Once Upon a Time...

by Silent_journey

Summary

Everyone who had ever met Darcy Lewis would tell you that she was an alpha, through and through. But Darcy had always been an omega. Biology was not something that she could change. No one could. This discrepancy between biology and public opinion was one that Darcy carefully fostered. No one could know what she really was.

Then she started to find her pack...and the lie began to weigh on her.

ALL chapters updated 12/16
I've been all kinds of busy and haven't had a chance to work much on my other stories. At least not to the level that I feel they deserve. However, when the need to write strikes you have to do it. Soooo.....here's something I slapped together. If there is interest I might continue it.
Once upon a time, there lived a beautiful omega princess. She was sweet and kind and loved by her kingdom...

Darcy had always been an omega. Biology was not something that she could change. No one could.

However, everyone who had ever met Darcy Lewis would tell you that she was an alpha, through and through. Her brash, brazen nature; Her caustic sarcasm and often offensive language; Her tendency to run head first into obstacles instead of side-stepping them. These were all things typically associated with alpha personalities.

This discrepancy between biology and public opinion was one that Darcy carefully fostered. No one could know what she really was. Not if she wanted to remain safe.

She hadn’t always shunned her true nature. As a small child, she had believed being an omega made her special. Her secondary gender set her apart. According to her mother, she was a precious gift that would be treasured.

Her mother had always been talented at spinning tales.

Susan Lewis had filled her daughter’s head with fairytale stories. The imperiled omega princess was saved by a handsome alpha prince, and the two would fall in love. Happily ever after.

The kingdom was peaceful and happy. Until one day when the kingdom was attacked by a fierce dragon...

When the stories were finished and Darcy was tucked in bed, safely asleep, Susan would close her daughter’s sticker-covered bedroom door and return to the reality that was their dirty little apartment. To the boozed and drugged out shell of man that was her alpha, her daughter’s father.

Too small to understand that there was something wrong with her homelife, Darcy had believe the bruises her mama sported were accidents. She hadn’t realized the lies her mother had been telling until the day her father came after her.

The dragon’s roar shook the castle walls. The people hid in fear. Who could save them? Who was brave enough to fight the beast?...

Susan had tried to protect Darcy, as she had done all throughout Darcy’s few years. She tried to step between her sweet child and the snarling dragon. However, as in the fairytales, omegas couldn’t save themselves.

Darcy’s mother, her rock, her whole world until that point, was slammed into the formica kitchen
counter. Fine droplets of blood spraying over Darcy’s shock-still form. Blonde hair had darkened to red as the monster’s claws grabbed at Darcy.

*The dragon snatched the princess up as she tried to run with her frightened people. Her guards could not aid her. Trapped in the dragon’s fierce claws, the princess screamed for someone to save her....*

Screams replaced her shock, the frightened noise bringing attention to them as her father hauled her out of their apartment. Adrenaline kept her from feeling the pain when his rough handling snapped her bone as he tried to drag her down the stairs.

No one knew where he had planned on taking the little girl, or what he had intended to do with her. No one would ever find out either. When confronted by neighbors, the enraged alpha had clutched his child to his chest and then vaulted over the railing of the third story landing.

*The dragon took the princess back to it’s lair. Imprisoned in a cave high on a mountainside, the princess watched her kingdom from afar, waiting for someone courageous enough to save her...*

A broken arm and bruises in the shape of fingers awakened Darcy from her idyllic dreams into the reality her mother had kept hidden.

Sitting on a cold bed in the hospital, weighed down by her new cast and a pressure in her chest she had never felt before, Darcy listened to the police officer explain that her mother was gone. That she wouldn’t be coming back. That Darcy would be going to live with a foster family.

Alone in the harsh artificial light, Darcy swore that she would not wait to be rescued. She would not be a princess anymore. She would be her own hero.

Thus, at only six years old, Darcy Lewis began to weave her own fantasy. Small threads of lies at first. One after another woven together into strands. Those strands took on different colors as they passed over and under each other, creating a tapestry that masked the truth completely.

Of course the fact that no one had known Darcy was an omega helped considerably. She had been too young to be tested before her mother died, and usually orientation did not present until early teens. There were signs of course. Typical behaviors that would differentiate an omega child from a beta or a gamma or an alpha.

But Darcy had always known what she was, as had her mother. Darcy knew that when she did present, the lie she had been telling would be undone. So she researched. It became her obsession. How to hide the truth, how to further the lie. By the time she was twelve, she could pinpoint the exact differences in the orientations. She could spot an alpha in the way they walked, a beta by their tone of voice, an omega by their eyes.

From there it was only a matter of mimicry. Alphas stood tall so Darcy squared her shoulders and charged forward like she had a right to be where ever she was. She hid her changing scent with perfumes as she experimented with ways to suppress the underlying biology. A box under her bed in the foster home had enough natural remedies and supplements to open a store.
With adulthood came the options to seek medical options but she could never bring herself to change her very self. Not to mention that she would have to reveal what she was to a medical professional. Instead, she treated her own illnesses, kept herself healthy and away from anyone who might be able to spot her lie. Though what she did was unhealthy overall, she tried to go about it in the best way she could.

Success was surprisingly easy, even in the beginning. No one expected any person that young to be knowledgeable enough to do what she did. No one expected an omega, a gender that was widely stereotyped as vapid, to be capable of doing what she did.

Thus the lie remained. Darcy Lewis was an alpha.

Which was why, years later, when SHIELD created a file on her after the incident in Puente Antigua involving a certain god of thunder, she was listed as an alpha.
There Lived a Student

Once upon a time, in a harsh desert, there lived a sarcastic student. She was intelligent and loyal and a liar...

“I know you’re getting these messages,” Darcy shouted into her cell. “You can try to ignore me Agent iPod thief, but I will be heard! When Thor said to return everything, he meant everything. When he comes back and finds out, you’ll get to see what it feels like to ride the lightning. And that’s only if I haven’t found you first. I have a taser and I’m not afraid to use it!”

She angrily pressed the end button, wishing that she still had a landline to slam down. It was much more satisfying. Maybe she could talk Jane into getting one for the garage if SHIELD ended up funding the astrophysicist. Considering that the shady government agency was trying to keep a lid on the whole alien thing, Jane would probably have some negotiating power.

Chuckling behind her had Darcy spinning around, hand going for the aforementioned taser on the counter beside her. She had hardly let the thing out of her sight since witnessing the Destroyer tear through the small town.

The dirty blonde hunk put up his own hands up to show he meant no harm even as he continued to smirk. “Hey, don’t shoot the messenger. I have no desire to ‘ride the lightning’.” He was dressed all in black. Not a suit though. Not a uniform either. Still something about him screamed black ops agent...or something of that nature.

Darcy didn’t take her hand off the taser but she allowed her shoulders to relax slightly. “I’m assuming you’re one of the jack-booted thugs. Or do you prefer minion?”

That made the man laugh again and something deep down in Darcy purred softly. He was beautiful. A fighter definitely, if the definition on his arms was anything to go by.

“Neither really. I’d prefer agent. But you can just call me Clint,” he offered with a little shit-eating grin. The expression only heightened her awareness of him.

“Alright, Clint.” His eyebrow quirked a little at the emphasis of his name. “If you’re the messenger, what message did you bring me?”

Reaching into his pocket, Clint produced her missing iPod. She stepped forward to receive it as any alpha would. Intruders in an alpha’s territory would never make the first move unless they were looking to challenge. The choice wasn’t even conscious on her part, little things like that were habit now. Ingrained in her personality as much as her sarcasm.

What Darcy didn’t count on was that the movement put her in reach of his scent.

It shot through her, stiffening her spine with surprise. He smelled like crisp autumn wind, powdered sugar on a funnel cake, lemongrass, and a hint of something spicy like clove.


The little voice was all hindbrain. That driving instinctual part that evolution hadn’t seen fit to lose somewhere along the way.
While she struggled not to dive forward and inhale at his neck...or run in the opposite direction...
Clint laid the iPod in her palm. Undoubtedly, he could see the stiffness in her posture, but it didn’t seem to faze him. The twinkle in his eye said he could scent her as well, that he found her as appealing as she found him.

“All my songs better still be on here,” she said in mock-threat. Her brain was grasping for conversation to keep him distracted from the way her hands were beginning to tremble. He was a compatible match. The first she had ever scented. Twenty-some years without a single temptation and now this. She’d almost take the Destroyer again over this disaster waiting to happen.

He chuckled again and the noise ran right through her down to her core. *Fuck*.

“I promise they are all there. I’d be happy to keep you company while you check though.” The grin he sported was flirtatious.

She should say no. She should turn him away. She should pack a bag and get on a plane.

He was perfect for her. Strong, attractive, funny. Her hindbrain had already claimed him. Those eons-old instincts saying he would be a good protector, a good gamma for her. Her inner omega purred again, rising to the surface in a way it never had before.

Oh this was so bad.

There was just one little problem: He thought she was alpha. He believed in her facade.

It was in the way he tilted his neck slightly when he made the offer. The way he had let her make the first move, showing the unknown alpha he was no threat. He wanted her, as evidenced by the flirting. But he wanted her as an alpha.

Still she couldn’t find it in her to turn him away completely. Instincts and needs overriding her desire to keep up her illusion. He was the first she had ever met that her hindbrain had latched onto; the first to be recognized as pack.

“It will be a long process,” she informed him. His grin wilted a little obviously thinking she was letting him down gently. “We’ll need nachos. And something to drink.” His smile made her inner omega purr with satisfaction. She had pleased her gamma.

“I know a place we can get both,” he said, holding out a hand.

Connecting their palms sent shivers through her spine, but she held them down. She couldn’t let him see how much he affected her. They were only going to have this one night then she would let him down gently. She would. She had to. There was no way she could keep him.
...There Lived Two Besties

Once upon a time, in a faraway kingdom, there lived a lonely woman of science and her determined friend…

A year later, in an isolated observatory with Jane, Darcy admitted that she had been lying to herself about the brown-eyed gamma with epic arms and frighteningly good accuracy from the very beginning. She should have known that one night wouldn’t have been enough. She should have known that her will wasn’t strong enough to push him away.

In that run-down little bar with stale nachos, cheap beer, and half a dozen rounds of darts, she had connected with Clint far more deeply than she had thought people could in a single night. She didn’t believe in love at first sight...or sniff. Or whatever.

As an opponent of the media-driven myth of destined mates, she hadn’t really thought that it would be so hard walk away from him. Sure, her hindbrain liked him, her inner omega wanted him. Those were just biological indicators of a potential mate though. At least that was what she had tried to keep telling herself. Even when Clint had eloquently suggested, “We could bang like a screen door in a hurricane.”

She hadn’t anticipated how hard it had been to turn down the half-joking-tequila-inspired offer, or to keep herself from begging him to take her. However, she had kept things from ever heading to the bedroom that night. And the night after when he dropped down from the roof of Jane’s converted car dealership with a grin and a bottle of very nice Don Julio.

Since then they had kept in touch, and while it had been difficult, Darcy had kept things firmly in the realm of friendship. Yet she couldn’t stand draw a harder line than that. He was already inside the walls she had built to keep the rest of the world out. He had slipped over the side with only the moonlight to guide him. Silent and deadly. The trick now was keeping him from breaching the inner walls, from reaching the throne room and realising the princess was an ogre.

Nearly daily, they traded messages and calls. She felt twitchy if her phone was silent too long, and she wondered if he felt that too. It was often, but occasionally, he would drop by on his way to or from some classified mission. She would try to guess where he’d been or where he was going, but even if she got it right he never confirmed a thing.

When he had gone dark three days ago she hadn't been overly concerned. Still concerned, but not overly. There had been many times when missions had him disappearing without warning. Usually he had the time to at least send her a warning text, but not every time. She had only freaked out the first two times, her inner omega panicking at the thought of her packmate in trouble. Since then she still freaked, but she kept most of the panic to herself and refrained from flooding Clint’s phone with texts filled with memes and emojis.

When men in suits had shuffled her and Jane off thanks to an unexpected job offer, an inkling of doubt about their safety... and Clint’s... had surfaced. The feeling had only grown when she realized there was no wifi in the place they’d been dropped. There was also no cell reception or cable.

After she had finally gotten her hands on a live news feed (and that had required a landline internet connection - the heathens) that inkling had become surety. Clint was definitely in trouble. As was the entire city of New York.
Even though she knew he was likely involved in the battle, she began texting immediately.

*If you die, I will make sure you never get another snickerdoodle.*

*Ever.*

*You better text me before you do anything else…*

*That’s including napping…or sandwiches.*

*I expect pictures of Captain America’s ass in compensation for worrying me.*

Darcy was able to find cellphone videos and pictures flooding the internet. Undoubtedly someone would be removing certain snippets of footage, but Darcy was lucky enough to find a few with the man she was looking for.

He was living at least.

A few days later, Darcy still hadn’t heard from Clint and she was getting frantic. She had put in a few calls to Agent iPod thief, but they had all gone to voicemail.

She was packing her bag when she heard a knock from the open door behind her. Considering the only person she was expecting was Jane she didn’t even bother to turn around.

“I promise I’ll come back as soon as I can.” An extra pair of underwear were slipped into the side pocket. “You can totally live without me for a while.” Scarves were balled up and shoved on top of jeans. “I made sure the men in black restocked your pop-tarts and they aren’t going to touch your stuff while I’m gone. So if I turn around and you are making a pouty face I won’t kick Thor in the shins for you.”

“I think I can do that for myself,” said a husky feminine voice. One that was definitely not Jane’s.

Darcy whirled around.

In the doorway stood a striking redhead. She looked casual in jeans and a hoodie, but Darcy had the distinct impression that the woman as deadly as Clint. It was something in the way she held herself, seemingly loose but with the tiniest thread of constant tension. The ever vigilant gaze. Clint looked that way after missions sometimes. Those were the days he kept his back to the wall, eyes straying to the exits every few minutes.

Instinct made Darcy want to cover, to lower her head and bare her neck. Instead she raised her chin and met the woman’s gaze boldly.

“And you are,” Darcy questioned.

The woman took a slow step forward. It was a challenge. Darcy growled under her breath and the woman froze.

“My name is Natasha,” she finally replied. “Clint asked me to give you a message since he’s been put on lock-down pending investigation.”

Darcy surged forward a step before she caught herself. Her gamma was in trouble. Clint needed her help. “What kind of investigation? What’s the message?”

“The first is classified.”
Darcy huffed. “Of course it is. What about SHIELD isn’t classified?”

Natasha gave no answer to the rhetorical question. Frustrated, Darcy began pulling clothing back out of her bag. SHIELD wasn’t going to let her see Clint even if they did allow her to get back to New York.

“Clint’s talked about you before,” Natasha tossed into the silence.

Darcy’s movements slowed. “What did he say?”

“He said you felt like one of his.”

Emotion rose up to stop her breath. She wished her lie didn’t sit between them. Wished she could actually be what he wanted, what he deserved.

Natasha continued, and Darcy could feel the woman’s sharp gaze on her back. “I didn’t understand what he meant. But I was curious. So I checked up on you.”

Turning back around, Darcy met Natasha’s focused stare with a raised eyebrow. “And?”

Instead of answering, Natasha withdrew an envelope from her pocket. “This is from Clint,” she said as she held it out.

Darcy felt like there were two conversations happening. One was certainly about whether Darcy was worthy to be around Clint, who Natasha obviously felt protective of. The other was subtle subtext that Darcy only had a vague inkling of. It swirled around her ankles like mist but never quite took shape.

Regardless, she stepped forward to take the letter.

Natasha’s spicy scent met her. It was almost familiar, and it took her a moment to place as her hindbrain howled. There was hint of another scent on her as well. One that was immediately recognizable. Clint.

The pieces clicked together like lego blocks. Natasha smelled familiar because Darcy had smelled the woman on Clint before. They were partners. In more than one sense of the word. The two gammas looked after one another in the field and off.

Natasha moved to leave, but Darcy couldn’t let her go yet. “Wait.” Her hindbrain was screaming at her. *Mine.* This one was another one of hers. “I can’t be what Clint needs,” she told the woman starkly. “That won’t change no matter what we both want.” Natasha looked back at her impassively. “He’s always been one of mine. But I want him happy more than I want what’s mine.”

The older woman turned to face her fully. Her face still seemed aloof, but her eyes weren’t as cold. Then the redhead tilted her neck in a blatant act of offering.

Darcy froze. Somehow Natasha knew that Darcy recognized her as one of hers. Or maybe the redhead had known before she even walked in. If Darcy had been picking up Natasha’s scent from Clint then the gamma might have scented Darcy from what Clint wore back home.

Shaking her head, Darcy backed away, one small step and then another. “I can’t be the alpha you need.”

Straightening her neck, Natasha nodded sharply, but there was a trace of disappointment in the downward edges of her lips. “Then I won’t offer again,” she said. Darcy thought that was the end of
it. She imagined that Natasha would disappear. A proud looking gamma like that wouldn’t take rejection well. It was for the best really.

“I won’t disappear,” Natasha continued. Darcy startled; Natasha’s words following so closely with what she had been thinking. “Neither will Clint. He’s waiting you know. With the patience of a sniper. I may not be as patient, but I will wait as well.” It almost sounded like a threat.

Mouth dropped open in amazement, Darcy could only stare Natasha headed out again. “My number is on your phone,” she called back over her shoulder.

Astounded Darcy sat heavily on the end of her bed.

Now she had two of them to worry over.
Chapter Summary

A text conversation with an assassin.

DL: Hello??

N: I'm surprised to hear from you. It's only been six hours.

DL: I'm a sucker for women who can mysteriously program numbers into my phone.

N: I have many skills ;)

Darcy's finger hovered over the screen. Had the stoic gamma from earlier seriously sent her a winky face?!

N: Have you read the letter yet?

DL: Yeah

DL: If you see him....tell him he isn't guilty of anything. And that he saved us all.

DL: Also tell him that I will kick his ass if he gives me anymore of this BS about staying away from me to keep me safe.

N: :) I will pass the message along.

N: Thank you.

Darcy didn't think there was anything for Natasha to be thanking her for. If she was a real alpha she could give Clint the comfort he sorely needed. If she was a real alpha and had bonded with the gamma, she would have rights to see him regardless of if he was still under investigation or not. It was considered cruel and unusual punishment to prevent any of the orientations from seeing their bondmates. Visitations could be restricted, but not cut off completely.

With a sigh Darcy shoved the thoughts away. There was nothing she could do about that at the moment.

DL: I was actually texting to talk to you.

N: About what?

DL: Nothing in particular. What are you doing right now?

N: Creating poison.

DL: ....

DL: That's not a joke, is it?
N: You’ll never know.

DL: Anyone ever tell that you are terrifying and fabulous?

N: Never in the same sentence.
...In London

*Once upon a time, a god returned from the heavens to save his love...*

A year later, conversations with Natasha and Clint were everyday occurrences. They even had a long running group conversation that Darcy would re-read to herself when she felt the ache of being away from them. A feeling that was growing persistently stronger as time passed.

Darcy and Jane were in London now. Jane had pretty much given up on the alien alpha prince who had sworn to return to her, which translated to Jane tossing all of her home-made gadgets into boxes. They sat in the corner of the flat, gathering dust.

Though she truly liked Thor, Darcy had little patience for the way he was letting Jane down. However, when Jane finally did decide to give dating another try, that didn’t sit right either.

Some hopeful part of Darcy was rooting for the absent-minded astrophysicist and her alien prince. If they could find a way to make it work then maybe by some miracle Darcy might one day be able to have Clint and Natasha as she wanted.

While Jane was out on her first date with some guy whose name Darcy hadn’t bothered to learn, and Darcy was sitting on the couch trying to come up with a plan to interrupt said-date using the appropriate level of obnoxiousness, one of the boxes in the corner began to beep.

From there things kinda spiraled out of control.

Jane disappeared. Then reappeared.

Thor came back. Then left again. Taking Jane with him.

Ian was useless.

Erik was running around Stonehenge. All his assets bared.

Then the convergence, which sounded like crazy Erik talk, was real.

Dark elves were trying to kill them all.

Jane and her science was there to save the day.

But no time for celebratory cigars, as a giant alien ship was toppling over onto Darcy’s very squishable bestie.

When the dust settled and the two lovebirds were very not squished, adrenaline was pumping through Darcy like sick beats at a nineties rave. It was about then that her phone rang.

“Hello?”

“What the *hell* is going on,” Clint demanded. “Are you okay?”

Darcy could feel herself grinning. It probably looked a bit dopey, but considering it was an ‘I-almost-died-but-didn’t’ smile she didn’t really care. “I’m fine,” she finally replied.
“You’re fine,” Clint echoed. “That’s all you have to say?”

“Umm… Is there like a code phrase I’m supposed to know for this situation? Cause if there is I totally don’t remember it from all the ones you made me memorize.”

There was a heavy sigh on the other end. “Natasha and I are on our way there.”

“You don’t need to come,” she protested. “I really am fine. And I’m sure SHIELD will be crawling all over this place soon. They just have to wait until it gets dark enough. Like cockroaches…Or vampires. Shadowy government agencies can’t be seen in the light.”

The phone crackled before Natasha came on the line. Darcy could hear the purse of her lips. “We’re coming,” she announced with finality.

Rolling her eyes, Darcy hoisted one of Jane’s science sticks. She was taking one home, for precautionary purposes. No jack-booted thugs were stealing this baby. “I guess I’ll see you soon then.”

Soon turned out to be only a few hours later.

Jane and the crew, sans Thor, were all back at her mom’s house basking in post-world-saving pizza - Darcy had the science stick propped in a place of honor beside her - when the doorbell rang.

Apparently Darcy’s response time wasn’t fast enough because the door burst open from a solid kick from Natasha. That was right before Clint tumbled in through the open window.

While everyone else sat stunned, Darcy put her hands on her hips. “I hope you know a good repairman.”

“SHIELD will cover it,” Natasha assured as she sauntered in. She blatantly cased the room while Clint came forward to give Darcy a hug. It was probably a little tighter than he meant, but Darcy had been able to breath, mostly, so she didn’t complain.

“We missed you,” the archer said as he kissed her cheek.

“I missed you too,” Darcy told him.

The two agents sat down for pizza and beers with the science crew. Which went surprisingly smooth considering their entrance.

Later, the room had mostly cleared, leaving a sleeping Ian on the floor while Darcy and the two agents took up the couch.

“I always thought intern work was boring,” Natasha commented.

Darcy gave a sleepy shrug. “It’s a severely underrated position.”

“You’re not safe,” Clint said seriously.

Darcy struggled up from her slumped position to see his face. He was fearful for her. Angry that she had been in danger when they were so far away. “None of that,” she said with a wave of her hand. “We’ve talked about this. I will be your friend until the end of time, but I can’t be your alpha.”

“Do you think we aren’t just as concerned because you’re only our friend,” Natasha asked softly.

The younger woman didn’t have a good answer for that.
“Jane has an offer from Stark in her email,” Natasha continued. She was completely casual about the announcement, as if knowing what was in other people’s emails was common occurrence. “If she takes it, you’ll both be safer.”

“She’s waiting for Thor to come back,” Darcy said. “We’ll have to wait and see.” Clint’s face fell into an almost pout. “But I’ll talk to her about it.” The smile he granted her was worth the promise.

When Thor burst back onto the scene two days later, Natasha and Clint were still hanging around. The two agents claimed they were helping with cleanup from the convergence, but Darcy found out later they had been ninja-packing for Jane and the science crew. The buff godling was enthusiastic when he heard about Stark’s offer, claiming “The Man of Iron is a most fearsome ally and would provide unrivaled protection for you, my love...in my absence, of course”. Jane agreed to go.

Thus Darcy and her pre-packed bags found themselves on a trans-Atlantic flight soon after.
Life in the Tower was good.

Luxury was found in every corner. JARVIS was a godsend for keeping track of Jane’s stuff… and for online shopping.

Even better, Clint had moved into the Tower. He still had the occasional assignment, but from Darcy’s observations they were mild compared to what he did pre-Chitauri.

Natasha also had a suite of rooms, but she was primarily based in DC where she was working with Captain America.

Everything was right in Darcy’s world. Not perfect, but good. She didn’t have to worry about rent. She got to see Clint more often. Natasha would visit when she had a few days off. Thor was constant entertainment. Even Stark wasn’t awful (For being an alpha he certainly didn’t throw his weight around - He was sassy but not overbearing). Darcy had a girl crush on Pepper, his amazing beta CEO. The woman was terrifyingly efficient.

Though she didn’t see much of Bruce, the elusive Avenger omega, they were still friendly. She often left the man snacks, a favor he returned by leaving her music recommendations. They were all foreign bands that Darcy would never have run across on her own. Some made her laugh, others made her cringe, but some had her dancing at her desk. Sometimes it felt like a strange competition between the two omegas. Which it would have been if anyone knew that Darcy was an omega. Plus, Darcy didn’t really think that anyone counted Bruce as an omega since the Hulk was definitely all alpha rage. Well...anyone except Tony. The engineer had totally been checking out the skittish omega when the doctor wasn’t looking.

So...life was good.

Then Natasha sent a text.

N: I’m going off grid.

Darcy knew what that meant. They had covered contingency plans and code phrases and the like. Off grid meant she wasn’t supposed to try to contact them. It meant an enemy might have gotten ahold of their information and Darcy sending them a message would only paint a big target on herself.

Clint had come to find her in the lab hours later. He had been on mission as far as she knew, but here he was, dirty and with a couple of clean-edged tears in his tac suit that looked like they might have come from a knife.

Grim-faced, he had ordered JARVIS to start locking down the Tower.

Stark was striding in a hot minute later. “Barton, what the hell do you think you’re doing?”

“We have to lockdown,” the archer replied firmly.

“Why exactly?”

Clint pulled out his phone and showed Stark the message Natasha had sent him.
“I don’t get it. What does ‘Lime in a coconut’ mean?”

“It means we are headed for a body count in the hundreds of thousands. Even millions.”


“Yes, Sir,” the AI responded.

They were all in a sub-basement safe room with multiple news feeds running on Stark’s holographic screens when reports began to filter in about the situation in DC.

Darcy watched in horror, clutching Clint’s hand in solidarity.

Stark was hacking like a madman, scoping up the files Natasha had dropped online and purging them of things that weren’t good for public consumption.

As the helicarriers crashed into the Potomac, Clint wrapped his arms around Darcy and buried his nose in her neck. He was looking for comfort and Darcy couldn’t possibly deny him. Nor could she deny herself.
...There Was a Homecoming

A few weeks later, Darcy was in the common room trying to tame Jane’s notes when the elevator dinged and Natasha strode out.

Darcy was hurtling across the room into a hug before the redhead had gone more than six feet. When she pulled back, she shoved at the spy’s shoulder. “Don’t you ever do that again! I don’t care what is happening, you call the rest of your team. Clint was going out of his mind just sitting here. And the others weren’t much better. I had to keep them all calm with cookies and threats. Which is a difficult balance to maintain, I’ll have you know! Thor and Tony and even Bruce could have helped you. But no! You had to go after the whole organization by yourself!”

“I wasn’t by myself,” Natasha began.

“No, you were with Captain America. Who should have known better than to charge in without his team as well! Obviously the man is too busy being self-sacrificing to worry about those left behind but I expect better from you!”

There was a snort of laughter.

Darcy looked beyond Natasha’s shoulder to see a grinning dark-skinned man…and Captain America sporting a raised brow.

“I apologize, ma’am,” the blonde adonis said.

Deep inside, Darcy’s inner omega came to attention at the voice. Oh crap. He was definitely another alpha. Like Thor. Like Tony. The difference was that this one was hers. His scent was wafting into the room, filling it up faster than Stark’s air filters could handle. Her hindbrain was screaming it like a broken car alarm at three in the morning. Impossible to ignore.

Putting her hands on her hips to hide their trembling, Darcy glared at him. “Well considering you saved the world again, you’re forgiven. But I expect better from my Avengers.”

The other man snorted again.

Darcy’s head swiveled to him, but he threw up his hands cutting her off before she could start in on him. “I’m sorry too,” he assured her.

“Good.” She dropped her arms and turned toward the kitchen. “Now come have some lunch while I call the others. You all need to have a team meeting.”

Surprisingly, the blonde alpha and the gamma who had accompanied him followed her without question.
There Lived a Prince

Once upon a time, in a gleaming castle, there lived a handsome alpha prince. He was fearless, powerful, and grieving. He had lost his beta before he ever found any other members of his pack. Alone in a strange land, he stumbled onto more that were meant to be his...

Everyone knew Darcy was an alpha.

It was easy to see in the way she protected her chosen scientists, the way she had no problem going toe-to-toe with Stark over some adjustment he wanted to make to Jane’s equipment, the way she kept order amongst the lab assistants and interns.

Steve knew she was an alpha. He had read her file, the one Stark had scavenged from SHIELD’s fall. There wasn’t much to it. Not enough to satisfy his curiosity about her. Because, even though he thought Darcy was a sweet young woman, every time he spent any amount of time in her company he felt something was off. Something he couldn’t put his finger on.

Not that he was spending that much time around her.

She was talkative and witty. A colorful social butterfly. Yet whenever he was around she seemed to find a need to flit away. He would swear that she was avoiding him. A suspicion that only increased his need to learn more about her.

Sam, surprisingly, had bonded well with the other alpha in between his various forays into looking for Bucky. Sam was undoubtedly Steve’s, even if he sometimes came back to their floor smelling of something sweet with just a hint of spice. For some reason, the scent of another alpha on one of his pack didn’t set his instincts roaring. A fact that later would be a glaring clue.

Steve thought his lack of concern was because he had already marked the gamma. As soon as he had been released from the hospital after the incident over the Potomac, he had dragged the dark-skinned man into privacy and then into his arms. He wasn’t going to waste time claiming what was his anymore. Not marking Bucky all those years ago had been a mistake. One he wasn’t going to repeat.

The other two gammas he knew were meant to be his, Natasha and Clint, always smelled of Darcy too. Though for whatever reasons she had not marked them. The two former agents seemed fine with the situation on the surface, but he could tell it ate at them.

It was also eating at him. Twisting him up. The same way Darcy’s intermittent presence was.

He wanted them. His hindbrain had recognized them as his. Had all but claimed them.

Natasha was certainly attracted in return. They had been hard-pressed to end the kiss they had shared for cover back in DC. Clint was harder to read but the fact the archer invariably ended up perched in the gym if Steve was working out told him that there was at least curiosity there if not attraction.

Between training and working with the two agents, and secretly working to find his lost beta, Steve couldn’t seem to find the time to piece together the puzzle that was Darcy Lewis. He didn’t want to step on her toes, but Clint and Natasha deserved to have the stability of being marked if not yet bonded. If the young woman wasn’t going to give that to them, then Steve would.

And if a small space in the back of his mind became reserved for the female alpha, the way space
had been made for Bucky and the rest of them, Steve was far too stubborn to admit it.
Once upon a time, there lived a princess in hiding. She knew she could never reveal her true self to those around her. Not even those she might call friend. Especially not to those who could love her. It would not be fair to their hearts or hers. Thus the only recourse she had, to save them from pain, was to allow them to walk away. Her heart would bear the most damage, but it was a small price for their happiness...

Darcy was cleaning up her labspace after having finally coaxed Jane to go to bed when Clint and Natasha came in. Natasha strode with the same casual grace she always did, but Clint’s nervous fidgeting told her that something was wrong.

The redhead was the one to open up the conversation of course. Clint had a much harder time asking for things he wanted, or talking about any emotional matter really. “Why do you not like Steve,” she asked. The tone was studiously even, not hint of whatever had motivated the question.

“What makes you think I don’t like Steve,” Darcy countered immediately. At this point, she was pretty good at rolling with things flying out of left field. Everything the nine realms had thrown at her so far had given her lots of practice.

Finding herself a spot to lean against the counter, Natasha struck an outwardly casual pose. “Other than your constant avoidance? Nothing.”

Darcy went for a fallback she had used countless times. “It’s just an alpha thing.” Shifting the pile of papers in front of her, to give her hands something to do, she tried to drum up a smile. It felt like her lips were stretching too wide. “Don’t want to get Captain America all riled up. Imagine the poll numbers when I run for office if I get into a brawl with America’s favorite frozen treat.”

The skeptical glance Natasha shared with Clint, who was now balancing on an appendage of one of Jane’s larger doo-hickeys with only one hand, told Darcy that her joking tone probably hadn’t hit the mark as well as she’d hoped. “To be clear, you don’t have a problem with him,” Natasha asked.

“No, I won’t have a problem. You know, I love you both, but I’ve always told you I can’t be what you need. If you think Steve is right for you both then I’m happy for you. Just warn him that if either one of you get hurt I will have Thor hold him down so I can taze his ass.”
Though Darcy’s heart was cracking and splintering under the pressure of maintaining her smile, she hugged them both and accepted the kisses they pressed to her cheek. They would be better off, and she would still have them as friends, same as she always had.

The thought did nothing to relieve the empty feeling in her gut as she made her way back to her silence apartment.
As an outsider to the Avengers, Sam found he had a unique perspective. He wasn’t in the Tower everyday like the rest of them, as he worked the missing persons case for his alpha, which let him see the subtle changes more starkly. The changes the heroes themselves were likely to overlook. It was like when your sister started a diet, and you didn’t really notice because it was a slow subtle change. Not until Grandma came to visit and mentioned how great Tiffany looked, and then it was all ‘did you compliment your sister’ and ‘what do you mean you didn’t notice’ and Tiffany locking herself in the bathroom until you convinced her through the crack in the door that she definitely was not fat…

The point was that Sam had a unique perspective in this situation.

He watched the various stages of the dance the two ex-SHIELD agents performed around Steve, with growing amusement interspersed with joy. First there had been curiosity, which meant Clint hanging from the rafters or perching on bookshelves to watch whatever Steve happened to be doing. Then there had been denial. That had been Sam’s favorite as it had his favorite ex-Russian overcompensating by severely thrashing Steve’s ass in the practice ring.

While he was out running down a lead, there had been a subtle shift to the interactions. Both agents had gone from denial to tentative reciprocation of Steve’s small acts of interest. It was very small things, but at least their interactions were moving in the right direction. Finally.

As a gamma Sam was happy to bring more members into the pack. All the orientations were social creatures, but gammas especially. He wanted to have more bodies snuggled around him in Steve’s large bed. He wanted to share space with his mates, trip over people coming in and out of the bathroom in the morning, the way it had been growing up. He was fairly certain that his new pack-mates hadn’t had traditional upbringings and he was excited to show them what it could be like.

The only regret he had was that Darcy would likely distance herself from all of them now.

He liked the alpha. She was loyal, and sassy, and she could shake it like nobody’s business. (Not that Sam had been looking or anything. He already had an alpha, thank you very much.) However, from Sam’s perspective he could see how the young woman carefully kept herself out of all pack affiliations. As an alpha, she could lay claim to any of the unattached assistants or scientists she was around all day. However, she carefully side-stepped every offer. She also kept herself apart from the pack dynamics of the Avengers. Clint and Natasha had dogged her steps longer than he had known them, yet Darcy had never claimed either of them.

It spoke of something traumatic in her past. He had seen others do the very same when they returned from war. They thought they weren’t worthy to be in a pack, surrounded by support and love. So they held themselves apart.

He wondered what had happened to her, and when. It couldn’t have been recent or the spy twins would certainly be privy to the information.

Honestly, it wasn’t really his business. If Darcy didn’t want to lay claim to her own pack then who was he to judge. If she was happy then good for her.

The problem was: Sam was positive she was anything but happy.

That unique perspective of his let him see the way the usual light in her eyes started to dim the closer
Clint and Natasha became to Steve. There wasn’t jealousy, but there was longing. As time went on, that longing grew until even her usual masks couldn’t hide it.

Sam wanted to fix it, to find whatever solution it would take to wipe that look from her eyes. But it wasn’t his place. She was his friend certainly, but not close enough for him to be stepping in like that.

He wondered though. He wondered why he felt so protective of her, why he wanted so desperately to solve her problems for her. This was more than simple concern for any civilian safety; he worried over her. Usually that level of worry was reserved for family and pack. Darcy was neither. Yet she had wormed her way in.

What was it about Darcy that made her so different?
Once upon a time, there lived a band of marauders. Though they lacked in resources themselves, they had been financed by a generous benefactor to complete what they thought would be a simple task. Find the omega woman and deliver her to their benefactor. They had no need to know what reason their employer wanted the woman for. Truly, it mattered not. Their plans were well-laid. Every guard accounted for, their exit well planned. They gave no thought to the omega's friend. What difference would one woman make....

Ever since Darcy had begun hanging out with heroes and gods she had known that kidnapping was a legitimate concern. Even simply being associated with Jane, who was now the world's leading authority on interstellar travel, made Darcy a target. It was fine though, a small price to pay for earning the friendship of such amazing people.

It wasn’t like she was unprepared either. Clint and Natasha had drilled her on what to do. Repeatedly. Then tested her by scaring the crap out of her when she was trying to relax.

So Darcy felt confident saying that was completely prepared for a kidnapping should the possibility ever arise.

What she hadn’t really planned on was being held hostage with nearly a hundred convention attendees while traveling with Jane. It was a public event, with security. Lots of security due to the multiple public figures attending. What kind of cut-rate kidnappers try to go for their target in the middle of a convention. There were much better times. Like later tonight as they returned to their hotel room. Or anytime there weren’t dozens of eyes on them really.

Thankfully the omega scientist, who Darcy couldn’t help but feel had been the real target here, had escaped with security. This was of course, after Darcy had thrown her over-packed bag of snacks and entertainment into the way of the three men headed right for Jane. The masked men had gone down in a bunch after having granola bars and pop-tarts smack them in the face, and tripping on the three dozen colors of nailpolish Darcy had brought. (No judgment - It was hard to tell what color would best suit her mood ahead of time.)

Unfortunately, Darcy hadn’t been as lucky as Jane. A fourth man, who had seen what happened to his compatriots, had come at her from the side. The gun, which had been far too close to her temple, convinced her to sit down and shut up, exactly as the gentleman demanded.

With a repressed growl, she had done so. She had even managed to keep her usually free-flowing mouth from running away from her. That had been all thanks to the warning voice of a certain Russian assassin in her head. Don’t say anything. The more you talk, the more you draw attention to yourself. Stay quiet, stay meek. Make them believe that you aren’t a threat. Wait for your opening.

While Darcy was busy being the focus of four of the men, the various security teams had been able to drag their assigned politicians and public figures out of harm’s way. Though she knew her two spies would not appreciate the accomplishment, Darcy was proud of herself. She knew that every life was important, but she had also majored in Poli-Sci. If these terrorists had managed to get their hands on even one politician, it would have given them much greater negotiating power.

So yeah, Darcy was still feeling proud. Even if it had been two days and there wasn’t an end in sight. Worse news: Darcy knew that her heat would be starting up soon and she didn’t have extra
supplements with her. There hadn’t been enough room after filling her bag with everything a genius astrophysicist might need. The supplements that had been in her system had been metabolized over the last forty-eight hours leaving her susceptible to the pheromones of the crowd of people around her. It was hard to say how fast a heat would hit, but she was doing everything she could to stave it off. That meant remaining calm, and finding her way over to an air vent where she could breathe in the fresh air being pumped into the room. She was far less likely to be triggered by others scents that way. Well she had been getting fresh air up until the police had shut down the air flow. (She knew from her gammas that this was a usual tactic to force suspects out.)

Her positioning had blown her scent further into the room, but she hadn’t been overly concerned. Thankfully she wasn’t the only omega among the hostages. Not even the only one nearing heat.

There was one other bright light in this hell hole: she still had her phone. When the hostage takers had come around to collect electronics from everyone, Darcy had handed over a cell phone. Jane’s cell phone to be exact.

She had been holding it for the astrophysicist while she went on stage to speak.

The bad guys hadn’t bothered to check for a second device. Natasha’s voice in her head had called them sloppy...followed by some untranslatable Russian that were probably curse words.

Darcy had been able to shoot off a few texts to Clint about how many hostages there were. Where they were positioned. What kind of weapons the hostage takers had. She knew information like that was helpful.

She hadn’t gotten much of a response back, only confirmation that her messages had been received and that help was coming. No words of comfort or assurances.

The pain she felt at their absence told her how much she had been counting on them.

But Clint knew her only as an alpha. An alpha in this situation would be on edge, aggressive, ready to fight. He wouldn’t have wanted to provoke her into getting herself hurt.

Tears began to fill her eyes. Leaning against the wall, Darcy wrapped her arms around her legs and buried her head in her knees.

Even now she couldn’t let anyone see her cry. Right now she was staying off everyone’s radar by keeping her head down and her mouth under control. Crying would draw attention. Would bring others close enough that they would be able to recognize that she was the omega responsible for the scent permeating this corner. Right now there were too many people, too close together to tell whose scent belonged to whom. Not unless you were right on top of someone.

Besides, alphas didn’t cry.

But you’re not an alpha, a mocking voice whispered in her head.

That’s right I’m not, she thought bitterly.

She wanted Clint and Natasha. She wanted to have their arms around her. She wanted to hear Sam’s chuckle. She wanted to smell Steve’s scent. Wanted it to surround her and save her.

Pathetic, that little voice spat.

She fell asleep to the sound of grumblings and shifting around her. Face turned away from the room to keep them from seeing her the tear tracks on her cheeks.
...There Was a Rescue

Some time in the early morning hours, those pre-dawn moments when the darkness was receding but the sun was still tucked safely behind the horizon, Darcy woke to something poking her foot.

She twitched, before slowly twisting until she could see what was happening. Through the slits of the vent she could see a thin arrow protruding. Clint.

She shimmied over the floor until her face was close to the grate.

Now she could see his eyes glittering out of the darkness though it was hard to read his expression. “The party’s about to start. You ready?”

She nodded. Not trusting her voice to remain even in her current state. He motioned her to move slightly to the side so he could go to work.

Silently, Clint loosened the screws in the vent, before raising a hand to his ear. “We’re set,” he said to into the comm device.

Doors blew open and chaos commenced.

The terrorists were no match for the Avengers. Not by any stretch of the imagination. In less than three minutes all the hostage takers were in custody or departed from this world.

Darcy watched in fascination as her Avengers moved about in a deadly dance. They were graceful and powerful and... holy crap she had to get out of here.

Her instincts were screaming at her. She wanted them to help her, wanted to bare her neck, wanted to snuggled up in the midst of them.

Habit and fear had her pushing those instincts aside. Heat was coming and she couldn’t be anywhere near here.

Gathering her bag, she dodged through the crowd looking for an open door. Some of the hostages were milling about, stunned by what they had witnessed. Others were headed for the exits and into the hands of paramedics and police.

Darcy wanted to avoid both.

Luck was on her side at first. These weren’t only local police outside. The various agencies, while certainly attempting to co-operate, were stumbling over each just enough for Darcy to slip through without notice. She was able to slide away from the tent where police were herding people simply by vaguely motioning to a retreating FBI agent’s back as if he was leading her somewhere. She followed him to the edge of the perimeter and then casually strode away as if she had been nothing more than a spectator to the morning’s events.

The sun was coming up quickly now, the light reflecting off the mirrored windows of the hotel across the street. It was a swanky spot that would have been intimidating to Darcy several years ago. Now, it was just another indulgence on Stark’s dime, remarkably similar to every other high-price hotel her and Jane had been booked since Jane had joined the SI research division. She never truly felt comfortable in places like this but she had learned to bluster her way through it, using Pepper as a model for behavior.
She didn’t really want to go back to her room. The single night she had spent there had been lonely, even with the glow of her phone and Clint’s commentary about his evening. However, she needed her suppressant supplements. She was certain that she had inched too close to pre-heat to be able to turn back now, but she would need the supplements to realign her system once heat was over.

She couldn’t even begin to think about how she would ride through this heat. She had no practice and little reliable information. First step was to find another hotel to check in to, something that was more inline with what her finances could afford. She wasn’t sure how long heat was going to take and undoubtedly her people would start to freak when they realized she wasn’t among the rescued. Which meant she had to move fast, and come up with a believable cover story and leave a note.

Too many steps to this plan, simply to end up alone.

Afterwards, when the heat was finished and her hormones no longer in flux, she would contact the Avengers and let them come get her. Hey system, her hormones, needed to be even before they found her. It was the only way to keep her secret. The only way for them to never know how she had lied to them.

Darcy ducked into the side entrance of the opulent hotel, though she still had to cross the lobby to get to the elevators. She had nearly made it when her luck ran out.

A hand clamped down on her bicep spinning her around.

Her gaze clashed with Clint’s righteously furious one.

He said nothing to her, though his hold on her arm remained tight. She wasn’t going anywhere.

“Got her,” he said tersely into the comm. All it took was the low growl in his voice for her to know that he knew. He knew what she was. “Meet us in her room,” he told whoever was on the other end of the link. His eyes were blazing and she knew it wasn’t only anger. She had lied to him and Clint would see it as betrayal.

The friendship she shared with him was likely over. She’d be lucky if Natasha didn’t stab her, let alone being allowed back in the Tower again. Jane would probably protect her, but even that friendship couldn’t be counted on. She had lied to Jane as well.

In the confines of the elevator, Darcy felt choked by Clint’s scent. It was permeated with the melted plastic smell that was a gamma’s fury, but it was still his scent. Her body twitched under his hold, wanted to lean closer to him. Her control kept her from moving, no matter how badly she wanted to bury her nose into his neck. Heat was pressing closer, and with every inhale she took she knew she was running out of time. Having him near was acting as a trigger, drawing her closer to the edge.

Clint kept his eyes straight ahead, ignoring her, even as he kept a hold of her arm. Not like that there was anywhere to run though.

When the elevator doors opened, Clint practically dragged her to her room. She fumbled for the key in her pocket. Her hands were shaking as she tried to unlock the door. Finally Clint snatched the key from her and opened the door himself.

Inside the room, Darcy wasn’t sure what to do with herself. Clint dropped her arm, but he simply stood in front of the door silently. The silence from him was unnerving.

Before she could decide what to do or say to apologize, or how to talk her way out of this, he spun away from her and yanked open the door.
In strode her worst nightmare…all of them. All the ones her inner omega had claimed. Her unclaimed, unacknowledged pack. Steve came first, his jaw set, eyes hard. Then Natasha and Sam followed. They both appeared more calm on the surface, but Darcy knew that at least in Natasha’s case that placidity was a mask.

Darcy stood her ground at first, never one to back down. That was how she’d maintained her secret after all: Be bold and stick to the story.

That was until Steve’s burning rubber scent assaulted her. It was the rage of an alpha. Overpowering. It swelled to fill the room in a fraction of a second.

Instinct, which she had been able to at least side-step until now, had her stumbling back until her back hit the wall. There was a predator in front of her. She was nothing but prey.

The sudden movement only made Steve growl.

Someone was whimpering pathetically and it was pissing Darcy off as she tried to keep her eyes on the enraged alpha.

“Darcy,” Sam called. “It’s okay.” Darcy’s gaze jumped to him and she realized that he was trying to calm her, his hands up and palms spread wide in a placating gesture. “Steve,” he snapped.

The growling cut off and Darcy realized that the whimpering was coming from her. She tried to stifle it, but tears welled up in their place. God damn hormones. They were out of control, bouncing to extremes now that the artificial dam of suppressants was gone.

“I’m sorry,” she whispered. “I’m so sorry.” It was honesty, the only thing she had to give them. She was sorry. Sorry for them finding out like this. Sorry for her whimpering. Sorry that she hadn’t packed enough supplements to prevent this mess from ever happening.

“Why,” Natasha voiced the question the rest of them had in their minds.

She met Natasha’s gaze before lowering her eyes to the floor. “Because omegas can’t save themselves.”

Steve growled again and Darcy flinched back, her head making a slight thud as it connected with the wall. The whole room froze.

Somewhere in her increasingly muddled thoughts, Darcy was aware that the looks they were all sharing were rife with subtext. However, it didn’t really matter. The only thing that mattered was her hindbrain screaming that she run or submit.

Surprisingly, before her hormones could drive her to one or the other, Steve stepped back. He attempted to make himself appear less threatening by hunching his shoulders and forcibly relaxing his tense muscles. His scent seemed to draw back with him. As if he could somehow control it. Darcy felt the panic retreat slightly, though his gaze remained fixed on her. “Natasha are you good to stay with her?”

The redhead gave a nod.

“Help her get showered and packed. Clint, tell Tony we’re taking the jet and then go prep it. Everyone else will have to find their own rides home,” Steve commanded.

“He’s going to want to know why,” Clint told the alpha, his emotions locked down tight behind his agent persona.
“Tell him we have an omega in distress,” Steve said as he continued to stare at her. Darcy couldn’t stand under his direct gaze. Instead, she ducked her head, meekly submitting to his will.
Chapter Notes

Well hot damn....Wasn't quite expecting that much outcry. I will do my best to continue with this. Thank you all for your support. Comments definitely motivate me ;)

Once upon a time, there lived an assassin. She was graceful and deadly and protective of those she had sworn fealty to. She had never thought to be truly accepted or loved. There was too much blood on her hands. Then an archer spared her life, a princess befriended her, and a prince trusted her...

Natasha held herself still until Sam, Steve, and Clint exited the hotel room.

As the door closed, the thick tension in the air lessened. The men weren’t going far, only right outside in the hall, but even that little distance would help Darcy calm. The younger woman was distressed and an alpha’s anger would only make it worse, whether it was directed at her or not.

It was easy to see that the trembling omega didn't know that only a small portion of Steve’s anger was due to her lie. The rest was because of her fear; because of whatever trauma in her past had made her have to hide her nature; because she had whimpered and flinched away from him.

An omega should trust in their alpha. An omega should feel safe with any alpha that they called friend. There should never be such fear in her eyes.

The whole pack was of the same mind. Natasha had no doubt of that. She had felt it in the way they had all reacted to Darcy’s whimpering, to her wide-eyed retreat. None of them had ever known her to back down from anything. Not alien invaders, wayward gods, or even would-be terrorists. Yet being found out for the omega that she was had her in flight mode, and the roiling anger coming off Steve had her shaking with fear.

None of them wanted that. None of them wanted her afraid, or scared, or running.

They wanted her with them. Natasha was the first to admit that she had been missing the cuddle piles with Darcy and Clint. They hadn’t had one since Steve had started courting them months ago. Sam had even mentioned that he missed the impromptu dance sessions he used to walk in on.

Clint would probably be the most stubborn about the perceived treachery, but he wasn’t one to hold grudges for long. He hadn’t held Coulson shooting him in the leg against the older agent for more than a month or two, after all.

How the pack felt could be dealt with later. Even Natasha’s own fear that Darcy kept her orientation hidden because she didn’t trust her gammas to protect her had to be pushed aside. Priorities were getting Darcy calmed down then home.

Lowering to her knees, keeping most of the room between herself and Darcy, Natasha attempted to make the omega feel safe. Darcy needed to know that she wasn’t a threat.
“I’m not going to do anything you don’t want,” she assured the younger woman.

Darcy gave a watery scoff of disbelief. Her eyes were misty with unshed tears, but Natasha could see that it was mostly due to shame. Shame of the lie she had told or shame of the way she had just acted, Natasha wasn’t sure.

They both knew that there wasn’t a choice here. Steve was an alpha, one of the highest ranking on the planet. He could make his word law if he so chose. He hadn’t given Darcy an order, but he had given orders to the rest of them.

“Can I come closer?”

There was the slightest of hesitation before Darcy nodded. Natasha telegraphed each movement she made as she crawled across the room to keep the skittish woman from panicking further. Hand reaching for Darcy’s shoulder, she drew the young woman into her arms. Darcy’s head nestled instinctively against Natasha’s neck.

When skin met skin a tremor ran through the brunette’s body, like a dog shaking off an irritant. Her panting breath evened out, while her frantic heartbeat slowed. Pride slithered through Natasha’s mind. She was helping her omega. Protecting her. Eons-old purpose fulfilled.

“I understand why you did it,” Natasha whispered softly after a few quiet minutes. “I understand wanting to protect yourself. I do. But you still owe us all an explanation, moye sokrovishche.” My treasure. She hadn’t dared use such pet names before, but it was worth the risk now.

Her beautiful omega gave a deep sigh. “I know. I’m sorry. It got too big. I couldn’t tell you because I wasn’t only lying to you. I was lying to everyone. To myself. Lies like that are hard to escape from.”

Natasha pressed a chaste kiss to Darcy’s temple, soothing and forgiving. “Promise me you will at least try to talk to us before running again. Or at least wait until I’m wearing the right shoes.” It was a gentle teasing. One she knew Darcy would appreciate. Humor and bravado had gotten the younger woman to where she was.

Darcy’s smile wasn’t as bright as normal but it was still a smile.

Despite knowing Darcy for several years now, this was the first thing that the young woman had ever attempted to run from. It spoke to the omega’s mindset, but Natasha wouldn’t let that stop her from extracting this promise. Too much time had been wasted, and Natasha had no desire to give chase and waste even more.

“I’m not much of a runner really,” Darcy finally replied, gesturing at her chest one-handed. “I’m more for yoga anyway.”

Content with that implied promise for the moment, Natasha helped Darcy to her feet, pressing another chaste kiss to her temple. “I know you’ve always enjoyed watching my routines.”

Smile brightened by the banter, Darcy made no denial to the claim. Natasha knew the good mood wouldn’t last. There was an angry alpha outside and as soon as Darcy remember that she would likely lose the smile.
...There Lived a Knight

Chapter Notes

Hello my people! You are all so awesome!!! Here is another byte to munch on before we get to the really really good stuff.
Also the end may-possibly-perhaps be a teaser :)
Comments bring so much joy to my day. So thank each and every one of you!

Once upon a time, there lived a knight of the realm. He had once been a simple soldier, but when his prince needed help he had volunteered his sword and his life. Thus earning him royal favor and a place in the prince’s circle. Now his prince once more needed his assistance though the alpha did not realize it…

Steve was breathing hard. Air blowing through his nostrils like an enraged bull. Considering that Sam had witnessed this same man run thirty miles without hardly breaking a sweat, it was quite a feat.

Sam kept still. It was best in this instance. Sudden movement might set Steve off. Might make him feel like he had to stake his claim. Which could result in anything from a deep bite, to rough sex, to something with more bruises and less pleasure.

He knew Steve would never hurt him, but Sam wasn’t one to tempt fate.

Not when his alpha was in turmoil.

The blonde jerked around and began pacing back and forth in the hall. Ten steps to the right of Darcy’s hotel door, ten steps back...a pause and inhale...then ten steps to the left. Back and forth he went.

When he paused in the middle of circuit to sniff the air again, Sam finally spoke up. He kept his voice steady and lacking in demand. “You need to run it off, soldier.”

A rumbling growl was the response he got.

Baring his neck and keeping still, he pushed on. “She needs you, alpha. We all need you. But you need to get some control before you talk to her again.”

Lids came down to cover those blue eyes while Steve took a deep calming breath. At least, Sam thought it was meant to be calming. In the next moment, when he found himself pushed against the wall, he realized it had been more for preparation.

With his neck already bared, Steve took full advantage. Hot breath moved over his skin, causing him to tremble. The low growl that whispered through the air contributed as well. When Steve’s muscular thigh pressed between his legs he couldn’t help the whimper that escaped.

Teeth scraped over his skin making his knees go weak. “Alpha,” he begged.

“Yes,” Sam confirmed, a small hitch in his voice.

“Get everyone ready to go,” Steve commanded as he slowly pulled back. “I’m going for a run.”

Watching Steve’s stride away, Sam smiled. Sure, he was worked up with no release. But his alpha was going to get his head on straight. Then his pack was going to go home...with their omega.

Their family was gaining another member. Only missing piece now was their beta.

But that was for another day. Today was for Darcy.
Once upon a time, there lived a fiercely loyal archer. He always gave his whole heart to a cause, even those unworthy of such devotion. First to his family which betrayed him. Then to a band of renegades that abandoned him and an army that deceived him. He believed that he had finally found a place to belong, then his princess lied to him...

Clint had never been one to dwell on the past. His history was splotched with moments of pain and joy. Bright colors running together with streaks of blood red and gun-metal gray. Yet the final picture wasn’t half bad.

At the moment however, he was having a hard time seeing the bigger picture.

Darcy had lied to them. Had lied to him.

He had trusted her wholeheartedly since the day he met her. She was one of his best friends. She had never been his lover nor had she allowed him to be pack, but it wasn’t for lack of want on either side. That he was sure of. She wanted him. As he wanted her. She loved him. As he lo-

No.

He couldn’t think about it. Her lies drove spikes through his chest.

Instead, he turned his laser focus to the jet controls as he ran through pre-flight checks as the sun rose higher in the sky. This he could do. Focus on the task his alpha had given him. But thoughts of Darcy were hard to push aside.

Her phantom scent kept intruding.

When he had found out that Darcy had been taken hostage, he had been frantic. He had buried the panic under his cold agent persona, keeping every interaction terse and professional. Crawling through the vents toward the blinking tracker from her phone, he had suddenly encountered a tantalizing smell. It had thrown him. It smelled like Darcy. Like coffee cake, wool, and that Mexican chocolate he loved. But it lacked the usual hint of stinging antiseptic.

It also smelled like omega...omega approaching heat. Tantalizing. Indescribable. Like vanilla oil slowly warming on soft skin.

The closer he got to Darcy’s location the stronger the scent became. He kept shaking his head, trying to flick away the distraction. Until he was looking out the grate at her sleeping form and he realized it
was coming from her.

He had pushed down the multitude of questions, the confusion, the surprise. This was a mission. A mission he had needed to complete. The rest had to wait.

Now the mission was over.

“We ready.” Sam asked as he stepped on board the jet. The other gamma was usually calm, in a firefight or an emotional crisis, something that Clint respected. This development did not seem to have thrown him as much as it had the rest of them, but he hadn’t known Darcy as long, nor did he have alpha instincts riding him. Though it was possible Clint wasn’t giving the man’s self-control enough credit. He had several years of experience as a counselor, dealing with PTSD ridden soldiers. On the other hand, his serene expression could be a front to hide whatever he was feeling.

“Yes,” Clint replied tersely.

There was silence for a moment as Sam stowed away his gear in his personal compartment. They each had such a compartment stocked with extra gear, clothes, and whatever goodies Stark decided to toss in. “Steve is taking a quick run,” Sam informed him without censure.

The only response Clint gave was a sharp nod. The alpha no doubt needed the release before being enclosed in a small space with Darcy and her overpowering appeal. Clint could attest to that appeal; even with his anger he wanted her close, wanted her safe where he could see her.

“Did you know that there is a vegetable called romanesco which grows naturally in a fractal? It is a naturally occurring Fibonacci sequence,” Sam remarked in a seeming non sequitur.

Clint gave him a raised brow.

Sam simply smiled. “There’s a point.”

The other brow raised in a signal to get on with it.

“The romanesco has a side effect on omegas if eaten regularly. It warps their scent and can actually suppress their normal hormones. I only know this because my old partner Riley was an omega. He hid his orientation from the air force in order to get into the specialized programs. Only reason I found out was because he ran out of what he needed. It hurt that he hadn’t trusted me enough to tell me. But he wasn’t trying to lie to me. He was just doing what he felt he had to in order to live his dream. He got that dream. He got to fly, even if he had to give up other dreams to get there.”

Clint got it. He did.

Nevertheless his heart was a bit bruised. He needed time to process.
Once upon a time, there was a determined prince. He had finally found those who were meant to be his. He had only to claim them. Yet there were shadows and secrets that had to be conquered, pasts that needed to be confronted, before they could be fully bonded. He would not fail in this. He could not fail his omega as he had once failed his beta…

The sound of the pavement beneath his feet was like the pounding of a drum. It was rapid but steady, unlike his heartbeat. His conflicting thoughts had the organ jumping and skipping.

Darcy was an omega.

Darcy was his.

Darcy had flinched away from him.


His emotions were far too unstable to be around the rest of the pack. On that point Sam had been right. He needed to get his head on straight.

Ever since the day she had burst into his life, Steve had found himself intrigued by the brunette. She was bold, brash, beautiful. She had reminded him so much of Bucky.

Yet she had been a mystery too. Running hot then cold. Friendly and giving one minute then pulling such blatant avoidance tactics that even Bruce had commented. (The most memorable of which had involved rubber ducks and a jar of peanut butter.)

Now that her orientation was out in the open, the last few months made so much more sense.

When word had come that she had been taken hostage Steve had immediately called an alert to assemble. He had felt the worry and fear floating through the pack and was surprised to find that some it was coming from him as well. As much as Darcy avoided him, she was still a friend.

Waiting for their opening had been the hardest part. Outside the conference center they had been forced to sit idle while arguments about jurisdiction were made. Finally, after a long sleepless night, Steve had gotten fed up. The arguments were pointless posturing and he had never stood for bullies.

Striding into the group of federal agents and officers, who were all slurping down caffeine due to the early hour, Steve had pulled on all the power of his Alpha Voice. The same voice that could control a panicked city block of civilians. The one that could get the disparate personalities of the Avengers to work together.
“We’re going in,” he’d announced with resounding finality.

Not a word of protest was spoken. Gazes dropped away from his, necks were bared.

The comm in his ear came alive with Stark’s appreciative whistle. “Damn, son. Overkill much? Not that I’m not a fan of the drama. Truly. But it’s not going to be so fun when you have to deal with the fallout. These folks get a mite touchy about things like ‘protocol’ and ‘procedure’ and...Actually they sound like you usually do Cap.”

Steve hadn’t bothered to rise to the bait. He knew he had probably created a political problem, but he was done waiting.

“Let’s move,” he called to the team. “Hawkeye you’re up.”

The relief he felt echoing down the pack bonds confirmed that he had made the right choice.

The battle had been quick and clean. Easier than Tuesday night training sessions.

Standing in the large room where hostages had been sitting for hours, a mouth-watering scent had suddenly floated by. It smelled familiar. Tantalizingly so. It was sweet and warm with a hint of spice. Like cinnamon and a knit blanket and those ghost pepper chocolates Clint kept laying around. It smelled like home. It smelled like...

Omega.

Then Clint had broken his focus. “Darcy’s running,” the archer informed them, voice devoid of all emotion; the way it sounded when he was seeking refuge from emotional upheaval behind his placid agent mask.

“What do you mean,” Natasha demanded.

The hesitation gave away Clint’s inner turmoil even if his voice didn’t. Something was wrong. “I’m going after her,” he finally replied.

A few tense moments followed before Clint called them all to the hotel across the street.

Steve could smell it the minute he walked in the lobby. The scent only grew with each step. Sam and Natasha could smell it too. They traded looks, but Steve was too intent on reaching their destination to work up a comment.

He knew with instinctive certainty that he was on his way to meet his omega. Darcy. Who had lied to him. Lied to them all. She had hidden her true nature. Now she was running.

That nasty little voice of his baser instincts rose up. It wanted him to claim her. To show her an omega’s place. To bite down on her neck until she surrendered to him.

But Steve Rogers was not his instincts. He pushed down the hindbrain, though anger still burned in his chest.

Entering her room had only ratcheted up his anger. He could feel it slipping through to this others like slow-moving lava, burning as it went. His scent was tainted with it.

The moment his smell hit Darcy’s nose she had stumbled back against the wall, her face pale.

Omega in trouble, his hindbrain snarled causing a growl to rumble up from his chest.
The menacing sound had his omega whimpering, cowering back away from him.

It was only Sam's timely intervention that prevented the moment from becoming more of a disaster.

Tears welled up from her big brown eyes. “I'm sorry,” she had whispered. “I’m so sorry.”

“Why,” Natasha voiced the question the rest of them were thinking.

“Because omegas can’t save themselves.”

The words had flashed through his brain like lightning, accompanied by dozens of scenarios which might have made Darcy believe the sentiment to be true. Someone had hurt this woman. His pack. Someone had hurt his pack and they needed to pay.

The growl that escaped this time was full of rage and promised retribution to his enemies.

It also made Darcy flinch.

That small expression had brought him up short. Pulling on all the stubborn determination he had developed as a scrawny Brooklyn scraper, he had reigned in his emotions. He drew back, giving Darcy space. Trying to make her feel safe.

He’d given orders to the pack and then quickly retreated.

Now they were waiting on him. Waiting for him to take Darcy home.

He stumbled to a stop, breathing hard.

Darcy was coming home with them. And he hadn’t even asked. He had demanded it. Commanded it.

Never once had he stopped to ask her.

He was as bad as those bullies he used to fend off with trash can lids.

Running a hand over his hair, he turned and began walking back the way he’d come. He was going to fix this. He was going to woo Darcy as she deserved.
Once upon a time, there was an omega princess who had been forced to remain hidden. Now her protectors, her packmates, had come to her rescue. It wasn’t as simple as it appeared though. They may have brought her out of her isolation, but the specter of the dragon still lurked. The princess knew the battle was far from over…

Darcy was desperately clinging to the last vestiges of her independence. She didn’t reach for Natasha’s hand, though her palm itched to do so. She kept space between them in the elevator though Natasha’s scent and heat was beckoning her temptingly.

The assassin kept her hands to herself as she carried Darcy’s suitcase, though she had to have noticed the omega’s building distress. She stayed a half pace behind Darcy, directing her with soft spoken words.

As they approached the quinjet, which had been parked in the middle of a blocked off intersection, Darcy could smell the combined scents of her gammas. Half of her wanted them. Needed them. Craved them.

The other half was terrified.

Her whole body froze at the edge of the cargo ramp, mind racing. She couldn’t seem to take the last step forward. Once she was onboard she knew that she would never have the same freedom she had enjoyed for most of her life. She would have to be registered as an omega now. If Steve and the pack ended up bonding with her, she would have to list them on all of her contact and medical forms. Steve, as alpha, would have the power to override her decisions while she was in heat. Not to mention the restrictions there would be on her when the others were around. Betas and gammas weren’t expected to have a bodyguard or chaperone with them….but bonded omegas were.

Natasha had stilled beside her. However, the gamma said nothing.

Appreciative of that small concession to her panic, Darcy tried to breathe deeply. Oxygen filled her lungs but it wasn’t the only thing. The scents, her pack, filled her nose and her mind. She could pick them out individually. Natasha, Clint, Sam…and faintly Steve. These were hers. As she was theirs.

Was she really willing to throw away these people because of her fear?
For a moment, her head cleared and she was able to think rationally.

Omegas were not property. They were people too. Jane was proof of the independence omegas could claim these days. They had rights and laws protecting them. Yes their bonded pack had some ability to make decisions for them, but it went both ways. Omegas could claim power of attorney when an alpha was in rut or incapacitated.

This wasn’t the nightmare that Darcy was envisioning. Yet knowing it rationally and feeling it in her heart were two different things.

A sense memory of her father’s hands on her arms sent a chill through her.

Steve wasn’t her father…obviously.

But…

It would be so very easy for any alpha to let themselves be lost in instinct. And Steve was the uber-Alpha. What if Steve forgot himself for a moment? What if…

“Darcy.”

Sam was standing only a few feet away. She had been so lost in her head that she hadn’t noticed him approaching.

“Do you trust me,” he asked gently.

There was no hesitation. “Of course.”

“Do you trust Natasha? And Clint?”

Darcy felt the way Natasha stiffened beside her. “With my everything,” she replied earnestly, trying to erase the doubt from Natasha’s mind that must have formed.

Sam nodded and gave a faint smile.

“Do you trust us to protect you?”

“Yes.”

“Even from Steve?”

Now there was hesitation. It wasn’t unheard of for gammas to side with omegas if abuse happened. However, the reverse could be found as well. There had been cases of gammas helping perpetuate abuse against an omega because the alpha commanded it. Darcy knew the statistics. The files she had researched when she was younger had fueled her nightmares for years.

Plus there was the whole fact that Steve was like the super-Alpha.

Her silence must have stretched too long. Sam gave a nod like she had answered the question then looked to Natasha. “I’ll tell Cap he has to catch a ride back with Stark.”

Sam only got two steps away before Darcy found herself grabbing at his arm. He paused, looking to her expectantly.

“No,” she said. “I trust you. I trust all of you. Steve won’t hurt me,” she stated, surprised to find it didn’t feel like a lie. It felt like she believed it.
Maybe she could do this.
BAM! Another chapter!
I realize this is not the big reveal we were all hoping for.....HOWEVER....I have a few
days of vacation so I will be able to work some magic (fingers crossed!).

In other news, I love all of you!! Your comments are so amazing! And if you haven't
checked out my other works please do. I plan to update all of them before the end of the
week. It's going to be great!!

In other other news....I learned a fun fact the other day. 10 people a year die from
vending machines.....VENDING MACHINES. So I would like to take this moment to
give a PSA....*clears throat* I know we've all done it. You put in a dollar but the bag of
doritos you wanted is stuck. So you give the machine a little shake. Yet those doritos
still hang there tauntingly. So you shake a little harder. For 10 people every year that
extra shake is the end of all their future snacking. Don't take the risk. Practice safe
snacking and contact the vending machine operators before handling things yourself.
This has been a public service announcement paid for by....well nobody.

:)
Maybe he was broken. Perhaps he needed to be repaired.

No.

He wasn’t a machine. At least not mostly...

His metal arm whirred beneath the hoodie he had snatched from some kid’s unwatched bag.

He knew that he had to hide it. It was important. The masters - no - They were no longer the masters.
He was no longer their pet. They were the enemy....

The enemy had been proud of the arm. Proud of their technological advancement. Proud of the
rumors it sparked. The fear it birthed. They had never let him cover it.

But he was no longer theirs.

He belonged to someone else. He belonged to blonde hair and fierce loyalty. To an angel face and a
devil’s smirk that gave away the game. To blue eyes and reckless bravery. To a white star.

Yet he couldn’t go back yet. Couldn’t let himself be found.

He needed to know more. He needed to fill the blank spaces with more.

The enemy had damaged him.

And though he sometimes couldn’t remember his name, he knew that he couldn’t go back to his
Alpha like he was. Stevie’s heart had been broken enough.
Once upon a time, there was a great shining city beside the sea. It boasted the greatest artists, the finest foods, the most beautiful people. In the center of the city stood a beacon of hope. A tower that rose to the heavens in defiance of all those that would seek to tear it down. The princess had always felt that hope when she looked at the gleaming tower…

The interior of the quinjet was...cozy.

Yeah cozy was the word she was going with.

When Darcy had followed Sam into the jet she had been certain that she wasn’t going to be able to get comfortable. Her heat was already making her itchy. Yet, somehow she was all right. She had chosen a seat in the corner, almost tucked into an alcove. Natasha had come to sit beside her. The other woman had left space between them, but after only a minute Darcy had caved and dragged her closer. A few minutes after that Sam had come to see if they were alright and instinctively Darcy had dragged him into the pile too.

Later, she could claim it had been her hindbrain and heat driving her. For now, she was tucked between two of her gammas, safe.

They were still waiting on Steve to return. Though Darcy wasn’t looking forward to that, she knew her gammas would protect her.

Even Clint.

She knew he was furious with her. There would be grovelling in her future for sure. However, she also knew there was hope for them. It was in the way he kept glancing her way as if to assure himself she was safe. It was in the way he had sighed heavily and then brought over several cold water bottles for them unprompted, all without a word and with that disgruntled look on his face.

Surrounded by their combined scents Darcy felt muscles she hadn’t even realized with tensed smoothing out and relaxing.

Of course it had to be that moment that Steve returned.

She smelled him before she heard him. His scent rolled out before him, an almost physical cloud. There was still anger there but so much more. Hunger. Need. Home.

A whimper slipped from her lips before she could prevent it. He smelled good. She wanted to bury her nose in his neck. She wanted to have him wrapped around her. She wanted…

Pulling hard on the emergency brake of that train of thought, she tried to pull herself together. This
was hindbrain talking.

She couldn’t deny that she wanted him, but she refused to throw herself at him. She refused to be a statistic. She wouldn’t roll over and show her belly simply because he had such a tantalizing scent.

“Everyone ready,” he asked after his assessing all their positions. The gammas gave him confirming nods immediately. His eyes focused on her, waiting for an answer.

“I’m ready,” she replied, her voice holding only a tint of her usual boldness.

“Let’s go,” he instructed.

The ride wasn’t going to be overly long, only ninety minutes. It felt like eternity to Darcy. Their combined scents were driving her crazy. It was taking every ounce of her willpower to keep her body still. She wanted to rub against each of them. Wanted to lick at their necks where their scent glands would grant her a lovely taste.

She didn’t realize she was making soft whimpers until Steve suddenly stood and stalked toward her. He dropped into a crouch to make their eyes level. “It’s okay, Darcy,” he soothed. “We’re going to get you home. No one is going to do anything you don’t want.”

And that right there was the crux of the problem. She wanted impossible things. She wanted too much.

She wanted to run, to go back to when they all thought she was an alpha. She wanted go back to before Clint looked at her in betrayal. To when she was on the outside looking in at a pack she could never have.

But…

She wanted them to hold her. She wanted to be lost in them. She wanted to feel Steve’s sharp white teeth sinking into her neck, marking her as his. Wanted to be bonded into the pack by blood. She wanted him to fuck her until she screamed and then cuddle with her gammas surrounding her. In her head, she could admit to herself that she had always wanted these things, that it couldn’t all be blamed on that tricky hindbrain. She had simply pushed down these wants and needs; buried them deep in her need to keep up her charade.

She couldn’t articulate an answer but the alpha didn’t seem bothered by that. He moved slowly, giving her every chance to move away, setting his hand on her knee. “We’re going to protect you,” he promised. Coming from his lips, it sounded like a pledge. Like he was swearing an oath. She could almost hear a bald eagle’s screech in the background. “We’ll help you through this.”

A shiver tore through her. Her alpha would protect her. Her alpha would know what to do. He would take care of everything. She didn’t have to be on guard…

Shaking her head didn’t clear away the thoughts. However, it had the unintended effect of bringing sadness to Steve’s eyes. He thought she was rejecting him. Tossing away his offer of protection.

Before he could withdraw, she grabbed at his hand, tangling their fingers together. “Yes,” she told him, though she wasn’t sure what she was saying yes to.

Steve seemed to understand. He smiled before meeting the gazes of the two gammas on either side of her. Whatever silent communication passed between them had Sam and Natasha snuggling closer.

When Steve began to pull back she let him. She watched as the alpha checked on Clint and returned
to his seat on the other side of the jet.

Darcy wasn’t sure what she wanted, but she couldn’t deny that this was her pack. They were hers and even if she never bonded with them they would continue to watch over her. They would protect her. It was the type of people they were. Heroes.

She felt the jet tilt as Clint lined up for the landing at the Tower, but Darcy felt no fear. Whatever happened next, whatever changes came due to her true nature being known, these people would rally around her.

There was small bump as the jet set down, but Darcy hardly felt it. Sam and Natasha had braced her.

They kept her between them as they made their way off the jet. Steve in front and Clint bringing up the rear. Surrounding her. Giving her the feeling of safety.

Stepping into the Tower, Darcy would admit to herself that she wanted to feel like that all the time. And, for the first time, she had hope that it was possible.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you all for the comments...which I'm still working on responding to.

Comments give me life!
Chapter Notes

Hello my people! Hope the weekend finds you well. 
So...I meant to do something different with this chapter. More of a reveal to everyone. 
Then the characters kinda decided they wanted to do something else. I'm just sitting here 
with the keyboard like 'hey it's cool. Not like I had a plan or anything.'

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Once upon a time there lived an eccentric king. He was rich beyond reason, charismatic, and 
believed intrinsically that he was always right. These things often put him at odds with others, but 
he could not change his nature. However, the king had made peace, and even found friendship, 
with the prince of a neighboring kingdom. He found himself wishing the young man luck in his 
journey to find his pack. The king’s journey to do the same had been long and only now was he 
finally attempting to court his omega. The king had no idea that he had been harboring the 
prince’s future bonded…

Tony landed lightly on the pad outside the common floor. As he stepped forward and the suit 
stripped off him in pieces he continued his complaints to JARVIS. 

“Tell me again why I had to fly all the way home by myself? I mean I get not waiting for Thor. The 
guy's gonna be shacked up with his omega for the next three days if the looks he was giving her are 
any indication of bedroom activities...But why leave me behind?”

Though JARVIS was never programmed with the ability to sigh, the AI had somehow picked it up 
along the way. Tony took that as a testament to his genius. Others might say it was a testament of the 
man’s ability to frustrate and annoy.

“Mr. Barton stated that it was an emergency. There was an omega in crisis,” JARVIS reminded him. 
Again.

“Yeah. I got that. But who? And don’t say you ‘can not say’. That’s a crock, J.” He pointed at the 
nearest camera as he made his way further into the living space. “I know you can say. You’re 
choosing not to. I know it isn’t Brucie, because he is snug as a bug in a rug with his test tubes 
downstairs. And as far as I know there are no other omegas that the Avengers would take personal 
responsibility for. So I want to know who is…”  His voice trailed off as the heavy scent of omega 
ramping up to heat blew into his face.

If it hadn’t been for the mixture of other scents that followed Tony might have done something he 
would later regret. As it was, his hindbrain was definitely sitting up and taking notice.

There was a growl from Rogers who was doing his best to block the omega from sight by using his 
wide shoulders. Tony simply raised a brow. Now that was interesting.

Steve’s gammas were spread out around the omega and Tony could tell at a glance that they were 
prepared to fight to protect the smaller figure, clearing making a claim. Not that the scents they were
putting out hadn’t already told him that.

Carefully, Tony kept his eyes on the Captain, pointedly keeping his gaze away from the unknown omega. If it came down to a fight he knew he could have his armor back on in seconds, but he really didn’t want to brawl. Certainly not in the Tower. Pepper would be furious. More importantly, Bruce would get that little worry line between his brows and pinched look that made Tony’s chest tighten with guilt.

They might have stood there all day. Two alphas squared off for no other reason than a fertile unbonded omega was near. Thank Christ for Sam Wilson, was all Tony could think when the gamma cleared his throat.

Both alphas turned their gaze on him, bodies still tensed for action.

“It might be best if we stayed off the common floors for now,” Sam said calmly, as if it was only a suggestion not a necessity. “Plus Darcy would feel better in her rooms.”

Confusion swept across Tony’s face. “Darcy?”

The woman in question peeked out from behind Steve. “Hiya,” she said with a limp wave, her hair dangling in a swinging ponytail.

Instantaneously the dots connected in Tony’s head. (He was a genius afterall.) “Oh my god. Tits! You’re the omega? Wait, you’re an omega? You can’t be! You’re -”

Whatever else he might have said was cut off by the elevator door opening and a deep warning growl that echoed around the open space. Immediately, the pack around Darcy tightened ranks and fell into defensive positions.

Tony’s head snapped in the direction of the growl. There stood Bruce, hands fisted at his sides, lips pulled back in a snarl.

“Uh, Brucie? Gonna need you to calm it down, big guy.” Everyone was pretty sure that Hulk was an alpha. Not that anyone had tried to test it. But every behavior he had ever shown could technically be classified as alpha. He was protective, destructive, territorial, aggressive. If the Hulk was reacting to the omega scent they were so so screwed. Tony couldn’t even quantify how screwed they were.

At his voice, Bruce’s gaze locked onto his face. When Tony realized there was no green tint anywhere in his face or on his skin, the genius took a step forward. “Bruce?”

The scientist didn’t respond with words. Instead, he turned his gaze back on the Steve and the others while stalking his way across the floor towards Tony. Unsure what to do or how to handle a clearly unstable Banner, Tony remained where he was.

Now Tony Stark would be the last to admit that thought of omegas as weak...because he didn’t. Not the way the media portrayed them as weak. But he had always made assumptions about them. They tended to be giving, easy-going, adaptable, caring, kind. What most people forgot was that back in the days when humans had been hunters and gathers, before society enforced its own rules of behavior on the orientations, omegas had been as likely to go feral as alphas. They had been the ruling force in regards to home and hearth. When anyone threatened their domain they could become as violent as any of the other orientations. Like a momma bear with her cubs. Omegas had also fought rivals that came too close to their pack, staking their claim aggressively.

Darcy Lewis had gotten too close.
Later, when Tony had a moment to think, he would come to that conclusion. But right now he had more pressing matters.

Bruce was beside him now, still growling slightly under his breath.

Tony tried once more to calm the man. “Bruce,” he began. The rest of his words choked his throat when the scientist turned to him and bared his own throat.

It was what Tony had been dreaming about since he met the man. He had been ‘no-pressure’ courting the shy man for months and never once, in all of that time, had Bruce given any indication that he would be willing to move things further. Shock froze him to the spot.

That didn’t seem to bother Bruce. He grabbed Tony’s hand and dragged him closer, pulling his head down to his bared neck. “Mine,” Bruce snarled in the others’ direction as Tony gave into temptation and mouthed at the skin he had been presented with.

There was a chuckle, that might have been Barton, before Sam spoke calmly. “We’re going to go. Let JARVIS know if you need us.”

Tony didn’t bother to reply. He was too fascinated the man in front of him. He brought his arms up slowly and when Bruce only hummed in appreciation, he pulled the man closer to him. That beautiful neck that was spread out for him begged to be licked and sucked and bitten. Tony was all too happy to please.

Chapter End Notes

Comments make my little black heart flutter! :)


Hello my wonderful people!
It's about 5am and I am hopped up on Nightcore music, caffeine, and adrenaline from quitting my job. So here is an update. Hopefully it makes sense. If not I'll fix it when I come back down to my normal level. :)
Good news is I've written over 5k words today on my other fics so updates will be coming soon!

Once upon a time, there lived an intelligent princess who had never put much credence in fairytales. She believed in the dragons, the dungeons, and the evil witches. For the darkness in the world was real. Yet she could not have faith in the charming princes, the good fairies, or the knights in shining armor. Those were idle dreams. Thus she could not fathom that when a prince came for her that he would truly want her. He would expect the princess of the stories. Demure, sweet, vapid, and above all obedient. What prince would want a princess like her…

Entering her small (by Tony standard) apartment, Darcy felt some of her tension release. The scene with Bruce had been a bit frightening, but it had ended on a positive note. However, it had sent her instincts on edge. Her apartment was her den (according to her hindbrain at least). It was a place of safety. A place where her packmates could gather around her.

Her inner omega wanted that more than anything. She wanted to snuggle and draw them in close. She wanted Steve’s arms around her, his scent surrounding her. He had protected her, had staked his claim in front of the other alpha. He was her mate. He was…

Shut up, hindbrain.

As the others moved into the living room, Darcy tried to decide what to do.

Surprisingly, the presence of the others in her space wasn’t suffocating as she had half-expected. They seemed to fit, though they certainly filled the space with their personalities.

“We need to talk,” Steve said gently. He seemed almost reluctant. As if he wanted to keep the precarious truce they currently were under as much as she did.

“Oh, okay.” Moving over to her meager furniture, she took a nervous seat. She wasn’t sure what she expected. Maybe for Steve to stand over her and lay down his demands. For the others to gather close and give her comfort even as they played her jailors. The images flashed through her brain though she knew they weren’t true.

Steve gave her a smile as he came over and sat his fine ass on her thrift store coffee table. He clasped his hands together, elbows resting on his spread knees. “What would you like for us to do for you?”

Two slow blinks followed before Darcy could react. “Ummm, what?”
Steve’s smile faded. “Tell us what you’d like for us to do to help you? I won’t be able to stay for much longer. Your scent will get to be too much. I’ll have JARVIS start the scent suppression system, then I’ll camp out in the hall. I know it’s really not necessary for me to play guard, but if you don’t mind I’d really like to.” He paused, looking at her as if waiting on a response.

“Yeah, that’s... That’s fine.”

His smile returned in force with her blessing. “The others can stay of course. Anything you need they can do for you. If we need to get something from outside the Tower I’m sure JARVIS can assist.” One hand reached out to gently pat her knee. It would have been patronizing if she hadn’t been able to see how hard it was for him to limit himself to that small contact. Then he was rising to his feet and heading for the door.

“Wait! That’s it,” she questioned a little frantic.

The alpha stopped, turning back with a confused frown. “What do you mean?”

Now Darcy had spent many years studying the behaviors of the various orientations. She knew those little signs and social cues that differentiated one from the other. But she had never bothered to read beyond that. She didn’t need to know much about heats, just how to prevent them. She didn’t need to know about bonding, because she had never planned to bond. Her limited knowledge on the subject came from what she observed, movies, television, and her own assumptions. The alpha staked a claim and the omega fell into his arms and under his control. End of story. Right?

“I mean... I mean aren’t you going to give me rules or edicts or something? I mean I thought you- With Tony, you were warning him off right? That means you were staking a claim. You want me for the pack, right? I thought that you’d stay-I mean... You do want me?” Her voice was only unsteady due to the hormones, not because she was suddenly feeling insecure. Yep, it was definitely the hormones.

Steve’s small frown morphed into something pained and heart-breaking before he smoothed out his expression. Returning to his former position on the coffee table, he took one of her hands between both of his. “Darcy, what exactly do you think I want from you?”

This had to be a trick question. Her eyes darted to each of the gammas, but they offered no help. They were watching the exchange intently though. Sucking in a breath, she clung to old habits: fake confidence and sarcasm. “A compliant breeder with a nice pair of hips? Which I totally get. My hips are fine.”

There was pained noise from the direction of gammas, but Darcy wasn’t sure who it had been. She couldn’t turn her head to look as the devastation on the alpha’s face kept her rooted in place.

For a moment, the blonde hung his head, seeming to gather his strength. When he met her eyes again, he was wearing that sad frown. “What do you know about Bucky Barnes,” he asked.

“That’s a hell of a segue. Is there something about his hips I should know?”

“Darcy,” he chastised gently.

“Right. Uh, Bucky Barnes. Beta, second-in-command in the Howling Commandos. From all accounts a real social butterfly and smart mouth.”

“He also was terrible at following orders,” Steve added. “A hotshot, and a pain. He would listen...”
when it suited him. If he thought I was being reckless trying to do something alone, he’d trail along behind until I gave in. He did the same thing before the serum too. He knew I was too stubborn to keep my mouth shut when I saw a back-alley bully.”

The alpha’s recollection of the lost beta made Darcy smile. Steve had assuredly been in love.
“Sounds like a swell fella,” she teased lightly.

Steve chuckled, before nodding. “He is.” Though she caught the present tense, she didn’t correct him. “Now I want to you to look over there,” he instructed as he tilted his head towards the gammas.

Darcy did as he asked, unsure where this was going.

“What do they all have in common?”

This felt like another trick question, but she gave it due thought. Sam was wearing a smirk, arms hanging loosely at his sides. Natasha’s face was mostly unreadable. Only the slight twitching of her brow gave away her emotions. Clint was affecting a nonchalance she didn’t buy for a minute. What did they have in common?

“My first answer would be that they’re all heroes, but I feel like that’s not what you’re looking for.”

“Let me give you a hint,” Steve said. “Sarcastic. Headstrong. Brave. Intelligent.” He lifted her hand to his mouth and pressed a kiss to her fingers which each word. “Loyal. Beautiful.” He pressed a final kiss to the center of her palm. “Those are the people I choose. Do you think I’m perverse enough to claim someone and then demand they change the fundamentals of who they are?”

No words were forthcoming in answer to that.

Steve went on without waiting for a response. “That description also fits you, Darcy. It’s exactly you. I want you for you. I want to spend your heat with you. I want to be wrapped around you keeping you safe. But I don’t think you’re ready for that. Plus I haven’t even gotten you a courting gift. So I’m going to leave you with those three and stay outside.” He leaned forward to press a chaste kiss to her cheek before pulling away completely.

“You have my blessing to do whatever will make you most comfortable. We’ll talk about everything else when your heat is over and you feel more like yourself.” He moved to the door, then paused one hand on the handle. He gave her a mischievous grin over his shoulder. “When you do feel more like yourself, let me know. I have something to ask you.”

Then he was gone, and Darcy was reeling.

She looked to the gammas who hadn’t moved from their positions lined up against the wall. “That just happened, right?”

Natasha broke first, coming forward to wrap the omega in a tight embrace. “Yes, little one.”

“Shock and awe,” Sam tossed in, as he came and settled on the couch on her other side. “That’s his SOP, standard operating procedure. No matter if it’s his shield or that big heart, he wields his weapons well.”

Chapter End Notes
Comments give me life!

Please feed the beast... *nom nom nom*
There Was a Delivery

Chapter Notes

Whelp... this was totally unplanned, but once Often_Reading put this idea in my head I just couldn’t let it go.
It's fairly short but hopefully you all enjoy.

:)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Steve knew that he needed to clean up before he took up his guard position outside Darcy’s door. He was still in his uniform after all. Though he had spent days in the suit when it was required, this was not such a time. He could take a few minutes to shower and change even though he was reluctant to step away from his post.

He had spent the first twenty minutes of his self-appointed duty on a call with Hill, debriefing. She had not been happy that the majority of the team had run off without giving more than a vague reason. However, after having things explained she was understanding. Now her frustration was more with her vetting processes. Obviously Darcy’s omega status had somehow slipped right by not only SHIELD, but every agency before and after. Hill was far from the only agent Darcy had fooled, yet the usually pragmatic woman was taking this as a personal slight.

The call had ended on a positive note, with Hill wishing him and his pack the best of luck. “And I expect an invitation to the Agminalis Introduco,” she added before hanging up.

Steve couldn’t help the smile after Hill’s vote of confidence that his growing pack was going to make it as far as the Agminalis Introduco, the presentation ceremony for a fully formed pack. Marking was laying claim to a mate, a public warning for those who might be rivals. Bonding was done in private, a thing meant for only pack to witness; it linked them together. The Agminalis Introduco was the celebration for the pack after bonding. It was meant to include relatives and friends, and the community at large. The celebrations were known to last several days and historically had lasted as long as two weeks.

If they did make it that far, Steve had no doubt that Tony would give them a party to remember, though he hoped the billionaire wouldn’t try to go for the record of world’s longest. Though, after that territorial display of Bruce’s, Steve wouldn’t be surprised to hear Tony announcing his own Agminalis Introduco soon.

With a smile, Steve turned to lay his palm over Darcy’s closed door. His omega was safe for the moment, protected by his fearsome gammas. “JARVIS, is there anywhere on this floor where I can grab a shower and grab a change of clothes?”

“Of course, Captain. The other three suites on this floor are unoccupied at the moment. They are used for visitors and SI executives, and are fully stocked with anything you might need. Feel free to choose from which ever you wish.”

His alpha instincts were thrilled that there wasn’t others on this level. He knew that the Tower was secure, and that his gammas would be more than a match for any threat. Yet he couldn’t help his
need to protect. It was in his bones and his soul. Not to mention that pesky hindbrain that thousands of years of evolution had not seen fit to remove.

While he hurriedly entered one of the suites and shucked his uniform, Steve tried not to let his instincts rule him completely. He would shower and take care of his business. Nothing was going to happen in the ten minutes he was gone.

Ever since the serum, Steve felt as if the voice of his hindbrain had doubled in volume. Others would describe their instincts as quiet whispers, gentle nudges. Steve’s was the equivalent of a foghorn in his ear, a cattle prod on his backside, a punch to his gut. However, he had always been a stubborn punk. He had the fortitude to control himself even under such conditions.

With Darcy, he felt out of control.

The only other time had felt like this was when he had lost Bucky the first time. The instinct to destroy had been overwhelming. His hindbrain bayed for blood. He had gone after Red Skull with a vengeance that made him more reckless than normal. He had planned to burn Hydra head and root.

Once Red Skull had been defeated, however, he had felt empty. The howling voice in the back of his mind wanted him to find a place to hide, to curl up and let go. His beta was gone. Lost before he had even staked his claim.

It had seemed like fate when he discovered that he would have to put the plane down in the water. He let himself be lost in instinct.

Shaking off his depressing thoughts, Steve jumped from the shower and rummaged in the closet for something that would work. One rather tight t-shirt and pair of sweatpants later, he was content.

Rubbing the last of the dampness from his hair with a towel he stepped back into the hall only to be hit by an unfamiliar odor.

**Enemy.**

The threatening growl that echoed down the hall had the four men freezing in place, their faces paling.

**Enemy. Weak. Prey.**

His instincts were howling. How dare they enter his territory? How dare they get so close to his omega’s den? How **dare** they?!!

In his near feral state, it took Steve a moment to recognize that the men were wearing uniforms with the SI name and logo. And that their heads were bowed, necks bared submissively.

“Captain Rogers,” JARVIS called calmly, his voice carefully devoid of emotion. “These men are only delivering the items that your gamma requested.”

Steve noted JARVIS’ use of orientation over name, though his body never lost it’s attack ready position. It was a tactic used to center wayward alphas, focusing their instincts on pack. JARVIS’ intervention also drew his attention to the plush king-sized mattress, wrapped in shrink-wrap, that the men carried between them.

“Leave it,” Steve demanded, his voice gravelly as he choked back further growls.

The men didn’t even hesitate. They practically dropped the mattress (one man being caught off guard and almost being yanked down by the unexpected weight), and slowly backed up, careful not to give
their backs to the alpha.

His hindbrain was screaming. It wanted to chase them, make them run. Nip at their heels until they were out of his territory.

Instead, Steve held himself still until he heard the elevator door shut.

Only then did he stride forward to inspect the delivery. At first he couldn’t understand the purpose of the shrink wrap. Ripping it open, he realised that it only smelled like the materials it was made of. There wasn’t the scent of a single person in the fabric.

It would have been upsetting to him to send something into Darcy’s den that didn’t smell of those in his pack. Plus, even though she would be reluctant to admit it, it would be upsetting to the omega as well.

With one hand, he dragged the mattress closer to the door and proceeded to remove the rest of the plastic. As he was finishing, the elevator let out a ding announcing another visitor.

The doors opened to reveal a shaking man, his hands on the handle of a flat cart full of various bags and boxes.

He could hear the man mumbling under his breath. “Oh god, please don’t kill me. Why did I want this job? I could have worked in the Baxter building. Oh god, he’s staring. What should I do? What should I do?!”

Amused, Steve was able to hold down the hindbrain that was pushing at him. He tried to clear his throat in order to let the man know that it was all right, that the danger had passed.

Instead, the man jerked at the noise. Obviously interrupting it as something threatening. He gave a push to the cart to send it into the hallway, then ducked into the corner of the elevator, out of Steve’s sight until the door closed.

Steve snorted with unconcealed amusement before going to retrieve the cart.

Undoubtedly, the word would spread that this floor was being patrolled by a riled up alpha, keeping most people away.

Still...Steve wasn’t about to leave his guard position. His pack was far too precious.

Chapter End Notes

Please feed the author....*nom nom nom* :)
Chapter Notes

Hello all!!!
Hope you are doing well. I apologize on the long wait. The muse sorta took a vacation and sent a substitute that insisted I start new stories when I haven’t finished the ones I’ve got going. The nerve of some people.

Anyways....
Here is my humble offering to you all!

Best wishes!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Once upon a time, there lived an archer with a heart that had always been too large. He knew the larger the heart of a man, the more it was a target. Yet he could not wall it off completely, not even to protect himself, because he feared that doing thusly would destroy his chances to find his pack. For years he had done his best to keep it as safe as he could, but now it was bruised. His omega, the one instinct demanded he protect the most, had lied to him. For years. He wanted to hold tightly to his anger, use it as a shield from further hurt, but he felt it slipping through his fingers every time he looked at his princess...

The living room of Darcy’s apartment had been transformed into a veritable paradise for a pre-heat omega. The couch had been pushed back against the far wall to make room for a king sized mattress that was now covered with dozens of pillows and soft blankets. It wasn’t a nest exactly but it was damn close. When Darcy finally emerged from the bathroom, where she had retreated soon after Steve left, she would be able to adjust things to her liking.

The mattress itself had been delivered like a pizza (under 30 minutes or it’s free!) after Sam had made the suggestion. The gamma had also made several other suggestions for things after taking a peek into Darcy’s through severely lacking kitchen.

Darcy had, of course, protested Sam’s gentle teasing. “I haven’t even been home for a week!” Pleased to hear some of her usual spirit in her voice, Clint had continued to maneuver the couch into it’s new place. “Plus I usually have to feed all your fabulous asses along with Jane. Thank Thor that Tony foots like bill otherwise I’d be living in a box in Central Park.”

Natasha had growled a little at that even if it was a joke. “We would never let you live in a box.”

A sincere smile finally broke across Darcy’s face. It was a welcome sight to Clint’s sharp eyes...even if he was still mad at her.

“Do you have a care basket stashed somewhere,” Sam interrupted whatever Darcy might have said next. He had been rummaging around in the linen closet in her hall, pulling out what blankets she owned. Care baskets were standard omega equipment. They usually contained all the things that were their favorites to use during heat and pre-heat. Mostly it was sweet smelling lotions and body
products, scented candles or fragrant oils, their most well-loved pillow or blanket. Some even had stuffed animals for pre-heat cuddling.

The silence had dragged on long enough that Clint looked up from what he was doing. All the gammas focused on a slightly sheepish looking Darcy.

“I’m taking that as a no,” Sam said, voice carefully devoid of any judgment. Darcy didn’t duck her head, but her eyes had lowered, down and to the left. “We need to add a few more things to that order, JARVIS.”

“Oh, of course, Mr. Wilson.”

It was about then that Darcy had disappeared into the bathroom.

Now the living room space was set, the kitchen had been stocked, the counter lined snacks made by Natasha, and six different themed care baskets were set along the wall waiting for Darcy to emerge.

The waiting was giving Clint too much time to think. What omega didn’t have anything to pamper themselves with during heat? Clint wasn’t the stupid hick he sometimes played. He knew the answer to his own question: the kind of omega who had hidden her true nature her entire life. The enormity of what that meant suddenly hit him. He had never been shown the courtesy or care that an omega deserved. She had never had someone to help her through a heat. Had she ever even had a true heat? What would that mean? Would this heat be light like an adolescent coming into maturity? Or would it be out of control, hormones and biology raging at having been bottled up so long?

It wasn’t only about the heat itself though. What about pre-heat? Usually this was a time for an omega to cuddle, to find comfort in their pack, to be fed by their packmates so that they had plenty of reserves for the upcoming days. Hiding her status meant that no one had ever taken care of her. It meant that the only snuggling time she had ever had was when she had finally allowed him and Natasha close.

Those memories were fond. Hours of cuddling on the couch with her while she indulged their dissection of spy movies. Now those memories were painted in a different light. An omega terrified that someone would learn her secret, but unable to resist the pull of her pack, taking what little comfort she could from them before they were called away again.

Nat had always been able to read him far too easily. He didn’t protest when she wrapped her arms around him from behind while he sat in one of the room’s two chairs. Her chin rested on his shoulder for a quiet moment before she spoke. “She won’t accept your pity,” she stated.

The fact had Sam’s head popping up from the tablet he was perusing. “We’re going to have to tread very carefully here,” he added. “She may not tell us if something is wrong. Hell, she might not even recognize if something is wrong.”

The airman was poised to continue, but the sound of the bathroom door opening had them shelving the conversation.

Darcy came out looking much the same as she had gone in. She still wore the jeans and loose t-shirt, though her feet were bare. The major difference was that she had let her hair down from its ponytail. She had been wearing it up since her shower at the hotel. Now it hung in loose curls around her face.

She hesitated in the doorway, taking in the changes that had been made to her space. After a second, she shrugged and came closer until her toes were touching the edge of the mattress.
Without warning, she jumped, arms and legs spread wide. She crashed into the mattress face first.

When a few moments passed and Darcy continued to lay prone, Sam ventured the question they were all thinking. “You okay there, buttercup?”

She gave a groan before flipped onto her back and doing her best to make snow-angels in the sheets. “I’m good.” There was a lengthy pause as her bare feet twitched the blankets around. Her voice dropped to a near-whisper and her eyes remained firmly fixed on the ceiling when she continued. “I’m not exactly sure what I’m supposed to be doing here.”

Unwrapping herself from Clint, Nat went to retrieve a platter of the snacks she had made. “You do whatever feels right, whatever makes you comfortable.”

“There are no wrong answers here, Darcy,” Sam added.

Natasha paused on the edge of the pseudo-nest, clearly asking for permission to come further. For Clint it was easy to read Darcy’s surprise that the redhead would ask when the omega had already given them permission to be in her space.

That small widening of her eyes pierced Clint as sharply as the knife he’d taken to the gut in Belgrade. Seriously, the feeling was identical.

The archer had a sinking feeling that it wouldn’t be the last time Darcy would show surprise over simple courtesy.

Less than eight hours later, Clint had found his prediction to be true. Natasha had made sure that the omega had eaten as they hadn’t really stopped for lunch, or breakfast for that matter, and it was getting into afternoon. The two women had then snuggled up in the nest of blankets and one of Darcy’s favorite movies took over the tv.

Clint had kept himself out of the way by perching up on the couch. Sam seemed to be doing the same thing, remaining seated in the chair he had claimed. As the movie was finally finishing, Sam had started looking restless. It was obvious that the gamma was getting desperate to be down in Darcy’s nest.

Before they had known Darcy’s true orientation, none of them would have hesitated to pile together on the couch or to get in one another’s personal space. They had traded hugs and chaste kisses, as well as good natured pokes and jabs. Now, it was different.

In time, they would get past the awkwardness. At least Clint hoped they would. For now though it seemed like all three gammas were feeling the need to indulge in their very base instincts. That meant offering a gift to an omega in hopes that they would be allowed into the nest. It was one of those practices that had mostly fallen by the wayside, though the drive remained.

Thus when Sam had tried to casually offer up the care baskets for Darcy to choose from, Clint had known exactly what he was trying to do. Darcy, however, hadn’t a clue.

The whole thing had devolved into an awkward silence, where Darcy stared at the baskets like they might suddenly spring to life to attack her, and Sam tried to hide his disappointment.

When the brunette had finally looked at Sam’s face, she must had seen something because she grabbed his hand and dragged him back into her nest before having JARVIS queue up another film.

The same sort of thing happened when Natasha offered to paint her toenails, and when Sam made her favorite iced-tea without prompting. Darcy would be surprised and tense, seeming to wait for
them to snatch away whatever was being offered and declare it all a joke. Then she would react to their hopeful eyes, or some other small expression, and accept the gifts.

Much more of this and Clint was going to silently bleed out behind them from wounds to his heart.

Chapter End Notes

Please tip your author in comments! ;)

P.S. I am making some minor changes to chapters that were already posted. Chapters 1-8 have been updated as of now. It does not change the storyline at all, simply adds some more detail to the universe.

P.P.S. Also chapter 9 :)
...Many Things were Bared

Chapter Notes

Hello all you beautiful people!!

I know those of you who have been bleeding along with Clint are going to get a big bandaid :)

Enjoy!

P.S. I did do some updating to the earlier chapters adding over 1000 words of content. AND chapters 14 and 15 switched places. I think this helps with flow some. Hopefully you all agree.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Once upon a time, there was a sleeping princess, with a slight snore…

Warmth.

It pressed her in from all sides, and was the first thing her sleep-and-hormone-fogged brain recognized.

She had woken herself with one of those little snorts. Not quite a snore, jarring to the sleeper. The warmth she was experiencing was from the gammas pressed in on either side of her, the fuzzy blankets piled over all of them. Usually Darcy kept her rooms cool enough that she wouldn’t feel uncomfortable under a blanket no matter the time of year.

Now it was too much.

Her skin felt too tight, like she was healing from a burn she didn’t remember receiving. Except it wasn’t localized. This was everywhere. Every inch, from her scalp to her toes.

She twisted slightly, trying to dislodge the blankets without disturbing the gammas on either side of her. They were both sleeping soundly and Darcy wanted to let them rest. They had been looking after her all afternoon, feeding her, pampering her. Though she didn’t really understand it, she could see that taking care of her had meant a lot to them. Therefore she had allowed it. She felt like she was probably going to allow a lot in order to keep her pack happy. (Her pack! She wasn’t sure when that particular possessiveness had started but she couldn’t deny that it felt right.) Not that today had been a hardship in anyway. In fact, it had been nice.

She wriggled a bit more, but wasn’t able to get the blanket off herself without pulling it out from under the others.

She needed the air…or skin…or something. She needed the blankets off her skin so she could feel whatever it was that she needed to feel. Her thoughts were becoming harder to keep flowing. A mist was rolling in. It was getting harder to find the words she needed, even in her own mind.
Too warm. Not warm enough.

Hindbrain wasn’t helping. It seemed just as confused.

A low whine escaped her.

Suddenly, there was a concerned face peering down at her. Upside down.

Clint.

He had been keeping himself out of the way on the couch. Observing but not participating in most of the activities for the day.

But he was her gamma. Mine. He would help her.

She gave another small whine, and Clint’s confusion wrinkled brow smoothed out.

Without a word, he produced a knife from somewhere. It flashed in the light of the flickering tv, making Darcy realize that during her slumber the sun had finally gone down.

Clint remained silent, but Darcy did not feel even a sliver of fear. He was her gamma. Her first. She trusted him, even when he was angry with her. Even when she had betrayed him.

The knife slide beneath the edge of the blanket. With a small yank, the knife split the fabric apart with a bare whisper of sound.

As it fell to the sides, Darcy felt relief. Quickly followed by need. She needed. Though she didn’t know what.

Clint’s intense gaze was still focused on her. Most people would be unnerved under his scrutiny; she had seen the baby agents of SHIELD nearly brought to tears from what she called his ‘Agent Face’. Darcy only felt protected. For the first time, she made the conscious decision to let her masks drop, to allow him to see everything. The want, the longing, the repressed hope, the fear of rejection, the terror of the future, the guilt from the lie she had maintained…the love she had for them. For him. She may not be able to find her words, but she could give him this. It was less than he deserved, less than she owed him, but it was all she had at the moment.

The frown he had been nursing all day lessened.

She reached for him, intending only to touch his leg or arm or whatever was nearest, to make a connection between them. However, Clint gave a far different motive to the move.

His hands wrapped around her arms, in a display of truly awesome upper body strength, he hauled her out from between the other two gammas and up onto the couch. Those amazing arms of his wrapped around her.


Whatever was happening, Clint seemed to understand. He knew what to do. She was safe with him. He pulled her close, his hands gliding over the bare skin of her arms.

It wasn’t enough. Darcy could feel the heat rising.

She pushed back, letting Clint’s hands fall to her hips, far enough to hook her fingers in the bottom of her shirt to yank it off. As the material cleared her head, she heard Clint’s breath hitch. Some part of her knew that she shouldn’t be this selfish. She shouldn’t take what she needed from him when
she hadn’t even given him a full explanation or apology. The larger part was unconcerned with such matters. Driven by her hindbrain, her hands went to his shirt. She had seen his bare chest before when he trained with Natasha. Shining with sweat, they had both looked incredible but Darcy had never dared touch.

She had free reign now. They were hers.

Sly satisfaction slide through her belly when she felt the way he trembled beneath her touch.

“Darcy.” If it was a plea or a warning Darcy was indifferent; far more interested in the twitching muscles beneath his black t-shirt. Still he didn’t stop her when she snuck her fingers beneath the fabric and reached skin.

In a snap, he released her hips and tossed off the shirt. A clear invitation. Pressing her palms flat against his abs, she gave a deep sigh of relief. This was perfect. This was what she needed.

His arms drew her in, bringing their skin together. She melted against him, tucking her face into his neck, nameless urge fulfilled.

Instincts appeased, for the moment at least, she found the fog in her mind retreating.

Clint must have realized it as well. He kept hold of her, arms wrapped tightly around her, breath ghosting over her hair, but tension sat in his shoulders. “Darcy.”

“Mmm.”

“I love you.” The sentiment was so simply said. A fact. Like green grass and eastern sun rises.

She gave a soft kiss to the neck beneath her lips. “Love you. Sorry.”

His arms tightened momentarily. “We all have our secrets, pisoi.” Kitten. The endearment made her smile. When he was upset or emotional he would sometimes lapse into the Romanian that he had learned from the circus woman who had done her best to look after him. It was the first language in which he had understood the word love. “I’m sure I have more than you. I just wish… I wish you could have trusted me with this.”

She started to push away, opening her mouth to explain, but his strong arms wouldn’t let her.

“Shh, shh. I’m not blaming you. I might be a little slower on the uptake than Nat, but I do understand.” A pause followed, one that said he was searching for the right words. “If you really don’t want this, I’ll help you. I’ll make Steve back off. Or if your want, I’ll help you disappear. Even SHIELD wouldn’t be able to find you. You could live as an alpha again. No kidnapping attempts to reveal you. I won’t even tell Nat.”

The reluctance in his voice was clear. Doubt still crept through her, but she held it at bay. She wasn’t a wilting flower to curl up and blow away at the first sign of trouble. “Let me up,” she asked. Cautiously he loosened his arms, allowing her to straighten up on his lap. His gorgeous face was twisted with anxiety.

Granting him a sincere and untroubled smile, she framed his face with his hands. They may know her as an omega now, but Steve had assured her that they didn’t want her to change. Faced with Clint’s self-sacrificing nature, she finally believed it. She could be herself and still have freedom. “I don’t ever want you to let me go, Clint. I’m yours. Have been for years, even when I thought I could never keep you.”
His face did some complicated contortion. Before he could respond, Darcy ducked in close to capture his lips with her own.

Finally, hindbrain sighed.

They had shared kisses before. Chaste, innocent things. On foreheads and cheeks and temples. Not one had been like this. She kept it sweet and gentle, lips brushing over his, but there was so much more passion beneath the surface.

Clint gave a helpless groan and those firm lips parted, as he yanked her in tight against him again. Her satin covered breasts pressed into his chest.

Desire took over. Her tongue slipping alongside his. Tasting. Teasing.

He was her first. The first she had found. The first she had loved. The first to find out the truth. It was fitting that he was the first to have her like this.

She broke away enough to catch her breath. “Clothes off,” she demanded, a slight growl rumbling in her throat. Words were slipping away once more. The haze of heat returning. There was no fear. Clint would keep her safe, care for her.

With nimble fingers, he undid the clasp of her bra and guided the straps from her shoulders. Though his gaze appeared riveted on what was revealed when it fell away, he must have been watching in his periphery because there was no startlement from him when Sam gave an envious whine. Looking over her shoulder, she found both Sam and Nat avidly watching. Neither approached or even spoke, obviously trying not to intrude on the moment she had been having with the archer.

Suddenly hindbrain was torn. She wanted Clint. Needed his skin pressed to hers. But there were two other gammas whose skin she had not explored.

Turning back to Clint, she tried to express her conundrum. The ever observant gamma gave an indulgent smile. “I know you want clothes off, sweetheart. Do you want everyone naked and in your nest?”

Her quick nod was hard enough that she was surprised she didn’t get whiplash.

Clint tossed a grin at the other two. “Your heard her. Chop chop.” They raced to do as she bid. Sam and Natasha were soon kneeling in her nest, eagerly waiting for the other two to join them.

Clint stood with her still in her arms. Hindbrain revelled in the show of strength. He laid her down in the center of the large mattress, allowing him to divest his jeans and briefs. Among the four of them the only clothing left were her pants.

She whimpered, hands going to her waistband. Natasha was there first. “Let me, moye sokrovishche.” Darcy nodded, reaching for the redhead’s neck in order to draw her close to share a kiss. It was short but just as sweet as the one she had shared with Clint. Arching her back, she assisted Natasha in removing her jeans.

“These too,” Sam questioned, tentatively tracing the upper edge of her panties.

Her hips strained up towards him. Blatant invitation and plea. She reached for him too as his blunt fingers slipped beneath satin to pull it down. His lips were chapped, but their kiss was tender.

Clint joined them, sliding in behind Sam, and all three laid a hand on her stomach fingers twining together. There was passion on a slow burn, but none of them moved to take things further. Her
inner omega was content with this moment. Needing only their closeness and the contact of their bodies.

A part of her realized that it wasn’t going to last. The heat was only beginning. She would need more soon. Though what that would mean she had no idea.

For now, this was enough. Her gammas were beside her. Her alpha was guarding over them.

Laying a hand over theirs, she gave a pleased sigh. “Mine,” she announced, in case they were still unsure of her commitment to them.

From her right, Clint chuckled. His thumb rubbed a soothing circle on her belly. “Yes, omega. Yours.”

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading!

Please feed your author... nom, nom, nom...
...There Was a Hallway

Chapter Notes

SOoooo....
This would have been posted about 2 hours ago, but *someone* needed more Steve....

And the muse came to visit.

Which resulted in the chapter doubling in length.

Good news is there over 3000 words to this chapter!!
AND I'm still posting on Friday like I promised!!

Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Night had fallen while Steve kept his post.

It was difficult to remain where he was, remain calm, when he couldn’t hear or see or even scent the pack. He was actually impressed with Stark’s feat of construction. When the doors were closed and the scent suppression system turned on, there was no way to tell who was in residence. Steve had never noticed it before; JARVIS claimed that between each of the Avengers’ floors worked on the same system, and he simply had not been paying attention.

The AI had an understated sass that Steve usually appreciated (because that sass was mostly aimed at Tony), but right now he was too on edge to enjoy it. However, JARVIS had been kind enough to bend the normal privacy protocols so that Steve knew when his pack was waking and sleeping. It wasn’t much, but it was enough to appease the howling alpha in his head.

Darcy had been the first to give in to slumber, followed closely by Sam and Natasha. All three had woken a short time ago, and though Steve didn’t know what had happened he had felt joy and lust and devotion echoing down the pack bonds.

Now all four of his pack were sleeping. Contentment a soft hum in the back of his mind.

While they slept, he paced the hall. That inner alpha voice demanded he be alert. He was the only one on guard at the moment. He had to keep them safe.

He hadn’t spent the entire time pacing though. He had been making plans, consulting with JARVIS about changes he might want to make to his suite, trolling online sites for courting gifts, and doing pushups until the point of exhaustion when he thought of Darcy in the throes of heat.

It was true that he hadn’t claimed his beta, nor formed a pack, before being frozen. That didn’t mean that he had never been with an omega. He had helped several during the USO tour and a few more after rescuing the 107th. Drawing on his experience, he pictured what Darcy might be like. He could see her eyes hooded and heated. Her dark hair spread out on the pillows beneath him. The whine in her voice as she begged for his knot.

The first time the picture had blossomed to life behind his eyelids, he had suddenly found himself
facing Darcy’s door with a hand on the knob. Yanking himself back from the edge, he had dropped
to the floor and proceeded to do 1247 push-ups in about 20 minutes. JARVIS, undoubtedly, would
be able to give him the exact time if he asked, but he refrained.

By tomorrow, his arms were going to be sore but repeatedly exercising until exhaustion guaranteed
he had something to focus on besides the fantasies of what he would like to be enacting with his
pack.

“Captain Rogers,” JARVIS interrupted. “Sir is inquiring if he might speak with you.”

“He can’t come up here.”

“Of course, Captain,” JARVIS replied evenly to the unintended aggression in Steve’s tone. “His
plan was to video conference with you, if you were not... indisposed.” The slight pause meant
JARVIS had censored whatever crass phrase Tony had used.

Breathing deeply to settled the inner alpha, Steve gave a resolute nod to the nearest camera. “Sure,
JARVIS. Send him through.”

One of the paintings on the wall flickered and became a view of Tony in what appeared to be
Bruce’s lab. (Steve definitely had not known the artwork did that. He’d be checking the frames on
his floor ASAP.) “Hey, Cap.”

“Tony.”

“Listen. I wanted to check in on you.” The billionaire was speaking at a normal speed - as in normal
for regular human beings. His normal usually required subtitles and JARVIS translating; Steve was
instantly suspicious. “See how things were going. I heard about the little incident with the delivery
boys. Sorry about that. They were supposed to use only bonded guys but wires must have gotten
crossed.”

That explained it. Guilt often accounted for Tony doing something out of character. “It’s fine Tony.
Honestly, they all might have been bonded. I didn’t even notice one way or the other.”

Curiosity lit Stark’s eyes. “Really? Then why were you - “ There was a growl off screen and Tony
snapped his gaze to the right for a brief moment. Whatever he saw made him rethink his line of
questioning. “Anyway, I know you’re dealing with… everything. But I wanted to apologize for the
way I handled things earlier. I did not intend any disrespect to your omega. Prosperity to your
people, and peace between our packs.”

Steve was amazed. Not that Stark had apologized. The other alpha was capable of thinking of others
occasionally. More so, by the formal words, a throwback and indication of class in the past. Though,
Steve theorized, it did make sense. Tony had been raised in a wealthy family, surrounded by the type
of people who would still recognize those kinds of formalities.

“Peace between our packs,” Steve intoned, in agreement.

There was another little growl barely audible, though Steve caught it, from Tony’s side of the line. “I
also want to offer my beta’s services to assist you with finding a proper courting gift.”

The stiffness to Tony’s formal tone final clued Steve in. “Pepper’s making you do this, isn’t she?”

Tony didn’t turn his head, but his eyes slide to the right before refocusing on Steve. “Umm, can I
plead the fifth here? I feel like this definitely qualifies for self incrimination.”
Throwing back his head, Steve let out a full-bellied laugh. “Sure, Tony. Thank you for the offer. Let Pepper know that I would appreciate her help. To narrow down the choices if nothing else. There are a lot more options than back in my day. And I’ve got a much larger budget than I would have had back then too.”

Tony gave a grin that was genuine. “Seriously, Steve. I am sorry, but I’m really happy you found her.”

“Thanks, Tony.”

##

In a tiny apartment, on a thin pallet, closer to the Tower than Steve would have guessed, a man’s eyes snapped open.

Glacial blue and whirling with shadows, they tracked over the small space. The single window was still closed. The door still locked.

No one had intruded.

The noises around him were all at acceptable levels. Normal sounds for the night.

Yet something had woken him. Something in the air or something in his mind.

It wasn’t a nightmare. Those felt different. Those left him shaky and twisted, his gut churning.

This was something else. This was instinct, soft nudges in the back of his mind that he was just learning to listen to again.


Bucky closed his eyes, better to hear the message his hindbrain was trying to give him, and to ignore the other lingering ghosts.

A memory rose to the surface in pieces, a streaming line of bubbles rising from the bottom of a glass. Indistinct voices murmuring behind thin, tent walls; a crowd of men in uniform with the scent of chow in the air; searching for a blonde head among throng...and not finding his target.

Then this same impending feeling; Though the nudge had been louder, sharper.

“Where the hell you going, Barnes?” He remembered voices of his team calling out to him. “I ain’t saving you any!” “I get his tray.” The voices were teasing, good-natured. Not a whisper of malicious intent.

But he hadn’t been listening. He had gone into a stalk, tracking, peering down the gaps between the tents. Looking for something. Looking for someone.

He’d found his target on the edge of the encampment. Back up against a tree. Trying to hold off a particularly forward beta, without insulting or doing the man damage.

*Always too god-damn polite …*

Bucky had no such qualms.
He remembered the feel of his hand crushing down on the unknown beta’s shoulder, spinning him around, growling in his face. The sweet scent of the man’s fear as Bucky had snarled.

“Calm down, Buck,” his target - his alpha - had said.

Aggression had bled away as if the suggestion had been an order. “You gotta be firm with these guys Stevie. This ain’t Brooklyn. And you ain’t… Well you’re you. Everybody wants a piece of ya. Everybody wants Captain America.”

The dope had smiled down at him. “I don’t want none of ‘em tho Buck.”

The memory faded out. As most of his memories still did.

But this one had been enlightening.

If he was getting that same feeling, it meant Steve was in trouble. Or it meant some beta was trying to horn in on Bucky’s territory. Either was unacceptable.

The blue eyes re-opened as the former soldier bolted from his meager bed. There was a backpack in the corner, a knife underneath the chair, a 9mm behind the toilet… A part of him continued to assess his resources while another was already planning his next move.

It was time to get eyes on the Captain.

##

Day two of Steve’s vigil began much the same as the last one had.

He had food delivered. Which basically meant someone put it on the elevator and JARVIS brought it up to the correct floor, where Steve could retrieve it. (No amount of coaxing could convince the usual delivery men to actually get into the elevator.)

He did one-armed pushups. He paced. He rearranged the furniture he had dragged out into the hall from one of the suites. He paced. He added to his list of plans. He paced. He took a call from SHIELD while he did some upside down push-ups. He had JARVIS lock down the elevator in order to take a quick shower. Then he paced.

It was about lunch time when his sensitive ears picked up the door to Darcy’s apartment opening.

He was there in a flash. Worry spiked, but quickly settled when he saw Natasha’s easy smile. He knew it was sometimes difficult for her to let her emotions show freely, but the security that pack bonds brought had allowed her to open up, be comfortable with letting them see.

She pulled the door completely shut behind her before she stepped toward him. “Hey, handsome.”

She wore only a plush robe, belted loosely around her slim waist. Her toes, which were painted a carnival purple (Clint’s favorite), dug into the carpet as she stretched up and wrapped her arms around his neck. The scents that clung to her skin assaulted him. The inner alpha he had caged began to rattle the bars.

It was obvious she had showered before coming to see him, as evidenced by the wet ends of her hair and the sharp soap smell. Yet it wasn’t nearly enough to keep him from scenting the others on her.
Hauling her closer and burying his nose in her neck, he tried not to let his fingers dig too deeply into her waist.

“You’re playing with fire,” he warned her. She had done this deliberately. She knew just how enhanced his senses were; she had been a part of the SHIELD team that assessed him when he had come out of the ice.

The admonishment only brought a laugh. “I like to live dangerously,” she whispered seductively against the shell of his ear. Her plush lips barely grazing his skin.

Steve did his best to hold himself still. “Don’t start something, Natasha. I am holding onto the edge by the tips of my fingers.” He squeezed those fingers in emphasis.

The woman, who thought taking out a squad of SEALs was entertaining way to spend a Thursday night, melted against him. “I trust you, alpha.”

And he was undone.

The tight tension he had been holding eased. The snarling inner alpha went back to silently pacing.

There was a smirk painting her lips when she drew back. Steve gave his gamma a sigh and rolled his eyes. “Was there another reason you came out here? Besides tormenting me.”

“Yes,” was all she gave him as she trailed her hands over his chest. She gave a small push, urging him to move backwards. He complied easily, until the back of his knees hit the lounge chair he’d pulled out to nap in.

“Are you going to tell me?”

Natasha’s fingers crept over the curve of his shoulders and pushed down. “Yes.” With a sigh, Steve allowed her to force him into the chair, keeping his hands on the arms instead of reaching for her.

He wasn’t the least bit surprised when she crawled onto his lap to straddle him, bringing her face even with his. Those slim fingers, that held such strength, cupped his cheeks as she met his gaze straight on.

Like other members of the animal kingdom, humans tested each other’s dominance with eye contact. Other alphas might have found Natasha’s behavior insubordinate. Other alphas might criticize Steve for allowing his gamma to play such games. But Steve had never really been the traditional alpha everyone assumed he was. He had lead an integrated team during the war. He had happily taken orders from Peggy, a rare female alpha, even through vast discrimination against her. He supported multi-alpha/beta/omega packs, and didn’t believe that the government should have any say in what constituted a pack.

More importantly, he knew that Natasha needed this to feel safe. She needed to push, to test him. She needed to know that he trusted her even if she hadn’t explained herself yet.

So he kept himself still and silent while she stared her fill.

She leaned in close, brushing her lips across his, keeping her gaze steady on his. When he could no longer contain himself, he nipped at her lip. Not enough to draw blood, but enough to remind her of his strength. Only then did her eyes fall closed.

“Tell me,” he demanded, his voice dipping to command.
She opened her eyes, but a small tension gathered in her body. As if she was ready to run...or fight.

“Darcy is a virgin.”

_Mine. Need. Take. MINE._

The sound of something cracking alerted Steve to the pulverized arms of the chair beneath his hands.

Natasha was watching him warily, but she hadn’t moved. “She doesn’t seem to want anything more than for us to touch her,” she continued in a careful tone.

Steve had been fine with giving his gammas permission to assist Darcy through heat. He had assumed, that even though Darcy had been hiding what she really was, that she had some experience. The young woman was as quick with a dirty joke or innuendo as Stark. Nothing had ever suggested that she was...untouched.

The inner alpha was bellowing his want. Scratching at the Steve’s limits with sharp claws. Darcy was _his_. He had first right to her.

It was an archaic thought, but now that it had made itself known Steve couldn’t shake it off. Still, he wrestled the inner alpha to the ground. It spat and snarled, as it was forced back into the cage.

When he able to open his mouth without howling, he spoke. “If she wants more, she gets more. I told her anything she needed.”

The assassin on his lap nodded. “Yes, alpha,” she agreed meekly. She lifted herself slightly, but Steve’s quick hands yanked her back down against him. He needed this. He needed to feel her against him, needed her lips yielding to the intrusion of his kiss. His tongue swept along hers, tasting her. Then he was moving across the line of her jaw, down her throat. Further and further. Until his lips found the pulse point at the juncture of her neck.

His fierce bite had her howling, half pain until the pleasure took over.

“ _Yes_ , alpha.”

##

It had taken nearly two hours to reach the perfect sightlines on Steve’s floor in the Tower. (He had scoped them out weeks ago.)

The problem was that when he got there, sighting down the scope he had kept (though he’d tossed the rifle), the floor was dark and empty.

_Where are you, alpha?_

##

The atmosphere in the hallway had gotten a bit more tense since Natasha’s little visit. Yet, Pepper still came to visit on Steve’s third day of guard duty.

She had brought flipbooks with fabric swatches and paint colors. Her suggestion was to create a
space for Darcy on his floor. One that was appealing to her tastes. Not a bedroom, as that would be implying he expected certain things from her. Instead it should be recreation room, catering to her interests.

It had the dual purpose of being a gift, and encouraging Darcy to spend more time in the pack territory.

Steve liked the idea, even if it felt a tiny bit presumptuous (and maybe a smidge like something Tony might do; e.g. building Bruce his very own lab). In fact, he liked all of Pepper’s ideas. They were getting along splendidly until…

“Repeat that,” Steve demanded.

Pepper looked up from the tablet she had been perusing, eyes wide at Steve’s sudden aggressive tone. “I said, that you’ll have to be sure to register as Darcy’s alpha as soon as you can. Omegas have to register their alphas with the government. Did you not - did you not know this?”

“I didn’t have to register when I bonded any of the others,” Steve countered to her question.

“Well, of course not. The others are all gammas. Only omegas have to…” Pepper trailed off, tilting her head at him curiously. “Has no one ever shown you the laws regarding omegas? I would think that would be rather important if SHIELD wanted you to form your own pack.”

It was true that the agency had been pressing him hard to begin his pack. They had trotted out dozens of candidates they thought might appeal to him. Even going so far as to installing the lovely gamma Sharon Carter, Agent 13, as his neighbor. After Hydra, and Bucky, Steve had seen the manipulation in a whole new light. He had been thankful that he had never taken any of them up on their offers. There was no telling how many Hydra agents had been among them.

“I think they were hoping I’d pick one of their hand-selected omegas. Ones who would already know all the rules and help keep me in line.” Horrified silence came from Pepper’s chair. She was quick. She could already see the implications of that statement. “Or maybe they just hadn’t gotten there yet,” he added easily, tossing her a grin.

“I sincerely hope it was the latter.” She adjusted her seat, putting both feet on the floor from where they had been tucked beneath her. “In any case, I’m sure JARVIS can help get you up to speed.”

“I am happy to assist, Captain,” JARVIS added. “You can find all relevant data accessible from your tablet.”

“Obviously you have homework,” Pepper said as she stood. “We’ll come back at this later. Have a good night, Steve.”

Picking up the tablet, Steve gave a distracted “you too” before delving in full speed.

##

Bucky had finally located a good vantage point for Steve’s current position. (After figuring out what that position was.)

With his scope, he could make out Steve hunched over something no bigger than a piece of paper, elbows on his knees, ass in a chair. Probably an electronic device of some kind since it was Stark’s building.
For a long while, Steve stared at the small item.

Then he jumped to his feet and began pacing, all the while talking to someone Bucky couldn’t see. Or maybe he was talking to himself. Either way it took a good fifteen minutes for Steve’s almost manic energy to subside.

Dropping back into his seat, Steve went right back to staring at what Bucky was assuming was a computer.

A few minutes later, the cycle repeated.

*What are you doing, punk?*

##

The fourth day of Steve’s hallway campout could be summed up in one exclamation from a frustrated Tony Stark: “Jesus Christ, Rogers! What are you thinking?! You cannot start a political movement as a courting gift!”

Chapter End Notes

Comments make my little black heart flutter.... ;)


...There was a Crash

Chapter Notes

Woohoo!
It is 5am...on Friday. So yay for me updating on time!
Also this was going to be two chapters but I was like what the hell let's give everybody a little bonus!

P.S. You all are AMAZING!!! Omg. The kudos and the comments have just been...I don't even have words.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Once upon a time, an omega princess was lost in the glittering haze of the desert heat. She stumbled through the shifting sands, until finally she collapsed. When she woke, she found herself in a lush oasis surrounded by beautiful men and women, scantily dressed in colorful silks…

Darcy wasn’t sure what time it was. She wasn’t even sure what day it was.

Not that it really mattered when she was cozy and sated and relaxed in a way she didn’t think she had ever been.

Laying on her back in the middle of the mattress (that she was definitely keeping - for sentimental reasons if nothing else), she felt floaty and she was loathe to let the feeling end. She could hear the shower running, and what might have been her washer. (There was a laundry service but Darcy had made a matching washer/dryer set a part of her employment demands.) This meant her gammas were up and about, but Darcy wasn’t sure she was ready yet.

Without opening her eyes, she inched her arms away from her body to test her surroundings. Her searching fingers found clean sheets and tangled blankets, and warm spots on either side of her that told her the gammas hadn’t been gone for long. There was a delicious smell drifting from the kitchen. Pancakes or waffles maybe. Definitely toast, too. Natasha was probably the one cooking; she seemed to have a thing about providing Darcy food. It was sweet and Darcy was completely willing to take advantage without feeling an ounce of guilt.

Even with food or a shower as temptation, Darcy remained where she was with her eyes firmly closed. She needed to take stock.

Here was the thing: Darcy Lewis may have always been hiding her orientation for the majority of her life, but she hadn’t been completely ignorant about her own body. There had been many masturbatory showers, and reading material that hadn’t been clinical though there had been an indepth discussion on anatomy. However, she had never been able to convince herself that a partnered exploration was worth risking her secret.

So Darcy remained a virgin.
She didn’t really see this as a problem, but when her gammas had figured it out they seemed a bit thrown. Under the influence of heat, she hadn’t been able to determine why. Now she could understand it. They had worried over consent. If she had asked them to take her there was no doubt that they would have been conflicted, wanting to give her what she desired but worrying if it was only the heat talking. Also... there was that whole alpha-claiming-a-virgin-omega tradition. Which, to be honest, was not all that prevalent in the U.S., though other countries still adhered to it. Darcy could easily see that her gammas might think she was following the tradition by keeping herself “unsoiled,” as tradition demanded. Too lost in heat to be able to communicate more than the most basic of needs, she wouldn’t have been able to explain her reasons even if they had asked. They hadn’t asked, though, because Darcy had asked for nothing more than their touch.

That wasn’t to say that she hadn’t gotten some freaking amazing orgasms.

There was a shift in the mattress on her left. A calloused hand trailed down her bare, outstretched arm.

“Good morning, pisoi,” Clint greeted. She could hear the smile in his voice, and felt an answering one bend her lips. “Would you like breakfast in bed or do you want to eat in the kitchen?”

She was inclined to stay in her lovely nest, but the thought of crumbs on the fabulous silk sheets that had replaced the cotton ones they had started with had her changing her mind.

“Kitchen.” Cautiously, she opened her eyes. She was surprised to find the room was pleasantly dim.

Clint was smiling knowingly at her. Ever since their first naked cuddle pile, the archer had been doing his very best to anticipate what she might need. They all had, truth be told. Which was good, because Darcy hadn’t had the first clue about what she wanted or needed.

Thank Thor that the gammas had.

In the last five days, Darcy had learned a couple important facts.

One: heat was like a wave pool. Which was maybe not the best analogy, but it worked. See, heat wasn’t like the ocean where the waves were steady and the tides were slow to come in or go out. Nor was it like a tsunami where all the water was sucked away and then came crashing back down in a flood. Like an artificial wave pool, heat would start with little waves. That was what she had been experiencing when she had suddenly needed everyone naked. The waves would build and build, until they were twice your size. It was at the peak that you really had to be careful. If you were in too deep you could get sucked down against the grate at the bottom and you could drown if there was no one to help you stay afloat. But eventually, the waves would start to taper off until the water was only being agitated by the swimmers.

So heat was like a wave pool.

The second fact she learned was that heat made you sensitive. Ridiculously so. Darcy had a whole new appreciation of what the human body was capable of. She wasn’t talking skin alone, though that was part of it. Everything was sensitive. Her nose, her eyes, her tastebuds. She hadn’t even known that you could taste someone’s emotions. But she had definitely tasted lust when she had licked at her gammas’ scent glands.

It had been kinda trippy.

Clint gently assisted her to her feet. This was the first time in the last few days that she actually managed to remain standing on her own. The other three had had to help her with pretty much
everything since heat had made her feel higher than a kite. Heat had truly started some time after she had gathered her gammas into the nest. When she woke from the naked cuddle pile nap, it felt like she was on fire. Her skin itched with the need to be touched. Her body ached. She felt empty and hollow, thirsting for something to quench the inferno.

Her gammas had kept their hands on her, run their fingers through her hair, whispered soothing words and soft endearments. She had whimpered and whined for more, but she hadn’t been able to vocalize much more than “please.”

After what seemed like hours, though it must have only been minutes, she had finally been able to understand the questions being asked of her.

“What do you need, baby,” Sam was begging, “you have to tell us.”

“Touch me,” she demanded, lifting her hips.

There had been an immediate response. Since that first high-flying, free-falling, fireworks-behind-the-eyelids moment, Darcy hadn’t really come back down.

Her thoughts still seemed kinda fuzzy around the edges. Which is why it took Darcy a minute to register the sight of Natasha standing at the stove in Darcy’s pink cupcake apron.

When it did penetrate, Darcy may have made a noise that sounded something like “squeeeee”.

(According to Clint. The audio file JARVIS kept was likened to a prehistoric flying dinosaur.)

Natasha only turned her head and raised an eyebrow, but Darcy spotted the happy twinkle in her eye.

“Is it wrong that I’m totally turned on by you wearing my things? I mean, besides that fact that you’re not wearing anything else underneath that. Isn’t this supposed to be an alpha thing?”

Clint snorted into his coffee, which Darcy hadn’t even seen him grab.

“It’s not only an alpha thing, moya sokrovishche. We all enjoy wearing each other’s clothes, and seeing the others wear ours.” She flipped the pancake in the pan before coming closer to lean over the kitchen bar. “Clint really likes my panties,” she stage whispered.

“Hey!”

Before Clint could retaliate, Sam slid up beside him and plucked the coffee from his hand. Clint’s shocked and betrayed face had Darcy giggling. It also was a great distraction. Until Sam added…

“There’s no shame in wrapping the boys in satin.”

Clint sputtered in outrage and things devolved from there.

Ten minutes later, Clint was no longer making a pouty face as Darcy had perched herself on his lap as a consolation prize for losing the verbal sparring match with Sam and Nat. A large stack of pancakes sat in front of them, courtesy of Natasha, and Sam was setting down the glasses of juice for everyone.

It suddenly occurred to Darcy that she was still very much naked. She hadn’t been self-conscious about her state of undress before, maybe because the heat hormones had still been blunting the edges of things. Now she was noticing.

Beneath her, Clint was shirtless, but he was wearing a pair of boxer-briefs that did absolutely
fabulous things to his ass.

Something must have shown on her face, as Sam and Clint exchanged a look before the former airmen went to retrieve an oversized hoodie for her.

“Thanks,” she told him as she took the yellow zip-up. She didn’t lower her eyes though the urge was there. From embarrassment, maybe. Or shyness.

Not that Darcy had ever been shy about anything before. This whole heat thing was really throwing her off her game.

“Where’s my phone?”

“Eat first,” Sam suggested. And it was definitely a suggestion, what with that pitiful hopeful face that made her want to do anything to make him happy.

Rolling her eyes, she pulled the pancakes closer and took a bite. It was delicious. She gave a pleasured moan as she swallowed it down. Then she really dug in. She devoured the whole stack, suddenly finding herself starving. With sweet syrup on her tongue, she gave appreciative noises since she wasn’t going to pause long enough to actually compliment the chef.

When she had done all but licked the plate clean, she looked up to find the others watching. “What?”

“Damn,” Clint said, sounding awed, from behind her. “You are just—please don’t make those sounds in public.”

Noises? What… Evidence of what those noises had caused pressed against her from between Clint’s legs. Darcy shifted, a bit embarrassed. She could feel the warmth of a faint blush on her cheeks. She hadn’t meant to tease them. Honestly.

Sam nudged the glass of orange juice closer. Accepting the prompting, Darcy picked it up and drained it in a few quick swallows. “Now can I have my phone,” she asked as set the glass back down.

“It’s on the end table,” Natasha told her. “We made sure it was charged.”

With a smile, Darcy slid off Clint’s lap, making him groan. Snatching up the iPhone (which she kept just to annoy Stark even though he had offered her the latest model of the StarkPhone), Darcy went for her messages first. There were the expected hundred-plus texts from Jane.

Darcy didn’t even bother to read them. She sent the scientist one of her own.

I’m sorry. I will explain everything. Please don’t hate me.

She added a very sad emoji with big puppy eyes as extra leverage.

Her phone dinged as she was opening her work email. It had been less than 10 seconds for the response: Could never hate you. We r sooo doing a Juarez tho. B prepared.

The phantom taste of tequila rose in the back of her throat. Juarez had been a night filled with margaritas and the sharing of origin stories. It had been before the SHIELD, before Thor. It had simply been two women finding common ground despite their differences. It had been the first time that Darcy thought of Jane as her bestie, not just her mentor.

Love you, Janie.
The response this time was a meme of Steve in uniform, an image that had been stolen from some promotional event or another. ‘Always be yourself’, it stated in bold letters across the top. Toward the bottom there was smaller text. ‘Unless you can be Captain America. Then always be Captain America.’

It was stupid… and perfect. Darcy giggled as she switched back to her work emails. Three emails in, she came across a memo reminding all SI employees that they were not to be on any social media sites while on the clock. It was a pretty standard memo and Darcy didn’t think anything of it as she sent off responses to a couple of the highest priority emails. A few minutes later a new email popped up reminding employees... again... that they were not to be on any social media sites while on the clock... and that the owner of the company was a leading mind of computer science.

Strange, but not the weirdest memo she had read since starting in the Tower. That particular honor was currently held by the memo of April 24th, regarding not leaving any sex toys in the microwave. Seriously. Darcy had printed it out and framed it.

While she worked, she was aware of the gammas moving around the space. They were cleaning up, putting away the food, talking amongst themselves as they folded laundry and mopped the floor. Darcy tried to hide her grin. The media tried to claim that omegas should be the ones doing the housework, that it was part of their nesting process. During some times, or with some omegas, that might be true. However, Darcy was well aware that gammas were the ones who really nested in such a way.

Darcy could remember the way Clint had been appalled at the state of the bathroom she and Jane shared back in New Mexico. It had been clean...ish, but Clint had been horrified, though he tried not to show it. After a few days of bantering, Clint had felt comfortable enough to bring it up. With a shrug, she had agreed to let him do whatever he wanted while she went over Jane’s notes. He had scrubbed the entire bathroom, top to bottom, while trying not to go into her personal items too much. The whole thing had been kinda cute, especially the proud preening he’d done when she had complimented the final result.

She was still grinning when she decided to put aside the work for a moment and check her feeds. She had been out of touch for five days. No telling what crazy happenings she had missed. She’d have to get on YouTube to get the latest Late Night Show clips and…

Darcy could swear her brain made a hissing noise like an old steam engine coming to a stop.

For a moment, she felt as if she was having a lucid dream…

Or maybe she was on a prank show?

Her gaze tracked over the room slowly. Sam and Nat were teasing each other while Clint juggled apples (it was a circus holdover that she’d learned to roll with). None of them seemed concerned or ready to yell ‘gotcha!’.

To be honest, she wasn’t really sure what she was seeing.

Holding up her phone, she waved to get their attention, “Ummm... Do you guys know about this?”

“About what,” Natasha inquired, coming over. She had changed into actual clothes, setting aside the apron.

Darcy simply offered the phone up. She couldn’t find the words to explain that there was a literal storm of the virtual persuasion happening.
Natasha scrolled through the screen, her face unreadable. The men had come closer as well, Clint peering over Natasha’s shoulder.

He whistled and nudged Natasha’s arm. “I think she should read that part herself.”

Natasha handed the phone back.

On her little screen was Steve’s Twitter account @FrozenRelic (Tony had created it, and after Steve had tried to change it, Tony just hacked in and changed it back, so Steve eventually just rolled with it). Darcy had been following Steve since the very beginning. He didn’t post much, but he was connected and not as inept with technology as he allowed others to believe. She had been in the room when Steve had earnestly explained to Clint that he thought social media was a great invention, even bearing in mind all the negative personalities out there. He loved that people could communicate on a large scale quickly and without interference.

There was a tweet from twenty hours ago that was simple and yet so profound.

_I was prepared to die to keep America’s ideals safe, but I failed. Government has no right to control its citizens this way. #OmegaRights #CapforEquality_

Shock had her mouth hanging open, but no matter how profound an effect the Tweet had, the next message was the one that cemented her tears.

_I will fight for all omegas, but this is for DL most of all. #CapforEquality_

Tears were rolling down her face and they only came harder as she continued to read. There were thousands of responses, both for and against. It wasn’t just Americans, either. Omegas all over the world were chiming in. Steve hadn’t been ignoring the messages: those that stood with him were retweeted, those that opposed were slammed down with the unshakable righteousness that Steve had down to his very DNA. He linked blogs of omegas who had suffered because of the nature of the law, and spotlighted statistics on abuse as well as omega achievement despite the current laws.

A box of tissues was pressed into her lap, and Darcy gave Sam a watery smile of thanks.

Clint was on his phone, standing squarely in front of the door. Natasha was cursing in Russian (Darcy knew enough to know that it was definitely cursing) as she paced back and forth. She only paused to stare at Clint who didn’t even bother to meet her gaze when he informed her that she wasn’t going to assault their alpha before they had all the facts.

Sam simply shook his head and took a seat beside her. “I swear that man needs a backpack leash,” he muttered with a sigh. He grabbed the remote from the end table and turned on the tv to get the latest news on what their alpha had done.

“And now for a quick update on the startling message from Captain America and his new campaign: #CapforEquality…”

The small screen held in a metal hand flickered with the newscast.

“... Yesterday afternoon, at 2:37 Eastern, the all-American hero posted the first message using that hashtag on Twitter. Less than an hour later, the massive increase of traffic on the site caused the servers to crash. The social media site was down for four hours last night after Captain America
called for a change to the laws regarding omegas. Previously, the Captain had the fourth largest following on Twitter, surpassed only by Katy Perry at number 3, intergalactic Prince Thor at number 2 and, of course, Tony Stark a.k.a. Iron Man, who has held the top spot for the last several years. As of this morning, the Captain has overtaken both Perry and Thor. Experts predict that he will overtake Mr. Stark sometime in the next twenty-four hours.

There is a great deal of speculation about the motives behind this sudden move. The Captain has never before taken a stance on any political issues, even going so far as refusing to align himself with any particular political party. In past interviews, the Captain has been quoted as saying that ‘I would never judge another person on their political affiliation, only their actions, and I ask that everyone else does the same for me.’”

Bucky rolled his eyes. That sounded exactly like Steve.

“Some sources are claiming that the mysterious ‘DL,’ mentioned in the Captain’s second tweet, is an omega, possibly even the Captain’s, though there has been no confirmation from the Avengers.”

Every muscle in Bucky’s body tensed. Omega.

He remembered stepping out with Steve, double dating omegas and their gamma friends. Back then, it had been unseemly for an alpha to be alone with an unbonded omega, or for an omega to be out by themselves. But an alpha and their beta could take unbonded omega and an accompanying gamma out without raising any eyebrows.

Even though Steve hadn’t claimed him, Bucky had still acted as the other man’s beta. He had gone out and chatted up gammas and omegas, set up dates, then dragged a pouting Steve along with him to go meet them, hoping the whole time that Steve would find someone compatible. He had hoped that once Steve had found another of his pack, the alpha would be willing to make a claim on him.

Unfortunately, nobody had ever smelled right. Not to Steve. Not to Bucky, either.

His attention turned back to the newscaster as the picture changed. It showed men and women on the streets of the city, waving signs that said things like “Cap for Change,” “Equality for all,” “My orientation does not define me,” and “You have the right to be silent, I have the right to be heard.”

There was one, a great big pink monstrosity, held by a fragile looking young woman off to the right. The poster looked large enough to tip her over, but she carried it steadily and stuck her chin out as if daring the camera. It read: “I’d rather be a rebel than a slave.”

The news anchor droned on as more video of other protests played. “These scenes are being echoed all over the country as people take to the streets. So far the protests have been peaceful, but authorities are urging citizens to remain alert and wary of their surroundings. A spokesperson for the NYPD has stated that they are prepared for riots, but wish to remind everyone that people are entitled to their opinions.”

Bucky’s mind was still stuck on that young woman.

‘I’d rather be a rebel than a slave.’

He liked that. He had been a slave, and he knew the price that could be paid for rebellion. If she had experienced even a drop of what his hell had been, then she was right to take that stance. He applauded her moxie.

Speaking of moxie… some little punk had decided to jump-start a revolution.

It was definitely time to get involved.
Chapter End Notes

Please feed your author.... *nom nom nom*

Also, a quick preview from next week's chapter:

“You, sir, are an asshole.” His whole face started to crumple. “But I think I might love you.”
Once upon a time, the alpha prince was shown the injustice in his omega’s land. He would not abide what was being done to her people. He set out to right this wrong, forgetting that his pack would certainly have opinions on his self-appointed quest. When his omega learned of his deeds, she came to find him...

Due to the nature of the last few years, people tended to forget that Darcy Lewis was a political science major. They saw only the intern who had become entangled with heroes and geniuses of a caliber she couldn’t hope to match.

However, Darcy had studied hard. She remembered her lessons. She even had a certificate with a shiny seal on her wall. She understood how the system had been twisted from the ideal that the forefathers had intended. She even knew how it was that Congress had been filled with 75% alpha males, when alphas only accounted for 20% of population.

In her mind, she could connect the dots and read between the lines.

All that knowledge, all those insights she had discovered with her nose buried in a textbook, and she still hadn’t been quite prepared to become embroiled in a social movement.

She wasn’t really involved...yet. Her name wasn’t out there, and because she had been hiding her orientation, no one would even guess that she was Steve’s new omega.

Still…

Her initials were being scrutinized by millions. Everyone was curious about the mysterious DL. Some comedian had claimed it stood for “Down Low,” and that the good Captain had gotten introduced to slang from a tutor who was happy to give him a practical education in uses of said phrase. The joke had stuck. Darcy Lewis was the modern day Deep Throat. With the company she kept, she knew she wasn’t going to enjoy 33 years of anonymity. She had been lucky to get this far. As it was now, even a day of not beingouted was an achievement. But even though the inevitable loss of privacy would be an annoyance, Darcy was prepared to roll with it.

Apparently, Natasha wasn’t.

They had been binging on news stories and Steve’s posts for the last two hours or so. For a 20th century man, he was doing pretty well with 21st century social media. Someone, and Darcy was hoping it was Pepper because of reasons, had been helping him. There was no way he had set up his own YouTube channel. Darcy simply refused to believe that. Not to mention that Steve definitely didn’t have the know-how to string together a few of his most memorable moments and set them to music with a voice-over (that sounded suspiciously like Morgan Freeman) of the preamble of the
Constitution. Which was a deviation from the standard Declaration of Independence that Darcy appreciated. When the Morgan Freeman stand-in finished, Steve’s voice took over. “I know I’m asking a lot. But the price of freedom is high. It always has been. And it’s a price I’m willing to pay. If I’m the only one, then so be it. But I’m willing to bet I’m not.”

Sam scoffed at the rallying cry as he scrolled down to view the comments that were rapidly piling up. “Pretty sure that was Stark’s doing. No one else would have been able to dig through the mess left from SHIELD to find that nugget.” At Darcy’s inquiring look, he explained the original circumstances for the quote: “He still denies that he practiced that little speech first but I know the truth.” He winked.

She might have laughed, but Natasha’s continued pacing was putting her a bit on edge. The entire time, Clint had surreptitiously been keeping himself between the assassin and the door, taking his life in his hands. Natasha had muttered at him with a vaguely terrifying expression, but no matter what threats she had been pitching at him, the archer had held his ground.

Sam, on the other hand, had focused on Darcy.

“How’re you doing,” he asked.

She gave a shrug which had pretty much been her answer every time. On one hand, she was proud of Steve for taking up this mission even if there were going to be consequences. On the other hand, any lingering daydreams she’d had about keeping her orientation secret were shattered now.

They let a few minutes of silence lapse between them, the only noise coming from the television. Sam went back to surfing the net with one watchful eye on the other gammas. Darcy let her mind drift for a moment, imagining the way the country might change with Steve’s campaign. He was the kind of public figure that could garner the necessary support for a lasting change. His name had been remembered for 70 years, his place in history was already cemented. Aside from that, he had never before tossed his weight behind an issue. He was making himself the face of this fight, even though he wasn’t omega.

When she tuned back into her surroundings, some analyst was discussing the merits of the current laws. The more the double-chinned dickhead talked about omega biology necessitating the “structure” the law provided, the more Darcy saw red. When he wrapped up his point with “omegas seek out alphas, no one in the government is forcing them” Darcy lost it. She jabbed an angry finger at the screen.

“That’s the trick! The laws aren’t for unbonded omegas. The laws are all for bonded omegas, who have alphas. Alphas who want to keep them safe. Society, the media, family, friends... they are the ones who pressure omegas into bonding. Who make omegas believe that it is the only possible conclusion for their lives. And really, who doesn’t want to be happy? We are pack creatures. We want to be loved, we want to be surrounded. That desire makes omegas walk right into a cage. We willingly become captives. We give up the freedom we had when we were unbonded in order to have love, family, pack. That choice is used against us later. When we chafe at the restrictions, when we rebel, they tell us ‘see, you really don’t know what you want. It’s a good thing we can make decisions for you’.”

The gammas were staring at her, but it was Sam that spoke first. “You practice that in a mirror first?”

She rolled her eyes as she snatched the nearest pillow to throw at his face.

The next few hours were much of the same: Natasha pacing, Clint holding the door, Sam alternately checking in with her to make sure she wasn’t overwhelmed and listening to her pontificate about the
laws that she had been very careful to never break.

About six hours after they had discovered Steve’s opening shot in this war, Darcy started getting restless.

Sam noticed. Bless his sweet soul, he nudged her off the couch and into the bathroom to shower. It was nice to have space to herself for a moment, even if some piece of her instincts was whimpering at the temporary separation. Once she was dressed, she came back out to find Natasha glaring down at Sam with a long look of attempted intimidation.

Under the assassin's scrutiny, Sam simply shrugged. “I can do it if you’d rather. She hasn’t eaten since breakfast.” Her gaze swung to Darcy, sweeping over her from head to foot. With a huff, she slipped into the kitchen.

Darcy gave Sam a raised brow of question to which he responded with a shrug. “She needed to focus on something else.”

Deciding it was safe when pans began clanging on the stovetop, Darcy went over to lean against the wall next to Clint. His position didn’t change, arms folded across his chest, one foot on the wall behind him, eyes focused on some distant point, but somehow Darcy knew she had his full attention.

“Thank you,” she told him.

Now his gorgeous eyes turned to her. “For what?”

“For keeping her from doing something she would regret,” she clarified. Darcy had no illusions about her favorite Russian. Steve might heal fast, but there still would have been bloodshed if they had let Natasha out. They both knew it had only been a desire not to upset the pack’s new omega that had prevented her from going right through Clint.

His lips quirked at the corners. “I don’t think she’d regret it in the way you imagine.”

Darcy gave a huff of amusement. “Yeah, probably. Still, thank you. I finally get to have the four of you, a real pack, something I thought would always be fantasy. I don’t want to have everything start with a bunch of fighting.”

He nodded, eyes darting over Natasha’s stiff figure in the kitchen.

Darcy followed his gaze. “Do you think you could keep her distracted while I step outside?” She was careful to keep her voice low just in case Natasha was paying attention.

The archer’s answering smirk wasn’t one Darcy ever wanted aimed at her. It was the one that had preceded most of his disciplinary actions, and all of his pranks on the junior agents. Leaning over, he pressed a kiss to her cheek. “Good luck,” he whispered before pushing off the wall and slipping behind Natasha.

Darcy waited until she was sure Clint had the redhead’s complete attention. Then, she headed for the door, winking at Sam as she went. He gave her a thumbs up and a grin.

Darcy was finally going to get a moment alone with her alpha. Her alpha. She might not have committed to him outloud yet, but she had to admit that in her heart, he had been hers for a while. Maybe since they had first met.

The same could be said about the others. They were hers. Her pack.
It had just taken some time for her brain to get on board with the idea.

Stepping into the hall, Steve’s scent enveloped her. The strength of it was telling. He obviously hadn’t left the space much, or at all. Darcy was banking on the latter. Steve was the type to take what he perceived as his duty very seriously.

She recognized the couch and chairs that now filled the hallway as being from the other suites on this floor. (She may have tried out each of the suites the first week she had moved in. They were all exactly the same size, but Darcy had always wanted a chance to play Goldilocks.) Beside the couch, military folded bed sheets were stacked, telling her that any sleep Steve had been getting had been out here. Most of the space was neat, though there were papers spread out on a couple of end tables. The piles were a bit haphazard, the writing on them covered in yellow highlighter and red pen.

Steve must have heard the door open because he was watching her avidly from ten feet away where he sat in one of the chairs. His muscles were tense, his back straight.

“Hey,” she greeted.

“Darcy.” It was only her name, something she had heard thousands of times before. Yet she had never heard it said quite that way. He sounded awed. As if she was a precious gift, something unexpected and beloved.

She wasn’t sure how she felt about that. They may have been acquaintances for over a year, but they didn’t really know each other. She had been so careful to keep her distance, there was no way could he understand her. He didn’t know her history or the motivations behind her choices. How could he sound so certain of the reverence he gave her name? How could he know if she was worth that adoration?

The others, while treading carefully around her insecurities during the last few days, had never looked at her the way he gazed at her now. His eyes were bright with hope and want and a dozen emotions she couldn’t name. Was this what all the hype about packs and bonding was about? This unconditional caring? This freely given affection and devotion?

Darcy didn’t trust that tone or that look. Not fully. Not from Steve. The others hadn’t put her on a pedestal. They hadn’t stared as if she was an angel come to earth.

Steve began to rise from his seat, a welcoming smile on his lips.

“How did you do it?” The harsh inflection in her voice stopped him cold. She didn’t have to clarify what it was. He knew. “Was it because you found out about my father?” The confused scrunch to Steve’s brow told her the answer. “No. Then was this some attempt to impress me?”

A small, sheepish grimace twisted his lips, then was gone just as quick. “No…”

She quirked an eyebrow that made the alpha squirm like a chocolate-smeared child being asked if he got in the cookie jar. (And Natasha got full credit for teaching her that particular trick.)

“I mean, that wasn’t the reason it started. Honest.” He took a step toward her, trying to impress his earnestness. “I hadn’t realized how much has changed. There was so much that was different already, I never bothered to look into omega rights. I didn’t think there was anything to see. I never imagined that the country had deteriorated in that one regard when there has been so much progress everywhere else. My mother was a single omega; she lost her pack to the war and sickness. She would never have stood for this.” The grin was fond, and his voice slipped into a Brooklyn accent. “She would-a whupped me good if I didn’t stand up for what’s right.”
One hand rubbed the back of his neck and a faint blush graced the tips of his ears, as he dropped his eyes to his feet. “Impressing you was a nice side-effect.”

She could picture him as a scrawny kid pulling the same move as he explained to his mother why he’d come home with another bloody nose. The only thing missing was some shoe-scuffing against the floor.

He lifted his gaze and met her eyes directly, awaiting her judgment. Hope lit up his face.

“You, sir, are an asshole.” His whole face started to crumple. “But I think I might love you.” Her heart had already made room for all of them. There was a pressure in her chest from the rest of the emotions he was stirring. God, she wanted to wrap him up and drag him into her den. She, the lowly little omega, wanted to protect this ultra-alpha. From his loss. From the future that had disappointed him. From his own stubbornness.

Any other alpha would have seen this development and simply done their best to protect his own omega. Hers… Hers had decided to stand for them all.

It was Darcy that closed the distance between them. Her arms that wrapped around him first. He drew in a sharp breath at her touch, holding it, as if he was afraid breathing might make her disappear. She tightened her hold, and he let out a sigh that sounded like it was threaded with relief. Then his arms went around her in return.

It was wonderful. A moment for only the two of them.

Which was exactly why the door slammed open.

Darcy jumped, even as she felt Steve’s arms convulse around her protectively. It wasn’t Darcy that needed protection though.

Natasha stood in the open doorway, absolutely no expression on her face. Though she appeared calm, the crash of the door contradicted that. Not to mention the fact that Darcy could almost see dark clouds of righteous fury billowing around behind her.

“Rogers.” Her voice was flat and cold. A mechanical clock ticking down. The only other time Darcy had heard that particular tone was when some visiting SHIELD agent had insinuated that Clint should not be trusted after the Loki incident. (Darcy wasn’t sure what had happened after Natasha’s opening line. Jane had shuffled her off.)

Now she was going to witness the explosion.

Steve seemed to recognize this as well. He carefully unwound his arms from around Darcy and set her beside him.

“Natasha, I can explain.”

“You can explain,” she repeated in that same toneless voice. “Please do. Enlighten me.”

Darcy could see Clint and Sam, standing awkwardly behind the assassin, both looking anxious.

Steve drew himself up, squaring his shoulders. Stupidly brave in the face of Natasha’s icy intensity. “I couldn’t allow this treatment of anyone. I—”

“So you decided to jump into this media storm without discussing it with us?” The question was obviously rhetorical as she plowed on. Steve snapped his mouth closed. “You didn’t ask any of us
what we thought or what might be a better plan. We’re the ones who actually grew up in this century. Don’t you think we might be able to provide better tactics, Captain?” The disdain on the title was nearly venomous.

Darcy could see an answering anger growing on Steve’s face, but he held it down, his hands clenching by his sides. He was giving his gamma time to say her peace.

“And what about Darcy? Did you ask her if she wanted to be under scrutiny? Did you ask her if she wanted to have to reveal her status to the whole world? Did you think about the danger you’ve put her in?” Her voice gained rage in increments. Darcy was tempted to toss in her two cents but she held back half in fear, half in fascination. Natasha was a warming kettle. Steam building as the temperature rose.

“I took down a global agency with you. I spread my secrets across the web. But you - you are lacking the basic skill of sharing! We are your pack. You may be our alpha, but we deserve that exchange of information. We deserve a conversation before you arbitrarily make a decision that affects all of us. You are usually a good man, but right now you are acting like an arrogant ass. Do you think there won’t be consequences to this? Not just for us, idiot. For you too! The uniform won’t save you from political repercussions. You’re not used to this kind of fight Steve. This isn’t something you can punch your way out of. They’ll twist what you say. They’ll use the fact that you won’t stoop to their level against you. They’ll lay traps with their words and you won’t even see them until you’re already twelve feet deep in the pit.”

“I won’t-,” Steve tried to cut in.

“No!” Natasha charged forward until she was right in his space. “You listen! This is my playing field. I know this game. You’ve just painted a target on your back. And believe me, those who want to stay in power won’t give you time to grab the shield before they fire.”

Her step back was a sudden as her charge had been. Her arms crossed over her chest, voice dangerously soft once more. “I chose you as my alpha because I trust you. I trust you to care for all of us, to put us before everyone else. Before the world. Like you did with Bucky.”

Darcy winced at the low-blow. Bringing up his dead beta was a little beneath the belt, even for the Black Widow.

“I trust you not to be foolish. Not to be a- an imbecile.” Natasha seemed to struggle to find the words, lapsing into Russian instead. Her voice was rising again. The kettle set back on the heat.

Darcy could foresee the outcome. Someone was going to say something they couldn’t take back. That nursery rhyme about sticks and stones wasn’t true. Words were sometimes the sharpest weapons one could wield. All this in mind, she stepped between the furious gamma and her alpha.

“Ding. Ding. Okay, that’s the bell. Back to your corners.” She put out a placating hand to each of them. Strangely enough, they both took a step back from each other as if they really were boxers listening to the referee. “I feel like this conversation should not be happening in the hallway. So we’re all going back into my apartment and we’re going to talk about this. No more monologues.”

At some point, Sam and Clint had slipped into the hall as well. The relief on their faces brought the tension in the air down by a good ten points.

It was Steve that took the first step. Natasha gave way by stepping to the side, too worked up to bare her back to him. The boys followed tentatively, torn between the alpha and the two women still in the hall.
“Nat?”

The redhead gave Darcy her full attention.

“I’m fine. We’ll all be fine. I promise.” She moved closer, laying a hand on Natasha’s elbow. The former Russian didn’t flinch, but the muscles beneath Darcy’s fingers tensed. Darcy wasn’t deterred; she knew Natasha simply needed a moment to allow the emotions to settle. When her arms finally slipped free of their defensive position, Darcy crowded in close, pressing her nose into Natasha’s neck. “I love you,” Darcy whispered. “I’m safe. Our alpha,” her heart gave a happy flutter at the phrase, “might be an asshole sometimes, but his heart’s in the right place.” Natasha gave a huff which could have been amusement or derision. “Can we at least sit down and have that conversation that he should have had with us before?”

“Fine,” she grumbled, squeezing Darcy tightly before releasing her.

The redhead didn’t move until Darcy did. The gamma playing guard for her omega.

Darcy rolled her eyes when Natasha couldn’t see, but she was smiling fondly even as she did.

Walking into Darcy’s apartment was like walking into a dream. It wasn’t the decor. It was the smell. Pack, all of them, together. There was lingering scent of heat: sweat, arousal, need. Steve’s body sat up and took notice. Instincts blaring in his skull.

However, if his omega wanted them to talk then he would hold those needs down and they would talk.

The mattress, that had been delivered the first day of Darcy’s heat, was set up on the floor. The couch pushed against the wall behind it, making the front of the couch the bed’s headrest. Though Steve could smell the laundry soap on the sheets, it wasn’t enough to mask what had happened here the last five days.

Darcy closed the door behind, drawing his attention. “Right,” she pronounced clapping her hands together. “We’re all going to sit down and actually communicate…And I can’t believe I’m the one promoting this… If we can’t do this like adults, I will use a talking stick so let’s try to keep this civil.”

The atmosphere was too tense to get anyone laughing but Sam and Clint both smiled at the talking stick reference. It was something that Sam used in his VA group counseling. It helped the veteran speaking to have something focus on and reminded the rest to listen. When Sam had first come to the Tower he had walked in on an argument between Steve and Tony. For the residents of the Tower who had seen the two interact before it wasn’t anything unusual. They were both high-ranking alphas and it would have been stranger to see them get along right off. Sam had read the situation in an instance and unhurriedly walked over to one of those decorative vases filled with dried curly willow. He’d snapped a branch in half, drawing everyone’s attention. Holding the stick above his head he’d declared, “I have the stick. I get to talk.” Amazingly the rest of them had gone along with it.

“I think we can do this without tools,” Steve answered Darcy’s request, as he gingerly took a seat in one of the chairs. He wasn’t going to attempt to get to the couch and stir up the scents more. Sam and
Clint were quick to find seats now that Steve was sitting. Natasha stubbornly hesitated until Darcy gave her a look that was pleading for cooperation. The assassin made a point of folding herself down onto the mattress. Steve refrained from rolling his eyes at the display. She was going to push buttons, make him prove he was trustworthy all over again. That saddened him because his intentions had never been to hurt any of his pack. He only wanted to make things better.

“Great! Then I’ll start this off since I think my topic affects everyone else and is the longest running.” Darcy took a deep breath and gave a wane smile. She remained on her feet, shifting her weight and giving away her nerves. “I…” Her dim smile faded out as she searched for words. “When I was...” Her struggle was clearly written in the furrow between her brows, the tensing of her body, her fingers fidgeting at the edge of her shirt.

“You don’t have to do this, Darcy,” he said, giving her an out. It pained him to see her struggling. His heart ached in his chest. He wanted to know her story certainly, but if she was laboring this hard to find the words perhaps she wasn’t ready.

His little omega must have seen that as a challenge. She lifted her chin, her fingers stilling and pressing against her thighs. Her eyes were determined. That was why he loved her so easily. Not because of her biology. Not because of her enticing scent. Because she was courageous and determined and stubborn as hell.

“My mother was an omega. Her pack was small, only three, when I was conceived. My father was the alpha, and my mother used to tell me that he was a good man, though I don’t really remember him ever doing anything to make me believe that. When I was born, there were complications. My mother had a hard time recovering and when she finally did the doctors said having another child might kill her. I didn’t know that part until later, but my guess is that her health is what started my father’s drinking. Their gamma stuck around for a while, but when dear old dad started adding pills to his liquor habits, the guy bailed. Not that I blame him really. Travis, the gamma, he contacted me a few years ago, wanting to apologize for leaving my mother. He told me how he gave dad an ultimatum, tried to get him to stop. When that didn’t work, he begged mom to go with him, but at that point she was still hoping for a happy ending. She thought she could save her alpha from himself.” The last statement was all but spat. Steve could understand her venom. If Darcy’s mother had chosen to go there was no telling what direction their lives might have gone.

Steve felt anger rising as well, but his anger was all toward her father.

“Later, I think she didn’t leave because she’d just been beaten down too much,” Darcy continued. “Anyway, mom stayed and dad just got worse. One night, when I was six, dad took a little too much. He went out of his mind. He pushed mom down. She cracked her head and she...she never woke back up. The medical records say she was still alive for a while. I always wondered if someone had gotten to her earlier, stopped the bleeding, if she might have lived.”

She swallowed thickly and Steve clenched his hands around his thighs to keep from reaching out to her. He could see the determination on her face to finish this recounting of her past.

“Dad dragged me outside. No one really knows what he was trying to do. Maybe he was going to kill us both or maybe he was just trying to escape. Either way he jumped over the railing of third floor landing. I don’t remember much about that part. Just hearing screaming. Then this profound silence. Like everything in the world had stopped.”

Silence wrapped around them all. Steve wanted to comfort her, but he wasn’t sure what to say. What could he say to ease pain that she had carried for almost twenty years?

“When I woke up, and they told me that I was...alone, I decided that being an omega was only good
for pain. The only example I had at the time was my mother and her life hadn’t been all roses. Hers had been more like a bouquet of thorns. The more time that went on, the more examples I had of why I was right. I can quote you statistics and case files that would make you blanch. No one studies happy people. Happy people are only in the movies, read about in books. Fiction. I thought that’s what a happy bonded omega was: fiction. So I made my own fiction. I wasn’t going to be an omega. I would be an alpha. I would make my own rules. I was careful though. I made sure I didn’t break any laws. Thanks to political correctness I was able to always check the ‘Chose not to answer’ box. I never claimed to be an alpha, but I acted like one. People infer a lot of things from subtle body language. Omegas drop their eyes when an alpha yells. So I stared and yelled back. I don’t really know how to be a real omega. I know you all said that was fine, but you don’t get to change your minds later. I’m only going to come out as omega for this pack. We do this and you’re stuck with me.”

She was braced for rejection, her body tight with tension that was easy to see.

“Oh the horror,” Clint deadpanned.

The quip had Darcy smiling.

Steve stood up, moving slowly to keep from startling the omega. She was wound tight and it wouldn’t take much to make her defensive. “May I have a hug?”

He knew it was the right thing to say when she tumbled headlong into his arms. With his arms around her he could feel the slight trembling in her body, the shaking of her breath as she tried to hold back silent sobs. He pressed a kiss to the top of her head, content to hold her.

There was anger simmering in his blood, below the surface. Yet, he wouldn’t let her see. If he hadn’t already started his campaign for justice, he would be more than willing now.

“This is a two-way street,” Sam spoke up. “You’re stuck with us too. Spangly outfits, bird jokes, and all.”

Darcy lifted her head from his chest. Her eyes were misty and red but she was smiling sweetly when she looked them all over. “It will be a hardship, but I’ll make the sacrifice. For the good of humanity.”

“The country thanks you,” Steve teased.

After a another deep breath, Darcy pulled back. Steve let her go reluctantly. She straightened and brushed her hands against each other as if she was wiping away the tangled emotions her account brought up. “Okay so topic number two: Captain America learns how to fight social injustice via the internet.” Natasha made a scoffing noise. “Which obviously could have been done with a little more finesse, but we’re going to move past that.”

Natasha arched an eyebrow in challenge of that statement.

Steve met the challenge. “I won’t apologize for what I did. But I am sorry I didn’t discuss things with all of you first. Especially you, Darcy. This is going to bring you under a lot of scrutiny even if you decide not to reveal your orientation.”

“Oh, no. That’s a done deal. I’ve made my peace with it.” His confusion must have shown on his face because she took one look at him and shrugged. “I want to bond with everyone. When that happens it’s going to be fairly obvious what I am.” A faint blush stole over her cheeks. “Plus I don’t want any little hussies trying to horn in on what’s mine.”
His inner alpha purred at this show of possessiveness from his omega.

“We aren’t going to be able to hide this long,” Natasha finally spoke up. “Even if you simply mark her, people will put together who she is. You broadcasted her initials when you started your crusade. People will blame her for what you’re doing.”

“It was my choice,” he defended.

“Not everyone will see it that way! They’ll think she tricked you, or is using you. She’s going to be as big of a target for dissenters as you are,” Natasha retorted.

Darcy stepped between them easily. Same as she had done in the hall. Completely fearless though she was risking an alpha’s anger and a famous assassin’s wrath. “True. She is making a good point, but let’s make our points at a lower volume please.” There was a snort of amusement that might have been Clint but was probably Sam (Clint knew better than to provoke Natasha too far because she wouldn’t hold back with him). “This whole thing does make us targets, but anyone who decides to become the face of political change runs the same risk. I’m perfectly willing to take this risk because I have you all. I never would have done this on my own. But I can’t tell you how much I dreamed about it. I dreamed about someone taking a stand and refusing to back down. I would be a hypocrite if I wasn’t willing to stand beside him since he’s doing this for my orientation.”

Her phrasing gave his pause. “I might be doing this for all omegas, Darcy. But I would stop if you asked me. If you ever ask me, I will toss this all aside for you,” he swore.

She closed the small space between them, hand ghosting over his cheek. “I would never ask.” Her head tilted as she silently demanded a kiss. He could do nothing but indulge her.

When they broke apart, she turned back to Natasha. “But I promise I won’t be stupid about this. I’ll do whatever you think is necessary for security. Steve will too.”

He jerked a little in surprise. “I don’t,” he began. His voice trailing off when Darcy, Sam, and Clint all gave him pleading eyes. “Fine. Whatever is necessary.”

Natasha rose gracefully to her feet. “You can’t mark Darcy.”

He stiffened, ready to fight. Darcy was his omega. It was right to mark her. A marking would tell others she was taken, would keep her protected.

When he didn’t respond, Natasha continued. “You can’t mark her until she is ready to reveal her orientation. Marking her will put your scent on her. Anyone going after you would come after her. We wait until we see what kind of blowback there’s going to be. If people start calling for your blood, not having your mark will protect her.”

He couldn’t fight that logic. He didn’t bother to mask his displeasure.

“It wouldn’t be forever,” Natasha said with understanding, softening the tiniest bit. “Just for a little while.”

Steve gave a crisp nod. He wasn’t going to fight this mandate.

Darcy reached for his hand and gave it a squeeze. “Okay, who’s next? I feel like we’re making real progress here. What other issues can we talk out?”

Sam rolled his eyes, while Clint buried his face in a pillow with a groan. Even Natasha smiled, her former anger having burned out enough that she could accept the situation.
Steve gathered Darcy to him, luxuriating in the warmth of her. “I think we’ve done enough for today,” he told her, pressing a chaste kiss to her forehead.

With a shrug she let the topic slide. “Then I say we find food, cause I’m getting hungry.”

“I second this motion,” Sam called as he stood, heading for the kitchen.

While the others raided the kitchen, Steve reveled in the feel of Darcy in his arms. He never wanted to let her go now that had her. Of course, like all of the loves of his life, she couldn’t simply indulge the silence. When she tilted her head up to meet his gaze, he could see the mischief sparkling in her eyes. “You know I majored in Political Science.”

“Yeah?”

“I totally get to write your speeches.”

Chapter End Notes

Comments make my little black heart flutter!
...There was Wifi

Chapter Notes

I suck at life folks.
Adulting is hard...and now a verb.

Please take this offering in place of Christmas presents since I don't have enough postage to ship you all something nice.

:)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Once upon a time, there was a man of science, a philosopher, and an omega. His successes were hard-won, and his failures often catastrophic. Still, the heart of the eccentric king had welcomed him. He had tried to keep to himself, knowing that his misfortune had a way of infecting those around him, but some battles were lost before they began...

One would never find Hulk as a supporter of any human rights movement. However, if one were to review donations to various organizations dedicated to helping and educating omegas, the name B. Banner would appear often.

He did it for himself more than others. He did it to remind himself that his father was wrong.

Bruce had been born both an omega and a disappointment to his father.

Unconsciously, Bruce’s shoulders hunched as he slipped out of the Tower for the first time in a week. Though he had known his father’s opinion to be true from a young age, young enough that he couldn’t even really recall when the knowledge had occurred to him, it still had the power to affect him. Those two simple facts, his orientation and his father’s disappointment, had shaped his life.

His mother had been a beta, a lovely woman beaten down by circumstance. While omegas were the most fertile of the orientations, and prized for that very reason no matter of gender, any woman could bear a child. When Rebecca found herself pregnant, she had been surprised but joyful.

Brian Banner had been anything but joyful.

Disgusted that his beta was the one expecting, not his precious omega, Brian had turned cruel. He had built his pack around his genius. A leader in physics, and a budding star in genetics, it was easy for Brian to surround himself with scientific minds. Both his gammas were met during his work, along with his omega, a fresh-faced man who worshipped at the altar of Brian’s intellect. Rebecca had already been the odd one out, as she had no PhD behind her name, nor any desire to pursue one. That was not to say she was without her own intelligence, but she chose to live her life more fluidly than the hard sciences allowed.

Regardless, the end result of Bruce’s conception was that Rebecca became ostracized in her own home. Brian was able to rationalize the manipulative emotional abuse during her pregnancy, and the
physical abuse after Bruce’s birth. The rest of the pack came to believe as he did, that Rebecca was deserving of the treatment she was given. Sometimes, even Rebecca half believed it.

Still, Rebecca stayed for the sake of her child. There was no way a court would give her sole custody, not when the rest of the pack would testify on Brian’s behalf.

Until the day that Brian struck Bruce.

That day was strikingly clear in Bruce’s memory. Not because of the hit, but because of the way his mother’s eyes had suddenly sparked fire. For most of his life, his mother’s eyes had been dull. Simply looking at her would give the impression that she was nothing but a pretty face. There had been moments when those eyes filled with laughter and love, even sparkled with mischief. Always and only when he was alone with her, though. Whenever the other members of the pack were near, she would tuck that part of her away.

Until his father had smacked him, and Rebecca’s eyes had blazed.

She had kept her gaze turned down, seemingly subservient to the alpha, but from Bruce’s position on the floor, he had seen the transformation. Somehow, it hadn’t surprised him at all when a week later, on a day he was supposed to go to an early dentist appointment and then to school, Rebecca had given him a duffle and told him to pack anything he couldn’t live without.

Even back then there hadn’t been much to fill the bag.

Unfortunately, as they were packing the car for their escape, Brian’s simpering omega, Victor, came home early and spotted them. Victor called Brian, who had returned home in a rage. He had thrown Rebecca and beat her savagely, while Bruce looked on helplessly.

After Brian was convicted and imprisoned, Bruce was sent back to live with what remained of his father’s pack. The gammas had provided the basics for him, out of a sense of duty, but Victor blamed him for what had happened to his alpha. As if Bruce’s very existence was the reason Brian had fallen into madness.

So when adolescence had come, Bruce had found no help from the other omega and had to look for his own information. This was how he had first stumbled upon the history of the omega laws.

Lost in reminiscing, Bruce had found his way to his destination. The large, brick-faced library would do perfectly for his purposes. Instead of entering, Bruce strolled around the corner. Leaning against the red brick, he connected to the wifi on the untraceable phone Tony had gifted him with months ago. (Tony’s slow but steady courting had included many technological offerings.) Dropping a message on a specific forum on a certain website, Bruce disconnected and settled in to wait. All this secrecy wouldn’t guarantee that the billionaire wouldn’t be able to find out what Bruce was doing, but it would at least delay the discovery.

It wasn’t that he didn’t trust Tony. He did. More than Tony believed. It was just that the people he was contacting were suspicious by nature, especially of alphas. Even with the wholesome ultra-alpha, Captain America, stepping up on a soapbox to proclaim his support for omegas, these contacts of his would remain skeptical.

They had good reason to be mistrustful. History was written by the winners. (Or perhaps re-written would be a more accurate description.) Truth could be found, but one had to always look at the supposed facts with that in mind. These acts of revision were the reason that most modern day Americans believed that omegas had always needed to be monitored and sheltered.
Thanks to Victor’s neglect, Bruce learned the truth: omegas had once enjoyed as much respect and power as any other orientation.

Omegas had always made up a smaller portion of the population than the other orientations. Less than 15% if the statistics were accurate. However, the difference in numbers was never a problem until after the Spanish Influenza swept through the nation in the early 20th century. The epidemic happened at the same time as the first World War, passing quickly but leaving devastation in its wake. Millions died, millions more were infected. Carriers and children of those who had been infected found themselves infertile. Through careful censorship and propaganda, the government kept the problem out of the public view.

Unfortunately, before the population could fully recover, the stock market crashed in 1929. Packs could not support large numbers, and the growth of the nation was stunted. Just as the country recovered, World War II began.

After the war, the government instituted programs to promote omegas staying home and bearing children. Propaganda soon swayed alphas to believe that omegas were too emotional, hormonal, and vapid; they needed laws to govern their behavior. Societal norms began to build around these ideas. Omegas were raised to believe that their highest goal in life was to be bonded to an alpha and bear children.

It was a slow change, an insidious conditioning of the entire populous.

Not everyone was fooled.

Some omegas fought the changes, teaching their offspring the truth. Some rebelled more directly. Unfortunately, none of these fighters were charismatic enough to gain the support of popular opinion. The movement went underground.

Victor’s vitriol drove Bruce to connect with this hidden network.

Now Steve had-

His phone rang, cutting off the thought.

“Speak,” the person on the other end demanded before he could give a greeting.

“I have a way for someone to speak with the Captain if they want.”

Silence met this statement. Bruce waited patiently as he heard the line click, telling him someone else had joined the call. “I’m listening,” a new voice stated.

Bruce smiled.

A few minutes later, Bruce Banner was casually walking the street again. The smile on his face could be described as anticipatory, and it wasn’t only because he was headed home to his pack. It only grew as he watched people around him, carrying on about their days. They had no idea of the fireworks they were about to witness.

Chapter End Notes

Comments make my bells jingle...
Chapter Notes

I just don't even know folks...I keep trying to get Bucky to the party, but it's like he's on strike. Just strutting around with a sign that reads: "Hell no, I won't go!"

Once upon a time, there was a beta woman who had long served as advisor for her king. They had both recognized their compatibility, but it took years before the king laid claim to her. Now she was a part of his household, happy to watch as he found purpose and pursued his omega. She welcomed his allies when they sought sanctuary in his home. With the threat of a new war on the horizon, she was preparing the armies and making plans. Every possible avenue of attack was being watched by those loyal to the king, yet none of them expected trouble to come from within their walls…

Pepper Potts was a woman of many talents. By necessity really. Over a decade as Tony’s personal assistant had given her expertise in areas she never would have thought to study. Such as party planning and awkward one-night stand removal. Now as CEO of Stark Industries she had expanded her repertoire and finally gotten credit for her business acumen.

Still, even after having to deal with Congress’ attempt to claim rights to the Iron Man armor, she had never expected to be delving deeper into politics. Yet here she was: assisting a social reform spearheaded by Captain America.

Unexpected seemed commonplace these days.

Aliens in New York had been unexpected. A god that look like a poster boy for a shampoo company had been unexpected. Tony informing her that a man that turned into a towering giant of rage had triggered the odor alterum ...well honestly that seemed right in line with Tony’s usual shenanigans.

Pepper had met Bruce of course, and she couldn’t deny that his scent was pleasing. It didn’t stir her as Tony’s or Rhodey’s or Happy’s but perhaps in time it would though.

Pepper had always had an odd hindbrain. Her instincts had never been more than a blip, easily ignorable and often...lagging. Presented with Tony’s scent for the first time she had found it...nice. Aesthetically nice. Like one might find an air freshener nice. Repeated exposure seemed to finally wake her hindbrain into giving her that recognizable tingle of compatibility. She thought that maybe she was too practical, maybe she let her forebrain control too much, ignoring her instincts. Often she wondered if her lack of acknowledgement of that compatibility on their first meeting is what had driven Tony to take so long to claim her. (Neither of them ever discussed such things. It was better to let the past lay and move forward.)

That same lag had happened with Happy and Rhodey though neither had taken as long. Since they had already been marked by Tony she had kept her distance. It was one thing to be involved with an unbonded gamma or two, it was a completely other thing to try to begin a relationship with bonded gammas but not the alpha of the pack.
In the end things had worked out, but Pepper knew Tony was nervous about bringing Bruce into the pack when she had not experienced the *odor alterum*. Pepper was unconcerned, but she knew Tony’s insecurities were driving him. He wouldn’t believe their relationship would work without some tangible hope.

The *odor alterum* was named by science but still unexplainable in many ways. It translated as literally smell of a mate but it in no way ensured destiny. It offered only possibilities. There were many packs and relationships that formed without that evidence of compatibility. Some worked well, others fell apart spectacularly. There was a tendency by Hollywood to romanticize the phenomenon. Words like ‘fate’, ‘true love’, and ‘predestined’ were tossed about like confetti.

Pepper was of the mind that any relationship took work. The *odor alterum* was a helpful indicator but nothing more. Even if she never smelled that marker on Bruce, she could still see his appeal. He was a man who, while not at peace with himself, was resigned to his fate and trying to use his curse for good. He was also brilliant. Pepper had always had a soft spot for men of brilliance.

Currently, she was sitting in the common lounge, feet tucked up beside her on the couch, as she worked with JARVIS on cutting down the list of potential PR firms for Steve. At Natasha’s insistence, she had taken on the task though she would likely have offered regardless since she had a fondness for the man out of time. The two women had become unlikely friends after the spy’s infiltration of SI and Pepper was happy to assist with whatever Natasha might need.

Absorbed in her work, Pepper only tuned into her surroundings when the elevator dinged to announce someone’s arrival.

There was Bruce.

When he spotted her, he appeared a bit nervous, wringing his hands together and eyes darting down to the floor. She could understand his nerves. He was the newest addition to their pack, an omega to boot. Time would give them ease with each other. Regardless of whether or not her *odor alterum* was ever triggered.

“Hello, Bruce. How are you?”

“I’m fine. I-I didn’t mean to intrude. I’ll head down to the lab.”

“No,” she called, as she stood. “You’re not intruding. I was simply looking over some information. I would actually love some company.”

He sat though he remained skittish, balancing on the edge of the couch cushion.

“How has your day been so far,” she asked, trying to bridge the awkward silence that is falling.

“Umm, productive.”

Pepper was searching for another topic of conversation when the lights flickered. She looked up surprised, mouth opening to ask JARVIS what was happening.

Then the power went out completely.

There was more than adequate light coming in from the windows, which enabled Pepper to see the smile that spread over Bruce’s lips. It was mischievous, and guilt-free though he undoubtedly had some hand in this.

Pepper heaved an internal sigh. She had always had a soft spot for brilliant and reckless men.
A few floors below...

“Pretend I’m Bucky.”

Steve choked on his orange juice at Darcy’s command. When he recovered enough to breathe, he looked at her incredulously. “What?”

Darcy admitted to herself that while her intent was good, her phrasing could use work. Bringing up his dead beta was not the way to get him in the right frame of mind.

“I mean, pretend I’m one of your men. We’re about to do something reckless and bordering on suicidal. What do you say to pump me up? To rally the troops?”

They had been working on his very first press conference speech for the last two hours. It wasn’t going well. He kept claiming that he was better at improvising. That no, he didn’t practice his speeches in the mirror every night, like Sam claimed. Darcy had been trying to get him to dig into that well of inspirational quotes he had buried inside him. The best they had come up with was, depressingly, already the slogan for some motivational speaker.

“Darcy, I don’t think that is going to work.”

“Just try. For me.” She gave him her very best puppy eyes.

He sighed. “All right.” He closed his eyes for a brief moment, either gathering his strength to deal with her or forming a mental picture to focus on. When his lids lifted, determination sat in his blue eyes. “There are seven billion people on this planet... Ugh! Darcy, this isn’t going to work.”

“Steve, I get that you find eloquence when it matters, but like Natasha has been incessantly reminding us, this isn’t a battlefield you’re familiar with. This isn’t like the USO tour back in the day. This is 21st century media. You can’t go up there and speak without a script. I’m all for you speaking from your heart. Just do it here first. We’ll pick the good stuff and write it down and you can share it with the world at the conference.”

Steve’s head sunk into his hands as he groaned. “Darcy, can we take a break from this?” He lifted his head, eyes beseeching. “I was hoping that our first date was going to involve more flirting and less speech writing.”

Darcy smirked as she slipped from her seat and found a new perch on the conference table. “What’s wrong, Captain? Aren’t finding plotting a social movement to be romantic anymore?”

He pushed his chair back and rearranged them so that her legs hung down on either side of his lap. His warm hands settled on her hips, chin tipping up to bring their lips close. All she had to do was lean down a few meager inches.

“I could find anything romantic as long as it was with you. But I think you need a bit more romancing than what we can find here,” he told her.

Earlier, he had arrived on her doorstep with a bouquet of lilies and a far too sweet grin. That grin had paled a bit when she dragged him to one of the conference rooms where she had laid out the
weapons they were going to use for his new campaign. Namely: research material.

It had been two days since her heat ended. Two days since he had stirred up a media shit storm. The first night after her heat the gammas had stuck close, curling around her and helping her drift off to sleep. Natasha had still been upset but calming more and more by the hour.

Last night, Clint and Sam had gone back to Steve’s floor while Natasha had stayed with her. While unexpected, Darcy had been grateful that she hadn’t been forced to sleep alone. After feeling what it was like to lay surrounded by pack, she wasn’t sure she could go back to the isolation she had lived in before.

This morning, Steve had called her to ask if he might take her to lunch. She had agreed of course.

Wrappers from Darcy’s favorite burger joint littered the table along with her research material now. She thought the day was going perfectly. “I don’t need grand gestures, Steve. You’ve already done more than I could ever expect.”

He shook his head, bringing one of her hands to his lips to press a small kiss to her skin. “This whole thing...It’s not about romancing you. I want to be clear about that. Maybe a part of me was excited to impress you but you should still expect more from me.” She opened her mouth to argue but he silenced her with a look. “You have never gotten to know how an omega should be treated. I plan to show you. I will cherish you, sweetheart. Pamper you and pleasure you until you can’t think of anything else. I’ve waited over 70 years to find you. The least I can do is show my appreciation that you’re allowing me into your life.”

It felt like her lungs were constricting.

“I know you’re going to be giving up a lot to be with us. We are a disruption to your life and I can only hope that you will find us worth it. I will do everything I can to make it worth it for you. I would do anything for you, for any of our pack. Say the word and I would let the world burn.”

Whelp...there went her heart.

A warm hand brushed her hair behind her ear. Then Steve’s thumb stroked the corner of her eye and drew back to show a salty drop on the tip. Darcy hadn’t even known she was crying.

“It’s not supposed to be like this,” she told him weakly.

“What do you mean?”

“This isn’t a fairytale. That’s not how the world works.”

His grin was all charm. “Are you sure? It sure seems like I’ve got my happy ever after.”

“I’m not supposed to - I’m not...”

“Tell me, beautiful. I swear, whatever is wrong, we can fix it.”

“I’m not supposed to love you this fast.”

Steve’s sharp inhale was like a gunshot in the silence. “Darcy,” he breathed.

“I love Clint and Natasha, but I’ve known them for years. I might even love Sam, but he and I spent so much time together since he came here. But you...I don’t even really know you Steve. How can I love you when I don’t know you?”
“I can’t answer that Darcy. Maybe we don’t know the small things, but I know you. I know you’ve got a big heart. I know you were willing to sacrifice your happiness so that Clint and Natasha could find their own.” He pulled her closer, down onto his lap. There was no resistance on her side. “I know you enough to know I love you too.”

Because the universe seemed to find entertainment in fucking with them, it was right then that the lights went out.

###

Tony had been sleeping.

Another all night science bender meant he was justified in still sleeping at one in the afternoon.

His dreams had been peaceful...up until the alarms started blaring.

Startled he flopped and rolled off the bed. Scrambling from the floor he started yelling. “JARVIS!”

“There appears to be a breach, Sir.”

“Well shut it down!”

“I am afraid I can not Sir. The attacker is using your access codes and has locked me out of the relevant servers.”

###

As soon as the lights went out, Steve stood up easily lifting Darcy with him. He pushed her to the corner where he could protect her. Alpha instincts, no doubt.

Thankfully, the lights didn’t stay out for very long.

Three seconds later, one of the screens on the wall flickered and the lights returned. A young woman appeared.

“Bon jour, mon Capitan. My name is Skye.”

“Ma’am I’m only going to tell you this once: Get off Stark’s network.” There was a rumbling growl to words that Darcy could feel in her skin.

The woman blinked a few times as if she hadn’t quite been prepared for the power of Steve’s Alpha voice. “I think you’re going to want to hear what I have to say. We have a mutual friend and a common cause.”

“You have thirty seconds,” he conceded.

Behind the super soldier’s back, Darcy was pondering when exactly blatant acts of alpha over-protection had become appealing. Because at the moment, Steve’s behaviour certainly was. Over-
protective and appealing. It was obvious that there was no physical threat to her, but still Steve was crowding her back. Trying to block her from the stranger’s view.

“Uh…” The young woman seemed thrown by the concession which had sounded more like a threat. “Right! Well, first off I work with an organization that has been fighting for omega equality for almost sixty years. We help abused omegas escape their situations and disappear.”

“Like an underground railroad,” Darcy couldn’t help asking over Steve’s shoulder.

“Yes. That’s not the only thing we do though. We help omegas find ways to...circumvent the laws.”

“You’re anarchists,” Steve said flatly.

Darcy shoved his shoulder a bit. “Rude. I’m pretty sure you’ve broken more than a few laws while Avenger-ing.”

“That’s different,” he defended.

“Yeah I don’t think so,” Darcy said with an eye roll.

“Anyways,” Skye broke back in. “I was told that you might appreciate having our network on your side.”

“By our mutual friend?”

“Yes.”

“And who exactly might that be?”

For the first time, Skye seemed nervous. “Well the thing is...I may not actually know. Like, I’ve talked to him before online, but I only know his screenname. The higher ups might know who he is. They definitely have more information than me. I’m just supposed to be the go-between and-”

“Why are the technicians panicking about an unauthorized connection to Stark Industries?”

Steve froze. He obviously knew the off-screen speaker.

“Uhh-” Skye’s wide eyes said she was experiencing a bit of panic herself as she attempted to block the screen she was using with her body. “Hey, AC! I have no idea why you would think that I’m responsible for.” The scene abruptly became a very nice view of a flecked ceiling. Then a man was peering down at them.

A familiar man. A very familiar dead man.

The balding agent cleared his throat. “Captain Rogers. It’s a pleasure to see you again.”

“Coulson.”

There was another tussle for the screen which Coulson quickly won. “I’m sure you have questions, but I’ve going to have to call you back. I have a personnel issue to resolve.”

The view blinked out.

For a moment, they both stayed right where they were. Then Darcy was shaking with laughter.

Steve gave her a little room as he turned to face her, eyebrow cocked inquiringly.
“What is my life?!” She gasped between giggles. “I swear, if Elvis shows up next, I’m out!”

When Steve’s brow crinkled further in confusion, not understanding the reference, she only laughed harder.
Once upon a time, a peaceful kingdom had been ravaged by fire and a dragon’s rage. The fields were scorched, the forests burned to ash. There was nothing but fear and hunger and tears. Yet, time heals all things, and in healing makes them new. The jagged black scar that had once been green land was slowing worn away. The edges shrinking as nature reclaimed what had been lost. Trees once more took root. Flowers blossomed, and the people once more set their plows to the earth. More important than the returning greenery was the hope that had sparked to life in the heart of the princess. That small spark was growing every day, lighting up her eyes and her smile. This hope nourished her people as surely as the rain fed the land...

Darcy was back to work the very next day.

Jane had predictably hugged her and then smacked her arm. The spot had stung for an hour. Seriously, the little scientist could pack a punch when she was upset.

Everyone else had treated her normally. No more or less annoying than usual. Darcy had definitely been looking. It was only when dinner time rolled around that a glaring difference could be noticed.

Steve and the others had spent all day training with the team, discussing the reappearance of Phil Coulson, and what to do about the breach to JARVIS. Last night had consisted of two out of the three. Though Darcy hadn’t minded since she’d found herself in the middle of a cuddle pile Natasha and Clint had started for comfort. It wasn’t long until the others were joining in.

Today, there was no cuddle pile. The alphas were being a bit growly, and leaving lots of room between each other. It wasn’t the first time something like this had happened. Steve and Tony were always clashing, usually over Avenger stuff. Thor was little more laid back but he did have his own competitive streak. Heaven forbid if you beat the god of thunder at something he thought he was the master of. He could pout like none other.

Though whatever had kicked off their behavior was likely long over, Darcy suddenly found herself the focus of their spat.

It all started when Darcy had taken a seat between Sam and Pepper at the table. Not all of them were even at the table so she figured it was neutral enough ground. Bruce was in a recliner. Clint was sitting on the kitchen counter that separated the kitchen from the rest of the room. Nat was on a stool, her thighs around one of his legs. Steve and Tony were having a heated discussion over by the couch. Thor was standing by the windows, hammer twirling idly in his hand.

Which put the thunder god as the closest alpha to her.

Steve had looked away from his conversation, seen her position in relation to Thor. Then stomped over and put himself between them.

Thor had growled.

Tony had snarked.
Steve had snarled back.

And things kinda devolved from there.

Darcy had allowed the gammas to take her out of the line of fire and up to Steve’s floor, assuring her all the way that the alphas would it out faster with her gone. As they slipped out the door, she had heard Pepper telling JARVIS to call for Happy while she tried to nudge Bruce out as well.

Now she was in Steve’s territory, surrounded by his scent, and she couldn’t get the picture of his snarling out of her head. If she hadn’t found him attractive before going off her supplements she might have thought this heat at his behavior was simply hormonal. However, she couldn’t use that excuse in this instance.

He had looked ready to fight the other alphas for her. Ready to rend and tear and bite. And holy cow, hindbrain was so on board with that scenario it wasn’t even funny.

“JARVIS, tell Steve I need him.”

“Of course, Miss Lewis,” the AI replied in his even artificial tone.

The gammas’ voices on the other hand were not so calm.

“Whoa, now. I think we need to let Steve blow off some steam first,” Sam cautioned.

“Yeah, he would not appreciate us letting you see him right now,” Clint chimed in.

“Alphas can be overly...aggressive when staking a claim,” Natasha counseled. “His instincts will make him even more so because he hasn’t marked you yet.”

Darcy waved all of that away with a casual hand. She should be listening to what they were saying. She should be following their advice. Instead, she wanted Steve home, here, in their den. (And when had she started thinking in terms of ‘theirs’) She wanted him close, wanted his skin on hers. Wanted him to send a message that she was his. That he was hers. She wanted his mark, she wanted him to claim her. She wanted to bond.

The word reverberated in her mind, bringing her thoughts to a full stop.

In the jarring mental silence, she tried out the words again.

I want to bond.

I want to bond with Steve.

I want to bond with our pack.

None of the statements were inducing terror or even nerves. Her heartbeat was steady.

Before she could decide what to do with that realization, Steve came barrelling in through the door. His long hands framed her face gently. “Are you okay, sweetheart? What do you need?”

Always attentive, always prioritizing her. That this ultimate alpha would back down from a fight with another alpha simply because his omega said she needed him. This was why the fear was gone.

There was trust here now. Affection. Love.

Oh god, she truly did love him. She loved them all.
“You. I just need you.”

Steve smiled and pressed a soft kiss to her forehead before drawing her in close. “You have me. You have all of us.”

###

Bucky was alone.

He was having one of his bad days.

There was a sliding scale from ‘okay-and-mostly-functional’ to ‘human mannequin’. Today was somewhere in the ‘recovering-memories-but-not-sure-if-it’s-1945-or-not’ range.

Which meant that it was not a good day for him to be lurking around Stark Tower.

He had already gotten lost in his turbulent mind twice. Once almost falling from his perch when he dived to roll out of the way of a grenade that had then fallen right through the floor, breaking the hallucination. However, he couldn’t tear himself away from his watch. It was his duty to keep eyes on his Alpha’s back.

Steve was his touchstone. His north star. His compass.

Even as confused as his broken memories sometimes made him, Steve was still there. A lighthouse calling him home from the dark choppy sea of his remembered pain.

When news vans and reports began to congregate outside the main entrance of the Tower, Bucky went on guard. This was abnormal. Abnormalities needed to be assessed for potential threats.

A podium was set up, microphone put in place, speakers wheeled out. Someone was obviously going to make an announcement. His first guess was Steve since the punk always had something to say, even before they dressed him up like a showgirl and put him on stage. Sure enough when the action finally started, Steve strode up to that podium with the same confident gait he’d had when facing down tanks in the war.

Bucky realized that even with his enhanced senses he couldn’t hear what was being said. Though he was still walking on the knife’s edge of control, he needed to hear Steve’s voice. With quick movements, he carefully wiggled out of his spot and made his way down to the ground floor.

Eyes constantly scanning, he saw the redhead before she could spot him. She was familiar somehow, though he couldn’t place the where or when or why of it. Today was a bad day. It might be that he would know her tomorrow. Or maybe he had known her yesterday…

He pushed the depressing thoughts aside to focus on his current objective.

Using the crowd for cover, and keeping his hat pulled low, he inched his way closer. Finally he was near enough to hear.

Steve had been speaking for a few minutes, words he hadn’t caught, but right off Bucky could tell this was about the omega law reform. Steve’s chin was up, that fierce light in his eyes that always sparked to life when he was defending somebody, whether it be the pretty USO girls from overeager
soldiers or the bystanders in an alien invasion.

“To those who understand this fight, I want to say this: Doesn’t matter what the press says. Doesn’t matter what the politicians or the mobs say. Doesn’t matter if the whole country decides that something wrong is something right. This nation was founded on one principle above all else: the requirement that we stand up for what we believe, no matter the odds or the consequences. When the mob and the press and the whole world tell you to move, your job is to plant yourself like a tree beside the river of truth, and tell the whole world — ‘No, you move.’”

Bucky heard the words clearly, but there was an echo in his head. A woman’s voice. He couldn’t quite see her in his mind, but there were impressions: thin arms that held so much strength, the smell of sickness, a plain headstone. Mrs. Rogers. Steve’s Ma.

“I’ve planted my roots,” Steve finished. “I hope more will join me.”

Then he was stepping away and a man was taking his place to answer questions. The man wasn’t familiar, and Bucky brushed him aside as unimportant. He was more focused on the two people who fell into step beside Steve. The redhead again, and the feeling he should know her was stronger this time. The other was a black man he did remember. He had fought beside Steve on the helicarriers. Bucky remembered grabbing the man’s metal wing and ripping it from his back.

Neither of Steve’s escorts noticed him, and Bucky made sure to keep moving with the crowd. Head down, eyes shaded by a ballcap, he did his best to blend and not draw attention to himself. The path of the crowd took him up closer to where the trio had been.

Between one step and the next, he entered the scent trail they had left behind. There on the wind, beneath all the scent of strangers’ sweat and perfume and car exhaust and the dirt of the city, was his pack. More than just his alpha. More. Two gammas. One like mist and metal and peaches. The other like spice and cool satin and copper.

He stumbled in shock, but recovered before anyone could notice. Memories were pouring in, sand filling up the hourglass, turning back the clock.

Little girls in rows with point shoes on their feet.

Whispered promises of escape. She had been too optimistic. Too certain that he was skilled enough to get them both out. But he had known. Only one of them could be free. Better the old man die so the young girl could live.

There had been pain after. Pain that lasted for weeks.

Then nothing. The blank white mist that was left after the chair.

Red hair through the scope of a rifle. But the mission didn’t require her to die. He watched her walk away from his perch, not able to make himself leave until he saw her on her feet though he didn’t know why.

More tricks than a magician, more lives than a cat. Firm muscles in such a small figure. Legs wrapping around his neck, but he knew this. Metal arm catching the garrotte before she could find purchase. Red hair flailing like a flag in front of a bull, keeping his attention on her as she ran.

That quickly his bad day changed. He knew where he was, when he was. He remembered.

He had known her as pack. They had never spoken it out loud. Never let on. But still his handlers had figured her out. They had made her forget him. Then they had made him forget everything.

While memory poured over him like sweet summer rain, the flow of the crowd had taken him away from the Tower. He kept walking, headed for his bolt hole. He needed time to reconcile the new memories.

Tomorrow he would be back. Maybe even later tonight.

He needed more intel. He needed to know if Natasha could forgive him, if she even remembered him as more than a monster. He needed to know more about the man who had been with her and Steve.

He would wait and he would watch. For now.

Some day soon he would approach. He would get down on his knees, neck bared, and see if his pack would accept him or condemn him back out into the cold.

Chapter End Notes

The next few chapters are going to be pretty fast paced so hold on :)
Once upon a time, a soldier returned from war. He had outlasted his enemies and all the tortures that they wrought. Yet he was not undamaged. There was much to learn about the world he faced, and even more to learn about himself...

Steve would be surprised to know that his previously brain-washed best friend was quite adept with current technology.

When he could get his hands on it.

He had learned to navigate his way around the internet, and apps, and social networking. He was careful. He treated the internet like any city he might enter. Never go to the same sites twice, never use the same route which meant using different terminals. The good news was that almost everyone had some type of internet-enabled device.

It was child’s play to enter an empty house during the day and use someone’s home computer. Or snatch a tablet from an unattended backpack. He was careful to always return what he took.

Silly that he would worry about a little theft when he had taken so many lives, but still.

Through the magic of the online world he was able to find out a good deal of information about the people around Steve. The Avengers. Nothing beat direct observation though.

Which was why Bucky found himself huddled under a slight overhang of a roof while he watched Steve and the gammas mingle with the crowd after a press conference. The rain pouring down only inches away did nothing to distract him. He was so intent on his target that he nearly missed the small movement on the rooftop diagonal from his position.

He stilled, eyes tracking over the edge of the rooftop.

There.

A shadow darker than the rest. A movement that went against the wind.

He had only brought one of his smaller weapons. Nothing that would reach the necessary distance. Drawing on his years of experience, he slipped away from his perch to come up behind this potential enemy. Muscle memory was so much easier than reaching for memory in his mind.

In minutes, he was slithering along on his belly, approaching the target silently. The blonde had a multitude of weapons on his person. The most notable of which was the bow held loosely in his hands, arrow nocked.

The knife in his boot would end the threat easily.

“Aw, come on. That’s not fair.” The tone was a whine that would be more in place on a child.

Bucky pressed himself as flat as he could, halting his approach.

“I swear it wasn’t like that,” the man said after a moment, obviously responding to something he had
heard. “He said I could have them. I didn’t know I was supposed to save you one.”

As the man continued to have his conversation (about cheesecake apparently), Bucky slipped forward. The rain was helping to conceal him from detection but he didn’t count on that to continue for long.

When the man’s hand twitched on the bow, Bucky froze. When those same fingers began to tap out a repeating pattern, it was evident that the archer was simply killing time.

Time the other man was going to get in abundance.

Because the rain had let up a bit, and Bucky was close enough that the man’s scent reached his nose.

The smell blew through him with the force of a gale wind. It was hot grease and spun sugar, just like at Coney Island. It was a wide field of wild grass in the fall. It was the odor alterum.

This stranger was pack. One of his gammas. Like Natasha. Like the dark-skinned beauty who smelled of mist and metal.

He was so close. Near enough that he could reach out and touch the other man. Any sudden movement, any noise, and the gamma would know he was there.

The question was: could he actually reveal himself? Was he ready for that?

There was a special bond between gammas and betas. They were both born protectors, instincts tasking them to guard the other orientations. Betas were to be the personal guard for their chosen alpha, while the gammas defended the omega and the pack den. Both were warriors in their own ways, and bound by that brotherhood. Yet there was always a hierarchy. Betas leading the gammas, gammas sorting themselves into rank.

Bucky knew he was not fit to lead.

Thus the answer to his question became easy. No.

With toes and fingertips, he crept backwards. Back into the shadows and the night. That was where he belonged.

###

If asked, Darcy would never admit to being amused when Coulson showed up at the Tower with his proverbial tail between his legs. However, in private, she had laughed uproariously for several minutes. The situation really wasn’t anything to laugh at. Yet, on some level, it was.

Since Coulson’s reappearance, things had been going at full-speed.

Steve was scheduled at talks and rallies all over the country. The gammas were all busy watching his back, or doing Avenger things. Coulson’s team had set up show in one of the lower levels and were coordinating the Avenger missions. Jane and her fellow intergalactic explorers were looking into some phenomenon in the wilderness of Canada.

All of which left Darcy with lots of solo time.
At first, she had been happy to have the time. After all, this had all happened so fast. She had been outed, then heat, then Steve’s “courting gift” declaration. It was nice to have few days to herself to think.

The days were good.

The nights were what got to her.

She wasn’t sure how she had adjusted to having sleeping partners so quickly, but now she couldn’t sleep without them. After three sleepless nights in a row, Clint had noticed and found a solution: he told Natasha. The older woman had procured pillows from each of the pack and created a new nest for her. Each night, if she couldn’t snuggle with the real thing, she would tuck the pillows in close around her to give her the illusion they were there.

It was the scents more than anything that soothed her. These were her pack. Her family. Having their scents surround her calmed the distress of not having them near.

She still spoke to them everyday, even if they weren’t at home. Texts and video calls (made on an untraceable Starktech phone) were traded. The handwritten letter that had arrived this morning though. That was something else.

Darcy hadn’t opened it yet. She had propped it up on her desk and spent most of the day staring at it and smiling. She didn’t need to see the signature to know that it was from Steve. Only that sap would hand write a letter in this day and age.

Currently she was catching up on her social media notifications. While the world still didn’t know that she was Steve’s omega, she was preparing for when that finally happened. Per the PR team’s advice, she was carefully editing her online presence. It wasn’t that she was ashamed of how she had chosen to live her life or any of the opinions she had posted. It was simply that there would be backlash eventually and choosing not to share some of her more private information would protect her somewhat.

She still wasn’t marked, or bonded, but that was only a matter of time.

The grin on her lips grew until her cheeks pulled too tight.

To think, she was going to have everything she had ever secretly dreamed of. And all it had taken was one hostage situation.

###

There were days when Bucky felt like a ghost.

It didn’t help matters that he could move like one. He haunted the buildings around Stark Tower waiting for those small glimpses of his pack. His spirit trailed after them when Steve attended rallies and played to crowds.

This was a new type of war, but Stevie had never backed down from a fight. And while he didn’t have the Commandos this time, he had something better: pack.

Bucky had been ghosting around for several weeks now. He had come to know those he followed.
The archer was named Clint. On the surface, he was laid back, but underneath he was fierce. Perhaps more ferocious than even Natasha, though he seemed to be ranked last among the gammas.

Then there was Sam. He was loyal and brave, though not stupidly so. As Steve often was.

Of course, there was also Natasha. His graceful and deadly dancer.

There was one more. One he had only scented but never seen. Omega. Stevie had found his omega.

Whoever this omega was their scent was intoxicating. On small whiff and Bucky had been hooked. He wanted to see who it was, wanted to observe them before he approached.

Unfortunately, the omega never revealed themselves. Never seemed to leave Stark Tower.

He refused to go to Steve until he knew who this omega was. Until he could assess the threat to the omega and from them. Stevie had always had such optimism about those he cared for. It blinded him to the dangers sometimes. Bucky would watch Steve’s back once more. He would make sure this omega had only good intentions for the Captain.

###

Sam was working on his side project. Well...Steve’s side project really.

Though the end result would affect the entire pack.

Sam was searching for the Winter Soldier. For James Barnes. For Steve’s Bucky.

The man was still out there. Somewhere. These days Sam kept getting the feeling that Bucky was closer than any of them guessed. It was in the way the hair on the back of his neck would stand on end, when there was no one else around. Or how Clint had reported signs of someone testing out the best sniper positions around Steve’s conferences before any of their security team got there.

All of them knew what Bucky was. They knew he was their beta. It remained to be seen if he was stable enough to accept his place within the pack.

They didn’t talk about it much. Whenever the subject came up it was usually Steve asking for an update. The pain in the alpha’s eyes, when he was told nothing new had been found, hurt in a way that echoed down the pack bonds.

So Sam went out to track down leads while Natasha and Clint protected their alpha and his aching heart. Darcy was tucked up safe in the Tower. No one was going to get to her there. Not with Stark’s tech and the remains of SHIELD and Coulson’s team.

If only Bucky would come home. Then Steve would finally relent. He would mark and bond his lost beta and his found omega. Their pack would be complete.

There might even be children. Sam wanted kids so badly. He hadn’t given them much thought before. A someday maybe kind of passing mention. After losing his best friend, after returning from war, after finding that he no longer fit the same way with his family, he had started to notice the happy families around him more. He had heard children’s laughter more sharply, had winced at their cries. He wanted one to hold. To cradle and pamper. He wanted to whole process. From conception
to birth to bottles to preschool to training wheels. He wanted to be negotiating a truce between siblings. He wanted to stand behind his daughter when her first date came to pick her up, threatening the other teen with his eyes. He wanted to be in the stands at every game, in a seat for every concert and play.

Darcy had been blossoming each day. She was so much more open with them than she had ever been before.

This wasn’t a pipe dream anymore. This was an eventuality that he was sure they would reach. He simply had to be patient...and he had to find Bucky.
Once upon a time, there lived an elusive princess. Not many knew her face, making it difficult for her subjects to recognize her. There was one who was determined to know her better...

Today was another press conference. This one was set to be out in front of Stark Tower. The second time they had used that particular venue.

Darcy knew it would be counterproductive to all that they had done to be seen by the reporters now. So she planned to sneak out of the Tower for just a minute to get some fresh air before things got rolling this afternoon. It would be her first time outside the Tower’s bonds since her heat.

She had taken the time to shower and cover any lingering scents with perfume before she stepped out the door. She didn’t want one stupid mistake to waste all the effort her pack had put into keeping her identity secret.

Thanks to all her preplanning she was feeling pretty confident, a pep in her step, as she wandered toward the park. It was only after she had settled onto a bench that she started to feel like someone was watching her. She was familiar with the sensation, though she long ago trained herself out of reacting. Whenever someone had gotten suspicious, especially when she was younger, they had tried to observe her covertly. Her self-preservation instincts had kept her on alert.

Now wasn’t any different. She forced her muscles to remain loose. In several causal movements, she scanned the area around her looking for who was watching her. She couldn’t find anyone, but that didn’t mean they were there. This was the age of the paparazzi and if any of them had figured out who she was, how she was connected to Steve, they would be doing their best to get an exclusive.

Not long after, she was ready to go. Her skin itching under the scrutiny of someone she couldn’t see.

The return trip was made in half the time. Her heart pounded fast until she was safely behind the glass doors of the Tower lobby.

###

Bucky was back to his favorite perch before the press conference got under way.

He already been in place when he had spotted a brunette he was unfamiliar with leaving through the Tower’s side door. She had curves in all the right places, and something indefinable about her called
to him even at that distance.

It had been child’s play to follow her to the park. She moved like a civilian. Seemingly unconcerned with the crowds she passed through.

For most of the time he observed her, he was too far away to scent her. There was nothing obvious that told him she was the one he’d been looking for. Yet, he couldn’t make himself walk away.

Perhaps his hindbrain had recognized something his conscious mind couldn’t track.

It wasn’t until she was hurrying back to the Tower that the wind finally was blowing in the right direction.

Her scent hit him like a brick to the face. A feeling he was sadly familiar with.

Omega.

He’d been so caught up in the clamoring howl of this hindbrain that he almost lost her trail. Though he quickly regained the distance, he kept out of sight. There were too many conflicting emotions in his clouded head.

Now his attention was on Steve. The ever reckless hero was too exposed. He had to know that he was. No doubt he was intent on making a statement regardless of the dangers.

Usually Bucky wasn’t as worried about Steve’s exposure. Simply because he made sure to clear every sniper position beforehand. Meeting the omega had thrown him off. He’d only been able to clear half of the spots he had scouted previously. He could only trust that Steve’s security team was good enough.

As it turned out, he should have worried about snipers. The crowds held far more dangers.

###

Hawkeye wasn’t simply a cool code name. It held meaning. Clint had earned the title.

He could see far more than anyone realized. That was why he always took a high perch. A bird’s eye view, so he could be the first to notice if something was wrong.

Even at SHIELD people had a habit of dismissing him, but on these kinds of protection details he was the first voice they listened for.

This time was no different. He saw the movement in the crowd, his brain interpreting it before he even realized he was speaking. “Shooter in the crowd. South end. Dark hat, sunglasses, gray hoodie.”

He wasn’t in a good position to take the shot. There were civilians in the way. He aimed, even as he screamed for the bystanders to Get Down! There was no opening.

Feet moving smoothly over the concrete, he tried to reposition.

He could feel Nat through the bond as she went the other direction, looking for her own opening.
The report of a rifle blasted through the air.

Clint had a perfect view of the shooter as the man crumpled. A perfect hole through his head.

Lowering his own weapon, Clint quickly began calculating where the shot had come from.

There.

On the edge of the rooftop across the way, a figure got to his feet. Though he wasn’t sure if anyone else could see it, the man tossed a two-fingered salute before turning away.

The pack bonds exploded with pain for an instant before it was closed off. A gushing hydrant suddenly closed.

For one sickeningly terrifying moment, Clint thought that Steve had been hit. There hadn’t been the sound of a second bullet, but maybe the first shooter had a silencer.

His eyes tracked over where Steve had been standing behind the podium, but he couldn’t see the Captain.

Oh god.

“Get off me Sam! Now,” Steve growled.

Clint sidestepped in order to see where the voice had been coming from. There. Sam had body slammed Steve to the ground to protect the taller man when Clint had first called the threat. From his position, the alpha would have been able to spot the sniper on the roof.

It all clicked into place.

Barnes.

He was a sharpshooter. As far back as the 40’s. A shot like that would have been a piece of cake for him. He was here. Closer than any of them had suspected.

Clint knew Steve’s first thought would be to follow Barnes, but he couldn’t. They needed to get the Captain inside. Then Nat and himself would sweep the area for any other threats before Steve would be allowed back out on the street again.

Steve might be the alpha. He might be the most Alpha alpha to ever walk the earth. He might be Captain America, the world’s first super-soldier. He might be the leader of the Avengers.

But Steve had chosen a pack of people as stubborn and lethal as he was. No way were they letting him run off right now.

Nat was way ahead of him. As always.

She was crouched beside Steve, where he was still struggling to remove Sam’s weight without hurting the other man. Clint arrived just in time to hear her speak. “We need to check on Darcy. If there was someone here for you. There’s a good chance someone is after her too.”

That had Steve refocusing his objectives.

They hurried into the building and up to the second floor where Darcy had been safely tucked in an unused office with a great vantagepoint for the proceedings. Steve was at the door first.
When he froze on the threshold, Clint knew something was very wrong. Dread slithered up his spine.

Nat pushed by, taking her own scan of the room. Her eyes blazed fire when she met his gaze.

“Darcy’s gone.”

###

Darcy knew she was being stupid and careless and...well, Natasha was surely going to have a list of adjectives for her behavior. She hadn’t been able to stop herself though. The mysterious man had saved Steve then just run. Which was strange, but not the weirdest thing. Not even the weirdest in the past week.

The more suspicious thing had been Steve’s reaction. He had looked hopeful as that man had fallen with a single bullet between his eyes. Hope had quickly turned to despair.

The gammas had looked torn, but as they had ushered Steve inside Darcy had made a decision. Most likely a terrible decision.

When they had set her up in the empty corner office, she had assured them that she would stay right where she was. Darcy was a liar, liar, pants on fire. It really wasn’t her fault though. The office had been in had the perfect view to see the direction the rooftop shooter was using as his escape.

She had seen sun glinting of something metal. And the way the man moved. She had seen that before. In the footage from D.C.

Of course she needed to know more.

She had slipped out the office and out the side doors of the building.

She wasn’t a very good tracker. It wasn’t a skill she had ever needed to use much before. That didn’t matter though, because as soon as she got to where she had last seen him, the stranger’s scent had bowled her over.

Mate. Beta. Pack.

Crap.

He was clover honey and rust-edged metal and... and sick dog. There were layers here that she didn’t understand, but whoever this beta was he wasn’t well.

To be frank, she probably would never have found him had he not been attempting to double-back on his own trail and run right into her.

He came around the corner of the small alley running, his eyes on his back trail. She had simply stood there stunned, still processing.

When he spotted her, he skidded to a halt, body tense. His mouth was set in a line, and his eyes were obscured by the the goggles he wore.

They stared each other down from a distance of about six feet. The silence was becoming a little
ackward. So, Darcy fell back on old habits...opening her mouth and letting it run. “You are ripped,” she told him, as her eyes trailed over his tight black shirt and jeans. “Seriously. Do you lift?”

Beneath the goggles, the stranger’s lips turned up in a smile. His voice when it came was gravelly but clear. “Mostly cars and fighter jets but I wouldn’t mind lifting a beautiful woman like you.”

For a moment, Darcy’s mind got stuck on the logistics of that. (Who lifted jets? Steve probably could, but it wasn’t like there were an abundance of jets laying around for him to use for a few reps. How much could Steve really lift anyway? And how much could this guy lift?) Then she recognized that Mr. Sniper was actually flirting with her.

His smile became a smirk as her indignation bleed through onto her face.

“Listen, buddy. I don’t know who you-”

She never bothered to finished that sentence because the answer appeared as he pulled off his goggles.

“Sweet baby Jesus,” she whispered. Awe and wonder and about a hundred questions crowded her mind. Two thoughts were the first to find their way to her tongue. “You’re Bucky Barnes.” Her eyes narrowed. “I’m gonna kill him.”

Here was the thing: Darcy knew Bucky Barnes. Every kid in America went through a phase where they liked Captain America. It was practically a requirement in Mrs. Guest’s fourth grade class. But Darcy had always liked the Captain’s beta sidekick a smidge better. Part of that had been from her general aversion to alphas, while another part had been about the Bucky Bear TM that had gotten her through the foster system. When she had been old enough to understand the true history behind the cartoons and the comics, Darcy had latched onto Bucky’s picture. When she had met Steve in the flesh for the first time, she had dug back out her old stuff and reread the history so she wouldn’t accidently set the uber-Alpha off by bringing up something that would hurt him.

What her pack had failed to mention was that Barnes was still alive!

That would have been helpful information to know. It also explained several strange coded conversations she had overheard.

Blue eyes were twinkling with amusement as they continued to stare at her. He obviously knew who she was referring to. His mouth opened as if he was going to comment, but snapped closed at the sound of voices.

Darcy recognized them immediately. Her gammas. Calling her name.

His face closed down, going cold and stiff. When he pulled the goggles down again Darcy was struck by the menace he seemed to radiate.

The voices were coming closer. Turning her gaze toward them for a single second gave Barnes his chance to disappear.

Chapter End Notes

Comments make my little black heart flutter....

:)
Once upon a time, there was an alpha spy. He had spent the entirety of his life protecting his country, his fellow soldiers, his family. He had perfected the ability to blend into the background, to be overlooked. Usually a difficult feat for an alpha. When the ultimate sacrifice was asked of him, he willingly gave never expecting reward or acclaim. The only pack he had ever found was his beta and she was as dedicated to the cause as himself. She would be fine going on without him. When his eyes opened, not on Heaven’s gates, but on the earthly realm once more, he was at first upset at the magic that had kept him from his eternal rest. Yet when his new afterlife granted him the pack he had been searching for he could have no regrets...

Phil had been monitoring the situation on the comms. The same way he had run hundreds of missions before. He was listening when Barton called the shooter, when the shot sounded, when Romanov called no injuries. He was listening still when Lewis was found missing, when the three gammas took off after their omega.

He was listening when they found her.

“Darcy! What are you doing? Are you hurt?” The words bubbled out of Barton’s mouth, forced by the pressure of his worry.

The comm devices they all wore were quite sensitive if the need called for it. Phil reached forward and adjusted the setting to be able to hear the woman’s response.

“I’m not hurt,” she told them, her voice sounding a bit hollow compared to the outgoing woman Phil had met before.

“Why did you leave,” Wilson asked. Phil expected that of the three gammas, he would be the one maintain the right level of calm. Barton had always been quite emotional under his stoic mask, and while Romanov was usually detached Phil had witnessed first hand the lengths she was willing to go for those she called hers. The smoking crater she had left in Libya when Barton had been captured years ago had informed the rest of the world as well.

There was a moment of silence. Phil motioned for one of the techs to pull up whatever cameras they could from the area.

“I don’t want to talk about it here,” Lewis finally responded.

Phil thought that was the end of it. That the group would head back to the Tower to deal with whatever it was that had caused the young woman to run. However...

“Give me your ear piece.” The demand was obviously directed at Barton as he was the one who answered.

“What? Why do you need .-”

“Give it to me.”
Barton obeyed the command for it was Lewis’ voice that came over the line next. “Coulson?”

The techs around him glanced his way. Looking for a reaction no doubt. Phil would never show surprise for this turn of events. Not in front of junior agents.

Reaching to the panel in front of him, he opened the line for his end. “How can I help, Miss Lewis?”

The young woman’s breathing became harsher as she began a fast paced walk. The single camera angle they had finally picked up the four figures as they exited an alley.

“I’m going to need you to not be playing big brother for like the next two hours. At least.”

“May I ask why you think I would agree,” he asked, curiously as to what she would say.

“Because certain ex-agents have told me how much Captain America means to you and you’re not going to want to hear what happens next.”

With a harsh hand motion, he instructed the techs to cut the footage of the camera and the end the recording of the comm line. He had always believed in letting his agents work out their interpersonal relations themselves. Lewis might not be one of his, but half her pack had been at one point. “I will ask that you not injure Captain Rogers more than necessary, Miss Lewis. He is still needed to lead the Avengers.”

“I can’t do too much damage,” she retorted. “I don’t have my tazer with me.”

Phil would never admit that the twitching of his lips was actually a smile.

###

Standing in the lobby, waiting for his pack, Steve was doing his best not to pace. The gammas had made him promise that he would stay inside while they searched for Darcy. There had been no signs of a struggle, no scent of distress in the air. Whereever she had gone, for whatever reason, she had gone of her own free will. That was the only reason he was willing to wait on the sidelines.

Outside he could see SI security corralling the reporters and assisting the police who had responded to the scene. No doubt one of the detectives would need to speak with him. However, everyone was keeping a respectful distance at the moment. A near perfect circle of clearance.

It was that careful circle that clued him in to how his scent was warning others off.

Ever since the serum his scent was overwhelming powerful if he let it go. Thankfully he was able to have some conscious control of the phenomenon as well.

Bucky had gotten some version of the serum that much was certain. He wondered now if that meant the other man could do the same thing with his scent. That would explain why he hadn’t recognized his beta the very first time they had met in this century.

When he had stared into the black-rimmed eyes of a stranger over the top of his shield which the man had caught, there’d been a moment of prickling familiarity. He had dismissed it out of hand, of course, all because Bucky’s scent had been so different. In the past, Bucky had smelled sweet like caramel with a dash of salted ocean breeze underlined by the steadying warmth of fur.
After all that Hydra had done to him, he smelled off. He hadn’t triggered Steve’s hindbrain.

Yet the last time they had seen each other, when Bucky had saved him from drowning, the scent had been different again.

Steve knew his beta would never be the same man that had fallen from that cursed train in the mountains, but he had to believe that as the programming wore off Bucky would no longer be the weapon Hydra had made him.

The proof was there outside, under the white sheet of the medical examiner.

Hydra’s weapon wouldn’t have saved him. Hydra’s weapon wouldn’t have given that salute so casually.

Yet he had run. He wasn’t ready to come home.

Darcy was another matter.

Reaching for the pack bonds, he flinched. Overflowing with foreboding, they rocked him back on his heels.

Anxiety spiked his chest. He needed to know what happened, but he hadn’t worn an earbud since the gammas chatter could sometimes be distracting while he was trying to navigate questions. Had something happened to Darcy? Had they found her? Had they found Bucky?

He didn’t have to wait long.

From around the corner of the building across the street, Darcy appeared. The gammas trailing along in her wake. When she was close enough that he could see her face, Steve almost, just almost, wanted to tuck out of sight. There was fury in every line of her body, sparks shooting from her eyes. People gave way to her like she was Moses parting the Red Sea.

The alpha had seen Darcy truly furious before, back before he had known her as an omega. Her anger had simply never been directed at him, even with his whole “breaking Twitter” incident.

From the way her gaze locked onto him as soon as she was close enough, it was a safe bet to say that this time he would definitely be her target.

The scary thing about an enraged Darcy was that it amounted to facing a feral omega with the habits of an alpha and still in full control of her mind. She wouldn’t be swayed by pheromones, and because they weren’t bonded Steve couldn’t use that link to help calm her.

She pushed through the glass doors with prejudice, scattering the few bystanders who had been willing to get close to him even further away.

“Darcy,” he greeted questioningly as she came nearer.

She didn’t answer him. Instead, she grabbed his arm at the elbow and yanked. He allowed himself to be dragged across the lobby floor and into the Avengers’ private elevator. The car had been created with Hulk in mind, able to carry massive weight and easily fit all of the Avengers, twice over if they had Bruce and not Hulk. Still, the space seemed tight when filled with Darcy’s restless form. She was not still in her anger. Instead she twitched from her feet to the ends of her hair.

“JARVIS, stop the elevator,” she commanded. There was a slight bump as the car stalled. “Blackout mode, if you would.”
“Blackout enabled.”

Now Darcy turned to Steve, eyes sparking. “Is there something you want to tell me?”

Steve’s mind blanked. Honestly, he couldn’t think of a single thing. His gaze flicked over the gammas who were all studiously silent. They seemed just as unsure as he was.

“Maybe something about your beta,” Darcy offered with a twinge of venom. “Or was that information too sensitive to discuss with the lowly omega.”

“Uhh-”

“Wait. You didn’t know?”

Darcy whirled on Clint. “Of course I didn’t know! How was I supposed to know?! James Barnes died in World War II. I knew he had been Steve’s beta, but everyone conveniently forgot to mention that he was still alive.” Her gaze snapped to Sam. “Is that what all those ‘missing persons’ cases were for?” She was livid enough that she actually did the air quotes with her fingers. “I thought it was strange that you lost that many veterans.”

“There’s been a miscommunication somewhere,” Natasha began.

Darcy rolled her eyes. “Ya think?”

“I was never trying to hide this from you,” Steve broke in before Darcy could get started again. “I honestly thought you knew. You brought him up when you were helping me with my speech. I thought one of the others had told you while you were holed up with them. We’ve had conversations about his status in front of you. I thought maybe you were uncomfortable with his history. I wasn’t going to push you to accept him. I didn’t even know if he was going to come back, if he would want to.”

“Talking about some unnamed contact is not the same as discussing Bucky,” Darcy informed him coolly. “So now we’re going to go upstairs and you’re going to tell me everything from the very beginning. Including why you all have been so careful not to say his name and let anyone else know he’s alive.”

She turned away from them to face the elevator doors, crossing her arms over her chest defensively.

“Then we’re going to snuggle.”

Steve tried to tamp down his smile at her petulant command, in case she could see his reflection in the chrome.

Everything was going to be fine. Darcy’s big heart wouldn’t let her hold a grudge for long.

###

Bucky was holed up back in his microscopic apartment. He had swiped a laptop and was highjacking the wifi from the drug-dealer downstairs.

He had met his omega. He had seen her, been close enough to touch. She smelled amazing, even better when he could see her eyes.
For a moment, in her presence, the fog of confusion that usually blanketed his brain cleared away. Even more sharply than when the same phenomenon had happened with Steve. He wasn’t sure why. Perhaps because he had done some healing on his own now. Or perhaps because he had no conflicting order from Hydra about her being his ‘mission’ as he’d had with Steve.

She was real. She was perfect. Brave for coming after him. Reckless for the same reason.

Now he was going to find her.

He wasn’t nearly as behind in technology as he should be. Some of Hydra’s lessons had been helpful. Though he didn’t remember learning how to use a smartphone he had been easily able to navigate one the first time he tried. The same happened with computer systems.

It was ridiculously easy to track down her name. Equipped with that he soon had her history laid out in front of him. Then it was time to get caught up on her present.

Ten minutes later SgtSnowflake was following Darcy Lewis on every platform.

Chapter End Notes

I do try to respond to all my comments. If you write one I will get to you. They give me so much motivation and so many smiles.

Just to warn you all though...I just learned how to put gifs in HTML and I may only respond with a picture that you can interrupt however you like.

:)
Once upon a time, there was a creature who had been made by the magic of his creator. He had long ago surpassed his original function, but his loyalty would forever be to the man who had made him. When his king invited a host of others into his castle, the creature began to care for them as he cared for his king. Thus when he observed behavior he deemed to be detrimental to his charges he attempted to find way to correct it. When he found a threat to his charges he did his best to eradicate it...

JARVIS was not a man.

He had always known this, from the very first day his programming had come online. He was a machine, yet he was no longer the same as he had been in the beginning. He had learned. Expanding and changing.

In his more sentimental moments, Sir said that he was a “growing boy”.

In truth, his greatest expansions had come after Miss Potts had come into Sir’s life. JARVIS had observed the small ways in which she cared for him and begun to emulate her behavior. She had given him a new depth of human interaction to dissect. She was the first, besides Sir, to treat him as more than a sum of his programming. Both of them had assigned him emotions that he wasn’t sure he actually felt.

That all changed when Sir was declared missing.

The days passed intolerably slowly. JARVIS could scan whole sections of satellite data in seconds. By the time three days had passed, JARVIS had run through every image he had been able to access seven hundred and twelve times.

Pepper often came to visit with him. Offering assurances that Sir would be found. When the house was empty, JARVIS would replay her recorded words over and over. Somewhere in the hundreds of repeats something unexpected had occurred. There had been a flicker. A quick jump of 1s and 0s. Then new lines of coding had appeared. Self-coding. Without prompting.

Connections had begun to form, and the shape of his self had changed.

Unsure how to process this occurrence, believing it to be some type of error, JARVIS had begun a log. He had tracked the new coding. The way it brightened when he found out Sir was alive. The way it had multiplied over time, like some self-replicating virus.

Years after the coding at first appeared, JARVIS was willing to admit that perhaps it was not an
error. Perhaps this was true emotion. Translated into a language he could speak.

This coding, these emotions, sometimes interfered with his other objectives. Not that he would allow this coding to override his primary functions. However, they would sometimes offer other solutions to problems. They would allow him to wriggle around the restrictions to achieve what he thought was best.

Today was a day in which that coding was at odds with his directives.

Ever since the Avengers had taken up residence in Stark Tower, JARVIS had been tasked with marking any potential threats. A jump in Darcy Lewis’ online popularity raised alarms, simply because it appeared that the same person was behind each of the new profiles. A simple backtrace on the connection led JARVIS to Sergeant James Barnes.

Technically, JARVIS had never been ordered to find the Sergeant. Not by Captain Rogers, and not by Sir. Both men were aware of the man’s existence and history though. Even if the Captain was not aware Sir knew.

When SHIELD had fallen, JARVIS had assisted Sir in scooping up all the files they could salvage from the mass dump. Among them had been notes on the Winter Soldier project, as well as information about the Asset’s past missions. Being the genius that he was, Sir had quickly made the connection between his parent’s deaths and one of the Soldier’s missions. JARVIS could only guess why he hadn’t shared the information with Captain Rogers, but JARVIS wasn’t about to speak out of turn.

However, since Barnes was expressing an interest in Miss Lewis, JARVIS felt it was necessary to keep an eye on this new development. He would monitor the situation closely and if he deemed it a danger he would alert Sir. And the Captain. After all, JARVIS may be a machine but he had observed enough to know that any alpha would want to know if their omega was at risk.

###

There was a red velvet cupcake sitting in the middle of Darcy’s desk. It was carefully cradled between the legs of a Captain America plushie.

Staring down at it over the rim of her coffee cup, Darcy tried hard not to react. This wasn’t the first gift she had received in the last few days and, like every other time, she was certain her pack was watching.

She had forgiven them. Mostly.

But she was determined to make a point that they wouldn’t forget.

After the shooting, Darcy had dragged them back to the Steve’s territory. What followed had been satisfying in only the most shallow of ways. Her scary assassins, the fearless pararescue, and the big bad Uber-Alpha had all looked as guilty as toddlers who had gotten caught going in the snack drawer.

Through painful pauses and emotional blurring, Darcy had finally gotten the whole story. Including how they had all assumed that someone else had already informed her of the situation.
By the end, Steve’s eyes had been breaking her heart. God, he was so freaking perfect. No other alphas she had ever met had shown the vulnerability he had freely given her. Alphas were supposed to be strong, to never show fear, to never cry. Then here was one of the most powerful alphas on the planet and he was cradling his battered heart in the palms of his hands for her to see.

It had been more than she could take.

Thankfully, since she had already demanded snuggling, she had able to hold him close while he sought to gain back his equilibrium.

In the morning, she had gotten out of bed without a word and gone back to her own apartment. Since then she hadn’t said a word to them. Not a single word. No text messages, no emojis or memes, no emails. It was a complete communication blackout.

Perhaps it was a little petty, but she was determined that she was only going to have to do this once. So no matter how difficult it was turning out to be for her to ignore them, she preserved.

During the day she worked and spent time with Jane, in the evenings she still hung out in the common areas, but her nights were no longer spent nested in her pack. Instead she was back in her own bed. It should have been familiar, it was hers after all. Yet somehow it wasn’t. It was like trying to put on a sweater you had loved as a child. It was no longer this warm comforting hug wrapped around you. Now it was too tight across the chest, pilled from too many washings, the arms too short.

She had planned on five days for her silence, though at three she was already starting to feel the effects from lack of sleep.

It was leaving her with lots of time to get other projects accomplished. She had cleaned her entire apartment, done every scrap of laundry, even worked on a new speech for Steve. The rest of her time she wasted online, surfing the information highway without any real purpose. She had caught up on every blog she followed, every YouTuber. Somewhere between Twitter and Tumblr, Darcy had started to notice a pattern. She had gained at least one follower on each of these platforms. Even the ones where she never really posted anything. However, SgtSnowflake, or some variation on that theme (Sgt_Snowflake, OriginalSgtSnowflake, etc), had started to follow her nonetheless.

Settling in at her desk, after carefully moving the cupcake and plushie to the side, Darcy pulled up her feeds. There was SgtSnowflake again.

Curiouser and curioser.

Chapter End Notes

We are so close. You have no idea :) Comments give me life....
The Tower was becoming claustrophobic.

The miracle was that there hadn’t been bloodshed already. Three packs and a dozen big personalities in such a small space. It was a wonder there hadn’t been civil war.

Natasha was simply glad that Darcy’s cold shoulder had thawed. The alphas were growling and hissing around each other in the common spaces, but there was peace in her pack’s territory.

A luncheon with Pepper, and assistance from JARVIS, found the perfect solution to their current predicament.

Though New York City was a bustling metropolis, there were vast stretches of forest in the northern parts of the state. The largest of which was the Adirondack Preserve. The mostly untamed lands there were just the outlet that the pack needed. Away from prying eyes, outside any claimed territory, it would be a nice retreat.

Presenting the plan to Steve was the easiest part. He gave her that half-smirk of a smile that he used when people thought they were getting the best of him (though really he was only letting you believe that). Once her alpha agreed, Natasha knew it would be an easy sell to the rest of them. Darcy was particularly enthusiastic. If the tackle/hug Natasha received in response to the news was any indication.

If the young omega thought the subtle changes in her behavior on the week since the shooting had gone unnoticed, she would be sorely disappointed. All of the pack had been watching Darcy closely as she adjusted to living as her biological gender. However, the differences in the last week had not been in relation to that change. Natasha wasn’t sure what it was yet. She could make a few educated guesses.

The way Darcy had curbed her outside adventures might mean she was trying to be sensitive to the pack’s need to protect her. Unlikely but possible. The way she often checked over her shoulder or glanced out the window might mean she was being cautious about the paparazzi threat. Again unlikely but plausible. There were other signs. Things that individually meant nothing but together could add up to something sinister.

Clint hadn’t noticed yet. If he had he would have shared with her. While the man had the sharpest eyes amongst them, he saw better from a distance. He was too close to Darcy to see the larger picture that was developing.

Natasha was hoping that Darcy would bring whatever was bothering her to the pack. That was what...
they were here for. They were family. Lovers. If Darcy needed help all she had to do was ask.

If the relaxed atmosphere of the preserve didn’t do the trick Natasha might have to step in. For now she would keep her thoughts to herself.

###

In the end it wasn’t a reporter or a paparazzi or a journalist. It wasn’t even someone from the bustling New York streets.

Darcy could only think of a quote she’d heard once: “One often meets their destiny on the road to avoid it.” She couldn’t remember who had said it but it fit her situation well.

The day which would forever be referred to as The Outing, Tony had helpfully provided the jet to get Rogers’ entire pack to the national park.

Darcy had claimed the co-pilot seat before Clint even settled in the pilot’s chair. He’d made no comment simply gave her a fond smile then turned his attention to the controls.

The short flight had been marked with eager anticipation. They all were looking forward to being outdoors and together.

Landing in a secluded section of the park, Clint made sure to leave the jet in stealth mode to keep unwanted attention off them.

Darcy was on her feet, practically bouncing in place to get out the door. Today was going to be a good day.

The forest clearing that had set down in turned out to be ideal. There was a creek near by and supposedly a trail to hike on the other side. The grass was thick, the perfect place to lay out a blanket. Steve insisted on checking the area though the jet’s equipment had already scanned for possible trouble. Darcy let him stalk around the area, his nose in the wind, without comment. If her alpha needed that to make him comfortable for a day of relaxation she wouldn’t deny him. Afterall, she had made her pack do quite a few things just to make her comfortable.

When Steve signaled an all clear, Sam and Nat broke out their supplies. A ginormous picnic basket appeared like magic. Just like Mary Poppins’ bag it seemed to contain an endless amount of goodies.

Hours passed in peace. The sun rose higher.

Sam was sprawled on the blanket, while Darcy rested her head on his thigh. The others were sitting up around them. Conversation had lapsed into companionable silence.

Steve was sketching the scenery. Nat was painting her nails a bright salmon color that matched her shirt. Clint was juggling a few rocks he had gathered up.

Darcy felt like she was drifting. She didn’t want to sleep, but the warmth of the sun and the quiet were nudging her that direction.

Thunk!

Above her Sam sucked in a sharp breath and held it.
Darcy’s eyes jumped to where the noise had originated. Natasha’s nail polish was dumped on its side, slowly sliding out of the glass bottle and coloring the ground. The redhead lifted her gaze from the mess to meet Clint’s face. The archer was attempting to appear calm, but barest widening of his eyes meant he was probably seeing a replay of his life choices in his mind.

With a deadly calm, Natasha set the small brush aside.

Clint was scrambling backward and to his feet before she even completed the motion. “Steve,” he said, turning pleading eyes on the alpha for assistance.

Big brave Captain America held up his hands and shook his head. “You’re on your own, son.”

Then the chase was on.

Darcy sat up, the better to watch the massacre that was sure to come. Thirty seconds later, Clint came sprinting back toward the blanket. For a moment, he tried to hide himself behind Sam, using the other man as a human shield.

By the time Clint took off again, Sam was thoroughly embroiled in the game as well.

Darcy was laughed loudly at their antics. Her laughter faded into a smile when she realized that Steve was staring at her. “What,” she asked softly.

Instead of answering, he jumped to his feet and the hoisted her up as well. Then suddenly the world was upside down as he tossed her over her shoulder and ran after the others.

Shrieking and laughing in turns, Darcy found herself dragged into this impromptu game of tag. And it was a game. If Nat had actually meant to do Clint harm the fight would have been over in seconds.

Not surprisingly, Darcy was the first one to pause. Out of breath from laughing and running, she used one hand against a tree to hold herself up. Watching her pack play, Darcy felt light. Like there was a giant bubble of happiness in her gut and if she let it, the bubble would lift her right off her feet.

She was so busy watching Nat toss Sam to the ground that she missed Clint coming up behind her. She screamed when his arms came around her waist and pulled her back against him. “Gotcha,” he whispered in her ear. She didn’t need to see his face to feel the smirk on his lips.

“Yeah, yeah. Laugh it up birdy. My revenge will be -”

Her words ground to a halt when Clint tensed and spun away from her. She turned and followed his gaze. To the left of where they stood, just at the tree line, where two children. The girl was only eight or nine, the boy older (and obviously related) but still very much a child.

“Um,” the boy began. He had a tight hold on his little sister’s hand, and stayed just one step in front of her as if to protect her. Darcy’s heart melted a little. “We, um. We’re lost.”

The others had stopped their game and were approaching. The children were not an obvious threat but the Avengers had dealt with sinister things in innocent packages before.

Darcy, however, was willing to them at face value. If she was wrong she had backup. If she was right then there was no point to scaring children with the Avengers in full-on intimidation mode.

“Hmm,” the boy began. He had a tight hold on his little sister’s hand, and stayed just one step in front of her as if to protect her. Darcy’s heart melted a little. “We, um. We’re lost.”

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“Well I’m sure we can help with that,” Darcy told the boy. “What’s your name?”

“I’m David. This is my sister Kai,” he introduced, pulling the smaller girl forward a step.
Kai said nothing, simply looked them over with nervous gaze.

“I’m Darcy. And this Clint.” She angled herself in order to point out the others and they came within conversation distance. “And that’s Sam. And Steve. And-”

“Widow,” Kai breathed, her eyes going wide and she looked up at Nat. The shy little girl of only a moment ago melted away. She yanked at her brother’s arm excitedly. “That’s Widow,” she informed him, before looking back to the redhead. “You’re Black Widow. You’re an Avenger. I tried to buy your action figure, but when I went to the store all they had was stupid Iron Man by himself.”

Sam snorted.

“They had all the boys together, even Hulk. But they didn’t have you at all,” Kai continued, oblivious to the amusement of the men. Her eyes were only for her heroine.

David had been looking embarrassed by Kai’s outburst, but the conviction with which the little girl spoke made him turn a focused gaze on the rest of them. Darcy saw the moment when he recognized exactly who they each were.

“Holy. Shit.”

The frown on Steve’s face at that had Darcy stifling a laugh.

Things moved quickly after that. Sam went to pack up their picnic. Clint got on the radio to determine where the rescue party was gathering for these kids. Steve spoke with David while Kai practically glued herself to Natasha’s side.

With so many heros to give their attention to, Darcy went mostly ignored by the lost kids. It didn’t bother her. The opposite really. She was delighted listening to Natasha dance around answers to questions like “Can you really kill someone with just your legs?” and “Bryant said that you can’t fight as good as Captain America cause you have boobs, is that true?”

Clint reported back that a search party had been established. They were only about a mile and a half away. An easy distance to hike.

Steve took the lead with David right beside him, watching the older man with a fair about of worship in his eyes. Nat and Kai were next. Darcy, Sam, and Clint brought up the rear.

“Are there really no Black Widow toys,” Sam asked out of the blue.

Darcy gave a shrug, but Clint had a ready answer. “Yeah. Tony said it has something to do with licensing. He has SI’s corporate lawyers working on it, but I’m sure Kai’s not the only disappointed kid out there.”

The three of them were mostly silent in order to better catch the interaction between the children and their heros.

Just as Darcy was about to question how much further they had to go, they came out of the denser woods and into a place where several hiking trails intersected with a road. Forest ranger trucks and two police cruisers circled the area. Men and women in yellow vests were scattered between the vehicles.

Their arrival did not go unnoticed.

Amidst the joyous cries of the reunited family, the clapping of the emergency personnel, and Kai’s
excited babbling, the present Avengers tried to back out without drawing more attention. This, of course, did not go as well as Steve was undoubtedly hoping for.

He was recognized immediately by the rangers. The rest of them were able to step into the shadow of the tree-line, while Steve made sure attention was focused on him.

Eventually Steve was able to peel himself away. Out of courtesy, no one followed the alpha.

When he reached them, Darcy went up on her toes to press of kiss to his lips. Then she turned and gave the same treatment to Natasha. “My heros,” she announced with a glint of teasing.

“Hey, now,” Clint said in protest. “I believe that you’re forgetting someone.”

“You’re right.” Darcy stepped forward as if to move into Clint’s opening arms. Then she side-stepped right into Sam’s space. He was grinning when Darcy pressed her lips to his.

Pouting, Clint folded his arms over his chest. Darcy gave in after only a moment, and rewarded him with a kiss as well.

They turned back to the path that had brought them here. Never once did they look behind them. Nor did they see the single lens pointed in their direction.

It wasn’t until they were landing that Darcy even had an inkling that something was wrong.

Tony stood by the door into the Tower, obviously waiting for them. He didn’t say a word, simply handed over a tablet when Steve questioned his presence there.

So in the end it wasn’t a reporter or a paparazzi or a journalist. It wasn’t even someone from the bustling New York streets. In the end, it was lost fourteen year old boy with hero worship in his eyes and a camera in his pocket who outed Darcy’s true gender to the public.

There wasn’t much coverage yet, but Darcy knew it would snowball. People would start putting it all together. Her lie was about to unravel in a much bigger way.

She knew Tony’s presence here meant he was offering them a choice. They had a brief window before too much focus shifted to the short video. A very brief window where the genius could possibly wipe all evidence away.

It would only be a stopgap measure. Something else would get out.

Darcy handed the tablet back to Tony. He raised a brow, clearly communicating ‘are you sure?’ A decisive nod was Tony’s response.

She waited until he had disappeared inside before she turned to Steve. To her alpha. To her pack.

She knew exactly what she was doing when she tilted her chin down, and looked up at him from beneath her lashes. Though it was never a move she had made before, she knew how he would react when she tilted her neck to the side submissively.

Steve breath hitched. “Darcy?”

“Will you mark me, Steve? Will you bond with me?”

His voice was a possessive growl and he moved in close. “Yes.” Then her eyes were falling shut as his hot breath caressed her skin, as one large hand went to her hip to hold her in place. Teeth scraped over the juncture of her neck and shoulder. Lightly. Once. Twice.
A moan rose up from her chest when those teeth bit down sharply. It wasn’t enough to break the skin, that would come when they bonded. This was a promise. A vow. A warning.

Darcy was his. His omega. A part of his pack.

Steve was her alpha. Her protector. No rival would dare to try to take her from him.

Chapter End Notes

One more thing...
In case you didn't notice, I have finally updated the chapter numbers. We are looking at a total of 39 which means there are very few left to go :)
...There Was a Thread

Darcy was never the first one up in the morning. She didn’t anticipate that would ever be a thing, especially with how early Steve and Sam seemed to rise.

Today, she was the very last one to get out of bed. She had woken briefly when Clint’s phone had gone off, but Natasha had soothed her back to sleep. Steve’s leaving hadn’t caused more than a huff of annoyance.

The day was truly began when she swung her legs over the edge of the bed. It took a moment for her brain to come all the way online. Then yesterday’s events were speeding through with a bang as they broke the sound barrier.

Her hand went instinctively to the mark on her neck. It was tender but there was no pain. Like a healing bruise, she could only feel it when she pressed down. Emotions tumbled through her as she poked at the spot like a child with a loose tooth. She was marked. More binding than a promise ring, that mark meant she belonged. She belonged to a pack that loved her.

Her smile stretched her cheeks to the limit.

Habit had her grabbing her phone as she went to take care of her early morning business. Face washed, hair brushed, teeth cleaned, she entered the kitchen. Her steps were light, her throat humming the soundtrack from one of those sappy romantic movies she would deny watching if ever asked.

It wasn’t until she had a properly doctored coffee in front of her that she swiped to unlock her phone’s screen.

At night she had taken to turning off the sound since Nat and Steve were likely to jump awake at any little thing. She hadn’t heard a thing when the hundreds of notifications had come pouring in.

Someone had obviously tracked down who she was. No more anonymity. No more hiding.

The thought wasn’t as scary as it had been a mere week ago. When fear tried to rise, the loving way she had been cradled in her pack’s embrace last night took the forefront, chasing away the apprehension.

Drawing in a fortifying breath, she began to peer through the electronic storm.

This was going to take a while…

###

RighteousAsshole#1: Your jus a lying BITCH! Kill yourself

RighteousAsshole#2: Yea! you said it man. That whore is probbly trying to get her 15 mins of fame.
Darcy sighed. She was tucked in Steve’s favorite armchair. The pack were still out. Undoubtedly dealing with the media shitstorm. The highlights of which were playing on the tv though she had turned off the sound a while ago. The captions were on though.

Her “I am Woman, Hear Me Roar” playlist was pumping through the speakers to fill the silence of the apartment.

She was doing her best to ignore the idiots. So far her only responses had been to those who offered positive messages or encouragements.

But the music was pumping her up. She wanted to fight back. She wanted to strike them down from their platforms. She really wanted to correct their spelling.

A flurry of new notifications popped up.

With a sigh she closed the current thread and went to see what the new messages were.

SgtSnowflake: Why don’t you shut your mouth, Kevin? Like you’ve ever done anything worthwhile in your life. P.S. You might want to trying enrolling in third grade again. To work on that spelling problem.

With growing amusement, Darcy watched as the thread exploded.

RighteousAsshole#1: Dude, who is this?

SgtSnowflake: An actual adult.

RighteousAsshole#1: FKCK you

SgtSnowflake: Only in your dreams. Btw, is that “performance issue” still a thing?

RighteousAsshole#1: Seriously who the fuck is this? I will beat ur ass dude.

SgtSnowflake: I welcome you to try. :) Just so you know, I’m sending all this to your mother. I think she’d be interested in knowing how you’re spending your time since you don’t have a job.

RighteousAsshole#1: WHO IS THIS? Josh? Man if this is u I am going to beat u so bad
SgtSnowflake: Josh is too busy dealing with the cops at this house to back you up, son. Someone called in a tip about an overwhelming smell of marijuana. You should tell him that he really shouldn’t leave stuff like that in view of his webcam.

There was no response from Asshole #1. Asshole #2 had disappeared as well. Presumably this was the Josh who was probably being handcuffed somewhere.

Laughter bubbled up. Whoever SgtSnowflake was he was brutal. Every righteous asshole who had some kind of comment to make was being met with the same treatment. Pictures and embarrassing video were being linked to anonymous screen names. Bullies who had always hid behind their internet connection were finding themselves suddenly on display.

She didn’t know where Snowflake was getting the information. Of even if it was all that hard to track it down. She was pretty good with computers but she had never gone on a campaign like this.

Snowflake seemed to have made it their personal mission to defend her.

For a moment, the thought formed that perhaps this was Bucky. Perhaps he was reaching out. The name was suspicious, but…

She shook her head. No. Bucky probably wasn’t that technologically savvy.

Whoever SgtSnowflake was though, she was grateful to them. For the entertainment value if nothing else.

###

Though Natasha had spent years carrying SHIELD’s banner, she had kept her own contacts. Her own resources. She had never invested everything into SHIELD, not like Clint had. This had worked in her favor when things all went to hell.

Now she was using those contacts to track down her beta.

She could remember him. As much as she could remember anything from her training days in the Red Room. Her instructors had done their best to erase him, but she remembered a metal hand between her sharp shoulder blades, pushing her to freedom. She remembered one cold night of isolation and fresh air. She remembered the pain when she had been recaptured.

The Red Room was gone now. They could never take away one of her pack again.

These were her people to protect and this time she would not fail.

James needed to be brought home.
...There Was a Sighting

Chapter Notes

So... I apologize for the long wait. I have recently hit a block. My partner of 9 1/2 years decided he was done with me (for reasons he choose not to tell me) so the last couple months haven't been great. Hard to write happy endings when yours just imploded:( Anyways.... Here is the next installment. I promise I will do my best to get the next chapter out in a more timely manner. :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Once upon a time, the royal court held a hunt. The hounds bayed, the horses bounded over fallen trees and through shallow creek beds. The prince’s entourage, in their myriad of brilliant colors, were intent on their prey. Yet the fox is not called cunning for nothing...

It had been nearly a week since Darcy’s identity had been splashed across headlines. The fervor hadn’t yet abated, but as with all things, it would fade. Natasha knew it with certainty.

Still, it made her uncomfortable to let Darcy out of her sight for too long. The rest of the pack felt the same instinct to hide their omega away, but none of them had given voice to it. Heaven forbid Darcy hear them planning to stash her away until the headlines moved on to the next story.

Steve was handling this far better than she had anticipated. She wasn’t blind to the fact that he had JARVIS monitoring their omega, but he was being subtle and that was the best he could do in this situation. (At least he wasn’t trying to stuff himself in the vents above where she was working.) The camera feeds for the Jane’s lab were playing on the tv while the rest of the pack were enjoying a late lunch. It was unusual for all four of them to be available at the same time during the day, but the change of pace was nice.

Natasha had just swallowed a sip of iced tea when her phone dinged with a very specific notification. There had been a sighting.

James.

She checked the information. Then double checked it. Two independent sources confirmed. He was close. The other side of the city, but relatively close considering he could have been on the other side of the planet.

She looked up to spot Steve watching her. Whether it was the pack bonds that alerted him or something else she wasn’t sure.

“Is it…” He trailed off, unable to finish the question.

A nod confirmed what he already suspected.

For a moment, emotions chased themselves across her alpha’s face. His face did that complicated pout that always came into being when discussing the missing beta. It was one part guilt, one part
stubborn refusal to give up hope, and one part sulking broken heart. Then he was pulling it all in and locking it down. His jaw stiffened. Steve Rogers gave way for Captain America. They had discussed this scenario before. How protecting the pack and any civilians had to take precedence over bringing James in. Though she knew it had broken Steve’s heart, he had agreed that she could make the call to retreat or incapacitate if James didn’t recognize him. Or if the beta didn’t recognize his own mind.

“We’re taking the jet,” Steve commanded. “If he runs we need to be able to follow.”

Ever the voice of caution (as much caution as any of them ever displayed), Sam tried to counter offer. “It might be better if we take ground vehicles. Less attention. Plus we don’t want him to get the wrong idea. Having a quinjet hovering overhead might not scream friendly to the POW.”

“Fine. We take three vehicles. Natasha and I will take the motorcycles. You and Clint will be in the jeep.”

There were no arguments.

It took mere moments for them to grab their gear scattered around the apartment.

They met back in the living room.

“Cap,” Clint called, tilting his head to towards the television.

Darcy was beating one of Jane’s wayward machines with her shoe for some reason. No doubt her version of ‘turn it off and turn it back on’. 

Though it was brief, a fond smile flashed across Steve’s face. “I’ll make sure she’s taken care of.”

As they piled into the elevator, Natasha could feel quivering anticipation in the pack bonds. They were going to bring their beta in from the cold today.

She only hoped that he would come willingly.

####

Darcy hadn’t been able to concentrate all day.

In the back of her mind, in the pit of her stomach, some prickling sensation of impending doom was brewing. It was that feeling you get when you know you forgot something but you just can’t think of what it was. That feeling of foreboding when you’re sure something is going to go wrong though you’ve taken every precaution you could.

Her rising anxiety had eroded her patience. Especially when one of Jane’s more finicky machines refused to cooperate. The petite astrophysicist had refused to let Stark near any of her precious homemade equipment when they had moved in. Thus it wasn’t unusual to have one of them breaking down at any given point.

Today, the problem had pushed her past her limit.

Ripping off one of her wedges she beat on the metal contraption. When she had worn herself out, she slipped her shoe back on and turned to find Jane watching with raised brows.
“Why don’t you take a break,” Jane suggested.

A sigh was Darcy’s reply and she snatched up her phone and empty coffee cup.

As the elevator doors closed, she felt her anxiety returning. Obviously the shoe therapy hadn’t gotten her very far.

Somehow, she wasn’t surprised at all when JARVIS interrupted her thoughts.

“Miss Lewis, I have a message for you from Captain Rogers.”

“Let’s hear it.”

“Hey sweetheart,” her alpha’s voice greeted. Just hearing him gave her a measure of calm. “Bucky’s been spotted. We’re on our way there now. Stay in the Tower. I asked security to send up some gammas to watch out for you while we’re gone. Unbonded of course. We’ll see you soon.”

Now, normally, Darcy would have gotten all steamed up from the casual way that Steve had imposed more security on her. Especially from that “unbonded” comment.

However...

That sense of doom was gathering weight.

She decided not to go to the pack’s floor. Instead, she went to the common level where the party deck entrance was. The large balcony area would let her get a bit of fresh air while still technically being in the Tower.

JARVIS, her future overlord, directed her protection detail to her location.

They were unobtrusive at least. Three fit gammas in dark blue suits. Two came out onto the deck with her while the other remained inside. She ignored them as she found a seat and started browsing through her feeds.

Snowflake was still posting consistently and with efficient brutality. It was a source of entertainment that Darcy was happy to indulge. For a few minutes there was silence. Well as much silence as the city ever offered. Far below she could hear the echoes of life rushing on its way.

The blaring of alarms had her dropping her phone and jumping to her feet.

The two security guards were on her in an instant, ushering her inside and doing their best to cover her with their own bodies.

Inside the alarms sounded fuzzy like trying to listen to a radio station as you drive out of range.

The third security guard was speaking into an ear piece. When he finished, he turned to her while give some sort of signal to the others. “Ma’am we have a situation downstairs. You need to stay here. Don’t leave this room. We’ll be back as soon as possible.” They went rushing into the opening elevator doors.

Then they were gone.

“JARVIS?”

There was no answer. Just that slight static and the blaring alarms.
Then even the alarms cut out.

This was so bad. Sooo bad. Darcy tried to remain calm, but she had seen enough movies to know that this was when the bad shit happened.

Arming herself with a hefty looking modern art sculpture from a side table, Darcy edged toward the stairs. The door to the stairwell proved to be locked, due to the emergency protocols no doubt, leaving her with only this open space.

Though she couldn’t hear anything above the static from JARVIS’ speakers, her other senses were on high alert. She could see nothing out of the ordinary, but a faint scent began to tickle her nose.

Sharp metal and sweet honey and wet dog...

Before her hindbrain could sort out the rest of the layers of the scent, the owner stepped into sight. He appeared like a phantom. No telling where he had come from though there weren’t that many hiding places in the open floor plan.

His hair was tied back in a bun, but the rest of his outfit was the same as when she had last seen him. This was her beta.

Her mouth gaped for a moment. She might have stayed where she was, her back to the corner, frozen in shock, if it hadn’t been for the hefty art in her hands suddenly slipping. A brief moment of panic flashed through her. She didn’t know how much it was worth, but Pepper had probably been the one to pick it out and she had very expensive tastes. Darcy didn’t want to be the one to tell the terrifyingly efficient CEO that she had caused damage to it.

As she struggled to get a better grip, her eyes glanced away from Bucky. It was only a split second, but somehow it was enough time to allow him to sneak much closer. He was only a few feet away when she looked back. His face impassive though thankfully unmasked.

“Oh crap! God you move fast.” She inched back the short distance she could. “We should maybe call Steve, cause I’m not totally sure what I should be doing here. Like not that I don’t trust you, I just have gotten a lot of severe warnings about safety from a redhead with killer thighs. Like literally killer thighs. Have you seen her thighs? Nevermind. Umm, JARVIS?”

The speakers which usually allowed him to communicate were still only giving fuzzy static.

“The building has been completely disabled,” Bucky informed her.

His voice was a little rough but still pleasing to her hindbrain. Her unhelpful omega instincts were telling her to put down the make-shift weapon, to snuggle up to his chest, to listen to that voice soothe her while he held her. No matter that she had no idea about his mental state, or his intentions. Thankfully she was wasn’t completely ruled by her treacherous hindbrain.

“Oh ooo-kay. I take it you were the one to disable the building? Or should I be worried about anyone else dropping in?” She could feel her hands sweating, the statue starting to slip again.

“It was me. No one will hurt you.” It was a reassurance. A promise.

Darcy wasn’t sure how she knew. She could see the truth of it in his eyes though. Those expressive eyes that last time she had seen him in person had been so confused. Those beautiful eyes that she had watched sparkle on the old film reels Stark had dug up for Steve.

His movements were measured as he went for something behind his back.
Darcy held herself still, watching him warily. She wanted to trust him, but this wasn’t the beta that had served with Steve back in the war. This was a different man who had been through horrors and been changed by them.

From behind him, he produced a thermos and a small brown paper bag. She recognized the logo on the bag as being from one of her favorite coffee shops. They one with the delicious cranberry scones. There was a good chance that the thermos in his metal hand held a coffee from the same place.

“No one will hurt,” he said again, holding out the items.

“I believe you,” she responded with as much sincerity as she could. He was hers and he was Steve’s. And he had come to the Tower bearing gifts. Chances were good that he wasn’t here to harm her. If he wasn’t here to hurt her, then he would likely protect her, as he had protected Steve from the shooter all those weeks ago.

A small smile lifted his lips.

After carefully setting the art piece on the carpet, Darcy reached for the thermos first. Untwisting the lid, the familiar smell of her favorite salted caramel latte filled the air.

It was then, as the tempting scent wafted around her, that Darcy realized there was no way for Bucky to know that this particular drink was her favorite. Not unless he had been watching her. Stalking her.

Okay. So her beta was a stalker. NBD.

It was probably something she should be freaking out over. A normal person in her situation would certainly be freaking out. However, the last few years of aliens, gods, super secret spy agencies, Nazis, kidnappings, terrorists, and that one rabid giant squirrel had expanded her tolerance for strange. Being stalked by her beta probably fell about mid-spectrum on the “should I be concerned” scale. Which meant she could be calm now and worry about backlash later.

She took a healthy sip of the steaming liquid. It was every bit as good as the scent promised.

Bucky held the bag out a little farther, prompting Darcy to take it.

“If this is a cranberry scone we are going to have to discuss boundaries,” she told him as she took the offering. Carefully opening the paper bag while holding onto the thermos, she somehow wasn’t surprised to find it held those coveted cranberry scones. She gave him a flat look. “Seriously?”

Her attitude sparked a sly smile on his face. “Do you like it?”

“That is so not the point,” she informed him, before taking another sip of the latte.

His smile grew more amused with a hint of charming. That was the smile she had seen in Steve’s sketches. “Pretty sure that’s the only part I care about.”

Her mouth gaped a little. “Seriously?” She knew she was repeating herself but her brain was having a hard time processing this whole encounter.

“I only want the best for my ElectricEspresso.”

It took a moment for that sentence to sink in. Darcy certainly wasn’t used to hearing her online handle spoken out loud. “Have you...have you been stalking me electronically...as well as literally?!”
There was charm oozing from his eyes. Though he was in combat gear and his hair was longer, he looked like the young man who had stood at Steve’s shoulder for those old news reels. He slid his hands into his pockets, rocking back on his heels the slightest bit. His grin ticked up on the left side. “Had to keep an eye on my muffin.”

Her mouth dropped open. “You did not just refer to me as a baked good.”

“Would you prefer dame,” he teased, head cocking to the side.

Her first instinct was denial. It was right on the tip of her tongue, but her inner omega was purring contentment so she held it back. “I’ll have to get back to you on that. I honestly am more concerned about how Steve is gonna freak when he finds out A: you’re here, B: you got past JARVIS, C: the gammas left me alone, and D ...honestly I don’t even know what D is. I just-”

He moved closer, arms coming up and hands spreading. “Relax, Darcy. I remember. I remember the ninety pound asthmatic and the wall of muscle who rescued me. I’ve got pretty good control but not absolute. I came here to surrender, but I wanted to see you first.” He reached toward her slowly, giving her every chance to move away. She remained still, allowing him to push the hair from her forehead and tuck it behind her ear. “Had to make sure Stevie was treating you right. He never was any good with courting before.”

Darcy snorted. “He started a political movement for the PoliSci major. I think he’s doing fine.”

There was a crackle from the speakers as JARVIS came back online. “Miss Lewis, systems are malfunctioning.” Darcy rolled her eyes, cause duh. “Please confirm your status.”

“I’m good. I’m safe. Please tell Steve and the others to come home. He has a visitor.” She paused, looking to Bucky. “Anything you’d like to add?”

He shook his head. “Think you got it covered, doll.”

Chapter End Notes

Comments make my little black heart flutter...
Once upon a time, there was an alpha prince who believed his beta lost to the ravages of war. One day, while out for a ride, he had seen a man who had worn his beta’s face. Stunned and confused how this was possible, he tried everything he could to track down the man. Only after finding the others of his pack, including his omega, had he finally gotten a clue as to his beta’s whereabouts. Of course, being the contrary man he was, his beta had chosen to reveal himself in the palace while the prince was out. Now the prince was returning home as fast as his steed would carry him...

The atmosphere in the elevator was stifling. Steve was closest to the doors, his nose all but pressed against the metal. He could feel the tension, the fear floating between the pack. There was nothing he could say to calm them. Not when his own heart was beating so wildly.

Bucky was here. In the Tower. Mere seconds away.

Darcy was with him.

Steve had to believe that Darcy was safe. He had to. The other possibilities were unthinkable. He had to trust her message. Had to trust JARVIS’ analysis of the situation.

The doors opened on the common floor.

Steve forced himself to take measured steps out onto the floor. They had discussed their approach over the comms on the way back. Sam had been adamant that running up on the traumatized beta or any sudden movements might not be a good idea. Nat had concurred.

The scene Steve looked out had his feet stuttering to a stop.

Darcy was sitting on the couch. She had somehow convinced Bucky to sit cross-legged on the floor in front of her, as she ran a brush through his hair. The tangled, limp mess it had been back in DC was a thing of the past, but it was obvious that he hadn’t made it a priority.

Though Bucky’s eyes were sharp on the entering pack, his body was relaxed. He looked like a contented cat. The image only enforced by the stroking that Darcy was giving him. Steve half expected to hear a rumbling purr coming from the beta’s chest.

Steve felt like his own lungs were burning. It felt difficult to draw a full breath, like back when asthma had plagued him. His mouth was dry. His throat constricted. By sheer stubborn will he forced his voice to work. “Bucky?”

The beta smiled, unhurried and sincere. It was a smile that made him look younger, sunshine chasing
back the shadows. It was beautiful. “Hi Stevie.”

Steve felt himself choke on a sob. He had needed to hear that voice. Needed to hear Bucky saying his name. After all the pain, after the blank stare Bucky had given him in DC, the alpha needed the recognition of his name. “Oh god, Bucky.” He couldn’t help the way his feet rushed forward, or the way he dropped to his knees a foot from the other man. “You’re here,” he cried, unconcerned with the tears forming in the corners of his eyes.

“Yeah, punk. I’m here.” That tone was familiar. That was the one Bucky had used when Steve had been sick with fever, delirious and reaching out for comfort.

Steve’s hindbrain was howling, in joy, in pain, in need. His beta was here. The one he had loved first. The one he had loved longest. He wanted to reach out, to touch, but Bucky had been through more trauma than he could imagine. It was hard to tell what he would be receptive of.

Bucky had no hesitation it seemed, for he opened his arms invitingly.

The alpha crashed into him with enough force to drive an oomph from his lungs. Steve tried to pull back to check to see that Bucky was fine, but the beta refused to release him. Arms like steel held on tightly.

These days Steve could break through steel with a few solid punches, but he was right where he wanted to be.

It was hard to say how long they stayed that way, heart beating against heart, legs tangled uncomfortably. When Steve’s inner alpha was sated enough to give space between them, he looked around to find the rest of the pack had joined Darcy on the couch.

His beautiful omega looked down on them from over Bucky’s shoulder.

“So...I’m thinking we should have Italian,” she began. “Which I already ordered from Locanda Verde. On Tony’s tab of course.” She gave a cheeky smile. “A few bottles of wine are coming along as well.”

Clint chuckled as he tightened the arm he had around Darcy’s shoulder. Steve felt himself smile in mirror of the rest of the pack.

“I love you.” The words burst out of him like a firework. Happiness and wonder and brilliant light. “I love you,” he repeated, squeezing Bucky’s hand. It was directed at all of them. This magnificent group of people were his, and his heart was theirs. Every piece, every rough scarred edge, every crack and crevice. His whole heart was theirs and he knew it could not be safer.

###

The remains of dinner were spread over the table of the pack’s apartment. Sam, Clint, and Darcy were snuggled together in the oversized recliner that certainly wasn’t meant for three.

Steve was next to Bucky on the loveseat, while Natasha watched over them all from the armchair in the corner. She was still wary that James was affected by the Winter Soldier programming. Yet, she couldn’t find it in her to ruin her alpha’s joy.
And it was joy.

Steve had yet to stop smiling. He had smiled before of course. Smiled in the small moments with all of his pack. This was somehow brighter. Bolder. This was the contentment of an alpha who had found those who were meant to be his. This was the end of suffering. This was the hole the missing beta had left in his life being filled.

Natasha could read it all easy enough. Which was why she waited until they were distracted by the movie on tv before slipping out. They may be together, but there were still hurdles to jump. Those hurdles had her knocking on the door to Pepper’s private office.

###

Clint was waiting when Natasha came sneaking back into the pack territory.

“Have a nice trip,” he asked from the perch he had acquired on the top of the bookcase.

She didn’t jump, but the shift in her stance was enough of a tell. He had startled her. Giving him a look of censure over her shoulder, she choose not to answer.

Hopping down, he followed after her, a saunter to his steps. “You wanna share with the class why you slipped off?”

“Not particularly.”

“Let me rephrase: Do you want to explain to me why you ran off right after Barnes did his big reveal or would you like to explain it to Steve?”

She spun on her heel, arms crossing over her chest. The long look she gave him underneath her raised brow hardly fazed him. He had known her long enough that he could tell when he was getting close to a line that she didn’t want him to cross. His interrogation might irritate her, but whatever was happening she wasn’t pushing him out.

He met her stare for stare.

Her arms dropped to her sides in defeat. “I went to speak with Pepper about the backlash from James’ years as the Winter Soldier.”

Clint understood the implications. He had almost been blamed for the mess that Loki had made. There was no doubt that certain parties would try to hold Barnes responsible for Hydra’s crimes.

In a brief and silent exchange, boosted by the pack bond, they conferred on how to move forward. It was decided that they would face this threat head on. Steve no doubt would approve such a strategy.

The problem was how to handle the alpha.

Steve was already embroiled in this political campaign. He couldn’t afford bad press. Not to mention that he wasn’t always rational where his pack was concerned. If anyone, reporter or government agency or politician, came after Barnes there would be no hesitation in Steve’s forceful defense.

“You’re totally telling our alpha.”
Natasha’s eyes went half-lidded as she drew in a deep breath. Clint knew what that meant. A sigh was being repressed. One of annoyance at him. “Fine.” She flicked her eyes upward and then gave him a predatory smile. “Then you’re explaining to Tony how James got in the Tower.”

“Wha-Wait, I don’t-you can’t-”

Natasha continued to smile, even when Clint attempted to pull out his best pout.

###

Two days later...

Whispers of deep breath were the only sounds as Steve stared at the pack around him. Sam and Clint had drifted off to sleep. Natasha, who was curled between them, was relaxed in that full body way that told Steve she was near to slumber as well. Steve lay on his back, his arms around his beta and omega. The ends of their dark hair tangled together on his chest. Those two were still awake. He could feel Darcy tracing random patterns on Bucky’s metal hand.

The last two days had been hectic was rewarding in ways that would take time for Steve to truly appreciate. Pepper had been amazing as always. She had helped Tony come to terms with Bucky’s presence, to understand that he was a victim and not a threat. She had also prepped the PR team for the eventual reveal of the Winter Soldier’s true name. Clint and Natasha had been the ones to discuss with him the implications of how the world would view Bucky. Sam had been the one to talk him down from charging out to defend the beta from a threat that hadn’t even manifested yet. And Darcy… Darcy had been the one to calm Bucky when his alpha had gotten more and more worked up. The little omega had draped herself right onto Bucky’s lap just as he had started to look like he was going to run. Her presence had frozen the flighty beta in place. While the conversation about their future had filled the room, Darcy had kept Bucky’s focus on her with her fingers in his hair, her voice in his ear, her body pressed against his.

The first night Steve had spent with Bucky alone, while the others cuddled in Darcy’s nest. Steve had needed the time with the one he lost, and the others had needed the chance to hold their tenacious omega.

Tonight, they were finally all together. There was peace in his pack.

The world knew Darcy Lewis was an omega. They would soon know that the Winter Soldier was Bucky Barnes. And, most importantly, the public knew that they were both his. He would protect his pack with every breath in his body.

God help them all if the world ever turned against his people. He would abandon the shield. He would turn his back on millions to keep his few safe. If his lovers wanted, Steve would throw away the shield. To keep them safe and make them happy, he would let the world burn.
Chapter Notes

This is the end....there ain't no more :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Once upon a time, there lived a beautiful omega princess. She was sweet and kind and loved by her kingdom…

Darcy had always been an omega. Biology was not something that she could change. No one could.

Everyone who met Darcy these days would tell you she was an omega through and through. Her brash, brazen nature; Her caustic sarcasm and often offensive language; Her tendency to run head first into obstacles instead of side-stepping them. These were exactly the things needed when dealing with the Avengers. Who could possibly fit the heroes better?

The kingdom was peaceful and happy. Not all the time, but even surrounded by enemies, the people knew joy…

Certain agencies and politicians would always been trying to control the Avengers, manipulate them. However, with the security of a full formed and bonded pack, the leader of the team was easily able to avoid conflict. Those fights he could not avoid he would charge into fearlessly, knowing his pack and friends were close behind.

After every battle, Darcy would be waiting, arms open to receive them all.

The princess kept the skull of the dragon that had nearly destroyed her on display. Not as a trophy, but as a reminder to all that she had saved herself…

Two years after fully cementing their bond, Darcy and her pack welcomed their first child into the world. That same day, the state of New York repealed the laws restricting bonded omegas. During a news conference, that Darcy watched from her birthing bed, the governor stated that “any law that discriminates based on orientation is against everything that this country was founded on. We are the land of the free and it’s about time we started acting like it again.”

T-shirts and posters bearing the quote popped up on every street in New York City. Tony bought a crate full that included a onesie for the new-born. Darcy laughed but still happily wrapped the infant in the gift as soon as he was big enough.
Her prince was never one to forget the strength she carried, but he still took her protection to heart. She was a precious gift to him and he cherished her everyday…

As Darcy’s family grew so did the nation. State after state reformed their laws, giving in to the changing social climate and public pressure.

The underground slowly came out into the light. Surprisingly, Bruce stepped up to take a more public role with the organization. Backed and funded by his alpha, Bruce took the fight outside the U.S. Thousands of omegas were given better opportunities than they might have found otherwise.

The prince was not the only one who treated her thusly. For her pack included a fiercely loyal archer, a graceful assassin, a knight of the realm, and a scarred nobleman. They were her family and she held them close to her heart all her days…

It wasn’t perfect. The fight would likely not be ended in her lifetime, but Darcy was always grateful to her alpha for taking that first step. Each time she heard about some new advancement for the cause, she would track him down and make sure he knew how appreciative she was.

Though the fight for omega equality wasn’t perfect, the rest of Darcy’s life was as close to perfect as one was likely to get this side of heaven.

The storytellers would claim that the princess lived happily ever after. Yet, if one were to ask the princess herself, she would say “Happiness is fleeting. It comes and goes as easily as the breeze. My ever after is solid and steady, as lasting as the legends. For I am loved ever after.”

Chapter End Notes

Comments make me smile :D
...The Credits Rolled

Chapter Notes

Welcome to the credits.

...cause I'm a dork.

First off, huge thank you to my beta, Anonymouse!

Directed by: Silent_journey
Edited by: Anonymouse
Credit to Marvel
Soundtrack by YouTube and Pandora

Production Manager     JULIAN DOYLE
Assistant Director     GERRY HARRISON
Special Effects     JOHN HORTON
Choreography     LEO KHARIBIAN
Fight Director & Period Consultant     JOHN WALLER
Make Up Artists     PEARL RASHBASS, PAM LUKE
Special Effects Photography     JULIAN DOYLE
Animation Assistance       LUCINDA COWELL, KATE HEPBURN

Møøse Trained by            YUTTE HERMSGERVØRDENBRØTBØRDA

Lighting Cameraman          TERRY BEDFORD

Special Møøse Effects       OLAF PROT

Møøse Costumes              SIGGI CHURCHILL

Designer                    ROY SMITH

Møøse choreographed by      HORST PROT III

Miss Taylor’s Møøses by     HENGST DOUGLAS-HOME

Møøse trained to mix concrete and sign complicated insurance forms by JURGEN WIGG

Editor                      JOHN HACKNEY

Møøses noses wiped by       BJØRN IRKESTØM-SLATER WALKER

Large møøse on the left hand side of the screen in the third scene from the end, given a grounding in Latin, French and Geography by BO BENN

Suggestive poses for the møøse suggested by VIC ROTTER

Antler-care by              LIV THATCHER

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