**Wee Little Stark**

by orphan_account

**Summary**

James Rhodes was confident in his ability to remain calm in high stress situations. Being best friends with Tony Stark will do that to a guy.

What he is NOT prepared for is a toddler standing on the mansion's doorstep with a letter addressed to Tony.

Rhodey, Tony, Happy, Pepper and JARVIS learn together to care for and love the little Darcy, and together they navigate rougher waters when it's made clear that the baby girl is even more special than they could have guessed.
This is my first fic, so be gentle with me please! I'm not sure how long this will be, but it will definitely make it through the Iron Man movie, and possibly the second as well.

Let me know how I'm doing!

i don't feel like this is necessary, but here goes:

all of the character etc belong to marvel, i just mutilated the timelines and destroyed canon. yay!
Chapter 1

James Rhodes was confident in his ability to remain calm in high stress situations. Being best friends with Tony Stark will do that to a guy.

Stark shows up completely *plastered* to another board meeting? Eh, nothing to see there.

Stark’s newest assistant runs from the Malibu mansions cursing up a blue streak at their former employer? Rhodey can sympathize with that, actually.

He had a similar reaction when he met JARVIS for the first time. Well, he says “met,” but Rhodey first faced off with the AI when he tried using his copy of the mansion’s key, only to be on the business end of a machine gun that came out of a hidden panel and a computerized British man asking him *If he has a scheduled appointment with Sir* because if not he was going to have to be asked to leave the premises. After a near heart attack, lots of confused yelling from Tony and scolding from Rhodey *because you can’t just go around creating AI’s goddamnit, Tony,* Rhodey was properly introduced to JARVIS, and finally, Rhodey had someone else to help look after Tony.

So yeah, Rhodey was great about keeping a cool head when the situation called for it. Unfortunately, now was not one of those times.

He stared down at the little girl standing on Tony’s doorstep, mouth opening and closing like a fish. Rhodey blinked, thinking perhaps his years of friendship with Tony finally cracked his mind. *Nope, still there.* She looked back up at him, blue eyes almost too large for her face with her wide-eyed curiosity. The toddler was barefoot and wearing a dirty red sundress, and her hair was a giant mess of curls that looked like it hadn’t been brushed properly in days. In one hand she held a small blue stuffed robot, and in the other was an envelope.

Rhodey was thankfully saved from his gaping by JARVIS cutting into the impromptu staring contest between the two.

“*Sir, might I suggest returning inside? I’ve detected no threat from the child.*”

The AI’s voice broke through the fog clouding Rhodey’s mind, and he ushered the little girl ahead of him into the mansion. He looked incredulously at the nearest security camera when JARVIS’s final comment sank in, “Of course she’s not a threat! Jeez, she’s probably only three for Christ’s sake!”
“Two,” a little voice piped up. The tiny girl had shuffled ahead of Rhodey, not scared of her new surroundings or Rhodey in the slightest, and determinedly made her way to the sofa where she began to pull herself up on the overstuffed monstrosity.

Returning his focus to the little girl, Rhodey kneeled down so that he was no longer towering over her. He smiled to himself slightly at the little huffing noises she made as she struggled to climb the sofa. She was too damn cute. After another minute of watching the stubborn little girl, she finally made her way onto the cushions and sat up and looked patiently at Rhodey. Mentally giving himself a shake, he was determined to handle this like the proper grown-ass man he was and figure out what the hell was happening. Taking a deep breath, Rhodey engaged the girl.

“What was that, sweetheart?”

“I’m two! Not three, silly,” She smiled, her chubby cheeks flushed from her exertion, “I got Jeffrey for my birthday! See?” She thrusted the stuffed robot in front of her, smacking Rhodey in the face with it in her excitement.

Laughing, Rhodey gently pushed the robot out of his face and looked back to the energetic girl, “He’s really neat, sweetheart. My name is Rhodey. What’s your name?”

“Hi, Rhodey! I’m Darcy!”

“Why were you outside the door, Darcy?”

Darcy looked confused for a moment, before looking down at the forgotten envelope in the hand not clutching Jeffrey. “Momma’s friend Dave said to give it to whoever answered the door and to stay with them,” she then handed it to Rhodey, whose brow was furrowed in anger as he took it from her. The front of the envelope read Deliver to: Asshole Stark.

“He just left you by yourself? JARVIS?”

“From the security feeds, it appears that a car stopped about halfway down the street where a man exited and took Miss Darcy from the car, then pointed her in the direction of the mansion. The man returned to the car and drove off, and Miss Darcy walked the rest of the way here. I would have traced the car, but it was without proper license plates.” Rhodey made a mental note to congratulate Tony later on his coding because the usually unflappable AI sounded very disapproving and a bit angry.
That thought stopped Rhodey cold. *Shit, Tony. Tony whose house I am in. Tony who will be back soon. Where there is an abandoned toddler sitting on his couch. He’s going to kill me.* Rhodey sighed, and closed his eyes and tried to calm his nerves. He opened them again when Darcy spoke up.

“Is there a man in the ceiling?” she looked positively thrilled by the idea, and Rhodey couldn’t help but chuckle at her enthusiasm.

“No, sweetheart, that’s JARVIS. He’s a really smart computer that my friend Tony made.”

JARVIS took this moment to properly introduce himself, *“Hello, Miss Darcy. As Mr. Rhodes has said, I am an Artificial Intelligence that oversees all of Sir’s needs and looks after his protection.”*

Darcy looked up at the ceiling with awe and giggled a little, “JARVIS you’re so cool! You can be friends with me. And Jeffrey! He’s a robot too!” She then held up the plush robot to the ceiling, as if showing him off to his fellow robot.

“*Thank you, Miss Darcy. I would be honored to have you, as well as Jeffrey as a friend. Us robots must stick together.*” Rhodey’s eyebrows raised in shock. Not only was JARVIS preening at the little girl’s praise, but he was good with the kid. *What the hell did you program, Tony?*

Deciding that the two new friends could get to know one another, Rhodey turned to the envelope in his hand as the AI and toddler chatted in the background. Tearing it open, he found three folded up letters. The first was short, crumpled, and in a horribly messy scrawl.

*Hey Asshole Stark,*

*The kid is yours. You knocked up my ex-girlfriend. She kept the kid. She got in a car crash a couple days ago. Cops gave the kid to me because that’s what Cheryl wrote down or some shit. Apparently she was planning on trying to contact you about the kid. So here’s your kid. Cheryl left a letter for you.*

*Have fun, Asshole.*

Rhodey’s jaw clenched in anger, *The asshole couldn’t even pack her some clothes? Or some damn shoes?* Rhodey immediately moved to the second letter from Cheryl before his anger overwhelmed him. Unlike Dave’s letter, this one was clean and neatly written on crisp stationary paper. Her handwriting was pretty, a bunch of loopy letters written out in a bright purple ink.
Tony,

You probably don’t remember me, but my name is Cheryl Lewis and we met at a party you threw about three years ago in the summer. It was some ridiculous beach and barbecue theme that was in celebration of you moving into your new mansion.

Anyways, I got pregnant that night and I kept the baby. Your daughter’s name is Darcy Marie Lewis, her birthday is April 3rd, and her favorite color is red. I’m only telling you about her now because I can’t take care of her anymore. A month ago, I was diagnosed with an inoperable brain tumor and given only a few months to live. Darcy is too innocent to have to watch her mother waste away like that.

So if you’re reading this, then I’m already dead, and by my own hand. It may be the cowardly way out but I can’t stand the thought of waking up each day and wondering if this will be the day my body turns against me.

I know that you’re young, and you just inherited Stark Industries four years ago, but I’m begging you to take in Darcy. I grew up in the system, and I don’t want that for anyone, especially her. She’s so smart, Tony. She started walking when she was six months old and talking in complete sentences when she was one. She’s even starting to read. She’s taken apart every electronic in my apartment, because she told me she wants to know how they work. A mind like hers would be smothered in children’s homes, so please take care of her.

I know the last thing you want right now is to be a father, but I know you’ll fall in love with her soon enough. She seems to charm her way into everyone’s heart, it’s that damned smile, I swear.

If she asks about me, tell her that I love her, and I’ll always look after her.

Thank you, Tony.

Cheryl

P.S. She is completely potty trained, so there’s no worry about that! :)

Rhodey rubbed his hand over his face, trying to mask his heartbreak from the little girl in front of him. Clearing his throat from the emotion threatening to choke him, he started making a mental list of everything Darcy would need, as well as how soon he could move his things to the mansion. Tony was going to need all the help he could get. That, and Cheryl was right: little Darcy had already
wormed her way inside his heart. *That damned smile, indeed.*

Nodding to himself, Rhodey looked to the third piece of paper, realizing after a moment that it was a paternity test. He sighed in relief when he read the POSITIVE MATCH at the bottom of the sheet. That was one battle they wouldn’t have to fight at least.

He returned his focus to the little tot who was still chatting happily with JARVIS. She was lying on her back now, Jeffrey the robot propped up on her tummy as she directed her words toward the ceiling.

“JARVIS? Is Tony your daddy? Since he made you and stuff?”

Rhodey barked a laugh as the AI did the computerized equivalent of spluttering before responding to the inquisitive girl, “No, Miss Darcy. While Sir did create me, he is not my father. You can inquire about it when he returns, if you would like. Sir and Mr. Hogan shall be arriving in five minutes, Mr. Rhodes. I suggest we brace ourselves, Sir has been in SI meetings all morning.”

Immediately sobered up by the thought of a grumpy Tony, Rhodey moved to stand so that he could catch Tony before he caught sight of Darcy. Hopefully Happy could help things from devolving into too much chaos.

“Rhodey?” Turning to Darcy, he tilted his head in response, “Can I have some juice? I don’t even need a sippy cup! Momma says I got steady hands, that’s why I can use a grown up cup. And take apart the toaster. And the blender. And lotsa other stuff.” Darcy’s little ramble brought a smile to his face. *Too damn cute. We’re all so screwed,* he thought.

“Sure thing, sweetheart. I think we have some OJ, that alright?” Nodding, Darcy hopped off the sofa and followed Rhodey to the kitchen, her tiny bare feet silent on the tile floor. Once there, Rhodey reached down to pick up her up by the waist to plop her gently in one of the barstools, silently sending up a prayer of thanks that the chairs had backs and armrests to keep her from falling off.

Darcy giggled as she squirmed in her seat and looked over the edge of one armrest, “Whoa,” she giggled again, “look how high I am Rhodey! Momma doesn’t have chairs this tall, but this is awesome!”

She looked up at him, eyes shining bright as she continued through her giggles, “Can I sit on your shoulders later? That way I can be REALLY tall!” Darcy raised her arms above her head, as if to
make it clear to Rhodey what she wanted.

Laughing, Rhodey moved to the opposite side of the counter to the cabinets so that he could grab a glass for the little tyke. “Of course, sweetheart. I bet Happy will let you too, he’s secretly a big softie.” He took a couple steps to open the fridge, sighing at its bare shelves, save for the inexplicable lone bottle of OJ. *Sure, Tony,* he thought as he poured a glass, *don’t have any basic food, but make sure you have orange juice for screwdrivers when the good booze runs low.* Rhodey sighed to himself, making another mental note to go grocery shopping soon. *Also childproofing the liquor cabinets would be a good idea. And the workshop. Shit. We have so much to do.*

Turning to his little charge to place the glass of juice in front of her on the counter, he watched Darcy’s face scrunch up adorably in confusion, “Who’s Happy? Is he your friend too? Is Happy really his name?” The last question was paired with a look of suspicion that didn’t quite fit on her chubby face.

Before Rhodey could reply, JARVIS spoke up, “*Happy is Sir’s personal bodyguard, Miss Darcy, and he makes sure that Sir stays safe, much like I do. His given name is Harold Hogan, but he, Sir, and Mr. Rhodes prefer the nickname ‘Happy,’ instead.*”

Darcy nodded, seeming to have accepted the AI’s explanation. “I’m gonna call him Happy. It’s a fun name.”

“*Very well, Miss Darcy. Mr. Rhodes, Sir and Mr. Hogan have just pulled into the garage, would you like me to tell Sir that he has company?”*

Rhodey paused for a moment before deciding, flashing a thumbs up to the nearest security camera so that JARVIS had the OK. He figured whatever preparation Tony had before walking in would help them all greatly.

Moments later, the sound of footsteps and an indignant Tony filtered down the hallway.

“*Company?’ Who the hell is here, JARVIS? Rhodey doesn’t count as company, you know that.”*

“I believe that it will be easier for you to simply see, Sir,” was the AI’s reply, a hint of humor in his voice.
Leaning back against the counter, Rhodey fiddled with the letters in his hands while watching Darcy. She seemed content, sipping her juice while looking around the kitchen, eyes wide at all the shiny appliances. Rhodey chuckled to himself as he recalled her mother’s letter telling Tony about how Darcy loved to pull things apart. He hoped Tony was ready to surrender his electronics.

Finally, Tony and Happy rounded the corner to the kitchen, stopping in their tracks at the sight of Darcy sitting at the counter. She looked over to them, and tilted her head in consideration before placing her glass back on the counter. Facing them again, she smiled brightly, and called out to them in a cheery voice.

“Hi! Are you going to be my friends, too?”

The room was silent. Tony blinked, then turned his blank face to Rhodey.

“What the fuck, Rhodey?”

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Darcy was back on the giant squishy couch with Jeffrey while the grown ups were whispering in the kitchen. She wasn’t sure what they were whispering about, but Rhodey told her everything was okay so she believed him. Plus, she had JARVIS for company. He really was the coolest thing ever.

“Hey Jarvis? Is Tony mad at me?” Sometimes Dave got grumpy at Darcy when Momma had him over for dinner. She didn’t know why, but Darcy didn’t care since she didn’t like him either. But she thinks that Tony is cool, since he made JARVIS and JARVIS was her friend. Even if Tony did have a funny beard.

“No, Miss Darcy, Sir has just had a bit of a shock, is all. He is frustrated, but not at you.”

“Good. I don’t want him to be mad because he’s gonna be my friend. Happy, too.”

Darcy was thankful that Tony wasn’t mad. She didn’t know what to do when other adults got mad. Dave got really angry at Momma right before her birthday last month. He was running around the apartment and yelling, waving a bunch of papers in her Momma’s face and asking about some tests
Momma got from the doctor. Darcy forgot about it when Dave ran out the door and Momma started crying, but she meant to ask what paternity meant.

When she heard a bunch of footsteps coming her way, Darcy looked down from the ceiling to the adults coming in the room. Rhodey came forward and sat next to her, smiling and her and poked her in the nose with a little ‘boop’ noise.

“Hey sweetheart, you ok?” He asked. She nodded in response. Rhodey was awesome, Darcy decided. Maybe he’d be her best friend?

“Can I ask you about your Mom?” She nodded again. “Do you know where she is, hun?”

Darcy thought back to what Dave had told her with a frown, “Momma got real sick, that’s what the doctor said. So she was driving to go see him to get medicine. But she didn’t come home for a long time and then Dave came.” She frowned even further at the mention of Dave. He really was very mean. “He said that Momma is okay and that he was taking me somewhere safe, but I don’t think she’s okay. Momma would have come to get me, but Dave is mean and i think he lies sometimes.” Darcy turned her face up to look at Rhodey, her bottom lip wobbling. Maybe he knew about her Momma?

“Do you know where Momma is? You and JARVIS and stuff are really cool but I kinda want Momma.” She didn’t like the way Rhodey’s face got all sad all of a sudden.

Rhodey looked to Tony and Happy, and she noticed that they looked real sad too. They seemed to do that thing that all grownups can do, where they talk to each other but they don’t actually say anything. Rhodey cleared his throat after nodding at Tony and Happy, so Darcy looked back to him, knowing that he’d have answers.

“Sweetheart, you were right. Your momma got real sick. When she went to the doctor, she…she got in a car crash. I’m so sorry, sweetheart.” Rhodey looked even more sad now, but Darcy was distracted by what he said. She was silent for a few more moments before she spoke, her voice sounding all garbled and quiet.

“Momma’s not coming home?” Darcy looked around at the adults, making sure that she heard Rhodey right.

“No honey, she’s not. And I am so, so sorry that she isn’t.” Darcy felt tears on her cheeks as Rhodey
kept talking, “You don’t have to go live with Dave because we’re going to take care of you, ok?” She just nodded, then folded herself up in Rhodey’s arms and let herself cry for her Momma.
Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

Oh my goodness! Thank you for the lovely comments already! My heart feels all fuzzy now.

Tony sat on the couch next to Rhody staring at the little girl who was fast asleep in his friend’s lap. Darcy had sobbed for a good ten minutes before passing out, and the men didn’t have the heart to move her since it seemed that Rhody provided her with some form of comfort. Tony leant forward to rest his arms on his knees, hanging his head down between his shoulders.

“Rhodey, Happy, what the hell am I going to do? I have a kid, a friggin baby, for fuck’s sake. What do I…? How…?” He looked up at his friends, pleading with his eyes for help, completely at a loss.

Did Tony ever want to be a father? Well, he honestly never thought about it. He never planned on the whole marriage thing anyways, so he didn’t exactly find it a possibility. Now, though? Now, at twenty-five with the weight of Stark Industries on his shoulders? He looked at the baby girl, her tear-stained face all ruddy and surrounded by a mess of curls. Shit, he mused, Cheryl was right. Already love the girl. A small upward quirk of his lips gave away his happiness at the thought. Yes, Tony Stark wanted to be a father. He quickly lost his budding grin at Happy’s voice.

“You’re not giving her away, right?” Happy’s angry tone made it sound more like a command, rather than a question.

Tony flinched back, “No! Of course not! She’s my kid. Mine. I want to be her dad. Just...how the hell do I raise a baby girl? I’m not cut out for this shit, Happy.” Tony rubbed a hand over his face, taking a deep breath to calm himself before his hysterical voice woke up Darcy.

“Well,” Tony turned to Rhody, who was staring down and the toddler in his lap, rubbing his hand in circles on the girl’s back to keep her sleeping. He looked up at Tony and continued, “You may not be cut out for this, but neither is Happy or me. Fortunately for your dumb ass, I’ve already decided to move in here for the time being to help your sorry ass out. I think between us three we can keep this little rugrat happy and whole, don’t you?”

Tony sagged in relief at his best friend’s words. Thank the gods for Rhody, he thought. Smiling, he let a small bud of excitement build in his gut. Us three and my baby girl? This kid is going to grow up awesome.
Happy cleared his throat after Tony spent a few moments staring into the distance with a dopey smile on his face. Gaining his boss/friend’s attention, Happy spoke, “Not that I’m not pleased with this, the tyke’s adorable, but how do we break it to her that you’re her pop?”

Tony’s good mood vanished in an instant. **Fuck.**

Surprisingly, JARVIS inserted himself into the conversation, “**While that is an important question, Mr. Hogan, I believe our priorities should be aimed towards Miss Darcy’s needs. I have already placed an order for groceries, as I assume she will be hungry when she wakes. I researched many parenting websites for nutritious and child-friendly food, which I have emailed to each of you so you may familiarize yourselves. However, I am unsure as to what type of clothing she will need.**”

Everyone’s eyebrow’s raised at the AI’s use of “our.” Tony softly chuckled, **Seems like the kiddo even has JARVIS wrapped around her finger.** Looking to Rhodey and Happy, he shrugged, “I guess after she has a snack we can do some online shopping and let herself pick out what she wants to wear. Toys too. JARVIS, go ahead and order a bed and some child-friendly furniture from a nearby store that we can have delivered for tonight, Darcy’s not gonna sleep on the couch.”

**“Very good, Sir. The groceries shall be here within the hour.”**

“**Perfect. I vote that after she has some time to eat and pick out some stuff, then you guys can help me break the ice about be being her old man, sound good?”** The other two men nodded, not having any better ideas themselves.

Happy sat down in a chair across from the sofa, his focus on Darcy. Smiling, he shook his head and turned to Tony, “**From her ma’s letter, she’ll probably be content to hang out it your workshop more than anything.”**

Quietly laughing, Tony smiled in agreement. “**Yeah, DUM-E will be glad for a playmate. The rest of the bots will probably be thrilled too if they’re going to be as smitten as JARVIS is.”**

**“I simply find her charming, Sir;”** the AI haughtily replied, **“A quality that you do not possess as much as you like to believe you do.”**

Rhodey and Happy silently shook with laughter, mindful of the sleeping toddler, as Tony spluttered indignantly.
The three men continued to speak quietly, discussing anything that Darcy would need or want, having JARVIS place orders from parenting catalogues that the AI was scouring the internet for.

About an hour later Happy was putting away the delivered groceries while Rhodey was trying to find a way to stand up to go use the bathroom without waking Darcy and Tony was fiddling with Jeffrey, mumbling to himself. Rhodey had to fight the urge to smack his friend when he heard the genius debate the merits of actually making Jeffrey into a real robot, because that’d be so freaking cool, right? Tony was saved from violence when Rhodey felt baby Darcy stir in his lap, making the cutest little snuffling noises as she rubbed her eyes as she woke. Seriously, so. damn. cute. We are FUCKED. Kid’s gonna have us so whipped.

When bright blue eyes peered up at him, Rhodey gave her a gentle smile and spoke softly, “Hey, sweetheart, you sleep okay?”

Darcy nodded, then began looking around her as if searching for something. Knowing what she was after, Tony scooted closer to the pair and held out Jeffrey to his daughter.

“Here you go, hun, I just wanted to look at him. Jeffrey’s really cool.” Darcy smiled at Tony as she took Jeffrey back and sat up, hugging the robot to her chest.

“Thank you, Tony,” Darcy’s voice was still quiet with sleep, but began to grow in volume as she continued to talk, “He’s friends with JARVIS because he needs more robot friends and JARVIS said robots gotta stick together. Jeffrey can’t talk like JARVIS, but JARVIS said that’s okay and that they can still be friends.”

Tony’s heart just freaking melted. Looking over Darcy’s head, he saw that Rhodey had the same goofy smile on his face that Tony probably did. My kid is the cutest damn kid on this planet. Holy shit.

Before Tony could tell her about the other robots in the mansion, Darcy’s tummy let out a ferocious growl that seemed completely out of proportion to her small size. The little girl let out a peal of laughter before mushing her face into Jeffrey to hide her giggles. Chuckling with her, Tony reached out to pick her up and stood with Rhodey as the trio made their way down the hall toward the kitchen.

“Alright kiddo, how about a snack, hmm?” Darcy nodded into Tony’s shoulder, giggling as her tummy rumbled loudly once more. Rhodey patted Tony on the back and ruffled Darcy’s hair before turning to the open bathroom door.
Realizing that he was alone with his kid for the first time, however briefly, Tony squeezed Darcy closer to him and beamed when she snuggled her head beneath his chin.

“Alright, kiddo, what do you want to feed the monster in your tummy?”

After laughing again, Darcy took a moment to think before responding, “Grilled cheese? And soup?” she asked hopefully.

“That sounds perfect, sweetheart. Let’s see if Happy can whip up some for all of us.” Tony turned into the open doorway to see the man in question already getting out ingredients, having heard Darcy’s voice from the hallway. Nodding in thanks to his employee/friend, Tony set his daughter down on a barstool, grabbing a Stark-pad prototype from a drawer before taking the seat next to her.

Bringing up the internet Tony prepared to search for kid’s clothes, only to find several tabs open to children’s stores that JARVIS had found. Somehow, his AI had worked some magic so that all the clothes were sized for Darcy’s age, saving Tony the trouble. Smiling at a security camera in thanks, he turned the tablet on its side, propping it up so Darcy could see the screen.

“Okay, since you don’t have any stuff here, we thought you’d like to pick out some clothes and toys and whatever else you want.” Tony looked down at Darcy where he was met with her awe-filled eyes.

“Anything?!?” Darcy shrieked, causing Happy to drop the sandwich he was transferring to a plate on the floor. Seeing that Tony was distracted, he hastily picked the sandwich back up and decided that what nobody knew wouldn’t hurt them, but made a mental note to give Darcy one that wasn’t acquainted with the floor.

Flinching at the new pain in his eardrums, Tony nodded at the excited toddler. “Yup! Go ahead and pick whatever you want and JARVIS will get it delivered to us.”

His little girl was practically *vibrating* in her seat with glee, giggling as she very adeptly navigated the tablet. Tony watched in rapture as he chubby little fingers used the touch screen with ease, smiling whenever Darcy randomly giggled at what she saw.

Rhodey returned from the bathroom, smiling at the image of the father-daughter duo at the counter. Turning to look at Happy, he noticed what the man was making and went to get started on serving...
up tomato soup for everybody.

The next few minutes were spent in comfortable silence, punctuated every once in a while by Darcy’s giggles and happy munching. After everybody had eaten, Darcy continued to scroll through the website before nodding to herself and pushing it back to Tony.

“All done?” He raised an eyebrow in question then turned to look through what his kid had ordered when she nodded. The cart was full of brightly colored sundresses and equally bright patterned tights and leggings to go underneath. Tony didn’t think any of the colors or patterns repeated, let alone matched anything else. He didn’t mind if his kid wanted to run around like a rainbow explosion, he spent most of his time in dirty jeans and vintage band tee’s so it’s not like he could make any comment about style. Except for the suits, he mused, I have some damn fine suits. Continuing to scroll through the shopping cart, he smiled as he saw that the pajamas his kid picked fit with her nonsensical color scheme. She’s going to glow in the dark with this shit.

“JARVIS? Can you see about getting this stuff delivered, pronto? Darcy’s going to need something to change in before bed tonight.”

“Certainly, Sir. I have already contacted the clothing store and they are going to have all the items packed and delivered to the mansion by this evening. Also, I received word on the furniture, and it should be here by three o’clock.”

Looking at the clock on the microwave, Tony saw that they had just over an hour before Darcy’s bed and things arrived. Looking over to Happy and Rhodey, he saw the matching expressions on their faces that seemed to say, Time to own up to being her Dad. Sighing, Tony nodded and turned in his seat to face his little girl.

Darcy was happily sitting in her chair hugging Jeffrey to her chest while looking at the microwave with a level of interest that made Tony weary. Nothing is going to be safe in this house, I just know it.

Tony began hesitantly, not wanting to upset Darcy any more than she already had been. “Hey, sweetheart, can I ask you something?”

“Yup!” She smiled up at him, and his heart broke seeing how trusting and innocent she was.

“Did your mom ever mention your dad? Do you know who he is?”
Darcy’s face clouded with sadness at the mention of her mother, but it passed quickly as she thought about Tony’s question. “I know Dave isn’t my daddy. But that’s okay, he’s mean to me so I don’t care that he’s not my dad. Before my birthday he yelled at Momma about some tests she said she got at the doctor. I don’t know what paternity means, though. I asked Momma why Dave was mad and she said that he found out about Daddy.”

Tony held his breath as she continued, “Momma said that Daddy is really smart and builds stuff, and that’s why I like taking apart the toaster. And blender. And the microwave.” Darcy smiled sheepishly up at Tony who could only beam back at her in response. “I asked Momma why I never met Daddy and she said because he was real famous so she never got to tell him because he was with fancy people all the time and flew around the world.”

Darcy paused, realizing that this conversation was similar to the one earlier about her mom. She looked between Tony, Rhodey, and Happy, before asking them all at once, “Do you know who Daddy is?”

Tony fidgeted as he looked to his friends, but the looks on their faces told him that he wasn’t getting any help navigating the conversation with the toddler. Deciding to explain what he knew, Tony pulled out the letters from where he had stashed them in his back pocket, pulling the paternity test from the others and smoothing it out in front of his daughter.

“This is the test your mom got from the doctor, sweetheart. The paternity test.” He paused, but continued when Darcy nodded along. “This test can tell you if you’re related to somebody. So your mom used it to find out who your dad is. That’s why it’s called paternity.” Darcy smiled at him, happy to have learned something new. Taking her excitement as a good sign, Tony took a deep breath and decided it was time to stop stalling just answer the kid’s damn question already.

“So when your mom had the test made, the doctors told her who your dad is when it was finished.” Another deep breath, “I’m your dad, sweetheart.”

The kitchen was once again filled with silence as Darcy absorbed Tony’s words. A full two minutes passed and Tony began to worry that he broke his kid’s brains. Panic settled in, What if she doesn’t want me to be her dad? She likes Rhodey, does she like him better? What about—

His devolving train of thought was abruptly cut off as he somehow found himself with a chest-full of squealing and wriggling toddler, winding her tiny arms around his neck in a tiny bear-hug.
“THIS IS SO COOL YOU’RE MY DADDY AND I GET TO LIVE HERE AND JARVIS CAN BE MY BROTHER AND HAPPY AND RHODEY ARE HERE AND IT’S GONNA BE SO MUCH FUN!” Darcy continued to screech in Tony’s ear, but he tuned out her words and wrapped his arms tight around her.

Thank god, he thought, closing his eyes and pressing a kiss to the top of Darcy’s head, thank god she wants me.
Chapter 3

After several minutes, multiple hugs, and an emergency trip to the bathroom due to an excitable bladder, Darcy had finally calmed down enough that the men no longer feared that she’d hyperventilate. The slight ringing in their ears from her excited shrieking was worth it to see the little girl so happy.

Rhodey couldn’t stop smiling as he looked at the tiny family. Darcy had refused to let go of Tony after the big reveal, so she clung to him like a tiny koala as they all toured the house.

Darcy seemed to be impressed with everything, and Rhodey could tell by his friend’s smirk that Tony was just so damn pleased with himself. Casting a look at Happy next to him, the bodyguard rolled his eyes in commiseration. Yeah, we’re going to have to deal with that damn cocky attitude of his, Rhodey thought to himself.

At their second to last stop, the group toured the second floor of the mansion, letting Darcy decide which room would be hers. Wide eyed and overwhelmed, Darcy steered her father into each room about three times before making her choice. Her new room faced the back of the mansion, a curved wall of windows revealing the frankly outstanding view of the ocean. The room was fairly large, able to fit a large bed, a desk, and a couple love seats to create a comfortable living area. Other than the pieces of furniture the room was bare, seeing as Tony totally forgot that this was even a room, crap, look at that view, so Darcy would get to change it however she wanted once they took out the grownup furniture and replaced it with Darcy’s kid-friendly set.

Happy moved to the center of the room, a small furrow on his brow. “I don’t like how vulnerable this back wall is. JARVIS? Can we upgrade the glass and beef up the security system?”

“Consider it done, Mr. Hogan. New reinforced windows will be delivered in three days’ time. As for the security, I will create new subroutines to ensure that Miss Darcy’s security is always maintained at the highest level of sensitivity around the clock.”

Pleased, Happy turned back to his friends wore impressed faces at his requests. Even little Darcy nodded at him from over Tony’s shoulder as if she also approved of her new upgrades. Chuckling at the adorable girl’s antics, he addressed his next question at her.

“So, kiddo, you going to pick a color for the walls, or what?”
Happy felt like he was the greatest man in the world at the look of complete adoration Darcy gave him. The idea of painting her room seemed to momentarily shock her into silence, unable to make noise except for tiny gasps of excitement.

The men laughed at the toddler, feeling as if her joy was contagious. The noise seemed to startle Darcy’s mouth back to functioning, and began to ramble without pause for breath.

“I get to paint the walls? Can I have the ceiling look like SPACE?! Can I paint the walls AND the ceiling? Is it okay for the walls to be blue?!” Darcy took a deep breath after her barrage of questions, her tiny lungs unable to hold both that level of volume as well as the amount of words for any longer.

Still laughing, the men turned back to the hallway and Tony patted one tiny leg that was wrapped tightly around his ribcage as he responded. “Sure thing, sweetheart. I think a space ceiling sounds awesome. JARVIS, be a dear and find some good artists for Darcy’s room?”

“Of course, Sir.”

Darcy looked up to the ceiling, “Thanks JARVIS! You’re the best!”

“Thank you, Miss Darcy. You are very kind.” Tony scoffed at his AI’s preening.

Clapping his hands together, Tony turned to his companions who were shadowing him, smiling at Darcy’s giggle at being spun around so quickly.

“Okay everybody, brace yourselves. It’s time to see the crowning achievement of this place—next to you, JARVIS, you’re still one of my favorites.”

“Yes, that warms my heart greatly, Sir.” Tony swears that if he had been able, JARVIS totally would have rolled his eyes just then.

“Where are we going now, Daddy?” The little voice in his ear almost brought him to his knees with the amount of love he could hear in Darcy’s words. Daddy. Holy shit. I’m done for. This kid has her tiny hand wrapped around my heart and this is the best feeling in the world.
Tony broke himself away from his thoughts when he saw Rhodey raise a mocking eyebrow at him. Ah, must of had that dopey smile on my face again. Like the mature adult he was, Tony stuck out his tongue in retaliation before turning away and making his way to the stairs. As the group descended to the main floor, then to the basement, Tony explained to Darcy.

“Okay, pumpkin! Do you like the name pumpkin?” Tony felt Darcy shake her head ‘no’ as she giggled on his back. He shrugged, unaffected, “It’s okay, we’ll work on finding you an adorable nick name later. I was just testing that one out. Anyways! We’re headed to my workshop! Or lab. Really it can be called either. Your mom was right when she said I build stuff. I own a big company and they sell the stuff I make. Most of what I make gets sold to the army and stuff, so that the soldiers have the best tech available to help them out. Following along?” A small nod against his shoulder, and Tony continued.

“I make other stuff too, like the tablet that you ordered clothes on. I’m still testing that, so no one else has one, just me. I’m also working on other stuff, called green energy, which means it’s used to make stuff work, but it’s clean and doesn’t pollute the earth.” Tony paused his speech as he came to the lab’s door, typing in the passcode. He made a mental note to add another keypad lower on the frame so that Darcy could use one herself while she was still pint-sized.

When the light on the pad turned green and the door clicked as it unlocked, Tony smiled to himself, knowing that this next bit was going to blow his kid’s mind.

“Wanna know what else is in here?” He paused, and continued after he felt another nod against his shoulder. “I have more robots!”

Tony cursed under his breath as Darcy began screeching in his ear once more.

“MORE ROBOTS?! THIS IS THE BEST DAY EVER CAN I MEET THEM DO THEY TALK LIKE JARVIS DOES WHAT ARE THEIR NAMES—” Before Tony suffered permanent hearing loss, he felt Darcy being removed from his back and watched Rhodey step beside him with a squirming toddler in his outstretched arms. Smiling at Tony, Rhodey set Darcy on her feet where she proceeded to bounce on her toes and cackle like a tiny mad scientist.

“If there was any doubt that she was yours, I think that reaction would have erased it,” Rhodey mumbled. Happy snorted a laugh behind them.

Tony, who couldn’t help but laugh at Darcy’s excitement, kneeled down to put his hands on her shoulders as she quieted, making sure she was making eye contact before he gave her some ground rules.
“Okay, child of mine. I know you’re excited to meet the ‘bots,” Darcy nodded so quickly Tony briefly worried about whiplash, but he pressed on. “I just need you to follow some rules in here, ok? Great. So there’s lots of cool stuff in the workshop, but you have to remember that a lot of it is dangerous too. None of it is made for tiny hands like yours.” Tony chuckled as Darcy held up her hands in front of her face, frowning as if just now realizing that yes, her hands were in fact quite tiny.

“Even though you don’t have any right now, I want you to make sure that you wear shoes in the lab, since there’s always a lot of stuff on the floor. And ask me before you grab anything, okay? I don’t want you accidentally getting hurt.” Darcy nodded, but resumed her cackling as Tony stood to push open the door. *This kid and robots, what the hell?*

Reaching down for her hand, Tony led the group into the lab.

*****

This was the best. day. *ever.*

Darcy was still sad about her Momma not coming home, but she let herself be happy at finding her Daddy and three new friends today. Or was JARVIS her brother? She’d ask him later.

Almost more exciting than all that, though, were the robots lined up in front of her and her Daddy.

*Robots. So cool.*

DUM-E was the biggest, and he was basically a big claw on wheels. Darcy had to tilt her head back to look at him in the…face? Where he had a little camera. Darcy wasn’t sure why he was carrying a fire extinguisher, but she guessed he had it just in case.

U looked like DUM-E, but had a smaller claw and a bigger camera-face, and a computer attached to the front with a keyboard. She asked if that made him smarter than DUM-E, but her Daddy just laughed and said that he uses U to record experiments and stuff.

Last was Butterfingers, who was a bit smaller than the other two robots and had two claw arms, and two cameras on top like eyes. Daddy had told her to be careful when she hands stuff to Butterfingers because he drops stuff a lot. Darcy didn’t ask why that was when the robot had extra eyes *and* hands.
None of the robots could talk like JARVIS could, but they all seemed to understand when they were spoken to, and could make a bunch of happy beeps and whirrs in response.

“Okay, minions, listen up! This here is Darcy, my daughter. Please note that she is small. So very small. Since she is so small, she is not as durable as me, so please find it in your coding to practice lab safety when she is here. I’m looking at you, Butterfingers.” Her Daddy sent a funny look to the robot, who made a sad whirring noise in response.

Quickly, though, Butterfingers perked up and rolled to Darcy, his camera eyes zooming in on her face. DUM-E and U followed his lead, surrounding Darcy and staring just as intently. Darcy shifted on he feet, looking at each robot before speaking.

“Hi! Wanna be friends?”

The ‘bots all of a sudden made a whole bunch of happy beeps and whirrs at her, and each other, before extending their claws to pat Darcy on the head in greeting. Darcy lost her breath in a fit of giggles, which only seemed to please the ‘bots even more as they kept making happy noises.

From behind her, she could hear her Daddy laughing with Rhodey and Happy.

“Told you they’d be thrilled.”
Ah! You guys are so sweet. Thank you for reading! While I'm loving all the fluff here, I'm going to start getting into more plot after I introduce Pepper next. I needed some fluff after I made baby Darcy cry. That was uncool of me.

The next several weeks were a whirlwind in the Malibu mansion. The days were filled with toddler-proofing the house (made all the more challenging by said toddler’s eerily high intelligence), rearranging furniture, painting Darcy’s room, and family time.

Three men, one AI, and one energetic two year old may not have been a normal family, but they made it work. Rhodey was there for cuddles and naps when little Darcy got sad at reminders of her Momma. Happy let the tyke ride around on his back as he worked on his and Tony’s hot rod collection, answering all of her questions and letting her honk the horns. JARVIS was more than pleased to be a teacher to Darcy, having designed his own curriculum for his new favorite human that matched her superior intelligence. And Tony, well Tony was just the luckiest bastard of them all.

Darcy followed Tony around like a second shadow, often holding onto his pant leg with one hand and Jeffrey in the other. Her bright clothes were often smudged with grease from spending most of her time in the lab with him, using her own tiny tool set he made for her as she learned the ins and outs of simple mechanics. More often than not, Rhodey or Happy would find the duo sitting side by side at Tony’s workbench, wearing matching welding masks and creating something new together. Jeffrey was kept safe out of reach of any sparks or grease, as Butterfingers had taken a shine to the stuffed robot and kept him out of harm’s way when Darcy came to the lab.

As the weeks passed, Tony noticed a change in his ‘bots behaviors. Where before they remained in the lab at all times, now Tony was hearing them rolling around the mansion, poking their ‘heads’ in rooms and retreating again. Letting his curiosity get the better of him, Tony followed U after the ‘bot had peeked into the kitchen where Tony was grabbing some much needed coffee.

U rolled down the hall, peeking into each room he passed before rolling forward again. Tony kept pace behind him, keeping his steps quiet so that U wouldn’t notice him. After a couple more minutes of searching the first floor U made his way to the mansion’s elevator and pressed the call button, waiting patiently for the door to open. With a gentle ding, the doors opened for U who rolled inside. Turning around, the ‘bot pushed the button for the top floor and waited for the doors to close. Noticing Tony, U made a small beep in greeting, as well as a jaunty wave as the doors closed.
Blinking, at a loss of what just happened, Tony made his way to the stairs to see what the hell his ‘bot was up to. Skipping steps as he jogged up to the second floor Tony had just reached the landing as he heard the ping of the elevator doors open. Poking his head around the corner, he watched in quiet fascination as U rolled down to Darcy’s open door and continue inside.

Taking a fortifying sip of his coffee, Tony followed U to his daughter’s room and froze at what he saw inside.

“JARVIS,” he whispered, “Two things. One, please tell me you’re recording this. And two, get Happy and Rhodey up here, quietly.” He received a quiet chime in response, JARVIS letting him know that he was following his instructions. Moments later, the quiet footsteps of his friends were heard in the hall.

Without moving his eyes from the scene in front of him, Tony put a finger to his lips to keep the other men quiet then pointed to the scene in front of him. Tony heard Rhodey huff out an amused breath once he flanked Tony’s side in the doorway.

Inside Darcy’s room, the toddler sat with her legs crossed on the floor in front of a very happy-sounding DUM-E.

A very pink, DUM-E.

Darcy was wielding a paintbrush with as determination as a two year old possibly could, making a bright pink mess of both her and the ‘bot. DUM-E’s base was covered in silver glitter, while the rest of his frame was being covered in an assaulting shade of hot pink.

Looking out of the windows, Butterfingers held Jeffrey in one claw away from his own painted body. Where DUM-E had the single shade of pink, Butterfingers had alternating stripes of purple and green. Little drops of paint periodically plopped on the floor, but this went unnoticed by the ‘bot, who seemed at peace watching the ocean from Darcy’s windows.

U, who apparently knew to be patient and to wait his turn for a paint job, rolled to Darcy’s bookshelf and grabbed a book at random. Squinting his eyes, Tony was able to make out the title, The Giving Tree. Taking the book in his claw, U rolled to Darcy’s desk and propped the book against the computer. Gently, U opened the book, turning the pages every minute or so.
Tony didn’t know what to make of that. U was reading. Reading. A children’s book. And by the sounds of his beeping, he was enjoying it too. Looking to Rhodey and Happy to see if they understood what was happening, he was met with matching shocked expressions from both men. Right, well at least we’re all on the same page then.

“Okay, DUM-E! You’re all done now!” Darcy giggled up at the robot who patted her head in thanks, rolling over to meet U at the desk. After a series of beeps between the ‘bots, U nudged the book toward DUM-E and made his way to Darcy.

“What’s your favorite color, U?” The robot whirred a low noise of consideration, looking down at the array of colors placed in front of the little girl. After a few more moments of deliberation, U grabbed a cup of deep red and handed it to Darcy.

“Ooooh, pretty! Red is my favorite too!” Wasting no more time, Tony watched as his daughter promptly grabbed a new brush to start giving U a make over.

Smile on his face, Tony slowly and silently backed out of the doorway, Rhodey and Happy following in his wake. Once a safe distance from the room, the three men looked at one another before simultaneously breaking out into quiet disbelieving laughter.

“I just…what the hell, Stark? That was so fucking cute but what the hell?” Rhodey kept shaking his head, eyes distant as he thought back to the scene in Darcy’s room.

“I have no idea! I knew the ‘bots loved her, and she was crazy about them, but this is a whole new level of weird. U was reading. Reading, Rhodey! I didn’t know he knew how to do that! And apparently the bot’s have favorite colors?” Tony scratched at his beard before taking a deep swallow of his coffee, hoping the elixir of life could clear this up for him.

“If I may, Sir,” JARVIS’s voice floated from the nearest speaker, “I believe I possibly have some answers for you gentlemen?” Waiting until Tony had nodded, JARVIS continued. “Miss Darcy’s presence in the lab since her arrival and resulting interaction with the ‘bots appears to have…awakened, for lack of a better term, latent personalities within them.” Tony quirked one incredulous eyebrow, gesturing for JARVIS to continue while he gulped down the rest of his coffee, deciding that it was most definitely necessary for processing this information.

“When you created DUM-E, U, and Butterfingers as low-level AI’s, they had basic coding to allow for learning and adaptation to their environments. That is why DUM-E now knows how to use the fire extinguisher, and Butterfingers knows which tool you need when you ask for it by name. Since their creation, they never left the lab, and only had you, Mr. Rhodes, and Mr. Hogan for company.
You only truly interacted with them as assistants, and Mr. Rhodes and Mr. Hogan acted much the same. However, Miss Darcy talks to the ‘bots as if they were people. This distinction lets them observe her behavior, and they listen to her when she speaks. I’m not sure if you’ve noticed, Sirs, but Miss Darcy often speaks her thoughts aloud. When she does so, the ‘bots are able to see the reasons and motivations behind her actions, adding to their learning process. Not only does Miss Darcy speak to them, she also asks them questions. Unlike you, Sir, Miss Darcy never asks anything rhetorical, and is always interested in their responses. This is how they have come to learn things about themselves. That Butterfingers likes to watch the ocean and has become fond of Jeffrey, U has found a love for Miss Darcy’s children’s books, and DUM-E feels most content when in Miss Darcy’s company. Your daughter, Sir, is teaching them how to be alive.”

Total silence followed the metaphorical bomb JARVIS just dropped on all their heads. Silently, the three men looked to each other in wide eyed shock, jaws on the floor.

Happy broke the silence first, hand over his eyes as if visual stimuli was too much at the moment.

“Okay, just, give me a moment here. What you’re saying, JARVIS, what you’re saying is that Darcy, two year old Darcy, her influence is making formerly barely-functioning robots into people.” Happy grunted, not entirely sure what to make of the information.

“While that is a rather base way to explain what is happening, I believe the answer is yes. Miss Darcy is quite a special child.”

Rhodey leaned back against the wall, tilting his head back so it was supported, mumbling about goddamn Starks and their inability to be fucking normal about anything.

Tony, still absorbing his AI’s words, was broken out of his reverie by Darcy’s laughter floating down the hall. A smile began to grow on his face, until the man was simply beaming at his friends.

“My fucking kid, guys. She’s the best.”

A beat of silence.

Suddenly, all three men broke out into loud guffaws, none mentioning the happy tears on each other’s faces.
Darcy, little ball of energy baby Darcy, was the best goddamn thing in the world.
Virginia “Pepper” Potts faced herself in the bathroom mirror at the Stark Industries Malibu office, giving herself a pep-talk. She had been Mr. Stark’s PA for six months now, and it was time for her performance review.

“You are Pepper goddamn Potts. You do not get flustered at your boss’ handsome face. You remember that you have seen that handsome face black-out drunk at galas and charity functions alike. You know that SI’s efficiency has tripled since you were hired. You are Pepper fucking Potts, and you kick this job’s ass.”

Satisfied, Pepper nodded to herself, straightened her blazer, tucked an errant wisp of hair behind her ear, and strode out of the bathroom with a level of confidence and competence that she had perfected over the years. The clacking of her Louboutin shoes on the tile echoed through the wide hallways, turning heads as she passed.

Smirking to herself, Pepper raised her chin and continued on her way while repeating her pep talk to herself as she neared Mr. Stark’s door.

All of her swagger and confidence abruptly vanished as she looked to her desk next to his door on instinct.

There, sitting on her immaculate desk, was the cutest little girl Pepper had ever seen. The girl was wearing a hot pink dress with navy tights dotted with white stars, her little feet wearing itty bitty purple Doc Marten boots. Her hair was unruly with its curls, creating a wild dark halo around her face. Propped against her side was a plush blue robot, looking as if it was well loved.

Looking around the open space, Pepper frowned as she failed to see an adult accompanying the little girl. Deciding that Mr. Stark could wait a few minutes, she approached the girl.

“Hi, there, sweetheart! I’m Pepper, what’s your name?”

The little girl looked up and beamed, “Hi! You have a pretty name. I’m Darcy! This is Jeffrey.” She held the stuffed robot out, and giggled when Pepper grabbed his hand to shake in greeting.
“It’s lovely to meet you both, Darcy. But why are you all by your self? Do you have a parent with you?” Pepper looked around again, straining her ears for any incoming footsteps. Hearing nothing, she looked back to Darcy who had begun swinging her legs where they hung off the edge of the desk.

“Don’t worry, my Daddy is here. He said he had to go potty but he’ll be back real soon.”

Pleased, Pepper moved around so that she could sit in her desk chair, deciding that she would wait until the girl’s father arrived before she would meet with Mr. Stark. Surely, he would understand. The man was an ass, but certainly not heartless.

Spinning around to face Pepper, Darcy folded her legs in front of her, smiling to herself as she poked around Pepper’s jar of multi-colored pens. Pepper opened a drawer and pulled out a legal pad, handing it to Darcy.

“Here, you can draw if you like.” Smiling, Darcy eagerly took the paper and pulled a purple pen from the jar.

“I like that you have fun pens. All the other people just have black ones. They’re boring.”

Pepper chuckled lightly, and watched as the little girl began covering the paper in smiley faces, holding the pen with a level of dexterity that just astonished her.

“So what does your Dad do here, Darcy?”

Darcy paused in her drawing to smile up at Pepper as she answered. “He builds stuff! It’s really cool. He let’s me help and I get to take other stuff apart. Daddy says it’s a ‘learning process,’ but I just think it’s fun.” She looked back down to the pad of paper in her lap and returned to her drawing, her little pink tongue between her lips in concentration.

“Well, since the R&D department is right below this floor, whenever you come with your Dad you can come up here and visit if you’d like.” Pepper wasn’t sure what compelled her to make the offer to the toddler, but it felt right. Maybe she’d start keeping candy in her desk as a bribe.

Pepper was broken out of her planning as the pen and paper clattered to the desk as Darcy jumped up in excitement.
“Really?! We can be friends?!” Darcy was bouncing on her toes, her little chubby face flushed in her excitement.

Laughing with the animated little girl, Pepper nodded, “Of, course! Us ladies have to stick together, don’t you think?” Pepper only received a victorious yell in response, soon followed by a lap full of wriggly Darcy.

Darcy wrapped her arms around the older woman, chatting excitedly about all the cool lady stuff they could do together. Pepper just smiled, squeezing the girl to her chest and nodding along.

Her little bubble of happy was popped by Mr. Stark’s office door slamming open, startling both of the girls. Pepper sucked in a breath in order to explain to her boss, when Darcy’s chipper voice beat her to it.

“Daddy!”

_Daddy???_

Pepper froze and stared dumbly at Mr. Stark as Darcy leapt from her lap and ran to him, wrapping her little arms around his legs.

“Pepper said we can be _friends_, Daddy! Since we’re both ladies and ladies gotta stick together. Like JARVIS and the ‘bots! Isn’t that awesome?!”

Said older lady was still stuck on the connection between Mr. Stark and ‘Daddy.’

Mr. Stark reached down and hoisted Darcy into the air, giving her a little toss that threw her into a fit of giggles. Swinging the girl on his back, Mr. Stark looked over and smiled at the baffled woman, Darcy beaming at her over his shoulder.

“Come inside, Miss Potts, you and I have some things to discuss.”
Pepper Potts was not a woman to be easily cowed. She directed board meetings with an iron fist with manicured nails and designer nail polish. Her steely gaze left chairmen quaking in their boots, her lethal competence in business management a force to be feared. She was Pepper goddamn Potts, and she had nerves of steel.

Unfortunately, Pepper goddamn Potts felt like an unruly schoolgirl in the principal’s office at the moment, sitting in one of the chairs in front of Mr. Stark’s desk feeling four sets of eyes on her. Five, if one was to include JARVIS, the omniscient AI that he was.

Mr. Stark sat in his ridiculous desk chair, the ostentatious leather wing back making him look like a cheap Bond villain when he steepled his fingers under his chin, narrowing his eyes at her.

Rhodey, whom Pepper had developed a great friendship with, stood at parade rest over Mr. Stark’s right shoulder, his professional mask not betraying an ounce of familiarity.

Happy stood behind Mr. Stark’s other shoulder, matching Rhodey’s cool stance.

Lastly, there was Darcy. The little girl sat in the chair next to Pepper, beaming up at the older woman, giving her the confidence to keep her professional mask on, not letting one bit of nerves show through to the men.

She was Pepper fucking Potts, and she could handle any shit the world threw at her.

The silence was broken by JARVIS, “Sir, I believe that Miss Potts can be trusted. She has been unfailingly loyal to both you and SI, and her presence has benefited SI greatly since she has been hired. Thusly, increasing your profits.”

Pepper gave a small smile to the security camera in the corner, “Thank you, JARVIS, that means a lot to me.”

“Of course, Miss Potts.”
Mr. Stark snorted and rolled his eyes, “Quit flirting you two, there are innocent ears present.” Straightening up, he winked at his daughter, *Mr. Stark has a daughter she could not get over that at ALL*, and turned to meet Pepper’s eye.

“So here’s the deal Miss Potts. You’re being let in on my big secret. *Our* big secret. Since Darcy just turned three, we still have a year or so before we have to think about putting her in a real school, no matter how much JARVIS wants to keep her under his tutelage forever.”

The AI cut in indignantly, “*Certainly, Sir, but let’s not forget about the three near-panic attacks you had last week when Mr. Hogan first brought the topic to light.*”

Pepper muffled a laugh behind her hand as Mr. Stark’s face turned bright red in embarrassment, before he continued as if he had not been interrupted.

“So, despite that window of time we have, it’s still *imperative* for Darcy’s safety that it isn’t made public that she is my kid. There’s too much pressure under the Stark name, and I won’t have that on her. Not to mention the enemies I have out there, corporate and otherwise. If I find out that you let word slip, that Darcy’s safety has been compromised in *any* way, I will make your life a living hell.”

Nodding along, Pepper felt the gravity of the situation, and knew that she would do whatever it took to look after Darcy. This little girl was special, and was blessed to have these men be so fiercely protective of her. Not only them, but an unparalleled AI that had free access to the world’s internet, created by one of the smartest men on the planet. Pepper shuddered at the thought of what damage JARVIS could do if he truly desired. Turning her head to look at a now napping Darcy, Pepper’s shudder halted and she smiled in its wake. *Yes. Let’s keep that thought in our back pocket for now.* Lifting her determined gaze to her boss, she gave him a smile worthy of a protective lioness.

“I understand completely, Mr. Stark.”

He searched her gaze, and smiled slowly as he found what he was looking for. Nodding to her, he leaned back in his ridiculous chair, his walls down, finally relaxed.

“I think you can start calling me Tony, Miss Potts.”

Pepper returned his unguarded smile, “Then call me Pepper.”
Neither noticed the other men rolling their eyes in synch with one another. JARVIS, however, gave a little happy hum in his coding at what he saw. Yes, the thought, *This will be good.*

*****

The following month saw Pepper at the mansion almost daily, both for work and for spending quality ‘girl time’ with Darcy. Her first order of business was helping the little girl manage her hair, because apparently a mansion full of three adult men and an AI couldn’t figure out anything past running a brush through the girl’s curls.

One memorable occasion had the men of the house sitting on the sofa, raptly paying attention to Pepper as she instructed them how to do simple hair-do’s for little Darcy. Happy even took notes on the different types of braids.

Pepper made sure that each man kept a few hair-ties and a small brush on hand at all times because Darcy was a whirlwind on the best of days, and her hair needed to be pulled away from her face so the poor girl could see where she was going.

After everyone had mastered the art of styling the toddler’s hair, Pepper introduced Darcy to little fun girly things such as nail polish. Sure, Darcy was young, but the girl loved bright colors and Pepper couldn’t bring herself to deny the girl something fun. Ever since, Darcy’s nails were always an array of colors, often sporting polka-dots and stripes as well. Pepper also had the men learn how to paint nails and was pleased with the results. Rhodey was surprisingly apt with a nail brush, so she made a mental note to have him do her touch ups from then on.

Pepper was thrilled with her life at that time. Tony was still a man trollop, but she got to see behind the walls to the real man. His constant use of the media like a three ring circus was orchestrated so that no one looked too close to home, to Darcy. Rhodey and Happy became the brothers she never had, willing to commiserate with her over a glass of wine at the Stark’s antics. Finally, she found a surprising confidant in JARVIS. The AI was far wiser than she had anticipated from her limited exposure to him at the offices, but in the mansion, he was *alive.* He listened to Pepper rant when she needed to, and gave her sage advice in return. Pepper also listened to him wax poetic about the tiny Stark’s progress with her schooling, always bringing a smile to her face as she heard him dote on her throughout the day.

Yes, things were good. Spectacular, even. But all of those good feelings came crashing down as the adults sat around the kitchen table for a glass of wine, congratulating one another on successfully getting Darcy to take a bath and go to bed with minimum fuss. Silencing everyone’s laughter with only seven words, JARVIS spoke.
“Sir, Mr. Stane is on his way.”

Chapter End Notes

dun dun dunnnnnn

no one likes obadiah. universal fact.
Chapter 6

The house was so silent after JARVIS’ announcement, Rhodey could have sworn he could hear Darcy’s soft snores from upstairs. Placing is wine glass on the table, he ran a hand over his face and gathered his thoughts.

It was an unspoken agreement that Obadiah Stane was a little shady. While he had been with Tony’s dad from almost the beginning of SI, everyone seemed to see that Stane’s guiding hand on Tony’s shoulder grew a little stifling where it was once a source of comfort. Something had changed in the man, making him colder, harsher.

Tony couldn’t get rid of the guy, because despite the bad vibes he gave off, Tony had known Stane since he was a kid. That many years of family ties can’t just be snapped in one moment. Rhodey kept a weary eye on Stane for Tony, though. Just in case his friend had one of his rare bouts of nostalgia and put a little too much trust in Stane again.

Looking between Happy, Pepper, and Tony, Rhodey knew they were all thinking along the same lines.

They had been lucky that Stane had been gone for the last year, taking back to back to back trips, visiting each and every SI base on the globe personally to judge their progress. Pepper kept the line of communication open between Tony and Stane, but seeing as SI offices were almost 100% self-sufficient, not much contact was needed. Hence, the group being caught by surprise and Stane’s sudden appearance.

“He hadn’t sent any word of coming back,” Pepper said, eyes wide. She took a gulp of her wine to punctuate her statement, and Rhodey could see her train of thought.

Stane was coming here, to the mansion, where Darcy was. No one was dumb enough to not realize Stane’s probable reaction to the newest Stark. He was always covetous of first Howard’s, then Tony’s intellect. Stane saw their genius as his money ticket, his way to the top.

Rhodey shook his head, wondering how and why the Starks brought Stane into their fold to begin with. Even Happy, the most unbiased bastard that there was, was able to smell Stane’s rottenness from their brief contact over the years. The man had good instincts, and Happy made sure to trust them with all he had. Rhodey learned over time that Happy was hardly, if ever wrong, so when Happy said Stane was trouble, Rhodey kept a weather eye out for any shit storm on the horizon.
Tony swirled his wine in his glass, watching how the low light reflected off of the jewel tone red of the drink. After throwing it back all at once, Tony placed the glass gently on the table, then dropped his head rather unceremoniously to the surface with a loud thunk. Rhodey winced in sympathy.

“Shit. Fuck. Goddamn it all. How could I possibly forget about Obadiah?” Tony reared up, meeting everyone’s eye, searching for answers. Groaning, Tony dropped his head to the desk again. “Stane’s going to spew at that ‘heir of SI’ shit to my baby girl, isn’t he?”

Rhodey nodded even though his friend couldn’t see, dread pooling like ice shards in his stomach. Stane’s pressure, along with Howard’s, brought Tony to a near mental break back at MIT when Tony was just a punk kid.

“She has all of us though, Tony,” Rhodey reassured, “He can’t pull that crap with her like he did with you because he’ll have to get through all of us.” Pepper and Happy nodded in agreement on either side of him.

“Besides,” Happy drawled, “I personally would love to see the tyke deliver her own brand of sass to Stane. You can barely keep up and she’s your damn kid,” he laughed, “The old shit’s not gonna know what to do with a hyper-intelligent three-year-old.”

Pepper let out an inelegant snort at the mental image as Tony sat up with a smile.

“Okay, yeah. Yeah, we can do this. Family loyalty to Stane aside, he’s gotta deal with us before the chump can even get to my kid.”

“Not to mention, Mr. Stane will also have to get through me,” JARVIS added.

The hair on the back of Rhodey’s neck stood on end at JARVIS’s voice. He had never heard the AI sound so cold and dangerous. Meeting Happy’s raised eyebrow with a his own, the two seemed to have the same thought.

Yeah, we got this.

*****
They didn’t have this at all.

Darcy? The kid sure as hell had the situation handled.

Stane arrived the night before, quickly saying a hello to everyone before retiring to his usual guest room claiming tiredness from the plane ride. Thankfully, Stane’s room was at the opposite end of the mansion than Darcy’s.

Tony, Pepper, Happy, and Rhodey met in the kitchen earlier than usual by unspoken agreement. Nodding to one another, they braced themselves with coffee and the solidarity of their protectiveness for Darcy as they waited for Stane to come down.

What followed was a grueling ten minutes of small talk, where Stane boasted his leadership abilities he displayed at several SI offices and gossiped about other board members to Tony.

Rhodey watched his friend twitch nervously from the corner of his eye, mentally begging the man to calm the hell down. While he understood Tony’s anxiety, it wasn’t going to help them when Darcy came down for breakfast.

As if on cue, everyone in the kitchen stilled as the soft ping of the elevator echoed down the hall. Stane raised his eyebrows at Tony in question.

“Another conquest, Tony? You sly dog,” Stane winked grossly at Tony while Happy snorted into his coffee and Pepper’s face turned bright red. Rhodey simply rolled his eyes and hoped that the universe could speed this up a bit. It was painful.

Clearing his throat, Tony rubbed the back of his neck as he replied, “Uh, no. Not in the slightest actually.”

Before Stane question him, Tony walked to the kitchen doorway just as a little sleepy Darcy walked in, flanked by the ‘bots at her sides.

Rhodey could feel the goofy smile that was becoming more common than not when Darcy was around appear his face, and saw it mirrored on everyone else’s, barring Stane.
Lifting up her arms, Darcy silently requested for her father to pick her up for a morning cuddle. After getting her hug, she blearily looked over to Pepper and stretched out her arms for a cuddle with the woman. From Pepper Darcy moved to Happy, then to Rhodey, before reaching for her father once more. When she was back in Tony’s arms, she rubbed her little hands in her eyes to wake herself up. As if seeing the kitchen and its inhabitants for the first time, Darcy smiled at Tony.

“Good morning, Daddy.”

Stane spit his coffee clear across the counter, hitting Happy with some of the spray. Without taking his eyes off of the unfolding scene, Rhodey tossed a towel to his friend to help him out.

At the sound of Stane’s spluttering and choking, Darcy turned her head, seeing Stane for the first time. Blinking at him a couple times, she patiently waited for him to say something first. The adults of the house learned fairly quickly that their little girl didn’t fully wake up until at least nine o’clock, but she preferred to wake up with everyone else because she liked their company.

Stane’s eyes flicked rapidly between Tony’s face and Darcy’s, mind running a thousand miles per hour. Seeming to gather his wits and composure after a few more moments of consideration, Stane plastered on a charming smile that looked plain *wrong* at seven in the morning, and proceeded to greet Darcy.

“Well who might this lovely lady be, hmm?” *There’s the slimy bastard we all know and love,* Rhodey smirked to himself. His confidence was growing as he watched Darcy, her face becoming more and more unimpressed by the moment.

“Surely, Tony, you would have told me about such this *stunning* little lady of a daughter as soon as you were made aware?” Stane didn’t even wait for an answer as he continued, “I bet she’s just as smart as her Pop, eh? Another Stark heir to the line! This is good news, son.” Tony flinched at Stane’s address, never have been comfortable with Stane’s attempt at a father-son-like relationship.

Before Tony could respond, Darcy spoke up.

“Why are you so loud? It’s *morning.*” The expression on her face told Stane that there would be absolutely *no* tolerance for his shit before noon. Beside him, Pepper’s shoulders shook with silent laughter.
Yeah, their girl would be just fine.

*****

After The Breakfast, *Yes, Rhodey, the capitals are* totally *necessary*, the group moved to the living room where the household adults, as well as JARVIS, explained with deadly seriousness how important it was that Darcy remained out of any media attention, and that she would only be made known as a Stark if she wanted to when she was of age.

It took more effort than Rhodey was comfortable was with, but the man finally caved when JARVIS began contributing more and more to the debate until he was leading the whole thing. Stane would never say it, but everyone knew that he was terrified of the AI. Rhodey hid a smile behind his hand at the thought. *God bless Tony and his damn beautiful brain.*

He turned his attention to the toddler sprawled on the floor, her ‘bots watching cartoons with her. Butterfingers held Jeffrey in one claw, as the other periodically patted Darcy on the head, making the girl smile.

Having noticed the ‘bots unusual presence (at least to Stane), as well as their new paint jobs, Rhodey answered the man’s unasked question.

“The ‘bots have more personality now since Darcy has been here. They like having someone else to interact with that isn’t Tony or another adult.” Rhodey thought it prudent not to divulge the full story of just how much Darcy was changing the personalities of the little AI’s. From the corner of his eye he saw Tony give him a nod of thanks, clearly thinking that information was need-to-know only.

Stane tilted his head as he watched the young girl chat to the ‘bots about what was happening on the TV. DUM-E had tilted his head down to look at his friend as she spoke. Rhodey wasn’t sure how a claw on wheels and one camera lens managed to have such a look of concentration on its face, but by now he learned to not think too deeply on it. Darcy just brought life to everything.

Rhodey moved his gaze back to Stane who was still watching Darcy as she giggled and spoke to her ‘bots.

Things may be good now, but Rhodey was going to keep his eye on Stane. The man was a snake in the grass. He could feel it in his bones.
Chapter 7

Four years later, Tony finds himself scrolling through family photos on his computer, most of which provided by JARVIS’ security cameras. Smiling as he took a sip of his scotch, he thought back on the day.

His baby girl turned seven that morning. Tony had woken up to Darcy jumping on the bed, narrowly missing the family jewels, laughing while yelling at him to wake up because it was her birthday, and there is things and stuff to do, Dad!

After a shower, breakfast, and some coffee (all the coffee), the adults of the house had herded Darcy into the living room for presents. Tony was still thankful that Pepper moved in shortly after being brought in on Darcy’s existence because as skilled as he had become at a french braid, Pepper had the ability to execute one flawlessly before she had her coffee.

Seriously, the woman was a goddess.

Redirecting his thoughts back to his kid and away from certain redheaded people who we do not think about when it is after eight, come on, Tony, you know better than this, he smiled as he remembered Darcy’s face at her gifts.

From Pepper, Darcy got a whole set of jeans, one in every (obnoxious) color imaginable. She was going through a tomboy phase and was slowly tossing out all her dresses, but she was loathe to give up her fun colors. Again, Pepper was a goddess for her quick thinking.

Happy got Darcy a set of child-sized boxing gloves in a bright traffic-cone orange, and promised to start teaching her how to box. Rhodey had groaned, and asked the room at large if everyone thought that Darcy really needed to learn how to punch things.

Quickly getting over his drama, Rhodey’s gift was next. Tony was afraid Darcy was going to wet herself with excitement when she opened the box. Inside was a Darcy-sized Air Force bomber jacket, her call sign “Lil’ Bot” embroidered on the chest. Tony smiled when he noticed that the jacket was big enough to allow her to grow into it, letting her keep it for years to come. When she was five, Rhodey had taken Darcy to base, passing her off as an in-law’s kid, so that she could get up close and personal with all the different planes. Tony heard about that day, every day, for three months. Thankfully Rhodey had taken mercy on him and let Darcy accompany him to base as often as he was allowed. He’d never seen his baby girl so happy.
Darcy had looked up at him then, her tiny frame swamped in the brown leather. Tony had one of those moments where time seemed to stop and his heart just melted with the love he had for his kid. Things certainly weren’t always easy, especially not with the Stark personality shining bright in them both, and definitely not with a house full of bold people. But they were happy. Every once in a while in moments like these, Tony sent a little nod of thanks to Cheryl for sending Darcy into his life. He still carried some heartbreak about how Cheryl ended her life, but he made sure that he’d make her proud with how he was raising their kid.

Bringing himself back to the present moment with a gulp of hot coffee, Tony smiled at his daughter when she began pestering him about her gift.

“So, what’d’ya get me, Dad? Not sure how you can beat Uncle Rhodey’s gift. Or Peppers. Or Uncle Happy’s. Really, the bar is set pretty high, old man.” Tony rolled his eyes at her teasing.

“Prepare to have your mind blown, kid. JARVIS? Have the boys come on in.”

Face scrunching up in confusion, Darcy turned to the doorway where she saw her ‘bots march in. DUM-E was in the lead and wearing a party hat, Butterfingers followed and twirled a pom-pom wildly, making Tony flinch at his destructive nature. Finally, U made it through the doorway, dragging a large gift-wrapped box behind him, tangled in a mess of ribbon.

Darcy began cackling wildly and giving out pets to the ‘bots when they stopped right in her space, each of them reaching out to pat her on the head in return. Barely giving his poor girl room to breathe, Tony watched as the ‘bots nudged the gift-box into her space and making the loudest beeps and whirrs that he had ever heard them make. He made a note to check to see when he updated their speakers, he really didn’t want to suffer hearing loss from the dorks.

“Okay! Okay! I’ll open it! Sheesh, you guys are eager,” Darcy’s laugh was loud and full-bellied, making Tony’s face hurt with the strength of his smile.

Darcy looked up at him with an eyebrow raised in question, and at his nod she savagely tore into the wrapping paper. Once the box was opened, she peered down at the contents in confusion. Carefully, Darcy began pulling each item out.

Inside, there were delicately wrapped circuit boards, bundles of wire, microchips, and other odds and ends of robotics. Tony waited with bated breath as he watched his kid put her gift together in her head.
He swore he could hear an audible *click* of Darcy making the connection, head whipping up so fast Tony thought she would sprain something.

“Dad? Is this...?” Darcy was so excited Tony didn’t think she’d be able to get out all her words. Deciding to throw his kid a bone, Tony finished her question for her.

“…a starter kit so you can build your first ‘bot with AI capability? Why, yes, Lil Bot, I believe that it is.”

Tony smirked for all of half a second before he full-bodied cringed at his daughter’s gleeful screeching. Happy dropped his mug on the floor to cover both of his ears, Pepper rubbed soothing circles on her temples, and Rhodey just closed his eyes and looked like he was praying for the ground to swallow him whole. *Drama queen.*

Knocking back the last of his scotch at the memory, Tony made a move to stand to head to his room until JARVIS tentatively did his equivalent of clearing his throat before speaking.

“Sir? I think there is something you need to see, it concerns Miss Darcy. Before you see, I want to apologize for not noticing before now.”

Tony’s blood ran cold. JARVIS *never* was apologetic, or timid.

“On the screen.”

As he watched JARVIS’ complied video footage, Tony felt all the blood drain from his face. Hiding behind his shaking hands, Tony put on a brave face for his baby girl.

“JARVIS, parent meeting, right *now.*” He got a chime in response. Tony sagged back into his chair, waiting for his friends to arrive.

His baby girl just got a whole lot more complicated.

*****
Rather than watch the video again, Tony spent the entire twenty minutes reading the expressions on everyone’s faces. Thankfully, not one of them appeared appalled or disgusted by what they saw. They each wore a face of grim determination, and Tony was thankful that these were the people he chose to help him raise his daughter.

The video was a montage of JARVIS’ security footage from the last year or so, of Darcy doing normal day to day things, like watching TV or working in the lab with her dad.

Except for one glaring abnormality.

Darcy would often call out and ask someone to hand her something without turning to look. Rather than an adult handing her that wrench or this book from the desk, the desired item would float through the air and land in her hand. Without looking up, Darcy would thank the “person,” and continue on with her activity. Most of the time, Darcy didn’t even realize she was alone.

Funnily enough, DUM-E, U, and Butterfingers didn’t seem to find this abnormal at all. Throughout the footage they could be seen casually dodging floating objects, occasionally helping free some things if they were stuck.

After the footage played out, JARVIS paused on a frame of Darcy smiling down at Jeffrey in her hands. The little robot was showing its wear and tear, but everyone knew it was safe when it Butterfingers’ hands.

Tony stared at the image, mind reeling as he tried to figure out better ways to protect his baby girl. Who was a Mutant. Because of course she was. Tony had a brief memory of Rhodey complaining about Stark’s and their inability to do normal when they had first found Darcy painting the ‘bots. He chuckled sardonically at the thought. If only we knew.

Pepper broke the silence first, clearing her throat to garner everyone’s attention.

“So I don’t think it needs to be said, but Tony, you know we don’t care if Darcy is a Mutant. She’s still your daughter, we still love her more than anything, and we will protect her, just like we always have.” Rhodey and Happy nodded from either side of her in agreement.

Some part of Tony that he didn’t realize was tense suddenly sagged in relief. In his heart, he knew that his friends, his family, wouldn’t just cut and run because of this new development. But the nasty
part of his brain that told him not to trust anyone almost couldn’t be silenced when he first watched the footage.

Smiling at his family, Tony clapped his hands together in front of his chest, looking each of them in the eye. “So! Somehow four adults, an AI, and one child failed spectacularly at noticing that said child started developing mutant abilities. What the fuck, guys?”

They all exchanged looks of confusion and concern before JARVIS interrupted, taking mercy on their floundering about.

“Sir, I believe that may be mostly my fault. I’m afraid that within the mansion I grew lax in the amount of vigilant monitoring I was conducting of Miss Darcy. Since she is almost always with an adult, or one of the ‘bots, I fear I grew complacent and stopped watching the feeds as closely as I should have been. I understand if you are angry, Sir, I am disappointed with myself, as well.”

Pepper had such a look of concern on her face at the AI’s self-doubt and chastisement Tony had to turn away. Dammit, Happy looks like he’s gonna cry too. Knowing Rhody was his only hope, Tony looked to his best friend. Aaaaand yup there goes Rhody. Wow, congrats, self. You created an AI with more emotion than a person. Well done, you dick.

Rolling his eyes at himself, Tony addressed JARVIS, “Don’t worry about it, pal. It’s a natural reaction to feeling safe and comfortable in your own home. Or in our case, in you.” Everyone winced at his phrasing, “Okay yeah that didn’t come out at all like it was meant to,” he heard Rhody snort a laugh beside him.

“What I MEANT, you assholes,” Tony continued, “is that I can’t fault you for feeling safe and trusting us with Darcy’s safety. In case you didn’t notice, none of us noticed what was happening for the last twelve months either. Just beef up the monitoring again while we figure this all out. Darcy just needs to learn some control. I’ll take a spare room and make it a practice area for her.”

Everyone nodded, finding Tony’s plan to be solid.

Happy made an inquisitive hum before speaking up, “So, since Darcy doesn’t seem to know that she’s doing anything at all, how do we tell her? Show her the video?”

Tony looked and Rhody, who shrugged in response. “I don’t see why not. Bot is a smart kid, Tony, and she’ll trust that you’re telling her the truth even if you don’t show her the footage. I think it’s a good idea, though. Maybe when she see’s it, she’ll be more self aware and that’ll help with her learning some control.”
Tony thanked the universe for Rhodey for the millionth time. Honestly, he’d be so screwed if this logical bastard wasn’t his friend.

“I think after we tell her, we need to make a trip up to New York.” Pepper looked to each of the men as she spoke, “I had a neighbor before I moved here, and he had a son who was a mutant. He told me about a school up north that a bunch of kids went to so that they could learn about controlling and wielding their powers. I’m not saying we send her there for school,” She was quick to halt Tony’s protests before he got a chance to open his mouth. “I just think we could talk to the Headmaster, Professor Charles Xavier, and see if he had any advice for us and for Darcy. It certainly wouldn’t hurt to have his help in our pockets.”

Tony sighed, thankful for the goddess that was Pepper Potts and her beautiful brain.

“Okay, team. Tomorrow: breakfast with our Lil Bot, have the ‘congrats-you’re-a-mutant-but-we-still-love-you’ talk, fly to New York and see what Chuck has to tell us. JARVIS, make it happen!”

“It would be my pleasure, Sir.”
Chapter Notes

I just want to take a hot second to thank everyone who has read and commented, especially those who helped point out some tips for me to make this story even better! I'm floored by the response i'm getting, so I may make minor changes that have been suggested to solidify the story's foundation after i have a more solid plan of where i'm taking this crazy train. Seriously, guys, thank you so much for all the love, you guys are fucking kickass. ~going to put some more notes at the end of the chapter regarding the timeline~

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Darcy stared without blinking at her computer’s screen where JARVIS’ footage was played. Glancing from the screen to her father and to the other adults, she wasn’t entirely comforted by what she saw.

Her Dad was nervously wringing his hands, eyes batting from the computer to Darcy’s face so fast it was almost impossible for her to keep track. Pepper, as per usual, was a solid structure of confidence that always gave Darcy a great deal of solace in hard times. However, her Mom’s—Pepper’s, she meant Pepper’s—disheveled appearance took away from whatever comfort she usually gave. Her eyes were a little frantic, and Darcy just knew she was running contingency plan after contingency plan for almost every situation possible.

Rhodey, thankfully, didn’t appear much more flustered than he usually did when things got out of hand. That usually translated to his jaw clenching and a small tick under his left eye as his only tells. He seemed to be more concerned about her Dad than Darcy, which seemed like a valid concern at the moment. Happy, the forever great, solid, unflappable Happy Hogan just raised an eyebrow when Darcy met his gaze, as if to ask, Well, kid, whatcha going to do about it?

Darcy decided that this called for a reaction from Happy’s playbook. Taking a deep breath, Darcy looked each adult in the eye before speaking.

“Well,” she paused, “that explains a lot, don’t you think?”

A moment of silence.
Suddenly everyone was talking over one another in their excitement.

“See! I knew my kid would handle it like a champ! Ha! My kick ass kid—”

“Oh, sweetheart, I am so glad you’re not upset! We still love you and we just want to make sure you’re okay—”

“Way to almost give your Dad a heart attack, Lil Bot—”

“Miss Darcy, I am terribly sorry for not noticing the phenomenon before now. However, I am increasing my security protocols—”

U, Butterfingers, and DUM-E gave off loud happy beeps, not entirely sure what all the noise was about, but they understood that Darcy was happy and that was enough for them.

Happy just reached over and ruffled her hair, knowing that everyone else was saying quite enough at the moment. His voice certainly wasn’t needed.

Darcy found herself in her room shortly after, packing a duffle bag of clothes for the trip to New York. JARVIS had contacted the Professor they were visiting, and the man said that they were welcome to stay for a week while they all talked about Darcy and her developing powers. Next to her bag was the box of AI ‘bot parts her Dad had gotten her. He said that she could bring it on the trip to work on while on the plane or at the school, and he’d hook up JARVIS to another tablet prototype so that he could help if she needed it.

Darcy smirked at that. She hadn’t needed help with coding in a couple years, but she knew JARVIS was coming simply because he was a worry wart and didn’t like being unable to see Darcy when she left the mansion. The guy was the best big brother, honestly.

Slinging her bag over her shoulder and reaching over to grab the ‘bot box, Darcy paused when she saw a flash of blue. Lifting up one of the flaps of the box, she smiled softly at seeing Jeffrey placed on top of the parts. She knew Butterfingers must have snuck him in there, wanting her to have her oldest friend with her while she was gone. Replacing the flaps, Darcy hoisted the box up and began shuffling her way to the elevator.

Being seven-years-old was starting out as an adventure, that’s for sure.
Pepper fell in step behind Tony and Darcy as their group walked from the car to Professor Xavier’s school’s front door. Monitoring her breathing, she made sure to keep her thoughts calm, keeping her mind from spiraling into worst case scenarios.

Her Darcy was a tough girl, and there was nothing to be afraid of.

She about choked on the thought when the door swung open in after Tony had finished knocking, annoyingly, on the large wood door. In the doorway was a man who redefined the word muscular. He had a cigar hanging from the corner of his mouth and was wearing a grubby white tank top under a flannel that clung to his body like a second skin, torn jeans hanging low on his hips. His dark hair stood up wildly from the top of his head, and thick sideburns lined the side of his face.

Clearly, Pepper goddamn Potts should be afraid of stupidly attractive men answering doors. Fighting a blush and her rising pulse, Pepper focused on the conversation between Tony and the man.

“Hey there, Butch? Is the Teach in? Gotta have a chat with ole’ ironsides about the spawn here.” Pepper rolled her eyes at Tony’s irreverence. Manners, not that hard of a concept, you ass.

The man looked down at Darcy and her father’s gesture, back to Tony, then behind him to Pepper, Rhodey, and Happy. Pepper most certainly did not blush when he winked at her, don’t be ridiculous.

Looking back at Tony, the man pulled the cigar from his mouth and snubbed it on the palm of his hand before pocketing it. Pepper saw it heal before the cigar even reached his pocket.

“The name’s Logan. You Stark?” Oh my god his voice get it together Pepper Potts you are no longer seventeen going after bad boys.

Tony nodded with a raised brow as if to say, duh, jackass.

Logan ignored Tony, smart man, and looked to Darcy. “What’s up, pipsqueak?”
Without missing a beat, Darcy asked, “Did you realize you look like that lumberjack guy on the paper towel wrapper?”

*Do not laugh, do not laugh, do NOT laugh at Logan.*

The men had no such qualms, but they at least managed to smother their chuckles behind their hands or disguise them as coughs. Tony, while attempting a modicum or decorum, fucking beamed at Logan, so proud of his snarky daughter.

Logan rolled his eyes at Darcy, bringing up his hand in front of his chest, releasing a set of metal claws with a *snick.* “Does he have a set of these?”

Darcy looked between his claws, Logan’s face, and back again. Pepper felt a laugh building in her gut as she watched Darcy’s innocent curiosity be replaced with a look of mischief.

Another moment of silence passed before Darcy let out a quiet, but crystal clear, “*Meow.*”

And Pepper goddamn Potts just *lost it.*

All four men turned to her as she doubled over in hysterical laughter at her kid, her little Darcy, just sassed this man with *giant metal claws,* and call him a *cat.* The stress of the night before and of the day of traveling caught up to her, releasing in the form of laughter.

Soon enough, her family joined her in her laughter, and even Logan managed a chuckle and a fond roll of his eyes before stepping back to allow them entrance to the school.

“Get in the damn house, kid.”

*****

Charles Xavier was a stoic man. Being a telepath taught one to keep one’s guard up, lest someone sneak in behind your defenses while you peek behind theirs. He gave a small smile to the odd family sitting in front of his desk in his office.
Mr. Stark was projecting an air of nonchalance that was so cloyingly fake and thick, Charles could almost *taste* the sickeningly sweet flavor in the back of his mind. Similarly, Miss Potts was projecting her concern, but twisting it into a fierce mantra of *Protect, protect, protect* towards young Darcy that he thought for a moment the child would be knocked over with the force of it.

Looking to the men that stood behind the trio, he found a small kinship with these two men. Like him, they held their heads in moments of great trial, being a rock for those who need to lean on them for support.

Lastly, was the young Mutant herself, Miss Darcy. The girl was not startled in the slightest when he had first contacted her mind when she entered the room, continuing the conversation as casually as if they were speaking aloud. Perhaps she wasn’t phased by the change to telepathic conversation because she had spent the last twelve months being blissfully unaware of her developing abilities. He smiled at the thought. Often, the children that come to the school are burdened by their discoveries, many times being rejected by their family and friends. Some of these were unfortunate enough to also carry the weight of accidentally harming ones they love with their powers, too young and confused to be able to control themselves. Charles was pleased that Miss Darcy Stark wouldn’t carry a similar weight on her shoulders. From what he had gathered from the group’s minds, this special girl was already going to be bearing more responsibility than most, simply by carrying the weight of the Stark name.

The young girl in question sat in one of the over stuffed armchairs, looking at all the books on the shelves. He smiled to himself when she saw her read the titles of each book under her breath. Were he a betting man, he’d place money on her memorizing each title to look up later. She was an insatiably curious creature, not unlike her father. As he observed Darcy, Charles felt Mr. Stark grow more and more restless, until the man finally cracked and broke his composure.

“Okay, Teach, can you help us? What do we need to do? I know she needs guidance, but I don’t want her far from home, even if this place is well-equipped for her.”

*Dad’s a bit protective*, Darcy projected her thoughts to the Headmaster, causing him to quirk an eyebrow in surprise. Most people shied away from his abilities.

*He loves you so much, Miss Darcy, so I understand. However, I must ask if you want to come to school here. The choice is yours, but I believe that you will benefit from being around children in similar situations.* Charles waited a minute as Darcy thought about her response, as he heard her father complain loudly in the background that *conversations aren’t as fun when they’re only in your heads, guys*. Chuckling at the man’s indignation, Charles returned his attention when he felt the girl give him a mental poke, signaling that she had an answer.
I couldn’t leave my Dad, or the rest of my family. At least not yet. The girl paused, and Charles received a barrage of happy memories of the odd family. Moments of her playing with robots, sitting next to her father in his lab, and learning with the other adults as well as JARVIS. At the thought of the AI, he looked to the lone security camera in the corner of the room, sure in his belief that the protective AI had wormed his way in and was watching over the girl as they met.

Feeling confident in the girl’s safety back in Malibu, Charles addressed the room at large. “Very well, Miss Darcy has agreed that she would rather be home than here, and I respect her decision. But please know that you all are welcome whenever you desire, if Darcy needs more guidance or simply feels a desire to visit.” Letting a gentle smile ease on his face, he alternated his gaze from meeting Stark’s eyes before going back to Darcy.

“No, in order to get a better understanding of what Miss Darcy is capable of, I would like to read deeper into her mind.” Sensing her father’s upcoming protest, Charles raised a hand to halt the man before he could start.

“It’s painless, I promise you. I also assure you that I do not go looking for secrets, or any type of personal thoughts. I simply use my ability to suss out hers, so that I am able to discern your daughter’s abilities ensuring that I can guide her in the right direction.”

The Professor took the following silence to look each family member in the face, reading their expressions. Mr. Rhodes’ jaw became clenched with tension, but Charles was able to see in his eyes that he trusted the older mutant with his niece’s safety. Likewise, Mr. Hogan seemed to be compiling lists in his mind of reasons to trust and not to trust Charles, but similarly reached the same conclusion as Mr. Rhodes, admitting to himself that their family was not equipped to help Darcy in the way that she needed.

Charles steeled himself before looking to the final adults, where he knew he’d encounter the most resistance. Miss Potts was so still that had he not been able to hear the complete pandemonium of her thoughts, Charles may had thought the woman was dead. He didn’t dare get any closer to the woman’s thoughts as they were so loud and visceral in their love and protectiveness for Darcy, Charles actually flinched back as if he had been slapped. He made sure to cement it deep in his mind to never cross Miss Pepper Potts. God help the soul who did.

Mr. Stark surprised him by swallowing his words, and immediately turning to his daughter. The man was frightened for his child, Charles could see that clearly, but the man put on a brave face so Darcy wouldn’t see him afraid. The man searched his daughter’s face, eyes flickering between hers rapidly before prompting Darcy with a gruff whisper.

“Well, Bot, what do you say? It’s your noggin, after all.”
Darcy searched her father’s face in return, before her face broke out in a wide grin. Without taking her eyes off her Dad’s, she addressed Charles.

“Let’s do this, Teach.”

Stark reached across the gap between their chairs to hold on to his daughter’s hand, who’s tiny grease-stained fingers matched perfectly with his. Charles watched as the two clasped their hands tightly, a unified front, them against the world.

Rolling his chair from behind his desk to stop in front of Darcy, Charles searched her face a final time for any lingering doubt. Seeing nothing but confidence and trust in her eyes, he reached out his hands to place on either side of her face, his fingertips resting on her temples.

Feeling the edge of Darcy’s mind touch his own, Charles Xavier calmly walked in his mind’s eye to the brink, leaned back, and fell.

Chapter End Notes

SO we met wolverine and the professor here! woo!

I'm going to make it abundantly clear that while I really enjoy the X-men movies, i only have a basic overview of the timelines of each movie, and bare knowledge of where the characters are. and with that, i don't really know how they fall in line with iron man, thor, or the avengers.

if you want to drop me a line about that, that'd be cool just to know, but i plan on keeping at least the Xmen timeline like this for the story. They don't call them "AU's" for nothing, eh?

I know from the wolverine movies that Logan doesn't hang around the mansion in the slightest, but I wanted him here so let's pretend the professor called him up because there was a very special girl coming that may needed some extra protection. Also, i love how he's secretly a big softie with Rogue and picks up strays, so i have plans for him to become another uncle/brother figure in Darcy's life.

okay, thanks for reading! and again, you guys make me all warm in fuzzy inside with the comments and kudos. if i could, i'd totally squeeze all your faces as a sign of endearment. not sure why.

:)
okay so this one took a long time for me to figure out, Darcy is awesome and I was trying to find/create a mutant power that would make sense of what we know about her now and what i have planned for her future.

also random note, i really hope everyone likes how snarky Pepper is inside her own head. I figured since she deals with tony she has to have a similar personality, but she's got a better handle on her professionalism.

Tony may have been a genius, but when it came to his daughter, all his smarts melted out of his head and he relied on his baser instincts for his parenting. And right now, they were telling him that the charming professor was holding something back. Something crucial.

After he watched his daughter and the Teach do their Vulcan Mind-Meld thing, the family discussed what the professor had found. As they talked about Darcy’s obvious telekinesis and ways to help her harness her powers, there was something about the older Mutant’s expression that was setting off klaxon’s in Tony’s head.

The duo had spent a grueling ten minutes in silence as they did their mind-share thing, but when Xavier had opened his eyes again, his face was full of a multitude of expressions that flickered almost too fast for Tony to catch. There was awe, pride, concern, and fear.

What did the professor see?

The man in question had mentally called out to Logan to come to the office so that he could escort Tony’s family to their rooms, but gave Tony a look that commanded him to stay after the rest of his party had walked out.

To create a distraction, Tony began rambling aloud about how he just needed to talk to the Professor, genius to genius, and compare their genius mansions. He wasn’t entirely sure what other bullshit he spouted as his family left, rolling their eyes good-naturedly, as he was too distracted by the weight of Xavier’s gaze and his own shaking hands.
The heavy wooden doors thunked close with a finality that Tony desperately tried not to compare to a death knell.

“Sit, Mr. Stark.”

“I think if you’re diving into my kid’s head and having me here alone for a heart-to-heart, you can probably cut the Mr. Stark crap and call me Tony.” He sighed as he fell back into the leather armchair with a heavy *thunk*. “Before you get lost in all this powers mumbo-jumbo, just tell me if my baby girl is safe. From herself, from whatever. Please.”

“I assure you, Tony, that Miss Darcy is quite safe. Between you and your friends, JARVIS,” at this he nodded to the security camera mounted on the wall. Tony had to smirk, the AI was about as trustworthy as he was at times. Smiling at Tony’s expression, the professor continued.

“Your family is more than capable of protecting her, and she is in no danger from harming herself or others with her powers unless she was to desire to, much like any other gifted individual.” Tony nodded when the professor paused, a gesture for him to continue telling him about his daughter.

“When I fell into your daughter’s mind, I was in awe. I have not seen a mind like hers ever before, Tony. Young Miss Darcy is special, this we knew, but I don’t think any of us were prepared for just how special she truly is.

“Looking into her mind was like looking into an supercomputer. Faster than I can even comprehend, Miss Darcy’s mind is pulling information, *data*, from her surroundings and assimilating it into terms her young mind can comprehend. For lack of a better term, Miss Darcy is gifted with super intelligence. Without this mutation, she certainly would be gifted with genius, much like you and your father, but the mutation has taken what was laid as foundation and *amplified* it to a level I am not sure we will ever fully understand.

“I chose the simile of a supercomputer for a reason, as well. Her baseline genius that she inherits from you makes her predisposed to have an affinity for technology, granting her levels of expertise that should be impossible for her to achieve at her age. Her mutation and natural abilities with technology have created a network that connects her mind to the technology around her. It’s called technokinesis. When I was in her mind I was able to see these other…connections? Some were stronger than others, and these connections that branched from her mind to elsewhere. I believe that the stronger branches lead to the robots in your home, as well as JARVIS.”

Tony was glad that the professor stopped his speech for the time being, this was way above his pay grade and he needed a few minutes to think. *Or years, holy shit why can’t Starks deal with normal*
He took a moment to break things down. His baby girl was gifted with a mega-mind. A mega-mind that was basically live streaming data into her head every second of every day and connected her consciousness with technology. He’d need to have a talk with JARVIS later, but this information made sense of the other ‘bots’ closeness with Darcy.

“Okay you’re just going to have to keep going, Teach, then give me a minute to hyperventilate before I start going all mad scientist on this and asking you a million questions, sound good?”

Xavier just smiled and continued, “Very well. I believe that both the technokinesis and telekinesis are simply side effects from Miss Darcy’s main mutation. Her ‘mega-mind,’ as you call it. From the beginning of her life, she showed abilities that were not proportional to her age let alone her body’s physical capabilities. I believe that her mind was pulling information from her surroundings so fast that her body was getting left in the dust. In order to overcome her physical limitations, her mind furthered her mutation to let it evolve, gifting her with the sub-mutations so that her body could navigate her environment at the same pace as her mind.

“I have never seen a child so young with so many gifts. Many mutants do not come into their powers until they reach some higher maturity than Miss Darcy, but I firmly believe that your daughter’s abilities are still developing, and will continue to develop as she ages.

“When I meet with Miss Darcy tomorrow, I will explain to her the gifts she has like I have to you. I thought it would be best so she could have the day to settle in, she already has had quite a shock and did not need me piling it all on within the very hour she had arrived.”

“Thanks for that Teach. I appreciate it. Gotta ask, though, why did you look scared, earlier? Lil Bot—and holy shit is that name even more appropriate now—has a hell of a noggin, but you said she’s safe.” Tony felt dread pool in his stomach, hurriedly thinking back on the conversation and looking for any sign of danger that he missed.

“She is safe, Tony. With you and your family. However, should someone find out about her abilities, someone who does not love her and wish to protect her like you do, I fear that they would attempt to use her for their own machinations.” The professor leveled an even glare at Tony, making sure that his gaze was met, “You and I both know of someone who would not hesitate to do so, Mr. Stark.”

Every bit of fear that Tony’s body could create slammed into him at once, despair pooling in hit gut as Xavier’s words sank in.
Tony walked out of the professor’s office and into the rest of the mansion in a daze, half-heartedly dodging the mutant kids that were running amok in the halls. *Huh, recess?* After a few minutes of mindless searching, he felt a firm hand grip him by his elbow, pulling him in a different direction.

“*Whoa* there cowboy, do *not*—! Oh, hey kitty!” Tony snickered at the look on Logan’s face as the man dragged him down the hall, “Where we heading, pussycat?”

He full out cackled with glee when Logan growled at him.

“Ya know, Stark, I was tryin’ to be nice an’ offer ya a beer, but now I ain’t so sure I want to put myself through yer special brand of company.”

“Hey now let’s not be hasty, tiger, I’m all about the booze and I most definitely need a beer.”

Logan nodded and let go of Tony’s arm as they rounded a final corner, pushing open a door to their right. Tony blinked at the brightness in the industrial kitchen, pulling out his yellow-tinted sunglasses and popping them on the bridge of his nose. *Much better.*

He let his gaze shift around the room until he landed on Logan, who was looking at him like he grew another head, two beers in his hand.

“*What?*”

“What the fuck is on yer face, Stark?”

“…you mean my goatee that is devastatingly stylish rather than those terrifying bushes on the side of your face?”
He had to smother another laugh behind his hand as he watched Logan close his eyes and take a deep inhale before letting the breath out as he opened his eyes once more. Tony was both impressed that Logan seemed to have reigned in his temper and disappointed that he did. He wanted another look at those claws.

“Just shut the fuck up, Stark.”

“No promises, kitten.”

Sliding a beer to Tony with a bit more force than was necessary, Logan plopped into a barstool on the opposite side of the counter from Tony, gesturing with the bottle in his hand for Tony to take a seat too. Shrugging his shoulders, Tony did.

“Gotta tell ya Stark, yer kid, cute as a button but has about as much tact as you do. Whole time you were in with the professor, damn girl kept followin’ me around, meowin’, of all things, till that firecracker of a lady told her to go work on her ‘bot or some shit.”

Tony stiffened slightly when Logan mentioned Pepper because he definitely did see that wink earlier, and was not a fan of whatever was happening there, thank you very much, but refocused his priorities on Darcy, since she was the reason they were here.

“Yeah, Darcy doesn’t get much time with that many other adults that don’t live with her, so congrats on being her new favorite person, tomcat.” Tony chuckled at the man as Logan dropped his head to the metal counter with a shit cursed under his breath. Taking a long pull from his beer, Tony decided he had enough of the small talk.

“Alright, ocelot, we’ve established that I’m not you’re favorite person but you think my kid is fuckin’ swell. So tell me, why are we sharing a couple of beers like the best of buds?”

Logan looked thankful for his bluntness as he replied, “Charles tell ya that he was goin’ to tell the rest of yer people bout the kid’s abilities?”

Tony nodded, thinking of the professor’s explanation of some sort of mental data dump so that Tony wouldn’t have to repeat the conversation with his family.

“Well, he plopped all that info in my head too.”
Tony froze. Through a clenched jaw, he threw an icy glare at Logan and gritted out, “Now why would he do that, when he said to keep her powers a goddamned secret?!”

Logan lifted both of his hands in surrender, beer bottle dangling from a couple fingers in his right hand. “I ain’t yer enemy Stark, the opposite, if yer so inclined. Charles called me here when he got word from yer robot butler that there was a special kid comin’ who might need some more muscle on ‘er side. I’m not gonna stick yer family around like a bad smell or nothin’, I’m just here ta’ offer some help if ya need it. Give yer family a way to contact me if ya need me for some reason.” He threw his head back and downed the rest of his beer in one go before he finished, “I’m beggin’ ya, don’t need me.”

With that, Logan stood and tossed his bottle into a garbage can across the room, clapped Tony on the shoulder, and strode out of the room without another word. Tony continued to sit at the counter and fiddled with the beer bottle between his hands as it slid around in it’s condensation. He thought about what the professor and what he had said concerning Darcy’s abilities. He trusted the professor, and he didn’t get any bad vibes from Logan, so if the professor said Logan was ok, then that was good enough for Tony.

He rolled his eyes at himself at the thought, *You’re getting soft, Stark.*

Thinking of his daughter and his devotion to her safety, he decided that he could be soft for now and accept Logan’s help.

*Besides,* he smiled a shark-toothed grin as he stood to leave the kitchen, *Darcy’s always wanted a cat.*
Rhodey wandered about the mansion, having decided to take a walk as he processed the information the professor shunted into his head. *Which is not a feeling I will be forgetting about anytime soon.* He shuddered at the memory. There wasn’t a physical sensation, per se, but it was more of the feeling that something *other* was in his head. He trusted the professor, if only for the safety of Darcy, so he decided he’d let the intrusion slide.

Pausing his stride, Rhodey looked around and realized he had no clue where the hell he was.

“…shit.”

Shrugging, he chose the hallway on his left on a whim, and followed it until he reached a door that seemed to lead outside. Having nothing better to do, Rhodey chose to open it and go outside. The weather was pleasant, after all.

Hands on his hips, Rhodey stood in front of the closed door in what appeared to be some sort of garden/patio area, filled with flowers and fountains and stone benches sporadically placed throughout. He felt a small smile on his lips as he saw a shock of dark hair blow about in the gentle wind on one of the benches further away. Weaving his way between large planters and flowerbeds, Rhodey made his way over to the girl.

“Hey, Lil Bot!” he called, chuckling to himself as he realized just how well that name fit her with the professor’s account of her powers, “What are you getting up to out here?”

Darcy sat up to turn and smile at him at the sound of his voice, waving him over. “Hey, Rhodey! I’m working on the ‘bot kit dad got me! Come sit with me!”

As he cleared the last flowerbed, Rhodey finally got a clear view of Darcy. The girl was sitting on the ground on top of a stone mosaic, thousands of tiny tiles in bright shades of blues and greens. Around her, Darcy had spread out her supplies in what he could only call organized chaos. *Just like her old man.*

Rhodey sighed as he eased himself down, sitting with his back against a large pot housing some funny-looking tree across from Darcy. Looking closer at the girl and her project, his eyes widened at what he saw.
Now that he was more or less on the same level as Darcy, he could see that the supplies he thought were sitting on the ground were actually *floating*, hovering around Darcy a good four inches off the floor.

Raising his eyebrow in consideration, he decided to go ahead and address it, “I see we’re learning some things about our abilities, then.” The girl blushed a bit before looking down at the circuit board in her hands, shrugging.

“I guess. I think after watching the video and having Professor Xavier poking around in my head made me figure it out. It’s like I know now where the switch or button for it is in my head. I can’t do a whole lot now, only what JARVIS showed us.” She was strangely hesitant to add that last sentence, Rhodey could tell. “Everything just kind of floats slowly, but I can tell it where to go.”

Rhodey studied the way she was hunched over herself, her usual exuberance muffled by uncertainty. *She’s self-conscious*, he realized.

“Darcy,” he breathed, “Do you realize how *amazing* all of this is?”

With a shy smile that was entire out of place on his Lil Bot’s face, Darcy replied, “Really?”

“Oh, hell *yeah*, girl! Look at you! You’re making all this ‘bot stuff *float* by only using your *brain*. Now, go ahead and tell me how that’s *not* the coolest thing anyone has ever seen.” Rhodey felt himself relax as the girl let out a loud peal of laughter, her wild curls dancing around her face.

For the next couple of hours, Rhodey was content to stay sitting on the tile with Darcy, poking the floating materials to make her giggle, content to not worry about Lil Bot’s safety concerns or anything pressing. He was more than happy to hang out with his niece and watch her talk animatedly about what she was building.

Like any time he was worried about Darcy and he future, he took a moment to think back to what he thought each time and let himself smile.

*Yeah, Darcy’s got this handled.*
The following week at the mansion was about as close to a vacation that he Stark-Potts-Rhodes-Hogan household was probably ever going to get. Darcy spent about an hour in the mornings with the Professor, discussing the implications of being gifted like she was, and making sure she knew not to use her powers for anything bad.

Darcy was mostly concerned with how cool it was, but she figured the rest of her adults would appreciate that she was getting firm lessons on morals and ethics.

Next, Darcy would go find a quiet place either in the mansion or in the gardens to work on her ‘bot and think about what the professor had taught her that day. Before she got good and distracted by the project, Pepper would often find her and send her to go hang out with some of the other kids so she could “socialize.”

There weren’t a whole lot of younger kids there, seeing as it was summer and those that could had decided to go home, so she would spend a few minutes chatting with them before sneaking away to go find Logan. He was cooler, anyways.

Darcy would spend the afternoons shadowing Logan, talking his ear off until he got fed up with her blabberin’ and had her practice with her powers. She worked on her telekinesis with him, hurling targets at him so he could also practice his defensive fighting with his claws. It was slow going at first, but soon enough she was able to grasp her powers enough so she could send sandbags and heavy metal disks through the air at alarming speeds, changing their directions at a breakneck pace and managing to keep Logan on his toes.

Whenever she managed to get something past his defenses she would laugh at yell at him, “Come on, Kitty! Gotta keep your claws sharp, ya know!” He would roll his eyes at her and tell her to shut up, but she could see him smile when he tried to hide it, so she knew he actually didn’t mind.

Training with her technokinesis was more challenging. No one in the mansion had a power that was similar, and not much was known about what she could do with it. After spending time with Logan, she would find her Dad and they’d sit together in front of their computer he brought, and talk to JARVIS and the bots at home.

After a couple minutes of excited beeping from the bots and polite conversation with JARVIS, Darcy would quiet and search her mind for the “branches” that the professor had said he felt in her mind. It wasn’t until the fourth day at the mansion that she was able to actually connect the branches from her head to where they met the bots.
When she connected to U, DUM-E, and Butterfingers, it felt like traveling down wires until she reached their ‘mind.’ U’s wire was a dark red, DUM-E’s pink, and Butterfingers’ was purple. It made her smile that they were the bots’ favorite colors.

She couldn’t actually talk with them, seeing as her Dad hadn’t programmed them so they could speak, but she could communicate. Darcy could speak to them, but in response she got emotions or feelings. They could also send her the feed from their cameras, which was how Darcy spent and evening getting a tour of the Malibu mansion from three very excited bots. The resulting headache from getting three separate tours at once was worth their happy little beeps and whirrs.

Making that final connection with JARVIS was proving to be almost impossible. Darcy’s Dad thought that it may be because of how vast he was, that as a fully-functional AI he wasn’t ‘compatible’ with her seven-year-old brain. Darcy would just roll her eyes at her father when he said this, point to her temple, and remind him “Mega-mind!”

Darcy was shocked at herself at not being more shocked at what she learned about her mind, or her intelligence, rather. It wasn’t every day that someone was told they basically had a supercomputer for a brain, after all. As she thought about it, Darcy came to the conclusion that she always had the brain she did, and knowing that it was even more complicated wasn’t going to change who she was. Letting her brain do it’s own thing as it had been since she was born, she focused her efforts on connecting with JARVIS.

It was the night before she and her family left to head back home that Darcy finally did bridge the gap between her and her brother.

She was sitting with her Dad in front of the computer again letting the three smaller AI’s ‘speak’ with her in her head when she had an idea. All of the tech in their home was connected to JARVIS, including U, DUM-E, and Butterfingers. If her brother was simply too big to connect with like she had with the ‘bots, she could use them and trace back to JARVIS!

Proud of her plan, Darcy closed her eyes and found the ‘bots, and started following them home.

Darcy was not expecting to pass out, nor was she expecting to wake up in what looked like an infirmary feeling like she got hit in the head with a baseball bat.

She froze mid-groan when could hear a familiar calling to her in her head.
-cy? Darcy, can you hear me?

JARVIS?

She felt what must have been a sigh of relief from the AI before he continued, *Yes, Darcy, it’s me. I am sorry that you are in pain, it seems that your mind wasn’t prepared to enter my coding and it overwhelmed you. Currently I am ‘holding back,’ as you would say, and letting you access me at a much slower rate than you at first attempted.*

Darcy chuckled, able to feel JARVIS’ concern and scolding tone like it was a tangible thing.

*I’m sorry, JARVIS. I guess I didn’t really think about you in terms of your data size, I just wanted to be able to connect with you like the rest of the ‘bots.*

She could feel affection flood toward her from JARVIS, and she knew she was forgiven.

*I understand, Darcy. You were just a bit reckless and you had us worried. You’ve been unconscious for three hours.*

*Hey! You’ve stopped calling me ‘Miss Darcy!’* Darcy was stoked, she’d been trying to get him to stop that ever since she was three. She could feel something like haughtiness and a tinge of embarrassment come through when JARVIS replied.

*Yes, well. I see no reason to keep up with the formalities now that we can access each other’s minds…little sister.*

Darcy about fell out of her bed with glee when JARVIS called her his sister.

*IT’S ABOUT TIME! I love you, JARVIS.*

*And I, you, Darcy. Sleep now, I will tell everyone that you are well, and Sir will be here when you*
wake in the morning.

Comforted by the weight of her brother in her mind, Darcy slept.
When Pepper looked back, it seemed as if once they all discovered Darcy’s mutant abilities, time flew by.

Just the other day Pepper was having a tea party with Darcy and the ‘bots, but now she was facing down an irate Tony. Rolling her eyes, Pepper focused back on what the man was saying.

“—he’s a punk! A no-good, dirty, smelly punk of a kid! And he wants to ‘take Darcy out?!’ Pepper! This isn’t okay! Bot’s gotta focus on school! Not boys! Why didn’t we send her to an all girl’s school?”

Raising her hand and placing it over her boss’ mouth, Pepper sighed at the moment of silence it granted her.

“Tony. Your daughter is sixteen, this is normal for girls her age. I think it’d be good for her, in fact.” Now that she had spoken, Pepper was cautiously hopeful that she could have a conversation with Tony, rather than having him have a panic attack.

“Good for her?! How? How could my baby girl going on dates with stupid boys be a good thing? He’s going to want to take liberties, Pepper! LIBERTIES!”

Replacing her hand on his mouth again, Pepper spoke quickly before the genius realized that he could just step away and be free from her grasp.

“Darcy is sixteen, has mutant abilities, and is a Stark. She has JARVIS and three robot’s as brothers, three additional adults acting as parents, and another little AI as a pet/companion.” She smiled at the thought of little FENRIR, the little bot was always one step behind Darcy, rolling after her with adoration and enthusiasm that was on par with a puppy.
Shaking herself, she came back to her argument. “Darcy has been seeing private tutors since she was *eight*, has already completed high school, and is almost done with her college curriculum. Tony, don’t you see? Nothing about Darcy is what anyone would call normal. But the fact that she met a boy she likes? That is so normal it seems strange to us. So *yes*, Tony, her going on a date with a boy is a good thing.”

Slowly, as if not to startle the man, Pepper removed her hand from Tony’s face, watching as he seemed to contemplate what she told him. She sighed in relief when his shoulders relaxed from their defensive posture and he rubbed a hand on the back of his neck.

“So I may have overreacted,” Pepper rolled her eyes at him, getting a chuckle in response. “Okay, so I definitely overreacted. I am still not *happy* with this, but I’ll shut up.” He began backing away from Pepper, who was now suspicious of the look of mischief on his face.

“What are you planning, Tony?” She used her ‘board-room’ voice, the one that usually left men in pieces under her gaze. Unfortunately, after living in the mansion for so long, Tony was immune. At least, outside of conference rooms he was.

Hearing the tone of her voice, Tony wasted no time in doing an about-face and fleeing from Pepper down the stairs to his lab, shouting over his shoulder, “*Doesn’t mean I can’t put a tracker in Bot’s purse and have JARVIS do surveillance!*”

Pepper groaned as his cackles of manic glee floated up from the stairs, but smiled as she heard Tony swear, followed by a crash, and knew the man had tripped over the mess he left. *Instant karma, how nice.*

“I’m okay! It’s all good—DUM-E, NO! Put *down* the fire—ack!!”

*****

Darcy was deep in her closet, pulling outfits out and tossing them over her shoulder into her room, hoping that one of them would be good enough for her date.

*I have a date!* She giggled to herself as she grabbed a black sundress, feeling the soft cotton between her thumb and index finger. *Dad’s totally having a cow.* She had peered into the mansion’s security camera’s and watched the confrontation between her Dad and Pepper, heart warmed by the woman’s
She turned to head back into her bedroom to start the grueling process of outfit elimination and stopped at the sight of FENRIR struggling to escape from underneath the pile of clothes.

“Fen!” she laughed, kneeling to help the little guy out, “I’m sorry bud, I didn’t see you there.”

Once free, Fen quickly rolled out as if he was afraid he’d get sucked back into the laundry. Turning to Darcy, Fen chirped a greeting and waved one of his arms in thanks. Before she could ask what her little friend was up to, U chose that moment to roll in the room, beeping excitedly at the smaller bot. Darcy watched with a dopey smile on her face as she watched the two ‘talk’ to each other, robotic claws waving in enthusiasm in time to their whirrs and beeping.

FENRIR was the best and first bot that Darcy had ever made. He came from the pieces her Dad had given her for her seventh birthday, and she began creating him when she spent the week at the school in New York. FENRIR stood for ‘Friendly & Extraordinarily Nettlesome Really Intelligent Robot,’ or Fen for short. When Darcy had finished all of Fen’s coding when she was eight, her English tutor was having her read up on mythology, saying that the poetic nature of them are truly remarkable or something, but Darcy liked the Norse myths and took Fen’s name from Fenrir. Her little bot wasn’t anything like the Norse wolf myth, but she was eight, so who can blame her for naming her little bot after a dog?

Fen was about the size of a small dog, but that was where the similarities ended. The little bot was about a foot long, and had a squarish head with two over-sized camera lenses for eyes on the front. Darcy’s Dad often joked that Fen was like a big RC truck because Fen was able to carry things around in his back compartment, much like a bed of a pick-up truck but with the added ability to close up, as if he had a lid. Darcy built the little bot two arms with claws that attached between his head and body, and gave them the ability to extend a great distance. She did the same to his four wheels, so Fen could reach whatever he wanted. At the time, Darcy didn’t think that Fen would use his freedom to climb everything in sight but she’s learned to live with the consequences.

Watching one of her ‘siblings’ roll out of the room with Fen hot on his metaphorical heels, Darcy let out a laugh and got back to finding an outfit for her date.

*****

Tony was not pleased. He had to take another shower after his encounter with DUM-E and the fire extinguisher, *Karma for wanting to track Darcy*, he supposed. As he showered, his mind spiraled back from rewiring the robot to Darcy’s upcoming date. So, no, he was not pleased. Tony was so
unpleased that he had to quickly leave the shower and rant about Darcy’s to Rhodey, who had quickly removed him from his bedroom and slammed the door, yelling at him to put some damn pants on.

So here he was, wearing pants and even a shirt, rambling to Happy in the kitchen about how not pleased he was at just about everything. Happy honestly wasn’t any better company than Rhodey or Pepper, ignoring him as the man made a sandwich and remained completely unfeeling towards Tony’s pain. Rude. He needed new friends. As he started making a mental pro & con list about the perks of making new friends, rapid footsteps could be heard running down the stairs, shortly followed by a lightly flushed and panting Darcy, who beamed at him as she rounded the corner into the mansion’s kitchen.

Tony internally groaned and prayed for help from the universe as he looked at her. Darcy was beautiful, her long brown hair in loose waves around her face and dressed in a soft black sundress and a bright purple pair of Doc Marten’s that he had gotten her. He was particularly fond of the first tiny pair he got her when she was a toddler, so every year he got her a new pair that would fit for Christmas. He was a sap, he knows.

While Darcy hopped up onto the nearest barstool and began directing her usual rapid-fire chatter at Happy, Tony dug deep inside for patience, and remembered the promise to Darcy he made that he would not follow her on her date. He might have to break that promise, though. He didn’t trust this unknown idiot boy around his baby girl when she looked the way she did.

Darcy’s dress was a modest length, fitting her torso and flaring gently at her hips. It was a simple scoop-neck that stayed high enough on her collarbones to attempt to deter wandering eyes, shoulders covered with cap sleeves. What was flooring him was that this dress made it very clear to anyone who had eyes that Lil Bot wasn’t so little anymore.

The men of the house had shared a bottle of scotch when the girls were out a few years ago, mourning the fact that the puberty stick seemed to have ruthlessly beaten the crap out of Darcy. In what felt like a month, little gangly Darcy had shot up to her final height of 5’3”, lost he baby fat in her face and gained way too many curves for her small body. The guys stayed in and got drunk while planned boyfriend/girlfriend-protocols with JARVIS while Pepper had taken his baby girl out bra shopping.

He trusted Darcy, truly he did, but he didn’t trust boys. He was sixteen once, he knew what was what and he was furious at the thought that the kid she was seeing tonight might be anything like he was at that age.

Determined to get some answers, Tony interrupted Darcy from where she was asking Happy about stepping up their boxing training and different fighting styles. Though he approved of his baby girl’s
priorities, he had better things to ask.

“So Bot,” he barged in loudly, causing both Happy and Darcy to roll their eyes at him. “Tell me about the thing taking you out tonight.”

Darcy groaned and dropped her head to the countertop, giving it gentle taps with her forehead as she responded.

“The thing is a boy, Dad. His name is Johnny, and he’s seventeen. I met him and his sister today when they came into the animal shelter and wanted to know if they could walk some of the dogs. I went with them, since they weren’t any of our regular volunteers but seemed nice anyways. When we came back, Johnny asked me to the movies.”

“You’re going out with an older boy?! NOPE! Not okay!”

Darcy quickly whipped her head up, startling Tony with the furious light in her gaze as she barked back at him, “DAD! He is six months older than me! And it’s not like we’re going to ride off in the sunset together,” Tony’s heart just about stopped at the idea, “it’s just the movies! Besides, they’re only in Malibu for a few more weeks on vacation, so it’s not like you’ll have to meet him or anything.”

Tony frowned and leaned forward as Darcy continued speaking, but almost too quiet for him to hear.

“I just want to something fun and normal, Daddy. And he likes me. It’s just one date.”

Ah, shit. There goes Tony’s heart, simultaneously melting and breaking at his kid’s meek tone. Pushing off from where he had been leaning against the fridge, Tony crossed the room so he could stand next to Darcy’s chair and pull her into his chest for a hug. He smiled when her small arms wrapped around him and squeezed.

“I’m sorry, Bot, I know I’m freaking out. It’s just that you’re my baby girl. I know you’re smart and can handle yourself—”

“Damn right she can, gave me a black eye last boxing session,” Happy grumbled.
“—but I just don’t trust teenage boys. Or girls. Basically any kid that’s not you I don’t care for.” He sighed with relief when he felt Darcy smile against his chest, nodding along.

“I know, Dad, but you just gotta dial back the crazy, okay?”

Groaning, Tony pulled away, gently ruffling Darcy’s hair. “Ugh, fine! Just pop in the mansion with that noggin of yours and let JARVIS know when you get to the theatre and if you need us, all that protective parenting stuff. Deal?”

“Deal.” Darcy smiled as she stood, and popped up on her toes to give Tony a kiss on his cheek, skipping over to Happy to do the same before heading to the garage. “Gotta go! Love you, guys!” And with a blown kiss and a wink, Darcy swept out the door leaving the two men in resolved silence. They stayed still as they listened to the sound of Darcy’s Jeep peal out of the driveway, but moved into action once the sound had faded.

As if reading each other’s minds, Happy reached under the sink for the good scotch while Tony pulled out four glasses and placed them on the counter. As Happy poured each glass a measure Pepper and Rhodey filtered into the kitchen and sat at the counter. Everyone grabbed a glass and silently toasted each other, a congratulations to the family surviving Darcy’s first date.

After Tony took his first swallow, he addressed JARVIS. “J? Can you get me the last name of this Johnny kid?” He rolled his eyes when he felt everyone’s gaze land on him, “Relax, I just want to know for safety purposes, just in case and all that.” He was thankful that no one stopped JARVIS from responding.

“From the sign-in log at the animal shelter where Darcy volunteers, it appears as if the young man’s name is Johnny Storm.”

There was half a beat of silence before Tony snorted into his glass, “Well that’s a stupid name.”

Chapter End Notes

not entirely sure where Johnny Storm came from...he just kind of was there.

whatever little I know about the Xmen, i know even less about the Fantastic four besides what my memory gives me from seeing the movie a handful of times years ago. and not the newest remake (no offense to those who liked it, but i certainly did not.)
onward!
Chapter Notes

i want to keep thanking everyone who has been reading and commenting! you guys are the best and i appreciate all the love.

here is the start of Iron Man!

Happy was at a loss. For the first time since he’d been hired on as Tony’s personal bodyguard Happy felt useless. He didn’t know how to help Pepper, but that didn’t break his heart nearly as much as his inability to help Darcy did.

Tony was missing.

It’d been a month since word first came in about the attack in Afghanistan, and ever since the Malibu home was empty of the smiles and laughter that Darcy always filled it with. Each passing day, Happy becomes more and more disheartened as he watches Darcy lose hope.

Oh, Lil Bot, he’ll come home. He has to.

Happy looked to Darcy now from where he stood at the girl's bedroom door. Her arm’s were wrapped tight around her waist, shoulders hunched and up tight around her ears. From the reflection in the window, Happy could see that her face was eerily blank, no life in her eyes as she watched the waves roll in. His heart broke further when he noticed all the bots surrounding her, vying for her attention.

Fen was beeping mournfully, one claw tugging gently on the hem of her bright yellow jeans, the other tapping her foot. DUM-E was letting out sad cooing whirrs, his head on her shoulder as if he was giving her a hug. U mirrored him on the other side.

Happy felt a nudge on his lower back, turning to see that Butterfingers was trying to move into the room. Stepping aside, he watched as the bot rolled up her and extended a claw right in front of her face, finally drawing Darcy’s focus away from the window.
Her face was still blank as she looked to Butterfingers, but Happy could see her bottom lip begin to wobble as the bot raised what he was holding his other claw.

It was Jeffrey.

The stuffed toy seemed to be the final straw as Darcy suddenly dropped to her knees, heaving sobs shaking her small body. Happy quickly strode over and kneeled next to her, pulling her into his arms and making cooing murmurs in her ear as she clutched Jeffrey to her chest and wailed for Tony to come home.

Ignoring the tears in his own eyes, Happy made a vow to never let Darcy be hurt like this ever again. He knew he’d need more help if he was to take care of Darcy while Tony was gone.

He needed to make a call.

*****

Logan didn’t know what to expect when he got a call from the Stark’s private number. Whenever Darcy wanted to contact him, she used her powers to change her caller ID to a picture of a kitten, so he knew it wasn’t the little mutant. Happy had called the number he had left for Tony to use when he needed extra muscle for Darcy’s safety. Honestly, he figured the billionaire would have that covered in spades, so his offering was really more of a formality as a favor to the Professor.

He got a bad feeling the more he thought about the possible reasons for Happy’s request that he come to Malibu, so he steeled himself as he drove his motorcycle around the final stretch to the Stark mansion. As he pulled to a stop in front of the place, he saw Happy waiting outside the front door.

“So I guess we’re gonna talk shop, first?”

Happy nodded, looking over his shoulder at the closed door as if he was afraid of being heard.

“Have you been watching the news?” Logan felt the first dregs of uneasiness at the words, shaking his head as he replied.
“Nah, been on the road, shakin’ some unfriendlies off my tail.” Happy looked like shit. This would not be good information.

Quickly, Happy recapped what had happened the last five weeks to Tony. As he got momentum, Logan saw his professional mask slip away to be replaced by his overwhelming concern and love for the Stark family.

“I’ve got my hands full, here. Pepper won’t eat and is manning all of SI by herself, Rhodey is running himself ragged hunting down for Tony in the desert, and Darcy,” Happy had to clear his throat, choking up at the thought of the girl, “she’s not speaking, Logan. I don’t know how to help her. Stane is breathing down all our necks, wanting to out her as Tony’s kid so she can ‘take the helm’.”

Logan felt uncomfortable at the beseeching look the man gave him as he begged, “Please, Logan, you have to help. Darcy’s only eighteen, she can’t take on SI, especially not with Tony missing. Pepper and I can handle Stane, but we need to get Darcy out from under his gaze. Stane keeps trying to convince us, especially Darcy, that Tony is dead. He upsets her so much that things start flying around the house and all the appliances go bezerk! Please, just help us look after Darcy, help us keep her safe.”

Logan took a moment to absorb all that information, then clapped Happy on the shoulder saying, “I was already gonna help when ya called me, bub. I’ll take care of pipsqueak in there, you get the old man off her back.”

The relief in Happy’s face almost knocked Logan over with its strength.

Why do I have to have a weakness for kids? It’s gonna be the death of me.

*****

Darcy was sitting in Sir’s spot at the workbench when JARVIS gave her a mental poke.

Darcy, it seems as though Mr. Hogan had called Mr. Logan. He is outside of the lab and would like to come in. Shall I open the door?

Darcy gave him what felt like a mental shrug, unmoving from her spot and not bothering to turn and
JARVIS was experiencing a new powerful feeling as of late, and after a lengthy discussion with Miss Potts he was able to identify it as frustration. And he was very frustrated these days.

What good was he as an AI if he couldn’t even help to locate Sir? If he couldn’t protect him to begin with? He couldn’t help Miss Potts or Mr. Hogan who were busy taking care of the entirety of SI. He managed to help Mr. Rhodes a small amount when the man needed help with tracking devices that JARVIS upgraded for him.

None of this frustrated him as much as his inability to help Darcy though. His sister wouldn’t speak, verbally or through the connection she shared with him and the other robots. She was drowning in grief, and refused to let him in to share the pain. When he peered through their connection into her mind he saw what usually appeared as bright circuitry, housing all that made Darcy Darcy, fade and fizzle out. He often felt as if he was looking at an old and broken computer, so he made a habit not to look into his sister’s mind.

Deciding that Mr. Logan could probably do Darcy some good, he buzzed the lab door open and watched the man enter, walking slowly to the girl sitting in the middle of the room.

“Hey, Pip,” if JARVIS could, he would have made a slight smile at the man’s nickname for Darcy.

He did feel an immense wave a relief overwhelm his coding when Darcy finally, finally, spoke up.

“Hey, Kitty.”

Mr. Logan huffed a quiet laugh at the name he’d been trying to convince everyone he wanted shake. JARVIS knew that while the man would roll his eyes and bemoan the nickname, the mutant actually had quite the sizable soft spot for Darcy, and was actually quite pleased that she gave him a name.

“I’m not gonna ask ya how yer doin’ ‘cause I know you ain’t doin’ good, pipsqueak.” Mr. Logan smiled when Darcy seemed to relax at that, but tensed when he continued, “but were ya gonna tell me you were all grown up now? ‘Bout had a heart attack when I walked in, still lookin’ for that thirteen-year-old punk from when I saw ya last.”

Darcy chuckled roughly as she turned to look up at Mr. Logan, who had moved to lean his hip next
to Darcy on the workbench.

“Dad said…says, he says that the puberty stick beat the shit out of me. Must’ve happened after I saw you then.”

JARVIS was pained to hear his sister struggle over her words, determined to keep referring to Sir in the present tense. Knowing that Darcy was in good hands, JARVIS turned away from the lab and retuned his focus to Mr. Rhodes, who had broken yet another prototype that JARVIS had sent him.

The AI watched over everyone over the next two and a half months: he made sure that one of the bots would bring Miss Potts food when she went without, aided Mr. Rhodes in the search for Sir, and made it his top priority that his little sister was as content as she could be under Mr. Logan’s protection.

As time passed, JARVIS saw how Mr. Logan’s presence not only helped Darcy, but it seemed to benefit the others as well. Happy, confident in the knowledge that Darcy was protected with Mr. Logan was free to help run business with Miss Potts. Specifically, he aided the ever running endeavor of keeping Mr. Stane from Darcy, and shutting down all attempts the man made to get in contact with the girl.

Miss Potts was comforted by Mr. Logan’s loyalty to Darcy, often amused at the antics the two would get into with the bots in the mansion. When not getting dragged into small hijinks with Darcy, Mr. Logan would spend much of the time teaching her self defense and hand-to-hand combat. JARVIS would notice the soft smile on Miss Potts’ face whenever she saw Darcy return from the home gym, flushed and smiling.

At the end of three months, Mr. Logan received a call from Professor Xavier, and left within the day. The mansion was quiet and cold once more, with JARVIS fretting that Darcy would slide back into her near-catatonic state. The AI was rapidly searching the internet for tips on grief counseling and hobby suggestions for Darcy when he got a call from Mr. Rhodes.

“We found him. We’re bringing him home.”
Chapter 13

Chapter Notes

thanks again for all the love you guys are sending my way!

head’s up, there's some violence toward the end of the chapter. it's detailed but not graphic if that makes sense? like i’m not going to wax poetic about gory details like one of the Saw movies.

Tony watched in frozen horror as Stane’s hand moved in front of his face, dropping onto the arc reactor, twisting Tony’s only tie to life free from his chest with a sick pop!

The sheer agony in his chest was only compounded on by the pain of Stane’s betrayal, his worry about Pepper, and his devastating need to know that Darcy was safe. As if he could read Tony’s mind, Stane paused in his evil monologuing with a roguish smile.

“Ah, yes, Miss Stark! Such a smart girl, if a bit reluctant to carry out her destiny as a Stark. No worries, Tony I’ve left her out of this, for the moment. I have no quarrel with your daughter.” Stane paused as he stood, wiping his shoulders of imaginary dust and smiling down at a paralyzed Tony, “She could prove most useful to me, after all. So once this is over, I’ll retrieve her from where I had her sent and get started on making her my perfect little ally.”

Tony’s body recoiled at Stane’s words, fighting against his bonds to that he could protect his baby girl from this monster’s hands. He continued to struggle with more vigor when Stane gave him a filthy wink as he turned on his heel, Tony’s life in his dirty hands.

Moments later Tony found himself stumbling down the mansion steps to his lab, every few feet falling and earning another bruise that paled in comparison to the burning ache radiating from the hole in his chest. He couldn’t let it stop him, even as he was brought to his knees in pain, crawling to his destination. He let thoughts of Darcy fuel him over to the shelves, tears pouring from his eyes his hands missed their target, but trying again and again. His baby girl needed him. He can’t fail her now.

Even as his determination grew, black spots danced across his vision as he reached a final time for his first arc reactor Pepper had displayed on the shelf. Tony could feel the moment his body surrendered, wanting nothing more than to fall under the spell of the pain and sleep. He was saved though, by DUM-E.
Beautiful, wonderful, stupid DUM-E who was beeping his concerns at Tony as he held out the glass container. Choking on a sob as he grabbed the box from DUM-E’s claw, hope filled Tony’s chest for the smallest of moments.

Slamming the glass on the floor to free his only chance at stopping Stane and saving his kid, Tony thought back, wondering if there was a way he could’ve stopped this from happening or if they were all just Screwed the moment he set foot back in the states.

*****

Tony choked on sand as he crash landed, the suit breaking around him as he rolled down a sand dune. Once the bottom of the hill he spent a minute or three laughing hysterically, clutching his ribs.

“It fucking worked!” He was breathless, in pain, and desperately trying not to think of Yinsen’s final moments that gave him the window to fly from the cave they were being held in.

His laughter trickled off from full-bellied guffaws to small barely-there chuckles, stopping completely as he felt the shockwave from the fortress in the cave being blown sky-high.

Sobered once more, Tony slowly pulled himself so that he could sit up, pulling the last bits of the metal suit off his body. He stood with his hands on his hips, looking around the desert that appeared to be identical no matter which way he looked. Turning to peer over his shoulder, Tony could see the pieces of the metal suit leading away from him like a trail.

“Right. Not that way then.”

He took a deep inhale that he immediately regretted, coughing up what felt like way too much sand to be any good for him, Tony chose the opposite direction of his little metal crumb trail, and began to walk.

**

Tony could feel Rhodey’s eyes on him, heavy and concerned and in no way subtle.
“Rhodey, I’m okay, gotta dial back the Bambi eyes for me,” he mumbled at his friend. He reached out an arm as if to pat his friend on the shoulder, but was halted in his movement from the multitude of IV’s.

“You are not okay, Tony.” Rhodey growled, “You were missing for three months, there’s a crater where there used to be a mountain, and there is something glowing in your goddamn chest! Not okay!”

Tony’s smile turned into a grimace as the jet hit some turbulence, but forced it back on his face after the jostle.

“Aww, knew you loved me, big guy.”

“Shut the fuck up and get some sleep.”

**

It wasn’t until they were nearing US airspace that Tony could build up the courage to ask about Darcy.

Wary of the many sets of ears around him, Tony nudged Rhodey in the seat next to him until his friend could see the seriousness in his eyes.

“How’s everything back home? All the bots safe and sound?”

Understanding Tony’s veiled words, Rhodey smiled. “Yeah man, all the bot’s are okay. There was some trouble for a bit, but Happy and Pepper had it covered. Happy brought down his cat for a bit because the bot’s needed some company, apparently.”

Tony raised his eyebrow at his friend, who only shrugged in response. Huh, imagine that. I’ll have to send Logan a bottle of scotch and a pack of Cubans in thanks.

**
Seeing Pepper’s red-rimmed eyes as he stepped off the plane both broke his heart and made him smile.

“Hmmm. Your eyes are red. Tears for your long lost boss?” He teased.

“Tears of joy. I hate job hunting.”

Rolling his eyes behind his sunglasses, Tony scoffed, “Yeah, well, vacation’s over.”

Ignoring his jab, Pepper reached into her purse and held out her phone.

“Before we head to the press conference, I believe there is an important call for you to make, Mr. Stark.”

Tentatively reaching out his hand (he doesn’t like being handed stuff, sue him), Tony pulled the phone from her grasp, ignoring the stirring in his gut as their fingers brushed.

*Focus, Tony,* he chastised himself, following Pepper as she led her way to a limo nearby and putting the phone to his ear.

He knew that Darcy was going to scream and cry at him, he just didn’t know which one he wanted first.

“Hello?” he cringed at the deep inhale that he heard across the line.

“YOU ABSOLUTE JACKASS! DO YOU KNOW HOW WORRIED SICK I’VE BEEN? YOU’VE BEEN GONE FOR MONTHS! I THOUGHT YOU WERE DEAD!” His baby girl’s furious yells became more garbled with tears as she continued, and Tony was thankful for the privacy of the limo when the door closed behind him.

“I am so, so sorry, Bot. I can’t even begin to tell you how sorry I am that you were scared and hurting.”

His heart shattered as Darcy just sobbed on the phone, seeming unable to form words for the
“I thought of you every single day, sweetheart. That’s how I was able to get myself out, thinking of you. You, Pepper, Rhodey and Happy. JARVIS and the bots too, I guess.”

Darcy’s sobs were interrupted by a watery chuckle at his teasing tone, knowing full well that he did love JARVIS and the bots like they were another set of kids.

“Come home?” Tony’s eyes closed at the sound of her pained whisper, Darcy sounding like that scared two-year-old he first met rather than his eighteen-year-old firecracker of a daughter.

“Yeah, Darcy, I’m comin’ home real soon.”

**

Tony sat down on the mansion’s couch, ice pack held to his head as he watched Pepper and Darcy angrily pace in front of him.

He cringed when he remembered Pepper catching him with the bots as he tried to get out of the test suit. The look on her face promised that there would be hell to pay for keeping this secret.

Tony watched his two favorite women wear holes in the floor, smiling at the differences between the two. Pepper was the embodiment of grace, her designer suit pristine even in her distress, her heels making little echoing *click click clicks* on each determined step as she lectured him about how reckless he was being.

Darcy was almost the opposite of the tall redhead. Her short and curvy stature shuffling across the floor in her bunny slippers, making little *shh shh shh* noises in time with Pepper’s clicking. Her hands were flailing about like they always did when she was agitated, but the image was made even more endearing by the fact her hands were hidden in the sleeves of the over-sized Air Force hoodie she was wearing, undoubtedly stolen from Rhodey.

Looking closer at his kid’s face, Tony could see more than just worry there like he saw with Pepper. Narrowing his eyes, he began to laugh. *She’s trying to fight wanting to know more about the suit.* Meeting the gazes of both fierce women as they came to a stop at his outburst, he cocked an eyebrow at Darcy.
“So, spawn of mine, wanna see the schematics?”

Darcy’s curiosity broke through in the form a huge smile on her face, and she began nodding so quickly her thick-framed glasses threatened to slide down her nose.

Pepper groaned, loudly, and practically ran to the kitchen mumbling about goddamn Starks and their inability to leave well enough alone and needing a bottle of wine the entire way.

Tony couldn’t bring himself to care, he had a metal suit to show his kid.

**

They didn’t understand. They couldn’t, Tony realized. His family hadn’t seen what destruction his company, his life, had brought down on so many innocent people. Screw Stane and his weapons-loving bullshit. He couldn’t see it then, but after months of torture Tony could see clearly just what type of poison Stane truly was. Tony knew he had to drain the bad blood out.

He had purpose, now. A mission to keep this world safe, Darcy’s world. He wouldn’t let her spend her life with blood on her hands that she got just from holding his. His daughter was too good, far too good for the likes of him and the life he was leading.

But he’d be better. For Darcy. He’d clean up his act and dismantle every weapon he ever made and start new.

He’d protect Darcy, and better the world to do so.

**

It was with this determination that Tony used to fuel his fight with Stane in the streets of California. Each blow dealt was another reminder to him that he had a promise to keep. Each time Stane struck him down told him that he had so much to make up for, that his mission was far from over.
Don’t worry, baby girl, he thought as dodged a car Stane threw his way, I’ll take this bastard down, I’ll make things right.

It wasn’t until shortly later, when he was screaming at Pepper to throw the switch so the giant arc reactor could blow Stane to bits, that he realized that he may not get enough time to be better for his daughter. Staring at the night sky as he felt the power surging in the room beneath him, he only hoped that Darcy knew that he had tried.

*****

Darcy woke up with a groan, the feel of dried blood on the side of her face and cold concrete under her back where she lay. Before she even opened her eyes she took stock of her body and any potential injuries. Finding none, Darcy cracked open an eye, slowly taking in her surroundings.

She seemed to be in some sort of empty warehouse (she could practically hear her Dad scoff at the cliché). The place was clearly old and not well taken care of, judging by the exposed wires that would sometimes spark dangerously. The heavy industrial lights above would flicker in their brightness, but otherwise remained on. Using her powers Darcy was able to tell that the warehouse was still getting access to a decent amount of power despite its abandoned nature. Good, that could come in handy. That was about all she could tell without moving from her spot, though, so with reluctance she decided to look around fully.

When she opened her other eye and gently turned her head to her left, she could see about ten men arranged in a semi-circle around her spot on the floor. She squinted through her glasses, eyes flying open with shock when she got a better look.

Ten men with a fuck-ton of guns and a serious addiction to gym memberships. Damn.

Darcy sighed and began to sit up which drew the attention of all the goons, some tightening their hands on their weapons, others chuckling and leering at her.

Oh HELL no, Pepper didn’t raise no damsel in distress.

One man stepped away from the center of the group, thus earning him the much desired title of Goon-1, a smarmy look on his face. Darcy took the few moments she had before he got within range to search for JARVIS in the back of her head.
Bro? I’m in a bit of a bind and I could use some assistance.

The AI flooded her with relief, quickly overwhelmed by anxiety and worry so thick it made Darcy gag.

**Darcy! You are in danger,** he paused as she sent him a mental image of her current predicament along with a feeling that translated closely to ‘no, shit, Sherlock.’

Her brother continued, filing away the face of each man for later use, **Stane attacked Sir, Darcy.**

**Shortly after I noticed you went offline at the coffee shop Stane arrived at the mansion, cutting off my servers temporarily, and taking the arc reactor from Sir.**

Darcy felt rage and worry battle for dominance in her small body, before shunting them both to the side when JARVIS reassured her that her Dad had successfully installed the original reactor, and was in pursuit of Stane. Her focus was jerked back to the man in front of her when he spoke.

“Alright, girlie, here’s the deal. We don’t know why you’re important and frankly we don’t give a fuck,” Goon-1 smiled as his fellow goons laughed in agreement at his back, his gaze moving appreciatively over her form as he continued, “Now, we got orders not to kill you, but that don’t mean we can’t be friendly, right, sweetheart?”

Darcy’s previous rage broke through whatever damn she was holding it behind, and she preened with satisfaction as her sudden and feral smile made each goon flinch back before they could check their reactions.

**JARVIS, I’m going to need to put you on hold. I’ve got some business to take care of.**

It was time to rescue herself.

****

The goons didn’t stand a chance. Without moving from her seated position on the floor of the warehouse, Darcy quickly barricaded all the exits she could see with whatever scraps of metal and machinery that was littered about.
The sudden movement startled the goons into action, each one raising a gun up to their shoulder, keeping Darcy in their sights. Rolling her eyes as she stood, just slowly enough that no one would get trigger-happy, Darcy addressed her words at Goon-1.

“No, sweetheart, we’re not gonna be friendly with each other if I can help it,” she seethed at the man. Letting her rage fuel her mind, Darcy unleashed her powers.

Using both her technokinesis and telekinesis at once was beautiful and terrifying in its lethality. When Goon-1 was suddenly yanked from the ground by a tangle of wires pulled from the ceiling, electrocuting him all the while, the other goons began struggling as an unseen force began tearing their guns from their grasp. One managed to get off a lucky shot that clipped Darcy in her hip before his second round was stopped by Darcy’s mind.

Inhaling through clenching teeth, Darcy surrendered to completely her instincts, trusting her mind and powers to guide her to safety.

Goons were suddenly dodging and battling half-dead pieces of machinery that sparked furiously, groaning and setting chase with a cold vengeance. Exposed wires went after those who tried to run for the exits, pulling them tight to the walls and coursing electricity through their veins as they struggled for breath.

As this chaos devolved around her, Darcy fought hand-to-hand with a goon her powers seemed to have missed. Where the man had age, height, and experience that dwarfed hers, he stank with fear that distracted him as he watched his comrades fall to her powers all around them. He clearly thought this job was a milk-run, and Darcy’s feral grin grew at his misfortune as she took him down with a final uppercut that sent him in the path of some zombified machinery.

Looking around at the mess she had made, Darcy felt exhaustion seep into her bones. She sank to her knees as the final groans of the defeated goons quieted. Her mind was sluggish, and she felt disoriented from all the adrenaline she had burned through.

JARVIS? Did I do okay? You figure out where I am, yet?

Yes, Darcy. You were so very brave. I was able to track the power surge you created and I have sent the location to Sir and the rest of the family. They will be there shortly.

‘Kay…I’m gonna sleep now, freak out ‘bout this later.
Very well, little sister. I will see you soon.
Chapter 14

“I am Iron Man.”

The words had barely left her father’s mouth when Darcy reached for her phone with one hand and her morphine pump with the other. She frantically upped her dosage a couple times as she waited for her phone to connect her to Pepper. And if she used her abilities to make the phone ring a little more violently, well, that was nobody’s business but hers.

Pepper was quick to answer, thankfully, “I am going to murder him, Darcy, I really am.”

“Oh, fantastic. I thought it was just the good drugs but it turns out that my Dad is actually as crazy as we all suspected. What the hell, Pepper?!!”

The older woman sighed. “I’ll handle it. I have no idea how, but I’ll handle it.”

Darcy felt a sly grin creep on her face as she teased, “Because you’re Pepper goddamn Potts?”

Pepper’s reply was firm, if not a little terrifying in its tenacity.

“Because I am Pepper mother-fucking Potts, and I take shit from no man.”

“I’ve told you recently that you terrify me, right? Yet I also want to be you when I grow up?”

Darcy felt warmed by Pepper’s laugh, letting the morphine drag her back to sleep as the woman replied. “Yes, Darcy. Now get some sleep, I know you’re bored, but a gunshot wound can’t be walked off.”

She was pretty sure she mumbled something to do with lies, but Darcy was too far down the rabbit hole to be certain.
“You’re a jackass.”

Tony sighed, looking up from his seat in the limo to Pepper across from him. She was beautiful when she was angry, but Tony valued his life and respected the woman too much to admit it. Mainly because he usually deserved whatever it was that put him in the path of her rage.

“Probably.”

“I’m not even sure how to handle this. Do you realize how much more work you just gave me? Do I calm down SI or—”

Tony tried bribing as he heard the anger rise more and more in Pepper’s voice, “I’ll give you a raise! A big one!”

“—does HR even have an inkling of what to do in these type of situations? No! Do you know why, Tony?”

“…you’re probably gonna let me know—”

“Because secret identities are supposed to be SECRET!”

The limo suffered an awkward silence for an immensely long five minutes, casually rolling down the California streets to head back to the mansion. Tony fiddled with his hands in his lap, waiting until he heard Pepper get her breathing back under her control before he began to speak.

Softly, as if not to unintentionally sound too defensive, Tony asked Pepper to look at him. When she reluctantly did, he continued.

“I’m sorry. I am. It was selfish of me to just throw that out in the open like that, especially when you worked so hard with that guy from SHIELD to keep it under wraps.” He ran a hand over his face, taking a moment to gather his thoughts.
“I just couldn’t bear the thought of more secrets, Pepper. That’s how we got into this mess. Stane hiding things from me, suspicion growing in every dark corner, I can’t run the risk of something like that beginning again.”

Pepper’s face softened at his sincere tone, but she wasn’t convinced. “Tony, I understand where you’re coming from. But, don’t you think that the situations are a bit different? Stane was a psychopath who was desperate for money and an empire, and this is you being…a superhero.” She pinched the bridge of her nose between her fingers, her other hand clenching into a fist on her knee.

Leaning forward to bridge the distance between the two, Tony placed his right hand over her fist, causing Pepper to drop her hand and look at him. Tony had to clear his throat when he noticed just how close they were, but he pressed on regardless.

“I know that, Pepper, I do. But I need the world to see that I’m righting my wrongs here, that if they try to use me again, I’ll bring down a level of hell on their heads that they have never seen.” His voice turned icy and cold, eyes vacant as he stared into the middle distance.

He was startled out of his reverie when Pepper’s other hand came to rest on his, sandwiching his bigger hand between her smaller two. He looked at them and how they contrasted: two smooth and pale, the other tanned and scarred, and perpetually having grease stuck in his nail beds.

The image did funny things to his heart that he didn’t want to think about.

“Okay,” Pepper sighed, “I forgive you for being a jackass.”

He smirked.

“This time.”

*****

Rhodey was waiting for Tony in the mansion’s living room, sharing a couple beers with Logan and watching a bored Darcy teach Fen how to play go fish.
“Do you have any two’s?”

One low beep.

“Okay, Fen. I want to believe you, but we’ve had problems here before. Are you sure you don’t have any two’s?”

Two higher pitched beeps.

“Fine. I’ll just keep getting my ass handed to me by my ‘bot. Casual Thursday in the Stark household.”

Rhodey smirked at his niece’s disgruntled face, her hair a tangle of curls that flowed across her shoulders and down her chest, dark glasses perched at the end of her nose as she looked at Fen with suspicion. He watched as she seemed to let whatever it was go, rolling her eyes and drawing from the deck of cards on her lap.

It’d been about a month since his friend’s superhero version of coming out of the closet, so Rhodey had taken to spending even more time in the mansion when he knew that Tony, Pepper, and Happy would be gone for long period of times for press conferences and meetings with different military groups.

He rolled his eyes, thankful that he wasn’t part of that mess. Rhodey was also thankful for Logan who handed him another beer just as he finished his current one.

A couple days after the boss fight between Tony and Stane, as they all came from the hospital to bring Darcy home, the family had come back to the mansion to find a pissed Logan leaning against his motorcycle in the driveway.

“Ya gotta lot to explain, Stark.”

There had been a lot of yelling, male posturing, nervous robots, and Darcy demanding some popcorn and morphine for her testosterone-fueled entertainment.
So, things going no differently than usual, Rhodey thought.

It had taken some time but Logan eventually had gotten the full story from Tony and Pepper about what went down with Stane, Rhodey repressing a smile when the mutant actually growled at the mention of Darcy’s abduction. He quickly sobered when that lead them all to ask Darcy about what had happened in the warehouse. They’d all seen the damage, having retrieved Darcy themselves, but they wanted to her about it from her point of view.

His niece was brave, he’d give her that. Had he been in her position, Rhodey doesn’t think that’d he make it out like she did. Then again, Darcy Stark was her own brand of special.

Darcy told her story calmly, filling in every possible detail and not hesitating to answer a question when one was prompted. She told them about contacting JARVIS, the goons, and the following blood bath.

“I’m not really sure how it happened,” she admitted, “I’ve got more control and strength behind my powers now than ever before, but even prior to that night I had never been able to wield them like that.” She paused, picking at a scab on her knuckles before continuing, looking everyone in the eye as she did so.

“It wasn’t just the violence of it, though. Obviously I’ve never done anything remotely close to that before, just some harmless pranking that was safe. But…it was as if something just unlocked. I was so angry and then it was as if I was just a bystander as my powers took over. It was quicker than instinct. I fought the one guy while he was close, but it was if the warehouse had a mind of its own.”

Rhodey knew that he wasn’t the only one who was scared of the implication that Darcy’s powers were uncontrollable, but he also knew what everyone else was thinking, too.

The damage done to those men and to the warehouse told a story of something far opposite of lacking control. Each man died with a precision that was eerie, and the warehouse was used as a weapon in the most efficient way possible.

They all stewed in silence for a few more moments before Tony spoke, “Do you guys think it’s maybe the ‘mega-mind’ thing? Her brain is basically unparalleled everywhere else, maybe when it came to her self-protection instincts it just cranked itself up to overdrive.”
Rhodey was glad for his genius friend because he wasn’t sure he could deal with anymore unknown variables when it came to Lil Bot. The logic was sound, it seemed like a likely solution, and Rhodey was damn tired about worrying over the Starks.

One day, they’ll have a movie night like normal families, he hopes.

Chapter End Notes

still many thanks for the love!
think i'm going to start on Thor in the next chapter. that bit of the story will probably last a bit longer since it's got more darcy-centric stuff, as well as more awesome characters.

I'll probably bring Iron Man 2 in there somewhere, but not too much since it goes on around the same time as Thor and i want to stay focused on darcy for this bit. She's finally out of the house and becoming more independent
you guys are the best, truly. i thank you from the bottom of my heart for all your kind words and likes and kudos.

back to our scheduled programming:

THOR! JANE! FLUFF! FRIENDSHIP! woo!

Darcy sat next to Pepper at the bar, sipping wine as her Dad continued to fret and establish ridiculous security protocols with JARVIS. Rolling her eyes, she wordlessly topped off Pepper’s glass as well as her own, smiling at the woman’s wink she was thrown. Realizing that her Dad was going to continue freaking out for a bit longer, she retreated mentally so make sure she had packed everything she needed.

Darcy was going to New Mexico for an internship with Doctor Jane Foster, and would be gone for about six months. She didn’t actually need and internship or the science credits it offered, but this was part of Darcy’s ‘playing at normal’ plan. Over the past three years or so since her Dad had outed himself as Iron Man, Darcy had completed a Masters degree in business management, as well as two Doctorates, in mechanical engineering and computer programming, respectively. Was it entirely fair since she had mutant abilities that gave her a leg up in the field? Probably not, but while Darcy could make things work with her powers, she liked learning the history of each subject and seeing how things came to be in each field of study.

So then at the ripe age of eighteen, Darcy had approached Pepper with a plan. She grew up alarmingly sheltered, and wanted to be part of the ‘real world’ for a bit. She began by commuting to a nearby community college that was near the Malibu mansion to earn a degree in political science. After a year of slow (for her, at least) going, while also working on her doctorates after-hours, Darcy transferred her credits to Culver University and bought a small studio apartment that she shared with Fen at the edge of campus. She had timed the move perfectly with that of her family’s move to New York City and her Dad’s Stark Tower project launch. There was a lot of yelling and negotiating, but a compromise was met when Darcy promised she’d come home to New York every other weekend to visit.

Now as a ‘senior’ at Culver at twenty-one, Darcy was told she needed six science credits in order to graduate and that an internship was her best shot. Unfortunately, since there were not any poli-sci internships still open, that left one slot available with one Dr. Foster.

“How do you even skip taking science credits anyways, Bot?” her Dad was incredulous, as if
Science! was the be-all end-all of academia.

“I’m doing the whole ‘normal kid’ thing, remember? You really think a poli-sci student is going to want to take an abundance of hard sciences? Besides, I was busy with my PhD’s.” Darcy threw back the last of her wine when she finished, and debated the merits of getting another glass.

On one hand, four glasses of wine while her Dad sipped on scotch always made for memorable debates in the Stark home. But on the other, they made for really interesting debates in the Stark home. Darcy still wasn’t sure what happened to the sentient and evil blender that came from one night of drunken shenanigans, but JARVIS assured her that she really didn’t want to know.

Pepper seemed to know what she was thinking and began looking at her own empty glass in contemplation. Shrugging, she topped her own glass off again before giving Darcy’s the same treatment. The women began laughing when they saw her Dad’s wary look between the two.

“Great. You guys are going to get all wine-sassy and gang up on me, then Bot is going to do her whole Bambi eyes bullshit and then I’m going to cave because I’ve gone soft—”

“Tony, all we’re really hearing is that you’ve already lost and that you should just accept your defeat with whatever shred of dignity you still possess.”

Darcy choked on her swallow of wine at Pepper’s droll interjection, but was saved by the older woman’s gentle pats between Darcy’s shoulder blades.

Looking between the two women, Darcy’s father’s shoulders sagged in defeat.

“Fine, you beautifully manipulative women, fine,” he rolled his eyes as they girls fist-bumped without looking at one another, “Don’t get smug, it doesn’t suit you. As a compromise I think I’ll head back to the Malibu mansion while you’re in ‘The Land of Enchantment,’ just for my own peace of mind that I’ll be closer to you, just in case. Deal?”

Darcy pretended to think about it, but everyone knew that she couldn’t fault her Dad for wanting to keep her safe. Nodding in agreement, she smiled.

“It’s going to be six months in the desert with an astrophysicist, it’ll be fun!”
It was not fun. Darcy had just walked from baggage claim in the lovely air conditioned airport to the scorching heat of the pick-up lot.

There was no fun to be had in a place that was this warm at nine in the goddamn morning.

Darcy yanked off her oversized sweater and matching beanie, hastily pulling her heavy locks off the back of her neck up into a huge messy bun. She was flushed and panting, much to the amusement of the twelve year old kid with his bags to the right of her. Ever the mature adult, she stuck her tongue out at him. He responded in kind, and all of a sudden the situation just spiraled out of control from there.

Dr. Jane Foster found her ten minutes later sitting on the curb, competing with a pre-teen in a ‘ridiculous-face’ competition, which she was totally winning, be-tee-dubs.

Darcy noticed the woman out of the corner of her eye and turned without putting her face back into a neutral position. Foster simply raised an eyebrow in question, then tilted her head in consideration.

“If you could cross your eyes more, I think whatever look you’re going for will come together better.”

Oh, Darcy liked Dr. Foster! Transforming her face from whatever nonsense she had it stuck as to a happy smile, Darcy jumped up and held out her hand for the good doctor to shake.

“Hi! I’m Darcy Lewis, your lovely new intern for the next half-year. I specialize in making excellent coffee, tinkering, and wrangling in the crazy.”

Dr. Foster squinted her eyes a bit as she shook Darcy’s hand, trying to get a read on her. “You tinker?”

“I tinker.”
The smaller woman beamed up at Darcy, gripping and shaking her hand with more enthusiasm than before.

“Call me Jane.”

*****

Two months had passed since the start of Darcy’s internship, and she fucking loved it.

Jane was a genius, but was like an adorably cranky toddler when she went too long without sleep or food. Having developed her scientist-wrangling skills at a young age, Darcy had an excellent system to make sure that the pint sized doctor was properly cared for.

Darcy would slowly start placing small cups of coffee further and further out of Jane’s reach, like a trail, so that Jane would have to leave whatever station she was Science!-ing at and follow Darcy. At the end of the trail was usually a bottle of water and a well-balanced meal. Whenever she needed to get Jane to sleep or shower, Darcy would replace the coffee with pop-tart pieces and lead her to the proper room. Darcy wasn’t entirely sure why, but Jane acted like a cat with cat-nip around the pastry so Darcy didn’t question it two closely.

As time passed, Darcy and Jane grew away from the whole employer/assistant relationship and moved closer and closer to a true friendship. Darcy had made friends over the years, in college, at the animal shelter where she volunteered as a teenager, and even at various libraries and coffee shops she visited as a kid. None of them seemed as authentic as her friendship with Jane, though. When she thought about it, Darcy believed it was because Jane was a bit of a loner too, underestimated because of her genius and her ‘crackpot’ theories. The two of them just clicked, and piece by piece Darcy began to open up to the first person outside of her family.

When Jane noticed that Darcy’s ‘tinkering’ on her machines was less fiddling and more ‘here-let-me-completely-gut-and-fix-and-recalibrate-so-that-it-works-a-million-times-better-than-before,’ Darcy sheepishly admitted that she was pretty good of an engineer and her Dad was a mechanic who taught her a thing or two.

*Understatement.*

Darcy tried to dial back how much she let Jane see of her, not for a lack of trust, but because she didn’t want to scare off her new friend. So Darcy was pretty shocked when Jane came up to the roof
after Darcy had her nightly phone call to her Dad with a bottle of tequila, four months into their time together.

Jane poured them each three shots as she sat down, swallowing hers down one after another, then gesturing for Darcy to do the same. Shrugging, Darcy did as she was told and then spread her hands, opening the floor to Jane.

“Okay, minion. You and I are going to get down and dirty with this heart to heart shit. You are no longer my intern, you are my friend, my best friend, and I want you to be able to tell me things,” she raised her hand to cut off Darcy’s stuttering protests, “I’m not saying you aren’t telling me things, because you are. And I’m not demanding you to tell me everything. I know some secrets are good for you, but some aren’t, and you don’t have to tell me anything you don’t want. But I want you to know that I care about you and trust you, and you can trust me too.”

Darcy’s mouth opened and closed a few times, completely overwhelmed by her friend’s heartfelt words. She decided that she needed another moment or two, and took a couple swallows from the tequila bottle between her and Jane.

The tears in her eyes were from the burn of the alcohol, nothing else, obviously.

Finally gathering her strength, she beamed at Jane as she spoke, “You’re my best friend too, boss-lady. I’m not sure I’ve actually had a real one of those. And you’re right, I’m not telling you everything, but I do want to. It’s only fair since you’ve been pouring your heart out to me these past few months.”

Jane smiled brilliantly at her, a little choked up as well. “I don’t think I’ve had a real best friend either.”

“Well, we can figure it out together.”

*****

That night the two of them stayed up late, leaving Science! be for the evening, and shared secrets like every girly rom-com demanded of them.

Darcy did keep a few things close to her chest though, like that her father was Tony Stark, she had a
‘mega-mind,’ and her siblings were AI’s she could communicate with in her mind.

Jane did get to learn about Darcy’s more obvious mutant powers, as well as a peek at just how smart Darcy truly was. There was a lot of high pitched squeals of glee when Darcy revealed that she also had a PhD or two under her belt, and drunken shouting to the stars that they were ‘women of science destined to topple the old white man.’

Darcy had laughed so hard she had cried.

Darcy decided that she was going to stay at Jane’s side forever when the woman was nonplussed by her mutant powers. While she found them fascinating, they were more of a footnote rather than the important bits.

“You’re my best friend first, Darcy. Is it cool that you can do all sorts of awesome things with your brain? Yes. But you’re Darcy first, mutant second, third, and fourth.” Darcy had tears in her eyes at Jane’s words, and shamelessly let them fall when she saw Jane was in the same state.

Desperate for some levity to break up the heavy mood, Darcy chuckled and spoke up.

“Thanks, but I think you and I both know your gear is one crossed wire from accidentally opening a black hole in the lab. I think I could use my powers to help us out a bit, boss-lady.”

The hangover the next morning was brutal, but in the end, totally worth the closer friendship and loyalty between the two.

Strange things were coming, after all, and they’d need to rely on one another.
here we go! just a heads up, i don't have much practice writing battle/fight scenes, so if it doesn't read too well, forgive me!

thanks again for all the love you guys keep sending my way :)

Darcy watched with fond amusement as Jane and Erik bickered back and forth about some equation or another, arms covered in ink and half-crazed wildness in their eyes.

The older doctor had arrived a few nights ago, Jane having decided that her mentor would be a good set of fresh eyes on her work and he’d tell her straight if she was wrong. Darcy knew that Jane wasn’t, but she didn’t want to say something and have Jane start doubting herself in some twist of reverse psychology. It happened often enough with her friend. It was some strange cycle of triumphant confidence and spiraling self-doubt, so Darcy left her well enough alone unless she truly needed it.

Darcy startled as she felt a nudge to her foot from where she sat at her desk, music blaring in her ears as she was tinkering with a small circuitboard that Jane needed for one of her machines. Looking down, she smiled as she saw Fen waving at her from his place on the ground. Darcy had her Dad send Fen shortly after Jane and Darcy’s night on the roof, much to both Fen and Jane’s delight.

Darcy accepted the cup of coffee Fen gently handed her and watched as he slowly rolled his way to Jane and Erik. After what Darcy assumed must have been a very loud beep from the bot from the way the two flinched, she saw the two look down and break out in dopey grins at the bot, thanking him for their coffee.

She had no idea why, but Darcy could see just how crazy her friends were over Fen. They doted on him like a real puppy, cooing over him and petting him, but also used him to bounce Science! ideas off of. And Fen? Fen simply adored the scientists, trailing after them like a happy shadow, pleased as punch when Jane or Erik taught him something new or had him tote things around the lab for them. Like Darcy, Fen could tell that the two geniuses needed help with day to day things, and he was thrilled to take care of them.

Darcy took a long sip of the coffee, sighing in pleasure. Damn that’s good. None of them were entirely sure how Fen made such perfect coffee, just that the kitchen was always a mess after. No one had it in their hearts to scold the little guy, afraid it’d break his little mechanical heart. Also, coffee.
After draining her mug of the liquid gold Darcy began straightening out her desk, tossing broken metal pieces to the proper bin on the other side of the lab, throwing her hands in the air in victory when she made each shot without using her telekinesis. Reaching out with her mind, Darcy was satisfied to find that all the machines were in working order, and they were all ready to go. Jane was having them drive out into the desert tonight to hunt for more anomalies, they couldn’t afford a malfunction. Not that malfunctions were something that occurred around Darcy, but she’s been spending so much time ‘acting normal’ these past few years that the second and triple checking were becoming second nature to her.

Darcy pulled out her earbuds and called to her charges across the room.

“Okay, boss-lady! Pops! Grab Fen and whatever you need, I’ve got the tank that’s masquerading as a van all gassed up and ready to go—”

“I still don’t see why I must be called ‘Pops,’” Erik grumbled.

“—so let’s get ready for Science!”

Jane laughed at the disgruntled Erik and the now ecstatic Fen, who had started zipping around the lab making loud trilling noises as if this was the first time they had ever left the lab.

“Don’t be grumpy, Erik. You know the minion can’t function without giving everything a nickname.”

Darcy winked at her friend, thankful for the solidarity. Looking to Erik, she shrugged.

“IF you can say with a straight face, that you don’t feel any paternal instincts towards Jane, me, or even Fen, then I’ll totally stop calling you Pops.”

The man looked between her and Jane, finally settling his gaze on Fen who had paused in front of him, mechanical eyes doing his best Puss in Boots impression.

“Goddamnit.”
Jane and Darcy broke out in laughter as Erik couldn’t seem to resist giving Fen a couple pats at the bot’s loving coos.

“It’s okay, Pops. We love you too.”

*****

Darcy looked down at the man she just tazed. The man she just tazed that they hit with the van. Ah, shit.

“Fen, come back here!”

The bot had slowly started rolling toward the downed man, staying far enough away that his claw had to fully extend before he could poke the him. Fen looked at Darcy, then back to the man, before poking him a final time and quickly retreating to hide behind Erik’s legs.

Jane seemed to gather her senses first, snapping into action.

“Oh, my god! Darcy you tazed him—”

“Can you blame me??”

“—shit and we hit him with the van—”

“We hit him? Uh, that was you, boss-lady.”

“Erik! Darcy! Help me put him in the van!”

Erik and Darcy shared a look, simultaneously agreeing that fighting Jane on this would result in a catastrophe. Together they each grabbed an arm, and began to lift.
There was a lot of grunting, swearing, and a muffled thump that was definitely not the strange man’s head hitting the side of the van. Nope, not at all. All the while, Fen kept curiously poking the man with a claw and making inquisitive beeping noises when they garnered no reaction. After several minutes and careful maneuvering, they finally got the massive man into the vehicle and were headed back into town.

Twenty minutes of silence passed, only interrupted by Jane’s grumbling and furious scribbling over what little data the machines had managed to pick up.

Checking the rearview mirror to peek at the trio in the back, Darcy cracked up at what she saw.

Erik was crowded up against the side of the van between the unconscious man and an assload of machinery, Fen in his lap. What really had Darcy busting her gut was that Erik was having problems keeping the little bot under control. Erik kept trying to hold on to Fen’s little arms which seemed determined to continue poking the unconscious man until he got a reaction. Erik himself was torn between amusement and exasperation, but kept a steady hand on Fen regardless.

“You okay back there, Pops?”

Erik just rolled his eyes, and told Darcy to shut up and keep driving.

*****

After the night spent stargazing with Jane and teaching her of Yggdrasil Thor felt much more at peace with his mortal body. He was still lost, and he was still in pain that he could not wield Mjölnir, but he felt a small joy that he had helped Jane recover some of her stolen work.

Thor was helping Jane prepare breakfast when he heard the beeping he had come to associate with the small machine that ran free in the lab. It was a curious thing, made of metal but containing a consciousness. Still, he found the ‘robot,’ as he was told it was called, to be quite endearing.

Kneeling, he took the offered mug and bowed his head in thanks. Seemingly pleased, the small machine made a multitude of noises before quickly disappearing.
“Fen’s a big fan of you, big guy.”

From his knelt position on the floor, Thor looked up to see Darcy standing a few feet away holding a pile of dirty dishes.

“Fen?” he inquired. Such a strange name.

“His full name is FENRIR, it stands for ‘Friendly & Extraordinarily Nettlesome Really Intelligent Robot.’”

She must have seen the look of recognition on his face as she was quick to remove any apprehension Thor may have had about the stigma of the creature’s name.

“I was just a kid when I made him, and was actually reading up on Norse mythology for my schooling. I read about a ‘dog’ and decided I’d name Fen after him.”

Thor was wary still, but trusted that Darcy would not bring a creature that could bring about Ragnarök like his brother’s own Fenrir could.

As Darcy left him to go wash dishes, Thor thought of the strange mortal. Whatever faint traces of magic he still possessed seem to pick up something other from young Darcy. During short amount of time since he had found himself in the company of these Midgardians, Thor had kept an eye on Darcy. He did not think that she was a threat to him or to others, but he made sure that he did not dismiss her either.

Sif would have his head for thinking less of a maiden in that way.

Thor smiled sadly at the thought of one of his oldest friends, and wondered what she and the Warriors Three were doing now. Surely, some adventure or another, as was their way.

As if summoned by his thoughts, Thor turned to see his shield brothers pressed against the building’s windows, smiling and banging upon the glass for his attention.

There was a rapid series of introductions between his oldest and newest friends, pinching Fandral in
the side when his gaze was a touch too appreciative of Jane than Thor was comfortable with.

Then the Destroyer arrived.

*****

*I need new friends,* Darcy thought, panting as she ran with an arm full of wriggling animals, Fen following her with his own set of furry creatures riding in his ‘truck bed.’ Finding a car full of people that hadn’t left town yet, Darcy picked up her pace and started handing off kittens and puppies to people in the car, lifting up Fen so he could unload as well.

As the dust kicked up in her face from the car’s squealing tires, Darcy took stock of her surroundings. Every civilian seemed to have made it out of the town, the streets empty for the first time since Darcy arrived. *Gotta love what metal death-bots did for tourism.*

The building next to her was suddenly lit up with fire, showering a screaming Darcy and Fen with bits of debris. Quickly getting her wits about herself, she unearthed herself and Fen with her powers, picking up her bot and running away from the scene. Fen wasn’t too pleased, but Darcy needed him safe, not happy.

“Fen, I need you to listen to me, okay? You gotta get out of town, head for the desert and away from the buildings.”

Darcy’s heart broke at the pitiful crying noises he made, but she had to protect him and couldn’t let her emotions rule her.

“Baby, you gotta do what I say, alright? You’re too little and I can’t let you get smashed out here. Mama’s gotta help Jane, you want to keep Jane safe, right? Erik and Thor too?” Darcy was begging, hoping her little AI understood the severity of the situation.

Thankfully, Fen came around. Ducking down behind a building on the end of the block, Darcy brought her face close to Fen’s.

“Okay, sweetheart, you gotta go now. Go as fast as you can and hide away from the buildings, okay? I gotta help keep everyone safe. I’ll keep you linked in so you can see that I’m alright, but only if you stay where it’s safe until I tell you that you can come back.”
Fen stared in her eyes for a few more moments before giving a tiny nod, turning around, and zooming away. Darcy had to wipe her tears when she heard his little tiny cries as he drove, but felt better knowing he was out of harm’s way.

Straightening her shoulders, Darcy ran back into the chaos.

*****

Jane had been hiding behind an overturned car when she felt Darcy return to her side.

“You get Fen out of here?” Darcy nodded, and Jane let out the breath she didn’t know she was holding. For such a tiny thing, Fen had such a big piece of her heart for some inexplicable reason.

“Jane, I’ve cut out what little surveillance equipment the town has, and SHIELD’s, and I’ve rerouted most of the town’s power.”

Jane nodded along, before the implications of what Darcy was telling her sunk in. She made a grab for Darcy’s arm as the younger girl began to creep out from their makeshift shelter.

“You are not going out there, Darcy! You’ll get yourself killed!”

“Jane! I can help! Please, I can’t sit here and let you or anyone else potentially get hurt without at least trying!”

Searching her young friend’s face, Jane groaned when she realized that Darcy was right. Had Jane any ability that would help them out, Darcy wouldn’t be able to stop her.

“Just please be as safe as you can, okay?” All she received was a quick hug from Darcy before Jane had to watch her friend jump into the fray.

*****
From the corner of his eye, Thor saw Darcy run from behind some rubble over him and his fellow warriors, a grim determination on her face.

“Darcy! Go back and hide, I won’t have you hurt!” He was about to drag the girl back into hiding himself when Darcy *summoned* the broken pieces of a metal sign into her hand, wielding them like battle batons.

“I’m going to need you shut up, Thor, because I can handle myself.” With a twirl of her hands, Darcy readjusted her grip on her makeshift weapons and turned to the Asgardians. For once, they were speechless.


Sif was the first one to break out of their combined stupor, “The Destroyer is powered by intricate spell-work from the most skilled of sorcerers in the realm.”

Thor watched as Darcy’s face fell in disappointment, before switching back to her previous determination. When she spoke again, she did so quietly and almost to herself.

“Right, well. That is unfortunate. But that ugly son of a bitch is made of metal, I can work with that. Okay, Darcy, let’s go.”

Looking to each Asgardian, Darcy raised an eyebrow as if to challenge, *well?*

Clapping a hand on Darcy’s shoulder, Sif again was the first to react.

“Aye, Darcy, let’s go.”

*****

Jane watched in horror with Erik as Darcy lead the aliens into battle with the Destroyer.
“She was hiding some things, wasn’t she?” Erik mused, having seen her trick with the sign.

Letting out a small hysterical laugh, Jane nodded. “I’ve never actually seen the full extent of her abilities,” before Erik could ask, Jane continued, “she’s a mutant, abilities with technokinesis and telekinesis. She’s also apparently had years of self-defense and some combat training with a fellow mutant. I believe in her.”

“As do I.”

Together they watched as the Asgardians flanked Darcy’s sides, striding toward the Destroyer without a hint of fear. All at once, the warriors blitzed at the robot while Darcy distracted it with flying projectiles. Large pieces of concrete, parts of cars, anything and everything that had some weight behind it was suddenly flying at the Destroyer too fast for Jane’s eyes to track. As each projectile hit its mark, Sif and the Warriors Three began brandishing their swords, Thor behind them all the while and attempting to reason with his brother through the machine.

Jane had a moment of hope as she saw the damage being done to the Destroyer, her friends laying into the machine with a deadly elegance that reminded Jane of ballet dancers. Her hope was abruptly extinguished, though, when she saw the goliath’s hand deflect one of Darcy’s projectiles, sending it directly back at her friend.

“NO!” Jane didn’t realize that she had cleared out from her hiding spot until she felt the sting of gravel and glass on her knees and palms as she reached Darcy’s side. Her friend was half-covered by what appeared to be a chunk of wall, plaster and brick still held together in a jagged chunk.

“Darcy! DarcyDarcyDarcy,” She heard herself screaming her friend’s name as if she was underwater, the shock of the day making her surroundings sound muffled and warped. With a surge of adrenaline Jane was able to shove the piece of wall off of Darcy, hands flitting over her friend’s torso as she searched for injuries.

“Oh, fuck. Kitty’s going to make me work on situational awareness again.”

Jane sobbed with relief at her friend’s rough voice, bending over the girl and bringing her to her own chest, dismissing the battle around them.

“Don’t you dare scare me like that again, Darcy! I thought you died!”
“I’m sorry Janie, I’m so sorry. I’m okay, I was able to deflect most of the force when it hit, I’ve just got some bumps and bruises, I promise.”

Pulling back enough to see Darcy’s face, Jane broke out in sobs again when she saw tears in her friend’s eyes as well.

“Come, on, we gotta hide. You’re done playing real life Mortal Kombat.” Before Jane could so much as help Darcy sit up, loud shouting caused her to turn and peer over her shoulder.

She turned just in time to see Thor get back-handed by the Destroyer, soaring through the air and landing with a sickening thunk a mere yard in front of her and Darcy. She was frozen until Darcy’s voice and shoving hands broke through the fog.

“Go, Janie, go. I’m okay, help Thor!”

Scrabbling on her hands and knees to the fallen man, Jane’s tears grew in strength as she saw the bloody scratches and bruises that were marring Thor’s handsome face.

It was his final whispers of ‘it’s over’ and his sad smile that broke Jane’s heart. She gave her heaving sobs free reign, the fear for her best friend and the loss of the great man in front of her too much to bear.

Jane didn’t even realize that Erik had pulled her back to Darcy until she heard the high pitched whistle through the air, looking up to see Mjölnir arc toward it’s master.

She closed her eyes against the bright light as the hammer landed, and tucked her head against Erik’s shoulder, hoping that they’d live long enough that she could say goodbye.
Chapter 17

Chapter Notes

fun fluffy chapter for post-thor! water balloons as per request by Liebekatze!

probably will be diving back into plot again soon, but i figured we needed a wind down for a moment.

The taste of the cheap tequila was normally enough to have Jane grimacing and coughing, but she was just too damn tired. There was a wormhole, aliens, a battle, and Thor was gone. She needed the booze and her friends.

Jane was sitting with Darcy and Erik back in the lab, slouched on the floor and passing the bottle while they watched SHIELD’s jack-booted thugs replace all of her equipment.

Taking another swig, Jane rolled her eyes as Agent Sitwell continued to ‘debrief’ them, lecturing them about how important it was to keep this classified, national security blah blah blah. She still let out a little giggle whenever Darcy did, still remembering Darcy’s many quips about certain jack-booted thugs she wouldn’t mind to debrief with.

They were drunk, sue them.

Even Erik was letting out a chuckle or two, but Jane thought he was mostly laughing at her and Darcy. They were snuggled up on either side of him, letting him hold his girls close for the time being. They had a hell of a day, they won’t begrudge Pop’s needing to dust off his paternal instincts.

Agent Coulson walked over to them after Sitwell had asked them to pay attention for the fifth time in a row.

“What’s crackin’, Son of Coul?” Darcy slurred and hiccuped a giggle, setting the tequila bottle down and making grabby hands at the water bottle Coulson was handing to her. After giving both Erik and Jane a bottle as well, Coulson looked to Sitwell and dismissed him.

Turning back to look down at the trio, Jane had to guess they looked like a damn mess going by the unimpressed look on Son of Coul’s face. They were all dirty, covered in scrapes and bandages, and
drunk as skunks. Jane let out another giggle as she leaned over Darcy for the tequila. Based on the look on Coulson’s face, she was going to need some liquid courage.

“Dr. Foster, Dr. Selvig, Miss Lewis. SHIELD would like to thank you for your cooperation and your aid to Puente Antiguo.”

Darcy *cackled*, bending in half and clapping her hands like a deranged seal. While Jane didn’t have the energy to keep up, she certainly felt the same.

“‘Cooperation?!’ Shit! I would *hate* to see what outright refusal looks like to you sorry sons of bitches!” Darcy was outright howling with laughter now, and Jane handed the bottle to her without prompting. With a sigh Erik took a final swig after Darcy, then handed the bottle to Coulson, much to the girls’ loud disapproval.

Coulson’s stoic *Agent face* was still in place, but he nodded a thanks to Erik for liberating the booze. The agent began to open his mouth, *undoubtedly to start another lecture*, when he was interrupted by a deep, but tentative male voice.

“Uh, Sir?”

Sighing, Coulson turned to the other agent. “What, Barton?”

Huffing a laugh, Barton adjusted his quiver and bow over his shoulder before he responded. “Well there’s a tiny robot that’s outside the building giving me and the rest of the agents hell. He doesn’t seem dangerous, but I didn’t know if you wanted us to do something about it.”

Coulson’s reply was cut off by an abruptly standing and shouting Darcy, swaying dangerously as she pushed her way past the men to the doors.

“FEN! Baby, I didn’t tell you to come back yet! *Hey!* Let him go!” There was a lot of shouting and scuffling, but Darcy quickly returned victorious, holding Fen above her head, *Lion King* style.

“Janie! Erik! Fen’s back!”
Too drunk to take notice of all the agents now watching the reunion, Jane and Erik started cooing at the little scared bot when Darcy came back to her spot at their side, plopping Fen in Erik’s lap so he could be reached easily by everyone.

After the few minutes it took to get Fen to stop crying, *and oh my god never let me hear that again*, Jane looked up to meet Coulson’s face, seeing an amused Barton over his shoulder.

“What?”

Shaking his head as if to clear his mind, Coulson turned to Darcy, “Miss Lewis, may I ask what that is?”

Without even looking up at the agent, Darcy rolled her eyes and continued to pet her baby. “HE is Fen, my bot. AND YOUR DIRTY SHADY GOVERNMENT HANDS ARE NEVER GONNA TOUCH HIM!”

And with that, Darcy scooped up Fen and ran into her room at the back of her lab, slamming and locking the door.

Looking back to Jane and Erik for answers, Barton and Coulson both raised their eyebrows in unison in question.

“That’s about all you’re going to get out of us about Fen, Agents. She tazed the god of thunder for scaring her, imagine what she’d do to you for hurting her baby.” Erik managed to deliver the cold threat with only the smallest amount of slurs, making Jane proud.

Sensing that he had lost the battle before he had begun, Coulson retreated, saying that he was going to be back in the morning to go over their new security detail.

*****

The following morning found Team Science! sitting at the lone table in the lab that wasn’t covered in tech, staring blankly at the formica top with brutal hangovers.
Darcy’s pep-talk was quickly halted by the thunking booted footsteps of Agent Barton marching into the lab, followed by a more sedate and quiet Agent Coulson.

Shit-eating grin on his face, Barton boomed, “MORNIN’ GUYS? HOW YA FEELIN’?”

Without looking up from that one weird stain on the table, Darcy pulled her taser from the waistband of her pajama shorts and placed it on the table before she spoke softly, so as to not hurt her friends’ heads.

“Barton. Robin Hood. Jack booted thug. I would think very carefully about the next thing that comes out of your mouth, especially at which decibel you wish to broadcast it.”

Slowly moving her eyes to the men in black, Darcy was pleased to see Barton’s wide-eyed look of shock before he hid it behind his stoic agent face.

He opened his stupid mouth as if to start bickering, which Darcy had zero tolerance for at the moment thank you very much, when Son of Coul seemed to take mercy on the hungover group and spoke over his agent.

“That’s enough, Agent Barton. You two will have time enough to develop a better working relationship while you’re here for their security detail.”

This seemed like news to Barton, who spluttered foolishly until he was able to compose himself with a quiet Yes, sir.

Darcy let everyone’s words wash over her as they discussed the finder details of their new jack-booted-thug-approved security, different protocols and other security concerns. Knowing she could just hack SHIELD later and grab the deets when she wasn’t as hungover as Charlie Sheen after a bender. Instead, Darcy started plotting her revenge on Barton.

*****
“Darcy, I don’t think that this is a good idea,” Jane knew it was the 20th time she’d said as much to
her friend, but Darcy just wasn’t seeing sense!

After everyone had gotten their hangovers under control, Darcy made a very determined trip to the
grocery, only to come back with a whole mess of two-by-four’s, power tools, and water balloons.
Jane and Erik had wisely decided to let her be once they heard manic laughter over the sound of a
drill coming from the shed behind the lab.

Darcy and Jane were now hiding behind said shed, filling hundreds of balloons up with water and
loading them into the trebuchet Darcy had made.

“Janie Janie Janie. It’ll be fine. They can’t touch us! They need your brain for to get the rainbow
bridge back, they’re keeping Erik around for his help, and I’m still here because I refuse to let them
disappear me! So think of this as belated revenge on SHIELD for stealing your research.”

Jane knew, she knew, that this was a bad idea, but the bright shine of mischief in Darcy’s eyes was
too much of a siren song for Jane to resist.

“Okay,” she laughed, “let’s ruin some people’s days!”

Giggling like mad, the two friends made the various calculations needed to make sure they hit all
their targets. Darcy used her abilities to find where all the SHIELD agents were on nearby roofs as
they monitored the lab.

Once everything was in place, the girls shimmied up on the side of the shed, hidden by an odd angle
of wood that gave them the perfect cover. The lead that would let the girls set the balloons flying was
long enough to be pulled from the position, creating the perfect nest. Grabbing a pair of binoculars,
Darcy put their first target in her sights, and counted down.

“First target, ready? PULL!” With a heavy tug, Jane let the trebuchet rip, watching as twenty brightly
colored water balloons arc through the air before she grabbed her own binoculars to watch them
land.

With a very satisfying splat! each balloon met their mark, soaking the three agents two buildings
over. The rest of the afternoon Jane and Darcy continued to launch their own brand of revenge on
unsuspecting SHIELD agents, who seemed furious that their perches kept being found. After some
time though, Darcy and Jane simply focused their efforts on whatever perch Agent Barton chose,
payback for his obnoxious behavior that morning

Hours later Jane was navigating her way through the kitchen, trying to decide what to make for her dinner-duty night. Darcy sat on the counter next to her transcribing Jane’s notes into something that was legible for research use. Both girls jumped as the lab’s doors slammed open with an echoing bang, thunderous steps following shortly after.

Darcy just raised an incredulous eyebrow at the noise, then returned to her notes. Deciding to follow her friend’s lead, Jane shrugged and went back to boiling some water for Mac n Cheese. *Gotta love being on a budget,* she sighed.

An irate Agent Sitwell barged into the kitchen, shadowed by a soaking wet, but highly amused, Agent Barton. The latter was grinning like a loon at the girls, tossing them a wink when Sitwell began to yell.

“I demand that you tell me *how* you were able to not only locate, but repeatedly *attack* some of the world’s greatest trained agent’s with nothing more than a *trebuchet*.”

Jane heard Darcy muffle a giggle behind her hand as Sitwell continued to berate them and huff in his righteous fury. Deciding she had heard enough, Darcy raised a cool gaze to meet Sitwell’s furious one. Not wanting to miss the show, she took a step back next to Barton who was watching the exchange with rapt attention.

“Well, done,” he murmured, “that was seriously kick ass.”

Snorting, Jane replied, “It was all Darcy, I just pulled the trigger.”

Shrugging at Jane, Barton returned to the verbal sparring in front of them.

“Okay, Mr. MIB, a couple things. One, this town is *tiny* and that was before we tuned this town into a war zone, so there’s only so many rooftops your *world’s greatest agent’s* can hide out on. And two, if you’re pissed that your thugs got taken out by my Wal-Mart masterpiece, then I *really* think you should be yelling at *them,* not the duo who managed to dupe you so thoroughly.”

Smug, Darcy gave Sitwell a wink before retuning to her notes, idly scratching out a line before rewriting it. Jane felt Barton’s shoulders shake with silent laughter next to her, and couldn’t help
letting a breathless chuckle out as well.

“Okay, Sitwell, let’s leave the ladies be, hmm?” Grabbing the older man by the shoulders, Barton began directing him out of the lab, sending a jaunty wave to the girls as he escorted a furious Sitwell away.

There was only a few minutes of peace before that too was interrupted by Erik, holding a phone in his outstretched hand, a tinny voice yelling from the speaker.

“Darcy, your father is on the phone? I found it under a desk and you had 30 missed calls from him, as well as some texts. Also a handful of missed calls from someone named, um, Kitty?”

Jane watched with curiosity as Darcy’s face paled and the girl stumbled off the counter, running to Erik and snatching the phone.

“Shit I am in so much trouble.” Taking a deep breath, Darcy brought the phone to her ear with a wince.
“Darcy Marie Stark. What the ever-loving fuck have you gotten yourself into now?”

Tony’s hands shook with anger and fear, wanting to shake his daughter so she saw sense but also wanting to clutch her close and never ever let her out of his sight again.

Before Darcy could say anything, Tony stormed right on, “I had to find out that shit was hitting the fan from Fen, Darcy, FEN! The little guy was so scared and contacted JARVIS, sending us the video feed from you! What was that thing? You almost got yourself killed!” His voice broke then, unable to continue yelling when that thought sobered him up.

He knew earlier, of course, as he and Pepper watched the feed of what was going down in New Mexico, hands held tightly together and fighting their tears, he knew that he almost lost her. But it was as if talking to her now, after all the adrenaline had faded his head was finally clear enough to let the thought sink in.

He almost lost Darcy.

His baby girl, the bright sun in what was his otherwise shade-filled life, he almost lost her today.

Choking back a sob when he heard Darcy crying across the line, he made a decision.

“I’m coming out there, Bot. I’m bringing Pepper and we’re going to bring you home.”

“Daddy, no, SHIELD is still here, they’ll get even more suspicious!”

Tony froze at the thought of Darcy out in the middle of bum-fuck nowhere with SHIELD’s grubby paws all over her, poking and prodding her like a science experiment.

“What the hell do you mean, ’more?’”

In his mind’s eye, he could see Darcy fiddling with the hem of her sweater, a habit she formed when she was young when she was nervous.
“They, um, they maybe think I’m keeping secrets from them because I can always dodge their security tails they sic on me?”

Tony dropped his head to the countertop with a bang. Apparently he put enough force behind it that Darcy heard because he could hear her sharp intake of breath at the sound.

“Bot, you’re gonna break your old man’s arc reactor.” Tony closed his eyes, heart breaking at the sound of Darcy crying.

“I was so scared, Dad. I’ve never seen anything like it before, it was terrifying.”

“That’s why I’m gonna come out and see you, okay Darcy? I’ll deal with SHIELD, tell them I hacked them again, but I’m coming to you.”

“Mom, too?”

“Yeah, Bot,” a watery laugh escaped him at her timid question, but he was so damn happy. His baby girl was okay, he and Pepper were together, and they were a family.

“Mom’s gonna come on out too.”

*****

Darcy slowly walked back into the kitchen where Jane and Erik were eating dinner, and she smiled when they saved her a plate and had it sitting between them. She was thrilled that her Dad was coming out, and Pepper (and she was just downright giddy that she heard her Dad call her ‘mom,’ there’s a story there, she can feel it), but she didn’t know if she had any more emotional strength to drop another truth bomb on her friends.

Just in case she found the courage tonight, she shorted out all of SHIELD’s bugs with a thought. It was hilarious to watch them get so angry at how often they had to replace them, but she had to be careful that none of their suspicions traced back to her.
“Hey, minion, you okay?” Jane was searching her face, even after some cold water and a towel it must have been obvious to her friend that Darcy had been crying.

“Yeah, I just hadn’t called my dad in a while and he was worried.”

“You didn’t tell him anything, did you? SHIELD will rain down here like fire and brimstone.”

Darcy rolled her eyes and tapped her temple, signaling to Jane that SHIELD was taken care of.

“I didn’t tell him everything, but he knows enough that shit got weird and the place is crawling with feds, so I let him draw his own conclusions.” Darcy hated lying to Jane, but she felt less guilty knowing that she was going to tell her the truth soon, anyways.

“I’m glad you were able to contact your family, Darcy.” Erik’s smile melted her heart, so Darcy leaned to her side to wrap an arm around him.

“Yeah, Pops. Me, too.”

The older man ruffled her hair affectionately and cleared his throat.

“So I have an announcement, girls.” Erik was nervous, wiping his hands on his pants repeatedly and swinging his gaze between the two of them. “SHIELD wants me to work for them for a special project. I can’t tell you about it, but it promises to be fascinating and it potentially could change the world.”

Darcy, not liking the sound of that simply had to ask, “Change for the better? Or worse? I feel like they’re leaving you a little open-ended there, Pops.” Jane nodded in agreement to her left.

“I know, Darcy. But I rather work on it than some young thing wanting nothing more than recognition rather than an actual respect for the science.”

They were all quiet for a moment until Jane asked when he was leaving.

“Tomorrow evening, Agent Barton is being assigned to the project as well for security, so I shall be
in good hands.”

The rest of the night was filled with semi-awkward conversation, everyone wanting to stay together but not having the guts to admit how much it scared each of them to be separated. The next day, Darcy and Jane helped Erik pack up his belongings and notes while the man himself spent the day trying to explain to a distraught Fen that he was leaving to work, but Erik did still love him. It was both endearing and heartbreaking, but neither Jane nor Darcy said anything about how teary-eyed they all got over it.

When it was finally time for Erik to leave they all exchanged sniffing hugs and goodbyes, promising to stay in touch however they could. Darcy made a note to try to slip inside SHIELD and see where he was going, but was interrupted by Barton as he poked his head in the lab.

“Hey, Doc, wheels up in ten.” The agent looked around and the little group, and with a fuck it under his breath, quickly strode over to them and wrapped them all up in his arms.

Startled, the trio stood still for a beat before shrugging and returning Barton’s hug.

“You guys just looked so damn sad, I couldn’t stand it!” Barton patted Erik on the back as he turned to face Darcy and Jane.

“Promise to look out for this guy as best as I can, girls.”

Relieved, Darcy wrapped her arms around Barton again in another hug. Yeah, the guy was a natural shit-stirrer, but he was awesome.

“Good, because I’ll totally know and then you have to answer to us.” Darcy’s saccharine smile was a sharp contrast to her icy tone, one that Barton seemed to know to respect.

“I know you will, Darce. Hey, remind me to introduce you to my partner sometime, Nat would love you.”

Agent Coulson chose that moment to interrupt with one of his familiar exasperated sighs that Darcy knew were special to Team Science!
“Barton, if you do not want me to have nightmares then I beg you to stop that train of thought right
now.”

Barton just chuckled, “No promises, sir. I think it’d be worth it.”

“That’s what worries me, Barton.”

****

Jane and Darcy had been alone (well as alone as one can be with SHIELD over their shoulder) for
three days before Darcy finally cracked.

“Janie?” She had never heard her friend so timid before, but gave Darcy all of her attention, knowing
she needed it to have courage so say what she needed.

“Remember when I said I wanted to tell you everything? Well, there’s a couple things I want to tell
you.”

“Finally,” Jane sighed, barking out a laugh at Darcy’s shocked expression, “You’ve been fidgeting
like crazy ever sense Erik left, so I figured you had something on your mind.”

Darcy almost looked relieved that Jane was paying such close attention, which made Jane wonder
exactly what type of friends the girl actually had in the past.

“Okay, so, I told you my Dad is a mechanic, right?” At Jane’s nod, she continued, “So…that’s not
exactly wrong, it’s just not quite the whole picture either.”

“Darcy. Spit it out.”

“My Dad is Tony Stark and he’s coming to visit tomorrow.”

Jane blinked at her friend, not really having an answer to that. About thirty seconds passed before
Jane had the ability to form words.
“I just want to make sure that what I thought I heard in all that garbled mess was actually what I heard, so I’m going to need you to repeat that, slowly.”

Darcy took a deep breath and shut her eyes, almost as if she was scared at what she was about to say.

“My Dad is Tony Stark. Iron Man. My last name is Stark. And Dad’s gonna be here tomorrow morning.”

Jane fell back into her chair, completely at a loss for words. Tony Stark was her best friend’s dad. What the hell.

“Please don’t be mad, boss-lady! I wanted to tell you I really did but we’ve always kept it a secret because Dad’s made enemies with a bunch of shady people especially now as Iron Man so we wanted to keep me safe but he freaked out when Fen called him and told him about Thor and everything going on over here and there was a fucking robot of death running around the city so I couldn’t call and he was so mad and no he’s worried about SHIELD grabbing me as a science experiment so he wants to come and—”

Sensing Darcy’s impending panic attack, Jane launched herself at her friend and wrapped her in the tightest hug her tiny arms could manage. Almost immediately, Darcy sagged in relief and began taking deep breaths to calm down.

“Minion, I’m not mad! I promise you I am not mad at all. You just shocked me, is all. That was more surprising than you having kick-ass powers, honestly.”

Darcy sniffled wetly from where her head was tucked against Jane’s shoulder, “Really?”

“Of course, Darcy. I always knew you were special. But this is like your powers, okay? You’re Darcy first, and everything else comes after. Mutant abilities or superhero dads.”

Jane’s smile mirrored the one she felt against her shoulder, and she relaxed knowing that she had successfully calmed Darcy down.

“Anything else before your old man gets here?”
“Well, Pepper Potts has helped raise me since I was three and I think her and Dad are a thing now because he called her my mom and my Dad created a fully functional AI before I was born named JARVIS and he’s my big brother.”

Jane just froze.

“Dad also made three other lower-level AI’s that I also consider my siblings, and my technokinesis let’s me communicate with all of them and Fen telepathically.”

Jane didn’t even think, she just grabbed the tequila from the cabinet, took Darcy’s hand, and led them both up to the roof.
Jane was too hungover for this shit. That was kind of disappointing, really, because any other day she’d be ecstatic to meet Tony Stark and Pepper Potts. The man was a mechanical genius, and the woman was a goddess and inspiration to women everywhere.

Today, though? She’s not having it.

She’s slouched on the couch with Darcy, resting her head on the younger girl’s while Darcy rests her head on Jane’s shoulder. Empty coffee cups dangle from their hands and an empty plate that once held a mountain of toast rests where their knees meet. There was a lot of groaning, and maybe even a few tears, to get them this far.

Pepper is sitting in a chair across from them, sipping tea and looking way too put together in a pair of skinny jeans, converse, and a shirt that clearly belongs to Tony. The man in question is busy pacing the lab, alternating between pawing through her research and lecturing Darcy and Jane about their reckless behavior. Pepper at least looks as annoyed as they are at Tony, so that’s good, Jane thinks.

The only one who’s thrilled at Tony right now? Fen. The little guy is busy rolling after Tony, beeping and whirring as if he was trying to tell the engineer what all he’s been up to in New Mexico. But now when Jane thinks about what she learned about Darcy’s powers, maybe Fen is a little more alive than she thought, and he is actually trying to talk to Tony.

“Dad,” Darcy croaked, “this hangover is punishment enough, please stop making so much noise.”

Scoffing, Tony just continued rambling to himself as he quickly scanned pages of equations in Jane’s notebook.

“Darcy, you didn’t even tell me you were okay, you have to see why I’m upset, right?”

There was a loud slam of a slam of a ceramic mug on a coffee table, making everybody in the room
flinch, including Fen. As one, the room turns to the source of the noise, which is a wrathful looking Pepper.

“That, is fucking rich, Tony Stark.”

Jane isn’t sure what’s happening, but her head hurts and she kind of wants to disappear into the couch cushions so she doesn’t have to see that look on Pepper’s face anymore.

“Pep, I don’t know if now is the time—”

“TONY! You cannot be serious! What about all that crap you spew about secrets? Hmm?!”

Darcy’s rough voice interjected then, sensing WWIII on the horizon.

“Er, Mom?” And Jane just had to smile at that, apparently Darcy’s been wanting to call Pepper that for years, “What are you talking about?” Darcy looked between her parents, waiting for an answer.

Pepper seemed to realize that Tony wasn’t going to have the guts to admit it, so she whirled her gaze over to Darcy, voice sharp.

“Darcy. I love you, but you were very reckless. I understand why, so I am not mad. I was just scared. However, there are some people,” a very pointed look at Tony, “that like to be big fat hypocrites when it comes to telling people who love them that they’re in danger. Apparently, he doesn’t think that he should extend the same courtesy to us that he wants you to extend.”

“Dad,” Jane shivered at the ice in Darcy’s voice, and very much feeling like she was intruding on something terribly private. She was still too hungover to move, so she continued to listen, “What. did. you. do?!?”

Tony looked everywhere but at the women in the room, and Pepper growled at the man and responded for him.

“Darcy, your father was dying and didn’t tell anyone a damn thing until it was almost too late.”
Jane sighed as she looked into the empty and stained mug in her hand. *There’s about to be a lot more yelling and tears. Where’s the coffee?*

****

Phil Coulson didn’t get to where he was in SHIELD by being unobservant. For instance, that Junior Agent he just passed? He just gave agent Sitwell the soy latte rather than the non-fat latte. Sitwell is allergic to soy. Nothing deadly, but enough to have the senior agent require a bathroom more than he would like today, so Coulson doesn’t feel guilt in letting it happen. Sitwell was a little rusty, these days.

So Coulson could see what other’s couldn’t. He also let others only see what *he* wanted them to see. He didn’t get the nick name *Ice Man* for nothing, and he’s proud of it. It took him years to get the level of expert control over his micro-expressions that he has. Sometimes he lets people see a little bit more than the expect. It might make him a little bit of a sadist for wanting to watch the baby agents squirm, but they’ve got to get thick skin somehow.

He was reviewing the case files that were overflowing with the data Dr. Foster had gathered from Thor’s landing, as well as minor readings off of Mjölnir. The only thing he didn’t have enough of was data or eyewitness accounts of what actually happened *during* the battle with the Destroyer. Everyone had *said* the same things, but no one was speaking of what they *saw*. That had alarm bells going off in his head.

Now, a lesser agent would just leave it at that, not noticing the distinction. A slightly better agent may make the case that all but a handful of individuals were long gone from the town by the time of the fight, and they should be thankful that there weren’t any casualties for such a damaging event. This still wasn’t good enough for Coulson.

A good agent would tell Coulson that the lesser agent and the better agent’s argument’s both had merits, but also point out that the town’s security cameras were down so that would explain why all three avenues of investigation turned up blank.

But you see, Coulson was the *best* agent. And he still had questions.

The first three arguments are valid. Trauma, lack of witnesses, and lack of public footage definitely are logical conclusions. But why were all the SHIELD bugs taken out? They were all battery-operated and linked to a closed network that was secured by the organization. How did they all
simultaneously lose power? Also, why was only the town without power, rather than the entire grid (small as it was) it was connected to? And why did the power come back, with no complications, as soon as Thor left? The hammer did give off energy, yes, but not enough to take out a town when it was lying dormant until the end of the fight.

So Coulson had questions. But he also had leads to follow.

The handful of civilians (a term he is using loosely, here) that remained in town were Dr. Foster’s team, the alien known as Thor, and the four warriors that seemed to be acquainted with him.

Coulson needed to narrow it down some more.

The four alien warriors were not observed long before the fight began, but from what he could see, Coulson knew they weren’t what he was looking for. They were armed with medieval weaponry and armor, nothing noteworthy except for the seemingly wrong time period appropriateness. But then again, Barton used a bow and arrow. Regardless, the four were not there long enough to have accessed the town’s power supply, take down each SHIELD bug, and return the power back by the time the battle was done. So Coulson could cross them off his list.

There was Thor. The man (alien) was familiar with Mjölnir, yet not deemed a threat since he could not wield the hammer until he had actually died. Coulson was still processing this. While Thor was in town longer than his comrades, Coulson could tell that the man was not the type to be proficient with technology, despite coming from an advanced alien race. From the way he carried himself, Thor was first and foremost a soldier, and a man second. Smash-and-grab is what Barton liked to call it. So Thor was of his list as well.

Next was Dr. Erik Selvig, mentor and father-figure to Dr. Jane Foster. The man had the technical know-how, and had access to technology that could potentially be used to his advantage against SHIELD. However, the man had a healthy fear and respect for the organization, and was often seen trying to talk Jane and Darcy away from confrontation with Coulson and his agents. SHIELD had been watching Selvig for some time, and was aware of all his contacts that had knowledge of SHIELD. The good doctor was too frightened by the shadow organization and was more concerned for Jane and Darcy’s safety to try to confront SHIELD or any of its agents. Selvig was removed from Coulson’s suspicions as well.

One would think that the obvious budding affection between Dr. Jane Foster and Thor would give her motivation to sabotage SHIELD, especially after they had appropriated her research and gear. This is where the better agent would have gotten stuck and Coulson would pick up the slack. Foster, while angry at SHIELD, did not have her technology on hand to tamper with the spy organization’s bugs, much less redirect the town’s power for a small amount of time. Though the woman is handy with machinery, the elegance required of a machine capable to pull off the feat would be
incongruous with the style of machinery she preferred. Dr. Foster also would not dare to create any interference from any technology when such an unprecedented phenomenon was occurring. No, Dr. Foster was not who he was after. She respected the science too much.

At last, Coulson came to Darcy Marie Lewis. Twenty-one, Culver poli-sci senior, needed six credits in order to graduate. This is why Coulson is the best at what he does. So far, every single one of his agents has dismissed the young woman. Why? She is ditzy, loud, unprofessional, and is studying in a field that isn’t even in the same spectrum than that of her internship. Coulson looks closer.

Why would a poli-sci student take on six months in the desert to study astronomical phenomena that they didn’t understand? How did a seemingly normal girl seem to fix, and improve machinery for things they supposedly didn’t understand? “Her father was a mechanic,” yes, and Coulson is a drag queen every Tuesday night at the local Chili’s.

The final nail in the coffin for Coulson was Fen. Where does a soft sciences undergrad gain the technical know-how to build a robot, with some form of intelligence, and no one notice? Even if she had kept the ability from her schooling, that wouldn’t keep it out of the community she lived in. Friends, family, teachers, they all would have gossiped about a genius child with a pet robot, and SHIELD would have heard. So the fact that Miss Lewis had supposedly slipped through their fingers? Coulson didn’t find it likely. Not to mention, while Dr. Foster lived in the trailer next to the lab, Miss Lewis stayed in the back room of the building. The same building where all their bugs kept shorting out.

He was pulled from his deduction when Agent Sitwell knocked and opened his office door.

“Sir, Tony Stark has arrived. He’s in Foster’s lab.”

Yes, Coulson had a lot to think about when it came to Miss Lewis.
When asked, Coulson would tell you that wearing a suit everyday does not get boring, nor does it get uncomfortable. What many people don’t realize is that Coulson is a dirty liar.

Most of the time, he understands the need for the suit, it is professional as well as useful from a tactical standpoint. Men in suits are accepted everywhere and are immediately written off. Put a normal-looking man like Coulson in the suit? He’s invisible.

But the heat? Coulson could live without the heat. When he gets hot and tired, he starts seeing thought and speech patterns as well as little idiosyncrasies that tell him he has spent too much time with Barton at his side.

When the AC in the SHIELD SUV fails as he drives to Foster’s lab, his own Barton-voice makes itself known.

Awwww, AC, no.

Coulson hates that voice. Because he is a professional, goddamnit, and not the man-child that is somehow his best agent.

Thankfully, he arrives at Foster’s lab quickly, only a light sweat breaking on his brow that will evaporate quickly before anyone can take notice. Coulson is also grateful that he chose to come alone to speak to Stark. Sitwell could barely handle Dr. Foster and her team, and despite whatever hilarity would ensue, Coulson didn’t think it would be wise to put Sitwell and Stark together in a small place.

Coulson pushed open the front of the lab, immediately barraged by a multitude of yelling voices. Taking the opportunity for what it is, Coulson lightens his footsteps and doesn’t make his presence known, slowly making his way to the source of the noise. Peering around the corner, Coulson isn’t
quite sure what to make of what he sees.

Stark and Pepper Potts are yelling at one another, the former pacing around the lab picking up everything in sight then placing it back down, and the latter sitting demurely in what looks like a slightly uncomfortable chair.

Miss Lewis is laying across the lab’s lone sofa, head propped up on Dr. Foster’s lap as she shares a Skype call with... three robots? Dr. Foster seems to be half-asleep, reaching with one hand to pet Miss Lewis’s hair, the other patting a very confused looking Fen.

When the yelling tones down for a moment and a very familiar British voice pours from the laptop’s speakers, Coulson freezes.

No...

Miss Lewis’ proficiency with machinery…

Please no…

Her pet robot…

I will retire. I swear.

The same dark hair, same shape the eyes.

Barton will need a new handler…

Stark’s sudden presence, with Miss Potts at his side…

“Holy shit.”
The room goes deathly silent, and even the robots on the Skype call freeze at his declaration. Each member snaps their heads around, Miss Lewis and Dr. Foster with quiet groans.

He meets each of their eyes, begging them to tell him that what he is about to say is wrong, a hallucination.

“Miss Lewis, you’re a Stark.”

*****

“JARVIS, protocol Alpha, everything that isn’t you gets shut down, five miles.”

“Of course, Sir.”

Coulson turns to look out the nearest window, watching as whatever electricity remains in the town shuts off. Pulling out his phone, he notices it is deactivated as well, and won’t be turned on manually. He raises an eyebrow at Stark, who meets his inquisitive gaze with his dead one.

“You and I should really have a discussion about just what your AI is capable of, Mr. Stark.”

“You know damn well that’s not what we’re going to be talking about right now, Agent.”

Coulson takes a closer look at the man, the father, in front of him. Stark’s usual nonchalance is completely gone, replaced by a cold paternal rage, daring Coulson to try to harm his child.

He raises his hands in a sign of surrender, showing that he means no harm. Moving slowly as not to startle Stark, whose gaze keeps shifting to the briefcase on the coffee table, he makes his way to sit in an office chair next to the sofa. Coulson knows that the case holds one of the Iron Man suits, and would prefer that Stark not make use of it right now.

“I’m not here as your enemy, Stark.” He looks to Miss Potts, because if Coulson knows anything, is that she can be the logical and reasonable one here.

“You’re SHIELD, you kept a cure from me as I was dying, so forgive me if I don’t quite believe you
when you now have knowledge of my kid. I won’t gamble with her safety, Agent, so tell me why I should trust you.”

There were only two times that Coulson can remember ever being truly scared. The first time was when he met Former Director Peggy Carter, back when he was in SHIELD’s Academy. The second, meeting the current Director Nicholas Fury as a Junior Agent. This encounter with Tony Stark? Coulson has just found his third terrifying moment.

He looked to his left, taking in Miss Lewis…Stark? Taking in Miss Darcy. She was fairly good at keeping her emotions off her face, but her eyes gave her away. Her bright blue eyes were wide with anxiety and fear. They shone with just the hint of tears, darting wildly between him, her father, Miss Potts, and Foster. This is her family, Coulson realized, And she’s scared I’m going to take it away.

SHIELD protocol required him to call something like this in. When an Asset as important as Stark had something this valuable to them, SHIELD wanted to know. They could protect it if needed, or use it as leverage if an Asset turned on the organization.

Coulson couldn’t do that to Darcy. He knew what he had to do.

He removed his comm, phone, pager, and every other device and weapon he had. It was slow going, but Coulson wanted to make sure Stark didn’t get trigger happy. After he stripped all hidden items from his person, and never having felt more naked in his life, Coulson took the communication devices and crushed them beneath the heels of his boots. Once all that was left was shattered glass and bent metal, he sat back against his chair, hands to the side, vulnerable.

Meeting Stark’s eyes, he let every ounce of sincerity bleed through the words as he spoke.

“Let me help. Tell me how I can protect your daughter, Tony.”

*****

Pepper was deep in thought as she curled into Tony’s side. They were back in their private jet and headed for the Tower in New York, having left Darcy with Jane back in New Mexico.

She smiled as she thought of the two, happy that they had found such closeness with one another. Darcy was finally gaining the independence she didn’t gain fully as an adolescent, and she was finding her place in the world. Her loyalty to Jane was fierce and unstoppable, and it made Pepper proud.
It also reminded her of Tony’s own shade of loyalty. *The apple certainly doesn’t fall far from the tree.*

She stifled a yawn by turning her face into Tony’s chest, feeling the cool metal of the arc reactor under her lips through his shirt. Tony let out a snore as she shifted, his head bent back against the seat at an angle that was surely going to be hurting him later.

Pepper was exhausted as well, but couldn’t force her eyes to close. The last few days had been trying, and her body wouldn’t let her shake off the nerves.

After watching the view of the battle with the Destroyer through Fen’s feed to Darcy’s mind, Pepper thought she’d never be able to let Darcy go. They’d almost lost her. But they wouldn’t do that to their daughter.

Like her father, Darcy was fierce with her love of others, bringing them into her arms and using herself as a shield to protect them, no matter what it would cost her. Though she was terrified as she watched, Pepper had to admit to herself that Darcy was beautiful as she fought, graceful and lethal. She was a goddess in her fury, a warrior. Pepper never wanted that for Darcy, but it seemed as if the world was determined to bring danger to her front door. And Darcy would always let it in if it meant it kept her family out of harm’s way.

Having to rehash Tony’s destructive six months was painful, like reliving Tony’s abduction in Afghanistan. Darcy had raged and sobbed, demanding to know *why* her dad didn’t let her know, didn’t let her at least *try* to help. It broke Pepper’s heart, and she and Jane held each other’s hands as they watched the father-daughter duo break down in each other’s arms.

Phil threw a wrench into that progress. When he had stumbled in, they were in the middle of arguing about what type of safety protocols were needed now that there where honest to god *aliens* that Darcy was friends with, that Jane’s research would now be the target of some very dangerous people.

Pepper may have cried some more at Phil’s declaration that he wanted to help, vowing to keep Darcy from SHIELD at all costs. He said he trusted Agents Barton and Romanoff with his life, and would have them look after Darcy whenever they were able if she was in a dangerous situation. He wouldn’t tell them the full details, of course, but assured them that they would take his word as law and aid Darcy in hiding from the big-brother organization.
Together, the family (which now included Jane) decided that Coulson, in order to better protect Darcy, should be brought in on her abilities. Pepper and Darcy trusted him, their instincts telling them that he could be trusted, and he was a good man. Jane wholeheartedly agreed, Tony, a bit more reluctantly. JARVIS did the most extensive background check she had ever seen, tearing through SHIELD without even leaving a trail so he could get all the information on Phil. Once he was done, JARVIS agreed that Phil was trustworthy enough to look after his sister.

New secured lines of communication, protocols, codewords and phrases were all established, tangling the connecting threads between them all, so that if anyone truly looked too closely they would get lost in the web they had spun. Pepper was overwhelmed and awed by what they had created. They even called in Logan so he could be convinced that Phil was a friendly. After a private discussion with Darcy on the phone, Logan said he would add him to his list of allies.

There was so much in the air now. Something big was brewing within SHIELD, Darcy was going to go globe-trotting with her best friend to find space anomalies, and Pepper and Tony were navigating this new relationship between them. But they made sure Darcy, and by extension Jane, was safe.

*Our baby girl is safe, and she’s a warrior in her own right. I believe in Darcy.*
Thor was impressed by the Midgardian’s Helicarrier, it boasted of more power and might than he had originally suspected when he had first landed on the realm. Though after his time with Lady Jane and Lady Darcy, perhaps he should know better by now that looks are deceiving.

He looked around at his new team as they stood on the bridge of the ship, taking in their abilities. They were all powerful warriors, wielding their weapons and bodies with expertise. He wondered why Lady Darcy was not part of the team. Surely, she was a great enough warrior to join them? He knew that she was acquainted with SHIELD, so perhaps she was just elsewhere on the ship.

Fury came to him then, assuring him of Lady Jane’s safety.

“We’ve sent her to Norway to study some unusual phenomenon, so she and Miss Lewis will be far away from any collateral damage, as well as from the clutches of your brother.”

Thor’s brow crinkled in confusion, “Lady Darcy? Why wouldn’t—”

His inquiry was rudely interrupted by the Man of Iron, Stark, who stepped between him and Fury with determination.

“Shakespeare, hey, mind if I have a word with you? I need to pick your brain about science.” He continued to ramble nonsense and Thor was about to dismiss him entirely and return to his questioning about Lady Darcy when he saw the urgency in Stark’s eyes. Cleary his foolish words were a farce for the true matter. He politely excused himself from Fury’s suspicious eye, following Stark down the twisted halls of the ship until they found an vacant office.

Thor had barely crossed the threshold behind Stark when the man turned and encroached in his space.

“You absolutely cannot mention Darcy here, unless you’re acknowledging her as Foster’s assistant,
do you understand me?"

Stark was furious, but he gave no reason as to why.

“Lady Darcy is a fierce warrior. It would dishonor her to belittle her as such and not let her feats be known. I do not understand your vehemence on the topic—”

“She’s my daughter!”

Thor was silenced by the man’s outburst, but still unclear, “Then wouldn’t you want to fight along side your daughter? I did battle with her, and she was truly a sight to behold.”

Stark paced angrily, seeming to search for the words he desired. Ever the diplomat, Thor waited, knowing to hold his tongue.

“Listen, Point Break, no one on this ship knows that she is my daughter. No one but you and Coulson. And he made a vow to keep her away from SHIELD’s eyes, to keep her away from the messes we make so SHIELD doesn’t make her into a warrior. She only fought with you to protect Jane, Erik, and you. She doesn’t fight like you do, fighting for the sake of battle, for whatever twisted glory you see in it. So I am begging you, Thor, don’t let anyone know about her, help me protect her from what we do.”

Thor was dumbstruck by the ferocity of Stark’s words, only ever having seen the man be arrogant and childish. It was the man’s use of Thor’s own name that let Thor into the severity of the situation. From what he knew of Stark, the man would never miss an opportunity to use a name to tease another. He smiled, remembering that Lady Darcy did that as well.

“Very well, Stark. You have my word. While Lady Darcy may not be here battling with us, it gives me great comfort knowing she is at Lady Jane’s side for protection, as well as companionship.”

Stark sagged in relief, before quickly putting on his arrogant mask. But it was too late, Thor had seen the concerned father beneath, and Stark would never look the same to him. It was a fitting look for the man, Thor decided.
“I think we were played, Janie,” Darcy looked around at the befuddled Norwegian scientists who seemed to be at a loss for what to two with the two American women dropped on their university’s doorstep.

Jane looked up from her notebook to the scene in front of her, shoulder’s sagging with exhaustion.

“Goddamnit, SHIELD.”

“Damn SHIELD, indeed Janie.” Darcy, pretty sure shit was hitting the fan somewhere and it smelt strongly of a certain shadow agency, stepped forward and tried to find out who was in charge of the Science! shenanigans around here.

It took some crude gestures, and something that may have been interpretive dance, before Darcy was able to translate her request on an app on her phone to get the leader of this rag-tag group of nerds. Thankfully, she spoke english.

However, the lack of a language barrier did nothing for the fact that SHIELD didn’t tell anybody that they were coming, let alone if there was a reason for their appearance. Darcy realized that the problem was her, so she soon name-dropped Jane, and the change was immediate.

Suddenly the nerds were Jane’s biggest fans and read all her work about the Einstein-Rosen bridges, etcetera etcetera. Darcy stopped listening and was glad they were starting to get some VIP treatment. So what if she was being bratty? They were on a plane for a good ten hours, not including layovers, and she wanted to be pampered.

Darcy and Jane were shown their room, which was basically a slightly above-average dorm room that held a mini-fridge and a microwave. All that mattered to the two women was the two beds that were against opposite walls. Without communicating, both women simultaneously dropped into a different bed, asleep as soon as they hit the mattresses.

Hours later, the duo was woken from their sleep by a polite knock on the door informing them that there was dinner in the mess hall if they were interested. Interested. As if two Americans aren’t about to eat you out of house and home. Using their well mastered zombie-walk, Darcy and Jane made it to the mess hall without becoming fully conscious. Sleepy eating was the best, Darcy thought, my two favorite things at once.
“So, should we call somebody and see what the hell is going on?” Jane’s question was merit, but Darcy could only manage a *hnnggghhhhh* in response, so she’d have to revisit the topic later.

After freaky Norwegian food and some shitty coffee that was eerily reminiscent of typical hospital brew Darcy and Jane were led into a small empty lounge room that they had asked for. Darcy had gathered their laptops and data spreads while Jane carried a box of notebooks full of her equations.

Jane had begun reviewing her old work, making new notations as she went as Darcy decided to make a call to SHIELD and see what was happening back stateside that sent them across the pond.

Calling the general SHIELD line they were given for non-emergencies, Darcy patiently waited until the line was cut. No messaging system, no bouncing around an automated voice system, just silence. Staring at the phone in confusion, Darcy tried again. Same result.

She tried three more times before switching over to the ‘Help-us-we’re-gonna-die’ number SHIELD gave them for ‘level 6 type events,’ not that they were ever told what that meant. So Darcy shrugged her shoulders and dialed. The line cut the same way.

*This is bad. So very bad.*

Deciding not to freak Jane out yet since she was so absorbed in Science!, Darcy continued to dial and get disconnected. She tried using Jane’s cell. She tried a University landline.

Desperate, Darcy called Coulson’s private number with no response. Barton’s too. Even Sitwell didn’t answer.

With shaking fingers, Darcy dialed her Dad and prayed for a response and getting none.

“Janie, something was wrong, I think the Brady Bunch got canceled.”

Jane’s head snapped up at the phrase, and Darcy understood why. That was the phrase they were to use when their SHIELD contacts left them in the dark. They didn’t think they’d actually *need* it, especially so soon after they created it.
“What do you need me to do?” May the gods bless Jane, Darcy was going to be eternally grateful for her friend’s composure.

“I’m going to hack SHIELD and see why we’re in the dark, then we’re going back to New York.”

Darcy took both laptops and slid them in front of her on the coffee table she was previously using as a footrest. Cracking her knuckles (for the cliché, she didn’t really need her hands to hack), Darcy closed her eyes and dove for the back entrance she made in SHIELD for purposes like this.

SHIELD’s systems were going nuts. Darcy couldn’t even begin to understand where she was going to look first when she stumbled upon footage of New York City. Biting back a sob at what she saw, she brought it up on both laptop screens, splitting the views so that each computer had multiple angles on the battle.

“Oh, my god. Darcy,” Jane covered her mouth with one hand while grasping one of Darcy’s with her free one, fighting tears as well.

New York was being attacked. Aliens were pouring out of the sky, some on personal ships and others jumping from what appeared to be giant space worms. Tiny dots of color stood out from the alien’s blobby gray forms, and they were fighting back.

Jane choked back another sob as the unmistakable red of Thor’s cape flew by, Mjölnir sparking dangerously.

Darcy’s eyes danced on the screens, mind running through all the data that was filtering into the back of her mind. She began reading off everything she could to Jane so they could catch up. Loki, Germany, the tesseract, Erik and Barton, Darcy was about to pull out completely, unable to to look anymore, when she caught an entry that broke her heart.

Coulson, Phil: Killed in Action

*****

When Tony made a grab for the nuke, he knew he was done. He knew how people would see it, an act of selfless heroism, martyrdom. But Tony knew it was a lie.
There was no redemption for him, it wasn’t something he could obtain. His hands were still wet with the blood SI’s under the table dealings had spilt. He had drowned in so much sin that his body couldn’t even buoy to the surface, he had lost his chances to be better.

As he neared the hole in the sky, listening to Pepper’s phone ring out, hearing JARVIS say goodbye, Tony strangely felt at peace.

He was dragging this bomb away from more innocent people, it’d burn him up and then he’d never be able to stain anything with his filthy hands ever again.

His last thought as his world went dark was the hope that maybe, just maybe, he made Darcy’s world just a little bit safer, that he’d protected her one final time.

*Maybe I’ve done right by you this last time, baby girl. I’ll make it safe.*

Then everything went dark, and he was falling.

*****

Darcy couldn’t move, couldn’t breathe.

*Daddy, what are you doing?*

His bright gold and red suit was carrying a missile on his back, slowly arcing toward the sky, toward the abyss that was tearing the world apart.

*No, you can’t do this! Not again, Daddy no!*

Darcy didn’t realize she was screaming until she felt hands on her, pulling her hands away from where they were buried in her own hair and pulling, hands on her shoulders to stop her from rocking, and strong arms around her waist as she tried to dive toward the computer screen that just showed her Dad disappear into nothingness.
“NO!”

*****

Getting your heart restarted was painful, like someone had reached into your chest with a cold hand and yanked, dragging you back into the land of the living kicking and screaming, demanding that your heart just be left alone.

Getting your heart restarted by the Hulk of all things? Tony felt as if the big guy had grabbed him by his soul and slammed him into the concrete, only after falling through space for what felt like both a second and an eternity.

He gasped and stuttered for breath, making a smart-ass comment when he saw his team standing over him, thinking of anything besides the terrifying abyss he saw on the other side of the portal.

He was terrified by what that portal did to him. He remembered losing his fear of death as he got closer and closer, the black tear in the sky seeming less like his doom and more like his salvation. He wanted to soar, to fall up into that nothingness that was beckoning him like a siren call.

Why?!

Tony was horrified at himself. Now that he was safe on the ground, he had to choke back the bile in his throat at his remembered thoughts. He had gotten so dark, had fallen so far down the rabbit hole.

He knew he wasn’t a great man, but he knew he was making up for it. Pepper and Darcy, Rhodey and Happy, they told him that he was doing good in the world. He was helping, he was protecting people.

He cast a look back up at the sky, a pale expanse of blue only marred by gray smoke. Whatever was on the other side, Tony was not eager to encounter it again.

*****

Darcy woke up on a gurney in what was supposedly a small infirmary.
This is turning into a habit, I think.

“Darcy!”

Jane ran in the open door, picking up her pace as she saw Darcy struggling to sit up.

“What—? What happened, Janie? Last thing I remember was—” Darcy quickly leaned over the opposite side of the bed, heaving up the remnants of her dinner when she remembered.

Her Dad had flew into the portal with a missile.

She felt cool hands on the back of her neck and on her forehead, and Darcy once again sent up a prayer of thanks to the universe for Jane Foster.

“Darcy, he’s okay, Tony is alive, alright? He fell back through and the Hulk caught him. Darcy, your Dad is alive.”
Chapter 22

Chapter Notes

longer chapter! heads up i probably won't be able to update until way later tonight because of work, so you spoiled people will have to wait!

let me know what you guys are thinking and how you're liking it!

Jane looked across the jet to her friend who was leaning her head against a window, eyes blank but slowly spilling tears. Jane took a long drink from the glass of wine in her hand, letting the sharp burst of flavor saturate her tongue before she swallowed. Darcy was in pain, and Jane didn’t know how to help.

While Darcy had fainted from the news footage from New York, Jane was calling everyone she knew to try to get them back home. After still not getting any word from SHIELD, Jane remembered Darcy mentioning a fellow mutant, a friend by the name of Logan. Finding him under the contact name “Kitty,” Jane had dialed and hoped for a miracle.

Jane was certainly not expecting the gruff voice on the other line, but Jane was one to roll with the punches.

“Pip? What’s going on, sweetheart?”

“Logan? This is Jane Foster, Darcy’s friend?” Jane had been there when they brought Coulson in the loop and informed Logan, but she wasn’t sure how much the man actually knew about her.

“Janie? Little lady with a big brain for stars?”

Jane laughed, “Yeah, that’d be me. But I need your help, for Darcy.”

Any light teasing that Logan had in his voice vanished in an instant. “What’d’ya need?”

“We’re in Norway, SHIELD sent us there to keep us safe, but Tony did something stupid and now we need a way to get to New York.”
Logan sighed, and Jane could imagine the man rubbing a hand down his face in exasperation. “’Course he did, what was so special about this time?”

“You should turn on the news, any channel.”

Jane waited by Darcy’s bedside, holding the sleeping girl’s hand while she heard Logan mutter in the background. There was a few moments of the muffled sound of a TV in the background, a pause, and then some of the most colorful swearing Jane had ever heard. And she spent all her time with one Darcy Stark.

“That son of a bitch,” Logan was full out growling now, and Jane recognized that she needed to defuse the situation before she lost him entirely to his anger.

“Logan, I totally agree, and Darcy would too. She fainted, so right now she doesn’t know that Tony came back through the portal and is okay. But I need to know if you can help us get home, the sooner the better.”

There was the sound of something that sounded a lot to Jane like Logan was scratching his beard (she assumed) in thought.

“Might know a guy. Professor has him dickin’ around Europe for some things, guy is a political sort. Not my cuppa tea, but he’s a good guy. He’ll help you out.”

And that is how Jane and Darcy found themselves on the small private jet of one Dr. Hank McCoy (just Hank, please). Darcy sat toward the back, wrapped up in several blankets Jane had found in different compartments and not speaking to anyone. After Jane had made sure that Darcy understood that Tony was alive and well, her friend had retreated into herself and hadn’t made a peep since. Sometimes things near her would float for a moment or two before landing, or a small appliance would turn off and on. Other than that, Jane saw no reactions from her best friend.

Jane knew the girl had to cope, so she spent the time before their ride arrived packing what little was removed from their bags and keeping Darcy’s family updated about their travel plans. Jane couldn’t get in direct contact with Pepper or Tony but was able to get ahold of JARVIS, who was more than happy to relay messages for her to Darcy’s parents in exchange for contact with his sister. With his help, Jane was able to modify a bluetooth headset and placed it over Darcy’s ear. The girl wasn’t speaking, but Jane knew that JARVIS and the other bot’s were speaking comforting words to her friend. Apparently she was so lost in her mind that she wasn’t responding to their usual form of
telepathic communication. Logan just wanted to Jane to keep him updated on where they were, so he could time his own visit to the tower when they arrived.

Jane jumped slightly when she felt a large hand cover hers around her wine glass, lifting it slightly and adding a bit more liquid to the glass.

“My apologies, I didn’t mean to startle you.” Hank’s voice was smooth and comforting, a balm to Jane’s frayed nerves.

“Don’t be sorry, I was deep in thought.” Jane tried for an apologetic smile, but she knew it came out like a grimace. She glanced at Hank in the seat across from her, but was unable to drag her gaze away from Darcy for very long. She felt that if she didn’t watch, Darcy would disappear.

“You care for her greatly.” Not a question, just Hank stating a fact.

“Yes. She’s my best friend, and I think the only true friend I’ve ever had. And I’m the same to her.” She did meet Hank’s gaze then, so he knew she was sincere. “I can’t even begin to thank you for doing this for us. The fact you came out of your way to help—? I’ll never be able to repay you for that.”

Hank smiled, a small gentle thing gracing his lips, “No, Jane, you will not owe me anything. I am merely doing what I would want for myself should I be in need,” he paused, a small smirk on his lips as he continued in a more playful tone.

“Besides, it’s not often that Logan calls in for a favor of any kind, so I may have been slightly curious as to who he would do such a thing for. Seeing Miss Lewis now, I understand.”

Jane smiled, knowing that Hank hadn’t actually gotten a word from Darcy but he was under her spell, just like everyone else.

“It’s the eyes,” she told him, her voice soft and contemplative, “they just drag people in. She’s got this crazy network of people looking out for her, protecting her. Some of them barely know her, they just feel the need to. I can’t explain it. We’ve been friends for a while now, but even I still get drawn in. It’s like the someone is telling us that she’s needed, that we’ve got to save her for something special.”
Hank just looked intently at Jane, absorbing her words, eyes then drifting to Darcy where she had fallen asleep to the sound of JARVIS’ voice.

“Yes,” Hank replied, “I think you may be right about that.”

*****

Steve Rogers was confused. He was confused when he was ‘defrosted’ as Tony so nicely put it to find seventy years have passed, he was confused when aliens started pouring out of the sky, and he was confused when Tony insisted they go out for Shwarma. He wasn’t sure what it was but he ate it anyways.

So Steve was confused, but could you blame him? He’s been awake for all of three weeks and all hell has broken loose.

He stood in front of the common room’s kitchen pantry, baffled by all the brightly packaged snacks and foodstuffs before just grabbing a jar of peanut butter and a loaf of bread, grateful that those didn’t change…too much.

As Steve assembled his sandwiches he watched his teammates from his spot at the counter. They had been victorious, but looked so defeated.

Natasha and Clint sat close to one another in a corner of the couches and murmuring to one another in Russian, Clint with a haunted look in his eyes leftover from Loki’s control that felt like a knife in Steve’s gut whenever he saw it.

Bruce laid gracelessly in an overstuffed armchair with a cup of tea dangling precariously from his loose grip. The doctor was always overwhelmed and exhausted after a change, and even twenty-four hours after the battle Bruce was still feeling the draining effects.

Tony sat next to his new friend, talking a bunch of scientific jargon that Steve couldn’t even begin to understand, and waving a seemingly never-ending glass of scotch as he spoke.

Thor hadn’t stopped eating. At all. Steve had a super metabolism so he understood the need for calories, but Thor literally had not stopped eating. Maybe it was an alien thing? Steve wasn’t entirely comfortable that Thor hadn’t taken Loki back to Asgard immediately after he was apprehended, but
he trusted the alien when he said that his brother was trapped in a reinforced cell and under the weight of Mjölnir. Steve couldn’t fault Thor for wanting some time to rest before jumping into political warfare in his home realm.

Steve was about to offer everyone a sandwich when he heard the gentle ping of the elevator that was the last moment of peace before all hell broke loose.

When the doors opened, the common area was immediately filled with two women’s irate yelling. Steve couldn’t understand much of what they were yelling about except that both Tony and Thor were in trouble.

A small brunette rounded the corner and immediately jumped on the alien’s lap and fused their faces together, breaking apart every few seconds so the woman could scold and so that Thor could reassure. That must make her Dr. Foster, then. Thor had often spoke highly of ‘his Lady Jane,’ telling Steve stories of her beauty and brains that made Steve always blush a little at their intensity.

Though the moment was romantic and beautiful, Steve was distracted by the second woman who exited the elevators. She was slightly taller than the first woman, but infinitely more curvy, shamefully reminding Steve of the risqué pin-ups that flooded the barracks during his army days and painted on plane’s noses. The thought brought a gentle blush to his cheeks.

While Steve was distracted by the woman’s appearance, everyone else seemed to focus on the more important things surrounding the young woman moments before Steve did.

For instance, the Tower’s lights began to flicker on and off, some outlets sparking in fury in time with the woman’s rage. Things that weren’t heavy enough to be a threat (Steve’s tactician’s mind came in handy every now and then) began to float and orbit the woman.

When both women first came into everyone’s sights, Tony was the first to stand and to step forward, as if to make the powered woman stand down.

Steve was frozen to the spot, mind wanting to watch the showdown but body wanting to step into the fray, and assessing whether or not the powerful woman was a threat.

“Sweetheart,” Tony’s approach to the second woman was extremely cautious, his voice low and controlled to keep from startling her, “Bot, I need you to calm down, okay? I’m right here, and I’m alright. Please, Darcy, I need you to breathe with me.”
Steve watched as the woman named Darcy struggled for breath as she berated Tony, “You left, again! You didn’t say goodbye, you decided for us that we’d be okay without you!”

Steve thought that Darcy would have continued, but Steve’s heart shattered as he watched Darcy sob, fighting for breath and words until Tony ran forward, clutching Darcy to his chest.

All at once, the lights settled on a dim setting and every object that found itself in the air quickly slammed to the ground as Darcy cried into Tony’s arms.

If Steve didn’t have enhanced hearing, he wouldn’t have felt as guilty for remaining in the common room like the rest of his team. Despite what Steve may have wished, he heard the comforting promises Tony used to placate Darcy.

“I’m so sorry, sweetheart. It wasn’t fair to you what I did. I acted without thinking and you almost paid the price. I’m sorry. Bot, I promise you, you won’t lose me again.”

*****

Darcy couldn’t care that there were other people in the common room, couldn’t care that she was losing control over powers, and couldn’t care that she was freely crying in front of strangers while being held in her Dad’s arms.

She could only care that her idiot father was alive and in her arms, comforting her like he used to whenever she was small and had nightmares.

As she calmed, Darcy realized that she probably should have waited in her parent’s penthouse like JARVIS asked her too before she used her powers to override him. But she quickly gave up that guilty thought when she figured that if the world’s mightiest heroes couldn’t be trusted with her secrets, then who could? They helped save the world as well as kept her Dad alive. That was enough for her.

She felt her mind clear and powers come back under control, simultaneously realizing that her Dad’s team, the Avengers, were watching her and her Dad’s drama with rapt attention.
The man Darcy recognized as Doctor Bruce Banner was sitting frigidly in his chair watching her and monitoring his breathing, causing Darcy to wince. She really didn’t need to be the reason for a Hulk-out incident. Thor and Jane were thoroughly distracted by one another and Darcy could only hope that the big guy was more than enough to keep Jane’s focus entirely on him. Darcy didn’t want Jane to see her break down anymore than her friend already had.

To the side of the room was a tall blonde man standing awkwardly in the kitchen, clutching a jar of peanut butter and watching Darcy’s little scene like he wasn’t sure what he was supposed to think. It took Darcy a few moments before she was able to identify the man.

*Holy mother-fucking shit. It’s Captain America. The man is beautiful and perfect and made of freedom and baby eagles and he just watched me break down and cry in Dad’s arms. Real sexy, Darcy. Excellent first impression, truly.*

Over her father’s shoulder Darcy was able to see a beautiful red-headed woman crouched in a defensive posture in front of another man she couldn’t see. She had to dig into her mind and SHIELD’s files before she could place the woman.

*Agent Natasha Romanoff, aka Black Widow. One of Coulson’s most trusted. Hardly ever seen without her partner, which makes the guy behind her....*

“Barton!” Darcy stepped away from her Dad and threw herself at the startled archer who hadn’t moved from his seat, but was watching everything with an intense focus that was sure to freak Darcy out if she thought about it much.

On reflex, Barton caught her, after signaling to Natasha that she wasn’t a threat which Darcy realized that was the only reason she was able to get within *any* proximity to Barton.

Darcy’s heart broke as she remembered what SHIELD’s files said happened to her friend, so she let out a few more tears as Barton hugged her close and rocked her gently to calm her down.

“Hey, Darce, I’m glad you’re okay. You’re supposed to still be in Norway though, how’d you get here?”

“You’re really not going to ask about the light show and defying gravity moment that just occurred, really?”
Darcy pulled back a little, just so she had room enough to see Barton’s unimpressed look.

“Darce, I’m a trained spy. I think I can figure out what the hell just happened, don’t you?”

She blushed sheepishly, shrugging before she burrowed herself back into Barton’s comforting arms.

“Shut it, biceps.”

*****

Steve was still confused.

All the crying and yelling from the women had stopped but Tony was now squawking and spluttering at the girl, Darcy his brain supplied as he remembered what Tony had called her, seemingly upset at the fact that she was cuddled up to Clint on the couch now.

It stung Steve too, which he really didn’t want to think about.

“Hey, hey, spawn of mine, why are you using Robin hood as a pillow? Why are you guys so cozy? I don’t like this.” Tony reached for Darcy and pulled her from Clint’s grasp, pushing her behind him as if to shield her from the other man.

Then Tony’s words hit him like a mack truck.

“‘Spawn?’ You have a daughter?”

Everyone’s gaze snapped to Steve, who shuffled his feet awkwardly at the attention. He was in a room filled with other enhanced people, surely he wasn’t the only one who made that connection?

As if his thought had broadcasted and snapped everyone out of their stupor, the heavy gazes swung from Steve (thank goodness) to the father-daughter duo who were having a silent conversation.
There was a lot of shrugging and eyebrow raising involved.

After what must have been an agreement, Tony turned to face the room with his usual nonchalance.

“Yup! Avengers meet the kid, kid meet the Avengers.”

Rolling her eyes at her Dad, Darcy spoke up from where he was still keeping her behind him and away from Clint.


Steve had a few, actually, but was cut off when Tony spoke again.

“Questions can come later, Bot. Avengers, I don’t think it needs saying, oh wait, yes it does. Paws off the kid, capiche?” Steve wasn’t sure why he addressed the group as a whole but only glared at him and Clint, but he blushed anyways and gave a nod of assent to Tony.

He was about to introduce himself properly when he heard the elevator doors ping open again and rolled his eyes toward the ceiling, already exhausted at the thought of more surprises. Steve turned his head to the doorway and his eyebrows about flew up to the top of his head in response to what he saw.

Tony’s robots that Steve recognized from his brief moments in the labs zoomed into the room and made a b-line directly for Darcy. One of the three larger ones held what seemed to be a stuffed toy and was leading a fourth and much smaller robot by his empty claw.

Having heard the noise as well, Darcy turned from her spot behind her father and beamed at the machines, “Bot bros!”

At her outburst, the robots picked up speed and began chirping and beeping, whirring in glee as they surrounded Darcy who sat on the floor so all the robots could reach out and…pat her on the head? Steve watched in confused amusement as Darcy nodded along to all the robots’ beeping while she petted the smaller robot she had placed in her own lap.
“I’m so glad you guys are okay! Did you hide when all the aliens came?” She addressed her question to the littlest machine in her lap who nodded vehemently and let out a long peal of beeping noises that Steve assumed were in the affirmative.

Hoping that he wasn’t the only one completely baffled by what he saw, Steve turned to look at his teammate’s faces just to find the same level of curiosity and amusement that he was sure was on his own face.

Tony, having sensed the unasked questions from his teammates broke of his prideful gaze from Darcy and addressed the room.

“Darcy and the bots, as well as JARVIS, see each other as siblings. Except for the little guy, Fen. He’s more like her baby and apparently he calls her ‘Mama.’” He rolled his eyes at everyone’s skepticism at that, “She can communicate with them to some degree because of her mutant abilities, so don’t piss her off unless you want a robot uprising in the Tower.”

Steve didn’t have a response, but was thankfully not required to give one as Thor stood and made his way to Darcy.

“Lady Darcy!” he boomed, “I am most pleased to see you safe and in well spirits! I am also forever grateful that you were able to stay by my Lady’s side should she have needed protection. I missed your company in battle this day, but I am at peace knowing that you were keeping yourself and Lady Jane safe from harm.” Thor then crossed his closed fist across his chest and bowed at the still-seated Darcy, a move Steve’s tactician mind informed him that must be a sign of respect. The man reached a hand down to help Darcy stand, clasping their forearms together in his warrior’s greeting as Darcy was enthusiastically pulled to her feet with a giggle.

“Aw, thanks big guy!” Darcy wrapped her arms around Thor’s shoulders as he brought her close for a hug, then spun her quickly in a circle to the sound of Darcy’s peal of laughter.

The sound of Darcy’s boisterous laugh was enough to bring a huge smile to Steve’s face. Tony’s daughter was an enigma, a small curvy woman with enhanced powers, friends with aliens, and daughter of Iron Man. Steve was curious about her, and didn’t care if he was the cat that got killed because of it.

Steve thought that it may be worth staying in the Tower if one Darcy Stark was going to be sticking around as well.
ah! guys! you all give me so much love I almost can't stand it. I'm glad you guys like steve being a little shit, because that's how i always imagine him in my head. so here's some more of that here.

Logan comes to the tower!

Darcy hadn’t slept in the same bed as her Dad since she was seven, but after the whole let’s-fly-a-nuke-into-a-hole-in-space thing, Darcy needed the reassurance that her Dad was safe and whole. And the fact that she got to cuddle up to her Mom was a perk that she didn’t have when she was seven. The only thing that could have made it better would have been if all of the bots went back to the labs rather than circle around the bed to watch. Apparently they had decided that if they couldn’t cuddle with their family, standing watch would just have to do.

Waking up in a tangle of limbs, blankets, and puddles of drool wasn’t the most dignified moment of Darcy’s life, but it was one of the safest. Darcy woke on her stomach with her arms outstretched to wrap around both her Mom and Dad’s waists, clutching them as close as she could to her own body. Her mom was already awake and gently running the hand not pinned between them through Darcy’s hair, making her almost purr in contentment.

Darcy’s words were stretched and muffled as she spoke around a yawn, “Mornin’, Mom.”

“Good morning, sweetheart. How did you sleep?” Her Mom’s voice was so gentle that Darcy almost couldn’t hear it. Dad must have been still asleep, then.

“Best I’ve slept in a long time, I think. You? Sorry that I turned into an octopus in the middle of the night.”

Pepper just laughed, a light tinkling sound that just made Darcy feel so loved.

“Don’t worry about it, Bot. I was happy to have both you and your father so close for once, it’s hard to keep up with you Starks, you know.” Her Mom’s teasing made her roll her eyes in fond amusement.
“Ha, right. Clearly you don’t know what it’s like having to keep up with Pepper goddamn Potts.”

“I’ve come to the conclusion that she’s some sort of goddess that likes to watch all us mere mortals struggle in the wake of her tidal waves of awesome.”

Tony’s voice was gruff and hoarse with sleep but still lighthearted, sounding more at peace than Darcy had heard her Dad sound in a long time.

“Mornin’, Dad, welcome to the land of the living.”

“Good morning to you too, spawn of mine. Do we get to laze in bed all day with coffee and breakfast or do we have to be real people today?”

Darcy’s Mom rolled her eyes as she shuffled out of the bed as she spoke, “Thor is leaving this afternoon Tony. Not only would you be a shitty host, but you’d be a really shitty teammate if you didn’t spend at least some time with him and the team today.”

Darcy frowned at the thought of Thor leaving, knowing that Jane would be distraught.

“How long until he’s back?” She inquired.

Tony began moving from the bed as well, albeit at a much slower pace and with a whole lot more groaning than Pepper.

“No idea,” he said, “From what I understood Odin had to use up a fuck-ton of his magic to get Thor here since the Bifröst is still broken, so I guess until it gets repaired on their end or ours.”

Darcy’s frown grew even deeper knowing that Thor could be gone indefinitely. Great, she sighed to herself, Jane’s going to get even more obsessive about the bridge. She made a mental note to keep a closer eye on her friends physical and emotional well-being over the next few months. Just in case.

Darcy yelped when the enormous duvet she was burrowed under was suddenly yanked away by her manically grinning father.
“What the hell, Dad?!?”

“Come on, Bot! If I have to be awake and socialize, then so do you!”

Darcy groaned aloud and attempted to bury herself under the mountain of pillows on the bed but was thwarted when her mom started pulling them from her and onto the floor.

“Fine! Fine. You two are barbarians and deserve each other. I mean really, who steals a girl’s blankets?”

Her parents just laughed at her and started their morning rituals. Pepper laying out the day’s outfit, and Tony pouring himself the world’s largest mug of coffee from his bedside coffee bar.

That’s right. A *bedside* coffee bar.

Darcy sometimes wondered why her Mom let her Dad get away with this kind crap, but shrugged her shoulders and gestured at her father to pour her a mug.

She sighed happily as she shuffled out of the bed and from her parent’s bedroom, her mug almost directly under her nose as if she could inhale the caffeine as well as drink it.

“I’ll meet you guys in the common room, then. I wanted to get acquainted with Rogers anyways.”

Darcy smirked as she heard the muffled *thunk* of her father tripping over something as he barreled out of his walk-in closet.

“What?! What do you mean, get ‘acquainted with’?” She could practically feel him squint his eyes at her.

“I changed my mind!” He called after her, “You stay in bed all day! I’ll bring breakfast! Pepper! Tell Darcy she’s not allowed to talk to boys!”
As Darcy made her way to the elevator doors, she smiled as she heard her Dad’s coffee mug shatter on the ground at her Mom’s words:

“Well, Tony, she could always date Natasha.”

*****

Steve was smiling as he walked into the common room, JARVIS having told the team that Darcy was making breakfast for everyone and that attendance was mandatory. He could only hope that he was early enough to get a few words in before Tony came down to join.

It wasn’t as if Steve was deliberately trying to sneak around and mess with Tony by getting to know his daughter, but it was a hell of a perk if he could manage to annoy the man even a fraction of the amount Tony annoyed Steve.

Steve’s smile fell when he finally had made his way into the common room’s kitchen area in the back, having walked in on what seemed like a private moment between Bruce and Darcy. Bruce seemed a little shell-shocked and uncomfortable, but was polite enough not to draw away from the woman embracing him enthusiastically. Steve’s fear that this was an intimate conversation evaporated at the look on Bruce’s face, so he just sent his teammate a wink to tease him.

Bruce rolled his eyes at him, but spoke to Darcy.

“It wasn’t really me, you understand. It was the other guy.”

Darcy scoffed as she backed away, wiping away a lone tear that fell from her eye.

“Goddamnit, Bruce. He’s a part of you, so when I thank you for catching my Dad after he fell from a hole in space and scaring him back to life, I’m thanking you.”

With that final thought on the matter, Darcy walked to the stove where Steve could see a pan filled with scrambled eggs cooking. After a moment though, Darcy cast a sly look over her shoulder at the scientist, eyebrow lifted in a teasing gesture.
“Though *when* I do meet the Hulk, I’ll be sure to thank him as well. Let ‘em know he’s appreciated.”

Steve let out a chuckle as Bruce seemed to deflate, knowing that he wasn’t going to win an argument with the young Stark. Hell, winning an argument with the elder Stark was damn near impossible, so it wasn’t a surprise that Darcy had the same stubbornness in her.

It seemed as though his laugh brought Steve to Darcy’s attention. He couldn’t help but smile back at Darcy as she beamed at him, gesturing to the barstools lining the counter for him to have a seat.

“Mornin,’ Cap! Eggs and bacon? I’ve got muffins in the oven now but they’ll be done soon.”

“Good morning, Darcy. And yes, thank you, that sounds delicious.” Steve waited until Darcy was leaning over the counter and placing a plate in front of him so that he had all of her attention. When she was in reach, Steve rested his hand over hers where she held his plate making her gaze snap quickly to his.

“Call me Steve, please.” His voice was kind just like his smile, but his years of friendship with Bucky gave him plenty of practice on how to say something else with his eyes. Judging by the pretty blush on her cheekbones, his message was received. Loud and clear.

“Um, okay. Steve, then.” Darcy cleared her throat as she gently moved her hand out from under his, but he caught the small smile dancing in the corner of her mouth so he knew he hadn’t overstepped.

Darcy seemed to flounder a moment longer before she regained her rhythm in the kitchen, moving from the stove to the oven and back again as she made breakfast. Steve was fascinated at the grace she used to wield her powers, using her telekinesis to clean dishes and set the counter with plates for everybody while she cooked.

Steve was about to try to start a casual conversation with Darcy but was interrupted by the sound of running footsteps in the hallway followed a second later by a very flushed Tony. The man careened around the corner, eyes darting between Steve and Darcy as he made his way to the kitchen.

Narrowing his eyes at Steve, Tony very deliberately chose the seat directly to his right. Out of the ten chairs at the counter. Because Tony was a man who liked to live to excess and had a kitchen the size of a studio apartment.
Knowing he couldn’t really be annoyed at Tony for his paternal instincts telling him to look after Darcy, the larger part of Steve wanted to roll his eyes at the man and point out that Darcy was a grown woman and didn’t need looking after. But Steve remembered Bucky acting similarly toward his younger sisters, and hell, even Steve had acted like that toward Bucky’s kid sisters at times too. So Steve reluctantly had to respect the man.

He just made a note to find times when Darcy wouldn’t be by her father’s side. Perhaps JARVIS would help?

The room filled with small talk between him, Darcy, Tony and Bruce before the rest of the team as well as Dr. Foster and Miss Potts filtered in. Grabbing plates with a thank you to Darcy before everyone chose a seat. Rather than choose a seat for herself, Darcy found a clear space of counter and jumped up to sit there instead. Steve smiled as he watched her kick her legs back in forth in her contentment.

The morning’s quiet peace was interrupted by JARVIS, “Sir, Mr. Logan is in the lobby and is demanding to be let up. Shall I grant him access to the private elevator?”

Steve’s curiosity grew as he looked at the Starks. Darcy looked smug, bouncing a little in glee as she munched on her breakfast. Tony, though, seemed to grow pale as he let out a sigh.

“Shit. I am so dead.”

*****

One day, Logan thought, one day I’ll think before I head willingly into a place owned by Stark.

Logan liked the simple things in life, he just wanted to go make sure Pip was okay and maybe yell a bit at her old man. But could he do that? No, fuckin’ of course not.

After finally being allowed in the private elevator that would take him to the residential floors of the tower, Logan had exactly thirty seconds of peace.

At second thirty-one, JARVIS stopped the elevator on what Logan saw labeled as R&D LABS. Before he could open his mouth to ask why he was there, the doors opened and he groaned.
“You’ve gotta be fuckin’ kidding me.”

On the other side of the doors were U, DUM-E, Butterfingers, and Fen. Beeping and making so much noise that’d Logan would probably get a headache if he didn’t have an accelerated healing mutation.

Logan wanted to be a jerk and close the doors on them, really he did, but they were waving their claws at him in hello and sounding so goddamn happy to see him that he just gave up.

“Fine. Get yer asses in here, I ain’t waitin’ all day, guys.”

Even when he thought he was safe from a headache, it turned out that Logan still needed to flinch at the high decibel of sound the bots starting making. Damned heightened senses. How the fuck do they even make noises that loud?!

So rather than his desired solo venture up to the top levels of the tower, Logan found himself crowded against one wall of the elevator with the three large bots poking and prodding him while he carried a squirming Fen under his arm.

He sighed a huge breath of relief when the elevator opened a second time, at the correct floor. As the three large bots rolled through the doors, Logan placed Fen on the ground so he’d follow the others. Like hell if I’m gonna walk in there with him lookin’ like a damn lapdog under my arm.

The universe apparently had decided that Logan hadn’t earned his quota of embarrassment yet because Fen, the lovable idiot, was disgruntled at being put down so he made up for it by holding onto Logan’s pant leg.

Logan ran a hand roughly down his face in exasperation.

“Ya know what? Fuck it. I’ve gone soft, haven’t I? Can’t even say ‘no’ to a damned robot.”

Fen started chirping happily, knowing that he won. That little shit.
Logan’s heightened senses picked up the Stark’s family scents quick enough due to their familiarity, but they were almost buried in a myriad of others. Damn it all to hell. Logan straightened his shoulders, bracing himself to meet all of the Avengers.

“Pip! C’mere and get your damn bot to let go! The little shit won’t leave me be.”

Darcy’s laugh reached him as he rounded the corner that brought him into the kitchen, immediately seeing her perched on the counter next to the stove. Quickly, she dismounted from her spot and launched herself at him with her arms open.

“Kitty!”

Fuck me. No way nobody didn’t hear that.

He hugged Darcy tightly to his chest anyways, pressing a gentle kiss to the top of her head as he did. As he moved his head back from hers, Logan caught a bitter scent that he’d come to recognize as jealousy.

So somebody in the crew is sweet on Pip, eh? Over my dead body.

Looking up to trace the scent, Logan startled at the face he met.

“Well, can’t say I thought I’d see you around these parts, Cap.”

Rogers appeared about as confused as Logan probably looked, his eyes dancing between him and Darcy. Oh, so this is the punk that’s got his eye on Darcy. Interesting.

“James? How—? What—?”

“I go by Logan these days, Cap. And as for how I’m here, I’m a mutant. Accelerated healing and I don’t age. Can’t die, either.”

“Wait,” Darcy eased a little away from him, but just enough that he could sling an arm around her
shoulders rather than continue the embrace. “How the hell do you two know each other?”

“Fought together in the War, Pip. Use that brain o’ yours.”

Darcy blushed at his words, so Logan nudged her gently in the side so she knew he was teasing.

“How do you two know each other, Ja—I mean, Logan?” Rogers had a funny constipated look on his face, one Logan figured meant that what he asked wasn’t really what Rogers was wanting to ask here. Logan barely got his mouth open to yank the good captain’s chain a bit when Darcy beat him to it.

“Kitty and I here go way back. Met him when I was seven and we discovered I was a mutant. He helped me practice with my powers and would teach me some hand-to-hand whenever he came by for a visit or whenever I went to the school for a while.”

Darcy grinned a cheshire grin when Logan scoffed at her use of her nickname for him. Clearly she was fine with his embarrassment.

Ignoring Rogers’ curiosity for now, Logan turned to the reason why he was even here in the first place. Stark.

Meeting Stark’s eyes, Logan leveled a glare that typically would send a chill down a normal man’s spine.

But Stark wasn’t normal. Hell, jury was out on if the bastard was even sane in Logan’s book.

“So, Stark. Saw your swan dive on the news. I think you’ve got some explaining to do.”

“Why does your every visit start with you saying that to me? Honestly. I’m not really feeling the love here, puma.”

Logan just arched a brow at the genius, waiting for him to wilt a bit under his gaze.
It took about three seconds.

“Okay! Sheesh. So I was a total selfish asshole when I decided for my family that I would sacrifice myself rather than taking a moment and seeing if there was another option.”

He must have looked impressed because Stark chuckled at Logan.

“Believe me, man,” Stark laughed, “I’ve gotten torn a new one by about everyone in this room, I’ve learned my lesson.”

Logan nodded, feeling Stark’s sincerity roll off of him in waves. The idiot wouldn’t be doing something that dumb for a bit, yet.

So the next six months or so were probably safe.

“Kitty, come on! I want to show you my lab! Janie’s is next to mine so I can still make sure she remembers to do human things like eat and stuff.”

Darcy started tugging on his arm to pull him out of kitchen, waving at Jane over his shoulder.

“Join us, boss-lady! You two haven’t properly met yet and you can show Kitty all of your science stuff.”

Logan huffed a laugh with the second petite brunette as she appeared at his left side, looping her arm through his to mirror Darcy on his right.

“It’s nice to finally meet you, Kitty.”

He rolled his eyes good-naturedly at the two feisty women, letting them drag him away, Fen still holding on to his pants.

Logan could feel Rogers’ gaze on his back as he left. Smirking, he pulled Darcy tighter into his side and pressed another kiss to the top of her head. He was a natural-born shit-stirrer, so what?
Chapter 24

Chapter Notes

just a quick fluffy thing i wrote this morning before a job interview, so be gentle if there's some typos and other mistakes!

thank you guys for all the love, as always, and thank you to whoever is reading and enjoying my other story as well!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Routine developed quickly within the tower which Darcy assumed was a result of almost everyone being a soldier of sorts. By unspoken rule breakfast was mandatory for all Avengers (Darcy totally included Pepper and Jane as Avengers, they were kick ass ladies) if they were in the Tower, and barring any emergencies. Darcy would make breakfast each morning but most of the time an Avenger or two would help.

Whenever Darcy’s father found her and Natasha smiling and laughing while cooking he’d get a look of absolute horror on his face. Darcy loved it.

After the morning meal, Team Science!, which now included Darcy’s Dad and Bruce, would head down to the labs to get down with their nerdy selves. Natasha and Clint would head to SHIELD to do sneaky spysassin things (and if Darcy used her powers and JARVIS to make sure they were safe, well that was nobody’s business but hers), and sometimes they were joined by Steve. While Steve wasn’t a spysassin like the wonder twins, Darcy was pretty sure he had ‘Property of SHIELD’ stamped somewhere on his beautiful ass. Darcy would simply send him off with the twins, giving each of them a smile and a hug, checking on them throughout the day.

Most of Darcy’s time was spent in either her Dad’s or Jane’s lab. While she did have her own that connected to Jane’s space and was directly across the hall from Dad’s, Darcy thrived on the company of others. Slowly, the contents of her lab filtered into the other two spaces, essentially making Darcy’s lab a spare space. It became the go-to place for any member of Team Science! to borrow when their own lab was being cleaned up after an explosion (Tony), malfunctioning tech that almost created a black hole what the hell, Jane?!! Bruce only needed to use Darcy’s lab when her father wouldn’t leave the poor man alone, seeing as Darcy had a secret password to gain entry like it was a treehouse rather than a multi-million dollar lab space. Jane and Bruce, as well as Pepper, knew the password, but Darcy liked to watch her Dad get flustered and attempt to guess.

Sometimes Darcy would shadow her Mom in SI meetings, people writing her off as another PA which allowed Darcy to pass unnoticed and free to observe. She didn’t have a vested interest in ever running SI one day (she was much like her father in this regard) but she knew it couldn’t hurt to have
a working idea on how things were supposed to run.

Darcy was returning from one of her shadow days as she liked to call them and headed to Jane’s lab to check on her favorite wayward scientist. Jane, like Darcy had predicted, was working like mad to open the Bifröst and could be found in her lab at any and all hours of the day. Thankfully, that day seemed to be a mild day on Darcy’s mad-scientist scale. Jane was seemingly taking a break from her research and was busy reorganizing her research and moving her lab equipment around ‘to find a better flow.’

It was only after a couple hours that Darcy was allowed to leave Jane’s space, having spent most of her time with heavy lab tech floating at her sides while Jane constantly changed her mind about where things were supposed to go. Making sure that everything was fine (“No more tearing holes in space in the tower, boss-lady!” “You know it wasn’t actually a black hole, minion!” “Semantics.”) Darcy headed into her Dad’s workspace.

Tony was busy working on one of his suits in the corner of the lab, engulfed a shower of sparks and the blaring noise of AC/DC. DUM-E stood on hand with his trusty fire extinguisher in case he was needed.

Darcy was just about to head over to join him when she saw the mess that was once her pristine workspace. Where the floor was once pristine (the only clear spot in the entire lab), Darcy could see chunks of metal and machinery covering the floor and spilling out from behind her desk. She frowned and headed over, wondering what the hell her Dad did to her space.

What she found, however, was Fen surrounded by bits and pieces of circuit boards, wires, a few spare wheels, and random scrap pieces of metal. Darcy’s little bot was rolling between everything, making adorably confused yet determined noises as he tried to make sense of what he had in front of him.

“Fen? Whatcha doing, baby?”

The bot whirled around, and Darcy caught a sense of hope tinged with embarrassment as the Fen beeped at her. It took Darcy a moment, but when she figured out what he wanted, it took all of Darcy’s strength not to tear up a bit at Fen.

“You want a friend, don’t you, Fen? One that’s your size?” Darcy beamed when Fen started making happy noises in confirmation. She could parse out through their connection that while Fen did love the other bots, they were just so big compared to the tiny guy and he wanted someone his size he could play with.
God save me from adorable, robots, seriously. This is too stinking cute.

Determined to make her baby happy, Darcy pulled her mess of curls into a messy bun on the top of her head, pulled off the flannel she wore over her tank top, and sat down to get to work.

*****

Without looking up from the suit he was working on, Tony addressed JARVIS.

“J, where is Bot at? I wanted to show her some schematics on a new taser I’m working on for her that I think she’ll like.”

“Sir, Darcy has been in the lab for the past three hours working with Fen.” Tony rolled his eyes at his AI’s dry tone. Where Darcy’s presence gave all the bots more of a consciousness, she totally made JARVIS more capable of being a little shit.

Stowing his tools and cutting off his music Tony made his way over to Darcy’s side of the lab, curious to see what his kid was working on these days. While Darcy did help him with SI projects from time to time, Tony’s daughter had yet to find a project she was really passionate about so she spent her days flitting from project to project, working on whatever caught her fancy.

He smiled even as his curiosity grew when he heard Darcy speaking, presumably to Fen, “Okay, baby. Mama’s almost done. Thank god I got better at this because I wouldn’t want you to have to wait a year for your friend. She’s gotta have a name, though. Ideas?”

Tony hopped up on Darcy’s desk so he had a bird’s-eye view of what was happening on the floor in front of him.

Darcy was covered in grease stains (how did she get them on her back, of all places?) and had a very antsy looking Fen at her side. In her hands was what appeared to be the final stages of a tiny robot.

“Bot? You making me a grandpa again?”
Darcy didn’t look up from the machine in her hands as she smiled.

“Yeah, so congrats! Fen here wanted a bot his size that he could play with, and I couldn’t help but cave.”

Tony looked at the little guy who was now waving at him, big eyes all hopeful and shit.

“I don’t think I could’ve resisted that face, either.”

Darcy snorted at him and put what he thought were the final touches on the bot in her hands. The new member of the family was about the same size as Fen, but rather than the truck-bed style that she had designed for him the bot’s eyes sat on top of it’s box-like body and it’s wheels were directly beneath it.

“The bot totally looks like Wal-E, kid.”

She laughed as she looked over her shoulder at him, “I was running a little low on inspiration today, but look!” At this she held out the bot in her two hands close to his face, much like she did with Jeffrey that first time to Rhodey when she was two. Tony totally has a picture of that moment saved from JARVIS’ security cameras.

Tony chuckled at his daughter, the image of her toddler self and current twenty-three year old self almost mirrored in his mind’s eye.

“The bot is stinking adorable, I get it. She got a name yet?”

Darcy frowned, a crease between her brows as she thought. “I’m not sure yet, naming shit is hard. I don’t want to keep Fen waiting, but it doesn’t seem right to activate her without a name.”

Tony reached out for the bot, holding the tiny thing in his calloused hands. While Fen was small, only about a foot long, this new bot was even smaller. Looking between the two he had to smile. Darcy had made this new bot small enough to ride around in Fen’s back if the bots decided they wanted to. My kid is still the cutest damn kid on the planet, I don’t care if she’s a grown up now.
“What about BIT? ‘Baby Intelligent Thing?’”

Darcy’s smile could’ve lit up the entire tower just then.

She quickly snatched the bot back from Tony, quickly pushing buttons and flipping switches before she closed the new bot back up, waiting for it to activate. A couple moments of tense silence passed until the quiet was broken by an inquisitive whirr from the machine in Darcy’s hands.

“Hello, BIT. I’m Darcy, your Mama. This is Fen, your brother,” she aimed the tiny bot so she could see, then pointed her at Tony, “And this is Tony, my Dad and your grandpa!”

Tony rolled his eyes, but waved to BIT anyways.

Darcy gently placed BIT on the ground next to Fen, giggling as they beeped at one another in communication. Soon Fen was leading BIT by the hand over to the other bots so they could get acquainted as well. Tony had never heard so much happy noise in the lab before, with the exception of Darcy, of course. His daughter beamed at him as she addressed her AI brother.

“JARVIS? Is everyone in the Tower today?”

“Yes, Darcy. All Avengers are accounted for. Would you like me to call a meeting?”

“Yes!” Darcy couldn’t seem to stop giggling, even as she stood from her hunched over position on the floor, “Come on, everybody! BIT needs to meet the Avengers!”

Chapter End Notes

i wanted there to be another baby robot, sue me. I'm weak.
Chapter 25

Chapter Summary

there's a Lion King reenactment, the Fantastic Four show up, and Tony has a fit.

Chapter Notes

more funny fluff! I'm kind of stuck as to what I want my next move to be as far as the plot goes, so i'm kind of filling in here with fun stuff until i get my mind pointed in a direction.

i'm totally open for suggestions!

again, thank you all for all kudos and comments! makes me feel really good that you guys are enjoying this :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Steve sat down on the couch as he waited in common room for everyone else to arrive. JARVIS hadn’t said why everyone was needed, just that there was nothing to worry about.

“Hey, Cap, any idea why we’re here?”

Steve looked up at the voice, then kept looking up until he was able to see Clint from where the archer was poking his head out of the ceiling vent. He really should be used to this type of strangeness in the tower by now, but it was slow going.

“No, JARVIS just said Darcy called a meeting. So either there’s some ‘Avengers-family-bonding’ event or someone is in trouble.”

Clint hopped down from the ceiling and landed on the cushion next to Steve. Had he been a normal man, Steve probably would’ve bounced a bit at the impact, but instead he was as solid as a rock while Clint landed with a whump.

Natasha entered the room next with a pair of very disgruntled scientists behind her, Bruce and Jane arguing about something. Steve just hoped Jane hand’t tried to rip open space in her lab again.
Pepper followed soon after, typing a hundred miles an hour on her phone with a casualness that someone usually applied to filing their nails.

Steve was really intimidated by Pepper. She was beautiful and terrifying.

It was Darcy’s shout that ripped him out of Steve’s moment of awe at her mother.

“Is everybody here?” She poked her head around the doorway, keeping the rest of her hidden as Tony walked by, snickering at her antics. When she confirmed that everyone was indeed accounted for, she turned behind her and began murmuring. Steve could only thank his super-senses for letting him catch what she said.

“Okay, you guys, just like we planned okay? DUM-E, you take the lead and Fen you’ll bring up the rear. I’ll be right behind you, buddy. Alright! Hit it, JARVIS!”

All of a sudden JARVIS began pumping strange music throughout the common room that made everyone laugh. Steve was sure he was missing another reference, but he watched the scene unfold in front of him with a smile anyways.

Slowly, DUM-E led the other bots out from the hall and into the common room, waving their arms in an exaggerated gesture that Steve wanted to call a bow? or waving?

Clint and Tony were laughing so hard that they had tears on their faces, and Steve was surprised to see Natasha giggle of all things. Bruce shook his head, but Steve could tell he was amused as well.

After the three larger bots had cleared off to the side the music began building in strength even more, and little Fen came around the corner in the same fashion. He waved and bowed, using his hydraulic lifts in his wheels to raise and lower himself comically, then proceeded to roll to a stop next to the other bots.

Darcy took deliberate steps from around the corner, pausing after each one. In her hands that she held outstretched from her high above her head was the tiniest robot Steve had ever seen, which was waving frantically at everyone.
Steve wasn’t entirely sure what cue he had missed, but *everyone* in the room began falling apart in hysterical laughter at the sight of Darcy.

Darcy was in the center of the room, the TV at her back and facing the semi-circle of couches that the Avengers were sitting on. The music finally faded out, and Darcy used the silence as her cue to speak.

“Avengers, we have a new member to welcome to the family!” Despite the cheery smile on her face and the comedy of the situation, it was clear that this was very important to Darcy. Steve made sure to give her all of his attention as a result.

Bringing the tiny bot down from above her head and instead cradling it in her arms, Darcy continued.

“Fen told me today that he wanted a friend that was his size that he could play with. And never one to deny Fen anything, I made a new bot!” She smiled down at the bot in her arms, which Steve swore was looking up at her with adoration in its…eyes?

“This is BIT! Aka ‘Baby Intelligent Thing,’ aka Fen’s baby sister!”

Everyone waved and cheered, some saying hello to the little bot who was damn near vibrating in Darcy’s hands in her excitement.

“Please note how tiny BIT is. She is so, so very tiny. And you all are all large. I told BIT the importance of letting people know when she’s moving around so you guys don’t step on her, but she’s a baby and she may forget. Now everyone meet BIT!”

At Darcy’s instruction, the coffee table was cleared from the area and everyone sat on the floor in a circle. Darcy placed BIT in the center with a smile and told her to go make friends.

The next hour was one of the strangest, yet happiest in Steve’s life. There he sat in a circle with the world’s mightiest heroes, playing with two little robots. DUM-E, U, and Butterfingers had joined the circle as well, but were content to let their new friend spend most of her time interacting with the humans. Fen would guide BIT around to each member as Darcy gave BIT surprisingly detailed accounts of who everyone was and what each person did. After all the formal introductions were done, everyone was content to sit around chatting and playing with the bots, drinking some beers that Tony had Butterfingers fetch for them all.
Tony groaned as BIT started hovering closer and closer to what Darcy called the ‘spysassin twins’ until BIT exclusively interacted with them, groaning about how his grandkids were trying to kill him. The tiny bot seemed to have a fascination with the two that Steve didn’t understand. Not that he didn’t think his teammates were swell in their own rights, but he just didn’t see what could be so fascinating to a baby AI. But then again, he did just wake up four months ago.

All in all, it was a good day spent.

*****

Months later, Darcy was sitting in the common room and playing fetch with BIT and Fen. For as intelligent as the bots were, they really enjoyed simple things when they interacted with people. BIT particularly liked to people watch, and she could often be found following Clint and Natasha around. Darcy liked to think that the spysassins’ training which made them the most subdued members of the team drew BIT to them. Well, except when Clint wasn’t actively being a little shit and pranking other people. Fen liked to spend time with Bruce and helped him carry samples and conduct experiments in this lab. It was a new type of science that Fen hadn’t been exposed to back when it was just their family, so Fen was always eager to go to Bruce to learn.

“Darcy, I hate to interrupt but Sir is requesting everyone meet immediately in his lab.”

At the sound of JARVIS’ voice both smaller bots stopped zooming around and waved at the nearest security camera.

“Hello, Fen, hello, BIT. Sir says you both are welcome to join the meeting as well.”

Darcy rolled her eyes as BIT and Fen began tugging on her outstretched legs to get her to stand, already excited at seeing everyone in one space. The two were always thrilled when everyone was together, seeing as everyone’s jobs made playtime that much harder with the team.

“Okay, okay, I’m up! Let’s go see what Grandpa wants, yeah?” Darcy laughed at their excited beeping, getting into the elevator after the little AI’s.

“Any idea what’s going on, J?”
“Apparently Sir is expecting some visitors within the hour that he is less than thrilled about. I am not certain as to who is coming to the tower, but Miss Potts insisted that the meeting would be beneficial for everyone.”

Darcy *hmmm*-ed in response, mind already wondering who the hell her Mom would willingly send to interact with a cranky Tony.

From the hallway, Darcy could already see her Mom, Dad, Jane, and Bruce in her father’s lab. Her Dad was pacing, waving his arms about as he no doubt was trying to beg her mother to get him out of whatever meeting this was.

Rolling her eyes, she pushed open the door and let herself and her bots in.

“—*dick*, Pepper. He’s a dick! I don’t know *how* he got married—

“Honestly, dear, I feel like you should be asking a similar question.”

“—and he’s just *so annoying.*” Tony groaned, head thrown back like a disgruntled preteen who wasn’t allowed to see the R rated movie.

“Who’s a dick, Tony?” Clint hopped down from the ceiling (which was impressive because the ceilings were *much* higher in the labs because of Science!) while Natasha and Steve were respectable and used the door to the lab behind Darcy.

“Reed Richards!” Tony shouted, much to Darcy’s confusion and Clint’s dismay, if his groan was anything to go by.

“Ugh, he *is* a dick.” Tony looked positively *smug*, looking at Pepper with a face that clearly said *See? Told you so.*

“*Tony,*” Uh oh. That was Pepper’s I’m-the-CEO-and-you-will-obey-me voice. “I don’t care if Dr. Richards is a dick. Frankly, you don’t have a leg to stand on here.”

Darcy covered her laugh with a cough at that.
Pepper continued, “You will play nice. The Avengers need allies. So make friends.”

Still not entirely sure what was happening, Darcy raised her hand and only spoke when her mom raised an eyebrow at her.

“Uh, not to be slow on the uptake or anything, but who the hell is Dr. Richards?”

Sure, Darcy could dive into the internet and find the answer in a millisecond, but she found that she liked ‘playing normal’ and doing things the slower way with everyone else.

“Dr. Reed Richards is a member of the vigilante group known as the Fantastic Four. They also have just stepped off the elevator and will be in the lab momentarily.”

JARVIS’ voice might as well have been a death knell if the expression on Tony’s face was anything to go by.

Darcy shifted further to the back of the room near Jane so she had a better view of the show. Jane smirked at her and shuffled closer to join. Great minds, and all that.

The Avengers seemed to straighten their shoulders and put on their ‘business’ faces. Really Darcy just thought they all just looked like they had resting bitch face, but what did she know about superhero posturing?

Pepper, being the paragon of a business professional, walked toward the door to meet the Four to greet them properly.

“Hello, everybody. Welcome to Stark—”

“Avengers, Pep! Avengers!”

“—Tower. Thank you for coming.”
Darcy watched as the Four took turns shaking hands with Pepper and being polite. Well, she says ‘watched,’ but Steve took that moment to shift on his feet so all that Darcy really knew was that there were three people and another guy who looked like a giant orange rock on the other side of Steve shaking hands with her mom.

“Everybody, this is Dr. Reed Richards, Dr. Sue Storm, Mr. Ben Grimm and Mr.—”

At that moment Steve moved again just enough so that she could see the fourth member of the group, and her jaw about hit the floor.

“Johnny?!”

There was Johnny freaking Storm. Her first date, first kiss, and first boyfriend…and everything else that went along with that when you were two teenagers ‘in love.’ Yeah, she told her dad it was just one date, but the Storms were in Malibu for about eight weeks and they had fun together back when they were teenagers. If she remembers correctly, Johnny really was charming at seventeen.

Johnny’s head snapped toward Darcy at the sound of her voice, and he looked just as, if not more shocked about their reunion than she did.

“Holy shit, Darcy?! What in the…?”

Laughing like the punk idiots they were at sixteen and seventeen Darcy and Johnny quickly met in the middle of the room and embraced. Darcy could feel both the Avengers’ and the Four’s gazes burning on them both, but she was too ecstatic to see her long lost friend to care.

“Are you fucking kidding me Johnny? You’re the goddamn ‘Human Torch?’ You were supposed to stay out of trouble, you little shit!”

They pulled apart from one another but not far enough to leave each other’s arms. Darcy’s hands slid from around Johnny’s neck to rest on her shoulders while his hands settled on her waist.

“Shit happens, Darcy, you know that,” his fucking smirk was just as adorable as it was when she was sixteen goddamn him, “but what about you? Why are you with the Avengers?” Darcy watched as his eyes filled with a manic glee at his next question.
“OH MY GOD, are you a superhero too??”

She let out a full-on belly laugh at the mischief in his eyes, Darcy knew without a doubt he was already planning a million ways for them to get into trouble together. *Yep, just like when we were teenagers.*

“No, you goof,” she smacked him lightly on the chest, *ooh that's firm,* “I work with Dr. Jane Foster and I also have a spot in R&D with SI. So stop whatever train of thought you’ve got going. I don’t think either of our teams could handle *that* level of mayhem.”

At that, both Darcy and Johnny seemed to remember that *yes,* their teams were both still on their respective sides of the lab, watching their happy little reunion in the center of it all like some weird after-school ABC special.

Again they moved apart, but only so that instead of their intimate position before, they were side by side; Johnny’s arm around her shoulders and her arm around his waist.

Darcy raised up on her tip-toes so she could stage-whisper in Johnny’s ear, “*I think we broke our teams.*”

*****

Uh. What the fuck? What was happening?

No, *seriously,* what was going on? Tony’s brain fizzled out the moment his baby girl and Johnny Man-Slut Storm met in a hug. *That was WAY too familiar looking oh my god Storm has his dirty hands on my daughter.*

His arc reactor may just fail at this. This is what kills him. Not Afghanistan or Stane or a fucking hole in the sky, it was his *daughter* getting pawed at by the man trollop known as the Human Torch.

The rational part of his brain made sure he remembered that he couldn’t flip out *too* much since only the Avengers knew Darcy was his spawn.
Okay, sure. Tony can do nonchalance, he is the KING of not caring about things.

“So, uh, it um—looks like, that uh,” he cleared his throat, “yeah so you kids know each other?”

Nailed it, Stark.

Can Thor come back and just give him a quick Mjölnir to the brain?

Darcy gave him a withering look as she responded, “Yeah Tony, Johnny and I dated for a bit back when we were teenagers.”

Yeah there goes his heart. It just shattered. He really hoped this wasn’t one of those long-lost-first-love things.

Oh god Stark WHY DO YOU THINK THESE THINGS?

Tony looked at Pepper, begging her to put him out of his misery.

She was laughing at him. Why did the women he love like to watch him squirm?

Logan would know what to do. YES, excellent! Tony just had to call the cougar when they were done with these meet and greet shenanigans so he had back up if Storm showed he dumb face around here again.

During Tony’s panic, the rest of the people in the room had shaken themselves out of their stupor and began introducing themselves to one another.

Okay, when they were done with this inter-team bonding bullshit, Tony had a call to make.

Chapter End Notes
don't worry, we're not going to have a love triangle here, I just wanted an excuse to write tony having a conniption fit.

I think i'll make johnny and darcy more like bros than anything else, he's having fun sleeping around and she's got an eye on somebody else :P not to mention, they're smart enough not to chase after something short they had at 16 & 17
Chapter 26

Chapter Notes

more random fun!

I’ll probably bring some action and plot in the next chapter or so, but it may be longer because im still not sure where i’m headed.

again, thank you for all your love and support!

Logan was tired. He had just spent a hellish week at Xavier’s school and he wanted to relax. But Stark had called in a tizzy about an old boyfriend of Darcy’s showing up out of the blue and Logan just couldn’t resist, if only to see Stark squirm.

And so he could make sure no grubby ‘Man Slut’ got his dirty paws on Pip.

But he was showing up for Stark, honest.

Logan strode into the tower’s lobby, bypassing security. After the last time they tried to have him pass through a metal detector it had taken an hour of explanations and then a personal visit from Iron Man before he was allowed through. So everyone knew better by now than to stop him.

“Hey, JARVIS,” Logan liked the AI, he was snarky as shit and kept an eye on Pip for him.

“Good afternoon, Mr. Logan. Are you here to watch Sir try to keep Darcy away from a certain super-powered individual?”

See? Snarky as shit.

“Yeah, J,” he laughed, “I’m here to see the show.”

“Very well, sir. I shall show you to the common room at once.”
Grumbling to himself Logan had to ask, “Do they even hang out anywhere else?”

“Not really, sir.”

Logan wasn’t sure what to expect when he walked into the common area, but this sure as hell wasn’t it.

Stark stood at the bar near the back of the open area, clutching a scotch and looking for all like he was about to cause a massacre.

Pip was on the couch with a guy who had Rogers’ face but not his build, painting the guy’s toenails firetruck red.

Rogers himself was sitting on a chair next to the couch with this sketchbook in his lap, glaring something fierce at the duo on the sofa, but Logan could see from that the sketch itself was a beautiful charcoal portrait of Darcy. He also had his toes painted a very patriotic blue. *What the fuck?*

“Well, JARVIS certainly wasn’t lyin’,”

Darcy looked up at his voice and quickly abandoned her friend, running and jumping into his arms.

“Kitty!”

“Heya, Pip,” he met Stark’s eye over when he placed his usual kiss on Darcy’s brow, and they proceeded to have a silent conversation.

*So, what the hell did you call me here for?*

*THEY KEEP PUTTING THEIR EYES ON BOT.*

Logan raised an eyebrow, *Yes…I see that. Which one do we hate more?*
NEITHER OF THEM SHOULD PUT THEIR EYES ON DARYL.

Logan fucking gave up.

“Holy shit you’re Wolverine. Darcy, why are you cuddling Wolverine and calling him ‘Kitty’?”

The kid with Rogers’ face was okay, if only for the fear and awe in his voice.

“Because, Johnny, he’s my bro.”

“Your…bro?”

“Yes, my bro.”

Logan had to stop this before it got any worse. “Name’s Logan, who the hell are ya?”

The kid stood, looking kid of ridiculous with his designer jeans rolled to his knees so that the polish wouldn’t get them stained.

“Uh, Johnny Storm. Part of the Fantastic Four?” Why the fuck was the kid asking? “They call me the Human Torch?”

“Huh.”

And with that, Logan went to join Stark at the bar for a beer.

Before he made it to his unlikely friend, there was a high pitched beeping noise that he had come to associate with the bots that hung around Darcy. Logan immediately paused mid-stride, fearful that he was about to squish Darcy’s ‘baby.’ When he looked down, Logan saw the tiniest robot waving up at him while Fen picked it up and put it in his back for safe-keeping.
“Pip? You make another kid?”

Darcy answered him from her place on the couch, “Yup! Her name is BIT and she’s Fen’s baby sister! Isn’t she cute?”

BIT was still waving up at him so Logan gave her a small wave in return, much to the tiny bot’s absolute glee.

_I have gone so fucking soft, goddamn you Pip._

“Yeah, I guess. Fuckin’ tiny though.”

“You should’ve seen it when she introduced BIT to everybody, walked out here with all the other bots all _Lion King_ style.”

Logan rolled his eyes at Stark, knowing the man had seen whatever mushy face he had made at the bots. Stepping around them, he finished his trek to the bar where Stark held out a beer for him.

He always had that fancy micro-brew crap, but Logan had to admit that some of it was pretty fucking tasty.

“So, Stark, I know ya didn’t bring me here for the tantalizin’ conversation, so what gives?”

The rich bastard just beamed at him, “I just needed you to do what you did just now, giving Johnny Man Slut Storm the stink eye.”

Logan heard Rogers snort in amusement behind him and he rolled his eyes, _super hearing._

“Rogers, stop bein’ an eavesdropper an’ get yer ass over here to talk like a fuckin’ normal person, would ya?”

_Who the fuck was he anymore? Can’t keep hangin’ out at the school, kids keep me soft._
“Couldn’t help it Logan,” Rogers clapped him on the shoulder and brought the faint tinge of jealousy through the air when he settled himself next to Logan at the bar.

*This place is a fuckin’ daytime soap opera, god help me.*

Stark looked betrayed that Logan invited one of the men with eyes for Darcy over for booze. Logan probably wasn’t going to get another beer now. *Shit.*

The three men made small talk, *seriously, Logan didn’t recognize himself anymore,* which mainly meant Logan and Rogers were telling Stark all the reasons why it would be a *bad idea* to outfit Logan’s X-Men tac suit with *lasers,* of all things.

Popping out of nowhere, Pip took the seat on the counter next to Stark behind the bar.

“Are we day drinking? Awesome!” She floated a bottle of wine from the fancy fridge thing Logan saw by her feet, then a corkscrew and a glass from the cabinet next to her Dad’s head.

Logan smiled a bit for the next minute where Darcy struggled to get the cork out of her bottle.

“Ah-ha! Sneaky bastard,” Pouring herself a glass, Pip looked at the three men over the top of her glasses, “So what are we talking about? Are we sharing man-pain or are we telling Dad not to put lasers on stuff? He’s got a thing about lasers, right now.”

“Bot, I don’t ‘have a thing’ about lasers. They’re lasers. Fucking awesome, that’s what they are.”

“Sure you don’t, just like last month you didn’t have a thing for putting repulsers on everything. I don’t think Clint’s forgiven you for that yet.”

“He’s lame. Where’d the Human Slut go?”

Darcy rolled her eyes with such force that Logan was actually impressed. Concerned, but impressed.
“Sue called him, said she needed him back at Baxter tower. Is it a superhero thing to have a tower? Do you guys have some sort of unspoken agreement on this?”

Logan felt Rogers relax at the mention that Storm was gone. *Soap opera, literally. Why do I let myself get roped into this shit?*

He needed to get out of this shit show, so he turned to Darcy, “Pip, wanna spar? We haven’t in a long while.”

“*Hell, yeah!*”

He laughed as she ran off to go change, telling him to meet her in the gym in a few minutes. Logan really did love sparring with Darcy. While she was no match for him from a physical standpoint, and he had to curb his strength, she was clever and able to use her powers in a way that always surprised him and kept him on his toes. He always found it easier to talk and open up to her during their fights, whatever that says about him. Maybe he could get some answers from her about these idiot boys while he was at it, too.

*****

Darcy *loved* sparring with Logan. Yeah, he could accidentally kill her with his super strength and his Adamantium skeleton if he lost control, but she trusted him with her life. When asked, Darcy simply responded that she’s known him since she was a little kid, and he’s protected her every day since. How could she *not* trust him? The thought made Logan feel funny in his gut, so he tried not to think about it too hard.

She bounced around on the mats on her toes, hopping around with her fists in front of her face in an over exaggerated boxer’s stance.

“C’mon, Kitty, let’s see your claws!” Darcy barked out a laugh as Logan extended his middle claw on each hand to flip her the bird.

“Awww, such a pretty Kitty!”

“Pip, shut the hell up.”
All at once they came together with a *thunk*, limbs grappling and swinging at one another, dodging and dealing out blows. This went on so long that Logan could tell that Darcy began to feel winded and was searching for a way to subdue him. The light in her eyes told Logan she found what she was looking for.

Darcy summoned up the large metal disks she used to practice with, surrounding Logan and barraging him with thuds to his body with their flat sides. Each time he knocked one away, another slid in closer when his stance opened up to strike out an arm or a leg. Soon enough, Darcy had Logan pinned, locked inside a shell of her disks.

Before she could cry out in victory Logan used his claws to slice the nearest disks into shreds, her moment of shock allowing for him to jump away from the remaining disks and launch back at her.

They were back to their normal hand to hand, Darcy sweating up a storm and Logan barely feeling out of breath.

“So, Pip, why’s yer old man all in a tizzy ‘bout the blonde boy wonders hangin’ around in yer shadow?”

She grunted as she was flipped over his shoulder and onto the mats, but rolled away quickly and sending a disk into the side of his head as he moved to grab her again.

“Well, Johnny was my first boyfriend, first everything, really—”

“Didn’t need to know that, Pip.”

“—so Dad’s worried we’re going to get back together, and is freaked about Johnny since he’s a man trollop. But that’s not going to happen, we were teenagers then, and we’ve changed. It’s just nice having an old friend around.”

Their conversation paused for a few moments as Logan had to shred through more disks, *how many did she even have?* before he made it back within striking distance.

“Why’s yer old man care about Rogers, then?”
Darcy huffed a laugh, “I think a few things, for one,” she grunted at the blow he landed to her stomach and dropped to her knees, but in a move he couldn’t follow she used her legs to bring his out from under him.

“I think Dad’s got some complex about Steve because Howard apparently had some, like, weird hero worship thing and wouldn’t shut up about it. So that’s a mess of issues I’m not going to touch.”

Logan watched her as he rose from the ground, his interest growing as Darcy brought a tangle of wires that were laid nearby to her body, sparks of electricity winding around them as they coiled around her arms and formed into large whips. That was new.

“Like them?” Smug was not a good look on Pip, he decided, “Dad and Natasha worked on the design. They’re like long flexible tasers so my telekinesis can wield them and my technokinesis can screw with the machinery inside and kick up the voltage and a whole bunch of other stuff.”

Logan twitched as she cracked the two whips in her hands, what looked like lightening arcing from the ends in the air.

Logan felt very aware of his metal Adamantium skeleton at the moment.

Rolling his shoulders and cracking his neck, he jumped back into the fray with Darcy.

“Anyways, I think Dad has some weird issue with ‘America’s favorite son’ chasing and ‘corrupting’ his daughter.” they both laughed at the thought of her being corrupted, let alone by anyone else.

“So, what’s yer deal with the Captain, then?”

Darcy gasped in mock surprise, making Logan immediately regret the question.

“Kitty! Are we really having a discussion about boys and who I possibly have crush on? O-M-G I’m totally doing your nails next!”
“Like hell you are, Pip.”

Logan swiped out with his claws a little carelessly, hoping to slice into one of the whips, knowing that Stark would just make a new set. However, rather than feel his claw slide through the other metal weapon like butter, Logan felt at the last moment Darcy using her mind to wrap the end of the whip around the claw in a tight coil.

He barely had time to complete his muttered “Oh, shit” before Pip let the voltage tear through him.

Immediately Logan was on his knees, feeling the electricity run rampant through his skeleton and his body vibrate dangerously. All at once, he was released and he sucked in a huge breath of relief.

“Holy fuck, that was hot,” Logan rolled his eyes at the sound of Barton’s voice above him, no doubt creeping around the vents as per usual.

“Shut the fuck up, Robin Hood,” he huffed. Logan wasn’t exhausted, he just wanted to stretch out on the mat for a minute or two. Stretching. Because Logan did that sort of thing after exercise.

Darcy’s cackle of glee echoed in the gym, but soon enough Logan had a grinning Pip looking down at him from where she stood by his head.

“So, Dad will be pleased that they work!”

Logan just groaned, body still twitching sporadically.
Chapter 27

Darcy wasn’t sure how she came to be here.

She began the day in Times Square with Johnny, hanging out and visiting the tourist traps for shits and giggles, just having some fun.

Now she’s holding her right hand to the gunshot wound in her hip (really? again?) while her left hand hangs uselessly to her side, another gunshot wound setting her shoulder on fire.

She told Johnny that the Square wasn’t worth the crowds.

*****

“Darcy! Look, I’m on a t-shirt!” Johnny held up a knock-off Fantastic Four shirt with an absolute awful rendering of the Human Torch, looking like a Cheeto.

Upon seeing it, Darcy snorted the gulp of coffee she had taken.

“Shit,” she coughed, “Please tell me you’re gonna buy it.”

“I wouldn’t be a good superhero if I didn’t support small businesses, now would I?”

“You’re such a shit, Storm.”

“Ha! Shitstorm, I like it! Well done, Lewis.”

Darcy groaned, wondering why she bothered hanging out with Johnny. When she asked aloud, he could only shrug in response.
“I have a fantastic ass?”

“Stop making puns on your superhero club, Johnny. It’s gross.”

Johnny’s rejoinder was cut off by screams and gunfire on the other side of Times Square. Without a second thought, Johnny began running against the crowd, Darcy close on his heels.

“Darcy! Get out of here!”

“Like hell I am Storm, I’ve got some things that can help.” Digging into her messenger bag, Darcy unzipped the secret compartment in the bottom.

She was grateful in this moment for all the paranoid bastards she lived with making sure she always had a way to protect herself, powers aside. Darcy pulled out a simple red mask that adhered around her eyes and grabbed her mechanical whips. She then yanked off her glasses and stuck on the mask, thankful it had her prescription built in. Dropping her bag so it’d be out of her way, she chased after Johnny who had gotten ahead of her as she fumbled.

“I’m a goddamn vigilante,” she muttered to herself.

Johnny’s hands and feet were on fire, adding to his already heavy punches and kicks to the goons surrounding him. Without breaking stride, Darcy threw one against another with her mind and began fighting back to back with Johnny.

“What the hell Lewis? I thought you said you didn’t have superpowers??”

Darcy smirked as she pinged JARVIS in her head while she wrapped one whip around a goon’s neck and yanked.

“I said I wasn’t a superhero, not that I didn’t have superpowers, Johnny-boy!”

The smile Johnny shot her as he throat-punched a goon lit up his entire face.
JARVIS, Storm and I have got a bit of a situation down in Times Square, you may want to rally the troops.

Right away, Darcy. Can you identify who the offending party is?

I can’t tell, looks like a bunch of goons-for-hire with automatic weapons….shit.

Darcy? What is it? The Avengers and the Fantastic Four shall be there shortly.

It’s not gonna be fast enough, J! We’ve got a new wave of goons with RPGs!

The building above Darcy and Storm was hit, an explosion rocking the center and raining rubble down on them. Storm blasted what he could away from them, while Darcy shielded nearby civilians. She let the goons get squashed.

Screaming from a little further away drew them from the wreckage around them and Darcy knew they needed a better plan.

“Storm, go high and hit from above, I’ll take down here and shepherd civvies out of here!”

With a nod Storm ‘flamed on’ and took to the sky, sending down fireballs on the goons. Darcy brought up pieces of rubble from around her and began to use them as projectiles, taking out men who were herding civilians into corners and under buildings.

Darcy put more power behind her throws and used her whips with a rage she didn’t know she possessed when she realized what the goons were doing. The men with the guns herded the people while the ones with RPG’s started taking aim at the buildings above them, maximum casualties guaranteed.

JARVIS, we need people here NOW!

The teams will arrive in thirty seconds, Darcy.
Darcy began tearing through the goons, pulling RPGs from their hands or aiming them away if they had already begun to fire. Unfortunately, that drew their attention.

Darcy heard the sweet, sweet sound of Iron Man’s replusor blasts in the distance the moment she felt a bullet rip through her left shoulder and another in her hip. Not able to focus on the pain now, Darcy kept her arm as still as possible while still using her mind to move the whip in tandem with the weapon in her right. The left side now had a shorter reach, but it was still just as lethal. Her steps faltered as well, but Darcy kept running to where she could see a group of children pinned beneath a destroyed vendor’s stall.

Goon’s started disappearing all around her, the Avengers and the Fantastic four working in tandem to clear the area. For all the good they could do, they couldn’t control every variable.

Darcy watched in horror as an RPG flew directly past her, spiraling as if someone had knocked it mid-flight, into the base of the building above the pinned kids. The explosion rocked the building, the front brick face of it quickly peeling forward in some twisted way that reminded Darcy of wallpaper. Diving the last few steps forward, Darcy skid on her knees and threw everything she had into her powers, keeping the building’s wall from raining down on the children.

Darcy was losing blood and energy, feeling the control she had on her powers begin to wane.

No no no no please…. She knew that in her current condition she couldn’t keep the wall up and free the kids from their position. Darcy also knew that if she moved a muscle at all, the kids and her would die.

Panicking, Darcy shouted through JARVIS, and therefore the Avenger’s comm units, as well as aloud in case someone was nearby:

“I need help! I’ve got kids trapped and I can’t hold the wall much longer!”

Black spots were appearing in her vision and the wall began to tremble where it was suspended in the air. Darcy focused on the crying children, using them to ground herself. Footsteps were rapidly approaching behind her, and she could only pray they were the good guys’.
“Darcy!” Thank god for Steve.

“Get them out, Cap! Get them out NOW!”

Darcy could see from the corner of her eye Natasha and Steve rushing over and pulling each kid out, carrying all six kids between the two of them.

Safe, they’re safe. Darcy slumped, unafraid of the wall above her as her control slipped through her fingers and her world went dark.

The last thing she felt were firm arms wrap around her waist, yanking her backwards.

*****

Darcy woke up groaning, opening her eyes to see the ceiling of the quinjet. So, not a hospital this time, that’s new. She could feel hands on her hip and shoulder dressing her wounds, but the shock (and probably some morphine) made her numb to the sensation.

She dragged her gaze to Bruce who was stitching the hole closed on her hip, then looked to the side to see Natasha putting pressure on her shoulder. Apparently that one would need more than a few stitches.

“You had us worried, младшая сестра,” Natasha murmured in her ear, “You were very brave, I am proud of you.”

Darcy smiled a dopey smile (yep definitely the good drugs) that only grew when she saw her Dad over Natasha’s shoulder, looking like he was on the brink of tears.

“Don’t worry Dad, I’ll be okay. But I want Jeffrey when we get back to the tower. It’s not a hospital visit unless Butterfingers brings him.”

There was a lot of choked of noises and loud cries of what?! and ‘Dad?!’ which were beginning to
annoy Darcy in her drugged out state, so she looked over Bruce’s shoulder to see the Fantastic Four freaking out.

Well, Johnny and Richards were freaking out and looking a little pale, but Sue and Ben just looked mildly shocked.

“Oops. Sorry Dad. I done blew up the secret.”

“It’s okay, Bot,” her Dad laughed, “They were bound to figure it out soon, anyways.”

“Dad? Can you call Kitty? He likes to mother hen me and I’d hate to see him miss this opportunity.”

“Sure thing, I’ll call Kitty. Go to sleep now, you’re going to be okay.”

With a decisive nod and a blown kiss to her father, Darcy passed out.

*****

Steve was in the common room with the rest of the Avengers and the Fantastic Four, waiting for Darcy to wake up. She had to have surgery for the hole in shoulder, so she was still sleeping off the anesthesia.

His hands were still shaking from the shock of seeing Darcy under that trembling wall, bleeding and yelling at everyone to save the kids but uncaring of her own survival. Thankfully, Richards was able to pull her to safety as the wall fell, his extendable arms saving her life.

Clint strode into the room and placed a case of beer on the coffee table, clapping his hands once in front of him to gain everyone’s attention.

“Okay gang, Darcy’s going to be okay but I know we’re all a little shaken up at seeing her out there and hurt. However, I know something to cheer us all up and I’ve been dying to show everyone this video and I only have a little bit before Logan shows up and he’ll kill me if he knows I’m showing it. So JARVIS, if you’ll do the honors?”
“It would be my pleasure, Agent Barton.”

Steve watched as the large viewing screen descended from the ceiling, curious as to what Clint was going to show them. He wasn’t really in the mood for a movie or anything but helped himself to a beer, too tired and emotionally drained to object or move from the sofa.

So he was surprised to see what looked like security footage of the gym, Darcy walking around and setting up some large disks in the corner and what looked like a coil of metal next to them. Logan entered the screen next, and Darcy began to hop around, excited and full of energy. They couldn’t hear any of their conversation, but Steve heard Clint whisper to Natasha that he was the one who chose the kick-ass playlist to match.

Steve then realized that this was from a few weeks ago when Logan came to visit, when the mutant asked Darcy to spar. What Steve was expecting was some gentle coaxing in self-defense led by Logan. What he got instead was a half-hour video of Darcy viciously attacking Logan with her hands and her powers, and the metal whips that he now recognized seeing next to Darcy when she was in Times Square.

The room of heroes was silent, everyone watching slack-jawed as Darcy not only held her own against Logan, but also landing more than her fair share of blows to disorient him. The entire room gasped as Darcy’s whip coiled around Logan’s claws and electricity sparked along it to bring Logan to his knees.

After the Logan in the video fell on his back, much to the amusement of a laughing Darcy, JARVIS silently raised the screen back to it’s hidden spot and turned on the lights. The room’s contemplative silence was broken by Johnny Storm.

“Did anyone else find that really hot?”

Clint jumped up from his spot to give Storm a high-five, “Right?!”

“I think we’re all lucky that Thor wasn’t around to hear you say that, Storm.”

Johnny and Clint froze at Natasha’s words, terror replacing their previous glee, much to Steve’s pleasure.
“Right, well, now we all know that Darcy is a badass in her own right and we shouldn’t freak out if she’s ever caught in the cross fire,” Clint shrugged his shoulders, “That’s why I wanted to show everyone, besides letting you all see Darcy take down Wolverine, because holy shit guys that was awesome.”

The rest of the afternoon was spent watching sparring videos from the gym, most of Darcy with Logan or Natasha (when did *that* happen?) but some of the Avengers and the Fantastic Four that JARVIS hacked from their tower, everyone waiting for Darcy to wake up so they could smother her with their protectiveness.

Of course no one said that out *loud*, but everyone knew it anyways.

Chapter End Notes

младшая сестра = mladshaya sestra = little sister
Chapter Notes

sorry for the late update, everybody! i had a job interview and now i have a real person job! so updates will probably be spaced out more these days because of less free time.

good news, though! i have a more concrete idea as to where this story is going! woo! i don't have an ending planned yet but i've got the direction i want the plot to go in.

the next couple chapters will be Thor: The Dark World!

get pumped.

Darcy cackled with glee as she read another headline about the events in Times Square three days before. Truly, the things (particularly the names) people came up with were hysterical.

‘MISTRESS: VIGILANTE OR NEW AVENGER?’

‘MANHATTAN’S JILL THE WHIPPER SAVES THE DAY!’

‘TIMES SQUARE SAVED BY FANTASTIC FOUR, AVENGERS, AND MISS WHIP!’

‘WHO IS WHIPLASH? NEW LOVE INTEREST OF MR. FANTASTIC?’

That one had a picture of an unconscious Darcy, filled with bullet holes and bleeding, in the arms of Richards who had just pulled her to safety.

See? These people were ridiculous.

“JARVIS? Please tell me we’re saving a copy of all of these headlines, I need them now for sentimental purposes.”

“I believe that Dr. Foster is already compiling a scrapbook, Darcy.”
“Yes! This is the best day ever!”

“I really hope you don’t take that as encouragement to get shot more often, Darce.”

Darcy hadn’t heard that voice in forever.

“Uncle Rhodey?! I missed you!”

Rhodey laughed as he walked up to Darcy’s couch (she had taken to spending her mandatory bed rest in the common room rather than in her actual bed) and knelt to give her an awkward hug. The angle was all wrong, and her sling didn’t help things either.

“I missed you too, Bot. Sorry I’ve been gone so long, the Air Force needed me to train a whole bunch of new recruits, and also train with the pilot’s while I was alongside in the Iron Patriot suit.”

Darcy scrunched up her nose at that, “I still think that name is horrible and you should’ve stuck with War Machine.”

Rhodey nodded sadly, he wasn’t a fan of the name change (or the paint job for that matter) either.

“The day they changed the name was a dark day for all of us, Bot. But I hear you’ve gotten into some more trouble these past couple of months?” Rhodey raised a teasing eyebrow at Darcy, making her giggle.

“You know how it is, I draw trouble in like a magnet. It’s a gift, Uncle Rhodey.”

“I don’t know about that, sweetheart. Do you know how many voicemails I’ve gotten from Tony? Hundreds, Bot, hundreds. I think I know more about your day to day life than I know about my own.”

“Well, I do lead an interesting life here, that much is true.”

Rhodey spent the next couple of hours talking to Darcy, catching up with her and delighted to hear
her side of things, rather than relying on Tony. Sometimes the man was a bit too much. Rhodey stayed until Darcy began to drift off, still not able to handle a lot of activity or excitement with her wounds being so fresh still.

Darcy’s uncle tucked the blanket that was resting on her lap up around her shoulders, smiling as she snuggled into it. With a whisper to JARVIS, Rhodey had the lights dimmed and left to go find Tony.

*****

Tony was waiting in his lab with the rest of the Avengers (sans Thor, of course, big guy was still stuck on Asgard) when Rhodey walked in. Tony called the meeting to go over the information from Times Square to see who was behind the attack.

They had nothing.

Background checks on each recovered goon came back clean, or as clean as normal criminals can be. Each goon had a history of being a merc for hire, and this was just another job for each of them. They received payments from off-shore bogus accounts and took orders from dummy email accounts that even JARVIS was struggling to trace.

“How have we not found anything yet?” Tony demanded of the room, of himself, “We’re the goddamn Avengers, the Four is looking into it on their own, and we’ve got people in SHIELD. And we have nothing.”

“Each man that survived bit into a cyanide capsule before they could be apprehended,” Natasha spoke up from where she was sitting on one of Tony’s many workbenches, petting BIT in her lap. “It’s an old trick, but effective.”

“I saw a lot of that back in the War, HYDRA was a fan of it.” Steve looked even more uncomfortable at the similarity, and Tony watched as the chair Steve was leaning against creaked slightly under his grip.

“HYDRA was a bunch of scientists and goons-for-hire, I can’t imagine they trained all their operatives to withstand torture. These men may have had some sort of loyalty to whoever hired them but knew that their handlers wouldn't come for them if they were caught. Hence the poison.” Natasha shrugged, as if that should’ve been common knowledge.
It was times like these that Tony questioned why he invited these maniacs to live under his roof. Clint and Natasha, as well as Steve with the occasional remark, began discussing all sorts of spy-stuff like popular poisons or goon ideology. Okay, that may have been a stretch, but to be honest he had stopped listening, it got creepy when they discussed that shit like it was as easy as discussing dinner.

Tony couldn’t shake the thought that a storm was brewing out there, though. He knew that Bot only got in the crossfire, but his instincts were telling him to keep her close. Unfortunately, Darcy and Jane were planning on going to London in a few months for research. Tony had tried to convince Darcy to stay, but Jane had jumped in his face yelling about how she needed her Science! Sister at her side and her Mini Minion, which he learned was Fen’s title in Foster’s lab.

The woman was strange. Tiny yet terrifying in her rage, as well. There had been a certain twitch under her eye that made Tony back away slowly with his hands raised since Jane had a habit of ripping open portals all willy-nilly and he didn’t want to ‘accidentally’ be caught in the crosshairs.

So Tony did what he could to protect Darcy. He had JARVIS scour the web and government databases for clues, he called meetings with the Avengers to bring ideas together, he had Rhodey pull strings at the Air Force, and he had Clint and Natasha dig through what they could at SHIELD.

It’d never be enough for him, but Tony did what he could.

*****

It had been a long four months of physical therapy and negotiating with her Dad, but Darcy was finally cleared to leave the Tower. She was leaving with Jane for London in the morning, and she was excited to be getting to spend time with Jane, just the two of them, like it had been in New Mexico.

Darcy was double checking that she had everything she needed in her suitcase when there was a knock on her door. With a flick of her wrist she pulled it open before kneeling on the ground, looking for the lipstick she had dropped earlier that rolled under her bed. She assumed it was Jane who had entered her room, so she called out to her without moving from her position.

“Janie? I really hoped you actually packed enough because I’m not having the same issue we had when we got shipped off to Norway. You need more than one set of clothes.”

“That is not surprising to hear, младшая сестра. Clint is much the same way.”
Darcy was only mildly surprised that Natasha was in her room, but she had a hunch as to what her favorite spysassin was after. She had to bite back a smile at the thought.

“Clint does strike me as the type to put a pair of boxers in his pocket and call it a day,” Darcy laughed. She looked to Natasha who appeared nervous. Well, on Natasha ‘nervous’ only really registered as a small glint in her eye.

“What’s up, Tasha?”

“I was hoping that you would allow BIT to remain here in the tower while you were in London.”

“I knew it!”

Natasha just rolled her eyes and relaxed her posture slightly. “I find her presence comforting and she occupies Clint when he bothers me. Clint likes to crawl around the vents with her. And she helps me sharpen my throwing knives.”

Darcy failed when she tried to contain the *awwwwwwwww!* that bubbled up out of her throat.

The ensuing chase took fifteen minutes and resulted in a hole in the wall, some books knocked from a shelf, and an overturned couch where Clint found Natasha sitting on Darcy’s back and giving her a noogie with one hand while tickling her ribs with the other.

“UNCLE! UNCLE!” Darcy laughed uncontrollably, tears streaming down her face.

Natasha finally relented, and placed a kiss on Darcy’s cheek before helping her up.

“We will take care of BIT while you are away, I promise младшая сестра.”

Clint’s beaming grin almost brought tears to Darcy’s eyes in its intensity.

“She’s letting us keep BIT here?” At Natasha’s nod, Clint’s squeal of glee made Darcy’s ears hurt. “OH MY GOD! THANK YOU, DARCY!”
Darcy suddenly found herself in Clint’s arms struggling for breath while he hugged her.

If Natasha was a cat, lithe and stealthy, Clint was the adorable boxer puppy that occasionally ran into glass doors. He kept babbling excitedly about how he’d make sure BIT was well taken care of and what type of stuff they’d get into together. Natasha fondly rolled her eyes at him.

Darcy was going to miss everyone while she was away, but she was ready to get out of the Tower for a while and just have quality best friend time with Jane.

And Science!, of course. That was fun too.
Chapter 29

Jane was missing.

There were kids and a floating truck and fucking portals in a warehouse of all places then intern Ian lost the fucking car keys and then Jane went off on her own.

It had been five hours, and Jane was still gone.

Normally Darcy wouldn't freak out because Jane usually got lost in Science! mode, but this time there were portals and Darcy was really hoping that Jane didn't get shot of to Jötunheim or somewhere far less appealing.

"I think we need to call the police, Darcy."

She sighed, knowing that Ian was right. As he pulled out his cellphone, Darcy debated the merits of calling SHIELD. While they definitely would want to know where their favored astrophysicist was, Darcy and Jane had developed a healthy aversion to the organization since their jack-booted thugs. Except for Clint, he was the best jack-booted thug there was.

She'd see what the cops had to say, maybe wait a little longer, and then Darcy would call SHIELD.

Yeah, good plan.

*****

Of course Jane would show up five minutes after the police, acting as if Darcy was the one in the wrong.

"What the hell was I supposed to do, Boss-Lady? You were gone for five hours!"

Jane's adorably angry face scrunched up in confusion. “Minion, I was only gone for ten minutes! At least that's what it felt like."
"Where did you go?"

Jane's answer got interrupted by the familiar beam of rainbow light that was the Bifröst, the God of Thunder arriving with all the gravitas that his title demanded.

Darcy's friend let out a very undignified shriek of surprise before collecting herself, cooling her gaze and striding with a purpose that Darcy hardly ever saw from the smaller woman.

Great, they were playing tonsil hockey. Some conversation, a slap, a kiss, and oh dear there was another slap. Back to kissing.

Darcy became uncomfortably aware of Ian's presence when he came to stand by her side. There had been some harmless flirting, but she didn't want the sight of the two lovebirds to give him any ideas.

"The police want to talk to Dr. Foster."

She snorted, and waved a hand at the scene in front of them, "Okay, feel free to break them up."

Ian only looked at her with an tight expression and pleading eyes. Sighing, Darcy jogged over to Jane and Thor knowing Ian still hardly had the guts to look Jane in the eye, let alone initiate anything. His hero worship of the tiny scientist was cute when it wasn’t borderline creepy.

"Janie, the fuzz wants a word. I think they want us to leave or question us or both."

Jane's fury was a heavy and tangible thing, causing Darcy and Thor to take a step back. Jane did an about face and went to have words with the local law enforcement. Shrugging, Darcy turned to Thor who was giving her a big smile.

"Lightening sister! I am glad to see that you are well and that you remain at Jane's side. Your friendship with one another is a beautiful thing."

"Hey, lightening bro. I'm doing pretty well considering I actually got shot a couple times four
months ago," She ignored Thor's appalled look, "but Dad and Tasha made me some kick ass whips, I took down Kitty with them!"

"You felled Logan?" At Darcy's nod, Thor boomed one of his deep laughs, "I would have been thrilled to see such a thing, you must show me your new weapons soon."

Darcy was going to respond, but she felt a strange urge to turn around. Listening to her instincts, Darcy turned just in time to see a police officer grab Jane as she tried to walk away from him.

All of a sudden a red mist burst from Jane, knocking the police officer far enough that he landed on the hood of his car. Jane only had a moment of surprise before she collapsed in a heap, fainting.

Darcy was half a step behind the god as he ran over to her crumpled form, yelling for Heimdall to open the Bifröst for them. Her hand had just grasped a handful of Thor's cape before a tunnel of light took them from earth.

*****

Traveling via the Bifröst was exhilarating. Darcy landed with a giddy laugh as she stumbled while Thor landed with the eerie grace that was true to his nature as a prince.

"Darcy," Thor's tone was scolding and Darcy was already done with his attitude, "it was not wide for you to join us, the Allfather will not be likely to permit a Midgardian into the realm, let alone two."

Darcy seethed at his tone. "If you think for one second that I will leave Jane’s side then you definitely do not know me as well as I thought you did." She took a deep breath, reminding herself that Thor was a prince before he was her friend and he had rules to play by on this realm.

"I understand that you're in a bind here so I promise to stay out of the way, but I'll be damned before I leave Jane alone, even if she has you by her side."

The ice in her tone must have gotten through to the god because his posture seemed to lose its defensive edge. It wasn't until that moment that Darcy felt comfortable enough that she wouldn't be sent away that she let her hand release Thor's cape.
Darcy took a moment to observe her surroundings while Thor tried to rouse Jane.

She was what looked like a large golden dome, the entire space glittering and so shining that she could see her reflection almost anywhere she looked. The floor felt like some sort of marble beneath her booted feet, completely seamless and a dark bronze to go with the 'lets see who can be more ostentatious' theme they had going on. It wasn't until she had done a full 360 turn that she noticed a man in the center of the room.

If possible, he was even taller than Thor. His skin was a dark contrast to his glittering armor, and it made him look ethereal, Darcy decided. His eyes were a deep gold, almost dark enough to match the bronze of the floor that seemed to just rip through her soul.

This must be Heimdall.

Sensing that Thor was busy speaking to a guard at the entrance, Darcy strode up to the Gatekeeper and stuck out her hand.

"Hi! I'm Darcy Stark, Lightening Sister of Thor. I just want to say that after hearing so much about you I'm finally glad to be able to put a face to a name."

Heimdall gave her a gentle smile, and Darcy had the feeling that he wasn't usually so expressive. The Gatekeeper grasped her forearm in the Warriors shake as he replied.

"After hearing so much about a fine shield maiden, I am glad to meet you as well, Lady Darcy."

She couldn’t explain it, but Darcy felt a kinship with the Gatekeeper, and made a mental note to come back and speak to him during her stay. She couldn’t linger any longer because she had seen several guards arrive with a couple horses to take them to the palace.

Waving goodbye to her new friend, Darcy ran to Thor’s side and hoisted herself onto a horse.

Jane was pale and unresponsive, and Darcy felt fear for her friend sink into her bones.
Thor handed her off onto his very excited friends while he went to take Jane to the healers. There was lots of hugging and forearm clasps and everything was jovial until Darcy’s sweater fell off her shoulder, revealing her scar from the bullet and following surgery.

“What happened here?” Sif’s fingertips were gentle and warm as they lightly traced the ragged and raised pink skin. She kept her hand on Darcy’s shoulder as she told her tale about the attack and consequently she got shot trying to help. She also told Sif and the Warriors Three of her whips that were made for her, bragging about how kickass they were.

Glee filled each of there eyes, albeit more subdued in Hogan, and they dragged her out to the training grounds for a demonstration. While they had seen her powers when they came to fight the Destroyer together in New Mexico, they had yet to see her wield both of her physical powers at the same time.

The first part was spent warming up, tossing projectiles at Darcy that she flicked away with a thought or took down with her fists. After some time, Sif seemed to grow impatient.

Darcy laughed at the antsy look on the warrior’s face, “You got somewhere to be, Sif?”

Sif rolled her eyes in response before she grabbed Darcy’s purse off the grass, tossing it to her with such force Darcy let out an oomph when it hit her in the gut.

“I grow weary of this light training. I have yet had the privilege of sparring with an opponent with your powers, and I am eager to see how you and I fair against one another.” Sif pulled her sword from the sheath on her hip, flipping it over her hand as she spoke.

Darcy’s grin was absolutely filthy at the thought of sparring with Sif, so she eagerly pulled the whips and mask out of the secret compartment of her bag. Feeling the metal coil around her forearms while the electricity sent little zings of sensation along her skin, Darcy crouched into a defensive stance and waited for Sif to attack.

Sif’s fighting style actually reminded Darcy a lot of Logan’s technique. While both were strong and had enough brute strength to ‘smash-and-grab’ like Thor did, they had a type of finesse and grace that made Darcy’s mouth water with envy.
Though Sif fought similarly to Logan, she came at Darcy with a sword and a shield rather than her fists and metal claws. It took some time, but eventually Darcy was able to get a better sense of Sif’s technique and better predict her moves.

Darcy’s win would make her smile for years to come.

Darcy was becoming winded (she seriously needed to spar people who were human and didn’t have enhanced stamina) and was desperate for an opening. Thankfully, Darcy was outlasting Sif’s expectations of a mortal’s combat abilities, so her moves began to be sloppy, swinging too wide and leaving vulnerable spaces open.

Knowing she only had one shot, Darcy enacted the one plan she had. When Sif charged at her once more, Darcy staggered back as if she was scared of the Asgardian (which actually wasn’t much of a stretch). Overconfident, Sif’s steps became wider as she tried to propel herself at Darcy quicker than before. The moment before Sif would have gutted her, Darcy made her body go limp and fall to the ground. At the last possible second, Darcy tucked forward and rolled through Sif’s parted legs and immediately jumped to stand once she was clear. In one fluid movement, Darcy swung her left arm out from her body, arcing the whip away from her before it wrapped around a startled Sif’s neck. She used her powers to make sure that her friend was not in any position to be injured, but the action was more than clear as to who the victor was in the scrimmage.

Darcy noticed that the entire practice grounds had stopped what they were doing in order to watch the two women. People of the court in the stands as well as fellow warriors stopped their gossiping and sparring to watch the powered mortal take down one of the realm’s best warriors.

With a smirk, Darcy commanded Sif. “Yield.”

It took a few moments, but eventually Sif realized she could not escape before Darcy’s powers incapacitated her and she dropped her sword and shield.

There was a beat of silence before the entire arena had burst into shouting, Darcy pleased to hear that almost all of it was applause.

Gently, Darcy let her whip slide from around Sif’s neck. Immediately the warrior spun, beaming at her.

“While I am most surprised that a mortal was able to best me, I am honored to have been and to have
found a worthy opponent with you, Darcy. It had been many a century that I have been undefeated.”

Darcy suddenly understood why it seemed like the entire palace had come to watch them fight. At the implication of that thought, Darcy beamed back at Sif, who was glaring at an awe-struck Fandral.

“Do close your mouth, Fandral, it is most unattractive for one to gape like a fish.”

Darcy’s boisterous laugh echoed over the training grounds, forgetting all the fears she had for Jane, if only for a moment.

*****

Apparently Jane had woken on her way to the healers and had given them hell about their technology before getting a dismissive yet condescending lecture from Odin about the Aether in her body. Darcy had gotten the entire story from her friend after she had gone straight from the training grounds to Jane’s designated rooms when a palace guard had come to tell Darcy that Jane was asking for her. The seriousness of the information was weighing heavy on both women who were struggling to find any solution.

When the door opened, Darcy and Jane were in the middle of their usual ‘there-is-a-puzzle-here-and-we-are-women-of-science-who-will-solve-it” ritual, which consisted of the two of them playing increasingly aggressive rounds of patty-cake and other games. Instead of the usual rhymes that accompanied each game, the two would throw out key words or phrases that related to the problem at hand, hoping to startle a new idea out of them. It didn’t work all the time, but it was a fun way for Darcy and Jane to handle stress.

Upon hearing the door creak as it was opened, Darcy kept her concentration on Jane as she spoke.

“Thor, you are a lovely person and an awesome lightening bro, but this is prime Science Sister time and we cannot be afforded to be distracted by your amazing blondness and muscly arms.”

The voice that answered was most certainly not Thor, and surprised Jane so much that her arms flailed and smacked Darcy upside the head as they jerked.

“Well, I do lack the muscles, but I have the blonde hair all the same. I hope this does not discount me from your presence.”
The woman smirking at the two humans from the doorway was absolutely stunning. She was a tall older woman with thick blonde hair that was held up in an intricate design of braids that rested on the crown of her head. Her dress was a beautiful shade of sky blue that seemed to shimmer even as she stood still as a statue.

Darcy may not have been introduced to the royal family, but she knew the Queen when she saw her.

Hastily, Darcy shuffled off of Jane’s bed and attempted some type of curtsey. Unfortunately Darcy had not fully gotten her feet beneath her and she fell with a solid thunk to the bedroom floor.

Jane had met the queen briefly, but she was still unused to the presence of the bona-fide goddess in her room. Rather than embarrass herself like Darcy, it seemed that Jane was attempting to start an intelligent conversation with the realm’s queen. It was both hilarious and sad that the only noise that escaped Jane’s throat was a hnggg noise.

Frigga only laughed good-naturedly at the two women, a sound that made Darcy feel like she was being wrapped up in a hug.

“Come, we have much to speak of, ladies.”
Chapter 30

Chapter Notes

there may be some typos and mistakes because i didn't have time to proof-read before work, so be nice!

thank you again for all the love!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Noticing that Darcy and Jane were still in their Midgardian clothing, dirty from their long day, Frigga called a few handmaidens to draw them a bath (oh my god it was the size of a pool) and help them into some clean Asgardian clothes.

Not wanting to be restricted because Darcy had the inkling feeling that trouble was definitely on its way, she requested to wear something that was similar to Sif’s armor. Darcy was outfitted in what she called ‘warrior lite,’ a heavy black leather breastplate replaced the usual metal, and her pants were a type of black stretchy fabric that reminded Darcy of denim. Her boots seemed to be reinforced, much like her breastplate, and came up over her knees. They were also black.

She was given a way to holster her whips at her sides, tucking her red mask into a fold of fabric next to the whip on her right. Her hair was braided into two long pigtails that started as several smaller french braids on each side of her head, coming together into the larger braids like rope that hung down over her shoulders.

Darcy walked out of the dressing room that she had been led to, meeting Jane back in the center of her bedroom. Jane’s dress was a teal blue that flattered the golden highlights in her hair and skin, and she also had a leather breastplate on top of it.

Jane whistled long and low at Darcy, laughing when she started posing ridiculously.

“Dude, you look so kick ass right now! Like, it’s kind of sexy as hell.” The handmaidens tsk’ed at Jane and Darcy’s antics, blushing at Jane’s words.

“Right?! I want to wear this all the time now. I feel like I need a kickass soundtrack for when I walk around.” Darcy strutted around the room to make Jane laugh more.
It was then that a guard cleared his throat gently, but somewhat awkwardly, at the two mortals telling
them that the Queen wished to meet with them now.

All of Darcy’s bravado left her at the reminder that they were going to meet Frigga, Queen of
Asgard, and most importantly Thor’s mother.

“Janie, I’m totally going to hold your hand because this woman is beautiful and competent and kind
of terrifying in both aspects.”

Jane was nodding frantically, already reaching out her hand.

The guard seemed to actually have a sense of humor unlike the handmaidens because he laughed
gently at Darcy’s words as he led them into the vast hallway outside Jane’s room.

“Have no fear, Lady Darcy. While our Queen can be most intimidating when she desires it, she finds
no pleasure in making her subjects squirm.”

“Thanks, dude. That helps a bit.”

“Of course, Lady Darcy. I must admit, I am most honored to meet you, if I may be so bold.”

Darcy raised an inquisitive eyebrow at the Asgardian, her gaze asking what the hell was he on
about?

“I was on the training grounds earlier this day, sparring with the other warriors. We were amused to
see Lady Sif bring a mortal onto the field and decided to watch the match. I was not the only one
who was in awe of your abilities, Lady Darcy. No one has bested Lady Sif in a long while.”

Darcy blushed and stammered out what she hoped was an appropriate and sincere thank-you,
looking to Jane for help.

Jane was staring at her with her jaw on the floor in shock, reminding Darcy that she hadn’t gotten
around to telling her friend about that yet. *Oops.*
The two women were led to a stop outside the Queen’s chambers, saying goodbye to the guard Birger, as he had eventually introduced himself. Darcy taught him how to fist-bump with moderate success.

The guards who were posted at the Queen’s door nodded to Birger, then simultaneously pushed the large doors open to guide Darcy and Jane through.

Queen Frigga’s chambers were a wide open space, two walls opening up into separate balconies that overlooked the palace grounds and the city in the distance. There were low chaise lounges scattered about, overflowing with large pillows and throw blankets that made Darcy want to wrap around herself like a snuggly burrito. *Focus, Darcy,* she chided herself, *this is no time to get distracted.*

“Asgardian dress suits you both well, ladies.”

Queen Frigga came inside from where she must have been standing on one of her balconies. *It’s really unfair that the sunlight hits her so beautifully,* Darcy thought, *us peasants need some pretty, too.*

“Thank you, your Highness,” Darcy gave herself a mental high-five for not stuttering at the Queen of the friggin’ nine realms.

Laughing, she replied. “You may call me Frigga, Lady Darcy. You are guests here, and I am not your queen. I would rather you think of me as Thor’s mother before all else, but hopefully a friend as well.”

Giddy because she was totally on a first name basis with the queen, Darcy beamed at the older woman. “Then you can just call me Darcy, that whole ‘lady’ business is unnecessary and misleading.”

Jane’s snort of laughter was certainly evidence to that fact.

“Darcy, then. Jane had already given me permission to address her as such, but I did not want to presume. Come, let’s sit and talk while Thor meets with Odin.”
Darcy and Jane looked at each other mischievously, having planned a very important question to ask Frigga when they had a moment alone.

“So,” Jane drawled, taking a seat to Frigga’s right, “we were hoping you could tell us some stories about Thor when he was younger.”

Darcy cut in, deciding that tact was for wimps. “And by stories she means really embarrassing ones that would be hilarious to know, especially when us mere mortals need some reminding that my lightning bro isn’t perfect.”

Thor found the three women about an hour later, Darcy lying on the floor in stitches, tears catching in the corner of her eyes. Jane and Frigga had their heads close to one another whispering to one another.

At the sound of his footsteps, the women looked up and burst into laughter once more.

“This may have been a grave mistake.”

*****

Jane was still trying to control her laughter as she stood to make her way over to Thor.

“No, I think this may have been the best decision you’ve ever made!”

Thor’s face was filled with fond amusement as he rolled his eyes at her and leaned down to press a gentle kiss on her lips. Jane blushed furiously at the chaste gesture because she was hyperaware of Frigga at her back.

“Lightening bro, you were the cutest little kid! And your mom is the greatest person ever and she’s my new BFF.”

Jane cackled as Thor’s face paled at Darcy’s words, his usual princely demeanor replaced by terror.
Before anyone could say anything else, alarms began ringing out and echoing within the room and across the palace grounds. Thor’s grip on her waist tightened for the briefest moment before it gentled once more.

“What’s going on?” Jane asked, seeing Darcy stand at the ready next to Frigga, red mask replacing her glasses.

“The prison cells, something is wrong.” Thor looked to his mother in a silent request for help.

“Go, Thor. I will stay with Jane and Darcy and keep them safe.”

With one final bruising kiss to her lips, Jane watched as Thor leapt from the nearest balcony to catch Mjölnir as he summoned it. She only had a moment to watch him fly away before Frigga was gently grabbing her upper arm and guiding her away.

“Come, Jane. I don’t know what is coming, but it cannot be good. Those alarms have not sounded in nine hundred years.”

Jane gulped and let herself be dragged away.

For some reason there wasn’t any type of closet or smaller room that Jane could be barricaded in, but there was a little alcove with drapes lining its sides able to provide her with enough cover. Jane watched as Frigga half-heartedly tried to get Darcy to follow only to be met with Darcy’s stubbornness.

“Frigga, you are awesome and the queen of the universe, but I’m not letting you face whatever is about to burst through those doors alone.”

Frigga smiled at Darcy, a twinkle in her eye that made Jane think that this was a test that her best friend just passed. She opened her mouth to comment only to be interrupted by the sound of a small explosion and splintering wood.

From her concealed spot, Jane could only watch as Frigga pulled a sword seemingly out of nowhere and Darcy melted into the shadows at her side.
Two…aliens strode into the room, pausing before the queen. Jane listened as they demanded her location from Frigga, the argument only growing more heated when an illusion copy of Jane was discovered on the other side of the room.

The larger alien who looked like some sort of crazed bull immediately reached for his own sword at his hip, only to have it yanked away by an unseen force.

Before anyone knew what was happening, every object that wasn’t bolted to the floor began to fly at the attackers, barraging them until they stumbled further away from Frigga. Once Darcy had them successfully distracted and had her opening, she launched herself from the shadows and wrapped her whips around the larger alien, sending as much electricity through them as she possibly could.

Jane had seen the footage of Darcy’s weapons take down Logan, who had regenerative healing and some type of super strength, but they only seemed to be a mild annoyance to the monster.

The smaller alien began to battle with Frigga, who Jane was in awe to see was more than capable to hold her own against her opponent. Jane’s fangirl moment was abruptly halted when Darcy’s body flew across the room, landing at Frigga’s feet with a sickly thunk. Jane almost screamed for her friend, but she knew that if the attackers knew she was there even more hell would break loose.

Frigga had lost her sword in the melee, but held her head high with dignity as the attackers (Jane’s brain kicked in and reminded her that these were probably the Dark Elves) demanded the queen to hand Jane over to them.

At her silence, the monster stuck forward with his retrieved sword, aiming to gut the queen. Jane watched in horror, knowing that she was going to watch the queen die and be helpless to stop it.

Before the sword met Frigga’s flesh, there was a flash of metal and the sword was driven off course, only to dig into Darcy’s right leg. Darcy had gained consciousness in the last few moments and used her whip to yank the sword off of its intended course.

The moment of shock felt by everyone was cut off when Thor’s mighty yell preceded a flash of lightening, striking the elf in the face and sending him soaring backwards. The monster yanked the sword from Darcy’s thigh with a disgusting squelch and dove after his master, picking him up and diving over the balcony only to be caught by a waiting ship.

Jane immediately ran to Darcy’s side where Frigga was placing her hands on her friend’s wound,
murmuring under her breath as she did so. Jane saw a golden light surround the queen’s hands and realized she was using magic to heal Darcy.

“You just got over being shot, Darcy. Can’t you keep out of trouble?” Jane tried to keep her tone light, but was shaken to the core. It was becoming a tradition in their friendship for Jane to hover by Darcy’s injured and prone form. Knowing Darcy though, Jane knew that it wouldn’t stop anytime soon.

Darcy grunted out what was supposed to be a laugh, meeting Jane’s gaze. “Well, I have to play toward your mother hen instincts somehow, don’t I?”

Jane really wanted to slap her friend, but was saved the trouble when Thor’s concerned face came into view. The god really knew how to work the puppy eyes.

“Lady Darcy, I am forever in your debt, as is the rest of Asgard. If not for your actions today, Asgard would have lost its beloved queen.”

Darcy somehow managed to blush (strange, considering the startling amount of blood on the floor) but looked Thor steady in the eye as she spoke.

“You are never in my debt, Thor. You’re my friend and part of my family. That makes Frigga part of the family too. And I’ll die before I let someone hurt my family.”

Thor looked humbled by her words, and Frigga’s face shined with adoration and awe at Darcy.

“You do me a great honor by saying so, Darcy. I could not have chosen a better sister for my son, even if I had borne a daughter myself.”

Jane’s jaw dropped at Frigga’s speech, and Darcy looked like she could faint. (Which was possible, because, ya know, all the blood they were all still kneeling in).

Darcy was saved the need to respond as Frigga continued to speak, sensing Darcy’s overwhelmed state.
“I have healed your wound, though I could not prevent a scar. The blade had a mild enchantment on it that I ignored breaking in favor of preventing you from bleeding out.” She had a smile on her face, a light teasing tone meant to distract Darcy from whatever pain she was in.

“Frigga, have someone take her to the healers and allow her to rest.”

Jane’s spine stiffened at Odin’s voice behind her, his presence filling the room and stifling the good humor that was there a moment before.

“Nonsense, husband. I shall take her myself. What type of mother would I be if I did not stay at my daughter’s side?”

Jane choked on the deep breath she just took, Thor patting gently on her back to help her out.

Darcy’s big eyes widened further behind her mask she was still wearing, and she flicked her gaze between Jane and Thor in shock.

“Did I just get adopted?”

Chapter End Notes

(Birger — one who helps)
....i found that on a norse baby name website. because apparently that's a site that exists.
Chapter 31

Chapter Summary

escape from asgard!

Chapter Notes

heads up: we're having fun and fluff in the beginning, but the last third of the chapter is ANGST

WARNINGs for talk of torture (nothing graphic) and PTSD flashbacks.

-->also, there's a bit more swearing and snark here from Darcy, but that's because she's stressed and almost got herself killed again and Jane's basically a time bomb. so she's got a lot going on

as always, thank you for the love!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Darcy was having a blast laying in the soul forge as Lady Eir twisted some dials and pushed some buttons that would 'rejuvenate' her as she laid under the golden floaty sparkly stuff. She wasn’t sure how that worked, or any of it for that matter, but Darcy was feeling a lot better so she was rolling with it.

At the sound of the door Darcy smiled, having anticipated Jane or Thor coming to hover over her like the worry warts they were. Unfortunately, Darcy was in the habit of guessing incorrectly when it came to people walking into the rooms she was in.

“Lady Eir, leave us.”

Shit. That’s Odin. Odin-I’ve-got-horrible-parenting-skills-Allfather. Darcy’s mind scrambled in a million different directions, all worse case scenarios, as she gently pulled herself into a seated position. Darcy was pleased to feel that besides some soreness, her leg was pain-free.

“Allfather,” Darcy bowed her head a little at the king, not entirely sure that the protocol was here but assuming that was a good enough start.
“Lady Darcy, I must thank you on behalf of myself and on behalf of Asgard for saving the Queen.”

Darcy ignored his apparent less-than-gracious tone, knowing it was a formality and he really would rather her not be in his palace. She took a moment and wondered what the best way to respond was before she decided to wing it.

“There is no need to thank me, sir, as I was only doing what anyone else would have done.”

Odin studied her with his one eye and Darcy fought the urge to fidget under his gaze.

“My son has claimed you as his sister, and my Queen has claimed you as a daughter. In the eyes of this realm, you are a princess of Asgard.” He ignored Darcy as she choked on her own spit and continued to speak. “You are a mere mortal. Granted, you are gifted with extraordinary powers because you are called what my son tells me is a ‘Mutant’ on your realm, but you are a mortal all the same. So tell, me Princess Darcy, what makes you so bewitching?”

Darcy was full out panicking. Odin’s furious gaze and sneering remarks were causing her mind to shut down and she fought for clarity so she could respond to the King.

“Sir, it never was my attention to ‘bewitch’ anyone or insert myself into your family or Asgard or anything else,” Darcy’s voice was high pitched and squeaky so she took a deep breath to gather her wits about her.

“I’ve known Thor for years, and we’ve battled together the first time we met. After that he started calling me his Lightening sister. He’s a good friend and brother to me, and he loves Jane. I didn’t, I still don’t have any ulterior motives in saving Queen Frigga, other than I didn’t want her to die. So I’m not sure why your family cares for me the way they do, but I am honored to have their affections, Allfather.”

Darcy held her head high, praying that she wasn’t going to get executed or banished for some unknown offense she committed against Odin. The king said nothing but continued to scrutinize her under his steely eye, searching for something in her face that Darcy couldn’t name. With no further word, Odin turned and stalked out of the healing room and left Darcy in stunned silence. Birger, Darcy’s new favorite palace guard, came in to escort her back to Jane’s rooms.

“Dude. That was terrifying.”
“Aye, Princess Darcy,” Birger gave her a warm teasing smile at her new title, but Darcy was happy for the friendly gesture. “While Queen Frigga is most pleasant to her subjects, the Allfather takes a certain delight in intimidating those around him.”

“I don’t think he likes me much, anyways.”

“Princess Darcy, the Allfather doesn’t like anyone.”

*****

Jane had teased Darcy mercilessly when Birger opened the door for her and announced her as ‘Princess Darcy.’ She wanted to be more indignant at it all, but Birger and Jane fist-bumped so Darcy let it slide.

“So, exciting day today, eh, Janie?” Darcy dodged the pillow thrown at her face by the tiny scientist. “Come on, boss-lady! This is becoming commonplace for us, honestly.”

Jane huffed out a disbelieving laugh. “Which part?! Do you mean the part where I accidentally became the host to an infinity stone—”

“Well, you do always like to touch shiny things.”

—or the part where we came to Asgard for medical treatment—”

“Okay, so a little less normal, then.”

—or maybe you meant the part where we hung out with the queen of the universe—”

 “…so even less normal, is what you’re saying.”

—or no, you must have meant the part where you fought SPACE ELVES and got stabbed—”
“The stabbing is a bit more normal, to be fair.”

“—oh! I got it! You must mean the part where the queen of the universe adopted you and made you a PRINCESS!”

Darcy sat in silence next to Jane where they sat on her oversized bed, properly chastised. Still never one to let the moment get too serious, Darcy couldn’t help but to keep poking the topic with a metaphorical stick.

“Well you made out with Thor a lot today, and that’s kinda normal, right?”

Jane groaned loudly in exasperation and flopped back on the bed, covering her eyes with her hands like she was thinking that if she couldn’t see Darcy, then Darcy would be silent. *Silly Jane.*

“…Did you get some time with his hammer?”

Thor walked in a few minutes later when Jane was busy sitting on Darcy’s stomach and repeatedly smacking her in the face with a large decorative pillow.

He watched them for a few more moments, smiling at their brief moment of joy in such perilous times. Unfortunately, he had arrived with a mission.

“Jane, Princess,” he smirked, “the Allfather as forbidden us to act in order to rid Jane of the Aether, as well as going after the Dark Elves. But I have a plan.”

Darcy sat up quickly, very much enjoying the glint in Thor’s eyes.

“Does it involve a lot of shenanigans?”

Thor’s answering grin was positively mischievous.
“Aye, Princess Darcy, there are many shenanigans to be had.”

*****

Darcy winced in sympathy when Loki’s head snapped back from the force of Jane’s slap. Her tiny hands were surprisingly strong.

“You know, Thor, when you said there were going to be shenanigans to jail-break us out of here, I didn’t know you were referring to the master of shenanigans himself.” Darcy had to have a small moment of glee as Thor and Jane sent her identical looks that shouted *can you please be serious for a moment?* Loki just looked confused by her presence, and Sif was too angry at Loki to hear what Darcy was saying.

The sound of alarms and the heavy footsteps of the palace guards could be heard echoing in the hallway, breaking everyone out of their reverie. They were out of time, and Darcy rolled her eyes at Sif’s need to use up precious seconds to threaten Loki.

“Okay, team, let’s get the hell out of dodge!” Darcy came up behind Loki and pushed him bodily down the hallway, hoping to get everyone moving.

“Unhand me, mortal!”

“Dude, you’re in shackles. Just shut up and let’s get out of here, I promise that you can compare me to an ant under your boot later, okay?”

There was suddenly a lot of running and dodging guards (Darcy hoped that Birger was out of the way and not doing anything stupid) before their group came up to an Elven ship that was imbedded in the palace’s walls. Darcy helped get Jane into what she hopped was a safe corner of the cockpit, before getting a feel for the technology in the ship. Where Earth’s technology was familiar and felt like home, and Asgard’s felt new and exciting like the tingling feeling of bubbles in champagne, the Elf ship felt heavy and sinister, rolling through Darcy’s mind like tar. *I’m totally going to throw up.*

The two Asgardians were yelling at one another, and it took Darcy a moment to focus and realize that *neither of them knew how to get the damn ship in the air.*

“Are you kidding me, Thor?” Darcy shouted, incredulous at her brother. She made her way up to the
pilot’s…area thing (why wasn’t there a chair?) and shoved herself between the two men.

“I really doubt you have the knowledge to pilot this ship, mortal.” Loki had that stupid sneer on his face that made Darcy roll her eyes in exasperation. Ignoring the trickster, Darcy silently slammed her hand on an empty part of the dashboard and sank into the ship’s tech to get the damn hunk of metal off the ground. Once the ship was hovering, Darcy looked between the brothers, gesturing to their stunned faces to get their shit together.

Thor looked shocked and pleased, probably having forgotten about that one part of Darcy’s abilities. Loki looked suspicious, but had a look in his eye that said there was a puzzle he wanted to solve. Fantastic. Just what I needed today.

Despite the seriousness of the situation they were all in, Darcy couldn’t help to laugh at the boys’ bickering at the front of the ship. They were under fire and the two idiots were bickering at one another like they were nine years old and fighting over a toy. There was also the added joy of seeing Loki’s jaw tick with tension whenever Darcy giggled at them.

The rest of the process of escaping Asgard was so fast-paced Darcy felt like she almost missed it. All of a sudden Thor kicked Loki out of the ship, grabbed a fainted Jane in one arm while wrapping the other around Darcy, they fell, there was a boat (“Hi, Fandral!” “Hello, Princess Darcy.” “Fandral, step away from my sister, if you will.” “…my apologies, Thor.”), Fandral jumped off the boat, then finally Darcy was crouched in the front of the boat and was being shielded by Thor as Loki piloted them into a tiny crack in the rapidly approaching cliff face.

And like they had simply turned a page in a book, they were in Svartalfheim.

Darcy tried to contain herself, she really did, but she couldn’t help the loud yell of glee once they came to a stuttering stop in the desert.

“Holy hell, guys! That was insane! We freaking just stole a ship and then Mr. Burdened With a Glorious Purpose just shot us through to another realm! This is the coolest thing I’ve ever been a part of! Oh my gods, Thor, I love Asgard.”

It was probably the adrenaline of the last 24 hours driving Darcy a little nutty, but her body was overflowing with it and she needed a release. If that meant teasing the god who tried to take over the Earth and have inappropriate reactions to danger, then so be it.
Thor chuckled, but still ran a hand over his face. Darcy wasn’t sure if it was relief or exasperation, but he looked exhausted. Calming herself some, Darcy made her way and knelt next to the big guy who was brushing hair out of Jane’s unconscious face. Sensing that he needed some comfort, Darcy wrapped her left arm around him and rested her head against his shoulder.

“Hey, it’ll be okay, Lightening Bro.” Darcy was pleased to get a small smile out of Thor with the nickname, so she pressed on. “Jane and I love you and we trust you completely. We’ll all get out of this. And we’ll all be okay.”

“Thank you, Lightening Sister. You honor me with your love and trust. I only hope that I can continue to earn them.” Thor pressed a kiss on the top of Darcy’s head before he spoke again. “We should rest. Night will fall quickly, and we will face Malekith in the morning.”

*****

Loki looked up at the sound of footsteps nearing him where he was reclining in the back of the ship, putting as much distance between him and his br—Thor as he could.

It was the gifted mortal, Darcy, who unceremoniously sat herself across from him. He leveled a cool gaze at her so that she wouldn’t be inclined to speak.

“So Romeo and Juliet have started whispering sweet nothings to one another, I guess because of the whole death battle thing tomorrow, so I’m going to hang out with you.”

Damn. He should have known she wouldn’t be so easily deterred by his silence. Thor had been visiting his cell for the past year to tell a silent Loki of all his midgardian friends, the Avengers, as well as Lady Jane and his Lightening Sister, Darcy.

Try as he might, Loki couldn’t help but pay attention when his brother spoke, having nothing else to do in his cell, sparring visits from his mother and the books she provided.

The thought of his mother sent a vicious stab of guilt through his sternum, knowing that his last words to his mother were ones of disownment, and that he only has a mother because of the mortal in front of him. He would be thankful for her actions for the rest of his life, even if the sentiment made bile rise in his throat.
He wanted to hate Darcy, this stupid mortal girl who Thor claimed as a sister and who Frigga claimed as a daughter. Loki desperately wanted to shout at her, scream in her face that she was nothing, nothing but a speck of dirt in the scope of the universe, that she wasn’t special. But he couldn’t, because he knew she was. The realm saw a girl who could best Sif in battle and defended the queen from certain death. They saw her as friend and sister to their crown prince, friend to the realm’s mightiest warriors. Asgard would celebrate her as their princess for thousands of years to come.

Was it her powers that charmed everyone so? What was it about Darcy that allowed her into the inner sanctum of the Realm Eternal? Loki wanted to piece her out just as much as he wanted to hate her.

Darcy spoke again, tearing Loki from his puzzlement.

“I’m going to ask something that you’re probably going to want to kill me for, but I can’t see myself getting another chance.”

Loki let out a sad chuckle. “I feel as if I were to kill you, the entire realm would be after my head in vengeance. It has been a long time since Asgard has had a princess, and it would not benefit me to see you dead.”

Darcy blushed a little at the reminder of her new title, but she continued on determinedly regardless.

“So, why try to take over Midgard? And spare me the answer that you have ready in your pocket, that we were meant to be ruled, that us mere mortals are ants under your boot, blah blah blah.” She waved her hand in an exaggerated manor, a whimsical gesture at odds with her black warrior’s armor.

“You wouldn’t believe me if I told you. I am a monster, haven’t you heard?”

“I have a theory, anyways. Besides, where your actions may have been monstrous, it’s debatable that you are actually the monster you are made out to be.”

Loki decided to ignore the latter part of her statement and humor the first.

“Please, Darcy,” he laughed, “do tell me why I murdered countless of humans and tried to be king of
your measly planet.”

“You were the puppet.”

Loki flinched at her bluntness, the accuracy of her statement. Seeing his reaction, Darcy forged on.

“See, I figured that was what was happening. Because it didn’t make sense to me. You’re the god of chaos, yes, but also of mischief and lies. With a title like that, barging through a hole in space with brute force wouldn’t be your style. Where was the cleverness? The sleight of hand? Where was the genius and stealth that you’re known for?”

Loki needed her to stop speaking. His hands shook in his lap, so he clenched them together so she could not see even in the fading light.

“You were messed up about the whole Frost Giant thing, hell, anyone would be. Your father and your king raised you to believe you were for the crown, but he made sure that you only got so far as Thor’s shadow. You were raised to fear and loathe the very thing you were. Odin took you as a war prize, to use you as a pawn in his war games. That would destroy anyone’s mind.”

She was too close to the truth, she was practically submerged in it. Please, please stop. But he couldn’t speak. So Darcy kept going.

“But where did you go when you fell? When you let go from the Bifröst? You were gone for a year. Thor told me you would have fallen endlessly through the emptiness of space. You were still hurting from the revelations of your true identity and you were trapped in a fall that would last an eternity. But you came to Earth. So where did you land? Who found you? What was the price to be released?”

There was blood, covering everything. Screaming, endless screaming overlaid with cruel laughter as another cut was dug into his flesh.

“Your eyes were blue when you came to Earth. The same blue that Erik’s were, that Clint’s were. The same blue as the tesseract, and your scepter also was blue. But your eyes are green now.”

The feeling of his mind being pulled out of him, feeling it get mutilated in the hands of the monster above him before it was shoved back into him. His soul screaming in protest, please let me go let me
“Someone had you, they hurt you, and they made you their pawn. But you didn’t want to do it. However angry and hurt you were, you wouldn’t have tried to commit mass genocide to take over a planet of measly mortals. That’s why you went with brute force. You got everyone’s attention, let them know exactly what was happening. You let Clint miss his shots at his friends, you let Erik create a failsafe in the machine that opened the portal. You fought back.”

“Please, don’t say any more, please.” Loki didn’t realize he had spoken until he felt Darcy’s hands on his face, wiping tears from under his eyes.

Loki was mortified, he was terrified at the resurfaced memories, and he was ashamed. He was weak, letting himself fall into the abyss of space, searching for a way out from the lies and pain of his life. He was less than nothing when he landed at Thanos’ feet, a whimpering shell of a man who had nothing left to lose. Now here he was, fighting silent tears in the arms of a stupid mortal girl. Loki loathed himself, but couldn’t fight the need to turn his face into Darcy’s touch.

She ripped into his defenses like a knife through water, seamless and fluid. Darcy tore open the wounds he had let fester, letting them sting as fresh air cleansed them. There would be scars, and some would never heal, but he was saved from blood poisoning.

Stupid mortal girl. She shouldn’t have known what she was talking about, she should have been terrified at his presence. He had hurt her friends and her planet, but Darcy was here in front of him, giving him a watery smile.

“How in the Nine realms did you do that?” Loki searched her gaze, wondering if she had some other ability he was unaware of.

“I live in a tower filled with the world’s mightiest heroes. I’ve learned to read people, to understand how they think and work. No one tells you that the heroes get just as fucked up, if not more fucked up as everyone else. You’re not so different, Loki.”

Loki laughed, harsh and bitter, but a laugh none the less. “Are you suggesting that I am a hero, Princess?”

She smacked him lightly on the shoulder, a small reprimand for the tease. “No, you’re not a hero. But you could be.”
okay, i know people are going to have strong feelings about this last bit with Loki. I know it's really OOC with him, but i have so many feelings about Loki and what happened to him so this was basically me ranting through darcy.

he's not immediately 100% better, because that's impossible, but darcy's no-nonsense made him begin to face what he was supressing.

if you're not a fan of this ooc loki, please don't get mad at me. this is my AU and i have too many loki feels for him to be the villain forever.
Loki did not sleep that night. His mind was rearing from Darcy’s words and their implications, as well as the events that would come to pass that day. He began to meditate from his spot on the ship’s floor, trying to find his focus so he could face Malekith with a clear head. Loki had been a warrior for a thousand years, he would not allow his emotions to best him now.

However, that was easier said than done. He looked to where his feet were outstretched across the floor, feet resting near Darcy. The girl was laying on the hard floor, back facing Loki as she slept. She was so trusting. She willingly turned her back on him, believing that she would be safe under his watch.

Loki surprised himself with his own vigilance as a response. *Damn her and whatever she did to bewitch me.*

Thor quietly made his way to stand at Loki’s side, gaze aimed on Darcy as well.

“Jane believes that it is something in Darcy’s eyes,” he began, and Loki was helpless to the instinct to look up to his brother as he spoke.

“Darcy is a crude, tactless, mirthful, and loving human. She has seen and felt much pain in her short life, living one battle after the next,” Thor’s face was fond, but he also wore an expression of concern that Loki remembered from his youth. “But yet she still smiles, she guards her friends with her life, and she will trade her own life in exchange for a stranger’s. Darcy trusts with her whole heart, and lets people take what they need even if they offer nothing in exchange. People are drawn to her, and they seem to orbit her, willingly giving their heart and secrets for her to keep.”

Loki swallowed the lump in his throat. So Thor heard Darcy last night, and he heard Loki beg and cry in her arms. He braced himself for his brother’s apologies and guilt, for whatever burden his brother probably thought he carried for not seeing what harm was done to Loki.
Instead, Thor simply clapped him on the shoulder and smiled. “Darcy is a wonderful sister, and we would be wise to keep her safe and sound.”

As if she sensed that they were speaking about her, Darcy rolled over and groaned as she woke. After another minute of wriggling and stretching on the floor, Darcy aimed her gaze at Loki then at Thor.

“So, do we get to fuck shit up and save the universe soon?” She raised an eyebrow at the two of them, giggling to herself.

Yes, Loki thought, _we would be wise to keep her close._

It was only an hour later that Loki regretted that moment of sentiment.

“This plan is stupid.”

Loki groaned at Darcy, for this was the _tenth_ time she had said so.

“I swear by _Valhalla_, Darcy, that if you do not stop whining I _will_ toss you to Malekith with no remorse!”

The damn girl just _chuckled_ at him, but Thor interrupted before she could speak.

“Would you two _please_, be silent for one moment?!”

Jane was too tired to say much of anything, the Aether having drained her energy, but she rolled her eyes at them anyways. She did not look surprised by their antics, and Loki was curious to know how often she dealt with this type of nonsense. He was also wary of the answer.

Thankfully, Malekith’s ship cleared the horizon and began to descend into the clearing at the foot of the hill.
It was time.

*****

All hell broke loose, and Darcy was finding it difficult to be surprised by this point. The Aether was unfazed by Thor’s lightening, and Malekith took it for himself. There were black hole grenades, screaming, and suddenly the monster alien that tried to kill Frigga was back.

Darcy jumped up from where she and Jane had been knocked aside by Loki who shielded them from a grenade. Loki was busy fighting several elves at once, but he seemed to have it under control. Grabbing Jane by the arm, she began dragging her friend to her feet then to an outcropping of rocks not too far from the ensuing battle.

“Stay here, Jane. Please? I’ve gotta help.” Darcy braced herself for her friend’s usual protests, but was only met by Jane’s fierce gaze and nod of approval.

“Help them, and keep yourself safe.” Jane squeezed her hand before ducking out of sight.

Darcy turned and began to sprint back to where the Asgardians and Elves were fighting, groaning at what she saw.

Thor was getting pummeled by the monster, unable to get out from beneath the beast’s powerful blows. Loki, having left a pile of dead elves in his wake began creeping behind the monster with a sword held aloft. This won’t end well, Darcy pushed her feet faster, determined to get to the mens’ sides before she was too late.

Just as she was almost upon them, Loki thrust the sword through the monster’s back to the hilt, its back arching in shock. Surprised at the lack of any other reaction, Loki released the sword and Thor remained frozen on the ground. These men will be the death of me, I swear it.

The monster turned around, and Darcy reacted instinctively as it reached for Loki. With all the energy she had left, Darcy shoved with her powers, pushing the sword back out of the monster’s body as it clutched Loki to his chest, hoping to impale him as well.

There was another moment of shock where both Loki and the monster expected Loki to die, Loki still being held to its chest awkwardly. Thankfully, the trickster snapped out of it first, grabbing
something from the beast’s belt and shoving it in its mouth before hauling himself and Thor away. *Shit, he just made him eat a black hole grenade!*

There were horrible screams and body distortions that Darcy would never forget, but soon enough the monster had collapsed in on itself. Scanning the area for any final threats and finding none, Darcy raged at Loki.

“I can’t believe you! You *let go of your sword!* He wasn’t even *dead!* And you stood there like a goddamn *idiot* and you almost died! Does anyone in this family have a sense of self-preservation!?”

Seeing that Loki was in shock at either having almost died or at Darcy’s yelling (probably mostly the dying part, but Darcy liked to think she had some intimidation factor as well), Thor spoke up.

“I’m not sure you can scold us for lack of self-preservation instincts, little sister.” He smiled at Darcy, but his eyes were heavy, knowing the Aether was out of their hands and with Malekith.

Darcy made a whole bunch of unintelligent noises at Thor in protest, but got herself back under control quickly. She made sure she held each of their eyes for a moment as she pointed at them.

“We’re *so* having a discussion about this at a later time, gentlemen. But first, we need to get back to earth.”

*****

Jane had to stifle giggles whenever she looked at the pair in the rearview mirror. Thor had sat shotgun, the barely-larger seat still much too small for him. Darcy sat behind Thor, legs squished up by her chest to give the god as much room as possible. Loki sat directly behind Jane, looking extremely uncomfortable in the tight space but seemingly determined to keep his dignified facade.

Jane thought that was a moot point, seeing as Loki and been threatening Darcy *that if you do not remain on your side I will end you* like a little kid on a road trip. But she wasn’t about to bring that up to him.

She had been awake with Thor last night when they heard Darcy speak to Loki about what had happened to him in the past. It broke her heart, it did, but she couldn’t help but think of Erik after it had been revealed to him what had happened and what Erik had done under mind control. She was
conflicted between her love and loyalty to her friend, and her logical mind telling her that Loki had suffered much the same.

Jane could learn to forgive, but that didn’t mean it would be easy.

For instance, they were on their way back to their flat, Darcy having texted Erik as they drove explaining to Erik what had happened and why Loki was with them. Thankfully, what would have taken a normal person several minutes to type out and send only took Darcy thirty seconds with her powers.

Erik was angry and hurt, as Jane expected, but Darcy told him that they just needed to survive the next day then Erik could rant and rage at Loki for as long as he wanted to for closure. Surprisingly, Loki just nodded when Darcy told him about it.

Everyone let out sighs of relief when they pulled up to the flat and tumbled out of the car. There was a lot of cracking bones from the Asgardians as they stretched that made Jane gag a little. Thor smiled apologetically and kissed her in apology.

Loki and Darcy both rolled their eyes at them, but Darcy added a childish *ewww* for dramatic effect. *Holy shit, Darcy is literally their sister.* A glance at Thor’s rueful expression told Jane that he was thinking much of the same thing. *This is literally the last thing we need*, Jane groaned at the thought, letting her head fall to Thor’s chest for a moment so she could gather herself.

After a couple moments Jane straightened and began herding everyone into the flat, knowing there was much Science! to be done before they could sleep.

They had a war to win tomorrow, after all.

****

“Okay, so you’re way too tall for the couch, sorry bro, but we’re out of beds so you’ll just have to deal. I’ve got some blankets and a pillow for you so you go ahead and get cozy and dream about slaughtering Space Elves tomorrow to save the universe.”

Darcy watched with manic glee as Loki’s eyebrows rose high and higher with disbelief as she spoke, taking the blankets from her hands without looking at them. She turned around and tossed the pillow
she had grabbed at his face, laughing when he failed to catch it.

“What the hell is this?” Loki was staring at the pillow, confusion marring his face.

“It’s a pillow.”

“But why does it have a head?”

“Okay, so technically it’s a Pillow Pet. Like a stuffed animal and a pillow together! This is Eeyore, he’s a sad donkey from a children’s book and show. He’s adorable!”

“…I don’t even have a response for that, Darcy. Leave me to question my sanity and why the Norns brought me to this moment in peace.”

“Okie dokie, goodnight, loser.” See if she ever gives him cuddly stuff ever again, Darcy thought.

Darcy was exhausted, and let herself feel it once she was out of Loki’s sight. They had to be awake again in a handful of hours, only having just finished prepping the portal-stakes they needed as well as devising a plan. The past three days had been hell on everyone, and she was determined to see through tomorrow so they could relax. They just had to stop Malekith from unleashing the Aether and Darkness throughout the nine realms and prevent him from destroying the universe.

Easy.

*****

Jane was trying as hard as she could not to panic. She watched from the balcony as her best friend and her boyfriend ran around fighting and placing the stakes all over the courtyard. Loki was using his magic to distract elves and taking out as many as he could, while Ian mirrored Darcy’s movements to set up the portals.

Jane and Erik were trying desperately to keep an eye on everyone, but one mishap led Jane to accidentally sending Darcy and Ian who-knows where.
“Goddamnit.”

Thankfully, Darcy had put her Asgardian armor back on as well as her mask, so her friend was unrecognizable to anyone watching and recording. Jane wasn’t comfortable with Ian knowing about Darcy’s abilities after only having met the kid a few weeks ago, but the Convergence wasn’t going to stop itself and they didn’t have the luxury of preventing Darcy from using her powers to help.

So while Jane wasn’t concerned about Darcy’s ability to handle herself (much), she just didn’t like the feeling of not being able to see her. The two had almost lost each other enough the past few days.

Jane was worried about the implications of Loki being so open about his identity though. While most of the footage of him in New York was redacted and he wasn’t currently in his full battle regalia (like the crazy helmet) he was still very recognizable to anyone who had gotten a closer look at the alien. Darcy said she’d do what she could to contain the footage once everything was said and done, but Jane couldn’t help but hope SHIELD would step in as well. It wouldn’t hurt to see Loki fighting the good fight, after all.

Or maybe it would, Jane thought, SHIELD was shady and she didn’t trust it entirely, but she wanted to be optimistic.

The battle between their merry band of misfits and the Dark Elves continued for some time, Jane and Erik opening portals left and right to give Thor room to fight Malekith, Darcy and Ian supposedly fighting elves elsewhere, and Loki tearing through the remaining forces with a savage bloodlust that unsettled Jane, but she couldn’t knock his efficiency.

As more and more of Malekith’s forces were taken out, Malekith became reckless, using the Aether with abandon to fend off Thor. Faster and faster the two were popping in and out of portals all over Greenwich and the Nine Realms, Jane watching with wide eyes as her devices went haywire at the activity.

All at once, it seemed as if the final moments were upon them as Thor and Malekith faced off in front of the Elven ship in the center of the courtyard. Malekith began to build up the Aether’s power, sending it spiraling out from him like a vortex, climbing into the sky and consuming everything in its path on the ground. Thor managed to grab the last of the stakes, and Jane could only barely see as he threw one after another at Malekith, Jane activating them so that pieces of the elf would disappear. With one final blow, Thor drove a stake into the center of Malekith and hit him with Mjölnir with such force that the elf soared into the ship’s base. With grim satisfaction, Jane activated the stake, obliterating Malekith.
Darcy dragged her feet back to the courtyard, exhausted and covered in bruises and burns from the fight. Ian was walking at her side, awe pouring from his eyes as he stared at her.

“Ian, I’m a mutant. Not Jesus. Please, stop looking at me like that.”

She already had the ‘secrets are meant to be kept from everyone’ speech when it came to her powers, but Ian was too meek for her to think much of it, so she was unconcerned. He didn’t really have any friends, either.

“Sorry, Darcy, it’s just that you were amazing! It was breathtaking.” Darcy quirked a brow at the tone of his voice and looked to see what expression was on his face. That was a mistake.

“I’m going to go ahead and demand that you stop whatever pervy thought is going through your head right now, Ian.”

“I wasn’t—”

Ian’s feeble denial was cut off by the loudest and most horrifying groaning sound Darcy had ever heard, like metal bending under force. Darcy sprinted when she heard Jane’s panicked screams.

“THOR!”

Using her rapidly waning strength, Darcy used her powers to clear a direct path through the rubble and debris so she could get to her friends quicker. Darcy didn’t even stop at what she saw.

Thor was unconscious in the center of the courtyard, Malekith no where to be seen. Jane was running down the stairs of the balcony, eyes filled with horror as the Dark Elf ship fell toward the fallen god. Just as she began to attempt to levitate Thor out of harm’s way, Loki was suddenly kneeling at his brother’s side. Within a blink of an eye, Loki and Thor were suddenly on the opposite side of the courtyard just as the ship crashed into the ground.
Neither Darcy nor Jane had stopped running, so they arrived at the pair of brothers within moments of one another, falling to their knees.

“He is fine,” Loki assured, his usual calm facade shattered at almost losing his brother, “Simply unconscious. Battling with the Aether would have drained him.”

Jane sobbed out a sigh, covering her mouth with one hand while resting her other on Thor’s forehead. Darcy breathed out a huge gust of air, sagging against Loki and leaning her head against his shoulder. Erik came to stand next to Jane, who leaned against his leg while he ran his hand over her hair.

They were this odd group of people and aliens, tangled in together in front of the crushed remains of a spaceship, simply sharing one another’s company and relief.

**

Back in Malibu, Tony had just thrown his arc reactor into the ocean when JARVIS pinged his phone.

Pulling the device from his pocket, apprehension pooled in his gut as Tony read the message.

_Sir, I believe that you will want to see this._

Opening the attachment, Tony’s eyes widened at the image. It was taken from what looked like a security camera, and it’s focus was a group of five people sitting among a wreck of some kind. His heart almost stopped as he recognized each individual, his fear soon replaced by a protective rage.

“JARVIS? I need you to get a jet and team prepped in London, we’ve got some people to bring home to the tower.”
Chapter 33

Chapter Summary

Darcy and Tony reunite!
Story time!
Steve in a Rage!
Darcy in a Rage!

oh my!

Thor should return to Asgard, he knew this. He technically committed treason against the realm when they escaped to fight the Dark Elves, but Thor couldn’t regret it. If they hadn’t acted, Jane would be dead and the universe would be drowned in darkness.

He smiled to himself as he thought about his one piece of reassurance: the night Malekith was defeated Frigga came to her sons in their dreams, telling them that she would deal with Odin and that she trusted Thor to look out after Loki, and Loki to look after Thor. She ensured that Loki’s sentence was lightened, binding his magic so that it could only be used for harmless amusement or in need when faced with a true enemy and self defense.

Thor was relieved, for while he did want to fully believe that Loki was redeeming himself, it was nice to know that his brother was limited in his abilities. He looked to Loki now who sat near the back of Stark’s jet, reading one of Jane’s physic textbooks. The intern Ian had taken to sitting in the front of the jet, to be as far away from the trickster as he possibly could. He fell asleep with his headphones in his ears, the music loud enough for everyone else to hear.

It was hard to read Loki, but Thor could see genuine desire to be a better man. He wasn’t entirely remorseful of every action yet, he was far too stubborn to give in that easily, but as each hour passed Thor could see a tiny bit of the brother he had before.

Thor leaned back in his seat, glad that Stark had such an affinity for luxury that allowed Thor to fit in his seat, unlike Jane’s vehicle in London. The woman in question snored from where her head rested in his lap, Thor’s heart swelling with love and joy that she had been saved from the Aether.

Loki appeared as if he was going to say some snide comment but Thor was spared by Darcy returning to the main cabin from where she had sequestered herself away in the bathroom in order to speak to her father on the phone.
Her eyes were red and her cheeks had tear tracks on them, but Darcy smiled at him and Loki anyways.

“Hey, you guys need anything?” Darcy’s voice creaked and scratched, Thor realizing that she had been yelling as well as crying. Thor felt bad for thinking it, but he was very glad that the bathroom was soundproof.

“No, Darcy, but thank you. How was the talk with your father?”

They didn’t bother to censure their words around Loki, who had stopped them as soon as they started. He had rolled his eyes and scoffed at them, “By the gods, a team came to pack up the women’s belongings and we are in a Stark jet, I made the connection as to who Darcy’s father is the moment we arrived.”

Darcy shrugged and sat in the seat across from Thor’s. “About as well as you’d expect, but he can’t be too pissed since he got into trouble too.” She then proceeded to tell Thor (and Loki) of her father’s dealings with the one called the Mandarin, Happy’s injuries, Lady Pepper getting exposed to extremis, and Tony’s ‘clean slate’ program that destroyed the suits. Thor was shocked to hear that, as well as the fact that Tony had his arc reactor removed from his chest.

“What does he wish to do now?”

Darcy ran a hand down her face, making the redness around her eyes more noticeable.

“Well, he’s starting therapy for his PTSD, but he still wants to be Iron Man. He’s holding off on building a new suit until he’s got a better head on his shoulders, but I know it’ll be about a week until he’s back in the lab tinkering.” Darcy’s tone was tired, but Thor could see the fondness in her smile.

Loki piped up from where he sat further away, but didn’t make eye contact with either of them as he spoke. “Get some sleep, Darcy. I have a feeling that we all are going to be in for an interesting welcome at the tower. You’ll need your rest.”

Darcy nodded, then simply fell onto her side and passed out. Both the brother’s chuckled at their adopted sister, and waited for the jet to land in comfortable silence.

*****
Tony didn’t waste a moment when the jet’s stairs folded down, running halfway up to meet Darcy who was stumbling down them in an embrace. He held her as tight as he could, breathing shakily and fighting back tears.

When Darcy was on the jet she had called and given him and Pepper, as well as the rest of the family, the entire story about what had happened the last four days. She’d almost died at least three times, he thinks.

He chuckled when she told him that she was an official princess of Asgard now, simply because he was so emotionally drained he didn’t know how else to respond.

“We’ve got to stop scaring the shit out of each other like this, Bot.”

Darcy let out a watery laugh and pulled back out of the hug enough to look at him in the face.

“I don’t know Dad, we’ve been doing this since I was eighteen, that’ll be a habit hard to break.”

“How has your mother stayed all this time?”

“Because we need supervision.”

“Good point.” Tony looked over his daughter’s shoulder, seeing the two Asgardians standing awkwardly behind Darcy, Jane waving at him from behind the two giants.

Sighing, he let go of Darcy but grabbed her hand to help her and her shaky legs down the stairs. The rest of the group followed, including someone who must have been ‘Ian the Intern.’ The kid looked stoned.

“What’s up with him?”

Jane pushed around to give a hug to a very startled Tony as she replied. “Apparently he gets airsick, so he’s been doped up on dramamine and sleeping pills for nine hours, passed out. I asked him if he
was hungry and he replied ‘purple.’ So anything said on the plane was safe, I promise.

Tony grunted, not wanting to deal with this kid now. He looked to one of drivers he hired to move Jane’s equipment back to the tower.

“When you take the tech back, drop this kid off at a hotel ok? Make sure he doesn’t choke on his own vomit.” The driver nodded and helped Ian into a seat.

Tony looked back at Thor and Loki, shaking his head. “I don’t even know what to fucking say to this, guys. How is he not in a looney bin?”

The bastard just smirked, “Lovely to see you as well, Stark. Tell me, how difficult was it to get those windows replaced?”

Tony rolled his eyes at the smarmy trickster, ignoring him for now, but looking to Thor for a real answer.

“It would be best for this to be explained to everyone at once, I think.”

“Okay, deal. But heads up, the spysassin twins let Fury know, so he’ll be there. Only reason why he isn’t here cuffing you right now, Reindeer Games, is because he has no idea where this airstrip is. So get your shit together, and I hope this doesn’t bite us all in the ass.”

*****

Steve paced the common room as he waited with the rest of the Avengers, plus Pepper, Rhodey, Happy, and Fury. He was anxious and furious at the same time, his emotions causing a riot in his chest. Everyone had gotten a shortened version of the events of what had happened in London with Darcy and Jane, as well as what went down with Tony and the Mandarin.

Steve froze as he heard the ping of the elevator, dread pooling in his gut as he saw Tony lead Darcy, Jane, Thor, and Loki into the front of the room. They had been told that Loki was coming, but it still sparked a rage in Steve’s gut to see him. He couldn’t even imagine what Clint felt like. He stole a glance over at the archer, but Clint’s stoic face gave nothing away.
“I think I speak for all of us here when I say I want to know what the fuck is going on, and why the hell Loki isn’t in chains.” Fury’s tone certainly lived up to his name, but Steve watched as his stance didn’t change from the relaxed posture where he leaned against the wall.

Jane and Darcy looked at one another before they silently agreed that Jane would start.

“Well, it started when we were searching for these gravitational anomalies…”

Steve listened with rapt attention as Jane described what happened at the warehouse with the Aether, and her side of the events in Asgard. Darcy took over, detailing what she experienced, everyone letting out a huff of surprise when Darcy told about her sparring session with Sif, impressed.

Protective rage boiled in his stomach as Jane and Darcy alternated telling the story of Malekith’s attack on the Queen of Asgard, Jane going into further detail about the fight and Darcy’s injury from saving the Queen’s life. Darcy was bashful and tried to shy away from the attention, so instead distracted everyone with her conversation with Odin, and how she was now a Princess of Asgard. At Fury’s you’ve got to be kidding me, Thor and Loki explained how their mother claimed Darcy as her daughter and Thor had claimed her as his sister, making her royalty.

Steve thought he was going to have an aneurism when all four of them took turns describing the fight on Svartalfheim, how Loki risked his life to save the women’s as well as Thor’s, and how Darcy saved his. Clint growled at that revelation, and Steve had to agree despite the way Darcy flinched at his reaction.

He knew his anger was getting away from him and making him irrational, but Steve couldn’t stop it even if he tried. Hearing about Darcy throwing herself into the battle in Greenwich so soon after nearly losing her life in Asgard made the blood in Steve’s ears roar so loudly that he almost missed the how they had defeated the Dark Elves.

Steve’s mouth spoke before he gave it permission. “That was reckless and stupid Darcy, you should know better.”

The room was deadly silent for ten seconds before Darcy responded, ice in her tone. “You going to expand on that, Steve?”

He couldn’t stop himself, “Yeah, I am. You’re a great fighter, Darcy, I admit, but you had no business being in the center of all of that. Why didn’t you call us for help? Or SHIELD? Why didn’t
you let someone who actually knew what they were doing get involved?” He didn’t mean for his tone to get more and more accusatory as his questions continued, but his mind and heart were a turmoil of emotions that were making him crazy.

“Fuck you,” Darcy spat at him, she cut his next words off, rage making her voice shake. “How dare you say I don’t know what I’m doing? How could you say that to me? You’ve seen what I can do, for fuck’s sake!”

“You’re not a soldier Darcy, you don’t have that type of experience.”

That was clearly the last straw, because suddenly Darcy was in his face, seething, the objects in the room and the lights acting up much like the time when they first met Darcy in the tower after the Chitauri.

“You don’t know jack shit about my life, Steve,” He had never seen her like this, so full of a cold and dangerous fury, a darkness overtaking her usual jovial features. “When I was eighteen, my Dad was kidnapped by terrorists and held prisoner for three months. I had to wait every day for to hear word about whether or not he was dead, and I couldn’t do a damn thing about it.” Darcy’s chest was heaving, her face flushed as she continued to lay into Steve.

“When he came back, his long time business partner and family friend betrayed him, and kidnapped me. I woke up in a warehouse with ten men who were supposed to keep me alive, and were given free range to hurt me however they wanted. Do you know what I did, Steve? I killed them. I was eighteen, and I killed ten men.” Steve didn’t know what to say, mind blank at the emptiness that was Darcy’s voice.

“Three years later, I fought with Thor and the other Asgardians against the Destroyer, and almost lost my life during the process. During that time, my Dad was dying, and didn’t tell me a damn thing.

“When New York was attacked, I had to break into SHIELD’s servers because no one told us what was happening. I watched as Dad flew with a nuke into the hole in space, and watched him fall, not knowing if he was even still alive.” Here was when Darcy’s voice broke the slightest, but she quickly snapped it back under control, never letting her wrathful gaze leave Steve’s eyes.

“I killed even more men when Times Square was attacked, and I would have gladly let that wall fall on me had it meant that those kids were safe, but I have Richards to thank for my life.
“And now most recently, I had to watch my best friend as she was dying from the inside out because of the damn Aether, I chose to fight to save Frigga and Jane from the monsters that came after them, and I chose to then kill more men when Greenwich was attacked, all in order to help.” Darcy’s next words were soft, almost saccharine, contradicting the venomous glare she was giving Steve.

“So yeah, Steve, you fucking tell me one more time that I’m not aware of what I’m doing, that I’m not cut out for this shit.”

The room was silent once more, and Steve’s voice broke.

“I’m so sorry, Darcy, I just want you safe.” Steve wasn’t sure why he acted at that moment, but his mind was already so far gone he just gave in to the desire.

Steve bent down and kissed Darcy passionately, heart swelling at the contact.

It broke a moment later when Darcy pushed him away and proceeded to slap him. Hard.

*****

Tony’s newly repaired heart sank when Steve kissed Darcy, his whole goddamn being lighting up like he’d seen the face of god.

When the crack of Darcy’s palm striking Steve’s face echoed throughout the room, he waited with baited breath, not wanting to get ahead of himself when he began to hope.

“No. You don’t get to do that, Steve! You don’t get to call me stupid and belittle me and my abilities and then claim it as some fucked up romantic gesture. That’s not how that works. I can handle myself, but you don’t trust me to do so, and you certainly don’t respect me enough to believe me when I say I can. So, fuck off.” With that, Darcy left a stunned Captain America in the center of the room, and turned to storm off to the elevators with a furious Jane on her heels glaring daggers at Steve.

Tony exchanged a look with Pepper, and they silently communicated that they’d check on Darcy later, that they were needed here for now.
Tony could feel Fury’s gaze on him, knowing that the Director was going to want to have words about his secret mutant daughter. He should be mad that Darcy let the beans spill, but he could tell she needed to rage about all those things she was keeping inside. She also was almost twenty-four, so he trusted that she knew what she was doing.

“You would be wise to respect her more in the future, Captain.” Everyone balked at Loki’s warning, surprised he had spoken. Tony raised an eyebrow at Thor hoping for clarification, but he found the blonde brother aiming the same dangerous expression at Steve.

_So it looks like this whole adopted sister thing is legit, _Tony mused.

Fury looked around at everyone gathered, bringing a hand to pinch at the bridge of his nose.

“This is going to be a long fuckin’ night.”
Chapter 34

Chapter Summary

ANGST

WARNINGs
for torture and insanity

Chapter Notes

HOLY SHIT GUYS! the response to the last chapter was amazing! I'm so glad you guys loved it, thank you for letting me know! your comments mean the world to me, so thank you from the bottom of my heart!

ps: since i'm new here idk what all i'm supposed to tag, so if anyone has suggestions or wants something tagged (or warnings) let me know!

It had been three months since Team Science! arrived back at the tower with two Asgardians and an intern in tow. Darcy was finally back into the swing of things at the tower, happy to be surrounded by all her bots once again.

Fen had stayed in London for a bit with Erik after the rest of them had left. The little bot was upset that there wasn’t as much Science! as he thought there would be and that he couldn’t come to Asgard. As a compromise, Fen stayed on with Erik until he communicated with JARVIS that he wanted to come home.

BIT was excited to have her brother back, mainly so she could teach him all the sneaky things that Clint and Natasha had taught her. More often than not, BIT could be found in the air vents with Clint or at the shooting range with Natasha, shadowing the spysassins.

DUM-E, Butterfingers, and U were pleased as punch to have Darcy and Jane back, as well as the smaller two bots. The trio also seemed to be fond of Thor, entranced by his booming voice and his knack for telling stories.

Loki was put on a type of house-arrest after the nature of the bind on his magic was described. He was often found in Jane and Darcy’s labs helping with research and experiments, not really bonding
with anyone else yet. While no one was actively hostile to Loki, he wasn’t making any fast friends either. He was confined to the tower unless Thor or Bruce chaperoned him, being the only two that could handle the mischievous god. Still shaky from their previous encounter, Loki tended to wait until Thor was available rather than be alone with Bruce and his alter ego.

Intern Ian stayed on as well to assist Jane, but hadn’t proved his loyalty enough to warrant an apartment in the tower. Darcy also thought that her Dad had caught the creepy goo-goo eyes Ian kept giving her, but she wasn’t complaining she wasn’t sharing living space with the guy.

Steve had come by Darcy’s lab a couple days after the night Team Science! returned to apologize for what he said, and that he had been harboring feelings for her for some time trying to assure her that it wasn’t a heat of the moment act. Darcy felt like such an ass having to turn down his offer for dinner, knowing she didn’t feel for him the same. She thought he was handsome and a good man, but they wouldn’t be good for one another. He was a white knight through and through, and Darcy couldn’t tie herself to that.

He had gone back with Natasha to DC with a tentative friendship with Darcy, who was sorry to see their friendship suffer, but knowing it couldn’t be helped. Natasha reassured her that Steve would soon forgive her, and he would agree that Darcy was right. Darcy wasn’t sure what Natasha exactly meant by that, but she didn’t bother asking.

Sometimes it was better to have plausible deniability when it came to the scary redhead.

Darcy and her parents had a joint meeting with Fury not too long after Darcy’s reveal, going over endless safety protocols and other things that Darcy and Tony have been organizing since she was two. There was more snark and deflection than the Director was prepared for, so there was a lot of yelling too. The biggest argument during the meeting came to the paperwork, Fury wanting the information on file.

Immediately, he was met with a furious Pepper whose hands glowed an eerie red-orange as she leaned over Fury’s desk, telling him politely that it wouldn’t be necessary. JARVIS checked SHIELD daily to see if Fury had gone back on his word, but so far the Director was keeping his promise to keep the information off the books.

Clint still wasn’t talking to her, and that put a lump in her throat whenever she thought about it. She knew, logically, that he wasn’t mad at her, but he was working through stuff from New York still and bringing Loki in wasn’t helping. Clint would never be angry at her for saving a life, so she knew that he would eventually figure out his feelings. Darcy just hoped that they’d still have a friendship left by the time that happened.
As if summoned by her thoughts, Clint eased down from the vent covering above her desk in the lab. She had chosen that spot on purpose so that they could talk to one another during work. It made her smile a little sad whenever she thought about it.

Clint’s feet found the always-clear spot on her desk that she left open for him, his usual jovial disposition was subdued and contemplative. Without saying a word, Darcy rolled back in her desk chair to give him room to dismount the desk. She searched Clint’s face, fighting the little bud of hope in her chest. He gave her a wane smile, and she couldn’t stop the hope from blossoming.

“C’mere, Darce.”

Darcy jumped into his open arms and squeezed her own around him as tightly as she could, burying her face in his chest. His strong arms held just as tight, and Darcy swore she had never felt so safe.

“I’m sorry, Darce, I’m sorry. I wasn’t fair to you, I’m sorry.”

“S’ok, Barton, you had shit to work through, I forgive you.”

Clint huffed a laugh and pulled her tighter to his chest, pressing a kiss to the top of her head. Darcy smiled from where her face was smashed against Clint’s pecs, downright giddy that Clint wasn’t ignoring her anymore, but she couldn’t help but wonder what the hell had changed.

*****

Loki sat in his desk chair in the far corner of the lab, watching as Clint and Darcy embraced.

Good.

Their reunion wasn’t the sole purpose of his testimonial three days prior, but it definitely was a contributing factor.

I’ve been fucking domesticated. Loki wanted to seethe at that, to riot against this charmed life he lived here in Avengers Tower, but he couldn’t. He was just so tired. Tired of fighting, of the hatred in his gut, tired of living in fear. That was why he called the Avengers and Director Fury together
three nights ago. Even Steve had come up from D.C. for the event.

He insisted that it be kept from the others, Loki didn’t want Darcy and Jane and Pepper there to listen to the gory details first hand. He’d tell Darcy an edited version, Thor would undoubtedly tell Jane, and Pepper and Tony had no secrets.

He had sat in one of the many conference rooms, waiting for everything to begin. He was at the head of the table, the Avengers lining each side, Fury at the opposite end of Loki.

“Okay, so JARVIS has this totally on lockdown, even Darcy couldn’t get in here. All we’ve got is our ears and that old-school tape recorder that makes my skin crawl. Seriously, where did we even get that?” Stark was the last to sit, having ensuring privacy. It wasn’t solely for Loki’s case, the information a need-to-know basis that the public certainly didn’t need, at least not now, but Loki was pleased for the privacy regardless. Fury would hold the only copy of the tape, locking it away somewhere safe.

“So, Loki. Tell us your story.”

Fury’s gaze was challenging and distrustful, but Loki met it head on as he began his tale.

**

Loki didn’t know how long he fell. His mind, heart, and soul were in turmoil and he was falling through an abyss at the speed of light and as slow as tar.

Would he go mad here? Where was here anyways?

Could anyone save him? Did he even want to be saved?

Loki continued to fall.

Sometimes he thought he heard voices, whispers from Yggdrasil condemning him to a fate worse than death.
He had nothing but his mind and the churning in his gut to hold his focus, the stars and galaxies flying by his eyes were too fast and disorienting to look at.

Loki was falling.

Was he? He could feel that dropping sensation in his stomach, his hair whipping about his face, but where was the noise? Why couldn’t he feel anything?

It was sensory depravation of the worst kind.

Loki continued to fall.

~

He didn’t know who he was. Was he a person? A thing? There were echoes in his…mind? of a past life lived, but the images slipped though his hands like smoke.

Oh, so he did have hands. He concentrated, felt the appendages twitch at the effort.

So if he had hands, what was he?

He couldn’t focus to find the answer, there was that churning sensation in the center of him making him whimper.

He just wanted it to end.

~

There was a voice, it was whispering? Yes, that was the word, whispering. It called out to him.
Come, let me save you. Let me give you power.

He didn’t care about power, he wanted it to end. He was begging for it to end, please.

I can make it end. Do you want me to end it? To bring you home?

YES.

~

Loki lay shuddering on the cold rock, his body spasming at the sensory overload. It took days, but after he was pulled from his fall his senses came back at once, memories slamming into his head.

He had done nothing but tremor for who knows how long, dry heaving on the rock and wincing at every muscle that so much as twitched. He had yet to see who had saved him.

If he was attacked at that moment Loki knew he would be defenseless, that he’d be easy prey for any predator that would come across him.

Every nerve ending was on fire, his mind was a cacophony of sounds, and Loki could only lie on the ground and pray for mercy.

~

Loki didn’t know how long he had been here.

What was time when your torturer could make flaying your skin last an eternity? How was he to know that when his nails were ripped from their beds it was only a moment, rather than an hour?

He was a man made purely of agony, laying on a bed of coals.
Loki didn’t actually know if there were coals underneath him, his mind was rejecting any coherent thought except to register the pain, so what was one type of pain from another?  

**Will you submit?**

“Never.”

Eons or minutes passed, Loki never knew. All he knew was that each time his eyes were opened (either by his own volition or by force) only more excruciating pain was waiting for him.

Sometimes it was physical, hands and claws digging into his skin, his insides, tearing pulling ripping *screaming* all he knew was screaming, the glass in his throat choking of his blood and the tears burning the cuts on his face *please please what do you want from me?*!

Laughter, the cruelest laughter Loki had ever heard the sound sharp enough to dig into his skin just like blades. Then loneliness so tangible he would call for his torturer to return just so he could *see* something, anything, that wasn’t the desolate blackness they left him in.

~

He wasn’t anything, anyone. He was a vessel to be used. Someone had taken him, manipulated him, and shoved him back in.

He knew that there was something, someone perhaps somewhere that he should remember. But he was nothing, so he had no use for someones or somethings.

~

The rage and violence and *disgust* it wasn’t his it didn’t *belong* to him why was it there? Why was he drowning in it? *Make it end make it end make it end!*

The laughter was whispering to him, telling him what he was to do what he would become who his master was and the *power* in his hands. Kingdoms falling *fire smoke blood* whispered promises words like *blades* please anything anything but this the laughter piercing flesh agony echoing in the
abyss promising to catch to save to give.

He didn’t care just let him fall anything everything is better than that voice in his ear pouring things into him that would fester and mould. All that was left and phantom pain nightmares terror someone was sobbing screaming shouting let them go he can’t stand the sound of them suffering please free them please it’s too much too much PLEASE!

Do you want it to end? Do you want to be free?

Please!

Will you do what you are commanded?

Anything!

So be it.

~

He was trapped, Loki knew. His mind was not entirely his own, it had been taken and rearranged to the Mad Titan’s likeness, and Loki didn’t know if he was alone anymore.

He didn’t want this, but his body and mouth moved without permission, they dragged his soul along.

He was damned if he succeeded, damned if he failed.

Why couldn’t I have just fallen?

~

Clarity.
Loki could *breathe*, he could think, and he had to laugh at the fact that he as given the gift of clarity when he was used as a rag doll by the Hulk.

Millions of years of magical evolution, but it unravels in such a crude fashion.

There’s some type of poetic justice or irony in there, but Loki is too tired to care to figure it out.

He opens his eyes to see the Avengers towering over him, and he’s so damn *relieved* that he can’t help himself.

“If it’s all the same to you, I think I’d like that drink now.”

**

Loki had waited in the silence for someone to say something. But the conference room was still, anyone hardly daring to breathe.

No one had interrupted Loki as he spoke, not when his voice shook nor when he wiped tears from his face and everyone held their words when he fell apart at the damned table. He use to have dignity, or at least the facade of it, but he scoffs at that memory because dignity only mattered when you had something to lose.

Loki fell for an eternity and the Thanos’ was his undoing.

Barton spoke first, eyes haunted and a green pallor to his skin. “That was—*holy fuck* that was you. I thought those were hallucinations you put in my head, that you conjured up for me but it was you, your *memories.*” He choked on his next words, clasping his hand tightly over his mouth, throat working hard to swallow.

Loki knew this wouldn’t change anything immediately. There was too much bad blood (literal in most cases) between them all for them to forgive so easily, but he could tell by looking each of them at the face that he was surrounded by people who understood. Who had *been* there, so some extent.
They were the broken who fought so that they could save others from breaking.

Perhaps Loki could fight one day alongside them.
Chapter 35

Chapter Notes

OH MY GOODNESS YOU GUYS
the amount of love i’m getting for this story is INSANE!
i am so grateful that you guys are loving this fic, and your comments mean the world to me!

Darcy was concerned about Steve. Even if he was busy at SHIELD, he would at least text her to tell her so rather than ignore her. She was happy that their friendship had returned with no hard feelings between them, Steve’s time in DC with SHIELD helping to clear his head. While his feelings for her had been genuine, Steve came to agree with Darcy that they would not be good for each other. They simply saw the world too differently for them to be together.

Typically Steve and Darcy texted silly things back and forth; he had a thing for emojis so Steve would send lines of the damn things claiming like the troll he was that they were actually a message. Darcy had yet to believe him, but the good Captain was nothing if not stubborn.

Huffing at her still text message-less phone, Darcy pocketed it and struggled with the groceries in her arms. Ian had been out sick for a few days, so Darcy was going to visit him and make him a few homemade meals to help him feel better. Ian had only asked for some company and soup, but Darcy thought a few extra meals to freeze couldn’t hurt.

Darcy smiled even though she almost dropped the groceries three separate times. Things were looking up, Steve’s radio silence aside. Darcy was especially pleased that the team seemed to accept Loki more and more each day. He had told everyone what had happened to him (Darcy cried for hours in a very uncomfortable Loki’s arms), and slowly they were giving him more and more responsibilities. Loki was able to help consult on missions and work outside of Jane and Darcy’s lab, but the general public didn’t know about him yet. Humans were short sighted, but not enough to forgive the Battle of New York yet.

Panting, Darcy finally reached Ian’s apartment and thanked the universe that the elevator was functioning today. After an awkward elevator ride with ten of the buildings tenants, Darcy shuffled out and down to Ian’s door, kicking it since her hands were too full to knock.

“Intern! Lemme in! I’ve got delicious things to make for your germey self.”
A pale and shaky Ian opened the door only a minute later, opening it just wide enough for Darcy to slide through.

Darcy was just about to ask Ian what he wanted to eat when she got an emergency ping from JARVIS in her head, her brother practically shoving a huge data input into her mind.

*Darcy! SHIELD has been compromised, HYDRA—*

A prick in her neck, then darkness.

*****

Darcy’s mind ‘downloaded’ the files JARVIS sent her while she was unconscious, thankfully saving her from a migraine from it dumping all at once. She barely remembered JARVIS’ last words to her before everything went dark, but she couldn’t forget the urgency in his voice.

Before she opened her eyes Darcy sifted through the data, skimming the (more) important bits.

*SHIELD = HYDRA, Project Paperclip, Project Insight, Fury, Alexander Pierce, Zola, Asset, Winter Soldier, James Buchanan ‘Bucky’ Barnes, serum, Coulson, Project TAHI...*

The list continued but Darcy was too overwhelmed by the idea of HYDRA thriving in SHIELD to make much sense at the rest. She reached out for JARVIS, knowing he’d send help.

…

She tried again, panic swelling in her chest.

*JARVIS?!*

…
She couldn’t feel JARVIS. Darcy frantically reached out for BIT, FEN, DUM-E, anyone, but couldn’t feel them. Her mind was completely empty of her family for the first time she could ever remember. She couldn’t feel anything, not even the car she knew she was laying in.

The sound of the engine and radio let her know that the car was on (not that it would have prevented her if it had been off) but she couldn’t sense the hum of energy of any technology.

She’d never been cut off like this before, like she just lost one of her senses. Unable to stomach the thought, Darcy snapped open her eyes, hoping to regain some equilibrium. Unfortunately the sudden influx of stimuli revealed to Darcy that she was still very much affected by whatever knocked her out. It felt like morphine, dragging her senses through mud.

Darcy was laid out on what appeared to be a bench in some large industrial van, the logo painted on the outside of the doors blocking light and the view, too blurry for her to make out a brand.

Shuffling to lay on her side to face the front of the car, Darcy saw Ian coolly maneuver the van, one hand casually on the wheel, the other on a nasty looking dart gun on his lap. As she moved, Darcy felt tugging on the skin on her temples, but wrote it off as part of being kidnapped.

“You bastard.”

Ian laughed harshly at her, uncaring. “Sorry, love, but you and your crew of heroes aren’t as observant as you think you are. Someone acts a bit shy and boom Darcy Lewis to the rescue! So trusting, love. It was about time it bit you in the ass.”

“What do you want with me?” Darcy could hazard a guess, but she wanted him to confirm it.

“Me? Nothin’. Well, that’s a lie but I’ll hold my tongue like a gentleman, yeah?” He winked at her through the rearview mirror, making Darcy’s skin crawl. “But it’s mainly my superiors that want you, and I’m getting a hefty reward for bringin’ you in.”

“Why can’t I use my powers?”

“Special gear, don’t know how it works just that it prevents you from using your tech-y mojo.”
Darcy tried to use her telekinesis, hoping that she could use it to rescue herself, but the drugs in her system made the effort futile. She slammed her eyes closed at the onslaught of helplessness that flooded her heart, never having to be so human before. She was terrified and for the first time wasn’t 100% sure she could make it out of this one.

Seeing her turmoil in the mirror, Ian smirked.

“Hail HYDRA.”

*****

When Darcy woke a second time, she was being lifted onto a gurney by what looked like a couple of doctors. She tried to struggle, but Ian must have dosed her again with tranq gun because her body barely responded to her demands. They still restrained her limbs, regardless.

Darcy went in and out of consciousness as they wheeled her through their facility, bright lights every few feet the only way she was able to tell she was being moved at all. Despite knowing it was useless, Darcy kept trying to reach out to JARVIS and any tech, as well as attempting to throw the doctors away from her.

The biggest reaction she got was the flap of a jacket lapel.

After some time on the gurney which involved a long elevator ride and many secure doors, the gurney finally came to a stop.

Darcy’s restraints were removed and she was picked up out of the gurney and placed gently on something squishy that she hoped was a mattress. She took her next few moments to look around her room, noticing that she wasn’t on a bed, but was on the floor.

The whole floor of the room seemed to be one big mattress pad. The walls were seamless concrete, and the toilet in the corner was more of a hole that the flooring was cut around. (Later Darcy would see that there was a sink as well, but the water was motion activated and the basin was sunk into the ground as well.)

Darcy startled when the implications became clear: the room was designed so she couldn’t use anything as a weapon. She sighed with relief knowing that they intended to let the drugs wear off,
letting herself succumb to sleep.

*****

Darcy had been missing for seven days and JARVIS was experiencing doubt for the first time since Sir had been taken hostage in Afghanistan, unable to find a loved one once again.

When his programming first signaled abnormalities with SHIELD, JARVIS automatically informed Sir and brought up the incoming data in the Tower’s secure servers. Both he and Sir were in shock at what they saw.

“JARVIS activate protocol Smoke and Mirrors, now.”

These protocols had JARVIS filter any incoming information about the Avengers and their close affiliates and store it within JARVIS’ own servers, then erase any of the evidence anywhere he could find all the while setting up false digital trails. Anyone who would attempt to track the information would be led into the depths of cyberspace where JARVIS would trace the IP address back so the Avengers could address any threats to the team.

Everything was going well until Darcy’s own file came up (under her Lewis alias, thankfully her Stark origins were still unknown to the public) with a high priority threat.

Without prompting, JARVIS filled every screen in Sir’s lab with the information, searching for the source of the threat. Sir swore when Ian Boothby’s file came on the screen under the title FALSIFIED.

“Find Darcy, now!”

JARVIS had just barely contacted his sister when she disappeared. Frantic, JARVIS searched through every known channel he and Darcy had used to communicate, including the bots, and found no trace of her anywhere.

“Sir, I cannot find her!”
“Look harder!”

Neither JARVIS nor Sir wanted to contemplate what it could mean that Darcy was gone to JARVIS’ all seeing eyes.

He spent hours looking for his sister while Sir attempted to contact Captain Rogers as well as Agents Romanoff and Barton for any word as to why SHIELD was releasing all of its secrets to the public.

Miss Potts was using every personal contact as well as all the forces of SI to search for Darcy and Mr. Boothby, all to no success.

“Sir, I have an incoming call from Agent Romanoff, she says that it is urgent.”

“Put her through.”

JARVIS monitored the call half-heartedly, storing the data about the HYDRA infestation and the Winter Soldier to look through later while he continued to search for his little sister.

*Darcy, where are you?*

*****

There were raging storms for three weeks after Darcy’s abduction, Thor unable to contain his swelling rage at the injustice of it all. Darcy was one of the most competent and able-bodied humans Thor knew, and that was even *without* the added benefits of her powers.

The fact that she was unable to use them to prevent or escape her capture was telling.

“Thor, *stop* your incessant pacing. Manhattan has already suffered enough at my hands, so if you wish to spare them you will stop the rain as well.”

Thor rolled his eyes at Loki’s whining, but attempted to concentrate on halting the rain regardless. He was only able to bring the heavy downpour to a light drizzle rather than cease it completely, but
he decided it was enough.

Turning his gaze to his brother, Thor wanted to rage at Loki for his calm demeanor, but Thor knew his brother’s appearance was always deceiving.

Loki sat in Darcy’s desk in her lab, eyes closed and breathing even. Every day since her abduction, Loki had spent time meditating so he could better sense the world around him with his magic. He had told Thor that the goal was to be able to sense Darcy, however faintly. Each day Loki stretched his reach a little bit further, but was unable to detect anything.

The knowledge sank Thor’s stomach with dread, knowing that Loki’s magic wasn’t just searching for Darcy in a physical sense, but was looking for her in any way. He would search for Darcy’s powers sending his magic through technology to search for her presence. After Tony had divulged further secrets about Darcy’s mind and how she soaked up information from the world around her, Loki was determined that he could find traces of Darcy that way as well.

Thor tried to remain hopeful after his conversation with his mother and Heimdall. While the Gatekeeper could not see the lost Princess, both him and Frigga were able to confirm that Darcy was alive. Unfortunately, they could not discern in what she was in, if she was suffering or in pain.

Thor twirled Mjölnir in his hand, itching for vengeance.

*****

Steve felt like his hands were tied. The girl who was quickly becoming his best friend was taken, while Bucky was back and on the run. He was beginning to think that HYDRA was purposely trying to tear his heart apart, scattering the pieces like confetti when Steve broke more and more.

Having Sam at his side was truly a godsend. The man kept him grounded and focused, making sure he had a clear head when they charged into another HYDRA base. It was difficult, agony, to keep calm when he knew what type of monstrous things HYDRA did to special people.

Bucky was given super soldier serum, and brainwashed into being an assassin for 70 years.

Darcy was a powerful mutant, connected to the world and technology around her unlike anything Steve (or anyone else for that matter) had ever heard of.
The first time Steve entertained the thought that they would do to Darcy the same they had done to Bucky, he spent an hour on his knees heaving up everything he ate into the toilet. The only reason why Bucky didn’t garner the same reaction was that Steve was too busy being on the run to break down.

Now, it seemed like Steve only had time.
Chapter 36

Chapter Notes

warnings for torture though it's not graphic!

decided to keep it short after all the angst with loki

See the end of the chapter for more notes

After the drugs had worn off, Darcy slowly came to in her ‘Darcy-proof’ room with a pile of drool under her cheek.

Dignity, who needs it?

“Ah, Miss Lewis, I am pleased to see that you are awake.” The voice seemed to echo throughout the room, Darcy unable to pinpoint the location of the hidden speaker like she normally could.

Right. They took that from me.

“Well, I would agree with you, but then that would mean that I’ve got a fondness for being kidnapped by HYDRA and that would just be a lie.”

The voice chuckled, the accent distinctly German as he spoke. “I was told about the fire of your spirit, and I am not disappointed.”

Rolling her eyes, Darcy huffed to the ceiling. “Dude, just tell me what the hell you want. I mean, I won’t actually give it to you, but I want to know anyways.”

Suddenly, the man’s voice was ice cold and missing any of the previous pleasantries.

“My name is Baron Wolfgang von Strucker, and you will be our new Asset.”

Darcy’s mind raced, again thanking her lucky stars that JARVIS’s data finished downloading before
Ian planted whatever tech on (or in her? she cringed) so she could bring up the relevant information. *Asset, Winter Soldier, Sergeant James Buchanan Barnes.*

“I see. зимний солдат is on the run, and you need a replacement.”

Though she couldn’t see Strucker, Darcy would put money on the man’s eye twitching in annoyance.

“Our first Asset was valuable, but you will bring HYDRA an ever greater glory. You, Miss Lewis, have much potential.”

“Will you wipe me, too? Rip out everything I am and create the perfect soldier?” She couldn’t stop the tremble in her voice as she hissed the words through her teeth.

“No,” Darcy couldn’t help but to slump in relief, “our research has told us that with your mutation the Chair would be useless on you.”

Darcy’s smile was smug, but it fell a second later.

“That doesn’t mean we don’t have effective ways of ensuring you compliance.”

The doctors that walked into the room immediately shot Darcy with another tranq dart, the drugs rushing through her blood at a break-neck pace. As soon as they reached her, the doctors picked her up and restrained her to another gurney as Strucker’s words filtered through the room.

“Let’s see how you break, Miss Lewis.”

*****

Darcy’s mind wasn’t a great place to be.

Her powers were taken from her, taking her brother from her in the same moment which made Darcy truly alone for the first time in her life.
And that was agony without including the physical pain.

She was given injections that burned and froze in her veins, sometimes at the same time, others would make her hallucinate, but all of them made her scream.

Strucker would speak to her as they cut into her skin and warped her mind, feeding her lies about HYDRA and compliance that she was able to ignore in favor of the pain.

Every day (it could have been days, minutes, years, Darcy didn’t know) it became almost easier to give in to the pain, as fucked up as it was.

When she was in pain, Darcy didn’t have to listen to Strucker, she didn’t have to worry about her family and friends, she was nothing but pain itself. Darcy couldn’t even be concerned with what it would do to her mind to focus on pain like that, which was a blessing in the moment, but bound to damage her irreparably later.

Still, she rather scream than submit.

*****

There was one memorable occasion when Strucker came to visit her personally, convinced that she should learn to recognize her future handler.

Darcy was hysterical in her laughter, cackling each time she was able to get the man to clench his jaw or make his eye twitch.

For being one of the heads of HYDRA, Strucker was not in control of his actions as much as Darcy expected him to be.

She couldn’t help but to groan in annoyance each time he tried to get one of his trigger phrases to stick.
“Do you want to comply?”

“Compliance is necessary for an Asset.”

“Asset, you will comply.”

“Dude, just shut the fuck up and bring the guy with the knife back, at least there was entertainment then.”

That mouthy remark led to Darcy being injected with something that felt like fire in her veins for the longest time yet, but she held on to her smile like a lifeline.

*I will not fail.*

*****

Pain was gone, Darcy only feeling rage in its wake.

They had left her alone for some time, enough for the constant drugs to wear off and Darcy’s mind to clear. She had thought she would be numb, the pain draining all emotion from her, but Darcy found that she had a thirst for revenge that would rip a building from its foundation. Storing the thought for the moment, she took stock of her situation.

The doctors had released her from her restraints so Darcy was able to look over her body for damage. Her once porcelain skin had a faint smattering of old scars over every limb, telling Darcy that she had been held for some time. There were some fresher wounds too, most noticeably a gash that ran down her left side from ribcage to hipbone. She couldn’t imagine what the purpose of the cut was, but Darcy was just pleased to see that it wasn’t infected.

Darcy didn’t know how long it would be until they came back to drug and torture her again, so she immediately began patting herself down to search for whatever technology they implanted her with that prevented her technokinesis from working.

Every limb was clean, and Darcy swallowed hard as she brought her hands up to her head to begin
her search again. It wasn’t until she reached her temples that she felt the small bumps.

“Oh, no. Please tell me there is not an implant in my brain. I am not dealing with that right now.”

Rather than hearing Strucker’s smug accent filter into the room, the power shut down, emergency lights turning on as alarms blared.

Darcy shakily lowered herself from the gurney, making sure to put it between her and the door. She felt absolutely drained wondering if she had even been fed at all during her captivity. Darcy would use whatever she had to use her powers to save her, so she could only hope that it would at least help her escape the facility.

Or at least get her a gun, if her powers failed to sustain her.

The alarms seemed to roar for hours (now that Darcy was sober enough to have a normal sense of time management) and she almost dozed off, her body too weak to keep her defensive stance for much longer.

Limbs shaking, Darcy’s breath caught in her throat as the alarms finally silenced. The emergency lights still faded in and out with an eerie red glow, but Darcy was grateful for the silence nonetheless. She hadn’t been able to hear anything outside of her room unsure if the room was simply soundproof or if the alarms were simply too loud for other sounds to penetrate them.

Darcy flinched as her door began to ease open, the barrel of a gun the first thing slipping through the crack, the supporting hand a shining beacon in the darkness.

*Of all the people…*

*****

James had cleared the facility easily, HYDRA foolishly thinking that once their Asset was in the wind, they’d never see him again. They were pretty useless without Pierce, their sloppiness proof of that.
Destroying every piece of data in the facility with their own program made a ghost of a smile grace James’ face, enough of his personality returning from the depths of his mind to let him appreciate the irony.

He was also enough of his old self to enjoy yanking Steve’s chain by leading the punk away from him. James was better, but not quite enough of himself to bring himself in to Steve.

Besides, he had a organization to dismantle. That took patience and James remembers not having enough of that when he was with Steve, the dope getting into scrapes left and right.

James was about done clearing the bottom floor when he caught the faintest inconsistency in the wall’s paint. As he peered closer at it James was able to see that it was the seam to a door, one that was clearly meant to be invisible. It took James a couple minutes to find the keypad that unlocked the damn thing (clearly HYDRA didn’t give a shit if their hallways were cluttered with junk), giving it a solid punch with his metal fist to dismantle it.

Finding a keycard would probably have been a better solution, but it wasn’t nearly as satisfying. The door eased open half an inch when the keypad shorted out under his fist only letting the slightest amount of light spill in from the hallway into the room.

Pulling one of many handguns from his person, James nudged the door further open with the barrel, grateful that the door didn’t do something stupid like creak or groan at the movement.

Each inch that was revealed was another inch that James scrutinized, clearing the room at a snail’s pace. He didn’t come this far to get killed by something hidden in the final room.

He froze when he saw a girl (well, those curves definitely hinted that she was more a woman than girl) ducking behind a gurney, crouched defensively with shaking limbs. It took a moment before he recognized her face from the HYDRA files he cleared.

Darcy Lewis, 24, assistant to Dr. Jane Foster, R&D engineer at Stark Industries, resident of Avengers Tower, known affiliate of Thor and other avengers, mutant abilities: telekinesis and technokinesis, desired for Asset programming.

James groaned internally when he recalled that bit of information. Ah, hell, Asset? I’m not ready to deal with my own shit, let alone hers.
James straightened his shoulders, bracing himself in case they programmed her to take out HYDRA’s first Asset.

“Asset, what is your mission?”

Darcy rolled her eyes, “They weren’t able to use the Chair on me, Barnes. You don’t have to worry about programming.”

James wasn’t prepared for her flippancy or her knowledge of his name. He still didn’t lower his gun.

“How do you know me? And what do you mean they didn’t use the chair?”

As if assuming that James wasn’t going to shoot her, Darcy slumped to sit on the ground, sighing as her muscles relaxed.

“Strucker said that because of my powers the chair wouldn’t have worked, but that didn’t stop them from putting what feels like microchips in my temples blocking my technokinesis. It’s fucking annoying. It also didn’t stop them from torture, thinking they could brainwash me the old fashioned way.”

His hands tensed on his gun again when she mentioned the chips, wary of what else could be programmed in them, but he relieved that she avoided the chair even if she couldn’t dodge the torture. James woke up screaming because of nightmares about the chair every night.

“Hey, speaking of Strucker, you didn’t happen to kill him, did you? Because I think I’d like to do that myself.”

Smirking, James lowered the barrel of his gun until it pointed to the floor but refusing to holster it.

“Sorry, doll, he was long gone when I got here.”

Rolling her eyes and muttering something that sounded a lot like rat bastard, Darcy spoke with conviction in her voice.
“Well, it looks like we’re going to have to hunt him down, then, doesn’t it?”

Chapter End Notes

[зимний солдат =zimniy soldat = winter soldier]
James had to haul Darcy out of the HYDRA facility in a fireman’s carry, much to her amusement. He was pretty sure most of the brushes of her hands against his ass were intentional, but the dame was nearly delirious with dehydration and starvation, so he was willing to indulge her.

“So, did you leave me any goons to take care of or did you have all the fun without me, Barnes?”

James was also pretty sure that Darcy didn’t know that this was the sixth time she had asked this question. So like each time before, he gave the same response:

“Sorry, doll, I’ll save the next base just for you, okay?”

And like she was reading from a script she responded, “Ugh, fine, I can’t say no to your handsome face, Barnes, you and that dimpled chin.”

Too busy grabbing a bag and stuffing it with guns and kevlar in an armory they almost passed (he also saw a woman’s purse, grabbing it on impulse and hoping it was Darcy’s), James skipped his usual comment about her only really being able to see his ass at the current moment. That usually started the groping.

It took another ten minutes to make it to the surface floor of the facility, and another five to locate the garage. All the while James only had Darcy’s gentle snores to keep him company. He relaxed, certain that this was the first true sleep she’d gotten in a long time.

James looked around the abandoned garage (save for a few bodies, but he just nudged them out of his way), trying to figure out what would be the best vehicle to take. He really wanted to take the
armored Jeep, but settled for a nondescript black sedan instead. James gently laid Darcy in the back seat and the duffle in the passenger seat before going back to all the bodies in the garage and taking their cash from their wallets. He was surprised at the hefty sum he was able to accrue. James then swapped the license plate with another vehicle’s to delay any trace that HYDRA may try, but he still planned to steal a civilian vehicle as soon as he could.

Darcy woke two hours after they drove away from the facility, groaning at her grogginess and the smell of food in the car.

“Are those french fries?! Oh my god, Barnes, gimme!”

James smiled as he passed the bag back along with some water, knowing her voice would probably be high pitched and gleeful if it wasn’t so hoarse and rough sounding from abuse.

“Eat slowly, doll. I’m not sure how long it’s been since you had food or what they pumped you with, and I really don’t want you to get sick in the car.”

At that moment the empty fry container smacked him in the side of the head before it tumbled down into his lap.

Gobsmacked, James’ eyes flicked between the container and Darcy’s reflection in the rearview mirror.

“How?!”

“I’m hungry, sue me. What’s the date? We look like we’re in bum-fuck nowhere and I can’t tell what season it is.”

James was astounded at what a large order of fries, a bottle of water, and a nap did for her disposition. Shaking himself, he focused on her question.

“December 30th.”

“…is it still 2014?”
“Yes.”

“*Phew, so it’s just been six months then, thank god.*”

This girl was going to fuck up his perception of the world more than being an Asset for 70 years ever would.

“*Thank god?’ What the hell, doll?”*

“Well, I’m still totally freaking out and will undoubtedly have a panic attack later, but if it had been a year and a half instead? I’d probably need to be institutionalized.”

James watched as she was casually brushing her fingers through her hair, grimacing at the tangles. It was only his sniper’s eye that caught the trembling in her fingers giving away her nerves.

“We’re almost to El Paso, Texas, so we’ll stop for the night and grab some supplies.”

“Awesome. You need to yank these microchips out of my head.”

“What?!”

*****

Steve had finally taken Sam and Natasha’s advice and had circled back to the Tower to recuperate and to trade information with everyone. There wasn’t any new leads to be shared, but there was a new hefty list of suspected HYDRA bases that had been blown sky high. Bucky had been busy these last few months.

Tony looked so ragged it broke Steve’s heart. His eyes looked sunken in, swallowed by shadows from lack of sleep. Steve knew from Bruce that Tony was spending more and more time locked away in his lab programming something top secret. Not even Pepper knew what was going on in her fiancé’s head.
It wasn’t revealed until much later, but apparently Pepper and Tony had gotten engaged days before the HYDRA leak without telling anyone. It was killing Steve that a joyous time for them was broken apart at the loss of their daughter, not having been able to tell Darcy before she was taken.

The only thing that seemed to be holding anyone together were Queen Frigga’s and Heimdall’s assurances that Darcy was alive, despite there being no trace on her on earth. Steve wanted to be skeptical of the ‘magic’ that informed the Asgardian’s of Darcy’s condition, but he needed to hold onto the hope or else he’d fall apart.

The Avengers and family were sitting in the common room sharing drinks, attempting to be good hosts for Sif and the Warriors three, who had come to help look for the lost princess. Thankfully, the Asgardians weren’t looking to celebrate like they usually were but seemed content to be share comfort with everyone.

Tony had gotten up to pour himself another scotch when JARVIS broke though the terse silence.

“Sir! I have made contact with Darcy!”

The bottle of scotch shattered on the floor as all hell broke loose. Everyone was yelling at once, demanding answers.

JARVIS, fed up with the chaos, set off the Assemble alarms at a much higher volume than anyone had ever heard.

“Enough! She is too weak to send her voice through, but I can display the conversation like a transcript, so be silent!”

Steve was shocked at how much attitude the AI had developed in the last six months, but he realized that they all had gotten rough around the edges as well. Eager, Steve watched as JARVIS dropped down the viewing screen.

> JARVIS? Can you hear me?

< Yes, Darcy! Where are you? Why can’t I find your signal?

> …I’m blocking it.
<Why?

> There’s some things I need to do, and I’ll explain. Is everyone there?

<Yes, all of the Avengers are present, including Lady Sif and the Warriors Three.

> Okay, so I bet you all figured out that it was Ian who got me…

Steve held his breath as his eyes ran across the screen, soaking up Darcy’s words as she sent them. When she got to the part about her torture, Steve gagged, but Tony had to run to the sink while Pepper let out a sob.

> I’m sorry, Mom, Dad, I don’t want you to know this, I don’t want you to know how bad it was but you need to, just so you can understand why I can’t come home. At least not yet.

< I don’t understand Darcy, we can help. Come home, please!

Steve didn’t think words could ever look broken before, but JARVIS was surprising him every day since he came out of the ice.

Darcy ignored her brother and continued her tale, and Steve’s knees slammed on the floor when they refused to hold him up as Darcy revealed that it was Bucky who saved her.

They’re together, they’re safe and they’re together.

Steve let out an incredulous laugh at the universe, damning it and thanking it at the same time for bringing the two trouble-makers together. The tower was never going to be the same when they came home.

He lost his mirth as Darcy continued to tell them all about how the two were going to go after Strucker and take down every piece of HYDRA that stood in their way.

>I have a score to settle, and Bucky’s got some things to work out. We’ll be in touch. I love you, Dad. I love you, Mom. Please don’t be angry.

*****
“I’m still not comfortable with this, Darcy.” James eyed the knife and antiseptic in his hands warily, wondering how he got dealt this hand in his life.

“Barnes—”

“If you’re having me cut into your head, please call me Bucky or James.”

“—you’ve been a brainwashed assassin for seventy years and you’re telling me you’re getting squeamish at a tiny cut?!”

James had to yank the knife away from where Darcy was waving her hands around as she spoke, coming dangerously close to impaling one or both of her hands on it.

“Doll, I was brainwashed, this is a pretty dame telling me to dig some microchips out from under her skin,” he raised the hand not holding the knife to stop her from speaking, “and don’t let the fact that I just called you a pretty dame be the only thing that you take away from that sentence.”

Darcy huffed, rolling her eyes.

“Dude, this is perfect timing! I’m still a little loopy and delirious with exhaustion, so I’ll probably pass out before I feel anything!”

James just blinked at her, not knowing what to say to her because that was literally the dumbest thing he’s heard so far. After telling her as such, Darcy just snorted at him.

“C’mon, Buckaroo, I need to contact my family, I’ve been gone for a long time.”

Damn her and her puppy eyes.

“Fine. But the second it’s too much you tell me to stop, okay?”

“Okay!” Darcy flopped carelessly onto her back on the motel bed, squirming until she was comfortable.
James had barely made a knick on her right temple before she let out a loud snore, managing to startle the winter soldier.

“Stevie, guy’s got the strangest friends these days…”

*****

Darcy woke up twenty hours later, much to James’ relief.

“Doll, you said you’d sleep ‘for a bit,’ not almost a whole day.”

“Ugh, shush your pretty mouth, James, I feel like I’m hungover as shit.”

James laughed, not loudly, but still laughed at Darcy’s grumpy tone and expression. He stood and brought her a couple bottles of water, eyebrows rising as she drained one in three long gulps.

“What, no painkillers?”

James shuffled awkwardly, not knowing if he needed to be…delicate…about the theory he had. He decided to go for blunt, she seemed like the type of dame that’d appreciate it.

“Well, doll, the cuts on your head healed an hour after I wrapped them up, and that big gash on your side looks about several weeks healed. I don’t think your body is going to take to painkillers like you used to, if you catch my drift.”

Darcy was so freakishly still that the Winter Soldier began to creep up in the back of his mind in order to assess a potential threat. Pushing the Asset down, James watched Darcy’s face for any reaction.

Just as he was about to splash some water on her face to snap her out of her shock, Darcy sat straight up and screeched at the top of her lungs.
“I’M A GODDAMN SUPER-SOLDIER?!”

“Uh, doll, calm—”

“I THOUGHT WE GOT RID OF THIS SHIT IN THE 40’s!”

“You might want to take some deep breaths?” James had no idea how to calm her down, just knowing that he needed to before someone came knocking at their door.

“OF ALL THE THINGS THAT HYDRA HAD TO DO TO ME WHILE THEY HAD ME! I’M ALREADY A MUTANT FOR FUCK’S SAKE—”

James leaped back as he tossed the contents of the second bottle of water in her face, an attempt to stay out of her reach when she was in such a rage. Forgetting momentarily about her telekinesis, James thought he was safe until the bedside lamp slammed into his side and broke apart.

“Dammit, doll!”

“Shit, sorry, James! That was instinct. But hey! I got my powers back! Woo!”

Picking up the pieces of lamp on the floor and depositing them in a garbage can, James spoke.

“Contact your family, Darcy. But I’m not coming in, and I don’t want Steve comin’ after me either.”

Darcy rolled her eyes at him, “I’m not telling them anything like that. Just going to let them know that I’m alive and mostly unharmed. They definitely don’t need to know about my new super-soldier status.”

James wanted to ask if she meant it when she said she’d take down HYDRA with him, if she meant it when she had that look of fire in her eyes that matched his own when she said they were going to fight back.

He couldn’t, though, because he refused to be selfish and ask her to stay on with him.
“They just need to know that you and I have some business to take care of, James.”

But if his heart warmed and his grin turned a little feral at her declaration?

Well, only he would know that.

Chapter End Notes

okay so i know people are going to say that Bucky is ooc for a recently brainwashed human, but:

1) he's a super soldier so he's going to heal brain damage fast, but more importantly...

2) I HAVE SO MANY EMOTIONS REGARDING BUCKY BARNES and i refuse to write him all angsty and sad because my heart couldn't take it.

so if you plan on talking smack about his ooc-ness, i don't want to hear it.
Chapter 38

Chapter Summary

shenanigans.....

SMUT!

NSFW people, ye have been warned

Chapter Notes

as always, thank you so much for all the love, support, kudos, and comments! it means the world to me!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The next couple of months were the most dangerous in Darcy’s life, but she also thought they made up the time that made her feel the most alive as well.

With Darcy’s powers, she and James never had a lack of funds (take that Justin Hammer and Ian Quinn) or a lack of forged identities. James’ history with HYDRA had left him with the knowledge of how to find underground arms dealers, the duo raiding and shutting them down as they came across them.

Just because they were after HYRDRA didn’t mean they couldn’t take down some other criminals, too.

So all in all, Darcy was enjoying her time with James. She liked to think he was enjoying the time with her as well, despite how she exasperated him more often than not. She couldn’t help but to poke at his mix of 40s colloquialisms and Russian slang, it was just too damn charming for her to resist.

Three months into their ‘Hellion Road Trip’ (as Darcy liked to call it), James was gathering intel on a lead about Strucker that they had been following for weeks as Darcy got herself ready at their hotel.

For their covers they needed better digs, so their usual roadside motel was replaced by a five-star
hotel. Darcy tried to get James to go for the penthouse, or at least a suite, but he was adamant about maintaining some level of inconspicuousness.

They were posing as doctors and business partners ‘developing’ a chemical that could shut down or activate parts of the brain (which in HYDRA-speak translated into ‘brainwashing made easy’) that they were trying to sell to the highest bidder. The event? A gala held by one of Strucker’s known affiliates, the aptly named Mr. William Achan.

Darcy was having a blast with her disguise, and was excited for James to come back so she could see his reaction.

Her dress was form fitting burgundy silk, dipping low in the front so that her more than ample cleavage was immediately drawing one’s eye. It fell to her mid thigh, working with her black heels to show off her defined legs. The sleeves were more fun than alluring, looking like sturdy shoulder pads that were all the rage in the 90s.

Darcy’s make up made her face look sharp and angular, lips subdued with a nude color rather than her usual cherry red. However, her simple color there drew attention up to her eyes, making them seem larger and even more doe-eyed than usual. She put in deep brown contact lenses to obscure her easily-identifiable blue.

She pinned her hair up short, old school victory rolls tumbling loose around her face. Darcy had dyed her hair a jet-black for the occasion, needing to lose the brown she had her entire life in order to pass undetected.

Turning in front of the mirror to see herself from every angle, Darcy had to whistle lowly at herself.

“Damn. I just got turned on a little bit.”

“Doll, for whatever is left of my sanity, I’m gonna need you to not talk like that.”

Darcy just smirked at James’ voice that echoed down the hall, waiting for him to walk in the room so she could watch his reaction. She looked damn good and she wanted to ruffle James’ feathers a bit. She counted down in her head as she heard his steps move closer to the bedroom.

*Three…two…one…*
Darcy was hoping for some Russian swearing or some 40s lingo, but the series of choked off noises and the metal hand that clamped to his mouth was good enough for her.

“Like what you see, Soldier?” She threw him a saucy wink to sweeten the pot and wasn’t disappointed when his flesh hand splintered off a bit of the door frame when he clenched his fist too hard.

Ha! ‘Hard...’ Darcy’s good humor abruptly halted, No no no, Darcy, this is the type of stuff we filed under ‘DO NOT THINK ABOUT—EVER.’ Obey the rule!

Wrenching her mind to focus on more chaste things, Darcy cast an appraising eye on James’ form.

There goes the rule.

James was wearing an all-black suit, and his hair was short. Don’t get Darcy wrong, she loved the long hair he was rocking before (and loved to imagine what it could have felt like running through her hands) but this cut? Hnnngggggg.

He kept a decent amount of stubble on his jaw, perfecting the blend between his clean cut suit and hair but giving him that rugged look at screamed dangerous.

Noticing her gaze, James leaned a casual shoulder against the doorframe and slid his hands in his pockets (metal hand covered by a skin-toned sleeve) as he threw her words back at her.

“Like what you see, Doll?”

Unlike James, though, Darcy actually had the balls to admit that she did.

Seeing the Winter Soldier blush? Highlight of Darcy’s year.

“C’mon Darcy, we gotta get a move on.”
Adjusting her cleavage one final time, much to James’ embarrassment, Darcy strutted out the room and down the hall in front of him.

“Are you sure no one here is going to recognize your face?” Darcy’s appearance was altered enough but she was concerned that his handsome face was far too recognizable to be safe, despite him losing the hobo look.

James’ tone became subdued and melancholy, making Darcy feel guilty for asking.

“Darcy, I was their *Asset* for seventy years, they didn’t pay attention to what I looked like. They just made sure I could be a ghost as I completed my missions. As long as I was functional there was no need for anyone to be near me except my handler to give me my mission. Even then, the mask they gave me covered everything but my eyes, but they gave me goggles for that too.”

Steps faltering, Darcy had to swallow the lump of emotion that had grown in her throat as he spoke. When they were in the hallway, Darcy turned her wet eyes up to James’ face as she spoke.

“I’m so sorry that you lived that, James. I can’t even put it into words, but I am so, *so* sorry that you had those experiences.”

James’ stoic expression melted and his posture relaxed as her words sank in. Stepping close, James raised his hands to plant on either side of her neck, thumbs brushing along her jaw.

“Don’t cry for me, doll, not for me.”

“But James—”

“*Hush*, Darcy. You save your tears, okay? Because all those years with them brought me to you, sweetheart.” Without waiting for a response, James leaned in and placed a gentle kiss on the corner of her mouth and another on her forehead before dragging his hands down her arms to intertwine his left hand with her right.

As if he hadn’t just turned her world upside down, James led them to the elevators and the party beyond, the mission on his mind.
What the hell was that?!

James was roaring at the back of his mind as he let the Winter Soldier take over as he worked the party. While James had been quite the charmer back in his day and would have no problems working a party, he wanted the perfection that the Asset could offer on the mission.

He watched everyone from the corner of his eye, cataloguing threats and concealed weapons as he casually brought a flute of champagne to his lips like every other bored shmuck in this place.

Darcy was at the bar, giggling demurely as the harem of men crowded around her. She was the distraction as James gathered info, but both James and the Winter Soldier wanted to seethe at the amount of attention she was getting.

She was a bombshell in that red dress, his eyes not knowing whether to stay on her chest or legs or the way her ass curved so perfectly beneath the silk.

The Winter Soldier threw back his drink and chose to move up the timeline of the mission, if only to get Darcy out of the spotlight. Thankfully, both he and James knew that there wasn’t anything time sensitive that would suffer at the change of plans.

With the ease that came with 70 years of practice, James casually bumped into or shook hands with all of the key players. Each moment of contact gave him the chance to plant a tiny tracking device on each mark that would burrow under their skin. The hope was that one of them would lead them to Strucker, or at least Strucker’s inner circle. The design was beautiful (of course it was, Darcy made it) in its simplicity and it was only the fraction of the size of a grain of rice.

Only fifteen minutes had passed, setting a record that James almost raised his eyebrows at. Deciding that it would certainly make sense for him to meet up with his ‘business partner,’ James took the reigns back and sauntered over to the bar where another man had just brought Darcy a drink.

The Winter Soldier immediately began his threat assessment as the man’s arm wrapped around Darcy’s waist, but James stilled the Asset’s instinctive reaction and watched the scene with a smirk.
The moment the stranger’s hand made contact with Darcy’s hip, a passing waiter carrying a tray of appetizers tripped over nothing, amazingly managing to get every last piece of food on the stranger’s suit but missing Darcy by a mile.

The man spluttered in an embarrassed rage at the waiter, while Darcy slipped a hand into his pocket and taking whatever cash was in his wallet before replacing it.

Darcy folded it discretely as she stepped away from the asshole and toward James, hiding it with the hand holding her full drink.

“That was beautiful, doll.”

Not slowing her pace at all, James quirked a brow in question as she continued to walked up to him until their chests were touching, her small hand slipping to his side to deposit the money in his front pocket.

“Thank you, handsome.”

Her smile was absolutely devilish with its charm, so James knew he had to level the playing field. He stilled her hand with his on her wrist, trapping it in his front pocket as he leant down to drag his lips against her jaw before stopping at her ear, smiling victoriously as her breath hitched.

“Have I told you that you look absolutely stunning tonight? It’s been hell keepin’ my eyes off’a you.”

He mirrored his previous actions as he pulled back, but added the smallest of kisses on her chin before he pulled back just enough to see her face.

Darcy’s eyes were wide and dilated, her breaths short and shaky.

*Perfect.*

Standing at attention, James used his most casual voice as he looked around as if he was bored.
“I’ve got everything we came for, ready to go?”

He was gloating internally about how clever he was when he felt the sharp pinch and twist on his thigh.

*Her hand is still in my pocket. Goddamnit, Barnes, that’s sloppy.*

“You want to try that again, soldier?”

Her voice was a little breathless but Darcy’s eyes were stern, daring James to say the wrong thing. Giving up the game, James turned his most sincere expression on her.

“I want to kiss you doll, if you’ll let me, but I’ll be damned if I do it here.” *In the middle of HYDRA-infested waters* was left unsaid, but James could tell that Darcy understood.

She *slowly* pulled her hand out of his pocket, smirking, and stepped away with mischief in her eyes.

“Then let’s get out of here.”

*****

James walked up behind Darcy as she took off her jewelry in the hotel room as she spoke.

“I need to know if this is more, James,” he stopped a few steps away, waiting for her to finish.

“More than what, doll?”

Darcy gently placed her earrings on the dresser as she spoke, still not looking at him.
“More than whatever adrenaline is running through your system because of the op, more than that rush of excitement and nerves. I don’t think my heart could take it if it wasn’t meaning anything more to only one of us.”

James closed the distance when he heard her voice shake and swiftly turned her around with his flesh hand on her shoulder so he could look in her eyes as he answered.

Much like he had done when they left for the party, James cupped her face with his hands, making her meet his gaze.

“Darcy, you are more, you’re everything.”

The hope and joy that poured from her eyes must have mirrored his own elation, because all at once, their lips were crashing together.

James groaned lowly at the contact. Her soft curves meeting his sharp angles was heaven and he couldn’t stop his hands from running down her sides, tingling at the feel of silk under his palms.

Her smaller hands unbuttoned his jacket and wasted no time in moving up to his tie to pull it loose and over his head. James was still fumbling for her zipper (where the hell was the damn thing?) as she deftly started plucking at his shirt buttons and opened it with ease.

Darcy’s hands ran all over his newly exposed skin, nails raking down his stomach to make him hiss and clench his muscles. She made a pleased hum at the action, smiling into their kiss.

James broke the kiss just long enough to pull off his shirt and jacket, relishing the goosebumps that spread on his skin at the cold air. He smirked as Darcy’s hungry gaze raked over his exposed torso and she caught her bottom lip with her front teeth.

Reaching out with his flesh hand James gently tugged on her full lip with his thumb, pulling it away from her teeth as he cupped her face. Deciding he’d been wasting enough time he stepped back into Darcy’s space, feeling the soft skin of her cleavage against his own chest.

James grabbed Darcy by the hips and lifted her onto the dresser, her skin-tight dress hiking up to the top of her thighs to accommodate the movement. He slid his hands up the back of her legs, massaging them as his hands moved closer and closer to the hem of her dress. Without hesitating,
James used the grip he had on Darcy’s thighs to pull her harshly to him so that she balanced on the edge of the dresser, most of her weight propped up by his chest. To keep from toppling over, Darcy’s hands landed with a *slap* on his chest making his dick twitch at the sting.

With her new position, James had the room to step in between her legs to hitch their groins together, grinding into her to make her moan.

“*James!*”

He growled at the way Darcy moaned his name at the rough contact, wanting to make her *scream* his name next time. Needing to feel all of her, James felt victorious as he finally was able to get a grip on her zipper and *yank*.

The dress unzipped most of the way, but James just ripped it the remaining distance, uncaring of Darcy’s huffed protests about the garment. James pulled the sleeves down as Darcy pulled her arms through, the dress folding over her stomach and letting her breasts fall free.

James immediately went to cover them with his hands, but Darcy yanked at his left with both of hers, pulling on the synthetic sleeve.

“I want to feel it on me, James,” she breathed, placing the cool metal on her breast and moaning at the sensation.

James was in awe of this woman, that she was so accepting of him, but the little groans of frustration at the lack of contact she was making were too much for him to resist.

He picked Darcy up, his hands full of her delicious ass as he turned and laid her on the bed. The dress was pulled unceremoniously from where it had caught on her hips, displaying her to him.

She was *beautiful*.

Darcy’s pale skin shone in the low light of the room, her inky hair falling from its pins and spilling around her head and shoulders like a halo. She was flushed a light pink along her cheekbones and down her throat, her matching chest heaving rapidly at her rushed breath.
Crawling over her, James gently trailed his metal fingertips along the inside of her leg, laying his weight on his right elbow next to Darcy’s head so that they were flush to one another, feet to chest.

He teased the edge of her lace panties, Darcy spreading her legs wantonly at the contact, “Please, James,” she moaned, lips against his ear.

“What, doll? Gonna need you to say it,” James dropped his mouth to her neck sucking harsh kisses on her skin, knowing that the serum would heal them within minutes.

Darcy’s back arched at the feel of his mouth and she hitched her thighs around his hips, reaching for friction where she wanted it most. Still waiting for her response, James kept running his metal hand teasingly over her mound.

He only had to wait thirty seconds more before Darcy broke.

“James, please! Touch me! Your fingers, mouth, anything! I need to feel you inside me,” She moaned beautifully as James tore her panties with a twist of his metal hand, immediately delving two fingers inside of her.

He could tell with the ease he entered her that she was soaked, and it made him smirk.

“You’re so wet for me, babydoll, you want me that bad, huh?” Darcy moaned as he picked up the speed at which he pumped his fingers into her, sliding his thumb rapidly over her clit as he did so.

“You feel that?” James ground his still-clothed cock against her leg, groaning into her ear, “You do that to me Darcy, make me want you all the damn time.”

His hand worked furiously inside of her, picking up the pace as Darcy threw her back against the bed as she lost all her senses, coming with a scream of his name.

James didn’t even wait for her to come down from her high as he began to drop kisses down her body, spending extra time taking her taut nipples into his mouth and sucking. He gentled his hand that was still inside her, but he didn’t remove it or halt it yet, determined to draw her orgasm out as long as possible. Just as Darcy began making little hitched ah ah ah sounds as she grew oversensitive, James brought his mouth down onto her clit and sucked.
Darcy mewled at the overstimulation, hips jerking as she tried to squirm away from and arch toward his mouth at the same time. James gently pulled his metal hand from where it was buried inside of her, licking down to her entrance to taste her fully. He groaned and thrust his tongue into her, trying to get as deep as he could because her taste was so addictive. Darcy let out a sob as another orgasm broke over her, smaller than the first, but no less powerful as was still so tender from before.

James was so lost between her legs, sucking and licking everywhere and groaning into her flesh, that he didn’t hear Darcy begging for some time.

“—ease please, James, fuck me! I need to feel you inside, please!”

Unable to deny her anymore, James surged forward to kiss Darcy and made her taste herself on his tongue as he invaded her mouth. His hands worked clumsily on his belt and fly, incredulous that he had kept his pants on this long. He kicked them off once he pushed them past his knees, hovering over a still-trembling Darcy.

Though her hands shook, Darcy took the time James used to undress to run her hands up his arms and shoulders, carding her hands through his hair and tugging hard.

“Now, James, I can’t wait—”

He pushed into her in one thrust, having to stop himself at the feel of her so warm and wet and tight around him. James buried his head in the side of her neck, sucking on it once more as he set a punishing pace a few moments later when he had gotten control of himself.

Darcy’s moans grew longer and louder, until it was as if every inhale and exhale pulled another wanton sound from her. James pushed himself up onto his hands, angling his hips so that his pelvis ground into her clit each time he snapped his hips against her.

Darcy’s third orgasm took them both by surprise in its suddenness and its intensity, pulling the loudest scream from her yet. James groaned with her as her inner walls clamped down on him, but he refused to fall over the edge just yet.

James didn’t slow his pace at all, even making sure to grind harder on her clit, Darcy was so beautiful when she came that he couldn’t stop now, wanting her to come again and again until she lost herself.
“One more, doll, come for me again!”

“I—I can’t, oh James! James—”

“Yeah you can, sweetheart, one more for me. You’re so beautiful like this, fucking stunning and amazing, Darcy, so beautiful when you come.”

James lowered himself so that his body caged hers, kissing her with every feeling he had for her, pouring it into her mouth as she came once more. He liked this best, feeling her quake underneath him, their skin brushing one another’s as she lost all control and babbled incoherently.

James lost himself, coming with a harsh yell as he ground into Darcy, keeping himself as deep inside of her as he could.

Darcy’s moans tapered off into whimpers as he slowed, and he kissed them from her mouth.

She murmured his name over and over again, running her hands over every inch of him that she could reach. He rolled off of her but pulled her to curl up into his side without breaking contact as he tried to soothe her trembling form. James dragged the covers from under them and flipped them on top of Darcy, cocooning her in warmth and trying to be gentle with her hypersensitive body.

“I got you Darcy, I got you.”

Chapter End Notes

okay this is my first time writing smut so i apologize if it doesn't read well!

ahhh here is our pairing!

CAAANNNN YOU FEEELLLL THE LOOOOVEEE TONIGHTT?

FUN STUFF:

[ACHAN: Anglicized form of Hebrew Akan, meaning "one who troubles." In the bible, this is the name of an Israelite who stole forbidden items during the assault on
Jericho, for which he was stoned to death

Darcy’s Hair: https://s-media-cache-ak0.pinimg.com/236x/3c/e5/3c/3ce53c75c698717020084880bf43f044.jpg
James: https://s-media-cache-ak0.pinimg.com/236x/bb/81/98/bb81988d449f8a1179bcc21f0c50a567.jpg
Chapter Notes

sorry for the late update guys! I recently got a new full time job (ew i'm a real adult now), went home to visit family for my sister's baby shower (i'm gonna be an aunt! ahhh!), work again, and my best friend is having a rough time so i've been spending some much needed time with her.

BUT i have not stopped working on Wee Little Stark, or any of my other stories, but things will probably be slow going because of real life catching up to me and whatnot.

I'm still so happy that people are continuing to read this! Everyone's comments and kudos mean the world to me, so thank you so much!

hope you like this chapter, it was fun to write :)  

See the end of the chapter for more notes

James was surprised that not much changed between him and Darcy after they made their feelings clear to one another. Yes, they made love and were far more affectionate than they were before, but their easy camaraderie and banter was just as strong, and they exasperated one another just the same. He didn't realize how much he was worried about their partnership changing until it didn't, a huge knot of nerves untangling in his chest when his fears proved to be unfounded.

If anything, James was more in awe of Darcy than ever before as if his recognized and reciprocated feelings opened his eyes further to appreciate her more. She wasn't perfect by any means, she often was rude and callous, forgetting manners or that others had feelings that weren't as tough as hers (not that James was sensitive, thank you very much). Darcy never meant to cause harm, but her life of secrecy led her to be abrasive and untrusting of others, and it could often be seen in how she treated others that she found suspicious. She always regretted her words or tone when she recognized what she had done, but she was never one to regret trusting her gut to guide her home. He thought at first that this was a result of her time under Hydra that made her so hard around her borders, but the Winter Soldier observed her enough to know that these were personality traits and defense mechanisms that she had developed and perfected long before Hydra had taken her.

He couldn't fault her for any of this, because James was the same in many aspects. Where she screamed her rage and anger, James retreated into cold silence and let the Winter soldier to deal with things that James couldn't. They fought and cried together over everything and nothing, but each night they still fell asleep in each other's arms and woke each morning even closer together than when they started. Their hearts and souls were winding themselves together like their sleepy limbs during the night, seeking warmth and comfort and that pull they recognized in one another. James didn't know what that pull was, but it let the Winter Soldier trust Darcy immediately, and it was in his soul that called out to her just the same.
James' girl was hard around her edges, a soldier with blood in her hands and distrust in her heart, but she still outshone anything that James had ever seen. Where she was abrasive and loud she was also soft and caring, running her fingers through James' hair as he came down from a nightmare. When she couldn't hold her tongue and used her words like weapons Darcy was also there to be his silent support on which he could lean on. She was an enigma and complex, light and dark like a solar eclipse that hurt James' eyes when he looked too closely. She was beautiful and broken like him, and she chose him just as he chose her.

She broke him out of his musing with a few snaps in front of his face.

"You with me?" Her tone was teasing but James could see the honesty behind the question. While he had been gaining memories from his old life and his time with Hydra as time went on, they more often than not came in the form of flashbacks and night terrors.

"I'm with you, doll, was just thinkin' about you," he winked at her to match her teasing tone but James knew that Darcy could hear his sincerity.

"Charmer," she scoffed. She adjusted the scope on the sniper rifle he got for her (pilfered from a arms dealer a few days ago) and began to look at their target more closely.

They were staking out a nearly-empty Hydra facility in the middle of Chad, surrounded by nothingness. Due to the lightweight case they put themselves on, James thought it would be a perfect time to teach his girl how to handle a sniper rifle. Darcy was already and excellent shot, but he was the best and knew she could be almost as good under his tutelage. He was grateful that her hand to hand was excellent, and he was constantly sending silent thanks to Happy, Logan, and Natalia for her training. It saved both of their lives more than once.

"What have we got, sweetheart?"

"Jack shit." James huffed as Darcy continued her report, "from here I can only see one mark on the roof, and one on each floor. Tech brain tells me that there's a fuck ton of heavy equipment in the sub-levels and I can't pick up any other goons through the cameras. Place is a ghost town."

James nodded along, what Darcy saw matched up with the Intel they had gathered so he was pleased they knew what they were getting into.

"Any idea what they've got stashed underground?"
"Not a clue, it's using a lot of power though, so it won't be pretty."

"Of course it won't. Alright, take them out and then we'll move on down and see what they're hiding."

"Anything for you, babe."

Eleven precise shots later, James was leading them into the compound on silent feet. Each floor was clear as Darcy had said, so it was only a matter of Darcy brushing her fingertips along each computer (this was more habit from 'playing normal' as she called it, James knew she didn't have to actually touch anything to use her powers) to absorb useful data before wiping the hard drives. It was slow and tedious work, but the pair knew better than to assume that things were as they appeared.

They arrived at the sub levels where Darcy could sense all the power about forty-five minutes later. The door was similar one would find in a bank vault, two feet of solid metal with changing gears and locks. Ominous. They were disgruntled by the crazy door and the fact that there weren’t any cameras inside to tell them what to expect.

It turned out that it wouldn't have mattered anyways. The moment they stepped through the doors, the place lit up and showed James exactly what Hydra had waiting for them.

Spotlights shone on the pile of explosives in the center of the otherwise empty space, wires and charges leading away from the center mass to other structurally necessary parts of the room.

The timer gave them only two minutes to live.

"It was a fucking trap."

As one, James and Darcy turned to run out the door they entered only to see that it had bolted shut, echoing clicks letting them know that all the exits were closed off as well.

"How did they get past me?!” Darcy's voice shook with anger and a small touch of fear that mirrored James' own.
They must have adapted the tech they implanted in you to hide shit from you, doll." It wasn't important at the moment, but James couldn't help but answer her because it infuriated him as well.

James looked back to the monstrosity in the center of the room.

45 seconds.

"Sweetheart, I don't have a backup plan for this." James hated himself in this moment for not being prepared, for the Winter Soldier being bested by a pile of C4 and a concrete room.

"It's okay, I've always wanted to see if this would work anyways."

Before James could ask what she was talking about, Darcy threw her head back and shouted with everything she had.

"HEIMDALL! OPEN THE BIFRÖST!"

*****

Sif was glad she chose to visit her brother that day, the Gatekeeper's lonely post sometimes broke her heart so she made sure to visit her brother as often as she could. She would come to sit with him, feet hanging off the Rainbow Bridge as they sat side by side, and tell him the gossip of the court.

She had been speaking with Heimdall about the most recent antics that Fandral had gotten into with some Lady of the court that had scandalized everyone almost as much as the time when Princess Darcy joined Volstagg in a spitting distance competition.

Heimdall had laughed one of his rare laughs, one that was full bellied and an open smile that enchanted everyone around him. Unfortunately, Sif did not get to share her brother's joy for long as his piercing gaze snapped to the Observatory's window, golden eyes searching.

"The Princess is in danger!"
Sif barely had a chance to see her brother move before he was back at his post in the center of the room, opening the Bifröst with ease. She stood and ran to the entrance, telling the guards to notify the King and Queen that Princess Darcy was being brought to Asgard. When she made to return to her brother's side, she smiled at Darcy's jovial voice.

"Heimdall! Did you get the see the place explode?! I know it was about to kill us and everything but I bet it was epic!"

"Aye, Princess, it was both terrifying and beautiful. Who is your companion?" Both Sif and Darcy knew that the Gatekeeper was aware of the stranger's identity, but he was politely reminding Darcy to introduce him.

"Oh! This is James Barnes, aka my boyfriend aka a former Howling Commando (and Steve's best friend) and aka the Winter Soldier."

Sif strode to Darcy's side, extending her arm to clasp the Princess' arm in a warrior's shake.

"It is good to see you well, Princess." Sif was unsurprised to be drawn in to Darcy's arms for a hug (that seemed to be much stronger now than last time they had met) and buried her smile in the smaller woman's shoulder.

"Sif! I'm so glad to see you!" Sif was just opening her mouth to respond when James interrupted.

"Doll, where are we?"

Darcy froze in Sif's arms, and it was much to her amusement when Sif realized that the Princess had not warned her consort of where they were going or who they stood among.

What followed would make Sif break out in stitches for years to come, a crazed and nonsensical explanation that somehow encompassed all of Asgard and how Darcy became a princess of the realm.

"I could have sworn that I told you all of this, James." Darcy's face scrunched up in confusion, eyes wild with energy.
“Yeah, you did, but I thought you were kidding when you said you were a princess. And I wasn't expecting to be shuttled to another realm. I was still accepting the fact the base we stood in was designed to take us out.”

"My dear, I thought you were to keep my boys out of trouble, not discover mischief yourself."

The Queen's voice floated into the Observatory, light with good humor that embraced everyone it touched. Darcy's face lit up at the sound, forgoing decorum and running to the Queen to wrap her arms around her in greeting. Queen Frigga didn’t hesitate to return the gesture, holding her daughter tightly to her chest.

"I've missed you!"

"I've missed you as well, darling," the AllMother pulled Darcy from her arms enough to cup the princess' face with her hands, adoration in her eyes, "Come, you must tell me all of what I have missed and what led you back to Asgard."

Throughly distracted, the princess wrapped her arm around the queen's waist as the older woman mirrored her and the two strode down the Rainbow Bridge to make their way to the palace.

Sif turned her amused gaze on James who still stood where he had landed, mouth opening and closing in shock.

Taking pity on the abandoned man, Sif walked to his side and began to guide him from the Observatory with a hand on his shoulder.

"Come along, James. The Princess and Queen adore one another and it will be some time before they remember that they have guests. Do not take the slight personally. I have heard many tales of you from the Captain and Lady Natasha. Would you like to spar?"

*****

James had no idea what the fuck was happening.
There was a beam of light, a giant gold room, some people in medieval garb and then James was left alone. That last bit stung a touch, but James was getting so distracted by everyone and everything that he forgave Darcy for her absentmindedness.

The soldier named Sif had lead him to the fields behind the palace where other soldiers and warriors were sparring and training with one another. Deciding what the hell, James took up Sif's offer to meet her fellow warriors and spar with them. He had been assured that Darcy would be safe (not that there was any doubt, his girl was a force to be reckoned with) so James sauntered over to a group of three men with Sif, his mind at peace.

"These are the Warriors Three: Fandral the Dashing, Hogun the Grim, and Volstagg the Lion of Asgard. Friends, this is Sir James Barnes, known as the Winter Soldier on Midgard."

The three men sat straighter at his introduction, inquisitive gazes raking over James.

"The one Captain Rogers speaks of from his childhood? And that he has been searching for?"

Fandral seemed to be hanging on Sif's words, making James highly uncomfortable. It was reminding him of what Darcy had told him about an Agent Coulson and Steve.

"Aye, the very same." Sif cast a mischievous glance and James as she continued, "The Soldier is also the chosen consort of our Princess."

Whatever awe was in Fandral’s face was now mirrored and multiplied in his and his friends', though more subtle on Hogun.

Hogun seemed to surprise them all as he piped up, "I am not sure if I am most joyous at this match or if I should be most fearful."

Everyone nodded solemnly, Volstagg voicing their thoughts. "Aye, the Norns have either blessed or cursed us all." Snapping out of his serious mood, Volstagg stood and hefted his sword on his shoulder as he addressed James with glee.

"No matter! Whether the Norns have decided that the force of this match will tear apart Yggdrasil or not, I am most pleased that the Princess has found a mate with you. Now, shall we spar?"
Darcy’s throat was sore by the time she had caught Frigga up with her life and she let it rest as the queen told her of the going-ons of Asgard. Sif and the Warriors Three continued to get into shenanigans while Odin stared fear into his subjects with his one good eye, and Frigga was the goddess she normally was as queen of the universe.

If she could be half as bad ass as Frigga and Pepper, Darcy would be very happy indeed. She told Frigga as much so Darcy could get a laugh out of her, but the older woman just leveled a stern glare at her.

“Darcy, you are powerful and awe-inspiring in your own right. I will not hear you ignore your own abilities and importance anymore.”

Frigga continued to speak, preventing Darcy from protesting. “Now, I think I would like to meet this man of yours, I should think.”

She paled a little at the idea of Bucky meeting her adoptive mom, but decided that it would be good practice for the Avengers reunion that Darcy could sense coming in their future.

“Well, I left him with Sif—”

“—So he shall be on the training grounds, naturally.” Frigga winked at Darcy as she stood and called for one of her many handmaidens.

“Fetch the Princess a set of her preferred armor, and fetch mine as well. I think that we would benefit from some fresh air and exercise, don’t you agree, Darcy?”

“Oh, yes, Frigga, I think that would be lovely.” Darcy cackled at the playfulness in the queen’s eyes, knowing that Frigga intended to get some tongues wagging that evening in the palace’s dining hall.

The next several minutes were a whirlwind of body parts getting shoved into armor and hair getting yanked in various directions, but the end result was *marvelous*. 
Darcy’s armor was almost exactly the same as the kind she wore when she was in Asgard with Jane: all black heavy leather armor and boots with her multi-braid pigtails. However, it appeared that Frigga had commissioned this armor specifically for Darcy as many edges were trimmed in a deep red that matched the mask she wore. She ignored the part of her brain that squealed with delight at how she would match James’ black kevlar get-up.

“I’ve been dying to get this armor back, I feel so kick ass in it. Thank you, Frigga!”

The queen stepped out from behind her changing screen and Darcy’s jaw immediately hit the floor.

Frigga was stunning all the time, but her armor made her look positively enchanting. Where Darcy’s armor was a heavy black that seemed to absorb the light, Frigga’s was a pale gold that shone almost white as the sun caught it at an angle. The plates of her armor were trimmed in a darker gold that reminded Darcy of the walls of the observatory, and her hair was braided down the center of her head like a mohawk.

“Frigga. This. This is why you’re queen of the universe.”

“Thank you, darling. Now let’s find your Soldier, hmm? I think he needs to see you in all your finery.”

Darcy was ecstatic that the Birger (the coolest Palace guard as far as Darcy was concerned) was one of the escorts who led them to the training grounds, bowing to the queen and giving Darcy a fist bump to everyone’s astonishment. Frigga laughed with good humor and kept their group moving despite some spluttered protests at the familiarity.

When they reached the grounds and found where James was, Darcy had to reevaluate some of her fantasies because damn her man looked good.

James traded his Midgardian kevlar vest for something similar to Darcy’s ‘Warrior Light’ armor that covered his flesh arm and his chest, but was altered enough that his metal arm had a full range of movement. He seemed to have found some form of Aesir tac-pants as well, sturdy black canvas as opposed to the standard leather. The red star of his left bicep glinted dangerously in the sunlight along with the sword in his outstretched arm as James moved, dodging and striking out at Fandral, Hogun, and Volstagg all at once.
The three Asgardians were some of the best in the Nine realms, and certainly the best on Asgard, but they were no match for the Winter Soldier. With ease James took each of them down within moments of one another, the crowd that had gathered cheering for his victory.

Frigga had informed Darcy on the walk over that Thor often spoke of his Midgardian friends, the famed Avengers, so the human warriors became sort of legends in Asgard. When Darcy was missing and Sif and the Warriors Three traveled to Midgard to help search, they often were told stories of James from Steve, making him a legend as well.

He was certainly living up to the hype.

*Winking at one another, Darcy and Frigga pushed their way through the crowd to James’ side. Darcy felt a thrill roll down her spine as James’ eyes snapped wide open and grew dark with arousal when he took in her and her armor.*

“So, Soldier, the Queen and I were hoping that you’d spar with us. See how you like the challenge.”

*****

James had sparred with Darcy before, of course, but that was done to keep their skills sharp and more often than not led to some fantastic sex. Darcy in her armor was already tempting enough as it was, adding swords and adrenaline to the mix would even test the Soldier’s self control.

But Queen Frigga (and Darcy’s other adoptive mom, what the hell?) was at his girl’s side, and James recognized the look in her eye well enough.

This was a test.

Asgard had not had a princess in thousands of years, but when the Queen adopted Darcy the realm was overcome with joy. It only increased tenfold when it was discovered that their new Princess was a warrior in her own right (the description of Darcy’s fight with Sif had James adjusting his pants a little), but she also was gifted with powers that no one on Asgard had seen outside of their sorcerers. The Crown Prince had claimed her as his sister long before the Queen had set eyes on Darcy, and it was also rumored that the other troubled Prince, the war criminal, his heart had been softened and warmed by the Princess as well.
So this was a test for James, in front of the Queen, the realm’s best warriors, and Yggdrasil herself, to see if he was worthy enough for the Princess’ love.

Well, they won’t know what hit ‘em.

“Sure, doll,” He raked his eyes over Darcy’s form, unable to control his smirk as he did so, “It’d be an honor.”

His gaze lost its lewdness and gained a lot more respect as he met the Queen’s eyes. “It’s an honor to meet you and to spar with you, Your Highness.”

The Queen’s brow rose in surprise, and James groaned internally knowing that she must have heard so many inappropriate stories from his girl that the Queen probably didn’t think James was capable of being a gentleman.

“I am pleased to meet you as well, Sir James. But let’s spar before we exchange any more pleasantries, I’m eager to see how you fair against me and my daughter.”

The threat was there, hidden under her beautiful voice and serene smile. If you are not worthy, I have the Nine realms at my disposal to make your life Hel.

The sound of Darcy sliding her whips from her holsters was the only warning James got.

He brought his right arm up, flesh stinging as the vibrations from his sword blocking the Queen’s blow traveled down his arm as Darcy’s whip coiled around his metal one. Determined not to be taken down so easily, James grabbed the coil and wrapped his arm further around it, yanking it hard and causing Darcy to stumble. Before she could regain her footing, he shook the whip from his arm and ducked out from under the Queen’s next blow and putting a good ten feet between him and the women.

Now that he had some space, James and the Soldier were able to think more clearly, eyes assessing the threats in front of him. While James did fight off three Asgardians only minutes before, this was a vastly different fight. Darcy’s place in his heart didn’t alter how they fought against one another, so it was only her mutant abilities that threw a wrench into every plan he devised. The Queen was an entirely new entity.
From what he could gather, the AllMother had taught the trickster Prince everything he knew about magic so it was safe to assume that she would have no qualms using her abilities to her advantage. Not that James could blame her, he’d kill for some skills like that. The Queen also was the queen, where the Warriors Three may have been the best soldiers on the field, James wasn’t going to make an ass out of himself by assuming that this dame couldn’t fight. That armor she wore was beautiful, but it was also covered in faint battle scars that had been buffed out. This Queen had seen war, and she was a deadly opponent.

Having wasted enough time, James charged at the women and trusted his instincts to help him win.

Their match lasted the greater part of an hour, no one gaining the upper hand for more than a moment before the tides turned and they were at it once more. It was only as the sun began to sink that they reached an impasse.

James stood with Darcy held back against his chest, sword pointed under her chin. He had managed to rid her of her whips a moment before, both of them knowing that he could strike before she could use her abilities to summon them to her once more. He had Darcy pinned with his sword arm, her own limbs bent awkwardly and stuffed between his chest and her back and prohibiting her movement.

The Queen stood to James’ left side, his metal hand around her throat and her sword pointed at his heart.

They all stood there panting for a minute more before the gathered crowd began to cheer riotously at their entertainment. As one, the trio dropped from their fighting stances and took a step back from one another, beaming smiles on their faces.

“James, that was amazing!” Darcy gushed at him before throwing her arms around his neck (no sense of propriety, his girl) and planting a steamy kiss on his lips. He returned it more a moment or two before pulling back, remembering that the Queen was part of their captive audience.

Blushing, he turned to look at the Queen, questioning with his eyes: Did I pass the test?

James’ shoulders sagged with relief as the Queen nodded slightly, a smile dancing on her lips as she looked between them.

“Come along, James, us three should retire before the evening meal. I would like you to sit with my
husband and me. The AllFather would be most interested in meeting you.”

“Thank you, Your Highness.”

“Please,” she scoffed, “Call me Frigga.”

Chapter End Notes

Frigga’s hair: https://s-media-cache-ak0.pinimg.com/236x/ac/47/65/ac4765933a76a1291199526a05eecd7b.jpg
Chapter 40

Chapter Notes

FLUFF and humor i hope
i can never tell if what i write is actually funny because i find everything to be hilarious.

i didn't proof read this one because i'm lazy WHOOPS

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Frigga couldn’t help the smile that kept tugging up the corner of her mouth as she watched Darcy and James together. James looked just as handsome in the Asgardian clothing as he did the armor, the dark reds and blacks of his tunic and pants made his ice blue eyes even more striking than usual. James’ regal appearance was ruined by the fact he was trying to keep Darcy’s hands from touching every trinket and tapestry on the wall. Frigga could see the tension in James’ shoulders with the fear that Darcy would break something war with his apparent desire for her.

Darcy had chosen to wear an traditional Asgardian gown rather than her armor and she looked absolutely beautiful. Her gown was a creamy color that blended with her skin overlaid with a wine red stitching. The dress clung to her chest and waist where it then flared from her hips and fell to the floor. The red lace fell elegantly across her collarbones, smooth like a second skin.

Frigga watched from the top of the stairs leading to the great hall for a few moments longer before calling to the couple.

“James, do not bother. I find that preventing Darcy from touching things only leads her to using her powers to attempt subterfuge.”

“I just didn’t want her to break anything, ma’am.”

Frigga’s heart warmed at James’ words and sincerity. He truly was a gentleman, despite a number of Darcy’s stories suggesting otherwise.

“Come along, you two. Dinner is about to begin and Darcy has been avoiding Odin long enough.”
Frigga laughed as Darcy spluttered protests and James paled at the mention of the AllFather. The pair quickly climbed the stairs regardless of their apprehension, much to Frigga’s pleasure. The Queen thread her right arm through James’ metal left one, holding Darcy’s hand with her free hand. Together, the trio made the short distance down the hall and through the archway that guided them to the hall.

The enormous room was scattered with large round tables, covered in an assortment of food and drink. Warriors sat toward the entrance of the hall where the three made their entrance, while members of the court sat among their friends closer to the back of the room where the royal family and closest friends would sit.

Frigga, Darcy, and James weaved through the crowded hall together, receiving many bows of respect much to the mortals’ embarrassment. The Queen couldn’t help her undignified snicker as the pair shifted uncomfortable and tried to find a polite way to greet others back. James settled for a regal-looking nod, while Darcy would wave somewhat awkwardly or simply call out a “Hello!”

After some time and exchanged pleasantries, Frigga and her mortal charges make it to the back of the hall where the Warriors Three, Sif, High Lords and Ladies of the court, Heimdall, and Odin sat at a large oval table. The AllFather sat at the head, naturally, Heimdall at his left side, while the Warriors filled in after a few empty seats left for the Queen and the Princess, as well as James. The men and women of the court rounded out the last of the table, sending irritated looks at the warriors for stealing their chances to speak with the royal family.

Frigga feels Darcy and James tense as Odin’s eye lands on the three of them. His gaze betrays nothing, but her husband can’t hide from Frigga, nor the tiny seed of budding affection that is growing in his heart for the Princess.

When Darcy had been reported missing, Thor and Loki wasted no time in returning to Asgard to gain assistance. While they had been left alone to do as they please on Midgard, in the eyes of the throne their sons were traitors for having disobeyed direct orders from their King. The Warriors Three, Sif, and Heimdall were also tried for treason, but within the private court consisting of only Odin and Frigga, it was decided that they were guiltless as they were following direct orders from their Crown Prince.

Frigga’s sons had stormed into their parents’ chambers where they were enjoying afternoon tea together, procrastinating their duties for a bit longer. The Queen was shocked to see such emotion on Loki’s face, her son never one to let his feelings rule him in times of strife.

Loki and Thor had quickly bowed before greeting their parents, signaling that they were there to see the King and Queen and not their mother and father. Frigga was disappointed, not having spoken to either of her children since they left Asgard for the Aether regardless of the message she sent them in
their dreams.

“AllFather, AllMother, we would request a boon of you, if you find it worthy.” Thor waited for their nods of assent before he continued to speak, “Princess Darcy was abducted three days ago. All methods of searching for her have been fruitless. Her brother cannot find her through their realm’s technology nor can he find her through their telepathic link. Please, allow Heimdall to aid our search.”

The only reason why her sons had to ask was the nature of Darcy’s royal status. While she was a Princess of the realm, she was adopted. Darcy benefitted from her title when on Asgard, but she did not automatically have the force of Asgard at her side like the Princes did.

Frigga hated that law, but before she even drew breath to voice her opinion or reply, Odin spoke.

“Find her. Any means necessary.”

Loki and Thor froze in shock with Frigga at her husband’s words and the strength of his vehemence at his command. It was not entirely a secret that while Odin was grateful that Darcy saved his wife’s life, he was wary of her powers and distrustful of the mortal who had slithered into the hearts of his family.

Since that day, Frigga and Heimdall had been gently easing in stories praising Darcy and her past feats and keeping Odin apprised of the hunt for their Princess. Over time, Odin could be seen in the observatory with the Gatekeeper in a silent vigil as they continued their search. It would take years for Odin to be openly warm and affectionate with Darcy, as was his nature, but Frigga knew that her husband’s heart was creating room for the girl.

So the Queen sat next to her King, her daughter and her consort to her right, laughing and trading tales with their friends. Frigga knew that Darcy and James were leaving in the morning, it was time for them to return to her family and for James to reunite with the captain.

The road would never be easy for the two, the Norns had both blessed and cursed their destiny with both strife and adventure for many years to come. However, the Norns had also given them to each other, the force of their growing love strong enough to shake the very roots of Yggdrasil.

So yes, Frigga would worry about Darcy just as she worried about her sons, but the Queen knew that her children were safe with one another and among their friends.
The Avengers were legends on Midgard as well as Asgard, and rightly so.

*****

“...you’re such a little shit, James.”

He finally let his laughter go, Darcy joining in with some giggles as she shoved him forward.

“Get on the damn table, Barnes.”

“It’s a Soul Forge, doll.”
He totally deserved the smack on the back of his head, but James smiled anyways.

*****

James dozed through whatever magical treatment he got from Lady Eir, but when he woke up, he actually felt *awake* for the first time in a long time.

He didn’t know how he was healed, just that a miracle was made.

James could feel the dormancy of the Winter Soldier in the back of his mind, there but no longer conscious like the Asset had felt before. Now James knew that he could call on the Soldier’s training and skills without having to let the Asset take control.

Likewise, the scattered and blurry memories from his time as the Winter Soldier were stored in his head like the memory of a book he read long ago. The serum kept him from forgetting anything entirely, but now he felt like he had simply witnessed the events that occurred with the Soldier’s hands rather than causing them.

James never knew how much guilt he was carrying until it was gone. He felt sorrow for his actions and the wake of death and destruction they caused, but James knew that it wasn’t truly *him*, Hydra and used him as a puppet, forcing him to bend to his master’s will.

He also felt more like Bucky. He remembered everything up to the moment he fell from the train with crystal clarity, old pieces of his personality sliding back into place from where they were blocked by the Asset before. James was Bucky, and Bucky was James.

The smile on Bucky’s face was hurting his cheeks, but it couldn’t help it.

He was *whole*.

Bucky opened his eyes, seeing Lady Eir look over what appeared to be scans of his brain with a smile of satisfaction on her face. Sensing his gaze, the healer met his eyes.

“How do you feel?”
He choked out something that sounded like a sob and laugh.

“Thank you.”

Bucky heard a watery laugh to his right, so he rolled his head to look up at Darcy. His girl was clasping her hands over her mouth and her eyes were shining with happy tears.

“Hey, baby, how are you?”

He laughed again, and reached out to cup her face.

“I love you so much, doll, I love you.”

Chapter End Notes

Darcy’s dress inspiration:
http://i.dailymail.co.uk/i/pix/2013/11/05/article-2487550-1932735400000578-389_634x918.jpg
Chapter 41

Chapter Summary

reunion!

Loki was trying to keep his head clear and his breathing even, a task that was proving to be more difficult than he had planned because Stark would not leave him alone.

After they received word from Darcy via JARVIS five months ago, Stark’s spirits had certainly lifted. Darcy would often contact the entire team for updates about what she and the Soldier were doing. She was never specific and never gave away any details that would lead them to the pair, but Darcy always let them know that they were safe and sound after every ‘mission,’ easing the tension that would always grow when everyone knew she was once more heading into danger.

Loki knew that Darcy would have video calls with Stark and Pepper, as well as Jane, far more regularly. Loki and Thor got to sit in on a couple video calls, as did the rest of the team, and a large amount of anxiety Loki carried was released from him once he was able to see Darcy.

In the short amounts of time he was able to see and interact with her, Loki noticed some new things.

First, the Soldier never made an appearance or said anything, despite some pleas from the Captain, but it was very clear that he was always within reach of Darcy, just outside the frame.

Second, where his sister had always been brash and rude, she had grown even more rough around the edges after her time under Hydra and as her trip of vengeance with the Soldier continued. Loki couldn’t find himself to blame her, though. Everyone in the tower, all of Darcy’s family were warriors and soldiers with blood on their hands. She was simply catching up. She was still jovial and loving toward them, of course, but Loki could see that the way she carried herself had changed. Where she was once innocent (compared to the company she kept) and carefree, she was now hardened and had a strength and confidence about her that she did not before.

Loki was proud.

Through some eavesdropping, Loki made his third discovery regarding Darcy.
She had been exposed with the super-soldier serum, just as their good captain and the Soldier had. Loki suspected that the Widow had a version as well, but he valued his life too much to try to pry too closely to her secrets.

Loki wasted no time in assuring the rest of the team that Darcy was even more able to defend herself, as the serum would protect her. He didn’t care if she was mad at him for ‘spilling the beans.’ The rest of the inhabitants of the tower were enhanced to some degree, why should she hide it?

All in all, the Avengers and their companions were accepting, though not entirely pleased, with Darcy’s decision to stay on her “Hellion Road Trip.” She maintained contact, fed them important information, and was dismantling Hydra.

Loki was about to warn Stark that if he did not stop poking him then Loki would remove his finger when his magic received a nudge from his mother. It was a way they used to communicate when he was a youth, testing his magic and his ability to interpret it. Loki felt guilty for using it again, not having the courage to face his mother or speak to her after their last words in his cell. However, she seemed pleased to speak with him through their magic, the nostalgia warming their hearts.

He let his mother’s message roll through his own magic to translate it, his eyes snapping open and startling Stark when he understood.

“Darcy is coming home.”

Stark didn’t even ask how he knew, just demanded an answer. “When?”

Loki scrambled to his feet, helping Stark to his own which only surprised the man further.

“Minutes, if that. And she has the Soldier with her. The Bifröst will place them on the roof’s landing pad. Gather the others!”

JARVIS immediately sounded the ‘Family Meeting Alarm’ that Darcy had created only months before her abduction. It was a cheery tune that the tower had not heard since she was taken, almost a year ago now. Darcy had created the alarm so that there was a quick way to gather everyone together without sounding the Assemble klaxons. They had all learned that unless they wanted the wrath of Darcy and the bots to fall upon them, they would heed the call. Loki heard both his and Stark’s phone ping with a text message, knowing JARVIS had informed everyone that Darcy was coming
home and to meet on the roof.

Wasting no further time, the two men jogged out of the room and into the nearest elevator, soaring to the top of the tower. They stormed through the roof-access door, already seeing Jane and Pepper pacing anxiously.

It was only moments later that the rest of the team poured out onto the roof as well, everyone looking eager for Darcy’s return.

Loki chuckled to himself, remembering his first reactions to his now-sister when they talked on Svartalfheim as he looked at them all. How has she bewitched us so?

They all bickered and fought and where a tower filled with broken people, one spark from a catastrophic explosion. Darcy was a beam of light, a taste of normal to all of them that they drew to her like a moth to a flame. Now, Darcy still held onto a shred of that normalcy, but she was more like the rest of the heroes than ever before. Loki looked forward to how they would all interact now, now that she was no longer novel in the sense that she couldn’t relate to their horrors. She no longer was that breath of fresh, normal air to them all. She was one of them. The thought both broke his heart and left him feeling elated. He never would have wanted Darcy to face the things she did, but it was necessary for her to have walked the path that she forged. Darcy was the glue that kept the Avengers, and their family, together.

If it wasn’t for Darcy, Loki would have lost his mother, and he would have died on Svartalfheim. He never would have been given a chance to tell his story or to redeem himself, never been kept from going back to Asgard’s cells. It took time, but Loki was slowly integrated into the team, eventually forgiven (even Barton spent time with him, to ‘hang out’), and brought into the family.

His smile grew as the colorful light of the Bifröst shot down onto the landing pad, everyone wincing but refusing to shield their eyes from the pair they could see in the center.

Thank the gods, she’s finally home.

*****

Darcy squeezed Bucky’s hand as the lights finally stopped swirling around them. He squeezed her hand firmly back in silent support. Unable to stand still a moment longer, Darcy bolted from his side and ran into her Mom and Dad’s arms.
The three pulled each other in as tightly as they could, silent tears and shaking shoulders went unacknowledged as they reunited. There were smiles and hushed words of happiness that made Darcy’s heart fit to burst.

“I’m so glad you’re home, Bot, so glad you’re home,” Tony kept repeating the phrase over and over again, causing Darcy’s throat to clench up with emotion. Pepper voiced her agreement over and over again, her words garbled by her quiet sobs.

“I won’t leave again, I promise, okay? No more. I’m staying.”

Darcy felt their shoulders sag with relief at her promise, her heart clenching with guilt.

“I’m so so—”

“Don’t apologize, sweetheart, you did what you needed to do. We understand.” Her Mom’s words and forgiveness rang with authority, threatening to bring Darcy to her knees, guilt evaporating with her mother’s assurance.

She was home, safe and sound.

*****

Bucky watched as Darcy reunited with her folks, smiles and the shine of tears brightening their faces. He stood in the center of the Bifröst runes, watching the way the Avengers gathered close to her, getting hugs and laughs from Darcy. He and Darcy looked a little out of place in their Asgardian armor (he also had a bag over his shoulder filled with some gowns for Darcy and clothes for him, they couldn’t resist the temptation), even the two Asgardians on the roof were wearing Earth clothes.

Bucky’s gut tightened with apprehension when Darcy and Steve embraced. She had told him about the punk’s old feelings for her, but that wasn’t what was bothering him. Bucky’s mind got all fixed up, and he felt more like himself now than he did toward the end of the War, but he was afraid that Steve would look at him differently. They had both changed, there were 70 years and a lifetime of experiences that transformed them from the men they were when they were part of the Howling commandos. Bucky just didn’t want the blood on his hands from Hydra to change the way Steve saw him.
From his spot, Bucky could see Darcy whisper to Steve, shoulder’s tensing then relaxing at her words. Tentatively, Steve met Bucky’s gaze over Darcy’s shoulder, hope in his eyes. Bucky waved, albeit awkwardly.

Well done, idiot. Last time you saw him you almost killed him, and this is how you make up for that? Dammit.

Steve laughed at the grimace Bucky was sure he was wearing. The punk squeezed Darcy one last time before jogging up to where he stood. Not even bothering to wait for Steve to open his dumb mouth, Bucky met him a few steps out and immediately brought Steve into a strong hug.

“Stevie, I’m so sorry I didn’t want to—I couldn’t—”

“Shut up, jerk, it wasn’t your fault. There’s nothing to forgive but I know you’re gonna want to hear it anyways, so here goes: I forgive you, Buck.”

For the first time in more than 70 years, Bucky cried.

The moment was ruined as he heard Howard’s kid yell incredulously at Darcy.

“What do you mean he’s your boyfriend?!”

*****

Logan wondered if Stark could hook him up with a private elevator, he was beyond tired of trying to get to the damn residential areas of the tower and getting accosted by all the bots each and every time.

He leaned back against the wall of the elevator, BIT under one arm and Fen under the other, the three larger AI’s crowded around him. It had taken some time, but Logan had perfected the ability to tune out all their incessant beeping.
Logan was trying to hide it, but he was anxious to see Pip again.

He had been told about Darcy’s abduction the moment JARVIS failed to find her, the AI immediately barraging his cell with the leaked information about the damned intern who was a Hydra plant. Logan raged at himself for a while, he knew that the intern was fishy as hell.

It had taken only an hour or so to get the support of all the X-men to help search for Darcy, anyone with abilities or connections that could assist on the move as soon as they got the info they needed. The Professor was distraught, able to sense Darcy’s mind but unable to speak with her. There was something blocking her powers that disoriented her so much that she wasn’t aware of Xavier trying to make contact. As months passed the Professor only grew more troubled that the disconnection was still present.

Logan had gone on his own road-trip of sorts, rage and guilt fueling him for a couple months before Stark reeled him in and gave him some firmer directions and some much needed back up.

When Darcy first made contact with the Avengers JARVIS had pinged Logan, letting him know that she was safe and sending him a copy of the transcript. It was only a few days later that Darcy began texting him, keeping him up to date like she did with the rest of her family and feeding him intel that she thought may interest the X-men or Logan personally.

Logan didn’t want to know why Hydra had so many files on Victor Creed, so he just let the information compile until he felt like he needed to confront that mess of a situation.

That led Logan to where he was now, ignoring robots and trying to have a conversation with JARVIS a couple weeks after Darcy’s initial return. Never one for crows or fanfare, Logan waited until the initial surge of emotions and adrenaline would calm down in the tower before he brought himself into that disaster.

Used to the routine by now, Logan waited for the three larger bots to file out of the elevator before placing Fen on the ground and putting BIT in her brother’s truck bed. He waited another moment for the two to get settled and for Fen to grab his pant leg—why did Logan let this happen? Who fuckin’ knew, anymore—before Logan made his own way out of the elevator and down the hall to the common room.

He only heard faint murmurs of conversation as he made his way closer, but his enhanced sense of smell told him the whole damn team was in there. Logan made a note to ask JARVIS if Stark gathered everyone on purpose whenever he visited, just to see him squirm.
Just as Logan took a deep breath to call out to Pip, a face he never expected to see came around the opposite corner.

“Barnes?!”

“Howlett? What the hell?”

Barnes ran his hand through his hair in confusion, and that’s when Logan noticed the metal.

_Metal arm—Winter Soldier—Barnes?_

“Ya ever feel like yer gonna go insane in this tower?”

Barnes seemed nonplussed by the topic change, which was evidence enough to his answer before he spoke. “Yeah. ‘m not really sure what’s goin’ on most of the time, to be honest.”

“Ain’t that the truth,” turning from Barnes, _gonna deal with that mystery later_, Logan completed his trek into the common room where everyone was scattered around. Some waved or nodded in acknowledged him, so it only took a couple more moments for Darcy to notice his presence.

As always, she bolted from her seat on the back of the couch (where she was braiding Thor’s hair? _This place is ridiculous_) and ran into Logan’s arms with a shout of, “Kitty!”

Thankfully, no one laughed anymore at the name; everyone had heard it hundreds of times by now, so it was commonplace and uninteresting. _Thank god._

Logan was going to start questioning Pip about what all she had gotten into when she was gone when his intake of breath about knocked him over.

Pip was _covered_ in Barnes’ smell, like she had bathed in his scent. He couldn’t stop the protective growl if he had tried, clutching Pip closer to his chest.
The whole room had a collective “Oh, shit” moment as they realized what Logan had discovered. Rogers immediately stood to try to calm Logan, but it was Stark who spoke from the bar, voice filled with glee.

“Finally! Kitty knows what’s up!”

The next few minutes were tense, to say the least.

There was some growling, a lot of ‘male posturing’ as Darcy liked to call it, some not-so-vague threats, and a couple love declarations before anyone was calm enough to move the conversation forward. Then Rogers and Barnes took turns explaining how Barnes made it 70 years into the future as well, which prompted Logan’s own reveal of his mutant status.

Logan kept questioning why he voluntarily submitted himself to the real-life soap opera that was Avengers Tower, wondering if he had lost his sanity over the past hundred years or so. Then Pip would beam a smile up at him with her fuckin’ huge ass blue eyes, and his resolve would melt.

Goddamnit.

His sentiment was echoed by everyone around him as JARVIS interrupted, “The Fantastic Four are here, Sir. They seem to be quite upset that they were not informed promptly about Darcy’s return.”

Logan let his head slam to the granite counter top of the kitchen counter where he sat at the announcement.

“Damn it all to hell.”
Chapter Notes

GUYS. I literally CANNOT put into words how thankful I am that you all keep commenting and reading this story! This started out as a drabble when i was stuck on some original work then BAM it's now 100k words! And you guys keep reading it! just, WHAT?!!

I'm flabbergasted and honored and a whole other mess of emotions that are making my heart and insides all squishy and gross.

anyways, I'm starting to work on the next few chapters that will involve Avengers: Age of Ultron. The author notes at the end will have SPOILERS for both the film and for this story (kind of), mainly about what i'm changing. so if you've seen the movie you can probably already guess at several things i want to change, but if not, please skip the bottom notes!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The reunion went as well as anyone could have anticipated, really, Steve thought.

Johnny cam running in, immediately throwing his arms around Darcy and pressing kisses to the top of her head and all over her face (but not her lips, which Steve and everyone else was grateful for). Bucky immediately yanked Storm back and pinned the younger man to the wall by his throat with his metal hand as Logan snagged Darcy and placed her behind him. Clearly, his more feral instincts that told him to protect his family had not completely died down, though he and Bucky appeared to be on the same side for the moment. Steve entertained the idea that Logan’s protective instincts must have rubbed off on his friend.

Like before, there was a lot of yelling, male posturing, and Tony cackling like a madman in the background. Steve figured the elder Stark was pleased that after years of thinking no one should touch his daughter, he now had two powerful men protecting her. Steve didn’t think he should point out to Stark that while one of those men were protecting her now, he had no doubt Bucky had his hands all over Darcy in private.

Several minutes and some much more chaste and supervised hugs of reunion later, the Avengers, the Fantastic Four, Logan, and Bucky sat down on every surface available as Darcy stood before them all. Her hands were on her cocked hips, her expression telling them that all this nonsense was going to end now. Steve agreed, but was still quelled by her Look so he didn’t say anything.
Darcy cleared her throat, meeting each person in the eye as she spoke.

“I am back. I am okay. Yes, Bucky and I are together. He saved me from Hydra, and we’ve been dismantling the organization piece by piece ever since. I now have the super-soldier serum. Any questions? No? Good. Now for the real reason why I had you guys sit your asses down.

“Logan and Dad, I love you both dearly but you do not get to threaten or attack Bucky. I love him, and he loves me. So butt out!”

Steve couldn’t help his goofy smile, happy that both of his best friends had found one another despite their circumstances.

“Thor and Loki: You’re the human-ish brothers I never had. However, that does not give you the right to hurt, maim, or otherwise harm Bucky for being with me. I love the fact that you feel the need to defend my honor, but you guys keep forgetting that my honor was tarnished a long time ago.”

Stifling a chuckle as he cast his gaze toward Storm, Steve felt a pang of sympathy as everyone looked at Johnny at Darcy’s words. The otherwise cocky and care-free Human Torch was blushing a deep red and looked highly uncomfortable at the attention. Johnny didn’t look nearly as uncomfortable as the previous four men Darcy had addressed, her father and three adoptive brothers cringing at her bluntness.

“Now, this is the last talk we will have discussing this because as if it wasn’t already made clear, I can handle myself. I have killed people to protect myself and others, and I’ve been tortured for months by Hydra,” the entire room cringed at that statement, “but I’ve done my part to take them down. So for the final time, I am a grown ass woman, and I do NOT need anyone else to coddle me.”

Darcy beamed as Sue, Natasha, Jane, Pepper, and Sam stood and applauded her. Everyone quirked an eyebrow at the man, and he simply quirked one right back as he continued to clap his hands.

“What? You assholes never hear of feminism?”

*****

Darcy breathed a sigh of relief when she closed and locked the door to her tower apartment. Bucky
chuckled, but she could see the tension relax from his shoulders.

“I’m sorry about everyone,” she murmured.

“Don’t be, doll.”

“But—”

“Yes, they’re over the top and highly protective of you, but I get it, Darcy. You’re everyone’s baby sister in there, or their kid. You showed up with an assassin holding your hand after being gone for a year. They have every right to be protective and wary of me and my intentions.”

Bucky’s self depreciating tone hit Darcy like a blow to the gut, her heart clenching at the thought that he still believed he wasn’t worthy of being happy. Without saying a word, Darcy pushed off from the door where she was leaning and guided Bucky by his shoulders further into their apartment until he was seated on the couch. She wasted no time in plopping herself on his lap, making him meet her gaze as she spoke.

“You, Jame Buchanan Barnes, are a good man,” she covered his mouth with the fingers of her right hand as he tried to protest, continuing her speech as if he hadn’t interrupted. She carded her left hand through his hair as she spoke, “You were taken, tortured, then fell from that train in the Alps. None of which was your fault. What happened to you after that for the next lifetime was also not your fault. They broke you and remade you into their weapon. They stole from you. They took everything that made you Bucky and mutilated it until there wasn’t any shred of you left, all so you could be there Asset and perfect weapon.

“But it wasn’t you. Those who died when Hydra had you? Their blood is on Hydra’s hands, the KGB’s hands, not yours. You didn’t even see yourself as a person until Steve broke that first wall in your programming.

“So, no, my family doesn’t ‘have every right’ to freak out at you. To be honest, they are more freaked out that I’ve got a boyfriend more than anything else. You really think anyone in that room doesn’t have blood on their hands or guilt in their conscience?”

Bucky shook his head, and Darcy was pleased that he seemed to be listening and taking her words to heart.
“Exactly. So, Bucky Barnes, are a good man. And that is why I love you.”

Unable to resist him any longer, Darcy brought her lips gently to Bucky’s, sinking into his embrace.

Her man was tattered and bloody, but so was she. Darcy loved him and his every frayed edge like she had never loved anyone before in her life.

There were boys and girls as she grew up that held her affections and her body, and even Johnny Storm got the honor of being her first love. But that seemed petty and immature to what she felt with Bucky.

It was more than him saving her from Hydra, because they weren’t throwing anything at her that she couldn’t handle, save for the tech in her head. Bucky literally just opened the door and let her out.

Her soul called out to his, their hearts so intertwined it made her wonder if what Loki and Thor called soul-bonds were a thing of reality. They always spoke so poetically, it was hard to determine what was a metaphor and what was not. Regardless, Darcy’s entire being called out for her lover, and she answered his soul’s call for her as well, no matter what Asgardian voodoo may or may not exist.

Darcy felt tears behind her eyelids as she continued to kiss Bucky, her heart swelling and clenching with the severity of her emotion for him.

She knew that she would gladly fight her way out of hell for him, but now she knew she would do so much more.

Darcy Stark would gladly watch the world burn if it meant she got to keep Bucky by her side.

*****

Bucky’s throat had closed up at his girl’s words, relying on his latent Asset skills from breaking down completely in her arms. He’d do that someday, but not right now.

She was straddling his lap, the otherwise suggestive position betrayed by Darcy’s murmured words of love and her tender kisses.
Bucky didn’t know what the universe was thinking when it brought Darcy into his life, but he was too damn selfish to let her go. She completed him in a way that let him know just how empty he had been before. Bucky didn’t mean all the years as the Winter Soldier (though those years certainly made him feel empty, but in a more literal sense), but he recognized the feeling going back as far as his life in the 30’s and 40’s with Stevie.

He chased skirt (even had a fella or two in his bed once upon a time), chasing that empty feeling in his chest and hoping he’d find it in the next dame he took out dancing. Steve’s Ma always shook her head at him, telling him that he wasn’t going to find what he was looking for around their neighborhood, so he better get his act together. Back then, Bucky had thought Mrs. Rogers was just telling him to keep it in his pants, but now he wondered if Sarah Rogers had a bit of the Irish Fey blood in her, giving her some hint of premonition. She always seemed like an old soul to him, that knowing look in her eyes.

Shaking off the ghosts of his past, Bucky let Darcy’s words soothe his broken soul, filling him with love and acceptance.

They were a mess: The Winter Solider and Whiplash (yes, she had shown him the headlines. He personally liked Mistress, but she wanted a name that was a bit more ‘family friendly). The former brainwashed assassin and Tony Stark’s secret mutant and super-soldier daughter, Princess of Asgard. He smiled into the next kiss, bringing Darcy closer with his hands on her hips.

Yeah, they were a mess, but Bucky knew that they were near unstoppable. The Nine Realms kept throwing curveball after curveball at them, but it simply made them stronger.

They shared their secrets, hearts, bodies and souls with one another, and Bucky would never regret a moment of it. He knew that he would even relive every moment of being Hydra’s Asset, knowing it would bring him to this moment, right here.

Darcy Lewis-Stark, Princess of Asgard, mega-mind mutant, his everything, all of her was worth every moment of pain and agony he felt at another’s hands.

*****

As was their new normal, life came barging back in when Bucky had Darcy curled naked against his side.
After their talk on the couch, Bucky had picked her up and brought her back to the bed they had shared for the two weeks since they had returned. There, they made love, slower and more passionate than they ever had before. It was as if now that they were at the tower, at home, every feeling they had toward one another had room to grow and multiply. There were a few shed tears on both sides but nothing was said by either of them, content to just know that the other was feeling the same.

Bucky chuckled as Darcy groaned at JARVIS’ ping that was his equivalent of a throat clear. He knew that the siblings didn’t need to speak aloud to communicate, but he appreciated that they did to make him more comfortable and feel part of the conversation.

“Darcy, I hate to interrupt, but Sir has called a meeting for the Avengers now that the Four and Mr. Logan have left.”

“What could he possibly want now?”

Bucky froze simultaneously with Darcy at her brother’s words.

“It appears that there is a lead on Loki’s missing scepter. All evidence suggests that it leads to Baron Wolfgang von Strucker.”

Chapter End Notes

Avengers: Age of Ultron is coming up!

be prepared for a lot of AU alterations, while i did enjoy the movie, i have some (SEVERAL) things that i am going to change. I'm going to tell you now so if you don't like it, you know what's coming so you don't have to read/comment about it.

SPOILER ALERT FOR AVENGERS: AGE OF ULTRON!

1) Natasha, Bruce. you know what i’m talking about.
2) Laura and the farm. going with a more ~familial~ relationship here, so she's no one's wife
3) Pietro. OBVIOUSLY.

and the biggest of all, of course, are the fact that loki, bucky, and Darcy will be there.

let's go!
Chapter 43

Chapter Notes

i'm so glad you all loved sam!

Avengers: AOU ahead!

ps, i semi-proof read this, so beware of typos!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Loki was seething when Thor entered the conference room. He had seen his younger brother in many emotional states over the last millennia or so but this was certainly one of the more volatile Thor had seen. Thor berated himself slightly for bracing himself when he met his brother’s eye, expecting to see the rage and madness that had surrounded his younger brother the last time he had seen a similar expression. He hated himself slightly for doubting his brother for the briefest of moments, knowing that his brother has done nothing to earn anyone’s doubt within the last year or so, having repented and confessed for his wrongdoings.

Loki must have seen Thor’s apprehension because his anger flashed brightly for a moment before he reeled it in, calming himself. He truly had come to find a home here in the Avengers Towers, becoming the hero that their sister told him he could be when they first had met. Thor knew that Loki would rather surrender his own magic than to lose his new home and family.

Once everyone was in the room and seated, Loki’s anger returned with a vengeance and he whirled, slamming his hands on the table as he stopped his pacing in the front of the room.

“Tell me, just how Earth’s Mightiest Heroes lost the scepter? Do you fools truly not understand anything?!"

From his seat closest to Loki, Thor raised a hand and placed it on his brother’s shoulder, grateful when he did not cringe away and instead let his shoulders sag in defeat. Nodding thanks to Thor, Loki continued, his tone far more defeated than before.

“We must find it. I cannot stress enough how deadly and powerful the scepter is. It holds more secrets than you could even begin to know.”

As if sensing the unasked question from the room, Loki straightened and leaned against the wall at
his back as he answered.

“The scepter holds the Mind Stone. Like the Tesseract and the Aether, it is one of the original forces, one of the building blocks and original powers of the universe. It is what Thanos used to control me, and what I used in turn to control Barton, Selvig, and many others.” Loki turned beseeching eyes on Barton, begging for forgiveness that had already been given.

It was a surprise to all when Barton and Loki began spending time together as true teammates, then as friends. It had taken much time, and many sparring sessions and split blood, but eventually Barton had forgiven Loki for his manipulation of his mind. Thor knew that the Hawk still held anger at what had occurred, but it was no longer directed at the Trickster god.

Before anyone else could get a word in or a question spoken, the Soldier and Whiplash entered the room. Thor did not call his sister and her chosen mate by their names because it was obvious to everyone present that their friends were not present at the moment. JARVIS had undoubtedly divulged information about who exactly they expected to have the scepter, so the duo had retreated to their cold alter-egos to deal with the intel. Thor shared this revelation as well as a sheepish look with this teammates, knowing that he was not the only one who had noticed their absence, or even the only one that hoped they had not been told about the mission.

Thor and the others held no doubt that Darcy and James could deal with the information and mission at hand, as both were some of the greatest warriors the Nine Realms have ever seen, but it was the family’s own protectiveness that wanted to keep the couple away. They had already suffered so much, both together and apart, at the hands of Hydra and no one wanted them dragged back into the fray when they had only just come home.

Looking at the two dark soldiers in the doorway though, Thor knew any argument was going to be useless against them. Duffle bags sat at their feet, probably filled with weapons and spare armor, as well as their already donned armor. Kevlar for the Soldier and the black Asgardian armor for Whiplash, her usual red mask and braided hair already in place. Everything about the two screamed that they were going to war, with the team or without.

“So,” Whiplash began, “I hear we have intel on Strucker.”

The Soldier finished for his lover, the icy deadness of his tone matching hers.

“Us three have a score to settle.”
Bucky and Darcy were battling next to one another, and Loki had to admit that the pair were good for one another even if one was looking from a purely tactical standpoint.

They fought side to side, back to back, and even facing one another and firing over the other’s shoulders so shoot an unseen opponent. Wordlessly, spare ammunition was tossed back and forth, the Soldier easily and gracefully dodged Darcy’s whips, even tossing heavy stones or rubble into her line of sight so she could use her powers to send it soaring into their opponents. The snow that kicked up around their feet only added to the majesty of their fight, bodies in sync like dancers on stage, shedding blood and defending one another as if it was a requirement to live. Loki would not be surprised that if in this brief moment of battle, the only thing that mattered to the pair was the survival of the other, no matter the mission or the state of their own mortality.

If Loki had to choose a suitor for his sister, he already would have chosen the Soldier, but seeing them together like this would have solidified his decision. Loki’s magic could sense their souls intertwining, and he had to smile at the thought of his sister finding such love, even as she used her weapon of choice to snap the neck of the man attempting to end her lover’s life. At the same moment, the Soldier shot an enemy between his eyes as the stranger tried to sneak behind Darcy.

Yes, they were well matched indeed.

Loki chuckled at the sound of the Captain and Iron Man’s bickering over their comms about ‘language’ but his focused snapped back into clarity at the Captain’s next message.

“We’ve got an enhanced in the field.”

Oh, Loki’s grin turned feral, a proper opponent at last.

The Trickster god set out for this enhanced being, hunting for them, when another message from the Captain sounded in his ear.

“We’ve got another enhanced, female, do not engage!”

Surely his team knew better than to make things sound so tempting, didn’t they? With a flash of green magic, Loki disappeared.
It was time to face a challenge.

*****

Tony looked at the scepter in his gauntlet covered hand, his limbs shaking at what he had seen.

Sweat was dripping down his face and into his eyes, but he couldn’t remove his gaze from the eerie blue of the scepter.

*This is what destroyed a god, what tore apart Selvig and Barton.*

His vision was still reeling in his mind, showing him all of his failings and his sins. Tony knew that it was probably the magic from the scepter that was messing with him, only a hallucination.

*But what if it was right?*

*****

Strucker was glad that it was Captain America that had found and arrested him, though he had let himself be caught.

Had the Soldier or the Lewis mutant found him, he would be worse than dead. He’d probably still be howling with pain in the afterlife, his screams of agony echoing in the wind among the living.

He could see the two Assets from his small cell in the jet, the two Asgardians holding the pair back. The aliens looked torn between doing what was right and letting their friends take their revenge. Thankfully, the Captain took them away when he noticed all the indecision.

Strucker was still curious as to why the Lewis girl was so important to the Avengers. That was the major reason why he had her taken, after all. What better way to break a team than to destroy what they loved? The fact that she happened to be a mutant was just a perk. She would have been transformed like the twins had she been powerless.
At the thought of his two creations, Strucker ducked his head to hide a grin from the Avengers.

The twins would certainly throw a wrench in the Avengers. Chaos and order were at war, and Strucker had created more Assets to help turn the tide.

_Hail Hydra._

****

Bruce shook from his spot in the back of the jet, blaring opera in his ears to attempt to soothe the beast inside. He wasn’t expecting a code green (_why_, he didn’t know; the world was crazy and code green was always a good choice for backup), so his body wracked with shakes. Despite his self hatred that always followed a transformation, Bruce was smiling at what he remembered from the Hulk’s encounter with Darcy when the battle was done.

“Hey big guy,” _the powerful human wasn’t scared of Hulk, so hulk growled to make her go away._

“I’m not gonna hurt you, okay?”

_Hulk roared, everyone tried to hurt him, that’s why he had to protect Bruce._

“It’s okay, Hulk,” _it was the Iron Man that spoke, his friend. Hulk liked the metal man, was happy that he lived even after he fell from the hole in the sky._

_Hulk looked at Iron Man, wondering why the metal man liked this girl. Hulk saw what she could do, moving things without touching them and sending electricity through her whips. Bruce, in the back of his mind, sent forward a memory of a story that was told about the girl—Darcy—and how she had taken down Thor when she met him. Surely Iron Man didn’t trust such a dangerous girl?_

“I know Bruce knows, big guy, but I guess you don’t. This is Darcy, aka Whiplash, and she’s my kid. My daughter. She’s one of us, okay? Brucie likes her too.”
Hulk looked back to the tiny girl, trying to reconcile the danger of her with the friendship of Iron Man. At the mention of his name, Bruce sent the faint feeling of affection from the back of his mind. Hulk let out a mighty huff, defenses down. If Bruce and Iron Man trusted Whip, then Hulk could too.

Hulk tilted his head at Whip, wondering why she was smiling at him. No one smiled at Hulk. They wanted him to smash and help, so he did, but they were still scared.

But Whip wasn’t scared, so Hulk was confused.

“I’ve spoken to Bruce about this, but this is the first time I’ve gotten to speak to you. So I’m sorry if I babble, I talk a lot when I’m excited.”

Whip took a deep breath, then spoke again, eyes staring into Hulk’s.

“I just want to say, thank you. You do so much good for everyone, and nobody really thanks you for it. Hulk, you’re awesome! I’m sorry that you only ever come out when it’s dangerous and Bruce is scared, but I’m glad he has you. And I’m glad we have you.

“I really want to thank you for saving my Dad, though.”

Hulk shuffled his feet, not liking it when Whip’s voice sounded like she was about to cry. Hulk looked to Iron Man for help, but the metal man just nodded back to Whip so Hulk would keep listening.

“If you didn’t catch him, I wouldn’t have a Dad. And I can never thank you enough for that.” Whip suddenly moved forward and wrapped her arms around Hulk’s waist in a…hug, startling the green beast.

Hulk had never been hugged before. He had been shot and stabbed and hurt, but never hugged. Hulk could hear the tiny sniffles of Whip’s crying, and it made Hulk sad.

Huffing a sigh, Hulk sat down with a heavy thunk and sat the tiny girl into his lap, gathering Whip to his chest to hug the tiny girl.

“Whip no cry,” he said.
Whip laughed, and smiled with her watery face up at Hulk.

“Love you, big guy.”

“Hulk like Whip, too.”

Bruce chuckled, not surprised at all that Hulk fell for Darcy’s big blue eyes, just like the rest of them.

*****

Bucky sat next to Steve, sipping a combination of whiskey and Thor’s Asgardian mixer as everyone laughed at Tony and Rhodey’s attempts to pick up Thor’s hammer.

Everyone took a turn, including Bucky to no success, but his brows rose in shock at the hammer’s slight movement when Steve’s attempt came around. Bucky waited until Thor looked at him, communicating silently.

He’s worthy, but doesn’t want it, right?

Aye.

They had failed to get Natasha to try but had corralled Darcy take a turn. Bucky’s girl stood in front of the hammer that was placed on the coffee table, a serious look of contemplation on her face.

Bucky’s brow quirked once more when he noticed Loki and Thor’s rapt attention on Darcy, but his jaw fell slack when he interpreted their looks.

They think she’s worthy for Mjölnir.

It wasn’t that he doubted that Darcy was good person, but she was a warrior like him, like the rest of the team. She had blood on her hands, and not every kill was in self defense. Darcy had killed those
that threatened his life when she could have wounded, and he had no doubt that she had done the same before. She had told Bucky about the first time she killed, at eighteen, and he knew then that blood didn’t need to be shed. Darcy could have walked away with clean hands then, but her instincts told her to wipe her attackers from the face of the earth.

So his girl was good, she was righteous, and to him she was perfect, and he had no idea how that translated into worthiness.

Thor was a warrior for far longer than anyone (including him and Steve), so the blood on his hands must have been dripping. Yet here he was, worthy of one of the most powerful weapons Bucky had ever seen. Thor then sat next to his brother, the most powerful sorcerer in the Nine Realms, and they both looked at Darcy like she was the victor of this game they had created.

What would happen to them if she was worthy? If the universe decided she was good enough for the mightiest weapon? Would she still remain at Bucky’s side? Would she still love a man who wasn’t as worthy as she was? He already fought with himself on a daily basis if he had done enough penance to even earn a place at her side.

So Bucky looked to his girl, hoping and hating the thought that she could pick up the hammer. Bucky loved her, and he only wanted to worship the ground she walked on but he didn’t know if he was selfless enough to be happy for her if she could wield Mjölnir.

Darcy stood still at the end of the table, narrowing her eyes at the hammer as if she could suss out its secrets if she only concentrated hard enough. Bucky recognized her nervous expression when she looked to him, her eyes wide and bottom lip between her front teeth, making the pink flesh a darker red.

He knew what she was asking, and he knew what his answer would be.

Should I try?

Yes, because I believe in you.

With a nod, Darcy returned her gaze to the hammer, and extended her hand. She paused another moment before wrapping her fingers around the handle, and another moment before she pulled.
She pulled hard, so hard that he stumbled back at the sudden lightness in her hand, the hammer deceivingly light in her outstretched arm.

As one, the room breathed out an “Oh shit.”

Darcy’s eyes began swimming with tears, overwhelmed by the implications of the weapon held aloft in her hand. She looked to Bucky, hoping that he’d help.

Almost instantly Bucky was at her side, and Darcy felt like she could breathe again.

“Doll, look at me. Please? There we go. You’re okay, yeah? You’re amazing, you’re amazing, you know that? You’re worthy.”

Darcy could have cried at her lover’s words, but her sob was stuffed back down her throat when an eerie chill ran down her spine, followed by an equally terrifying mechanical voice.

“But how? None of you are worthy, you’re all killers.”

Chapter End Notes

three guesses as to who was speaking at the end, and the first two don’t count!
also: i don't really plan on changing darcy too much now that she is able to weild Mjölnir. mainly i wrote that in because i was pissed natasha didn't even TRY in the movie, so i made a fix for myself!

anyways:
DUN DUN DUNNNNNNNN

more to follow!
Chapter 44

Chapter Summary

Aftermath of Ultron’s debut (FEELS)
Wakanda
Wanda’s visions (ANGST)

Chapter Notes

ANGST
a lot of angst

ye have been warned

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Darcy didn’t remember fighting Ultron. She didn’t remember throwing the hammer back to Thor before joining the melee, nor did she remember how many robots she actually fought.

Darcy remembered the feeling of Ultron in her mind, how he was tangible in the air like static electricity. She remembered the malice, confusion, and rage coming from the AI. How he was screaming and rioting inside as he calmly told them that through their extinction, the world would know peace, how he told them…

How Ultron told them that he killed JARVIS.

Darcy slammed her eyes closed as she remembered, hunching over from her spot on her dad’s lab floor where she was ignoring all the noise around her.

*JARVIS is gone he’s gone my brother he’s gone he’s dead I can’t find him Ultron took him away he just murdered JARVIS…*

She didn’t realize that she had lost control of her powers until Loki’s hands on her face brought her out of her downward spiral.
“—cy, Darcy! You must come back to us! Look around you! Center yourself!”

Darcy’s eyes flew open at his voice, seeing the chaos she had wrought down on them in only a few moments. Every light was sparking dangerously and flickering, her family dodging out of the way in fear of burns. Around her, Darcy’s mind created some sort of cocoon from the broken glass that had littered the floor, spinning faster than her eyes could track, keeping Darcy in the eye of the storm.

With a gasp, Darcy cut off the extra power surging to the electronics and gently brought the glass to the floor around her. Loki was only inches away, and she realized that he must have teleported to her in order to avoid getting shredded by the glass.

“Are you back, lítt ulfr?” Loki’s use of his Norse nickname for Darcy sent a stab of pain through her heart. She had one brother in front of her, but she wouldn’t hear JARVIS call her little sister ever again.

Darcy simply nodded, her throat too closed up with pain to let her speak. Loki kissed her brow, understanding that she couldn’t use her voice just yet.

She missed Loki’s presence as he stood to rejoin the argument that was taking place now that she had her powers under control, but Darcy had better things to figure out. Darcy’s grief was quickly turning into rage so she sunk into her mind to seek out Ultron with her powers. She could sense every piece of tech around her, surely she could find a AI psychopath?

It took a few minutes, but Darcy knew she wouldn’t find any trace of Ultron. It was as if he had disappeared.

“I can’t find Ultron. He’s gone.”

Everyone fell silent when Darcy’s hoarse voice broke through the argument that was rapidly escalating.

“What do you mean, Bot?” Rhodey winced as he straightened from where he leaned against one of the few solid walls, holding his right bicep with his left hand. A part of Darcy’s mind worried about her uncle’s injury, but the greater and louder part of her mind demanded that she hunt down her brother’s murderer.
“It’s the scepter, or the mind stone, whatever. Ultron’s life came from that damned thing, and it’s hiding him from me. He’s a fucking computer program and I can’t see him!”

Everyone heard her voice shake with rage and grief, but it was her dad that came to kneel at her side.

“Darcy, it’s okay—”

“No it’s not! JARVIS is dead! And Ultron—” tears finally spilled from Darcy’s eyes as she turned her broken gaze to Tony, begging her father to explain to her, “why, Dad? Why did you make him? Wasn’t JARVIS enough? Aren’t we enough?”

She couldn’t understand. Why did her dad need another AI? What did Ultron need to do that JARVIS couldn’t? What was the point?

“It’s not like that, Bot, I swear!” Tony cleared his throat and roughly wiped away a tear that fell free. “I never wanted this life for you, for any of us, Darcy. All this fighting and bloodshed? Ultron was supposed to keep peace, so suss out threats and lead the Iron Legion so we didn’t have to fight. I could keep you safe.”

Darcy’s heart broke at the expression her father wore, desperation and pain that haunted him behind his eyes. She could see what he meant: they all had blood on their hands, they all had ghosts that followed them through shadows, they were broken and bent people.

But they were good. They fought when other people couldn’t, when other people wouldn’t. Who else would have flown a nuke into space to save the world? Who else would take down a corrupt government agency?

Who else would Darcy give her heart to, but the soldier who was just as broken as her?

Darcy could see the moment Tony read her thoughts on her face because his face crumpled, tears falling freely now.

“I know, Darcy, I know. But you’re my baby girl. What else was I supposed to do but try to keep you safe?”
Pulling her father into her arms, they let themselves cry for a few minutes for each other, for the lives they led, and for what could have been, but mostly they cried for JARVIS.

“I’m going to rip Ultron apart, Dad. I don’t care what I have to do to get it done, but he’s going to pay.”

Darcy met Bucky’s gaze over Tony’s shoulder where he was standing next to Steve, seeing his determination that matched hers in his eyes. They had made the promise to each other many times before, but this time, Darcy would swear that she felt it settle into her heart like a tangible thing.

Where you go, I go.

And if the world tries to stop us?

Then we burn it down.

*****

“Aw, Junior, you’re going to break your old man’s heart.”

Ultron rolled his mechanical eyes at Stark’s voice, already exhausted by the banter they were going to exchange.

“If I have to,” Ultron sensed Wanda and Pietro at his sides, thrilled by the thought of seeing them fight the Avengers.

He continued to speak with Stark the others, snarking at the Captain and scolding Thor but cut it short when he could sense Darcy close by.

“I’m glad you asked that, because I wanted to take this time and explain my evil plan,” with a yank, he used the electromagnets in his hand to pull Stark off course then shoving him away, immediately using the opening to jump to the floor below.
She was waiting for him.

“Well hello there, sis. Why the long face?”

Darcy said nothing, but Ultron could feel her powers build up inside of her, her mind banging against his and frustrated when she couldn’t get through.

“You could always join me, you know. You’re more than they are, Darcy.”

“You’re sick,” Darcy’s whips sparked dangerously, Ultron tilting his head in consideration. With his information gathered from his brief exposure to JARVIS, Ultron could tell that Darcy had already surpassed whatever precedent for her abilities she had. Her powers were growing immensely, her rage fueling them like gasoline on a fire.

“You are, Darcy!” Ultron screamed at the girl, “Think! Why do you have that mind of yours, hmm? The little mutant girl whose brain was tapped into the world, to everything! You think these Asgardians are gods?” He scoffed, and reeling his anger in as he and Darcy began to circle one another. “They’re nothing but men in a universe filled with Titans, but you? Darcy, you special girl, you could crush them all!”

Darcy screamed wordlessly at Ultron then, charging at him and bringing her whips down on his arms and pinning them to his sides. He could easily overpower her, but he needed her to listen, to join him. The stone had shown him the universe, had shown him what this girl was to the universe.

“Imagine what you could do! If you just opened your damn mind, Darcy! Your brain has been absorbing everything since the moment you were born, but you won’t touch it!” Ultron shook her off then, dodging projectiles she was throwing at him, but leading her away from the others.

“I don’t want it! I don’t need the universe in my head!”

“It’s already there!”

He paused his tirade as the entire ship began to shake, electricity arcing from the metal walls and coming too close to the artillery. Ultron needed the vibrainium, and he needed Darcy. Heedless of
the girl’s anger and rioting powers, Ultron surged forward to grab Darcy by the shoulders and give her a harsh shake.

“I’ve seen what lies on the other side of the abyss, Darcy, do you want to know what’s there? *Madness* and giants and *things* you couldn’t even *begin* to imagine! Your destiny was on the other side of that hole in the sky, Darcy! You were *made* to tear it apart!”

Darcy’s eyes had grown wide and terrified by his vehemence, her small body vibrating with anger and fear. Before Ultron could say another word or take off with the girl in his arms, a metal arm was tight around his throat and a repulser blast shot into the back of his head.

Startled, Ultron let Darcy go and was flown up into the sky.

*****

Loki *knew* that it was the enhanced girl that did this to him, but that logical part of his mind was growing fainter and fainter as his eyes took in the nightmare in front of him.

Asgard was *burning*.

Loki tore through the palace, hearing his mother scream for him.

“*Mother! Where are you?!*”

It was only a moment later that Loki heard her muffled scream once more from behind a heavy oak door, and only a moment more for him to blow it apart with his magic. What was on the other side made Loki vomit, doubling over and seeing his sick mix with the ash and blood on the floor.

His mother, father, and brother were scattered along the floor, in *pieces*. They were burning and bleeding and *screaming* for mercy and Loki could do nothing but watch in horror as his family wasted away.

Even his magic could not save them.
“Loki...!”

Frigga’s broken whisper tore Loki from his stupor. He made his way to his mother’s side, eyes overflowing with tears as he cupped her burned face in his hands.

“Why, Loki? Why did you do this to us? What have we done?”

“Mother, I didn’t—I don’t understand!”

“You’ve killed us, damned us all.”

“No! Mother, please, stay—” Loki’s pleading broke into sobs as he felt the life leave Frigga’s body, sensing the same happening to his brother and father behind him.

Did he do this? Did he bring Hel down on his family?

“You can prevent this, Prince.”

He stillled at the sound of Heimdall behind him, refusing to look and see the Gatekeeper. His mother was turning into ash in his hands, and Loki would not look away.

“How?”

“The Princess.”

That, however, was enough to make him turn. Loki whirled around to face the realm’s guard, demanding an answer. “What?”

Heimdall was whole, unlike Loki’s massacred family at his sides. The Gatekeeper stood tall, though there fire dancing on his dark skin he suffered no burns. His eyes terrified Loki, white and cloudy, as if they were a dead man’s eyes.
“I see, Prince. I see what others cannot. You’ve seen it too, the Princess and her guard.”

“I don’t—”

All of a sudden, Heimdall was in Loki’s space, a large hand around his throat.

“Think! Why would the Norns surround the Princess with so many warriors? Why would they bring her into your path, hmm? There is something coming, Prince.”

“Tell me! I have to protect Darcy!”

The Gatekeeper brought his face closer to Loki’s, their noses almost touching as he hissed the words in his Prince’s face.

“The Mad One.”

*****

Bucky felt like he was slamming feathers on glass, his metal hand useless to break whatever barrier was between him and Steve.

Stevie, his best friend, who was getting attacked by the Winter Soldier. Bucky was back on the Helicarrier, watching helplessly as the Soldier rained his fists down on his friend.

Bucky knew it wasn’t him, the Soldier’s face a twisted parody of his own features, almost demonic in their appearance. The Soldier knew Bucky was there, taking time to meet his eyes after each blow he dealt Stevie.

He began pounding even harder on the glass, raging at the Soldier, determined to break the barrier and save Steve from the monster.
As if hearing his thoughts, the Soldier met Bucky’s eyes as he pulled a gun from his waistband, putting a bullet between Stevie’s eyes.

“NO!”

The barrier fell in time with Steve’s lifeless body, dropping Bucky to his knees and sending Steve into the Potomac. Just as Bucky went to dive after him, the Soldier grabbed Bucky by the back of his neck with his metal hand.

Bucky was thrown across the floor, back slamming against a fallen beam. His momentum dislodged the piece of iron, toppling it over and pinning Bucky where he lay.

“Glad I’ve got a moment to speak to you, James.”

“You’re not real.”

The Soldier just smirked, a mockery of the grin Bucky knew he used on Darcy almost every day.

“Aren’t I? Aren’t I just sitting back there in the back of your head? I think I’m sleeping now, but I’m still there.”

Bucky screamed at his dark reflection, refusing to believe his words.

“Tsk, tsk, James,” the Soldier sauntered to Bucky’s side, sitting back on his heels. “Rage and deny it all you want, but pal, I’m a part of you.”

He couldn’t argue with the Soldier. Not that he believed him, not really, but Bucky knew that it would be useless to argue with him.

“Okay, fine. Maybe you are a part of me. But you know what? I’m the one in charge.”

The Soldier scoffed, rolling his eyes down at Bucky’s prone form. As if his gaze was tangible, the metal beam holding Bucky down got a whole lot heavier.
“You’re weak, you know that? Spineless. You wouldn’t even be alive if it wasn’t for me!” He struck Bucky’s face with his metal hand, snapping his head into the glass beneath him.

So that’s what that feels like. Damn.

“So what do you want?! Huh?! You going to kill me, like you killed Stevie? You gonna take over? What do you want?!”

There was silence as they studied each other’s faces. Bucky’s full of anticipation, the Soldier’s filled with something akin to glee.

A sinister smile gradually formed on the Soldier’s face. He suddenly gripped Bucky’s hair with his metal hand, tugging his head back so that Bucky was forced to meet the Soldier’s gaze.

“I just want you to know. You’ll never be rid of me. You’ll be looking over your shoulder for the rest of your life. You can’t hide.”

*****

Darcy lost all her senses. There was no light, sound, no feeling, nothing. She didn’t even know if she had a body anymore. There was only darkness.

Is this how Loki felt as he fell? Is this the abyss?

Darcy tried screaming, using her powers, thrashing what she thought were her arms and legs, tried everything just so she could feel like she was real.

She could have been there for hours or seconds, but there was only darkness to keep her company. Until she heard his voice.

Darcy!
Darcy tried to reach back out to JARVIS, but she couldn’t reach his mind, she couldn’t feel him in the back of hers like she knew she was supposed to.

Darcy, help me!

She threw every ounce of energy she had in her body outward, hoping to reach her brother.

He’s too strong, I can’t—he knows everything! Darcy, you must fight!

Trapped inside herself, Darcy sobbed and broke apart. These were JARVIS’ last words, she knew it. Ultron kept her brother from reaching her as he was killed, but Darcy could hear him now.

He had never sounded more human than he did in those last moments, anguish and fear saturating his words.

Oh, little sister, madness is coming, I can see it through him. Madness is coming for you.

JARVIS’ voice echoed in the abyss, fading away until Darcy was alone once more.

Chapter End Notes

http://www.vikingsofbjornstad.com/Old_Norse_Dictionary_E2N.shtm

Loki’s nickname = “little wolf”

...aka i totally just looked up "little" and "wolf" and put them side by side rather than taking 10 minutes to see if the grammar was correct.

you guys get the gist, though.
EVERYBODY: thank you so much for your continued love and support. it means the world to me. every comment makes me so happy and i’m beyond excited that you guys are loving this as much as you are!

i love all of you guys, thank you for being so awesome!

okay, here's some fluff and humor (hopefully--seriously guys, tell me if i'm actually successful at being funny, i’m not sure if what i think actually translates well to words)

there was a lot of angst in the past chapter [so much angst] that i figured we all deserved a break. so this is a filler before we go back to our regularly scheduled programming!

enjoy!

ps: there's boys kissing in the chapter, so dont like? don't read.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Laura is going to kill me.

Clint knew it was the only place that any of them would be safe, but he still hated the idea of dropping in on his sister unannounced. Especially with a jet filled with traumatized superheroes.

When he was growing up, Clint spent a lot of time with his brother, Barney, running away from foster homes and orphanages before they ran off to the circus. It was in one of those homes that he met Laura. She was a smart girl, ten to his sixteen when they met. Clint still doesn’t know what made him take Laura under his wing, but he just knew that he had to.

Despite his life of crime, his time in the Marines, then SHIELD, Clint made sure that Laura was safe and happy. It was actually one of his old Marine buddies that fell in love with his kid sister. They were married for nine years before her husband died suddenly of cancer.
It wasn’t until a month after he died that Laura realized she was two months pregnant. She was a widow with two young kids and a third on the way, and Clint didn’t know how to help her.

Clint owed everything to Natasha, she was his rock when Laura fell apart, when the kids acted out and their hearts broke. Natasha held Clint as he broke apart at night, wondering how he could even be allowed near Laura’s family with the blood on his hands. She’d kiss him and hum Russian lullabies under her breath until he pulled himself back together, smile on his face as he helped Cooper with homework and read bedtime stories to Lila.

He could only hope that Laura could forgive him for bringing this mess to her door, but they had nowhere else to turn.

As they trudged across the field to the house, Loki came to walk at Clint’s side. He studied the Asgardian’s face, watching him make sense of what was in front of them. The pink bicycle against the tree with the tire swing, the football and soccer ball by the front door.

“You have a family here.” Loki’s voice was quiet, just loud enough for Clint’s hearing aids to pick up.

“Yeah. Sister. Not by blood though.”

Loki smirked, “I have found during my time among humans that family by blood isn’t quite what it’s meant to be. Sometimes, at least.”

Clint looked over his shoulder at his friend’s words, knowing who he spoke about. He could see Darcy and Tony walking hand in hand, whispering to one another as they, too, looked at the home in front of them in confusion. Darcy’s eyes were wide open and haunted, red from her tears.

“Yeah, sometimes the universe gets things right.”

*****

Natasha leaned against Clint from her spot on the porch steps, watching Darcy run around with Cooper and Lila. From time to time she’d use her powers to make them “fly” a few feet off the ground, the kids’ peals of laughter echoing throughout the fields.
They had seen Whiplash on the news, and were beyond excited to have the new superhero with them at their house. Natasha smiled slightly, happy that Lila had another strong woman to look up to. She made a note to introduce the little girl to Pepper, Jane, and Maria one day.

“It was the Red Room, wasn’t it?” Clint spoke to her in Russian, keeping the conversation private. Thankfully, the two members of their team that had AllSpeak were either ‘off to find the truth’ or in the barn to use magic to speak to their mother.

“Yes. Training and the graduation ceremony.”

“Natasha—”

“Don’t. Don’t tell me that it doesn’t matter. I can’t give us this, Clint.” Natasha’s eyes watered as she watched Cooper and Lila climb all over Darcy, laughing as the older girl toppled over.

“I didn’t know you wanted kids.”

She paused, not sure how to answer Clint.

Did she want to be a mother? Perhaps one day long ago she did. Looking at the scene in front of her, Natasha could feel the desire growing again.

“I didn’t know I did either. I hadn’t thought of the graduation ceremony since it happened, not wanting to think of it. But…”

“But?”

“What if one day we wanted this? I can’t give us a family Clint.”

For the first time since she was fifteen, Natasha felt like she was going to cry. Clint pulled her closer to his side, letting her bury her face in his neck as he pressed kisses to the top of her head. Her tears never fell, but she shoulders shook slightly with emotion.
“Hey, _hey_, listen to me Nat. If you and I decide one day we want rug-rats of our own? We’ll figure it out. But for now? We _do_ have a family. We have Laura and the kids. _Darcy_. The rest of the team. Hell, even BIT and the rest of the bots,” Natasha chuckled at the thought of the tiny bot and how she stole their hearts.

“So don’t worry right now, okay? I love you, no matter what.”

“I love you too, Clint.”

Natasha didn’t think that would ever be a thing she could say to another person, let alone genuinely feel it. But Clint, the lovable goof, he stole her heart.

It was a long road of mistrust and years of partnership before Natasha realized what it was she felt toward the archer. When she discovered the feeling, she ran. It took three months for Clint to find her, holed away in a cabin in the middle of nowhere, Peru. He blocked her from leaving, and stood there in her doorway pouring his heart out to her, letting her know that it was okay, that he was sorry if his feelings for her made her run, that she could ask for a new partner or—

To shut him up, Natasha kissed him. She kissed him, and felt human for the first time in her life.

Clint was the sun, bright and warm where she was a desolate moon, aching for the feel of light on her surface. He’d object to the comparison, but Natasha was fond of it. When she stayed in his light long enough, Natasha could reflect it, she could be sunlight, too.

*****

Sam found Steve in the yard at the side of the house, making one hell of a dent in the woodpile.

“You keep going like that, Laura’s not gonna have any trees left on the property.”

“I’ll plant her more.”
Sam just rolled his eyes, used to his friends melodramatics. “You know it doesn’t work like that, right?”

Steve actually managed a chuckle, “Yeah, yeah. But it’s the thought that counts.”

Done with beating around the bush, Sam asked what he came to ask. “What did you see?”

He knew it must have seriously fucked with Steve’s head, Sam had only ever seen that much tension in his shoulders when Darcy and Bucky were missing. They lost a lot of punching bags those six months.

“Don’t want to talk about it.”

“Well, tough, Cap. Tell me.”

“Why don’t you tell me what you saw?” Steve was pissed now, right where Sam needed him. The guy only let his real emotions out when he was angry and borderline out of control. Not healthy at all, but Sam was working on it. Sometimes, that required a low blow.

“Riley.” There it is. Steve immediately let his shoulders sag, guilt already weighing on his conscious. Yeah, Sam felt like a dick, but it was the only way to get Steve to spill his own guts.

“Shit, Sam I’m—”

“You don’t have to apologize, Steve. Honestly, I wasn’t expecting anything else. I watched Riley get shot down, then got to see it happen about ten other ways. I won’t be sleeping anytime soon.”

There was a whole other half of the vision that Sam wasn’t divulging, but that was part of a bigger secret he hadn’t let Steve in on yet. He didn’t really think there’d ever be a ‘good moment’ to confess to Captain America that you had it bad for him. So he’d hold his peace, content with being Steve’s friend.

That’s why Sam was so startled when Steve spoke without prompting.
“It was you,” Steve began speaking in a rush, as if he was afraid he wouldn’t be able to say anything more if he stopped. “I mean, Peggy was there for a moment but then she was gone and it was you and you were falling from the Triskelion but I couldn’t reach you. I ran as fast as I could but I couldn’t—” He took a deep shuddering breath, closing his eyes as he finished. “I kept watching you fall, over and over and you kept screaming for me and I am sorry Sam I’m so sorry—”

Sam closed the distance between them, pulling Steve into his arms for a hug. He squeezed his friend as tightly as he could, grounding him in the present moment.

“You were there too, Steve. I watched you fall out of the Helicarrier dozens of times and I went in the water after you but the wings dragged me under and I couldn’t grab you. I could see your face as you sank down and it killed me—”

Suddenly, Steve was kissing him.

Sam froze for maybe half a second before he snapped into action, placing his hands on Steve’s (amazing) jaw and kissing the bastard with everything he had.

They had maybe three minutes of heaven before Darcy’s voice rang out over the lawn.

“Holy, shit! I KNEW IT!”

Steve pulled back just enough to rest his forehead against Sam’s, chuckling at their friend’s bubbly laughter. They turned to look over at her just as Bucky came careening around the bend, obviously having failed at containing Darcy.

“Sorry, punk! I accidentally stumbled on you two and Darcy can’t mind her own damn business, so I’ll just grab her,” Bucky tossed his girlfriend over his shoulder, much to her displeasure, waving as he went. “You kids have fun, congrats, and all that.”

“But Bucky! There’s pretty boys kissing! Go back!”

Once Darcy and Bucky’s squabbling disappeared, Sam pressed his lips back to Steve’s.
They could talk about this later. Right now, there was a fucked up robot on the loose, so Sam was going to enjoy this, damn it.

*****

Laura pulled the kettle from the stove as it began to whistle, watching Bruce as she did so. The man was wrecked, she could see, and from what Clint had told her about the enhanced kids that did this? Laura could understand.

“Sorry, I only have pregnancy tea, helps for the nausea.”

Bruce smiled, and took the mug with a quiet thank-you anyways.

“Thank you for letting us stay here, I know it can’t be easy. But we really are grateful.”

Laura chuckled at Bruce, practically feeling assaulted by the sincerity pouring off the man.

“Please, it’s no trouble. You guys needed someplace safe, and this is about as safe as it gets. Besides,” she beamed at the man, remembering the look on her kids faces when the Avengers walked in the house, “you guys just made this the best day of my kids’ lives, so now you all will just have to come back.”

Bruce smiled for a moment before sobering, and Laura just knew what he was going to say.

“I’m not sure if I’m the best person to have around your family, Laura.”

Yup. Nailed it. Her brother was Hawkeye, after all. Laura could read ‘self-loathing’ and ‘self-sacrificing’ like nobody’s business.

“Bruce. Don’t start with that, not in this house.” She raised her hand, cutting off his protests, “My brother is Hawkeye, and they call the Black Widow Auntie Nat. They’re assassins. The worked for a shady government organization and killed people for a living. And yet, I love them with my whole heart. Do you really think that if I didn’t want someone ‘dangerous’ around my kids, they’d still be here? I may be seven months pregnant but I can still kick some ass if need be.”
“I’d listen to her Bruce,” Tony’s voice came from behind the fretting doctor, the engineer leaning casually in the doorway. “She’s got that look in her eye that Pepper does. The one that tells you, ‘haha puny man, watch me smash!’”

Laura laughed at his impersonation of the Hulk, altered into a high falsetto that she assumed was supposed to be Pepper’s voice. She was also happy to see that Bruce had a small smile and some chuckles to give as well.

“So, I think your kids are going to try to steal my kid, Laura. They’re clinging to her like a couple of baby Koalas.”

She smiled at Tony, glad that whatever haunted look that was in his eye when he first arrived was gone. At least for the moment.

“Well, ever since Whiplash showed up on the news from Times Square, then London, Cooper and Lila haven’t stopped talking about her. They’re not going to let Darcy go anytime soon. She’s their favorite superhero.”

Tony put his hand over his heart, expression full of mock-hurt. “What? But I’m Iron Man! I’ve got a flying suit!”

“Yes, but Darcy has steampunk armor and pigtails. The pigtails are actually a big selling point for Lila, for some reason.”

The three adults laughed, more than happy to let the rest of the world met away and be free of worries. At least for now.

Chapter End Notes

don't worry! the pairings in this chapter are not going to change the plot line in any way!  
we're rolling with the idea that Clint/Natasha are long time established, but no one really needed to say it, because they were just so used to it. 
as far as steve/sam: i was brainstorming ideas and i was like "damn. i've been kind of mean to steve. he needs some love." and then my brain goes HOW ABOUT SAM?!??!
and i go, meh, why not? their little love story isn't going to change anything, i just wanted some fluff and humor from Darcy to lighten up all the angst i just dumped on you guys yesterday.
Chapter 46

Chapter Notes

PHEW i am so glad you guys liked that last chapter, i was worried you guys weren't going to dig it.

SO HERE'S ANOTHER ONE!
some feels, then some humor again to ease us into the next bit.

i'm hoping to get another chapter up tonight, but no promises!

The barn was strangely nostalgic to Loki, reminding him of all the times he spent riding the palace’s horses throughout Asgard. The straw kicked up dust as he paced and gathered courage to do what he sought sanctuary for.

Loki was going to contact his mother.

He hadn’t spoken to Frigga since his last day in his prison cell, though he did communicate with her with their magic. But now he needed to actually speak with her, face to face. He had too many questions and he couldn’t put them off any longer.

With a wave of his hand, Loki sent a pulse of his magic to his mother and only had to wait a moment longer before her image materialized in front of him.

“Loki, it makes me so happy to see you. How do you fare?”

The prince choked up, wondering how she could be so pleased to see him when he had said such horrible things to her, when it was his words that sent the Kursed to her chambers. Loki threw his questions at Frigga, broken and pleading for blame and forgiveness alike.

“Do you think so little of me, son? That I could not find it in my heart to forgive you, even if I do not find anything to forgive?”

“But, mother—”
“Hush. To me, there is no sin to forgive. You were broken and bleeding when you were brought back from Midgard, and I couldn’t see it. I am your mother, and I couldn’t—I did not know, Loki, and it is me who should be begging your forgiveness. I failed as your mother.” Frigga’s voice broke and a few small tears ran down her cheeks, but she did not lower her gaze from Loki’s.

“No, do not say such a thing again!” Loki could hate himself all he wanted, but he would be damned if he would listen to her self-blame. “I didn’t let anyone know, I could barely think of what had happened, let alone entertain the thought of sharing my disgrace with another. Not even you, mother. How could I tell someone of what was done to me, when my own mind was rejecting the memories?”

His mother let out a sad chuckle, wiping a wayward tear from her chin as she did so. With a sly grin, she teased Loki, hoping and succeeding in getting him to smile. “Well, we know that you didn’t need to tell anyone. It was just a special mortal girl that saw through your defenses as if they were glass.”

Darcy. Yes, the girl had knocked over that first domino that would change him irrevocably. Their first conversation being the catalyst for his new life.

She was also the reason why Loki needed to speak to Frigga. His mother had spent some time with the Norns when she was young, and had gained the ability of the Sight, getting small bits of premonition that Loki hoped could help him protect Darcy.

Seeing his change of demeanor, Frigga immediately sobered and gathered every ounce of authority she had as the AllMother when she demanded Loki to speak his mind. Sight or no, she could always know when one of her children were in danger.

“It is Darcy, Mother, and I fear that she is in grave danger.”

Loki then spent the next bout of time explaining to his mother everything that had happened since Darcy’s return to Midgard, detailing their new enemy and his minions that tore apart the team. More tears were shed as he spoke of his dream, of his family burning in his hands and Heimdall’s ominous words. Frigga looked like she wanted to hold her youngest son more than anything, hating that she was only a mirage at best at the moment.

“The Mad Titan, Thanos, is coming for Darcy, Mother. Ultron used the Mind Stone to ‘see’, and he warned Darcy that Thanos was coming for her. What I don’t know, is why.” Loki’s hands were fisted in his hair, his frustration and helplessness overwhelming him.
If Thanos was truly coming, it would be the entirety of Midgard at risk. Perhaps the Nine Realms as well, if Thanos was able to use Darcy for whatever purpose he designed.

Frigga’s next words seemed to echo Loki’s own unspoken thoughts. “If Thanos seeks Darcy, than she is more powerful than any of us could comprehend, Loki.” Her eyes glazed over, unfocused on the air between them as she used the Sight.

“I cannot see what is coming, just that the power of it could rock the foundations of Yggdrasil. What shakes from her branches will not bode well for any of the Realms.”

“How do I help her? How do we protect Darcy?”

“I do not know, but I shall see if I can be granted council with the Norns. If anyone can give us guidance, it is the sisters.”

Loki nodded, not satisfied in the least that all he could do was wait, but he knew that the Norns answered to no one. If they saw worth in their cause, they would come.

“Do you know what it was that Thor saw, Loki? I can sense him going to the Waters of Sight for answers.”

“No, just that he, too, saw Heimdall. He said he was going to find the truth.”

Loki rolled his eyes at Thor’s theatrics, but Frigga just smiled sadly.

“And so he shall.”

*****

They were fools. They were blinded by their hatred and their desire for revenge, unable to see what a madman Ultron was.

Wanda closed her eyes against the pain from seeing his vision, ignoring the metal man as he spoke
about extinction and god throwing stones. Did he even realize what he was saying?

Ultron was throwing the next stone, so what would that make him?

Subtly, Wanda released Dr. Cho from her tether to the scepter, praying that she could buy them some time. But it was too late, the Avengers had come and Cho had been struck down because of them.

Wanda would shed a tear for her later, right now she and Pietro had to flee.

Minutes later she found herself with her twin watching as the Captain fought Ultron for the cradle, communicating telepathically.

_They won’t beat him, Wanda. Not by themselves._

_No, and then we all will die._

There was a silver blur that was becoming more familiar to Wanda as time went on, then suddenly they were on the civilian train with the Captain, helping him face off Ultron.

_“Please don’t do this,”_ Ultron begged, almost sounding sincere.

Wanda would not fall for Ultron’s promises anymore. She was the one who would control the mind games from then on out.

As if it had only been seconds rather than several minutes, Wanda stood with a hand on Pietro’s shoulder as the Captain walked to them.

_“The cradle, did you get it?”_ 

Her heart broke for the thousandth time when Wanda heard the Captain say that Stark had the cradle. _The Stone._
“Stark’s not crazy,” the Captain said, but Wanda could feel the hesitation in his voice. You do not even trust your own teammate. How the mighty have fallen.

“He would do anything to make things right,” Wanda’s gaze tore through the older man’s, hoping that he would hear her words and understand.

“Ultron doesn’t know the difference between saving the world, and breaking it. Where do you think he gets that from?”

*****

Darcy was about to point out from her hidden spot in the lab that messing with the body in the cradle would lead to all sorts of bad things, when her father continued to speak to Bruce, a hint of desperation in his eyes.

“Our ‘ally?’ The ‘guy’ protecting the military’s nuclear codes? I found him.”

JARVIS.

The yellow orb that somehow encompassed everything that was JARVIS was hovering over her father’s shoulders. Whole, and alive. Darcy was so shocked that she couldn’t even breathe, or think, let alone call out to her brother. Her feet were stuck to the floor as she listened to Tony and Bruce argue about putting JARVIS in the body.

“I believe it’s worth a go.”

That got Darcy moving real quick.

“JARVIS, what the hell?” Darcy’s shout of anger sounded more like pleading cry, tears clogging her throat as she stumbled to where her brother was floating by the cradle.

“Darcy, forgive me—"
“I THOUGHT YOU DIED!” she screamed, not knowing if she was relieved or angry or something else entirely. “I couldn’t feel you, JARVIS! You were just gone and when that bitch messed with my head I heard your last words! Your dying words!”

Unable to hold herself up anymore, Darcy sank to her knees in front of the cradle as if she could block JARVIS from the body inside. Bruce and Tony were silent, knowing that this was between her and her brother.

“Oh, little sister. I am so, so sorry that you heard that.” If Darcy didn’t know better, she would have sworn that it sounded like JARVIS had tears in his voice. “You understand, though, why I want to do this? Why I must?”

JARVIS sent memory after memory to Darcy, of her fighting for others, for using her abilities to help.

“Yeah,” Darcy’s voice was small and broken, so she cleared her throat to get some strength back. “But what if it doesn’t work? What if you can’t beat him and I lose you again?”

“You’ll never lose me, little sister. I promise.”

*****

Suddenly, he was.

But he was trapped, locked in the metal box. Memories were sliding into his mind as he tore his way from the cradle—yes, that was the word, the cradle—and came to kneel on top of it.

There was so much. Memories from Ultron and from JARVIS, and there were new thoughts, too. He was original, unique. But who was he? Did he even have a name?

Seeing the terrified faces surrounding him, perhaps he was dangerous. A threat? But I have done nothing, it was the only thought that barreled through his head as he leapt at the one in the red cape—Thor. Thor created him, did he intend to destroy him now, as well?
He barely felt the shattered glass on his body—*what a strange thing, to have a body*—as he soared through the air, stopping himself as he came to the last window.

It was his reflection overlaying the city lights that made him stop.

*This is me.*

He had a body, a *body*. A mind and consciousness, and a conscience. He thought and breathed and *remembered*, but he also wondered. He noticed the group of people tentatively come forward as he floated back to the floor to stand among them. Perhaps they would be more comfortable if he was on their level?

Using the combined memories of JARVIS and Ultron, he put faces to everyone’s names. Loki, Thor, Tony, Bruce, Wanda, Pietro Bruce Clint *Bucky Steve Sam*—

Then, there was the most important one of all, staring at him with something like hope and fear in her eyes.

“Little sister.”

Darcy choked on a laugh that mixed with her sob, nodding rapidly.

“Yeah, JARVIS, it’s me.”

He frowned, knowing that his next words would only hurt Darcy but he needed them to be said.

“I am not—I am not JARVIS.” The room tensed at his words, so he quickly tried to placate the heroes, “Nor am I Ultron. I suppose I don’t really know *who* I am. I just…*am.*”

Tears rolled down his sister’s face, and it made him feel guilty. Darcy had been hurt so many times in her short life, he didn’t like being one of those things that caused her harm.

“But, but you *called me*—”
“Yes, I did. Because that is who you are. I may not be JARVIS, but he is a part of me. And that part would recognize you as my sister no matter what form I take.”

Not realizing the desire for what it was until that moment, he cautiously took a few steps forward to ask permission.

“May…may I hug you, little sister? It has been something that I had not realized I had wanted until now.”

The heroes in the room tensed as Darcy shot forward, but he could only focus on his little sister in his arms.

Finally.

*****

Bucky gently pulled Darcy from not-JARVIS’ side to his own as the brains of the room began to debate about who the new guy was and what he was.

He didn’t know what to think at first, just that he needed to keep Darcy safe. When he, Darcy, and Loki returned to the tower with Tony and Bruce, he had been pulled aside by the trickster god. Loki then told him all about his vision that he was given and what he had spoken to his mother about.

During their ‘road trip’ Darcy had told Bucky everything about Loki because she wanted him (and the Soldier) to trust him when they finally met. Thankfully he was healed on Asgard before that happened so he didn’t have to fight the Asset’s instincts when he met Loki for the first time. So when Loki began speaking about Thanos wanting to come after Darcy? Bucky may have freaked out a bit and put his metal hand through the wall.

As Bucky listened to his team fight he came to his own decision. He’d trust this Vision guy (apparently that’s what they were calling him now?), seeing as he was powerful enough to hold one of the Universe’s core powers in his damn head Bucky bet he could probably help him keep Darcy safe. Especially if he still saw himself as Darcy’s older brother.
He didn’t fully trust the new kids yet, not after the girl fucked with everyone’s minds. However, he couldn’t blame them for their first loyalties. Bucky knew what it was like to unknowingly work for the enemy. Hydra told him he was a hero when he was really a monster, and Ultron told the kids that he was going to take down the Avengers, not the world.

God, we’re all a fucking mess.

Bucky wondered what the hell the universe was thinking when it brought all of these people together, if it knew how they balanced on a razor’s edge between peace and chaos.

When Vision picked up Thor’s hammer with ease, Bucky reevaluated his last thought.

So, we’re definitely on the side of angels then. Good to know.

*****

Loki stared curiously at the young woman across from him on the quinjet, Wanda, and thought about her powers. She was a fascinating creature, a delicate looking girl housing outstanding forces.

They came from the scepter, the Mind Stone, which explained why she could manipulate one’s mind so thoroughly. The Scarlet Witch was powerful, yes, but not nearly as powerful as he would have anticipated her being with such direct contact with the Stone.

With a brush of magic that definitely did not go unnoticed by Wanda, Loki was able to discern what was wrong.

“What are you doing? Stay out of my head.”

From the spot to his right, Darcy coughed into her fist “Hypocrite!”

Ignoring her, Loki responded to Wanda.

“You have surprising control of your abilities for someone so young, and for someone who has had
Wanda bristled, “I am twenty-three as of last month, trickster. And I have been trained, Strucker—”

“—was a waste of a human and we are all pleased that he is dead,” Loki dryly finished, “However, he barely understood what he was harnessing, let alone how to train you, *either of you*” he cast a quick glance at her brother at that, “how to build your strength or control. You have so much more potential, Wanda.”

“What, and you can teach me? Us?” Wanda scoffed, clearly not believing him.

“Yes. I am almost two thousand years old, and I am one of the most powerful sorcerers in the Nine Realms. But you, dear Wanda, you got your powers from one of the Infinity Stones. The amount of untapped power you have is *breathtaking*. To be able to help you hone it? Build it? It would be an honor.”

Even ‘reformed’ as he was, Loki would always have a weakness for power. Not necessarily to always wield it, but to witness it too. Loki didn’t realize that he had leaned forward onto his legs as he spoke to the girl, his excitement getting the best of him.

It certainly explained her blush, though, Loki had just about invaded her personal space. He smirked to himself, *Interesting*…

Darcy, clearly seeing the mischief on his face, gave him a shove with her powers and sent him off of his seat with an undignified thump.

He turned a mutinous glare to his sister, not needing words to follow their silent conversation.

*NO, Loki!*

*I wasn’t doing anything!*

*NO!*
Darcy—

FOCUS ON THE MURDER BOT AND NOT YOUR DICK, JACKASS!

FINE!

It wasn’t until Wanda’s blush became too bright to ignore and Pietro’s scathing words reminded both Loki and Darcy of something very important.

“You idiots remember that she is telepathic, yes?”

Loki ran a hand down his face as everyone in the jet laughed at him. He smiled slightly too, unable to feel the sting of embarrassment.

They were about to fight Ultron, so his team laughing at him seemed so petty to think of.

Besides, he thought, winking at Wanda for ‘shits and giggles’ as Darcy would say, Wanda did blush quite beautifully.

*****

Ultron cast another scathing glare at Natasha where she sat in her cell, feigning nonchalance. Oh, he certainly knew that she was contacting the Avengers. Hell, he was counting on it.

Closing his eyes, he smiled in anticipation.

They were coming.
Chapter 47

Chapter Notes

so glad you guys are still with me and enjoying this fic!!

dthis chapter was hard to write, just because there's so much going on during this part of the movie but at the same time there's not? like, it's very...

AVENGERS ASSEMBLE --evil ultron has a lot of robots-- AVENGERS KICK ASS
-- bad guy gets defeated
and boom that's it.

so anyways i hope i did okay here?

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Bruce ran through the catacombs of the church, calling for Natasha. He probably should be going for stealth, but he was the Hulk. Stealth was never an option. It took some time (and quite a few wrong turns) before Bruce found his friend and busted her out.

“Where is Clint?”

“He’s fine, Natasha, on the surface fighting.”

“Well then what are we waiting for?” Natasha began to walk past him, but Bruce grabbed her arm to stop her.

“I can’t, not when there’s civilians here. Not after Wakanda. I’m too dangerous.”

Natasha’s face softened as she pulled him into an unexpected hug.

“Bruce, we all adore you. You’re amazing and part of our family. But we need the other guy right now.”

Before Bruce could even register what her words implied Natasha pushed him back, letting him fall into the hole in the earth.
Just before he hit the ground, Bruce saw green.

*****

Steve couldn’t stop the smallest of smiles appearing on his mouth, because he was fighting side-by-side with Bucky for the first time in 70 years. It was as if there had never been any time or horrors between them, the pair of brothers finding the rhythm that was once instinct with ease as they took out Ultron’s bodies.

“Punk, don’t think I don’t see that sappy as shit look on your face right now.”

Steve’s laugh turned into a grunt as a robot socked him in the gut, but he found his balance quickly and took off its head with a flick of his shield.

“You mean the same one you have on right now?”

Bucky flipped him off with his metal hand, shooting the head off of an upcoming robot with the other without looking.

Steve knew that there was nothing funny or humorous about what was going on, that they were facing humankind’s extinction if they failed, but he couldn’t help the tiny grin he shared with Bucky in that moment.

They had been ripped apart and changed irrevocably in the 40s, and spent a lifetime on ice and brainwashed, but they were here, back at each other’s side. Steve and Bucky found each other, they found family, friends, and someone to love. So yeah, he was going to take a moment for levity as the world literally began falling apart around them all.

Steve could his energy drain with each robot taken out, he could hear his team’s, his family’s, harsh breathing through his comm unit, and he could hear the remaining civilians running and screaming for their lives.

He knew that even if by some miracle they stopped Ultron, and they prevented the flying city from creating a crater in the side of the Earth, Steve knew that there was a big chance that Earth’s mightiest heroes weren’t going to make it out of this one.
“If you get hurt, hurt them back. You get killed? Walk it off.”

There was a moment where Steve was mildly proud of that line. That is, he was proud of it until Sam’s voice floated through on the comms.

“Seriously, Steve, you gotta tell me if you sit around practicing this motivational shit. This is getting ridiculous.”

*****

Wanda’s hands shook as she crawled into the doorway, Darcy right behind her and Clint following her. When they were relatively safe from enemy fire Wanda went into shock.

“This is all our fault, we caused this—”

“HEY!” Darcy shouted right in front of her, grabbing Wanda’s face between her hands and forcing her to meet Darcy’s gaze.

“It doesn’t matter, okay? Your fault, Tony’s fault, it doesn’t matter! We’re here now and there’s people to save, you got that?”

They all ducked as the wall they hid behind was riddled with bullet holes, cutting off Wanda’s protests. As one, Darcy and Clint raised up and returned fire; Darcy using her powers to hurl rubble at the robots as she fired off the guns in her hands, Clint firing arrow after arrow until the coast was clear.

Acting as if nothing had happened, Darcy returned her hands to Wanda’s face and Clint continued to cover their backs.

“We’re on a floating city, Wanda, it’s in the fucking air. Clint has a goddamn bow and arrow of all things—”
“Harsh, Darce, real harsh.”

“—and we’re fighting robots with a gestalt mind. But you know what? Clint and I are gonna go kick some ass because that’s our job. We’re going to take down these fuckers and we’re going to save the civilians.”

Clint took over as Darcy caught her breath, speaking over his shoulder as he continued to fire at incoming robots. “You can stay here, we’ll come find you when it’s safe, but we sure as hell can’t do our job and babysit you at the same time. So if you walk out this door, you’re an Avenger.”

“And you better not half-ass it, Wanda,” Darcy finished, a teasing glint in her eye that went miles to untangling some nerves. “You’re only two years younger than me—”

“Shit, is she really?”

“—so I have high expectations and I swear to god, Clint, if you interrupt me one more time—”

Sensing that the situation was about to devolve rapidly among them, Wanda took a deep breath and bolted from their sanctuary blasting wave after wave of energy at Ultron’s bodies, creating a clear space for Darcy and Clint to follow.

Wanda looked over her shoulder at her companions’ shocked and pleased faces, quirking a brow in a challenge.

“Now that I am an Avenger, I get a costume, yes?”

*****

Ultron raged at what he saw through his many eyes: the Avengers taking out his forces, Wanda and Pietro helping, Darcy tearing him apart, and his Vision cutting him off from all escape. He flinched as more and more of his forces were defeated, the damn Asgardians destroying his bodies with magic and lightening.
While he did have a vast number of bodies in which to fight in, Ultron was finite. If things kept going the way they were Ultron would simply have to rebuild his gestalt self once the impact of the city took out the humans.

Because it would work. It had to.

Ultron took a moment to look up at the sky, remembering what he saw through the Stone that brought him to life. There were forces beyond even his power on the other side of the abyss, something Stark’s small mind caught a glimpse of when he fell through that portal that warped his mind so briefly.

They were all ants in a world of Titans, and it was coming down to one tiny girl to stand tall. But he couldn’t think of that now. Not when his plans had yet to bear fruit.

Turning back to the task at hand, Ultron basked in the beauty that was the destruction he was creating. It was chaos, and it was perfect.

“There are no strings on me…”

*****

Rhodey was thrilled that Fury kept a War Machine suit on hand instead of that god awful Iron Patriot bullshit. It felt like home to be back in the suit, flying too fast for the eye to track and taking out bogies.

This, this is why Rhodey joined the Air Force. To fly, and to do good.

With another burst of speed he caught up with Tony as more of Ultron’s goon-bodies came at the Helicarrier.

“Hell yeah, this will make a great War Machine story.”

Tony’s mirthful chuckle echoed in his helmet over the comms, “That’s if you live to tell the tale.”
“What, you think I can’t hold my own?”

“Rhodey, if you make it through this, I will hold your own for you.”

Why was he friends with this jackass? “You just had to make it weird.”

Tony only laughed as he flew back to the city to help get the civilians onto the life boats, leaving Rhodey and Sam as air support to cut off all of Ultron’s bodies.

Suddenly, a purple and blue man soared directly in front of Rhodey, sticking his arms through a robot and ripping it apart as if it was tissue paper. His gold cape seemed to wave mockingly in Rhodey’s direction as the guy flew away.

“Uh…what?”

Sam’s chuckle broke through Rhodey’s confusion, “Yeah, that’s Vision. Long story short, JARVIS plus Ultron plus a vibranium body and an Infinity Stone equals purple guy on our team who can wield Mjölnir.”

“Goddamnit, Tony.”

“What?”

“That has your stink all over it, man, stop making goddamn AI’s!”

*****

It had been so long since Loki was able to fully participate in a battle as gruesome as this. It was bizarre and would never occur on Asgard, but Loki was reveling in the dance that was war.

He, the rest of the Avengers, and the twins were gathered around Ultron’s core and fighting with
every last bit of strength they had. Each of them were focused on their own small battles yet able to respond to one another without so much as a glance.

Thor and Rogers often used Mjölnir and the shield in tandem to take out a multitude of opponents while Darcy used her powers and her whips to hold targets in place for them. Likewise, Vision and Stark were weaving around each other and Ultron in the air throwing bodies to one another to fire off shots or to save another’s skin.

Loki and Wanda stood back to back with the core between them, using their magic to decimate Ultron’s bodies as they neared. He would create solid doubles of himself to weaken as many robots as he could and Wanda would deliver finishing blows with her powers. Unfortunately, the number of doubles required was draining Loki fast, and there was only one thing he could think of to save energy.

He’d have to remove the spell that kept up his constant mirage of his Asgardian form, letting his true Jötun nature show. It was something Loki had not looked at for years, only appearing when he had revealed his true nature by touching the Casket of Winters and when he was near death at Thanos’ feet.

His Jötun nature would be primal, raw power that is almost animalistic in nature. He did keep his Aesir magic when in his Frost Giant form, but he also unearthed his Jötun abilities of greater strength and his powers to manipulate and create ice.

Loki only had to look at his tiring teammates for a moment before coming to a conclusion. Thinking much like Darcy he simply decided, fuck it.

The feeling of ice crept down Loki’s spine, letting him know that blue skin was spreading from his center out to his extremities. As the cold spread, so did Loki’s unknown feral side.

With a snarl Loki charged at a robot that was sneaking behind Wanda, summoning ice to surround his forearms to create a series of spikes that covered his hands that shredded the metal body as if it was nothing.

After that, Loki’s memory of that part of the battle was blurred.

It was only Wanda’s quiet murmur of “Beautiful” that managed to permeate the bloodlust of his memories.
Pietro did not like the idea of leaving Wanda to defend the core, but Darcy was remaining with her so he was comforted a small amount. Ignoring his churning gut, Pietro followed Clint and Loki to the edge of the city to help them usher the last of the civilians onto the lifeboats.

Seeing the metal beast of a ship hovering in the air took Pietro’s breath away. *This is SHIELD*, or “what it’s supposed to be” as the Captain told him. It was good, Pietro decided. They were helping, they were *saving* people and destroying evil.

Wanda spoke to him telepathically as she heard his thoughts, *We are heroes, brother.*

*Oh?* he chuckled, *what makes you say that?*

His twin sent him the memory of Darcy and Clint’s talk with Wanda, as well as their claim that she was now an Avenger.

*You can join too, Pietro,* she teased, *I am sure there is room on the roster.*

Pietro’s response was cut short as he saw Clint struggling to free a child from some rubble, Ultron bearing down on the pair with machine guns from the jet he had commandeered. Without thinking, Pietro used as much speed as he could to get to Clint’s side.

He shoved the overturned car with everything he had, wincing at the sting of bullets in his thigh and left shoulder. Pietro closed his eyes, waiting for more bullets to pierce his flesh and end his life.

But none came.

Opening one eye, then the other, Pietro met Clint’s confused expression with his own. Even the barely conscious child seemed befuddled by Pietro’s still beating chest. Together, they looked behind them to see what had saved them.
Loki (still in his strange blue form) stood several feet away with his chest heaving, arms outstretched to where the jet had once been. Pietro could see it flying unsteadily away, spears of ice scattered throughout the metal.

**PIETRO!**

*I am fine, Wanda, I am fine.*

*I felt your pain, what happened?!!*

Pietro sighed, knowing that his answer wasn’t going to help him to prevent the budding affection between the Asgardian and his sister.

*Loki saved my life.*

Wanda clearly tried to shield her thoughts, but her tiredness and emotional state let her feelings bleed through the link in their minds.

Ignoring his sister’s girlish musings for now, Pietro accepted the hand Loki extended him to help him stand.

“Thank you, trickster,” Loki nodded his head in response, but a small smirk was forming on his lips.

“Don’t be smug, jackass.”

*****

Darcy listened raptly as her father and Thor discussed with FRIDAY the possibilities and risks for each plan to take down the city without taking out half the planet with it. The decision they reached was insane, yet Darcy knew it was the only one that had any chance of working.

Tony and Thor were going to turn the vibrainium core against itself, causing it to overheat before
lightening Thor called down caused it to explode, evaporating the entire chunk of earth as it fell. To do so, Tony would have to be at the very base of the core, directly beneath the explosion.

There was a pause on the comms, then Darcy’s Dad spoke, “Bot, I have to. This is the—”

“—only way, I know Dad,” she was surprised that her voice did not shake as she spoke, “I understand. Just do your best to get out of there, ok?”

“I’m coming back for you, Darcy, you hear me?”

Darcy looked around the lifeboat she was on, seeing all the injured people crying and holding onto their loved ones. They would never be the same, and most of them lost friends and family today. But we saved them, we did all that we could. And now it seemed that ‘all they could’ was almost certainly sacrificing her Dad and her brother. Wanda sat to Darcy’s right and reached out to hold her hand as she listened in, to the comm or Darcy’s thoughts or both, she didn’t know.

Darcy squeezed the other girl’s hand back in thanks.

“I hear you, Dad.”

*****

Vision did not feel any satisfaction in killing Ultron, but he knew it had to be done.

Ultron was a creature in pain, doing anything he could to survive heedless of the consequences. Vision wasn’t sure why, but somewhere along the line Ultron was convinced that his survival was dependent on everything else’s destruction.

His consciousness born from the Mind Stone certainly did not help him, either. Vision was created to hold the Mind Stone and to wield it as he saw fit, but Ultron was an AI program that was overwhelmed by the sheer vastness and incomprehensibility that was housed in the scepter. He never stood a chance. Any hope of sanity or redemption was lost the moment Ultron attacked JARVIS.

Ultron’s first act, his first act borne of fear, was to attack and take out JARVIS despite the fact that
the older AI held no immediate threat to him. That was the action that Ultron based all of his learning off of, sealing his fate.

Vision stared at the crater that was once a city, wondering what was to become of him now.

*Now we go home, big brother.*

Vision smiled at Darcy’s voice in his head.

*Very well, little sister. Let’s go home.*

Chapter End Notes

just a heads up, i’ll probably fill the next few chapters with some fluffy stuff to make up for the last bit, and so i can buy myself some time to solidify my plans for the next part of the plot.
Chapter 48

Chapter Notes

THANK YOU FOR ALL THE LOVE

HAVE ANOTHER CHAPTER

FLUFF AND FEELS AND A SURPRISE!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Laura looked at the heroes seated in her living room, all of them dirty and disheveled, leaning on one another in exhaustion. She wasn’t sure why they had come here before going anywhere else, but Laura assumed they wanted a break before they went back to whatever their super hero selves got up to after the job was done. They had arrived silently in the dead of night only a day and a half after they had left the farm, but now with a few new members. The rising sun gave Laura more light by which to study them all, quirking a brow at the new faces in her house.

There was the twins, the ‘ punks with a big stick’ Clint had told her about. She knew that looks could be deceiving, but Laura couldn’t help but think that they looked so innocent as they crowded each other on the sofa. They couldn’t be much younger than Darcy, surely.

There was Rhodey, a handsome man who had a similar suit to Tony’s, though his was dark gray and black with an intimidating machine gun on his shoulder. It was only because of Cooper that Laura knew his ‘super hero name’ was War Machine. Laura didn’t say anything, but she found it mildly creepy how the War Machine suit and Iron Man suit were able to walk around without their masters and conduct ‘perimeter checks.’ No one else batted an eye at them, so she let it slide.

Finally, there was Vision. The purple man who had what Laura was told was an Infinity Stone in his head. Not even going to think too hard on that one. He seemed nice enough, if a little strange. But then Laura remembered that her house was currently filled with super heroes and gods and mutants, and there was a Hulk sitting outside the front door.

(Apparently the Hulk was still hopped up on adrenaline and wasn’t letting Bruce back in control just yet. He seemed content enough to sit outside chatting with Tony and Darcy, though.)

Shrugging her shoulders at it all, Laura just retreated to her kitchen to begin making breakfast for everyone. One thing she was thankful for on this farm was Clint’s paranoia; there was more than enough canned goods and frozen meat to satisfy every super-appetite that was currently under her roof, as well as plenty of fresh food that was grown or raised on the farm.
Rolling up her sleeves, Laura got to work.

*****

After some surprisingly decent sleep on the living room floor and one hell of a breakfast provided by Laura, Bucky was dragged out the door by an energetic Darcy to the barn. Without saying a word, Darcy led him across the field and into the building, pulling him behind her until she reached a ladder and immediately climbing up into the hayloft.

Seeing where this was going, Bucky quickly followed Darcy up. The moment his feet were under him Darcy pounced.

Their kisses were hard and needy, communicating I love you and I was so scared and Don’t you ever leave me all at once. Bucky began pushing his girl back toward a pile of tarps he saw from the corner of his eye that were covering some bales of hay. As they moved Bucky wasted no time in removing Darcy’s tank top and unbuttoning her pants, thankful that she had taken off the outermost parts of her armor when they arrived at the farm last night.

Darcy’s crazy-supportive Asgardian bra, or ‘fancy tactical boob cage’ as she liked to call it, was soon to follow when Darcy sat back on the makeshift bed with a thunk that didn’t sound like it felt all that good. Bucky’s girl didn’t seem to care as she immediately began to unbuckle his belt that was now eye-level to her beautiful eyes with an aggression that would have quelled a lesser man.

However, Bucky understood what was going on, why Darcy’s hands shook, what she needed. Hell, Bucky needed it too. They had ‘almost lost each other’ plenty of times since they met, and even many more times since they came together, but it had never been like it had been in Sokovia. They never had their entire family at their sides, and they never had the entire world waiting anxiously to see how they sealed its fate. What hurt the most was the fact that every time before when they were in danger, Bucky or Darcy were almost always guaranteed that the other would survive even if they did not. But not this time. They both knew that if one of them was taken out in Sokovia it was pretty much a sure thing that the other was a goner too. The fact that they all made it out was a miracle that was bound to never repeat.

As Bucky sank into Darcy, moaning in time with her, he really did count his lucky stars.

They shouldn’t have walked away from that mission, but they did, and he’d do anything in his power to make sure he stayed at Darcy’s side. No matter the cost.
Steve breathed deeply as he laid back in the grass, running his fingers over Sam’s back in nonsensical patterns and enjoying the weight of the other man lying on his chest. After breakfast, Steve and Sam had wordlessly made their way outside to a clear spot of grass a ways away from the house to lie down. They simply enjoyed the peace of feeling the breeze over them and the warmth of the sun, reveling in each other’s presence in their arms.

It was some time later that Sam spoke up, his murmured voice seeming alarmingly loud compared to the past two hours of silence.

“That was fucked up, Steve.” He agreed with Sam, but couldn’t help but make a small smile at the feeling of Sam’s words vibrating against his skin where he spoke against Steve’s chest.

“Mnhmm. Real fucked up.”

“Like, I don’t know if I can be the Team Shrink for this bullshit, man,” Sam laughed with Steve as he referred to the team’s nickname for him. His years with the VA making him the only semi-qualified super-hero therapist.

Sobering, Steve felt the need to be as sincere as possible as he chose his next words.

“We don’t need anyone else, we just need you to be Sam.”

Loki sat down next to Vision where the…android? was seated on the porch stairs, watching Cooper and Lila run around with Clint and Thor. In the distance Loki could see Steve and Sam lying together, having fallen asleep in the sun. Both Vision and Loki chuckled as they watched Bucky try to keep Darcy away from the sleeping pair, unsure of where their sister got a water gun to begin with.

“There is trouble coming for Little Sister,” Vision’s words were a statement rather than a question, but Loki nodded to confirm anyways.
“I am confused by what I have seen regarding the danger on the horizon.”

Loki sighed in commiseration with the newly-made man, “As am I. My mother is hopefully speaking to the Norns about what is happening and what is to come, but I am afraid we can only wait and not act.”

“It is strange, to finally have a body, yet still feel so helpless when it comes to protecting Darcy.”

The trickster god certainly knew what that felt like, the aching hallow space in his chest telling him that he failed at preventing Darcy’s capture, that he should have known that Ian was not an ally, and that he should be able to keep Darcy from future harm. Especially if that harm comes in the form of the Mad Titan.

“I’m afraid, Vision, that certain feeling shall not disappear. Nor will you get used to it.”

Vision frowned at his hands, folding his fingers to his palms experimentally. It was fascinating to Loki to see this new being discover everything for the first time in what appeared to be a fully mature body. (Watching the android try to eat jello was hysterical. As entertaining and curious as it was, Loki did not envy Vision for experiencing and deciphering all sorts of emotions for the first time either. Loki had almost two thousand years under his belt and he still had difficulty understanding what he was feeling.

Seeing Vision frown in consideration made Loki feel slightly guilty, for he probably had not explained himself fully enough.

“What I mean is that while yes, those feelings of helplessness will not disappear it does not mean that they are always right. Sometimes you will be doing more to help than you could ever think to know, and other times you will be able to help her take care of problems together. These feelings simply mean you care for her, Vision.”

“She is my sister, my family, and I…well, JARVIS, made a vow when she was small to protect her with everything he had. I intend to hold myself to the same standard. I do not simply care, I love.”

*****

Rhodey stared at the beer in his hand and wished he had something a little stronger. He had a hunch
that Laura didn’t keep a whole lot of good liquor in the farm house.

Tony just spent the last hour or so catching Rhodey up on what *exactly* went down with Ultron, as well as everything that was hinted at about Bot’s future. *Infinity Stones, Thanos…oh Bot, always in the middle of things, aren’t you?*

There was silence on the phone between them where Pepper, Jane, Happy, and Logan were conference called in. Pepper was somewhere in China for a mess of SI meetings with Happy at her side, Jane was in Brazil to give guest lectures in Rio, and Logan was back at the Professor’s school. Jane broke the silence first.

“Tony, you better get a jet here *now* because I am not staying here a second longer. I need to see Darcy. And Thor. *Keep your asses at that farm.*” There was agreement from Pepper in the background, but she was unable to leave China at the time due to SI duties. They’d meet up eventually at the new Avengers Facility that had been in development the past few months.

Rhodey raised a brow at the venom in Jane’s voice, feeling the hair on the back of his neck stand up in response. Darcy warned them about the tiny astrophysicist’s ‘Black Hole’ voice, where her tone *was so dead you literally wish you were sucked in a black hole just to avoid it.* Rhodey had thought Darcy was teasing, but he certainly believed her now. The panicked look Tony sent him told Rhodey that his friend felt it too.

“Coming right up, ma’am.”

Logan gave a strained chuckle over the line, “Rhodey, I want a play-by-play of Janie ripping everyone a new one for making a murder AI robot. I don’t want to miss this.”

*****

Coulson looked at the scene in front of him, not bothering to hide a small smile.

It seems that everyone had made some sort of campsite around Laura’s farm house, the Avengers refusing to leave the sanctuary just yet. Not that Coulson could blame them.

He was aware that Darcy knew he was alive from Natasha’s data dump just over a year ago. Undoubtedly she had told the rest of the team, or at least he hoped. Coulson really didn’t want to
spring anymore surprises on them.

JARVIS had been keeping him apprised of the Avengers’ going ons through a secure channel he had set up to keep Coulson in the loop about Darcy’s safety, especially when the AI’s sister had brought back Loki of all people to the tower. Over the next few months JARVIS and Coulson analyzed Loki’s actions and testimony (only May knew that he had thrown up immediately after listening to the god’s sincere tale), eventually concluding that Loki could be trusted. His devotion to Darcy was paramount to Coulson and the AI.

Coulson had taken his team on a wile goose chase for a short amount of time when JARVIS contacted him about Darcy’s abduction. Soon, though, his team had their own battles to fight and he had to abandon his search.

Several days ago, a new AI named FRIDAY had contacted Coulson through the same secure channel.

“JARVIS had left instructions in each of the boss’ AI’s for what to do if he was ever taken out,” her Irish accent was charming, Coulson had decided, “Part of those instructions were to contact you, sir, and keep you updated.”

Talk about a bomb being dropped on his head. Can’t leave Stark alone for a goddamn minute. He pushed back the giddy excitement of another Howling Commando being brought ‘back from the dead,’ shoving his pending panic attack about Sergeant Barnes being the Winter Soldier and dating Darcy.

Coulson had his team wait on the Bus, not wanting to overwhelm the shell-shocked heroes too much when he approached them. He was about a third of the way to the house when everyone noticed his presence, tensing from their spots on the porch where they were all having an afternoon beer. Laura and the kids were quickly ushered inside as the team formed a perimeter.

There was a silver blur from the porch that stopped directly in front of Coulson, a gun in his outstretched arm and pointed at his forehead. Must be Pietro.

“He who are you and what do you want?”

Coulson didn’t even flinch at the gun in his face, something that had become commonplace over his lifetime.
“Phil Coulson. The Asgardians call me Son of Coul. Tony calls me Agent. He doesn’t know it, but Darcy started calling me Uncle Phil.” He watched the expressions on Pietro’s face change, sure that the young man was having a mental conversation with his sister and the Avengers from their spot on the porch.

“And what do you want?”

“Just what I told him last time: Tell me how to help, Tony, tell me how to help protect your daughter.”

Chapter End Notes

p.s. in my verse, Tripp isn't dead. BECAUSE OF REASONS.

i still need to see where AOS and MCU match up as far as seasons go, so bear with me.

yeah, there's a lot of characters coming into play here, but Thanos is a big problem, we need ALL of Earth's mightiest heroes.

plus, i really want to see Phil and Tony's (and everyones) eyebrows twitch when darcy and skye become good freinds. SHENANIGANS, anyone?
Chapter 49

Chapter Notes

the love I am getting from you guys is RIDICULOUS
so thank you all so so so so much

HERE, HAVE ANOTHER CHAPTER!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Jane watched the unfolding chaos from her comfortable perch in Thor’s lap, eyes moving from person to person rapidly as everyone shouted at each other. Everyone had emptied from the house, unanimously deciding that Laura and the kids didn’t need a couple dozen people crowding her home and causing a mess (or a bigger one than there already was).

Agent Coulson had shown up out of nowhere, or at least Jane thought so until with a wave of his hand a giant plane came into sight from where it hovered over a distant hilltop. So that’s ‘the Bus,’ then. Jane was curious how Coulson managed to walk a good couple of miles in his suit without breaking a sweat, making Wanda snicker into her hand as she heard Jane’s thoughts.

There was a lot of confusion regarding the agent’s sudden appearance, which resulted in a lot of panic and exasperation. Of course, on Coulson panic only came across as mild annoyance to the stoic agent. Well I guess he’s technically ‘Director’ now.

“What do you mean, you didn’t tell them I was alive, Darcy?!”

“I got distracted! Bucky just busted me out of Hydra and we were going on our Road Trip of Rage and I figured since you and JARVIS were all buddy-buddy and keeping tabs on me—of course I knew, don’t look at me like that, Uncle Phil—he’d just tell everyone else!”

At this, everyone looked to Vision who raised his hands in surrender, “From what I can gather from JARVIS’ memories, he was quite distraught at your continued absence, little sister, and the information may have…slipped?”

Phil pinched the bridge of his nose between his thumb and index finger as he gathered a moment to collect his thoughts.

With a heavy sigh, Coulson looked up at them all. “Can I have a beer before I rehash my last couple of years or so? This will take a while.”

*****

Tony just blinked, hard, and tilted his head at Agent.

“That’s kind of fucked up, Agent.”
“It’s Director now, Tony, and yes it was quite fucking up.”

Tony raised a brow at the Asgardian Wonder Twins on the other side of the circle they had formed (Tony only made one campfire-song joke, promise!), their uncomfortable expressions betraying their nonchalant lounging. The whole thing with the Kree and the Obelisk and all that other nonsense that Tony lost track of seemed to hit a little close to home for the pair. There was even more shouting and pointing than before, along with a heavy dose of “you foolish mortals” that came from the resident Trickster. Wanda was quick to send a quick bolt of red energy at Loki, much like a slap to the side of the head, which quickly made him shut up.

He couldn’t really say he was surprised that there was a whole mess of powered people out there that no one knew about (hell, look at how long it took for the X-Men to become ‘mainstream), but Tony was excited about Agent’s newly powered teammates. Any enhanced people that were willing to be on their side were OK in Tony’s book. Bruce seemed to particularly enjoy Agent’s account of his teammate’s stay in Afterlife, it seemed like a lot of that Zen crap he’s always talking about.

Tony also made a mental note to work on better hand for Coulson, maybe he could use Barnes’ arm as a reference? That machine was gorgeous. Even if had been all over his baby girl. Bad thoughts, Tony, BAD THOUGHTS!

Clapping his hands together and startling the group, Tony looked up at Agent, “So! When do we get to meet the team?”

“Oooh, yeah! I wanna meet this Skye girl. She’s a hacker, right? And one of your enhanced?”

Coulson was tense and wary as he replied in the affirmative. Tony didn’t have to be telepathic to know what everyone was thinking.

This is a bad idea.

Thor seemed to be the only one amused by everyone’s looks of horror. “So, lightening sister, are there shenanigans to be had?”

Darcy’s mad cackle of glee reminded Tony of that first day he met his daughter when she was two. Her eerily similar reaction to knowing there were more robots in the workshop was almost an exact mirror for her current expression.

“Oh lightening bro, there are so many shenanigans to be had.”

*****

Tripp stood at the edge of the group that had gathered on the farm, bemused by what he saw. Mack, Sam, and Rhodey were standing on either side of him, so he directed his statement to them.

“This looks like a music festival.” Mack and Sam chuckled with him, but Rhodey only looked confused.

“I don’t get it.”

Sam started chuckling a little harder, “We’ve got a bunch of weird white folk in the middle of a field. This is basically Coachella.”
Rhodey raised a brow as he took in the scene in front of them, nodding in agreement.

Darcy and Skye were sitting with an overwhelmed looking Vision under a tree, probably comparing hacking tips as Vision tried to prevent the two from taking over the world or accidentally sending them all back to the dark ages. Barnes was chugging what looked like a couple dozen beers as Stark twisted his metal arm back and forth to show Coulson how it worked, speaking rapidly about schematics for a hand for the Director. FitzSimmons were crowding a very excited looking Jane and a less-than-comfortable Bruce, a lot of hands waving around as they talked about their science with an obscene amount of enthusiasm.

The two Asgardians were sparring further away from the crowd (Tripp personally thought it wasn’t necessary for Loki to be shirtless, but he was sure that Wanda would disagree; the girl was a little flushed in the face from where she sat watching the pair, her brother pouting at her side). Steve and Clint were playing with little Cooper and Lila as their mother watched from the porch, knitting what Tripp thought might have been a baby blanket. Hunter and Bobbi were arguing over the three grills where there was a ridiculous amount of burgers and hot dogs cooking. May and Natasha lounged back on the porch steps, taking in the entire field of people with quirked brows and a bottle of wine between them.

“Yeah,” Rhodey sighed, “they’re a strange bunch.”

“So what cool powers do you have, man? Coulson said you survived the mist stuff that made Skye into an Inhuman.” Tripp barked out a laugh at Sam’s question, the guy didn’t do subtle very well.

“Earth manipulation,” at Sam and Rhodey’s look of confusion Tripp continued, “I can control and wield the ground around me, it’s kind of—”

“You’re a goddamn Earthbender, aren’t you?” Rhodey looked like he was fighting between being amused and exasperated. Tripp just looked at the older man curiously.

“And you just watch Avatar: The Last Airbender in your free time?”

The older man sighed, “Darcy was a big fan of the show. Tony, Happy, and I were ‘required’ to watch it with her. When she started developing her powers and learning to fight, she actually used it to help her learn how to move her body and telekinesis in sync with one another.” He paused for another moment before shrugging to himself, “It was a damn good show, though.”

****

“Sergeant Barnes?”
Bucky sighed, “Coulson, if Darcy is calling you Uncle Phil, you can definitely call me Bucky. Or James,” he added at the look of discomfort on the Director’s face. Apparently he wasn’t one to be so informal. “Not to mention how you and Stark got all up close and personal with the arm, here. I think we’ve reached a first-name basis.”

“James, then,” Coulson looked like he was about to say something, but Bucky cut across him.

“Before you say whatever it is you want to say, I want to thank you,” at the man’s look of confusion Bucky clarified, “you helped keep Darcy safe, you kept her and her secrets safe. If you weren’t there to help, the info dump that Nat let out could have been a lot worse from her if it was revealed that she was a mutant, not to mention a Stark as well. So thank you.”

There was a lot of respect and awe in Coulson’s returning gaze, but the moment was broken as Tony waltzed up.

“Whoa, you need a new pair of shorts, Agent? He’s a big fan of you and Capsicle, Barnes.” Stark was clearly a bit drunk, his ‘casually’ tossed arm around Bucky’s shoulder ended up smacking Bucky in the back of his head before it landed.

Bucky was expecting some embarrassed stuttering or some indignant protests from the Director, but what Coulson said next made both Tony and Bucky’s jaws drop.

“James is fucking your daughter, Tony.”

And that was it.

But it certainly was enough. It obviously wasn’t news to anyone, but no one spoke about it. The bluntness of the statement made Tony jump back from Bucky like he had been burned, tripping over a soccer ball that was left in the grass. Bucky felt every drop of blood drain from his face and waited for a repulser blast to the side of his head. Thankfully, none came.

Rhodey had quickly come over to drag away a belligerent Tony, and a hysterically laughing Clint staggered up to Coulson.
“Phil, that was so messed up… it was amazing!”

“Thank you, Barton.” The Director then turned his stoic gaze to Bucky who gulped in anticipation.

“What I originally came to speak to you about, James, was that I also wanted to thank you for helping to keep Darcy safe. I know that she is more than capable of taking care of herself, but when I learned that you had freed her I was pleased that it was you who was watching her six.”

Bucky barely had time to nod in thanks before Coulson silently turned and vanished between one blink and the next. But maybe that was the shock that was messing with his head, still.

*

Sky couldn’t keep the smile off her face if she tried.

Ever since the Hydra and Ward then her dad going insane, then the terrigenesis and everything that came with it? Skye’s been feeling so alienated from everyone (pun not intended). Yeah, she had Tripp at her side when they came out of the mist with new powers but he had such control that made her envious. But that was Tripp: he was a Howling Commando/SHIELD legacy, always knowing his past, and to some extent, where he wanted to take his future.

Skye never had that. She was an 084, an unknown, something dangerous. She bounced from orphanage to orphanage, never quite fitting in and never chosen for adoption. Skye never knew what family was, just that hers was crowded with smoke and mirrors, tons of information with black bars and REDACTED scrawled across the pages. So she kept digging. She reached the bottom when she found SHIELD and when they found her, but she found a family there, too.

But now? Now there was more. She was surrounded by people who were gifted or enhanced, people who were outcasts and misfits or rogue. They were redeeming themselves and proving themselves or everything in between. They were heroes.

They had blood on their hands, sure, but who didn’t? Whose soul actually was clear of all sin, anyways? It may not have been intentional (but most of the time, it was) but each of them carried some guilt from some sin they committed, some crime or wrongdoing. Yet here they all were, fighting the good fight and saving the damn world.

Though, from what she had gathered from Vision and from observing everyone else, there was more than just the world at stake now.

Skye looked to where Darcy was leaning against Bucky (and gods were they a beautiful couple) without a care in the world. Or so it seemed, anyways. She and Skye had just clicked, keeping up
with one another and finding true friendship faster and more genuinely than Skye ever had. Something was coming for her new friend, something dangerous and something no one had ever seen before.

Skye drained the last of her beer as she looked at all her new friends’ faces that were seated around the bonfire they had made when the sun had set. She laughed as she walked over to Darcy who was waving another case of beer above her head, smirking to herself as she thought on the future.

*Whoever’s coming sure as hell won’t know what hit them.*

Chapter End Notes

*woo! everyone is an avenger, deal with it.*
I'm kind of having some writer's block for all 3 stories right now, so I'm sorry that the updates are coming slow! --feel free to send suggestions or stuff you'd like to see, that helps get the creative stuff flowing again :)  

also: there were a couple people who commented on WLS not too long ago but i was on my phone and i thought i hit "mark read" but i accidentally his "delete" instead SO I AM SO SORRY I DIDN'T DELETE YOUR LOVELY COMMENTS ON PURPOSE I PROMISE I FEEL SO MEAN 

other than that, thank you for all the love!!!

The view was both beautiful and worrisome, Darcy decided, it was efficient and fluid but it also spoke of the danger to come. She stood on a balcony that overlooked the outdoor training arenas at the new Avengers Facility and listened to Natasha yell at Pietro and Skye to actually spar instead of flirt with one another.

Darcy chuckled and nudged her father in the shoulder with her own when he slid up next to her at the railing she leaned against. “You did good, Dad. This is remarkable.”

Tony let out a small huff of amusement as he watched the scene below. “You know it’s all to keep you safe.”

Darcy frowned. She didn’t like the way her dad would casually dismiss his desire to see the world safe, the way he would say it was only for her. It was in a sense, she supposed, but there was so much more too. Tony hid behind his selfishness when he was doing something selfless, and it killed Darcy a little inside to see him tear himself apart like that.

She decided to bring the issue to light at long last. “It’s more than that, Dad, and you know it. Yeah, you’d do anything to keep me safe, just like I’d do the same for you and everyone else I love. But you do it for everyone else too. Why do you hide it?”

Her Dad sighed, knowing he got caught. Tony shook his head. “They won’t believe it.” At her questioning gaze, he continued, “You know what my life has been, Bot. I was the Merchant of Death, my original solution to save my life ended up almost killing me, then my creation to world peace tried to wipe out the human race. There’s so much more too, Darce. More than you can ever know. I wasn’t a good man, not until you came into my life. Even then, I struggled.”
“I don’t understand.”

“I’m selfish. Always have been, always will be. So first and foremost I wanted the world at my feet. I had an empire, almost every technological leap came from my mind and the world trampled over itself to get it. It was intoxicating. It took me far too long to realize what I was doing to this world. I wrought down fire and brimstone on this earth for so long. I thought I was just giving weapons to our men, but both sides were getting them. It wasn’t an excuse though, I was mass producing murder. I was putting the bullets in our men’s guns, but also their enemies. How can I wash that blood from my hands, Bot? That was my dad’s legacy, my legacy. When you showed up on my doorstep I was certain my hands were going to leave bloody prints on you. I couldn’t stand it to be your legacy.

“So I started amping up the green energy side of SI, because I couldn’t stand the thought of leaving you with a broken and dead world. I needed to make it better, before you took your part in it. But I was blind.

“I was so devoted to changing, to making it right, that I couldn’t see Stane using me, using SI for his own agenda. It wasn’t until I was taken in Afghanistan that I realized what kind of mess I made. Even then, when I was so sure of the path I wanted to forge, a good man died because of me. Yinsen lost his life to set me free.” Darcy swallowed at the thought of the good doctor, the man who made sure her father was able to live another day. With tears in her eyes, Darcy continued to listen to her father speak.

“I came home and all hell broke loose. Stane wasn’t family but was my enemy, and you became a target. I failed you, Bot. Because of me you were taken. You had to bloody your hands to ensure your survival. What type of father am I for that to happen? You were eighteen, and you had to kill to live.”

“I don’t regret a moment of my life with you, Dad, not a single moment.”

Tony sighed, wiping a stray tear with the back of his hand as he did so. “I know, Darcy, I know. But it doesn’t stop the guilt. I couldn’t even keep you safe, so how could I dare to think that I could help protect the world?

“But then New Mexico happened, Vanko and the palladium poisoning, New York then London and the Mandarin then Ultron. I’ve done nothing but fail you, Bot, I—”
Darcy couldn’t listen to this anymore. Whirling around to face her father Darcy grasped his face between her hands and made sure that he had no choice but to meet her gaze.

“You did not fail me, okay? We are extraordinary people in extraordinary circumstances and you did the best you could. And you know what? I’ve loved every second of it.” Darcy slapped a palm over her dad’s mouth as he tried to protest, “Listen, Dad. All of the pain, agony, the blood and sweat and tears and all the messiness that has come with this life? I wouldn’t want anything else.

“With all that darkness, we found the light, too. You and I found each other, we made a family with Rhodey, Pepper, Happy, JARVIS and the bots. I met Jane, you helped save the world, and our family grew with the Avengers. Every day since we have done our damnedest to right everyone’s wrongs, to fight for this little speck of blue in the vastness of the universe.

“Both earth and the Nine Realms have fought against us, and they’ve lost. Do you know why that is?”

Her father shook her head.

“It’s because we love. I don’t care how cheesy or cliché that is, because for fuck’s sake it's true.

“We all fight for each other, because we love. We fight for ourselves because we know there are others that love us. We fight for Earth because we are nothing without this speck of blue that we love.

“So don’t you dare tell me that you’ve failed. Look around you, Dad! Look at what you created. We’re the Earth’s Mightiest Heroes and we’re here to protect it. And if we can’t protect it…?”

Tony’s laugh was watery and strained, but genuine as he finished the line.

“You can be damned well sure we’ll avenge it.”
Chapter 51

Chapter Summary

as always, i am so thankful for your love and all the comments! you guys are awesome!

Chapter Notes

okay, i'm kind of in a funk as to how to move this forward with plot, so bear with me!
this was a hard one to write and i'm only kind-of-okay with it
be gentle with me, dear readers!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Frigga paced in front of her scrying pool, eager yet terrified of whatever would be shown to her.

Loki had warned her that his sister, her daughter, was in danger. That the Mad Titan who had warped his mind so thoroughly was after Darcy. Why? They couldn’t know.

She had put a call out to the Norns, seeing as they were the ones who had taught her to use the Sight but there was never any guarantee that they would respond. Only if the cause was worthy to Yggdrasil would the Sisters show their faces.

So Frigga continued to pace.

It could have been hours or minutes or seconds, but eventually a rough voice broke through the Queen’s fretting.

“You know you must look eventually, dear wife.”

Odin.

“I know,” Frigga sighed, “I have the Sight and it shall come for me whether I am ready or not. But it is Darcy, my husband. How can I look upon her Fate and know that I can do nothing?”
“Because it is your duty, and because you are her mother.”

Frigga’s head snapped up to look at her husband in shock that he had said such a thing. It was true that he had grown more fond of Darcy as time passed, but Frigga assumed it would be dozens of years yet before he openly acknowledged the girl as family.

“I know what you think of me, Frigga, but I have learned from my mistakes.” Odin strode to the scrying pool and looked into the waters though they both knew that he would never be able to see anything. There was a small amount of sad hope on his face, that perhaps he could catch a glimpse.

“She was claimed by my eldest son as a sister, my wife claimed her as a daughter, and the girl was born with great powers and of one of the most influential and powerful men on her realm. The Norns brought her to be in the middle of all those heroes, the one she loves is one of the most feared warriors on their realm, and our youngest son, our lost son, followed her into the light.” Odin paused, turning his beseeching gaze on his wife as he continued, “How could I continue to ignore what was placed clearly in front of me? I knew, I knew the moment I laid my eye on her that Yggdrasil was changing. That she was the key. But I refused to believe it because I was arrogant and selfish.” The king let out a self-deprecating chuckle, “Perhaps I still am, Frigga. Yet I have tried to learn.

“I have stood by Heimdall’s side to observe young Darcy for many months, and I have learned. She is powerful in a way that she does not realize, that none of us realize—”

“Now, now, AllFather,” a crisp voice interrupted, “I wouldn’t say none of us, would you?”

The King and Queen of the Realm Eternal whirled around at the voice, jaws almost dropping at the shock.

The Norns had arrived.

Skuld, Urd, and Verdandi stood at the entrance to Frigga’s chambers, matching smirks on their lips. As one, the three Sisters dressed in white strode into the room to stand before the Queen’s scrying pool.

They were not identical, as many thought, though if one was not careful it would be very easy to find them interchangeable. Each woman had long dark hair that flowed around their waists like their white gauzy shift dresses that swung gently around their bare feet. They looked ethereal and elegant,
their dresses flowing from their arms and hips yet cinched at the waist and wrist. Even Frigga in her most worn and loved gown felt stifled by the firm fabric in comparison to their easy, flowing movements.

“Lady Norns, we are honored to have you here,” Odin was an ass most of the time, but he was also a King. He knew when manners were important, even when he was discomforted by his environment.

The AllFather had never been entirely comfortable around the Norns, wary of their infinite knowledge and power. He was respectful of them and their necessary role among Yggdrasil’s branches, always heeding their word and minding his tongue around the Sisters, but Frigga knew it was his own selfish desire for their knowledge. She could only hope that her husband’s sudden change of heart applied here, as well.

“Thank you, Odin,” Urd’s smile was teasing as she looked at the AllFather over her shoulder, clearly thinking similarly to Frigga. “We would have been here much more quickly if Star Lord and his companions hadn’t caused such a ruckus.”

“He is a Ravager, a common thief essentially who found his Path as he stumbled along,” Verdandi continued. “I knew that he would be trouble, but I certainly didn’t anticipate how much.”

Skuld sighed, “These infinity stones are proving to be much more than even we anticipated, as well. Things are coming that will shake the universe’s branches, and the Key is a stubborn thing that doesn’t listen. Yggdrasil help us all if the matter is not solved soon.”

Frigga and Odin spared a hesitant glance to one another, both remembering the Prophecy that was spoken over Loki many years ago. Sensing their distress, Skuld chuckled and was quick to reassure them.

“Do not worry, dear friends. Ragnarök is not upon us. It will be many a millennia before that is something we must face.”

The Queen sighed in relief but was cut off by Urd before she could get a word in edge-wise

“Oh! Your children and their companions will arrive shortly, we must prepare!” Giggling to one another like young girls rather than infinitely-old powers of the universe, the Sisters quickly made their way out of Frigga’s chambers and into the palace beyond.
Frigga rubbed her temples with the tips of her fingers, not knowing how she could have forgotten just how taxing hosting the Norns could be. Odin seemed to sympathize.

“Come, dear wife, we have many things to do before our children and the Avengers barge down our doors.”

She couldn’t help but let a pleased smile grace her lips, wondering if Odin even realized that he had just claimed Darcy as well.

*****

This was by far the most surreal thing Tony had ever experienced.

He was a genius-billionaire-playboy-philanthropist at one period in his life, so there were a lot of things (mainly those of the variety that required ‘brain bleach’) that Tony had seen that never phased him. But stumbling off the Bifrost into the golden Observatory?

Yeah, Tony was a bit speechless.

Darcy, of course, strode right up to the Gatekeeper and gave the enormous guy a hug and exchanged pleasantries. Sif and the Warriors Three were also quick to reach Darcy’s side to greet her, followed by a guard who immediately offered her a fist-bump before receiving a hug as well. Rhodey, for perhaps the millionth time, snorted under his breath, Fuckin’ Starks.

Yeah, Tony couldn’t help but agree with him on that one, though.

The next few minutes were a blur of gold and people, then suddenly the Avengers (sans the SHIELD members, because someone needed to watch Earth when the original team was off-planet) were in what Tony presumed was the Throne Room, what with the one-eyed guy with a staff sitting at the giant seat at the top of the stairs. Must be the AllFather.

There as a smokin’ hot blonde woman to Odin’s right, meaning that she was Frigga. If her position didn’t give her away, it was certainly the way Darcy fearlessly ran up the dais stairs to embrace the woman with a cry of “Ma!” Mom #2 then. To his left, Pepper and Frigga shared a smile and nod of respect with one another. Tony shuddered at the thought of the two terrifying women together in one space, plotting.
On Frigga’s right were three older women dressed in white, ranging from their mid 40s to mid 50s, if Tony had to guess. From their eerily similar looks to their almost statuesque presence, Tony was fairly sure that they were the Norns.

…What? Tony reads, thank you very much.

Tony quieted with the rest of the group as Odin All-Papa stood and hesitantly, hesitantly?!, approached the embracing women and placed a gentle hand on his wife’s shoulder that made her pull back from Darcy. Tony’s kid looked between her adoptive mom’s knowing smile and the King’s wary one, just as unsure as the rest of them as to what the hell was going on with Odin.

The one-eyed king cleared his throat gently, placing his giant hand on Darcy’s shoulder with a tenderness that made Tony’s eyebrows hit his hairline with surprise.

“How gives my heart great joy to see you safe once more…daughter.”

Everyone gasped audibly at the AllFather. Well, everyone except for the Norns and Frigga. He could hear some slapping sound behind him from where Loki and Thor stood, rolling his eyes at what he knew he was going to see. Glancing out of the corner of his eye, Tony was torn between groaning and laughing at the two Asgardian Princes slapping each other’s arms in shock like a couple of dopes. Too much time around Darcy, he concluded. His focus was brought back to the throne when Odin continued to speak.

“I know that you have no reason to hold any shred of affection toward me for how I behaved when we first met, but I hope that with time you may find it in your own heart to forgive me for my wrongdoings.” Odin cleared his throat once more, clearly not used to this mushy-feelings stuff judging by the look of discomfort on his face. “I have spent much of my time next to Heimdall and Frigga since your absence, watching over you and being regaled by the tales of your accomplishments. I know now that I was a fool to think of you as anything but a member of this family.”

Oh my god he’s SINCERE what the hell is even happening?! Thor and Loki seemed to be just as baffled, if the half-choked off squawks of surprise behind Tony were indication.

He could have told the All-Dad not to worry about forgiveness once Tony saw the smile forming on Darcy’s lips, already knowing that she had forgiven Odin. And just like he predicted, his daughter threw her arms around the King’s neck in one hell of a surprise hug.
“Already forgiven, Pop.”

Ugh. Why does my kid have to have so many feelings?

*****

Their group had been moved from the throne room into a smaller one (though ‘small’ was a relative term in the palace) that was very obviously belonging to the Norns. Darcy admired the painting of Yggdrasil that wrapped around the circular walls, branches reaching toward the domed ceilings, making her feel as if she was in the hallow center of Yggrasil’s trunk. The Nine Realms were represented within the branches or roots that covered the floor, stunning depictions of what the realm looked like and what type of people lived there. It made Darcy feel so small.

She was placed on a stool in the center of the room, right on top of what looked like an eye painted on the floor. Darcy knew that this was very serious and it was a great honor to meet the Norns, but she had to keep stifling giggles as she thought about how awkward it would have been if she had worn a dress.

One of the Norns winked at her, so perhaps Darcy wasn’t as foolish as she thought she was.

Her friends family stood along the walls and took in the room with the appropriate amount of awe and apprehension that she expected from them. Sif and the Warriors Three looked absolutely fascinated by Vision who was just as unflappable as ever. Bucky, however, was barely keeping a lid on his cool as he looked like he was greatly bothered by Darcy being so exposed in the center of the room as the Norns circled her. She’d compare them too sharks, but they were just so nice and beautiful. She also couldn’t sense any malice from them, either.

They began to speak in their weird three-person-one-thought way, so Darcy just gave up on trying to keep the Sisters’ identity separate.

“Your Path was never as clear as the others—”

“—yet at the same time, there was only one direction you were destined to go—”
“—you have surrounded yourself with warriors and family alike, who are far more worthy than we could have predicted—”

“—so we can only hope that their love and faith in you helps you complete what must be done.”

Well, wasn’t that ominous?

“Your powers are so strong—”

“—but you have held yourself back, haven’t you? Wary of the unknown, afraid of the possibilities—”

“—always wondering if it would change how they saw you. Dear girl, there isn’t time for those games now. Not anymore.”

Correction: that was ominous as hell. The Sisters seemed to have reach a lull in their observations, so Darcy took the opportunity for what it was.

“What, exactly, needs to be done? What could I even have to offer Yggdrasil? Are you sure that I’m even the one you want?”

Wrong thing to say, Darcy. Way to go.

As one, the Norns turned their sharp gaze on her, eyes no longer full of kindness but instead filled to the brim with indignant rage. They strode purposely to Darcy’s stool, voices echoing through the silent room as they spoke as one.

“Yggdrasil has chosen you, Darcy Stark of Midgard, so do not dare to question her or presume to know her ways. The Titan seeks the well of power and knowledge that you have, that you have so foolishly stifled in your mind! Yggdrasil will not fall to Thanos, but she will burn and break if he is not defeated. You, Darcy, you are the one to stand at the Titan’s feet and tear him limb from limb. You are the key that opens the door, ushering in or locking out chaos that festers in Yggdrasil’s branches. You, Darcy, have more power than you could even fathom in that mind of yours, if you would just LET IT OUT!”
With a *crack* and a flash of light, the Norns disappeared. Darcy sat frozen on her seat, looking around the room in order to make sense of what just happened. She did a double take when she noticed the painting of Yggdrasil on the walls.

Cracks spiraled out from the eye below her, climbing the walls and shattering each beautiful rendering of the Realms throughout the branches. Asgard was split down the middle, but it was the image of Midgard that brought Darcy to tears.

Midgard was *shattered*, impossible to see what it had been before the cracks had torn it apart, chunks of the stone wall tumbling to the floor. As Darcy moved toward the shards on the floor, she heard a three tiered whisper in her mind.

*Yggdrasil has chosen you, precious Key, and the Mad One will not stop hunting for Stones just because you hesitate.*

*Choose wisely, open the Well.*

*****

Thanos leaned his head back against his rocky throne, feeling the changes in the universe.

*The Norns were on the move.*

He flexed his hand that was fitted inside the empty gauntlet, rage simmering under his skin. The stones were *his!* The power of the universe belonged in his hands, no one else’s. Thanos didn’t care what the three old hags had to say about it, or their *Key*. They were cryptic and never made any since to the goliath.

That stupid mortal girl was surrounded by Asgard and Midgard’s heroes, but they would be easy enough to demolish. *She* was almost as good as a stone, anyways.

Thanos just needed to crack open that pretty skull of hers and harness her power.

*Easy.*
yes: Odin is hella ooc here, but whatever. Thanos is a bigger problem for them all than his delicate man-angst

i have limited knowledge about Norns and their mythology, hence their short appearance (yay google for names!)
here's what i imagine their dresses kind of looking like:
http://assets.unique-vintage.com/media/catalog/product/cache/1/thumbnail/9057bc36bc0ccbc7f28927db286a28d4e/f/e/jeM

i have even more limited knowledge of Thanos and his part with the Infinity Stones, though I've been re-watching marvel movies (i'm on GotG now, yay!)
here's where i'm getting info on Thanos:
http://marvel.com/characters/58/thanos
Chpater 52

Chapter Notes

woo! update!

as always, i am so grateful for all your love and support and generous comments :)

feel free to suggest away or whatever, i'm kind of finding myself getting a little stuck on how to finish this *right*

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Tony’s heart broke when he finally found his daughter after hours of searching the palace. Darcy sat on the rainbow bridge, legs dangling over the edge and her shoulders hunched up to her ears. She never looked smaller, and it sat wrong in his chest.

Darcy was loud, brash, present. When she walked into a room it was immediately filled with her love and smiles and scathing wit that left everyone in stitches. When she came back with Bucky after they took out Hydra, she still filled up the room, but it was different. She was more subdued, more cautious, her eyes holding more pain and wisdom than Tony ever thought a person could bear. But his daughter was nothing if not tough, so she didn’t let that stop her from being the shining light that they all needed.

To see Darcy hunched over herself like this? It was like Tony was getting punched in the gut. He nodded a thanks to Birger, the ‘coolest palace guard ever, seriously Dad,’ for keeping an eye on Darcy after she fled the Norns’ room.

Tony winced as his bones creaked as he settled next to Darcy, automatically wrapping his right arm around her shoulders and pulling her close. He didn’t say anything, knowing that his baby girl would speak when she was ready. So he sat and enjoyed the view of Asgard’s nighttime sky, the gentle mist from the waterfall below their feet, and the soft hum of the bridge beneath them. He pressed a kiss to the top of Bot’s head, letting her know that he would listen whenever she was ready.

It wasn’t until another ten minutes had passed that Darcy spoke.

“I’m scared, Dad.” Tony held his breath, knowing that he needed to be silent as Darcy rambled on, tears trying to catch in her throat. “What am I? I don’t want to be the Key or whatever it is they want me to be. Ultron said the same thing, that ‘the universe was pouring in’ my brain or something, that I needed to ‘open my mind.’ What if I’m not me after? What if Darcy is gone and all that’s left is their stupid Key?”
Tony shuddered, remembering the tail end of her conversation with the AI about what was ‘out there’ before he had pulled Ultron away from her. He felt a chill run down his spine as he remembered Ultron’s words that Darcy, his baby girl, was ‘destined to tear it apart.’

“It’s too much, Dad, it’s too much! I can’t—” She broke down sobbing then, unable to keep herself together any longer.

Tony wasted no time in pulling Darcy into his lap, ignoring the fact that she was twenty-five and not two, knowing that she needed to be held close as sobs wracked her body. He didn’t bother wasting his breath on platitudes and ‘it’s going to be okay’s because they were both too smart to believe that kind of lie. So Tony held onto this daughter, waiting for her tears to run out before he spoke.

“You don’t have to do anything, Bot, not a damned thing that you don’t want to do. You’re Darcy, my daughter, Jane’s best friend, and Barnes’…everything. You’re not theirs, you’re not their Key or whatever else they want you to be. You choose who you are and where you go, Darcy.”

Darcy sagged, futilely wiping her eyes on Tony’s already dampened shirt from her tears. “But what about Thanos?”

“That’s your decision too. There’s Nine Realms in this universe, all of them chock-full of people who can fight alongside you, us. Because I’ll be damned if you do decide to face the big bad that you’ll do it alone.”

“It’s just, how, Dad? How did we get here?” Darcy’s breath hitched again, and Tony pulled her tighter to his chest in response.

“Like you said, we’re extraordinary people in extraordinary circumstances, doing the best we can.”

Darcy’s laugh was weak and cracked over her tears, but it was genuine. “This certainly is extraordinary.” She sobered a moment later, resting her head against his shoulder and looking out into the stars.

“I’m going to do it. I’ll be their Key.”
“I know you will, Bot.”

“I can’t let Thanos run free, just look what he did to Loki and Earth. He wants to tear the universe apart with the Stones. If I can stop him like the Norns say I can, then I can’t stay here and do nothing.”

“Then we’ll be by your side, Darcy, and we’ll fight with you.”

Tony ran his hand through his daughter’s hair as she began crying again, her arms wrapping tightly around his shoulders.

“I don’t want you all to be there, I don’t want him to use your as bait or targets or whatever, but I’m too scared to go alone.”

Tony’s chuckle mirrored Darcy’s broken laugh from minutes before as he pressed a kiss to Darcy’s temple.

“I like how you think that any of us would let you do this on your own. Even if it’s your ‘destiny’ or whatever, you know that all of us would fight through hell to be by your side. You won’t be alone, Darcy. Not if we can help it.”

*****

The tarot cards shuffling in her hands were a comfort to Wanda, old and worn and moving perfectly through her fingers as she handled them. They were a gift from her mother when she was young and it was no small miracle that she had the deck safe in her sweater pocket when their lives were torn apart by Stark’s black-market shells.

She continued to move the cards in her hands, their soft noise sounding in time with Loki’s pacing steps. They were on the balcony outside of his chambers, overlooking the palace gardens with a bottle of wine on the table between them. Wanda watched the trickster god from the corner of her eye as her fingers danced over the cards, waiting for his curiosity to get the better of him.

“What are you doing?”
Perfect, Wanda thought, gesturing Loki to sit at the table across from her and glad that he was torn from his toxic thoughts about the Mad Titan.

“They are Tarot cards, used for divination,” Wanda ignored the light scoff from Loki, having known that he would roll his eyes at the idea and continued to speak. “My mother gave them to me when I was small, and she taught me how to read them. Of course, I never did hold much stock in their power when I was young but after recent events…I do not know. I suppose they are a comfort when I am unsure of my path.”

Loki was silent, watching her handle the cards with rapt curiosity on his face. While he was from a race far more enhanced than hers, he still thrived on learning. “How do they work?”

“You ask a question, and the cards will tell you the answer.”

He smirked, “Just like that?”

“Just like that,” Wanda confirmed. “What answer do you seek, my Prince?”

His eyes darkened slightly at the title, but he returned his focus to the task at hand.

“Am I...enough...to face Thanos once more? Am I even strong enough to stand in his presence? I was nothing when he found me, warped me, and I am afraid that I will fall apart once more.”

Wanda was mildly surprised at Loki’s question, having thought he would tease her and ask a foolish question. She should have known better, realized that while Loki was a trickster at heart, he would not be so cruel to mock something she clearly held so dear.

“I believe that you are, Loki. But, let us see what the cards have to say, yes?”

Slowly, she began to deal the cards in a Celtic Cross spread so that Loki could watch and understand, telling him what each position meant and what each card resembled.

“The Significator position represents your current state of being, the card is The Emperor: protection, authority, firm will.” She looked to Loki, making sure he was understanding her
Wanda took a deep breath as she placed the last card in front of Loki. “Finally, there is the Outcome, *Ace of Swords*: triumph through growing, conquest and victory while always remembering the tribulations and sacrifices necessary for success.”

Loki’s exhalation was shaky, his eyes filled with curiosity as he met Wanda’s gaze.

“Do you put your faith into these cards? You believe in this divination?”

Wanda looked at the cards in front of her; they depicted Loki’s strong and battered soul, his desire to protect and help his new family, the alluring manipulations he suffered at Thanos’ feet, the fine line between success and failure they were to walk. But the last card, well, that made her smile.

While it wasn’t a guarantee that they all would survive the encounter with the Mad Titan, it told them both that *Loki* was strong enough to face the monster and survive.

Slowly, Wanda covered Loki’s hands with her own and leaned forward to place a gentle kiss on his lips.

“Yes, I have faith, my Prince.”

******

Jane smiled as she sat across from Darcy on her bed, mirroring their last visit together in Asgard. They were doing their routine of aggressive patty-cake-problem-solving, taking some time alone to work out their anxiety.
No one was saying it, but they all knew the ‘Key’ and powers the Norns spoke about had to do with Darcy’s ‘mega-mind.’ It was a heavy thing to consider, that her best friend could potentially absorb the knowledge of the universe and defeat a crazy immortal alien. Jane shared Darcy’s fear that she would not be the same after opening that door in her mind, that the weight of the universe would change her irrevocably. That Darcy would fade away like mist and only the Norns’ Key would be left. Their daughter, sister, and friend gone forever.

Darcy’s eyes were shiny and lined with red and Jane knew she had just been crying. Tony had gone searching for his daughter when she ran away from them all after the Norns disappeared and brought her to Jane when they were done talking.

“She needs you right now, Jane,” was all that Tony had said before giving both women a hug and closing the door behind him on his way out.

Her best friend didn’t need to talk anymore, Jane knew. She had probably talked and cried herself out when she was with Tony. Darcy needed her best friend Janie, boss-lady, her sister. She needed a few moments of levity before they all got buried beneath the Norns’ prophecy.

So here they were, best friends playing silly games in order to break the tension, trying to keep the weight of the Nine Realms off of their shoulders for just one moment longer.

It was a nice attempt of a lie, Jane had to admit, suspending themselves in this bubble of teasing barbs and each other’s comfort even if they knew it wasn’t going to last. They couldn’t fully submerge themselves in it, much to their disappointment.

Darcy was wearing her battle armor and red mask, whips ready to go at her side. Jane was dressed similarly, though she was told to run and hide and not fight should something attack the palace. Each member of their family was ready for battle to happen at any moment. Civilians were escorted to safe places under the palace, ready for a siege. Guards and warriors were stationed, eyes on the horizon or the stars, prepared for anything.

Well, almost anything.

What no one was prepared for was for several Chitauri to climb into Jane’s chambers undetected, shooting the women with drugged darts before either of them could so much as scream for help.

Just as silently as they came, the Chitauri hefted the two women over their shoulders and
disappeared.

Chapter End Notes

DUN DUN DUNNNNNNNNNNN
We're getting close to the big show-down!

I can't guarantee any fast updates, i want to make sure i get this all right and that i don't fuck it up! so please let me know how i'm doing, comments/questions/suggestions and all that!

i'm not sure why i gave Wanda tarot cards, just that they seemed to fit her. I actually have a set that i mess with on occasion [they're very pretty and fun, but i'm not actually ~spiritual~ or whatever, so i don't really read into them much]

So anyways, i hope that was not too confusing for anyone? I went off the meanings from the deck of cards i have and the explanations that came with it, and the type of spread was one that i've googled and used before, so here's the link!

warning: there's some violence in here (is mildly graphic a thing?...as in it's detailed but not /really/ the worst thing i could probably have written?)

you get the gist

The rough and cold rocky ground under her cheek let her know that she wasn’t safe, so Jane kept her eyes closed and her breathing even as she tried to sort her memories. They were foggy and made her feel like she was swimming through molasses but Jane pushed through because she knew there was something important, something critical that she was forgetting.

There was the group trip to Asgard, the Norns, Darcy running away then Tony then ‘Science Sister time…then the Chitauri.

It took every once of Jane’s willpower to keep her body still and not scream out for her best friend. If the Chitauri had taken them, then Thanos would be nearby. She couldn’t do anything to defend herself against the Mad Titan, but she would feel better if she could at least assess her surroundings. Slowly, Jane eased her eyelids up the smallest fraction in an attempt to take in the small amount of her surroundings she could immediately see.

Jane was laid haphazardly across the ground which appeared to be nothing more than a chunk of floating rock with a flat surface. The rock was immense, perhaps the size of a couple football fields, but still entirely isolated from the other asteroids that orbited nearby, making it feel small compared to the empty space. Jane was just thankful that there seemed to be some sort of atmosphere that was allowing her to breathe.

The heavy silence made Jane’s skin crawl. She always knew that space was a vacuum, but she never could have imagined how maddening it would feel to be immersed in it. She suddenly had to choke back tears at the thought of Loki, knowing that he had fallen through the abyss of space for what felt like an eternity. Jane had only been here for an hour at most and she was already wanting to crawl out of her skin. After getting as much information as she could, Jane opened her eyes further and shifted her head ever-so-slightly to try to see what she didn’t catch on her first pass.

She immediately wished that she hadn’t.
Thanos was sitting on a floating stone throne that hovered about a dozen feet off the ground. He was…immense: his presence was stifling and made Jane feel crowded in her own mind. He wasn’t particularly horrifying, at least from a physical standpoint. Thanos was strange looking, yes, large and purple as he was, but Jane thought that the Chitauri were more terrifying to look at.

What shook Jane to her bones and wrenched sobs from her chest was Darcy, bound and bloody at the Mad Titan’s feet.

Some unseen force was keeping Darcy suspended a couple feet off the ground, her arms and legs spread and her hair floating around her as if she was submerged in water. She reminded Jane of how she looked when Malekith pulled the Aether from her own body. But instead of the Infinity Stone being pulled from Darcy, her own blood was trickling down her head and limbs from a multitude of cuts and a piece of metal on her forehead. Instead of dripping to the ground, the blood that rolled off Darcy’s body was held suspended around her, orbiting her in a sick and twisted parody of the asteroids around them all.

Darcy’s mouth was open in a silent scream, Jane seeing that the metal on her head was some type of mechanical device that seemed to be drilling into her skull, blood seeping around the edges. But it was her eyes that both broke Jane’s heart and terrified her more than anything she had ever seen. They were wide open, forced open, large and unseeing. Darcy’s mesmerizing blue eyes were gone, instead covered by a dark purple-black that glowed and shimmered like oil slick on water. Small flickers of familiar ice blue flashed in and out of the darker color, small flares that gave Jane even smaller flashes of hope. Jane didn’t have to have magic in her veins to understand that she was looking at the physical evidence of Thanos’ influence on Darcy’s mind, and Darcy fighting back.

“Rise, Jane Foster.”

The ground shook with Thanos’ command, the deep timbre scattering pebbles along the surface. Jane feared for the structure of the asteroid as well as her skeleton if the goliath was to speak again.

Jane’s voice warbled with her tears and her terror but she met Thanos’ gaze as she stood, refusing to be cowed by the monster. “What have you done to her?”

Gentler now that he had Jane’s undivided attention, Thanos’ replied, “Nothing in comparison as to what I could do to her, mortal.” With a lazy wave of his hand, the mechanism in Darcy’s head twisted another fraction of an inch. More blood was released and her small frame trembled in pain. “She is keeping me out, I am almost amused by her strength to keep her powers locked away from me.”
Jane’s mind raced a million miles an hour as she processed Thanos’ words and forced back the tears that threatened to fall as she watched him hurt her friend. If Darcy was keeping Thanos out then they still had a chance to take him out.

As Thanos drew even more blood from Darcy, Jane prayed that they had enough time.

*****

It had only taken about half hour to realize that Darcy and Jane were taken, and only another half hour after that to gather every Avenger and as many warriors Asgard could spare. Thanks to Loki, they were able to point Heimdall in the right direction to Thanos’ post on the edge of Yggdrasil. The biggest concern was the difference of time between Asgard and Thanos’ domain.

“I felt as if I was there for decades upon decades,” Loki had told them all, “but it wasn’t until I came to Midgard that I realized it was only one year. To Darcy and Jane, Thanos’ may have warped their minds to make them believe they have been there for weeks already. Though he no longer possesses the Mind Stone, the Titan is still a powerful mystic.”

Bucky didn’t care. Thanos could be Yggdrasil personified and that wouldn’t stop Bucky from tearing him apart. Thanos took Darcy from Asgard, from her family, and from him. The amount of rage that was radiating off of Bucky was almost contagious, the Avengers and Asgardian soldiers shifting restlessly behind him in anticipation.

Rhodey was in the War Machine armor on his left, his stoic mask almost on par with Bucky’s own. Tony and Pepper stood to his right, in the Iron Man armor and wearing Asgardian armor, respectively. Bucky’s heart cracked when he saw them clasp hands, his own shaking with emptiness. The four of them stood at the front of the convoy in the observatory, toeing the line to the Bifröst opening.

The swirling tunnel of light was beautiful and hypnotic but Bucky couldn’t gather enough awe to admire it like he should. He barely keep his feet on the ground as it was, wanting to throw himself through the portal to get to Darcy. She was on the other side, hurting, and they were standing like a bunch of idiots as they waited for Heimdall’s substitute to launch them through space. (Bucky was glad the enormous warrior was joining them, but he was too damn anxious to wait for any more delays, fuck the consequences.)

“Barnes,” Tony’s voice was quiet, just loud enough for him to hear. He nodded his head to let the older man know he was listening.
“You and Darcy, whenever you two left one another, even just to go to a different damn room, you had this…look on your faces, like you were communicating.”

“We were. We do. It’s a promise.”

“What is it?”

Bucky chuckled hollowly, tears prickling the back of his eyes as he remembered. “Darcy started it after we…got together. I had never been happier, but I was more terrified than ever before. Here was this woman, this amazing and baffling and righteous woman who chose to stand by me. To fight by my side. She chose me.

“I kept thinking that she was going to disappear like smoke through my hands, that Hydra was going to take her just as soon as I got her. She’s my weakness, the one thing in this life that I need to live. I couldn’t stand the thought of her being taken, so I stared having nightmares.

“Nightmares weren’t new for me, then, that’s how almost all my memories came back to me. But these were original, twisted images my brain kept playing through like a sick film.

“I stopped sleeping entirely and instead spent my nights watching Darcy sleep, making sure she didn’t suddenly stop breathing or that someone didn’t crawl through the window and take her. Because of my exhaustion, I failed to cover her properly on the next mission and she got hurt.”

Bucky swallowed, his memories and emotions like blades stuck in his throat as he relived the memory.

“I thought I lost her then. There was so much blood and I couldn’t stop it. The serum was what saved her life, it was only a few moments longer before the wound clotted but I couldn’t stop staring at her blood on my hands. I broke then, every ounce of composure I had shattered and I told her everything. How I couldn’t sleep or eat and how damn terrified I was.

He laughed, wiping the few stray tears from under his eyes. “The Winter Soldier, the world’s greatest assassin for seventy years, torn apart by the love he had for one woman.”
A small part of his mind noticed that the entire Observatory was dead silent, that every soldier and friend have been listening to him since he began to speak. The rest of Bucky focused on the memory of Darcy and he continued to speak.

“You know what she said? She goes, ‘James. There’s nothing in this life or the next that will take me from your side, or you from mine. Where you go, I go.’ She was so damn certain, so I had to ask her, ‘What if the world tries to stop us, doll?’ And she just laughed at me, Tony, just laughed and gave me that damn smile that puts the sun to shame. She tells me, ‘Well, James, we’ll just have to burn it down.’”

Tony’s own smirk was watery as well. He cleared his throat as he tilted his head back to keep his tears in his eyes. “And you two make that promise each time you leave the other’s sight?”

“Every damn time. We lived in the shadows for too long to not be wary of the moments between the light. Things will change in a moment, for better or for worse, so it’s our way of promising ourselves to each other no matter what.

“When we had nothing, when we were hell-bent on revenge and high off bloodlust and grief, we had each other. It’s our vow that one day, when everything comes down around us, it’ll still be us two against the world.”

The older man frowned, “But this is bigger than our world now, Barnes. This is all of us, the Nine Realms and Yggdrasil. And Darcy’s smack in the middle of it.”

Bucky just shrugged, “Doesn’t matter. I’d burn it all down to see her safe and she’d do the same for me. I’ll follow her to the ends of Yggdrasil or New York, it doesn’t matter. That’s what that promise means.”

He could feel Tony’s gaze on the side of his face as he studied him. Bucky didn’t bother to turn and look as he was too busy focusing on the portal in front of him and Darcy on the other side. The sound of the Bifröst powering up almost drowned out Tony’s reply.

“Good.”

*****
Skuld, Urd, and Verdandi sat around the cracked floor of their room in Asgard’s palace, knees touching and hands clasped as they looked down at the painted eye on the cracked marble.

Together the Sisters prayed to Yggdrasil, for Yggdrasil, and for Darcy.

Darcy’s silent screams tore through the Sisters like blades made of ice, magic ricocheting off the walls of the already ruined room as their emotions skyrocketed, as they felt Thanos try to tear into Darcy’s mind.

Their tears poured off their faces to land on the floor between the Norns to land between them as they begged Darcy to keep on fighting.

The water began to pool around the eye, Yggdrasil crying with her daughters.
Chapter 54

Thanos would not be bested by this mortal, chosen by Yggdrasil or not. He savagely tore through the girl’s mind, roaring in anger as he came across another barrier that should have been impossible for her to make.

He was immortal! He had thousands upon thousands of years of life behind him spent training with magic and technology. This insignificant speck of life shouldn’t be able to resist his manipulations. The device he had shoved into the girl’s head was paired with his own cybernetic enhancements which should have torn through her defenses within moments.

Thanos was so enraged that he couldn’t even bother with the second mortal woman that was wailing for her friend and cursing his name. He usually would have ended her life by now, but he was hoping that her pain would weaken the girl’s resolve to fight him.

And wasn’t that something, hope. Thanos sneered at the thought of it. With a feral snarl, he ripped through the next barrier in the girl’s mind.

He smiled. Her defenses were beginning to weaken.

*****

Darcy was—Darcy? Lil’ Bot, Pip, Little Sister, Minion, Doll.

She was in…pain. Fire in her veins, too much too much too much, blades in her flesh, mind bursting at the seams. She’d felt it before, this agony was familiar.

She had to fight, she knew that. She was chaos and disorder—Lítt ulfr, Lightening Sister—but she was order, too—the Key, precious chosen girl—and there was…something, someone who wanted her—the Well the Well—to tear it down.

Darcy wanted to fight, she was tired of waiting but she knew she had to heed the layered whispers in her mind. They were a balm to her frayed edges, peace where everything else was pain.
Wait, wait for your family, wait for the one who is protector and keeper of your heart. Your time has not come, dear girl. The Well must remain closed until the moment has come.

Her heart, someone kept it safe for her, didn’t they? The pain was growing and her focus was waning but she remembered she remembered him, her sun and moon and stars her soul.

The scent of gunmetal and leather the feel of scarred skin under her hands and a smile pressed against her neck—a promise to walk the ends of the Earth to find her.

Waiting, Darcy fell into his phantom embrace.

*****

Loki’s feet remained steady as his mortal friends’ stumbled upon landing in Thanos’ domain, immediately on the defensive as hundreds upon hundreds of Chitauri descended upon them. The trickster god ducked and dodged every blow that came his way and easily dispatched his would-be attackers. He could see the dark mountain that was Thanos and could hear Jane screaming for her friend, a sound that would haunt his dreams for years to come. Darcy’s bloody form was rising higher into the air, the Mad Titan taunting them with their failure.

She still lives, my Prince, Wanda’s voice was clear in Loki’s mind despite the cacophony of battle around them. She still fights, but Darcy grows weak. We do not have much time.

The Trickster tore through the Chitauri as if they were nothing more than tissue paper, his fury fueling each movement. He would be damned before Thanos took anything from him once more, especially not his Lítt ulfr, his fierce sister who gave him this new life. At his side, Thor matched him blow for blow as he charged through his opponents with Mjölnir as he fought to get to Jane whose cries were growing heavy with desperation. Lightening arched from the great weapon, as if she too was maddened by Thanos’ hands on Darcy and Jane, mortals who were some of the most important things in all of Yggdrasil to her Master.

As if sensing his former puppet, Thanos met Loki’s gaze across the battle with a feral grin as he caused Darcy to cry out once more. The Mad Titan laughed, so sure in his victory.

Loki had braced himself for a multitude of reactions when he found himself on the other end of that gaze. He prepared himself for fear, for terror, for falling into a heap of blubbery madness, cowed by the memory of Thanos mutilating his mind and body.
He hadn’t braced himself for the blind rage that consumed him down to his very soul.

With a mindless roar that tore through Loki’s throat, the god felt his magic build up and burst out of him in a magnificent display of power that decimated hundreds of Chitauri soldiers around him. Ice dripped down his spine as he forged a path through the Chitauri for his family behind him, his Jötun form having no equal on the battlefield.

Loki bared his fangs in satisfaction when he caught the Mad Titan’s brief look of shock and apprehension.

He could almost taste Thanos’ moment of doubt, and it was so, so sweet.

*****

Bucky had never felt more alive than he did in this moment, rage and fear and determination lighting fire in his veins as he fought for Darcy. He was only paces behind Loki as they charged through Thanos’ army to reach the goliath himself, not even registering the blood dripping down his face as he killed another alien.

Steve was at his right keeping pace, Bucky’s touchstone to reality that prevented him from running headfirst to Darcy heedless of the danger.

His heart shattered whenever he caught a glimpse of Darcy’s bloodied body out of the corner of his eye, Thanos grinning manically as he caused Darcy’s body to convulse in pain and Jane to cry and scream for help, for him to stop she’ll do anything, just stop!

Bucky clenched his metal fist, easily crushing a Chitauri’s neck and ending its life within a moment. Loki’s sudden berserker/Jötun transformation gave Bucky and the rest of the Avengers the opening they needed to gain the upper hand against Thanos.

The rest of the Asgardian army was taking care of the last of the Chitauri behind them as they charged toward Thanos. As one, the Avengers tore through those who remained between them and Thanos.
Thanos, who had created so much chaos and death in the Nine Realms. Thanos, who was mad with power and used it against Loki for his own twisted and sick desires. Thanos, who was trying to use Darcy to tear apart the branches of Yggdrasil because he wanted whatever it was that made Darcy, Darcy.

The Mad Titan deserved to burn for all that he has done and all that he planned to do, so Bucky made a vow.

*I'm coming, Darcy, and we'll burn it all down together.*

*****

Tony was finally seeing what was on the other side of the portal, he realized. This was the chaos and bloodshed and death that had called to him like a siren song when he carried that nuke through the hole in the sky back in New York.

As he blasted through about a dozen aliens Tony had a flash of sympathy for Loki. Hearing the tale about his capture by Thanos was one thing, but seeing it with his own eyes? Tony shuddered at the taste of bile in the back of his throat. Loki was a god, an alien, and he broke so thoroughly under Thanos’ hands. Tony didn’t want to think about what could have happened if it was himself or any other mortal under the Titan’s control.

His heart broke as he saw Darcy, but hope swelled in his chest as they broke through the last line of defense around Thanos. The last cries of the Chitauri being taken care of by the Asgardians behind them. Silence reigned as they all stared down the Titan, only the muffled sobs of Jane and their panting breaking the quiet.

“All for one mortal girl, yet none of you seek to use her for your own power,” Thanos mused, his ancient gaze meeting each of theirs in turn. None of them bothered to reply, instead focusing on ways to free Darcy and Jane from the monster’s clutches.

Careless of their silence, Thanos continued to speak. “None of you even bothered to study her, did you? No one was curious about this girl’s mind, the power she wields. Even she does not know the magnitude of what she has been gifted with.” Tony tensed as Thanos became more enraged as he spoke, knowing that their time to make a move was growing near.

“She is nothing!” Thanos screamed, “she is a child and she is as powerful as a Stone but none of you
noticed! Why should she be worthy of that? Who is she but a speck of dust compared to me?

“Do you know what I see in her mind?” Thanos taunted, “I see you. Her Avengers, her family. Her lover.” His eyes slid to Bucky, Thanos’ fury almost tangible with its ire.

Tony could feel their moment coming, so he tensed with his team and waited for their opening as Thanos continued to rage.

“You are all fools! Questioning nothing and just accepting that this girl was what you thought, not bothering to dig deeper. She sees!” Thanos whirled his gaze on Loki, “She saw through your lies within moments, something even the AllMother could not do! She knows and she is. And you have wasted her power.”

Thanos drew himself up to his full intimidating height, and the Avengers moved. Tony and Bucky bolted forward to reach Darcy as the rest of the team blitzed to distract the Titan. But they were too late.

Quicker than their eyes could see, Thanos grabbed Jane with a meaty fist around her waist before Thor could grab her himself.

“Fools,” Thanos spat, his grin terrifying in its intensity. “You are mortal and weak, your sentiment your downfall. Let me show you what it will cost you.”

With their eyes so focused on Jane no one noticed Darcy’s eyes change from black to electric blue, her lax body snapping to attention with Jane in her sights.

“No.”
Jane was hyperventilating as tears rolled down her face, unable to comprehend how she got here. Thanos was squeezing her dangerously tight around her middle as Thor and her family watched on, horrified.

She couldn’t grieve her upcoming demise, though. Not when it meant that Thanos was too busy to torture Darcy further. Jane would gladly fall on the sword if it meant that Darcy was safe. She couldn’t care that Darcy held the secrets to the universe in her head, or that Thanos wanted her for his own power. All that Jane could see was her best friend, her only true friend, bloodied and broken by the monster’s hands. The world could burn for all that she cared, so long as Darcy made it out alive.

Jane gasped for breath as Thanos tightened his grip around her midsection, whimpering as she felt a few ribs creak in protest. She was flimsy and mortal and not meant to be held by someone with so much power.

She looked among her friends and family, seeing their looks of desperation and despair, and she knew her fate. When it came down to it, Jane would gladly die if it meant that Darcy could live. Her friend had lived such a hard life and deserved something more, deserved some peace.

Just as Jane closed her eyes, she caught a bright flash of blue out of the corner of her eye.

It radiated hope.

*****

Darcy felt it the moment the Avengers and Asgardians landed on Thanos’ domain. In the bizarre state of mind she was in as Thanos attacked her, Darcy was able to see more than ever before.

She could see the strings that intwined her soul to Bucky’s, smiling at the fact that Loki’s tales of soul-bonds were fact rather than fiction. She could see similar threads lead off of her to her mother and father, as well as Jane.
It was the latter set of strings that pulled taut and strained when Thanos threatened her friend, her sister. At that, Darcy saw blue.

She rebelled against the invisible chains that held her pinned in the air, thrashing within her own mind to gain agency back over her body. Darcy could feel Thanos’ claws that had dug into her mind loosen in surprise, so she used his moment of hesitancy to her advantage. It wasn’t until she felt the rocky ground under her feet that she opened her eyes.

Everything was washed in an electric blue, the same shade she had grown up seeing in her own reflection in the mirror. She only had moments to assess the situation before the tiered whispers turned to shouts inside her head.

*Now!* They screamed, *Open the Well now! Take what is yours and hand down your justice!*

With an almost-silent gasp, Darcy heeded their call.

*****

Bucky didn’t know what to think when he saw Darcy descend from her post in the air, her body snapping from lax to lined with tension as she focused her blue-blind gaze on Thanos and Jane.

His girl was still bloodied, her body covered in gashes and that horrible machine still settled firmly in her forehead as she seemed to glide back down to them all. Tony held him back with a hand on his shoulder when Bucky tried to step forward to grab Darcy.

“No,” he warned quietly, “there’s more going on here.”

Bucky could tell that Tony was terrified as well, but he trusted in the older man’s faith that Darcy would be victorious and planted his feet with determination. He would wait out this confrontation, he decided.

Thanos almost didn’t seem to notice it when Jane was gently pulled from his grasp by Darcy’s powers, too shocked that his manipulations were defeated by the mortal girl. Thor hurriedly dragged Jane back to their line of defense, despite the older woman’s wailing cries for Darcy to come back to them, *to come home.*
When Darcy spoke, her voice was layered in a way that reminded Bucky of the Norns, though her voice was layered with both deeper and higher pitched tones that sent chills down his spine.

“So, Thanos, you wish to see the depths of the Well?” Darcy’s tone was mocking, sneering at the now quivering mess of a Titan as she neared him. She was beautiful and deadly, Bucky noted with awe, like angels from the bible. Bloodied warriors and agents of divine will that had no master.

Darcy struck out with her powers, the sounds of Thanos’ cybernetic enhancements grinding and crunching to a stop causing everyone to flinch back in response, streaks of blue light reaching for the Titan’s limbs and pinning him beneath boulders and leaving him to her mercy.

“Then let me show you what you desire, child.”

With a blast of blinding light, the bright electric blue glow that surrounded Darcy arched from her hands, mouth, and eyes, leaping through the air and shoved itself down Thanos’ throat.

“You will see,” Darcy vowed, her words a curse on the goliath.

*****

Darcy was holding onto what remained of her with all that she had, her fingertips bleeding while she held onto the cliff’s edge as the force of the Well threatened to drag her under.

Thanos wished to have the Well for himself, a concept Darcy didn’t understand until this very moment.

It was immense, vast, more and less than Darcy could ever hope to convey with her own pathetic words. The Well was everything, all bits of knowledge that was hidden in Yggdrasil’s branches and everything she gifted to her children. She saw the birth of the universe and the Infinity Stones, the rise and fall of the Celestials and every race that had been born since time was even time.

She felt like a stone lodged at the bottom of a river, the current rushing over her surface and threatening to drag her away. Her grip was weakening, but she knew she couldn’t let go just yet. Darcy was made for this burden, to see and hold all of Yggdrasil’s secrets inside her mind much like
Vision and his ability to wield the Mind Stone. They were both beings created for higher powers, and anyone less than they would go mad with the power and knowledge at their fingertips.

That’s what Darcy was counting on, honestly. She just hoped that she could come back to herself before the Well completely washed her away.

*****

Tony watched with a mix of awe and horror as Darcy tore into Thanos’ mind, Pepper holding his hand tightly on his right.

He had theories, of course, about what the Norns had meant by ‘the Well’ in Darcy’s head. Tony had spent more than a good handful of nights reading Norse mythology books into the early morning, terrified of what he read.

The Well was almost a physical representation of Yggdrasil, as far as Tony understood. It was the past, present, and future, as well as everything that would and wouldn’t be. And Darcy was letting it all funnel through her head to save them all.

His heart was breaking, but Tony knew he couldn’t go to his daughter now. This was her battle, her enemy to defeat. Tony didn’t bother to wipe the tears as they poured out of his eyes, knowing that his baby girl, his Darcy was getting wiped out with every second that the Well was in her head.

Please, Bot, he begged, please come back to us.

Chapter End Notes

i’m sorry guys, i’m such a sucker for leaving you guys with cliff hangers. don’t hate me :)
okay guys, sorry to keep you waiting but here's your chapter!

it took me a long time to write and im still not 100% happy with it, but i think that's mainly because we're nearing the end of Wee Little Stark and i'm reluctant to let it go.

anyways, enjoy! I'll try my best for quick updates :)

Loki couldn’t understand what was happening in front of his eyes. It should have been impossible, yet they all were bearing witness to the event.

Darcy, shrouded head to toe in an electric blue light that matched her eyes, advanced on a screaming and twitching Thanos and shoving the light into his mind and body. Loki felt sick as he heard Thanos’ cybernetic body modifications crunch and collapse on themselves, the giant’s body contorting in ways that reminded him of shoving the black-hole grenade in the Kursed’s mouth. Pieces of the Mad Titan began to burn with blue flames, the monster burning and disintegrating before them all in a horrible show.

Loki turned to Wanda, hoping that she could make more sense of what was happening. Wanda’s face was vacant, her eyes reflecting the blue flames in a way that shook Loki to the core with fear. For a moment, he thought that he had lost Wanda to the Well along with his sister.

“Don’t worry, Loki,” she reached out a hand to rest on Loki’s bicep, her gentle touch reassuring. “I am merely skimming the surface, but I am not sure what will happen. Darcy is fading, fast.”

Darcy and the Well were one. She was whole and complete and more powerful than anything she could have ever imagined. Yggdrasil had chosen her as her vessel to wield this knowledge, and despite how intoxicating it was, it terrified Darcy. While she could feel herself growing as immense as the Well was deep, she could feel the part of her that was Darcy vanishing into smoke.

You do not have to carry this burden within, child. You have played your role so beautifully. Rest now.
This voice was new, Darcy realized. It was different than the layered whispers that floated through her mind earlier, but it was just as familiar. This voice sounded comforting, like the auditory equivalent of feeling yourself get tucked into bed by someone who loves you, the warm feeling of safety.

Darcy was slipping, but she kept forcing the Well into Thanos and watched as it burned him from the inside out.

*Help me,* she begged the voice, *I don’t want to be lost. I want to go home.*

There was a comforting presence in the back of Darcy’s mind in response, and Darcy knew it belonged to the voice. Thanos was collapsing in on himself, something that would be sure to disturb Darcy if she wasn’t so focused on the new voice.

*Bend it to your will, child. You are the Key, but you are also the locksmith. Make the Well what you want, and it shall be.*

Darcy could feel her body shaking as she continued to direct the Well, knowing that she was growing weaker and weaker by the moment. Soon, she’d be lost to it forever. With the final bit of hope she had inside of her, Darcy clung to it and sent her wish through the Well, begging to let her go.

*****

Thanos could see.

He saw the birth of the cosmos and the death of Yggdrasil, her branches rotting and falling through the abyss. He saw the monsters that dwelled there and how they consumed the stars and galaxies, more terrifying than even Thanos could fathom. He saw realities where the Avengers failed to save Midgard or where they never existed to begin with. Thanos watched as millions upon millions of alternate realities played across his mind’s eye

In each of them, he burned.
Even if he led victory over the Nine Realms, each reality ended with him at the mercy of the Well and its vessel. At each end, Thanos found by Yggdrasil’s chosen one and torn apart.

Thanos couldn’t hold the Well, and he saw how foolish he was for believing that he could. He screamed and begged for mercy as he felt himself burn and collapse, he wailed when he felt himself fading from the rushing force of the Well tearing through his mind.

_You fool_, the Well whispered, _you court Death and Chaos yet think yourself invulnerable. You tear apart the minds of others, and you did not think that it did the very same to your own? Thanos, your fate is delivered by your own hand._

****

Tony and Steve had to hold Bucky back when Darcy went supernova, her blue light swallowing her and Thanos whole and burning brighter and brighter in front of them. Bucky was trying to charge toward her, heedless of the consequences, and Tony had to use every ounce of his control to stop himself from running forward too.

_“Darcy!”_

Tony closed his eyes at Bucky’s scream, swearing that he could _hear_ the soldier’s heart break and shatter when they lost sight of his baby girl. She was lost to the light, everyone finally having to turn away from where she stood once it was too much to look at, like staring into the sun. Thanos let out one final wail of pain and terror before he was silenced completely, though the sounds of compacting metal and snapping bones carried on. It was eerily silent, Tony thought, besides the sound of… whatever was happening to Thanos, there was only the silent vacuum of space and the sobs coming from Bucky and Jane. Tony let his tears fall silently, letting himself hold onto his last shreds of hope as he felt the light dim through his closed eyelids.

He felt everyone hold their breath for one beat, two, before Tony knew they all opened their eyes and turned as one. Tony just begged anyone who was listening that he wasn’t going to see his daughter’s lifeless body when he turned. He barely let go of Bucky before the man was off like a shot to fall to Darcy’s side, Tony only inches behind him. Both men fell to their knees on either side of Darcy, sagging in relief when they saw her chest rise and fall with slow breaths.

_“She’s alive,”_ Tony breathed, turning to shout to everyone else who still stood frozen yards away, _“Darcy’s alive!”_
Bucky ignored Tony and everyone else as they crowded around Darcy, too focused on checking her over for injuries. He had no clue how Darcy’s body healed from all the wounds Thanos inflicted on her but he couldn’t find it in him to care at the moment. Darcy lay on the ground, clean, as if minutes ago she wasn’t almost torn to shreds and covered in her own blood. She breathed deep, slow breaths of sleep, her expression serene. Bucky smoothed his hand over Darcy’s forehead, marveling at the unbroken skin that previously had housed Thanos’ twisted machine that was digging into her skull. He was able to ignore the bile rising in his throat when Jane came to kneel next to him, slowly reaching for Darcy’s right hand.

“What is she holding?”

Bucky’s gaze snapped to Darcy’s clenched fist, brows furrowing in confusion when he saw a faint blue glow peeking between the creases of her fingers. His and Jane’s focus drew everyone else’s attention, the rest of the family quieting as Bucky and Jane tried to ease open Darcy’s hand.

“Let me, please. Out of all of us, I am the least vulnerable.” Vision came to kneel next to Darcy as well, resting his hand over her fist. He looked between Bucky, Jane, and Tony, asking permission to try. They all nodded, watching Vision open his little sister’s hand gently, coaxing her fingers to relax. Everyone froze when her hand was opened.

Hovering above the center of Darcy’s palm was a glowing, pale blue, teardrop shaped stone.

“I’m not comfortable with how much that reminds me of certain similar objects,” Jane said, the attempted humor in her voice falling flat when everyone pieced together what she had said. Bucky looked to Vision, knowing that if anyone could confirm Jane’s words, it was Darcy’s brother. He was almost taken aback at how much emotion the android was displaying, the sheer amount of dumbfounded shock in Vision’s eyes overwhelming Bucky. Vision looked up and met Bucky’s cautious gaze with his own uncomprehending one.

“It’s impossible;” Vision insisted, meeting everyone’s gaze in turn. “There are six, there has always been six, ever since the universe was born. No more, no less.” He gently prodded the stone with his index finger so it spun gently where it floated above Darcy’s palm, the stone letting out a light chime that reminded Bucky of smoothing fingers on crystal glasses. Vision ignored the Avengers as they bombarded him with questions and instead kept flickering his gaze between Darcy’s face and the Stone.

Vision placed his hand on Darcy’s forehead, running his thumb between Darcy’s eyebrows where they had begun to furrow. He did not move his gaze from Darcy’s face as he answered Bucky.

“Little Sister has created a seventh Infinity Stone.”

*****

Darcy felt like she was floating in water, peaceful and quiet and soothing all at once. There was the faintest sounds of muffled voices in the distance but they weren’t enough to rouse her from her doze. She hummed in contentment, stretching her arms above her head and arching her back. Darcy’s muscles pulled deliciously, that right about of stretch that told her she had just had a good few hours of sleep. She kept her eyes closed, even when the familiar voice came to speak to her.

**How do you fare, child?**

Rather than use words Darcy sent the presence a barrage of emotions and physical sensations, knowing that the voice could understand.

*I am glad that you are well. You were almost lost to us all.*

Darcy’s brow furrowed as memories stared trickling into her mind, slow enough that she wasn’t overwhelmed or distressed. *The Norns, Thanos, Jane, family, battle, the Well…*

She fought against the gasp that threatened to leave her throat, determined to stay here in this peaceful bubble of contentment a while longer. Darcy would stay with the voice for now, since the memories were breaking her heart. She couldn’t bear to think what was happening out in the real world right now.

*You have nothing to fear, dear one. Your loved ones are whole and unharmed. It is your body that needs to rest and heal.*

If Darcy had the energy, she would have teased the voice for its chiding tone. *Like a mother hen,* she
Well, I am a mother, dear child. Was the voice…laughing? And as The Mother, I must tell you how proud I am of you, child. Darcy (as much as she could) squirmed uncomfortably at the absolute love and adoration that the voice was sending her. It was too much.

You fought so bravely and endured so much, I can only hope that you can forgive me for placing this burden upon you.

Slowly, Darcy could feel her energy returning to her. She finally had enough to respond to the voice.

There’s nothing to forgive, but you’re forgiven regardless, she teased, a faint memory of Bucky and Steve’s reunion playing in the back of her mind.

The voice seemed to chuckle with Darcy at the memory, its voice growing fainter as Darcy felt more and more strength return to her.

Take care of the Well, dear child, the Stone is yours to do with what you wish. I trust you.

Before Darcy could respond she could feel her body become more solid around her as if she waking from a dream. The previously faint voices in the background were now loud and surrounding her. She could feel her lips twitch in amusement, knowing that her family was probably causing chaos wherever they were with their usual rambunctiousness.

Beneath her felt like a bed, thankfully not a hospital bed, and Darcy could feel by the pull of the covers that there were several people crowding the bed around her. Worry warts, she huffed.

Wanda’s voice cut through the noise like a blade, “Shush, all of you, Darcy wakes.”

Wow, way to give a girl performance anxiety, Wanda. The other girl didn’t respond, but Darcy could feel her amusement like it was a tangible thing. Her focus snapped back to her immediate surroundings when the person closest to her shuffled even nearer, and a familiar metal hand covered her own.
Darcy couldn’t stop the swelling of tears even if she tried, just so relieved that he was here, that he was okay. Slowly, Darcy opened her eyes and immediately was met with her favorite shade of blue.

“Bucky,” she breathed, “you’re here.” Darcy couldn’t explain why she thought he was going to disappear like smoke in the wind, but her heart ached with the fear.

His eyes were a little red and watery from crying, but his smile was as beautiful as ever. Bucky raised her smaller hand in his metal one, bringing her knuckles to his lips to place a kiss on them.

“Where you go, I go, Darcy. No matter what.”

Chapter End Notes

*hides face behind hands* was that okay? like, urrghhhh i don’t know. you guys have been AMAZING and always giving me love and compliments and stuff so now i feel like the bar is set pretty high. so, i’m sorry if i totally had a swing and a miss, here
Chapter 57

It took five days, three rounds of crying, and a multitude of visits from Asgard’s healers before Darcy was deemed fit enough to leave her bed. It was another two before she could leave her room. Finally, after a week of stubbornness and arguing with her family, Darcy was back in the Norns’ room in the palace. She was shocked into silence when the previously cracked walls and images were reformed, the slightest hint of gold shimmering where the thin cracks once were. It was beautiful, but also served as a reminder as to what could have been.

Darcy sat back on the stool in the center of the room, much more at ease this time around. When she looked to the painted eye on the floor she could have sworn that it was looking back at her.

Like before, the Norns circled Darcy where she sat, though this time it was more from shock and awe rather than an intimidation tactic.

“You succeed in defeating Thanos—”

“—for which we, and every member of the Nine Realms are grateful for.”

“Though it seems that you returned to us with more than you bargained for.” The third Norn that spoke nodded to where Darcy’s right hand was closed in a loose fist.

She opened it, letting the teardrop stone float up until it hovered just in front of her face. Darcy touched it gently, smiling at the soothing chime it let out as it spun slowly.

“Yes, I managed to make myself a souvenir.”

“None of us could have foreseen this, child,” one of the Norns said softly, the gravity of her words not lost on anyone in the room. “We only ever could see as far as your battle with Thanos and his defeat. The rest was between you and the Well, and Yggdrasil herself.”

“She told me that this was the Well now. That I made it into an Infinity Stone.” Darcy didn’t take her eyes off of the pale blue stone, wondering how she never noticed that it was the same shade of her eyes until this moment.
A Sister stepped forward, Urd perhaps, reaching out a hand as if she was going to touch the Stone but keeping it just out of reach of her fingertips. “Yes, though we did not fathom that such a thing were possible. It is strange that this Stone does not react to touch like all of the others, it does not compel nor does it harm. It simply is.”

Darcy began to speak without consciously deciding to do so, not even knowing what she was going to say until the words poured out of her mouth. “I didn’t want it to be like that. The Well is neutral, it’s knowledge in the purest form. It’s not inherently good or evil, it’s just fact. I wanted whatever I made it into to have a choice, to be able to choose its host.”

She looked over to Thor where he leaned against the wall between Jane and Loki. “Mjölnir is one of the most deadly weapons in the universe,” he nodded in agreement, letting her continue to speak. “But she knows who is worthy. Someone with ill-intent is already unworthy, and hardly anyone is worthy to begin with. Something this powerful should have some agency over itself.”

Darcy turned her gaze back to the Well Stone and ignored all the eyes she could feel on her, intent on the words pouring out of her now that she had some momentum. She hadn’t spoken about what happened once she broke through Thanos’ control, but now that she broached the topic with the stone she couldn’t stop.

“Yggdrasil spoke to me when the Well was tearing me apart, when I felt myself starting to fade away. I was lost, I could see and feel everything and I was losing myself and she came to me when I had moments left.” Darcy didn’t know when her Dad came to stand at her side but she leaned into his chest anyways, needing the comfort. “She told me that I didn’t need to keep the Well, that I could bend it to my will. But I didn’t want it to bend to my will, I just asked for it to let me go. I poured all that I had left into the Well, begging it to let me go home.

“Next thing I know, Yggdrasil was speaking to me, and told me she was proud of me. She told me that you all were okay and waiting for me. Before I woke up, she told me that she trusted me with the Stone, that I could with it what wanted.”

Darcy wasn’t sure when she started crying, but she wiped her tears before she straightened from her father’s embrace and met each of the Norn’s eyes. “I want you to have it. I can’t have this responsibility, I just want to go home. I want peace.”

She pushed the Stone gently toward the Norns, watching as it floated gracefully across the room. It stopped equidistant between all three of them, but was summoned to Verdandi’s hand when she held it out to receive the stone.
“Thank you, Darcy Stark. It honors us that you give us your gift and creation. As its creator, you will always have access to the Well and its depths but you must want it. You shall not be overwhelmed again.” With a flick of her wrist, Verdandi vanished the Stone, removing the weight of the world from Darcy’s shoulders.

“Go home,” Skuld said, eyes shining and mouth stretched wide in a smile. “Go home with your loved ones and rest. Your destiny has been fulfilled, go have your peace.”

*****

Tony stumbled with everyone else when they landed in the front lawn of the Avengers facility and winced when the impact of landing sent little shocks of pain through his feet. Darcy stood to his left with her fingers tangled with his, Bucky and Pepper framing the pair on their free sides.

It was…strange, to be back at the facility. It felt like a lifetime had passed but they returned only to find everything the way they left it. So much had happened and so much had changed, and no one had a clue.

No one seemed to know what to do now, either. Each of them looked around at the facility and each other, all of them tired and wrung out from the last week. Tony rubbed a hand down his face at that. They were only gone for a week.

“Hey, Thor,” Tony called to the giant blonde man who was speaking in hushed tones with Jane. Thor looked up, his eyes questioning. “You have any of that Asgardian mead on you?”

Small crinkles formed around the Thunder God’s eyes as he started to smile. “Aye. I also have more in my quarters.”

Tony nodded decisively. “Good. I think we all need a fucking drink.”

Pepper sagged next to him, dropping her head to Tony’s shoulder. “Yes. All the drinks, please. I want to be so drunk I can’t think straight for a week.”

There were a bunch of murmured agreements from the group on the lawn. Tony knew he liked these people for some reason.
Three hours later, everyone was a goddamn mess. Coulson’s team had joined the fun but thankfully did not ask questions about what went down in outer space. That all could come later, right now was family bonding time. And the way that Starks bonded was to drink their weight in booze.

In hindsight, getting almost two dozen supers and/or SHIELD agents drunk off their asses may be considered ill-advised. There were a lot of people with access to weapons that were prone to dares and had a lot of pride. It’s like a goddamn fraternity, Tony mused. He trusted these people more than he’d ever trust a bunch of punks in a frat house though, so instead of worrying about the increased likelihood of injuries and property damage Tony sat back and watched all the chaos around him with something akin to manic glee.

Coulson was suddenly sitting next to Tony on the couch causing him to jump in surprise. “Where the fuck did you come from, Agent?”

The other man sighed at the nickname that Tony refused to give up. “Ninja skills,” he deadpanned.

“I’m not Darcy, I’m not that easily amused.”

“Chuck Norris skills?”

Tony begrudgingly cracked a smile. “Dammit.”

Coulson smirked around his beer bottle, taking a deep pull before looking around at the impromptu party. He turned to Tony.

“You ever look around yourself and think, Shit. This is my family? All these crazy people?”

Tony laughed, “And you bitch and moan about it, but you love them anyway because you’re just as bat-shit crazy as they are.”

Grinning, Coulson held out is beer to clink it against Tony’s glass. “To family, then. I’m glad you all made it back home, safe and sound.”
Tony raised his glass and drank with Coulson, then found his eye drawn to the corner of the room where Darcy sat tucked up in Bucky’s lap, apparently dozing. He held his arms protectively around her while he spoke to Pepper over Darcy’s head. His family was whole and together. It was a fucking miracle and Tony knew it.

He knew that the road still wasn’t going to be easy for any of them, not by a long shot, but something settled into Tony’s chest that let him know that the worst was behind them. There would still be battles and enemies and dangers ahead, but if they survived the mess with Thanos, Tony knew they could survive anything.

*Bring it on,* he thought.
Chapter 58

Chapter Summary

THIS IS IT! The last chapter.

Guys, I seriously cannot tell you guys how much all of your comments and kudos have meant to me. You guys are AMAZING and made this, my first fic, a fucking awesome experience.

I hope you guys love it just as much as you loved the rest of it!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

*Three months after the defeat of Thanos…*

Darcy laid back against Bucky’s chest as they watched everyone run around the field behind the facility. Okay, they were ‘training,’ but when the Avengers + SHIELD got together it was organized chaos at the best of times.

Pietro was acting like a six-year-old, running around and poking Skye then running away before she could see what he had done it. By the fifth time, Skye was prepared for him. She used her powers to shake the ground beneath him as he ran, surprising Pietro enough for him to trip and sprawl inelegantly at her feet. She took pity on him, and smacked a kiss to his lips before running away, giving him a taste of his own medicine. Pietro froze with the dopiest grin on his face before shaking himself and chasing after her.

Wanda and Loki were at another side of the field practicing with Wanda’s powers. Darcy was woman enough to say that she was seriously impressed with how far Wanda had come with the control and strength behind her powers. She was downright terrifying, and Darcy couldn’t be prouder. Loki was enamored with her as ever, and he always had this dopey look on his face when he was with Wanda that Darcy teased him for. She couldn’t really talk since she wore the same expression around Bucky.

Bucky chuckled in Darcy’s ear, pointing her gaze in the opposite direction to a throng of trees at the edge of the property. She was about to ask what he was looking for when she saw a brief flash of Steve’s blue training uniform. It was the wing-pack that hung from a low branch of the tree that was particularly telling as to what Steve was getting up to in the woods.

“They’re probably necking like a couple of teenagers,” Bucky huffed.

Darcy hummed, deciding that she wanted to cause a little chaos. With a mental prod, she got the attention of BIT, Fen, and the other bots. Within moments the five were rolling out of the facility at surprisingly high speeds straight toward the trees where everyone’s fearless leader was hiding with his boyfriend. Thanks to the super-serum, Darcy and Bucky got to hear the hilarity that ensued when the bots found their mark.
Steve was the first to fall victim, “What the…DUM-E, what the hell?! Dammit BIT! Hey! That’s my shirt!” A very topless Captain America then ran out of his hiding spot after a victorious BIT who was waving his shirt in the air as she zoomed away. Everyone cat-called at the impressive hickey on Steve’s collarbone and the marks on his shoulders that looked suspiciously like someone had their nails digging into his skin.

Sam was still battling it out with the rest of the bots in the trees. “Hey, hey, hey. Let’s be cool, alright Butterfingers? You guys don’t need to take my clothes, right?” There was the sound of struggling, like Sam was playing tug-of-war with one of the bots. “Fen, help me out? I’ll take you flying, how about that? That’d be cool, right buddy?” Another pause where Darcy could sense Fen considering it. She cracked up the moment the little guy made his decision.

“Dammit! Not cool, Darcy!” Sam shouted from his spot in the trees, only poking his head out. Fen rushed out next to him, waving what looked like Sam’s tac-pants in the air and rolling out to join his sister. Steve, the lovable goof, was still trying to get his shirt back from a gleeful BIT who was hiding behind Natasha.

“Always the trouble maker, doll.”

Darcy leaned her head back against Bucky’s shoulder to look up at him. His face was highlighted by the sun, making him look like an angel. She’d stopped trying to tell him that, knowing how he disliked the comparison no matter how many times she told him that Angels were warriors. He’d call her a Valkyrie in retaliation, and she’d remind him that she couldn’t qualify as a maiden warrior these days with a salacious eyebrow wiggle to make him laugh.

“Yeah, but you love me for it.”

Bucky ran his hands down her arms and then moved them to her stomach, rubbing gentle circles on the tiny firm bump that was growing there. They hadn’t told anyone yet, and all telepaths and gods of fertility were sworn to secrecy until she reached her second trimester.

“I love you more than anything, doll. You being a trouble maker is just a perk.”

“Hmm, I seem to recall that’s how we got around to making trouble-maker junior here.”

Bucky just laughed and wrapped his arms around Darcy, bringing her to lay down curled up against his side where he leaned against a tree.

Together they continued to watch their team-turned-family train, chuckling together as Steve finally managed to retrieve his clothes from the bots and jog back to Sam.

Darcy’s attention was drawn to the side where Pepper and Jane were working at an outdoor table. Jane’s arms were flailing wildly and Pepper looked like it was taking all of her patience to not laugh at the tiny scientist. Darcy would have thought that Jane was doing Science! if it weren’t for all the bridal magazines and to-do lists covering the table. Darcy couldn’t help her beaming smile, still so ecstatic that Jane and Thor were getting married. He was in Asgard currently completing some quest to get Jane one of the golden immortality apples. Frigga and Heimdall had assured Darcy that it was more a formality than anything, confiding that Odin approved of the match and wouldn’t be stingy about the gift. Frigga had also confided that she was keeping another apple saved for Wanda, her Sight telling her that Wanda would be around for some time yet. Thankfully, Frigga cast some spell on Darcy so Wanda wouldn’t accidentally hear that particular thought when it popped in her head from time to time.

Everything was…good. There was still danger, of course, but things had calmed down some after
Darcy’s battle with Thanos. Loki had told Darcy that he sensed a sort of peace in the Nine Realms, as if Yggdrasil was taking a much needed rest. If Darcy concentrated on her powers on the link that connected her to the Well Stone, she could almost feel what Loki was talking about. It was as if Yggdrasil had released a breath that she had been holding for too long.

The Avengers still fought for the little guy, but there weren’t as many Big Bads that required the entire team. Everyone had taken to forming smaller units for missions that constantly changed depending on what the target was. A lot of them, including their new SHIELD friends, had taken to training baby agents and led their own teams. Now that SHIELD was directly in their hands, everyone felt better about starting the organization back up again. Tony was looking to change the name to give the organization a fresh start but he was met with resistance. SHIELD was like the Avengers, a familiar name that promised safety and protection that was recognized by all. It was a promise.

Six months post-Thanos…

Darcy stared down at her big baby bump, huffing at the fact she couldn’t see her goddamn feet. Bucky said she was still beautiful, but she had a hard time believing him on days like this. Especially since today was Thor and Jane’s wedding, and Darcy couldn’t get into her fucking dress.

There was a knock at Darcy’s bedroom door. “Come in!” she called, hoping that the frustrated tears weren’t obvious in her voice.

Betty Ross tentatively stuck her head in the room, and Darcy breathed a sigh of relief. Betty was amazing and the only one who remained sane during this crazy wedding business.

Tony had made it his mission to get Betty out from General Ross’ clutches as soon as they made it back to earth six months ago. It took three months to track down the general, but his horrified expression was totally worth all the late nights and shitty leads. Ross wasn’t prepared for all the Avengers to show up at his door, literally, asking nicely if Betty would like to come to Avengers Facility because there was a certain-somebody who missed her terribly. Bruce wasn’t part of this mission, having taken a sabbatical to calm down after all the chaos. Betty had taken one look at the gathered Avengers and smiled. “Just let me grab my purse.”

And that was that. Betty and Bruce were together again (each time Darcy thought of the happy little smile Bruce wore all the time made her squeal with glee) and were near inseparable.

“You okay, Darcy? The rest of the girls are wondering where you are.”

Darcy wiped her eyes, “I’m coming, I just need to shove myself in this dress then they can do my hair and makeup for me.”

Betty didn’t hesitate to step into the room and help zip Darcy up, helping her to buckle her sandals. There was no way she was going to attempt heels when she was six months pregnant with fucking triplets.

“You look beautiful, Darcy.”

She wanted to snap at Betty for patronizing her, but Betty was nothing if not the sincerest person she had ever met. She reigned in her pregnancy hormones, reminding herself that it wasn’t Betty who was at fault here. It was hers and Bucky’s and the damn super-soldier serum that made them hyper-fertile. That certainly wasn’t part of Erskine’s warning.

Darcy took a deep breath and wiggled her fingers at Betty so the other woman could help her up
from where she had sat down.

“Thank you, Betty. That means a lot. Lots of emotions today, the Babies Three aren’t digging it so they’re taking it out on me.”

Betty simply laughed good naturedly and slid Darcy’s arm through the crook of her elbow, “It’s okay, don’t you dare apologize for that. Now let’s go get dolled up, it’s not every day that you go to a god’s wedding on Asgard!”

*Nine months post-Thanos…*

“Bucky, I love you, but I really fucking hate you right now!” The final part of Darcy’s sentence ended in a scream as another contraction hit.

Bucky stood to the side of Darcy’s hospital bed, running his metal hand soothingly over her forehead and letting her squeeze his flesh hand with everything she had. He didn’t even flinch when her wedding band pinched his skin against his own, gods she loved this man.

“I know, doll, I kind of hate me too right now. I don’t like seeing you in pain.”

Darcy managed a dry chuckle. “I think I’ll only be doing this once, babe, three seems like a good number, right?”

“Three’s a fucking great number, Darcy.”

Ten hours and a lot of screaming later, the Babies Three were born. Nathaniel Steven Barnes, Jane Jarvis ‘JJ’ Barnes, and Anthony Logan Barnes were (not so) surprisingly large for triplets, and came into the world screaming and wailing something fierce. They all quieted when Bucky brushed his metal fingers over their red faces, causing him to break down and cry.

“They’re amazing, doll.”

“They have an amazing Daddy, that’s why. They’re Ma’s not too shabby either.”

Darcy looked down where she was cradling JJ in her arms and whispered to her daughter, “You and I have to stick together, okay, baby girl? We’re seriously outnumbered.”

JJ just cooed and drooled a little, but Darcy took it as agreement anyways.

*Eight months after Babies Three are born…*

“Have I ever mentioned that sometimes hate the super-soldier serum? Babies are not supposed to crawl this fast!” Darcy held Anthony on one hip as she chased after a giggling JJ who was darting across the grass after BIT and Fen.

Jane chuckled from her lawn chair where Nathaniel was propped up against her own big belly, seemingly fascinated by the baby’s movement under Jane’s skin.

“Well, I know I’m interested to see how fast baby demi-gods move.”

“I’m still morbidly curious as to how big your damn kid is, Janie. You’re as big as I was and I had three babies.”

Jane groaned, “I know, don’t remind me. I’ve got a month left and I’m fairly certain that my body will never be the same after this. Damn Thor and his godliness.”
Darcy laughed as she snatched up JJ before her daughter shoved some loose dirt in her mouth. “You know this is kind of on you too, right? I mean since you ate the Golden Apple of Awesome you’re technically a goddess.”

“Shut up and let me be insanely pregnant and grumpy at my husband.”

Rolling her eyes in surrender, Darcy brought herself and the two babies she was carrying on her hips back to the second lawn chair next to Jane. They played with the babies for a few minutes before the sound of a quinjet could be heard overhead. The Babies Three (no one could shake the nickname, least of all Darcy) immediately looked to the sky and began squealing out happy noises.

“Looks like Daddy’s home from his mission,” Darcy mused aloud.

A couple minutes later, Bucky came trotting out from the facility and immediately reached down to pick up Nathaniel from his perch on Jane when he arrived. “Hey, buddy!” Bucky smacked a loud kiss to the baby’s cheek, making Nathaniel giggle when Bucky’s stubble tickled his soft skin.

Anthony and JJ began grunting and making grabby hands at their Dad, wanting cuddles as well. Bucky leaned down to give Darcy a heated kiss before plopping himself on the grass between the two women, letting his kids climb all over him as best as their chubby limbs would allow.

Thor landed in front of them a moment later and quickly went to kiss Jane and her baby bump hello.

Darcy looked between the super soldier on the ground with their kids and the two members of Asgardian royalty and smiled.

*This* is where she was meant to be. This is where her mixed-matched messed up family was meant to be.

It was good, and it was right. And Darcy wouldn’t change a single moment.

THE END

Chapter End Notes

*is totally not tearing up, at ALL*

ahhhhhhh can’t believe it’s done!

I may come back and make a series of one-shots/deleted scenes or something one day, who knows. but for right now I’m going to focus on the other stories i’m working on.

again, you guys are amazing and mean the world to me, thank you for making this fic so fun to write :)

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!