I Never Could Get the Hang of Thursdays

by Catolyn

Summary

Much like Arthur Dent, Darcy Lewis never could quite get the hang of Thursdays.

On the upside, no one has destroyed the planet to make way for a hyperspace bypass. Yet. Anything could happen.

On the downside she may have just attacked Tony Stark with bowl of popcorn.

This may or may not be the worst thing to happen to her on a Thursday.

Notes

These will be several short chapters worth of story bits of funny/ awkward/ horrible things that happen to Darcy on Thursdays. The first one takes place about three months after That Which Burns Twice as Bright, Burns Half as Long. All chapters from there will take place on subsequent Thursdays.

Probably 3-5 chapters when all is said and done.

Rating will be for some cussing.

I own none of these characters and am doing this solely for my own twisted amusement.
Popcorn? Why did it have to be popcorn?

Darcy went sailing through the air, barely managing to turn her abrupt flight into a controlled tumble before sprawling out on her back on the padded mat in the gym.

Natasha sauntered up to her and asked, “What did you do wrong?”

She hauled herself up to sit, “Let myself take self defense lessons from you?”

The corner of Natasha’s mouth twitched. “Besides that.”

“Ugh, I did what you keep telling me not to do; I telegraphed my move and came in too high with my punch. You grabbed me and I got to have a flying lesson.” Darcy stood up and stretched her shoulder. She knew the spy pulled her punches, but it still hurt when she got tossed around like a sack of potatoes.

“You’re learning. Eventually it should be much more of a challenge for me to throw you.”

“Notice how you say it’ll be more of a challenge, not that you won’t be able to.” quipped Darcy.

Natasha shrugged, “There are only a select few I’ve sparred with who can really give me a run for my money. Most of them have either been genetically modified or trained to fight since early childhood. Honestly, you’re doing quite well.”

“The only reason I’m not calling complete bullshit is the fact I don’t think you’d ever say that unless you meant it. You’ll pull Tony’s chain just to weird him out, but you’d never tell someone they were doing good on the mat if you didn’t mean it.”

Darcy was rewarded with one of Natasha’s true smiles. “So does that mean you’re going to stop telegraphing that punch?”

“I’m sure as hell going to keep trying. Your flying lessons sting.”

“Good. Now go finish the rest of your workout. And remember we’re continuing situational awareness training.”

Darcy sighed, situational awareness training; or Clint and Natasha trying to ambush her all over the tower. She was sure they’d shaved years off her life by just appearing in the most unlikely places. Once she’d figured out they were using the vents to move unseen though she’d cut down the instances of her being caught unawares significantly. This week though they were going to start ambushing and attacking her. She was supposed to either evade her ambushers and ‘escape’ by getting out of whatever room she was in, or defend herself well enough that Clint or Natasha would declare she’d incapacitated a normal attacker.

Steve had been irate when she’d told him about her little ‘chat’ with Director Fury. Especially when she told him about the pictures. He’d vanished that evening and returned with an envelope of photographs which he’d handed to her. “I spoke with the director. He’s assured me these are the only hard-copies of these pictures. I refused to leave his office until he deleted the electronic copies.” He’d given her a tight, angry smile. “And since I’m not feeling particularly like trusting him right now I asked Jarvis to confirm that the electronic copies were removed from the SHIELD files.”

Darcy had gone through the photos and shredded all but one. The remaining picture, the one of them kissing, she’d bought a frame for and stuck on the bookcase in her apartment. She’d been surprised
to receive an internal email from Jarvis with electronic copies of the pictures attached. The AI’s note had simply read “I believe these belong to you.”

However, Steve had been in complete agreement with Fury about Darcy receiving self defense training. Not that Darcy disagreed, but when she turned up with her first set of real bruises two weeks into training Steve had tried to tell her it wasn’t safe for her to be involved with him. She’d told him to stick his nobility where the sun didn’t shine. That it wasn’t his responsibility to decide what risks she should or shouldn’t take.

Their first fight had also been the first night they had sex. Right after she called him ‘an antiquated overbearing idiot’ and he shouted that he didn’t think he could deal with losing anyone else he cared about, she’d fisted her hands in his shirt and kissed him for all she was worth and told him the only way he was going to lose her was if he didn’t let her make her own decisions. One kiss had led to another, which had led to their shirts ending up on the floor, and eventually to Steve carrying her, with her legs wrapped around his waist, to his bedroom.

Lost in memory Darcy moved through her workout routine. She was thoroughly distracted when Clint suddenly appeared at her elbow and made a grab for her. Startled she dodged the other way and flung the dumbbell in her hand at his head before running hell bent for the door; the door that was all the way on the other side of the room. She nearly made the door when his hand came down around her forearm, jerking her toward him. Making a fist with her other hand she let the momentum of his pull turn her around to face him, landing a solid punch on his solar plexus. His grip loosened and she yanked free. Slightly off balance she took a quick steadying step back before resuming her headlong flight for the door. Darcy pulled the door open and took two running steps - and ran straight into the heavily muscled mass of Thor. She rebounded off his chest and fell straight back on her ass. “Oh, ow. Who put a wall there?”

The expression on Thor’s face was comical. “Lady Darcy! Are you well? Why are you running from Clint?” He reached down to help her up, and scowled at the archer.

Darcy glanced back over her shoulder to see Clint rubbing his chest and giving her a thumbs up. Apparently despite being distracted with sexy thoughts about Steve she’d still managed to successfully evade capture. Though she’d let him sneak up on her, she was willing to call it a wash. “Clint is helping me practice escaping. He’s supposed to sneak up on me and I’m supposed to get away.”

“And you did a fine job of it too.” said Clint from behind her. “That was a good use of that hand weight, you’re finally starting to remember that anything can be a weapon. Though you let me sneak up on you. You really need to work on that.”

“Why do you need practice escaping?” was Thor’s concerned question.

Darcy patted him on the arm. “It’s just a safety thing in case someone decides they want to try to hurt Steve or the team by kidnapping me. This way if anyone does, I can fight to protect myself or escape. Natasha is teaching me to pick locks.” she finished brightly.

Thor looked troubled. “I do not like this.”

“Yeah, well, it beats the hell out of being a damsel in distress.” was her casual reply.

Natasha sauntered out of the gym. “Good work, you barely telegraphed that punch. But keep better mind of your foot work, you got a bit crossed up and that could have cost you.”

Darcy nodded, hugged Thor, and went back in the gym to finish her sets. She kept a better look out
for Clint or Natasha, and when she saw the spy trying to sidle up close she’d brandished the weight in her hand to let the redhead know she’d been spotted and wouldn’t be getting the drop on her. Natasha had smirked and slunk off to plan her next ambush.

Her days had acquired a new rhythm since she’d begun her training. Morning sparring and physical fitness with Natasha (‘I don’t care if you don’t like running, if you need to escape, you need to be able to run and then keep running.’). Late mornings and afternoons in the lab with Jane (‘Darcy, where are those readouts?’). Early evenings on the firing range with Clint as he taught her how to handle a pistol (‘Breath in, breathe out, and squeeze.’). Dinners in the common kitchen with whoever was in residence at the tower (‘Bruce made curry; I hope there’s enough milk in the fridge.’). She spent her nights with Steve, either in his apartment or hers.

By three o’clock she’d been ambushed eight times. Five times she’d seen it coming and was able to preemptively escape. Three times they’d gotten the drop on her. She’d managed to fight her way free once, but the other two times she’d been taken ‘hostage’. Darcy was starting to feel a little antsy and on edge from being snuck up on all the time. The second time she’d thrown a stapler at Jane because she’d seen movement out of the corner of her eye. Jane had exiled her from the lab with a pile of data entry and instructions to come back after she’d calmed down.

Which was why she was in the common living room with her laptop working on a spreadsheet and eating popcorn. She thought she heard the sound of someone trying to sneak up behind her. She grabbed the bowl of popcorn and threw it toward the noise as she slid her laptop onto the couch and started to bolt. A half second later she realized that the offending Avenger hadn’t been Clint or Natasha, and Tony was now standing in a small sea of popcorn looking offended.


Darcy opened her mouth to try to explain why she’d just attacked him with popcorn when Steve walked in, chatting with Bruce. They stopped and stared at the bizarre scene.

“I’m waiting.” snarled Tony.

Suddenly the absurdity of having attacked Tony with popcorn struck her and she began giggling. “Oh god, I’m sorry. So sorry.”

Tony’s anger faded away to vague disgruntlement as he looked at Darcy like she might need mental help.

Bruce looked from Tony, to Darcy, and back again as though trying to divine the exact cause of the mess. Finally he pushed his glasses up his nose before he shoved his hands in his pockets and drawled, “I’m not sure I want to know.”

Steve looked at Darcy, concerned. “Darcy? Is everything okay?”

Finally getting her giggles under control she said, “Yes. I attacked Tony with popcorn because I thought he was sneaking up on me and Natasha and Clint have been drilling me on awareness and evasion.” she snickered. “Jane tossed me out of the lab because I kept throwing things at her too.”

Tony looked down at the popcorn and up again at Darcy, “Well I don’t know if that would have stopped me, popcorn isn’t what I’d have chosen as a weapon. But you’re cleaning up this mess.”

“I swear I wasn’t even thinking I just tossed the nearest thing and made for the door.”

“Good reactions, not the best choice of weapon. Next time throw the laptop; its heavier.” was Natasha’s dry voice as she got off the elevator. “Though I suppose the element of unexpected might
have bought you enough time to escape or hit your panic button.”

Darcy sighed and went to the kitchen for the broom and dustpan to deal with the popcorn explosion. Muttering under her breath she began to sweep.

“What was that?” asked Tony as he slumped onto the couch where she’d been sitting.

“This must be Thursday. I never could get the hang of Thursdays.” and began giggling again.

Bruce and Tony blinked at her before laughing uproariously. Steve and Natasha looked at the scientists and Darcy in complete confusion. Steve shrugged as if to say ‘Welcome to the asylum’ and sat down.
“It’s time for something a little different.” said Clint with a wicked gleam in his eyes.

“Different sounds like code for ‘time to find a new way to traumatize Darcy.’” she replied, eyeing him warily.

Trying to look hurt and failing he tossed a pair of goggles at her. “Hey, don’t diss my teaching methods. My teaching methods have you up to snuff in nearly record time to be good enough to take the agent range test.”

She caught the goggles and lobbed them back at him. “And yet, I still don’t want to be an agent.”

He threw the goggles at her again, beginning an impromptu game of hot potato, “Why is that anyway? You would totally kick ass.”

“Because I think I’m going to apply to grad school in the fall.” and she pitched the goggles back.

Clint snatched them out of the air without really looking, “Huh? Really?” his cocked eyebrow suggesting surprise and a perhaps a little skepticism.

“What you thought I’d send all my days as Jane’s lab flunky?”

He shrugged, “You guys are tight, I just have trouble seeing you leaving.”

“And that’s the part I haven’t figured out yet. Meh. So what are you going to torture me with today?” she said, clearly trying to change the topic.

“You’re good at hitting the stationary paper targets. And you’ve done well with the moving mechanical targets. Now you need to learn to shoot at a moving person.”

“This sounds like an exceptionally bad idea.” she panned.

“And that is what paintball is for Darce.” and with a flourish he pulled out a paintball pistol.

She arched one eyebrow, Spock like, over the tops of her glasses. “Oookay...”

“Field trip time! We’re going to go to HQ and use the paintball range.” he replied, practically
bouncing on the balls of his feet.

“SHIELD has a paintball range? Why am I both not surprised and baffled by this all at the same time?” her expression was set somewhere between ‘what the fuck?’ and ‘why me?’.

“Eh, it’s a good way to train baby agents. Plus it’s fun.”

“Have I ever said you have a decidedly warped idea of ‘fun’?”

“Only every other day.” he replied smirking. “Go change into something you don’t mind ruining. You’ll have gear to put on over your clothes, but eventually the paint just gets everywhere. Meet me in the garage in twenty.”

As she turned to go he said. “And put in your contacts. The goggles work better if you aren’t wearing glasses already.”

She flipped him the bird and jogged out of the range to go change.

He was waiting for her with Natasha in the garage, leaning against one of the ubiquitous standard issue giant black SUV’s that SHIELD seemed to favor. “Hop in, ‘Tasha is driving.”

“Oh thank god for small favors,” she sniped. She’d ridden in a car driven by Clint exactly once. Weeks later she was still shocked her hair hadn’t turned entirely white from the experience. She had no interest in reliving the experience.

Natasha smirked. “See, no one wants you to drive Barton.”

“It’s called ‘self-preservation’ I have it. It’s why I won’t sign on with your creepy government agency.” snarked Darcy.

Clint continued to grouse as they got in the truck. On the way to headquarters he turned to speak to Darcy in the back seat. “Since this is your first paintball exercise it’s just going to be the three of us. Once you’ve gotten the hang of it I’m going to bring you in for some of the junior agent training.”

“Um, why? I think I’ve made it pretty clear I’m not joining SHIELD.”

“Because we do hostage situations and it would be good to have you play ‘hostage’ a few times and practice escaping from people other than ‘Tash and me. Also, it’s fun. We have a weekly game of capture the flag.”

Darcy nodded, considering his logic. “So, I’ve got to ask, because you guys have taken training me super seriously. How likely do you think it is that someone’s going to try to snatch me off the street to make the Avengers do something?”

Natasha nodded to Clint who took a paper out of his bag and handed it to her. “We think it may have gotten a lot higher in the past few days.”

It was print out of the TMZ webpage. And there was a picture of her and Steve in Central Park from the week before. The headline read ‘Captain America’s Girlfriend: Is America’s Favorite Son off the Market?’.

She remembered that afternoon; he’d wanted to go to the park to draw and she’d brought a book to read so she could keep him company. What she hadn’t anticipated was that her book was fairly awful, even for her usual standards of trashy romance novel. So she’d sat with Steve and made up absurd stories about the people who walked past them. After a while even that had gotten boring and
she’d snatched his pencil out of his hand and run away with it, laughing like a loon. He’d jumped up and chased her. The combination of his longer legs and that she wasn’t trying very hard to get away meant he caught her easily and had tossed her over his shoulder to carry her back to their bench. In the first picture she was over his shoulder and it was clear they were both laughing. There was a second picture from when he’d put her down and she’d claimed a kiss in exchange for his pencil. As far as pictures went they weren’t damning or racy, but they did have an easy intimacy to them and it was blindly obvious that he cared for her.

“Well the headline is awful, but the pictures are fairly good. I guess it’s only a matter of time before someone comes forward and gives them my name to go with the pictures isn’t it?” she asked.

“Yup.” replied Clint. “Honestly I’m pretty shocked that it’s taken them so long to catch on. You’ve been dating for what, four months now?”

She considered his question for a moment before answering, “About that long, yeah. I think it’s helped that I’ve been making an effort to lay low and the media doesn’t always spot him when goes out as Steve Rogers. He’s remarkably good at being unobtrusive.”

Natasha nodded from her place in the drivers seat, “That was a good move on your part. Means that you’ve had time to gain some skills to protect yourself.”

“Well I can’t entirely take credit for the media being unobservant, but I’ll take what I can get.”

They arrived at SHIELD headquarters and with Natasha’s help threaded the intricacies of obtaining a visitor badge for Darcy. Mostly it seemed to involve Natasha glaring at a junior agent who just said “Right away Miss, I mean Agent Romanoff.” Clint rolled his eyes and they trooped off down the labyrinthine halls to the paintball range.

Once they were properly geared up Clint showed her how to operate the paintball gun and explained the exercise. “This is going to be pretty straightforward. You hide here,” he indicated one of the pieces of ‘cover’ designed to simulate a low wall, “and ‘Tasha and I will be your ‘targets’. You need to score at least one hit on each of us.”

Darcy nodded, figuring that managing a single hit on either spy would be nigh impossible. “So that sounds roughly impossible; what’s the catch?”

Natasha smirked, “You learn quickly. The catch is we’ll be firing back.”

Darcy sighed, “So what this really is, is ‘take Darcy down a peg’ day?”

The redhead patted her on the shoulder, “Think of it like this, we wouldn’t even be doing this if we didn’t think there was some chance of you succeeding. Besides, this is much less lethal than the version of this game I learned.”

“As a votes of confidence go; you really need to work on your delivery.”

Clint tugged his goggles in place and grinned. “You have sixty seconds and then it’s game on.”

Darcy pulled her goggles on and tucked herself against the wall, checking her paintball pistol and wondered, Dating Captain America and playing paintball with spies; how is this even my life?

By the time she was done playing tag with the two spies Darcy was splattered in purple and red paint. They’d each scored hits on her arms and legs, though she’d done a good job of keeping her head and core protected and behind the ‘wall’. Somehow she’d miraculously scored a hit on Natasha with her dark blue paint and two hits on Clint, one a solid mid-body shot that would have put him
She'd pulled her goggles and the stocking covering her hair off and stowed her weapon in the case Clint provided. Darcy sighed and ran a gloved hand through her sweat soaked hair thinking she couldn’t wait to take a shower; a gloved hand that she suddenly realized was covered in paint. Plaintively she asked, “This washes out, right?”

Clint and Natasha looked up from stowing their own weapons and blinked at the streaks of paint showing up vividly in Darcy’s long, dark hair.

Clint snickered and Natasha helpfully swiped at the paint on her shoulder and smeared it in his hair. He yelped and hopped back from his partner. Grinning evilly Darcy advanced on Clint, her hands covered in paint.

Ten minutes later Agent Sitwell lead a group of probationary agents on to the range for a game of capture the flag and found the pair of spies and their erstwhile civilian trainee on the floor of the paintball range, howling in laughter, and covered in three different shades of paint.

He pinched the bridge of his nose, feeling a headache of staggering proportions descending on him. “Barton! Romanoff! Your range time is up! I have a class to teach, so kindly get the hell gone.”

Still giggling the trio gathered their things and left. As they exited the room the curvy little brunette looked at him and sagely said, “It’s Thursday. Thursday’s are problematic. But at least I didn’t attack Tony with popcorn again.”

He could hear Barton cackling down the hall.

Sitwell turned to his group of probies and sighed, “Appearances can be deceiving, at least two of those people could kill you in the middle of Grand Central Station without anyone else noticing. One of them tased Thor. All of them have impulse control issues. I suggest you forget you ever saw that.”

Internally he agreed with the Lewis girl. Thursday’s were problematic. He was also positive he didn’t want to know about the popcorn.
A scientist and her assistant walk in to a sushi bar...

Chapter Summary

Jane and Darcy try to go out for dinner for some little friendly bonding time.

What can possibly go wrong?

Chapter Notes

This turned out a lot differently that I'd originally intended. Like I'm still scratching my head over this. Um, enjoy?

Work weeks were flexible constructs when one worked for an absent minded astrophysicist. Darcy had known that since her internship for Jane in New Mexico. It had been reinforced when after the Chitauri invasion while Jane worked non-stop to repair the bifrost.

When Jane was on a research tear there was little that could (or did) stop her. Which is why Darcy was fairly sure her friend had been mind wiped by Loki when Jane suggested they should go out for drinks.

Darcy eyed Jane suspiciously, “I’m sorry, but who are you, and what have you done with the real Jane Foster?”

Jane stuck out her tongue and scrunched up her face at her assistant. “I said my paper is done and submitted so we deserve to go out and celebrate.”

Darcy continued to give her friend a dubious look, “Yeah, and the reason I’m wondering if you’ve been possesed is because you said you had to write two articles and unless I’ve missed something in five days of bringing you poptarts and coffee at all hours I only see one completed paper.”

The scientist grinned, “The other paper is a joint thing with Erik, I’m still waiting to get his draft so I can plug in my data. He’s doing most of the work. He said he’ll have it to me by Saturday. So free night tonight and day off tomorrow. So - drinks tonight!”

“Woo! Is this a two girls in the name of science night or a lets invite everyone and see how many laws we can break and not get arrested because we’re partying with the Avengers night?” asked Darcy with a grin.

Jane stretched, popping her back, “I want to treat you. And we really haven’t been out, just us in ages. Let’s leave the madhouse behind.”

“Done! Want to get dinner too? I’m in the mood for sushi, and Steve’s still suspicious of eating raw fish.” she said, making a face at the idea of finding sushi questionable. Steve was wonderful, but his suspicion of sushi was problematic at times.

Jane clapped happily, “Great idea. Let’s get changed and meet down in the main lobby in a hour?”
An hour and a half later found the friends sipping their sake and snacking on edamame as they waited to place their order for dinner. The restaurant was busy, but not crowded.

“So, you and Steve? How’s that going?” asked Jane with a mischievous grin.

“I’m still sort of shocked that I seem to be in a relationship with a capital ‘R’. I mean I usually have some kind of land speed record for blowing through NRE and dumping a guy or getting dumped. This just keeps getting better. And I’m actually trying not to freak out a little.”

Jane clinked her glass to Darcy’s, “Cheers, here’s to us both developing MUCH better taste in men.”

“Though I am starting to wonder if I should just give up the pretense of my apartment. We usually end up in Steve’s apartment; he’s got a bigger bed.”

“Are you ready to do that? You’ve always said you didn’t think you’d be good live in girlfriend material because you were an only child and never had to share.”

Darcy took a sip of her drink and slowly replied, “I - I want to be ready to. If that makes sense.”

Jane was about to reply when four men with guns and ski masks stormed through the front door, brandishing weapons. Several patrons screamed and one waitress dropped her tray of drinks before fainting dead away.

“Everyone put their hands where we can see them and no one gets hurt!” shouted one of the men. There were a few more sounds of terror and a little boy out with his parents began to whimper as everyone slowly raised their hands.

Jane’s eyes were wide and she shook her head slightly at Darcy trying to indicate she hadn’t been able to trigger her panic button before they’d been ordered to display their hands.

Using her recent training to observe Darcy decided the men had probably done this before; they seemed to have a system as they fanned out through the restaurant. She bit her lip, knowing the best thing they could do would be to cooperate.

“Everyone just stay cool. When we bring the bag around I want the men to hand over their wallets, phones, and watches; same for the women, but open your purses slow. Anyone goes for mace or a weapon gets shot.” He pointed to one of the servers, “You, go open the register.” he jerked his head toward one of the other men, indicating he should follow the server to collect the contents of the till.

Darcy and Jane held as still as possible as the robbers made their way around the room. When they got to their table Jane made a big show of reaching into her purse to pull out her wallet and phone before she dropped it in the bag. Sadly she reached around and undid the clasp of the silver chain around her neck; from the chain was a small silver replica of Mjolnir that Darcy had given her as a joke when they were working to repair the bifrost.

Darcy followed her example and tried to make herself seem clumsy, as though she couldn’t find her wallet in her voluminous handbag. She managed to trigger her panic button before handing over her wallet and phone. Slowly she stripped off her jewelry, thankful she was just wearing her usual cheap earrings.

The bagman moved to another table and the friends exchanged minute nods.

Darcy caught one of the men staring intently at her, she glanced away hoping to avoid any attention. “Hey. Hey you with the tits and the glasses.”
“Oh that is so original.” she muttered as quietly as possible before putting on her best blank ‘I’m from California and I smoked too much weed in college’ face and turned to face the thief. “Um, me?”

He took a few steps toward their table, “Yeah, you. I know you.”

“Geeze dude, I don’t think so. I’m hella sure I’d remember you.” she tried to keep her expression as vacant as possible.

“No, you dumb bitch, I’ve seen you in some magazine.”

Darcy closed her eyes a moment to combat the sinking sensation that made it feel like her stomach had relocated to her knees.

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**Meanwhile on the Helicarrier**

“Director Fury!” shouted Sitwell as he burst into the director's office. “Director, we have a situation!”

The director was up from his desk and halfway across the room. “Report!” he snapped.

“Five minutes ago Doctor Foster and her assistant Darcy Lewis triggered their panic buttons. Doctor Foster triggered hers first and Miss Lewis set hers off about ninety seconds later. We have their last known position and are trying to get eyes on the ground through CCTV of that position.”

“Motherfucker! You’re telling me the girlfriends of Thor and Captain America have been abducted?” growled Fury.

“Actually sir, we don’t know the exact situation. We don’t know if they’ve been abducted or if they’re just at ground zero of some new phenomenon or invasion. We should have more information within the next five minutes.”

Fury pushed past his agent, striding purposefully to the situation room down the hall from his office. He didn’t think this required his presence on the bridge; yet. “I want all intel and video feeds routed to situation room three. And get me a line to Captain Rogers, I’ll need to advise them of the situation.”

He pulled up all the video feeds in the area surrounding the last known whereabouts of Doctor Foster and her assistant. Sitwell followed him in, tablet in hand. “Sir, I think we have a read of the situation. It looks like there is an armed robbery in progress where Doctor Foster and Miss Lewis are.”

“They triggered their panic buttons for an armed robbery?!”

“Sir, they were given those buttons with instructions to use them in the advent of anything threatening or suspicious. They may have reason to suspect there are other motives behind this. Or just been scared.”

“Until we know otherwise alert the police. Without an immediate threat to the city SHIELD has no jurisdiction. Get me any kind of security feed from inside wherever Foster and her minion are.”

“Yes, sir. I have Captain Rogers on the line for you now sir.”

“Thank you Sitwell.” Fury sighed and clicked over to the line where Rogers was waiting for him. Somehow he had to tell the Star Spangled Man With a Plan and the God of Thunder that their
girlfriends were in danger. He tried not to grind his teeth. “Rogers!”

“Director Fury, how can I help you this evening?”

“Rogers you can help me by being very calm.”

“Sir, I think you know me well enough to know that is not how to make me calm.”

“Eight, no nine minutes ago Doctor Foster and her assistant Miss Lewis triggered their panic buttons. I would appear they are in a restaurant that is currently being robbed by four armed and masked gunmen. There are at least six staff and another fifteen people in the establishment. Because SHIELD does not have jurisdiction we have notified the local law enforcement. This is NOT, I repeat, NOT a call to assemble or avenge anything. I am calling and letting you know about an emergent situation concerning residents at the tower. Am I understood?”

Steve’s voice took on a sharp, clipped, quality. “Are you suggesting that we not do anything while Darcy and Jane are in danger?”

“No Captain, I’m asking that you and Thor show a little fucking restraint and not go in guns blazing and get everyone in there killed. Law enforcement is scrambling to the scene now with a hostage task force. If you choose to go there, I can’t stop you. But please do not make this any worse.”

“I understand, Sir. Please transmit all necessary files and feeds to Jarvis.” he heard Fury sigh. “Sir, if you give them to us now I won’t have to waste valuable time asking Jarvis to hack the same feeds you’ve already accessed. I’ll notify the team.”

The line clicked dead as Steve disconnected the call. Fury looked at Sitwell, “Well that went better than expected. Please open communications with Stark’s AI, give him access to everything related to this situation. Now to sit here and hope Lewis’ smart mouth doesn’t get her killed.”

“Yes, sir!”

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**Back in the restaurant**

For what had to be the first time in her life Darcy didn’t have a witty comeback or a snarky answer. She was desperately aware of the power the robbers had. Hoping that grudging cooperation might avoid escalation she said as dismissively as possible, “I think my picture might have been on line somewhere. I’m not really sure.”

He looked at her closely and crossed the room to one of the other men and they began an animated discussion, punctuated with a lot of hand waving, and more concerning, gun waving.

The man who Darcy had mentally tagged as the nominal leader of the band of thieves cursed at the other two men, “We’ve got what we wanted, get everyone into the fridge in the back, we’re going out the back.” The patrons and wait staff just sat there staring before he screamed “MOVE IT! Everyone up. Get your asses in gear or I swear to god I’ll shoot!”

People jumped up and scrambled for the back of the restaurant, one of the waitresses was sobbing quietly, her hand against her mouth. As they filed into the walk-in fridge the man who’d been trying to remember where he’d seen Darcy before grabbed her arm and yanked her back. “I remember now, you’re Captain America’s girlfriend, aren’t you?”

She froze for a second before she began babbling, “Well I don’t know that I’d call myself his
girlfriend. We just hang out you know? Nice guy, little too goody-two-shoes for my taste. Poor dude doesn’t even know how to work an iPod.”

He shook her arm hard enough to rattle her teeth, “No, you’re totally his girl.” and he slammed the fridge door as the last of the other patrons entered the fridge. Darcy could see Jane looking terrified behind one of the waitresses. “Guys! We’re taking this one with us. She’s worth at least a couple hundred thousand.”

“Hey!!” Darcy yelled, offended at being reduced to a figure. He shook her arm again and she bit her lip to shut herself up.

“The FUCK man? We are not kidnapping some bitch just because you like her tits. We need to bounce, the cops will be here soon? Put her in the fridge asshole.” said one of the other men.

Darcy was finally able to tell them apart. There was the tallest one who seemed to be the leader of the group. The dude with the really narrow shoulders who seemed most nervously twitchy, which she was pretty sure wasn’t good for a guy with a semi-automatic weapon. The third guy was the most average, not tall, not short, and entirely lacking any good way to identify him; he’d also been the quietest. And the fourth guy she was mentally beginning to call “Creeper” for the way he looked at her chest.

The one who’d objected to kidnapping was Mister Bland. Tall Dude glared at Creeper. “What’s so special about this chick?”

Creeper grinned in a way that made Darcy sick to her stomach and wishing she could get her hand in her bag to get her taser. “She’s Captain America’s girlfriend. I bet we can get some serious cash for her.”

“Please.” she began, “This is SO not worth it guys.”

Creeper leered her, “Oh, we’re gonna make it worth it honey.”

The thugs began to argue again about bringing her. Tall Dude was willing to as long as she was worth some money. Bland didn’t think it was worth the risk. Twitchy was clearly on the fence, but Creeper kept saying if they could get enough money for her to make it worthwhile and nothing ventured nothing gained, which seemed to sway him into the camp of kidnapping.

They all jumped when they heard an amplified voice from the front of the restaurant. “Lay down your weapons and come out with your hands up.”

“SHIT! Back door NOW!” yelled Tall Dude

Darcy found herself being dragged between Creeper and Bland out the back door. Remembering her training with Natasha and Clint she tried to become uncooperative dead weight. She felt the sharp press of metal against the side of her head. “Get up now or I blow your brains out over the wall.” When she hesitated a moment he screamed, “GET UP!”

She scrambled to her feet and let herself be pulled out the back door and down the alley to a large, late model beige SUV. Twitchy took the drivers seat, Tall Dude was shotgun, leaving the back seat for Bland, Creeper, and Darcy. The men got in first and dragged her in after. Twitchy was already pulling away before the door was closed; giving Darcy a horrible idea.

She edged as close to the door as she could and hoped the truck wasn’t the sort with auto locking doors.
Twitchy tore out of the alley hell bent on escape.

Darcy worried at her lip, her best plan for escape involved jumping out of a moving car. Which as plans went wasn’t really great, but considering her options, she wasn’t sure there was a better way. She could hope that someone would think of tracking her phone, but that might take hours. Given the number of times Tall Dude had threatened to shoot her, she wasn’t really sure she had that much time. Even if she did, the way Creeper kept leering at her made her almost as uncomfortable. She slid her hand into her purse and wrapped her fingers around the reassuring weight of her taser.

Exiting a moving car wasn’t something she’d covered with her spy instructors.

Also, what the hell was with the cops not covering the back exit?

Darcy thought she saw a flash of light out of the corner of her eye, and as she turned to look something flew in to the windshield, reducing it to spidered glass.

Everyone shouted in shock and Twitchy yelled a curse as he began to lose control of the SUV.

In a flash she decided the last place she wanted to be was in the car if it was under attack, even if it was a rescue attempt. Taking a deep breath and hoping the car was slowing down and not speeding up she lunged forward for the door handle and shoved as hard as she could pushing the door open.

She started to fling herself out of the truck, trying not to see how fast the pavement was speeding by when Creeper grabbed her arm. She whipped her hand out of her bag and jammed the taser against his arm, pressing the button. He screamed and she dove for the door again. Tall Dude had jerked around in his seat when he heard his accomplice scream and was raising his pistol when she tumbled out of the car.

There was a sickening moment that almost felt like flying right before physics took over and she began to fall to the pavement. Oh fuck this is going to hurt was her last clear thought before she impacted with gold and red metal.

Iron Man skipped on his back like a stone across the pavement several times before managing to control their slide and they came to a stop; Darcy laying on top of Iron Man, his arms wrapped protectively around her.

“Nice dive Lewis, but I think the Russian judge is going to dock you points for form.”

She looked up groggily to see Steve running toward her, in jeans and leather jacket, shield on his arm, as Thor landed in front of the car of thieves. She struggled to sit up, but Iron Man held on. “Nope, you’re not moving until we can get you checked out. I barely caught you and you might have a concussion.”

“Please? I think I’m gonna puke.”

Tony immediately let go and she scrambled off of him to heave up what little of food she’d eaten in the gutter.

Steve got to her side moments later and gathered her hair back as she was sick, “Oh god Darcy.” he began

“Cap, take care of your girl, I’m going to give Thor and Natasha an assist with these assclowns.” and Tony got up, walking toward the car which Thor had stopped by pounding in the hood with Mjolnir. Natasha stood back slightly, guns aimed on the car looking fierce and deadly.
Darcy gasped for breath and spat to the side, finally sitting up. Only to be engulfed in a crushing hug from Steve. “Ow. Steve, honey, I need to breathe.”

He loosened his grip marginally. “Are you hurt?”

Slowly she took stock of her body, her ribs were a giant sea of pain, so was her left knee and right elbow. Her head felt like someone had rung a huge bell inside of it and there was an odd ringing in her ears. “I think I’ll live, but the bruising is going to be epic. No public appearances for us or people are going to start talking about how you beat me.” she giggled a little hysterically.

Carefully he released her, “I should go take care of that.” he said, jerking his thumb over his shoulder.

Clint dropped off a fire escape and jogged past Steve and Darcy, “Don’t worry about it Cap, I think we’ve got it handled. Apparently angry gods of thunder make these fuckwits piss their pants. Emergency crew and police are enroute and should be here in two. Keep her from moving much until they can check her out.” He turned to Darcy, “Good job kid.” and turned to go.

Steve sat on the curb and carefully drew Darcy into his lap. She rested her head on his shoulder. “Please don’t ever do that again.” he said.

“Get kidnapped or jump out of a moving car?” she asked wearily.

He snorted, “Yes, but especially the moving car. Why’d they take you?!”

She sighed, “One of them recognized me. He thought he could ransom me for a couple hundred thousand.” she could feel him stiffen. “I tried to tell them I wasn’t anyone important, but they didn’t believe me. I think if they’d known Jane was Thor’s girlfriend they would have grabbed her too. I mean he’s a prince and all, so he’s got to be loaded.” suddenly remembering her friend she struggled to sit up, “Jane! Is she alright?”

He smoothed a hand over her hair, “Everyone at the restaurant is fine. Jane was hysterical that you’d been grabbed. Told us if we didn’t bring you back she was opening a black hole in her lab. I’m convinced she wasn’t joking.”

Darcy tried laughing and gasped instead. “Okay, ow. Ribs, super not happy.”

Police and paramedics arrived on the scene, sirens blaring. The police took custody of the four thugs; while the paramedics began asking Darcy where it hurt. It turned out ‘everywhere’ wasn’t really a good answer and she found herself on a gurney.

She flailed a hand out for Steve and looked pleadingly at the paramedics, “Can he come with me? Please?”

The paramedic glanced at Steve and shrugged, “No room for the shield in the bus.”

“I’ll get someone to take it back for me.” he replied shortly. “I’ll be right back.” and he jogged off to pass his shield to Clint before climbing in the ambulance to hold her hand.

At the hospital she was diagnosed with two cracked ribs, a bone bruise to her knee-cap, a sprained elbow, and a very mild concussion. She may not have hit the pavement, but she did slam into Iron Man. Between all possible rocks and hard places, she felt good about the overall outcome.

The doctors asked to keep her overnight for observation. Despite being neither family or spouse Steve stubbornly refused to leave her side. The nurse who suggested he perhaps should go home was
rewarded with a glare that could have blistered paint. After that none of the medical staff felt up to trying to argue with Captain America about his rights to sit with his girlfriend.

She sighed as she tried to get comfortable while she waited for the painkillers to kick in, “I think this wins my ‘Worst Thursday Ever’ award.”

Steve said pensively, “It could have been a LOT worse.”

She looked up at him sternly, “If I hear one word about how you’re breaking up with me for my own good, I swear to god I will get out of this bed and use some crazy ass ninja move on you I learned from Natasha. I don’t care how much my ribs hurt.”

“Darce, they took you to get to me!”

She started to shake her head and stopped, it made her head throb unpleasantly. “No, they took me because they thought they could get money out of you. You’re famous so people assume you’re loaded. Those assholes didn’t care about hurting you or the Avengers, they wanted your money. I was just a convenient excuse.”

“I could have paid it. I would have paid it if it meant getting you back.” he said, matter of factly.

“Steve!”

He shrugged, “I got paid seventy years of back pay, plus interest. I have money. And it would have been worth every penny of it to get you back safe.”

“Well thanks to my not entirely well thought out plan that meant jumping out of a moving car - you didn’t have to break the bank to save the girl. This girl is totally self-saving. So much better than those dodgy Disney Princesses.” Darcy couldn’t quite conceal a small amount of smugness for having successfully escaped; even if it had been by dint of jumping out of a moving car.

He stood up and pressed a kiss to her forehead. “Please don’t ever do that again. I don’t think my heart can take it.”

Darcy found herself unexpectedly blinking back tears. “I promise you that I will never jump out of a moving car again, unless I’ve been kidnapped, and then all bets are off. Deal?”

He smiled fondly at her, “Deal. Though if it’s all the same, can you skip on being kidnapped again? I’d appreciate it.” and the corner of his mouth turned up with a wry smile.

She saluted him smartly, “Yessir!” Dropping her arm loosely, as though it suddenly weighed more than it should, she said, “Whooo... okay the good drugs are kicking in. I think I’m gonna pass out now.”

“It’s okay, you rest. I’ll be here when you wake up.”

Her eyes were drifting closed and she was beginning to mumble. “Love you. I do. I think it all the time, but don’t say it. I’m sorry, I should say it. Love you. So much.”

Steve felt something hitch in his chest and he kissed her very gently, “I love you too Darcy Lewis.”

The slow rise and fall of her chest told him she’d already fallen asleep.

He pulled the chair closer to the bed and took her hand. Sleeping in a chair was hardly the most uncomfortable place he’d had to kip for a night.
In the dark hours of the morning Natasha snuck in the room, Steve cracked open one eye and regarded her. “Visiting hours are over.” he said quietly, with a smirk.

“I wanted to drop something off for her when she wakes up. Clint had a line of sight into the car when she was trying to escape, one of the goons grabbed her and she tased him so she could jump. I thought she’d like her weapon back.” and she put the taser on the table beside the bed. “She’s a strong girl, she’ll be fine. Once she’s healed I’ll start teaching her how to properly jump out of a moving vehicle. If Tony hadn’t caught her she’d probably have broken her neck, she needed to tuck more.” And without a backwards glance Natasha slipped from the room.

Steve sighed quietly, somehow he thought Darcy’s promise to not jump out of anymore moving cars was about to be negated by Natasha’s plans.

Being in love with Darcy was many things, but he was absolutely certain it would never be boring.
And Now for Something COMPLETELY Different

Chapter Summary

Two weeks ago Darcy was kidnapped by idiots.

Now she's being hijacked by Pepper Potts - the most frightfully together woman in the world.

Darcy isn't sure what just happened, but she might have just been offered a new job.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Darcy had unequivocally decided she hated convalescence. It was boring. And painful. And borning. And did she mention painful?

The doctors had recommended a week off work, which meant Jane had spoken with Jarvis, who had locked her out of the lab. Unfortunately Jane had then left for three weeks to do research at the observatory in Hawaii three days after enforcing the exile from the lab. So even though her week was up, and then some, she was STILL locked out of the lab.

No amount of whinging at Jarvis had convinced him to open the lab to her, the AI politely apologized and explained that Doctor Foster had been very clear in expressing that she was the only one authorized to let Darcy back into the labs because she was Darcy’s supervisor.

The entire team had left on Tuesday to Central America to do... something. Steve hadn’t been at all forthcoming with details, she suspected because they hadn’t actually had any and that’s why the team was being sent. Something had exploded and they were being sent to deal with the inevitable repercussions. So Steve had kissed her thoroughly enough to make her toes curl, told her he loved her, and made her promise to be safe while he was gone.

Her ribs still hurt and she avoided taking deep breaths or laughing too hard. Her elbow was tender, but not bad, so long as she didn’t extend her arm quickly and her knee only hurt if she really whacked it, which after that one time she’d decided was to be avoided at all costs.

She sat at the table in the community kitchen and nursed her cup of coffee, up far earlier than usual. Vacations were nice and all, but she preferred to have somewhere to go or something to do, enforced idleness made her skin itch.

She looked up from her ruminations when Pepper stalked in from upstairs where her suite was with Tony. Pepper was on the phone, gesturing in agitation with one hand, while her voice was calm, “Yes, yes, I understand. More notice would have been appreciated, but I realize some things can’t be anticipated. I’ll manage. Yes. Thank you. I’ll make sure HR calls you before the end of the day. Bye.” she shifted her gaze to Darcy and smiled. “Good morning. I don’t suppose there’s more coffee?”

Darcy smiled ruefully, “I forgot everyone was gone so I made the usual pot. I think we have enough coffee for a small army.”
Pepper smirked, “Or at least one Tony.” she brought the carafe to the table and topped off Darcy’s cup. “How are you feeling?”

“Fine. My ribs are a little sore still, but it’s been two weeks and the bruising has mostly just turned nasty green. Honestly I’m bored silly. Jane’s locked me out of the lab so I can’t even catch up on the mess I know she’s made.” she sighed. “I feel like I need to do something. But without scientists to support I’m at loose ends really.”

Pepper eyed her speculatively, “Do you have business wear?”

Darcy shook her head, “I have what might be generously considered to be business wear if you don’t look at it too closely, it was all thrift store finds when I needed to put together ‘Interview Attire’ when I was trying to get my internship.” she fixed the other woman with a suspicious look, “Why?”

Pepper smiled, “You’re bored, and I need a new assistant. At least until HR can hire me a new one. That call I was on? That was my PA quitting. He’s having a family crisis. Which is really why I’m not angry with him, but it’s horribly inconvenient. I need a PA. Preferably someone who can think on her feet, type at least eighty words a minute, and keep up with me. I’ve seen you type and you can corral Tony which puts you leagues ahead of anyone that HR might send up from the administrative pool downstairs.”

Darcy looked down at herself, she was wearing her favorite corduroy pants and had borrowed one of Steve’s flannel shirts and was wearing it over a plain tank-top. “I think I’m a little under dressed. Like permanently underdressed. There’s no way I own anything appropriate for being your PA; I saw how your other one dressed. Hell I think I saw him on the cover of GQ once!”

“There’s a solution for that, and I can promise we’ll be done before lunch, which would put us on time for my luncheon meeting with the Japanese investors. I don’t suppose you speak Japanese?” was Pepper’s brisk reply, clearly brushing off Darcy’s concerns.

Automatically she replied, “I’m conversationally fluent in French and I can mumble my way through Italian and Spanish if you don’t expect more than a kindergartener’s vocabulary.” Darcy snapped her mouth shut.

Pepper picked up her phone and sent a quick flurry of text messages, “It’s a pity you don’t speak Japanese, but we’ll manage. There, Anton is expecting us in forty-five minutes and Happy will pick us up in ten. Can I see your phone for a moment?”

Numbly Darcy handed her phone over and watched as Pepper’s fingers flew over the screen. “Don’t worry, I’m just making sure you can access my calendars and have an SI email account. We can start reviewing things in the car.” With a flourish she handed the phone back. “There, that should take care of that. I need to run back up to the suite and get my laptop. Why don’t you get your purse and I’ll meet you in the garage.”

“I can’t afford clothes like yours!” Darcy blurted.

Pepper gave her a impishly wicked smile, “Did I say anything about you paying? I’m commandeering you from Sciences and Research. Consider this a signing bonus. If you do well I may not give you back to Jane at all.” and she glided out of the room.

Darcy sat for a moment blinking in confusion. “Jarvis?”

“Yes Miss Lewis?”

“Did that just happen? I mean did Pepper Potts, the most put together woman in the world just hire
me on the spot to be her temporary PA and declare she’s taking me shopping so I can go to a business meeting with Japanese investors? Please tell me no, because otherwise I don’t think I’m in Kansas anymore.” her voice was plaintive.

“Miss Lewis, to the best of my knowledge you are not, nor have you ever been, in Kansas.” was the terminally dry response. “I do suggest however that you hurry to keep your appointment with Miss Potts, I know that she appreciates, and expects, punctuality in her assistants.”

Darcy bolted from the table, hurrying as much as her sore ribs would allow. “I’m never going to complain about being bored again!”

In the car Pepper handed her a laptop and a folder. “My schedule is fairly light today. What I really need today is note taking and observation. Watch and see if anyone reacts strongly to anything and keep track of who’s talking and who isn’t. The folder has your new employment agreement and a SI procurement card. You’ll mostly use it for paying for food and small gifts. I’m going to give you a little time to review the agreement, please let me know if you have any questions.”

Darcy settled in to read while Pepper made a call. When she got to the salary portion her jaw dropped. She waited until the other woman finished her call and said, “I think there’s something wrong with the salary - it’s twice what I make now.”

Pepper gave her a shrewd look, “That’s because you’re probably going to be doing twice the work.” her phone began to ring. “Excuse me, I need to take this.”

As she continued to read she realized that Pepper was likely right. The job as it was outlined had no set hours, was considered to be an ‘on call’ position and required the ability to travel with no more than an hours notice.

At the bottom of the paper work was the graceful signature of ‘Virginia Potts’. Darcy pulled a pen out of her bag and signed above her name and handed the packet back. Pepper smiled and nodded, clearly pleased.

Several hours later Darcy was wondering if she’d fallen into some bizarro world parallel dimension.

Pepper had presented her to Anton, a thin, well dressed, man with a faint Eastern European accent that Darcy couldn’t identify. He took her measurements with terrifying speed and accuracy, and began pulling out sharply professional looking suits. He made a moue of distaste at the bruises on her knee but agreed that for the time being pants were the obvious choice until the discoloration had healed completely.

When they left Darcy was wearing new lacy lingerie, charcoal grey pinstriped pants, a matching jacket, and a luxurious dark cream blouse in a fabric she was sure was silk. Several other outfits had been whisked away to be tailored with a promise to have at least one delivered by the following morning.

Somehow she’d also ended up with new shoes, flats since her knee had protested loudly when she’d tried heels, but they were perfectly acceptable with the suit.

Pepper smiled broadly at her as Happy drove them to lunch.

Darcy eyed her cautiously, “Please don’t take this the wrong way, but you are terrifying in your competency. I seriously cannot comprehend what’s just become of my life. I don’t even know why you need an assistant since you just spent all morning managing me.”

“I admit, I ambushed you and used my powers for evil.” she said, deadpan.
“Oh god, is there where you confess your plans for world domination and want me to become your minion? I can promise I’m not good minion material. I’m way too opinionated. Can you even BE an evil overlord when you’re dating an Avenger. Isn’t that a serious conflict of interests?”

The redhead smirked, “I have no plans presently for world domination. And I do need an assistant. Normally I’d have Marco sit with you for at least a week, but family emergencies are what they are and he’s not going to be available. So I’ll have to explain what it is I need from you. After lunch we’ll go over my inbox so I can show you the best way to triage it.”

“Is it okay if I still find you personally intimidating?”

“You’ll get over it.” she replied with a wave of her hand.

“Pretty sure I won’t.” was the disbelieving reply.

Pepper grinned, “I bet you a pair of shoes that you’ll have gotten over it the first time I melt down because I can’t find the right chocolate chip cookies.”

Darcy gave her new boss a puzzled look, “So, that’s your way of telling me specific cookies are a thing?”

“See, I knew you would catch on quickly.”

Darcy sighed and said with a wistful tone, “At least I’m not bored anymore.”

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The end of the day found Darcy and Pepper each sipping a glass of wine and sitting on the couch in the community living room. Their shoes kicked off under the coffee table.

“So, that was roughly the most unreal first day of a job ever” Darcy mused.

“Too much?” asked Pepper.

Taking her hair out of it’s messy tail she shook her head, “No, actually it was kind of nice to not have huge chunks of downtime in the middle of day. One of the problems of working for Jane is that when she’s sciencing there isn’t much for me to do other than make sure she’s properly fed and watered.”

“Oh good, I think Steve and Jane would be a bit cross if I broke you.”

Darcy snorted, “I jumped out of a moving car two weeks ago, I think I’m tougher than a few meetings.” and she refilled her glass. “So, not to sound ungrateful, I really have to wonder what possessed you to draft me this morning. I mean, you probably could have called someone else in or had HR send someone.”

“Guilty as charged.” Pepper tucked her long graceful legs up on the sofa, “A few weeks ago Jane asked me if you’d spoken to me about other positions with Stark Industries. She said you were thinking about future options that would put you working more on the renewable energy side of SI. So when you were there this morning after Marco called it seemed like it might be a good opportunity to see how you worked and think about somewhere you might fit.”

Darcy nodded, “Well this wasn’t quite what I was thinking when I was considering making a change.”
“Oh?”

“I was considering grad school. I mean I majored in poli-sci but I don’t really want to go work as some campaign grunt in the middle of nowhere trying to get someone no one cares about elected as mayor. Grad school seemed like the next step.” She shrugged, trying to express her ambivalence.

Pepper picked up on the hesitancy in Darcy’s voice, “But?”

Darcy stood up and began to pace in front of the couch, “But I don’t know what I’d do with grad school. More policial science? Finish the journalism degree I abandoned for poli-sci? Go for a business degree maybe? I want the chance to help change the world; I just don’t know how I’m supposed to do it.” she paused in her pacing and sighed, “And I’ve just realized that this is probably a horrible conversation to be having with the person who is now my boss.”

Pepper took a slow sip of her wine and waved a hand dismissively, “I’d rather know you have goals and ambitions. I’ll make you a deal; give me six months as my PA. If at the end of it you think you’d rather be in grad school I will write you a letter of recommendation and gladly send you on your way. I am working to change the world with the tech that Tony builds and to be honest I need someone who can corral me as well as I corralled Tony when I was his PA. I have a hunch that won’t be a problem for you. What do you say? Do we have a deal?” and she held out her hand.

Darcy stopped her pacing and studied the proffered hand for a moment before taking it. “Yes, we have a deal.”

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The team had returned by Saturday but Jane wasn’t back until the following Thursday. Darcy had traveled to Hong Kong with Pepper, and was setting out briefing packets in a conference room when her phone rang. “Jane!” she said gladly.

“Darcy! Where you?! And why did Pepper send me a basket full of poptarts and an apology note?” her friends voice was suspicious.

She tucked her phone between her shoulder and cheek as she continued laying out packets, “Remember how I was complaining about being bored? Like considering my life options and trying to decide if I should go to grad school bored?”

“Yeesss...” replied Jane cautiously.

“Well I’m not bored anymore. I may never be bored again. Also, you have interviews with potential interns next week on Monday and Wednesday, and interviews with paid research assistants on Tuesday and Thursday.”

“Darcy! Why do I need interns... Why do I need a new research assistant?! I have one!” Jane’s tone had started to get shrill.

Sheepishly Darcy said, “I kinda got head-hunted by Pepper, which is why there’s a basket of poptarts. I made sure they were your favorite.”

“Oh, that bitch! She stole you!” exclaimed Jane, her voice more indignant than venomous. “I guess that’s why she sent me an email when I was in Hawaii - probably the one I didn’t read.”

“Hey, no bad mouthing the new boss lady. If you’re not nice I won’t share my green tea mooncakes with you.” said Darcy as casually as possible.

There was silence on the other end of the line, “Mooncakes?” said Jane hopefully.
“Red bean and green tea. I promise.”

Jane grumbled for a while before finally hanging up.

Darcy turned to Pepper who was smothering a laugh, “You may fear my competency, but your people management skills through bribery with food should never be underestimated.”

Darcy gave the CEO of Stark Industries an arch look, “Everyone has a weakness, it’s just a matter of knowing how to use that weakness to my advantage.”

Pepper tried to give her a stern look, but mostly failed. “And you accused ME of planning world domination.”

Tapping her lips thoughtfully with a finger she asked, “Hey boss-lady, do you think if we take over the world quietly they’ll even notice?”

Pepper’s eyes sparkled with laughter, “Oh, probably not until it’s too late for anyone to do anything about it. What’s next?”

Grinning Darcy said, “Your meeting starts in five, everything’s set up. I’ve contacted your pilot and let them know you’d like to leave this evening rather than tomorrow morning. When we get back to New York I do need to be sure to meet with whoever Jane decides to hire so I can teach them the filing system and the best ways to make sure she eats something other than pure processed sugar products. But your next two weeks of meetings are all in New York or DC so I don’t expect that to be a conflict.”

As they waited for the rest of the members of the meeting to arrive Darcy thought to herself, *I think I might finally be getting the hang of this Thursday thing.*

Chapter End Notes

Note: Green tea mooncakes are amazing. Like if you ever know someone going to Hong Kong make sure they bring you back a box. Thank me later.

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