currently, he was seated at their formal dining table and sipping on a snifter of expensive brandy. Watching the light play through the liquor, Nick was forced to concede at least one thing in the General's favor. There was no doubt Gregory Braddock was an exceptionally shitty human being, but he did at least have good taste in liquor. He even kept a box of chilling stones in his fridge so ice didn't dilute the alcohol and ruin the purity of the flavor. The sound of approaching footsteps only increased his delight in the alcohol, a small smirk on his lips as he savored the coming confrontation.

The door opened and before long the married couple jolted to a stop at the sight of him from where they stood in the doorframe to their dining room. Braddock gaped at him for a moment, before letting out the expected roar. “Who the hell are YOU!?”

“Someone you don't have the security clearance to know about,” Fury replied, shifting his combat boots from where they had rested on their mahogany dining table. "VsNicholas L. Fury, Director of the Strategic Homeland Intervention Enforcement and Logistics Division.” The bewildered look on their faces caused a small smirk as he continued, “S.H.I.E.L.D.”

At the way her mouth dropped open, his small smirk became one of his trademark shark's grins. “Yes, Mrs. Braddock, that S.H.I.E.L.D.. The very same organization which employs your former son . . . and Agent Marina Petrovka.”

There was visible horror in Diana Braddock’s face as she finally caught sight of the muddy prints Fury's combat boots had left on her otherwise immaculate table. There was always theory suggesting her face typically looked like that. Considering what he’d been told about the woman's personality, it was a possibility. With his characteristic disregard for stupid, Fury resolved to ignore her.

“Frankly, I'm surprised to see you breathing. By all reports, you have achieved something no one else in this world has managed. You have successfully pissed off the Viper, and by extension, her
family . . . and stayed alive. Congratulations.”

Clicking his tongue against the roof of his mouth, he swirled the liquor around the bottom of the glass. “Agent Petrovka is one of the best agents I have, and I don’t like seeing her upset. Bad things happen and a lot of people tend to die when she's pissed.” Taking a luxurious sip, he continued, “Since you've manage to survive her formidable wrath for the moment, allow me to offer you some free advice. Stay away from the Grimms . . . Sam included. They are extremely hazardous to the health of anyone they don't like.”

Pausing for a moment, he chuckled as he considered what he'd just said. “And I promise you, they really don't like you. She’s taken Sam for her own, with an ironclad and unassailable adoption contract. I will remind you, you both have signed that contract and it restricts you from coming anywhere near him ever again. There’s no way you will ever get your son back.”

Tossing back the dregs from the glass, Fury gave the couple another shark's grin. “I'll admit, I had a hell of a speech prepared. From what I hear, though, Marina already gave you an earful. Not much more I can add to that.”

Gathering up his coat, he pulled it over his shoulders and moved towards the door, the leather swirling around him dramatically. Pausing in the jamb of the door, he twisted to look back at them with a frown. “If you cross her again, you can’t say you weren’t warned. To be frank, I’d rather not deal with the clean-up. So, for your own sake, stay out of her way and steer clear of the family.”

With these final words of warning, Nick Fury rotated on his heel and saw himself out, coat flaring out behind him. Both Braddocks dashed to the door, surprised to see he was already gone, having disappeared as quickly as he had come.

********************

Considering the first part of their Toronto vacation, it was understandably a shock when the rest of the trip passed relatively uneventfully. There were a few bumps in the road, of course, but for the most part they were manageable problems. Will may have been feeling all right initially, but all it took was a single night's rest for his whole body to stiffen up like a two by four. As a result, he preferred to let the rest of the boys rough house to their heart's content, while he cuddled with Marina wherever they happened to be; at the park during a family picnic or on the couch during movie nights at home.

As for Gus, he settled into the place Marina had carved out for him uneasily. The boys accepted him readily enough, more than willing to embrace his arrival. It was quickly apparent, however, that the painfully shy former firefighter seemed to prefer lingering on the outer edges of the family. Both members of the family's Power Couple were content to let him ease in at his own pace, effortlessly running interference on some of the more . . . enthusiastic . . . members of the family.

Rene and Sam got on like gasoline and a lit match, though which was which was cause for considerable debate. Most of the time, Sam seemed to adore his new little brother, with 11 year old Rene emerging rapidly from his shell around the 27 year old. Then there were the times Rene could light his older brother's temper like nothing else Marina or Will had ever seen. Even Barney hadn't managed to cause explosions from his brothers like the ones Rene could coerce from Sam.

Part of it was both Sam and Rene were borderline obstinate. As a matter of fact, on more than one occasion, Will's brothers had been heard to tease Marina about whether or not she was sure Will had never had children. Sheer bullheadedness was one of the Colonel's defining characteristics and each of his brothers were convinced he would one day pass it on to his own children. The other part of it was Rene had no sense of self-preservation, which led to his taking unnecessary risks . . . which
infuriated his risk-taking, adrenaline junkie big brother. It never failed to make Marina snicker a little; served her Sammy right to get a little taste of his own medicine.

Either way, flashes of raging temper aside, the two adored each other. Once Sam could stand up without feeling like the world was tilting on its axis, they were often found in the backyard with Vincent and Catherine, the three adults playing all kinds of games with the eleven year old.

Before long, though, it was the last day before vacation came to an end. Marina spent the whole day in the kitchen cooking, loading Sam's freezer with foods he enjoyed so he would eat. Though Sam wasn't Will's biological son, they were very much alike; both of them were terrible at remembering to feed themselves. With any luck, that would change if his options were all of the things Marina made that her eldest son liked best.

Though he'd never admit it, Sam wasn't looking forward to having his best friends leave Toronto and over the last few days had tried to spend as much time with Vincent and Catherine as he could before they left. The three adults had decided to spend their last day out at the shooting range. Rene had begged to go along and, despite Marina's misgivings, had been allowed to go with them on the condition he did exactly as he was told without question. Rene had promised to be a perfect angel, which in turn made Sam roll his eyes, the older of the two wincing hard as the action caused his dormant headache to flare briefly. However it had happened, the four of them were out of the house.

The younger Grimm brothers were out and about with their significant others, sightseeing on their last day in town. This left Gus and Will at home with Marina, the two keeping her company in the kitchen as she danced around the one area of the house which had always been her indisputable kingdom. The two were seated at the table, talking and laughing with each other as they attempted to get to know each other better.

Of course, her stoic lover would never tell, but there was a small part of the Colonel which was jealous of his newfound older brother. Especially the easy relationship Gus had with Marina herself. A little jealousy never hurt anyone though. And when Will was the one jealous, it always led to absolutely world-altering sex. Smirking wickedly as she contemplated the activities the evening ahead would inevitably hold, Marina hummed to herself happily as she moved about her domain.

Dinner was as cheerful as it could be, and before anyone even realized it, dawn had broken across the horizon the following morning. There were tears streaming down Marina's cheeks as she fuss anxiously at her oldest. Adoring and conciliatory, Sam stood silent under her maternal scolding, but for the occasional “Yes, ma'am” and “No, ma'am” she seemed to expect.

Fortunately, it didn't take long for Will to come to his rescue. Looping his arm around his partner's shoulders, he pulled her into him even as he pressed a warm kiss to her temple. “Marishka... samaya malen'kaya... stop fussing at him. We're not even an hour away. Our numbers are on every speed dial he has. Spike and Lou and Jules are here to keep an eye on him for you, not that he needs anyone to babysit him. Not to mention, you have guaranteed he will eat well until at least Christmas.”

“But the Braddocks!” she protested, cut off as Will interrupted her gently, “...will be held at bay by the restraining order we included in the adoption agreement. And their newfound fear of Fury and his Angelic Viper. Okay?”

“And we're sure? They can't come within 250 meters, right?”

“Yes ma'am... written in the adoption agreement and everything. Now please say goodbye to our son so we can get going. I am dreading what my department looks like after three weeks away.”
Glowering at him fondly, she teased, “Fatalist.”

“No, realist,” he argued, bending to press a fond kiss to the apple of her cheek.

Rolling her eyes at her Colonel, she slipped from his embrace and into Sam's open arms. The two stood together for a long time, arms tight around the other and silent in the face of their coming separation. Finally Sam choked out, “I love you, Ma.”

Going up on tiptoes, Marina pressed a warm kiss to his tearing face. “I love you too, Sammy-honey. If you need anything, you call us. No matter what time it is. Promise?”

“Yes ma'am,” he agreed, squeezing her tightly once more.

Marina backed up then, wiping her eyes with the backs of her fingers. Almost immediately into her place stepped her partner, father and son embracing fiercely. “I'm gonna miss you, Dad.”

“We'll miss you too, Sammichka.” There was a small pause, before Will gripped the sides of his son's face and forced him to look into his eyes squarely. “You ever need to come home, you don't need an invitation. The door is always open to you.”

“Copy that,” Sam choked out, dropping his forehead against Will's own for a long moment before they both stepped back at the same time.

Marta lunged forward next, wrapping her arms tightly around her nephew. Whatever the two said between them was private, the entire exchange in Quebecois. Determined to keep it that way, the Brothers Grimm each decided to forget Quebecois was one of the many dialects Will was fluent in. Once Marta went up on tiptoe to kiss his cheek, Aaron stepped forward to offer his hand. Sam grinned at his uncle, the two dragging each other into a back-slapping embrace. “Thank you, Aaron... for everything.”

“You're welcome,” the blue eyed Grimm promised with a laugh, ruffling sunny hair with a smirk. “You're gonna be one of my groomsmen, right?”

“Wild horses couldn't keep me away,” the blond laughed with a bright grin. “Just let me know when and where. I'll be there with bells on.”

“Good.”

Vincent all but attacked his best friend, roaring playfully as he scooped Sam up into a bear hug which lifted the smaller man clear off his feet. Sam laughed outright, eyes alight as he smacked playfully at the emergency doctor's shoulders. “Put me down, Vince!”

Dropping him onto his feet, Vincent grabbed his shoulders firmly. “Keep in touch, okay?”

“I'll be around.” Twisting slightly, Sam teased Catherine as she joined them, “Do me a favor. Keep an eye on this guy, huh? Let me know if I need to come riding to his rescue.”

Vincent huffed as he insisted, “I'm not a damsel in distress.”

The pretty detective ignored her boyfriend as she joked with the blond, “If anyone is riding to the princess' rescue, it'll be me.”

Sam burst into laughter at the betrayed look splashed across Vincent's face in response to that. Jaw dropping for a moment, he protested loudly, “Traitor!”
Grinning at him, she hip-checked Sam quickly, before moving off towards their rental car. “Hurry up, Vincent . . . I am not paying for another day on this hunk of junk.”

The two men stood there watching her go, before the SRU officer announced, “Hold on to her, Vince . . . she's a keeper.”

A warm but small smile curved Vincent's lips upwards as he promised, “Don't I know it.” Blinking sharply, he turned to face his best friend again. “Take care of yourself, Sam. We'll see you soon.”

“Sounds like a plan,” Sam promised, the two men exchanging another hard hug before Vincent dashed off after his girlfriend.

Rene all but attacked his brother, leaping upwards to wrap his arms around his neck as the preteen buried his nose in the crook of Sam's neck. ‘I'm gonna miss you.”

“I'll miss you too, squirt. Look after Ma and Dad for me, okay? They've got the world on their shoulders. So be good.”

“I will. I promise,” the eleven year old swore, looking up at his new brother with hero worship in his eyes.

“Good kid.” Nudging him lightly towards the car, Sam insisted, “Go on . . . I think you guys are almost ready to go.”

The rest of the family's goodbyes were much more subdued, before at last Marina was in the Jeep as it backed out of the driveway. Shoving herself to standing, she could feel Will's free hand grab her hip to steady her as she leaned on the center crossbar and waved back at where Sam stood alone on the driveway. “I love you, Sammy!”

“Love you too, Ma!” he called back, his arm waving widely over his head as the Jeep moved down the street before he finally disappeared from sight as Will turned the corner towards the highway.

Plopping down in her seat, Marina sought her lover's hand, her tears blinding her as she clutched onto him tightly. “It'll be okay. We'll see him again soon . . . I promise,” the Colonel vowed, lifting her hand to his lips to press a warm kiss to the palm.

Nodding, she considered the last three weeks to that point. She'd gained not just one, but two new sons, the younger of the two curled up in the backseat and the ink not even dry yet on the paperwork. Her older son had finally found his footing at his job, and friends to share the difficulties with. Her lover was in the seat beside her, his hand warm and familiar as it folded over her knee, mercurial eyes alight with adoration as he watched her. The couple was still trying for a child, but even still, she was thrilled with the family they had built to this point.

It was a good life. A happy life. And it could only get better from here.
Chapter Notes

Merry Christmas!!!!

No real translations, but what there are, are at the end as always. This is an extra long chapter to make up to the dry spell. We have Marta and Aaron's wedding coming up next, and then we take a big jump; a year or so, I think. I hope you're ready for it!

Either way, I hope you enjoy this one. Backstory; if you've seen Flashpoint, you know what happens between Sam and Jules in the second season. If not, you're about to find out. Let me know what you think in the comments section below, they always make my life!!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
Marina's heart all but glowed with warmth as she took in the collection of women scattered around her living room. There was S.H.I.E.L.D.'s very own set of Three Musketeers; sweet but shy Marta, brash and bold Casey and brilliant if absent-minded Scarlett. Of course her beloved sisters were also in attendance; calm and steady Vika, vivacious and vicious Nika, and beautiful but lethal Natasha. Then last but not least, her best friend in the whole world, rational and practical Maria. Catherine, the newest addition to their fold, was still trying to find her place among them, but she would settle in. Everyone always did.

Though they were admittedly an odd collection of women, there were deep connections between each of them. Not the least of which, each woman's devotion to a certain family. Fortunately, while the Grimms were a small part of why they had gathered together, the true reason for their meeting was much more enjoyable.

Planning a certain wedding celebration for one Dr. Marta Ann Shearing herself.

It had been a long few weeks since they had returned home from Toronto. Almost immediately, there had been a slew of problems that cropped up as a result of the extended vacation. Marina had vowed never leave anyone in charge of the handler pool again; that mess had given her at least a dozen gray hairs. Marta and Scarlett got lost in the experiments they had put off, and Casey took up her post in R&D once more as Jason's head of security.

After what felt like a small eternity, the light at the end of the tunnel had appeared, however. Things finally began to settle. Tasks could start to be delegated to underlings. Experiments could either be left with interns or unattended entirely. And last, but not least, Jason was lost in a research project with one of his newest engineers – Marina just wanted to pinch Leo Fitz's cheeks, he was the cutest thing!! – and could be counted on not to come up for air for at least the next 24 hours.

Ergo here they were, carving out what little time they could to start planning the event. To be frank, Marina could not be any more ecstatic than if Marta was her own daughter.

The virologist had requested that neither her sister or her brother-in-law be invited to the wedding. A request that the former assassin had had no qualms about granting. If she ever saw either Braddock ever again, she'd probably shoot one or the other or both. Of course, that didn't even come close to what Will, Aaron or any of the other Grimm boys would do should they ever show their faces again.

Granted, seeing as the bride's family traditionally handled the wedding affairs, that put a bit of a twist on the plans. As the Braddocks would not be in attendance at all, the honor of hosting the wedding fell to the Grimms.

Had the Russian mentioned how excited she was about that fact?

Finally, after letting the women chat amongst themselves for awhile, Marina called the meeting to order by banging the flat of her hand against the armrest of her chair. “All right, ladies! This meeting of the Grimm Family Women is now in session!” Glancing around the packed room, she joked, “It would appear that we have increased in numbers since our last meeting.”

“Just means that the Colonel needs to buy you a bigger house,” Maria laughed with a teasing grin and a sly wink.

I have expended a lot of time and energy making this house a safe haven for my boys. My Misfits included. No way in hell is Misha allowed to uproot me from all of my hard work,” the older woman huffed, with a playful pout.

Casey snickered as she took the opportunity to tease S.H.I.E.L.D.'s Assistant Director. “I'm surprised
that Marina isn't reading you the riot act, Maria. You and Hansel eloped!?”

The Russian huffed lightly in disgruntled reminder, as the younger brunette glared at the redhead. “I had just gotten her to stop harping on this, Casey. Thank you very much.”

Hot chocolate eyes narrowed at her best friend lightly. “You're just lucky I was there. Or I would have never let you live this down.”

“It was a firefight, Marina . . . of course you were there. Who else was going to be watching my six?”

“Wait . . . you got married during a firefight?” Scarlett asked incredulously, eyebrows up in disbelief.

“Only Maria,” the Russian sighed with a roll of her eyes. “Fury officiated. It was all very 'Pirates of the Caribbean’.”

“Why was there a firefight?” Catherine inquired curiously.

“Let's just say, we were at a summit in Prague. And Fury was having all kinds of fun kicking ass – apparently, he doesn't get to do that anymore. And Hansel was like . . .” here Marina dropped her tone an octave, imitating her foster father's German accent as closely as she could manage, 'Meine Spatzi, let us exchange vows'. And Maria was all . . .” the sound of Marina's natural tenor morphing into a high soprano singsong earned a peal of giggles from around the room as she all but trilled, “'Oh Hans! I thought you would never ask!'”

Maria chucked a handful of popcorn at her best friend as she protested, “I do NOT sound like that.”

“Ah ha! But you don't deny that that's what you said!” Marina laughed, pointing a finger at her as she caught Maria gleefully in her trap.

Momentary stumped, the AD paused to consider where she'd gotten tricked and then slumped in resignation. “You suck.”

“I love you too, Vorobey,” she teased, leaning over to pat the younger woman's shoulder fondly.

Nika bit down on a celery stick, munching thoughtfully as she mused, “I'm not sure which part surprises me more about this. That Director Badass Coat can officiate weddings. Or that he DID.”

“Let's go with both and call it even,” Vika replied with a grin, digging a legal pad from the bag at her feet and pulling her pen from the pocket of her sharp Oxford.

“Which reminds me,” Marina interrupted, leaning forward in her chair to fix Marta with a level stare. “If you and Aaron elope, Marta, I will be personally affronted and utterly devastated. I may never recover. So do us all a favor and don’t.”

The virologist smiled shyly as she promised, “Aaron's pretty adamant about making this wedding a big deal. So I think we'll be good.”

“Excellent!” she cheered, bouncing cheerfully in her seat as she clapped her hands like a giddy schoolgirl. “All right then, first things first. We need a date!”

Marta blushed lightly as Nika drawled, “How about the Longest Night? There'll be plenty of rack time to be had then.”

“Nika!” was the squealed protest, as the pretty young woman flamed in mortified embarrassment.
“It's just a suggestion,” the black-haired Russian teased, with a broad wink and a swaggering sip of her vodka.

The heat in Marta's glare was miles below the heat in her blush, and caused the entire room to giggle at her expense. When at last everything settled down once more, the scientist straightened her shoulders and looked at Marina head on. “To be honest, I don't care when it is. I just want it to be in Toronto.”

“Toronto?” Casey asked in surprise, staring at her best friend with wide eyes.

“Aaron really wants Sam as a groomsman. If the wedding is in Toronto, even if he has a shift, we can work around it.”

“I can work with Toronto. We will need to plan another trip up there to check out churches, venues and what have you. Preferably soon . . . we do need to have some kind of a timetable.”

Whatever Marta was about to say in response was interrupted by a sharp knock on the front door of the house. Frowning, the Family Russian looked around as she took in the fact that everyone was accounted for. “Are we expecting anyone?”

“No one here for us. Could it be the boys?”

“Why would my boys knock? This is their house!” Marina questioned, tossing her clipboard onto the side table.

Getting up from her chair, she frowned as she threaded her way through the room. Her frown deepened at the familiar, though shadowy, silhouette she could see through the small window in the front door. Almost without thinking about it, she came to a stop just outside of Sam's awareness, taking in the unexpected sight of her son.

Whatever had happened, he was hurting. Even from where she stood, Marina could make out the veiny redness of his eyes, a clear indication that he had recently been crying. His cheeks were blotchy with color, as though he'd scrubbed hard at his face to rid all traces of tears. His hair was disheveled and windblown, more than likely a result of him riding his motorcycle all the way from Toronto without a helmet. (When she got to the bottom of the problem, they would be having a long and unpleasant conversation about that little detail.)

Still, he looked serious and calm. There was no sign of whatever turmoil had created the little tells earmarking his distress. As a result, as much as she hated not hunting down whomever had harmed her child, she resigned herself to pretending as though everything was all right. Taking a deep breath to calm her nerves, she strode forward and pulled open the door briskly.

Clearly her acting skills were better than she had thought, as Sam barely flinched when she cheered, “Sammy! What a pleasant surprise!”

“Hey Ma,” he greeted, coming forward to wrap his arms around her waist.

Though Marina noticed that he lingered within the confines of her embrace a little longer than usual, she refused to mention it. Calm and steady would be the best play here; until he told her otherwise, she would continue to pretend as though nothing was wrong. First things first though . . .

Narrowing her eyes, she scanned her attention up and down his frame. Though he was still thinner than her Russian heart would like, it did appear as though he had put on some weight. The last of the bruising that had stubbornly clung to his face had cleared and those beautiful blue eyes were liquid as they watched her scan him. “You break my Russian heart, Sammy . . . come into the kitchen. I'm
sure I have some leftovers I can heat up for you to eat.”

“It's all right Ma.”

“You always say that . . . and when was the last time I listened to you?” she asked, prodding him towards the kitchen. “March, kiddo.”

Grinning at her tiredly, he agreed, “Yes ma'am.”

Before long, she had fixed him a plate of pierogi and stroganoff, with a bottle of beer at his left. His smile was small and sad as he mumbled his thanks, before tucking into the meal halfheartedly . . . a reaction which, she was pleased to note, didn't last long past the first bite. If there was one thing she could count on, it was her boy's love for her cooking.

Reaching out, she laid a hand over the one he'd left on the table. “Sammy-honey, you know I'm happy to see you.”

The slight clenching of his fingers on his fork was impossible to miss, as was the slight twitch at the corner of his eye. “Dad said the house was always open if I wanted to come home.”

“And it is . . . that is never in question,” she promised, reaching out to thread her fingers through his hair fondly. “But I am curious as to why you're here.”

“I just wanted to come see you.”

“You had a shift today, Sammichka . . . and you have one tomorrow too. You just going to skip it?”

“I took some emergency time off. Teammates aren't supposed to date; it's against the rules. I just . . . I needed some time.”

Marina flinched backwards in shock, causing a broad wince to slide across her eldest's face. Seeing the apprehension there, she smoothed her features once again. “I didn't know you were seeing anyone. Is it serious? When do I get to meet her?”

The single shrug held a mountain's worth of pain as he replied meekly, “I thought it was. And you already did meet her, Ma.”

Hot chocolate eyes narrowed slightly at the past tense. “Who was it, Sammy?”

For a long time, she was worried he wasn't going to answer her. He picked at his dinner, taking bites to avoid the question for as long as he could. It wasn't until he was chasing the last meatball around the plate that she heard him whisper, “Jules.”

Swallowing hard, he forced out, “She left me. I was there for her, when she got shot . . . I helped her PT . . . I helped her re-qualify for Team One. And last night, she told me she loved me . . . but that I wasn't going to stand in the way of her job. That if I wanted to be with her, only one of us had to transfer teams.” The smile was self-deprecating as he looked up at her, “It was pretty well implied that if someone did transfer out, it wasn't going to be her.”

To say that Marina was livid was probably an understatement. However, her son was in pain; he clearly still had feelings for his teammate regardless of how things had ended. So while she wanted to plot out a very bloody death for the diminutive SRU constable, Marina resigned herself to simply ranting about it to her lover as soon as her Misha returned home.

Her fingers were trembling as she stroked her fingers over the back of his hand. “I'm sorry, baby.”
Sam forced a small smile as he looked up at her. “It's not anyone's fault but mine. I knew the rules, and if it wasn't for the team I could have done it . . . but I just . . . with you and Dad and Aunt Marty and Uncle Aaron so far away . . . I can't give up the team. Spike and Lou . . . they're my best friends. Some days they're the only things that keep me from going crazy from loneliness. I can't give that up.”

Rage soared in Marina's heart, and she struggled to keep the reaction from showing on her face. She would bet every diamond her partner had ever given her, Jules knew that. Had known that Sam wouldn't be able to give up the team. And had intentionally hurt him further by announcing her love for him within the same breath she had told him he was going to need to find companionship elsewhere.

Pulling Sammy to her, she pressed a warm kiss to his forehead. “I'm sure it's not really your thing, but I have some ice cream in the freezer. I can send the girls home, and we can watch a movie until Misha and Rene get home. Just the two of us.”

Biting down on his lower lip meekly, he asked timidly, “You don't mind?”

“Absolutely not,” she promised, standing from her chair. “Let me send the girls home while you get out the ice cream. Your pick . . . as long as it's explosion heavy and there are NO special agents. I get enough of that crazy at work; I'll literally spend the whole movie picking the stupid agents apart.”

This time Sam's grin wavered just that little bit closer to real, as he chuckled, “Whatever you say, Ma.”

“Damn right,” she agreed, ruffling his hair before moving out of the kitchen. If she heard the soft sob Sam let out just before she left earshot . . . at least she tried to pretend as though she didn't notice.

Several hours later, Will arrived home from work, a chatty Rene in his wake. Marina twisted slightly so she could watch them come into the house, trying not to move too much and dislodge Sam where he slept with his head in her lap. “Rene, Chado . . . I need you to lower your voice a little bit.”

Her lover's eyebrows furrowed as he came further into the room, his face clearing in understanding once he had rounded the couch and took in the pale features of his older son. “Oh Sammy,” he murmured, dropping into a crouch. Looking up at his partner, the analyst inquired quietly, “What happened?”

“I'll tell you in a little bit. Can you help me get out from under him? I don't want to wake him; those bags under his eyes are damned impressive.”

One corner of the man's lips twitched upwards as he reached out to help. Between the two of them, they managed to rearrange their son just enough that the Russian could slide free. Will worked on removing his boots, while Marina ran for a blanket in the linen closet. At last the two stood in the entrance to the living room, watching their son sleep. With his arms looped over her shoulders, it was impossible to miss the way his beloved Marishka was trembling, her muscles quivering under her skin with unmistakable rage. Pulling her that small inch closer, the Colonel pressed a warm kiss to her temple, murmuring against the skin, “Not that I'm not happy to see him, but do I want to know what brought our son home, unexpected and unannounced?”

Marina sucked in a long breath through her nose, a gesture Will recognized as a calming technique the handler only used if she was trying not to kill someone. Turning to look to where her eleven year old lurked in the doorway, she ordered firmly, “Homework, Rene . . . now.”

“But Ma! It's Sam!”
Narrowing her eyes, she pointed towards the stairwell imperiously, “Now, Enjolras Rene . . . Sam is going to be home for a few days. You'll have plenty of time to see each other.”

Seeing that the boy was still uncertain, Will chimed in, “The sooner you get your homework done, the more time you'll have to spend with your brother once he wakes up.”

Biting down on his lower lip, Rene considered that statement, before nodding sharply once. “Okay, Dad!” Rotating on his heel, the kid scooped up his backpack as he dashed for the stairwell, taking them two and three at a time.

Once he was gone, Will stepped away. He offered his lover a hand, insisting, “My office? Or the bedroom?”

“Bedroom . . . I'm probably going to throw something. And my pillows are a lot less likely to break than anything in your office.”

One eyebrow canted upwards as he sighed reluctantly, “That bad, huh?”

A heavy sigh dragged itself from the Russian, mosaic opal gleaming through brown strands as Marina shoved her fingers back through her hair. “Worse. He's hurting, Misha . . . he's hurting and for once there is not a single thing I can do about it.”

Glancing at the sleeping blond, Will could feel the way his lips dragged downwards. Taking Marina's hand, he insisted, “Bedroom . . . I need to know what's going on.”

“You don't need to know, you just want to know,” she chuckled, a small, sad smirk on her lips as she teased her lover for his incessant need to know everything.

Lifting her palm to his lips, he pressed a warm kiss to her skin. “Zhemchuzhina, I already know you want to rant to me about this. I also know you don't want to wake Sammy while you're screaming.”

“I cannot handle your typical rationality at this moment, Misha. I cannot be rational right now.”

Tugging her into their bedroom with him, the Colonel closed the door as he agreed fondly, “I understand. I'll let you rant, and I won't even try to calm you down.”

There was relief and fond amusement in the Russian's smile as she breathed, “You are a good man, and I love you.”

Strong warm hands cupped her cheeks as he lifted her face for his kiss. “I love you too, samaya malen'kaya.” They kissed for a long moment, before at last Will broke away and went to sit on the edge of the bed. Shucking his uniform jacket, he tossed it onto the pillows behind him and leaned back on his hands, watching her with stormy hazel eyes. “All right . . . what happened?”

“Sam was dating Jules . . . and she left him.” Her face twisted with fury as she all but screamed, “She told him she loved him with one breath and left him in the next. That suka!”

Frowning, Will protested, “I didn't even know he was seeing anyone. What did that happen?”

“Apparently they were keeping it a secret. From what he told me, members of the team cannot be involved romantically. There are protocols against it, so they didn't tell anyone.” Unable to stand still, she began to pace as she ranted, “Jules got shot and Sam thought it was his fault, because he had the shield . . . he didn't protect her. Nevermind the fact that he was doing his job and that he can't be everywhere at once.” Muttering to herself for a moment, she rotated on her heel and paced back the other way before continuing, “He helped her rehab, he helped her re-qualify, he was there for her
during her recovery. And when it was time for her to come back to the team, she gave him a choice. He could have her or he could have the team, but he couldn't have both. She wasn't, and I quote, 'going to let anyone get in the way of her coming back to the team'."

The Colonel sighed heavily, “Meaning she wasn't going to let Sam get in her way of coming back to the team.”

“I'm going to rip her heart out with my bare hands!” Marina screeched, rounding on her lover furiously.

“No you're not,” was the calm rebuttal. “And more importantly, you already know you're not.”

“Misha! You promised you weren't going to be rational right now!” the woman protested on a petulant whine, offering him a disappointed pout.

“I know, and I am sorry. But Marishka . . . Sammichka clearly still cares about Jules. You know that and I know that, just from the pain on his face while he was sleeping. Ergo, you already know that anything you do to Jules is only going to hurt Sam more than he already is.”

Huffing at him, she spun sharply on her heels as she continued to storm around the room. “Just because I know I'm not going to kill her, doesn't mean I'm not going to take immense pleasure in planning to kill her.”

“You wouldn't be my Viper if you didn't,” he agreed with a fond grin. He reached for her hand, using it pull her onto the bed next to him and into his arms. “I love the way you protect our sons, Marina, but you gotta let Sammy handle this one on his own this time. You can't be his mom, rushing in to save him and fix the problem, okay?”

“But I am his mom. And I just want to protect him from this,” the former assassin protested, burying her face in the curvature of his throat, free hand coming up to grip the collar of his shirt.

“I know. And we'll do the best we can to help him heal and recover. But you can't fix this . . . nothing can fix this. The pain has to run its course or he'll never get over it.”

Marina moaned, burying herself deeper into him. “My poor Sammy . . . my poor darling boy.”

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It was more than a week later that Sam was back in Toronto. Both Marina and Marta had insisted on going back with him; they had appointments with several different venues for Marta's wedding. Though Marina hadn't explicitly told Sam what she had relayed to his aunt, the young man knew that his sweet and loving Aunt Marty was furious with one Jules Callaghan.

The two women lingered in the doorway as Sam moved to Spike and Lou at Winnie's desk. “Sup guys!”

“Samtastic!” Spike cheered, the three slapping backs as they exchanged a round of hugs. “Dude, you look good. You been eating or something?”

“Dude, I just spent a week at my parents'. Have you ever known my mom not to stuff me with food when I'm at home?”

“Good point,” Lou laughed, the two best friends grinning at each other. Both men were well acquainted with Marina Petrovka's near constant desire to feed her oldest son.
Before long, the rest of his team – including Jules' temporary replacement Donna Sabine – had joined them at the dispatcher's desk. Parker had brought Timmy's coffee and was currently passing them around the group. The reappearance of the blond constable clearly didn't surprise the sergeant, as he only offered Sam an Iced Cap with a small smile. “How was your soul searching, Sam?”

Donna's reply was snide as she chimed in, “Yeah . . . did you find one?”

Marina's temper, already short at the prospect of seeing Jules, flared sharply as she snarled, “Well, she's a charmer.”

Sam sighed as he twisted to smirk at his adoptive mother, scolding fondly, “Ma.”

“What!? It was just an observation, right Marta?”

The virologist was all but glaring at the woman, arms folded across her chest as she agreed, “Marina is not wrong, Sam.”

Meanwhile Spike had whirled to hear Marina's voice, a wide grin on his face as he cheered, “Samtastic's Mama!” All but skipping to hug her, he begged, “Please say you're going to feed us?”

Rolling her eyes in fond exasperation, Marina dug in her backpack for a large dish. “You're lucky I like you,” she joked as she offered it to Spike.

Peeling off the lid, the bomb tech cheered at the sight of still warm cinnamon rolls. “You're amazing!” Spike cheered, bending to press a warm kiss to her cheek as he dashed back to the desk.

“Damn right I am,” she agreed, her whole demeanor going cold as Jules suddenly appeared through the door. Glancing at Marta, she caught sight of the pleading look on Sam's face and resolved to remove herself from the situation so as not to say something that would hurt her son further.

Jules, however, froze like a deer in headlights at the sight of the two women in Sam's life who were the most protective of him. Going up on tiptoes, Marina pressed a warm kiss to her son's cheek, insisting, “Love you, Sammy. Be safe today.”

Turning on her heel, she moved towards the door. Pausing next to Jules, she leaned sideways slightly so as to make herself heard. “I know what you did. I know what choice you forced him to make. And I can promise you, Julianna Callaghan . . . you hurt my son again?” There was a long pregnant pause as horrified mahogany eyes stared into boiling hot chocolate ones. Finally, Marina cracked a brittle smile as she promised, “Let's just say, this is your only warning. I hope we understand each other.”

“We do.”

“Good. Then I would suggest you tread lightly.” Raising her voice slightly so that the others could hear her, she chirped cheerfully, “Have a good day, Jules. Congratulations on making it back.”

Chapter End Notes

Translations:

(G) Meine Spatzi - my sparrow (Hansel's nickname for his fiancée, Maria Hill)
(R) Vorobey - sparrow (Marina's nickname for her best friend, Maria Hill)
(R) Sammichka - a Russian diminutive of Samuel
(R) Chado - child (Marina's nickname for her youngest son, Rene)
(R) Zhemchuzhina - pearl (one of Will's lesser used nicknames for his longtime partner, Marina Petrovka)
(R) samaya malen'kaya - my little one (Will's most common nickname for his longtime partner, Marina Petrovka)
(R) suka - bitch
Happy New Year! I hope this beginning brings you joy and happiness!

No translations this time. But . . .

Will & Marina request the pleasure of your company as they joyfully celebrate the marriage of their brother, Aaron Grimm, to Marta Ann Shearing.

Here . . . there be shenanigans. Next chapter is the ceremony and reception, this is just the lead up to the big day! Enjoy!!!!!
had paid a handsome sum to be able to secure the entire park for the event. Regrettably Sam had an early morning shift, but – barring any last minute or lengthy hot calls – his shift would be over by about four in the afternoon.

Aaron had insisted Marina take the role of “Mother of the Groom,” despite Marta desperately wanting her for a bridesmaid. As a result, in the interest of keeping the lines even, Aaron had given up having his eldest brother as a groomsmen. The former Outcome operative contented himself with knowing the Colonel would be just as happy seated next to his Russian as he would be standing up with him.

Currently, the two senior officers in the family were taking care of all the last minute details, while Aaron was in the dressing room with the rest of his groomsmen. At least, he was there physically; mentally he was a million miles away. Clint’s smacking at his hands as he fidgeted with his tie brought him back to the Land of the Living. “Thinking deep thoughts there, Kenny.”

Unable to stop the smile, Aaron asked, “Are you ever going to call me 'Aaron'? Kenny's been gone for a long time.”

“Says you . . . but as much as you've changed, big brother, Kenny is still a large part of who you are. So no . . . you will always be 'Kenny' to me,” Clint insisted with a grin and a wink.

Jason chuckled as he worked on his own tie. “Guys . . . we have 45 minutes to start. How about we worry about where Sam might be? Isn't Natalie already here?”

Aaron shook his head as Clint fussed at him, reminding his older brother calmly, “Team One was on shift this morning. We knew it was going to be tight; that's why Marta wanted it in Toronto. So he could be here.”

“Besides, the wedding doesn't start until the bride says so. And I doubt she's gonna say so without her favorite nephew.”

“Sam is her only nephew,” Aaron laughed.

Jason rolled his eyes, even as he agreed with a sly grin. “Because that matters. Technically, Marina only has two sons.”

Meanwhile, Marina was standing in the foyer of the church, greeting the guests and keeping an eye out for the still missing Sam. Her longtime friend, Denise Perron, arrived then on her beloved Davey’s arm, prompting delighted squeals from both women. The two lunged at each other, hugging tightly as they chattered simultaneously to each other. “I will never not be jealous! Marina, look at you! I was convinced that color could only be found in Army uniforms. Yet here you are, looking ravishing in a dress of Army green mesh and lace!” Denise exclaimed, pushing her friend back a step. “Must be why you're always such a knockout in your uniform.”

The Russian smiled, fingering the almost Army-drab of her knee length dress, the embroidery and beading on the lace bodice and ¾ sleeves twinkling in the meager lighting of the church. “This is unsurprisingly Aaron's favorite color. It looks good next to Misha's dress greens, too, so bonus!”

“You two are always such a striking couple,” Dave agreed, leaning forward to exchange a warm kiss on the cheek with the junior officer. “Where is Will, anyway?”

“Problem with the caterers. We've learned things get done much faster if Misha glares at people, so he's being very . . .” here she paused, trying to decide on an accurate descriptor, before giving it up for a lost cause. “He's being very encouraging right now.”
Dave's chuckle was knowing as he agreed, “I'll bet.”

Marina grinned as she returned her attention to Denise, spinning the woman in a tight circle. “As for gorgeous women, look at you! You look fantastic!”

“I look gray, you mean,” the general's wife snarked with a roll of her pretty eyes.

Marina was peripherally aware of the door of the church opening behind them as she scolded, “And who said gray can't look fantastic?”

“Oh Marishka . . . you flatter an old woman's soul,” the other woman laughed, squeezing her arm fondly.

Movement in the corner of her eyes drew the Russian's attention and she turned to see Sam quietly standing with his team, obviously waiting for her attention. “Sammy-honey! Thank God! You're here!” she cheered, rushing forward to throw her arms around him. Drawing back to get a better look at him, she frowned at the line of bruises running down his cheek, her fingers reverent and whisper soft as they brushed over the injury. “What happened!?”

“Took a Glock to the face. I'm okay.”

“I don't think the pictures will agree,” she huffed, narrowing her eyes at him again. Knowing what she was seeing, he gave her a sheepish smile as he scrubbed self-consciously at the back of his neck. Rolling her eyes, she scolded fondly, “How are you still so thin? You break my Russian heart, malysh, truly. Eat more . . . please. For my sake, if not for your own.”

Denise chuckled as she teased. “Ahh . . . the famous Sammy. Hello again. How do you like being a Grimm, Sam?”

The sniper turned rosy as he cuddled into his Ma, letting her fuss at the bruises on his face. Eery blue eyes were gleaming as he gave Denise a small, pleased smile. “I have no complaints.”

“Good to hear,” Dave laughed, glancing at his wife out of the corner of his eyes. There was a matchmaking gleam in her eyes as Denise questioned, “Are you single, Sam? I still find it hard to believe, but again . . . stranger things.”

Sam's pause was momentary, but it still earned a narrow-eyed look from Marina, her head tilting as she took in the flashfire glance toward his left where a Julianna Callaghan stood fidgeting uncomfortably. Marina's jaw clenched slightly as she fought to rein in her temper. Sam had fallen hard for the young woman only to be left for a cold and thankless job. The Russian tossed her head slightly, refusing to focus on her anger for too long. There were already too many things which could go wrong that day and this did not need to be one of them.

She tuned back into the conversation in time to hear Sam's cautious reply of, “Yes, ma'am.”

“Fabulous!” Denise cheered. “My granddaughter Kaia had to come alone. I hope you won't mind escorting her? You'd be doing me a big favor.”

Marina smirked at the name. Kaia Perron was career military, a first rate nurse . . . and happily committed to her girlfriend Talia. Stepping forward before Sam could gracefully decline, she agreed, “I'm sure he'd be happy to, Denise.” Turning to Sam, she cocked an eyebrow, “Wouldn't you, Sammichka?”

Sam's eyes narrowed slightly as he took in the mischievousness in his adoptive mother's eyes. She was definitely up to something, but whatever it was, the sniper knew she would never intentionally
hurt him. Shrugging slightly, he turned back to Denise and agreed, “Sure. Sounds great.”

“Thank you, Sam . . . you cannot imagine how relieved I am,” Denise sighed, twisting slightly to covertly wink at her friend. Marina’s grin grew a small inch more as she allowed an all but unnoticeable shrug in reply.

“No problem,” the young man agreed, gesturing toward the collection of people who stood at his back. “Do you mind if the team stays, Ma? We just left a hot call and it was faster to come straight here than back to the Barn.”

“Of course not, Sammy-honey. There are portable showers set up behind the conservatory, if you all would like to change.”

Dave spoke up then, a frown on his face. “Sam, I meant to ask you before. Are you any relation to Gregory Braddock?”

Sam paled at the question, glancing toward Marina, before nodding gamely. “He's my biological father, Sir. He went by Sir at home, though.”

Dave frowned, insisting, “I am off the clock, so I would prefer just Dave.” The soft growling in the back of Marina’s throat caught his attention and Dave cocked an eyebrow. “Marishka? Am I missing something?”

The effort to remain calm was clearly written across Marina’s face. Hearing her son claim Gregory Braddock as his biological father had enraged her, seeing as she, Marta and Will were the only ones who knew this was not the case. Will had been searching for Sam's true biological parents without much success. Until they had results, however, Marta had begged her nephew's adoptive parents not to tell Sam; there was no need to hurt him if they didn't have to.

Shaking her head to clear her thoughts, Marina took a deep breath and rounded on her son. “You need to go get changed . . . your aunt is freaking out. I had your uniform dry-cleaned for you; it's hanging up in the dressing room.”

Sagging in relief, the blond nodded in silent agreement. Leaning forward, he sketched a quick kiss across her cheek. “You look great, Ma.”

Giving him a genuine grin, she patted his cheek fondly. “Thank you, Sammy-honey. I'll go let your aunt know you're here.”

Nodding again, he bolted off towards the groom's dressing room. Marina plastered her “Agent Petrovka” grin on her face and turned back. “Go ahead and take seats. I have to reassure the bride.” With that she twirled on her heel and moved to check on Marta and her bridesmaids.

Denise looked up at her husband, cocking an eyebrow in question. “Do you know something I don’t?”

“If I do, it is as much of a mystery to me as it is to you.”

Rounding away from her husband, Denise demanded, “Where's the Colonel? Will can always be counted on to tell me what's wrong with his partner.”

“Will is glaring at caterers, remember? If we need to know, they will tell us. And whatever else happens, Marina is not going to let anything ruin her boy's wedding.” Offering his wife a formal bow and a hand, he inquired, “May I escort you to our seats, darling?”
“My hero,” she laughed, accepting his hand with an unsteady curtsy. Glancing at Team One, she insisted, “You'll probably want to get showered and changed quickly. We are all very late.”

Knocking on the door of the Bride's Room, Marina cracked open the door an inch as she called tentatively, “Marta? It's Marina.”

Almost immediately, the virologist was there to fling the door open. “What's wrong!? What happened!?” There was a moment's pause, before she grabbed Marina's mesh covered arms and shook her once, “Who DIED!!?”

Chuckling, as the remaining tension in her muscles fled, the Russian promised, “No one died. Sam is here at last. He's in with Aaron and the other boys getting dressed.” Placing her hands on Marta's shoulders, she insisted, “Relax, malyutka. Everything is just fine. And anything that's not, Misha and I will take care of it.”

Casey Shraeger, Marta's Maid of Honor and Jason Grimm's girlfriend, smiled as she came over to wrap an arm around Marta's shoulders. “I've been telling her that for hours.”

Natalie Braddock, Sam's baby sister and Marta's niece, snickered lightly. “Aunt Marta has always been prone to anxiety.”

Scarlett Doyle, newly married and uncomfortably pregnant, huffed as she scolded the younger woman. “Be nice, Natalie. This is the biggest day of her life. She's allowed to be worried.”

Looking between the four women, Marina couldn't help but smile. It had been a shock to everyone when the fiery, badass detective and the shy, unassuming virologist had emerged from a “Girls' Night In” as best friends. They should have had nothing in common . . . except for the worry which stemmed from being the girlfriend of a Grimm. Apparently, this single commonality had been enough for the both of them and the two had been as thick as thieves ever since.

As for Scarlett, she had had a rocky start of it after her rescue during the “zombie apocalypse” in Georgia. Her boyfriend – Will's newly found brother and Hansel's oldest natural-born son, James Doyle – had been ecstatic to see her and the two had attempted to promptly pick up where London had cut them off. However, ten years apart changes people, especially considering the circumstances of their separation, and both had struggled to really come back to each other.

In the meantime, both Marta and Scarlett became good friends. They were both well respected scientists in approximately the same field, in addition to sharing lab space at S.H.I.E.L.D. Over time, the two women had grown very close to one another. It wasn't uncommon for Scarlett and Casey to gang up on the quieter of their trio and drag her out for a night on the town, just because they could. The relationship was clearly good for all of them, offering support and two steady shoulders to worry on when their respective boyfriends were out on mission and putting their lives at risk.

When Scarlett and Doyle had gotten pregnant, the scientist had panicked; she didn't want to trap Doyle into something he didn't want, despite all his protests to the contrary. After three months of her prevaricating, Casey and Marta had finally managed screwed their friend's head on straight and Scarlett had accepted her boyfriend's proposal.

As fond of both women as she was, Scarlett had been genuinely distraught at the prospect of choosing between them for her Maid of Honor. The two women had solved the problem for her, insisting on splitting the responsibility between them as Scarlett's bridesmaids instead. Casey had planned the bachelorette party and Marta had been the one to go to all dress fittings and cake tastings. The arrangement had worked out for everyone.
The only reason they had not gone with the same arrangement for Marta's wedding was due to Scarlett's physical condition. Five months pregnant with rambunctious and mobile triplets, the scientist was uncomfortable on her feet and even sitting was a thoroughly miserable alternative. As a result, they'd agree to let Casey take the lion's share of the wedding responsibilities to be able to take the load off the older woman, while Scarlett contented herself with being a very supportive bridesmaid.

And then there was Natalie. Marta's niece was not a bad person, but it was not hard to understand why Sam could get so frustrated with his sister's self-centered behavior at times. She'd pitched a fit at the understated, though elegant, bridesmaid's dress Marta had decided on, insisting the dark azure blue and the cut of the dress, with its scoop-neck, cap-sleeves and knee-length, were not flattering with her figure or her coloring. It had taken the combined threesome of Marta's tears, Casey's fury and Scarlett's calm to convince the general's daughter to put aside her own prejudices for her aunt's sake. Granted, she had felt bad for making her aunt cry and had done her level best thereafter to be agreeable to everything, but still . . .

She would take some getting used to, as she was nothing like her more biddable and complacent older brother. At the very least, Marina could see herself liking the girl with a little more exposure to her.

Checking her watch, the Russian squeaked at the time displayed there. “Oh shit! We're late! I'm going to go check on the boys. Is everyone all set to go here?”

Marta's eyes were glowing as she nodded firmly, “I'm ready.”

“All right then . . . let me kick the boys into gear and we'll get this show on the road.”

Nodding in agreement, the younger woman accepted the Russian's warm hug gratefully, whispering, “Thank you so much.”

“You're welcome, Marta . . . you make my boy very happy and that makes me very happy,” Marina insisted, giving her another quick squeeze. “All right, we'll be back to get you soon.”

Outside the door, the Russian caught sight of Brian ushering people to their seats and reached out to grab him. “Bri, when you're done, I need you to meet me at the Groom's Room. Sam's got a nasty bruise on his face and I need you to cover it up for me.”

“Why me?”

“Are you or are you not the one who went undercover as a makeup artist on an assignment, and actually ended up being good at it?” was the rhetorical question, earning a wretched groan from the second eldest Grimm.

Cocking an eyebrow at her, he begged plaintively, “Is anyone ever going to let me live that down?”

“I wouldn't hold your breath too long. Hurry up . . . we're already late and I really would like pretty pictures during the ceremony,” she insisted, moving towards the Groom's Room quickly.

Knocking on the door, she called, “Aaron, it's Marina. Is everyone decent? Can I come in?”

The answer came immediately, as Jason swung open the door and gestured her inside. “What's up, Marishka? Everything okay?”

“Everything is fine . . . we're running a little behind, but it's no one's fault.”
Sam's tone was dark from behind the changing screen as he grunted, “Except mine.”

“Sam . . . we knew starting on time wasn't going to happen because of your shift this morning. I'm just glad you were able to make it reasonably on time. Brian's coming in a minute to see what he can do about covering the bruises on your face. I really would like pretty pictures, and I'm sure Marta would too.”

Aaron's smile was small but adoring as he crossed the room to take his sister's upper arms his palms lightly. “Have I told you thank you for this yet?”

Marina grinned, lifting her own hands to fuss helplessly with his uniform tie. “You have . . . at least a million times. Seriously, it's my honor and my pleasure. I like Marta . . . you couldn't have chosen anyone more perfect for you, solnyshko. No way I wasn't going to make this day perfect for you both.”

Pulling her into a fierce hug, the two stood together for a long moment. Finally, Marina pushed a step back as she laughed tearfully. “Nika is going to kill me! This mascara isn't waterproof.”

“You look amazing, Marishka,” Clint grinned, coming to join his brothers.

Sam emerged from behind the curtain then and before long, she was surrounded by all four of them. The sight of them, each of them smiling and happy, caused her eyes to well up again. “Look at you all . . . my boys, so handsome in their uniforms.” Reaching up to wipe helplessly at her eyes, she scolded, “I said I wasn't going to get all blubbery today.”

“I think we'll forgive you for getting a little emotional,” Jason teased, bending to press a warm kiss to her cheek before he moved to answer the next knock at the door.

The two remaining Brothers Grimm stood there, an adoring smile on Will's face at the sight of his teary-eyed partner. “Samaya malen'kaya . . . the ceremony hasn't even started yet,” he teased, coming to gather her into his arms.

Slapping at his chest halfheartedly, the S.H.I.E.L.D. handler scolded, “Hush you . . . it's a big day. I am allowed to cry.”Sniffling hard, she continued, “Everything okay with the caterers?”

Pressing a warm kiss to her hair, he agreed, “Everything is all set. At this point, we're just waiting on the bridal party.” Pointing his thumb over his shoulder, he questioned playfully, "Which I think is why Brian is here?"

Glaring at his older brother at the teasing jab, Brian gripped Sam's shoulder lightly and pushed him inexorably downwards into a chair. Tilting his face upwards into the light, the agent grumbled under his breath as he dug into the make up kit he'd borrowed from Natalie and set to work covering up the bruise on the young blond's face. Smirking, Will continued, “All right. When you're ready, just come line up at the altar. Marina and I are going to go find our seats.” Reaching out, the Colonel pulled the grinning groom into his arms for a warm hug, whispering into his ear, “I am so proud of you, little brother.”

“Thanks, Will,” Aaron murmured, ducking his head into the older brother's uniform for a moment before straightening up again.

The two stood together for another moment, before the elder took a step back and interlaced his fingers with his Russian's once again. “We'll see you out there.”

Before long, the two settled into the family pew at the front of the church, 11 year old Rene tucked against Marina's opposite side as he watched the venue fill with people while he waited for the
wedding to start. Aaron had asked him to be the ring bearer and the boy was so excited he could barely sit still. Will sat in the aisle seat, one arm draped over the back of Marina's seat, as Marina turned to engage her three sisters into an excited conversation about Vika's upcoming due date over their son's head. The “graduation ceremony” the three elder sisters had gone through at the end of their training in the Krasnaya Komnata was designed to sterilize the agents. Marina had avoided the “ceremony” due to being assigned to the Project Cahill before it could happen, but her continued struggle to conceive with her beloved Colonel had convinced the four sisters they would not be able to have children of their own. When the blond haired Amazon had announced she was expecting a little boy with her beloved Fil, the news had been met with a great deal of joy and excitement. As far as each of the sisters were concerned, this child was a miracle and the four could hardly wait.

Will's eyes slipped closed as he took in the thrilled Russian chatter beside him, fingers stroking absentely over the sequined fabric of Marina's dress. He was aware of Team One seated in the pew behind him, their curious eyes pinned on the two senior Grimms, and resolved to talk to Sam about what the blond had told his team about the family and what they did for work.

It was about then he became aware of a rustling coming towards him. With a heavy sigh, he opened his eyes and looked up in time to see his aide, Corporal Patricia Hadley, skidding to a halt beside him and shooting to attention. “I'm sorry, sir, but this was just delivered for you.”

Returning her salute, Will's response was absent as he reached for the missive, “Don't call me sir; I work for a living.”

“Yes sir, Colonel. I forgot, sir.”

There was dry amusement in his tone as he agreed, “You always do. Thank you Corporal . . . dismissed,” he insisted, returning her sharp salute and looking down at the folded page as she scurried back up the aisle.

Turning back into his seat, he was met with Marina's concern as she insisted, “Don't open it. If we don't know about it, they can't send us anywhere right now.”

“It's not orders . . . not the right kind of paper,” Will negated, sliding his thumb under the seal and peeling the page open. Eyes scanning the page, he could feel his jaw tightening before he refolded the page and passed it off to Marina. Standing, he called out, “Lucky! Front and center!”

Marina's gasp was both furious and horrified as Owen melted out of the shadows and was suddenly standing in front of them. “What's up, Boss?”

“How dare they!?” his partner raged as she shot to her feet beside the two men. Rene jumped at the anger in her tone, earning a shaky smile from the Russian, her fingers trembling slightly as she smoothed them gently through his hair. Though he still looked concerned, the pre-teen calmed at the familiar action. Looking up, Marina gestured for Catherine and Vincent to join them. "Would you take Rene back to Sam? It should be about time for him to line up with Marta and the girls anyway."

"Sure thing, Marina," Vincent agreed, reaching out to ruffle the boy's hair. "Come on, squirt."

"Sam's the only one allowed to call me 'squirt'," the child protested, reaching up to smooth down the rumpled curls.

"Whatever you say, squirt."

Placing one hand at the nape of her neck, the Colonel waited for the three to be out of earshot before answering his best friend. “General and Mrs. Braddock are going to be here in about an hour.”
Owen's eyes went wide as he joked miserably, “They have some big brass balls. You're kidding?”

“No. I am not.”

“Did they give a reason why? I thought they weren't invited.”

“Apparently, Mrs. Braddock is so distraught at the fact she was **not** invited to her 'beloved baby sister's' wedding, they have decided to come anyway.”

Marina broke in then, chocolate eyes boiling as she hissed, “She **was** invited, but she wouldn't concede to not bringing her husband! I waited for three months for her to agree to come alone before I started planning again. Otherwise, we would **still** be waiting for her to say something.”

“Marishka . . .” the Colonel admonished, trying to settle her down before she caused a scene at the front of the church.

“I am not okay with this! Aaron can't know . . . neither can Sammy,” Marina ordered, glaring at the two men as though they were personally responsible for her anger.

“I have no intention of telling the bridal party at this point. I believe you said you wanted happy pictures of the ceremony, yeah?” he reminded her calmly. Taking the missive back, he read it over once again, before sighing, “They shouldn't be here before the ceremony is over and the bridal party is off getting their pictures done.”

“What about after?!” Marina demanded, arms coming up to fold over her chest. “We can't just not tell them, Misha . . . Sammy at least needs some kind of warning before he has to deal with those assholes.”

“We'll tell them when the pictures are over.” Turning back to his best friend, Will took Owen's elbow and insisted, “Pass the word . . . discretely . . . to everyone not in the bridal party. And make sure to pass on . . .

“. . . under no circumstances is the General to get close to Sam? Yeah, I figured that part out already,” Owen joked, with a wink. “How do we keep Sam distracted?”

“Well . . . Denise has expressed interest in Sammy for her granddaughters,” Marina sighed, reaching up to rub at her temple with two fingers. “Kaia came alone, and Denise asked him to escort her.”

“Kaia?” was the deadpan inquiry, earning a narrowed eyed glare from his partner. Sensing there was something going on between Marina and Denise with respect to Sam and Kaia, Will proceeded to brush the question away and focus on the rest of his partner's statement. “Do I need to remind you Denise has fifteen granddaughters, ranging between 18 to 24?”

The question earned a small smirk from his lover as she laughed, “Fifteen pretty girls flirting with him should keep him fairly occupied, don't you think?”

“Maybe just a little,” the Colonel snarked, with a smirk and a roll of his eyes. “All right . . . get the word out. We'll keep an eye open up here.”

“Copy that, Boss,” Owen agreed, with a grin and a wink, moving to pass the news along as he melted back into the shadows.

Marina rounded on her lover, mouth pinched furiously as she hissed, “They have a lot of nerve!”

“Agreed,” Will sighed, reaching up to pinch the bridge of his nose as a migraine built steadily behind
his eyes. “Damn, I need a drink.” The sight of his partner working herself up into a rant caused him to reach out and smooth his hands over her arms, as he insisted firmly, “And you need to calm down.”

Marina all but exploded at the admonition, “I am pissed, Misha!”

“I know . . . and as soon as they see you the boys are gonna know too. Which means they'll just worry about what's gone wrong. So you need to calm down and try to put this out of your mind for the time being. There is nothing we can do about it right now.”

“Two hundred and fifty yards, Mishka . . . 250!!” she burst out, in a furious fit of pique.

Viktoriya Coulson, the only sensible one of the four sisters, could always be counted on to soothe the youngest of their quartet. Smoothing one hand over the bulge of her belly, she reached up with the other to tug her sister down into the seat beside her. “Deep breaths, sestrenka . . . there isn’t a single member of this family who's going to let the General hurt Sammy. Every single one of the boys are armed, and Vincent is here to play bodyguard. It's going to be okay.”

Veronika grinned wickedly from where she sat next to her lover, Jim Street, reminding her sister cheerfully, “If you'd just let me put a bullet in him the first time, this wouldn't be happening right now.”

Unable to prevent herself from laughing at the playful reminder, Marina groaned, “Nika!”

“I'm just saying!”

Will rolled his eyes fondly as he settled back into his seat next to his longtime partner, “No one is shooting the General.”

“Why not? It would solve a laundry list of problems,” the Russian huffed, though the Colonel could tell by the twist of her lips she wasn't seriously considering it . . . as much as she’d like to be.

“We're not shooting him, because Sammy asked us not to. He's made his choice and chosen this family. Let's not betray his trust like his own parents did please,” he reminded his partner, earning a twist of the mouth and another huff as she flopped back against the back of the pew.

Phil looked over at his brother-in-law and asked solemnly, “So what do we do about him?”

“We'll run him off when he gets here. With the kids taking pictures, with any luck, Sammy won't even know he was here.”

“It's a big if, Will,” Vika murmured, linking hands with her practically vibrating sister in an effort to calm her down.

Rubbing one hand over his face, Will sighed heavily as he conceded, “It's all I've got right now. We'll have to hope it's enough.”
Sorry for the long wait.

I would recommend that everyone read "In the Family Way" before the next chapter, as this story will skip to past that point next. We will touch on it a little bit, but there won't be much detail. If it happened in Ghost Protocol, we can assume that it happened in The Grimm Truth.

Translations are at the end as always. Part two of the Kenta Wedding. I hope you all enjoy!

Chapter 208: Family Ties Take 3

Knowing a thing intellectually is a great deal different from knowing a thing in reality.

Therefore, even having read the note for himself, there was still a part of Will Grimm that was both shocked and infuriated to see the General and his wife arrive shortly after the ceremony had concluded and the bridal party was off getting their pictures taken. If the way Marina went stiff at his side was any indication, he hadn't been the only one to notice either. One hand came up to fold over the back of her neck, as he ordered calmly, “Steady, Marishka.”

“And we're absolutely sure that I can't shoot him?” she hissed vehemently, even as her body consciously relaxed into him.

Will smirked, leaning over to kiss her hair. “I love you, samaya malen'kaya.”
Tilting her head back, she wrinkled her nose as she teased him, “Of course you do . . . you are a smart man.” Lifting her hand to his cheek, she caressed the curve gently as she sobered. There was an uncharacteristic seriousness to her features as she locked onto brilliant blue ones. “Ya lyublyu tebya, moy Mishka, vsegda.”

The Colonel smiled, bending to her height, with his palms cradling her cheeks. Their kiss was languid and easy, an uncharacteristic display of affection that was nevertheless steadying for them both.

When at last they broke apart, Will sighed in reluctant resignation. “Shall we?”

“Shall we indeed,” she purred, looping her hand into his elbow and allowing him to lead her across the room.

The eldest Grimm was not unaware of how he looked when he was pissed off. His own brothers had nicknamed his resting face as his “I will fuck you up, bitch” face. His lover had teased him more than once about the terrific horror to be found when he combined that with his stone-featured Colonel-face. He could feel his features hardening, and – for the first time ever – he simply could not bring himself to care. He just wanted the Braddocks to go away, preferably with a long walk off a short pier.

As they neared the couple, Will spoke, his tone as cold and hard as his eyes. “Do you not understand the purpose of a restraining order? Because you are currently in violation of one.”

“Marta is my sister!” Diana protested furiously, glaring up at the officer as though he was personally to blame for her invitation being rescinded.

He gave her a cold, flat smirk as he reminded her wryly, “Yes, and she was very clear on the details of your attendance. If you would like to stay, Mrs. Braddock, fine.” Twisting slightly to take in her husband, Will insisted, “He will have to leave. He is not welcome here.”

“Please . . . I just want to apologize to my son,” the General pleaded, eyes broken and sincere.

However, the Colonel had not earned the reputation of being a cold-hearted bastard by being nice to people. Shaking his head firmly, he all but growled at the older man. “Not a chance in hell. If and when Sammy wants your apology, he will seek you out for it.”

Marina's features were murderous as she chimed in next, “And until then, you stay the required 250 meters away from him.”

“But . . .”

“General Braddock, I will have to insist you leave or I will have you arrested for violating your restraining order,” was the only response, Will's tone brusque and unforgiving. He had officially run out of fucks to give.

Glancing over his shoulder, he smiled to see his best friend lurking just outside of his peripheral view. “Lucky . . . would you do me a favor?”

“Sure thing, Boss,” Owen grinned, the expression sinister and manic. “Just tell me who I need to kill.”

Smirking at the startled look in Diana Braddock's eyes, Will joked, “I may take you up on that eventually, Owen, but for right now . . .”
Turning back to the Braddocks, he announced, “You have two options. First; you leave and you
don't look back. You stay as far away from my son as you can and maybe, just maybe, in another
fifty years while you're both lying on your deathbeds, Sam will forgive you for everything you put
him through while he was growing up.” Laying a hand on Owen's shoulder then, he continued,
“Your second option is the much bloodier one.”

Nodding in surrender, Gregory Braddock turned to look at his wife. “I'll go. Stay . . . Marta is your
sister.”

Diana frowned as she argued quietly, “Marta and I have never been close, Greg, you know that.”

“Then maybe it's time to put forth the effort and try to change that. Just stay and pretend to give a
damn,” Braddock argued, earning a blink from his wife and a smirk from their new in-laws. (Now
there was a thought. Just the idea that he was now related by marriage to these two lethal individuals
before him . . . it felt as though someone had dragged an ice cube up his spine. It was an unpleasant
sensation and he resolved to avoid it from then on.)

Bending, Braddock kissed his wife's cheek before turning on his heel and striding away. A voice
from the shadows by the door made him jump and he spun to see Fury leaning against the wall, a
shark's grin on his face. “You're not nearly as stupid as you look, Braddock, I'm impressed.”

“I can learn.”

“Apparently. Remember what I said, Braddock . . . you'll live longer if you do,” was the last thing
the S.H.I.E.L.D. director said before the Canadian general hauled open the doors of the conservatory
and moved out of sight.

Diana whirled on the two officers, all but spitting nails. “I can’t believe you ran him off! He's my
husband!”

“Yes, and you were informed at the time you received your invitation, neither Marta nor Sam wanted
him here. You declined to come without him and instead chose to attempt to make a scene the day of
the wedding itself by arriving unannounced and husband in tow.”

Marina's features twisted, as she scolded, “They're called manners. If you're not invited, don't show
up.”

“And what the hell do you know about manners? You're a common killer . . . you're worth nothing
to anyone who truly matters. You will never be anything more than a waste of perfectly breathable
air,” Diana sneered, lifting her chin and looking down her nose at the former Russian assassin.

Will's entire frame locked up at the insult, but surprisingly it was Marta's voice which rang through
the conservatory. “She matters to me.”

Diana whirled at the sound of her sister's voice, seeing her sister standing in the door jamb, fingers
white-knuckled where they clutched the frame. “Marta, you are a child . . . your judgment when
making friends has always been sorely lacking. Peter could take care of you! He could provide for
you! He could . . .”

Marta's face was stone as she interrupted her sister furiously. “Shut. Up. Di.” The hem of her skirt
swished around her knees as she moved deeper into the room. “I'm not a child and you are not my
mother. I have every right to make my own choices about the people who are in my life.”

“She's a killer Marta!”
“I know. And I don't care.” Straightening her shoulders, the virologist stared her sister down calmly. “She was kind to me, when I had done very little to deserve it. She matters to Sam, who would do anything for her . . . to make her happy, to make her smile. Rene adores her, because she loved him from the moment she laid eyes on him, no question or hesitation. She is everything to those boys she raised and who are only alive because she put her life on the line for them.” Looking up at Will, she smiled tremulously. “She matters to the Colonel . . . she is everything to him.”

Turning back to her sister, Marta clenched her hands and bit her lip hard. “They taught Aaron how to love . . . and I will be forever grateful for that. Because he loves me, Di . . . he loves me more than anyone ever has. So you can take your disappointment and your anger that I rejected your precious Peter and shove it where the sun don't shine.”

“Marta, I am your sister . . . I only want what is best for you.”

There was infinite sadness and total resolution on the scientist's face as she replied, “Then leave . . . and don't come back. I don't need your kind of love in my life anymore.”

Diana stared at her sister in shock, clearly surprised by the statement. “Marta, you don't mean that.”

Lower lip trembling, Marta clutched her dress in her fists as she nodded. “I do. I love you, Di, but that just isn't enough to justify your place in my life anymore.” Back stepping quickly as Diana moved towards her, she ducked back behind Will quickly. The Colonel said nothing, only wrapped an arm around her shoulders and put himself between the two sisters.

The General's wife froze, horrified by what was happening in front of her. “Marta . . .”

“Please, Diana, I'm begging you . . . just go.”

The two women stared at each other for a long time, before Diana straightened her shoulders and jabbed a finger towards the door. “If I walk out that door, Marta, I am gone. You are dead to me. And when this so-called 'true love' of yours is over, don't come running back to me.” The older sister's face twisted as she sneered, “You'll screw it up, Marta . . . you always do.”

Aaron's tone was glacial as he barked, “Get the fuck out before I throw you out, bitch.”

Marta all but lunged into her newly wedded husband's arms, taking comfort in his presence as he squared off with her only remaining family. “You are no longer welcome here, so kindly remove yourself from the premises. Marta is my wife and I will not stand silently by while you malign her and mistreat her and misjudge her.”

Owen all but materialized next to the elder Shearing sister and clamped a hand around her elbow. “If you'll follow me, Mrs. Braddock . . . I'm sure there's a lovely little corner of hell just waiting for you to arrive,” he insisted cheerfully, all but dragging her towards the exit.

The former Outcome operative looked down at his wife with a frown. “Are you okay?”

“T'm fine. I've been wanting to say that for years,” she laughed shakily, her fingers finding their way into the lapel of his uniform coat. Grinning up at her husband, she begged, “Can we go dance now?”

“Your wish is my command,” the man agreed, bending to kiss her sweetly, before turning back to the older couple. “Thank you for taking care of her for me.”

“She's family, Kenny. We always take care of our own.” Marina reminded him from her Colonel's arms, reaching out to lay a gentle hand on his shoulder. “Come on. I'm sure everyone is wondering where the hell we have disappeared to.”
“Probably not . . . everyone is still out taking pictures. We're just waiting on the two of you.”

“Us?”

“Well yeah . . . you were practically my parents growing up. I want you in my pictures.” One corner of his lips curled upwards as he teased, “Is that okay with you?”

Will clapped his brother on the shoulder with a wide grin. “More than okay. We're proud of you, little brother.”

There was a soft blush to his ears as the second youngest Grimm grinned in return. “Thanks, Will.”

It should never be said that the Brothers Grimm didn't know how to throw a party.

Before long, Diana Braddock and her nefarious husband had been completely forgotten in the flurry of the reception. There was the sound of loud music and raucous laughter to chase her memory away, and exquisite food and free-flowing alcohol to drown out her words. Soon it was as though she had never even been there.

Denise Perron had taken great pleasure in introducing Sam to her granddaughter Kaia. Though Denise liked Talia Anderson, Marina was her dear friend; she was more than up for anything that would help the Russian in the long run. Before long, the twosome was chatting amiably about various deployments while Jules' face was turning a sickly puce green on the other side of the room. (As to the matter of Talia herself, Marina knew the instant Kaia told Sam about her adorable girlfriend. The way her son slumped with relief was impossible to miss.)

Marina couldn't remember a time she'd laughed so much. Shockingly, she had been wrestled out onto the dance floor by her lover more than once, causing happiness to sing through her being. It was no secret that Will hated to dance and, to be honest, pretended to be not a very good at it so as to avoid having to do it. But he seemed devoted to making her happy and so she giggled like a schoolgirl every time he swung her around the floor with an uncharacteristic grin on his adored and adoring face.

It had been several hours when finally Marta got up onto the impromptu stage that they had erected for the DJ's stand. Accepting the microphone from the DJ, she turned back to face the attentive crowd. “All right. So Aaron and I argued a lot about this next part of the night. My father died when I was very young, and to spare my feelings, my loving husband had proposed to skip the traditional 'father/daughter' and 'mother/son' dances.”

Smiling tremulously towards where Marina and Will sat together at a table, the Russian perched on her Colonel's knee, Marta continued, “That however wouldn't have been fair. Because while my father was gone, Aaron's mother was still here. And I would never have been able to forgive myself if they weren't allowed to have this special moment together on the day of our wedding.” Nodding at the DJ, she insisted, “And so, now for the mother/son dance.”

Marina had straightened sharply when Marta had mentioned Aaron's mother, and when her second youngest boy appeared at her side with a smile, she could do little more than blink at him. Cobalt blue eyes twinkled down at her as he insisted, “May I have this dance?”

“Kenny, are you sure?” she breathed hesitantly, eyes wide and awed as he offered her a very stately bow.

“Marina, you're my mother . . . you always have been.” Offering her his hand, he begged, “Let me have this dance with you?”
She stared up at him in shock for what felt like an eternity, before the sun broke across her face in a joyful smile. Accepting his hand, she let him lead her into the middle of the dance floor to the accompaniment of a dozen cheers and thunderous applause. Taking up waltz position with him in the center of the dance floor, she beamed up at him for a moment before the music began to play.

At which point, she started to cry.

“Hey mom, I know that it's late,
Hope I didn't wake you.
Yeah everything's okay,
I just needed to talk to you.

“I had one of those days,
But I didn't call to complain.
Just to say everything I didn't for all of those years.

“You were a taxi cab driver, a nurse and a maid,
A waitress, a cook and a shoulder to lay
My head on to cry on, when nothing was going my way.
You knew every answer without crackin’ a book,
And I took for granted that I had it so good.
And I'm sorry it's taken me so long to say,
Thank you, I love you, twenty years late.”

Bending his head, Aaron pressed his forehead against Marina's own as he sang along with the words, feeling Marina's tears roll down her face as though they were his own. The Russian was sobbing, her shoulders shuddering as she clutched to him tightly.

“I don't know how you did it, I can't find one spare minute,
The days run together, but I don't remember you ever,
Letting us down.

“You were the judge and the jury when I did wrong,
You were my biggest fan from my very first song,
The gas and the engine that always kept me moving on,
A seamstress, a councilor and the one referee,
That could stop a fight between my brothers and me.
And I'm sorry it's take me so long to say,
Thank you, I love you, twenty years late.”

Wrapping his arms around her, he buried his face into her neck as they stopped dancing. The song still played as they hugged, just enjoying this moment they had together, the one that belonged to them and them alone.

“I'll let you go now, but I hope you know now,
How I feel.
Thank you for making me the man I've become.
I love you and I will always be your son.
Mom, that's all I called to say,
Twenty years late.

“Hey mom, I know that it's late,
I just needed to talk to you.”
When the last strains of the song faded away, Aaron lifted his face from her neck. Brushing a curl out of her face, he insisted, “I love you, sestra.”

Marina choked on her tears as she cupped his face in her palms, promising, “I love you, solnyshko . . . and I am so proud of you. I am so glad you found Marta and she makes you happy. It's all I ever wanted for you.”

“Thank you for teaching me what love meant and how amazing it could be. I could have never had this if it wasn't for you and Will.”

“I wouldn't be so sure about that, Kenny. I think you probably would have been just fine on your own.” Brushing at her tears, the S.H.I.E.L.D. handler caught sight of Marta waiting behind them patiently. There was a warm smile on her lips as she took her boy by the shoulders and spun him around to face her. “That's your future, solnyshko. Don't you dare look back.”

Stumbling forward at the sharp shove she gave his shoulders, Aaron grinned back at her over his shoulder before moving to take Marta into his arms. She grinned up at him, her hands trailing up his arms to lock behind his neck. “Sergeant Grimm.”

His smile beamed at her as he teased, “Dr. Grimm.”

Her eyes slipped closed and she sighed, “I could get used to hearing you say that.”

“I could get used to saying it,” he replied, trailing his knuckle down her cheek. “I love you.”

The look of joy and excitement on the scientist's face could have powered the room at the declaration. “I love you too . . . so much.”

He lifted her to his lips then and they exchanged their second real kiss as husband and wife. And if they noticed that eruption of cheers, whistles and catcalls that filled the area around them . . . neither of them gave any sign.

They were living in their own little world and it was perfect.

Chapter End Notes

Translations:

(R) samaya malen'kaya - my little one (Will's most common nickname for his longtime partner, Marina Petrovka)
(R) Ya lyublyu tebya - I love you
(R) moy Mishka - my Misha (Misha is a diminutive of Michael/Mikhail; Will's middle name is Michael and Misha is Marina's most common nickname for her longtime lover)
(R) Vsegda - always
(R) sestra - sister (one of the lesser used nicknames for Marina by her boys)
(R) solnyshko - sunshine (Marina's nickname for Aaron/Kenny)
Hey guys, so as I said, this chapter takes place following the Cahill outtake "In the Family Way". It's mostly covering what's happened to this point, so we can make our time jump and get going on what everyone really wants . . . the MCU.

I hope you guys enjoy this and that you let me know what you think. Your comments make my LIFE!

Translations at the bottom as always.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
Chapter 209: Exposition and Backstory

If Marina had been hoping Aaron and Marta’s wedding was the start of some rest and relaxation, she ended up being terribly disappointed. In point of fact, the wedding ended up being the start to a whirlwind of events.

The best thing to happen during those months was also the first thing to happen. Yasha Filipovich Coulson was the first of the children born to the Merry Murderesses, and his parents could not be more delighted with him. Weighing in at 10 pounds and 8 ounces, the boy was a joy to the entire family. If the training agents had thought Phil was scary following his return from his honeymoon, they found him even more terrifying now after the successful birth of his first child.

Viktoriya had implored her youngest sister to be her son's godmother, a role Marina had agreed to exuberantly, joy and excitement shining in her plain but pleasant features. Phil had once again turned to the Colonel, imploring the man to be Yasha's godfather. Will had surprised the handler by blushing, practically stammering as he consented to the other man's earnest request. It was no secret the two colonels spoiled their godson more than his own parents did.

The return of Tony Stark from captivity in Afghanistan occurred barely a week after Yasha’s birth. S.H.I.E.L.D. was aware of his abduction and had sent more than a few agents into the area discretely to try and track him down. The Ten Rings had long been one of their primary targets in the Middle East; both Brian and Natasha had been dispatched to the Sandbox several times over the years to track down various leaders of the ring.

And then came the sudden appearance of “The Iron Man”, raising more than a few eyebrows among S.H.I.E.L.D’s upper echelon.

It quickly became apparent Tony Stark himself was Iron Man. Except for maybe Jason Grimm, who S.H.I.E.L.D. kept a close eye on to avoid such toys, there was no other engineer in the world who could design and manufacture the suit so effectively. With no other option, Phil Coulson had gone to Malibu to check in on the situation. Marina had protested, seeing as her sister Vika had just given birth to their son and they needed him more than the world did. Surprisingly, it had been Vika who insisted Phil go; the married couple knew their jobs and knew how important those jobs were to both national security and stability.

Even considering Phil's presence at the scene as it were, no one wanted to look too deeply into the details of Tony Stark or Iron Man. The satellite footage of Iron Man completely decimating the Ten Rings' stronghold was met with celebration. Iron Man had done S.H.I.E.L.D. a huge favor by taking them out, something S.H.I.E.L.D. had never been allowed to do on their own. They owed him a debt of gratitude, even if they owed him little else.

Every superhero story has a villain though; first comes captivity, then comes metal suit, then comes Obadiah Stane. Marina still huffed to herself wherever someone mentioned him. Frankly the man was an ass. Stark was a playboy and a genius, and those two things rarely combined well. But he had been genuinely trying to atone for his mistakes and the blasé attitude he had held towards the deaths he caused.

Attempting to ruin all of that development for the sake of money? Just as well the man was dead.

Stark's announcement of “I am Iron Man!” caused a media flurry unlike anything anyone had ever seen before. The Hot Airhead Panel was pushing Fury to take control of both Stark and Iron Man, getting more and more irritating every time they called. Regrettably, his irritation rolled over onto the
rest of his agents, and there were more than a few times Marina contemplated shooting him, just to put him out of everyone's misery.

Of course, then Ethan Hunt crashed landed back into her lover's life like the heat-seeking missile he was. Will and Marina had gone with the Secretary of Defense to Moscow, to participate in some peace talks. Despite her partner's concern for her safety, Marina had been adamant; he was not going alone. She'd donned some hideously disfiguring glasses over hazel contacts and been given an entirely new identity, thereby allowing her walked unimpeded through Moscow's international airport and into the motorcade waiting for them.

Neither Will nor Marina had told the Secretary of their relationship, or who she truly was. They had told him she was a skilled interpreter and her presence would be useful, and the Secretary had allowed her to come with no questions asked. As a result, she would never forget the conversation she had overheard between the two men after she'd decamped from the conference room for a brief moment.

The Secretary was an older man with smug features. Leaning back in his chair lazily, he looked Will square in the face and asked, "How's your Russian assassin, Brandt?"

Will jolted hard at the question, quicksilver eyes flashing to the Russians conferring amongst themselves on the other side of the table. Marina's safety depended on the Russians continuing to believe she had been killed by the Winter Soldier so many years ago. Her insistence on accompanying him had already set his nerves on edge; he was literally shedding years off his life like a dog shed water from its coat.

Biting down on his snide response, the Colonel responded carefully, "She's not a Russian assassin, sir. She works for us now."

Cocking an eyebrow, the Secretary sipped on his own mug as he took in Will's face. "She's Russian, isn't she?"

Sighing heavily, Will leaned forward on his elbows and nodded, "Yes sir. Born in Kemerovo, Siberia."

"She's an assassin, isn't she?"

"She used to be sir. She's a handler for S.H.I.E.L.D. now," Will reminded him, earning uplifted eyebrows and a look of disbelief from the other man. It was a long time before Will grunted and caved, "Yes sir, she is."

Grinning as though he'd won the lottery, the Secretary smacked Will's back companionably and demanded, "All right then. How's your little Russian assassin, Brandt?"

Gritting his teeth, the analyst forced a skull's grin as he agreed, "She's fine, sir, thank you for asking."

"Good to hear," he chortled, turning back to the delegation as one of the Russian Ministers approached.

The Gadyuka was not a spy for nothing. She slipped back into the room unobtrusively and trailed the edge of her pinky along the back of Will's neck to offer him what support and comfort she could without blowing their cover. One of his hands came up to fold over the back of his neck, his fingers moving as he spelled out O.K. Settling in her seat to Will's left, she nodded briskly to acknowledge she'd received the message. There was no time to address the conversation, however, as the next thing anyone knew, the Kremlin
had exploded and the Impossible Missions Force was being blamed.

Peace talks pretty much dissolved from there.

The Secretary had demanded her partner join him on a quick side trip before they met up with the rest of the delegation at the airstrip to catch their ride home. The look on his face when Marina had grabbed her lover by the ears and proceeded to kiss the hell out of him had made the entire trip worth it. She had smirked all the way back to the airstrip.

The smirk had been wiped off her face as soon as the plane was in the air and neither the Secretary nor her lover were back aboard. She’d gotten a phone call from an unknown number and everything had spiraled downwards from there.

The only good thing to happen during that time was Marina's discovery she was two months pregnant. It was a dream both she and Will had prayed for more than once; to have it finally come true was more than either had ever imagined was possible for them. The look on Will's face as they had stood on the tarmac in Dubai, reveling together in their news... it would linger in her favorite fantasies for the rest of her life.

Whatever happened from there, Will had come home from the op nearly blinded by his concussion and riding on a proverbial cloud nine. The two had cuddled together in bed for nearly a week, reveling in the life growing with her body and the miracle which had created it. To date, this had been the easiest recovery Will – and by extension, Marina – had ever had.

Of course, then there was her eldest son... and his rekindled relationship with one Julianna Callaghan.

Introducing him to Kaia had been both a blessing and a curse. On the one hand it had kept Sam from missing Jules and kept him focused on the person with him. Kaia was hilariously deadpan and the two had gotten on from the word go. He had genuinely enjoyed being her escort. On the other, it had clued Jules in to the little catch in her plans stemming from her feelings for Sam. The rush of jealousy she'd experienced watching Sam and Kaia move together on the dance floor had cleared things up for her quickly. So while Marina would have preferred Sam steered clear of the relationship, he was 27 years old and his own man. There was really nothing she could or should say to gainsay him from whatever was going to make him happy.

Her boys were understandably shocked by this development. Their beloved Russian was notorious for being unable to hold her tongue. She said what she thought, typically without censoring, and everyone else simply had to deal with it. When it came to the petite SRU constable, however, Marina had been consciously censoring herself. She knew in spite of everything, Sam was still in love with the woman and any of Marina's diatribes would only cause him pain.

The two were once again keeping their relationship a secret from the brass and even though Marina understood the necessity for it, she didn't like it. The secrecy had ended their previous relationship, as well as Jules' obsession with her job, and starting another relationship on the same grounds as the last felt as though they were only repeating the same mistakes. Mistakes which could inevitably lead to no different ending than the one before.

Either way, it was not her place to say anything. Jules knew Marina's feelings on the matter. And though she and Sam had never explicitly talked about it, Sam was more than aware that his Ma's feelings towards Jules Callaghan had considerably cooled in the aftermath of their first relationship.

(However, if she happened to rant to her lover in vehement Russian after everyone else had gone to sleep, whatever she said was between her and her Mishka. If there was one thing Marina could trust
about her lover, it was his ability to keep a secret.)

Of course, all of this led them to where they were now. The Hulk had broken Harlem. Though if Marina was being truthful, the Hulk hadn't been the problem. Thaddeus Fucking Ross, however . . . of him she could not say the same. Marina rested one hand on her slightly protruding belly as she stared out at the mess the Hulk and Ross' Abomination had created at Culver University. “You think Ross is every going to learn to keep his nose out of other people's business?”

Will chuckled as he shook his head, “I doubt it. He seems destined to be a thorn in our sides.”

The Russian bit down hard on her lower lip, feeling her body contort around the constantly moving forms of her twin daughters. “Hush now, devochki . . . Mama needs a break,” she soothed, drawing absent designs across the distended swell.

Grinning, Will laid his palm alongside hers. “That's my girls.”

Marina glowered at him, scolding fiercely. “That will be quite enough out of you, Colonel Grimm. They do not need any encouragement from the peanut gallery, thank you very much.”

“Yes ma'am,” he teased, dodging her playful slap. Lifting her hand, he pressed a sweet kiss to the back before leaping away from another swing at his head. “Ya lyublyu tebya, zhena chzhina . . . samaya malen'kaya . . . moya sumasshedshaya devochka.”

The sound of his laughter followed him as he disappeared from the command tent, leaving Marina behind to coordinate the S.H.I.E.L.D. agents while he took command of the Army contingent Ross had left behind. “Ooh, that man makes me crazy,” she muttered, before turning away from the door towards the main Hub.

Her hands moved in an unconscious caress over the swell of her stomach as she watched the clean up through the giant monitors Jason's techs had set up in the command tent. Lifting one hand, she went to point at an overturned tank, when a hard grip closed around her bicep and swung her around.

Her eyes went wide as she was suddenly nose to nose with General Thunderbolt Ross. Even as she gaped at him in horror, she could not stop herself from taking him in. He was definitely older, his hair having gone steel gray in the intervening years. Those eyes were still as cold and as piercing as ever, and Marina could feel herself shrinking back away from him fearfully as she had so many times before. A cruel sneer disfigured his face as he leaned into her space.

Finally, he spoke, his tone a yell as he barked in her face. “You Russian bitch! You traitorous, heinous bitch! Where are there!?”

Here there was a pause, before he roared at the top of his lungs, “What the fuck did you do with my Cahills!”

Chapter End Notes

Translations:

(R) Filipovich - a Russian patronymic that identifies Phil Coulson as the father of Yasha Coulson
Gadyuka - Viper (Marina's call sign given to her by the Krasnata Komnaya and the Akademiya)
devochki - girls
ya lyublyu tebya - I love you
zhemchuzhina - pearl (one of Will's lesser used nicknames for his partner, Marina)
samaya malen'kaya - my little one (Will's most common nickname for Marina)
moya sumasshedshaya devochka - my crazy girl (one of Will's lesser used nicknames for Marina)
Hey guys! No real translations. Please . . . your comments make my life! Let me know what you think. I love to get them and to read them. Thank you so much for all the time you guys have invested in this fic. It makes my life!!
Chapter 210: Complications and Insubordinations

The words reverberated through the command tent, the agents inside shocked by the knowledge that someone would have the nerve to manhandle the Viper in such a way. Marina's eyes were huge as she stared up at the uniformed officer, her body visibly shrinking away from him as her free hand came up to cradle her belly protectively.

As for Sam Grimm, he was pissed. His jaw locked furiously as one hand reached back for the service pistol holstered at his back. Before he could say anything however, a calm voice insisted firmly, “Let her go, sir!”

The blond's head whipped around, eyes going wide at the sight of Grant Ward appearing almost magically from the shadows. Frowning, he considered the other agent; he hadn't even known Ward had been assigned to this op. Then he took in the way he was watching the Russian and suddenly understand; Dad had assigned Ward to be Ma's bodyguard. Snorting lightly in ill-placed mirth, Sam muttered, “Oh boy. That's gonna end well.”

Ross himself didn't seem to give a damn for anything the other agent had to say, shaking the Russian agent sharply. “Where are they, bitch!? What did you do with my Cahills!?”

The name jolted Sam out of his reverie and he reached up slowly, triggering his comm. “Braddock to Brandt . . . Dad, please have your comm on.”

Will Grimm's tone was concerned as he asked, “Sammy? What's wrong?”

“There's some guy here. He's got Ma and he's practically tossing her around like a ragdoll.”

There was a distinct bite in the Colonel's tone as he barked, “What!?”

“I don't know who he is, Dad . . . I've never seen him before. Ma's scared of him and he keeps asking her what she did with the Cahills.”

The explanation caused both Owen and Will to let loose with the filthiest string of curse words Sam had ever heard from either of them. When at last they calmed, Owen snapped, “It's Ross . . . Thunderbolt fucking Ross.”

Sam blinked at the name. He'd never seen Ross, either in person or in a picture, but he was more than aware of who the man was. And what he'd done to his father and uncles. He could feel his features hardening into stone, rage building in his heart. “I'm gonna kill him.”

“No!” his dad barked, stone calm and utterly resolute. “You're going to protect your Ma. Where's Ward? Is he there?”

“Yeah . . . as soon as Ma was threatened, Ward came out of the shadows.” Chuckling mirthlessly, Sam insisted, “Ma is gonna hit the fan when she finds out you assigned her a bodyguard.”

“She knew . . . I just didn't tell her who they were so she couldn't ditch them like she does all the others.” There was a pause, the other two men clearly talking amongst themselves, before Will was back on the comm. “Keep an eye on the situation. Get Marina free if you can. If you can't, do not provoke Ross. Lucky and I are on our way back to you.”

“Copy that,” Sam agreed, eyes fixated on the scene as he watched Ward slide a small inch closer. Whistling in a low undertone, the blond called the other man's attention. Ross was focused on
Marina, so when the tall agent looked over Sam felt comfortable asking, “Can I trust you? That's my Ma.”

Grant Ward was renown for being an excellent field agent, excellent at solo ops . . . and abysmal at social relationships. And yet, when he looked back at Sam and vowed, “She’s my responsibility; I will not let her down,” the blond agent believed him.

“Good. Dad says not to provoke Ross. They're on their way back. We just gotta try to get Ma free.”

“Sounds like a plan,” Ward agreed, gesturing Sam to take up position on the other side of the tent, essentially caging Ross and Marina between them.

Of course, it was about then Ross swung his free hand and backhanded Marina across the face, her tiny body tossing at the force. At the sound of her pained whimper, Sam literally saw red. The sudden feeling of his sidearm against his palm surprised him, as he didn't remember drawing the weapon. Ward's tone was firm but calm as he called again, “General Ross . . . I am going to have to insist you release Agent Petrovka right now.”

The name brought Ross' attention away from Marina finally, eyes snapping with fury as they glared at Ward. “What the hell are you talking about!?"

“That would be my superior, sir, Agent Marina Petrovka. Senior handler with the Strategic Homeland Intervention Enforcement and Logistics Division,” Ward explained calmly, his hands clenching reflexively around the gun he had aimed at the older man.

“Bullshit! This bitch is Mary Peters! She's a traitor and a thief! She owes the federal government millions of dollars in destroyed hardware.” Shaking Marina again, he roared in her face, “I've waited thirty years for this, Peters!”

Sam forced himself to loosen his grip on his gun as he spoke, “Sir, how old was Miss Peters when you last saw her?”

The question seemed to throw Ross off as he looked up, blinking at the blond in question. “What the hell are you talking about! Why does it matter! This bitch is finally going down . . . she won't get away from me again.”

Ward seemed to pick up on Sam’s reasoning behind the question, “Sir . . . does she look thirty to you? I am going to have to insist you release her . . . Agent Petrovka is currently in a very delicate condition due to her pregnancy. Please . . . let's just think about this before you do something you'll regret.”

Marina cried out as Ross' hand suddenly tightened in a vice grip, his face contorting as he shouted, “No! You're on her side! I'll haul you all up in front of a review board! I will have my revenge!”

Sam all but sagged as his dad's voice suddenly broke through Ross' rant. “General sir . . . I am going to have to insist you release Agent Petrovka . . . this instant.”

The Russian's voice was choked, tears of fear and pain streaming down her face as she struggled against Ross' grip. Whether that fear was due to Ross hurting her or to Will standing clear as day in front of the general, Sam was pretty sure no one would ever know. She strained forward, sobbing, “Misha!”

Rage and fear battled with calm on Will's face, and Sam felt himself stiffen up as his dad gave his partner a small, sad smile. “It's okay, Marina. You're okay.”
“No,” she begged breathlessly, groaning quietly as she bent over to hunch around her belly. “Please no.”

The anxiety on the eldest Grimm's face was palatable, though he forced himself to remain where he was. Glancing around the command center, Will boomed, “Everybody out!”

“Sir!” came the expected protest from the head technician.

“Now!” the man roared furiously, sending the junior agents and techs scrambling for the closest exits.

While the command tent was emptying, Owen slipped into view, taking up position on the other side of Ross from his best friend, leaving Ross the center of a four man cage. Of the four men, Sam's dad was only one not currently aiming a gun at the enraged officer. However, Clint was not the only Grimm with a fast draw and an exceptionally accurate aim; Sam had no doubts his dad could get a shot off before any of the rest of them if the situation called for it.

Sam shifted slightly as Will moved cautiously forward. “What do you want to know about the woman you're currently terrorizing? Do you want to know that she was born January 31, 1966 . . . that she's older than I am and the love of my life? Do you want to know that she was born in Siberia . . . that she was KGB . . . but we met while I was on leave in the states and she defected for me? Do you want to know that she turned herself in to the Pentagon voluntarily? That she was thoroughly interrogated for a **month** before being released, with a commission with the Army as a Major?”

Will shifted forward further, trying to get close enough to where Marina was now hanging limply from Ross' grip, her body contracted into itself and a low keen coming from deep in her throat. “Do you want to know that she's five months pregnant with my daughters? That it's been a high risk pregnancy from the start? That she's been so strong and so patient, when all I want to do is wrap her in bubble wrap and prevent her from doing anything ever again?

“Do you want to know about her boys? The men who have sworn their loyalties to her? Who will do anything to protect her? Do you want to know about her sons, one of whom has a gun to your head and no problem pulling the trigger if he thinks you're going to hurt her?”

Taking another step forward, Will begged, “Tell me what you want to know . . . and I'll tell you. Just please . . . let her go.”

Sam held his breath, watching the two officers stare at each other, Marina still dangling from the general's grip. For a second, it seemed as though Will had gotten through to the other man, that he was going to let Marina go. But then, Ross seemed to shake himself free from whatever reverie Will had caused. Marina screamed as he yanked her up, shouting, “No! She will not get away from me again!”

Almost before he'd finished speaking, Will had his gun in hand and double tapped the trigger, putting two bullets in the other man. Ross stared in shock, blinking sharply as his grip on the Russian agent went lax. Marina collapsed to the ground with a sob and Sam holstered his weapon, dashing forward in a crouch to lift her up and get her out of the way. The Russian's fingers were claws as they dug into Sam's shoulders, her face buried in his neck as she cried.

The end of Will's pistol was smoking, his eyes cold as he watched Ross look down at his own chest, seeing the two neat holes clustered together in his left shoulder. The sight of Ross going to his knees seemed to jolt Will free from his own thoughts and he took a deep breath, eyes warming as he holstered his weapon. “Lucky . . . call Medical. We need EMS out here now.”
“Yes sir,” Owen agreed, teeth gritted as he watched Ward move forward to toss the general onto his stomach and cuff his hands behind him. The agent’s hands moved quickly, extracting the man's weapons and tossing them away. Finally, Ward hauled the man up into a seated position, back braced against a desk as he put pressure on the wounds in his chest. Twisting slightly, he nodded briskly at Will. “He’ll be okay . . . two exit wounds and no chance of injury to any major arteries. Medical should be here soon . . . he'll live. Regrettably.”

“Good,” the Colonel insisted. Rounding on his best friend, he ordered, “Watch him.”

“Copy that,” the former sergeant agreed, before the stone-cold Colonel facade broke and Will was dashing for his partner with a panicked cry, “Marishka!”

Sam released his Ma into her partner's hands, her body locked up as she all but dove into his arms, burying her face in his chest and her fingers white-knuckled where they dug into the nape of his neck. “Mishka . . .” she sobbed, trying to pull him closer to her as her tears practically shook her apart.

The man’s arms were vice tight as they pulled her into him, his hands moving like fire over her body as he tried to convince himself she was all right. His tone was low and soothing as he murmured, “It's okay, zhenvchuzhina . . . you're okay. WE are okay. Shhh . . . I've got you.”

Ross glowered at the two officers, Will's total concentration focused on his partner as she sobbed. “I'll have you drawn up on charges! I am a general! I'll have you discharged with a dishonorable . . . your career is over!”

Owen growled, but it was Ward who spoke up in answer. “You assaulted an unarmed and very pregnant S.H.I.E.L.D. agent, General Ross. Regardless of the outcome, you were in the wrong here.”

Marina moaned softly as she cuddled into her lover. “Misha . . . something's wrong. I don't feel good.”

“You bitch! This is all your fault!” Ross howled, furious. “I will see you both run out of the service!”

Seeing the concern on his best friend's face, Owen moved over to the general's side. “Shut up!” he barked, bending over to grab his injured arm and haul him to his feet, accompanied by a sharp grunt. “Before I shut you up.” Twisting back to look at Will, the man insisted, “Medical can find him outside just as easily as they can find him in here, Boss. Take care of her.”

Nodding in agreement, Will watched Ward and Owen escort the wounded general outside. Looking up at his son, the Colonel ordered firmly, “I need you to call Fury . . . get him on the phone. Explain what happened and let's get some sympathetic press coverage. If we don't get this under control, this is gonna be a clusterfuck.”

“Copy that,” Sam agreed, leaning forward to press a warm kiss to his Ma's cheek before dashing towards the door, already digging his phone from his pocket.

Marina flinched sharply, fingers digging into Will's neck. “Misha . . .” she moaned, panting hard as she convulsed in on her self. “Something wrong.”

Fear flashed across the Colonel's face, before he scooped her up into his arms and all but bolted from the command tent. “I need a medic over here!” he shouted, moving towards an unoccupied ambulance idling at the curb.

Almost immediately there were paramedics at his side, helping guide Marina onto the gurney as Will
laid her down. The two were all business as they gently pushed Will out of the way, starting to take vitals and determine a preliminary diagnosis. The woman wrapped a blood pressure cuff around Marina's arm, demanding sharply, “How far along is she?”

“Five months,” Will answered, eyes locked on Marina's face as the Russian forced herself to take slow, deep breaths. “It's high risk . . . she's been under constant doctor's care. My sister-in-law is a doctor.”

“Her blood pressure is 160 over 90 . . .” the male paramedic reported, causing the woman to speak up. “You said she was high risk? Why?”

Biting down on his lip, the Colonel reached out to smooth back his partner's hair as he confessed sheepishly, “We had a hard time conceiving . . . she's older than I am and I'm almost 42. They were worried she wouldn't be able to carry to term.”

“All right, let's get her to the hospital. She's going to need to be checked out, just to be safe. We're taking her to Lenox Hill; the one here is already filled to capacity from all the wounded.” Will moved to follow as the man pushed the gurney into the ambulance, only to be stopped by the woman. “There's no room. You're gonna need to find another ride. I'm sorry,” she insisted, climbing up into the confines of the truck.

Nodding briskly, he watched as Marina reached for him before the man slammed the doors shut and dashed for the driver's side. He barely flinched as the sirens began to sound and the ambulance squealed away from the curb. Shoving his hands into his pockets, he stood there for a long moment before a hand came up to rest on his shoulder. Expecting Sam, Will blinked when he twisted and saw Nick Fury instead. There was a small smile on the Colonel's lips as he greeted him calmly, “Nick.”

“Will,” the other man agreed with a smirk. “Ross is on his way to the hospital. Braddock and Elliot are handling the clean up here. Ward has already left to keep an eye on Marina, make sure she's safe at the hospital.”

Will's lips compressed tightly as he nodded in agreement. “Thank you.” There was a long pause, before the Colonel spoke again, “I shot a superior officer. My career is over.”

“No, you protected an unarmed, pregnant woman who was being assaulted by a general.” Winking, his next statement was sly as he drawled, “The General is a good man, I'm sure, when he has all of his facilities in order. Once he's had time to think and to consider what's happened, he'll see he was in the wrong . . . not you.” There was a pause, before Fury shrugged, “And if he does not do it of his own volition, S.H.I.E.L.D. will ensure that he sees the light. We – I – have your back, Will, yours and Marina's both.”

There was a loosening of the tension in Will's shoulders, even as he protested, “He was adamant. He was not at all surprised to see Marina, looking exactly the same.”

“I know. Your son told me what happened.” Patting the other man on the shoulder, Fury gestured behind him. “Come on, I'll give you a ride to Lenox and you can fill in any of the holes.”

When Fury pulled up to the front of the hospital, the two men exchanged looks at the media presence outside. Sighing, the Colonel pulled out his phone as he announced, “Looks like the vultures are out.”

“I wonder what tipped them off,” Fury agreed, shifting the care back into gear as the other man called Ward. “You think they know Ross is here?”
“Considering he broke Harlem? I guarantee they paid attention,” the analyst grunted, before turning his attention back to his phone as Ward's voice came through the earpiece. “Ward! It's Brandt. We're here, but it's a circus outside.”

Ward's tone was severe as he agreed, “They showed up almost as soon as the ambulance carrying Ross arrived, sir. Combined with the rumors already circulating . . . I think the media is going to have a field day with this, sir.”

“Great,” he groaned, dropping his head back against the headrest. “How is Marina?”

“Resting. They gave her some ativan a little while ago to calm her.” There was a scoff, before he explained, “They tried to put Ross in the cubicle next to her. Agent Petrovka did not react well.”

“You have a gift for understatement, Ward, truly.”

The younger man's tone was confused as he replied, “Thank you, sir? I think?”

“It wasn't a compliment, Ward, just an observation.” Reaching up a hand to pinch the bridge of his nose, Will took a deep breath before asking, “Can you tell me anything about the ambulance bay?”

“What do you want to know, sir?”

“Is it empty?”

“Yes sir.”

“Good . . . I'll meet you at those doors in two minutes. Brandt out,” he reported briskly, before turning to Fury. “The ambulance bay is empty. Let's go.”

Fury nodded in silent agreement, pulling away from the milling crowd and heading towards the back of the hospital. The car hadn't even come to a complete stop before Will was jumping out and jogging towards where Ward waited, holding open the doors for him. The Colonel gave the young agent a tight smile as he clapped him on the shoulder firmly. “You did good. Thank you.”

“I just did my job, sir.”

“I know. That doesn't negate the fact you protected my woman and kept her safe for me. So thank you.” Slipping into the emergency room, Will waited as Ward pulled the doors shut behind them. “Where is she?”

“I'll take you to her. She was resting comfortably when I left her just a minute ago,” Ward promised.

When Ward finally pushed back a curtain, he waved the Colonel through before planting his feet and facing off with one of the battle-axe nurses coming their way. “Hello, Ms Taylor.”

The woman was older and heavyset, her arms akimbo as she shook her finger under the agent's nose. “Don't you, 'hello' me, Agent Sourpuss. Who the hell was that?! You can't just be lettin' any old asshole have access to my patients!? Who was he?”

Ward's face was amused as he replied calmly, “The baby daddy.”

Nurse Taylor's eyes narrowed in speculation, though she was clearly taken aback by Ward's use of the colloquialism. After a bit, she sighed. “I'll allow it . . . THIS time. Don't push your luck.”

“Yes ma'am,” he agreed, eyes solemn and fierce as he nodded in agreement.
Huffing, the woman scolded, “At least pretend to be a real boy . . . no one likes a sourpuss.”

Whatever the agent may have said in response was lost as the woman bustled along back down the walkway. His eyebrows furrowed as he considered the statement, before shrugging it off. He had a job to do and someone to protect; his responsibility to his superiors was all that mattered.

Meanwhile, the Colonel had paused just inside the cubicle. Marina lay curled up on her left side, her eyes closed and her hands balled into loose fists by her face. Will could feel his entire body sagging in relief at the sight of her. Taking in the monitors around her, he noted that her blood pressure was still elevated from her usual, but even still, it wasn't nearly as bad as it had been back at the site. Moving on silent feet, the eldest Grimm rounded the foot of the bed and settled into the chair next to her.

He would never be able to explain the nervousness which overtook him at the thought of touching her, but before long he was reaching out to take one of her hands in both of his own. Bringing it to his lips, he pressed a warm kiss to her knuckles. There was a drowsy smile on his partner's face as she struggled to open her eyes, purring softly, “Misha . . .”

“I'm here, samaya malen'kaya,” he promised, pressing another kiss to the back of her hand. “How are you feeling?”

She grinned at him, her eyes bright and shining if a little distant. “Wanna know a secret?”

“Sure,” he agreed with a fond grin. “What's your secret?”

“Ativan makes me sooo drunk,” she giggled brightly, her other hand reaching out and capturing the end of his nose in her fingers. “Boop.”
Chapter Notes

Hey all! Enjoy! It's a heartbreaker! :D

Translations at the end as always.

(Photobucket is down, but there IS a banner coming. Will add it when the site comes back up.)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 211: Her Worst Nightmare

When Will pulled into the driveway, he sighed heavily at the sight of Brian standing on the porch. The second eldest Grimm was glowering fiercely at the Jeep, his arms folded over his chest and his body all but raring for a fight. Sam whistled under his breath from the backseat, his eyes flickering towards where Marina lay dozing with her head in his lap. “This looks like it's going to be fun.”
Will snorted lightly as he agreed, “Oh yeah . . . loads of fun, Samny.” Twisting in the driver's seat, he reached out to thread his fingers through her hair tenderly. “Marishka . . . we're home.”

There was a soft hum from the woman as she blinked, struggling to come up from under the drugging effects of the Ativan. “Mishka?” she asked quietly, her back arching as she stretched.

“Yeah . . . come on. Let's get you inside. I'm sure our bed will be more comfortable than the backseat of the car.”

“Kay,” she agreed with a yawn, allowing her son to help her sit up.

As unsteady on her feet as a newborn foal, Marina held tightly to both Sam and Will's hands as they guided her from the car. Once she was free of its confines, the Colonel scooped her up into his arms. She smiled at him tiredly, her arms coming up to loop around his neck as she rested her temple against his shoulder. “My hero.”

“Always,” he agreed with a soft laugh, a warm kiss pressing to her forehead settling her once again.

Striding towards the house, he watched Brian open his mouth and interrupted. “Not now.”

“Will,” the younger man protested sharply, earning a bark, “Not. Now.”

Jaw set, the S.H.I.E.L.D. agent glared for a moment before nodding sharply, “This isn't over.”

“I never would have dreamed it was,” the older brother agreed, smiling at Sam as his son pulled open the door, before the Colonel carried his drowsy partner into the house.

Will would have been lying if he'd said the sight of his brothers – all of them – and his father congregated together in his living room was a surprise. The media had had a field day with the news of General Thaddeus “Thunderbolt” Ross having allegedly been shot after assaulting a pregnant woman. His brothers would have panicked at this report, especially since the only pregnant woman Ross could have reason for assaulting was their sister. Ross' hatred of Mary Peters was legendary; their altercation could have been much worse.

Fortunately, whatever blast they'd been gearing up for was delayed when thirteen year old Rene looked up from where he was sitting on the loveseat with Marta and Casey and caught sight of his parents. There was a wordless sob, before he lunged from his seat and bolted at them head on.

“Mama!” he hiccupped, all but crashing into Marina as she loosened one arm from around Will's neck and gathered him to her.

“I'm all right, chado,” she promised with a tired smile. “Just a little shaken up.”

Smiling at the reunion between the two, the Colonel looked up and grunted at the stern look on his own father's face. “No, Dad. Not now.”

“Yes now!” Jason insisted furiously, jolting away from where he was leaning against the wall.

“What the fuck happened?”

“Jay . . . I said not now.”

“You can't avoid this, Will.”

“I'm not. You all have every right to lambast me for what happened . . .” he agreed, looking down in shock as Marina hauled back and punched him sharply in the chest. “Ow!”
“No they don't. They weren't there,” she insisted, her tone suddenly much stronger than it had been since her first dose of the relaxant. “You put yourself in danger to protect me. They have no right to say anything about what happened.”

“Yes they do, samaya malen’kaya. I promised not to be reckless, didn't I?”

“He was going to kill me,” she breathed, her eyes very wide as she stared up into his face. “He had every intention of seeing me burn in hell. You put everything you had ever fought for at risk, just to protect me.”

“And I would do it again in an instant,” he vowed, ducking his head to rest against her own. “Nothing is more important to me than you and our girls . . . nothing.”

Sniffling hard, the Russian used her arms to pull herself closer to her lover, burying her face in the side of his neck. The two stood there for a long second, analyst and assassin, taking comfort in the fact they were still together and still fighting. It seemed like an eternity before Marina yawned, her eyes fluttering sharply as the drugs started to catch up with her once again. Turning to his eldest, he asked, “Would you take your mom and your brother upstairs? She could use the rest and from the looks of things, Rene has no intention of letting her out of his sight for awhile.”

Sam grunted as he agreed, “I know the feeling. Yeah, let me take her.”

“No!” Marina protested sharply, tightening her arms fiercely as she protested. “I'm not leaving you.”

“Marishka, you need to rest. No stress. Remember what the doctor said.”

“Not without you,” she insisted stubbornly, hot chocolate eyes determined as she glared at him. “Zhemchuzhina . . .”

“I don't care. They can wait. I need you more than they need to yell at you.” Lacing her fingers through his hair, she shook her head. “If they want to yell at you, they can wait until after I'm asleep.”

There was violence in her eyes, daring him to argue with her. However, it was the fear hiding behind the violence which made up his mind. “All right. I'll come lay down with you and the boys for awhile.”

There was an instantaneous protest from his brothers, each of them vehemently protesting this turn of events. Marina flinched hard in her lover's arms, but it was surprisingly Hansel who spoke up in defense of the decision. “Silence, meine Sohne . . . Marishka is right . . . her well-being is more important at this time. We can wait.”

Nodding in grateful acknowledgment, Will clutched Marina a fraction closer then turned towards the stairs, both of their sons trailing along behind them. Fortunately, the couple's bed was huge. By unspoken agreement, Will and Marina ended up in the middle, with Rene cuddled into his dad on one side and Marina on the other, with Sam laid out on his side next to the Russian. The teenager and his mom clutched to each other tightly, their clasped hands resting on the Colonel's stomach as piercing blue eyes scanned the woman from head to toe.

Marina smiled, squeezing fondly, as she promised, “We're all right, Rene . . . get some rest.”

“Agreed,” the eldest Grimm insisted, “It's been a long day.”

“You're okay, Mama?”
“I am, baby . . . your dad and your brother made sure of it,” the handler promised, releasing his hand to run her fingers through his hair. Rene cuddled a small inch closer to Will, his knees tucked up into Will's ribs and his forehead pressed into the hollow below his armpit. The man's arm tightened slightly around his youngest son's frame, knuckles running soothingly over the skin laid bare between his t-shirt and his shorts. Marina's own eyes were drifting closed, even as Sam began to hum quietly under his breath.

Recognizing the song, the Colonel closed his eyes as he sang along softly to the tune, “You are my sunshine . . . my only sunshine. You make me happy . . . when skies are gray. You'll never know dears . . . how much I love you. Please don't take my sunshine away.”

The soothing baritone was warm and familiar. Before long Rene had drifted off, snuffling adorably as he tossed onto his back, splayed out like a starfish. Both of his parents chuckled, Marina's laughter infinitely more tired than Will's. Sam continued to hum, his arm coming up around his ma's waist as she fought the last drop into unconsciousness. “Go to sleep, Ma,” Sam whispered, pressing his nose into her shoulder blade. “We've got you.”

One of the woman's hands came up to link with her sons, while the other reached out to clutch her lover's shirt. Knuckles went white as she whimpered, “I'm scared.”

The Colonel's own hand came up to tangle with hers, as he replied softly, “Me too.”

“He looked right at you, Misha . . .”

Sensing the nature of her thoughts, Will interrupted, “. . . And he didn't know me.”

“How long can we guarantee that? How long until he remembers?”

“Marishka, samaya malen'kaya . . . I refuse to borrow trouble. For now, he doesn't know me. With any luck, he never will. However, just because we hope for the best doesn't mean we won't prepare for the worst.” Using a knuckle, he tilted her head back and pressed a warm kiss to the pout on her lips. “I will not let him hurt you . . . not now and not ever.”

“If he takes you, that will be the worst pain I will ever know,” she breathed, her body starting to go lax as unconsciousness crept up whether she liked it or not.

Nuzzling his nose against hers, he promised solemnly, “Then we'll just have to make sure he never has the chance.” Tightening his hand around hers, he insisted, “Close your eyes, Marina . . . we're okay. Ross cannot hurt us again.”

There was a soft sound before he could feel her body sag against him completely. The soft hum from Sam faded away as his oldest murmured, “I think she's out.”

“Yeah,” Will agreed, shifting slightly to press another kiss to her forehead, before he started to extricate himself from the bed.

Those ice blue eyes were sleepy as Sam watched his adoptive father climb from the bed. “Dad?”

Will gave him a small smile, his fingers nimble on the buttons of his uniform jacket as he moved towards the walk-in closet. “Yeah, Sammichka?”

“What are you doing? It's been a hell of a long day . . . I think if anyone deserves a break, it would be you and Ma.”

“And while I would love to, your uncles will eventually lose patience and storm up here to yell at me
if I don't go downstairs to meet them head on.”

Yawning, Sam shoved himself upwards, knuckling hard at his eyes. “You want me to come with you? Owen's not here and you could probably use an ally right about now.”

The Colonel emerged from the walk-in then, dressed in a pair of old jeans with holes in the knees and a navy button-down with the sleeves rolled to his elbows. Fingers flew as he threw a tie around his neck and knotted it loosely. “Nah, Sammy . . . stay here with your mom and your brother. Get some rest while you still can . . . you look wrecked.”

“Pot meet kettle,” Sam joked with a tired grin. “You're sure?”

“Yeah,” the older man agreed, bracing one hand on the bed as he bent to press a warm kiss to the top of his son's head. “Get some rest. You can always come to my rescue when you wake up.”

“I sincerely hope they don't intend to yell at you for that long.”

“So do I,” was all the Colonel said in agreement, flashing another small smile at the blond before he turned and left the room, closing the door softly behind him.

********************

Will Grimm was not a stupid man. He knew the coming confrontation was going to be ugly and brutal. It was part of the reason he had chosen to wear what he had. If this showdown had to happen, at the very least he was going to be at ease. The button down was one of Marina's favorites, and more importantly, her perfume still lingered at the collar from the last time he'd held her while she applied it. The jeans were his oldest and most comfortable pair, soft and worn with age. Even still, he moved glacially down the stairwell, fidgeting at his watch as he went. Just because he knew this was inevitable, didn't mean he was looking forward to getting it over with.

The tension in the room was palatable, easily spilling into the hallway where the Colonel had paused to take in the mood of the room. Brian's tone was loud and brash as he ranted to his father about the idiocy of Will, Marina, Sam, and all of their antecedents – the elder brother wisely refrained from reminding him Brian shared most of those same ancestors. As for Jason, typically the most outspoken of the three younger brothers, he was suspiciously pensive and quiet, seated on the couch next to worried and attentive Casey. The tech seemed oblivious to everything else in the room, eyes fixed on where his girlfriend's fingers laced between his. Clint however was signing emphatically at Aaron, who sat with Marta on the loveseat, his features flat and stoic in response.

Of everyone present, only Hansel and Bucky seemed relaxed. Taking a deep breath in through his nose, Will released it slowly before stepping completely into the room. Brian whirled on him instantly, snapping, “About damned time!”

“Marina is asleep; so are Sam and Rene. If you're going to yelling, I can accept that. I would ask, however, we at least try not to wake them.” Glancing upwards at the ceiling overhead, he sighed, “Marishka's had a hell of a scare today; she needs the rest.”

It was at that moment Brian lost what little patience he had thus far been clinging to. “What the fuck happened, Will!”

“Marina is asleeep; so are Sam and Rene. If you're going to yelling, I can accept that. I would ask, however, we at least try not to wake them.” Glancing upwards at the ceiling overhead, he sighed, “Marishka's had a hell of a scare today; she needs the rest.”

It was at that moment Brian lost what little patience he had thus far been clinging to. “What the fuck happened, Will!”

Sparing a fervent wish for the absent Natasha – she had been assigned to the Harlem clean up after the incident with Ross, and Will was not counting on her reappearing for some time – the Colonel shook his head. “In order to answer that question, it might be prudent for someone to tell me what it is you do know. That way I don't have to go over the same material twice.”
Hansel pinned his hot-headed son with a warning glare, before turning to his eldest. “We know only what the news has shared. Both Ross and an unidentified pregnant woman were rushed to Lenox Hill Hospital after the incident in Harlem.” Gesturing towards the stairs, the German smiled sadly as he reminded his son, “As meine Tochter is the only pregnant woman I know of who would huf been in Harlem at the time . . . hyur brothers and I were understandably concerned. And considering the state she arrived home in, our concern does not seem to huf been misplaced.”

Nodding once in subdued agreement, Will allowed his gaze to move from face to face before he shifted to put the wall at his back. Best to have everyone in his eyeline; what he said next was not going to be well received. There was a long pause, before at last the Colonel spoke, “I shot Ross.”

Instantly, the room exploded into enraged pandemonium.

Hansel sank into Marina's armchair with horror in his eyes, while three of the Colonel's four brothers lunged to their feet and began to yell at him. As for Clint, the archer had been complaining of a lingering headache for days and was currently without his hearing aids. He had missed the announcement and grabbed at Aaron's sleeve to pull his best friend's attention around. Blue eyes were smoldering, even as the former Outcome operative twisted to look at the younger brother. There was fierce frown on his face as Clint's hands flashed through his question, the younger man's face twisting at the sharp reply. Gray eyes went wide at the statement, before Clint too was on his feet and demanding answers with forceful signs which clearly displayed how upset he was.

Fortunately, Bucky grabbed hold of his boyfriend and hauled him back into his lap, prompting both Marta and Casey to follow his lead. Though it did nothing to lessen the tension or reduce the anger, it wasn't long before only Brian was still on his feet. Forcing himself to relax, the Colonel rolled his shoulders back and slouched, trying to shake the fight or flight instinct he'd been struggling with while confronted with four of S.H.I.E.L.D.'s most talented assets. “Are you done?” he asked tired, one hand coming up to rub at the bridge of his nose, tired to the marrow his bones.

Jason's head snapped up from where it had been resting in his palms, as he barked, “How the hell can you even ask that!? No we're not done! Do you want to be raising your daughters from Leavenworth!? Ross is a General! He outranks all of our asses, even yours, Colonel Badass!”

Aaron chimed in next, “Did you even think of what would happen when the Army comes for you? Geez, Will . . . how the fuck are you not locked up in a brig somewhere awaiting trial!?” Paling sharply at the statement, he sank backwards into his seat as a thought struck him. “Your trial is gonna end us. They're going to figure it out . . . they're gonna figure out we're Cahills.”

Brian railroaded over the silent Clint as he pushed into Will's face, sneering, “We've all wanted to ghost the bastard, but what the fucking hell!? What . . . you wanted a little revenge, you saw the shot and you wasted him!? Who the fuck are you to . . .”

Suddenly Sam's voice roared through the room, causing everyone to jump in surprise. “Shut up!”

Those eyes were hot and crackling with lightning as the blond shoved between his dad and his uncle, both hands planting firmly on Brian's chest and shoving him several steps backwards. “First of all, Ross isn't dead. Second of all, the bastard deserved everything he got.”

Hansel's head came up at the information, watching his grandson face off against the entire room, the young man's father exhausted and slumped against the wall at his back. “He is not dead?”

“No, but I wish he was. It would have been no less than he deserved.”

“How do you know?”
“I was there . . . no farther away from him than I am from you now,” Sam gritted out, shame and guilt flashing across his face as he remembered how helpless he had been to protect his own mom, the one woman in his life who had always loved him unconditionally.

Robin’s egg eyes flashed towards the Colonel, who was leaning up against the wall with his eyes closed and his sleeves pulled down over the ends of his hands. Looking back at his oldest grandson, Hansel insisted, “Tell me what happened, Sam.”

The blond pulled in a sharp breath through his nose before glancing back at Will. “You okay, Dad?”

“Fine, Sammy . . . just very tired.”

“Ma's still asleep upstairs if you want to join her. I can handle this.”

“No, this is my mess . . . my actions put this entire family in danger. I have no intention of dodging that.”

Throwing up his hands in total exasperation, Sam hissed, “Damn it, Dad. For once, would you attempt to offer up some kind of defense for yourself. You did exactly what needed to be done to protect Ma . . . if you hadn't done it, I was going to. So was Ward.”

Aaron held up a hand to pause whatever argument the eldest Grimm was going to offer, asking, “Wait . . . Grant Ward was there? Why was Grant Ward in Harlem?”

Will sighed heavily, one hand rubbing at the back of his neck as he explained, “I had assigned him as Marina's bodyguard . . . she knew she had one, just not who it was. I have never been so relieved in my life to be an overprotective boyfriend. Ward and Sam kept Marina as safe as she could have been, at least until Lucky and I got there.”

The German cleared his throat sharply, cocking an eyebrow at his sons. “I will not ask again. What happened, Adler?”

“I only know half of it; I didn't get there until after Sam called me over comms that someone had grabbed Marina.”

“Ross grabbed Marina? And you're sure he's not dead?” Bucky asked, eyebrows in his hairline as he stared in shocked awe at the Colonel. There wasn't a single person in the room who doubted that had the Winter Soldier been there, the outcome would have been a very different one. Clint agreed, hands flashing as he signed, *If ever there was a time to kill Ross, Will, it would have been while he was manhandling your girlfriend.*

Sam was already shaking his head, answering in his dad's place, “Double tapped the trigger, two to the shoulder. Clean through, no significant muscle damage. He'll live to be an ass another day.”

“I will not ask again,” Hansel interrupted, arms coming up over his chest as he glared at the two blonds.

“Dad had left Ma at the Command Tent. He was heading off to give orders to the contingent of Army grunts Ross had left behind in Harlem, while Ma took over coordinating the clean-up and supervising the S.H.I.E.L.D. agents on site. Dad left me with her. Out of nowhere, this guy shows up, grabs Ma and starts yelling in her face about Cahills. Kept insisting she had stolen from him, and he was going to make her pay.”

Scrubbing both hands through his hair, Sam growled, “He backhanded her. I don't even remember grabbing for my gun. All I know is. one second I didn't have it and the next, I had it leveled between
his eyes more than willing to use it if he tried to hurt her again. Ward was right there with me. There was no hesitation; Grant would have killed Ross if the General had given him reason to."

Will gripped his son's shoulder firmly as he took up the story. “I showed up about then. Tried to talk him down.” Shaking his head at the memory, he grunted, “I thought I had him . . . that Ross was gonna let her go. But he just started raging again. I pulled my gun and put two in his shoulder.” There was a weary shrug, even as Will met his father's eyes head-on. “I don't regret it and I would do it again in a heartbeat.”

“I do not blame hyu, mein Adler. I do not think any of us would have done any differently, had we been in hyur place,” Hansel agreed, one hand coming up to grip his shoulder fondly. Cocking an eyebrow at Brian, he insisted, “Hyu will hear nothing more from us.”

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Some part of Marina knew she was dreaming. The rest of her didn't care.

Sam and Lucky had both of her arms, holding her in place, as faceless soldiers hauled Will away. It was her worst nightmare. She could hear herself screaming, could feel the drag of her pregnancy on her body, could taste the tears on her tongue.

The next images were disjointed and blurry. Her daughters born with Will still gone. A rescue mission. Will coming home, a fake smile on his face and emptiness in continually silver eyes. Endless fights. Countless tears.

Waking from a deep sleep, breathless from the pressure of Will's hands closed around her neck, his beloved eyes gone silver, cold and heartless . . . carrying out Ross' last revenge with the perfect weapon, his perfect weapon. Through the sounds of her gasping wheezes she could hear the sound of screams . . . screams Marina knew instinctively belonged to her innocent, infant daughters.

Eyes flashing open, she jolted upwards and screamed, the sound an anguished howl of soul-deep agony and paralyzing fear.

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The scream ripped through the house and immediately the Brothers Grimm were on defense, Casey and Marta shoved none-too-gently to the floor while the rest pulled weapons from their holsters. “What was that?” Jason asked, green eyes cold as they scanned the room.

It took only a moment for a light-bulb to go off behind the Colonel's eyes, before he turned on his heel and dashed toward the stairs, shouting, “Marina!”

The sound of Sam's footsteps on the stairwell behind him was a comfort as the older man bolted towards the master bedroom. They had left Rene on the bed with Marina, the two of them still sleeping soundly at the time. Whatever had happened, the teenager was no doubt terrified by the sound of the Russian's screams.

Sure enough, Will came into the room, to the sight of Rene trying to calm his adoptive mother. There were tears on his cheeks and it was clear her continued screams were freaking him out. There was a distinct absence in Marina's eyes; whatever had happened, it was clear she was not seeing the room around her or her frightened son beside her. “Sam . . . get Rene,” was all the eldest Grimm said, eyes intent on his partner.

The blond nodded, moving forward cautiously to grab his younger brother around the shoulders and guide him away from the bed. Rene's blue eyes were wide and panic-stricken, hands coming up to
grip Sam's wrists as the constable pulled him back towards the door. “Sam?” the boy whimpered, tilting his head back, ice blue eyes locking with cobalt.

“It's okay. Ma's gonna be okay . . . I promise. Dad's got her.”

“Why is she screaming like that?” he asked, watching his adoptive father approach the bed slowly.

“Nightmare,” Sam replied, tightening his hold just a touch, before attempting to explain. “Something happened today, something that really scared Ma.”

“Can I help fix it?”

“No . . . I don't think anyone can fix it.”

“No even Dad?” was the plaintive inquiry, eyes very wide as they peered up at his brother.

A sad smirk lifted one corner of the elder's lips as he replied, “No, Rene . . . not even Dad.”

It was about then Marina seemed to snap back to the present, the screams starting to fade into whimpers as she took in the room around her. She sagged slightly at the sight of her sons close by, before catching sight of Will moving slowly closer. Clearly still caught within the horror of her dream, the Russian scrambled backwards towards the headboard as she insisted vehemently,”No! Stay away from me!”

Will froze, features shocked at the negative reaction from his partner. “Marishka?” he asked curiously, his head tilting as he looked her over. “Zhemchuzhina . . . what's wrong?” The sound of her labored wheezing caught his attention and he frowned softly. “Marishka . . . breathe . . . you have to calm down. For the girls' sake.”

Hot chocolate eyes watched him intently, taking in every nuance of him. They shot back to his face as the Colonel begged, “Please, Marina. You have to breathe . . . if not for my sake, then for the girls. Please.”

It took a moment, but the Colonel seemed to come to the realization she was searching for something in his face. Forcing himself still, he held his hands out to his sides, with his eyes locked on her trembling frame while she looked him over. Finally, her eyes locked with his. Almost instantly, she sagged with a sob, before all but throwing herself from the bed and into his arms. “Mishka!” she cried.

There was no hesitation. Will was across the room and gathering her into his arms without even a thought, one hand smoothing through her hair as the other held her as closely to him as their bodies would allow. “It's okay, samaya malen'kaya . . . you're all right. We're all right . . . I am never going to let him hurt you again.”

Lifting her face from where she had buried it in his throat, she whispered, “I know.”

Chapter End Notes

Translations:
(R) chado - child (Marina's nickname for her youngest son, Rene)
(R) samaya malen'kaya - my little one (Will's most common nickname for Marina)
(R) Zhemchuzhina - pearl (one of Will's less common nicknames for Marina)
(G) meine Sohne - my sons
(R) Sammichka - a diminutive of Sammy (one of Will & Marina's nicknames for their eldest son, Sam)
(G) meine Tochter - my daughter (Hansel's nickname for Marina)
(G) (mein) Adler - (my) Eagle (Hansel's nickname for Will)
Chapter Notes

I melted writing this. I hope you melt reading it. :D Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter 212: The Minnow

Maria Hill-Kuhn grinned at her best friend, more than a little amused as she watched the Russian fend off her over-protective lover. Will had all but started smothering Marina Petrovka following the incident in Harlem with Ross. As much as she loved her best friend, watching the couple do battle never failed to make the AD crack up. Finally, the woman huffed, reaching up to grab his cheeks and hauled him down for a passionate kiss, cutting off the list of rules and concerns he'd been giving her.

Disengaging from him, she kept her hands on his cheeks and when he opened his mouth to protest once again, she hauled him down for another kiss. This time when they disengaged, she cocked an
eyebrow at him and teased, “I can do this all day, Misha, but eventually Maria is going to stab you with something.”

Those quicksilver eyes were vibrant blue, warm and amused, as he chuckled, “I just worry about you.”

Leaning into his hand as he reached to brush a strand of hair out of her eyes, she laughed, “I know, Mishka . . . trust me, I KNOW. But it's a baby emporium, not an undercover mission in Chechnya. Chill out.” Kissing him, she promised, “I'll call you when we're ready to leave. And I promise not to lift anything heavier than a onesie. Agreed?”

Looking up at Maria, he relaxed almost instantly in response to her firm nod of agreement. “I'll keep an eye on her, and she'll keep an eye on me. We'll be fine. I promise.”

Confronted with these two Fury's Angels, the Colonel finally conceded defeat. “All right!” he capitulated, throwing up his hands in surrender. “I'll let it go. Please though . . . at least tell me you both are armed.”

Marina rolled her eyes as the other woman scoffed. “Please, Will, we are not amateurs. Of course we're armed.”

“Thank God. Have fun,” he laughed, kissing the Russian's cheek, before hauling himself up into the driver's seat of their Jeep. “Love you, samaya malen'kaya.”

“Love you too,” she agreed with a grin and a wave, blowing kisses after him as he put the car in gear and drove away. Once her partner was out of sight, Marina bounced on her toes with a happy squeal, clapping her hands together happily. “Freedom!! It's a miracle!”

Bursting into laughter, the AD looped her elbows through the Russian's. “You need to get out more.”

“I know!” she groaned, tugging on her friend. “Quick, let's go before he changes his mind and comes back.”

Giggling like school girls, the two women headed into the store. They barely made it through the door before they both froze, horrified by the sheer magnitude of the space. “Bozhe moi,” Marina breathed at the exact second her best friend groaned, “Oh shit.”

“We brought the list, right?”

“We did,” Maria agreed, watching her best friend nibble on her lower lip. “Marishka . . . it's just baby things. You were the one who said we needed to stop putting it off.”

“I know! I just never imagined there would be so much stuff!”

“We got this. Think of it as just another mission. Except, you know, with a lot more pink.”

“No pink!” Marina burst out in horror. “Daughters or not, a child of Will Grimm does not wear pink. Green maybe, or a beautiful blue.”

“Traditionally, blue is for boys,” her best friend reminded her, grabbing a blue onesie off a rack with a fire truck on it.

“Buck tradition, Vorobyey . . . blue is for everyone. We wear blue everyday.”
The AD smirked as she reminded the Russian fondly, “Hans will kill me if I dress our daughter in S.H.I.E.L.D. blue. I'm just going to throw that out there.”

“Eh, what's life without a little danger? Live a little. Besides, she needs at least one 'Mommy's Little S.H.I.E.L.D. Agent' outfit! It would be so cute!” Marina chirped cheerfully, clapping her hands together excitedly. “Come on! Let's go see what they've got!”

About an hour later, the two women were seated at the emporium's in-store cafeteria. They each had chosen their cribs, which had been the biggest reason they had come, and arranged for them to be shipped to the base the very next day. There was bags piled beside them, filled with clothing, blankets, infant toys and other knick knacks that Marina had been unable to argue herself out of. And of course, a receipt for three matching t-shirts, specially ordered to read “Mommy's Little S.H.I.E.L.D. Agent.”

Marina frowned as she watched her best friend pick listlessly at her lunch, cocking her head slightly as she questioned, “Vorobey? You okay?”

“Yeah . . . I've been dealing with Braxton Hicks contractions all day. They're starting to get annoying,” she insisted, frowning fiercely in frustration.

“Maria . . . are you sure they're just Braxton Hicks?”

“What else would they be?” the AD inquired, shifting uncomfortably as she reached for her herbal tea.

“Actual contractions. You're due in three days!”

“That's ridiculous. My water hasn't broken yet.”

Chuckling, Marina rolled her eyes as she teased, “You didn't read a single one of those books Medical gave us, did you?”

“I tried, but admittedly, I've had a lot of other things to do in the last nine months,” the woman huffed with a roll of her eyes.

Glancing towards at the ceiling in a plea for sanity, Marina bent to dig in her purse for her phone. “I'm calling Vati and Medical. Even if you're not in labor at this exact second, having contractions for that long? You're probably a lot closer than you think.”

Maria sighed as she reached for her things, insisting, “You're overreacting.”

“Be that as it may, I am not going to be held responsible for that baby getting dropped on her head, because you weren't paying attention to the signs your body was screaming at you.” Shooting upwards as a sudden thought flashed across her mind, she demanded, “Wait . . . how long have you been experiencing the contractions?”

When Maria's only reply was to glance at her watch to try to figure it out, Marina all but screeched, “That long!? And you thought they were Braxton Hicks!? MARIA!!”

“You're being ridiculous,” the assistant director scolded. Of course, as soon as she stood up, she froze. The Russian caught the action, watching her best friend blink in horrified mortification. “What!? Vorobey, what's wrong?”
“My water just broke,” was the sheepish response, an uncharacteristic blush spreading across her cheeks.

Marina stared in startled shock, eyes wide as she watched Maria sink back into her seat. Finally, she squealed, “I told you!”

“Can we hold on the 'I told you so' for right now? We have a few other things that probably need doing right now,” Maria groaned, hunching slightly as another contraction ripped through, this one stronger and longer than the others before it.

Glancing at her watch, the handler timed the contraction, even as she put herself in the seat next to her best friend, arm wrapped around her shoulder's familiarly. Eyes widening at the time – 45 seconds meant her best friend was more than likely almost fully dilated and had been in labor for several hours at that point – she turned her attention back to her friend. “We got this, Vorobey, just breathe.”

“I made a mess,” the AD whimpered, just as a pair of employees bolted over.

The manager was a kindly older woman, easily sixty if she was a day, her eyes smiling just as brightly as her mouth. “Don't you worry about that, honey. It happens more than you think. We'll get it cleaned up in no time.”

Another contraction ripped through the younger woman, her hand tightening hard on the former assassin's hand. The managed looked alarmed at the sustained nature of the action, glancing towards Marina who was once again timing it. Finally shaking herself free, she twisted to look up at her employee, ordering firmly, “Call 911. Explain what's going on . . . and make sure they know to step on it.”

The other girl bolted away with a brisk nod, just as the woman asked, “My name's Annika . . . what's yours?”

“Maria,” she all but keened, sucking in air through her teeth.

“It's nice to meet you, Maria. How long have you been having contractions, sweetheart?”

“All day,” she panted, sagging into the Russian as Marina soothed gentle fingers through the rapidly soaking hair. “I thought they were just Braxton Hicks. They didn't hurt . . . they were just annoying.”

Blinking at her, Annika chuckled, “Well, I don't think we've ever had an actual birth at the store, but I guess there's a first time for everything.” Smiling gently, the woman promised, “The paramedics are on their way. You do what comes naturally and you'll be holding your baby very very soon.”

Looking up at another employee, the woman channeled her inner drill sergeant as she began dispensing orders. “Mandy, we just put those nightgowns on clearance. Go grab me on, and then get some receiving blankets and a pack of onesies and some of the infant washcloths. Take them into the Mother's Room.” Turning back to Marina, she cocked an eyebrow at the Russian's own distended belly, before she questioned, “Can you help me get her into the Mother's Room? There's no reason to keep her in soaked clothes and she'll probably be more comfortable out of the public eye.”

“Yeah, I can help,” Marina breathed in relief, reaching out to grab the woman's wrist. “Thank you.”

“Don't you worry, honey. I had five of my own and was there for at least a dozen grandbabies. From what I can see, she looks healthy and strong, and I don't hear any of the panic that I do from some of the other women who go into labor at my store. Mother and child are going to be just fine.”
By the time the paramedics arrived, the contractions were ranging anywhere from 55 to 60 seconds in length and the soft whimpers Maria had been making had graduated to full on keens. The female paramedic smiled kindly at the laboring woman as she leaned over to grab a couple blankets, tucking them around Maria's bottom half as well as laying them out on the ground under her bent knees. “Can you tell me how long you've been having contractions?”

“Almost 13 hours, as best as she can tell me. The contractions are ranging from 55 to 60 seconds and they’re not giving her much rest between them.”

“All right. In that case, we’re probably not going to make it back to the hospital. I prefer not to birth children in the van . . . not a whole lot of space to maneuver and only one set of hands.” Reaching for the hem of Maria’s borrowed nightgown, she soothed, “Take a deep breath for me, ma'am. I'm just going to check and see how far you're dilated.”

Reaching under the fabric, the woman's hands were steady and competent as she felt before nodding. “We are not going to make it. Your fully dilated and the head is already crowning.” Looking up, she told her partner, “Call it in. We're not gonna be able to make it make it back to the hospital. We're gonna have to deliver here . . . better get the birthing kit.”

Maria clutched at her best friend, slumped back against her as she sobbed, “I want Hans . . . he's supposed to be here for this.”

“I know, Vorobey, I know. But I'm here . . . we've got this,” she promised, brushing the hair out of the other woman's eyes. Clutching her hand tightened, she forced the woman to meet her eyes. “It's just another mission, okay? I've got your back and I'm right here . . . I'm not going anywhere.”

Sensing the conversation was over between the two women, the paramedic placed her hands lightly on Maria's knees. “All right, next time you have a contraction, I want you to push, okay? You're gonna have this baby in your arms before you know it.”

It was almost an hour later before Hansel skidded into her hospital room, his sons hot on his heels. The two women were both staring at the swaddled bundle in Marina's arms, the handler singing a Russian lullaby to the baby as the child slept. Looking up at her husband, the assistant director gifted him with a tired smile, “You're late.”

Looking up, Marina grinned at her partner's father, shifting to her feet carefully. Coming to join him, she offered him the child carefully. “Congratulations, Vati . . . you have a beautiful, healthy daughter.”

Hansel's eyes were huge as he accepted the infant, cradling her as though she was made of the most priceless porcelain with only a little nudge from Marina. Tucking her into his chest, he brushed the blanket from the little girl's face so he could take all of her in at once. Moving to the bed as though in a daze, the German bent to kiss his wife fiercely, “Huu are amazing . . . she is beautiful.”

“I know,” Maria agreed with a brilliant grin, one hand reaching out to smooth fondly over the wrinkling forehead. Looking up at him, she smiled, “I know you wanted to name her Minna . . . but we hadn't picked out a middle name yet.”

Smiling he agreed, “No . . . do hyu have one in mind?”

“Annika.”

Robin's egg eyes narrowed slightly as he considered the name, musing softly, “Minna Annika Kuhn . . . I like it.” Bending, he brushed his nose against his daughter's as he sighed, “Our little Minnow.”
Hiking up onto the bed next to his wife, the couple spent long moments staring at their little miracle. Neither noticed Marina herding the baby’s older brothers from the room. They could wait . . . there would time enough for introductions later.

Chapter End Notes

Translations:
(R) samaya malen’kaya - my little one (Will's most common nickname for Marina)
(R) Bozhe moi - oh my God
(R) Vorobey - sparrow (Marina’s nickname for her best friend, Maria Hill)
(G) Vati - Dad (Marina's nickname for Hansel Kuhn)
American Idol

Chapter Notes

Hello honeys! Here we go! This one's a roller coaster. I hope you enjoy!!

Translations at the end as always!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 213: American Idol

It had been three months since Harlem. It had taken weeks for Marina to stop jumping at every creak in the floorboards and every step on the porch. Eventually though . . . even the Russian had had to concede that if Ross hadn't come yet . . . he wasn't coming. Which wasn't to say that she or her lover forgot what had happened. The Power Couple had instead prepared themselves for any eventuality should her nightmare ever become a reality.

She'd been showing a little bit since Week 16. So she hadn't really understood why both Marta and her S.H.I.E.L.D.-appointed OB seemed so concerned that she hadn't “popped” yet. The term was contradictory in Marina's opinion and she had puzzled over it more than a few times at night when the twins were active and she couldn't sleep.

And then, it had happened . . . she'd popped. Overnight, she was suddenly the size of a beached whale.

Of course, as if that wasn't bad enough, she was also having to contend with her worrier of a lover. If Marina herself was Batman, then Will was Alfred; worrying and scolding and generally trying to protect her from herself. Lately it had become apparent that her size was in direct correlation to how
much he worried. She couldn't hardly lift a finger, without her erstwhile partner swooping in to rescue her from whatever she was attempting to do for herself.

It was getting a little tiring.

Currently, it was the first week of December, it was freezing outside . . . and Marina was sweltering. She'd waddled around her home, throwing open all of the windows that morning, sighing in instant relief at the cool breeze coming through the screens. Her poor Rene . . . he was working on his homework at the dining room table, bundled up in a thermal henley, a pullover sweater, a hoodie and the heavy winter coat his brother had left behind when Sam had returned to Toronto.

Smiling from where she was cutting up celery for lunch, she chuckled as she watched him tug the blanket tighter around him. She'd offered to close the windows a dozen times, and every time he'd insisted that he was fine. “Rene . . . *chado* . . . let me close the windows, love.”

She hadn't even finished speaking before the fourteen year old was shaking his head. “I'm fine, Mama.”

“You're shivering like a leaf on a blustery day,” she protested, eyes wide.

“And you're wearing a tanktop as though it's 100 degrees out. I can suffer a little bit, if the cold makes you feel better.”

Coming around the counter, she wrapped her arms around her son's shoulders tightly. “I love you very much, *golovnya*.”

“*Ya tozga tebya lyublyu*, Mama.”

Pressing a quick peck to the top of his head, she waddled slowly back into the kitchen and picked up her paring knife once more. For awhile, there was peace and quiet as mother and son enjoyed each other's silent company. At which point, Will returned home for lunch. There was the heavy thud of his messenger bag hitting the floor next to the door and the jingle of keys in the bowl on the entry table. Then a relieved sigh as two thunks, one after the other, landed on the hardwood; his boots, unless the Russian missed her guess. “Welcome home, Mishka!” she called, one eyebrow cocking as he came into view.

Frowning at her standing on her feet, he moved forward quickly. “Marishka . . .”

Already guessing the nature of his thoughts, the handler interrupted smoothly, “So help me god, William Michael, I am pregnant . . . *not* an invalid. If you even think of scolding me for making my own lunch, I will stab you with my knife.” Smirking, she sing-songed, “I will stab you with my knife . . . ten . . . times.”

Blinking at her in surprise, it took a moment for him to catch the reference. Once it clicked he smirked, “Been watching Chicago again, huh?”

“It really is a terrible film, but I do love it so,” she agreed with a happy purr as he moved to her side. Her head dropped back as her eyes slipped closed, their lips tangling lazily as they kissed. “How's work?”

Huffing, S.H.I.E.L.D.’s Chief Analyst begged, “Please, Marishka, for the love of whatever god you believe in . . . do not ask.”

Chuckling, she teased. “That good, huh?”
There was an overly dramatic groan from the analyst as he slumped onto a bar stool, he dropped his forehead onto the bar with a bang and groaned, “Worse.” After a moment, his head came up again. There was a puzzled frown on his face as he inquired cautiously, “Is it just me or is it freezing in here?”

Rene's tone was cheerful as he piped up from the table, “Not just you, Dad. I think there's a couple blankets left in the linen closet. But I'm not giving Sammy's coat back; it's warm.”

Just then Will's phone rang in the pocket of his slacks, prompting Will to drop his head on the bar once again. “I am on lunch,” he muttered, even as he shifted on the stool to dig for it.

Marina was giggling as she passed him an apple, watching as he put it to his ear without ever looking at the screen. “Brandt . . . this had better be insanely important.”

Jason's tone was amused as he joked, “I have to know . . . do you ever actually check the Caller ID on your phone before you answer a call? That's what it's there for, you know.”

The Colonel chuckled as he agreed, “I'm on lunch, Jay. Anyone calling me now had better have a damn good reason.”

There was a serious undertone as the middle Grimm snorted. “Well, I don't know if this qualifies. But I'm pretty sure you're going to want to know anyway.”

“Want to know what?”

“You're never going to believe this, Will, but they found him. Hell, I'm looking at him right now, shield and everything.”

A tiny light bulb was flickering in the back of Will's mind even as he asked, “Found who?”

“The fucking corpse of Captain Fucking America is lying on one of my lab tables right now. If I didn't know my history, Will, I would swear he was just sleeping and not a day over 20. Jesus . . . this is the guy we were built to replace!? He was a kid, at best!”

Will's eyebrows rose at the excited gushing coming from his baby brother. "I think you're gonna have to say that again, because there is no way I heard you right the first time."

"Did you hear the part about Captain America laying out on my lab table?"

"Yes."

"Then you heard me right."

Reaching up to pinch the bridge of his nose, Will let that process for a moment. Finally, he asked, “How? I thought his plane went down in the Arctic?”

"A systems program I've been working on located a downed plane in the Arctic Circle. They dispatched a bunch of agents. Lo and behold, there he is, lying in a coffin made of ice.” There was a pause, "Also, that shield is awesome. I'm going to try to convince Nick to let me duplicate it if I can. If not, I think Coulson has already called dibs."

“Coulson should probably keep in mind that he's married to one of the Viper's beloved older sisters. It will help with those inappropriate thoughts of his,” Will snarked, before frowning. “Wait . . . you're not the morgue. Why would they bring him to you?”
"Did you think the ice coffin was a joke? Cause it wasn't? They brought him to me so my nerds can thaw him out before they put America's Hero in the ground at Arlington or something."

"Jay, are you sure that's all they're planning on? That body is all that's left of Erskine's original serum."

There was a pause, before Jason sighed, "Those are my orders. If they have any plans, I don't know about them. But I can look into it, if you want. Either way, I would suggest rounding up the Soldier. The body won't be here for long I'll bet."

Will looked up at Marina, the Russian watching him curiously as he agreed, "Yeah. I'll get right on that. If they come before we get there . . ."

"Stall, yeah . . . I know."

Hanging up the phone, he smiled at Marina. "You are not going to believe this."

Hot chocolate eyes were resigned as she agreed, "I'm not going to like this, am I?"

"Probably not." Leaning forward on his elbows, he reached out to grab her hand in his. "Do you know where Bucky is today?"

Those eyes flashed wide, pain flashing through them like lightning. "He's supposed to be at the training center with Clint today. Why? What's wrong with Bucky?"

Standing, Will shoved his hands back through his hair as he replied, "I'll tell you about it on the way."

The Russian immediately paled. "Bozhe moi. That's bad."

"You're probably going to want to put your uniform on," was all he said, reaching out to grasp her elbow and guide her around the counter. Ruffling Rene's hair, he begged, "Close the windows, huh?"

"Thank you!" he cheered, bolting up from his homework and setting to work on that instantly.

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At this point, Bucky and Clint were just fucking around on the mats; they'd stopped being serious about ten minutes before. The trainees assigned to their earlier demonstration didn't know that though, glancing at each other in confusion as the two legendary snipers joked with each other in seemingly angry Russian. There wasn't just enough time in the day to spend together and neither was willing to give up the time they had with each other at the moment.

Of course, it was about then that Will's voice called through the room. "Class dismissed!"

The unexpected shout jolted both snipers out of their mock-battle, the two straightening immediately. As soon as he locked eyes with his former protégé, Bucky knew something was wrong. Officially, Marina was on leave until after her daughters were born. Yet here she stood, dressed in her uniform and looking up at him with liquid chocolate eyes, one corner of her lip trapped between her teeth and diamond tracks on her cheeks left by tears. Glancing at his boyfriend, he could see that the younger man had also realized that there was something wrong.

Dread rose like a rock in his throat, as he stepped forward. "Marishka? What is it? What's wrong?"
Glancing up at her lover, she took comfort in the compressed smile he gave her before turning back to her oldest friend. “Oh Buck . . . they found him.”

The Soldier glanced at Will but saw nothing in the Colonel's face to explain the statement. Concerned, the man jumped from the mats and came to join her, reaching out to take her hands fondly. “Marina . . . found who? Are you all right?”

“I'm fine,” she promised, twisting her hands in his to grip his wrists. Those delicate but deadly fingers tightened insistently as she looked up into his eyes calmly. “Bucky . . . they found the plane. The one Captain Rogers went down with.”

Suddenly, it felt as though the air had been sucked out of the room. He stared at her, horrified, the world wobbling in and out of focus like a top at the end of a spin. Before he knew it, he had Clint and Will on each side of him, hauling his arms over their shoulders and guiding him towards a chair. The archer's hand was insistent on the back of Bucky's head as he shoved him forward until his head was between his knees, ordering firmly, “Breathe, Bucky.”

Despite her bulk, Marina's whole form was graceful as she dropped to her knees in front of him. “They found the plane last night. His body is intact . . . it's here, at S.H.I.E.L.D. Jason called Will to let him know.”

Ocean eyes narrowed as he asked, “Why did Jason know before the Colonel did?”

“Apparently, they have the body up in R&D for right now, trying to thaw it out. When they found him, he was encased in ice.” Reaching out to take his hands once again, she insisted, “We don't know how long the body's going to be here, Bucky. If you want to say your goodbyes, you're going to need to do it soon.”

He blinked at her, surprised by the very idea. “I can do that?”

“Of course you can. You were his best friend. Not to mention, according to everything I researched on the way over here, you were his next of kin before your death. You get final say over what happens to the body.”

The word made him flinch and he shook his head sharply, “Stop calling him that. Please.”

Nodding in solemn agreement, she promised, “Of course. I'm sorry.” There was a moment as she reordered her thoughts around the new terminology, before looking up at him once again to ask, “What do you want to do, Bucky?”

“I want to see Steve . . .” he insisted, tears burning in his eyes as he tried to hold them back. “. . . right now. Please.”

Nodding in agreement she reached back for Will's hand, grunting softly as the Colonel helped pull her back to her feet. “Would you prefer to go alone? Do you want someone with you?”

“I don't want to go alone. Can you come with me? You and Clint?” he asked, twisting slightly to look up into his boyfriend's solemn gray eyes.

The archer gifted his partner with a small smile as he promised, “You didn't even have to ask.”

The Russian's reply was silent, offering only a single dip of her head. Will wrapped his arm around his partner's shoulders as he pressed a warm kiss to her temple, admonishing her gently, “Please don't overdo it. For my sake?”
“Yes dear,” she drawled with a roll of her eyes, earning a smirk and another brisk kiss to the cheek.

“Be good,” he teased, dodging the playful swipe she swung at his head. “I'm in my office when you're ready to go home, okay?”

There was a soft kind of brilliance in her smile as she nodded, the three watching S.H.I.E.L.D.'s Chief Analyst go before the handler turned back to the other two. That brilliance dimmed slightly as she reached for her former mentor's hand, insisting, “Let's go see Captain Rogers . . . okay?”

Reaching out blindly for Clint's hand, he linked his fingers with his boyfriend's fiercely before following after Marina to Jason's labs at R&D.

The room was freezing. Which he guessed made sense. Didn't want America's Hero rotting before the world got to see him laid out in state.

James Buchanan Barnes barely registered Jason's voice as he spoke to the techs hovering around the table. “All right, lunch time. Everybody out.” Glancing at the man who was for all intents and purposes his brother-in-law, he insisted, “Let's give Agent Barnes a few moments alone with him.”

People brushed by him, hands reaching out in silent comfort as some passed by, before at last, Bucky, Clint, Marina and Jason were the only ones left in the lab. The Russian woman's tone was devastated and concerned as she murmured, “He looks like he's sleeping.”

“It's the ice. It preserved him perfectly,” Jason explained to the woman, even as he looked at the Soldier, making it clear that the explanation was not just for Marina's benefit. “I am sorry, Buck.”

The older man nodded silently, tears trickling down his cheeks as he tried to understand what he was seeing. There was sadness and horror and devastation warring in Bucky's heart as he stared down at Steve. Still soaked from the brine the techs had used to dissolve the ice, his features were calm and peaceful as though he was only sleeping. The former assassin stood next to the lab table, hands braced on the edges as he took in every nuance of his best friend's face. Just looking at his Stevie was pulling long forgotten memories from the depths of the Red Room's brainwashing.

He could hear Marina and Jason talking quietly behind him, the two exchanging rapid fire commentary in Russian about the thawing process. Clint leaned back against the wall just outside of his periphery, a silent and steady presence for Bucky to take refuge in once he had said his own goodbyes. A surge of gratitude rushed through the Soldier as he thanked whatever cosmos was out there for such a supportive partner.

Leaning forward on his elbows, ocean eyes roamed over those familiar features. “Damn it, Punk. This wasn't how we were supposed to meet each other again. You were supposed to be golden and perfect, raising a glass with the rest of the Commandos in heaven, while I rotted in hell for the things I've done.” Dropping his forehead against the other man's chest, he groaned, “This isn't how I wanted to remember you, brother.”

He must have stayed pressed against him for at least ten minutes. At first, he thought he had imagined it . . . the soft contractions under his forehead. Closing his eyes, he tried to keep his imagination from running away from him. But finally, he couldn't deny it; they weren't heartbeats, but something was happening inside of Steve's chest cavity. Jolting upwards, Bucky stared down at him in shock, straining his eyes and trying to convince himself he'd imagined it, even though he knew he hadn't. “He's alive,” he gasped.
Marina frowned, glancing at Jason, even as she insisted, “That's impossible.”

“It's not . . . I kept feeling contractions, under my head. Get a heart monitor on him. Check if you don't believe me. I'm not imagining this.”

Jason squeezed his sister's arm in comfort, before moving past Bucky towards the portable medical equipment against the wall. He came back shortly with a portable AED unit and a pair of scissors. Slashing through the fabric of all but shredded uniform, Jason laid the captain's chest bared before sticking the electrodes on his chest. Flipping on the machine, he fiddled with for awhile before setting it down. There was nothing and Jason looked up at Bucky sadly, “Buck . . . you just . . .”

A sudden beep cut Jason off, his eyes flashing back down to the monitor. Another few minutes and another beep sounded, correlating with the jump of the heart monitor. Green eyes went wide in horrified shock before he bolted to a phone on the wall. Punching in a three digit code, he ordered into the phone, “I need Vincent Keller and Marta Grimm at Lab 2 immediately.” There was a pause as the person on the other end of the line protested, before Jason railroaded over him urgently, “I don't give a damn what they're doing! Get them here now!”

The phone made a loud bang as he hung it up. Gesturing insistently at Marina, he explained, “I need to go back and get the techs. If we want to keep him alive, we got a lot of work to do to make sure he comes up safely.”

“Go, we'll be here,” she promised, watching her boy bolt out of the lab at a run.

As she shifted her eyes back to Bucky, they snagged on Clint. There was desolation and happiness warring in her youngest's eyes. On the one hand, Clint wanted to be happy for his boyfriend; Bucky's most impossible dream could be a reality all too soon. On the other, the archer knew all too well the torch the Bucky had once carried for the golden man on the table . . . and the glaring evidence that once again, he was a placeholder, a replacement, and little more than that.

She stepped forward instantly, long held instincts urging her to comfort him, as she soothed, “Dorogoy . . .”

Those eyes snapped to hers, before he shook his head sharply and bolted from the lab. Reaching out to grab him before he left, she just barely missed him and instead was forced to call after him, “Clint!”

Bucky whirled around, just in time to see Clint disappear upwards into an open vent. Marina grimaced lightly, reaching out to grab for the wall next to her as she turned back to her oldest friend, hot chocolate eyes pained as they locked with ocean blue. Eyebrows furrowed as he moved to her side, taking her arm and guiding her to a chair. Crouching in front of her, he demanded, “Are you okay? Do I need to get the Colonel? Marina!? Talk to me.”

“I'm fine. Kidney shot,” she promised, a small smile on her face as she reached to cup his cheek. Glancing towards the door, she sighed, “I wish I could say the same for Clint.”

“What's wrong with Clint?”

Cocking her head at him, she teased sadly, “Not even you are this obtuse, Tovrets. Steve Rogers is alive . . . and every reason Clint has ever had for existing is suddenly null and void.” Her lips compressed as she smoothed her thumb over his cheek, “He thinks he's lost you . . . and I'm not sure either of us are going to be able to convince him, he's wrong.”

The horror of Marina's words lingered for the rest of the day and long into the night. When he
climbed into their bed that night, Clint was still MIA and no one had seen or heard from him since he'd fled his brother's labs. It was nearly two in the morning when Bucky startled awake as a body climbed onto the mattress beside him. Clint settled uneasily on his side, with his back to his boyfriend, both aware that the other was awake and neither sure what to say. Finally, Bucky rolled and fit himself against his partner's back. Hooking his chin over the archer's shoulder, he pressed a warm, gentle kiss to the curve of his throat. There was a small twitch in his cheek as Clint smiled at the action, his hand coming up to tangle with Bucky's own.

The former killer buried his face in the nape of his boyfriend's neck and for a long time the two were silent. Finally a Brooklyn accent broke into the room, promising, “I love you.”

Clint said nothing for a long time and for awhile, the older man didn't think he was going to say anything at all. Bucky was seconds from sleep when the archer finally replied in a tortured whisper, “I know.”

By the time Bucky woke the next morning . . . Clint was already gone.

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Three days later, Steve was removed from the hyperbaric chamber he'd been residing in while Medical fought to get his body functioning without causing damage to his heart, brain or other organs. He was transferred to a recovery room decorated to match what he was most familiar with and outfitted in period appropriate attire. At which point, Will, Marina and Bucky threw up a massive protest to Coulson and Fury's idea about what to tell the captain.

Bucky frowned, arms folded over his chest, as he listened to the Power Couple make his arguments for him. “We're not going to lie to him.”

“We can't tell him the truth!” Coulson protested, looking concerned at the very idea.

“Why not? I've read the reports; Captain Rogers isn't stupid. You lie to him like this, you try to deceive him like this? Not only is he going to figure it out, he will never trust S.H.I.E.L.D. again,” Will protested, cocking an eyebrow in question. “That's not exactly the kind of rapport I think we want to start off with, considering this is America's Hero.”

“So what do you suggest? We've already started the deception,” Fury argued lightly, though clearly still content to hear other options. “You've seen the room he's in.”

“We've surrounded him with things that are familiar to him. That doesn't mean we're lying to him,” Marina insisted, grunting slightly as one of the twins took a shot upwards into her lung. Smoothing her hands over her belly, she hummed in a low undertone, “Easy, devochki, give Mama a break . . . please.”

Will's hand came to rest beside hers and instantly the girls settled, earning a relieved sigh. Looking up at him with an impish smirk, she laughed, “You're not allowed to move for the next month and a half.”

“No hardship here. Maybe I'll actually be able to keep you in bed.”

“Haha, very funny,” she sighed with a roll of her eyes. “Misha and I have both discussed this with Agent Barnes. I'll go in and I'll tell him the truth.”

“The truth about what?”

“Everything. S.H.I.E.L.D., the crash, finding him . . .” pausing, she glanced toward the silent Winter
Soldier, before continuing, “Bucky.” Pinning Fury with hot chocolate eyes, she insisted, “After everything he's been through, we owe him that much.”

There was a moment, before Fury nodded in silent agreement. “All right. We'll play this your way. But if this goes wrong, you're going to be the one to explain it to the WSC.”

“It won't. I'll have Agent Barnes in my ear, guiding me through the conversation. And I'm pregnant. As far as he knows? I'm harmless.”

That caused a round of instantaneous laughter. Pregnant the Viper may be, but there wasn't a man there who believed for a second she couldn't wipe them all out with her pinky finger if she was of a mind to, not even Will. And he'd been the most protective of her since Harlem.

Just then a technician came running over. “Director Fury! His vitals are spiking and he's starting to stir. The captain's waking up.”

Nodding in agreement, Fury turned back to Marina, smiling at the woman who was practically his sister as he admonished her, “Be careful and be safe, okay?”

“Yes sir,” she agreed with a small grin, tilting up her cheek to accept the uncharacteristically fond kiss the one-eyed man pressed to her cheek. Spinning on her toes, she went up to kiss her own lover, before heading off to the captain's recovery room. Glancing at the tech supervising the monitors, she asked, “Is he awake?”

“And starting to realize something's wrong,” he agreed, giving her a bemused smile.

Bucky's voice was confused from behind her as he insisted, “As he should. Who chose that game? We were there . . . he wouldn't have heard it over the radio.”

“Well then, sooner rather than later it is,” she chirped, bouncing on her toes. Moving to the door of the room, she put one hand on the handle and turned back to the other man. “Wish me luck, Tovrets.”

Grinning, he laughed, “Don't break a leg. Your boys would kill me.”

She burst into startled laughter at the tease, before facing forward once more. A quick straightening of her spine and a squaring of her shoulders, before she pushed open the door and stepped into the room. There was deep suspicion in the eyes of Steven Grant Rogers, narrowing at her as she came into the room. Closing the door behind her, she moved to the radio and snapped it off, before turning back to face him. Her hands clasped over her belly, drawing his attention downwards; she fought to contain her smirk as he visibly sagged, clearly willing to relax in front of someone he saw as essentially harmless.

“Hello Captain Rogers. My name is Lt. Colonel Marina Petrovka, of the United States Army.”

Gesturing with one hand to the room, she continued, “Welcome to S.H.I.E.L.D.”

Chapter End Notes

Translations:

(R) chado - child (one of Marina's nicknames for Rene Grimm)
(R) golovnya - firebrand (one of Marina's nicknames for Rene Grimm)
(R) Ya tozga tebya lyublyu - I love you too
(R) Bozhe moi - Oh my God
(R) Dorogoy - darling (Marina's nickname for Clint Grimm)
(R) Tovrets - architect (one of Marina's nicknames for Bucky Barnes)
(R) devochki - girls (Marina's unborn twins)
(R)
Enjoy!

Translations, what few there are, are at the end as always.

(Credit should also be attributed to my betas - you know who you are - because seriously, I had a hard time with Steve and Luna jumped in to give me his voice . . . and of course, everyone else cheerleading and throwing me ideas and just being generally awesome. Thank you all so much.)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 214: Debriefing Cap

Marina Ivanovna Petrovka was not a tall woman. She stood a petite five foot one and before she got pregnant, the most common descriptor for her was diminutive. Her Misha stood at an easy five foot
eleven, towering over her on any given day. The two of them were a striking couple and more than a few of their friends had commented on the way they complemented each other in looks and temperament.

She had read the file on Steven Grant Rogers. The file had said that he was six foot even and 230 pounds. Looking at him as he rose from the bed, Marina was disinclined to believe it. The man appeared to her as though he was massive, with wide shoulders and slender hips and a stern demeanor that Marina could remember seeing on Will when he was pissed off. Blinking slightly, she muttered under her breath, “I would have appreciated a warning, Tovrets.”

Bucky's tone was curious as his voice rang in her ear, “About what?”

“He’s huge!” she argued, fingers sketching across her stomach as she watched the man stalk forward.

“You should have seen him when he was a kid. Scrawny little punk; he made me crazy,” the man argued, a Brooklyn accent lingering on his words as he grumbled.

“Careful, Soldat . . . your Brooklyn is showing,” she teased, before returning her attention to the captain as he paused next to the false windows. There was a moment, before Marina snorted lightly, retorting, “And I'm supposed to believe that moy dorogoy doesn't make you crazy.”

There was a sharp bark of laughter through the comm, as her former mentor snarked, “Scrawny Steve was a thousand times worse.”

“Well . . . there's a scary thought,” she drawled horrified, before suddenly the officer was directly in front of her.

“Where am I?” he demanded, blue eyes flashing with lightning as he approached her. “Who the hell are you?”

Cocking an eyebrow, Marina scolded firmly, “Watch your mouth! Soldier you may be, but you're also in the presence of a superior officer and I will insist that you comport yourself accordingly.”

“You said you were S.H.I.E.L.D.”

“No, I said I was United States Army. I was welcoming you to S.H.I.E.L.D.” Cocking her head, she watched him for a moment before offering insistently, “I don't think you realize the uniqueness of your situation here, Captain. You've been dead since 1945, at least according to the United States government.”

Those eyes went wide, shock registering across his face as he fumbled backwards for the bed. “Dead?”

“You crashed the Red Skull's plane in the Arctic Circle shortly after the disappearance of your friend, Sergeant James Buchanan Barnes . . . best known as Bucky Barnes.”

“Disappearance? You mean death . . . he fell from the train and into a ravine.”

Cocking an eyebrow, she inquired lightly, “Did you see a body?”

“Well no, but we didn't exactly have the time to go back and look for one. The Red Skull and HYDRA had disastrous plans for our country . . . I couldn't go back for him.”

Marina’s long honed protectiveness came roaring to the forefront as she snapped, “Then how can you be so sure he died? When you rescued him, Armin Zola had been experimenting on him! How
can you be sure if you didn’t even bother to check?!”

Bucky’s tone was calm and soothing in her ear as he insisted, “Back it up, Marina. It’s all right . . . I’m okay.”

Closing her eyes, Marina forced herself to take a long, deep breath through her nose. The action, as well as Will’s voice warm and adoring in her head counting down from 100 in Arabic, served to steady her temper, shove her Hufflepuff tendencies back into their box and force her logical brain back into play. Shaking her head to clear her thoughts, she opened her eyes once again to offer the captain a small, sad smile. “I’m sorry. That was uncalled for.”

“What’s going on? Who are you talking to?” the man demanded suspiciously.

Marina’s eyebrows furrowed as she cocked her head, “You heard me?” Glancing at the door, she asked in concern, “What else do you hear?”

Blue eyes narrowed as he considered the question. “I don't know. I've never heard anything like it before. It's a buzzing sound . . . kind of like bees but . . . not.”

Smirking, she laughed, “Eloquent. But effective. It's a comm . . . kind of like a radio, but much much smaller.”

Though he clearly didn't believe her, he nodded slowly. “I remember you.”

“I beg your pardon? I'm not that old,” she huffed, speaking mostly to the laughter ringing in her ear from her former mentor. “Shut up, before I let Clint put shaving cream in your boots and all of your uniform pockets again.”

There was a sputter, before the sniper protested, “You wouldn't dare!”

“Oh, wouldn't I?” she taunted smugly, before turning her attention back onto Steve Rogers. “May I ask how you remember me? Because I can say with all assurance . . . we have never met.”

Sinking onto the bed, he sighed, “I think it was a dream? It couldn't have been real, whatever it was.”

“A dream?” she asked cautiously, perching on the end of the bed outside of arm's reach. “What kind of dream?”

“I heard him . . .” the super-soldier whispered wretchedly, dropping his head into his palms.

Immediately the Russian’s maternal instinct was in overdrive. Conscious of the fact that he was still - at least mentally - the same age as her eldest son, Marina reached out a laid one hand on his forearm. “Heard who?”

“It doesn't matter . . . he's dead. I watched him fall.”

Compressing her lips, she could all but feel Bucky’s pain through the comm. They had agreed - her and Will and Bucky - that showing Bucky to Steve right off the bat would hurt the Captain more than easing him into the transition his life had abruptly taken. But damn if the kid wasn't ripping at her heartstrings.

Will's tone was calm as he reported, “Stick to the plan, Marishka. Tell him what's happened since he went into the ice. Owen's ready too, whenever you're ready to take him for that drive.”

“Captain Rogers, I know this is all going to be quite overwhelming but the year is 2009 . . .
November to be a bit more precise. You have been presumed dead since 1945. But in that time there was always a hope that the wreckage and ultimately you would be found. That you were not only found, but found alive, is a miracle.”

Those eyes were wide and horrified as he whispered, “2009?”

“Yes. The world has changed and I am afraid that there a lot for you to catch up on. But you are not alone. S.H.I.E.L.D knows that you have lost a lot. We're committed to helping you regain a place in the world . . . even if it is not the one you once had.”

“Peggy? The Commandos?”

“Director Carter still lives, though she suffers from moderate dementia.” Giving him a serene smile, she promised, “She had a good life, with an adoring husband and beautiful children. I can promise she missed you though. She still speaks of you fondly.”

There was a small sad smile as he announced, “I’m a little overdue for our dance.”

“I think, in light of the circumstances, she will forgive you.”

A fond smile lit the captain’s face and he shook his head, “Then she’s changed. If I saw her again, she would give me hell.”

Smirking, Marina laughed, “Sounds like my kind of woman. Her reputation was well known when I was in training as a child; though we never met personally, I can tell you that I would not have wanted to be on the opposite side of a fight with her.”

“Most didn't learn that until too late.”

There was amusement in hot chocolate eyes as she teased, “Sounds like you were one of those who caught on a little late.”

“You ever see pictures of my shield?”

“My Jason would literally kill to be able to recreate it. He’s got it sitting on a shelf in his lab and no one is allowed to touch it. Not even my brother-in-law; trust me, Phil and Jason are having a standoff over it.

“The first time I held it, she was standing maybe ten feet from me and pulled the trigger of her gun four times. I never asked her after, but I don't think she knew what it was made out of, she could have shot me and she didn't even blink an eye.” His smile never wavered. “Even considering the fact it’s vibranium, you can still see the bullet scars.”

“Hmmm . . . there’s a thing to find attractive.” A soft blush painted her cheeks as she replied, “Although . . . my lover thinks it’s sexy when I have blood in my hair, so I may have an idea what you’re talking about there.”

“Blood in your hair?”

“It’s complicated, I guess? I’m the XO of a highly trained, highly specialized alpha unit. We’re the ones the Army sends in when shit has hit the fan and they need some serious clean up.” Shrugging lightly, she continued, “When we’re not active duty with the Army, we work here, for S.H.I.E.L.D. It’s not exactly a bloodless occupation.”

There was a furrow between his eyebrows as he considered the statement, before inquiring, “I don’t
“remember S.H.I.E.L.D.”

“No, but I’ll bet you remember the S.S.R.?”

“Yeah, Peggy worked for the S.S.R.”

“While the S.S.R. and S.H.I.E.L.D. are not the same thing, they were born with the same ideals. Peggy Carter and Howard Stark claim the lion’s share of the credit for S.H.I.E.L.D.’s inception.” There was a distant look in her eyes as she recited, “A global community committed to peace.”

“Is that how it works?”

There was a self-deprecating twist to her mouth as she conceded, “Not always. But even the best intentions can pave the way to hell. We are only human and we do the best we can to keep to the parameters of peace Director Carter and Mr. Stark believed in.” Reaching out, she laid a hand over his with a soft squeeze. “You rather inspired them both, just so you know.”

“That’s not terrifying or anything,” he replied, a sharp frown on his face at the announcement.

“I wish I could say that everything you have inspired has been so positive, but that would be a lie. I spend rather a lot of time lying in my professional life . . . I try to avoid it in my personal one if I can.”

“I understand the inspiration part, Schmidt and I were created from the same compound and he tried to destroy the world. Even my own country saw different things when they looked at me after the serum.”

He seemed to see something in her features that upset him as those broad shoulders sagged a little. “I don’t want to know . . . do I?”

“I guess that will rather depend on you,” she hedged, one hand on her back and the other on the mattress as she forced herself to her feet with a small grunt. “Shall we?”

“Shall we what?” he asked cautiously.

“Did you not want to see the world outside of this room? Or do you find yourself content with the manufactured reality you find yourself in now?”

The two watched each other for a moment, before the captain pushed himself up from the bed. Gesturing with his right hand, he insisted, “After you, ma’am.”

“Just Marina . . . I’m not THAT old,” she sighed, with a roll of her eyes. Both of her hands came back to brace her back as she groaned, tone resigned as she sighed, “Misha is going to kill me.”

“Do you need protection ma’am?”

“Steve, Marina . . . I’m not kidding,” she scolded, narrowing her eyes and wrinkling her nose. “As for the protection, no. Although, if you let me hide behind you, that would be great.”

Will’s tone was dry and amused as he teased, “I’m standing at the door.”

“Damn it,” she sighed with a soft laugh. “No, Captain . . . I’ll be fine. Misha is my daughters’ father; he worries.”

Owen’s voice came from the door then, as he joked, “Understatement, Boss Lady. You about ready to blow this popsicle stand? Car’s gassed and ready.”
Before long, Will came up to stand beside his best friend, one eyebrow cocked and a warm smirk on his face. Squeaking adorably, Marina skittered behind Steve. Lifting one arm to look behind himself, the young man was surprised to see her peeking out from behind him, a wide grin on her lips. “Captain Rogers has promised to protect me from the big and scary Colonel, Mishka.”

The Colonel’s shoulders were vibrating and it took a moment for Steve to realize that the man was laughing. “What am I gonna do with you? You don’t intend to adopt this one, do you?”

Nose wrinkling adorably, she chirped, “I haven’t decided yet.”

Steve looked between the three not quite sure what to make of what was happening. His eyebrows rose as he echoed, “Adopt?”

Both of the men burst into laughter at the question, causing Marina to pout slightly. Still chuckling, Will sidestepped the captain deftly and swung his Russian into his arms. “How are you feeling?”

“I’m fine, Alfred,” she snarked, with a roll of her eyes.

“Whatever you say, Batman. Just take it easy, okay? I have a younger brother to go corral, so I will not be able to go with you.”

“Which brother?” Marina asked, wide eyed and worried.

“Clint . . . he’s apparently scaring the baby agents at the shooting range.”

“He’s really worried about what all of this means for the both of them, Misha . . . dig deep and find the nurturing side of you, okay? For my sake?”

“Haha,” he snorted. “I’m going to challenge him to a rematch. It’ll put him in a better mood, and give some of the trainees a little piece of mind. He’s a little intimidating when he’s full on Hawkeye at people.”

“Agreed,” she replied, before thinking for a moment and sighing, “Except for when he’s pissing them off by shooting them with nerf arrows from the airvents.”

“Touche,” her lover agreed, hands coming up to cup the swell of her belly as he bent to kiss her. “Be careful. I’ll see you when you get back.”

“What about Zima?”

“Waiting at the motorcade when you get back, as agreed.”

“Still in my ear?”

Bucky’s voice was a warm and gentle hum as he replied, “Always.”

“All right. I leave you in Owen’s capable hands and I’ll see you later tonight. I’m feeling like Chinese.”

Lifting her chin, she hummed happily as he engaged her in a warm kiss. “Tease . . .” she groaned, eyes rolling back as she considered her partner’s penchant for delicious Chinese dishes, each made from scratch and absolutely to die for. “Ya lyublyu tebya, moya Mishka.”

The Colonel smirked, even as he murmured his reply against her skin before slapping Owen on the back and dashing off out of sight. Seeing the curiosity in the captain’s eyes, the Cleaner jerked his
thumb over his shoulder. “That was the Boss. He’s the boss cause he’s banging the Boss Lady.”

Rolling her eyes at the double entendre in the words, Marina corrected fondly, “Other way around, Lucky.”

There was scandalized shock in Owen’s eyes as he protested, “Says who!?”

Several hours later, Marina was leaning back in her seat, fingers drawing designs over her belly, as she watched Captain Rogers take in everything outside of the SUV. He’d made them stop at Time Square; the awe and shock on his face as he rotated had caused a deep pang; Marina had been around long enough to remember how it used to look, and had watched it change drastically over the last twenty years since the Grimms had joined S.H.I.E.L.D.

The sight of Stark Tower, still in construction but clearly delineated against the skyline, had earned a twist of his mouth. When she had inquired, he’d stated that the he considered the building to be an eyesore. And yet, he’d gravitated naturally towards the older buildings still standing in Brooklyn and near Harlem. Snorting, she contemplated Tony Stark’s reaction to Captain America disliking his building; the engineer was so egotistical, Marina truly doubted he would care.

They had paused briefly on the block where Steve and Bucky had lived, following the death of Steve’s mother Sarah. While it looked nothing like it had, the location was understandably familiar to him. Neither she nor Owen had pushed to continue on, content to let him explore to his heart’s content.

All in all, it had been a good tour. Which was quickly coming to an end. As much as Marina had been hoping to put it off, the moment of truth had nearly arrived. “What’s our ETA, Lucky?”

“We’re five minutes away from base, Boss Lady.”

Nodding briskly, the Russian took a deep breath through her nose before releasing it slowly from her mouth. “Captain Rogers, there is one last thing . . . something you need to know, before we arrive back on base.”

Steve pulled his still distant gaze from the window and blinked, focusing on her, then noticing something about her manner asked, “Problem?”

“Nothing like that, Captain. Quite the opposite, in fact.”

“Then what is it, Ma’am?”

Sighing at the persistent terminology, Marina waved it aside before folding her hands in her lap. “When I was four years old, the Russians took me from my home and took me to what they called ‘The Academy’. They trained me to be a killer . . . but I was too kind, too sympathetic. I was 13 when the order was given to terminate me.”

Another strong pull of air lifted her shoulders as she considered how to consider, “There was an assassin . . . an asset, for the Red Room, who saw me defending one of my sisters from a group of bullies. And instead of letting them terminate me . . . he took me under his wing instead. He had promised that I would be the best in my class; and I was . . . I am.”

There was a pause as she nibbled on her lower lip, eyes wide and luminous as she watched him. It was clear that she was hesitant about telling him the rest, evidenced by the way her hands twisted and clenched together in her lap. “He was kind to me . . . he brought me candies which were forbidden to trainees . . . he took care of me . . . I daresay he even loved me, even though his reputation would have suggested he was incapable of it.
“There were rumors he was an American, though the idea was ludicrous to those us who heard it. Russia and America were in the midst of a Cold War; it was unthinkable to children, what had to have happened to make him loyal to Мать Россия. He was wiped of all memory constantly, and there were rumors of a machine that kept him loyal. But there were little idiosyncrasies; slang, terminology, occasionally a foreign accent . . . they all pointed to an American.”

Steve’s eyes were narrow as he watched her, visible confused. “I don’t understand. Why do I need to know this?”

Looking up, Marina saw they were pulling into the motorcade. There was a solitary figure standing in the entryway to the garage, feet planted at shoulder width apart and hands in the pockets of his cargos. Turning back to Steve, she replied, “They called him the Zimniy Soldat . . . the Winter Soldier.” Pointing out the front window, she continued, “You know him better . . . as James Buchanan Barnes.”

Chapter End Notes

DON'T KILL ME!!!!! *flees the pitchforks*

Translations:
(R) Tovrets - Architect (can also be father; Marina's nickname for Bucky Barnes)
(R) Soldat - Soldier (shortened form of Winter Soldier, the callsign for Bucky Barnes)
(R) moy dorogoy - my darling (Marina's nickname for Clint Grimm)
(R) Zima - Winter (shortened form of Winter Soldier, one of Marina's nicknames for Bucky Barnes)
(R) Ya lyublyu tebya, moya Mishka - I love you, my Mishka
(R) Мать Россия - Mother Russia
(R) Zimniy Soldat - Winter Soldier (the callsign for Bucky Barnes)
Terms & Conditions

Chapter Notes

Sorry about the wait. Steve would not put himself on the page; stubborn little punk! However, thanks to my wonderful betas for sticking with me and letting me annoy them at all hours of the day and night . . . the chapter is ready. Also, fair warning, it's short. But this is where the story demanded I cease.

Also, new banner! Woot!

There are no translations, except for the typical ones, so I won't bother this time. Enjoy!!
BROTHERS-IN-ARMS
ForGED IN Fire
Chapter 215: Terms & Conditions

Steve’s breathing hitched sharply at the name. He continued to stare at her, not looking to where she was pointing and shook his head, “That’s not possible. Even if he survived that fall, even if… he would be dead, or too old to be standing there like that. Whoever is over there is young.” He didn’t even have to look straight at them to see that. “So either you have been misled or we may in fact have a problem.”

“Captain Rogers, the only thing misleading about anything you have learned about James Barnes, was that HYDRA only wanted information from him when he was captured. While he was in custody, he was experimented on by Dr Zola. What they did to him allowed him to survive the fall… and kept him perpetually young, such as yourself.” Glancing out the window, she sighed at the stonewalled features of her former mentor, before insisting, “I imagine any other questions you may have, he would want to answer himself.”

She sighed in sympathy at the uncertainty on his face. “Captain Rogers. Look at him. I promise… I have no intention of deceiving you. It truly is him.”

His eyes were laser sharp on her face, hope, fear and nervousness in his features. Half of him was desperate to believe… to know that his best friend had survived the fall. The other half was terrified… How could Bucky have survived unscathed? How would he have landed in the hands of the Russians? What kind of machine? How much of Bucky truly still remained?

Her smile was firm and determined as she nodded, gesturing towards the motionless figure once again. “Just look. At which point, you can decide for yourself.”

Taking a deep breath in through his nose, the captain tore his eyes away from the woman and directed his attention forward through the windshield. The man standing framed in the doorway was strikingly familiar, even as Steve struggled to see past the strangeness of the man’s outward appearance. He wore a pair of dark blue jeans, paired with a dark gray henley and a pair of black combat boots. The shoulders were broader than he remembered, stretching the grey henley to its widest point. Emerging from the end of the left sleeve, if the agent moved just right, there was a flash of shine; this must have been the metal arm the Lt. Colonel had told him about. Blinking as it reflected light into his eyes, he redirected his attention to the face. It was the face that confirmed the woman’s words, however. Long dark hair hung from in a tail down his back, a few stragglers hanging around his all-too-familiar face… and ocean blue eyes that Steve had spent week since he’d died looking for in the bottom of a bottle. “It can’t be,” he breathed, fumbling for the door handle as he continued to stare.

He spilled from the confines of the vehicle, eyes wide and filled with wary hope as he got closer. The face was impassive as the agent watched him approach, as though he was a big cat tracking its prey. “Bucky!” he breathed in shocked hope, clearly terrified that this was all a dream.

One corner of his lips flicked upwards as Steve’s best friend replied, “Hey punk. What the hell did you think you were doing, crashing a plane into the Arctic? I’m not always gonna be around to look after you, ya know.”

Steve’s eyes flashed wide at the lopsided grin, before he took three great strides and threw his arms around Bucky’s shoulders and quickly dissolved into ugly, disgusting sobs. “You’re alive,” he gasped, arms tightening hard.

“Easy, Stevie… most of the rest of us are still kind of breakable, huh? Loosen up a bit,” he
chuckled, patting Steve’s shoulder fondly, before looking behind him. Whatever he saw made his eyes go wide as he scolded, “Marishka! Wait a second! You’re gonna hurt yourself!”

“I am pregnant, Tovrets, not an invalid. I am perfectly capable of climbing out of a car by myself,” the Lt. Colonel scolded, even as she accepted Owen’s offered hand. “Thank you, Lucky.”

“That’s what I’m here for, Boss Lady . . . I keep you safe and the Boss doesn’t hand me my ass on a sparring mat. Been there, done that . . . didn’t need or want the t-shirt.”

Marina snorted delicately, turning her attention back to the two super-soldiers before her. “So . . . are you satisfied, Captain Rogers, that I have not been deceived?”

Frowning, Steve turned back to his childhood friend and asked, “Do you know me?”

There was a sharp roll of his eyes as the former Winter Soldier recited, “Your mother’s name was Sarah. You used to put newspapers in your shoes to keep warm. You made me crazy with your ridiculous antics and your incessant need to start fights. I can’t tell you how many times I was cleaning your blood out of my fingernails . . . or how many fights I got into, saving your scrawny, five foot nothing butt.”

Glancing at Marina as she pulled up alongside, he cracked lightly, “That tendency didn’t get any better after the serum either. He was still a reckless little shit. Now he was just a bigger reckless little shit.”

“Sounds like moy dorogoy . . . clearly you were born for corralling ‘reckless little shits’ as you say,” she chuckled around a groan, hands coming up to brace against her back. “Ugh . . . is it January yet?”

“Just a little while longer, Boss Lady,” Owen promised, hand out as though he clearly wanted to assist her in some way but was reluctant to.

Shaking his head, Steve reached out to wrap an arm around her waist and guide her towards the door. Marina blinked up at him, surprise in hot chocolate eyes as she was all but herded into the garage. “Captain Rogers, I’m all right. Really.”

“Your back hurts. Your ankles look swollen. There are pinches at the corners of your eyes that are clear indication that you’re in pain. Please . . . let me help, ma’am.”

The response was instantaneous as she protested, “It’s Marina.” Reaching up one hand to poke at his chest, she asked in awe, “Are you real?”

“Yes ma’am.”

“Marina.”

Cocking an eyebrow at her, he took in her implacable features and simply nodded in agreement, “Of course . . . Marina.”

Grabbing on to the back of a chair, Marina eased herself into it, still staring up at Captain America as though she was staring at some heavenly specter. “Tovrets?”

“Da?” he asked, smirking at the way Steve fussed around her trying to make her comfortable.

“Am I dreaming?”
“No . . . how do you feel, honestly?”

“No . . . how do you feel, honestly?”

Tired, but I’m carrying twins and I’m supposed to be on bedrest. I am always tired,” she reminded him with a fond smile.

“Do I need to go get Boss?”

“Would you all stop fussing at me!? There is kind of a bigger deal happening right now.”

“Oh?” Bucky asked, ocean eyes narrowing as he watched her settle back.

“Sergeant James B. Barnes and Captain Steven G. Rogers are in the same vicinity for the first time in 70 years . . . and they’ve hardly even looked at each other.”

Bucky and Steve both flinched in that moment, glancing at each other sheepishly before their eyes darted away once again. She waited for a long time, watching the two avoid each other. Finally, she threw her hands up in the air and ordered, “Oh for crying out loud! Would you just kiss and make up already!? You’re giving me a toothache over here!”

She smirked with an eyebrow cocked upwards as the Soldier aimed a vicious glare in her direction at the statement. Steve, however, had turned to look at his best friend. He stood motionless, staring at the other man as he tried to reconcile the man he’d seen fall not so long ago with the man who stood before him now. It took a moment, but eventually he came to the same realization he had always had.

He looked different, undoubtedly; the arm was going to take some used to as was the longer hair and ponytail. He moved differently; strong and stiff and determined where before there had been a confident laziness in his stride that had drawn people like flies to honey. But those eyes . . . those eyes had not changed. This man before him -- for all the changes Steve did not yet understand - this man was still his best friend, his Bucky.

As the thought struck him, a well of piercing gratitude and unaddressed grief welled up in his throat. Stepping forward, he threw his arms around the other man, choking on the emotion swelling his airways closed. Bucky went stiff, clearly surprised, before softening as Steve’s whispered words made their way to his ears.

“Thank God you’re alive, Bucky . . . thank God for you.”

There was another moment, before Bucky’s arms came up around the other man and squeezed tightly. “Welcome back, punk . . . I missed you.”
New Horizons

Chapter Notes

Sorry about the wait. This one broke my heart, but yeah. At least it's done.

I hope you enjoy this one!

Translations at the end, as always.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 216: New Horizons

S.H.I.E.L.D.’s Eye in the Sky had only been in the podunk little town for an hour and he had already found the bar. Adding to his building buzz, he was already horrifically bored.

The sound of heartbroken screams were terribly familiar to Clint now. The fact that they were all his head, did not make them any less real. Reaching for one of the shots lined up in front of him, he tossed it back sharply, the alcohol silencing the anguished cries for a moment. At least before they started up again.

Even after only an hour, Clint was fairly certain he was very, very drunk.

Grumbling as they started up once again, the archer tore himself away from the miserable picture in the mirror and rotated on his barstool to take in the room. Puente Antiguo, New Mexico, wasn’t much of a town, but for the foreseeable future . . . this place was home. Feeling the tears linger at the corner of his eyes, the archer clenched his eyes together hard and started counting backwards from 100 in Latin. The last thing he needed was to lose his will and go home. He had spent two weeks
single; he had broken up with Bucky so that his soldier could be happy. Being 2000 miles away
want going to change his mind.

After everything he’d endured with the Red Room, Bucky deserved happiness more than anyone
else in this world. Marina herself had been the one to tell the archer so many years before, that if
walking away was the best thing to do for Bucky, Clint needed to be strong enough to do it. And
since Captain Fucking America was blatantly adamant that there could be no place for him in his ex-
boyfriend’s life . . . what else could he do?

The stories almost made everything hurt that much more.

The comics had ensured that Captain America and his best pal, Bucky Barnes, were legendary and
their close relationship well known. Even the history books, with their dry recounting of WWII, had
agreed that the relationship between the two men was close and unprecedented. They were
inseparable, living in each other’s back pockets constantly. Snorting he muttered, “And people think
Grimms are co-dependent.”

A hot surge of heartbreak and disappointment swelled into his throat, forcing him to rotate back to
the bar for another drink to wash it down. Swirling the amber liquid in the bottom of the glass, he
watched the light play through it as he remembered his brother and sister’s reaction to his request for
this posting a little more than six hours before. It wasn’t often that something or someone caught his
older brother off guard.

Will had been flabbergasted when Clint had come to them both after the altercation with Captain
Rogers and begged to be assigned to the security detail for the object which had touched down
outside of the little town. He’d argued with Clint for almost an hour; the assignment was pocket
change and Clint was inarguably overqualified for it. It would be boring and a waste of the sniper’s
time.

Thank goodness for Marishka . . . she had been settled in her favorite armchair, fingers tracing the
bulge of her belly as she watched two of her favorite people go at it. Finally she spoke up, “Will this
assignment make you happy, dorogoy?”

He’d rounded on her and begged, “Please, Marishka . . . I need to get away for awhile.”

Never let it be said that Marina didn’t know her boys. She’d watched him for a moment, then pushed
herself to her feet. A quiet word with her partner had changed the Colonel’s mind and before the
archer could even blink, he’d been assigned to the post as Head of Security. Clint would give his
brother this; it was definitely boring.

Vaguely, he became aware of someone hitching up onto the stool next to him. It was quiet for a
moment, before a lovely voice spoke up, “Last time I saw you, you were giving me a lapdance while
I was on Spring Break in New York City. What brings you to this little hell hole?”

Blinking in shock, Clint’s head swung around to stare. There she was, the girl who had haunted his
thoughts constantly since the night of Jason’s promotion to detective. Even Bucky had known how
much he thought of her; none of their other flings had ever lingered on his mind for as long as she
had.

She was beautiful. Long, waving dark hair, framed a pixie face. Honey colored eyes were framed by
blocky black glasses, above a pert nose and sensuous mouth. She was thin and willowy, with a rack
that made Clint’s mouth water. She was gorgeous and the archer could feel his body sitting up to
take notice. Shoving out a hand, he introduced himself, “I’m Clint.”
Smirking at him, she took the hand and shook it firmly, “Darcy. Nice to meet you, Clint.” Blushing lightly, she laughed, “It’s nice to finally have a name to accompany the memory of your butt.”

Clint grinned at her, laughing, “I’ve been told, my ass is my best feature.”

Giggling, she cocked her head at him before reaching out to trace the veins bulging from his exposed forearms. “Maybe not your best feature . . . but definitely in the top ten.” Shifting, she looked around the room before asking, “Where’s tall dark and studly?”

“Who?”

“The guy who was staring at you as though you were a tall drink of water and he was dying of thirst? I always kind of hoped you two had gotten together.”

The archer’s mouth compressed as he reached for another glass, tossing back the alcohol without even tasting it. Darcy’s jaw contorted, her tone small as she sighed, “Oh . . . I’m sorry.”

“It’s not his fault . . . but apparently someone had a prior claim and I was infringing on it.”

“Asshole. He was cheating?”

Clint’s eyes went wide at the question, before he shook his head firmly. “No! No, Bucky wasn’t cheating. He was loyal . . . it’s complicated and messy, and - no offense - but I’m drinking to forget, not to remember.”

Darcy grinned at the statement, chuckling, “I’ll drink to that.” Biting down on the inside of her lower lip, she asked, “Do you want some company? It’s not nearly as much fun, drinking alone as it is with a friend.”

He smirked at her, amused, as he teased, “Friends, huh?”

“Well, I can think of a few friendly things we could do . . . requires a lot less clothes, though,” she teased, her nose wrinkling as she tossed her curly dark hair over one shoulder.

“Oh really?” he asked with a slight tilt to his head. Anyone who knew him would know what the gesture meant; he was sizing her up, trying to assess her weaknesses and gauge her sincerity. “Just between friends, huh?”

“Hey, you don’t believe me, it’s your loss. I will rock your world,” she sassed, rolling the head of her beer bottle against the fullness of her bottom lip.

Chuckling, he tossed his head back, eyes closing as the chilly familiarity of his guinness slid down his throat. “I don’t think I’m drunk enough for this conversation.”

“Then drink up, Stud . . . I have designs on that ass. And they are not for public consumption.”

“I thought you said it wasn’t my best feature,” he laughed, gesturing over the bartender with two fingers to order another round.

She grinned, tone a throaty purr as she promised, “I lied.”

Watching her over the rim of his glass, he watched her throat work as she took several long draughts from her Miller Lite. The imagery was more than enough to bring to mind several fantasies he’d indulged from the last five years. “So . . . for the record, what’s the endgame here?”

“You, me, cotton sheets, and hours of mind-blowing sex. The hot, dirty, nasty kind that sticks with
you . . . the kind you dream about on lonely nights when it’s just you and your hand.”

“Gonna make it worth my while, then, huh?”

“Honey . . . by the time I’m done with you, you’re gonna be begging me for more,” she vowed, leaning forward on her arms . . . more than aware of the fact the position put her delectable breasts on perfect display.

“Promises promises,” he teased, with a cheeky wink. “Let’s see you put your money where your mouth is.”

Her eyelids fluttered at the mental image his words conjured up, before she purred, “You want my mouth where your money is, sexy . . . trust me.”

Groaning at the sudden flare of heat her words shot through his groin, he set the glass on the bar then reached out with the same hand. Hooking his fingers behind her neck, he hauled her forward into his lap and captured her mouth in a hot kiss. She moaned, the sound luscious and obscene, even as her own hands came up to grip his lapels and pull him closer. Her fingers pricked on the hawk stitched into the shoulder of his S.H.I.E.L.D. hoodie, and she smirked against his mouth. Her words were little more than a whimper as she insisted, “Come on, Hawkass . . . take me to bed or lose me forever.”

“Just show me the way home, honey,” he replied, completely the quote and earning a brilliant grin.

“Oh I like you,” she giggled, fingers shifting to comb through the short hairs at the back of his neck. “You and I . . . we’re going to get into a lot of trouble together.”

“I aim to misbehave,” he agreed with a wink as she cheered, her eyes alight with joy and excitement. “My place is just around the corner.”

“After you,” he agreed, setting her on her feet on the floor. Tossing a few fifties to cover their drinks, as well as the bottle of whiskey he swiped from behind the bar, Clint pushed himself away from the bar and reached for her hand. Honest appreciation and excitement about the night that lay ahead of them shone in her features as she laced her fingers with his and leaned into his side.

It was destined to be the first night of the rest of their lives together.

Years later, Clint would laugh when Marina would tell the story about his and Darcy’s first night together. “A lot of alcohol, a lot of sex, and a hell of a lot of paperwork.”

There was no question that there had been passion in spades, but there had also been more than enough laughter to warm the cold desert night too. Darcy’s joy had burned as hot as her body, and despite her earlier teasing, she had not been wrong . . . she definitely rocked his world.

By the time dawn broke the following morning, Clint had dragged her screaming into bliss at least a half dozen times, and was working her towards yet another. Her sobs were half-elation and half-agony, her body fighting to keep up with his ministrations as his lips, tongue and teeth worked her to another glittering climax. “I can’t!” she wailed, throwing her hands up to pull viciously at her hair, back bowing under the weight of her pleasure.

He chuckled, lifting his mouth from her as he promised huskily, “You can . . . you will. Even if it takes me all morning . . . you’ll scream for me again.”
As if his words were a prophecy, she spasmed hard, bucking wildly against his mouth as her orgasm swept her up and away once again on a tidal wave of bliss. Smirking against her, and knowing there was no way he was going to be able to get hard again any time soon, Clint flicked one last lick to her clit, before crawling up her body and pressing his mouth to her own. They shared the taste of her between them, her arms coming up to haul him down into her. “Damn . . . I may have to keep you around for awhile.”

“No complaints here,” he laughed, flopping onto his back and pulling her into the circle of his arms.

Cuddling close to him with a purr, she used the pads of her fingers to trace infinities over the skin covering his sternum. Clint buried his nose in her hair, fingers smoothing over her shoulders as he enjoyed the closeness of another human being, body pressed heartbeat to heartbeat and completely honest in their nakedness. After a long silence, she shifted slightly to look up at him. “Clint?” she asked cautiously, her eyes searching his as he tilted his chin down to look her in the eyes.

“What’s wrong, Darce?”

“Do you mind if I ask?”

His shoulders stiffened slightly against his will, even as he took a deep breath through his nose. “Ask me what?”

“What happened? I mean you don’t have to . . . but I’d like to know. If it’s okay with you?” she asked, with a small frown. “He seemed pretty besotted with you . . . and considering the way you kissed him, I would say the feeling was pretty mutual.”

“It was . . . we were together for nearly ten years.”

“So what happened?”

“It’s a long story?” he asked, watching his fingers dance over the bared skin of her shoulder.

“I’ve got all the time in the world,” she promised, a warm smile on his face as he watched her.

Taking a deep breath, he released it slowly with a nod. “His name is Steven Rogers . . . and when my boyfriend . . .” here he paused, heart wrenching hard in his chest once again with the remembrance that Bucky wasn’t his boyfriend anymore, before plowing forward, “. . . when Bucky was a kid, Steve was his best friend. They grew up together . . . Buck was in love with him.”

“But he was with you.”

“Yeah . . . Steve was a soldier. There was an . . . incident, and they thought Steve was dead. Bucky thought Steve was dead.”

“And suddenly he shows up and he’s not.”

“He’s a hero and Bucky is happy he's alive.”

“Again, Bucky was still with you,” Darcy reminded him.

Huffing, he laughed as he realized he was going to have to dance around the conversation a lot more than he was usually forced to. “There’s a lot I can’t tell you. Something’s are classified for a reason. But suffice it to say, I had good reason for being jealous of Steve Rogers to begin with. When he suddenly showed back up into our lives, with no memory of the last ten years and under the impression that no time had passed . . .”
Darcy snuggled closer as Clint trailed off, prompting gently. “Tell me what happened. Let me help carry the hurt for awhile.”

**Flashback**

**Two Weeks Prior**

The devastated look in Bucky’s eyes was wrecking Clint’s resolve. “Khishchnick... why are you saying all of this? I don’t want this to be over.”

Clint bit down hard on his lips, Marina’s words from ten years ago repeating a steady mantra in the back of his head. “I have to let you go, Bucky. It’s just a break... but he’s back from the dead, and you deserve the chance to see if there’s anything there between you.”

“I don’t want there to be anything between us! I want you!” the Winter Soldier insisted, stepping forward to take Clint’s face in his hands and visibly distraught when the archer stepped back out of range.

“And if that’s the case, then a little time apart isn’t going to change that. But I have to know I’m not your second choice here, okay? I love you... but I can’t play second fiddle to him again.

Going up on tiptoes, Clint pressed a warm, last kiss to his now ex-boyfriend’s lips, before stepping away. “I’ll see you,” he promised, with a wobbly smile.

There was a moment as the sniper watched the other man, before shoving his hands into his pockets, turned on his heel and walked away. Leaving Bucky still standing where he’d been left.

There wasn’t much about the next two weeks Clint actually remembered. It was all kind of a daze of training sessions with the junior agents, target practice at the range, and dinners with his brothers and very pregnant sister. The Russian, seeming to sense that something was wrong, said nothing about Bucky’s absence from her table and instead focused her attention on making all of her youngest’s favorite foods.

He recognized Bucky in his peripheral occasionally, typically with Steve and typically trying to ignore him. Clint never noticed the gutted look on the other sniper’s face when the archer would turn and leave without any kind of acknowledgment whatsoever. Each time, he could see Bucky and Steve getting closer... and each time, Clint and Bucky had never felt so far apart.

Of course, this all came to a head now... staring at Steve’s face and watching the other man turn red with anger. The accusation the captain had thrown at him rang in his ears and he stammered, sure he’d heard him wrong. “Come again?”

“I said, back off!” the blond ordered, all broad shoulders and flashing blue eyes.

Cocking his head slightly, Clint watched the taller man for a moment before one hand moved through his hair as he insisted, “I’m sorry, i think we’re probably crossing wires in this conversation. Back off of what?”

“Agent Barnes... you need to stay away from him.”

Never let it be said that Clint couldn’t be the most contrary of the Brothers Grimm when he was of a mind to be. Seeing as he had been trying to do exactly that, his hackles went up; Marina called it his “perverseness factor,” where he had to give whoever was giving him crap a hard time in return. Narrowing his eyes, Clint snarked, “Last I checked, he’s a consenting adult and of age. So kto chert voz’mi to stick your nose in my... our business?”
“He will always be my business. And if you think I'm just going to let you come near him you've got another thing coming. He doesn't need anything you've been giving him.”

Clint flinched hard, the gesture earning a pair of narrowed eyes. It wasn’t every day that your boyfriend’s . . . ex-boyfriend’s first love told you that everything you’d ever tried to do for him was worthless. Steeling his nerves, Clint let his lip curl as he snarled, “And who are you to make that call for him? His mother?”

“A better man than you apparently. His mother is a gem and would agree with me about protecting her son from you.”

Every word was a knife. Clint could feel each pain in his heart as they stabbed at him, attacking his most vulnerable places and leaving him bleeding. Reaching up to push the heel of his hair against the side of his face - and catching the single tear he hoped had gone unnoticed thus far - he asked quietly, “What did I ever do to you? Or Bucky for that matter? You’ve been dead for 70 years . . . the rest of us had to keep on living. So what exactly do you think you know?”

“I know you don't have the right to call him Bucky, that's reserved for family.”

“Yeah? And who do you think qualifies as family? Or are you the only one in his life who matters?” he asked, forcing himself to pull on his “Agent Face”; the one that most closely resembled his older brother’s “murder face” . . . and the one that scattered junior agents like marbles on a tile floor.

Steve straightened, “As far as you’re concerned, I am.”

Clint’s jaw tightened, as he nodded in quiet agreement. “I’ll keep that in mind. Thanks for the head’s up.” There was a small, sad smile to his lips as he promised, “I wouldn’t worry about my interfering with your relationship with your precious boyfriend. I got the message loud and clear . . . you won’t be seeing me any more.”

Turning on his heel, he stormed away . . . ignoring everything and anything that followed. Including the sputtering sound of a man caught completely off his guard.

End Flashback

Smiling sadly, he insisted, “Three hours later, I was on a Quinjet to New Mexico. I touched down twelve hours ago and I haven’t looked back since. I hope they’re very happy together.”

Darcy’s arms wrapped around his waist tighter as she just cuddled, promising, “I’m sorry. But hey, look at the bright side?”

“There’s a bright side?” he asked with a smirk.

“Well yeah . . . breaking up with him brought you here so I could rock your world.”

Grinning, he hauled her under him and pressed a hot kiss to her lips. “Good point . . . let’s see if I can rock it one more time.”

Moaning as he slipped inside of her, she begged, “Fuck yes . . . let’s do that.”

Meanwhile, in on a S.H.I.E.L.D. base in New York City, more than a few agents quailed at the clipped sound of high heels on linoleum. Especially when the owner of those heels came into view, lightning in her eyes and thunder in her features. Marina Ivanovna Petrovka stormed into mess hall, temper clearly on a hair trigger, as she stormed up to the table where Bucky Barnes say with Steve Rogers.
Bucky blinked at her, startled by her anger. “Uchenyy?”

“What the hell happened to my son?!”

Chapter End Notes

Translations:

(R) dorogoy - darling (Marina's nickname for her youngest Grimm)
(R) khishchnik - little hawk (Bucky's nickname for his long time boyfriend, Clint Grimm)
(R) kto chert voz’mi - who the hell are you
(R) Uchenyy - student, scholar (Bucky's nickname for Marina, his oldest friend)
Broken Fences

Chapter Notes

Enjoy! Most of the translations are pretty common. The one that isn't is in the main work . . . easier that way. :D

Let me know what you think!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
Chapter 217: Broken Fences

The mutual fondness between Marina Ivanovna Petrovka and James Buchanan Barnes was well-documented in the annals of S.H.I.E.L.D. It had been the Viper who lobbied to bring the former Howling Commando into their ranks. Who lobbied to pair the perpetual Soldier with S.H.I.E.L.D.'s Eye in the Sky. It had been her lover who dragged the Zimniy Soldat into S.H.I.E.L.D. custody, but it was the Viper who brought him in from the cold.

Only a privileged few knew the origin story to the relationship at all. Who understood the significance of “Tovrets” and “Uchenny” . . . architect and scholar. Who knew the reasons for their closeness, their mutual respect and their individual adoration of each other.

Clint Grimm had been one of those few. In his absence, rumors had begun filling his sister's ears and triggered her legendary temper. Hence, her current rage.

“Do you want to tell me what the hell happened to my son?!” she demanded, hot chocolate eyes boiling with fury as she glared at her oldest friend.

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The Zimniy Soldat had always loved his Gadyuka; this was an indisputable fact. He had raised her, trained her and guided her, before arranging for the assignment that would eventually set her free. When he had been given the chance to, he had killed her to save her.

In return, the diminutive assassin had looked up to him. She had learned from him, adored him, and - dare he say it -- loved him. She looked up to him, eager for everything he had to offer her. The Gadyuka had been a credit to his legacy and to this day, her name struck terror in the heart of her enemies.

He remembered the first time he saw her again in London . . . it had been almost three decades since she had left the Krasnaya Komnata for the United States under the alias of “Mary Peters”. She was as young and beautiful as she had been at their last farewell. It had taken every inch of training the Soldat had had, to pull the trigger and watch the bullet pierce her chest . . . throwing her to the ground and leaving her fighting for her life.

The wait had been agony . . . the not knowing if he'd killed her. It had been the first time he had ever doubted a shot. Even a quarter of an inch too far . . . and she would have been in the morgue and not the ICU. He had recited every prayer he could remember, even as he reported her death to his handler.

Seeing her at NRAG, the Gadyuka he had trained, striking the fatal blow to Byer's plans for him . . . spiriting him away. It had flipped on a light in his soul that had been dimmed all the decades of their separation. The joy of a prodigal child come home.

Seeing the true worship in the eyes of her lover, and the adoration of her chosen family . . . it had filled him with joy and pride. His Viper was at her deadliest when she had someone to protect, a cause to go to hell for. A family and a home and a lover who adored her; it was all he had ever wanted for her. Setting her free had been the best thing he could have ever done for her.

And then there had been Clint.

Armed with laughter and fun and mischief, Clint had carved a niche for himself in the Winter Soldier's heart, opening the way once again for Bucky . . . for the man he had once been. His
*khishchnik* made him crazy, and drove him completely around the bend, but Bucky Barnes was head over heels in love with him. He had never felt this way about another person before; not any of the girls from Before; not any of the men he'd dallied with when no one was looking, not even Steve whom he would have sworn once was his forever.

They had had ten years together. Ten wonderful, frustrating, blissful, aggravating, perfect years together . . . before it all went to hell. His Hawk had left him . . . had given up his claim for the sake of another, and every time Bucky saw him it was just another knife in his gut, knowing that – for Clint's sake – he had to be sure that Clint was the one he wanted, without a shadow of a doubt. If he went back without that perfect knowledge, his lover would always worry that he had been Bucky's second choice.

So he kept his distance, abstained from Marina's table, spent sleepless nights in his cold, impersonal quarters. Spent time with Steve, catching up and bringing him up to speed . . . all the while wishing for his partner to once again be at his side.

Blinking up at his former protege, he found himself speechless in the face of her fury. To his recollection, she had never lost her temper with him before. Eight months pregnant and heavy with it, his Viper was no less dangerous than she had ever been. And considering the look in her eyes, he had better have a good answer to her question, or she was going to fillet him with her favorite knife.

He leaned back slightly, eyes taking her in cautiously, before scanning the cafeteria in search of the Colonel. It was a well known fact that Agent Petrovka was on maternity leave, her pregnancy considered to be very high risk, and she should have technically been in bed. That Will wasn’t directly at her back meant one of two things; the Colonel was aware of her whereabouts and was more than willing to let her kill him this time or the Colonel was not aware of her whereabouts and either way he was a dead man.

"Marishka . . . what’s going on?" He asked, standing slowly, hands up in supplication as though she were the viper for which she was named. “What happened?"

“He’s gone, Bucky . . . he took an assignment in New Mexico!” she snapped, jerking back out of his reach angrily. “I am less than a month to my due date, and my *dorogoy* has decided he would much rather be 2000 miles away from you than here with his incredibly high-strung older brother and miserably pregnant sister.” Hands coming up to plant on his pectorals, she shoved him hard even as she demanded, “What did you do?”

Bucky staggered, hand groping out for the back of the chair at the news. “He’s gone? But . . . it was just a break . . . what happened?"

“I don’t know,” she hissed, folding her arms over her belly. “He came to Misha and me last night and insisted he had to get away. That artifact just landed in New Mexico; he’s taken over as Head of Security.”

“He is way overqualified!” Bucky protested, furious on Clint’s behalf.

“We know. My two idiots fought about it for an hour last night. He would not be swayed.” Narrowing her eyes, she stared at him for a moment, taking in the devastation on his face. It took a moment, before she slumped into a chair with a heavy sigh. “You seem surprised.”

“A little,” he replied hotly, shoving his hands back through his hair.

“I should have said something when you stopped gracing my table, and when Clint started looking so miserable . . . but I had assumed that you were both big boys and you could handle your
relationship issues yourselves. Clearly, I was mistaken.”

“I didn’t want to break up, Marina!” Bucky shot back at her hotly, ocean blue eyes the color of a tempest. “I love him!”

A sharp smile curved her lips as she hissed, “Then tell me why he seems to think differently. He files a Close and Continuing this morning, with a Ms. Darcy Anderson-Lewis . . . background check pending.”

Bucky felt as though he’d been poleaxed, sinking into his chair as though he’d been cut off at the knees. “He filed a C&C?”

“I don’t know what happened between you two, Bucky, but you’re clearly miserable. Do me a favor . . . fix this.”

“How!? I don’t even know what happened!? We were just taking a break . . . a break I didn’t even want! But he was insistent; he didn’t want to be second fiddle to Steve again.”

“Do you blame him? He’s been the replacement for Captain fucking America since the day of his birth. I can’t say as I begrudge him the need to know he’s first in your heart.”

“But a C&C, Marina! What the ever fuck!?!”

“Clearly, he had reason to believe that your break was permanent. Have you even spoken to him?”

“Clint was the one who insisted on the break! I was doing what Clint wanted!” Bucky argued, one hand flashing out and sending his tray flying in a fit of temper.

About then, Steve’s voice broke into the conversation, “Wait . . . Clint Barton?”

To say that the two assassins jolted was an understatement. Marina pulled a wicked looking dagger from thin air, and Bucky was suddenly armed with a huge pistol the likes of which Steve had never seen before. Blinking at being the focus of these two deadly individuals, the Captain could suddenly understand why these two alone kept S.H.I.E.L.D. in ghost stories; they were scary on their own, together they were terrifying.

After a moment, the tone of his voice broke through Bucky’s focus and his eyes narrowed. “Steve . . .” he drawled, ice in his voice and his eyes.

It was impossible to miss the way the supersoldier squirmed under that look. There was a small smirk on Marina’s lips as she slid the knife back into her boot and leaned back into her chair, to watch her Tovrets read the newbie the riot act. Captain America and best friend or not . . . you did not fuck with Bucky Barnes’ Hawk; it was stupid. “Steve . . . what did you do?”

“What kind of break?” He asked instead, mouth contorting slightly as his eyes flicked between the two.

“Clint was my boyfriend, before you suddenly showed up alive. He has reasons to be jealous . . . and he wanted me to be sure he was what I wanted, when I had been in love with you for years before we both died.”

“Wait . . . you’re gay?” Steve asked, clearly surprised by the statement.

“Bisexual . . . guys and dolls both turn my wheel, so to speak. Clint’s the first person I’ve actually loved since you.” Folding his arms over his chest, Bucky was aware of how imposing he appeared
as he glared down at his best friend. “Steve . . . cut the shit . . . what did you do!” He demanded, the brisk burr of his Brooklyn accent there and clear for the first time that Marina could remember.

Steve blinked up at Bucky; this was a side of his childhood friend he had never seen before. The demanding tone, body language and the anger lingering in his eyes making the supersoldier squirm slightly in his seat. Clearing his throat he stammered “I may have told him to back off and leave you alone? I saw the hurt look on your face Buck, every time we saw him and he’s STRIKE; I assumed he was talking shit about you like the rest of them.”

Marina blinked, her tone glacial as she hissed, “Did you actually hear him talking shit? Or did you just assume, like the kolossal'nyy tupitsa (colossal dumbass) you are?”

Looking up at the heavily pregnant, irate Russian Steve suspected even in her condition she’d have no qualms about thoroughly kicking his ass for jumping to conclusions. Sheepishly scrubbing one hand over the back of his neck, he cast his eyes downwards as he muttered “It seems I may have drawn the wrong conclusion.”

“You think!?” the woman snapped, hot chocolate eyes boiling over. Rounding on her oldest friend, she snapped, “I’ll let you handle this. If I handle it . . . I’m going to prevratit’ yego vnutrennosti naiznanku i ispol’zovat’ ikh dlya podvyazki. (turn his guts inside out and use them for garters.)”

Unable to help the bark of laughter at the mental image, Bucky nodded in agreement, bending to kiss her cheek. “Anyway you can arrange for a change in assignment?”

She looked infinitely innocent as she chirped, “Somewhere sunny maybe? I hear New Mexico is lovely.”

“If you would be so kind,” he teased, earning a fond wink.

Rounding on the Captain, she hissed, “If you know what’s good for you, you’ll stay the hell away from moy dorogoy or I will make your life extremely uncomfortable. Dong le ma?”

“Yes, Ma’am. Sorry Ma’am, though I would like to make an attempt to apologise at some point if you and he would let me?” Steve replied wide eyed. He had never imagined, even having known Peggy Carter, that he would ever find himself this terrified of a slip of a woman, especially one this small and this pregnant.

Letting out a sound very much like a harrumph, Marina rotated on her heel and stormed out of the mess hall. And if she noticed the way the junior agents bolted out of her path, she gave no sign.

As for Bucky, he was still giving his best friend his best impression of a pissed off Brooklynite . . . not a sight for the faint of heart. “What did you say to him, Steve? Clint’s got thick skin; he’s the youngest of five boys and he’s never been one to particularly care about what other people have to say about him. I’ve never even seen him lose his temper, except for when someone was talking shit about Marina or his brothers. So what did you say, that he bolted like a long-tailed cat in a room full of rocking chairs?”

“I told him you’d always be my business and if he thought I was going to let him near you he had another thing coming. That you didn’t need anything he’d been giving you. That your mother would agree with me about protecting you from him and that he didn’t have the right to call you Bucky. That was reserved for family.” Steve winced as he summed up his words to Clint. Looking back he could see they probably hadn’t been very tactfully chosen and how the young man could have taken it to heart given what he now knew.
If it had been possible, there would have been steam coming from Bucky’s ears. The Captain had never seen his best friend so red in the face. And that included all the times he’d exploded upon finding Steve trying to enlist, despite his physical ailments at the time. When he did finally speak, it was in a lethally calm tone that sent chills up the back of Steve’s neck. “You told him he didn’t have the right to be part of my family.”

It wasn’t a question . . . and it was clearly the only part of their conversation Bucky cared about.

Steve shifted in the chair, squirming uncomfortably. “Yes?”

And just like that, Bucky was someone he’d never seen before. “You did what!?” He roared, tendons in his neck standing out and tempests churning in ocean blue eyes. “How DARE you!?”

Both hands reached out and planted in Steve’s chest, shoving him hard and sending the chair tilting backwards onto the floor. “You have been dead for 70 FUCKING YEARS! And the last thing you have any right to do, is get tangled up in my business!! HE LEFT ME FOR YOU! Because he thought there was something between us; that I DESERVED the chance to find out if YOU were going to be the one to make me happy . . . when he’s the one who healed me when I woke up ME again and you were STILL DEAD!!”

Steve scrambled across the floor, trying to get out of range as Bucky stalked towards him. “I LOVE HIM!!” the Soldat roared, hands clutched into furious fists and looking very much like he was contemplating taking Steve’s head off with one well placed punch. “And you have made him feel like DIRT . . . like he was RIGHT about you and me . . . didn’t you!? I bet he snarked that he wouldn’t get in the way of your ‘precious relationship with your precious boyfriend’ . . . didn’t he?”

Steve’s jaw dropped as Bucky quoted the archer nearly verbatim, stammering, “How did you know that?”

“Because I know Clint . . . I know him better than anyone except for maybe his sister . . . the Russian woman you’ve royally pissed off and who would very much like to hurt you right now.”

Grimacing, the blond asked meekly, “Is she usually that scary?”

“Only when you fuck with her boys . . . it’s stupid. Don’t do it,” Bucky snapped, eyes blazing. “What the hell were you thinking?!”

“I was just trying to protect you, like you’ve always protected me,” Steve promised, eyes wide as he watched the other man seethe furiously.

“Don’t . . . you suck at it. For that matter . . . stay the fuck out of my business. I built a life without you, Steve . . . I have a family that didn’t include you for 70 years. I HAD a lover, who I fully intend to win back and make mine. And if this girl, Darcy, is who I think she is . . . I’m going to do everything I can to make sure that I don’t lose him to her.” Jabbing a finger in his face, he hissed, “Stay out of my life . . . you’ve fucked it up quite enough, thank you.”

“Buck . . . you don’t mean that,” came the wretched statement, the captain’s face twisting hard at the knowledge that he may have lost the only person he knew in this new world he’d woken up in.

“Right now, I do. If you ask me again in six months, we’ll reevaluate,” he hissed, rotating on one heel and putting his back to Steve. “I can’t believe you would do that. I’m a big boy, Stevie . . . I don’t need you to protect me. Not from STRIKE, not from Clint, not from anybody.”

“I’m sorry . . . really.”
Bucky’s eyes slipped closed at the pleading tone, before he straightened his shoulders and insisted, “Just leave me alone,” before he stormed out of the mess hall, leaving the other man still on his back on the floor.

Chapter End Notes

I promise, it gets better from here!
Chapter Notes

So this chapter is gargantuan! But you know what . . . WARD!!! There can never be too much Ward. :D

Enjoy and let me know what you think? I look forward to hearing your thoughts.

Translations at the bottom as always.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 218: Tidal Wave Woman

It had required a veritable act of Congress, but Marina was currently back in her office to catch up on some paperwork. Much to her lover's displeasure, of course, but desperate times . . . Besides, it was only for a very short amount of time and with Maria still out on maternity leave, her sister and her brother-in-law had rather enough to do.

As she was sorting through the backlog, she came across an un-reviewed report regarding Harlem . . . as written by Grant Douglas Ward, Agent, Clearance Level Six. Frowning at the front of the folder,
she cocked her head as she took in his signature on the bottom left corner, attesting to the accuracy of
the file and the account recorded therein.

Marina had never put much stock in handwriting analysis or in the anatomy of signatures. When one
was a spy, handwriting could change on a moment's notice as required for the mission. And one
never signed the same way twice, to avoid accidental detection down the line. However, she did
know that when a signature was sloping downwards the way his was, most analysts would suggest
this was a sign of depression or disappointment. Which did not coincide with the word of mouth she
currently knew about him.

Agent Grant Ward was John Garrett's protégé, and it was rumored that their relationship predated
S.H.I.E.L.D. Admittedly, her first impression of Ward had been a dark one. She clearly remembered
their first conversation following that disastrous training sessions. The month of janitorial duty he'd
been assigned as punishment had actually forced his cockiness down and put his head back on
straight. As it stood, he was quickly becoming a rising star at S.H.I.E.L.D. Garrett bragged about
him to anyone he could find who would stand still long enough and even her own Mishka had good
things to say about him.

Frowning, she reclined back in her chair and flipped open the folder, eyes catching on the solemn
features in the picture attached to the file. He may not be an agent under her direct purview, but she
clearly remembered him stepping up to try and protect her from Ross.

While she was content to disabuse herself about handwriting analysis, Marina had always subscribed
to the theory that action reports, and how they were written, was a clear tell into the agent who wrote
it. As she read through this particular report, she detected a note of sadness . . . almost loneliness, in
his recounting of the events. He seemed genuinely in awe of her Colonel as he transcribed their short
exchange at the hospital in impressively perfect detail. When in combination with his sincere relief as
to the safety and health of her and her children . . .

Needless to say, Grant D. Ward intrigued her.

Her actions were aimless as she reached out to trigger her intercom, eyes glued to the page as she
read his account of her initial reaction to Ross. (She had remembered being frightened. She had not
remembered hyperventilating or her keening whimpers as he shook her.) “Vika?” she asked through
the com, turning the page to his retelling of the General's shooting and the actions immediately
following.

“Da, sestrenka,” was the cheerful response from the Amazonian blonde.

“Would you do me a favor? I need the personnel file for Grant Douglas Ward, Agent ID A-
0849329, as soon as you can.”

There was a noticeable pause as her sister considered the request, before the woman spoke. “Uh-oh.
I know that tone. Are you intending to adopt this one?” Viktoriya asked warily, clearly concerned
about her de facto brother-in-law's reaction to the news.

Laughing even as she conceded that the concern was valid, Marina assured her sister warmly, “No . . .
I'm not planning on adoption at the moment. I just . . . I need answers, to questions I didn't even
realize I was needing to ask. That's all.”

“Of course. Give me ten minutes. I'll send it to your tablet, shall I?”

“Sпасибо, Vika, you're a saint,” the younger Russian chirped cheerfully, before flipping off the
intercom and becoming absorbed in her reading once more.
There was something itching under her skin about Agent Ward. She just needed to figure out what it was.

Which is how her partner found her three hours later, when he showed up as agreed to take her home. Marina was seated on her desk, with what looked like an explosion of deconstructed report copies behind her. She had her tablet in hand, bouncing it idly as she stared at the white board set up across from her. There was a timeline sketched on it, with bits of paper, post-it notes and actual sections cut from mission reports laid out to correlate with the events listed.

Eyebrows up at the behavior, Will came further into the room and closed the door behind him. “Doing a little extra credit, samaya malen'kaya?” he asked, a low whistle working its way free as he took in the full extent of the board.

The spread of information was impressive, extensive and clearly important to her. Considering the way she startled at the sound of his voice, she hadn't even heard him come in, she was so absorbed. Blinking at him, she greeted him. “Hello Mishka . . . how long have you been standing there?”

“Just a couple minutes,” he promised, coming over and hitching himself up onto the desk beside her.

He reached out to take the tablet, cocking his head at the profile there. “Grant Ward? What did I miss?”

“I think the real question is what did WE miss,” she sighed, leaning over to accept his kiss, before hopping down from the desk. “Just follow me for a minute, okay?”

“Okay,” he promised, setting the tablet aside and leaning forward on his hands. “What am I looking at?”

“This is Agent Ward's entire life, according to his personnel file.” Her fingers were careful and gentle as she touched the beginning. “Parents . . . siblings . . . Juvie.”

“Juvie?” Will asked, with a blink. “We don't accept juvenile offenders . . . at least I have never passed one through.”

“That's just it . . . his file skipped you. It went to Garrett instead. Of course, he's also admittedly talented. He and Sammy were in the same training class. They graduated One Two, with Sam only points ahead of him.”

“Okay . . . you have my attention.” he promised, eyes narrowing as he backtracked to the beginning, “You mentioned parents and siblings?”

“Yeah . . . details are vague as in nonexistent. I have notations of a brother Christian who's a senator. His parents are almost deliberately forgotten and/or left out. Also, there is a comment about a younger brother and an older sister, but no information on either.”

“Classic abuse case,” Will explained, receiving a nod of agreement from his lover. “Uh-huh.”

Turning back to the board, she spread her fingers over a blank space in the timeline. “Now here's where it gets interesting. I have almost five years with exactly nothing. No associates, no contacts, no address, nothing. I spoke to the warden at the detention center where he was being held pending trial . . . he escaped from Juvenile Detention. Then he just disappeared.”

“After which point, he showed up at S.H.I.E.L.D.,” the Colonel continued, clearly following her thought process.
“Yeah. Vouched for and signed through by John Garrett.”

Cocking his head, he frowned, “Pending trial for what?”

“Allegedly burning his parents’ house to the ground . . . with his brother still inside. That same brother, Christian, was pushing for a maximum sentence of attempted murder; Ward maintains that he didn’t know Christian was inside . . . I’m inclined to believe him. I sent out a couple feelers with my friends among the attaches at the Senate . . . they’ll get back to me.” Frowning fiercely, Marina glared at the picture she’d tacked up of the man, insisting, “Something about Christian Ward . . . he’s not right, Misha. Whatever happened in that house while Grant was a child? Christian was just as complicit as Ward’s parents. I’d bet my bonus on it.”

“So he is an abuse case. What do his psych evals looks like?”

“He doesn’t lie . . . he misleads and he redirects and he withholds but he doesn’t lie. All of our shrinks have seen him post-mission over the years. I went through all of their reports; he’s fit for duty. A little depressed and a lot anti-social, with . . .” here she reached past him for a file folder before reading off the front page, “. . . an awkward sense of personal ownership and social interaction.” Reaching for another folder, Marina handed it to her lover with a frown. “Maria gave him top marks in combat, as well as the highest espionage rating since Tasha. Only thing she marked him down for . . . was his people skills. I asked around; he doesn’t have hardly any friends and none of the other agents ever see him at the watering hole down on 5th where they all go to destress.”

Giving her a fond smile, he teased, “If you want to adopt the kid, just say so.”

“Promise?” she chirped, head tilting adorably as she bounced on her toes.

“In what world have I ever stopped you?” he laughed, hopping down from the desk and coming to finger several of the reports near the bottom. “The Maxwell case? He was assigned to that disaster?!”

“Yeah . . . he took four bullets to center mass. Did you know that?”

“No. But I do remember Garrett pushing him out within the week onto another solo.”

“He’s working wounded, Misha. I have a dozen reports from Medical, where he’s been checked out, by Garrett, against medical advice. And then I have action reports, dated days later.” Pushing her hands back through her hair, she begged, “Why didn’t we notice?”

“He’s STRIKE,” Will answered, showing her a page in his file. “I don’t get his reports . . . Rumlow and Garrett do.”

“And we come back to Garrett,” she huffed, slumping against the edge of her desk.

The Colonel frowned, eyes skimming over the papers and taking in all of the information displayed there quickly. “He does seem to be a recurring factor. Did Garrett break him out of Juvie?”

“Maybe? But that begs the question; what does a top S.H.I.E.L.D. agent want with a juvenile offender?”

Will opened his mouth, poised to offer a theory when he became aware of a flurry of activity headed towards Marina’s office. He knew those heavy footfalls, the huff of frustrated sigh that usually accompanied the family’s resident medic. Turning slate grey eyes towards the door Will wasn’t at all surprised when moments later Vincent was loitering in Marina’s doorway, an angry scowl firmly etched on his face with a low rumbling growl the only thing breaking the silence.
Marina cocked an eyebrow, hands coming up to brace her back as she drawled, “Well . . . you’re in a fine state. What happened?”

“Grant Ward and John fucking Garrett happened,” Vincent growled scrubbing one hand through his hair, his eyes occasionally flashing gold in irritation as his gaze flicked between the power couple.

“Ward got back from his latest mission injured. . . again. Not that that’s a surprise to anyone, and Garrett’s down in Medical trying to get him released.”

“How badly injured? Should he be released?” the Colonel asked, hands finding their ways into his pockets.

“Not as badly as some he’s had. But frankly, I wouldn’t release him. He was already injured when he went out. If I had my say the boy would be on indefinite medical leave until he’d had sufficient time to recuperate.” Vincent huffed, propping his hip on Marina’s doorjamb as he crossed his arms.

“Garrett’s adamant the boy is leaving with him though. So I currently have Ward under light sedation. The nurses have orders to play musical patients with him until I get back and to inform Garrett he’s undergoing tests.”

Will snickered as he questioned, “Musical patients? What the hell does that mean?”

“Same as musical chairs obviously,” Vincent snarked with a roll of his eyes before explaining “They are currently rotating him every fifteen minutes around Medical to prevent Garrett from trying to abscond with the boy. In all seriousness Will, the way Garrett’s running the kid he’s likely gonna end up in a grave sooner rather than later.”

“We were just discussing that,” Marina replied, waving her hand at the white board displaying Ward’s history in black and white detail. “How bad is it? Details, Vincent.”

“This time it’s a bullet wound in his thigh, but he’s still recovering from the broken ribs from his last assignment. He was just in medical last week. Frankly I’m surprised he doesn’t have a punctured lung.” Vincent growled his tone more animalistic than he’d intended.

“Will he walk again?” Will inquired, well acquainted with bullets to legs and the devastation the percussion alone could do to muscles and bone and ligaments. “Is the bone fractured at all?”

“The bullet just missed the bone, thankfully. He should walk again . . . provided we can give him the required time to recuperate, heal and get whatever therapy is required. But if Garrett gets his claws into him before I can see the extent of the damage following Ward being back on his feet . . . well the damage could end up more long term.” Shaking his head Vincent lifted one hand to pinch the bridge of his nose. “Even you idiocy don’t go out as injured as Garrett is continually sending this boy, unless it’s absolutely necessary, which in Ward’s case it isn’t.”

Will hummed, looking to Marina and catching sight of the white board behind her. “He’s STRIKE. My hands are tied . . . I don’t have the authority to take him out from under Garrett.”

“There’s one person who does. Someone even Garrett wouldn’t argue against.” Vincent pointed out, one eyebrow cocking as he looked between the couple before continuing “I highly doubt Fury would want to risk losing such a talented asset to Garrett’s idiocy.”

Marina’s eyebrows rose at the idea, tone curious as she agreed, “Nick would do it, if I asked him to. . . he’d give Ward to me. And with the clear negligence being displayed by his current SO? Nick would never say no.”

“Frankly, Will, the boy would be better off in Marina’s hands. Not only in regards to his injuries but 
his overall health. He’s underweight for his build, pushes himself too hard on mission and even when
he’s off duty from what I’ve seen. He’s working his body towards an epic breakdown.” Vincent
supplied with a sigh.

“Did you bring documentation to back up your grievances? If so, we can go see Nick now . . .
Marina intends to adopt the kid anyway,” Will chuckled, one hand coming up to pinch the bridge of
his nose.

“I left the folder of grievances on Vika’s desk . . . it’s heavy and thick.” Vincent retorted with a bitter
chuckle and unamused twitch of his lips as his fingers clenched. “Let’s just say if I ran into Garrett in
a dark alley, he wouldn’t be walking out of it.”

“Behave yourself, Vincent,” the Russian admonished fondly, with a wink. “And if you can’t, let us
know so that Owen can deal with the body.”

“Given the mudak is still breathing, I am behaving Marishka.” Vincent said with a toothy grin to the
Russian. “And even if I didn’t the body would never see the light of day.”

Rolling his eyes, Will snarked, “Focus, the both of you. You said this folder is thick? How thick?”

Pushing off the doorjamb Vincent disappeared momentarily, before entering folder in hand. The
folder was approximately three inches thick, earning a pair of raised brows as he handed it over to
the Colonel with an arched brow of his own. “Thick enough. This is every medical report, every
account of Garrett checking him out against medical advice and a statement from each of his treating
doctors with understandable concerns over Ward’s health.”

Will flipped over the cover of the folder, fingers paging through sheets and his eyes growing darker
and darker green. “Wait . . . this is after the Maxwell Case. Four bullets, center mass. Four hours of
surgery and Garrett took him out within an hour of leaving Recovery? You’re kidding?!”

“Nope, and the boy was straight back in days later in worse condition. And that folder is starting
from the Maxwell case. There are more cases going further back, though not quite as serious hence
my call not to include them currently.” Vincent rumbled, eyes now full on gold as he stared at Will
seriously. “If I didn’t know better, I’d swear he was intent on killing the boy. That kid looks up to
Garrett like a father and the bastard keeps dumping him injured into life and death situations.”

“Not for much longer, once Nick sees this folder. Oh man . . . the look on Garrett’s face is going to
make my day.”

“He’s a good kid . . . quiet, obedient and a model patient; he deserves better than he’s getting.”
Vincent grumbled with a shake of his head. Before nodding towards Marina’s whiteboard and
continuing “He needs someone who’s going to look out for his interests without having an ulterior
motive. If he stays with Garrett . . . he’s going to go down a dark path with his life. Considering his
childhood, his past . . . that won’t end well.”

Will snapped the folder closed as he cocked an eyebrow at the doctor. “I mentioned the part where
Marina intends to adopt him, right?” Rolling his eyes toward the ceiling, he sighed, “I need a bigger
house.”

“Little Russian mothers man, whatcha gonna do with them?” Vincent teased with a wry grin before
chuckling. “You wouldn’t trade her for the world though.”

A warm smile on his face, Will took her hand a kissed the back, “Nah . . . she’s stuck with me. More
the pity her.”
Marina giggled as she pushed herself up on tiptoe to kiss his chin. “Ya lyublyu tebya, moya Mishka.”

“Vsegda,” the Colonel promised, before insisting. “All right, let's go see Nick.”

“One would hope she’s stuck with you, given the fact she’s carrying your twin girls,” Vincent huffed before turning to clear the doorway for the Power Couple.

Will cocked an eyebrow at his partner as he laughed, “How did an agreement for three hours at your desk become this?”

“You should be grateful this is all that came out of it. In three hours Marina could have plotted someone’s demise in over a dozen different ways or be launching a plot to take over the world.” Vincent snarked in Will’s direction as he fell into step with the couple once they’d exited the office.

“Oh Vincent, that plan has been in place for the last ten years at least,” Marina snickered with a grin. “Maria and I have been fine tuning the details for awhile.”

“And how are you feeling? Are you even supposed to be on your feet?” Vincent asked suddenly, diverting the topic as he switched back to doctor mode, a critical eye running over the deadly, diminutive Russian wedged between him and Will.

“Oh no, not you too,” she groaned, eyes rolling to the ceiling as she grumbled.

“Yes, me too. Whose ass do you think Will’s going to beat if something happens to you three!” Vincent shot back with mock concern and wide eyes . . . not that he held back his rumbling chuckle for long as he bent to press a fond kiss to the top of Marina’s head. “We’re all worried about you.”

Huffing fondly, she joked, “Tell me something I don’t know.”

“Now you know how we feel when you go all ‘fussy Russian mom’ on us.” Vincent pointed out with an unrepentant grin.

“You all love it, don't lie,” she teased, wrinkling her nose at the medic.

“Technically we love you . . . the fussing is an unfortunate byproduct.” Vincent replied playfully, with a gentle poke to Marina’s ribs. “But you love to fuss so we let you.”

It was about then they arrived at Fury’s office. Harrison looked up from his desk and frowned, “The Director is not to be disturbed without an appointment, Agent Petrovka.”

Scoffing Marina sailed past with the reply, “And since when has that ever stopped me?”

Reaching for the door, she trekked further into the Fury's office, announcing, “Hello Nick! I need a favor!!”

That single eye pinned her as he looked up from the paperwork on his desk. “Do you have an appointment?” he snarked fondly.

“No, do you want me to make one?” she inquired innocently, eyes wide and features angelic.

Grinning at her, he laughed, “You have impeccable timing. I’ve been trying to avoid this file all day and I had run out of excuses for it.” Waving his hand at a blustering Harrison, he ordered, “You may go. And send in whomever Agent Petrovka brought with her. Hold my calls and cancel anything on my schedule.”
“Yes sir,” he agreed grudgingly, disappearing through the door to be replaced by Fury's Chief Analyst and his primary trauma doctor. Leaning back in his chair, he drawled, “Well, this can't be good. To what do I owe the gratitude of interruption?”

Will tossed the file onto the desk with a frown, even as Marina insisted, “We need to talk about Grant Ward; from the looks of things? His SO could be trying to kill him.”

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Eyes fluttering open slowly Grant squinted and blinked. It took several attempts for him to get his eyes to focus enough to register that he was staring at the ceilings of Medical . . . again. Some small part of him hoped, maybe . . . just once . . . his injuries were serious enough to require a long term stay that Garrett couldn’t get him out of. Even as he thought it though, he acknowledged how unlikely that was. If four bullets to the chest garnered only an hour's stay at Medical, a single bullet to the thigh would probably give him even less of a reprieve.

He was so tired of it, going out on Garrett’s suicide missions while wounded. Not only did it make his job infinitely harder, he often found his focus wavering, which is usually how he wound up injured again. The soft sound of a chair shifting beside him was the first clue Grant had that he wasn’t alone. His head turned slowly, stomach churning with dread even as he hoped it wasn’t Garrett seated beside him . . . waiting for him to wake up so the older man could whisk him away again.

The very last person he’d expected to see seated at his bedside had been one very heavily pregnant Marina Ivanovna Petrovka. All his previous interactions with one-half of S.H.I.E.L.D.’s top handlers were hit and miss to say the least. She smiled at him kindly, “Hello Agent Ward. Would you like something to drink? I imagine your mouth feels like you swallowed cotton. You’ve been under sedation for some time.”

“Yes please, Ma’am.” Grant croaked hoarsely, blinking sheepishly as he looked to the handler curiously. “Begging your pardon, Ma’am, but why are you here?”

She pushed herself to her feet, waddling slightly as she poured him a glass of water and placed it securely in his hand. “You have it? It's all right to be shaky . . . you've been through an ordeal.”

“Yes, Ma’am,” he agreed respectfully, fingers tightening around the glass as he lifted it to his lips and gulped greedily. Before lowering it momentarily to frown at the Russian, his gaze flicking briefly from her face to her stomach before he mumbled “That’s nothing new to be honest, Agent Petrovka ma’am.”

“And we come to my reason for being here. You've been reassigned, Agent Ward. You are no long an agent under Garrett’s purview. You belong to me.”

“Ma’am?” Grant blinked several times, her words slowly registering as he frowned “Garrett won’t like that Ma’am.”

Grinning at him gleefully, she replied, “I know . . . front row seats to his finding out. Happy day for all involved.” Leaning back, she folded her hands over her belly. “I never got to thank you . . . for what you did in Harlem.”

“It was my job, Ma’am. The Colonel picked me for your team for a reason; I’m good at what I do and wouldn’t have let anyone hurt you . . . well more than Ross did.”

Cocking her head at him, she scolded fondly, “The appropriate answer is, ‘you're welcome’. Now
"You're welcome?" Grant responded quickly and uncertain. They weren't exactly words that had been common in his vocabulary since his early youth, long before his childhood had devolved into pain and misery. Biting down on his lip, he reminded himself why it was a bad idea to accept her offer, as tempting as it sounded. "All due respect, ma'am, I don't need a new handler."

Marina’s eyes narrowed at him as she considered the fidgeting and nervous young man before her. "Why not?"

"Garrett brought me into S.H.I.E.L.D. Ma’am, with the understanding that he’d be my handler,” Grant supplied, it wasn’t the whole truth by any means but for the most part it was true. "Also, Garrett and I work well together. Understand each other. We’ve never had a problem. There doesn’t seem to be reason to disrupt our high success rate."

"Can you do me a favor, Agent Ward? Can you tell me how many of the last ten missions have ended with you injured?" she asked, seating herself in the chair and folding her hands over her belly. Ward squirmed, clearly uncomfortable with the line of questioning. Especially since she already seemed to know the answer. After a long pause he asked instead, "This is because of me? Am I being disciplined? Because injured or not, those missions were all completed successfully."

"You're not being disciplined. I'm proving a point. Working wounded, Agent Ward, increases the possibility of further injury. Eventually, it will get you killed. As you a valuable member of mankind and a vital agent of S.H.I.E.L.D., your health and wellbeing need to be of greater importance than success in the field." Nodding towards the door to the tiny bathroom, she promised, "I'll make you a deal . . . if you can walk normally to the door of the bathroom and back without falling over or the use of crutches, I'll ask Fury to rescind the decision. Deal?"

"Deal, Ma’am," Grant replied brusquely, his hand moving to set the glass on the table beside the bed. Forcing his body to move to sit him upright he threw the bedding aside to swing his legs over the edge of the bed. Some small part of him was grateful for the fact he was wearing a pair of scrub pants as opposed to those horrible backless gowns that would have left his ass hanging out; best not to offend a superior officer and regardless of her current condition Marina was his direct superior.

Easing off the side of the bed Grant took a moment to gain his balance. Gritting his teeth, he straightened and started towards the bathroom door, not that he made it that far. His thigh screamed and burned after the first step even as he forced himself to take a further two before his legs buckled beneath him. He soon found himself sprawled face first on the floor with a soft grunt escaping his throat upon impact.

Almost immediately, Marina was next to his fallen form, eyes worried and mouth set as she rolled him onto his back. "Are you alright? How are your ribs?"

"Fine," he wheezed, fibbing slightly. His ribs burned something shocking and he was struggling to catch his breath, let alone draw in a decent lungful of air at all.

"Uh-huh . . . we'll call that a horrific lie," she snarked, bending to haul his arm up and over your shoulders. "Come on . . . let's get you back to bed."

Feeling her pull him upwards, he balked. "Your pregnancy! You can't!"

"I am made of sterner stuff than I look, Agent Ward, I promise. Come on . . . let's get you up and back into bed," she insisted again, grunting as she levered him inexorably up to his feet. Between the
two of them, they got him back into the bed and Marina fussed a little bit with his sheets before retaking her chair. “So, have we settled that matter to your satisfaction, Agent Ward?”

“Yes Ma’am,” Grant replied slightly sullenly, wincing as a thought occurred to him. “Garrett on the other hand won’t be Ma’am. He’ll want me back, come hell or high water.”

“Garrett currently has no say. He'll have to go through Fury. One of the medical staff here went to Fury with a complaint that Garrett was trying to kill you.” Cocking an eyebrow, she joked, “We spent a lot of time and effort to train you . . . We would prefer to take care of our investment. Da?”

“Da.” he replied evenly, his hand shooting out to grasp at Marina’s, his voice quiet and slightly hazy as he murmured, “Garrett . . . he spent enough time training me himself, Ma’am; he’ll want his own investment back.”

“He will simply have to live with the disappointment. You are mine now. And I do not easily relinquish that which is mine. Is that understood?” she asked archly, her free hand coming up to fold over his own.

“Clearly Ma’am . . . though his determination not to lose what’s his could rival your own.” Grant snarked back, before wincing and awaiting a reprimand, body slipping into attention as much as it could and causing another wince as his ribs protested. Garrett wasn’t big on informality or anything that wasn’t related to their mission.

To his surprise, the Russian laughed in response to his snark. “So you do have a personality! I am so glad.” Pausing, she considered his words and frowned fiercely, tone demanding, “Garrett considers you ‘his’? In what way?”

He blinked, realizing he’d said the wrong thing. “Just has the biggest claim, I guess; we’ve worked together a long time, Ma’am.”

Seeing how tense and rigid he was, Marina forced herself to smile and relax back into her chair, instructing firmly but fondly, “At ease, Ward . . . you're not in trouble.”

“That will take some getting use to Ma’am. Most of my life has been me getting into trouble . . . not always by doing anything wrong.” he huffed out quietly, voice broken and eyes slightly distant.

There was a fond press to her lips as she replied, “I know about your parents. I can guess at what they did, and I know how you retaliated. I can understand fighting back against those who have hurt you, the only way you can.”

“It wasn’t just my parents Ma’am. There’s things in my past that can’t be forgiven . . .”

Marina interrupted then, “Your past is just that, in the past. We all have one, and I know few people who don’t have regrets about things they’ve done at some point. The past holds no bearing on the future if you don't want it to.”

The Russian’s hand on his cheek startled him, as he hadn't seen her move. “You're safe here. S.H.I.E.L.D. will protect you, if you let them.” Eyes swept his frame, the glance warm if impersonal as she stated, “So, let's talk what happens next and not happened before. As of now, you're on downtime. You will rest and you will heal and once you have been declared fit for duty once again, you will be returned to the field. Is that understood?”

“Yes Ma’am. But . . . what am I supposed to do if I can’t be in the field?”

Frowning, she asked, “What do you normally do on downtime? You do get downtime, right?”
“Kind of? I train, Ma’am. Garrett was never big on leaving me idle for any period of time; idle hands are the devil’s playground type of thing.” Grant grunted with a scowl.

“Under no circumstances are you to train until you’ve been released by Medical. Do I make myself clear?”

“Crystal, Ma’am. Which again brings me back to my question of what I’m to do in the meantime?” he shifted slightly on the bed, one arm moving to curl protectively around his ribs as he sucked in a short breath.

“Agent Ward, are you in pain? And do not think of lying to me; I have sons who are notoriously bad about hiding when they’re hurting . . . I will be able to tell if you lie.”

“Only when I breathe Ma’am,” Grant joked with a wry grin and a slight wince.

“I think we’re going to need some rules, you and I. What do you think?” Railroading over any protest, she insisted, “Rule 1: you tell me when you are in pain. I don’t care if it's a papercut. Agreed?”

“Yes, Ma’am. Though I may forget . . . on occasion. Garrett considered pain a weakness so I’m used to having to hide it,” he replied quietly eyes downcast.

“I am not Garrett. If I find out you are neglecting your own health or wellbeing, because you don’t wish to bother me, there will be consequences . . . and you won't like them.”

“Duly noted,” Grant acknowledged with a slight nod.

“Rule 2: since you don't know what else to do, you will spend your downtime at the Handler Pool. I'm sure I have work that needs doing, which keeps you off your feet and recuperating as ordered.”

“As you say Ma’am,” his head cocked in thought “I can help with the paperwork and whatever else you deem satisfactory.”

Smiling at him kindly, she promised, “We'll find something for you to do. My sister, Viktoriya, is a task master; she'll put you to work. Rule 3: you obey doctor's orders to the letter. That includes crutches, follow up visits, consistent health checks. Your annual physicals are on time and completed in a timely manner. And you listen to what your body is telling you. Ponimayete?”

“Da” Grant responded, fingers twitching as he processed everything. “I’m not used to being idle Ma’am.”

“Who said anything about being idle? I seem to recall telling you my sister is a taskmaster.” There was a grin to her mouth as she laughed, “Vika is going to adore you.”

“She can’t be worse than Garrett,” Grant murmured under his breath before shaking his head and speaking in a normal tone. “Looking forward to meeting her.”

Marina's eyes narrowed speculatively and he knew she’d heard him, as illogical as that seemed. Ducking his head, he watched her through his eyelashes, clearly able to see the gears turning behind her eyes. Finally, she stood and patting his calf carefully. “Rest well. As soon as you’re released, come find me. Understood?”

“Yes, Ma’am . . . are you in your office or on leave?” He asked curiously. It was a combined case of needing to know so he could find her easier and wanting to know. Coming up against that thought, he stopped short in shock; he usually didn’t want to know anything outside of his mission details.
The change in attitude, and what it would mean, had him frowning as he tried to remind himself of his mission, his orders.

“If I’m not in my office, I’m at home. As to whether or not I’m on leave, technically yes.”

“Copy that Ma’am . . . the Colonel isn’t going to kick my ass again is he? For making you haul my ass off the floor.” Grant murmured quietly, eyes flicking upwards to her face to judge her expression.

Marina smirked, “What Misha doesn’t know, doesn’t hurt you. Promise. We’ll keep it a secret between us. Rest, Ward . . . I’ll be back to check on you in a few days.”

He flinched at her use of his surname, eyes flicking up to see her watching him speculatively. Suddenly sure that she wouldn’t have missed the action, he asked meekly, “Ma’am, may I make a request?”

“Oh course,” she replied, warm and maternal, making every part of him struggle to remember his training, his need to keep her at arm’s length.

“You’re not like Garrett, Ma’am. I’d appreciate it if you didn’t call me Ward . . . it doesn’t seem right coming from you. You have only the best of intentions.” He stammered suddenly eyes darting wildly around the room. He couldn’t believe he’d just confessed to that; he must be drugged. Eyes flicking to the bags at the end of the IV line, he tried to figure out what he was on that would have loosened his tongue so dramatically. Turning back to her, he stammered, “I mean . . . you don’t have to, if you don’t want to. I just . . . I’ll shut up now.”

Her eyes narrowed at the statement and he could almost see the lightbulb go off behind her eyes. Before long though, she smiled again, though he could see her dissecting the statement over and over again. “I can do that . . . rest well Grant.”

“Copy that. You should take your own advice Ma’am, pregnancy is rough under normal circumstances least of all with a high stress job like yours. My sister . . . she miscarried her first two pregnancies.” He offered by way of explanation.

Frowning at the statement, the Russian replied, “I will take better care of myself if you can agree to do the same. Deal?”

“Deal Ma’am.” He replied quickly with a slight grin before adding on “And if I forget I will submit to whatever punishment you decide on.”

“Follow the rules, Grant, and there will be no cause for punishment. However, that being said, you break the rules and your ass is grass.”

“Is that just for intentional rule breakage or if it slips my mind and I fall into old habits?”

“Both,” she promised. “I’ll expect notification of your release, unless I see you before then.”

“Yes Ma’am, you’ll be my first stop upon leaving,” he acknowledged wearily, eyes drooping slowly even as he tried to force them to stay open.

“Grant . . . you may call me Marina,” she chuckled, leaning over to press a warm kiss to the too warm flesh of his forehead. “Go to sleep or violate Rule 3. You don’t want to be in trouble already, do you?”

Blinking up at Marina as his eyes widened in surprise at the action, he stared as he tried to figure out how to react. She was wailing on all of his defenses, a three pronged attack from which he was
seeing less and less hope of escape. The Specialist shook his head stammering “No Ma. . . Marina. Before I sleep . . . can I ask a favor? My sister and my younger brother . . . I haven’t had contact with them in some time. Would you . . . I mean, could you check that they’re okay?”

“Of course . . . what are their names?”

“My sister’s name is Lilli, Lillian Monroe . . . she and her husband lived in Vancouver and my brother Thomas used to be in Washington.” he murmured drowsily, eyelids fluttering and fighting to stay open as the pain wracking his body struggled to pull him under.

Reaching out, she hit the button on the morphine pump he’d been given, so as to control his own discomfort. The dose of the fast acting medication hit his bloodstream like a sledgehammer. Combined with the touch of her fingers stroking over the skin of his earlobe, he started to slide completely into unconsciousness. “Rest Grant . . . I’ll see what I can find about them both and let you know. Close your eyes.”

He was helpless to do anything but follow that order. He ached everywhere and was suddenly drained, the morphine a blissful relief as it removed his pain and lulled his body into a relaxed state. It didn’t take long at all for sleep to claim him, his eyes closed and breathing evening out.

The last thing he heard before he slept was a gentle, “Sleep well, Grant . . . may your dreams be pleasant and restful.”

As he slipped away, he thought, “Oh damn . . . she’s gonna be bad for me . . . shit, Garrett’s gonna be pissed,” after which, he knew nothing more.

Chapter End Notes

Translations:

(R) Da/not - yes/no
(R) sestrenka - little sister
(R) spasibo - thank you
(R) samaya malen'kaya - my little one (Will Grimm's most common nickname for his longtime partner and lover, Marina Petrovka)
(R) idiocy - idiots (Vincent is currently referring to the Brothers Grimm specifically)
(R) Ya lyublyu tebya - I love you
(R) vsegda - always
(R) ponimayete - understood?
Chapter 219:

Clint was cussing a blue streak as he went skidding into his quarters late the next night. The speed with which he'd fallen for Darcy was still a little surprising to the archer, but at the same time, it made sense. She was deadpan funny, unfailingly cheerful, delightfully intelligent, wonderfully snarky, and way too good for an experienced assassin like himself. Of course, it helped that it didn't seem to have surprised his sister in the least, that he'd fallen so hard and so fast.

She was also incredibly distracting, thus the wide span of swear words from his admittedly impressive collection. His older brother's voice coming through the speakers of his laptop only earned another round of increasingly creative cursing. “What's the matter, punk? You late for something?” he teased sardonically, and the sniper could just picture the smirk on his face.
“Shut up, jerk,” Clint snarked, as he dropped into his desk chair and leaned forward on his elbows, glaring half heartedly into the camera. “I got distracted.”


“It's Darcy . . . and she's not my girlfriend. She's a friend,” he protested.

“The C&C you filed, would suggest otherwise,” Aaron reminded his brother with a sly grin and a wink. “I know all about your ‘friends with benefits' thing . . . but what about Bucky?”

“What about Bucky? Captain Rogers made it very clear. I have no place in Bucky's life anymore,” Clint reminded his brother morosely, slouching back in his chair as he flipped a pen between his fingers. “I'm just trying to move on with my life. I like Darcy; she's awesome.”

“You're an idiot,” the blue-eyed brother scoffed with a roll of those eyes.

Grey eyes narrowed as the younger clone snapped, “I thought you were supposed to be on my side!”

“I am on your side! But Clint . . . it's all over S.H.I.E.L.D.! Bucky tore the Captain a new asshole for running you off. Rogers thought you were one of the members of STRIKE's 'Fuck Barnes' Club.”

Snickering, Clint snarked, “I was . . . frequently and with relish.”

“Okay, ew. Not how I meant that, Clint. There's a mental image I didn't need,” he groaned, scrubbing at his eyes with the heels of his hands. “I'm talking about the Mudak Squad of Rumlow, Rollins, Murphy, Mercer and the rest.”

“In what world would I ever want to be associated with those dumb shits? Their mouths are filled with trash, and it taints the rest of the intelligent world just to listen to them. I'm a Grimm . . . we have a reputation of excellence to maintain.”

“You wear the same STRIKE patch they do, Clint,” Aaron reminded him with a roll of bright blue eyes.

“But I don't share their stupid,” he grunted, with a fierce scowl. “Grimms need a team patch, Kenny, just like STRIKE.”

Chuckling, Aaron joked, “I'll make sure to bother Will and Marina about it. I'm sure they'd be more than willing to jump on it, as soon as they manage to resurface from weird pregnancy cravings, wedding plans and their endeavors to adopt their newest acquisition. He is not making it easy on Marina . . . it's kind of fascinating actually.”

Despite his curiosity over that, Clint zeroed in on the second thing and chirped, “Wedding plans, huh? Did Jay finally grow a brain and ask Casey to marry him? She's too good for him . . . I hope she made him work for it.”

“Not yet. Rumors . . . aka my wife . . . indicate a proposal should be forthcoming at some point this week, but for the moment, no . . . it's not Jay.”

Frowning, he hedged uncomfortably, “Don't tell me it's Brian and Natasha? She would never be that stupid, so who . . .” It was about then, the horrible awful lightbulb flashed on in his brain. “Oh no. Not Sam.”

“Yep . . . Marina is unsurprisingly not happy about it. The only upside to the proposal, would be this
“Jules is pregnant.”

“I beg your pardon?” he stammered, eyes going wide, “...you're fucking with me.”

“Nope... three months along. Sam told his parents at the same time he told them he'd asked her to marry him and she'd said yes.”

“Well, that’s... damn, that's a double-edged sword for Marina.”

“Which is why she's keeping her opinions, knife-edged as they are, to herself. Jules is on a probationary period. We'll see if she can dig herself out of the ditch she’s made for herself.”

“For Sam's sake, I hope so. How’s Marta taking it?”

“She has some reasonable reservations about it. Number one of which seems to be that Jules doesn't appear to be quite as head over heels for Sam... as Sam is head over heels for her,” Aaron sighed, leaning forward on his elbows and lowering his tone, “This is gonna end ugly, Clint... I can feel it in my gut.”

“I don’t doubt it. Our gut instincts are rarely wrong and likely the only good that would come from the entire shit storm would be the grandbaby Marina’s always wanted.” Clint grunted, a frown forming as he tried to picture his nephew’s life with Jules involved. “Somehow I don’t see Jules digging herself out of the ditch but more so deeper into it, she doesn’t seem the motherly type when you compare her against Marishka.”

Aaron grinned as he reminded his brother, “No one seems like the mothering type when you compare them to Marina.”

“I dunno man, your Marta might end up giving Marishka a run for her money. Look at the way she looks out for you and Sam.” Clint teased with a shit-eating grin curving his mouth.

“You need to shut up,” his brother snarked with a roll of his eyes. His features turned wicked as he inquired innocently, “Did I mention that Bucky asked to be reassigned?”

Clint blanched suddenly as he squawked “He WHAT? To where?... Wait, do I even want to know the answer to that?”

Blue eyes sparkled as they flicked to something behind his brother, insisting, “You should look behind you.”

Blinking owlishly at his brother on the computer screen Clint’s brow furrowed in confusion, as if in slow motion he spun the chair to look behind as directed. Standing in the doorway was his boyfriend/lover... ex-boyfriend he reminded himself, his gear in hand and watching Clint steadily. He couldn’t stop the slight snigger that slipped free as he mentally categorised Bucky’s expression as a surprisingly accurate imitation of the Grumpy Cat Darcy revelled in showing him every chance she got.

Bucky watched him, fingers tightening slightly on his dufflebag strap as he took in the man he’d never realized would mean the world to him. “So... hi.”

Aaron’s deep breath in was audible through the speakers as he spoke, “Okay then... I’m gonna go! You two have fun. Don’t kill anyone... or each other. Marina will be pissed if either of you end up dead, dong la ma?”
“Thanks for keeping him busy, Aaron,” Bucky replied, with a firm nod of thanks towards the webcam.

Clint whirled, staring at his brother in shock. “Traitor!”

“Love you, little brother. Don’t be stupid and throw away something that means this much to the both of you,” was his only reply, before his side of the connection shut down and Aaron was gone.

Staring agape at the blank screen Clint muttered under his breath for a long moment before turning back to Bucky, shoulders slumped as his eyes focused on the taller man’s boots “So I heard you and Captain American Legend had a bust up?”

“Yes . . . that’s putting it mildly,” he agreed with a small, sad smile. “So . . . a close and continuing huh? Marina told me . . . congratulations. I’m glad you found someone who makes you happy.”

Clint groaned at that, his hand coming up to scratch absently at the back of his head. “Yeah . . . about that, I kinda thought we were over and well Darcy . . . you saw Darcy that night all those years ago. The night we first kissed.” He stammered hand waving absently.

“So it is . . . your mystery girl, that you couldn’t stop thinking about,” he replied, his dejection clearly visible on his face. “I didn’t think you’d move on so fast with anyone but her. I’m glad you were able to find her. I hope she makes you happy.”

Suddenly Clint felt as though that metal hand had just driven into his gut, reached up and yanked his heart out. He wasn’t entirely certain he could be happy with Darcy alone, especially not now, knowing Bucky had all but fallen out with his best friend over him. “Buck . . . I’m torn. My head and heart are splitting and pulling towards the both of you. Yebat’, where is Marishka when you need her!”

“At home . . . trying to adopt a STRIKE kid. He is NOT making it easy for her.”

“Wait . . . which STRIKE kid? Not . . . no way, Ward? How’d that little shit crawl into her heart?” Clint blurted with wide eyes before continuing “Don’t get me wrong; the kid seems nice enough if you can get him away from Garrett and Rumlow.”

“Well, Marina did. Vincent had . . .” here he paused, trying to figure out the right terminology for the Epic Rant the medic had unleashed about Garrett, his antecedents, and everything and anyone to do with STRIKE, “. . . let’s just say, he took his concerns to Marina and Will, and they managed to get Fury to reassign Ward to Marina as his handler. Garrett is still his STRIKE S.O., but Marina has final say in any and all missions, post-mission assessments, and the right to determine whether or not he is fit for duty.” Remembering the crutches and the ugly bandaging and brace around the kid’s knee, Bucky sighed, “Which currently . . . he’s not. Hence, Vincent’s Epic Rant, capitalization required.”

"About time someone did something,” Clint huffed fingers clenching into fists briefly “I’ve been tempted to shoot Garrett more than once for sending him out in the field when he clearly wasn’t at a hundred percent.” Clint’s tone was a low feral growl before he shook his head “So . . . what happens now with us and I guess Darcy?”

Biting down on his lower lip, Bucky flinched slightly, head bowing as he stared at the tops of his boots. “I guess that’s up to you.” One hand came up to scratch at the back of his head as he insisted, “I love you . . . I will abide to whatever will make you happy. Ball’s in your court, Clint. You’re the only one who can make that decision.”

“I never stopped loving you, Bucky. But my heart was in pieces when I got here and Darcy has been
good to me. So . . . if I said I wanted to try and make it work with both of you, what would your reaction be?”

“Whatever you want. Anything you want. Like I said, you make the call . . . I will abide with any decision you make,” Bucky promised sincerely, scuffing the toes of his boot against the concrete beneath his feet. “If you want to just try to be with Darcy, I’m okay with that. I just . . . I don’t want to lose my best friend, along with my boyfriend.”

It’s not just my call, Buck. This involves you and Darcy so it kinda needs to be okay with all of us.” Clint pushed off the seat and closed the distance to Bucky, head cocking slightly as he contemplated his next words. “You didn’t lose me, I still love you, Captain Ego just . . . eh I know he was trying to protect you and now know he didn’t have all the facts but don’t give up on your friendship with him or us.”

Bucky’s fingers flinched forward, halting for a mere moment, before his hand looped through one of the tac straps on his uniform top and pulled him forward. “I’m so mad at him right now. I could have lost you, because of him. I need some space; New Mexico seemed like it was going to be putting enough space between us that I’d get over being furious.” Ocean eyes searched Clint’s as that metal hand came up to brush tenderly against his jaw, cradling his face carefully as he asked quietly, “May I kiss you?”

“So you fled here knowing full well that I could be possibly lost to you as well?” Clint arched one brow as he stared up into Bucky’s eyes, mouth twitching into an amused grin “Should I be insulted you felt the need to ask that question?”

“I would never ask you to cheat . . . that’s not fair to you, or to Darcy,” he replied with a frown. “You kidding? Darcy was half expecting to find you around somewhere when she recognised me . . . that wasn’t a fun conversation to have.” Clint huffed out a bitter chuckle before taking the decision out of Bucky’s hands and closing the slight distance between their mouths in a tentative kiss.

Bucky moaned deep in his chest, fingers spasming against his face, before he took control of the kiss. “I’ve missed you,” he breathed into the other man’s mouth, a soft keen slipping from his lips as Clint spanned his back with his hands. “I’m so sorry . . . for Steve, for agreeing to this stupid ‘break’, for all of it. I just . . . I want you back, Clint . . . I want you mine. But I understand you feel something for her and I will not be the one who stands in the way.”

“Give her a chance Buck, you might feel something for her too. Darce has a wicked sense of humor and might surprise you; just don’t piss her off or you’ll be facing the wrath of her and her taser.” Clint snorted, easily remembering the other night when the brassy woman had tased one of the idioty baby agents from the security detail for refusing to take no for an answer.

“If she caught your attention, khishchnik, I’m sure she’s a hell of a woman,” he agreed with a soft chuckle. Bowing his head, he pressed his forehead against Clint’s gently. “God . . . I want you to fuck me. I want you in me, surrounding me . . . is that . . . can we do that?”

Clint stared at Bucky for a long moment pupils blown wide with lust as he tried to force his brain into coherent thought. He nibbled momentarily at his lower lip before groaning in defeat “You locked the door right?”

Chuckling, he agreed fondly, “I can . . . if you want me to.”

With a roll of his eyes Clint snarked “I’d rather not have some of the idioty currently under my command come storming in while we’re in the middle of hot, awkward reunion sex.”
"Awkward? Since when has sex between us ever been awkward?" he teased with a soft frown.

"Since your ninety something year old best friend decided to butt into our business without knowing everything and the fact I’ve been sleeping with someone else?" Clint pointed out with a huff. "It just seems like it’d be a little awkward."

There was a pause, as he considered, “Yeah . . . you may have a point there.” Bending he chuckled as he nibbled teasingly on Clint’s lower lip again, “Well . . . everyone has to have at least one awkward first time. And since our first, first time was mind blowingly amazing . . . this is going to be our awkward first time. What do you think?”

“Sounds about right . . . though we actually may have another in the future if you and Darcy both agree to us trying the whole threeway relationship thing,” Clint reminded with a grin, his hand snatching the duffle away from Bucky as he moved to deposit it at the foot of his bed.

“You’re gonna need to be the one to pitch that idea, khishchnick. Especially considering the fact, I’ve never even met the girl.”

“Met her or not, the first question out of her mouth was to ask me where you were.” Clint chuckled at the memory. "Boy was that another dagger in my chest.”

Bucky flinched widely, his mouth twitching downwards as the statement caused a pain in his gut. “I’m sorry . . .”

Clint smirked, one finger coming up to press lightly against his lips. “Hey . . . none of that. You can make it up to me, by getting naked and getting on the bed. We have three weeks to make up for, yeah?”

Bucky’s eyes rolled back, as he groaned, “Twenty-two days and thirteen hours, but yeah; I’m willing to round it to three weeks.”

“I guess I’ll have to thank Captain Tight-ass eventually. Rumor has it make-up sex is the best.”

Stripping his shirt, the soldier cocked an eyebrow as he teased, “And who taught you that? The Colonel and Marina hardly seem the type . . . and the only one of your brothers to break up with someone was Jason. Not that he seemed to care much . . . he ended up getting Casey out of the whole mess.”

“Darcy, she can be a bit of a chatter box on the most random ass, mundane things. Unless you give her mouth something else to occupy it,” Clint smirked with a shrug “She has a history rife with angry makeup/break up sex apparently.”

“Oh yeah? She teach you anything new?” he drawled sensuously, slinking forward to loop his arms around Clint’s waist and pulling him close, their bodies pressed together from abdomen to knees.

“I wish. There’s this thing she does with her tongue when blowing me. Drives me chertov insane; regrettably, I’ve yet to be able to get her to teach it to me. Could have something to do with that stupid trick of her of tying cherry stems together with her tongue too.” Clint groaned eyes flicking towards the ceiling at the memory, before he teased “Pretty sure you’re going to love her, she gives great head.”

Chuckling, Bucky folded gracefully to his knees and lifted his hands to Clint’s belt. “Better head than me?” he asked wickedly, fingers pulling the zipper down agonizing slow. Clint could swear he heard each tooth as it clicked open, earning a quiet moan from the archer as Bucky leaned in to
nuzzle against the soft flesh just below his belly button.

“Hmm, you’ll have to refresh my memory. Give me something for . . .” Clint trailed off with a groan as Bucky nipped at his skin. When his brain kicked his libido back momentarily, he blurted out hastily “. . . an in depth comparison.”

Bucky grinned wickedly, as he replied, “Copy that, Major,” before engulfing Clint’s dick to the root.

The younger man’s eyes rolled back; the hot wet mouth in combination with his rank kicked off a kink he hadn’t realized he had at all. “Oh fuck . . . I cannot wait to get in that ass, Sergeant Barnes. You gonna be my hot bit on the side? Take my cock so good?” Leaning over, he murmured huskily, “I’m gonna get so deep inside you, you’re gonna taste me in the back of your throat.”

Bucky smirked around his length, drawing off with a pop as he teased, “Kinda already do.”

Rolling his eyes, Clint threaded his hands back through his hair as he ordered, “More sucking, less talking.”

"Yes sir," Bucky agreed, before bending back to his task with an almost joyful resolve.

And if Clint lost time a little from that point on . . . well clearly, they’d never been on the receiving end of that mouth or been gloved in that sweet, gorgeous ass. Damn. Fortunately, they didn’t know what they were missing . . . and if Clint had anything to say about it . . . they never would.

When they were finally cuddled together in his bed, Bucky curled into his ribs and dfozing peaceably, Clint frowned a little. His fingers drew absent designs in the drying sweat at the base of his boyfriend’s - his **boyfriend**, thank FUCK - back, his eyes picking out all the imperfections littering the ceiling of his temporary quarters. Taking a deep breath, he called to mind the look on Darcy’s face that night at the bar, when she didn’t see Bucky right there at his beck and call. With any luck, it wouldn’t be hard to convince her to give the three of them a chance. He loved Bucky, and he was well on his way to being batshit insane about Darcy; he didn’t think he’d ever be able to be content to have only one or the other ever again.

Bucky’s voice was a low hum as he murmured sleepily, “You’re thinking too loud . . . go to sleep. Whatever you’re chewing on, it’ll still be there in the morning.”

Smirking, Clint bowed his head to kiss the top of his head gently. “Yeah . . . I know.”

“If you’re still coherent and awake, clearly I did that wrong,” the Soldier grumbled petulantly, glaring up at Clint through the strands of dark hair that had fallen loose from his usually neat pony tail.

"Nah . . . that was amazing make-up sex,” was the chuckling reply from the archer, bowing his head to nibble happily at the other man’s lips. “Just thinking about Darcy.”

Smirking, Bucky cuddled closer and yawned widely, “I can’t wait to meet her.”

"I can’t wait for you to meet her either. You’re gonna love her,” he promised, looping his arms around the older man’s shoulders and tugging him that small fraction closer. “Go to sleep, Buck . . . I’ll be right behind you, yeah?"

A deep breath through his nose accompanied a warm smile from Bucky as he agreed fondly, “Kay. Love you.”

“I love you too, James Buchanan Barnes . . . my whole life. That will never change."
“Good . . . because I don’t intend to ever let you go again,” he vowed, throwing his arm over Clint’s waist and snuggling closer. “Sleep . . . we’ll worry about your girl Darcy in the morning.”

Nodding against his forehead, the archer hummed a quiet agreement before closing his eyes. Between one breath and the next, he was out . . . his beloved Soldier only seconds behind.

When he woke up the next morning, it was to the announcement that Rumlow had arrived . . . and the look of distaste and disgust on Darcy’s face every time she looked at his partner. Clint didn’t know what Rumlow had told her, and he had told her something, but whatever it was . . . there was no permanent threesome in his future. Not with these two people, who were each one half of his perfect match.

As much as he liked Darcy and wanted to make a go of it with her, Clint LOVED Bucky. He couldn’t lose him again. So he pulled back, made distance, but remained her friend. Just because they couldn’t fuck anymore - which was a damned shame - didn’t mean that he wanted to lose her from his life completely. Maybe, just maybe . . . one day he’d get lucky.

But he kinda fucking doubted it.
Hey guys! So this is the first of two chapters I'm planning to post today and tomorrow. With any luck, the second one will continue falling into place so that can happen. (Reviews will help with that . . . honest.)

Translations at the end of the chapter, same as always.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
The Grimm Truth

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Chapter 220: Reconciliation Part One

Maria Hill was NOT in a good mood. She loved her daughter, don’t get her wrong . . . but the persistent lack of sleep was starting to drag on her hard. And of course, her big lug of a husband - love of her life that he was - was driving her crazy trying to keep her happy and spoiling their little Minnow. “Hans! Let her sleep, please!” she scolded, smacking at his arm as the German leaned in the doorway of Minna’s nursery and just watched the two month old sleep.

“Her leetle snores, Spatzi . . . I cannot get enough. They are so precious,” he whispered, glancing at her briefly, before turning back to stare at the baby.

“And when your lurking wakes her up, her screams will be equally so I’ll bet,” the AD scoffed with a fond chuckle and a roll of her eyes. “I’m going to bed. I haven’t slept in four days and I need a break.”

Smiling at her fondly, he bent to press a warm kiss to his warrior woman’s cheek. “Ja . . . ve will be fine,” he promised with a grin as he shooed her away gently.

Of course it was about then that her phone screamed from the other room. Maria groaned, sagging in horror as she twisted to glare at the appliance. Storming off to snatch it up, she barked, “I am on maternity leave . . . this had better be insanely important.”

Frowning at the snarking reply on the other end of the line, she sighed heavily, her fingers coming up to pinch the bridge of her nose. She could hear the nursery door click shut quietly, and then her husband’s hands came up to knead gently at her shoulders. Reaching up, she squeeched his left hand, his wedding ring a cool presence against her palm. “All right . . . I’ll send someone to take care of it. Thank you, Agent Gamble.”

Clicking the phone shut, she sighed, “And my usual go-to would probably wring his neck if I tried to send her. Not to mention, the Colonel would probably kill me for trying.”

Hansel chuckled, “Let me guess . . . Captain Rogers?”

“Yes . . . he’s apparently destroying the punching bags in the gym, and scaring the bejesus out of the baby idiots training in there.” Groaning, she whimpered, “I haven’t slept for four days, Hans . . . I want sleep!”

“Hyu sleep . . . I will go.”

“Are you sure? You’re just as sleep deprived as I am. Maybe I can get the Colonel to go take care of it.”

“No . . . I will go.” Smoothing his hands around her shoulders, he promised, “Hyu rest . . . I will handle our wayward Captain, ja?”

“You are a saint, and I love you so much right now,” she groaned, head falling back as she gripped the front of his grey henley. Grinning into his kiss, she lifted her left hand to curl around his jaw, conscious of the weight on her wedding finger; there were times she still couldn’t believe he loved her or that he had been so stubborn not to give up on her.

“I love hyu both more than all the stars in the sky, Spatzi,” he promised, thumb stroking over the strip of skin between her comfortable flannel pants and his t-shirt.
Smiling, she laughed, “You know . . . the doctor approved me for regular activity yesterday. Maybe tonight . . . after I get some rest and if the Minnow goes to sleep quickly . . .”

There was a wicked gleam in his eyes as he promised, “Hyu rest . . . I will return as soon as I am able.”

She pressed one more kiss to his lips before letting him go, head cocking as she admired the way his jeans clung to his ass. Humming happily, she muttered, “Damn that ass . . .” before rotating girlishly on her toes and all but skipping for their room. If she was going to get what she wanted, she was going to need to get some sleep so she didn’t fall asleep in the middle.

Unhooking the latest in the line of busted punching bags and discarding it on the pile, Steve collected a new one and clicked it in place on the chain. Taking up his stance once more he scowled at the bag, as he launched into a series of brutal punches into the soft, aged leather.

He was peripherally aware of the awed looks he was getting from the training class on the other side of the gym. As well as the sharp, annoyed barks coming from the instructor as he tried to haul the class’ attention back to their lessons and off the man in khakis colored work out pants and a white t-shirt. Vaguely, he realized he recognized the instructor . . . but where he knew him from was beyond him.

Thinking of the awe in their faces only served to remind him of the looks he had been getting from the rest of the agents he’d come across since he’d woken in this strange time. Not that it wasn’t familiar. Before the serum, he had spent his life looked passed, over or through. After Erskine’s experiment and his subsequent death, suddenly all eyes were on him; with the attention had come the awe. He’d seen it a lot while he was traveling with the USO; as Captain America, he stood for something. And not that he didn’t appreciate the starry eyed applause, but he hadn’t actually done anything to deserve it, unlike the men out battling on the lines. But then, he had finally gotten involved in the war and hadn’t had to deal as much with those looks, he was with his teammates, who mainly looked at him with true respect, something he had returned in equal measure.

Now the looks were back but they didn’t seem to grasp the fact that they were looking at Steve Rogers and as Steve Rogers . . . he was still just a little guy who didn’t like bullies. It made him crazy to watch that awe and respect run to disappointment and distress once they discovered he had no interest in standing for whatever crusade they were pushing for. He was just trying to make his way through this new world.

That was a familiar feeling as well. He was unable to stop himself from once again comparing this to what happened after his transformation. What he wanted didn’t seem to matter. He quickly became aware of what he was worth to people in different positions of power. And along with the awe from many agents he couldn’t help but also see another familiar look, one he had gotten enough from Senator Brandt. He could see them calculating his worth, determining how they could use him.

And while he wanted to useful . . . he refused to be used.

Used. His thoughts unwillingly turned to Bucky. Who had been brainwashed . . . tortured . . . used, by horrible people. If only . . .

Steve’s punch wavered as Bucky’s falling face pushed to the forefront of his thoughts. There was a look he wished he could forget. Even when he’d been a runt, from the day they met, Bucky had always looked at him with respect, fondness . . . typically coupled with exasperation over whatever situation Steve had gotten himself into next. But always . . . that love had been there.
Even when Steve had stepped out the the car to see him alive, it was there though it had been marred slightly by Bucky's uncertainty. Then, when he learned of what Steve had done, it was gone. He hadn't been able to see it anymore from behind Bucky's fury . . . behind the betrayal.

Why hadn’t he told him about Barton? It didn’t make sense, but now the uncertainty made more sense. Had Bucky thought Steve would turn away from him, think less of him? Bucky was different, there was no doubt about that, he had seen the new hardness . . . a deep well of darkness in him. But it didn’t matter to Steve . . . why would it? Bucky was his oldest friend, his brother. How was it possible he didn’t know him anymore, hadn’t known his preferences or that he’d fallen head over heels for the man he’d chased off? Grunting in frustration as he landed a particular harsh punch, detaching one of the chains from the bag, he’d royally screwed up and in the process of trying to protect Bucky all he’d really managed to do was chase off his only lifeline.

“Hyu have quite the collection of broken bags . . . may I suggest hyu do not break another? Mein Spatzi does not appreciate it when people destroy what is not theirs,” came a German accented voice from behind him, tone amused if stern.

“Pretty sure I’ve got some back pay owing; she’s quite welcome to take the cost of the replacements from it.” Steve grunted with one last blow to the uneven bag before he turned towards the voice, eyes focused on his hands as he worked the bindings loose.

“And while that may be true, I am the one who suffers from hyur lack of care, so if hyu would be so kind,” he snarked with a roll of his eyes.

Looking up to the voice’s owner Steve’s eyes widened in shock before flicking to the trainer across the way. And suddenly, it clicked . . . where he knew the trainer from; the two faces were virtually identically to that of Bucky’s boyfriend. Granted when he focused closer there were minute differences . . . even still they were things he likely would have missed if it hadn’t been for his penchant for art. “You’re related to Barton.” He stated quietly.

“My youngest son. The one over there is Brian; he is my second eldest. And I do believe you have also met my oldest, Colonel Brandt, meine Tochter’s partner.”

“Your daughter is partner to your son?” Steve blinked at that for a moment before clicking “Ah the heavily pregnant Russian who threatened to kick my ass, is married to your son the Colonel?” Steve asked with a wince, suddenly thinking he may have stepped on a live landmine with this particular family.

“They are not married . . . only very committed,” he replied with a smile. “My grandchildren are due very soon . . . I confess to a certain amount of pride about it.”

“I have no doubt that Agent Petrovka, once she is fit, will make good on her promise to deal with me over what happened with your youngest son. Had I known then what he meant to Bucky . . . I would have kept my mouth shut.” Three was a moment’s pause, before his eyes went wide as he extended his unwrapped hand to the man befroe him, “Forgive my lack of manners, my ma raised me better than this. Steven Rogers.”

The German accepted the hand with a firm shake, before replying, “Johannes Kuhn . . . most people call me Hansel. I know who hyu are Captain . . . regrettably, hyur reputation precedes hyu.”

“Which reputation exactly? The one as a dancing monkey or the one where I break your youngest son’s heart by misjudging his fascination in my best friend?” Steve huffed bitterly.

“Bucky and mein Falki have reconciled. And hyu did not act in malice. Even Marishka is not very
angry now; if she was, hyu would already be dead, pregnancy or no.”

“I don’t doubt that Sir. But I’m glad to hear Buck and your boy have mended their bridges. Had I known about them I wouldn’t have said what I did. I overreacted and judged your boy by the rest of STRIKE. For that, I am sorry and I hope eventually to be allowed to apologise to them both.” Steve responded, turning from Hansel as he worked the rest of the bindings off.

“As for which reputation, neither. We are in a rather unique club, hyu and I. I know of only one other, and she sleeps still.” There was a gentle twist to his mouth as he inquired, “When were hyu born, Captain?”

“July 4th, 1918, Sir.”

Here he smiled, a warm edge to it that put the other man at ease. “I was born October 31st . . . 1796. My sister was born two years following, though she still slumbers in her cursed sleep.”

Steve had froze hearing Hansel’s birth year, “1796? But that would make you . . .”

“Two hundred and thirteen years old, yes. My sister is 211. So hyu see, Captain . . . hyu are not the only man out of time here. I woke from my sleep in nineteen hundred and ninety-nine. I was in my thirties when I was cursed . . . I slept for far longer than I had lived.”

Steve shook his head slightly, awed by the idea. He had not thought he would meet anyone other than Bucky would understand how strange it was to have slept longer than you had lived. Then, he frowned, suddenly curious, “Your sister . . . she’s not named Gretel is she? Like in the fairy tale.” He could confess that, despite his own seventy year sleep, the knowledge of another’s sleep was amazing to him. And for her to still be sleeping . . .

“According to my son, my sister and I are the basis for the fairy tale of the same name. Her name is Margaret . . . but yes, we have always called her Gretel. We are German; it is our way.” Frowning he scolded, “Either way, I understand where hyu have been. It is isolating and lonely, but there is a world beyond destroying punching bags and frightening baby agents.”

“Frightening baby agents?” Steve repeated blinking as his gaze swept to the group on the other side of the gym. “Am I that fearsome without realising it?”

“When angry and depressed, hyur face makes quite a terrible expression,” the other man laughed. Reaching out, he laid his hand on the captain's shoulder, “Mayhap, hyu have need of a friend, ja?”

“Probably, but I doubt anyone will step up after what I did to Bucky, and he was my oldest friend.”

“I would not be so hasty in that assumption. Hyu may find hyurself surprised.” Moving his head to indicate the door, he insisted, “Come . . . hyu will come to dinner. It is good food and good company. After we eat . . . I would show hyu something, if hyu permit it.”

“If you’re anything like your eldest son and his partner, Hansel, I suspect I don’t have a choice.” Steve shook his head with a soft chuckle “And while I may be good in combat I suspect you have a few tricks up your sleeves.”

“Hyu would find hyurself dearly challenged against our Murderesses. May I suggest hyu seek one out? Come, come . . . we will be late. That is never a good idea, trust me.”

“I’m not sure I want to ask how those particular women got that nickname. Lead on?”

“They were Russian assassins once, who defected from their motherland. Marina is one, as are her
three sisters. They are fearsome to behold. Even I would balk to meet them in a dark alleyway, as they say.” Hansel replied, pausing briefly at the side of his son. “Are hyu about done, Arger?”

“Tasha and I will meet you there, I promise.”

“Do not be late,” he instructed the brown-eyed agent firmly. “Hyu know how Sova feels about late arrivals at her table,” he insisted, before clapping one hand on his son’s shoulder and striding away, Steve in reluctant tow behind him.

“Do all your son’s look like you?” Steve inquired as his gaze flicked across to the one Hansel had just been speaking too. “If I weren’t an artist and used to picking out slight differences I’d swear you all looked identical.”

“All ten of them, ja. Will looks the most like me, however. His eyes, hyu know . . . they change depending on his mood. So sometimes, rare times, they are exactly the right color.”

“Ten?” Steve blinked at that, his brow furrowing as he frowned “I don’t want to ask how you have ten identical sons, if you were cursed . . . do I?”

“Marishka has told hyu; hyu inspired many, yes? They are the results of one of the more . . . inhumane . . . inspirations. One day, I will . . .” here he trailed off, taking a deep breath in through his nose to calm his temper. “Eet is complicated.”

“Your boys were meant to replace me? That’s what she meant when she said to Bucky about Clint’s whole life being spent replacing me?”

“Only five were, but ja, they were the solution the Army came up with after losing you. They are good soldiers, good agents; they were built to be so. But when hyu awoke . . . everything Clint had ever been was now moot. It was a little daunting to him; he believes that of his brothers, he is the fuck up of the batch, though Sonnenstrahl and Grauchên would disagree.”

“And then I come along and try and take Bucky away from him while sticking my giant foot in my mouth. Suddenly I feel like the little runt I was, picking fights in a back alley with a garbage can lid as my only protection.”

“Hyu have said hyur apologies. When the twins are born, those two will be back. Patience; hyu will get to beg their forgiveness soon enough,” he insisted, smiling up at a huge house on base. “Ah, we are here.”

Staring wide eyed at the house Steve turned to Hansel asking “Exactly how many people live here?”

“It depends on any given day. Come, let us go in. I miss my Minnow . . . her Papa's arms are empty without her in them.”

The door opened to the smell of fresh Chinese stir fry and sweet ginger spiced wontons. “Ah. Adler is cooking.”

“You can tell that by the aroma of the food?” Steve gaped at the man’s back before his head shook and he jogged to catch up.

“Ja. No one makes Chinese quite like Will,” he replied as he led Steve into the kitchen, where Will was working at the stove and Marina sat cuddled up in a cushy armchair someone had dragged in from the living room. “Hello . . . I hope hyu do not mind. I brought a guest to hyur table, Adler.”

Steve stood in the doorway, glancing around the kitchen, feeling out of place. He hadn’t realized,
somewhere, that they were going to this particular son’s home and tried not to fidget under the gaze of the very pregnant Russian, who had torn into Bucky so frightenly before. His gaze flicked to Will as he asked, “Is there anything I can do to help? I’d like to pull my weight since I’m a surprise addition.”

Will’s eyes flashed through colors as he wiped his hands on a rag, before they flicked to his partner. “Zhemchuzhina?”

Huffing, she sagged back, “I’m too tired to care, Mishka. He can set the table, if he's of a mind to.”

“You weren’t kidding about the changing eye color.” Steve said as he glanced at Hansel for a moment before returning his attention to the couple in the kitchen. “I can leave if it’s inconvenience, Colonel.”

“It’s not. Marina is just a nasedka and fussing. You’re welcome . . . if you could set the table, it's one less chore I have to wrestle away from Agent Stubborn over there.”

Marina's tone was singsong cheerful as she replied, “Pot, meet kettle!”

“Point me in the direction of the table settings and consider it handled. I also insist you let me handle the dishes afterwards.”

“Oh no . . . we have boys for that,” Marina insisted, before shouting, “Boys!! Dinner!! Wash up please!”

Will rolled his eyes as he retorted in a dry tone to his father, “Well at least this time she didn’t try to get up.”

“Hush you,” the Russian snarked, nose wrinkling adorably as she pouted at him. “I’m pregnant . . . not an invalid.”

“I’m not sure how it is now, Agent Petrovka, but back in the 40’s no pregnancy was easy. I remember Bucky’s Ma being on bedrest while carrying his baby sister Becca.” Steve spoke up dazedly, his mind obviously in the past as he worked to set the tables.

Groaning, she huffed, “Don't give him ideas . . . he has far too many as it is.”

Rene came skidding into the kitchen, screeching as he tried to evade a furious Sam. “I’m gonna kill you!” the older blond roared, swiping at his brother and just barely missing him.

Will's hand was on Marina's shoulder to keep her seated as he bellowed, “Enough! Sam . . . sit down!”

“But Dad!”

“NOW!!” was the booming reply, prompting Sam to drop the ground next to Marina in a heartbeat.

Will's hand coming out to snatch the back of Rene's shirt as the teenager attempted to slither past. “If the two of you are finished behaving like heathens, we have company. Kindly remember your manners.”

“Boys will be boys, Colonel. Bucky and I used to give his ma far worse than that.” Steve’s mouth curved into a sad smile “Course it used to end with Bucky’s pa’s strap being reintroduced to our backsides if we got too out of hand.”

Will gave his younger son a stern glare as he insisted, “I'm considering it.”
“Dad! I'm almost 16!” Rene protested, wide eyed.

“Do I look like I give a damn?” was the reply, glancing at where Sam was fuming even as Marina's fingers pet through his hair. “What did you take, Rene?”

“Jules’ engagement ring,” Sam grit out, glaring at his baby brother.

“Is your name Rene?” Will barked, causing his eldest son's jaw to snap closed as he shook his head. Turning back to the younger, he ordered firmly, “Give it back.”

“Why is he marrying her?” he whined, even as he fished the box from his pocket and handed it over to his father sullenly. “She's so . . . obsessive. Like seriously, Dad's a workaholic, but he's never left Mama for the job either.”

“Sam loves her, Enjolras Rene, and that is all that should matter to you, is that understood? Or should I get the strap I used to use on your uncles’ butts and use a little old fashioned discipline on your backside?” Will ground out, snatching the ring box while simultaneously shaking Rene gently by the collar of his shirt.

“Whatever,” Rene grumbled, yelping as his dad’s hand came down hard on the seat of his jeans.

“Try that response again,” the Colonel insisted, his “Dad” face on at full force.

“No sir. I understand,” he insisted, hand back to rub at the still stinging spot on his ass.

“Smart boy. Wash your hands and face for dinner; we're seconds away.”

Steve finished setting the table, expression stoic even as the scene had reminded him of his own past, the only thing really missing was Bucky. Glancing over the table with a critical eye he inquired “Is there anything missing? Obviously aside from the bodies around the table.”

Marina flicked at the back of Sam's head fondly as she ordered affectionately, “Help the Captain get out the beer, wine, tea and other drinks, please, Sammy-honey.”

“Yes Ma,” he agreed, a small quirk to his lips as Rene scrambled out of reach as he stood. “Yeah . . . you’d better run, little firestarter . . . pyros tend to get burned.”

Steve’s brows rose slightly as he looked at Sam for a moment before shaking his head with a low chuckle “It’s like looking at a blond version of Bucky when we were growing up.”

Sam grinned at the information, “Yeah!? Uncle Bucky is awesome, not gonna lie. He still hasn’t forgiven me for taking him out in paintball though.”

“Paintball?” Steve asked with a confused frown, shaking his head he continued “Bucky’s a sniper, used to be the best. The enemy couldn’t ever find his perch, so how’d you manage to take him out?”

“Ma took a running leap off a roof?” he replied with a grin, the two partners exchanging a fist bump. “Lead him AND Uncle Clint right into my sights. It was awesome.”

Steve’s brow furrowed at that information; clearly his best friend had changed more than he’d known. Excluding the arm of course, that difference was definitely hard to miss. “You’re a sniper yourself then I take it?”

“Yeah . . . my scores come in pretty consistently behind Uncle Bucky. And even Bucky hasn't ever been able to touch Clint's scores, with a gun, a rifle or a bow. Uncle Clint's the Best, Greatest
“Marksman in the World,” Sam gushed, a clear case of hero worship gleaming in brilliant blue eyes.

“Sounds like talent runs in the family then.”

Sam blushed as he shook his head, “Nah . . . I'm adopted. I didn't get any of those genes.”

“Sammy . . . what do we say when someone gives us a compliment?” his mother prompted gently, eyes sad as she watched her exceptional eldest sink back under the General's conditioned belittling and self-deprecation.

“Thank you, Captain.”

“Steve is fine, unless I’m in the field.” Steve said with a slight grin before he shrugged “Family isn’t always about genetics and blood. Bucky and I were like brothers growing up in Brooklyn. He and his family were life savers after my Ma passed.”

“This is the only family Sam or I have ever had,” Rene chimed in from where he was hiding behind his father. “My mother and Sam's General . . . not exactly gonna win ‘Parent of the Year’.”

“The sad truth Rene . . . it was Rene right? Not all people are cut out to be parents, and a lot of the time the best parents are ones who never would’ve thought they would be.” Steve said gently as he took the drinks Sam was passing out.

Sam grinned, “Nah, Ma was destined to be a mother. Just took her awhile to get stuck with us is all.”

“She has a big heart; I could see that the first day I met her. More so when faced with her fury not so long ago.” Steve grinned at Sam for a moment before looking to Marina “Bucky always did have a huge heart himself; it's no wonder he threw his lot in with Agent Petrovka.”

“Flattery will get you into many places, Captain Rogers . . . back to my table included,” Marina laughed, reaching up to take the hands Will and Sam both offered her and letting them pull her to her feet. “Ugh . . . I am a whale,” she huffed, hands coming up to brace her back as she stretched a little.

Steve snorted at the comment head cocked slightly “Begging your pardon, ma’am, but that’s a load of crap. You're radiant; if I had my sketch pad, I’d draw you to prove my point.”

Frowning she asked, “Do you have a decent sketch pad, Captain? I know there's been some disagreement among the higher ups about your backpay.”

“Not currently; I’ve been improvising with scraps of paper.” Steve admitted sheepishly, one hand scrubbing at the back of his neck.

Turning to her eldest, Marina instructed firmly, “Sammy-honey, go get one of the empty sketchbooks, from Aaron's old room. He doesn't need 20 blank ones littering his room.”

“Yes Ma,” he agreed, before bolting off towards the stairs.

Steve stared at Marina, slightly dumbfounded with his mouth agape before his brain kicked back into gear “Are you sure you want to do that? I mean I appreciate the thought but given my earlier incident involving your family . . .” He trailed off there with a wave of his hand.

“All due respect, Captain . . . shut up. It's my house and I can do whatever I want with the junk my boys store in it. Aaron buys them in bulk around back to school time, and then formulates his explosives in them. Last I saw, his current book is still three quarters of the way empty. He won't miss one, I promise.”
“Then thank you, Agent Petrovka.” Steve beamed brightly at the Russian before flicking his gaze curiously between Will and Hansel as he quipped “Ever noticed that whenever anyone says ‘with all due respect’, they really mean ‘kiss my ass’? Not that I got that vibe from Agent Petrovka but certain people give it off especially some of the other Agent’s I’ve met.”

Will and Marina both grinned as they replied together, “Nick and Maria.”

“I am not ashamed to admit I’m just the tiniest bit afraid of AD Hill; she reminds me far too much of Peggy for my liking. Which likely means she’ll gladly kick my ass if I screw up.” Steve stated with a slight roll of his eyes and a sad sigh. “Ah, hell. I bet Peggy was livid that I missed our date.”

Marina gnawed lightly on her lower lip before she sighed, “Director Carter lives, you know? Her niece works for S.H.I.E.L.D. too; it is what it is, because she put forth the effort to make it so.”

“That’s good to know. Peggy always was the bravest dame I knew, and if her niece is anything like Peggy . . . S.H.I.E.L.D’s enemies better beware.”

“Sharon Carter is an exceptional agent. Agent 13 . . . she's been my asset for awhile now,” Marina agreed with a fond smile. “She isn't family, but I'll confess I had hopes,” she teased, cocking an eyebrow at her eldest son.

“Ma,” the blond sighed fondly, bending to kiss her cheek. “Meddle in someone else's love life. Isn't Uncle Lucky still single?”

“To my undying dismay,” the Russian snarked, frowning as she hunched over with a sharp gasp and instantly had the attention of the entire room. Will was at her side in an instant. Steve could admit to being impressed, if asked; he hadn’t even seen the Colonel move.

“Everything okay, Agent Petrovka?” Steve’s tone was laced with concern as he took in her hunched posture and the concerned expressions littering the faces within the room, while her partner cuddled her as he fussed.

Will didn't even wait for a response, swooping up the diminutive woman and striding towards the couch in the living room. She grunted as she smacked at him gently, “I'm fine . . . it was a kidney shot.”

“Regardless, you should probably rest a while. You can lay down in here while we’re eating dinner.”

Marina sighed, sagging into the couch. “I don't want to be in here all by myself. Please Mishka . . . it's just a kick, that's all.”

Rene chimed in quietly, “Maybe . . . we could eat in here with her, Dad? If that's okay with you.”

“It’s not right to let a lady eat alone.” Steve chimed in suddenly, a cheeky grin spreading across his face “And Agent Petrovka is a lady.”

Her teeth flashed at him in a sinister grin as she snarked, “A lady who will turn you inside out, if you ever call her a lady again.”

“Peggy was a lady . . . albeit a lady who regularly liked to kick my ass or shoot at me when I screwed up. Seems a fair comparison for you Agent Petrovka; ass kicking ladies as opposed to the prissy little house wives of the 40’s.”

“Shoot at you? There's a story there,” she insisted, perking up a little bit.
“Yes, uh, Howard and I were discussing shields at the time. Shortly before that though Peggy found a blonde dame kissing me,” Steve’s cheeks went a little rosy for a moment as his eyes dropped to his feet. “I pissed her off by saying I thought she and Howard were ‘fonduing’, then asked her opinion on one of the shields. She picked up a pistol and shot at me, then said - and I quote - ‘Yes, I think it works.’ Good thing vibranium is bulletproof.”

“Indeed,” she laughed with sparkling eyes, distracted sufficiently enough that Will could recruit his father and sons into moving the place settings to the living room coffee table. “I only had occasion to meet her the once and found her most enjoyable, wonderfully deadpan company . . . however my handlers genuinely feared her. She was a hell of a woman.”

“That she was, deceptively so. I have no doubt she was a fearsome director for S.H.I.E.L.D. She was never one to sit by and take no for an answer. There were times she tried to join me, Bucky and the Howling Commando’s in the field. She had them wrapped around her little finger and I think she was about the only dame that made Bucky think he was invisible.”

Marina’s eyes went sad at the reminder of her mentor, nibbling on her lower lip as she started to cry. And not just tears; great gulping sobs that found her burying her face in her palms and her shoulders shaking hard as she literally lost it before Steve’s eyes.

“Oh darn, I didn’t mean to make you cry.” Steve stammered as he crossed and dropped to a crouch in front of the sobbing Russian. “I’m sorry if I said something to upset you.”

“I miss him,” she wailed in honest distress, rolling slightly to grab his shirt and sob into his chest. “I want Tvorets home!”

“That’s my fault, I’m sorry for that. I’d like to make it up to you for taking him away from you . . . especially now.” Steve stuttered in dismay, still a little clueless when it came to women as he reached one hand around to pat lightly at Marina’s back.

The Colonel frowned as he came further into the room, hands full of dishes. “What happened?!” he demanded, all but throwing the plates down and crouching at her side.

“I miss Clint and Bucky!” she hiccupped, transferring her weight to her lover and clinging like a limpet.

Sighing out in relief, Will replied, “Oh. That's not nearly as terrible as I was imagining.” Looking over at Steve, he took in the man’s features and promised, “It's the pregnancy. She can and will literally start to cry at the drop of a hat. Don't worry; I promise . . . nothing you did personally.”

“Actually Sir, that one is all my doing. If I’d kept my nose out of things or had thought to look closer before speaking . . . this wouldn’t have happened.” Steve sighed head turning to the ceiling as he scowled “Is there anyway to get them back?”

“They’re assigned to the base there until the situation in New Mexico is resolved, so no,” he replied. Marina suddenly straightened, tears paused as she stared at the dishes, “Those are my good china, William Michael Grimm! What are you doing throwing around my good CHINA ?!”

“See? Crisis averted,” he chuckled bending to kiss her forehead and straighten once more to standing.

“Maybe for me; I think it started a whole new one for you though. I can see why Bucky likes Agent Petrovka though. There’s similarities to his sister Becca in here,” Steve reached out to tap gently at
Marina’s temple as he grinned “And given the size of your family, in her heart as well. Becca was always coming home with stray animals.”

“Marina prefers stray boys; they clean up after themselves better,” Will joked, moments before she burst into tears again. “Misha . . . I'm hungry.”

“I know samaya malen'kaya, I'm working on it,” he agreed, bending to kiss her forehead gently. “Why don't you tell the Captain about Bucky raising you at the Krasnaya Komnata while I finish dinner and we wait on the rest of the idiots. Would you like a couple crab rangoons to hold you over?”

“Please?” she asked meekly, big hot chocolate eyes blinking up at him adorably.

“Oh yeah, definitely Becca reincarnated,” Steve teased with a low chuckle.

Turning her head to glare at him lightly, she stuck her tongue out at him playfully. “Be nice, or I won't tell you about the time I drenched the Soldat in chocolate on a mission once.”

Will snorted hard, clearly privy to those details. “Oh boy . . . hauling out the big guns, huh?”

“Mnhmm,” she hummed contentedly, grinning up at her lover as he pressed his hands to her belly. She folded hers over his, lifting her chin to accept his adoring kiss happily. “Ya lyublyu tebya, moy Mishka.”

“Vsegda, zhемchužhina,” he replied in adoring agreement.

“I’m sorry, I’m having a hard time picturing Buck covered in chocolate. He was always so finicky about keeping clean before the war.” Steve mumbled, head shaking as his lips twitched. “You’ll have my best behavior, if I get to hear that story.”

“I was 10 . . . pretending to be his daughter. We were in Bucharest, hunting some rogue KGB. I was a spitfire even then and I was not afraid of him. He scolded me unfairly and I upended my mug of hot chocolate over his head.”

Steve burst into a fit of riotous laughter, dropping back onto his butt on the floor in front of Marina. Hunching over his legs as his face darkened with his laughter “I would have paid to see that.” Steve wheezed a few minutes later.

“He terrified my classmates; the Gospozha used to call him the Boogeyman.” Frowning, she sighed, “He was always kind to me . . . brought me chocolates, ruffled my hair. He was the only father I had then; it broke my heart to disappear, to defect from the KGB. I knew I would never see him again . . . and yet, here we are.”

“It’s good to know there was still some part of him alive in there. My one regret from the war was when he fell, I never went back to look for his body. We were ordered to move on.” Steve growled with a shake of his head. “I guess in some weird roundabout kind of way that would kind of make you my surrogate niece then.” He teased with a wonky grin, blue eyes shining brightly.

“Imagine how he feels, as he's sleeping beside the boy I raised from diapers. By that same roundabout logic, Clint is his grandson,” she giggled, eyes shining with amusement.

“Well ain’t that just a kick in the pants.” Steve snorted with a roll of his eyes. “Bucky and I used to know cousins who dated, it was an amusing thing to discuss on the cold nights when we were huddled up together under the blankets to stay warm. I’m gonna have to do something to make it up to both of them.”
“Be supportive. Bucky loves you . . . he just loves Clint more.”

“Yeah, I get that now. I promise I’ve got their backs when they get home. Bucky . . . he’s my family and that makes Clint family by extension.” Steve said sincerely.

“See . . . you can be taught,” she chuckled, cheering considerably as Will carried in a plate of rangoons for her. “Ooooh . . . yummy. Gimme gimme.”

“That’s me, just a big ol’ dumb, loyal dog that needs a firm hand to train me right,” Steve snarked with a broad grin.

Will rolled his eyes, chuckling, “That sound like something Jay would say. ‘That’s me; just a big dumb dog’.”

“Well how else would you explain me jumping into hell after my best friend and your partner’s surrogate father? Colonel Phillips was not impressed by my behavior.” Steve pointed out with a smirk “But I was done being the Senator’s dancing monkey.”

Will frowned, asking very seriously, “You are his brother. What else were you supposed to do? I’ve done nothing less for my own and for Lucky . . . when it’s all you’ve ever had, family is important.”

“Apparently I was expected to be their perfect little apple pie of a soldier and continue doing their propaganda campaign. If I hadn’t have gone after Bucky, I never would have seen active duty. They were content to let me ‘play’ at soldier when all I wanted to do was protect those I cared for.” Steve grunted, blue eyes darkening at the recollection. “I’m grateful for Peggy and Howard helping me to go after Bucky.”

Marina cocked an eyebrow at her lover as she snarked, “Perfect Little Soldier . . . now who does that sound like, I wonder, Mishka?”

“I love you, Marishka . . . the love of my life, the joy of my heart, the apple of my eye . . .” he continued spouting off epithets, laughing, as she threw her fork at his head seconds after he ducked back behind the door into the kitchen.

“Oooh, that man makes me crazy.”

“You love him regardless of it though,” Steve said solemnly, lips twitching in amusement “I can see it, the same way I saw it in your defense of Clint. They may drive you up the wall but you can’t help loving them, Bucky was the same with me. When I was a scrawny little runt getting his ass kicked in Brooklyn on a daily basis, Bucky used to sweep in like an avenging angel to ‘save’ me.”

“Misha nor I rarely need saving,” she promised with a fond grin. “Where he goes, I follow. A world without him . . . it isn’t a world I want any part of.”

“No but I have no doubt the pair of you sweep in to protect your family, both blood and chosen. Come hell or high water you’re always there for each other no matter what. I missed that when Bucky fell.”

Marina grunted with the effort as she leaned forward to lay her hand over his. “He will forgive you . . . I have every faith in that. As you’ve said, Tvorets’ heart is big and loving. You are his brother . . . why else would he be so mad?”

“That is true, however he’s also an elephant. He never forgets and boy can he hold a grudge when he wants to.” Steve chuckled squeezing her hand gently. “Do you mind if I draw you? I think it’d be a good gift for not only you but for Clint and Bucky as well.”
“I am a whale, Captain . . . but if you wish it, I have no objections,” she agreed with a laugh, seconds before Will, Hansel, Rene and Sam all came in carrying trays stacked high with homemade Chinese food . . . followed by a veritable flood of Grimms. “Yay!! I’m starving!!”

Steve snorted softly at her complaint. “You are far from a whale and I stand by my earlier opinion that you are radiant and I’m throwing in beautiful and kind hearted to boot.” He picked up the book and pencil Sam had left and flipped it open to start sketching an outline.

“I have never been beautiful, Captain,” she chuckled, earning a fond kiss from her lover as he slipped under her body and pulled her back into him. “You've always been beautiful to me.” the Colonel promised with a smile.

“You're biased,” she scoffed with a roll of her eyes, even as she pressed a quick kiss to his lips in reward.

“Beauty is in the eye of the beholder Agent Petrovka. As my Ma used to say there’s more to beauty than looks, your kind heart and protective nature only add to your natural beauty.” Steve hummed peering up over the top of the sketchbook briefly with a grin.

“Bozhe moi . . . at this point, I think you can call me Marina, Captain.”

“My ma taught me better than to use someone’s name before they give me permission, Marina. Same goes for you though, you can call me Steve.”

It was about then that a snide voice chimed in, “Who invited Captain Mudak?”

“Aaron Kenneth James . . . you shut your mouth this instant, if the only thing coming out of it is rude and vitriolic.” Sighing, she muttered, “I could have sworn I taught the lot of you basic manners. Maybe I imagined it.”

“It’s alright Marina, he has a right to be upset. My actions chased off his younger brother.” Steve mumbled shrinking back behind the book as though he were still a scrawny runt from Brooklyn.

“Not just my brother . . . my best friend. Clint is gonna kick my ass when he gets home, for distracting him long enough that Bucky could get to him before he could bolt.” Glaring, blue eyes were boiling hot as he hissed, “Which wouldn't have needed to happen if he'd just kept his mouth shut.”

Flinching at the reminder Steve flipped the sketchbook shut and set it on the coffee table before pushing himself off the floor, his lips a thin line as he tried to avoid looking at any of the newly arrived brothers. “This was a bad idea; I’ll just excuse myself and leave you guys to it.”

“Sit the fuck down,” Will ordered, eyes a silvery grey that pinned Steve in place effortlessly. Turning his attention onto the second youngest brother, his tone was calm, quiet . . . and made Aaron blanch paler than the pages in the sketchbook. “That's enough, Kenny. If you cannot refrain from running your mouth, you may leave.”

“You don't mean that.”

Cocking a single eyebrow, the eldest Grimm asked in reply, “Don't I?”

“Colonel, I don’t want to be the cause of anymore unrest within your family,” Steve stammered from where his butt had plopped back on the floor.

His interruption was sharp as he insisted, “This is my family and my home. And I will have anyone
in it I wish. If Kenny doesn't like that . . . he has a home of his own. He can go sulk in it.”

Steve reeled a little on the floor at that, not to mention the fact the merest order from the shorter man before him had him quailing a little. He had a couple inches on the Colonel and more than a crew pounds as well. The authority radiating off the man, however; it was awe inspiring and frankly kind of intimidating. This was not a man he would wish to find himself on the wrong side off, ever.

His eyes flicked to Aaron, tone quiet, as he apologised “I am sorry for what happened with your brother, and I intend to fix it however possible once they return.”

“I did that already,” the blue eyed brother muttered with a roll of his eyes. “Last I talked to Bucky, they were . . . well, yeah. Probably TMI in current company. It was for me, anyway.”

“Bucky’s always over shared,” Steve admitted with a wry grin as he shook his head “And I didn’t mean fix their relationship, rather fix up my own misguided mistake. I need to earn back Bucky’s trust and by extension Clint’s, they both deserved better than my assumptions.”

“STRIKE are morons . . . but Clint’s a Grimm. The only reason he's STRIKE is because he's the best.”

“Well I know that now.” Steve replied insistantly. “I never knew he was a ‘Grimm’ until Marina and Bucky showed up. All I saw was a STRIKE member making my brother and best friend upset whenever he was nearby. Add in the angry and disappointed looks he was throwing over at us . . . my instinct to protect Bucky slammed to the forefront.”

“There are other reasons to ogle the Soldier, you know. Half of the current training class has a bet about who can get Bucky into bed first . . . and I'm not talking about just the women,” Jason snickered with a roll of his eyes. “Brian's been bitching about it for months.”

Will cocked an eyebrow, mouth opening to speak, just before the second deadliest couple in the family blew into the room. “Fuck damn shit! I hate stupid anyone, okay? And those idiots take the damned cake, Will. You’re getting soft in your old age.”

Jason snarked, “Speak of the devil, and he shall appear.”

“Bite me, Jay Jay.”

“Don't call me Jay Jay,” was the cold reply, prompting Will to clear his throat and draw their attention before the two brothers attempted to maim one another.

“I highly doubt I've gone soft, but okay . . . you have my attention. What happened?” the Colonel asked with an amused grin.

Steve glanced curiously to Hansel, one brow arched before he joked “Should we be worried the gym is now lined with the corpses of idiot baby agents as well as busted punching bags?”

“Brian has very exacting criteria about murder. They are probably not happy to be alive right now, but they do live.” Hansel replied calmly, tone and features totally serious.

“Good to know, I wouldn’t want to have been the one to explain that to Fury.”

Natasha chuckled as she slipped around her lover and moved to her sister’s side. “Allo sestrenka, kak samochuvstviye segodnya? Kak moi pleyannitsy? (Hello, little sister, how are you feeling? How are my nieces?)”
“Klassno,” the other Russian replied, the two sisters giggling as they felt the twins rolling around in her belly. “So strong already . . . they're going to keep me on my toes.”

“Hello! Could the murderous contingent of the family kindly pay attention here? I'm gonna start maiming them, if they don't pay attention?” Brian complained with a growl and an impressive pout.

“Oh Bri . . . now what happened?” Marina teased, her hands lying over Natasha’s, as one of the twins battered against the pressure insistently.

The redhead looked back at her lover, teasing, “Apparently, the good Captain has replaced the Soldat as the most fuckable man at S.H.I.E.L.D. His training class couldn't stop staring at him today.”

“I'm trying to teach them how to stay alive. It would be nice if they would pay attention, Will!”

“And how, exactly, is this my fault?” the Colonel asked in amusement, stealing a rangoon from Marina's plate and chuckling at her indignant squeak of dismay.

“Can I make a suggestion?” Steve stammered, cheeks aflame from the comment. “Use the distraction to your advantage. While they're distracted knock one of them on their ass, Peggy did it in basic training before I got the serum. One guy too busy hitting on her and staring at her cleavage to see her fist coming.”

“Why do you think half of them are in Medical and the other half are going to be needing ice packs just to sit for awhile?” Brian snarked, flipping onto the floor with a groan. “And it's your fault, Will, because you vetted them and let them be recruited.”

“I don't recall the application saying anything about 'does not get distracted by hot, blond and badass’. If it did, no one would ever get recruited; haven't you seen the lists in the locker room about which Grimm is the hottest?” Casey snarked with a roll of her eyes. "Last I checked the tallies, Will was stomping all of your butts, pretty much across all specialities."

“Thank you, Casey,” Will replied with a grin. Cocking his head at the addition, he drawled, “I think.”

Marta's cheeks flamed as she insisted meekly, “I know which one has my vote.”

Casey grinned at her best friend as she teased, “I think we all know who that is, Marty. Pretty sure, you married that one.”

Blinking at the conversation as Brian’s words suddenly registered, Steve’s brows both rose to his hairline “You disabled your entire class?”

“Wouldn't be the first time,” was the unanimous response from the entire room.

“Well in that case if you ever need a distraction to reinforce that lesson, I don’t mind assisting.” The blond offered with a shrug. “Breaking them of the habit will save their lives in the long run.”

Brian's eyes sparkled as he drawled, “I'm pretty sure, I'm not supposed to like you, for my brother’s sake. But damn it . . . I like you!”

Will smirked as he joked, “And Brian doesn't like anybody who isn't family.”

“Well if it helps you can kick my ass in your brother’s stead?” Steve stated with a grin. “I do regret what happened with Clint and fully expect Bucky to kick my ass when he returns.”
“Nah . . . I'll let Clint do it. He's . . . sneakier. Maybe you'll learn something.”

“I've got a lot of learning to catch up on,” the blond admitted with a wry chuckle. “The world is nowhere near the same as it was when I went under.”

Will spoke up as Jason opened his mouth to contribute to the conversation, “Guys . . . Chinese is going cold. Can we maybe talk and eat?”

“Preferably not at the same time, my Ma is likely rolling over in her grave at the very thought,” Steve pointed out even as he glanced at the food.

Chuckling, Will gestured around the room, “So . . . this is our family. You're welcome, at your own peril.”

“Hey if Buck considers you lot family . . . then you’re good people. So I’m afraid you may well be stuck with me, I tend to follow Bucky around like a lost puppy according to his Ma.” Steve chuckled with a wide grin.

Nudging at Sam's head when he sat beside the couch, Marina ordered fondly, “Eat something, Sammichka.”

“Motherly instincts never seem to change over the years, however it seems.” Steve teased gently as he gathered a plate and eyed the food.

“My son's relationship with food is neglectful,” she muttered, elbowing back into her lover as she snarked, “Except for that I know better, I'd swear he got it from his father.”

“I've seen worse . . . I was worse. Pre-serum I wasn't much bigger than Rene there.”

Marina humphed in the back of her throat. “You should consider yourself fortunate I did not meet you then.”

“Between you and Peggy, I would have been doomed and Bucky would never have let me hear the end of it. Especially with my tendency to fight outside my weight division.”

“Recklessness at its finest, I see. You fit in with the rest of my Misfits very well . . . my poor Misha.”

“You're not adopting Captain America, Marishka . . . bad plan all around,” Will chuckled with a roll of his eyes.

“Good thing Captain America is a smoke screen then and you just have plain, old ordinary Steve Rogers sitting in your living room,” Steve snarked as he finished wolfing the food on his plate.

Marina smirked at the behavior. “There is plenty Captain. Living in a family of supersoldiers . . . we learned long ago how to cook to feed them until they are full.”

“Sorry, it’s good. I’ve been living on the cafeteria food and MRE’s.” He stammered in apology with a wry grin.

“First lesson you learn in the Army. Eat as much as you can, as fast as you can. You don't know when your next meal will be,” Will chuckled.

“Actually I learnt that before the army, the food in the 40’s was occasionally hard to come by.” He admitted sheepishly. “At times before my Ma died, I’d give up my share to her while she was sick.”

Nodding, Will replied, “There is plenty. Have as much as you'd like.”
“I’m good, thanks. The company is a welcome change.”

“I’ll bet,” was the warm reply, before Casey chirped, “So, Jason built an AI. He named her ‘Shae’…pronounced like the first syllable in ‘Shraeger’.”

“Casey!!” Jason protested, eyes wide.

The eldest brother could only chuckle at the reaction; clearly it had not been something Jason wanted people to know. Before too long, the conversation had moved away from Steve and onto ribbing Jason for his “geekiness” - Brian - or scolding him for pushing himself too hard - Marina. And if anyone noticed the way that Steve seemed content to settle into the conversation silently, at least they were kind enough not to mention it.

Chapter End Notes

Translations:

(G) (meine) Spatzi - (my) little Sparrow (Hansel's nickname for his wife, Maria Hill)
(G) Ja/net - Yes/no
(G) meine Tochter - my daughter (Hansel's nickname for Marina Petrovka)
(G) mein Falki - my little hawk (Hansel's nickname for Clint Grimm)
(G) Arger - Anger (Hansel's nickname for Brain Grimm)
(G) Sonnenstrahl - Sunshine (Hansel's nickname for Aaron Grimm)
(G) Grauchën - Little Grey (Hansel's nickname for Bucky Barnes)
(G) Adler - Eagle (Hansel's nickname for Will Grimm)
(R) Zhemchuzhina - Pearl (one of Will Grimm's lesser used nicknames for his longtime partner, Marina Petrovka)
(R) nasedka - mother hen
(R) Tvorets - architect (Marina's nickname for her former mentor and oldest friend, Bucky Barnes)
(R) samaya malen'kaya - my little one (Will's most common nickname for his longtime partner, Marina Petrovka)
(R) Krasnaya Komnata - Red Room (the special operations division of the Akademiya)
(R) Soldat - Soldier (shorted form of Zimniy Soldat or Winter Soldier; call sign given to Bucky Barnes by the Krasnaya Komnata)
(R) ya lyublyu tebya - I love you
(R) vsegda - always
(R) Gospozha - Mistress (head of the Krasnaya Komnata)
(R) Bozhe moi - Oh my God
(R) Mudak - asshole
(R) Klassno - awesome
(R) Sammichka - diminutive of Sammy (one of Marina's nicknames for her eldest son, Sam)
(R)
Fated and Mated

Chapter Notes

Special thanks to my betas, lunarweather and AlekWalker. They have been awesome!!

Translations, what there are, are at the end, as always.

See the end of the chapter for more notes
Chapter 221: Fated and Mated

Several hours later, Hansel glanced down at his watch with a smile. Brian and Steve were exchanging training techniques, while Marina dozed happily from her place curled up against Will’s chest. Sam still sat the floor in front of his mother, her fingers tangled lazily in his sunny hair. Blinking in surprise at the time, Hansel cleared his throat as he pushed himself to his feet. “Adler . . . it is very late. I had hoped to take the good Captain somewhere, to show him something.”
Will glanced at the Captain, asking, “If that’s all right with the Captain . . . I should probably wrangle Marina into bed soon anyway.”

“Yeah, sorry. Time got away from me,” Steve admitted sheepishly, pushing to his feet he collected the sketchbook before moving to where Hansel waited.

“That happens when one is enjoying companionship and good food,” Marta replied, a soft blush in her cheeks as she grinned up at the tall blond. “Sorry about my husband . . . he’s really a softy, honest.”

Aaron slouched, arms coming up across his chest as he pouted adorably, “I am not a softy. I am a grumpy man.”

“Whatever you say, darling,” she agreed, leaning over to press a warm kiss to his cheek.

Grumbling even as he wrapped his arms around his wife, Aaron glowered up at Steve, he insisted, “Don’t fuck up, okay? When you see my brother again? I hate it when he’s so far away.”

“Trust me when I say I’ve learnt my lesson and if I haven’t I’ll let you lot take it outta my hide.” Steve promised with a wry grin.

“Ooooh . . . bets on whether or not Steve could beat Will? Anyone?” Brian asked, perking up as he looked between his brothers.

“Wait . . . clarify that. Are you betting on Steve winning or on Will?” Jason asked curiously, eyebrow cocked upwards as he looked at his brother.

“Duh . . . Will,” Brian replied, to which the rest of the younger brothers announced, “No bet!”

“I get the feeling I’m missing something there,” Steve glanced to Hansel brow arched curiously before he continued “Besides my hand to hand seems to consist more of hand to shield.”

Hansel smiled proudly at his eldest son, amused by the sharp blush coloring Will’s cheeks, as he explained, “Will has never been beaten. He has been injured, of course, and even fought one-handed, but he has always prevailed in the end. I have never seen him laid low in a fight . . . training, real or otherwise. It is a source of continual aggravation for his brothers.”

“That no one can beat him?” Steve asked a little confused “I’d have thought that would be something to be proud of.”

“Only when it is not them whose faces he is grinding into the mat,” Hansel agreed, still laughing as Will ducked his head behind Marina’s hair. “And even then, it is not something mein Adler himself is proud of, only his brothers.”

“It’s something to be proud of in a way, means he’s more than capable of looking after his family.” Steve stated with a shrug. “Nothing to be ashamed of.”

“Adler was built by the Army . . . to be stronger, faster, and better. The strengths and skills he attained from this . . . they are nothing he sees pride in. Nevermind the fact that he worked hard to take those advantages and improve himself with them,” Hansel sighed in a low tone, glancing back towards where Will was engaged in conversation with both of his sons. Whatever catastrophe had happened earlier between them, the two brothers seemed to be on good terms once again with each other. “He breaks my heart, Captain . . . his only happiness lies in Marishka and his brothers. I do not
even think he would find happiness in his job, except for the fact that he feels useful in it.”

“Makes sense, he never asked for what was done to him so doesn’t like to show it off.”

“And while that may be so . . . it does not mean that he should not take pride in the things he has learned.”

“Maybe it’s just not in him to be prideful, he does what he needs to do to get his job done and come home to where he gets to be himself. Where no one judges him.”

Hansel’s jaw ground together as they disappeared from the house, closing the door behind him. “I do not think it has much to do with Adler himself . . . and everything to do with what Ross has done to him. It is hard to find happiness in anything, when hyu are groomed from infancy to be the perfect soldier.”

Glancing to the German as they walked Steve’s shoulders tensed, mouth going to taut as he spoke through clenched teeth “I don’t want to know what this Ross did to your boys while trying to replace me . . . do I?”

“I doubt it . . . though I feel hyu should know, just so hyu can be prepared for the rest of what hyu will learn about the extents to which people will go to emulate hyu. My sons are not the only experiments . . . though their success rate is a much higher percentage than the rest.”

“So even while dead they were still using me as a propaganda tool so to speak and trying to create more.” He shook his head with a huff “Dr Erskine was very selective when he chose me, I doubt this Ross was that thorough.”

“Mein Sohne are the only ones he was able to create from scratch. The rest . . . they were enhanced, such as hyu were.” Glancing over, he asked, “Do hyu remember Vincent?”

“The medic right? There was something deadly in the way he carried himself.”

“Has anyone told hyu about 09/11? What happened here?”

“Yeah, apparently someone decided my history refresher course was best started with wars and terrorist atrocities. Two planes crashed into the Twin Towers right?”

“Vincent is the youngest of four brothers; his brothers pushed him through medical school . . . he did not want to be a firefighter as they had been and his brothers did not want him to waste his potential either. It was this, that saved his life. He was working at the ER, when the Towers fell, all three of his brothers inside doing their jobs and trying to save lives. He enlisted almost immediately following that. While he was in, he was selected as a candidate for a procedure, that would make him enhanced . . . a better, faster, stronger soldier.” Frowning, he sighed, “Of the twenty participants in the program, Vincent is the only survivor. He escaped, while the rest were put down due to becoming too dangerous and unmanageable.”

“The powers that be can’t seem to leave well enough alone.” Steve muttered with a shake of his head.

“That can’t have been easy for him. He was surely friends with some of the other nineteen.”

“Ja, he was. Legally, he is dead. He cannot even tell his brothers’ widows that he lives. His girlfriend, Detective Chandler, she found him . . . vowed to protect him. But my Jason . . . he snoops when he is bored.”

“That’s the tech right? The one whom if I recall correctly still has my shield?” Steve inquired to be sure he was thinking of the right brother. “Somehow I suspect it’s ingrained in all your sons to snoop
in some form or another.”

Chuckling, Hansel agreed, “Hyu are probably right. Jason is the Department Head for Research and Development for S.H.I.E.L.D. Before that . . . he was a detective for the NYPD. He convinced Chandler, our dear Catherine, that the secret she was protecting was too much for one woman. She brought Vincent to that home, during Adler and Tochter’s annual Memorial Day barbeque; he was deployed on his first assignment for S.H.I.E.L.D. less than four hours later.” Looking back with a sharp tug of his mouth, he breathed, “He and Marta saved my grandson’s life; without his blood, Marta could never have created the antidote. And Sam would have died.”

“Antidote to what?” Steve asked cautiously, eyes flicking sideways to the older man as he awaited the answer.

“Believe it or not . . . zombies,” the German responded with a wry chuckle.

“This world got a lot weirder while I slept,” the blond chuckled with a shake of his head.

“Ja . . . that is quite the understatement.” Clasping his hands behind his back as they walked, Hansel considered, “They are not the only experiments. The Rage Virus in London; Owen and the Regimen; Aaron and Outcome; Bourne and Treadstone; Vincent and Muirfield; Blackbriar; Cahill; Dr. Bruce Banner and the Hulk . . .” Looking to the Captain, he concluded, “HYDRA and what they have done to my sister.”

“HYDRA is still around?” Steve’s jaw clenched at the information no one had thought necessary for him to know; he’d essentially given up his life to stop them. The last portion of Hansel’s comment had him frowning though “What they did to your sister? I thought you said she was ‘sleeping’?”

“She is . . . but when one has access to a beautiful, immortal young woman . . . better men than HYDRA would have been tempted. Her body is young still . . . fertile . . . and capable of bearing children . . . specifically a son.”

“They violated her? For their own means, turned her into breeding cattle?” Steve hissed, the mere thought of what had happened upsetting him immensely. But what he felt, it wasn’t the run of the mill anger he felt on someone else’s behalf for an injustice done. No this was different . . . this was a raw, roiling ball of fury coiled deep in his gut. His entire body tensing and thrumming with sheer outrage. Some part of him was aware that this was unusual, the rest of him was of the opinion he didn’t care.

“Ja . . . we cannot find the boy. Adler has been hunting for him for two years now and I have looking for longer than that. I do not even know if he still lives.” Looking up as they approached Medical, Hansel allowed a small smile to curve his lips as turned to the Captain. “Come . . . there is someone I would like hyu to meet.”

“Lead on,” Steve easily fell into step with Hansel, blue eyes scanning the hallways of Medical and memorising the route they took.

As they moved together along the hall, Steve could feel something pulling at him. It felt kind of like a hook had gotten caught behind his heart and was pulling him inexorably along. Not that he was fighting it very hard . . . he was more than content to find out what it was at the end of the string. Reaching up, he rubbed absently at his chest as he followed behind Hansel, taking in the features of the nurses around them. Most of them seemed to flinch at the sight of Hansel, or turn away quickly when they saw him coming. “What’s wrong with the nurses?”

“What do hyu mean? I see nothing out of the ordinary,” he replied, taking a right and nodding
briskly at the doctor standing against the wall.

The man opened his mouth to protest, before just sighing heavily and waving him off. Steve could swear that he heard the man mutter, “Why should I even bother? He’s going to do what he wants anyway. Damned Grimms.”

“‘Damned Grimms’?” he repeated in surprise, turning to look at Hansel in question. “I get the impression you’re not well liked here?”

“Nein . . . not really,” he chuckled in agreement. “My sister . . . I told you her sleep is cursed. Only her True Love’s kiss can wake her. We had hoped we would find him by now, but . . . we have been looking for him since we rescued her. But no one who has come has felt the pull to her, that my Maria felt to me.”

“What kind of pull?” the Captain asked, striding a little faster and pulling ahead of Hansel slightly. Hansel’s mouth opened to instruct him to turn, and watched in surprise as Steve took the correct hallway before he could be told. Cocking his head slightly, Hansel felt a well of hope surge through him, even as he clamped down on the unwilling suspicion creeping through him. Lingering behind Steve, he watched the younger man lead the way through the hospital, seeming to be completely unaware that Hansel was several steps behind him and not leading the way as he had been.

Steve was the first to pause at a door, blinking a few times. After a moment, he twisted to look back at Hansel, more than a little confused to be ahead of him. Sounding more sure than he looked, his fingers twitched as he resisted the urge to reach for the doorknob, insisting, “We’re here.”

Taking a deep breath, Hansel stared at the familiar hardwood for a long moment before nodding in reply, “Ja . . . we are here.”

Pushing open the door and waving Steve ahead of him, Hansel replied, “Steven Rogers, I would like hyu to meet . . . my sister, Margaret Huberta Kuhn.”

He moved into the room as if on autopilot, blue eyes wide as he took in the sleeping beauty on the bed before him. The breath whooshed from him suddenly as though he’d been struck a physical blow, leaving him breathless and struggling to fill his lungs. Eyes wide, he stammered out, “She looks like an angel.”

Hansel chuckled, “She would fit in well with Fury’s Angels, yes. She may look angelic while she sleeps, but I have seen her break a man’s nose with her forehead.”

“Remind me not to piss her off when she wakes then.” Steve replied with a grin, “But that’s good, that she can defend herself I mean.”

The German offered acknowledgment of the statement as only a single nod, his mouth pulling down as he sighed, “If she wakes.”

Coming to the side of the bed, Steve watched her face as he asked over his shoulder, “You never told me . . . what did the pull feel like?”

“She could not stay away from me, though heaven knows she tried. According to Marina, who was there, Spatz did not truly think she would wake me with a Domroschen kiss. They had been joking about it, and Marina had dared her to try. Ergo, her surprise when I opened my eyes at the touch of her lips on mine.”

“A kiss? Just like the fairy tales?”
“Yes . . . HYDRA . . . they referred to her in their files as ‘Dornroschen’ . . . it means Sleeping Beauty. I can only imagine how many men, HYDRA tried to have wake her.”

Steve frowned, looking uncertain as he confessed, “This is probably going to sound really stupid . . . but as we were walking the halls something felt like it was tugging at my heart. And the knowledge of what was done to your sister . . . I can’t quite describe the anger I felt.”

“Hansel have felt a pull to Gretel? Hansel are sure hansel were not imagining it?”

“For lack of a better way to describe it . . . it felt like a fishhook behind my heart and the line tugging incessantly at me. Then when I saw her I felt as though Bucky had driven that metal fist of his into my gut and forced the wind from me.” Steve said sheepishly, one hand lifting to scratch at the back of his neck as his eyes flicked from Hansel to Gretel and back.

Those robin’s egg eyes were very serious as he stared at the Captain calmly. “She is my sister. I would give the world to have her wake and stand at my side once more. But I . . . I confess . . . I am frightened by this so called ‘pull’ of hyurs. What if hyu are only imagining it?”

“I don’t . . . it’s hard to explain. The tugging was there even before you mentioned it. If you would like to see whether or not it is similar to what AD Hill felt, we can do that.”

“Wake mein Spatzi now? When she has clearly slept long and well? No . . . I have real fear of only one person . . . and she would be my wife.”

“No . . . I didn’t mean wake your wife. I meant wait and see whether or not I keep winding up back here without consciously doing it.” Steve explained.

Hansel could no longer hold it back, exclaiming, “Hansel truly were not aware were hansel?”

“What do you mean?”

“Hansel led the way to this room, without ever having been here before.”

“No, I . . .” Once again, Steve looked confused.

“Believe me I was very much aware of following hansel to my sister's room.”

“I didn't . . . I just followed it. Let it take me where it was pulling me.”

Hansel frowned, along, “And it led hansel here.”

“Yes.” Steve confirmed, his gaze falling to Gretel again.

The German moved to the side of the bed, reaching out to take Gretel’s hand in both of his own. “I love my sister . . . it has been torture to be without her at my side for so long.”

“I can relate . . . though it’s likely far worse for you right now with her being so close and still so far.”

“Yes . . . to have her with me and still unable to stand at my side where she has always been. I miss her.” Mouth twisting, Hansel chuckled sheepishly, “I do not see myself being patient enough to wait and see, as you suggest.”

“Then what would you suggest? She is your sister after all.” Steve inquired with some embarrassment over the conversation.
Hansel frowned as he looked down at his sister. The sight of her so silent and still . . . it never failed to make his heart jerk deep in his chest. Despite ten years of the same picture, his mind rebelled to see her so quiet. “Are you an honorable man, Captain?”

Steve blinked in surprise at the question, before replying cautiously, “I would like to think so, sir.”

Bending to press a warm kiss to his sister’s knuckles, Hansel laid her hand on the bed beside her and stepped back. “I will be in the hall. I trust you to treat my sister with honor. But . . . if you are of a mind to . . . I would ask you to wake my sister if you can. She has been silent for long enough.”

Staring at Hansel’s back as he exited the room Steve pondered the heartfelt request from the older man. He knew all too well what Hansel was feeling. Crossing to the bedside Steve stared down at Gretel’s sleeping face, she looked so peaceful that he couldn’t resist stroking one hand over her hair. His fingers moved to trace down along her cheekbone and jaw, bending down over her sleeping form Steve pressed a chaste kiss to her lips.

There was a moment of perfect stillness before there was a huge intake of air and her eyes fluttered open. For a long moment, the two stared at each other before she spoke in rough German, tone low and husky with disuse.

Steve frowned; he didn't know the language and it was apparent, she was getting frustrated with him. “Uh . . . Herr Kuhn . . . help!?”

Gretel’s whole body went right as she demanded, “Kuhn?! Hansel?! mein Bruder?!”

“Yes,” Steve stammered uncertainly, not sure whether to keep her lying down or assist her in sitting up. His eyes flicked to the door again as he called “Herr Kuhn . . . your sister is awake.”

Hansel appeared at the door, eyes wide and disbelieving as he stared at his sister. “Gretel?” he breathed, as he stumbled to her bedside.

Straightening Steve reached one hand out to Hansel’s shoulder, he used the grip to guide Hansel to the head of the bed where he stood before moving to the foot of the bed. Eyes flicking curiously between the siblings as the weight of the situation dawned on him and what he’d just done.

There was fire in the woman’s eyes as she barked at her brother, clearly demanding answers in their shared language. Hansel answered as much as he could, before flicking his eyes to Steve and insisting, “English, Gretel . . . we are not in Deutschland any more. They speak English here.”

Steve gripped the end of the bed as he looked between the siblings once more before clearing his throat. “Ma’am, Herr Kuhn . . . did you want me to leave you two be and go inform your family of this new development?”

“No, thank you. You woke her . . . you have every right to remain here.”

“Yeah, about that. I don’t think she was too happy when she woke up to a stranger hovering over her.” He admitted scrubbing one hand through his hair. “I couldn’t understand what she was saying.”

Gretel cocked an eyebrow and insisted, “I asked, ‘who the hell are you?’ An answer to which, I am still waiting.”

“Steven Rogers, Ma’am.” Steve supplied with a shy smile.

“And for what purpose, were you kissing the dead, hm?” she asked sturdily, her eyebrows furrowing as she took in his sheepish expression . . . and the blush creeping up the back of his neck.
Hansel blew out a breath, as he scolded, “Hyu were not dead, Gret... if hyu were dead, we would not be speaking now.”

“Semantics,” she snapped, eyes starting to take in the room before turning to her brother, taking in the unusual attire of t-shirt and denim jeans under a long black leather jacket... the only thing she vaguely recognized at all. It wasn’t the one she remembered, but it was close enough. “Vhat are hyu wearing?!”

“Good to know I’m not the only one who has that reaction to this time,” Steve mumbled quietly more to himself than the siblings.

“And who are hyu!? Hyur name tells me nothing! Vhat are hyu here for!?” she demanded, having heard his voice though not his words.

“He woke hyu from the curse, Gret... he is hyur match,” Hansel replied, a small amused grin on his face.

He stared at Gretel for a moment with a shrug and slight nod at Hansel’s words. “Your brother was kind to me and when we were coming here I felt a pull. When he explained the situation, I offered to try and bring you back to him.”

“Hyu offered?” she deadpanned, cocking an eyebrow at him, before turning back to her brother and snapping at him in a scathing tone in brisk German.

“Gretel! We speak English... unless hyu are around Adler or meine Tochter, that is rude!!”

“TOCHTER!?” she screeched, eyes going wide. “Vhat the hell have I missed!?”

“Two hundred years, give or take a decade,” Hansel replied calmly, a small smile on his face as her eyes bugged out in reaction.

“Don’t forget the ten sons,” Steve chimed in with a slight shrug “Better to tell her everything now before she’s faced with them in person.”

“Ten sons!? Mein Gott in Himmel... Hansel, what have hyu done?” she breathed in shock as she stared wide-eyed at her brother.

“Not entirely sure he did anything Ma’am. Your brother slept like you did and certain unsavory elements conducted experiments using his genetics.” Steve offered by way of explanation, a slight scowl forming on his face as he recalled his conversations with Hansel.

“Conducted experiments... they are not human!? Hansel... why do they still live?” she demanded, eyes terrified and uncertain of what she was being told.

“They are not evil, Gretel. I swear it. They are good people.”

“He speaks the truth. They are good people with kind hearts who had no say in how they came about.” Steve said adamantly.

Gretel opened her mouth seconds before Aaron bolted into the room, shoulders heaving as he breathed. Clearly he had run hard and run fast to find his father, “DAD!! Come quick!”

“What is it, Sonnenstrahl?”
“It's Marina! She's in labor!”

Chapter End Notes

Translations:

(G) Adler - Eagle (Hansel's nickname for his eldest son, Will Grimm)
(G) mein Sohne - my sons
(G) ja - yes
(G) Tochter - daughter (Hansel's nickname for Marina Petrovka)
(G) Spatzi - little sparrow (Hansel's nickname for his wife, Maria Hill-Kuhn)
(G) Dornroschen - sleeping beauty
(G) mein Bruder - my brother
(G) Deutschland - Germany
(G) Mein Gott in Himmel - My God in Heaven
(G) Sonnenstrahl - Sunshine (Hansel's nickname for his son, Aaron Grimm)
Hey guys. I hope you enjoy this!

No translations, though I do have the usual words in the chapter. Let me know what you think!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 222: Complications

It had been an awesome day. Only one hot call, no warrants and Team Three was on inventory duty that month. Currently, he and Spike were hanging out, joking and laughing in the SUV as they patrolled. The rest of the team chimed in occasionally . . . mostly because they were giving Sam crap about the absent Jules.

“Shut up guys! She's scary okay . . . especially when she's sick,” Sam insisted with a fond roll of his
eyes. It was still a secret from the team as to why she was ill. Even still, he all but glowed on the inside about it.

Spike glanced over at the blond laughing, “So . . . when are we getting wedding bells, anyway?”

Sam glanced over with a cocked eyebrow. “You remember my Ma is pregnant right? It’s been a rough pregnancy and she can’t fly. And it’s not a terrible drive, but it’s not short either; she’d be miserable in the Jeep.”

The Boss spoke up then, “After your sisters are born then?”

“Most likely . . . so another month at the earliest.” he replied, ignoring his phone as it buzzed in his pocket for the third time. He’d been getting plagued with telemarketer calls and Jules would never call him on shift.

“Are you two gonna be okay to wait that long?” Ed asked curiously.

Sam chuckled, “I’m not getting married without my parents. So yeah . . . I’ll be fine.”

“What about Jules?” Lou asked cautiously. He well remembered the confrontation between Marina and Jules all those months before.

“Ma and Jules are . . . iffy. But Ma is civil for the most part. She hasn’t forgiven her for hurting me. Ma’s mind of overprotective,” he insisted absently as he silenced his phone once again without looking at it.

Spike glanced over and frowned, watching Sam move his hand from the pocket holding his phone. “Everything okay? That’s like the fourth time you’ve shut that phone up.”

“Yeah . . . telemarketers. They’re making me crazy.”

It was a moment later that a voice came over the comms . . . one that didn’t belong on comms. “Glad to know I make you crazy, Sam. Damn it!! Answer your chertov phone!!”

Sam blinked, asking cautiously, “Uncle Jay?”

“No, it's your conscience speaking,” was the dry retort.

Sam’s Team Leader, Ed Lane, was clearly unimpressed by the snark, his tone dry as he inquired, “Who’s conscience? We can all hear you.”

“Everybody’s . . . either that or I’m God,” was the swift snark reply.

Sam rolled his eyes, “Uncle Jay . . . I’m at work. What are you doing?”

“Trying to get a hold of you obviously. You wouldn’t answer your phone so I had to resort to hacking your comms.” Jason replied with a heavy sigh.

Spike spoke up then, “Which reminds me . . . how did you do that anyway?”

“What!? Like it’s hard,” Jason snarked, before refocusing his attention on his nephew, “This is important Sam . . . Marina has gone into labor and your Dad is freaking out.”

Sam jolted, tone horrified. “What!?”

“We’ve just rushed her to Medical. Vincent and Marta are in with her but we don’t have any news
yet. Your Dad . . . he’s not handling it at all well. The girls are a month early and he’s worried about them and your Ma.”

Greg Parker’s tone was speculative as he asked, “Define ‘not handling it well’. ”

“This is his third cigarette in three minutes,” Jason sighed heavily, clearly concerned. “Will doesn't smoke unless he's on deployment.”

Sam snarked with a roll of his eyes, “Or freaking the fuck out.”

“Exactly . . . the nurses are giving him an even wider berth than usual.” Jason responded “I sent Aaron to find Dad but I don’t think that’s going to be enough.”

“Where is Grandad?” Sam asked, reaching for his phone and staring in dismay at how many calls from family members he’d ignored. Swiping through them, he started looking up flights, hoping one would get him home as soon as possible following the end of his shift.

“We think he took Rogers to meet Aunt Gretel,” Jason replied to the question. He sighed before continuing “I called the Toronto base to have the ‘jet prepped and put on standby for you.”

Sam's eyes widened at that. “Thank you. I can be there following shift. I'm on for another four hours.”

“Copy that. Do what you have to do Sam . . . just get to Medical as soon as you land. Hopefully World War 3 won’t break out in the meantime.” Jason commented dryly.

Ed and the Boss had obviously been talking of comms cause Greg chimed on then. “How soon can you be ready to go, Sam?”

“My go bag is at work, in my locker. Once I have that, I'm golden. Why?”

“You're off shift as of now. We’ll even give you an escort to the base.”

“Appreciate the assist gentlemen,” Jason said cheerfully before his attention redirected to his nephew “We’ll see you when you get here Sam, I’ll have someone meet you at the LZ and bring you to medical.”

“Thanks, Uncle Jay. I'll see you guys soon. Don't let Dad kill anyone okay?”

“Oh we’ll definitely try. Even if I have to get Dad and Captain America to sit on him.” Jason snarked with an almost audible eyeroll.

“Wait . . . who??!” Ed asked incredulously.

“Amercian Hero from the 40’s, fought Nazi’s. Had comics and trading cards made after him.” The Hacker quipped in response.

“Exactly. He's not real. And even if he was, he'd be in his nineties.”

“And yet he doesn’t look much older than Sam.” Jason chimed wickedly with a cackle before clearing his throat. “But you didn’t hear that from me.”

Sam chuckled before along seriously, “What about Jules?”

“What about her Sam?” Jason asked curiously.
“Should I bring Jules? She is my fiancee.”

“That’s up to you Sam. I don’t have a problem with it and I don’t think your Ma is going to be in any state to comment.” Jason said quietly.

“What about Dad? What are his thoughts?” he asked cautiously, clearly concerned about his dad's state of mind.

“Your Dad as you know him Sam . . . not currently with us. The only way I can explain his thoughts at the moment are spastic, frantic, worried and he’s starting to look stressed.” Jason hummed distractedly in response.

“**Starting**? To look stressed?” Sam asked, well able to see his father's face at that moment. “You have a gift for understatement, Uncle Jay.”

“Trust me Sam . . . there are varying levels of stress when it comes to your Dad. This is just the beginning and given it’s related to your Mother and sisters he’s going to get a hell of a lot worse.”

“Well that's a terrifying thought,” he sighed with a groan. “Poor Medical. If the nurses didn't hate him before, they will now.”

“I think that’s already starting. Between the chain smoking, the glares and demands for news on Marishka I think Will’s wearing his welcome thin.” Jason sighed.

“Why won't they just let him in with her? That would stop the smoking and the demands. The glares, of course, aren't going anywhere until the twins are born, but the rest is fixable.”

“I don’t know Sam. We can only assume something’s going on but they haven’t told us anything yet.”

“Something's going on? Like what?! Where's Vincent?”

“Sam breathe!” Came the sharp order from Jason, there was a pause before he continued “Vincent’s in with your mother but she’s a month early Sam. At the moment they are preparing for anything.”

“I am breathing!” he snarked, throwing his hands back through his hair. “Where's Rene? He with Dad or . . . ?”

“He’s sitting here with Casey at the moment. We were all too busy trying to get here to figure out who was going to stay home with Rene.”

“Can I talk to Dad? How does he seem? He okay?”

“About as well as you’d expect. Hang on.” Jason’s attention diverted to his older brother but his voice still carried over the comms “Will, you up to talking to Sam?”

There was a moment, before Will spoke into the comm, “Sammy? You on your way?”

Sam nodded, a knot caught up his throat. “Yeah Dad . . . I'm coming as fast as I can.”

He had never heard that note in his father's voice before. That desolation and pain was yanking on every part of Sam's heart. “How you holding up, Dad?”

“Just . . .” there was a noticeable pause, before there was a heavy drag on a cigarette. “I don’t know, **Sammichka.** I just don’t know.”
“I'll be there soon. I promise,” the blond insisted, before there was a rushing sound as the phone was passed off again. “Jay, seriously . . . how is he?”

“Given he’s on his fifth smoke in as many minutes, I’m going to say not well Sam.” Jason commented.

“Has anyone tried to take them from him? He's gonna give himself lung cancer.”

“We’re going to put Dad on that when he gets here apparently. Unless Natasha decides to takes things into her own hands before then.”

“Yikes. How are my favorite Murderesses?”

“Looking about ready to live up to their name if they don’t hear news about their sister soon.” Jason remarked. “Nika looks about ready to throttle the next nurse who ignores her questions.”

“Nika is the hot-tempered one.”

“She’s doing her best to keep it under wraps for her sister’s sake but . . . well, things could get bloody.” Jason snarked before he yelped suddenly and muttered “What Casey?! It’s true!”

“When the hell are you gonna marry her?” Sam teased with a laugh.

“She has a helluva backswing, I'll give her that,” Jason grumbled. “Your brother wants to talk to you.”

Rene’s tone was timid as he asked, “Sam?”

“Yeah, kiddo?”

“Is Mama gonna be okay?”

Later, Sam wouldn’t be able to explain how he knew or even what prompted him to reply. All he knew was that, no matter what, everything was gonna be just find. “Yeah, Rene . . . Ma’s gonna be just fine. I promise.”

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“It's Marina! She's in labor!”

Hansel blinked at the announcement, visibly startled by the news. “Vas? But she is early!? She its not due for another month at least.”

Steve was standing by the end of the bed in visible shock, shaking his head he glanced briefly at Gretel who was staring at Aaron. Every so often he saw her eyes flick to her brother as though she were comparing the two. Clearing his throat Steve looked to Aaron as he spoke “I doubt the Colonel is taking this well.”

“Understatement of the century. Jay is on the phone with Sam now; apparently he's gone through five cigarettes in five minutes. He never smokes like that . . . not even on deployment,” Aaron replied, eyes wide and frantic with concern for both his sister and his brother. “Dad . . . you gotta come.”

“Mein Gott, Hansel. He looks almost exactly like you.” Gretel’s rough husky voice broke the silence.

“Ja,” Hansel chuckled. “I hear that a lot.”
Aaron, for his part, was staring at Gretel in shock. “Bozhe moi . . . she’s awake!? How the fuck did that happen?”

Gretel arched one brow at the younger version of her brother before her eyes flicked to the shuffling, blushing blond at the foot of the bed. “Steven was kissing the dead.” She retorted with twitching lips.

“Oh . . . yeah, Maria did that to Dad too, and now she’s our step-mother. It’s weird . . . she’s kind of our boss,” Aaron snarked with a smirk.

Gretel’s eyes widened at that her eyes flicking back to her brother’s back as a wicked grin curved her lips as she inquired “Someone finally tamed him enough to settle down?”

“I’m not sure ‘tamed him’ is the correct terminology. More like, he wouldn’t stop harassing her until she agreed to marry him. He proposed with a Chinese daodao; Maria loves the stupid thing. It’s hanging in her office,” the second youngest Grimm replied with a roll of his eyes, before wincing as Jason yelled through his comm. “Where the hell is Dad!? Aaron!?”

“Yeah, Jay, I hear you . . . we’re coming! Also . . . ow!”

“Must be quite a woman to put up with my stubborn, thick headed brother.” Gretel stated quietly, her eyes narrowing slightly as the young doppelganger appeared to be talking to thin air.

Aaron shrugged lightly, as he replied, “She’s just as stubborn and thick headed as he is. Dad . . . seriously . . . Jason is about to plotz and Will is probably going to give himself lung cancer and I still have to call Clint and someone needs to call Bucky and then we have to get Sam and . . .”

Hansel bit down hard on his lower lip, even as he moved to place his hands on his son’s shoulders. “I am coming, Sonnenstrahl. Calm hyurself. But I cannot leave Gretel.”

Rolling her eyes at the statement Gretel pushed herself up, tossed the bedding aside and swung her legs over the side of the bed. Before any of the three men could even try to stop her she inched off the mattress, bare feet hitting the solid, cool floor. She managed to stay standing by herself for all of a minute before the room spun and her hands fisted in the bedding as she fought to stay upright.

Steve was there in a second, sweeping her up into his arms as she toppled to the floor. For a long moment, the two were silent and shocked as they stared at each other, Gretel’s fingers clutching the collar of his shirt as her eyes searched warm blue. “Thank hyu,” she insisted, eyes still wide as she stared at him.

“You’re welcome,” he replied, a soft blush painting his cheeks. “I did the same thing when I first woke up. It takes a little bit for your legs to come back to you, but they will.”

“That is good to hear. I have lain idle too long.” Gretel stated quietly. Her head tilted slightly as she studied Steve’s face, shoulders and arms, before her lips twitched in amusement and her eyes brightened “Come brother, let us go. I believe Steven here is a suitable replacement for Edward for the time being.”

Hansel’s eyes slipped closed as he began muttering to himself. “As hyu say,” he muttered, with a roll of his eyes before turning back to his son. “Come . . . take me to hyur Bruder.”

Aaron nodded, glancing at his father for a moment, before turning to bolt from the room. It was only after he was gone, that Jason asked in Hansel’s ear, “Who the hell is Edward?”

The German’s tone was a low growl as he replied, “Her troll.”
The entire family blurted at the same time, “TROLL!?”

Gretel frowned at her brother as he too appeared to be talking to thin air. “Be nice Hansel . . . Edward used to pull your body cart if you recall.” She snapped briskly.

Will’s tone was absent as he asked, “Normally, I would really want to know what she’s talking about, Dad, but right now? I just can’t bring myself to give a damn.”

Brian chirped next, “I can . . . what’s a body cart!?” Which of course, prompted a heavy sigh and a grunting explanation from the former witch hunter himself.

“I fear my brother may be possessed Steven.” Gretel whispered as she still scowled at her brother’s back as they moved after the bolting doppleganger. “He never used to talk to himself.”

Steve chuckled as he shook his head, “He’s not talking to himself, Ma’am . . . he’s talking to his sons via comm. It’s um . . .” here he paused, clearly stumped on how to explain it, before replying, “It’s complicated, but it lets people talk to one another over long distances. It’s in his ear, so you can’t see it. They all have one.”

“Oh that would have been handy when we were hunting,” Gretel chimed before blinking “Ma’am? It is a bit late to be that respectful after kissing me while I slept, is it not?”

The blond’s cheeks flamed brilliant crimson as he ducked his head. “Well . . . I . . . um . . . No? I don’t believe so. You have not given me permission to use another, and it is clear that you are not happy about the kiss in question.”

“Still you may call me Gretel. My brother will tell you I am very independent and often anger easily. Isn’t that so Hansel?”

Hansel’s tone was fondly exasperated as he called back over his shoulder, “Understatement is a gift you possess in spades, Gret.” About then, they reached the end of the hall, and Hansel slammed to a stop in shock. His tone was equal parts worried and horrified, as he breathed, “Mein Gott in Himmel.”

Gretel had been about to speak when her gaze found several faces almost identical to her brother’s. Her mouth opened and then shut before she blurted “Mein Gott, they all look like you.”

“Ja . . . they are my clones,” he agreed, eyes scanning over the occupants of the room, before apparently landing on the one he was looking for. “Excuse me.”

Striding further into the room, he moved quickly to the one fumbling in his pockets, a half-finished cigarette dangling from his lips. Steve and Gretel both watched as he reached out and snatched the cigarette from his lips, before taking possession of the small box the younger man had pulled from his pocket. “That is enough, Adler. I will not see hyu kill hyurself when Marishka is in such need of hyur strength.”

Those eyes were mossy grey, features pale and distraught. Despite her initial inclination, Gretel felt her heart go out to the young man who was clearly so worried. Strong, capable hands came up to shove back through his hair as he all but keened, forced to focus on what was happening without his self-imposed distraction. “Dad . . . they won’t let me see her. They won’t tell me anything. I just . . . I need to know she’s okay,” Will begged, suddenly looking much younger than Hansel could ever remember. Will had always been the strong one, the steady one . . . he had never been allowed to break down before. It appeared that the prospect of Marina’s loss was enough to break through all of his usual walls and leave him more vulnerable than Hansel could have ever imagined.
There was a moment in which Hansel debated his next course of action. However, this was his son. And while Hansel had never been particularly demonstrative before, in this case ... it was something his son desperately needed. Reaching out, he gripped the Colonel’s shoulders and pulled him into his embrace, offering a safe place to shatter for awhile until he could get himself back under control. The eldest Grimm resisted for all of a moment, before he sagged into the embrace and whimpered.

One of the German’s hands came up to cradle the back of his son’s head as he murmured, “She will be all right, Adler . . . have faith. She will not leave hyu . . .”

“You don’t know that,” Will gasped, fingers clutching his father’s shirt in a death grip.

“Ja . . . I do. She loves hyu . . . she will fight like hell to stay with hyu.”

Steve turned to look at Jason, blinking slightly at the sight of the teenager seated between the man and his girlfriend, Casey. “Has anyone said anything at all?”

“No . . . nothing. Nika’s threatened a few people and so has Brian. Will’s been slowly but surely melting down, as you evidenced by the mess you see before you,” the hacker snarked, with a wave in his brother’s direction, before looking up at him. “We’re Grimms . . . they don’t like us around here.”

The teenager whimpered slightly and leaned into Casey, “I want my mama.”

Gretel frowned at that piece of information, clearly that was far from normal to not be told anything. The young boy’s cry twisted like a knife in her heart as she turned her head back to Steve, one hand swatting at his shoulder firmly as she huffed “You are not a Grimm. They will answer you or by Gott they will answer to me.”

Steve nodded in agreement. “I’ll go find out what I can, Jason.”

“Thank you,” Jason agreed with a compressed smile and a firm nod. “Will needs something, or he’s gonna rip this place down to the foundations.”

“You are not moving Steven. Move before I make you.” Gretel pointed out with a fierce scowl.

Steve chuckled as he turned towards the nurses’ station down the hallway, teasing, “You’re very bossy, you know. Considering I’m carrying you around like your own personal litter.”

“You were the one who picked me up if you’ll recall,” Gretel huffed with a roll of her eyes as she grunted “Edward never complained when he had to carry us.”

“I’m not complaining, simply pointing out a fact of your personality, I would not have expected,” he laughed, eyes wrinkling and a broad, handsome smile on his face. Arriving at the station, he felt his face go flat as he arrived just in time to hear one of the nurses tell her colleague, “Damned Grimms are multipying . . . we’re all fucking screwed.”

Gretel’s scowl deepened at that comment, her hands clenching in the material of Steve’s shirt as she growled in a heavily accented tone “Mind what you say about my brother’s family.”

Steve’s eyes were blazing as he hissed, “How dare you?! You are a disgrace to your profession. I cannot imagine that nursing has changed all that much, since my mother was a nurse. I certainly cannot see it having changed enough to allow you to speak so ill of your patients, or their worried, terrified families. Their sister, lover, daughter and friend is in a room, fighting for not only her life but the lives of her newborn daughters. And you’re denying them the comfort that comes from knowing whether or not she still lives, because of your personal feelings!? How dare you!”
Setting Gretel gently on the edge of the counter, he braced his hands on the edge next to her and leaned over into the woman’s face. “You will tell me the latest news regarding Marina Petrovka, or I swear to God . . . I will see you fired and disgraced. You will never work as a nurse again.”

“And that is far nicer than what I and my brother shall do to you.” Gretel pointed out with a wicked grin, her eyes alight with the same fire they used to hold while she and Hansel hunted.

“Considering she has a troll, I wouldn’t test her if I was you,” Steve agreed.

Five minutes later they were back in the waiting room, both of their faces grave. Jason stood at the sight of them, his hand on his nephew’s shoulder as he asked, “What is it? What’s wrong?”

“They said Marina has something called placenta abruptio?” Steve replied cautiously, eyes twitching over to Will. He blinked at the sight of a young blond man with Hansel, the two working together to calm the Colonel down. He had a feeling his news wasn’t going to make that chore any easier.

“They’ve rushed her into the OR for an emergency C-Section . . . she’s lost a lot of blood.”

Moments later, the information caught up to Will and he let out a heart-wrenching moan of anguish. “No!” he begged on a sob, knees failing and his body crumpling to the floor, the blond catching him tightly and easing him down gently. “Please . . . God, no!”

Surprisingly, the blond was the only one in the room who didn’t look worried. There was a resolute calm on his face as the man held the Colonel close and promised firmly, “She’s gonna be okay, Dad . . . I promise, they’re all going to be just fine.”

Chapter End Notes

*runs like hell from the army of pitchforks*

Enjoy!
Chapter Notes

*peeks from hiding*

Enjoy!

*runs away again*
Ward’s eyes were huge and frightened as he watched Rumlow straighten up from where he’d been leaning over him seconds ago. The man gave him a sickly charming smile and reminded him, “Just remember who you are . . . and where your loyalties lie, yeah?”

The younger man hissed as Rumlow smacked the back of his hand against the heavily bandaged knee, causing his body to go tight with pain and tension. “Yeah . . . I remember.”

“Smart kid,” the man announced, with a brisk nod before he pulled a pack of cigarettes from his pocket and lifted one to his lips. “See ya around, Ward,” he tossed back over his shoulder as he left the room - and a rightfully terrified agent - behind him.

Letting his eyes fall closed, Grant slumped back into the mattress, one hand stretching towards the knee. He’d screwed up the joint on a mission about six months ago, and now that he was basically stuck here, he’d finally gotten it treated the way it should have been then. At this point, the agent was secretly convinced that Dr Keller was conspiring with Agent Petrovka - Marina - on all the different ways they could keep him in the hospital and off his feet for as long as possible.

The surgery had been yesterday and it throbbed on any given moment. Rumlow’s action had turned that throb into a screeching roar. Taking long, deep breaths in through his nose, he fought with his own body to control his pain. He was still several hours from his next dose of oral pain medication, though he did still have the morphine pump to manage any breakthrough pain he experienced.

Turning a stink eye on the stand, he glowered at it for a moment; he hated the damn thing. Marina was always triggering it for him, when she could see that he was being stubborn. He’d never tell her, but knowing she cared enough to offer him relief when he knew he needed it but refused to take it . . . it was battering against everything he had ever known.

Hence Rumlow’s little visit.

Ward was aware of his value to STRIKE . . . to Garrett; they never let him forget it. Squeezing his eyes hard, he punched down into the mattress as hard as he could. “Fuck,” he muttered, feeling tears linger in the corners of his eyes. He’d never regretted the choice he’d made when Garrett had offered it to him, but damn if he wasn’t regretting it now. He’d been such a stupid kid, desperate for any kind of paternal guidance and affection. What he wouldn’t give to go back and kick his own ass for being such an idiot.

Just then, there was a soft knock at the door and Ward jolted. “Agent Ward?” came the timid voice of the young nurse who had been tending him since the last shift change.

Pushing himself backwards, he used the heels of both hands to shove the evidence of his tears out of his eyes. “Yeah . . . I’m decent!” he called back, moments before she pushed open the door to his private room . . . one more benefit of being under Marina’s direct protection.

“You okay? Your vitals took a big spike,” she asked, eyes scanning over him as she tried to account for the change in his readings.

“Yeah . . . knocked my knee against the railing,” he lied with a shaky smile.

“That’s what the morphine is for, Agent Ward . . . breakthrough pain,” she reminded him with a fierce frown, coming over to trigger the switch for him.

“No!” he insisted, one hand flinging out to stop her. “Please, I don’t want it. I’m fine, really.”

Her hand hovered over the switch, eyes taking him in solemnly. They flicked to the monitors around his bed and then to his pleading features. Taking her hand back, she sighed heavily with a single
nod. “All right. I’ll let it go, just this once. Please be careful. You have a long recovery coming at you with that knee; don’t screw up all of Dr. Matthison’s hard work before you ever get to rehab, okay?”

“Promise,” he agreed, sagging back against the pillows in relief.

Moving to the door, the girl paused there for a moment, her hand clutching the doorjamb as she watched him. She was clearly tossing around something in her head, and for a moment it looked as though she wouldn’t say anything. “Hey . . . you know Agent Petrovka, right? She’s in here with you all the time.”

Ward frowned, pushing himself up a little bit as he cocked his head at her. “Yeah? What about her?”

Biting down on her lower lip, she glanced out into the hallway before turning back. “I could get in a lot of trouble for telling you this, but . . . she’s in labor. And it doesn’t look good. I thought you’d wanna know.”

It was like someone had dealt him a ham-fisted blow to the solar plexus. He gawked at the nurse, attempting to heave in air and unable to through the giant knot in his throat. His mouth worked, trying to come up with something to say, before he finally blurted, “I need to go.”

“You can’t,” she argued with wide eyes. “You’re not weight-bearing on that knee yet!”

“Then get me a pair of crutches or something . . . I can’t just sit here.”

“She’s been rushed into surgery. What do you think you’re gonna be able to do?”

“I don’t know . . . but she’s been kind to me when few people in my life have been. I can’t just . . . lay here while she could be dying.” His head snapped up in horror as he demanded, “The Colonel!”

“He’s here and pissing off the maternity staff,” she agreed with an amused smile. Glancing into the hallway again, she considered for a moment before nodding in agreement, “All right . . . I’ll get you some crutches. But if you even attempt to put weight on that knee, I’ll . . . I don’t know what I’ll do, but you won’t like it. Okay?”

“Yeah, I get it, I promise. Please.”

“Give me a minute. I’ll be right back. I need to find a stop for your IV port too, so that we can hook it back up when you’re back in bed,” she sighed with a roll of her eyes. As she turned to leave, Ward could have sworn he heard her mutter, “I’m gonna get in so much trouble for this.”

She returned a couple of minutes later setting the crutches to rest against the side of the bed, moving around to the IV he watched as the nurse made quick work of detaching the IV and putting the stopper into place. “There we go Agent Ward. Now to cover my own behind I’m going to escort you to maternity. When you are ready that is.”

Taking a deep breath, he forced himself to push himself around so his legs hung over the edge of the bed. “Can I have them, please?”

“Ooh manners . . . who knew. Most agents just deem to give us lowly nurses orders and demands.” She teased with an amused grin as she made her way back around the bed, collecting the crutches in the process and stopping beside him with them resting on the floor in front of him. “Your weapons, Sir.”

“Thank you,” he replied, before frowning, “Even the Grimms?”
“Personally I have no issue with the Grimms . . . they’re good people. The rest of my colleagues are scared shitless of them for one reason or another.”

Grant tucked the braces under his arms then hopped gingerly to the ground. “Having met the Colonel, I can sympathize. But even when I didn't deserve it, Marina, I mean Agent Petrovka, has always been kind to me.”

Nodding as she settled one hand in the middle of his back she giggled “You’re a ballsy one calling Agent Petrovka that; only family uses her name. I imagine the Colonel is likely wearing his ‘murder face’ up in maternity currently. As a matter of face, I’m pretty sure most of the nurses with issues against the Grimm got themselves transferred up there thinking they’d be able to avoid them.”

He gave her a lopsided grin as He inquired, “How’d that work out for them?”

“Not well apparently. I imagine the entire family that is on base currently is up there and rumor has it Captain Rogers has awakened their aunt from her Sleeping Beauty curse,” she gossiped with a wry grin and a slight shrug “Half the nurses with a grudge against the Grimms are just shooting themselves in the foot career wise.”

Fumbling a little bit as he tried to get his rhythm, he asked, “Career-wise? What do you mean?”

“The Grimms have Fury’s ear and their father is married to AD Hill. You fuck with them and you’re essentially asking to end up assigned to the crappiest assignments in existence.” She pointed out her head turning as he stumbled. “Take it easy, you fall on your ass and injure that knee and we’re both in for the Grimms’ wrath . . . or Dr Keller’s.”

“Not sure the Grimms would care if I hurt myself. And Dr. Keller would likely cackle like an evil mastermind to have another reason to trap me here,” Grant muttered with a roll of his eyes as he steadied himself out and started down the hallway at a better pace.

“Agent Petrovka wouldn’t be sneaking you food to fatten you up if she didn’t care. Same as Dr Keller; if he’s keeping you here it’s because you need to be here medically.” She pointed out with an eye roll.

Glancing at her with a lopsided smile, he asked, “Surgery on a knee that’s been healed for six months is medically necessary?”

“Healed doesn’t mean fixed right or even well. I saw the scans before your surgery; you would have had problems in a few years bearing your own weight if you didn’t get it fixed eventually,” she scolded, leaning over to push the button for the elevator.

Huffing he focused on moving himself into the elevator and putting his back to the wall, letting it support his weight. He hadn’t expected the short distance to wipe him out as much as it had.

“Whatever you say . . . you’re the nurse, right?”

“For another couple of years at least,” she replied with a smirk as she hit the button for maternity, head cocking to study him with a frown. “I think coming back we might need a wheelchair depending on your energy levels.”

“Not a chance in hell. I will not be so weak I can’t move myself where I want to go . . . or don’t want to go.”

“You’ve been hanging out with Agent Rumlow and his crew,” she muttered with a shake of her head as the doors opened to the maternity level and the sight of several flustered nurses scurrying past. “The Grimms strike again.”
Ward flinched hard at her scolding mutter, a well of shame and guilt surging upwards in his gut. “I’m sorry.” Looking out the elevator, he straightened and crutched out. There was a fierce frown on his face as he asked, “What the hell?”

Looking along the hall towards the nurses station the nurse’s eyes widened as she pondered aloud “I wondering if they’re fleeing from the Grimms or an angry Captain America and a 200 plus year old witch hunter.”

“That was . . . oddly specific,” he replied with a furrowed brow.

“You hadn’t heard the rumors about the Grimms’ father and his sister?” she asked curiously.

He shrugged lightly, as he forced himself to move, head down as he watched where he was placing his crutches and foot. “I’m STRIKE . . . I don’t get a lot of the gossip, unless someone thinks it’s relative to the mission.”

“Pretty sure the fact that the man and his sister have been in a cursed sleep for two centuries and are the Hansel and Gretel in the fairy tales is relevant gossip as it were.” She pointed out before frowning at the assembled Grimms.

Grant looked up, blinking to see a familiar blond head bent over the head of another blond boy, this one at least a decade younger, who was clinging to him with a death grip. “Sam? Sam Grimm!? I thought you were in Toronto?”

The man’s head jerked up and he blinked as he took in the hobbled agent before him. “Grant? Yeah, I was . . . what are you doing here!?"

Grimacing as he crutched over, he replied, “Checking on your mom. I just heard . . . is she okay?”

The woman swatted at Grant’s shoulder, pointing to the empty chair with a firm “Sit down before you fall down. Sam, good to see you not coming in blown to hell for once. Do me a favor and make sure he stays put.”

“Hi Miranda. Yeah, I can do that. I’m not going anywhere for awhile.”

“Good, I get the feeling this is going to be a long night so I probably should try and save my fellow nurses before they get themselves shot.”

Sam smirked at the huffing tone of her response, before glancing at Grant, brilliantly blue eyes catching on the tightly wrapped knee. “What the hell did you do? You’re the most accident prone field agent I’ve ever met.”

Grant scowled at his friend, and opened his mouth to protest. However, before he could speak, another voice boomed, “What the hell have you done!? That patient is post-operative and should be in bed, Reyes!”

Miranda flinched at the scatching tone in the voice of the post-op ward’s head nurse. She’d been kind of hoping the battle axe was drunk in her office and wouldn’t notice their absence for a while. Turning on her heel and standing tall she stated firmly “I’m doing my job, Ma’am.” The ma’am was utterly sarcastic as she cocked her head and continued “He wanted to find out how Agent Petrovka was doing and was adamant he was coming one way or another. I thought it prudent he be escorted to prevent any further injury.”

“And just how did he find out about Agent Petrovka in the first place, hm?” she demanded, hands on hips as she glowered at the smaller woman. “I highly doubt one of the damned Grimms came to tell
him, seeing as the only one who ever visits is the snake herself.”

Miranda’s lips twitched in amusement as her superior literally stuck her foot in her mouth, laughter eventually bursting free as she shook her head and asked, “You do realize that you just insulted the entirety of the deadliest family in S.H.I.E.L.D to their faces, right?”

The Colonel’s tone was ice cold as he spoke from behind the woman. “And my partner . . . to mine.”

The woman’s whole body locked up, horrified at the realization that the entire family was watching her with the kind of razor focus they were renowned for. Rotating slowly on her heels, she backstepped at the stone-faced fury written across that implacable face, eyes burning a molten silver into her features. “Colonel . . . I didn’t mean it the way it sounded, really . . . I just . . .”

“Shut your mouth, before I shut it for you,” Will barked, hands clenched tightly. “You should feel immensely grateful that the only reason I’m not ripping your insignificant ass into tiny shreds right now, is because I don’t have the patience or the energy for it at this moment. My VIPER may be dying . . . you are an annoying bug on the bottom of my shoe. Do I make myself clear?”

Miranda shot a glance back towards Sam and Grant both brows rising as she fought to still her laughter at the head nurse being thoroughly chewed out by the irate Colonel. Jabbing a finger in Grant’s direction, the man continued, “As for Agent Ward, my Marishka has made her claim on him very clear. He has every right to be with the rest of the family . . . this is where he belongs, not isolated and worrying alone. At least here with us, his family can offer some companionship and solace.”

Ward rocked backwards at the statement, awe and concern warring across his face in equal measure. Even Garrett had never claimed him as family before, and Garrett was the closest thing to a father figure Grant had ever really known. Glancing at Sam, he asked in a hushed undertone, “Did he mean that?”

Sam cocked an eyebrow at the other man, with a slow nod. “Dad rarely says anything he doesn’t mean.” Glancing up at Miranda, he teased, “You look like you’re enjoying this.”

“Oh immensely . . . I’m tired of copping the blame for her mistakes.” Miranda whispered in hushed tones with an eyeroll. “Who do you think was responsible for your last run in with a needle while you were conscious?”

Sam shuddered hard at the word, a dull fear creeping into his features as he replied, “I knew it wasn’t you, that’s all that matters to me.”

“I have enough brains and self preservation to wait until you’re unconscious.” Miranda retorted with a wink.

“Good plan,” the blond agent agreed with a roll of his eyes. Eyes flicking to Grant’s knee, he asked Miranda, “Should that knee be elevated?”

There was a roll of her eyes as she agreed, “Definitely, but will he? Is another matter entirely. Once your father is done tearing the battle axe a new asshole I’m going to ‘suggest’ you all move to the staff lounge. It’ll be far more comfortable.”

“Thanks Miranda,” he insisted, leaning over and grabbing an empty chair. Dragging it over, he positioned it in front of Grant and ordered, “Get it up . . . or I’ll tattle on you to Ma.”

“Evil,” the darker agent muttered, using both hands to lift his leg and lay it across the seat of the
About then, Vincent arrived at the door of the waiting area, still wearing his bloodied scrubs and reaching up to pull his cap off his head. Sam straightened at the sight of him, trying to read the man’s face. “Dad . . .” he called insistently, nodding his chin in the medic’s direction.

The Colonel whirled and caught sight of Vincent. Grant watched as he went even paler than he had been, and he staggered. Jason was there in an instant to catch him, moving so quickly the agent had even seen him move. “Vince . . .”

The young trauma doctor smiled kindly at the older man, coming over to wrap his hand around Will’s bicep. “She’s okay . . . she’s asking for you.”

There was a harsh gasp as Will sagged, eyes slipping closed in relief. “Slava Bogu . . . the girls?”

Catching the man, Vincent helped Jason get the Colonel into an empty seat. Crouching in front of him, the doctor continued, “No problems. They’re every bit their father’s children . . . strong and resilient and completely unaffected by their ordeal,” Vincent chuckled with a fond roll of his eyes. “If only the nursing staff could say the same,” Miranda quipped with a roll of her eyes as the head nurse slunk off while the Colonel was distracted. “Congratulations, Colonel on the arrival of your daughters.”

Smiling at the woman, Will agreed, “Thank you, Miranda. Also I’ll be recommending you for a promotion, if you’re up to it?”

“If it gets me out from under that incompetent, drunken battle axe . . . most definitely.” She replied with a warm smile. “I hate to see the way your family is treated by some of my fellows.”

“Actually, I’m thinking about you taking her job,” the man chuckled, before turning to Ward, “How are you? Marina is gonna be pissed if you’ve gone and injured yourself again.”

Ward shrugged, suddenly self-conscious at the attention. “I’m all right. It only hurts a little.”

Vincent snorted hard at the statement, snarking, “You’re a terrible liar for a spy, Ward.”

Hand coming up to ruffle the agent’s dark hair fondly, Will turned to Vincent and insisted, “I want to see her.”

“I know. Come on . . . let’s go see her.” Glancing around the room, he insisted, “No more than four at a time, not including the Colonel. She’s tired and she needs to rest. Deal?”

“Wait just a minute,” Miranda butted in rifling through the pocket of her scrubs before thrusting a stick of gum into the Colonel’s hand. “Chew that . . . you smell like an ashtray.”

Chuckling, the man accepted the stick and unwrapped it, shoving it into his mouth quickly. “Thank you.” Moving to his suit, he started to strip off his coat, tie and dress shirt next, leaving him in a clean black undershirt and his slacks. The discarded pieces were tossed haphazardly over the back of the seat where Grant’s foot rested. “All right . . . Sam, Rene and Ward . . . you’re up first.”

Ward blinked, stammering, “Sir? Are you sure?”

“Yes, I’m sure. Let’s go,” he insisted, before turning to Vincent and insisting, “Lead on.”

“Don’t argue with the man, Agent Ward. Just get on your feet and use those crutches . . . if Sam tells
me you didn’t I will sedate you when you get back into bed. Either that or hit your morphine dose depending on my mood and your antics.” Miranda stated one brow arched as she jutted her thumb after the retreating medic and Colonel.

Sam stood and leaned down to offer Grant an arm, “Come on . . . they’re gonna leave us. Rene . . . go.”

The teenager nodded and bolted, as Ward reached up slowly, accepting the offer and the slow steady pull to his feet. Fitting the crutches under his arms, he nodded, “We better catch up, or they’re gonna leave us.”

Sam nodded, slapping his shoulder gently before rushing after his father with Ward crutching after him. They arrived just in time to see the Colonel move into the room. “Zhemchuzhina?” he asked cautiously, momentarily distracted by the twin bassinets by the bed.

Marina’s head turned slowly to face the door, her eyes glittering as she caught sight of her partner. “Mishka . . .” she breathed, one hand coming up to reach out for him.

Reaching out, he linked his fingers with hers. One moment, he was standing at her bedside staring down at her and the next he was crumpling into her arms. Sam bolted, guiding the fall to the mattress so that his father’s bulk didn’t jostle his mother, causing a warm grin from Marina. “It’s all right, Sammy-honey . . . I can’t feel it anyway,” she promised, free hand coming up to squeeze her son’s wrist, before her arms wrapped around her lover’s shoulders and guided him into a more comfortable position. His nose buried in her throat and his body curled around her, huge and heaving sobs wracking his frame as he clutched to her, her hands sweeping in gentle strokes through his hair and along his back. “I’m all right, Misha . . . I’m okay.”

“I thought I was gonna lose you,” he whimpered into her skin, burrowing just that little bit closer.

“There is no power in this world strong enough to take me from you . . . not today, not tomorrow, not ever. Where you go, I’ll follow . . . never further from you than this,” she vowed, bending her head just enough to press a warm kiss to his forehead.
Beloveds
Ten year old Project One winced as the door clicked shut behind him, the sound disproportionately loud in the silence of the room. It was just after midnight and he was only just returning in order to get some rack time before his 0430 wake up. Despite the fact he was still up, the rest of his meager family was currently asleep and he refused to wake them. With the addition of the newest project to the barracks three weeks ago, sleep had been hard to come by lately.

Taking a deep breath, he forced himself to relax, allowing Ross’ Project One to slip into the background and bringing Marina’s Will to the forefront of his consciousness. It wasn’t often that he allowed himself the freedom to be his true self, far from the “Perfect Soldier” the General hoped for. The distinction between One and Will did nothing to ease the nightmares but at least it made him feel more human.

At least for the short time he allowed himself.

He moved quietly into the main common room, booted feet all but soundless on the concrete floors. His hands reached up to tug at the knot of his tie before he froze, suddenly aware that he was being watched . . . by something other than the habitual cameras. The soft murmur of a baby caused relief to flood through him, his head turning to take in his brothers’ longtime caretaker and his newborn brother - the one Marishka had named “Clinton Francis” . . . the one Ross called “Five”.

It shouldn’t have been a surprise to see Marina sound asleep in the rocking chair, her feet still moving against the floor to keep the rocker in motion. Clint, however, was awake and active, little hands waving in the air and feet kicking against his swaddling as he fussed. Desperate not to wake the woman, Will’s finger came up to press against his lips as he whispered, “Sssh . . . it’s okay, Clint . . . it’s just me. It’s Will.”

The baby gurgled loudly, before a babyish giggle erupted from his lips, clearly recognizing the name. Grimacing, Will’s eyes flicked upwards to take in the sleeping woman. “Come on, Clint . . . Marina’s exhausted,” the boy admonished softly, crossing the floor to stand beside the chair. “Let her sleep, okay?”

Kicking excitedly at the prospect of a new devotee, the three week old continued to kick and squirm in her arms as he cooed at his brother. Will bit down on his lip hard as he took her in; the bags under her eyes were a clear indication of Marina’s exhaustion, as was the fact she had barely stirred at Clint’s fussing. She needed the sleep. But the young boy had never held a baby as young as Clint before. He was a quick study though . . . and he’d watched Marina cart around three of his infant brothers since he was two. Surely this wasn’t as hard as he was imagining it to be.

Tiptoeing closer, Will bent and carefully lifted Clint into the cradle of his arms, hand cupped carefully to support his head as the child soldier tucked the infant close to his thin chest. Quicksilver eyes flicked to take in Marina’s features, a little surprised to see her still sleeping. It was clear she was tired . . . more than even Will had realized.

It was about then that he felt the grasp of a tiny hand pulling on him. He looked down just in time to watch the baby yawn, face screwing up adorably at the action as he flailed outwards. Both of Clint’s tiny hands were caught in the lapels of Will’s uniform, snuggling a little closer as his lips smacked together sleepily.
A small, fond smile slipped across Will’s lips at the action, his free hand moving to tuck the blanket around his brother a little tighter. “That’s it, little brother . . . close your eyes now,” he murmured in quiet Russian, moving away from the rocking chair and into the middle of the room. Cradling his brother against him, he swayed back and forth as he bounced his knees the way he’d seen Marina do countless times before, when trying to soothe her charges to sleep. “Let Marishka sleep . . . she’s had a hard day,” the little boy murmured, ever changing eyes fixed on his brother’s face as the baby started to drift to sleep.

Stroking tender fingers over the baby fine fuzz covering Clint’s head, Will watched in awe as Clint yawned once more before his eyes started to flicker and flutter as he drifted away. Smiling fondly, Will began to hum the melody from some song he could almost remember from his babyhood . . . eyes adoring as Clint finally slumped against him, perfectly asleep. “Good night, baby brother,” he whispered as he lifted the little boy upwards to press a soft kiss against his forehead. “No matter what . . . I’ll never let anything happen to you. I promise.”

A little less than an hour later, Marina found the two of them lying in Will’s bed, Clint’s tiny body cuddled against his brother and his fingers still clutching tightly to the older boy’s uniform. Leaning against the doorjamb, the Russian smiled.

Even in his sleep . . . Will was humming . . . bayushki bayu.

January 3, 2010

It had been thirty three years to the DAY since the first time he’d held his baby brother in his arms. But as Will Grimm bent to lift his fussing younger daughter into his arms for the first time, that moment came back to him in a rush. That awe and pride in his brother was multiplied a thousand fold by the knowledge that he had had a hand in the creation of this perfect miracle . . . the love he had for his Marina and her love for him had gifted them both with not one but two beautiful little girls.

“Allo Princesa,” he breathed, as he lifted the little girl against his chest, cradling her to him and using his free hand to support her head. “I’m your Papa . . . and I am so excited to meet you.”

Marina had passed out about ten minutes ago, exhaustion sapping her remaining strength and sending her deeply into healing slumber. Her hand was wrapped around Grant’s wrist in a death grip, pretty much forcing him to stay put. The specialist seemed a little alarmed by the action, nervous eyes flicking between Marina, Sam and the Colonel himself. Finally Sam rolled his eyes and snarked, “Would you chill? Ma wants you here . . . so here is where you stay. Okay? Stop overthinking it.”

Grant’s eyes narrowed as he snapped back, “Most people don’t want me around at all, so forgive me if I’m having a little trouble wrapping my head around the idea.”

Rene was curled up on the mattress next to his mother, her other arm wrapped loosely around his shoulders, two fingers twitching occasionally in an unconscious caress over his shoulder. The teenager’s eyes flicked between the two bickering men, before twirling to see his father. There was a soft surge of jealousy to see Will standing in the middle of the room, one of his new baby sisters cradled against his chest and his body swaying back and forth as he hummed an unfamiliar melody. Glancing at Sam once again, Rene gathered his nerve and asked timidly, “Dad?”

The Colonel looked up instantly, a soft smile on his face as he asked, “Yeah baby?”

The endearment almost caused him to lose his resolve, but there was a small nagging part of him that needed to get it out and see how the pieces laid when the dust settled. “I’m 15 now.”
“I know,” the man agreed, a bemused smile on his face as he watched the boy gather his courage. “I was there for that birthday party.”

White teeth bit into his bottom lip as Rene carefully extracted himself from Marina’s embrace and sat up, wrapping his arms around his knees. “I’m old enough to fend for myself now... if you need me to go.”

That earned a startled blink as the Colonel repeated cautiously, “Go? Go where, love?”

“I don’t know... I’m sure there’s some foster family here in S.H.I.E.L.D. that could take me. The twins can have my room then.”

That fond smile was back, infinitely gentle and adoring, as Will moved to take a seat on the bed next to his youngest son. Shifting the baby effortlessly into the crook of one elbow, the officer reached out with the other and pulled Rene into his embrace. “Rene... my darling boy who I love... no one is going anywhere. This is your home and this is your family; it wouldn’t be complete without you. *Dong le ma?”*

“But... you have the twins now. You don’t need me around, taking up space, anymore.”

“Oh yes we do,” Will promised, smoothing his palm tenderly over the boy’s blond hair. “Here’s the funny thing about love, Rene... it doesn’t matter how much you give to someone, there’s always more for someone else.” Lifting his hand, he caught the teenager’s chin between his thumb and forefinger, forcing the child to meet his eyes. “You are my SON. The birth of your sisters does not change that. We didn’t adopt you, or Sam, to replace something we couldn’t have. We adopted you both, because we needed you and we loved you and we wanted you. Okay? No one is going anywhere... most especially not you.”

“You promise?” the young man asked timidly.

“On my life, I swear it. I love you... that hasn’t changed.”

Nodding shakily, Rene used the heels of his hands to brush at his tears before leaning over to get a better look at the baby. “What’s her name?”

“Your mother and I are undecided as of this moment. We’ve narrowed it down to three... but which one gets discarded and which name is assigned to whom is a little up in the air.” Leaning over, he nudged his son’s shoulder gently with his own, “We had thought we had another month to figure it out.”

Sam grinned, leaning forward on his elbows against the edge of the bed, as he asked, “What are the three you’ve narrowed down to? I’m assuming they’ll have the patronymic, right?”

“Yeah... there’s no translation for William in Russian, so we’ve opted for using the Russian form of Michael - ‘Mikhail’ - instead,” Will agreed with a smile. “The only one we’re one hundred percent sold on is Valentina; Valentina was one of your mother’s sisters before she was killed. Marina wants to honor that relationship and I am more than okay with letting her.”

“And the other two?”

“Yekaterina was one and Galina was another. Personally, I think we’re going to decide on Yekaterina; your mother’s seamstress was one of her dearest friends before she was killed and that was her name.”

Rene’s face twisted up in dismay as he questioned incredulously, “Galina? That’s a girl’s name?”
Will chuckled as he nodded, “It is. She’d probably be Lina or something similar for short.”

“We already have a ‘Cat’,” Sam reminded his adoptive father, smirking at the memory of his best friend Vincent’s fiery and fierce girlfriend, Detective Catherine Chandler.

“Da . . . we do. So we were considering Katenka as a nickname instead. But, as I said, nothing is set in stone until we’ve chosen between the last two.”

It was about then that Jason stuck his head through the door, tone a conspiratorial whisper as he asked, “Is Vincent in here?”

Cocking an eyebrow at his brother, Will drawled curiously, “No . . . what are you up to?”

The hacker grinned brightly, before stepping fully into the room and throwing the door open further. “All right everyone . . . hurry . . . before we get busted.”

There was no protest from the Colonel, only a weary roll of his eyes and a snort as the entire family currently on base - including all Misfits BUT Vincent - trekked into the room and found places to lean, sit, stand or kneel around the room. Smirking at the middle Grimm, Will scolded, “When Vincent finds out about this . . . it was your fault.”

“I take full responsibility,” the man agreed with an innocent grin, before turning to face the bed. There was concern, worry and relief in his face as he moved closer to the footboard, free hand reaching out to lay over the lump that was her left ankle. “Can we wake her?”

“I wouldn’t,” Sam replied with a frown. “You heard Vince . . . Ma needs to rest. It’s been a rough couple of hours.”

“No, I know that . . . I just was thinking that Bucky and Clint would want to see her . . . see for themselves she’s okay.”

“And how do you think that’s going to happen?” Glancing down at his watch, Will calculated quickly, before continuing, “Even at max speed, their Quinjet is still at least another two hours out. And that’s IF they left their posts the instant they got the news Marishka was in labor. Which we all know they didn’t . . . for all that we tease Clint for being such a goof and a prankster, he takes his job very seriously. They would have waited for their replacements before they ducked away.”

When Jason lifted the laptop he held in the other hand, Will couldn’t even explain why he was surprised. Bouncing on his toes with a grin, Jason replied, “I know . . . but that’s what Skype is for.”

“You're gonna Skype the ‘jet?’ Sam asked, eyebrows up as he watched his uncle set the laptop down and turn it on. “Clint's flying the plane!”

“Nah . . . they'll have the autopilot on by now, and be worrying in the cargo hold.” Turning to Will, Jay asked calmly, “Your call Will . . . you tell me what you want me to do.”

Taking a deep breath in through his nose, Will nodded once, “Make the call. We'll let her sleep for a little bit though . . . they can meet the twins.”

“Awesome,” he agreed, before his fingers set to the keyboard and he got to work hacking the Quinjet’s onboard communication system.

Sam glanced around the room, before asking, “Do I need to go free Vincent from whatever broom closet you've locked him in?”
Brian grinned at his nephew as he teased, “Vincent is fine . . . he's currently the sole attention of one of my favorite nurses.”

Narrowing his eyes lightly, Will scolded, “What did you set Miranda to now?”

“She's the only nurse any of us like. Except for the husband and two kids, I'd adopt her in a heartbeat,” Will snarked with a roll of his eyes. “Either way . . . I don't want to get her fired okay?”

“She's not gonna get fired. Vincent and the rest of the staff are more than aware of her value, seeing as none of the rest of them like US!” Natasha reminded her de facto brother-in-law.

“There are times I feel like that should bother me, but I really just don't give a damn,” the Colonel sighed with a roll of his eyes.

“It's not our fault the nursing staff hates us . . . didn’t it start with Grandad?” Sam asked from where he sat.

“For the most part . . . not that we typically make life easy on nursing staffs anyway. Sometimes hard to tell who it's who, and that's frustrating to them.”

“Isn't that what our medical files are for? Not to mention dogtags.” Sam snarked with a roll of his eyes. “Thank god Miranda pays attention.”

“Agreed,” Will snarked with a roll of his eyes. “And regrettably, common sense in some people is desperately lacking.”

“Amen to that,” came Bucky’s voice through the speakers, tone anxious and worried. “So? What's happened? Are they okay?”

“Shhh.” Sam hissed suddenly towards Jay’s laptop, blue eyes glaring at Bucky as he continued “Ma’s sleeping at the moment.”

Clint's face was suddenly in the picture, demanding, “Sleeping?! Can she do that in labor? I didn't think she could do that!!”

Will chuckled softly, straightening from where he was lifting the second twin from the bassinet, an infant tucked into the curve of each elbow. He was more than aware he wasn't in the camera field and smirked as he teased, “Deep breaths, bratishka.”

“Come on, Will!” the youngest Grimm whined. “Don't tease! Is she okay?!”

The Colonel sank slowly into the rocker provided, arranging his daughters gently before nodding at Jason. “All right . . . put them out of their misery.”

The tech smirked as he rotated the laptop and brought the three into view. There was a moment before Clint whooped, the sound excited and proud and relieved. Bucky was the only one in the frame now, but everyone once in awhile you could see the archer as he bounced around behind him, whooping and cheering and causing a ruckus. “Hell yes! I’m an uncle baby!! Woohoo!”

The former assassin’s eyes were wide as he stared at the twins, in genuine awe of them. “Bozhe moi . . . Will, they’re beautiful!” he breathed, reaching out, his hand disappearing from view as he traced their features on the screen. “They’re so tiny!”
Will’s chin dipped to the one in his right arm, replying, “This one was 16 and a half inches and 5.2 pounds.” Turning to the other, he continued, “15 and a quarter and 5 pounds even.”

“What are their names?”

“Undecided,” the man chuckled, with a sheepish shrug. “Probably Valentina and Yekaterina, but don’t quote me on that yet.”

It was about then that something shifted in the corner behind Will, and Bucky’s eyes flicked up to see Steve and Gretel. The pair were whispering to each other quietly, Gretel perfectly content to curl up against his chest, her fingers fiddling teasingly with the collar of his checked button-down. Eyes widening a little bit, Bucky blurted, “What the fuck!?”

Jason snorted hard, “Yeah . . . that happened.”

“WHEN!?” he asked in shock.

“About the same time Marina went into labor, apparently,” the tech replied, watching his older brother bow his head over his girls, feet working the floor as he rocked the chair. “Marina would probably kill me if I let you see her while she was sleeping, so I won’t. But she’s fine. The twins are fine. Everyone is fine . . . even Will, though that was a near thing.”

Clint was in front of the camera in a second flat. “What’s wrong with Will?”

“Nearly gave himself lung cancer,” was the unanimous answer from the entire room . . . which is what Vincent walked in on.

The doctor was already scolding Miranda and froze to a stop as he caught sight of the room. “I thought I said four at a time!”

“Yeah . . . cause that was gonna happen,” Brian snarked with a roll of his eyes.”

Rounding on Miranda, the medic gave her the stink eye. “You were distracting me!”

The nurse smirked cheerfully as she chirped, “Of course I was.”

“You’re lucky I like you . . . and that you’re my best nurse to deal with these idiocy.”

“I’m your only nurse to deal with them.” Miranda pointed out with a raised brow. “Everyone else goes running in the opposite direction.”

Grumbling, Vincent muttered, “Don’t remind me. I need to hire new staff.”

“Can I suggest having at least one or two Grimms involved in the interview to test their reactions first?” Miranda cheeked.

“That will be quite enough out of you,” he joked with narrowed eyes, “Out!”

The woman practically skipped away, before pausing in the doorjamb and turning back to face the room once more. “Congratulations again, Colonel . . . they really are lovely little girls.”

“Thank you, Miranda . . . for everything.”

“No thanks necessary sir. Enjoy your family . . . I’ll keep the rest of the vultures away.”

Nodding in agreement, Will turned his attention back to his daughters. And if the rest of the family
was simply content to watch their brother, son, nephew, and friend adore his daughters . . . at least it was a unanimous decision.
Chapter Notes

Five in a week!! Woohoo!!! When's the last time that happened??

Thanks go to AlekWalker for being am awesome cheerleading section and helping when I got stuck. She's awesome!!

Translations at the end as always.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter 225: Home is Where the Heart Is

Marina slowly stirred from her slumber, vaguely aware of warm flesh beneath the fingers of one hand. It wasn’t until her eyes slowly blinked open and her head turned that she registered the owner of the wrist she held trapped in her vice-like grip. The dark hair atop the head resting on the mattress was vastly different than that of her light-haired boys. Her first thought wandered to when Grant had
found out she was here before detouring into how exactly he’d gotten to her room.

From what she could see Grant was curled rather awkwardly within the confines of his chair, wounded knee draped over one side of the chair as his head rested on the mattress by her arm. Rolling slightly onto her side, careful not to jostle herself too much, Marina released her hold on his wrist in favor of stroking her hand through the disheveled dark hair atop his head.

Grant murmured softly, leaning unconsciously into the fingers trailing tenderly down the defined curve of his cheekbone. “Ssshhh . . .” she whispered, thumb smoothing over a small scar below his left eye. “You’re all right, Prizrak . . . my little ghost.”

Tossing his head, Grant’s eyes fluttered open slowly, disorientation clouding those dark eyes as he struggled to make sense of his surroundings. Her smile was fond and gentle as she returned her fingers to his hair, fingers scritchting gently just behind his ear. A flashfire smile ticked up one corner of his lips, his voice a low slur as he asked, “Marina?”

“Yeah . . . it’s me,” she replied, watching him quietly as she indulged herself in petting him for a moment more. It wouldn’t be long before Grant’s walls came slamming down again and he withdrew from her. As a result, she was content to revel in it for as long as he would allow. “How’d you sleep?”

“Good,” he replied with a wide smile, for once appearing content to let her pet him and keep him close.

Marina’s eyes lifted from those now familiar features and scanned the room, before redirecting to take him in once again. “Where is everyone?”

“The nurses came for the twins . . . I think the Colonel went with them. Agents Barnes and Barton have arrived at the LZ; I think Agent Shraeger and Captain Walsh went to go pick them up. Dr. Keller is on his rounds . . . Gamble and Street took Romanoff and Belinskaya to the gym to work off some of their frustration. . . your sister Vika had to go pick up her son and Agent Coulson went with her.” Frowning, he continued, “Your son Rene had homework, so Sam took him home. He promised he’d be back though, and with something for you and the Colonel to eat.”

Her lips curled upwards into a fond smile as she laughed, “Sam is a good son. He takes good care of his dad and me.”

There was a deep seated pain deep in those dark eyes as Ward winced. “He loves you very much . . . he was convinced you were going to be okay.”

“How do you mean?”

Eyebrows furrowing, he shrugged lightly, “I don’t know. He was just adamant that you would be all right. Nothing anyone said would change his mind. It was almost like . . .” here he trailed off, shaking his head as he turned his eyes down to his fingers. “. . . either way, he knew you were going to be okay. I’m glad he was right.”

She smiled fondly as she agreed, “Me too.” Her eyes flicked to his knee as he moved it from its awkward placement and propped it up gingerly on the frame under her bed. “How are you feeling, Grant?”

“Dr. Matthison said I’m healthy and strong, so he’s not anticipating any problems with me getting back to my previous fitness level.”

“Just remember the rules, da? Doctor’s orders to the letter; so no independent work outs until you’re
cleared by medical, agreed?"

“Yes ma’am,” he agreed with a small smile.

Marina grabbed a pillow from the head of the bed and tucked it into her belly, curling herself around it carefully as she watched him stare at his fingers where they twisted in his lap. “Prizrak . . . are you all right?”

“Spectre? Why did you call me Spectre?” Grant asked brow furrowed in confusion as he attempted to divert Marina away from her question.

One eyebrow cocked upwards with an amused smile, a clear indication that he was not being quite as subtle as he’d hoped in redirecting her attention. Rolling her eyes, she allowed him to distract her before replying, “What’s the definition of a ‘spectre’, Grant?”

“A visible incorporeal spirit, a ghost, a phantom, or an apparition,” he recited, sounding as though he’d just read to her from a dictionary.

“Yes . . . ‘a visible incorporeal spirit’. I wonder . . . who does that sound like? Of all my boys, you would be the most solitary; we see you, but we can’t seem to touch you.” Smirking with a wink, she continued, “At least not yet.”

“Your ‘boys’? I’m not one of your boys Marina . . .” he trailed off eyes flicking back to his hands. The idea of being one of her boys was far too tempting, but he was Garrett’s asset. The man would never let him go.

The Russian’s mouth quirked into a sad smile as she replied, “Not for a considerable lack of trying. Your stubbornness reminds me very much of my Colonel’s but even my Misha has his weak point. I’ll find yours eventually, Grant . . . it’s just taking me a little longer than it usually does.” Reaching out to lay her hand over his, she asked, “Grant, my ghost, what are you so afraid of?”

“I’m not a good man Marina. There are things about me . . . you wouldn’t like me if you knew.” Grant stammered without lifting his head. He scowled at his hands not entirely sure why he told her that or how she kept managing to slide beneath his walls.

She watched him for a long time, seeing the tight shoulders and the hanging head and the guilt written into every part of him. Finally, she stretched out her hand and cupped his chin, lifting his face level with hers. Forcing him to meet her eyes, she let hot chocolate eyes peer into whiskeyed amber for a moment, before insisting, “Try me.”

“My family . . . they weren’t nice. My parent’s especially had a firm grudge against me and my older brother. Christian . . . he was jealous that Thomas was the favorite.” He paused to take a breath as he stared into hot chocolate eyes which made him feel as though he was drowning. “He wanted Mother to feel his pain so he tormented Thomas . . . but he didn’t do it himself. He was crueler than that . . . he made me do it and would then turn me in.”

“Plausible deniability,” Marina replied, understanding it even if she could feel her body trembling withpent up rage at the information. “Grant . . . look at me . . . who tormented Thomas? Honestly . . . who was at fault for the things that happened to your brother?”

“In theory Christian . . . but I’m just as much at fault. I had a choice . . . I was too afraid of what may happen if I chose to protect Thomas though.”

“There is no theory here, Grant; Christian is the only one at fault. You were afraid for yourself . . . that’s human. It doesn’t mean that you were to blame for what happened. You may have been
complicit with the act, but not the intent behind it.” Reaching up to lay her finger next to her nose, she extended it a moment later and tapped the end of his. “That doesn’t make you guilty of the crime. Just as we don’t blame the gun for shooting someone, neither are you to blame for the actions you were essentially **forced** to take.”

“Those actions had my parents deciding to send me to military school as they occurred more and more frequently.” Grant grunted with a fierce scowl. “I left and hitched my way home with the intention of making them feel my pain . . .”

Marina interrupted then, “Burnt your parents house down . . . and ended up in Juvie. Where you were met by one John Garrett, agent of S.H.I.E.L.D. . . . who I suspect was responsible for your escape. Da?”

“Da” Grant agreed with a nod before blurtting “I didn’t know my older brother was in the house when I set it on fire . . . for the record.”

“I believe you . . . I don’t think you intended to hurt anyone.” the Russian promised with a fond smile as she stroked her thumb over his cheek.

“Garrett, he offered me a chance to be a better man . . . or so I thought. Said I could make a difference,” he mumbled, face turning into her thumb as it stroked.

“‘So you thought’? What do you mean?” she asked, eyes narrowing speculatively as she watched him literally soak in her affection like a sponge. If ever there was a poster child for touch starved, it was definitely Grant Douglas Ward. He reveled in her physical touches more than any other person in her life; and Clint had always been particularly touchy feely.

“I don’t feel like a better man . . . it feels like it did with Christian. Like I’m a tool for his own purposes.” Grant shrugged slightly; it was hard to explain and if Garrett or Rumlow ever found out he was having doubts, let alone expressing said doubts to Marina Ivanovna Petrovka of all people, his ass would literally be grass. If he was lucky, there would even be a body to find when it was all over.

“Then it’s a good thing you’ve been transferred to me, hm? My agents get the hardest jobs, because I have the best agents in the field. It’s not easy work . . . but the reward is typically worth it in the end.”

His eyes flicked away from Marina briefly as he warred with himself internally over whether or not to tell her about Rumlow’s earlier visit. The Russian frowned at the deflection, as she promised, “Anything you tell me, Grant, is between us. No one will ever hear about it from me . . . I swear it. You can tell me anything.”

“I had a visitor earlier . . . just before my nurse told me you were here.” Grant stammered. His eyes flicking worriedly back to Marina as he tried to figure out how much to tell her. “Rumlow . . . he came to remind me of my place and where my loyalties truly lie.”

“And just where is your place, according to Rumlow?” Marina inquired, tone brittle as she contemplated how many ways she wanted to rip the STRIKE commander into a dozen pieces.

“With Garrett . . .” Grant said before his lips twitched and he snarked dryly “and under his authority apparently.”

“If Garrett wants you back, he's gonna need to pry you from my cold dead fingers . . . and even then, Nick doesn't change his mind easily once it's made.”
“Don’t give him ideas . . . the Colonel would have my hide if he wound up a single parent to those little girls.”

There was a quirk to her eyebrow as she inquired, “Last I checked, Garrett was an ass but not a murderer . . .” here she paused, eyes narrowing at him before she continued, “. . . unless you know something I don’t?”

“There’s probably a lot I know about Jo . . . Garrett that you don’t. Plus he has Rumlow and Rollins in his back pocket; STRIKE is well trained.” Grant replied semi cryptically.

A noncommittal hum was Grant’s only answer, her eyes narrowed as the Russian sought to figure out the problem at hand. Finally, she asked, “Are you lying to me? About anything right now . . . and I’m not just talking about this conversation.”

Shifting uncomfortably, he deflected, “Lying? No . . . just not divulging everything. Keeping my cards close to my chest as it were as a bargaining chip?”

“And for what purpose would you need a bargaining chip from me?” Pinching his ear lightly, she insisted, “You tell me the truth and I’ll protect you, that’s the deal, okay?”

“I know . . . I’m just not ready. If I tell you . . . you’ll look at me differently and Garrett will find out.” Grant stated whiskey brown eyes darting off Marina to scan the room.

“No judgement . . . I promise. You don’t have to tell me now, but I look forward to when you trust me enough to tell me. Okay?”

“Okay . . . in the meantime? Don’t trust him, Garrett is like an onion. He has many layers.” Grant grunted quietly eyes downcast.

“I haven’t trusted John Garrett in almost six years,” Marina promised with a soft smile. “I assure you . . . that isn’t going to ever change.”

“Just . . . don’t do anything more that’ll get his attention on you and yours. He’s not a man you want to cross Agent Pet . . . Marina.” Grant caught himself before he fell back on formality thankfully; his ear likely wouldn’t handle another tweak from Marina.

One eyebrow cocked upwards even as she smirked at him. “Nice save there.”

“Sorry . . . still a little stunned and awed by the fact the Colonel claimed me as part of the family in front of the head nurse earlier.” Grant admitted with a sheepish grin.

“Oh he did, did he?” she teased with a wink, “I knew there was a reason I loved that man.”

It was about then, the door slammed open and Bucky Barnes scurried into the room. He looked equal parts relieved and worried, all but bolting to her bedside as he demanded, “Are you okay?”

“Oh seriously, Zima, it’s just a 12 inch slice through my abdomen. We’ve both had worse,” Marina scoffed with a roll of her eyes and a teasing grin.

Grant was thankful for the sudden arrival of the former Russian assassin, his eyes dropping from Marina’s face as his face slid effortlessly into his agent mask. The extra guest he hoped would distract the new mother enough that he could focus on repairing the holes Marina was smashing in the walls around his mind, heart and soul.

The once-and-future Winter Soldier took a seat on the mattress next to her hip, reaching out to grab
her hand. “Come on Marishka, be serious. For once in your life . . . please.”

Rolling her eyes, Marina promised, “Tvorets . . . I’m gonna be just fine. I promise.” She turned her head back to look at Grant, free hand reaching to wrap around his wrist. “Zima . . . have you met Agent Grant Ward?”

As Marina’s hand once again curled around his wrist like a shackle Grant silently kicked himself for not trying to make a getaway while she’d been distracted. Not that he’d get very far with the crutches anyways . . . and certainly not without hurting himself again. Frankly he didn’t want a pissed off Marina or Miranda on his case over that. So really better to stay put anyway . . . at least that was his story and he was sticking to it. Lifting his gaze to look at the older man, Grant inclined his head as he spoke “Not to my knowledge Marina . . . though I’ve heard stories about the Winter Soldier.”

The sniper smirked sadly, protesting, “I’m pretty sure everyone has heard stories about the Winter Soldier. Few of them good.”

Marina rolled her eyes, glancing over at the door as she inquired, “Where’s Clint?”

“He saw Will over by the nursery and went to go tease him about fawning over little girls.”

“That could be taken . . . wrong.” Grant muttered quietly.

“Probably why, the last time I saw them, Will was chasing Clint with one of Natasha’s bo-staffs. Miranda’s fantastically amused.”

“Wait . . . they let her in medical armed?” Grant stammered staring at Bucky.

Bucky’s eyebrows rose towards his hairline as he asked in reply, “You wanna be the one to try and stop her?”

“In no state to try and even if I was I think she’d just put me back in here.”

“Entirely possible,” the man chuckled, before leaning forward with a conspiratorial grin. “Wanna know your most reliable weapon against Natasha?”

“Not sure I’m game enough to answer that.” Grant retorted glancing at Marina.

“I can tell you the answer, if you’d prefer . . . it’s Brian,” Marina sniggered, giving her oldest friend a deadpan look. “Leave the child alone, Bucky . . . your dramatics do not suit your advanced age, Tvorets.”

“Pretty sure I’ve seen him wiping the floor with the junior agents but thanks for the heads up?”

“There’s nothing quite like watching Brian and Natasha beat the hell out of every last baby agent in a line up,” the assassin chuckled, with a grin, watching as Marina’s eyes drooped despite her laughter. “Marishka . . . if you’re tired . . .”

“How can I be tired? I slept all day,” she muttered petulantly, her fingers loosening from around Grant’s wrist as she sank closer to unconsciousness.

“You were also rushed to surgery to produce two little people and also apparently missed the awakening.” Grant snarked gently.

“The awakening?” she asked head tilting back to look at him. “Whose awakening?”

Her fingers spasmed slightly, before her grip slipped completely and her hand fell back to the bed as
she drifted towards slumber. Grant moved his hand to hers, wrapping it back around his wrist and settling his hand over Marina’s, his fingers tightening around hers to secure her grip about his wrist as he replied “According to Miranda, Captain Rogers awoke the Colonel’s aunt. I guess she is from a Sleeping Beauty curse?”

Her fingers twitched slightly as she frowned, “Gretel’s awake?! Why didn’t anybody tell me?” her tone was breathy and her eyes fluttered as she insisted, “Unconsciousness is no excuse for keeping me out of the loop, Zima.”

“To be fair I don’t think it entirely hit the family until after they sure you were fine.” Grant pointed out with a squeeze of Marina’s hand. “And I think she’s going to be another one the nursing staff hate. When Miranda and I arrived, I’m pretty sure she and Rogers were threatening the nursing staff for not providing your family with information on your condition.”

“If she’s anything like her brother . . . they will absolutely hate her guts,” Marina giggled tiredly, her eyes flicking downwards to where Ward was pressing her fingers into his wrist with his free hand. A small smile curved her lips as she teased, “I would have thought you’d escape once I let you go, Grant . . . not give me a reason to keep you close.”

Grant’s head ducked over their hands as he blushed. Whatever answer he’d been about to give was interrupted as the door swung open once again . . . and in came Steve Rogers, still carrying Gretel Kuhn in his arms. Bucky jolted upwards to his feet, eyes wide as Steve froze, the two best friends staring at each other in shock. It was clear that neither had expected the other to be there. Marina snickered, as she winked at Grant, insisting, “Awkward.”

“Looks like it . . . I’m missing something aren’t I?” the Specialist asked as his eyes flicked from Marina to Bucky.

Stroking her thumb slowly over the skin of his wrist, she joked softly, “Wait for it . . . you’re probably going to get a front row seat to their awkward version of make-up sex.”

“That is probably more than I needed to know.” Grant groaned his head dropping over their hands in embarrassment.

“Considering the fact that Bucky is happily in love with my Hawk and Steve is Gretel Kuhn’s apparent soulmate, there’s probably not going to be any actual sex, Prizrak.” Cocking an eyebrow, she teased in a whisper, “Your virgin is showing. I think.”

Grunting in response to that Grant never lifted his head; he was fairly certain his cheeks would be a near scarlet shade considering how hot they suddenly felt. It probably was also a bad sign for him that Marina actually knew that much about his life.

“I won’t tell . . . I promise,” she chuckled with a wink.

“How do you even know that?” He huffed chancing a peek up at the Russian.

“Process of elimination. Your childhood is not exactly littered with companions . . . there was the five years by yourself in the woods and then you joined S.H.I.E.L.D. . . . where you have gone out of your way to be solitary and alone and have made no friends . . . outside of my son. Who is happily engaged, to my chagrin, and not to you.”

“Garrett frowns upon attachments outside of missions . . . even the four legged variety.” Grant mumbled in hushed tones before shaking his head.
“Attachments are important . . . they’re what convince you to fight hard and come home. Have you never tried to make any friends? Gotten a girlfriend?” Cocking an eyebrow, she asked, “Please, for the love of all things, tell me you’ve at least been kissed.”

“To date?” Grant paused, before blowing out a sharp breath “Only on the cheek or chin.”

The woman sighed heavily, as she lifted her free hand to smooth through his hair. “My poor boy.”

Shrugging slightly he stared at Marina for a long minute considering his words before heartbreakingly murmuring “Doubt anyone would want anything to do with me anyways. I’m a screw up and just not a good man.”

Marina’s fingers reached over and tweaked his ear hard. “You are NOT a screw up. You have a 95% success rate on all of your missions. And considering that most of the ones you’ve been on have been you working injured? That’s not exactly indicative of a screw up, understood?!?”

Wincing at the tug on his ear Grant blinked in shock, stammering incoherently for a long minute before nodding with a crisp “Yes, Ma’am.”

Steve cocked an eyebrow at the interplay between the two before moving to set Gretel into a chair gently. After making sure that she was comfortable, Steve straightened and turned to face the man he still considered his best friend with a small, sheepish smile. “Hey Buck.”

“Steve,” the Soldier replied, eyes flicking to Gretel before returning back to Steve. “So . . . soulmate huh?”

“That seems to be the popular theory.”

Narrowing both eyes speculatively, he remarked insistently, “You owe Clint an apology . . .”

“I know . . . I owe you both an apology and more. I’m sorry Buck, I didn’t know how close the two of you were and in trying to protect you I was the one who ended up hurting you.” Steve replied sincerely as his gaze dropped from Bucky to Marina’s bed.

Marina’s foot moved and kicked her oldest friend hard in the back of thigh. “Tvorets . . . be nice.”

“How am I the one you’re scolding right now!?” he asked incredulously, turning back to her with wide eyes.

“Be grateful that’s all I can do at the moment,” she replied with an overly sweet tone and a toothy smile.

Steve chuckled at the bi-play between the pair, his head shaking slightly as he teased “You seem to have a habit of adopting stubborn people Buck.”

Cocking an eyebrow at Marina, he drawled dryly, “She would be the second of two to come back and bite me in the ass.”

“Oooh . . . dirty!” she chirped with a grin, “I’m telling Misha!”

“I think she’s on the good drugs.” Grant spoke up as he stared at Marina.

“Quite possibly. I also can’t feel anything below my navel, so I’m kind of surprised I managed to hit Zima in the first place.”
“Numb yet still kicking ass . . . more skill than I thought.” Grant snarked as his eyes flicked to the woman settled in the chair beside him.

“You’re just jealous I haven’t kicked yours yet,” she laughed with sparkling eyes.

“Pretty sure that makes me smart. I’ve heard your reputation.”

It was about then that Clint came bounding into the room, head bowed over the baby in his arms as he cooed in her direction. “Look at you, so beautiful . . . yes you are . . . yes you are. You look just like your daddy, which is unfortunate because everyone knows that I am the handsomer brother . . . you should hope you take after your mom. She’s definitely the looker in that relationship,” he cooed, earning a roll of his eyes from his older brother who was coming in behind him.

“You’re an idiot.”

“And yet, still Marina’s favorite.”

Steve’s shoulders tensed at the sound of Clint’s voice, turning slightly so he was side on to his possibly former best friend blue eyes flicked to the youngest of the Brothers Grimm and the baby in his arms. Clint looked up and literally froze, arms tightening around the baby as grey eyes widened at the sight of Captain America. “Uh . . . guys? What the hell did I miss?” Those eyes flicked to the side and then narrowed as he demanded, “Who the hell woke Aunt Badass!?”

“That would be me.” Steve replied sheepishly, one hand lifting to rub at the back of his neck as he looked to Clint. Hunching slightly he was sure he looked every bit like the runt from Brooklyn he’d been pre-serum as he spoke again “I owe you an apology Barton. I’m sorry . . . I didn’t know what you were to Buck.”

“I could make a snarky comment to that, but I’m pretty sure my brother would punch me for cussing a blue streak in front of his little girls,” Clint all but snarled, lightning shooting across grey eyes as he sidled to place himself behind Bucky. “So you woke Aunt Gretel . . . so what? Does that make you my uncle or something? Cause Maria kissed Dad and now . . . she’s my step-mother.”

Reeling at the comment wide blue eyes shot between Bucky and Marina before Steve’s head turned to Gretel as he stammered “Uh . . . um, I don’t know? We’re taking it slow . . . she was ready to hit me at first, until we apparently bonded over threatening stupid nurses.”

A grin flashed across the man’s face, before he laughed, “Please tell me you gave them your disappointed face? Because I’ve read stories and I gotta tell you . . . the ‘Disappointed Look of Doom’ directed on the nurses, could not have happened to nicer people.” Sobering instantly, he snapped, “Unless it was Miranda . . . you insult Miranda, I’ll turn your guts into my new bowstring.”

“Miranda was escorting me upstairs.” Grant supplied suddenly.

“I did and your aunt threatened to burn them at the stake if they didn’t inform the Colonel immediately of Marina’s condition.” Steve said with a wide grin. “They turned all kinds of interesting shades of grey and white at that particular threat.”

There was an amused tilt to the archer’s lips as he insisted, “So . . . Grant speaks . . . it’s a damned miracle. Aww . . . and he’s letting Marina hold his hand; the android is human. Good to know.”

Turning back to Steve, that smirk turned vicious as he agreed, “I think you and I are going to get along just fine.”

“I still owe you and Buck . . . though I have no idea yet how to actually repay you for what I did.” Steve said looking to Clint with a small smile. “Though now I see the two of you together . . . you’re
good for him.”

That grin turned lecherous as he tilted his head in Bucky’s direction, “And good to him, I hope . . . but I’m pretty sure he’s the only one who can give me an answer on that.”

Bucky’s eyes rolled even as his cheeks flamed, “Shut it, khishchnik . . . Will, kindly corral your little brother.”

“I’ve been trying to do that for 33 years . . . you’re a lot more likely to succeed at that attempt than I am,” the Colonel replied with a laugh, as he rounded the foot of the bed and took the empty seat next to the bed, opposite Grant. “How are you feeling, Grant? That knee, specifically.”

Glaring in Clint’s direction even as his cheeks darkened Grant replied “The knee is faring better than my ears at least. Yes I speak . . . when I have something to say Hawkeye.” His hand tightened over Marina’s regardless of Clint’s teasing over the matter. For some reason he couldn’t quite fathom yet, losing that contact with Marina was scary.

Marina’s free hand moved back to smooth through his hair, fingernails scritchting tenderly against the back of his head, as she scolded her youngest charge fondly, “Behave yourself, dorogoy.” Turning her attention to her lover, she teased fondly, “Are you going to hog the kroshka the whole time? Or do I get to hold my daughters at some point?”

“What are you going to call them? I know the Colonel said earlier you were tossing up between three names.” Grant asked as he shifted on the chair and adjusted his foot on the under railing of Marina’s bed to stretch his knee.

“I want to name one of them ‘Valentina’ after my sister; considering I killed her, I think it’s only fair I make up for it in some way,” she sighed with a sad smile.

“What will you name which? Also how do people tell babies apart . . . they both looked the same earlier.” Grant inquired with a puzzled frown.

“A mother just knows,” Marina chuckled with a fond smile. “A real one anyway.”

“You are a real one. From what I’ve seen of your boys and Sam . . . you’re a better mother than mine ever was.” Grant stated adamantly, his eyes bright with emotion despite the deadpan expression on his face.

Lips compressing hard, she turned to her lover and sighed, “Remind me to arrange for some kind of unfortunate accident or something, okay Mishka?”

“Someone give the woman one of her kinder before she decides to start spilling blood, ja?” Gretel spoke up suddenly from beside Grant, one brow arched as she looked pointedly at her two nephews who were so much like her brother it was uncanny.

Clint moved forward, laying the infant on the pillow next to her belly, Marina's free hand curling around the child and pulling her close. “Oh . . . she's beautiful,” she whimpered adoringly. “Hello my little Valya . . . I'm your mama.”

Grant’s free hand lifted and brushed gently over the baby's tightly clenched fist. “Wow. I didn't realize she'd be so small.”

“They were early, ja?” Gretel inquired her eyes flicking from the baby on the bed to her eldest nephew. Her head cocked slightly as she studied the way he cradled his other daughter protectively. That in itself would have been all the indication she needed that these boys of her brother's blood
weren’t in fact evil. As it was, she’d seen the way Will had shattered in her brother’s arms earlier out of fear and concern for his lover.

“About a month yes. All I care about is they’re healthy. The details mean next to nothing to me,” the Colonel agreed, fingers stroking over the baby’s cheek. “Little Katenka . . . she’s so calm. Not what I expected from a newborn child.”

“If they are anything like my brother and I, and I suspect their parents, one will be level headed and calm while the other is hot headed and brash.” Gretel hummed in contemplation as her eyes flicked between both babies “They are rather precious.”

Grant’s eyes widened as Valya’s fingers shifted and she closed her hand around his finger. She watched him with big newborn blue eyes, little features solemn and intent. “She’s holding on to me,” he announced, sounding audibly alarmed by the fact.

“So is her mother . . . do not be such a Hähnchen.” Gretel responded with a sideways glance to Grant on her left. “She is an infant and unless she is a demon-child she will not harm you, boy.”

Marina scowled, “Gretel, be nice, please . . . his walls are actually down for the moment. Don’t ruin it . . . Hähnchen!? Good grief, not likely.”

“Ask my brother dear girl, this is me being nice. Especially with people I do not know.” Gretel replied with a slight shrug. “My apologies though . . . this has been a rude awakening and will take some adjustment. I also wish Edward were here . . . someone familiar in an unfamiliar place and time.”

Marina twisted to look at her lover, insisting, “She and Brian should not be friends,” seconds before Hansel’s voice chimed in from the door, “And what am I, Gret? Chopped liver?”

“You were busy calming your son.” Gretel retorted even as her lips twitched into an amused grin “Besides you have a rather huge family of your own now, that will no doubt keep you out of trouble.”

Will snorted, “Yeah . . . okay. We’ll go with that answer. One word . . . Austria.”

“Hyr disbeliev is unappreciated, Adler.”

“But not wrong either,” the Colonel reminded his father with a grin. “You were the one who spent 500 deutschmarks on alcohol, on foreign soil, because Maria got shot.”

“Still trying to hide your feelings in the bottom of a pitcher brother?” Gretel teased with an adoring smile in her brother’s direction. “I think I really must meet this Maria of yours.”

“She is home . . . with our Minna. She will be here soon, once the Minnow has woken from her rest. She is most anxious to see Marishka for herself.”

Dark chocolate eyes widened at the baby’s name, Gretel all but twisting on the seat and dragging herself to her knees. “Minna? After the white witch?”

“I had not told them that part, Gretel, so thank hyu for that. But ja . . . I owe Mina Blanche a debt. This is one way I sought to repay it, at least in some small measure.”

“She would like that I think . . . I did not know her well, though I remember hyr fondness for her even after she died.” Gretel admitted.
Will's eyebrow cocked upwards, though for once the notoriously curious Colonel said nothing. He turned his attention onto the bed and smiled; sometime since the two siblings had begun to speak, Grant had fallen asleep, his head resting on the mattress by Valya’s head, Marina and Valya both holding onto his hands as they too slumbered. The three were all but curled together, the two adults pinning the baby in place, even as Grant seemed to seek the protection of Marina's embrace as well.

Clint spoke up from where he was sitting on top of the dresser. “Think she's gonna be able to make him into a real boy, Will? Or is the attempt doomed to fail before it's begun?”

“I guess that depends on Grant . . . and whether or not he wants to be.”

“I think she made you into a real boy, Agent Barton,” Maria sassed as she came sailing into the room, her laughing daughter in the car seat she carried with her. “And you would have been the harder chore, I'd bet.”

“I beg your pardon, but I was adorable as a kid . . . ask anyone.”

Will snorted with a roll of his eyes, “An adorable pain in my ass.”

“But still adorable,” he cheeked with a wink.

Gretel twisted again in her seat to peer closer at Clint. “You . . . I think I like already.”

“Of course you do . . . I'm very likeable. Will's the cantankerous bastard in the family.”

“Like Hansel then,” Gretel teased as she looked to her brother with a broad grin.

“Of all my sons, mein Adler is the one most like me. Thus why I impersonated him all those years ago.”

Maria groaned as she insisted, “Don't remind me. You took twenty years off our lives with that little stunt.”

“You must be my brother’s Maria?” Gretel inquired as she settled in her seat, dark eyes studying her brother’s woman intently for a long moment before her eyes dropped to the child in the car seat, a warm smile curving her lips “And your little Minna.”

“The true love of your brother’s life, Fraulein Kuhn, I assure you.”

Minna laughed brightly, hands grabbing for her father as Hansel crouched to lift the child from the seat. “Little Minnow . . .” Hansel greeted fondly, brushing a tender Eskimo kiss across the tip of her nose. Straightening, he wrapped his other arm around his wife's waist and bent to kiss her sweetly, “Not true, Spatzi. Hyu are the woman of my dreams.”

“Your nightmares maybe;” she muttered, even as she melted into him and lifted her chin into his kiss.

“No, I can assure you the women of his nightmares are far worse. You may call me Gretel; we are family after all, Schwester” Gretel watched the pair with fondness. It was good to see her brother happy for the first time in far too long . . . at least that she could remember.

Maria turned to look at her best friend, sighing at the three curled up together. “Adopting again, I see.”

“Marina wishes . . . he is not making it easy for her,” Will chuckled with a fond grin. “She'll be disappointed she missed you, Maria.”
“How is she? Be honest.”

“How is she? Be honest.”

“Once the drugs wear off and she can feel again, she'll be sore and hurting. But she's strong and healthy and in great shape; she'll bounce back much faster than I want her to, I'm sure.”

“You make that sound to be a bad thing,” Gretel observed curiously.

“Because it would not be a bad thing if Marishka took some time off to rest and recuperate,” Maria explained with a small smile. “She tries so hard to protect everyone . . . to take care of those she loves. It would not kill her to let them take care of her for once.”

Will sighed fondly as he drawled, “From your mouth to God’s ears, Maria. Because it will take at least an act of God to keep Marina at home.”

The evil grin that slipped across the AD’s face was alarming for both Steve and Gretel. Even more so when she pulled her phone from her pocket and started to dial. “That can be arranged.” Lifting the phone to her ear, it was a moment before Maria spoke again, “Fury . . . we need your help with your sister . . . yes sir . . . an Act of God at the very least.” There was a long pause before the woman grinned, “Thank you sir . . . she's in room 469 and I know she would love to see you . . . we'll see you shortly.”

Chapter End Notes

Translations:

(R) Prizrak - spectre (Marina's nickname for Grant Ward)
(R) Zima - Winter (one of Marina's nicknames for her oldest friend, Bucky Barnes)
(R) Tvorets - Architect (one of Marina's nicknames for her oldest friend, Bucky Barnes)
(R) khishchhnik - little hawk (Bucky's nickname for his lover, Clint Grimm)
(R) dorogoy - darling (Marina's nickname for Clint Grimm)
(R) kroshka - babies
(G) Hähnchen - chicken
(G) (mein) Adler - (my) Eagle (Hansel's nickname for his eldest son, Will Grimm)
(G) Spatzi - little sparrow (Hansel's nickname for Maria Hill-Kuhn, his wife)
(G) Schwester - sister
Downtime

Chapter Notes

Enjoy this chapter guys! It's the second to last on this mini-arc, which will feature Daryl, Doyle and Gus, at which point we'll stop briefly on the events of "At the Royal York". After that we'll jump almost 9 months.

Enjoy this! Thank you so much for all of your reviews and your awesome! You've been so amazing!

Translations at the end of the chapter, as always.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
The Grimm Truth
Chapter 226: Downtime

Will had learned to be silent and observant practically from the cradle. As a result, it wasn't hard to read the ley lines lying between the people in the room. Some were strengthening, some repairing and still others beginning to grow.

Gretel may have been prickly with regards to the Captain at her waking, but you wouldn't know it now, barely hours later. She sought his reassurance constantly, glancing back over her shoulder just to make sure he was still close by. As for Steve himself, he seemed content to stay close, hands braced on the back of her chair as he leaned against it comfortably. The tips of his fingers stretched every once in awhile to caress her shoulder, causing a small smile from the witch hunter as she glanced up at him.

Bucky was leaning against the dresser under Clint, the archer perched once again on the highest point in the room. The two appeared to have suffered no permanent effects from their “break” and seemed to be just as happy as they had been before Rogers had woken from his ice encased slumber. From time to time, Clint leaned forward to whisper in his partner’s ear, earning a quiet chuckle from the former Russian assassin. Will would bet his hazard pay that no one else had realized that Clint had his fingers twisted in the back of Bucky's collar.

There was a shaky truce between Clint and Steve, though the friendship between Clint and their aunt was growing in leaps and bounds. Gretel found Clint amusing, giggling like a young girl at his cheeky teasing and deadpan commentary. As for Clint, it was clear he considered his aunt to be pretty awesome, all but preening at her laughter.

Will had been genuinely concerned by the apparent end of the legendary friendship between Captain America and his former right hand man. However while there were still deep fissures there, they were slowly beginning to mend. Steve’s sincere remorse for what had fallen out with Clint had made up for a lot of Bucky's anger, as well as Clint's determination to ignore the elephant in the room completely.

His father and step-mother were sharing the same chair over by the corner, the two taking minimal part in the conversation as they fawned over Will's little sister. The baby was already completely spoiled, and it was no secret she had her recalcitrant father firmly seated in the palm of her tiny fist. He was gonna have his hands full with that once she was a little older. Not that he seemed to care in the slightest.

His other brothers were absent for the moment, as were his sons. However, the Colonel had no doubt they would be along soon enough. Marina may be the deadliest member of the family, but she was also the heart of it. They would be in to check on her soon enough. And of course, Nick would be there before long as well.

Snickering, Will couldn't help imagining the reaction Nick and Marina - and their affectionate bantering - would get from Steve and Gretel. Neither had ever witnessed their sibling bond before and it was bound to cause some dropped jaws and wide eyes.

Speaking of Marina . . . his eyes flicked to the bed, only a little surprised to see Marina awake once more and smoothing her fingers through Grant's hair. That boy was stuck with her; he really should just give up the fight at this point. She would get her way . . . she always did.

Standing carefully, he laid his sleeping daughter in her bassinet before bending to lift Valya and place her in the one next to her sister. His lover smiled at him, her eyes gleaming as she murmured,
“Aren’t they beautiful, Mishka?”

He slipped onto the bed behind her, fingers finding the right knot at the base of her spine and massaging it gently. The woman grunted, eyes drifting blissfully, “You're a saint and I love you.”

“I love you too,” he chuckled as he bent to kiss the bared curve of her shoulder. “How do you feel, samaya malen’kaya?”

“Tired but bored. Worried about a few things I didn't get done before the kroshka were born.”

“Marishka,” the Colonel groaned, head dropping back as he sighed, “you just had emergency surgery. Could you spare my poor, overworked heart its premature heart failure, and take a break?”

“A handler’s work it's never done, Misha, moy lyubimov.”

“It is if I say it is,” came a new voice from the doorframe.

Marina groaned as she turned her head to the door, “No fair, Nick . . . sneaking up on an old woman, frail and infirm.”

The single eye sparkled as he joked, “So frail, you could still snap every neck in this room without ever leaving your bed.”

“Good thing too . . . I still can't feel my legs,” she agreed with a wink.

Fury glanced at Will, as visibly alarmed as the spymaster could manage. The analyst smiled, “The epidural was a little more potent than they had anticipated.”

“I see . . .” he demurred, scanning the woman carefully. “All the more reason she should be at home, resting.”

Marina’s eyes rolled as she muttered, “Sure . . . because that sounds like loads of fun.”

“Marishka,” Will sighed heavily seconds before Fury chimed in, “Who said anything about having fun?”

Steve’s eyes were wide, his jaw practically unhinged as he watched the two spies bicker with one another. The two men had met a couple of times since he woke from his slumber, and every time they’d met, Fury was professional and aloof. The all black attire and the rigid spine, hands clasped at his back while glowering through his single eye. Nothing at all like the man currently standing within the room and bantering with the new mother.

“Steven . . . close your mouth before you are cursed and frozen as such.” Gretel teased even as she twisted in her seat to study and assess the owner of the foreign voice.

“Cursed? Who’s cursed?” Marina asked, perking up curiously as Grant stirred from the bed. “Easy, Prizrak . . . you’re all right. Go back to sleep if you want.”

Gretel’s eyes narrowed at the man, taking in the cut and make of his coat. If she wasn’t mistaken, it was very similar to the one her own brother had been wearing when he appeared at her bedside after her awakening. “Is that my brother’s coat?”

“Oh contraire, my dear Fraulein Kuhn . . . your brother stole mine,” Fury grunted with a roll of his eyes.

Marina chuckled, with a grin. “You always were a little overprotective of your coat, brother mine.”
“At least I don’t kill the people who harm what I’m overprotective of.”

“That is nature . . . for one to seek vengeance for their loved ones.” Gretel stated as though what Nick said hadn’t entirely made sense to her.

Will chuckled, “Not quite to the extent Marina takes it.”

“A woman after my own heart then.” Gretel replied with a bright grin to Marina. “My brother has good taste with his adopted Tochter.”

Grant lifted his head from the mattress, asking, “Marina?”

“Hi sweetheart . . . you’re all right,” she promised, stroking her thumb over the inside of his wrist.

“New pet?” Fury snarked with a cocked eyebrow, “Seriously, Sis, are you ever going to stop adopting? I don’t have a house big enough on base to accommodate your addictive lifestyle.”

The Colonel’s eyes rolled as Ward’s eyes went wide, staring up at the Director of S.H.I.E.L.D. in shocked awe. “Ss . . . sss . . . sir!” he stammered, attempting to shoot to his feet.

“Nick! You’re scaring him! Stop glaring!” Marina scolded, as she tightened her grip on Grant’s wrist and forced him to stay seated.

Grant rounded on Marina, eyes wide, as he stammered, “NICK!? Who the hell is Nick!? That’s Fury . . . God . . . any number of really scary names.”

Fury gave the young agent his shark’s grin as he drawled, “I like this kid, Marina. He has the appropriate fear of authority. Unlike a certain Russian I know.”

“You love me,” she scoffed with a brilliant grin, as she soothed Grant back into his seat. “Please tell me you didn’t mess up your knee with that little stunt.”

“How . . . how can you talk to him like that!?” he whispered, staring at his handler with wide, awed eyes.

“He’s my brother . . . I can talk to him however I want.”

It took a moment, but eventually both Steve and Grant demanded together, “He’s your what!?”

Will chuckled, “You heard her right . . . you weren’t hallucinating, I promise.”

The blond’s eyes flicked between Marina and Fury, clearly tossing something around in his head. “So . . . who’s older?”

“I am,” Marina announced at the same second Fury replied, “She is.”

Gretel rolled her eyes, before demanding, “Okay, now for the important question, who’s God?”

“He is,” the Russian replied miserably, while the spymaster preened, “I am.” Turning to the his sister, Fury braced his hands on the footboard of her bed and insisted, “And since I am God, I am ordering you to stay home, take care of your daughters and heal. I don’t want you back at work for at least two months . . . maybe longer, depending on my mood.”

The handler looked horrified, “Two months!? But Nick!!”

“No . . . Marina, you nearly died this time. We will not lose you. Two months, that’s final.” Patting
the curve of one ankle, he all but begged her, “Your family needs you, Marishka . . . so please, for their sake, take a break. Okay? The Coulsons can handle the handler pool without you for at least that long. Let them.”

Just then a timid voice spoke from the door, inquiring, “Am I interrupting something?”

Everyone turned to see Sam loitering in the doorway, with a backpack over one shoulder. “Agent Grimm . . .” the director greeted, with a brisk nod. “No, you are not.”

“Nick was just bestowing an act of God upon Marina,” the Colonel replied, a small smile flirting with the edge of his mouth.

Sam chuckled, as he stripped the backpack and held it up. “Damn . . . sorry I missed it. But . . . I brought Dad some fresh clothes.” Winking at his adoptive father, Sam teased, “You’re getting kind of ripe, Dad.”

The Colonel sighed as Marina snickered. “Yeah . . . I could probably use a shower, while I was at it.”

“Each of the private rooms are equipped with ensuites,” Grant supplied timidly, gesturing towards the door opposite the bed. “The water pressure’s actually pretty decent.”

Will teased with a smile, “Are you saying I stink, Grant?”

“Technically Sam said that, I just pointed out there were shower facilities available Sir.” Grant pointed out with a slight grin as he looked to the Colonel.

Twisting to look back at his son, he asked, “You didn’t happen to bring a towel or anything in that backpack, did you?”

Sam’s cheeks turned a little rosy as he replied, “I went through your bathroom and grabbed everything I thought you’d need; your shaving kit, your electric razor, a couple towels and some washcloths. I was going to grab you a clean uniform and then decided that giving yourself a couple days off from the uniform would probably be a good idea. So I grabbed some jeans, Ma’s favorite button down and your favorite blue tie.”

“It does seem fitting . . . if Marina has to take two months off, the Colonel should take at least a couple of days.” Grant cocked his head studying the older man with a frown before he teased “He’s looking a little frazzled.”

The Colonel’s eyes narrowed lightly as he accepted the backpack from his son and started to rifle through it. Pulling out the jeans, shaving kit and towels, he set the backpack on the floor by the bed before bending to kiss Marina quickly. “I’ll be right back.”

“She promised sweetly, hand coming up to caress over his cheek fondly. “Love you.”

Smiling at her, he kissed her once more then disappeared into the bathroom, the door clicking shut behind him. Humming happily, Marina hunkered down into her bed with a happy, sleepy grin. “Someone wake me when the babies need fed?”

“Can do, Ma . . . just get some rest,” Sam promised, as he came further into the room and sat down on the bed, his back to the footboard. Laying his hand on her calf, he smoothed his thumb over the curve of her ankle. “Love you Ma.”

“Love you too, Sammichka,” she murmured with a grin, before allowing herself to drift into a light
healing slumber.

Sam smiled fondly, before turning to look at Grant. “Sup buddy? How are you feeling?”

The agent blinked in surprise at the terminology, “Buddy?”

“Grant . . . we’re friends.” Pausing, the younger blond considered the taller man before asked, “We are friends . . . right!?”

“I . . .” the agent seemed caught offguard by the question, glancing at the sleeping Marina before turning back to his old training partner. “I don’t have any friends, Sam.”

“Well, now you have at least one,” the constable replied with a haphazard shrug. “Better than nothing, I guess.”

Grant stared at Sam for a long moment, blinking slowly as he considered that. The last friend he’d had was Buddy and Garrett had forced him to shoot him. He genuinely liked Sam so he was hoping history wouldn’t repeat itself. “It is . . . I guess.” he admitted with a wry grin. “But it’s dangerous being my friend . . . just so you know.”

“Dude . . . have you met my parents?” Sam laughed brightly, “It’s dangerous just being their SON!?”

“I have; your mother breezed into my life like a force of nature.” Grant reminded with a smirk “Then proceeded to upend it to meet her specifications.”

“Yeah . . . Ma does that. There’s a reason my uncles call her ‘Hurricane’ when she’s in a mood.”

Will’s voice was muffled as he spoke through the towel he was smoothing over his face, to get rid of the rest of the shaving cream on his cheeks. “Among other things.”

Sam’s head tilted sideways as he looked out of the side of his eyes, asking, “Feel better, Dad?”

“Much . . . thank you, Sammy-honey,” he agreed, coming further into the room and lifting the backpack from the floor. Turning his back, he set the pack on the chair and dropped the towel from his shoulders onto the armrest.

Grant stiffened in his seat, eyes locked firmly on the Colonel’s scarred back even as he heard the quiet gasps from Steve and Gretel beside him. His hands fisted on Marina’s mattress as he blurted out, “What the fuck?”

His words were chorused by Gretel’s stiffly growled “Mein Gott in Himmel!”

Steve’s response was neither quiet or restrained as he all but roared, “Who the fuck did that to you?! What happened!?”

The Colonel’s shoulders stiffened sharply, every muscle in his back in suddenly stark relief as he realized the tactical error he had made. “Der’mo,” he breathed, even as he dug his shirt from the pack and pulled it over his shoulders, hiding the scars from sight. Turning to face the room, he watched his fingers work nimbly on the buttons as he asked, “I have no idea what you’re talking about.”

“Der’mo,“ he breathed, even as he dug his shirt from the pack and pulled it over his shoulders, hiding the scars from sight. Turning to face the room, he watched his fingers work nimbly on the buttons as he asked, “I have no idea what you’re talking about.”

“You are your father’s son.” Gretel rumbled eyes narrowing in Will’s direction as she added on “Stubborn.”

“There are worse things to be,” he insisted, with a small sad smile, finger flipping up his collar and
looping his tie around his neck. In moments, the tie was tied loosely around his neck and he leaned back against the wall, arms folded as he stared at the floor. “Maybe instead of asking general questions, you attempt to get a little more specific?”

“The scars on your back Neffe, how did you get them? Who did that to you?” Gretel asked, crossing her legs onto the chair as she leant forward hands braced on her knees.

Fury’s tone was a low rumble, as he spoke first, “His name is Thaddeus Ross.”

“Nick!” Will growled, eyes narrowing as he glared at his boss.

Maria chimed in next, “He’s a general with the United States Army . . . he built them. Will’s real name isn’t William Grimm, it’s . . .”

There was deep resignation in the man’s tone as he sighed heavily, “Project One. Ross’ perfect soldier.”

“Now my brother’s words make sense.” Gretel mused with a scowl firmly in place on her face. “Why does this man still live? No one who causes that much pain and suffering deserves mercy. I will kill him.”

Will bolted up from the wall, real terror sketched across his features as he insisted, “Ross is untouchable . . . the safety and freedom of my brothers depends on no one finding out who or what we are. You can’t!”

Steve Rogers was gone; Captain America stood in his place instead. “You can’t be serious. You’re just going to let him get away with what he’s done to you?!”

“My brothers, Marina and my daughters are the only things in this world I would give my life for. I will not put them in danger, because I want something as flimsy and unimportant as revenge. It won’t change what happened to me, and it won’t stop the nightmares . . . I have to protect my family.”

“Is your family truly safe with him still out there Neffe? Are your daughters safe? If he found out where you and your brothers were . . . would he not go for the innocent babes first?” Gretel pointed out with an arched brow, her knuckles white as her nails bit through the material of the scrub pants and into her knee.

“Why do you think we don’t talk about it?” Will asked with a frown. “Fury knows, Maria knows, Dad . . . Marina . . . Marta . . . Casey . . . family. And I’m going to tell you a secret; most of the Misfits? Are other experiments; they have just as much reason to fear Ross as we do.” Will’s face hardened into stone, causing Gretel to instinctively withdraw backwards as he suddenly seemed to loom in place. “And if he ever tries to take my girls . . . there is no world in which he’d be safe. I’ll kill him myself.”

“Wait . . . is that why Ross assaulted Marina in Harlem?” Grant inquired wide eyed.

Taking a deep breath in through his nose, Will’s eyes drifted to look at his lover, her eyes softly closed in sleep. “Da . . . he recognized her. She had been the caretaker for the project . . . she was the one who got us out, who helped us escape. She took care of my brothers; I was 12 . . . there wasn’t much I could do to help. I did the best I could, but . . . I wasn’t really able to do much until I enlisted and could start sending my paychecks home.”

Steve’s fingers clutched the back of the chair tightly as he growled, “What did Ross do? How did you get those scars?”
“Does it matter?” he asked calmly, quicksilver eyes flashing through colors as he watched the American legend fume.

“I would think that would be obvious to you Steven.” Gretel spoke up, head cocked as she studied her nephew’s ever changing eyes curiously “And it is obvious William does not wish to relive it by discussing it further . . . ja?”

Grant’s teeth worried at his lower lip as he considered the mental picture seared into the backs of his eyelids. “Based on the marks and the kinds of scars, I can guess at what made them . . . and if you were 12 when you escaped? None of them should have been used on a child. Not even my parents were so cruel.”

The Colonel’s eyes drifted closed as he lifted his hand to pinch the bridge of his nose. “Specificity, Captain. Which scars did you want to know about? As you saw . . . I have rather a lot of them. Not all of them physical.”

Before Steve could answer the question Gretel twisted and sent a hard punch into her soulmate’s chest “You do not answer that. Tell us of which ever ones you feel most comfortable talking about William.” Gretel responded her accent thick and heavy in her seriousness.

“I’m not sure there are any I feel comfortable with, Aunt Gretel,” Will replied with a soft grin.

Hansel frowned, asking, “Which of them would make them less homicidal, Adler?”

“There aren’t any of those either,” he chuckled bitterly, before continuing, “Ross took me away from Marina when I was three years old. The first time he took a whip to me . . . I was five. I’m sure you can guess what kind of damage that left.”

“Our family seems prone to traumatic childhoods, brother.” Gretel sighed as dark chocolate eyes flicked to her brother and his wife and daughter. “In case he neglected to tell you, a witch was fattening him up on candy at 10 to eat.”

“I don’t think he mentioned that to me,” Will replied with a cocked eyebrow.

“It was the catalyst for our occupation.” Gretel admitted with a sad smile as she turned her gaze back to Will. Her gaze darted to Clint then with a bemused expression as she stated directly at him “If you come across a house made of candy . . . don’t eat the fucking candy.”

“Wait . . . a house made of candy?! That’s REALLY a THING!? Awesome!”

Maria’s nose wrinkled as she protested, “It was disgusting . . . trust me, I’ve seen it.”

“It was not always such . . . we made the mistake of partaking in its goods when we were children. We were hungry. What came after haunts me still.” Gretel grunted as her nose crinkled in recollection of the aroma of burning witch.

There was a gentle caress over her shoulders as Steve’s fingers brushed gently over the skin of her neck. Meanwhile Hansel rolled his eyes as he retorted, “I would disagree, Gretel . . . seeing you stab the Hündin was, in the words of my Falki, ‘kind of awesome’.”

“Oh yes it was enlightening, to say the least . . . a good way to discover we were immune to magic. I still remember the smell of her burning.” Gretel huffed with a roll of her eyes. She then turned around to tease Hansel by snarking “As usual I did all the hard work and you did the heavy lifting.”

“As per usual,” he remarked with a huff. “God forbid you do any of the difficult work.”
“Says the one of us who drank the most and spent most of our planning time flirting with the bar wenches.” Gretel retorted. “Admit it Hans, I was the brains and you were the brawn.”

“The most handsome brawn hyu have ever seen, Gret,” he agreed with a smirk. “As for who is the brains now . . . even hyur intelligence pales in the face of mein Adler’s.”

Gretel rolled her eyes before glancing to Maria and asking “How do you put up with his ego?”

“I have a rolling pin . . . and perfect aim,” she replied with a snicker and a smirk.

“Oh I’m going to like you, Maria.” Gretel stated with a wicked grin. “A woman after my own heart.”

Clint snickered, “Pops sounds a little outnumbered, don’t you think, Will?”

“Maybe just a little.”

“So are Marina and her daughters from what I can tell.” Gretel pointed out looking to Clint with a grin as her fingers twitched. “My fingers itch for my crossbow after this revelation of Ross and recollection of the past.”

Clint brightened at the statement, “You’re an archer? That’s so awesome! So am I!”

“We shall have to compare skills once I am permitted. Given the way you are perched I am going to assume you prefer to be higher than your fellows? Hopefully the right way up . . . unlike Hans.” Gretel teased.

“Damn it, Gret, that happened once,” Hansel grumbled slumping back in his chair and glowering at his gloating sister.

“Fall off a broomstick one time and it sticks with you for life, Brother dear.”

Bucky chuckled as he looked back at his boyfriend fondly, “You're practically itching to get the details of that story . . . I can feel the dresser vibrating with your curiosity.”

“And you're not even a little curious!? You're a terrible liar, Buck,” Clint scoffed with a wicked grin.

Glancing at Marina, Bucky shook his head fondly. “How can she sleep through all our ruckus?”

“Practice,” Clint chirped cheerfully, “She's had decades worth of practice.”

Chapter End Notes

Translations:

(R) samaya malen'kaya - my little one (Will's nickname for his longtime partner Marina Petrovka)
(R) kroshka - babies
(R) moy lyubimov - my love
(R) Prizrak - spectre (Marina's nickname for Grant Ward)
(G) Tochter - daughter (Hansel's nickname for Marina Petrovka)
(R) Sammichka - diminutive of Sam (Marina and Will's nickname for their oldest son, Sam Grimm)
(G) Mein Gott in Himmel - my God in heaven
(R) Der-mo - shit
(G) Neffe - nephew
(G) Adler - Eagle (Hansel's nickname for his oldest son, Will Grimm)
(G) Hündin - bitch
(G) Falki - little hawk (Hansel's nickname for his youngest son, Clint Grimm)
(G)
Hey guys!!! Sorry about the long silence. I'm on vacation and this is the first time I've had the opportunity to post. I may hopefully have another here in a couple days, but we'll have to see I guess!

Enjoy this chapter!

No translations.

Chapter 227: Downsides of Being A Grimm

There was a downside to being a Grimm not that Doyle had ever realized that before this morning. He was heading down to the labs to see his beautiful, gorgeous, too-good-for-him wife when he caught sight of a nurse muttering to herself as she all but jogged down the hallways. “Fucking Grimms . . . and their fucking children . . . and fucking multiplying.”

Frowning hard, he backtracked, reaching out to grab her arm and yank her to a stop. “I’m sorry . . . you said something about a Grimm? And multiplying?!”

The woman stared up at the dark haired tactical officer with wide, horrified eyes, stuttering, “Commander Doyle, I . . .”

“You what?” he asked, hand tight around her arm as he insisted, “Tell me what you said.”

Biting down on her lower lip, she glanced over his shoulder, clearly hoping that someone would come along to rescue her. When the hallway behind him remained empty, she looked back up at him sheepishly. “I don’t think I was saying anything particularly kind, sir.”

“Yeah . . . I got that part. So just tell me what you said without the profanity,” he snapped with a glare.

“Well Sir . . . all the Grimms were in medical. Scowling and grumbling . . . “ She trailed off contemplating her next words carefully. “Then Captain Rogers and and a woman that I think might
have been the Grimm’s aunt chewed the nursing staff out for not informing the Colonel on Agent Petrovka’s condition."

“What about Marina!?” Doyle’s eyes widened as his hands snapped up to grab her arms and shook her once, “What happened!? Is she okay!? Is it her babies?”

“She went into labor sir. They had to rush her into surgery, but both she and her daughters came through the operation fine.” The nurse stammered with wide eyes. The Grimms themselves were legendary for their ability to scare people with one look and it seemed to her to be an inherited trait.

“Surgery . . . what kind of surgery?”

“Cesarean section. Her placenta detached and she was bleeding badly. Dr Keller made the call before things could get any worse.”

“But she’s all right!? You’re sure?” he demanded, khaki green eyes snapping with worry and concern. Part of him itched with irritation - not one of his half-brothers had called. The rest of him acknowledged the unlikelihood of any such call if Marina had truly been as bad off as it sounded.

“Yes Sir, she’s recuperating in a private room on the maternity floor of Medical. Both daughters are healthy and strong, but . . . their father possibly not so much. The Colonel didn’t look like his usual put together self.”

Doyle snorted as he rolled his eyes, “Did the Colonel know that his partner was bleeding so badly?”

“I don’t think they told him the extent of her condition? Hence Captain Rogers and Miss Kuhn threatening them . . . I heard she threatened to disembowel them before tying them to a pyre and setting them on fire.” She screwed her nose up before shaking her head. “I was not there I was busy assisting in the theater.”

“Then I can’t possibly imagine why the Colonel isn’t ‘his usual put together self’,” Doyle snarked with a roll of his eyes.

“I’ll admit . . . my colleagues would have been better off keeping him informed. But fear does strange things to people,” she admitted. “There are rumors floating around that the Colonel broke down into his father’s arms . . . not that I normally pay such rumors much attention.” The clarification came hard and fast as she tried to cover her mistake.

The commander’s jaw tightened harder as he huffed, “Uh-huh . . . I’m sure you don’t.” Jerking his thumb over his shoulder, he asked, “What are you doing in R&D anyway? We’re nowhere near Medical.”

“It occurred to Captain Grimm that he hadn’t informed you and he requested I find you . . . I may have been hopeful that you’d already left?” The nurse’s eyes flicked downwards as she muttered her reply

“I hadn’t even arrived yet . . . I’m not usually in R&D until it’s time to retrieve my wife from her crazy science projects.”

“Had I known that I would have left a message with her as opposed to pissing you royally off.” She paused and then straightened. “Sir.”

“Probably a smarter idea than cussing out my brothers and family.”

“I am sorry about that. It’s been a long few hours and when all the Grimms are together in Medical,
things tend to get . . . rowdy and hectic,” she stated still looking anywhere but at the man in front of her.

“You realize that half of that is a direct result of their mistreatment at the hands of your colleagues, right? As far as I can tell, my brothers have done nothing to deserve the wild stories that circle Medical, and by extension the rest of the base.”

“The stories do seem to continually change between tellings,” she admitted with a scowl as she tried to recall whether or not she’d had anything occur with the Grimms that hadn’t been started by her colleagues’ disrespect for them. “Nurse Reyes seems to sing their praises.”

“That’s because Miranda is a saint and should be treated as such,” Scarlett’s voice inserted as she exited her lab, taking a moment to lock the door behind her. “Hello husband.”

“Hello Scar, my beautiful gorgeous amazing wife.”

Cocking an eyebrow, she watched him for a moment. Suspicion dripped from her voice as she asked, “What did you do?”

He smirked at her, teasing, “Why do you ask?”

“Because when you start getting prolific with the flattering adjectives . . . you’ve clearly done something,” she replied with an amused smirk. “Please tell me you didn’t forget the triplets?”

“They’re still at daycare, where they should be,”

The nurse glanced between them for a moment before interrupting in a hesitant voice. “Since I have now delivered Captain Grimm’s message . . . rather awkwardly might I add I’ll just be going?”

“Do me a favor? Stop cussing out my family, okay?” Despite putting his words in the form of a question, no one would mistake Doyle’s underlying order.

“Yes Sir. I’ll aim to follow Nurse Reyes footsteps and treat them with the utmost respect.” She nodded and then squared her shoulders. “It’s not proper for one of my career to rely on other people’s opinions of potential patients.”

“Wait . . . what message? What did I miss?” Scarlett inquired, stepping forward to link her arm with her husband’s, eyes wide as she looked up at him.

Looking to Scarlett the nurse gave a quiet reply. “Agent Petrovka had her twins.”

“SHE HAD WHAT!? When did this happen!?” the scientist shrieked, her eyes wide and horrified, “But she’s early!”

A gentle sigh met Scarlet’s reaction and the nurse nodded “She is, hence Dr Keller rushing her into surgery when she had complications. Both mother and children are fine and were resting when I clocked off.”

“Are you sure?”

Doyle spoke up then, interrupting his wife’s quiet freak out, “How about we head over to Medical and check on Marina? Considering the fact she had surgery, I doubt they’re going to have let her out this soon, right?”

“We should stop by the gift shop . . . get something for the two of them. Oh! And I should talk to the
other women...we should probably put together a baby shower or something now that she’s going to be off work for awhile and we’ll be able to pin her down for more than a minute at a time.”

“Nurse Reyes can point you to Agent Petrovka’s room. She’s camped out in the nurses station, waiting for her patient to be ready to return to his own room,” the nurse suggested before finally retreating.

“Patient!? What patient?” Scarlet asked, eyes narrowing in concern as she turned to look at her husband. “Is someone else hurt?”

“Your guess is as good as mine, Scar... let’s just go check on her, okay?”

Nodding briskly, she adjusted her grip on his arm and then began to tow her husband along. “Didn't Will call you?” she demanded pulling him into the sunshine as Doyle tried to fish his phone from his pocket.

“Marina just had an emergency c-section. I'll be shocked if we get there and Will isn't chain smoking and looking like someone just died,” the oldest of Hansel's sons replied. “Which means I'd be shocked if anyone remembered to call Gus.”

“Oh Gus! He'll be devastated if something happened to Marina and he wasn't here with her,” his wife insisted with a frown. “Shame on Will. Isn't he the genius?”

“The genius who is thoroughly devoted to his wife... partner... lover... whatever she is... and a total wreck without her at his side. Besides, Marina is the one in that relationship with all the social skills, remember?” he chuckled, grunting as he finally pulled his phone free. “Fucking finally!”

Using one hand, he dialled his younger brother, hoping the former firefighter wasn't working that day. Gus’ tone was tired as he grunted, “Hello?”

“Gus, hey, it's Doyle.”

There was a moment of startled silence as the younger man considered that. For all that Gus and Doyle shared the same family, they were both still trying to find their way... and neither of them were particularly close as of yet. “Doyle? What... no offense, man, but why are you calling me?”

“It's Marina, she went into early labor.”

“Is she okay!!” he demanded, sounding worried. It was no secret to the family that Marina was fond of this particular Prototype... and that he returned her affection with equal fervor.

“According to the nurse Jay sent to find me, mother and daughters are all doing very well considering.”

“What about Will? He's probably freaking out, huh?”

“I haven't seen him yet; we're on our way there now. But yeah, that would be my assumption as well.”

“I don't know how long it'll take me to get there. I have the time off - I warned the foreman I'd be leaving when Marina gave birth - but I still need to book a flight.”

“Don't worry about the flight. I'll take care of that. Just get your bag ready and be at your house in an hour; I'll send an agent for you.”
“Can do. And tell Marina I'm happy for her?”

“Roger wilco,” he laughed, before Gus grunted a goodbye and the dialtone sang in Doyle’s ear.

He couldn't help it . . . he blinked. Gus was eccentric and kind of a hermit, there was no escaping that fact, but Doyle had expected a little longer of a conversation than he’d gotten. “Gus is not a fan of small talk, apparently.”

“And that surprises you?” Scarlett gave him a look that clearly indicated he had lost his mind. “It's Gus!”

“I haven't talked to the kid in months. I was hoping for a, ‘hey dude, how you doing?’ Or maybe, ‘what's new?’ Not ‘okay, bye’.”

“Gus is an extreme introvert.” His wife heaved a fond sigh in his direction as she reminded, “Doyle . . . his best friend is 14.”

“Fifteen . . . Marina's been keeping track,” the man joked with a roll of his eyes.

“Of course she has,” Scarlett laughed, shaking her head. “Did you hear? Malee has been learning Chinese AND Japanese. She's planning on Russian next; our Family Viper is as pleased as punch.”

“German is a perfectly respectable language too, you know.”

“And Hansel would be amused if she attempted to learn it. But Malee adores Marina; it makes sense she learns her own language then attempts Marina's native language. She’s never even met Hansel.”

“Semantics,” he snarked, hand on the small of her back as he guided her from the elevator and onto the maternity floor.

“Kind of an important one,” she pointed out, smiling at Miranda as the nurse looked up and called out a greeting, “Dr. Doyle! Hi!”

“It’s just Scarlett, Miranda . . . I’m pretty sure I remember us having this conversation before,” the scientist laughed with a grin and reached out to squeeze the other woman’s arm. “So . . . who is the patient you’re waiting on?”

“I don’t think you’d believe me if I told you,” Miranda laughed before gesturing down the hallway. “Marina’s room is the last one on the left . . . she’s the only single room on the floor.”

“Special treatment, huh?” Doyle snickered, earning a laugh and a shake of her head, “No . . . more like the only person on the floor with an army’s worth of visitors.”

“How many people are in her room?”

“Your entire family. Fortunately, Dr. Keller and Dr. Grimm are her physicians or she’d be in trouble for sharing her bed . . . the other doctors on the floor get huffy about that kind of thing.”

“I highly doubt any of the other doctors would even be game enough to stick their head in that room, let alone request Marina’s bed guests and visitors to leave.” Doyle snarked with a grin as he looked to Miranda. “In fact I’m almost a hundred percent sure the only person who’d get away with that outside of my wife, Vincent and Marta would be you Miranda.”

“And considering how terrible the Colonel looks, I wouldn't even try. He's not looking so good. This scared him.” Shaking her head with a frown, she continued, “I've seen all of you in here at one time
or another, and with some pretty gruesome injuries but nothing has ever terrified him like the thought he was gonna lose her.”

“Which would explain his forgetting to call me and Gus.” Doyle pondered aloud with a frown before continuing “Chain smoking?”

“Your father took his cigarettes away as soon as he arrived,” she agreed with a nod.

“And knowing Will . . . Dad’s about the only one who could.” His face grew even more serious. “How is she Miranda? I’m not sure I trust the opinion of the nurse Jason sent.”

“The epidural was more potent than expected, so she still can’t feel anything, but her prognosis is good. She should recover just fine and with no side effects.”

“Thank God for small miracles. Will wouldn’t take it well if anything went wrong and he lost any of them.” Doyle frowned.

“Indeed. I was genuinely worried he was headed for a bed on the cardio floor . . . he looked seconds away from a heart attack when I arrived on the floor.”

“Which once again brings us back to my wife’s question. Who are you waiting for? None of my brothers are currently in medical as far as I knew.” Doyle inquired with a confused frown as he tried to rack his brain for who the nurse could be waiting for.

“He’s in with Marina. And I’m serious; you won’t believe me unless you see for yourself.”

“Cruel woman,” Doyle teased before tightening his arm around his wife. “We’d best go see then, and check to make sure Will hasn’t worked himself up too much.”

“Agreed,” came Scarlett’s firm concurrence even as she smiled at the nurse. “Thank you, Miranda.”

Guiding Scarlett down the hall Doyle hummed in thought for a moment before looking down to his wife as he spoke “For the life of me I can’t think who she’d be waiting for . . . it’s like holding a bone over a dog’s head and teasing it.”

“Well, are any of the Misfits in Medical right now? Maybe it isn't one of your brothers.”

“Not that I know of other than Vincent but he’s always in medical.” He pointed out with a grunt. “I do know Marina’s been keeping a close eye on her latest asset who’s in medical.”

“I highly doubt Grant WARD is going to be hanging out in her room with the family.”

“This is Marina we’re talking about Scar . . . collector of strays and Misfits alike.” Doyle teased as he extended his free hand to open the door to Marina’s room and usher his wife through ahead of him.

Scarlett’s hands flew to her mouth as she stared; Grant Ward was sitting in the chair next to Marina’s bed, his head resting on the bed and her fingers in his hair as he slept. The woman herself laughed quietly at something that was happening on her tablet. Twisting to look up at her husband, the scientist replied, “Apparently, I can be wrong. Oh my goodness . . . I didn’t think she’d managed to get this far with him yet. He’s been fighting her so hard!”

“Marina could chip her way through Italian marble with her nails if she had a mind to Scar. Still good to know you can admit to being wrong on occasion.” He teased head dipping to press a kiss to the apple of her cheek.
“Hush you,” she sniffed lightly, elbowing her husband lightly in the side.

Marina looked up from her tablet with a smile, “Hello Scar . . . Doyle . . . I’m so glad you were able to come by.” Looking down to her side, she used her free hand to smooth over something Doyle could only partly see. “My lover isn’t quite as meticulous as usual right now. I was worried he hadn’t informed you or Gus.”

“He hadn’t . . . Jason had an afterthought to let me know by scared nurse and I called Gus on our way here and arranged to have him picked up.” Doyle explained with a shrug. “Not Will’s fault; way we hear it he was in a bad place worrying over you.”

Waving them over with two fingers, she sighed, “Still in a bad place . . . Marta had to sedate him to get him to sleep.”

“Good. I’d hate to have to try and knock him out the hard way.” Doyle grunted as he guided Scarlett further into the room. His eyes sweeping over the family spread out and pausing on the pair seated on the floor beside his father “When the hell did that happen and who woke her?”

Hansel’s lips quirked in amusement, but remained silent, allowing Marina to answer. Neither of the people beside him did more than flick an eyebrow in his direction.

“Apparently around the same time I went into labor. And, believe it or not, Steve Rogers woke her.” Snickering, there was a wicked grin on her lips as she joked, “My boys are having a hard time trying to wrap their heads around the idea that Captain America is probably going to become their uncle.”

“They’re not the only ones . . . how’d Clint take it, given the circumstances?”

“Surprisingly well all things considered. Means Steve has no designs on Bucky. Far as Clint’s concerned, he’s as happy as a clam. Though still a little leery; they’ll work it out. I have faith in moy dorogoy.” Turning back to the tablet, she said, “Sorry, Daryl-honey . . . Doyle and Scarlett just came in.”

The familiar Georgian accent came through the speaker, “Hey Scarlett . . . Doyle!”

“Hey Daryl, hope you’re staying out of trouble and aren’t having anymore zombie run ins.” Doyle called with a smirk that soon fell off his face as Scarlett once again jabbed him in the ribs with the point of her elbow. “Ow.”

“It was an accident!” she hissed with a fierce frown, glaring at her husband with a pout.

“No, no zombies,” Daryl replied, chuckling at the byplay. “Clean up is almost done, fortunately. And . . . Carol and I are finally dating.”

“Bout time,” Doyle snarked with a shake of his head. “From what I hear you two have been dancing around each other for a long time.”

“Carol’s husband . . . he was abusive to both her and Sophia. She’s just been a little leery about getting involved with anyone . . . for Sophia’s sake.”

“Didn’t you help save the kid . . . or am I remembering incorrectly?”

“I did, except that when you’ve been hurt one too many times, you have a hard time taking kindness for what it is . . . kindness. But I adore the kid and she adores me. So we’re making our way; slow and steady wins the race, Doyle.”

“Congrats man.” Doyle chuckled glancing to his wife. “A good woman at your side makes life
worth living.”

Cocking an eyebrow at her husband, she snarked back, “A good husband who doesn’t tease you about former failures is even better than a good woman . . . husband!”

“I wasn’t teasing! Well . . . not entirely,” Doyle muttered with a sigh “I’m sleeping on the floor aren’t I?”

She gave him a beatific smile as she taunted, “Make it up to me, and maybe not. But it had better be good! And there should be groveling involved somewhere.”

“Yes Ma’am,” Doyle chirped with a wicked grin and salute “I’ll get right on that when we’re alone.”

“Hmm,” she humped with a glare, “You’d better.”

Marina chuckled, cocking an eyebrow at her son who was softly snickering in his chair, brilliant blue eyes still closed. “Something funny, Sammichka?”

“Just Aunt Scar and Uncle Doyle; do either of them ever actually think the other is mad at them?”

“You best start paying attention Sammy, you’re the next one heading down the aisle.” Doyle teased as he crossed to the chair Sam sat in to noogie his nephew’s head.

Sam grimaced under the attention, hunching between his shoulders. “Yeah, I know. You’re coming right?”

“Soon as we know when. I doubt I’ll be on assignment anywhere unless shit hits the fan or your Aunt Scar inadvertently creates another catastrophic world ending virus.”

Marina burst into subdued laughter, earning a grunt and a groan from the body on the other side of her. Looking down instantly, she soothed, “Sshh . . . sleep, my love . . . we’re safe here. Shhh . . .”

Will’s voice was quiet and sleepy as he asked, “Who is it?”

“Just Doyle and Sam and Scarlett . . . it’s okay. Close your eyes.”

“Kay,” he breathed, shifting his head to bury a little more into the side of her breast before slipping away again.

Marina’s eyes narrowed as she mused lightly, ‘That sedative was supposed to keep him out for at least eight hours. Or at least that’s what I was told.”

“It’s Will, Marishka. When has anything ever worked on him as it’s meant to?” Doyle pointed out in hushed tones.

“Tell me something I don’t know,” she giggled, her free arm cuddling her lover a little closer to her body.

“It’s all that stubbornness.” Doyle grinned as he patted Sam’s shoulder before gesturing a finger in Ward’s direction “We didn’t realise you were that far inside his walls.”

“To be honest, I hadn’t either. But he insisted on coming up to be with the family when Miranda told him I was in surgery. As far as I know, he hasn’t moved from this chair since he sat down in it.”

“Well . . . keep chipping away at him and he may just shed that robot persona he sports ninety-five percent of the time.” Doyle studied the sleeping agent and grunted “He’s likely gonna wake up stiff
sleeping in that position.”

“He hasn’t protested yet, and he’s **NOT** a robot.”

“Didn’t say he was,” Doyle retorted, holding up a hand. “Just saying - others have said that. I’ve seen glimpses of emotion from time to time but it gets quickly buried. Almost like he’s been trained not to feel.”

Sam and Marina both spoke up at the same time, “Garrett.”

Sam’s tone was angry and his features were twisted with fury, while Marina only looked sad and resigned. “That man makes me crazy.”

“Well the sooner we get him away from Garrett the better, yeah?” Doyle asked brows raised.

“I’m working on it,” Marina huffed, with a roll of her eyes. “I get to the point where I think I’m making headway, then Garrett rears his ugly head again. Rumlow was apparently here yesterday, reminding Grant of where his loyalty was.”

“Maybe Rumlow needs to be slapped with a restraining order then . . . or at least the Murderess equivalent.” Doyle stated with a wicked grin as he winked at Marina.

“He’s going to be spending his recovery in the handler pool . . . with Vika protecting him. At this point, I don’t think even Rumlow will be so stupid as to piss off my sister; she’s a Coulson, she should give him nightmares.”

“True, Rumlow has **some** brains in that musclebound head . . . does that go for Garrett however?”

“I think I’m going to strike out there. But Vika can handle Garrett. She likes Grant; she’ll protect him for me, while I can’t be at the pool to protect him myself.”

“Can’t be at the pool? That’s not something I **ever** thought I’d hear coming out of your mouth. God put his foot down huh?” Doyle teased as he patted Marina’s covered knee.

“Three **months**! I’m gonna go crazy! I can’t stay away from work that long . . . who’s gonna manage my idiots!? No one else who has tried, has ever come out sane!!” she wailed.

“What about Coulson? He can threaten to tase them and use them as a footrest while watching Supernanny.”

“That barely worked the first time,” Marina snorted. “Misha is much more likely to force obedience out of his brothers. And he’ll probably be at home with me for at least the first month.”

“So sic the **Soldat** on the idiots; between him and Captain America’s so called disappointed face they’ll sort them out. Right?” Doyle asked no one in particular.

“Bucky and Clint have to go back to New Mexico; they left their assignment there but they only have a couple days leave. And my boys are still shaky about Rogers.” Humming softly, she frowned, “I’ll figure it out. If I have to work a little bit from home, I will.”

Scarlett took a seat in one of the empty chairs, cocking an eyebrow at the pair seated on the floor, speaking in low voices as they basically ignored the rest of the room. “In some weird way, those two actually make a certain kind of sense.”

“The sleeping soldier and the cursed witch? Both of whom time forgot? Yeah, they do. They’ll have
someone to commiserate with while they try to figure out the world around them.”

“I think you mean the Witch and her Troll,” Bucky chimed in with a smirk from where he was still seated on the dresser with Clint using him as a pillow.

Steve looked up at that, “I am not a Troll.”

“You were and still are a troll at times, Punk.” Bucky tossed back with a wry grin.

“Shut up, Jerk.”

Gretel sighed then, “I miss my Troll.”

Daryl spoke up then through the tablet, “Okay, I had to have heard that wrong. Did she say she misses her troll!? Like a REAL troll?!”

“Ja,” Hansel acknowledged looking up from his dozing wife and daughter. “She had a real troll named Edward.”

“Have Hans, I have a troll named Edward.”

“No one has seen Edward in centuries, Gret . . . we cannot guarantee that he still lives,” Hansel argued gently, trying not to hurt her but also trying to be as honest with her as he could.

“Trolls don’t exactly walk around in the open Hans, and we have no idea their lifespan.” Gretel retorted with a scowl as her gaze turned to the back of the tablet. “What magic makes that little box talk?”

“Not magic, technology,” Jason cheered, eyes sparkling with the prospect of being able to teach his aunt about the new world and all the technology that was in it. “I can’t wait to teach you all about it.”

“Does that mean the weapons have advanced too?” Gretel inquired, eyes suddenly bright at the thought. “I do not know whether my crossbow survived our last hunt.”

“Even if it hasn’t survived, crossbows are still being made even now. As a matter of fact, I think Clint has one.”

“I rarely use it though, Auntie . . . you can have it, if you like.”

“I will take a look and try it . . . though mine had certain accessories to it. It had a cabling hoist system and a knife.” Gretel sighed at the loss. “It was a trusty weapon.”

“It has been 200 years since we were hunters in Germany,” Hansel reminded his sister. “I would think the weapon long gone.”

“I’m pretty sure my crossbow has a cable hoist anyway . . . the knife wouldn’t be hard to fit into the butt or even attach to the stock.”

“I will try what is available and proceed from there.” Gretel replied with a slight incline of her head.

“A woman after my own heart,” Daryl chuckled “Nothing more reliable than a well made, well maintained crossbow.”
Hey all! Enjoy this! It's gonna be a fun one!

No translations at all.

Chapter 228: Going Home

Malee Chuang was fussing at the contents of her picnic basket, as she moved down the street towards Gus Maitland’s house. There were several decades between their ages, but Gus was probably the best friend she’d ever had. Not that her other friends weren’t awesome - they were - but
since Rudy had been killed, Jacob and Leo had been weird. Three years later and things between the trio, once foursome, had never quite gone back to the way they’d once been.

Not that she herself wasn’t weird; 12 year olds didn’t latch on to older men more than twice their age, because they can sense a kindred spirit in loss. But then, her mother had always said that Malee wasn’t exactly the poster child of “normal”. Practically skipping up the path, she hummed to herself as she knocked on the door firmly. “Gus! It’s Malee!” she called, head cocking at the sound of panicked movement inside the small home. “Gus!??”

There was a curse from the other side of the door, before it swung open to reveal a practically frantic Gus Maitland. “Malee! Hi!” His eyes flicked down to the basket, earning a wince. “Shit, that was today?”

“We’ve had this picnic planned for a week,” Malee scolded, free hand coming up to brace on her hip. “It’s your day off and you promised!”

“I know, I’m sorry. But Marina had her twins and my brothers are sending someone to come and get me. I’m still trying to pack.”

Malee perked up instantly, eyes going wide and excited, “Marina had the twins! That’s awesome! Oh, I can’t wait to meet them!” Shoving the basket at Gus, she whirled on her toes and dashed away, calling back over shoulder, “I’m coming too!”

She didn’t even pause at the sound of his called, “Malee! Wait!”

“Don’t you dare leave without me! I’ll tell Sam on you!” she shouted over her shoulder, ponytail bouncing behind her as she rounded the corner at a dead run and disappeared from view.

Gus sighed at that remark, his gaze falling to the picnic basket in hand. He’d been seriously considering doing just that and if Malee called Sam . . . well that would get to Will at least . . . if not Marina as well. At which point, the Russian would probably tan his hide if he showed up without her favorite, soon-to-be protege in tow. He huffed quietly as he turned back into the house “How the hell do I get myself into these situations?”

Setting the picnic basket carefully onto the floor just inside the door, he went back to his packing. All the while, he was praying that the agent Doyle was sending for him would arrive before Malee returned, and he’d be spared having to explain the circumstances to her formidable mother, Dr. Chuang. The woman knew one too many of his secrets; becoming friends with her daughter had been both a blessing and a curse.

Unfortunately, the agent arrived mere minutes after Carla’s car swung into his driveway, Malee bounding out of the passenger seat while her mother pulled a small suitcase from the trunk. He blinked, surprised to see her so complacent about it. “Dr. Chuang . . . what are you doing?”

“Take care of my little girl, Gus . . . she’s bound and determined to go, and she’s on the phone already with your nephew. So either you take her with you now, or Sam sends a car for her after you’re gone. Either way, you’ll both be on the same Quinjet heading east . . . might as well resign yourself to it.”

“I’ll give her credit . . . she know’s how to play the cards to get exactly what she wants. Having Sam wrapped around her little finger definitely works in her favor.” Gus stated with a resigned sigh. “Even if I could convince the ‘jet to leave without her, Sam would likely tell Marina and get me in all sorts of trouble.”
“She’s going to be a handful . . . I pity the man she drags to the altar. He’s going to have his hands full with her.”

“Possibly . . . that being said she could be exactly what he needs too. Your daughter is an old soul I think, far too wise for her years on occasion.” Gus shook his head watching Malee chatting excitedly with Sam even as his lips twitched into a slight smile. “Sometimes I can’t tell if God sent me a guardian angel or a devil when she rocked up in my world.”

“Devil . . . definitely a devil,” Carla laughed with a shake of her head. “She’s either going to put me in an early grave . . . or she’s going to rule the world. I’m not entirely sure it won’t be both.”

“Well given her attachment to my sister-in-law I’m pretty sure the latter is going to happen first.” Gus acknowledged with a wry grin “Malee, quit yakking it up with Sam or we’re going to be late.”

Malee grinned as she chirped cheerfully, “Gus is giving me his ‘Grumpy Dwarf’ face, so I have to go. I’ll see you guys in a little bit . . . I KNOW! I’m so excited!!”

“Sam quit encouraging her!” Gus shouted with a shake of his head before moving to take the small suitcase from Carla in order to put it in the waiting car with his bag. "I'll look after her and keep her out of trouble. Upside is Marina will be too busy with her babies to be filling Malee’s head with ideas . . . I hope.”

Carla shook her head as she laughed, “I wouldn’t hold your breath, if I was you.”

“You may have a point,” he replied dryly with a roll of his eyes. “Maybe I can convince Clint to pull out his old circus routines to keep her distracted.”

“Your best shot at that? Babies . . . just keep her distracted with babies. She loves kids and they seem to like her back, so . . .”

“Which again also leaves me with Clint, he’s still not entirely grown up sometimes.” Gus retorted with a rumbling chuckle. “I can see that though, she’ll make a wonderful mother some day.”

“Let’s hope that day is decades into the future. I cannot handle the idea of my little girl as a mother. Not right now . . . maybe after she turns 50. Ninety works for me too; I am too young to be a grandmother.”

“Good luck with that. I can’t see her waiting that long.” Gus pointed out. “Your daughter is strong willed and once her mind is set on something you have exactly two chances of changing it. Buckley’s and none.”

Carla shook her head in resignation. “Don’t let anyone knock up my little girl, okay, Gus? Please?!”

Gus blinked, visibly startled at the question, before nodding, “Yeah . . . of course. Besides, Marina would probably murder anyone who even tried.”

“Good point,” the therapist replied dryly, smiling at her daughter as Malee bounded into her arms. “Be good for Gus, Sam and Marina, okay? And help Marina out with her twins while you’re there; don’t just be a layabout. One baby at a time is hard enough . . . two has to feel like never ending toil when there’s a dozen other people to take care of.”

“Yes Mom,” Malee agreed with a grin.

“Good girl,” Carla chuckled, hugging Malee tightly, before turning her over to Gus. “I’ll see you both in about a week? School starts then, so she’ll need to be back for the first day of the next
I'll have her back by then, I promise,” the man promised, with a small smile.

Nodding once, Carla squeezed her daughter tightly once more, before releasing her and stepping back. “Have fun. I’ll see you both in a week.”

Malee waved brightly, before spinning on her toes to look at Gus. Frowning at the sight of his suitcase in his hand, with hers at his feet, she demanded, “Where’s the picnic?”

“You want to have a picnic on the ‘Jet?” he asked, eyebrows up as she snatched his keys and bolted back to the house. The picnic basket was still sitting just inside the door where he’d left it, and she lifted it before relocking the house briskly.

“Why not?” she asked innocently, hooking the basket over her arm. “We have to eat, don’t we? Cause if you tell me you ate something today, you’re a liar.”

Rolling his eyes, he bent to grab her suitcase next. “Let’s just go . . . or is there something else you need before we leave?”

“Nope, we’re good,” she chirped, grinning up at the straight-faced agent who was standing beside the open door. “Hi!”

“Miss,” he greeted her, offering her a hand and helping her into the backseat of the car. “Mr. Maitland . . . are we ready?”

“Yes . . . let me get the cases into the trunk and we can go.”

Nodding, the agent moved around the front of the car and climbed into the driver’s seat. Gus shoved the suitcases into the trunk and slammed the lid before sliding into the car on the other side of Malee. “All right . . . let’s go.”

Several hours later, Gus was still shaking his head at the ride they’d taken. A Quinjet was nothing like any commercial liner he’d ever taken, and when the pilot had informed them they could remove their restraints, Malee had bounded forward to chat with anyone who would take the time to talk back to her. Their picnic had ended up being attended by their chauffeurs as well, earning an amused grin as the 15 year old proceeding to wrap the entire flight crew around her pinky fingers.

“Do me a favor? Behave yourself,” Gus chuckled, reaching out to ruffle her hair fondly as they walked down the ramp out of the ‘jet together.

“Yes Dad . . . you’re such a stick in the mind.”

“Hey, it’s not that. It’s just . . . Marina gave my brother Will a hell of a scare. And from what Doyle said, he’s still freaking out a bit.”

“Will is Marina’s boyfriend?”

“Partner . . . they’ve been together for longer than you’ve been breathing, kiddo,” Gus chuckled with a small grin, reaching up to ruffle her dark hair. “Come on . . . Sam was going to meet us here to take us to Medical.”

Malee grinned brightly; it was no secret that the then-12 year old had hit it off with the sunny-haired sniper back when they’d first met so long ago. His relationship with Marina had also helped Malee relax around the normally intense Russian; Marina could be scary when she had a problem to fix.
“He’s so awesome. Did you know he’s engaged? Getting married is so exciting, isn’t it?”

Gus cocked an eyebrow at her, teasing, “Finally found someone to turn your attention on?”

“Nope!” she chirped, before waving at the blond who was approaching the jet. “Sam!”

“Malee!” he called back on a laugh, his arm moving in a wide arc over her head.

Bolting off, the teenager launched herself at the young man, squealing with laughter as Sam wrapped his arms around her waist and swung her around in a wide circle. “Hi, Sam!”

The grin on his lips was amused, as he teased, “Sup Short Stack?”

“I am NOT short!” she squealed indignantly, punching at the sniper lightly.

Sam laughed as he looped his arms around her neck, teasing, “Yeah sure . . . whatever you say!”

Looking up at his father’s doppleganger - or was his Dad the doppleganger, seeing as he was younger by a couple years? - he grinned. “Hey Uncle Gus.”

“Hey Sam . . . how’s Marina?”

“Ma’s fine . . . she came out like a champ. And my sisters are precious and beautiful; they already have Dad completely suckered.”

“I’m glad she’s okay.”

“Yeah me too . . . Dad nearly lost it when he thought she wasn’t going to . . .” here he paused, turning uncertain eyes on Malee, a small frown at the corner of his lips. “It’s not important. Dad and Rene were sleeping when I left and Grant was still refusing to leave Ma. All things considered, she’s okay.”

“Grant? That’s a new name,” Gus replied, as Sam led the two towards an ancient Jeep idling on the airstrip.

“It’s complicated. Grant’s good people . . . Ma’s wearing him down, I think, slowly but surely.”

“This is a . . .” here he paused, the word escaping him for a moment, before he continued, “. . . a Misfit thing, huh?”

“I think so. She seems fond of this one, though he’s not making it easy for her at all.”

“Willpower? Against Marina!? Has that ever happened before?”

Sam grinned as he helped Malee climb over the back tire before swinging into the driver’s seat. “Not that I can remember. But hey . . . Ma needs a challenge every once in awhile, or she gets a little stir crazy.” Waiting for Gus to stow the luggage in the back and swing into the passenger seat, Sam shifted gears deftly before throwing the Jeep around and speeding off towards the city. “How was the flight?”

“Interesting,” Gus snarked as Malee cheered, “We had a picnic!”

“A picnic? On a Quinjet?! Well, that’s new,” he laughed, before the howling of the wind prevented any further conversation at all.

Sam swung into a parking space at a tall, imposing building that had Malee’s eyes going wide. “Where are we?”
“Medical . . . Ma’s on the fourth floor. Come on,” he insisted, sliding from the Jeep.

“You’re not going to put the top on?” Gus asked as Sam strode towards the door of the building.

The blond smirked, shaking his head as he laughed. “There isn’t a person on base who doesn’t know who that Jeep belongs to. And there isn’t a person on base stupid enough to piss off the owner of that Jeep. Anything and everything that’s in it will be perfectly safe. I promise.”

It was as they were entering the building that Jason was heading towards the exit. “Uncle Jay?” Sam asked, frowning at the frazzled look on his middle uncle’s features.

“I hate hospitals, Sammy, Medical is no exception,” Jason insisted, eyes wide as he glanced back over his shoulder. “Owen’s in with Will and Marina on guard duty, Rene and Will are both crashed out on cots in Marina’s room, and the combined force of Miranda and Marina are trying to get Grant to head for his own bed. I don’t need to be here . . . my sister already told me to go before I freaked out.”

“You want a ride home?”

“Nah, Casey’s coming for me. Go on . . . your mother could use your help with Ward.” Looking over, Jason offered his older brother a hand. “Hey Gus,” he greeted, before cocking an eyebrow at the teenager with them. “Hey . . . kid?”

“Hi Jason. Jay, meet Malee Chuang. Malee, this is my younger brother, Jason.,” the older man replied, accepting the hand and going easily into the firm embrace Jason pulled him into.

“Hi!” she chirped with a cheery wave.

Smirking at her inherent kindness, he turned back to the younger Grimm and asked seriously, “You okay?”

“I will be when I get out of here,” he insisted, looking up as headlights swung around and a car idled in front of the doors. “Look . . . you’re staying at Marina’s for a few days, right?”

“That’s the plan I think.”

“Then I’ll see you back at the house?”

Nodding in agreement, Gus clapped the younger man on the shoulder and agreed amiably, “Sounds good.”

“Awesome . . . I’ll see you in a bit then. Case and I are staying at the house, to finish getting the nursery set up. The twins are early, and Will doesn’t do well right now when he can’t see Marishka so . . . someone has to do it.”

Sam nodded with a grin, “I’ll let Dad know. He hasn’t exactly been all there lately.”

Jason’s grin was flashfire, if worried, as he replied, “Not since Marina grabbed her belly and went down at the house.” Clapping his nephew on the shoulder, he nodded at his brother, before bolting for Casey’s car and climbing into the passenger seat. All three of them could hear his relieved voice through the window, as he insisted, “Casey . . . I love you.”

“Damn right you do!” the woman laughed fondly, finger appearing in the hair at the back of his neck. “You’re a smart man. Let’s go home, Sexy.”
“God yes,” he agreed, head and shoulders disappearing as he leaned towards her seconds before the car pulled away from the curb and quickly disappeared from sight.

Whistling cheerfully, Sam spun on his heel and led the way into Medical. Gus’ eyebrows furrowed slightly as he inquired, “You don’t seem worried about your mom.”

Sam’s eyes darkened a little as he shrugged lightly, “I can’t explain it. I just . . . Ma’s gonna be okay. And some part of me just knows that. I’m not worried, because I know everything’s going to be fine.”

Gus frowned, even as he nodded. The young man seemed convinced; there was little to do but take his word for it. The two followed Sam into an elevator and then out into a hallway. The blond grinned at a nurse still standing at the nurse’s station, her mouth twisted in fond exasperation as she sighed, “Still playing stubborn, huh?”

“He HAS a bed . . . it would be more comfortable for him than a chair next to Agent Petrovka. But does he listen to me? Of course not! Does he want to go back to his room to sleep? NO! He’d prefer to give himself a crick in the neck than sleep soundly. He’s making me crazy,” Miranda huffed, eyes narrowing as she cocked her head at the two new visitors. “Geez . . . how many brothers does the Colonel have anyway?”

“A lot,” Sam laughed, as he squeezed her arm. “Gus, this is Miranda Reyes, our favorite nurse. Miranda, this is my uncle, Gus Maitland, and his friend, Malee Chuang.”

“Pleasure to meet you both,” she chuckled, turning back to Sam. “Your Dad’s been getting antsy with you gone for so long. I’d get in there if I was you.”

Bending, he pressed a warm kiss to her cheek, teasing, “Marry me?”

“You’ll have to take it up with my husband,” she cackled, smacking at him in amusement, before Sam turned to lead the way down the hall. The blond stepped out of the way of the door, hand coming up to push against Gus’ shoulder as he called into the room, “Hey Ma? You have a visitor.”

Marina’s eyes were tired but happy as she looked up from the dark head resting on the mattress next to her. Her lips curved into a warm smile as Gus greeted her, “Hey Marina.”

One hand came out to reach for him as she replied adoringly, “Gus . . .”
Hey guys!! New chapter!!

New cameo, I'll let you guess who!! XD

No new translations, so yeah, not gonna worry about them this time.

Enjoy! Thanks to all who reviewed the last one!

Also, if you have not read At The Royal York - at all or recently - there is a time break of several months during which this happens (March 2010).

Chapter 229: Setting to Rights

“Khishchnik . . . it isn’t that big of a deal,” the Winter Soldier insisted on a groan, as he hauled his go-bag over his shoulder and followed his pissed off Hawk down the exit ramp. “You just spent two days with your sister and your baby nieces. They’re happy and healthy and beautiful . . . what more could you ask for? Just let it go! I don’t care what he said about me.”

“I can’t ‘just let it go’ . . . Rumlow is pissing me off. You heard what Marina said . . . what Rumlow said to Ward. The kid’s family, Marina’s pretty much got ‘Property Of’ stamped across his forehead. And now he’s messing with Darcy . . . I am going to kick his ass.”

“Or, you know, you could just talk to Darcy,” Bucky sighed in reluctant resignation. If there was one
thing Bucky knew about the Grimms, it was the full extent of their stubborn. Once they made up their minds, there was no changing it. The former assassin was pretty sure that character flaw was their father’s fault.

Grumbling, the younger man scowled. “Rumlow’s in NYC anyway. As awesome as I am, not even I can hit a target from that far.”

Rolling his eyes Bucky snarked, “At least you are capable of seeing reason.”

Sticking out his tongue at his boyfriend, Clint looked over and frowned at the baby agent sent to retrieve them from the airstrip. “Geez, they look younger and younger every year.”

“Nah . . . we’re just getting older,” the other man chuckled, tossing his bag at the agent and climbed into the passenger side. “Hello, Agent Hardy. How are you?”

“I’m good, sir,” the dark haired young man replied with a small smile. “How was your trip?”

“It was good,” Bucky replied, before Clint all but leaped into the backseat of the car.

“Sup Frankie!? How’s your brother? He liking hand to hand with Brian?” Clint chirped, lounging lazily in the backseat.

Frank Hardy’s eyes were sparkling with amusement as he twisted to look back at the older agent. “Your brother is malicious.”

“Preaching to the choir here, kiddo,” the sniper laughed, head dropping back against the window and an imperial wave to his hand as he announced, “Drive on, young one! Destiny and Darcy await!”

Frank glanced at Bucky even as he shifted into gear, joking lightly, “He always this dramatic?”

“This isn’t dramatic . . . this is actually almost tame,” Bucky agreed his own head tilting to the side to rest against the glass. “Sitrep?”

“The artifact is giving off a strange electrical pulse, but we haven’t been able to figure out what it is yet.” Shrugging, he continued, “We’re working on it. We’ll figure it out.”

“I have no doubt you will, Hardy . . . you’re one of Jason’s best and brightest. He wouldn’t have sent you if he didn’t think you could contribute to solving the problem.”

There was a blush colored tinge to his ears as he ducked his chin a little bit, replying steadily, “Thank you sir.”

Bucky rolled his eyes, glancing at the younger man out of the corner of his eyes. “You don’t have to call me ‘sir’, Hardy.”

A cheeky grin creased his lips as he replied, “Yes sir.”

“Snarky little shit,” Clint laughed with a grin, “I like this kid.”

“Of course you do,” Bucky drawled with a roll of his eyes. “Like attracts like . . . or is that snark calls to snark?”

“Shut up, asshole,” the archer cackled, lunging forward so he was leaning between the two front seats. “Hey look! The lights are still on at the garage.” One finger poked at the young agent as he insisted, “Let me out, out front?”
“Sir?”

“I have pressing business with Dr. Foster’s hot, stacked intern. This talk is long overdue and I am NOT in the mood to put it off for any longer.”

“Tact, Clint . . . remember to employ some sense of tact, okay? Don’t run her off; I seem to recall the fact that you really like the girl.”

A flashfire grin, eerily reminiscent of his older brother Brian, was the sniper’s only reply, before he ducked from the car and bolted towards the doors. His head shook in amusement, before insisting, “Back to base, Agent Hardy.”

“Shouldn’t we wait for him, Agent Barnes?”

“Barton will find his own way back. I’m tired, Hardy . . . take me back to base.”

“Of course sir.”

Turning back forward, he sighed, “I hope he makes sure she’s not carrying her taser before he starts talking.”

Hardy glanced at the older agent with a frown, asking, “Are you sure we shouldn’t stick around?”

“Very . . . Ms. Lewis doesn’t like me much. Whatever they have to say to each other will be better if it’s just between them.”

Watching his superior out of the corner of dark eyes for a moment, it was a second before Frank Hardy nodded and put the car back into drive. “Yes sir.”

Meanwhile, Clint had stormed into the old station, calling insistently, “Darcy! Where are you!?"

The intern’s head came up fast from her laptop, eyes going wide as she stared at him. “Clint!? I thought you left!”

“My sister had her daughters . . . I went home for a couple of days,” he explained, thunderheads in his eyes as he watched her stand. “We need to talk.”

“I have nothing to say.”

“That’s fine . . . you can listen.”

“To what!?,” she demanded, squeaking as he reached out and took her hand, tugging her gently from her seat and towards the side door for some privacy. “Clint!”

“Do you wanna have this conversation in front of your friends? Or would you prefer to have some privacy?” he asked, even as he continued through the doors and around the back of the building.

“You’re a crazy person,” she insisted, tugging lightly on her wrist and surprised when he released her without protest. “What are you doing here? Shouldn’t you be with the rest of your jackbooted thug friends? And the killer?”

“I’m a killer Darcy,” Clint announced bluntly, eyes flashing as he folded his arms over his chest. “How are my bloody hands okay, while Bucky’s are intolerable to you?”

“Because you kill for a higher cause, on the orders of the government. The people you kill . . . they deserve it.”
“So did Bucky!” Clint insisted. “He was following orders, same as me. His orders just didn’t come from the same place as mine.”

“He’s a murderer, Clint . . . Brock was very clear on the fact that he’d probably kill me just for the fun of it.”

The archer’s jaw locked up hard at the statement, nostrils flaring as he forced himself to take a deep breath in through his nose. “Brock Rumlow is a disgusting waste of space, and a pitiful excuse for a decent human being. Ask your precious Brock what HIS kill count is sometime, huh?”

“At least he’s been honest with me about it!” she shot back, hands clenched at her sides.

“You’ve never even given Buck a CHANCE to be honest with you. As soon as he got here, you did a complete 180 on me . . . you totally blew him off every time I tried to introduce the two of you.” Shoving his hands back through his hair, he insisted, “You didn’t even try to get to know him, Darce . . . he’s been one of my best and dearest friends for ten years. Don’t you think I may know a little more about what kind of man he is, than Brock fucking Rumlow?”

“He dumped you, Clint!”

“No, I dumped him! And when I left, it was all a misunderstanding. And if I’d just opened my mouth and I’d talked to him, I would have known that.” Shoulders slumping, he sighed, “I don’t regret it, running off, because it means I got to meet you again. But Bucky . . . he’s important to me. And I want you to know him, because you’re important to me. Please, Darcy . . . just try?”

“I don’t want to try. The things Brock told me . . . I don’t want to know a man who is capable of that. I’m sorry.”

His lips twitched as he shook his head, “No you’re not. And we both know it.”

Turning his back, he shoved his hands into pockets. “I wish I could convince you that Bucky isn’t the monster you think he is. But I don’t know how to do that. I like ya, Darce . . . you know that. But I won’t give up one of the best people in my life, because of the bias you’ve founded on the words of a morally corrupt asshole with a history of being a total jackass and disgusting piece of shit.”

Glancing back over his shoulder, he sighed, “I’ll see ya around, Darcy.”

“Yeah . . . you too,” she replied sadly, fingers playing with the pendant of her necklace, watching as he disappeared into the night as though he’d never been there at all.

It was several hours later before Clint slipped onto base, waving his credentials at the gate, before disappearing into the barracks. His feet were soundless on steel flooring as he disappeared into his quarters, stripping out of his uniform and folding it onto the chair across from the bed.

Bucky’s bulk was a familiar lump under the sheets and he sighed as he slid onto the mattress and under the covers, plastering himself to his boyfriend’s back.

For a while, the room was quiet, before the sniper asked in quiet Russian, “Ne poshel, kak vy khoteli, da? (Didn’t go the way you wanted, huh?)”

“Net,” Clint sighed, brushing his nose against the curve of his shoulder blade. “What are we gonna do?”

“Be patient . . . that’s all we can do,” the older man reminded him, reaching back over his hip and taking Clint’s hand, pulling it up and around to press a warm kiss to his knuckles.
“I hate this . . . I love you, Buck, I do . . . but there’s something about her. She fills a hole that I didn’t realize was there. She’s light and warmth and sunshine; she’d be good for us.”

There was another long silence, before Bucky sighed, “I believe you. But you can’t force this, Clint. If you try, you’ll push her away.”

Nodding, the archer closed his eyes and sighed, “I love you . . . so much.”

A warmth crept into the quiet voice as the former assassin replied, “Ya lyublyu tebya, khishchnik, vsegda.”

Startled and blinking, Clint breathed in awe, “That’s what Will tells Marina.”

“I know . . . and I mean it. I would do anything for your happiness, Clint. Anything at all.”

Pressing closer to his back, the archer sighed, “I don’t deserve you, you know. But I have no intention of letting you go.”

“Good . . . because I have no intention of going anywhere.” It might have seemed impossible for a man as big and as solid as Bucky to snuggle into his smaller lover, but the Soldier had no problems managing it as he wrapped Clint’s arms around him more fully and rested his head on Clint’s pillow. “Go to sleep, khishchnik . . . we’ll figure it out in the morning. Okay?”

“Okay,” he agreed, pressing a warm kiss to the nape of his lover’s neck before nuzzling into him. “Good night.”

For awhile it seemed like the other man wouldn’t say anything. However, just before the archer slipped away, Bucky murmured, “Sleep well, love.”

*****************************

Something had changed, between Darcy and Bucky. And yet, Clint could still remember the aching feeling of unhappiness that had filled him that night, as he drew Darcy away from the ballroom containing his bloodied, mangled boyfriend. “Darce, come on . . . we gotta let the Doc work. We need to get you checked out, okay? Come on . . .”

“No!” she begged on a sob, straining against the arms he had wrapped around her belly. “This is my fault. I should have done something . . . I should have said something! I could have lied! I could have protected him!”

“Lying would have only made it worse, Darcy. It’s okay, peresmeshnika . . . he’s gonna be okay.”

“No!” she begged on a sob, straining against the arms he had wrapped around her belly. “This is my fault. I should have done something . . . I should have said something! I could have lied! I could have protected him!”

“Lying would have only made it worse, Darcy. It’s okay, peresmeshnika . . . he’s gonna be okay.”

“He just took a half dozen bullets in the chest . . . how can you say that!?” she screeched, eyes wide as he finally managed to drag her completely from the ballroom.

“Because I know Bucky . . . and he will fight like hell to stay alive.” There was a small, sad smile on his lips as he continued, “For my sake . . . and from the looks of things, for yours.”

Sniffling hard, she stared at him in shock. “How are you here? I didn’t know you were here? Who were those people?”

“My family . . . my sister, HER sisters, my brothers, my nephew, my uncle, my sister’s Misfits . . . people we trusted to rescue Bucky and you.”

“I don’t understand. It’s only been about an hour; how did you all get here so fast?”
Clint snorted with a roll of his eyes, one hand coming up to scratch at the back of his head. “Believe it or not, it’s my nephew’s wedding in three days. We all came to help put the finishing details on the event.” One shoulder shrugged as he sighed, “It was just a matter of luck, that’s all.”

“Younger nephew . . . lives in Toronto?”

“My nephew is Sam Braddock . . . although, his real name is Sam Grimm. He only goes by Braddock when he’s working.”

“Braddock? Jane’s BODYGUARD!?” she squeaked, eyes wide open in shock. “He’s your NEPHEW!?”

“Da. He’s my brother Will’s oldest son. Will and Marina adopted him almost three years ago.”

“Why the hell was he assigned to Jane?” she demanded, hands coming up on her hips.

“Because this is not his first protection detail at the Royal York,” came a Clint’s voice from behind her, the tone uncharacteristically stern and almost angry.

Her eyes went wide in alarm as she stared at Clint - who was in fact standing in front of her - earning a wicked grin from the archer as he laughed, “Darcy . . . meet my brother, Colonel William M. Grimm of the United States Army. Will, this is Darcy Lewis.”

Spinning slowly on her toes, she stared up wide eyed at the nearly identical face of the man behind her, molten silver eyes looking down at her from their several inches of height difference. “Hi?” she squeaked, looking sheepish.

One eyebrow cocked upwards as he watched her; frankly she was a little offended his eyes never strayed from her face. She had fantastic breasts . . . they’d gotten her out of more than a few tight spots before. It would be a lie to say that she wasn’t looking for a little help. Colonel William M. Grimm, to be honest, looked pissed. “Miss Lewis,” he replied, eyes piercing into her for a second more, before they moved to his brother. “How’s Bucky?”

“Four bullets, center mass. Marina’s gonna be pissed.”

“Marina IS pissed . . . Lucky is inside grumbling about the ‘Boss Lady breaking all her toys’ again,” Will replied with an amused smirk. “Sam’s in with Vincent?”

“Yeah . . . Vincent needed extra hands and Sam is field trained.”

“Good,” he said, eyes scanning back to the intern. One eye narrowed slightly as he frowned, “You’re Darcy Anderson-Lewis . . . aren’t you?”

The woman blinked at him, startled by his usage of her full last name. She’d refused the “Anderson” identifier since she and her father - the King Asshat that he was - had had their final blow out and Darcy had left Ohio, as well as her beloved baby brother Blaine, behind. “How do you know that?”

His mouth relaxed as one corner of his lips quirked upwards. “I make a point to know everything about the people my brothers claim feelings for. It’s safer that way.”

“Safer!? For who? Stalker!” she exploded, hands coming up on her hips as she glared up at him.

“You are aware of what we do for a living, right? The last thing I want is some HYDRA mole sneaking in and taking out my family because one of my brothers fell head over heels and I didn’t do the smart thing, and check them out.” There was a small tensing in the corner of his smile, morphing
the expression to a grimace, as he insisted, “I value my loved ones too much, to care about a little thing like privacy.”

Her eyes narrowed at him, even as her logic brain argued that he did have a valid point. It was probably smarter not to trust anyone at the outset than it was to trust everyone. Which, of course, didn’t mean she had to like it. Folding her arms over her chest, she huffed, “Fine . . . I can kind of understand how that makes sense. However, just as a word of warning, it’s just Lewis now. Anderson has gone the way of the trash heap and I am more than content to let it rot there.”

Nodding once solemnly, he agreed, “Understood.” His head cocked to the side as he asked, “Are you all right, Miss Lewis? I understand you’ve been through quite the ordeal.”

Her eyes rolled as she blew a steady stream of air from between her lips. “I’m fine . . . my personal bulldog made sure of that.”

There was a moment where the Colonel seemed stunned at the response, before he shook his head. “Agent Barnes is one of the best agents I have. He asked to be head of your security detail specifically, left my son Sam to guard Jane.” He smirked as he continued in an almost teasing tone, “To be honest, it was a little startling. Bucky doesn’t usually like anybody.”

Clint’s grin was small as he watched Darcy slouch. “Damn it. Now I feel like a bitch for being so awful to him.”

“It’s okay . . . we all know who would be the one to blame for that little detail.” Will insisted, as his younger brother hissed, “Rumlow will get his . . . you can be sure of it.”

The Colonel chuckled as he reached out to ruffle his brother’s hair, teasing, “No blood on Marina’s carpet. Dong le ma?”

“Da,” the archer grinned with a wicked gleam in his eyes.

Turning back to the intern, the man nodded briskly in her direction. “You should get checked out, Miss Lewis. Clint can see you to the medical staff here on site.” Glancing up as someone called his name from the other side of the crowd, he nodded at her formally and insisted, “It was a pleasure, Miss Lewis. I imagine we’ll be seeing you more over the next little bit, yes?”

She blinked in surprise at the question, glancing at Clint in hopes he could provide the answer. The agent grinned as he promised, “We’ll see you at the hospital, right?”

“Likely . . . I have to head in eventually to check on Buck,” Will replied, looking over as the call came again, this time infinitely more impatient. “I’m coming! Clint . . . Miss Lewis . . .”

Darcy watched him stride through the crowd for a moment more before rounding on her . . . whatever he was, hissing, “You didn’t tell me you and your brother were identical!”

“Didn’t think it was important,” he replied with a lazy shrug.

“Of course it was important! Are you twins!?”

“No . . . Will’s ten years older than I am,” he explained, steering her towards the ambulances. “And I have eight brothers . . . most of them look like me.”

There was a long moment as she tried to assimilate that information before her voice screeched over the sounds of the crowd, “WHAT!?”
Yes, that IS Frank Hardy of Hardy Boys fame. And yes, Joe and Nancy Drew WILL show up at some point, I promise.

Also, check out Caiti and BairsSidhe's fics within the verse guys. They are awesome!!!!
So there was some confusion in the last chapter. Thor DID show up and he DID go back. However, because nothing really changed, I didn't feel the need to go into detail. We will see Thor again, I promise, very soon in fact.

Also. There is a story timeline coming. As soon as we've finished hashing it out, I will get it posted. Thank you!!!

Chapter 230: A Day of Firsts

Grant cursed silently under his breath as he fought to get his pants on over his knee. The brace had been a constant fashion accessory for three months already and he was more than ready to shoot a rocket at it . . . though, preferably not attached to his leg. “Fuck shit damn,” he cussed, teeth grinding as he struggled.

A knock on the door of his room jolted him upwards in surprise. “Yeah . . . I'm decent . . . mostly!”

Sam stuck his head into the room with a small smile. “Your grasp of profanity is awe inspiring, man.
“Seriously.”

“My pants are stuck,” Grant muttered, yanking on his pants.

“Okay, first of all, you're going to rip them. Second of all, you could ask for help,” the blond reminded him, coming into the room and crouching at his feet. Smacking at Ward’s hands, it was only a couple moments before the fabric was free, the brace was sitting correctly around the joint and Sam was drawing the pants upwards past the brace. “Voila . . . crisis averted.”

Grant blushed lightly as Sam moved to lean back against the dresser, watching the other man finish pulling his pants up and fastening them at his waist. Fumbling upwards, he hopped awkwardly to grab the belt from off the table. “Thanks Sam.”

“You are hella stubborn, you know that?” the sniper asked. “Would it KILL you to ask for help once in awhile?”

Grant kept his focus on his hands as he threaded the leather through his pants, shrugging haphazardly. “I'm used to being self-sufficient. Asking for help doesn't come naturally to me.”

Blue eyes rolled as Ward hobbled to the chair where his shoes were resting. Bending, he grabbed them up before making his way towards the bed. It took two seconds of struggling before Sam let out a foul curse and moved forward. “You kill me, Grant . . . like seriously. I'm standing right here!”

Shrugging, the specialist watched as Sam helped put his shoes on as though he were a child, triple knotting the laces just to make sure they didn't come loose. He frowned, watching his friend stand again before blurting, “Are you sure you want me to come to your wedding? You're SURE??”

“Oh geez, don't start this again,” Sam groaned.

“I just . . . I've never been to a wedding.”

“You have the easy job. You sit in a chair between Vincent and Ma and watch. I'm the one who has to remember my vows and say I do and endure a hundred eyes on me.”

“There's not gonna be a hundred people there,” Grant reminded him with a roll of his eyes.

“It was a figure of speech, Grant . . . people use those.”

Narrowing his eyes, he sighed, “Come on, Sam, be serious.”

“I am being serious. You're my friend. Friends come to weddings. I want you, as my friend, at my wedding.”

“But . . .” the brunette protested, earning a sigh and a grunted, “You're an idiot.”

“I am not! I have a decent if not exceptional IQ. I passed all my tests and . . .”

Chuckles stopped Grant in the middle of his diatribe. Frowning, he looked up to see Sam laughing. It took a moment for the light bulb to switch on, before he groaned, “Figure of speech?”

“We'll turn you into a real boy eventually,” Sam replied in answer with a smirk.

“You're hilarious,” Grant joked with a halfhearted glare, before leaning over to grab his crutches.

“Why thank you . . .” Sam sassed, following him from the downstairs guest room and out into the living room of his house. “Do you have everything?”
Grant shook his head, as he maneuvered to grab the items off the coffee table, a book, a notebook and a pen which ended up making its way behind his ear. Sam rolled his eyes in amusement as he watched Grant try to figure out how to use the crutches without losing his things. Stepping forward, he lifted the books and tucked them under his arm. “Come on . . . everyone else is already at the courthouse.”

Nodding, Grant hobbled after Sam as he led the way out to his truck. It took a moment’s maneuvering but eventually, he was inside and they were on their way. “How’s your uncle?” Ward asked, fiddling with the pages of his book as he stared out the side window.

“Bored and frustrated. My Uncle Clint is kind of smothering him.”

Glowering down at his knee, the specialist grumbled bitterly, “Must be nice to heal so fast.”

“Welcome to the world of the supersoldier. It’s a wealth of crazy ideas, batshit plans and a boatload of injury. But at least life is never boring,” Sam chuckled with a grin. “And because they heal so fast, it’s only a couple days before they get to do it all over again.”

“Yeah well us non-supersoldiers go out and do it all over again after a couple of days too.” Grant reminded with a low huff.

“Yeah . . . how long has it been since you’ve been in the field? Cause I don’t think Ma’s let you leave the handler pool since you got transferred from under Garrett last time you got hurt.”

“That was my last time. She’s adamantly I’m not allowed back in the field till I’m fully recovered. And between her and Vincent I don’t have a chance in hell of changing their minds.” Grant said with a roll of his eyes. “Don’t get me wrong; I appreciate what Marina is doing but I’m going stir crazy in the handler pool. If I never see another piece of unfinished paperwork, it’ll be too soon.”

Glancing at the book in Grant’s hands, Sam asked, “So is that why you brought work with you on vacation?”

“This is different. I like doing these for Marina . . . I never had a chance to read before now.” Grant shrugged, his head turning slightly towards Sam. “It’s enlightening?”

“So what are you reading?”

“Much Ado About Nothing. It’s a play by Shakespeare.”

The blond grinned as he teased, “I know what it is, Grant; I’ve read it before. Any favorite parts?”

“Not yet . . . I like that Beatrice isn’t a weakling though. And Benedict is funny.”

“The two of them are a hoot; I’ll let you read the whole thing before I tell you why I love them. But they’re the best characters in it. Certainly the most memorable.”

Grant flipped the pages through his fingers. “I’m only a little bit into it. I just started it.”

“Then sit back and prepare to laugh. It’s a riot.”

There was a reluctant smile, before Grant asked, “You’re SURE?!”

“Grant . . . shut up.”

The two friends arrived to find Marina flitting around the room. One of her daughters was tucked
against her chest and the other was in Will's arms, as the Colonel talked with his brothers. She looked like a honeybee gathering pollen . . . except three times as scary.

The two joined the circle, at about the same time Brian did, confusion on his face. “Okay, I missed something,” the brown eyed brother insisted, glancing back over his shoulder. “Who's the new girl?”

Will smiled at Grant and Sam, before turning back to his brother. “Which one?”

“The one holding onto Bucky’s hand like a spider monkey? Seriously, we're not gonna eat her.”

“That's Darcy Lewis. From what I understand, she has joined the relationship between Clint and Bucky.”

“She's one of their flings!?”

Aaron chuckled as he shook his head, “Nah . . . it's a permanent thing.”

“Wait, so the trio is a threesome?” Natasha asked curiously, even as her lover announced, “That doesn't explain what crawled up her bonnet and died.”

“It’s entirely possible that she’s a little daunted by the lot of you. I doubt Agent Barton informed her at first that all his brothers were identical and you all are very scary upon first impression.” Grant chimed up suddenly, his eyes flicking between the gathered Grimms before resting on the Colonel.

“She was appropriately stunned, when I met her for the first time last week,” Will agreed, reaching out to clap him on the shoulder gently.

Sam grunted as he replied, “Asshole terrorists. They couldn't have taken the hotel hostage AFTER my wedding?”

“And what is your day job again?” Grant snarked his eyes flicking to Sam. “Terrorists in general aren’t usually accommodating to our wishes.”

“Yeah, I don't care. Jules, on the other hand, wasn't happy about the delay. It gave Ma an extra four days to ‘brighten up’ the venue.”

“It’s your mother Sam . . . she would have done it regardless of Jules’ wishes. She wants the best for her boy.” Grant pointed out with a grin.

Sam grinned in return, glancing over at the threesome. “So, she's completely taken off guard then. The Grimms don't exactly come with a handbook or a reliable frame of reference.”

The two younger agents looked back at the younger woman. She was clutching at Bucky’s hand, as though he was her lifeline, while also fussing at the assassin whenever he tried to do anything. “So here's the next question? Should we go rescue Darcy? Or Bucky?”

“Well that and she met the most reckless Grimm first,” Grant chuckled, head cocking slightly as he studied to picture. “Frankly I think Bucky needs the rescue more, I don’t think Clint is the only one fussing over him.”

Sam sighed, "The things we do for love of family." Looking up at his dad, the blond snarked, “Grant and I are gonna go rescue Uncle Bucky. Is that okay?”

Will nodded once, an amused smile on his lips, before watching Sam prod the taller agent in the trio’s direction. “This should be interesting.”
“Why do I suddenly get the impression you are planning to use me as a shield?” Grant grunted as he hobbled along on the crutches towards the newly arrived trio.

“First rule of combat among Grimms? Don't harm the wounded,” Sam replied with a snicker.

“Right; so you’re expecting retaliation and I’m your best defense against it.” Grant shook his head before finally pulling to a stop in front of the group.

“Pretty much,” the sniper agreed, before grinning at his uncles. “Hey Uncle Bucky . . . Uncle Clint.” Turning to the woman, he turned on his WOW smile and insisted, “If I wasn’t getting married today, I could honestly say you're beautiful. However my sexy sniper chick would probably shoot me for even looking at another woman, so I'm gonna ask what you're doing with these idiots instead.”

“Your sexy, knocked up and hormonal sniper chick would take it out of your ass.” Grant retorted with an eyeroll “Though he kinda does have at least half a point in the latter, namely in regards to Clint.”

Darcy stared up at the two with wide eyes, prompting Bucky to take pity. “Darcy, my nephew Sam Grimm, and his friend Grant Ward. Guys, this is Darcy. Be nice.”

“Do you really think Marina would let us get away with not being nice to someone who is obviously attached to two of her boys?” Grant asked arching one brow as his eyes flicked to Bucky with a half grin. “Frankly I’m in no condition to handle her wrath.”

“How’s your book report coming?” Clint teased with a smirk.

“Marina has one waiting on Sam’s kitchen bench and I’ve only just started the next book.” Grant retorted as he shifted on the crutches.

Darcy patted the say next to her. “You look tired. Go ahead and take a seat . . . the both of you. You look like you have stories. I could use all the ammunition I can get.”

“I’m still learning the ammunition against them myself,” Grant chuckled even as he gladly slid onto the bench at Darcy’s offer.

Sam grinned, “I, on the other hand, have a lot of it. Ask me anything you want to know.”

Clint glowered at his nephew, muttering, “Don't make me get Marina, Sammy.”

“You really think Marina’s gonna do anything to him on his wedding day?” Grant retorted as his head tilted to look up at Clint. “She gets a little over protective of weddings from what I’ve been noticing.”

“Damn it,” he muttered, slouching back in his chair before reminding his nephew, “Just remember, I know where you keep your favorite rifle. I'd hate for the firing pin to go missing or something.”

“Doesn’t he know where you keep all your bows?” Grant queried as he looked to Bucky one brow arching “You're looking good given the extent of the injuries I heard you received.”

“Four bullets to the chest sucks . . . I don't recommend it,” Bucky agreed with a small grimace in place of his usual grin.

“Marina lecture you about being reckless and putting yourself in the line of fire, yet?” The specialist shifted on the bench to try and get his leg in a comfortable position. “She’s kind of scary when she goes into that whole over protective mother tiger mode.”
“I have more than a little experience with Marina's overprotective tendencies. I've been dealing with them since she was a child,” Bucky reminded the brunet with a grin. “But there may have been a conversation like that at some point in the last week, yes.”

Sam grabbed a chair and hauled it over, ordering, “Put your foot up. Your fidgeting is making me antsy.”

“You sure it's that making you antsy and not the impending nuptials?” Grant snarked even as he put his foot up on the offered chair “But thank you.”

Darcy snickered, amused by their relationship. “So . . . how long have you two been friends?”

Grant snorted, “Well . . . we're friends?! No one bothered to clue me in!”

“Shut up,” Sam chuckled, features bright and laughing as he rolled his eyes.

“I'm not the one to ask on that though Darcy. This is all new to me . . . prior to Marina swooping in most people called me a robot, or pinocchio.” Grant said quietly offering the young woman a slightly sad smile.

“Pinocchio?” she echoed, eyes wide at the undercurrent of loneliness in his eyes. “Why Pinocchio?”

“Well if you ask Sam, I'm sure he'd say I wasn’t a real boy and that they are doing their best to rectify that.” Grant admitted with a sigh. “I got used to being a lone wolf and staying away from human companionship.”

“Everyone needs a little love, Agent Ward. Even Pinocchio.”

“Maybe . . . frankly I'm still adjusting to the whirlwind presence that is Marina.” He chuckled with a shake of his head. “How she stays sane with this lot around boggles the mind.”

“Practice,” Bucky and Clint announced together, earning a chuckle as the archer continued, “Lots and lots of practice.”

“Somehow I suspect that Darcy is probably going to need to learn Marina’s trick.” Grant’s lips twitched slightly.

“Probably,” Sam agreed, seconds before Marina bustled over, offering the baby to the blond “Sam! Take your sister! I have to go figure out what happened to the officiant.” Giving the woman a warm smile, the Russian insisted, “Hello Darcy. I'm so glad you could make it. Grant . . . you stay off that knee as much as you can, da?”

“Da,” he agreed looking up to the woman with a sheepish smile.

Combing her fingers through his dark hair fondly, she then went up on tiptoes to press warm kisses to both her son’s and daughter's cheeks. “Love you, Sammy-honey.”

“Love you too, Ma,” the blond replied with a warm smile.

Darcy’s eyes were wide as she watched the handler disappear. “I was fully expecting to be terrified of that woman.”

“Give it time. You'll see the Gadyuka eventually. Maybe sooner than later depending on Sam’s fiancee and her current mood.” Grant turned to Darcy with a shrug. “Marina is the most loving person you’ll ever meet . . . until you hurt one of her boys. Than she'll likely disembowel you before
ripping you to shreds.”

Sam sighed, “My fiancee would be one of those people my mother doesn't like for that exact reason.”

“Jules was a bitch.”

“She had her reasons.”

“Be that as it may, her execution in the matter left something to be desired,” the specialist snarked with a roll of his eyes. They hadn't been friends then, but as he’d told Sam, he wasn't stupid. Marina was NOT happy with Jules, and he’d asked why. Sam had told him; he made his own opinions from there, an opinion Jules had not done much to overturn, though they had admittedly never spent any time together to this point. “Your mom loves you . . . she's biting her tongue, but I promise you . . . she hates this.”

“I know. She's trying though, for my sake at least.”

“Can the same be said of Jules though? She seems to avoid your family as much as can be possible from what I’ve witnessed and especially from being alone with any of them.” Grant shook his head and mentally chastised himself for voicing his opinion.

“I'm working on it,” Sam sighed, glancing over to where Team One was chatting amongst themselves. Spike was the only one who had ventured to the Grimm side of the room. He and Jason were animated in their conversation, which mean there was some kind of technobabble happening.

“Maybe the baby will mellow her out a little. It’ll certainly give her an in with Marina anyways.” Grant looked to the baby in Sam’s arms before scrunching his nose up and crossing his eyes to try and entertain the infant “Which of your sisters is that? I still can’t tell them apart.”

“Valya.”

“Hey there little Miss Valya.” Grant chimed one hand lifting to stroke at her cheek “They are getting bigger.”

“They're three months old already. I can't even believe it. Jules is 4 months pregnant too. It's insane. Five months, I'm gonna have one of my own.”

“Another person who’ll have you wrapped around their little finger,” Grant teased.

Bucky chuckled from where he was cuddling with Darcy. “Baby fever is on the wind. You thinking off a child of your own, Ward?”

“That kind of involves having a woman in your life who can stand being around you, Barnes.” Grant scoffed as he slouched back against the seat.

Sam laid his hand on his shoulder, squeezing warmly. “It'll happen.”

“Yeah and pigs fly, Sam.” The specialist retorted with an eye roll even as his hand came up to squeeze at Sam’s in appreciation.

Clint smirked, “Never thought I'd find our girl again, but we did. Just . . . keep an open mind, yeah?”

“All I can promise is that I'll try. Might take some rewiring of my thought processes though.” Grant snarked back at the archer with a grin.
The archer laughed, “I know a good tech nerd who could take care of that for you.”

Jason snorted as he approached, “You had better be talking about me, birdbrain.”

“Despite being called a robot I’m a hundred percent sure my brain is not a computer.” Grant snorted as he shook his head.

Darcy giggled, amused by the interplay between these men she’d committed herself and their family. Clint grinned, “Nah . . . I was talking about Hardy.”

“Good thing I like the kid, otherwise I’d be sincerely put out,” Jason snarked, before turning to Sam. “Your presence is required. I’ll take your sister.”

Sam suddenly looked nervous, even as he offered the baby to his uncle. “Shit . . . this is it. I’m getting married.”

“Someone make sure the doors are locked and the windows closed. Last thing we need is to lose the groom and face a hormonal, angry bride.” Grant teased even as he squeezed at Sam’s arm one more time before letting his hand drop.

“You suck.”

“You're the one who keeps telling me to be a real boy.” Grant tossed back with a smirk. “It seemed a good time to try it out.”

Sam rolled his eyes, before straightening his coat and moving towards the front of the room. “Here we go.”

Turning his head towards Sam’s uncles, Grant asked “What do you think the chances are that they get through this without the team being called out?”

“One in a million.”

“You think Marina will ever get used to Jules being a permanent fixture in the family? I get the oddest impression she already likes Darcy more than Jules.”

Clint chuckled, “You would not be wrong.”

“Buckle into your seat Darcy, I think you’re officially now part of the family crazy.” Grant turned to the brunette nestled between Clint and Bucky with a wry grin. “Though I’m pretty sure these two will keep you safe.”

“Oh that's not ominous at all.” Eyebrows furrowing, she asked, “It's a good thing she likes me, right?”

“So long as you don’t hurt her boys you’ll be fine. A badass Marina may be but there’s nothing she wouldn’t do to keep her family happy.” Grant admitted “It takes a little getting used to.”

“Spoken like a man with experience,” Bucky chuckled, wincing slightly as he pulled on the still healing wounds.

“Don’t laugh with bullet wounds in the chest man, they hurt like a son of a bitch.” Grant remarked with a sympathetic wince.

“Again with the experience.”
Grant shrugged his expression falling deadpan as he mumbled “What can I say I was broken a lot when Marina scooped me up. She’s still piecing me back together like Humpty Dumpty.”

“Did Garrett really drag you back out into the field after that fucked up mess?” Clint asked, tone hushed as the music began to play, though still curious.

“He always sent me back out before I fully healed.” Grant admitted quietly as his eyes flicked up to where Sam stood.

“Der’mo . . .” Bucky hissed furiously, “. . . someone needs to drop that asshole into a bottomless pit somewhere.”

“I suspect Marina is already planning that somewhere in the back of her brain between her multitasking.” Grant grunted “I’d be obliged if she dumped Rumlow in there with him.”

Clint’s growled, “I second that suggestion,” was not nearly as surprisingly as Darcy’s own, “Agreed.”

Grant blinked. “I missed something?”

Darcy waved her hand imperiously as Jules joined Sam at the front. “Sssh. It’s starting.”

He frowned, opening to speak before Marina took the seat next to him with the Colonel of the opposite side of her, Valya asleep in her arms and Katenka cooing up at her father adoringly. Reaching out with her free hand, Marina linked her fingers with the younger man and smiled. “We might actually make it through this without a catastrophe.”

Rene snickered from the other side of Will, “I wouldn't bet on it.”

Truer words had never been spoken.
Chapter Notes

Sit back and enjoy the ride. It's gonna be a crazy one.

Also there IS a TIMELINE!! It's in construction and subject to change, but it's up! Woot!!

Chapter 231: Toronto Falls

It had, surprisingly, been a good day. No explosions. No yelling matches. And Marina had NOT lost her temper with Julianna. It had been a very good day.

Sam and Julianna were on shift with Team One, enjoying their last day on the same team, before
Sam transferred to Team Three. Marina was in the kitchen, throwing together food for the rest of the family. Grant was at the dining room table, reading his book and working on his book report. And Rene was in the living room with his uncles, playing video games and screwing around together. The babies were in bed and the aunts were cuddling their lovers, gossiping about the wedding.

As for Will himself, he was seated at the table with Grant, keeping an eye on these people he loved and relieved that they were all safe for the moment.

Marina sailed from the kitchen, holding a tray of food. She bent to press an absent kiss to Grant's head before moving to give her lover a more lingering one. “You're thinking too loudly again, Mishka,” she teased adoringly, even as she placed a plate in front of Grant. “Eat that, Prizrak.”

“Yes ma'am,” her newest acquisition replied, tone absent as he continued reading. The specialist’s free hand groped across the table, finding the sandwich by touch and bringing it to his mouth without ever looking at it.

Marina sighed, smiling at him. “Remember to chew it too, okay?”

Grant said nothing, just hummed agreeably before tuning her out. Her Colonel smiled at his Russian, amused by her maternal tendencies. “You are too good to us, samaya malen’kaya.”

She laughed, the sound brilliant and happy. “No such thing, Misha.”

Lifting one hand to grip the collection of necklaces she wore, he pulled her down and pulled her giggling mouth to his own. Her fingers splayed across his face, petting fondly against the skin as she allowed him to devour her at his will. “Ya lyublyu tebya, zhemchuzhina.”

“Vsegda, moy lyubimov,” she breathed in adoring agreement, pressing another kiss to his mouth before taking the food into the living room.

Slouching back in his chair, Will closed his eyes and relaxed. It was a good day.

He could hear the girls in the living room, and he smirked as Casey sighed, “At least nothing exploded.”

Jason snickered, teasing his fiancee, “You love it when things explode.”

“Only in the labs . . . those explosions are pretty,” she argued lightly.

“Pretty?” Aaron asked in a deadpan tone. “Damn, Jay, what the hell are you blowing up?”

“Chemical compounds mostly. They make more interesting explosions than bridges and buildings and the like,” Jason snarked, grinning at the family demolitions expert.

“Bullshit. There's nothing quite like watching a well made bomb do what it's supposed to.”

Will spoke up calmly, “As long as its targets are not civilian, I can agree with that.”

“Bombers who blow shit up just to blow shit up and cause loss of life should be dumped in Afghanistan for a bit. All the IEDs would alter their realities,” Clint snarled, glowering furiously at the reminder of their last assignment in the Sandbox. They’d lost Kenny and, except that the archer was stubborn, they may never have gotten Aaron back either. Clint was understandably still a little bitter about it.

Aaron reached out and clasped his brother's shoulder warmly, hauling him over and into a hard one-
arm. “Cool off little brother. I'm back and Byer has seen the error of his ways.”

“He better have. I'm not sure Lucky and I can pull off another HYDRA claim,” Will replied, a small frown growing as Grant's head snapped up at the name.

Those whiskey colored eyes scanned the room for a moment, before locking with the Colonel's. There was deep seated fear and guilt in them, before he blushed and dove back into his book. One quicksilver eye narrowed, before Owen spoke up from the other side of the room. “Eh. They like to take credit for shit they didn't do.”

“How very true,” Will agreed.

Catherine sat on Vincent's lap in the armchair, chiming in, “So, Sam seemed like he was happy.”

“Sam looked worried,” Marta refuted with a shake of her head. “He meant his vows, no question, but he was having some concerns. I could tell.”

Rene looked up from the game, a fierce frown on the teenagers face. “What kind of concerns, Aunt Marta?”

“The tensions between his mother and wife are not imaginary, Rene.”

Marina protested instantly, “I was on my best behavior today. I did everything I could to make sure that was perfect for them both.”

“She’s threatened by you and your presence in Sam’s life,” Grant mumbled after swallowing his mouthful of sandwich, eyes lifting from his book and moving to rest on Marina. “You have a strong hold on his heart and she likely feels threatened by that.”

Will nodded in agreement. “But Sam made his choice and we will abide by it. She can make her peace with that or not . . . it's up to her.”

“So . . . bets on whether or not she gets over her issues and focuses on being happy with him?” Brian asked, curious about what the man thought.

“I can see it going either way really,” Grant stated with a slight shrug. “Depending on whether or not she can pull her head out of her career to focus on her family as well.”

Just then Will's phone screamed from where it was sitting on the mantle. Frowning, he glanced down at his watch, frown deepening at the read out of his son’s number. “It's Sam,” he announced, moving through the collection of legs and bodies to grab the phone.

“Sam never calls during shift,” Marina protested, instantly worried and body on high alert.

Nodding in silent agreement, Will lifted the phone to his ear announcing, “Brandt.”

Sam's voice was angry and frustrated, though the fearful undercurrent had the majority of Will's focus. “Dad . . . we have a problem.”

“What kind of problem?” he asked, hand coming up to stall Marina’s instant demands for answers.

“Someone has planted bombs all around the city and we could use the help. The Health and Welfare building and City Hall both just went up. And before that, Spike defused one at the 911 dispatch center,” his son explained, sounding frazzled and concerned. “We could use some S.H.I.E.L.D. help, if they'd be willing to give it.”
“Done. Where are you all headquartered? We’ll meet you there.”

“Dispatch. With the bomb dead in the water, it's the safest place right now.”

“Give me twenty. And Sam . . . be careful and be smart. Take care of your wife.”

“Copy that. See you in twenty.”

Turning off the phone, Will took a second to gather his thoughts before looking up to sweep his arms across the room. “Suit up . . . we're going to work.”

Grant straightened in his chair. “Work?”

Marina was maybe the only one not stunned by the statement, already bolting for the stairs and her uniform. Will nodded, “A bomber has placed a series of bombs at several points around the city. We've been asked, as S.H.I.E.L.D. to assist.”

Grant reached for the crutches leaning against the table and announced, “I can watch the kids for you.”

“No, Cat, Rene, Gus and Malee can do that. You're a specialist. I need your brain.”

The younger man seemed startled by the insistence, even as he nodded. “I brought my uniform, just in case.”

“Then go change. Vincent, this could be a mess. Can you handle it? Sounds like they're gonna need medical personnel.”

“I'll be fine. Let me go get changed into uniform.”

Everybody move. We're on a clock and it's ticking.”

“Yes sir,” was the instantaneous reply.

Bucky looked up at his CO as Will stepped to place a hand on his shoulder. “You gotta sit this one out, Buck.”

Taking a deep breath, the assassin nodded in agreement. “I know. I hate it, but I know.”

Do you want me to keep Clint with you and Darcy? Just say the word.”

“You need Clint. He's the best sniper in the world. We'll be all right. Bullet wounds or not, I am not helpless.”

“I’d consider myself in your debt if you could watch out for everyone we're gonna leave behind. I don't anticipate the bombs making their way this far out, but panicked people do stupid things.”

“Of course. You don't even need to ask.”

“Thank you,” the Colonel sighed in relief, a small tug at the corner of his mouth. Patting the man's shoulder quickly once more, he turned and headed towards his room, already pulling at his tie and getting into his analyst mindset. The next several hours were gonna be a clusterfuck; civilian targets were always the worst.
Will was already handing out orders to his family as he led the way into the dispatch center. “Jason, I need you to get online. Reach out to as many of your hacker friends as you can. Start with Auggie . . . branch out. I want to try and get this asshole pinned down.” Glancing at his Second, he insisted, “If it has a cell signal, I want to know where it’s coming from and where it’s going to.”

“Copy that,” Jason agreed, veering off towards where Spike was already seated at one of the dispatch tables, Casey hot on his heels.

“Aaron, I need a read on the bomber. Take a look at the bomb Spike defused and see what you can figure out.”

“Got it,” the demolitions officer agreed, moving towards Spike, the two bomb guys shaking hands familiarly before Spike led Aaron out of sight.

Turning to his Doctors Three, Will frowned heavily. “We have a lot of casualties. I need you to check out the city . . . find the best location for a mass triage center. Check the maps first. Soon as you have a few ideas, let me know . . . we’ll get you the security you’ll need. At which point, we need you to get there and get to work. The wounded are the first priority.”

“Yes sir,” Vincent replied, glancing at his colleagues and seeing the same determination on their faces that he knew was on his own. “Ladies . . . shall we?”

Next the Colonel turned to find Grant, finding the specialist bringing up the rear as he crutched through the cluttered space. Looking around the space, he spotted a huge map of Toronto hanging on the wall. “Grant . . . I need your brain.”

“Yes sir,” Grant agreed, crutching forward to stand next to the Colonel in front of the map. “What am I looking at?”

“Targets,” Will replied, glancing at him seriously. “I have a whole city to cover. You’re a specialist . . . if you were our bomber, where would you hit?”

“How many bombs am I looking at?”

“Take a look at your options, assign them a rank in term of viability. Soon as I have an answer, I’ll let you know.”

“Copy that,” Grant agreed, hobbling forward and grabbing a black sharpie from one of the cans on the desk next to him.

Marina came bolting up then, her sisters dark and vengeful behind her. “Misha . . . the federal building that was hit. There’s a daycare inside. Sam can’t get to it . . . he and Lane are too big for the tunnel. I’m going.”

“Wait . . . what?” he asked, whirling to face her, features stern as he asked, “What are you talking about, you’re going?”

“There are children, Misha.”

“I understand that. And I can understand why that’s your first pull. But you’re not going alone.”

“I won’t be alone . . . my sisters are going with me,” the Russian agreed, gesturing to the other three Murderesses at her back.

Natasha’s jaw locked hard as she snarled, “And if we meet the mudak responsible for this, we
promise to leave him breathing and regretting every intake of air.”

“That’s my girls,” Will agreed with a vicious grin, stepping forward to kiss Marina quickly. “Go. Be smart . . . kick ass.”

“That’s what we do,” Nika purred in agreement, black eyes gleaming as brightly as stars in her face.

Hands shoving into his pockets, he watched the four women storm from the room, and felt genuine pity for any idiot who got in their way. A voice cleared from behind him, and the Colonel turned to look at Sergeant Gregory Parker, the two men staring at each other awkwardly for a moment. Will hadn’t forgotten the fact Parker had all but accused him of beating his own son within an inch of his life . . . and Parker knew better than to think that the Colonel would have ever forgotten.

This was going to be uncomfortable for everyone.

Taking a deep breath in through his nose, Will offered the other man his hand. “Sergeant Parker.”

Those eyes were assessing, even as he reached to clasp the officer’s hand. “Colonel Brandt. Much obliged for the help.”

“Sam asked . . . I could never have denied him,” the Colonel reminded him with a small smile. “Tell me what you know.”

“Nothing . . . in fact, even less than nothing. We’ve had one call from the bomber, but it told us absolutely nothing.”

“Recorded?” he asked, earning an answering nod.

“Yeah . . . come on. Maybe you can catch something I didn’t.”

Nodding, Will followed Parker to a station and giving the woman running it a charming smile. “Ma’am,” he greeted. “Colonel Will Brandt . . . a pleasure to meet you.”

“Colonel . . .” she replied, seconds before she returned her attention to the call she was taking.

Parker reached out and grabbed a small recorder, offering it to Will with a set of headphones. “I hope you can get something.”

“Do you have a pad of paper? And a pen? I prefer writing out my notes . . . makes it easier for my brain to work.”

A moment later, items in hand, Will put the headphones on and then pressed play. Frowning, the officer closed his eyes and began to scribble his thoughts onto the page. After a moment, he hit stop, rewound and played it again. Over and over again, until at last, he opened his eyes and hit stop. “I think I have a handle on this guy . . . I think.”

“I’ll take any theories you’d be willing to offer.”

“He objected to your rank first . . . he’s seeking control, he wants to be in charge. Your rank is a threat to that. It’s a hindrance to his dominance.” There was a pause, before Will smirked wryly, “I can only imagine what his reaction to my own would have been.”

“I doubt it would have resulted in anything good.”

“Doubtful,” the analyst agreed, as he turned his attention to his notes. “This is the part that strikes me most, though, that tells me the most. ‘The one who’s running the show’. In combination with his
calling you a ‘puppet’ . . .” Will’s head shook once, eyes narrowing, “He wants control, because before this he has always been the puppet.”

“Puppet of what?”

“Soon as we figure that out . . . we’ll have a better idea of pinning this guy down.”

Jason spoke up just then, “Will! I have a manifesto!”

“Shit . . . I hate it when the bad guy has a damned manifesto,” Aaron swore, coming back into the room with a scowl. “How’d you get it?”

“He sent it to the news stations . . . news forwarded it on to 52nd Division. Just showed up . . . and he’s either getting sloppy or he’s dropping bread crumbs. Cause it was sent to the station from a smartphone, registered to an Anson Holt.”

“Get on it. Find Holt . . . I want to know how he’s connected.” Turning to Jason, Will ordered, “Under no circumstances are you to send anyone after Holt, until I figure out what the hell is going on.”

“Copy that.”

Turning to Parker, Will asked, “You’re a profiler . . . and I need you to set up a profile. You and Julianna . . . look at the manifesto, let’s break him down . . . get him into his component parts, okay?”

“Absolutely. Let’s get this bastard,” the sergeant agreed, glowering angrily.
Chapter Notes

Hey guys . . . so the next chapter will be a time jump. This is the end of our latest sojourn in Toronto. If you HAVE NOT read Bloody Moon, I would recommend it. We're going to be picking up with Darcy and Bucky, while Clint is away on that hunt with the rest of the family.

Translations, what few there are, are at the end as always.

Enjoy this one! It's going to be wild!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes
Ya lyublyu tebya, Mishka.
Vsegda.
Chapter 232: Countdown

The percussion sound of the bomb going off through the comm sent ice rushing through Will’s veins. He’d just been arguing with his son about abandoning his bomb . . . heading for safety. Staggering backwards, he was almost instantly braced up by someone, Jason’s voice next to his ear demanding a sound off through the comms as the technical specialist helped his older brother to a chair. One by one, the family called in . . . except Sam.

From Sam, there was only silence.

Marina’s voice was ringing with terror as she screamed through the comms, “Sammy!? Please, talk to me!”

Will was vaguely aware of Parker speaking to Team One via their own comm system a little ways away, but all he could focus on was the continued absence of his son from the cacophony of voices through the comms. “What the hell was that!?” Aaron demanded, tone furious as he ran through the aisles of the triage center towards his brothers.

Jason had the older brother shoved forward, head between his knees as he hyperventilated, completely focused on the voices in his ear and little else. Green eyes were grave as he murmured, “Keep your voice down. Sam’s bomb blew . . . he’s not responding.”

“Der’molo!” he cussed, a fierce frown on his lips as he reached to place a hand on the Colonel’s shoulder.

Just then a cough and a groan came through the comms. “Listen to the boss, guys . . . you don’t want to do this the hard way,” Sam muttered, the sound of him heaving in air audible through the speaker.

The Russian gave a cry of relief, earning a tensing in her Colonel’s shoulders. Pushing back against Jason’s hands, he straightened in his chair and asked, “Sam? Status.”

“All my pieces are in one place, so I’m gonna count it as a win,” Sam groaned, a harsh grunt coming through the line. “I’m all right. My ears are ringing, so it’s hard to hear, but I’m in one piece.”

“Samuel Wayne Grimm, don’t you EVER do that to me again, you understand me!?” Marina demanded, a wealth of terror and relief in her voice. “Your father tells you to get out . . . you go! That is not up for negotiation.”

“Yes Ma,” he agreed, the heavy sound of boots thudding on linoleum flooring. “This one was pretty little. Not much damage here. They were able to evacuate most of the building, so casualties should be low.”

“Good . . . get yourself checked out by EMS. Then get to the stadium triage center. Understood?” Will ordered, tone a cross between worried father and stern commander.

The sniper knew better than to test his luck at the moment, offering only a firm, “Copy that,” before he turned his focus to his wife’s voice in his other ear. “Jules . . . I’m fine. Really . . .”

Tuning that conversation out, Will closed his eyes and allowed the Colonel side of him come out at full force. “That’s the last thing this govnoyed is blowing up today, is that understood?”

“Yes sir!” came the blanket agreement across the family.

“Marina . . . how’s the daycare coming?”
“Children have been evacuated,” she reported, her voice sad as she continued, “We lost one . . . his name was Ethan. He was a beautiful boy.”

Will’s gut clenched, eyes slipping closed as he breathed a prayer for the parents of the lost child. He could not imagine the pain of losing a child so young . . . the thought of losing Sam had locked him up, but Sam was 28 years old and an officer of the law doing his job. He’d lived a whole life. This little boy was a child, a baby, with a life still to be lived.

Jaw tightening furiously, he hissed, “I’m going to kill Faber with my bare hands.”

Grant had been paying peripheral attention to the conversation happening through his own comm unit. There had been a rush of relief at the knowledge Sam was okay, however the majority of his attention was on the map laid out in front of him. Team One had found the map of targets in Marcus Faber’s home. Jules had been able to trick Faber into confirming the existence of ten bombs . . . however there were only nine targets laid out.

He was trying to pinpoint the tenth, based on the profile Parker and Jules had put together from the manifesto. Suddenly, he snapped upwards, staring at the middle of the map in horror. Eyes flicking back to the profile, he leaned over and circled the stadium with a foul curse . . . the stadium where he stood at that moment. The stadium which held the triage center Vincent, Marta and Scarlett had picked, where the Doctors Three were hard at work for the wounded and injured from the attacks. The stadium where the Colonel was running the family from. The stadium Agent Walsh had moved his computer, and to where Agent Cross had followed his wife to protect her. The triage center housing more than a thousand civilians whose only crime against Faber was being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

“Fuck,” he swore, fumbling for his crutches and trying to get them situated in the crowded area.

Moving forward as fast as he could, he shouted, “Colonel!”

Will looked up, eyes scanning the area in search of Grant as he called back, “Over here!”

“I found it! The tenth target, I found it!”

“Where?” Jason demanded, watching the agent crutch forward.

“We’re standing in it. He hates victims . . . he hates being a victim, so he’s targeting victims.” Lifting one hand from his crutch, he gestured around the makeshift medical center, insisting, “And we’ve been stashing his victims here for hours.”

Aaron nodded, “And he wouldn’t have known where the last target was, until it was announced on the news about an hour ago, so he couldn’t have plotted out where he was going to hit it.”

“Yebat!,” Will cussed, ordering through the comm unit, “Everyone to the triage center, that’s an order! And book it double time.”

“Copy that!”

Turning to the second youngest of the Grimms, Will insisted, “Where would he put it?”

“He had the one bomb that was dirty, remember?” Aaron reminded his brother, one hand on Grant’s shoulder as he guided the younger agent into a chair and off his knee. Turning back to Will, he continued, “The one that took out Holt and the University. None of the others have been dirty; it’s a fair guess that this one is gonna be dirty.”
“Okay . . . so what options does that leave us?”

“He's gonna put it high. The magnitude of the bombs he’s made; none of them would have been able to take out this stadium. And he’s been a one trick pony, all of the bombs have been the same. This one is just going to be a vehicle for the Cesium; but if it’s a big enough bomb, it’s gonna spread. The higher the better.”

Will groaned, his head dropping back to stare up at the jumbo-tron overhead. “Why does it always have to be heights?”

“At least it's not the Burj Khalifa,” Jason snickered, earning a shudder from Will at the reminder. Hanging out the window some 100 stories up was not how he’d wanted to spend his day; damn Ethan Hunt anyway.

“There's a story I'm missing here, I'm guessing?” Grant arched one brow curiously as his eyes moved between Will and Jason. “If you're not a fan of heights Colonel, designate someone else to go up?”

“No . . . he’s gonna be here to make sure that his ‘message’ . . . his endgame plays out the way he wants it to,” the Colonel replied with a frown. “And I want to kill him . . . it’s the only way I’ll be convinced he’s dead.”

“Well in that case think of your daughters while up there to distract yourself from the fact you're up high?” the Specialist offered with a slight shrug “Mind over matter and all that.”

A small smile lifted one corner of the older man’s mouth as he looked back down at the people surrounding him. “Jason . . . let’s start evacuating these people. Talk to the Doctors Three . . . let’s try to get as many people out as we can, okay?”

“Got it,” the tech agreed, dashing off to find Casey and Vincent.

“Aaron, you’re with me. I can handle Faber, but that bomb is your top priority.”

“Copy that.”

“Grant . . . the rest of the team is going to be congregating here. I need all hands on deck, getting these people out. Until Marina gets here, you’re in charge. Got it?”

“In charge? Are you sure?”

“Yes . . . make me proud.”

Eyes like whiskey stared at him in shock, before he nodded firmly, “Yes sir. You can count on me.”

Clapping the younger agent on the shoulder, Will turned to look at Parker. “I don’t know if you’re interested . . . but I could use the back-up.”

There was grudging respect in the sergeant’s eyes as he nodded. “I’d be honored. This guy is really starting to piss me off.”

“A sentiment I can agree with wholeheartedly, I assure you,” the Colonel replied, nodding once at Grant before turning away towards the stairs. “We should head up . . . it’s a long climb to the top. We don’t know where he hid it or how long is left on the timer . . . we have no time to lose.”

“Copy that,” the two men with him agreed, before the three moved off towards the stairs.
The three men were nearly to the stairs when a familiar voice rang from behind him, causing the analyst to freeze in his tracks. “Dad!”

The Colonel whirled, quicksilver eyes scanning through the area and catching on Sam where he stood with Grant and Vincent. “Sam,” he breathed, his entire being pulled back towards his bruised and battered son. There was relief at seeing him alive and frustration with the bomber who had nearly taken him from them.

Aaron reached out and touched his brother’s shoulder. “Go . . . I got this. I’ll head up and I’ll meet you there.”

Nodding briskly, Will turned on his heel and bolted towards his searching son, shouting, “Sam!”

The blond whirled to find the voice, face brightening instantly to see his father bolting in his direction. “Dad!”

The two men met halfway, Will’s arms coming around his son hard as they crashed into each other. “Slava Bogu,” the Colonel sighed, one hand coming up to hold the back of his head. Reaching up, he gripped the younger man’s arms and pushed him back a step, silver eyes scanning him from head to toe. “Are you all right, Sammichka?”

“Yeah . . . I’m okay,” the sniper promised, a sheepish smile on his lips as he watched his dad catalogue every bruise and scrape he could see before hauling his son back into his arms once more. “I’m all right, Dad. What about Ma?”

“She’s on her way back from the daycare. They were able to get all of the children out; they lost one though.” There was a sad tilt to the officer’s mouth as he sighed. “She’s not taking it well.”

Sam winced hard, “She’s gonna yell at me.”

“Probably,” Will chuckled, hauling his son back to him and pressing a paternal kiss to his temple. “Don’t do this to us again, please. We tell you to go, you go. We will not lose you.”

“Copy that,” he agreed, hands tightening around his father for a moment before he stepped back. “What can I do?”

“Help Jason and Grant evacuate the stadium. Keep it quiet and discreet, but as quickly as possible. I don’t want to tip our hand until we have to.”

“You got it. Be careful.”

“I will . . . you too.”

“You know me,” Sam laughed with a grin, earning a roll of the eyes from his father, “Yeah . . . hence why I’m saying something about it.”

Aaron’s voice rang from overhead, “Orel! I think I found something! I’d suggest you get up here!”

“Coming, Sokol!” he shouted upwards, before turning back to Sam. “I’ll see you soon.”

“Damn right you will. If not, Ma is gonna resurrect your ass and then kill us both.”

Will snorted hard at the mental image, even as he nodded, “Best not to disappoint her then. Stay safe.”

The blond sniper’s mouth twisted as he demanded in return, “Go careful.”
“Copy that,” he agreed, before squeezing the back of his son’s neck one more time, then bolted for the stairs . . . and hopefully the end of the nightmare.

The first bullet pinged off the handrails mere inches away from his hand. He could hear Sam through his earpiece, shouting his name, as well as Marina’s own demands for an update. “No harm . . . we’ve found the bomb and our bomber.”

“Go careful . . . I’m on my way,” the Russian insisted coldly, moments before her partner protested, “No! This thing only has a few minutes left on the timer. If it goes . . . the twins need at least one of their parents living when this is all over, Marishka . . .”

“Don’t you dare say you’re damned goodbyes, William Michael Grimm, you understand me!?” she demanded. “I am coming to you . . . that is not negotiable. Our daughters will have both parents at the end of the day, so help me God.”

Will grunted, eyes searching lifted his head in search of Faber, infinitely conscious of his younger brother working on the bomb behind him. “Aaron? How are we looking?”

“Two seconds . . . I just need to lift the circuit board and cut the wire,” the bomb tech replied, digging in his pocket for his tools. “I’ve got this . . . you worry about him.”

“Copy that. Parker . . . if you could stay and cover Aaron, I’ll go around and see if I can flank him.”

Glancing over at the younger Grimm as he worked at the bomb, the older man nodded in agreement with the older. “Of course. Go careful.”

“You too,” the Colonel replied, quicksilver eyes scanning the area before he bolted down the gangway in the opposite direction from Faber.

As he made his way around the gangway, closing in on Faber’s perch Will’s vision hazed slightly; his blood rushing through his pounding heart. He was so close to the man who’d almost taken his son from him . . . so close to putting the asshole into the ground, he could almost taste it. Taking a deep breath in through his nose, he let himself get lost in his instincts. If there was one thing he’d learned as a child soldier under Ross, it was that his instincts would never lead him wrong.

Time always passed strangely while he was in his “perfect soldier” mindset. It could have been moments . . . it could have been hours. Either way, Marina was always there to call him home to her. He blinked at the soft sound of her voice, insisting, “Mishka . . . he’s dead . . . put the gun away.”

Shaking himself free, he followed the instruction absently, before looking up at Marina in confusion. “Zhemchuzhina?”

“Da,” she agreed, stepping fearlessly over the body and wrapping her arms around his waist as he swayed. “You’re all right . . . you don’t usually go so deep . . . how’s your head?”

“I’m gonna have a migraine, I think. He’s dead?”

Marina looked back over her shoulder with a twisted, cruel smirk as she replied, “Very.”

The Colonel frowned at her, before letting his eyes follow hers to the mangled body on the ground. There, lying on the ground, was one Marcus Faber. Cause of death . . . six bullets to the face. Will blinked, startled by the brutality of the act. “I don’t remember . . .”
“I know . . .” she replied gently, wrapping her arm around his waist as she guided him away from the body. “Come on . . . let’s get you downstairs. Vincent needs to take a look at that shoulder.”

“Shoulder?” he asked in confusion, before searing pain rocked through him, as though the word unblocked the pain from his mind. He sucked in a sharp breath, free hand coming up to grip the appendage. “Damn . . . when did that happen?”

“Awhile ago,” she replied, fingers squeezing gently at his waist. “Parker’s wounded . . . EMS is on its way up. I would prefer it, if we were both gone by the time they got here.”

Nodding quietly, he asked, “What about the mess?”

“Cleaning up your mess for once will be a refreshing change for Owen,” Marina chuckled, her tiny body once again exhibiting its resilience as she all but manhandled him down the back stairs, completely avoiding the approaching emergency workers. “Come on . . . some hot, sweet coffee and some rest will bring you back to yourself soon enough.”

Leaning over to rest his forehead against her head, he sighed, “What would I do without you, Marishka?”

“The more worrisome question, moy lyubimov, is what would I do without you?”

Chapter End Notes

Translations:

(R) Der'mo - shit
(R) govnoyed - bastard
(R) Yebat’ - fuck
(R) Slava Bogu - Thank God
(R) Sammichka - Russian diminutive, basically Sammy
(R) Orel - Eagle (Will's callsign with SHIELD and the Army's Brat'ya Mrachnyy)
(R) Sokol - Falcon (Aaron/Kenny's callsign with SHIELD and the Army's Brat'ya Mrachnyy)
((R) Brat'ya Mrachnyy - Brothers Grimm (the Spec Ops unit comprised of Will, Marina, Jason, Aaron and Clint, under the Army's purview.))
(R) Zhemchuzhina - Pearl (one of Will's lesser used nicknames for his longtime partner and lover, Marina Petrovka)
(R) Da/net - Yes/no
(R) moy lyubimov - my love (one of Marina's lesser used nicknames for her longtime partner and lover, Will Grimm)
Chapter 233: Anchored Reconstruction

Grant Ward grunted as he lost his grip on his crutches, a pair of hands shoving hard as a panicked man shoved him out of the way. Without the stabilizing presence of the rods, Grant lost his balance and went down hard, curling up as much as he could to try and protect himself from the insanity that was the evacuation of the stadium. It took a second, but eventually the specialist could hear a familiar voice calling through the crowd. “Grant!?” came the call, before a different voice boomed, “Move it!”

Instantly, the crowd parted like the Red Sea, bringing both Sam Grimm and Vincent Keller into view, as the two men bolted towards where Grant was huddled up on the floor. Brilliant blue eyes lit up at the sight of the dark haired agent, bolting forward with the medic right on his heels. His knees skidded a little on the ground as he dove to shield him from the haphazard feet running roughshod over him. “Grant . . . man, you with me?”

“Yeah . . . I’m all right. Someone pushed me.”
Vincent’s growl was fierce and angry as he all but roared at the young man who was pushing frantically through the crowd, trying to get outside. The kid jolted in shock, shying backwards from the sound, before diverting slightly and continuing on, leaving a wide berth around the three men. Turning back to his friends, the doctor insisted, “We gotta move . . . people are panicked. The pushing and the shoving is only going to get worse.”

Nodding firmly, Sam moved to slip under one of Grant’s arms, utterly ignoring Vincent’s protests of, “You nearly got blown up!? What the hell are you doing?”

Blue ice eyes were glacial as he glanced up at his S.H.I.E.L.D. partner, hissing, “You said we needed to move . . . so help me.”

“Damn it, Sam . . .” the man sighed, as he slipped under the other arm and between the two of them they hauled the specialist upright, balanced precariously on his good leg. “Come on . . . let’s get him to a cot.”

“But the bomb?”

“Doesn’t matter now,” Vincent replied, with a shake of his head. “No matter what, we’re going to be exposed if that bomb goes off.”

“If it goes off,” Sam reminded them both, helping Vincent ease Grant to the thin mattress. “Dad is gonna do everything in his power to make sure that doesn’t happen. Uncle Aaron too.”

“Exactly . . . the best thing we can do now, is pray,” Vincent agreed, features settling into calm as he reached out and began to undo the clasps on the brace. “Tell me if it hurts anywhere, huh?”

Grant said nothing. Vincent wouldn’t have heard him anyway.

It was about ten minutes later that Sam and Grant both looked up from where Vincent was once again securing Grant’s brace at the sound of the medics name. “Vincent!” came the urgent call again, prompting Sam to push himself to his feet.

Vincent gave the blond a dirty look, insisting “Sam, sit down. You almost got blown up half an hour ago.”

“That’s my Ma . . . hell no,” he snapped, climbing up onto the cot to look around a little better. “Ma!”

“Sammy! It’s your Dad! I need your help! Bring Vincent.” Marina called, tone a barely controlled panic.

Catching sight of the family’s Power Couple by the back stairwell, Sam pointed “Over there Vince . . .”

The doctor gave Grant a significant look, ordering “Stay off that knee, you got me? You may have strained it when you fell.”

Grant’s mouth twisted petulantly, muttering “I did not fall . . . I was pushed.”

“Shoved, pushed, fell, skipped; I don’t care. Stay!” He ordered with a rumbling growl over his shoulder, bolting after the blond sniper.

Sam reached his parents first, catching his mother in his arms as she collided with his chest hard. “Bozhe moi, Sammichka, moy mal’chik,” she breathed, holding him tightly for a bit before scanning
a critical gaze over him “Are you okay? I was so worried . . . how’s your head?” There was a pause, before she waved away the question, “Don’t answer that . . . Vincent, how is my boy?”

Vincent moved past the two, heading for the dazed Colonel, as he replied “Surprisingly, he’s okay. May have a concussion, but I kinda doubt it.” Crouching, the medic took in the family’s leader, asking cautiously “Will? It’s Vincent . . . you with me?”

A single nod was the only answer, earning a fierce frown. “I’m gonna take a look at your shoulder now. Stay as still as you can.”

Another nod and Vincent was reaching for the clasps of his vest. “Marina, what’s wrong with him?”

“He went ‘perfect soldier’ . . . but he’s never been as deep as he went. It took me nearly ten minutes to get his attention; usually he hears my voice and comes right out of it.”

“‘Perfect soldier’?” the medic echoed, confused.

“I don’t know how else to describe it. Misha’s pretty sure it’s some kind of leftover programming from the Hoover Base. He just kind of . . . let’s go and does what he has to in order to survive and succeed. We’ve been never been too sure about what causes it . . . he’s always done it,” the Russian explained, moving to kneel next to Vincent. “Usually we just treat it like you would shellshock and get him somewhere quiet.”

“How deep is he?”

“Not as deep as he was. He recognized me . . . knew where he was and why he was here. But that doesn’t always mean anything. He’s not usually so . . . complacent. Which is why I think he’s probably still under the programming’s influence, even if he’s not as far under as he was originally.”

Mouth firming into a frown, Vincent looked over at Sam, ordering “Coffee . . . hot and sweet . . . go. And if you can find a clean one, bring one of the blankets too.”

Sam’s eyes were wide and scared as he nodded and bolted away. Between the two and with stern orders from Marina; they managed to get his vest and shirt off, cutting the tight-fitting under armour away from the wound.

Vincent’s touch was firm but light as he probed the wound, tone low as he talked the Colonel through it. “Faber? He asked calmly.

Will stiffened slightly, hissing as he reported briskly “Dead . . . six to the face.”

Dark eyebrows climbed into his hair as the doctor stared, repeating incredulously “Six to the face?”

Marina’s tone was dry as she replied “Hence why we call it ‘perfect soldier’. He didn’t even remember doing it.” Turning back to Will, she stroked her fingers tenderly through the close-cropped strands of blond hair and soothed gently, “You did good, Mishka. I need you to sit quietly for me and let Vincent patch you up. Let’s not call any attention to ourselves until Lucky sterilizes the scene and gets rid of Faber’s body.”

Vincent startled, clearly surprised by the statement. The hard look in Marina’s eyes was a clear sign she would tolerate no questions on the matter either. Sam was back shortly, coffee in one hand and blanket draped over the opposite forearm. Behind him, the two could see Grant crutching towards them, earning a huffing sigh from the doctor. “Why do I even bother?” Vincent muttered, hands moving separate from his brain as he continued to treat the wound. “Damn it, Grant; what did I tell you?”
"All due respect, Vincent, shut up." The specialist watched for a moment as Sam handed his father the coffee first, his hands cupping around his father’s own to make sure he had a good grip on the paper cup. Next came the blanket, the fabric pulled over one shoulder then tucked under the arm of the injured side, the ends drawn together tightly to stave off the minute trembling visible in the Colonel’s body.

"Shock?" Grant asked, lifting his eyes to scan the stairwell and the hallway. His professional mask dropped over his face, only a small flicker betraying any emotions when his roving gaze passed over the small knot of family.

“Of a kind,” Marina agreed, eyes narrowed as she pointed imperiously at the small ledge next to the stairs “Sit . . . what happened?”

Vincent’s “He fell,” overlapped with Grant and Sam’s simultaneous “I/He was pushed and fell.”

Frowning, the Russian asked “Are you okay? How’s your knee?”

"I'm fine," he insisted with a sigh. He followed her pointing finger and perched on the ledge, taking care to choose a spot that allowed him open sight lines to any approaches. “My knee is fine.”

Sam chuckled, laughing “Fair warning . . . fine is not an acceptable answer in this family. I’ll explain later.”

Cocking an eyebrow, Grant considered that for a moment before changing his answer, “Yes, I’m okay. Vincent just feels the need to mother hen me.”

“Tell me something I don’t know, Prizrak. As for the knee, let me know if the level of your pain changes or anything seems weird,” Marina replied with a quiet chuckle. Accepting Grant’s quiet nod of agreement, the woman turned her attention onto Sam next. “What do you hear, Sammy-honey?”

Evidently the question required no clarification as the blond replied instantly, “Ed’s aggressively not paying attention to whatever Owen is doing . . . and Jules is a little distracted by the Boss.”

“Good . . . means they’re not gonna make a big deal about the body suddenly disappearing,” Vincent agreed earning a lopsided grin of agreement from the rest. “Bullet went clean through . . . let’s get him bandaged up and out of here. The last thing we want is for someone to notice the body is missing and make a fuss.”

Grant frowned as he reminded everyone “Officially S.H.I.E.L.D was never here . . . I can guarantee you the satellites and security footage is already being scrubbed. Even if someone does make a fuss . . . without a body or witness, ain’t nothing anyone can do.”

Marina chuckled as she teased, “Interesting turn of phrase. Your Yale education has done itself proud.”

Grant threw the Russian a disgruntled face. She knew as well as he did, his so called ‘Yale education’ was just one of a whole list of fabrications Garrett had engineered to get him into S.H.I.E.L.D. “I’m sure there are a lot of reasons Yale is less than impressed with my educational credentials.”

Slipping under her partner’s arm as they eased the Colonel to his feet, his handler snickered “You may have a point there.”

Vincent slipped under the opposite arm, a worried frown etched onto his face at Will’s complacent acceptance of what was happening; it was unnerving to the medic who had gone head to head with
the headstrong Colonel on more than one occasion in the past. His fingers tightened in a small, fond squeeze, as he murmured, “All right, Will . . . let’s get you home to Sam’s, okay?”

There was no real reply from the man, only a slow blink and an indistinct hum of agreement. The medic and the handler exchanged worried looks before Sam insisted, “The coast is clear . . . let’s get out of here.”

****************************

Hours later, William Michael Grimm blinked. The action was unremarkable and indistinguishable from the one that came before it. But, even still, there was a small but subtle difference in the suddenly intent gaze as it scanned over the ceiling. It was only a second longer before Marina’s smiling face filled his view. The woman - his adored and adoring Russian - watched him with equal parts worry and relief in her eyes. He smiled up at her, blinking as he murmured tenderly, “Allo Marishka.”

Eyes slipped closed as she breathed a silent prayer of thanks, Marina bent to kiss him, the touch of her fingers familiar on the contours of his face. Straightening, she gifted him with a tear-stained smile, breathing out, “Hey, Misha . . . welcome back.”
Hey guys! Sorry it's been so long! Darcy/Bucky/Clint, as promised! Enjoy!

Translations are common, so I'm not going to worry about them today. Let me know what you think. I missed hearing your thoughts on the last chapter!

Chapter 235: Sweet Seduction

As was usual when engaged in various . . . amorous pursuits with one Darcy Lewis, Clint was laughing. He was lying sprawled on the double bed, head resting in the palm of his hand, as he watched Darcy tease their boyfriend playfully. Much to his chagrin, Bucky was still on restricted activity and being unable to grab the young woman by the hips and haul her under him was visibly testing his patience. “Damn it, Doll . . . stop teasin’,” the former soldier pleaded, fingers spasming on the tops of her thighs where she knelt over him.

“What’s the matter, gorgeous? Got an itch to scratch?” she taunted, squeaking as his fingers slipped behind the joint of her knee and gave her a quick pinch. “Ouch!”

“You’re killin’ me,” he groaned, his eyes slipping to half mast as he watched her hips roll against his. Her purr was warm and adoring as she bent to kiss him, murmuring against his lips, “Now, that would be no fun at all.”

“You sure is bossy . . . you should do something about that?”

The intern grinned as she twisted to look at Clint, asking loftily, “He sure is bossy . . . before I bust and you don’t get to enjoy the experience.”
The archer’s grey eyes shone silver as he winked at her. “Bossy can be a lot of fun, peresmeshnika . . .”

“Hm, I am not convinced,” she replied with a soft snort, a squeal slipping from her lips as Bucky suddenly threw her over and rolled onto her, earning a scolding, “Buck!” from the worried sniper.

“I’m fine, khishchnik . . .” he grunted, one hand coming up to capture both of Darcy’s wrists and haul them over her head, while the other moved to the hem of the miniskirt that had been flirting with him all afternoon. “But there’s a little girl who needs a lesson in teasing.”

Darcy’s moan rang through the room as his fingers found their way beneath her panties, both slipping into her to the hilt in a smooth thrust. “Oh damn,” she breathed, hips undulating against his hand as he worked her body like a master.

Cocking his head, Clint watched the two with a small grin. "Der’mo . . . you two look so hot together.”

Ocean eyes were boiling hot as they pinned the archer in place. “Get the toy bag.”

A wicked grin slipped across the younger sniper’s face as he rolled from the bed and all but bolted for the closet, pulling a black duffle bag from the shelf inside. Darcy’s eyes were huge as they darted between the longtime couple, arousal warring with mild alarm as she took in the glee painting Clint’s face. “Why do I feel like I should be worried?”

“Worried?” Clint replied innocently, setting the bag on the bed and rifling through. “No reason to be worried, beautiful . . . we’re gonna take good care of you.” Glancing at Bucky, he asked, “What did you want?”

“Mouse and the lube,” Bucky responded, extracting his fingers from Darcy’s core and earning a wretched moan as he lifted them to his mouth and sucked her juices from them. “And the jute rope.”

There was another moan when a short length of purple cording came from the bag, Bucky wrapping it around her wrists firmly and then hauling them up to the headboard, anchoring them there. Darcy tugged a few times, a sharp whimper slipping from her at the realization she wasn’t going anywhere. Her hips bucked against her lover, as she begged, “Damn it, Bucky . . . touch me.”

“I am touching you, Dollface,” he teased, fingers nibble on the fastenings of her skirt before whisking it and her panties away, leaving her naked from the waist down. Crawling up, he nibbled on her lower lip for a moment, before whispering, “Do you trust me?”

There was no pause of hesitation as she agreed, “With my life.”

One corner of his lips flirted upwards even as he replied, “You could regret that one day.”

“Not possible,” she vowed, eyes clear and solemn as the two watched each other carefully.

Clint watched them, a small smile on his lips to see these two people he loved starting to love each other, before he cleared his throat quietly, offering Bucky a small silver vibe. “The mouse, as requested.”

The Winter Soldier grinned at his lover, flesh hand taking the vibe while the metal one slipped behind the sniper’s neck and hauled him into a sharp, piercing kiss. Clint gasped, taken momentarily aback by the possessive desire in the action, before throwing himself into it without reservation. Darcy moaned again, head falling back as she murmured, “That’s so fucking hot.”
Grinning into the kiss for a second, Bucky bit down sharply on Clint’s lip before pushing him away gently. “Get naked.”

“Yes sir,” the younger man agreed, bounding up from the bed and attacking the zippers, buttons, and clasps on his uniform, while Bucky turned his attention back onto their girlfriend.

“All right, Doll . . . you have your choice. Ready for it?”

“Choice? Buck . . . fuck me,” she whined, hips bucking upwards frantically.

There was a wicked glint to his eyes as he tsked at her, teasing, “And when has that ever worked, my little firecracker?”

“Buck . . . please . . .” she gasped, rolling her hips and moaning obscenely in the hopes that she could get him between her thighs and into her.

The young woman jumped, startled, when the tips of his fingers slapped down lightly against her mons and drew her immediate attention. There was a scolding frown on the man’s lips as he shook his head at her. “You have a choice . . . and if you’re not careful, I’m going to make it for you. Is that understood?”

“Yes sir,” she breathed, staring up at him, feeling herself growing wetter and more swollen at the commanding set of his features.

“Here are your choices. One: I’ll make sweet love to you, while Clint plays with your clit, but you don’t get to come. Two: Clint fucks me while you play with our sweet little mouse here and you can orgasm as many times as you want.”

She stared up at him in aroused horror, eyes wide as she breathed, “You’re an asshole.”

“I know,” he chuckled, bending to kiss her softly. “Tick tock, Dollface . . . time is running out.”

Darcy’s eyes flicked back and forth between the two men, both of whom were watching her with hungry, expectant looks on their faces. She had just made her decision and was opening her mouth to speak, when Clint’s computer began to ring from the desk. The archer frowned hard, whirling to face it, announcing, “That’s Jay’s pattern.” Glancing at the two, he sighed, “Hold that thought, okay? Let me find out what’s up and we’ll continue this is a . . . you know what I meant!”

Bending, he grabbed his jeans and hauled them on over his naked - Darcy grinned as she continued adding increasingly lascivious adjectives in her head - ass, before moving to the desk. Making sure that the laptop was faced completely away from the bed, Clint triggered the camera. “Hey Jay . . .

Jason Grimm’s voice was amused as he teased, “It’s a miracle anything gets done out at that base, considering all the time you spend half-naked while you’re there.”

“I am off-shift, mudak,” Clint snarked back, grey eyes shining. “What do you want, Jay?”

“You up for a little witch hunt?” the older Grimm asked curiously.

“A witch hunt? That’s a new one.”

“Yeah . . . apparently a bunch of children have gone missing and Dad says we’re within a couple days of some dark ritual called the ‘blood moon’? Aunt Gretel said something about eating kids, and killing innocents, and Will pretty much said, ‘fuck that shit’ and got the time away approved.”
Despite the dry tone coming through the speakers, Darcy couldn’t hear any skepticism or distrust in what he’d been told. And based on the determined look stealing across Clint’s features, he had no problem believing the details either. The woman blinked as the younger of her lovers demanded, “Do I need to find a ride? Or . . . ?”

“The Quinjet’s enroute. You have ten . . . make them count, little brother. Walsh out.”

“Barton out,” the archer agreed, reaching out to snap the lid of the computer closed. “Sorry, *peresmeshnika* . . . gonna have to continue this plan a little later.”

Darcy’s jaw dropped, as she stared at him in honest surprise. “Are you serious right now?! You’re passing up sex with me . . . for some kind of wild goose chase, hunting things that only exist in legends and children’s fairy tales.”

Clint smirked at that, stripping off the jeans and moving to get into his off-duty gear. “Buck . . . I’ll let you be the one to enlighten our little bird here about the truth about that little myth. I gotta get going.”

“No problems. I’ll take care of our Doll,” Bucky promised, watching as Clint was dressed and ready to go in seconds flat. The younger sniper bolted to the bed, a grin on his lips as the two cuddled unconsciously. “Love you,” he murmured against Bucky’s mouth, before bending to kiss Darcy next, promising, “Love you too.”

Straightening, he moved to the closet once more and grabbed up the purple bag sitting in the corner. “I’ll see you both in a couple days. Behave yourselves.”

Bucky’s grin was wicked as he agreed, “Of course . . . go before you miss your ride.”

“Yes sir,” Clint laughed with a grin, before slipping through the door and disappearing from sight, the door slamming closed behind him and the heavy sounds of booted feet rang through the hallway, as he bolted away.

Darcy’s head flopped back, groaning. “Damn it. Well that sucked. Is he sure his brothers need him there?”

Ocean blue eyes sparkled as the former assassin chuckled in agreement, fingers tracing lazy fingers over the swell of her belly. “Even if he wasn’t, the Brothers Grimm are the very definition of co-dependent. He was going whether they needed him or not.”

Huffing out a frustrated sigh, Darcy tilted her head back to stare up at her wrists then sighed, “Well, I guess you can untie me. With Clint gone . . .”

“With Clint gone, all the more for me,” Bucky interrupted, one eyebrow winging upwards as he watched her.

Darcy visibly startled at the information, “I thought . . .”

“That I was only in it for Clint? Yeah, I know . . . that’s why I didn’t offer to go with him, despite being family to Hansel too.” Bending, he nibbled lightly on her lips as he murmured, “You and I needed a little one-on-one time. No Clint, no distractions . . . just us, getting a feel for each other and learning who we are to each other outside of him.”

“That sounds dangerous,” she sighed, a blissed out smile on her lips as she smiled up at him.

He gave her a smarmy grin as he bent to kiss her, murmuring, “Very,” against the plump curvature of
her lips. “Hang on, Dollface . . . this is gonna be a helluva ride.”

“Can’t wait,” she promised in a breathless whisper, before her body arched into him as he slid into her. “Fuck me running . . . you feel so good.”

“Just wait . . . it gets better.”

Her tone was a delicious purr as she rolled her hips into his, taunting him wickedly, “Less talk, more action, big boy . . . put those hips to work.”

“Yes ma’am,” he agreed, drawing his hips back and then slamming back into her.

Darcy’s whole body exploded into sensation, a long reedy cry slipping from her throat as he rode her hard . . . fully intent on putting her away wet.

From there things got a lot hot and hella heavy. Which could explain the quiet swear words Darcy was muttering to herself as she tried to run and button up her shirt at the same time. She’d thought Clint was bad for her time management skills; Bucky Barnes was freaking worse! Skidding into the lab, she announced breathlessly, “I’m here! I’m here!”

Jane’s tone was fond, if exasperated, as she sighed, “You’re late.”

“I know, but in my defense? I was totally having an out of body experience.”

Eric Selvig snorted at the statement, quiet laughter slipping from his lips, as her boss-lady/bestie snarked dryly, “I’ll just bet. Do me a favor? Ride your boys through galaxies on your own time, huh?”

“You got it, Boss lady!” she chirped, with a grin, fingers combing through the wreck that was her sex-hair, and pulling it up into a messy bun. “So . . . are we any closer to finding Tall, Blond and Muscley?”

Eric smiled sadly as he replied, “No . . . hence Jane’s frustration with your . . .” here he paused, considering, before chuckling, “. . . prolific sex life.”

“Got it . . . no more morning sex . . . I can do that,” she insisted, before hesitating, “Well, I can try to do that. Seriously? The man’s hands, Jane . . . they’re magic. It’s obscene . . . and delicious . . . and . . .” she blinked as a pen cup flew past her head and startled her out of her dewy-eyed remembrance of the morning, “Right, of course, yes . . . shutting up now. Sorry Jane.”

There was a heavily put-upon sigh from the astrophysicist, after which Jane’s Science Face made its first appearance that day. “I need you to correlate this data. Find a pattern. If we can locate the pattern, we can locate the next site. If we can locate the next site . . .”

“. . . you can have your own ‘prolific sex life’!” Darcy cheered excitedly, hands up in a touchdown pose. “Get it girlfriend!”

“Darcy . . .” Jane groaned, even as she chuckled along with her assistant’s exuberant cheering. “Just get to work.”

“On it!” the younger woman agreed, twirling on her toes and bouncing off. And if the scene from that morning caused a few distractions, well . . . who could blame her? Bucky Barnes was one fucking hot hunk with a body to die for . . . and who knew what to do with it. She couldn’t wait to be off for the night, so they could do it all over again.
Also, before I forget, so I got this amazing prompt from Lennox_Crewe. And I just want you guys to know, if there's something you want to see, I am more than willing to see if I can make it work within the story I'm trying to tell. It may not be in the main fic, but outtakes are fun and further the story along. I would love to hear from you guys! Let me know!
Connections and Reflections

Chapter Notes

Okay, so here we go! I'm finally getting back into my groove, now that the move is over and I'm mostly stationary. So I'm catching up! Woot!

Let me know what you think guys! Seriously, your reviews are the reason I write. They always make me so happy to hear that you love what I do!

Translations are at the end as always.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter 236: Connections and Reflections

Darcy Anderson-Lewis stirred sleepily, a happy hum vibrating through the corridor of her throat. She ached pleasantly in every fiber of her being and she all but purred as she tossed over, intent on her lover's body in the bed beside her . . . at least it should have been next to her. Frowning with a pout, she tilted her chin up and listened for him. The familiar rumble of the beloved baritone filled the room, prompting a contented smile at the haphazard mix of Brooklyn accent and Russian vocabulary. It took her a little longer than she would have liked to admit that he was speaking to someone.

Horrified at the thought one someone unknown to her in their quarters, she squeaked as she threw herself around. Scrambling for the bedcovers to pull them up over her nakedness, she froze as Bucky's chuckles filled the compact space. “Net khishchnik . . . it's just our little bird,” he explained into his phone, ocean eyes sparkling at her over the adoring smile lingering on his lips. “Da, I understand. Tell Marina I hope she feels better. Be safe and be patient . . . you'll be home with us soon enough.” There was a pause, before the man's stern features softened further, “Ya tozhe lyublyu tebya, khishchnik.”

As her alarm faded Darcy blushed, abashed by her moment of panic. Relaxing back against her pillows, she let the covers fall loosely once again and took in her lover, specifically his attire or the lack thereof. The former assassin wore a pair of tight black boxer briefs and little else. The metal arm gleamed dully in the natural light and there was a soft sheen leftover from their recent activities.
clinging to his skin. A muscle in his chest twitched, the nipple contracting to a point as the pectoral muscle flexed in reaction.

Biting down on her lower lip, she grunted, “Erk.”

“How’d you sleep, Dollface?” he asked with a fond smile, tossing the phone onto the desk then crossing the room to her. He crawled across the bed, arms and knees bracketing her body as he kneeled over her.

She gave him a lascivious smirk, her hands linking behind his neck to pull him down to her. “Good dreams. Be a good boy and give a bad girl a few more, huh?”

“I can probably arrange for a few more of those,” he chuckled in agreement, allowing her to pull him down against her. Bracing himself up on his elbows again, he allowed his fingers to trace the contours of her face. His smile was warm and affectionate as he teased, “Good morning, Dollface?”

Beaming up at her lover, Darcy purred, “A very good morning indeed.”

The two kissed lazily for a bit, before she pulled back with a contented sigh, setting into her pillows. Tilting up her chin, she nuzzled her nose against his as she asked, “What’s wrong with Clint?”

“Nothing,” he promised solemnly. “Marishka took a bad knock to the head. Plus, she and the Colonel managed to pull home a couple of foster kids. But Clint's fine . . . sticking around through the end of the day for his sister's sake then catching a 'Jet home tonight.”

Darcy grinned at the news, the tip of her tongue poking through her teeth playfully. “We'll have to plan a special 'welcome home' party, then.”

“A welcome home party? This isn't home and no one but us is even going to care that he's back anyway,” Bucky laughed with a grin.

“I know,” she replied with a careless shrug, her smile turning puckish as she agreed, “I was thinking more along the lines of a 'clothing option, dinner and playtime' party.”

“Playtime, huh?” he teased with a wicked smirk. “And what exactly were you planning for your playtime activities?”

She winked, tone lofty as she laughed, “Between the two of us, I'm sure we'll think of something.”

There was times when Darcy could not believe this was her life.

James Buchanan Barnes held a prominent place in American mythology, was covered thoroughly in history books. Of course, they gave the dry details of him; the stats and the kill counts and the blaring details that anyone could figure out for themselves just by watching the Captain America films from the era. His devotion to Steve Rogers was lauded and dissected vehemently, as was what little of their childhood friendship was known. His features were black and white and sepia, always a small figure when standing next to his larger than life best friend.

The James Buchanan Barnes from the history books held no similarity to the flesh and blood Bucky Barnes she was holding within the circle of her arms now.

Oceans crashed and swelled in the depths of his eyes, the color hidden from history for far too long. Silk strands tumbled along his cheeks and down his back, soft to the touch and held tamed by the bun at the nape of his neck. Darcy knew intimately the tenderness in the touch of his lips, had caressed the gentleness hiding in the strength of his frame.
She loved to listen to him, and could happily lose herself in the sound of his voice. It was impossible to predict what he'd sound like on any given day, and each day was an adventure in finding out. Sometimes, he'd tell her stories of his childhood, and she'd be able to see the cacophony of Coney Island and the greenery of Prospect Park in the cadence of his words. Other times, he'd be on the phone with his beloved Uchenny, and she'd glimpse Moscow's Red Square and the iconic St. Basil's Cathedral in the way his lips formed the Russian syllables.

The history books could never know of the haunted look in his eyes or the terrible nightmares that woke him, still screaming. They would never talk about the great love and utter devotion he held for those he loved. Could never see the soul deep bruises or touch the source of his lifetime of pain. She could never have believed it, all those weeks when she hated and feared him, but in this moment she knew . . .

She loved him.

More importantly, she loved him for himself. Not for Clint's sake, but for his own. God or Thor willing . . . she would never have to go a single day without feeling the way she did right now.

Reaching up to caress his cheeks, she pulled him down into a lingering kiss. When at last they separated, she kept him close to her. Earthy brown eyes searched ocean blue ones as she announced, “I love you.”

The joy and happiness in his eyes exploded outwards across his face as he beamed at her. There was sweetness in his smile as he replied reverently, “Ya lyublyu tebya, Dollface.”

Darcy gave him a shaky smile, feeling tears fill her eyes as she read the truth in his words between the cresting waves of emotion in his eyes. Guilt swelled in her throat and she choked out a sob as she begged, “I'm so sorry, Bucky.”

Bucky blinked in surprise at the statement, before he seemed to soften, understanding without explanation, “It's okay, Doll.”

“No, it's not . . . and don't you dare let me off so easily. I was horrible to you.”

“Darcy, Rumlow is the only one to blame for that. You could never have known the truth.”

“Clint tried to make me see the truth, and I wouldn't listen to him. I could have lost this . . . without ever getting to have it at all.”

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Bucky Barnes had never and could never claim to be a whole man. He had been broken and molded and reformed too many times to be anything less than irreparably damaged. There were simply too many fractures in his being for him to be completely healed.

His Gadyuka had started the healing process. Her fearlessness and adoration had filled the deepest chinks in the mortar, strengthening him with every breath she took. He could not truly remember his friendship with Steve except in little bits and pieces, but he remembered her . . . and how very much he had loved the stubborn, compassionate and utterly fearless little girl she had been, as well as the headstrong, passionate woman she had become.

Then came his Hawk, the love of his life. Clint was fearlessly reckless with love, just like his sister, and utterly careless with his trust. He was also unfailingly loyal, brutally honest and a better man – a better lover – than Bucky deserved. He reached for the hearts of people and had never been wrong yet.
With Clint had come a maverick family, regardless of their admittedly rocky beginnings. That family had given him so much and had asked for nothing in his return. He'd gotten his Marishka back, and gained a confidant in her Colonel. He had a friend in Jason and a conspirator in Brian . . . a defender in Aaron and a supporter in Hansel.

If not for them, he would never have been in a place to be good to Darcy.

She was so very different from Clint. There was evidence she had been hurt before and trust did not come easily to her. But there was laughter in her heart, same as in Clint's, and a boundless capacity for love and hope. There was a pure innocence in her, that had been eradicated from Clint and Bucky both very long ago. As Clint had said, she was good for the both of them.

Bending to her, he kissed her cheek tenderly. Personally, he could think of nothing she had done that she needed to be absolved of. However, if she needed that from him, he had no qualms with giving it to her. “Darcy, I forgive you. It's over and done. All we can do now is focus on starting a new life . . . a new life together.” Brushing his fingers through the fall of her bangs, he gifted her with a warm smile. “Can we do that? Can we build a world together, somewhere you and Clint and I can just love each other and be happy? Some place we can shape and mold to be whatever we want it to be?”

He could see her yearning for it and smiled, insisting, “Dollface, build a life with me. Be the stars in my night sky and the sun in my dawn. Be the strength in Clint's bow and the power in my arm. Can you be that for me? For us . . . for all of us?”

It took her a moment, but before long she relaxed and beamed up at him. “Yes . . . yes, James Buchanan Barnes . . . I will build a life with you and Clint. And we'll be so very happy together.”

He grinned, bending to kiss her sweetly, “That's our girl.”

It was nearly eighteen hours later before Clint entered his quarters on base. It had been a long, if satisfying, hunt. Marina was going to be fine and was already over being fussled at by her partner, and the two Winchester boys seemed to be settling in well with the rest of the family. All that remained was crawling into bed with his lovers and enjoying some quality time with the two of them.

He'd been a little surprised when Bucky had declined to go with him, however he hoped that the time away had given the two a chance to bond together without him there to pad the space. Twisting the key in the lock, he eased the door open and then froze, staring at the picture on the bed. A warm, adoring smile curved up the corners of his lips as he leaned one hip against the doorjamb, arms covering over his chest as he watched them.

Bucky was lying sprawled out on his back, with Darcy clinging to him like a limpet. The two had clearly tried to wait up for him, but had fallen asleep when it had taken him longer to get home than expected. But this right here? This was everything he'd ever wanted . . . and he was never going to let it go again.

His Mockingbird stirred on the bed, blinking her eyes at the light streaming in from the hallway. “Clint?” she murmured sleepily, turning her face into Bucky's chest petulanty.

“Yes, peresmeshnika. it's me.”

“Good . . . shut the door and come to bed. It's still early,” she yawned, humming adorably as she burrowed back into Bucky's arms as the sniper shifted on the mattress in reaction to her voice. “You can tell us all about it in the morning.”

“It is morning, Darce,” he laughed lightly, coming in and shutting the door behind him.
He undressed swiftly as she contemplated that, before climbing under the covers on her other side. Giggling sleepily, she insisted, “Whatever . . . too early.”

“Yes ma’am. Love you, Darcy.”

“Love you too, Hawkass . . . (yawn) . . . see you in the morning.”

“See you in the morning, love. Sleep well,” he whispered, accepting her body as she rolled into him burying his nose in the strands of her hair. She sagged into him, already swept away by sleep again. Clint's free hand quested across the bed to link with Bucky's metal hand, the finger squeezing reflexively against them. Thus connected to both of his lovers, Clint was at last able to relax. He closed his eyes and yawned. “Missed you . . .” he murmured just before he slipped away into the Land of Morpheus. “It's good to be home.”

Chapter End Notes

Translations:

(R) khishchnik - little hawk (Bucky's nickname for his longtime boyfriend, Cling Grimm)
(R) Uchenny - scholar (Bucky's nickname for his former protégé and oldest friend, Marina Petrovka)
(R) Gadyuka - Viper (callsign given to Marina Petrovka by the Krasnaya Komnata)
(R) peresmeshnika - mockingbird (Clint's nickname for their girlfriend, Darcy Lewis.)
Chapter Notes

Enjoy this one! (Reasons for my lateness at the end, as I don't want to spoil anything.)

Translations, what few there are, at the end as always.

Thank you all for your continued support and your reviews. They make my life!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 236: Even a Perfect Soldier Bleeds . . .

It shouldn’t have happened. There were a million excuses he could offer for why it HAD, but at the end, it all boiled down to that. Four words (five if you counted shouldn’t as two), twenty-three characters finalized by a single, unassuming period.

It was embarrassing.

One minute he’d been headed back to his office from a meeting, listening to Jay through the family’s comm. His attention had been split between his frazzled brother complaining about his future mother-in-law and the folder in his hands. He’d walked this route a million times, knew every crook and cranny so how had he missed that something was off?
The tech genius was incensed as he ranted, “How in the hell did I get the only sane member of that family?! Seriously Will, her mother?! She's NUTS!! Batshit, absolutely crazy!!”

Will's tone was absent, though attentive, as he snarked, “I'll be sure to tell Casey you think her mother's evil.”

“I'm pretty sure Casey agrees with me,” Jason drawled lazily, aware he had only half of his brother's attention. “She's been an absolute menace since we announced our engagement.”

“We're not exactly the high society types,” the Colonel reminded his brother with a soft chuckle.

“Tell me something I don't know. Still, we're certainly wealthy enough for her tastes. You have more money stashed in offshore accounts than the Shraegers could ever dream.”

“That's emergency money, Jason. It doesn't figure officially into our finances.”

“Honestly, if I’d thought Marina wouldn’t tan my hide for it I would have tried to elope.” Jason grumbled irritably.

Will blinked at the word, before bursting into laughter. “Marishka would have had your head on a platter.”

“I dread to think which head she’d have taken,” the Tech specialist muttered, his eyeroll almost audible.

“Pretty sure you wouldn't have cared, since your ability to sit would have been severely compromised,” Will snickered, easily able to imagine the thrashing Marina would have dished out.

“Good point. And then Casey likely would have added to it for my ‘idiocy’ as she’d term it.”

Whatever Will had been about to say in reply was cut off by the sharp, searing agony erupting in his lower back. He choked, arching slightly away from the pain and papers slipping from nerveless fingers. A low, vicious voice hissed, “Ward belongs to US. You and your kind need to leave him alone. Or a knife in the back will be the least of your problems, got me? Hail HYDRA, Colonel.”

It wasn't until the word was spoken that Will understood he had been stabbed. He gasped as the knife wrenched free and he staggered into the wall, feeling the hot, sticky sensation of blood pooling in the waistband of his pants. Looking up, he caught the edge of the STRIKE patch, but saw nothing more before his assailant was gone from view.

“Will?” Jason prompted his brother. He'd heard the mumbling of words followed by his elder brother’s sudden intake of breath. As a result, the sudden silence was eerily unnerving to the tech specialist. “Is everything okay?”

“Jay . . .” he breathed, the sound of pain familiar and prevalent in the officer's voice. “. . . help . . .”

There was no hesitation. Will did not ever ask for help, not even when he needed it. To have him asking now? Something bad had happened and Jason felt fear spear through him, even as he insisted, “Where are you? I'm coming, big brother.”

“Back hallway . . . by Analysis . . . hurry . . . there's a lot of blood . . .” was the terrifying answer, Will's voice going quiet and strained.

“I'll call Medical . . . have them meet me there.”
“No!” was the immediate reply, tone sharp and insistent. “No doctors. Just you.”

“Fine . . . no doctors. But I’m calling Vincent and Owen to meet me, no arguments.” Was Jason’s firm response. “Marina really will kill us all if you bleed out.”

Will had never sounded so weak as he did just then, whimpering, “. . . Don't tell . . . Jay, please . . . she'll worry . . . still weak . . .”

“She’ll find out sooner or later Will; she always does. But I won’t tell. You just focus on yourself right now and hold on for her and the girls . . . we’re on our way.”

“I’ll try . . . tired, Jay,” he murmured, tone going hazy as he fought off unconsciousness through sheer stubbornness. “Hurry.”

Jason was already moving. Garnering more than one strange look from people as he raced from his office in the labs, his attention was focused solely on his brother as he barked towards the comm. “Vincent, Owen. You two got your ears on?”

Vincent's tone was concerned as he agreed, “I'm here,” seconds before Owen asked, “What's up, Jason?”

“Something's happened to Will. Meet me in the back hallways by Analysis ASAP. By his own admission, he’s bleeding . . . badly.”

“What!” Owen roared, though Vincent said nothing. There was only a steady stream of cuss words coming from that participant in their conversation. “How!? This is HQ! Who would attack a Department Head IN HQ!?”

“No idea, Owen. Will’s not exactly in the best position to provide information at the moment . . . he’s more concerned about Marishka not finding out.” Jason huffed with a shake of his head as he barreled through the hallways, uncaring of who he may have knocked aside.

Vincent snorted hard as he snarked, “Yeah . . . good luck with that. Why me? Why not Medical?”

“Will said no doctors. I wasn’t going to argue while he’s bleeding and you’re family; he won’t argue against you being there.” Jason shot back with a sigh. “I did try to tell him Marishka would find out anyways.”

“Uh huh. And she's gonna have all of us in body bags,” Owen snarled, before there was a squealing sound like running shoes on concrete, before the Cleaner and assassin shouted, “Will! Shit! Hey Boss Man, I'm here. Stay with me, huh? Guys, where are you?!”

Rounding the corner Jason spotted Owen and Will ahead, his boots screeched on the floor as he skidded to a stop. “Son of a bitch,” the tech specialist snarled as his eyes swept over Will.

Will's eyes were half-lidded, but his lips were moving insistently, unable to force himself to put any more air into his voice. Owen was stripping his own uniform shirt to make a pressure bandage and didn't notice, though Jason knelt to try to figure out what was so important to the Colonel. “What is it, Will? What's wrong?”

The man's hand closed on Jason's hand like a vice, eyes blazing silver in his face. “. . . Ward . . .”

Jason scowled momentarily at the word. It seemed highly unlikely to him that Marina’s latest addition would be responsible for this . . . not in his current condition anyways. Head cocking slightly as he studied his brother Jason queried “What about Ward? He can't even walk straight and

Exchanging a furious look with Owen briefly at the mention of STRIKE, Jason cursed vehemently in Russian for a moment or two before squeezing his elder brother’s hand. “Yeah Will. We’ll look out for him, just save your strength . . . your girls all need you to stick around.”

He huffed out a sigh of air, “. . . Handler pool . . . warn Vika . . .”

Jason was already fishing his phone out of his pocket as Vincent rounded the corner. Stepping aside to give the medic room to work, he hit the speed dial for Marina’s sister and waited for her to answer his call. “Come on, Vika . . . come on!”

“Dubrovskaya,” was the sharp greeting from the blond Amazon.

“Vika, it’s Jay. Is Ward there with you currently?”

“Yeah. He’s at his desk, working on a book report for Marina. It's due on her desk tomorrow. Why?”

“Keep a close eye on him and keep STRIKE away from him.” Jason hurried out, eyes raking over his brother before blowing out a sharp breath. “Someone from STRIKE just stabbed Will in the back because of him . . . and don’t tell Marishka!” He stressed with a fierce tone of voice.

“What!?” she squeaked, horrified by the information. “Just NOW!?”

“Yeah, a little while ago. If you need backup call in Nat and Brian, and tell them what’s going on. Something’s going on and the only word Will huffed out in explanation of what happened was Grant’s name.” Jason growled his free hand balling into a fist at his side.

“And you're telling me NOT to tell my sister why?! She's going to flip out! The Colonel means everything to her!”

“Will’s orders. He’s concerned that she’s still too weak to know right now. As much as I know she’s gonna chew me out for it when she does find out, on that I do have to agree with him. She hasn't bounced back as quickly as we’re all used to.” Jason sighed into the phone his attention torn between Vika and what was going on with Will.

Vincent glanced up into the injured man's face worriedly, before insisting, “I'm sorry,” and dragging Will forward ruthlessly.

The Colonel’s shout reverberated through the echoing hallway, ending on a whimpering moan as he sagged forward over Owen’s bracing arms. “Der'mo,” he breathed in gasping agony. “How bad?”

“It's deep . . . there's a filial puncture. It went hilt deep at the very least. Will, man, we have to take you into Medical. Complications alone . . .”

“No,” was the blunt, stubborn refusal. “I will not let them see they got to me. Take me home. Stitch me there.”

Rolling his eyes Jason spoke to his phone “Vika, what do you think the odds are that Marina will kick Will’s ass for the decision to be stitched up at home?” He gave his elder brother a pointed look even as he shook his head at the order. “The only upside I see to that option, Vincent, is that we can protect him better. Not only from STRIKE but from his own stubbornness.”
Grimacing in agreement, Vincent leaned Will back cautiously. “Here's the problem, Will. You have a puncture wound, at least three maybe four inches deep, in your lower left back maybe an inch above your pelvic bone and four inches left of your spine. If you had more meat on your bones, I wouldn't be as worried about moving you. As it is . . . you let us move you, okay? Or no dice.”

Will's teeth gritted at a wash of pain rushing through his hips and lower back, before he panted out, “Deal.”

“Vika, I gotta go and help them move Will. After you read in Brian and Nat, do you think you could give Clint a call and let him, Aaron and Bucky know? As much as Marina will kill me for her being the last to know, I don’t feel right leaving them out of the loop.” Jason rambled suddenly, his brain whirling over the shitstorm in progress.

“I'll handle it. Just . . . let me know what the prognosis is? I'll keep an eye on our other Perfect Soldier for Will and Marina.”

“Thanks, Vika. Soon as Vincent’s done patching him up I’ll pass on the sitrep.”

“Thank you. And good luck with Marina. You're going to need it.”

“Hey, at least I know she won’t kill me before the wedding.” Jason snarked with a roll of his eyes.

“Small comfort, seeing as you won't get to enjoy the wedding night before she does,” Vika snarked.

“Gotta go. Garrett just showed up . . . and he's making a beeline for Grant.”

“No worries, I'll comm Brian and get him and Nat enroute just in case.” Jason replied before hanging up his phone and turning his attention to his comm link. “Brian, if you're on comms I need you and Nat enroute to the handler pool to back up Vika. She'll fill you in on what’s going on.”

“On it,” the second eldest agreed, before Natasha chimed in, “Is my sister okay?”

“Fine. Just some unwanted guests we would prefer to disappear. Among other things . . . Vika will explain. I gotta go.”

There was a startled second of concern, before Brian growled, “Don't make me kick your ass, Jay. We'll see you back at the house.”

“Yeah, you too,” the tech agreed, before clicking his comm off and coming back to his brother's side. “How are you doing, pravitel?”

Will groaned, breathless and unable to articulate other than, “Zhemchuzhina . . .”

“Yeah, I know. She's gonna kill us all dead.”

“If we’re lucky, Boss Lady will start with the person responsible for the actual stabbing.” Owen joked, even as he adjusted his hold on Will to prevent the Colonel from trying to move away from Vincent’s working hands.

“From your mouth to Thor’s ears,” Jason agreed, crouching and grabbing his brother's hands. “Easy, big brother. He's almost done.”

“Well even if we don’t know which member of STRIKE was responsible we can just aim Boss Lady in their direction and let her go. The only ones we can rule out is Clint and Rumlow who's still with Clint’s detail in New Mexico right?” The Cleaner speculated, while looking up at Jason. “And I doubt the security cameras caught a clear image of Will’s assailant in these halls.”
Jason’s jaw tightened hard, gritting out, “That will be rectified immediately. This will NOT happen again.”

“Not your fault Jason. Whoever was behind this knew Will’s pattern well enough to know that he multitasks even while walking and that he frequently takes the same routes.”

Vincent spoke up, “The ones where he won’t have to talk to people much.”

“Exactly, also meaning less chance of witnesses or of him being found too quickly.” Owen acknowledged with a scowl. “If he hadn’t have been talking to Jason who knows how long he’d have been bleeding here before someone found him.”

Jason groaned, head hanging. “He was distracted because he was talking to me.”

Will’s hand gripped tightly, dragging his brother’s attention to him. “Not . . . your . . . fault . . . say it!”

The Cleaner elbowed the tech specialist when he stalled for too long. Grumbling insistently, he ordered, “You heard the Boss man, say it.”

Jason grumbled even as he agreed playfully, “Not my fault. Shut up, Will; you’re so bossy.”

“Someone . . . has to . . . be,” he gasped out, arching away from Vincent and renewing his struggles against Owen's grip. “Stop . . . please . . .”

“Easy, Boss Man. The more you struggle, the more strength you lose.” Owen grunted, dipping his head to look Will in the eyes. “You focus on the Boss Lady and those beautiful baby girls of yours. Picture their faces and hold onto them. You hear me?”

“Hurts . . . trying . . . Marishka is gonna kill me . . .”

“Which we’ve been arguing from the get go. We need to tell her, Will.”

“No . . . got stabbed . . . just to avoid . . . dancing . . . at the wedding . . . hear her now . . .” he breathed, hauling in gulps of air between words.

“Nah, man. You wouldn’t stoop so low as to conspire with Garrett and STRIKE to avoid dancing with that pretty lady.” Owen teased with a smirk.

“Hands . . . off . . . my . . . woman, Lucky!” was the growling response, the banter between the two practiced and familiar.

“Then keep your ass alive and make me Boss Man,” Owen retorted with a wink and low chuckle. “Keep that fighting spirit front and center.”

“Mudak,” he hissed.

“How you looking back there Vincent?” Owen queried as his gaze flicked from Will to the medic.

“Almost done. Two more minutes and we can move him.”

“And where exactly are we going to put him that buys us more time from Boss Lady’s wrath?” Owen glanced up to Jason then as he continued “It needs to be somewhere defensible . . . just in case these bastards decide to try again.”

There was a momentary silence before the Cleaner paled slightly and started muttering curses under
his breath. “If this was a ploy to get Ward away from Boss and Boss Lady . . . is anyone looking out for Boss Lady? Would they make a move against her and the girls?”

Jason swore viciously, triggering his comm, “Aaron . . Nika . . Jim . . get to the house, NOW! Anyone who can, get to the house!!”

Will whimpered, “Marina?”

“I’m sure she’s okay Boss Man. The Boss Lady is badass to begin with; with the girls there, she’ll be as fierce as a momma tiger protecting her cubs. Still better to be safe and send her some backup . . . just in case.” Owen stated with a firm grip to his best friend’s shoulder. “You know your woman. She won’t go down without a hell of a fight.”

“Home . . . take me home . . .”

“So am I the only one thinking the Grimms need to start walking around in Kevlar 24/7?” Owen snarked light heartedly. “Seems to me you guys draw attention in the most unlikely of places. Almost like you’re the foxes in the hen house and drawing down the farmer’s wrath.”

“More likely the chickens . . . hunted by the fox.”

“Nah man. You’re all too badass and sly for chickens. The foxes hunted by the dogs maybe?”

“Either way . . . said ‘hail HYDRA’ . . . as he walked away.”

“So now we have multi headed vipers in the hen house to deal with too?” Owen growled, eyes flicking between Jason and Vincent. “I for one am not being the bearer of that bad news to Fury.”

“We knew . . . something rotten in our house . . . just not what,” Will explained with a hiss and a sharp frown.

Jason frowned fiercely, hissing, “And now we know. Son of a bitch . . . why the hell can’t anything be easy?”

Chapter End Notes

All I can say here is that Will is hella stubborn. He just wouldn't behave himself and let me stab him! It was very frustrating. :D

Translations:
(R) pravitel - big brother
(R) zhemchuzhina - pearl (one of Will's lesser used nicknames for his long time girlfriend and partner, Marina Petrovka)
(R) Mudak - asshole
Circling the Wagons

Chapter Notes

Getting caught up!! Woohoo!!

Translations at the end as always, what few there are anyway. XD

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
Chapter 237: Circling The Wagons

“Hey, at least I know she won’t kill me before the wedding.” Jason snarked, rolling eyes all but audible in his tone.

Viktoriya Coulson was thrumming with rage and fury. Even still, she forced it down, acknowledging that what had happened was not Jason’s fault. Instead she snarked back to the middle Grimm, “Small comfort, seeing as you won’t get to enjoy the wedding night before she does.”

There was a sudden crash as the door leading into the handler pool slammed into the wall behind it,
causing Vika’s head to snap up in alarm. The sight of John Garrett standing there, with his eyes glued on Grant Ward’s bent head caused a deep sigh as she turned her attention back to the phone. “I’ve got to go. Garrett just showed up . . . and he’s making a beeline for Grant.”

Dropping the phone into its cradle without a goodbye, she didn’t think Jason would be upset about it. He had his own hands full with his eldest brother. “Agent Garrett . . . can I help you with something?” she asked, tone glacial. Any of the other agents in the pool would have known not to test her patience when she was utilizing that tone, but Garrett didn’t even glance her way. Striding purposefully through the crowded room, he approached the younger man. Leaning over, he grabbed him by the upper arm and immediately had the kid’s attention.

Grant flinched hard, pulling back against the grip as Garrett snapped, “Let’s go.”

Viktoriya was not the dangerous one among her sisters. Marina was the mother bear, in all of her protective fury. Nika was the wolverine, vicious and gleeful with it. Natasha was as beautiful and as poisonous as her namesake, grace and death in human form. Vika had chosen administration because that was where she had always felt most comfortable.

This did not mean, however, that she was not as skilled or as lethal as her sisters. She was just better at hiding it than they were.

Lunging forward, she laid a well placed chop with the blade of her hand to the curve of his wrist, causing Garrett’s hand to spasm and his grip to release. Grant literally toppled backwards off his chair and scrambled out of his reach. Vika immediately stepped between the two men, her “Murderess” face on at full strength. “Do not touch him again.”

“He’s my asset and he’s sat on his ass long enough,” Garrett growled, eyes blazing as he stared up at the blonde Amazon.

Viktoriya smirked, easily able to see the alarm in his features at the realization she was taller than he was, though not by much. John Garrett may be 6’2” tall, but she was 5’11” without heels . . . and her boots were rocking a four inch heel. “I had it on good authority, Agent Garrett, that Agent Ward is now under the direct supervision of my sister . . . not you.”

“He’s still STRIKE.”

“And he’s on the disabled list. That hasn’t changed. Until he’s released by Medical, he’s not going anywhere!” she hissed, blue eyes blazing as she placed her hands on her hips and leaned into his space.

Growling at her, he leaned down and grabbed Grant by the upper arm, attempting to drag him across the floor. However, he didn’t get very far as Vika’s boot stomped down on his bicep and he released the agent with a pained howl. Using the tip of her boot, she kicked him high in the chest, just below his collarbones, and then used the sole of her boot to shoved him sprawling backwards. Tall and lithe, she cut a terrifying figure as she hissed, “You touch him again, and I’m going to rip you apart. Got me?”

“You and what army?” he sneered disdainfully, before freezing at the sound of throat clearing delicately behind him.

Natasha’s tone was a warm, misleadingly gentle purr as she replied, “Surely you haven’t forgotten who you’re talking to, Garrett? Vika may not like kicking ass, but that doesn’t mean she isn’t still very VERY good at it.”
“And we may not be her army per se, but the Grimms are still an army in and of themselves. So don’t piss me off and back the hell up,” was the rumbling growl from the second eldest Grimm, the one universally accepted as most likely to rip your limbs from your torso if you pissed him off.

The redheaded assassin cocked her head, green eyes wide and deceptively guileless as she asked, “Do we have a problem here?”

Ward’s eyes were huge as he stared up at these three protectors he’d suddenly earned for himself, trying to make himself as small as he could despite the brace around one knee. “No ma’am,” he murmured, scooching to put his back to the wall and keeping the rest of them in his line of sight.

“She wasn’t talking to you, Ward,” Brian insisted firmly, though not unkindly for all of that. “She was talking to Garrett, however.”

“No . . . no problem,” the STRIKE commander insisted, forcing himself to straighten up with a gasping breath.

“I didn’t think so,” she agreed sweetly, before her tone hardened to pure steel. “You can go now.”

His jaw tightened, though he said nothing as he cradled his battered chest and forced himself to his feet. “This isn’t over.”

There was power and magnificence in Vika’s eyes as she insisted coldly, “Yes . . . it is. And if you know what’s good for you, you’ll stay away from this family.” There was a noticeable pause, before she continued, “And that includes everyone, not just Grant. Because if I find out you had anything to do with what happened today . . . I will be the least of your worries. I’ll unleash my sister in all of her fury . . . my sisters and I directly at her side. And we will lay waste to you.”

He glared at her, before stumbling from the handler pool. Brian rounded on Vika as soon as he was gone, demanding, “Something happened?!?” There was barely a pause before he demanded, “What happened!?”

Slumping back against the edge of her desk, the woman shook her head. “I don’t know all the details, but Jason just called. Will’s been stabbed.”

A moment of perfect stillness rang through the room, before Brian exploded with a furious roar, “WHAT!?”

Natasha’s own question was quieter, “Is he okay?”

“I don’t know. From the sounds of it, it’s pretty serious. Jason was gonna call me when they got him home.”

“Who the hell would be that stupid? Don’t they know Marina at all?” Natasha asked, eyes wide with concern and horror. “She’s gonna be pissed!”

Vika’s mouth twisted as she sighed, “Pissed? Is an understatement.”

“And knowing Will, he doesn’t want Marina knowing he’s hurt, so she’s going to be as equally pissed at him and Jay for not telling her.” Brian growled as he paced around the handler pool.

“Yeah. She’s gonna smother Will and scream at Jason. Jason’s already convinced she's gonna kill him.”

“Good bet,” Brian chuckled as Natasha moved to crouch beside Grant. “Are you alright?”
It was clear the younger agent was in a state of shock, seeing as he jolted at her touch. “Is he gone?”

Vika nodded, crouching to cup his cheek. “Yes, Grant . . . he's gone. Are you okay?”

Vika could tell by the way he stared up at her, Grant had considered lying . . . for all of a split second. If Marina found out he’d lied to her, her sister would definitely kick his butt for breaking the rules Marina had laid out. Evaluating his knee by flexing it Grant winced before shaking his head and mumbling “I think I twinged my knee . . . it hurts.”

The blonde nodded, insisting, “All right. Off to Medical with you, Agent Ward. Let's go.”

“Again? Marina’s gonna kill me and it's not even my fault.” Grant groaned as he attempted to haul himself up off the floor unassisted.

“At least if you're following the rules, she'll only scold you. I would sincerely be more worried if I were Agent Garrett right now. I have a feeling a good portion of her wrath is heading his way.”

“I have a sinking suspicion that you’re right and it's going to start a chain of events as Garrett tries to take out his wrath on me . . . again.” He huffed out as he finally managed to get himself into a position to grip the edge of a desk to assist himself upright.

Vika’s grip was implacable as she vowed, “We will never let that happen. You're family, Grant . . . anyone touches you, they deal with us. Da?”

Schooling his features Grant gave a terse nod, although he suspected his fear was still clearly evident in his eyes to both of Marina’s sisters. “I'm still trying to adjust to that fact . . . my family never would have given half a damn over my well being.”

“This one does . . . it does take getting used to, but you're a smart boy. You'll figure it out.”

“Why do I suddenly feel like Pinnochio? With Marina being Geppetto and you the fairy who turns me into a real boy?” Grant snarked light hearted with a wry half grin breaking his mask.

“I've always wanted to be the Blue Fairy,” Vika joked, chuckling. Reaching up to fluff her short blonde ringlets, she taunted, “I even have my hair like hers.”

The specialist bit down on his lower lip in an attempt to quell the laughter forming in his chest at the comment. It was really a losing battle however. After a minute or so there was a soft splutter before a low chuckle broke the silence; Grant’s head dropping towards his hands where they clenched against the desk as his shoulders jerked.

Vika’s lips quirked, pleased by the reaction. “Come on. Sooner gone, sooner done.”

“Yes Ma'am,” Grant responded even as he hobbled to retrieve his crutches.

Brian reached over and grabbed them, sighing, “Sam's right. You are terrible at asking for help.”

“That’s a case of pot meet kettle if ever I heard one. Sam’s not that hot at asking for help himself.” Grant retorted as he grudgingly accepted Brian’s help. “Seems a running theme in this family on occasion too from what I’ve seen.”

“No argument there,” Natasha giggled, earning a smirk from her sister. “Come on you . . . let's get you to Medical so Marishka doesn't totally spaz out.”

“Uhm . . . could one of you grab my book and notes for me? If I’m going to be sitting in Medical I
may as well continue my report for Marina. I dread to think what she’ll do to me if it’s not on her desk tomorrow,” Grant asked quietly, eyes downcast.

“I think in this instance, she’d understand, but as you wish,” Vika agreed with a fond smile.

“Probably, but it’ll let me distract myself from the fact I’m in Medical again and stop me from trying to sneak out and getting sprung by Miranda.” Grant admitted.

“Good point.” Turning back to Brian, she cocked an eyebrow and inquired pointedly, “Don’t you have somewhere else to be?”

Brian’s eyes went cold at the reminder, as he growled, “Oh yeah. I’ll keep you informed, Vika.”

There was a rush of affection as Vika gave him a small smile, “Thank you, Bri.”

He gave the two brisk nods, before ruffling Grant’s hair and all but running from the room. Natasha and Vika looked at each other calmly, before Natasha huffed out a sigh. “All right . . . you good to go, Grant?”

“He came,” Vika chirped, turning to the two women still looking at him narrowly. “I’ll lead on,” he agreed, adjusting his grip on his crutches before following the two women from the handler pool. And if he noticed they took up protective positions on either side of him, he at least was smart enough not to mention it.

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Jason pulled the Jeep into the driveway of his brother’s house, ears peeled towards the backseat where Vincent was trying to keep his now unconscious brother from bleeding to death. Owen sat in the passenger seat, but he hadn’t been facing forward since the engine had turned over. Slamming the car into park, Jason wrenched the keys from the ignition and twisted. “How is he?”

“Stable, for the moment,” the medic announced, looking up and eyes sweeping the area. “Looks like STRIKE didn’t try to come for her. Front yard’s as pristine as ever.”

“That would be my perfectionist older brother. Stubborn idiot,” the tech geek replied, looking up at the sound of his name. Brian had pulled up on his motorcycle, body moving in practiced repetition as he turned the bike off. “Bri!”

Brian bolted across the lawn, stopping by the back wheel, hands gripping the steel siding fiercely. “How is he?”

“All right for the moment. Guys, if you two could clear the way and distract Marina, Owen and I can get him inside.”

Brian nodded, tone amiable as he agreed, “Can do!” Slapping Owen’s back, the second eldest Grimm insisted, “Be careful with him?”

Jason smirked as he watched the two. No one would ever believe that these two men had once hated each other. Granted that was decades ago, but it was still good to see that the animosity between them was gone. Owen took the question in with the gravity it was intended, nodding solemnly, “You have my word.”

“Thank you.”

The two brothers jogged across the lawn, heading towards the door. Brian froze on the top stair, hand coming out to grab Jason’s shirt, snapping sharply, “Wait.”
“What!?” the younger brother asked, glaring at Brian impatiently.

Brian reached back and pulled his gun, chambering a round as he announced, “There’s blood on the floor.”

“What!?” Jason demanded, whirling and staring at the dark red stain. Someone had tried to clean it, but the imperfection in the wood was there for all to see nonetheless. Jerking away from Brian, Jason pulled his gun and barrelled into the house yelling, “Marina!”

“Damn it Jay,” was the only thing Brian said, as he bolted into the house behind him. Jason ignored him, his only thoughts for his sister and nieces. Whatever had happened, it was clear it was over as there were no sounds of struggle inside. Ergo, there was nothing stopping him from making sure the Russian was okay.

He skidded to a stop in the kitchen, staring wide eyed at the line of bodies stretched out along the tile. “Jesus . . .” he breathed, unable to prevent himself from counting them. Five bodies and no back up on sight. Shit.

A noise from the hidden stairwell into the kitchen had Jason whirling, gun coming up without pause. A familiar chuckle, tired but still amused, drifted through the area as a voice teased, “That’s the second time you’ve pulled a gun on me inside my own home, Jason Leonard. Something I should know?”

Marina stepped from concealment, her daughter Valya against one shoulder and a Glock 9mm gripped tightly in her other hand. Jason felt a rush of relief, stowing the gun and moving forward to pull them both into his arms. “Slava Bogu, are you okay?”

“I’m all right. Just a little bruised, but I’m okay,” she promised, the stock of the gun a firm press against the small of his back as she allowed herself to hug him. “Katenka’s upstairs . . . she slept through the whole thing. This one however, was in the living room with me when they burst in.”

“Is she okay?” Brian asked, darting forward to smooth his fingers over Valya’s dark curls.

“Scared, but all right. Not a scratch on her. I was able to keep them out of the living room for the most part.” Looking between the two, she demanded, “Does someone want to tell me why STRIKE broke into my home today and did their damnedest to put me in an early grave?”

“Marina . . .” Jason hedged, trying to figure out how much to say.

She blanched, her features going very pale as she whispered, “Where’s Misha? What’s happened!?”

The two brothers glanced at each other, before Brian stepped forward and extracted Valya from her arms. At the same time, Jason reached to wrap his hands around her biceps. Hot chocolate eyes were huge as her wrists twisted so her hands could clamp around his own wrists. “Jay . . . what’s happened? Where is Mishka?”

“STRIKE wants Grant back. They knew the only way to do that, was to go through you and Will.”

Marina was already shaking her head, whimpering, “No . . . no . . . no . . .”

Jason tightened his hands around her and announced, “He’s alive . . . but he’s been stabbed.” He winced at her terrified cry of, “No!” but continued, knowing she needed to know everything. “It’s bad, Marishka . . . but Vincent is a stubborn cuss, almost as stubborn as Will. He’s gonna be okay, all right? And then you can kick his ass for scaring you.”
“Is he in Medical? We need to go . . . I'll go get Katenka.”

The tech specialist glanced sheepishly to his brother before clearing his throat. Turning his gaze back onto Marina, he grunted, “Actually, he’s outside in the Jeep with Owen and Vincent. Will didn’t want to go to Medical. He doesn’t want anyone knowing what happened.”

Marina’s eyes widened, before her mouth twisted and she snarked, “I’m going to blame that stupid on the pain. Why isn't he in Medical if it's as bad as you're implying?”

“This is Will we’re talking about, Marishka. Bleeding out or not, he's so stubborn he could butt heads with a bull and likely win. I’m also going to assume he doesn’t want to risk showing any weakness where his attackers can see . . . the STRIKE goon who got him told him to ‘Hail HYDRA’ as he was walking away. So there’s that too.” Jason rambled while putting his sidearm back in its holster.

Brian spoke up next, announcing, “Garrett made an attempt to collect Ward as well, but Vika and Nat are sticking close to him.”

Marina went ice cold at that statement, her tone furious as she demanded, “Say that again!?”

“Which part?” Jason snarked with a fond roll of his eyes. “The part about Garrett being stupid enough to try and engage your sister, the part where Will’s as stubborn as a bull, or the part where we have a secret group of Nazi extremists in our midst?”

“The part about Ward,” she demanded, visibly worried about her boy. There was a moment's pause, before she insisted grudgingly, “. . . and the part where a member of STRIKE said ‘Hail HYDRA’ to S.H.I.E.L.D.’s Chief Analyst.”

Jason sighed, guiding Marina to the table and sitting her down. “When Will told me his attacker said about Ward being ‘theirs’ I rang Vika to read her in. Apparently Garrett was already storming into the Handler Pool so she had to run. Brian and Nat went to back her up, so he likely has a better run down of what happened with Garrett.” Jason explained, one hand lifting to pinch the bridge of his nose “It wasn’t until Vincent was trying to tend to Will’s wound that my idiot brother dropped the HYDRA bombshell.”

“So that's what's rotten in our house,” the woman sighed, one hand coming up to scrub over her face. For a long time, she sat quiet, before straightening in her chair. “At the moment, I don't care. We'll figure it out later.”

Jason’s eyes popped out of his head as he protested, “Marishka . . .”

“No!” she ordered, eyes wide and luminous as though she was holding back tears through sheer force of will. Jason had never seen his sister so fragile . . . so human. Even at her most maternal, there was a core of strength and steel in her. “I am going to handle Misha. The rest can figure itself out.”

“What are our orders in the meantime?” Brian asked, glancing between his two siblings.

Marina’s smile was fond and proud as she replied, “Ask Jason . . . he's Misha’s Second.”

“What?” the middle Grimm asked, startled. The woman said nothing, only bent to kiss the top of his head before extracting her daughter from Brian's arms and heading out to see to her lover. “Marina!”

Her voice was firm as it rang back over her shoulder, announcing, “You can do this. Utilize their
strengths and put things in order. I have faith in you, Jay . . . have some faith in yourself.”

The tech was floored; he was Second yes, but **after** Marina. He’d never taken over while Marina was still in commission, only when his brother AND his sister are unable to give the orders.

Brian took pity, understanding his dilemma. “Jay, Marina is out of play, okay? Her whole priority right now is Will and their daughters. So just parse it out like you would if Marina was down for the count okay? What do we do first?”

“We rally the troops.” Jason stated firmly, scowling as he looked to the ceiling. “We get Rene and **Samonik** home to look after the girls. Call in Gus and Malee . . . we get the whole family together to protect Will, Marina and the girls. *Der’mo* I didn’t call Dad . . or Maria about Will.”

“One thing at a time. I'll go get the kids; tell Marina I'm gonna take the NSX. Call Nat and Vika . . . get Ward here as soon as he's released; Marina's gonna worry until she sees him for herself.”

Squeezing his brother's shoulder, Brian promised, “You got this, Jay. One thing at a time.”

Jason's hands came up too push back through his hair as Brian left, feeling panic spike in his gut. “I wasn’t built for this,” he groaned, trying to calm down. After a moment, he straightened, “But that doesn't mean I'm not gonna rock the shit out of this.”

Chapter End Notes

Translations:

(R) Da/nyet - yes/no  
(R) Slava Bogu - Thank God.  
(R) Samonik - Sammy-baby (nickname for Will and Marina's foster son, Sam Winchester, used by the whole family.)  
(R) Der'mo - shit
So there's a Firefly Anniversary party in Grimm Pack, if you haven't read it, you should!!

Only one translation. At the bottom as usual.

Let me know what you think and enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
Chapter 238: Vincent’s Lament
After sweeping from the room her boys were in, Marina made her way towards the entrance of their family home, Valya being bounced gently against her hip as she walked. The Russian’s eyes widened as Vincent and Owen appeared in the doorway with her unconscious lover in tow. “Bozhe moi! Misha!”

Her fingers tightened unconsciously, earning an indignant squeal from Valya as the Russian watched her partner’s head loll against his best friend’s chest as they carried him inside. The dark blood staining his clothing earned a gasp as she felt tears well up in her eyes. Bolting forward, she grabbed for his dangling hand, whimpering, “Mishka?”

Vincent’s attention diverted from Will at the whimpering tone; one look at Marina and he could already see the tension coiling in her tiny frame as well as the large bruise marring one delicate cheek. He moved to settle a hand gently on her shoulder; voice a low purr as he spoke “Marina, listen to me. You need to stay calm. For little Valya’s sake, she can already sense your fear.”

Hot chocolate eyes brimmed with tears as she looked up at the doctor. “Tell me . . . is he gonna be okay?”

“If he were anyone else, I’d have my doubts. But we both know Will is a stubborn son of a bitch and he won’t leave you and your girls without a hell of a fight.” Vincent soothed with a squeeze to her shoulder. “What about you . . . how are you? That cheek looks nasty.”

She looked up at him with startled eyes, fingers twitching around Will’s hand as she made an aborted movement to touch her face. “My cheek?”

“You have a rather nasty looking bruise there Marina . . . did you not know?” the medic sounded surprised by her response.

“I was more worried about the girls . . . I’m still coming down from the adrenaline.” She gifted him with a tight smile, “I’m sure I’ll feel it soon enough, if it’s as bad as you say.”

“And when Will finds out about that he’ll kick all our asses.” Vincent retorted as he glanced beyond Marina. “Where’d Brian and Jay end up?”

Marina’s head tilted toward the kitchen, as she replied, “They were in the kitchen last I checked. But I imagine they’re calling in the troops at this point . . . getting everyone home safe and sound.”

“Good plan. Once we get Will settled I’ll get Owen to get some ice for your cheek. How are the girls? I’m going to guess they didn’t get close enough to do any harm to them?”

“Katenka was already down for her nap, but this little one was being stubborn. She’s scared, but unharmed. Katenka slept through the entire thing; I just checked on her and she’s still asleep.”

“So her mother’s daughter then,” Vincent teased as he lifted one hand to tap Valya’s nose. “We’re going to get Will through this, Marina. You need to stay strong for him though and remind him you and the girls are waiting for his stubborn ass.”

Marina’s lips quirked slightly as she sighed, “He requires so much looking after.” Taking a deep breath she vowed, “I can keep him with us, Vincent. I will not lose him this way.”

“Admit it. You wouldn’t want him to be any other way.” Vincent retorted with a wink before pulling Marina, and by extension Valya, into a warm, bracing hug. “We’re all here for you.”

“A Will Grimm who wasn’t a stubborn cuss. What on earth would I do with such a man?” Burrowing into the doctor a little, she laughed and continued bitterly, “A better question is, what
would such a man do with me?"

“He’d probably be six feet under several times over by now.” Vincent chuckled sadly before pressing a kiss to the crown of Marina’s head and then dipping lower to do the same to Valya. “Pretty sure whoever concocted this plan is going to be regretting it soon enough.”

Her face contorted into vicious fury as she agreed, “I intend to make sure of it.”

“And we’ll all have your back while you and your sisters lead the retaliation.” Vincent vowed. “But right now, I need you focusing all your energy on yourself and these girls first, then Will. If he wakes up and you’re frazzled, he’s gonna kick my ass for not doing my job.”

“And what, pray tell, is your job?” she teased.

“To keep you lot alive. Not easy on the best of days; go ahead and throw in people stabbing you in the back in places you should be safe and I’m having issues.” Vincent replied with a heavy sigh before he teased “Sometimes I think you lot are going to be the death of me.”

“I’m pretty sure, we are going to be the death of ourselves,” she snarked. Her mouth dragged downwards in genuine dismay as she watched Owen carry her unconscious Colonel towards the stairs. “What are we going to do?”

“What we do best. Keep our heads during the crisis; get Will back on his feet; and get Jason and Casey married. Then go hunting for the idiot responsible for this.” Vincent’s voice was a low menacing growl, his eyes holding a golden tinge to them. “They made a mess of him and I’d rather like to return the favor.”

“I’ll make sure you come along then, shall I?”

“Would be appreciated. I know how much Will dislikes it when we disobey orders. Come on, you two need to get some rest, as does the patient.”

Marina bit down on her lower lip, eyes terrified as she looked towards the stairwell. “I don’t know if I could rest. Not now that I know what’s out there... waiting in the wings to kill us.”

“Marishka, we won’t let them anywhere near you. With the entire family coming in this place is going to be as secure as Fort Knox.” Vincent gave her shoulder a firm squeeze. “Trust me, right now these idiots think Will is on death’s door, bleeding out in the back hallways of HQ. They’ll be thinking they’ve won.”

“Like hell they have,” she snarled, earning a wild giggle from her daughter at the sound. Bending, Marina brushed her nose against Valya’s own as she cooed, “We’ll rain bloody vengeance on their little parade, won’t we, my sweet girl? Yes we will.”

“God have mercy on future generations when your children are grown.” Vincent chuckled as he watched the mother and daughter.

“There will be no mercy for anyone who harms my family... not while I live to avenge them.”

“Duly noted. But please hold off on plotting the massacre until we get your other half back on his feet and get Jason married off okay?” Vincent nudged her towards the stairs. “Now get moving before I pick you up and carry you and Valya upstairs after Will.”

Looking up at him, the Russian reached out and cupped his cheek. “Thank you, Vincent, for everything you do for this family. You have been our true friend and I do not know what we would
do without you.”

“I could say the same. But we’re family, blood or not. I’ll always stand with you and your boys. Forever and always I’ll be at your back,” he promised. “Now, upstairs with you. Move it, Marishka.”

Gifting him with a quirky grin, she offered him a sassy salute. “Yes sir, Dr Keller, sir.”

Vincent quirked a brow at the antics even as his lips twitched in amusement “Funny, Marina. Now I’m not kidding move it or I will carry you. If Will wakes and you're not there he’s going to struggle against Owen and likely hurt himself more.”

Her eyes went wide at the suggestion, before she clutched Valya closer and bolted toward the stairs.

“I swear one day I’m going to come in here and find you with a broken neck!” Vincent called after the diminutive Russian’s retreating form. He took the stairs quickly, two at a time after her and his patient.

Marina laughed over her shoulder, agreeing, “Be that as it may, at least your life is rarely boring!”

“My life has been far from boring . . . even before I met your lot of reckless boys.” Vincent retorted. “Still at least I know my skills will never get rusty.”

“Thank Thor for that stroke of good luck,” she agreed, eyes turning downwards to take in the quiet features of her eldest daughter. Valya was finally asleep, cuddled to her mother's heart a content grin on her face. “Give me five . . . I need to put her down.”

“Go on. I’ll go make sure Owen’s not having any trouble getting your stubborn partner settled.” Vincent patted Marina’s shoulder on his way past her.

“Thank you,” she murmured, moving quickly down the hallway towards the nursery.

When she came back to her room, Will was still unconscious and lying on his side, facing into the middle of the bed. Vincent was leaning over him, fingers deft on the makeshift bandage. “How is he?” she asked, fingers clutching the doorframe as she watched.

“Resting thankfully, though I don’t know how long that'll last. I may need to go get you some painkillers and sedatives to make sure he rests in order to heal up.” Vincent lifted his head to look at her. “Come and sit with him. Talk to him so he knows you’re here. He’s far too tense and last thing we need is for him to have one more thing to stress about.”

Nodding, she scampered across the floor and climbed into the bed beside him. Fingertips were soft and trembling against the plains of his upturned cheek as she promised softly, “We’re okay Misha my love . . . the girls and I, we're all right. Just rest and get well. I'll be right here beside you, when you wake.”

“You gonna be okay to keep an eye on him for a bit Marina? I want to go call Miranda and get her to collect some supplies I’ll need for Will’s care.” Vincent said quietly, eyes taking in the Russian’s features.

She nodded solemnly, eyes fixed on her lover. He reached over to squeeze her shoulder, before moving to the door. Pausing in the frame, Vincent turned back in time to watch her lay down beside the Colonel, their hands clasped in the small space between them. Hot chocolate eyes searched the beloved features, taking in the pallor of his skin and the darkening bruises beneath his eyes. There was a small sad smile on her lips as she leaned forward to kiss the very corner of his mouth. “I love you,” she murmured, before shifting that small inch closer and tucking her head beneath the jut of his
chin, conscious to leave space between her body and his own.

Vincent retreated, feeling as though he had just witnessed something intensely private and incredibly intimate. He worshipped at the feet of his Catherine, his wild Cat with her brazen attitude and fierce protectiveness. He could only hope that one day, their love would become something like what the Colonel and his Russian had. Something deep and all consuming and quietly passionate; a love full of total devotion and crowned with utter joy in each other.

As Vincent made his way down the stairs the front door slammed open with a loud bang, the sounds drawing the medic's attention away from his mental assessment of what was needed for Will’s care. All his senses went on alert, eyes shimmering golden as he prepared for an attack before he caught sight of Marina’s youngest son barrelling towards the stairs. Just as Rene went to move past him, Vincent hooked one arm around the boy’s waist and lifted him off his feet.

Starting back down the stairs with the teenager his golden eyes locked on the younger Winchester’s back as the tall young man closed the door behind them. As for Rene, he was thrashing in Vincent's grasp and trying to wriggle free causing the medic to emit a low growl before he demanded, “Rene, stop.”

“My dad!” he protested, tears in his eyes as he struggled. “Let go, Vincent!”

“No,” was the blunt response, even as he was dumping the teenager onto the couch.

“I need to see my dad!”

“You need to grow up,” the doctor snapped in reply, causing Rene’s jaw to drop in shock. “Your mom is exhausted and she's gonna be hurting in the morning. Your dad was stabbed; it's pretty serious and he is currently unconscious. Which means someone needs to look after your sisters. And who do you think is going to do that, if not for you and Samonik?”

Reaching down, he took Rene’s chin and forced the teen to look at him. “They need to rest and heal, okay? They NEED that. Which means the rest of us need to step up and lend them a hand or twenty.”

Rene considered Vincent’s words for a moment or two before giving a sharp nod as he blurted swiftly “We can do that. Right Sam? Can I assume the family is all being called in?”

Smirking, the medic agreed, “Fort Knox has nothing on a house full of pissed off and overprotective Grimms.”

“Then I guess we better drag out the extra pillows and blankets to air out before everyone arrives.” Rene’s eyes flicked to the ceiling momentarily before asking in a quiet voice “Dad’s not gonna die is he? Mama couldn’t handle that.”

There was always a part of Vincent that had known how fierce Rene was, how much like Will he was. This was perhaps the first time Vincent realized that more than Will's son, Rene was Marina's Child. Fierce, protective and devoted unendingly to those he loved.

Squeezing the thin shoulder, Vincent promised, “No, Rene, your dad isn't gonna die. Your mother will never allow it. You all need him . . . your mother needs him too much to let him go without a hell of a fight. Right?”

“Sometimes I feel like their lives are an endless horror movie,” Rene muttered, scrubbing one hand over watery eyes as he tried to pull his head on straight to take over the care of his baby sisters.
“There is too much love in their lives, for them to ever be a horror movie. It's definitely an action flick though; nonstop go go go.”

“Maybe. But this current situation is screaming slasher fic to me.” Rene retorted before recalling Vincent’s words. “Wait . . . how was Mama hurt?”

Taking a deep breath through his nose, Vincent considered the young man before him. There was a moment when he thought about lying, but that thought never fully developed. “The same people who were behind your father's stabbing, sent a goon squad here to the house to take out your mother.”

The teen’s shoulder’s tensed, eyes narrowing as his gaze darted between his best friend and Vincent as he hissed, “They came for her in her own home? While the babies were here!?”

“There's a tableau of dead bodies laid out in the kitchen,” came the unexpected response from behind Vincent, Jason's green eyes weary and heartsick as he watched his nephew. “Five of them, to be specific.”

“Valya and Katenka . . . they’re okay?” Rene asked suddenly, eyes darting to his Uncle as he processed that information.

“Kat was already down for her nap; she's fine. Valya was frightened but unhurt. She's sleeping in the nursery with Katenka now. Your mother laid her down about fifteen minutes ago,” Vincent promised.

“Why is it whenever Mama’s happy . . . or even when anyone in this family is happy something goes majorly wrong? It’s like Karma hates the Grimms.” Rene groused, slouching down into the couch.

“Your parents face off against the dark every day. This is just one more blip on their radar. They’ll bounce back from this,” Jason promised, a small smile on his lips. “They always do.”

“But in time for your wedding? Mama was excited for that.”

Jason's hands scrubbed over his face as he groaned, “Beatrice is gonna have my head on a platter. I gotta call Casey.”

“Mama won’t let that happen.” Rene responded shakily. “You’re one of her boys, no one hurts her boys.”

“Too true,” Brian agreed, coming into the room holding the phone. Offering it to the teenager, he ordered firmly, “Call your brother. Get him here. Samonik, I called MIT to get Dean excused for a few weeks. You'll need to make up the futon in your room for when he gets here.”

Taking the offered phone Rene dialled Sam’s cell phone, lifting the handset to his ear he focused on the ringing as he tried to figure out just what exactly he was going to say to his brother when he picked up.

Vincent offered him an out, insisting, “Put it on speaker, Rene.”

Just then there was a click as the call was answered. “Grimm,” was the deep baritone, solemn and monotone. It had clearly been a bad day.

“Sammy!” Rene’s voice cracked at the sound of his brother’s familiar, comforting voice. His shoulders started to shake as he fought to not breakdown.
There was concern and confusion in the older brother's voice. “Rene? What . . . are you okay? Where's Ma?”

“Something bad happened, Sammy. You need to come home . . . now.” Rene’s voice wavered as he looked between his Uncles and Vincent. He took a deep breath before suddenly blurting “Mama and Dad, they were attacked.”

Sam’s voice was an infuriated roar as he exploded, “What!? By who!?"

“I don’t know. All Vincent and Uncle Jay told me was that Dad’s been stabbed, that it’s bad, and a group of goons came for Mama at the house and their bodies are littering the kitchen.”

Terror rang through his next question, “The girls?”

“Katenka was asleep upstairs, but Valya was with Mama. Vincent says they’re both okay though.” Rene’s voice wavered, his eyes watering uncontrollably as he fought to stay strong.

“Rene, deep breaths, squirt. Okay? Can you do that for me?”

Sam’s only response was the sound of deep breaths through the line. Rene’s grip on the phone white knuckled as his other hand fist against his jeans. “Uncle Jay’s called all the family home . . . I’m guessing they think this isn’t over yet.”

“Let’s hope no one would ever be that stupid. Okay, so here’s what I need you to do for me, Rene. You listening, squirt?”

“Weren’t they already that stupid coming for Mama in her own home? And yeah I’m listening,” Rene snuffled suddenly as the soothing presence of his brother’s voice helped him to pull it together again.

“Find Owen. He's not gonna want to leave Dad, but we gotta clean those bodies. Ma shouldn't have that filth dirtying up her kitchen. You got Samonik with you?”

“Yeah. Vincent said we’re to look after the girls.”

“Girls are sleeping though right?”

“So I was told.”

“Good. Let them sleep. Get all the blankets and pillows out; make up as many of the beds as you can. There’s some air mattresses in the garage, find them. Then, when Owen’s done, scrub the tile in the kitchen. Get as much blood up as you can, before it dries completely. If it won’t come out, call me and I’ll arrange to get it replaced. Okay?”

“Already a step ahead of you on the beds. I thought of that already.” Rene cheeked before sighing and repeating the instructions “Gotcha. Get Owen to get rid of the bodies, scrub the floor and call you if it doesn’t come out. Anything else?”

“Yeah . . . Samonik? You there, kid?”

“I'm here,” he agreed softly, eyebrows furrowed. “What can I do?”

“Seal the doors; sigils, salt, locks, everything you can think of. With Ma and Dad down, and a bunch of dead in the house, I want to take no chances. Understood? Get Granddad and Great-Aunt Gretel to help if you need it.” There was a pause, before insisting, “See if you can convince Owen to salt
and burn the bodies, okay? I want no ghosts in my parents’ home. They have enough to worry about in the dark of the night.”

“Do Granddad and Great-Aunt Gretel even know yet?” Rene asked aloud as he twisted to stare at his Uncles.

Taking a deep breath, Jason nodded miserably, “That was NOT a fun call. They're on their way here. They had to detour to pick up Steve and Maria on their way.”

Rechecking the checklist he’d made in his head Rene nodded slightly in Jason’s direction before turning his attention back to the phone. “We’re on it Sammy; we’ll be in touch if needs be. If not, we’ll see you soon?”

There was the sudden roar of a motorcycle engine through the phone as the key turned, before Sam agreed, “Give me about two hours. I'll be there as soon as I can. Be smart, be safe and, above all, stay inside the fucking house! I'll see you soon.”

Ending the call Rene looked to Vincent, brow furrowing slightly as he asked “Is Owen upstairs with Mama and Dad?”

“Yeah; I sent him up with an ice pack for Marina's face.”

“Could you . . .” Rene’s voice stammered momentarily before he cleared his throat and straightened his shoulders “Could you please send him down? If I go upstairs, I might not leave Mama alone.”

“Yeah, I'll go get him,” the doctor promised kindly. “You get started on your chores, huh?”

“Yeah, I’ll get started on the bedding while Sam does the doors and such.” Rene agreed as he rose off the couch.

Reaching out, the medic pulled the kid into a strong embrace. “It's gonna be alright, Rene, okay? We're gonna get through this. I promise.”

“We always do. Especially when the family pulls together.” Rene acknowledged as he returned the embrace. “You just make sure Dad doesn’t leave us.”

Chapter End Notes

Translations:

(R) Bozhe moi - Oh my God
Rene knew exactly zero about spells, magic, sigils or what have you. What he did know had been taught to him by Samonik since the younger Winchester had come to live with them. The older boy had explained that most of them were only effective if you believed in them . . . except for salt.

Salt was always effective. No matter what you were up against.

Currently they were on the front porch together, Rene holding up one of Sam’s books while the taller teenager carved them into the doorframe. The scholar in Rene was fascinated by the ancient texts, while the terrified son in him was just praying the symbols would protect his uncharacteristically vulnerable family.

Just then, the sound of an engine rumbled through the air, the sound still far off and faint. Even still, the familiar rumble of a motorcycle caught Rene’s attention. The Grimms were famous on base for preferring two wheels to four, and almost everyone - with the only notable exceptions being his father, his grandfather and his Great-Aunt Gretel - had at least one. Case in point, his father had purchased his mother a Ducati for an anniversary present years before. Except for her opal - also given by his father - it was probably her most prized possession.

Rene knew motorcycles . . . knew how they sounded . . . and the engine approaching was a well-loved one.

The book lowered as the rumbling grew closer, Rene’s suspicion of its destination confirmed as the machine appeared. The Ducati was a sedate forest green, laid out almost completely on its side as its rider ripped around the corner at a higher speed than was probably prudent. The motorcycle hardly slowed, manipulated upright effortlessly seconds before it swung into an open space along the edge of the driveway.

Sitting up straight, a gloved hand reached out and snapped off the ignition, startling silence ringing along the street as a result. Stepping to stand next to his friend, Samonik asked cautiously, “Who the hell is that?”

Rene didn’t even hear the question, his attention glued to the figure as the driver stripped off his gloves and then reached up to remove his helmet. Sunny blond hair gleamed even in the meager twilight, the compact frame moving easily from the seat, one leg swinging up and over the back. A
soft sob tore from Rene’s throat as he shoved the book at his friend and bolted forward, shouting, “Sammy!?”

Blue eyes flashed as he spun to find the origin of the voice, a small smile slipping across his lips at the sight of Rene running headlong towards him. The two brothers crashed into each other, Rene on a trajectory like a heat seeking missile and nearly knocking the stockier brother back a step before Samuel W. Grimm recovered his footing. Strong arms banded around the teenager’s waist in a fierce bear hug, Rene’s own arms coming around his brother’s neck and clinging like a frightened child. With his face buried against Sam’s neck, his brother’s voice was more vibration than anything as the elder Grimm soothed, “Hey squirt . . . it’s okay.”

“I’m not a squirt,” was the petulant protest from the almost 16 year old, a soft sniffle belying the argument.

“Sure you are,” Sam laughed gently, arms tightening for a second more before he dropped his little brother back onto his feet.

“We’re the same height, Sammy,” Rene pointed out with a huff.

Sam’s hand was fond and playful as it scrubbed through Rene’s hair, earning a squawk of indignation. “Height has nothing to do with the nickname . . . squirt.” Looking up at the sound of his name, the blond gifted the brunette on the porch a half-hearted smile. “Hey Kitty-Cat.”

Catherine Chandler cocked an eyebrow at him. “Hey Sammy . . . you made excellent time,” she admonished, clearly unimpressed by the fact her friend had made an almost eight hour drive in just over five. “How many cops did you leave eating your dust, exactly?”

There was a dark shadow in Sam’s eyes as he herded his baby brother up the porch steps, then bent to kiss her cheek fondly. “A few. I would have gotten busted a couple times, if Uncle Jay hadn’t installed the jammer into the chassis. Where is everyone?”

“Your parents are sleeping. Grant is bunked down in your room, sleeping off a dose of heavy painkillers. Vincent is crashed out on the couch, trying to get a nap while all of his patients are in dreamland. Your sisters are asleep in the nursery. Your grandparents are at HQ, informing Fury and dealing with some kind of problem. And your uncles have got their noses to the ground, trying to sort out what happened and why,” the detective recited, counting off groups of people on her fingers.

Nodding, the sniper shoved a hand back through his hair in frustration. “How’s my dad?”

“You’ll have to ask Vincent, Sammy; I don’t know, I’m sorry.” Cocking an eyebrow, she asked cautiously, “So I don’t see Jules . . .”

“She’s okay. Spike and Lou are gonna bring her down tomorrow for the wedding. She can’t fly and she can’t reach the wheel around her belly right now either. I needed to get here ASAP, so I didn’t bring her with me.”

“How much longer till her due date again?”

“Two months, minus a week or two,” was the preening reply, a sharp grin on his lips. “How are you and Vincent?”

“I’m on sentry duty, with your dad’s friend and your Uncle Jason.”

“They’re here!? But I thought you said . . .”
“Yeah, I know what I said. But Owen’s up with your parents upstairs and Jason is in the study, going through surveillance footage with Casey.”

Nodding, Sam turned to look at the younger Winchester. “Hey Samonik. How’s it going with the sigils?”

“Just got this door to finish. But like I told Rene, if you don’t believe in their power, they’re not going to do much good.”

“We do believe in their power . . . it’ll be enough. Thank you. Your brother on his way home?”

“Yeah . . . I’m sure he’s pushing the Impala to her limits. He was away on a ROTC thing, when the call went out. He just got the message about an hour or two ago.”

“All right.” Turning back to his brother, Sam cocked an eyebrow curiously. “And how are you, squirt?”

There was genuine hesitation as he considered the question. “Is it okay if I don’t know?”

Sam’s arm tightened around his shoulders, pulling him back into a warm embrace and pressing a quick kiss to his temple. Rene huddled close, relieved to have his brother home . . . to be able to pass off the reins to someone else. “It is absolutely okay, Rene,” Sam promised, head coming up and around at the sound of the door. Smiling at his best friend, he greeted the medic fondly, “Hey Vincent. Interrupt your beauty sleep?”

The scarred features were still tired but resolute, the two men embracing hard, exchanging grunts and back slaps. Rene and Samonik snickered as Cat’s eyes rolled in amusement. “You made good time.”

“Yeah . . . don’t tell my Ma. How’s my dad?”

“He’ll live, but the wound is in a tricky spot. He needs to be calm and be still for awhile . . . and you know your dad.”

“Huh . . . good luck with that.”

“I’m hoping we’ll be able to keep him in bed, to look after your mom’s own injuries. Not to mention, she’s still recovering from her C-section. If we can convince him that him staying in bed is in Marina’s best interests, we may be able to swing it.”

“Injuries!? What injuries!?” Sam demanded, rage glittering like diamonds in his eyes.

“She’s got a pretty nasty bruise on her cheek. I can only imagine what else she’s sporting that I can’t see,” the medic reported angrily, a golden sheen shining on the surface of his eyes.

Rene knew how fiercely Marina’s Misfits loved their leader, and had seen with his own eyes the ferocious love Marina Petrovka had for her boys. The depths of fury in Vincent and Sam’s eyes could have started a war, they were practically vibrating with it. “Mama’s okay though, right?” he asked meekly, eyes wide with worry.

“Yeah,” Vincent promised with a fond smile, one arm coming around Catherine’s shoulders, as she slipped her own around his waist. “Your mom’s tough through and through. They underestimated her when they only sent five. Considering your sisters were in the house, they should have sent an army. And even then, it proudly wouldn’t have been enough to take her down. Not with her daughters in danger.”
“Is it smart? Gathering everyone here at once?” the younger Sam asked cautiously.

Vincent shrugged, replying carefully, “We’re on base. And HYDRA was clearly hoping Will would be dead before he could tell anyone about their involvement. Same with Marina.”

“Both attacks essentially failed . . . and they lost five loyal soldiers. They’re going to lay low right now . . . reorganize their strategy.” Sam agreed, blue eyes flashing in the porch light. “Speaking of the bodies . . .?”

“Salted and burned out back. Owen took care of it,” Catherine explained, eyes hard. Despite her profession, she clearly felt no qualms about their deaths or the dismissive manner of their disposal. “Better than they deserved.”

Both Misfits nodded in unanimous agreement, as Vincent agreed, “Also, Will is adamant. Grant is not to know who did this or why this happened.”

Rene blinked, startled by the insistence, though it was clear his elder brother was unsurprised. “Last thing we want is for him to pull away again. Ma’s worked so hard to get him this far; this would only make him regress backwards.”

Samonik sounded as confused as Rene, the two teenagers wearing matching frowns as the older boy asked, “So what does he know?”

“There was an unsubstantiated attack on Will and Marina, perpetrators unknown for the moment. Marina killed her attackers, but Will was wounded in the ambush,” the doctor replied with a sigh. “The bodies were already gone by the time he was released from Medical. He doesn’t know they were STRIKE, and I’m pretty sure no one intends to tell him.”

“So who was it?”

“Jason has the credentials and IDs in the study. Ask him. He’s trying to figure out their patterns over the last six months from the security footage.”

Rene shook his head with a smirk, “Thank Thor that Uncle Nick is such a suspicious and paranoid Magnificent Bastard.”

“Indeed,” was the resounding agreement from everyone else standing on the porch.

Sam bit on his lower lip, glancing at his watch. “Anyone been up to relieve Owen yet?”

“Who in this family would dare try?” Catherine asked with a rueful shake of her head. “I think he feels guilty . . . like this is penance. He is Will’s security.”

“No one could have anticipated an attack like this at headquarters,” Vincent protested, a frown on his face as he tried to argue against it. “It’s not his fault. It could never have been his fault.”

“You really think that matters to him?” she asked gently. “Would it have mattered to you? If it had been JT? Or Sam? Or Grant?” Here she paused and continued, confirming the knowledge that everyone knew about Owen’s loyalty to Will but never spoke of. “Would it have mattered to you if it was me?”

Taking a deep breath in through his nose, Vincent’s lips compressed as he sighed. “No . . . no, it would not have mattered to me. I never would have left you . . . any of you.”

“So what happens now?” Rene asked tentatively, leaning into his brother seeking comfort.
Sam Grimm’s eyes were molten sapphires as he replied firmly, “Now, we wait . . . for the Colonel to wake up . . . for the dawn to rise . . . for the next move. And when it comes . . . we kick its ass.”
Chapter Notes

Hey guys! So I know it's been a long time since we updated on the main fic, but I hope you guys have been enjoying the Outtakes and Separates fics that Caiti and I have been working on for you! We're getting to the end of this particular plotline, so look forward to the next big bit. It was at the request of a reviewer a few weeks ago. I promise! I haven't forgotten!

In the meantime, thank you all of for your reviews on the last chapter! They are always a delight and a pleasure to read. And I can't wait to hear what you think about this new chapter! Please, go ahead a leave a comment at the end. Even a smiley face makes my day! Thank you for your long time devotion to this verse. It means more than I can say.

Translations are in the fic, so I'm not going to worry about putting them at the end. Enjoy!

With any luck, the next chapter will be up within the next couple of days, though I wouldn't quote my on that. Real life, man. It messes with everything!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
Furious eyes watched the lean, scarred chest move with each ragged breath. One hand came up to
scrub over his face as he took his seat in the chair beside the bed. “Damn it, little brother. Why is it always you?”

James Doyle leaned back in his chair, blinking at the ceiling for a moment before turning troubled eyes back to the still figure on the bed. Sure, he had only known of his brother for a few years now, but that didn’t make this any less nerve-wracking. In fact, the whole situation pissed him off. Who the hell thought they could get away with stabbing this particular man? Who would have ever been that stupid and overconfident?

Well, whoever they were, they better find one hell of a deep hole to hide in – the Grimms were on the hunt. Or they would be . . . as soon as Will decided to wake the hell up.

Frowning, Doyle allowed his eyes to scan over the body on the bed yet again. He’d heard the stories about Will's scars, the horrific things he’d endured in his childhood. However he had never seen them for himself until now.

The stories did not do them justice.

Will lay bare-chested on the bed, curled on his uninjured side so as to allow Vincent ready access to the injury itself. Despite the blood loss, the Colonel's temperature had risen and he had kicked away the heavy comforter more than once in his restless sleep. For the moment it lay low across his hips, allowing Doyle to see Will shivering from the slight chill in the air.

Doyle moved to ease the blankets up, employing everything he’d learned from having restless twenty month old triplets to keep from jostling his brother and waking him. Despite his caution, Will's forehead still began to furrow at the movement. He stirred, his head tossing as he adjusted to the temperature change. Shaking his head in amusement, Doyle lifted his fingers to smooth through the blond strands. “Easy, little brother. You're safe . . . you rest now. We've got the watch. Rest.”

Those familiar features smoothed at the well-known voice, trust inherent in the action as Will slipped deeper into unconsciousness once again.

A wide yawn caught Doyle by surprise, his exhaustion streaking through him as he struggled to stay awake. He’d been on a tactical mission with Bravo Unit when the call came and had rushed back home as quickly as he could. He was running on about two hours of sleep in the last seventy-two. His younger brothers, and his father, tried to hustle him to bed the second they laid eyes on him, but he’d insisted on taking his turn at Will's side.

New to the family or not, Will was just as much Doyle's brother as he was Clint’s or Aaron's.

Knowing he wouldn’t be able to fight the need floor sleep much longer, the elder brother reached out to wrap his fingers around the Colonel's wrist, fingertips resting over the steady beat of his pulse. “Wake me if you need me, Will. I'm right here with you,” he vowed. With that, he closed his heavy eyelids and let himself doze, not planning on going too far under just in case.

When the dream began, he knew it for a dream. Had he fallen asleep a moment ago . . . or a century? For once, his dream came through, clear and concise, though the scenes moved along within that odd sort of disjointed time frame common to dreams. Time might have been weird, but he had no doubt about the theme - a strange and apocalyptic future, following a nuclear holocaust one hundred years in the past.

And all of it centered around a tall young man with dark eyes, wild curls and freckles dusting across his cheeks – a man he didn’t know.
Doyle watched as the stranger moved through the dream, curious against his will. Sure, he didn’t know the kid, but . . . Something struck him as familiar about the boy; something he recognized on a bone deep level, though he would have never have been able to put it into words.

He stared in horror as the young man collapsed, blood dripping from his nose and mouth. Before he could try and force himself to move or wake up or whatever, he became aware of a soft voice calling his name. “Doyle . . . wake up,” came the whispered call, the tone weak and rasping. His instincts turned away from the dream – this particular voice held the greater priority.

Blinking himself awake, khaki green eyes met dull grey ones the same color as the steel from his dream. At the sight of them, he jolted upwards, his mind clicking from dream-self to fully awake, and lunged forward to clasp Will’s hand in relief. “Will! Thank God, you’re awake!”

“More’s the pity,” his younger brother breathed with a small, but impish smile. “Marina?”

“I can go get her,” Doyle promised, already moving to do just that. “I think she’s feeding the twins.”

“No . . . she okay?”

“Oh, yeah,” Doyle promised with a fast smile. “Kicked all the asses.” He winked. “She’s a hell of a woman, your Viper.”

Smug pride shone in Will's features as he agreed, “I know.” Yawning, he asked, “ Weird dream?”

“Yeah,” he grunted with a roll of his eyes. “Memo to me; nuclear winters suck.”

Genuine concern flashed in that pain-filled gaze. “Explain,” Will ordered, his tone as close to a demand as his weakened body could manage.

“It's just a dream, Will,” Doyle reminded his brother, earning a huff from the younger Grimm as Will settled back into the mattress once again. “How do you feel? Do I need to go and get Vincent?”

“I'm all right,” he insisted, before asking, “Sit rep?”

“All quiet on the Grimm front so far,” Doyle said. He knew keeping information from his brother would only get him more riled up. That would put a target on his own ass and he had no intention of becoming the focus of an irate Viper or Healer. “Jason's looking into the agents who attacked here; Owen's already taken care of the bodies. Sam's home; he's downstairs, helping distract Somonik and Rene.”

“Clint?” Will asked, a fierce frown on his face. Despite the archer’s stubborn independence, Clint was their youngest, and the Colonel worried about him – he always would. Rumlow was ruthless, fearless, STRIKE . . . and in New Mexico.

“He's on his way here, with Bucky and Darcy. Fury reassigned someone to security at Pegasus for the time being. Coulson’s at HQ, trying to figure out why this happened, and Maria is with your girl.” An amused smile turned up the corners of Doyle’s mouth and he lowered his voice to a conspiratorial whisper. “Apparently the Left Hand of God can be scared. I keep checking over my shoulder, just in case she’s plotting to get rid of those who know.”

Will chuckled, his body jolting in pain as he tried to suppress the action. A groan escaped him as he squeezed his eyes closed. “Please don’t make me laugh,” he begged.

“Sorry kid.” Doyle’s lips compressed as he reached out to pull the covers back up from where Will had pushed them. “You gotta leave the covers on. You’re shivering.”
“It's too hot,” he whined, sounding very much like a sick child.

“I know it feels that way, little brother, but your body isn't agreeing with you right now.” Doyle rested his hand on Will's forehead as affection surged through him. Maybe he’d only known his brothers for a few years, but it looked like he would still get the chance to play big brother once in a while. “Leave them on, okay?”

A small pout quirked the Colonel's lips for a moment before he nodded with a soft sigh. Taking a second to adjust to the warmth, he asked, “What about Grant?”

“He's here. He's in Sam's room, sleeping. I think Vincent may have dosed him with something; he's been out for awhile.”

Will drew a long breath in through his nose as he considered that. “I wonder if Garrett came to the handler’s pool for him. Jason was on the phone with Vika for a while, but I didn't hear what happened before I passed out.”

Khaki colored eyes narrowed as he watched his little brother pant, eyes at half-mast as he tried to control his pain. Using his hands on his knees, he pushed himself to his feet, with the announcement, “I'm getting Vincent.”

One hand flailed out, latching around Doyle's wrist as the younger man protested, “No! I'm fine, just talk to me.”

Twisting his wrist, Doyle wrapped his fingers around his brother's own wrist and squeezed. “Will, you're in pain. Vincent can help with that.”

“I need to know what happened.” Stubbornness flared in the Colonel's eyes as he argued, “I need to know if my family's okay. That will always outweigh my own discomfort.”

The two men, near mirror images of one another, locked eyes for a long while . . . both trying to change the other's mind. They could have been gridlocked forever but for a quiet knock on the door and Sam's voice calling, “Uncle Doyle? There's someone here to see you.”

Rolling his eyes with a sigh, Doyle poked his finger into his brother's forehead gently and announced, “This is not over.” He turned back to the door, twisting his body to keep himself from pulling free of the hold Will still had on his wrist. “Send them up, Sammy,” the oldest of Hansel’s sons called out.

“Are you sure?! I mean . . . it's a social worker,” Sam replied, his uncertainty clear in his voice. “I can stay with Dad . . .”

“It's all right Sammichka,” Will called with a soft wince, “I'm awake. Go ahead and send them up. And if you could find your mother . . .”

Sam's tone brimmed with joy as he replied, “Yeah, I can do that. Be right back!” Both brothers chuckled to hear his whooping cry as he bolted from the door. “Ma! Dad's awake!”

Will’s grin was tired but worried as he looked up at his brother. “Social worker?”

“You got me . . . and I got nothing.”

Nodding slowly, Will shoved the covers away, glaring at his brother as though daring him to protest before settling more comfortably onto his side. He lay there for a moment, before reaching for the covers. Doyle rolled his eyes, reaching with his free hand to help pull up the comforter. “You are so
damn stubborn.”

Will's head shook, shoving at Doyle's hands. “Not the comforter, just the sheet.”

Doyle cocked an eyebrow, but said nothing, just doing as he was told. He separated the lightweight sheet from the collection of fabric near Will’s waist and drew it up to hide the scars from view. “Better?”

The younger man managed a single nod before another soft knock rang against the door. “Misha?”

Doyle watched Will light up at the sound of his partner’s voice, all but beaming as she poked her head into the room. “Marina . . .” he breathed, hand reaching out for her.

“All Mishka,” she murmured, coming to take his hand, a warm fierce kiss pressed to the knuckles. “How are you feeling?”

“Better,” he promised, turning his hand to cup her cheek. “Much better now.”

“Good.” Marina reached into a drawer in the bedside table and pulled out an emergency t-shirt. “Sam is bringing up the social worker and I know you don’t want to meet her laying down.”

“Let me help,” Doyle offered.

Between the two of them, they managed to get Will into the t-shirt and seated against the headboard, cushioned by all of the pillows on the bed. Marina sat beside him, letting him curl his arm around her waist. She eyed her brother-in-law. “Anything we need to know?”

“I am as clueless as you are, Marina, honest.”

“Well, that's comforting,” she sighed.

A brisk knock on the door preceded Sam Grimm peeking into the room. “Everyone decent?”

Knowing Will's dislike of his scars, Marina checked once more to be sure they were hidden from view before replying, “Come on in, Sammy.”

Sam bolted through the door, his attention focused on the bed. Will smiled up at his son as the young man picked up his father’s free hand. “I’m all right, Sammy,” Will assured him, giving a firm squeeze of his hand.

“You're a rotten liar, Dad,” the blond refuted, voice caught between amused and choked. The harsh clearing of a throat prompted Sam to roll his eyes even as he gestured to the woman behind him. “Everyone, this is Miss Evelyn Post, from Philadelphia's Child Protective Services.”

“Philadelphia!!” Alarm lit Marina’s voice as she turned to look at the woman.

All eyes focused on the small, squirming child Miss Post held by the wrist. An unruly mop of dark curls sat atop the boy’s head, hanging over his forehead and into wounded dark brown eyes ringed by long dark eyelashes. His tiny body appeared waifish and frail, but that proved to be misleading. He all but yanked Miss Post off her feet each time he tugged against her grip.

“Bozhe moi!” Marina breathed, hot chocolate eyes flashing wide.

Will frowned and leaned forward, wincing as he pulled on his stitches. “May I ask what business you have with my brother, Miss Post?”
“I’m looking for Mr. James Doyle,” the woman insisted, her nose lifted just enough to indicate her low opinion of her current surroundings. “I was told by his wife he could be found at this address. My business is with him alone.”

“I’m Doyle,” the man in question snorted as he stood up. “And in this family, no one’s business is theirs alone. How can I help you?”

She dragged the child forward, earning an enraged squeak from Marina though the Russian said nothing as the social worker announced, “This is your son, Mr. Doyle, Bellamy Blake.”

Three good seconds of silence passed during which Doyle forgot to breathe. “Excuse me?” he finally managed to ask in disbelief.

“I did not stutter,” the woman sniped as the shorter woman somehow managed to look down her nose at him.

The little boy struggled that much more, as her fingers tightened around his wrist, his free hand coming up to shove at her hand. “Get off! You’re hurting me!” he cried in protest, face scrunched up unhappily.

That proved to be the last straw, galvanizing Marina into action. She slipped away from Will and darted for the boy. Two fingertips pinched down on a pressure point at the woman's wrist and the child was free. Marina swung him up and away in the next heartbeat. “You poor thing!” she soothed, cuddling the little boy as she ran gentle fingers through his hair. “You just stay right here with Auntie Rina . . . we'll protect you from that mean old suka, won't we?”

The child stared up at her in clear surprise for a second or two before burrowing into her. Miss Post reached out as if to take Bellamy back. Not her smartest move. Marina’s glare cut like diamond through glass as she hissed at the woman. “You touch this child again, I'll break your hand.”

Miss Post backed off.

The woman might be stupid, but she’s not suicidal. That errant thought somehow managed to make it through Doyle’s shocked brain. Words proved too much for him just this moment though as he continued to gape at her. Yeah, he’d gotten used to meeting new family members out of the blue in the past few years, but . . . a son?

Marina continued to cuddle the child as she returned to sit down beside her partner. Will reached out to touch the little boy’s hand. “Allo, kroshka.”

The boy sniffled, a tiny frown on his face as he protested, “I'm Bellamy.”

“Da, I know. Kroshka means kiddo . . . or baby.”

Marina snickered as she explained, “I'm Russian sweetie, and your Uncle has been speaking Russian since he was a baby.” Pausing, she considered the boy before suggesting, “What about kolokol instead? It means ‘bell’.”

He perked up a little bit, cheering, “That’s my name!”

“Yes it is, love,” Marina laughed, suddenly seeing the child under the ageless, too responsible eyes. “So . . . do you like it?”

He turned serious for a moment, before asking, “If you give me a nickname, does that mean you’re gonna keep me?”
The Russian's heart squeezed tightly at the question, prompting her eldest son to rush to her rescue. "Ma doesn't give nicknames to people she doesn't intend to love forever. Her nicknames have magic powers," Sam promised, gifting the words with all the gravity of a magician.

Bellamy lit up, breathing out an excited, "Really?! What kind of magic?"

"The very best kind... the kind that means you're loved and wanted. They mean you're always going to have a home with her."

The puckish features went curious as his head cocked in question. "Do you have a nickname?"

Sam grinned as he nodded, "I do."

"What is it?"

"Sammichka. It means I'm her son... and she loves me. Kolokol means you're family... and she loves you too."

The conversation was enough to jar Doyle from his shock. Turning to face Miss Post, he asked firmly, "Where do I sign?"

The woman looked aghast, demanding, "Excuse me?"

He smirked, "That's why you're here right? To leave him with me?"

She stammered, clearly caught off guard by the question. Will frowned at her alarm, his tone sarcastic as he inquired, "That IS why you came, right?"

"Truthfully no," she confessed sheepishly. "Most father's choose not to take in their byblows, especially married ones. They sign away their rights and the children are placed in foster care."

Marina looked horrified by the very suggestion. Doyle’s jaw tightened at the rude term and hissed, "Miss Post, I'm only gonna say this once. You ever refer to my child in that manner again, I'm going to let my sister-in-law rip your spine from your body. I hope we understand each other."

"Is that a threat, Mr Doyle?" she demanded, tone prissy and sanctimonious.

"First of all, it's Sergeant Doyle. Second of all, no... that's a promise. Get out."

She gaped at him, before protesting in a shrill voice, "I can't just leave him here! There's paperwork to be filed and... this isn't the way we do things! This isn't proper!"

Will spoke up, "Sammy, find my phone. Call Lawrence... tell him the Colonel needs the usual custody paperwork and to put a rush on it. I want it here within the hour, if at all possible."

Sam grinned, blue eyes sparkling as he promised, "I'm on it Dad."

Doyle chuckled as he teased the Power Couple, "I never thought the day would come when I would be grateful you have an adoption attorney on speed dial."

Marina's eyes were fixed on the woman as she held Bellamy just that much tighter. "Miss Post, you need to get out of my house. If you can't leave until the appropriate paperwork is in hand, fine... you can wait on the porch."

Looking down at the child, she announced, "I have some freshly baked, chocolate chunk cookies in
the pantry. How about a cookie and a glass of milk, hm? Does that sound like something you might be interested in?"

Those dark eyes wide with wonder as he breathed, “A whole cookie? All to myself?”

“Oh honey, you can have as many cookies as you want. I promise. Come with me, kolokol, let's get thee fed and let the rest of the adults work out the details.” All but flouncing to the door, Marina called over her shoulder, “Doyle, honey, please call your wife.”

“Yes ma'am,” he agreed with a grin, heading shaking in amusement as he watched her go. Turning back to the woman once the two were out of sight, he asked, “What happened to his mother?”

“She passed . . . heroin overdose.”

“How long ago?” Will asked, arms coming up to fold over his chest as he scowled.

“What does that matter?” she asked, genuinely confused by the question.

One hand lifted to pinch the bridge of his nose as he groaned. “You cannot possibly be that obtuse. Was she buried? Has there been any kind of service for her? Anything at all to signify her passing?”

“Of course not. No family to claim her body, no life insurance policy and no money. She was buried by the city almost three weeks ago.”

Will grimaced as he threw back the covers, hauling his legs around and causing both Sam and Doyle to lunge, already protesting. “Dad! What the hell?!?” the younger Grimm demanded.

“Sam . . . I am getting up with or without your help. Now are you going to help me or not?”

Groaning, Sam moved to brace his father as he swore a blue streak under how breath. “Ma is gonna kill us for this.”

“You let me worry about Marina. Doyle, call Scarlett and get your family here. Then someone, for the love of Thor, find my fucking phone!” Will ordered, free arm wrapping around his body to press against his wound. “Kitchen please . . . now. Miss Post, I believe my lover banished you to the porch, so if you would be so kind.”

Twenty minutes later, the ink was drying on the paperwork and Miss Post had been sent immediately on her way. Will was on his phone, arranging for Malaya Blake to be exhumed and a proper burial arranged in the family's plot outside the city. Marina and Sam were fussing at Bellamy and Will both, while Vincent cursed stubborn Colonels as well as all of his antecedents.

And Doyle was standing on the porch alone, waiting for his wife and three children to arrive.

Their little SUV pulled up in front of the house, Scarlett’s features warm and understanding as her husband joined her next to the car. “Scar . . . I'm sorry.”

She smiled, going up on tiptoe to indulge them both in a long, sweet kiss. “Doyle, you thought I was dead. And I heard all about your yearlong drunk from Flynn. It's okay. We'll handle this, same as we handle everything else crazy in our lives.”

“But this is a child . . .” he reminded her, earning a wink as Scarlett agreed, “Your child. And that's all that could ever matter to me.” Linking her fingers with him, she squeezed them tightly before insisting. “Come on. Let's get the kiddos out of their carseats and then, I'd really like to meet him.”
“You're amazing.”

“And don't you dare forget it!” she sassed with a laugh, before the two focused on their triplets and corralling the three into the house.

“Be careful with Uncle Will!” Scarlett called, as the twenty month olds dashed at breakneck speeds towards the kitchen.

“Oh Scar!” the Colonel protested with a soft laugh, “I'm not delicate. I can handle some rough love from my favorite nieces and nephew. Come here, kiddos, give me hugs.”

Kelley, Doyle's solemn child, stepped into his uncle's arms, hugging carefully before turning to stare at the newcomer to his aunt’s table. Nike and Kyrene, however, had no such concerns; the two girls bolted into him like a heat seeking missile. “Are you okay, Unca Will? Mommy said you was hurt,” Nike lisped, her dark eyes wide and luminous.

“I'm all right, little Victory,” he promised, though everyone could clearly see the strained white lines of pain between his brows and across his forehead. “And how's my Kyrie?”

“Who's he, Unca Will?” the little girl asked in lieu of an answer.

Smiling, Will looked up at his brother and replied, “Why don't you ask your father?”

Doyle moved to kneel next to Bellamy's chair. “Hey Bellamy . . . I'm so sorry about your mother.”

The kid shrugged as he played with his cookie, turning it into crumbs. “It's all right. She's in heaven now, with Octavia.”

“Octavia?” Scarlett asked, settling her children into seats and dishing up a cookie and milk for each.

“My sister. She was in mommy's tummy, but she came out wrong. The nurse said she was stillborn,” Bellamy explained with a frown. “Are you really my daddy?”

Doyle nodded, reaching out to touch his shoulder gently. “I am so sorry kiddo. I had no idea you existed.”

“Why not?”

“About ten years ago, I lost someone I loved very much. And I made a lot of bad decisions while I was grieving. I met your mom and she was kind to me. But then I got deployed and I never heard from her again. I would have been there if I knew, I promise.”

Reaching back for Scarlett's hand, Doyle pulled her forward. “This is my wife, Scarlett.”

“Hello Bellamy. I'm very happy to meet you,” the scientist promised, a genuine smile on her face as she watched the little boy blush a little bit. “These are our triplets . . . your brother, Kelley and your sisters, Nike and Kyrene.”

“Sisters?” he asked curiously, head tilting as he watched them watch him. “I'm a big brother?”

“Oh yeah. And these three? They can get up to all kinds of mischief so they need an awesome big brother. Whew! Am I glad you came when you did!” Doyle insisted, wiping his forehead of imaginary sweat.

Bellamy giggled a little before turning serious once more. “So I can stay?”
“Yes, Bellamy, you can stay. And we hope you want to stay... forever, if you'll have us.”

A long silence filled the kitchen, before the oldest of Doyle's children inquired solemnly. “Will there be more cookies?”

“As often as you’d like, kolokol,” Marina protested from the wall by her partner.

“And I can keep my nickname?”

“Yours forever,” Will chuckled, amused by the child’s priorities.

Nodding, he looked back to his father once more. “Is it okay if I want to stay?”

Pulling his son into his arms for the first time, Doyle held him close and vowed, “It's more than okay, Bell... it's perfect.”

Chapter End Notes

So we're gonna be trying to chop up Grimm Truth into more readable sections. Not yet, but soon, so keep an eye out for the New Sections, yeah? I promise, this fic is a LONG ways from over.
Hey guys!! I'm glad everyone is still enjoying this fic!! Here's a chapter that addresses some things that haven't been forgotten, but needed to be put off for a bit, within verse. Hansel is a good brother; it's my only excuse.

Enjoy and please do comment. Thank you to all who commented on the last chapter!! They truly do make my day!!
Marina was bouncing with Valya in her arms, patting her back lightly as she waited for the baby's burp. Maria and Hansel sat a little ways away, Maria's eyes glued to her best friend. The AD would never admit it ever, but the news of an attack in Marina's own home had scared the everloving shit out of her.

Steve stood with Gretel in the doorway to the living room. Both had heard the knock at the door, content to see Sam check his gun before moving to answer it. The German huntress turned under Steve's arm, forehead coming to rest on his chest. "Who could do something like this? I do not understand," she breathed in horror, clearly seeking reassurance. "There were children here."

Steve frowned, fingers tracing gentle figure eights between the blades of her shoulders. "HYDRA has never been known for their gentle nature. The children would have been an acceptable sacrifice, if they had succeeded in taking out Will and Marina."

The stream of vehement words coming from his girlfriend then was in German . . . but Steve didn't need the translation to know the gist of it. Tightening his arm around her, he pressed a warm kiss to her forehead, before resting his chin against her temple. "He's gonna be okay."

"I hope so . . . for Marina and Hansel's sake, I truly do pray that is the case."

For a long moment, there was no other sound than Marina's tender murmur and Valya’s quiet babbling. The baby’s twin sister, Katenka, lay on her back on a blanket at her grandfather’s feet, their infant aunt Minna waving a block in the air beside her. The burp, when it happened, earned a blink and a scattered smile from the Russian. Bending to rub noses with her baby girl, Marina teased, "Oh my, that was a good one, my little piglet. Yes it was."

Steve smiled to see mother and daughter giggling at each other, before all motion froze at the sound of Sam's joyous shout from upstairs. "Ma! Dad's awake!"

Relief swept across Marina’s features like a wave across sand. She moved quickly, pressing Valya into Gretel's arms as she passed. The huntress didn't even hesitate, accepting the child capably. The assassin smiled, asking, "Look after her while I see to her father please?" even as she was dashing away.

Gretel didn't even notice Marina's departure, captivated by little Valya. Her knees bounced lightly, causing the baby to coo and giggle at her Great-Aunt. "Of course.

Steve’s eyes softened, watching Gretel pamper Valya with tickles and kisses. "You’re a natural with her," he murmured, a fond smile on his face as he reached to twirl one of Valya's tiny curls around his fingertip.

"Unfortunately it was not just children we saved from die Hexen. They would also take the babes, though not as often, thank goodness. We learned to soothe the little ones. However, changing them would always fall upon Hansel . . . I refused. Do hyu remember the first time, Brother?" Gretel asked with a mischievous smile. "Hyu should have seen him, Maria. Not even a witch had ever caused such a look of horror!"

"Hyu were not the one changing the child!" Hansel protested. "Hyu were hiding behind the witch’s corpse!"

"I was not! I was using it to block the stench! Believe it or not, the witch smelled better!" She looked back down at the baby cooing, "Not hyu, Valya, hyu smell lovely . . . of love and lavender soap.”
“Just wait, Gretel. One day I will have hyu watch my Minnow and hyu will have no choice but to change her.”

“You think so, do hyu? We will see,” she laughed with a teasing grin then looked to Steve and found his soft gaze still upon her. She couldn’t seem to prevent the blush that crept into her cheeks. It wasn’t a stretch to say that no man had ever looked at her in such a way. It was true that she had turned a few heads in her time but they were usually filled with lust. She was never like the other women; she wore pants . . . spoke up for herself and for her brother . . . carried a crossbow and knew how to utilize it.

She had come to realize quickly that she would never find a man who would love her for herself. But then the cursed sleep came and brought her here, to a place in time she was still trying to understand but which felt more like home to her than where she had once been. A place where she could be herself and be welcomed and . . .

She smiled shyly back at Steve.

. . . And, quite possibly, loved.

“But I suppose,” Hansel teased, interrupting her thoughts, “That Steven would have a hard time saying no to hyu, should hyu try and pass the task off onto him.”

Gretel scowled at her brother, her eyes promising a swift comeuppance.

“I wouldn’t mind,” Steve offered. “I may have been an only child but I was pretty much adopted into Bucky’s family. It was to be expected that I learned to help in changing the young ones’ diapers.”

Gretel giggled a little. “There is a sight I would have to see for myself in order to believe. Captain America . . . changing a baby’s nappy.”

He grinned at her, teasing, “I have many talents, you know. I’m also killer at geometry.”

“There’s an understatement,” Maria snorted with a roll of her eyes.

The sound of heavier footsteps than normal on the stairs drew their attention and everyone turned to see Marina come down the stairs, a diminutive little boy perched easily on her hip. “I believe I speak for all of us when I utilize Darcy’s favorite phrase, and ask, ‘Sweet Thor’s tits’, Marishka, what did you do?” the AD demanded in alarm.

“Maria . . . Hansel . . . meet Bellamy Blake . . . Doyle’s son and another grandson to add to the brood,” the Russian explained with a fond smile. “Kolokol, these are your grandparents, your father’s father and his wife, Maria.” Turning a warm smile on her best friend, she insisted, “I promised cookies, so we’re heading towards the kitchen.”

“Cookies!?” Maria asked in mock horror. “Surely not my ooey gooey chocolatey chunky cookies?! Good gracious . . . Marina never shares those!” A warm smile slipped across her lips as she teased, “She must like you.”

The little boy beamed as he cheered, “And she gave me a nickname too!”

“I heard! Did she tell you what it means?”

“Bell!” he announced gleefully, a wide grin on his lips as he bounced in place. “That’s me!”

“Well then . . . I think this calls for a dozen cookies, What do you think?” Turning to Marina, the
brunette winked, “Whatcha doin’ standing around for, Marishka . . . to the kitchen!”

Marina was rolling her eyes hard as Bellamy slithered down her frame like a monkey, reaching out to take his new grandmother’s hand. Scooping up Katinka and Minna, the Russian trooped along after the two.

Seeing no reason to remain where they had been left, Gretel reached out with her free hand and took Steve’s, following along behind them. They had barely made it in the door before the woman was plucking Valya free and situating her in her high chair. Steve chuckled a little at the shocked look on Gretel’s face, before wrapping an arm around her shoulders and holding her close.

As Marina busied herself with the familiar task of tending to the children, the remaining four loitered in the entryway to the kitchen. “I have so much catching up to do. I woke to the fact that my brother had a whole new family, with sons grown and grandchildren. And here I have not even begun.”

Hansel and Maria stilled, the smiles dropping from their faces. It was only moments later that Gretel realized something was wrong. “What?” the huntress demanded, seeing the change in her brother. “What did I say?”

She watched Hansel have a silent conversation with his wife before turning back to her. “I must speak with you Gret . . . outside,” he said guiding her to the back door.

“What?” Steve asked with a frown, clearly wanting to follow.

“Let them talk, Steve,” she heard Maria say as the huntress followed her brother into the backyard.

The door slamming closed behind them cut off anything else her sister-in-law might have said. The sound caused dread to clutch at Gretel’s gut as she turned to face Hansel. He was shifting his weight anxiously, hands fluttering as he struggled to figure out what to do with them. All too soon, her dread was a brick of fear threatening to strangle her. “Johannes Kuhn . . . you’re scaring me.”

Blanched and bloodless features twisted in dismay as he read the truth in her face. “Gret . . . Sister . . . What hyu said is not entirely accurate.”

She watched her brother fidget, fingers twisting together as he tried to find the best way to explain. “Hansel, what is it?”

“I did not know how to talk to hyu about this before. As hyu have said, hyu awoke to so many new things in this world. I know the feeling. When I woke, everything was so different . . . difficult to comprehend at times. I learned of my sons the same day, but that was the only way for it to happen. They would have been impossible to explain any other way.”

“Hansel, hyu know I prefer hyu to be straightforward with me. Please tell me what is bothering hyu.”

Hansel’s eyes were resigned as he replied, “I am not the only one to wake with a child in this world.”

Rage unlike anything Gretel had ever known boiled from her as she glared at her brother. “Why . . . how could hyu not tell me?!” she demanded, the betrayal she felt clear in her voice. “Do hyu mean like hyur sons? Daughters made with science to look like me?”

“No. You have a son.” Hansel paused before adding, “He was not made with science.”

“I do not understand. Then how . . .”

Hansel’s jaw tightened in fury, tone a rumbling growl as he hissed, “HYDRA took advantage of
hyur slumber.” He looked into her eyes. “They took advantage of hyu.”

‘Took advantage’ . . . Gretel’s gut clenched and she took an involuntary step back as her arms wrapped around herself.

Gretel knew she had been moved, washed, changed, but this . . . How could she not know this had happened? She felt as if her own body had lied to her. She became aware of every inch of her body, how it moved with each breath she took. A feeling of helplessness swept over her, the likes of which she hadn’t felt since the confrontation with Sheriff Berringer and she reacted as she always did; with unsuppressed fury. “Hyu lie!”

Hansel said nothing, allowing her fists to slam into him angrily. “Hyu lie!” she repeated, her tone starting to choke with tears. A keening wail built up within her, tears flowing down her cheeks in torrents.

Finally, she collapsed into her brother’s embrace, overcome by her anger and her hurt. Hansel said nothing, only holding her closer to him. “I am so sorry, Gretel.”

“How could someone do something Like that?”

“HYDRA is responsible for many wrongs in this world. Thus why my sons are so determined to thwart them at every turn,” Hansel insisted chin resting against her temple. “They will pay, Gretel, I swear it. Those responsible for this will pay with their lives.”

She shuddered in his arms, trying to force her tumultuous emotions back under control. It was only as she was pulling away the thought occurred to her. “Wait . . . if I have a son, where is he? Why have I not met him yet?”

Hansel watched his sister, pure heartbreak in his eyes. After a long silence, she demanded, “Hansel . . . where is my son?”

Another moment of silence rang through the area before Hansel replied gently, “We don’t know. As far as we know . . . he may be dead.” Squeezing her shoulder at her horrified gasp, he promised, “We are looking for him, Adler and I, and we will find him. It is just taking longer than either of us had hoped. If he still lives, he is well hidden. If he is dead . . .” he paused at the tortured, strangled sound from his sister. Taking a deep breath, he pressed on, “If he is dead, we will not rest until we find his bones. I swear it . . . on the lives of my grandchildren, I swear.”

Digging in his pocket for his wallet, he pulled a folded page from a hidden pocket. “This is the only photo I have of him. I am sorry that I cannot offer hyu more than this. I know it is not enough, to heal what harmed hyu.”

Gretel clutched the page between trembling fingers. “Do hyu believe he lives?”

“If he has inherited even a small trace of hyur stubbornness, he lives . . . and more importantly, he thrives.” Squeezing her shoulder in soft affection, he vowed once again, “We will find him, Sis, I promise.”

It was just about then that Jason leaned out through the sliding glass doors. “Hey Dad . . . I hate to interrupt, but you need to hear this.”

“Ja, Schalki. I am coming.” Turning to his sister, he murmured, “Shall I send Steven out to join hyu? Or do hyu wish to be alone?”

Gretel’s fingers tightened before she whispered, “I want to be alone.”
“Are you sure?”

“Ja, I believe I shall go for a walk. I promise, I will not go far.”

“Of course. Come and find me when you are ready,” he begged, before letting his hand fall and watching her walk away. A deep breath heralded his distress before he turned to his middle child. “What has happened?”

“We have a problem,” he replied, leading the way back into the kitchen.

Hansel grinned to see Will standing next the table, one hand braced to keep himself upright. Sam and Rene were carrying an armchair into the kitchen with Marina trailing behind carrying a million pillows.

“Adler, I feel as though you are going to be in considerable trouble when our Healer finds you out of bed,” Hansel teased, coming forward to slip his arm around his son’s waist.

“Quite possibly. But there is a lot of work to do,” the Colonel replied, leaning against his father as the elder man assisted him to the chair. Once he was settled, he smiled up at his partner as she offered him their daughters. Between the two of them, they were able to get the twins situated in Will’s embrace, before Marina took a seat on the armrest.

Bellamy’s giggles could be heard in the living room, the little boy clearly a big hit with his new siblings. Doyle and Scarlett stood together near the door, one eye on their children, and the rest on the going-ons in the kitchen.

Aaron sat in a chair at the table, with Marta seated on it and her feet in his lap. His fingers traced lazy designs on the skin of her ankle. Brian and Natasha leaned side by side against the wall behind them. Casey was slouched in the corner of the cabinets, a fierce expression on her face as she watched her fiance pace back and forth.

Steve and Maria stood together, Minna in the woman's arms as they watched Hansel approach his wife. “Where's Gretel?” the captain demanded, clearly concerned about his girlfriend.

“My sister needed a moment to herself. She went for a walk . . . she promised not to go far and she would be back soon.”

“What's wrong?” Steve asked, looking past Hansel toward the back yard, “Is she okay?”

Hansel shook his head slowly as he replied, “No . . . she is not. I told her about her son. It is a shock and she needs time to adjust.”

Steve looked dumbfounded at the news but said nothing.

There was a long moment of silence as the members of the family aware of the situation digested that, before the Family Russian cleared her throat and drew the attention of the room. “So all we're missing is Clint, Bucky and Darcy,” Marina announced, an anxious look on her features as she nibbled on her thumbnail.

A voice boomed from the doorway, “Who said we were missing!? Clearly you have been misinformed, big sister.”

Marina whirled, a look of immense relief on her face, to see the trio come into her kitchen. “Dorogoy, Slava Bogu!!” she cried, lunging at him and throwing her arms around his neck.

Clint’s arms closed tightly around her waist, lifting her clear off her feet and leaving her dangling
nearly a foot off the ground. The two clutched each other hard, each of them relieved to have the other close. Darcy smiled and moved to stand with Casey, even as Bucky waited impatiently for his own turn with the handler.

There was relief in the archer’s features, hidden quickly as he buried his face into the curve of her throat. His voice was choked as he confessed, “Damn it, sestra. I was really worried about you. Are you okay?”

Kissing his cheek, she promised, “I'm fine. Your brother, too . . . assuming he'll behave himself, of course.” Releasing him, she transferred her embrace to Bucky, the Winter Soldier’s arms hard bands across the small of her back. Freed, Clint moved to kneel beside his brother's chair, grey eyes scanning over his hero’s face before his arms slipped around Will carefully, Clint’s face buried in his stomach. The analyst smiled, fingers petting through the younger man’s hair, tone reassuring as he insisted, “I'll be alright. It's okay.”

“You could have died, Will.”

“I know. And I'm going to be sidelined while I heal, but at the end of the day, I'm going to be fine. Vincent does excellent work; he's taking good care of Marina and me.”

Jason cleared his throat then. “Guys . . . if I could have everyone's attention? Phil brought something to my attention, and I have a feeling we're gonna want to look into it immediately.”

Will frowned, tone concerned as he asked, “What is it, Jay?”

“Phil found a report at HR.”

“A report? What kind of report?” Bucky asked, arms tightening around his former protege as they both hovered between Will & Clint and Darcy.

“Apparently someone filed a report, in which they claimed to overhear a threat against Chief Analyst Brandt and Senior Handler, Agent Petrovka.”

“How very convenient,” the Colonel drawled with a roll of steel grey eyes. “When was this report filed?”

“Timestamp says a week ago, but I checked . . . the file didn't exist until about four hours ago.”

“Sounds like HYDRA is covering their tracks. Did it happen to name the conspirators in question?”

“Five names matched the identification we pulled off the goons from today. One is unaccounted for.”

“Who?”

“Alberto Ramirez . . . he's STRIKE Team Echo. Coulson had him called in but he was a no show. Phil wants to know if we want to go and look into it for him.”

“Ramirez? That can't be right,” Clint protested with a frown. “Ramirez is pretty much the nicest guy in STRIKE.”

Will grunted, “All the more reason to check him, and this report, out.”

His brothers looked horrified at the suggestion, Jason insisting hotly, “You're not going, Will!”

“Of course not . . . I can barely move. I can however, request a contingent to stay at the house. The last thing I want is to leave Marina and the children vulnerable.”
Sam spoke up from the doorjamb. “I'm staying.”

The blond’s announcement earned a firm nod from Owen. “Me too. The Boss is down and the Boss-Lady is out. I'm not going any further from the house than the sound of a shout.”

Vincent agreed as he insisted, “I'll stay too.”

“All right then. The rest of you; be safe . . . and good hunting.”
Tragic Break

Chapter Summary

Gretel is pissed . . . and she has every right to be.

Chapter Notes

Enjoy this!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes
The Grimm Truth

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Chapter 242: Tragic Break

Margaret Huberta Kuhn couldn't decide if she felt horrified by what had happened to her . . . or mortified that no one had told her. Which, of course, segued into the question of who all had known.

Clearly Hansel had known, which meant Maria must have as well. Considering the devotion between her brother and his wife, it was unfathomable to her them not sharing in this secret. Maria’s inclusion in the secret caused a further frown, as Gretel could not reconcile herself with the idea that her sister-in-law would not have told her best friend. And considering Marina Petrovka’s total devotion to her lover, Will Grimm certainly knew as well.

Even if they were the only four, they were still four people who had said nothing about her son . . . or his conception. Four people who should have told her. As she continued to walk, she felt her rage begin to build until it was an all-encompassing thing.

Veering sharply into the wooded area behind Will and Marina's home, she broke into a run. With any luck, she could find Edward . . . he was always good for listening, even if he didn't say much in reply. She bolted through the trees - through the veritable forest her nephew had had erected solely for Edward's safety - and her rage grew exponentially.

Her troll had received more consideration than she had. A clear enough indication of how der Oberst felt about her. Of course, she couldn't forget Marina; her father had been right all those years ago . . . one should never trust a Russian. Back-stabbing, duplicitous, no-good, cowardly, Schweinchen.

A low booming grunt cut off her thoughts and had her almost stumbling to an unexpected stop. There was Edward, off to her right a few yards, sitting on a boulder. Gretel blinked. She would have had to be blind not to notice him there, and yet she hadn’t. Her focus went inward again. The rage was still there but it was simmering instead of overflowing. She huffed a laugh, one grunt and her troll had cut off her spiraling thoughts.

Edward tilted his head inquisitively at her and she tried to give him a reassuring smile as she walked over to join him. “Hello Edward. How are you, my old friend?” she asked, the sound of her native German welcome to her ears. “Do you have enough to eat?”

He rumbled at her, the sound almost like a purr as he moved to bump her shoulder fondly. Rocking on her heels, she gave him as brave a smile as she could manage. “I'm okay. I have enough to eat.”

The look on his face could only be described as concerned, as he bumped into her again. Knowing he didn't believe her, she sighed and attempted to explain her melancholy. “Much has changed while I slept . . . even more than I realized. I have a son.”

As though the words were a sledgehammer, the dam on her tears broke and she dissolved against the troll’s massive bicep. “Oh Edward . . . I have a son,” she sobbed, one hand coming up to smother the sound.

The huge arm came around her shoulders, the troll's ageless voice rumbling through her skin as he soothed, “Calm. Be all right.”

“They've known, Edward . . . Hansel & Maria and Will & Marina. They all knew, and who knows for how long!! And none of them bothered to tell me . . . not until today.” Her jaw tightened. Five months. She had been awake for five months and Hansel had . . . what, forgotten? Only remembering by happenstance? Because of something she said? No . . . it did not make sense.
They had spent so many years together just the two of them. Never trusting anyone else. Protecting each other not only from witches but from the rest of the world. Despite her tough facade, she wasn't emotionless; there had been plenty of tears throughout their years together. Just the two of them in the woods . . . until tears couldn't be held back. But never in all their years had he caused tears of any kind, much less of betrayal.

Her anger simmered once again, forcing her tears to dry and her jaw to tighten up once again. “Hansel would have never kept this from me, except for them.” Not the Hansel she had known . . . not her brother.

Edward's mouth drew downwards as Gretel straightened, rage glimmering brightly in her eyes. He grunted at her, reaching out to prod at her shoulders. Shrugging him off, she whirled towards the house. “They're going to be honest with me, whether they like it or not.”

Edward's soft voice was all but lost as she bolted away, rage clenching her fists tightly at her sides. The run invigorated her, left her feeling powerful and well-equipped to handle the upcoming confrontation. Eyes fixed ahead of her, she broke from the treeline and into the family's backyard.

Slamming through the backdoor, she froze at the tableau before her. At first look, the house appeared to be empty, save for the four she had come to see . . . and the children. It took very little time for her to realize that was not the case, and grudgingly appreciate the devotion the members of their extended family had for Will and Marina.

The crash of the door against the wall had Marina on her feet and guns in hand in a heartbeat. Not even a second later, Sam Grimm and Vincent Keller flanked her, their own guns up while Owen Elliott materialized out of the shadows behind a seated Will like the ghost he was. Those mercurial eyes watched his aunt for a moment, before he murmured, “Marishka . . . samaya malen’kaya, it’s only Gretel. Put the gun away.” Shifting his eyes to his twin daughters, both of whom still slept in his arms, he spoke again, “Sammichka, if you could find Rene and Samonik for me? Have them come and get the girls?”

Ice blue eyes flickered to his mother's own hot chocolate ones, a frown on his face at the small nod she gave him. Stashing his weapon he nodded solemnly. “Yeah Dad . . . I'll be right back.”

“Thank you, Sammy.” Turning to his own father, he insisted, “You may want to let them take Minnow too.”

Gretel's voice was harsh as she demanded, “Protecting the child from me?! I am her aunt.”

Will’s eyes were the colorless silver of fish scales in light, his features stone as he agreed, “Yes . . . and considering the look on your face, she should probably not be privy to the conversation anymore than my own girls.”

Huffing at her nephew's ever rational nature, Gretel rounded on her brother, demanding, “Where is everyone?

“They have gone . . . to track down a lead on Adler’s attacker.” She watched as tumblers clicked over in her brother's head. After a moment, Hansel frowned at the fury coating her features. Head cocking, he narrowed his eyes at her even as he inquired carefully, “Are hyu all right, sister?”

She could feel the way her jaw firmed angrily and the hard line of her mouth as her lips compressed tightly. The Family Russian frowned in what appeared to be genuine concern, her voice gentle as she asked, “Gretel, is everything okay?”
Whatever vitriol Gretel wanted to spit at the woman, was interrupted by the reappearance of the two teenagers. Rene froze for all of a second at the tension in the room. Then he came forward and crouched at his father's chair, hand gripping the man's knee. “You okay, Dad?”

“I'm fine, Rene. But if you and Samonik could take the twins and Minna upstairs please?” the Colonel asked, eyes still fixed on Gretel's slowly reddening features. “Quickly, Rene. And once they're in the nursery, if you would stay with them? Door closed, if you please?”

Nodding slowly, Rene glanced back at his foster brother briefly before agreeing for the both of them. “Sure thing, Dad.” The teenager crouched to take the twins from his father, the two men infinitely careful with the babies as they transferred custody. Unsure but still obedient, Sam Winchester moved to accept Minna from Maria, tucking the seven month old against his chest nervously.

Marina moved to kiss both boys on the cheek, hands correcting the taller boy’s hold unconsciously. “Thank you loves. We’ll come up to get you for dinner, da?”

The two teenagers exchanged a worried look between them, before nodding as they chimed together, “Okay . . .”

Shooing them away, Marina moved to touch Will’s shoulder. “Is anyone hungry? I could put together something for lunch, if anyone would like me to.”

Will’s tone was calm and gentle as he reached out a hand for her. “Marishka, my love, come sit with me. I believe Gretel has something she would like to address with those of us still here.”

Gretel’s jaw tightened at his level tone, her own voice sneering as she replied, “I have recent concerns about your ability to lead this family, Nephew. At least with honest, integrity and honor.”

The Colonel’s eyebrow cocked upwards as he asked, “And what lies have I told you, that you find so offensive?”

“How about what you have determined my brother was not to tell me?”

Marina frowned fiercely, though whatever she’d been about to say was interrupted by Hansel himself. “Gretel . . . this is not their fault. They gave no such instructions.”

“Then why did you not tell me?! I have been awake for months now and I am only just discovering I have a son now! Why is that, but that they have changed you . . . whether you realize that or not.”

Rounding on her sister-in-law, she hissed, “And you! You are supposed to be my sister!”

Teal eyes wide in alarmed concerned, Maria shook her head. Her distrustful nature was a known entity in the family. Even now, she counted very few among the family as her true friends, though she was working to change that. “I am sorry, Gretel; Marina’s the only sister I have. I’m still getting to know you.”

The German woman held in her flinch by pure strength of will, and in her head she acknowledged what the woman said. She had no sisters . . . not even this woman who’s tenacity she had admired since meeting her for the first time. Her brother moved forward, clearly seeing how she had taken that statement, insisting, “Gretel, that is not what Maria meant. Her occupation is such that she gives her trust rarely. Just because she does not count you as her sister now, does not mean she will not eventually. You must be patient, and let her learn to trust you first.”

Her chin lifted as she forced herself to go cold, removing herself from this newest hurt. “You do not need to gentle the blow, Brother, I understood her perfectly. They do not know me. There is no basis for their loyalty or their courtesy.”
Hansel’s eyes narrowed as he snorted derisively. “Gretel, clearly hyu have not been paying attention. Or hyur anger has rendered hyu blind. This family does not have to know hyu, to offer you the same courtesy and loyalty they give each other. Furthermore, their loyalty is finite; once given, it is never retracted.”

Watching her brother she frowned. That was true, as far as she had seen to date, which only served to anger her further. “Their loyalty should have garnered their honesty as well, and yet no one sought to tell me anything about my son... or how he was conceived.”

Marina’s eyes went wide at that, her hands coming to press over her mouth. “Bozhe moi... Gretel, I completely forgot! I am so sorry!”

“Hyu forgot? How could hyu forget something like that?” she demanded, eyes blazing as she stared at the Russian woman. “Hyu Russians are all the same! Hyu care for no one but hyurselves! My father was right! Never trust a Russian, except to stab hyu in the back.”

Marina stepped forward, anguish and shame on her face. “Oh Gretel, honest. I would have told you, or insisted you be told. I know how that feels... to have your body treated as something of use and not as something of value.”

Gretel’s rage boiled over at that point. “Hyu know nothing! Hyu could never know how I feel! How dirty and disgusting I feel!”

At the minute flinch from his adoptive daughter - and knowing the truth of Marina’s history his sister did not - Hansel stepped forward instantly. Braving her anger, he put himself between the two woman and reached to grab his sister’s shoulders. “Gretel, this is not Marina’s fault. I should have told hyu. Just as I should have protected hyu... should have kept hyu safe. I failed in that.” Forcing her to look up at him, he vowed, “I did not mean to keep this from hyu for so long. I just... I did not know how to tell hyu. There were already so many things for hyu to learn, so many things this world would force hyu to come to terms with.” Sheepish and shamefaced, he sighed heavily, “I did not mean for it to go unsaid for so long. I am sorry... I had only the best of intentions.”

“Good intentions...” she snarled, giving a short and brittle laugh as she shook herself free. “... because that turned out so well for us before. Our parents had good intentions... and we were nearly eaten by a WITCH!” Glaring around the room, she hissed, “Hyu could have told me, yes. Whether any of hyu would have is debatable.”

Will’s jaw tightened, his temper starting to boil behind his eyes. “Leave Marina alone. She forgot... she was not being malicious or cruel in not telling you.”

“You did not either. What is hyur excuse!”?

His chin lifted slightly as he looked up at his irate aunt, his eyes swirling pools of verdant green. “We found out five years ago, shortly before we ever met Doyle. Since then, there has been the Prototypes, and the IMF, and getting pregnant, and dealing with Ross in Harlem. Steve’s waking - and yours - nearly loosing her in labor. Then the stress and strain of raising twins, while still performing our duties to the best of our abilities. It is not her fault she forgot... though I assure you, now that remembers she won’t stop until she has avenged you and someone is dead.” Jaw tightening, he continued, “And the last thing you ever would have wanted was for me to tell you. You think the way you found out was bad? I would have been a million times worse. I have no tact... coming from me, it would have been a disaster.”

“I see... so instead I must have preferred for months to pass before being told at all.” Seeing the shadows in her nephew’s eyes, the secrets scattered across his mind, she screamed, “I have the right
to know! He is my son! And I demand the truth!"

There was a long moment of perfect stillness, before at last Will nodded briskly. Hands tightening on the arms of his chair, he pushed himself slowly to his feet. Vincent lunged to stop the action and was waved aside insistently. Noticeably, Marina said nothing, her teeth making deep indents in the skin of her bottom lip, as she fought to keep silent about her own protestations. Once he was on his feet, standing as tall and as straight as ever, he spoke, “You want the truth. I can promise you, you won’t like it. But, you demanded it so here it is.”

Taking a deep breath, he held it for a moment, before announcing to the room, “The truth is this. In all actuality, your son - my COUSIN - is still alive and breathing. And even more likely, he’s an agent of HYDRA . . . and one day, I will have to kill him.” His irises were pinpricks of black within the well of murky silver eyes. Frowning at her, he asked sincerely, “Is that the truth you wanted?”

She stared at him, eyes wide. Then the sound of skin against skin rang through the room, Will’s head tossing to the side as Gretel slapped him with all the force she had in her body. Vincent’s eyes went golden, as he roared at her, grabbing her by the wrist and all but throwing her away from his patient. “What the hell!?” he demanded, body coiled with protective fury.

She ignored the healer completely, her focus on the tossed aside head of the Colonel. “My son is not HYDRA,” she hissed, glaring at her nephew as he straightened once again, a bright red blotch on his cheek where she’d struck him.

“I hope not,” he replied, tone as level and calm as ever. “But I have to face reality. And that is the reality of the matter. I’m doing the best I can to find him . . . but he’s either been kept completely off the books or he does not wish to be found at all.”

Marina’s eyes were fixed on her lover. She stepped forward as she watched him sway slightly, his hand coming out to brace himself on the edge of the table. “Misha?”

His eyes slipped closed, even as he spoke, “I don’t feel so good.”

And then, the entire room watched, as Will Grimm’s eyes rolled back into his head and his body crumpled to the floor in a faint. His lover’s voice rang through the room as she screamed, “MISHA!”

Chapter End Notes

Translations:

(G) der Oberst - the Colonel
(G) Schweinchen - pigs
Enjoy!! Let me know what you think. Your comments mean the world to me.

Also I have decided to accept my title of Queen of Cliffhangers. Muahaha! Mine is an Evil Laugh!! XD

Translations at the end as always.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter 243: Rolling with the Punches

Maria Hill-Kuhn felt her husband’s hand clench down hard on her own. Teal eyes wide, she looked up to see Hansel watching his son - his steady, stalwart and untouchable son - collapse to the ground in a dead faint. Her sister-in-law back stepped in shock, making way for a panicked Marina, Sam, Owen and Vincent. All four were rushing to prevent Will's head from hitting the floor, Vincent moving just that split second faster and cradling the Colonel’s head in the crook of his elbow as he lowered the man to the floor.

Shucking off his flannel shirt, the doctor ordered firmly, “Sam, my bag . . . go.”
The blond didn’t even protest, up and scrambling away in a heartbeat. The AD felt her heart contract hard as Marina reached with trembling hands to touch her lover’s face, begging in a whimper, “Misha?” Even her voice shook, a clear indication of her fear.

“Marishka, I need to turn him . . . can you and Owen help me?”

Cornflower blue eyes were approving as the question forced Marina to take stock and push away her fears. She scrubbed the backs of her fingers against her cheeks as she nodded firmly. “Da. What do I do?”

“Keep his neck steady. Owen, you've got his shoulders and I'll get his legs & hips. Let's keep his spine in line as much as we can. On my count . . .”

Sensing her husband’s rising anxiety, Maria reached with her free hand to touch his face. Distracted from the scene on the floor by the touch, she smiled kindly as he looked down at her, puzzlement thickening his accent, “Spatzi?”

Going up on tiptoes to kiss the corner of his jaw, she urged him, “I promise; I'll keep an eye on Will . . . and Marina. But you need to get your sister away from here. Once she’s not freaking out, Marishka is going to be on a warpath.”

Nodding in resolute agreement, he replied, “I will take her upstairs. She can pound on Adler’s bag for a bit, hm?”

“Good plan. I'll let you know when Vincent's finished his examination. Go . . . take care of your sister,” she insisted, tilting up her face for his customary kiss.

Kissing her warmly, he stroked his fingers over the curvature of her face before focusing on his sister. “Komm mit mir, Gretel . . . komm.”

Gretel went along at her brother's urging but her eyes remained fixated on her unconscious nephew. Only when the siblings were gone did Maria focus back on the immediate circumstances. She jumped a little bit when Sam Grimm blew back into the room like a hurricane, then frowned as her best friend’s son slammed to a stop just inside the door. Vincent looked up, with a frown, “Sam, dude, I need my bag.”

“Vincent . . . look at the pillows,” he argued, tone strangled and worried.

The healer frowned, before twisting to do as told. There, where Will had been leaning, were bloody smears only now turning rusty from oxidation. Even Maria felt alarm, her hands flying to cover her mouth at the rush of concern for her friend . . . and sometime adversary. Whirling back, the man barked, “Roll him . . . now. On my count . . . three . . . two . . . go . . .”

Once the Colonel was settled into recovery, Vincent moved to take in the huge, bloody stain across the t-shirt. Swearing a blue streak under his breath, Vincent lifted his shirt out of his way, then peeled away the sodden bandages. “He tore the stitches. Damn him for being a stubborn idiot.”

Marina’s hands were visibly shaking where they cradled her lover’s throat, panicked hot chocolate eyes glittering with terror as she whimpered, “Don't leave me . . . Misha, please . . .”

Shifting her hands, her fingertips pressed to his pulse briefly. Gasping, she bowed her body forward as though to protect him. A moment later, her hands lifted to cup Will’s cheeks as she vowed, “I have the watch, Mishka . . . we'll be alright . . . rest.”

Vincent and Sam worked together in silent tandem, both of their focus on stemming the blood loss.
“Marina . . . I need you to strip your bed. Use towels . . . old sheets; anything you don't care if he bleeds on . . .”

Marina’s tone was firm as she replied, “He can bleed on everything in this damned house, as long as he lives to kiss me every morning.”

“We're gonna make sure of that much, Marishka, I promise.” Vincent vowed, with a frown.

Owen grinned, elbow stretching out to nudge her fondly. “Boss is gonna outlive us all, Boss-Lady.”

“He had better or I'll kill him myself.” she grumbled, her tone worried and fond despite her words.

Vincent smirked despite himself, shaking his head at the fierceness of the woman before him. “That's our girl.” Turning to look at Sam, he continued, “Take your mom upstairs. Owen and I are right behind you. Let's get him into his own bed.”

The former soldier nodded, moving to take his mother's shoulders between his palms tenderly. “Come on, Ma. Let's go get the room ready.”

Nodding, Marina bent to kiss her lover again before standing with her son's assistance. Moving quickly, Maria reached to touch her best friend's shoulder, halting her in her tracks. “You okay? Is there anything I can do?”

The Russian smiled at the taller woman, moving to hug her fiercely. “As soon as I know Misha is okay, I'll be just fine. As for the rest . . . I would suspect your husband needs you more than I do right now.”

“You're my best friend, Marina, he'd understand,” the AD protested sincerely, arms tightening around her slightly.

One side of her mouth quirked up in a laughing smile as the handler insisted, “I know, but you're his wife. Don't worry; I'm gonna need all the stupid action movies and cheesy romances you can manage to take my mind off of Will's injury soon enough.”

“You got it,” Maria laughed softly, squeezing her once more before letting Sam lead his mother away.

Bracing herself she headed upstairs. She didn't envy Hansel's position in the slightest. Maria could understand how and why Gretel was feeling betrayed, seeing as Hansel was her brother and the only one she’d ever been able to rely on. However, that meant Hansel was already feeling immeasurably guilty about keeping this secret from his sister. Gretel would give him hell and he would allow it, believing it no less than he deserved.

Her husband was too self-sacrificing by half. She had once wondered where Will got that trait from. Since her marriage, she no longer questioned it. Hansel was almost worse than the Colonel.

Climbing the stairs to the attic Maria was surprised by how quiet it was. The door was ajar and she could just make out Hansel's aggrieved sigh before the familiar sound of a punching bag being attacked began. “Gretel, please . . . listen to me. This world . . . it does not work this way. Not anymore.”

There was no response, just the continual pounding on the bag. “I will return Gretel. Please, do not leave.”

Pausing at the door, Maria waited patiently for her husband to appear in the doorway to the attic. His
footsteps sounded heavy on the stairs, the beloved face careworn and sad as he appeared in the doorframe. Visibly startled by the sight of his wife, he inquired, “Späti? What is it? How is mein Adler? Is he alright?”

Maria could feel her dismay transform her face as she shook her head. “Vincent is doing the best he can. We must be patient, at least until we know more.” Glancing towards the door, the AD frowned at the sounds of Gretel’s rage being pounded out on Will’s well-used bag. “How is she?”

“Angry. Very angry,” he sighed, hands coming up to scrub at his face. “I cannot fault her for it. However, I do wish she would listen to me. She has not lost him, though she will not believe me.”

“Lost him? I’m confused . . . lost who?” she asked, even as she insinuated herself into her husband’s embrace.

“Hyu must understand. Things have changed . . . in our time, such a thing would have ruined her. She would have been deemed unfit for a wholesome match, a tainted spinster for the rest of her life.” Eyebrows rising in alarm, Maria’s tone was incredulous as she echoed, “Ruined?! Hans, you can’t seriously be suggesting that she believes Rogers is going to leave her because of this!?”

“It is the reality she knows best. We know differently, but . . . Steven must return home. She has great need of his reassurance.”

“Hansel, you know how Rogers feels about HYDRA. This assignment . . . it’s personal for him. He feels as though he must avenge those whom HYDRA has mistreated and abused; Gretel, Barnes, her son . . .”

“Ja, I know this. But my sister . . . she needs him. And the longer it takes for him to arrive, the harder it will be for him to rebuild what she is trying to break.”

Jaw tightening, Maria frowned. “Alright then . . . let’s call the boys.”

Meanwhile, Jason was staring at the barracks housing Ramirez’s quarters. “It’s awful quiet, all things considered, Krechet,” Aaron murmured into his comm, strengthening Jason’s concern over the situation. “This feels wrong.”

Clint chimed in then. “I’m telling you. Ramirez is the nicest guy in STRIKE.”

Brian’s reply was stone cold and final as he insisted, “And people aren’t always what they appear to be, Yastreb. Sometimes, their private persona is vastly different than the one they sport in public.”

“Just because you are paranoid and suspicious as a rule, Skopa, doesn’t mean everyone else is,” his redhaired goddess teased through the comms.

Brian smirked, unable to help it, even as he grumped over the comm. “That doesn’t mean I’m wrong, Vdova.”

Jason crouched in the mud, hands dangling lazily from his wrists as he watched the building cautiously. “Shut up. I wanna know what Ramirez knows. If he’s being framed, I wanna know that too. Be smart and keep your eyes open. We go in on my call.”

Anticipation filled the silence over the comms, but no one expected the voice that spoke next. “Jay, this is Maria. Do you copy? Over?”

Jason blinked as his step-mother’s voice broke across them. “Maria? What's wrong?”
“We need Rogers back at the house, pronto.”

Steve frowned from where he crouched opposite Clint, next to Bucky. “Why?”

“It's Gretel. She and Will had an . . . altercation. She needs your support right now.”

“Altercation!?” was the immediate question from the entire family, tones wavering from shocked to furious.

Steve's voice was a dull roar as he demanded, “What kind of altercation?”

A heavy sigh broke across the wavelength, before Maria replied sadly. “Will told her the truth, about her son, which wasn't the truth she wanted to hear. She slapped him.”

“Slapped him!?” Aaron and Clint asked simultaneously, both of their tones smoldering.

“Good on her,” Brian announced, earning an incredulous, “WHAT!?” from his baby brothers.

“Will nearly died, Bri! She shouldn't be slapping him . . . he's not even supposed to be out of bed!”

“She might not have if he was still in bed.”

Maria scoffed, snort clear through the receiver. “Because the Colonel is so good at taking care of himself, when his brothers need him or they could be in danger. Right.”

“Exactly. And knowing Will, it probably could have been handled better. What did he say?”

“The truth. That her son is probably alive, he's more than likely HYDRA, and one day, if that's the case, your cousin is going to die at his hand.” Sighing heavily, she continued, “In his own defense, he did warn her she wasn't going to like what he had to say. But she insisted.”

Jason groaned, even as he continued, “And you know Will's relationship with tact, Bri. This is on Aunt Gretel, as much as on Will. Neither of them is blameless.”

“Yeah, I'll give you that, but telling a mother he was going to kill her child? He’s lucky she didn’t at least break his nose . . . I would have.”

Maria chuckled. “Surprisingly, she was more irritated about his insinuation that her son was HYDRA, than the part where Will would have to kill him. Again . . . truths she didn't want to hear but wouldn't let him keep to himself.”

“Everybody, stop choosing sides . . . Are they okay?” Aaron asked, genuinely worried about both his aunt and his brother.

“Gretel is beating the hell out of Will's punching bag in the attic. Will . . . he's unconscious. Vincent is doing everything he can, I promise,” Maria vowed solemnly.

“She hit him that hard!”?

“Yes and no. He ruptured his stitches, internally and externally, getting out of bed to help Doyle get custody of Bellamy. He didn't say anything. As a result, he fainted from the blood loss.”

“Damn it, Will,” Jason groaned, seconds before Brian sighed, “Marina’s going to kill him.”

“She has already promised as much.” Maria snarked, before her tone went soft and fond as she continued, “But again . . . Will's life will never be as important to him as the health, happiness and
well-being of his family. Doyle is his brother and Bellamy is his nephew; there was no question in his mind where he needed to be. And we all know that.”

Bucky and Clint both echoed together, “Who is Bellamy?”

“That’s right, you two missed the pissed off social worker Marina banished to the front porch today. Apparently Doyle has a son.”

“Knew that. His name's Kelley . . . which reminds me. Who gives a boy, a girl's name?”

“You're one to talk, Clinton Francis,” Jason teased with a snicker.

“Shut it, Jay!”

Maria's tone was brisk as she continued, “Bellamy is eight years old. By all reports, Doyle was on an epic bender for a while after Scarlett’s alleged death. Bellamy was the result. His mother has passed . . . Doyle is the only biological parent left.”

“Damn. Poor kid,” Bucky rumbled with a sigh.

Steve glanced at his best friend, amused, before speaking up again. “So what's wrong with Gretel? Doesn't sound like Will laid a hand on her . . .”

“The Colonel is many things,” the AD stated primly, “but abusive to family is not one of them. Hansel found out why Gretel is truly so angry . . .”

Steve frowned, visibly halting himself from speaking as he waited for Maria to explain. The woman sighed sadly, before continuing her thought. “. . . she believes she's lost you, due to the circumstances in which she conceived her son.”

“Lost me? The woman is my soulmate, predetermined by God, or Fate, or what have you, to be my match. In what world would I be lost to her?” he asked, genuinely curious.

“The one into which she was born. Gretel was born into a time that was even more righteous than yours . . .” Maria retorted, the roll of her eyes all but audible as she explained.

Glancing at Bucky as he contemplated those words Steve exhaled sharply, his voice barely audible to the comms as he replied, “But I could never think differently of Gretel over something she had no say in.”

“Which is why she needs you here. She needs you to say that to her face and make her believe it,” she insisted briskly, as sharp and logical as always.

It was clear to everyone that the Captain was torn. On the one hand, his Gretel needed him. On the other, this was HYDRA, the one foe he’d never definitively beaten. Bucky sighed, nudging his friend with an elbow. “Go . . . we got this.”

“Are you sure? I don't want to leave you a man short.”

“Yeah. Besides, Aunt Badass is way more important than Ramirez. Go,” Clint insisted, with a roll of his eyes.

Aaron's tone was a growl. “There's going to be plenty of HYDRA ass for you to kick another time.”

“Alright then,” Steve nodded, gathering his gear. “Be careful.” On some level, he had known that their devotion to their older brother was unmatched. But seeing it for himself firsthand was
something else altogether.

“We always are,” Brian snarked, before running towards the barracks with Natasha and his brothers trailing quickly behind.

Steve’s absence was quickly forgotten; out of sight, out of mind as it were. All that mattered was Ramirez . . . and finding out what role he’d played in their brother’s stabbing. Will wasn’t perfect, a fact they all knew, but he had always been their protector. He’d done everything he could to care for them, even when he’d been little more than a child himself. Now it was their turn to repay the favor.

Jason’s voice brooked no argument as he murmured, “We need him alive. No killing, Bri . . . not until we know.”

“I’m telling you . . . this can’t have been Ramirez,” Clint muttered stubbornly.

Bucky lifted a hand to squeeze the back of his partner’s neck. “We will be as open minded as possible. But first, we must find him.”

They arrived at Ramirez’s barracks, to the sight of the door slightly ajar. Almost instantly, the Grimms were on alert. Natasha’s voice was hard as she murmured, “That’s not good.”

“When does anything that stems from one of us getting hurt ever really end up in our favor, Nat?” Clint snarked, even as his hand gripped his bow tighter.

“Good point,” she sighed.

“We do seem to be perpetually jinxed as a family,” Jason murmured. Already he was inching slow and steady towards the door, eyes alert as he drew his sidearm.

“I’ll take jinxed over some other people’s misery. We at least have each other,” Aaron replied, gun in one hand and fingers of the other stretching out to bump open the door. “Ramirez? Alberto Ramirez? This is STRIKE Team Grimm . . . identify your location.”

Resounding silence answered the announcement earning a fierce frown from the family’s former cop. Raising his voice, Jason took over.

“Agent Ramirez, this is Captain Walsh. If you will not come out peacefully, we will come in with force. You have been warned,” Jason called, fingers tightening slightly around his gun. “You have till the count of five.”

There was a pause before Jason began using commands through sign language. “Five . . . four . . . three . . . two . . . one . . . . . . .”

Chapter End Notes

Translations:

(R) Da/net - yes/no
(G) Spatzi - sparrow (Hansel’s nickname for his wife, Maria Hill.)
(G) Adler - Eagle (Hansel’s nickname for Will Grimm)
(G) Komm mit mir - Come with me
(R) Krechet - Merlin (Jason’s callsign for the Army and SHIELD)
(R) Yastreb - Hawk (Clint's callsign for the Army and SHIELD)
(R) Skopa - Osprey (Brian's callsign for SHIELD)
(R) Vdova - Widow. (short for Chernaya Vdova or Black Widow; callsign for Natasha Romanoff, given to her by the Krasnaya Komnata)
Chapter Notes

Steve is hella contrary. It would be wonderful if he'd just comply with my plans for him without fighting me every step of the way. Oh well; if he did, he wouldn't be our Cap, would be? XD

New chapter; short but it's the best end point for the next bit. Thank you! Enjoy all!!

A couple translations, but not many. At the end as always.

See the end of the chapter for more notes
Chapter 244: Tale As Old As Time

If you asked his best friend, Steven Grant Rogers was a special kind of crazy. Which was saying something, considering the asinine and crazy antics he and one James Buchanan Barnes had gotten up to in their long and storied history together. The two of them had been getting into scrapes, one following the other, since before Steve could really even remember. But none of the stupid things they’d done before came close to the stupid thing Steve was going to try and do now.

Try and reason with a pissed off German woman, who could turn him into a pretzel, if she was of a mind to. And, as a matter of fact, had towards the beginning of their relationship when he attempted
to coddle her instead of going all out against her. That was a lesson he’d learned quickly and well; he had no interest in getting his ass kicked like that again.

It could be said that Steve had a type. First, there was the obvious affinity for women named Margaret. He wondered sometimes, how Peggy would react to the fact that his soulmate shared her name. He could always ask her, of course, but there was a part of him that was reluctant to tell Peggy about Gretel; if he was honest with himself, it was because the idea of those two women becoming friends was frankly terrifying and definitely more than likely.

Then there was the fact, that the women he typically fell for could beat the crap out of him with their pinky fingers. He would never forget the look on Peggy’s face as she pulled the trigger and took three direct shots at his unfinished shield. Vibranium it may be, but Steve still shuddered to think what would have happened if the shield hadn’t stood up against the assault.

In some ways Gretel was softer than Peggy had been, and in others she was harder. Both of them were women in predominantly male professions. They’d had to deal with detractors and defamers all their lives, most of them male and all of them wrong. They got down and dirty with the best of them, and neither cared much for the stupidity of social conventions.

But where Peggy was a ballbuster every moment of every day - even in her softer moments - Gretel had moments of real vulnerability. In large part, that was a direct consequence of waking up into an entirely new time, filled with so many bizarre things to try and navigate through. Steve would never tell her, but he was grateful he was there with her to help her through the worst of the roller coaster.

Of course, he had known about Gretel’s son. And though Hansel hadn’t said specifically how the child had been conceived, Steve wasn’t stupid; he’d guessed . . . and Hansel hadn’t denied. Not a detail he was going to tell a pissed off Gretel, of course, but it did give him a leg up on understanding why she was so angry. Jogging lazily through the darkening streets of the base, the Captain tried to gather his thoughts so he would be able to help her come to terms . . . and hopefully heal.

He arrived at the Grimm home, to almost dead silence. Rene and Samonik had taken the children upstairs, leaving Hansel, Maria, Will and Marina waiting for the return of both Gretel and the "hunting party". Considering the incident between Will and Gretel, the house was a lot more quiet than he would have expected.

His best bet in figuring out what happened from the point where they left until now, would probably be Hansel. If he could get the German to talk to him about it. Even now, the witch hunter was notoriously close mouthed about some things.

Pausing at the base of the stairs, he listened for a second in hopes of pinpointing locations.

“She is in the attic, Steven.”

Steve whirled, alarmed as always by Hansel’s ability to move without sound. “Someone needs to put a bell on you.”

Hansel chuckled as he agreed, “Hyu are not the first to say so. My sons . . . I am not the only sneak here, hyu see.”

“That I knew,” Steve chuckled, well remembering the first time Aaron and Clint had scared the bejesus out of him by suddenly appearing where they had not been a moment before. Sobering, he inquired, “What happened?”

“My sister is angry,” was the succinct reply. “She believes hyu will leave her . . . see her as tainted
by what has been done to her.”

“What was done to her, was in no way her fault.”

“Ja, I know this as do hyu. However the time in which we were born has a different theory.”

Steve's jaw tightened. “Damn it.”

There was a sardonic twist to the German’s mouth as he agreed, “Indeed. The attic . . . hyu will find her there.”

A brisk nod was Steve's only response, as he turned to go. Pausing, he inquired, “How is Will?”

Hansel's features grayed with concern as he shook his head. “I do not know. He is very ill . . . only time will tell, I fear.”

“He's stubborn . . . he'll be alright.”

“I know that in my heart . . . my head requires a little more convincing. Go . . . my sister has need of you now.”

Nodding, Steve jogged up the stairs and into the tiny closet which hid the stairs to the attic gym. Will had allowed him the use of the bag on a couple of occasions, when the ghosts of the past had refused to be silenced and only violence would ease their fury. The dull thud thud of fists against the bag were familiar and fast; Gretel's fury had not abated as yet. He would be walking into dangerous waters if he was unable to ease her fears.

He wasn’t surprised when the creak of the door drew her attention away from the bag to him but what was a surprise was how her expression changed. The anger vanished, she looked startled and afraid, her eyes darting to different points in the room before settling back on the bag. Her face grew hard again, followed by - what he was reasonably sure was - an impressive string of German cursing, aimed at her brother and all of his descendants.

“Well then,” she said, straightening up and facing him. “We both know why you are here Steve, so say what you must and leave me be.”

He took a step into the room and closed the door. “I understand I owe you an apology.”

She blinked at him, clearly startled by his sincerity. It was not what she had expected him to say, that much was clear. Pain stabbed through him sharply, as he vowed to make it up to her. “What?”

“Apparently, I have done a terrible job of letting you know just how much you mean to me.”

“I do not . . .” here she paused, eyes narrowing as she hissed, “. . . what exactly did Hansel tell you?” she demanded.

“Only that you have a son, born while you slept. I inferred the rest myself.”

“So then you know. You understand-”

“That I have even more reason to bring HYDRA down? Yes.”

“Stop being so obtuse, Steven! You are too respectable to be with me now! I do not wish this to be drawn out.”

“Even considering the fact that I’m pretty sure the world now doesn’t care as much as you seem to
think it will, I’ve never been someone to just sit back and do as I’m told,” he reminded her, with a small, sad smile.

Gretel shook her head, hands coming up to cover her face. “Hyr reputation is important to me, Steven. Why is it not important to hyu?”

“It’s not important to me, because all that is, is standing before me and completely unaware of her value.” His mouth twisted sadly as he confessed ruefully, “It’s breaking my heart.”

“Why will hyu not just leave me? Save hyurself from my taint?”

“Taint?” Steve almost growled. “You have to stop saying things like that. If anyone else even implied such a thing about you . . . I honestly don’t know what I would do to them. But if anything, that is how I would want to lose a meaningless reputation, defending the honor of the woman I love.”

“Hyr reputation tells people what kind of man hyu are, Steven. Is that really the legacy hyu want for hyurself and hyur heirs?”

“Excuse me if I am being too forward but if I have any heirs, I want you to be their mother.” He stepped forward, keeping his eyes locked with hers. “And my legacy will be to live each day worthy of your love and respect. From the moment I saw you asleep on that bed a part of me knew that nothing else would matter as much as you. And now that I know you, nothing will ever make me give you up. Least of all the whims of popular opinion, as fickle as they are.”

Her lips trembled for a moment, before she was lunging across the room and burying herself into his arms. “I was so scared.”

Steve’s arms were solid and reassuring around her as he pressed his lips into the fall of her hair. “I know. But it’s okay; I’m here. I will do everything in my power to protect you . . . even from yourself.”

She dissolved against him, frame trembling with the crash of fear and adrenaline. Her fingers clutched his shirt in a clawlike grip, her nails a soft pinprick through the cotton of his shirt. Steve murmured softly to her, stroking through her hair and over her back.

It was a long time before her tears stopped. Pressing a sweet kiss to her forehead, he asked, “Feel better?”

She nodded, easing a single step back and wiping at her eyes with her fingers. “Besides feeling like a fool, yes . . . much better. Thank hyu.”

“A beautiful fool . . . Bucky used to tell me that love makes even brilliant men idiots,” he chuckled, reaching out to help her smooth her hair from her face. Cupping her cheeks, he lifted her face to his, indulging them both in a poignant kiss.

Gretel bit down on her lip, glancing towards the door to the attic. “I have made a mess of things.”

“No one blames you for your anger. You had every right to be angry.”

“And Will? Did I have the right to harm him when he was only telling me the truth I had demanded from him?”

“That’s between you and the Colonel. I doubt he’ll hold it against you though.”
“It is not mein Neffe I am worried about.”

Steve grimaced as he recalled the glittering rage he'd been confronted with so many months before. He had only hurt Clint’s feelings, and Marina would have gleefully murdered him if not for Bucky threatening to do it for her. He could only imagine the fury she would unleash on someone who had physically harmed her lover. Squeezing his arm around her shoulders, he agreed, “It may be prudent to avoid Marina for a bit until her temper cools. Her rages are not for the faint of heart.”

“Indeed,” Gretel chuckled tearfully. Leaning into him, she toyed with one of the buttons on the front of his shirt. “Hya are a good man, Steven Rogers. I am fortunate to call hya mine.”

Bending to kiss her, he argued lightly, “No . . . I'm the lucky one. Luckiest bastard this side of the pond.”

“How generous,” she teased, nose wrinkling in amusement. “Well . . . not really. I'm afraid if I got him first, I might kill him without letting you get your own vengeance.”

“Thank you for choosing me.”

“Thank you . . . for not writing me off that first day.”

She grinned up at him, before a clatter on the stairs leading up into the attic pulled both of their attentions to the door seconds before it slammed open. Jason stood there, looking grim and solemn as he took them in. “Sorry to interrupt, but have either of you seen Dad?”

“Not since I came upstairs. Why? What happened?”

“Ramirez is dead and I'm pretty sure that, despite their best efforts, it wasn't quite as neat a suicide as HYDRA wanted it to be.” Shoving a hand back through his hair, he insisted, “You're both gonna want to come downstairs. We gotta figure out what the hell our next move will be.”

“What about the Colonel?” Steve asked as the two moved to follow Jason.

“Vincent is still stitching him back together. For the moment it's just us . . . I don't want to burden him if I don't have to. He and Marina have enough to deal with right now. I'm his Second; I can handle this for the moment, until he can take up the reins again.”

“How did the man die?”

“Single bullet to the temple . . . left a suicide note. Said he wasn't going to prison for the Grimms.”
“I’m confused about your urgency here. He's confessed. Isn't the matter now closed?” Steve asked cautiously.

“Ramirez was right handed . . . the bullet entered his left temple. Suicide note or not, he was either murdered or sacrificed. And I need to figure it which one it is . . . for Will’s sake.”

Gretel’s voice was soft as she remarked, “Hyur loyalty to hyur brother is admirable, but does he deserve it, Neffe?”

Jason froze at the question; when he turned to face her, his features were eerily calm, “My brother would cut off his own hand to protect us . . . turn himself in to Ross, if that was what it took to keep us safe. I will never do him the disservice of less. So yes, Aunt Gretel, he does deserve it . . . my loyalty and so much more.”

Rotating sharply on his heel, Jason stormed away, both of the lovers watching him go. Steve sighed, “Well then, I guess that answers that question.”

“What question?”

“Exactly how far the Grimms will go to protect the ones they love from harm.”

Chapter End Notes

Translations;

(G) Neffe - nephew
Happy New Year!! Enjoy!!
The Grimm Truth
Chapter 245: When Darkness Falls

Will's eyes felt like lead as he lay in bed, a sharp pain piercing through his side over and over again. Letting the pain carry him away, he drifted in darkness. Voices lured him back.

Marina's beloved voice was worried and trembling as she insisted, “Tell me the truth, Vincent.”

Vincent sighed, before speaking. “I don't know, Marishka. The wound . . . it's deep and serious. And he's so stubborn, especially about his own health.”

“What do I need to do?”

“I've sedated him for now . . . the best thing for him is to remain still and calm. This is the only way I know how to make that happen.” Huffing out a bitter laugh, he sighed, “Remind me to punch Ross in the face. Will’s resistance to most sedatives makes keeping him under a tricky, pharmaceutical marvel of engineering.”

“But you can do it,” she insisted, not sounding concerned about any kind of alternative.

“It'll take careful monitoring, and he'll probably never be very deeply under, but yes. I can keep him unconscious, at least until the wedding. That should give the injury enough time to start to seal itself closed.” Another heavy sigh, as he grunted, “Never thought I’d say this, but thank God for Cahill healing.”

Marina sounded resigned as she replied, “Agreed. Thank you Vincent.”

“You're welcome Marishka. Just . . . don't forget to get some rest yourself. Let the rest of us worry about this shit.”

A soft sound, a whisper of hair against her throat, and Will could see in his mind’s eyes her quiet nod and the weariness that dragged at her body. “I'm going to lay down now. I think the adrenaline is officially gone.”

“Good girl.” A quiet smack of lips against skin caused by a kiss to the forehead and Will felt affection well within him for this man who loved his Marishka so dearly. Vincent would take care of her; to say it was a relief was an understatement.

A warm body climbed into the bed next to him, the familiar scent of coconuts and hibiscus flowers wafting to his nose. Marina’s lips pressed lightly to his, as she whispered, “I'm here, Misha. Rest well; your brothers have the watch.”

Allowing her presence to ease his worry, Will let go and drifted away into the darkness again.

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When Will’s consciousness came back to himself, it was to a sound he rarely heard. Clint was worried, and there was a solemnity to his voice that jarred Will's overprotective, older brother instincts. “He’s shivering again,” the archer announced to the room.

The answering voice was calm and gentle, clearly used to the worry already. “Vincent said that was normal, remember? It's okay if he shivers; we just need to tuck him back under the covers,” Bucky soothed, before substituting word for action.

Will hadn't realized he was shivering until his brother had said something. The warmth of the
comforter being drawn over him felt nice and he relished the trapped warmth against his chilled skin. Drifting on the sensation, he nearly missed Clint’s next words. “I knew that . . . sorry, Buck.”

“It’s okay, khishchnik,” was the amused reply from the legendary assassin. “I know you're worried about him.”

A familiar grip wrapped around Will’s hand, bringing the appendage to rest against a familiar chin. “He was always this mythical creature, when I was a kid, you know? Superhuman, almost.” A heavy sigh breathed out against the skin of his knuckles. “He was my hero.”

“Clint . . . he's still your hero. Everyone sees the way you worship him,” Bucky chuckled, the sound fond and teasing.

It wasn't hard to picture the way Clint’s ears turned red as he blushed. Will could tell he was embarrassed by the rough sounding, “Shut up,” he huffed at his boyfriend.

The quiet shush shush of a hand ruffling hair earned a sheepish, “Ah Buck . . . knock it off.”

“You're love for your brother is an admirable thing, khishchnik. And he's gonna be okay.” The rustle of fabric, then Bucky's voice was much lower as he no doubt crouched beside Clint’s chair. “And do you know how I know that?”

“How?” came the meek question in reply.

“Because your brother loves you. And he will do everything in his power to stay with you and Marina and his twins and the rest of your family.” A pause signalled some action Will couldn't determine, before Bucky soothed, “He'll fight like hell to stay with us, because that's how Will shows how much he cares; he stays.”

“I know, I just . . . I'm scared. He's never looked so human before,” was the trembling response and Will's heart soared into his throat, yearning to comfort his baby brother. To offer the words that would soothe his fears. Be Clint’s big brother, the one job he knew he’d always been good at.

The small surge of adrenaline was exhausting and Will started to slip away again. The last thing he heard before he was pulled back into the lonely dark once more is, “Love you, Will. Don’t worry, okay? I've got the watch.”

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He was never really sure how long he drifted in the darkness, before he found himself pulled back by the sound of voices. Brian had taken a turn following Clint, silent but for the warm press of fingers to Will's pulsepoint. The elder brother had known Brian instantly; the instantly recognizable tattoo running down his forearm, skin raised and scarred from the ink. The darkness had washed him away with the beat of Brian's heart, the cadence comforting and familiar.

His father was telling him old German folk tales when he “woke” next, the words drawled lazily as the witch hunter recited them from memory. Absently, Will had wondered if these were stories his grandmother, Adrianna, had told her son . . . nearly two centuries before this one. Hansel's voice, slow and accented, had nudged him under with quiet insistence. “Rest, mein Adler. I am here with you. Ich liebe dich, mein Sohn.”

How long the darkness held him each time was unclear. However, time continued on, like the inexorable tide of a never-ending river.

**************
When next he woke, it was to the deep rumble of his eldest son’s voice, the younger man seated in the same chair inhabited by the others before him.

“Hey Dad. Vincent said you may be able to hear me, even though you're asleep. And if you can, I don't want you to worry. Ma’s all right; the bruise on her cheek has already started fading. The girls have been little angels, although they miss you; they've been looking for you, I think. You'd be really proud of Rene and Samonik; they've really stepped up to help out and keep Ma on an even keel.”

There was a soft, rueful chuckle as his son cut himself off. “Bozhe moi, some big tough agent I am. I can't even talk to my unconscious father without stalling.”

If Will could have sighed, he would have. His poor Sammy. The blond hid it well, but there were times when the old insecurities raged to the forefront of his thoughts. What the Colonel wouldn't give to rake Braddock over hot coals for the damage the General had caused his son.

Forcing himself to calm, Will settled in to wait. It might take his Sammichka a bit to spit out whatever was bothering him, but he'd get there . . . eventually.

Sam's hands were calloused and warm, as they held his father's hand between them. He rambled for a bit, unable to settle on any one topic for any extended period of time, while his fingers played absentmindedly over Will's own. It was the affection in his touch which calmed Will's concern in the end. Whatever was bothering Sam, it was not his place in their family.

Finally, the young sniper fell silent, having run out of things to say . . . reasons to stall. The chair creaked as he leaned forward to press a warm kiss to the back of Will's hand. “I hope you can hear me, Dad, because I really need your advice.”

The short hair of Sam’s eyebrows tickled the back of Will’s hand as Sam pressed his knuckles against his own forehead. “I think I made a mistake, Dad. And if you can hear me, don’t tell Ma.”

Every warning bell in Will's psyche began to clang at him, forcing his attention squarely on his son. The first press of tears trickled down between Sam’s cheeks and Will’s hand, a clear indication of the distress his son was feeling. What the Colonel wouldn't give to be able to take his son into his arms and hold him tight; to take on the burden of whatever pain Sam was struggling under and carry it for him. But, as much as he railed at the darkness of his body’s prison, he remained motionless to the outside. He could only lie still and listen as his son poured out the fears of his heart.

“I love Jules, Dad, I do. And I can't wait for our child to be born. But . . .” here he paused, motionless in word and action. “This is stupid. I'm being stupid, I know that. Jules married me; of course she loves me. Right? Isn't that what marriage means?”

A flicker of memory - an elfish young woman smiling teasingly into the face of an affectionately stern blond twice her size - shifted through his thoughts at the question. What he wouldn't give to tell his son the truth; that sometimes love came after marriage . . . that sometimes, it was the wrong kind of love for happily ever after. That marriage, like anything, was flawed and imperfect. After all, it was not just his own preference preventing a wedding between him and his beloved Russian. Marina had reasons of her own for refusing a walk down the aisle.

However, he could say none of these things. He could only listen as Sam continued. “Sometimes, I think she's expecting someone else to come through the door. And she's disappointed when it’s me.”

A soft snort filled the room as Sam snarked, “I can tell, because she suddenly gets aggressively affectionate, as though she has to prove to herself - and me - that she loves me.

“And yet, sometimes things between us are so easy, it’s like breathing . . . which is usually when I'm
not saying or doing anything to “hover’.”

There was a long silence, where Sam tried to gather his thoughts. When he spoke again, there was an old familiar sadness in his voice . . . a long acquainted pain that would never truly heal. “Things with Matt were never this complicated. Not that I expected Jules to be like Matt. Obviously that's unfair to both of them; different times, places, and people.” There was the sound of a hand through hair, before Sam continued bitterly, “Maybe I lost him before things could turn out this way. Maybe it's me, maybe it's my fault. I just don't know.”

The name was familiar and it was only a second’s reflection, before Will had called its owner to mind.

Matthew Parker Benjamin, known as Matt or Ben, depending on who was talking about him. Sam and Matt had gone to school together on base, and when the General enlisted Sam, Matt was right behind him. Sam had never said, but Will was fairly certain that the friendship between the two boys had already morphed into a romantic relationship by that point. However they weren't allowed to be open about it until they were out from under Braddock’s constant watch.

That the relationship had been one of the happiest in Sam’s life was indisputable. The pictures of Matt and Sam all contained a brilliantly beaming Sam, ice blue eyes sparkling with joy at being with this man. The Matt in those pictures had looked on Sam with adoring eyes, an awed smile on his lips as though he couldn't believe his good fortune.

Combined with Sam’s soul deep devastation at Matt's loss . . . the relationship between those two had been deep and strong. Unable to help it, the Colonel often wondered how things would have been different, if Sam hadn't killed his lover . . . and Matt was still standing at Sam’s side.

Will's attention turned back to his son as he continued, “But I don't think she understands the damage my parents did; the Braddocks and whoever abandoned me on their doorstep. She doesn't understand that I trust her to take care of herself, but I need to protect her too. It’s all or nothing sometimes . . . most times.”

Sam sniffled hard, mucus and tears sucked back into their place as he tried to pull away from his own fears. “I know it's stupid, Dad, I do. We’re having a child together.” Another pause before he breathed out fervently, “I love her. I have since the second I saw her. And that love has just grown as I've gotten to know her better. But . . . I don't know. I just feel like she's already slipping away. And no matter how tightly I try to hold on, the easier it is for her to wiggle free.”

There was a wealth of pain in his voice as he begged, “I don't know what to do, Dad. Do I let her go? Or do I try to hold on? I wish I knew . . .” he stammered off on a sob, before whispering painfully, “More than that, I wish you could tell me.”

The IV pump chose that moment to hiss another dose of the sedative and Will railed against it as it flooded through him. He could feel his awareness trickling away and he fought it, wanting to stay with his son. To be with him, even if he couldn't offer the comfort Sam wanted just then.

The pull of the dark was too strong however and Will slipped away once more. Just before he gave up the fight, however, he heard, "Love you, Daddy.”

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There was a glow of affection at the timid voice as Will regained awareness once again. This child
was a challenge and a pistol and a charging bull, but Will loved him fiercely. Marina liked to tease him that Rene was definitely his child, an accusation that filled the Colonel with pride.

Enjolras Rene Conrad was eleven years old when they first adopted him. Sullen and angry at the world, he’d blossomed quickly under Marina’s maternal adoration and Will’s instilled discipline. He’d taken a keen interest in the families and soldiers under Will’s authority. Even going so far as to insist on visiting the injured and the newly widowed at his father’s side.

The Colonel would do a lot to spare his son further pain. But he could already see the passion in Rene’s eyes . . . the fire to change the world. With any luck, the teen would find a partner with whom to battle against the world. Someone who would protect him from himself, if it was warranted. Whether that person would manage to keep up . . . Will was trying not to push for miracles.

The bed dipped as Rene slipped onto the mattress next to him, curling into the open space beside him. A soft humming filled the air, the song one Will recognized as a favorite of Marina’s. The tune was quiet and soothing, welcoming the darkness in once more. “Love you Papa . . . sleep well,” his baby boy murmured.

Moments later, the Colonel was whisked away into the depths of darkness once more.

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He knew already that he wouldn't be able to stay aware for long. But that was Grant’s voice and the extent of Will's curiosity was legendary. He was definitely fond of the kid, but he hadn't expected him to take up vigil at his bedside either.

“I won't stay long, sir. I just . . . Sam said he thought you could hear him and I . . .” Ward huffed at himself, clearly irritated with his own thoughts. “There are things you should know . . . about me . . . about the kind of man I am. But I don't know if I could ever have the courage to tell you while you were awake.”

He paused, the rapid sound of his breathing a clear indication of his agitation. “I'm not a good person, sir. Garrett made sure of that, all those years I was his loyal puppet. I never asked questions; I just went where I was pointed and did as I was told.

“No one will tell me how you got hurt, or who did it. But I bet I know why. You scare him, you and Marina both do. Because there's no compromise to either of you; there's no shades of grey to the truth with you. And that worries him . . . the thought that you could change me, change the loyalties I've always held, into a life you could be proud of.

“I've never been jealous of anyone before. I've felt hatred, anger, rage. I've allowed the darkness within me to perform acts that haunt me still. And until you and Marina showed me a different way to live, I had never regretted the choice I made.” His voice grew muffled as though he was speaking into his hands, as he continued, “But I am so jealous of Sam and Rene. I would give anything to be your son; to have had a father who loved me, the way you love your sons.”

Mentally, Will frowned as he listened to the specialist. This almost felt like a confession, except there was nothing Will felt Grant needed to atone for. But clearly the young man was weighted down by some dark burden, some sin he held close for fear of rejection. Making a mental note to talk to Marina, he allowed the wave of darkness to crest over him, dragging him away on an undertow of drugs once more.

Grant's vow followed him under. “I will make you proud, sir. I promise.”
Aaron’s turn at his bedside brought Will back slowly. The second youngest Grimm was pulling the covers up and straight, checking Will’s temperature and even replacing the old bandage on the wound. The actions were hardly surprising, however; Kenny had always been the worrier. He fussed after his brothers - and now Marta - whenever they were hurt or sick like a mama bird with her hatchlings. Now, as it had then, fondness welled within the Colonel’s heart.

In this, Kenny - and now Aaron - took after Marina more than anyone.

Clint was always Marina's favorite, a bullet child rushing headlong into every trouble he could find. Kenny had been quieter and gentler, a charming child with a smile like sunshine. Marina had worshipped the child and indulged him more than any of the others . . . even Clint.

One of Will’s clearest memories from just after the escape was Kenny crawling into Will's borrowed bed and snuggling close. The four year old hadn't asked for any comfort or anything at all, in fact. He simply curled against his big brother’s back, closed his eyes, and let the sound of Will’s heartbeat lull him to sleep.

Kenny was Will’s favorite, and the eldest Grimm was not ashamed to admit that he had spoiled Kenny as much as their meager finances would allow. If Kenny wanted it, Will would find a way to make it his. Not that he ever asked for much; he contented himself with being close to those he loved and rarely asked for more.

Losing Kenny had ripped a hole in the Colonel, and even getting Aaron back hadn't completely repaired the damage. Aaron was not Kenny, though it was not quite the definitive separation Aaron believed. However, there was a lot of Kenny buried within the former Outcome operative. The kindness and compassion that made up so much of Kenny’s personality was in Aaron still, even if it wasn't quite as apparent as it had once been.

Content to know he was in good hands, Will let himself drift back into the well of darkness. Aaron’s voice was rough comfort as it floated along beside him. “Ya lyublyu tebya, pravitel.”

“Hyu are so much like hyur father,” was the rough insistence when next Will rose to awareness. “He too is terrible at taking care of himself.”

There was a large part of him that wanted to roll his eyes. That was of no surprise to him. Everyone had mentioned at least once how much Hansel's formerly eldest son took after him. It amused Marina to no end, even as it made her crazy. There was a brutal satisfaction in it, though; despite all of Ross’ attempts, Will was his father’s child and NOT Ross’ Perfect Soldier.

Despite the roughness of his aunt’s voice, Will could detect no trace of the anger it had held before he’d lost consciousness. Which meant he’d either been out of it for longer than he’d expected or Gretel had worked off her anger in some other way. Absently, he wondered how many new dents he’d find in his attic punching bag.

“I wish I understood hyu better . . . the reasons for the choices you make . . . why the name Ross is so terrible to hyu and hyur brothers.” There was the quiet sound of friction as skin rubbed briskly over skin; she’d scrubbed her face with her hands. “There is so much about this world I do not understand.”

Amusement flooded him and he would have snickered if he could. Even he didn't completely
understand the world, and he'd been living it in for longer than she had. Lady Luck and her lover, Lord Misery, were fickle creatures and they upended the world frequently. Especially within the sphere of espionage and assassination.

Correction; especially within the sphere of the Grimm family’s life in general, Will mused. Nothing ever seemed to run smoothly for his family for any extended period of time. As much as they may want normal lives, it always seemed just out of their grasp.

Gretel huffed as she continued grudgingly, “I will not apologize for the reasons I slapped hyu . . . I will apologize for causing hyu more harm while hyu were already wounded. Just so hyu know.” The soft sound of hair against skin heralded a shake of her head, “Hyu have no tact, Neffe. Hyu would do well to learn some.”

Now Will really wished he was awake for this conversation. He’d tried to warn her; could he truly be blamed for his particular brand of honesty? She’d demanded an answer he hadn't wanted to give. What else could he have done, but tell her the truth she demanded but did not want?

Marina had been scolding him for his lack since the time he told his first teacher that his teeth were yellow and he smelled like an ashtray. He was 13. His relationship with tact had not improved in the following years. He tried, but - as his beloved Russian was so fond of saying - he was very much a student from the school of blunt force trauma to the face. Be it physically, verbally or, very rarely, emotionally.

Maybe it was just the way he’d been built, or maybe this was how he’d always been intended to be. Either way, Will was a leopard and leopards could never change their spots no matter how much they may try.

Gretel sighed heavily, before speaking once again, “Steven trusts hyu. I guess, for now, that is good enough for me.” A gentle kiss pressed to his forehead, before she insisted, “Rest well. Much has happened while hyu have slept. Hyu will need hyur strength.”

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Will didn’t remember drifting away, but when he woke, it was to a rough, familiar hand holding his. Relief and comfort soared at that touch, knowing instantly its owner.

“I don’t think I ever knew you were such a lazy slug, Boss-man. I mean, don’t you think you’ve been sleeping long enough?” Owen asked, tone rough with affection and worry.

Will had a dozen comebacks instantly on his lips, furious at the prison that refused to allow their use. The loss of their age old bickering and bantering, no matter how temporary, left Will feeling weaker than he’d felt after being stabbed. The practice had given him strength in his darkest moments and he wished for its bracing effect more than anything.

Forcing himself to be patient, he made note of all the cracks Owen made so as to retaliate later. Thanks to his enforced slumber, he would have plenty of time to come up with the best insults. A comfort that followed him into the darkness as he slipped away again.

************

He had known who his next visitor would be long before he ever heard his voice. Not by process of elimination, or even a really good guess. More because, if there was anyone who needed his big brother in the middle of their family’s current crisis, it was Jason.

Tools clicked and clacked against each other in cargo pockets and Will wanted to laugh at the small
squeak emanating from one of his shoes. Ten to one, the absent minded tech still had a hole in the sole of his left boot. Will had been on him to replace them for at least six months. However, Jason rarely listened about anything so mundane for longer than five minutes before some new invention captured his attention.

A heavy thud sounded as the former detective dropped into the chair next to the bed. Amused, Will settled in to wait; Jason was agitated and it wouldn't be long before he exploded with it. “How do you do it?!” the tech specialist suddenly demanded, sounding frazzled and worried. “Fuck, Will, this is hard! Running our family, managing the crisis . . . you always make it look so easy!”

Warmth flooded through Will, pride and affection filling him from tip to toe. He had always known that the middle brother would come out the best of all of them. Independent and stubborn, his loyalty was a thing of legend even outside the confines of their family.

Jason had never been the one to believe in himself unflinchingly. But Will had always known that Jay would step up when called upon and do what needed to be done. Hence why he had never worried about leaving for the Army at 17; Jason was only 12, but Will had trusted him to take care of Marina and his little brothers. That trust had grown rapidly, as Jason had proven himself worthy of it.

When Barney had done what he'd done and left, Jason had stepped into the role of Second without flinching. And while the elder brother knew in his gut that the role made Jason nervous, he'd never truly flinched from the responsibility. Will had told him all the time after they'd left Hoover, that “courage was not the absence of fear but instead being scared and doing it anyway.” Jason was terrified, but doing his best job anyway; Will was so proud of him it was nearly a living thing unto itself.

Jason’s hands closed around Will's own, and the Colonel focused on forcing something to show his brother he could hear him. A slight twitch of his fingers was all he could manage, prompting a sob of relief from the younger man. “I need you to wake up, Will. I'm not built for this and I'm scared I'm fucking it all up.”

Another twitch and Jason took a deep breath to steady himself. “I don’t know all of the details, but Alberto Ramirez is dead.”

The name triggered a flash of information and Will would have staggered if he'd been awake and on his feet. Everything in Ramirez’s file flashed through Will's brain like intel downloading onto a computer. Including the audio clips from various missions, confirming the man’s identity . . . and Ramirez’s hand on the knife that had stabbed him. Which then forced Will to ask; if they had gotten the loyalties wrong of someone like Ramirez, known as the nicest guy in STRIKE, who else’s loyalties were in question?

Jason sighed heavily, hands clutching tightly around his brother’s. “I want you to get better fast, Will, because I can't do this job long term. You are always going to be better at it than me.”

Will wasn’t as sure about that as Jason. But before he could up with someway to argue while he was still unconscious, the darkness dragged him away again. Jason's voice followed him under, insisting, “Miss you, big brother . . . and I love you.”

****************

When next Will came aware, it was a relief to finally see something besides the darkness. Marina sat on the bed beside him, watching him wake with a smile on her lips. “Welcome back,” she teased, bending to kiss him sweetly.
He indulged himself in a long kiss with his beloved Russian, before touching her cheek with his fingers. “We have work to do.”

She shook her head, amused by his declaration. “Don't we always?”
Chapter Notes

Hold on to your shoes. We have another cameo coming up!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
Blasts From The
Chapter 246: Blast from the Past

Jason could see it already. Will had had enough and was on the last legs of his patience. Granted, the middle Grimm could understand the fussing and the double-checking and the scolding (Marina wouldn’t be Marina, if she wasn’t scolding Will for something with regards to his health). The Colonel had given the entire family a hell of a scare and it would be awhile before they relaxed enough not to smother him. To see him up and around eased a lot of the fear, but Vincent had been insistent before he’d taken Will off of the sedatives.

On the mend was not healed. Will was NOT out of the woods just yet.

It didn’t take long for Jason to take pity on his brother, though, and give him a job to do. One that required of him nothing but sitting in a pew and delegating. Currently, the elder brother was arranging people into their seats with the help of Brian and Clint, while Marina fussed with the last minutes details for the meal. Jason and Casey both had begged the Russian to cater their wedding and Marina hadn’t been able to say no. Casey was in the bride’s rooms, getting ready with her bridesmaids, all of whom were in attendance and nearly ready. Which left Jason with only one thing to do; worry over the absence of two of his groomsmen.

Checking his watch once more, he felt anxiety swelling his throat closed. He nearly jumped a mile moments later, though, when a familiar voice rang through the cathedral Beatrice Shraeger had procured for the ceremony. “Jay!”

Head snapping around in search of the voice, he felt a huge grin light up his face at the sight of the two men approaching. “Finally! You’re late!”

Dark brown eyes gleamed behind wire-rimmed glasses as Dr. Thomas Oliver, laughed, “Chill out, man. We just got off the plane like ten minutes ago.”

Jason burst into laughter, the two men colliding in a strong embrace. “Damn, Tommy . . . it’s good to see you two.”

Billy Cranston chuckled as he fidgetted with the strap of his bag. “Which prompts my next question. Haven’t you ever heard of a phone? Long time, no see, Jay.”

The bridegroom laughed, releasing Tommy and capturing the other engineer in a bear hug, lifting him clear off his feet. “Phones work both ways, Billy . . . Mr. I Haven’t Been Anywhere That Had Cell Service in Five Years.”

Blushing, he agreed, “Okay, yeah . . . I have been a little hard to get ahold of. You may have a point there.” Thumping Jason on the back companionably, he teased, “So, is there anywhere we can change? We did come straight from the airport and, as you said, we are a little late.”

“Yeah. This way,” he agreed, leading the two men away.

Jason frowned, curious and concerned as he caught sight of Jules staring at them from off to the side of the cathedral, her face paling sickly before contorting in mild horror. Clamping her hands over the lower half of her face, she turned and bolted, surprisingly agile for a woman currently eight months pregnant. He made a mental note to have his nephew check on her, before coming to the groom’s changing room.

Clapping Tommy on the shoulder as they disappeared inside, he chuckled to himself as he recalled the first time he had ever officially met the two. Angel Grove High School had been one of the few
schools he’d attended where he was enrolled for longer than a single semester. As a result, he was still friends with a few of the people he’d hung out with back then. Adam Park was coming in as well, though he wouldn’t be able to make it until the reception at the earliest which was the only reason Jason hadn’t asked him to be a groomsman too.

As for the others, Jason was still in touch with them, but didn’t reach out via email or phone call nearly as often as he did with the first three. Tanya Sloan was back in Africa and wouldn’t be able to make it, but Adam was hoping he could drag Rocky DeSantos away from his dojo for at least a couple hours. If anyone could, it would be Rocky’s longtime best friend. Jason and Katherine Hilliard had been friends as a result of Kat’s relationship with Tommy, but they had long ago fallen out of touch . . . about the same time Tommy and Kat had broken it off.

Everyone knew that Tommy still had a thing for his first girlfriend, Kimberly Hart, but none of Jason’s friends had seen or heard from her in more than a decade. As for Jason himself, he’d never met her, only heard about her from the rest.

Those three guys had made his sophomore year one of the happiest periods of his life that he could remember. And at least two of them who were going to be standing up with him as he married the love of his life.

Flashback
Angel Grove, California
August 15, 1987

Marina’s voice was gentle and adoring from the other side of the mat as the 15 year old ripped into the punching bag at the Youth Center. She seemed utterly oblivious to the group of teenagers that had been watching Jason attack the bag for the last hour, though Jason could almost feel their curiosity at her presence. “You do remember that your brother is coming home today, right?”

Excitement and joy flooded through Jason at the reminder that his beloved older brother was coming back on leave, quickly dampened by his fury at his other older brother. As a result, his reply was a surly grunt, “Yeah . . . I know.”

There was a rustle of fabric as she shifted, before she asked kindly, “Wanna tell me what happened? Or do you just want to abuse the bag - and your hands - a little bit longer?”

As was usually the case, Jason caved to Marina’s long honed “Mom-voice”. Snarling, he threw a vicious roundhouse kick into the bag and sent it swinging wildly. “Barney is an asshole.”

Marina laughed, startled by the announcement, before smothering the sound at Jason’s betrayed look. Her shoulders continued to shake as she replied, “Undoubtedly. And seeing as you already knew that, I’m struggling to see what the problem is.”

Jason turned to look at her, seeing her in bare feet and workout clothes. Taking the unspoken permission, he dropped into a defensive stance, before swinging out at her. She swept him aside easily, her hands open and guiding as she side stepped him without thought. “If you didn’t react, Jay, he wouldn’t pick on you like he does,” she reminded him, flowing past him as he swung out at her again.

“Unlikely,” he grunted, as he paused to take her in. “He gets off on screwing with us.”

“Something Misha will have something to say about once he gets home, no doubt,” she agreed with a chuckle, ducking his punch and putting a solid fist into the sweet spot just under his ribs.
Instantly winded, Jason dropped to the mat, wheezing. Marina folded her arms as she scolded, "Focus and patience, Jason Leonard. I feel like we have this conversation rather a lot."

"I know. But Barney makes me so mad." Folding his hands over his stomach, he asked plaintively, "And you're sure I'm the younger brother?"

Marina looked back from where she was slipping her feet back into her shoes. "I was there when you both were born, Jason. I'm very sure." Pulling her hair into a ponytail, she insisted, "Misha's plane doesn't get in until about 5, and it's almost a two hour drive home from the airport. Feel free to avoid home for as long as you want, but I do have to ask you to be at home when I get him back. I'm going to need your help with him."

Jason sat up and wrapped his arms around his knees, asking, "It's bad, huh?"

"I don't know; he won't tell me. Which in and of itself tells me more than he wants me to know," Marina replied with a small sad smile. Coming to stand in front of him, she bent to press a warm kiss to the top of his head. "Love you, sladkiy. I have the boys, okay? So have some fun for a few hours?"

"Yes ma'am. Love you too Marishka," he laughed with a grin, one hand coming up in a wave as he watched her leave the Youth Center behind.

An almost familiar voice behind him asked, "That's your mom!?"

Looking back over his shoulder, Jason could feel his mouth twisting as he agreed, "The closest thing I've ever had to one, yeah."

A tall, long haired teenager in a red shirt and blue jeans stood there. Five other teenagers stood with him, all of them watching him with curious eyes. "Dude, she kicked your ass."

"Well, she could have . . ." Jason agreed, pushing himself to his feet. Offering his hand, he introduced himself, "Jason Grimm. I'm a sophomore at Angel Grove."

One of the teenagers, dressed from head to toe in black, spoke up with a chuckle. "I know who you are. You're the only sophomore in my AP Computer Science course. You're good; I've watched you code before."

Jason blushed, a sheepish shrug lifting his shoulders as he confessed, "I've always been good with computers." Cocking his head, he asked cautiously, "You're Billy Cranston, right? I think we have Physics together too."

"Yeah," the bespectacled teenager agreed, gesturing to his friend who had originally spoken, "This is Tommy Oliver."

The girl in pink was introduced as Tommy’s girlfriend, Kat, with the girl in yellow as Tanya. Adam was the solemn, shy young man in green, while blue-clad Rocky all but bounced in place as he cheered, "You wanna spar? I bet you could give Tommy a run for his money."

"I don't have any formal training. And I've heard all about Tommy Oliver and his three black belts in three different disciplines."

Tommy shrugged, "All due respect, you may not have formal training, but you're pretty good."

Glancing towards the door Marina had disappeared through, he chuckled, "Which isn't to say she's
“Marina was the one who trained me. She’s always going to be better than me; she knows my tells better than I do.”

Tommy and Adam exchanged glances, before Tommy offered the sophomore a hand. “Adam and I can help you hide your tells . . . if you want to learn how.”

Thinking about it for a second, it wasn’t long before Jason was accepting the hand with a grin, “Hell yeah. When do we start?”

**End Flashback**

Not that the additional training did any good. It did help him kick Barney’s ass on occasion, but Marina still beat him five times in every five. Still . . . it had been nice to get one up on Barney at least. Jason typically chalked it up to Marina just being better at hand to hand; her life had depended on it more than once, while his speciality was always going to be his computer and engineering prowess.

Speak of the devil and she will appear. “Jay? You okay, sladkiy?”

Twisting to look at Marina, he grinned, “Yeah . . . Tommy and Billy just got here. I was just . . . reminiscing, I guess.”

Marina smiled; she’d hosted the rambunctious group at their little railcar on more than one occasion that year. She liked all of his friends from that time in their lives, though Adam Park had always been her favorite. Jason knew she was looking forward to seeing him during the reception. “I’m glad they were able to get here and mostly on time too. Bonus!”

Grinning at her, he reached out to wrap his arms around her. “How are you, Marina?”

“Tired . . . worried about your brother. But, I have to stop fussing at him. I can tell he’s getting to the end of his patience.”

“Long past, I think,” Jason agreed, before the two turned to look as Sam’s voice filled the hallway. “Ma! Uncle Jason!”

“Here, Sammy-honey!” Marina called in response, a frown on her face as she watched her son bolt around the corner towards them. “What’s wrong? What is it?”

The SRU constable took a deep breath, clearly gearing himself up for an unpleasant conversation. “I hate to do this . . .”

Hot chocolate eyes narrowed sharply as the Russian demanded, “Do what!?”

“Jules isn’t feeling well . . . she’s asked me to take her back to the house,” he confessed, with a sharp grimace.

Marina’s eyes went wide and both men waited for the moment of shock to pass . . .

“She wants you to do WHAT!?!” came the expected shriek.

“Ma, I’ll be right back, I swear. I just gotta take her back to the house so she can get some rest.”

“It’s your uncle’s wedding, Sammy. She drove all the way here with Lou and Spike, just to be able to be here. And she’s not even going to attend!? Why did she even bother?”
Sam sighed heavily, begging, “Ma, please. She’s pregnant . . . doesn’t that gain her a little leeway?”

Marina’s hands came up to scrub over her features, before she sighed. “That’s not the point, Sammy. She knows how important the family is to you, and she’s asking you to miss the wedding . . .”

Jason spoke up. “I’ll talk to Casey. We’ll push it back a little bit. Two of my groomsmen just barely got here, so it’s not a bad thing to give them a little more time to get ready. Go, quickly. We’ll save you a seat in the family section.”

“Thank you, Uncle Jay.”

“You’re welcome, Sammy. Go . . . now.”

Sam nodded, leaning forward to kiss his mother’s cheek, vowing solemnly, “I’ll be back before you even realize I’m gone. I promise.”

Nodding, Marina cupped his cheek fondly, before shooing him off. “Go . . . you have half an hour at most before Beatrice Shraeger starts to get antsy.”

“Thank you!” he called back over his shoulder, before bolting off down the hallway once again.

Jason frowned, before turning to Marina. “I think she might have had an attack of nausea.”

Marina cocked an eyebrow at the statement, asking cautiously, “How do you know?”

“I saw her run off with her hands over her mouth, when I was bringing Tommy and Billy back here a little bit ago.”

“She’s in her eighth month,” Marina reminded him, though he was grateful to see her calmer. “If she’s having struggles with nausea, that’s something her OB/GYN needs to know. Could indicate something’s wrong . . .”

“Or she ate something that didn’t agree with her when we were out at the restaurant for breakfast this morning.”

Huffing, she smacked at him, as she teased, “Stop being so reasonable.”

Tommy’s voice spoke up from behind them as he joked, “Wait . . . we are talking about the same Jason, right? Cause I don’t remember that being a problem he suffered with.”

“You’re hilarious,” Jason snarked with a roll of his eyes, before gesturing to Marina. “Tommy, you remember Marina?”

“I remember her cinnamon rolls,” he agreed hopefully with a boyish grin.

Marina laughed brightly. “Of course you do . . . I could never keep them on the plate long enough for anyone else to enjoy them. How are you, Tommy?” a wicked smirk tilted the corner of her mouth, as she teased, “And how is Hailey?”

Tommy’s cheeks pinked, causing Jason to hoot with laughter. “She’s not my girlfriend, Marina.”

Marina’s hair tossed as she strolled away. “I don’t remember saying she was.”

Jason snickered, as he jostled the taller man fondly. “Busted,” he teased, before moving after her.

The paleontologist was left sputtering in their wake, insisting, “She’s not!”
Billy chuckled, slapping his friend on the shoulder as he followed after the retreating duo. “That’s what you always say. I gotta tell ya, Tommy . . . we haven’t believed you in years.”

Grunting, Tommy raced after them, muttering, “You all suck. She’s not my girlfriend!”

I’m planning on a brief outtake series, based on the circus years, with one ficlet for each of these pictures. Please let me know what you think.

Chapter End Notes

This takes place after Kim was already gone to the Pan Global Games, so Jason and Kim have never met.
Chapter Notes

Sorry for the long wait. I had this finished awhile ago, and then I went to go see Rogue One: A Star Wars Story and found myself drowning in feelings and fix it fic.

Either way, I'm here and I've already got the next chapter started and almost done. So hopefully the wait will not be nearly so long in the future.

Translations at the end as always. Enjoy this!

Chapter 247: It's Never Gonna Be Easy, Is It?

Jason chuckled as he dropped into the seat next to his older brother. “You look bored . . . or murderous, one of the two.”

Will smirked lightly at the teasing tone. “How about both? Both is probably the most accurate.” Glancing back over his shoulder, he asked, “Was that Tommy I saw? Looks a little different than I remember.”

The engineer smirked. “Pretty hard to believe huh? From long-haired martial artist to responsible paleontologist. Who would have thunk it?”

“You ever tell them you knew? About their . . .” the blatant pause was clear, even as Will continued, “extracurricular activities.”
“They weren’t the only ones with secrets Will,” the tech reminded his brother. Earning an understanding hum from his brother, he shrugged. A single eyebrow cocked upwards after a moment, before he asked suspiciously, “Wait . . . you were hardly even around while we lived in Angel Grove. How did you know?”

The wince was there and gone in a second, before Will replied, “Marina told me. We keep no secrets, Jay.” There was a wealth of unspoken knowledge in those quicksilver eyes as he glanced at his brother, “We never have.”

“Not even one?”

“None. I know things about *samaya malen’kaya* no one else knows and vice versa.” Glancing over at his partner as her giggles filled the room, he smiled, adoration and muted joy flooding across his face. “Things even you don’t know, Jay.”

Jason sputtered at the declaration, unable to fathom something so ludicrous. He had grown up in Marina’s back pocket; he would dare anyone to tell him something about the woman he viewed as his sister that he didn’t already know. “Like what!?”

The Colonel’s laughter was warm and low as he teased, “That’s why they call it a secret, Jason.” Pushing himself up with a hand on his brother’s shoulder, Will grunted as he straightened to his full height. “Come on . . . let’s get you married, huh?”

Willing to be brushed off for the moment, Jason allowed the excitement of the day to rush over him as he agreed, “Hell yes.”

The two brothers strode up the aisle, though Jason frowned as his elder brother came to a stop beside his eldest son. Taking Sam gently by the arm, he looked the blond in the eye and insisted, “We need to talk, okay? Today.”

Sam looked confused for all of a second, before his eyes went wide with startled understanding. Nodding, he agreed, “Yeah . . . okay Dad. Let me know when?”

“Reception?” he inquired gently.

A firm nod accompanied the constable’s agreement, “Sounds good.”

“Good kid,” the Colonel replied fondly, ruffling the sunny hair before once again herding Jason to the pulpit . . . and the disapproving almost-mother-in-law standing there glaring at him.

Jason sighed, already dreading this conversation, before greeting the woman wearily. “Hello Beatrice. How can I help you yell at me today?”

The socialite scowled, unamused by his sarcasm. “You missed the rehearsal dinner. As a matter of fact, your entire bridal party did. Not even my own *daughter* was in attendance.” Glowering at him, she hissed, “Are you aware of how that reflects on me?”

“Frankly Beatrice, I don’t give a damn. My family has been eyebrows deep in a crisis . . . and Casey didn’t want the *chertov* dinner in the first place,” Jason reminded her in a surgery sweet tone. “You wanted it so all your high class friends could see how she was marrying beneath her and ‘disappointing you’.”

“I’ll have you know, *Detective* . . .” she began in a scathing tone that only caused Jason’s mocking grin to expand even further.
He took gleeful pleasure in interrupting her, “It’s Captain, actually.”

The woman fell silent in surprise, blinking at him dumbly, before stammering, “What!?"

“My title? It’s actually Captain . . . Captain Jason L. Grimm, to be specific.”

Will snickered, drawing his brother’s attention away from his adversary. “Technically, it’s Major Jason L. Grimm. I’m just waiting for your updated orders to show up at the house, along with the rank insignia.”

The middle brother’s eyes flashed wide and he whirled to stare at his brother. “What!?"

“It was supposed to be your wedding present, but you know how bureaucracy works. So . . . surprise?” he laughed, rocking on his feet with a groan as Jason hit him in the shoulders with a slightly manic bear hug. “Jay . . . off!”

Releasing his brother like the older man was made of lightning, Jason grabbed his brother by the shoulders and demanded, “Are you serious, right now?”

“As a heart attack,” the Colonel agreed with a laugh. Cupping the younger man’s cheek for a moment, he insisted, “It was long past time you got a promotion. I’m only sorry I wasn’t able to get your insignia before today, so you could married in the right uniform.”

Jason lifted his hand to tug at the cuff hiding the tattoo at his wrist, asking, “Does this mean I need to get this one replaced?”

“Your choice,” Will replied with a shrug, before a strident “Eh-hum!” interrupted anything else they may have said about the matter.

The sound easily sent Jason’s good mood through the floor as he sighed and turned back to the woman staring at them reproachfully. “What Beatrice?”

“Whatever your title is, I was in the middle of making a point,” the woman sniped irritably.

“Of course you were,” he sighed with a long suffering roll of his eyes. “What is it?”

“Rehearsal dinners are so you know what to do during the ceremony.”

Will snorted. “There have been a few weddings in the family to this point. He’ll manage just fine without it.”

“I beg your pardon,” she hissed, mortified by his interruption.

“No, lady, you beg patience. A lot of patience,” Will replied, before rolling his eyes, “And I’m generally accepted to be the most patient one in this family. So take that for what it’s worth.”

“Excuse you!?” she squealed, her tone reaching eardrum splitting levels and reverberating through the cathedral.

The Colonel pulled on his “I am taking none of your shit” face and cocked an eyebrow at her, tone bald and uninterested as he asked, “Who are you again?”

A sharp sniff was clear indication of her disgust with a question. “I am Beatrice Shraeger, Casey’s mother.”
Jason snickered, even as he nudged the elder with a gentle elbow (he hadn’t forgotten the groan of pain Will had let out when he’d hugged him). “Don’t antagonize my future mother-in-law, pravitel.”

“She shouldn’t be antagonizing me. She’s not the one with a 9mm in the holster at her back,” he shot back in a falsely cheerful tone.

The tech felt a sick satisfaction at the way the woman blanched just before organ began to play. Huffing at the tech, she stomped away to the bride’s side of the cathedral. Will chuckled, before reaching up to fix his brother’s uniform tie, his tone fond as he asked, “You ready for this?”

“Can I say yes . . . and still be terrified that I’m going to screw it up?” Jason asked, grinning as his other three groomsmen came bolting up the aisle towards them.

Will ruffled his hair fondly, a warm glow in the blue of his eyes, promising, “Absolutely.” Nudging him along, he insisted, “Come on . . . let’s get lined up. The girls around going to be coming out in about thirty seconds and Marina will flip if we screw this up.”

“Nasedka.”

“Indeed.”

Once again the perfect officer, Will ran critical eyes over Aaron, Tommy and Billy as they all took their places in the line, before taking his own place at his brother’s side as the Best Man. The Colonel had initially balked at Jason’s request, but Jason had refused to even consider the suggestion that someone else would have been more suited to the role. Glancing over at his brother, Jason grinned for a moment at the fond look on his typically stoic brother’s face, before turning back to face the rest of the audience.

Mere seconds later, the doors at the back opened and his half-brother’s daughters, Kyrene and Nike Doyle, led their brother Kelley Doyle up the aisle. Kelley’s half-brother, Bellamy -now Bellamy Doyle- was there too, prodding a clearly reluctant Kelley up the aisle with a small amused smile. The two girls were precious in their red and black flower girl dresses, while Bellamy and Kelley presented handsome portraits in their matching, miniature tuxedos. The girls were clearly loving it, though Kelley looked as though he’d been sucking on a lemon at the restrictiveness of the suit and requisite tie.

Jason winked at his two nephews, earning a shy smile from the older and a brilliant grin from the younger, before the two came to a stop. Kelley pressed back into Will’s legs, the Colonel’s hand brushing fondly over the dark hair before reaching out and nudging his fingers against Bellamy’s ear teasingly. The 8 year old grinned at the tease, finally moving to take his place next to his brother and their uncle.

Next was Natasha, the assassin dressed a blush pink gown that radiated against her skin and flattered her fiery curls wonderfully. A low wolf whistle made its way through the crowd and Jason rolled his eyes. There was only one person that could have been; there was only one person in the world crazy enough to catcall the damned Black Widow. The red-haired Murderess preened a little bit, even as she gave her roguishly grinning lover a blistering glare. Not that anyone really believed she was upset; the blush on her cheeks was pretty clear on that.

Next was Marina, in a dress to match Natasha’s own but in a wonderful blue color that nearly matched the color of Will’s eyes when his brother was happiest. Jason smiled, blessing the ground Casey stood on; the fact that she’d taken the time to notice the color his brother’s eyes were when he
was happy and translated it into this moment was more than he’d ever known he’d needed from a partner. He didn’t deserve her. As for the Family Russian, she was beaming almost as brilliantly as any bride, thrilled beyond measure both for her sladkiy and for the opportunity to bring Casey completely into the family. Unable to help himself, Jason glanced over at his older brother, and snickered at the awestruck look on the Colonel’s face. Leaning over, he teased quietly, “You’re catching flies, pravitel.”

Will shoved him fondly, earning a giggle from his partner even as she took her place beside her sister. Scarlett came next, one of Casey’s Matrons of Honor; the fact that Casey had refused to choose between her two best friends had sent her mother into a tizzy . . . an outcome Jason was fairly certain she’d been expecting and looking forward to. Scarlett’s own gown matched the others, except for the color; a creamy seafoam green that played well against her dark hair and dusky skin. She was beautiful and Jason could imagine the look on Doyle’s face as she watched him. The scientist smiled as her two daughters clustered against her, their little faces glowing as they giggled together.

Last but not least came Marta, her gown a radiant yellow that was nearly golden. Both Will and Jason checked back over their shoulders at the audible intake of air from their baby brother. Aaron looked as though he’d swallowed his tongue, earning a brilliant blush from the virologist as she reached up to fix an imaginary strand of hair. She rushed the last few steps to the altar, uncomfortable with the scrutiny from the room, though she glowed at the joy her husband was exhibiting from his place beside her. The family chuckled a little, knowing that her tendency to shyness would never truly go away, and loving her all the more for it.

The bridal march began then, and Jason’s eyes turned once more to the back of the cathedral. For a moment, the door frame was empty, before Casey Beatrice Shraeger materialized like magic from the gloom, all but glowing on her father’s arm.

Jason felt as though he’d been gut-punched. She wore a strapless gown of pure white, the skirt swishing against her legs as she walked to take her place beside him. Her veil was small and curved against the side of her face, topped by a spray of white silk flowers and jewels. She was the most beautiful thing he’d ever seen. He was pretty sure he forgot how to breathe from the moment her father laid her hand in his all the way until the preacher spoke up for the cathedral’s benefit. “If any here have cause to object, let them speak now or forever hold their peace.”

The tech’s eyes went wide, fully expecting Beatrice to say something, a concern Casey shared if the way she tightened her grip on his fingers. However neither of them expecting the voice that spoke, the unexpectedness of it ripping them from their blissful daze. “Well . . . I COULD and considering the way dear Beatrice is glaring at the groom, I SHOULD.” There was a pause, during which Jason smirked at the murderous look on Casey’s face before the voice continued, “However, darling Casey looks like she wants to shoot me. And Casey is much scarier . . . so I won’t.”

Jason turned to look at the speaker and jolted in shock at the sight of him. He didn’t even remember inviting the man, and considering Casey’s own surprise, it was a good bet she hadn’t invited him either. So clearly, he was crashing the wedding, which wasn’t unexpected all things considered, but still . . .

It was about this point when Marina’s voice rang out in disappointed censure. “Anthony Edward Stark, just what do you think you’re doing?”

“Hello Marina,” the genius greeted her, his smile warm and familiar, before he leaned over to the stranger seated just to his left. “I’m gonna be honest. That tone of hers is not any less scary than it was when I was five.”
Marina sighed, visibly exasperated, amused and fond as she scolded, “Tony, sit down and shut up. Whatever crazy idea you have cooking in your brain, you can sit on it until the ‘I do’s. Okay?”

“Yes ma’am,” he agreed meekly, sinking into the pew beside him. “Carry on.”

The Russian rolled her eyes before chuckling softly. Turning to look at her partner, she asked softly, “What am I going to do with him?”

Will only shrugged, unfailingly amused, before gesturing to the preacher to continue. The man, obviously expecting a protest and getting none, shook himself free of his thoughts and hurried through the rest of the vows. At long last, he insisted, “I now pronounce you husband and wife. You may kiss your bride, Major.”

Grinning, Jason gathered his wife close to him, before laughing, “Tony Stark is at our wedding and you’re all mine. Will wonders never cease?”

She laughed up at him, fingers sliding tenderly into his hair, “Here’s hoping. Now shut up and kiss me.”

“Yes ma’am,” he agreed, before proceeding to do just that.

Chapter End Notes

Translations:

(R) samaya malen'kaya - my little one (Will's most common nickname for Marina Petrovka, his longtime partner.)
(R) chertov - fucking
(R) pravitel - big brother (nickname used solely for Will Grimm by his younger brothers)
(R) Nasedka - mother hen (Marina Petrovka's most common nickname from her boys)
(R) sladkiy - honey (Marina's nickname for Jason Grimm)
There's a lot going on in real life right now. And I am sorry for how long this took, however, in penance I have prepared two chapters for you all. It was supposed to be just one, but I didn't want to lose the significance of the one over the other.

Enjoy and let me know what you think?
no greater love than a father for

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Chapter 248: Father and Son

If there was one thing about Sam’s father that everyone knew - be they family, co-worker, adversary or otherwise - it was this. Will Grimm was a very patient man.

The blond constable stood in the frame of the side door to the small reception hall, shoulder braced up against the wood and arms folded over his chest as he watched his father sit on the bench less than 10 feet away and smoke. Eyes half closed as he savored his cigarette, the Colonel looked as relaxed and content as he ever seemed to get without his partner at his side. His uniform jacket had been discarded over the back of the bench beside him, the cuffs of his dress shirt rolled up to just shy of his elbows. The dark blond strands had been ruffled from their usual tamed style, clear evidence of fingers through short hair.

It was a side of his father Sam didn’t see very often . . . a side he was pretty sure very few people ever saw at all.

Chuckling softly, Sam called out, “You know Ma is going to freak out if she looks around and realizes you’re gone, right?”

That earned a soft bark of laughter as the Colonel twisted to look back at his elder son. “Well she would, except for the fact she knows where I am . . . and who’s with me.”

A single eyebrow cocked upwards as Sam realized he’d played perfectly into his father’s ploy. “Sneaky, Dad.”

“Sort of comes with the job description,” Will agreed with a laugh, free hand coming up to wave his son forward. “Come sit with me. Let’s chat.”

Sam moved forward, taking the seat next to his father and slouching backwards against the backrest. The lights of New York City were beautiful from where they sat and Sam smiled. “I can see why you and Ma love this city so much.”

“It has its darknesses, same as any city, but it’s hard to find anywhere else in the world more beautiful,” was the response, cigarette lifting to his lips before he took a slow, lazy pull. “How’s Jules?”

The flash of fury and shame that seared through Sam was startling, even as he knew its source. “At home. Far away from me . . . which is where she seems to prefer being right now.”

“That doesn’t seem fair. She’s your wife, Sammy-honey . . . you’re having a child together.” A small curve tilted up the corner of Will’s lips as he teased, “A little detail that has your mother in quite the tizzy. I don’t think I’ve ever seen her this excited before.”

“Grandbabies . . . every mother’s dream,” the blond agreed with a small smile, before his face smoothed and he sighed, leaning forward, elbows braced against his knees. “How much do you remember? From when you were unconscious?”

“I remember most of it . . . some of it I’m sure I missed, but . . .” Here there was a one shoulder shrug as Will took another drag on his cigarette. “Tell me about Matt.”

Sam flinched, ice blue eyes flashing wide as he jerked. “Matt?!?”

The Colonel’s eyes were warm and understanding as he reached out to lay a hand on his shoulder,
steadying his son calmly. “Did you honestly think I didn’t know about your boyfriend?”

The constable groaned, covering his face with his hands. He cussed vehemently, Will’s lips twitching at the younger man’s creative Quebecois cursing. Finally, his hands dropped and he stared at his father with desolate eyes, begging in a horrified whisper, “How long have you known?”

“You don’t mourn a friend like you mourned Matt, Sammy. That soul deep devastation . . . that gut wrenching agony? That’s the kind of pain that comes from losing a lover . . . a companion.” Running his fingers through his hair, Will cupped his son’s cheek and smoothed his thumb tenderly against the skin. “We’ve known since you came to us.”

“Ma knows too?” he asked in a breathless whimper.

“Of course. Your mother and I keep no secrets,” Will told his son. “Why are you so surprised? So upset that we know?”

“I was JTF2, Dad; we both were. That kind of . . .” here there was a bitter sneer as Sam allowed his anger to contort his face, “attachment was heavily frowned upon. And then, considering what I did . . . how he died . . .” Shaking his head, he nearly snarled as he definitively answered the question, “My sexuality hasn’t exactly been something I’ve been able to tell many people about, without them turning on me completely. And if the General had ever found out, being disowned would have been a kindness considering what he would have done to me.”

“I am not the General,” Will reminded his son firmly, before shrugging lightly, “And so what . . . you’re bisexual. So are your uncles; your uncles who happen to be the World’s Greatest Marksman and the Winter Soldier, respectively. Your sexuality does not change who you are; not as a person, as an asset, a soldier or a sniper.” Smoothing back a strand of hair, Will asked fondly, “Have we ever given you reason to think that we would shun you for the gender of the person you loved?”

Sam shook his head again, his wet eyes looking away, “I’ve kept it a secret for so long that I didn’t even know how to say anything. I never told anyone. Jules doesn’t even know.”

“Do you think she’d hate you for it? Turn you away, if she knew?”

Sam shrugged, a bitter laugh ripping from him. “At this point . . . I couldn’t even tell you, Dad. There’s a lot about my marriage that I wasn’t expecting when I asked Jules to marry me.”

An affirming hum floated through the air, tone warm and paternal as he asked, “Such as?”

A long pause rang through the area, before Sam sighed, “Loneliness. I never expected the loneliness.”

“Sammichka . . . my dear boy . . . tell me the truth. Are you happy with Jules?”

Hands coming up to cover his mouth, Sam snorted hard as he shook his head. “I don’t know, Dad. I don’t even know if I can explain it.”

“Just try, Sammy . . . I’m here to listen. No judgment, I promise.”

“I just . . . I love her so much and things with her can be so good and so happy sometimes. And others . . . I don’t know, it seems like I’m having to work so hard just to get to have those moments. I’m willing to try, to work at it . . . I just get so tired sometimes. Listen to me. I’m not trying to complain; I know marriage takes work. It’s just that you and Ma make it look so easy!”

“I promise . . . there have been more than a few times your mother has wanted to fillet me with her
favorite knife,” the man chuckled, taking his last drag then stubbing the cigarette out against the sole of his boot. “And it doesn’t matter how hard you work at it, Sammy, if she won’t work at it too. You told me, while I was unconscious, that you thought sometimes she was expecting someone else to come through the door. Do you think she’s having an affair? Or maybe just missing something she had a long time ago?”

“Maybe? Not about the affair. No, I don’t think she would do that, but missing something, someone? Possibly. Jules doesn’t talk about her past much. Even when I ask her directly about something, she avoids it. But it seems like she’s trying to forget something, not remember it, so I don’t push her about it.”

“Noble of you. And I guess, if there's things you don't wish to tell her, it's only fair to let her keep her secrets too, right?”

Sam looked sad but resigned, “Right.”

“Of course. You could always subscribe to your mom's and my philosophy; no secrets. But that has to be something you both come to an agreement on.”

“I would tell her everything . . . anything she asked of me,” the blond insisted, trying to convince his father.

“But will she give you the same level of honesty?” the Colonel asked in reply, a sadness in his eyes clear indication that he already knew the answer.

Sam took a moment to think. “Right now? Probably not. But I’m willing to wait, to have patience.” Sam smiled. “You learned patience from dealing with my uncles, right? I know it’s a different dynamic, but I can do that with Jules. Show her that I can wait . . . that I’m ready to be completely open with her, when she is with me.”

“Just remember to have a limit to your patience, Sammy. Otherwise your wait will never end,” Will reminded his son, with a small sad smile. “Even I have limits to my patience with your uncles.” Rolling his eyes, he snarked, “Just ask your Uncle Brian how many times I thrashed him growing up because Barney was being a little shit.”

Sam chuckled, having heard a couple of those stories from his two youngest uncles over the years. “Uncle Clint’s told me about a couple of those.”

“I’ll bet he has . . . just like I doubt he’s told you about the times I kicked HIS ass because he was being an idiot.”

“No . . . but Uncle Aaron has,” the blond laughed with a sly grin. Sighing heavily, Sam slumped back against the bench. “I just wish I knew how to fix my marriage, Dad. I want us both to be happy in it.”

Will’s lips quirked slightly as he sighed, “Sometimes, a marriage isn’t meant to last forever. Sometimes, they’re supposed to teach you something that will allow you to move on with your life.”

One eyebrow cocked upwards as Sam frowned, tone hesitant as he insisted, “That doesn’t sound like anything I’ve ever been told about marriage.”

“That doesn’t make it any less true.” Smiling, Will reached out to ruffle his son’s hair. “Let me tell you about a couple I knew once, okay? They were married first and then learned to love each other . . . even though that love wasn’t the ‘be all, end all’ of their lives.”
“Married first?” Sam frowned, curious, before inquiring suspiciously, “Who are we talking about? Someone in the family?”

“I think I’ll leave this anonymous for now. And no, I’m not telling you,” Will shook his head as Sam began to protest, continuing fondly, “I’m sure you’ll find out for yourself someday but that day is not today. What’s important right now, is for you to know that there could have been many different outcomes to their story. Like I said, even though they didn’t love each other at the start, they did learn to love each other . . . very deeply in fact. Ask either one of them, and they would both tell you the love they felt for their spouse could have been enough for the both of them . . . despite how happy they each are in the relationships that came after.”

Turning to his son, he smiled fondly, “And while I know things are difficult with Jules right now, you’ve only been married for a few months. The first year is the hardest one in a relationship. Learning to be with someone else so completely, so utterly at their mercy . . . it’s hard. It takes effort and tears and time. It was hard for Marina and me . . . it was for the couple I’m telling you about . . . even for Brian and Natasha, and they’re pretty damned committed to the idea that they’re not committed,” Will snarked, rolling his eyes in concert with Sam’s own derisive snort.

Reaching out to cup his son’s cheek, he promised, “I’m not saying everything is just going to suddenly get better or easier with time, but allowing time for adjustment does help with some of it. And, once that happens, you never know . . . things between you and Jules could get easier. You both could put the little things aside and focus on the big picture.”

“Of course, there’s also another way your story with Jules may end. The same way my friends’ relationship ended, with moving forward . . . moving on . . . committing their lives to someone else.” Threading his fingers through his son’s hair fondly, Will insisted, “I’m not saying you should give up on your marriage, Sammy-honey. But if - after putting everything you have into it - it ends . . . there is no reason you should think of it as a failure. It’s just a jumping point, to something that could be happier and more wonderful for you both. Okay?”

Sam nodded, his slightly distant gaze showing he was thinking over everything Will had said, before wrapping his arms tightly around his dad. “Thank you.” After a moment he pulled away, his head lowered sheepishly, “Sorry for taking you away from the reception for this. I mean, Jason just got married. This could have waited.”

“Probably, but should it have? I don’t think so.” Cupping a hand against the back of Sam’s neck, the Colonel pressed a warm, fatherly kiss to the skin of Sam’s forehead. “Jason is my brother, and I will always be there for him. But you are my son . . . and right now, you needed me more. Jason would more than understand . . . besides, it’s not often he sees the idiots from his high school days.” Snickering, he promised, “He probably hasn’t even realized I’m gone yet.”

“True. My wedding day was mostly a blur. It was so overwhelming. Nothing would have gotten done if Ma wasn’t there.”

“That’s because your mother is a force of nature and there is no stopping her when she has her mind set to something.” Twisting, Will looked back toward the reception hall and sighed, “Even when others have different ideas.” Marina was on a beeline for an enthralled Tony Stark, which was not going to end well if she captured him alone. “Come on, Sammy . . . let’s go rescue your mother from her own good intentions.”

“She’s not going to kill him, right?”
“I don't think so. But it's Tony Stark; god knows stranger things have happened in his orbit,” Will chuckled with a rueful shake of his head and a small, almost unnoticeable wince. “Go on, Sammichka . . . I'll catch up.”
Answers

Chapter Notes

Part two of two. Yay!! Enjoy!!!
Friendship is just a different invention to build.
Chapter 249: Answers

Marina was only a few paces away when Tony turned and noticed her approach. His eyes quickly went to the cup and plate of food she carried, and she noted a tiny twitch in his features. Less than a second showing of . . . distress? As his mouth switched to a smirk and began to open, no doubt to try and sell her a line, she set the dishes on the table next to him and stepped back, one brow raised.

Tony blinked in surprise. She folded her arms and cocked her head, scolding, “It's gonna get cold if you just stare at it, Anthony.”

“Tony, actually. Every time you call me Anthony, I keep getting flashbacks to my childhood and that is last thing I need, so,” he smiled and picked up the glass.

“Tony then . . .” she agreed fondly. “You were always a little troublemaker, you know.”

His smiled widened, “Still am.”

Smirking, she teased, “There's the boy I knew.” Smirk smoothing to a frown, she asked, “What are you doing here Tony? Not that I'm not glad to see you, but . . .”

“Believe it or not but it was actually Daddy Dearest that brought me here. I was checking through my family's assets, accounts and what not when I came across a grant set aside for one Jason Leonard Grimm.”

Marina didn’t even try to hide her surprise as he continued.

“Nothing too special; just enough for a full ride to any college the kid wanted. And so there I am . . . I’ve never heard of a ‘Jason Grimm’ before in my life, and Dad wasn’t exactly one to set up a fund like that for just anyone - especially without a charity dinner to go along with it - so my interest was piqued. And lucky me, what pops up when I do a search for him? Turns out he’s getting married, to a Shraeger! So . . . here I am, at the wedding of a guy I was thinking was going to prove my dad was an asshole to my mother as well…” his gaze was purposely light but bore into her nonetheless, “talking to an old nanny of mine who actually looks younger than me.”

“Just ask your question, Tony. Dancing around it isn't getting you any more answers than you already had.”

“Well congratulations, this is about as speechless as I’m ever going to get because I don’t even know what to ask to start us off.” After a pause. “I don’t suppose you slept with my father and this Jason Grimm is your son? Because I’ve got to say, if he was going to tap any of the nannies, you were the hottest.”

At her unimpressed look he went on, “Alright, that’s a no.” He let out a huff as he looked her up and down, “Who are you exactly? Because you can bet as soon as I saw you here, I started a search. I can be pretty persistent so if I look deep enough what am I going to find?”

Marina's lips quirked, as she insisted, “Nothing . . . you'll find absolutely nothing that I don't want you to find. Your father made sure of that a long time ago.”

“I like the confidence. Though, that was a little hurtful. You know I’m a genius right?” Tony could tell she was amused by his stream of consciousness rambling, seeing as she only chuckled while he attempted to sort out his thoughts into coherent questions. Straightening his shoulders, he frowned and insisted, “Alright, so maybe you’re right and I can’t find anything; either way, it doesn’t sound like you want any attention drawn to whatever the hell this thing is. So why don’t we have a pleasant conversation? No fuss, no muss. Just two old - in your case not as old as you should be - friends
talking."

A voice rumbled behind the man then, asking, “Is it possible for him to be any more like his father?”

“Not even a little bit,” Marina laughed, looking up as a man came to her side, lifting her chin for his kiss. “Allo Mishka. Did you and Samny have a good talk?”

“Very good,” Will smiled as he pulled away from Marina and turned his attention back to Tony, who was looking from Will to Jason, who was laughing at his two best friends from his place beside Casey on the other side of the room. Will could see the moment when he noticed Clint and Aaron, laughing and drinking with their partners two tables over, his eyes widening a fraction more.

Tony downed the glass of wine in one motion. “ Seriously, ” he said, turning back to them, “ I need some answers because there is no way I’m going to let this go now.”

“Your father hid us,” Will replied in lieu of an answer. “Of the five of us, Jay was his favorite.”

Tony’s smile became somewhat strained, “Of course he was. Hid you from what?”

Marina shook her head, “Hold that thought. Jason! sladkiy, can you come here please?”

Jason twisted to look back at her before nodding. He turned back to his bride, murmuring something to her, before coming over to the small group. Leaning over, he kissed her cheek, “Thank you for the food, Marishka; everything looks and smells amazing.”

Marina cupped his cheek fondly, before turning him to face Tony. “Jay, I’d like to reintroduce you to someone . . . this is Tony Stark . . . Howard's son. You two used to play together, when Howard would bring him to the circus.”

The fake smile dropped from Tony’s face and was replaced by surprise and confusion, “Wait, what?” His gaze swept over the Grimms again. “You were...that little circus he kept going to see? He hid you there?” Tony looked thoughtful. “I always thought that one was an odd choice for him. A bit small and out of the way.”

“He didn't hide us there . . . but he kept us hidden while we were there. Your father . . . he kept my brothers safe and I owe him a debt,” Will explained calmly, fingers sifting through Marina's curls. “A debt I can only repay to his son.”

Tony held up his hands, “Hey, woah, that’s not why I’m here. I don’t want anything from you . . . besides some answers.”

The Russian woman giggled as she announced, “Actually, Tony has something for Jason . . . a long belated gift from Howard.”

Jason’s eyes narrowed and his head tilted, his longstanding tendency towards curiosity winning out as he frowned, “What? What kind of gift?”

“It seems that back in the day, dear old Dad set up a college fund for you. And while you’re never too young to learn, college may not be what you would want to use it for now, so we’ll just call it a wedding gift. Mazel tov! I’ll have it transferred to any account you want.”

Ivy green eyes blinked, clearly startled at the announcement. His tone was curious and awed and hushed as he continued, “Wait . . . Howard left me a trust fund? Are you . . . you’re kidding me, right!? I was just . . . he felt guilty for what he let happen to us, but we weren’t . . . we weren’t his kids. I wasn’t his kid. Bozhe moi, he liked Marina a hell of a lot more than he liked anyone else,
because she was the only one who would kick his ass at the same time she was trying to take care of him.”

There was a fierce frown on Will’s lips as he insisted, “Jay, you know he loved you. You **know** he did.”

“Well yeah, but he did feel guilty . . . right?”

“Doesn’t change the fact that he loved you . . . or that he wanted you in particular to be happy.”

“In particular?” Tony repeated, then gave Jason a look over, “What makes you so special, J Man?”

Jason flinched hard, shoulders shuddering, “Geez, could you sound any more like your dad? He used to call me that.”

Marina reached out and touched her boy’s shoulder, before turning to Tony once again. “Jason is a brilliant engineer and inventor . . . Howard taught him as much as he could before he died.” Smiling sadly, she continued, “More than a few of Jason’s random toys have saved our lives over the years.”

“Huh,” Tony frowned, “I remember you now. You had all those boxes from the junkyard.”

“Your dad . . . he used to bring me stuff. Old tools or debunked projects or just . . . stuff.” Biting down on his lower lip, Jason’s eyes were sad and serious as he locked eyes with Tony, “I mourned him, when he died. I wanted to go to the funeral . . . but it wasn’t safe, so I couldn’t go. But . . . he was always nice to me, even though he didn’t have to be.”

Tony took a moment to reply, “Sounds like a nice guy. It would have been nice to meet him. Engineering huh? You sure you’re not his kid too?”

“If I am, then I’d like to know why I look so much like my dad . . . and engineering was a,” here Jason paused, looking uncomfortable, “. . . let’s just say, I didn’t choose it; I’m just good at it.”

Will and Marina both snorted hard, Marina’s hot chocolate eyes rolling hard at the statement. “More than good at it, *sladkiy*. And it may have been chosen for you, but you love it.”

“I’ve got to agree there. For exceptional life saving creations, you’ve got to have a passion to go along with skill.”

Jason’s cheeks turned rosy, before a call of his name came from behind them. Twisting, he waved a hand in response, before turning back to Tony. “Come on . . . it’s my wedding day, and if you’re going to be here, you might as well have fun, right?”

Tony raised an eyebrow, “What did you have in mind?”

“My friends are here from California. We’re going to get stupid drunk and do stupid shit. And trust me when I say, my wife? Will drink even **you** under a table. So . . . you in?”

Marina sighed, as she leaned against Will, muttering under her breath, “This is going to be fantastic.”

The Colonel snickered, as he watched Tony stare at Jason in surprise and confusion. “What’s wrong, Stark? Cat got your tongue?”

Tony recovered quickly, a more genuine smile turning his lips, “If you wanted to get crazy you should have invited me to the bachelor party, but I accept your challenge. Believe it or not, this is not the first time I’ve gotten into a drinking contest with a bride on her wedding day. First time its
happened after the actual ceremony, though, so we’ll see how it goes.”

Jason’s eyes rolled as he snarked, “I didn’t HAVE a bachelor party. Two of my groomsmen didn’t get here until ten minutes before the ceremony was supposed to start. And the other one of my best friends wasn’t going to get here until the reception . . . and is, in fact, still NOT here. This is my bachelor party, and my wedding party, all rolled up in one.”

“I can get a stripper here in twenty minutes, just say the word. Or just the pole. Either way Beatrice would hate it and we’d have a blast. And since I can’t see you winning that woman over anytime soon, why not?”

“Jason Leonard . . .” Marina warned, tone glacial as she gave him a firm frown.

The tech’s eyes were wide and innocent as he turned to face the Russian, asking sweetly, “What? I didn’t do anything!?”

“Mhmm . . . but you were thinking it,” she scolded, seconds before arms came around Jason’s waist and the younger man was lifted clear off his feet to the accompaniment of a barbarian yell.

“Jason Grimm . . . you slippery bastard!” came the cheer from an all but sparkling Adam Park.

“Adam!” Jason laughed, managing to wiggle free and throw his arms around the shorter man. “You made it!”

“Fucking everything,” Adam snarked with a roll of his eyes, before slapping Jason’s shoulders in a fond hug. “Sorry I’m late . . . I got here as fast as I could, I promise.”

“At least you’re here, dude. That’s all that matters to me.” Turning slightly, he gestured to Tony as he insisted, “Adam, I’d like you to meet a new friend, Tony Stark. Tony, this is an old friend, Adam Park. Adam is awesome . . . and I’m frankly a little worried about introducing him to Casey; they both have proven amazingly adept at smothering me to protect me.”

“If you weren’t such an absent minded inventor, we wouldn’t have to protect you from yourself,” Adam scoffed with a grin, before cocking an eyebrow at Tony. “Tony Stark huh? Any chance of getting some real action up in here? Crazy music, epic alcohol . . . an exotic dancer or two? From what I hear, Jay’s monster-in-law could use a little lightening up.”

Tony glanced over at Marina, grimacing at the murderous look on her face, before shaking his head. “No, you see that look right there? That look used to mean I was in major trouble growing up . . . the kind of trouble where I didn’t sit down for two weeks. I think I’ll pass.” Shrugging, he beamed as he joked, “Besides, I’m told it is possible to have fun without strippers. Never had any myself, but it’s always fun to try something new.”

There was a distinct twitch in the corner of the Colonel’s mouth, though he said nothing as Marina threw her hands up in frustration. “Idiocy,” she muttered, before storming away.

“Damn, I hate to see her go, but I love to watch her leave,” the eldest Grimm joked, before turning to clasp Tony on the shoulder. “Welcome to the family . . . go have some fun,” he insisted, before striding away in her wake.

Jason’s arm slung around an awestruck Tony’s neck, as he laughed outright. “You heard the boss. Let’s go have some fun.”

“Wait . . . family?” Tony asked meekly, twisting to look back at the Colonel as he disappeared from
“Yeah . . . we may be crazy science experiments, but we’ve always been family first.”

“Later, you’re going to have to explain that statement. But for now let’s enjoy the open bar.”

Jason locked his arm around Tony’s neck and bent him in half, rubbing his knuckles briskly across the top of his head. “Good plan!”
Enjoy these chapters my darlings!! I can't wait to hear what you think. And this is the last chapter of this storyline. Next chapter is going to be an all new storyline; starring our dearly beloved Brian!

Let me know what you think! No translations this time. Until next time!
Chapter 250: To New Beginnings

“You know, Billy, you never did tell me where you disappeared to for all those years.”

Noting the way Adam and Tommy suddenly started paying more attention to the conversation, Jason sensed confirmation on what he had always suspected; the genius’ absence had something to with their extra special extra curricular activities in high school.

“Pretty sure I did.”

“Traveling to ‘find yourself’ was vague. And not really an answer in the first place.”

“I didn’t say that,” Billy protested with wide eyes and a frown.

“You might as well have,” the tech teased with a grin, “And anyway, it must have been a hell of a spirit quest or something, man. What with all the patents you’ve been applying for. Every time I talk to you, you’re working on another one.”

The young genius snorted as he replied, “And how many do you have approved now? I think it’s like twenty, the last time I checked?”

Jason’s cheeks blazed, heat searing through him as he blushed. “That’s because of my work with S.H.I.E.L.D. Otherwise I would probably still be a detective, and still wallowing in the kind of crazy bullshit my department specialized in.”

Tommy smirked as he took a drink of his beer, as Adam laughed out loud. “Speaking of . . . how the fuck did that happen? Last I heard, you were joining your brother in the Army and you were probably going to die there . . . or so you claimed.”

Jason grunted, staring down at the shot of whiskey before him. “Her name was Sarah . . . I don’t want to talk about it,” he snarled, before tossing back the shot like water, barely wincing at the burn down his throat.

“Fair enough,” Tommy said, holding up his hands.

“We’ve all got someone we don't want to talk about,” Billy reasoned.

“Yeah,” Adam agreed with a frown.

“Since I’ve never seen you in a long term relationship, Adam, I really want to ask you about that, but I'm not going double standard you, so how about a toast to silence?”

“I'll drink to that,” Adam said, knocking back a shot.

“Speaking of exes,” Tommy began.

“I knew it!” Adam moaned. “Never talk about exes around Tommy.”

Tommy’s eyes went wide in horrified protest, arguing, “Come on, Adam, I am not that bad!”

There was an indulgent huff as the shorter man snarked fondly, “You talk about her every time I see
you!"

Billy nodded. “But to be fair we don’t actually see each other all that much.”

“At least Billy’s got my back.”

Billy smiled at his old friend, tone fond and gentle as he replied, “I still agree with Adam.”

Tommy’s eyes rolled as he muttered, “Traitor.”

Waving a hand magnanimously, Adam announced, “All right, let’s hear it. What new ‘Kimberly’ thought are you having now?”

“You guys are jerks.”

“And your point?” Jason laughed with a grin and a wink. “We’ve known each other for how long? You’d think you’d know that already.”

“You’d think.” Tommy sighed, “I could have sworn that I saw her before the ceremony started today.”

A single eyebrow cocked upwards, even as Billy and Adam both gawked at him. Finally, Adam spoke up, “Tommy . . . come on, man. Be serious. You have to know you didn’t see her, right?”

“None of us have seen her since she left in high school,” Billy reminded him. “That letter was last we ever heard from her.”

Tommy scowled into his beer. “I know that, Billy . . . I just . . . I saw her okay? I would recognize her face anywhere. She looked right at me; someone walked between us and suddenly she was gone.”

Jason sighed heavily as he reminded his friend carefully, “It is a wedding. And we all know she’s ‘The One Who Got Away’. Maybe you were just feeling nostalgic? Imagined her where you wanted her to be?”

“Maybe,” was the reluctant agreement, those eyes staring into his beer with a frown. It was clear from the sadness in his face, he had not wanted to consider the possibility he’d imagined her, even as he accepted it for the truth it was. “Actually, probably.”

Jason twisted slightly and smiled to see Tony watching the four men with wide eyes. It was clear that this was a level of familiarity between friends that Tony had rarely witnessed before. Not that the friendship between Tony Stark and Colonel James Rhodes wasn’t one for the history books. Jason was pretty sure that relationship was one of frustration and insanity and more than a few migraines. But, the tech specialist rarely heard about Rhodes in the articles that dictated some of Stark’s more . . . wild and drunken adventures. It was a fair bet that, despite the closeness between the two men, the concept of just sitting and drinking together was a foreign one.

Reaching out with an elbow, the younger tech nudged the other man. “We don’t bite, Tony. You can chime in.”

“I don’t have exes . . . at least not like the rest of you. Most of mine lasted a single evening, and I couldn’t remember their names the next morning,” Tony replied, tone matter of fact and almost blasé.
Jason cocked an eyebrow, as Billy blinked. “Well . . . that sounds lonely.”

Green eyes glittered as Jason hummed in careful agreement. “Very lonely, actually.” After a moment, he frowned. “Wait a minute . . . I thought you were dating your CEO? Pepper Potts?”

“Ah, my Pepper . . . she is definitely my better half,” the man who was not-so-secretly Iron Man replied with a grin. “She runs circles around me. Deserves better, to be frank, but I’m not going to be the one to tell her that.”

“Who would dare to say anything of the kind? From what I can tell, Pepper Potts is not someone you argue with. She’d probably turn your guts into garters and enjoy every second of your agony,” Adam snarked, grinning into the edge of his glass as he tossed back a shot of expensive tequila. “Damn . . . that is good stuff.”

“It had better be, considering the price,” Jason laughed with a grin. “Never let it be said that Marina allowed my brother to spare any expense for this or any family wedding that has ever come before this.” Smirking, he caught sight of two heads of sunny hair moving through the crowd towards them. “Hell, even Sammy’s wedding was a big deal, small as it was.”

“Sammy?” Tommy asked, head cocking curiously, before Adam spoke up next, “Who the hell is Sammy?”

Ice blue eyes were dark and assessing as the elder of Jason’s nephews spoke, “I am.”

“Guys, my nephews, Sam and Rene Grimm. Sammy . . . Rene, these are three of my oldest friends; Tommy Oliver, Billy Cranston and Adam Park,” the tech laughed, introducing the two groups to each other. “And a new friend, Tony Stark . . . who is apparently an old charge of your mom’s.”

Sam’s eyes practically glowed in the meager light as they swept across the group. “Nice to meet you.”

Rene rolled his eyes, before insisting, “Uncle Jay, Aunt Casey is looking for you. It’s almost time for the First Dance . . . she’s arguing with the DJ about the song.”

Jason frowned at the information, tone heavy as he spoke, “I was pretty sure the DJ wasn’t playing our song . . . Casey asked Marina to sing it forever ago.”

“Hence the argument,” Sam agreed with a small, sad smile.

Taking a moment to watch the older of the two brothers, Jason took Sam in from head to toe. Though he was clearly still upset that Jules had begged off the wedding, there was also a lightness about him that his uncle had never seen before. He held his shoulders straighter . . . his head higher, as though some terrible weight had lifted from him and left his body feeling lighter as a whole. “You good, Sam?”

“Yeah, Uncle Jay . . . Dad and I talked. It’s good.” Here there was a pause, before Sam continued in a firm, insistent tone, “I’m good.”

His oldest friends exchanged telling looks between them, before Billy blurted, “Wait . . . whose son are you? Because you are too old to belong to any of the brothers I knew back in high school.”

-A sly smirk crossed Sam’s lips as he replied shortly, “I’m adopted. Will and Marina are my parents.”
The three turned to face Jason, demanding together, “Will has **kids!**?”

“Four, in fact,” Jason laughed, smirking at the flabbergasted look on their faces. It was a much talked about conversation during their high school days, that Will was married to the Army and that children were not in his future. Seeing his friends readjust their worldviews was fucking hilarious.

“That’s . . . not possible. **Four!**” Tommy demanded with wide eyes, Adam tossing back a shot of whiskey like water as he struggled to come to terms.

“Well, Sam and Rene are both adopted, so that’s two,” Jason replied with a grin, before gesturing towards where Will and Marina were cuddling their daughters at another table, “But then there’s the twins, who are six months old now. Yekaterina and Valentina . . . Katenka and Valya for short.”

Leaning forward on the knuckles of his hands, the paleontologist swept the room with his eyes, taking in the entire crowd. It was clear which of the group was from Casey’s side of their newly melded family - none of the Grimms he’d ever known had **ever** been that snobbish or pretentious - and which was from Jason’s side, and it was to his side that Tommy’s eyes clung. “Damn Jason . . . your family is huge.”

Sam snickered at the statement, even as Jason burst into laughter. “Ma has a habit of adopting people into her orbit, whether they realized they wanted to be there or not.” Mouth twisting lightly, the blond sighed, “I think the only person Ma hasn’t been able to get a permanent hold on is Jules . . . and that’s more because of the fact Ma hates her guts than anything.”

“Who’s Jules?”

“My wife,” Sam replied, before a brilliant grin split his face, “My very pregnant wife.”

Tommy sighed, knocking back a shot as he sighed, “Damn, I’m getting old. Even the babies of the world are married.”

Sam scoffed out a laugh as Rene protested indignantly, “Sam’s twenty-eight years old! I doubt you’re that much older than he is.”

Adam chuckled, with a shake of his head. “Nope . . . only about six years actually. And Tommy’s always been kind of an old man, so you have our permission to ignore him.”

“Easy Squirt . . . save your energy for a more noble cause,” Sam teased, locking one arm around his little brother’s neck and rubbing his knuckles over his sunny hair fondly.

Rene squawked, struggling futilely against the noogie. “Damn it, Sam, let go!” he grunted. “One day I’m going to be taller than you . . .”

“. . . and you’re still going to be ‘Squirt’. I’d suggest you get used to it,” the sniper laughed in easy agreement.

“Revenge is going to be a sweet thing.”

“It usually is,” the older brother chuckled, before twisted to look over as **Samonik** slunk over to join the two. “Hey **Samonik.** You find your brother?”

“Yeah . . . he’s flirting with . . .” here the taller teenager paused, as he thought, “Casey’s cousin? I think she’s Casey’s cousin. I decided to be somewhere else, because there’s only so much of my brother’s schmoozing I need to see in a lifetime. And I am getting drastically close to that limit already.”
Rene smirked up at his friend as he insisted slyly, “You need to give Sammy a noogie.”

“So he can smash me into the floor? I don’t think so,” the teen argued lightly with a soft chuckle. “And if you think that you’re ever going to be tall enough to be able to beat your brother out like that, I would like to advise you now, you’re wrong. Dean’s shorter than me, and he still beats me 10 times in every 11.”

Adam chuckled, amused by the interplay between the two teenagers, as Samonik subtly began to steer Rene away from the adults and towards the banquet table for food. “Who’s that?”

“Sam Winchester . . . one of Will and Marina’s foster kids. His brother Dean is apparently around here somewhere, flirting with Sarah Shraeger and no doubt loving every second of it.” Cackling Jason joked, “And when she turns him inside out and upside down, I am going to laugh like a crazy person. Sarah is not a woman for the faint of heart . . . or the seductive by nature.” His tone dropped into a conspiratorial whisper, “She’s scary.”

The other five people at the table laughed at the faux terror in his tone, before talk devolved into the kind of mundane things that happened when people had seen each other for awhile. Tommy was thrilled with his teaching career; three of his students, in particular, seemed to have made an impression on him. (For awhile it was all, Kyra this, and Connor that and Ethan this. It was cute . . . and earned him more than a little teasing from his long time friends.) Billy was self employed, busy building his crazy inventions and clearly suffering from a lack of human companionship. Which, admittedly, wasn’t that different from normal, but he was definitely in need of some company while he spent so much of his time geeking out.

As for Adam . . . Adam was miserable. The dojo he worked for as a sensei was a joke. The kids didn’t care, and the Master was a lazy ass, and the pay sucked. But, it was martial arts work, which is what Adam had always wanted to do.

Finally, Jason frowned and solidified the thought he’d been playing with since his friends had arrived at his wedding. “Hey, you know . . . I’ve been thinking.”

“Historically, never a good thing. You and Billy tend to blow stuff up when you do that,” Adam joked with a grin and a wink.

“Shut up, Park,” the two nerds snapped in concert, before Jason continued, “It would be nice to have my friends around more permanently. So, you know, if you guys needed a change of pace . . .”
Family Matters

Chapter Notes

So this is the last chapter to this behemoth. Ths next chapter will be the first chapter of the next. XD I am still planning to slice this into smaller sections, so keep your eyes open for that too!!

Let me know what you think. I love to hear your thoughts and I can't wait to hear them!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
Chapter 251: Family Matters

Sam didn’t know how Jules did it. His Ma, he could understand how she got right back into the swing of things at work; she was enhanced. But here it was only three months after the delivery and Jules was already back at work, minimal as it was, it was still more than most women could handle. She was insistent though. Said she was going crazy being stuck at the house.
So here he was.

Sam looked around at the kitchen, purposely ignoring the dishes in the sink; he could tackle those last . . . even as Marina’s well-trained son felt a twinge of guilt for the thought. Still, what his mother didn’t know . . . maybe wouldn’t hurt him. Puttering around at other tasks in the kitchen, he kept one ear open for Sadie’s cry and reflected on the last few months. Sam loved his job with the SRU, he did; however, there was no world in which he’d complain about the opportunity to spend more time with his Sadie Bug. A Sadie Bug who was finally back asleep for the moment, content and with a full stomach. Luckily Jules had stocked the fridge with all the breast milk they would need for the day.

Knowing Jules’ desire to head back to work as soon as possible, the newlyweds had stocked up on all of the necessities. Of course, even if they hadn’t his Ma had brought enough to stock a daycare. They had only stayed at the hospital only as long as needed, but one call from Sam and Marina had commandeered a jet. She’d later lamented to her laughing son that she should have had the forethought to take a helicopter, nevermind that she wouldn’t have been permitted to actually use the hospital’s helipad. Sam smiled remembering the first time she had held Sadie at the hospital.

*Flashback*

*July 10, 2010*

Sam was cradling his miracle in his arms, while Jules slept in the bed behind them. She’d fought hard to bring their daughter into the world for hours . . . she deserved the rest. Which was just as well; his mother and father were on their way, and Jules’ silent animosity was the last thing Sam wanted to be dealing with. Closing his eyes over the downy softness of her head, Sam recalled the conversation he’d had with his father the month before and forced himself to calm. He was doing everything he could to make their marriage happy for them both . . . he had no control over Jules’ own behaviors. Or her feelings.

Just then the door eased open and Will Grimm appeared in the doorframe, a warm smile on his face at the sight of his son. “Sam . . .” he greeted in a whisper, arm firmly around his partner’s shoulders as the Russian all but vibrated at his side.

Ice blue eyes were warm and adoring as they lifted to look at his parents. It wasn’t hard to see the impatience in Marina’s frame, every part of her thrilled to meet this first of the new generation . . . her first grandchild. Grinning at the Russian, Sam offered, “Ma . . . come meet your granddaughter.”

Marina lunged forward at the invitation, eyes wide and adoring as the two adults transferred the infant between them. Sadie, fast asleep and comfortable in her swaddling, made a soft sound before settling against the new heartbeat happily. There was a piercing kind of joy in those hot chocolate eyes as his Ma stared down into the cherubic face. “Oh Sammy-honey . . . she’s so beautiful.”

“Sadie Marina Grimm,” Sam replied with a soft smile, watching his father come up behind his mother and peer down at the child over her shoulder. “Maybe it’ll become a tradition.”

Will’s face twisted at the idea of his daughters becoming parents, before he chuckled softly in agreement. “Maybe.” Glancing toward the bed, Will asked quietly, “How is Jules?”

“Tired . . . doctors said it was an easy labor, all things considered, but it was still almost eight hours. She’s been sleeping for about an hour.”

Marina’s fingers were warm and familiar on his cheek as she reached to stroke his face, no doubt tracing the dark circles under his eyes. “You should have called us sooner, Sammy. You look
exhausted."

"Worth it," he agreed with a tired grin and a small yawn. "I didn’t want her to be alone."

Will and Marina exchanged a look, the Russian nodding sharply in agreement with whatever
conclusion her lover conveyed, before the Colonel moved to his side. Taking his bicep in a firm grip,
Will levered his son to his feet and shuffled him over to the cot in the corner. "Be that as it may,
Baba i Deda are here now so she won’t be alone. You need some sleep."

"Dad . . . I’m fine."

"That is not a word, Sammichka," Will scolded fondly, running his palm over the sunny strands,
before tipping him over and guiding him firmly under the covers of the cot. "You need rest . . . Sadie
and Jules will need you to be in top form once they wake, da?"

Sam’s exhaustion was clear, when his answer was a quiet, ‘Oui’ instead of “Yes.” Even Sam knew
that when his native québécois French slipped free instead of his more common English, it was time
for him to get some sleep.

“All right then. Rest . . . Sadie will be perfectly safe with us,” the Colonel vowed, taking a
precarious seat on the edge of the cot next to Sam, one hand coming up to smooth over Sam’s back
and shoulders in a fond caress.

In his own defense, he did try to fight it . . . but then Marina started singing his lullaby to his
slumbering child, and Sam was lost. The rhythmic motion of his mother’s body as she swayed back
and forth was hypnotizing and he fought to keep his eyes open as it lulled him into safety. At last,
Sam fell asleep to the sound of her voice, his father’s hand warm and soothing as it smoothed up
and down the curve of his spine and dragging him further down. The last thought he had was . . .
“Thank you for coming.”

“We would never have been anywhere else,” Will promised in a hushed murmur. “Sleep.”

“Sing me a song of a lass that is gone,
Say, could that lass be I?
Merry of soul, she sailed on a day . . .
Over the sea, to Skye.”

End Flashback

Sam was sweeping every inch of that floor, fully aware that it was the last thing he could reasonably
do before it was finally the dishes’ turn. He moved the trash bin to get behind it when he saw the
small folded piece of paper tugged into the corner. Unfolding it, he realized it was a receipt from the
week before when Grant Ward had showed up out of the blue and had insisted on taking him out to
lunch. Grant must have tossed it and missed. Sam was about to throw it away, however, one detail
nagged at him. It was a small thing but the receipt was folded not crumpled up like trash. Tapping the
slip against his fingers, he considered his memories of that day and vaguely remembered Grant
folding it again and again as they walked around town, a giggling Sadie with them. It was a nervous
habit Sam had found odd to see the agent get lost in.

The whole meeting had been odd, if Sam wasn’t putting too fine a point on it. Grant had been . . .
weird . . .

Which wasn’t to say that Grant wasn’t usually some level of awkward, but this was out of the norm,
even for him. Fiddling with the page in his hands, Sam frowned as he considered that day.
Flashback

Sam Grimm laid out on the bed, ostensibly to get a short nap while his three month old daughter was resting. However, he couldn’t seem to close his eyes; not when there was a literal miracle lying in her cradle beside the bed, less than arm’s reach away. It never ceased to fill him with awe that she was his . . . a child he shared with Jules, his wife. Fifteen years ago, he would never have believed such a thing to be possible.

Of course, then the doorbell rang, sharp and shrill through the house. Sam lunged off the bed, rushing to get to the door before the sound woke Sadie. Granted, she was due to wake up soon, but even a few extra minutes would give her father the chance to get rid of any unwanted visitors . . .

. . . which this one was not, seeing as Sam pulled open the door to see Grant Ward fidgeting on the doorstep. The blond jerked in surprise, head tilting as he took in the frazzled frame of his friend. “Grant?”

Grant’s smile was awkward and lopsided as he tugged on the strap of the rucksack over his shoulder. “Hey Sam.”

“Not that I’m not happy to see you, man, but what are you doing here?” the constable asked, hands finding a home in his pockets as ice blue eyes scanned over his friend. “You okay?”

“Yeah . . . I just. I got off an assignment and my plane is laid over in Toronto until tomorrow afternoon, so I thought I’d swing by,” he explained sheepishly. His shoulders scrunched up to his ears self-consciously as he asked, “Is that okay? I mean, I can go find a hotel . . . you know what, this was a stupid idea. I’m sorry.”

“Hey, dude, chill,” Sam ordered, reaching out to grab Grant’s elbow and swing him back from where he’d started to turn away. “I just wasn’t expecting to see you. And come on, a hotel? I have an entire house that’s empty . . . you know you’re more than welcome to stay at Ma and Dad’s house in the city.”

“I don’t want to put anyone out.”

“You’re not. Ma and Dad aren’t here this week, and I’m not living there right now. You’ll need to order something for dinner tonight, but otherwise, have at. Okay?” the older man asked, trying to soothe the almost manic fidgeting. “Dude . . . what is up with you?”

“Nothing.”

“Liar,” Sam argued, eyes narrowing. “You can’t stand still . . . you’re freaking me out.”

“I just . . . lunch?” Grant mumbled hastily before taking a calming breath and trying again “I was thinking we could go out and have lunch? My treat . . . you know to catch up?”

Sam glanced back over his shoulder, before shrugging. “I have Sadie. So yeah, as long as you don’t mind trucking around a three month old with us. She’s a good baby . . . barely ever cries.”

Grant released a sudden sigh as his shoulders fell down from his ears and he relaxed, a smile curving his lips as he nodded, “I don’t mind, not one bit. Marina can’t stop talking about your little girl.”

The blond chuckled as he stepped back into the house and waved Grant inside. “Yeah, I’ll bet. Ma is a very doting Baba.” Lowering his voice conspiratorially, he snarked, “But I think Dad has her beat. He’s a sucker for the kiddos in the family.”
“Until he comes to the realization that his beloved little girls are eventually going to grow up and start dating . . . then have kids of their own,” Grant shot back with a chuckle. “Then your dad has a tendency to go a little pale.”

A wicked smirk curved the constable’s face as he chuckled. “Fortunately, Dad has awhile before he has to worry about that . . . maybe. Every time Vika and Phil bring over Yasha, my sister Valya is utterly smitten.”

“Sounds like your dad is doomed,” Grant said with a shake of his head. “From what I hear puppy love is the hardest to shake.”

A soft cry rang through the house and Sam whirled, instantly pulled like a moth to flame. “And that’s the Bug.” Gesturing towards the couch, the older agent insisted, “Take a seat, man. Let me get her ready to go, then we’ll be on our way. Okay?”

“No rush, I got nowhere to be.” Grant replied even as he headed for the couch. Stowing his bag out of the walkway, he settled on the couch mildly relieved that Sam had his baby daughter for the day.

It was about a half an hour, filled with a baby’s soft coos and the adoring hum of Sam’s voice, before Sam came out into the living room, a three month old little girl cradled in the curve of his arm. She had a tuft of perfectly blond hair on her head, and was dressed in an adorable footie onesie that said, “What happens at Grandma’s, Stays at Grandma’s.” She was chewing contently on a purple teether, little feet kicking happily. Over Sam’s other shoulder was the baby’s diaper bag, a dark brown leather bag with a patch of Winnie the Pooh stitched on the front flap. “All right . . . I’m ready. You?”

“Yes. You need me to carry anything?” Grant offered as he pushed himself up off the couch, eyes stuck staring at the small person residing in his friend’s arms.

Sam smiled, as he watched Grant’s fascination with his daughter. “You wanna hold her?”

“No . . . no, I might break her,” the specialist replied, horrified at the idea that he could harm the baby.

“She’s tougher than she looks, I promise,” Sam chuckled, reaching out to clasp his friend’s shoulder. “When we get to the restaurant, and you’re sitting down, you can. She’d love to get to know one of Daddy’s friends . . .” there was a soft sigh as Sam looked down at his daughter, before continuing sadly, “. . . Daddy doesn’t have many to introduce her to.”

“Unfortunately, you’re stuck with me. I’m in the same boat man, so I am definitely not giving up one of the few friends I have.” Grant replied as he lifted a hand to squeeze Sam’s shoulder.

Sam’s smile was a little more genuine as he nodded once. “Glad to hear it. Come on . . . we’ll take my car. I have the carseat installed already.”

Awhile later, Sam pulled up outside of a nice cafe near the house he shared with Jules. “This okay? Their lunch menu is pretty good, and they’re pretty fairly priced too.”

“Hey you know me, I’m not fussed. Nothing compares to your Ma’s cooking but food’s food.” Grant slid easily from the car and waited for Sam to collect the baby.

“Don’t ever let Ma hear you say that,” Sam laughed, pulled Sadie free with a cheerful coo. “Hello my little Bug . . . you ready for some lunch? Yeah? Come on, pretty girl, let’s go get lunch . . .”

Looking up at his friend, Sam continued on his previous thought. “Ma’s cooking is the best, but she would be horrified to hear you say that any food is as good as another . . . even as I know exactly
where you’re coming from.” There was a sly wink as the constable teased, “That’s when Ma starts pestering up a storm, to try to find out the food you like best. And God help you, if you can’t think of one on your own, because then she goes through the cookbook to find something you enjoy.”

“You’ll note I said nothing compares to your ma’s cooking. Every food other than Marina’s is all the same.” Grant grinned as he nudged Sam carefully. “Thankfully, Marina has been too busy doting about her grandbaby to realize she hasn’t started that process on me yet.”

“Give it time. Soon as she’s no longer fussing at the new grandbaby, and my sisters, she’ll be on you like syrup on hotcakes.”

“Like I’ll complain about that? I’d rather be over stuffed with your Ma’s cooking than survive on the cafeteria food on base.”

The face Sam made in response to that statement was eloquent enough about his own opinion of the cafeteria food at S.H.I.E.L.D., even without the disgusted, “Blech!” that followed it. “Amen to that. And we can’t even blame Uncle Jason for that . . . he’s not allowed near the mess hall stoves.”

“Not entirely sure I’ve ever heard the reason as to why your Uncle is banned from Marina’s kitchen and not allowed to set foot in any other kitchen.”

“Two words; spaghetti-os and M&Ms.”

“That’s just wrong man. Who could ever desecrate M&M’s like that?” Grant asked even as his face contorted at the visual of the dish in question.

“And now you know,” the blond chuckled, waiting for Grant to take his seat. “All right, crook your elbow, 45 degree angle is fine.”

Doing as instructed Grant locked his body into place; the last thing he wanted to do was drop Sam’s beloved daughter. Marina would literally bend him over her knee and tan his hide if he was the cause of harm to her only grandbaby.

Sam laughed, nudging him lightly. “Loosen up, man. She's a baby, not a bomb. Relax . . . I trust you. You're not going to drop her, okay?”

“Actually she’s more like a hand grenade and Marina is holding the cord attached to the pin.” Grant teased as he tried to relax enough for Sam’s liking. “Your Ma is kinda scary remember.”

“Dude, preaching to the choir.” Sam’s fingers were gentle and firm as he adjusted Grant's posture, before bending to lower Sadie into his arms. “Watch her head . . . you got her?”

“Yeah, I think so.” Grant answered even as he stared down at the small bundle in his arms. “She’s so tiny!”

“That's because you're so huge,” Sam teased with a laugh, taking his own seat across from them. “She’ll get big fast. She was even smaller when she was born . . . she’s gonna take after Jules, I think. Short and compact.”

“Nothing wrong with that. You’ll just have to let your Ma teach her how to fight using her size and speed.” Grant said with a teasing grin. Lifting his free hand he stroked the soft downy hair with a sense of awe. “Your Ma is right, you make beautiful babies.”

“Pretty sure Jules helped. You wanna tell me what's going on with you?”
“Just needed to see my best friend. Needed to ground myself in something other than S.H.I.E.L.D bullshit for a little while.”

There was suspicion in Sam’s ice blue eyes, but he said nothing. “Well, you know you’re always welcome here.”

“Think we can hold off further questions of anything other than general chit chat until after lunch? I kinda want to just hang and chill with my friend and his baby girl, get a sense of a normal life for a bit.” Grant asked with soft tone as he tapped one finger lightly on Sadie’s nose. “Besides we don’t want corrupt your little munchkin do we?”

“No . . . I want to keep her free of this world for as long as I can.”

“Good plan. Let her keep her innocence for as long as possible.” Grant agreed.

“Amen to that.” Slouching back in his chair, he asked, “So, you found a girlfriend yet?”

Grant felt his cheeks heat at the question and he dipped his head over the infant to try and hide the blush he knew was clearly there. A shake of his head was followed by a quiet “No. Why on earth would any woman want to tie herself to someone who’s barely there?”

Sam chuckled sadly, “Well, as a husband to a wife whose barely there, I’m not sure I’m the best to ask.”

“Yeah but you two are also in similar jobs, so I’m not sure that counts?” Grant said quietly, eyes flicking back up to Sam with a sad smile. “Like your parents. There’s times they’re always together but on occasion they get sent out on different ops.”

Nodding in quiet agreement, the blond promised, “You’ll find someone, Grant. Just . . . give it some time. And in the meantime, nothing saying you can’t find a lover.”

Coughing suddenly at that last statement, sounding as though he had choked on something, Grant shook his head “Let’s not go there, okay? Seriously after my parents, I was kinda fine with being alone. Now, though, after meeting this munchkin . . . I don’t think that’s quite the case anymore.”

“Good . . . everyone needs someone Grant.” Reaching out, Sam folded a hand over his friend’s own and squeezed. “And I don’t know why taking a lover makes you flinch, but just think about it.”

“I just . . . I’ve never . . .” Grant trailed off and sighed “A lover wouldn’t seem right . . . I mean, it’s not really a good time to . . . you know.”

“No, I don’t. But . . . it’s your life, Grant. Far be it from me to tell you how to live it.”

“Think about it Sam. I was sixteen; I went from military school, to juvie, to homeless, to S.H.I.E.L.D. I didn’t exactly have any time, or any place, to be getting it on with someone.”

A single eyebrow winged upwards, before Sam asked in a quiet whisper, “Are you telling me . . . you’re a virgin?”

“That is indeed what I’m telling you.” Grant admitted with a sigh and shake of his head. “After I got out of juvie, I lived alone in the woods with a dog as my only companion. It was just us for five years out there.”

A fierce frowned formed in the crease between Sam’s eyes, as he asked, “What happened to your dog? I’ve never seen you with a dog.”
“He died . . . someone shot him,” Grant said weakly, his tone breaking slightly at the memory of Buddy, his last and only friend before Sam.

Sam winced hard. “Shit Grant. I'm sorry.”

“Not your fault,” Grant replied, before shrugging lightly, “Anyway, I just need some time away from S.H.I.E.L.D. for a little bit. I figured being stuck in Toronto over night was a good time to take the break.”

Sam nodded slowly in unstated understanding, eyes distant as he considered that while lifting his beer bottle to his lips for a sip. After a moment, he shrugged, “Well, Jules is working a double. Team Three’s profiler is sick, and Jules is covering for him. So if you don't mind a baby waking you up at all hours, you're welcome at the house. I wouldn't mind the company.”

“I'm used to running on not much sleep; it's pretty much second nature by now.” Grant admitted as he glanced from Sam to the baby. “If you show me what needs to be done I can maybe help you look after her tonight? Take turns or something so you can get some sleep.”

“You would be my hero,” Sam laughed in agreement. “Sounds good . . . and I'll give you a ride to the airport too. No need to get a taxi, when I can take you for free.”

Chuckling, Grant agreed, “Far be it from me to argue with you, man.”

“Smart kid,” the blond teased, saluting him with his beer, before settling back into his chair and watching Sadie wrap his friend around her tiny pinky finger.

Back at the house later that evening, after the little Bug had been put to bed, Sam introduced Grant to another one of his loves, hockey. Sam chuckled, flipping to a Maple Leafs game, before heading into the kitchen for something to drink. “You want a beer? Water? Anything?” Frowning, he glanced toward the cupboard over the fridge, he announced, “I think I still have some of the whiskey left, that Dad gave me on my wedding day.”

“Whiskey sounds good,” Grant called from the living room, followed by a quiet, “I need a drink,” that the blond figured he probably wasn’t suppose to hear.

Sam called back over his shoulder, “So lunch is over . . . does that mean we can talk about the hard stuff now?”

“The ‘hard stuff’? What do you mean?”

“Whatever’s going on, that you need a drink,” the constable replied, reappearing back in the living room, with two drinks in his hand. Offering one to his friend, he asked, “Come on, man . . . talk to me. I could barely walk today; you were so close, you were nearly stepping on me. You've touched me more today, than I think you've touched anyone ever. I'm your best friend . . . whatever you tell me, doesn't go further than us.”

Grant seemed to be at a loss, “I just…” He blinked a few times, “I wasn’t touching you that much.”

Sam cocked an eyebrow, eyes laser sharp on the other man as he waited for Grant to recount the day and realize how out of character he’d been acting. “Really? You're being weird . . . even weirder than normal, which is a feat in and of itself.”

Grant took a long sip of his drink, then stared off for a moment before turning to Sam, “I'm . . . new to this whole friend thing.”
“Preaching to the choir, kid,” Sam reminded him with a small smile. “So tell me what you need from me to make this easier for you.”

Grant stared at him then looked away shaking his head and chuckling, “Make this easier for me. You’re a good guy Sam. I’m pretty sure I don’t deserve you.”

“Bullshit,” the agent snarked with a roll of his eyes. “Everyone deserves good friends.” Reaching out carefully, Sam laid a hand on Grant’s shoulder and squeezed firmly. "Whatever you need, Grant . . . I’ve got your back.”

Grant smiled back, still looking somewhat uncertain, “I’m just looking for some companionship I guess.”

“Well then, drink your whiskey, kick back and let’s watch some hockey. The Leafs are actually decent this year . . . they may actually make the playoffs,” Sam explained, flopping into the couch - probably sitting a little closer than he usually would be - and slouched against the back. “They’ve gotta get past the Vegas Aces, though . . . and Parson’s an asshole.”

“Speaking a foreign language, Sam.”

“Yeah I know . . .” Sam chuckled, with a lazy shrug. “Let’s just watch the game, huh?”

Nodding in agreement, the two men sat back to watch the hockey game play out. Sam barely flinched as Grant began to list sideways as the night went on, finally passing out around the second intermission, the crown of his head resting against Sam’s shoulder. Resituating himself to the far end of the couch, Sam prodded the taller man into stretching out completely, letting Grant get some uninterrupted sleep for the first time in what was probably forever. Grant’s head rested on Sam’s leg, snuffling a little as he unconsciously snuggled closer in his sleep. The former soldier chuckled, lifting his hand to card his fingers through the dark strands carefully; his Ma did that to everyone, no matter who they were, and it always made the person feel warm and safe. With any luck, it would produce the same feeling for Grant as well.

End Flashback

Grant had jolted awake at some point and panicked, apologizing profusely for falling asleep on him before bolting to the guest room. Knowing the agent’s twitchy nature, Sam had waved the behavior off, even as he’d noted how horrified Grant had seemed by the idea he’d nodded off in front of someone else. The next morning, when Sam had driven him to the airport, Grant had been almost obnoxiously friendly and cheerful, as though trying to make up for what he considered a grievous accident.

Concerned about the agent’s strange behavior, Sam had called his mother. Marina Petrovka had peppered him with questions about her granddaughter for ten minutes before Sam could even get a question in edgewise. At which point, Marina had gone quiet and concerned. At which point, she’d told him something that frankly he should have already known.

Grant Douglas Ward was touch starved. Plain and simple. He’d gone so long without casual affection and meaningless touch, he didn’t know how to react when he received it from someone whose opinion he valued. Combined with having someone like Garrett as a mentor, Grant probably thought he’d f*cked up by accepting the comfort from his friend . . . even if the affection had been offered willingly and while he was unconscious.

Sam grunted as he dumped the contents of the dustbin into the trash, Sam put the broom away in the laundry room. Returning to the kitchen, he glowered at the contents of the sink for a moment, as
though that would make the dishes wash themselves, before he rolled up the sleeves of his flannel and dove in. The repetition of the act was mindless, and for a long time he lost himself in the task.

It was the simultaneous scream from his daughter and the shrill screech of his phone that dragged him back into awareness. He snatched up the cell as he moved to the nursery, tucking it into the crook of his shoulder and chin as he bolted for his child. “Grimm,” he grunted, leaning into the crib and lifting the baby clear. “Sssh, little Bug. Daddy’s got you . . . you’re all right, Sadie Bug.”

“Sammy,” came the fond but worried tone from his mother.

“Ma?” he asked, lifting Sadie to his opposite shoulder as he tried to soothe her. “You okay?”

“I hate to do it, since I know you have Sadie right now. But I have to recall you.”


“Your Uncle Brian and Grant went on an assignment together about four days ago. We lost contact almost 24 hours later.” A small, suppressed sob got Sam’s hackles up. “We just received visual confirmation that they’re in the custody of the Latverian oligarchy. Oh honey, I know he’s your friend, and I’m sorry . . . Grant doesn’t look so good. I don’t know if we’re going to be able to make it there in time.”

Chapter End Notes

Oh man, it feels very weird to see it read Completed. But, never fear, the next chapter is coming soon. I promise.

Works inspired by this one

Don’t Believe In Fairy Tales (but I believe in you and me) by Amerou, Grimm Family Photos by Caiti (Caitriona_3), GalahadsGurl, Do Witches Dream in Enchanted Sleep? by Caiti (Caitriona_3), Marta’s Day by Caiti (Caitriona_3), Rise and Rise Again - Until Lambs Become Lions by Caiti (Caitriona_3), GalahadsGurl, Form 319-A: Why one should never anger a Coulson by BairnSidhe, Song of Marina’s Misfits by BairnSidhe

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