Standing in a Hurricane

by CaptainAmelia22

Summary

Evony Potts is invited by her older sister, Pepper, to move to New York City after disaster strikes her life in LA. Within moments of arriving she's thrown into the world of superheroes, aliens and irradiated scientists. This is a story about a young woman falling in love with the Hulk and his purple shirted alter-ego.

(Rated M for later chapters)

(Formerly titled "Bruce Banner Finally Gets What He Wants")

Title comes from Beck's song "Gamma Ray"

Notes

I started publishing this story in June of 2012 on Ff.net. But after a few weeks went on hiatus for personal reasons regarding the site's policy. Hopefully I'll be able to get everything uploaded into the archive and will truly come out of hiatus. I'll post chapters every Saturday so keep an eye out! Also, this is part of a series; my writing partner, ambpersand, has a story involving June Auld and Steve Rogers that will begin tying in with Evony's and Bruce's. So make sure you check out her story, Strong Enough to Break.

All characters belong to Marvel.
Prologue

Evony Potts should have been used to infamy by now. After all, her older sister, Pepper, was the girlfriend of one of the biggest playboys in the nation who also happened to be a superhero, while she, herself, was the former fiancée of a multi-billionaire douchebag.

But Evony could not help but cringe as she was wheeled out of the Cedars-Sinai hospital in Los Angeles, and was immediately bombarded with reporters and paparazzi. They kept their distance, this time, since she was still an “invalid.” She slipped a pair of Gucci sunglasses on one handed, straightened the sling cupping her left hand and waited for Happy to help her into the black Mercedes waiting for her under the hospital’s awning.

“Drive me to the cemetery, Happy,” she said. Her chauffeur, on loan from Tony Stark and her sister, nodded at her in the rearview mirror and drove quickly away. Evony glanced behind her and couldn’t help a small smile forming as she saw the paparazzi milling hopelessly as their prey sped away.

“Is my sister going to get here in time for the funerals?” She leaned her head back on her seat and closed her eyes; the doctors had said her headaches were common after a car accident of this caliber, but she wished the pounding would ease just a bit.

“Not sure, Miss Potts. Your sister said she would be taking Mr. Stark’s jet as soon as she got done with finalizing the plans for the New York Stark Tower. She should be landing in the next hour or so,” he replied politely.

Evony grimaced slightly. Pepper, the ever vigilant assistant, wouldn’t miss helping Tony with his towers. Ever since Tony had started going green, Pepper had been all over Tony’s newest project. It was a worthwhile endeavor of Stark Industries and after the recent legal battles he’d had to endure over the past year about his Iron Man suit and tech, anything he could do to keep his name out of a negative light was a good thing. Evony loved and admired her sister for all of the hard work she had done for Tony Stark but she could have really used her older sister’s support this past week.

“Happy?” She needed to talk to somebody. Happy Hogan glanced at her worriedly. “Yes, Miss Potts?”

“Why didn’t you go out to New York with Tony and Pepper?” She ran her fingers through her mahogany colored hair and stared out the window at the city around her.

Happy drummed his fingers on the steering wheel, considering how to answer. Very few knew his past; only Pepper and Tony knew of his underworld dealings and his penchant for boxing.

Evony gazed at him through the dark lenses of her glasses, trying to distract herself from recent memories of glass shattering and the sound of crushing bone. Happy sensed her nervousness and decided to tell her about his past.

“Well, Miss Potts I grew up in Brooklyn. It wasn’t an easy life. My dad was a mechanic, my mom died from a drug overdose and I had two little brothers. Dad drank a lot and we always seemed to be on the verge of eviction. We moved around the burrow a lot, and each time dad got worse and us kids got a little skinnier. When I was fifteen I decided to take matters into my own hands. I started boxing in underground rings. I was always a big kid. Didn’t have much trouble holding my own and there was good money in it. Win a round the pay could be anywhere from twenty bucks to a hundred depending on how veteran your opponent was. From there I got into the drug business.”
Evony’s eyebrows shot up. She hadn’t known this. She had always suspected he had been some sort of fighter; he was Tony’s most trusted bodyguard after all. But drugs? That was new.

“Is that why you can’t go to New York?” She asked. She was very curious now. Happy glanced at her, slightly surprised.

“How’d you know?” He chuckled, slightly. “I guess it’s pretty obvious. Well, in the old days Tony was always on the lookout for a new way to upset the board. The only surprise was how long it took Tony to get into the drug racket. He was in New York for a conference and one of the women he was involved with happened to be employed by the same man as me. She knew of a special kind of drug Tony may enjoy. He immediately took her up on the offer. I didn’t like any of the deal. A respected businessman and alleged genius using illegal drugs?” Happy laughed bitterly. Evony just gazed at him avidly. “It was a little naïve of me I suppose, but that night I followed him after he left the hotel where he made the deal. I wanted to make sure he didn’t kill himself or anyone else; sure enough he got in the worst car accident. The car wasn’t even recognizable after he was done with it. I took me the better part of half an hour to pull him out. Wouldn’t let the search and rescue crew help. Had to do it myself. Felt responsible for him, you know?” Happy made a left turn and went quiet.

Evony smiled slightly, “Yeah, I know the feeling,” she muttered. “So that’s how you got hired? You saved Tony’s life?”

Happy glanced at her again as they came to a stoplight. They were outside of LA now, almost to the cemetery. “Yea, Miss Potts. That’s how I got hired. Some interview right? And now if I go back to New York I’ll find myself at the wrong end of a gun, or worse, get dragged back into that racket. I prefer to stay here and help you out. Especially now…” He drifted off and made the last turn into the cemetery.

“Home of Peace Memorial Park” read the sign they drove past. Evony’s good hand tightened on her purse. She did not want to be here. She wanted to be in her studio. Or in bed.

Suddenly her phone rang. She and Happy jumped slightly. Carry on my Wayward Son blasted from her phone and she fumbled trying to answer it.

“Pepper.” Her voice caught and she tried to regain some of her composure.

“Evony! Evie I’m heading to the cemetery right now. I’ll be there in twenty. Honey, are you okay? I’m sorry I couldn’t get out here sooner. New York’s tower was having security issues and Tony’s just been impossible!” Pepper’s voice sounded slightly panicky. Evony could hear an engine revving in the background. Pepper’s driver was definitely putting on some speed.

“Pepper that’s okay. I knew you’d get out here if you could.” Evony’s headache was getting worse. “You know where the place is right? It’s really nice. Just outside of LA. Beautiful land. Very quiet, I think they’d like it here.” She was rambling. And she was about to cry. Again. She was so sick of tears. They made her feel small.

Pepper kept saying her name over and over again, “Evie, honey it’s okay. John and Mary would love anything you picked out for them. You know that. I’ll be there soon. I’m going to hang up now. Tony’s calling me. Have Happy hug you for me okay? I love you.” And Pepper was gone.

Evony sniffed and placed her phone back in her purse. She ran her fingers under her eyes smoothing away any tears. Happy gazed at her in the mirror. She realized that was the only way she ever saw his eyes. In a mirror, gazing at her worriedly. She gave a shaky smile and smoothed her hair. They were stopped in front of a small plot in the cemetery. Two urns sat on an altar and a few rows of
black draped chairs sat near the grave sites.

She was the first one here. She swallowed and squaring her shoulders as much as the sling would allow, stepped out of the car. Happy hurried to get her door for her; he always hated when she or any of his other charges didn’t wait for him to help them out of the cars. Evony just never remembered to wait for him.

She smiled again and straightened her black dress and walked over to the grave site. The minister was sitting in one of the first chairs. She stopped by him and gently touched his shoulder.

“Father Michael?” He jumped slightly and closed his prayer book as he stood up to face her. “Miss Potts. How are you?” He gave her a brusque little hug and then gazed around. “Is your sister here?”

Evony glanced at the watch on her wrist. “She’ll be here in about five minutes I’d think. Just in time for the service. Thank you for doing this. I know it was very last minute. But John would have appreciated it.”

“Not a problem. John was one of my favorite colleagues. I always loved listening to his sermons. And Mary’s lemon cake was the best I’ve ever had. I’m just sorry they had to leave us in such a way. Are you doing okay? I see you’re still in a sling.”

Evony grimaced and tugged the sling a little tighter. “Just a dislocated shoulder and a concussion. Despite what John thought, seat belts are a good thing.” She looked around at the sound of a car coming to stop in front of the plot.

Relief filled her as her older sister, Pepper, threw herself out of the car. Pepper rushed across the grass and immediately hugged Evony, who grimaced again as her shoulder got pressed against Pepper’s body.

“Pepper please, my shoulder,” she gasped.

“Oh my god! Evie I’m so sorry! I was just so relieved to see you. I’ve been a mess since Happy called us a couple days ago. I’m sorry I couldn’t get away. I knew he’d be able to take care of you.”

Evony smiled at her sister. “It’s okay Pepper. I understand. I was perfectly fine. And Happy makes a good personal assistant. I might consider hiring him permanently.”

Both sisters laughed at the slightly dismayed look on Happy’s face. Pepper smoothly introduced herself to the reverend who had been greeting arriving mourners.

Pepper turned to her sister as they went to their seats, and said “Evony I want you to move out to New York with me. You’ll be closer to Joey, which means you can collaborate better on the book and you can set up a studio in Stark Tower! Tony would love to have you. Please consider it. The only reason you stayed here was because of John and Mary. And now they’re gone. I would feel so much better having you closer.” She stroked her little sister’s hair, so much like their mothers, and watched her consider her offer.

Pepper rushed to reassure her when she saw Evony’s frown, “You don’t have to make a decision now. Just think about it. Tony came up with the idea first. He’s all aflutter to find things to do with the tower. A resident artist would just make it a million times better for him.”

Evony gazed at Pepper, touched that she and Tony had offered their home to her. As the funeral service for her guardians started all she could think about was her sister’s offer; it had a certain appeal to it. A ring of well, almost like destiny. She smiled and thought of her tiny studio here in LA—not enough room for her and Joey, and really not enough room for her alone either. Stark Tower would
have such potential. And she had never been to New York before. She gave a decisive nod and gripped her sister’s hand tightly as the two of them said good-bye to the only family. If she was being honest with herself, California had too many painful memories; it was time for a fresh start.

Three days later Evony arrived in New York City and her world changed forever.
Evony couldn’t help a small flutter of excitement in the pit of her belly as the Stark jet touched down in LaGuardia Airport. She had done it! She had left LA behind.

She was moving in with her sister and her superhero boyfriend.

“Oh my god.” She placed a trembling hand onto her forehead and gave a slightly hysterical laugh. “What am I doing?” She was moving in with her sister. Maybe she could blame the concussion on that decision. She glanced out the window and watched the jet taxi slowly into the Stark hangar. Dusk had fallen over the city.

“Miss Potts, welcome to New York City. There is a car waiting for you outside the hangar.” JARVIS, Tony’s artificial butler, as she liked to think of him, made her smile. His cool British voice always instilled a sense of security for her.

“Thank you JARVIS.” She stood and stretched, wincing slightly at the twinge of pain in her shoulder. She had a list of recommended physicians to go to here in the city if any problems arose with her shoulder or her head. She really hoped one of them would allow her to get out of this annoying sling. Joey would get more and more panicky the longer it took for her to get to work on his book. “JARVIS is my sister here to pick me up?” she asked before she stepped off the plane.

“I do not believe Miss Potts is here. She and Mr. Stark are getting ready to place the Arc Reactor to make the Stark Tower sustainable. She wanted to help him as much as possible. She sends her apologies.”

Evony nodded, thanked the AI and stepped off the plane. She knew Pepper was busy. Yet another black Mercedes waited for her along with Happy Hogan. She grinned and rushed to the big man, giving him a quick hug.

“Happy! I didn’t realize you would be here to pick me up! I thought, now that you’re back with Tony, you’d be helping him and Pepper, instead of me!”

He smiled, “I asked Mr. Stark if I could come and pick you up. I think he was relieved. He wants you to be as safe as possible in the city. Plus I wanted to make sure you were okay.” He helped her into the car and as the porters were loading her luggage into the trunk he turned around in his seat to address her face to face. “I’m sorry I wasn’t there to help you after the funerals. Did you get the place packed up okay?”

Evony nodded. She had missed Happy in LA. He made her feel safe. After she had had some problems with her ex, Tony had appointed Happy to escort her and protect her while he and Pepper were on the East Coast. Happy gave a small smile, oddly out of place on his usual frowning face, and pulled away from the Stark hangar.

Evony settled back in the seat and slid her heels off. “I’m having some of my supplies and other memorabilia shipped out here. I was able to get rid of a lot of stuff I didn’t need, which was kind of a relief. Happy, I thought you wouldn’t be safe here in New York?”

Happy glanced at her in the rear view mirror; she smiled at the familiarity of it. “I found out the men who employed me all got arrested or killed. Seems after twenty years of being off the scene I may be a little safer. Plus Tony can’t function without me for long.” They both chuckled and slipped into a comfortable silence. Happy turned on some classic rock, but kept it low, just like she liked it.
She gazed out the windows as the Mercedes sped through the New York streets. As they got closer to Midtown Manhattan she saw a black towering blur take over the island’s horizon.

“Is that,” she gasped-

“Stark Tower.” Happy finished as his mouth quirked. “Tony’s currently setting up the Arc. It should be lit up here soon.”

“It’s so…big!” She gazed out the windshield at the giant behemoth looming over them. She could just make out a word on its apex but it was too dark to see. She had her suspicions though. She’d seen enough of the plans from her visits with Pepper and Tony to know what it said.

“Ninety three floors,” Happy supplied. “The first floors are all research and development. Tony’s private labs make up the top ten floors and his and Miss Potts’ suites are in the penthouse. I’m not sure where your studio is. But Miss Potts wanted to make sure it had excellent light and a good view. I think it’s near the top of the tower as well.”

Evony smiled excitedly. This sounded so promising!

Suddenly the tower’s lights flickered on. Evony gasped. The tower was really beautiful! And there at the top, just like she thought, “STARK” could be seen with the familiar script the company used. Evony could not help but laugh.

“Little narcissistic isn’t it?” she stated. Happy just glanced at her once again in the mirror and said, “You know Tony, right?” She chuckled again as they pulled into the private parking garage under the tower.

Evony’s butterflies began to flutter around in her belly even more. She wasn’t nervous about seeing Tony. He had always been like a crazy uncle towards her. Loud and snarky, she couldn’t help but love being around Tony Stark. It was Pepper she was nervous about seeing. Her sister was always so professional. After graduating from college and getting hired by Tony’s father, Howard Stark, she had had very little time for her kid sister. Evony and Pepper had essentially been strangers while Evony grew up. Pepper would always come over to John and Mary’s for Thanksgiving, Christmas and Evony’s birthday, but she had never stayed long and she had only ever talked about her work.

Now though, the two were closer. Mostly thanks to Tony. He had been amazed to learn Pepper had a little sister. He had sponsored her at Barclay Academy for the Arts, gone to her award ceremonies and even agreed to be a guest speaker at her graduation. She still sort of regretted that decision. Tony was known for being unconventional but even she was a little surprised when he showed up at a private high school’s graduation in his Iron Man suit; that was a commencement that would go down in infamy.

Evony’s hands clenched slightly. As Happy pulled into a parking space amidst a small collection of Tony’s sports cars, including his favorite hot-rod roadster, Evony straightened her hair and slid her heels back on. Happy opened her door and helped her out of the car. As she straightened, a black Yukon stormed into the garage. Happy immediately tensed and began to reach for his gun, just as a man, with thinning brown hair, dressed in a black suit, stepped out of the giant SUV. He glanced around, saw the two of them, nodded and headed towards the elevator at the other end of the garage.

Happy gazed after the man in the black suit and said softly, “SHIELD? What is SHIELD doing here?”

Evony was confused. “Shield? Who has a shield?” Happy ignored her and began following the man. She followed quickly. “Happy! Wait for me, what is going on?!?” Happy just waved at her to go
She swore quietly and took off her heels, rushing to catch up with the big bodyguard.

The two of them arrived at the elevator in time to see the man punch some numbers into the keypad by the doors.

“You need an authorized code to get up there Coulson.” Happy stated calmly. Evony glanced at him nervously. Coulson? The man in the suit? Whose nickname was apparently “shield”? She watched as Coulson began arguing into his phone.

“JARVIS I need to talk to Stark. It’s extremely urgent. I know he is here. His tower just lit up like a Stark Christmas tree. JARVIS this is a matter of national security and we both know Stark gave me the wrong code to get into the tower. I will override your protocols.” He paused and then let out a short laugh, “of course I can…”

The little man stood calmly gazing at the doors, as if hoping JARVIS would allow the doors to open. Happy folded his arms and listened to the conversation with a small smile on his face.

Coulson sighed, glanced at the two of them again and then began tapping on the keys of his phone. He finally gave a small smile just as the elevator doors swept open. He looked at Happy and Evony and said quite calmly, “I’m afraid you’re going to have to wait for the next elevator.” And he stepped into the shaft.

Evony and Happy stared at each other. She cleared her throat, “So, uh, what’s going on here Happy?”

He punched in his access code furiously and growled, “I really have no idea, Miss Potts but I mean to find out.”

Suddenly, two other men in suits walked over to them and clapped their hands on their shoulders.

“Mr. Hogan, Miss Potts would you step away from the elevator please?” The man holding Evony had a bored expression on his face but Evony did not miss the fact that he was packing and he had a little ear piece connected to his ear.

She blurted, “Who are you? The fucking Men in Black?” She tried to shake him off but he tightened his grip and led her away from the elevator.

Happy wasn’t having any luck with his agent either. “Let go of me,” he kept shouting but neither man was listening. They stopped by the big black SUV and the suits conversed quietly with each other. One even touched his ear and listened to something over his piece.

Evony was pissed, but kind of intrigued. Who were these nutcases? How did that one guy hack JARVIS?! And why was everyone talking about shields?!

Just then the elevator opened and the first guy, Coulson, stepped out.

“Pepper!” Evony was very relieved to see her sister with the man in the suit. She started to run across the garage to her sister, but she was stopped by one of the men. Pepper looked very surprised to see her and Happy surrounded by agents.

As Pepper and Coulson walked over to them Pepper said, “Phil, why do you have my sister in custody? She just got to New York.” She pushed through the two agents and hugged her little sister.

Coulson just smiled, “We have enough on our plate, and we don’t need another civilian knowing about the Initiative. Keep your sister in line Miss Potts. We can’t afford information falling into the
wrong hands.” He glanced at Evony, arched an eyebrow at her and then gestured to his agents. Both men stood down and stepped into the SUV.

Turning to Pepper, Coulson said, “Still heading to LaGuardia?”

Pepper frowned. “Actually, Phil, I’ll have Happy drive me. Since civilians shouldn’t know about SHIELD and its superheroes.” Coulson glanced at Evony again, shrugged and said goodbye to Pepper.

Then the black vehicle drove away after executing a tight u-turn.

Pepper sighed. “What a mess.” Turning to Evony she grinned, “Hi Evie! I’m so sorry you had to see that. SHIELD has been driving us all bonkers for years now.” Turning to Happy she asked, “Happy would you mind driving me back to the airport? I have to be in D.C. tomorrow morning.”

“Not a problem Miss Potts. Let me get the other Miss Potts’ luggage out of the car and I’ll be ready to go.” He headed over to the Mercedes and began unloading it.

Pepper rested against a yellow Porsche; Evony sat next to her. “So, what’s going on Pepper?” Evony asked after a few moments of silence. Pepper was frowning, her fingers tapping gently on the hood of the car.

Pepper glanced at her little sister and sighed, “Tony has homework.”

“Homework?” Evony was still confused.

“Yeah, SHIELD has a problem and they’ve asked Tony to help with it.”

“What kind of problem?” Evony asked curiously.

Pepper sighed and rubbed her forehead, “I’m not sure. But it’s bad enough for them to want Tony’s help. He’s not exactly in their graces. Or he wasn’t. I don’t know, you should go up and see him. I trust you and he trusts you so he may be able to tell you more.” She stood as Happy started the car. She turned back to Evony, “I’ll see you in a few days okay? I’m really hoping we’d have tonight to catch up but…well. Tony’s here. Go talk to him for a bit.” She hugged Evony and headed for the Mercedes.

“Bye Pepper,” Evony said to her retreating sister. Pepper turned back to her and waved, then she got in the car and they peeled out of the garage.

Evony gazed after them for a moment and then went over to her pile of luggage by the elevator and grabbed her messenger bag with her laptop and entered her access code into JARVIS’s keypad.

As the door opened the AI said, “Welcome to Stark Tower, Miss Potts.”

“Thank you JARVIS. Could you take me to the lounge Tony’s in? I need to talk to him.”

“Right away Miss Potts.”

Evony nibbled her lip as the elevator sped up.

What had she gotten herself into?

Finally she had arrived at the penthouse lounge. The door opened and she saw Tony standing in the middle of the room in front of several holographic images. He was contemplating one on the far right and playing with the image of a blue cube.
As she stepped into the lounge JARVIS spoke up, “Mr. Stark, the younger Miss Potts has arrived. She asked to see you.”


“Hey there, kid. How’s life?” Tony twirled the cube on the tip of his index finger.

Evony chuckled, “oh you know, getting accosted by men in suits and stuff.”

“Ha! So just a normal day for Evony Potts, huh?”

“Yeah pretty much.” She gazed around the room. It just screamed Tony.

“Welcome to New York.” Tony grinned and started flipping through the images in front of him.

Evony shivered in anticipation at his words. Something about this tower, this city excited her.

She just didn’t know why.
Evony walked over to where Tony stood contemplating the hologram screens covered in images of three...people? As she got closer she saw a heavily muscled man toss a shield brutally at some men in outfits reminiscent of World War II era German soldiers; she wasn’t sure, but it seemed to be actual footage from the war. In another screen a man with a monstrous Celtic looking hammer and flowing blond hair battled a giant metal machine in the middle of a desert town. And finally in the last screen...She gasped. What was that?!

Tony was flicking through the first man’s screen, pulling up documents of a blue cube, he glanced at her and said, “You know kid, this stuff is top secret.” Evony didn’t even look at him.

She was too busy reading the last screen. “Doctor Bruce Banner (The Hulk)” read the title. “Doctor Bruce Banner is the world’s top specialist in gamma radiation,” the document continued. “After an accidental overdose of gamma radiation Dr. Banner began experiencing negative results.” Evony’s eyes widened and her eyes drifted back to the image of two monsters battling in Harlem.

She looked at Tony, who had been watching her with a quirked eyebrow and a smirk on his lips. He kept twirling the blue cube in his fingers. Evony asked, “Tony...Are the Avengers...superheroes?” Her eyes drifted over the screens once again; from the blond man in the middle of a lightning storm, to the soldier fighting tirelessly in a forest, to...Doctor Banner. Then finally her eyes rested on Tony, and his arc reactor. She walked forward and tapped it gently and looked at Tony, wonder in her eyes. “Well, are they?”

Tony sighed and began to close the holographic screens. She glanced once more at Dr. Banner’s screen, where he was currently being surrounded by military personnel armed with tranquilizers. He was not going down easily. She imagined him roaring in anger as his fist smashed through a tank. A shiver ran up her spine.

Tony slid the tablet Coulson had given him apart and headed for the bar saying, “yeah Evie. We’re superheroes. But we’re all so volatile SHIELD discontinued the program.”

Evony raised her hand, “Wait a second. What the hell does a shield have to do with all of this?” she gestured at where the holographs had stood.

Tony was pouring himself a whiskey and tapping on the screen of his phone. He glanced at her, “Not a shield. SHIELD. The Strategic Homeland Intervention, Enforcement and Logistics Division.” Evony just stared at him from the middle of the room. Tony sighed, “they’re a high tech super secretive espionage agency. They have their fingers in a lot of different pots, including it seems, in creating a team of super soldiers to save the world from this Loki.”

His finger made a sweeping motion and another holographic image came onto the screen.

“He’s a bad guy?” Evony couldn’t believe it. Loki was young with swept back black hair, pale skin, dark eyes and a pretty impressive suit of armor. “He looks like something out of a King Arthur legend.” Tony walked around the bar with his glass in his hand and stood next to her watching Loki grin at them.

“He’s a demigod. Thor’s brother.” He sipped his whiskey while Evony just gazed at him, still slightly confused.

“Like the Norse god Thor? They really existed?” This just beat all! Tony closed Loki’s hologram
and walked over to one of the couches in front of the fireplace. Coulson’s tablet was back in his lap and he was putting it together and tapping the screen. Evony followed and sat on the arm next to Tony.

“In a manner of speaking they are out of Norse legend. They’re from a planet called Asgard. They’ve considered themselves the protectors of Earth for millennia. Last summer Thor was exiled to Earth and Loki tried to kill him. That’s how SHIELD got their hands on him.”

Evony watched the big blond man battling the metal giant and read a brief note on him. “Thor is the strongest being SHIELD has come across. While the Asgardians consider themselves to be immortal our scientists have come to no conclusions on that front. The hammer Mjolnir is made from a foreign metal not found on this planet, called uru.”

“Tony…” she said worriedly. “Tony what’s going on?”

Tony Stark, the country’s most famous billionaire and sworn protector, smacked her gently on the knee, downed the rest of his whiskey and gave his most winning smile. “I don’t know kid. I’ve got a lot of homework to do.” He stood and began walking out of the room, before getting to the elevator he turned to her and said, “I do know this though—we’re Earth’s mightiest heroes against a man in a helmet with antlers. I think we’ll win.” And he swept out of the room.

Evony was left alone, wishing she had gone with Pepper to D.C. A slight pounding behind her left temple signaled another headache coming on. She sighed and walked over to the bar and poured herself a small glass of whiskey. “What the hell have I gotten into?” She asked herself and then with a small sigh she tossed back the shot and left the room coughing.
Evony snapped awake. “Ugh,” she groaned throwing her arm over her eyes. “What a horrible dream.” She lay like this for a few more seconds trying to remember the details. There wasn’t much she remembered except for a green monster rushing after her through a never ending hallway she thought might represent the hallway outside her door here in Stark Tower.

She did remember the monster roaring one word though, “SMASH!”

She shuddered. She should have read a book or watched some television before going to bed, but instead she had sat on the balcony outside of her room and watched the city settle into the night and thought of the Avengers.

Particularly Dr. Banner.

“Ugh!” She threw the blankets off of her and rolled out of the bed. As she rushed angrily towards the mirror she once again watched the green monster once smash through a building in Harlem. She imagined his giant head swinging towards her and letting free a furious growl. She shuddered involuntarily, utterly fascinated with her thoughts.

“Stop!” She slammed her hands on the vanity table. Everything jumped and skittered around on the surface and a cell phone bounced off onto the floor. She gave a trembling sigh, ran her hands roughly through her sleep tangled hair, and bent to pick up the phone.

“This isn’t mine,” she muttered. Her fingers brushed the screen gently and it suddenly lit up.

“Good morning Miss Potts. You have one new message,” JARVIS’s voice stated calmly, “Would you wish to listen to this message before having your breakfast?”

Evony glanced around the room; Tony must have left it for her during the night. Which meant he was no longer at the tower. She should listen to the message.

“Yes JARVIS, I’ll listen to the message now.”

“Very good, ma’am. Message is as follows:” JARVIS’s voice stopped and Tony’s voice took over.

“Evie. I have a board meeting in Germany. I’ll be gone for a while. Not sure when I’ll get back. Evie you can do whatever you want. Just stay out of the labs. I know I was going to show you your studio but JARVIS can get you there just as easily. There’s a car for you in the garage. You’ll know which one I mean. Use this phone when calling me or Pepper. It’s secure. And whatever you do don’t talk about last night and stay out of the labs. I’ve gotta go. Talk to you later kid!”

“Would you like me to replay the message Miss Potts?” JARVIS’s cool voice once again spoke. “No JARVIS, that’s fine.” Evony walked slowly towards the windows on the eastern side of her room. She touched the control that rolled the black screens back and gazed out at the city. It was still very early. The sun was barely over the horizon. Evony tapped her fingers on her cheekbone. She hadn’t put her sling on yet and her shoulder only twinged slightly.

“JARVIS?”

“Yes, Miss Potts?” Instead of answering through the phone, JARVIS spoke from the room controls.

“What time did Tony leave?” Evony still stood gazing at the city below her.
“I believe he left before three A.M.” JARVIS did not sound very enthusiastic about her question. That was odd. The AI was usually pretty keen on being as helpful as possible.

“Did he take one of his jets?” Evony turned into the room and folded her arms, almost as if she was confronting JARVIS himself, who was very quiet all of a sudden. “Well, JARVIS? Did he take a jet?”

“No Miss Potts I don’t believe he did.” JARVIS actually sounded uncomfortable for a computer system.

“Ah-ha!” Evony hugged herself at this news. “I knew it wasn’t a board meeting. He’s doing something about that Loki character isn’t he?”

“I really have no idea what Mr. Stark is doing in Germany, Miss. I see no reason to disbelieve his meeting with the board. If I consult his calendar the date is filled with a Stark Enterprises board meeting.” If JARVIS could escape the room, he would have been long gone, by the tone of his voice and the excuses he was using.

Evony just scoffed. “We all know Tony detests board meetings. And why would it be in Germany anyway? The board is based here in the city. That’s why he and Pepper relocated, so she could go to meetings and be with Tony at the same time.” While she had been talking to JARVIS she had been rushing around the room throwing on clothes and pulling her hair into a messy bun.

As she was heading out the door her fingers brushed the sling resting on the vanity. She should put it on. Then with a determined shake of her head she threw open the door and rushed out into the hallway.

“Miss Potts! Where are you going?!” Poor JARVIS sounded distinctly panicked now. His cool British voice had sharpened and was actually sounding like a computer now.

“I’m going to find out where Tony went. I know it has something to do with the Avengers and SHIELD. I want to know what these superheroes are going to do.” Evony hurried down the hall towards the private elevator Tony had had built for himself.

Evony mashed the button with her thumb as JARVIS said, “I really don’t think you should do that Miss Potts. Mr. Stark would not want you worrying yourself with this issue.”

She stepped into the elevator saying, “Well JARVIS then he shouldn’t have let me stay in that room after Agent Coulson left. Now I’m invested.” Her mind once again flashed to Dr. Banner and she felt a shiver of trepidation once more crawl up her spine. “JARVIS what floor is Tony’s private lab on?” She didn’t expect an answer but to her surprise the elevator began to move smoothly down.

Three floors later (she could have taken the stairs) the doors swooshed open and she was let onto a completely different world. Fluorescent lighting flickered on as she stepped into Tony’s private play pen. It was much like the lab in Los Angeles. But at the same time it was completely different. Instead of cars lining one wall, Iron Man suits in various states of completion filled the wall space. The silver suits Colonel Rhoades used were present, as well as Tony’s red and gold suits. Some of the latter were in horrible condition. Battle scarred, she thought as she walked deeper into the lab.

She saw every Mark type present. Some she knew were not meant to be used any longer; Mark III-IV suits were in the lab for safe keeping. Tony did not want any of his suits to fall into the wrong hands. Rhoades’ suits were all Mark II suit types.

As Evony moved around the lab she noticed one suit was apparently missing. Mark VI had been
used last night while Tony fitted the tower with an arc reactor. As she stroked the straps and buckles used to hold the suit in place she smiled. Tony had taken the suit to Germany.

Suddenly JARVIS came over the speakers, “Miss Potts, I must tell you, I have alerted Mr. Stark to your intrusion. He will not be pleased. I must ask you to le-“

“Mute.” Evony sat down at Tony’s desk. Once the AI was quiet she tapped the black surface of the desk. The image of a keyboard lit under her finger tips and three screens rose out of the surface. Naturally, Tony had locked his system with a pass phrase. Evony considered for a moment; in LA the passphrase had been the name of his hotrod. Evony’s fingers tapped absently on the edge of the desk as she thought.

She smirked and her fingers flew over the holographic keys. “Salt’n’Peppa,” she muttered as she typed. She rolled her eyes at the awkward memory that brought up. Pressing ENTER she waited, holding her breath. The screen went black and the computers cool voice said, “Welcome Tony Stark.”

Evony cheered and power fist ed as Tony’s computer as the screensaver appeared.

Instead of Tony’s usual hotrod image, a picture of him and Pepper in Central Park flashed on the screen. Evony paused for a second and gazed at the two of them smiling and laughing on a bridge overlooking a lake. Nibbling her lip she glanced at the elevator; maybe she should leave. This really wasn’t any of her business at all. As she debated with herself her fingers accidentally tapped the keyboard and Tony and Pepper’s picture faded away.

Evony’s eyes widened as files embossed with the SHIELD emblem and a circled A appeared before her.

It was a detailed report of something called the Tesseract and the scientist in charge of researching it, a Doctor Selvig. As she read the reports she bent closer and closer to the screens, her brows furrowed in concentration.

“Doctor Selvig reported the Tesseract’s odd behavior twenty four hours before the event. The readings the Tesseract was giving off were above the normal readings SHIELD had seen prior. Radiation levels would fluctuate at apparently random intervals increasing the likelihood of gamma radiation emitted. What radiation was emitted was at low levels, not dangerous enough to require full evacuation. At Director Fury’s discretion the upper levels of the base began evac five hours before the event as the Tesseract’s odd behavior increased.”

Evony scanned through the rest of the first document which described the alien Loki’s appearance, compromise of Selvig and SHIELD’s top assassin, Clint Barton.

The next four documents were devoted to something that looked too much like physics. With a grimace she skipped past each not even bothering to read the titles of the documents. One did seem to follow the gist of thermonuclear astrophysics and Tony had made many personal notes on the document. Evony shook her head and flipped past that one.

The last file was simply titled, “Doctor Bruce Banner,” and the image of the man beside the title drew her eyes like nothing else on Tony’s personal computers had.

Evony’s heart skipped a beat. Dr. Banner in his human form was the most handsome man she had ever seen. And that included Anthony Stark. She rummaged in her pockets pulling out a flashdrive. She quickly plugged it into the port and copied Banner’s file. Tony would never know. She hoped.
Her hands shook in anticipation; she had to resist opening the entire file and reading it right here. She wondered what he was like in person…both as the green monster and as a human. Without really knowing what she was doing, her fingers stretched out and stroked the image of his face. She shivered.

Suddenly Stark’s voice snapped at her via the phone in her pocket; Evony jumped and squawked, shoving her hand quickly under her butt.

“Evony Potts I told you to stay away from the labs. JARVIS is beside himself, which is very hard for artificial intelligence to do. Kid, I know you accessed my computer, I know exactly what you’re looking at right now.” Evony started to close things down, grinning all the while. She pulled the phone out of her pocket.

Tony continued, “If your sister knew you were mooning over a notoriously unstable man who happens to turn into a giant green monster, she would have my b-“

“Okay Tony, okay!” Evony interrupted what sounded like the beginning of a long-winded lecture geared towards self-preservation. “I was not mooning over Dr. Banner. And how can you tell what I’m doing anyway? Are there cameras in the lab?” She peered suspiciously around as she headed for the elevator.

Tony chuckled, “No. I was just looking at one of those documents and found I couldn’t control where I wanted to go which meant someone was reading the master copy in the lab. Couldn’t have been JARVIS and Happy’s in D.C. with Pepper. Final conclusions? You, my dear Miss Potts.”

Evony squirmed uncomfortably as she waited for the elevator to open. She glanced at the phone she held in her hand. Tony seemed to be walking in a large hallway. He was wearing the Black Sabbath tee shirt Pepper hated.

“Tony where exactly are you?” She couldn’t see anything other than Tony’s face.

“Currently? Somewhere over the Atlantic Ocean. I have a very important meeting; seems there is this asshole who thinks he can take over the world and I need to remind him of who’s really in charge. Hey, gotta jet kid. Stay out of my lab. I’ll have JARVIS create some codes for it. Yeesh. Making my life pretty hellish already, aren’t you? How’d you figure out the password for my desk, anyway?” He didn’t wait for her answer; someone seemed to be talking to him, wherever he was. He scowled and said to her, “See you soon Evie.” And just like that Tony was gone.

Evony glanced up as the elevator once again swooshed open. As she stepped into the room she opened her hand not holding the phone and looked at the tiny flash drive cupped in her palm. Smiling, she slipped it into her pocket. Tony may have locked his labs down but she had gotten the only file she was interested in.

“Doctor Bruce Banner,” she whispered, savoring his name. She shivered again. Her eyes sparkled at the thought of reading secret documents on a mysterious split personality doctor.

Skipping down the hall towards her room she called to JARVIS, “I would like to have breakfast now! And JARVIS, can you have the rest of my supplies sent to my studio? I would like to get settled in before Tony and Pepper come home.” She twirled into her room and giggled.

“Of course Miss Potts.” Tony’s artificial butler had seemingly regained his composure as his voice was once again calm and very, very British.

Evony’s heart raced as she moved around her room. She had to resist running for her laptop and
opening Banner’s file; instead she placed the drive into the little pocket of her messenger bag. It wasn’t safe here, JARVIS would see immediately what she was doing. She would go somewhere else, maybe a Starbucks or the library.

She started cleaning herself up, glancing often at her bag sitting on the bed. Finally she was cleaned up and as she headed out the door, she said, “JARVIS I’m going to the Starbucks down the road so you don’t have to worry about breakfast. Let me know when the studio is ready.”

She grabbed her messenger bag with her laptop, sketchbook and the very nondescript flashdrive and made her way out of Stark Tower, humming a Black Sabbath song.
New York City had way too many Starbucks. That was the only conclusion Evony had come to an hour after leaving Stark Tower. She didn't go to the one closest to Stark Tower; she wasn't sure how far JARVIS's reach was. It was better to just play it safe.

So here I am, she thought to herself as she sipped her latte and watched Manhattan bustle around her. She could still see Stark Tower but it was four blocks away. Doing something I'm fairly sure is illegal. The flashdrive and her laptop sat on the table in front of her. She hadn't gathered her courage enough to open the file.

Instead she had sifted through email, most of which were from Joey Maguire, her partner. He had new pages for her to illustrate. His preliminary sketches were, as usual rough, and the text for each panel was framed and laid out for her. She should get back to the studio and start rough sketches for each page. Joey would just get more impatient with her, the longer she waited. And the fact that she was closer to him now meant she had lost the safety of being a long plane ride away.

She sighed. Her fingers tapped impatiently on the laptops keys. She glanced once more at the flashdrive and then clenching her teeth she plugged it into her laptop.

"Just a quick look Evony," she told herself as the laptop pulled up the drive's menu. She clicked the icon to open the folder and minimized the window so no nosy Starbuck's patrons could see what she was reading.

Tony:

You requested Dr. Banner's psychological report. I cannot give you the complete transcription of my one meeting with Banner (doctor-patient confidentiality hocus) I can send you a shortened briefing of Banner. This may help you understand the man better. My findings are extremely conclusive. Bruce Banner is a kind hearted man who has experienced very horrible things in his life, the Hulk or the "Other Guy" as he calls him, the least of these occurrences. When not roused, he is calm, quiet and willing to converse on any number of topics.

I hope this report may aid you when you meet and eventually work with Banner. Not to psychoanalyze too much, but I believe the two of you would be very compatible partners. Consider helping him. He may be able to help you as well.

Best Wishes,

Leonard

Doctor Bruce Banner (born Robert Bruce Banner)

Birthplace: Dayton, Ohio

When: 1977

Parents: Father: Atomic physicist Brian Banner (dec.)

Mother: Librarian Myrtle Banner (dec.)

Dr. Banner is highly intelligent; he is the top specialist in nuclear physics in the world. After an experimental gamma bomb was deployed prematurely Dr. Banner was irradiated to dangerous levels.
His poisoning was so extreme it altered his genetic makeup. This spawned what SHIELD scientists and Dr. Banner have dubbed the Hulk.

Our scientists do not believe this creature retains any of Dr. Banner's personality or memories. It is, to all intents and purposes, completely other of Dr. Banner.

Dr. Banner has had much success in controlling the beast. Most of this comes from charity work in the third world country where he provides medical aid for those who may not be able to afford it. While he believes his escaping provides anonymity for himself, especially when he disappears to the third world, SHIELD knows of his whereabouts at all times.

Dr. Banner would not reveal how he controls his Hulk urges. I suspect it does not come from controlling his anger but by in fact embracing his rages. No conclusions have been reached on this note, though.

While Dr. Banner may be prone to extreme fits of rage, when he is clairvoyant, he is the perfect example of calm intelligence.

Conclusions:

Dr. Bruce Banner, when not other, is mentally stable. He is not a danger to himself or to others. He controls his rages extremely well and when he does transform it is suspected enough of his mentality remains that the Hulk is controlled so as not to endanger unduly. SHIELD scientists have agreed with this conclusion. Thus follows my approval for Dr. Banner/the Hulk to join the Avenger Initiative.

Evony sat back. "Wow," she exclaimed, much to the chagrin of the woman sitting at the table next to her. Evony smiled brightly at her, which seemed to disturb her even more, and closed the file. Disconnecting the drive, she slipped it into her bag and finished her coffee.

Staring at her computer she thought of Banner and wondered what he was like in person. The images she had seen of him in his human form called to mind a quiet, tenured English professor in a tiny liberal arts school. He seemed to have a propensity towards purple, which she thought was curious. He was undoubtedly super intelligent. She thought conversations with him would be fascinating and mind boggling at the same time.

Smiling, she wondered what it would be like to have Banner and Tony in the same room. It would probably be so infuriating Pepper would throw them out after ten minutes.

Evony made it a personal goal to get them in the same room and see how conversation would proceed. She smiled.

Disconnecting the drive she slipped it and her laptop into her bag and finished her coffee before walking up to the counter to order another one.

She wondered what had happened in Banner's past to make the psychologist think Banner was wounded.

She pushed aside thoughts of her own past and took her new latte back to her table.

He fascinated her. His quiet brown eyes seemed peaceful, completely opposite of the bright green they became when he was...not Dr. Banner. Tapping her fingers on the table she dug out a pencil from her bag and a small sketch pad.

She was thoughtfully sketching and thinking of Bruce Banner and how much she wanted to meet
him, when she heard a familiar sound; boosters, similar in sound to the one's Tony's suits used, were sputtering overhead. Grabbing her bag she ran outside and looked up. There, flying towards Stark Tower, was Tony's scarlet and gold Iron Man suit. As she watched the suit's boosters stuttered and stopped and Tony dropped several feet. She gasped, her heart jumping into her throat. Before she could scream or even take one step forward, Tony's suit started back up and he flew more smoothly towards the tower.

Evony began to run. What was wrong with Tony? His suits were always in the best condition. The only time they weren't was if he had battled with some nutjob super villain. She froze midstride, nearly crashing into a tourist gaping at the skyline. Tony had not been at a board meeting! She knew he had to have been pulling her leg. Tony must have been fighting someone in Germany.

She pulled out her phone, "call Tony," she told it and waited right on the sidewalk in the middle of Midtown Manhattan. Her eyes were locked on Stark Tower; it was too far away to make out any details but she thought she could see Tony landing on the platform outside of the Penthouse. He was just a speck but the sun hit the metal of his suit and for a brief moment the tiny speck glowed like an ember.

Bouncing on the balls of her feet she heard the phone ring once and then Tony's voice came over the speaker:

"Kid I don't have time. Are you in the Tower?" Tony did not sound collected, he sounded angry.

Evony gulped, "no Tony. I just saw you fly over the Starbucks I was sitting in. What is go-"

"Evie, listen to me: Get out of Midtown. It's not safe for you here. There's going to be a showdown, a knock-down, drag out fight. There isn't time to explain, just get as far away from Stark Tower as you can."

"But Tony-"

"DO IT!" Tony fairly roared into the phone. Evony jumped. She had never heard Tony get angry, even last year when he was dying. Despite the early summer heat, Evony went cold.

"All right Tony. Are you going to be okay?" Her voice was very small; her hands had gone clammy with fear.

Tony started to say something, but then he laughed, and said "Well yeah, kid. I'm Iron Man. Just get as far away from here as you can and call Pepper. Evie? Go."

And he was gone.

Evony didn't even pause; instead of running towards the subway or hailing a taxi, she ran for Stark Tower. She wasn't entirely sure why, but as she ducked and dodged tourists and men in suits, she found herself drawn to the Tower.

She laughed breathlessly, "Evony Potts, what are you going to do? You're just you. Not a man in a metal suit, not a god, not a super soldier! You don't even know how to shoot a gun. You're a damn artist, not a fighter!" She ignored her head though and kept running. Her shoulder had been quiet up until this point, but she had forgotten the sling in her room, and now she felt bone grinding on bone and winced. She didn't stop running though.

As Evony rushed down West 34th Street towards the tower, a giant explosion pulsed through the air. Evony stumbled to a stop and gazed, horrified at the Tower.
A column of writhing blue light blasted from the very top of Stark Tower; it blasted right into the sky which started roiling like something out of a Spielberg film.

Suddenly there was the faint sound of shattering glass and people began to scream; Evony tore her eyes from the black hole in the sky and watched as someone fell from the top of the Tower.

"TONY!" She screamed in horror as Tony Stark plummeted to the ground at breakneck speed. He was spread eagled but he was still falling faster than a rock. Just when Evony thought he was going to plunge right into the cement sidewalks below the tower a rocket flew from the tower and began to assemble itself over Tony's spread limbs.

"Mark VII?" Evony whispered. She had heard Tony and Pepper talk about this new version of Tony's mobile suit. Apparently it attached itself to two cuff bracelets and could be initiated from anywhere in a two mile radius.

Tony, complete with his newest Iron Man suit, righted himself and blasted his way towards the giant hole in the sky. As she watched, along with several hundred other people, monsters began spewing from the hole and all hell broke loose.

Before Evony could even begin to react the creatures began firing at people.

**

Evony snapped awake to the sound of screams and explosions. How had she ended up on the ground? All she remembered was the sky ripping open and alien creatures spilling from it. She was lying on her back in the middle of 54th street. Rubble lay all around her, including a piece of rock which she remembered crashing into her head knocking her unconscious. She raised trembling fingers to the bruise forming at the side of her skull; flinching she gauged the size of the knot; when her fingers came back only slightly bloody she breathed a sigh of relief.

"Thank god for my hard head," she muttered to herself. Her mouth was really dry; it felt like it was coated with all of New York City's dust and dirt. Coughing, she sat up and took stock of where she was. Her head swam sickeningly as she sat, but after a few seconds it settled and her body found its equilibrium. As she was analyzing her body and slowly realizing where she was, a fresh round of screams began.

Glancing up she saw hovering, alien-like chariots with two riders on each, steering through the air between the buildings. They were blasting and shooting anything that moved or tried to oppose them. Evony's survival instincts kicked in and she threw herself to her feet and rushed towards the nearest building, a bank.

Just a block away, Stark Tower was engulfed in flames, exploding windows and the column of blue light continued to pulse into the sky. Evony desperately hoped Tony was all right. She hadn't seen him since he started fighting off the aliens coming out of the hole in the sky.

Evony scrambled, tripping over rock, bodies and flipped cars. Suddenly a giant tourist bus careened towards her around the corner. She froze, not knowing which direction to run, when from behind her a blue light shot into the bus which flipped onto its side. The people in the bus screamed as the bus tipped; Evony glanced behind her; one of the aliens was bearing down on the bus; children were crying and the tourists were all crying for help.

Evony did not see any police or military personnel around; she stooped, picked up a hefty piece of cement and waited for the scaly creature to get closer. Bouncing the chunk in her hand, she turned herself sideways and wound into a pitcher's stance. Her left shoulder groaned in agony; she gritted
her teeth and as the alien took another step towards her she threw the cement as hard as she could. It smacked right into its head, and it dropped heavily to the ground. Evony laughed maniacally and turned to the bus. Some of the tourists had managed to break open the windows and were attempting to crawl out; Evony scrambled up using the tires as handholds.

Going from window to window she pulled people out, usually children, and once a couple men levered themselves out they began to help her. One little boy was badly injured and his mother was nowhere to be seen. She pulled him out gently and held him in her arms, trying to keep his head steady as she walked to the edge of the bus to hand him down to one of the men helping her when she saw a very familiar person standing with the rescued tourists.

He was all in red, white and blue, a blue mask covered his face and a round shield hung from his arm. He was pointing towards the building nearest them telling the men where to get the women and children. She could do nothing but gape. That was one of Tony's Avengers.

"Miss?" A quiet, but commanding voice spoke from below her. She tore her eyes from the star spangled super soldier to the man standing below her. His arms were up waiting for the little boy in her arms. He was blond, blue eyed and clothed in sleeveless black leather. A bow and quiver full of arrows hung from his shoulders. Her eyes widened even further and she pulled the little boy tighter into her arms. The master assassin.

"Miss, I need to help you down. Want me to take the little boy while you get down?" His voice was still quiet but it had gotten a little more forceful.

"You work for SHIELD don't you?" Evony blurted out. The man frowned, his eyes sharpening.

"Who are you?" he asked, coming closer to where she knelt on the side of the bus. She scrambled back from him. As he was reaching out to grab her ankle another explosion tore through the sky above them.

"Barton!" the man in blue (Captain Freaking America!) shouted at the man beneath her. Evony jumped down from the bus and holding the little boy in her arms ran for cover. Barton. He was one of SHIELD's operatives. For some odd reason he terrified her.

Looking behind her she saw Barton and the man in blue running back towards a bridge where a woman in black stood shooting aliens as they sped above her. Lightning had now filled the sky along with the aliens.

Evony scrambled into the building across from the wrecked bus. The group of tourists was all huddled in the atrium along with what looked like the complex's employees. A sobbing woman saw her stumble through the broken doorway and letting out a pitiful wail, ran towards Evony and the boy and grabbed him from her arms. "Thank you, thank you for saving him! I thought he was stuck in the bus." The mother hugged her little boy who still had his eyes closed. Evony did not think that was a good thing, but she kept silent and moved closer to the door so she could see what was going on.

Outside the bank, Armageddon had struck New York City. Everywhere were exploding vehicles, crumbling buildings and aliens scrambling like spiders over the rubble. From overhead she heard the odd whine of their hovercrafts and then a very familiar but terrifying roar.

She rushed out on to the street and ran toward Stark Tower just in time to see a giant green blur crash into the road in front of her. She froze, not even ducking as rubble flew overhead. Her eyes widened in disbelief as Dr. Bruce Banner quite literally landed at her feet.
Of course, he wasn't actually Banner now, was he? The Hulk pushed himself to his feet. Evony scrambled back until she was sitting on a fallen pillar. Her hands covered her mouth as the Hulk turned to face her. His brute face was clenched in a grimace and his rippling muscles flexed and rolled. His green eyes swept over her and then up into the sky where a crowd of the aliens were swarming.

She could do nothing but stare. He was massive—at least seven feet tall and all rippling green muscle. Suddenly he turned his back to her and let out an earsplitting roar. Evony clapped her hands over her ears when suddenly the Hulk turned to her and grabbed her in giant, fiercely strong hands. He dragged her close to him and hunched over her protectively.

She had had no time to react, no time to run away. He had just grabbed her and smashed her across his chest. It had happened faster than blinking! Evony bit back a scream as her shoulder ground against his chest and her hands rose to rest on him. He was so huge!

The Hulk let out a growl just as the gathered aliens opened fire on the two of them. Evony flinched and the Hulk actually tucked her head tighter against his chest. He roared defiantly at the aliens and after what felt like centuries, they ceased firing. The Hulk straightened and seeing her still tucked in his arms he set her gently on the ground. And then he grabbed the pillar she had sat on just seconds before and using it like a baseball bat began to smash the aliens out of the air.

Evony could do nothing but watch, her mouth agape, as the Hulk smashed aliens out of the air using the pillar and sometimes by just jumping and grabbing the unlucky ones who drifted too close to him. He did not seem to be injured from the onslaught.

Finally, their section of the street was clear of aliens. He huffed angrily and glared around menacingly. Evony stood on shaking legs and walked over to him. He watched her, his heavy brow furrowed and his green eyes following her every move.

When she was close enough to him she placed her hand on his forearm and said, quietly, "Thank you, Bruce." He snorted and amazingly his green eyes began to darken to what she knew was his human form of dark brown. Suddenly his head snapped around toward Stark Tower. He let out a roar and before she could even blink he was gone, barreling towards Manhattan's newest skyscraper.

Evony stood, absurdly, in the middle of Midtown Manhattan with her arm extended, feeling slightly shell-shocked and very, very lonely.

Suddenly something smacked into her back and Evony flew into the ground. A strange clicking noise came from behind her and a scaly hand dug into her shoulder, tearing through the soft flesh of her chest and flipped her over.

She screamed, both in terror and in pain. One of the aliens had landed on her. It gazed at her with milky white eyes; part of its head was bleeding heavily and in its hand was a very familiar block of cement.

Evony gazed at it and began to laugh hysterically, "You have got to be fucking kidding me!" The alien just gazed at her pitilessly. It raised its odd three fingered hand and prepared to smash the chunk into her head. Evony tried to fight it off but with its other hand lodged into the soft flesh of her shoulder she could not move. She groaned and closed her eyes prepared for the thing to finish her off.

The alien smashed the rock into her temple just after an atomic bomb destroyed its home base thousands of light years away.
Evony's world went dark in an explosion of red and white sparks. She did not feel the heavy extraterrestrial collapse limply across her. She did not see the alien army lose its power; she did not see the giant hole to space close miraculously. She didn't see Tony tumble through the hole, didn't see the Hulk save him. Evony Potts only saw a brown eyed monster frowning briefly at her and then she didn't see anything at all.

She didn't open her eyes for a while.
"Do you think we should tell the girls?" Mary's voice was so quiet Evony had to scoot closer to the open window; she was getting too big for this hiding place behind the hydrangeas but it was right outside of John's office window in the rectory where they lived.

"We should tell Pepper. She remembers how violent their father was. Evony is just young enough she'll remember only the good things the man did for her." John sounded tired and worried. Evony frowned, why were they talking about her father? He had died in the car crash which had killed their mother when she was only three.

Evony nibbled her lip, a nervous habit that would continue well into her twenties. She scooted even closer to the open window, risking exposure, but so fascinated with the ongoing conversation she had forgotten where she was hiding.

"John maybe we should take the girls somewhere, at least until Mathieu is caught." Mary was pacing, her voice kept fading in and out. John was probably sitting in his wheely chair watching his wife flutter around the room.

"I'm preaching this weekend Mary. I can't leave yet. And I have a class this evening at the seminary." John's voice was gentle as always but Evony could still hear his concern. They were really worried. Evony wasn't sure why, her father was dead. Dead.

The eight year old fought off the onslaught of faded memories of screams and loud bangs. She was sure they were just half remembered dreams…

"Well John, we can't just sit here and wait for that monster to come for his girls. We are their guardians, we are charged with protecting and keeping them. We don't know what he'll do!" Mary's voice had risen, she sounded slightly panicked now.

Evony heard John scoot his chair back, the wheels bumped over the edge of the carpet and the chair rested against the window. She saw John's back, clothed as always in black and shoulder length blond hair tied back in its little pony tail, and then he walked over to where she assumed Mary stood because he vanished from her sight.

"Tell you what," John's voice had faded a little but she could still hear him, "We'll keep them near the church grounds for the next couple of weeks; we won't let Evony ride her bike anywhere without us. We'll tighten security, so to speak, and we'll pray the police catch Mathieu Potts soon. Don't worry, love, we'll all be fine."

Mary sniffed; she'd been crying! Of all of this over-heard conversation that was the most terrifying for Evony. Mary never cried!

"You're right John. It'll be perfectly fine. I'll see where the girls are and make them lunch. They don't need to know what's going on, right?" Evony heard Mary's heels click a few paces and then they stopped, probably by the office door. "I love you John," Mary said very softly. John walked over to her and they must have started kissing because Evony heard disturbing sucking and smacking noises coming from the room.

Making silent gagging faces and trying to stifle her giggles she slid as quickly from her hiding place as she could. She crawled a few paces towards the swing set sitting in the garden and when she deemed herself far enough to not be seen from the office window, stood and ran towards the
"Pepper," she called as she ran between the stones. "Pepper I have something to teeeeeeelllllllllll you!"

"Shut up, you pest." Pepper's voice said from one of the ancient mausoleums.

Evony skipped through the open doors and laughed. "Why do you keep putting flowers on these old graves? All of these people have been dead for ages!"

"Shut up Evony! Go away." Pepper's arms were full of fresh cut flowers and she was setting little bouquets around the crypt. Her little sister bounced around, blabbing. Pepper just tuned it out. At sixteen she was too old and too wise to pay attention to everything Evony said.

"Pepper," Evony asked quietly. Pepper didn't look at her. She was setting some daisies on the shelf of a five year old who had died in 1900. "Pepper! I have something to tell you. And you're not listening to me."

Pepper finally looked at her little sister. "What, Evony. What do you have to tell me?"

Evony fiddled with her pigtail. "Is our father still alive?"

Pepper froze and went white; "what," she gasped. "What did you say?" Her light blue eyes were wide, panicked. She was crushing the flowers in her arms.

Evony was afraid. She backed away from her sister. "Nothing," she muttered. "I-I didn't say anything."

Pepper lunged at her and clutched her shoulder. "What did you say," she screamed at her sister.

Evony started to cry, "I heard John and Mary talking about our f-father! They think he's going to c-come and hurt us but I don't know how h-e-e can because I thought he was dead and you're really sc-c-caring me P-p-p-epper!" Her face was crumpled up and tears were spilling onto her jumper.

Pepper just stared at her, her blue eyes haunted.

"Pepper? Evony? What are you two doing in that tomb?" Mary's voice snapped at them.

Pepper jerked her eyes up to look at their guardian. Evony tried to stifle her sobs; not with much success.

"Well? What are you two doing? Evony? What's wrong baby?" Mary hurried over to the girls and gathered the youngest into her arms.

Evony started to sob again, "I h-heard you t-talkin' to Joooohn and I d-didn't know our father was st-ihill aliiiiive!"

Mary looked at Evony in shock; her eyes flashed to Pepper who was standing next to them, expressionless. "You heard that Evie? What have we told you about eavesdropping?"

"I-I knoooooow!" Evony buried her face in Mary's chest.

Mary smiled gently and patted her back. Then stretching her hand out to Pepper she said softly, "Pepper, honey, you okay?"

"No." Pepper shoved away Mary's hand and started to run back to the house.
"Pepper!" Mary watched the teenager run away and sighed. "Damn," she muttered. Evony was hiccopping in her arms. Mary sighed again, "Okay honey, let's go back to the house and get you cleaned up." She gathered the eight year old up into her arms and began walking back to the house.

"Mary," Evony's plaintive voice wrenched Mary's heart. She sniffed.

"Yeah, baby?"

"Why is our father going to kill us?" Evony twisted her fingers into her foster-mother's curly blond hair.

Mary stopped and took the girl's chin in her fingers. "Evie, your father is not going to kill you. He is a very sick man, who has done very bad things and John and I are going to keep you safe." She smiled at the little girl, who gazed at her doubtfully.

"Are you going to call the police?" Evony hoped she would be able to see a police officer up close tonight. She didn't think John and Mary should protect her and her sister against such a scary man.

Mary smiled and continued walking. "We already have. They're coming out tonight. One may even have dinner with us!"

Evony smiled. "That will be fun!" Mary laughed. "What are we going to do about Pepper, Mary?"

Mary's smile slipped from her face and she felt the same anger she had felt when these beautiful girls had been handed over to her after being hurt by their father. "We're going to keep her safe, Evie baby. Just like we always do."

Evony smiled, "Okay."

When they go to the porch Mary set her foster-daughter down and straightened her dress and hair. "Evie?"

"Yes Mary," Evony was ready to get her bike and go for a ride down to her best friend Heather's house. She jiggled up and down impatiently.

Mary placed her hands on her shoulders and stilled her. "Evony listen to me. I want you to stay close to the house. The police will be here soon. Find Pepper. Send her to John. I want you two to keep your eyes open. Stay in the house for now. Okay?" Her brow furrowed.

Evony nodded. Mary gave a small smile and stroked her cheek. "Oh baby, I'm sorry this is happening." She sighed and planted a kiss on Evony's forehead. "Keep your sister safe, all right. And don't bug her too much. She's scared." Mary stood and started heading for the door leading into the rectory.

"Why is Pepper scared," Evony piped up.

Turning, Mary said softly, "Because she remembers your father." And then she walked into the house.

Evony gazed after her and remembering her instructions, began searching for her sister.

She wondered what their father was like. She wondered if she was going to see him.

Walking into her room, she noticed the closet door was closed; she frowned, she never closed the closet. Maybe Pepper…
"Evony!" She jumped as John's booming voice called up the stairs. She dropped her hand, which had been resting on the closet door handle and rushed out of the room, forgetting her worries about the closed closet.

She was eight. Things didn't scare her as much as they should.
Bruce Prays

Bruce Banner was not normally a man of prayer, but in the aftermath of Loki’s futile world domination, Bruce prayed constantly. First he prayed the Other Guy wouldn't make another appearance. The city couldn't afford another destructive force running rampant through its streets. Then he prayed his green alter-ego wouldn't be the sole focus of the public's scrutiny. Finally he prayed he hadn't killed Pepper Potts' sister.

He wasn't entirely sure how he remembered her so clearly. Usually when the Other Guy had the reins, Bruce faded away. But for whatever reason she stood out in his memory; the Other Guy was absolutely fascinated by her. Very few ever approached him calmly when he was Hulked out. According to Barton he had come across her as well, only a block away from where the Other Guy had seen her; she had been helping children out of a wrecked bus. She had apparently recognized Barton and reacted fearfully towards him, which in turn interested Barton. He hadn't known who she was until Pepper had shown them all a picture of her younger sister.

Pepper was inconsolable. They had not been able to reach Evony, which meant either she had lost her phone or something had happened to her. Bruce searched for her single-mindedly after Loki and Thor had returned to Asgard.

Unlike the other Avengers he had a certain amount of anonymity which allowed him to travel the streets easily; just another dubious gift from the Other Guy.

Bruce didn't go alone. There were always SHIELD agents with him; not for his protection but for the public's protection. Bruce couldn't help but smile wryly at the thought of Director Fury still not trusting him. Agent Romanoff assured him it wasn't his fault. They just wanted to be sure of him.

So Bruce prayed; he first searched the streets and then the hospitals when a couple days had passed. It really was amazing how quickly the city recovered after the attacks. After the onslaught the hospitals and morgues had been swamped but soon they were able to transport bodies, living and otherwise, to sister hospitals and morgues in and around the city.

After three days Bruce had almost given up. Tony and Pepper had started searching outside of Midtown, just in case she had been sent to another hospital. Bruce kept to Midtown, mostly because he knew the area fairly well and with the city still trying to recover it wasn't as busy some of the other burrows.

The third day dawned and Bruce was walking through the halls of Mount Sinai Hospital. Two SHIELD operatives trailed him, dressed in their impeccable black suits and dark glasses. Somewhere Director Fury was watching him tirelessly.

Bruce's wry smile twisted his lips once again as he consulted the chart of yet another Jane Doe admitted May 5, 2012. A young nurse, with dark shadows under her eyes and messy hair stood before him with her arms full of promising Jane Doe files. His eyes scanned this woman, Jane Doe #15's paper work:

Admitted after Midtown attack on 5/5/12

Patient was unconscious upon admittance.

Paramedics revived twice in ambulance. MSH doctors revived once more before admitting into ICU. Left shoulder, left side chest required immediate surgery. Prior damage, suspected injury. Left
shoulder replaced, punctured lung collapsed twice during surgery. Patient is currently breathing via ventilator. Patient is concussed, kept on 24/7 observation. Minimal pain medication. Patient has not woken since being admitted, suspected brain damage. Scans are inconclusive.

Bruce glanced at the nurse standing in front of him holding some of the other Doe records he had requested. "Would you mind taking me to Jane Doe #15's room," he asked quietly. It wouldn't hurt to see who this woman was. Armed with a picture of Evony, Pepper had given him before he set out on this task, Bruce Banner walked into Jane Doe #15's room.

He stood gazing at the slender woman lying on the bed almost disbelieving what he saw. After all this time, he had found Evony Potts.

Behind him one of the SHIELD agents was talking quietly on his cell phone, requesting a helicopter with medical equipment. The other agent was asking the nurse for the doctor. The poor girl looked terribly confused. Bruce could do nothing but stare at the woman the Other Guy had saved in the middle of West 54th Street and thank god he hadn't killed yet another innocent person.

After many threats from the agents and quiet reassurances from Bruce, Evony Potts' frazzled doctor agreed to her release, mostly because the hospital could use the bed and because he saw the young woman as a lost cause. Bruce promised to mention the hospital bills to Tony and Pepper and rushed up to the helipad where Evony was being loaded carefully onto a SHIELD chopper. The short flight to Stark Tower would be hard on her already beaten body, the sooner they got her settled the better for all involved.

Bruce gripped her limp ice cold hand and talked to Tony on his head set, giving him a rundown of Evony's state and the equipment they would need for her care. When they touched down on the Tower roof Pepper and Tony were there to greet them; Pepper started to cry hysterically, while Tony directed Bruce and the medical team where to take Evony.

Once they had her hospital bed set up in the lab and all of her equipment arranged around her Bruce took charge, shooing everyone out of the room with promises of constant reports. He then began the long, arduous, task of repairing Evony Potts.
Evony felt vaguely irritated at the persistent beeping next to her head. She should turn the alarm clock and get up but she really just wanted to lie in bed and try to fight off this god-awful headache.

Urgh, she thought, fine. (BEEP) Fine.

Inwardly groaning she tried to reach with her left hand towards the beeping alarm clock.

Fiery pain gripped her chest and shoulder and her left arm wouldn't move; not that she would have moved it anyway. She was paralyzed by brutal agony. It wrapped her in red-hot wires and made her gasp in terror.

The beeping at her left increased in speed: BEEP BEEP BEEP BEEP!

Suddenly cool hands were cupping her face and a man's voice began saying her name.

"Evony? Evony, you're okay. Evony can you open your eyes for me? I know you're in pain but I need you to open your eyes for me. Evony? Please honey, open your eyes. I can help you; you just need to open your eyes."

His voice broke through her fiery prison slowly; Evony latched onto his voice and used it to calm her racing heart. The hands were back, slightly callused fingers rubbed her temples and cheeks gently. His quiet, calming voice kept up its mantra, and slowly but surely her heart rate settled and the pain faded to a dull, but constant ache.

(BEEP Beep Beep...Beep...Beep...Beep)

Evony focused on remembering how to open her eyes; her head felt like it had been through a meat grinder. Finally she got it. It was extremely difficult, but eventually she did it.

Her eyelids fluttered open and she flinched at the bright light beaming down on her. Those hands were back on her face and fingers gently peeled back her eyelids, one by one, forcing her to stare directly into the bright light which she realized was coming from a penlight. Her eyes adjusted quickly in response to the blinding flash. The man inspecting her let out a sigh of relief and the light clicked off.

Evony squeezed her eyes shut and then fluttered them open again. The blackness behind her lids terrified her; she felt like she had been asleep for years. Now that she was awake she didn't want to slip into that darkness again.

As her eyes drifted open she took stock of her surroundings. She was in a bed with railings. All sorts
of medical equipment surrounded her, including a heart monitor. That was where the annoying beeping was coming from, she thought, relieved. She stared at it for a second, watched the lines squiggle up and flatten steadily and felt relief that her heart was still working.

A noise to her right grabbed her attention and the monitor spiked as her heart raced fearfully. A man of medium height and build was standing in front of one of the machines hooked up to her and was holding her charts. He was making notes from the numbers flashing on its screen. Evony thought she recognized him, but she wasn't sure. His dark hair was curly and there was no trace of gray in it, so it wasn't Tony.

The man turned around when the monitor began beeping hurriedly again. His dark brown eyes met her slightly panicked blue ones and he gave a wry smile.

"Hey," was all he said.

Evony just gazed at him in wonder. She swallowed hurriedly, trying to get some moisture in her parched throat, as he walked over to her. He stopped by her bed and picked up her wrist to measure her pulse; she said creakily, "Hi Dr. Banner."

Bruce just gazed at her; his brow furrowed as he felt his interest in this woman spike. Her face was pale and slightly skeletal, her dark blue eyes pain filled and the bandages wrapping her head hid her dark red hair. But in his mind's eye he remembered her approaching the Other Guy fearlessly, rubble and blood streaked her face and her hair was coated in dirt but her eyes were filled with respect. When her hand had settled on the Other Guys arm she had gazed at him with no fear in her countenance; even more amazingly the Other Guy had not responded angrily.

Evony could not believe Dr. Bruce Banner stood over her. His eyes were kind and worried behind his gold framed spectacle, no trace of his green companion. As she studied him pain suddenly gripped her and her eyes clenched closed while her back arched reflexively. She groaned in agony and felt her muscles cramp as the pain rolled over her body.

Bruce grabbed a syringe filled with morphine and stabbed it into her IV. Her heart monitor was beeping frantically once again and her body radiated agony. He waited tensely for the pain meds to work; slowly, her body relaxed, the monitor stopped screaming and her eyes drifted open.

Her blue eyes were now clouded with medication, but as she started falling asleep her right hand reached for his. He gripped it tightly, "I'll be here when you wake up Evony," he reassured her.

She smiled and whispered, "Thank you Bruce…" She trailed off with a sigh. Her hand went limp in Bruce's and he set it gently on the bed beside her. He checked her bindings, making sure the stitches in her shoulder and chest hadn't ripped open and that the bandage on her head didn't need changing.

As she slept he drifted around the lab, checking her monitors and the medication levels. When he was sure she was deeply asleep he settled behind the desk in the middle of the room.

"JARVIS," he asked, "Please wake Miss Potts and Mr. Stark. Evony just woke up."

"Right away Dr. Banner. This is very good news. Mr. Stark and Miss Potts will be greatly relieved." The AI sounded pleased.

Bruce smiled briefly and rubbed his hand tiredly across his face, feeling the bristle of his beard and the clenched muscles of his jaw. This had been the longest week of his life.

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"Evony, I'm pretty sure 'zort' isn't a word." Bruce glanced at the Scrabble board set up on Evony's lap desk. His eyes were sparkling behind his golden frames.

Evony laughed, "yeah it's a word! It means…um…to make an impolite noise out of one's nose!"

Bruce raised his eyebrows at her, "oh yeah? Like this?" He snorted. Evony grinned. "Okay, I'll let you keep it. So that's…fifteen points to you." Evony laughed, victorious and grabbed some new tiles. Bruce rolled his eyes.

It was four days since Evony had woken up the first time. She was propped up in her hospital bed, still attached to several machines and still bandaged. Her face was pale, her eyes shadowed and drugged. But she was alert and her body was healing, slowly but surely.

Bruce looked at his tiles and seeing an open Y on the board he laid Q-W-E-R-T.

Evony stared at it; once again he had played a fifty point word. She glared at him. Bruce just raised his eyebrows and rummaged in the bag for five replacement tiles.

Evony stuck her tongue out at him and placed T next to the word "Urd".

Bruce laughed. "Touché," he muttered as he played the word "valiant".

Evony groaned, "How do you get such great words?"

"Because I'm a genius," Bruce said grinning. He then tapped her forehead, "and because I'm not suffering from a traumatic head injury."

They continued the game in general silence except for when they made fun of each other or challenged a word.

When Bruce played the word "jangler" and won the game with a whopping seven hundred points, Evony laughed.

"Next time we're playing Uno! You don't have to be a super genius to win that game!"

Bruce chuckled as he cleaned up the board, "You'd be surprised. You can use some good strategy for that game." Evony smacked him.

"You're such a jerk Bruce Banner! Haven't you heard? Let the ladies with brain damage win the game. It makes them feel better about their pathetic state." She grinned at him as he rested his arms on the bed railings.

He gazed at her soberly, "I don't think you're pathetic." He reached out and hesitantly stroked the back of her hand. She gazed at him in surprise. He continued, "I think you're extremely brave and very strong. Not many people would have survived what you went through. I…" he swallowed. Evony just stared at him in fascination.

His gentle hands were wringing themselves, a tic he had when he was nervous, left forefinger and thumb rubbing the webbing between the index and thumb of his right hand.

He looked at her with agony in his eyes, "I haven't apologized for accosting you in the streets that day. And I haven't apologized for leaving you. If I had stayed with you for just a moment longer none of this would have happened." He gestured at her body.

Evony frowned, "Bruce, you don't have to apologize! You saved me, not just once but several
times!" She reached out and cupped his chin when he refused to look at her. "Bruce, look at me. You," she shook his chin gently, "you saved me. And if you had stayed a moment longer, Tony would have crashed to the ground and probably died." He sighed. She stroked her hand gently on his cheek, "never doubt you were a hero that day." She smiled at him.

Bruce gave a sideways little grin, "Well, it wasn't really me who saved the day, now was it?" He turned away from her

Evony caught his hand, "Bruce! Just because the Other Guy had the reins doesn't mean you weren't there somewhere in his head, giving him directions. I know that for a fact."

He gazed at her and wondered again at the clarity of his memories pertaining to this woman.

Evony sighed and settled back on the bed, closing her eyes. Bruce jerked back to the present and took her pulse. It was going much too fast for his liking. He cupped her face and asked quietly, "Evony are you in pain?"

She shook her head, firming her lips in resolution.

He frowned. "Evony, tell me the truth. It's not good for you to be in pain. Your body needs to heal. Let me get you some more meds." He began heading for his desk where her medications were arranged.

"Do you have to?" she whispered.

He turned back to her and smiled kindly, "It'll be better for you to sleep the pain off."

She sighed forlornly, "I don't want to sleep. I want to sit here with you and talk."

Bruce selected a vial of pain killers and a syringe and measured the needed amount into the needle. Walking back to her he stuck it in her iv and said, "I'll be here when you wake up and we can talk until you fall asleep, okay? This is only a half dose so you won't be as groggy when you wake up."

Setting the empty syringe aside he leaned on the railings of her bed near her head. She smiled at him, "Thanks Doctor Banner."

He smiled and smoothed her hair out of her eyes. His fingers brushed the bandages at her left temple and she flinched. "Did that hurt?" He narrowed his eyes at her as she straightened her face.

"Not a lot." He frowned as she attempted to change the subject, "Bruce what are you and Tony working on?"

Bruce straightened and walked back to his chair. Settling into it and picking up his book he said, "Just some designs for a new arc reactor."

Evony struggled against the drug haze, "New reactor? Isn't his current one strong enough?" Her eyes were getting heavy.

"Well you know Tony, he has to make his toys better and better." Bruce waited for her to fall asleep. She smiled and snuggled deeper under her blankets. "Bruce?"

"Mmhmm"

"Why do you turn green?" Her voice was clearer than he thought was possible, even with half a dose of meds.
His eyes shot up to meet her guileless gaze. He frowned. "Go to sleep, Evony."

"No. I want to know. Why do you turn green?" She was glaring at him now, struggling with her whole being not to fall asleep.

He sighed and marked his place. Meeting her gaze, he sat forward in the chair. "It's a chemical change due to large amounts of radiation."

"How much radiation?" He was surprised she wasn't forcing her eyes open with her fingers.

"Enough to equal an atomic bomb." He shifted uncomfortably in his chair as her eyes widened.

"Were you standing in the middle of a bomb site?" She sounded horrified.

Bruce paused. These were memories he didn't want to think about. Evony was still watching him, like a child listening to an exciting fairy tale.

He caved. "We were running experiments, trying to replicate a Dr. Abraham Erskine's super soldier formula." He glanced at Evony to see if she understood.

"The formula that made Steve Rogers Captain America?" she was still with him.

He nodded and rubbed his forehead. "We had a couple volunteers. One kid, his name was Emil Blonsky, was the perfect specimen. He was small, asthmatic, just skin and bones. We were foolish enough to think this was all the formula required. We did not even consider the recipients personality. We were not Erskine." He sighed again. Evony yearned to wrap her arms around him, to soothe his pain.

"What happened?" Bruce smiled at the curiosity in her voice. She really was too inquisitive for her own good.

"We started the sequence. We thought we knew the exact amount of radiation needed for the formula. All seemed to be going well and then…well things didn't go well."

His hands were rubbing each other again. Evony stirred. "Bruce? How did the…Other Guy happen?"

His mouth quirked. He raised his haunted brown eyes to her wide blue ones and said softly, "Blonsky began reacting dangerously to the formula. His body began rebelling against the radiation. The lab went in melt down. Something needed to be done with the remaining radiation before it hurt anyone else. I plugged myself into the system and rerouted the program around Blonsky's harness and siphoned the radiation into my body." He took a shuddering breath and closed his eyes. "That amount of radiation? I should have died. But…I didn't." He stood and walked over to his desk and fiddled with papers on his desk.

"So…you saved that Blonsky kid and everyone in the lab?" Her soft voice made the small hairs on his neck raise. He felt something stir in his body; he didn't know what it was. The Other Guy stirred in his mind. Hush, he whispered to it, there is no danger. The Other Guy subsided.

Bruce looked at her and said, "I suppose I did."

"Then Bruce? You're a hero. And the Other Guy is too. I think he saved your life." She smiled at him sleepily.

Bruce gave a small smile and walked over to her bedside. "You think so?" he asked softly.
Her eyes darkened and her hand stroked his cheek. "I know so." And her eyes finally drifted closed.

Bruce caught her falling hand and kissed the tips of her fingers gently. "Thank you Evony Potts," he whispered. Then slipping on his gold spectacles he settled in his chair and opened his book at his spot and prepared for a long night of thinking. Evony slept through the night oblivious to his ponderings and to the way his eyes darkened as he gazed at her.

Not much was read that night.

**

One night, after a very competitive game of Uno, Bruce was slouched in his armchair dozing, when he jerked awake violently. His heart beat frantically for a moment and the Other Guy stirred, grumbling. But he was fine. He forced himself to be calm, to push the Other Guy back to sleep. His ears perked, trying to hear the sound that had woken him.

There it was again; a whimpering, like a child crying. His eyes swung around the room, searching through the shadows until they landed on Evony.

She was twisting in her sleep her back arched her hand knotted in the sheets. And that horrible crying was coming from her.

He threw his book onto the floor and rushed to her side.

"Evony, hey hey, Evony wake up, wake up honey," he chanted while he gently stroked her face.

Evony shuddered under his hands and the whimpering continued for several moments. Bruce knew the pain killers were making it hard for her to wake up but he couldn't help but be a little concerned about her obvious terror.

Suddenly she shrieked, "STOP!" and her hand thrashed out at him. His heart froze for a second and he grabbed her hand gently in his.

"Evony? Evie can you hear me? It's just a dream. You're safe, I'm right here with you. Come on, baby, come back." Some of her panicked twisting ceased and the whimpering was fading away. He continued to stroke her face and calling softly to her. He felt the Other Guy stirring in the recesses of his mind but he pushed him away and concentrated on Evie.

The Other Guy subsided; there were no enemies about-just a panicked young woman having a nightmare. Not his concern. Bruce sighed as the tension in his mind eased.

Finally Evony's eyes snapped open. She gazed at him with something like wonder in her eyes. Her good hand reached out clutched his tightly.

"Bruce?" He felt like his heart would break at the plaintive note in her voice. "Why are you crying?"

She pulled her hand free and ran her thumb under his eye; he was surprised to realize there really were tears on his cheeks.

He pulled away and quickly wiped his eyes with his back turned to her. "I wasn't crying," his usually mild voice was gruff.

She stared at him wonderingly. "What happened?"

"You were having a nightmare." He turned in time to see her face freeze in a rictus of horror.
"Oh..." was all she said. She raised her shaking hand to her eyes and took a ragged breath. "Well, that's not good," her usually chipper voice quavered.

"No it really wasn't. You were terrified." He rested his arms on the railings and leaned over her. "What were you dreaming about?"

He watched as her pupils dilated and her cheeks lost what little color they had. "What was I...I don't know. I-I don't remember." She shifted her eyes away from his and began anxiously twisting her fingers around her sheets.

Bruce leaned even further over the railing and forced her to meet his eyes. "Evony, talk to me. Were you dreaming about the battle?" His heart wrenched at the thought of her having nightmares about being accosted by the Other Guy. He hoped he hadn't scarred her too badly...

Evony felt like she was drowning in his eyes; he always made her lose her concentration. Bruce waited patiently for her to answer. As she took a deep breath she fought off the remainders of her dream and tried to ignore the ghostly fingers clutching her throat. Squaring her shoulders she told Bruce about her nightmare.

"Pepper and I were sent to foster parents when we were children. Our mother had...died... in a car crash and we were told our father had too. When John and Mary Collins took us in I was three and Pepper was around eleven. We were...well, we were damaged goods, I guess you could say. But John and Mary had lied to us, to protect us, I suppose. There hadn't been a car accident; our father had killed our mother in our kitchen one night when she tried to stand up to him."

Evony's breath hitched and her hand was trembling. Bruce clasped it, trying to pass some of his strength on to her. He felt a familiar anger creeping into his bones; the Other Guy was growling quietly in the back of his head.

Her eyes closed and a few more tears slid down her cheeks. He wanted her to forget her fear. "Evony, you don't have to tell me. I can give you some more medication to help you sleep..."

She shook her head, "No. No, I need to tell you, so you understand." She swallowed more tears and her blue eyes flashed at him. "He came for us one night. It was years later and he'd escaped from prison to finish the job." She laughed hopelessly. "He hid in our closet, of all places, and waited for us to go to bed."

Bruce stilled. His heart thundered in his chest and the Other Guy snarled furiously. "What happened," he ground out through clenched jaws.

"He went after me first. I woke to my father leaning over me with his hands squeezing my throat. Pepper..." she closed her eyes, a small smile forming on her face. "Pepper attacked him with our Fisher Price vacuum cleaner."

Bruce let out a startled laugh, "What?"

Evony laughed too, her eyes still closed. After a moment her smile slid off her face and she continued, "She cracked him over the head and his hands loosened enough for me to get breath to scream. He slammed his fist into Pepper's stomach and she went flying across the room. She smashed into the wall and I was so sure he'd killed her. I screamed again and tried to run away but he caught me...I..." she passed her shaking hand over her eyes again. "The next thing I knew, John was in the room along with a police officer and my father was being dragged off of me. He was screaming such horrible things and some little part of me just wanted to hug him." She laughed, a brittle sound in the silent lab. "Somehow, my eight year old self knew who he was and why he was..."
there. The man nearly crushed my throat and I just wanted to be loved by him. How sick is that?"
She turned her head away from Bruce as her hand clenched against her hip.

Bruce was quiet, staring at his folded hands. "That's not sick, Evie," he whispered. Evony turned back to him. He smiled ruefully, his hands rubbing nervously. "My father…well let's just say I have a very similar story to yours. It's ironic really, how most of us in this Tower have had twisted childhoods."

Evony smiled sadly, "Wounded souls tend to band together I think."

They gazed at each other for a moment and then Bruce flushed. Clearing his throat he moved around to his desk and began rummaging through her medications. Coming back to her with a syringe and vial, he asked her, "So…your dream tonight? It was about that night when you were little?"

Evony was watching him dosing her IV. She cleared her throat when he glanced at her, "I haven't had dreams about that night for a long time." She shifted in the bed, feeling the drugs once more working through her system. "I don't know why it decided to come back tonight…” She settled against the pillows as her eyes got heavy.

Bruce glanced at her as he wrote in her chart, "It's probably the pain killers. I've switched them now and changed the dosage. Hopefully it will let you sleep through the night without dreaming." He walked back to her bed and watched her eyes getting heavy. "Although, the fact that you're dreaming so vividly is a good thing."

Her eyes opened and she smiled vaguely at him, "Oh? Why?" She forced herself to pay attention to what he was saying.

Bruce laughed and tapped her gently between the eyes, "It means your brain wasn't damaged." She smiled.

"Oh! I guess that is a good thing." Her body started to relax and she settled even deeper into the bed. Bruce moved back to his chair. Before he sat down she whispered, "Thank you Bruce."

He smiled at her and slipped his glasses back on, "Anytime Evony." She sighed and her eyes finally closed.

Bruce watched her sleep and thought about what she had revealed to him tonight. He fought back memories of his own father screaming at him. Thankfully Brian Banner had been locked away in Almagordo for years now. Bruce hadn't seen his father since he was six…

Ironic, he thought to himself sleepily, his mouth quirking. Evony snored softly, her body curled into itself; as the night continued, Bruce sank deeper into his chair and the two wounded souls slept soundly.

**

After Evony opened her eyes for the first time it got easier and easier for her to wake up and the pain lessened day by day. Her favorite time of day was in the early morning before Pepper or Tony checked on her.

Evony would open her eyes to the soft light of the lab and see Bruce slumped in the chair beside her bed. The poor man, she had told him he could go to his own bed at night but he refused, stating he wanted to be here with her in case something happened in the night. Evony was secretly pleased. She didn't want to be left alone in Tony's lab.
After waking up she would lay quietly and watch Bruce sleep. He was always sprawled in the arm chair, his legs stretched as far as they would go and his head propped in one hand. Most times his glasses were knocked sideways on his face and if she was really lucky, sometimes he would have drooled in the night. That always made her giggle.

Sometimes Bruce would have fallen asleep in his chair with one of Tony's tablets. He and Tony were up to something; they tried to be subtle about it but Pepper and Evony weren't fooled.

Pepper called them the "science guys," which was very appropriate.

Evony woke, this morning, unbelievably excited. It had been three weeks since she had first woken up and Bruce had finally agreed to letting her leave the lab; she had healed rapidly since then but was still confined to her bed. Her arm was bound tightly to her chest with a heavy duty black sling which irritated her. While Bruce praised her progress and allowed her to walk around the lab occasionally, he was concerned by her head injury.

The Chituarian soldier had smashed the rock viciously against her skull shattering the delicate bones in her temple. Mount Sinai had replaced them with titanium plates which Bruce deemed appropriate. After seeing half of her skull with drastically short hair and horrific scars, Evony had asked Pepper to even the rest of her hair out. Bruce had hidden his panic. He personally loved her hair long. Evony loved having her hair so short. Especially since Bruce and Tony were constantly running scans on her brain. Tony kept laughing at her, because even with a chin length bob, her bangs still fell in her eyes.

As Evony thought every day as Bruce leaned over her with his sensors, having nasty smelling jelly gelling up one's hair was not how one wanted to start the day. Especially when one's doctor was so gorgeous.

Today Evony woke around six, and after stretching carefully in her very uncomfortable hospital bed, she rolled onto her right side and watched Bruce sleeping. He had one leg draped over the arm of his chair and his head was cocked at the oddest angle. Evony couldn't help but gaze at him appreciatively. He really was pretty cute. Even with drool on his chin.

When Bruce wasn't around Tony would heckle her about falling for a giant green monster. She bore it cheerfully, but kept her feelings from Bruce. He didn't need to know how she felt; she had also sworn Tony to secrecy. He had promised after she blackmailed him by telling him she knew about the engagement ring reserved and waiting in Tiffany's.

Reaching for a pencil sitting on the bedside table, Evony sat up and chucked it gently at Bruce.

It smacked him in the chest. He jerked awake, sitting up so fast he almost fell out of the chair. Evony giggled. Bruce put his glasses away and glared at her; as he stood he popped his back and grimaced.

"You really should sleep in a bed Dr. Banner," Evony said as he walked over to inspect her injuries.

Bruce ignored this and asked instead, "How are you feeling? Are you sure you want to do this today? It wouldn't hurt to rest down here another day or so." His gentle fingers traveled from her shoulder to her chest as he spoke, they were constantly pressing and prodding, his dark brown eyes studying her face for any flinches or grimaces. She only felt the slightest of pangs as his fingers pressed against her chest above her left breast but this pain was manageable.

She thanked god she was no longer hooked up to the heart monitor because her heart rate increased drastically as his fingers brushed her breast. That would be embarrassing for both of them.
"I feel perfectly fine," she said. Bruce just cocked an eyebrow at her and inspected her temple. "Well, not perfectly fine," she amended. "I still have headaches and my shoulder hurts if I move too fast. But that's normal!" she hurried to finish as Bruce's mouth opened and his brow furrowed. "I'll be able to handle not being under medical surveillance every moment of every day. I'll take it easy." She was practically begging him now, "Plus you'll be able to keep an eye on me all of the time. Please, I don't want to stay in this horrid room anymore. I want to sit in the lounge with Pepper and Tony and I want to meet the rest of you guys," she finished breathlessly. Bruce just stood and stared at her with his mouth slightly agape.

"Evony, I'm not sure you should meet the rest of us 'guys.' The Director is already on edge because you're living here. He's afraid you'll tell people about us." Bruce leaned on the railing and gazed into her sapphire blue eyes; she tried to look as innocent and healthy as possible.

"But I already know about the Avengers! I met that one SHIELD agent right in the middle of the battle and Tony's known me since I was fifteen." She tried to sit up; Bruce pushed her back gently when she gasped after pulling her shoulder too fast. She lay on the bed and glared at him, "And then there's you Doctor Banner." He frowned as she continued, "I obviously know you both as a human and...as the Other Guy." Her voice trailed off as he rubbed one hand across his forehead. "Please Bruce?" She set her hand on his which lay on the rail by her side. "I just want to be in a normal bed and I want to finally see my studio." Her quiet voice pleaded with him.

He dropped his hand and set it on top of hers and met her gaze, "I'll let you leave the lab. On one condition," one finger flashed up as her eyes lit up, he clenched her hand as she started to pull away, "if you feel anything, either a piercing headache or if your shoulder becomes even a little too stiff you will let me know." She nodded adamantly. Bruce sighed. He didn't want her to get hurt again. He worried over how protective he felt towards this woman. What if the Other Guy manifested while he was near her? And this Tower was the worst place for her to be if she was going to stay safe.

On a sudden impulse he brushed his hand through her bangs which had tumbled into her eyes.

Before Evony could react the doors swept open and Tony and Pepper burst through them like a whirlwind. They were arguing, as usual. Pepper was pushing a wheelchair.

"I really don't understand why all of the towers have to be converted to Avengers headquarters. Wouldn't it be better to have one central base?" Pepper was not pleased. Tony was in front of her with another shawarma sandwich in his hand.

"Pepper, what if the Cap and I get called out to LA or D.C. and can't get back home and want somewhere to crash? Want us to stay in a seedy hotel or god forbid, ask SHIELD for a bunk?" Tony winked at Evony and Bruce and took another giant bite out of his sandwich. He then froze and took stock of the situation.

Bruce was bent over Evony, their hands were resting against each other and Bruce had his other hand touching her hair. Tony's brow wrinkled.

"Banner! What are you doing with the younger Miss Potts?" Bruce jumped back at the accusing tone Tony used. Pepper stood at the foot of Evony's bed with her arms folded and her eyebrow arched. Evony flushed and scowled at Tony.

"None of your business Mr. Stark. You interrupted a private consultation with my doctor. If you're going to be nasty, I'll have Dr. Banner remove you," she said imperiously.

Tony arched an eyebrow and looked at Bruce, who was trying to appear very busy. "I'd like to see Banner try." He laughed and turning back to Evony clapped a hand on her leg.
"Well kid, you ready to get out of here? We got your room and studio all fixed up. Took a while longer than we were hoping, but hey, when aliens destroy your tower there's only so much we can do. So, how about it?" so saying he took one last bite of his shawarma and folded down the railings on the side of her bed.

Pepper watched her worriedly. "Evie are you sure you want to do this now? You're still really pale. And if something happens Dr. Banner's equipment will be floors away!" she pulled at her bottom lip while Tony and Bruce helped Evony into the wheelchair.

Evony couldn't help being excited, "I'll be fine Pepper! JARVIS can get Dr. Banner the moment something happens, if it happens, and I'll be around everyone." She missed Tony and Bruce exchange glances at this statement and she continued, "Besides, I'm so pale because I haven't seen sunlight for weeks! I want to sit on a balcony and drink a beer, not hide down here in the bowels of this tower and drink Campbell's soup. I want to get out!" She watched as Bruce and Tony gathered up her belongings; there were books, sketchpads, pencils and an mp3 player scattered around the lab. Tony stacked them all in Bruce's arms. Pepper just sighed and began wheeling her little sister towards the elevator.

"I really just want you to be careful. First the car accident and now this? We're going to have to keep you in a plastic bubble, Evie! You're just an accident waiting to happen." Pepper's tone was disparaging.

Tony and Bruce had been talking quietly together; at this point Tony broke in, "If she had listened to me she may not have had the crap knocked out of her by an alien or run across this green guy," he smacked Bruce on the shoulder.

As they rode up the tower, Tony heckled Bruce, Bruce worried about Evony, Pepper gushed about Evony's studio and Evony sat quietly listening to it all with a smile on her face. She was getting out of the lab. She was going to meet the rest of the Avengers.

When Pepper propelled her into her bedroom and Bruce confined her to her bed for a few more hours, Evony just glared at them all. "I want to see my studio," she pouted.

Tony chuckled, "Which translates to 'I want to snoop through the tower and see all of the superheroes living here.' Isn't that right kid?" He cocked an eyebrow at her from where he leaned in the doorway.

Evony groaned and threw a pillow at him. It fell short. "Tony I am so sick of lying in bed!"

Tony straightened and walked to her bedside. He placed the pillow behind her back, saying, "It's just for today. Banner just wants you to get settled before you gallivant around the tower, terrorizing everyone, okay? Just for today. We'll check on you in a little while. Just get some sleep." He stroked her hair back from her eyes and gave her a small smile, very unlike Tony Stark.

Pepper was in the hallway talking to Bruce about where he would stay so he could have easy access to Evony's room. Bruce met her gaze and gave his signature wry smile. Then he and Tony went back to the labs. Pepper sighed and sat down next to Evony.

"Evie, I have a meeting in a little while. I'll have my phone so if you need me just text. Let JARVIS know if you need any help." She stroked her little sister's hair. She sighed, "Stay in bed for a little while longer. It won't hurt you for one more day. Okay?"

Evony nodded, "Okay Pepper."
"Promise me?" Pepper quirked her eyebrow.

Evony grinned and settled deeper into her pillows. "All right Pepper?" she laughed. "I'll stay here for today. But you guys owe me a tour!"

Pepper laughed and then kissed Evony on her forehead. "I'm so glad you're here with me Evie. I really missed you. I hope the rest of your stay goes better than the past few weeks." She stood to go but Evony grabbed her hand,

"Pepper, would you think I was mentally deranged if I said I don't mind all of the stuff that's happened?"

Pepper gazed at her little sister, "I wouldn't say mentally deranged. Maybe just a little crazy." She tapped Evony's temple, "You do have a metal plate holding your head together." She headed for the door; just as she was about to close it she leaned back into the room and said, "Dr. Banner is pretty hot, isn't he?" She laughed at Evony's shocked face and closed the door.
Pepper couldn't believe she had lost her little sister!

She tried to still the panic as she walked quickly through the halls of Stark Industries; most of the employees ignored her. They were used to Howard Stark's intern running around the facility. Pepper tried to appear calm and organized; she didn't hurry too fast, that may have people questioning her...

"Where is she?" Pepper muttered as she glanced into every room she passed. No Evony.

"Miss Potts!" Pepper froze at the sound of her boss's commanding voice. Turning she schooled her features into a look of polite interest. Howard Stark bore down on her with his arms folded behind his back. Several assistants followed him obediently like puppies.

"Mr. Stark! I didn't realize you were in the office today!" Pepper's heart began to pound. Why had she brought Evony to work with her? It was just her luck that the head of the company had come in when he should have been on a plane to New York!

"I was just about to ask you that myself, Miss Potts. Isn't today your day off?" Howard Stark settled before her. Tall and very muscular for a man in his sixties, his sharp black eyes blazed at her, pinning her on the spot.

Pepper swallowed and fiddled with her purse, "I-uh-I um..." she stammered.

Stark's eyebrows rose up his forehead as Pepper blushed a brilliant shade of red. "Well spit it out Potts! I have a plane to catch." He waited as his secretary forced herself to look into his eyes.

"I lost my sister." She choked out, turning even redder. She was going to be fired! She wasn't supposed to bring family members to the compound. She had only brought Evony because Evony had been suspended this afternoon and Pepper had had to pick her up on the way to the office.

"Lost your sister?" Stark's eyebrows went even higher. "Why is your sister here?"

Pepper groaned internally. She did not want to explain to this man about her burn-out sister. It was just too mortifying!

"Well, Miss Potts? Why is your sister here in the factory?" He prompted her. Mr. Stark did not sound angry; he sounded irritated but she thought he was also trying to hold back a laugh.

She glanced at him and blurted out, her words running together, "I had to come to the office to pick up some files and on my way here I also had to pick Evony up from yet another school that's suspended her." She finished breathlessly and sighed. There. It was off her chest. Now Stark could fire her.

"Ah. Well, we should find her shouldn't we?" Howard Stark took her arm and they headed down the hall, entourage included.

"You're drawing the wheels wrong."

Tony Stark jerked around at the sound of someone speaking behind him. His eyes took in the girl standing behind him. She was in a school but her eyes were made up in heavy black eyeliner, her purple hair was piled on the top of her head and held in place with what looked like bones and string and piercings covered her ears and face.
"Who the hell are you?" he exclaimed. She was a gothic version of the escort he had got last night!

She smirked and grabbed the pencil out of his hand. Leaning over his sketch of a suped up hot rod, she said, "Don't draw the wheels like a Looney Toons cartoon. You need to make them 3-D; use your pencil to shade them. Don't draw with such hard lines either."

Tony gazed in amazement as his rudimentary sketch suddenly turned into a full on concept drawing of his dream car.

"How did you do that?" He gazed at the girl as she straightened and absentmindedly slid the pencil into her bun. "That's amazing!"

She blushed faintly and gave a small smile that looked out of place on her severely made up face.

"I like drawing. It's the only thing I'm halfway decent at." She shrugged. Glancing at the sketch she said, "Know what that's missing?" She quirked an eyebrow at him and smiled mischievously.

Tony laughed, "What?"

"Flames." She bent back over the drawing and sketched flames along the side of the hot rod. Grabbing some pens from his desk she colored the car in.

"Red and gold, I like it." Tony watched as she dug in her hair and pulled out a gold colored pencil. She flashed him a grin and colored the flames in.

Suddenly a loud voice spoke from the doorway, "Anthony Stark are those the memos I wanted you to copy for me?"

Tony's smile slid from his face and he scowled. Evony froze and shrank up against the wall, trying desperately to disappear.

"Don't know Dad. Looked like blank paper to me." Tony leaned back in his chair and folded his hands behind his head.

Howard Stark, Pepper at his shoulder, stormed into the room. Snatching the sketch off the desk he glared at his son. "These are the memos! I needed you to get those sent to New York days ago! You realize it's the fifth of March and my meeting is tonight?"

"Yeah Dad. And why aren't you on your plane yet? Don't want to be late to your all important meeting." Tony smirked and met his father's furious gaze fearlessly.

Howard Stark trembled, his hands clenched in fury. Then his eyes landed on Evony who was staring at him with terror in her eyes. She was shaking like a leaf, her blue eyes haunted.

Stark forced himself to calm down and held the sketch out to her, "Did you do this Miss Potts?" he said very quietly. Tony's eyebrows shot up and he glanced at the girl hiding behind his chair.

Evony fought off haunting memories and gave a small nod.

Stark smiled, "It's very good. You're a better concept artist than some of my professionals." He held the drawing out to her. "You should keep this. Bring it to me when you graduate. I always need more artists." He turned on his heel and started for the door. Before he left, he turned back to Tony and said coldly, his face scrunched into the scowl he wore whenever he talked to his son, "While your mother and I are in New York we're leaving Obadiah in charge. Don't do anything stupid, Anthony."
And then he and his entourage were gone.

Only Pepper was left. She was glaring at Evony, her arms folded and her fingers tapping furiously on her elbows. Tony glanced at his father's secretary and wondered if he could get her in his bed like the last one. That would piss the old man off royally...

Behind him, the girl let out a trembly sigh. He glanced at her and saw she had slid down the wall, still clutching the drawing. Her head rested on her knees and she was shaking.

Tony got out of his chair and knelt in front of her. Tapping her shoulder he said quietly, "You okay kid?"

Howard's secretary walked over to them; she knelt, balancing on her heels and pulled her skirt over her knees. She stroked the girl's hair out of her eyes and said softly, "Evie, honey, are you all right?"

Tony raised his eyebrows at the red haired secretary; she met his eyes calmly and said, "She's my sister."

Tony nodded and said to the girl huddled in front of him, "So you just met Howard Stark. Do you feel special now?" The secretary shot him an irritated glance.

Her sister sniffed and shook her head.

Tony smiled. "No? Yeah, I never feel very special when I talk to him either." He tapped her arm, she glanced at him from around her arm, he gave her a big smile, "At least you don't have to live with him!"

She giggled. Tony stood and held his hand out. She hesitated for a moment and then clasped it. He hauled her up, saying, "I'm Tony. Welcome to my own personal hell."

She nibbled her lip, he still held her hand. She glanced at Pepper, who had also stood up; she then took a deep breath and said, "I'm Evony Potts."

Tony pumped her hand, "Pleased to meet you Evony Potts!" Turning to the older woman standing next to him he asked, "And you're her sister?"

Pepper frowned, he had met her just last week! "I'm Pepper Potts. Your father's secretary."

Tony snapped his fingers and shot her his most winning smile. "That's right! Have to say, you seem much more capable than the last few."

Pepper's expression did not change. Evony stood awkwardly between them, still holding her sketch. Clearing her throat she said, "We should go Pepper."

Pepper sighed and glanced at her sister, "Yes. I have some words for you too young lady. Just wait till John and Mary hear about what you've done today."

Evony sighed. "Do we have to tell them?"

Pepper laughed shortly, "Yes we do! Come on, let's go."

She headed for the door.

Evony started following her but Tony grabbed her arm, "So what did you do today? Besides run into Howard Stark?"
She grinned and said proudly, "I got kicked out of my fourth high school!"

Tony laughed. "What'd you do?"

Pepper stormed back over to them and grabbing her sister by the should she snapped, "She was running a comic strip about her headmistress under the alias 'Chaos Sprite.' And she did not get kicked out, she got suspended." Tony roared with laughter as he sat back down at his desk.

"Better luck, next round kid. If you need any suggestions, just let me know. I know all the good prep schools in the city." He shot her a grin a as they were heading out the door; Evony slipped free of her older sister's grip and ran back to Tony. Setting the sketch back in front of him she grinned and gave him a quick hug.

"Bye Tony Stark!" she crowed as she ran back across the room.

"Bye Evony Potts! Send that comic strip to me; I'd like to read it!" Tony leaned back in his chair as the young lady flashed him a smile and a thumbs up before getting snatched out the door by her domineering sister.
Evony Meets an American Legend

Evony stayed in bed for almost two hours. In retrospect that was pretty impressive. For the first hour she answered some more of Joey's panicked emails, (he had survived the attack, mostly by hiding in his closet) and then when she got tired of playing on the internet, she dragged her sketchbook onto her lap.

She was working on a new idea, something that would never see the light of day; if Tony got his hands on it she would never hear the end of it.

But even her new idea couldn't interest her for long.

She sighed and looked around her room; the tower had seen heavy damage from the attack. Most of the top floors were in the process of being redone, including her room and studio. According to Pepper, Tony had made plans for each of the Avengers to have their own floor complete with the specific amenities each would use.

Pepper had had fun designing the 43rd floor for Steve Rogers; apparently it was styled like a 1940's flat from Brooklyn complete with an old fashioned gym and boxing ring.

Evony nibbled her lip absent-mindedly and tapped her fingers on the silver bedspread. Looking around her room she sighed. "This is so boring," she groaned. "I just want to walk somewhere." She nibbled her lip some more and then came to a decision.

Throwing back her comforter she got up and walked over to her bureau. Pulling open the drawers she realized all of her clothes had been replaced. Her luggage must have gotten lost or destroyed in the attack. Pulling out a lacy top, Evony burst into laughter, "Really, Pepper? When do I wear things like this?" Throwing the top back into the drawer she rummaged around until she found a pair of yoga pants and a concert tshirt that must have been salvaged.

Carrying her loot back to the bed she stood and looked at it.

"Fuck." She had forgotten all about the stupid sling.

Squaring her jaw, she unbuckled the sling and slid it carefully off her arm. Grimacing as her support vanished she slid her pajama top off, silently thanking Pepper for keeping her in a camisole under the shirt.

Finally she got herself dressed. It was only marginally better than the pajamas she had been wearing, but seeing as how this was an outfit she would wear in the studio, she felt fairly comfortable. She also grabbed a sweatshirt which she wore half on.

Her shoulder was screaming by the time she got it settled back into its sling; she grabbed the bottle of vicodin and took half a pill to help stave off the pain.

Checking herself in the mirror, she tried to straighten her shortened hair; it wouldn't lay flat so she just let it be and then she walked out of the room.

Her stocking feet made no sound in the hallway-she was kind of surprised JARVIS hadn't stopped her from leaving her room-she passed Tony and Pepper's room and getting on the elevator, she pressed the button for the floor she thought her studio was on.

Well it apparently wasn't the third floor. "Damn," she muttered. This seemed to be the security wing.
Walking down the hall she passed several rooms with monitors ranged around the walls. There were no security guards. She smiled, who needed security guards when the residents were a motley mix of super soldiers, assassins and a cocky business man in a high tech metal suit? Glancing in the first couple of rooms, she saw the monitors showed different floors in the Tower.

One monitor caught her eye as she wandered by. Glancing up and down the hall, she darted into the room and leaned close to the screen. Two people, one she recognized, were in the lounge eating what looked like Chinese food. A young woman with curly red-blonde hair, dressed in a delivery uniform, was eating lunch with a muscular man in a leather jacket and she seemed to be teaching him how to use chopsticks.

Evony scoffed, who didn't know how to use chopsticks? She watched in fascination as the lunch progressed. The two of them were laughing and chatting and even though Evony couldn't hear their conversation, she imagined the big guy was totally engrossed in this girl. He was gazing at her with wide blue eyes and every time the red-head smiled or laughed, he would light up.

As the lunch progressed, Evony wished for a snack; popcorn would have been perfect for this little drama. The two people she was spying on were leaning towards each other and he was talking excitedly about something, his giant hands waving in the air and the girl was laughing daintily behind her hand.

Suddenly they both froze and the delivery-girl pulled a cell phone out of her pocket. She laughed, said something to the big guy and then they both stood up and began cleaning their lunch remains up.

Evony watched in fascination as he escorted the girl out of the lounge. When they disappeared from her screen she twirled around in her chair and tried to find a screen with them on it. Finally she found one; she'd missed them in the elevator but they were now walking through the garage under the tower towards the outer door.

"Damn," she muttered. "They're leaving the Tower." Glancing around the room she saw there were no cameras showing the block outside the building. "JARVIS," she called.

"Yes, Miss Potts?"

Evony spun her chair around in circles and grinned cheekily. "I need a view of the street outside the Tower. Be quick about it."

"Right away, Miss Potts." A few seconds later a screen in front of her flickered, went black and then lit up, showing the two people standing on the street next to a Vespa scooter.

They were talking about something. Evony sighed, why didn't Tony's security cameras have sound? This was better than soap operas! As the girl started her scooter, the big man shook her hand and said something. The girl blushed and was obviously flustered. She said something in return and snapping her helmet's visor down sped away.

Evony leaned closer to the screen; her nose was almost pressed to the glass, and watched the big man stare after the delivery-girl. She sighed at the forlorn look on his face. He looked so lost!

Finally he turned and walked back to the tower. He stepped into the elevator; Evony pushed her chair around the room and watched as he sped up the elevator. She didn't want to miss a single moment of this little drama! He was obviously preoccupied; he was frowning and rubbing his hands together. He went back to the lounge and he stood gazing at the couch the girl had sat in. Evony sighed again her eyes going misty.
As she watched he walked over to Tony's impressive sound system and he started to press buttons on the machine. He rummaged around in Tony's collection of records for a few moments when he obviously found what he wanted to listen to; he smiled, placed the record on the turntable, set the needle on it and walked back to the couch.

He sat, listening to the music and Evony sighed again. Glancing at the computer's screen, she jumped. She'd been spying for over two hours! She shot up out of the chair and swayed slightly. She groaned and pressed a hand to her temple. Her head was starting to pound. That vicodin had obviously worn off.

She walked slowly down the hall towards the elevator. Stepping in she requested the 40th floor. That was the floor her room was on. Right? She couldn't really remember anymore.

When the doors binged open she realized she was wrong; the elevator opened onto the lounge. And of course, there was someone in the lounge.

"Crap," she muttered as the door swooshed open. The guy she'd been spying on for the past two hours sitting on his couch listening to one of Tony's records; something jazzy, reminiscent of the Big Band era. She couldn't see the guys face but she could see he was wearing a plaid shirt and his dark blonde hair was slicked back.

She briefly contemplated closing the elevator's doors and trying to remember where her room was, but her head was starting to swim so she walked into the room and stopped a few feet behind the couch he was sitting on. "Is this Duke Ellington?" she asked. He jumped and turned quickly towards her.

He then stood and said, "Hello! I didn't hear you come in! I'm Steve Rogers." He thrust his hand out towards her. She shook it and smiled.

"Hi, I'm Evony Potts." Recognition filled his eyes as he released her hand.

"Pepper's little sister. I thought you were still confined to bed rest?" His eyes swept her shoulder and rested on her temple with its horrific scars.

Evony gave her sunniest smile, "Well I was. But then I decided I wanted to go for a walk." She sat down on the couch and picked up the record sleeve, Steve chuckled.

He stood awkwardly for a second and then sat down next to her. "I always loved this song," he said. "There was a band in London who would play this during the Blitz. Always seemed so defiant at the time."

She looked at him, with wonder in her eyes. Steve smiled sadly.

She blurted out, "I'm sorry, it just amazes me still. Tony told me a little bit about your story; I wasn't sure if I should believe him, he was always pulling my leg when I was a kid." Evony continued to stare at him. Steve fiddled with his leather jacket which lay on the arm rest beside him. She cleared her throat, he met her eyes and she said softly, "I'm sorry, that was rude of me." She laughed, "I think I've forgotten how to talk to other people. When your only company is Tony Stark, a split personality scientist and your overbearing sister, you forget how to be human I think."

Steve let out a burst of laughter as she smiled at him. "I can only imagine. I think it'd be awful if I couldn't escape Stark and his constant sarcasm."

The two grinned at each other for a moment and then Steve stood and went to the bar. "Can I get you something to drink?" He held up a glass; Evony shook her head.
"Better not, thanks though. My body's pumped full of painkillers right now." Steve smacked his forehead gently.

"Oh yeah. I forgot! You've only been up and around for a few days. Sorry."

"That's okay. I would love to but Dr. Banner would kill me." She shifted a little on the couch. Her shoulder was starting to ache dully. And her head was really pounding now. Steve sat down next to her and the two of them sat quietly listening to the music while he drank slowly.

Steve looked at her and cleared his throat, "So tell me something…"

She glanced at him with her eyebrow quirked. "Yup?" She was getting very tired. She should get back to her room soon, maybe everyone was right and she should have stayed in bed. She smiled wryly, mirroring a certain doctor's grin. Of course, it would help if she remembered what floor she really belonged on. She would have Tony draw up a map of the Tower for her with clear instructions on how to get anywhere.

Steve shifted slightly, obviously uncomfortable. "So, I uh, went into your studio the other day—I was helping Pepper move some furniture!" he hurried when her eyebrows shot up, "I wasn't snooping or anything. But I accidentally dropped one of your portfolios and it flipped open…" Evony was facing him now, with a slight frown on her face. He cleared his throat and swirled his glass, "You're an amazing artist. Pepper said you went to school for art. And that you're the illustrator for a famous "graphic" novel." She raised her eyebrows at the obvious quotes around "graphic." He flushed and muttered, "I thought they were amazing comics."

She smiled. "Thanks Steve. Don't worry. When most people say they've seen my work they always say it with a shocked expression and the meaning behind their words is 'You're a woman illustrating comic books pre-teen boys read in their bathrooms?' I can't help getting prickly as a result."

Steve laughed quietly, "I guess that makes sense." They leaned back into the couch. They were sitting close to each other and Evony's head rested near his shoulder.

Soft jazz continued to play and after a while Steve heard her breath slow and her body began to relax. She curled into the couch next to him with her head resting on the back of it and she started to snore softly. He gazed at her for a second, gave his sad smile and then let his head fall back against the couch.

Soon he was asleep too, his legs sprawled out and his arm resting gently around her shoulders.

"So, this is an interesting development."

Evony snapped awake at the sound of Tony's voice. She was resting against something that was hard, yet soft and very warm. It also smelled like men's after shave. Sitting up, she realized she had fallen asleep against Steve Rogers, who happened to be watching her with his intense ice blue eyes; it looked like he had been for a while.

She blushed bright red; Steve smiled kindly. He very politely didn't look at the tiny drool spot on his shoulder. Evony blushed even more.

And that's when Tony cleared his throat. Evony swung around and saw him standing by the bar. He had a snifter of whiskey in his hand and his usual sardonic grin plastered on his face. Two other people were at the bar with him; a petite woman with curly auburn hair was leaning against the bar while a burly man with buzzed blonde hair watched her interestingly. Both were vaguely familiar, but she couldn't place them.
"You're lucky your sister got caught up in another meeting kid," Tony swirled his glass. "She would go through the roof if she knew you were out of bed. And sleeping on such an…interesting… pillow." He looked pointedly at Steve, who just stared blandly back at him.

Evony cleared her throat, ran her fingers through her hair and said testily, "Pepper doesn't have to know I was out of bed and sleeping on the couch." She glanced at Steve, who assumed an innocent expression. "Steve and I were listening to some music and he was telling me a little bit about his history when I very rudely fell asleep."

Tony cocked an eyebrow at her, "Listening to music, huh? That what the kids back in the 1940's called it?"

Evony gasped and grabbing one of the remotes from the coffee table chucked it at Tony, who caught it smoothly, not spilling a single drop of whiskey. Tony laughed. The two people with him glanced at each other. Evony frowned at the man. He really was familiar…

The woman standing at the bar pushed herself off and came over to stand by the couch; "Hello again Evony," she said as she proffered her hand. Evony stared at her, trying to place where she'd seen the woman before when suddenly it hit her.

"Natalie? Oh my god! I haven't seen you for months!" She jumped off the couch and wrapped her arm around the petite woman. Natalie laughed,

"Actually my name is Natasha Romanoff. I'm a SHIELD agent." Evony stepped back in surprise.

"Really?" Natasha nodded. "So that would explain why you stopped working for Tony after he fixed his arc reactor. You were undercover! That's so cool!"

"Yes that's right. I was placed by Director Fury to help and protect Stark." Tony rolled his eyes as Evony sat down again next to Steve.

Natasha smiled and sat on the armrest beside Steve. The other man had walked over and was watching her with cold, calculating eyes. Evony could not place him. Probably because of the headache pounding behind her eyes, but he really looked vaguely familiar. The two of them stared at each other until Steve cleared his throat in the uncomfortable silence.

"Miss Potts this is Agent Barton. He's one of the best marksmen I've ever seen."

And then it hit her; the SHIELD agent, the master assassin, who had been helping Steve evacuate the streets. She went cold. He was terrifying. She remembered reading in his file about all of the people he had killed; women, children, dictators, soldiers. He was the top of his field. And he was looking at her like a hawk would eye a mouse.

Her face lost all of its color and there was a rushing sound inside of her ears. Suddenly her headache was unbearable.

She moaned and dropped her head into her hand. She heard Natasha and Steve say her name but she waved them away.

Tony hurried over to the couch and plopped himself between her and Steve. She shifted away from him, but he grabbed her wrist. "Evie? Look at me, kiddo." He turned her gently towards him and cupping her chin he looked into her eyes. He pushed her hair away from her temple and inspected the bandages there. "How bad's the pain, kid?" His dark brown eyes were crinkled in concern and his voice had dropped its usual acerbic tone.
She sighed. "I have a headache and my shoulder kind of hurts but other than that I'm okay, honestly Tony." He dropped her chin and reached into his pocket. Pulling out one of her prescription bottles he twisted off the cap and shook out a couple vicodins.

"Take these." The auburn haired woman handed him a glass of water, which he then handed to Evony. She took it and opened her palm for the pills. Tony watched her attentively while she took them.

She swallowed and leaned back on the couch. "Tony?"

"Yeah Evie?" He placed his arm gently around her shoulders. The other three in the room watched them interestedly. They had never seen Tony this gentle before, not even when he was around Pepper.

"Can I stay here until I fall asleep? I don't want to be alone…” Evony's voice was getting foggy, which meant the painkillers were working fast.

Tony frowned, "I don't know if that's a good idea. Banner wanted to check on you before you went down for the night and Pepper's going to want to make sure you're doing okay too."

She stirred, "You can move me when I fall asleep?" Her voice was very small. Tony squeezed her gently.

"Yeah, we can do that. Just go to sleep Evie."

He glanced at Steve who shrugged and said, "I'll help you move her. She looks pretty light."

Tony nodded and looked down at Evony; her eyes had drifted closed and her face had relaxed as the pain dulled. Suddenly she spoke up, "Can Dr. Banner stay with me tonight? We can move a cot into the room for him…” Her head slid a little further down Tony's shoulder.

"I'll ask Banner okay? I'm sure he won't mind. He'll probably insist on it in fact." Tony shifted her a little so she fit more snuggly against his side.

Evony sighed, "Mmm-kay. Thanks, Tony…"

"Don't mention it kid. Just go to sleep. We'll take care of you, all right?"

She didn't respond. The room was silent except for her soft, even breathing.

"We'll let her stay here for a moment longer," Tony said. "Let the painkillers really knock her out." He settled into the couch and couldn't help a small smile as Evony settled her head more firmly in the hollow of his shoulder. Just like old times...

Everyone was staring at him. His sardonic smile reappeared and he cocked his eyebrow; "What?" he demanded.

Steve was staring at him in wonder, "I've never seen you like this before, Stark. It's kind of…well, heartening."

Natasha laughed throatily, "Who would think the incorrigible Tony Stark had a father's instincts?" She nudged Barton who was still standing stiffly by the couch. He looked the least interested of them all.

Tony scowled, "She's a good kid and I've known her for years now."
Natasha gave him a small smile, "Don't be defensive Stark! We've just never seen this side of you before. Even when I was out in LA working for you and Pepper, I never saw you treat anyone like this."

Tony tapped his fingers slowly on his arc reactor and scowled. Turning to Steve he asked, "Mind helping me get her to her room?"

Steve nodded and gently scooped Evony up, being mindful of her injuries. Tony watched them carefully and then led the way to the elevator. Natasha and Barton stayed behind, making use of the bar.

"Tony?" Steve asked as he set Evony gently in her bed, "Why do you get along so well with Evony?"

Tony considered him for a moment and then, as he pulled the blankets tightly around her, he smiled and said, "She's like a daughter to me Rogers, that's all."

Steve nodded and smiled as they left the room. "She seems like an interesting person."

Tony chuckled and glanced over his shoulder, "She's an artist, did you know that? She'll probably share her studio with you once she gets up and moving. You should ask to see some of her work. She's amazing."

Steve smiled thoughtfully as the elevator swept them down to the dining room and he murmured as they stepped out, "I'll do that. Thanks Tony."

"No problem Cap. By the way, how'd your lunch go?" Tony grinned as he headed down the hall and Steve frowned.

"Wait! Did you abandon me on purpose?" he asked horrified.

Tony only laughed and flashed a peace-sign; Steve watched him go and then sighed in frustration. "Damn Stark's, they're all the same," he grumbled as he headed toward the dining room as well.
Kissing the Other Guy

Chapter Notes

Finally, a brand new chapter!

If you're from ff.net, greetings and thank you for finding me.

If you've just found this story and finally made it through to this far, hi!

I will update with a new chapter on Saturday!

Bruce checked on Evony after Steve and Tony had tucked her in; she was snoring softly, relaxed in her big bed. Bruce smiled tenderly at the sight of her sprawled out. She obviously loved being back in her own room. He very gently rolled her so she was lying on her back and not her stomach; he did this every night and it always made him cringe in worry. She really did put too much pressure on her shoulder lying on her stomach. But old habits die hard. Tonight she didn't even stir; Tony had really knocked her out.

He glanced around the room and his eyes finally settled on the cot. But Bruce wasn't ready for sleep. Sighing, he rubbed his hands and tried to ignore the growing presence in the back of his skull. The Other Guy was on edge, antsy. Bruce shuddered involuntarily and decided to go down to the lounge before dinner.

He needed to get away from Evony, just in case.

He walked down the hall and tried to keep himself calm. Tonight was not the night for an incidence. What if Evony woke up and he wasn't there? He flinched as his heart gave a painful wrench. He knew he couldn't abandon her and that's what him Hulking out would be, an abandonment.

So Bruce decided he'd join the others for dinner. Pepper had been pushing him to join them since he'd come to the Tower. He had gotten out of them in the past because he couldn't bear being away from Evony for any length of time when she was still healing. But tonight she was obviously down for the count. It wouldn't hurt being social. And it might force the Other Guy into docility.

Bruce entered the lounge to see Natasha Romanoff and Clint Barton talking with Pepper Potts. Natasha and Pepper were close friends because of the agents previous work with Stark Industries and the two women always enjoyed being with each other. Clint was looking extremely uncomfortable as the two women teased him. His eyes lit when Bruce stepped into the room.

"Banner! Thank god you're here! These harpies keep haranguing me about my suit." He rushed over to where Bruce was standing awkwardly in the doorway. "They think it needs more purple in it. I really don't know why, purple isn't a very manly color." He scowled.

Bruce sighed internally; now that he was here, he really just wanted to disappear back into Evony's room. He thought of her sleeping and felt a flutter of unease again at the thought of her waking without him. You're having separation anxiety, Banner, he thought sarcastically to himself.

The four of them chatted quietly for the rest of the hour leading up to dinner; well, Pepper and Clint chatted. Natasha and Bruce sat quietly and listened to the two argue about the agent's uniform. Bruce
was concentrating on keeping the Other Guy calm. He didn't want to disappoint Pepper by having a meltdown at the dinner table. That would be… unpleasant.

Finally they went down to the giant dining room where Steve and Tony were waiting for them and while Bruce was sure it was a good dinner he couldn't really focus on it. Tony kept talking to him about the new arc reactor, or one thing and another all while the Other Guy was still trying to break his control. Bruce gritted his teeth and tried to appear normal.

When Tony suddenly changed the subject and asked Steve about his lunch, Bruce forced himself to pay attention; the Other Guy snarled and clawed at the sides of his mind, sensing his distraction. Shut UP, Bruce snarled back at him and asked Tony, "Which restaurant?" They all seemed to be talking about a delivery girl that had delivered food for Steve and Tony, who had conveniently vanished, forcing Steve to share lunch with this girl.

Well, maybe "forced" was the wrong word. Steve was blushing furiously and squirming in his chair. That was interesting; Bruce was not used to seeing a discomfited Steve.

"It's that little Asian-Fusion place down around the corner. Really popular. Great Panko Crusted Chicken." Tony answered. His eyes settled on Bruce and he was frowning slightly.

"Oh yeah!" Bruce said, trying to sound normal and interested. "I think Pepper ordered me some of that last week, right?" He looked at her.

She nodded and took a drink of her white wine. "That's the one. We order from there quite often. Are you sure you don't want to go back tomorrow, Steve? Or maybe later this week?" She tilted her head, a genuine smile on her face.

Bruce sighed. There, he thought, I've socialized with the rest of them. Now to just appear calm and relaxed with Tony. He didn't like the considering look Tony was giving him right now. He rubbed his eyes, hoping they weren't turning green. The Other Guy was growling angrily in his head, yearning for release. He sighed again. When was dinner going to be over?

Tony jumped back into their earlier talk and Bruce let his words wash over him. The good thing about Tony Stark was you didn't always have to respond. As the dinner continued Bruce nodded and occasionally chimed in; Tony watched him and wondered if they were going to experience their first Hulk-out since the battle with Loki.

Despite Pepper's one dinner rule about no tech at the table, he pulled out his personal tablet and watched the levels of gamma radiation spike around Bruce's body. He glanced at the doctor and felt unease trickle down his spine as his eyes began lightening to green.

"Banner," he said quickly, glancing again at the tablet in front of him, "I'm thinking of working on the arc tomorrow. Could use your help." He breathed a sigh of relief as Banner's eyes shot up to his and they were their normal brown.

"What? Oh, of course. We should start working on that before Fury sends you off on another mission." Bruce mentally shook his head and sighed when the Other Guy started calming down. He'd almost lost it a second ago. He glanced at the fork in his hand and flinched; the sterling silver was bent in an odd angle. Poor Pepper, with all of these super-strong beings in her house, she was probably going to go through a lot of dinner-ware.

Tony nodded and turned to face Pepper, who had snapped, "Tony, what have I said about no technology at the table? It's rude." She scowled at him and he flashed a grin and slid the tiny computer into his pocket.
"Sorry, Pep. But if you don't want tech at the table then that means I'm going to have to miss any future dinners." He grinned as she sighed.

"Tony, you are such a jerk sometimes," she groaned as she turned back to Natasha.

He glanced at Bruce who was staring at a mutilated fork, turned to Clint and began discussing the new bow he had designed for him sitting in the lab. The agent's eyes shifted around the room, settled briefly on Bruce and then focused on Tony. He talked to him about the new weapon but his eyes kept darting to Bruce who shivered under his curious gaze and suddenly stood; he needed to get out of here. He flinched as everyone stopped talking and stared at him. He noticed Steve's spot was vacant as well. He cleared his throat and said to Pepper, "I should go check on your sister. Thank you for the dinner, Pepper, it was wonderful."

She smiled kindly and waved him away, "It should have been; I was in the kitchens all day making it." She chuckled and continued, "Thank you for all of your help Dr. Banner, it means so much. I hope you sleep well tonight."

He smiled, distracted, "I'm sure I will," he muttered and then he hurried out of the room. What am I going to do about Evony? He thought, horrified. He shouldn't stay in the room with her if he was this close to Hulking out. His heart wrenched again at the thought of not being around her and he smiled grimly. He requested Evony's floor and debated angrily with himself.

As the doors swooshed open on her silent floor he muttered to himself, "I'll just check on her. She's going to sleep through the night anyway. If I'm still me in the morning, I'll come up and be there when she wakes up." He sighed; that felt like cheating. But if it kept her safe? That wasn't cheating, that was being proactive.

Before he knew it, his hand was on the doorknob leading to her room. He twisted it and stepped into Evony's room.

He hoped she hadn't woken in the night and seen his empty cot. As he was moving around the shadowy room his hip bumped her vanity; pain lanced through his leg and he swore softly before freezing and staring at her bed.

He needn't have worried. She was still sleeping. Bruce smiled as she let out a soft snore. She was still sleeping on her back, her right hand bent towards her face, her fingers curled slightly as if waiting for someone to hold her hand. Her dark red hair was a spiky mess and her legs were sprawled out. At some point she'd kicked the blankets off.

Bruce bent and pulled one of the lighter blankets over her and laid his finger gently on her wrist taking her pulse. Slow and steady. He then pulled her shirt down slightly to inspect her shoulder. As he was moving to check the bandage on her head, he realized she was looking at him. He froze; she smiled vaguely at him, her dark blue eyes were still cloudy with drugs. He couldn't help smiling.

"Hey you," he murmured keeping his voice pitched low in case she was still not fully aware.

"Hi. I was afraid you wouldn't show," she said, her voice husky with sleep. Her hand lifted and she gently trailed her fingers down his jaw.

His belly tightened as the Other Guy's presence roared to the forefront of his mind. He caught her hand and stopped it from touching him again. She frowned and her eyes sharpened. He gave a forced little laugh and said, "Are you kidding? I wouldn't miss sleeping on a lumpy cot!"

She smiled, but it was no longer vague, instead it had turned thoughtful and her eyes were
calculating as she gazed into his. His throat went dry; he knew where this was going. He should get out but he was rooted to the spot, stuck in sick fascination as she suddenly sat up and tugging her hand free she tangled it into his hair.

"Bruce…" she breathed and his heart skittered in his chest and he felt the muscles in his back tighten and bulge.

She leaned forward and before he could pull away her lips were moving on his. He went rigid as the Other Guy thundered in his skull. He felt his muscles pull and shift and her mouth firmed against his and she was deepening the kiss, pressing her body closer to his.

Somehow he had ended up on the bed, his hands were tangled in her hair, his mouth was working against hers and his knee pressed between her legs.

Evony moaned; her body was thrumming, screaming for this release. She no longer felt drugged, she felt alive and Bruce's body was setting hers on fire.

A guttural growl ripped the room in half. Bruce stiffened his back arching, and tried to stifle another growl threatening to tear through his chest. Evony gazed at him in wonder, "Bruce?" Her hand rested on his chin and she forced him to look at her. His eyes were clenched closed and his mouth was frozen in a snarl. Her heart hammered, what have I done?! screamed through her mind. "Bruce. Look at me."

He snarled, his usually mild voice now a primitive roar, "NOOO!"

He tore himself away from her and stumbled across the room where he collapsed against the closed bathroom door. Evony pushed the blankets off of her and walked slowly, fearfully, towards him. Bruce's breath was ragged; he tried to fight the Other Guy back, he couldn't believe how quickly he had lost control, how quickly his body had started to change. Agony and sorrow filled him. He had known something like this would happen…and he had let her tempt him.

Her voice called through his internal battle. He heard her fear and on some level Bruce Banner understood and wished to gather her into his arms and soothe her.

But Bruce Banner was not in complete control of himself anymore.

He was a hybrid; a dangerous mix of man and monster and when she set her hand gently on his shoulder he had no room for pity or understanding. The Other Guy did not understand love and thus Bruce Banner at this moment had no understanding of love.

"GO AWAY!"

He roared and pushed Evony away (some vestige of Bruce kept the monster from truly hurting her) and she crashed to her butt a few feet from him. He threw himself free of the wall and careened to the door, he threw it open and as he plunged into the hall he heard her whisper, "I'm sorry Bruce. So sorry…"

Bruce Banner was close to gone. He hadn't turned green yet but he could feel the chemical change as his body reacted to the Other Guy; he felt his mind slipping and he groaned in agony as he remembered Evony's hurt and horrified face.

He had hurt her…

Somehow he contained enough of his sanity to make it to his laboratory. Stumbling into the giant room which was reinforced as per his designs, Bruce let the Other Guy go.
As his blood boiled and his bones cracked and shifted he began to cry.
He had hurt her…
"I'm sorry Bruce. So sorry…"
"NOOOOOOO RAAAGH."
Bruce was lost. For a very long time. The Other Guy reveled in the release and did not remember the slender, mahogany haired woman several floors away.
"I'm sorry Bruce. So sorry…"
Evie and Tony

Chapter Notes

I'm sorry for the late posting guys. I've been busy with Midterms, wedding plans for 3 friends and getting ready for graduation. Crazy times. Getting old sucks. I'm currently working on the rest of the story so bear with me. It needed some major revamping.

So here's a fluffy flashback story between Evony and Tony.

“Carter!” Evony could not believe Carter was leaving. He was leaving her in the middle of Chateau de Roveau!

“CARTER!” She screamed it this time, right in the middle of the restaurant. Tears were spilling down her face. How could he leave? Carter was near the front of the restaurant. He paused and glanced back at her, “What Evie?” His cultured tones, which she had once thought sounded elegant, now sounded pompous and fake. He was after all, the son of a librarian and butcher. The front he presented to the public was just that, a front.

“Carter Williams, you forgot something.” His light blond eyebrows rose, his blue eyes never left her tear streaked face.

She twisted the heavy, diamond crusted, engagement ring off her left ring finger. She held it up into the light, “you should give this to that whore you love so much.” She dropped it where she stood and then in front of everyone staring avidly at her, she flipped Carter the bird and turned and stormed out of LA’s famous French restaurant.

Later that night Evony sat curled up on Tony Stark’s balcony. Pepper was in New York City and Evony hadn’t felt like facing John and Mary this late at night. So she had come to the only other person she trusted. Tony had let her in after JARVIS alerted him to her car sitting at the gate. He took one look at her face, popped open the beer he held and handed her that along with a baseball bat.

“Smash anything you want kid.” Evony had gazed around Tony’s once beautiful home. It was in a shambles. After his and Rhodey’s fight Tony had left the house as it was. Tony just clapped her on the shoulder and walked over to the single intact couch and turned on the new TV he had just installed.

Evony took a sip of beer and walked over to the busted piano. Carter had always played piano for her before tucking her into bed. The ultimate fan’s dream; Carter Williams, world famous lead guitarist of the band Natalia, singing his fiancée to sleep every night. With a snarl, she raised the bat and smashed it into the piano’s remains. “That. Bastard. Had. The. Balls. To. Sing. Me. To. Sleep. Last. Night.” Each word was punctuated with a discordant smash onto the piano. Tony just sat and drank a whiskey.

“He. SANG TO ME! And. Then. He. Fucked. His. WHORE.” She panted and lowered the bat. Tony’s eyebrow quirked, but he didn’t say anything. Her shoulders slumped, “he left me for that Armenian bitch with the reality TV show.” The bat slipped from her fingers and her knees buckled. A few tears slipped from her eyes but she didn’t all out cry. She felt emotionally beaten down. The
past few hours had been some of the worst in her life.

Evony didn’t look up when Tony knelt in front of her. He reached out and cupped her chin and gently lifted her head; she wiped her puffy eyes but couldn’t seem to stop the tears from falling. She sobbed and he ran his thumbs under her eyes, gave her a small smile and folded her into his arms. “Shh kid. You’re okay. He wasn’t worth your time. Shh take a breath.” Evony took a shuddering deep breath rested her head limply on Tony’s arc reactor; it was very warm. He rubbed his hands briskly up and down her back while her body slowly calmed down and her tears slowed and then stopped.

“Better?” he asked, leaning back so he could see her face. Her blue eyes were dark with tears but her cheeks were dry. She nodded and nibbled on her bottom lip. Tony chucked her under the chin and helped her up.

“Come down to the lab with me. Got something to show you.” Evony followed him as he ran lightly down the stairs leading to his basement lab. Like the rest of the house it was in a shambles. A couple of his precious sports cars were twisted heaps in the far corner, the rest had a thick layer of dust on their surfaces. Tony’s equipment had all been rearranged around the lab; a giant tube was propped up by books, tool boxes and random paraphernalia.

“What are you doing down here, Tony?” she asked, curiously. She hadn’t been back to his house since the disastrous birthday party. As far as she knew, not even Pepper knew what Tony was doing in the lab.

His fingers tapped on his arc reactor and he rubbed his neck; “Oh, just doing some remodeling.” His eyes darted to his computer and back to her. He flashed his cocky grin at her and she smiled weakly back. She was too depressed to even wonder what kind of remodeling involved a giant tube and the destruction of several walls.

Tony wound his way around the mess until he got to his desk. Evony followed and curled into one of the leather chairs. Tony was rummaging around his desk, muttering to himself, cursing out the different robots clustered around him. Evony smiled slightly; Tony may tell his robotic equipment he was going to donate them to community colleges or dismantle them for parts on a daily basis, but she knew he would never get rid of them. He had built them when he was in high school; a tiny part of him considered them family.

Finally Tony found what he had been looking for. “Ah-ha! I knew Pepper had left it somewhere around here!” He was holding a thick, light pink, leather photo album. He blew on its surface, a little cloud of dust rose off of it and then he handed it to her. “Pepper left this on my desk. She wanted me to get it to you. I completely forgot until you showed up on my doorstep.”

Evony glanced at the book resting in her lap. Engraved in gold ink, the title read, “EVIE’S BOOK.” Evony gazed at the title, her heart pounding. She didn’t recognize the book but she knew what would be hidden in those pages.

Swallowing thickly, sniffing loudly, she opened the book. Inside were pictures; pictures of her as a newborn, as an infant, then as a toddler. There were pictures of her and Pepper, Pepper eight years older than her baby sister. There were pictures of their parents, some from before Evony was born and some after her birth. Evony’s eyes were glued to a picture of her mother in her studio. Kyra Potts’ hair was a deep mahogany, much, much darker than Pepper’s strawberry blond hair.

Evony twined a finger through her own deep red hair and fought off more tears. Finally she allowed herself to look at a picture of her father. Mathieu Potts gazed at the camera from amidst his lab equipment. His dark green eyes did not smile and his brows were furrowed in irritation. Evony felt a
chill shiver up her spine. She quickly flipped that page and fought off half-forgotten memories of those eyes glaring at her as strong hands gripped her throat.

The rest of the book was made up of letters her mother had written to her for the first three years of her life. They were filled with anecdotes of her daily doings. Kyra also included sketches of Evony and Pepper in the garden or on the beach. Nowhere was there a mention of their father. Except for a note about how Evony had crawled into his lab and somehow gotten caught in cables. Kyra wrote that she thought Pepper might have left the door open.

Other than that, no mention of Mathieu and the abuse Kyra had had at his hands. Evony’s hands tightened on the books edges.

She looked at Tony who had busied himself with his hotrod, “Where did Pepper find this, Tony?”

“Hm? Oh when Rhodey and I busted through her office, some of your childhood things fell out of a crate Mary had had sent over.” He wiped his hands off and continued, “Pepper wanted to get it to you before she went to New York, but she ran out of time. But you got it, so no harm done, huh?” He flashed her his winning smile. Evony smiled back.

“Thanks Tony.” Her fingers tapped on the books surface. “Would it be all right if I stayed here tonight?” She really didn’t want to drive in the dark, by herself, back to the rectory.

“Course kid. Your room is pretty intact.” Tony went to stand. She stopped him.

“That’s okay Tony. I know how to get there.” She kissed the top of his head and walked out of the lab.

**

Evony did not go to her room. Instead she went to the balcony that overlooked the valley. LA looked like a small faery city spread out below her. She sighed, looked at the album in her hands and sat in one of the deck chairs.

The next thing she knew it was morning. At some point in the night Tony or someone must have come and placed a blanket around her. The album sat on the table beside the chair. Along with a note from Tony telling her he was going to New York City to visit the expo.

Her phone also sat next to the table. Picking it up she saw there were ten missed calls and about thirty unread texts. All from Carter.

Evony frowned and listened to the first voice mail. As she listened her eyebrows rose steadily and she began to grin.

“What did you fucking do? I went into La Boheme to start recording my new album and they’ve dropped me! I know you have something to do with it, you evil bitch!”

Evony exited the voice mail and her gaze drifted over the valley view once again. She smiled, picked up the phone and dialed a number. She got his voicemail, but that didn’t matter.

“Tony? Thank you. I know it was you. And all I can say is…thanks.”
Well, hello again.

Sorry for the very, very late update.

I promise I will get some more Bruce and Evony out there.

-M

“You’re going to have to talk to her eventually Banner.” Tony was leaning against the table eating dried cranberries.

Bruce glanced at him and frowned, “Do you have to eat in the lab, Tony?”

“Yes,” Tony said through a mouthful of cranberries. “Don’t change the subject. If you keep ignoring Evony it’s going to get messy very quickly. Our girl does not handle unexplained rejection well. You didn’t see her take a bat to my piano after her fiancée broke up with her.”

Bruce raised his eyebrows at Tony as he typed on the tablet in his arms.

Tony nodded, his eyes wide. “It was terrifying.”

Bruce frowned, “Where’d she get the bat?”

Tony grinned, “Well, the piano was already wrecked and the bat was just a tool I used in some minor remodeling. But she did take it to the remains of that grand piano and let me tell you, the language on that girl when she’s pissed!” He whistled dramatically.

Bruce rolled his eyes and said mildly, “If you’re not going to help me with this Tony, I’m going to force you out of the lab.”

Tony chuckled, “Yeah right big guy. You’ll have to go all green and steroidy for that. I’ll just stay right here and watch you.”

Bruce sighed and kept running schematics. Tony munched quietly on his cranberries for a few moments and then he quipped, “She’s going to tear down that door and wring your ears!”

Bruce didn’t even look at him; he calmly gazed at the screens around him and adjusted numbers. Tony followed him.

“She’s going to hunt you down…she’ll get you to talk to her one way or another. And it’s going to be violent when she does.”

“Tony.” Bruce heaved a sigh. “Evony is going to have to realize I’m not good for her. She’s…going to have to move on.” He rested his hands on the desk surface and heaved another sigh.

Tony gazed at him, still munching. “Yeah?” His fingers tapped slowly on his arc reactor as he gazed thoughtfully at his friend. “Guess what Banner?” Bruce glanced at him, “She’s not going to realize
that. She’s going to be gnashing her teeth and making all of our lives hell. She’s already torturing Rogers. Poor guy doesn’t even know how to look at a woman let alone talk to her.” Bruce gave a small smile. Tony hid a grin behind a handful of berries. “He’s going to have a full on meltdown if we’re not careful.”

“Tony…” Bruce rubbed his face, pushing his glasses up his face.

Tony patted him on the shoulder and said, “Don’t worry about it big guy. I understand, you have to have some boundaries. Just keep in mind, she’s like a daughter to me and the angrier she becomes, the angrier I become.”

He headed for the door before Bruce could respond. “Just something to think about big guy,” Tony tossed over his shoulder.

Bruce watched him go and heaved yet another big sigh.

What was he going to do about Evony Potts?

That was the question swirling around his head most often the past two days. The other night was still fresh on his mind; he couldn’t believe he had lost control like that. The Other Guy was not a fan of Evony. He could feel his jealous anger creep through him every time he thought of her.

Shuddering he concentrated on the screens around him. When he had lived (hid) in India he had come close to finding a cure for the Other Guy. It hadn’t been all right; whatever chemicals didn’t work, the Other Guy just absorbed them. Bruce had given up a long time hoping his experiments would kill his alter-ego. Now though, there was even more of a reason to rectify the formula.

He may not fix the radiation poisoning but he may be able to block the Other Guy. Bruce knew his anger was the key to the Other Guy’s release. Being human did not make this realization very easy to work with, however. How many people went through the day without being a little irritated at least once in a while?

So Bruce was hoping for something that would stifle his anger, something that would help him put a wall up between him and that special place the Other Guy lurked in in the back of his mind.

Glancing at the formula on his tablet he felt a stirring of hope. Maybe this time it would work?

Walking to his chemistry table, Bruce remembered that night. He could smell her hair; she always seemed to smell like oranges or jasmine. It made his blood stir…He remembered her eyes darkening with desire, the soft touch of her hand on his cheek and her voice whispering his name…

“Ugh!” He smashed his fists on the table surface. Glass beakers and vials jumped and jingled in their stands. He sighed, forcing thoughts of Evony out of his head. He then concentrated on making the serum he had first created in India. Maybe this time it would work…

After a couple hours of careful measuring, mixing, heating and weighing, a syringe waited full of pale green serum.

He smiled. Why did these things always end up being green?

Picking up the syringe in careful fingers he slid the long, thin needle into his forearm. Wincing slightly and trying to keep calm so the Other Guy wouldn’t react, he pushed the plunger and watched the green fluid empty into his body.
Fire laced up his arm and through his chest. He gasped and staggered into the table behind him. Glass bottles crashed to the floor as he thrashed, pale green foam frothed out of his mouth and he felt as if his head would implode from the agony.

The Other Guy sensed the danger and tore through Bruce’s body forcing him to change so the serum wouldn’t kill them.

Bruce groaned as the Other Guy tore through his muscles and cracked his bones.

“I think,” he choked, “that test was a fail.”

The Other Guy growled in agreement.

On to the next trial.

**

“Steve, it’s been two months,” Evony grumbled one day from where she lay sprawled on the boxing ring in Steve Rogers’ private gym.

Steve glanced at her around one of his boxing bags. His dark blond hair was sweaty and kept falling into his eyes but he did not even look tired despite having worked out with her before this.

“Have you tried talking to him?” thud-thud-thud.

Evony sighed, “I’ve tried. But he keeps locking me out of the lab.” She began unwinding the boxing tape from around her fingers.

Thud-thud-thud-thud-thud-THUD

“Have you asked Tony?”

“No. This is between Dr. Banner and myself,” Evony snapped as she wadded the tape up and went back to watching Steve work out.

“What happened between you two anyway?” Steve’s muscles rippled as he worked the bag. Evony should have felt appreciation for this specimen of a man but her mind was still preoccupied with the stubborn scientist several floors below her.

“I did something wrong.” She sighed, once again remembering that night two months ago. It was really kind of vague, just a haze of drug dreams. She did remember him roaring at her and her lips touching his. “I kissed him,” she said very softly.

Steve froze, “You did what?!?” His eyes were staring at her in horror.

Evony blushed. “I kissed him!” she groaned. She pointed an imperious finger at him as he started to say something else and said, “And please don’t give me the lecture. Tony has given it to me at least once a day. I can’t stand it anymore.” She flopped backwards onto the ring.

Steve walked over towards her and leaned against the ring. “Well, do you love him?” he asked. He was very curious now. He and Evony had built a very unusual friendship over the past few months. Still, she had never told him about kissing Banner.

She squinted at the ceiling and didn’t say anything.

“Evony. Answer me.” Steve nudged her leg.
Evony groaned and flopped her arms on the ring, saying, “I don’t know! There was a time, when I was still recovering from the battle, that I thought there was something there. He would look at me every now and then and…well…” she trailed off and Steve glanced at her.

“You thought he felt something too?” he supplied and after a moment’s hesitation, she nodded.

“Huh. Well that certainly complicates things doesn’t it?” he said with a wry chuckle.

“I know,” she whispered, feeling very pathetic and very, very lonely. Her eyes began to tear up. “He just fascinates me; he’s like two sides of one coin and he’s all I can think about.” She sniffed. Her tears were starting to fall now. She rubbed her hand furiously against her burning eyes and groaned, “God, the stupid man makes me so mad. All I want to do is talk to him. To apologize. To have some sort of closure…” And that’s when she started to really cry.

Steve hauled himself onto the ring and sat next to her. “Hey, shh it’s okay. I’ll go and talk to him if you want.”

She groaned and smacked her fist lightly against his forearm, “I don’t want you to talk to him! I want to talk to him!” She sniffed once more and was glad to realize her tears had stopped.

Steve nodded and smiled sadly. Evony straightened and gasped, “Oh Steve! I’m sorry! I didn’t mean to be so crass. This really isn’t fair for you! You don’t want to hear about my problems after you’ve just returned from a mission!”

Shaking his head as he said, “Evony stop. I’m your friend; besides, I like hearing about your problems.” He smiled thoughtfully and ran his fingers over the soft rubber of the mat they sat on. Finally he raised his eyes back to hers and murmured, “I understand why you like Banner. In all honesty you complement each other really well.” He chuckled. “I’ve never met such pig-headed people.”

Evony snorted as Steve swung off the ring and said, “If I asked you, would you tear open the lab doors and hold Bruce down while I proclaim my love?”

Steve laughed, “I don’t think so. Thor’s pretty much the only one who can handle the Hulk and you know the moment you confront Banner he’s going to change. So, no. If you want to go that route wait till the Asgardian decides to drop by for a visit.”

Evony chuckled and then muttered “Why does he have to be so infuriating?!”

Steve shrugged, “Maybe he’s scared.”

Evony was silent at that. She wondered if it was true…

Carry on My Wayward Son suddenly blasted through the gym. Evony sighed, “Two bucks that’s Pepper calling to make sure I have a date for this gala on Saturday?”

Steve chuckled as she threw herself free of the ring and grabbed her phone off the bench where her stuff sat.

“How? …Hi Pepper.” She rolled her eyes at Steve who grinned. “Yes Pepper, I will be at the stylist…No Pepper I don’t have a date yet. Yes I know I should have a date. Look Pepper…” She glanced at Steve, who was gathering up some of his equipment. “I’ll ask him. No, I don’t think he’s seen June today.” She glanced at him and he shook his head.

She sighed and rubbed her forehead gently before saying, “No, Dr. Banner will not talk to me…”
Tony doesn’t have to do that! When is he getting back? Tonight. Hah! He’s probably stopped in San Fran for that ice-cream he loves so much. Okay Pepper. Don’t worry, I will wrangle a man to take with me to the gala; maybe I’ll ask Joey!” She laughed as Pepper groaned.

She hung up and stood staring at the ground for a moment. Steve, sensing her agony, hurried over and hugged her fiercely.

“Evony?” She looked up at him as her eyes welled with more tears and he smiled gently, “Everything is going to work out.”

She snorted and rested her head on his chest and sighed, “I hope so Steve.”

“Oh it will; otherwise Tony’s going to drag Banner out of the lab forcibly and have him apologize to you on his knees,” he said with a chuckle.

Evony grimaced in his arms but before she could say anything a horrified gasp came from the doorway and the sound of about a dozen file folders hitting the cement floor ripped through the still air of the gym.

Both turned in time to see June Auld run from the gym, her face buried in her hands; her files, which she had been in the process of bringing for Steve’s review, lay scattered over the floor.

“Oh shit,” Evony murmured as they stepped apart. She raised her deep blue eyes to his horrified light blue one’s and whispered, “Do you think she saw us hugging?!?”

Steve nodded, his face twisted in a pained expression and he said weakly, “Appears so.”

Evony groaned and dropped her head in her hands, “Oh shit. She probably thinks we’re together!”

The muscles in Steve’s jaw tensed and before Evony could say anything, he was running after June. She stared after him for a moment and then sighed again. “What a fucking disaster!” she muttered. After a few moments of waiting to see if Steve would return she sighed again and gathered her boxing equipment up. She’d go upstairs, shower and then spend some time in her studio.

Maybe then she’d be able to come up with some new ideas about what she was going to do with the troublesome scientist hiding from her.

And maybe Steve would be able to fix things with June.
Evony had to admit she looked pretty damn gorgeous right now. Her stylist had left half an hour ago but she still stood in front of her floor length mirror taking in her shimmering silver gown and curled mahogany hair.

She gazed at herself thoughtfully; her make-up was perfect, accentuating her dark red eyebrows, high cheekbones and deep blue eyes. Her hair was half-up and hid the scars on her left temple. The gown was empire wasted, gathered under her breasts and came with a clever sapphire blue half-jacket which hid the scars on her shoulder and chest. Its stiff collar accentuated her slender neck and quarter length sleeves gave it a Regency flare she loved.

It was really all too perfect. She sighed sadly and fiddled with her jacket, tugging it into place.

“Well,” she muttered. “I have the dress, the shoes and the domineering sister. Now where the hell is my Prince Charming?” Her mouth quirked in a wry smirk and as she turned to grab the earrings sitting on her vanity a soft knock on her door distracted her.

“Come in?” she called curiously; Pepper never knocked. Who was this?

The door opened slowly and Steve poked his head around the edge. “Evony? Are you dressed?” His eyes were closed and a big grin plastered his face.

Evony laughed and dragged him into the room. “Come on you big oaf! I’m dressed. What’s up?”

Steve followed her into the room, his eyes still closed. She turned to her vanity and scooped up the necklace sitting there.

“Open your eyes Captain America.” She held the necklace out to him so he could put it on her.

Steve opened his eyes, blinked and then just stared. His mouth popped open, “Wow!” he gasped. “Evony…you look…wow!”

She blushed at the appreciative gleam in his eyes and busied herself with her earrings. “You look pretty ‘wow’ too Steve. Was the green tie your idea or Pepper’s?” she asked as she watched him fiddle with his tux in her mirror.

He flushed and fiddled with the olive green tie strangling him. “Actually,” he muttered as he sat in Evony’s armchair by the window, “It was Tony’s idea; he said it would accentuate my eyes or something.”

Evony laughed as he squirmed in discomfort and asked, “So how did it go with June? Did she finally talk to you?” She suspected she hadn’t, otherwise he wouldn’t be here looking as awkward as a middle school kid at a school dance.

Steve sighed, his shoulders slumping in dejection and shook his head. “She wouldn’t even open the door to me this time,” he muttered.

Evony’s eyebrows rose and she said, surprised, “You went to her apartment?!”

He nodded, his cheeks darkening. “Yeah, it seemed the most courteous way to apologize to her,” he said. “But when she told me to leave her alone or she’d call the cops, I think my apology wasn’t going to be very well received.” He dropped his head on the back of the armchair and sighed.
Evony groaned in sympathy and then went over to where he sat slumped in his chair. He glanced up at her and smiled sadly, “I think I’m just going to go down to the gym. I won’t be any fun tonight.”

She snorted and grabbed his hands; hauling him upright she said with a laugh, “No way buster! You’re going to this gala, you’re going to be happy that Tony is finally proposing to my sister and then you’re going to dance with me. Want to know why?” She gripped his hand tightly as she dragged him to the door and he laughed.

“Why?” he said, still chuckling. She stopped at the door, grabbed her clutch from the table under the coatrack and smirked.

“Because you are my best friend and if you’re not going to the dance then I’m not going either and that’s going to piss Pepper off and in the end neither of us wants to piss Pepper off.” She turned to him and held her hand out and continued, “So Steve Rogers, dejected single, will you be my pity date on this most auspicious evening?” Her blue eyes sparkled as he stared at her for a moment and then finally he smiled, chuckled and clasped her hand tightly in his own.

“Evony Potts,” he said solemnly as he folded her hand into the crook of his elbow. “It would be my genuine pleasure to be your pity date for tonight’s dance.”

She smiled and hugged his arm tightly, secretly glad that she wouldn’t have to go to the dance alone. As they neared the elevator, though, her smile slid from her lips and she paused. Steve stopped and glanced at her, his brow furrowing as he saw the agonized indecision in her eyes.

“Evony? What’s wrong?” he asked, his voice concerned.

Her eyes rose to meet his and she said, “I have to do something really fast before we go down to the gala, Steve, is that all right?”

He considered her for a moment and nodded. “You’re going to talk to Banner one last time, aren’t you Evony?” he murmured.

She hesitated and then nodded; he smiled sadly and tucked a curl behind her ear. “Go ahead; he’s a fool if he doesn’t listen to you. I’ll wait in the lobby.”

She smiled shakily and stood on her tiptoes to press a quick kiss to his cheek. “Thank you, Steve,” she whispered. And then she was gone, the elevator sweeping her down to Banner’s basement laboratory.

She didn’t even stop to think about what she was doing; Steve had given it one last try tonight, she should too. Maybe she’d have some luck.

Not that she believed that, but she was stubborn and she never gave up without a fight.

And Bruce Banner was worth fighting for.

Evony stopped in front of the steel door of Bruce’s lab, raised her fist to knock and froze.

She was suddenly very afraid. He was never going to listen to her…

JARVIS’s voice broke through her panic: “Miss Potts? Dr. Banner is within. I will relay your message to him if you wish.”

She gulped and raised a shaking hand to her hair. “Yes, all right JARVIS.”
She paused. JARVIS’s cool voice was very impatient, “The message Miss Potts? You will have to hurry, Mr. Stark is over the Hudson Bay and he will be here shortly.”

“Yes okay. Message is as follows,” she rested her hands and forehead on the door, imagining the man within and hoping he would hear her. “Bruce, I know I hurt you. I know I scared you. …I just want to say I’m sorry…and if you find it in your heart…forgive me.” She took a deep breath and fought off tears. “End message JARVIS.”

She turned and ran down the hall and felt her heart shatter.

**

Bruce stared at the needle poised above his elbow. Her message washed over him and he pressed the point of the syringe into his arm.

He depressed the green fluid into his veins as he heard her last words: forgive me.

Forgive her?

He was the one with the killer monster lurking in his bones.

He was the one who had almost killed her.

He was the one who had hidden from her for two months.

He had hurt her.

And she wanted him to forgive her.

Bruce’s head dropped into his hands. The syringe fell to the ground, empty.

“Sir?” JARVIS broke through Bruce’s fugue. “Mr. Stark wishes me to remind you of the tuxedo in your closet and he wonders if you will be attending the gala this evening.”

Bruce sighed. “What should I do JARVIS? What’s the right move here?”

“Well sir, I do believe tonight is a very special evening and it would be made even more special if you decide to attend. But Mr. Stark leaves that decision to you.”

Bruce sighed again. He was so tired of feeling guilty. He stood and walked over to the heavy steel door. Pausing he rested his forehead on it and whispered, “I forgive you.”

And he left the lab.

**

Stories above Banner’s lab, Tony Stark had landed on his penthouse balcony. Pepper was standing inside the door, her arms folded and her lips pursed.

Piece by piece Tony’s suit was dismantled until he stood before her in a pair of jeans and an AC/DC t-shirt.

Pepper opened her mouth to lecture him and then took one look at his face. He was grinning.

“Tony, what did you do?” Pepper placed her hands on his hips. She didn’t smile even when he wrapped his arms around her and kissed her firmly on the lips.
“Do? What makes you think I’ve done something?” He was still grinning manically.

Pepper arched an eyebrow. “Usually when you smile like that you’ve either done something very bad or you’re about to do something very bad.”

Tony chuckled and kissed her nose. “I may or may not have helped Evie’s situation a little bit,” he said over his shoulder as he walked into his room to start getting dressed for the party.

“Helped Evie? What do you mean? Tony! What did you do?” Pepper followed him as quickly as her emerald green gown would allow.

“I may have given JARVIS instructions to push Banner in the right direction,” Tony called from his closet where he was putting on his tux.

“The right direction?” Pepper followed him and watched as he buttoned his shirt.

“Yep. He has seriously spent too much time in that lab and he wasn’t listening to me or Evony so I rewrote JARVIS’s advice program on my way over here from D.C.”

“Rewrote JARVIS?! Tony!” Pepper placed a shaking hand on her forehead.

“Just for tonight. Just for that one moment, really.” He smiled sheepishly and held out his tie, “would you do this for me Pepper?” As she tied his tie he chuckled once more and said with an evil grin on his lips, “Oh and I think I may have helped Rogers’ as well.”

She sighed and pinched the bridge of her nose. “Oh god, what’d you do to Steve now?” she muttered.

He bent and kissed her cheek, “Oh nothing. Just some good old-fashioned evil boss manipulations with our newest secretary,” he said cheerfully as she yanked the knot of his tie straight.

She sighed and muttered, “I really hope you know what you’re doing Tony.”

“Pepper,” he said seriously, “I know exactly what I’m doing.” He grinned and taking her by the arm led her from the penthouse.

Pepper only snorted doubtfully as they walked into the lobby of the Tower.

“I certainly hope so, Tony,” she muttered as he wrapped his arm around her waist.
“Steve, you are a horrible dancer,” Evony said with a laugh as Steve awkwardly spun them in the wrong direction and almost mowed down Colonel Rhodes and his girlfriend. She smiled as Steve stammered an apology to Tony’s best friend and she pulled him gently to the edge of the ballroom. “Let’s just stay on the sidelines, big guy,” she said with a laugh as he sighed in relief. “We really need to work on your dancing skills, Captain. Didn’t you ever dance back in the 40’s?” she asked curiously as he concentrated on not stepping on her toes.

He smiled sadly and shook his head, “There was never any time; the Commandos and I were constantly attacking Hydra and by the time Peggy and I realized we had feelings for each other…” his voice trailed off and Evony tightened her grip on his hands.

“You went into the ice,” she murmured, tears pricking her eyes. “Oh Steve, I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have brought it up,” she said as his eyes darkened with old memories.

He shook his head and hurried to say, “No! Evony, it’s fine. They’re just memories. Besides, Peggy and I…well, I’m not even sure if she was the right partner for me.”

She frowned and started to say something but the song ended and Tony breezed over to where they stood in the shadows by the bar.

“Hey kids!” he said as he snapped his fingers at the bartender. Evony frowned as a whiskey was shoved into Tony’s hand and she opened his mouth to lecture him about his drinking habits but he interrupted her. “So! How are you two morose puppies doing? Nobody has caught your eyes at this little shindig yet? What a pity.” His dark eyes sparkled as he draped his arm over Evony’s shoulder and her frown deepened.

“What have you done, Tony?” she said slowly, her voice ominously similar to her older sister’s.

Tony affected an innocent expression and clapped his free hand over his arc reactor. “Me?! What makes you think I’ve done anything?!?” he said in a wounded tone.

Evony snorted as his lips twitched in a little grin and she elbowed him. “You’ve done something bad, Tony,” she said, rolling her eyes at a bemused Steve.

“What did you do, Tony?! You’re not going to do anything with the Suit tonight, are you?” he asked quietly, his eyes darting around the ballroom taking stock of all of the civilians swirling around them. He sincerely hoped Tony wasn’t planning anything too disastrous; he didn’t think Director Fury would appreciate the paperwork.

Tony only snorted and clapped his hand on the Captain’s solid shoulder. “You two wound me with your doubt. Here I am, enjoying my evening, while you two Debbie Downers lurk in the corners and step on the toes of my best friends because you’re such horrible dancers. Really, Evie, we have to get him some lessons or the ladies will never come to my parties ever again!” Tony was craning over the heads of the people around them as he talked, his eyes narrowing as he searched through the crowd and before either of his friends could ask him who he was looking for he laughed and smacked Steve’s shoulder solidly.

“Hey! Cap, I think I just found you a new dance partner!” he said, his eyes sparkling with giddy happiness at the sight of a slender girl in an olive green dress standing uncertainly in the doorway of the ballroom.
Steve, following Tony’s sparkling gaze, froze at the sight of June Auld standing in the doorway; before Tony could shove him into the dance floor, he ducked behind Evony with a quiet curse.

Evony squawked as the big man used her as a shield and smacked Tony’s chest. “What did you do?!” she hissed at him, her eyes wide as she took in the sight of June moving smoothly around the edge of the ballroom towards them. She didn’t think June had seen them. “Tony you are going to be in so much trouble with Pepper for this! How did you get her here?” she hissed as she struggled with Steve, who was pale and sweaty.

Tony only grinned as he watched the two grappling and he waved to June. “Oh, you know,” he said to Evony as he melted into the crowd. “Just a little blackmail.”

Before either of them could respond, June had arrived. Evony immediately ceased trying to make Steve stand upright and cleared her throat. “Um…” she glanced around and spotted Pepper talking to Rhodes, “I should go talk to my sister. I’ll leave you two alone,” she said weakly as June glared at her. Steve sputtered and tried to grab a hold of her hand but she shook her head and like Tony, melted into the crowd.

She glanced over her shoulder as she slid through the mingling guests and saw Steve and June talking and sighed. Maybe they’d be able to fix their relationship. She supposed she should have made a point of talking to the younger girl but she’d been so caught up in her Banner problem she just hadn’t had the energy to think about it.

Besides, June hadn’t slapped him yet, and considering their close proximity and the way she was looking at Steve…well…

At least someone’s relationship was going to be fixed tonight.

She sighed forlornly as she moved to the front of the room when someone grabbed her hand. She gasped and spun around, expecting to see Steve or maybe even Joey Maguire who was here with his boyfriend. It wasn’t either of them.

She froze.

Her mind stalled.

She opened her mouth and nothing came out.

He just smiled at her and said, “Hey.”

She punched him.

**

“In retrospect Banner, you probably should have talked to her, at least once,” Tony said gleefully as Clint handed Bruce a towel with ice cubes wrapped in it.

“I know! I just didn’t expect her to hit me.” Bruce set the ice gingerly on his jaw where a bruise was forming.

Clint sat next to him on the lab’s couch and said through a mouthful of cocktail olives, “I would have punched you too if you had ignored me for weeks and then decided to show up after I’d said goodbye to you.” He reclined in the couch and tossed another green olive into his mouth, ignoring the glare Bruce shot him.
“Not helping Barton. I just wanted to apologize to her,” Bruce grumbled; he winced as he wiggled his jaw experimentally.

Tony started heading for the door and tossed over his shoulder, “Probably should have opened your door once or twice and had a civilized conversation with her. Now she’s pissed and you’ll never get a civil word from her.” He was almost to the door when a quiet knock sounded from the other side.

The three men froze and stared at the lab door.

None moved to answer it.

**

After hitting Bruce, Evony had run from the ballroom. She’d ordered JARVIS not to tell anyone where she’d gone and when she’d arrived in her studio the first thing she had done was toss the sketches of her secret project into the trash.

She couldn’t bear to look at him, even in sketch format.

“That bastard,” she snarled as she paced furiously around the studio. Her silver gown slid like water over her legs and as she ran her fingers furiously through her hair it finally slid free of its pins. “That bastard!” she said, her voice venomous as her foot connected with the trashcan she had just filled with drawings.

She watched it fly across the room, scattering the papers and she sighed.

“What are you going to do, Potts?” she muttered as she bent to gather the drawings up. Her fingers stilled on one of the sketches she had drawn during her convalescence in Bruce’s lab and she smiled absently.

Despite her fury, despite her wounded pride, the sight of Dr. Bruce Banner tonight had made her happy.

She hadn’t seen him for weeks, hadn’t talked to him for what seemed like years, but the sight of him in his tux with his curly hair and slightly askew glasses, had reaffirmed the feelings she had for him.

He’d come upstairs…

She snorted and shoved the pictures back in their file and slapped the thick folder back on her table. “That does not mean I forgive him for ignoring me!” she growled as she prowled from the studio.

“That stupid man is so infuriating and if it’s the last thing I do, I’m going to make sure he knows it!”

She firmed her jaw as she rushed down the hall; her body thrummed with furious anticipation. He was going to open the damn lab door tonight or she’d really get Steve to tear it down.

He had no right to ignore her now.

**

All three men were staring at the door in fascination; none had moved. JARVIS hadn’t spoken up either, which meant the person on the other side had overridden his controls.

Knock-knock.

“Guess I should get the door, huh?” Tony glanced at Bruce who was very pale, staring at the door
with a mix of horror and anticipation on his face.

Clint nodded, clapped his hand on Bruce’s shoulder and grinned sympathetically. “Good luck, Doc,” he said as he followed Tony.

Tony opened it but Bruce couldn’t see who was on the other side. He strained to hear what Tony said and his heart pounded when he heard, “Hey kid, you certainly made some waves tonight.”

Then he heard her voice; it was quiet, controlled, but he could hear the fury lurking in its depths. He flinched. “Sorry about that Tony. Just couldn’t resist.”

“With good reason; Banner’s been a jackass.” Tony chuckled. “So can we do something for you?” He was standing between her and the rest of the room so she couldn’t see Bruce standing anxiously in the middle of the room.

“Is Dr. Banner here, Tony?” Bruce flinched again, at the chill way she said his name.

“He may be,” Tony said cheerfully; he was enjoying himself too much. Bruce scowled as he considered shoving Tony aside.

“Can I speak with him for a moment?” A pause. “Privately?” Her control was slipping, it sounded like she was speaking through clenched teeth.

Tony didn’t move as he said, “Not sure I should do that Evie. I think you need to go back upstairs and cool down some more.”

“I do not need to cool down!” Her voice had risen. She paused, he heard her take a shuddering breath, “I am perfectly calm Tony. I just want to talk to Dr. Banner for a few moments. Please.” She ground that last part out.

Tony and Clint glanced at each other; the agent nodded and Tony stepped aside to let the younger Miss Potts through the door. Clint grabbed her wrist as she passed him; she turned to him and an eyebrow rose angrily as he said quietly, “We’ll be just outside Evony.”

She gazed at him for a moment and he saw something click in her eyes. She nodded and Clint released her wrist; then he and Tony stepped out of the lab and closed the door.

She turned to face the room. Her eyes found Bruce and she just stared at him as he shifted uncomfortably at her chilly demeanor. The silence stretched and still she glared at him. He finally cleared his throat, jumping as the quiet noise filled the silent room, “Evony I—”

“No.” She took one step towards him and pointed at him, snarling, “Don’t you dare say you’re sorry. No.”

He flinched and nervously rubbed the skin between his thumb and index finger; she’d noticed he only did this when he was really concerned but she didn’t care if she was scaring him. Right now she wanted to beat the shit out of him. She paced quickly across the cement floor of the lab and her heels were the only sound in the tense silence. Her hands flexed and her hair rippled furiously as he waited for her to confront him.

Finally she faced him and he could feel the pain and anger rolling off her. Her blue eyes captured his and did not release him. “Why Bruce?” she whispered quietly, painfully and he winced.

He looked away from her for a second and then raised his haunted eyes back to hers “I…I wanted…” he swallowed and flexed his hands; he yearned to hold her, to touch her. “I wanted
to ask for your forgiveness,” he whispered and he closed his eyes briefly, wishing to hide from her as his heart tore in agony.

She took one step forward and felt her composure slip. As he opened his eyes, she schooled her features back into a mask of imperious indifference. “Did you get any of my messages Dr. Banner?” she asked scornfully.

As his fingers tapped on his keyboard she hesitated and then followed him. He lips twitched up in a small smile; she may hate him but she hadn’t lost her inquisitiveness. Finding what he was looking for, he pressed play on the screen and listened as her recorded voice filled the lab:

“Dr. Banner, it’s me. I just wanted to tell you I’m sorry for the other night. I really don’t know what happened. I think I was demented or something. Well…uh…I just wanted to see if we could talk about it…but if you’re not you right now…I guess I can wait.” End of message

“Bruce, Tony told me you’ve been moping around the lab. Just stop okay? You didn’t hurt anyone and there are a bunch of people up here who want to see you. I want to see you. Just…come out please? I miss you.” End of message

“Bruce Banner, I swear to God, I will have Steve break down this door! And don’t think he can’t because he’s strong. He just lifted me up and ran up thirty flights of stairs without breaking a sweat. And that was after doing physical therapy with me. So open this fucking door right now Banner or I swear…” End of message

Six more messages played, all in varying degrees of chagrin and anger. And then the one from that night played; they both flinched as her voice washed over them.

“Bruce, I know I hurt you. I know I scared you…I just want to say I’m sorry…and if you find it in your heart…forgive me.”

Bruce sat for a moment and reveled in the feel of her standing directly behind him. Her scent washed over him, reminding him of his time in India; she smelled like jasmine and oranges and he loved that. His heart hammered as he listened for the Other Guy and felt only relief when he sensed nothing. He finally had his head to himself. At least for now.

“I listened to all of your messages, Evony.” His quiet voice made her jump slightly; she resisted stretching out her hand and running her hand through his too long curls. He really needed a haircut.

He spoke again, “I listened to all of your messages and it took my entire being not to throw open that door and kiss you every time you stood outside it talking to me.” He turned in his chair and grabbed her hands; she halfheartedly tried to pull away, but he held firm and gazed into her eyes.

“Evony, I am so sorry for the pain I have caused you. I am so sorry for scaring you, for forcing you to make a decision you did not want to make and I am so very sorry for breaking your heart.” He stood and cupped her chin, “you deserve so much better than that.” Her eyes welled and she shook her head. He smiled and wiped her tears away gently with his thumb. “So, I forgive you.” He kissed her nose. “Do you forgive me?” he murmured as he kissed her lips, very, very gently.

She took a deep shuddering breath and her eyelids flickered as her eyes darkened. Her hands rose and clutched his shirt and she whispered, “I think I can forgive you now.”

He chuckled, his chest rumbling under her hands, and then he really kissed her. She groaned. She had never been kissed like this—not even by Carter. This was deep, passionate, full of their stifled desire for each other.
Her lips parted under his, which were firm but warm and their tongues touched tentatively. He buried his hands in her thick hair feeling the curls slither seductively over his hands. She slid her hands under his jacket and he shivered as her fingers spread over his chest.

He ran his hands down her back and clasped her butt. She groaned as he slowly pulled her up his body trailing his lips from her earlobe to her breasts. Her legs straddled his hips as he rested her buttocks on his desk.

Their lips never left each other’s skin. Evony groaned as he once again trailed his lips down her neck and over her collar bones. She felt like she was on fire.

Bruce slid his hands up her rib cage and under the blue jacket she wore. As he began to slide it from her shoulders he kissed her revealed skin. She stilled when he got to her scarred left shoulder; she tried to pull away from his lips as he kissed her first scar.

Bruce raised his head and cupped her face. “Evony,” he murmured as she raised her eyes midnight dark eyes to his. She tried to pull the jacket up over her shoulder; he stopped her. “Evony, you don’t have to hide your scars from me,” he said, his voice husky with desire. He kissed her deeply and pulling away from her lips finished, “especially from me.” He began kissing her shoulder once again and found the side zipper of her gown before he pushed her gently back onto the wide surface of his desk.

Her fingers shakily began unbuttoning his shirt as he pulled the dress from her body. She raised her hips and he pulled it out from under her quickly.

They paused, panting and gazed at each other.

Evony whispered, “Are you sure Bruce?”

He stroked her hair and whispered back, his wry smile on his lips, “Aren’t I supposed to ask you that question?” She smiled uncertainly and began unbuttoning his pants as he began unhooking the tiny clasps of her boustier.

They moved slowly, cautiously. Waiting…for him.

His pants pooled around his ankles. He slid his feet out of his shiny black shoes and kicked them and his pants away. Her boustier fell to the table behind her.

She raised her eyes to his, timid.

He waited, his eyes tightly closed, his hand tangled in her hair.

Nothing.

She trailed her fingers down his chest, wonder in her eyes.

“Bruce…” she whispered.

His eyes opened and he smiled, “You are so beautiful right now, Evony,” he murmured as he rested his forehead against hers.

She laughed shakily as her breast brushed against the solid mass of his chest. “I don’t want to hurt you again, Bruce,” she whispered as he ran his hands down her back.

He only laughed as he slid his knee between her legs. “Believe me, you won’t Evie,” he said.
She gasped as he slid himself deeply into her core and he groaned as her back arched and her hips surged to meet his.

“You are so damn beautiful,” he whispered as they matched pace with each other.

Neither noticed JARVIS dimming the lights of the lab; the only thing they noticed was the feel of the other and the perfect way their body’s met on Bruce’s lab table. It was the perfect moment and nothing was going to ruin it for them.
Somehow they ended up in Bruce’s bed.

He very carefully disentangled himself from her legs the next morning and couldn’t help smiling when she muttered in her sleep and shifted over to his still warm, vacated spot. Her hand rested on his pillow and her sprawled legs made him want to climb back in bed and kiss her awake.

But his growling stomach put paid to that idea. Instead he pulled the blankets over her and stroked her hair gently away from her face. He found a pair of boxers on the chair by his window and pulled them on. He then left the room.

Bruce stretched in his kitchen, popping his joints and enjoyed the still languorous feel of his muscles rippling over his bones. He measured coffee into the machine and dug around for ingredients to make pancakes.

Whistling softly he maneuvered around his kitchen and tried not to think of the woman sleeping in his bed. He couldn’t stop a giant grin flashing across his face every now and then, though, as he made breakfast.

Finally he had a plate piled high with cakes, syrup was on the table, orange juice and coffee in cups and plates and silverware set out. He walked back to his bedroom and paused in the doorway. Evony had curled into herself and her hands and face were buried in his pillow. Bruce smiled gently and went to the bed.

“Evony,” he stroked her shoulder, she muttered sleepily. “Evony, I have breakfast.” He kissed her and her eyes fluttered open.

“Mmm,” she stretched slowly, extending her arms and legs like a cat. She turned onto her back and gazed at him sleepily. “Hey,” she said, smiling. She reached out and touched the dark purple bruise on his jaw, “I’m sorry about that Bruce.”

Bruce caught her hand and kissed her lips, “It’s okay, I was a jackass,” he said softly. He deepened his kiss as she groaned and tangled her hands into his hair. Soon their breath was ragged and Bruce found himself between her legs. He pulled away laughing, “Hold it, hold it! I made breakfast for you.”

Evony groaned, “I thought we were having breakfast…”

Bruce laughed again and moved away from her; he met her dazed eyes and took in her flushed, sprawled body. “We could always have second breakfast,” he said and waggled his eyebrows at her.

Evony burst into laughter and rolled off the bed. “I’ll be right there,” she said, kissing him. “I have to make myself presentable.” She smacked his butt and hurried to the bathroom. Shooting him a grin she closed the bathroom door.

Bruce gazed after her and felt wonder that he was standing here at this moment, with this beautiful woman in his bathroom, and the Other Guy had actually let him have his mind to himself for the night.

He frowned, and felt a tickling unease start in his mind. Pushing it away he went to the kitchen, determined to enjoy himself for as long as he could with Evony. He heard her step into the kitchen and turned to see her leaning against the doorjamb in one of his purple button up shirts. His mouth
went dry as desire rolled over him.

She smiled slowly and folded her arms. “Hey,” she said huskily.

Bruce swallowed, his throat made an audible click, “Hey,” he choked out.

They skipped first breakfast and went right for seconds.

**

“So why do you have so many purple shirts?”

They had ended up in bed again. She was lying on top of him, her head pillowed on his chest. His hands rested on her hips.

“Hm, what?” he murmured as his eyes drifted closed.

She propped her chin on her folded hands and looked down on him. “You have a lot of purple shirts Bruce,” she said with a chuckle.

“Wha-oh yeah.” He shifted a little bit and smiled as her body rocked with his. “I like purple. It’s calming. I try to avoid greens and reds,” he said as he opened his eyes and drowned in her sapphire blue ones.

“I guess green’s pretty obvious. But why red?” Evony lay her head back on his chest and listened to his heart pound and felt a shiver of leftover desire trickle through her when his voice rumbled under her ear.

He frowned and said slowly, “Red kind of pisses the Other Guy off.” He stroked his fingers through her hair as she considered his words.

“Like bulls?” her voice was slightly slurred; she was falling asleep.

“Yeah, kind of I guess.” Bruce put his hands behind his head and listened to her quiet breathing.

“Evony?”

“Mhmm”

“We should get our stuff from the lab.”

She laughed gently as he sat up, cradling her body and he kissed her. “Come on you lazy bones, let’s get cleaned up,” he said as she buried her hands in his hair.

She sighed as he stood, still holding her and muttered, “Ugh, walk-of-shame, I haven’t done one of those since college.”

He grinned as he carried her into the kitchen, “I know, right?”

She laughed as he set her down in one of the kitchen chairs and started cleaning up their cold breakfast. “You never did a walk of shame,” she said as she braided her hair. He glanced at her and his mouth went dry at the sight of her breasts pressing against his shirt. She smirked and continued, “You went to college when you were fourteen; you probably didn’t even know what sex was at that point!”

Bruce flushed and turned away from her as he placed the dirty dishes in the sink, “Yeah, you’re
right.” He paused and flashed a mischievous grin at her from over his shoulder. “But grad school was a different story,” he said.

Evony stared at him in surprise for a moment and then burst into laughter. He smiled as her warm laugh washed over him and tried to ignore the tight desire once more gripping him. Finally the breakfast dishes were cleaned up and they were munching on sandwiches he had whipped up and as she licked tomato juice from her fingers she frowned and said, “We should probably go soon before Tony goes down there.”

Bruce cringed, “It’s not going to be pleasant with him, is it?”

She shrugged, “I really don’t know; I haven’t had much experience with this. But he hated Carter. It got to the point where I couldn’t bring him around because Tony would just harass him. But seeing as how you work with each other and he likes you…” She shrugged again, “I guess we’ll find out, right?”

Bruce smiled, “I guess so.” He ate the last bit of the sandwich and dusted his hands off. “Let’s get down there now, just to be sure.”

“Okay.” She set their plates in the sink and followed him out of the room.

They stepped out of his apartment and walked the few steps to the lab. Bruce held her hand as they ambled along silently. He kept glancing at her; her mahogany hair was bound in an orderly French braid but he kept imagining it spread across his pillows and his fingers itched to tear it loose of its bindings so he could bury his face into its silken mass. He didn’t though and he grinned wryly at the sight of her in his purple shirt.

She looked good in purple.

Evony felt him watching her and tried to slow her pounding heart. Her hand felt like it was on fire and she couldn’t stop the slow burning desire from growing in her belly. They were going at this like cats in heat! She had never felt passion like this with any of the men she had dated in the past.

Bruce Banner was so different…

They got to the lab and Bruce entered the code quickly; as they walked into the huge room JARVIS greeted them, saying, “Good afternoon Dr. Banner. Miss Potts your sister wishes me to remind you that you have a meeting at the Stark Industries office in fifteen minutes and that if you miss it she will, quote, ‘have your head.’” The AI paused at the horrible thought of the Potts’ sisters dismembering each other and continued, “Should I alert her that you are on your way?”

Bruce glanced at Evony who had moved over to the desk where their clothes lay in jumbled piles. She straightened from picking up her shoes and rolled her eyes at Bruce as he smiled and folded his pants. “Yes JARVIS,” she said with a sigh. “I’ll be there soon.” Turning to Bruce she shrugged one shoulder and his mouth went dry once more as her pale shoulder slid free of the shirt. “Duty calls, I guess. I’ll get my stuff out of here so you don’t have to explain to Tony,” she murmured and he nodded.

They gathered up their belongings silently; Evony blushed for most of the clean-up. Bruce’s desk was a disaster zone. Papers and equipment lay scattered all around it; glancing at the leather couch she saw in indent in the cushions and almost burst into manic giggles…

Bruce sat at his desk organizing it; his mind was preoccupied. He could feel the Other Guy stirring, which meant the serum he had used had worked, but for less than twenty-four hours. He had started scribbling notes on a scratch sheet of paper, when a black lace thong tumbled onto his lap.
Evony leaned in close and setting her lips gently against his ear, she whispered softly, “You can keep that for your trophy case.” Bruce shuddered as her fingers trailed down his neck and over his bare shoulder.

He picked up the little piece of fabric and cocked his eyebrow at her as he said cheekily, “Can I show it off to Tony?”

She was heading for the door, her arms full of evening clothes and shoes. She grinned, her sapphire eyes sparkling, “Oh, please do Dr. Banner. And when you do? Have JARVIS record the whole thing for me.”

He started to laugh, his head thrown back, Evony grinned and left the lab.

**

Bruce was glad Evony had left; his head pounded as he struggled with the once simple equations he jotted in his notebook. He could feel his control slipping and he shuddered as the Other Guy stirred to wakefulness.

If Evony had been in the lab she would have noticed his shivering skin and the faint popping of joints as his body changed. Bruce ground his teeth as he struggled to regain control over his alter-ego but he couldn’t; something about the formula had further nullified any control he had once had over the Hulk.

With a faint snap, his pencil broke and he groaned as his vision blurred.

Too late. The Other Guy was coming to the forefront of his mind and there was nothing he could do to stop him.

An agonized groan ripped through the silence of the lab and he fell to his knees as his motor control warped; dropping his pounding head in his hands, he snarled, his shoulders hunching and rolling under the forced chemical change.

Raising his shaking hands, he watched as his skin slowly slid from olive toned to the bright green he so loathed.

Thank god Evony isn’t here, Bruce thought as the Other Guy took full control of his body; he froze and his eyes, which were an odd mix of dark brown and bright green, widened as a thought struck him. Did I lock the lab do-

His thoughts stopped there and the Hulk raised his head with a dangerous growl as the lab door, which hadn’t been locked behind Evony, opened slowly and an unfamiliar person poked her head around the edge and called quietly into the dimly lit lab, “Hello? Dr. Banner? I have a package for you from Mr. Stark! Are you he-”

Her voice died at the sight of the massive figure rising from behind Dr. Banner’s desk and she shrieked at the primitive snarl that ripped through the lab.

“HULK SMASH!” growled the Other Guy, his teeth bared in a grin at the thought of annihilating this new enemy.

His fingers, now massive and green, closed around the soft body of his enemy and he chuckled as he focused on protecting himself and the Other Guy from this tiny human.

After all, protecting the soft-hearted man was his only purpose in life.
When You Go Up Against the Hulk

Evony was in her studio, working on some panels of her secret project, when Pepper slammed through the door. She didn’t glance up, only muttered, “Hi Pep, what’s up?”

Pepper folded her arms and glared at her little sister; she didn’t say anything, just watched Evony’s hand move in fluid movements along the paper spread out on her table. After a few moments of this tense silence, Evony glanced up and frowned.

“What’s wrong?!” she asked, suddenly worried at the furious glare on her sister’s face.

“Really? I’m as bad as Anthony Stark?” she said with a snort, a wry grin on her lips. “I kind of find that hard to believe. I think he makes a point of being the most difficult person in the world.” Pepper shook her head and pinched the bridge of her nose, sighing heavily. “So what did I do that’s put me up there with the god of discomfiture,” Evony muttered as she turned back to the drawing she had been working on.

Pepper stared at her and then said, coldly, “The meeting, Evony? The meeting with the Board during which you were going to provide us with new logos for Stark Industry?” Her blue eyes sparkled angrily as Evony groaned.

“Oh shit! I completely forgot about that!” she said as she stood and hurried to the table under the windows. “I got up here and got distracted by the book I’m working on-JARVIS?!?” she snapped as she rummaged through papers and drawings scattered on her work table.

“JARVIS was quiet for a second and then he said in a slightly put-upon voice, “I believe you ordered me to only disrupt you in your studio if something happened to Dr. Banner and I have located the drawings you need; they are in the waste basket under your painting table. I believe you threw them there the other night by mistake.”

Evony flushed and plopped in one of her chairs. “Oh, everything was fine,” she muttered as she spun in a lazy circle. “Dr. Banner and I had a good talk last night.”
Pepper smiled and hugged her little sister’s shoulders, “I’m glad, Evie!” she said happily.

Before Evony could say anything else, JARVIS spoke up. “Miss Potts?”

“Yes,” both sisters said and the AI paused before continuing, “The younger Miss Potts, please.”

Evony laughed and said, “Go on JARVIS.”

“Very good Miss. I have been alerted by the mainframe that Dr. Banner has a visitor and that Dr. Banner is not available at this moment,” the AI said, his mild voice slightly discomfited.

Evony frowned and said, “What do you mean, ‘not available’ JARVIS? He was in the lab half an hour ago. Where did he go?”

The AI paused as he consulted his mainframe and then said, “According to my life scans there are two people within the laboratory at this moment; one of whom is Mr. Stark’s new assistant, Miss Auld, but the other contains similar characteristics as Dr. Banner, but he is not indeed, Dr. Banner.”

Evony froze, her eyes widening and she gasped at the same time as Pepper, “The Hulk!”

“Indeed Misses Potts,” the AI murmured as they ran from the room. “I believe I shall alert Mr. Stark to this latest development,” he muttered to himself.

Seconds later, in his workshop, Tony jerked upright from his slouch over one of his Suits as a piercing alarm sounded.

“What the hell?!” he snapped as he scrambled to his computer. “JARVIS turn that horrid alarm off!”

“Sorry, sir,” said the AI mildly. “I was unsure if you would hear my warning over the cacophonous music you are listening too.”

Tony rolled his eyes and grumbled, “That’s Ritchie Blackmore on the guitar, you box of wires.” His fingers flew over the screen of his computer and he frowned, “What’s the problem JARVIS? Why did you sound off the fire alarms?”

“I thought you would like to know, sir, that the identity known as the Hulk is running rampant in Dr. Banner’s laboratory and that Miss Auld is within with the beast. The Misses Potts are en route to run interference but I would recommend you attend as well.”

Tony swore violently as JARVIS provided him with a video feed of Banner’s lab and he threw himself towards the center of his lab so he could Suit up. As the Suit assembled over his limbs he snapped, “J, alert any of the Avengers who may be about that I’m going to need their help down at Banner’s lab. Oh, and has Agent Barton arrived yet?” The helmet snapped over his face and the HUD lit up, providing him with scans of the workshop.

The AI was quiet for a second and then he said in Tony’s ear as he rushed out of the shop, “I believe he is due to arrive at any moment; according to Director Fury’s memo he left the Helicarrier twenty minutes ago.”

Tony smiled grimly and blasted down the hall toward the elevator. “Excellent,” he said quietly as he stepped into the elevator. “Send him to the lab the moment he gets here. Who else is in the Tower?” he paused as a new thought struck him and he went white. “J? Where’s Captain Rogers?”

As the elevator swooshed open on Banner’s lab a primitive roar ripped the silence, followed by the sound of something slamming into the wall of the lab. JARVIS’s voice was quiet as he said, “I
believe Captain Rogers is in his gym, sir. Shall I alert him as to what is occurring presently?”

Tony shook his head as he headed down the hall, “Better not J. Just get Barton down here as soon as you can.”

He paused outside of the slightly ajar door of Banner’s lab and shivered at the growls issuing from within. “Ho boy,” he grumbled as he pushed the steel door open slowly.

He struggled to see what was happening in within the dim interior of the lab; it looked like the Hulk had smashed every single light fixture in the room and Tony sighed. It was certainly going to be expensive, living with the Hulk.

As he stepped into the lab, he froze at the horrifying sight before him.

**

After JARVIS had alerted the sisters about the Hulk, Evony had rushed down the lab, ignoring Pepper’s insistence that they let the Avengers handle Banner. She hadn’t listened, only thrown herself into the elevator and requested Bruce’s floor. JARVIS had protested but after ordering him several times he had agreed.

Evony barely registered the silent fall of the elevator; her only thought was to get to Bruce before he hurt himself or June further. She dreaded to think of how Bruce would handle this latest Hulk-out. She hoped with her entire being that he wouldn’t lock himself away from her again.

As the doors swept open she slid slowly into the hallway; the air was still, tense and she shivered as she made her way slowly towards the lab. She saw that the door was slightly ajar and as she drew closer, she saw a few envelopes lying scattered on the floor. Her heart froze at the sight and she went cold; JARVIS was right, June Auld had come to Bruce’s lab.

“Oh please let her be okay,” she whispered as she pushed the door open slowly.

An ominous growl ripped through the dusty lab air and her hair stood on end. “Bruce?” she called softly. “Bruce? It’s Evony; can I come in?”

Silence.

She coughed as the dusty air coated her mouth and peered through the dim lighting. “June?” she whispered as she edged along the wall. “Are you in here, June?” She prayed to god that the assistant had run away, that she hadn’t been trapped by the Hulk.

She gasped as her foot slid through something wet and she caught herself on the edge of a lab table; hesitating, she bent and in the darkness stretched her hand down to touch the puddle of something that she had stepped in.

“Oh god, please let that not be blood,” she whispered as whatever it was coated her fingers. Before she could pull her cell phone out to use as a flash light, a pitiful groan reached her ears and she felt her blood chill.

“June!” she gasped as she edged around the table to see the crumpled form of Steve’s petite friend. “Oh my god!” she whispered as she stroked her fingers through the girl’s bloody hair. Before she could do anything to help her though, a growl ripped through the air right behind her and she turned, almost sliding in the pool of blood again.

“Bruce!” she said breathlessly, her eyes wide as she took in the shadowy massive figure before her.
A tiny voice in the back of her head shrieked, NOT BRUCE! NOT BRUCE! RUN NOW!

But she didn’t run. She could only stare at what had once been Bruce Banner as he took a thundering step in her direction.

She took a step back and this time slipped in the blood; as she fell to the ground she scrambled backwards, trying to get as far away from the Hulk as he edged closer to her. She didn’t get far though.

She shrieked as his massive green hand closed around her leg and dragged her towards him. “Bruce!” she gasped as he caught her around the chest and lifted her. “Put me down Bruce, you’re hurting me!”

She struggled in his arms and he growled ominously; she froze as his head lowered towards hers and her eyes widened as he buried his nose in her hair.

Before she could respond, there was the familiar sound of thrusters from the doorway and the Hulk was thrown backwards across the lab, with Evony still in his hands. He snarled as he straightened and shook his head; Evony, stunned from the rough landing, scrabbled free as he released her to confront this newest threat.

She panted as her vision spun and she saw Tony land solidly before the furious Hulk. Her eyes widened as he raised his hands and she threw herself forward, screaming. “Tony! No, stop!”

Tony’s head spun in her direction and he groaned. “Evie? What are you doing in here?! Get out now!”

She shook her head as she planted herself between Tony and the Hulk and she pointed towards where June lay. “Tony,” she gasped, “June’s still here! She’s lying over there! You have to get her out, now!”

Tony stared at her and as the Hulk growled ominously he shook his head and said grimly, “No, I have to neutralize Banner.”

She laughed bitterly and shoved against his chest. “You’re not going to be able to do anything against him,” she ground out, the Hulk’s breath hot on the back of her neck. “You’re just a metal toy for him to crush! Get to June, I’ll talk Bruce down.”

Tony snorted as she shoved ineffectually against him and raised his hands once more, “You can’t talk him down, Evie. He’s beyond reason right now,” he muttered as he revved the thrusters up.

Before they could do anything the Hulk, who’d been watching the metal man warily, grabbed Evony and hunched over her. “NO!” he roared, his face twisting in rage at the metal man. “NO HUR VONY!”

Tony froze, his gauntleted hands still raised, and he choked out, “What did you say big man?!”

Evony, safe in the circle of the Hulk’s arms, rested her hands on his massive chest and laughed bitterly, “See? I told you I’d be okay. Now get June out of here; I’ll distract Bruce.”

Tony hesitated a moment longer and then nodded. “Where is she?” he asked JARVIS who scanned the room.

“I believe she is in the corner by the spectrometer, sir. Her life signs are minimal at best; we should act immediately,” the AI said quietly.
Tony gritted his teeth and nodded; sparing one last glance in the Hulk’s direction he blasted towards the area JARVIS had shown him. Evony watched him worrily from where she stood encircled in the Hulk’s massive green arms. Her hands trembled as she smoothed them over his heaving chest and tears pricked her eyes as she saw Tony working over June’s crumpled body.

“Oh Bruce,” she whispered sadly, “What are we going to do?” She laughed shakily as her hands vibrated with his deep laughter and he tightened his arms around her, burying his face once more in her hair.

He tensed as Tony rose with June’s body in his arms and an ominous growl rumbled through his chest; Evony shivered and smacked her hand lightly against his chest.

“Stop it,” she snapped as he swung his head back in her direction. “You’re being rude. That’s June, she’s a friend of Steve’s and a friend of mine and you’ve hurt her!” The Hulk glared at her, his green eyes sparkling angrily and she smacked him again. “Do not look at me like that, Bruce! You know you’ve done something wrong.”

From the corner of her eye she watched Tony leave the lab and she tried to ignore the blood smeared across the blue glow of the arc reactor. Once they were alone she relaxed slightly and rested her forehead against the Hulk’s chest. “Oh Bruce,” she whispered. “What am I going to do with you?”

The Hulk did not answer but a mild voice from the doorway did. “Evony, I’m going to need you to duck now.”

She turned in time to see Clint Barton, dressed only in jeans and a t-shirt, raise his loaded bow and without a second thought she ducked. The Hulk roared furiously as the arrow buried solidly in the meat of his shoulder and Evony watched as the tranquilizer deployed; within moments the Hulk staggered and his grip on her slackened. As he fell to his knees Clint rushed forward and dragged her free of the Hulk’s arms.

“What did you do to him?!” she gasped as the Hulk crumpled.

He spared her a glance and slid another arrow onto his bow. “Special tranq SHIELD developed,” he said mildly. “One should be enough to knock him out but you never know; with all of those chemicals he’s been pumping into himself lately, we’re not sure how that’s affected the gamma poisoning.”

Evony collapsed onto Bruce’s desk and watched as the Hulk’s form shrunk and the green slid from his skin like water sliding over a window. “Chemicals?” she said weakly. “What are you talking about?”

Clint sighed and lowered his bow, the arrow unused, and gazed at the once-more normal form of Bruce Banner. “He’s trying to find a cure Evony. He experimented with one last night and it looked like it might actually have worked,” he paused and bent to check the doctor’s pulse. Turning back to Evony he said softly, “And then he Hulked out.”

Evony swallowed thickly and felt tears prick her eyes; he’d come to her last night and he’d had hopes that he’d finally found a cure for the Other Guy.

Did that make last night a lie?

Her chest tightened as she watched Clint pick Bruce up in a fireman’s lift and carry him out of the lab; a single tear slid down her cheek as she followed the archer down the hall towards Bruce’s apartment. He glanced at her as deposited the doctor in his bed and murmured, “You should go
upstairs; you have a nasty cut on your forehead. Is all of that blood yours?” His voice was horrified as he noticed the blood coating her hands and arms.

Evony shook her head and muttered, “It’s June’s. I’m fine. I um…” she shivered and reached out to grip Bruce’s olive toned hand. “I think I’m going to stay here with him. He’ll…he’ll need someone with him when he wakes up.”

Clint stared at her for a moment and then shrugged, “Okay,” he said quietly. “Let me take care of that cut on your head though.”

She nodded, and after he cleaned her wound and bandaged it using supplies from the first-aid kit in Bruce’s medicine cabinet, she raised her eyes to his and said, “Can you let me know how June is when you find out, please? I…he…” she trailed off as her voice cracked and he nodded.

“Sure, Evony, I’d be happy to.” He turned to go and then turned back to her, “This isn’t anyone’s fault you know, least of all Bruce’s,” he smiled as she stared at him and continued, “Make sure he knows that, when he wakes up.”

She hesitated and then nodded, a shaky smile on her lips, “I will. Thank you Agent Barton.”

His lips quirked in a sideways grin and he squeezed her shoulder gently. “Let me know if you need anything,” he murmured as he left the room.

She watched him go and as the apartment door closed she sagged onto the bed beside Bruce and murmured, “This is a minor plot twist, Potts.”

Then she took up her watch; as the night dragged on her mind spun and she tried to find the right words to say to Bruce, to make him realize that none of his had been his fault.

She knew it was a hopeless task though.

If they were lucky, he wouldn’t completely lose it and run away to Canada.

If they were lucky…
Bruce groaned as a woman’s weak voice screamed in his mind; his vision staggered as he raised his hands to his eyes and he groaned at the sight of thick blood dripping down his fingers.

What have I done?! he thought in a panic. Oh god, please no! Did I…Did I kill somebody this time?

He shuddered as he forced himself to recall the green tinted memories; he watched as the Other Guy attacked a slender girl with reddish-blond hair and he groaned once more as she screamed.

Please, please let it be just a dream. A horrible nightmare caused by the serum. Please god, he whispered to himself over and over.

More green memories bombarded him and he watched as Evony approached him, her eyes wide with inquisitive terror and he moaned as the Other Guy snatched her and held her. He could have broken her so easily, could have tossed her across the room like that other girl.

He paused, his heart hammering with panic, and he frowned.

Why hadn’t the Hulk attacked her?

Before he could ponder this new thought, cool hands cupped his face and a familiar voice said his name. “Bruce? Bruce, can you hear me?”

“Ev…on…ee” he groaned. His mouth was dry and as was usual after a Hulk out, his throat was ragged and sore. His eyes fluttered open and he winced as his eyes adjusted to the bright light. Her soft chuckle raised the hairs on his arms and he listened as she quietly asked JARVIS to dim the lights in his room.

As the light faded he opened his eyes fully to gaze at Evony, who was sitting beside him on his bed. She was smiling, but her eyes were dark with concern and Bruce winced at bandaged cut on her forehead and a bruise darkening her cheek.

“Did I…” he rasped as he raised his hand to stroke her cheek gently.

She caught his hand and shook her head, “Stop it Bruce. I’m fine; I’ve gotten worse from Steve’s physical therapy sessions,” she murmured with a small smile.

His eyes darkened as his mind changed gears and he hauled himself upright. “Who did I hurt?” he snapped, his muscles tightening with the horrified realization that those green memories had not been dreams.

He snatched his hand from hers and swung his legs out of the bed. “Bruce,” she said softly and he shook his head.

“Don’t Evony. Just don’t. I hurt that girl, June, and I hurt you,” he said, his voice agonized.

Her hands slid around his waist and she rested her head gently against his shoulder. “That wasn’t you, Bruce,” she murmured. He shuddered, his muscles rippling under her touch and she pressed a soft kiss to his shoulder. “It wasn’t you Bruce, please believe that.”

Her soft voice calmed him enough and as the green memories slid from the forefront of his mind, he turned in her arms and buried his hands in her hair. His eyes were agonized as he gazed at her but
she felt only relief as the horrified panic drained from their dark depths.

“Who are you?” he muttered, his right hand moving to stroke the scars at her temple. “Why does the Other Guy not want to hurt you?”

She smiled shakily and her hands tightened on his hips. “Maybe he knows I can help you with your anger issues, Dr. Banner,” she murmured, her blue eyes shining as he lowered his forehead to hers.

He sighed, his body shuddering in her arms and he whispered, “I hope you can Evony Potts. I really do.”

**

Bruce was finally sleeping and as Evony slipped out of his room to go upstairs to get some breakfast and an update on June’s status, she sighed. It had taken her most of the night to get him calmed down; he’d wanted to go straight to his lab but she had literally planted herself in front of his door and refused to move until he lay down and got at least a few hours of sleep.

“How long has it been since you got a decent night’s rest, Bruce?” she’d said mildly as he swayed in front of her. He’d only snorted and started pacing the front room of his apartment.

She’d watched him until he finally collapsed, his body, already beaten by the Other Guy, past the point of exhaustion. When he’d sagged to the couch in front of his unused TV she’d sighed in relief and hauled him upright.

“Come on, you stubborn ass, let’s get you in bed,” she’d groaned as he settled heavily against her shoulders.

He’d followed her slowly and she’d smiled at his sleepy demeanor; this was a Bruce anyone could love. He’d looked like a particularly rumpled teddy bear and as she’d settled him back into his bed he’d smiled sweetly at her and murmured, “Thanks, ‘vony.”

“You’re welcome Bruce,” she’d murmured back, running her fingers through his coarse curls. “Just get some sleep, okay? Everything will be better when you wake up.”

His smile had deepened and as he’d settled deeper into sleep he’d said, “Promise?”

She had hesitated, her trembling as the magnitude of what had happened in the lab once more hit her and she’d said sadly as she bent over to plant a kiss on his cheek, “I promise you Bruce, I will make everything better.”

He’d only sighed in his sleep as she pulled the blankets more snugly over him.

“I promise, Bruce,” she’d whispered once more before taking up her own worried pacing in the living room.

He slept most of the night and when Evony felt like she herself was on the verge of collapse she’d decided it was time to journey upstairs and to see what state the members of Stark Tower were in.

As the elevator carried her up the many floors to the main lounge, she found herself hoping that Steve wouldn’t be there; she wasn’t sure if she could face him today. He was probably beside himself with worry for June and furious with Bruce.

She shivered as the doors swept open and tried not to imagine what a confrontation with him would be like. He’d blame her as well, for the Hulk attacking June. Not because he thought it was her fault, but because she was tied to Bruce now.
“JARVIS?” she murmured as she made her way slowly down the hall towards the lounge.

“Yes, Miss Potts,” the AI replied, his tone as mildly civil as ever.

She sighed and pinched the bridge of her nose. “Can you lock down the location of Dr. Bruce Banner? Only allow myself and Mr. Stark access to him for the next few days; lock his floor as well, only Tony, myself, and Bruce should be given access at this point.” She hated doing this, but she knew that the moment Steve returned from the hospital, he’d want to confront Bruce; she couldn’t have that, not with both men in dangerous states of panic.

“Of course, Miss Potts. Mr. Stark had the same idea as well; he ordered a lock down of Dr. Banner’s floor the moment he and the other Miss Potts left for the hospital. I will continue to uphold your orders.”

She sighed, slightly more relieved, and said, “Thanks J. Is there anyone in the lounge right now?” She hoped not.

“No Miss Potts. You and Dr. Banner are the only ones in the Tower as of this moment, sans the security personnel of Stark Industries. Shall I send for anyone in particular?”

She shook her head as she entered the lounge and made her way to the bar. “No thanks,” she muttered. “I need some time to think and a very strong drink to start the day right.”

She paused as she rounded the bar and said with a wry chuckle, “Don’t tell Pepper, she’ll think I’m becoming Tony Stark Jr.”

“Of course Miss Potts, although I must say, your alcohol intake would have to be much higher if you had any hopes of becoming Mr. Stark.”

She snorted as she splashed some rum into a tumbler half-full of coke and said, “JARVIS! You’re so snarky in the morning. I love it.”

“Thank you Miss Potts. Enjoy your drink.”

She smiled and sipped her rum and coke. Her eyes landed on a stack of napkins and as she settled herself into one of the bar stools she selected a couple of the napkins and grabbed a pen from her pants pocket.

The lounge was silent as she sketched but even so she almost missed the sound of the lounge door sliding open.

“Evony,” said a cold voice from the doorway and she jumped. Turning on her stool, her heart froze as she took in the disheveled figure entering the room.

“Steve,” she whispered as he prowled over to her. Her heart hammered in her chest and her blood ran cold at the sight of the hopeless anger in his eyes. “Oh god, please tell me June’s okay!” she said as he stopped in front of her.

His lips pulled back in a snarl and he snapped, “Don’t say her name! You have no right to ever speak of her again!” before she could react, he grabbed her wrist and gripped it tightly. She gasped as the bones ground together and as her eyes welled with tears he hissed, “Where is Banner, Evony? Tell me now!”

She only shook her head which made him angrier. “Stop protecting him Evony!” he shouted, furious. “He almost killed June yesterday! He needs to be neutralized, he needs to be taken to
SHIELD! He’s a danger to civilians here.”

She shook her head again and whispered, “That’s not true Steve and you know it. He’s your friend—“

“He almost killed June!” he roared, his face twisting in horrified agony and Evony felt her heart wrench at his pain. He yanked her off of the stool and dragged her to the door.

“Steve! Steve, stop it right now! Let me go! You’re not thinking straight!” she shouted, suddenly furious at his manhandling. She twisted her wrist in his grip but he only clutched her tighter, making her hiss with pain.

“I will break your wrist, Evony, if you keep twisting like that,” he ground out as they neared the lounge door and she went cold at the venom in his voice. “Tell me where Banner is now.”

Her voice was cold as she said, “Steve Rogers, you let me go this instant or I will have JARVIS alert Tony to how you’re treating me; he won’t take kindly to it, nor will he like the idea of you attempting to turn one of your friend’s into SHIELD. So let me go or I scream as loud as I can and JARVIS takes it from there. Do you hear me?!“

Steve stopped and placed his free hand on the lounge door; her heart hammered in her ears as his shoulders hunched and she breathed a sigh of relief as his fingers, one-by-one, released her from their deadly grip on her wrist. She cradled it and backed up a few steps away from him, her eyes wide and her chest heaving as she tried to contain her terror.

Finally, he spoke, his voice broken, “I’m sorry Evony, but I can’t live in this Tower if that monster is still wandering free.” He glanced at her over his shoulder and her heart shattered at the hate and sadness on his face. “And I can’t even look at you, because every time I do, all I can see is your love for him. You’re blind with it and it disgusts me. So if you can’t tell me where he is and if JARVIS is refusing to answer my queries then I’m just going to have to find him on my own.”

He straightened and as she took a hesitant step towards him he shook his head and raised his hand, saying wearily, “Don’t say anything; nothing either of you do or say now is going to fix this. June’s nearly dead, lying in a hospital bed attached to more machines than Tony has in his workshop and you’re sitting here drinking rum and doodling while Banner walks free.” He stepped towards her, his face twisting in hatred and he pointed a finger at her, “You disgust me. Both of you disgust me.”

She watched him push the lounge door open and said, “You don’t mean that Steve and you know it. So go, get out of here; try to find Bruce but just think, will this make you a good man? Or will it make you just as bad as Loki or the Red Skull or any number of those villains you fight on a daily basis?” Her voice was cold as she called after him and her heart broke even further at the sight of him pausing as her words came to him but he continued anyway.

The door slid closed and all of the strength rushed out of her limbs; as her knees buckled, she sobbed and hunched forward over her bruised wrist. It felt like her heart had shattered into a million pieces with this betrayal and she wasn’t sure if she’d be able to glue it back together this time.

Some wounds were past healing…

It was quiet for a few moments and then JARVIS spoke: “Miss Potts? I wish to assure you that I have limited Captain Rogers’ access to Dr. Banner. He is currently being deposited to his home floor and I will refuse him access to the elevator; I do believe it is time for a scheduled overhaul of that mainframe so the elevator will be out of commission for a few hours. I do hope this will not inconvenience you too much, Miss Potts.”

Evony’s lips twitched and she nodded, “That’s fine JARVIS, thank you for realizing the elevator
needed some maintenance. It’s been making a horrid sound for weeks now…” her voice trailed off as Steve’s words rushed once more through her mind, You disgust me. Both of you disgust me he’d said.

“God,” she groaned as she pulled herself upright. “I kind of disgust me too right now, Steve.”

She glanced around the room and her eyes landed on the napkin she’d been sketching upon. She stretched out her hand, wincing at the bruises starting to darken around her wrist, and pulled the napkin towards herself. She’d drawn the Other Guy, but not an angry Other Guy; instead it was a rough sketch of how he’d looked when he’d held her, when he’d buried his face in her hair.

He’d looked so much like Bruce at that moment. She realized, while she may be disgusted with herself, may be hurt beyond repair by Steve’s angry words, she could never be angry or disgusted with Bruce.

Any part of Bruce.

Her lips twitched into a tiny smile and she flipped the napkin over. It was quiet for a few moments as she sketched Bruce Banner as he’d appeared while falling asleep.

And then, as she stood to leave the lounge, she wrote “Two sides of one coin…” across the bottom of the napkin.

Then she left the lounge to return to Bruce’s floor. She hoped he was still sleeping and that he hadn’t woken up to find her gone. He would think she’d abandoned him. She was running by the time she reached his floor and when she threw herself into his apartment she almost laughed at her silly panic.

He wouldn’t have woken up, he’d been out like a light.

She froze in the doorway leading to his bedroom and groaned.

His bed was empty.

Bruce had gone to his lab.

**

He’d had woken shortly after Evony had wandered upstairs; Bruce had gazed at the vacant armchair hopelessly for a few moments, a tiny voice in the back of his head murmuring snidely, She’s gone now, Banner. You got her back and then you had to have a temper tantrum and now Evony’s gone and you’ll never get her back.

His lips twisted in a hopeless smile as he hauled himself out of bed; Evony may have abandoned him, and for good reason, but that didn’t mean he should wallow away pining for her.

The remedy he’d made the other night had been the most effective test thus far; he should try to figure out what had gone wrong. Perhaps…perhaps this time he’d get it right and he wouldn’t have to live in fear of killing every single one of his friends anymore.

As he rushed down the hall to his lab, that snide voice in the back of his head snickered and whispered, Too late, Banner. Even if you do find a cure now, how will you be able to face Steve? How will you be able to ask for forgiveness? This is beyond anything that’s happened in the past… How can you even expect Evony to look at you now? Can you imagine what she experienced in the lab? Can you…
“Shut up,” Bruce growled to himself as he entered the lab. His hands trembled slightly as he paused in the doorway and took a deep breath. His skin crawled as he gazed around the lab; everywhere were signs of the Other Guy’s latest rampage. Tables were upended, glass sparkled everywhere in the dim emergency lighting and the acrid smell of chemicals burned his nose.

“JARVIS?” he called uncertainly, unsure if the Other Guy had somehow damaged the AI’s programming during his tantrum.

“Yes, sir?” said JARVIS, apparently back online.

Bruce breathed a sigh of relief as he made his way to his desk which had survived the onslaught relatively intact. “Mind turning on some lights for me?” The moment he asked the remaining lights clicked on and Bruce sighed in relief. “Thanks.”

“Of course, Dr. Banner. Shall I send the sweeper bots out to clean the floors? There is a fair amount of broken glass scattered about and your safety is at risk,” the AI said, his voice concerned.

Bruce’s lips twitched in a smile as he logged into his computer, “Yes that would be fine JARVIS.”

“Yes very good sir.”

His fingers flew over the keyboard in front of him and when the lab door locked he relaxed slightly.

If something happened, if he lost control, no one would be able to walk in on him this time.

The lab was quiet as Bruce began reworking the formula he had attempted the night before; finally, after almost an hour of careful revisions and calculations, he had a new vial full of light green fluid sitting before him. He glanced at the computer screen and ran the formula once more, but he knew it would work this time.

It had to…

Not even pausing to think or to wonder, he picked up the syringe in careful fingers and held it up the light. His lips twitched in a bitter smile and he took a deep breath. This was it. If this didn’t work…If he couldn’t eradicate the Hulk then he would have to leave, to seclude himself once more. He was dangerous in this state and he would not risk these people anymore.

They were his friends, his family and he was sick of worrying about what an episode may do to them.

What if he lost it near Evony again? What if Evony had been June?

His blood ran cold at that thought and he pushed the sleeve up on his left arm. Setting the needle to his arm he firmed his jaw grimly and thought, Never Evony. I’ll never hurt her again.

Then, with a hissing breath, he slipped the needle into the vein bulging in his elbow and depressed the syringe.

This was it…

**

“Where is he JARVIS?” she snapped as she rushed down the hall towards Bruce’s lab.

The AI was quiet for a moment and then said, “Dr. Banner has ordered me to allow him to work in privacy, Miss Potts. I believe he will not wish to be interrupted.”
Evony snorted as she neared his door and said, ‘‘Interrupted’’ my ass! He’s going to make another attempt and who knows what this is going to do to him this time!” The AI was quiet and she smiled grimly, ‘‘I’m right, aren’t I, J? He’s shoving a needle in his arm right as we speak, isn’t he?’’

The AI sounded very uncomfortable as he said, “I am unsure, Miss Potts. The feed of Dr. Banner’s lab has been damaged due to the events of a couple days past; I no longer have visual of Dr. Banner’s actions.”

“Right,” she muttered as she slid to a stop in front of the heavy steel door. She punched her entry code into the lock but nothing happened. “JARVIS,” she growled, “let me in this instant.”

“I’m afraid my controls have been overridden, Miss Potts,” he said, his voice slightly frazzled.

A grim smile settled on her lips as she pulled her phone from her pocket. “We’ll see about that,” she murmured, pulling up the schematics on the screen. JARVIS sighed as her fingers flew over the screen and within moments the lock released and the door slid open on silent hinges.

“Now where is he?” she snapped to the AI as she slid into the room. Sweeper bots zoomed about, their tiny motors purring in the silence and as she searched for Bruce, her eyes locked on the thin screens of his computers. Numbers and chemical signs filled every surface and as she neared, the bottom line of the code flashed onto the screen, Attempt #52: Ineffective.

Before she could even begin to process what those red words meant, an agonized groan broke the silence and she spun on her heel to gaze at the lab tables behind her.

“Bruce!” she gasped as she threw herself through the maze of broken and tumbled furniture between her and his chemistry equipment. “Oh my god,” she whispered as she fell to her knees, her hand brushing an empty syringe that had fallen beside his writhing body. “Bruce…” She stretched out a hand to touch him but his eyes snapped open and she froze.

They were bright green.

“GET OUT!” he roared, his voice a terrifying mix of Bruce Banner’s and the Other Guy’s.

She hesitated as his body hunched and twisted before her, and then with a deep breath, she hauled him into her arms and tucked his head under her chin. Running her hands over his bunching muscles she bent her head and kissed the top of his head, her lips buried in his tousled curls.

Closing her eyes she hugged him tightly to her and said, “No. Bruce Banner I will not get out. I will sit here with you and help you get through this.”

The lab fell silent and Evony rocked him back and forth gently as he writhed in agony in her arms. Neither knew how long they sat there, but when finally the chemicals had burned through his body, Bruce went limp in her arms and sobbed, “Oh god…”

Evony’s eyes closed as she felt his hands tighten in her shirt and she kissed his temple gently. “No more Bruce,” she whispered. “No more experiments. This is going to kill you if you keep doing it.”

He hesitated and then nodded, “All right,” he murmured as he sagged against her. “All right…”

Evony sighed in relief and pressed her cheek to his hair, “Thank you Bruce,” she whispered.

“Don’t leave me,” he choked as he wrapped his arms around her waist.

She smiled and rubbed her cheek against his curls, “I won’t Bruce.”
“Promise?”

“I promise.”

His lips lifted in a tiny smile and he pressed a gentle kiss to her collar bones.

“Thank you,” he whispered against her skin.

She shivered and laughed softly before saying, “Any time, Dr. Banner.”

The lab fell silent as they held each other, simply taking relief from the warmth of each other’s bodies.
How Do You Fix This?

Chapter Notes

Just a short one guys!

Hope everyone is doing well with finals and the end of term blues.

Bless.

-M

The first week after June’s run-in with the Hulk was tense; Bruce confined himself to his lab, despite Tony’s insistence that he come upstairs at least for meals. He didn’t think he’d be able to face Steve, who prowled the Tower like an angry predator when he wasn’t at June’s side at Mount Sinai. Steve had already gotten into an argument with Natasha and had only backed down after she’d blacked his eye and cracked a couple of his ribs.

Not that it mattered that much; being a super-soldier, he’d healed within hours.

But that had been the tip of the ice-berg for them all. Evony had finally given up trying to make amends with him and had kept to Bruce’s floor. She hadn’t wanted to leave him alone, which secretly pleased Bruce.

He didn’t think he could handle being by himself anymore. She was like a drug; spicy and addictive. That week, while tense and full of worry, was one of the better weeks Bruce Banner had had in a very long time.

Evony moved around the floor like a whirling dervish; she was constantly forgetting pencils or pens in his lab and papers were always being scattered as she worked on a multitude of projects, both for Joey, her writing partner, and for her secret project that she refused to show anyone. Including Bruce.

He’d seen scraps of it though, usually quick glimpses as she flipped through her sketch books or tossed balled up pages across the lab to his trash can. She never talked, just muttered or swore to herself and JARVIS who took her panicked disorganization in stride, reminding her where certain drawings or memos were with put-upon aplomb.

It was sweetly amusing and Bruce suspected she was doing it for him; her wild sense of humor served to distract him from his worries about June and as the week dragged on, he found himself watching her more and more.

He loved the way she would drape herself across his leather couch, her long legs sprawled over the back and her hair thrown haphazardly over the armrest; he didn’t think it looked particularly comfortable, but the sight of her in her yoga pants and his purple shirt was enough to set his bones on fire. She would lie like this for a while, usually no longer than an hour since she would have inevitably forgotten something which led to her scrambling across the lab or up to her studio, and he would watch in fascination as her hand blew across the pages of her sketchbook.

From what he could tell it was another graphic novel and he didn’t think it was the zombie series she
and Joey had started in college.

This looked suspiciously like a superhero comic featuring a man in a red and gold suit and a bespectacled side-kick. He didn’t think he wanted to know what the storyline was…

One day, during this sweetly uncomfortable week, Bruce opened his eyes to find that he was in his own bed, in his apartment. His brow furrowed as he tried to remember how he had gotten here; the night before he had been studying some formulas Tony had sent him. He couldn’t remember much after 3 a.m. except for JARVIS quietly telling him the time.

He shifted, struggling to remember what had happened after that. Had he slept walked down to his bed?

He stilled as someone in the arm chair next to his bed murmured in her sleep and shifted. Jasmine and oranges drifted through the air and he smiled.

Evony.

She must have come down to check on him and hauled him back to his bed. He glanced over to where she sat curled in his chair, a blanket wrapped around her and her sketchpad hanging from the tips of her fingers She must have been drawing when she fell asleep.

His eyes were drifting closed as his body once more relaxed into sleep, when JARVIS spoke through the pitch black gloom of his room. The control panel by the door lit in faint blue iridescence as the AI said apologetically, “Dr. Banner? My apologies for this interruption but Mr. Stark is en-route to your residence. Shall I ask him to wait in the living room?”

Bruce frowned and glanced at Evony, faintly highlighted in the blue light of JARVIS’s’s panel and he sighed as he slid out of bed. “Yes, that would be fine JARVIS; we don’t need to give Tony a stroke this early in the morning,” he said softly, easing his arms under Evony and shifting her to the bed. He couldn’t help smiling as her fingers tightened in his shirt briefly and he smoothed his hand over her hair.

Evony, still deeply asleep, groaned and curled into herself, her hand stretching out to his vacant side of the bed and he stroked the back of her fingers before leaving the room. He ran his fingers over his hair, trying to make it lie flat.

It was quiet in the apartment and he glanced at the clock on JARVIS’s control panel by the front door; it was only seven in the morning. He frowned. What did Tony need at seven in the morning? He didn’t think Tony even knew what mornings were.

He was in the kitchen making some coffee when he heard the door open. “I’m in the kitchen, Tony!” he called softly as he poured water into the well of the machine.

“Oh thank god, somebody’s making coffee. Thank’s Banner,” Tony drawled as he sauntered into the room, his free hand shoved in his pants pocket.

Bruce glanced at him as he pulled out a frying pan from the cupboard next to the stove and his lips twitched in his wry smile. Tony Stark looked like death; he was still bruised from his latest run-in with Norman Osborn on Wednesday and Bruce flinched in sympathy at the sling SHIELD medical had forced on him. “When’s that sling coming off?” he asked as he reached into the fridge for eggs, bacon and butter.

His companion sighed in frustration as he threw himself into one of the stainless steel chairs set around Bruce’s breakfast table and scrubbed at his stubbled jaw. “The bastards have me in it for the
next week; they’re afraid I’ll dislocate this bad-boy again and I’ve been put on sick-leave. No Suit, no Avenging,” he said grumpily.

Bruce whistled in sympathy as he cracked eggs into the buttered frying pan and murmured, “Fury won’t be happy about that; with Steve refusing to leave June’s side and now you out of commission? Things are going to be tight. How are Clint and Natasha holding up?”

Tony snorted and pulled his phone from his pocket, “Well, you know Clintasha, they’re as deadly as a pair of rattlesnakes; as long as they get to zap and shoot, they’re golden.” Bruce chuckled quietly and began portioning bacon to fry up. Tony watched him thoughtfully before saying, “I just came from the hospital…” Bruce’s shoulders hunched instinctively and Tony’s fingers rose to tap slowly on the arc reactor glowing through his Metallica shirt.

“Bruce,” he said quietly, hoping his friend would turn to face him. He didn’t. Instead he continued his work on breakfast, his hands shaking only slightly as he flipped eggs and turned bacon. “Bruce, June woke up this morning,” Tony said. He smiled as Bruce turned in surprise.

“What?!” he gasped, his hand tightening around the spatula he held. “What did you say, Tony?” he choked out, his eyes wide.

Tony chuckled and repeated, “June woke up this morning. She opened her eyes and looked right at Steve and me.” He smiled as Bruce swayed and rested against the counter. “She’s going to be fine, big man!” he laughed as he stood and clapped the other scientist on the shoulder. Bruce gazed at him in shock and Tony’s smile slipped a little. “She’s in rough condition, yeah, but she’ll pull through. She’s tough and she’s got Steve to fight for her. She’s going to be fine, Bruce,” he said softly, as his hand tightened on the other man’s shoulder.

Bruce nodded; he found himself hoping she would be but at the same time, the cynical part of himself who still had nightmares about throwing her body across the room, wondered if anyone would be fine after a run-in of that extent with the Other Guy.

“Thanks Tony,” he murmured as he turned back to his eggs. He slid them out of the frying pan as well as the bacon and reached for some mugs.

Tony watched him, his eyes narrowed and he said, “All this for me, Banner?”

Bruce froze and glanced over his shoulder at Tony, a small smile on his lips. “No way Stark. I’m going to be in the lab all day. Need a hearty breakfast and all that.”

Tony’s eyes narrowed as he stood slowly. “Right. Lab. Okay Banner.” When his friend didn’t respond, simply focused on pouring coffee into the mugs he’d set out, he sighed and made his way to the door. “Well, whatever. I’m going to go upstairs and see what Pepper’s doing. Maybe she’ll be more entertaining…”

Bruce snorted and rolled his eyes as the man left the room. He couldn’t help breathing a sigh of relief at the sound of the front door closing though. He and Evony had been careful about her staying with him; she hadn’t been sure how either Tony or her sister would handle the thought of her sleeping with him.

Not that they’d actually done anything after June…

But still.

“You know, one of the best things about waking up in the morning is the smell of bacon wafting through the air,” said a voice from the doorway. Bruce turned to see Evony leaning against the
doorjamb, a cheeky grin on her lips and her dark red hair tousled. “One of the best things,” she finished with a soft laugh. He flushed at her knowing smirk.

“Hey,” was all he could say as she shook her hair out, sending her spicy scent wafting towards where he stood holding a cup of coffee.

“Hey,” she whispered, as she stopped before him.

Bruce’s lips twitched in his wry grin and he handed her a plate full of eggs and bacon. She leaned over and set it on the table and then turned back to him, a small frown on her face. “Bruce?” she said, her voice concerned. “Are you okay? Was Tony here about June?”

He nodded and she waited patiently, her fingers toying idly with his shirt she wore. Finally his eyes rose to hers and he whispered, “June woke up.”

She stilled, her eyes widening and he shivered at the fear rolling off of her. She still had nightmares about that day in the lab...

“Bruce,” she whispered as he turned away from her. “Are you sure you’re okay?” Her hand brushed over his shoulder, sending shivers down his spine at the gentle warmth of her fingertips on his skin.

He busied himself with their mugs being sure to fill hers to the brim and as he poured some skim milk and sugar into his own he said, “I think so…I’m still processing it, you know.”

She came up behind him and slid her hands up his back, her lips shadowing her touch as she pressed feather-light kisses into his skin. “It’s all right now Bruce. June’s awake, everything is going to be fine,” she murmured as she rested her cheek against his left shoulder blade.

He stared at the milk swirling in his mug and his wry grin turned into a full-on smile; turning, he wrapped his arms around her waist and kissed her. Pulling away from her lips he laughed and said quietly, “You’re absolutely right! Everything is going to be fine.”

She gazed at him in surprise and then placed her hands gently on his cheeks, “What should we do to celebrate?” she asked, her voice husky as her eyes darkened.

Bruce’s mouth went dry and he eased himself out of her arms, “Well,” he said as he caught her hand and dragged her to the table, “We should eat first, since neither of us have eaten well this week,” he said, making her chuckle with memories of take-out boxes scattered throughout the lab and popcorn bags being tossed into overflowing bins. “And then you should go to your studio for a while and get some work done before Joey comes and kills us all and I should…” he paused and frowned at his plate.

Evony froze, a fork full of bacon and scrambled eggs halfway to her mouth and she said softly, “Bruce?”

He jumped and grinned wryly at her, “Sorry, got caught in my thoughts,” he murmured. He shook his head and scooped up some eggs before saying, “I think I should go to the hospital and talk to June.”

Evony sighed and set her fork down, “Is that a good idea? Steve will be there and…” her voice trailed away as he shook his head again.

“I know he will be, but I won’t be able to think straight if I don’t go to her. It’s the right thing to do,” he murmured, trailing his fork through the eggs on his plate.
Evony was quiet as she sipped from her mug of black coffee and he shivered under her thoughtful gaze. Finally she set her mug down and nodded, “Okay. I can understand that. Do you want me to go with you?”

He raised his eyes to hers and shook his head. “No,” he said slowly. “If Steve is there, and he will be I’m sure, it’ll be best if I go alone. Besides,” he continued with a pointed glance at her right wrist. “There’s going to be enough guilt spread around in that hospital, we won’t need anymore.”

She was quiet for a moment and then she stood and wrapped her arms around his neck; pressing a kiss to his temple, she murmured, “I’ll be here when you get back.”

He smiled and raised his hand to hers. “Promise?” he said softly.

Her throaty chuckle in his ears made him shiver and as she pressed her lips to his ear, his heart began to pound.

“I promise,” she whispered.
Bruce had to admit, the sight of Evony bent over her work table with her sleeves pushed up past her elbows and her hair balled into a messy top knot was one of the most beautiful sights he had ever seen.

The tight jeans and his flannel shirt completed it. Her legs were spread and her hair was lit in a soft halo of light as she worked on tracing panels for hers and Joey’s novel; his mouth went dry as she bent even further over the table, her back stretching so that her butt thrust out. He longed to run his hands over her body, to press himself against her...
He shook himself, forcing his mind away from his desires and he cleared his throat. She jumped and shrieked, her hands flailing. She turned so fast, her hip bumped the table causing several pens to skitter over its surface.

“Bruce!” she gasped, her ink stained fingers rising to press against her lips. “You scared the shit out of me!”

He grinned and shrugged his shoulders, “Sorry,” he said. “Thought I’d return the favor.”

She stared at him for a moment, her heart still hammering and then she said as she lowered her hands, “What’s wrong? Has something happened? Is it June?” Her blue eyes were wide and Bruce started to feel a little guilty. He hadn’t meant to truly scare her.

“Everything’s fine,” he said soothingly as he straightened from his casual lean on the doorjamb. She sighed in relief as he moved across the room to gather her in his arms. “Everything is fine,” he said softly, running his hands firmly up and down her back.

Her hands rose to cup his face and she frowned. “June? She’s all right?” she asked.

He stilled, reveling in the feel of her fingers running through the hair over his ears and he murmured, “She’s as well as can be expected at this point. She’s still weak from blood loss and the medications she’s on make her a little cloudy. But she’s lucid and there seems to be no memory loss which is good.”

Evony smiled slightly and stroked the smattering of gray hair over his ears. “That’s good,” she murmured as his hands settled on her hips. “She was able to talk to you?”

Bruce nodded but didn’t say anything. Evony didn’t push; she understood that whatever had been said was between Bruce and June. As long as Bruce didn’t lock himself away in his lab, then she wouldn’t become involved.

“Was Steve there?” she asked, her voice agonized. Bruce sighed and rested his forehead against hers.
“Yes he was,” he said, his voice just as agonized. “He almost didn’t let me in her room but she forced him to stand down. She…she wanted to talk to me,” he said with a small smile. Evony’s fingers stilled in their gentle stroking and she chuckled sadly, “I bet he wasn’t too happy about that.”

Bruce shook his head and sighed again, “No,” he said softly. “No I don’t think he was.”

They were quiet for a moment, just standing together in the middle of her studio with their foreheads pressed together. Finally he pulled away from her and said, “Evony I have a question for you.”

She raised her eyebrows as she turned to gather up some of her dried panels and he rubbed his hands nervously for a moment. Then, plucking up his courage, he grabbed her hands and turned her towards him. “Evony Potts,” he said, his tone light and his dark eyes sparkling mischievously. “Would you do me the honor of going on a date with me tonight?”

She stared at him, her sapphire blue eyes wide with surprise and then she laughed. “A date? Like, dress up nice, go out to dinner and then a chaste kiss on the front porch kind of date?” she said curiously.

He only shook his head and with a cheeky grin said, “Well actually it’s a surprise. Can I come for you at eight this evening?”

She hesitated, but her curiosity got the better of her; she’d never seen him like this before. He had never been this cheerful, this carefree since she’d met him. As she smiled and nodded, she realized she liked this Bruce Banner very much.

She hoped she’d get to see more of this side of him…

“Great!” he said before planting a light kiss on her cheek. “I’ll see you at eight!” He waved as he left the room and her soft laugh followed him out of the studio.

“Bye Bruce!” she called as she settled into one of her chairs.

Glancing at the clock, she groaned. It was only two in the afternoon. How was she going to last until eight?! **

Evony groaned at the state of her closet; here it was-7:50 and she still hadn’t found anything to wear! Her eyes flitted from dresses to jeans to pant suits thrown haphazardly over very surface of her bedroom and she swore. “Son of a bitch! I have nothing to wear! What am I going to do?! I
shouldn’t have stayed in the studio all day. I should have had Happy drive me to Macy’s or something. Dammit!”

Glancing around, she considered calling Pepper and asking her for some sisterly advice but her sister was currently finishing up a board meeting and wouldn’t want to be interrupted.

Evony’s hand had settled on a soft gray jersey knit dress during her frantic pacing when JARVIS said, “Miss Potts, I wish to inform you that Dr. Banner is disembarking upon your floor.” She swore as she glanced at the clock on her bedside table; he was a whole five minutes early.

“He’s one of those guys then,” she grumbled as she began digging through the pile of shirts jumbled on her armchair.

JARVIS interjected at that point, obviously horrified at the state of her room and her lips twitched as clothes went every which way as he said, “I would recommend the gray dress, the lace stockings and blue ballet flats currently tossed in your laundry hamper, Miss Potts.”

Evony froze in the process of pulling said gray dress once more out of a pile of clothes and glanced at it. “Really?” she said as the soft material slid over her hands. “Are you sure J?”

“I am indeed, Miss Potts. That is your favorite dress after all.”

She laughed in disbelief as she pulled it on and said, “Now how in the world do you know that JARVIS?”

His voice was mild as he said, “It is the only dress you ever hang up after a use or after a wash, Miss Potts. That is fairly easy to compute.”

She snorted as the dress slithered over her skin, “JARVIS, you dog! You could have told me this an hour ago and saved my poor closet and my sanity.”

“Quite right madam. My apologies,” the AI murmured as she sat to pull on the lace tights draped over her vanity mirror. “Dr. Banner is outside your door. Should I inform him that you will be a few minutes late?”

She paused in the process of straightening her tights and digging the blue shoes out of the hamper and cringed. “Yeah,” she said with a sigh. “That will work JARVIS. I still have to fix my hair. Damn!”

“Of course madam. I daresay he should be used to it by now.”

She snorted and rolled her eyes as she wove through the abandoned clothes and shoes tossed about the room to the bathroom. Gazing at herself in the mirror she froze.

How was she going to handle tonight?

She’d never been with Bruce on a normal basis, had never simply been with him; there had always been hospital beds or worry about the Other Guy’s temper hanging over them.

Except for that night…

But she still wasn’t sure that counted.

Firming her jaw, she grabbed her brush and began taming her hair. Her eyes started to sparkle with nervous anticipation as she swept half of her hair up and she imagined how the night would go. As
she applied some basic makeup and made sure her bangs fell just right so her scars were covered she took a deep breath.

She was ready. Or as ready as she could ever be.

She clenched her fingers and said, “Okay you box of wires and snark-how do I look?”

JARVIS was quiet for a moment and then he said gently, “As beautiful as ever Miss Potts.”

She blushed and muttered, “You are so Tony’s creation, J.”

As she left the bathroom without a backward glance, JARVIS said, “So I am told. Good luck, Miss Potts. If you require assistance do not hesitate to call for me.”

She smiled as her hand rested on the doorknob of her door and whispered, “Thank you JARVIS.”

“Of course madam.”

Then, taking another deep breath, she threw open her door to reveal Bruce Banner standing on the threshold rubbing his hands. They stared at each other for a moment and then she laughed and said, “Hey.”

He smiled and held his hand out for her to take and murmured, “Hey,” as her fingers entwined with his.

“Sorry I’m late,” she said as his thumb ran over her skin. They were still standing in front of each other, only a few inches apart and Bruce felt himself drown in her eyes.

“That’s okay; I’m used to it,” he said, his wry grin in place.

Evony chuckled and ran her fingers through the graying curls above his ears. “JARVIS said you would be,” she murmured.

“JARVIS is very smart, but don’t tell him I said so. According to Tony he’s getting too full of himself,” Bruce said with a soft laugh.

She leaned forward and whispered, her eyes sparkling, “I think Tony makes him that way.”

He laughed softly and as he fell silent she shifted; his eyes swept over her, noting her hair and its careful arrangement and his stomach clenched at the sight of her pale collarbones framed by the soft sweep of the dress.

“You are so beautiful tonight, Evony,” he said and her fingers tightened in his.

“Thank you Bruce,” she murmured as her cheeks warmed. Her lips twitched in a sideways grin and she tweaked the tie tied loosely around his neck. “You look quite dapper yourself.”

He smiled and started heading down the hall towards the elevator. As they stepped into the shaft he glanced at her and said, “Thanks. JARVIS helped me.”

Her warm laugh echoed down the hall as the doors swept closed.

**

“So what’s the plan for tonight, Dr. Banner,” she asked as they neared his floor.
His wry grin was in place as he glanced at her and said, “It’s a surprise. Be patient, Miss Potts.”

She snorted as his thumb resumed its stroking over her hand and she muttered, “You don’t know me very well Bruce.”

As they stopped on his floor he glanced at her over his shoulder and said with a mischievous grin, “Actually, I know you very well.” He chuckled as her eyebrows rose and he continued as they neared his door, “Your impatience is one of the cutest things about you.”

She laughed softly when they got to his apartment and as he opened the door before stepping aside to let her in first, she slid her hand over his waist as she stepped through the door and murmured, her voice husky, “You think I’m cute Dr. Banner?”

Bruce felt his mouth go dry and he coughed to cover his discomfiture. “Don’t let it go to your head, Miss Potts. This Tower already has one egomaniac; one more would make it implode.”

She laughed, the sound warm and rich in his home; his blood made a rushing sound in his ears as she leaned against the table set just within the foyer, her long legs with their black lace tights crossed jauntily. She was watching him, her blue eyes sparkling in the soft light.

Bruce forced himself to focus, to tear his eyes away from the way her dress clung to her curves or the way her blue shoes matched her eyes perfectly.

Clearing his throat, he pulled her into the living room and said, “I hope you like Indian food.”

Evony froze at the sight of the coffee table full of steaming dishes piled high with rice, chicken and curry. “Oh wow Bruce,” she whispered. “This is amazing! Did you make all of this food?”

He chuckled and shook his head, “No, there’s this great Indian place that delivers. I just took all of the food out of the carry-out containers and arranged them across the table.”

She laughed softly and he shivered as she ran her fingers over the sari’s and cushions draped over the couch and around the table. “Where did you find all of these fabrics?” she asked as he settled on the couch. She didn’t sit next to him; instead she settled at his feet, her back pressed against his legs and he shivered at her warmth.

“I spent almost two years in Calcutta; I sort of developed a taste for the culture. I would love to redecorate this apartment using some of the things I fell in love with while I was abroad,” he murmured.

She smiled and glanced at him over his shoulder, “That would be really cool! Pepper would love to help you! I’m horrible at interior design but it’s right up her alley.” She paused and turned back to the table of food. “So where do I start?” she asked uncertainly.

“You’ve never had Indian food?” he asked as he leaned forward to pour some wine into her glass.

She shook her head and murmured, “John took me once, when I came home for one of my spring breaks, but that was the only time.” He smiled at the hesitation in her voice and he smoothed his hands gently over her shoulders.

“Don’t worry, I’ll help you. I’m well versed in Indian cuisine. You’re in good hands,” he said, his lips close to her ear and she shuddered.

“You promise?” she whispered as he ran his fingers over a strand of her hair before tucking it behind her ear.
“I promise. You should start with the peach curry and the long grain rice. You’ll love it, it’s spicy and sweet at the same time,” he said softly. She followed his finger and picked up a small bowl full of curry and took an appreciative whiff.

“All right,” she said slowly. “Here I go!”

He chuckled and said, “Good luck!”

She laughed as she placed small portions of all of the dishes on her plate and he smiled tenderly, giving her advice about which dishes would go well together or the history of certain spices used or why some chicken was fried or simply cooked. Evony listened to it all avidly, her eyes glowing with excitement as she tried each new food and Bruce noted which dishes she loved the most, filing the information away for future use.

The dinner progressed like this, Bruce directing her to try different dishes and her laughter rippled through the room making his blood thrum with energy. He didn’t eat much, he was too focused on her enjoyment. He couldn’t help chuckling as she blended dishes, trying the spicy chicken in the honey sauce with the sticky rice, not the brown, but he didn’t dissuade her. She wouldn’t have followed his advice anyway, he knew.

As the dinner drew to an end, she sagged against his legs with a groan, her hands clapped to her stomach. “Oh my god, that was amazing Bruce!” she said with a laugh. She dropped her head back onto his knees and he smiled happily.

“Ready for the next thing?” he asked.

She frowned and turned; planting her hands on his knees, she laughed softly and nodded. “Sure, what do you have next on the agenda commander?” she asked, her voice warm and her eyes darkening.

Bruce’s legs tensed under her warm touch as he laughed wryly and gathered her hands into his. “Not that,” he said gently, his eyes narrowing.

Evony paused and with a woeful sigh said, “Well damn.”

Bruce laughed and stood, pulling her upright as well. “All right you greedy thing, let’s get out of here so the maids can clean up the carnage,” he said before pausing and gazing at her thoughtfully. “Do you have a jacket?”

She frowned and shook her head. “We can stop at my floor if you want,” she said but he shook his head and led her to the front door. Stopping at the front closet he pulled a light jacket out and handed it to her.

“We won’t be out for long,” he said as she shrugged into the sleeves. She opened her mouth to ask where they were going but he shushed her and placed a finger gently on her lips. “Patience, Evie,” he said with a soft laugh. “Trust me.

She sighed around his finger and mumbled, “All right.”

He zipped her into the jacket and kissed her nose; then he led her out of the apartment and down the hall towards the elevator.

**

“Dummy, I swear, if you don’t hold still I am going to donate you to NYU as a modern art sculpture!
Tony sighed in frustration and shifted the sling binding his arm as Dummy turned to gaze at him in confusion.

“You are a worthless bag of bolts and I’m going to give you to Rhodey the next time I see him,” he grumbled as the bot rolled away.

He was about to flip the arm of his Suit over so he could repair some of the wiring that had been damaged by his latest run-in with the Iron Patriot when JARVIS spoke. “Sir, you directed me to inform you when Dr. Banner and Miss Potts left his apartment. They are currently en-route to the 93rd floor and Dr. Banner’s desert. Should I set up a visual?”

Tony chuckled, his irritation with his bots and Suits forgotten and leaned back in his chair. “Go ahead, J,” he called as he scooped up a bag of Craisin’s. “Let’s see what our love birds are up to.” His lips lifted in a feral grin as JARVIS provided a visual of Banner’s careful balcony set-up.

“If they do anything nasty on my balcony there is going to be hell to pay,” he grumbled as he fiddled with his screwdriver.

He still wasn’t sure how he felt about Evony and Banner “dating”; it set him on edge.

He had to admit though, the sight of her laughing as Banner fed her ice cream and the look of the man’s face as she rested her head on his shoulder made him wonder if perhaps everything would work out between these two.

He hoped so.

He was about to turn the feed off and go back to fixing his Suit when the workshop door opened and a tired looking Pepper entered.

“Hey sweetheart,” he called, leaning even further back in his chair so he could watch her approach. “How was the Board?”

She only rolled her eyes and said, “Don’t lean so far back in your chair, Tony. You’re going to fall and crack your head open and then Director Fury will really be beside himself.” She sighed as he pulled her into his lap and she rested her head on his arc reactor. “The board was fine,” she murmured. “You should have been there of course, but we’ve gotten used to you ignoring my texts so we just moved right along.” Her fingers stroked the blue circle glowing through his shirt and Tony planted a tender kiss on the top of her head.

“Sorry Pep, you know how much I hate those things,” he murmured, his eyes still on the feed of Bruce and Evony. They were leaning on the balcony now, just talking and Bruce had his arm wrapped around her waist. “Wonder what they’re talking about,” he muttered. He really should install audio on his security cameras…

Pepper frowned and sat up, “What are you talking about—OH MY GOD! Tony! That’s Evony and Bruce!” she gasped, her finger pointing at the screen.

Tony laughed and shrugged. “Obviously,” he said with a grin.

She smacked him solidly on the chest and snapped, “Turn that off this instant! It’s rude to watch people like that! What have I told you in the past?”

He snorted and leaned around her to turn the video feed off and muttered, “You didn’t care when we
were watching June and Rogers that day a few months ago.”

She pulled on his ear and growled, “June’s not my baby sister.”

Tony howled in mock agony at her tight grip on his ear and said, “I yield, I yield!”

She smiled but kept a grip on his ear, “No more spying, Tony Stark. Swear on the-“ she paused and glanced around the lab; then with a sly smile she leaned across him, still holding his ear and grabbed a thick book from the desk. “Swear on the ‘Advanced Physics and Technology Development: A Master's Guide.’”

He sighed and rested his hand on the surface of the only book he’d ever read cover to cover and enjoyed. “I swear,” he said sullenly. “But what if something happens and Evony-“

Pepper shook her head and smacked her fingers firmly over his lips. “Nothing is going to happen and even if it does, JARVIS will let us know. They don’t need you spying on them, Tony.”

He sighed and nodded; she watched him carefully and after a moment dropped her hand. She smiled and leaned forward to plant a tender kiss on his lips. As she straightened, she glanced over her shoulder at the now-black screen and murmured, “What do you think they were talking about?”

Tony stared at her for a second and then started to laugh.

“Pepper Potts, you are the most amazing woman I have ever met,” he said as tears slid down his cheeks.

She smiled contentedly and once more curled up against his chest, her face pressed to his arc and she said, “Oh I know Tony. Who else would have been able to put up with you for fifteen years?”

The workshop was quiet while floors above Bruce and Evony were once more ducking into the elevator to return to her floor.

Neither knew that their desert had been the topic of discussion in Tony’s workshop but neither of them would have been surprised.

After all, this was Tony Stark’s Tower.

**

“Well, goodnight,” Bruce murmured to Evony. They were standing outside of her door and she was smiling sleepily at him.

“Goodnight Bruce,” she said with a small smile. “I had so much fun tonight. We should get Indian food again. I really loved that peach curry.”

Bruce smiled gently and brushed her bangs out of her eyes. “I’ll be sure to order some soon,” he said with a chuckle. He paused and his hand fell from her hair, “Thank you Evony for tonight. It was…” his voice trailed off and she grabbed his hand.

“It was exactly what was needed, Bruce,” she said with a small smile. “You’ve proved to yourself that you can be a normal man, that you can go on dates and teach naïve women how to eat Indian cuisine. I understand,” she finished.

Bruce stared at her, his eyes wide and she smiled sadly at him. “You’re not a monster Bruce Banner,” she whispered as she closed the small distance between them. “You’re a normal man who
has a bit of a temper problem. I can work with that,” she said gently. Before he could say anything
she stood on her tiptoes and buried his hands in his hair. “You’re a good man, Bruce, please don’t
doubt that.”

Bruce sighed as her fingers smoothed over the back of his head and his shoulders sagged, “I’m going
to need you to remind me of that, every now-and-then Evie.”

She laughed softly and pressed her forehead to his, “Of course, Dr. Banner.”
He chuckled as well and then pressed his lips to hers. As he pulled away he whispered, “Promise?”

She clenched his fingers; “I promise,” she said as she opened her door. “Goodnight Dr. Banner,” she
said as she rested her head on the edge of the door.

He chuckled and shoved his hands in his pockets, “Goodnight Miss Potts. Sleep well.”

She smiled, her blue eyes sparkling, “You too. I’ll see you in the morning?”

He nodded and resisted grabbing her and kissing her once more. “Of course. Come whenever you
want; I’ll be where I always am,” he said with a wry grin.

She chuckled and nodded, “All right. It’s a date.”

Then her door closed and Bruce was alone in the hallway.

He wondered if he should have asked her to come back to his apartment; he wondered if she would
come down tonight like she had been every night this past week. He swallowed heavily as he started
down the hall. Would he be able to sleep without her curled up at his side, snoring softly?

Somehow the feel of her in his arms always managed to keep the green-tinted nightmares at bay.

As he entered his apartment he pulled off his tie and gazed around the bland walls. He’d never
noticed how quiet his new home was, how still. After spending a week with Evony and her constant
energy in this place, it just seemed sterile now.

He moved to the bedroom and started taking off his dress clothes; his eyes settled on the bed and he
frowned. He didn’t like the thought of spending the night alone. Maybe he should go to the lab…

Before he could make a decision, a quiet knock sounded on the front door. He froze in the process of
unbuttoning his shirt and glanced at the control panel near his bedroom door.

“JARVIS? Who’s at the door?”

No response.

Swallowing heavily, ignoring the tension in the back of his head and the half-forgotten memories of
armed men breaking down countless doors to capture him, he moved from the bedroom to the living
room.

He stretched his hand out to open the door and hesitated. If it was her…

Steeling himself, he threw the door open and froze.

“Hey,” she said with a sheepish smile on her lips and her phone in her hand.

“Hey,” he croaked, relief coloring his voice at the sight of her in her yoga pants and Jack’s
Mannequin shirt.
JARVIS’s systems came back online the moment Bruce Banner’s door closed.
Three weeks Later

Three weeks after June woke and Bruce and Evony had their first date, the Hulk attacked.

They'd had dinner with Tony, Pepper and the other Avengers that night, totally normal. Bruce had been quiet, but that hadn't been so unusual for any of them. Evony had just chatted with Pepper and Clint and kept her hand on Bruce's knee.

When dinner had finally ended they'd made their way to his floor and curled up on the couch, her with her sketchpad and he with his notebook and had JARVIS cue up a movie for them.

She couldn't even remember what it was.

Maybe... *The Heathers*?

Something like that...

Bruce had been preoccupied, focused on his notebook and the numbers there and she had drawn him, with the faint frown on his forehead, the slight crinkle of his eyes and the messy mop of curls she loved to run her fingers through when he was distracted.

The Hulk had been very far away in that moment.

Or had he?

Could she be blamed for not noticing the tremor in his hands?

The slight growl in his voice every time he spoke?

Had that been blindness?

Or obstinancy?

She wasn't sure.

She still wasn't sure, even when she opened her eyes that night in Bruce's bed and found the green gaze of a monster staring back at her instead of the warm reassuring dark brown eyes of her favorite doctor.

"Bruce?" she whispered.

He didn't let her say anything after that.

Simply threw her from him and growled half-intelligent obscenities at her.

This was a side of the Other Guy she had never seen before.

He was almost...worse than the Hulk, far more rabid.

"I'm sorry Bruce," she whispered a few moments later when she shoved a tranq dart Clint Barton had left for her in the bedside table into his chest. "Forgive me."

Her tears had slid down her cheeks to land on bright green skin slowly turning to the dusky olive she
loved so much and as she hugged his shaking body to her she tried to tell herself that they could work through this.

But could they?

When she fell asleep, a while later, her body wrapped protectively around the now normal Bruce Banner, her dreams were bloody and full of green eyes and the sound of cracking bones.

Even her conscious wasn't completely sure she was doing the right thing here.

Loving the monster was a lot harder than loving the man sometimes...

**

Evony:

You're still sleeping. I'm not surprised I suppose, you did stay up with me all night...thank you for not running away.

I'm sorry if I scared you. I can only imagine what it was like waking up to that. I think Tony's right. The chemicals I've used in the past few months in hopes of eradicating the Other Guy may actually be contributing to his emergence. He's taking me to SHIELD headquarters today. Please don't worry. I promise I'll be back this evening for our movie date.

Ferris Bueller, right? I always loved that movie...Doesn't Tony kind of remind you of Ferris? I suppose that makes me Cameron...

I'm sorry if you can't read this. My hand won't stop shaking.

I promise you, everything will be fine. Please don't worry and please don't fight with Tony. He's only doing what I ask him. If anyone is going to know what to do it's the SHIELD scientists and medics. I can't risk you anymore...

I will see you tonight.

Be safe.

Bruce

**

“Evony? It’s Tony. JARVIS told me this morning that you were in Banner’s lab again during an episode. Evie, I have to ask you to stop doing this to yourself. We already have one girl in the hospital, do we really need another? And before you say anything, I know it’s you who’s been hacking J’s systems. Kid, you have to stop that! What’s going to happen the next time if you can’t stop the Hulk? What if he hurts you and we don’t know? Can you imagine what that would do to Pepper?

Can you imagine what that would do to Bruce when he changes back?

I haven’t said anything about these past few weeks; God knows I have no right to even play the father-figure with anyone, but Evie you have to be careful. This is not a trifling matter. We can’t lose you, okay kid?

Pepper can’t. I can’t.
Bruce can’t.

So, please, please be more careful. Let JARVIS do his job and let us do our job. Otherwise I’m going to send you back to California.

That’s all I have to say. I’m taking Banner to SHIELD. He’s probably told you he’ll be back tonight. And he might be. But this is a serious situation and things may not work out.

So don’t wait up for us kid. Get out and do something fun today. Don’t mope around the Tower waiting for us.

I’ll bring Banner back if I can.

Just….well. Be safe.” [End message.]

“Shall I play Mr. Stark’s message again Miss Potts?”

“No, JARVIS. That’s fine. I’m going up to the lounge for a drink,” Evony muttered, her fist tightening around the balled-up note from Bruce.

“Is that a good idea, Miss Potts? Mr. Stark did say…”

“I don’t care what Tony said, JARVIS. I need a drink so I’m going to go get a damned drink,” she growled as she left Bruce’s apartment.

All of the muscles in her body screamed and she tried to ignore the ache in her ribs every time she breathed; last night’s visit with the Other Guy had been especially brutal. For both of them.

She shuddered as she stepped into the elevator; it would be a long time before she forgot opening her eyes to the Other Guy’s bright green gaze instead of Bruce’s mild brown eyes. Roars echoed in her mind and she tried to forget how his chest had heaved under her fingers with every panicked breath he’d taken.

Bruce had been as unprepared as her for that episode, which in turn fueled the Hulk’s panic and terror. She’d tried to calm him, to tell him everything was going to be okay but he hadn’t listened to her. He’d actually hurt her last night, but she would never tell him that.

She pressed a hand to her ribs and winced; a part of her was glad Tony and Bruce had left the Tower. One look at her and they’d have known she’d been hurt. She didn’t need that. Bruce was only just now forgiving himself for hurting June. A few cracked ribs was not worth his guilt.

“Miss Potts, I should inform you that there is one other person in the lounge. I hope this will not discomfit you too much,” JARVIS’s voice was concerned as she stepped off the elevator and she paused.

“Well, I guess it depends on who it is, J,” she said. She shifted the strap of her messenger bag to her other shoulder and tried to think of who else may be in the Tower. Steve was probably still with June, Pepper would be at SI offices all day and Bruce and Tony were gone.

“I do believe it is Agent Barton. He’s on leave this week and taking advantage of Mr. Stark’s hospitality,” JARVIS said mildly.

Her lips twitched at the tone of his voice and began heading for the lounge. “Well that’s fine then. I’ll just pop by and say hello and make myself a drink-ow!” she groaned as her ribs shifted and she pressed a hand to her chest before sagging against the wall.
JARVIS was immediately concerned, “Miss Potts?! Miss Potts, my scans show some considerable
damage-”

“That’s enough J,” she snapped, taking a deep breath and straightening carefully. “I’m perfectly fine
and don’t you dare tell Tony otherwise.”

He hesitated as she pushed open the door and then murmured, “Of course, Miss Potts. Enjoy your
afternoon.”

She sighed. Somehow Tony’s AI always seemed so mopey after he’d been told off; Bruce was right,
Tony’s creations were developing way too much personality for their own good.

She paused in the doorway of the lounge and took in the disarray of the room; Clint Barton was
sprawled on one of the couches, surrounded by empty beer cans and take-out containers. He was
shirtless, his hair stuck up in every-direction and she was pretty sure he was in just his boxers. To top
it off, the Olympics were on and he was shouting angrily at the Russian archery team currently
competing against Turkey.

“Oh come on! You guys know how to shoot better than that! I’ve gone up against at least three of
your team members! What is Karkova teaching you?! Aw dammit!” he groaned as one of the
Russian archers missed the bulls-eye by a centimeter.

“Funny, I never thought archery inspired such high passion,” she said dryly from behind his couch.
She tried to pretend he wasn’t nearly naked; it was kind of hard though. His boxers were bright
purple.

Clint didn’t even jump. He only glanced at her over his shoulder, leaned over to the cooler sitting on
the floor beside his couch and tossed her a beer, “Pull up a chair, Little Potts and prepare to be blown
away,” he said with a small smile.

Evony gazed at the beer and then around the room, “Clint? Are you living in the lounge?”

He shrugged, once more focusing on the archery competition. “Only so long as the Olympics are on.
Stark doesn’t mind,” he muttered. “Oh come on! Sonofabitch these bastards cannot shoot to save a
life. I hope Fury doesn’t have any thoughts of replacing me, because the Russians suck!” He flopped
backwards as the buzzer rang and the announcers took up their dry commentary once more. Sipping
from his beer, he turned his gaze on her and frowned. “You okay Little Potts? You’re kind of pale.”
he said, sitting up.

Evony jumped and pasted a smile on her face, “What? Oh yeah, I’m fine. Just tired,” she said. Then,
when he still didn’t look convinced, she changed the subject, “Tell you what, Mr. Bond, how about I
go up to my floor, get in some comfy clothes and come back to watch this stupid sporting event with
you.” She laughed as she headed towards the door.

Clint watched her thoughtfully and then flopped back on the couch, “Sounds good to me, Little
Potts! If you hurry you’ll beat the commercial break; NBC’s are always really long.”

She nodded and then before she left the room she said, “I’ll watch this with you as long as you clean
this place up. I don’t really want to sit in old Chinese.”

She laughed as he groaned and then headed to her floor. It wouldn’t hurt to watch the Olympics with
the resident archer, right? That didn’t count as moping did it?

She didn’t think so.
“Banner I cannot believe you’re afraid of needles.”

“Have you seen that needle, Tony? That’s not a needle, that’s a poker,” Bruce said grumpily as a SHIELD medic swabbed his arm. Tony only rolled his eyes and munched on a handful of peanuts.

“You’re a big green baby, Banner,” he mumbled through a mouthful of nuts.

Bruce only laughed and leaned his head back in the padded chair he sat in; his head was pounding but he wasn’t sure if that was an after-effect of last night’s Hulk-out or if it was because he was hooked up to several machines which studied his neurological cycles and the gamma radiation corrupting his cells.

It was all very normal, very mundane and he should have been at least a little relaxed. But he’d seen the looks Tony had been shooting him occasionally and he could feel Fury’s one-eyed gaze on him from behind the one-way glass of the medical bay.

“Tony,” Bruce said his voice only slightly shaky as the medic slid the needle into his arm.

“Mmhmm, big man?” Tony said from behind the computer he sat at.

Bruce hesitated for a moment, unsure how to say what was on his mind. Finally he took a deep breath and said, “Do you think Evony and I are…you know…” he trailed off and Tony glanced at him around the monitor. Bruce closed his eyes as the medic removed the needle slowly and he tried to not focus on the deep-red blood sloshing sickeningly within the syringe.

Tony’s eyebrows were up and he was grinning; Bruce rolled his eyes and sighed. He was going to make him say it.

“When would be an appropriate time to ask Evony out, to you know, go steady?” he mumbled as the medic came near him with another needle.

Tony stared at him and then burst into laughter. “Steady? Steady?! Jesus, Banner! Who are you? The Living Icicle?!” he laughed for almost a minute and Bruce would have blushed if his blood supply wasn’t being drained by a blank-eyed SHIELD flunky.

“Oh shut up,” he grumbled with his eyes closed. His headache was getting worse. He hoped that didn’t mean he was going to have another episode. “Hand me that tablet would you?” he asked as Tony’s laughter trailed away to the occasional guffaw. He did and Bruce pulled up the scans they were currently running.

As he breathed a sigh of relief at the relatively normal numbers flashing across the screen, Tony said thoughtfully, “You know Banner, if this were a normal situation and you and Evony were normal people, I’d say you’re already dating. She’s spent all of her free time in your lab and she’s all you can think about when you’re not, you know, having a temper tantrum. But…” he trailed off and rubbed his goatee thoughtfully. Bruce’s hands tightened on the tiny computer he held and he didn’t look at his friend. Tony sighed and shrugged. “But I don’t think this is dating quite yet. I think this is dancing on eggshells. Especially after last night; I think you two are going to have to be very careful.”

His dark eyes met Bruce’s and the men gazed at each other thoughtfully. Tony leaned forward, resting his elbows on the armrest of the chair and he said softly, “Do you know what brought on last
night’s Hulkisode? Was it Evony? Or something…else?” He watched the other scientist carefully; Bruce was quiet, adjusting the scans being run from his tablet and he tried to think of what had brought on the Other Guy’s fury the night before.

“I don’t really know Tony,” he said slowly, his eyes focusing on the images of his brain SHIELD was sending him. “We watched the Breakfast Club, ate pancakes she’d made and she sketched for most of the night. I don’t even remember going to bed.” He sighed and met his friend’s eyes. “The next thing I knew, she was holding me, whispering my name and the room was in a shambles,” he murmured, his muscles tensing at the memory of the pain of his transformation. She’d held him for most of the night, trying to soothe his guilt. “I…” he hesitated. Tony was watching him avidly, his dark eyes wide and curious. “I think she’s the only thing that keeps me sane anymore, Tony,” he said softly, his shoulders slumping.

Tony leaned back, a small smile tugging at his lips and he chuckled. “Well,” he said slowly. “That is interesting. I wonder how Evony feels about this entire thing…”

Both men were quiet for a moment and then their gazes met. Bruce smiled as the other man started to chuckle.

“I guess that’s a stupid question, right Banner?” Tony said. Bruce only shrugged.

Before they could discuss anything further, though, a young woman in a SHIELD uniform and white coat appeared at their sides, making Tony jump and swear. She only spared him a quick glance before handing Bruce a SHIELD tablet.

“The results, Dr. Banner. Would you mind?” she asked timidly. Bruce idly wondered if she was terrified of him because of the Other Guy or if she was new.

He didn’t have time to think about that though. Instead his eyes were caught by some discrepancies in the data.

“What is this?” he said sharply, his usually mild voice harsh. “What numbers are these? Your tech messed up on something! This isn’t possible!”

Tony tensed as the doctor sat up, Bruce’s grip on the tablet the young medic had handed him tightened and he said softly, “Easy Banner, take a breath. What’s wrong with the data?” His eyes darted around the room to rest on the Mark V currently sitting in her suitcase and he wondered if he’d have to suit up in the medical bay of SHIELD. That would get Fury’s panties all in a knot.

Bruce stood and began pulling the electrodes off of his body; Tony placed a hand on his arm and said softly, “What’s going on big man?”

He didn’t answer, just thrust the tablet at him and began pulling on his shirt. Tony only stared at the results SHIELD had laid out for them. “What the hell is going on? When did this change Banner?!” he said, his voice harsh in the sudden silence of SHIELD medical.

Bruce only glanced at him and shook his head, “The chemicals…”

“They chemicals you were pumping into yourself suddenly made you fertile?! Banner! That’s impossible! That’s entirely fucking impossible!” He paused as Bruce headed for the door and he said weakly, “Isn’t it?”

Bruce turned to him and said, “Tony. When I’m angry I turn into a green monster. Anything is possible at this point.” And he pushed through the doors.
Tony stared after him for a second, processing his words and the hopeless look on his friend’s face and then he rushed out of medical as well, only pausing to pick up the Mark V briefcase.

“Wait! Banner!” he shouted as he ran after Bruce who was heading for the deck and their waiting Quinjet. “Banner, what does this mean? Does this mean…”

Bruce glanced at him and the terror in his eyes was enough of an answer for Tony, who suddenly lost his temper.

“You slept with Evony,” he said, his voice cold. Bruce didn’t nod, or agree but the way his shoulders slumped was answer enough for Tony Stark. “Oh my God! You bastard! You slept with her and you didn’t even know if you’d be you while doing it! You could have hurt her! You could have killed her, Banner! You fucking bastard!” He growled this last and punched Bruce solidly.

Bruce didn’t fight back as Tony punched him; his eyes were wide and glassy as the implications of what SHIELD’s new discoveries meant for him. He sagged to the deck and touched the spot on his jaw Tony had hit.

“We have to get back to the Tower, Tony,” he murmured raising his eyes to the other man. “We have to double check SHIELD’s data. Have JARVIS run scans on me…and Evony,” he said with a heavy swallow. His hands were shaking and that headache was beginning to turn into a migraine.

Tony only stared at him, his chest heaving and he said, “If you knocked her up, I’m going to kill you Banner. I’ll find a way.” Bruce winced at the cold hatred in his friend’s voice and he nodded.

“Fair enough, Tony,” he said quietly. “I’ll help you…”

Tony shook his head and grabbed him by the elbow. “Let’s go. SHIELD gave you clearance; just heard it in the Comm.”

“Where did you get a Comm?” Bruce asked weakly as he was hauled across the deck to the jet.

“Stole it from that medic. Get in and don’t talk to me. I don’t think I’ll be able to resist punching you again,” Tony growled as he flexed his hand.

The flight back to the Tower was tense as both men processed what they had learned at SHIELD headquarters.

Neither knew quite what they were going to do.

Tony was sure he was going to have to find a way to kill Bruce Banner.

Bruce tried to find a way to tell Evony about this latest development.

As the jet landed on the flight deck of Stark Tower, Tony pulled out his phone and snapped, “Where’s Evony? Keep her there. We’ll be at the lounge in five.”

Turning to Banner he said, “You’re going to have to tell her, Banner. This is all on you and you’re going to have to bear the consequences.”

Bruce only nodded and concentrated on not passing out.

*What if she was…*

*What if he was…*
Pregnant?

A father?

Impossible.

**

Clint was watching her; she could feel his gaze on her and she shivered. Who had called him just a moment ago? And why was he so tense?

“Mind handing me another beer?” she asked softly as she worked on the shading of the sketch she had in her lap. She didn’t look up at the sound of the lid of the cooler thudding in place and when he set the can down at her side she thanked him and tried to keep her spine straight.

“What are you drawing Little Potts?” he asked curiously. She jumped and then handed him the sketchpad. “Wow,” he said, awe coloring his tone. “This is amazing. Is this me?”

She nodded and smiled shyly; she never shared her personal drawings with people. Tony and Pepper were the only one’s she’d allowed to flip through her sketchbooks. She had thought about letting Bruce or Steve when they’d asked but had never had the courage to. She didn’t think she’d be able to handle criticism from either man, especially Bruce.

“Do I always look this intense?” Clint asked with a soft laugh. She took the pad back from him and shrugged.

“Only when you’re watching the Olympics or about to use your bow,” she murmured, her fingers running over the edge of the paper.

He snorted, “So all the time, right? Excellent.”

He threw himself back on the couch and she popped the tab on her beer. As she was about to bring it to her lips to take a sip, the lounge door was thrown open and Tony Stark roared, “Set the beer down this instant Evony Potts!”

She froze her eyes wide as Tony rushed across the room towards her and she gasped as he tore the can out of her hands, “What the fuck, Tony?! What is up your butt?!”

He only glared at her and said through gritted teeth, “How many? How many beers have you had?”

Her mouth popped open and she stood to confront him, “You should ask! What the fuck Tony, are you questioning my habits?!” She folded her arms and scowled.

Tony only shook his head and ground out, “Don’t be ridiculous! I couldn’t care less about your habits. I just want to know how many beers you’ve had today.” His eyes were dark and his jaw was flexing furiously.

She glanced at Clint, who shrugged, and then she turned her gaze to Bruce who was standing by the door. “How many, Evony?” he asked softly, his dark eyes unreadable.

She frowned and threw her hands in the air, “Two, all right?! I had two beers! Does that make me an alcoholic now?! Is this an intervention? Because if it is, I think you,” she snarled, poking Tony in the arc reactor, “should have one before me.”

He didn’t say anything, only grabbed her by the hand and started dragging her towards the door. “Tony!” she cried as her ribs screamed in protest. “Stop dragging me. I can walk on my own!” He
didn’t release her, only loosened his grip on her wrist and she took a careful breath. “Where are you taking me, Tony?” she whispered, her eyes wide as she took in the hopeless look on Bruce’s face and the tension in Tony’s shoulders. “What’s happened?”

Neither man answered but Bruce said quietly, “You can let her go Tony. She’s not going to run away.”

Tony glanced at him and shook his head, “No,” he snarled, making her stare at him in horror. Never in all of the years she had known him, had Tony ever treated her roughly or talked to her cruelly. This was a new Tony and he terrified her more than the Hulk.

Bruce stepped in front of the door and said carefully, “Let her go Tony. Now.”

Evony’s eyes widened at the growl in his voice and twisted her hand in Tony’s grip, “Let me go Tony, please,” she whispered.

Tony’s fingers sprang from her wrist and he took a deep breath; sparing her a glance he turned to Bruce and poked him in the chest. “This is on you, remember? You,” he said before shoving past him and through the door.

Evony stared after him and then turned wide blue eyes on Bruce. “Okay,” she said slowly. “What the hell is going on here?! What happened to you guys? And why is my alcohol intake suddenly of interest?” She folded her arms carefully over her ribs and Bruce sighed.

He pinched the bridge of his nose and started to say something but Tony interrupted. “BANNER! POTTS! ELEVATOR! NOW!” he bellowed, his voice echoing down the hall.

Bruce sighed and held his hand out for her to take. “I’ll explain later,” he murmured, his eyes begging her to trust him. She hesitated, her eyes rising unconsciously to check to see if his eyes were their usual dark brown. They were.

“Promise?” she said weakly as she slid her hand into his.

His lips twitched in a shadow of his wry grin and he squeezed her fingers as he murmured, “I promise.”

Clint made gagging noises as they left the lounge and Evony flipped him the bird. “I’ll tape the rest of the archery and fencing expos for you Little Potts,” he shouted as the door swung closed and she laughed.

“Thanks Mr. Bond,” she shouted back.

She glanced at Bruce and shrugged when he raised his eyebrows. “He was explaining some of the rules for archery and fencing,” she said by way of explanation. “I don’t really understand it but he was fun to watch; he gets this really intense look on his face when the archers line up their bows. He’s kind of fun to sketch,” she finished as they neared the elevator.

Tony was standing in the shaft, a thunderous scowl on his face and she poked him in the chest again, snapping, “Whatever has your panties in a knot Mr. Stark, you better deal with it because I hate it when you’re an asshole.”

He stared at her and then turned his gaze on Banner. “We’ll go to my workshop. JARVIS will be able to run the scans faster there,” he muttered as the doors slid closed.

Evony glanced from one to another and said, “Wait! What scans? What are you going to have
JARVIS do? Is this about the Other Guy? Is this about last night?! Tony! Everything was fine! Bruce and I handled it!” Her fingers tightened around Bruce’s and she tried to forget the feel of the Other Guy clutching her so tightly her ribs cracked. That hadn’t been Bruce…

Tony turned on her and snarled, “Everything is not fine! And if there’s one thing everyone in this Tower knows, it’s that Banner is not handling the Hulk! And you of all people should not be expected to handle him either! Jesus Evony! How many times have you nearly died? How many times have you been face-to-face with the Hulk now?” Both Evony and Bruce flinched and he snorted. “This is not okay. None of this is okay,” he muttered as the doors slid open and they stepped out onto his floor.

Evony hung back, her fingers still held in Bruce’s and she frowned. “There’s something else going on here, Tony. There’s something else that has you scared,” she said, her voice clear in the hall. Tony stilled but didn’t look at her; she turned to Bruce and said softly, “What’s happened? And don’t you dare say ‘nothing’ because Tony Stark has never raised his voice with me. And I’ve never seen either of you at odds with each other. So something has gone wrong and I want to know why. And I want to know why JARVIS needs to run scans on me. So tell me now or I leave. Bruce? Tony?”

She pulled her fingers free and folded her arms over her breasts and waited for the silent men to tell her what had set them off.

They stared at her for a long, long moment and then Tony shoved Bruce gently in the shoulder and said in a much milder voice than he had used previously, “Tell her Banner. Get it over with now.”

Bruce turned to her and opened his mouth but no sound came out. He was pale and he swayed dangerously. Evony caught hold of his arm and said worriedly, “Bruce?! Are you okay?”

“No,” he muttered. “No I’m not.” He raised his eyes to hers and she shivered at the hopelessness once more present in their dark depths. “Evony I’m so sorry,” he whispered.

She felt the blood drain from her face as she said, her voice harsh with fear, “Why? Why are you sorry Bruce?”

“Evony, we think you might be pregnant,” he said, his voice agonized.

She could only stare at him, the words barely registering.

“Pregnant?” she whispered, her voice echoing hollowly in the hallway. *Pregnant.*

*Oh god...*
Evony Makes Her choice

Chapter Notes

Hey guys!

Happy Holidays!

Sorry for the lack of updates. Been busy with school, finals, work and now family and just haven’t gotten time to really work on these two.

I’m tentatively promising to have this done by the end of January so bear with me!

Love to all.

-M

Tony Stark was scared. His dark eyes were unreadable as the results of Banner’s and Evony’s scans started lining up on the screens around him. He did not let Banner look at them and he ignored any questions Evony shot his way.

For once, he didn’t have the answers. For once, he didn’t know what to do.

And that scared him more than anything JARVIS was telling him. He ran as many tests as he could, going above and beyond anything SHIELD had attempted, but he had to admit the medics had been right. Banner was fit in every way. And Evony…

He sighed and leaned back in his chair. JARVIS’s scans were winding down and there were no more tests he could put them through. He’d literally run everything he and Banner could think of. He scrubbed his face wearily, trying to recall his earlier fury, but all he felt was bone-deep exhaustion.

The workshop was quiet; his Suits lined the walls, the bots were quiet in their charging stations and JARVIS was preoccupied with the tests he still ran on the resident gamma specialist and comic book artist.

He stood and popped his back; the rippling crack was loud in the silence and Banner stirred from where he sat on the couch. His arms were around Evony, who had fallen asleep after Bruce had wrapped her ribs. JARVIS had revealed right off that some of her ribs were cracked, but neither had said anything about the Hulk and last night’s temper tantrum.

But then, they hadn’t really needed to, had they?

As he moved around the lab, gathering up medical supplies and forgotten tools Tony flinched at the dark look on his friend’s face.

“Tony, I-“ he started to say but Tony stopped him. “Don’t say anything Banner. I’m still figuring this out,” he said quietly as he headed for the kitchenette and the bottle of whiskey he kept hidden from Pepper in the back of the fridge.

He could feel Banner’s eyes on his back but he ignored him; he needed a drink before he told the
scientist the good news. A very strong drink. He sighed as the amber liquid splashed into the tumbler he held and he tried to stop the words, “Positive Result,” from flashing before his eyes.

What was he going to tell Pepper?

He shuddered and tossed the whiskey back. He would cross that fiery bridge when he got to it.

Finally, two tumblers later, he was ready to face Banner. Heaving another sigh, he headed back to where his friends still lay on the couch. Evony was sprawled across him and Tony’s lips twitched at the sight of her drooling on his chest. His girl had always been the cutest sleeper…

“Tony,” Banner said, his dark eyes worried, “What were the results?” His arms tightened slightly around Evony and she murmured in her sleep before snuggling her head more firmly under his chin. He smiled and brushed her hair back from her scarred temple gently making Tony’s teeth clench as he sat in one of his desk chairs.

“I think you know what that screen is flashing right now, Banner,” he said softly before dropping his gaze to the whiskey he still held.

Banner inhaled sharply and made to sit up but Tony raised his hand, saying softly, “Let JARVIS finish the job, big man. Besides our girl’s asleep and considering the past couple of weeks, she probably needs it.” He sighed and his fingers rose unconsciously to tap out a nervous rhythm against the glowing arc reactor in his chest.

Banner watched him, his eyes hooded and after a tense minute, said, “You should know we only slept-together once, Tony. That night of your gala…” he sighed and ran his fingers through his coarse curls. “I wasn’t myself and Evony was…” he trailed off at the dark look Tony shot him and his hand fell to once more rest against her hair.

“What are the chances, though? Even if I had known I was, well, normal,” he flushed and Tony rolled his eyes. “What were the chances that she would get pregnant after one time?”

Tony leaned back in his chair and rested his glass against the edges of his arc reactor. He gazed thoughtfully at the ceiling thinking of some of the numbers JARVIS had provided him and he murmured, “There was a three percent chance of her getting pregnant Banner. Not high, sure, but all things considered we shouldn’t be surprised.”

Banner was quiet, letting Tony’s words sink in and when he next spoke his voice was agonized, “So it’s true? She’s…”

Tony turned his eyes to the two people lying on his couch; all he could see was Evony as he had first known her, wounded and rebellious, leaning over him to fix his ridiculous hot-rod sketch, and he sighed. “I should kill you for this Banner,” he said wearily and he watched as the other scientist flinched. “She’s like a daughter to me and you’ve…defiled her,” he said in disgust.

Banner opened his mouth to say something ridiculous like Sorry, but Tony stopped him again. “Do you know how long I’ve known her?” he asked, his dark eyes settling on her and his lips twitched in a small smile as she snored softly. Banner shook his head, his brow furrowing as he tried to figure out where Tony was going with this. “I’ve known her since she was fifteen,” he continued and he sipped his whiskey. “I watched her grow up; I helped her with her Calculus homework, spoke at her high school graduation, built her her first motorcycle which Pepper promptly took away and let her help me program JARVIS. She’s one of the most amazing people I know and it’s not because she’s Pepper’s baby sister. It’s because through thick and thin she has fought for me, fought for Pepper. She’s fierce, Banner, and she does not go down without a fight and I love that about her.” His voice was quiet in the workshop and Banner stared at him avidly.

“When I thought I was dying a year ago and I’d pushed everyone away, Pepper included, she came
to my house one night. She’d been having her own issues; her asshole of a fiancée was cheating on her, she’d been getting criticism for some of her artwork and she and Pepper had had a bit of a falling-out, but she came to my house, hacked into JARVIS’s systems, skirted the SHIELD agents keeping me on house-arrest and she sat with me while I watched Howard do his ridiculous Stark Expo schpiel. She held my hand as he told me through a camera that he loved me and she never questioned why I was acting out. She’d known that I’d been having a bad time of it—she hadn’t known I was dying—but she’d sensed me pushing everyone away and she’d decided to fight for me.” He sighed and rubbed his face before continuing, “She fought for me when I’d given up and that’s what makes her amazing, Banner. She’s my knight in shining armor and no matter how things work out between Pepper and myself, she will always be like a daughter to me.”

He sighed and stabbed a finger in Banner’s direction, “So you better believe she’s going to fight for you, Banner. She’s going to fight for you tooth-and-claw and she is not going to take no for an answer, ever. And you better believe the moment I catch wind of you wanting to run away, I will tell her and watch as she rings your ears and claps you in irons. You cannot expect her to give up on you and because of that you can’t give up on her. Ever.” He stood and stared down at the man he considered a friend who had his arms wrapped around the one person in this world he loved unequivocally and sighed. “I should have sent her back to Cali,” he grumbled as he headed back to his computers.

Bruce watched him go and his lips twitched as Evony shifted in her sleep, her fingers tightening in his shirt. He lowered his lips to her temple and whispered against her skin, “I’ll fight for you too, Evie.”

The workshop was once more quiet as Banner drifted off to sleep, his soft breath matching Evony’s and Tony stayed up, keeping watch over them and the tests JARVIS continued running.

His dark eyes would drift over to the two people sleeping on his couch and in the wee hours of the night he found himself thinking, Fighting’s all well and good, but what do we do about the Hulk?

And that question pretty much summed up all of their issues.

What were they going to do about the Hulk?

Tony still didn’t have the answers, even at six in the morning.

**

“Tony? Can you hear me through all of that whiskey sloshing around in your head?”

He snapped awake as someone tapped him solidly on the forehead and he swore, “What the hell!”

He froze at the sight of two big blue eyes staring worriedly at him and he sighed. “Hey kid, how’s tricks”

Evony smiled and stroked her fingers through his hair, “You’ve been passed out for a while Tony. I was getting worried,” she said quietly. She propped her head on her hand as he sat up and popped his neck.

“JARVIS shouldn’t have let me fall asleep,” he grumbled as he ran his hands roughly over his face.

“My apologies, sir,” the AI said, not even a bit chagrined and she laughed.

“Don’t get mad at JARVIS! He knew you needed sleep. Plus he didn’t need you to run the tests,” she paused and turned to the screens before them, a small frown on her face. “What are the results
anyway? There’s so many numbers here, I can’t even begin to understand them,” she murmured as her fingers rose to flick through the files JARVIS had provided for them.

Tony sighed and rubbed his forehead, “I think you know what some of the tests are saying Evie.”

She glanced at him out of the corner of her eye and her lips twitched, “Yeah, well, I could have run to the CVS down the road and it would have been cheaper and easier for all of us.” She swallowed heavily as he pulled up a scan showing her name at the corner and she gazed at the long row of numbers and the two words shining in blue text at the bottom of the screen. “Positive Result,” she murmured and her hands slid to her belly. “Does that mean what I think it means?” she asked, turning to him.

He hesitated and met her concerned gaze, “Yeah I’m pretty sure, kid.”

She turned her gaze back to the screen and whispered, “Oh.”

“Yeah,” he said and she laughed, her voice only slightly hysterical.

Suddenly she stood, making him jump, and she muttered, “I need to get some air.”

Before he could stop her, she was rushing out of the workshop. Tony stared after her for a moment and then glanced over to the couch. Banner was still sleeping, sprawled on the supple brown leather and only drooling a little bit. Sighing, Tony stood and followed Evony.

“This is a mess, J,” he muttered as he shoved his hands in his pockets and waited for the elevator.

JARVIS agreed, saying, “I believe Miss Potts needs a chance to process this information Mr. Stark. Perhaps it would be best to give her some time alone.”

Tony only shook his head as he stepped into the elevator. “No J. I can’t let her deal with this by herself. She doesn’t ask for help, ever, and this is a time when she should not be alone. I’ll just go and stand with her, that’s not too oppressive, right?” he said, as he nervously rubbed his chin. “I guess we’ll find out right?”

“Of course sir. Miss Potts is currently within her studio debating a run to one of the pharmacies in the neighborhood.”

Tony’s lips twitched as the elevator arrived at her floor and he murmured as he stepped out, “Of course she is.”

**

She was standing by the window staring at some of her artwork which lay scattered over the surface. She didn’t turn when he entered but he saw her shoulders stiffen. “Evie?” he asked, hoping she would turn to him with her usual sunny smile and “Hey there, Anthony!”

She didn’t. Her head was bowed, her hair falling forward to shield her face; she was crying he realized when her breath hitched and her shoulders trembled.

“Evie…” he said as he took a step forward, his hand extended.

“So what do I do now, Tony? What’s my next move?” she asked, her voice cracking. She still didn’t turn to face him and he stopped right behind her.
His brow furrowed as he considered her questions. “I… I don’t know Evony,” he said softly and she finally turned to him. He smiled at the surprise in her eyes and he wrapped his arm around her. “This doesn’t happen often, me, not having the answers. I don’t think I know how to handle it,” he said as he squeezed her gently.

She sighed and rested her head on his shoulder. “Tony, I hate you not having the answers. Don’t do it anymore,” she said with a soft laugh. He smiled and kissed her hair. They stood like this for a moment and then he cleared his throat.

“There are… there are things we can do Evony. There are options here…” he blinked in surprise when she turned on him and stabbed one finger against his arc reactor.

Her blue eyes blazed fiercely as she snapped, “Don’t you dare Tony Stark! Don’t you dare talk to me about ‘options’! If you’re right, if I’m pregnant, then this is Bruce’s and my child. A child, Tony! Bruce didn’t think he’d ever be able to have children and that’s all he ever wanted!” She paused her chest heaving and she sighed before turning back to her drawings. “That’s all he’s ever wanted, to have a normal life.” She glanced at him and handed him one of her sketches. “We owe him that chance, Tony,” she whispered as she left the studio.

Tony watched her go and then he glanced down at the drawing she had handed him.

It was a picture of Bruce playing with a little girl with dark red hair.

Tony sighed as he folded the drawing and slipped it into his pocket. “Well,” he said softly, as he headed out of the studio. “Looks like she’s made her choice.”

“Possibly, sir,” JARVIS said as Tony entered the elevator. His lips quirked as the elevator swept him down to the elevator. “Shall I offer my congratulations?”

“Guess it wouldn’t hurt J,” he said as he headed for the workshop. “Keep this quiet though. We still have to tell Pepper,” he paused at that thought and shuddered. “That’s not going to be pleasant.”

“No sir. I would not recommend telling her through food either; your last effort to that effect was, in so many words, disastrous,” JARVIS said.

Tony snorted and pointed his finger at the ceiling, “Watch it you bag of wires and snark. I can still deprogram you.”

“Of course sir. My most humble of apologies.”

“There’s nothing humble about you, J,” Tony said as he reached the door.

“Quite true sir. But I must remind you that you created me sir,” JARVIS said smugly. Tony only shook his head as he entered his code into the door.

When he entered the workshop, Evony and Bruce were hugging and he was rocking her gently, his hands buried in her hair; Bruce glanced at him and the terrified anticipation in his eyes made Tony smile.

“Well, needless to say, the next few months are going to be interesting,” he said.

Bruce and Evony just laughed; each had tears in their eyes.

“Don’t get too excited, kids. We still have to tell Pepper,” he grumbled as he skirted around them on his way to his desk.
Evony’s groan was loud in the still air of the workshop. “Can’t we have JARVIS do it?” she griped as Bruce looped his arm around her waist.

**

Bruce was in his laboratory, three days later, studying his and Evony’s cells, when JARVIS spoke. “Dr. Banner?”

He jumped and turned the music down he’d had playing in the background. “Yes JARVIS?” he muttered as he turned back to the microscope he’d been using for his studies.

“I should inform you that Miss Potts approaches,” the AI said.

Bruce glanced up from the microscope and absent mindedly straightened his glasses; “Evony’s back already?” he asked in surprise. She’d had a meeting with her writing partner Joey this morning and she’d bemoaned the fact that it would most likely last the day. Glancing at his watch, he realized that she’d only been gone for a little less than two hours.

JARVIS sounded uncomfortable when he once more spoke, “Alas, sir. It is the elder Miss Potts.”

He sighed and rubbed his eyes. “Pepper,” he groaned. She’d been in California the past two days doing business for Stark Industries and had thus no idea of all that had occurred the past few days.

“Shall I admit her sir? She’s in quite the dudgeon, I’m afraid,” JARVIS said nervously and Bruce’s wry grin appeared at the AI’s desire to protect him. Evony had done quite a number on his programming he realized.

“Yes,” he said with a sigh. “You’d better let her in. Otherwise she might break down the door.”

When the door’s lock clicked open, Pepper stormed into the lab; her light blue eyes, so dissimilar from Evony’s deep blue’s, blazed fiercely and he couldn’t help a nervous shiver from darting up his spine. He wondered if it was too late to duck behind one of his lab tables and hide from Evony’s big sister.

“Bruce!” she snapped, her voice harsh with irritation and worry. He flinched guiltily and glanced hopelessly around the lab for something to protect himself. “What the hell is going on in this Tower?!”

He opened his mouth to start explaining but she stopped him. With her hand raised she craned on her tiptoes, her eyes expectant as she said, “No-actually, where is Evony? Or Tony? You probably don’t know anything! You’ve probably been in this lab doing sciencey things all this time while those two have been wreaking havoc! What makes it worse is now they’ve got Agent Barton involved in their shenanigans. I wish his leave was over and he’d return to killing things for SHIELD.”

He froze, his mouth agape at her frazzled mutterings and he interrupted, his voice weak, “Agent Barton? Shenanigans? I’m sorry—I’m not following.”

She huffed in irritation and tossed a bright yellow Hallmark card envelope onto his desk. “I just got home from L.A. and I ran across Agent Barton wallowing in the lounge in nothing but his boxers watching the Olympics and he gave this to me,” she muttered and Bruce turned his gaze the envelope as her perfectly manicured nail tapped its surface.

He sincerely hoped Clint had gotten Pepper a “Welcome Home!” card. But somehow he doubted it.

The bright yellow envelope glowed cheerfully in the soft lighting of his lab and he wondered if he
should add yellow to the list of colors he hated. His head was starting to ache as he said nervously, “What is it?”

She snorted and tore the card violently out of its packaging; he winced as the envelope ripped with the force of the card’s removal. “What is it?” It’s a sick prank is what it is! Did he think this would be funny? If I find out Tony was somehow involved I will personally yank that arc reactor out of his chest and sit on him until he apologizes…”

Bruce stopped listening as she ranted; his eyes were locked on the happy stork flying across the front of the card under the words in neat, blue, cursive, “Congratulations! You’re an Aunt!”

“…I’m going to wring both of their ears! Is it possible to ground grown men? Maybe if I discuss it with Director Fury…”

“Pepper!” Bruce forced himself to focus and he jerked his eyes from the happy stork to the furious woman pacing in short quick steps before him. “Pepper!” he snapped, his eyes sparking furiously when she ignored him.

She froze midsentence and midstride, her eyes wide and her mouth open. He sighed and rubbed his face roughly before saying, “How about we go down to my apartment and make some lunch?”

Pepper’s eyes narrowed and she folded her arms, making him think of Evony when she was truly irritated and didn’t trust what he was saying.

“Why?” she asked, her voice cold.

He stood, gathered his tablet and notebook before heading for the door. “Well,” he said gently, “I’m hungry and I’m tired of looking at blood samples so I think it’s time for a break; plus you just got home and you’re probably tired and hungry as well. And,” he hesitated for a moment and glanced at her. “I have something to tell you.”

She was staring at him; he couldn’t help smiling as she nibbled worriedly on her bottom lip. The Potts women were really far too similar.

“What’s happened Bruce?” she asked, her voice no longer strident with irritation. He noted the way her eyes darted around his lab, taking in the relative intactness of his equipment and furniture. “Did the Hulk…” her voice trailed off and she swallowed heavily at the thought of another of Dr. Banner’s “episodes.”

Bruce shook his head hurriedly, “No, no! Not that! It’s um…something more pressing than my temper issues. We really should get some food and I’ll be able to explain what’s happened.” He didn’t mention his hope that maybe by the time they got to his apartment and he’d made lunch, that maybe Evony would have miraculously returned from her meeting with Joey.

“Happened? What’s happened?” Pepper’s voice was strident once more but he ignored her panic and headed for his apartment. “Bruce! Bruce, what has happened?!” she shouted to his back.

He didn’t reply and she huffed angrily once more; then with a quick glance down the hall towards the elevator, she hurried after the man. Bruce’s lips twitched at the sound of her clicking heels behind him.

“Come in,” he murmured when they got to his door. She gazed at him thoughtfully for a long moment and then entered his home. Bruce hesitated on the threshold, his eyes darting hopefully toward the elevator as well. But Evony appear to save him and so he was on his own. “Facing the dragon,” he muttered to himself as he rubbed his forehead. Was it too late to run away to Canada?
The door slid closed with a quiet click and Bruce prepared to tell the eldest Potts’ sister the good news about her baby sister.

Maybe he should have gone Clint’s route and gotten a card; although it seemed doubtful that even Hallmark had a card summing up, “Congratulations, your baby sister got knocked up by a split personality gamma specialist with anger management issues and a propensity for breaking things!”

His wry grin widened as he thought, “Maybe I’ll send a concept to Hallmark.” He was sure Evony would design it. His smile disappeared at the sight of a thunderous Pepper standing in his kitchen and he wondered briefly if Tony hand any construction paper and crayons.

“Tell me now. What’s Evony done?” she snapped, the muscles in her jaw flexing furiously.

Bruce struggled to keep his desperate humor in check but he couldn’t help blurting, “Have you ever thought about designing a nursery in this Tower, Miss Potts?”

The sound of her open palm connecting with his cheek was loud in the still apartment and as he shook the stars from his eyes and he thought, “Should have gotten a card too, Banner.”

**

Evony’s phone started ringing three hours into her meeting with Joey; she ignored it the first two times but when Carry On, My Wayward Son once more blasted from the depths of her messenger bag, she sighed and dug it out. “Sorry Joe boy,” she said as she glanced at the screen. “It’s Pepper. She’s probably calling to chew me out about Clint living in the lounge.”

Joey waved her away and muttered, “Tell her I hate her.” Evony rolled her eyes at his back and moved from the tables they had huddled over for the past three hours.

“Hi Pep,” she said cheerfully as she brought the phone to her ear. She got no further.

Even from across the sunlit studio Joey rented, he could hear Pepper’s voice as she screamed at her younger sister. He straightened slowly, his brow furrowing as Evony swayed, the blood gone from her face.

“Evony? Evie? Baby! You need to sit down?” he asked as he rushed to her.

“Pepper, I’m sorry,” she whispered as he caught her around the waist. Her knees buckled and Joey grunted with the strain of holding her much taller body.

He could still hear her sister shrieking and he snatched the phone from Evony’s limp hand. Holding it to his ear he snapped, “Yo! Virginia, listen to me! You need to take a breath and calm your fiery self down! Evie’s collapsed so you can stop screaming at her!”

There was a moment of silence on the other end and then Pepper shrieked, her voice panicked, “Collapsed?! Oh my god! Is she okay?”

He sighed and glanced at the dark red-head he considered his best friend. She was still white as a sheet. “She’s fine; I think you traumatized her though. She’s down for the count right now. What’d you say to her?” he asked curiously as he checked Evony’s pulse; he began chafing her wrist as he listened to Pepper ranting about a Hallmark card and a gamma specialist.

“Wait. Is this about Evony’s pet project? The one she’s doing on the sly? I mean, I know she’s been taking it pretty seriously-“ he said but Pepper interrupted him.
“It’s not that Joey! God not everything in her life is about the stupid comic books you two write.” He rolled his eyes at that and shifted Evony in his arms before absently stroking her dark red hair out of her eyes.

“Don’t let Evie hear you talk about our ‘comic books’ Virginia,” he growled and she snorted.

“How is she?” she asked, once more the worried older sister. He sighed and glanced down at the unconscious Evony.

“Still out. This is kind of weird,” he muttered, shifting again. “She’s got balls of steel. She doesn’t go down easily; that’s why she’s the artist for our books. I take one look at the zombies she draws and shew-“ he shook his head as Pepper once more interrupted him.

“Joseph! Shut up! Has she woken up yet?”

He frowned at the odd echo her voice had taken on and he asked curiously, “Where are you Virginia?”

The sound of her car starting was answer enough. “Wait! You’re coming here?! Here?!” He stared around the studio in horror as she sighed.

“Yes I’m coming there! Evony needs me and that’s worth braving that pit of a studio you two wallow in!” she snarled as the engine revved.

He sighed when she hung up and settled to wait for the brilliant Virginia to breeze into his studio. He should have cleaned when Evony had told him too.

When Pepper arrived twenty minutes later she took in the sight of Evony curled into a miserable ball on Joey’s couch; her eyes widened at the sight of her baby sister leaning over a bowl and when she glanced at Joey who was across the room with his head out the window she snapped, “What’s wrong now?”

He only waved from his position at the window and Evony moaned, “I’m sorry Pepper,” before retching over the bowl.

Pepper only folded her arms and sighed. “It serves you right Evie. Now I have to turn the 50th floor into a nursery and Tony’s going to bitch about it since that’s where he wanted to put his own personal Starbucks.”

Evony groaned, “Why does he need a Starbucks?” as Joey yanked his head out of the window and shrieked, “‘Nursery’?!”

Pepper rolled her eyes and sat next to her sister; stroking her bangs out of her eyes she said, “Because he’s an ass.” Sparing Joey a glance she said, “It appears my baby sister is pregnant with one of Tony’s colleague’s babies.” Joey’s mouth dropped even further as she turned back to Evony. “So what’s wrong with you? Isn’t it a little early for-“

“Don’t say it!” Evony groaned, her hand flying out to snap around her sister’s wrist. “Please don’t say it.”

“Fine,” Pepper said, frustrated. “But we’re getting you back to the Tower. I don’t like that nasty green color you’ve turned.” Evony only shivered at her touch.

It took both Joey and Pepper to get her down to Pepper’s red Porsche; by the time they got her settled in the car she was shivering uncontrollably.
“Serves you right,” Pepper kept muttering as she drove them back to the Tower. She couldn’t help glancing at her sister as they wove through traffic and when she asked, “Why Evie?” she watched in fascination as Evony turned grey.

“Pepper,” she groaned, “It’s not like I did this to screw you over. This is…is…” she swallowed heavily and turned to look out at the buildings they passed.

Pepper’s hands tightened on the Porsche’s steering wheel and murmured, “This is Bruce’s child. And this is you. I know how you feel about each other, Evie. But,” she glanced at her sister once more and sighed. “But is this what you want? Is this really what you want?”

Evony straightened carefully and frowned, “Of course it’s what I want! I…” she swallowed once more and said weakly, “I love Bruce and I would do anything for him.”

Pepper’s eyes widened as she stared out the windshield and she grumbled, “Well, let’s not be melodramatic, Evie.” She turned to Evony as they stopped at a light two blocks from the Tower looming in the distance. “If this is really what you want then I’ll support you. I don’t condone this at all of course, after all he still has his anger management issues to figure out, but I think if anyone can help him, it’s you. Plus he’s like, three times your age!” she said, her voice horrified.

Evony snorted weakly as she dropped her spinning head in her hands, “Now who’s being melodramatic? He’s not even ten years older than me.”

When they had parked in the garage, Pepper leaned over and stroked her sister’s hair gently. “Oh Evie,” she murmured sadly. “I’m not being melodramatic. Now let’s get you to Dr. Banner so he can figure out what’s going on with you.”

She slid out of the car and moved over to Evony’s side of the car. As she helped her out of the bucket seat, Evony muttered, “There’s nothing wrong with me. You just stressed me out; it’s nothing major.”

Pepper only shook her head and looped her arm around her sister’s waist. As they headed towards the elevator she said, “We’ll see. Besides you know Dr. Banner will want to know about you not feeling well.”

Evony sighed forlornly and Pepper’s lips twitched. “How did you find out about us anyway?” Evony muttered as she leaned her head against the elevator wall.

Pepper folded her arms and said grumpily, “Agent Barton gave me a card.”

The elevator rang with Evony’s breathless laughter and Pepper’s lips lifted in a bitter smile as she grumbled, “I’m going to ground him.”

Evony was still laughing as Pepper dragged her into Bruce’s lab.
Hey guys!

Just letting you know that this chapter was missing part of it after I published it, (operator error, oops) so make sure you read the end.

Love to all!

-M

“Bruce?”

“Mm-hmm?”

“After Tony is done running his scans can we spend the day in my studio?”

Bruce’s eyes snapped open at Evony’s question and he sat up slightly, balancing on his elbow so he could look at her fully. She was curled on her side, her legs drawn up against her belly, her thin nightgown hugging her curves and leaving very little to his imagination. Her dark red hair spread like a river across her pillows, fragrant tresses he longed to bury his face in.

The Other Guy growled in the back of his head and his fingers clenched as he imagined gathering that deep mass in his hands and cradling her to him.

Calm. Be calm, he whispered. The Other Guy sniffed disdainfully but eased back to the dark corner of his mind he’d lived in since their accident. Thank you, my friend, Bruce whispered. All he got was a snort in response.

Good enough.

Evony was watching him, her blue eyes intent and he knew she’d seen the mental play going on behind his eyes. His lips twitched in his customary wry smile despite the worry he felt about her and her question and he chuckled to himself.

Our girl doesn’t miss a play, does she Big Guy? he whispered, not to himself, but not exactly to his other half.

The cheerful growl that he got in reply relaxed him even further.

“Bruce?” she asked, her voice soft in the still air of his bedroom. He could hear the worry in her tone and he winced. He needed to work on not worrying her, especially now that she was pregnant.

“Evony,” he said, his voice slow, hesitant. “I’m not sure that’s a good idea. The Other Guy might decide to act out.”

She sighed and ran her hand up over his hip to cup his waist, her fingers smooth and warm against his skin. “Please Bruce?” she whispered, longing in her voice. “I want to draw you and the light just
isn’t good enough in the labs or Tony’s workshop. And if the big green meanie decides to be grouchy I’m sure we can put a stop to that before he gets too out of control! We have before.” Her blue eyes were dark pools in the dim light of his bedroom and he shivered as she glanced at him from under her eyelashes. “Please…” she whispered as she pulled her body closer to plant a tender kiss on his chest. “Bruce…please…”

He groaned, the sound very nearly a growl but she didn’t stop, simply pushed him back so he was lying against their pillows, his chest bare and the sheets puddled around his hips.

“Evony,” he said, warning in his voice. “What are you doing?”

“Persuading you,” she whispered, her voice husky as she straddled his hips. “Is it working?” she continued as she bent over him to plant a kiss at the hollow of his throat, her dark red hair falling forward to curtain their faces.

Bruce’s muscles clenched as he fought for control and he groaned as he bared his throat for her warm kisses. “Evie,” he ground out, “please be careful.”

Her soft laugh washed over him and she nuzzled her nose along his jawline. “Careful?” she whispered. “Why?”

“The Hulk,” he ground out, his body shaking as the felt the Other Guy rear his head to sniff along the edges of his mind. “Don’t test him.”

Her sigh rustled the thick curtain of hair surrounding them and she stilled her soft kisses. “Bruce,” she murmured, her fingers smoothing over his chest up his neck and over his jaw to bury themselves into his hair. “Bruce look at me,” she said, her voice firm but still loving.

He swallowed heavily and then opened his eyes to meet her gaze. She hesitated for a moment and then smiled. “Hey,” she said as she leaned over him to plant a kiss on his lips. “Look at that. Your eyes are still brown.”

His bunched muscles began to relax but she did not slide off of him nor did she release him from her gentle touch. “Stop,” she whispered. “Stop Bruce, relax.”

“Evony,” he groaned, his voice more growl than normal inflection. “Please don’t.”

She cocked her head and her thoughtful gaze settled on him, consideration in her gaze. “Why?” she asked as she stretched her long body along his. “We haven’t tried this before.”

His blood ran cold at her words and in the back of his head the Hulk growled in agreement. “Evie we can’t. My control…” he swallowed and turned his head away from her as she feathered soft kisses along his collar bones. “My control isn’t good this morning.”

The Other Guy was very much there suddenly, filling his mind, fighting for control and he could feel the familiar hot fire of the gamma radiation beginning to burn along his bones.

Oh please god no, he groaned as the walls he had built to keep the second half of his mind controlled crumbled under her insistent touch.

“Bruce,” she whispered. “Trust me. Please.”

His eyes snapped open at her soft voice and he turned to see her gazing solemnly at him. She smiled, her lips only shaking a little and he found himself suddenly longing to kiss her, to smooth his hands up her sides to cup her breasts, to run his tongue over her pale skin.
“Trust me please, boys,” she whispered as she pulled the thin nightgown off and shook her hair out so it tumbled down her back to brush against the small of her back. “Trust me…”

His hands rose to smooth over her legs and he shivered as they rested at her hips. He was not sure if he had been the only one to move his limbs; the Other Guy was very there at the moment and his control wasn’t good at all. Not anymore. Not here, with her in on his lap with her rosy nipples pebbling in the cool air of his room. His fingers rose of their own volition to brush along the undersides of her breasts and her soft moan shot through him like an electric charge.

“Bruce,” she whispered, her eyelids fluttering closed as his fingers traced the soft skin framing her nipples. “Please…”

“Evony…” he groaned, his voice just as agonized, just as hot as hers. But he did not do anything but touch. He was intent, despite the burning desire rushing through him at the sight of her rocking before him, on determining how well his once tight control was holding on his second half.

Happy growls filled his head and his eyebrow quirked as he listened to the Other Guy rumbling along. The green fire was still washing through him, but it was mild, almost…calm…compared to what he normally experienced when the Hulk burst free.

Turning his gaze back to Evony, who was watching him patiently now that his hands had stilled their teasing, and he asked the only question that mattered, his voice still harsh as he dealt with the giant presence in his skull and the radiation wriggling through his body, changing him just enough so he wasn’t just Bruce Banner, “Why?”

She cocked her head, her hair falling over her scarred shoulder to shield her breast from view and she smiled. “Because you need to learn to trust him, Bruce,” she said as she caught his hand in hers and planted a tender kiss to his palm.

“All…” she hesitated, her dark blue eyes, almost black in the soft light of his room, calm despite her own desire washing through her as she rocked her hips against his. “I trust him.”

The Other Guy’s excited roar was splitting in the back of his skull but Bruce could only stare at Evony as she smiled lovingly at him, her blue eyes full of tender care and longing, and her words ran through his mind as she bent over him to press another kiss to his lips.

*After all… I trust him…*

*TRUST ME*, bellowed the Hulk and Bruce found he did, despite everything that had happened between them.

Very well, he whispered to his counterpart as he returned Evony’s kiss. *But please be gentle my friend. This is a test.*

*For all of us.*

*GENTLE. YES. GENTLE WITH ‘VONY.*

And amazingly enough…

They were.

All three of them.

His arms were tight around her a while later when they collapsed limply against the tangled sheets
and he started to laugh as he buried his face in her slightly sweaty hair.

“I love you Evony,” he whispered. He swallowed as she stirred in his arms and he bent to kiss her gently. “We love you.”

She smiled, her blue eyes sparkling through the aftermath of her climax and she ran her fingers along his jaw, something like wonder in her gaze.

“Promise?” she whispered as her hand fell to rest against his chest.

“I promise,” he whispered back, his lips resting at her scarred temple.

PROMISE, bellowed the Other Guy from the back of his skull and he smiled as he dragged the blankets over their tangled limbs.

Well, that was interesting, he thought to himself as his eyes drifted closed, his body falling into a heavy doze as it dealt with the aftermath of gamma radiation and his own post-coital bliss.

**

Tony was pissed; they were late. Again.

“Third time in a week, a WEEK, JARVIS! This is entirely unacceptable!” he snarled as he paced the lab in front of the couch. “Don’t they realize I have more important things to do. Like Avenging or getting a root canal?”

“Of course sir. Shall I message Dr. Banner?” the AI asked politely.

Before Tony could respond, the door opened and Bruce and Evony entered; Tony took one look at Evony’s tousled hair and Banner’s hooded gaze and threw his hands in the air. “Oh that’s just great!” he snapped. “You two are worse than teenagers! How many times this morning? Don’t you have any idea how bad this is?” He was actually tearing at this hair at this point. Evony rolled her eyes and squeezed Bruce’s fingers in reassurance. He sighed as Tony continued, “Do you know how hard it is to keep Pepper from busting down your doors and locking you in your room Evie? I’m almost in support of her at this point.”

Evony snorted and headed for a chair set in the middle of the room, and tossed over her shoulder as she sat, “Okay Dad, you’re one to talk.”

He leaned over her as she settled down in the chair and pulled her sketch pad into her lap, sliding a pencil free of her hair with a soft hum and a small smile at Bruce standing by the computers.

Tony almost growled and poked her sharply as she flipped to a clean page and muttered, “I’m not the one pregnant with an irradiated scientist’s baby.”

She only glanced at him and rolled her eyes. “Tony, you’re being melodramatic. We’re both adults and as such should be treated as adults. J?” she called to the AI, “Let’s get these scans going, I don’t want to be stuck in the Heat-Miser’s cave all day.”

“I’m not a miser,” Tony grumbled as he headed for his computer where Bruce had been adjusting JARVIS’s programming. The other scientist glanced at him, a mild twinkle in his eyes as he adjusted his glasses and Tony felt his irritation grow at the wry grin on the man’s lips. “I’m not, okay! I’m just annoyed because you two seem to think the highlight of my day is making sure the baby you guys made doesn’t have an anger issue or a skin problem! Well, let me tell you, it’s not. This is the very last thing I want to do at eleven in the morning and—“
“Tony, just shut up, okay?” Evony snapped, her words accented by the soft thud her sketchpad made as it fell to the floor from nerveless fingers. “We all know you wouldn’t have this any other way. If you really didn’t want to run these scans Bruce and JARVIS could do it just fine.”

Tony was quiet at the irritation in her voice. Glancing at her from around the computer he realized that he had pushed her a little too far. Her head was back and the blue light of JARVIS’s scanners silhouetting her frame made her pale cheeks glow sickeningly.

“All right, kid,” he murmured, chagrin coloring his tone. “I’ll back off.”

“Good,” she muttered as she draped her arm over her eyes.

“I still think you’re being fucking idiots,” he muttered under his breath as he continued watching her, calculation in his gaze.

Bruce stiffened at his side and his voice was sharp with concern when he said, “Evony? Are you all right?”

She only shook her head; Bruce watched as she swallowed heavily and before he or Tony could do or say anything, she was gone. Tony watched as she threw herself into the bathroom at the back of his workshop and when he turned back to Bruce he chuckled.

“I was wondering when that would start. I don’t think you’re going to be able to eat Indian food for a while, Banner,” he said with a chuckle.

Bruce only sighed and dropped his head in his hands.

**

“Director Fury, there’s a message for you.”

SHIELD Director Nick Fury, turned at Maria Hill’s brisk tone and his eyebrow rose. “Now’s not the best time Hill,” he said as he adjusted his hold on the golf club he held. He turned his head back to the ball resting patiently at his feet and he hunkered down, prepared to tap it gently into the hole resting in the middle of the Helicarrier’s Rec Hall.

Hill cleared her throat just as his arm moved gently back and he swore as the putter connected with the ball a little too hard and overshot the hole.

“Hill!” he snapped as he turned back around to confront one of his best and coldest agents, but he stopped at the calculating stoicism on her face. It was very Hill, yet not at the same time.

Her eyes were almost…sparkling…

“What’s going on Hill?” he asked, his one eye narrowing as he studied his assistant. “What’s the message?”

She hesitated and then held her hand out; his gaze dropped to her open palm where a StarkVidPhone rested and he sighed.

“What’s it from?” he asked as he took the VidPhone from Hill’s hand.

She didn’t respond, simply raised her eyebrows and folded her arms. Fury sighed, knowing this was not going to bode well and pressed play.

There was a soft beep and then a light blue hologram rose out of the screen and a voice began to
issue its recorded report.

Director Fury the voice said as the holographic figure rotated slowly a few inches above the screen of the phone.

There’s been a development at Stark Tower. I’m not sure what it entails for SHIELD or for the Avengers Initiative and I’m sure there are some in this Tower who would not want me to tell you this-but there’s been a development in the Hulk situation. The agent paused, glanced over their shoulder as if hearing something coming towards them and then turned back to the phone, saying quietly, urgently, We found out the day Bruce Banner came to the SHIELD medical bay that he may have impregnated Evony Potts. He and Stark confirmed it the other night. Evony Potts is some five weeks pregnant. Sir, I tell you this because none of us, Stark and Banner included, have any idea what kind of baby she’s carrying. The agent sighed and even through the hologram Fury could see the uncertainty and guilt on their face.

This was a betrayal. A duty-spawned betrayal.

I would suggest you take action sir. This is a situation that requires containment and study.

I hope I’ve done the right thing in telling you Fury.

Fury was quiet as the message ran its course and the hologram vanished with a soft beep.

And then he turned back to his assistant, who was watching him carefully, dark calculation in her gaze.

“Sir,” she said carefully but he stopped her.

“How are we only just now finding out about this?” he snapped, his voice harsh, his mind spinning with their agent’s message. “Damn Stark!”

“Sir, with all due respect, shouldn’t we get in there right away and neutralize this situation?” Hill asked but he shook his head.

“No,” he said, his eye thoughtful as he fiddled with his club. “No, we need to do this carefully. We can’t break into that Tower, guns blazing. Stark and Banner will be protecting her…keeping her safe.” He sighed and rubbed his forehead, his eye crinkling as a headache bloomed in his temples. “Damn Stark,” he growled. “Come on Hill, we have to make a call.”

He rushed from the Rec Hall, only pausing to grab his black coat as he exited the cavernous hall only partially full of relaxing SHIELD agents and medics. All were watching the Director and his assistant but none dared to ask what had happened.

Judging by the Director’s furious expression and Hill’s smirk, it wasn’t good.

It probably had something to do with Tony Stark and the Avengers.

**

"Hold still. You keep twitching and it's messing up my lines."

Her fingers were warm on his bare shoulders but he shivered anyway. "Sorry," he muttered as she repositioned him again on the couch she'd placed him on the moment he'd poked his head around the door of her studio and cleared his throat, saying Hey.
Evony rolled her eyes and settled back on her stool, crossing her long legs absentmindedly as she bent over her sketchpad. The sun, streaming through the windows of her studio, caught her hair, turning it to deep fire. Soft curls drifted around her face despite the top knot she had it in. She always joked one little rubber band wouldn't tame the beast.

Bruce loved it.

"So...you got me into the studio," he muttered as he poked at his tablet, trying not to jostle his half-naked body too much. She snorted and shot him a dangerous look from under her eyelashes and he grinned. "Sorry." He lowered the tablet and focused on her instead.

She was wearing a soft green shirt, something she normally wore while watching movies, curled up around a bowl of popcorn and a bag of peanut M&M's. It was one of her favorite shirts and it showed off her dark red hair and deep blue eyes perfectly. Her bare shoulder slid tantalizingly free of her shirt, falling just so as she concentrated on her sketching and his mouth dried as the soft curve of her breast was revealed and he couldn't help chuckling as the Other Guy purred.

"What?" she asked as she glanced at him, a small frown wrinkling her brow. "What are you laughing at?"

He hesitated for a moment and then, seeing her curiosity decided to tell her. "We like seeing you this way."

Evony stilled, her fingers ceasing their habitual twitching to fall flat against the soft paper of her pad. "'We'?" she asked, her head cocking as she studied him. "Do you mean...him?"

Bruce nodded. "Yeah, he's surprisingly calm right now. I think he likes the sunlight." His dark eyes drifted from her to the wall of windows surrounding Evony's studio and he shivered as the Other Guy muttered contently in the back of his head.

Suddenly, she was there, in his arms, her hands tangling into his hair and she chuckled. "Well no wonder," she said, her voice a soft purr as she pressed a kiss to his jaw. "You haven't let him out into the fresh air since May. You're keeping him cooped up like a dog on a tie-out Bruce."

She sighed and rested her forehead against his. "Doesn't that make it harder for you? Not letting the sunlight touch you? And him?"

"Evie," he whispered, his nose skimming along her jawline so he could press a kiss to the soft skin under her ear. "I can't, it's not safe."

She pulled away from him ever so slightly and quirked an eyebrow. "Well...we could go somewhere where it is safe."

Before he could respond she threw herself free of his arms and rushed towards the panel located just to the side of her door. "JARVIS?!" she called as she pressed her fingers against the holographic panels. "J, can you call Tony for me? I need a favor."

Bruce came up behind her, his hands resting at her hips, wrapping around her, almost as if he hoped to pull her away. "Evony, please," he whispered as Tony's voice came over the speaker.

She ignored him and laughed. "Hey Anthony!" she said as she glanced at Bruce over her shoulder. "Is that special project of yours and Pepper's nearly done?" she asked as she rested against Bruce's chest, her hands resting against his atop her belly.

Tony was quiet for a moment and then he said, slowly, "Yeah, but you weren't supposed to know
about that."

She snorted and shook her head, making Bruce smile as well. "Sure Tony. You're so funny." She
leaned her head back and kissed Bruce on the jaw. "So," she said as she glanced back at the
glowing panel by the door. "Can I use it for a little while today?"

He sighed and she could imagine him rolling his eyes behind the safety goggles she and Pepper had
persuaded him to wear after the last time he singed his eyelashes off. "Are you going to mess it up
kid? Because if so, you know Pepper will kill you this time."

"No Tony, I'm not going to mess it up. I just need it for a little while." She glanced at Bruce once
more and he frowned.

"Evie," he said, his voice worried. "What are you scheming?"

She didn't answer and Tony chuckled, "Hey Brucie. Should have known this was about you and
our green friend." He sighed and Evony started to grin. She'd won. Again. Maybe this whole
being pregnant thing was going to work out for her. "All right, just for an hour. I'll get the workmen
and gardners out of the way. Do what you want kid. Just don't break anything."

There was a faint beep and JARVIS came on the line. "Sir has hung up Miss Potts. Was that all
madam?"

"Yes, that's fine J," she said as she twisted free from Bruce and headed for her sketchpad and small
pack of colored pencils she called her roadtrip supplies. Glancing at Bruce, who still stood shirtless
and uncertain near her door in a pool of bright sunlight she smiled. "Ready for a day trip big man?"
she asked as she swung her messenger bag, complete with supplies and sketchpad over her shoulder.
Seeing his hesitation she chuckled and stretched up to place a soft kiss on his cheek. "It's nothing
scary Bruce, don't worry."

"Promise?" he asked as he slid his arms into his shirt and followed her from her sun filled studio.

She glanced at him as she stepped into the elevator, pressing a button for a floor he'd never been to as
she did and smiled. "I promise," she whispered, wrapping her arm around his waist as the elevator
slid silently upwards.

He swallowed heavily and tried to keep calm, even as the Other Guy started muttering dangerously
when the doors swept open on the mystery floor. "Evie, where are we going?"

She smiled and shrugged one shoulder, the bare shoulder and he longed to drift his fingers over the
smooth bone there. "We've been calling it Pepper's Garden of Eden," she said as the elevator slid to
halt on silent casters.

"Garden?" he choked out as the doors slid open and warm sunlight streamed towards them. Her soft
chuckle made the fine hairs on his arms raise and he hurried after her as she left the shaft, her dark
red hair, set free of its top knot, swinging with her light movements.

"Evie, wait-OH my god!" he gasped as his feet settled on verdent green grass. "How? What?
Why?!"

She laughed and spun in a small circle, her bag smacking against her hip as she turned before him.
"Haven't you noticed? Tony's a bit exorbitant."

As he gazed around the beautiful indoor garden spreading before them on the 98th floor of Stark
Tower he couldn't help but laugh. "Yeah, I think I've noticed," he choked out as she caught his hand
and pulled him towards a rose arbor warming under the golden October sunlight. "What are we doing here Evie?"

She smiled as she sat in the soft grass filling the sweet smelling arbor and began sliding free of her shirt. "What we're doing is giving you boys a chance at relaxing in the sun. And I'm working on my tan."

He jumped when her shirt and yoga pants landed at his feet and his cheeks warmed as she lay back in the soft grass, mostly naked. He couldn't help himself from glancing at her belly; he knew it was too early in her pregnancy for her to be showing but he couldn't stop himself. It was still baffling for him.

Being a father.

His shirt and jeans falling beside her own made a soft thud against the grass and she and the Other Guy chuckled as he settled beside her, his hand drifting over her hips to rest at her still flat belly.

"Working on your tan hmm?" he murmured as he settled his hand on his palm and watched her stretch languorously under his touch and the warm sunlight. "But you burn, Evony Potts."

The sound of her soft slap echoed around the glass windowed garden and she snorted as he kissed her. "Shut up Banner," she muttered against his lips. "No one likes a know-it-all."

"You do," he whispered.

She only laughed and kissed him.

The Other Guy was a soft purring soundtrack in the back of his head as he leaned over his girl, his lips moving against hers in perfect synchrony.

"I love you Evie," he whispered.

"Promise?" she whispered back, her dark blue eyes sparkling in the soft sunlight as he tuckered her against his chest.

"I promise."

I promise...
A Day in the Tower

Chapter Notes

Happy New Year loves!

Hope everyone is having a great time.

If you're anything like me though you're going to spend the end of 2012 curled up in blankets and cats and tumblr.

Keep on party rockin’!

-M

One morning, about two weeks after their discovery, he woke to find his bed empty. He sat up quickly, his heart starting to race fearfully at the thought of Evony leaving him, when a Post-it note fell off of his forehead. Frowning, he picked up the sticky neon pink slip of paper and flipped it over to see Evony’s untidy short hand he could barely understand. His lips twitched and he rolled his eyes.

_Gud mrrning DBB!_ it read. _I woke up a Nile ago and tht Id let u slp. Twr to rselves 2day. Wut shall we do? Hehe. I’m in the pul if u want to join me. J will trnsil8 4 u. E._

Rubbing his forehead as he swung his legs out of the bed he called to Tony’s AI, “JARVIS, where is Miss Potts?”

It was quiet for a second and then JARVIS spoke up. “I believe Miss Potts, the younger, is currently located at the pool. She professed a desire to exercise upon waking but did not wish to disturb you. Shall I inform her that you are awake?”

Bruce shook his head, his wry grin in place as he reached for the boxers puddled at the side of the bed. “No that’s okay JARVIS. I’ll surprise her. Thank you,” he said.

“Of course sir. If you require any assistance do not hesitate. Miss Potts the elder wished to inform you that due to a scheduling conflict all residents of the Tower are absent today. She hopes this will not inconvenience you too much and she reminds you that she has a visual of the Tower at all times so if anything were to occur in which you need assistance she will be only a phone call away.”

Bruce’s lips twitched and he thought wryly to himself, Meaning, _I know what you’re doing and you can’t fool me_. He sighed and rolled his shoulders. Then with a glance at the bed he padded over to his closet to find a comfortable t-shirt and sweat pants. Then having dressed in his “lazy day clothes” he padded barefoot out of the room and rode the elevator to the floor with the pool.

This was just another example of Tony’s exorbitance; as far as Bruce knew the only people in the Tower who used the pool were Evony and Clint. Tony scorned all exercise and Pepper preferred running. Natasha, as far as he knew, burned her calories by beating up Clint and Steve boxed his frustrations out. And he would simply let the Hulk take over if he wanted to slim down a little.

His lips twitched at that horrible joke and he filed it away for future telling; Evony would get a kick
But having a pool had been essential for Tony and after the battle with Loki and the destruction of the sixth dining room, he’d had his very best architects build him an Olympic sized pool out of the rubble. As Bruce slid into the steamy room, he paused. This was one of the prettiest rooms in the Tower; soaring ceilings, towering windows and beautiful mosaic floors gave it an otherworldly air which he loved. The pool was a marvel in-and-of itself. Made out of the best marble Tony could buy (the very best of course) it sparkled as the sun streamed through the windows. The water shimmered in little wavelets as the sole occupant of the room swam laps.

Bruce’s eyes softened as he watched Evony slide with ease under the water. The sunlight distorted her slender body, made her long legs seem ever longer and the dark blue speedo suit she wore clung to her perfectly, giving her the appearance of a mermaid. He leaned in the doorway and watched her complete two more laps and as she surfaced at the end of the pool nearest him, only slightly winded, he said, “You know, you should be taking it easy, lying in bed with your feet propped up eating banana pepper and turkey sandwiches and watching soap operas.”

She turned as his voice echoed through the pool room and her soft laugh wove through the warm air, giving him goosebumps. “Then I’d get really fat and I would never hear the end of it from Barton or Tony,” she said, her eyes sparkling as he came towards where she rested against the edge of the pool. He made sure not to get too close to her, in case she decided to pull him in, and he folded his arms, adopting a stern stance. “Miss Potts you are in a delicate state and you should not be straining yourself,” he said, his voice firm and she paused, uncertainty flickering in her eyes and then she snorted.

“You are such an ass sometimes Dr. Banner,” she growled as she levered herself out of the pool. He shivered as the muscles in her arms and chest stood out in stark relief under her slick skin and he imagined running his fingers over her wet body. “You know,” she purred as she approached him. “You could join me? It’s rather relaxing and um,” she trailed a finger down his chest, leaving a thin wet streak in the white cotton. “You may find you enjoy it.”

Her blue eyes reflected the sunlight refracting off the water and he shivered as she pressed her body against his. “You’re getting me all wet,” he whispered his fingers rising to brush the edges of her swim cap.

“Likewise,” she murmured as she stood on her tiptoes to press a kiss to his lips. He snorted and pulled away from her slightly.

“Really?” he said, disbelief coloring his tone, his brown eyes sparkling with wry humor.

She smirked and slid her hands under his shirt; as she pulled it over his head she pressed a kiss to the hollow of his throat. “We have all day, Dr. Banner,” she whispered.

“I think you should know that Pepper warned me through JARVIS that she’s keeping an eye on the place,” he said, his voice suddenly husky as her nails dragged over his skin. She glanced at him and he shivered at the determination in her gaze.

“Then let’s give her a show, shall we?” she purred.

Bruce’s eyes widened. “Oh no! Oooh no! Don’t you d-“ before he could finish, she caught him around the waist and pushed him bodily into the pool. Waves kicked over the edge of the pool as he sank to the bottom. Before rising to the surface, he kicked out of his sweatpants. Then he surged
upwards towards the sunlight refracting across the pool.

“You are in so much trouble Evony Potts,” he sputtered as he caught hold of the edge of the pool. Blinking water out of his eyes, he focused on the painted toes curling into the mosaic tiling and abandoned speedo suit before him.

“How much trouble, exactly?” she asked and Bruce felt the Other Guy, so long quiet raise his head and sniff at the mischievous tone in her voice. Squeezing his eyes closed for a brief moment, he then let his gaze drift up her long legs to take in her naked hips with her hands resting on her waist.

Briefly, he imagined what she would look like in a few short months and he felt excitement feather up his spine at the thought of holding her and feeling their child move under his hands.

“How much trouble, exactly?” she asked, and Bruce felt the Other Guy, so long quiet raise his head and sniff at the mischievous tone in her voice. Squeezing his eyes closed for a brief moment, he then let his gaze drift up her long legs to take in her naked hips with her hands resting on her waist.

“Just going to take in the view, Dr. Banner?” she asked, and he couldn’t resist chuckling at the uncertainty in her tone.

“Get in here, you trouble maker,” he said. He stopped her when she prepared to jump and shook his head, a small frown wrinkling his brow. “Take it easy. How about you, um, take the stairs?” he said and she sighed.

“Between you, Tony, and Pepper I’m not going to be able to even walk without someone telling me to go slower, am I?” she grouched as she waded into the water beside him. He smiled and cupped her face in his hands.

“We all love you and we all want you to be safe,” he said as he brushed a kiss along her jawline. Pulling away he eyed her swim cap and tried to choke back a laugh. “I’m sorry,” he murmured as his fingers worked at the soft latex covering her dark red hair. “But I can’t take you seriously in a skull cap.”

She chuckled as he pulled it free and her dark red hair tumbled around her shoulders to trail in the water behind her. “You two,” she said, her arms wrapping around his neck so she could drift closer to him. “You two could never resist my hair.”

He still, his muscles shivering under her touch, and she only rolled her eyes. “Oh stop, you’re fine. He’s quiet, he’s just smelling along the edges of your mind,” she murmured.

He frowned, his hands running down her sides to stroke over her buttocks. “How can you tell?” he asked curiously.

She rested her elbows on his shoulders and ran her fingers through his damp curls. “I know you very well Bruce Banner,” she said with a tender smile. Then with a laugh she yanked on his ear. “Plus your eyes are a very comforting shade of brown.”

Before he could say anything she kissed him, her body pressing against him, molding to his perfectly. He groaned against her lips and she chuckled, her chest vibrating under his hands. “You boys,” she murmured, her lips trailing along his jawline, teeth nipping gently. “What shall I do with you two?”

He ran his hands down her back and she murmured nonsense words as he turned slowly in the warm waters of the pool; her legs rose to wrap around his hips as one hand cupped her buttocks and the other buried in her hair.

“Please, Bruce,” she whispered, her eyes closed as she nuzzled his neck with her nose. “Please…”

He kissed her lips as he carried her towards shallower waters. “Are you sure?” he whispered.
She only snorted and wriggled her fingers down between their bodies to snap the waistband of his boxers. “I’m always sure,” she growled as her fingers stroked him through the wet cotton. “That’s always been my biggest problem with you Bruce Banner.”

His laugh was almost a growl in the still humid air of Tony Stark’s pool. The only sound after that was the quiet lapping of water and the occasional sigh.

Neither knew that JARVIS had cut the visual feed of the pool the moment Bruce had arrived. Evony would have laughed and rolled her eyes. Bruce would have blushed.

It was the perfect morning in Stark Tower.

**

“Oh god. They had sex!”

“Shut up Barton!”

“But look at them Tash! When have you ever seen Banner looking that relaxed? He’s practically grinning in his sleep!” Clint Barton made gagging noises as he watched the feed of Stark’s Lounge. Evony and Banner were sprawled on the couch, her head pillowed on his chest. Banner’s arms were tight around her and Clint could barely distinguish whose legs were whose.

“At least they’re clothed,” Natasha said quietly as she snapped a fresh clip in her pistol. “Why are you watching the Tower anyway? We’re trying to deal with Hydra here!”

A distant boom supported her words but Clint only shrugged. “They’re a mile out and besides we can’t do anything until we hear from Cap or Stark. So I’m going to entertain myself in the meantime.”

Natasha rolled her eyes. “What are you sending them now?” she asked curiously as she eyed the Amazon page he was on.

He only snorted and said, “Triplet onesies. They have numbers on them.”

She didn’t get a chance to respond as her comm crackled and a breathless Stark shouted over the link, “We have the rock! Let’s get our asses out of here!”

Cap’s voice boomed over the link at that point as well and both agents cringed out of habit as he shouted, “You heard him! Go! Get back to the Quinjet!”

Clint laughed as he hauled Natasha up. “I can’t wait to get back to the Tower!” he crowed as they ducked and dodged through the rubble of the Bolivian city they ran through.

“Don’t tell me,” she said, resignation coloring her tone. “You express shipped it, didn’t you?”

“Hells yes I did! I want to see their faces when the footman delivers that package. It’ll be perfect!”

“Evony’s going to kill you,” she grumbled as they began climbing a chain link fence leading to the abandoned warehouse where they’d landed the jet.

“Oh probably,” Clint chuckled as he helped her over the barbed wire. “Between me and Stark? She’s going to have enough baby supplies and baby care books to last a century.”

“Don’t expect me to protect you,” she shouted as they rushed towards the waiting jet. A streak of blue and red rushed parallel to them and overhead boosters whirred as Tony’s gold and crimson suit
tumbled out of the sky.

“Why do you think I sleep with my bow whenever I’m at the Tower anymore?” he shouted back as he hauled her into the jet.

As they piled into the jet she turned to Stark and said in her calm voice, “You’re going to have a dead Hawk on your hands within the next eight months.”

Tony’s Suit’s blue eyes settled on Clint and his mechanical voice only scoffed, saying, “Not my problem. I leave the paperwork to SHIELD.” He paused, ignoring the cold glare of Steve and then said, “What’d you get her this time?”

Clint held up the tablet and said with a cheeky laugh, “Onesies!”

“Perfect,” Tony’s Suit said as the jet lifted off.

Both agent and superhero laughed as they blasted over the jungles of Bolivia. Soon they would be back in their Tower and Stark and Banner would be able to continue their experiments.

That would have to wait until Evony got her latest gift though.

This was just too much fun for all involved.

Except for maybe the happy couple and the mother’s older sister.

**

He was dreaming, he was sure of it.

He had never seen this little girl in his life; and yet…did he know her? She was so familiar with that dark red hair and those inquisitive brown eyes.

His eyes.

Evony’s hair.

She was playing on the floor of his lab, coloring a picture, of what he couldn’t tell. Her soft voice humming one of Evony’s favorite songs made the hair on the back of his neck stand up and his vision spin slightly.

Suddenly she raised her hand to look at the crayon in her hand and his heart froze at the sight of her pale skin slowly sliding to green; that slow transformation was far too familiar, far too terrifying. His eyes widened and an agonized groan slipped from his lips as the green slid up to her shoulders and vanished under her shirt.

He knew the green continued all over her tiny body.

“Olivia,” he groaned, his hand stretching out to caress her hair.

She turned at the sound of his voice and he bit back a scream as he realized her brown eyes were now green.

Bright green.

“Daddy?”
“NO!” he screamed as he sat up violently. Evony, who had been cradled in his arms woke with a start.

“Bruce?” she mumbled, her eyes cloudy with sleep. “Hey, hey, shh it’s okay!” she said softly as she registered his shaking. She shifted on his lap, her legs straddling his hips, and she cradled his slowly shaking head in her hands. “Easy big guy,” she murmured, her voice mellow despite the panic she felt. She couldn’t see his eyes…

“Oh god Evie,” he groaned as his head pounded and the Other Guy growled menacingly. “Oh god help me.”

Her eyes widened at the roughness of his voice and she cast a prayer heaven’s way that she wasn’t holding the Hulk right now. “I’m here, Bruce,” she whispered, her fingers rubbing gently at his temples. “I’m here baby. Take a deep breath, you’re going to be okay.”

He shuddered in her arms and she winced as he wrapped his arms tightly around her. “Don’t leave me,” he whispered, his face pressed against her collar bone.

She laughed softly and pressed a kiss to his curly hair. “Wouldn’t dream of it, buster. You’re stuck with me.” She rested her cheek in his hair and waited as his shaking stilled. Her eyes closed in relief as she felt him take a few deep breaths. She could tell he was calmer now. “So, what was that all about Bruce?” she asked, pulling away ever so slightly so she could see his face.

He was quiet, his mind still fixated on the slow spread of green sliding over the little girl’s hands. Was this an omen or was it just his mind playing tricks?

“I dreamt of our daughter,” he whispered, his head falling forward to rest in his hands.

“Oh-ho! So we’re having a daughter now, are we?” she said with a soft laugh. His lips twitched involuntarily as her cheek pressed against his. Her hands smoothed gently over his shoulders to wrap around his back. “You were so sure the other day we were going to have a boy.”

“Evony,” he said slowly, his hands rising to clasp her hands. “What if I don’t find a cure?”

She stilled and he felt his heart stall at her hesitation; before he could panic though, she was there, just like always. “Bruce, stop it right now. You know you’ll find a cure! You and Tony have been working on this non-stop. If anyone is going to know how to fix this, it’s going to be you two. Please don’t doubt that!” Her blue eyes were earnest and he felt himself begin to drown in their depths.

“How do you know? How can you be sure?” he choked out; his eyelids fluttered closed and his breath hitched as he saw once more the steady trickle of green on his daughter’s arms. “What if there is no cure?”

She snorted as she gripped his chin tightly. “Listen to me, Banner,” she snapped. He didn’t open his eyes and she growled before shaking his chin. “Listen!” He opened his eyes and she smiled. “Bruce Banner, haven’t you realized I will have you as is? You’re a good man and you’ll be a good father. If you don’t find a cure then that’s fine! We’ll just be extra careful. Okay?” her fingers were stroking his cheeks as she finished and he shivered under her touch.

“But what if…” he ground out as she bent closer to him.

“Shh,” she whispered as she gripped his head tightly. “Just, shh, you impossible man,” she muttered, her lips brushing against his. “I won’t let anything happen to you or to the baby, all right?”

His wry grin flashed quickly on his lips as her lips began their tender exploration of his jawline.
“Promise?” he murmured as his hands rose to rest on her hips.

She smiled and pressed her forehead to his. “I promise,” she whispered as she straddled his hips. “I promise you Bruce Banner, I will always be here to keep you sane.”

“Thank you,” he whispered as her hands slid up his chest.

“No problem,” she said with a soft laugh.

They were quiet for a few moments, each caught in their own thoughts and then Evony shifted in his arms. “What did she look like?” she whispered, her eyes fluttering open to meet his.

He hesitated and then kissed her nose. “Beautiful. She was beautiful. Just like you Evie.”

She chuckled softly before saying, “I hope she has your eyes. Your eyes are like melting dark chocolate.” She stroked his cheek gently, her dark blue eyes sparkling as she pressed herself tightly against his chest.

Before he could respond the door to the lounge slid open and Clint Barton stepped into the room bearing a box marked with the Amazon logo. “Oh I don’t know,” he said, his eyes sparkling. “I always thought Banner’s eyes were the color of Nutella. All hazelnut and cocoa. Mmm.”

“You’re just hungry,” Natasha said with a roll of her eyes as she followed him into the lounge.

“Oh definitely! I’m glad Cap and Stark are in charge of food tonight. You always get the same thing Nat,” he groused as he collapsed on the couch, too close to Bruce and Evony for comfort.

Bruce scowled and shifted her in his arms so she was a little more decent and she sighed as she was suddenly cradled in his lap. “I was fine where I was,” she muttered.

Clint glanced at her and only rolled his eyes. “Yeah? Well some of us don’t want a live preview Little Potts so keep it G.”

She stuck her tongue out at him but let Bruce tuck her head under her chin. “You’re an ass, Barton,” she growled from the safety of Bruce’s arms.

Natasha chuckled as she sat elegantly upon the leather armchair next to them and she said, “Well, he is. Why do you think Fury was so happy to see him take regular quarters at the Tower?”

Clint clapped his hand to his heart and gasped, “Ouch, my heart!”

Both women rolled their eyes and Natasha requested JARVIS to put in a movie. They all groaned as Eastern Promises cued up and she curled into the chair. They didn’t get a chance to harangue her about her choice in films though because at that moment the door swept open once more and the smell of Thai food filled the room.

Tony entered first, carrying only a snifter of whiskey, and Steve followed, his arms loaded with grease stained paper bags.

“Oooh, Thai!” Clint crowed in appreciation as the food was deposited before them. “You spoil us.”

Tony only rolled his eyes and dropped onto the couch between Clint and Bruce and Evony. “Don’t worry Barton, we got you shawarma.”

"God,” Clint groaned while Natasha laughed. “Why do you and Tasha love that stuff so much?”
Tony didn’t answer, only glanced at Evony who was staring at the open box of seafood curry he’d handed her. “You okay kid? You’re looking a little peaky.”

“Yeah,” she whispered, her lips barely moving as the smell of the seafood rolled over her. She usually loved this dish, ate it as much as possible, always ordered it when Tony got Thai. So why the sudden desire to vomit? “I uh, have to go. Something must not have agreed with me earlier today.”

Before any of them could respond, she was gone. Tony stared after her, his mouth slightly open and he said as he turned back to Banner, “Did she eat anything today?”

Bruce only shook his head and muttered, “She hasn’t eaten today. We’ve been taking it easy because of the morning sickness.” He stood then, setting aside his container of phrik khi nu. “I’m going to go check on her.” He left the room then as well, a worried frown wrinkling his brow.

Clint snorted into his bowl of noodles and said, “I know what I’m getting for her next!”

Steve smacked him upside the head and grumbled into his soup, “Leave her alone Barton.”

Tony only stared at the door and grumbled, “How long does morning sickness last?”

“The first trimester, at least,” Natasha piped up. All of the men swung their gazes toward her and she shrugged in irritation. “What?” she grumbled as she lowered her head to her box of rice. “It’s just something women know.”

It was quiet after that; Tony quietly asked JARVIS to run some basic scans on Evony once more and as the night wore on he and Bruce traded emails so that Tony could keep appraised of her condition. He didn’t envy the man, but as he said in his texts to a frantic Pepper, it was touching how much he was caring for their girl. He never left her side, even held her hair back as she puked. It was very touching really.

If only they didn’t have to worry about the temper problems of father and child.
Vanished

The day SHIELD kidnapped Evony Potts she’d actually been let out of the Tower for an afternoon away from Bruce and Tony and their freakishly huge needles, ultra sound goo and tense mutterings about the scans they ran on her.

She’d been asking to leave the Tower for days, ever since the morning sickness had started. But the men had refused, saying they needed to keep her in the Tower, in case something happened.

She’d tried to get Bruce to come with her, just for the day, to Central Park, or to the art museum. Anything to get him out of the Tower as well.

Was it too much to ask for a day away from it all?

Apparently so.

The worst thing about it was she had refused an escort, insisting she just wanted an afternoon to herself, to gather her thoughts, breathe in peace without worried scientists watching her every move.

Maybe if she had let Bruce or Tony come along, she wouldn’t have gotten involved with SHIELD at all.

But of course, she only thought of this after Nick Fury had gotten his grimy hands on her.

That afternoon when she sat in the Starbucks secretly enjoying her spiced apple cider and the sound of her pencil on the paper of her sketchpad, she didn’t even hear the agents surround her. She didn’t notice the suddenly silent and empty coffee shop. Nor did she notice the Director approach her from behind.

It was always a problem with Evony, her getting lost in her sketching. Pepper had constantly bemoaned this fact, ever since they were kids, saying it was no wonder her kid sister never knew what was going on around her.

So, yeah, she didn’t notice her compromising situation. But that wasn’t her fault. It was her day off. Her day away from superheroes, irradiated scientists and pig headed older sisters.

She did notice, though, when he buried a gloved hand in her hair and connected something to the base of her skull.

Before she could scream or even slash out, Evony Potts’ vision went black and she crumpled into the arms of an agent in a black suit and dark sunglasses.

“I’m sorry,” whispered a man’s deep voice as her vision darkened.

Bruce! Her mind screamed as she felt her body break. Help me…

Hulk…

Please…

But her boys were far-and-away and she was lost.

In a matter of moments, Evony was in the hands of SHIELD and for quite a while there was no sign of her at all.
To all intents and purposes, she had vanished.

Not even Tony Stark could find her once SHIELD decided they needed her.

**

The days following Evony’s sudden disappearance were tense. Bruce, usually mild and calm, was suddenly transformed into a tense barely controlled mirror of himself. The Other Guy was just inside of his control in those days, his usually dark chocolate brown eyes constantly ringed by bright green. If he sat for too long the sound of creaking joints and stretching tendons surrounded him within seconds and Tony had Pepper keep a constant list of furniture needed to be replaced.

No one knew how to keep him calm either. Only Evony had ever been able to talk him down, to help him find his sanity, to keep the Other Guy under control. But she was gone. And Bruce in a lot of ways was gone too.

All of the Tower inhabitants were at a loss.

What had happened to Evony? Where had she gone? Had she run away?

Or did someone else have her?

At first Tony thought she had gone to Joey’s after her Starbucks run to escape the Tower for a while; he and Bruce had been dogging her every move since that first day she had exhibited signs of her pregnancy. Pepper had not given her a moment’s piece. And he and Barton had been keeping FedEx and Amazon in business with all of their express orders of joke baby presents.

If their roles had been reversed, Tony would have gotten fed up with them all long before this and gone somewhere to catch his breath for a while.

Maybe Canada.

Or New Mexico.

But Evony wasn’t Tony and running away was not her forte. It never had been.

When she’d gone out that day they’d sworn they wouldn’t track her. And they hadn’t.

Well, Barton following her to the Starbucks right down the road so he could get a soy, no whip, sugar-free vanilla latte didn’t count.

Not really.

While Pepper had protested this day away from the Tower, Tony had understood her need to escape; after all, he’d shut people out and closed his entire life down the moment the shit hit the fan the year before.

And even Bruce, reluctant, sure, had agreed that Evony deserved a small escape.

If anyone knew what it was like to feel trapped and to desire nothing but a release, it was Dr. Bruce Banner.

So that night, when Evony hadn’t shown, most of them had shrugged it off and decided it was her way of rebelling. Tony and Pepper reassured Bruce that this had been a common occurrence when she was growing up, her disappearing for a night or two when things got really tough and she was afraid she wouldn’t be able to cope.
None of them expected her to have actually run away, for good.

That just wasn’t Evony.

She was too happy-go-lucky for that.

Too…Evony.

**

The first thing she noticed when she woke up was the metallic taste in the back of her mouth that warranted a bout of morning sickness.

“Urgh,” she groaned as she stiffened instinctively and tried to control her bile. But that just made her want to throw up even more. She didn’t know where she was or even if she was close to something for her to vomit freely in. The last thing she needed was to throw up on some of Bruce or Tony’s important papers or equipment. She’d never hear the end of it.

As her stomach roiled more insistently she shuddered and started to sit up.

She didn’t get far. Somebody had gotten the bright idea to strap her down to the bed.

“Oh fuck,” she moaned. “What the hell is this?”

Suddenly cool hands were on her face and an unfamiliar voice was calling her name. She immediately started to panic.

That wasn’t Bruce or Tony’s voice. Where the hell was she?!

Evony tried to open her eyes and almost screamed when she couldn’t; someone had blindfolded her.

If this is Barton’s idea of a joke, I’m going to kill him, she thought as she struggled, weakly against both forms of bondage. It was no use though. Panic started to wash through her as she twisted her hands in the straps holding her down and she almost screamed as a hand, a hand that wasn’t warm and callused, grabbed her own.

“Miss Potts, please, don’t struggle,” said the scarily unfamiliar voice. “You don’t want to hurt yourself, or the baby.”

“Let me up,” she ground out through clenched teeth. She could feel her stomach trying to force its way up her trachea and that just freaked her out all the more.

Where’s Bruce?! Her mind screamed over and over. Oh god what if something happened to him?

She sobbed brokenly as her back arched against her bonds and she gasped, “Please, let me go. I’m going to hurl!”

How was she supposed to protect herself against whoever kidnapped her if she was vomiting down her shirt?!

Pregnancy sucked…

“I’m sorry Miss Potts, I can’t do that,” said the woman’s voice and Evony stiffened even further.

Slowly, memories of her afternoon away from the Tower trickled out of the shadows in the back of her mind and she groaned as she realized she didn’t remember anything past a sharp burst of pain
and the snapping of her pencil’s lead on the paper of her pad as her body convulsed.

And a whisper…

Somebody had whispered they were sorry…

Damn right they should be. By the time this was done she’d make sure they were really sorry.

Images of the Hulk tearing the mystery woman to pieces flashed through her mind and she couldn’t help a feral grin from flashing across her lips. But if Bruce was going to save her…he’d have to find her first.

“Where am I?” she hissed as her body strained against the bindings holding her.

Her captor was silent but Evony could hear her, rustling around just catty-corner to where she lay; it sounded like she was flipping through some papers, almost as if she held a clipboard. A soft beeping could be heard just to her right, similar to the heart monitor Bruce had used when she was healing after the attack on Midtown.

So, she thought, I’m in a hospital of some sort. But why the straps and blindfold? What kind of outfit is this…

Then she heard something that made her blood run cold. And in that moment she almost lost it entirely.

Agent Barkova the Director is coming to speak with the Potts girl, is she awake?

The Director…

There was only one Director who could possibly be involved in this whole situation.

“Oh god,” she choked out as her body convulsed in her bonds. “Please, no.”

Suddenly the mystery woman was back, her hands holding Evony down as she said into her comm unit, “Yes Agent Hill, Evony Potts is awake. Director Fury will be able to speak with her. You better hurry though, she’s starting to panic.”

If Evony wasn’t so terrified and so sick she would have laughed.

Panic didn’t even begin to describe how she was feeling right now.

Her entire world had dissolved into a black, twisted nightmare.

“The Director,” she whispered as she sobbed brokenly, her head thrashing in the woman’s hands. “Please, god no.”

“Please Miss Potts,” the agent begged, her voice harsh as she struggled with Evony’s convulsions. “You need to be calm. You need to calm down, breathe, please don’t panic.”

Don’t panic.

What a joke.

How could she be calm when she was here?

In SHIELD’s medical bay.
“Bruce,” she sobbed as her heart hammerd with her terror. “Oh please Bruce, get me out of here.”

Vaguely, she heard the doors at the far end of the room slide open with a soft swoosh of air and the distinctive thud of boots marching across the medical bay’s floors. But she couldn’t focus on it.

Couldn’t be calm.

I only wanted a day off, a day to catch my breath, she thought, as unfamiliar hands caught hold of her and more straps were drawn across her limbs and waist, truly holding her down now.

And then he spoke and she knew, knew in the pit of her stomach, she was in a lot of trouble now.

“Hello Miss Potts,” he said as he removed the blindfold, providing her with her first look of the infamous one-eyed Director Nick Fury, Tony Stark’s biggest pain in the ass. “How are you feeling?”

She stilled, her heart continued to hammer painfully against her ribcage as she fought the black panic his calculating gaze caused and she started to laugh.

“How am I, Director?” she asked, her voice hoarse as she sagged against the thin pillows of her SHIELD issued hospital bed. “I feel like you’re going to be in a world of hurt once Bruce and Tony figure out what you’ve done.”

Fury was silent for a moment, his dark eyes full of shadows as he watched the pale, sweaty girl twisting in the sheets before him. “You think so Miss Potts?” he asked as his lips twitched into a small smirk; he pulled something from his pocket, almost reveling in the abject terror buried deep in Evony’s blue eyes as she followed his movements. “They’d have to find you first.”

And then his thumb pressed into the surface of the tiny black device he held and a rather familiar burst of pain exploded at the base of her skull. She gasped and a broken scream slipped free of her lips.

“Goodnight Miss Potts,” he said as her vision went black and her body fell limply against the mattress. “I’ll be seeing you.”

I bet you will, she wanted to say but cotton now filled her mouth and she felt as if her body was falling into a thick soup, her limbs deadened by lead weights at wrists and ankles and she couldn’t stop from crying as pain and darkness wracked her body.

As she finally collapsed she whispered, “I’m sorry Bruce…”

Before she could even finish her sentence she was asleep and her tears fell unchecked to the pillows tucked under her head.

As Fury bent over her to check and see if she was unconscious, his fingers brushed the tiny circular device attached to the base of her skull and he sighed. “You’re sure the Sleeper won’t hurt her Agent Bartova?”

He glanced at the petite blonde agent who blushed and fiddled with her dark glasses. “It has no lasting neurological effects sir,” she muttered as she shifted before the Director and his assistant; seeing their looks of skepticism she sniffed and pushed her glasses up the bridge of her nose, summoning her courage and her intelligence in the face of their disbelief. “It may be painful at the time, yes, but it’s not debilitating just increases the hypothalamus’s hormones, which causes a person’s need for sleep. Nothing too dangerous, really, just chemistry and biology, sir.”

Fury straightened and clasped his hands behind his back. Glancing at both women and then back to
the still figure of Evony Potts he sighed. “We’ll have to move her off base, take her somewhere else. Stark and Banner will catch on soon and we can’t have her in such an obvious place. Hill?” he glanced at his assistant who’s light grey eyes were sparkling with something like humor.

“Sir!” she said with a soft click of her heels as she straightened. “The base in Tinsel may be the best place for her. It’s isolated, our best scientists are on location and if we lay a false trail…”

Fury’s gaze was calculating as he watched his assistant and then he nodded.

“Take care of it Hill,” he said as he turned to go. “I want her off the carrier before the night is through. Send the best agents we have, but not Barton or Romanoff; they’re too close to this as it is.”

As the medical bay doors swept open he turned back to gaze at the sleeping woman strapped to her hospital bed and shook his head.

Why was it, that whenever the Avengers and their counterparts were involved, his life increased in difficulty.

“Damn Stark,” he growled as he swept from medical, scattering agents and soldiers before him as he made his way to the bridge. “Been a thorn in my side since day one.”

When he arrived on the bridge he requested a call to SHIELD headquarters tucked away in a little town in southern Nevada called Tinsel.

It was a tiny desert town tucked away in the mountains and the perfect location to hide something away.

Especially if that something was a slender red-haired woman carrying the child of one of their greatest assets.

“Director Fury are you sure about this?” Agent Robertson asked, his voice slightly nervous at the thought of the Hulk’s girlfriend being transferred to his care. “If Dr. Banner finds out this is where you’ve put her…” he swallowed and Fury’s eye rolled in irritation at the man’s uncertainty. “Won’t he try to take action, sir?”

Fury sighed and contemplated hanging up on the man. The western branches always seemed to lack backbone, especially after the Loki situation and the PEGASUS station.

Although…all things considered, he wasn’t sure if he could blame them. Whenever things happened, they always seemed to take place out in the western deserts. An ominous shiver darted up his spine at that but he ignored his foreboding. This was one time where SHIELD was in the right. Everything would be fine.

He snorted and shook his head.

“Robertson,” he barked as the man continued with his frenzied worries, now on the topic of how his facility wasn’t equipped for dealing with a pregnant woman who may be carrying an irradiated baby. “Shut up!” He sighed when the man fell silent and he turned his back on the curious looks being shot his way by the agents running the Helicarrier’s everyday functions. “Robertson,” he continued, “your base is the only SHIELD outpost in the nation outfitted for a situation of this like. If the Hulk does make an appearance or if our plans go through with the Potts woman and her progeny, we’re going to need your base and its specialized facilities.” He paused for a moment and the agent on the other end of the line made a sputtering noise, almost as if he was choking on his tongue. “Is there a problem with this Robertson?” he growled, his dark eye blazing furiously as he watched the clouds scud by the wall of windows fronting the bridge he stood in.
The agent sputtered again and then said, his voice only slightly meek in the face of his Director’s fury, “‘Specialized facilities,’ sir? Do you mean…you’re not…But she’s a civilian!”

Fury sighed and rubbed his forehead where the strap of his eyepatch cut into his skin. “Yeah? The thing is Robertson, she hasn’t been a civilian since the day she first stepped foot into that damned Tower. She’s not a normal woman, Agent and that baby sure as hell isn’t normal either.” He paused and his fingers rose to rest at the earpiece attached to the side of his head and he sighed. “So we’re going to use the facilities you’ve been dusting for us and we’re going to keep this quiet, do you understand Agent? We keep this out of the way and if we’re lucky, Stark and Banner won’t know what’s happened until it’s too late.”

A pause and then, “Until it’s too late, sir?” the agent repeated, his voice weak. Fury could almost imagine the bespectacled and lab coated agent sagging into his chair and going white as the implications of his words became clear. “But Director, that program was shelved years ago, after General Ross determined the Hulk was erratic, incapable of being controlled! We…you…we can’t expect the Project: Rebirth program to work now.” He hesitated and cleared his throat when Fury didn’t answer and whispered, “Sir, we’d need a Hulk for the program to work.”

Fury’s lips twitched and he growled, “Exactly agent. So prepare your facility.”

His thumb pressed into the earpiece and the call was dropped.

Even though his call was done and he knew he should go oversee the transference of Evony Potts to a SHIELD Quinjet but something about this order, this mission disturbed him.

“Damn,” he muttered as he walked slowly up the raised walkway towards the head of the bridge. “This better be the right thing to do.”

He kept watch on the bridge for nearly an hour, his mind spinning over his orders to Robertson about the Potts woman; but when a gurney laden with their latest asset’s still sleeping figure, was loaded into a double decked Quinjet along with an armed Agent Quartermaine his assistant arrived on the bridge, interrupting his thought process.

She made very little noise as she halted behind him but he knew she was there, a small smirk on her lips. “I’m leaving you in charge for a bit,” he growled, not bothering to glance at her to gauge her reaction. Knowing Maria Hill she’d be tickled pink about this. Or whatever the equivalent of pink was to his straight-laced assistant. “I think I’m going out to Tinsel to oversee this Potts situation, I don’t think Robertson has enough clearance for this entire outfit.” He sighed and rubbed his jaw as he watched the video feed of the flight bay where Quartermaine was still arranging his team of agents and medics around the gurney. “You know what to do Hill.”

He could feel her steely gaze on his back and he knew, knew she would do the best thing. Which at this moment was keeping Stark and Banner out of their mainframe and away from the Helicarrier. Just her prickly personality alone would do the job.

As he climbed onto the jet a moment later he stopped at the side of Evony Potts’ bed and stilled when he saw her cloudy blue eyes watching him in sour interest. “Hello Director,” she whispered, her voice harsh from her crying and screaming earlier. “Squirreling me away so you can play your games?”

He froze and his eye narrowed as he bent over her, the remote control connected to the Sleeper attached at the base of her skull once more in his fingers and she stilled as she caught sight of it.

“Be careful Miss Potts,” he said, his voice a soft growl as the doors of the jet were thrown shut and
his agents began positioning themselves in the seats around the passenger section of the jet. “We are not to be trifled with.”

She smirked and as his thumb pressed into the rounded button of the Sleeper’s control and as pain wracked her body she hissed, “Neither is Bruce!”

Fury watched her impassively as her eyes closed and her body fell limply against the mattress once more and sneered.

“We’ll see Miss Potts. We’ll see.”

Then he settled in for the long flight to the hidden base tucked away in Nevada’s westernmost reaches of the Sierra Nevada’s. The flight was silent, tense and every single occupant of the jet couldn’t stop the ominous feelings of foreboding from darting up and down their spines as they glanced from the stone faced Director and the crumpled red haired woman lying beside him.

None of them were positive this particular mission was going to end well.

After all, this was the girlfriend of the Hulk and the kid sister of Tony Stark’s fiancée and CEO.

Somehow…this didn’t seem like the best plan SHIELD had ever concocted.

Not that any of them were going to say so to their Director. That would almost be worse than dealing with the Hulk on a firsthand basis.

Almost.

**

When several days had gone by since Evony disappeared and they hadn’t heard a single word from their wayward artist, they knew, all of them, that something had happened. But none were sure exactly what. Or how to go about finding out. She’d vanished, in a very un-Evony-like manner.

Bruce was chomping at the bit, threatening to leave the Tower himself so he could trace her footsteps and confront the Starbucks employees so he himself could hear their report, despite the fact that Tony, Pepper and Clint Barton had already done the same.

This, of course, increased everyone’s tension. Bruce Banner was normally a calm man, when not being pressured by the Other Guy, but now, with Evony’s disappearance he was losing his control. Tony wasn’t sure how long he’d be able to keep the man contained.

And then her messenger bag and cell phone was found in the Lost & Found of her favorite Starbucks she had visited on her one day of freedom.

Barton was pale when he handed her favorite leather-bound sketchbook over to Bruce, his thumb marking a ruined sketch of a dark haired man playing with a tiny girl with soft curls tumbling down her back and the usually mild scientist dissolved into a black rage.

“What happened to her, Barton?!” he snarled as he threw the agent against the wall of Evony’s studio, his arm tight against his working throat. “Where is she?!?”

Clint Barton was calm, even as Bruce’s entire body shook and his eyes swirled from dark reassuring brown to vibrant green, and he said as calmly as possible, “I don’t know Banner. Take it easy. That one barista just dropped off her things when he found them in the back of the store. We have no idea what’s going on. Take it easy, big guy.”
Bruce’s eyes were full of distrust and horror; the implications of her abandoned belongings terrified him and as hopelessness competed with the Hulk’s furious bellows in the back of his head, he hissed, “If I find out you’re lying or that SHIELD is somehow involved, I’ll tear you all from limb to limb.”

Barton waited for a moment, his eyes thoughtful as he watched Bruce’s fury settle into a simmer and finally nodded. “Fair enough big man,” he said softly, his hand patting the somewhat calmer scientist’s arm. “But I don’t think this was SHIELD. This doesn’t seem like something they would do.” He hesitated and glanced over Bruce’s shoulder to Evony’s window worktable where her sketchbook stood open, revealing her sketch of what he assumed was Bruce and their child. “It’s too messy. None of my guys would have left that stuff behind.”

Bruce watched him carefully, his eyes cold as he studied the agent and thought about his words before finally nodding. “You’re right. I’m…I’m just jumpy. After all,” he laughed hopelessly and ran his fingers through his hair, “why would SHIELD want Evony? She’s not a superhero or a spy, she’s just Evie. Why would anyone want her?”

Barton stilled from flipping through Evony’s sketchpad and glanced at the doorway of her studio as a cold voice, utterly unrecognizable from Anthony Stark’s usual sardonic, cocky tone, said, “Because she’s the mother of something completely different from anything any of us have ever seen before.”

Bruce froze as he took in Tony’s cold gaze and the slender tablet he held. Even from here he could see the now recognizable run of numbers and figures presenting a medical test JARVIS had run on Evony and he choked, “What do you mean Tony?”

Tony glanced from scientist to archer and sighed heavily, his shoulders sagging as he tossed the tablet onto the surface of the worktable standing between them. “Take a look,” he muttered.

Bruce’s hand shook as he took up the tablet and he almost cringed as he took in the first array of numbers. And then he saw the last figure and consequent formulas and numbers and gasped, “No! That is not possible!”

Tony shrugged and collapsed across the couch Bruce had lay on so she could draw him in the sunlight. “Blank slate Banner,” he muttered as his fingers tapped a nervous rhythm across the arc reactor. “That baby is a blank slate inundated with your genetics. I think you can see the appeal.”

Barton glanced from each scientist and then raised his hand, “Uh, what’s going on guys? What’s this about blank slates and appeal for mystery kidnappers?”

Bruce didn’t answer, only stared at the screen of the tablet he held. Tony did though. “What’s going on is someone took Evony and she’s carrying a baby that may provide the right footing needed to create the next super soldier.”

Barton scowled and opened his mouth with a weighted look at Bruce who still stared at the tablet but before he could say anything about the obvious dangers of the super soldier program, Tony said, “That baby has the perfect genetic makeup, the perfect backdrop for the serum because she’s a stabilized form of the Hulk. She’s the step you missed Bruce when you were testing the gamma rays all of those years ago.”

All three men fell silent as they gazed in horror at each other and then Barton choked out at the same time as Bruce, “‘She’?”

At Tony’s pitying gaze Bruce stood and snarled, “We have to find them Tony!”

Neither argued, not with the suddenly green eyed scientist Hulking out in front of them.
Barton simply shoved a tranq dart in Bruce’s bicep, narrowly missing getting punched in the chest by a green fist as he did so and gasped, “We’ll find them Bruce! Just calm down man!”

The Hulk simply roared in fury as he slumped to the floor of the studio, his eyes going vague and dreamy as the tranq activated in his irradiated bloodstream.

“‘VONY!’ he groaned as he lost his hold on reality and slowly transformed back to his better half.

“Evony, I’m sorry,” Bruce whispered as he lost consciousness.

Tony sighed as he knelt beside his friend, checking his pulse and his eyes as he muttered, “I’m sorry Bruce. We failed you and we failed Evie. We’ll make this right.”

As he and Barton hauled Bruce upright the archer groaned, “And how the hell are we going to do that Stark? She’s gone, somebody has her and there’s no trace. Where do we even start?!”

Tony glanced at him from around Bruce’s chest and slumped head as they entered the elevator and said, his voice solemn, “We start with the only people who could possibly know about her.”

“Who’s that?” Barton gasped as suddenly all of Bruce’s weight settled on him while Stark fiddled with his phone.

Tony glanced at him as he raised the slender device to his ear and said with a sneer, “Your people, Barton.

We start with SHIELD.”
“Olivia! Olivia, baby, don’t get too close to the waves!”

Evony stirred at the sound of Bruce’s voice coming through her open studio windows and smiled. It sounded like Olive had made a run for it while Bruce fixed their sandcastle.

Again.

“Olivia! You’re going to get your dress all wet and Mommy’s going to be really mad. Oh, sweetie!”

Chuckling, Evony stood from her worktable and moved towards the window, cracking her back as she did so. The faint crackle was loud in her tiny corner of heaven but she didn’t pay attention. She was focused on the charming vista before her.

Bruce was chasing their daughter, two years old now, down the beach, his hair wild as the wind off the Atlantic caught his curls and played. Olivia, just as dark haired as her father but as ornery as her mother, according to her Uncles Tony and Clint, was running before him, her chubby legs, sand caked now that she had slipped free of her father to play in the waves, pumping through the damp sand.

“WEEE!” she shrieked as the waves dashed over her feet.

Evony could hear her piping giggles all the way up to the cottage and the sound amused her as nothing else could.

Even the sight of Bruce tackling the little girl and wrapping his arms around her in a tight bear hug as the tumbled to the soft white sand didn’t tickle her in the same way as Olive’s laugh did.

“You two are going to have to strip down when you come back for lunch!” she shouted from the window, her eyes sparkling as she laughed. “I don’t need any more sandpeople in my living room, you heathens!”

Bruce’s hand shot up and his fingers curled into the “o.k.” symbol making her laugh. “I love you Mommy!” he shouted as he flipped a still giggling Olivia over his shoulder and began running towards the waves.

“’Ove oo Mommy!” their daughter shrieked as he set her down to splash in the waves.

Evony laughed and leaned a little further out the window to shout, “You better, you mermaids!”

Turning away from the window, with Bruce’s laughter and Olivia’s giggles still ringing in her ear, she paused by her workbench and shivered, wrapping her arms tight about herself as she did so.

A sketch of a dark haired girl and of the gentle faced Bruce she had fallen in love all of those years ago in Tony’s basement, sat there, still in its roughest state and she sighed as her fingers stroked the rumpled paper.

“I love you Bruce,” she whispered, her voice suddenly agonized as an unexpected wave of sorrow and loss threatened to overwhelm her. “Please forgive me…”

Before she could ponder her words and the hopeless emotions threatening to drown her, despite the happiness she had felt at seeing her daughter and Bruce playing together on their little slip of beach,
her studio door was thrown open and her worst nightmare stepped through the doors and she realized she had dreamt up the cottage and the beach and the little girl with the Bruce-dark hair and Bruce’s happy laughter.

“Oh god,” she whispered as she backed across the dreamscape, her mind halfway processing the slow awakening of her senses; even as she watched the cottage vanished and the soft background noises of waves and a dark haired child laughing faded away to nothing but tense silence.

“What are you doing here?”

“Are you ready to work with us Miss Potts?” he snapped, his deep voice cold and impatient as he gripped her arm; she screamed as her eyes flashed open and the dream vanished for good.

Her blood ran cold and she groaned as she curled into herself upon the uncomfortable mattress of her cell’s bed, her hands wrapped protectively around her belly and her shoulders hunched against his dark presence.

“No,” she whispered brokenly. “No please go away. I don’t want to do anymore. Please…”

And then he pulled the remote she had learned to hate from his pocket and she whimpered as his thumb pressed into its surface.

“Please no…”

“Work with us Miss Potts and everything will be okay.”

“No,” she ground out as she shook at his feet. “No, I won’t.”

“Fine.”

She vaguely watched as his thumb pressed into what the medics who surrounded her every waking moment called the “Zombie Maker;” and as fiery pain, as brutal as a clump of cement being smashed into her skull, wracked her, she sobbed brokenly.

“Bruce, please,” she whispered, curling into her chest, trying uselessly to protect herself and the child she carried against the cruel pain darting along her nerves.

She did not notice the many-times folded piece of paper she held in her hands. And neither did the SHIELD Director.

“If you help us we’ll send you back to Banner,” her one-eyed nightmare murmured when he bent over her crumpled figure. “You don’t have to fight us Miss Potts. We’re the good guys.”

She laughed at that, even as her eyes began to drift close and she shook her head. “You’re not good Fury, you’re manipulative bastards,” she whispered. As her mind lost touch once more with reality, she couldn’t help reflecting that the dream of her daughter and Bruce had been good while it lasted.

“I hope the Hulk smashes you,” she slurred as Fury took up her wrist in one of his gloved hands, his one eye dark and pitiless.

“Banner can’t touch us, not here, Miss Potts. So don’t get your hopes up,” he growled as he gestured to the waiting medic standing just over his shoulder with a vial and syringe full of some disturbingly blue fluids.

Evony choked out a broken chuckle as the medic bent over her straightened arm and whispered as
she finally lost consciousness, “We’ll see Director. We’ll see…”

The pinch of the needle at the joint of her arm was a dull memory as she opened her eyes once more to a sun filled room of white washed driftwood walls and open windows through which she could hear waves and a little girl’s laughter.

And the reassuringly mellow voice of the man she loved singing a Billy Joel song as he shoveled sand into a plastic kiddie bucket.

“Bruce! Olive!” she called as she straightened from her huddled position in the far corner of the room and began making her way towards the open window through which she could just see their crazy beach antics taking place a few yards away. “It’s time for lunch!”

She didn’t allow herself to focus on the ghostly voice in the back of her head telling his assistant to “up the dose” and to “monitor the baby’s heart rate while the serum takes effect.”

All she allowed herself was the glance at her fisted hand resting on her belly and the knowing smirk from darting across her lips.

“We’ll see Director, how this all plays out,” she whispered as she heard the front screen door of their cottage open and her daughter’s voice start calling her name while Bruce sang in his soft baritone. She smiled fully now, as she emerged from her studio to sweep up the little girl with the dark brown hair and big blue eyes. Pressing a kiss to her cheek and then resting her forehead against her lover’s own, she chuckled and whispered once more, as her eyes drifted closed and a frenzied beep beep beep of a heart monitor rose in the back of her head, “We’ll see…”

Opening her eyes she met Bruce’s curious dark brown gaze and felt peace fill her, despite the tension in her head and the sudden heaviness of her limbs, “I love you Bruce.”

“Promise?” he whispered, his figure blurring for a moment as her vision spun sickeningly.

“I promise,” she ground out through a suddenly tight throat; her fingers were desperate as she hauled herself and their daughter closer to him and she kissed him, even as their figures melted away from her. “Oh god I promise, Bruce.”

Before she could even finish, sharp pains stabbed her in the stomach and she screamed, her body curling in response around her belly.

And again, for the second time in one day, and for the umpteenth time in an unknown amount of weeks during which SHIELD had pumped her full of strange blue fluids, the dream of her perfect man and their sweet baby, was lost to her.

“Bruce,” she whimpered as pain gripped her and her vision truly blackened. “Help me.”

Please…

**

“Clint, that can’t be her. You know that can’t be Evony.”

Natasha Romanoff flinched at the cold look her partner shot her and turned her gaze back to the video feed they had hacked an hour ago showing a dark cell with a single occupant currently huddled under a small pile of blankets.

They could just see a tumble of dark red hair spread across the pillows and she sighed.
“Maybe it is her Clint,” she allowed, her voice grudging.

One quirked eyebrow and a quick flit of fingers across the keyboard spread across his lap and the camera zoomed. Natasha leaned closer to the video screen and watched as the woman they were too afraid to assume was Evony stirred and leaned over the railing to retch into a bedpan.

“She’s awake,” she whispered. She glanced at her partner who started to grin, his teeth white in the gloaming. “Clint, what are we going to do?”

He crept through the tight airshaft they knelt in the bowels of the SHIELD Helicarrier and began packing up their equipment.

“She’s not here Nat,” he muttered as he zipped the bag and pushed it ahead of him to the ceiling tile they had climbed through. “Did you see the call point at the base of the feed?” Glancing at her over his shoulder and seeing her frown he sighed. “She’s in Tinsel.”

And then he dropped through the tile and landed with a quiet thud upon the empty desk shoved against the back of the office wall they’d come through.

“Clint!” Natasha hissed as she swung agilely after him, “You don’t expect to be able to do anything about this do you? We work for SHIELD and if that is Evony and if Fury has her for some reason then we need to acknowledge that. There’s nothing we can do about this Clint!”

He was packing the equipment away and had begun fiddling with his bow. “How can you say that Nat?” he asked as he turned towards her, his face shadowed in the dim light of the empty Helicarrier office they stood in. “She may not be an agent and she may not be an Avenger, but she is our friend. Or at least,” he said at Natasha’s soft snort, “Bruce is our friend and he loves her. We have to help her.”

“Clint,” she murmured as he swung the case bearing his bow and quiver over his shoulder and began heading on silent feet towards the door, “We’re spies, assassins, not friends. We never have been.”

“Natasha,” he hissed as they eased out of the door, mild expressions of boredom on their faces despite the sharp flutter of nerves each felt in the pit of their stomachs. Breaking into high security bases for other espionage organizations was one thing. But this was SHIELD. They were lucky Hill wasn’t already bearing down on them with handcuffs in her hands and enough SWAT to take out the Hulk.

“If you don’t want to do this,” he continued as they eased their way down the hall towards the flight deck, their backs straight and their pace easy, “I can do it on my own with Stark and Rogers.”

She grabbed him by the elbow then and dragged him closer to her so she could hiss in his face, “Not a chance Clint. You’re my partner. We don’t do anything like this on our own, got it. Not after the last time…”

Barton’s eyebrow rose as she moved away from him, her hands shoved in the soft leather of her coat pockets and her boot heels making an insistent crack on the Helicarrier’s floor.

“Okay,” he breathed as he started after her. “That went better than I expected.”

“Come on Hawkeye!” she snapped and he hurried his steps. “We have to get back to the Tower before Hill gets suspicious.”

He glanced around as they climbed into Stark’s Quinjet and he muttered, “Think Fury’s with Evony?”
She glanced at him as she slid the headset over her ears and nodded minutely. He cringed slightly but didn’t say anything. He’d wait till they were back at the Tower.

Then everyone could get their questions answered.

As the plane taxied down the short Helicarrier’s runway he couldn’t help from reflecting on the visual they had hacked from SHIELD’s internal security cams.

That had been Evony, just like they’d suspected.

But why did SHIELD have the red head?

And why hadn’t they told them they had her?

Before now, Stark’s theorizing that SHIELD had her and the baby because of their genetic makeup had seemed a little far fetched.

And then they had caught wind of something called, “Project: Teddy Bear,” and all of them had known, known SHEILD had her and the baby.

“The bastards,” Barton growled as the jet banked over Hudson Bay and began making its way towards the flight deck Tony had just built atop the Tower. “What is Fury thinking? He’s going to get them all killed.”

Natasha did not answer, but judging by the slightly sick look on her face, he could tell she wasn’t happy about this whole situation either.

The moment the jet hit tarmac JARVIS came over the speakers, welcoming them home and saying, “A family meeting has been asked for on the 98th floor Agents Barton and Romanoff; your presences are required.”

“Perfect,” Barton muttered as they rushed across the flight deck and made their way down the twisting stairs to the patiently waiting elevator. “We don’t have to try and round up this herd of cats ourselves.”

“I wonder what happened?” Natasha mused as they rode the elevator down the five floors till they arrived silently at the 98th.

Barton didn’t get a chance to answer because as they pushed their way through the sliding frosted glass doors of the penthouse lounge a horrifying sight met their gaze.

“Woah! Woah! Hulk! Set the geriatric super soldier down!” Barton shouted as he and Natasha froze, their hands up in the air.

The Hulk, his furious green eyes blazing as he squeezed his prize, the man in the blue suit and the nasty shield that made his teeth vibrate, turned to them with a snort and snarled, his lip pulled tight over his straight white teeth.

“NO!” he bellowed and Barton winced as Steve Rogers groaned.

“Stark,” he muttered as he turned to the billionaire currently sipping a whiskey and flicking his finger along the screen of his tablet. “What the hell is going on?”

Stark’s eyebrow rose and he glanced at first the Hulk and the super soldier struggling in his mighty grip and then to the wide-eyed agents before him and smirked. “What’s it look like birdy? Use
those hawk eyes of yours to figure it out.”

He turned back to the tablet where he was overseeing the Hulk’s gamma poisoning, his spit-fire mind calculating and analyzing even as he waited for the green brute the tear Steve apart and his lips lifted in a feral grin.

Funny, he’d never thought betrayal would taste like whiskey and beer nuts before.

“Bruce, take a breath.”

All of the men stilled at Natasha’s soft voice and the Hulk snarled as he took a step towards her, the soldier in his arms still struggling feebly.

“Natasha,” Steve croaked as the Hulk’s arm tightened over his chest. “Don’t come any closer!”

She ignored the soldier, instead shot him a quelling glare and took a small step forward, her hands raised as she tried to appear calm.


The Hulk hesitated and then shook his head. “NO!” he roared once more and he backed up a step, his eyes wilder now that she was approaching him.

Natasha halted as Steve swore under his breath and threw his head back against the Hulk’s chest; the sound of cracking bone was loud in the penthouse and she winced. “Okay, okay,” she said slowly, her voice soft, gentle in the tense air. “Take it easy, I’m not going to hurt you. Why are you mad at Steve?”

Steve flinched and began to shake his head, a few tears sliding down his cheeks as he struggled against the Hulk’s grip.

“Please Natasha,” he whispered, “please don’t ask him that.”

She frowned as she turned her gaze from the Captain, to Stark, who was watching this whole scene dispassionately, cold fury in his eyes and suddenly the last few puzzle pieces of this epic disaster clicked into place.

“You sold Evony out, didn’t you?” she asked.

Steve didn’t have to answer.

The Hulk took care of that for him.

There was a heart wrenching roar and the Hulk hunched over his captive, his shoulders heaving as his hands fell slack from Steve’s battered body and he groaned, “‘Vony! ‘Vony, Hulk sorry star man hurt you!”

Steve fell to the floor with a pained cry but none moved to help the good Captain; instead Natasha rushed to the Hulk’s side and she wrapped her slender arms around the Hulk’s shuddering shoulders. “Easy, easy,” she murmured, her soft voice soothing against his pained fury. “Take it easy big man. You’re safe, you’re fine. We’ll take care of you.”

With a desperate glance in Barton’s direction she nodded and the man withdrew his bow carefully from its case and selected a specific arrow from his quiver. *Duck,* he mouthed as he aimed and she shifted her body from the line of sight; she kept her arms firmly around the Hulk, though, and only
winced slightly when his own rose to wrap around her waist.

“Easy, easy,” she whispered as she rested her cheek against his dark hair. Tears pricked her eyes and she winced ever so slightly as the soft sound of Clint’s bow snapped through the room. “Easy, Bruce, take a breath,” she whispered, even as the archer’s arrow struck right on target and the Hulk’s massive body writhed in her arms.

His green eyes met her own as the gamma poisoning began to reside in his bones and his green fingers rose to stroke her cheek. She did not respond, simply let this hand drift over her skin and she smiled sadly as his eyes began to close.

“’Vony, Hulk love you,” he whispered as he sagged to the slate floor of Tony’s penthouse lounge.

Natasha continued to hold him, even when his figure shrank and his skin washed from bright green to the comforting olive skin tone of Bruce Banner. Her arms were tight around his shoulders and she kept him cradled against her chest, her cheek pressed to his curls.

Memories of Evony strapped to a hospital bed buried in some SHIELD bunker washed over her and she herself felt like vomiting. This was just too disgusting.

All of it.

“Natasha, please understand…”

She stiffened at the sound of Steve’s voice and slowly straightened from her protective slumped posture over Bruce’s crumpled form.

“What did you say?” she hissed as her head turned slowly in his direction. He opened his mouth to say something else but suddenly she was there, flying through the air to land on his chest, her hands buried in his hair and she struck his head painfully against the slate floor. “You bastard!” she hissed. “What were you thinking?! Evony was your friend. She loved you, treated you with nothing but kindness and this is how you repay her? By selling her out to men who will do nothing but try and hurt her and that poor baby she’s carrying?”

Steve groaned as her knee settled painfully on his fractured collarbone and he gasped, “June, I did it for June. Banner hurt June and who’s to say that baby won’t hurt innocents in the future.”

Natasha froze and then bent over him to hiss in his face, “Doesn’t matter Rogers. She didn’t deserve this and you know it.”

“All right kids, take it easy,” Stark said as he neared them, his hands full of tablet and whiskey. “Pepper will kill me if you mess up our floor.”

Before she could respond, Barton was there, wrapping his arms around her and gently pulling her body into his arms. “Come on Nat,” he murmured as he carried her over to one of the leather couches sunk into the floor before the plate glass windows of the penthouse. “Take it easy.”

When he had deposited her on the couch he made his way to Banner and eased the shirtless man into his arms as well. “Ooomph,” he groaned as the scientist’s weight settled in his arms and he shot a dangerous glare in Steve’s direction. “Don’t look so disgusted old man. You brought this whole fucking disaster on yourself the moment you went behind our backs to Nick Fury,” he snapped as he threw Banner onto the couch beside Natasha. She shifted absently and took the man’s head in her lap, her finger stroking through his hair as she did so. Her dark green eyes were locked on Steve, a furious scowl on her face.
Steve shifted and winced as he inspected his body for broken bones; already the few that there were, were healing and he sighed as he eased himself up stiffly.

“Don’t be hypocrites,” he said coldly. “This was only ever a question of duty. It was my duty to report this whole debacle to Fury. If it had been anyone else any of you would have done it too.”

As he made his way across the room, Tony sighed and said, his voice carrying to the retreating super soldier, “Yeah? Well, this wasn’t just anyone. This was Evony Potts and now she’s in trouble and she only has you to thank for that Rogers. So, duty may be your saving grace but at some point you’re going to realize friendship may matter more.”

As the door swept closed behind their super soldier, Stark sighed and buried his hands in his hair. “What a nightmare. We don’t even know where they have her squirreled away.”

The lounge fell silent and then Barton cleared his throat. “Actually,” he said as he withdrew the flashdrive from his pocket and waved it in the air before Stark. “We do now.”

Stark didn’t get a chance to respond. From his position against Natasha, Banner slurred, “We’re going after her Tony. We have to.”

Tony stood and made his way to where his friend still lay slumped against their resident assassin and knelt so he was eyelevel.

His dark eyes met Bruce’s and he smiled as he reached out to clap a hand to the man’s bicep.

“Hell yeah we’re going after her Brucie,” he muttered. “This is war and we’re knights in fucking shining armor set out to save us a damsel or two.”

He stood and as Bruce smiled wearily, he rubbed his hand along his jaw and muttered, “But we’re going to have to do something about the Hulk, Banner.”

Bruce’s eyes rose to his and he swallowed nervously. “It’s time then, Tony,” he whispered as he struggled to sit up.

Natasha hurried to help him and as she glanced from one scientist to the other she frowned. “What are you two talking about?” she asked.

Bruce glanced at her and then stood, only swaying a bit. As Tony caught his elbow, steadying him lest he fall into the glass and iron coffee table in front of Natasha’s couch, he stretched out his hand to squeeze hers. “Thank you for helping me Natasha,” he whispered.

Her eyes were wide as she stood, and she took a step after them; Barton stopped her though and she raised her voice as she asked, “What are you two going to do? Bruce, tell me!”

He hesitated and then glanced over his shoulder at her and she shivered at the hopeless anticipation in his eyes.

“What I’ve been trying to do for the past eighteen years Natasha,” he said, his voice soft, but carrying in the still air of the lounge.

“I’m going to use the cure.”
A Message in a Bottle

On Tuesdays they let her walk around her prison.

Or at least she thought it was Tuesdays.

She’d kind of lost track of the days, so for all she knew it was a Friday at dawn and she was in Willy Wonka’s factory. No matter what day it was, she got two days of peace from SHIELD’s poking, which made her think it was possibly a weekend where the grunts got to go home to their family’s and pretend they weren’t torturing innocent women and children in their office spaces, and then Fury and his assistants would arrive in the early morning after her two days of peace and dose her with twice the amount of chemicals they normally gave her.

“Vita-rays,” they called them.

“Fucking nasty,” she called them, when she was able to speak. Which wasn’t often.

So whatever day it was, her “Tuesdays” were usually a relief, a chance for her to ease aching muscles and try to regain her clarity.

If there was one thing she did know for sure though, was that she had been in SHIELD’s “care” for quite a while now.

She was finally starting to show.

Which meant the baby was growing.

She wasn’t sure if that was a good thing or a bad thing.

She didn’t like thinking about what “vita rays” may be doing to her genetic makeup, let alone the little person she was carrying.

One day her team of uniformed SHIELD medics wheeled her into a sun filled room she vaguely remembered from previous “Tuesdays” and actually retreated to the back corner of what she assumed was a rec room to give her some space.

Evony sighed in relief and turned her face to the sun streaming through the barred window she sat in front of; stretching her hands out towards the warm light she concentrated simply on letting the sun work on easing her aching joints. She shuddered at the sight of her swollen and bruised knuckles and the twisted scars on her wrists from where she had struggled against the restraints SHIELD normally kept her in.

A part of her wondered if she should just take it easy from now on and let SHIELD do what they needed without her panicking.

But that was a very small part of Evony Potts.

She hated surrendering.

Glancing around the cavernous space they had sequestered her in, she shivered again. Like the cell where she’d been staying for what felt like eternity, she sat in a cement mausoleum, as cold and depressing as a tomb.

Judging by the architecture and the type of font style used to denote rooms and hallways around the
place, she was pretty sure she’d been taken to a Cold War bunker that had been converted for more…secretive… projects than missile warfare.

There were nights when ghostly screams matched pitch with her own and she knew she wasn’t the only one in this hell hole.

Turning her eyes back to the window, through which she could just make out a ridge of hazy blue mountains and a scrap or two of blue sky, she reached under the edge of the white shirt they’d put her in for this particular Tuesday and pulled a many times folded slip of paper from the gray sportsbra she wore.

Glancing surreptitiously around to make sure the three agents who sat across the room playing cards weren’t watching her, she stood, carefully, and made her way to the window seat tucked away in the corner of the room.

From past experience she knew this was the one place in the rec room that didn’t have a good security visual.

She’d been yanked from it forcefully enough times to remember that, even when her mind was still hazy from the drugs they were pumping into her veins.

Easing herself slowly into the seat, she sighed again and folded her legs. Besides the white shirt with the shallow v-necked collar, they’d put her in gray sweatpants with an elastic waistband.

She couldn’t help smirking.

Her ass was getting huge; they’d start running out of clothes that fit her soon.

Her smile slid a bit though as a new thought struck her.

The moment the asylum type clothing ceased working for them they’d probably stick her in a hospital gown.

“Well fuck,” she whispered as she rested her head wearily against the wall. “Nobody can rock a hospital gown baby.”

Glancing down at her waist she sighed and smoothed her hands over the slight rounding of her belly.

If she remembered correctly from the baby books Clint Barton had gotten her in those early, blissful days after realizing she was pregnant, this meant she was almost three months.

Which hopefully meant the morning sickness would stop eventually.

But then again…who knew what the drugs were doing to her.

For all she knew she’d never be able to look at normal food again without gagging a little bit.

“I hope not,” she whispered, her head lowered towards her belly and her fingers tightened convulsively on the top of her stomach. “I could really do with a PB&J sandwich, little guy.”

Then, with another tentative glance towards the agents she could just see from her corner of seclusion, she unfolded the paper she’d rescued from her cleavage.

She wasn’t sure how she’d managed to keep a hold of this particular drawing. She’d been working on it in the Starbucks, right before Fury had gotten his grimy hands on her. She couldn’t even remember tearing it free from her sketchbook.
She must have though because here it was, in her hands.

The sketch of Bruce holding a little girl with pigtails in his arms made her heart ache with longing and loss and she knew, knew that if she ever got of this and if their child survived whatever Fury was doing to it, she’d be sure to frame this drawing.

No matter how rumpled it was.

She smiled as she turned her body towards the sunlight, absentmindedly letting the light spill over her dark red hair and warm her chilled joints, and straightened the picture over her lap.

It wasn’t finished, not by a long-shot, but as she stroked the lines of Bruce’s face and the soft curls of what she imagined their daughter would look like, she realized it was perfect.

“That’s a right pretty drawing you have there Miss Potts,” drawled a voice from beside her.

Evony, caught unawares, jumped and shrieked, curling into herself instinctively as she caught sight of the pleasantly smiling agent standing before her.

“What-what?” she stammered as he took a step towards her. She pressed herself against the window, her eyes widening as he closed the small distance between them and choked out, “Please, don’t rip it up.”

He paused in his reaching for the paper she clutched so desperately and frowned. “I’m not going to rip it, ma’am,” he said, his soft Southern accent soothing, despite the uniform he wore and the odd symbol his chest under the S.H.I.E.L.D logo.

She vaguely remembered his name.

Quarter-something, and she knew from the whispers of the other agents and from Fury’s mutterings that he had something to do with the Hulk.

And she didn’t think it was providing tea and crumpets.

“May I see it?” the blonde agent asked, his light blue eyes sparkling in the sunlight. His posture was loose, relaxed and his lips were lifted in a mild smile.

He was treating her like a wild animal, she realized.

And judging by her close proximity to the window and the frantic hammering of her heart, she supposed she rather resembled a cornered beast.

Swallowing heavily, she nodded and relaxed her stiff posture just enough for her hand to slide forward on the window seat, the folded sketch in her fingers. “Please don’t rip it,” she whispered as he stretched out his own hand ever so slowly to take the drawing from her. “It’s all I have of them.”

The agent, Quarter-something, nodded and smiled as he flipped the sketch open. She watched attentively, prepared to launch herself at him if it looked like he might go back on his promise and she couldn’t help a pleased smile from darting across her lips at the look of wonder in his eyes.

Memories of Clint Barton exclaiming in wonder over her sketch of him while watching the Olympics struck her and she couldn’t help giggling softly.

She stopped the moment her visitor glanced at her.

“Sorry,” she whispered as she ducked her head, instinctively hunching in on herself, her hands
wrapped protectively around her belly. She shivered as she heard him approach her and she resisted the urge to run away as she felt him bend over her.

“Miss Potts, you don’t have anything to be sorry about, sweetheart,” he muttered as his hand rested gently on her shoulder for a brief moment. He paused for a moment and when she continued to not look at him he sighed. “You’re an amazing artist Miss Potts,” he murmured.

She didn’t relax from her defensive position in her sun filled window seat until she was sure he was gone.

She sighed when she let her body relax and she swallowed nervously as she glanced around the room. Quarter-something was gone and her babysitters seemed to be finishing up their card game.

With another sigh, she started to ease herself out of the window seat, but she stopped when her hand rested on the drawing.

Evony gasped in surprise and snatched up the folded paper, silently rejoicing that the agent hadn’t taken it with him. Then she froze when she saw several words scrawled across the corner of one of the folds.

She glanced wildly around the room and then hunched once more over the sketch.

Her eyes widened as she read the single sentence once, twice and finally for a third time.

“What?” she breathed as she hurried to fold the paper away and once more surreptitiously reached under her shirt to tuck the drawing away into the side of her bra, against her rib cage.

Her mind spun with the words she had read, even as her babysitters approached her and escorted her back to her wheelchair and then finally to her cell. One made sure to keep his fingers on the remote which controlled the nasty chip buried in the base of her skull.

That had been a nasty surprise for her, the first Tuesday she’d had to herself.

She still remembered the feel of blood streaming down the back of her neck as she clawed desperately at the chip the agents called the Sleeper.

She’d been restrained in medical for days after that, her head bandaged and some of her hair cut unevenly so the medics to stitch her back up.

It had taken her three baths to get all of the blood out from under her nails.

“Did you have a pleasant afternoon, Miss Potts?” one of the medics, Fury’s personal favorite, asked and Evony shivered as the woman studied her carefully.

She tried to remember how to look bored and horrified at the same time, but it was difficult.

Those words were still running through her mind.

“Yes doctor,” she said as calmly as she could, striving to seem mild and cowed despite the fierce energy running through her bones. “The sunlight was absolutely wonderful today.”

She kind of lost some of her bravado though at the sight of the array of vials arranged before the doctor though and she balked as the agents began to herd her towards the bed.

The doctor didn’t even glance up at the slight scuffle that ensued but when Evony cried out as her arms were jerked painfully back, subduing her, the woman smiled and adjusted her glasses.
“Mmm, that’s good,” she murmured as the three agents carefully escorted her subject to her bed with the restraints. “Anything exciting happen?” she asked as the agents strapped as one, Evony’s right wrist to the bed and then her left.

Her teeth gritted at their less than gentle treatment and shook her head stiffly; she could feel them getting ready to strap her legs down.

More vita-rays then.

*Vita-licious! So yummy you can give them to your children as a bedtime snack!* she sang to herself, her thoughts scattering to the wind as her ankles were strapped to the bed.

“No,” she choked out as one of the agents patted her foot. “No, no.”

“No what, dear?” the doctor muttered; Evony winced at the slight tink the woman’s nail made as she struck a familiar vial of blue fluids.

Her heart started to race desperately and she panted as the doctor approached her, the syringe raised so none of the liquid within the vial could slip free, “Please, no more, please…”

The doctor paused, her pleasant smile fixed and she cocked her head, “But we have to do your treatment today, Miss Potts,” she said, her voice as sweet as sugar. “We can’t have you missing anymore sessions. We’re so close to the needed results, my dear!”

Evony shuddered at the thought of what those results could be and twisted her body as far as she could from the doctor as she could.

Which was impossible of course. Being strapped by the wrist and ankle did tend to limit one’s movement.

“You bitch,” she hissed as the woman caught hold of her arm and set the needle point to her arm. “I hope the Hulk cracks your skull.”

The doctor snorted daintily and shot her subject a pointed glare over the bejeweled frames of her cat’s eye glasses and muttered as she slid the needle home, causing Evony to gasp and sob, “Haven’t you realized yet Miss Potts?” She smiled as the syringe depressed and the blue fluid began to drain into Evony’s veins. “Dr. Banner isn’t coming for you,” she whispered as she leaned into her subject’s ear.

Her nostril’s flared as she took in the other woman’s sweet smell of abject terror and she laughed softly as she tossed the used syringe away. “None of them are, not Stark, not the Captain and certainly not Dr. Bruce Banner, in his Hulk form or otherwise.”

She smiled, a cold, bitter smile as Evony’s body started to spasm and she whispered, “They’ve given up on you. You and your precious baby.”

Evony’s vision swam sickeningly as she watched the doctor reach for another vial and she almost started to cry.

But then the doctor’s words came back to her and she started to laugh, her voice as harsh and ragged as a crows, and the doctor froze in the process of readying another dosage of the poison they were using on her.

“Did you have something to say dear?” she asked, her eyes flashing like silver behind the frames of her glasses and Evony coughed weakly as her laughter petered off.
“Yeah,” she croaked as she rolled her head towards the woman, her eyes already blanking as the drugs took effect. “Who’s the blonde agent with the fists on his chest?”

The doctor paused, a small frown wrinkling her brow and she cocked her head. “Agent Quartermain? Is that who you’re talking about Miss Potts?”

“Must be,” Evony slurried as her eyes started to close. “I like him.”

“Well, that’s nice,” the doctor muttered as she set yet another needle to her subject’s skin.

She froze though when Evony’s dark blue eyes flashed open and her own widened as the woman hissed, her gaze wild and teeth bared in a snarl, “And you better believe they’re coming for me, you cunt. And I hope they destroy all of your’s and Fury’s clever plans. It’s what you deserve.”

The doctor hesitated as her subject subsided and then she snorted. “We’ll see,” she whispered as she slid another needle home.

Evony’s vision was still spinning but she wasn’t out quite yet; in the distance she could hear waves crashing on the shoreline and a little girl’s voice calling for her daddy to save her from sea monsters.

And she could hear him singing as he made sand castles and kept an eye on their sweet baby Olive.

But she didn’t let herself go to her place of haven.

She had to be alert, had to fight this, had to be strong for the baby.

Because what she’d said was true.

They were coming for her.

All of them.

A small flutter of excitement darted up her spine at the thought of being held in Bruce’s arms once more and she couldn’t help smiling as her head twisted into the pillows bunched under her head.

They were coming for her.

All of them.

As yet another needle was slid into her arm and the sharp pinch of it mad her back arch in agony, eleven words, scrawled in an untidy hand upon a crumpled piece of sketch-paper drifted through her mind and she smiled ever wider, even as her sanity started to slip through her fingers like sand as her body began to convulse with violent spasms.

_Banner and Stark are coming for you in 2 days. Be patient._

_Be patient._

_Banner and Stark._

_Two days._

_Banner._

“Bruce!” she called as she made her way from the kitchen to the front porch of their beach cottage, a cup of coffee in her hand. “Tony’s on the phone! He wants you to help him teach a guest lecture at
MIT in two days! Better hurry, he’s getting antsy!”

“All right,” she heard him call and she smiled contentedly. She could just barely see him, gathering their daughter into his arms and planting a kiss on her cheek. “Let’s go see mommy!” he was saying to Olivia as she giggled and thrashed in his arms.

Then he was making his way up the beach, his chest bared to the sun streaming down on them and his dark curls whipped by the wind coming off the Atlantic.

She sighed in happiness at the sight and leaned in the doorway, raising the mug to her lips absently as she watched the two most important people in her life make their way towards her.

He was coming for her.

Her lover.

Her Bruce.

“Hey,” he said as he mounted the porch, their daughter clasped tightly in his arms and her hands tight around his neck.

“Hey,” she whispered back as she handed him the phone and accepted Olivia into her arms.

He leaned in for a quick kiss and she sighed as his forehead rested against hers.

“I love you Bruce,” she murmured as her fingers stroked one of Olivia’s pigtails.

“Promise?” he asked, his wry smile in place as he kissed the tip of her nose.

“Oh I promise,” she said, as she kissed him firmly on the lips.

In the back of her head she could hear the panicked voices of medics trying to revive a broken woman, but she ignored them. All that mattered was the little girl she held and the man she was kissing.

“Come back to me Bruce,” she whispered as tears slid down her cheeks. “Don’t leave me alone.”

“Never,” he said fiercely even as a voice in the back of her head bellowed, “GET THE CRASH CART! SHE’S CODING!”

None of that mattered right now. All that mattered was Bruce. And their daughter.

And this little slip of heaven.

That’s all that mattered.

“CLEAR!”
“Bruce…we can’t use the cure just yet.”

Tony’s voice was hesitant and that more than what he’d said, made Bruce’s skin crawl.

“What?” he growled as he sat up in his bed. “What did you say?”

His chest vibrated with a snarl and he struggled, struggled as hard as he could, to keep the Other Guy at bay. It was so difficult though. He could almost feel his bones melting, despite the sedatives Tony had made sure to dose him with once they’d gotten him to his room.

The man was shifting nervously in his chair, his gaze lowered to the tablet he held in his lap and Bruce almost lost it at the look on Tony’s face.

“Tony,” he said, as calmly as he could. Both men flinched at the growl in his voice and he threw his head back on his pillows and took a deep breath. Calm, he said to himself, be calm. It almost worked.

At least he wasn’t growling anymore. And his skin was a comforting shade of olive.

He couldn’t help sighing in relief.

But that didn’t mean he was ready to accept his friend’s rather random declaration.

“Tony, what do you mean, can’t use the cure yet?” he asked, his voice more desperate than anything now. “It’s ready, it’s waiting! JARVIS is ready to divert ninety percent of the Tower’s power to the energy cells! We have to do this if we’re going after Evony!”

“You might want to rethink that once you find out who exactly is playing games with our girl, Bruce,” Tony said, his voice soft, agonized.

Bruce’s skin crawled insistently once more, even as Tony handed him the tablet and he shook his head. “Oh no,” he whispered as he shrank away from the device. “Oh please god tell me no.”

“I’m sorry Bruce,” Tony said as he set the tablet down gently on the twisted sheets covering the other man’s shaking body. “But we have to play the game a little differently now that all of the players are on the board.”

Bruce’s eyes snapped from Tony’s dark, pitiless gaze, to the tablet and he felt his blood run cold.

It was a bunker blueprint.

A bunker he recognized.

And under the SHIELD eagle logo?

Two crossed green fists.

“The Hulkbusters,” he whispered, his voice cracking as the Other Guy roared into a fury in the back of his skull. “Oh god no.”

EVONY!
“Tony, we can’t take him.”

“We have to, Nat,” Barton said as he fiddled with the quiver Tony had designed for him. “Do you have more tranq’s, Stark?” he asked as he inspected the hundred count of arrows.

Tony glanced up from his suit, a monstrous concoction of black, gold painted titanium and stainless steel alloy and frowned. “Over by the bots, Barton. I think Dummy was counting them earlier.” He turned back to the suit and muttered as sparks once more began to fly from his torch, “He’s right Natasha. We have to take Bruce. The Hulkbusters are there and the last time we went up against Ross and his gang of thugs they had the Red Hulk on their side and Rogers nearly got crushed. No god of Pantene and no Captain America?” he shook his head and slid the safety shield up his forehead so he could meet the red haired assassin’s frustrated gaze.

“We’re going to need Bruce, Natasha,” he said with a shrug. “There’s no other alternative.”

“But the cure…” she trailed away as the workshop door slid open with JARVIS’s quiet greeting and all turned to see Bruce Banner standing before them in one of his button up shirts and a pair of loose fitting khaki’s.

“The cure will have to wait for a better time Natasha,” he said, his voice mild and his eyes their normal comforting brown. He smiled, a ghost of his wry grin and ran a shaky hand through his hair. “Tony’s right. You’re going to need all of the help you can get. And the Hulk knows that facility very well.”

Everyone stared at him, their eyes wide and horrified as he shuffled his feet and fiddled with a button on his shirt.

Then, just as he was about to lose his nerve, Barton came up to him and clapped him on the shoulder.

“Well big guy,” he said as he smiled cheerfully at the other guy. “I’ll have your back. Don’t know about the others but at least I’ll be there to keep you on task.”

Bruce’s smile was suddenly a bit more sure of itself and he breathed a sigh of relief.

“Thank you Clint,” he whispered. His hand rose to rest on the other man’s shoulder and he squeezed; the others missed Barton’s wince.

“Just take it easy, Bruce,” he whispered, “if Stark even begins to suspect you don’t have a tight enough leash on the Hulk he’s going to back out.”

Bruce hesitated and then nodded. “I know,” he muttered. “I’m trying.”

Barton nodded. “Good. We’ll help you as much as we can. Just don’t let the Hulk panic.”

Bruce’s eyes were thoughtful as he watched the archer make his way towards the workbench which held the rest of his arsenal. Then, as Barton slipped the arrows into a hip quiver Tony had designed for him, he turned to Natasha and Tony and smiled.

“I’m fine guys,” he said when he met their worried gazes. “It’s going to be fine. I’ll keep calm.”

Tony sighed as he set down the torch and commanded the bots to take the new Suit to the center of the workshop. “Just don’t do anything that may hurt Evie more, okay Bruce?” he said as he followed Butterfingers, You and Dummy as they picked up each piece of armor and carried it to the center
panels. He glanced over his shoulder to the other scientist and frowned. “We can’t afford another captive situation.”

Bruce hesitated for a moment and then nodded as the panels slid under Tony’s feet and the bots started to assemble the massive black and gold suit over his limbs.

“Tony?”

Natasha’s voice was hesitant, timid almost, as Tony’s body was consumed by metal and electrodes and he glanced in her direction, surprise in his eyes.

“Yeah?”

She shifted, her eyes wide as the massive chest plate clicked and connected with the arc reactor.

“What Mark is that?”

Barton snorted at the gleeful light in Tony’s eyes as the neck plates whirred and ground into position, waiting for the new helmet with its red glowing eyes. “You and your toys, Stark,” he sighed as he tested his bow and kept an eye on Banner who was watching Stark with quiet knowledge in his eyes.

Tony shrugged first one shoulder, then the other, testing the Suit’s movements and the arc’s power and he smirked as the helm finally slid over his face.

“This is not a toy Barton,” he snapped, his voice muffled from behind the mask covering his face. “This is a weapon.”

Then, turning to Natasha, he shot a glance in Bruce’s direction and said, “It’s the Mark XI. JARVIS and I are calling it something else though.”

“Oh yeah?” she asked, her voice and eyes calculating as she studied the hulking mass of metal in front of her. “Let me guess…Over Compensation?”

“Ha ha, Widow. Very funny,” Tony growled as he raised one hand and bent his fingers one by one; all of them could hear the excitement in his voice.

Toy this may not be, but for Tony his creations would always be the best part of his day.

“What did you name it Tony?” Bruce’s voice was soft as he pushed off the workbench he’d been leaning on as the others finished suiting up and the black and gold suit turned once more in his direction.

It was a lumbering creation, this Suit.

“It’s the Hulkbuster armor, Banner,” Tony said, his voice suddenly transformed from his usual sardonic tone to a fierce growl and all in the workshop shivered.

Then, before any of them could react his repulsor’s began to hum and he took up his launch position.

“Finish suiting up,” he growled. “I’ll meet you on the launch pad in five.”

There was a hum as the lift he used to travel the length of the Tower when suited up began to rise under his feet and within a matter of seconds, he was gone.

“Like Jesus ascending to the fucking clouds,” Barton grumbled as he slid a comm unit into his ear
and his sunglasses over his eyes. “That’s not a very original name, Stark!” he shouted.

All of them saw Tony flip the archer the bird before he disappeared from view. Barton chuckled and shook his head. “Bastard,” he muttered.

Natasha slung her kit containing more Taser units, several extra rounds for her pistols, as well as a couple high caliber backups, unto her back and began to head for the door. “All right boys,” she called as she opened the door with a simple brush of the keypad on their side. “Let’s get going. Stark will be getting antsy.”

Barton sighed and glanced at Bruce. “Ready big guy?” he asked.

Bruce only shook his head. “I just want to get her out of there as quickly as we can. I almost want to let the Hulk take over so I don’t have to think anymore. But then…” his voice trailed away as they began to head down the hall towards the elevator. The soft beep of its computer as it hit each floor on the way to Tony’s mid-level workshop was only background noise.

“But then what?” Barton asked as he watched Natasha fiddling with her bracelets, waiting for the elevator doors to open.

“Then I remember that Evony’s been under SHIELD’s control for nearly six weeks and I don’t know how she’ll be able to handle…him.” He sighed as the elevator gave one last beep as it arrived at their floor and he glanced at Barton. “I want her to see me as me and I want to see her as me, too. Does that make sense?”

The elevator doors open and before Barton had a chance to say, Yeah, totally. I completely understand, believe me big man, the very last person in the world any of them wanted to see, stepped out of the elevator and folded his arms.

“You’re going to get yourselves killed,” he said, his voice as mild as ever and they all tensed as they reached for their weapons.

Or in Bruce’s case, loosened the leash.

“GET OUT OF THE WAY CAPTAIN AMERICA!” he bellowed, his voice an odd hybrid of the Hulk’s and his own.

Steve Rogers still, his eyes, shadowed by the mask he wore, narrowing as he studied the shaking scientist in front of him and he shook his head.

“Can’t do that Banner,” he said carefully.

“Yeah? Well I think you should probably listen to jolly green old man,” Barton growled as he tightened his hold on the bow string he held. An arrow was aimed at the Captain’s eye; all of them knew that at this close range not even Steve’s impressive acrobatic skills would keep that projectile from a bull’s eye. “Or things are going to get very messy very soon.”

Natasha’s hand was warm but tight on Bruce’s bulging forearm and her eyes were cautious as she watched their Captain. “What are you doing Steve?” she murmured, her voice mild. “Why are you here? I thought Tony told security to keep you out of the Tower.”

Steve snorted and shifted the shield on his arm, glancing over his shoulder as he did so. “He did,” he said as he stepped aside, revealing who he had been shielding from his teammates.

Bruce stiffened as the slight person settled her hand gently on Steve’s shield and turned her soft
green eyes to the rest of the Avengers.

“Hi guys,” June Auld said, her voice weak as she took in the weapons aimed in her direction and the seething scientist being held gently back by Natasha. Barton swore and lowered his bow, pointing it at the ground, instead of her. She smiled and turned back to Bruce, saying, “Hi Dr. Banner. How are you?”

“June,” he groaned as his shoulders hunched and the Other Guy groaned in agony. “What are you doing here?”

She smiled and patted the shield, forcing it to lower. Natasha’s eyes rose at this and almost smiled. Almost.

“June, this shouldn’t concern you,” she said as she took a step forward; she still maintained her gentle grip on Bruce’s arm though, keeping him calm with her touch. “You should take Steve home.”

The little red head shook her head, though, saying, “I can’t. It’s not right, you guys fighting.” She glanced at Steve, who was watching them all, his eyes dangerous as he noted Bruce’s agonized eyes. “Steve did something wrong, I know, but he did it for me. Just like you all are doing this for Evony.” She shrugged and her smile widened. “So you should take him back on the team.”

Barton snorted and turned his gaze to the sullen Captain. “Yeah? Well we’ll take him back when he apologizes for being an asshole,” he said, his voice smug.

They all knew how stubborn their Captain could be when he thought he was in the right but the other’s didn’t.

He would not apologize.

They all knew it.

But then…he did.

“I’m…sorry,” he said and Barton dropped his bow.

“Wha-what did you say?” he choked out as they stared wildly at Steve, who’s cheeks warmed. June smiled and nudged him gently, her elbow poking into his waist and he sighed.

“I’m sorry for hurting you and Evony, Bruce,” he said his voice clear and his gaze solemn. “It was wrong and I hurt the team. Even if I did think I was doing the right thing and I don’t like the thought of you still living in this Tower uncured Bruce-oof.”

His cheeks warmed as he met June’s stern gaze but he subsided. “Sorry,” he muttered once more as he ran his fingers over the edge of his shield.

Everyone was quiet for a moment, bodies tense as they waited to see what each of them would do and then finally Bruce relaxed.

“Apology accepted Steve. I understand…” he said as he stepped forward, hand extended, eyes wary.

“Kind of a crappy apology Rogers,” Barton growled as the scientist passed him but he was ignored.

Instead June stepped between the two tense men and slid her palm gently in Bruce’s, ignoring Steve’s sharp intake of breath, and smiled. “Thank you Dr. Banner,” she murmured as she led him
towards the Captain.

“Steve,” Bruce said, his voice soft, cautious as the other man stared at his proffered hand. “Believe me when I say I will try to not hurt anyone else. Believe me.”

“I wish I could,” Steve said, just as softly. Then his blue eyes met June’s gentle green ones and he sighed. “But I suppose none of us are perfect, least of all me,” Barton snorted but Natasha nudged him with her hip, silencing him and Steve continued. “I guess I should ask if I can be back on the team.”

Bruce smiled. “I vote yes. Natasha?”

He turned to the red haired agent, who in turn shrugged and nodded. “We’re going to need all of the help we can get. Barton?”

All eyes settled on the archer who groaned and rested his face on his bow. “Really?! It’s coming down to me?” He sighed and then raised his head to the towering Captain. “Majority rule Cap so no matter what I say it won’t matter. But I just want you to know that I think you’re a right dick for doing this. You played us and you hurt Evony. I won’t forget or forgive that.”

And then he brushed past them and into the elevator.

“Come on, you bastards. We have to rescue a damsel.”

Bruce glanced at Steve and smiled. “Would you like to do the honors Captain?” he asked as he handed the man a spare comm unit.

Steve stared at the little ear piece and then sighed. “All right,” he said as he slid it into his ear and pressed the tiny activator.

“Avengers,” he began with a small smile on his lips as he gazed at his team.

“Assemble.”

All grinned as they stepped into the elevator, June snug against Steve’s chest and they actually chuckled when Tony’s sardonic voice came over the comm, saying, “Was that the Captain? That better not have been. Don’t tell me, he’s back on the team. Damn. Can’t leave you guys alone for a moment, can I? Don’t get comfortable Rogers! I’m still mad at you.”

“Shut up Stark,” Barton growled as he cut the feed.

“What?” he asked as they all glared at him. “He’s a bastard.”

They were silent as the elevator dinged, alerting them that they had reached the level with the flight deck.

“Well, he is,” Barton grumbled as they slid out of the lift.

They all ignored him, making their way for the Quinjet.

June waved as they piled into the jet and the only thing any of them said as the plane set off with a roar of engine was, “Huh, we have a cheerleader now?”

“Shut up Stark,” most of them growled as the plane disappeared into the clear blue sky over New York City.
Only Bruce was quiet, his gaze locked on the tiny figure still waving beneath them.

He couldn’t help thinking that maybe he was doing the wrong thing here.

Maybe Steve was right to not trust him.

The thought stuck with him for most of the flight to Nevada.

None of the others bothered him.

Not even Tony Stark.
“You know, I could just walk up to their front door; that would certainly take Fury ad Ross by surprise.” Tony’s eyebrows rose behind the faceplate of his suit, as they stared down at the expansive compound below them.

The Hulkbusters had certainly set up well after Bruce destroyed their last bunker ten years ago.

It was positively a fort. Impenetrable.

The compound was tucked in a valley in a range of mountains deemed inhospitable due to thirty years of nuclear testing in a desert on the wrong side of the Colorado River. And SHIELD and the Pentagon had spared no expense on securing it. There were actual trenches ranging for half a mile out of the twelve-foot high fences and more barbed wire than all of the cattle ranchers in the world could ever need.

Even from here, Tony could tell this was going to be impossible.

No wonder Evony had disappeared.

His lips quirked as several voices chorused, “No Tony!” and he rolled his eyes. “Fine,” he grumbled as he settled back on his heels with a whir of joints. “Won’t put my two cents in anymore. I leave it to you James Bond and Miss Moneypenny.”

The agents ignored him. Captain America, all noble and proud in his uniform simply fiddled with his shield.

And Bruce…

Bruce struggled to keep his sanity.

Tony could see the man’s inner turmoil, in the way he was holding himself, tense and hunched, the muscles in his back bulging as he fought with his second half. You could almost smell his anger, smell the Other Guy sniffing along the edges of Bruce’s mind.

The Hulk was leaking out of Bruce’s control, like water slipping over a dam.

The man was going to break soon. And the monster was going to be released.

Tony didn’t know what to do. None of them could control the Hulk, least of all Bruce. Even he, Tony, was going to be hard pressed to beat him back.
The most they could hope for was that the Hulk could remember what was at stake here.

“Bruce,” he said, his voice gentle, “We’ll get her out, okay. It’s going to be fine.”

He flinched at the hopeless glint in his friend’s eyes but let it slide as Bruce smiled and nodded.

“I know Tony,” he said as he shoved his hands in his pants pockets. “Everything will be fine.”

Tony and Barton glanced at each other doubtfully but nobody mentioned the sadness in Bruce’s voice.

Instead, Natasha stood from her crouch behind a boulder and removed a pair of night vision goggles, pausing to rub her eyes as they adjusted to the sudden change in spectrum.

“Right,” she said, her tone as calm and detached as ever. Only the slight pinch of her lips served as an indicator of how truly worried she was. “There’s five men on the front gate, three sentries moving counter every quarter hour and two men up top in each of the towers, of which there are four.” She sighed. “We’re going to have use some of Stark’s toys.”

Tony smirked at the resignation in her voice and clapped his hands together. They all winced as the metal clanged cheerfully and he snickered. “I’ve got just the thing,” he said as he turned to the compound.

He stopped though, when Steve spoke up. “We need to plan this out. What do we need to do Natasha? We’ve looked at the blueprints, but that’s the bunker itself. How do we get from the front gates,” he pointed to the twelve foot chain link electrocuted gates, “to the bunker?” He sighed and folded his hands on top of his shield. “We can’t go in guns blazing.”

They were quiet for a moment as they stared at the blueprint spread on the boulder before them and then Natasha sighed. “There’s no way we can sneak in. Hawkeye and I scouted the moment we landed; there’s no grate, no secret tunnels. The thing is…”

“Impenetrable,” Tony supplied with a sigh.

Nobody snapped at him to get his mind out of the gutter.

That, more than the bright as day compound below them spoke of how much trouble they were really in.

“Yeah,” she said with a sigh as she ran her fingers through her curly red hair. “We’re going to need to do this differently than any mission. We’re going to need a…”

Again she trailed off but nobody supplied the word she was thinking of.

Nobody really wanted to think about what this mission was going to mean to one of their members.

Bruce sighed after a tense moment and turned tired eyes to his friends.

“We need a diversion,” he said, his voice harsh and every single one of his teammates flinched at the growl in the back of his throat. “We need a distraction to set Fury and Ross off balance.”

“Bruce, buddy, think about this, please,” Tony said as he took a single thundering step in his friend’s direction. His suit’s gaze was impassive but Tony’s was twisted in agony. He did not like his friend’s chances of surviving this foolish plan. “We can come up with a better plan,” he choked out.

Bruce’s hand rose and he shook his head. “Think about it Tony, I’m the only one that can do this.
Ross already wants me and Fury probably thinks it’s only a matter of time before I crash down his doors, why else would he camp out here? Besides, I’m the only one who can take on the Red Hulk.”

His throat worked as he thought of meeting Ross in his counter-ego’s form and he shuddered as the Other Guy growled in the back of his head.

There was a faint hum from behind Tony’s suit and both turned to see Barton slipping an arrow onto his bow.

He was smiling.

“Now,” he said as he sighted down the arrow, towards the compound. “While you babies think all is lost and that this is a suicide mission, what you don’t realize is that we’ve got some friends in the lowest of places.”

Everyone was frowning as the bow released and four pairs of eyes watched as the arrow streaked through the air towards the compound.

Tony’s mouth popped open to spout some probabilities of a single arrow striking anything even close to the Hulkbusters headquarters but before he could, another arrow flew through the air and landed directly in front of Barton.

Who smirked and bent to yank the shaft from the soil.

“Banner?” he asked as he handed the arrow over to the trembling scientist. “Mind doing the honors?”

Bruce hesitated for one brief moment, his eyes wide, and then he took the arrow gently from the agent’s open palm.

Wrapped tightly around the shaft was a piece of paper bound with a piece of blue string.

All of their eyes were wide as they watched his trembling fingers remove the string and begin the process of removing the paper.

As he unfurled it, he gasped and his knees buckled. Tony and Steve caught him by the elbows but before they had a chance to ask what had happened, there was another arrow flying through the air to land at Barton’s feet.

He looked a bit surprised at this but was soon bending to yank it free.

Natasha’s eyes widened as she took in the familiar red feathers and threw herself across the boulder to strike it from Barton’s hands.

“NO!” she shouted as his fingers brushed the head.

She was too late.

“Oh damn,” he muttered as his fingers pressed against a button nestled in the head and as they watched, their eyes wide, there was a click and an explosion of noxious green gas.

“What the hell did you do Barton?!” Tony snapped as the gas rolled over them, causing Barton, Natasha and Steve to cough as it burned their lungs.

JARVIS simply switched the Suit’s air filtration system on and soon Tony was breathing recycled air.
That didn’t stop him from panicking though as the green gas wreaked havoc on three of his friends.

“Natasha! Don’t breathe in the gas!” he shouted as he stretched out massive hands to catch hold of his coughing and swaying teammate. She only snorted and crumpled into his arms.

“Too late Stark,” she whispered as her eyes rolled into the back of her head.

Glancing around, he noted Barton and Rogers buckling as well.

“Damn! Come on Barton! Rogers! Steve! Come on, don’t do this to me!”

But they were down for the count too. And judging by the still swirling gas, he’d say they were going to be out for a while.

His Suit’s helmet swiveled as he turned to gaze down at the compound and he bared his teeth in a silent snarl; somebody at the damned hell hole had tricked them. Judging by the surprise on Barton’s face when he’d held the arrow-

Suddenly a loud snarl split the chilling silence and Tony froze.

There was one team member he’d forgotten to check on.

“Banner,” he gasped as the HUD flicked from casual to battle mode, highlighting a massive figure shaking on the ground just over his left shoulder. “Shit!”

How could he have forgotten Bruce Banner?

Or…the Hulk.

“Bruce, buddy, take it easy, you’re okay,” he muttered as his hands rose in hopes of calming the monster writhing before him.

It didn’t work.

“HULK SMASH!” Banner’s green alter ego snarled as he straightened, his muscles twitching as he fought against the toxins pouring through the lungs.

Tony realized, in the moment before a massive green fist struck him in the chest, that the Hulk had emerged to save his alter-ego.

“Interesting,” he breathed as he tracked the Hulk’s fist absently. He was starting to feel a bit loopy now, signaling the Suit’s difficulty in cleaning his air. But that’s not what he noticed as he flew through the air, after being hit with the equivalent of two tanker trucks worth of force.

What he noticed was the group of soldiers coming towards them, armed to the teeth and being led by a burly grey haired man with a cigar stuck between his teeth.

Ross was here then.

Lovely.

He also noticed, as he slammed forcefully into the boulder strewn mountainside they’d hid on, Agent Clay Quartermaine with a quiver and bow strung across his shoulders. He was smirking.

“Playing games Agent?” he choked as Ross and Quartermaine settled before him, the former’s foot rising to rest against the arc reactor glowing in his chest.
Quartermaine’s eyes rose to the peak of the mountain where they could hear the Hulk snarling and his smirk grew. Tony’s unease increased at the dark knowledge in the agent’s gaze but before he could ask what the man had planned, Ross was leaning over him.

“You’re in over your head, boy;” he drawled, his cigar trickling noxious smoke over Tony’s face. The Suit’s filtration system definitely wasn’t working; Tony began to cough and sputter as the acrid tang of Cubans washed over his nose and he tried to get JARVIS to improve on the air quality.

He didn’t get a chance.

“Night son,” Ross said as he pulled a peculiar device from his pocket. It looked rather like a miniaturized cattle prod.

Which he shoved into the arc reactor.

As his back arched and his heart shorted out, Tony’s eyes drifted towards the figure straightening atop the mountain and he groaned, “Run Banner, get the hell out of fucking Dodge.”

That was a losing battle though.

Banner was gone.

They were dealing with the Hulk now.

“ROSS!” roared the monster and as Tony’s vision blacked with the HUD’s collapse, he smiled one last feral smile.

Who was in over his head now?

“Good luck Ross,” he snarled as he passed out, crumpling in his coffin of a dead suit.

The Hulk’s roar matched the sound of the blood rushing frantically through his head.

He didn’t hear the sound of tranq guns firing, but in some other plane of his consciousness he did hear Quartermaine leaning into his ear and whispering, “I’m sorry Stark, it’s the only way to get you into the compound.”

Not that it mattered much.

The Avengers were down.

And in General Ross’s playground.

“Well, better get them down into the bunker, Clay!” Ross said gleefully as he puffed on his cigar. “No idea how long those tranq’s or the gas will last on these bastards.”

Clay Quartermaine’s expression was mild as he oversaw the shackling of each of the Avengers and the heavy bindings placed on the now returned Bruce Banner.

None of his compatriots would ever suspect he had other plans than capture and experimentation to carry out.

He was a SHIELD agent after all.

As he bent over the now unconscious Dr. Banner, he eased the man’s fingers open and breathed a sigh of relief at the sight of a much folded piece of paper tucked against the man’s palm.
At least one part of his plan had gone well.

“Right, sir,” he drawled as he finished strapping the scientist into a straitjacket. “Hulk’s neutralized. Stark is enroute to the base?”

Over the stocky general’s shoulder he watched as several agents piled Stark and his suit into the bed of a Humvee and he smiled.

Ross may think he’d damaged Stark with his electornray but what he wouldn’t realize until it was too late was the ray had only been set to half its power.

Stark would be up and functioning in less than an hour.

Just in time for a mutiny.

“Let’s get back to base,” Ross muttered around his cigar, his eyes sparkling gleefully as he surveyed his new toys. “I want Banner quarantined and Stark and the Avengers placed in separate cells. Don’t need a mass breakout, now do we Clay?” he asked as he and he agent began walking towards their own waiting Humvee.

“No sir,” Quartermaine muttered as he slid behind the wheel.

As they began heading back to base, Ross glanced at him and said, “How’s Patient Zero? Think she’s going to make it?”

Quartermaine’s hands tightened subtly upon the wheel of the Humvee but other than that nothing betrayed how truly furious the Texan was.

“Patient Zero is finally stable but the doctors are unsure if she’ll wake up. There was a lot of damage done the last experiment,” he drawled, his voice as disinterested as if he was discussing the weather. His eyes blazed, though, and a small nerve ticked in his jaw.

Ross didn’t notice.

“Pity,” he muttered as he chewed thoughtfully on his cigar. “We were making progress too.”

Quartermaine contemplated flipping the Humvee at that.

Progress, Ross had said.

Murder, really, if they were being honest.

All in the name of science.

Their’s was the last of the convoy and the moment they entered the gates of Gamma Base 1, the gates slammed closed behind them.

Quartermaine’s lips lifted in a small, knowing smile.

Somehow, security on the base had lessened in the past half hour.

Ross better hope he wasn’t going to get caught with his drawers down.

Again.

They were about to have a Hulk-fest tonight.
The agent was kind of excited about that.

He’d never seen one before.

**

Suit system’s rebooting.

System analysis ongoing.

Program Identification: JARVIS

Arc Reactor status: Repairing

Air filtration: Ongoing

Defensive diagnostics rebooting

Health parameters: Normal

“Sir? Sir, there is a situation.”

“Mmph, g’way J, I’m sleepin,’” Tony slurred, his eyelids fluttering as JARVIS continued calling for him.

“I am afraid you are not sleeping, sir. I believe this is a lack of consciousness. Shall I increase the voltage to the arc, sir? To further along your waking?”

Tony fell asleep again.

JARVIS increased the energy streaming through the arc.

By about ninety percent.

“Ow! Son of a bitch JARVIS!” Tony swore as his body arched in the Suit’s mechanical limbs and the arc reactor began to hum cheerfully.

Coughing and sputtering he tried to roll onto his back, ultimately failing as he realized his limbs were weighted down by his new suit.

“Dammit,” he swore. “Right, J, get the excess plating off, blow it off if you have to I can’t even move right now.”

“Yes sir,” the AI said, his voice soft.

“Jesus,” Tony swore once more as finally, with a release of pressurized gears the heavy outer casings of the Hulkbuster suit crashed to the floor.

Finally, with the sloughing of about half a ton of titanium enriched metal, he was able to move. He was finally in just the inner skeleton of the Suit, similar to his earlier Mark’s and it was like curling up in his favorite pair of disgusting sweats and plopping into bed beside Pepper.

Who would have thought a mere tone of armor would be as light as a feather after wearing nearly four tons?

It certainly put things in perspective.
“Right J, where’d they squirrel us away?” he asked as he rolled onto his side and finally his knees.

The HUD glowed cheerfully, providing him with diagnostics of the dark cell he had been thrown in and he swore again.

“Son of a bitch, they’ve got me in a gamma cell.”

Even Iron Man was going to have some troubles with that door.

Where was a gamma specialist when you needed one?

Where’s Bruce? he thought as he immediately began running life scans on the walls surrounding him.

…Where’s the Hulk?

His heart almost stopped again when the HUD provided him with the results. Not that he needed the HUD to show him who was coming his way.

JARVIS had to zap him again, just to be sure Tony didn’t crumple, lifeless, to the ground once more.

“Ow! What the hell J!” he groaned as he rubbed his chest.

“Sorry sir, just taking necessary precautions.”

Judging by the way the floor rocked under his feet and the sound of screeching metal, this was going to turn into one hell of a party.

Tony snorted and pressed a button set in his left wrist. As a soft beep began to issue from the now glowing device he grumbled, “Necessary precautions my ass. You better watch it you hunk of wires, pretty soon you’re going to be obsolete and I’ll be outfitted with a new computer. Maybe I’ll name it SNIC.”

“‘SNIC’, sir?” JARVIS asked as several pulsing lights began to glow at different points on the HUD.

“‘Silent, Nice, Intelligent Computer,’ J,” Tony said slowly as he tracked the pulsing lights in the corner of his screen.

“Ah, quite. How quaint,” JARVIS supplied, his voice highly unamused. “May I recommend the depulsors for that door, sir? It appears Agents Barton and Romanoff are already planning an escape. You wouldn’t want to miss the fun, now would you?”

Tony’s lips twitched as he raised his right palm and he nodded, “Thanks for that J, good advice.”

“Sometimes, I feel silence is overrated sir,” the AI said as Tony’s palm began to hum and the arc’s glow increased drastically.

Tony only snorted at the AI’s words.

Before he could blast the door open though, there was a knock and a voice boomed, “METAL MAN WAKE? HULK LIKE SMASH DOOR NOW!”

Tony barely got a chance to react before the door was thrown backwards and he gasped as his eyes caught sight of who exactly stood waiting for him.
“Natasha! Bruce! What the hell is going on?”

Natasha’s lips lifted in a small smile as the Hulk growled at his side and she nudged the green beast with her elbow. “Mass breakout,” she said with a wink as she fiddled her bracelets, snapping them into position quickly and efficiently. “Seems the security systems had a massive overload with the increased numbers of incarcerations.”

Tony’s mouth was open behind the gold and black face plate of his suit and the only thing he could do was stare.

Then, as he grew impatient, the Hulk stretched one massive hand through the doorway and snatched Iron Man from the cell, growling as he did so, “RUN OUT OF TIME. GO NOW.”

“Yeah,” Barton muttered from his position at the back of the group, with Steve at his side, “Jolly Green’s right. We’re running out of time. Ross and his boys will be finding a way out of that rockslide soon.”

“Rockslide?” Tony gasped as the Hulk tossed him over his shoulder and began running down the hall towards the center of the bunker. “What’d you guys do, bring down the mountain busting out?”

Barton snorted and pushed his sunglasses up his nose. “Yeah, Bruce got a little pissed at finding out he’d been slapped into a straitjacket. Somebody didn’t strap big fella down tight enough.”

Hulk chuckled, his chest vibrating cheerfully, making his teammates smile absently in response and he patted the wayward agent on the back as they stopped at a juncture and checked to make sure they were still in the clear.

“That’s a little odd,” Tony mused as he bounced in an undignified manner against the Hulk’s back. “You’d think they’d know better at this point that Mr. Destructo here needs some pretty kickass handcuff’s. What do you think it means?”

Barton only smirked and shrugged. “No idea,” he said. Only Natasha caught his snicker.

But before she could question him, they were turning the last corner to medical and for the first time tonight, which in and of itself was bizarre, they came up against opposition.

Tony, still draped over the Hulk’s meaty shoulder, couldn’t see what made everyone lurch to a stop but judging by Natasha’s gasp, Barton’s sudden uplift of his bow and the sneer on his lips and the thunderous scowl on Steve’s face, he’d have to say whatever they’d come across, it wasn’t good.

And then the Hulk was roaring, a great bellow as pained and furious as a warrior’s battle cry and Tony knew in the pit of his stomach that this just was not hella good.

“Quartermaine,” he snarled as he ducked his head around the Hulk’s side to see the blonde Texan standing before him with his hands resting on his SHIELD issued holsters and his gaze impassive. “What the hell are you doing?”

“Hello Avengers,” the SHIELD’s Hulkbuster liason drawled, his face and voice impassive as he took in the superheroes spreading out before him. “Out for a nighttime stroll?”

**

The Hulk was furious.

But not…mad.
This was a calculated fury, the likes of which he’d only felt a few times in his bizarre life.

Once, when he’d fought Blonsky in Harlem and the next when they’d fought in Midtown against Loki.

Both times his rages had been…controlled.

Like tonight.

*Set Tony down, my friend,* muttered the Other Guy in the back of his head, the quiet faced scientist who shared his skull.

*WHO?* bellowed the Hulk to the Other Guy as he took stock of the threat facing them in the Hulkbusters medical bay.

A sigh and then, *The metal man you’ve got draped over your shoulder? That’s Tony. Set him down please. Gently.*

*OH. OKAY.*

The Hulk rolled his green eyes as he loosened his hold on the little metal toy he held and his lips lifted in a fierce grin as the metal man collapsed to the floor in a tangle of limbs and loud clang of metal.

“SORRY,” he grumbled as he dropped to his fists in front of his toy. “YOU HURT?”

The metal man’s (Tony, his name is Tony,) blue eyes settled on him and the Hulk’s dark eyebrow rose quizzically.

It was a very Bruce look.

“No Bruce, I’m fine,” the metal man, Tony, said as he righted himself and faced their enemy, their friends ranging behind him as he did.

The Hulk didn’t react to being called by the Other Guy’s name.

He had more important things to worry about than names.

“WHERE ‘VONY?” he bellowed as he towered over the stoic Texan. “WHERE PUT HER?!”

Clay Quartermaine hesitated for one brief moment and then took a step back. “She’s in here. I’m sorry, but the game has changed since I contacted Clint.”

His quiet voice washed over all assembled and the Hulk let out a very human groan of pain. Everyone flinched at the agony in his voice and Quartermaine retreated a further step as the great green beast entered the medical bay.

“I’m sorry,” the blonde man whispered. “Things went further than they were supposed to.”

**

*Beep…beep…beep…*

*Carry on my wayward son…*

*Beep…beep…beep…*
Promise you love me?
I promise.

Beep...beep...beep...

The baby’s gone, sir, I’m sorry. There was too much blood...

Get out.

Beep...beep...beep...beep...

Evony, kid, can you hear me?

Beep...beep...

Please little Potts, wake up...

Beep...

Hulk, you have to let Bruce out. He has to talk to her, we don’t have time to waste. The Hulkbuster’s are coming...

Beep...beep...beep

There’ll be peace when you are done...

Beep...beep...beep

A soft growl and then...

“Evony? Evie, baby, can you hear me? Please, talk to me love, please open those eyes for me.”

Beep-beep-beep

“Evie, it’s Bruce, I came for you. Come on baby, you can do it.”

BEEP-BEEP-BEEP

Bruce.

Bruce was here.

He was here?

But...how?

BEEP-BEEP-BEEP

“Times up Banner! Ross and his cronies are coming. We have to make a break for it.”

“But Evie…”

“No time, let’s go!”

They were going to leave her.
Tony and Bruce…

Were going to leave her!

“Bruce!” she screamed as her back arched and her eyes flashed open for the first time in days. Beside her the heart monitor fell silent as Natasha disconnected it but that wasn’t what she noticed.

What she noticed was Tony in an unfamiliar gold and black suit halfway out the door and Bruce hunched in the middle of the room, his body shaking.

She screamed again, her voice ragged with panic and she almost started crying as they all turned to her with shock in their eyes, “No, don’t leave me!”

His eyes were green.

And he was broader than normal.

But it was Bruce.

Her Bruce.

Her Hulk.

“Boys,” she whispered as she stretched a pale hand in Bruce’s direction. “Please don’t leave me.”

Then, as the medical bay’s doors were blown open and Tony went flying across the room, tangled in Steve’s crumpled body, Bruce bent over her and began helping Natasha with disconnecting her from the machinery scattered around her bedside.

“Never,” he said with a fierce growl as he bent to scoop the back of her skull into his larger than normal still olive toned hands. “I will never leave you again.”

And then he kissed her passionately as Agent Quartermaine arrived at their sides and said, “The Red Hulk sir, ya’ll are going to have to make a break for it if you don’t want to fight a mean as hell Ross.”

Natasha glanced at him and Evony’s vision spun sickeningly as Bruce scooped her up into his arms, cradling her gently against his chest saying, “Might want to step aside Banner. We’re going to need some assistance with this.”

Bruce nodded and then glanced at the very weak woman in his arms, his heart lurching as he took in her bone-white cheeks, the dark bruising under her eyes and the sickening flatness of her belly.

The baby…

Oh god…

Their baby…

Their little girl…

Olivia.

Gone.

Those bastards…
Evony was staring at him avidly, wonder in her gaze and as her hand rose to stroke his stubbled cheek he shivered, wondering if it was possible for her agony to break his heart.

“I’m sorry baby,” he muttered as he glanced over his shoulder to where Barton, Steve and Tony were holding off the Hulkbuster forces. “But I think the Hulk’s going to be the one to carry you out of this hell hole. Can he do that?”

She was limp, somehow as boneless as a rag doll and it took all of her strength to nod. “Yes Bruce,” she whispered as his hand wrapped gently around her skull, pulling her head close to his bare chest. “He is you after all. I trust him…”

Her voice trailed away and as Bruce let the gamma take over his muscles he heard her whisper, “I love you both.”

The Hulk’s bellow rocked through the medical bay and in the far distance, over the sounds of battling Avengers, came a matching bellow.

“Yeah,” Tony gasped as he landed with stuttering repulsors next to the hunched Hulk. “Time to go. Where’s the back door Clay?”

Quartermaine, his hand cupped to his side where a stray bullet had grazed his ribs, shook his head. “There isn’t one,” he gasped. “I was going to take you through the rec room but it’s blocked off.”

Barton sighed as he nocked an arrow to his bow and he glanced at Natasha who was hovering at Bruce’s side. “Never easy, huh? We can never do things the easy way.”

Steve laughed breathlessly as he used his shield to deflect a few shots. “Well, that’s just not the Avengers way Hawkeye,” he said, his voice oddly cheerful.

All of them stared at him oddly for a moment and then the Hulk raised his head and boomed, “HULK SMASH WALL. GET OUT THAT WAY.”

Without waiting for a response he headed for the far wall nearest the windows, his arms still cradling Evony’s limp figure and as they all watched, wide-eyed, he raised his foot and slammed it solidly into the support infused cement wall of the medical bay in Tinsel’s Gamma Base 1.

“You have to admit,” Tony said with a chuckle as they slid through the rubble. “He never wastes time trying to be fancy.”

And then he turned and with a full-on blast of his center repulsor, he brought the roof of Gamma Base 1 down on the Red Hulk and his forces who had just emerged into the medical bay.

“Luckily for us, neither do I.”

None were around to see his smirk.

They were already halfway across the base, heading for a waiting Quinjet.

“Nobody ever waits around to see my toys play,” he grumbled as he blasted towards the jet. He could just make out Natasha and Clint in the cockpit, and judging by the way Steve was hovering on the tarmac with his shield in a defensive position, they were waiting for him.

“Don’t know what you weirdos are waiting for!” he snapped as he landed besides the Captain. “We’ve got an escape to be making.”
Steve’s eyes narrowed behind his cowl as they stepped into the bay of the jet and as they began taxiing down the tarmac, he said, “Well we were waiting for you. What took you so long?”

Tony sighed as he finally disconnected the helmet from his head and he rolled his neck, wincing slightly as his neck popped.

“I was just bringing down the roof, Rogers,” he muttered as he headed towards where the Hulk still sat hunched over their girl.

“Was it an awesome party, Anthony?” Evony slurred as he squatted beside her.

“It definitely was,” he said as he stretched out a hand to stroke back her hair.

The Hulk growled ominously at that but Evony’s hand rose to pat his chest. “Easy, big man,” she whispered as she tucked her head firmly under his chin. “It’s just Tony.”

The Hulk hesitated for a brief moment, his bright green eyes locked on Tony’s and then as the plane finally rose, he nodded. “OKAY ‘VONY,” he growled as he hugged her carefully.

She only smiled and let her eyes close.

She was safe.

Safe in her Bruce’s arms.

Finally.

_Told you he’d come for me, you bitch_, she thought to herself as she recalled that awful day in her cell when she’d gone toe-to-toe with her last SHIELD scientist. _Told you…I hope Tony crushed you all…_

Tony stood as she fell asleep with a sigh and glanced at Natasha in the cockpit.

“Why’s the Hulk still here? Why hasn’t Banner taken control yet?”

Both agents glanced at each other and then Barton muttered, “She asked the Hulk to stay. At least till they’re safe. Banner’s allowing it, I take it.”

“Huh,” Tony said as he turned back to the green alter-ego of his friend. “That’s interesting. Wonder why…”

Natasha’s eyebrows rose and she shrugged. “He makes her feel safe. She probably hasn’t felt that for a while now.”

They were all quiet for a moment and Tony watched as Steve wrapped Clay Quartermaine’s wounds efficiently in the rear of the jet.

Then he muttered, “We’re going through with the plan, right?”

Barton nodded.

“Yeah,” he said as the jet began to bank. “We’re dumping the jet and then going our separate ways. After you and Bruce do your mojo. I think you bought us enough time. It looked like the base was collapsing in on itself as we flew over. You and Bruce did a number on it.”

Tony nodded, a fierce grin on his lips as he finally sagged into one of the passenger seats. “Good,”
he muttered as he watched the Hulk stroke Evony’s hair and rock her gently in his arms. “I hope they all burn.”

He didn’t want to think about what SHIELD had done to his girl.

Not until they got her to safety first and took care of the Hulk once-and-for-all.

Not until then.

“I’m sorry, Evie,” he whispered, his voice cracking as the Hulk pressed his lips to her temple. “So, so sorry.”

There was a part of him that was happy he’d removed the helmet.

He wouldn’t have to see the damage then.

Wouldn’t have to know the god awful truth of how hurt Evony Potts was.

“I hope I crushed them all,” he whispered fiercely as he buried his face in his hands.

Those bastards…
It's a terrible love
And I'm walking with spiders
It's a terrible love that I'm walking in
It's a terrible love
And I'm walking with spiders
It's a terrible love that I'm walking in
It's quiet company

And I can't fall asleep
Without a little help
It takes awhile
To settle down
My shivered bones
Wait til the panics out

Somebody was singing to her, his voice warm and gentle and familiar.

It scared her.

Goodnight, my angel, time to close your eyes…

“’Uce,” she mumbled as she turned her head in the direction of the crooning voice; she kept her eyes closed, just in case this was another twisted nightmare. Clearing her throat carefully, she winced slightly at the rasp but was able to say more clearly, “Bruce?”

She could make out the sound of a beeping heart monitor and some part of her wondered if she was in Bruce’s lab/infirmary still. Would she be able to move her shoulder this time? Was all of this just a horrible nightmare? Just something caused by heavy painkillers?

Or…was it real?

Wherever you may go, no matter where you are, I never will be far away…

She shivered as his voice washed over her and suddenly his hands were stroking hers, his lips brushing over the tips of her fingers as he planted tender kisses on each digit. Summoning all of her strength and courage, she finally opened her eyes.

To drown in the warm brown eyes she had loved since an ill-fated day in the burning streets of New York.

“Bruce,” she whispered brokenly, tears beginning to well in her eyes as she took in his weary face and tousled curls with just the barest sprinkle of gray at the temples. “Bruce.”

“Hey,” he whispered, his voice just as rough as hers.
She shuddered, her hands shaking violently in his gentle grasp and then she was laughing and crying, all at once. His eyes widened slightly at the hysteria in her voice and he bent to scoop her up into his arms, carefully, so as not to dislodge the IV in her wrist or the pads attached to her chest.

“Easy baby, easy,” he whispered as he folded her painfully thin figure into his arms. “Evony, it’s okay, you’re safe!”

He rocked her gently back and forth as she shook to pieces in his arms; burying his face in her deep red hair, he closed his eyes and inhaled deeply. She was back, she was safe in his arms. She was a little worse for wear, but then, they all were.

All that mattered was Evony and getting her back to normal.

They could do it. They’d have to do it.
He began humming, that soft Billy Joel song Clint would sing on missions or when the Hulk got a little too antsy in the back of his head and as he did he felt Evony’s fingers tangle in his shirt and her head press more firmly against his chest.

He smiled gently and ran his hand gently over her hair.

“Easy,” he whispered after a moment and she sighed, her tears having run their course. “Easy, baby, you’re okay now.” He kissed her gently, against her scarred temple and his eyes closed in relief at the feel of her in his arms.

They’d done it…they’d gotten her back.

Thank god.

A happy rumble had been going on in the back of his skull the moment she’d opened her eyes and he couldn’t help smiling at the warmth of the Hulk in the far corners of his mind.

He wasn’t the only one happy about having their girl back, safe, in his arms.

“It’s okay,” he whispered over and over, whether to Evony or the Other Guy or both, he wasn’t sure.

Evony wasn’t sure if it was the combination of Bruce’s warm arms or the soft vibrations of his chest under her ear as he hummed, but after what felt like an eternity, she finally got some of the panic under control. As soon as she did, though, she sat up in his arms and cupped his face gently in her hands, her long fingers, still bruised and battered from her stint with SHIELD, stroking over the lines at the corners of his eyes.

He’d aged in the weeks since she’d been stolen from him, she realized with a pang.

God knew she herself felt older, more brittle.

His eyes were intense as he stared at her, something like wonder swirling in their rich depths and a small shiver, not entirely from hysteria, darted up her spine at the expression in his gaze.

Then, before she could talk herself out of it, she kissed him.

Deeply and more than a little desperately.

“Hey,” she whispered as she broke away from him by just a bit and rested her forehead against his.

His lips lifted in a small smile and he pressed his lips gently to her jaw as his hand rose to cradle the back of her skull in his wide palm.
“Hey, you,” he murmured as she pressed herself to him, her arms wrapping tightly around his neck. “I missed you Evie.”

She laughed at that and tucked her head against his chest, listening to his heart beat steadily and waiting for her own to match pace with his.

“I missed you too, Bruce,” she whispered as her eyes began to drift close. “Please don’t leave me.”

His arms tightened instinctively around her at that and he murmured against her hair, “Never again Evony Potts. Never again.”

Her fingers convulsed around the bit of shirt she held and he flinched at the desperation rolling off of her.

“Promise?” she whispered as her mind started to drift.

He kissed her then, bringing her chin up gently so he could press a soft kiss to her lips.

“I promise, with all of my heart, Evie.”

“Thank you,” she whispered as she finally lost her grip on consciousness.

Thank you…

**

She’d been sleeping for what seemed like days.

Maybe it had been days.

Either way, when she finally stirred after that first desperate waking, she was so rested it felt like she had never had her brains bashed in by an alien or been the plaything of maniacal scientists.

Opening her eyes, she jumped and looked around wildly; her heart, calm until now, began to race in terror and she sat up with a stifled shriek.

She was in a white hospital room.

Lying on a hospital bed.

“Oh no, oh no,” she sobbed as she tried to jump down from the bed. “Oh no, god, no. This can’t be happening. Please god…”

She couldn’t move.

Something was holding her back.

She was strapped to the bed, again.

“Damn it, damn it,” she whimpered as she turned back to see what she was caught in. Her eyes widened slightly at the sight of the corner of her shirt caught in the bars of the bed but before she could detangle herself, a door was opening near where she lay in this bright little room and a familiar voice was saying her name.

“Evony! What are you doing?”
She froze in the process of yanking her shirt free and turned slowly in the direction of the voice.

“Bruce,” she whispered, tears starting to stream down her face. “Oh my god, it’s you!”

His lips lifted in a wry smile and he hurried to her side, reaching behind her back to pull the soft white shirt she wore free. “You’re okay, you’re safe,” he whispered as his fingers rose to cradle her face gently.

“Promise?” she gasped weakly, her heart finally calming as he studied her from behind his gold framed glasses.

“Most definitely,” he chuckled. “I promise with all of my heart Evie. Nobody can get you here.”

She sighed and rested her head on his shoulder. “Where’s ‘here’ Bruce? Where have you and Tony squirreled me away?”

He hesitated for a moment and then stood back, keeping his hand on her knee as he pulled a wheelchair over.

“Would you like to see?” he asked with a small smile, his eyes suddenly sparkling mischievously and she couldn’t help but stare.

This was a different Bruce than she was used to. He was calm, easy in his skin. There was no hint of tension about his person, no hint of the Hulk in the way he held himself.

“Bruce,” she murmured as he helped her carefully into the wheelchair; she didn’t even protest it at this point. She was so weak, so broken right now, she didn’t think she’d make it three steps without collapsing. “What’s going on?”

He simply leaned over her shoulder and pressed a kiss to her cheek. “Shh,” he murmured as he began to push her towards the door. “I have a surprise for you.”

Before she could demand a proper answer, he was reaching around her to push open the door and they were stepping into what is surely paradise.

“Oh my god, Bruce!” she gasped as her hands rose to her lips. “Are we in-no way!”

He chuckled as he leaned on the back of her chair, resting his chin on the top of her head as he did so.

“Yes, way and we are,” he said as he pressed a kiss to her temple. Then he wheeled her across the beautiful mosaic wrap around terrace so she could better gaze out at the stunning vista before them.

“Evony Potts, welcome to Bihar, India. Our little piece of paradise.”

All she could do was stare at the sweeping rainforest before them and the beautiful, hazy mountains in the distance.

Suddenly, she was as far from Fury and his cronies as she could ever get and all she could do was let the tears fall.

“Oh Bruce,” she whispered as he wrapped his arms around her neck and settled his cheek against hers. “This is perfect. So perfect.”

He only smiled and pressed his lips to the hollow beneath her ear.
“It is, now that you’re here with me Evie,” he whispered, relief coloring his words and love making his heart swell.

**

Evony was curled up on Pena Village’s hospital terrace that night, when Bruce found her.

He had gone to the village to scout around a bit, to make sure SHIELD wasn’t sniffing around and had left her sleeping peacefully in her private, sun-filled room a few hours before. He’d almost had a heart-attack when he’d returned to find her bed empty and the wheelchair unused.

“Evie?” he called nervously as he gazed around the now dark room for her. A part of him, the part that was still shocked at what had been done to her, wondered if Fury had found them again. Already…

“Evony, sweetheart?” he called as he pushed through the French doors onto the terrace. The soft glow of an oil lamp caught his attention and he turned to see Evony curled up in one of the terrace’s wicker chairs, a nurse leaning over her to wrap a blanket around her knees.

“Namaste, Dr. Banner,” the young girl said as she straightened. “I hope I do not offend. She is sleeping soundly, I did not wish to move her.”

Bruce smiled gently and nodded. “It’s fine Aditi. Thank you for not waking her.”

The nurse sighed in relief and tucked one last fold around Evony’s waist. And then she said, her head still lowered, “She has seen great troubles. Her soul hurts. Will she heal, Dr. Banner?”

Bruce sighed as he knelt beside Evony and picked her hand up gently in his own. “I hope so Aditi. I hope so.”

The nurse smiled and patted his shoulder as she moved around him to head back into the hospital. “You will make it so, Bruce Banner,” she murmured before stepping into the hospital. “You are a good doctor and an even better man. Good night.”

“Good night,” he whispered as he watched her go and then, as he turned back to Evony he brought her hand to his lips. “I will try to be better, for you Evie.”

Sighing, he rested his forehead briefly against her hand and then he gathered her still figure up into his arms, being careful to not jostle her too much. He barely noticed the warm rush of gamma in his blood as the Other Guy helped him compensate for her slight weight and as he wrapped his arms around her his alter ego purred in the back of his mind, absolutely content now that they were here, all of them, together.

Bruce’s lips twitched into his wry smile at the happy rumblings going on and he almost laughed at the irony of this moment. He’d been so ready to eradicate the Hulk back in New York, back in the City he’d broken twice now, but here in India it seemed more natural to have the Other Guy around.

As he settled her in her bed he wondered what Evony would say when he broached the subject with her.

Would she be like Tony and push him?

Or would she be as patient and happy-go-lucky as ever and leave the decision to him?
He wondered…

“Bruce?”

He jumped at her quiet voice and turned from the tray of medications resting beside her bed to face her.

“Hey,” he said quietly as he bent over her to stroke her hair from her eyes; she smiled sleepily at him, her eyes cloudy with much-needed sleep. “How are you feeling?”

“Like I’ve slept for seventy years,” she grumbled as she started to sit up. He pushed her back though and she subsided with a sigh. “Still shaky though.”

Bruce nodded, his brow furrowing. “There’ve been a lot of chemicals shoved into you the past few weeks. Your body is going through withdrawal right now. No lasting damage though,” he said with a sigh. “That would have been absorbed by the…fetus.”

His voice trailed away as Evony went stiff and began shivering. “Hey,” he said hurriedly, his eyes widening in panic as she trembled in front of him. “Hey, hey, it’s okay, it’s okay, just breathe everything is fine.”

“Bruce,” she sobbed as he climbed into the bed and cradled her to his chest. “I’m sorry, I’m so sorry…the baby… I’m sorry.”

His eyes welled with tears and he shook his head as he cradled her to him. “Shh, don’t be. You’re safe, it’s fine, none of this is your fault. It’s mine if it’s anyone’s. You’re okay Evie, please, please believe me.”

She was shaking to pieces in his arms, her legs drawn tightly to her chest, her body stiff and cold as she fought her guilt.

“My fault,” she whispered repeatedly. “My fault. Should have fought them. Should have stopped them. Oh god, the baby.”

Bruce, his heart breaking and the Other Guy growling ominously in the back of his arm could do nothing but hold her and soothe her, his hands a warm and constant pressure against her back. “Easy, easy,” he whispered over and over, his voice cracking as she sobbed into his chest.

And then, as the night drew on, he began to sing, his soft voice washing over them and easing some of the tension of her body.

*Goodnight, my angel*
*Now it’s time to sleep*
*And still so many things I want to say*
*Remember all the songs you sang for me*
*When we went sailing on an emerald bay*
*And like a boat out on the ocean*
*I’m rocking you to sleep*
*The water’s dark*
*And deep inside this ancient heart*
*You’ll always be a part of me.*

She was quiet, still, as his voice trailed away and he was relieved to feel her body relaxing against his.
“I’m sorry Evony, about the baby,” he whispered against her hair, his tears tracking slowly down his face to mist in the deep red strands spread over her pillow. “That shouldn’t have happened.”

Her fingers were knotted in his shirt, her body pulled tightly against his as if she was afraid she’d be snatched away once more.

“Bruce,” she murmured, her voice ragged with tears, “I just wanted to give you what you always wanted. I just…I wanted to be good for you.”

Bruce froze as her words washed over him and he sat up a bit. “Evony,” he gasped as he gazed down into her teary blue eyes. “Why are you saying that?!?” When she opened her mouth to reply he shook his head and slid out of the bed. “No, don’t. I-I can’t-I have to take a step back right now.”

Her eyes were wide as she watched him fold his hands behind his head, taking several deep breaths as he did so and she wondered if she had pushed him too far.

“Bruce, I’m sorry,” she whispered brokenly, her fingers twisted into the sheets as desperate sorrow filled her. “Sorry…”

When he turned back to her she gasped at the bright green shooting through his brown eyes and she had to resist scrabbling backwards against the bed’s bars. This was Bruce, just Bruce. Nothing to be afraid of, she’d just have to tread carefully.

“Bruce,” she said slowly, but he didn’t let her continue.

“Evony Potts,” he growled, his voice an odd hybrid mix of the Hulk’s and his own. “Listen to me now.”

She was all ears.

All shaking ears.

“You,” he said as he bent over her and cradled her head in his hands. “You are what I’ve always wanted. You. You have stood by my side when things went to hell, you fought for me when I was being an ass and you loved me, even when I wasn’t very lovable. Never,” he shook her head gently at that, his greenish eyes sparkling in the moonlight streaming through the windows. “Never doubt that I love you, that I will always love you.”

He kissed her, fiercely, his lips firm and warm on hers and she gasped, opening her mouth for his tongue’s gentle probing.

“Bruce,” she whispered as he pulled her into his arms, still kissing her flushed skin. “I failed you though.”

“No you didn’t,” he whispered, against her neck. “You didn’t Evony. You survived and that is not failure. That’s the stubborn, bull-headed girl I fell in love with. You stood up to SHIELD’s science and cruelties and you fought and you survived.” He leaned back and smiled, his usual wry grin and she couldn’t help but mirror the expression. “You are what I’ve always, always, wanted Evony Potts,” he whispered as he tangled his fingers in her lush hair and kissed her, gently now. “Someone brave enough to face the world with me,” he finished as he set her back onto the bed and tucked the blankets around her.

She was staring at him, avidly, her blue eyes sheening brightly in the moonlight and her hand rose to stroke his face.
“I love you Bruce,” she whispered. “All of you.”

He caught her hand to press a soft kiss in her palm and smiled. “I know. And I thank you for it,” he whispered back.

“Now get some sleep. You’re still run-down. I’ll be here with you, don’t worry.”

“Promise,” she whispered as she watched him settle in the comfortable armchair beside her bed.

“I promise,” he said, his hand stretching out to squeeze her fingers. “Now go to sleep, Evie.”

After a while, she did, her body slowly easing into her bed and the questions in her mind finally falling silent as the welcome darkness took her.

The last thing she remembered seeing was Bruce sprawled in his chair, reading a message on his tablet.

Her lips lifted in a small smile as she settled into the pillow and she murmured sleepily, “Just like old times…”

Bruce heard her, she was sure.

Or at least his warm chuckle washed over her as she finally fell asleep.

“I love you Evony,” he whispered.

She only smiled and hummed in her sleep.

**

**Six Weeks Later**

“So how’s our girl doing Brucie? Still having nightmares?”

Bruce glanced at the computer screen where a slightly blurry Tony Stark could be seen, half buried in the torso of a black and gold Suit, sparks flying as he welded something in the chest plate.

“No, the nightmares are gone, thank god,” Bruce muttered as he poured some hot water over some tea leaves. Raising the brew to his lips he sighed happily and took a sip.

Tony’s eyebrow was quirked, in that slightly judgmental manner he always affected when he was waiting for Bruce to clarify a postulated theory but Bruce kept his silence, his lips lifted in his wry smile.

Tony snorted in frustration and leaned into the camera, “You’re being an ass Banner. What’s going on? What aren’t you telling me?” He paused and then snapped, “Is it the Hulk? Did you have an episode?”

Bruce hesitated and then shook his head. “No, no, I’ve been seven weeks Tony. Nothing has ruffled his feathers. Don’t worry about that.”

He settled into his desk chair and glanced around the little bedroom he and Evony had allotted as an office and smiled contentedly. The yellow paint was peeling, sure, and the bookshelves had been found in the streets of Pena but they’d managed to make the place a little homey.
And Evony was drawing the village.

Her sketches hung everywhere, some in charcoal, some in pencil and still others in pen.

Pictures of the children who would follow her around, chattering at her in Hindi.

Pictures of the mountains, hazy in the distance.

Pictures of the women waiting at the well every morning.

She was capturing India in her sketchpad.

He loved it.

She didn’t know he had all of them.

His favorite was framed and sat on his desk.

It was rough and crumpled, nothing as clean or crisp as the others, but it was still his favorite.

Leaning forward he wiped a few flecks of dust from the frame, his fingers pausing to brush against the glassed over lines and he couldn’t help smiling at the three people drawn there.

It was painful, sure, seeing it but it reminded him.

Reminded him that it was okay to dream and that there were people out there in the world who would help them if they still wanted to dream.

She’d told him some of the story behind the sketch when he’d removed it from his pocket and shown it to her.

She’d backed away from him at first, her eyes wide with horror and he’d hurried to fold it away but she’d stopped him.

No, wait, she’d said, her voice cracking. Don’t put it away Bruce.

I’m sorry Evie, he’d said. I didn’t know what it was…

Quartermaine, she’d whispered. Clay Quartermaine made sure I had it with me. He was there that day when SHIELD got me. He whispered in my ear he was sorry and made sure I had the sketch after that; he sent it to you that night, right? I’d wondered what had happened to it.

He’d stared at it, the paper soft in his hands and the lines smudged and he hadn’t been able to pull his eyes away from the laughing little girl in his sketch-form’s arms.

It’s beautiful Evie, he’d whispered and she’d laughed, brokenly.

It’s just a drawing Bruce. You can throw it away.

She’d wanted him to, he understood why of course.

But he hadn’t.

He’d framed it instead.

“Bruce? Hey, Brucie! Snap out of it buddy! The jungle rotting your brain?”
Bruce jumped at Tony’s loud voice snapping from the laptop set up on his desk and laughed wryly.

“Sorry Tony,” he muttered as he ran his fingers through his hair. “Just thinking. What’s going on then?”

Tony sighed and rolled his eyes. “You know what’s going on. Pepper and I are in Cali, holding out against Fury and his goons, Steve and June are in Europe being romantic and cute and Natasha’s somewhere, maybe Russia or something. Probably slitting a few throats or drinking some poor schmuck under the table. And Clint’s in Jersey taking some much needed leave. And you two…” he sighed and shook his head. “You can come back, you know. Fury knows he overstepped his bounds and now that he’s lost his greatest prize he won’t bother you two anymore.”

Bruce hesitated and moved towards the window, making sure he was still in range of the microphone and webcam. “Yeah, I don’t think that’s going to happen for a while Tony,” he muttered as he brushed aside the sari-turned curtains to gaze out at the burgeoning flower garden spread to the side of their little cottage.

Children’s laughter washed through the open window and his lips lifted in a small smile as he watched three of the village’s orphan’s dart across the flagstone paths, waving sticks in the air as they called to each other in their native tongue; he could just make out someone with dark red hair chasing them from beyond the fountain.

Her voice was the loudest of the wild band and he couldn’t help but chuckle at her broken Hindi and beautiful laughter.

“Yeah? Why’s that Brucie? Falling back in love with the jungle?”

Bruce could hear the disbelief in his friend’s voice and he smiled and shook his head.

“You could say that Tony,” he said as he leaned on the desk and finished his tea.

Tony snorted. “She’s refusing to leave isn’t she?”

Bruce chuckled and as he prepared to cut the video chat, he leaned into the camera and smiled. “You could say that,” he said cheerfully.

Tony sighed, but before the chat ended, he said seriously, “Just remember Bruce, the cure is waiting for you in that package I sent you. You’re going to have to decide if you want to use it, and soon. It won’t last forever.”

Bruce hesitated, his smile slipping just a bit and then before Tony could further lecture him, he snapped the laptop closed.

Leaning on the desk, he lowered his head and stared blankly at the computer’s surface.

Tony was right.
There was a box waiting for him under the loose floorboard of this office.
There was a cure for his ‘condition’ just within his reach.
What was he doing? Why hadn’t he used it yet? What was he waiting for?

“Bruce?”

His head snapped up at her quiet voice in the doorway and he straightened at the sight of Evony
standing there, her arms wrapped around a little Indian boy of about three years. He was sniffling, his
tears running grimy trails down his face and Bruce noted immediately the deep cut on his forehead
and the scrapes on his knees.

“What happened to Ollie?!” he asked as he hurried around the desk to take the little boy from her
arms.

He ignored the worried frown wrinkling her brow or the dark knowledge in her eyes.

Instead he smiled brightly at the little boy, who grinned in response and stretched out dirty fingers to
play with the doctor’s glasses.

Bruce chuckled and set the little boy on his desk; Evony moved the laptop aside and sat beside the
little boy, her arm around his waist lest he fall and she sighed.

“He fell. The older kids were going too fast for his chubby little legs,” she stretched out her hand to
tickle his feet and the little boy giggled, making Bruce smile as he reached for his black bag. “We
were playing cowboys and Indians,” she said, “Weren’t we Ollie?”

The little boy jabbered something in Hindi and she laughed before planting a kiss on his temple.

Bruce’s eyebrows rose as he began cleaning the little boy’s injuries. “Did you understand what he
said?” he asked.

Evony shrugged and pressed her cheek to the little boy’s hair. “I’m getting better. I understand it
better than I speak it.”

Bruce nodded and murmured something to the toddler, in Hindi, and the little boy giggled, even as
Bruce began to numb his head wound in preparation for stitches.

“Hold him for me Evie,” he muttered as he selected a needle and thread.

She nodded and set the little boy firmly in her lap. “Hold on hotshot,” she whispered in his ear.
“You’re going to get a huge cookie for this!”

“Cookie?” the little boy repeated, his eyes wide as he turned to look at her and she smiled.

“Youre going to get a huge cookie for this!”

“Yup,” she said as she bounced him gently in her lap. Bruce shot her a warning glance but she
ignored him, instead busying herself with wrapping her arms more firmly around the little boy. “As
big as the freaking moon Ollie. All chocolate chips and macadamia nuts and Nutella. It’s going to be
great.”

Bruce shook his head at her slightly hysterical chatter and muttered as he very gently began to stitch
the little boy up, “Don’t pass out Evie.”

She groaned as she closed her eyes and turned her head away.

Ollie simply giggled and played with her fingers, which she wiggled teasingly for him.

“Can’t promise you anything Banner,” she said through clenched teeth.

“Baby,” he muttered as he concentrated on his neat whip stitches.

She laughed. “You have no idea.”

After a few moments of still silence, Bruce had the little boy stitched and bandaged up and Ollie,
really Ollav, was safe in her arms, asleep.

“Thank you Dr. Banner,” she said with a smile as she eased herself off of the desk and pressed a kiss to his cheek. “You saved the day.”

He chuckled as he snapped his bag closed. “That’s me,” he muttered as he caught her around the waist and kissed her lips. “Big green superhero.”

She chuckled. “My favorite kind,” she muttered against his lips. Then, with a soft nip of her teeth on his bottom lip, she pulled away from him and began heading out of the office. “I’m going to tuck this little heathen into our bed and then I’ll call the orphanage and tell Priya we’ve got him for the night.”

She glanced over her shoulder at him, a small smile on her lips. “You know, for observation.”

He only shook his head and chuckled. “Observation, huh?”

She smiled and hefted the little boy more firmly in her arms. “Thank you Bruce,” she whispered. “I’ll be back.”

And then she was gone.

He listened to her nearly silent footsteps on the soft bamboo floors of their cottage and smiled wryly as he knelt beneath is desk and clicked the loose floorboard open. Inside was a tiny steel box, locked and coded with his biosignatures. His hand shook as he removed it.

But what waited for him under the cover of that little box wasn’t what he was so worried about.

It was Evony and that little boy she was most likely tucking into their bed right now.

One day, almost four weeks ago, she’d brought home a stack of official looking papers and asked if he would help her with something.

An adoption.

He’d stared at her, shocked, and asked why she’d wanted to do this. She’d only shrugged and replied that she wanted to help as best she could in the village.

Then she’d handed him the papers. He’d hesitated, but after a moment, pulled the top form towards him; Priya’s note written in her looping scrawl, had made it clear that Evony and Bruce were welcome to choose any of the orphanage’s wards and as many as they wanted.

His lips had quirked at that and he’d raised one finger.

Just one, Evie, let’s not get overeager here.

She’d only chuckled and wrapped her arm around his neck as she perched on the armrest of his chair.

Priya was just joking. You’re only allowed to adopt one child at a time in India, she’d said quietly, her chin resting on his head. Priya really likes us Bruce, we have to help her.

The Pena Village Home for the Children’s matron and Evony had struck up an immediate friendship, after Priya had caught Evony sketching some of the children as they played by the well and soon she hadn’t been able to go anywhere in the village without one or two or three of the orphans following her.

He wasn’t sure when it had happened, but soon Ollav, or Ollie as she’d cheerfully nicknamed him,
had become a constant companion for her. He’d seen the love in her eyes and the care she took with the little boy.

He just couldn’t help wondering if it was too soon after the loss of their own little girl…

Was this healthy?

Should he put a stop to it?

He’d signed the papers that night as she slept beside him, her hand resting on his hip, her fingers curled into his hipbone.

She’d taken the papers to Priya the next morning after kissing him and resting her forehead for a brief moment against his.

*Thank you Bruce,* she’d whispered before grabbing her scarf and heading out the door.

Then had begun the very long, very frustrating adoption process.

But it was worth it to see her smile and to hear her bright laughter.

And to see her sketching again.

As he reflected on the adventures of the past few weeks, his fingers brushed the cover of the box and as the latch released with a sigh of hydraulic locks, she spoke from the doorway.

“What are you doing Bruce?”

He jumped and glanced in her direction, his eyes widening slightly at her frown and stiff stance.

“What am I doing? Uh…” he stammered as he straightened, hiding the box behind his box as he did. “Nothing, I uh, just dropped something under the desk.”

Her eyes narrowed as she approached him and before he could react she was reaching behind him to snatch the little stainless steel box from his hands.

His eyes closed at her gasp and he sagged into his chair as she whispered, “What is this Bruce? What is it?”

He didn’t reply right away. Simply buried his face in his hands.

“Bruce,” she said firmly, “Look at me. Now, please.”

Finally, his eyes rose to hers and he swallowed nervously at the sight of her fingers brushing over the four syringes, full of clear fluids, nestled there.

Her sapphire blue eyes, as dark as midnight and as hard as the gems they resembled, bore into him and her eyebrow quirked at his silence.

“Is this what I think it is?” she asked as her fingers toyed with the box.

He nodded, after a brief moment and she sighed. “Oh Bruce,” she muttered as she fell to her knees before him. “Why didn’t you tell me you had a cure waiting?”

His fingers shook as he stretched out a hand to stroke her cheek and he smiled gently as she leaned into his touch. “I was going to talk to you about it once the adoption was finalized.”
She sighed and shook her head. “Bruce, who knows when that will be finalized. It could be months from now. Or it could be never happen. Why were you really waiting?”

Bruce’s eyes rose to meet hers and he couldn’t help but smile wryly at the knowledge in her eyes. “I was…I couldn’t…”

“You don’t know if you want to get rid of the Hulk, do you?” she asked as she leaned against the armrests of his chair.

He hesitated and then shook his head. “I know I should want to get…get rid of him. But there are times when…”

“When you remember him saving you and your friends?” she asked as she rose to settle in his lap.

He nodded as his hands wrapped around her waist and she tucked her head under his chin.

“He’s been a part of me for so long and brought me a lot of pain, it’s true. But he’s also helped me. I wouldn’t have ever gone to India if I hadn’t been on the run. I wouldn’t have met Tony or the other Avengers.” His hands ran slowly up her back, making her shiver and soon his fingers were tangled in her hair. “And I wouldn’t have met you, Evony Potts,” he whispered as he bent his head to kiss her gently.

She hummed under his lips, her eyes fluttering closed as his hands moved slow, burning tracks over her skin.

“There’s always that, then,” she whispered dazedly as his lips trailed over her jaw.

He chuckled as he began kissing her neck, the Other Guy purring in the back of his head. “Yes, there’s always that,” he murmured as his teeth nipped gently at her sweet smelling skin. “Mmm, what do I do Evie?”

She was trembling, her fingers locked in his shirt, every inch of her on fire with the soft stroke of his lips and she had to drag herself back towards clarity.

“Bruce, Bruce, stop,” she gasped as she pushed herself away from him, panting slightly with the hot desire washing over her skin. “Stop.”

Bruce’s eyebrows rose and he groaned. “Why?” he asked, his voice gravelly and they both froze, eyes flying wide at the sound.

“Easy,” she whispered as she caught his chin gently in her hands. “Easy, big man.”

She was staring into his eyes, searching for any sign of the Hulk.

There was none.

Sighing in relief at the sight of his dark brown irises, her head sagged forward to press against his forehead. “Bruce, you have to stop distracting yourself. Just…stop.”

“How can I when you’re here with me?” he asked, his fingers twisting through a few strands of her hair.

She only chuckled and caught his hands into her own. “No, wrong answer. Don’t be sappy big man. Not now. Not with those,” she pointed at the little box with its syringes glinting in the warm sunlight streaming down on them. “Not with those waiting for you.”
He watched as she straightened, his hands still clasped in hers and asked, “What do I do Evony? What’s the right path here?”

She sighed and brought his hands to her lips. “I don’t know, baby,” she whispered as she pressed feather-light kisses to his knuckles. “I really don’t. This isn’t my choice, isn’t my battle. It’s yours.”

She set his hands down gently and ran her fingers through his hair, pressing a soft kiss to his temple as she did so.

“This is your choice, Bruce Banner,” she whispered.

And then she was making her way towards the door; he hurried after her, catching her hand before she could leave, and he asked as he pulled her back towards him, “But it’s your choice too Evie. If you…” he swallowed as she raised big blue eyes to his. An eyebrow rose as one corner of her mouth twitched into a smile and he sighed. “If you’re going to be with me, this is your choice too.”

She smiled, tenderly, and raised herself to her tiptoes so she could kiss him.

“Bruce,” she whispered as her hands rose to twist in his curly hair. “Haven’t you realized yet?”

He frowned. “Realized what?”

She chuckled and kissed his jaw. “I will always love you. All of you. The big, green rage monster Bruce and the handsome,” she kissed the tip of his nose, “intelligent,” she kissed lips, “and devastatingly kind,” she kissed the hollow of his throat, “Bruce.” She kissed his hands once more, tears standing in her eyes as she gazed at him.

“I love you Bruce Banner. I always have. And nothing is ever going to change that. Nothing.”

He could do nothing but stare at her, some small part of him wondering if this was just a dream, a wonderful, horrible dream and as she smiled gently and pressed her hand gently to his cheek, he choked out, “Why?”

She hesitated and then her other hand was rising to cradle his face in her slender fingers. “Because the Hulk is just as good as you Bruce. He’s just a little brusquer about it.”

She smiled and kissed him gently once more and as she pulled away she whispered, “I’ll be in the garden. I’ll be waiting for you.”

“Promise?” he whispered as his fingers brushed her deep red hair tumbled down her back.

She turned back with a sad little smile on her lips and rested her palm gently against his chest. “Of course. I promise with all of my heart, Bruce Banner. I will always wait for you.”

And then she was gone, her barefeet making no sound on the bamboo, and he watched her stride down the hall. Entering their bedroom he heard the little boy start to laugh and Evony’s warm voice asking him how he felt and he smiled. He watched as she slipped out the back door, her arms full of the little boy, and into their sweet little garden she had fallen in love with the moment he brought her here.

As the door closed behind them, he turned back to his office, his hands sliding absently into his pockets and he gazed thoughtfully at the walls covered in her elegant hand.

Everywhere was Evony’s essence.
She had inundated his entire life.

*What do I do here, my friend?* he asked himself.

His mind was quiet for a moment and then his lips twitched as he felt that other half of him stir and shrug.

*YOUR CHOICE*, bellowed that thunderous voice he had once loathed. *CAN'T CHOOSE FOR YOU OTHER GUY!*

His fingers brushed the glass vials of the cure he and Tony had created before Evony’s kidnapping and he frowned.

*Your choice.*

*I will always love you.*

*All of you.*

*My choice…*

“What do I do?” he whispered to himself as he selected the first dosage and toyed with the plunger.

*I will always be waiting for you…*

As he pondered what to do, he drifted to the window and watched as a little boy, with a Star Wars bandaid on his forehead, played in the fountain, Evony’s arms around him, in case he slipped and he smiled.

She would love him no matter what he chose.

No matter…

Turning away from the window he realized he had made his choice.

A wry smile touched his lips as he reached out to close the box gently.

*GOOD CHOICE!* bellowed a voice in the back of his head.

He couldn’t help but agree as he made his way towards the garden.

Nothing had ever felt so right before in his life.

“I love you,” he whispered in her ear as he wrapped his arms around her waist.

“Oh good,” she whispered back. “I was starting to worry.”

The little boy laughed and splashed water on each of them, making them laugh in response and as the sun set over Pena Village in Bihar, India Bruce Banner realized that he had finally, *finally*, gotten what he wanted.

It was a very odd feeling.

~Fin~
The very last chapter of Bruce Banner's and Evony Potts' saga.

It's been a long time coming, god knows, and been through more re-writes than any of us cares to think about but finally it's here.

To those of you who have stuck through since the very beginning, thank you. To those who have just found this monster, welcome.

All I can do is breathe a sigh of relief and turn my eyes to other projects.

I hope this is to everyone's liking.

As always, love to you readers.

And abounding, continuous love to my best friend and beta Ambpersand.

She's kept me sane in the 7 months it's taken to get this thing figure out.

So enjoy!

-M
“Happy anniversary, Dr. Banner,” she murmured, her eyes welling unbidden with tears as he fitted himself tightly to her chest and stroked his own fingers over her skin. “What would I have done without you and the Other Guy, that day?”

She woke to his lips pressing gently to her collar bones, soft caressing kisses that even in her sleep, made her toes curl.

"Mmm, Dr. Banner, I feel funny," she murmured sleepily, a smirk curling her lips even as he moved those damnable lips further down her sternum.

"Describe the feeling for me, Mrs. Banner," he said, his voice vibrating through her chest as those lips pressed into the soft swells of her right breast "Is it a tingling sensation...here?"

She giggled the moment his too-warm hands, with their callouses and impossibly strong joints, rose to tease the hardening buds of her nipples.

"Bruce," she gasped breathlessly, hips writhing and pressing into their bed while those fingers rolled and plucked her blissfully sensitized skin. "You are so cruel to me," she panted, her eyes narrowing as she watched his curly-haired head lowering to her swollen and perfectly reddened breasts. The moment his mouth locked around one of her nipples, she cried out and arched even further into his hands. His lips curled in a smug smile even as her legs rose to lock around his hips and he smothered the contented growling in the back of his skull.

Easy my friend, easy, he thought to the presence waiting ever so patiently for his own sweet release, even as the stunning red haired woman rocked blissfully beneath their touch. It's been a few weeks since we've done this. So just relax.

The growling quieted and the pressure at the back of his head eased, even as the Other Guy nodded.
in understanding.

No one was in danger here.

Although Evony would maybe snort at that and say something crude about the dangers of pent up frustrations exploding magnificently.

He shifted at that, at the friction her body pressed to his through layers of sheets and his clothes caused, and he actually growled aloud. Her fingers, locked in the curls at the top of his head froze, and her legs, locked tight around his thighs, loosened.

"Bruce?"

She said his name so calmly, careful even after all of this time spent in his life. It set his skin on fire.

"I'm fine," he said, his head rising enough so she could see for herself, just how fine he was. He smiled gently at her, that same crooked grin she'd fallen in love with two years before when he'd stitched her back together in Tony's basement.

Peaceful dark brown eyes locked on bright sapphire and her fingers turned caressing in his graying curls.

"Hey," she breathed and he raised himself enough to kiss her lips, knee slipping forward to press between her thighs. His crooked grin deepened as she gasped at the sensations that pressure caused and he kissed her once more, teeth toying with her lips in a similar manner to the torment her breasts had gone through moments before.

"Hey," he panted, curls tumbling into his eyes and fingers once more cupping her breasts. "I missed you, Evony."

She smirked at that, hands busying themselves with the black button down shirt he wore. It looked like one of Tony's, something the man would wear to a meeting after Pepper had told him to dress respectably.

It suited Bruce in a way she never would have expected.

It made him seem...rugged.

She almost purred at the realization.

The buttons flew apart beneath her fingers and Bruce rolled his eyes when a couple popped off to smack into the abstract painting hanging across from their bed.

"I wasn't expecting you home so early," she murmured as he shrugged free of the shirt, his lips still trailing blazes of agonized pleasure over her exposed skin and she pouted when she could no longer touch his warm skin. He dragged the soft cotton sheet off of her legs, his eyes sparkling at the sight of her thighs spread for his touch, and she visibly shuddered when his hands moved from her hips to caress the back of her knees, absently spreading her legs a little wider apart.

"Tony didn't need my help with the new AI he's building after all, so he sent me home," he muttered, his fingers busying themselves with the buckle on his belt.

Evony arched a single brow at that, the expression eerily similar to a certain assassin they all knew but who still remained in hiding after SHIELD's rather impressive imploding a year before. He shrugged and she folded her arms behind her head, her breasts even more exposed to his darkening
"Mhmm? And since when has Tony Stark been introspective enough to realize his friends have lives outside of his workshop?" She asked, her eyes following him as he finally removed the charcoal gray slacks she was fairly sure she had never seen in his closet. Her eyes narrowed a bit at that but before she could question him further on his change of wardrobe, his damn lips were once more wreaking havoc on her flushing body.

She gasped and arched, fingers digging into her hair at the very moment his tongue stroked along her throbbing clitoris and he chuckled, the vibrations his voice caused on her heated body, pleasure enough.

Her voice was ragged as she whispered his name, while his fingers replaced his mouth, and he grinned before pressing a kiss to the side of her knee.

"He knows it's our anniversary, Evie," he whispered against her skin, his fingers stroking and toying with her poor ravaged clit. His eyes glittered with a dangerous gleam she was all-too familiar with. She froze at that, pleasure completely forgotten as horror washed over her, and she gasped.

Despite knowing better-knowing their wedding anniversary had passed three months before, relatively quietly in their apartment, with Ollie sprawled in their laps and a cartoon movie about two sister’s, one of whom had a dark secret and an even darker side she needed to hide.

The irony hadn’t been lost on either of them, even if their little boy had fallen asleep halfway through the charming film. Bruce had wrapped his arm around her and simply pressed his forehead to her temple for most of it and come up with dirty lyrics for the ridiculously campy songs.

It had made her smile. And it had been proof enough that even after all of these years, they were still perfect together.

So what had Stark meant? He knew better than this...

"Anniversary?!"

Her horrified gaze had locked on his the moment he’d revealed why he’d come home so early and he chuckled as he rested between her legs, pressing his chin to her belly. "You forgot, didn't you?" He asked, his voice gentle and without a single trace of disappointment. His brown eyes still glittered though, their dark depths lightened just enough to make a primal part of her, the prey part, tremble in trepidation. "You forgot what today means for us?"

And she suddenly realized what he meant.

It was May 5th.

She shivered at the memories that date awakened in her and she propped herself up a bit on their pillows, pulling him along with her as well.

His chest rumbled beneath her hands, calling to mind that darker side of him she loved so desperately, and she kissed his temple gently.

“Happy anniversary, Dr. Banner,” she murmured, her eyes welling unbidden with tears as he fitted himself tightly to her chest and stroked his own fingers over her skin. “What would I have done without you and the Other Guy, that day?”

He smirked and rolled his eyes.
“Barton claims he would have saved you and you would have fallen madly in love with him as well,” he said, dark eyes sparkling mischievously even as she smacked him lightly with her pillow. “Natasha said she would have been willing to share, you know.”

Her groan was muffled by his lips once more locking on hers and her body melted into his very capable hands once more, despite her mock horror.

May 5th dawned—far quieter than it’s previous years—and as the Banner’s bedroom fell into a still but heavy silence, she pressed a gentle kiss to his throat and dug her nails into his hips, locking her body to his.

It was her way of telling him.

Telling him she’d never let him go.

Either side of him.

The Other Guy growled in approval and only Evony Banner witnessed the bright flash of green in the dark brown eyes hovering mere inches above hers.

Her lips curled in a contented smile, her body arching to meet his instinctively, and her fingers rose to stroke the grey in his temples.

“Happy anniversary, my boys,” she purred, eyelids fluttering in time with the pleasure he stroked from her body and he chuckled, his voice a far rougher growl than normal.

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