This Love (Left a Permanent Mark)

by Archetype_ElectraHeart

Summary

Captain America was blank. Captain America didn’t have a soulmate. Until now. And apparently, she had grown tired of waiting for him.

Phil sighed. Nick was going to be a nightmare when he found out about this.

(Or: a soulmate AU where Darcy copes with being a blank by getting tattoos and SHIELD gets quite the surprise when Captain America gets defrosted.)

Notes

Inspired by this post from tumblr: "Soulmate au where when you write something on your skin with pen/marker/whatever the hell you want, it will show up on your soul mates skin as well."

and this comment from kidsoup on I've Got a Blank Space, Baby (Write Your Name): "Imagine this concept but instead of drawings Darcy went ahead and got tattoos all over her..."
body knowing she didn't have to worry about her soulmate getting backlash and years later captain America wakes up with a full sleeve and a tramp stamp."

See the end of the work for more notes.
Darcy didn’t cope well with being a blank, because by the time she started middle school there was no one else at school who had never had a response to the questions they wrote on their skin.

The summer before she started eighth grade, Darcy learned how to fake someone else’s handwriting on her skin just well enough to stop the teasing at school. She kept it up all through high school, convinced everyone that she had a phantom younger soulmate who lived across the country by writing questions and corresponding answers before she left for school in the morning, or occasionally in bathroom stalls throughout the day.

She had no intention of keeping up the farce after she left her small hometown in Georgia for college, although she did tend to wear fairly modest clothing. The less of her skin people could see, the fewer questions they tended to ask.

On her eighteenth birthday, Darcy got her first tattoo: “what’s past is prologue” in minuscule script across the inside of her left wrist.

From then on, she was hooked.

She had a small wing tattooed behind each ankle bone, and clusters of abstracted flowers around the phrase “have courage and be kind” across her right shoulder-blade. She had a fish riding a bicycle on the outside of her right thigh as a rather tongue-in-cheek tribute to her feminist beliefs (and frankly, to her blank status).

A month into her internship with Jane, she got the Pleiades star cluster tattooed on the inside of her left elbow, and the day after Thor left the planet she added the coordinates of his touchdown in New Mexico just above the stars.

She had more than one tattoo artist give her a strange look for coming in solo to get inked, since soulmates usually agreed on a design and came in together, but she found a great shop in Willowdale during her time at Culver with a blank artist who had done her larger pieces without batting an eye.

Darcy may have been born a blank, but she didn’t have to stay one.

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Steve Rogers had grown up a blank in an age when soulmates were sacred—there was no such thing as divorce for soul-marriages, and forming relationships outside a soul bond was definitely frowned upon.
But Steve had always assumed that he was blank because of his poor health. After all, how would it be fair to his mate to be fated for someone who would most likely die young because of a weak immune system?

And then came the war, and the serum, and Steve’s prognostication simply shifted. He was going to die in the war, serum or no, and it would have still been unfair to his mate to have him and lose him so soon.

(If a little voice inside pointed out how many of the men he served with had been blessed with mates anyways, that was something Steve dealt with at night in the privacy of his own head.)

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Phil Coulson honestly had not expected that there could be anything that would surprise him after he got the call that Captain America’s body had been found, that he was being defrosted, and that it seemed he was still living (somehow) after 70 years in the ice. (And all this after dealing with the first alien contact ever, in New Mexico of all places. It had been a long week.)

So Phil was standing up on the catwalk, watching the technicians below and finalizing his reports from New Mexico, waiting for the moment when they finally freed the Captain’s body from the ice. But when the medics cut him out of his uniform (and yes, Phil’s inner history nerd and archivist had cringed at that) to reveal markings on his elbow and wrist, Phil could honestly say that he was surprised. There had been no indication in their records that Captain Rogers had ever got a tattoo. When they turned him onto his side to reveal a (very obviously feminine) tattoo over an entire shoulder blade, Phil had frozen on the spot.

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Captain Rogers was still in a medically-induced coma when Phil was allowed into his hospital room to take a closer look at the tattoos that had suddenly appeared on his skin. Director Fury had made it abundantly clear that he wanted the identity of the Captain’s suddenly-acquired soulmate ASAP (“I fucking mean it, Phil. I don’t care what you have to do to find her. I don’t care if you have to troll Facebook for the next six fucking months looking at pictures of people’s tattoos, you find her and
you check her out and if she’s clean, you get her a security detail. Yesterday.” Phil had resigned himself to a wild goose chase, to months and months of fruitless searching.

Dr. Cho was still in the room when Phil walked in. “Hey, Agent Coulson. I take it you’re here about the tattoos?”

Phil nodded. “I noticed the ones on his arms and shoulder back in observation. Any others I should know about?”

Dr. Cho looked like she was fighting a smile as she drew back the sheet over the Captain’s thigh. “As a matter of fact, yes. There’s a small wing on the outside of each ankle, and we found this one after we got him in the room. Looks like your Captain’s soulmate has quite a sense of humor.”

Phil blinked at the image in front of him. It was a beta fish on an old-fashioned bicycle. Why would anyone… “Oh my god.”

Dr. Cho smirked. “Finally figured it out, then?”

“A woman needs a man like a fish needs a bicycle.”

“She’s going to be a firecracker.” Dr. Cho gathered up her notes and started out of the room. “Any way you could film their first meeting for me? Or at least his face the minute he figures out what that tattoo means? Because I have a feeling both will be made-for-TV moments.”

Phil waved her off. “Absolutely not. And I don’t need to tell you that this needs to be kept quiet.”

Dr. Cho sighed in annoyance. “Yes, yes, Agent Coulson. But I want to meet that girl if and when the powers that be declare her identity up for grabs. I’m going to buy her a drink or five for brightening up what has been one hell of a week.” Dr. Cho closed the door behind her, leaving Phil alone with the unresponsive Captain.

Coulson took a photo of the fish and then the wing on Captain Roger’s ankle before pulling the sheet back down. He rolled the Captain onto his side to get a picture of the “have courage and be kind” surrounded by flowers that had caught his attention earlier. And then he turned his attention to the cluster of dots with a set of coordinates beneath it at the inside of his elbow and the “what’s past is prologue” on his wrist. Phil could have sworn there was something familiar about those tattoos, but he could not place them for some reason. He turned his attention back to the elbow tattoo and stared.

There was something familiar about those coordinates in particular. Phil pulled out his StarkPad and input the coordinates, watching as the image on his screen zoomed into a spot in the desert a few miles outside of Puente Antiguo, New Mexico.

Agent Phil Coulson then promptly pulled out his phone, pressed number one on the speed dial and waited.

“Well, Cheese? Any idea who we’re looking for?”

“Actually, I think I know exactly who she is.”

“Are you for real? Already? Who the fuck is she?”

“Remember Dr. Foster’s intern?”

There was a brief pause. “You have got to be shitting me.”
“Afraid not, sir.”

“The one who created a false identity good enough to fool your agents into allowing a fugitive alien prince entry to a secure site? The one who spotted Agent Barton’s surveillance and used a mirror to temporarily blind him? The one that has called my office screaming about her iPod everyday since it was seized even though this number is supposed to be a closely-guarded government secret?”

Phil sighed. “Yes, sir. That one. Darcy Lewis. I recognized a few of the tattoos.”

“Well, we’ve already cleared her, correct?”

“Yes, sir. She has no suspicious connections. Although we assumed that she was a blank.”

“So fix her file. And Cheese?”

“Yes, sir?”

“You stick with the Captain for now. But get a surveillance team on her. And make sure they stay out of sight this time.”

“Of course, sir.”

Phil shook his head. This was going to be a disaster.

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Steve stared at Director Fury. “I’m sorry, I must have misheard you.”

“Not at all, Captain Rogers. You’ve got a twenty-first century soulmate. Check your wrist.”

Steve looked down to see words across the inside of his wrist and elbow and stared. “I have a soulmate.”

“Looks like your lady’s a fan of ink. There’s more where that came from.”

“Ink?”

“Tattoos, kid. I'm guessing she got tired of waiting for her soulmate to leave a mark and decided to make a few of her own.”

When Steve had been growing up the only people who got tattoos were soldiers or the folks in the circus at Coney Island. But what he could see so far looked nothing like the sorts of tattoos they had. A Shakespeare quote? Geographic coordinates? “There are more? Where are they?”

Fury handed over a file with photographs. “There are photos of each tattoo in here. Should be easier than trying to catch a glance in the mirror. I should also tell you that we know who she is. Whether or not you want that information for yourself, and when, is up to you.”

Steve nodded. “I’ll think about it. Thank you, sir.”
Fury swept out of the room, leaving Steve staring down at the file in his hands. He flipped it open and pulled out the first image, of twin wings on his ankles. On the back of the photo was a series of small notes, including speculation that the wings may or may not have been in reference to Mercury/Hermes, the messenger god who wore winged sandals. There was a further note that the planet Mercury was close to the Pleiades, the subject of the tattoo at her inner elbow. Steve pulled out that photo next. The cluster of dots in fact represented a set of stars known as the Pleiades, or Seven Sisters. Although the file noted the presence of the geographic coordinates, it stated that the significance of those coordinates was redacted until Steve’s security clearance level could be finalized and also that they had personal significance that might reveal his soulmate’s identity. The next photo showed the phrase “have courage and be kind” in neat cursive, surrounded by clusters of flowers, mostly in blue, but with touches of turquoise and orange and green and the barest hint of pink. On closer inspection it became clear that there were a few butterflies flitting around and between the flowers. The style of the tattoo was light and charming and feminine in a way that surprised Steve, and the sentiment at the center of it made him smile. Steve skipped over the notes on the wrist tattoo, since he had figured out the source of that on his own, and squinted at the final photo in the pack. There was an orange fish riding an old fashioned red bicycle. According to the notes, it seemed to be a nod to a well-known saying: “a woman needs a man like a fish needs a bicycle.” The phrase had been popularized by a woman named Gloria Steinem, a leading feminist figure beginning in the 1970s, although it had originally been written by another woman, Irina Dunn. Steve pulled over the device that an agent had briefed him on earlier and opened the Google window to search for more information. He was clearly going to have a lot to catch up on before he could understand his soulmate.

Chapter End Notes

for a photoset with images of Darcy's tattoos, click here!
Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

So, this chapter takes us through the events of the first Avengers movie. When our story resumes in the next chapter, canon will basically be locked in a cupboard under the stairs for the duration.

Also the timeline for this fic is stretched out over a longer period of time than I initially expected, so there is definitely going to be more than one chapter to come...

Apparently tattoos were a totally normal part of modern society. The internet informed Steve that they had grown in popularity beginning in the 1970s, and were no longer the near-exclusive purview of men in the military. On the other hand, since soulmates automatically shared any tattoos, it seemed that normally people planned them together and often got interlocking tattoos as a testament to their bond. His soulmate had to be over 18, since that was the legal age to get tattoos in the US (assuming she was American).

From what Steve had seen on Google and something called Pinterest, his soulmate’s tattoos were actually remarkably restrained, compared to a lot of things he had found on the internet, so he should probably grateful that they were all relatively easy to hide on a day-to-day basis.

He was still undecided on whether or not to take Fury up on his offer for his soulmate’s identity, and he hadn’t written to her yet. There was no doubt in his mind that he would make contact with her eventually, but he had some personal things to take care of first. Like finding a place to live out from under SHIELD’s thumb, and learning how to navigate modern banking and technology, and figuring out enough of how male-female relationships had changed in the past 70 years to make sure he didn’t make a fool of himself or accidentally offend her. (It wasn't like he had a great track record with women in his own time, and could not even imagine how much more he could screw things up with 70 years of missing cultural context.)

He was already proud of her independence, of the humor with which she had approached being a blank—because Steve was under no illusion that the fish-on-a-bicycle was as much a personal statement as it was a political one. Steve Rogers had been raised by a single working mother and had been proud of her every day. He had no problems with the principles of feminism, at least as far as he could understand them at this point, although he hadn’t had time to follow up on some of the more recent developments—intersectional feminism and how non-binary genders played into the concept of feminism. Maybe his soulmate would be able to explain those things to him someday.

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"Director Fury’s office, how may I help you?"

"Yeah, you can put the Dread Pirate Fury on the phone for me."
“Miss Lewis, you really need to stop calling this number.”

“Look, Fury’s Girl Friday, either that man explains to me why I have a jack-booted brigade surveilling me or I go straight to the nightly news and scream about government invasions of privacy. That NDA I signed only pertained to discussions of a certain alien prince and has no bearing on ongoing surveillance.”

A pause. “Please wait one moment while I see if the Director is available.”

A click. “For fuck’s sake, Lewis, what do you want now? I sent your goddamned piece of junk iPod back.”

“I want you to explain why there is ongoing surveillance on me.”

A sigh and a click as she was put on speakerphone. “What makes you think that we have surveillance on you?”

“You seriously think I can’t tell the difference between tourist looky-loos and trained agents? You think that as a single woman living in a small town I’m not gonna notice two macho dudes who spend 85% of their time eyeballing me? They aren’t dressed to fit in, they stare too intently, and they’ve been here too long to stay under the radar.”

Another sigh, and then Coulson’s voice came over the line. “I told you this wasn’t going to work.”

“Shut up, Phil. I want those agents demoted to Level 3. And send them back to surveillance training. This is fucking embarrassing. I’ve got a fucking college student making my surveillance teams on a consistent basis. Am I supposed to assign a Strike Team to a goddamn surveillance detail?”

“Hello? I’m still waiting for an explanation here. You have no right to stalk me when I have broken no laws, national or intergalactic.”

“Miss Lewis, we have a team on you and Dr. Foster in order to assess potential threats against you. I assure you, those agents are only there to make sure that you are safe.”

“And I’m just supposed to take your word for that, Agent iPod-Thief?”

“Yes, Miss Lewis. You are simply going to have to take my word for the fact that this organization is only trying to make sure that you are safe. Should any concrete threats arise, we will notify you so that you and Dr. Foster can take additional precautions.”

“Fine. But the next time I catch one of your agents taking too much of an interest in my boobs, I will taze them.”

“Fine. And then you can report them to Phil, here.”

“Fine.”

“Now, would you please explain to me how in the hell you got this number?”

“Sorry, Director, but I’m afraid that information is classified. Toodles!”

“She just fucking hung up on me, didn’t she?”
“I told you, sir.”

“Phil, cut it out with the ‘I told you so’ bullshit and go tell Hernandez and Miller that they are getting a 25 day rip and a demotion, courtesy of Miss Lewis. Who do I have to kill to get some competent fucking agents around here?”

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Steve still hadn’t made contact with his soulmate when SHIELD called him in to deal with Loki and the Tesseract.

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Darcy got a call one afternoon from Agent Coulson with the very information she had been dreading.

“We need to move you and Dr. Foster to a more secure location.”

“When?”

“Immediately. I have a team on their way now to help pack up your equipment and take you to the airport.”

“Where are we going?”

“There’s an observatory in Tromsø, Norway that previously denied Dr. Foster’s requests for access. We have arranged for a six week research fellowship with funding for the both of you.”

“In Norway.”

“Yes.”

“Starting immediately.”

“That is correct.”

“I don’t have a passport.”

“You do now. One of my agents is delivering it to you, along with your entry visas.”

“This feels very rushed. You wanna tell me what’s going on?”

“I’m afraid that’s—“

“Classified. Got it.”

“Miss Lewis, I know this has been frustrating for you—“

“How much danger is she in?”
“Pardon?”

“Jane. How much danger is Jane in?”

“The threat is not directed specifically at you or Dr. Foster, but we are moving you to a more secure facility in anticipation of a larger and most likely imminent threat.”

That sounded very bad and very big and also like they should have way too much on their plate at SHIELD to worry about an astrophysicist and her intern. Something else was going on here, but now was not the time for Darcy to play 20 questions.

“I’ll have Jane ready to go by the time your agents get here. Thank you, Agent Coulson.”

“You’re very welcome, Miss Lewis.”

“You watch your back around that vague-yet-imminent threat. I’d hate to have to break in a new secret agent.”

“Perish the thought. Enjoy Norway, Miss Lewis.”

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When the Battle of New York came up on Darcy’s twitter feed she only barely held herself back from calling up Super Secret Agent Coulson and tearing him a new one. An alien army descending on New York City? A wormhole opening up over New York fucking City? Thor’s sudden reappearance on Midgard?

“JANE! GET IN HERE, NOW!”

The next time someone uttered the phrase “that’s classified” in her presence she was going to fucking taze them, seriously.

She turned on the breakroom TV and settled in on the couch to follow the live coverage from New York. She heard Jane walk in behind her.

“Is that Thor?”

“Yes, Jane.”

The camera feed switched angles.

“And is that the SHIELD agent from New Mexico that you blinded with your blush compact?”

“I believe so, yes. Not many of them use a bow and arrow.”

A new camera angle.

“Who’s the woman?”

“She’s wearing a SHIELD-issue catsuit. Can’t give you anything more specific than that.”
“Who’s that?”

“I don’t know. He’s dressed like Captain America, but the real one died like 70 years ago. The shield looks right, though.”

Another camera feed.

“Well that’s clearly Hulk and Iron Man.”

“Yup.”

Midtown Manhattan was suddenly full of crumbling buildings and shattered glass and upended cars and weird flying whale creatures with laser weapons.

Jane slowly sat down next to Darcy on the break room couch. “This doesn’t look good, Darce.”

Darcy grabbed Jane’s hand and laced their fingers together. “I know, Jane. I know.”

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Steve decided that shawarma was definitely going in the “plus” column for the twenty-first century.

(Alien armies were definitely going in the “negative” column.)

Thor was starting on his third serving of shawarma (chicken, this time) when he glanced over and noticed the writing on Steve’s wrist where it was just peeking out from under his uniform sleeve. “A dear friend of mine has the same words on her wrist. She said they were a present to herself on her 18th name day.”

Clint nodded and swallowed a massive bite of falafel. “You’re talking about Darcy, yeah? She has a couple of pretty awesome tattoos.”

Steve froze. It looked like he was going to have to make a decision whether he wanted to learn more about his soulmate or not. Well, no time like the present, right? “Darcy?”

“She is Jane’s intern, and was a great help to me on my first trip to your planet.”

“Dude, she knocked you out with a tazer and Foster hit you with her van. Twice.”

“Indeed, they were most competent at defending themselves. Lady Sif has already expressed a desire to meet them.”

Steve cleared his throat. “So, you both know her?”

Clint nodded. “Yeah, I was sent to keep an eye on her and Foster and Selvig after Thor’s hammer crash-landed in New Mexico.”

Natasha snorted. “Isn’t she the one who spotted you in your perch and blinded you with a cosmetic compact?”
Clint pouted. “Technically.”

Natasha continued, “And she figured out how to call Fury’s direct line so that she could demand her iPod be returned to her?”

“Yes! She’s awesome. When she isn’t directing sunlight into my eyes.”

Steve cleared his throat. “You said she has other tattoos?”

Clint proceeded to describe the twin to the tattoo on Steve’s shoulder, and Thor explained that the cluster of stars at his elbow was actually Darcy’s tribute to Jane, who was an astrophysicist.

Natasha narrowed her eyes at Steve. “Wait a minute. When would you have had time to get a tattoo? You just came back.”

Steve knew he was blushing, but was powerless to stop the flush rising on his cheeks. “Um…”

Her gaze sharpened. “You didn’t have time. That isn’t your tattoo; it’s Darcy’s. She’s your soulmate.”

“Um…”

Tony finally spoke out from the other end of the table. “Wait, wait, wait. Are you telling me that Mr. Truth, Justice, and the American Way’s soulmate is the sassy intern who tazed Point Break and has been crank-calling the director of SHIELD?”

All eyes turned to Steve. “Apparently?”

Tony flailed. “Well, where is she right now?”

Thor spoke up, “She and my Jane were sent to an observatory in Norway for safekeeping by your SHIELD.”

Chapter End Notes

((Did you know that in the shawarma footage Steve is still wearing his gloves? How are you going to eat like that, Steve? Didn’t your mother teach you to wash your hands before dinner, Steve?))

for a photoset that was made for this chapter, click here!
Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

Darcy plays phone-tag with various Avengers.

Chapter Notes

I am absolutely, positively blown away by all the positive feedback I've had on this little fic so far. I haven't had time to respond to every comment, but thank you all (times a million) for all the love!

Jane’s phone was ringing. Somewhere in this weird Norwegian space lab Jane’s phone was ringing. Not that Jane noticed, because apparently one of the instruments on the roof was actually doing something worth watching and had been for like, four hours now. So Darcy was wandering around, checking under piles of paper and power cords, only to find Jane’s phone (luckily still ringing) under a plate of mostly-eaten cookies.

“Hello, you’ve reached Jane Foster’s phone. I’m afraid she’s busy doing some very important science and can’t come to the phone right now. If you’d like to leave a message, I can take one, but I cannot guarantee that your call will be returned.”

“Darcy, it is I!”

Darcy moved the phone away from her ear to keep from being deafened. “Thor, my man, who taught you how to use a cell phone?”

“My new team mates have been most generous with their knowledge of your realm.”

“Yeah, Jane and I saw you on the TV when you were in New York with the giant whale creatures. Are you okay?”

“Yes, I am well. I had to take Loki and his weapon back to Asgard to ensure the safety of your planet, but I have returned. My new friends would like to meet you and Jane.”

“Um, first of all, what? And second of all, we’re kind of stranded in Norway right now doing space things, and until our government keepers see fit to give us a means of exodus, Jane and I are stuck here.”

“Nonsense. My friend Tony has offered to provide a jet to retrieve you and bring you to New York.”

“Tony Stark? Iron Man Tony Stark wants to send a private jet to retrieve your lady-love and her intern for a meet and greet?”

“Please, Darcy. It is important.”

Darcy sighed. “Look, Jane was promised six weeks at this place for her super-duper important
research. Dragging her away is going to take some delicate maneuvering.” Darcy lowered her voice even though no one was technically around to hear her. “I didn’t tell her that Coulson only shipped us out here for safe-keeping until the aliens were gone, and I can’t very well tell her that now.”

There was a heavy pause. “Darcy, I should tell you that Agent Coulson was mortally wounded by Loki during the attack on the helicarrier.”

Darcy shook her head. That didn’t make any sense. “No, Thor, that’s impossible. He can’t be dead.”

“Little one, I know that this information must be upsetting—”

“No, I mean that I know he isn’t dead. I checked up on everyone that I knew after the battle was over using…slightly questionable means, and Coulson was transported to SHIELD’s hospital wing. After his surgery he was taken to some kind of specialized rehab facility.”

“Are you certain, Darcy?”

“Hold on a second, I can double check…” Darcy tucked her phone between her ear and shoulder and pulled her laptop over to hack her way through the hidden backdoor into SHIELD’s system, typing in Coulson’s ID number and checking his file in case it had been updated. “Sorry, big guy, but according to my sources, Coulson is still in recovery at a facility in Pennsylvania. But his file is still active. I take it the Dread Pirate Fury is to blame for this particular obfuscation?”

Thor grumbled unhappily. “Indeed.”

Struck by a sudden solution to the Jane Problem, Darcy switched to an internet browser and checked the upcoming weather for Tromsø. “Okay, hold up, I have an idea that might help convince Jane to go on the trip. It turns out that we’ve got some clouds and storms headed our way in a couple of days which is a no-no for star watching. So I can probably convince Jane to take a break from Science! until the weather clears. But she is definitely going to want to come back here once the storms clear out.”

“That is no problem at all! I am sure that Tony’s plane can return you to Tromsø whenever Jane demands.”

“Um, dude, I know that you don’t really understand how air travel works on this planet but it is very expensive and there all kinds of logistical things that have to be taken care of, so I would really feel better about running this by Jane if you confirmed with Tony that this is all ok.”

“Of course! I will go get him.”

“What? No, Thor, you can just call me back…” Darcy trailed off as she realized from the sounds coming through the receiver that Thor no longer had the phone to his ear.

She could just barely hear an exchange between Thor and what had to be Tony Stark.

“Friend Stark, Darcy wishes to speak with you regarding the terms of her visit.”

“Woah, E.T., I don’t like being handed things. We’ve had this conversation before.”

“Thor, just put me on speakerphone!” Darcy was shouting into the phone in the hopes that someone would hear her well enough to put the phone back to their ear. “THOR! SPEAKERPHONE!”

“What is that, Darcy?”
“Thor, put me on speakerphone. Then I can talk to Tony without him holding the phone.”

It took a few moments of fumbling and grumbling, but finally Darcy could hear both voices clearly. “Did you figure it out? Am I on speakerphone?”

“IIndeed! A most ingenious solution.”

“Lewis! What can I do for you?”

“Hi there, Mr. Stark. I was just explaining to Thor that Jane has a six week research fellowship here and that although I can probably tear her away for a couple of days coming up that she’s going to want to come back and finish up—“

“Of course! I’ve got plenty of jets to fly you and your errant scientist wherever you need to go whenever you need to leave. But you have to come to New York, I’m throwing a party—really Pepper is planning it, because she thought I was going overboard—and you and Foster need to be here. Really, it will not be complete without you. I won’t take no for an answer.”

Darcy pulled the phone away from her ear and blinked down at it. “Um, okay then. I’ll talk to Jane and work my persuasive magic and then call this number? Is this Thor’s phone now or did someone loan it to him?”

“It is my personal device, Darcy. You may reach me on it at any time.”

“Alright then, I’ll be in touch. Uh, thanks Mr. Stark for the…plane. Right. Bye!”

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A few hours later, Darcy’s phone started ringing.

“Hello, you’ve reached Under-Appreciated Interns Weekly, how may I help you?”

“Darcy? It’s Clint. Barton. Agent Clint Barton, from New Mexico—“

“Yeah, of course. I remember you. Sorry about the whole mirror thing…”

“What? Oh, right. Don’t worry about that. Thor said that you have proof that Phil—that Agent Coulson is still alive?”

“Uhhhhh…”

Look, it was one thing to tell your alien friend that you knew things that were supposed to be closely-held government secrets, but it was a whole other level of self-sabotage to tell an agent who worked for that very organization that you knew things you Absolutely Should Not Know.

“Darcy, I don’t care how you got that information. I’m not asking you as an agent, I am asking you—as Phil’s friend—to tell me if he is alive.”
Darcy bit her lip and thought for a moment. “Hypothetically speaking, if I were to have that information about Agent Coulson, it would have come from his personnel file, which would hypothetically be located on SHIELD’s mainframe, and would theoretically state that he received medical care on the day of the Battle of New York and was subsequently transferred to a rehab facility in Pennsylvania that I know absolutely nothing about. But if one were looking for it, for whatever reason, I would probably suggest looking on the outskirts of Pittsburgh.”

“Darcy, are you telling me that you hacked SHIELD’s personnel files?”

Darcy huffed in frustration. “I am saying that if one were looking for that information that that is where I would suggest searching for it, not that I myself have in fact hacked into SHIELD and seen them personally. Because that would be illegal. Also, that is absolutely not, in any way, how I obtained the Director’s phone number.”

Darcy heard a woman’s voice in the background say, “Clint, she’s right. It’s right here.”

“He’s alive? I didn’t—“ a muffled smack, “Christ, Nat, cool it with the punching. You’re sure he’s alive?”

“It’s right here, Clint. I mean it’s buried under a few layers of encryption and there’s a dummy file that anyone doing a search will pull up first, but this definitely indicates that he’s alive. Injured, but alive.”

“I’m going to kill Fury.”

“Um, do you still need me here, or should I go? Because I would like to maintain plausible deniability.”

“Sorry, Darcy, it’s just…Phil’s funeral was yesterday. I had to give a eulogy and it was terrible and to find out that he isn’t actually dead…”

“Look, I’m sorry. If I’d known that Fury led you guys to believe that Phil was dead I would have told you as soon as I found out. But why would Fury want Phil to stay dead? I mean, the man has been a thorn in my side, but he doesn’t do anything without having a reason.”

The female voice popped back up. “Phil’s death gave the team a reason to work together. But just because Phil needed to die doesn’t mean that he needed to stay dead. Something else is going on.”

“Yeah, what your lady friend said.”

“Natasha Romanov. Pleasure to meet you, Darcy.”

“Natasha is my partner in all things covert and deadly.”

“That is possibly the coolest and most terrifying thing anyone has ever said to me, but my partner in all things Science! needs me to shepherd her off the roof before she passes out from low blood sugar, so I’m gonna go. But you know, call or text me if you need anything that may or may not be hypothetically related to information that I might hypothetically have regarding a certain secret agent man.”

“Thanks, Darcy. We’ll see you soon.”
Chapter Summary

Steve finds out about Darcy's impending arrival, Tony is in trouble, Natasha regrets nothing.

Chapter Notes

I'm back from my whirlwind two weeks in London, where I had a marvelous and lovely time, and should be back to posting fairly regularly from now on.

“What do you *mean* Darcy’s coming here?”

“Well, you know, I thought that Thor could really use a conjugal visit from his lady scientist, and apparently wherever Foster goes, so goes her nation—”

Steve pinned Tony to the wall with a forearm to his neck. “Do not lie to me, Stark. You did this to mess with me.”

Tony spluttered for a moment before relaxing into Steve’s hold. “Okay, I didn’t do it to mess with you, exactly. I genuinely think that this could be good for both of you. And you were just gonna keep dragging things out and coming up with excuses out of some misguided nobility or chivalry or something equally moronic, so we decided to give you a little nudge.”

“We?”

Tony paled. “Nope, you didn’t hear that. It was all me.”

Steve narrowed his eyes and thought. There was no way that Thor wasn’t involved in this, that much was clear. But Thor also would probably admit to it proudly and did not scare Tony enough to merit that kind of reaction, which meant… “Natasha put you up to this.”

“No! No she did not, at all. In fact, she knows nothing about it whatsoever.”

Steve let Tony go and sighed. “You are a terrible liar, Tony.”

***

“Romanov.”

“Rogers.”
The two were facing off in the common room. Clint glanced between them from his position on the sofa, hunched his shoulders and quickly darted out of the room.

Natasha sighed and rolled her eyes. “Tony told you.”

“Not explicitly, but it was pretty obvious.”

“Look, the two of you are going to have enough soulmate related issues that meeting face-to-face is going to be a better option than you trying to come up with a witty one-liner to write on your skin. You aren’t going to be keeping her safer by holding her at arm’s length because the second SHIELD realized that you had a soulmate they put a security detail on her. She dealt admirably well with an alien who had no knowledge of Earth culture, so I’m pretty sure she can handle your old-fashioned views with aplomb. Let her school you on modern mannerisms instead of trying to learn them from the internet.”

Steve slumped and pinched the bridge of his nose. “Objectively, I see where you are coming from.”

“But?”

“But I am terrible with women. I was terrible at talking to women in my own time who were not my soulmate. I just wanted some more time to…”

Natasha put a hand to his shoulder. “You don’t get to plan this, Steve, it isn’t a battle.” She glanced down at her watch. “And she and Dr. Foster took off over an hour ago, so there’s no turning back now.”

“Seriously?!”

“Relax, you still have nearly ten hours before they land.”

***

Stark’s private plane was the stuff of dreams. There was a fully stocked minibar, a normal-size TV, fully-functional wifi, and comfortable chair/couch things with room to stretch out.

Jane had pulled an all-nighter to finish collecting some of the data she wanted before the storms set in and was at the level of sleepiness where she acted like a grumpy toddler, so Darcy had Jane lay down across a row of seats with her head in Darcy’s lap and proceeded to hum along to the music on her iPod until Jane was quietly snoring.

Jane may or may not have also started drooling on Darcy's yoga pants, but friends don't fault friends for sleep-drooling.

So Stark’s plane was awesome, and had slightly dulled the suffering that Darcy usually associated with international flights, but when the plane finally landed at the private airport just outside of New York she was unspeakably grateful to be back on solid ground. She was very, very much not looking forward to the return 11 hour flight in the next couple of days. Maybe she could convince
Stark to work on inventing a viable teleportation device and volunteer to test the prototype. That would be awesome. Or totally terrible. One never knew with new forms of science.

She ushered Jane in off the spotlit tarmac and steered her through the reception area to where Thor and Clint were waiting. Thor swept Jane up into a hug and a kiss, and then pulled Darcy in for a bone-breaking hug.

“Friends! I have brought Mjölnir with me and can fly you back to the tower in a matter of moments.” Darcy slumped. “However, Clint suggested that you may not wish to be in the air so soon after your flight and has also brought a car.”

Darcy just held herself back from collapsing at Clint's feet in pathetic gratitude. “Speaking for myself, I have absolutely no desire to lose contact with the ground for at least a week after that marathon flight. Give me wheels and a radio, no offense to mew-mew.”

Jane volunteered to fly back with Thor (shocking, totally shocking, never saw it coming), so Clint, Darcy, and all the luggage piled into a black SUV in the quiet darkness. Clint let Darcy pick the radio station, but she was asleep fifteen minutes into the journey to Stark Tower.

***

Steve was going to punch Tony in the face. And then the stomach. And then possibly put him in a headlock while setting his favorite AC/DC shirt on fire.

His soulmate was in the Tower somewhere, asleep, having rode in with Clint from Teterboro Airport. According to Clint, she had been exhausted and fell asleep almost immediately.

Steve was supposed to meet her tomorrow.

He hung up a fresh punching bag and checked the tape on his hands one last time before squaring up and picturing Tony’s smug face in front of him.
Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

When Darcy Met Steve

(Steve put his foot in his mouth, because what did you expect?)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Darcy woke up in a strange room, in an uncomfortably firm bed, with gritty eyes and wild hair. She fumbled her glasses onto her face and blinked at the fancy-but-generic furniture and huge blacked-out windows and nodded to herself. Stark Tower. Right. She was in a guest room, far enough away from Thor and Jane to ensure that she wasn’t going to hear any sex noises.

She rolled out of bed and shoved her feet into her sneakers, because she needed to find a place where she could get a glass of water and (hopefully) coffee.

“Um, Mr. Robot Butler Dude whose name I have forgotten? You there?”

“My name is JARVIS, Miss Lewis. How may I be of assistance this morning?”

“Do I have access to a kitchen or something where I can get a glass of water and some coffee?”

“Of course, Miss Lewis. If you will follow the lighted path I have provided, it will take you to the common kitchen.”

“You are an angel and have my everlasting gratitude.”

“I am merely an AI, Miss Lewis. But you are very welcome.”

Darcy pulled on a sweater and shuffled along various hallways and into and out of an elevator, following the lighted path to the kitchen. According to her phone it was only just 5:30 am (thanks, jetlag, you cruel mistress), so she assumed she would be the only one out and about, but when she turned the final corner to the kitchen she saw a very tall, muscular blonde guy already fussing over the coffee maker.

Which would have been totally cool if the dude seemed like he knew how to work the coffee machine and could provide Darcy with her morning fix, but…

“Ok, so the water goes in the top…somehow. Somehow it opens and I pour water into it.” His hands fluttered around the top of the machine, clearly unsure how to proceed. “Somewhere.”

“My man, please step aside and allow the intern and resident addict to operate the coffee maker for maximum efficiency.”

Tall, blond, and chiseled spun around in surprise. “What?”
“You just seemed very perplexed by the coffee maker, and I am very much in need of caffeine. So if you want to just scooch on over there and let me at that thing…” She edged the guy back into the corner of the kitchen and pushed up the overlong sleeves of her sweater so that she could fill the machine with grounds and water. She turned it on and then turned back to Dude only to find him staring down at her hands (which was totally preferable to him staring at her boobs, but also weird).

“It’s you.”

Darcy blinked and brushed her (super tangled, yikes) hair out of her face. “I am me, yes. Darcy Lewis, at your service.”

Steve answered on auto-pilot. “Steve Rogers. Nice to meet you, ma’am.”

He winced, clearly regretting the “ma’am” already, so she let it slide because…”Wait, Steve Rogers as in Captain America as in ‘war hero found in ice after 70 years still miraculously living and being defrosted by SHIELD’? That Steve Rogers?”

“You know that? Wait, how do you already know that? That information hasn’t been released to the public yet.”

“I have approximate knowledge of many things that SHIELD knows. But they do not know that I know. You get me?”

He shook his head. “No.”

She sighed. “I am very good with computers. Sometimes I use my skills to acquire knowledge in a manner that some people might consider legally questionable.” He still looked confused, so Darcy changed tack. “Hasn’t anyone taught you to use the coffee maker yet?”

He shuffled and ducked his head, and it was weirdly adorable on a guy of his size. “They taught me how to use the one in the break room at SHIELD, but I haven’t really mastered this one yet.”

Darcy nodded her understanding and they stood for an awkward moment listening to the coffee maker gurgle and hiss before he suddenly blurted out, “You’re my soulmate.”

Darcy was struck speechless. Or nearly speechless. “What the what?”

Steve, who was definitely blushing now, held out his left arm for inspection. And really, it was kind of a surreal moment to see her own ink mirrored on someone else, so she could not be entirely blamed for going completely mute and just staring, unblinking, at his arm.

But clearly the poor guy was nervous as hell, because he started rambling to fill the silence. “I just found out—obviously—when I woke up. And I felt like I needed to take a little time to figure out how things are now, before I contacted you, because I was always terrible at talking to women and I really hoped that I would do better for you. Which I did not, clearly, because this was not at all how I wanted to tell you.” He groaned and finally pulled his arm back. “Please say something.”

Darcy started laughing, nearly hysteric. “I cannot believe that Captain America has a tattoo of a fish riding a bicycle because of me. I accidentally defiled a national icon.”

“No!” Steve hesitantly reached out to put a hand on her shoulder. “It was nice, actually, knowing that there was someone out there when I woke up and pretty much everyone else was gone. And it made me smile. Makes me smile.”

“That is quite possibly the sweetest thing anyone has ever said to me. But it is also very sad, and I
feel like you need a hug. Can I give you a hug?” Steve nodded, so Darcy stepped forward and wrapped her arms around his stomach and squeezed. Her face was pretty much pressed between his pecs, which… “Dude, you are tall. Objectively I knew that before this moment but it is just really hitting me right now.” She pulled back and poked at his abs. “You are also very fit. Like, I know the serum helped with all that, because you are looking at a girl who aced US History in both high school and college, but damn.”

Steve blushed, both embarrassed and pleased. "Well, it just so happens that there is a pretty big gap in my knowledge of US history. Natasha suggested that you might be amenable to helping fix that."

Darcy started to nod before she suddenly froze and narrowed her eyes, focusing on a spot just to the left of Steve's shoulder. "Wait a minute. You knew I was your soulmate already. And judging from what you just said, so did Natasha?” Steve nodded. "Except the people who insisted that I just had to come to New York were Thor and Tony Stark." Steve grimaced. "The whole team knew didn't they? Before I got on that plane."

"They knew that you were my soulmate, yes. We all figured it out just after the Battle of New York. But I didn't know that they were bringing you here until after your flight took off. They all kind of conspired against us. For us? They technically had good intentions.”

Darcy bit her lip, considering. "How do you feel about getting even? Like how deep does the moral righteousness go, here, Captain, because I am known to be petty and childish on occasion and I think you should know that upfront. Honesty being the best policy and all."

Steve smirked and tightened his grip on her waist. "I'm not sure if you've heard, but I'm an excellent tactician. So what did you have in mind?"

Chapter End Notes

For those of you who might be interested, in addition to my primary blog (pepperpottsplots), I now have a side blog for all things marvel and fic related at pepperpottsblogs.tumblr.com.
Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

Pranks are carried out; Steve and Darcy have breakfast.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Darcy’s original plan had to be scrapped because Steve was a terrible liar.
Like, the worst.

“Don’t get me wrong, I’m mostly thrilled that you are never going to be able to lie to me convincingly, but since we can’t pretend to hate one another, I’m gonna need supplies for pranks.”

“Was I really that bad?”

They had been practicing insulting one another from opposite ends of Steve’s couch for a mere 5 minutes.

“Steve, your resting face is basically the equivalent of the heart-eyes emoji, and every time you try to be mean to me, you look like you’re about to puke.”

“What is a heart-eyes emo—thing?”

Darcy pulled out her phone and typed a series of them into a blank text message to show Steve. “It’s that.”

Steve, looking rather pleased with himself, smiled down at her screen. “Those are adorable.”

Darcy laughed and plucked her phone back out of his hand. “And so are you. But that’s not really helping with Plan A, so we need to switch to Plan B.”

Steve was staring at Darcy as if she had grown a second head. “Did you just…lift Mjölnir?”

She hadn’t explained what favorite possession of Thor’s she was going to retrieve from Jane and Thor’s room, and had left Steve in the hallway for the minute she had been inside—said it wouldn’t do for anyone to see them together so early in their plotting in case the lovebirds weren’t still asleep—but this was the last thing he had expected.

Darcy, who was standing in the hall and waiting for the elevator with Thor’s hammer dangling from her wrist, utterly nonchalant, just blinked at him. “Yeah? You just have to ask nicely.”

Steve’s voice was faint with shock as he followed her into the elevator. “You just have to ask
nicely…of course. Why didn’t I think of that?”

Darcy eyed the door to Natasha’s apartment skeptically. “You’re sure it’s safe to go in there right now?”

Steve looked up at the ceiling and called, “JARVIS?”

“Agents Romanov and Barton are both presently in the gym, sparring.”

“See? We’re good to go.”

“Alright, but I’m waiting out here. She scares me and I want plausible deniability when she finds out about this.”

Steve stared at Mjölnir where it was now nestled in Clint’s fridge, directly on top of Natasha’s favorite pair of shoes. “You really think this is the best spot? We could put everything on one of the non-residential floors where none of them go.”

Darcy shrugged. “Considering there is exactly zero food in this fridge, I figure it’s gonna take them awhile to find it anyway. Besides, who looks for a giant hammer or a pair of shoes in a refrigerator? And why would they look for their stuff in Clint’s room?”

Steve shrugged and straightened up. “Sounds good to me. Want to move on to part two?”

“Trust me, you’re gonna want to wear gloves for this.”

Steve stared down at the tub of vaseline and glitter in front of him. “Why? It’s not actually toxic right?”

“No. Glitter,” Darcy explained, “is a bear to get off. Sticks to everything. Gets everywhere. Which is why it is perfect for pranks. But when you bind it with Vaseline it is a thousand times worse.”

Steve grinned as her own latex-covered hand smeared a swath of pink and purple glitter in a thick layer over Tony’s new suit. “You know, I think that there are few more things around this tower that could use a coating of glitter.”

Darcy stared, open-mouthed, at all the cars in Tony Stark’s garage. “I could cry, they’re so pretty.”

Steve glanced over at her. “You got a thing for cars, doll?”
She ran her hand along the hood of Tony’s Maserati, not quite touching. “I’ve got a thing for tech—
cars, planes, bikes, computers, even Jane’s machines. Although these are much, much prettier.”

Steve chuckled at her. “Something tells me we aren’t going to be putting glitter on the cars as I had
planned.”

Darcy bit her lip and glanced around, eyes zeroing in on a blindingly yellow Ferrari. “That one is fair
game, because the paint color is atrocious and can only be improved by glitter. But,” she sighed
reverently at the silver McLaren to her left, “the rest are simply too beautiful to be dragged into our
vengeance.”

Steve—indulgent, charmed—nodded his assent.

Once all the parts of their plan were in place, Steve and Darcy left the Tower for the day, although
JARVIS had been set up to alert them when each of their pranks was discovered and resolved.

Since it was still relatively early in the morning, and both of them needed breakfast, they swung into
a diner down the street from the Tower. Steve ordered pretty much all of the traditional breakfast
foods (pancakes, eggs, bacon, sausage, hash browns, fruit salad), causing Darcy to raise a brow at
the sheer amount of food he could pack away. Darcy ordered the lox platter, with an everything
bagel, but only because she knew there was a pack of gum in her bag. (Because this was her
soulmate, and he was gorgeous, and at some point today there was going to be a kiss if she had
anything to say about it, but she would rather not have fishy-red-onion-garlic breath when that
happened.)

“So you’ve been awake for what, a little over three weeks?”

Steve nodded. “More or less. How do you know all of this, again?”

Darcy took a sip of coffee, and explained, “After the Battle of New York, I checked up on the
people that I knew in SHIELD by hacking their files. I saw that immediately after he left Puente
Antiguo, Agent Coulson was sent to oversee your defrosting. But then I got distracted tracking down
what happened to him after the Battle, so I didn’t actually go any deeper into your file.”

“So you had no idea you had a soulmate until this morning.”

“I was absolutely convinced that I did not have a soulmate until you told me otherwise. It’s why I
started getting my tattoos. At the time, anything over an 18 year age difference just seemed so
unlikely and I figured it was too late...” She suddenly started giggling. “Wait a minute, I just realized
that your soulmate is like seventy years younger than you.” She kept her voice light and teasing as
she poked at his arm and called him a cradle robber.

Steve groaned, although he was clearly amused by her antics. “I am actually only 26 years old. I
didn’t age while I was frozen.”

Darcy shook her head, grinning mischievously. “That is what we will tell other people, but if you
think that I am not going to tease you for being a 90 year old man every time you tell me my music is
weird or too loud then you have got another thing coming.”

Their waiter swung by their booth, covering the tabletop with plates—the majority of which were
obviously Steve’s—refilled their coffee, and then left.
Steve was squinting at Darcy’s plate in confusion. “Are you eating raw fish for breakfast?”

Darcy threw her head back laughing. “Don’t worry, grandpa, it’s perfectly safe to eat and actually a very common breakfast. Especially in New York.”

Steve watched, occasionally taking a bite of his own food, as she spread cream cheese over her bagel and then carefully layered on lox and red onions and capers.

Darcy, who could never resist feeding people and was admittedly curious to see Steve’s reaction, cut out a wedge of her bagel-lox creation and slid it onto one of Steve’s plates. “Just try it, I promise it’s good.”

He eyed her suspiciously. “We just spent the last several hours pranking people.”

“Steve, I will do many things for the sake of a prank, but messing with my own breakfast is not one of them. Now eat.”

***

After a full day of searching for their stolen belongings, Thor and Nat were finally standing together in front of Clint’s fridge.

Only Natasha’s slightly raised right eyebrow betrayed her surprise as she asked, “You didn’t put your hammer in here and just forget, I take it?”

“No.”

“Then who moved it? I thought no one but you can lift it.” As a test, Natasha reached in and tried to pull Mjölnir off of her shoes, to no avail.

Thor suddenly chuckled and muttered, “There is only one person I can think of who could accomplish such a thing.”

Natasha rolled her eyes. “Yeah, yeah, Cap would be pure enough of heart—”

Thor cut her off, saying, “While it is possible that Steven could lift the hammer if he tried, my guess would be Darcy.”

Natasha straightened and stared at Thor. “Darcy Lewis. Who hacked SHIELD, and prank called Nick Fury, and tazed you, is worthy enough to wield Mjölnir.”

Thor shrugged and pulled the hammer out of the fridge before passing Natasha her shoes. “The hammer chooses for itself. I cannot explain how it decides upon the worthiness of an individual.”

Chapter End Notes

I am honestly kind of stunned by the response I got to the last chapter (you are all wonderful and I love you) but this fic is nonetheless winding its way to a close.
There will be one more chapter after this, which will be an epilogue set a few months after the events of this chapter and will center on Darcy and Steve getting their first joint tattoo. Should be up in the next couple of days, so stay tuned!
Three days after Darcy and Steve’s prank extravaganza, the Avengers were called out to eradicate a bunch of giant mechanical rats emerging from manholes in the Lower West Side. Despite his best attempts to clean his suit, Iron Man was still noticeably sparkly in all the footage being broadcast, much to Darcy’s delight.

She printed out the series of memes in which sparkly Iron Man was shown fighting alongside the PowerPuff Girls, a series of My Little Ponies, and (her personal favorite) the one where it looked like he was leading a ballet class for toddlers in tutus, and stuck them to the communal fridge.

“Seriously, Lewis, how do I get it off?” Tony had glitter smeared on his forearms and face, a glitter coated rag in one hand, and an utterly defeated expression on his face.

She glanced up from her laptop and popped her gum to convey her apathy for Tony’s plight. “Hmmmmmm?”

“I have been trying to wipe that glitter gunk off of my suit for days. If I’m lucky it turns into a thinner layer of glitter goop. But mostly I feel like I’m just moving the glitter around.”

Darcy shrugged. “I personally think the glitter is an aesthetic improvement on your wearable tank.”

Tony sighed loudly and plopped down on the floor directly in front of her. “If I promise never to interfere in your intergenerational romance with Capsicle ever again, will you tell me how to clean off my suit?”

Darcy looked back up from her laptop and narrowed her eyes at Tony. “Is that an actual promise?”

“I promise. No more meddling.”

“And you stop calling him Capsicle.”
Tony pouted, but dutifully parroted back to her, “And I will stop calling him Capsicle. To his face.”

Darcy nodded, satisfied, and waved Tony off. “Use dishwashing soap to break down the vaseline. Should come off after a good scrubbing.”

Tony’s jaw dropped, and his voice was strangled when he finally responded, “Dishwashing soap?! That’s it?”

Darcy shrugged, unrepentant. “Not everything is rocket science, Stark.”

***

Darcy and Jane finished up the research fellowship at Tromsø, because even if it was organized underhandedly by SHIELD, Jane had no intention of giving up the opportunity to gather the data she needed and to take advantage of their equipment. But once their six weeks were up, Darcy and Jane schlepped back to Puente Antiquo to pack up so that they could relocate to New York, where Jane had been promised a state-of-the-art lab all to herself, Darcy had been promised an actual salary, and both of their soulmates were waiting for them.

***

Two months into their relationship—not long after Darcy had moved in with him—Steve was tracing the lines of the flowers on her shoulder blade. It was still the early hours of the morning, so Darcy was half-asleep, her hair a wild mass on the pillow in front of him. As he ran the tip of his index finger along the cursive “courage” at the center of her tattoo, he finally asked her if she had planned to get any more of them.

“Sure,” she murmured. “Didn’t have any reason to stop, then.”

“But what about now? Do you want any more?”

She rolled over to face him, nose scrunching up as she yawned. “Sure, but only if you wanted to. We’d do it together now. Although—“ she broke off on another yawn and wiggled further under the comforter before continuing, “I don’t know if I trust you to sit well, old man. No flinching allowed once you’re in the chair.”

Steve huffed an amused breath through his nose. “I’m sure I’ll manage just fine when the time comes.”

It took another four months for Darcy and Steve to finally get their first joint tattoo as soulmates.

As soon as Darcy discovered Steve’s talent for drawing, she insisted that he be the one to design it. “I’ve had my chances to choose what I put on my skin. You haven’t.”
It was a common enough refrain on her part—Darcy still felt guilty that Steve hadn’t had any say in the permanent marks she had put on their shared skin. Steve had explained numerous times that he didn’t mind, that it was a comfort to carry those little pieces of Darcy with him wherever he went, especially when he was out on a mission, but he could tell she wasn’t wholly convinced.

So every once in a while, while they were sat on the couch together watching whatever it was Darcy felt Steve needed to see in his ongoing cultural education, he would sketch out a plan for their tattoo directly on her upper arm with a felt-tip pen. When he was finished, Darcy would study the twin on his arm and point out her favorite parts. She taught him to make sure he left room for skin breaks, and not to pack things so tightly that they blurred together from a distance, and forbade him to extend his design onto the back of the elbow. The felt-tip pen had left her giggling helplessly next to him on the couch, but a tattoo needle working that close to bone would be blindingly painful. So Steve slowly put together a design for a half-sleeve that they were both happy with, and then Darcy found a reputable shop in the city with an artist that she liked and that she felt would replicate Steve’s style well and made the appointment.

“So are we both sitting for this?”

Steve glanced up from his slice of pizza, surprised at the question. “Of course we are. Unless you don’t want to, I can sit for the whole thing if you want, but if you’re trying to spare me—”

Darcy laughed and waved him off. “Okay, down boy. And of course I’m sitting. I’m going first so you can get an idea of what it’s like before your turn. I’m a champ at riding that endorphin rush by now.”

Mollified, Steve went back to eating his pizza.

“But you realize this is gonna take more than one visit right?” Steve furrowed his brow in confusion. “Something of this size and with this much detail will probably take like ten hours worth of work. Just because we get to split our time sitting, doesn’t mean the artist gets a break.”

Steve nodded and wiped a stray piece of cheese off of his chin. “Got it. You gonna hold my hand when it’s my turn?”

Darcy shot him a sly grin and took a slow sip of her wine. “Tell you what, not only will I hold your hand, but if you sit like a rock I’ll even treat you to a kiss afterwards.”

“And if I don’t sit like a rock?”

“Then I’m taking your spot in the chair and you can give me a kiss when it’s over.”

“Sounds like a win-win to me.”

Darcy shrugged and grabbed another piece of pizza from the box in between them on the table. “What can I say? I get what I want.”

End Notes
photoset with reference images for the tattoos:
http://pepperpottsblogs.tumblr.com/post/144980005025/pepperpottsplotsthis-love-left-a-permanent

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!