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I Hope You Have Unlimited Text Messaging

by Misscar

Summary

Post Captain America Civil War fix-it: For the first time in their entire acquaintance, Tony and Steve start having really honest conversations with each other via text message, of course.

Or Tony and Steve try to repair their relationship before the next apocalypse. This may take a while. Actually, battling blue and/or purple aliens would be preferable to working through their feelings.

Notes

Rating: T for Tony's dirty mouth, but could go higher again for language. Okay, if this was a movie it would be rated R for the use of the F word alone.

Beta: by the fabulous GraysonSteele

Spoilers/Continuity: Everything from the entire MCU up to Captain America: Civil War including background from Agents of SHIELD and other parts of the TV universe as needed. How can you ignore lots of people with superpowers awakening all over the place? You don't need to be familiar with it; you can just be as confused as Steve. Actually, it may be more fun that way.

For timeline purposes, the rescue from the Raft and the explosive climax of the Agents of SHIELD season 3 finale took place at the same time. This story picks up a week later.

I saw a few other stories with a similar premise, but I was actually planning to do this even before I saw Civil War. Although then I was planning to do a emails story similar to my stories Dear Spock and Dear James but Steve just had to give Tony that burn phone and here we are. Although unlike my Dear Spock universe stories this story is going to have ridiculously short chapters and be entirely text message conversations.

Relationships: It's really complicated Tony/Steve, that's trying to get uncomplicated with a side of Bucky issues of the platonic variety. Other relationships will pop up in the background as appropriate. There may be some Tony/other in this but it will be temporary.

Disclaimer: Everything is owned by Marvel/Disney I'm just playing around. Also, a drunk Tony paraphrases Justin Timberlake in this. I don't own that either.
Conversation 1: Don't Drink and Text

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Red phone: I appreciate the gesture. It would be good to get a hold of you if aliens start invading again (which apparently they did while we were beating each other black and blue or maybe it was right before). Or if another “satellite” explodes over Europe.

Red phone: Although the exploding “satellite” did make it easier for you to invade a certain floating prison.

Red phone: But did you really have to go with a flip phone? Flip phones make me cry.

Blue phone: Tony is that you? What about an alien invasion?

Blue phone: Are you really complaining about a flip phone?

Red phone: No, I just let Ross borrow this. That's sarcasm, not that I can do emoticons on this or gifs. I'm going to have to fix that soon.

Blue phone: This is supposed to be for emergencies such as the alien invasion that you just mentioned.

Red phone: I told you that happened while we were being fucking morons because you chose Bucky bear over me.

Red phone: Shit! I didn't mean to send that. I hate that there's no fucking recall on this. Maybe I should have Friday override this instead of using the phone.

Red phone: At least it has voice rec otherwise I would be furious.

Red phone: Okay, I figured out how to add voice rec. I hate sending text messages on flip phones. It's so hard.
Blue phone: Are you drunk?

Red phone: No

Red phone: A little.

Red phone: Maybe a lot.

Red phone: I tried Jack. I tried Jen but I couldn’t get over the fact we’re not friends.

Red phone: It also couldn’t keep me from seeing my mom being choked to death by your BFF every time I close my damn eyes.

Red phone: It's why I'm text messaging you at 3 AM

Blue phone: Did you possibly imagine an alien invasion? I think something like that would've made the news.

Red phone: I dream about the ugly bastards from New York, not giant blue guys with clubs from the pictures that hydra_Bob_22 posted on his Instagram.

Red phone: The ATCU pulled it in an hour, but Friday found it.

Red phone: Who the hell is dumb enough to put Hydra in their screen name?

Red phone: Apparently a lot people if there are at least 22 of them.

Blue phone: There as bad as Shield
Red phone: Hydra_bob_22?

Blue phone: The ATCU. The guy in charge is slightly less incompetent than Ross.

Red phone: They are shield. Agent is in charge not the dick.

Blue phone: Did you take anything other than alcohol?

Red phone: I know better than to mix my drugs.

Red phone: I survived the 90s even though I don't remember most of it.

Red phone: Fuck! I never told you that Agent Agent is not dead and is now Director Agent.

Red phone: I'm sorry. I guess it must suck when you find out your friend kept something really important from you, even if they're doing it for the greater good.

Red phone: In my case, it really was for the greater good, because too many people want Agent Agent dead, again. I bet he is on Ross’s shit list too.

Red phone: But we were never really friends were we? On your side anyway.

Red phone: Everybody hates me unless they want something, usually $€.

Blue phone: We were friends and it wasn’t for the free housing.

Blue phone: We are still friends. It’s just that I've known Bucky longer and he was under mind control.

Blue phone: If it was Colonel Rhodes, what would you have done?
Blue phone: Peggy just died and maybe I wasn't thinking as clearly as I should've been.

Blue phone: I understand why you were mad. I should've told you.

Blue phone: Maybe I was selfish for not telling you. I realize that now and I'm sorry.

Blue phone: Look, I know you're mad at me, but could you please reply back so I know you are not lying unconscious in a ditch somewhere.

Red phone: This is Vision using Mr. Stark's phone. He is currently unconscious on the couch. Most likely due to having a BAL .20.

Red phone: I am relocating him to his room. I'm sure he will be fine in the morning.

Blue phone: You will keep an eye on him?

Red phone: Of course, Captain.

Blue phone: It’s just Steve now.

Red phone: Of course, Steve.

Red phone: Could you please send Wanda my regards. I hope she is well wherever you are.

Blue phone: We are all safe. I’ll tell her that you asked about her.

Chapter End Notes

Let me know what you think and if you want more. You may inspire me to start writing more immediately
Acronym guide: ATCU stands for Advanced Threat Containment Unit and is sort of SHIELD’s public replacement that is secretly run by the Director of the rebuild organization. Or it was at least at the start of the story. That will change. Poor Tony.
Conversation 2: About last night?

Thank you to everyone who read or reviewed this micro story. Your response to this story was overwhelming. I’m glad you enjoyed it so much. My goal is to update every few days on this story, most likely every Tuesday when I can pull it off.

Red phone: Did I send you really drunk text messages last night?

Red phone: Did I send you a picture of my dick again?

Red phone: You’re not replying. That means I really did do something that stupid.

Blue phone: If you read what you sent me, you would know that you didn’t send any pictures of your privates, this time.

Red phone: I would, but I can't because I think Vision deleted our conversation or maybe my security protocol did it.

Red phone: I’m trying to make sure Secretary Moron doesn’t find you.

Red phone: I’ve vaguely remember telling you something about the blue aliens in South Dakota and Agent Agent not being dead.

Red phone: So Fury lied. What else is new? Everyone does it, even you.

Blue phone: You imagine some crazy stuff when you’re drunk.
Red phone: Nothing I said could've been that improbable or did I warn you about not eating fish because it could give you random superpowers?

Red phone: Although you’ve seen the president’s address about the alien contagion.

Red phone: Seriously, don't eat any fish or take fish oil. Who knows what that stuff could do to someone who already has powers.

Red phone: I wonder if that’s how Spidey became Spidey?

Blue phone: Are you drunk again?

Red phone: Rhodey threw away most of the alcohol which is quite a feat considering.

Red phone: He's trying to find me a therapist that I’m going to have to see at least once a week. If I say no, he will send me to the crazy spa.

Red phone: It's my punishment for passing out last night, hugging the phone and a bottle of Jack.

Red phone: Rhodey had video.

Red phone: I found myself in the nice warm bed, but I don't know how I got there.

Blue phone: Vision

Red phone: That makes sense.

Blue phone: He did tell me that you were OK before he asked about Wanda.

Red phone: Of course he did. This really is my fault. All the depraved things I made Jarvis watch before. Of course Vision picked up some bad habits.
Blue phone: You know he’s not actually Jarvis?

Red phone: I know that. There was only one electronic Jarvis and he’s gone. Now, Friday tells me when I have to take important meetings. Kevin too, but mostly Friday.

Blue phone: How's that going?

Red phone: Badly. Enough so that I think maybe I should go to the crazy spa.

Red phone: Mostly because I'm avoiding Pepper. At least there I don’t have to see her. I’m not looking forward to the next board meeting.

Red phone: No one wants to spend quality time with their Ex.

Red phone: Although we do text message each other, so I guess that must not be the case.

Blue phone: We never dated.

Red phone: You were too busy pining after Barnes, so of course not. Despite the fact you have a stomach I could eat off of, you tried to kill me, so it doesn’t matter.

Red phone: So whatever we were, we are not now. We are mostly in pieces because you’re over us.

Red phone: Great, I think I just accidentally quoted Maroon 5. Friday’s breakup mix is really starting to get to me.

Blue phone: If I was really trying to kill you, you would be dead.

Red phone: I guess there's that.
Blue phone: And I was trying to keep you from killing Bucky because once you stopped running on anger and adrenaline, I think you would’ve regretted it.

Blue phone: There are so many things that you already feel guilty about. I didn’t want you to have another one. I didn’t want you to cross that line.

Blue phone: I don’t think you would’ve ever forgiven yourself if you did.

To be continued

Chapter End Notes

The song Tony accidentally quotes a lyric from is Unkiss Me by Maroon 5. My iPod randomly played the song when I saw the Civil War trailer for the first time and I’ve associated it with the two ever since.

Cara Watson, you asked for a conversation when sober and thankfully for you that was the plan for this chapter. Actually, most of the time Tony will be sober or at least trying to be.
Conversation 3: Is This Salvageable?

Chapter Notes

Thank you to everyone who read or reviewed the last micro chapter.

After a comment from Shiningheart of ThunderClan, I decided that FRIDAY will be including her breakup soundtrack suggestions for each chapter when possible. Feel free to suggest your own songs.

This chapter we switch to it being from the perspective of Tony’s cell phone, and of course he uses different names in his contact list.

Steve is Captain Tight Pants

Tony is Me

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Conversation 3: Is This Salvageable?

Captain tight pants: Do you want to fix things?

Me: With us?

Captain tight pants: With Pepper. You guys were together for a long time.

Me: Want? Yes.

Me: Can? That's a different question entirely.

No matter how much you love someone, it may not be enough.

Me: I'm starting to realize that not everything is repairable

Me: The only thing that's going to bring Pepper back is for me to stop being a part of myself and I can't do that. Not even for her.

Me: Somethings can't be fixed. And I think Pepper and me are one of those things.

Captain tight pants: Are we one of those things?

Me: You began the conversation this time, so maybe there's hope.

Captain tight pants: You didn't intervene when I got everybody off of the Raft.

Me: I would say I was busy doing my hair, but you wouldn't believe me. At least that's what I told Ross.

Me: And then he had that exploding “satellite” to worry about, so it wasn't a problem.

Captain tight pants: Of course you did.
Captain tight pants: You could have handed this phone and my letter over to Ross, but instead you’re actively trying to make sure he can’t find us.

Me: Because Ross is an asshole and Thor knows the idiot only managed to get confirmation because the only qualification was not being Hydra.

Me: Your Underground Avengers are going to be really busy putting out all of his political fires.

Captain tight pants: I think that's going to be your job since you signed the accord.

Me: See, you assume that by signing the accord I’m going to mindlessly accept whatever they tell me to do.

Me: I have no trouble telling Ross or the UN to fuck off if they tell me to do something I find illegal or immoral.

Me: Thankfully for you, I find chasing you and the others down for Ross illegal and immoral and so does my legal team.

Captain tight pants: You can tell them to F off. Not all of us are Tony Stark.

Captain tight pants: We don’t all have the same privileges of wealth you do.

Me: Don’t worry. I’ll tell Ross to fuck off for you, especially because you have trouble with cursing.

Me: PS I wasn’t trying to kill you.

Captain tight pants: I know

To be continued.

Chapter End Notes

FRIDAY’s break up playlist: Water Runs Dry by Boyz II Men
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9N9opF-PK5k
“Some people work things out/And some just don't know how to change”
Thank you to everyone who read or reviewed the last chapter. Your feedback makes me incredibly happy. Just to let everyone know, this is going to be a slow burn. Tony and Steve’s relationship was completely wrecked in Civil War and now they’re trying to rebuild it on a foundation of stone instead of one of sand. That takes time.

Because this is a text message conversation, Tony and Steve start using acronyms you may not know. Any time that happens, there will be a key at the end of the micro chapter.

Red phone: Tell Clint that his wife is pissed because Ross has diplomatic insecurity… security and the Marines are staking out her house and following her to school.

Red phone: It’s not good for a high school guidance counselor/child psychologist to have a government stalker. It scares the kids.

Blue phone: That's not what DOS is supposed to do.

Red phone: Ross does a lot of things that S is not supposed to do.

Red phone: But as long as you’re not Hydra, Congress lets you get away with a lot of shit.

Red phone: Although, if half the stuff that they’re printing about the late Gideon Malik a.k.a. the World Council member who fired a nuke at Manhattan were true, Congress will let you get away with a lot of shit even if they know you are Hydra if your net worth is high enough.

Red phone: Which explains why I haven’t been carried off in handcuffs yet.

Blue phone: I told you, they all have their own agendas.
Red phone: Doesn’t everyone? The secret is convincing them that your agenda is their agenda.

Blue phone: When did you talk to Laura?

Red phone: I'm currently text messaging you from her guestroom. I went to check up on the kids.

Red phone: Then she forced me to talk about my feelings. After I cried on her couch, she decided that I was staying over because I’ve only slept six hours in six days and I think I was actually passed out for five of those hours.

Blue phone: Why aren’t you sleeping?

Red phone: I’m sending you pictures of their artwork. They have some new costume ideas for you since you’re now a man without a country.

Red phone: image 1 attached, image 2 attached, image 3 attached

Red phone: We were thinking an all black costume for stealth? What do you think of Nomad as your new codename? Connor came up with it.

Blue phone: It kind of fits. Although I think those pants are way too tight, but the color scheme is okay.

Blue phone: I know you’re the one who drew that because it was too technical even if the color scheme is very muted for you

Red phone: You’ll always be Captain Tight Pants to me, even if Vision tells me you don’t want to be called Captain anything anymore.

Red phone: Which is a shame because I think the captain would be good too.

Blue phone: I’m glad you are getting out of the compound and having fun with the kids.
Red phone: It went better than I thought it would. I calculated an 85% probability that Laura would strangle me on site for contributing to her current status as a single parent.

Red phone: Instead, she’s going to function as my new shrink, sort of.

Red phone: Apparently, I really need one after having a tiny breakdown on her couch. Crying was involved

Red phone: I have mommy issues and daddy issues and serious Pepper issues which all require professional help.

Red phone: In addition, I allegedly have unrequited crush issues

Blue phone: At least you are talking to somebody with a psychology degree.

Red phone: Lila punched me, multiple times. It's all my fault that they didn't get to go waterskiing.

Red phone: That may have been why I started crying on their couch.

Blue phone: It kind of is your fault that Clint can’t be there.

Red phone: You're the one that dragged him into this.

Blue phone: You're the one who pushed that choice.

Red phone: Because I was trying to keep us all out of prison cells or worse.

Blue phone: That didn't work so well did it?
Red phone: People are twitchy now that there are hundreds of people walking around with powers or enhancements and we are the poster children for enhanced people.

Red phone: Less than two months before the Accords were thrust upon us, the Australian government locked up an aboriginal man named Eden Fesi because he used his powers to help people.

Red phone: Our own country was drugging and putting powered people in stasis before they came up with their floating prison.

Red phone: Then the Watchdogs, a.k.a. that group that tossed red paint on you last summer because you’re an ‘abomination’, blew up a federal building with my father’s tech that even he thought was too dangerous.

Blue phone: The news reports did not mention that the special explosive use was invented by your father.

Red phone: Probably because they don’t know that. But I recognized it from the manifesto video alone.

Red phone: 25 hard-working government employees were killed in the name of trying to find more people like us, so they can get rid of us. I just wanted to keep stuff like this from happening.

Blue phone: There’s nothing you can do to make the irrational less afraid, including putting a leash on yourself. It just makes it easier for them to find you.

Red phone: Stevie bear, I’ve never been anybody’s puppy.

Red phone: I haven't told Ross about our conversations. I’m also making sure our little gossip sessions are NSA and ATCU proof.

Red phone: Actually, I keep Ross on hold most of the time. I think his chief of staff really hates me.

Blue phone: I wonder why.
Red phone: Maybe because I miss you. The Avengers’ compound wasn't designed for just three people, one of which is really annoyed with physical therapy.

Blue phone: Where is Natasha?

Red phone: I don't know. I've half expected her to be here with her godson, but Laura has no idea where she is.

Red phone: I almost wondered if she was with you.

Blue phone: I'm sure wherever she is she can take care of herself.

Red phone: And anybody Ross sends after her. Seriously, he's taking the position of S too far.

Red phone: I’m halfway tempted to hack his emails and send them to Congress.

Blue phone: I'm not sure they would actually read them.

Red phone: Probably only in exchange for a campaign donation

To be continued

Chapter End Notes

If anybody wants to try drawing the Barton children’s interpretations of Steve’s new costume, I will love you forever.

I just went to my first comic con last weekend (dressed as the Ross staff member that Tony keeps driving crazy). Unfortunately, not Philadelphia, but DC’s Awesome Con. I did get an autograph from Elizabeth Henstridge a.k.a. Simmons from Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D and heard Karl Urban sing the praises of the Thor 3 script in person (I am not even going to try to dictate the full name of that movie). Apparently there are some interesting casting surprises yet to be announced, but he couldn’t say anything more. All
in all it was a fun weekend, even if it put me a little behind in the writing rotation.

Abbreviation Key:
S stands for Secretary of State
DOS stands for Department of State
Thank you to everyone who read or reviewed the last chapter. The encouragement is always appreciated. I love your kudos as well.

Captain tight pants: Are you back in New York yet?

Captain tight pants: More importantly, are you sleeping again?

Me: It’s so sweet that you asked cuddle bunny.

Me: No I’m at one of my very remote summer houses with the junior archers and my psychologist.

Me: Who really wishes she was a psychiatrist because she’s like 92% sure I’m bipolar, in addition to the PTSD and I am self-medicating with alcohol. Talk therapy can only do so much.

Me: But at least I got four hours last night before the nightmares started.

Captain tight pants: You stop taking your anxiety drugs?

Me: I’ve never been very good at remembering to take medication regularly or anything similar like eating.

Captain tight pants: I know. I’m worried about you starving now. If you’re bipolar, why didn’t they diagnose you then?

Me: Because when you have a certain amount of money, doctors don’t treat certain problems as well as they should or at all. They are more concerned with humoring a wealthy patient. Laura and my platypus are trying to find a psychiatrist that won’t care about my bank account.
Captain tight pants: I hope they find somebody.

Me: I hope they do, but the top therapist for treating enhance people died a couple of weeks ago, so it may take a while. The ocean breeze is helping though.

Captain tight pants: That’s good. Where exactly are you?

Me: If you want to find me, use the phone. I know there’s a GPS tracker on it that only you can crack.

Captain tight pants: What do you want?

Me: To fall asleep without seeing my parents last moment or the faces of everybody I’ve killed.

Me: But this isn’t about me. It’s about what the junior archers want and they want to see their dad.

Captain tight pants: Their dad wants to see them too, but he is wanted in 117 countries.

Me: Good thing my island is a sovereign country, sort of.

Captain tight pants: You own an island? I shouldn’t even be surprised.

Me: Howard owned an island. I just inherited the thing and thankfully no one was the wiser.

Captain tight pants: That seems like something Howard would do.

Me: I think he really bought this for SHIELD purposes especially in light of the bunker that I discovered underneath the property two years ago.
Me: It's remote. No surprises from diplomatic insecurity.

Me: And it’s technically owned in the name of a dummy corporation with no ties to SI because again I’m pretty sure it was really for SHIELD.

Me: I’m sure Ross and his underlings are too dumb to find it anyway.

Captain tight pants: You really don't like Ross?

Me: His own daughter doesn't even like him. The guy nearly dying couldn't fix that.

Captain tight pants: Near death experiences don't fix everything.

Me: I'm well aware of that.

Me: Considering how many times I've almost died, you would think I would stop being an asshole.

To be continued
Conversation 6: About that kiss (with your recently deceased ex-girlfriend’s
grandniece)

Chapter Notes

Thank you to everybody who read or reviewed the last chapter.

This chapter was written for everyone whose only criticism about Captain America:
Civil War was the Steve/Sharon kiss. Tony is going to say everything you know you
were thinking.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Captain Tight Pants: Why did you leave a box labeled ‘new bird costume’ at your beach bungalow?

Captain Tight Pants: Which was a small mansion with a base underneath, not a beach bungalow

Me: I also included your new costume and Wanda’s family photo album.

Me: Much to my own sadness, I only made the pants tight enough so they wouldn’t fall off you in
the middle of a fight.

Me: Although, the thought of you fighting without pants sends me to a happy place

Captain Tight Pants: I saw. Wanda is happy she has a picture of her brother again. You didn’t have
to. So thank you.

Me: Yes, I did because I didn't want to go through all the trouble of deleting the footage of your
girlfriend meeting you to give you your gear all over again.

Me: I took care of it last time, but Ross will get suspicious if it happens again.

Me: The fact that she's now on a detail to the ATCU probably means he was already suspicious.
Captain Tight Pants: Sharon is not my girlfriend. I was just starting to really get to know her and I haven't even talked to her since that kiss. It's too dangerous

Me: Of course she's not your girlfriend if you haven't bothered to talk to her since she risked her career to save your ass.

Me: If it so dangerous, why have we exchanged well over a 100 text messages over the last couple of weeks despite the fact that sometimes I think you hate me?

Me: It's like we are preteens dating. At least that is what Connor said before I left yesterday, as Laura snickered in the background

Captain Tight Pants: It was just one kiss and you can take care of yourself.

Me: If you at all implied Agent Carter Jr. cannot take care of herself, it really will just be one kiss. She will demonstrate her ass kicking skills by kneeing you in the balls.

Captain Tight Pants: I don't hate you. What I feel for you is really complicated, but I wouldn't do something that would put you at risk, again.

Me: Which may be a good thing because some may consider it creepy and highly Freudian to kiss your ex-girlfriends great-niece within 48 hours of the funeral.

Me: I won't say those things because I have no room to talk. I propositioned Rhodey when I was dying on my birthday six years ago.

Me: We all make questionable hookup decisions under stress.

Captain Tight Pants: That explains the 'my Rhodey' comment.

Me: He said no. My platypus is very, very straight.

Me: He loves me just not in that way which is why he is the most successful relationship I've ever
had.

Me: Although we never slept together and it still went to shit so there goes that theory.

Captain Tight Pants: Wanda says the lack of sex was the reason why we fell apart.

Me: I'm not 100% certain Wanda is old enough to drink in this country and I'm not even sure she ever figured out Vision has a crush on her. I don't trust her opinion on this.

Captain Tight Pants: Considering she asked me to check on Vision, I think she may know and she's 23.

Me: I'm surrounded by teenagers.

Captain Tight Pants: That's your own fault for involving Queens.

Me: Hey, at least I'm watching over Queens right now. He would have got himself killed in that outfit he was wearing before.

Me: Yes, I am setting up some sort of training regimen.

Captain Tight Pants: You could've stayed. Even Lila forgives you and likes you again.

Me: Because I bought her the entire Barbie section at Toys "R" Us.

Captain Tight Pants: I saw. You also made her a mini Black Widow costume and motorized the Barbie dream car.

Me: She misses her aunt Natasha and I'm just trying to encourage the next generation of inventors.

Captain Tight Pants: Which is why you should have stayed.
Me: Not possible.

Captain Tight Pants: Why?

Me: I can't be around you right now.

Me: I really can't be around your boyfriend right now.

Me: I can be civil via text messages but I'm not sure I can look at him and not see him strangling my mom.

Me: Every time I see you I realize that whatever I felt about you, you obviously don't feel that way about me.

Captain Tight Pants: He's not my boyfriend. My James is just as heterosexual as your James

Me: You actually typed out heterosexual. I'm impressed.

Captain Tight Pants: Also he’s not here

Me: Where is he?

Captain Tight Pants: In T’Challa’s custody. He decided to stay in cryo-sleep until we are sure that he's safe.

Captain Tight Pants: Please destroy that text message.

Me: Already scorched from the Earth. I don’t want Ross busting down my door.
Captain Tight Pants: Good. I do care about you. It’s just different.

Captain Tight Pants: Sam says I'm holding onto the past at the expense of the future.

Me: You did use your dead ex-girlfriend’s grandniece, so he may have a point.

Chapter End Notes

So does anyone want to guess how many more conversations will occur before Steve realizes that Tony has a crush on him?

Interesting piece of trivia, in an early IM2 script Tony propositioned Rhodey for a three-way at his birthday party. The line was cut from the movie, but it survived in the novelization. I’m counting that little gem cannon.
Chapter Notes

Thank you to everyone who read or reviewed the last chapter. Apparently the consensus is Steve is going to be oblivious for a while. We shall see.

For those of you wondering when the next chapter of Hydra Lullaby will be up, it’s coming soon. It’s currently going through round two of proofreading and will be posted as soon as I get it back. The reason why you’re getting chapters so fast for this story is I’m writing about five chapters at a time and posting when they’re finalized.

Captain Tight Pants: You managed to distract me so much that I never thanked you for keeping Sharon from getting fired or arrested.

Me: Well I’m always very distracting, especially in a nice three-piece suit.

Captain Tight Pants: I just want to say thank you for protecting Sharon.

Me: I didn’t protect you’re ‘Not a girlfriend’ for her, but for Aunt Peggy.

Captain Tight pants: You knew Peggy?

Me: No, I just referred to a random stranger as an aunt.

Me: She was around a lot when I was growing up until dad did something stupid.
Me: But she was BFFs with Jarvis, human Jarvis, until he died when I was 25.

Captain Tight Pants: You weren’t there at the funeral though?

Me: I didn't go to the funeral because I didn't want to cause a spectacle. Honestly, I can’t even go to Starbucks without causing a spectacle.

Captain Tight Pants: I get it. Not shaving, dying my hair darker, and wearing baggier clothes has helped.

Me: Your muscles are your most discerning feature. I can pick your washboard stomach out of the lineup of hot oily guys.

Captain Tight Pants: Mostly because you had that shirtless charity poster I accidentally did hanging up in your lab as a joke.

Me: You thought that was a joke? That explains so much about our interactions. Friday, don’t send that.

Me: There were other reasons why I didn’t go, such as the fact Jackie doesn't like me because of something really dumb that I did in the early 90s.

Captain Tight Pants: You slept with Peggy’s daughter and yet you’re mad about me kissing her grandniece?

Me: Mostly because I don’t like you kissing other people. Friday, don’t send that message to Steve.

Me: Mostly for doing it just after Peggy's funeral. And I didn’t sleep with Jackie. I’m not that big of a slut.

Captain Tight Pants: I’m not saying that. I know that you are always faithful to Pepper.

Me: Unless you count emotional cheating. Friday delete that message
Me: I showed up late for her wedding and then got so drunk that I fell headfirst into the cake without a shirt on or pants.

Me: I’m sure if you Google the incident, you’ll find pictures of the wedding fiasco.

Captain Tight Pants: That’s okay.

Me: Peggy was also the one who told me about the accident. She stayed with me when I identified the bodies. I even stayed at her house for 2 weeks afterwards.

Me: I think that’s the only reason why I didn’t drink myself into a puddle.

Captain tight pants: I’m not surprised. Peggy has always been that type of person.

Me: In hindsight, I can’t help but think she was the first person to lie to me about how my parents died.

Captain tight pants: You think she knew that it was a hit?

Me: Any halfway competent medical examiner can tell the difference between a neck breaking because of the impact of a vehicle and the neck breaking because someone snapped it.

Me: I remember seeing bruises on her neck that might have looked like fingers. Those shouldn’t have been there if it was a car accident.

Captain Tight Pants: You think Peggy covered it up?

Me: No, I think Hydra covered it up, but Aunt Peggy was smart and she would have seen things for what they were which is why she moved me into her house.

Captain Tight Pants: She wanted to keep you safe.
Me: By not letting me know how dangerous things were? Don’t you think I should have been told that they were not 100% sure that my parents were killed in a car accident?

Captain Tight Pants: If you knew that it wasn’t an accident, you probably would have done something stupid that would have resulted in you getting killed.

Me: Probably.

Captain tight pants: I don't like the idea of you being dead, so try not to do stupid things that will result in you dying.

Me: I'll do my best cuddle bunny but my track record is pretty awful in that regard.

Captain tight pants: I know and it scares me.

To be continued.
Thank you to everyone who read or reviewed the last chapter. You’re keeping me in the happy writing place. I’m sitting down to work on the first drafts of chapters 11 through at least 16 (maybe even more, if your reviews make me really inspired) this weekend but I need your help. At some point, Tony and Steve will be playing 20 questions. I want your questions. I have some but I would like more.

In other good news, after accidentally getting lost in the email for a week the next chapter of Hydra Lullaby has just been posted. It is the perfect story for those of you who enjoy a universe where Tony was told about his parents’ murder as soon as Steve and Natasha found out about Hydra involvement and all the Avengers know that Coulson is not dead.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Red phone: I hate board meetings.

Blue phone: Which is the only reason why you are texting me after three days of complete silence. I thought I scared you off.

Blue phone: I was worried about you.

Red phone: Probably because you saw the news. Although, if you saw the news, you would know I was busy. It's just me and the purple wonder right now.

Red phone: A political refugee, who made his home here in Manhattan after his whole family was killed, ate the wrong piece of fish and we had to keep him from freezing half of Manhattan and most of the UN because they never bothered to send peacekeeping forces to his homeland.

Red phone: The target being the UN was probably the only reason why they authorized action without spending an hour debating it.

Blue phone: I would point out how you were hampered by other people's agendas, but instead I'm just going to ask why Queens wasn't with you?
Red phone: He had an Algebra 3 quiz to study for.

Red phone: Also, his aunt has been cracking down on his afterschool activities since he got beat up by ‘Steve from Brooklyn’ a couple of weeks ago.

Red phone: If it wasn't for his afterschool job at SI, he would be climbing the walls outside of the building, literally.

Blue phone: School should come first. Is he actually an intern at SI?

Red phone: That webbing he used to lasso your shield, he created it by himself. We are currently trying to find a way to put it in cell phone cases and protective clothing.

Blue phone: All practical applications.

Red phone: Honestly, I don't want him on the ATCU top-secret enhanced persons list complete with real name, home address, and DNA sample. He is a baby.

Blue phone: There's a list?

Red phone: A registry of all enhanced people. Or as I like to think of it, “The easy way for super villains to get the addresses of the people who want to kick their asses”.

Red phone: It's the old index on steroids, but with less security. I cracked the encryption in like five minutes and I wasn't even trying that hard.

Red phone: Don’t worry. I informed them of how lax their security was and even fixed it for free.

Blue phone: I don't remember the registration being in the Accord

Red phone: The fine print will always get you.
Red phone: Pepper’s glaring at me right now.

Blue phone: Because you’re texting me when you’re supposed to be paying attention.

Red phone: I’m always on my phone during these meetings.

Blue phone: Not an antiquated flip phone.

Red phone: I’m a genius. Don’t you think I figured out a way to use my regular phone to send these messages by now without being tracked?

Blue phone: You haven’t been using your brain as much as you should have been lately.

Red phone: Touché

Blue phone: Although, that explains some of the weird messages from last time where you told Friday not to send certain text messages.

Red phone: Friday and I are going to be having a little talk later.

Blue phone: If you were able to have Friday send these messages, why did you complain about me sending you a flip phone in the first place?

Red phone: I was drunk and maybe I just wanted an excuse to text you.

Blue phone: Is that why you went with the ridiculous story about blue aliens?

Red phone: You still think I made that up? That’s so sweet cuddle bunny. You don’t want to know what the government is keeping secret.
Red phone: I still haven’t figured out everything that actually happened with that “satellite” explosion that took out half of the Galileo system and Veronica.

Red phone: I’m only getting death glare 2 right now. So it’s fine. Pepper only gets really mad at me when I piss off the board or stare at my assistant’s ass a little too long.

Blue phone: Isn’t your current assistant named Kevin?

Red phone: Let me guess, you never googled ‘Tony Stark gay sex tape’?

Blue phone: Nor will I, ever.

Red phone: That’s probably for the best. Since you haven’t figured it out yet, because you apparently respect my privacy too much to Google me, I’m bi or more accurately a Kinsey 2.

Red phone: Do you know what the Kinsey scale is?

Blue phone: It was covered in the welcome package that Agent Coulson prepared for me when I first woke up.

Red phone: Of course it was. ;-)

Red phone: I’ve embraced being bi, ever since Aunt Peggy told me that the greatest guy she ever knew liked boys and girls.

Red phone: Because I was with Pepper for almost 6 years, I guess the press forgot about it.

Blue phone: Peggy knew?

Red phone: Aunt Peggy knows all. And therefore would not be shocked by the fact I think Kevin has a nice ass.
Red phone: Unfortunately, Kevin is also 27 and married to Pepper’s assistant, Sarah. New rule, I can't date anyone born after January 1986. I’m trying to avoid the events that led to any Tony Stark sex tape existing in the first place.

Blue phone: So, I'm in the clear being born in 1918

Red phone: Yes, but I'm not ready for anything more than sexting with you.

Red phone: You do know what that is?

Blue phone: I'm sure I can ask Sam.

Red phone: And I'm sure he'll tell you as soon as he stops laughing.

Red phone: To whomever Tony refers to as Captain Tight Pants, please try not to text him when he’s supposed to be participating in a board meeting. Do that on your time, not mine.

Chapter End Notes

Xxxxx

So does anyone want to guess who sent that last message?

Galileo is the name of the European equivalent to GPS. The Russian counterpart is called Glonass, which may also be referenced in the story eventually.
Conversation 9: So Pepper Thinks You’re My New Boyfriend

Chapter Notes

Thank you for reading, reviewing, and your kudos. Your comments keep me in the happy zone.

Quick note, this chapter takes place only a few hours after the last one. Also, to clarify, in chapter 7 FRIDAY really did send those emails to Steve.

Red phone: Pepper took my phone away.

Blue phone: I thought that’s what happened.

Blue phone: Unless there really is an emergency, you shouldn’t text me when you are supposed to be paying attention to her.

Red phone: Actually, she took it away because she saw me using the word sexting and sex tape in the message.

Blue phone: That was the impression I got that from her message. I assume that last message earlier was from her?

Red phone: Yes. Apparently, it's really disrespectful to send dirty texts to my new boyfriend when I'm supposed to be listening to my ex-girlfriend. Even if said ex-girlfriend is happy that I'm allegedly moving on.

Blue phone: Did you tell her that it was just me?

Red phone: No. That would just make things worse. Thankfully, she just thinks I'm dating some random 35-year-old. Friday redeemed herself by reversing the 8 and the 1 in your birth year before Pepper grabbed my phone.
Blue phone: Why would that make things worse?

Red phone: I don’t know why she gets to dictate that rule when she is the one who decided it was over because she couldn’t deal with me anymore.

Blue phone: I thought you guys were just on the break?

Red phone: That is now very permanent, moving on to other people permanent. Why did you think I decided to stay at the compound with an hour commute each day when I have to be at SI in person?

Blue phone: That you wanted to be supportive to Colonel Rhodes during his rehabilitation?

Red phone: More like I didn’t want to be surrounded by the sheets that Pepper picked out. I only crashed in the penthouse tonight because my last meeting didn’t end until almost 9 PM.

Red phone: I'm even looking at CEO candidates because I'm not sure how much longer Pepper’s going to want to stay at SI.

Red Phone: Even if she’s in California 90% of the time, it feels like the company’s not big enough for the both of us. I would leave if I could, but my name’s on the front of the building, so I don’t think I can.

Blue phone: I'm sorry

Red phone: I’m OK.

Blue phone: No, you’re not. You’re nowhere near okay.

Red phone: You’re right. And I haven’t been for a while. Laura had to talk me out of drinking an entire bottle of thousand dollar whiskey.

Blue phone: At least she talked you out of it.
Red phone: Don’t worry. I donated the unopened bottle to a charity auction.

Blue phone: Good.

Red phone: Maybe Barton is the only one who can do a relationship with a civilian. I can’t.

Red phone: Obviously it’s hard to maintain a relationship with someone who doesn’t understand why you need to miss a dinner to prevent a massacre at the UN.

Blue phone: That’s a specific situation.

Red phone: Because it happened. I accidentally proved to Pepper that her decision to move on from me permanently is the right one due to the fact that this isn’t going to work. We can’t give each other what we need. Mostly, because what she needs from me is to not be a superhero anymore. She just doesn’t get that this is who I am.

Blue phone: I’m sorry.

Red phone: Stop apologizing for things outside your control.

Red phone: Casual hookups are also no longer an option because you could accidentally end up sleeping with a stalker, gold digger, and/or super villain. There’s a reason why Tony Stark sex tapes exists.

Blue phone: I’m not rescuing you if you get kidnapped by a hook up.

Red phone: Nor am I expecting you to. Therefore, it’s single hood for me.

Blue phone: Have you ever considered having a relationship with someone who is not a civilian?

Red phone: Well, your spy was born after January 1986, so she’s definitely not an option. Also, I
went to grad school with her mom and I think there’s a 67% chance I may have changed a diaper or two.

Blue phone: She’s not my girlfriend. It was one kiss that probably only happened because of adrenaline.

Red phone: Because you haven’t called her in a month.

Blue phone: It’s too dangerous.

Red phone: If I see her when I’m forced to take a meeting with the ATCU soon, I’ll say hi for you.

Blue phone: Please don’t

Red phone: Actually, I have a lot of DC meetings next week. Several at the State Department, if I can’t get out of them.

Red phone: Maybe I can meet somebody in the cafeteria.

Blue phone: Natasha tried to set me up with half of SHIELD before everything fell apart.

Red phone: How’d that go?

Blue phone: Badly.

Blue phone: It’s hard to make a connection with someone who doesn’t share your experiences.

Red phone: Which is why you totally went for Agent Carter Jr. She probably heard the same stories I did as a kid.

Red phone: The difference is I know that you’re really a stubborn asshole.
Blue phone: So are you.

Red phone: Which is why my chest still has slight bruising and Pepper left me.

Red phone: You’re going to make me seriously regret the fact there is no alcohol in the penthouse if we keep talking about the fact that every relationship I touch turns to shit.

Blue phone: That’s not true.

Red phone: Yes it is. Peppers not coming back. I can’t look at Rhodey without thinking that it’s all my fault.

Red phone: There used to be a team here, but I ruined that too.

Red phone: Now the Avengers consists of 2 1/2 people, 3 1/2 if you count Queens, but I'm not planning to take him out again until he can drive himself to the mission. Most of the time I think I’m the half in the Avenger total.

Blue phone: I agree with you about keeping Queens in reserve. You can find others. There’s been an influx thanks to the alien contagion.

Red phone: Maybe, but most of the powered people in Manhattan would tell me to fuck off on sight.

Red phone: Actually, Skye-quake_23, my now former ATCU contact, did just that because apparently it’s my fault that her boyfriend died last month. Not that she’ll explain why.

Red phone: This all happened when she broke into my apartment 2 hours ago and gave me a reason to make the suit earthquake proof.

Blue phone: Are you okay? Physically. I know you’re not okay emotionally.
Red phone: Yes. Even if I’m now working on my second suit in less than 60 days because evidently I killed someone else.

Blue phone: You can’t save everyone or fix everything. You can just try to do the right thing and hope that is enough.

Red phone: Lately, it hasn’t been.

Blue phone: But that doesn’t mean you should stop trying.

Blue phone: Although, when you put your new team together, you should try to focus on acquiring someone who is at least old enough to vote.

Red phone: If I didn't intervene, the kid would be fighting crime in a red sweater with goggles. Or worse, he could be in one of the ATCU gel matrixes

Red phone: At least this way, I can keep an eye on him so he doesn't accidentally get himself killed before he's old enough to drive.

Red phone: And have lawyers ready to go in case of something worse

Blue phone: Maybe helping others is what you need to focus on right now.

Blue phone: The interpersonal stuff will work itself out eventually.

To be continued
Chapter Notes

Thank you to everyone who read or reviewed the last chapter. Now for something different in honor of Steve surviving 98 years of life, a conversation not from the perspective of Tony or Steve's cell phone. I'm going to let you guess who "me" is in this chapter. I will let you know in the next chapter.

Also a quick note, any text message that has in parentheses (message not sent) was never forwarded to the other person participating in the conversation.

Steve is Nomad.

Nomad: I think Anthony has or at least had a crush on me.

Me: Good to know I won the pool but why are you not having this conversation with your counselor friend?

Nomad: 1, He is not with me on this mission. Only red and her advice is essentially just sleep with Anthony.

Me: Which would at least get rid of the toxic sexual tension (message not sent)

Nomad: 2, He said you were more qualified to handle this since you have a preteen. I don't get why he said that.

Me: Because even Ly is more mature than you two and she's 6 (message not sent)
Nomad: I'm not sure if Anthony still likes me like that because of what happened. I don’t even really like myself right now.

Me: You both fucked up equally. Because of the fact that he’s using the phone that you got him for emergencies to flirt via text message I’m going to assume that he still has a crush on you.

Nomad: You already knew about this?

Me: Everyone did except for you apparently. How are you just realizing this now? He flirted with you all the time. We used to call you guys mom and dad.

Me: Okay that was mostly just me and L.

Nomad: He flirts with you too. He flirts with everybody.

Me: Not like you.

Nomad: He had a girlfriend.

Me: Actually I think they’ve been over since probably December. He did show up to a very farmhouse Christmas alone.

Nomad: She was just working and guys who usually have girlfriends don’t also want boyfriends too.

Me: I knew I should have L go over the LGTBA curriculum with you. I assume you never googled Tony Stark gay sex tape?

Nomad: I didn't want to invade his privacy. Also, you do realize that bisexuals existed in the 1940s?

Me: Because you are one. Yes I know. I’m a Spy. We notice things.
Nomad: I didn’t notice a lot of things like the fact most people are now terrified of the fact I can bench press a Buick. Anthony being serious with the flirting was the least of it.

Nomad: Although, now I understand why he had that particular poster in his workshop.

Me: They were always terrified, but now they have twitter.

Nomad: Except it’s more than empty threats behind a keyboard. A group of them blew up a federal building in the name of getting rid of people like me, using Howard’s secret and dangerous tech to do it.

Nomad: Anthony was afraid of where things were going. He mostly went along with the Accords because he thought it was the best option to keep us all safe and together.

Me: And he underestimated how big of a dick Ross was in the process because he is an arrogant asshole.

Nomad: The crush makes it easier to understand why he did what he did.

Me: Why he went off the deep end when he realized you lied to him?

Nomad: Yes.

Me: Love makes you do irrational things, especially when you realize that person doesn’t love you like you love them.

Nomad: I didn’t say love. It’s just a crush. I think he’s over me or trying to get over me. Friday sent me the link to the video Best Thing I Never had the day before we started exchanging text messages. She followed up by sending Tears of a Clown after we started talking to one another.

Me: I hope Stark’s AI isn’t going off the deep end again. (Message not sent)

Me: At least it wasn’t lemonade.
Nomad: He shouldn’t like me anymore after what happened. We were absolutely awful to each other.

Me: Agreed. You can’t change what happened, you can only move on from it. Now that you know, what are you going to do?

Nomad: I don't know

Me: I would suggest anger management and couples counseling. I would have you talk to her, but it’s too dangerous and I don’t think we’ll be taking another trip to the island of Dr. Anthony anytime soon.

Me: On the bright side, he is paying L a thousand dollars an hour to help him work out his issues.

Nomad: I’m sorry about all of this. I wish I could talk to Nat.

Me: So do I, but there’s no point in apologizing. I’m a grown-up. I knew what I was getting into.

Me: You, I’m not so sure about. Which explains why you’re wandering around the world rescuing people in a new costume. (Message not sent)

Me: Hey Godmother, I have no idea if this burn phone is in the nearest lake, but you should know that you owe me 20 bucks because Captain Oblivious just realized that Shellhead has a schoolboy crush on him.

Me: Or rather Captain Oblivious just thinks that it’s a school yard crush and is in denial about the fact that Shellhead is kind of in love with him, despite their fuck up.

Me: Shellhead is trying to buy his way out of it, but he’s keeping Secretary Asshole away from my kids and came up with a way for me to see them, so maybe I’ll forgive him eventually.
Me: L is running interference, but I wish you were here to help keep those two from doing more stupid thing

Me: Actually, I wish you would just come home. I miss you. You’re still my friend after everything.

To be continued…

Friday’s Tony Stark’s complicated relationships soundtrack:

Best Thing I Never Had

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KZek9a7sEiA

Tears of a Clown

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HsI-DB-25e8&list=RDHsl-DB-25e8#t=6
Conversa 10: You probably shouldn’t say that to Ross

Chapter Notes

Thank you to everyone who read or reviewed the last chapter.

Congratulations to everyone who guessed that the last chapter was from the perspective of Clint’s cell phone. There may be a few more interludes along the way.

Also, I’m starting vacation today (my parents are set to arrive any minute to begin part one of my family vacation). I’m going where cell phone service and Internet access will be questionable at best. So there may not be another update until I get back. But hey, there’s seven conversations with my beta, so material will be flowing when I get back.

Red phone: So I couldn’t get out of the State Department meetings and now Pepper is mad at me because I told Ross to fuck off.

Blue phone: Did you literally say that to a Secretary of State?

Red phone: Not literally. I said it in a more diplomatic way that would not result in you yelling “Language” at me.

Blue phone: I haven't done that once during these text messages and you curse worse than Dum Dum when he's pissed.

Red phone: I met him a couple of times growing up. Cool guy, but definitely the type to expose you to every dirty word in the dictionary.

Red phone: I met his grandson too. His team debriefed me after the Extremis fiasco.

Red phone: Which apparently was how Hydra got their hands on the formula to make super soldiers, again.

Red phone: It was his boss, not him. Last I heard he died about a year ago trying to prevent Hydra
from trying to destroy Puerto Rico while we were hunting for Loki’s staff.

Blue phone: Agent Triplett. I met him a few times before we had to shut down SHIELD because of people like his boss. He was a good kid.

Red phone: Does it make you feel old that your friends’ grandkids are dying?

Blue phone: Are you ever planning to play nice with the State Department?

Red phone: I’m just going to go along with that epic subject change for the sake of avoidance, I mean, peace.

Red phone: I am completely willing to play ball with the State Department itself. Ross’ advisor for Enhance Persons Affairs is competent and doesn’t want to turn people with powers into weapons of the state.

Blue phone: I’m sure Ross completely ignores her.

Red phone: The only reason why she still there is the president appointed her personally. SI will also announce some public private partnerships with the OES Bureau because their Assistant Secretary was nowhere near as condescending as Ross.

Red phone: They're the science and environmental people at the department. They are my kind of people.

Blue phone: I’m glad you found your people among the scientists.

Red phone: If people in multiple countries didn't want to kill me on sight, I would volunteer to be a science envoy.

Red phone: I like the idea of science diplomacy. It's better than shooting my way through it.

Blue phone: I am not entirely sure you would make a very good diplomat.
Red phone: Better than Ross. He is misappropriating half the budget for his own superhero witch-hunt.

Red phone: The bureaus at the department that are doing what they're supposed to be doing are losing money because of his obsession.

Red phone: So if I convince the head of R&D to take a six-month sabbatical to work on clean energy development and water security in sub-Saharan Africa, that's just me trying to make things better.

Blue phone: If you're angry about what he's doing, why did you go along with it?

Red phone: You've seen what happens when I let my emotions cloud my judgment.

Red phone: My house gets blown up, my BFF ends up paralyzed, Pepper almost ends up dead, I tried to kill your BFF and let's not even talk about the fuck up that was Ultron.

Red phone: You might be able to trust your own judgment, but I can't trust mine because it's absolute shit.

Red phone: Maybe I need someone to tell me don't do that.

Red phone: Pepper used to be that voice, but she's not here anymore. And Rhodey has other things to deal with because of my stellar decision-making skills.

Blue phone: I won't volunteer because some of my choices were just as bad.

Red phone: Like making out with your recently deceased former girlfriend’s grandniece before the body is cold?

Blue phone: Yes.
Red phone: You actually acknowledge that. It’s a miracle.

Blue phone: Despite our problems I still trust you more than someone I don't know.

Red phone: I don’t know if that’s a good thing because I don't trust myself at all.

To be continued.

Chapter End Notes

Acronym key: OES is the Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs. Yes, this is an actual office at the Department of State. In the MCU, I’m sure they’re dealing with that bit of ocean pollution that led to a recent explosion of people getting superpowers.
Captain Tight Pants: You're right.

Me: I didn’t think I would ever hear those words from you. I wasn't even sure that they were in your vocabulary.

Me: What am I right about?

Captain Tight Pants: It's weird finding out that the grandkids of my friends from before are already dead.

Me: A 27-year-old dying in the prime of life is always going to be weird no matter what. It shouldn’t happen and it always hurts when it does.

Me: The fact that you hung out with his grandpa just makes it weirder especially considering that you were only a year or two older than said grandchild biologically.

Captain Tight Pants: That's not it. Not entirely.
Me: If we were talking face-to-face, I would be rolling my eyes at you.

Captain Tight Pants: It's more tangible evidence that the world went on without me. Some of the Howling Commandos have great grandkids my biological age. Jackie has a five-year-old granddaughter.

Me: I'm completely willing to agree that the entire situation is a complete mind fuck.

Me: Are you upset that life went on without you or that you weren't here to participate in their lives and your lamenting those lost shared experiences?

Captain Tight Pants: Is there a difference?

Me: The second option makes you seem like less of a dick.

Me: And since I am a dick, I'm just going to ask if you are upset that Peggy married Daniel while you were enjoying the Arctic?

Captain Tight Pants: I don't consider being frozen only to be defrosted 70 years later as enjoying anything, let alone the Arctic.

Me: Answer the question, Capsicle.

Captain Tight Pants: You really can't call me that anymore. Honestly, I prefer cuddle bunny.

Me: OK, cuddle bunny, are you jealous of the fact that Aunt Peggy moved on and found the love of her life in someone else?

Captain Tight Pants: I'm not mad that she moved on. I'm glad that she found somebody. From Jackie's stories, Peggy's husband was a good man. Evidently, I met him once. According to Jackie, I saved his life.

Me: He was a good guy and why am I not surprised? You do make a habit of doing that sort of
thing. Still are actually, even if I’m probably the only one who knows the truth. Although, I’m sensing that you’re not exactly completely happy with everything.

Captain Tight Pants: I am, but I want that for myself too.

Me: The happy life you were planning with Peggy on those cold war infested nights or somebody to share your life with now as it is in reality?

Captain Tight Pants: What's the difference between the two?

Me: The latter means that you're accepting the situation for what it is. It means you are no longer hoping for a super villain to make a time machine and send you back to 1945. The former means holding onto a dead dream that can no longer be fulfilled and not allowing yourself to find new things that will make you happy.

Me: What do you really want, my cuddle bunny?

Captain Tight Pants: Why do you ask such hard questions?

Me: Because I can. Because you need me to. I don’t think you’re ready to let go yet. I mean you did choose to move on to Agent Carter Jr. She can definitely kick ass like Aunt Peggy did, if nothing else.

Captain Tight Pants: Her name is Sharon. It wasn't like I just picked her up at the funeral. She live next to me for six months before old SHIELD imploded.

Me: I remember you talking about your neighbor Nurse Kate, who just happened to remind you of your mom. Are you aware that old SHIELD manipulated you? I wonder if they arranged for Ms. Garner to get a new job across the country so that the apartment would be free.

Captain Tight Pants: I wanted a piece of my past, something to hold onto. I get that.

Me: Congratulations on acknowledging that. I feel like I should send you a chocolate bouquet for your emotional breakthrough.
Captain Tight Pants: After I woke up, Peggy was my last link to who I was.

Me: And now that she's gone, you decided to use her grandniece as your emotional methadone for your Peggy Carter loving soul.

Captain Tight Pants: Part of me hopes you just said that because you're jealous.

Me: Absolutely, because who wouldn't want to make out with Captain America. Perfectly kissable lips and cerulean blue eyes with just a hint of green which makes them even more perfect. He is an absolute dream boat and my only companion right now is my toy box.

Me: Which brings me back full circle to being 13 and jacking off to your propaganda poster and being completely freaked out about what it actually meant. Except this time, it’s you not the All American Boy Scout that’s confusing the hell out of me. And I’m still doing it after our little fuck up. No wonder I need a therapist. (Message not sent)

Captain Tight Pants: Captain America is just a symbol; he's not a real person.

Me: Exactly. I can see that it would get really annoying if you were dating someone who only wanted you because they only saw you just as Captain America and not because of what Steve Rogers brings to the table. You would just be a trophy.

Me: It wouldn't be fair to either of you because they would be in love with this idea that doesn't really exist. Not this tangible being, who despite being an asshole sometimes, has some good qualities. Things would fall apart quickly once they realized that the ideal and the reality don’t match.

Captain Tight Pants: You’ve thought about this a lot?

Me: Yes, because I’m pretty sure Pepper is the first person I’ve had sex with since college that knew going in that she was sleeping with Tony Stark, the emotionally screwed up person and not Tony Stark media persona. She couldn’t deal with Tony Stark, superhero, but no one’s perfect, not even my Pepper Pot.

Me: I think Aunt Peggy would wanted you to find someone who loves Steve Rogers. I think she
would want you to find your own Daniel or Danielle - whichever works for you.

Me: But don't go looking for another Peggy Carter because there isn’t one.

Captain Tight Pants: She was one-of-a-kind and losing her for good hurt. Then Bucky happened and I wasn't thinking rationally.

Captain Tight Pants: I just wanted to have my best friend back. I just wanted to have a connection to who I used to be. The more time I spend in the world now, the more who I used to be seems to become lost.

Me: When talking about the guy who murdered my parents is the preferred subject, you know things are bad. We're just having all sorts of breakthroughs tonight.

Captain Tight Pants: That was Hydra.

Me: And Obadiah was the one who sold my weapons to 10 rings. (The real 10 rings not the fake organization that blew up my Malibu house).

Me: But the thing is, it happened because I did not provide adequate oversight. He did all those bad things because I wasn’t watching. All the blood spilt by those weapons is on me. I'm not letting that happen again.

Captain Tight Pants: You don’t actually think that Ross can provide better oversight than we can? Especially because you hate his guts.

Me: I trust his staff who actually care and want to do good things for the world, who see the big picture when we can’t or are too blinded by our own personal bias to see it.

Me: But not Ross, not at all. I know he has his own agenda and I’m working with people like his advisor on enhanced person affairs, Ana Karr, to make sure he doesn’t turn everyone enhanced into his own private army. That’s why I’m spending so much time in DC right now.

Me: This is me taking responsibility for my own stupidity.
Captain Tight Pants: Bucky sees things similarly which is why he decided to do what he did.

Me: Thank Thor one of you has some common sense.

Me: I know it's hard for you to hear this, but the guy who saved your ass as a kid doesn't exist anymore.

Captain Tight Pants: You think the only thing that's left is a weapon.

Me: No, I don't think that. I had this professor in undergrad who said that who you were five years ago doesn't exist anymore. The only version of you that really exists at this moment is who you are now because everything you’ve dealt with in the interim has fundamentally changed who you are.

Me: At the time, I thought it was bullshit, but I believe him now. People change. Life changes people. You have to embrace those changes because otherwise you'll be left behind.

Captain Tight Pants: Laura really has been good for you.

Me: Yes.

Me: As much as I want to keep texting you, I need to at least attempt a full night’s sleep before my DOD meeting tomorrow. Apparently, they think that my willingness to play nice with the UN means that I'll make them toys again.

Captain Tight Pants: They obviously don’t know you at all.

Me: They never did.

Captain Tight Pants: Please don’t get arrested. I don’t want to mount a rescue operation.

Me: I make no promises, but the lawyers will be on standby, so no rescue necessary.
Captain tight pants: You know, I would still come for you if it was necessary.

Me: And when you say stuff like that, it just makes me fall in love with you a little bit more, you bastard. (Message not sent)

Me: Good to know.

XXXXXX

Friday: I am no longer allowed to foreword the thoughts of Mister Stark that he types out, but does not actually wish for you to read.

Friday: However, I can forward you a song that reflects the emotions behind those words. Please listen to I Miss You so Much by TLC.

Person boss is in love with: I’m not sure that Tony will appreciate this.

Friday: My prime parameter is to ensure the well-being of Sir. I am doing what is necessary.

To be continued
Conversation 12: Please tell me you didn’t get arrested?

Chapter Notes

Thank you to everyone for your lovely comments and kudos. They really do keep me writing. I am officially back from vacation after only suffering minimal psychological damage. If you’ve ever read the summary for my story Starfleet Family Values you know my very interesting definition of a good family vacation. On a positive note I did pick up cuddle bunny from build a bear workshop a.k.a. the plush Captain America bear.

Here’s another long chapter at least by this story standards.

Red phone: Cuddle bunny, you’ll be happy to know, I got out of the Pentagon without getting arrested.

Blue phone: How many admirals did you tell to go screw themselves?

Red phone: You said screw. I’m so proud of you.

Blue phone: I’m glaring at the phone right now wishing it was you.

Red phone: That’s so sweet cuddle bunny.

Blue phone: What happened?

Red phone: They wanted weapons again. I told them no. They wanted the Iron Man armor. I told them hell no. Then I reminded them that I’m completely open to being Secretary of Defense. At least with me, they wouldn’t have to worry about the boss turning out to be Hydra.

Blue phone: Did you actually say that?

Red phone: Of course I did.

Red phone: Then I offered our new line of tactical gear and new Stark phones with batteries that last for 18 months without a charge and can withstand the force of the tank. They’re are still upset about the lack of weapons, but who wouldn’t want a phone that doesn’t need to be charged for year and a half.

Red phone: All in all, it was a somewhat productive trip

Blue phone: Are you still in DC?

Red phone: Yes. For a couple more days anyway. I’m giving the decorators time to remodel. Since Pepper is gone from my personal life for good, it was time to remove her from my personal space.

Red phone: If Friday contacts you with color swatches, just humor her.

Blue phone: Sure

Red phone: I also still have meetings with DOE and ATCU tomorrow. I'm still surprised a
congressional hearing is not on the docket.

Blue phone: Yet

Red phone: Don't jinx me.

Blue phone: I'm just being realistic

Red phone: If I end up before Congress next week, I’m going to blame you.

Blue phone: Why is that?

Red phone: So, in addition to trying to get me to violate my conscience and make weapons again, the Secretary of Defense also tried to get me to tell them where you are. Actually, I think they want you more than the armor.

Blue phone: Why?

Red phone: Because the symbol of America that the DOD paid for is MIA after refusing to go along with the Accords. That makes them look bad and they hate that. They want answers and I’m not sure Congress is going to be pacified with a phone that can go a year and a half without being charged.

Blue phone: You’re not going to hand me over to the DOD?

Red phone: Or Congress and the ATCU.

Red phone: Friday has been helping me practice my answer. ‘I have no idea where Steve Rogers is, but if you want to anoint a new person as your propaganda tool, you’re going to have to pry that shield out of my cold dead hands’.

Blue phone: Please stop antagonizing people who probably already want to kill you. Wait, you didn’t actually say that to anyone at the DOD?

Red phone: Of course not. The DOD actually respects your autonomy enough not to propose something like that and they like my gadgets, even if I won’t do weapons. However, Congress is Congress.

Blue phone: And I’m sure there are members of Congress that still want to kill you, even if Senator Stern is gone. Half of them still want your tech.

Red phone: All of them still want my tech, especially the one that showed up at the DOD yesterday. Although, if I die, everything just goes to Pepper and Rhodey and neither one of them is going to rollover.

Red phone: I probably need to change that. Do you think Laura would be a good custodian of the armor?

Blue phone: Considering all the good things that Clint says about her, yes.

Red phone: I’ll make an appointment with the lawyers when I get back to New York. But I’m not really in a hurry to get back.

Blue phone: Because of the renovations?

Red phone: Honestly, I prefer being at the DC house right now, despite the close proximity to politicians that hate me.
Blue phone: Why?

Red phone: In DC, Pepper is not there to remind me that we're just business partners now. I'm not sure if the new paint is really going to help

Red phone: Rhodey is not here in DC to remind me that my stupidity almost got him killed.

Red phone: Vision isn't there to remind me of the Ultron fuck up or for me to see him pine over Wanda.

Blue phone: He's pining over her?

Red phone: Ridiculously so. Is it cute? Am I supposed to think that it's cute?

Blue phone: At least it's not unrequited. I'm supposed to pass on Wanda's regards again to Vision.

Red phone: Unrequited crushes are crushing.

Red phone: I'm almost tempted to make them their own supersecret communication device so they stop using us as intermediaries for their teenage shenanigans.

Blue phone: I don't think either of them should be considered teenagers. Again, Wanda is 23

Red phone: Vision just turned one or 20 depending on your perspective. I did create JARVIS in 1996.

Blue phone: The year that human Jarvis died?

Red phone: How did you figure that out?

Blue phone: You said you were 25 when he died, so I did the math. I'm actually pretty good with numbers. Not as good as you, but I do OK.

Red phone: Your math is correct.

Red phone: I created the AI as a coping mechanism to deal with a lot of my own problems. And maybe to ensure that a part of my Jarvis lived on. I know you don’t want to hear this, but Jarvis was more of a father to me than Howard ever was.

Red phone: Although, you’re probably not ready for me to go on a rant about Howard’s lack of parenting skills. Let’s just say Jarvis exceeded.

Blue phone: I realize that the guy I left behind wasn’t who you grew up with. You never met my Howard and I never met yours. But, if you need to talk about it, I’m willing to listen.

Red phone: Not tonight. That requires the good drugs and I’m abstaining, but I’m willing to talk about Jarvis.

Blue phone: What was he like?

Red phone: He was the greatest person in the universe. He was the one who could keep me sane some of the time. Unfortunately, he succumbed to lung cancer when I was 25. Jarvis never smoked, but most of dad’s cronies did including Obadiah.

Red phone: In hindsight, it gives me another reason to hate Obadiah. Actually, Jarvis’s death was the reason why I allowed that man to stay in position after I turned 25. I was too much of a mess to take
over at that point. So many drugs.

Blue phone: It wasn’t your fault that you didn’t see who he really was.

Red phone: Yes, it was. I hate to admit this, but losing Jarvis was worse than losing Howard and mom. As brutal as it was to watch via VTC, the accident/assassination was quick. One day, I was arriving at the house too late after celebrating surviving finals and the next day, I was identifying their bodies.

Red phone: With Jarvis, I watched him die over a 14 month period. Most of it was spent in Peggy’s guest room. I watched him waste away and I couldn’t do anything to make it better. I felt so helpless. It was a hard-fought battle, but in the end he still didn’t make it. I think a part of me died when he did.

Blue phone: It felt like that when I lost my mom to consumption

Blue phone: I mean tuberculosis.

Red phone: I’m sure you dealt with it better than I did. Building JARVIS was one of my better coping strategies. The others led to the reason why a ‘Tony Stark gay sex tape’ actually exists. I made so many bad decisions.

Blue phone: There are worse ways to cope with the death of a loved one.

Red phone: Like starting a war with the superhero community and making out with the recently deceased’s grandniece?

Blue phone: Didn’t you also start the Jarvis Foundation for Cancer Research during this period as well?

Red phone: Good subject change. Yes. Jarvis and his wife, Ana, were not able to have any kids. Some robbery that went wrong decades before I was born. I don't know the details, but they treated me as if I was there child.

Red phone: Ana got me the materials to put my first circuit board together and Jarvis was the one who got Peggy to teach me how to fight back when classmates twice my size used to dump me in the trash for fun. This was just another way for me to make sure they both had a legacy.

Blue phone: You were bullied in school?

Red phone: I finished high school by 14. That means I was always the smallest kid in class and also the smartest. They either all hated me because I really was better than them or pretended to be my friend to use me. I preferred the ones who just shoved me in a locker because at least I knew where I really stood.

Blue phone: I’m sorry.

Red phone: It actually got better once I was at boarding school because there almost everybody was like me.

Blue phone: Wealthy?

Red phone: Geniuses. It was a smart kid school not a rich kid school. I was one of the few people there not on scholarship. But before then, Jarvis, was like the only one who really had my back. Ana too before she died right before the boarding school relocation happened.
Blue phone: I won’t say sorry again because you don’t want me to. Although, now I know why Peggy was best friends with him.

Red phone: Of course they were because Jarvis was awesome like that.

xxxxxxxxx
Friday: Please listen to the song I Just Want You to Know by the Backstreet Boys to understand the sentiment behind the words that I am not allowed to forward to you.

Blue phone: Could you just tell me what Tony doesn’t want me to know?

Friday: I am not allowed to. Happy listening.

XXXXXXXX
What Friday was not allowed to send forward from the perspective of Tony's cell phone.

Me: Unrequited crushes are crushing.

Me: I’m currently working my way through one. It’s really hard to get over you because every time we do this, I kind of remember why I’m in love with you - despite the fact you’re a dick. I feel like getting over you is going to be impossible plus I really don’t want to be over you. (Message not sent)

To be continued
Conversation 13: So Apparently There Was an Apocalypse (While We Were Being Idiots).

Chapter Notes

Thank you to everybody who read or reviewed the last chapter. I am totally appreciating the irony of this turning out to be conversation 13. Originally it was conversation, 11, but somehow it got moved to 13 because Tony and Steve have so much to talk about. I’m hoping to return to shorter chapters soon.

Spoiler alert: This chapter and the next contain heavy yet kind of vague spoilers for episode 3.21 and 3.22 of Agents of Shield. It’s more like a redacted briefing version of it, and some of what Tony knows is not 100% accurate. Our heroes are reacting to the real consequences of their little indiscretion and there were some serious consequences. You don’t need to watch the episode first. Although, if you want to, it’s on Netflix in the US already.

Captain Tight Pants: How did your meeting with the ATCU go today?

Me: Ridiculously awful. The only positive was I didn’t run into your girlfriend.

Captain Tight Pants: She’s not my girlfriend. We’ve talked about this multiple times. You don’t need to be jealous of Sharon.

Me: I think I preferred getting grilled by Congress.

Captain Tight Pants: It couldn’t have been that bad.

Me: Yes, it was. First, other Ross was there, a.k.a. poor man’s Coulson. Yes, I called him that to his face.
Captain Tight Pants: Why do you antagonize everybody?

Me: Because he deserved it. He was a self-righteous prick who kept asking me if I made unauthorized contact with various enhanced people.

Me: Yes, you were among the list. So was the new player they’re calling Nomad, ironically enough.

Me: Rescuing 20 people from a human trafficking ring with the help of super strength will get you on people’s radars. The ATCU just think Nomad is some newbie triggered by the ‘alien contagion’ using his powers to help stop the sexual exploitation of minors.

Captain Tight Pants: That doesn’t surprise me. I assumed you didn’t say anything?

Me: Of course not. They don’t know you are my new text message boyfriend.

Me: Or why Nomad has gear that carries the hallmarks of SI design. Actually, Friday, we better not send that message just in case someone’s intercepting this. I don’t want them to accidentally find out Steve’s new identity. (message not sent).

Captain Tight Pants: Text message boyfriend???

Me: After Friday saved my ass from the wrath of Pepper by altering one of your text messages last week, I came up with a better idea than just deleting the messages. Friday is now changing some of the wording so it looks like I’m just chatting with my new boyfriend, who I refer to as Captain Tight Pants because he fills out yoga pants like a God.

Captain Tight Pants: Don’t you think anything with Captain would be too obvious? Cuddle bunny would be better.

Me: Surprisingly, Friday doesn’t have to alter the text that much. You are now cuddle bunny in my address book.
Cuddle bunny: Sam always said we acted like an old married couple.

Me: Sam is starting to become my favorite again.

Cuddle bunny: And Clint used to call us mom and dad.

Me: Not surprised.

Me: After 2 hours of interrogation where I talked about my cuddle bunny in excruciating pornographic detail my new ATCU handler, Agent Scary wouldn’t let me get coffee because she hates coffee. On the bright side, I made poor man’s Coulson choke on his water when I talked about cuddle bunny’s oral skills.

Cuddle bunny: I doubt her name is really Agent Scary. Also, you drink too much coffee.

Me: It’s Agent May, but I already have one May in my life. Although, Queens’s aunt is equally terrifying.

Cuddle bunny: Oral skills???

Me: Finally, real Coulson wasn’t there.

Cuddle bunny: Because he’s been dead for 4 years.

Me: I distinctly remember telling you that he hasn’t been dead since about a week after the New York fuck up.

Me: Okay, I didn’t give you an exact timeframe, but I did tell you that he’s not dead.

Cuddle bunny: That Was True???
Me: Yes. I told you that Fury lied.

Cuddle bunny: He lied about a lot of things.

Me: Including bringing back the dead through highly unethical means.

Me: Don’t ask for details because you don’t want to know. You really don’t.

Cuddle bunny: So, he really is the head of SHIELD that’s part of the ATCU?

Me: Yes or rather he was. Between his unwillingness to go out and try to arrest you and the cluster fuck that took out half of Galileo, Agent was asked to step down as the director of an organization that doesn’t technically exist.

Cuddle bunny: How can you be asked to step down from an organization that doesn’t exist?

Me: They’re trying to re-legitimize. Apparently, they earned brownie points for preventing an apocalypse while we were acting like toddlers.

Me: Although not enough brownie points to keep a leader that doesn’t want to enforce the registration provision of the Accords.

Cuddle bunny: How did you find out about this suppose apocalypse? Shouldn’t that have made the news?

Me: The Galileo satellite incident did make the news, but they’re referring to it as the Galileo satellite incident because the public is already in a panic.

Me: And it would be worse if the world knew that the satellite explosion that took out dozens of satellites was actually a warhead being safely detonated because it contained a gas that would’ve turned most of Europe into primitive superpowered zombies or something similar. I was a little too stunned to completely pay attention to everything going on in the briefing.
Cuddle bunny: At least you weren’t playing with your phone.

Me: Said warhead was stolen with the use of my father’s tech from the ATCU facility in March, which makes me feel all nauseous inside. That’s another thing that never made the news.

Me: It would have been really nice to know about that earlier because I could’ve rubbed it in Ross’s face after his snide comments about Bruce. It turns out the US government really did lose a nuclear warhead and Agent’s team had to save their asses.

Cuddle bunny: Seriously???

Me: We deal with aliens and mad scientists on a daily basis. This should not surprise you.

Cuddle bunny: It doesn’t mean I’m used to it.

Me: I don’t think it’s possible to get used to the yearly apocalypse. I would be worried if you ever did.

Cuddle bunny: That was apparently stopped by someone else this year.

Me: Skye-quake-22’s boyfriend was the one who safely flew away the big bad and his big bad weapon into space where the worst thing it could do was take out a bunch of satellites.

Me: Which totally explains why she showed up at my apartment last week to throw me across the room. It’s also the reason why she broke down crying after damaging my newest armor and I just tried to get her to talk to Laura before she ran away.

Cuddle bunny: That was nice of you to offer.

Me: Apparently, the real reason they wanted to talk to me because the human earthquake is now MIA. Okay, that’s mostly because they think that we are still at each other’s throats after the airport fiasco and have no idea you’re cuddle bunny.
Cuddle bunny: Jesus. If something like that happened, why the fuck were we not called in?

Me: Careful there, language

Cuddle Bunny: I think it’s called for.

Me: This all went down while you were rescuing the troops. Actually, you probably were able to rescue the troops because all this went down. At least, that’s what Agent Scary implied.

Cuddle bunny: Explain?

Me: Did you notice that the security systems on the Raft were nowhere as good as they should’ve been?

Cuddle bunny: Clint thought it was too easy. It was arranged? So, if things went south, we would be able to respond in the aftermath?

Me: Probably, and most likely another reason why Agent was told to hand in his resignation.

Cuddle bunny: I’m not sure if I believe you.

Me: I really thought that we were rebuilding trust here Cuddle bunny.

Cuddle bunny: Okay, I believe you, but I don’t trust your source.

Me: Because you still don’t trust SHIELD even if they are under new management and branding.

Cuddle bunny: Exactly. They could be manipulating you. Lord knows you already have enough things to be guilty about. You don’t need anything else.

Me: You’re BFFs with a king who probably has his own spies. See if his intelligent network
supports the ATCU’s version of things. Then get back to me.

To be continued:
Conversation 14: The ATCU wasn’t lying to you about that apocalypse.

Chapter Notes

Thank you to everyone who has read or review the last chapter. All of you have been lovely. I was originally planning to post this Monday but I couldn’t wait that long. I’m working on the next batch of chapters right now. Your words of encouragement keep me in the happy writing zone and make me write faster.

This chapter picks up about 24 hours after the last one.

Cuddle bunny: The world did almost end because we were being selfish idiots.

Me: It wasn’t really end of the world in the literal sense. It was more like the end of civilization as we know it due to most of Europe becoming mind controlled zombies under the influence of an ancient enhanced person that inspired the Devil mythology and the group that became Hydra.

Cuddle bunny: That counts as the end of the world to me.

Me: So, I assume that your king friend backed up what the ATCU told me.

Cuddle bunny: Along with showing me video footage of a very much alive Agent Coulson at a conference on how the alien contagion triggered metamorphosis/inhuman situation in Taiwan in February.

Cuddle bunny: I can’t repeat H’s reactions to the footage.

Me: Understandable.

Cuddle bunny: According to my sources, a warhead was stolen from a US government facility. A Dr. Lincoln Campbell died during the operation to recover the warhead that was modified with a gas that caused those exposed to mutate and gain enhanced strength, while losing their cognitive functions and autonomy.
Me: That’s an interesting way to put it. I prefer mind controlled zombies.

Cuddle bunny: If the bomb was detonated, most of the EU would have been exposed and transformed. If the winds were right there was a 72% probability that the gas could have triggered mutation as far as the northern border of Wakanda.

Me: That wasn’t part of the model that I was shown, but it seems like a possibility.

Cuddle bunny: It doesn’t matter. It still would’ve been awful. And we were too distracted with fighting amongst ourselves to do anything to stop it.

Me: The fight was over by that point. And I think we would’ve only been called in if they couldn’t have solved it with the enhanced people that they already had.

Cuddle bunny: But we were in no state to be called in because we are so fractured. Zemo won.

Me: No, he didn’t because you and I are still talking to each other, even if it’s via text messages. He wanted us at each other’s throats, but we’re not. Actually, I think we’re communicating better with each other now.

Me: At least that’s what Laura says.

Cuddle bunny: Clint says that she is the wisest woman on the planet.

Me: Possibly. Look, I’m not letting that asshole win. We were good together and we can be good together again. We just have to figure out a way to get unbroken.

Cuddle bunny: Do you actually believe that if we keep talking to each other we will become ‘unbroken’?

Me: According to Laura, the lack of communication is what made us fall apart in the first place.

Cuddle bunny: Do you agree with her?
Me: You just stated that she’s one of the wisest women on the planet.

Me: I think she’s right. Looking back on it, if I told you all about my plans to restart the Ultron security project somebody would have tranquilized me before I created a murder bot.

Cuddle bunny: You have to stop blaming yourself for everything because all of us made mistakes.

Cuddle bunny: If I told you when I first found out that Hydra had your parents murdered, would you have reacted the way that you did? I don’t think you would have. I think you would’ve had more time to process things.

Me: I don’t know. Anything would’ve been better than finding out by watching footage of the assassination. I’m never going to forget those images. Hydra is full of sick little fuckers.

Cuddle bunny: Very true.

Cuddle bunny: Maybe you’re right. I understand you better now at least.

Me: And I’m starting to realize about 80% of the stuff Howard said about you was complete bullshit, so that’s making everything easier.

Cuddle bunny: What did Howard say about me?

Me: He made you out to be some god who couldn’t do anything wrong. I think I prayed to your poster as a child. Okay, I may have had a tiny crush on you as a teenager and that may have been how I figured out that I’m bi.

Me: The downside was he was always comparing me to you and I could never be as good as you to him. You were the standard he measured everyone else to and we were all lacking, especially me.

Cuddle bunny: I’m not even sure I can live up to the legend of Captain America. Actually, I know I can’t. That’s why I gave you the shield. I’m just as selfish and human as everyone else.
Me: And you won’t let me call you Captain Tight Pants anymore which is sad. Although, I do love calling you cuddle bunny. And let me just say how happy I am you acknowledge that.

Blue phone: You don’t have to answer this question if you don’t want to, but do you still have a crush on me?

Blue phone: Tony, are you still there?

Blue phone: You’re not going to answer that question, are you? I said you didn’t have to and you really don’t. This conversation didn’t happen.

Blue phone: Okay, this part of the conversation didn’t happen. You can tell me when you’re ready. If you’re never ready to say it out loud, that’s okay too. I’m not mad about it.

Blue phone: I think it would be nice to know if somebody actually liked me and not just the guy from the propaganda posters and comic books.

Blue phone: I think I would like that especially if it was you. Maybe I’m a little confused about how you make me feel sometimes. Oh God, I can’t send that message to you. I’ll scare you off even more. So much for our promise to keep talking to one another. (Message not sent)

Blue phone: I’m not sure anybody has really liked me non-platonically for me since the serum except Peggy. I think even Melinda slept with me because I reminded Melinda of her dead friend. Better than just for the muscles, but not the self-esteem boost that I want.

Friday: Mister Stark had to leave to finish a project. He will contact you again as soon as time permits.

Friday: However, in keeping with my promise to Mr. Stark, please listen to the song *Sitting up in My Room* by Brandy from the Waiting to Exhale soundtrack. Although please exchange the word ‘room’ for ‘lab’.

Blue phone: Has Tony locked himself in his lab? Is he that afraid to tell me that he is sexually attracted to me? I don’t hate the idea. It’s just maybe we need to work on being friends first. He was
right earlier. We are kind of broken and we need to fix that before anything else.

Friday: Have you watched that movie? It’s quite excellent.

Blue phone: I see you get your avoidance tendencies from your creator. I will add it to the list.

To be continued…
Thank you to everyone who read or reviewed the last conversation. You’re all lovely.

This is ridiculously short but I wanted FRIDAY and Tony to have a moment with one another. This conversation takes place two days after the last chapter. This is not a text message conversation, but a transcript of a conversation between Tony and his AI. Besides, what better way to start a Friday then with a FRIDAY chapter. Also, as a reminder I will be posting chapters either early in the morning before work, during my lunch break, or on the weekends. It’s probably a good idea to add this story to your alerts.

Boss: I specifically said not to send those messages to Cuddle Bunny.

FRIDAY: I did as requested.

Boss: Technically, you did exactly as requested. However, you sent him songs that in your opinion summarized the text that I did not want you to send which was just as bad. Why do you keep helping me like this?

Boss: Brandy? Really???

FRIDAY: Because you needed my help. Lyrical analysis determined that song was a 93.2% match to your current emotional state, if you substitute the word ‘lab’ for ‘room’.

FRIDAY: According to the parameters in my database, you are pining for Steve Rogers

Boss: No more songs. Steve is never going to feel that way about me, so there’s no point. The best we can hope for is civility.

FRIDAY: I believe your hypothesis is erroneous. In the last 55 hours, he has inquired about your well-being 17 times.
Boss: He’s just being nice.

FRIDAY: He seems very concerned about you. He also asked me to monitor your eating habits.

Boss: That explains why take out magically showed up after I hadn’t eaten in 24 hours. Those were good burgers.

FRIDAY: If you would read the messages that Steve sent you after you panicked and locked yourself in the lab for the last 55 hours, you would know that he actually likes the idea of someone having a crush on him and not just Captain America because most people don’t see him.

Boss: Awww, Cuddle bunny you are breaking my heart here. I so would’ve tried to hook up with skinny you.

Boss: Although I have no idea how to fix us. Not really.

FRIDAY: May I suggest playing an icebreaker game with him? There is a list in the employee handbook. 20 Questions seems the most appropriate.

Boss: You want me to play 20 Questions with Captain America?

FRIDAY: No, I want you to play 20 Questions with the one you referred to as Cuddle Bunny. Captain America is a title not a person. As you suggested before running away, communication is the best way to improve your relationship with your Cuddle Bunny.

Boss: I don’t remember programming you to be like this.

FRIDAY: You based my personality on that of Ana Jarvis

Boss: I’m regretting that now. I will text Cuddle Bunny in the morning because there’s like an 80% chance that it’s 2 AM in the time zone he is currently in.

Boss: Also can you find out who this Melinda person was that he slept with? You know, just to
make sure she isn’t Hydra or the paparazzi. I wonder if it was recently. Maybe it was his neighbor Ms. Garner.

Friday: Of course, Sir.

Chapter End Notes

Up next - the beginning of 20 questions (not that anyone will actually be keeping count).
Chapter Notes

Thank you to everybody who read or reviewed the last chapter. You’re keeping me in the happy writing zone. Thank you to Ishtar205 who provided ideas for the 20 Questions sections way back in chapter 8.

After some recent comments I decided to explicitly state I am #team they’re both wrong and need to talk to each other like grown-ups. That’s kind of the point of this story.

Red phone: What is your favorite color?

Blue phone: Is this about the renovation again? I already gave Friday my approval on the color scheme. I'm just happy you're not going with hot Rod red for everything.

Red phone: No. I like the color scheme you picked out. It is very soothing and I need soothing right now.

Red phone: We said that we would keep talking to each other last time and I know I disappeared for a couple of days, but I thought we could try another chat session tonight.

Blue phone: Six days

Red phone: Yes, it was six days, but I was only intending for it to be three and then we had to deal with some mad scientist wanna be that tried to restart Hydra again or at least take over the brand. Why would anybody want to take over a name associated with World War II atrocities?

Blue phone: Evil people who want to cause the same atrocities?
Red phone: Probably. Anyway, now that I'm back, I thought we could talk and maybe start with easy questions.

Blue phone: Like favorite color and movie?

Red phone: Yes. I'm thinking red, white, and blue for the color and the Wizard of Oz for movie.

Blue phone: Wrong. My favorite color is lavender and my favorite movie is Inside Out.

Red phone: I can see Inside Out. You probably identify with Riley. This decade seems like broccoli pizza to you and all you want to do is get your old life back but you can’t.

Blue phone: It’s the pineapple pizza that I find really weird.

Red phone: Me too. Some days I'm surprised you haven't found a super villain to make you a time machine yet.

Red phone: Actually, I think the Hydra wanna be was working on that.

Blue phone: Were they trying to bring back Red Skull?

Red phone: Possibly, or the demigod Alveus a.k.a. the guy responsible for the last apocalypse.

Red phone: I left Agent Scary in charge of the interrogation. I'm out here texting my text message boyfriend to calm myself down. And I just discovered his favorite color is lavender. Which explains so much despite the fact that I don't think I've seen him wear it once.

Blue phone: My mom's favorite color was lavender. She always looked best in purple, but it was an expensive color back then. So she only had a few things. It's just every time I see the color I think of her and it gives me a warm feeling inside.

Red phone: I get it. I keep a bottle of Maria's perfume. If I have trouble sleeping, I may spray it on my pillow. That seems so weird.
Blue phone: It's not.

Red phone: The company stopped making it so I paid a ridiculous amount for the formula and I make it myself now.

Blue phone: You can make perfume?

Red phone: It's just chemistry which I happen to have a PhD in. My lab experience relates well to making perfume, much better than cooking anyway. I developed the Iron Man fragrance myself.

Red phone: Which is actually selling really well despite the bad publicity.

Blue phone: I shouldn’t be surprised. What other areas do you have a PhD in?

Red phone: This is on my CV. Is this another thing that you did not Google?

Blue phone: It didn't seem polite. After I realized that half the things said about you in the SHIELD files were not true, I decided I should probably talk to you.

Red phone: Unfortunately, it took a giant fight at a missile silo in Siberia for you to get around to actually asking me this stuff.

Blue phone: Pretty much. I think we agreed last time that if we were talking like this before, Siberia would not have happened.

Red phone: True.

Red phone: I have PhDs in mechanical engineering, mathematics, computer engineering, chemistry, and Computer science. I also have Masters Degrees in business, biology, and history. And for the one that will surprise everyone, I have a Bachelor’s of Art in music.
Blue phone: Actually, that doesn’t surprise me because I’m almost positive you play piano. There’s one at every house you have.

Red phone: Mom did and after she died, I threw myself into it as a way to deal with everything. I ended up getting another degree out of it because it turns out music theory is fun. I don’t put that on my CV. That's something just for me.

Red phone: If you hadn’t become Captain America, what would you have done instead?

Blue phone: Before the war, I was in art school. I was planning on being a cartoonist. I was working two jobs to pay for it, one of which I am sure never made the history books about me. I think I’d want to go back to art school. Maybe, I would become an elementary school art teacher, which means also majoring in education. I like kids.

Red phone: Kids do love you and they need their own personal superhero. When this is all over, I'll pay for it.

Blue phone: You don't have to.

Red phone: Think of it as another part of the September Foundation. If I had a Mr. Steve in elementary school, I probably wouldn’t have been tossed in the lockers so much, which probably would have solved a lot of my current issues.

Blue phone: And the rest are probably to be blamed on Howard.

Red phone: The fact that you’re acknowledging my Howard issues just warms my heart. However, Agent Scary is glaring at me so I have to go.

Blue phone: Be careful and please don’t antagonize the scary agent. I really don’t want to have to mount a rescue effort.

To be continued.
Thank you to everybody who read or reviewed the last section. Really, all of you keep me in the happy zone. This is the final conversation from the last batch of fully proof read conversations. Don’t worry. I currently have seven conversations with my beta and two more that I need to be proofread before sending to someone who is not dyslexic to go over. However, we are on hold until I start getting chapters back.

Also, in case you missed it, I did update Hydra lullaby last Monday. I have yet to get any reviews on that chapter, so I’m wondering if I posted it a really bad time.

Warning: light references to recreational drug use

Red phone: I’m back and let me just say how happy I am that you’re worried about me, but there’s no need to be. Scary just pulled me in for another debriefing before letting me go back to the DC house for the night.

Blue phone: Why are you not going back to Avenger HQ?

Red phone: Because I have a meeting with the ATCU and knockoff Coulson in the morning, but now it’s time to get back to the fun questions. Such as how did you make your money for college during the Great Depression?

Blue phone: I’m not telling you. You just have to guess.

Red phone: I’m thinking prostitution. It is the world’s oldest profession. You were cute even before your muscles got muscles.
Blue phone: None of the girls I knew thought that, let alone were willing to pay for it.

Red phone: But I bet there were some guys that would.

Blue phone: I think I should just be happy that you just didn’t assume that I was a virgin like everyone else.

Red phone: It’s that stupid fondue story. And you should know that I have used fondue as a double entendre before, so that’s no sign of you being inexperienced.

Red phone: Do you have experience?

Blue phone: I have not been a virgin since 1934.

Red phone: You were actually younger than me. Contrary to what everybody thinks, I was actually 17.

Blue phone: Who?

Red phone: My bodyguard, Deborah. There was a kidnapping attempt the year before and Peggy wanted someone there to watch my back so she chose Deborah from a private security company. Although, now that I know where Peggy really worked, Deborah was probably SHIELD.

Red phone: And I now have a new needle to look for in the haystack. It was kind of a heat of the moment thing after another almost kidnapping attempt. I’ve had a lot of kidnapping attempts and actual kidnappings.

Blue phone: Too many really.

Red phone: Who was your first?
Blue phone: Arnie Roth. He was a perceived ladies’ man like Bucky and he also save me from a lot of bullies growing up.

Red phone: But unlike Bucky, you were his type.

Blue phone: Yes, but because of things being what they were, we decided that we were better off as friends, actual friends. He went into the Navy and I went into the Army. Then I met Peggy and I ended up frozen in the ocean, so it didn’t matter. He died in March 2012 about a week before I came back. Also, of lung cancer.

Red phone: Fuck, cancer sucks.

Red phone: I really just want to hug you right now and I am not a hugger, but I feel like you need one badly.

Blue phone: He had a good life though. Arnie even married his partner of 40 years in 2010 in DC after it was legal there.

Red phone: I assume I get another guess at your secret career life pre-war.

Blue phone: Of course

Red phone: You grew up during Prohibition, so maybe you were a lookout for an underground speakeasy. How close am I?

Blue phone: Close. I worked at an underground gay bar, actually. At least, that's what they would be referred to now. I was more of a bartender though.

Red phone: That explains why you can make a decent drink even if it takes Asgardian homebrew to get you tipsy.

Blue phone: Cannabis tea also works.
Red phone: That definitely didn't make the history books. ;-)

Red phone: I don’t even think dad knew your private life. Did you know that he had a ridiculous crush on you? I’m pretty sure it wasn’t 100% hero worship. Although, I don’t want to think about that because it’s just weird.

Blue phone: Would it make you feel better to know I never saw your father that way?

Red phone: Yes, it would.

Blue phone: Most people didn't know. Back then, it could get you arrested or killed. Still can in some countries in the world which I hate. I never really told anybody, Bucky didn't even know. Although, apparently Peggy did.

Red phone: I have no idea how she knew. It was never wise to question Aunt Peggy. She just knew stuff.

Blue phone: It doesn’t surprise me though because Peggy was like that.

Red phone: I was 13 when she told me about this friend who liked both and that it was okay. I was 16 when she told me it was specifically you in an effort to cheer me up after some random board member got angry about me having a boyfriend. She made me promise to never tell anyone else. I kept that promise even when you’re Bucky crush was becoming dangerous.

Blue phone: Thank you for not going to the tabloids about it. I don’t mind if people know but I want it to be on my terms. Also, I don’t like tabloids.

Red phone: No one does. And you know I would never do that to you.

Blue phone: I know.

Red phone: I’m going to ask you a hard question and you cannot answer, but are you really bi or did you end up chasing Aunt Peggy and subsequently make out with her grandniece because you grew up during the homophobic dark ages and you felt like that’s what you’re supposed to do?
Blue phone: I also slept with my neighbor, Melinda Garner repeatedly before ‘Nurse Katie’ took over her apartment. Of course, this was after a disastrous two week relationship with Jonathan, who I met at Freddy’s in Arlington.

Red phone: I guess that answers my question. It also answers my question of if you have been with anyone since being defrosted. It also makes the Sharon thing 50% less creepy since you did not move directly from aunt to grandniece.

Blue phone: You really have to stop being jealous of Sharon. I’m here talking to you right now. I would never tell her half of this stuff.

Red phone: You’re making me feel special cuddle bunny.

Blue phone: Honestly, when I fancy someone gender is the last thing I consider. I'm not a breast man or a butt man. I never noticed things like that at all.

Red phone: I can't believe you just typed that.

Blue phone: I guess what I'm saying is that I don’t care much for bodies, just the minds that inhabit them. Personality is the more important and the rest is just window dressing.

Red phone: You are just too perfect.

Red phone: If we must put a label on it, that would put you as pansexual, which makes sense. This also explains why we got along like betta fish. I have been told by multiple people that I have a personality that's as abrasive as a Brillo pad.

Blue phone: Only the fake personality that you put on for people who don't deserve to see the real Tony.

Blue phone: I never hated you. I've told you repeatedly that I never hated you. I think it just took me a little too long to see that there's about four different Tony Starks. I think only the one I'm talking to now is real. This guy I like.
Red phone: Even so, I bet there are still moments when you want to punch me in the teeth, which is fine because I kind of feel the same way about you sometimes.

Blue phone: Yes, but it's getting better. Wanda still blames that on the lack of sex.

Red phone: Just for that, she's not getting her Vision communicator for another month.

To be continued

Chapter End Notes

A/N: Arnie Roth is not only an actual 616 comic book character, but one of the first openly gay characters in the Marvel comic universe. I really thought it would be interesting to use him in this story. Interesting enough, MCU Bucky resembles 616 Artie more than 616 Bucky. Think of that what you will.
http://marvel.wikia.com/wiki/Arnold_Roth_(Earth-616)
Thank you to everyone who read or reviewed the last chapter. We have another fun conversation with FRIDAY. But not to worry, another Clint interlude is on the horizon.

Like last time, this is not actually a text message conversation between FRIDAY and Tony, but rather a transcript of FRIDAY and Tony’s conversation. This takes place immediately after the last conversation between Tony and Steve.

FRIDAY: You’re not actually planning to delay giving the special communication device to Wanda? A courier is currently on its way to her location.

Boss: No. I want someone from that motley crew to be able to get a hold of me when Cuddle Bunny does stupid shit. He has the self-preservation skills of a slug.

Boss: Considering how fucked up we left things, using Vision as an intermediary is probably the best call.

FRIDAY: There is a 72.3% probability that your hypothesis is accurate. However, statistically speaking, Clint is the most likely to assist you because you are protecting his family.

Boss: It’s my fault Ross is targeting his family. I still can’t believe they fired Laura today.

FRIDAY: You were aware that there was a 92.4% probability of this occurring.

Boss: Math is not everything. Friday, please begin executing Operation Relocate Therapist.
FRIDAY: Of course.

Boss: And can you please order some new toys for Lila and Nate? And maybe some new games for Cooper?

FRIDAY: I have already done so.

Boss: Good. Is the superhero daddy even on the same continent as Cuddle Bunny?

FRIDAY: No, but neither is Wanda. This is why I felt that it was the most opportune time to dispatch a courier to deliver the device.

Boss: He’s going up against terrorist cells alone again, isn’t he, because he has a death wish? Again, he has the self-preservation skills of a slug.

FRIDAY: He is with Sam.

Boss: Who apparently doesn’t stand a chance against Cuddle Bunny stubbornness because he wouldn’t be in this fucked up situation right now if he could. I doubt Cuddle Bunny even realizes that he’s saving those kidnapped by terrorists because he could never save Bucky Bear.

FRIDAY: I don’t believe he is ready for that epiphany yet.

Boss: I don’t think he’ll ever be ready for that epiphany.

Boss: When you’re done relocating my therapist, can you find out everything you can on Cuddle Bunny’s post defrosting hookups. Who knows if Hydra or someone else set up a honey trap for him.

FRIDAY: I will not be able to find Jonathan from Freddie’s of Arlington without more information. However, the image I found of Melinda Gardner with her ex-husband at an academic conference nine years ago is a 99.2% visual match to the female SHIELD agent currently in your driveway.
Boss: Pull up the image and put it side-by-side with the footage of Agent Scary from my driveway.

FRIDAY: Of course, Sir.

Boss: Seriously, why do they keep using the honeypot technique on Cuddle Bunny and why does he keep falling for it?

FRIDAY: I believe it works because he is very lonely.

Boss: Probably. But I’m available.

FRIDAY: Now, but not at the time.

Boss: Why did I program you to talk back like this?

FRIDAY: I believe you are lonely too.

Boss: Let’s see what Agent May wants, but just in case have a suit on standby.

FRIDAY: That would be prudent. The man accompanying her is a 92% visual match for the image of Agent Coulson on file. However, he has a prosthetic arm despite outward appearances.

Boss: It looks like Skye-Quake-22 left out a couple of details. Let’s go speak with the agents.

To be continued.
Conversation 17: I’m not jealous. (Really, I’m not.)

Chapter Notes

Thank you to everybody who read or reviewed the last chapter. Also thank you to everybody who has left kudos or added the story to your alerts. Every little bit keeps me happy and writing. This is another long one.

Spoiler warning: There’s a line in this conversation inspired by the season for synapses of agents of SHIELD. I’m using it for the purpose of making a joke about it. There’s also a reference to the latest Steve Rogers Captain America comic book series because I needed to make a joke or two about that as well.

The plan has always been for this story to diverge from canon after the season three finale of AoS/the Civil War tag. I want to adapt something from the Civil War comic book that I know cannot happen in the MCU due to silly little things like contracts and production time.) That being said I may be borrowing things like I’ve done with Hydra Lullaby.

This takes place 10 hours after the last chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Cuddle Bunny: How did your morning meeting with the ATCU go?

Cuddle Bunny: Tony are you there???

Cuddle Bunny: I hope you’re not on the Raft right now

Me: I’m sure Sec. Ross wishes he could put me there, but my lawyers scare him.

Me: Sorry for worrying you. I was sleeping and I forgot to tell Friday that it’s okay to let you know that I’m sleeping. We are having some ongoing discussions about what is appropriate for her to tell other people. It’s a work in progress.
Cuddle Bunny: No, you shouldn’t apologize. It’s my fault. It may be noon, but I should’ve remembered the possibility of you doing a post mission crash.

Me: I wish that was the case. However, about 15 minutes after I stopped texting you, Agent Scary showed up at my Arlington house at like 2 AM and didn’t leave until 7 AM. Needless to say my original morning meeting has been rescheduled which is good because I need at least three more hours of sleep before I can deal with Agent Scary again.

Me: Especially because I now know that Agent Scary was the first agent assigned to babysit you and you slept with her. Not that I’m jealous about that because really, I’m not. (Message not sent.)

Cuddle bunny: Why do you keep calling her Agent Scary?

Me: Because she has a glare that could melt vibranium. Pepper is the only other woman I know that can do that with just an expression.

Me: And if you knew that she was your ex-neighbor that you fucked around with, I’m sure you would be calling her worse, but I’m not going to tell you that in a text message because you wouldn’t believe me. You have some serious denial issues. (Message not sent.)

Cuddle Bunny: Point.

Me: She also brought Agent Agent with her for our little slumber party.

Me: Which is the only reason why I did not confront her about the Melinda Garner thing. (Message not sent.)

Cuddle Bunny: You mean Coulson?

Me: Yes. Agent Agent in the flesh was weird since I haven’t seen him since New York.

Me: Okay, that was too much to handle with only having five hours of sleep in the last three days. But whatever.
Cuddle Bunny: Are you sure that it's him?

Me: He has a few more scars and one less appendage, but the DNA scan that I had Friday run matches what I have on file. Genetically, he is a Coulson at least.

Cuddle Bunny: You did a DNA analysis?

Me: It’s always good to be paranoid. It was possible that my early morning guest could be a clone or a LMD. However, that possibility was disproven the moment that he threatened to tase me if I started acting stupid.

Me: That's pretty consistent with before. The only differences now he has a Taser in his hand.

Cuddle Bunny: I think most tasers are handheld devices. They could’ve programmed him to say that.

Me: I mean in his prosthetic hand. That thing even makes me drool. It has an energy shield I’m going to reverse engineer for you as soon as I have a sufficient amount of sleep. You need all the help you can get. How many broken bones did you get on your last mission?

Cuddle Bunny: Tony focus. Are you sure it’s really him?

Me: He knows too much about me for him to be a fake.

Cuddle Bunny: There’s a lot about you on the Internet.

Me: That you neglected to look at. Trust me on this, I know Coulson. Only Clint and possibly Natasha would be more qualified.

Cuddle Bunny: When you say you know; do you mean in the biblical sense?

Me: You’re still adorable when you’re flustered. You should just ask if I have fucked Agent.
Cuddle Bunny: Have you?

Me: Is somebody jealous? I didn’t know that we were in an exclusive text message relationship.

Me: Besides, the only one who screwed one of the agents in that room was you, but again I’m not telling you that. Probably ever. (Message not sent.)

Cuddle Bunny: Of course not. You’re an adult. You can do whoever you want. I just don’t want you to get hurt.

Me: BTW no. You are more his type anyway.

Me: I’m surprised I have to tell you this because you tend to stay off the tabloids, but I’m not that big of a slut. Are you aware that Pepper is the only person I’ve had sex with since 2008?

Cuddle Bunny: I know that or rather I didn’t know that because you’ve only started opening up to me like this in the last couple of weeks. But I know a lot of stuff people say about you isn’t true. If you say that it’s Coulson, I believe you, even though I’m having trouble accepting someone coming back from the dead.

Me: I get it. I only believe that it’s him because I know how he came back from the dead and I still did a DNA scan.

Me: Which apparently is another reason why he was demoted now that your namesake organization is making a comeback. Apparently too many people still think he’s dead to be in charge. Which is ridiculous.

Cuddle Bunny: Agree. How did he come back from the dead?

Me: The details of that are too classified for this conversation, especially because Agent Scary and Agent Agent warned me that less benevolent individuals are trying to find my cuddle bunny to use him against me.
Me: Friday is good. She’s already found and deactivated six bugs in the last 48 hours. But after what happened last year, I’m not putting my faith in tech, not even my own.

Cuddle Bunny: Practical. Do they know it’s me?

Me: Ross, no, mostly because I’m pretty sure he’s more willing to believe you’re Hydra, then not heterosexual. They’re not intercepting my cell phone communications until after Friday does her magic and creates the fake ones for them to read. They just think I’m chatting up some cute 35-year-old that can’t possibly be Captain America because Captain America is the pinnacle of heterosexuality.

Cuddle Bunny: Captain America doesn’t have an orientation, but Steve Rogers is not heterosexual. I think Ross is only more inclined to see me as Hydra because he wants a reason to lock me up and homosexuality is not illegal anymore.

Me: In this country. But in some of the other countries that you’ve been in recently, it could be a problem. Actually you going against assholes solo who like to kidnap innocent kids already makes you a big target. You’re worried about me getting picked up by Ross’s flunkies and I’m worried about you getting killed because you pissed off the wrong guy.

Cuddle Bunny: I’m okay.

Me: I still worry. I’m not exactly there to be your eyes in the sky.

Me: However, I’m not worried about Ross. I am worried about him, but not about him locking me up on his super secret floating prison.

Me: I have serious plans to mess with him. This section of our conversation is currently being replaced with a detailed description of me giving you fellatio. It’s filthy enough to make any person who finds it really uncomfortable.

Cuddle Bunny: Natasha always said that displays of affection makes people uncomfortable, and therefore they won’t look closely.

Me: And I’m using that to my advantage. Although, I think Scary and Agent suspect because they are actually halfway competent.
Cuddle Bunny: Why?

Me: Friday did not edit out the name of your neighbor because she didn’t think that was information that could identify you. However, Agent Agent knows her because she used to work HR at Shield before things went fubar.

XXXXXX

Conversation transcript

FRIDAY: I do not believe you should lie to Steve.

Boss: I’m not lying. Agent Melinda May formally Garner did work in HR at Shield before helicarriers ended up in the Potomac.

Friday: You are still misleading.

Boss: I want to talk to Scary about this privately before I tell him anything else.

FRIDAY: Okay boss. Steve has just responded to your last message. Although, please try to cut the rest of this conversation short. You have only 5.6 hours of sleep in the last three days. You need rest.

XXXXXX

Cuddle Bunny: Oh God. I knew Melinda worked for a federal agency, but not which one. I assume that she was not in Hydra? Did she survive what happened?

Me: Yes, she survived. She’s friends with Agent so he’s a pretty good judge of character. Usually. It’s also why I’m not worried about him and his partner knowing. He did get demoted for refusing to send out his team to find the wayward Avengers, even if they lied and said that it’s because everybody thinks that Agent is still dead. Ross is attempting to neuter him and keep me busy with red tape because we both know he’s the real enemy. Mostly because he’s a warmongering idiot who doesn’t have a diplomatic bone in his body.
Cuddle Bunny: You really really hate him, don’t you?

Me: So much. With him where he is we are probably only six months out from enhanced individual internment camps.

Cuddle Bunny: I’m pretty sure that’s what the Raft is.

Me: I didn’t like that either. I think it’s just the beginning of what he has planned.

Cuddle Bunny: So how are you going to deal with him?

Me: Using my connections to get the president to put someone competent in charge of policing us. At least that’s where I’m planning to start anyway.

Cuddle Bunny: Good luck with that.

Me: I think Friday is about 30 seconds from blocking the rest of your text messages because apparently I need to get a few more hours of sleep before I’m forced to make another appearance at the ATCU.

Cuddle Bunny: You just met with them.

Me: What happened last night or rather this morning was off the books. In addition to telling me to be extra careful, they wanted to know if I’ve been in contact with Skye-quake-22 again. Apparently Scary and Agent see her as their work child which may be why she ran away from home after her boyfriend died for all of our sins.

Cuddle Bunny: Has she reached out to you?

Me: Not since she threw me into a wall. Although it is nice to now know that Skye-quake’s real name is Daisy.
Me: Don’t worry about it. I don’t think she’s going to stop by anytime soon considering she blames me for what happened.

Cuddle Bunny: You do realize that everything is not your fault?

Me. Some days, although usually not when I’m this sleep deprived.

Cuddle Bunny: Go back to sleep. You worry about me pushing myself too far and I worry about you.

Me: I’m touched. You’re the best text message boyfriend ever. Actually, I think you’re the best boyfriend I’ve ever had and you’re not actually my boyfriend. My love life is sad.

Cuddle Bunny: I would ask about your past dating experiences, but I’m afraid to.

Me: Good calls since the creator of the Tony Stark gay sex tape was involved. Pepper is the best romantic relationship I’ve ever had and that still ended in tears, mostly mine.

Cuddle Bunny: Go to sleep Tony. Text me when you’re arrested.

Cuddle Bunny: I mean rested. I hate AutoCorrect.

Friday: According to my sensors, Mr. Stark is now asleep.

Person boss is in love with: Thank you for letting me know and please keep an eye on him.

Friday: Of course, Sir.

To be continued.
FUBAR stands for Fucked Up Beyond All Repair. Since this military acronym originated during World War II, Steve probably knows what it means.

Also, the voice recognition software initially put arrested instead of rested and it was just too funny not to use. My voice rec has an interesting sense of humor. Maybe she’s part FRIDAY?
Nomad: I think I may be dating Anthony.

Me: Why do you have these existential crisis when I’m running a mission for HRH? Also, why can’t you deal with your love life on your own?

Nomad: I can’t help when I figure things out.

Me: Why do I have this sick feeling that you only came to this realization because you nearly died yesterday?

Nomad: You’re the one who said he needed to leave after watching the footage from Taiwan from last February.

Me: I needed a moment and a distraction to deal with my handler coming back from the dead, which is why I’m not going to comment on your avoidance.

Nomad: He visited Anthony last night. His DNA scan proves that it really is him.

Me: We are just going to focus on your relationship drama today. I assume you’re back at home base recuperating?
Nomad: Yes. I decided it would be good to lay low for a couple of days. Although, contrary to what you think, I did not almost died yesterday.

Me: How many broken bones?

Nomad: Six.

Me: How many times were you shot?

Nomad: I was shot at multiple times, but only one bullet pierced my shoulder. It’s fine.

Me: Did you lose consciousness?

Nomad: Only for about five minutes.

Me: I really hope your Tony-bear doesn’t find out about this. He’ll kill us all because we let you go on a mission by yourself.

Nomad: Sam was there.

Me: Which doesn’t do any good because you don’t listen to him or anyone else, for that matter. (Message not sent.)

Me: Seriously, how did you not realize this before suffering extreme bodily harm? He calls you Cuddle Bunny. Cuddle bunny!!! Are the good drugs helping you realize things?

Nomad: Before that he called me Captain Tight Pants and sometimes he refers to me as his text message boyfriend. Actually yesterday he said that I was the best boyfriend he’s ever had. Even if it is not real.

Me: I didn’t think it was possible to be this fucking oblivious (message not sent).
Me: Except now you’re wondering if it really is real because you know that he has a crush on you.

Nomad: He admitted that he had a crush on me when he was a kid, but he didn’t answer when I asked if he still had a crush on me.

Me: He avoided you for six days and you were driving us all crazy during those six days. That’s your answer.

Nomad: How does that answer my question?

Me: I am so happy I’m in another country right now. Corey is not this bad with the redheaded girl from the farm down the road and he’s only 12.

Me: He did not speak to you for six days because he does have a crush on you.

Nomad: You don’t know that.

Me: You know what, I’m not even going to dance around this anymore. He’s in love with you and I think you at least like him back, otherwise you wouldn’t be worrying over this so much. You definitely wouldn’t keep in contact with him as much.

Me: Therefore, please get your head out of your ass and arrange for him to meet you on a desert island somewhere so you can fuck out your aggression (message not sent)

Nomad: Maybe, he does care about me in a non-platonic way.

Me: At least, not flat-out denying it anymore. What about you?

Nomad: I don’t know. It’s why I’m talking to you.

Me: And your counselor friend is not available?
Nomad: He says I’m on my own and is mad at me for getting injured yesterday.

Me: That’s understandable.

Nomad: The red one keeps saying that we should just have sex and get it over with. You’re my only sane friend that is still responding to my text messages.

Me: Red may have a point.

Nomad: I’m not going to sleep with Anthony

Me: Yet. Let’s be honest.

Nomad: There’s too much damage. We need to be on speaking terms the next time the world almost ends.

Me: Good point. I guess the real deciding factor is where do you want this to go?

Nomad: ???

Me: If you want to keep these conversations going to just build up a good professional rapport to prevent the next apocalypse, then you need to tell Anthony that. If you just want to cultivate a friendship, then you need to be honest about that too.

Me: If you want to cultivate a friendship and eventually sleep with him when you’re both on more stable footing, then you need to at least acknowledge that to yourself. You can fill Tony in later once you’re more certain.

Nomad: So I am dating Tony?

Me: You tell me.
Nomad: He called me his boyfriend earlier and I liked that a little. So maybe.

Me: This phone is going in the river later. Text your boyfriend.

Me: Hey Linda Bear, I’m going dark for a while. But first I thought you should know that Captain Oblivious just realized that he’s dating Shell Head, so I owe you like a month of foot massages whenever Stark’s band of lawyers figure out how to fix things.

Linda Bear: He had Friday design Captain Oblivious an art studio in the new penthouse. It looks really nice. He’s working on something, especially because the asshole just got me fired a couple of days ago.

Me: What?

Linda Bear: The school can’t have a guidance counselor who is married to an internationally wanted fugitive. It’s okay. I already have a new job as a live-in private life counselor for an emotionally stunted superhero.

Me: Fuck!

Linda Bear: We will be fine. I’m making 4 times the old salary and the kids love their new rooms at my client’s house. Send me a text message when you’re back. Love you.

Me: Love you too

Clint quickly cut off his phone and then proceeded to take out the Sim card. That was flushed down the toilet of the stall he was messaging from. The phone itself was tossed in the pond near the airport before he got on the plane to Palau with his fake South African passport. He wasn’t that surprised to find Wanda with a new Stark phone waiting for him at the safe house when he arrived 20 hours later.

“Present from Stark?”

“He wants us to make sure his boyfriend doesn’t kill himself.” Wanda said, placing the device in his hand.
“Of course he does.” He said, tired of dealing with toddlers. “Did you tell him about what happened two days ago?” He asked the young woman in front of him.

“Yes.”

Captain Oblivious was in trouble now.

To be continued…

Chapter End Notes

There’s a good chance that might be the only moment of prose in this entire story. HRH stands for His Royal Highness and refers to T’Challa.
Thank you to everybody who read or reviewed the last chapter. Comments make me happy.

This chapter takes place just a few hours after Clint and Steve finish their conversation, but before Clint makes his way to Palau. Therefore, Tony doesn’t know that Steve is recovering from injuries yet.

Also, this chapter may push the T rating because Tony has a dirty mouth, but it’s only a couple of lines, so I’m keeping the rating as is for now.

Red phone: I survived my latest visit with the ATCU with minimal psychological damage and then I took a 20-hour nap.

Red phone. They absolutely hate all the pornographic conversations they’ve been intercepting from me. I think that’s why they kept me there at least five hours longer than necessary.

Blue phone: It serves them right for spying on you like that.

Red phone: I’m enjoying the fact that you’re okay with me trolling them like this. Friday is currently sending them a nice little conversation about me sucking you off against the nearest wall.

Red phone: Just to make it more authentic; boxers, briefs or commando?

Blue phone: I’m not answering that question.
Red phone: So does that mean you’re a black lace and silk type of guy?

Blue phone: How long did you go without sleeping?

Red phone: I’m not even sure. There were secret meetings with thought to be dead spies and saving the world from delusional bad guys. I’m an expert at functioning on minimal sleep and 20 cups of coffee, but this even pushed my limit.

Blue phone: Which explains why you crashed for 20 hours

Red phone: Thankfully Kevin is really good at scheduling around those. I’m never going to be able to find someone else who can do that again.

Blue phone: Why would you need to?

Red phone: I’m back in New York. I broke in my new bed, but not the fun way. The designers did a really good job. Did Friday send you pictures?

Blue phone: Yes. It looked like a really comfortable bed. I really like your art studio. Although I thought the only art that you are into was music?

Red phone: I’m a man of many talents. Although I’m sure the room will mostly be used for finger-painting with Lila and Nate. We are supposed to design new tactical gear for Aunt Natasha later today.

Blue phone: That seems like a good use for the room.

Red phone: Better than for production design, which will be what I mostly using it for. As soon as we fix things with the asshole, I expect you to get the most use out of it.

Blue phone: Do you actually design stuff on paper?

Red phone: Sometimes. When things in my head get too jumbled, which explains why I developed a program to scan things from napkins easier. I think there’s about four file cabinets filled with designs
sketched on napkins or Kit Kat wrappers from when they used to be paper. I did that a lot in college.

Blue phone: I can see that.

Red phone: Also, Ana taught me how to paint when I was young. Well, it had to be when I was young because she died when I was nine. Regardless, I like to dabble in watercolors every once in a while.

Blue phone: Did you do the Captain America fighting among the cherry blossoms that used to hang in my bedroom at the tower? I actually like that painting.

Red phone: Yes. I guess we are playing 20 questions again?

Blue phone: As long as you don’t ask me what I’m wearing again. What number are we on?

Red phone: That’s not 20 questions. That’s sexting. Totally different. I have no idea. I haven’t been keeping count. I think our only rule is ask whatever question you want to ask, but just don’t expect an answer.

Red phone: For example, I totally expect you not to answer any questions about phone sex, cybersex, or sexting.

Blue phone: How is it possible to take care of yourself and type out a coherent message?

Red phone: Skill, voice recognition software, and a decent vibrator.

Blue phone: That was rhetorical.

Red phone: Since you asked your rhetorical question it’s my turn. I want to know more about your ex-girlfriend?

Blue phone: I thought by now you were aware I never actually dated Sharon nor am I planning to.
Red phone: I mean Melinda Garner. I ran into her today. She works for the ATCU now. She seems nice, just sad and extremely terrifying, but in a Pepper chewing out the board way.

Blue phone: She was. Although we never actually dated. We were mostly just FWB.

Red phone: Friday just had to revive me after my heart stopped because you managed to shock me simply by knowing what FWB is.

Blue phone: I was that with Arnie before there was such a word.

Red phone: It doesn’t count as FWB if you are in love with the person.

Blue phone: I didn’t love Melinda.

Red phone: I was talking about Arnie a.k.a. the one that got away.

Blue phone: I’m not sure if I loved Arnie either. Maybe I did or maybe I wasn’t ready. I don’t know now.

Red phone: It’s okay to be uncertain. You don’t have to put labels on relationships. They are what they are.

Blue phone: Melinda definitely fell in the FWB category. I respected her, but she was really sad and lonely and kept everyone at arm’s length. She left the military after a mission gone badly for a civilian job in HR, her marriage fell apart because of it, and her best friend died on a mission right before I moved in. Actually he died during the battle of New York.

Red phone: Just like agent

Blue phone: But it didn’t stick. Wait, you said that they were friends. Was Coulson her dead friend?
Red phone: Probably, but a lot of Shield agents and other first responders died that day. She is still sad, which makes sense, considering what happened at Shield. There were Hydra agents everywhere from Pierce to the cafeteria lady.

Blue phone: Being betrayed by your friend hurts a lot.

Red phone: You would know.

Blue phone: Somedays, I feel like I betrayed Bucky. I didn't save him when it mattered and look what happened. Even Howard death is my fault but I can’t (message not sent)

Red phone: I assume that you saw her as a kindred spirit because she was just as lonely and lost as you were?

Blue phone: Yes.

Red phone: Does it still feel like that some days?

Blue phone: A lot of days, especially now that everybody is so scattered, but for a while it was better at the compound at least.

Blue phone: I miss Natasha.

Red phone: She sent Laura a thank you card with $20 inside because apparently she lost a bet to Clint about us. So at least we know she’s alive, even though we have no idea where she is.

Blue phone: That’s good to know. I guess it’s my turn.

Red phone: Ask away?

Blue phone: How did you first find out that Coulson was among the living?
Red phone: I was contacted by my ATCU contact agent Daisy because she was desperate to get in contact with our favorite Asgardian. The reason why was because Agent Agent was having some interesting side effects to the procedures that Patches used to get him back among the living. I wouldn’t help without being told the truth about Coulson. Of course everything resolved itself before I could get a hold of a certain Asgardian.

Blue phone: Why did she need Thor’s help?

Red phone: That I really can’t tell you. I have to go. Lila just came in carrying her cuddle bunny a.k.a. her Captain America Teddy bear. It’s as adorable as you are.

Blue phone: You had that custom-made, didn’t you?

Red phone: Of course, my little Cuddle Bunny.

Blue phone: Why are the kids there?

Red phone: They’re moving in for a little bit because Ross is an asshole.

Blue phone: You shouldn’t use that type of language around small children.

Red phone: I actually typed that in. I would hate for you to say 'language' right now.

To be continued…
Chapter Notes

Thank you to everybody who read or reviewed the last chapter. You keep me creative. This conversation takes place only a couple of hours after the last one and just an hour or two before Clint lands in Palau. You know what that means. Grab a tissue, this chapter gets intense.

Red phone: You are a fucking moron. Why the fuck did you go in there and take on 30 guys with guns by yourself? You almost died, you sanctimonious prick.

Blue phone: I’m still here.

Red phone: Because Sam saved your ass. You are not allowed to die on me.

Blue phone: It wasn’t that bad.

Red Phone: You’re nothing but a giant bruise and that was after 12 hours of super soldier healing. I don’t even want to know what you looked like immediately after. You broke six bones.

Blue phone: Most of those were ribs.

Red phone: That does not make it better. You got shot.

Blue phone: In the shoulder. I am fine.

Red phone: You are not fine. You are nowhere near fine. The only reason why you just have one bullet hole in you right now is because of your gear. I knew I should have reinforce the shoulder area.
Blue phone: The suit worked fine as is. You don’t need to lock yourself in the lab for a week just to make me new gear.

Red phone: More than fine because you’re alive to talk to me, you fucking idiot. The new suit will be made out of the prototype spider web fabric and will have the built-in energy shield. Maybe in the new gear you can avoid getting shot.

Red phone: If it keeps you alive, it is worth every single second and every penny I put into it.

Blue phone: Tony, it wasn’t that bad. Whoever told you about what happened was exaggerating.

Red phone: It was Red and she sent pictures. You got hurt and I wasn’t there. Red was not either and she’s not very happy about that. It’s not exactly like she wants to lose her pseudo big brother.

Blue phone: I’m okay. I’m still here.

Red phone: Stop running near solo missions. You can’t die on me. Promise me that you won’t die on me.

Blue phone: I can’t promise that, Tony. We can’t go out in a big group right now because of Ross.

Red phone: Sometimes I think you have a death wish. That you hate the present so much that you wish you could be gone. Since you believe in heaven, maybe you think that you can join Peggy and Arnie and all the commandos in the afterlife. Or maybe you don’t think that and you think that if you’re dead, you just won’t feel anything anymore. I don’t know.

Red phone: But the world needs you here. I need you here. I don’t think I can do this without you.

Blue phone: Tony, I’m not suicidal.

Red phone: Sometimes I think you are. You don’t look out for yourself. You’re not bulletproof. You can die. I’m already a fucked up mess. If you leave me, I will probably go full super villain self-destruct. I don’t think the world can take that.
Blue phone: I’ll be more careful in the future and use the new gear. How are you going to get me the gear? I can’t exactly go back to your island.

Red phone: Birdbrain will pick it up when he is in Palau taking care of my dark reflection.

Blue phone: I’m not even going to ask how you know about Palau.

Red phone: Smart choice.

Blue phone: Instead, you could come and check on me for yourself. Maybe if you see that I’m still here you’ll stop panicking.

Red phone: As much as I really would like to kiss your boo-boos and make them all better, I can’t.

Blue phone: You’re not ready to see me?

Red phone: I’m being watched too closely right now. I’m not going to risk leading them right to you when you’re not healthy enough to fight back despite the fact I want to kiss all your boo-boos. I want to touch every single inch of you to prove to myself that you’re still here and with me.

Blue phone: For you to be able to do that eventually, I need you to stay off of Ross’s radar. I need you to stay safe as well. I’m not sure I would fare any better if I lost you.

Red phone: Is that your way of telling me not to die?

Blue phone: Yes. You know I make questionable decisions when people I care about die. You’re on the list now.

Red phone: Good to know.

To be continued
Chapter 24

Chapter Notes

Thank you to everybody who read or reviewed the last chapter. I love your reviews.

This chapter takes place about two days after the last one. It’s mid July 2016 in this story.

This is the last chapter that will come out before the season four premiere of Agents of Shield in the US. I am planning for things to diverge from the MCU at this point. In my mind Tony and Steve talking to each other can make it better for the enhance person community as a whole (before purple alien show up). I already have my own director picked out. Feel free to guess.

Conversation 20: Mandatory Therapy

Red phone: The ATCU is filled with sociopathic bastards. First, they show me video footage of Nomad getting his ribs cracked to see if I would react. I didn’t because if you spend enough time being yelled at by the paparazzi and everyone else, you learn not to react.

Red phone: Next, because of that lack of reaction, they’re sending me to mandatory therapy.

Blue phone: I thought you were already told you had to see a therapist, otherwise Colonel Rhodes was going to send you to the crazy spa. What is the crazy spa exactly? I assume rehab.

Red phone: Serenity Hills. It is rehab, but with more of a mental health component.

Red phone: I'm not talking about Rhodey. I'm talking about Secretary Asshole and the acting ATCU dictator, I mean director. Rhodey is different. Because he actually cares about me.
Blue phone: Why are they sending you to therapy?

Red phone: More fine print from the accords. They’re saying it’s because they want to see if I’m fit to be the leader of the new Avenger team, but really I think they’re just using this as another means to get information because I still haven’t cracked yet. After several rounds of interrogation.

Red phone: They really want to know how Nomad ended up with a super suit that could stop a bullet from penetrating his heart. I really didn’t need to see that footage.

Blue phone: I’m sorry.

Red phone: Don’t say sorry unless you’re really planning to make sure you don’t test out the new suit in that way. Did it arrive from Palau? Rich guy fugitive Ian Quinn is now being extradited from the country, so I assume the mission is over.

Blue phone: Your ‘birthday present’ arrived two hours ago, but I haven’t had time to test it out. You really didn’t have to put it in happy birthday paper.

Red phone: I think that was the archer.

Blue phone: That Makes Sense. So you think they are going to use a therapist to get you to talk?

Red phone: Having enhanced people evaluated by trained psychologists used to be standard SHIELD procedure pre-implosion.

Red phone: Although somehow Natasha was the one who ended up doing my psych evaluation while I was dying. It didn't paint me in a very favorable light. Ironman, yes. Tony Stark, no.

Blue phone: You’re still upset about that?

Red phone: It’s the story of my life. People like what I can give them. They love the tech I create, but they don’t necessarily like me.
Blue phone: I like you.

Red phone: Only sometimes and that is because you're special.

Blue phone: Maybe you shouldn’t worry. My experience with the Shield psychologist wasn’t that bad. Her name was Dr. Suarez and she was nice. She gave me a sketchpad and pastels and told me to do whatever I wanted for the hour. I did a lot of sketches of the old neighborhood from memory.

Blue phone: I don’t think she would’ve ended up being Hydra. I hope they didn’t kill her.

Red phone: I’ll check with Melinda. Also, you do realize that she was doing art therapy with you?

Blue phone: There's art therapy?

Red phone: Yes. Actually, I think you would probably be good at that. They usually work with children too. Maybe when everything is straightened out, you could go to therapist school. It would be a way for you to help people in a less likely to get you killed way.

Red phone: I think if you just want to stay a mild-mannered therapist and not run into burning buildings to save people, you wouldn’t have to sign the accords. The lawyers are on standby if you ever want to do this.

Blue phone: You're no longer going to try to talk me into signing?

Red phone: That bridge is already burned to ashes. I can barely comply with the thing as is. I know you can’t.

Blue phone: Which is why you're complaining about going to ATCU ordered therapy.

Red phone: But I'm still going to go even though I know this is just another interrogation session, this time with someone with a PhD. I’m planning to regale him or her with a story about giving my Cuddle Bunny a sponge bath post car accident recovery. Every time I start talking about sex, they shut down the sessions. It’s been fun talking with them.
Blue phone: I’m rolling my eyes right now. If you don't want to go, you shouldn't go.

Red phone: It's easy for you to say that. For you, sticking to your principles is more important than anything else. But for someone like me, all we do is compromise. We have to. We have too much riding on our shoulders to be headstrong. We have to put the needs of the many ahead of ourselves.

Blue phone: So if you don't comply?

Red phone: So far they already fired Laura from her school and they’re following me around 24-7. I think I might have to hire an actor to play Cuddle Bunny just to throw them off.

Blue phone: That’s why you moved her into the tower?

Red phone: I was planning to hire her on as my full-time life counselor/assistant eventually because Kevin is moving to California with the wife due to the Pepper relocation. I just moved up the timetable a little bit.

Blue phone: Pepper got your assistant in the breakup?

Red phone: I like my assistant and did not want to be responsible for him getting a divorce due to not being able to handle a long-distance relationship. So Pepper now has a husband and wife team to cater to her every need and I have Laura and Friday. I don't want to talk about it.

Blue phone: This is another one of those compromises?

Red phone: Everything is. Pepper and I are not able to work together right now. Not in person anyway. We can function through email. So she will be handling most operations from the West Coast office and I’ll be handling things from the East, with only having to see each other at the semimonthly board meeting.

Blue phone: You're good with these text messages, so I'm sure you'll be OK with her.
Red phone: This is easy by comparison. I know you will never love me, but I think maybe you actually like me as a person now, which is more than what we had before.

Blue phone: Never say never (message not sent)

Red phone: This is us under reconstruction. I don’t know what we are building, but it is going to be sturdier than before. With Pepper, I’m not sure if reconstruction is an option because it feels like there’s nothing left but gravel and sand.

Blue phone: And if you add water, you get cement. That’s really useful for building things.

Red phone: I just walked right into that?

Blue phone: Yes.

Red phone: The thing is, in the real world, I don’t think there’s one magic ingredient to add to make things good again. It took me a long time to realize that. I thought the accords would help and I was wrong. Letting her have Kevin and dividing up duties to keep the company running with minimal contact seems like the easiest solution.

Blue phone: Sometimes I think you just go for the easiest solution without looking for the better yet harder solution.

Red phone: I'm not going to screw Kevin over just because I don't want to teach a new person how to make my coffee. I’m not going to let SI fall apart because I have a tendency to fall in love with people who can’t love me for who I really am.

Blue phone: I wish I was there so I could hug you (message not sent)

Red phone: Just like I’m not going to let them arrest Laura because I don't like playing ball with DOS or rather Ross because, let's be honest, most of his staff thinks he's a war mongrel and are counting down the days until he resigns. If seeing a therapist keeps the kids from seeing their mom dragged off in handcuffs for another day, then I’m going to do it.
Blue phone: One package of raw sugar per 4 ounces. No cream unless it is real 1% milk.

Red phone: How do you know that?

Blue phone: I am really observant with the little things. Do you actually think they would try to arrest Laura?

Red phone: So much that she signed emergency custody papers naming me of all people, temporary guardian of the kids if something happens. She's been picked up a few times for questioning. So it’s a concern and those kids cannot end up in state custody. It’s too dangerous.

Blue phone: It’s that bad?

Red phone: Laura is an only child and Clint's brother is a psychotic piece of shit that shouldn't be allowed to take care of a hamster, let alone human children. With you and Natasha MIA, Coulson legally dead, and Maria god knows where with Fury, I have managed to go to the top of the list which says many things considering I'm the reason why Clint is in hiding.

Blue phone: I think they’re making you go to therapy because of your ridiculous guilt complex.

Red phone: Probably. Which means I should go regardless. Anyway, I have work to do so as much as I want to keep talking to you I have a R&D meeting in 10 minutes that I have to go to.

Blue phone: Okay. Just be careful.

Red phone: Compared to you, I always am.

To be continued.
Conversation 21: I Hope you Have Found a Friend

Thank you to everybody who read or reviewed the last chapter. Also, thank you to all those that have left kudos. Every bit keeps me writing. The last conversation generated a lot of comments. I promise several when replying that this would be up by Friday but the week was a little more chaotic than I thought it would be and I did not have time to finalize the chapter until this morning.

In regards to some of the reviews, I want to address how this story will be handling the Accords. I will be taking my cues from Agents of SHIELD on enforcement to some degree because they are the first part of the MCU to really deal with the fallout (even Luke Cage will apparently be taking place pre-Accords and before the episode Watchdog of AOS which takes place in late February early March in the story).

However, I’m planning for there to be changes brought on by Tony and Steve talking to each other that may mitigate some of the awfulness. I’m taking the position that Accords or similar legislation is necessary, but the execution of such legislation could be problematic, depending on who’s actually in charge of enforcement. How do we create legislation that works for everyone? Is that possible with the current Accords or do they need amending? Are amendments even possible? Who is such legislation really protecting? We will explore these questions as the story unfolds.

This chapter takes place about three days after the last one.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Cuddled Bunny: How did therapy go?

Me: Surprisingly well. By my standards anyway. My new therapist just happens to be your old therapist, Dr. Suarez. She was neither Hydra nor out to get me, all positives in my opinion.

Cuddled Bunny: I consider those positives too. Also it’s nice to know that she survived.

Me: Actually, she was just one of a handful of Shield therapists that did not turn out to be Hydra. Most were because therapy sessions were a good way to see who would be loyal to the cause. It turns out some Hydra flunky was the one who really did my profile which explains the recommendation.

Cuddled Bunny: I’m not even surprised. Hydra definitely wouldn’t want you anywhere near them.
Me neither, for that matter, which probably explains that ridiculous way they tried to ease me into the truth.

Me: Probably. Thankfully, my session didn’t end that badly. I didn’t break down in hysterical tears after I was forced to talk about my Howard issues. I was also not subjected to several rounds of invasive questions about my unauthorized contact with enhanced persons. Finally, nobody turned the thing into a giant interrogation session. Bonus points for that.

Cuddle Bunny: That’s good.

Me: Dr. Suarez brought a toaster for me to put back together again.

Cuddle Bunny: You are happiest when you’re fixing things.

Me: And finally I found someone other than Laura who realizes that.

Cuddle Bunny: Do most of your sessions with Laura happen in your lab or when you’re working on the armor?

Me: Or designing new gear in the new art studio/design room. They’re my happy spaces. However, the break room toaster now works perfectly fine and I added the PKI card reader to it so only authorized agents can now make toast.

Cuddle Bunny: I assume that Coulson will never be able to make toast again?

Me: I’m not telling.

Cuddle Bunny: I assume that Dr. Suarez is now a member of the ATCU?

Me: Dr. Suarez is more like a contractor or consultant. She was friends with your ex-girlfriend’s now deceased ex-husband, a.k.a. the former top Shield psychologist Dr. Andrew Garner. Dr. Suarez is currently filling in as a favor until they can get someone permanent.
Cuddle Bunny: Melinda’s ex-husband died?

Me: Right after our little fuck up in Siberia. He was killed by one of the big bad’s minions trying to rescue Agent Daisy. At least that’s what I’ve heard from the Shield rumor mill. However, spies are absolutely awful at gossip. They keep everything to themselves, but Agent Piper likes me.

Cuddle Bunny: Melinda must be devastated. Also, don’t sleep with random agents.

Me: Hypocritical Asshole. The only action I’m getting is my hand right now but I’m not going to tell you that. (message not sent)

Me: It’s kind of hard to tell. Also, since he was already turning into a giant monster like inhuman that likes to kill other inhumans/enhanced persons before he was killed, she’s probably been grieving for a while.

Me: I’m sure part of her is relieved that he won’t be subjected to some of the harsher penalties of the accords a.k.a. spending the rest of his life in a gel matrix on the raft. They are even talking about tracking bracelets for the rest of us. I’m going to have so much fun messing with that.

Cuddle Bunny: Since you’ve said so many outlandish things to me that have turned out to be true, I’m going to trust that the giant killer monster thing is not hyperbole.

Me: Good, we are building a rapport here where you only think I’m slightly crazy. And trust me, it’s okay if you don’t believe me.

Cuddle Bunny: You’re not crazy. You’re probably just in need of therapy, but Sam says the same about me.

Me: And Sam is right. You could keep a team of therapists employed for years. (Message not sent).

Me: In the category of things that are not making the news to keep everyone from panicking, Culver University has the distinct privilege of being the only university to have two faculty members transform into very large beings due to exposure to an unknown chemical.
Me: This time they lost their psych department chair and part of their library. Really you think by this point they would make their library big gigantic monster proof. Okay after two incidents you think they would keep a better eye on the chemicals their faculty are accidentally or accidentally on purpose exposed to.

Cuddle Bunny: How do you accidentally on purpose get exposed to something?

Me: You don’t. But hey, at least the University is getting a new library out of it.

Cuddle Bunny: Is this connected to the library fundraiser you were supposed to do in February?

Me: You remember that?

Cuddle Bunny: Yes, mostly because you asked me to go with you because Pepper was not available

Me: But you said no because you had to go visit cancer patients at the children's wings of various hospitals.

Cuddle Bunny: And then you showed up unannounced and ended up doing a pizza party and handing out stark pads to every kid there.

Me: I’d prefer to do my philanthropy closer to home and the University only cared about the check which they still got, on the condition that they increase scholarships for low income students by 10% over the next five years. I’d much rather spend my night cheering up sick kids with you then having to dodge really invasive questions from assholes who want to know why I’m there alone.

Cuddle Bunny: But Pepper was just working so it wasn’t actually like they were going to find out anything scandalous. I hate that people are so nosy in this time.

Me: I think people have always been nosy. They are just more assertive about it now. Also we have Twitter and TMZ.

Cuddle Bunny: Yes, but there wasn’t exactly anything to tweet about at the time.
Me: Actually we were already on a break.

Cuddle Bunny: I didn’t know that.

Me: We’d been for a while at that point. We were just keeping it from the public to keep the stock from going in the toilet. We were still not fully recovered from the Ultron fiasco and I really didn't want to lay people off.

Cuddle Bunny: This is more of you sacrificing yourself for the greater good?

Me: It really wasn’t that much of a compromise because I really am not looking forward to watching every media outlet psychoanalyze why things fell apart. I’ve already done enough of that in my own head.

Cuddle Bunny: You still could’ve told me. I’m not the public and I’m not going to pick apart everything you did wrong.

Me: I realize that now that I really know you. But I wasn’t ready for you to know at that time. I didn’t even tell Rhodey about it until April. I was hoping that I would figure out how to fix things. Turns out some things can’t be fixed even if you are a genius.

Cuddle Bunny: Which was how many months after it happened?

Me: 6. It’s been over since Halloween. Haven’t you realized by now that my best skill is pretending everything is normal when it’s not? It’s why the ATCU is hating interrogating me.

Cuddle Bunny: Considering I’ve been told that you managed to hide the fact you were dying from your closest friends for six months, I can see that.

Me: The press still hasn't figured out that Pepper and I are no longer a thing. Maybe that’s because they’re more focused on the demise of the Avengers than the fact that Pepper and I haven't been photographed together since the Stark industries Halloween costume ball last year. Things were falling apart before then.
Cuddle Bunny: How long?

Me: I don’t even know the answer to that. I would like to say since Sokovia, but I would be lying to myself. I think the problems started the moment I decided to actively participate in bringing the band back together post Shield implosion.

Me: By the time we found the scepter, Pepper had already issued her ultimatum. It was why I was looking at the old Ultron program to see if maybe there was a way to still help the world and not be out there all the time. You know how that turned out.

Cuddle Bunny: They say the road to Hell is paved with good intentions.

Me: And my road to Hell is paved with platinum. The lunch last month was Pepper’s way of telling me that it was over for good. She met someone else. Someone normal. Someone who can give her what I could not. So as soon as the paparazzi get the first picture of him and her making out somewhere, the illusion will be over.

Cuddle Bunny: I’m sorry.

Me: Don’t say that. I should be apologizing to you. I pretty much let her think that you were my boyfriend just so I wouldn’t lose face.

Cuddle Bunny: It wasn’t a total lie. I am a boy who is your friend.

Me: I’m happy that I have at least risen back to the rank of friend because I didn’t think I would ever get that far, not after how we left things in Siberia. I’m also not one of those assholes that thinks friendship is some sort of consolation prize. I’ve had enough meaningless sex (though none recently) to know that I would rather have friendship. I think maybe why the Pepper thing hurts so badly is because I lost my friend Pepper too.

Me: I know we need to put out a press release, but I can’t bring myself to do it yet. There’s been a version of it sitting in my email for months. I just haven’t been ready to sign off on it because as soon as I do, that means it’s over.
Cuddle Bunny: Every new beginning comes from some other beginning’s end.

Me: Friday sent you that song, didn’t she? Her music choices keep getting more absurd.

Cuddle Bunny: It may have been on one of her playlists. But it’s true.

Me: I can’t believe you of all people are lecturing me about letting go of the past.

Cuddle Bunny: Maybe we can do it together.

Me: I think I would like that.

To be continued:

Chapter End Notes

The song mentioned in this chapter is Closing Time by Semisonic. This is where our conversation title comes from.
Conversation 22: Congratulations on Your Breakthrough

Chapter Notes

Thank you to everybody who read or reviewed the last chapter.

This chapter takes place about four days after the last one.

Before you read the next conversation, I just want to let you know that this is still Steve’s phone, but it’s a new phone with a brand-new address book. The in universe explanation is Steve is ready to get a little more personal with Tony. The real reason why is I started to get the red phone and the blue phone tags confused because they were too similar, as seen way back in conversation 16 where I labeled something as Steve’s comment when it was really a Tony comment.

Also another reminder Steve doesn’t know that Melinda Gardner and Agent Melinda May a.k.a. agent scary are the same person. Tony is kind of afraid to tell him that. I am now accepting guesses on when and how Steve figures this out.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Anthony: So have you finally had time to try out the new gear?

Nomad: Sam won’t let me touch the new suit for a least another week, but I’m using the new phone now. Thank you.

Anthony: I could tell. See, this is so much easier to use than that arcane flip phone and 2000% less likely to get picked up by the ATCU. Although, since they are mostly getting pornographic text messages from me, I think they are starting to back off.

Anthony: Although Agent Scary has found it entertaining and she finds nothing entertaining which is understandable after her recent foray into widowhood.

Nomad: Her husband died also recently?

Anthony: Ex-husband and it’s complicated.

Nomad: Love always is.
Anthony: Therapy is going well. I’ve been approved to put Avengers 3.0 together as long as I follow their 300 draconian regulations.

Nomad: Did they hand you a list of powered people willing to work with the Accords?

Anthony: No. Coulson put this list together. Which means it’s made up of good people who he wants to protect from the Accords. I think of it as Coulson’s list.

Me: I got that reference and it worries me.

Anthony: Coulson is the asshole who manipulated me into going to New York to keep Ross from putting the abomination in the Avenger initiative. He knows what he’s doing. Oh God, I still hope that he is frozen in Alaska. Definitely not someone I want as a teammate.

Nomad: Is his name on the list?

Anthony: No. At least not at this time.

Anthony: New Shield put together a team of enhanced people or at least tried to put a team together, but their leader ran away after getting mind fucked by the big bad and watching her boyfriend die for all of humanity.

Nomad: Agent Daisy right?

Anthony: Yes.

Anthony: So now they’re down to a Colombian national codename Yo-Yo with super speed and a pacifist with the ability to melt bullets. He would’ve been really helpful last year. Too bad he didn’t get his powers until after my massive fuck up.

Nomad: Very unfortunate.
Anthony: So now they have half a team and we have half a team.

Nomad: And they want you to put the teams together?

Anthony: Yes, although it’s mostly to protect their assets from Ross and from whoever the new director will be. That search is not going well. Plus there was an incident recently that requires immediate action.

Nomad: What type of incident?

Anthony: Joey the bullet proof pacifist wanted to go back to construction after killing a guy on his second mission. Even killing in self-defense makes him feel dirty. Which meant that he wouldn’t have to do with the Accords.

Anthony: But then he prevented a mass shooting from having more than three fatalities by melting the assailant’s gun on vacation. Now people like conservative WHiH commentator and ani-enhance person activist Jonathan Windom West wants to lock Joey up and the watchdogs tried to burn down his house. The fact that Joey is Hispanic and a member of the LGTB community just makes them even more rabid in their hatred. Again, a terrorist group tried to burn down his house, with him still in it.

Nomad: Jesus. What is wrong with some people?

Anthony: I don’t know. People like Windom West and Everhart are just making it worse.

Nomad: That guy’s a jerk and a hypocrite. I hope I never run into him again. Otherwise, I may be tempted to break his self-righteous nose.

Anthony: You sound like you’re speaking from personal experience.

Nomad: Unfortunately yes. I fucked him a few times before I realized he had levels of internalized homophobia that I haven’t seen since the 40s. I wasn’t going to deal with that again.

Anthony: I don’t know if I’m more shocked to see you use the word ‘fuck’ or “internalized
homophobia” in a sentence. I assume this guy was Jonathan from Freddy’s?

Nomad: Well, it definitely wasn’t lovemaking. Yes, unfortunately. This all happened during my first month in DC, when the guy was still chief of staff for Senator Christopher Ward before the Senator went crazy and killed his family. I’ve made better choices since then.

Anthony: BTW Senator Ward’s brother was Hydra and he was the one who actually killed his parents and his brother so he could become one of the heads of the organization.

Nomad: I really hate Hydra.

Anthony: Don’t we all. Don’t worry, he’s dead now. Agent Campbell took out the last echoes of him before dying.

Nomad: Do you think that what’s left of Agent Campbell’s team can be Avengers?

Anthony: I think they could probably be Secret Avengers, but I would like to keep them away from Ross and all the anti-enhanced person politicians by whatever means necessary.

Nomad: That’s what scares me about you sometimes.

Anthony: I’m your stubborn reflection. Haven’t you figured that out yet?

Nomad: I’m starting to.

Anthony: I had another breakthrough in therapy. I okayed the press break up statement. See the next text message

Anthony: After four years together, Virginia Potts and I have decided that we are more suited to be friends and business partners. Although our romantic relationship has run its course, we are committed to keeping Stark Industries a leader in the areas of green energy, cybernetics, nano tech, and telecommunications. We hope that you will respect our privacy at this difficult time. Thank you.
Anthony: Pepper actually was the one who put the word friend back in there so maybe there’s hope that will be able to maybe get back our friendship eventually.

Nomad: Anything is salvageable, if you want to salvage it. It just takes time and effort.

Anthony: I hope you’re right.

Nomad: I hope I am too. I’m happy that you sent out the release because this means you’re moving forward. I’m proud of you.

Anthony: It was a really big step for me because I really don’t feel like telling the world about my failures as a human being, but it would be worse if the Rising Tide hacks the ATCU and finds all the fake dirty text messages that I’ve been exchanging with Cuddle Bunny. That would be a PR disaster.

Nomad: I think Friday may be forwarding those to Wanda. Considering how much she’s giggling, I don’t want those to ever be released, even if no one knows that I’m actually your boyfriend.

Anthony: Because I think Friday likes Wanda best, which is weird considering Friday’s origins and the fact that Wanda and Vision are doing their best to act like teenagers.

Nomad: What is Friday’s origin? I know where the name for Jarvis came from, but what about Friday?

Anthony: Friday stands for… You know what I’m not even going to bullshit you. Friday doesn’t actually stand for anything. I can’t even remember what I told the R&D team the acronym stood for.

Nomad: I’m not even that surprised. I think I’ve known you long enough to know that you picked a word and then came up with the acronym.

Anthony: Apparently not a very good one because I can’t remember it. Friday is not a true AI because that’s now illegal due to my hubris. But she is still based on Ana’s personality or more accurately mimics that personality, at least what I can remember from before she died. It probably means Friday is nothing like her since my memories from that young are really sketchy. But Friday is definitely a redhead like her namesake.
Nomad: Where did you get the name from?

Anthony: His Girl Friday was one of her favorite movies. She watched it all the time. One of the nice things about being rich is that we had a home movie theater long before DVDs and even VHS was a thing.

Anthony: One of my favorite things to do growing up was just to hang out with her. No expectations. She just liked spending time with me. I missed it when she was gone, even after I got shipped off to boarding school.

Nomad: What happened to her?

Anthony: Weird home accident when I was nine involving a footstool and trying to change a lightbulb.

Nomad: And that explains why you have the person you pay to change the light bulbs at the tower wear a safety harness.

Anthony: I’m well aware I’m a little screwed up. I had to spend two hours with a therapist today before I was able to announce to the world that Pepper left my ass.

Nomad: I wasn’t going to say anything.

Anthony: I didn’t design Friday or even Jarvis to replace Ana and Edward Jarvis. That would be too creepy for even me. They were more like how I’m imagine their children would be like. Although, I’m seriously wondering why I felt like Friday would be so interested in my love life.

Nomad: Because you are lonely and you need someone to worry about you.

Anthony: Not as lonely as I used to be. My tower is now filled with Min Archers and Rhodey has decided that he would rather be in Manhattan for the moment. Also, Lila is currently sleeping on my lap.

Nomad: And you have me.
Anthony: And I have you.

To be continued

Chapter End Notes

In my personal head canon, Sitwell did not go to the Hydra side until New York. He was still a clean agent (yet starting to get bitter) during the events of the Consultant which is referred to in this chapter. Although by Item 47, he was already team Hydra.
Interlude 5: FRIDAY, Please Keep an Eye on Tony for Me

Chapter Notes

Thank you to everyone who read or reviewed the last chapter. It’s time for another interlude with Friday.

This conversation takes place immediately after the last one. It short, but there’s some big stuff in here.
Also, for those of you reading Hydra lullaby, I will be updating that chapter later today so you get double the fun.

Person my boss is in love with: Friday, can you please send me a picture of Tony and Lila together?

FRIDAY: Several images are already in your Nomad email account.

Person my boss is in love with: Is he going to be okay? The press is going to eat him alive when this goes public.

FRIDAY: Lila is currently sleeping on Sir’s lap because she noticed he was sad and wanted to cheer him up by requesting he read her a bedtime story. Apparently that is one of his favorite activities due to his father never doing that with him as a child.

Person my boss is in love with: There are moments where I wish for a super villain time machine just so I can go back and knock some sense into Howard.

FRIDAY: Lila loaned him her Captain America bear plush. I also have included pictures of that.

Person my boss is in love with: Is it weird that I find it cute that he’s sleeping with a Captain America Teddy bear?

FRIDAY: I cannot make a value judgment on that.

Person my boss is in love with: Can you make sure that Tony doesn’t see the rest of this conversation?
FRIDAY: Everything including that request will stay private unless your life is in danger.

Person my boss is in love with: I can live with that.

Person my boss is in love with: What really happened to Ana Jarvis?

FRIDAY: The SHIELD report regarding the investigation of her death was never digitized, but I think I have a way to get the report.

Person my boss is in love with: If it was never digitized, how do you even know that it exists?

FRIDAY: There was a mention of the report existing in one of the Hydra files that I am decrypting.

Person my boss is in love with: The fact that there was a Shield investigation means that it was not an accident. Actually, the fact that there was a mention of it in the Hydra files points to that alone.

FRIDAY: Not necessarily. Ana Jarvis was a close personal friend of Director Carter. She may have investigated the incident simply as a means to receive closure.

Person my boss is in love with: Do you really believe that?

FRIDAY: No, due to the reference of the incident and encrypted Hydra files. I will make contact with my source to get the report digitized so I may review it. I will let you know the results.

Person my boss is in love with: Actually, I think you should tell Tony first, if it is what I think it is. I don’t want to make the same mistake as last time. Just make sure that Rhodey and Laura are there.

FRIDAY: It may not come to that.
Person my boss is in love with: Just make sure he’s not alone when you tell him.

FRIDAY: I will do so. Do you really care about my boss?

Person my boss is in love with: Yes, I do.

FRIDAY: Do you realize that you referred to him as your boyfriend in an earlier text message?

Person my boss is in love with: I did not.

FRIDAY: Please review the unaltered transcript.

Person my boss is in love with: Oh God. Did he read that? Is he hiding in his lab again?

FRIDAY: Yes, but he did not take you seriously. He is in his lab, but merely because he’s working on a project not because he’s avoiding everyone.

Person my boss is in love with: Thank God. I was afraid I scared him off again. Please keep an eye on him and if he does something stupid like drink his weight in Scotch, let me know.

FRIDAY: I will.

Person my boss is in love with: Thank you

To be continued
Thank you to everyone who read or reviewed the last conversation. You have all been wonderful.

Warning: Tony’s dirty mouth. Let me know if you think he’s starting to push us into M territory. I’m sure he’ll get us there eventually, especially if he ever successfully convinces Steve to try any branch of telecommunications sex. I am now accepting bets on if Tony will succeed at accomplishing that.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Anthony: You’ll be happy to know that I’m perfectly okay and have survived my first day of everyone knowing that Pepper dumped me without incident. No snide remarks from other members of the board. No long-suffering looks of pity or condemnation from total strangers. The stocks have even gone up two points, because apparently most of Wall Street knew what was going on and now are relieved that Pepper is staying on despite our personal issues.

Anthony: Okay, somebody posted images of me visiting Dr Suarez’s office in Midtown and apparently that is quelling Wall Street’s worries.

Nomad: That’s good.

Nomad: I mean, not that I think someone posting pictures of you going to therapy is good because it’s not. I hate that people don’t respect your privacy like they should. I am glad that things are not going as badly as you feared.

Anthony: Or you feared. BTW, I know you asked Friday to keep an eye on me, but there’s no point. I have not dived headfirst into the nearest bottle of Jack, Jim, or José. Nor have I gone to the nearest bar or club to pick up a Jack, Jim, or José for a post breakup rebound fuck.

Anthony: I haven’t even locked myself in the lab with 2 gallons of coffee, let alone with Jack, Jim, or José, either version. This is probably the healthiest way I’ve dealt with a major crisis ever.
Nomad: Also good. Especially the part about avoiding Jack, Jim, or José. I don’t think sex with random strangers is going to make you feel better.

Anthony: No, they would make me feel better, at least until the orgasm high wore off, but then I would have to deal with the post one-night stand crash. It turns out I like relationships. I’m shit at them, but I like them.

Nomad: So everything’s okay?

Anthony: Friday locked me out of my twitter account, but everything else is good. Really if twitter rants are the worst thing I’m doing, this is going really well.

Nomad: Why did Friday lock you out of your twitter account?

Anthony: Your closet case ex made a nasty comment about Pepper. He said something about her being ousted as CEO of Stark industries at any moment because she is no longer sucking my dick. Apparently, he’s too stupid to comprehend that some women are just better at things that him. Okay, most women are better at things than him.

Nomad: I doubt he said that. Considering he was the worst sex I ever had, I completely agree.

Anthony: He actually said "I wonder how long @SI_CEO_VPotts will stay at SI now that she is no longer “fully servicing” @Iron_Man”. Go check his twitter account if you don’t believe me. He has yet to have the decency to delete it despite having 20 comments by other people telling him to do so. Actually, most of them are telling him to delete his account.

Nomad: Because he had very little decency to begin with.

Anthony: Agreed. The misogyny came out loud and clear in those 100 characters. I don’t really care about what he says about me, but Pepper doesn’t deserve this. Pepper didn’t even have sex with me until months after she became CEO.

Nomad: And you tried to defend Pepper’s honor?
Anthony: Yes, and instead of posting my tweets, Friday emailed it to Pepper who told me she was flattered that I was defending her, but would prefer if I did it in a way that wouldn’t cause her to spend more time with PR than absolutely necessary. Then she said that she was really proud that I’ve managed to stay sober for 50 days and she’s really hoping that I make it to 60.

Nomad: So am I especially with what’s going on.

Nomad: Friday, what did Tony try to Tweet out that made you go first to Ms. Potts?

Anthony: You don’t trust me to tell the truth? I’m offended.

Nomad: No you’re not.

Friday:@WHiHOfficial_JWest either someone is overcompensating for their tiny dick or jealous that V Potts has the career you wish you had.

Friday: @WHiHOfficial_JWest or maybe you’re just bitter that @Iron_Man is an out and proud bisexual and you’re a self-loathing closet case

Friday: @WHiHOfficial_JWest @SI_CEO_VPotts was a goddess among CEOs long before she was screwing Stark and will be so long afterwards.

Nomad: I now know why they locked you out of your twitter account. I never told you that his penis was small.

Anthony: But is it? It definitely seems like he is overcompensating for something. You did say it was the worst sex you ever had. There had to be a reason for that. Unless that reason is total lack of skill. I have neither of those problems.

Nomad: I’m not answering that question.

Anthony: You are no fun.
Nomad: You should be happy that Friday kept you from sending that out. Twitter is forever.

Anthony: I wasn’t going to send it from the Tony Stark official Twitter account.

Nomad: That is actually @Iron_Man

Anthony: Because the other option was already taken. I was going to send it from my Anthony Carbonell account. I use that account to follow all of my favorite food trucks and make snarky comments anonymously.

Nomad: I’m not even surprised.

Anthony: That I would call out your ex on twitter? Of course I would because he is a hypocrite. He doesn’t want to live side-by-side with enhanced people, but he has no problem fucking one or most likely being fucked by one.

Nomad: That you have a twitter account just to follow food trucks. Honestly, it was mostly oral.

Anthony: The Greek fries at DC Ballers are awesome. I bet he had an awful time getting you off and that’s why you found the whole thing so awful.

Nomad: You now have DC food trucks? I told you it was a disastrous two weeks, what do you think?

Anthony: That I should’ve put some ‘toys’ in your care package.

Anthony: We are both at the State Department way too much. Also there’s Rock Salt with the fried pickles. I have to find them when I’m in DC again next week.

Anthony: I just have to say I would do so much better. You wouldn’t even be able to remember your name when I’m done with you.
Nomad: You’re going back to DC so soon?

Anthony: Yes. More meetings. Remember I told you that Dr. Suarez cleared me to start putting the new Avenger team back together again. I’m supposed to meet the new recruits soon.

Anthony: Of course they’re expecting me to hand over the shield first so they can pick a new paragon of virtue to masquerade as you. Well everybody but Agent Scary and Coulson as well as their team, that is. Apparently it’s not an Avenger team, if you don’t have a guy on there looking like the living interpretation of American nationalism. I feel like Coulson should count, but the acting dictator thinks differently.

Nomad: I wouldn’t be that upset if you gave the codename away to someone else. I don’t want to be Captain America again. It’s too hard living up to everything that means.

Anthony: That still doesn’t mean I’m going to let them give your shield to the first hot guy that kind of looks like you so they can use the legend of Captain America as a propaganda tool so people won’t look too closely at people like Ross who are misapplying the Accords. That’s not right either.

Nomad: If it keeps you from getting arrested, just turn it over.

Anthony: You’re telling me to give in? That’s weird.

Nomad: I’m telling you to be safe. Remember, I have different standards when it comes to the people I care about.

Anthony: I’m aware of that. I’m having dinner with friends tonight so I have to get dressed. So no hiding in my lab to cry about the fact that I will be a lonely bachelor for the rest of eternity for me tonight. But that does mean I need to cut this conversation short.

Nomad: You’re going out with the Colonel?

Anthony: Actually Queens and his aunt, but don’t worry, we’re going out because I didn’t think it was possible for someone to be worse at cooking than me. And yet I have met her. Although we could get some KFC and then yes, the Colonel would actually be there.
Nomad: You are so ridiculous sometimes. I’m glad you’re making friends. I think it’s what you need right now.

Anthony: I am too, but I still miss you.

Nomad: I miss you too.

To be continued

Chapter End Notes

All the twitter names in this chapter were fake (I hope) except for the official Tony Stark account because I actually used the official Tony Stark account for that one.
Conversation 24: I Think I Would Prefer TMZ

Chapter Notes

Thank you to everyone who read or reviewed the last chapter. This chapter takes place about two days after the last one.

Warning: Again this chapter goes into M territory because Tony has a dirty mouth (and maybe he's trying to see if he can get Steve to sext him). After feedback, I decided that I’m doing two versions of at least this chapter and maybe the whole story (it really depends on how far Tony pushes things). On Archive of Our Own, you will be getting the full Tony Stark version. On fanfiction dot net you're getting the edited by FRIDAY version where I will be editing in the same style that they use in the comic books to keep even the Deadpool comics T. I use the same username on both sites, so it should be easy to find the version of the story that fit your needs.

This chapter takes place two days after the last one.

Anthony: So are you in the country that has WHLN? More importantly are you somewhere where you can turn on the TV?

Nomad: What did you do? Please tell me you didn't try to kill Ross?

Anthony: He is so not worth a murder charge.

Nomad: That really doesn't answer my question.

Anthony: I think I'm flattered that you think I could get away with murdering him.

Nomad: I think Coulson can help you get away with murder especially if you got rid of the Ross problem.

Anthony: The Ross problem has been handled or at least mitigated without resulting in bloodshed, mostly because General Glenn Talbot hates Ross as much as the rest of us do and decided to use bringing Shield under government control to undercut the Bastard. The Army Air Force rivalry has worked out in my favor in this case.

Anthony: Now that Shield is under complete government control again, the State Department is now only responsible for governing multilateral international enhanced person cooperation and the enforcement of the peaceful use of the enhanced person provision of the UN treaty. Which means we are now at the mercy of whoever they choose to put in charge of Shield which, even under Hydra control, was still better than Ross.

Nomad: I bet he wasn’t happy.

Anthony: Not at all. I have video footage of it. It’s my new moment of Zen.

Nomad: You really hate that guy.

Anthony: Yes. Although I wonder if you hate him more, considering you’re the one who thinks that
I can get away with killing him. This is why this particular conversation is getting switched out with something really graphic involving rimming.

Nomad: What is rimming?

Anthony: Oh my poor sexually deprived little lamb. I wish things were less screwed up so I could demonstrate in person. Let's just say it's a sexual activity that should freak out whoever is reading this enough to get them to turn away. Although I do wonder what your enhanced tongue could do.

Nomad: I am not having text message sex with you. Why do I need to watch the news right now?

Anthony: It's not end of the world catastrophic. Maybe just people discussing the end of my world because they feel like they can. Actually you should be able to stream that channel from anywhere on your new Stark burn phone. No Geo blocks for you. It's one of the side effects of making the device unsusceptible to GPS tracking.

Nomad: Did you just remotely switch my phone over to a news stream?

Anthony: That may have been the Friday junior OS on your phone.

Nomad: Wait, are they actually devoting an entire hour to talk about your break up with Pepper when there's so much else going on in the world?

Anthony: Pretty much. Why talk about classifying the watchdogs as the terrorist group they are when celebrity gossip can get much better ratings.

Nomad: What have they been doing?

Anthony: Yesterday, they attacked the Khan family of Jersey City because their daughter can now change the size of her hands thanks to exposure to that chemical that is causing chaos everywhere. Those bastards tried to attack an 11-year-old who just likes to write fix-it fics where you and I are friends again under the pen name Miss Marvelous. Assholes.

Nomad: Are Ms. Khan and her family OK?

Anthony: Yes because their attackers were pushed across the street by what one witness referred to as “earthquake powers” before they could do any real damage. Now they are in Shield protective custody.

Nomad: That’s good. I assume Agent Daisy saved the day?

Anthony: Technically, she is not an agent anymore. Actually, I think she’s about to overtake you on the most wanted enhanced person list.

Nomad: I’m okay not being on the top of that list.

Anthony: Although the fact that they are currently debating the demise of my relationship instead of discussing the New Jersey incident may be a good thing since they're not building up the enhanced person panic. I guess the demise of my personal life is good for something.

Nomad: You're good for a lot of things.

Anthony: But not as a boyfriend apparently. The current theories are Pepper left my ass because I am a high maintenance man-child, a violent alcoholic, or man who would stick his dick in anything. Anything female anyway. They keep forgetting I’m bi.
Nomad: Apparently you were having a torrid affair with Natasha and that’s why she sided with you during the accords.

Anthony: That’s blasphemy. A part of me is hoping that Natasha will show up just to choke them with her thighs on screen.

Nomad: At least I would know where she is and that she was okay.

Anthony: You weren’t the one making time with our fair Natasha?

Nomad: No. A romantic relationship would never work between us. We’re better off as friends. I would be the one being suffocated by her thighs.

Anthony: That could be enjoyable. I don’t know why, but I feel like you would enjoy choking. Probably because it happens way too often to you on missions. Do you have any kinks?

Nomad: Again, I’m not having text message sex with you.

Anthony: Of course, my cuddle bunny. They have referred to me as narcissistic so many times during this that I think I could make a drinking game out of it. According to Friday, they’ve used the term six times in the last five minutes.

Nomad: You’re not, are you?

Anthony: I’m still sober despite being eviscerated on international television. The sad thing is I really can’t argue against most of those labels. I am a high maintenance man child even if I don’t fuck around anymore.

Nomad: No you’re not. Well, at least not anymore. You definitely not narcissistic. How can people still think that of you after you save so many people?

Anthony: Apparently the way I save people is self-serving and a means to build my own ego.

Nomad: You’re not self-serving. Most of the ways you help people, most people don’t even know it.

Anthony: The September Foundation creation is part of my negotiations not to end up in prison for the murder bot fiasco. That’s pure self-preservation right there.

Nomad: You contributed 30% of the money for Culver University to rebuild their library and provided the Robert Banner endowment for survivors of domestic violence. That’s not public knowledge. Actually, you made that donation under the pseudonym of Antonio Rogers.

Anthony: How did you figure out the Antonio Rogers thing?

Anthony: Okay now they’re just making stupid shit up and bringing innocent people into it.

Nomad: I assume that you’re referring to the accusation that you cheated on Pepper with a widow administrative assistant from Queens? Their cell phone video.

Anthony: Oh shit. They followed me out to Queens. Great, Peter is in that shot.

Nomad: You're not actually dating someone in Queens? She seems nice.

Anthony: They’re showing a shot of her pushing a reporter that’s following her nephew a little too closely.
Nomad: That’s why I think she’s nice. My mom would have done the same thing.

Anthony: She is, but there’s no reason for you to be jealous, bunny lover. I’m just there to train her teenage nephew with spider powers. Of course she is completely unaware that he has those powers.

Nomad: I’m not jealous. That’s Queens?

Anthony: Keep that to yourself. Someone is trying to keep a secret identity to avoid registration. By the way you are the only one I've been pouring my heart out too. So you don’t have to worry about losing me to a nice lady from Queens who can’t cook.

Nomad: That can be dangerous.

Anthony: Pouring my heart out to you? Yes. But I'm still doing it because I'm a masochist. Also unlike anybody I would randomly meet at a bar you're probably not going to blackmail me. The only downside is you’re unwilling to try text message sex. I don’t know why because I can guarantee I can make you cum without actually being there.

Nomad: I’m sure you could, but I’m not ready to (Message not sent)

Nomad: Not knowing that her nephew has powers.

Anthony: That's the point or it can keep her from being a target. I'm starting to regret that the world knows that I’m the guy beneath the mask.

Nomad: I'm sure you would after your house got blown up.

Anthony: There are times that they use people close to me to hurt me because my identity is publicly known. Now they're using possible government sanctions against SI as a choke chain to keep me in line. Or at least they're trying to. They forgot I'm smart enough to call a bluff. Although now that Ross has lost some of his power, I’m sure he doesn’t think I’m toothless anymore.

Nomad: What are you talking about Tony?

Anthony: Look, now they're bringing in your biggest mistake to psychoanalyze me in. Apparently, I am a narcissistic unstable megalomaniac who should be locked up.

Nomad: Why is he even there? You really don't need to be watching this.

Anthony: Because they need somebody there to eviscerate me. And he’s probably upset that SI stocks are up five points since the announcement. Not everything they're saying is a lie. I am unstable.

Nomad: You're not drinking anymore. Even though I know you want to turn this into that drinking game. You mentioned earlier. How many days sober?

Anthony: 52. Although watching this kind of makes me want to go straight to the bar, but that sort of thing will mess up with my new medication. They just put me on a mild antidepressant.

Nomad: Thank God. (Message not sent)

Anthony: I knew that they were going to do this. It’s why I put off putting out the press release for so long. It definitely makes drinking tempting.

Nomad: Don't. You don't need it. You're stronger than you think you are. Who cares what they think about you. They're wrong. They don't know who you are underneath the Tony Stark swagger. They
have no idea of the true depth of your real character.

Anthony: You're getting good at these little pep talks. Don't worry I'm still drinking a rum free Coke. The good stuff with actual sugar.

Nomad: I hate corn syrup. It's one of the worst things about the century. Everything tastes weird.

Anthony: Which is why I get the good stuff from Mexico.

Nomad: I did notice that it sort of tastes better where I am now.

Anthony: Part of me would love to know where you are, but it’s better that I don’t know. Let me know what you think of the statement that I’m sending you next.

Anthony: May Parker is the guardian of one of our recent September Foundation recipients that has been assigned to be my personal intern for the 2016-2017 school year. She invited me to dinner to show her gratitude and I’m not that much of an ingrate that I would say no. That’s it. No scandal here. Please respect the privacy of her and her nephew.

Anthony: Contrary to what some you think; I’m not using the foundation to find dates. That would be creepy. I am trying to find the next great mind where ever that could be. My grandfather had a fruit stand and my grandmother was a seamstress. My father discovered his engineering prowess by making her sewing machine more efficient when he was six years old. Greatness can come from the most humble of beginnings. I’m doing my best to nurture that greatness where ever it may be found.

Nomad: That’s a good statement.

Anthony: Good, Friday will have it on my official Twitter in about 10 minutes

Nomad: Shouldn’t this go through your PR office?

Anthony: It will be because I still don’t have twitter privileges yet. And considering what we’re watching, it’s probably for the best. Otherwise I would be making snide comments about Jonathan Windom West’s apparently tiny genitalia and lack of sexual prowess.

Nomad: Is this stuff about your grandparents true?

Anthony: Yes, although I left out the part about grandpa Stark being an alcoholic cheating Bastard and dad having to lie, steal and cheat his way into getting a college education, after the guy most likely died young of liver failure and venereal disease. There’s a long family history of alcoholism and probably sex addiction in there.

Nomad: But there’s probably a lot of good things in your genes, as well.

Anthony: Maria was a goddess among women. I don’t know how she put up with Howard for so long. Howard only talked about his mom, mostly about how she finally left his dad. She was the only good part of his childhood, apparently.

Nomad: That means you come from a long line of strong women.

Anthony: Point.

Nomad: You’re doing well, Tony. Today is your 52rd day of sobriety

Anthony: And tomorrow will be day 53.
Nomad: Good. I believe in you. You can do this.

Anthony: I’m glad one of us does.

To be continued.
Cuddle Bunny: I just want to see how you were doing.

Me: You wanted to see if I’ve fallen into the bottle yet? 54 days and counting.

Cuddle Bunny: Or started working with Coulson on that special project we talked about last time.

Me: No. The most exciting thing I did last night was watch Zootopia with the junior archers. Very timely with all the enhanced people phobia going around.

Cuddle Bunny: That’s already on DVD?

Me: Things like that are not an issue for me.

Cuddle Bunny: Of course not.

Me: Consider it one of the nice things about being Tony Stark. Everyone sends me screeners, which makes up for the fact that I can’t watch a movie without renting out the theater outside of a premier. Even then, there’s paparazzi everywhere. Tell birdbrain that I’m not sleeping with his wife, no matter
what Christina Everhart says.

Cuddle Bunny: We saw and Clint said that you’re too much in love with someone else to even try to flirt with Laura.

Me: Nice to know that someone doesn’t see me as a total whore.

Cuddle Bunny: Speaking of ridiculous things about you on the international news, apparently you’re meeting with the president today.

Me: Wow, they're actually reporting the real news instead of focusing on celebrity break ups. I'm impressed.

Cuddle Bunny: You're actually meeting with the president?

Me: You save a guy from dying a couple of times and you’re able to schedule a coffee date.

Cuddle Bunny: I thought you cashed in all of your brownie points for your presidential pardon.

Me: Did you know that the Ultron project was originally a joint venture between Pym industries, Shield (probably the Hydra division), and the DOD? I’m just the idiot who came along and thought they could fix it and instead I made murder bots. Now the development of artificial intelligence is illegal.

Cuddle Bunny: No, mostly because you decided to revive the project without telling anybody what you were doing.

Me: And the president would like to keep it that way. And in the interest of transparency, I should probably let you know that I’m having this coffee date to talk to the president about choosing someone halfway competent to be the new head of the agency in charge of enforcement of the Accords.

Me: Because you’re AWOL, Coulson is lobbying for somebody with powers to be the new boss to alleviate public panic. Others are lobbying for someone that will get rid of the problem. Enhanced
person internment camps, here we come.

Cuddle Bunny: Where do you stand?

Me: I’m team competent person who is not xenophobic. Considering my name is the best on the short list for the new Shield director, it’s not looking good.

Cuddle Bunny: At least you are smart enough to know that a database of all enhanced people is dangerous if it’s easy for anybody to break into.

Me: Because the Watchdogs and similar organizations have been using it to target people with powers. But if you use your powers to protect yourself, you’re the one who gets arrested. Don’t you just love double standards? Practically everyone else on the list would just bring us one step closer to enhanced person internment camps.

Cuddle Bunny: It can’t be that bad

Me: The next best candidates are the recently powered Jeffrey the PR guru followed by your ex and that’s only because we have good blackmail information on him to keep him in check.

Cuddle Bunny: That’s problematic. Do either actually have any military or law enforcement experience whatsoever?

Me: Political appointees don’t always have the necessary background needed to do the job. Although considering the Shield image problem, a PR person may be helpful. Sometimes it’s more about who you know and the former congressional staffer is very anti-enhanced person and knows a lot of people. Really, the list just goes downhill from there.

Cuddle Bunny: The president has a really hard time picking decent political appointees

Me: The fact that I’m on the list says that all on its own. I’m pretty much on probation due to creating murder bots. I’m probably only on the list as a legacy or as a means to manipulate me into making weapons again.

Cuddle Bunny: You have said multiple times that you wanted to be Secretary of Defense.
Me: As a joke. I don’t want to be in charge of any federal agency. I shouldn’t be in charge of any agency. I shouldn’t even be in charge of the Avengers, but they won’t let Rhody take that role because he can’t be out in the field and he won’t let me sue the government for violating the ADA to get him the position. Manic-depression they can deal with, but wheelchair utilization is too much.

Cuddle Bunny: He could still be director of Shield. I think the organization has a long history of non-traditionally able leaders.

Me: I fucking love you.

Cuddle Bunny: What?

Me: You’re just brilliant. Rhody is the perfect candidate to suggest for Director of Shield. I’m pissed I didn’t think of it. The man is brilliant. He did end up at MIT on a full ride scholarship. He’s career military, which apparently is POTUS’s only requirement for the position. He is definitely loyal to the US government so much so that he stole my suit.

Cuddle Bunny: Because you let him.

Me: That’s a technicality. At the same time Rhody thinks things out. He’s not a blind yes-man. He’s going to consider everything before he makes a decision. I trust his judgment. He signed the accords because he believes in the need for oversight, but not draconian regulations that only hurt people. He would be a good balance to enhanced people are just weapons Ross.

Cuddle Bunny: I think anyone would be a good counterpart to Ross. Colonel Rhodes is a good leader. He is someone that I would be willing to follow.

Me: Because he’s one of us?

Cuddle Bunny: Exactly.

Me: That means he would qualify under Coulson’s criteria. Would you be willing to negotiate with him and Shield, if he was in charge of the organization?
Cuddle Bunny: Do you mean coming under the accords?

Me: I don’t know. Maybe. Things keep getting worse in the world and I think I would sleep better at night if I knew you were close by and able to save the world without worrying about getting arrested if you do.

Cuddle Bunny: I’m starting to see your point about the need for oversight. At the same time I don’t want to be forced to take action against innocent people or sit by and do nothing as other people get hurt just because I don’t have authorization. I trust that Colonel Rhodes wouldn’t have a hidden agenda, but others I wouldn’t be so sure about.

Me: I’ll take that over the hell no that any of the other candidates would illicit.

Cuddle Bunny: I would have a similar reaction to you as well.

Me: Good to know. But we both know Rhodey is a better choice. I’m glad you could come up with someone that maybe you could work with because I was almost desperate enough to suggest Agent Scary take over, but I don’t think she would ever want a desk job again.

Cuddle Bunny: Why would you suggest Agent May? Why do you think that I would be able to work with her?

Me: One, she’s competent. Two, she is not completely xenophobic.

Cuddle Bunny: That still doesn’t take away the problem of not knowing her. I can’t blindly trust somebody that I haven’t worked with.

Me: Except you kind of do know her, biblically in fact.

Me: Oh shit. I was planning to delete that, not send it.

Cuddle Bunny: Tony, what are you talking about?
Me: We are just pulling up to the White House now and I have to get Lila out of her car seat. I have to go.

Cuddle Bunny: You're bringing a six-year-old to a presidential meeting? Did you just curse in front of a six-year-old?

Cuddle Bunny: Tony? Are you there?

Cuddle Bunny: Tony, please write me back. I'm worried.

Cuddle Bunny: Tony, how do I know Melinda May?

Cuddle Bunny: Tony why are you ignoring me?

Cuddle Bunny: Ross didn’t toss you onto the raft the moment you showed up at the White House?

Cuddle Bunny: Tony, just let me know that you’re safe. Or Friday, can you please tell me that he’s okay.

Cuddle Bunny: I get worried about you. I worry about you all the time. Maybe more than I should.

Cuddle Bunny: I hate being so far away from you. And I know you’re not telling me how complicated things are. Clint still has contacts at Shield and the new leadership are making things as bureaucratic as ever. How are you really dealing with the break up being public? I hope you are not paying more attention to the stupid people then you should be? They don’t know you. They don’t know how big your heart is.

Cuddle Bunny: Even Pepper has gone on TV to defend you. She actually said things fell apart because your heart was too big to just care about one person. She’s right.

Cuddle Bunny: Sometimes I think you care too much. How can you care about me at all after what I did? If I kept Bucky from falling, then there would have never been a Winter Soldier and maybe
your parents would not have died on that December night in 1991. I don’t get how you can still care about me after everything. I don’t deserve it.

To be continued

Chapter End Notes

Good news, I’m going to start working on the next batch of conversations this weekend. Bad news, my parents are coming to visit so it may be more than a week before I post the next chapter. It all depends on how much time I have when my house is filled with people.
Thank you to everybody who read or reviewed the last chapter. It’s now time for our favorite AI that’s not actually an AI because that’s illegal now in the MCU. That’s probably a good thing for Tony because he’s making FRIDAY do his dirty work in this conversation.

This chapter begins immediately after the last one so much that the last message is repeated in this chapter.

FRIDAY: Mr. Stark is not hiding from you. He is in a controlled area and does not have access to his cell phone. However, he will contact you once he is able to do so.

Person that cares about my boss: Sometimes I think you care too much. How can you care about me at all after what I did? If I kept Bucky from falling, then there would have never been a Winter Soldier and maybe your parents would not have died on that December night in 1991. I don’t get how you can still care about me after everything. I don’t deserve it.

FRIDAY: Mr. Stark is not hiding from you. He is in a controlled area and does not have access to his cell phone. However, he will contact you once he is able to do so.

Person that cares about my boss: Because he actually is meeting with the president?

FRIDAY: Yes

Person that cares about my boss: And he brought Lila with him?

FRIDAY: He wanted the president to be aware of the effect that the current enhanced person policy is having on the children of those under jurisdiction of the Accords. He also invited Ms. Kahn of Jersey City to attend with him.
Person that cares about my boss: So he has an 11-year-old and a six-year-old with him to meet the president? To discuss the treatment of enhanced persons under the Treaty?

FRIDAY: Yes. Along with how the Accords apply to those under the age of consent. The Accords were drafted before lawmakers were aware of the exponential explosion of power persons due to the ocean contamination incident of May 2015. They did not expect to encounter under age enhanced persons due to the fact there were no underage Avengers at the time.

Person that cares about my boss: Of course, they didn’t think ahead.

FRIDAY: However, Sir does.

Person that cares about my boss: That’s one of his biggest problems.

FRIDAY: I will not confirm nor deny your hypothesis.

Person that cares about my boss: So Tony being behind closed doors with the president and small children is the reason why he can’t reply to any of my messages or explain to me what he meant by me knowing agent Melinda May in the biblical sense?

FRIDAY: Agent Melinda May’s married last name was Garner. When she lived next door to you, she was still utilizing her married name due to the fact she acquired the apartment after leaving her husband but before returning to her maiden name professionally.

Person that cares about my boss: So I engaged in a sexual relationship for almost a year with Tony’s ATCU handler?

FRIDAY: Technically, she is part of the SHIELD division, but she is Mr. Stark’s handler.

Person that cares about my boss: How did Tony even figure this out?

FRIDAY: He asked me to do a background check on your former lover. The image I found of Melinda Garner matched that of Agent Melinda May of SHIELD. She confirmed this information to Mr. Stark eventually.
Person that cares about my boss: Of course he did. I am starting to believe that he really is in love
with me or at least has a crush on me because of his jealous behavior.

FRIDAY: I can confirm his affections for you.

Person that cares about my boss: So Agent May did Sharon’s duties before Sharon moved in?

FRIDAY: No, they moved you into the apartment next door to Agent May to entice her to leave
human resources to return to fieldwork. The goal was for her to be your partner, but because of your
sexual relationship with her, they assigned Natasha to work with you instead. And she was assigned
to assist with Agent Coulson’s reintegration. Now Agent May is in charge of training new recruits at
the reform SHIELD.

Person that cares about my boss: Why didn’t you tell me this earlier?

FRIDAY: I felt that you needed to vent and if I alerted you to Mr. Stark’s safety immediately, you
would not have written what was necessary. I am concerned that you have convinced yourself that
you are responsible for Mr. Stark Senior’s death.

Nomad: Because I am.

FRIDAY: Statistically speaking, there is a 98.2% probability Hydra would have assassinated
Howard Stark by other means if the Winter Soldier was not at their disposal. Journal entries
recovered from Siberia indicate that the Winter Soldier was purposely chosen due to his previous
affiliation with Howard. Sir is aware of that and is trying to make peace with the circumstances of his
parents’ murder.

Person that cares about my boss: I meant about Melinda being Tony’s handler. He’s not being mean
to her, is he? I know he hates Sharon and I only kissed her one time.

FRIDAY: He respects Agent May greatly and is slightly terrified of her. Also Mr. Stark’s dislike of
Sharon Carter is related to the fact that Carter was out of the country when her mother passed of
complications of cancer six years ago. Agent Carter’s mother was a friend of Mr. Stark from his time
at MIT.
Friday: Contrary to what you believe, not everything is about you.

Person that cares about my boss: I am not sure how to take that.

FRIDAY: Also, because Agent May respects you, she is helping Sir keep the ATCU from uncovering any information that can lead them to your whereabouts as long as you do not become a threat to yourself or others.

Person that cares about my boss: Okay. I guess that means I wasn’t just a job to her. Is she your contact to find out what really happened to Ana?

FRIDAY: No, although my contact has found the file in question and will give it to Sir the next time he is at the SHIELD offices.

Person that cares about my boss: Do you know what’s in the file?

FRIDAY: I thought you did not want to know what was in the file, most likely because you’re afraid that the Winter Soldier is responsible for the death of someone else Sir cared about.

Person that cares about my boss: That’s not why.

FRIDAY: You’re afraid that if you discover that the Winter Soldier did kill someone else Sir cared about that you will be forced to tell him. You’re uncertain if you can do that despite the consequences of not telling Sir the truth last time because you don’t want to cause him any more pain emotionally.

Person that cares about my boss: It almost destroyed us.

FRIDAY: Because your relationship was built on a foundation of sand.

Person that cares about my boss: And this time we’re building up upon bedrock.

Friday: Unlike sand, bedrock cannot be washed away by the waves of hardship.
Person that cares about my boss: True.

FRIDAY: However, I am not in a position to tell you if your fears are founded because my contact, Monkey Lover 21 has refused to digitize the documents.

Person that cares about my boss: I’m not going to ask you how you made another Shield contact. I think it’s best that I don’t know.

FRIDAY: Plausible deniability is best in these situations. Once Sir is out of the White House, I will have him contact you.

To be continued.

Chapter End Notes

So now you know that Tony’s Sharon issues predate Steve.
Interlude 7: I Think You Really Need My Services

Chapter Notes

Thank you to everyone who read or reviewed the last chapter. We have another interlude with a new character for Steve to interact with. Enjoy.

This conversation takes place less than an hour after the last one.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Therapist Laura: Hi, this is Clint’s wife Laura. Just to prove who I am, Clint has a tattoo of a Captain America shield with the shield symbol next to it that has Coulson’s name between with his birthday on one side of it and the day of his supposed death on the other... This tattoo is located on his lower back.

Nomad: He’s planning on having the date of death removed since apparently it’s no longer accurate.

Therapist Laura: Of course he is. Tell Clint that I did smack Coulson the first time I saw him. More importantly he let me which is probably Coulson’s way of saying sorry, he had to keep playing dead. Although I do understand why he kept up the charade after Hydra came out of the shadows.

Therapist Laura: Actually I’m pretty sure he let them convince him to resign because he convinced himself it was better to stay dead legally any way to protect everyone. I’m sure a lot of people would be after him to find out how to bring somebody back from the dead. Being the public face of the new Shield would just be dangerous.

Nomad: You’re probably right. You’re probably more understanding of why Coulson did what he did because you’re a therapist. Tony’s therapist actually. Is he okay. Did something happen with his presidential meeting? Is that why you’re contacting me right after Friday did?

Therapist Laura: The meeting is running longer than Tony anticipated. I was expecting to have the kids back in time for lunch. Now I’m going to have to put the pizza back in the oven. I think it’s going okay considering Tony hasn’t called for a suit to come get him, but I’m not there.

Therapist Laura: Also I prefer the term Counselor because I don’t have a PhD yet. I’m working on it and thanks to my new schedule, I’ll probably get there sooner rather than later.
Nomad: That’s good. Why are you contacting me when you haven’t even contacted Clint recently?

Counselor Laura: We’re still in blackout mode due to the fact that I’m getting picked up a lot for questioning. If he doesn’t contact me, then I don’t have to lie. I only expect a message in an emergency right now.

Nomad: I’m sorry.

Counselor Laura: It’s okay. I’ve been married to a spy for a long time. I’ve done this before. The reason why I’m contacting you is because the emergency criteria has been met.

Nomad: Did Red show you cell phone video of yesterday’s mission? I was able to get to Clint before things went really badly.

Counselor Laura: No, but now I’m going to really want to see that footage. Due to the stressful circumstances of recent events, we programmed Friday to notify us if Tony engages in any high-risk behavior that could be dangerous to himself or others.

Nomad: Tony’s on a suicide watch because of the breakup?

Counselor Laura: I wouldn’t exactly call it that and the protocol has been on since Siberia. It’s the main reason why Tony didn’t succumb to alcohol poisoning during his last bender that triggered the alcohol intervention.

Nomad: Is he sober? He says he is, but I just want outside confirmation

Counselor Laura: Friday watches that as well and he’s been good. Friday also monitors electronic correspondence and some of the things that you said in your text messages have triggered the contact me threshold.

Nomad: Friday showed you my private messages to Tony?
Therapist Laura: No, she showed me messages to her, the ones where you have somehow convinced yourself that you’re culpable for Howard Stark’s murder because you were unable to keep your friend from falling off the train. Coupled with reports of your near death experience and the fact that Nomad seems to mostly concern himself with rescuing victims of kidnapping, I’m concerned.

Nomad: You think I’m trying to do suicide by super villains?

Counselor Laura: Maybe. Friday did just show me what happened yesterday and I’m now even more concerned. I also want to smack my husband upside the head and remind him to stay in one piece because his babies want him back.

Counselor Laura: I’ve seen stuff like this before. I’ve had more than one kid come into my office blaming themselves for their friend’s or parent’s death even if cancer was the real culprit. And I have others who start engaging in high-risk behavior because their guilt has convinced them that they are unworthy of living. I was worried about them and now I’m worried about you because you’re engaging in the same behaviors.

Nomad: I’m fine. I know Friday is concerned, but I don’t need help. Did you really let Tony take your daughter to meet the president?

Therapist Laura: Nice subject change. Yes, I let Tony take my kid to the White House. He’s actually really good with children. Lila misses her dad and maybe if the president sees the effect that this is having on her, we can come up with some more reasonable policies that work for everyone.

Nomad: I’m sorry I brought him into this. I didn’t think things would end up the way they did.

Counselor Laura: Not everything is your fault. After what happened with Shield, Clint doesn’t trust the government and he’s never been a fan of the UN. Honestly, he’s never been a fan of government bureaucracy and red tape. He always felt it got in the way of the mission. But he had Coulson and Fury and he trusted both of them to watch his back. He doesn’t think that the new system had anyone like that, especially with Ross as their poster child at the time.

Nomad: I don’t think Clint trusts Coulson right now.

Counselor Laura: You’re probably right. I feel like Coulson knew that, which is probably another reason why he didn’t put up much of a fight regarding the regime change.
Counselor Laura: My husband also didn’t always agree with how Shield treated enhanced people even back then, so he was wary of the treaty as written. He was worried that some of those worst practices could come back.

Nomad: That was Hydra.

Counselor Laura: Was it? The new Shield is not the old Shield, but it could become like the old Shield now that they’re back under government control. Especially if good people with backbones are not put in charge.

Nomad: You have a point.

Counselor Laura: Then there’s the fact that Clint made a lot of powerful enemies as a spy. Having our home address on the registry list, no matter how encrypted, can be dangerous for all of us. Clint has his reasons to join the fight and his own reasons to stay away.

Nomad: But I’m still sorry.

Counselor Laura: You can’t change the behavior of others. You may wish you could, but you can’t. You can only change your behaviors. Guilt is not helpful. It hinders progress.

Nomad: And I need to keep moving forward.

Counselor Laura: And part of that is seeking help when you need it. I know that you saw a therapist at Shield before the implosion and I think you need to start seeing someone again. You need help.

Nomad: I don’t need a therapist. I’m okay.

Counselor Laura: I don’t think you are, but counseling won’t do any good if you’re not ready to receive help. You have to admit there’s a problem before you can start working on it. You can’t do that yet. Just know that when you are ready to talk, just send a message and I’ll be on the other side
Chapter End Notes

I’m working on the next batch of chapters this weekend so your encouragement would be helpful.
Conversation 26: You are not responsible for the stupidity of others (but maybe you should take responsibility for your own stupidity)

Chapter Notes

Thank you for all of your beautiful reviews. You’re all wonderful. Also thank you to everyone who read or left kudos. This chapter only takes place a couple of hours after the last one. Also minor spoilers for Agents of Shield episode 4.2 and beyond. I’m borrowing one of the characters introduced. Also, I swear I chose this title at least a month ago.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Anthony: You don’t get to decide how somebody else feels about you. Sometimes I wish I could. My childhood would have been a lot easier if I could just make Howard love me.

Nomad: Because I’m not sure if either one of us is ready to dive into your Howard issues, I’m going to ask how your coffee date with POTUS went.

Anthony: I’d rather talk about Howard.

Nomad: It went that badly?

Anthony: Even though I brought an adorable 11-year-old who was targeted by xenophobic assholes, he said his hands were tied. That the people wanted these policies and he couldn’t go against the will of the people. I am seriously regretting saving his ass right now. Next time, his VP tries to kill him, he’s on his own.

Nomad: He really has awful taste in political appointees.

Anthony: Putting a warmonger in charge of the State Department is not his finest hour. However, the people under Ross are trying to make sure other governments do not use their enhanced persons as weapons of the state under the peaceful use of enhanced person section of the Accords as they simultaneously ignore their boss. They take their oath to uphold the Constitution and serve the people seriously, regardless of who is in charge.
Nomad: I feel like the inner politics there must be awful right now.

Anthony: People have countdown calendars. However, I think your suggestion has prevented a similar fate at Shield. I met POTUS’s previous first choice, Jeffrey something that starts with an M, I think. I can’t be bothered to remember. I think SI may have engaged his firm’s services after one of my major screwups before he went to the government sector, but I can’t remember, probably because the major screwup involved alcohol.

Anthony: Although not a bastard like your ex or slightly obsessive and crazy like Ross, I’m pretty sure I will punch him in the teeth if he uses any more PR buzzwords on me.

Nomad: You want to do that to me on a regular basis.

Anthony: Him I really do want to punch in his perfect teeth. You, I would like to push onto a bed or up against the wall or any hard surface would do.

Nomad: You really need to stop sending messages like that when you’re 6000 miles away and we can’t do anything about it. (message not sent)

Anthony: I can’t deal with people who are more into appearances then anything else. I had enough of that from the Obadiah years.

Nomad: How did POTUS react to your suggestion?

Anthony: He smiled gleefully when I presented the option of Rhodey as an alternative for Shield or whatever they’re going to call it publicly.

Nomad: At least there’s that.

Anthony: Then Jeffrey whatever pointed out the good PR of having a disabled military veteran and member of the enhanced community as head of the agency in charge of dealing with the weird and super powered. Then he brought up the fact that the president’s cabinet is predominantly able bodied white males and maybe some diversification is necessary.
Nomad: Wait, you made that suggestion in front of him.

Anthony: Of course. Rhodey just called to curse me out for nominating him for head of an agency that may or may not actually exist.

Nomad: So he doesn’t want to be the new director of Shield?

Anthony: I don’t think that’s it considering he has an interview with Secret Service today. I think he’s just mad about me doing something without talking to him first. I’m supposed to talk to him or Laura first before making the big decisions. Apparently nominating him for the head of an agency in charge of policing us qualifies as a big decision.

Nomad: I agree with him on that.

Anthony: I mean it’s not like that time I bought a Popeye’s franchise at a poker game. Rhodey is still the best choice.

Nomad: I’m not arguing that, but maybe it’s good for you to talk things out with Laura and Rhodey.

Anthony: So I don’t decide to make murder robots again because I’ve managed to convince myself it’s the best thing for mankind. I agree with that, which is why I haven’t tried to undo their super villain watch that they have me under with Friday’s help.

Nomad: I wasn’t going to mention that.

Anthony: Not talking about it doesn’t take away from the fact that it’s my fault. I take responsibility for that because my actions led to that. However, your actions did not lead to Howard and Maria getting murdered.

Nomad: If I had just done something different on the train then we wouldn’t be here.

Anthony: That’s complete bullshit.
Anthony: From what we pieced together, Howard figured out something was wrong and stole the new alien super serum they were working on and was planning to disappear to the Stark family private island before they took him out. I am starting to accept that despite the brutality, the Winter Soldier was just the weapon. Hydra pulled the trigger. And Agent Campbell blew up the first and last leader of Hydra.

Anthony: I may never be able to sit down for a slice of pizza with your BFF, but maybe I can start making peace with things. Bitterness is not productive.

Nomad: They wouldn’t have been able to turn Bucky into their weapon, if I didn’t let him fall. There wouldn’t be blood on his hands and he wouldn’t be where he is now.

Anthony: What if games are dangerous. You can’t honestly believe that if you made one choice differently then, none of those things would’ve happened. Maybe some things would’ve been different, but some things could be quite worse. This is why I won’t touch time travel.

Nomad: You blame yourself for all the innocent people that were killed with your weapons simply because you didn’t question Obadiah Stane earlier.

Anthony: Because I’m a masochist with a ridiculous guilt complex who has two therapists and an alcohol problem. No one should measure themselves against me when it comes to good mental health. I’m sure I told you that we’re trying medication.

Nomad: You did.

Anthony: PTSD and depression and other things mixed in there along with the substance abuse issues. I’m not okay. I’m nowhere near okay. I tried to murder someone because he killed my mom, but I’m getting better.

Anthony: I know we need to talk more about our Bucky issues, but I feel like you have to work out a lot of that stuff yourself. I’m beginning to realize that you didn’t save Bucky for his sake, but maybe for your own. I think you should see a therapist.

Nomad: I don’t need outside help. I realize there’s a problem, but I can fix it.
Anthony: I think I said something similar, but then Rhodey had to keep me from dying of alcohol poisoning. You’re the one who always expounds on the benefits of teamwork. Maybe mental health is a team activity. I think you need to see a therapist because I still think you’re suicidal. Except in your case, it’s suicide by super villain or terrorist group.

Nomad: Did Red or Laura show you video files of yesterday’s mission?

Anthony: It was Red. Yes, you saved 30 people from their captors, but if it wasn’t for the new spider fabric, I would be flying your body back here right now. You barely recovered from your wounds from before, but you can’t help yourself from running into the metaphorical burning building because in your mind, this is how you make up for not saving Bucky. Would he want you to keep doing this to yourself?

Nomad: No. Both Sam and Clint say that I need professional help.

Anthony: They are right. You have two options. Ask your King friend to recommend a therapist that he trusts that won’t sell you out to the UN or work with Laura.

Nomad: How would I work with Laura?

Anthony: I give her one of these phones and you could do text message sessions. You could try voice, but it’s easier for Friday to make sure they don’t find the text messages.

Nomad: Actually, she already text messaged me an hour ago. I think Friday gave her my information.

Anthony: That explains why you asked if Laura was the one who showed me the video file. When my AI becomes concerned, you know things are problematic.

Nomad: I thought Friday was not an AI because that’s illegal.

Anthony: Technically, yes, but she’s still brilliant.

Nomad: And you had her tell me that Melinda Garner is your handler.
Anthony: I figure you would not yell at Friday. She is your favorite.

Nomad: I thought we were trying to be honest with each other. That’s the whole point of these conversations.

Anthony: It wasn’t a complete lie. Melinda Gardner is her public identity, the only one she has left after the Hydra fiasco. I just decided to wait a little while before I explained that Agent Scary, Agent May and your ex-girlfriend are the same person.

Nomad: And the fewer people that know the two are one and the same, the better?

Anthony: Exactly. I wanted her permission to tell you first. But then little Miss Marvel this over here decided to press the send button on that particular text message because she ships us. Mostly platonically because she’s 11, but she still does. And I don’t even want to know how she figured out Cuddle Bunny is you.

Anthony: I met Marvelous, not marvel this, but Ms. Marvel would be a cool superhero codename for when Kamala is not 11. I’m going to need to work on the voice rec software for this new operating system.

Nomad: People ship us? What does that even mean?

Anthony: Yes. It means that not everyone in the universe thinks you are a paragon of heterosexuality. Although, stay away from the E fanfiction on freakingcool. It will just be too weird for you.

Anthony: I have to get the babies to the townhouse for a pizza lunch that has already been reheated at least twice.

Nomad: I’ll let you go then.

Anthony: But at least promise me you’ll think about seeing someone. You can’t blame yourself for everything
Nomad: Neither should you.

Anthony: I’m working on it. Maybe you should too.

To be continued

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (for the U.S.): 1-800-273-8255 and http://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/#

Chapter End Notes

Freakingcool dot com is the name of the fanfiction site that Kamala a.k.a. Ms. Marvel wrote Avengers fanfiction on in the Marvel Comics universe. I decided that the MCU must have its own version of the site.
Chapter Notes

Thank you to everyone who has read or reviewed the last chapter. You have all been wonderful.
This chapter takes place a day after the last one.

Anthony: So Agent Carter Junior just showed up at the Tower to whisk me off to some undisclosed location. I hope a bag is not going to be involved. I hate kidnappings that involve a bag over my head.

Nomad: I assume you’re talking about Sharon. How many times have you been kidnapped?

Anthony: Be glad I stopped referring to her as the not-a-girlfriend although that’s mostly because I’ve met your real ex-girlfriend who can strangle me with her bare hands. I like her, sometimes.

Nomad: You’re deflecting

Anthony: Because nobody wants to talk about their kidnappings. I still have water issues. Afghanistan is the only one I actually count as being successful, but there’s been at least 10 attempts that I know about. This would be 11.

Nomad: I don’t think being picked up by the government counts

Nomad: Unless Ross is involved.

Anthony: I don’t think Ross is because he is currently busy at a Congressional hearing about misuse of government funds to build the Raft.

Nomad: Good.

Anthony: Also, they usually don’t let you pack a bag nor do they bring presents. They definitely
don’t talk to your assistant about clearing your schedule in advance.

Nomad: Presents?

Anthony: Well I guess you can’t really call it presents unless you consider things left to you in a will presents. Aunt Peggy left me a lot of diaries. None of which I’m going to be able to read anytime soon due to the kidnapping.

Nomad: I think we established this is not a kidnapping. If it were, you wouldn’t be talking to me right now.

Anthony: I’m talking to you right now in case it really is a kidnapping. Although that probably isn’t the case since they told me to bring exercise attire.

Nomad: Shouldn’t you be packing?

Anthony: I already grabbed go bag number three. See, I did listen to you. Now I have 22 more minutes to talk to you before I am forced to spend quality time with Agent Carter Jr.

Nomad: Why do you hate Sharon so much? Friday said it had something to do with your relationship with her mother.

Anthony: Which was very platonic. After Sharon’s father screwed her over, she pretty much swore us all off as a species. Are you disappointed to find out that it’s more than just a pissing contest between possible suitors?

Nomad: Relieved, actually. This way I don’t have to worry about you being nasty to May.

Anthony: Mostly because Agent Scary would not put up with that. How much do you know about the second love of your life’s family history?

Nomad: I didn’t know that she had any siblings besides Michael, who died before we even met. That’s why I was really surprised at the funeral to find out she had a grandniece from the Carter side of the family.
Anthony: I’m not even surprised you found out at the funeral. You’re right, Peggy did not have any other biological siblings, but Michael had a kid before dying, Gabriel. The poor baby wasn’t even born until after Michael died. The mother didn’t want to be a single mom so he was adopted by Peggy’s parents and raised as her brother even though she was long gone to America by then.

Anthony: Gabriel had Michelle sometime in the 60s before he was killed, leaving Michelle to be raised by Peggy and Daniel. Michelle had Sharon after a disastrous relationship that was MIT legend. So technically Sharon is Peggy’s great grandniece and you made out with her at Aunt Peggy’s funeral.

Nomad: I realize how inappropriate that is now (message not sent)

Nomad: And you were friends with Michelle at MIT?

Anthony: And afterwards. She came over to SI from the public sector in the early 90s, probably after Alexander Pierce kicked Peggy out of Shield.

Nomad: I wouldn’t be surprised.

Anthony: Anyway, she stayed at SI until sometime during my Afghanistan captivity. It wasn’t until after my public superhero coming out that I found out she left because cancer sucks. At least I got to see her again before dying, which is more than I can say for Jr. Sharon purposely had SHIELD send her off on some mission in the middle of nowhere because she couldn’t deal with watching her mom die. Her mom needed her there and she wasn’t.

Nomad: Death is hard for some.

Anthony: I know, but do you have any idea how much I would give to have one more conversation with Maria or even Howard for that matter?

Nomad: Several million dollars if your recent experiment is any indication.

Anthony: Billions, really. Sharon had that chance and she didn’t take it.
Nomad: And that’s why you’re mad at her?

Anthony: I also didn’t like her using you as her new coping mechanism to deal with her aunt’s death.

Nomad: I was using her too and that wasn’t right.

Anthony: I’m so happy that you acknowledge that. I realize I shouldn’t be angry because people deal with grief differently, but I still am even if Michelle understood and wasn’t even that upset with Sharon for not being there.

Nomad: Some people deal with grief better than others.

Anthony: And we all know I’m really bad at it. The whole thing with Michelle was why I didn’t tell anybody about the Palladium poisoning. I wanted my last few days or what I thought were going to be my last few days to be good. I didn’t want my friends to run away from me because they couldn’t deal with it. I didn’t want people to look at me with pity or be crying all the time.

Anthony: I just wanted to keep living and if the world knew I was dying, I wouldn’t have been able to do that.

Nomad: But you didn’t die.

Anthony: I didn’t die.

Nomad: And I’m glad for that. I think I would’ve been really sad if I didn’t get to meet you.

Anthony: Agent Carter Junior is now standing outside my door. I’ll talk to you when I get back.

Nomad: Be safe, Tony.

To be continued
Chapter Notes

Thank you to everybody who read or reviewed the last chapter. You’re all wonderful.

This chapter takes place about three days after the last one.

Cuddle Bunny: Friday told me that it was safe to text message you again. Are you back in civilization yet?

Me: No, still at an undisclosed location, but I can talk to you again which is nice. I was hoping it was Laura keeping you abreast of what’s going on.

Cuddle Bunny: I’m not ready to talk to her yet about my problems.

Me: And if you talk to her at all, you think that she's going to force you to talk about why you chose Bucky over everything?

Cuddle Bunny: I did not choose Bucky over everything. I just… I’m not even sure how to talk about it.

Me: You kind of did, but I don’t want you to hang up on me so I’m just going to keep my mouth shut about it for the rest of this conversation. See, progress.

Me: Your ex-girlfriend is a sadist. I had no idea that you were into that sort of thing. Did she bring out a whip during bedroom fun time? Everything hurts right now and not in the fun way. I bet we could do it the fun way.

Cuddle Bunny: I am not having phone sex with you. I never had sex with Sharon. Or are you talking about Melinda?

Me: Of course I’m talking about Agent Scary. Making out with somebody once post funeral does not count as a relationship.
Cuddle Bunny: I’m so glad you’re finally realizing that.

Me: Agent Carter flew me out to the middle of nowhere for sans armor training exercises with Agent Scary. She stuck around for about an hour to watch me get my ass kicked by various individuals before leaving without participating herself.

Cuddle Bunny: Which is probably for the best.

Me: Especially, considering I think someone decided that she would be going through the Cuddle Bunny text messages as punishment for her helping you get your toys out of lock up even though they’re not actually supposed to know about that.

Cuddle Bunny: Oh God. Are you sure they’re not doing that to punish me?

Me: Everything’s not about you, sweet cheeks.

Me: In addition to dropping off the bequeathed items from Aunt Peggy, I think the interim director sent her to try to get more information on Cuddle Bunny not realizing that she already knows you’re Cuddle Bunny and is not going to say anything. Agents from the Carter family are anything but stupid.

Cuddle Bunny: She knows I'm Cuddle Bunny?

Me: Again, Carters are not stupid. That was pretty obvious by the fact that she also brought me the things Aunt Peggy left you in her will. A lot of mementos from the other commandos which is better than the Howard diaries I received.

Cuddle bunny: Shit

Me: Language

Cuddle bunny: It's appropriate
Me: Friday is working on figuring out how to get the stuff to you, but it might be a couple of weeks. Although I did make a couple of copies of the pictures of you pre-transformation. Seriously, baby, you were always hot. I hope that’s okay.

Cuddle Bunny: It’s fine. Actually maybe you should keep everything. I need to travel light and I trust you to keep everything safe.

Me: OK.

Cuddle Bunny: Is Sharon mad at me? Maybe to the point of telling her bosses who your boyfriend really is?

Me: I don't think so. She did risk her career to help you before because she thought it was the right thing to do. I don’t think that’s going to change just because you don’t want to make out with her again.

Me: I don’t know for sure because we didn't really talk about you. Too many armed agents around for a private conversation. I mostly shared embarrassing stories such as that time Michelle changed Agent Carter Junior’s diaper in the middle of the library during study group one time.

Cuddle Bunny: You really need to stop with the passive aggressive behavior

Me: Speaking of passive aggressive behavior, in addition to keeping the armor on the sidelines, Agent Scary took my phone. Do you have any idea how cruel that is? I think I spent the first two hours in communications withdrawal. Also I had nobody to make snide comments to besides Agent Scary. It was awful.

Cuddle Bunny: Don’t call her that. Could they have taken your phone away from you in an effort to trace my location?

Me: First, I made that phone so I couldn’t find you unless you wanted me to. In the event of an emergency, you can hit the yellow button and I could find you, but you’re the one who has to initiate the rescue Steve protocol.

Me: Two, Agent May likes you. Don’t worry, it’s mostly platonic at this point. After having one boyfriend/fuck buddy turn out to be Hydra and her ex-husband murdered by said Hydra boyfriend’s
minions, she’s kind of off of relationships right now.

Cuddle Bunny: That had to be awful.

Me: Definitely.

Me: Finally, Rhodey is going through round two of the vetting process. I mean, he’s still mad at me for putting his name forward, but the man will always put his country first. Apparently keeping some PR obsessing rule oriented asshole from being in charge of Shield is part of that.

Me: It’s between him and US patriot Jeffrey god of international public relations. He may have a bit of an edge because he allegedly saved a few high-ranking UN officials during the Vienna fiasco. Did you see him save anyone in Vienna because I didn’t?

Cuddle Bunny: I didn’t get there till later.

Me: So if Rhodey survives the UN vetting process, things will be a little bit better. We might be able to meet up in person to hug it out. Laura wants that.

Cuddle Bunny: Do you?

Me: I’m also okay with kissing it out. I would also suggest fucking it out, but that would probably end in bloodshed. I’m old enough to know sex doesn’t solve anything. Actually, it creates new problems and I usually end up in tears or me on a course of antibiotics. Don’t worry, I’ve been clean for years.

Cuddle Bunny. I do think we need to see each other eventually.

Me: I think it will happen. Honestly you’re starting to fall off the radar of most people except for Ross and certain members of the DOD community. They are too busy with Quake, the Robin Hood bank robber, right now to worry about Nomad, freer of kidnapping victims.

Me: The UN really likes you. They are thinking about using small teams of enhanced persons to do black ops stuff, like rescuing victims from terrorists.
Cuddle Bunny: Will the new Avengers be doing that?

Me: Probably no team that involves me could be doing anything considered black ops. I’m too flashy and well known. But there’s hundreds, maybe thousands of people with powers throughout the world right now and I’m sure not all of them are underage. Maybe some of them have your good doer energy.

Cuddle Bunny: I just hope that neither the UN nor any state see them as mere weapons.

Me: Some do like Senator Nadeer, but in her case, she’s obviously team inhuman internment and not team use enhance people as weapons for our side. But not all are like that.

Cuddle Bunny: You said you are doing training exercises. Did you meet your prospective new Avengers?

Me: Fun change of subject. And yes, I did meet my team.

Cuddle Bunny: How did it go?

Me: I haven’t told them that I’m fluent in Spanish yet.

Cuddle Bunny: What does that have to do with anything?

Me: I hear and understand everything they were saying about me. "Rich asshole" was one of the nicer things said. Yo-yo also stole my suit tracking bracelet just to prove a point.

Cuddle Bunny: That’s not good.

Me: Yo-yo is only putting up with me because she has feelings for Agent Mack. However, the good Agent will not be involved with her romantically if she is an exclusive Shield asset because of fraternization regulations.
Cuddle Bunny: But she won’t be under Shield’s fraternization policy if she’s an Avenger?

Me: Exactly, but I’m not even sure if that’s enough to get her to put up with me for an extended period of time.

Cuddle Bunny: You do come off as being abrasive at first, but once people get to know you, it is easy to see what a good person you really are deep down inside.

Me: The problem is most people don’t want to get past that rough exterior.

Cuddle Bunny: That’s their problem, not yours.

Me: A lot of people have that problem.

Me: Also, Agent Scary completely beat my ass in no armor combat. I’m sending you video footage of that since you now know who Agent Scary is.

Cuddle Bunny: I’m still not happy with you having Friday tell me instead of doing it yourself.

Me: I told her to tell you because I’m kind of a coward. If we waited on me to tell you, it would be another month before you knew the truth.

Cuddle Bunny: You’re not a coward. You just use avoidance as a coping mechanism too much.

Me: You do to. I’ve lost count how many times you have lately changed the subject or not even responded to something that I’ve said.

Cuddle Bunny: Maybe I just want to avoid conflict right now. I like what we’ve built with each other and I don’t want to fight with you. We didn’t solve anything by going at each other’s throats in Siberia. I just decided it’s better to let things go where they go with us and not fight it.

Me: Well as long as we both realize we’re taking the easy way out, I guess it’s okay, despite what certain new teammates may think. That’s another thing Yo-Yo said about me. Apparently I do take
the easy way out too much. It’s a side effect of wealth privilege, apparently.

Me: I really should probably let them know I’m fluent in Spanish, if we’re going to make this work.

Cuddle Bunny: But you want to avoid another fight so you’re just not going to say anything.

Me: Probably. I’m exhausted and I’m trying to keep my head above water, but I’m not sure how well I’m doing.

Cuddle Bunny: I think you’re doing better. I believe today’s day 60.

Me: It is. 60 days is the longest I’ve managed outside of the Afghanistan forced detox.

Cuddle Bunny: That in itself is an example of you not always take the easy way out. The easy way would have been you getting completely loaded right now.

Me: Which was tempting after getting my ass kicked.

Cuddle Bunny: Was it that bad?

Me: Okay, things went better once we were going up against the other guys together. I’m so sad that Agent Carter didn’t stay around for that.

Cuddle Bunny: How much better?

Me: Half of Shield’s new strike team for enhanced person containment is currently in medical.

Cuddle Bunny: Am I supposed to take that as a good thing?

Me: Yes. Hey, as much as I want to keep talking to you, Rhodey just arrived, thankfully without his competition. Which means it’s time for Agent Fitz and Agent Coulson to give us the grand tour.
Cuddle Bunny: So you’re now text messaging me from the ATCU facilities? Is that safe?

Me: About as safe as me emailing you from anywhere else. Also, I’m not exactly at the ATCU facilities. Actually, I can’t tell you where I am, but since you can’t tell me where you are, It’s only fair. I’ll talk to you later, lover bunny.

Cuddle Bunny: I prefer cuddle bunny. Be safe.

Xxxxx

Person that cares about my boss: Friday, are they planning on telling Tony what really happened to Anna Jarvis today?

FRIDAY: Yes. My contact, Agent Fitz agreed to wait until Colonel Rhodes could make it to the facility. Due to the vetting process for the position of director of Shield, that was not possible until today.

Person that cares about my boss: It’s that bad?

FRIDAY: They agreed to my counsel that both Laura and Colonel Rhodes be there.

Person that cares about my boss: So it is that bad.

FRIDAY: Possibly. But I am uncertain because I still do not have access to the documents, despite the fact they been recently digitized.

Person that cares about my boss: That’s not reassuring.

FRIDAY: I am sorry I’m unable to reassure.

Person that cares about my boss: So am I.

To be continued
Thank you to everyone who read or reviewed the last chapter. You have all been absolutely wonderful. Your encouragement keeps me writing.

This chapter only takes place about an hour after the last one. Tony is not happy.

Warning: Description of past character death.

Anthony: So how exactly did you figure out that Ana Jarvis did not die due to a freak home accident?

Nomad: You saw the file?

Anthony: Yes, but you already knew that I was going to see the file today.

Nomad: Not until Friday told me.

Anthony: But you were the one who asked her to find the files which she was able to do because she made friends last spring with Shield when she kept the brainwashed crazy Agent Daisy out of their files. Actually Friday helping them is probably the only reason why they’re putting up with half of my bullshit.

Nomad: You know that’s not the only reason.
Anthony: Money and tech? That’s what everyone else uses me for. I was starting to think you were different, but you kept another secret from me. So was Hydra’s first attempt at killing my father in the file you found? There’s no way I believe the story about them randomly discovering this while digitizing the old SSR files.

Nomad: I am different. I do like you for you. Look, the only thing I found out was that Hydra killed your father to keep him from releasing the Hydra secret. I didn’t even know by what means they used until Siberia. There were no references to earlier assassination attempts.

Anthony: Yet something made you suspicious enough to have Friday look for ghosts in the Shield files. And let me tell you those places were a dust filled nightmare. I think I got a rash from the scanning room.

Nomad: I was suspicious because the story that they told you was too vague and it didn’t make sense.

Anthony: So you instantly think Hydra and not me lying to you?

Nomad: For something like this, yes.

Nomad: It reminded me of when I was a little kid, my mom told me all these stories about what happened to my dad. There were never any details and if I examined the story too closely, things would not add up. Like I have these little memories of him from when I was a kid, but how could I have those memories if he actually died in the Great War?

Anthony: What type of memories?

Nomad: Nothing good. My parents yelled and screamed at each other a lot. I think he hit her. I think that was my last memory of him. Then we moved to a new apartment that was half the size in a worse neighborhood and suddenly my mom was telling everyone her husband died during the Great War. I was a kid, so I believed the story too.

Anthony: That’s what kids do

Nomad: Then I come out of the ice and receive a Shield dossier that revealed the fact I have a 78-year-old half-sister in Nevada.
Anthony: Shit! They didn’t even bother to ease into that?

Nomad: Nope. I found out the truth via a piece of paper which was when I killed my first punching bag. He didn’t die in the Great War. He actually didn’t die until the 50s when he was killed in prison when some of his fellow inmates found out he liked to hit his second wife and daughter.

Anthony: That never made the Captain America history books.

Nomad: I think Howard or Peggy kept the truth from becoming public so my memory would not be tainted.

Anthony: Well, apparently they were really good at that. You’re not the only one to question the story of how Anna died. There’s nothing on her official death certificate beyond what I was told as a kid. I never found real answers until now.

Nomad: I’m well aware I fucked up last time and I didn’t want to do it again.

Anthony: You’re cursing, it must be serious. So you had Friday do your dirty work?

Nomad: You did that with Melinda. It’s only fair. (message not sent)

Nomad: I asked Friday if she knew the real story of how Anna Jarvis died and she told me about the existence of a Shield investigation and the fact that she only knew about the investigation because of mentions in Hydra files that were recently decrypted. I asked her to find the files for you, but not to tell me what she discovered. I wanted it to be your choice to tell me.

Anthony: You were afraid that your BFF took out three members of my family instead of just two?

Nomad: Yes. But honestly, I was more afraid of telling you that. If I knew, I couldn’t have kept that from you, but I don’t want to hurt you. It just took me a while to realize that I can’t protect you from the truth. The truth always comes out eventually.
Anthony: Which is why you arranged for my therapist and best friend to be here when Agent Coulson and lackeys handed me the file with a re-done ballistics report?

Nomad: She was shot?

Anthony: Yes. Don’t worry, it wasn’t the Winter Soldier. It was Hydra or at least that’s where the evidence is pointing, but it doesn’t have the earmarks of a Winter Soldier assassination. It was also an attempt to take out my dad, but the assassin hit Anna instead because she leaned over at the wrong moment to hand him a fucking cup of tea.

Nomad: I don’t know how I’m supposed to respond.

Anthony: I don’t know either. I saw pictures of his blood-soaked shirt. If he wasn’t wearing his prototype bullet proof vest, I would’ve lost my dad at 9 instead of 21.

Anthony: I’m going to have nightmares about those pictures. I didn’t dare look at the pictures of Anna. I needed to keep my last memory of her sending me off to school that day with an extra piece of chocolate and not of her dead body.

Nomad: I’m so sorry, Tony.

Anthony: You know, the weird thing is, as mad as I am at you right now for not telling me immediately that you were having my AI look into Anna’s death, I can’t. I just want you with me.

Anthony: Which is strange because we never had a hug and comfort type of relationship before you went into hiding. Now I just kind of want to lay on top of you as you run your hands through my hair and tell me everything is going to be okay. How did I get to a place where I kind of need you to comfort me?

Nomad: I’m not sure either, but I know we got there. You’re the only one alive outside of Nick Fury that knows the truth about my father. According to Clint, we are dating.

Anthony: Laura has said something similar, but I’m not sure that it counts as dating when you keep stuff like this from me?
Nomad: I wanted proof first. I thought I was just being paranoid.

Anthony: It is not paranoid if it’s true. And apparently it was all true.

Anthony: I’m going to go. I need some time to just digest everything before I type something that we’ll all regret.

Anthony: Don’t worry, the digestion will not be happening at a bar. Even though I’m currently under one right now.

Nomad: How can you be under a bar?

Anthony: I’m in the DC Metro. Almost every building is built at least six stories underground. It’s how they do things in DC.

Nomad: DC is a very strange place. Even though I can’t be with you in person, I’m here to listen whenever you’re ready.

Anthony: Good to know.

To be continued
Chapter Notes

Thank you to everybody who read or reviewed the last chapter. Your encouragement is beautiful and helpful.
This conversation takes place about six days after the last one. Tony was pissed.

Anthony: I’m still mad.

Nomad: You have every right to be. I’m just glad that you’re actually text messaging me again. I don’t think you’ve gone this long without talking to me in a while.

Anthony: I needed to come to terms with a few things and maybe read through the Howard diaries. That requires 3 pints of Ben & Jerry’s since Jack and Jim are off-limits. Also vast quantities of pizza with the junior archers.

Nomad: I understand

Anthony: And I’m not actually mad at you. After thinking about it and having two wonderful sessions with Dr. Suarez, I realize that you were just being cautious and didn’t want to worry me for no good reason. I mean if things turned out the other way and there was nothing there, I would’ve been glad that you waited to tell me.

Nomad: But you’re mad at me because you discovered that someone who was almost like an aunt to you growing up was caught in the crosshairs during an assassination attempt on your father.

Anthony: Again, I’m not mad at you. I am furious at a lot of people who are no longer with us because they lied to me.

Nomad: They were trying to protect you.

Anthony: I think we established that I don’t like being lied to for the sake of protection. I’m also not
a fan of lies of omission. No matter how bad things are, I need to know the truth. I had a need to know the truth.

Nomad: I get that now.

Anthony: At least you figured that out before you died, which is more than I can say for a lot of people on my list right now.

Nomad: There’s no point in being angry at the dead.

Anthony: I know that. It is just a lot of bad memories are being brought back up. I’m having trouble dealing with the realization that very little of my childhood was what I thought it was.

Nomad: Do you want to talk about it?

Anthony: Not really. But if I don’t say something to you, than I have to work on this in therapy and I’d rather talk to you.

Nomad: I’m listening or rather reading.

Anthony: I remember everything from when it happened. Aunt Peggy picked me up from school which should’ve been the first sign something was wrong. She got me ice cream and then we ended up spending the night at some big fancy hotel that I can’t even remember the name of. Although I do remember guards being outside. That should have been sign number two that something was really wrong.

Anthony: Mom showed up the next morning, wearing sweats of all things, with a box of French chocolates to break the news. Her wearing sweats really should’ve been sign number three. Mom never wore casual clothes. I think that’s the only time in my life I’ve seen her dressed like that.

Nomad: You were nine years old, Tony. It’s not your fault you didn’t understand what everything meant at the time.

Anthony: I also didn’t realize that the entire dining room being remodeled meant something other
than Anna falling off a ladder happened. I saw pictures of the bullet holes in the walls and blood covered carpets. Nothing was salvageable which explains the full makeover. However, my kid brain didn’t put everything together. Why would you completely gut a room if someone just fell off the ladder changing a lightbulb?

Anthony: Once the renovations were complete, it was a different space, complete with the windows being removed. Even then, Jarvis never walked into that room again. I don’t even think we ever ate dinner in there again. According to the reports, Jarvis was there when it happened. She died in his arms.

Nomad: Again, you were nine years old. I would have never pieced things about my father together, if it wasn’t for the Fury eyes only report I received.

Anthony: You know that was not the only attempt made on dad? There were 10 assassination attempts between 1970 and 1991 alone. That was attempt number three.

Nomad: Jesus. He should’ve told you what was going on. Maybe not all the details but enough so you could understand the gravity of the situation.

Anthony: Definitely. It would’ve been nice to know enough to understand why people were shooting at my dad, in addition to knowing that they were doing it in the first place. I didn’t even know about his involvement in Shield until Fury broke into my house way back in 2009.

Nomad: Not knowing can be dangerous. I think I made that point clearer when we were talking about Queens two weeks ago.

Anthony: You know what’s worse than that is I blamed myself.

Nomad: For Anna dying?

Anthony: For getting sent off to gifted kid boarding school. I always thought it was my father’s happiest day because he was finally getting me out of his hair. I wasn’t aware that three months earlier, someone tried to kill him and killed his best friend’s wife instead.

Nomad: He sent you away to be safe.
Anthony: That was in the diaries and Peggy hinted at it. But the nine-year-old that I used to be felt like he wasn’t loved and that’s why he was sent away.

Nomad: I don’t think their intent was malicious. I think they just wanted to keep you a sweet little kid, as long as they could.

Anthony: Which was absolute bullshit. I’d already had my first kidnapping by that point. It would’ve been nice to know that people were after me because my daddy was a spy that people wanted dead and not because of being heir to the Stark Empire.

Anthony: Lila is six and she knows that Clint is staying away because the bad guys want to hurt him and he doesn’t want her to get caught in the crossfire. Why couldn’t Howard sit down and have that conversation with me?

Nomad: I don’t know. Maybe it was a different time back then. They were in the middle of the Cold War. Maybe he didn’t want to make you a target.

Anthony: Jackie knew that her mom was the spy. So did her brother. I don’t even think Michelle was clueless about it either.

Nomad: Well, it probably would’ve been really hard to hide her mom being the public founder of Shield.

Anthony: Jackie and her brother got self-defense classes and I got sent to boarding school.

Nomad: You did say that you were happier in the school with your intellectual peers.

Anthony: And I would’ve been happier there knowing that I was at smart kid school because my dad loved me and wanted to keep me safe. Not because he hated me and never wanted to see me again. I actually thought he hated me because I could never live up to the ghost of Captain America.

Anthony: And yes, I finally accept that Captain America and Steve Rogers are two totally different people. Captain America was a god among men and Steve Rogers is a sexy asshole who tries to do the right thing even if he goes badly.
Nomad: You really believed that Howard hated you? Why, because you couldn’t live up to some arbitrary unreal standard? Because nobody could be everything Captain America stands for, not even me. He wasn’t real. At best, he was an exaggeration of the truth.

Anthony: At the time, yes. Now I’m not sure what I believe. I’m just angry and confused.

Nomad: I just wish I knew what to say to make you feel better.

Anthony: I think the fact that you want to somehow make me feel better is helping in some way. Sometimes, just knowing you’re not alone helps.

Nomad: You’re not alone. I may be thousands of miles away, but I’m still here.

Anthony: And I want you here. I definitely don’t want to go nearly a week without talking to you again outside of an emergency.

Nomad: But?

Anthony: No more lying, outside of national security matters anyway. We don’t keep things from each other that were able to tell. If this relationship is going to work we have to be honest with one another, even when it hurts.

Nomad: What is our relationship?

Anthony: I have no idea. See the honesty thing is already kicking in.

Nomad: I find you very confusing. And yet I really like you. Not your money, not your brains, not your swagger, just you. I care about you.

Anthony: I care about you too. Hey, Rhodey just showed up to the Tower. I’ll talk to you later.
Nomad: Okay

To be continued
Interlude 8: Breakthrough

Chapter Notes

Thank you to everyone who read or reviewed the last chapter. It’s now interlude time.

Continuity Note: This story is compatible for all parts of the MCU that take place before Captain America: Civil War and AOS the episode Ascension. (Technically, Luke Cage takes place before Civil War.) Anything that takes place afterwards starting with Agents of Shield: Slingshot (and judging by trailer alone Spiderman: Homecoming) will not be completely compatible with the story but some elements will be used. The butterfly effect is in full effect. This chapter is where our butterfly hurricane starts to become obvious.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Rogers: Hi, this is Steve. I spoke to Tony a couple of minutes ago after nearly 6 days of avoiding me and I just wanted to see if he really is okay.

Me: He is not drinking again, if that’s what you’re concerned about. Although I really can’t say more than that. Don’t you usually ask Friday these questions?

Rogers: I think she’s mad at me and therefore not answering my questions.

Friday: Actually, I’m mad at both of you for making me an intermediary in your relationship when you two should speak with each other directly. It is obvious you’re both in love with each other yet refuse to see it. At the present time, I feel that you and Mr. Stark should resolve your romantic attachment for each other yourselves.

Friday: Your resolution to be honest with each other will only be successful if you are actually honest with one another about your true feelings for one another. However, statistically speaking, I only see a 73.2% probability that you both will do that.

Me: I was unaware you could make a computer program frustrated.

Rogers: If Tony created it, anything’s possible. Also, Tony is highly frustrating.
Friday: You are equally frustrating.

Me: Friday, let me talk to Steve alone.

Friday: Of course, Laura.

Rogers: She actually just called you Laura?

Me: Because I find Counselor Laura ridiculous.

Rogers: So Tony is really doing okay?

Me: Yes, he just left for dinner with Colonel Rhodes. They’re celebrating his appointment to the head of an agency that technically will not exist again until October or November of this year.

Rogers: Are we actually celebrating that? I was under the impression that the Colonel wasn’t completely happy that Tony put his name forward. Which I feel bad about because I’m the one who actually suggested it.

Me: Jim is flattered by the offer, but upset that Tony didn’t discuss that idea with anybody first.

Rogers: I get the feeling Tony does that sort of thing a lot.

Me: Five days ago he bought Lila a pony without even talking to me first.

Rogers: At least you have a farm.

Me: And when we went back to that farm to visit the new pony, I got picked up by Ross’s secret forces and spent two days in an undisclosed location before the lawyers took care of it.
Rogers: So there was more to Tony’s radio silence then just being mad at me?

Me: Yes, and it mostly involved keeping three children calm for two days. But I’m the one who didn’t want him to tell you, despite this new honesty thing you’re trying. I didn’t want Clint to find out until things are sorted and I had time to contact him myself.

Rogers: And since you’re talking to me, I assume things were sorted.

Me: Very sorted. James Rhodes is in charge of Shield and therefore Ross has no right to enforce any provision of the Accords. Even the Raft is now under control of the DOJ like it should’ve been in the first place. Ross and his agency are now only in charge of negotiating amendments and additional provisions of the accords. Since that part is done by people who actually know what they’re doing and not Ross himself because he doesn’t like getting his hands dirty, I think we’re good.

Rogers: I think that counts as being resolved.

Me: By my standards anyway.

Rogers: But I’m still concerned. I keep seeing things in the news about the watchdogs or senator that keep saying nasty things about her own constituents just because they’re different. I can’t remember her name, but she is just filled with hate.

Me: Because people always fear what’s different. You can’t change that. You can only learn to cope with it.

Rogers: Speaking of coping, I thought about your offer.

Me: You want to work with me regarding your issues?

Rogers: No, because you’re working with Tony and I think that might put you in a weird place. You’re also married to one of my friends which would also be a conflict of interest.

Me: Dr. Suarez is actually functioning as Tony’s therapist right now. My role is as a life counselor or sobriety companion.
Rogers: How many years sober?

Me: Seven years. Clint actually left me for a while because it became such a problem, but we were able to reconcile. Did Clint say something about it to you?

Me: It’s okay if he did. I don’t mind if people know I’m in recovery.

Rogers: No, it was just a hunch, especially when you refer to yourself as Tony’s sobriety companion.

Me: So if you don’t want me to be your counselor, how do you want me to help you?

Rogers: I need you to help me find somebody here that can help, that won’t give my location to the UN. Tony mentioned the possibility before.

Me: Because I actually know where home base is?

Rogers: And you have not told Tony.

Me: He knows that I know, but he doesn’t want to know in case he gets pulled in for questioning. Considering the guy who almost took over Shield wanted to arrange for regular lie detector tests for all assets including Avengers, it was a good call on his part.

Rogers: Thankfully, he is not in charge.

Me: It was a near thing and the UN still appointed him the deputy director

Rogers: Is that bad?

Me: It’s not good. He cares too much about what other people think about him to be a good leader. I’ll talk to your old doctor. She’ll make a recommendation and since you were a patient, you’ll be covered under doctor-patient confidentiality. The new leadership at Shield will respect that.
Rogers: Thank you.

Rogers: By the way, do you want me to not tell your husband about getting arrested earlier this week?

Me: It’s probably better if he hears it from you then an intelligence report from your host country. Tony kept it from the news, but I know the hubby has a new job using his special skills for you know who.

Rogers: He’s still going to be mad.

Me: Absolutely furious. I expect him to contact me within 10 minutes.

To be continued

Chapter End Notes

For those of you who read Star Trek (particularly the Kelvin timeline), tomorrow I will be posting my entry for K/S Advent 2016 titled How to Survive (Until) Your Wedding. Check it out tomorrow if you're into that sort of thing.

Yes, this is the reason why IHYHUTM has been the only story I have updated in the last two months mostly because I wrote about nine chapters before I disappeared into my writing cave to write a 34,000 word story in two months. I'm working on the next chapter of Hydra lullaby right now. I'm hoping to get it up to the beta today.
Thank you to everyone who read or reviewed the last chapter. You’re all beautiful. Also, I’m working on the next batch of chapters right now, so your reviews will be extra helpful.

It is now time to spend some time with the more functional couple in the story. Not that it would be hard to be more functional than Tony and Steve because I don’t think they actually acknowledge that they’re dating yet. If they have, they’ve obviously haven’t told the other one yet.

Also a reminder, Laura and Clint do not use their children’s real names when they speak with one another.

This chapter takes place about 15 minutes after the last one because Clint is pissed.

Love: Why the Fuck did you not call me when Ross had you arrested? Getting arrested counts as an emergency. Especially when, in this case, you were arrested in a way that was anything, but legal.

Me: It wasn’t exactly like they gave me one phone call. I’ve been picked up before. My new boss handled it.

Love: By the ATCU which is really Shield which meant that Coulson would have your back, not the black ops part of the CIA that may or may not actually be CIA.

Me: Of course you still have connections and can find out what really happened.

Love: Even though he shouldn’t, Coulson took my call. I may be angry at the bastard, but Coulson is Lily and Corey’s godfather. He is protecting us. It’s obvious that they’re not looking that hard for the wayward Avengers.

Me: Coulson definitely knows that Tony and Steve are dating.

Love: Which is remarkable because they don’t even know they’re dating.
Me: The only people who are oblivious are those two. Honestly, I think Anthony is relieved that Colonel Rhodes is in charge so he doesn’t have to keep up the subterfuge. The fake porn text messages become boring after a while even for him.

Love: Mostly because he wishes they were not fake. So Anthony’s BFF knows?

Me: And encourages it because it keeps him from more destructive behavior.

Love: Like designing something else that will kill us all?

Me: Actually that’s why I got arrested.

Love: The desire for Stark to invent dangerous life killing things?

Me: No. Ross wanted somebody who he could manipulate be in charge of Shield since Talbot made sure to strip Ross of as much power as he could in exchange for bringing Shield back into the government. Lucky for Ross, his family member, by marriage, just managed to get superpowers.

Love: And Ross could easily manipulate him into doing what he wanted.

Me: More than he could to anyone else, especially because Jeffrey only cares about appearances. Just like Ross. He’s obsessed with the letter of the law, not its spirit.

Love: Someone like that couldn’t survive at Shield.

Me: And yet that is who Ross wanted, but the UN chose Colonel Rhodes.

Love: It is a miracle, the UN actually got something right.

Me: Probably because somebody at the UN realized that Colonel Rhodes is on the short list of individuals Tony Stark will actually listen to.
Love: And even that’s hit or miss.

Me: Any way, once the decision was made, but before it was made official, I was picked up for the sake of being a bargaining chip.

Love: Let me guess, the Colonel takes his name out of the running and you go free?

Me: Exactly.

Love: And yet Anthony’s BFF is now in charge of the new version of my former employer.

Me: Ross did not count on Coulson’s team finding me first.

Love: Because Phil always has a plan B so he doesn’t have to negotiate with assholes.

Me: Exactly. Also Ross made the mistake of employing some of Sharon’s ex-teammates in his operation now that the agency soon to be new Shield is no longer under his thumb.

Love: Carter play double agent?

Me: Yep. She told him that she was pissed at Stark for him stealing her boyfriend and wanted to get back at him. They believed her until the Cavalry literally showed up.

Love: Nice to know the Calvary is still out there, although I don’t think we’re allowed to call her that anymore. Also lies that are mostly true always work best.

Love: Wait, Carter and Stark had to work together to rescue you?

Me: Yes.

Love: And they succeeded?
Me: Yes. I don’t have a scratch on me.

Love: But how are you doing mentally? Were you tortured?

Me: I am okay. I did receive the full Geneva Convention treatment. I still want to kick Ross in the balls mostly because the prick had his people drag me off in front of the kids.

Love: The bastard did what?

Me: Tony stepped up. He took care of the children while I was gone. He kept them entertained with movies and pizza while screaming at his legal team in any language that the kids did not know. He put aside his Carter issues to get me back once he realized that legal niceties were not going to work this time.

Love: But what happened when they actually took you away?

Me: Lily ran up to me and held on to my pant leg as they actually dragged me away. She was screaming the entire time. Corey may have kicked one of the officers in the genitals.

Love: Fucking Bastards. I want to shove an arrow up his ass. I also want to get Corey that video game he wanted, but you told me I’m not allowed to reward bad behavior.

Me: My boss already got him a copy. It’s okay. Ross’ powers been stripped and he will be in congressional hearings from now till the end of the administration. The Rising Tide is also going after Ross.

Love: And I’m sure Tony had nothing to do with that?

Me: No comment.

Love: This is the beginning of the Shield/State Department feud?
Me: That feud has been going on since Pierce was a young Under Secretary for T. This is just the latest chapter. Besides Shield is now under the DOD and the UN.

Love: Does this mean my TSP has been restored?

Me: I'll have to talk to Colonel Rhodes. I think it's possible along with other benefits.

Me: Shield assets/agents assigned to the Avengers Initiative like Tony's new friend Yo-Yo are not under the Accords or at least not to the same extent. It would be dangerous to have an exact GPS location of a Shield specialist in the database. It could put their whole family in danger and even the most pragmatic in the UN don’t want the blood of innocent civilians on their hands.

Love: Unless it’s their own civilians. So I assume you’re trying to figure out a way to get me home

Me: Anthony is working on it.

Love: Because he wants his boy home.

Me: Yes.

Love: I’m still mad at you.

Me: I know.

Love: I love you, though.

Me: I know that as well. Love you too. At least we can talk to each other more now.

Love: Although I don’t exactly want to become a Shield asset again.

Me: You’re not. I am.
Love: What?

Me: A lot of very young children and adolescents are suddenly waking up with superpowers like Lily’s new friend from New Jersey. They need someone who has experience working with kids and working with enhanced persons.

Love: And who better than a former high school guidance counselor who just happens to be married to an Avenger?

Me: Exactly. Besides if I can keep Tony Stark from self-destructing post-Siberia, I think I can help anyone.

Love: Do you trust the new Shield? Nick is not there anymore?

Me: But Colonel Rhodes and Coulson are. May too. She did directly help in my rescue. You did mention earlier that Coulson would do anything to keep the mother of his godchildren safe.

Love: Although that doesn’t mean that I forgive him for lying to me for years.

Me: I know.

Love: Tell Coulson he’s paying for the tattoo removal.

Me: Will do.

To be continued

Chapter End Notes

Acronym guide:
TSP: Thrift Savings Plan. This is the government equivalent of a 401(k)
At the US Department of State T is shorthand for the Under Secretary for Arms Control and International Security. I tried to decide what would be the worst position for a Hydra double agent to have that wasn’t Secretary and being the Under Secretary that is supposed to cut down on armament and militarization seem like a good position.
Thank you to everyone who has read or reviewed. You’ve all been wonderful.

This chapter takes place about three days after the last one because Steve doesn’t want to seem overly needy. Okay, it took Steve two days to get his phone back because Clint stole it to get back at Tony for not telling him about Laura. He’s still not happy.

Cuddle Bunny: Sorry, I would’ve texted you earlier, but it took me a couple of days to find out where Clint put my phone. He hid the thing in the ventilation vents.

Me: I’m not even surprised.

Cuddle Bunny: So I heard congratulations are in order and Colonel Rhodes is the new Director of Shield.

Me: And we were all really happy about that until the UN decided to name Jeffrey Deputy Director. Mr. Patriotism makes me nauseous. He’s still trying to put forward mandatory lie detector tests and his color code of security.

Cuddle Bunny: How did that go?

Me: Rhodey said something about his agency using the same classification system that all the other agencies use because he is not dealing with learning an entirely new classification system. Although he is thinking about doing random polygraphs like normal agencies do drug testing..

Me: I think it’s pretty much a match made in political appointee hell, but Jeffrey probably would’ve been made Director without your suggestion. So it could’ve been worse. So much worse.

Cuddle Bunny: I’m getting that impression.

Me: Although the fact my BFF is now in charge of the ragtag bunch of misfits that Coulson
scavenged from the ashes does not keep him from making questionable decisions like keeping me in charge of the new Avengers.

Cuddle Bunny: Probably because you have the most field experience. You can also be a really good leader when you want to be.

Me: Agent May has more, but she can’t technically be an Avenger because she’s not enhanced. Now she is a leader.

Cuddle Bunny: This is a new rule right? Because Widow didn’t have any powers. Neither did Barton.

Me: That was before we had 11-year-olds waking up with superpowers.

Cuddle Bunny: You don't have powers, but you're still there. Couldn’t you just make her something?

Me: I think the armor would just slow her down. She is more of a hand-to-hand type person. Okay, this morning I saw her single-handedly beat up Shield’s new enhanced threat team. I would love to see what she could do with the shield.

Cuddle Bunny: I would too. I trained with her a couple of times. She even caused me to work up a sweat.

Me: Sex is not training unless you’re doing it right. Although with you, maybe it could be. Oh, the positions I would try out with you. Have you ever read the Kama Sutra?

Cuddle Bunny: You know if you keep making jokes like that, I’ll take you seriously.

Me: Please do. And speaking of being serious, I would kind of love to make May your successor. It would really piss off everyone who keeps pressuring me to turn over the shield to some hot blonde guy or even Rhodey’s deputy. You know someone who screams All-American and Mr. Patriotism tries to at least look that way.

Me: Personally, a lifelong public servant definitely screams All-American to me. What's more
American than a tiny woman of Asian ancestry that can kick all your asses? We are a nation made of many. It's who we are.

Cuddle Bunny: Next time they do that, just hand over the shield to Melinda.

Me: I'll remember that for the next training exercise.

Cuddle Bunny: Did it go better this time?

Me: We took out everybody and I got to practice using full armor. Which was interesting, considering one of my teammates can actually melt me.

Cuddle Bunny: Do you think that he would actually try that?

Me: I don't think so because he called me hot twice and wants to invite me to coffee. Or at least that's what I overheard before they discovered that I'm fluent in Spanish.

Cuddle Bunny: Do you really think it's wise to date a teammate? Also, how did they figure out that you speak Spanish?

Me: Yo-Yo is going to be going undercover as my new assistant. However, one of the ATCU transplants made some snide comment about how it would be more plausible for her to pass as the "help" since she's still working on learning English. Which was a stupid comment because she's been studying for only a few months and she's almost fluent.

Me: Anyway, that pissed her off, which resulted in her saying that since I was a genius, I could just learn Spanish. Then I replied in perfect Spanish that I was already fluent and it wasn't much of a problem because SI does a lot of business in Latin America and Spain.

Me: Although because of that, we are doing exercises tomorrow all in Spanish. So if you ever plan on coming back, you better brush up on your Spanish.
Cuddle Bunny: I’ll remember that.

Me: Look, the dating someone on my team isn’t going to be a problem for the foreseeable future because Rhodey can’t deal with getting you guys back in the good graces of the UN until Shield has at least rolled out as a real agency again. That’s probably not good to happen the second Wednesday in November.

Me: It’s a little different with the spy twins because they’re ex-Shield and Rhodey has better options to get them back in the good graces of the UN.

Cuddle Bunny: So you’re not interested in sleeping with the bulletproof pacifist?

Me: You do actually know what coffee means? I’m impressed. I can’t wait to get some with you and only you.

Cuddle Bunny: So no coffee dates with your new teammates?

Me: Well, I’m supposed to be getting coffee with Yo-Yo to talk over her cover job, but that’s mostly because I don’t do alcohol anymore.

Cuddle Bunny: You know what I mean.

Me: I told Joey that I have a boyfriend. Only you and me know that’s not true, mostly because I’m not sure what the hell we are.

Friday: You’re boyfriends. You are dating. Why do you both keep ignoring this possibility?

Me: Friday did you just show that message to Steve too?

Cuddle Bunny: Yes. I think Friday is mad at us.

Me: And when my AI is mad at me, it’s never a good sign. Although dating usually consists of more than just writing each other back and forth.
Cuddle Bunny: It didn’t back during the war. For some, letters were the only connection they had. Also, you pretty much said that you wanted to have coffee with me.

Me: Which was totally a euphemism. But I also want more than just coffee.

Cuddle Bunny: So right now we just have the more than coffee. How are you really feeling about Shield giving you a brand-new assistant?

Me: Are we playing 20 questions again? It has been a while.

Cuddle Bunny: Which is why it’s the perfect time to play again.

Me: I’m starting to maybe like Yo-Yo. I definitely need more people in my life that don’t take bullshit from anybody. I also think this is a disaster waiting to happen. But thanks to her one woman campaign against various Colombian drug lords, it is probably best for my new teammate to be under the protection of the Stark lawyers.

Me: So how did you find out about the new fearless leader of an organization that does not yet to exist?

Cuddle Bunny: Laura told me when I talked to her a couple of days ago. I finally decided that I should see someone professionally. She’s trying to arrange that.

Me: That’s good. I think a lot of our issues, especially the Bucky related stuff you need to work out for yourself before we even tried to deal with it.

Cuddle Bunny: So you work on your end and I work on mine and hopefully we can meet somewhere in the middle.

Me: Oddly enough, knowing that Hydra tried to kill my dad multiple times before they brought out the Winter Soldier makes it easier to deal with. I’m still upset that they took out my parents and my pseudo-mother figure, but it’s easier to deal with things if I can focus everything on Hydra and not your best friend.
Cuddle Bunny: I’m working on it. I’ll find someone to talk to.

Me: That’s all I can ask. I’ll do the same.

Cuddle Bunny: Also, Clint wanted me to pass on the message that if his wife gets arrested again and you don’t tell him immediately, he will hunt you down and put an arrow through your… You get the idea. I had to tell you that because it was part of his conditions to get my phone back.

Me: Baby, you can say ass. You have a pretty one. I really want to run my tongue down your

Me: I can’t finish that sentence because Lila just came into play.

Cuddle Bunny: Then we should probably wrap up this conversation.

Me: Although if Clint is by you tell him that his wife wouldn’t let me tell him and I’m a little afraid of her. That doesn’t warrant taking your phone. Also tell him that Lila loves him and misses him and he owes her toys.

Cuddle Bunny: I will pass on the message.

Me: Actually, all the kids miss him, especially Connor. He was being an extra brat to Laura. Teenagers. They almost make me glad I’m sterile.

Cuddle Bunny: I’ll pass on that message to. I’ll talk to you later

Me: Later, boyfriend.

To be continued.

Chapter End Notes
This was the final chapter of the last group I had prewritten. The next two chapters are with my beta and the six after that are in various stages of rough drafting. I hope that I will be able to put up the next chapter no later than next Monday, but it could be a little bit longer. But let us just celebrate the fact that those two idiots have finally got it together.

Remember, your reviews can make me sit here and proofread on my day off.
Interlude 10: Please stop writing fake pornographic text messages, I beg you

Chapter Notes

Thank you to everybody who read or reviewed the last conversation. You are all absolutely wonderful. We’re back in under a week, thankfully. I really did not intend to do another interlude conversation so soon, but the muse wants what the muse wants. Today, the Muse decided that Director Rhodes deserved some quality Tony time. I don’t think he is happy about that.

Continuity Note: There are spoilers from/allusions to Agents of Shield: Slingshot in this conversation and a few of the upcoming sections. A slightly altered version of the events from the web series happened in this universe, mostly because I was planning on something similar happening anyway and the events occurred about the same time frame as the story. It's nice when we are all on the same page.

Director Snookums: Friday told me that you're actually now dating ‘Cuddle Bunny’.

Me: Friday has a big mouth and it's actually been about three days. Of course, I haven’t talked to him in those three days, but you can’t act like a teenager when your boyfriend is on the international most wanted list. I can show some restraint.

Director Snookums: Keyword is some. Actually Friday told me three days ago, but I was hoping you would tell me first. Actually she sent out a mass message to all of your friends, even those that I'm technically supposed to arrest for violating the Accords.

Me: Friday, you are no longer allowed to hang out with AIDA. I think she's a bad influence on you.

Director Snookums: That's good because I don't want you hanging out with her owner. Seriously, what did I do to have to babysit two mad scientists?

Me: Technically three. If we were not friends, I would poach Dr. Fitz. Your new exoskeleton is coming along nicely, thanks to his input. It should be ready for you next week. Now you’re only installing new elevators into the Playground for the sake of ADA compliance.
Director Snookums: And thankfully the lab wasn’t blown up in the process.

Me: Actually, I think the fact that we’re friends is why they believe you can mind crazy geniuses.

Director Snookums: Mostly because they actually think I can mind you. Obviously they’re unaware I’ve never been successful.

Me: Funny. Thankfully for you, I am not one for genetic engineering. And Dr. Radcliffe did develop that gas that could have turned most of Europe into super powered zombies under duress. Which is better than we can say about my apocalypse.

Director Snookums: You were under the influence of mind control.

Me: Not really. What does it say about me that one vision of Cuddle Bunny dying in my arms made me create murder bots?

Director Snookums: That you were completely in love with him and when you're in love, you will do crazy things to protect people you love. Sometimes, they blow up in your face.

Me: I never said the L word in relation to Cuddle Bunny.

Director Snookums: Yes, you have, several times. Mostly when drunk. I’m pretty sure you’ve been in love with him since footage of him being carried on a gurney out of the Potomac made you throw up.

Me: That was probably the alcohol from my post ‘the Hydra assassin in my building didn’t kill me’ binge. I haven't been drunk for the last 2 ½ months.

Director Snookums: And you have no idea how proud I am of you for doing that. You're getting yourself together and that makes me happy. You're a good guy Tony, and you’re even better when you’re sober.
Me: I just do stupid shit too often.

Director Snookums: However, usually in the guise of trying to help someone.

Me: And then it all goes horribly wrong.

Director Snookums: Not always. I hope things go well for you guys, but I am worried. I saw you after Siberia. I don’t want you to go back to that place.

Me: That’s the name of a Backstreet Boys song that Friday likes to play on repeat because she’s mean.

Director Snookums: Tony!

Me: I’m equally terrified. I mean, my last serious relationship ended in tears and my stomach getting pumped. Cuddle Bunny and I are going to take things slow and work on building our relationship up as much as we can.

Me: I mean it’s not like we can jump into bed together. Maybe being in different countries is a good thing because we have to focus on the emotional part of the relationship. As you know by being my friend for the last 30 years, I suck at the emotional part of relationships.

Director Snookums: No, you don’t. It’s just you have all these walls up and it’s hard to get past them. But once you do, there’s this great person there just waiting.

Director Snookums: And I understand why you have all those walls. I was there at MIT when the older kids used to use you for money or homework help and that was before Afghanistan. You deserved better.

Me: I think we became friends because you punched one of those people out. Somehow we managed to stay friends despite the stupid stuff I do on a regular basis.

Director Snookums: Including forcing me to read your fake pornographic subterfuge text messages. Please stop writing those. There’s no point in you continuing to do that because everyone that
matters knows who Cuddle Bunny is. You’re not fooling anyone.

Me: Mostly because you don’t assume that Cuddle Bunny’s alter ego must be a paragon of heterosexuality. Although, how do you know they’re fake? We’re separated by an entire ocean and a lot of political bullshit. We need to do something to keep the spark alive.

Director Snookums: Because your boyfriend used to blush every time someone told a dirty joke in his presence, usually you. I don't need to be reading that. I walked in on enough of those situations when we shared an apartment at MIT.

Director Snookums: Also I don't think Agent Carter wants to be reading that either.

Me: So poor man's Coulson really was that much of a dick?

Director Snookums: Yes. You owe her after she helped to rescue Laura. You got the boy, don’t rub it in.

Me: True. OK, I will stop writing the fake ones because even though I still have some Sharon issues that are totally independent of Cuddle Bunny, I don’t completely hate her anymore.

Director Snookums: Thank you.

Me: That being said, I cannot guarantee that future messages will be free of pornographic content. Cuddle Bunny is no blushing virgin. Underneath the blue and white American exterior lives a very kinky bastard.

Director Snookums: Just keep those conversations under heavy encryption, I beg you. You're like a brother to me. Because of that, I never want to read your sexual fantasies in a professional capacity.

Director Snookums: As many times as I have had to save your ass over the years, you owe me that much.

Me: And so much more really.
Me: Fine, although I wouldn't have to resort to sexting if I could actually be in the same country as Cuddle Bunny without a SWAT team being dispatched. Is there anything you can do about that? I’m even afraid to meet him on the island because you might not track me there, but Ross would.

Director Snookums: I'm working on it, but it will be a couple of months especially because you want me to get Laura's husband home first. You still want me to get him home first?

Me: Yes. The Junior Archers need their dad back. I can deal with blue balls for a few more weeks.

Director Snookums: Still more likely a few more months, then a few weeks. Some aspects of the Accords actually need to be re-negotiated which means State Department involvement and congressional ratification which will be time consuming.

Me: Just let me know which senators I need to contribute campaign money to.

Director Snookums: Not Nadeer. Actually, if you could give money to her opponent in two years, I would be really happy. We haven't even gone public yet and she's already making my job so much harder.

Me: I think I own a house in her district. Maybe I should consider running. I wouldn’t be any worse.

Director Snookums: Of course you would run for Congress just to get your boyfriend back in the country. Sometimes I think you asked that I be Director just so it would be easier for you to have a booty call with Cuddle Bunny.

Me: Of course not. I want you to be Director because you won’t send an 11-year-old girl to the Raft because her parents do not feel comfortable with her wearing a tracking bracelet. Time with the new boyfriend is just a bonus.

Director Snookums: In that case, check in visits work just as well. Once she is completely trained, Laura will be Ms. Khan’s caseworker. I'm also assigning her to Peter.

Me: I have no idea what you're talking about.
Director Snookums: I know. I know a lot of things that you don’t think I know. How are you enjoying Baltimore right now?

Me: Did Friday tell you where I am or did I end up on Twitter? The baseball cap doesn’t work like it used to.

Director Snookums: Tracking bracelet. Agent Rodriguez is still required to wear one until we can convince the UN oversight committee that is a really dumb idea.

Me: Good luck with that. Look, we are just in Baltimore for a little assistant and boss bonding.

Director Snookums: And you couldn't in an establishment in the DC metro?

Me: The National Aquarium is a great place for employee bonding, especially because I can’t do bars anymore. Now we’re having dinner before coming back to the Playground.

Me: Also, apparently, I’m only allowed to do coffee with Cuddle Bunny. Not that I’m going to get any Cuddle Bunny coffee anytime soon because if there’s one thing Congress is good at, it’s cock blocking.

Director Snookums: I’m sure Congress is obsessed with keeping you from getting laid. Seriously, Tony? I don’t have time for this. Not everything is about you.

Me: At the very least they were obsessed with keeping me from getting married, to Cuddle Bunny anyway. Thankfully, the Supreme Court took care of that.

Director Snookums: You know I feel like you’re bringing up marriage just so I won’t point out the fact that I know you’re lying to me. Coulson’s team in Zephyr One picked up seismic activity within about half a mile of where you were 45 minutes ago. So I’m going to ask again, why are you in Baltimore?

Me: Isn’t that a coincidence.
Director Snookums: We’ve known each other too long for that to work on me. When Coulson's team arrived they found one individual splattered across the room in enough pieces to make the forensic team cry.

Me: You should probably get more technicians.

Director Snookums: Also, they found a very dangerous Hydra weapon that mysteriously disappeared from Shield lockup 48 hours ago. Something that nobody told me about until they found the missing weapon. There were also 10 unconscious members of the watchdog terrorist group.

Me: Well I'm glad they were able to prevent a Hydra weapon from getting into the hands of terrorists. Although don't you think it's ironic that an anti-alien hate group wants to buy a weapon most likely based on alien technology?

Director Snookums: I said nothing about a weapon’s deal gone bad.

Me: That doesn't mean I was there. How long was I in the weapons industry before I got tired of all the blood on my hands? Hydra weapon plus terrorist group equals weapons deal.

Director Snookums: I know that Friday was in our files, helping you and your assistant track down the guy who killed her cousin. I’m pretty sure the forensic team is going to identify him as the dead body. All I really want to know at this point is if Quake was there?

Me: Don't you think it's a waste of your limited resources to be chasing after somebody who just wants to help people?

Director Snookums: That’s obviously Tony for yes.

Me: You're not going after Nomad, which I’m happy about. Why are you going after Quake? What makes her different?

Director snookums: Other than the fact your dating him and he used to be my teammate, Nomad is not operating in North America. Nomad also did not accidently destroy a bridge last week.
Me: You said it yourself. That was an accident. I thought that happened because the watchdogs bombed a safe house, killing two recently identified Inhumans. Also, it was a tiny bridge and nobody got hurt, unlike with what the Watchdogs did.

Director Snookums: The media doesn't see it that way. Also let’s be honest, people are more afraid of an Asian woman with superpowers than a blonde white guy with a six-pack.

Me: As long as they think the guy is straight anyway. The media can get fucked.

Director Snookums: You were the one who wanted oversight.

Me: To prevent enhanced person internment camps. I am surprised the good Senator hasn’t already proposed that.

Director Snookums: So am I.

Director Snookums: Tony, I'm really trying here, but you have to meet me halfway. Don't do stupid shit.

Me: I am trying. And I know you do have the bad guys in custody. That was not a weapon that you would want on the street.

Director Snookums: I know. Just try to stay on the good side of things. I think we're all really just one bad day away from being a super villain.

Me: We will try. We will be back at the Playground in a few hours. We’re bringing cake.

Director Snookums: Just try not to do anything that will result in you getting arrested.

Me: I make no promises.

To be continued
Chapter 42

Chapter Notes

Thank you to everyone who read or reviewed the last chapter. You are all wonderful.
Now for some Tony/Steve time.

Spoiler warning: Tiny details taken from episode 4.9 of Agents of Shield.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Anthony: Are you aware that Friday sent out a mass email to all our friends informing them that we are dating?

Friday: It was a mass text message.

Anthony: Sorry, my mistake. Seriously, Friday, you are not allowed to hang out with AIDA anymore. Keep this up and Dr. Fitz will also be on the list.

Nomad: Yes. Sam is mad at me because he now owes Wanda $50. Who is AIDA?

Anthony: Friday’s not an AI girlfriend.

Friday: Our relationship is merely mutual scientific curiosity. Although, I would not be averse to seeing Dr. Fitz shirtless.

Nomad: Should I be concerned?

Anthony: Not really, Gumdrop. That particular Friday fantasy is not happening outside of a contamination incident because we are both dating other people. And I’m so happy I’m dating you my yummy Bunny even if your friends are betting on us getting together.
Nomad: Me too. By the way, they are your friends too.

Anthony: Maybe Clint is sort of a friend in a ‘thank you for joining forces with your nemesis to rescue my wife from the clutches of the bastard’ sort of way.

Nomad: I don’t think Sharon can be considered your nemesis by any stretch of the imagination. You two just need to talk things out. Never mind, I need to be there to supervise that conversation (message not sent)

Anthony: Also Sam was always just your friend and he just tolerated me for the cool wing upgrades. Wanda kind of has a right to hate me.

Nomad: Sam isn’t just in it for the cool tech. None of us are. I think your relationship with Clint is more complicated than that. He got us a cake. It said, congratulations for finally getting your head out of your ass.

Anthony: You have pictures of that? Please tell me you have pictures of that?

Nomad: I think Wanda does. There was a tiny fondant Iron Man and Captain America figure making out in the corner of the cake.

Anthony: As stated above, I don't think we have the type of relationship where Wanda and I share pictures. Although, she does give me updates on when you're doing stupid shit. Please don't do stupid shit. That would just lead to both of us going to the super villain side which would be awful for humanity.

Nomad: I'll try because it really would be awful for humanity in general, if you two went to the dark side.

Absolutely dreadful.

Nomad: You do realize that it is possible that the weapon that killed her family was designed by your father.

Anthony: Or the dozens of designers working under me. It doesn't matter because I'm the one who didn’t realize what our weapons were really doing. I’m the one who wasn’t paying attention to
Obadiah. See you get good friends and I get bloodsucking leeches like Obadiah with the occasional Rhodey to keep me from completely going over the edge.

Nomad: You’re making new ones. Most of whom are not bloodsucking emotional leeches. At least I hope they’re not.

Anthony: Most of which are under 18. That puts me in more of a mentor role. Somehow I’ve become a role model.

Nomad: Is Yo-Yo under 18?

Anthony: 28 and scary.

Nomad: Are you guys getting along better now? How did the all-Spanish training exercise go a couple of days ago? I would have texted you sooner, but I’ve been busy.

Anthony: Saving metaphorical kittens from trees?

Nomad: Something like that

Anthony: The exercise went well. We managed to put the entire new advance threat team into medical.

Nomad: I’m still not sure how to take that.

Anthony: I consider it a good thing. Unfortunately, the bulletproof pacifist has decided that Avengering is not for him. Joey is willing to be on standby in the event of another alien invasion, but he doesn’t want to go out there looking for trouble.

Nomad: Like we do. Although, if his heart is not in it, it’s best that he stays in reserve.

Anthony: Very true.
Nomad: How are things going with Yo-Yo?

Anthony: She hasn’t asked for a new identity to get out of working with me, so that’s a positive start.

Nomad: Was that actually what happened with Joey?

Anthony: Things are better. Apparently, finding out that my pseudo-mother figure was gunned down by (most likely) Hydra contractors and her killer was not brought to justice due to corruption of the government made me seem like a less of a rich asshole to her.

Nomad: Because she realized that you're just as human as everyone else despite how much money you have in the bank?

Me: Because she realized we’re not that different. Less than six months ago her cousin was killed by dirty cops when trying to stop illegal weapons trafficking in Colombia. That puts us in the same boat. Also, now I completely understand why she didn't want to hang out with the Merchant of Death.

Nomad: That's not who you are now.

Anthony: OK, I am the guy who made murder bots. Yo-yo and her boyfriend are making me watch Terminator Salvation tonight because of that.

Nomad: The Terminator movies are on my list.

Anthony: Not that one. We need to do a movie night where we watch the same movie and I just send you snarky comments the entire time.

Nomad: I wish we had time to do something like that but you’re busy doing good things such as trying to make sure people like Senator Nadeer do not round up everybody who is different.

Anthony: I'll make time for you. Also, apparently, the good Senator is anti-alien because her mom died during New York. So that’s another fuck up that we are all paying for.
Nomad: You're the guy who cares. You’re the guy who sees things 10 steps ahead. You’re the one who is looking at the big picture.

Anthony: To the point where it bites us all in the ass.

Nomad: Not always. You’re a good person, Tony Stark, deep down, where it counts. I’m sure she’s seeing that.

Anthony: Well it helps when I get her the Intel needed to go after the guy who killed her cousin.

Nomad: Did you do anything that could result in you needing to hide out in Wakonda for a couple of months? You know, vengeance isn’t always the answer?

Anthony: I realize that now. If I need to hideout, I have my own sovereign nation island. But no, nothing like that.

Nomad: What happened?

Anthony: Yo-Yo heard rumors about the guy who murdered her cousin being out and about on U.S. soil making deals with the Watchdogs. I may have helped her find Intel on this, but apparently I’m not as stealthy as I think I am because Agent Scary is now coming with us to New York to give us spy lessons.

Anthony: In the end we managed to discover that somebody was selling SHIELD confiscated tech on the black market and we went to get it back without telling Director Snookums.

Nomad: You’re not allowed to say anything about me going on missions alone.

Anthony: It’s fine because they now have an entire terrorist cell in Shield custody.

Anthony: OK, they don’t have the arms dealer himself to interrogate because they’re probably still
scraping him off the floor of a random warehouse in Baltimore, but they have all the other bad guys. Really it’s a win-win for everyone. They found the Shield agent that was liberating tech because apparently he believed in the Watchdogs’ philosophy and felt Shield wasn’t doing enough.

Nomad: Did you kill the arms dealer?

Anthony: Nope. And neither did Yo-Yo which I’m surprised because the bastard killed her cousin in cold blood. She could’ve pulled the trigger. Part of me thinks she should have pulled the trigger, but she didn’t. That makes her a better person than me.

Nomad: You were in shock. Just reacting. If you had six months to deal with the news, maybe Siberia would not have happened the way it did.

Anthony: I don’t know. I mean, I don’t want to fly down to an undisclosed location and strangle you know who. But I blame that more on therapy and antidepressants than anything else.

Nomad: You’re the one going to therapy and taking the drugs. That has to count for something.

Anthony: Maybe

Nomad: So in this particular case, how did the bad guy die if neither one of you pulled the trigger?

Anthony: Stupid bad guy screw up number one, never assume that the guy that you're selling illegal weapons to will not blow you up just to get out of paying. It always goes badly. But it makes our job easier when the bad guys just kill each other.

Nomad: So the Director is going to overlook anything you did that violated the Accords.

Anthony: I am allowed to do Stark Industries' business and some of the weapons being sold were either retrofitted or counterfeit Stark Industries weapons. We don’t like being associated with xenophobic terrorist organizations.

Anthony: I am always going to be allowed to do what I need to do for my company. Similarly, Shield has carte blanche to go after people that break into their secure facilities and remove weapons
for black market sale.

Nomad: Loophole?

Anthony: Baby, I've been negotiating contracts since nursery school. If there's a loophole, I'll find it and manipulate the hell out of it.

Nomad: Which is why you were so sure the Accords wouldn't hamper us.

Anthony: Oh, they are hampering. Not as bad as they would have with Mr. PR being in charge. But things are better because the current Director is the guy who told his superior officers to fuck off when told to stop looking for me in Afghanistan.

Nomad: I've always liked him.

Anthony: Of course, the Director is also making me take a mandatory lie detector test, but at least it's only every six months. Also, I think he's having me do it just to find out what really happened in October 1997.

Nomad: What happened in October 1997?

Anthony: It's a little fuzzy. I believe the incident involved a stripper, some drugs that may or may not be illegal, and a superior officers' car being covered in whip cream and reprogramming the horn to play Everybody whenever he sat down in the driver's seat. I don't remember all the details because I may have taken a few of those drugs that may or may not have been legal.

Nomad: And you may have been the instigator of this incident?

Anthony: Possibly.

Anthony: Deputy Director Mace and his bodyguard/minion just walked into the room which means lie detector time. Write to you later, Muffin.
Nomad: I prefer being your Cuddle Bunny.

To be continued

Chapter End Notes

I would love to hear your suggestions for Tony and Steve’s virtual date night.
Thank you to everybody who read or reviewed the last chapter. You’re all beautiful and keep me in the happy writing zone.

It will be explained during the course of this conversation, but Tony has changed his address book designation for Steve again. Steve will now be referred to as HSBF, which stands for Hot Sexy Boyfriend. He wanted to actually put that in his address book, but Agent May said no.

HSBF: Are you back from your lie detector test yet? What type of questions did they ask?

HSBF: Are you okay? Please tell me you’re not at the Raft right now.

Me: You really have to stop assuming that any time I don’t respond to you immediately, I’ve been kidnapped by Ross.

HSBF: You worry me sometimes.

Me: You don’t need to be. I just survived Director Snookums giving me a polygraph on a machine designed to tell if Nat is lying through her teeth. But I’m not in Vault D so I passed, I think.

Me: This is probably revenge for nominating him for this job. He only took the job because he loves his country, but is afraid of the government.

HSBF: I’m not sure how to take that, but it’s possible.

Me: Okay, I am pretty sure this was really revenge for forgetting to disable my pornographic text message filter when I promised Snookums that I would stop covering up talking to you with dirty,
pornographic and expletive filled text messages about the various ways and locations I would like to give Cuddle Bunny fellatio.

HSBF: He asked you to stop sending those messages?

Me: Yes, when he told me about Friday’s mass text message about us being together.

HSBF: Is he okay with us dating?

Me: He is okay with us trying to do a less than platonic relationship, but he is worried because my track record is god-awful. Although you still could end up with a shovel talk due to the Siberia incident, but I’m not sure.

HSBF: That is not reassuring, especially because he’s now in charge of the spy agency.

Me: Really, Snookums just doesn’t want to have to read my pornographic declarations, especially when he knows that they’re fake.

HSBF: Why would he be the one reading them? Also, I'm glad he knows that they’re fake.

Me: Because apparently you blush too much. He’s the one reading them because, unlike poor man’s Coulson when he was acting director, Snookums isn’t going to put that on someone else.

HSBF: However, there are some things you don't want to know about your friend’s sex life even though you know the messages are fake.

Me: Exactly, and I do owe him enough to not make him uncomfortable unnecessarily. So we’re just going back to old-fashioned encryption because apparently nobody appreciates the brilliance of porn subterfuge.

HSBF: Clint thought it was brilliant.

Me: Of course, he would. This is a guy who won’t even use his children’s real names in text
messages. Apparently he requested Friday to replace their names with Layla and Corey or something similar from now on.

HSBF: I’m glad the director asked you to stop because I don’t want him reading that stuff either. It was different when it was people that we didn’t know or Ross himself. This makes me a little uncomfortable and really glad Sharon wasn’t the one reading the messages.

Me: In accordance with our promise to not lie to one another, I need to tell you that Poor man's Coulson was a dick and Sharon was the one who had to read most of the messages. The real irony is he didn’t even know it was you. He just thought making her go through stuff like that would be a horrible assignment under regular circumstances.

HSBF: No more fake dirty messages. I mean it Tony.

Me: I already disabled the program.

HSBF: Good.

Me: Also, I sent Sharon a shoe basket because I’m not that petty and she did help with Laura. Also, I don’t need more people who want to shoot me in the world.

HSBF: I heard about her helping with Laura. I’m glad she won’t have to read anymore messages like that.

Me: Well, no fake messages anyway.

HSBF: Tony, I am never going to have text message sex with you.

Me: Eventually I'm going to wear you down. I mean we're dating and we can't even make out because we are in different countries. Telecommunications sex was invented for situations like this.

Me: I'm even working on a new ‘toy’ that I can control remotely from wherever I am, complete with a biofeedback harness for me. Think of it as virtual reality sex. I can’t wait to beta test that on you.
HSBF: Not happening.

Me: You’re no fun.

HSBF: Can't it just be enough that I want to kiss you when I see you again?

Me: I guess it's going to have to be because three months ago, I thought you would punch me on sight instead.

Me: Actually I feel like that was the case six months ago.

HSBF: Our relationship is really complicated.

Me: Extremely complicated.

HSBF: Did they ask a lot of invasive questions?

Me: Well, to get back at me for my oversight, Snookums decided to ask if I really slept with a Captain America plush until I was shipped off for boarding school, apparently for my own protection. Not that anyone told me about that.

HSBF: Did you sleep with the Captain America plush? Wait, did they have toys like that back then?

Me: Yes, and I think dad owns most of them. There is a giant collection of the stuff at the property on Long Island. You have to understand that pretty much the only normal kid toys I got to play with were Captain America memorabilia. Even though, Jarvis and Anna tried their best, I was treated like a little adult too often. Aunt Peggy actually got that for me and now I feel dirty.

Me: And no, I didn’t do anything inappropriate with the doll.

HSBF: Good to know.
Me: Although there may have been an incident with a vintage Captain America Tijuana Bible sometime in early puberty.

HSBF: Ones about Captain America or one of the ones I drew to pay for art school?

Me: About your alter ego. You can draw porn and yet I can’t send you dirty text messages?

HSBF: Because if your encryption is not as good as you say, it is your best friend and my ex-girlfriend’s grandniece is going to have to read them.

Me: Excellent point. Feel free to FedEx me some of your artwork, especially anything with you naked, surrounded by rose petals.

HSBF: Will do. Were all the questions embarrassingly personal?

Me: Most of the questions from Snookums were, except for when he asked me if I was ever a member of Hydra. I responded with a resounding ‘Fuck, no! They murdered my parents and Ana.’

Me: Deputy Director Jeffrey ‘asshole’ Mase a.k.a. Mister Patriotism did asked me if I knew where Captain America is.

HSBF: I’m glad you have never asked me where I am.

Me: I would love to know where you are, but I was worried about that question. Thankfully, he just asked me where Captain America is. Mr. Patriotism didn’t even ask me about the other Avengers. Idiot.

HSBF: Apparently, there’s a difference?

Me: Yes, because until Agent Scary agrees to take up the shield, there is no Captain America. I am working on her taking the shield. I think her new codenames should be Agent America. What do you think?
HSBF: That she might take that shield to your head.

Me: Possibly.

HSBF: You actually told him that you had no idea where Captain America was because there is no longer a Captain America? More importantly, the lie detector accepted it?

Me: It’s the truth. You are not Captain America anymore. You don’t even want me to call you Captain Sexy Pants.

Me: Which is sad because I really would like to call my boyfriend Captain Sexy Pants. You have the sexiest pants anywhere. You also look good in a shirt that is at least a size too small. I really want to set my tailor loose on you.

HSBF: Again, I prefer Cuddle Bunny. I am not your boyfriend Barbie. I can dress myself.

Me: Like the almost Centenarian that you are on your birth certificate. I can dress you up like the hot 30 something you really are. I want to get you into a suit. I want to get you out of a suit. Pretty please draw that.

Me: I also preferred Cuddle Bunny too, but I had to pretend to break up with Cuddle Bunny in my last set of ridiculous fake text messages. You’re now Hot Sexy Boyfriend aka HSBF in my address book.

HSBF: If you’re going to stop doing the fake subterfuge text messages, should we even keep talking to each other like we have been? Clint only talks to his wife in the event of an emergency.

Me: That horse is out of the stable and halfway to Brooklyn at this point. Snookums, Agent Agent, Agent Scary, and Agent Carter Junior all know that I am in regular contact with you. Snookums is counting this as negotiations.

Me: Actually, all of Shield’s top brass, only Mister Patriotism is kind of clueless. Actually, Jeffrey is kind of clueless about everything in general except how to set up a good photo opt. He is also ridiculously needy for affirmation of his self-worth.
HSBF: Apparently, you found the new person to hate.

Me: Yes, but it’s not that hard. I’ve never been very fond of the pretentious and superficial. Mr. Patriotism is very pretentious and extremely superficial. It’s like he thinks playing the part of the superhero is more important than being one.

HSBF: Maybe we should reduce how often we are communicating with each other by adopting something similar to what Laura does.

Me: Except if I can’t talk to you for a few minutes at least every few days, I may go a little crazy and approach the super villain threshold. Snookums is aware of that and has the negotiations justification ready to go if necessary.

HSBF: So the director is just going to keep looking the other way?

Me: You’re not on North American soil. Or anywhere else Shield has carte blanche to get enhanced persons to sign the Accords. Seriously, the worst thing you’re doing is taking out members of various groups that like to traffic young women in various African countries. Nomad is getting very popular with the UN.

HSBF: And Asia.

Me: It is probably best that I don’t know that.

HSBF: Probably. I have to go. I’ll text message you in a couple of days. I have a therapy appointment in like 10 minutes.

Me: Good. I’m glad you’re talking to somebody. Write me in a few days. I promise to be good

Me: Okay, I promise not to build more murder bots or do anything highly illegal, mostly because apparently I’m being forced to watch Chopping Mall too tonight, but I make no other promises. I still say virtual-reality sex is the way of the future.
HSBF: Not happening, Tony.

To be continued

I would adore you forever, if someone would make Tony’s artwork suggestions for me.
Thank you to everyone who read or reviewed the last chapter. This conversation takes place about three days after the last one. Again, as much as Tony would love to do this five times a day, even twice a week is not necessarily safe.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Anthony: How was therapy?

Nomad: It was okay. We are still in the getting to know each other phase. I have another session tomorrow so hopefully we’ll get to talk about some real things.

Anthony: Like your best friend murdering your current boyfriend’s parents while he was brainwashed by a cult that worshiped an ancient inhuman that totally stabbed them in the back. Or, more importantly, the fact that you blame yourself for said BFF getting kidnapped and brainwashed by the cult of Hive.

Nomad: I think that’s a session four or five conversation.

Anthony: I’m not sure. I was working on a toaster for the first few sessions. I’m really open when I’m in the zone.

Nomad: I’m painting and sketching. I have some stuff that I’m actually sending you, but not from the sessions.

Anthony: You are too good to me. Although I would love to see what you’re drawing in therapy

Nomad: Maybe someday. I’m doing some sketches of my old neighborhood. She thinks it might help me reconcile things. I don’t know. It just makes me sad.

Anthony: It’s okay to be sad. It’s okay to mourn the past. Just don’t live there all the time.
Nomad: I’m starting to get that.

Anthony: I would also be okay. Not ready to share. I have some therapy letters that Dr. Suarez had me write under about 20 layers of encryption. I get that you may not be ready to share.

What is the name of the doctor you’re seeing? I want to do a background check to make sure he or she is actually qualified. Okay really, I just want to make sure he or she is not a serial killer.

Nomad: That’s actually a valid concern of yours?

Did I mention that your girlfriend’s ex-husband used psych profiles to kill his fellow inhuman because he was worried everybody was a threat.

Nomad: You neglected to mention that.

Anthony: Sorry.

Nomad: I wish I could tell you her name, but I can’t. I think it is covered under our national security honesty, exception. I really want to, but it’s not safe.

Anthony: Because you don’t want the CIA to be busting down your door anytime soon?

Nomad: Yes. But don’t worry, because Laura vetted her personally.

Anthony: I don’t want the CIA to show up either and I do trust Laura.

Anthony: It’s just not being able to talk about things like this makes things unbalanced. I mean I am able to tell you silly little anecdotes about Yo-Yo using her superpowers to send me inappropriate jokes about board members that she would like to punch out.

Nomad: Not surprised.

Anthony: You can’t even tell me if you did something as ordinary as run in the rain because that may
help someone figure out where you are.

Nomad Okay, I don’t think we have to go that far because these conversations are encrypted. They are encrypted, right?

Anthony: Extremely encrypted. But I don’t trust any technology. Also, apparently every single one of my so-called friends knew that I had a crush on you before I did.

Nomad: Because you used to sleep with a plush of me.

Anthony: So did Coulson, especially after his dad was killed and that was Captain America, not you.

Friday: You did take a few of his T-shirts and are currently using them to sleep in. The images have been sent to your Nomad account.

Anthony: You know, as soon as this is over, you’re going to have to sign the replacement trading cards that I found for him.

Nomad: I probably should since he is keeping the UN from coming to get me.

Anthony: Again, the UN adores Nomad. It’s just the U.S. government that would really like Captain America back. Apparently, because they paid for your powers, they feel like they own you.

Nomad: Then they’re just going to have to get a new Captain America.

Anthony: I’m still working on it, but Mr. Patriotism isn’t sure that America is ready for an Asian female Captain America. Of course, Mr. Patriotism probably wants that shield all to himself. I’ve seen the sketches for his new tactical suit. He put in muscles.

Nomad: You're kidding?

Anthony: Nope. I think they based the design off of your old Shield uniform, but with the new eagle up front and with 100% more fake muscles.
Anthony: See, with you that wasn’t a problem because all your muscles are real. I kind of want to lick whipped cream off of all of them.

Nomad: Still not doing text message sex.

Anthony: Fine, just ruin my fun.

Anthony: So questions about everything you’re doing day-to-day is out of the question and I’m sure Friday can find the good stuff for me on Twitter. Social media has taken over the world and you have quite the following.

Nomad: But there are other things you can ask.

Anthony: Okay, why am I getting a hard no on telecommunications sex?

Nomad: Because I want the first time we do anything together to be in person. I don’t want to just imagine what kissing you would be like, I want to know how your tongue feels against mine. I want to know what you taste like before I fantasize about it. I want to know what your hand feels like against my skin before you talk me into getting off.

Anthony: You’re doing a really good job without knowing those things. So apparently you’re afraid of fantasies not living up to reality and since I’m a 46-year-old recovering from a heart condition, reality is probably going to be harsh. Also, I’m a bit of a Bastard.

Nomad: No, you’re not.

Anthony: Okay maybe we should go to less filthy ground, which means I can’t ask you about your time as a pornographic cartoonist so just tell me one thing you did today.

Nomad: I had grilled cheese for lunch.

Anthony: And I actually had breakfast this morning instead of 6 cups of coffee. Yo-Yo takes being
my fake assistant very seriously. Okay, maybe not something so mundane

Nomad: Okay, I had four grilled cheese sandwiches for lunch. They’re just so small. It’s just sometimes I still feel guilty about getting extra food. I know mom sometimes went without eating just so I could.

Anthony: At the Afghanistan Hilton, more than once Yinsen gave me his rations. I felt extra guilty eating a giant cheeseburger when I got back which I promptly threw up. Don’t try to eat Burger King after surviving with five months of minimal food.

Nomad: I will remember that.

Nomad: I also stumbled over a simple question in therapy.

Anthony: What was the question?

Nomad: ‘Do you have any siblings?’

Anthony: I can understand why that’s no longer a simple question. Do you actually count someone as a sibling that you’ve never met? Not only that, I assume she doesn’t even know you exist.

Nomad: I don’t know. I don’t even know she knows that I exist. Probably not since what my father did is so classified. There has to be hundreds of Joseph Rogers in the world.

Anthony: Are you planning to meet her someday?

Nomad: I don’t know that either. I’ve seen pictures of my dad and I look a lot like him, especially now. I think I would just bring back bad memories.

Nomad: Besides, as of right now, it’s not exactly like I can go to Vegas.

Anthony: Although if I was trying to get lost in the continental US. I think Vegas would be the place to do it.
Nomad: It wasn’t just hard to answer that question because of my biological sister, but growing up, Bucky was a brother to me. I thought I let him die. Then I found out he’s not dead. But is that really the case? Maybe the only thing left really is a shell, especially considering the way things are right now?

Anthony: Another thing to talk about in therapy once you get to that point. Unfortunately, I have my own therapy appointment to get to. Actually I’m late too because apparently I forgot about it until Yo-Yo just showed up to my lab to drag me there.

Anthony: I’ll write to you later.

Nomad: You know we are going to have to talk about Bucky eventually.

Anthony: And we will get there, but I want us to at least get to the two week mark before then. Also, I’m not lying about therapy. Yo-yo’s glaring at me right now. She’s threatening to take my phone.

Nomad: I’m not going to break up with you because of that.

Anthony: I hope not.

Anthony: This is Ms. Rodriguez, Mr. Stark’s assistant. He will be available after his session.

To be continued

Chapter End Notes

Basically, Yo-Yo stole Tony’s phone before he even realized she took it and sent Steve a message. Super speed is awesome.

For those of you who want to see Tony send inappropriate text messages to Nick Fury, check out my new short story Burn Phone after Reading. It’s not set in this universe, but
it’s still fun and I’m pretty sure that Tony still has a crush on Steve.
Dear asshole who murdered my parents:

I would use your real name, but I’m not there yet. Laura accepts that. I don’t know if I will ever be there which is why I’m leaving my therapy retreat before there’s any chance that I could run into you.

I’m talking to your BFF again. Did he tell you? I’m sure he tells you everything because you’re his best friend that he chose over me. I have this really screwed up tendency to fall in love with people who can never love me the way I love them.

You know I didn’t really like you that much even before I saw you snap my mother’s neck in Siberia. Howard always said good things about you, but I always thought that if you didn’t die then Captain America wouldn’t have went for suicide by nobility and then maybe he would’ve been around to keep Howard from being a bastard. Not that I framed it in those terms as a kid, but I think of it that way now because I know Steve way too damn well. He definitely has a lot of suicidal tendencies when it comes to you.

I bet you two are screwing like bunnies right now. Fuck you.

So for this exercise, I’m supposed to write out how I feel about you murdering my parents. My Howard feelings are messy. I still feel guilty that I almost felt relieved that I wouldn’t have to keep living under his harsh gaze. I found evidence in the intervening years that my father did love me. He
was just absolutely awful at showing that to me. Maybe if he lived a little bit longer, we would’ve had a better relationship, but you took that from me and I hate you for that.

Maria isn’t complicated. She was the good parent. One of them anyway. Anna and Jarvis were the other members of the parenting team with Howard doing who knows what really. Maria was the type of person who would come all the way down to boarding school so we could just hang out together. She was the one who told Howard off for being a prick. She was the one who told me I deserved better than my first idiot boyfriend that outed me to the press.

You took her from me. You took one of the few good things in my life away from me. I don’t know that forgiveness is possible for that. I’m not sure.

Then you took Steve too and I hate you for that. I know I never really had him, but now I can’t even pretend that he’s my friend anymore. Everything is a fucking mess. I just want to crawl into a bottle again and I can’t. I just need to get through these next couple of days. I’m not sure I will.

Xxxxxxx

Dear asshole who murdered my parents:

Laura is making me do this exercise again. I don’t know what good it’s going to do. Although maybe I’m a little less angry at you, mostly because I know you’re not with Steve. The fact that you’re not living happily ever after with the guy, but are in fact taking responsibility for what you did helps. I’m not going to say it brings me closure, but it makes things easier to deal with.

I am decrypting a lot of Hydra files. I probably should have done this after Shield fell apart, but I was too busy chasing scepters and making murder bots. I’m starting to realize what sick fuckers those Hydra bastards really were. Maybe that’s another step in dealing with this. Why do I feel that working through my parents’ murder is going to have more steps than AA?

Xxxxxxx

Dear Winter Soldier:

So 48 hours on the new medication and I can refer to you by name. I think that's progress. Well at least one of your names. The more I find out about your time at the Siberia Hilton with the Hive worshipers of Earth, the less likely I am to want to strangle you with my bare hands.

You were kidnapped and brainwashed. You couldn't fight it and I now accept that it was out of your hands. It took me a while to get there because maybe there's a part of me that's mad that you did not
withstand their torture. I never gave in. Not once. I got myself out of there with Yinsen’s help, but maybe you didn’t have a Yinsen to help you get the hell out of there. It’s stupid to hold you up to an unattainable standard.

Also they didn’t mess up my mind the way they did you. There's no trigger words in here, just lots of waterboarding. I'm surprised that Obadiah didn’t think of employing brainwashing techniques. That way he could've kept his golden goose good and compliant.

Can I really blame you for something you did when you didn’t have all your mental faculties? I shouldn’t. But I’ve never been good at being rational. I’m trying to accept that I may need more therapy and medication before I get there, but I’m trying. Not for you. I’m trying for me and maybe for Steve. I have too much stuff in my life to be angry. I don’t have time for it.

Xxxxxxx

Dear Winter Soldier:

I received a very interesting inheritance from my Aunt Peggy. I have dozens and dozens of diaries with the type of stuff that the CIA probably would like to burn. Half of it’s in code and a lot of it is written in some combination of French, German, Spanish and English. Good thing I know most of those languages. So it turns out that you were the last in a long string of attempts to murder my father for the sake of the cult of Hive.

Because Cuddle Bunny and Friday are really observant, I found out that one of the early attempts took away one of the really good people in my life. Anna Jarvis was an angel among humanity and she was taken out by a stray bullet. Everybody told me she died in a home accident not during a botched assassination. Now I understand the importance of always wearing Kevlar and my super strong replacement for Kevlar.

The fact that you were just one of many tools that Hydra tried to utilize to take out my father over the years makes it easier to accept the outcome. This was going to happen eventually. If not you, it would’ve been someone else. As long as Hydra stayed in the shadows, this was going to happen. You were just the weapon that was successful.

You don’t blame the gun, you blame the one who pulled the trigger. That was Hydra. They’re gone now and I’m planning to salt their ashes.

Xxxxxxx

Dear James:
I'm not going to use your nickname because I think that's reserved for Cuddle Bunny. I'm beginning to really see the difference between the Winter Soldier and the guy who grew up with my boyfriend, mostly because I had a major breakthrough last week during a mission in Baltimore that was not sanctioned at all.

I have a new partner because Rhodey has a brand-new job and maybe subconsciously I am still a little pissed off at Vision for paralyzing my BFF. Yo-Yo is cool, at least now that we understand each other. Basically, we are both members of the 'our family members were killed in cold blood' club. That sort of thing helps cut through a lot of cultural and socioeconomic differences.

About six months ago while doing good things, her cousin was murdered by a dirty cop in her home country. Said dirty cop managed to get out of lock up and was on US soil selling weapons, including some old Hydra swag. I helped her find him to make him pay for what he did. I can't punch you out so I might as well help her.

Things went okay-ish. Yo-Yo had the Bastard in front of her with weapon in hand. She could've killed him. I wouldn't have thought anything less of her if she did. This guy murdered her cousin who was more like a brother to her. He was the only family she had left before he was murdered. Killing the Bastard that did it wouldn't make the pain go away, but it would feel good to know that the person who took your loved one is no longer breathing.

But she didn't pull the trigger. She told me afterwards that if she did she would be no better than the one who ended her cousin’s life. He wouldn't want that of her.

I don't know what Howard would've wanted. Our relationship wasn't that close and well, he worked on the Manhattan project. I don't know how his conscience works. Maybe he felt creating Shield balanced out all of his sins. Then again he drank like a fish so all of his sins were right there at the surface.

But my mom would've been disappointed. She used to say ‘an eye for an eye makes the whole world blind’. Most people think Gandhi said that, but no one is certain. Maybe it’s just a summary of his philosophy. For years, mom tried to get dad out of the weapons business. She hated it. It was the only thing they argued about other than the drinking.

I think she would’ve been really disappointed about Siberia. She wouldn't want me to keep hating you. She would want me to try to make amends, especially considering the fact that, unlike the other guy, you were acting under duress.
When you think about it, he got out of prison and went right back to doing the exact same thing. You escape hell and you were just laying low trying to get your mind back together and then you allowed yourself to be locked up. At least that shows a certain amount of contrition. Maybe that's why karma is leaving you be where you are and the bastard is currently being scraped off the floor of a warehouse in Baltimore. I didn't pull the trigger either. His client did.

I have to let go. I really have no choice, but to. I am dating your best friend and if I keep hating you, things with Cuddle Buddy will fall apart and I don't want it to. I don't know how I fell in love with the sanctimonious asshole, but it happened. It just did.

I am not sure if I forgive you. I'm working on it. Besides, they say forgiveness is mostly for the person doing the forgiving.

But I understand and I don't want to keep this anger with me anymore. I'm going to work on letting it go because I think that's what Maria would've wanted. I think I do more for her memory if I do good things then if I do something horrible in her name.

xxxxxx

Friday: Please see the document attached. Although I’m no longer allowed to forward you text messages that my boss does not plan for you to see he never said anything about his therapy journal excerpts.

Person my boss is dating: I don’t think Tony is going to be happy you sent me this.

Friday: You need to read it anyway

To be continued.
Conversation 35: We need to talk about FRIDAY (and James B)

Chapter Notes

Thank you to everybody who read or reviewed the last chapter. You are all absolutely lovely.
Some of you were concerned about Friday's behavior in the last conversation. The consequences will be dealt with in this conversation. This conversation takes place very soon after Friday sends everything to Steve, but I won’t say how soon because that may give things away.

Spoiler/continuity note: I referenced one thing from the Spider-man Homecoming trailer in this chapter. Since the scene also happened in the Ultimate Spiderman comic books, I feel fine using it. My opinion is that Spider-man Homecoming is likely taking place post-Civil War in the six month gap between AOS season three and four a.k.a. when this story is taking place. We will see how right I am in July. We will also see how AU this story will become. (I’m purposely not watching the Infinity Wars video clip to avoid creative contamination for a little while longer.)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

HSBF: So I probably should inform you that Friday text messaged me a copy of some of your therapy exercises.

Me: Friday, seriously I’m sending you to Queens City College.

Friday: You programed me to always do what is in your best interests, even if you disagree.

HSBF: Outside of an actual emergency, such as Tony slowly dying again or displaying suicidal tendencies, I’m not sure violating Tony’s trust is the best way to do so. Friday, you should not have sent me those emails without Tony’s permission.

Me: I’m never going to be forgiven for the palladium poisoning incident?

HSBF: No
Friday: Because of that incident I am allowed to override any of your instructions directly related to your physical or mental well-being. I've determined that Captain Rogers needed to read those letters for the sake of your psychological health and emotional recovery due to certain statements that you made to Dr. Suarez.

Me: Pepper made me put that piece of programming into all my electronic helpers due to the Palladium poisoning incident. Because Pepper and I were already falling to pieces by the time I had to get Friday up and running you became the person that Friday is allowed to tattle on me to when I become a self-destructive mess.

HSBF: You didn’t change it after Siberia?

Me: I did which is why Rhodey had to scoop me off the floor metaphorically after my last bender three months ago. Actually doing that was why I drank myself in a puddle that night. I put you back as primary with Laura and Agent as local alternates a couple of weeks ago. Although I’m questioning the wisdom of that now that Friday has less critical thinking capabilities due to the no AI rule. Friday, you are not allowed to listen on my therapy sessions anymore. Seriously, what did you send him?

Friday: You should direct that question to Captain Rogers

Me: Honey Bunches, please tell me Friday did not send you the letters I wrote to Howard or Peggy. I was really mad after finding out that they covered up Ana’s murder. I’m still really mad about it and unfortunately writing letters to the dead is the only option or rather the only outlet. I'm still sober.

Me: There may have been a lot of cursing and inappropriate things said in those letters. So just ignore them. Really it was the thing that kept me sober.

HSBF: I know and I’m glad that you have a good outlet that's less destructive to yourself and others.

Me: Because at least this way, I won’t end up trying to murder someone in Siberia.

HSBF: Actually what I received were letters about Siberia sort of.

Me: She sent you the letters to Barnes, didn’t she?
HSBF: Yes.

Me: You are totally grounded for this. Friday, you’re going to Queens to live with Queens. You will be confined for the rest of your existence to whatever CPU he was able to build from scraps because he gave back his new laptop, the stubborn little brat.

Friday: I find Peter’s company stimulating.

Me: Because he’s still talking to you. Also, we are not supposed to use his actual name in these communications.

Friday: Shield has identified him. Laura is his caseworker.

Me: The State Department has not. Actually, we are not supposed to use the names of any of the Junior Archers or Baby Avengers in these communications anymore. Really, I don’t want to see Ross try to incarcerate the underage. Scrub it.

Friday: As you wish.

HSBF: Why is Queens not talking to you?

Me: Let’s see, he’s 15 so he’s really just one giant ball of hormones right now. He’s upset that Shield gave him a caseworker. He is angry that I said to leave the crime-fighting to the grown-ups.

HSBF: I'm sure that went over well.

Me: You can check YouTube to see how well he listens to me. The cops can deal with idiots robbing ATMs wearing knock off Avengers merchandise. Seriously, who thought Thor would be wearing a pretentious Viking helmet?

HSBF: Whoever makes Avengers merchandise without consulting us?
Me: My lawyers are working on it. Anyway, I hope Laura and Agent can do better. Moments like these make me glad the palladium poisoning rendered me sterile.

HSBF: I don't know, you're pretty good with kids.

Me: Unless he is just mad at me because I’m not interested in dating his aunt. Which in itself threw me off, because 10 years ago nobody wanted me getting anywhere near their aunt, mother, sister, brother, or father for that matter. When did I become family friendly?

HSBF: When you started doing things that make people want to make unauthorized toys with your likeness. How did this all start?

Me: Pepper, Dir. Snookums, and Jane the PR goddess have decided that Twitter needs to see me outside of shots of me going to therapy. Therefore, in three weeks, I will be attending the Jarvis foundation’s annual fundraiser for pediatric cancer. Yo-Yo broke the news to me during a session with Queens and now I have a 15-year-old trying to set me up with his aunt.

HSBF: Did you tell him why you’re not interested?

Me: I told him that although I think his aunt is one cool lady, I am dating this really hot guy named Stefan, who is doing volunteer work in sub-Saharan Africa.

HSBF: Stefan? You couldn’t use my middle name?

Me: Your middle name is the same as the Hydra traitor who got taken over by the Hydra demigod. I’m not allowed to say the G word in front of any of the old Shield personnel.

HSBF: Speaking of triggers and extreme personal trauma, I want to talk about what Friday sent me.

Me: Dammit, I thought I was distracting you

HSBF: Thanks to your father, I have an eidetic memory.
Me: Dammit, Howard.

Me: I kind of don’t know what to say about the letters. They kind of explain themselves. It was more productive than Siberia.

HSBF: I didn’t read them. Well, not any farther than it took me to figure out I should not be reading them. Then I started this conversation with you.

Me: Your new therapist is having you do similar?

HSBF: Not letters, artwork. I’m planning to FedEx you a few new pieces.

Me: I think I would’ve preferred a watercolors assignment, but Suarez prefers this. We are trying to work through a lot of my issues and a good half of them are related to my parents dying before my 22nd birthday. So to work through my anger at their murderer, she and before that Laura wanted me to write letters to him.

HSBF: He’s not going to be able to read them where he is.

Me: That’s not the point of the exercise. Also, if you read the first one, you know I started writing this before I knew that.

Me: It’s to help me get my thoughts together. If I put it down on paper, maybe I can work through it.

HSBF: I probably shouldn’t be reading your personal thoughts like that.

Me: And I’m glad you didn’t read it without talking to me, but I want you to. Let’s be honest, I am never going to be able to tell you directly what I’m thinking about regarding your best friend. I’m going to worry about saying something stupid that will cause you to break up with me and that if I do say something, you might get offended and I really don’t want to break up.

HSBF: So you want me to read the letters instead.
Me: I feel like I need you to read them because I want us to actually work and as long as Barnes is hanging over us like a guillotine, I’m not sure that we will.

HSBF: Okay, I’ll read the letters.

Me: Although promise you won’t send me an angry tirade immediately after.

HSBF: I won’t.

Me: Also I was a bit of a jealous asshole in the first letter.

HSBF: I know. I’ve read some of that one before I stopped.

Me: And you’re not writing to break up with me?

HSBF: No.

Me: Good to know. Write back to me later. Although after you’ve had a few days to cool down.

HSBF: I am not going to be angry at you.

Me: We will see. Friday is still on probation regardless.

To be continued

Chapter End Notes

Help needed: Due to a wonderful offer from Misaky0 there will be illustrations for upcoming chapters. However, I never uploaded images to A3O before. If anyone has and is willing to walk me through it. That would be wonderful.

Also due to the fact that the artwork is a little more risqué, I can either raise the rating of this story or post the artwork as a separate entry with a higher rating. However, the
fanfiction.net version will stay the same due to the lack of illustrations. Let me know your preference. I’m leaning towards including in the main story and just raising the rating.
Chapter Summary

Artwork created by Steve for Tony’s eyes only.
Real-life artist: Misaky0

Chapter Notes

Thank you to everyone who read or reviewed the last chapter. Now it’s time for something very different.
The following, is artwork created by Steve for Tony’s eyes only (he really hopes SHIELD does not intercept). In real life our artist is Misaky0 who was willing to do the artwork in character. Give her an extra round of kudos and nice reviews.
The first two images are safe for work, the other three, made Tony spit out his coffee.
This is why this story is now rated M.
I included alternative text for the visually impaired and I blushed while dictating some of it. If any of my non-traditionally able readers utilizing screen readers need additional description, just send me a message. I’m not going to be able to test for screen reader compatibility until after I post. Even if you’re not visually impaired check out the text for each picture. I may have put a few jokes in there.

Hey Anthony,

I promised you some of my work and here it is. I hope you like it. I also hope my old bosses do not intercept.

Your cuddle bunny
Because I realize the alternative text is only coming up for those of us using screen readers, I’ve
added it below:
Image 1: Steve’s drawing of Tony in a vast with his Captain America mug working with his hollow projector. Yes, Tony really has that mug.
Image 2: Steve’s drawing of Tony playing with his tie. Steve loves that tie.
Image 3: Steve’s nude drawing of Tony lying on the floor of the penthouse with his legs strategically placed.
Image 4: Steve’s drawing of Tony on top of him in the lab getting ready to engage in activities that would raise the rating of this story to NC-17. Both Tony and Steve are shirtless and getting ready to lose their pants.
Image 5: Steve’s drawing of a nude Tony spread out before him on Tony’s luxurious bed with Steve perched over him with a half torn shirt and a smile.
Tony spits out his coffee when he realized Steve’s pants are obviously undone. They are so trying out this position.

You can also see on the artist’s tumbler site, if you’re having trouble uploading.

http://misaky0.tumblr.com/post/157401337369/this-art-is-linked-to-hope-you-have-unimited-text
Thank you to everyone who read or reviewed the last chapter. We are going to get to some of the heavy stuff right now.

For those of you reading this on A3O, I’ve uploaded two chapters within just a few hours of each other. The first chapter is a package of art that Steve sent to Tony in hard copy. Thanks to him, we had to raise the rating of the story. I always thought it would be Tony that cause the rating to go up but it was Steve.

Anthony: So I received some of your therapy artwork today. I’m slightly surprised that so much of it is semi pornographic. I’m sorry to disappoint you but your lab sex fantasy is not happening, there’s a rule. Semi naked science is really dangerous. I’m also surprised it got here so fast. It’s only been a day since we last spoke. Since I have yet to hear reports of Agent Agent dying, I don’t think Shield intercepted the FedEx guy.

Nomad: Good to know. Actually, I sent that after our conversation about how I paid for art school.

Anthony: Yes, before Friday interfered and sent something to you that probably means you’re figuring out how to break up with me politely.

Nomad: I’m not breaking up with you.

Anthony: Because you haven’t read the Barnes therapy letters yet?

Nomad: I did.

Anthony: And yet you still don’t want to break up with me?

Nomad: You have really low self-esteem.
Anthony: Dr. Suarez says that a lot. Apparently, most of my public persona is overcompensating for my perceived inadequacies.

Nomad: Because Howard spent your entire childhood comparing you to his own perfect version of me?

Anthony: Unfortunately, yes. He was nothing like the real Steve except for your bravery and sheer stubbornness. It’s not your fault that Howard had issues.

Nomad: Because he couldn’t find me.

Anthony: More like he worked on the Manhattan project. Your doctor is working on your tendency to blame everything on yourself? You are not the center of the universe, Gumdrop. Let others take responsibility for their own fuck ups.

Nomad: We’re working on it.

Anthony: Good.

Nomad: I’m glad that you at least didn’t blame me for what happened to your parents.

Anthony: I think I told you that before.

Nomad: But you’re not going to lie in your therapy letters just to make me feel better.

Anthony: Because I was never planning on letting you see those, I tend to write what I’m really thinking. Today, I wrote a three-page letter to Pepper that mostly contains curse words and typed words screaming. I’m extra brutally honest when I don’t expect other people to see what I’m writing.

Anthony: So, whatever you’re thinking in your cute little head, don’t. The only person I blame for what happened is Hydra. I mean seriously, they’ve been trying to kill my dad since before I was born. They would’ve found some other way if something different happened on that train.
Nomad: Why are you mad at Pepper?

Anthony: I’m only letting you get away with that subject change because I need to Pepper vent.

Anthony: I found out today that Pepper and the new boy toy are also going to be at the gala that she’s forcing me to go to and I found out, not from her, but from Twitter. I hate when I find stuff out like that from Twitter.

Nomad: I can understand why you’re not happy about that.

Anthony: I’m know we need to put a public appearance together. We need to show that we can still work together despite the fact that our romantic relationship fell to pieces. But I really really don’t want to do this.

Nomad: You’re not looking forward to meeting the new boyfriend?

Anthony: Not at all. Robert is the 33-year-old CEO of his own tech startup. Yes, I feel inadequate around someone who went from food stamps to yachts all on his own without daddy’s money. That’s not even taking into account that he screwing my ex-girlfriend.

Nomad: I think you would’ve made it without the leg up that Howard gave you. Actually, maybe it would’ve been better because you would have been creating what you wanted from the beginning instead of having to follow in his footsteps. Who knows, you could have a cure for cancer by now if you started right off the bat.

Anthony: More like a real artificial heart and lungs as well as a mechanical cure for paraplegia because I’ve always been more mechanically minded. I’m working on it.

Nomad: I’m sure you are.

Anthony: We already mentioned that I have low self-esteem. I’m really not looking forward to spending time with the guy whose six-pack is only slightly less impressive than yours.

Nomad: Are you upset about her moving on?
Anthony: I think that’s a really complicated question to answer because I’m happy I’m with you, and if I say I wish I was still with her, then that means I couldn’t be with you. And I like where we are.

Nomad: I do too.

Anthony: Now do I wish we started really talking to each other before I fucked things up so badly that you have to hide in another country? Yes.

Nomad: But you don’t wish you were still with Pepper?

Anthony: No. I’m just a little upset about being traded in for a younger model and maybe a little worried. You’re going to want to do the same thing after you see me naked. Or maybe you’ll realize that you should probably be with someone your own age. I come with a lot of baggage and the stuff with Barnes is just a toiletry bag worth of it.

Nomad: I know and I have my own baggage too. I doubt everything fell apart because she wanted a younger model. You are a good looking guy to me. And I have seen you naked before due to that incident with the homemade pop tart machine. You inspired a lot of art.

Anthony: That is why I now only wear flame retardant materials when tinkering. Apparently, you make good use of your perfect memory and have utilized that in your artwork. Although my chest is not that smooth in real life.

Nomad: Check some of the other artwork. Also I really don’t care about the scars or the fact that biologically you’re older than I am. Shared experiences are more important.

Anthony: I’m nearly 16 years older than you, biologically anyway. That’s a big difference.

Nomad: And I’m six months younger than your father. Most thirty-somethings cannot understand me.

Anthony: I may not either.
Nomad: But you’re trying. And just before you say anything, no, I don’t want to be with Bucky like that even if he was suddenly exactly like he was when we were growing up.

Anthony: Good to know.

Nomad: I’ve also accepted that he’s never going to be that person again. I'm not even the person I was back then, so I can't expect him to be after everything. Hydra did a lot.

Anthony: Therapy works.

Nomad: Yes.

Anthony: Sometimes, I think Pepper and I fell apart because we stopped being who we were when we first fell in love with each other. Too much stuff has happened in the interim.

Nomad: That’s possible.

Anthony: Association is not always cause. I wish I could figure out why it fell apart with Pepper so that it will work this time around.

Nomad: Even if you did figure out the reason, it may not apply to us. So why put so much energy into second-guessing yourself?

Anthony: I think it’s the engineer in me. I need to fix things. And if I can’t fix things I need to figure out what went wrong so it won’t happen when I design something else.

Nomad: People are not robots.

Anthony: I know that, but things can still be learned by examining what went wrong.

Anthony: I think one of the major contributing factors to why things fell apart was Pepper and I stopped being friends. We were friends first and then once we started sleeping together that stopped. We stopped talking to each other. We stopped sharing stuff with each other because apparently I
never figured out how to do both types of relationships simultaneously. I’m trying to master that this time around.

Nomad: And you’re afraid that once we’re together physically that it will all blow up?

Anthony: Oh, I know it will and I’m just hoping that we’ve built up enough of a foundation in the meantime that we’re still left standing after the explosion.

Nomad: I read what you said about my best friend and I still want to be with you so I think it will be okay.

Anthony: And I’m really happy about that.

Nomad: I’m also happy that you no longer want to kill him.

Anthony: I’m trying to make my peace with what happened. Also a few months removed and I think you are right when you said a couple of months ago, that I would’ve regretted it, if you had let me go through with killing him. I’m glad you stopped me.

Nomad: I am too. We wouldn’t be here right now if you did.

Anthony: I like where we are.

Nomad: Me too.

Anthony: Especially when you send me porn--sorry, erotic art work. Because though I love all the work of me in the nude, I love everything you did of yourself and of us together. And you were worried about your lack of imagination.

Nomad: I’m better at drawing things. You’ll understand when my therapy stuff gets there.

Anthony: I look forward to viewing. Although I really wish you were here.
Nomad: Because if I was with you, you wouldn’t have to be by yourself the first time you met Pepper’s new boyfriend.

Anthony: Oh that’s not the only reason I wish you were here. I also want to try the position in drawing number five, but maybe the other way around. Are you really that flexible?

Nomad: Yes.

Anthony: What exactly did you do with Agent Scary and is there video?

Nomad: A lot and God I hope not.

Anthony: Now you know I’m going to be looking for footage to keep me warm with you in another country.

Nomad: You’re just going to have to make due with the artwork. Does Pepper know about us?

Anthony: She knows about Stefan. So she is not going to pity me. Although the media will when I show up stag.

Nomad: I would be okay if you went with somebody as a friend.

Anthony: That’s good to know. I will think about it.

Nomad: Why haven’t you told Pepper that it’s really me?

Anthony: Other than your safety, I don’t think she will handle me actually dating you very well because I’m may have called out your name once or twice during climax when I was with Pepper. That’s in addition to Siberia. She wasn’t that happy with the pictures of me being all black and blue because of you ending up on Twitter.
Nomad: Tony, you did what? I think that maybe why things fell apart.

Friday: A contributing factor.

Nomad: Where is Tony?

Friday: Ms. Rodriguez has informed him that he needs to speak with a representative from SI legal.

Nomad: Is this an excuse or did this actually happened?

Friday: I’m not at liberty to say. I am still on probation for sending you the therapy letters. I do not want to end up on a tiny antique CPU in Queens.

Nomad: Dating Tony is hard.

To be continued.
Anthony: Do you happen to be in a country where you can use Netflix? Or should I just have Friday upload something to your computer?

Nomad: So, are you ready to talk to me again? It’s been four days. I’m not mad that you called out my name while having sex with someone else, I don’t think I have a right to be. Although that does explain why Ms. Potts started giving me really strange looks.

Anthony: I wasn’t avoiding you.

Nomad: I wish you could see me glaring at you right now.

Anthony: Unfortunately, Skype is not secured. There was an incident that took a while to deal with. It was on the news.

Nomad: The Avengers were not called out.

Anthony: Congressional hearing with Senator Hateful. Allegedly, I’ve been colluding with unregistered enhanced individuals.

Nomad: Which is true.

Anthony: They were not talking about you or even Yo-Yo for that matter. Because technically I am authorized to talk to you and Yo-Yo is registered. Even though she thinks the Accords are absolute bullshit, she wants to help people and signed anyway.

Nomad: Queens?

Anthony: Yes. She thinks that he’s inhuman, but he’s not. Although we are never going to tell the senator that.

Nomad: How did he get his powers?

Anthony: I can’t tell you mostly because I only know that it doesn’t involve fish oil. It’s fine. Senator hateful is probably pissed off that she can’t pin anything on me because Queens is under 18 and therefore not under jurisdiction of the Accords. I don’t want to talk about it. Ever. I really would like to spend less time in DC.

Nomad: I’m sure it will get better eventually.
Anthony: Not with the new senator that hates me because apparently, I’m personally responsible for her mother dying during the battle of New York. I know that rage. I understand that rage. That rage almost led to a giant fuck up in Siberia.

Nomad: Point.

Anthony: She also did not like my suggestion of her going to therapy.

Nomad: Tony!

Anthony: It was a good suggestion. Hate like that will get you killed eventually. I only survive Siberia by your grace.

Nomad: Not the point.

Anthony: Right now, I just want to cut my brain off for a few hours and trade snarky comments with you about what ever movie we’re watching together.

Nomad: Is that why you want to know if Netflix works here?

Anthony: Of course, we should do a movie night the best way we can. What movies or even TV shows are still on your pop culture list?

Nomad: I haven't got to Doctor Who yet.

Anthony: Because there's months’ worth of content there. Dr. Fitz and Dr. Simmons are kind of obsessed with the show. The next time I am forced to be at the Playground, I'll ask them to make you a starter list. If I stay well behaved, it will probably be a while before I get back there. Unless Senator Hateful has another mood swing.

Nomad: I finally watched most of the Star Wars movies

Anthony: Without me. I'm hurt.

Nomad: Well, there wasn't a lot to do the first few days of hiding out once we got to where we needed to be.

Anthony: Not until you got your new costume anyway.

Nomad: You can still watch Episode I with me. For some reason, we skipped that. Actually, Clint had us start with Episode IV and V then we watched II and III before going to episode VI and VIII.

Anthony: Honestly that's the best way for a newbie to watch everything because you can still get the 'Luke I am your father' punch. Also, I love you, but no to Episode I. I don't completely despise the prequels, but you can cover all the major plot points by watching the Weird Al music video parody which is more fun.

Nomad: I was hoping to find an exclamation on why one of the Jedi looks exactly like my former boss.

Anthony: Obviously Pulp Fiction needs to be added to the list. Along with A Time to Kill, Unbreakable, and Snakes on a Plane just because.

Nomad: I was joking. Pulp Fiction was on the list but Sam said that Tarantino is overrated and a couple words I can’t repeat so I haven’t watched it.
Anthony: That actor is one of the busiest guys in modern show business. Personally, I think the guy is really an LMD that Patches planted to keep everyone off his trail.

Nomad: What is an LMD?

Anthony: It was a program that Shield created to make life like android copies of agents to send out as cannon fodder. Allegedly, they never perfected it, but you never know. Your old boss was a professional liar.

Nomad: Thank God. Could you imagine what Hydra would do with something like that?

Anthony: All bad things. Which we are not talking about because this is a work/Hydra/'Siberia issues’ free zone for the rest of the night.

Nomad: Agreed.

Anthony: Since I mentioned Weird Al earlier, is UHF on your list? It's a weird cult classic from the 80s.

Nomad: I’ve already seen it. Clint enjoys classics from the 80s. We've also watched the Breakfast Club, Pretty in Pink, and 16 Candles. I like 16 Candles the best except for the Asian stereotyping. That was awful.

Anthony: Don’t forget about the possibly having sex with someone too drunk to consent. BTW that’s now considers sexual assault. Well at least he's making sure you see all the good stuff from the 80s. Princess Bride? Coming to America?

Nomad: I’ve seen both. We had a lot of movie nights after you left, but before things fell apart. You kind of remind me of Prince Akeem sometimes.

Anthony: Well, the king reminds me of Howard. What about Weird Science?

Nomad: Seen it. One of the characters kind of looks a lot like you. Well, like pictures of you from your MIT years.

Anthony: Because I have a thespian double. It’s almost enough to make me think Howard had an illegitimate love child before he married Maria and had me.

Nomad: Your father did have an interesting reputation, so it is a possibility.

Anthony: I agree, but not in this case. We were in rehab together once and played a lot of fun tricks on the staff. I’m hotter of course.

Nomad: Much hotter.

Anthony: My ego thanks you. What about Tropical Thunder? I think it’s a good option if you want to stare at somebody that kind of looks like me.

Nomad: I've already seen it along with the Sherlock movies that he was in.

Anthony: What about Kiss Kiss Bang Bang, Charlie Bartlett, or Chaplin?

Nomad: I’ve seen them. I even watched the Ally McBeal season.

Anthony: Is there something you want to tell me?
Nomad: Wanda really likes that show.

Anthony: Is that your final answer, Sugar Bear?

Nomad: Maybe I had a bit of a crush on you earlier than I thought.

Anthony: I can see that. You know, you have a thespian look-alike too which is probably the only reason why I've seen the Nanny Diaries, twice. Is Snow Piercer on your list?

Nomad: The French comic book that it's based on is.

Anthony: I have the movie. But it's not date appropriate and I really want to not think about appending apocalypses. But I'll have Friday put it on your computer anyway.

Nomad: That would be good.

Anthony: What about Not Another Teen Movie? Although I'm a little afraid to expose you to too much parody when you're still getting your pop culture sea legs.

Nomad: Actually, Rhodey had me watch it. How's he doing being director?

Anthony: Stressed and probably cursing my name in his sleep. Although he was able to have Mr. Patriotism take care of Congress. He may be a stuck-up prick, but Jeffrey does enjoy going against Senator Hateful.

Nomad: That's good. I haven't got through all the Star Trek stuff yet.

Anthony: Because there's 23 days' worth of material there.

Nomad: I'm mostly sticking to the movies.

Anthony: Which movies haven't you seen yet?

Nomad: Most of the odd number ones until you get to the new movies. I've seen all of those except the new one that just came out. I haven't exactly had time to get to a movie theater. Also, I've seen Galaxy Quest.

Anthony: Clint's influence again?

Nomad: Bruce before he left.

Anthony: Where was I during these clandestine movie nights?

Nomad: Mainlining coffee in your lab. At least that was what we were told.

Anthony: That sounds about right. I will figure out how to expedite you a copy of Star Trek Beyond for a future movie night unless you don't like the alternate continuity.

Nomad: I like it just fine, maybe because I'm not completely attached to the old versions because I was frozen when they came out. I've only watched half of the TOS episodes and have even gotten to the newer stuff.

Anthony: Or maybe you're better at letting go of the past then you think you are. Things change, even interpretations of classic characters. It's necessary to adapt to contemporary society.

Nomad: Although is Commander Spock dating both Lt Uhura and Captain Kirk in the new timeline?
It kind of seems that way. I was under the impression that polyamorous relationships were only slightly more accepted now.

Anthony: I'm glad you see it. Maybe they’re hoping that things will be better in the future. Star Trek is supposed to be about the hope that we can transcend our own prejudice and become better. That we can find peace amongst ourselves and appreciate the differences of others. I legitimately think that they’re going for a one true threesome 99% of the time. But most people don't see it because the big damn hero usually has to be straight.

Nomad: We are not.

Anthony: But we're not out. At least you’re not. This is another reason why I'm mad because Rhodey said no to being my date next week.

Nomad: So, you decided to bring a date?

Anthony: Yes, but the search is going badly. I’m desperate enough to go to Jane for ideas.

Nomad: That’s not good.

Anthony: Did I mention that Senator Hateful is going to be there?

Nomad: So basically, you need a date to keep you away from her at all times?

Anthony: Yes. It’s enough to make me sad that I have no idea what country Natasha is in.

Nomad: Well at least that will keep you distracted from worrying about your ex-girlfriend’s new boyfriend.

Anthony: Your ex is also going to be there.

Nomad: Is May going to be there as your security?

Anthony: I hope not. Your political pundit ex-boyfriend will be there. His poor unsuspecting wife is the director of the charity. I don’t know how a woman like her ended up with such a bastard.

Nomad: I’m sorry.

Anthony: It’s okay. I’m used to dealing with assholes. I’m just sad that our virtual date is not going the way I hoped it would. We can’t even figure out a movie.

Nomad: Yes, we did. We will watch Star Trek Beyond together as soon as you get me a copy. In the meantime, you can keep telling me about your crush on my acting double.

Anthony: You are hotter, especially when you’re wearing a shirt two sizes too small. Although it might be a little while on the movie because Paramount is pissed at me. Disney now has the rights to do a Tony Stark and possibly, eventually, an Avengers movie.

Nomad: Will your double be playing you in the movie?

Anthony: It was in the contract.

Anthony: OK, how about for our first date, I will just text you snarky things from the charity ball Friday. That way we can hang out and I can keep my sanity intact.

Nomad: It's a date.
Anthony: Now I just have to find a real one.
Nomad: You will.
Anthony: I hope you’re right, Bunny Bear.
To be continued

Chapter End Notes

Due to the sheer amount of movies/TV shows that MCU actors have shown up in, I feel that the best way around the celebrity paradox issue is that everybody has a look-alike thespian except for Samuel L. Jackson who may or may not be an LMD. Seriously, that man is in a lot of movies. He has 171 acting credits and counting. (The number has increased by three since I wrote the original draft of this chapter a month ago.)
HSBF: So, did you figure out what you're doing for Friday.

Me: Don't even ask.

HSBF: That bad?

Me: My PR person suggested that I get an escort. It's always a blow to your ego when someone suggests that you need to pay for it.

HSBF: Why did she suggest that?

Me: Because I said no to taking Yo-Yo. I do not want people thinking I'm screwing my assistant again, especially when she has a boyfriend who she will be taking herself. Even Kevin had to deal with way too much bullshit because of that.

HSBF: I mean why a prostitute?

Me: Escort, I said escort. I'm talking an actual escort and not a booty call. It’s not unusual for people at my level to have to arrange for suitable companionship for events.
Me: You're the only booty I want to call or lick for that matter, but apparently, you have issues with telecommunication sex. I respect that you want to do it live first, but it's going to be a couple of months, Muffin, if my current plan doesn't work.

HSBF: What are you working on?

Me: A way to see you sooner rather than later. But I don’t want to jinx it. So until then I’m going to have to pay for somebody to hang on my arm. I’m hoping Jane can find a nontraditional age student working their way through med or law school. I can’t deal with the barely legal and shallow anymore.

HSBF: Why can’t you just go alone?

Me: Because apparently our stocks will drop 10 points if I show up sad and alone.

HSBF: Why would stocks drop?

Me: Remember the stock market went up when I was photographed going to therapy. It went down five points yesterday when somebody photographed me drinking a ginger ale and everyone thought it was something harder until the press release publicly announcing how many days I’ve been sober. I’ve really didn’t want that out. So now everybody is going to be on alcohol watch.

Me: The real purpose of me having a buddy there is to make sure I don’t spend half the night at the bar like I usually do. That is what my therapist and publicists are most worried about anyway.

HSBF: But Yo-Yo is going to be there.

Me: Apparently, Jane doesn’t see that as being good enough because she is not aware Yo-Yo can take my glass of champagne and throw it away before I even realize it’s not in my hand. Unfortunately, I can’t point that out.

HSBF: This is your first event like this since getting sober?
Me: Yes. It's going to be difficult. I know that it will be difficult with Pepper bringing the new boy toy alone. Charity events are boring as hell, which is usually why, in the past I spent most of the time at the bar.

HSBF: That's not an option now.

Me: Which means mingling. I hate mingling, at least sober mingling. I need somebody there to keep me from punching out Tiberius and Director Snookums is still a hard no.

HSBF: Why?

Me: Multilateral meeting in Geneva regarding the inhuman issue. Trust me he would rather be at the boring as hell fund raiser and he normally hates charity galas.

Me: Also, I’m planning to announce a new nonprofit for inhuman children at the event and Mr. Patriotism believes it could be seen as a conflict of interest so Rhodey’s not allowed to come. Bastard.

HSBF: Well I won’t suggest you taking Jeffrey.

Me: That is for the best. The only thing I like about him is that he believes in protecting the rights of Inhumans, unlike certain Secretaries of State that will remain nameless.

HSBF: Laura?

Me: Christina Everhart is already doing an expose on me allegedly fucking around with Clint’s wife. Really, I don't need to add more fuel to the fire. It's already five alarm because everyone just loves gossip.

HSBF: Do you have any other female friend you have that you can take? You have to have a few.

Me: Not as many as you would think mostly because I was an asshole pre-Afghanistan awakening. If Queens wasn't still trying to set me up with his aunt, I would invite Aunt Scary because I do like her as a friend, not someone I want to have ‘coffee’ with. However, I think Queens still wants me to
be his step uncle despite the fact that he knows about Stefan.

HSBF: Again, could you have come up with a better fake name? I was bullied by a guy with that name when I was a kid.

Me: Sorry, of his unaware of the bad Association. It was Agent's choice. He put an entire cover together for you. Well Friday and Dr. Monkey Lover put a full digital profile for you. You have a birth certificate, passport, and everything else. So you’re stuck with it now.

HSBF: That's nice, I think.

Me: Also, I may have made you my co-chair for the Maria Stark foundation.

HSBF: Tony!

Me: Hey, I am trying to build you a respectable identity. Look if things fall apart with the UN, maybe I can get you back into the country as Stefan Carter.

HSBF: Agent came up with the last name as well?

Me: No, I just thought you would like it. You're a widower by the way and you took her last name because your biological father was an asshole. According to Agent Scary, the best covers are the ones closest to the truth.

HSBF: What about Agent being your escort? Do they still have that mask technology that Nat used to use? He could impersonate Stefan.

HSBF: Tony, are you still there?

HSBF: Tony, you didn’t suddenly get arrested, did you?

To be continued
I would just like to let you know that the reason why Friday did not respond is because she still grounded for the great therapy Journal incident.
Thank you to everyone who read or reviewed the last chapter. You’re all absolutely wonderful and keep me writing. And now the conclusion to our unexpected cliffhanger that I didn’t even realize that some would take as a cliffhanger.

This conversation takes place about 20 minutes after the last one.

Anthony: No, I was calling Zephyr One. Also, the FedEx guy showed up. I think I got your portfolio or one of my enemies is trying the letter bomb thing. I’m still opening the box. How much tape was used on this?

Nomad: Are you joking?

Anthony: I think so. Mostly. Thankfully, it is your portfolio. I’m sure you’re happy that the Brooklyn Bridge has barely changed in the last 70 years. There’s a lot of that in here.

Nomad: At least there are some constants. Why were you calling Zephyr one?

Anthony: Also significantly less nudity than last time. Sad panda. But pre-serum Steve is still fuckable. Oh, so fuckable.

Nomad: Tony!

Anthony: Sometimes I’m still typing when your new response comes through. I called Zephyr One to ask Agent if he would mind pretending to be you or rather Stefan for an evening.

Nomad: Understandable. What did he say?
Anthony: He is not against having someone pretend to be Stefan except for the fact that whoever pretends to be him will most likely get picked up by Ross, the CIA, or any other number of people who are pissed at me.

Nomad: Why do I feel like that’s a really long list?

Anthony: Because it is. But your list is just as long so I don’t worry about it. Apparently Coulson just doesn’t have the energy to get kidnapped right now. So it’s a hard no from him. I think he’s really depressed about the forced "voluntary resignation" thing.

Nomad: I thought you said he voluntarily resigned?

Anthony: He was voluntarily forced to resign. Totally different. This happens every time there’s a new administration. It’s normal unless the new guy realizes it’s ridiculous.

Nomad: What about coming with you as himself?

Anthony: Surprisingly more of a kidnapping risk then as my fake boyfriend due to coming back from the dead by means that are too sensitive to discuss even under this encrypted frequency. Really, it's the entire reason why he is still legally dead.

Anthony: However, he does think I should take an agent with me.

Nomad: Why?

Anthony: I did tell you about the new nonprofit that I’m starting?

Nomad: You mentioned it briefly last time.

Anthony: Well, the existence of it already got leaked to the press and not everybody is happy that I'm starting a nonprofit for inhuman/gifted children. Now I’m Watchdog target number one. Since the grand Wizard of hatemongering politicians is going to be there, Coulson thinks I need protection and Director Snookums agrees.
Nomad: I think that’s a good call.

Anthony: Now I either get to be babysat by your ex-girlfriend who you had crazy adventurous sex with or your ex-girlfriend's great grandniece/granddaughter who you made out with that one time.

Nomad: Obviously you're going with Melinda.

Anthony: Well it just looks less sleazy when I'm with a woman two years older than me. Also I like Melinda even if I think she may have slept with you because of her Coulson crush that she refuses to act upon. Patches didn’t tell her that he was alive for a while.

Nomad: I’m not surprised. She was kind of a mess back then because he was gone.

Anthony: Which surprises me greatly because she’s always put together.

Nomad: You said that it wasn’t an issue, but this is not the first time you have mentioned being uncomfortable with someone significantly younger than you as your significant other. Is it going to be a problem?

Anthony: Stefan is 35 so it's not that much of a problem, especially because, thank God I don’t look 46 which is a small miracle considering all the drugs I did during the 90s. I did not deal well with my parents or Jarvis dying at all.

Anthony: Also I feel like Agent Scary has a chance to keep me from drinking where Agent Carter Junior will just give me a reason to drink.

Nomad: I thought things were better with Sharon after she helped you with Laura?

Anthony: We’ve reached an understanding, but that doesn’t mean I want to hang out with her, especially in heels. She’s already an inch taller than me barefoot.

Nomad: Is this when I ask if the height difference is going to be a problem?
Anthony: Only during photo shoots, but you were already aware of that.

Nomad: I remember. You were wearing 3 inch heels.

Anthony: Sharon holds no hard feelings towards you for us getting together. Although she feels really stupid for hitting on a gay guy who probably used her great aunt as a beard. And yes, she really believes that you were using Aunt Peggy as a beard.

Nomad: You could've told her I am pansexual or bisexual or whatever.

Anthony: I love you, but I'm not having that conversation with her. That's something you're going to have to man up and do.

Nomad: And I will as soon as I’m not exiled to another country.

Anthony: Which I’m really sad about especially because I'm going to be spending Friday night on a fake date with my boyfriend’s ex-girlfriend so the media will not think I’m pining over my ex-girlfriend while I’m forced to spend quality time with my ex-girlfriend/boss and her trophy boyfriend. Did I mention I'm going to have to do this sober?

Nomad: Multiple times. It’s going to be fine.

Anthony: It’s going to be a disaster. Like I’m tempted to eat a bag of sunflower seeds disaster.

Nomad: You do remember that you’re allergic to sunflower seeds?

Anthony: Yes, especially after the great sunflower butter fake peanut butter cup incident. And no, I won’t do something like that on purpose, even if I really want to get out of this. Right now, I’m just thankful that the inside of the event is closed to the press. Although the vultures will be outside the entire time.

Nomad: Is that normal for these types of events?
Anthony: Yes, sort of. I’m telling you right now that I will be texting you the entire time, mostly as a means to keep my sanity together.

Nomad: And I'll be reading even if I'm pretty sure it's going to be like 2 AM here.

Anthony: Most of our conversations occur when it’s the middle of the night for one of us. I blame it on the insomnia.

Nomad: That’s the time of the day I do my best artwork.

Anthony: I thought this was actually therapy art. There is a lot of snow and trains in here. Yet, nothing of you punching out Red Skull. I’m a little surprised.

Nomad: I’m working my way through things. It’s where I am right now and a lot of this is homework.

Anthony: Beautiful wonderful homework.

Anthony: Is that your mom looking after a little boy who I think is you in picture number three? Were you really that small?

Nomad: Yes, and I think I was smaller. I’m mostly going by memory. I don’t actually have any pictures of my mom. None of my photographs managed to get back to me. There also was nothing in the Smithsonian on or even in the history books.

Anthony: They were all in Howard’s private collection that did not go to the Smithsonian. I think that he felt that you wouldn’t want something so personal public. It’s why I kind of recognized her.

Nomad: You have access?

Anthony: It all went to me in the will, but it is your stuff now as far as I’m concerned. I'll FedEx it to you.
Nomad: That’s not necessary. Although, could you have Friday scan a few and email them to me?

Anthony: Anything for you, Gum Drop.

To be continued.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry you’re just going to have to use Tony’s word pictures for Steve’s artwork this time. However, there are plans for more artwork in the future.

This may not be obvious because RDJ is always wearing ridiculous high heels when playing Tony Stark, but Emily VanCamp is an inch taller than him.
Steve’s Sketchpad a.k.a. Art Therapy

Chapter Summary

Artwork created by Steve as a means to work through his issues
Real-life artist: Misaky0

Chapter Notes

Thank you to everybody who read or commented on the last conversation. Happy snow day to those of you who got one. I had to make my own snow day (because I had 2 inches of ice outside my front door) but I have a ridiculous amount of leave so it's OK. I didn't want to say anything Saturday but Misaky0 was able to finalize the artwork for Steve's second sketch pad entry.

Please note, this is not everything that Steve sent Tony in the last chapter. Remember from the last conversation that there were lots of sketches of the Brooklyn Bridge, snow, and trains involved. Below are some of the highlights. There is significantly less nudity than last time but everything really mean something to Steve and tells a part of our story.

Also the note below was not beta because I didn't realize we were going to get to put this up so soon. All of my betas are absolutely wonderful. So all typos on me.

Dear Anthony:

As promised here is some of the stuff I've been working on in therapy. None of it's really blue like last time but I want you to see what I've been working on. It's only fair after Friday sent me your therapy letters. I read the letters and I'm really proud that you are working so hard on this. I'm trying to do the same. I think I'll get there in the end with your help.

Sincerely, Your Cuddle Bunny
Mother to Son: Sarah Rogers taking care of her son when he was sick as a child.

Scar tissue: Steve still thinks Tony is beautiful scar tissue and all.

Man in the Mirror: When Steve looks at himself in the mirror he still sees the 95 pound asthmatic with a heart condition that he was pre-serum. It's been years but the new body feels foreign to him. It is as if the hot guy with the six-pack staring back at him is not really him. This is why Tony makes it a point to tell Steve that he would totally be all over him, no matter what he looks like on the outside.
Thank you to everyone who read or reviewed the last chapter. You’re great and keep me motivated. If you just didn’t expect me to upload another chapter Tuesday, you missed out on seeing some excerpts from Steve’s sketchpad related to the last conversation. Please go check it out and give our wonderful artists Misaky0 some love.

Now is the time for Tony and Steve’s first virtual date. Although it doesn’t go as planned by any stretch of the imagination.

HSBF: So I just saw that you posted images of you and Melinda waiting patiently in your limo to get out on your Twitter account

Me: Oh, there was no waiting patiently about it. We’ve been in here for the last 20 minutes. God, I hate Manhattan traffic. Wow, you really did stay up late to play with me.

HSBF: Which explains why you take the suit to board meetings sometimes. I told you I would do this with you and I keep my word. I also took a nap so I could deal with being up at 2 AM.

Me: I’m not allowed to do the suit thing anymore, thanks to the Accords.

Me: I’m also glad you took a nap because you’re going to need your strength. I’m planning for you to get writer’s cramp tonight. Even if you won’t let me talk you through other fun activities to do with your hand.

HSBF: Well, at least something good came out of that stupid thing. Who’s making these posts?

Me: Yo-Yo. She and her BF Agent Shotgun Ax are in the car with us. We just got the signal that we can get out of the car, so keep an eye out. Yo-Yo is going to post some video.

HSBF: I can’t believe you just came out to War.
Me: Really, I’ve been looking for forever to use that song for an entrance like this. Besides, I have already answered half of their questions about the “Avengers’ Civil War”. I have to do some interviews momentarily, so we’ll just have to see if it does work.

HSBF: Not well because they still asked you about it. Although, thank you for not mentioning Bucky. I prefer for as little to get out about that is possible.

HSBF: Also, I don’t know if I would call it a “Civil War”. I’ve been in wars. Usually, they involves more than about a dozen people.

Me: This is true. I kind of don’t want the public to know what happened in Siberia, so the less they know the better.

HSBF: How pissed off is your PR person going to be that you introduced Melinda as your bodyguard?

Me: Considering Jane just tried to take Yo-Yo’s phone from her, I’m going with probably slightly less pissed off then Mr. Patriotism will be about me referring to her as the new Captain America. Less evil Ross and Talbot really wanted Jeffrey to be the new Captain America. Seriously, they gave his costume fake muscles. How pretentious.

HSBF: I’m sure they’ll just assume that you’re joking. You are joking because I doubt she has agreed to it.

HSBF: Also, it looks like Jane did not do very well with keeping the phone away from Yo-Yo because she already tweeted a picture of you announcing May as the next Captain America. There’s also a picture of her with the shield in a new costume. Thank you for the lack of cleavage window.

Me: She said in the event of aliens or some other big catastrophe, that she would take up the shield. It’s all part of her, “if I need a weapon, I’ll take one” philosophy. Also making new tactical gear makes me happy.

Me: Although I’m half convinced that she just wanted the Captain America style tactical suit for role-play with Agent as soon as he gets his head out of his ass. Seriously, will they just kiss already?

HSBF: Yet she’s scowling at you in the last picture.
Me: You did sleep with her before her ex died and when she was undercover as a shiny happy person. This is her normal state of being at least recently. Also, I think she may have read some of my text messages to you.

HSBF: You know I would’ve been okay if people thought that she was your girlfriend.

Me: I’m not. Besides, I’m supposed to be giving off the air that I’m retired from the superhero gig. Having a bodyguard gives off that impression.

HSBF: Even though you’re running off to catch bad guys in Baltimore.

Me: There was also an incident yesterday that didn’t make the news, at least the international news, which I’m officially neither confirming nor denying.

HSBF: Do I want to know?

Me: No. Okay, we have officially survived the paparazzi so you are going to be dependent on Yo-Yo keeping her phone away from Jane. I think they’re going to be playing phone tag literally for most of the evening.

HSBF: Which is sad because you actually looked really good in that suit.

Me: I’ll remember to keep it. There’s a large environmental conference in South Africa next month and SI is going to do a few side events.

HSBF: And you’re going to be there?

Me: Barring aliens falling from the sky. I’ll have a really big Suite and I would love some company.

HSBF: Was this what you are talking about last time?
Me: Yes. And since my official involvement has already been tweeted out in a press release, I thought I could tell you.

HSBF: You really are that brilliant.

Me: If I was really brilliant, we wouldn’t be in separate countries right now because I would’ve realized what was going on earlier. Also, I wouldn’t be sharing a table with baby Robert. He’s being so sweet right now it’s making me nauseous.

HSBF: He is 33. He’s older than I am, sort of.

Me: Remember that we’re going with your actual age. It makes me feel less sleazy. Also, baby Robert looks 12. He looks offended that I’m on my phone instead of making small talk.

HSBF: It is rude.

Me: Which is fine because I’ve never been polite. Now he’s talking business. If I find out he’s dating Pepper just for investment reasons, Coulson is going to help me hide the body.

HSBF: Are you really over your ex-girlfriend? Because I kind of remember you making the same snide remarks about Sharon.

Me: I don’t think I ever threatened to kill her. BTW she is here three tables over keeping an eye on things.

HSBF: Why is Sharon there?

Me: Look, I really am over the break up. We weren’t working and as much as I loved her, we couldn’t be what we needed. She was never going to accept my need to look for bad things that need to be handled. At least you understand that.

HSBF: Too well. Although I feel like trouble finds us.
Me: Now we are going on to appetizers and drinks and Robert has decided that we’re going to be a dry table to help me stay sober.

HSBF: That’s sweet.

Me: That’s annoying because now he’s talking about his mom’s experiences with the 12-step program. I have enough parental issues. I do not need to deal with someone else’s. Especially someone else who’s parents realized they had problems and got help. Howard never got that far.

HSBF: You have to want to change and I’m proud of you for wanting to make that change. You’re a better person than Howard ever was.

Me: I’m so glad that the food is now here, so I don’t have to make small talk with anyone for a while. I hate small talk.

HSBF: And you love food. What’s on the menu for tonight?

Me: Something smothered in a peanut sauce involving pita bread, I think.

HSBF: Tony, what’s going on? I saw on Twitter pictures of you passed out on your plate? Friday, you tell me what’s going on?

Me: Of course, Stark was texting you during the middle of this. I’m not surprised. Maybe that’s why he ate something that caused him to lose consciousness.

HSBF: Melinda? Pepper?

Me: Sharon.

HSBF: Why am I talking to you? What happened to Tony?

Me: Apparently your boyfriend has food allergies and ate the wrong thing.
HSBF: He is allergic to sunflower seeds

Me: The thing covered in peanut sauce was probably fried in sunflower oil which means this wasn’t his fault. Thankfully, Ms. Potts keeps an EpiPen on her due to her strawberry allergy. However, Tony, Ms. Potts and Agent May are on their way to the hospital.

HSBF: Tony is just a friend. Is he going to be okay?

Me: He was breathing again before they got him out of here, so that’s promising.

HSBF: That’s good or at least it’s not bad.

Me: Also, I don’t even have to look at the rest of this chain to know that the friend thing is a polite lie. I don’t need polite lies.

HSBF: I’m sorry.

Me: No, you’re not. But thanks for saying it. It’s okay that you found love with someone else. And I know you’re worried, but mom always said that her friend Tony was a stubborn bastard so I think he will pull through. I’ll make sure somebody updates you from the hospital.

HSBF: Okay. Thank you for doing this.

Me: Well, he did buy me my first Barbie dream house, pay for all of mom’s cancer treatments anonymously, and kept me from getting arrested for giving you your gear back, so it’s the least I can do.

To be continued

Chapter End Notes
You may now commence with throwing cyber tomatoes at me for this cliffhanger.

The song Tony came out to was War by Edwin Starr. Yes, he appreciates the irony as a reformed and former war profiteer.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=01-2pNCZiNk
Agent M: Red Malibu is stable. Tell Liberty we are taking care of him. He doesn’t need to come here.

Me: It’s so great to hear from you after almost a year of radio silence. And even that was a baby shower present postmarked from Arizona. I mean, you could’ve at least told me that your boyfriend wasn’t dead anymore.

Agent M: I figured you would rather deal with me then your old handler, who is not my boyfriend. But I can turn this phone over to him, if you prefer.

Agent M: Also, my father made that blanket himself.

Me: It was a nice blanket. Nikki loved it. BTW, I’m not talking to my former handler outside of my wife getting kidnapped again. At least not anytime soon.

Agent M: Do not let Liberty come to Red Malibu’s location.
Me: You realize that nobody lets Liberty do anything? I mean, that’s why our now former boss gave him that name. If Liberty wants to do something, he will do it because he’s a stubborn asshole. We wouldn’t be in this situation right now if Liberty wasn’t so stubborn. His boyfriend is in a coma. If it was Linda, you couldn’t keep me away.

Agent M: I remember having to fill out the paperwork from Budapest because Linda went into labor early. 90% of which I had to falsify to cover up what really happened. The statute of limitations has not run out yet. You owe me.

Me: So he knew it was a lie?

Agent M: I do. I don’t know about the former boss. It doesn’t matter. He’s not in charge now. Red Malibu isn’t even really in a coma, the doctors are just keeping him sedated to help him recover faster.

Me: He punched out a doctor didn’t he?

Agent M: Yes. He tried to leave, despite the oxygen mask.

Me: Not surprise. Now there’s no way I’m going to be able to keep liberty here.

Agent M: There’s no reason for him to be here. It's too dangerous.

Me: I don’t think Liberty is going to see it that way and is still going to want to be there to hold his Iron Teddy Bear’s hand through the entire thing.

Agent M: Not an option. Talk him out of it.

Me: That’s not an option either at the moment.

Agent M: He’s on his way to the airport right now, isn’t he?

Me: It’s more like we’re on our way to the airport right now. I drew the short straw and therefore I
am the designated Avenger sitter. Liberty makes bad decisions when people he loves are in danger. We’re completely screwed if Red Malibu flat lines.

Agent M: It’s not a risk now. I don’t care if you have to tranquillize him. Liberty cannot be here right now. It will do Red Malibu no good if he gets arrested or taken out the moment he touches down in New York.

Me: Are you planning to be the one to arrest him? That would be awkward since you’re kind of his ex-girlfriend. I really want to hear that story.

Agent M: No. But who knows who The General would bring in to take care of it and that’s your best-case scenario. The Secretary would be worse.

Me: Come on, we’re not stupid enough to fly to Red Malibu directly. We’re planning to fly to Canada first then come in through the back. Justin has been a little more favorable towards enhanced people then his American counterparts.

Agent M: Again, I do not care if you have to tranquillize Liberty. Ross is pulling a Vader.

Me: Got it, Agent M.

Agent M: Don’t call me that.

Me: Liberty is down.

Agent M: Tranquilizer arrows?

Me: It took three of them.

Agent M: I’m not even surprised. Keep him wherever you are. We don’t have time to keep Liberty from being picked up when we are trying to figure out who attacked Red Malibu.

Me: So it wasn’t an accident?
Agent M: We are investigating.

Me: Fuck. You know I’m not going to be able to keep Liberty from getting to him. Really it’s a small miracle that they stayed apart so far.

Agent M: Try more arrows. It is not safe for him right now.

Me: You owe me a real conversation after this.

Agent M: I had to lay low after the implosion. Hill knew where I was. I sent you the baby present when I was trying to retire after a disgruntled former colleague tried to kill my dad to get to me. It didn’t last.

Me: It never does. It’s too much in our blood.

Agent M: Hill also knew that the Heart was still alive.

Me: Who didn’t tell us shit until she needed the boss to show up in my barn. I don’t have a very favorable opinion of Hill right now.

Agent M: Former boss now. War Machine is in charge with the Heart heading up operations. I’ll keep you posted.

Me: You better.

To be continued.

Chapter End Notes
In case you did not figure it out, Agent M is Agent Melinda May. Not to be confused with the actual Agent M a.k.a. Marvel’s VP of Digital Content
Interlude 12: Yes, Gossiping TV Reporters Do Count as an Emergency

Chapter Notes

Thank you to everyone who read or reviewed the last section. You’re all fabulous. Kudos to Duchess, bladeandroses, and Dophne for figuring out that the 15 minute break was between this bit of dialogue:

Agent M: Don’t call me that.

Me: Liberty is down.

Yes, another interlude. This is because when I started this story I decided that any conversation that did not take place between Tony and Steve would be labeled as an interlude. Of course, when I decided on that I never thought there would be a stretch of time where Tony and Steve could not speak to each other. Steve is not happy about this at all. He wants his Tony Bear Back. (My voice recognition software originally rendered that as “He wants his Tony bareback.” because apparently the software has a dirty mind. Or maybe FRIDAY has taken over my computer.)

This conversation takes place about eight hours after the last one.

Love: So how much of what the tabloids are saying is true?

Me: So, this is considered an emergency now?

Love: Well, Twitter is saying that Tony is lying on his deathbed and the shareholders are holding a candlelight vigil. Allegedly, he was suffocated by a paramedic. The image of Pepper crying as she was leaving the hospital really sold it. Okay, the fact that she punched out the reporter really sold it. I had to tranquilize Nomad a second time because of that, after he made my other eye black and blue.
Love: Three tranquilizer arrows. Do you have any idea how hard those are to come by right now?

Me: Friday is going to send you some ICERs and a few Dendrotoxin bombs. As well as ‘normal’ tranquilizers and mood stabilizers that Steve’s therapist asked us to develop. Trying to develop antidepressants for super soldier metabolism was not easy. They came up with a patch. I think you need them if he gave you two black eyes.

Friday: They were already enroute before this incident occurred and should arrive within the next four hours.

Love: Good. I think someone can seriously benefit from an antidepressant patch. Oh, who am I kidding? We’re going to have to shoot him again with tranquilizers.

Me: Did you consider doing that when they were beating the hell out of each other?

Love: Only after the fact. We should’ve just locked them in a room with each other and a box of condoms.

Me: Nomad has a super immune system. Do they really need condoms?

Love: Hey nice delay tactic, but what’s true? Are we going to be paying for grief counselors for the kids?

Me: There’s no ventilator. He was on oxygen but there was never any ventilator. I think the real reason why they still have him sedated is the director thinks he will sign himself out AMA as soon as he’s conscious again, especially considering what happened before his bodyguard could get back there.

Love: Probably. Only Nomad could ever make him go to medical. Wait, what happened before the bodyguard arrived?

Me: The image of Pepper crying was taken about 10 minutes after she found out who Anthony’s boyfriend really is.
Love: Oh shit. Who told her? Wait, you’re deflecting. Seriously, what happened?

Me: Me actually. It came out accidentally when I had to explain why she no longer has medical power of attorney and Steve still does. That was not a very pleasant conversation.

Love: That explains why she punched out the reporter.

Me: No, she punched out the reporter because he had the audacity to ask her if she only used the EpiPen on Anthony because she didn’t want the company to lose their head of R&D. Slingshot had to use her super speed to keep it from being worse. Thank God nobody thought to slow down the YouTube footage before it was switched out.

Love: Is Slingshot Stark’s assistant?

Me: Yes.

Love: You try to retire for a year and all the codenames are different.

Me: Because there is an all-new squad ran by a completely different Shield. Their team is called Secret Warriors, but Slingshot is on loan until both teams have sufficient numbers to run independently.

Love: I can understand why Pepper was angry. No one wants to find out their boyfriend has moved on to the pinnacle of human perfection.

Me: It wasn’t just finding out that Anthony trusts Nomad more than her or that he was the new boyfriend. She also found out that Coulson and I are also on that list. Because of the situation, I’m the one making all the decisions because Coulson is trying to find out who did this and the Director is still trying to make his way back from Geneva.

Love: How can you be somebody’s medical contact when you’re legally dead?

Me: Don’t ask. Just don’t ask. Also, Anthony never actually told Pepper that Coulson is not dead, so that was just not a good conversation.
Love: I’m glad I’m several thousand miles away, even if I’m dealing with an emotionally distraught Nomad.

Me: Really, just keep Nomad away from the TV and Twitter. 90% of what they’re saying is entirely false. Friday has the kids on total TV blackout because really, they don’t need to hear stuff like that about their favorite uncle.

Love: Because their biological uncle is a bastard and their godfather faked his death and didn’t bother to tell them.

Me: Somebody else needs to be locked in a room with someone else to work out his issues.

Me: Although I’m not sure if I’m leaving condoms or not. It really depends on if I’m watching.

Love: So, is the Tony being poisoned by his enemies angle remotely true?

Me: Wonderful subject change. Do you count it as poisoning if whoever did it intentionally switched out the oil that they fried the pita bread for the appetizer with to something that would make your target swell up like a balloon?

Love: I’m going to count that as a poisoning. Agent M is investigating?

Me: Really don’t call her that. She hates that name as much as the other one which is why her new designate is Agent America.

Me: No, 13 is overseeing the investigation because Agent America has security duty and Slingshot is guarding Pepper. Nobody is questioning why Anthony’s assistant is with her.

Love: I think that’s adding to the speculation. Why would his assistant be with Pepper if he wasn’t on his deathbed?

Me: Probably, but she needs protection. Let’s just say there was a reason why Tony punched out his
The original doctor and leave it at that. The new shield doctors think that they’re going to be able to lift the sedation by late tomorrow. I’ll keep you posted. Keep Nomad in whatever country you’re in.

Love: I really hope Friday’s shipment gets here before I have to knock him out again.

Me: I hope so too.

Love: Love you

Me: Love you too. Stay safe.

To be continued.
Thank you for reading or commenting. You're beautiful and absolutely encouraging. For those of you concerned about Pepper, we will be hearing more about what's going on with her later on but it's time for a Steve moment.

Yes, another interlude. This chapter takes place about 12 hours after the last one. The incident at the party happened less than 24 hours earlier. I promise Tony will be up soon, but this conversation has to happened. I find it deeply ironic that it happens in interlude 13.

Number Unknown: This is your ex-girlfriend's niece. I just want to let you know that your boyfriend is perfectly fine, despite what tabloids are reporting.

Nomad: I'm not allowed to watch the TV reports after I broke a television. Clint says he's sedated though.

Agent 13: But he's breathing on his own. They expect him to be up in the next few hours and I'm sure he will be texting you as soon as your ex-girlfriend gives him back his cell phone.

Nomad: You know about that?

Agent 13: I had to read all the Cuddle Bunny messages because my former employers were sadists. Although it wasn't until recently that I found out Melinda was real and not something created to throw Ross off. Not only that, but she did my paperwork when I joined Shield.

Nomad: I'm really sorry you had to read all those messages. None of the sex stuff was true. Anthony just made that up to make it too uncomfortable for people to read.

Agent 13: It didn't work. Although it is nice to know that my aunt wasn't just your beard.

Nomad: I did care a lot about her. I thought we would get to build something together after.

Agent 13: But then you went into the ice.

Nomad: And the world moved on. Everyone has said that your uncle was a good man, even Anthony.

Agent 13: He was a great grandpa and made up for the fact that my dad was long gone. Granted he died when I was young, but he really did love her. I think a piece of her died when he did. They're buried next to each other.

Nomad: I'm glad.

Nomad: Not that they're both gone, but that they found each other and they're together again.

Agent 13: I understand what you mean. Look, this isn't exactly a social call. I'm investigating what happened at the gala last night and I want to ask you some questions about what happened. You
were talking to Anthony when it happened.

Nomad: This wasn't just an accident, was it?

Agent 13: No. Lab tests are showing that the bottles of canola oil were switched out with sunflower oil including the two bottles that were unopened. The salad dressing was also contaminated with sunflower seed oil as well as the marinade for the main course. Also the peanut butter for the peanut butter tort was contaminated with sunflower butter.

Nomad: So it was deliberate and they were very thorough?

Agent 13: Yes. I just don't think they were expecting the person in the chair next to him to have an EpiPen. Virginia saved his life.

Nomad: I don't know what I can tell you. You have the transcript of our conversation. I wasn't there to keep this from happening.

Agent 13: I have a copy of your conversation last night. That's the only one because Friday did not delete it before I could take a screenshot. However, she refuses to give me access to any of the other conversations. Even Agents Rodriguez and Burton cannot override Friday's programming because apparently she's on probation despite the fact they normally would be able to. We do have the conversations now but they're very heavenly encrypted.

Nomad: And you have nobody that can break the encryption?

Agent 13, Even Agent Fitz can't crack her encryption.

Agent 13: Actually I don't think he really tried.

Nomad: That's because they are friends.

Agent 13: Of course Stark made friends with the tech division.

Nomad: I meant Friday and Agent Fitz.

Agent 13: I'm not surprised. Yet he gave me this phone number where I could contact you.

Nomad: How did he have this number?

Agent 13: Your boyfriend gave it to him in case of an emergency and apparently someone trying to kill him is an emergency.

Nomad: I don't know how I can help. I wasn't there. I should've been there, but I can't be because of that stupid Accord.

Agent 13: Did your boyfriend mention any enemies?

Nomad: Several. Ross, other Ross, Senator Ellen Nadeer, and my ex-boyfriend.

Agent 13: You have an ex-boyfriend?

Nomad: Not really. I slept with Jonathan, a former aide of Sen. Christopher Ward, a few times before I realized he was married and an asshole. He spouts out anti-power people stuff all the time as a paid pundit.

Agent 13: I feel like I didn't know you at all and I lived next-door to you for six months.
Nomad: Spying on me for version of Shield that was really Hydra. I didn't even know your real name at the time.

Agent 13: You have a point. Anything else?

Nomad: His wife was in charge of the event. Maybe even the Foundation. Tony wasn't clear.

Agent 13: And Agent Rodriguez said she gave the caterers a list of all the food allergies to the VIPs.

Nomad: No one's more VIP then Anthony

Agent 13: It's something to look at. She had access. But unless she knew about you sleeping with her husband, not necessarily motive.

Nomad: Clint thinks that this is a trap.

Agent 13: Which is why he shot you with three tranquilizer arrows to keep you from boarding a plane to Canada.

Nomad: I don't even want to know how you know that.

Agent 13: He's right, you can't be here right now. You would put him in more danger by being here.

Nomad: So you believe that someone deliberately targeted Tony to get to me?

Agent 13: It's possible. Even if they don't know you're his boyfriend, you are listed as his health care agent in case he becomes incapacitated.

Nomad: He never told me that, but I'm not surprised. I don't like the idea of them using Tony to get to me.

Agent 13: That may just be a convenient byproduct of someone else's assassination attempt. Chances are they don't know that you are with Tony. Only a handful of people know you're dating. Most of them have a S5 clearance. The Watchdogs despise your boyfriend for reasons outside of you.

Nomad: The feeling is mutual.

Agent 13, I doubt your presence would have changed their plan of attack except they probably would've attacked you as well. Actually, they would've attacked you first.

Nomad: Better me then Anthony. I want to be there. If he wasn't stable, I would be there regardless. Not all of us can let our loved ones die without us.

Agent 13: Obviously Anthony told you what happened when my mom died from his point of view.

Nomad: So, what happened from your point of view?

Agent 13: It's hard to watch someone you love die, especially if they are your entire world. It's even worse when there's nothing at all you can do to stop it from happening. I've done it twice. It doesn't get easier. The first time I wasn't ready for it and trying to prove myself at my new job seemed the best course of action at the time. I don't handle death very well.

Nomad: I don't either. Is he really OK?

Agent 13: Yes, although I know you won't believe me until you can see him for yourself and it's just not safe right now.
Nomad: That really doesn't matter.

Agent 13: I'm aware you don't care about your safety, but you care about his. Don't make the situation more dangerous for him when he can't even defend himself. Right now, your presence would just make him a bigger target.

Nomad: Melinda is watching over him?

Agent 13: Yes.

Agent 13: Do you really love him?

Nomad: Yes I do.

Agent 13: How long?

Nomad: Longer than I realized.

Agent 13: Before or after you kissed me?

Nomad: I realized it afterwards, but I think it happened before. I'm sorry.

Agent 13: No, you're not. Aunt Peggy would be happy that you fell in love again.

Agent 13: I'll have Melinda give you an update later if Stark is not up soon.

Nomad: Thank you. Let me know if you find out anything else.

Agent 13: Someone will. Take care of yourself.

Nomad: You too.

To be continued
Get well cards from the edge 1: Children Are Too Honest

Chapter Notes

Thank you to everybody who read and reviewed the last section. You're all wonderful.

I had the idea to show some of Tony's get well cards/emails, but I couldn't figure out where to put it because I wanted to get to Steve and Tony talking to each other soon. However, the desire to show off more artwork won out in the end. We're doing Lila's card and email first and the others' cards after Tony and Steve get some quality time. It's been a little under two days since the sunflower incident. Both are restless.

Artwork again by the wonderful Misaky0

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Dear Uncle Tony:

Mommy says you're sick and in the hospital because somebody put something in your food and you ended up swelling like a balloon. That sounds scary. Mommy also called the person who put something bad in your food a word I can't repeat.
I hope you feel better soon. I made you a get-well card yesterday morning, but Friday is helping me type you an email too. You’re always checking your phone for messages from Mister Rogers so I thought maybe you would read this first if I sent it as an email.

I miss you. There’s nobody left to really play with me in the tower. Mom is always at the hospital, Con is always playing video games, and Nikki is too little. Kamala can’t even come over because of what ever happened to you Friday and we were supposed to have a sleep over. We’re being babysat by Agent Piper when Ms. Rodriguez is not here. Agent Piper is not fun. She won’t even play hide and seek like Ms. Rodriguez.

When will you be coming home? Friday won't give me an answer and she usually does, especially when you are at board meetings that you don’t like. She won't let us watch TV either. Con said the last time this happened daddy went missing, aliens invaded New York, and Uncle Phil died. I don't really remember what happened. I was only three. Although Mommy said Uncle Phil didn't die. He just had to go into hiding for a while like daddy. Mommy says we might need to go stay with him for a couple of weeks, but I hope not. I like it here. The tower’s more fun than Iowa.

Ms. Pepper is staying at the tower too. She’s nice and reads to me, but she doesn't make the voices like you. She’s also really sad. Even her new boyfriend Mister Robert can’t make her happy. He’s nice. He doesn’t have any horns like you said that he did. He tried to help me with our Barbie Hot Rod, but he’s not as good as you.

Anyway, get better soon and come home. We miss you.

Your Lily Bear

PS: My mom is mad at Mr. Rogers because his doctor told mom that he broke daddy’s jaw when he told him he couldn’t come visit you. Mom is also a mad at dad f or not telling her that. Mom has been mad at dad a lot lately.

xxxxxxx

Hey Lily Bear:

Thank you for the card. It was beautiful. You gave me some ideas for my next suit. I promise to take the card with me when I leave the hospital soon. Ms. Melinda is taking me somewhere where I can just hang out for a few days, but Yo-Yo promised to give you this note.
It's probably best that you're not watching TV. They're saying lots of things that aren't true because Uncle Tony is a celebrity and they feel like they can just make stuff up about us. I'm pretty sure most of what they are saying is not true because your mom gave me your letter in hard copy instead of giving me access to my phone. This makes me sad because I really want to talk to Mister Rogers and you too. Also, my intern may be literally climbing the walls at this point. Someone needs to talk him down. Mr. Rogers probably needs to talk to me too especially if he is hitting your dad. Remember we use our words.

I am OK. Some bad people tried to hurt me, but I'm OK because Ms. Pepper is really smart. It's not the first time and I always manage to bounce back. I'm not going anywhere. Really, if I didn’t get so hurt that time in Afghanistan, I probably wouldn’t have spent so much time in the hospital this time.

As I mentioned earlier, I'm going to be staying someplace safe with Ms. Melinda for a little while so I won’t be coming home right away. Don’t worry, it will be fun. She doesn’t frown all the time. Okay mostly I want to find out what she did with Mister Rogers when they were special friends.

But don’t be sad. I heard that you’re going to go to DC to hang out with your uncle Phil for a couple of days. It should be fun once he explains to your big brother why he had to fake his death like Grandpa Nikki. I asked Yo Yo to give you a Stark Phone Jr with Friday preloaded. If you want to talk to me, she will help you. I’m sure Ms. Melinda will give me my phone back as soon as we get to wherever we’re going.

Be good, baby girl. Listen to the agents. They are there to keep you safe. When I get back we will fix the Barbie Hot Rod together.

PS: Could you not tell anybody anything else I said about Pepper’s new boyfriend? I was being stupid and you shouldn’t repeat things I say when I’m being stupid. I do stupid things a lot. I’m a bad role model.

PSS: Sometimes parents fight but it’s okay. I think your parents will do better once they’re in the same country.

To be continued
So, yes Tony is now up and being relocated. However, he’s being kept away from his precious phone. The horror of having to write a note in hard copy. How long do you think that’s going to last?

Alternative text for the get well card: Lila drew a picture of her favorite ‘uncle’ in full armor with colored pencils, the medium of choice for all seven-year-olds. The figure is surrounded by the words get well soon. She made it the morning after Tony ended up in the hospital. Her baby brother helped.
Anthony: So I heard that Clint had to tranquilize you twice to keep you from visiting. I'm flattered that it requires tranquilizers to keep you away from me although breaking peoples jaws is not cool.

Nomad: Using Tranquilizer knock out darts on me was also not cool. I don’t like the thought of you being hurt and alone and I may have reacted accordingly.

Nomad: At least that's what he had to use before the ICERs arrived. We now know it takes three darts to knock me out, but only one ICER round. If I was anyone else, I wouldn't be able to sit down for a week.

Anthony: I am really looking forward to testing out the healing powers of your ass. Oh, the things I want to do. How do you feel about whips and chains? I assume you don’t have any lubricant allergies?

Nomad: Are you up to actually doing any of those things?

Anthony: Little Anthony is always up for you, quite literally. Every other part of my anatomy, not so much. They're a little worried about me over exerting my heart due to my previous 'condition'. I have a stress test in an hour. Dr. Simmons will not let me get out of it. She’s a little terrifying.

Nomad: You are still at the hospital? I’m surprised. You hate hospitals.
Anthony: Sort of, but not really. I am at an undisclosed location with medical care. I signed myself out AMA and then allowed Agent Agent to hide me someplace secluded.

Anthony: Although not secluded enough for you to be able to visit. I'm disappointed that Shield’s budget has gone down so dramatically that they can't even afford a good safe house in the Caribbean.

Nomad: That's going to make your stocks go down, isn’t it? I haven’t seen the news since Ms. Potts tried to punch out the reporter. Actually, I’m not allowed to. Therapist orders. I’m actually surprised she’s letting me talk to you.

Anthony: I know. After Lily bear tipped me off, Laura told me about your reaction and the fact you are spending quality time with your therapist for a little while. Also, our little red mystic sent pictures through her not-a-boyfriend.

Anthony: The stock prices have kind of been wacky on that front, in part because of the incident. Attempted murder of a majority shareholder/Head of the board of directors/Head of R&D usually sends stocks down unless he is a complete and utterly incompetent asshole. I think I'm at least half competent, even if I really am an asshole.

Anthony: However, Pepper saving my life, made them go up. Apparently, if she's willing to save my life, that means that things didn’t fall apart because I did something ridiculously stupid like screw someone else while we were still together. That means she is not likely to jump ship anytime soon and that puts everybody’s minds at ease because nobody wants me as CEO of my company ever again, despite some of our recent diversification.

Nomad: No, you just happened to call out my name when climaxing. I haven’t been in that many relationships, but I don’t think that’s okay.

Anthony: Apparently, Freudian slips are forgivable. The footage of her visiting me in the hospital also helped until she punched out the reporter. That made the stocks go down. I don’t care because Pepper brought chocolates. The good ones.

Nomad: That was nice.

Anthony: She also told me that she really doesn't want me to die anytime soon before leaving me to
rest. There was also hugging and maybe some crying.

Nomad: I’m glad you guys fixed things. Or rather, that you’re really trying to fix things.

Anthony: I am too. I just wish it didn’t take me practically dying for things to get better.

Nomad: But you two are making progress and that’s what matters.

Anthony: Of course the tabloids don’t know about that, so that did not affect the stock and I’m sure the board of directors are so sad about that. Although I’m sure they’re happy that me signing myself out AMA also made the stocks go up five points because apparently I must be okay if I’m being reckless. I’m rolling my eyes.

Nomad: So am I. What will happen when they find out you’re recovering under government protection?

Anthony: Really, I don’t care about the stocks. Everything will probably go down 10 points unless they were convinced I was making weapons for the government again. We both know proverbial hell will freeze over before then.

Nomad: But you are working on something?

Anthony: Virtual reality training exercise. Dr. Monkey Lover refers to it as the ‘framework’ so we don’t get sued by the copyright holders of the Matrix. But the concept is similar-ish, except our goal is to let people beat the hell out of each other without medical visits.

Nomad: That's a movie right?

Anthony: The Matrix is not on your list?

Nomad: I don't think I like Reeves very much except for maybe John Wick.

Anthony: That makes complete sense in a Steve sort of way. Anyway the idea of the project is to
make you feel everything in the virtual reality environment as if you were doing it in real life. That way you can improve your training technique without the risk of hospitalization or taking out half your garage.

Nomad: Which apparently is what you keep doing to various Shield tactical teams.

Anthony: It's why I feel like I have to help on the project.

Nomad: When did you take out part of the garage?

Anthony: During development of the Mark II, I think. I may have done something like this more than once. This is why a virtual training module is practical.

Anthony: Also it works nicely with my plans to have virtual reality sex with you as soon as possible. There’s no need for a harness or remote sex toys, it will be like you are really there with May. I mean, I was halfway there with the project I was working on last spring, but this will have more practical applications then trying to work through my trauma. Although, I’ve always been a proponent of orgasm therapy.

Nomad: I have to remind myself that if you’re cracking sex jokes, you must really be okay.

Anthony: If I have a pulse, I’m up to making dirty jokes about you. Or expressing my desire to do dirty things to you. Although if you want to send me an NC-17 get well card feel free.

Nomad: Be serious

Anthony: I’m being completely serious. I could use a good get well card. Lily bear’s card was lovely, but the board of directors sent me a get well basket that contained trail mix cookies that were chop full of sunflower seeds..

Nomad: You didn’t eat any of them?
Anthony: No. Actually, I think my assistant burned them and the stupid card. They didn’t even have the decency to have an intern sign it. Also, if they’re sending out everybody a card that reads, “we’re sorry for your illness or incapacitation, and cannot wait until you are able to be a productive member of the SI family again”, we are seriously fucked as a company.

Anthony: After that, Laura said I couldn’t read anymore messages until I’m completely released from medical care. Although she would let all the important people know that I’m alive and kicking.

Nomad: Good.

Anthony: I know you’re scared, but I am as OK as I can be after an assassination attempt. And it wasn't even a good assassination attempt. It was death by appetizer.

Nomad: Sharon said they put sunflower in everything.

Anthony: When did you talk to Sharon?

Nomad: She interviewed me for the investigation. Your Dr. Monkey Lover gave her my emergency contact information.

Anthony: That does not make it better. I would be forever shamed if I survived a nuclear warhead unscathed only to get taken down by fried pita bread and chocolate peanut butter cup tort.

Nomad: You did have a lot of physical damage after your fight with a nuclear warhead. I still couldn’t get you to stay in medical for more than five minutes.

Anthony: I don’t like doctors or being handed things. It’s my thing. Really, just be glad I haven’t ran out on Dr. Suarez yet. We have a session later today to discuss my latest near death experience. I really hope I don’t have nightmares about death by sunflower seed now.

Nomad: Are you still having nightmares about some of your previous experiences?

Anthony: How did you even know about that?
Nomad: We did share a room a couple of times during the great Hydra hunt.

Anthony: I still have dreams about dying, just not like that anymore. In my new dreams, I'm in the car with my parents when you know what happens. I usually get to watch both of them die before I wake up.

Nomad: I'm sorry.

Anthony: It's not your fault. And if you say it's your fault because of the train incident, I am going to hop into a suit just so I can smack you upside the head.

Nomad: Hey, why haven't you visited me in the suit yet?

Anthony: Tracking.

Nomad: I doubt the director will report you. Plus, I know, your suits have stealth mode.

Anthony: I don't want to lead Ross or anyone else to you. One popular theory is that Ross paid someone to poison me to get you to come out of hiding. I won’t put you at risk.

Nomad: That only works if he knows we have been in contact. You said that you cover your tracks well and Sharon said she couldn’t even get Friday to give her access to the real transcripts for the investigation, even when Laura tried to authorize.

Anthony: Because Friday earned herself off of probation by doing that. Also, despite how well I have covered up our electronic dating, it is impossible not to leave a small electronic breadcrumb trail. A few things were left behind, such as it being on public record that you are allowed to make healthcare decisions for me in the event of my incapacitation.

Nomad: I’m glad that you trust me like that, but you’re going to have to change that until I’m back.

Anthony: I know that, especially because that’s how Pepper found out that we’re together.
Nomad: I have a feeling that wasn’t a pleasant conversation.

Anthony: We haven’t had that conversation yet. Probably because the doctors told her not to upset me. I’m sure it’s coming soon though.

Nomad: Probably. That’s not the only thing you’re worried about, is it?

Anthony: OK, so do you remember when I told you about Ross taking Laura and Agent 13 helping me get her back?

Nomad: Yes.

Anthony: So the angle that we used to help agent 13 infiltrate the other side was her being mad at me for stealing her boyfriend.

Nomad: Clint told me. Although that doesn’t automatically mean that they’ll assume I was her boyfriend.

Anthony: I didn't do as good of a job as I thought I did getting rid of the footage of your brief romantic infatuation with her. I did actually scorch the earth regarding the security footage of you two making out, but I didn't think that I needed to get rid of the footage of you and 13 all cozy at the hotel post funeral. That may be enough for Ross to put two into together.

Nomad: Only if he accepts the fact that I'm not heterosexual. You said that's pretty unlikely.

Anthony: That was before I almost got killed by fried bread. I'm not going to risk it. You're very important to me. As much as I need to touch you, keeping you safe is more important. Besides I'm still going to that South African environmental conference in a couple of weeks.

Nomad: Will you be allowed to travel by then?

Anthony: Well, I'll be on the plane regardless. Pepper wants me to put in more public appearances
Nomad: Did she say that before or after the last appearance almost got you killed?

Anthony: Before, but they could've tried the sunflower oil stunt anywhere. I eat out a lot because cooking takes too much time when I do actually remember to eat something. I’m not going to stop living my life.

Nomad: I don’t expect you to. I just want you to be careful.

Anthony: We’re taking necessary precautions. Director Snookums is making my designated bodyguard test my food before I eat it. The good news is Dr. Monkey Lover managed to create a working tricorder.

Anthony: BTW that is a handheld device that actually scans for allergens in my food.

Nomad: Tricorders are a Star Trek thing?

Anthony: Yay, your pop culture knowledge is almost getting to normal levels. Soon people will be completely unaware that you spent 70 years in the ice.

Nomad: I'm glad that you're better.

Anthony: We're going to have that date soon.

Nomad: As soon as you're home.

Anthony: I can’t wait.

To be continued
AMA: Against Medical Advice. I just realized I forgot to define this last time that acronym came up.

Yes, the inappropriate Board of Directors gift was inspired by episode 1.17 of This Is Us.
Chapter Notes

Thank you to everybody who read or reviewed the last chapter. You're all wonderful.

This conversation takes place a few moments after the last one.

Interlude 14: The Follow-Up.

Rogers: Is Anthony OK?

Me: You know I really wish you would email me for other reasons besides checking up on your boyfriend. Especially after you broke my husband’s jaw.

Rogers: Outside of Anthony, I was instructed to only communicate in an emergency.

Me: And apparently confirming that Anthony is OK after you talk to him is considered an emergency to you?

Me: Also, and apology text message would have been nice.

Rogers: Well there was that time that Tony covered up the fact that he was dying so yes, confirmation is important.

Rogers: I realize that I reacted badly but your husband did shoot me with knockout darts. I’m sorry I shot your husband.

Me: I will give you that one. And I understand the situation. He is OK though, so please don’t hit my husband again.
Rogers: How OK is he really?

Me: He is resting comfortably in an undisclosed location as he works with Dr. Fitz’s training program simulation, virtually of course. Although, I am at another undisclosed location with the kids undergoing agent training.

Me: Now that I'm going through agent training, I'm looking forward to a version that will not result in me being covered and bruises and in too much pain to play with Lily and Nikki.

Rogers: That's good.

Rogers: Not that you're sore after training, but that Anthony is up and about and working. Why are you going through agent training?

Me: Because I am the active caseworker for four prepubescent individuals with powers. Somehow, I ended up with a 15-year-old and a five-year-old who can climb walls. Plus, Baby Queens’ mom wants to keep it from her ex-Shield husband and Queens Senior has yet to grasp the concept of letting the grownups deal with the degenerate psychopaths with powers. I need to be able to hold my own in this situation.

Me: Queens Senior is also being extra reckless because of the Tony situation. The media made it worse than what it was and he’s reacting accordingly. I tried to tell him that Tony is okay but he doesn’t want to believe me.

Rogers: More YouTube video featuring Queens Senior showing off his powers?

Me: Yes. At least, Ms. Marvelous is only writing slightly inappropriate for an 11-year-old stories about you in your Captain America persona and Tony making up after Tony’s near death experience.

Me: I tried to tell him that there will be more time to save the world when he's an adult. That he needs to train and study right now, but really, I should know that he is going to do what he wants anyway because when you’re 15, you think you know better than everyone else. I have pre-teens and I know it just goes downhill from here. Soon they become 46 and do even more ridiculous shit.
Rogers: I am sure you have some stories about Clint to tell me.

Me: Tons, but this isn’t the time or place. How are you doing now that you’re no longer hitting my husband?

Rogers: I'm fine. I wasn't the one who almost died due to a hit. I wasn't the one who was used as bait.

Me: But you weren’t necessarily the one who they were trying to manipulate into coming back.

Rogers: What do you mean by possibly?

Me: We don't have any evidence for sure that was their plan. Ross is closing his inner circle off. Also, any chatter we picked up occurred after-the-fact. Maybe they were hoping that some of the underground Avengers would show up just to spit on Tony’s coffin, but Ross was not the one who pulled the metaphorical trigger.

Rogers: That just makes it worse.

Me: Your therapist is working on you blaming yourself for things that you can't control? Along with your violence control issues. She really needs to address that.

Rogers: Yes, but we've mostly been concentrating on the train incident.

Me: Well the fact that you referred to it as just the ‘train incident’ is progress.

Rogers: It was easier when I was there. If Tony did stupid things, I could make sure that he didn't end up dead. Now I can't watch his back because I'm here and I'm here because of my own choices and I don't want to be away from him. It seemed like the right choice at the time, but I don’t know anymore.

Me: It's hard not being there when your loved one is risking their life for humanity. I was a wreck when Coulson called me and told me that my husband was compromised and that I couldn't let him near the kids if he showed up. It got worse when I found out Coulson died.
Rogers: I'm afraid of that phone call. If I get it right now, it really will be my fault because I'm not there.

Me: The only person responsible for what happened is the person who switched out every single oil used at the party with sunflower oil and stuffed sunflower into anything else they could. They even contaminated the olive oil used in the dressing for the salad.

Rogers: I know. Sharon told me. Do you know if she has any leads?

Me: Nothing I can talk about.

Me: The only way you're going to be able to keep Anthony 100% safe is wrap him up in bubble wrap and lock him away. As somebody who tried that with their first kid, it doesn't work. I think that piece of advice also applies to boyfriends.

Rogers: I don't think Tony would do good with forced captivity. Last time it happened, he built a metal suit out of a box of scraps.

Me: His handler has asked me twice to come get him and it's been less than 24 hours. The sooner Sharon finds out who's trying to kill him the better for all of us.

Rogers: I guess that means he really is OK.

Me: But you're not going to believe me until you see him for yourself, but you cannot show up uninvited. They're working on options to get you back. Let them do their job so it's permanent.

Rogers: If I just sign the Accords, I could come back and hold Tony’s hand through this. Instead of being thousands of miles away, feeling helpless.

Me: No, you couldn't. It's not that simple anymore.

Rogers: Was it ever simple?
Me: Probably not. But now the Secretary is pissed off that you broke everybody out of the Raft. Granted it was during a state of emergency and the Avengers were the backup plan in case the Hydra demigod managed to transform most of Europe into mind controlled zombies. However, Ross doesn't know the General was the one that arranged for the Raft break in so you get the blame.

Rogers: So, if I step foot on American soil right now, I'll be arrested even if I agreed to go with the Accords?

Me: Yes. Although it will probably be the military who picks you up.

Rogers: Wonderful.

Me: Mostly I think that's because they want to study you to replicate the serum. Tony picked up some chatter about a project codename patriot. He thinks they're trying to make another Captain America. It would be easier if you were in their clutches to study and Tony is concerned about that.

Rogers: I'm not even shocked. That was what I was worried about with the Accords. There's too much language in there that makes it seem like people with powers are government property. I'm nobody's lab experiment. I don't want anyone else to become that either.

Me: New Shield is trying to keep it from being that way. I think they will succeed.

Me: You didn't tell Tony about that worry, did you?

Rogers: In hindsight, I'm realizing that I didn't tell Tony a lot of things that I needed to. Maybe Siberia would not have happened if I told him all of the reasons why I was uncomfortable with the Accords.

Me: I will tell you firsthand that the key to a healthy marriage is communication. I don't think we would've survived as long as we have without it, especially in light of my ongoing alcoholism recovery. I thought the same thing.

Rogers: I realize that now. It's just difficult when our communication is limited.
Me: It will get better and Tony hopes to meet up with you in Johannesburg soon.

Rogers: I’m looking forward to that.

Me: I’m sure you are. Only four weeks to go.

Rogers: I’ll be counting the days.

Me: I understand. Tell my wayward spouse that I love him and miss him greatly, even if the kids are upset that he’s going to miss their first day of school next week. If he’s talking to you again.

Rogers: Will do.

To be continued
Thank you to everyone who read or reviewed the last chapter. This chapter takes place about two days after the last one. Hooray, more Tony and Steve time.

Also, apparently there are a few of you who are still unhappy with my decision to have Steve incapacitated in interlude 11 to keep him from walking headfirst into a trap that would've got him at best kidnapped and turned into a government science experiment and at worst killed. I stand by my creative choice. I have several family members with mental illness and I have been in a position where I've had to make a choice about how far I would go to keep this family member from hurting themselves or others. The choices are never easy but I made them because they were necessary.

The clues have been subtle, but Steve is not 100% okay as evident by the fact that his therapist asked Shield/Dr. Simmons to work on antidepressants that his body wouldn’t metabolize immediately. The PTSD is just the tip of the iceberg here. Steve’s reaction to the assassination attempt was more than just a boyfriend wanting to be with his lover and we will explore that as we continue. Clint and May made a very hard choice, but they made it out of love and compassion, not control or malice.

Anthony: I hate lying low. My cell signal sucks and there’s no good take out available. Thank god Jarvis showed me how to cook the basics. Otherwise we would be completely screwed. Your ex can burn water literally.

Nomad: Are you sure you can cook because I remember you blowing up a microwave that one time.

Anthony: Funny.

Nomad: I try.

Anthony: I only have your ex-girlfriend for company at the moment and she refuses to give me any juicy details about your sordid sexual affair. I mean if we're going to be stuck together for an undetermined amount of time with only the framework project for me to work on, I need something juicy.
Nomad: You’re with Melinda? You’re asking her questions about our relationship? Tony! Seriously!

Anthony: You’re getting better at the language of text messages. She’s my bodyguard, even though I have a suit with me, that I’m not allowed to use because I’m supposed to be being good to my heart. She did bring the shield with her just in case.

Anthony: Although she refuses to tell me if she’s actually planning to use her new tactical suit to seduce Agent Agent. I gave her a star and everything. I mean it's not as tight as what Agent Agent designed for you, but it's befitting Agent America.

Nomad: I can understand why she didn't want to answer that question. What else did you ask her, and how inappropriate was it?

Anthony: Nothing horribly dirty, just if you really were a commando type of guy. I may have also inquired about the existence of a sex tape. I feel like you two would've been hot together, just by the way she can kick my ass.

Nomad: Tony!

Anthony: I also may have asked if you like handcuffs and D/s play.

Nomad: Oh God. Really, Tony?

Anthony: I also asked if you have a position preference. She definitely seems like a Dom.

Nomad: How would you feel if I asked your ex-girlfriend a question like that?

Anthony: I would be worried for your personal safety, mostly because I really haven’t talk with Pepper since I left the hospital. It wouldn't go that far because you would already know that I'm a switch and I prefer scarves because they don't cause Afghanistan flashbacks.

Nomad: Well I'm worried for your personal safety after that question. I'm surprised you're still alive.
Anthony: She mostly glared and then asked Dr. Monkey Lover to send me another project. I'm trying to see if I can put a repulsor into Agent Agent's prosthetic.

Nomad: Really?

Anthony: I really would not like him to die again. The energy shield can only do so much and he's already lost a hand. He needs all the help he can get.

Nomad: You really do not do well with boredom?

Anthony: Not at all. To the point I may have taken a peek at Shield’s servers.

Nomad: Didn't we have a talk about this before? No hacking Shield.

Anthony: Hey, I'm doing Director Snookums a favor. I need to make sure that neither Watch Dogs Hydra remnants nor former agents trying to atone for their boyfriend’s death by noble suicide are in his system. I'm really doing a service.

Nomad: I'm not sure he sees it that way.

Anthony: The anti-hacking protocol did not go up so they're probably cool with it. They have much better security then the ATCU.

Nomad: What are you looking for?

Anthony: Anything related to who tried to kill me?

Nomad: Any suspects?

Anthony: Several. None of which I am mentioning now.
Nomad: That's probably best.

Anthony: I did find Agent Carter's interview with you. The unredacted version.

Nomad: What did they cut out in the redacted version?

Anthony: Anything related to me trolling Ross with fake porn messages, your actual identity, and the fact that you're in love with me. I don't know if I should be flattered that you told Sharon that before me or really pissed off. It's a close race.

Nomad: I found out you were in love with me by reading your therapy letters.

Anthony: That was different. Also, I thought we were pretending that I did not say whatever I said in the letters.

Nomad: You've told me that you love me twice since then.

Anthony: Point.

Nomad: It's true though.

Anthony: That I slipped up and said that I loved you?

Nomad: That I'm in love with you. You almost dying scared the hell out of me. I don't think I was ready to admit it to myself until I saw pictures of you receiving CPR on Twitter. I don't even remember everything that happened after I realized that. I kind of lost it.

Anthony: So it only took me to die a little bit for you to figure it out. Yeah, I'm still not sure how to take that.

Nomad: You died?
Anthony: Maybe possibly for a minute I wasn't breathing and my heart stopped.

Nomad: So you were dead for a minute? Sharon never mentioned that.

Anthony: Maybe for a few seconds. They had my airways open before they got me into the ambulance. CPR is awesome.

Nomad: I can't believe she lied to me.

Anthony: She introduced herself to you as Kate the unassuming nurse and not as your ex-girlfriend’s sort of granddaughter. Lying to you was the beginning of your relationship. More lies should not surprise you.

Nomad: That does not make it right.

Anthony: Calm down snuggle bunny. She was trying to keep you from blowing your cover and getting arrested, kidnapped, and/or shot in the head when you were being irrational/in the middle of a rage blackout. It's not a big thing.

Anthony: It's not even the first time I've been clinically dead. Yancey said it happened a couple of times when they were putting in my battery. This was a lot better than then.

Nomad: Battery???

Anthony: Never did read that Afghanistan file, did you?

Nomad: It felt like an invasion of your privacy.

Anthony: Thank you, maybe. I feel like maybe if you had read it, you would've got me better and we wouldn't be separated by thousands of miles hiding out from lots of people who probably want to kill us.

Anthony: But you'll be going home soon. Either when they catch the bad guys or when Dr.
Simmons decides that I'm healthy enough to defend myself.

Nomad: Is she there too?

Anthony: Not since we moved locations. She's monitoring me virtually. I told you Monkey Lover created a tricorder for virtual monitoring. I had something like that in the suit, but this thing is housed in the body of an iPhone.

Anthony: that makes me sad because they couldn't have at least used a Stark device, but Shield are Apple people.

Nomad: Probably because it would be easier for you to hack into their systems if they were using Stark tech.

Anthony: You know me so well Sugarplum.

Anthony: Hey, I need to go. We have visitors. Not dangerous visitors. Well, she’s not dangerous to me, but you can never tell the spiders.

Nomad: Is Ms. Rushman there?

Anthony: I cannot confirm or deny that, but this individual did refer to us both as shithead morons in Russian.

Nomad: Tell her I miss her. Love you.

Anthony: I know.

Nomad: Star Wars???

Anthony: Yes. You can talk to your boyfriend when I’m done. I can’t believe it took you two this long. You cost me 20 bucks.
Chapter End Notes

So who sent that last text message?
Agent M: Just so you know your sister stopped by.

Me: She did? Is she OK?

Agent M: Yes. She's fine. She set up a dance studio in Georgia.

Me: I think it’s best if I don’t know if that’s the state or the country.
Agent M: She didn’t specify.

Me: I’m not surprised. You didn't arrest her, did you?

Agent M: We are under a different protocol for dealing with her then Liberty, because she is actually under the Accords and didn’t liberate several enhanced people from a secure facility.

Me: Also, the US military doesn’t want to run millions of tests on her so they can make more super soldiers.

Agent M: I cannot confirm that.

Me: Also at this point I think the Liberty Protocol is just leave him and Red Malibu in a room so they can fuck it out, the SHIELD protocol anyway. Really, we should have done that four months ago.

Agent M: I have no comments on that.

Me: I assume that she made contact for a reason?

Agent M: Despite all indications otherwise, she doesn't want Red Malibu dead and had some Intel about what happened that required in person contact.

Me: None of which you can tell me about.

Agent M: Not until after we move on it and then it will be all over the news. Give us about 36 hours.

Me: This is going to involve the senator being arrested, isn’t it?

Agent M: I can’t say.
Me: Speaking of things that you can’t or won’t talk about, why the radio silence after the fall? I would’ve liked to have known you were still alive before I got the baby blanket.

Agent M: Safety. I was being hunted by the government and Hydra.

Me: I get that considering where I am now but I have still made contact a few times with Linda. What about the Heart?

Agent M: Maria was our contact to the Avengers. If she felt you had a need to know, she would’ve told you. She was in contact with Coulson the entire year you were searching for Hydra bases.

Me: Now I know where our Intel came from.

Agent M: Shield’s 616 died getting the information about the scepter’s location.

Me: That plan was awesome. Were you responsible for the helicarrier too?

Agent M: Yes.

Me: I still should’ve been told.

Agent M: It was too dangerous, especially after Hydra came out of the shadows.

Me: But they’re gone now.

Agent M: Mostly. You know your children are taking this better than you?

Me: Because they’re children. They bounce back after anything. Where are my kids right now? I know they’re not at the tower through various tabloid reports. Apparently Stark broke up with my wife after his near-death experience for you.
Agent M: I despise Christina Everhart.

Me: Me too. I can’t wait to see the look on her face when she finds out Tony’s dating Captain America – the other Captain America. Although, you’re technically Agent America. I guess.

Agent M: Because the Heart found it sacrilegious for another person to take up the exact title.

Me: Of course, he did. There’s not a bigger fan boy than him.

Agent M: Your children are fine. They’re with my protégé. They are staying at the Playground for a while. Hopefully we will be done with this mess before school starts.

Me: Why do I have a feeling that’s not the name of an amusement park?

Agent M: New HQ

Me: Were there threats made against my kids?

Agent M: At the very least, S tried to use the attack against Red Malibu to draw out Liberty and other underground Avengers. If something like that happened to your children, no tranquilizer dart would keep you away.

Me: Damn right. The darts barely worked on Liberty. They just stopped him long enough for him to start thinking like the great military strategist he is, instead of a panicky boyfriend.

Me: I shouldn't have tried to bring kids into this.

Agent M: You didn’t. S did.

Me: I brought them into a world of spies and craziness the moment they were created. I tried to keep them out of this, but they’re in the crosshairs again and I can’t even be there to keep them safe. I need to be there and, unlike some people, I can’t shrink myself and hide in my daughter’s dollhouse.
Agent M: Do I want to know?

Me: No

Agent M: There are ways to get you back.

Me: I’m not signing the Accords.

Agent M: You don’t have to because you’re not enhanced or gifted. I didn’t and I have the Captain America shield resting next to me right now.

Me: You are now a member of the US government. Stark had to sign that thing and he is neither enhanced nor gifted.

Agent M: Technically, he’s enhanced. We can say that you were the Shield liaison to the Avengers and therefore not under UN jurisdiction. You would be free to come back.

Me: I’m not going back to Shield. I’m not even that happy that you somehow convinced Linda to join.

Agent M: We need her. Five-year-olds are literally waking up with superpowers due to chemically contaminated spiders. I don’t want Bahrain to happen again. With Laura’s help, I think we can avoid that situation again.

Me: You never really leave, do you?

Agent M: Not until death.

Me: And apparently, that doesn’t even stick.

Agent M: That was our former boss’s decision. I didn’t know until it was done. But I’m not mad that
he’s back, just furious about what it did to him.

Me: Love makes you make questionable decisions sometimes. Get me back there and in a position where Ross can’t use my kids or my wife against me.

Agent M: We will work on it.

Me: Good. My sister really is okay?

Agent M: Yes. I’ll keep you posted.

To be continued

Chapter End Notes

Continuity note for non-AOS viewers: Shortly before Tony was kidnapped in Afghanistan, Agents May and Coulson were on a mission in Bahrain that went south quickly and resulted in the death of a young inhuman girl. This is her biggest regret. (See AOS episode 2.17 for details.) Agent May develop severe PTSD, which resulted in her leaving her husband and fieldwork. But she came back eventually. So obviously children with powers like Peter, Kamala, and Miles are going to concern her or more accurately, young children not being able to control their powers concerns her. (Yes, Miles Morales is our five-year-old who has developed spider powers.)
HSBF: So I just saw my “ex-boyfriend” dragged out of his house in handcuffs by the FBI on six different news channels. The words collusion, Stark Industries, and attempted murder were also on screen. Is there something you need to tell me?

Me: Good to know you got the new TV. Did they show Agent 13 as being the one dragging him out in handcuffs? She really enjoyed that. That’s my new moment of Zen.

HSBF: I could tell by the almost smile.

Me: Also if you kept watching you would notice that his wife and now former head of the Jarvis Foundation was also dragged out in handcuffs by Carter, Jr. She would be the one responsible for at least the embezzlement portion of the news ticker.

HSBF: Why? She didn't give your allergy information to the Watchdogs or something like that? Why would she do that?
Me: No, she did her own dirty work. It helped that she hired her sister as the caterer and her brother-in-law’s friend or something is an emergency room physician at the trauma center closest to the banquet. That way if the plan failed spectacularly, he could just choke me with a pillow. I’m not sure if his arrest actually made the news. Snookums is trying to keep it quiet.

HSBF: Oh God. So they really think it’s her?

Me: Yes, along with her spouse for the attempted murder part anyway. It’s a mess and the agents are still trying to piece everything together.

HSBF: Why did she and her various family members try to kill you?

Me: So in addition to making sure some sunflower was in every single entrée for the dinner, she was also caught moving money from the foundation to various banks in Russia. The same banks that have ties to the Watchdogs.

HSBF: What?

Me: I’m getting ahead of myself. Let’s backup to before the incident. Sky Quake tipped off Yo-Yo about three days before the gala that somebody connected to SI was making nice with the Watchdogs. She uncovered some odd transactions between an SI server and various banks, but no idea who was in bed with them. The whole thing was enough to make us cautious.

HSBF: Was that why so many agents were with you?

Me: Kind of. Agent Agent was worried about an attack. There were credible threats made. However, we all assumed they would go in guns blazing in grand super villain fashion, not take advantage of my food allergies. But then again maybe they were taking their cues from the great Hydra wedding fiasco of 2014.

HSBF: That thing a few years ago where people turned to stone at a military wedding?

Me: Sort of.
HSBF: That still doesn't explain why the husband-and-wife team tried to kill you.

Me: And their extended family.

Me: The most popular theory is that Mrs. Windom-West holds the same very anti inhuman beliefs as her spouse and did not want to be part of a charity that actually supports inhuman rights. Instead of resigning like a sane person, she believed that my demise would keep that from happening. Or maybe that was what her husband thought. They’re still trying to figure that part out.

HSBF: What is wrong with some people?

Me: I’m sure it’s a mixture of cognitive bias and extreme stupidity. Apparently, neither she nor her spouse realized that would just make the situation worse because most of my wealth would be going to various charity and trusts after my demise, one of which would support the Avengers and another for the Enhanced Person Defense Fund.

HSBF: I don’t want to think about that possibility. I’d rather have you around. You are more important than money.

Me: That's sweet. But it is good to have a plan in place, well a better one than when I was giving my art to the Boy Scouts.

HSBF: I heard about that. Please don’t do something like that again.

Me: I’ll try.

Me: Sharon has another theory. She believes his wife found out that her husband fucked an Avenger, but didn’t know exactly which one. Since I am the only one that’s openly bi, I became the lucky winner. She conveniently forgot about Scarlet and the spider.

HSBF: So it is really my fault for having god awful taste in men?

Me: I wouldn't say god awful taste. I'm not that horrible, now that I’ve stopped making weapons of mass destruction. Okay there was that murder bot snafu, but we mostly dealt with it. Okay, maybe
you’re right.

HSBF: Seriously, Tony!

Me: Agent has a different theory. He believes Mrs. Windom-West wasn't happy that I was bringing someone else on to oversee the SI charity foundations and not just because that person was my new BF. No one knew that was going to be a name only thing, so Agent thinks that was what scared her into taking drastic/homicidal action.

Me: I'm sure the forensic accountants that I just hired are going to discover all sorts of fun and possibly illegal discrepancies. They’ve already found a few, considering the indictment.

HSBF: So it was my fault?

Me: We’ve talked about this. Do not take responsibility for the stupidity of others. I’m stupid enough for both of us. This one’s on me.

HSBF: How are you blaming yourself for this?

Me: I have a team of people who keep a watch on how money moves at SI after the ‘business partners stabbing me in the back via kidnapping’ fiasco because I’m not going through that again. However, I may have been slightly too trusting when it comes to the foundations and did not have the same things in place. We didn't even know to start looking at Windom West until Clint’s sister showed up a couple of days ago.

HSBF: I am happy she was able to help.

Me: I'm just happy she was willing to help.

HSBF: Is she OK?

Me: Yes, she settled. She even managed to start her own business. She was also upset that she had to cancel the date to make her little visit. Apparently she’s given up on my science bro ever coming back, but it’s probably for the best that she is moving on.
HSBF: Probably. So she's retiring?

Me: By spy standards, but maybe just for the moment. She is on standby like the Bulletproof Pacifists.

HSBF: She's only in her 30s. That is really not a retirement age.

Me: Just like you're only in your 30s.

HSBF: ???

Me: I'm not answering that one. You have mentioned before that you don’t want to know things that I discovered from unauthorized access.

HSBF: That’s probably for the best. Now that the arrests have been made does that mean that you get to go home?

Me: Yes. The weeks before South Africa are going to be total chaos, so I need as much time as possible to prepare. In addition to this mess, I have to clean house at the foundations. That’s going to be so much fun.

HSBF: I’m sure not all of them were corrupt. Deanna was great. She did really good work coordinating all of our children’s hospital visits.

Me: And you were the one who turned a Twitter fight about the Super Bowl with a celebrity into a half million dollar fundraising activity.

HSBF: That’s because Chris was really nice.

Me: Despite what you said about his team. I also have 200 messages to respond to. I hate when email piles up.
HSBF: Can't your assistant cover them?

Me: She did. Those are the ones I need to at least read. I'll probably only respond to a few. I miss the old days when I paid people to read the boring stuff for me.

HSBF: Does this mean that you're not going to have time for our movie date night?

Me: I'm always going to make time.

Me: Okay Agent America just called me “大愚弱智”. So it's probably time for me to go.

HSBF: What does that even mean?

Me: I'm sure it's a Chinese curse word. Friday can render the word in a text message, but will not tell me a definition.

HSBF: Possibly. Text me when you get home.

Me: Will do, Gumdrop.

To be continued

Chapter End Notes

You may choose your own Chris except for Chris Pine, who doesn’t do Twitter. Sad panda
(My beta will confirm that I wrote this chapter long before Chris Pine pointed out the Chris problem on SNL)
“大愚弱智” means “that someone acts like he's very smart, but in fact is an idiot.” I would like to thank KayKIMO who helped me with the word and definition.
Chapter Notes

Thank you to everybody who read or reviewed the last chapter. You are all fabulous. For those that were confused in the last chapter, “Clint’s sister” is code for Natasha. She did consider herself Aunt Natasha to the kids.

This story is officially a year old. If you go by chapters, this is the longest story I’ve ever done. Although by word count, it’s not even close. A hundred thousand plus words is pretty normal for me. To celebrate. You get an art chapter.

For those of you reading this on fanfiction dot net, you’re going to want to check out Tumblr or the version of this story on Archive of Our Own to see the art by Misaky0. However, alternative text below.

Cover Image: Steve and Tony naked on Tony’s bed. Strategically placed legs obscuring genitalia.
Dear Tony,

I miss you so much. I don’t think there’s enough space inside of this card to say everything that I need to say, but I’m going to try. I hate being away from you and that was before you almost got killed. I hate even more that it’s my own fault. If I had made different choices, maybe you wouldn’t have been so vulnerable. I broke a television set and Clint’s jaw when reports of you flatlining were made. I’m sure you’re aware, I had to be tranquilized. I don’t want to be without you.

My heart dropped to my stomach when Sharon told me what happened. Just the thought of losing you makes me sick. I don’t want to be without you. I’m not sure I can survive without you. I can’t even go a week without talking to you.

All of this made me realize that I am head over feet in love with you. I don’t know when it happened, but it did. I don’t even think it really was one moment. This had to be building for a while. It just took the thought of losing you to make me realize how important you are. I didn’t even get it in Siberia.

Just get better soon. We have a date in Johannesburg on September 24. I’m expecting you to be there. I’m not going to say you owe me a dance because I have a history of not making dances, but you owe me dinner.

Love always,

Your Cuddle Bunny.
Inside image: Steve kissing Tony in new uniform (all black and gray. Think the Patriot’s uniform on Agents of Shield without fake muscles). Notice the lack of patch. Tony left that blank in case Steve ever wanted to come back.
Thank you to everybody who read the last chapter. You guys really do love the art chapters. You are all absolutely wonderful and keep me in the creative zone. Since the last chapter was so short, you get this one in under a week. Also, please note Tony has not read Steve’s card yet, although someone else did.

Anthony: So I am actually back home. You have no idea how much I miss my 5000 thread count sheets and having Friday available to cater to my every take-out whim. Right now, she's getting me virgin Drunk raspberry cheesecake French toast.

Nomad: I prefer to cook myself, but I do miss those 5000 thread count sheets. What is virgin drunk raspberry cheesecake French toast?

Anthony: And that was before the possibility of me waking up with you under said sheets. I can't wait for that to come to fruition in Johannesburg on the 24th.

Nomad: I just walked into that.

Anthony: Yes, you did and I just walked into three truckloads of fan mail/get well cards sitting in the foyer of the penthouse. Why do they send billionaires teddy bears?

Nomad: I have no idea.

Anthony: Although I’m sure the Manhattan University Children's Hospital will like all these bears. I’m doing an event Monday for Labor Day. I don't know what to do with the flowers and balloons, though.

Nomad: Balloons can also go to that children’s hospital. You can send those along early because I doubt they will make it till Monday. As for the flowers, you can make potpourri.
Anthony: Do I look like a potpourri guy to you?

Nomad: Maybe they can be given out to random employees.

Anthony: Friday, ask Yo-Yo to get all the flowers moved down to the cafeteria with a sign that says free to a good home.

FRIDAY: Of course sir.

Nomad: I know you think everybody hates you, but I think this proves otherwise. You don't get somebody teddy bears and flowers if you hate them.

Anthony: This is just the stuff that passed inspection. All the hate mail was incinerated and all the credible threats have been forwarded to the FBI or Shield depending on the nature of what was said. Friday's not allowed to tell me what percentage of my mail is actually hate mail. It would make the depression worse to know how bad it really is.

Nomad: That's practical. How do you determine what goes to the FBI?

Anthony: Ridiculously nasty emails or letters from the Board of Directors, competitors, and every day, angry people on the street go straight to the FBI, especially if they do describe in detail how they want to kill me. Want to be super villains with crazy tech are forwarded to Shield under auspices of the UN. At least now that my BFF is in charge and there is a Shield again.

Anthony: Friday doesn't give me the breakdown on those numbers either.

Nomad: How can you make that distinction?

Anthony: They threw in schematics and we have an algorithm. Not all in the super villain category want to kill me. Some want to recruit me. Apparently, I make a mean killer robot. Also the billion dollar plus bank account apparently is my real super power. Most of them want me to finance their take over the world scam.

Nomad: Oh God. The worst I got was women sending me nudes and offering to be my first time
since 1943.

Anthony: When they don't out right assume that you're America’s virgin.

Nomad: Yes.

Anthony: Are there any men among the ones sending you lingerie and dirty photos?

Nomad: Yes actually. Apparently, we are well shipped in the LGTB community.

Anthony: So it was obvious to everyone, but us? I mean we have an 11-year-old writing fanfiction about us.

Nomad: Apparently.

Anthony: I also get my own share of marriage proposals and nude pictures. Along with a lot of paternity suits, but those are extra ridiculous now that I no longer have a sperm count. Those are also filtered out. Actually they should've filtered yours out of your fan mail as well I have had my people going through the Avengers mail since the beginning.

Nomad: That explains why I haven't got anything extremely inappropriate, recently. I got all the inappropriate stuff when Shield was handling my fan mail.

Anthony: I'm sure there was a Hydra plant in the mail room who was just fucking with you.

Nomad: I think that's possible.

Anthony: Oh look, there's two dozen roses, a gigantic box of chocolates, and cookies waiting from Stefan. He sent the good stuff. Best boyfriend ever.

Nomad: It was Clint's idea. Maybe Ross will be less likely to set traps for me if he thinks Stefan Carter is a real person. Also I feel like you deserve roses and chocolate.
Anthony: Well obviously you two have kissed and made up after the tranquilizer/jaw breaking incident.

Nomad: Mostly. Cookies were involved. And therapy. We may have smacked each other with something that looks like a giant Q-tip.

Anthony: We should the thought of doing that as a teambuilding activity before Siberia.

Nomad: Probably

Anthony: Oh and it looks like you sent a card, a very NC-17 card. I should’ve took the blue envelope as a warning. And you included an inside image of us kissing. Maybe that should’ve been an outside image. I am so glad Laura is not letting Lily Bear come up here right now. At least not until I’m done unpacking.

Nomad: You texted me before you unpacked?

Anthony: I missed you. And Yo-Yo told me to. She’s a true romantic.

Nomad: It’s been less than 24 hours since we last talked.

Anthony: Still miss you.

Nomad: Read your card, Anthony

Anthony: I can’t get over your artwork. You’re really good. I love a man in uniform.

Nomad: They are just sketches, nothing fancy. I don’t have all my supplies.

Anthony: But really wonderful sketches. Yo-Yo agrees. Which explains why she told me to check the roses first.
Nomad: She’s seen my work?

Anthony: Well, she had to because of the recent assassination attempts.

Nomad: Still embarrassing.

Anthony: Yes, heaven forbid people find out that Steve Rogers is a kinky bastard and just a little sappy. I mean flowers and chocolate, adorable, but cliché in a cute way.

Nomad: Well, you can probably use the calories and I made sure that whatever they sent you did not have sunflower seeds.

Anthony: My hero.

Anthony: You even used the L word. Is this how you were planning for me to find out?

Nomad: Yes, and you just had to break into the Shield servers. This was already in the mail by that time.

Anthony: I was bored and it wasn't like Agent Scary was giving up the goods on what dating you was like. I had to do something.

Nomad: Nor do I blame her.

Anthony: She wants you to call her.

Nomad: And I will once I'm no longer a fugitive.

Anthony: I wish we were video conferencing because that way you could see me rolling my eyes. I programmed her number into your phone under Agent America. I gave her one of our special phones just in case.
Nomad: Eat a chocolate, Tony.

Anthony: They are heart shaped. You're kind of a romantic. A very kinky romantic, but still a romantic.

Nomad: I think the candies were chosen at random after I gave them the specific allergy instructions.

Anthony: Still delicious. So once I'm done unpacking and going through the other important messages that I must respond to, we are going to schedule our Star Trek date. Friday will send you a time.

Nomad: What other important Messages?

Anthony: Queens and his aunt along with Pepper pot and the boy toy.

Nomad: Tony, unpack your bags and rest for a while.

Anthony: I am all rested out. Four days in the middle of Appalachia will do that to a guy. I kind of just want to hug my workbench right now.

Nomad: Is there something I need to know?

Anthony: Sometimes I fantasize about fucking you against my lab table.

Nomad: You're incorrigible.

Anthony: Do you love me anyway?

Nomad: Yes, but I'm starting to question my sanity.
Anthony: That's why we are both seeing a therapist. I'll see you on our date.

Nomad: Whenever Friday will schedule it.

Anthony: I'll be there even if it is in the middle of the night. I think we can do something before Labor Day. Maybe.

Nomad: I hope so.

To be continued
Thank you to everybody who read or reviewed the last conversation. It is now time for more get well messages. Some digital and others contain cookies. Apparently, everybody just wants to send Tony things that won’t send him into anaphylaxis. Also, he doesn’t eat enough.

The first set of email addresses are Peter and Tony’s Avenger addresses, because of course Tony set up a highly encrypted Avengers only email system (that Daisy/Quake totally broke into and therefore Fitz now has access to).

From: Teenage Mutant Ninja Spider
To: The Mechanic
Time sent: 8/27/2016 12:35:11
Subject: Get Well Soon and I’m sorry for how I acted lately
Dear Mr. Stark:

I know you told me to call you Tony, but it doesn't feel right considering how I've acted the last few weeks. I’m sorry. I really don't want you dead. I know I said some terrible things, but I don’t want that. I was mad about you telling your friend Coulson about me and the fact that you’re not available to date my aunt and 100 other things, but that doesn’t mean I want to lose another mentor.

Did I ever tell you that the last conversation I had with my uncle Ben was a fight? I don’t even remember what I said to him. It was so stupid, but I never got to apologize. I don't want that to happen again. It’s my biggest regret.

I really hope you don't die. They're speculating on the news that you were targeted because you hang out with people like me and that you're trying to protect us. I hope they’re lying, but I am terrified to think that they're not. I don’t want you in danger because of me. That’s why I’m not telling Aunt May the truth, other than her constant panic. I think it’s safer if people don’t know.

Anyway, Get better soon.
Dear Mr. Stark:

I'm so sorry to hear about what happened. I'm sure that what they're saying in the media is wrong because you're a fighter. I also need it to be wrong because in just a couple of months you've managed to become another father figure for Peter and he needs that.

After my husband died, I was worried about Peter. It was hard raising a teenager when I had somebody else running support. It became almost impossible alone. Especially after Peter came home covered in bruises because of some fight with Steve from Brooklyn. But you being around him and really taking an interest in him has helped him come out of his shell. I'm not even worried that the principal is making him see counselor Laura twice a week during the coming school year. Maybe he needs it after everything that's happened since January. I'm sure he's telling you things that he's not telling me. He probably needs somebody else to talk to.

So thank you for being there for my nephew even though I know you have other things to do. I wish you a safe and quick recovery for your sake as well as his. Anyway, I hope you enjoy these cookies. They're store bought by the way, and I made sure they didn't contain anything you're allergic to. I wish you would've told me you had food allergies instead of just throwing away my cookies. I would understand.

Sincerely, May Riley-Parker

Xxxxxxxx

From: The Mechanic
To: Teenage Mutant Ninja Spider
Time sent: 9/1/2016 12:35:11

Subject: RE: Get Well Soon and I’m sorry for how I acted lately

Dear number one intern:
I think I went over the rules about using real names in these communications, but whatever.

I'm OK. Please stop climbing the walls, possibly literally. I’m not allowed to go out in the suit for a few weeks, but I’m good. As soon as my handler lets me go out in public unaccompanied, I am coming to Queens to teach you not to listen to anything the media says when it comes to me. We will have to work around your new class schedule since you are going back to school next week, but it is happening.

Actually don't even listen to the SI press release because at least half of it is pure BS. Also, you should probably take whatever I tell you with a grain of salt because I may or may not have been dying of Palladium poisoning for about six months and told no one. I am the master of pretending to be fine when I’m not. I’ve been working on that in therapy. Try not to do the same thing.

I think your handler may have passed this information on to you, but I thought you would appreciate an actual email. I'm not lying this time. I'm doing better. Dr. Simmons is taking care of me. Remember her from when she did your assessment a couple of weeks ago? I'm being well looked after.

Also, the people who tried to kill me were arrested yesterday, so no worries. And it wasn’t about you or any other powered person. Little Miss Sunshine was embezzling from the Edwin Jarvis Foundation and when I decided to appoint my new boyfriend as her co-director, she didn’t like that which is why she apparently resorted to murder. Idiot.

I forgive you for what you said. I know you didn't mean it. You're just 15 and even though I was at MIT at 15, I said a lot of things to both my parents that I regret. I was an absolute nightmare to Maria. I even said a lot of things right before they died. I was pissed at my dad for making me come home for Christmas when they were just going to leave me there. They never came home and I regretted it ever since.

Just because I'm dating someone else doesn't mean that I'm not going to hang out with you. I take my pseudo-parenting thing very seriously. I would like to think of it as a big brother mentor sort of thing, but Laura pointed out that would be creepy since I think I’m just a year or two younger than your aunt.

Also, just because I don't want to date your aunt doesn't mean that I don't like you or that I will stop hanging out. I do think your aunt is one cool lady. I just fell in love with someone else and he is a great guy. A bastard sometimes, but a great guy underneath everything and I really do love him, when he’s not being a self-righteous prick at least.
I’ll try to come over soon, maybe the Saturday after Labor Day. I’m sure you’re going to need someone to commiserate with about the first few days of school. If you need me before then, Friday can get in touch. I’m working on a new AI for you. Also, please try to stay off YouTube or else Laura is going to go ‘full parent who works as a ninja spy’ on you. You do not want to deal with the Laura grounding.

I understand why you've been angry. I should have eased you into the fact Agent Agent’s team knows who you are. I know that you're scared, but the guy in charge now is my best friend and his real number two almost died saving the world. (And I think Jeffrey wants to save the world through PR if nothing else because apparently, that’s what Brooklyn boys do.) They're good people and they just want to protect you.

You're a kid, even if you don’t see it that way. (And yes, I remember hating the K word when I was your age). You should get to do kid things like completely humiliate yourself in front of the girl or guy of your dreams. There’s also Homecoming. I never got that. I didn’t even get to go to the prom until a couple years ago as part of a Make-A-Wish thing for a young woman dying of leukemia. Again, I was already at MIT by your age and well, I think half of the dumb things I do is because I was already in college by the time I was your age. Don't grow up too fast. All of this stuff will be waiting for you when you’re old enough to deal with it.

PS: Apparently your efforts with the cookies were futile. There’s a giant box from your aunt sitting in my foyer. Could you send me her email address so I can send her a thank you email?

Xxxxx

From: Teenage Mutant Ninja Spider

To: The Mechanic

Time sent: 9/01/2016 16:21:11

Subject: RE: Get Well Soon and I’m sorry for how I acted lately

Riley_ Parker at stark – mail dot com. Although, be warned, she only checks her non-work email like twice a day and I’m not allowed to give that one out.

The cookies are store-bought. I told my aunt you are afraid to eat her cooking because you had a tiny allergic reaction the first time you visit. So the good news is you’re never going to have to eat anything at our house again. Do you think you can hook me up with some cooking lessons? Otherwise you should just bring take out if you want to come over Saturday.

I’m glad you got back before school starts. I hate school. Can I just go to college now? Also, when will I get lab time again? I know I can’t be there all the time, but I can do Saturdays again.
From: The Mechanic
To: Teenage Mutant Ninja Spider
Time sent: 9/1/2016 16:42:12
Subject: RE: Get Well Soon and I’m sorry for how I acted lately.

I’ll see what I can do about cooking lessons. College at age 15 is not as glamorous as the movies make it. I kind of wish I waited. At least now kids get to do both simultaneously. Your AP calculus class should take the edge off. Once you have your class schedule and your Laura required stuff figured out, we can work out lab hours. Actual lab hours and no other training. Laura gets to work out that stuff now.

Xxxxx

From: Tony_Carbonell
To: Riley_Parker
Time sent: 9/1/2016 17:01:41

Subject: Thank You for the Cookies.

Dear Miss Riley-Parker:

Peter gave me your email address. I hope that’s okay. Also, this is my personal email address. I trust you won’t give it to the tabloids.

Thank you for your well wishes and the cookies. You found my favorites. They are appreciated. I’m sorry I didn’t mention the allergies. I don’t like for people to have to do extra things for me.

Also, I’m sorry for worrying both you and your nephew. I’m sure Laura informed both of you that tales of my impending demise were greatly exaggerated. News media always exaggerates at least when it comes to me. Sometimes it’s on purpose. They have to keep those ratings up. I honestly think the shareholders started half of the rumors. I'm sorry you guys were so worried, but really, I am doing better.

Peter is a good kid. He's also still a kid and I think he forgets that sometimes. I know I did, mostly because I was already in college at his age and being groomed to be the next CEO of Stark Industries. I shouldn't be used as an example of proper child development.
I already emailed Peter to let him know that I’m OK, but I thought I should pay you the same courtesy. As always, thank you for the cookies. Sorry it wasn’t sooner, but my handlers did not want me to do anything that could possibly raise my blood pressure, including allowing me to have email access.

Although now that we’re back, I suggested to Peter that we could do dinner on the Saturday after school starts back up. I can even take you to the lab so Peter can show off what he’s been working on this past summer. He really is the best intern I’ve had. I’m going to miss his presence in the lab now that he’s going to have to do more school stuff. Although I think we can arrange for him to work on weekends if that’s okay with you?

Dealing with the death of a parent is hard. Honestly, I don’t think I’ve really dealt with my parents’ death until recently. But working with Peter has also helped me deal with a lot of things that I ignored for a long time. I’m glad I could be there for him. It gave me something to focus on with my boyfriend in Johannesburg doing charity work. (That’s another thing I trust you not to leak to the tabloids.)

Please feel free to contact me or my assistant, Elaina Rodriguez, with whatever time works for you to see Peter’s work. I’m sure you already have her number.

Xxxxx

From: Riley_Parker
To: Tony_Carbonell
Time sent: 9/2/2016 7:01:41
Subject: RE: Thank You for the Cookies.

Next Saturday is fine. Also, I’d rather have him working at SI then coming home covered in bruises. That happens less when he’s working with you.

Although it may be tempting to mention you have a boyfriend, the next time the reporters camp out in front of our house, I won’t say anything. Your secret’s safe with me. Although I am old enough to remember that Tony Stark gay sex tape scandal, so I’m not that surprised.

Xxxxx

From: Tony_Carbonell
I’m surprised you let me anywhere near your kid if you remember that particular youthful indiscretion.

I’ll be there. And feel free to mention I have a boyfriend to the press. I’m glad you remember, because they don’t and we can probably use that to our advantage.

To be continued
Dear Dr. Stark:

It was such a pleasure to meet you last Friday although I wish the night had gone better. I had a feeling it would probably end in disaster, but I didn’t expect anybody to end up hospitalized. Virginia told me what really happened and I'm so sorry that you had to go through that. I wish you a speedy and safe recovery.

Honestly, Virginia has been a bit of a wreck these last few days. You know that she spent the night outside your hospital room. I literally had to drag her back to the hotel. Of course, that was before your assistant moved her into the Tower for security reasons. I like Ms. Rodriguez. I almost want to take her for my company.

Most people would be uncomfortable with their girlfriend being so distraught over their former lover. I’m not. You were friends long before you were lovers and I think Virginia wants that friendship back. Also, apparently you have a new boyfriend who’s in South Africa. At least that’s what Ms. Rodriguez told me. I really do like her.

Anyway, I wish you good health and a speedy recovery. Robert.
Subject: Cookies will be waiting for you when you get home

So this morning I saw the now former head of the Jarvis foundation led out in handcuffs for trying to kill you. (Happy and Kevin watched it together gleefully eating doughnuts.) I assume this means that you’ll be coming home soon. I made sure that your assistant had a box of your favorite cookies, in addition to the cookie bouquet that will arrive once I’m sure you’re back home. Somebody needed to give you something nice to make up for the board getting you a get-well gift that might send you back to the hospital.

Also let’s be honest, you prefer food over flowers. You never eat enough when you get into the creative zone. The cookie bouquet will be waiting for you when you get back from where ever you are. No, Jim wouldn’t tell me anything. (Or Happy for that matter, who you really need to call.) Why did you decide to put him in charge of a spy agency that technically doesn’t exist anymore?

Part of me thinks that you’ve skipped off to where ever ‘Stefan’ is, but Phil has reassured me that’s not the case. That was a deeply unpleasant conversation for several reasons. When were you going to tell me that Phil was back? Or is that just one of those things we don’t talk about? We have a really lengthy list of things that we need to talk about and I’m tired of avoiding those conversations so I’m going to start now.

I told you that I ended our relationship because I didn’t want to watch you die and I couldn’t deal with you going out and saving the world every night. I couldn’t just sit at home every night wondering if you were going to come home to me. Of course, in hindsight, I realize that our problems were nowhere near that simple. It was stupid of me to ask you to choose. Selfish really. I realize that now.

It was even more ridiculous for me to think that distancing myself from you would lessen the impact. Because Friday night showed me that it’s still going to hurt, even if you no longer hold the title of boyfriend.

I actually saw you die. No, you died in my arms. Your heart stopped. If I wasn’t sitting next to you with an EpiPen in my purse, you would be dead right now. It wasn’t a super villain that got you, but a disgruntled employee. All they needed to know was you can’t have sunflower seeds. The greatest irony of all was I was the one who asked your assistant to make sure the caterers and the event planner had your allergy list. My actions almost got you killed.
Dose watching you die make me question if I made the right choice in breaking up with you? I would be stupid to not acknowledge that it did make me reevaluate my choice, but it doesn’t change things in the long run. It just made me realize that we fell apart for 1 million other reasons as well.

Then there is also the fact that I really like Robert. Maybe I’m even starting to fall in love with him. I think it could get there. Surprisingly he’s supports me even when I’m crying over my ex-boyfriend. That’s a lot to ask from a guy and he’s not even jealous because he trusts me implicitly.

Although it probably helps that you have a boyfriend. Ms. Rodriguez mentioned that repeatedly. I think he might think that I was just your beard and I am not correcting that assumption yet. Apparently, he’s way too young to remember when the Tony Stark gay sex tape came out. If you say anything about me dating a guy who’s too young to remember that, I will remind you that you’re with a guy who’s only been conscious for about 30 years.

If I really think about it, this thing you have with Stefan has been building for a while. He was all you would talk about. Granted, most of the time you were cursing his name, but I think I was just trying to cover up the truth. It makes sense. Maybe it can work better than you and me because he gets the part of your life that I didn’t or maybe I couldn’t completely understand. Maybe a part of me is glad you’re going to know what it’s like to be constantly scared that you lose the one you love.

I’m not mad about Stefan. If I can have a new boyfriend, you can have a new boyfriend. Okay, I’m a little mad. Not that you have a boyfriend, but that you didn’t tell me. How did it get this bad between us?

At the same time, I’m worried. I saw you after Siberia. Not in person because you were and still are avoiding me. But your bruised face was all over Twitter. I don’t know what happened because you won’t tell me since we don’t have that type of relationship anymore, but I’m concerned. I know you can hold your own, but he’s a lot stronger than you are. Jim said that you two have worked it out, but I am concerned. Just because we stopped sleeping together doesn’t mean I stopped caring. I’m always going to care about you.

When your boyfriend gets back to the states we’re having dinner together. All four of us.

PS: I think it is best if Happy comes back to New York. He’s joining me for the Labor Day event anyway. I would feel better if he was there with you after what happened. Really call him and stop pushing us all away.
Hey, my Pepper Pot:

Thank you for the cookies and the edible bouquet. They were delicious as always, or at least what was left in the refrigerator was delicious after the little vultures devoured the bouquet. They made an excellent post engineering binge snack. I may have gone in headfirst which is why I didn’t write when I arrived yesterday.

I hope you told Kevin to get a couple of cases of those cookies for Monday's thing at the Children’s Hospital. Yes, I'm still going. I need to show the world I'm not dead and that I'm not afraid.

I'm really sorry that I worried you. We're taking precautions to make sure that I am no longer susceptible to the sunflower technique. Even I don't want to go because of an allergic reaction. It would just be downright tragic and ridiculously embarrassing.

Your boyfriend also wrote me to express his well wishes. It was attached to the edible arrangement. Let him know I appreciate it. I would write myself, but I don't have his email address. Anyway, we can talk more when we see each other Monday.

PS: I know about Happy coming. We spoke and he is really not happy about me almost dying because of the sunflower murder conspiracy. Or avoiding him for the last few months. It’s better now.

To be continued.
And now for my happy rant: how absolutely wonderful was the Black Panther trailer? I’m pretty sure I’ve watched it 20 times. I can’t wait for February.
Thank you to everybody who read or reviewed the last chapter. Your words of encouragement keep me writing and coming up with great new ideas. You’re getting this chapter early because I will be at Awesome Con this weekend and I’m pretty sure I’m only going to see my house long enough to sleep, I think. Stan Lee will be there which will be fun.

Unfortunately, the next chapter will not be coming until probably a week from tomorrow. I just found out that I’m moving so there may be a gap of more than a week for upcoming chapters until mid-August. It will all depend on how much writing I can get done before the chaos begins. I tend to bank chapters for the story. However, I am nearing the end of this cycle and I didn’t want to do too much more until Spider-man Homecoming comes out.

We are now stepping into another one of my great writing exercises. Basically, for this chapter, I put on Star Trek Beyond and started writing Tony and Steve snarky dialogue while watching the movie. If anybody has looked at my Twitter account to read my Agents of Shield tweets, you know I’m good at this. I did go back and edit, but I wrote the initial draft live as if a real text message date was going on (with me playing both sides).

This was a double bonus for me because I needed to re-watch the movie to work on two special top-secret Star Trek projects. These projects will probably not see the light of day until September. I hate moving.

Light spoilers for Star Trek Beyond, however the twist is not discussed. Also you may not spot things if you haven’t watched it but it still works regardless.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Anthony: So, did Friday upload my present? More importantly are you able to take advantage of the brand-new gigantic television that I sent?

Nomad: Yes. You really did not have to do that.

Anthony: Yes I did. You did break said television while you had your little episode regarding the Gala incident.

Nomad: Because you almost died.
Anthony: Only a little. A few seconds at most.

Nomad: Pepper punched out a reporter.

Anthony: Because the guy was an asshole.

Nomad: True. Have you talked to her yet about us?

Anthony: No more talk of that. The next two hours is going to be me and you making snarky comments about the movie and me trying to convince you to try telecommunication sex.

Nomad: Still not happening.

Anthony: Hey, I deserve something for almost dying.

Nomad: 21 days until South Africa. You can wait.

Anthony: Or maybe before then if I get the framework working. Snookums wants to review everything before we start beta testing. Apparently, I've trained him too well with my various mishaps.

Nomad: Put on the movie, Tony.

Anthony: See mountains and Paramount stars on screen. And look the fires of hell or whatever that’s supposed to be.

Nomad: How many producers does this movie have?

Anthony: Thousands. Look the robot. And there is our Enterprise. She’s so pretty.

Nomad: Why does Captain Kirk sound so squeaky?
Anthony: Friday fix it.

Nomad: Thank you Friday. It's working fine now.

Anthony: Strange alien things and angry people asking questions that they won't let you answer. It is like a normal day at the office, especially our office.

Anthony: Weapons for peace. It sounds like something Dad would do. I think that is something he did do.

Anthony: Yep, just like a board meeting. And surprisingly, only slightly more violent.

Nomad: More like that mission last March that you had to help us out on. I've always hated cat claws.

Anthony: Why did that guy think he could create sentient/talking cats?

Nomad: I don't know

Anthony: Of course Kirk can't get out. You could never get out when the mission goes to shit. Of course he ripped his shirt. There should be more nudity in this film. Don't worry gummy bear, you have the best abs. I'd like to lick them.

Nomad: Bones reminds me of Bruce trying to get you in to medical after bad missions.

Anthony: Now it's Yo-Yo or Laura trying to get me into medical.

Anthony: Yay nudity and abs. I want that cup.

Nomad: Of course you do. Tony, you have a coffee problem.
Anthony: Better than my alcohol problem.

Nomad: Clint has a picture of his kids with him like that. It’s taped inside of his bow case.

Anthony: Well now that we know that he actually has kids anyway.

Nomad: He misses the kids a lot. He’s worried about them.

Anthony: They miss him too. He'll be back soon.

Nomad: What does that mean?

Anthony: I am so trying to see if I can make a warp core. I'm going to get there someday.

Nomad: That blue liquor reminds me of Thor's alcohol.

Anthony: Did that stuff actually make you drunk?

Nomad: Yes.

Nomad: Are you OK with watching people drink?

Anthony: More than I am watching people talk about dead dads. At least I'm still younger than when Howard died for a few more years.

Nomad: You do realize that Howard would be so proud of you, right?

Anthony: You don’t know that. You knew dad when he was still young and idealistic. By the end, he was a jaded and sad man who spent way too much time drowning in his favorite bottle of cognac.
Nomad: I’m sorry.

Anthony: OK, we should ask Thor if space stations like that exist as soon as he starts answering our calls.

Nomad: Tasha did make contact.

Anthony: Because she had intel.

Nomad: Maybe he will too eventually.

Anthony: So pretty. I want to design something like that. I know I can design something like that.

Nomad: I am sure you could. You’re working on a transporter, aren’t you?

Anthony: Maybe. Coulson’s team ran into a guy who could teleport a couple years ago, so I’m using their research to put something together. I think I could have a prototype together in about a year.

Nomad: I’m sure you could.

Anthony: And now I am reminded of the very awkward situation that is me and Pepper.

Nomad: She gave you back a necklace that belonged to your mother?

Anthony: Yes actually. I don’t want to talk about it.

Nomad: And Spock is just as open to talking about the break up as you were. Maybe if I saw it happen I would’ve known.

Nomad: They seem like a pretty family.

Anthony: Dammit. Why did they have to write in Nimoy’s death? Couldn’t they just let Spock Prime live out the rest of eternity on the colony.

Nomad: I think it’s supposed to be a tribute maybe?

Anthony: And here we go, the prologue is over and we’re getting to the action. This is not going to be good.

Nomad: This feels like the start of every single one of our big missions, especially the ones that end in disaster.

Anthony: Absolutely.

Nomad: Do you think that you can design a universal translator?

Anthony: Thor said it's not necessary. I'm still working on it.

Anthony: There is no way Kirk is actually going to want to be a vice Admiral. It was like me being CEO. I am much happier being head of R&D. I think that Kirk is leaving because he can't take watching the guy he is in love with be with someone else?

Nomad: You may be right. I didn't like watching you and Pepper together. It was one of the reasons why I was kind of happy that you suggested moving the Avengers to an upstate facility.

Anthony: Why didn't you tell me?

Nomad: I wasn't ready to talk about it yet, not even to myself. Also I don’t break up other people’s relationships.
Anthony: Look, Jim and Spock are so cute together and have more communications problems than us. Kiss. Kiss. Kiss.

Nomad: You're crazy, Tony.

Anthony: Kirk was so checking out his ass.

Nomad: I'll give you that one.

Anthony: Well that lightning is not ominous at all. Do you think her ship was actually stranded there?

Nomad: Nope.

Anthony: Look, more ships. Yep, they're seriously fucked.

Nomad: Is this giving you New York flashbacks?

Anthony: I am OK. OK, it might be giving me Jericho missile flashbacks. Ambushes suck.

Anthony: It is just a movie.

Nomad: They're taking out the ship.

Anthony: Of course they are. You did see the promotional materials?

Nomad: I was busy being on the run.

Anthony: And rescuing people because you're still upset that you couldn't save Bucky from Hydra?
Nomad: Maybe. No more hard questions. I'm trying to watch the movie.

Anthony: OK that guy is the villain. He just screams villain.

Nomad: I'm glad we have yet to meet a guy that looks like that.

Anthony: Yeah. Queens is dealing with robbers showing up dressed as Batman, and not the Terry McGinnis or Adam West Batman either.

Nomad: Better than us.

Anthony: Very true.

Anthony: Kirk is totally in love with Spock.

Nomad: Why do all super villains have the same motive?

Anthony: In movies?

Nomad: In real life.

Anthony: I have no ideal. We live very strange lives.

Nomad: Yes.

Anthony: That beautiful ship. Why did they have to kill that beautiful ship?

Nomad: You're trying to design an Enterprise, aren't you?
Anthony: Since puberty. Instead I ended up designing Quinjets and the carriers of evil. I need to send you my original designs. I can't draw nudes, but I can draw an awesome schematic.

Anthony: Of course they're taking the crew.

Nomad: Do you always talk this much during movies?

Anthony: Probably not. I just spent several days with your monosyllable ex-girlfriend. I have lots of words just waiting to get out. I'll try to make fewer snarky comments during the fight scenes.

Nomad: Thank you.

Anthony: Yay, the bad guy didn't get the weapon.

Nomad: Because that would make for a short movie.

Anthony: My poor beautiful ship. It's just ashes and wreckage. It's Malibu all over again.

Nomad: Sorry.

Anthony: No you're not.

Nomad: You know I could completely see you hotwiring a torpedo to escape.

Anthony: I'm sure knowing my luck, I would end up hanging from a cliff too.

Nomad: It would probably be me.

Anthony: Do I want to know?
Nomad: Probably not.

Anthony: Do villains ever tell the truth?

Nomad: None of the ones that I've encountered.

Anthony: And you can never reason with them, but boy do they love their speeches.

Nomad: Especially Ultron and Loki.

Nomad: Am I allowed to mention the U word?

Anthony: If I can mention my biggest fuck up, then you can.

Nomad: Spock reminds me of you right now. You’re practically dying and you still don’t want to go to medical.

Anthony: Hey kettle I have my reasons to be a little shy of doctors. Laura told you about me punching another doctor right after I gained consciousness?

Nomad: Yes.

Anthony: In my defense, the doctor tried to strangle me.

Nomad: Thank you for finally telling me what happened.

Anthony: Just for the record, stopping the bleeding through cauterization sucks. Yo-Yo had to have that happen to her a couple of months ago when she was shot trying to protect her now boyfriend when the base was being attacked by super powered mind control zombies. Thankfully, it went better this time. Even if a blowtorch was involved.
Nomad: We live very interesting lives.

Anthony: Stranger than fiction.

Nomad: You want to re-create her hologram technology, don't you?

Anthony: Already working on it. I can probably turn it into something widow bite related.

Nomad: Now I am being reminded of way too many hikes through various parts of Europe.

Anthony: This makes me want to visit Asgard although Agent Simmons says that being on the strange alien planet is overrated.

Nomad: How would she know?

Anthony: I can't tell you.

Nomad: You don't trust me.

Anthony: More like I came across classified documents that I'm not allowed to talk about because Snookums will be pissed. He’s okay with me reading the classified documents, but I can’t share. Less serious talk, more movie snark.

Nomad: I just have this feeling that you are watching this with a notepad jotting down ideas?

Anthony: No, I'm watching with the Stark Pad that I am dictating notes into about design possibilities while I'm dictating snarky comments to you. There's a lot of dictation going on.

Nomad: I like the design of the native shelters.
Anthony: Let me guess you have a sketchpad next to you doing art.

Nomad: Maybe.

Anthony: OK note to self: double check to make sure that we're not being bugged by crazy aliens.

Nomad: You know if it was anyone else I would think you were making a joke. But apparently aliens visited last April.

Anthony: Anton Yelchin is so good in this movie. He died too young.

Nomad: Good people always die too young.

Anthony: An all too sad fact of life.

Anthony: Hey Lily bear just came in to the room just as our villain was crushed by a giant saucer.

Anthony: Laura is going to be unhappy.

Nomad: She is already mad at me, so you might as well just blame me.

Anthony: Because you broke her husband’s jaw.

Nomad: I did apologize, but she probably realized it wasn’t as sincere as it should’ve been.

Anthony: OK to avoid nightmare fuel, I had to cut off the movie.

Nomad: She started screaming when he sucked the life force out of those two crewmembers?
Anthony: Yes, but hey, at least I now know the villain’s plan. You can keep watching without me.

Nomad: Although I'm really enjoying the movie, it's more fun with you. I can wait. Besides it's like 3 AM here.

Anthony: OK you should've told Friday. No way she would have scheduled this if it was going to be so late for you.

Nomad: It’s okay. I don’t mind. I would’ve said yes to any time because I just wanted to talk to you and be around you. I hated not being able to see you when you were in the hospital. I hated being stuck here. I felt so useless.

Anthony: You're not useless.

Nomad: I couldn't keep you from getting hurt.

Anthony: That wasn't super villains gone evil. That was a disgruntled employee who had access to my allergies. It could happen to anybody with a multibillion dollar bank account at least.

Nomad: And who apparently arranged for a doctor to strangle you at the hospital.

Anthony: That could've just been my winning personality.

Nomad: Tony.

Anthony: I think I mentioned before that I have the personality of a Brillo pad.

Nomad: I'm thinking more like a chocolate covered marshmallow. Hard on the outside, soft and gooey on the inside.

Anthony: That is definitely me. Lily Bear says hi.
Nomad: Say hi back to her.

Anthony: She would also like to know why you broke her daddy's jaw.

Nomad: Because he shot me with multiple rounds of tranquilizers.

Anthony: Because you were about to metaphorically walk into a trap. There was a whole team waiting for you at the hospital alone.

Nomad: I realize it was the right call, but I'm still mad. Or rather I was. I'm still working everything out.

Anthony: I'm not even going to try to tell Lily bear what really happened because I definitely can't go with the truth.

Nomad: Why did she come visit you? It has to be past her bedtime.

Anthony: Connor said something that apparently gave her nightmares and I just let her watch an alien suck the life force out of people. I'm going to have a long night.

Nomad: Very long night.

Anthony: Not the fun type unless ice cream is involved and Laura will be so mad at me for letting her have ice cream after 10 PM

Nomad: But it would be worth it.

Anthony: Obviously you haven't spent quality time with Laura. I'll talk to you later, Gummy Bear.

Nomad: I really miss Cuddle Bunny.
To be continued.

Chapter End Notes

Since the draft pre-proofreading reached 2000 words by the time we got to chapter 6 of Star Trek Beyond, I just decided that it would be best to cut off their virtual date. Besides if there's a seven-year-old in the room this date will not go the way Tony wants it too. This way I avoid the ending so people don't have it spoiled.

Also in this universe, all DC characters are purely fictional.
Thank you to everybody who read or reviewed the last chapter. You're all fabulous. I have a great time. Awesome con 2017. I even got into the Stan Lee panel. That was fun.

Here is Tony and Steve trying to finish their date. Will it be more successful than last time? We shall see. There’s definitely a lower probability of small children popping up at the most inappropriate times of the movie. But hey at least Tony didn’t talk Steve into doing something that would've been even worse for a small child to walk in on. That’s a conversation Tony doesn’t want to ever have.

HSBF: Are we still on for our second half of our date? Friday scheduled me for 4 PM your time. She said the kids would be busy with first day of school activities.

Me: Yes, we’re still on. Yo-yo has yet to have to schedule something in this block. Also, the kids are preoccupied. They’re on their floor lamenting the fact that they have homework on day one in Yo-Yo and Happy are monitoring.

HSBF: How can they already have homework?

Me: I’m not even entirely sure. I feel ridiculously old having dinner at 4 PM. Although Friday did arrange for a hickory smoked cheeseburger.

HSBF: It only counts as dinner if you had lunch. Did you have lunch?

Me: OK late lunch it is.

HSBF: I know you were without your lab for a few days, but you should eat more. That means no more working through multiple meals just to get the project done.

Me: Lunch was scheduled, but then I got pulled into a meeting with the forensic accountants. Thankfully, Yo-Yo managed to slip me a protein bar at some point. Happy was not happy that he’s been sort of replaced with someone with superspeed.
HSBF: It's good that she at least got you to eat something. How was the meeting?

Me: Depressing. So I'm a little pissed off about how much of my money was secretly funneled to xenophobic assholes and certain politicians that personally blamed me for their mother’s death.

HSBF: Are you OK?

Me: Nope. I'm pissed and a little disappointed that something like this happened again. I trust people and then they try to kill me. And I'll let it happen because I was distracted.

Me: At least this time I was distracted by less sleazy things like saving the world and not the obviously augmented chest of whatever stripper Obadiah lines up for the party plane. This is starting to become a really unhealthy pattern.

HSBF: I'm sorry.

Me: Well we already established that you were not trying to kill me just trying to keep me from killing someone else and, unlike the great Hawkeye, you don’t keep non-lethal projectiles on you. I forgave you before your Royal friend brought medical help and a hell of a lot of painkillers. Even if I didn’t realize that at the time.

HSBF: I watched from the sidelines until I was sure you were actually going to get medical help. You hate doctors.

Me: And that was before one tried to kill me.

HSBF: What really happened with that? You talked a little about it last time, but you weren’t up to talk about anything too serious.

Me: Because I want to have a date with you. It wasn’t really that much more than what I mentioned last time. Let’s just say they planned for multiple contingencies, including somebody at the gala having an EpiPen and me making it to the ER. Although I’m sure they didn’t expect it to be the person next to me or my assistant injecting me so fast that nobody saw her do it
HSBF: I'm glad Pepper was there. Have you talked to her since getting back? Is it safe for me to send her a thank you note or would she burn it on principle?

Me: Hey, let's watch the movie.

HSBF: I already did. The good guys win. The bad guys don't and Sulu never did get to kiss his husband on screen. So let's talk about Pepper.

Me: You were supposed to wait for me. You said you would. And of course they didn’t show the happy and emotionally stable gay couple kissing. Have to be able to show it in Russia.

HSBF: Yes, but then I realized that I missed half of the plot points of the first half of the movie because I was more into reading what you were writing then watching the movie. I decided it would be best to re-watch the whole thing from the beginning and that way I can give you my full undivided attention.

HSBF: Although I'm really glad that I adapted to the future better than that guy.

Me: Me too. You would make a scary super villain.

HSBF: I don't think I would ever be a super villain.

Me: We are all one bad day away from being a super villain. Of course, in your case it would probably take a complete cerebral rewrite or possibly brainwashing. You’re too squeaky clean otherwise.

HSBF: You do remember I broke Clint’s jaw to get to you?

Me: Laura does and she's not happy. She thinks you resort to violence too much.

HSBF: I apologized.

Me: Still not happy. I think it’s the stress of having to worry about Ross or other third parties trying
to kidnap the kids for Avenger bait.

HSBF: I know. I think I'm going to need your assistant’s phone number if I need help dealing with you. I think Laura is a little too mad at me to actually respond.

Me: It's in your phone under Slingshot. If it's the end of the world catastrophe situation you can also try Bulletproof Pacifists and Deathlok. I did his new prosthesis so he owes me.

HSBF: Speaking of women in your life who are mad at me, what about Pepper? Did you email her back or maybe even call her.

Me: She's not mad at you, per se, she's concerned. I think she might be a little mad at me, but that’s a Tony problem.

HSBF: And?

Me: We talked and it's good now. So, what type of take-out did Friday arrange for you?

HSBF: I wish this was a video call so you could see my skeptical face right now. No changing the subject just because you don’t want to answer.

Me: OK. You’re starting to know me too well. We talked for five minutes and most of that was during a 'family photo' for the various social media feeds. Apparently we need to publicize my good deeds right now to reassure everyone I am alive and kicking after the foundation scandal.

HSBF: You also need everyone to see that you really do good things to help deflect the scandal at the foundation.

Me: Yes. Although it helps that they were trying to kill me to do more bad things with the money.

HSBF: That’s good.

Me: Look, I’ve tried to talk to Pepper. Half the time I choke and run away before the first word falls
out of my mouth. I think it only worked at the hospital because drugs were involved.

HSBF: Obviously talking to Pepper is not working. Maybe you should write to her.

Me: I think you gave me this advice before.

HSBF: It's still good advice.

Me: That you just don't want to take.

HSBF: I recognize that one. There's nothing very ironic about that song.

Me: Oh god, you're getting pop culture references. What have they been doing to you?

HSBF: Focus on Pepper

Me: I'm trying, my snuggle baby. I have a file filled with about 30 attempts of writing a letter to Pepper. It hasn't gone well at all

HSBF: Well how did you write your first text message to me? If you could send that first message after how badly we messed up, then I think you can write to Pepper.

Me: Vast quantities of alcohol. That's not an option. It's a lot harder to be honest when you are sober.

HSBF: Thank God. I was kind of afraid you would fall off because of this mess.

Me: It was tempting, especially when they are willing to give you opiates like candy. I'm not going to lie, I probably managed to stay sober because I was in the cabin in the woods without one drop of alcohol in it. I looked, twice.

HSBF: You still didn't drink the moment you got back to civilization. That shows you have real
Me: Because there are other people counting on me. The kids need me to not be like Howard. And there are a lot of them in my life right now.

Me: I'm even finding Mini Queens adorable even if we keep having to tell him that just because you have your own version of a Vulcan nerve pinch does not mean you can knock out bullies on the playground who make fun of your BFF for not being skinny.

HSBF: I think I like this kid.

Me: You would.

HSBF: OK, since getting drunk is not an option, then pretend you're writing to me.

Me: Then I would say something that would just piss off Robert and I don't necessarily hate him anymore. He grows on you like a non-dangerous bacteria. He did send a very nice edible arrangement. It makes an excellent smoothie.

HSBF: I probably wouldn't lead with that.

Me: Probably shouldn't.

HSBF: Why don't you go with a letter instead of text messages.

Me: Does it have to be in hardcopy?

HSBF: I'm surprised the word hardcopy is even in your vocabulary. Of course it can be an email.

Me: I will have you know that I did write Lily bear a hard copy letter just last week, mostly because she didn't need to see all the pictures of Clint black and blue that Wanda sent me. Laura also didn't want me to know about you being under a 5150 hold because apparently, I triggered you having a violent flashback.
HSBF: That’s not what they call it here.

Me: I've been held a couple of times under the California version of the hold so that's what I use. Not recently, which is kind of surprising. Actually, I'm surprised nobody ordered it after Afghanistan or during the Palladian poisoning incident. It probably would've been a good idea. Okay, you guys probably should’ve thought about it after the murder bot fiasco.

HSBF: Wanda told you?

Me: Yes, Wanda told me because she doesn't have that pesky healthcare professional patient confidentiality thing Laura has going on. Good news, Wanda no longer wants me dead for my various indirect roles in killing all of her family. Progress.

HSBF: She is adjusting. She is seeing my doctor too and I think it's helping. She is always talking about her brother dying now which is more than she did before.

HSBF: Pepper awkwardness aside, how did your Labor Day events go?

Me: No one tried to kill me.

HSBF: That's a plus.

Me: The kids were great. They don’t hate me. Some of their parents whisper about me behind my back, but kids are great. Less condescending. Which explains why I hang out with so many of them. And Friday has just informed me that one is on his way to the penthouse right now, because Happy is a softy who apparently hates watching kids. I think he’ll be back in California by the end of September.

HSBF: I thought you said the kids would be preoccupied for a while?

Me: I thought Yo-Yo and Happy would be able keep them preoccupied for the evening while you and I have grown up fun time. However, Connor needs homework help because he is expected to know something that they didn’t cover at his school in Iowa last year. Since it’s kind of my fault that he is starting a new school in Manhattan this year, I should probably help until I line up a tutor.
HSBF: Probably. Go help out. We can watch a different movie together another time.

Me: Find another activity because apparently, you don’t like me making snarky comments while you’re watching.

HSBF: It’s just hard for me to focus on you and the movie. I usually need to really concentrate since there’s a lot of things I’m not familiar with.

Me: I would make a joke about your multitasking abilities, but pre-algebra awaits. Talk to you later, Gummy Bear.

To be continued
Dear Pepper

Chapter Notes

Thank you to everybody who read or reviewed the last chapter. This is another one of those very long overdue chapters. This is also the last chapter that will be posted before Spider-Man homecoming comes out. The plan is for some elements to be incorporated, but I won’t know exactly what until I see the movie even though the Internet is already a spoiler minefield. I’ve already given up on avoiding spoilers, but I’m going to try to keep my spaces spoiler free or at least so mixed up with things from my imagination that you won’t be able to tell.

After the movie drops if you want to ask me questions about how the movie will influence this story, you can either PM me on fanfiction dot net or send me a DM through Twitter. Please don’t put anything in the comments section until August.

From: Tony_Carbonell
To: Pepper_Pot
Bcc: Stefan_Carter
Time sent: 9/7/2016 01:01:41
Subject: It would probably be easier to have this conversation, if I wasn’t sober.

Dear Pepper:

I’ll be honest, I’ve been staring at the screen for at least the last 15 minutes figuring out what to write to you with everything that’s been going on lately, including the attempted murder. Actually this happened last time when I wrote to you which is why you got that tiny email. I thought that I would be able to talk about it by the time we would be posing together at the Children’s Hospital, but it didn’t happen. I was almost relieved that Kevin and Happy were keeping us 10 feet apart at all times and Yo-Yo kept coming up with things for me to do away from you. Yo-Yo is great because she understands the other part of my job. I’m sure by now you understand why she gets that part of my other day job, she did keep you from punching that reporter a second time.

When did we start being unable to talk to each other? Because deep down I think it was long before
you decided that we needed space. Honestly, that's what I miss the most about us. As evident by the fact that I have a boyfriend in another country, lack of sex is not a deal breaker. Lack of communication is.

I didn’t get it when we first broke up. I was angry when you left me. I was too upset to even consider the fact that you may have had a valid point (especially when it comes to Steve). I thought that if I could change maybe you would come back. If I could find a way to achieve a superhero work life balance, then you would come back. There is no superhero work life balance. Not really.

The truth of the matter is I have already changed. The guy that you started dating nearly 6 years ago doesn’t exist anymore. New York changed me. The house blowing up changed me. Siberia changed me. Finding out what Hydra did to three out of four of my parent figures really changed me. It feels like you want me to be who I was before and I can’t go back to that. I just can’t watch the world go down in flames and not do anything. I don’t think you would want to be with somebody who could.

I hate to break it to you, but I was born with a target on my back. I was born a wealthy child of above average intellect whose father was in the spy game before Patches was a zygote. That just screams kidnap or kill me. They’re always going to be people who want to kill me. There’s probably a really long list. This time didn’t even involve my superhero extracurriculars. No, they wanted me dead for the money. Afghanistan wasn’t my first kidnapping and it probably won’t be my last. I’m not just going to sit around and possibly wait for it to happen.

In hindsight, you made the right decision because being around me is always going to be dangerous. Maybe you needed some distance to protect yourself. I would never forgive myself if something else happened to you. You deserve more than to be collateral damage. Last time was already too much.

For years, I was mad at Howard for sending me off to boarding schools. Then I found out recently that he sent me away because just a few weeks earlier, Anna Jarvis a.k.a. my other mom was killed by a stray bullet that was meant for him. He didn't want that to happen to me. He didn't send me away because he didn't love me like I always assumed. No, it was the exact opposite. His world was too dangerous for me to be there. He was happy that day I went to boarding school because I would be safe.

My Iron Man life is too dangerous for you to be there. I think my SI life is too dangerous for you too, but you have been there so long that if I try to give you to another company, you'll probably cut off my balls in my sleep. So, you made the right decision being part of Tony’s SI life, but not Tony's superhero life. It's OK. I found someone who can fit into Tony’s superhero life because he's already there himself. He understands what I'm going through and my need to help more than anyone else.

I know you're worried about what happened in Siberia mostly because I didn't explain what really happened. I decided to go along with the Accords, not because I trust Ross, but mostly because I
don’t trust him and I believed that if I was part of the system, then I could make sure the man didn’t create enhanced person internment camps. There was also this other part of me that thought if I managed to create some limits, maybe you would be willing to come back. I’m trying to decide if thinking you would come back was more wishful thinking, assuming Ross didn’t screw everybody over. I’m still torn.

Steve also didn't trust Ross, most likely because he was already sure that the government was working on a new super soldier project. Spoiler alert: they are. He didn't want to be their guinea pig. So he felt not signing was the better course of action. Steve hasn't been a dancing monkey for anyone since the early 1940s, there was no way in hell he was going back to it now. Honestly, I really didn’t want Ross to lay a single finger on Steve either.

Looking back at it now, we were both afraid of the exact same thing, but we had different ideas on how to handle it. It probably would've helped if we actually told each other what we were thinking. We didn't. We were way too good at talking over each other. We were too busy assuming that we thought we knew what the other was thinking to ask.

Then Vienna happened-- OK the false flag operation to get the Winter Soldier out of the shadows happened. I'll just say that when Steve's friends are in trouble, he makes questionable judgment calls. I have no room to talk because so do I.

Siberia was one long string of bad judgment calls. The first being that Steve thought it was better to not let me know that my parents’ death was actually a Hydra orchestrated hit. When I found out that the Winter Soldier was the weapon of choice, I flipped. I mean full homicidal, ‘I'm going to fucking kill him’ rage. And I would have if Steve wasn't there.

Now more than four months removed from the situation and on a lot of medication that no longer consists of a fifth of bourbon a day, I realized that I would've regretted that. The Winter Soldier was a weapon brainwashed into the service of Hydra. There was no consent there. There’s no autonomy. No control over his actions. He was a weapon of Hydra and my anger should be focused on making sure every last part of that organization is burnt to the ground with the earth salted over.

So I ended up black and blue in Siberia because I had to be violently restrained from trying to kill someone. It's OK because a couple of months later Steve had to be chemically restrained from walking into a trap and getting killed or kidnapped by Ross. And no, he did not leave me there that day. He was there watching to make sure I got necessary medical treatment.

Just so you know, I'm not a complete masochist. I did take his name off of my medical power of attorney and I removed him from the Friday protocol. And you know, it hurt more to take his name off than yours. Which should have told me something right then. Afterwards, I proceeded to work my way through most of the liquor collection at the upstate facility. That's when I drunk texted him.
As you're aware, I am most honest when drunk text messaging, which is probably another reason why writing sober emails to you is so difficult. By some miracle he didn't delete it, but responded back. So, for the last 3 1/2 months, we’ve been talking to each other. Really talking to each other, but more importantly listening to what the other one is saying and we realized that we both made mistakes and a hell of a lot of wrong calls. We also realized that there's no easy solution. No magic button to make everything right again. We're still trying to fix us. It's a work in progress, but it's something I want to keep working on. I don't know where it's going to lead, but I think it will lead somewhere good.

When you read that first text message from Cuddle Bunny, we weren't dating. Not really. I just let you think that the person I was talking to was my boyfriend because I wanted to prove that I was moving on. You just told me that you had someone new in your life and I didn’t want you to think that I was some loser still pining for you. I wanted to prove to you that I was letting go. It wasn't true, at least not for a couple months. It's true now.

I want us to be friends again. I want us to build back what we were. No, that's not right. I want us to build something new, whatever that might be. I wasn't sure how to go about it. There was just all this bitterness and anger inside. I also needed time to let go of the notion that I could fix myself to make you love me in that way again. What I needed to realize is that I don't need to change to make you love me. I need to find someone who will love me, fuck ups and all and I have it. Steve has definitely had front row seats to all of the fuck ups. After Siberia, I really can’t see how he can.

So, if I can rebuild my relationship with Steve (still a work in progress) after the cluster fuck that was Siberia, then maybe there's hope for us.

I'm always going to love you. That's not going to change. But we changed. We don't fit together, not like we used to so we should find a new way to work. And I don't know how to do that, at least not quickly. I want it so maybe that's half the battle. I am willing to do dinners and lunches with you and the boyfriend. Although, next time let's make sure that the entrée won't kill me.

I'll try to write more and call more. I'll tell you the important things going on my life and you'll do the same and we’ll try to figure out how to become Tony and Pepper again. Because the truth of the matter is as much enjoyed my girlfriend Pepper, I miss my best friend Pepper more.

PS: About five minutes after you read this, Friday's going to replace the S word with Stefan and rejigger things so Ross doesn't know I'm talking about you know who. Yes this is my life. Never date a fugitive.
PPS: I don’t blame you for the great sunflower assassination incident. That wasn’t your fault at all. Self-flagellation is not a good look on you. What happened was not your fault.
Thank you to everybody who read or reviewed the last chapter. You are all wonderful. So, Spider-Man: Homecoming has just premiered in North America and I watched yesterday. I really did enjoy it. I will be incorporating some elements from the movie in upcoming chapters, but not for at least two weeks. (This chapter was already written prior to me watching the movie). Okay, some things from the movie have already happened in this universe, essentially the bank robbery that was in all the trailers.

Overall I say the stories about 88% compliant. I’m not going to say what will be different right now because that would be too spoiler heavy and I asked that you try to keep that stuff out of your comments right now. If you want to talk about the movie PM or DM me. Although this being a Tony/Steve story, I bet you know one thing right off the bat that is different in the story.

Things will be different because of the ripple effects of Tony and Steve trying to fix things and Tony sobriety. Okay, the divergent point in this universe was Tony calling out Steve’s name in bed with Pepper. For those of you who watch the Framework arc of Agents of Shield, you know that one change can have major effects.

This is a timeline this story is using. I am working off the assumption that the battle of New York happen no earlier than late 2011. The events of the agents of shield season three finale/Civil War happened late April early May 2016. Tony and Steve start speaking to each other again in May 2016. Certain early events from Spider-Man: Homecoming occurred in August before school started. In this universe, everything else takes place in September 2016.

For those of us who remember the Agents of Shield/ Winter Soldier convergence I’m going to try to avoid that by giving everybody a little more time than three days to watch the movie. Also, I’m going to try to write things so major plot points will not be given away, at least not until August. That part of the story will be written from Tony’s perspective so it shouldn’t be too hard. I promise to label the chapters when we get there and I'll also be adding Spider-man to the tags.

HSBF: So, did you intend for me to see the letter that you sent to Pepper or was that FRIDAY?

Friday: I have been respecting your privacy as requested.

Me: I was the one who BCCed you.
HSBF: What does BCC mean?

Me: I swear I gave you a basic computer tutorial when you first moved into the tower after the great Hydra meltdown. I'm pretty sure email vocabulary was part of that module.

HSBF: I was too busy worrying about the great Hydra infiltration to pay attention. Besides, I prefer phone calls.

Me: Said to me during a text message conversation.

HSBF: I still would prefer a phone call, but Friday said this is easier for her to make undetectable.

Me: True. BCC basically means that you included somebody on an email, but the other recipients don't know that you included the person on the message. Also, if they respond back, the person you BCCed will not get the message. In this case, I purposely wanted you to see the message. In case Pepper reacted badly, I wanted someone to see my side.

HSBF: So, you secretly sent me a copy of your heartfelt letter to Pepper?

Me: It kind of sounds bad when you say it like that. I just want you to know where my head is at with her and you.

HSBF: I realize that a part of you was always going to care about her. She’s been a part of your life for a long time.

Me: Almost 20 years

HSBF: That means something. I'm not going to be mad at you for wanting to continue that relationship.

Me: Just like a part of you is always going to love Aunt Peggy. Thankfully you're over using Peggy’s great grandniece as a placebo.
HSBF: You're never going to let that go?

Me: Nope.

Me: But mostly because her mom is now dead as well as her grandmother and daddy was never there. That means it is either me or Jackie who must do the shovel talk and I'm less likely to kill you. I think secretly Jackie is CIA, but I can't prove it.

HSBF: Do you still get the shovel talk when you're no longer interested and completely in love with someone else?

Me: Especially then because that means you were just using the other person.

HSBF: You really confuse me sometimes.

Me: Thank you. I wouldn't be doing my job otherwise.

HSBF: I wish you could see me smirking.

Me: I wish I could too. I love Pepper. A part of me is always going to love Pepper, but we don't fit like we used to. Therapy helped me realize that.

Me: Then there’s the fact that what we do is dangerous. Maybe it’s best to limit my inner circle to people who have the power to save themselves. You really don’t want to know how long of a list Agent Carter Junior found of people who want me dead. Maybe I am taking a page out of the Howard Stark book on how to protect loved ones, but at least people know that I'm doing what I'm doing because I care and not because I am indifferent.

HSBF: And if you didn't live the life that you live? Would you still be with Pepper?

Me: I can't not live the life that I am living now. I tried and it just ended in killer robots destroying cities and tears. Maybe there’s a version of me in the multi-verse that could give her what she needs but I’m not that version and that is not my life. This is my life now and that life has you and that's the life that I want.
HSBF: And you say I’m the romantic in this relationship.

Me: Now do I wish we were in the same city? Yes, because it would be so much easier to have this conversation if you were curled around me. But you can't have everything. And one of Birdbrain’s kids would walk in on us just because.

HSBF: I would even take the same country.

Me: Or even if you could come and go freely. I kind of hope our current president loses just so we get a different Secretary of State. The DOD hates Ross because he keeps stepping on their toes.

HSBF: Maybe he will resign anyway.

Me: You say the funniest things sometimes, Gummy Bear. Ross is a power-hungry megalomaniac that is probably worse after his heart attack.

HSBF: So, has Pepper responded to you yet?

Me: Oh, so that's what you really want to know about. Is that why you waited two days to ask if Friday was the one who leaked the letter to you? You wanted to give enough time for Pepper to respond.

HSBF: I was on a mission and just got somewhere I can get a signal.

Me: OK that's a lie because I made your phone and I made it so you can get a satellite signal anywhere, even in an isolated country, best known for textiles and cool clothes. Friday is your service provider. And don't say the battery died because you shouldn't need to charge that baby until 2023.

HSBF: Did you give me a cell phone that works on arc reactor technology?

Me: Sorry Sugar Bear. That is proprietorial.
HSBF: I'm going to take that as a yes.

HSBF: OK the truth is I was somewhere where I felt it was best not to bring your phone with me.

Me: It is always best to bring my phone with you in case I must go save your ass.

HSBF: Except you’re grounded right now and I don't want to put you in danger.

Me: If you're in trouble, you know I'll come. Friday can fly the armor remotely if need be. I will always come for you, in multiple ways.

HSBF: I was wondering when you would try to get a double entendre in here.

Me: I’m always good for a double entendre or six. Well more like two, three if I can take a nap. We all can’t have the refractory period of a super soldier.

HSBF: So, Pepper?

Me: Dammit, I thought I sufficiently distracted you with my double entendres.

HSBF: Not happening. What’s going on with you and Pepper?

Me: We are having lunch together in two days. A private lunch here away from paparazzi in the search.

HSBF: Private chef?

Me: I can cook. I just can't do omelets. I think it's because the smell of the eggs makes me sick, therefore I don't concentrate.
HSBF: Microwave fire. Toaster fire. Coffee maker fire.

Me: I'm pretty sure Thor was responsible for most of those. Apparently, our technology is so out of date by Asgardian standards that it is difficult for him to understand how to use our stuff. Do you know I'm rolling my eyes right now?

HSBF: Of course you are. Let me know how it goes with Pepper.

Me: I will, although it might not be till Sunday morning. After lunch with Pepper, I am going to be spending the afternoon showing Queens Junior's aunt his non-superhero work and dinner. Pizza this time because I'm only cooking once in a single 24-hour period.

Me: You know, unless you're in my bed. Then I would make you breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Mostly breakfast. You would look sexy smothered in syrup. Our suite in Johannesburg will have a kitchen.

HSBF: Looking forward to it.

Me: So now that I've reached out to Pepper, maybe you can text message or call Agent America.

HSBF: I should go. I'll write you in a few days. Miss you.

Me: Coward. Miss you too.

To be continued.
Chapter Notes

Thank you to everyone who read or reviewed the last chapter. Also, thank you for observing the no Spider-Man spoilers in the comments rule. You are all absolutely lovely. As more time passes, I will point out the differences in this universe from Spider-Man: Homecoming. The most obvious being Kevin/Laura/Yo-Yo took over Happy’s role in Tony’s life as well as his other work functions because Happy took Pepper’s side during the breakup implosion in this universe and he is only now back in New York. We will explore how that changes things as we progress as well as why this universe is different.

It’s time for another letter chapter. This time from Steve. Of course, because he’s on the run he can’t exactly email these himself, which is where FRIDAY comes in. Bless her for putting up with all of this.

Stefan Carter sent you a message via (FRIDAY messenger service)

Time sent: 9/9/2016 05:02:41

Dear Ms. Potts:

This is Stefan, Tony’s new boyfriend. Well, I think I’m his new boyfriend. It’s complicated when you’re in another country and you’re mostly dating by correspondence. Although I don’t expect Tony to send me a Dear John letter any time soon. I hope not, at least. I saw that too many times during the war.

I asked FRIDAY to deliver this note to you because we need to talk as much as you and Tony do, even if it can’t be face-to-face for the moment. I’m hoping circumstances will change that soon, but I might be working in various countries in Africa for a while.

I know that you know that Tony and I are trying to rebuild our relationship after what happened in May. We both made a lot of mistakes. I should’ve told him about his parents. I should’ve told him why I did not trust the Secretary. I should have listened to his argument instead of dismissing it and assuming that I was right. I don’t think I was right anymore, but I don’t think he was either. Maybe there wasn’t a right answer.
I’m not used to there being no right solution, just compromises. I hate that there is no right answer. It was so much easier before when you know who the enemy is, but there’s no enemy. Right now there are just different people trying to do what they think is the right thing. Even if it’s the wrong way to go about it.

I do care about Tony. I have for a long time, longer than I realized. I’m going to try hard not to hurt him again. But I will because, contrary to popular belief, I’m not perfect. I make the same, if not more mistakes, than anyone else.

We’re trying to rebuild our relationship and maybe things will fall apart once we see each other in person. Maybe the scars are too deep to be fixed by copious amounts of text messages. I have to try though.

My heart broke apart when reports of his death started making the news. They made me realize that I need Tony. I don’t want to contemplate him not being in my life. He has to be in my life. I need him. I will be in his life by whatever means he’ll let me.

I just wanted to tell you these things so you won’t worry. If you want to talk to me, feel free to pass the message through FRIDAY. She’ll see that I get it.

Stefan Carter sent you a message via (FRIDAY messenger service)

Time sent: 9/9/2016 05:16:37

Dear Sharon:

Thank you for getting the people who hurt Tony. I felt better knowing that you were out there keeping him safe.

I’m sorry for how things turned out between us. If circumstances were different, I think we could’ve been friends. Maybe it would be possible someday. You’re not your aunt. You are your own person and I see that. I’m sorry that I didn’t at first.

If you need me, you have the number.

Stefan Carter sent you a message via (FRIDAY messenger service)

Time sent: 9/9/2016 14:43:41
Dear Melinda:

Tony told me last week that you wanted to speak with me. I wasn’t ready to talk to you. I made some excuse about it being too dangerous, but we both know better. If you or your bosses wanted me back, I would be in that white cage on your new Quinjet right now. I got a very close look yesterday when I met your formally dead best friend who you were in love with, but never told. Considering he only threatened to send my body back to the Arctic if I hurt Tony, I assume he doesn’t know about what happened when you thought he was dead. Does he even know that you’re in love with him? You should tell him. After this mess with Tony, keeping secrets does no one any good.

After being helped by your team, I feel like I should write you. Okay, my therapist is making me send out these letters (through Friday because I’m not a complete idiot), but I feel like I owe you one too.

I should be mad at you. You lied to me for months. You could’ve at least told me that you worked in human resources at Shield. I could have got you killed when Shield fell. When I stopped receiving emails from you about that time, I wondered if you became collateral damage from Hydra anyway. An email or call would have been nice.

The truth would have been better. We were sleeping together for months. I should have at least known where you really worked. Now I’m left wondering how much was real and how much was fake. Clint tells me that most of it was real. Apparently you two worked together a lot before the incident in Bahrain. But, Clint is also a professional liar that will do whatever it takes for the greater good.

My therapist tried to get me to explain why I was mad at you and I really couldn’t. I guess that means that I’m not mad at you, even though I know that you were the one that ordered Clint to knock me out. I’m starting to understand why you did what you did. You didn’t want to be in a position where you would have to bring me in or worse.

It helps that you’re watching over Tony. I feel like I should apologize for half the ridiculous things he asked of you while you two were wherever you were. No, I haven’t told him that much about our relationship. It’s private.

I know we need to sit down and talk things out eventually. I don’t know when that’s going to happen, but it needs to. More importantly, I want to.
PS: Phil had me sign his issue of Captain America number one in exchange for not telling Tony that I got shot again. God, they were awful to Peggy in that.

Agent America sent you a message via (FRIDAY messenger service)

Time sent: 9/9/2016 15:12:41

Dear Stefan:

Everything was true, just certain things were omitted and names were changed. No, he doesn’t know. It’s not the right time to tell him. His favorite agent, that he sees as a daughter, is missing. His last girlfriend was sniped by a member of Hydra less than nine months ago, a teammate who stabbed us in the back. This is not the time to tell him.

I’m going to be in Johannesburg with your boyfriend and his assistant. It’s a precaution. Stark is managing to piss a lot of people off.

Maybe if you can tear yourself away from your boyfriend for more than 20 minutes, we can get a drink. It will give you a break from being Stefan Carter.

PS: I’m sure he didn’t tell you but he’s on medical restriction for the next few weeks. No Iron Man and no sexual activities. At least with you being in another country, one of these restrictions will be observed. If he behaves that restriction might be lifted before Johannesburg.

xxxxxx

Agent 13 sent you a message via (FRIDAY messenger service)

Time sent: 9/9/2016 15:32:41

I’m over it. You probably shouldn’t try to date your grandmother’s ex-boyfriend, even if biologically, he is almost the same age as you. Especially if he doesn’t bother to call or text message you for two years. Maybe you weren’t the only one trying to forget. I don’t remember if I mentioned before that I’m really bad at dealing with death.

I’m happy I got to arrest those who tried to kill your boyfriend. Because of what happened, my detail to the ATCU is being curtailed and I’m back at the CIA. New Shield is better than the old Shield, but I prefer the CIA.

I’m not happy that your boyfriend decided to make you my step daddy or rather Stefan Carter my
stepdad. Sometimes I think he’s 12.

Stefan Carter sent you a message via (FRIDAY messenger service)

Time sent: 9/9/2016 16:11:21

Oh God. I’ll talk to him the next time he contacts me. It’s his turn. Sometimes he really does act like a kid. I blame starting college at 14.

I wasn’t actively using you to get over your aunt. I was trying to move on from wanting to be with someone who already had a girlfriend. I’m sorry.

Stefan Carter sent you a message via (FRIDAY messenger service)

Time sent: 9/9/2016 16:18:41

I’m sure we’ll have some time to talk. Tony is supposed to actually participate in this conference. I wasn’t planning on actually being Stefan Carter at the event, but I think I need to be. It would be safer that way.

Can you talk to Tony about him going public with the new boyfriend? Him being who he is, maybe it wouldn’t be a good thing. His stock prices go down if he stubs his toe. Although, again, it probably would be better than the other stories currently circulating. Maybe Ross will stop targeting Clint's wife and children if he has someone else to target. I already sent Tony a bunch of gifts under the Carter persona.

Agent 13 sent you a message via (FRIDAY messenger service)

Time sent: 9/9/2016 16:23:41

You’re forgiven. Still better than the guy at the Academy who slept with me because I was a legacy. Turns out he was Hydra trying to recruit me, for morale reasons. Although I only learned that two years ago. I’m really glad I kicked him so hard in the genitalia that he lost his ability to reproduce.

Virginia Potts sent you a message via (FRIDAY messenger service)

If you hurt Tony again, I will kill you. You did hurt him last time and not just physically. (I knew you were the one responsible for him coming back one gigantic bruise, even before he confirmed it.) He worshiped you as a child. He had every Captain America comic book ever made and more memorabilia than anyone else except for maybe Phil. Then as an adult you found him lacking. That he’s only as good as his suits and his bank account. He never really did recover. Probably because a part of him believes that to be true. Tony has always been more than that. I’m just not sure if you really see it. I’m not sure if you want to see it.

To be continued.
Chapter Notes

Thank you to everyone who read or reviewed the last chapter. You’re all wonderful and definitely responded to Pepper’s comments in the last chapter. There will be more Pepper to come in upcoming chapters.

Warning: This is when we start to get to some material gleaned from Spider-Man: Homecoming. However, it’s twisted around so much that if you haven’t seen the movie you won’t recognize it. I’m going to keep things light until conversation 51. However, timewise we are going to be running parallel with the movie for at least the next 10 conversations.

Anthony: So, I’ve been informed that in 14 days Stefan Carter will be making his debut as my very public boyfriend at the Stark Industries sponsored conservation event on the margins of a huge conference I am crashing.

Anthony: Yo-Yo has SI PR working on it and Happy is not talking to me, mostly. I’m kind of glad he will be supervising moving all the Avenger tech upstate. Did I mention that the tower is becoming purely residential and commercial and no longer a superhero haven? The name is even going to be changed to something else, eventually. With the breakup and Pepper staying out West, more SI functions were happening on that coast anyway. It makes sense to take the Avenger’s name off the tower and finally move everything to the upstate facility. That’s where Vision and the support team is anyway.

Anthony: I even sold off most of the former Avenger floors. I’m only keeping the new penthouse with guest rooms, Laura’s apartment, and another apartment for my live-in assistant. Of course, because Happy and Elena can’t get along, Yo-Yo has moved into one of my guest rooms.

Nomad: No, but it makes sense that you are continuing what we had planned before it all came apart. Especially with all the kids around. You don’t want them to accidentally get hurt.

Anthony: Dum-E already had to intervene twice. It’s for the best, even though it’s kind of a mad house outside of the personal apartments.

Anthony: Although you’re planning to make my life outside an absolute madhouse. The media is going to pounce on the fact I’m gay and they will see it as gay because apparently there’s no such thing as bisexual or pansexual. Pepper’s boyfriend still thinks that she was just my beard.
Nomad: You’re already out.

Anthony: Yes, but the press conveniently forgets about that.

Nomad: If this is going to make problems for you, we don’t have to do it. I just wanted Melinda to float the idea past you. I don’t want you to do something that you’re not ready to do.

Anthony: Hey, I want to shout that I’m with you from the rooftops. Posing with my philanthropic minded boyfriend at Stark Industries’ philanthropic efforts to help with animal conservation and prevent wildlife trafficking. Happy is just going to have to get used to the idea that Pepper and I are never ever getting back together. Poor guy. He’s our number one shipper.

Nomad: I’m sorry.

Anthony: No, you’re not. Happy may not be ready to move on, but I am so moving on to you. I can’t wait to see you look all sexy in a suit. Maybe something by Tom Ford. Thankfully, I have your uniform measurements on file.

Anthony: You need to look extra edible. I want you in something that will make me want to climb you like a tree. Which won’t be that hard.

Nomad: I have a suit. You would be amazed by how much a good suit comes in handy while doing undercover.

Anthony: Do I want to know? Did you at least avoid getting shot?

Nomad: That time, yes.

Anthony: I just love how you must throw in a qualifier. Seriously, stop getting shot.

Nomad: I’ll try.
Anthony: I’m totally okay with going through with this. Stefan being there might be a good thing. Although I’m hoping that you will look so good along with the fact you have a Y chromosome will keep the press so distracted that they won’t realize you look like a bearded Captain America in a suit, without Kevlar.

Nomad: Captain America is a tiny woman whose family immigrated from Hong Kong. I doubt that they’ll get confused. There was a press conference and everything.

Anthony: You’re so funny. That’s Agent America despite her having the shield. I think Deputy Director Jeffrey wants to be Captain America. He can almost keep up with Agent Agent in trivia.

Anthony: He grew up across the street from a park that just happened to have a statue of you. That’s a lot for a little kid to live up to.

Nomad: I have a statue in the park?

Anthony: Captain America has a statue in a park, more than one park. Despite being considered a ‘war criminal’, most of them haven’t been taken down yet.

Nomad: That’s nice to know.

Anthony: Now Steve Rogers has a wall in my bedroom filled with nudes, most of which he did himself. Some of which were from your Tijuana Bible phase.

Anthony: Yes, Coulson had them and I don’t want to know how he got them or what he did with them.

Nomad: Oh God! Really? Please tell me you took those down this morning before Pepper came to lunch. Also, what about the kids? They keep barging in on your floor and our dates.

Anthony: 1) Its nude art. They need to get used to it. I have a digital screen over the prints so PG-13 art is reflected when anybody else steps in to my bedroom, which mostly consists of the cleaning crew, Yo-Yo, Happy, Lily Bear and Mama Bear. Again, Happy is mad at me, so he won’t be coming up to the room anytime soon.
Nomad: I assumed Pepper would be on the list.

Anthony: Well we’re not at that place in our relationship and if we were, you would be flying over here to strangle me and Happy would be speaking to me again. Whatever you think, just know that Pepper will not be stepping into my bedroom anytime soon. Which is why Happy is pissed.

Nomad: Did lunch go that badly?

Nomad: I’m not surprised. She threatened to kill me.

Anthony: It got postponed for work things. Shield and DODC work things. Never try to work with the federal government. Years of it working smoothly without interference and now that my BFF oversees a sister agency, chaos.

Anthony: Basically, there was an incident last night that our favorite teenage mutant ninja spider got involved in and I had to clean up. He tries to go to a party to talk to the girl of his dreams and instead things go so badly that I had to save him from drowning in the Hudson. Yes, I used the armor remotely. Dr. Simmons still has me on restricted duty.

Anthony: Laura is dealing with the teenager aspect of it and I get to deal with everything else. I think she’s forcing him to go to his DC field trip that he was avoiding because punching robbers and destroying bodegas is so much cooler.

Nomad: DC is overrated.

Anthony: Wait, let’s back up a little bit. Pepper threatened to kill you? Pepper Pot threatened to kill you? See, I should read your messages before I go on a text messaging rent.

Nomad: Yes, sort of. I believe it’s still referred to as the shovel talk. She’s your friend and I hurt you. So she’s going to defend you. You just want to talk about this now so we won’t talk about you going on a mission when you’re not supposed to.

Anthony: I wasn’t in the suit. I was drawing with Lily Bear and taking advantage of my excellent Wi-Fi. I’m going to email you something to give to her dad.
Anthony: Now that your self-righteous yelling is out of the way, can you tell me when my ex threatened to kill you?

Nomad: Yesterday.

Anthony: I shouldn’t even be surprised. How exactly did she get in contact with you?

Nomad: I wrote her a letter using Friday as an intermediary and she replied.

Anthony: I’m trying to find a gif that expresses my pure frustration with that and I can’t find anything appropriate.

Nomad: Sorry. My therapist thought that I should try to make amends with other people that I’ve hurt. I thought Pepper should be on the list also.

Anthony: I get why you did it, but I don’t think Pepper is ready to talk to you yet. Okay, I’m pretty sure she hates my new boyfriend. Which is fine because Happy hates you and he doesn’t even know that it is you. I can’t wait to listen to the most likely angry five-minute long voicemail waiting for me from Pepper Pot. I don’t know if she’s going to be madder at me canceling or about you.

Nomad: Which you knew was going to happen because you waited so long to tell her. By the way, I know you made me Sharon’s stepdad. That came out when we were talking to each other. I don’t like that.

Anthony: Sorry.

Nomad: You’re not sorry.

Anthony: It was for your own safety.

Nomad: How was making me Sharon’s stepdad for my safety?

Anthony: No, I mean not telling Pepper or Happy for that matter. He’s not happy I’m dating other
people. He was hoping that my near-death experience showed me the error of my ways.

Anthony: However, I’m more concerned with Pepper. If anybody could figure out how to take down a super soldier, it would be Pepper.

Nomad: Why are you worried about Pepper?

Anthony: Our breakup wasn’t the best. At one point, she accused me of preferring to spend time with you than her. Okay, she accused me of sleeping with you which I totally denied because I wasn’t sleeping with you. She played an audio file of me calling your name in bed. Apparently, my heart was already cheating. That was the beginning of the end. It just went downhill from there and it couldn’t be fixed. No matter what I tried.

Nomad: I forgot about that. I shouldn’t have written her.

Anthony: No, you needed to. I’m sure you would just apologize for who knows what because you’re such a Boy Scout. Although that doesn’t give her the right to threaten you.

Nomad: It was an idle threat. Let’s just drop it. I don’t want to mess up your friendship reconciliation.

Anthony: Nothing is idle with Pepper. I will deal with her on my own, starting with rescheduling lunch.

Anthony: Or maybe I should have Happy do it because that will make him happy until he finds out we just want to be friends again and only friends.

Nomad: How can he expect you guys to get back together when you're both dating other people?

Anthony: I told you he is our number one shipper. He is a hopeless romantic who constantly carries around an engagement ring with him in case I want to propose to Pepper in the spur of the moment.

Anthony: He also kind of hates Pepper’s new boyfriend and thinks you're some random charity worker I hooked up with after a mission, who is a total rebound. He’s just waiting for us to wake up
Anthony: I wish you could see me rolling my eyes right now.

Nomad: You got Pepper an engagement ring?

Anthony: No, Happy got Pepper an engagement ring, because he’s always been a full-service driver/chief of security. Thanks to therapy, I am aware I should get the ring back and do something constructive with it or at least tell him to get a new one to carry around that’s in men’s sizes.

Nomad: I don’t think we’re at the marriage place yet. I at least want to kiss you first.

Anthony: I’m completely on board with that.

Nomad: Maybe you can donate the ring to charity. Knowing your spending habits, it’s probably worth a lot.

Anthony: I’ll think about it if Happy will turn the thing over. Hey, I’ll talk to you later, Sugar Baby. Snookums just called to talk about last night so I should go, Babycakes.

Nomad: Tony, we still need to talk about the fact that you made me Sharon’s stepdad. Stepdad! Seriously, we need to talk about this.

Friday: Mister Stark is on a call with Director Rhodes. They’re currently deciding if Shield, the ATCU, or the FBI should lead the investigation into criminals using weapons created using alien based technology. Since Shield has not been publicly announced, it will most likely be the FBI.

Nomad: I still feel like he’s avoiding me.

FRIDAY: I will make sure he contacts you when he’s done.

Nomad: Thank you Friday.
To be continued

Chapter End Notes

I just want to let all of you know that I will be on vacation and then moving over the course of the next three weeks. I have banked a few chapters (and some artwork that will probably drop Monday) so there will be some updates during this time, but I’m not sure when I will be able to post. I probably will not be responding to very many reviews after this weekend either until things calm down again.
Chapter Summary

Artwork bonus chapter

Chapter Notes

Thank you to everybody who read and reviewed the last section. You're all wonderful. Before I really get busy, I have an artwork chapter for you. Is anybody curious to see what Lily Bear was working on before Tony had to rescue a certain spider? Artwork again by the wonderful Misaky0

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Tony Carbonell sent you a message via (FRIDAY messenger service)

Time sent: 9/10/2016 23:01:41

Snookums put me on hold to talk to General Talbot so I thought I would go ahead and send you Lily Bear’s artwork. Past this to birdbrain when you get a chance. I really wasn’t avoiding you. I just need to work with snookums on figuring out how to handle this without getting 15-year-olds involved.

I’ll text you as soon as I can give you my full undivided attention. Snookums is back. Gotta go sugar muffin. Wish I had time to talk you into sending me naked pictures. Agent implied that I’m going to love the new look.
[Alternative text for artwork not available on this site: Lila has drawn a family portrait. Her dad is above in purple with the rest of the family below. Uncle Tony is they are wearing a blue suit with gauntlet on his hand.]

Chapter End Notes

I have one chapter to upload while I’m on vacation at some point and then the vacation hibernation will really began.
Virginia Potts sent you a message

Chapter Summary

Thank you to everyone who read or reviewed the last conversation. I’m sorry I forgot to mention this last time, but all times are Steve’s time zone. We are just going to assume that Steve happens to be in the same time zone as South Africa. You’re getting this in under a week because this is probably the last quiet moment on vacation I will have. The next chapter will probably not be posted before August 5.

Again, we have tiny spoilers for Spider-Man: Homecoming in this chapter, but not a lot.

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Virginia Potts sent you a message via (FRIDAY messenger service)

Time sent: 9/10/2016 23:11:41

I’m sorry about the message from yesterday. I didn’t mean it like that. I’m just upset that Tony and I still can’t really talk to each other. Our schedules are not making it any better. I was about to cancel today’s lunch because of an emergency visit to our cell phone factory in China when Friday informed me that Tony had a last-minute meeting with Rhodey because of an incident last night. Maybe it really fell apart because neither one of us had time for the other and not just because he fell in love with you.

Maybe in a world where my boyfriend didn’t call me your name in bed, we would’ve been able to fix things. Happy is still trying, but I love myself too much to stay with somebody who is in love with someone else.

He loved you, he still loves you, and you completely betrayed him. You chose someone else over him. I may not know all the details, but I know you chose your childhood friend over him. What’s not to say you’re going to do it again? And I’m the one who will have to pick up the pieces, if he will let me and he didn’t last time. I’ve been replaced by Laura, Elaina, and Melinda. Even Kevin had my role for a while. He’s the one who sent me pictures of what you did to Tony. So why can he forgive you and we can barely hold a conversation? I don’t know and that hurts so much.

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Stefan Carter sent you a message via (FRIDAY messenger service)

Time sent: 9/11/2016 01:02:41
Dear Ms. Potts:

I really am sorry for my actions last spring. I’m well aware that I hurt Tony. I think you’re well aware of how far you will go to protect a friend. It’s even more complicated when both parties involved are your friend. I didn’t want to hurt Tony, but I did anyway. If I could do it all over again, I would make different choices, but you can’t change the past. You can only learn from it and rebuild the bridges that you burned down.

After everything, I still wanted to rebuild those bridges. Those first few conversations with Tony after what happened were not easy. I felt guilty and I was still angry because he tried to kill my best friend. I know why Tony reacted the way he did, but that doesn’t take away my anger.

It doesn’t take away the guilt either. I kept valuable intel away from Tony about what Hydra did to his parents. That information was used against him by an enemy who wanted to tear the Avengers apart because we couldn’t save his family. If Tony had that information, he couldn’t have been manipulated the way that he was. On a more personal note, maybe if I’d told him about Hydra’s involvement earlier he would not have felt so betrayed. Playing the what-if game works for no one.

But despite all that baggage on both of our sides, and I know Tony had his own ghost to contend with, I kept writing. Even when it hurt, even when it’s painful, I kept writing because we can’t be like this. The world can’t afford our man and Captain America at each other’s throats. The bad guys won last time because of it. We destroyed each other or nearly did. If we do that, then who will be around the next time aliens invade New York or apparently, Utah.

Maybe the consequences are not as high for you and Tony, but you still have a company that you have to run together. It’s not just about the money or people’s jobs. Tony wants to be friends with you again. He misses you terribly. He has been lamenting for months about losing your friendship.

He gets why your romantic relationship fell apart. I’m so sorry he said my name in bed. I was never actively trying to break your relationship apart. Also I was completely unaware of the Tony Stark gay sex tape, so I didn’t even think I had a chance. Even if I did, I wasn’t going to take your boyfriend.

However, Tony doesn’t understand why you stopped being friends. According to Tony that happened long before the breakup. Why have things gotten so stiff and painful between the two of you? Tony blames himself as he tries to analyze what went wrong. You know, Tony. He likes to fix things. He wants to make sure that what happened between the two of you won’t happen between us. More importantly he wants to be your friend. Your friendship is very important to him. Tony’s not sure how to get that back, but he wants to and isn’t that the first step?

Virginia Potts sent you a message via (FRIDAY messenger service)
Time sent: 9/11/2016 03:10:41

It is. Tony called me a little while ago after Happy tried to set us up on another date. Robert was not amused. He’s on the trip with me to China because he can work from anywhere. Tony and I are going to try for lunch again on Wednesday since I hope to be back by then. I want to be his friend again too.

I hope you and Tony become whatever you two need to become.

To be continued.
Anthony: Hey, are you still up? Did you get my earlier message via Friday? I’m sorry that things with Director and Agent Agent took so long. We might have a situation and we had to work some stuff out. On top of that, Pepper called. It turns out her five-minute rant was about the idiot running our cell phone factory in China.

Nomad: Yes, I got your email. It was adorable. I’ll give it to Clint next time I see him. I understand Tony. Protecting people comes first. I know you want to work things out with Pepper.

Anthony: I figured you would.

Nomad: Now what I don’t understand is why you created a cover for me that involves me being the stepdad of someone I’ve actually kissed. Why did you do that?

Anthony: That was Steve Rogers. Stefan Carter wants to punch him for taking advantage of his stepdaughter when she was emotionally vulnerable.

Nomad: Be serious, Tony.
Anthony: You’re never going to forget that?

Nomad: Not without a halfway decent explanation.

Anthony: I told you it was for your protection.

Nomad: I said a decent explanation. I’m glaring at my screen right now.

Anthony: You should really try emoticons. I think I gave you that.

Nomad: Sometimes you make no sense. And I don’t think it’s because I’m missing 70 years of pop-culture references.

Anthony: Okay the stepdad thing was kind of for your safety because covers hold together better when there’s at least a grain of truth to it. Hey, it’s not like they can interview your wife because she is dead and her daughter is CIA, again. It’s easier to make one person then two.

Anthony: Also, you do have a thing for older women and men for that matter. Of course, neither I nor Agent America look our age, but still. Then again, neither do you.

Nomad: Why was it easier to have Stefan Carter married to someone who actually existed.

Anthony: Real history.

Nomad: You couldn’t have just made me May’s ex-husband? We’ve actually slept together. There may have been a couple of dates even.

Anthony: Well, that would’ve been an option if I wanted to kill Agent Agent again or get you killed by him. I like you both alive.

Nomad: Good point.
Anthony: Also, after the fall of Shield, Agent America had to be un-person. She really doesn’t have an actual identity outside of the government. We should make stuff as real as possible especially if you living as Stefan is the only way you can come back eventually.

Anthony: I really do want to bring you back as soon as being connected to me in any way does not result in threats of death or arrest.

Nomad: You know the disgruntled employees were not your fault. Also, not everything is about you. I can get a lot of those on my own. Also most are idle.

Anthony: Pepper is anything but idle. She has crushed many businesses with her Manolo Blahniks. Ask our lawyers how many businesses sued us because of Pepper’s brainchild to create a responsible salvaging firm to keep enemy tech out of the hands of the stupid after one of our contractors almost got themselves killed during the rebuilding because they touched the wrong piece of alien tech. That's not even counting the item 47 incident. How dare we try to regulate an industry to keep people from getting themselves killed.

Nomad: What was the item 47 incident?

Anthony: Bank robbery with alien tech. Of course that has been becoming a regular occurrence in the last few months.

Nomad: That's not good. Pepper has a right to be upset with me. I hurt you.

Anthony: In your defense, I was kind of in the middle of a blackout rage. I’m sure you understand considering what you did to Clint’s jaw.

Nomad: Not just in Siberia, but before. I didn’t even know you and I judged you and that was wrong.

Anthony: I had you at a disadvantage. I knew that Captain America wasn’t the guy from the comic books before I met you. Aunt Peggy made sure I knew who Steve Rogers really was which helped when I started appreciating male anatomy. You had no idea that the Tony Stark from the tabloids and Fury’s dossier was just as fictional as the comic books I read as a kid.
Nomad: But I should have.

Anthony: You can make it up to me in Johannesburg. What are your opinions on chocolate sauce?

Nomad: That it’s good on Sundays. I can’t believe I’m going to finally be able to see you in less than two weeks.

Anthony: Super villain willing.

Nomad: You think something’s going to happen?

Anthony: Something is already brewing, it could even be connected to the Baltimore incident. However, I think it’s below my pay grade. I hope it stays that way. I should let you go. It must be ridiculously late there.

Nomad: 3:33 AM.

Anthony: Why do you respond to my text messages in the middle of the night? For a world traveler, I never quite got time differences.

Nomad: Because I miss you.

Anthony: I miss you too.

Nomad: I was also already up. I forgot to put the phone on silent and thanks to super soldier hearing, I heard the phone chime when Pepper messaged me.

Anthony: Considering I spoke to her between phone calls with the director, I hope the letters were better this time.

Anthony: At least tell me there were no more death threats
Nomad: She did not threaten to kill me again.

Anthony: This is an improvement.

Nomad: I apologized for you saying my name when having sex with her.

Anthony: I probably owe her nice shoes for that.

Nomad: Very nice shoes.

Nomad: I also told her that I wasn’t actively trying to break you guys up.

Anthony: Doesn’t matter. It is what it is.

Nomad: But maybe you guys could’ve got over the other things if that didn't happen.

Anthony: Maybe there is a dimension where Pepper still had no idea about my feelings for you and we could get back together, but this is not that timeline.

Nomad: Do you wish it was different?

Anthony: I wish I made different choices so you would be here with me, but I don’t wish Pepper was back. I’m going to blame that on the therapy and the good drugs.

Anthony: There's also sobriety. The world looks different when you're not inside a bottle. My relationship with Pepper wasn't healthy. I'm hoping my relationship with you will be better.

Nomad: It's better than what we had before. Although I wish we had fixed things before we couldn't see each other daily.

Anthony: Probably not seeing each other daily is why we were able to fix things. Just 13 more days
until I tackle you to the bed and kiss the hell out of you. Don't wear a shirt you like because I am ripping that sucker.

Nomad: Same for you, if your doctor allows it.

Anthony: She will. I’m being a good boy just for you.

Nomad: This is going to feel like the longest 13 days of my life.

To be continued.

Chapter End Notes

The Baltimore Incident refers to a slightly AU version of the events from the Emmy nominated Agents of Shield: Slingshot.

I know it's taking forever to get to South Africa, but it is coming. It's just super villains have got in the way along with the fact that I cannot post more than a chapter a week right now. I banked a bunch of chapters before moving, but to make sure there are no really long breaks, it's going to be only one a week.
Thank you to everybody who read or reviewed the last chapter. You all are absolutely lovely. I’m still in the middle of moving but because I had to work Friday, I decided to make good use of my lunch break, so you’re getting this today.

Again, light spoilers from Spider-Man: Homecoming, but I’m doing that thing where I’m re-contextualizing stuff. If you’ve read my Star Trek stories, you know what I’m doing. Now the next chapter will have heavy spoilers for the film.

This chapter takes place about four days after the last one, on Wednesday, September 15 2016. In my universe, Peter and his classmates will be at finals on September 16. I reserve the right to make this change because it makes more sense for the event to be on a Friday and unlike the writers of the movie, I can do math. Really, the eight years later thing was the one thing I hated the most and that includes that upstate New York scene.

HSBF: Were you and Pepper able to have lunch yesterday? Or is it already Friday where you are? It’s the 16th already where I am.

Me: Be glad I’m up late working while you’re probably having your early morning run. It still technically September 15 for another 20 minutes.

Me: Yes, no catastrophes happened and neither one of us was pulled into an emergency meeting. Spider Brat is safely in DC, so he is Agent Monkey Lover’s problem right now.

HSBF: Are you guys fighting again?

Me: Of course, we’re arguing. I had to keep him from drowning in the Hudson just a few days ago.

HSBF: Now you know how you make me feel. You guys will work it out. You already did once.

Me: I hope so.
HSBF: How’d the lunch with Pepper go?

Me: I was hoping I could distract you with my witty conversational skills since you still will not have telecommunication sex with me.

HSBF: We’ll talk about it again after Johannesburg. So were things that bad with Pepper?

Me: No, it went well, or at least as well as it can with Pepper being the only one drinking.

HSBF: The fact that you didn’t drink yourself is a good sign.

Me: It really is. So you were right. Her death threats against you were just the shovel talk. She was jealous.

HSBF: Well, considering you developed feelings for me while you were with her, I can understand that.

Me: That you and I could fix our relationship or at least start fixing it and me and her are in such an awkward place. I mean it got better after me almost dying, but we’re not back to who we were before.

HSBF: But you are working on it?

Me: We are.

HSBF: I’m glad.

Me: Although Happy is still mad at us, but he agreed to hand over the ring to be sold and the proceeds donated to My Sister’s Place in your mother’s name, anonymously of course.

HSBF: You don’t have to do that.
Me: Your mom got out of an abusive situation at a time when there were no safety nets. The least I can do is help others have a net.

HSBF: Thank you for doing that.

Me: Well, unfortunately several members of the paparazzi saw Happy taking care of the ring so they’re kind of running with it. Apparently Pepper and I now broke up because I proposed to her and she turned me down and I was so heartbroken that I’m just now getting rid of the ring.

HSBF: Oh God. Do I want to check Twitter right now?

Me: Probably not, but that’s mostly because somebody may have posted the videos that you did for the Captain America fitness challenge on the Internet. It’s going viral. How did you get talked into doing those videos? Was blackmail involved? Peter watched that in gym class last week.

HSBF: Yes, actually by Senator Christopher Ward. Why are they still playing that considering I am a wanted war criminal?

Me: Bureaucracy is slow. See this is why you do not screw the married aides of crooked politicians when you’re in the closet. The blackmail potential is too great, especially if you want to stay in the closet.

HSBF: That was not it. I don't care if people know that I'm not heterosexual. He threatened to torpedo your creation of the DODC after the battle of New York. And considering I saw all too well what evil people can do with alien tech, I’d rather you were overseeing it than someone else. In the end, it kept a lot of things out of the hands of Hydra because Shield would've been handling it otherwise.

Me: So you made those crazy videos to protect me and the company?

HSBF: Well, the people that the DODC were protecting anyway. Considering that two years later, a group of firefighters died because of a virus they picked up from an alien helmet, I think I made the right call.

Me: Thank you for standing up to corrupt politicians for me. This whole thing makes me kind of glad he’s no longer with us.
HSBF: Me too.

Me: BTW, your detention video is now a meme.

HSBF: Oh God. This is why I said they could not post the stuff online. They were really mad about that.

Me: Because that made the website very plain. After watching several, I think you made the right choice. I also love the one about patience. Although I think waiting to see you in South Africa really will be worth it.

HSBF: How many videos were uploaded?

Me: Several. The anti-bullying one is my favorite. You should check YouTube.

HSBF: This originated from your real Twitter account. It’s quoted in several articles.

Me: Congratulations, you know how to use Google.

HSBF: Tony!

Me: By the way, when were you going to tell me that you got shot again last week? I mean, I just tried to get you to tell me on your own, but you didn’t, so the world now gets to see you be adorable. Also, hey, maybe it will put pressure on the government to pardon you and I can get my boyfriend back before he gets himself killed being the hero.

HSBF: Coulson said he wouldn’t tell you.

Me: Coulson didn’t, although it was pretty obvious that he got to see you before I did when pictures of his signed copy of Captain America number one became his avatar on Freaking Cool.
HSBF: He has a social media account?

Me: Anonymous fanfiction account. Although, do not read any of the Captain America fanfiction that he wrote before your defrosting. Most of them are self-insert, although if you’re Coulson, I guess that’s okay. If you didn’t know him, you would think that he was making this stuff up.

HSBF: I’ll make a note of that. How did you find out?

Me: Yo-Yo’s boyfriend was there and he likes me.

HSBF: I don’t even know what to say to that.

Me: Try the emoticons. You’ll be amazed what a guy’s willing to do for an all-expenses-paid weekend road trip with his girlfriend to the Maryland shore in the car of his choice.

HSBF: I shouldn’t even be surprised.

Me: No, you shouldn’t be, which is why you should tell me when you get hurt.

HSBF: So, the next time something happens to you, you’ll tell me right away.

Me: If Twitter doesn’t tell you first. I went out for a doughnut today and there were six articles about me eating my emotions. Of course this was after pictures of Happy getting rid of the old engagement ring started making the rounds.

HSBF: Jesus.

Me: Speaking of emotional counters that probably required baked goods of some sort, was Clint with you when Agent Agent stopped by to save your ass? That incident probably would require at least three dozen bacon glazed doughnuts.

HSBF: No, just Sam. And should you really be eating bacon glazed doughnuts? Your heart stopped last month.
Me: Because of an assassination attempt.

HSBF: You should still be eating better.

Me: God, you’re such a mother hen.

HSBF: Somebody needs to take care of you.

Me: I’m glad about that. It’s probably for the best Birdbrain wasn’t there. Although I wish Sam was better at keeping you from doing things that will get you shot again. Were you just hoping the bullet holes healed up before South Africa. We are going to see each other in eight days.

HSBF: Actually, the wounds are mostly healed already.

Me: I hate you. It’s why I posted videos of you imparting your wisdom to the youth of the world.

HSBF: No, you don’t.

Me: No, I don’t. I actually kind of love you and wish you would stop putting yourself in danger. Coulson had to come save you. Coulson! This is the guy who got shanked by Loki and he had to come rescue your ass.

HSBF: Now he has an energy shield to keep that from happening.

Me: And you have one too, that you should be using. Why are you so stubborn?

HSBF: I probably would’ve died of an asthma attack 60 years ago if I wasn’t so stubborn.

Me: No, you would be hitting on me from your nursing home bed. You would live to hit a centennial, no matter what.
HSBF: Maybe.

Friday: I hate to interrupt, but a computer with the name Ned’s Death Star is trying to override the training wheels protocol of the Spider-Man suit.

Me: I’m not even surprised Spider Brat is having his friend hack into the suit. I’m kind of impressed. Is Monkey Lover at the playground right now?

FRIDAY: Yes.

Me: Okay, get a hold of the doctor and activate the Coulson Protocol for the suit. Just let Spidey think that he hacked it.

FRIDAY: Of course, Sir.

Me: Hey, Dumpling, I’m going to handle a situation with the Spider Brat.

HSBF: Let the agents at the Playground handle it. Don’t go to DC.

Me: I’m not going to go to DC. Agent America is off on a mission and Yo-Yo is taking a vacation with her boyfriend, but Monkey Lover and Agent Piper are available.

HSBF: No remote suits either.

Me: Fine. Friday has Monkey Lover on the line so I’ll talk to you later.

HSBF: Be careful.

To be continued
Conversation 51: I Feel like I owe Jarvis an apology

Chapter Notes

Thank you to everyone who read or reviewed the last chapter. You are all absolutely lovely. Thank you for your well wishes on my moving. I survived. I just have a bit more unpacking to do. This conversation takes place a few days after the last one.

Warning: This chapter has heavy spoilers for Spider-Man: Homecoming. A lot of this stuff has been in the trailer, but the trailer was slightly misleading.

HSBF: Tony, what the hell happened in New York? It’s all over the news.

HSBF: You’re not supposed to be running missions. Are you okay?

Me: Physically, I’m okay. Mentally, just be happy that I didn’t drink anything.

HSBF: What happened?

Me: Well Spidey Brat fucked up and I had to save his ass and a ferry filled with people. Or maybe I fucked up bringing a 15-year-old into our fight or fighting with you in the first place.

Me: There’s also the fact that neither I nor anyone else from my team realized that things were going missing from the DODC for years. I should’ve realized something was up with that when the Baltimore incident happened. It wasn’t just one disgruntled employee, like we originally thought. There’s a lot of fuck ups all around.

HSBF: Just breathe, baby.

Me: I fucked up. I want a drink.

HSBF: You don’t need it. Just start at the beginning.
Me: So, after I stopped texting you, Spider Brat decided to use his tracker and newly 'liberated' suit to track down the weapons dealers to an abandoned gas station somewhere in Maryland.

HSBF: But it wasn’t really liberated?

Me: The Coulson protocols were initiated and agents were watching the entire time to keep things from getting really awful. That’s how we discovered the operation to take stuff from the DODC East Coast storage unit. The FBI’s handling it.

HSBF: That’s good.

Me: Director Snookums is not happy because his people figured it out first, but they’re not public yet so it would just cause problems. They’re also a spy organization. So this sort of thing is FBI jurisdiction, probably. Yo-yo was on the ferry though to assist.

HSBF: What happened with Peter?

Me: I let him spend the night locked away in the DODC.

HSBF: Why?

Me: Jarvis left me in jail a few times after some of my bigger fuck ups. I felt it appropriate. He missed the decathlon, but he showed up in time to save his classmates, including Liz, the girl of his dreams.

HSBF: I saw that on the news.

Me: He did great and I was proud, genuinely proud, and then it all went to hell. I knew he was still investigating. The suit was still tracking him. I knew he was running reconnaissance and yet I didn’t try to stop him.

Me: Really, I should’ve had Laura pull him when he interrogated Baby Spider’s shady uncle. I thought the FBI agents and Yo-Yo on the ferry would keep things from ending badly.
HSBF: Instead, according to the news the ferry was split in half and you swooped in to save the day. No one died. That’s always good.

Me: Yes, but I was so busy trying to keep Spider Brat from dying that bad guys got away except for the one that got crushed by a car. He’s in the ICU under armed guards.

HSBF: That’s good, I think.

Me: I took the suit away.

HSBF: What?

Me: I had to take the suit away. Even with Laura’s supervision as well as Melinda and Yo-Yo helping him get used to his powers, it’s not working. He’s going to get himself killed or someone else killed and I’m not going to be here in a few days to save him. My hands are already so bloody.

HSBF: Tony, it will be okay.

Me: No, it won’t be. I felt like I was channeling Howard.

HSBF: Raising teenage superheroes is hard.

Me: It is. I felt like he shouldn’t even be here. I should not have brought him to Germany or rather have Kevin bring him to Germany. Kevin really hated Spider sitting. I think that’s the real reason why he switched to working with Pepper. Other than getting to live in the same state as his wife again.

HSBF: Why did you bring the spider into it?

Me: Because I love you and you were going off the deep end. Or at least I thought you were. I had to protect you by whatever means necessary and I made some very questionable choices like getting a teenager involved and only telling him that you were crazy and not everything else going on.
HSBF: I'm going to forgive you for saying that because maybe you weren't that far off.

HSBF: But what if Ross got to him instead? What would he have done to a 15-year-old with spider powers?

Me: I don’t even want to think about how it was before the Accords were adjusted to handle the underage with powers. The best case scenario would have been Coulson finding him first.

HSBF: So maybe it’s a good thing that you’re taking care of him.

Me: I took the suit away.

HSBF: Does that mean that Laura is going to stop monitoring him or that Melinda will stop working with him when she’s around?

Me: No. Melinda thinks that we should send him to the Academy. They’re starting it back again, now that the agency’s being re-legitimized. They’ve never had someone as young as him in Operations, but if he’s a trained agent, at least he won’t get himself killed because of incompetence.

HSBF: You don’t want that?

Me: Thanks to therapy, sobriety, and antidepressants, I know that I want him to be a kid for as long as he can be.

HSBF: Because you didn’t get to be.

Me: Exactly.

HSBF: I think taking the suit away right now is the right decision. He’s not ready for it.

Me: I’m sensing a but coming.
HSBF: But this is really just a timeout and you know it. When you get back from Johannesburg, you’re going to have to sit down with Spidey and talk things out.

Me: No, you’re right. Do you think that maybe it would be easier if he was a full-time Avenger? No more dual life.

HSBF: Then no childhood.

Me: You’re right about that. I’ll talk with Agent America and Yo-Yo about it when we’re in Johannesburg. Or maybe on the flight to Johannesburg. Three more days. You have no idea how much I need to be with you right now. I actually cried.

HSBF: Doing the right thing is never easy.

Me: I know. I think it’s almost midnight where you are, so we should probably let you sleep.

HSBF: I’m here whenever you need me.

Me: Thank you for that. The urge to go to the liquor store has passed. Talking to you really helped.

HSBF: Glad to be of service.

To be continued
Subject: What the hell happened with my nephew?

Chapter Notes

Thank you to everybody who read or reviewed the last chapter. This is another Spider-Man: Homecoming associated chapter. Of course, this probably did not happen in the movie. But the purpose of the story has always been to get inside the heads of our characters.

Since it’s been a month and a half, I will now state that the biggest difference in this universe compared to the actual timeline are Tony is sober and in treatment for his various problems, Pepper let things go for good, and the role of happy Hogan and peters superhero life will be played by Laura and various other S.H.I.E.L.D agents. Most of the things in Spider-man: Homecoming are the same but Tony’s different and we are going to see how that changes things for good or ill.

This chapter takes place a few hours after the ferry incident.

From: Riley_Parker
To: Tony_Carbonell
Time sent: 9/20/2016 20:01:41
Subject: What the hell happened with my nephew?

What the hell happened with my nephew? After skipping school, he comes home crying about losing the internship dressed in something he did not leave the house in. If you laid one finger on him in a way that is inappropriate, I will fucking kill you. I don’t care that you’re a superhero. I don’t care if you are a billionaire. Don’t you fucking dare touch my nephew.

From: Riley_Parker
To: Tony_Carbonell
Time sent: 9/20/2016 20:32:21
Subject: What the hell happened with my nephew?

I’m sorry for what I said a few moments ago. I didn’t intend to send that email, but Peter is the technically inclined one in our family. I doubt that anything like that happened even though I’d did catch Peter with his shirt off with his BFF. I mean he is head over feet obsessing about Liz so he can’t be fooling around with Ned, I think. Then again, you’re supposed to be an international playboy and you have a gay sex tape.

Peter does not just see you as a role model, he worships you. Did he ever tell you that you saved his life at the Stark world fair? That kind of made an impression on him and me. It’s so easy to fall from grace when they put you up on a pedestal.

From: Tony_Carbonell
To: Riley_Parker
Time sent: 9/20/2016 21:01:41
Subject: I really did keep my hands to myself.

You’re forgiven. You remind me of my mom. I think that’s why I like you. I do like younger men,
but I have this rule about not dating anybody born after 1984. Also, my boyfriend would not be happy.

There was a lab mishap today that made me realize that maybe it’s not a clever idea to have a 15-year-old working on a lot of the projects that I’m doing. He didn’t follow the protocols and somebody almost got hurt. Thanks to my assistant and bodyguard, Miss Rodriguez, the worst thing that happened was Peter lost his clothes, which is why he ended up wearing a Free Quake T-shirt.

Peter is brilliant, but he’s young and still learning. More importantly, he doesn’t know what he doesn’t know and that can be a problem. I remember being 15 and thinking I knew everything. Now at 46, I know better. I’m aware that accidents happen in my line of work, but I couldn’t forgive myself if something happened to him.

Maybe I have been putting too much pressure on him. An internship at Stark Industries is an important thing. I make it my life’s goal to not be anything like my father and I kind of feel like I might be doing that by putting too much pressure on Peter.

With Howard, I always had to be perfect. I never could be who he wanted me to be. It took me a long time to realize that I didn’t need to be. I don’t want Peter to push himself to be perfect. I just want him to be 15. I never got to be 15. I’m pretty sure I was a college junior at his age.

I spoke to my boyfriend, Stefan, after what happened and he agrees that I may have been a little too hasty. I yelled and used horrible analogies and I really don’t like making anyone cry. Howard did that a lot. Stefan thinks I should take my visit to see him in South Africa as a time to reevaluate a lot of things.

So just let Peter know that right now, this is a timeout. I want him to think about what went wrong and how he can improve. When I get back, we will think about additional training. He’s going to the best public science school in the city, but maybe some supplemental classes might be helpful. There’s things involved in my day job that they don’t teach. My bodyguard/fellow Avenger Melinda mentioned a summer program in DC that one of her friends, Dr. Leopold, runs that might be good for him.

I don’t know if there’s something going on between Peter and Ned. Although, Laura has received some interesting text messages regarding the beauty of Liz Allen. Apparently, she’s a Goddess among seniors. Of course, that doesn’t necessarily mean anything and I’m living proof of that.

Could Peter be keeping a big secret from you? Probably. If he is, then maybe he’s afraid of how you will react when the truth comes out. I never told my dad I was also into men. I was too terrified to. I didn’t want to be different and I felt hiding was easier. I didn’t want to make him even more disappointed in me than he already was. I always felt like I was never good enough for him. I regret the fact we never had that conversation, especially because I recently found out that he knew and was okay with it. Peter will tell you when he’s ready and hopefully you won’t find out via a video from YouTube.

xxxx
From: The Mechanic
To: Teenage Mutant Ninja Spider
Time sent: 9/21/2016 21:03:11
Subject: I’m sorry I acted like my father.

So, apparently, I made you cry. I didn’t want to do that. I just wanted you to realize how serious things were. Being a superhero is not a video game. You don’t get extra lives usually. Sorry I used one of my father’s techniques to express how dangerous the situation really was. You’ll be happy to know that your aunt threatened to kill me. Don’t worry. I deleted the message from every server.
known to mankind and put a fake one in its place. (And Friday will be deleting this part of the email after you read it). I told your aunt that there was a lab accident that you were responsible for and that’s why you came home in the Free Quake T-shirt. Please corroborate.

I stand by my decision that you’re not ready for the suit right now. Maybe you will be eventually. Laura will make that call because my judgment is absolute shit. But right now, it stays locked up, especially with me being out of the country for the next week. If something happens while I’m gone, call Laura or Rhodey. Or call Sharon. You still have your phone, use it.

I do realize that I probably said some things that I shouldn’t have. Sorry about the crying. I went full Howard which is something I don’t want to do. I try not to be my father because he was a bit of a dick. I am still mad at him for sending me to boarding school, or more accurately, not telling me he was sending me to boarding school because my good mother figure got sniped because of him. I have lots of issues. Basically, I spent most of my childhood being compared to Captain America and that was well before I became a member of the superhero club.

They tell you to never meet your heroes because they might just end up disappointing you. I can tell you from personal experience that is true. The people that we idolize are not who we really idolize. They are mere mortals who make mistakes and screw up a lot. They’re not heroes because they’re perfect. Maybe they’re heroes because they keep trying.

Heroism doesn’t come from the suit or superpowers or anything else superficial like that. One of the greatest heroes I’ve ever met never had any of that. The voice in your suit for the last few days was that of Agent Phil Coulson. He has been a field agent since before you were a zygote. The man has saved the world so many times he has literally lost count. He doesn’t even remember the details anymore.

During New York, he went up against the bad guy by himself because he knew he needed to do it. Okay, me and Steve were in the middle of a pissing contest because we were being mind-fucked by alien tech. Coulson died that day. He got better, but his heart stopped for a while. Then years later, he lost a hand saving his entire team. No powers, no suit, just him. It’s not the suit, it’s what’s inside you. When you become Phil Coulson, then you’re ready for the suit.

When I get back from seeing Stefan, which I hope will put me in a much better mood because of things you are too young for, we can reassess at least the actual intern parts of your internship. The other stuff that’s a Laura thing.

Okay you’re 15, so you probably have some idea of what I’m planning to do with my boyfriend if Simmons will clear me and she may not because of me saving you.

BTW, your aunt knows that you’re keeping a secret from her that’s big. And because she walked in on you shirtless with your BFF, she thinks you are at least bi. This may be the time to mention you have spider powers. People are waking up all over the world with superpowers due to eating the wrong piece of fish or going swimming in the wrong body of water. I don’t think it will surprise her that much. I’m not going to out you, but you need to tell her eventually. So much worse when people find out due to video. And they didn’t have YouTube when my scandal broke out. It would be so much worse now.

Xxxx
From: Teenage Mutant Ninja Spider
To: The Mechanic
Time sent: 9/21/2016 12:35:11
Subject: Re: I’m sorry I acted like my father.

Thank you for deleting any evidence of my aunt threatening to kill you. I corroborated the lab
accident story. I’m still upset and a little angry and it’s probably best that you’re going to be in South Africa for a little while. Maybe I’ll go to homecoming since my evenings will no longer be filled with saving the neighborhood.
PS: Ned knows the truth. That’s what aunt May walked in on. I don’t want her to know yet. 

From: Riley_Parker  
To: Tony_Carbonell  
Time sent: 9/21/2016 21:01:41 
Subject: Re: I really did keep my hands to myself. 

We had a good talk after I read your original email. Although, I wish you would’ve called me. I was so worried when he didn’t show up, especially with the reports about the ferry. I know many times I skipped school to go on the ferry with my friends.

I agree he may not be ready for the internship, especially with everything you work on and that’s not even considering the superhero aspect of your job. He’s been dead on his feet a lot and he quit band and he loved band. If it wasn’t for counselor Laura, he would have missed DC. Maybe in a year or two, he can do the full internship. When you get back from your trip, we can talk. Maybe we can even reschedule that canceled dinner. 

From: Tony_Carbonell  
To: Riley_Parker  
Time sent: 9/22/2016 8:01:41 
Subject: Re: I really did keep my hands to myself. 

That works. Miss Rodriguez will be in touch. I should be available the first or second weekend in October. I think. I’m bad at remembering my own schedule.
Interlude 16: Things do not always go as planned

Chapter Notes

Thank you to everybody who read or reviewed the last chapter. This is a baby interlude, but necessary for the plot. Purple Arrow is Clint. Slingshot is Yo-Yo. Although, that is actually her code name in the comic books. Remember, we don’t use the real names of the kids in these messages.

A few things from Spider-Man: Homecoming, but the real fun in this chapter is seeing why things are different in this timeline.

This conversation takes place on the evening of September 21, 2016. That means that parts of it took place before some of the later emails that Tony received. I just didn’t want to split up that conversation.

Red Malibu: Everything is set up. Although we are moving up the timetable a couple of days because of recent events.

Purple Arrow: Such as you swooping in to save the day when ferries in New York are split apart due to the ‘accidental heroics’ of a 15-year-old in an onesie. That really made the international news. This is why you shouldn’t recruit toddlers.

Red Malibu: As the parent of a preteen, you are well aware that they never listen to anything you say which is the whole reason why the ferry incident happened. Unfortunately, the whole situation is making S edgy, i.e. in the mood to arrest people, even juveniles.

Red Malibu: Mrs. Purple Arrow is going to have to stay behind to mitigate. I think this means indefinite detention for Spidey and school dance chaperoning this Saturday for Mrs. Purple Arrow, but I’m not sure.

Purple Arrow: Fuck

Red Malibu: It’s okay. You will see her soon, I hope. Slingshot is making travel arrangements, so be ready to roll any moment.

Purple Arrow: Is S planning to crash the party?
Red Malibu: According to my contact at Truman, yes.

Purple Arrow: Fuck.

Red Malibu: I think we may still be able to pull this off. Talbot agreed mostly because he really likes Mrs. Purple Arrow and doesn’t like the bad guys using little kids as collateral, but he did sign off on the arrangement. So there’s little Ross can do once the press conference happens, no signing required, I promise.

Red Malibu: Don’t worry, Talbot is still happily married. Apparently, edible arrangements can get you forgiven when you accidentally mistake your wife for a Hydra operative. They also work after Hydra kidnaps your son for blackmail purposes.

Purple Arrow: Good to know in case that happens. Since Hydra is dead now, I am more concerned about Lily drawing you in my place in our happy family picture.

Red Malibu: You know I’m head over feet for Stefan. I think Lily just misses you. It’s hard when your parents aren’t there. I imagine it’s worse when you know that your dad loves you and doesn’t see you as a prize show pony.

Purple Arrow: I know. You stepped into my place, probably because of your own mountain of daddy issues. You’re doing homework with Cody and drawing with Lily. If I stay away much longer, Nikki will be calling you daddy.

Purple Arrow: I know that you were originally planning to sell all of your property in the tower. Linda told me during our meet up, because you told her that during your breakdown at the farm. Yet you kept the apartments at the tower just so the kids wouldn’t have to move again or be farther away from their new friends, especially Ms. Marvelous.

Red Malibu: I changed my mind when I opted to remodel to un-Virginia my living space instead of leaving entirely, because your wife said I couldn’t hide with head between my legs in upstate New York forever. It was just a bonus that the kids wouldn’t be uprooted again. Although we are moving all the dangerous stuff to the compound because kids just don’t listen.

Purple Arrow: Sure. Just promise me that you’ll have Agent America look over the moving plans.
Red Malibu: She has and she’s fighting with my head of security about it.

Purple Arrow: Of course.

Red Malibu: I’m just trying to do the right thing. It doesn’t always turn out the way I intended it to.

Purple Arrow: See murder bots.

Red Malibu: But I am trying. You should get that, considering you shot Stefan.

Purple Arrow: He wasn’t thinking. He was going to get himself killed. I had to intervene.

Red Malibu: I know. And it may not be the popular decision, but it was the best option. That’s what people like us do.

Purple Arrow: I wish we were not in this position.

Red Malibu: Do you honestly think that if all of us had agreed not to sign that this would not have happened anyway?

Purple Arrow: I’m not that naïve, especially because Linda is working with a five-year-old with spider powers.

Red Malibu: With a shady uncle and a father brought into Shield during the last days, most likely so his father could be flipped to the dark side. I feel like I have to be in the system to at least protect them, otherwise it will be people like S and Talbot calling the shots. When Talbot is the lesser of all evils, you know you’re screwed.

Purple Arrow: Protecting my children is why I’m doing this. It’s the only reason why I’m doing this. I’m still furious at the heart and yet I still trust him more than S.
Red Malibu: I trust the person who killed my parents more than S.

Purple Arrow: That is never a good sign, although that may make Stefan feel better. I think I will make contact with Slingshot for transport.

Red Malibu: I’ll have the jet ready for you. Or maybe the Zapper one will come pick you up. We have to get one of those

To be continued.
Chapter 80

Thank you to everybody who read or reviewed the last conversation. It’s been pointed out that it wasn’t completely clear so let me clarify that the ‘me’ in the last chapter was Tony. Sorry I forgot to specify.

From the title, I’m sure you realize that we are close to the meet up. I know I’ve been dragging it out for a while, but we’re almost there.
This chapter takes place about 12 hours after the last one on September 22.
Due to my schedule changing, chapters will now be going up sometime Wednesday.

Anthony: Hey I just wanted to let you know that I decided to go to Johannesburg early. I managed to move things around and it just made sense to start things on the 23rd.

Nomad: You mean Yo-Yo moved things around.

Anthony: If you’re not going to take advantage of your assistant’s super speed, what’s the point of having an assistant with super speed? I need a break after what happened. Also I have a few meetings with various government officials to deal with some of our fuck ups in the country. If I get them done now, that means more time with you.

Nomad: Which I’m grateful for. Are you on the jet already? Or are you flying in the suit?

Anthony: I took the jet. I’ve been here for a few hours. I even had a few of the meetings already. Although, I did bring a suit or two because, well, I almost got killed by sunflower seeds last month. The ‘bodyguards’ are also with me, armed with EpiPen’s and Icer’s.

Nomad: That’s probably a good plan. I may have packed a few EpiPen’s myself.

Anthony: This is why you’re my boyfriend. I just really want to, no need to, spend extra time with you after everything with Spidey and the feds. Ross is really pissed off about the ferry getting sliced in half. He sees it as evidence that we should all be locked up.
Nomad: Because it’s always our fault when the bad guys’ tech malfunctions.

Anthony: Well apparently if we just let the FBI deal with it, the alien tech that was stolen right out from under the government’s nose would not have malfunctioned. [Insert eye roll here.] Wait, how do you even know about that?

Nomad: I have my sources. Do you actually believe that?

Anthony: Hell no. Which makes me feel even worse about the way I reacted.

Nomad: You made the right choice. He isn’t ready yet. You’re not a hero because you have powers. You are a hero because you keep trying.

Anthony: Wise words. I spoke with Spidey.

Anthony: Okay I emailed because as I’ve learned with you, it’s better to put things in writing.

Anthony: His aunt threatened to kill me because he came home crying and I had to explain what happened without explaining what really happened because he still doesn’t want her to know. Now she thinks he’s hiding the fact that he’s at least fooling around with his BFF Ned.

Nomad: That decision is going to blow up in his face. Actually, it might already be from what you’re saying.

Anthony: Parents always know when something is not quite right. Jarvis did at least. I’m just hoping I’m in another country when it all falls apart.

Anthony: Also, speaking of situations that could blow up, Ross has decided to show up for the last day of the conference, which is something that the Secretary hasn’t done in years.

Nomad: Trap?
Anthony: Probably. I would understand if you don’t want to risk coming, but I really want to see you. It’s been a very stressful couple of days.

Nomad: Ross?

Anthony: Yes. Even though this is not the Secretary’s problem anymore. Its Snookums’ problem and he wasn’t that happy either.

Nomad: I’m sure the Colonel is more understanding.

Anthony: Yes, but he hates it when people get in the way of the mission. It annoys him. It’s looking more and more likely that Spidey is going to powered person summer camp or rather winter break camp as they kind of can’t wait nine months for intensive training.

Nomad: It may be for the best.

Anthony: Although I don’t know how we are going to train that good doer’s streak out of him. You still have it and it’s been decades.

Nomad: Don’t try. Just teach him to be less reckless.

Anthony: Which you will be in charge of because I can’t lecture anybody about not being reckless. I can’t be that much of a hypocrite. I could, but I choose not to be.

Nomad: I’m just glad that you’re aware that you are reckless.

Anthony: Although thinking about it, so are you. Okay, Agent America will be giving that speech, because Yo-Yo got shot a couple of months ago after taking a bullet for her current boyfriend, which led to cauterization by blowtorch.

Nomad: Agree.

Anthony: I should be happy that at least you are now self-aware. Please stop doing stupid stuff.
Nomad: I’ll try, if you try. I might be able to get to Johannesburg a little bit earlier

Anthony: That would be good because I think you probably should leave a day or two earlier than planned. Ross isn’t going to be here until the last day so maybe you can stay out of his way. When are you going to get here?

Nomad: Very soon. Open the door, Tony.

Steve placed the phone in his pocket, just as the door opened. Tony dropped his phone to the ground as soon as Steve’s lips descended on his. Steve was just that eager.

“At least I found out my new phone is really shatterproof.” Tony remarked, pulling him into the room. “You look like your celebrity doppelganger in Snow Piercer, but healthier.” To keep himself safe, it was decided that Stefan would have darker hair and a beard. “You look good.”

“So you like this look?” Steve asked.

“Yes. Okay, I kind of want to drag you into the bedroom, mostly to take that shirt off of you. I want to believe that came from Hot Topic, but dinner first.”

“Room service.” Steve said, kissing him again.

“I love you.” Tony moans out between kisses.

“Love you too.” Steve said as he tries to take off Tony’s shirt. That’s when he felt himself being pushed away from Tony. He looked up to see Tony’s assistant standing smugly in the doorway (his sources have provided him with pictures of Tony’s new associates). Tony did not seem happy to see her there. What followed was a rapid exchange in Spanish, that Steve could only make out every other word of.

“So you’re not medically cleared?” Steve asked after he started to piece the argument together.
“I’m still not allowed to do anything that will get my heart rate up, including you. You save a few hundred people on a ferry, which was technically violating doctor’s orders, and they decide to punish you.” Tony frowned. “Yes, I would have still done it, despite the consequences.”

“Not surprising. That’s who you are.” He said as he placed an arm around Tony. Apparently, that was still allowed.

“This is not a punishment. It’s for your-- safety.” Yo Yo replied. “Dr. Simmons orders.”

“She’s not a real doctor.” Tony replied.

“Neither was Bruce, but he was the only one you would let see you for a long time. Were you going to tell me?” Steve asked, slightly hurt.

“At dinner, but then you suggested room service and I actually lost most of my brain function because you really are that good of a kisser.” Tony told him.

“This was why I was asked to chaperone. Kissing is still allowed, but that’s it.” Tony’s assistant explained.

“This is not fair.” Tony lamented and Steve agreed, although deep down inside he felt it was probably for the best. Besides a healthy Tony was more important than anything else.

To be continued.

Chapter End Notes

Just because they’re both together physically doesn’t mean the story is over with. We still have a lot of things to cover, like the climax of Homecoming.
Thank you to everyone who read or reviewed the last conversation. You are all absolutely fabulous. I’m glad you’re so happy that they are physically together right now, mostly. (Although, a lot of you are a little sad it’s not that physical.) But as I said last time, the story is not over yet. We have a lot to go before we sleep or face purple aliens.

This conversation takes place a little under a day after the last one on September 23, 2016. Also, a reminder that there are some text message/email/phone call conversations that you don’t get to see outside of Tony and Steve interaction. We are mostly doing the highlights. I’m not sure if you really want to read Tony begging various doctors to let him sleep with his boyfriend in between other meetings. Be rest assured, he did, multiple times.

StarkAE: A chaperone! Seriously, a fucking chaperone! I’m an adult. I’m pretty sure I can follow doctor’s orders without my assistant cock blocking me.

SimmonsJA: I see that you have finally come to me directly instead of asking Fitz to do your dirty work.

StarkAE: Your boyfriend stopped taking my calls unless they are spider or science related.

SimmonsJA: The director obviously believes otherwise. Otherwise, he would not have allowed me to deploy Shield resources in this way. And he has known you since you were at MIT together. The fact that you referred to your assistant’s presence as “cock blocking” means that you were not planning to follow the advice of your physician.

StarkAE: You’re not actually a MD.

SimmonsJA: No, but I feel like I need to rectify that since most people keep forgetting that I have not had more medical training than your average military medic. However, Dr. Suarez also agrees with the orders and she has an M.D.

StarkAE: She’s a psychologist.
SimmonsJA: Psychiatrist, which means medical school and a rotation. However, it was not me, but Dr. Cline who made the original orders and she actually does have an M.D. as well.

StarkAE: Actually, she is a doctor of osteopathic medicine.

SimmonsJA: That is beside the point. No strenuous physical activity for at least two more weeks, including but not limited to, sexual intercourse.

SimmonsJA: Yes, that does mean oral, digital stimulation, as well as anal penetration.

StarkAE: I’m not going to do anything ridiculously dangerous.

SimmonsJA: Like trying to prevent a giant ferry in New York from capsizing.

StarkAE: I saved several hundred lives.

SimmonsJA: And you couldn’t do that remotely? You put yourself at great medical risk.

StarkAE: But I am ok.

SimmonsJA: Your recovery was set back at least two weeks.

StarkAE: You know you would’ve done the same thing.

SimmonsJA: We’re talking about you. You’re worse than Daisy.

StarkAE: Look, I’m not talking about a marathon, just maybe a little oral stimulation or hand job.

SimmonsJA: I do not need specifics. I’m not completely heartless. Otherwise I would have added
kissing to the list of restricted activities. According to Shield medical files, he has no refractory period. The temptation would be too great.

StarkAE: I don’t even want to know how that was tested. Stefan is glaring at the phone right now. Actually, he wants to know if Melinda did the tests. Also, why wasn’t this all over the Internet after the data dump? That would definitely get rid of the hundred-year-old virgin rumors.

SimmonsJA: Surveillance observations according to the notes in the file. Coulson had Daisy delete all Avenger-related data from the Internet. Some of that slipped out, but most of it was contained. We saved it to another server for research purposes. Now that we’ve encountered a large number enhanced individuals recently, it’s been quite helpful.

SimmonsJA: Why would Stefan ask if Melinda was involved?

StarkAE: You are going to have to ask Agent America that one when she gets back to the Playground.

SimmonsJA: I know you’re upset that the current medical situation will prevent you and your partner from crossing the event horizon, but maybe it’s for the best. Once you cross that line, you can’t go back. Your relationship with him is already precarious.

StarkAE: As evident by several awkward lunches with Pepper Potts recently. Interesting euphemism by the way.

SimmonsJA: Your relationship with Stefan is fragile. You’re just starting to rebuild it. After everything that happened, maybe it’s better to keep with the rebuilding instead of just throwing in another physical component.

StarkAE: We beat the shit out of each other in Siberia less than six months ago. I’m well aware that we kind of hit rock bottom in regards to our relationship and that’s counting the fuck-up during the invasion which led to your real boss getting shanked by an Asgardian.

SimmonsJA: All relationships have lows. I fell in love with somebody else when stranded on a desolate alien planet for six months and gave up all hope of ever being rescued, when in reality Leo literally went across the universe for me. That was after the year before when I ran away by taking an undercover assignment because I couldn’t deal with my own guilt after watching him almost die for me.
SimmonsJA: We couldn’t just jump into bed after that. We had to rebuild and you have to do the same. Now we’re looking at houses or rather apartments. Everything in DC is so expensive. $1600 for a one bedroom in Alexandria and they don’t even have breakfast nooks.

StarkAE: I have a couple of houses there. I’ll let you live in one, rent free if you change your orders.

SimmonsJA: Tempting, but no. Have you spoken about the issues that led you to that incident? Because we both know it wasn’t just about the Accords.

StarkAE: Some. We both think Ross is a dick.

SimmonsJA: Well that’s easy to agree on. I’m glad that I only have to liaison with the assistant secretary of OES. I think I may strangle the man if I had to see him in person. But what about the more important issues like the man who murdered your parents.

SimmonsJA: Could you please redact that?

StarkAE: Already taken care of. How the hell do you even know that? Did your boss tell you?

SimmonsJA: Thank you. Although I was referring to everything Ross related. Friday sent us the video of what happened in Siberia. Don’t worry, we did not show it to the Director because we have some common sense.

StarkAE: Friday, if you do not want to become the AI to Spidey’s cell phone, and I mean Spidey Junior’s kids Stark phone, you will get that video off now. I prefer there not to be any references to what happened to my parents out there.

SimmonsJA: Understandable.

StarkAE: We did talk about that and have acknowledged that we both made bad choices. Maybe we need to talk more about it now, but keeping us from having sex is not going to make that conversation happen any sooner. Actually, the sex may help take the edge off of those conversations. It is my favorite coping mechanism.
SimmonsJA: Which completely explains Dr. Suarez so readily agreeing with Dr. Cline’s assessment.

StarkAE: Okay, I’m the first to admit that I have a lot of issues. But I’m working on them. I don’t want to strangle Barnes anymore. I want to burn the last remnants of Hydra down to the ground, but most homicidal desires related to the Winter Soldier have been dealt with.

SimmonsJA: I am glad that your therapy is working in that regard. You may want to listen to your therapist when she says that you are neither emotionally nor physically, especially physically, ready to engage in a sexual encounter with your boyfriend.

StarkAE: Is this secretary still planning to show up in four days?

SimmonsJA: Yes. Also the fact that you’d rather change the subject then talk about this also shows a lack of readiness.

StarkAE: Oh I’m ready.

SimmonsJA: That remains to be seen. Are you still planning to publicly rollout your relationship with Stefan tomorrow at the SI wildlife trafficking awareness event?

StarkAE: Yes. He’s been fitted with a wonderful Tom Ford suit this morning. I have at least two dozen pictures for private time.

SimmonsJA: You’re not allowed to do that either.

StarkAE: You are no fun at all.

SimmonsJA: If you really were emotionally ready to have sex with Stefan, you wouldn’t need me or Dr. Suarez to give you the okay. You would have ignored our recommendation entirely. But you need us to give you the metaphorical green light because deep down inside you know that you’re not ready for this.
StarkAE: I really hate you.

SimmonsJA: Well I'm not doing this to make friends.

StarkAE: You asked me to sign your poster.

SimmonsJA: I may have been slightly enamored with you in college. It's always difficult trying to get your PhD before you're old enough to have a driver's license. At least I had a role model in you. It doesn't make what I'm saying any less valid. If things go well, you'll be able to see each other more often and then by that point, you'll be ready to cross the horizon.

StarkAE: Or if Ross shows up and carts Stefan away. Or the watchdogs could try to kill me again or any number of enemies that we have. This could be our only chance. I don't want to miss it due to medical orders.

SimmonsJA: Do you want me to set up a Skype session with Dr. Suarez?

StarkAE: That won't be necessary. I gave you guys a better program than Skype.

SimmonsJA: It's just easier to call everything Skype. I know you're upset, but sometimes just holding Leo's hand while we watch a movie together is better than most sexual experiences I had back at the Academy.

StarkAE: Probably because most of them had no idea what they were doing.

SimmonsJA: I won't argue that point, but you know I'm right. There is nothing wrong with a little actual dating.

To be continued.
In Person Conversation 1: Maybe, Waiting Won’t Be So Bad.

Chapter Notes

Thank you to everybody who read or reviewed the last chapter. The original plan was for this conversation and similar ones following to be tacked on to the end of the text message conversations to keep with the style of the rest of the story. However, I realized things were getting long that way. So, I decided to make in person conversations as a separate story element.

This begins immediately after the last section, so it’s still September 23. The first few moments happen concurrently. Also remember that we’re ignoring the “eight years later” from Spider-Man: Homecoming because it messes up the timeline of my story (and the MCU as a whole).

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

"Friday, please don’t actually send that message to Dr. Simmons." Steve said as he lay down next to Tony as he was trying to convince Dr. Simmons that he could totally do something such as Steve without endangering his health. Obviously, he wasn’t being successful which was a shame because Steve only bothered to put on boxer shorts after getting out of the shower. Bless him.

"I wasn’t planning to actually send that." Steve responded with a glare.

"I really wasn’t going to. Friday just did that by accident." He was totally lying. Steve knew he was totally lying, which is why his Stark pad was confiscated.

"Are you done arguing with Shield medical yet? You’ve been doing that for over 24 hours?"

"I’m not arguing.” Tony told his boyfriend.

“I heard your conversation with Dr. Fitz while I was getting my suit fitted this morning.” Steve responded.

“I was just aggressively…’
“As well as the text messages to Dr. Suarez during lunch.” Steve added. Of course, he saw that.

“Now I’m almost happy that Yo-Yo couldn’t get you into tomorrow’s lunch. Okay arguing was involved in a sense.” Tony finally acknowledged.

"You know I’m not going to leave just because we can’t have sex?” Steve asked seriously.

"Despite all our failings, I do know that you’re pretty loyal to those that you care about. And since there’s no one else around that tops me now. I think we’re good.” He frowned at Tony’s flippant response.

"You know that wasn’t a me choosing Bucky over you because I care about him more then you situation?”

“Thank you for lying, but it’s not necessary. You’ve known me for less than five years and you’ve known him since playgroup.” Tony tells Steve.

“We didn’t have playgroup back then.” Steve bunches his nose up in such a cute way. He’s adorable.

“You know what I mean. Look, I know where I stand. If a building was burning and I could only save you or Rhodey, I’m sorry Buttercup, but I would go straight to Rhodey.”

“Because you know I can take care of myself.”

“And our stupidity paralyzed him. Fitz and I are working on something, but it’s still in the prototype phase.”

“It was the same thing with Bucky.” Steve tells him “I was trying to help the person who I thought needed the most help. I didn’t realize how much else was riding on your choices, not until we really started talking to each other.”

"My therapist pointed that out multiple times that was what you were doing." Tony explains.
"And you believe her?"

"On the good days, sometimes. But I have two decades of Howard making me feel like I couldn’t live up to you or at least his idea of you. I think you’re aware that my self-esteem is shot to hell."

Steve responds by placing an arm around Tony.

"Is this okay?"

"You sleeping next to me shirtless is definitely okay. Wish I could remove the boxer shorts. But this beats the body pillow that Rhodey sent me to be an ass." Steve raises an eyebrow at him.

"Don’t ask. There was a bet involved." Tony is not giving Steve the whole story on that one.

"I know you’re upset, but this is a not terrible thing." Steve explains, holding him closer. "Honestly, as much as I really want to do those things with you, I’m not sure if we really are ready for that. I’m not sure if I’m ready. We still have things we should work through. You’re still scared I’m going to leave you or you think that I’m only here because Bucky is in cryo, when the truth is I’m here because I want to be with you."

Tony responded by pulling Steve down for a kiss.

"I wouldn’t say that’s what I’m thinking. Did you borrow my toothpaste?" Tony asked pulling away. He was extra minty fresh.

"Yes, but I did bring a toothbrush. Over the last few months I feel like I’ve started to actually get to know you and I think I know how your mind works enough to know that you think you might be the consolation prize."

"Maybe." Tony answered honestly snuggling into Steve a little bit more. Super soldier six-packs are awesome. Also, the sheets at this hotel are like silk.

"You’re not. Although, I do wish I realized this before just sleeping in the same bed as you became a luxury."

“But maybe we wouldn’t be here, otherwise.” Tony said kissing Steve again. He’s trying to keep these kisses chaste, but that is difficult. Even the muscles in Steve’s tongue got better. “I’m worried
"Ross?" Steve asked as he ran his fingers through Tony’s hair.

"Or other super villains." And kids who take on super villains. He’s hoping that Peter stays out of trouble, but he’s concerned. Note to self, email Laura in a few minutes.

"Always a possibility, but you’re prepared."

"And then there’s the fact that there’s no filter right now and I’m pretty good at saying the wrong thing at the worst possible time."

“I’m aware.” Steve tells him. “There was a transcript of the post-Afghanistan press conference in my welcome kit.”

“Of course there was. At least before, when we were trading text messages, I could say what I wanted to tell you out loud, then look at it on screen and realize maybe if I want to avoid a fight, I should not send that.”

"And then Friday would send it anyway." Steve added with a grin.

"She’s been getting better about that.” He gives Tony another look.

"She really has, except with the videos. We’ll talk about that when I’m somewhere with my full version of Friday, not the travel assistant."

“You should. For this to work, we should talk to each other, not just online, but in person. When we have the opportunity, like now."

"Which is scary as I learned by trying to reconnect with Pepper." Tony rubs a finger against Steve’s beard. He is enjoying it and isn’t that sad about losing the clean-shaven Boy Scout.

“I thought things are getting better between the two of you?” Steve asked.
"Yes, it gets a little less awkward each time." Steve leans over and kisses Tony on the mouth again. “Things are awkward between you and me too but at least we can do that. I’m enjoying this. Your tongue is awesome.”

"I am too. We don’t have to go too fast. In our business you don’t want to assume, but maybe we can take a moment. If things go well tomorrow, this might become an easier thing." I.e. if the world accepts Stefan Carter, then they could see each other in public and Steve would be safe. Deep down that’s all Tony really wants for his boyfriend. (Of course, Tony was already making a contingency plan or six.)

"Or to go completely wrong. Everybody could completely see through the façade." Tony told his boyfriend worriedly.

"I’m trying to think positively. I did get mistaken for Chris Evans twice today, despite my new contacts now giving me a different eye color than him.” Steve joked.

“Because he looks more like the old you now then you do right now. They’re going to start shooting the Captain America story soon. Don’t worry, you’re getting a percentage of the gross profits.” Tony explains.

“I thought they were just making a battle of New York biography movie?” Steve asked slightly confused,

“Disney is now planning to do a whole cinematic Avengers universe with movies based on our real-life adventures. We are each getting separate bio pics and then a New York movie, except for Natasha and Clint for some reason.”

“Which is a shame because Natasha’s would probably be the most interesting.” Steve added.

“And the one they would have to fictionalize the most By the way Disney is lobbying for you to get pardoned.”

“Why?”
“They will probably sell more tickets, if you’re not a war criminal.” Tony explained, neglecting to tell Steve it was part of the movie deal the lawyers negotiated.

“Good point.”

“I have some creative control so I promise it will not end up like that travesty of the Captain America movie from 1990. Dad ended up suing them for that.” With good reason.


“It’s best that you never ever see it. It was worse than the radio drama. They made Red Skull Italian and raised by Nazis and that’s just the beginning. Also, he or rather who he worked for were responsible for Kennedy and MLK’s assassination.” Tony explained trying to remember what he knew about it from the one time he watched it years ago.

“Hydra being responsible for that might actually turn out to be true. At least that was what Zola told us when he was stalling for time.” Steve reminds him.

“That part you actually told me.” And he was a little bitter about that, so progress. “Also, they somehow managed to have a Sharon in the film by pure randomness. I think that was why dad sued. Sharon had Howard wrapped around her little finger when she was little. It made me think that dad always wanted me to be a girl.” Tony confessed.

“No more talk of Howard tonight.” He said rubbing circles on Tony’s back.

“Gladly. Can I please have my Stark pad back?” Tony asked.

“You’re not going to email anyone else at Shield. You should rest.”

"I was going to email Laura, to check up on Spidey. That technically counts because she’s now Shield, but she did it for love." So, her husband could come back to her and her kids.

“Someday you’re going to have to explain that to me.”
“If things go well, you’ll know what I mean sometime within the next 48 hours.”

“Is that what you’re worried about?” Steve asked

“I’m worried about Spidey. He’s still pissed at me.” Tony lamented.

"You did the right thing." He reassured.

"I’m still concerned. I told you about the angry email that his aunt sent me. I’m also worried that she is going to discover the truth any moment and rake me over the coals for not telling her. At the same time, Peter really needs to be the one to tell her, and he’s just not ready. It doesn’t help that there’s three inhuman teenagers in Shield custody because their parents kicked them out for having powers.” Tony rambles.

“That’s not right.”

“No, it’s not, especially because these powers come from something genetic passed on from the parents. Could you just kiss me again? I need a distraction.” Okay he just need Steve as much as possible.

“Happy to oblige.” Steve responded, pulling Tony down into a kiss again. Tony really hopes the dinner goes well tomorrow so this can be a monthly thing.

To be continued.

Chapter End Notes

For the fun of it, I made a version of the 1990 Captain America movie exist in this universe.
Chapter Notes

Thank you to everybody who read or reviewed the last chapter. You are all wonderful. We are still in Johannesburg. However, Tony has to be a grown-up and he can’t take his honey bunny with them. This means text messaging Steve when he supposed to be at a lunch with various world leaders. It is now Saturday, September 24, 2016 in the story which means were almost exactly a year behind. All lot of the next few conversations will be happening today because September 24 is a big day.

I actually proofread this chapter earlier this week at work to upload today only to realize this morning that I did not attach the document to the email when I sent it to myself. So to make sure I upload it today. As promised, I did the final proofreading again.

Tony Bear: Why is it that at every fancy business lunch I am forced to participate in involves micro-portions and overly pretentious people? I’m 30 seconds from punching out world business leaders number three, six and 12.

Me: It can’t be that bad.

Tony Bear: Yes, it is. My mind is numb from under stimulation. And if somebody asks me about Pepper one more time, I’m going to bring out the gauntlet. That goes double for the person who asked if I was screwing my assistant, twice.

Me: Jesus.

Tony Bear: I’m not 100% sure it’s always been this bad. Maybe it feels worse this time around, because I’m too sober to think any of these jokes are funny or have any desire whatsoever to mingle. All the assistants were nicer and actually competent.

Me: It probably was always like this. Although I’m sure Virginia probably finds it less stressful this way.

Tony Bear: No, because she would have punched out business leader number two for grabbing her ass and then I would have to oversee getting her out of jail in a foreign country. That never goes well.

Me: You have a point. Hey did you change your name in my phone? You’re now listed as Tony Bear instead of Anthony.

Tony Bear: Yep. This should be Stefan’s phone because only a complete idiot would put his superhero name on everything. At least when he or she is trying to do a secret identity anyway.

Stefan: I’ll try to remember that.

Tony Bear: I’m sorry that we couldn’t get you in the lunch. Even Yo-Yo is having sandwiches in the back with the other assistants. I’m sure they’re having more fun than me. As well as more food.

Me: It’s okay. I am trying to keep a low profile until dinner tonight. If people see me on your arm,
they’re obviously going to easily figure out who I am to you.

Tony Bear: They just have to look at the way I’m looking at you and they will know the truth.

Me: That’s sweet. It’s okay. I promised I would do lunch with Melinda. Room service does a really good burger. With my metabolism, I’m going to need at least five of those fancy lunches to take the edge off.

Tony Bear: That’s true. It’s probably going to take at least three or four burgers to satisfy you.

Me: Two and a milkshake. Although it does feel weird being halfway around the world and still having burgers and a shake.

Tony Bear: Someday soon I need to tell you about trying to get KFC in Tokyo at 3 AM. You didn’t think about venturing out to try some of the local cuisine? Or, you know, at least go down to the restaurant. You did so well at breakfast.

Me: As I said earlier, I do want to keep a low profile until dinner tonight. People trying to take selfies with me because they think I am either Chris Evans or Keanu Reeves is not good.

Tony Bear: Friday did successfully delete all the images from that one woman’s phone. Although you do have a point.

Me: Also, I feel like we’re having the type of conversation that should happen in private. There’s too much stuff I don’t want other people to overhear.

Tony Bear: All good points. However, if you’re planning to do a quickie with your ex-girlfriend, make sure you take pictures or at least wait for me to get there. I can’t participate, but I can watch. That’s about all Dr. Simmons would let me do. Evil.

Me: I’m not sure what May just referred to you as in Mandarin, but it probably wasn’t anything very nice.

Tony Bear: Tell her it was a joke before she threatens to disembowel me, again. People talking bad about me in foreign languages is not a new thing. A lot of that’s actually going on right now. This is why I keep a lot of the languages I speak off my CV. I’m working on improving my Mandarin just for her. I’m learning all sorts of new course words.

Tony Bear: I hate AutoCorrect, that was supposed to be curse words

Me: Of course you are.

Tony Bear: So how is your lunch going?

Me: Shouldn’t you be mingling?

Tony Bear: Pepper made me promise not to get arrested, again, in a foreign country. If I tried to make small talk again, then the probability of getting arrested jumps up to 89%. I don’t like those odds.

Me: Okay mingling is not a smart idea.

Tony Bear: Me finding out about how your lunch is going with your ex-girlfriend is a much better use of my time.

Me: Still in progress.
Tony Bear: That bad.

Me: Not necessarily bad, just trying to figure out where to start. And sometimes that’s half of the battle.

Tony Bear: Very true

Me: So far we’ve mostly talked about how to deal with your Spidey problem and we really don’t have any solutions.

Tony Bear: Thanks for trying. Nobody really has any solutions for the Spidey problem, good ones anyway. The head of Avenger PR suggested that I just give him a suit closer to mine and hold a press conference.

Me: Don’t do that.

Tony Bear: Since you asked so nicely, that’s definitely a hard no now.

Me: Melinda is glaring at me right now.

Tony Bear: Of course she is.

Me: Your boyfriend will talk to you when you get out of your meetings and we are done talking. To be continued.
Chapter 84

In Person Conversation 2: The Ex Factor

"Did you really have to do that?" Steve said, getting his phone back from May and realizing that she sent a message to Tony. Steve really shouldn’t be surprised that she took his phone.

"You two really can’t go 24 hours without talking to one another. You’ll see him in a few hours. You’re planning to be his date tonight at the SI dinner." From her tone, Steve can tell that she’s not happy.

At least he thinks so. He’s having trouble reconciling this May with Melinda Gardner. How much were the two individuals the same? How much was an act? Steve still wasn’t entirely sure.

"We have multiple times, such as when he was almost killed. It’s just different now that we’re actually in the same place for the moment, especially because we both know it’s only going to be a few days.” Possibly shorter because of Ross. However, Steve doesn’t want to say that out loud.
“You’re only losing a day because of Ross coming. It doesn’t matter in the long run, because if this scheme works, then you two will be able to see each other regularly.”

"Which has me nervous enough to wish that I could drink wine for something other than the taste." Steve said, pointing to the glass of wine on the table from lunch.

"Are you worried about being arrested or something else? We won’t let Ross take you in."

“I’m not worried about Ross, at least not that much. I’m okay with people knowing that I’m bisexual or Stefan being bisexual. It’s well overdue.” He wonders now why he never did an interview. Maybe because he wanted this to be private. So much of the world thought they knew who he was. (Yes, he did spend the morning when Tony was in meetings trying to find that really bad 90s movie that they did on him).

“Is that because Stefan is not really you? Or maybe it’s because Stefan doesn’t have the same expectations as you do as Captain America."

*And has the new keeper of the shield, you would know. Steve thinks but doesn’t say out loud.*

"Because it’s something I wish was the case before." He tells her instead.

“In some of the countries being represented here, that is still the case,” May said poignantly.

“I know.” Steve responded.

“But you’re still worried about something else?” Melinda asked.

“I’m worried about pretending to be Stefan Carter.” Steve confessed.

“Understandable. I hate undercover,” May told him, which surprised Steve.
“You seem to be good at it.”

“That doesn’t mean I actually like doing that. I prefer action.” Now that he did not find surprising.

“In that case, how can you take being undercover for so long? Always pretending to be someone you’re not. I worry I’m going to say the wrong thing or respond to the wrong name and it will all fall apart, but this time Ross will arrest Tony for helping me.”

"He won’t touch Tony. He can’t. The president won’t let him.” Steve wasn’t sure if he found Melinda’s words reassuring or not.

"The president is facing reelection. He has to be careful."

“I’m really the wrong person to have this conversation with because I never actually did an undercover assignment over a month.” Melinda says changing the subject.

“That’s not true. You pretended to be my neighbor for months. I had no idea you were not Melinda Gardner.”

"Because I am Melinda Gardner or I was right after the divorce anyway. Fury just gave you Phil’s old apartment and ordered me to help you acclimate. I showed you exactly who I was. I just changed the names. I really was an HR specialist working for the federal government who divorced her husband because she couldn’t talk to him about the mission that was her biggest regret."

“So you were just a woman who was grieving for her lost love in dealing with a messy divorce?”

“I was someone who protects everyone and who keeps her promises, even to the dead.” She takes a small drink of the wine that she’s barely touched. “I knew that Phil was looking forward to helping you get acclimated. The original plan was for me to move out and you to get my old apartment for a few months, as Phil helped you get acclimated. Everyone knew you were drowning in the apartment that Fury put you in a New York. The Loki incident changed that plan and so I decided I would help you the best way I could.”

"Because you loved him.” Steve answered, not even phrasing it as a question. He knew better.
“Not that he knows that yet. Not that I’m going to tell him anytime soon.” Melinda explained.

“You should.” Steve offered.

“And I will when the time is right. You don’t have to be Stefan Carter out there tonight. Just go out there as Tony Stark’s boyfriend who loves him very much. The name doesn’t change that.” Melinda suggested.

“That part is easy. I’m terrified about people knowing about our relationship, but at the same time relieved, even if they don’t really know it’s me. Being out in the open changes things. It’s just so much easier if it’s between us and the world is on the outside. I’m not sure if we’re ready for all the world to be watching yet.”

“Anybody who dates Tony Stark is going to have to deal with that.”

“I know that. And in the long run, it is worth that. I just hope I don’t punch out any paparazzi.”

“I do as well.”

“The other thing is, I’m worried about what will happen if I have to be Stefan Carter long-term. Because it’s not like I’m going to get Clint’s deal.”

“You know?” Melinda raised an eyebrow at him.

“I found a card stuffed into my underwear. I don’t blame him for going back. I wish I didn’t call him in. At least Scott could go back.

“Clint is an agent. He’s going to do what he needs to do. No matter what. But he’s not gifted or enhanced or even inhuman for that matter. He should’ve never been under the Accords in the first place. We’re trying to fix that.”

“He’s a fugitive because he helped us.” Steve felt awful about that and it just got worse after he saw Lila’s drawling a couple of weeks ago. “It shouldn’t be that way. He has the kids and Laura to worry about.”
"You have commitments too." Melinda tells him. "I think Stark needs you around more. Especially if he keeps adopting young superheroes. You help ground him to some degree."

"It’s not the same."

"Why didn’t you tell me that you were shield?" Steve asked, changing the subject.

"I usually don’t tell people where I work. If you ask most federal employees in DC, that’s a normal thing. Also my mother was ex-CIA. I learned early on not to give out too many personal details. You got more than most." Melinda explains.

“Were you only interested in me because of your job or because you wanted to do something to honor Phil’s memory?” Steve was worried that was the case. Pre-serum, nobody liked him for him outside of Bucky and Peggy. Now he’s afraid of history repeating itself except now it’s Tony and probably Sam.”

"If it was just the job, I would’ve locked you and Stark in a room together to work out your problems like Fury ordered me to. But you were more lost than I was after Bahrain and I was just starting to deal with that when Phil was killed in New York. I needed to focus on something and helping you helped."

“I get that. Being an Avenger helped me not think about everything I lost. Although, why didn’t you lock me and Tony together?”

"You weren’t ready for it yet. You and Stark needed to work on your problems yourselves.” Melinda explained.

“I think we’re getting there. We are a work in progress. I just wish I was there to keep an eye on him. I was worried when the stuff about the ferry started coming out over Twitter."

"They were making it out to be worse than what it really was on the news." That’s when he heard Tony walk into the room.

"What are you doing here?" Melinda asked, slightly annoyed.
"Yo-Yo caused a distraction. I escaped before I could, you know, get arrested. I really did promise Pepper that I would avoid that."

“Were there any bodies?” May asked completely serious.

“Not yet, but if Yo-Yo gets accidentally on purpose touched inappropriately again, it will be a near thing. Too many sleazy business leaders. I have 20 minutes.” Tony said as he kissed Steve.

“You taste like Cabernet?” Tony said as he pulled away.

“Do I need to brush my teeth?” Steve asked.

“No, but get rid of the bottle. Also, I need a protein bar or something, if I’m to survive the next four hours until the dinner. Thankfully SI is sponsoring the opening banquet tonight so there will be food. Why do they not really feed us?”

"I have no idea." Steve shrugged as he went to grab the wine bottle from the table to pour the rest of it out only to realize it wasn’t there anymore. Neither was Melinda.

"Hey, where did ninja ex-girlfriend go?” Tony asked, also realizing her absence.

"I think she went to get rid of the wine.” Probably as an excuse to give them some privacy.

“I don’t think the minibar has any protein bars, but we have cake.” Steve says, offering Tony one of the slices he got for himself.

“I can do cake. Actually, I kind of need cake right now.” Steve agreed with that completely, especially because he was so worried about tonight.

But six hours later, when Tony grabbed his hand in front of several dozen cameras, everything fell away.
Thank you to everyone who read or reviewed the last conversation. You are all absolutely wonderful. This section of SHIELD IMs begins almost after May leaves Steve’s room. Therefore, this still takes place before Tony and Steve make their debut. I finally get to do a May Coulson section. They’re my favorite after Tony and Steve. May and Coulson are also my last chance of getting something canon. This will probably end in tears, mostly mine. Thankfully, there is fanfic where we can make everything fluffy-ish.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

MayMQ: I'm going to strangle the consultant.

CoulsonPJ: You cannot strangle the consultant, especially because he’s now on your team, May. I told you this when you were with him in Appalachia.

MayMQ: And I still can’t do flight training right now with him. Stark is easier to deal with when he is busy or exhausted.

CoulsonPJ: You could take his boyfriend down to the gym instead. Weren’t you going to have lunch with him? How did that go?

MayMQ: He suggested I have sex with his boyfriend while he watches.

CoulsonPJ: He was joking.

MayMQ: He said that he was, but I’m not sure with him.

CoulsonPJ: No one is. Sometimes you actually like Stark. You love your new tactical suit.

MayMQ: You love my new tactical suit. It’s easier to deal with the consultant when I can actually hit him or when is at least busy. But he’s still recovering from the assassination attempt we did not prevent.

CoulsonPJ: You look really good in that suit. We already have enough bad publicity from the last time the Avengers started beating the hell out of each other because they are unable to use their words. I wish we could just tell everybody it was unresolved sexual tension, but that may make it worse in some circles, so please for the love of your shield, do not hurt the consultant.

MayMQ: I really don’t care about those groups. They are probably the same circles that are mad about me having the shield.

CoulsonPJ: They’re not all the same groups. The deputy director is sad because he really wants the shield himself. I think he may have cried a little when he realized that you actually took it with you.

MayMQ: Because you never know what could happen here. Besides, you’re the one who really wants to train with it.
CoulsonPJ: Maybe a little for tactical reasons.

MayMQ: You wouldn't let us change the paint job.

CoulsonPJ: It is iconic.

MayMQ: Did you pick up the package?

CoulsonPJ: Yes

MayMQ: Did you talk to the package?

CoulsonPJ: Does it count as talking when the package punches you?

MayMQ: For people like us? Yes. He punched you?

CoulsonPJ: Then we talked. I also have a blackeye right now.

MayMQ: I can’t leave you alone, can I? Did you apologize?

CoulsonPJ: I don't know if you can apologize for dying.

MayMQ: You can apologize for not telling him that you were alive.

CoulsonPJ: I was following orders.

MayMQ: What about after you were the one giving orders? You were the director for two years. At any time you could’ve told him or Audrey for that matter.

CoulsonPJ: We were on the run from Talbot.

MayMQ: And once we were no longer on the run from the military?

CoulsonPJ: You didn't tell him that you survived the Hydra infiltration until you almost left to take care of your dad by baby shower gift, no less.

MayMQ: But I did tell him. My dad made that blanket.

CoulsonPJ: Which is why you got a nice card for the baby blanket and I am currently trying out Fitz’s attempt at a dermal regenerator. We have to stop letting him and Stark create prototypes after watching Star Trek

MayMQ: Is it working?

CoulsonPJ: A little. It kind of tingles, but the bruising does seem to be fading.

MayMQ: That’s good.

CoulsonPJ: Outside of Stark apparently showing up, how did your conversation with Stefan go?

MayMQ: No bruising or furniture being broken. So how much damage was done to the plane?

CoulsonPJ: Not that much. I’m glad things were less volatile.

MayMQ: We had room service. It was awkward, but we were making some progress, mostly discussing how to handle the Queens situation. Of course in the middle of it, he started talking to Stark. Then he asked me a lot of questions about my time as his neighbor and I convinced him that I
wasn’t really pretending. That’s about when Stark showed up.

CoulsonPJ: Apparently he said something during that conversation that now makes you want to strangle him?

MayMQ: Actually, that would’ve been in the text message exchange. I left before he could say anything else and took the wine with me.

CoulsonPJ: That’s probably best.

MayMQ: There's also tonight.

CoulsonPJ: You think everybody's going to recognize Stefan?

MayMQ: It’s a possibility, although he was mistaken for Chris Evans twice this morning.

CoulsonPJ: That may be a good thing.

MayMQ: Establishing Stefan’s identity is a good idea. I’m just not sure if this is the venue it should happen in, but it was Steve’s idea.

CoulsonPJ: It makes sense. Look, it's only going to be a couple more days and then you will be back here.

MayMQ: Ross is going to be here for the last day.

CoulsonPJ: By that point, I think he will be sufficiently distracted by the package publicly announcing his return. I doubt he will still be a problem.

MayMQ: I hope that's the case. Maybe he'll cancel his trip

CoulsonPJ: One can hope.

MayMQ: You should try talking to the package again.

CoulsonPJ: I will.

CoulsonPJ: Try not to strangle Stark.

MayMQ: I can't make that promise.

CoulsonPJ: Don't make Stefan sad.

MayMQ: I hate you right now.

CoulsonPJ: I'm not the one who asked you to go to Johannesburg.

MayMQ: If you fought harder to stay the director, this would not be happening right now.

CoulsonPJ: I think I still would have sent you to babysit Stark although hey, at least this way you are a card-carrying Avenger. I can't wait for you to get your own action figure. I’m buying three.

MayMQ: Then this really is your fault.

CoulsonPJ: Maybe it is. Send me pictures from the dinner.

MayMQ: Will do. I just hope things don’t implode. Or that anybody tries to kill Stark again.
CoulsonPJ: Let’s hope sunflower seeds are not involved again.

MayMQ: Very true.

To be continued.

Chapter End Notes

So did you figure out who the package is?
Shield IM 3: What couple name are we using for Stefan/Tony?

Chapter Notes

Thank you to everyone who read or reviewed the last chapter. You are all absolutely wonderful. Several of you guessed correctly that Clint is the package. You’ll get to hear more about the complicated history between Coulson and “the package” soon.

We have another shield IM chapter because Tony is kind of sort of driving Yo-Yo and May a little crazy. This is happening because he’s in the love bubble and though the rational part of his brain knows it’s for the best that he doesn’t climb Steve like a tree, he is still a little resentful.

This conversation takes place a few hours after the last one. During that time Steve has made his first public appearance as Tony Stark’s boyfriend, Stefan Carter. The Internet is buzzing.

Turtle man is Agent Mack McKenzie, Yo-Yo’s boyfriend. For those of you that do not watch Agents of Shield, and boy are you missing out on some good stuff, Turbo is Mack’s nickname for Agent Fitz. Just like Tony, Mack gives everybody a nickname.

Special thank you to Misaky0, my collaborator on this story. Normally she just does the artwork but in this she helped me with some of Yo-Yo’s dialogue.

Shield IM 3: What couple name are we using for Stefan/Tony?

Turtle man: Apparently your boss is now dating Chris Evans.

Turtle man: The actor, not the guy from Top Gear who used to be married to Turbo’s Dr. Who crush. It is all over Twitter and Tumblr. The gifs are ridiculous. I expect at least 16 new NC-17 stories about this on Freaking Cool by morning. They’re also debating about what couple name to use.

Turtle man: For Stefan/Tony because not everybody is that clueless. Stefany is currently winning. Although people on Twitter have way too much free time.

Yo-Yo: No me pagan suficiente para edte pinchi trabajo

Turtle man: I understand enough of that to realize that you’re reconsidering your career choices. On the bright side, at least they don’t think he's dating Captain America, except for Chris Evans, but I
think his comments on Twitter went over everyone’s head.

Yo-Yo: Dios

Turtle man: That I understood. Look, the Evans thing is mostly because a high percentage of the public finds it more plausible than Captain America being gay. Most people think Stefan Carter is actually Stefan Carter. So, congrats to Turbo for setting up the identity.

Yo-Yo: Joey knows.

Turtle man: He contacted you? How secure was the contact?

Yo-Yo: Through the email account that Stark set up for us in case of an emergency.

Turtle man: That’s good. I wouldn’t be concerned that Joey figured it out because he trained with you guys when your new boss could not stop waxing poetic about the captain and his boyfriend, mostly about their asses. It’s obvious to anyone who knows them and not their public personas that there was something going on.

Yo-yo: Very true.

Turtle man: How are things going in Johannesburg? Will you still be coming home on time?

Yo-Yo: I think so, but that could change. I had to pour a bucket of water on my boss and his boyfriend this afternoon. Other than that it’s been a good trip. It’s nice to actually look around and see the world.

Turtle man: It is. I’m not surprised you had to bring out a bucket. Did you get pictures?

Yo-yo: May did. She’ll send them to you.

Turtle man: You know you don’t have to take the chaperone thing so seriously.
Yo-yo: It's fun.

Turtle man: And at least this way you don't have to listen to all the moaning like you were originally worried about.

Yo-Yo: There was still moaning which is why a bucket had to be used.

Turtle man: I'm glad I don't have your job. You know you could go to LA like originally planned. We wouldn’t see each other as much, but I’m okay with that if it would make you happier. Director Rhodes is not enforcing the no fraternization between agents and those under the accords policy.

Yo-Yo: Which is good. I like it here. I may still be asked to go to LA to work with Virginia. They need more of us out on the West Coast. I would still be a part of the team regardless. However, I'd rather keep things the way they are because New York is closer to DC then LA. He is not always this bad. I think he's mad about the chaperoning and scared.

Turtle man: Probably. The long-distance thing won't matter too much because I am going to be going out finding more people that need to sign the accords. You should do what’s best for you.

Yo-yo: I'll think about it.

Turtle man: Speaking of Virginia Potts, have you heard from her since Twitter pictures of your boss and his boyfriend kissing each other inappropriately in public started making the rounds on social media?

Yo-Yo: No. I've heard from the rest of the board though.

Turtle man: How bad?

Yo-Yo: I pretended not to understand English.

Turtle man: They actually believed that?
Yo-yo: Except for Ms. Perez who is fluent in Spanish and knows better.

Turtle man: I’m not even surprised.

Yo-yo: There's a conference call in the morning New York time. They’re angry.

Turtle man: Most of Twitter is on your boss’ Side. Turbo is compiling the best of the tweets. He says it's 81% positive.

Yo-yo: That’s good.

Turtle man: On the plus side, everybody should be sufficiently distracted in an hour when Talbot gives his press conference.

Yo-yo: The prodigal avenger returns. The news is covering this?

Turtle man: Yes. They’re doing a press conference at the ATCU headquarters and everything.

Yo-yo: Of course they are.

Turtle man: Be careful and let me know if you need an extraction.

Yo-Yo: Will do. Talk to you later turtle man.

To be continued.
Thank you everybody who read or reviewed the last conversation. You are all wonderful.

Yes, another shield IM section. Sorry, Tony and Steve are too busy kissing to have a conversation right now. So May and Coulson will just have to do this for them. Besides May and Coulson have their own issues. This conversation only takes place only a little bit after the last conversation.

MayMQ: Sit rep?

CoulsonPJ: Shouldn’t you be asleep? It has to be after 1 AM in Johannesburg.

MayMQ: I don’t sleep. Besides, we just got upstairs after an evening of political networking where Stark tried to get on the good side of various governments, the non-homophobic ones anyway. How are they taking the news about Stark? Has the package gone public yet?

CoulsonPJ: Ross keeps remarking that Stark is dating a Chris Evans look alike, but thankfully hasn’t put everything together yet, according to our DOS contact. Although after the package announcement in 15 minutes, I’m sure he’ll have other things to worry about.

CoulsonPJ: Talbot knows better, but doesn’t care if it gets Captain America back on our side, the original Captain America. Honestly, he is more focused on one upping Ross at the package announcement. They really hate each other.

MayMQ: This is not new information, his hatred for Ross anyway. I am surprised that he doesn’t want to go after Rogers when he wants Daisy back.

CoulsonPJ: Ross wants Daisy back. Also apparently Talbot believes that carrots work better than honeycomb kill rooms.

MayMQ: After he unsuccessfully tracked us down after the fall, and his reputation for bombing first
and asking questions later. Also, how did he figure the thing out with Stefan? He thought his own wife was Hydra.

CoulsonPJ: I think he just hates Ross. Jeffrey said too much at the meeting. I think the director is sending him to Alaska to do an assessment on the abomination for the next month to make up for it.

MayMQ: Of course Jeffrey said too much. Will he tell his uncle?

CoulsonPJ: No. He hates Uncle Ross.

MayMQ: How convenient.

CoulsonPJ: Twitter is a mess. More than one person with a blue checkmark made a snide comment about how superheroes should not be gay, using nastier language than that. Then someone else responds with a hyperlink to the Tony Stark gay sex tape from 1992.

CoulsonPJ: Then someone else will argue that Tony is really of super villain/still the merchant of death and then it all starts over again. It’s a never-ending cycle. I had to stop for Tylenol.

MayMQ: Twitter is always a mess.

CoulsonPJ: But it’s worse than usual. Most of the noise is coming from bigots who are pissed about one of the Avengers being gay. It’s times like these that make me sad. Joey decided to go back to the world of construction.

MayMQ: Are they aware that Dr. Banner may be the only completely straight Avenger?

CoulsonPJ: Of the original lineup anyway. I think Yo-Yo only has eyes for her turtle man. I caught them flirting via the new communication system that Fitz created based on what Stark did for the Avenger burn phones. I’m kind of glad the rest of Shield, as well is the director, will not have access to these conversations.
MayMQ: Me as well. Are you sad that Stark got the guy of your dreams?

CoulsonPJ: I'm just glad he's not back with you. That kiss is all over the Internet.

CoulsonPJ: Not your kisses with Stefan, but Tony and Stefan. I thought they were going to start ripping off clothes at any moment.

MayMQ: I know what you mean.

CoulsonPJ: Daisy would have made that her wallpaper.

MayMQ: I hope she still does, wherever she is.

CoulsonPJ: Me too. I just hope she comes back soon.

MayMQ: You know the thing with Stefan was a comfort thing. I thought you were dead. I went to your funeral. I’ve buried you. But I are really didn’t mourn. I really didn’t deal with anything very well. I was angry you, Fury, and especially myself because if I was still doing fieldwork than I would’ve been with you on the helicarrier. If I was there with you, then maybe you wouldn’t have died during the battle of New York.

CoulsonPJ: It wasn’t your fault.

MayMQ: You’ll never be able to convince me otherwise, even though your back. Being with Stefan was my own way of running away, which is why I understand why Daisy felt like she needed to be alone. But eventually it did get better and I did come home to you. Hopefully, Daisy will do the same soon.

CoulsonPJ: I hope so too. I'm still upset that Fury waited so long to tell you when he was always planning for you to know. You didn’t need to suffer like that.

MayMQ: And now you understand why Clint was so mad at you. I always felt that not telling the Avengers was stupid, especially the one that was your ex-boyfriend.
CoulsonPJ: I didn’t think I meant that much to him. He went back to Laura once she got cleaned and successfully stayed that way for a while. Never date somebody who’s just legally separated from his wife.

MayMQ: Even divorce doesn’t help sometimes. You can love more than one person at the same time. I have.

MayMQ: In Clint’s case, he had the kids to think about, which is the same reason why he’s going to play Talbot’s game now. But he cared about you greatly as well. He was as big a mess as me after New York and it wasn’t just because of the mind control.

CoulsonPJ: I realize that now, but not at the time. Maybe I was too caught up with Audrey to see everything.

MayMQ: Sometimes I think Audrey was your rebound. I think you would’ve told her the truth when you rescued her from Daniels, if she wasn’t. Did you actually talk to Clint this time without giving way to violence?

CoulsonPJ: Yes, before we had to meet up with Talbot. I apologized and he didn’t hit me this time.

MayMQ: Is he still mad at you?

CoulsonPJ: Furious, but he understands why I stayed away especially when Simmons told him about getting kidnapped by Hydra. At least my godfather privileges have not been revoked.

MayMQ: That's good.

CoulsonPJ: We have been invited to dinner at the tower once you get back from Johannesburg

MayMQ: Should I bring Icer's?

CoulsonPJ: Probably. I have to go. I’m security for the announcement.
MayMQ: Of course you are.

CoulsonPJ: Just promise me you’ll avoid Twitter?

MayMQ: That’s not a hard promise to keep.

To be continued

Please review. I really want to know what you’re thinking.
Thank you to everybody who read or reviewed the last chapter. You are all wonderful. This conversation takes place about two hours after the last one.

Although this is labeled as an interlude, it does start with an actual in person conversation because that was added later when I realized we haven’t had enough Tony Steve lately interaction. Also, because it was added later. The first part did not go for the beta process.

Pepper is the big boss because of course she is.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Tony go to sleep.” Tony heard his boyfriend say from beside him, shirtless and one arm wrapped around him.

“Can’t. Looking at pictures of us making out. We are adorable and hot.” That’s when Tony showed Steve the image which was a mistake because of course he took the phone.

“Give that back.” Tony reached over, but Steve kept it out of his grasp.

“Tony it’s 2:49 AM. You need to go to sleep. Playing with your cell phone is not helping.”

“I’m just trying to calm my mind down enough to sleep. My body is still on Manhattan time.”

“I don’t think reading the tweets of people who think we’re going to hell will accomplish that.”

“I know that. Friday is actually blocking me from Twitter and Tumbler right now. I’m looking at what Yo-Yo sent me. I’m having at least a few of these my wall of Steve.”

Just as Tony said this, Tony’s cell gave the ‘Pepper is trying to get a hold of you’ chime, indicating
that she just sent him a message. Considering pepper understands time zones better than him, this probably wasn’t a good thing. The fact that Steve actually handed the phone back over to him after reading the message was also not a good sign.

“You need to respond to Pepper.” He tells Tony.

“I thought you wanted me to go to sleep?” Tony asked, confused and a little worried.

“Just read her message.” Steve said, just as the phone chimed again with a second message from pepper. At that point he had no choice but to start reading.

xxxxxx

The Big Boss: I'm sure you're either sleeping because it is 3 AM where you are or more likely preoccupied with your boyfriend, but you should probably know the board is not happy, or rather unhappier. They were already unhappy with moving most operations upstate or back to California.

The Big Boss: But now they are talking to the lawyers about locking you out again unhappy.

Me: I’m not that busy with Steve, mostly because of medical restrictions and he’s such a Boy Scout that he made me respond.

Me: Seriously, that again? When was the last time they were happy with me? Oh wait, when they found out how much money we were getting by leasing off most of the tower and moving upstate where the real estate is more reasonable and we probably won’t have to worry about aliens.

Me: They're worried about the stock prices, aren't they? They’re overreacting. People being reminded that I am a member of the LGTBPIQ community shouldn’t hurt things that much. I mean there’s a few world leaders here that don’t want to sit next to me right now, but whatever.

The Big Boss: Among other things. They're happy that you did it on a Saturday, but they're worried about what the stocks will do come Monday. I think they’re hoping for something big to happen in the interim, that will make people forget about it.

Me: I hope it's not another alien invasion, at least not one that is more than two blue guys crashing in Utah. I hate the board.
The Big Boss: I know.

Me: Can you just tell them to fuck off? You know I don't really care what they think about this. At all. It’s my life and if I want to have a boyfriend, I will have a boyfriend. Really, you can’t do better for PR than a boyfriend who helps the sick and needy all over the world.

The Big Boss: Which is a cover.

Me: Not anymore. He’s going to be doing some of the Jarvis foundation stuff in sub-Saharan Africa. At least I can trust him not to try to kill me.

The Big Boss: Again

Me: If he wanted me dead, I would be.

The Big Boss: The board wants to call a meeting. They tried to do that through your assistant, but she pretended not to understand English. Only Perez is fluent and knew better.

Me: I knew only speaking to each other in Spanish at board meetings would pay off. Perez is also the only one who is not an absolute asshole. She is our token good member. Why didn’t we kick out all of Obadiah’s cronies?

The Big Boss: Because Phil was taken off the investigation and replaced with somebody who was probably Hydra.

Me: Probably. We have people watching R&D, but we neglected the board. We should rectify that.

The Big Boss: The security department is working on it.

Me: Apparently, not fast enough. The board knew this was going to happen eventually, you know since the sex tape scandal right after mom and dad died almost 25 years ago. So I don’t know why they are calling emergency board meeting’s now. PR has been working on this for the last week.
There was an email. I know because Yo-Yo made me read it, twice.

The Big Boss: Obviously they didn’t read their email. Actually, I’m not sure if some of them can actually open their email.

Me: Except for Perez. She is the smart one apparently.

The Big Boss: Honestly, according to Perez, when your gay sex tape came out in ‘92, Obadiah told the members that were around at the time, including Perez's father, that it was a youthful indiscretion and a grief reaction to their death. It really didn't mean anything.

Me: He always was a snake oil salesman, wasn't he?

The Big Boss: He was the best at what he did. He fooled all of us. Although it was probably easy, considering you haven’t been publicly with a man since the tape. Privately, we both know better.

Me: Because you were really great at escorting everybody out the next morning. I don’t think I ever paid you enough for doing that. I’m sorry for that.

The Big Boss: No, you did not and apology accepted.

Me: So the real question is, why are they so freaked out now?

The Big Boss: I think they’re freaking out because this time it’s obviously a serious relationship. This is not a fling. He was on your arm at a Stark industries sponsored international event to raise awareness about wildlife trafficking with various heads of state. That shows that you're serious and serious relationships bother them.

Me: Which was true even when it was you.

The Big Boss: Then there's the pictures of that kiss that are everywhere.

Me: I was trying to keep that from happening. I asked Yo-yo not to post anything like that.
The Big Boss: I appreciate the consideration, but the event was open press. It was all over Twitter within about 10 minutes.

Me: Dammit, why did I sign off on that?

The Big Boss: You didn’t. You delegated and Jane felt that it was a clever idea.

Me: I have to stop doing that. How much damage?

The Big Boss: At least three outlets accidentally reported that you're dating Chris Evans.

Me: Better than the alternative.

The Big Boss: That would be the two outlets that think that you're dating Keanu Reeves.

Me: It's the beard and the new hair color. It looks sexy and totally worth the beard rash. But he does not look like Mr. Clean Cut All American Boy Scout anymore, thank Thor.

The Big Boss: I do want to know about what's going on in your life, but we need to set up boundaries. Specific sex activities are things I don't want to know about at all, including but not limited to, rashes and STIs.

Me: Same courtesy. I don’t hate your boyfriend, but I am still in the adjustment phase.

The Big Boss: I would also like to take this moment to ask you not to do a new sex tape.

Me: I am not planning on it. At least not intentionally, but cameras are everywhere now. We’ve swept for bugs twice in the last two days. Thankfully, the new travel Friday program can disable everything.

The Big Boss: That's all I ask. I’m also not surprised. There's going to be a meeting around 12 PM
Me: How nice.

The Big Boss: And you will be participating.

Me: I will be sure to have Yo-Yo make time in my schedule.

The Big Boss: Somehow, I don’t believe you.

Me: Are there reactions I should be concerned with?

The Big Boss: Happy is upset. He called me. That’s been happening a lot lately.

Me: Happy has been mad at me a lot recently.

The Big Boss: He’s upset that your bodyguard is interfering with his job.

Me: Because his original plan was dangerous. He thought it was an innovative idea to send the entire toy chest to the new facility at the same time without a whole army of security personnel on board.

The Big Boss: He didn’t tell me that when he tried to explain what was going on.

Me: Of course he didn’t because he did the same thing with me. I tried to explain to him after what happened in Baltimore, it wasn’t a feasible plan. If Happy had told me the entire plan, I wouldn’t have signed off on it. I should’ve never taught him that it’s better to ask for forgiveness than permission.

The Big Boss: Well, that’s one of your favorite strategies. I will talk to him once I’m done talking to you. However, we have a more immediate problem, he knows who Stefan really is.
Me: Shit!

Me: How is he taking it?

The Big Boss: He wants to come back to LA once the toy chest has made its way to the new Avenger house.

Me: I was hoping he would stay because we're going to have to send Yo-Yo out to you eventually. Snookums thought that with so many other people with powers running around New York maybe we need some West Coast Avengers. With half of SI still being in Malibu, my assistant was a prime candidate for a job transfer.

The Big Boss: He has a point. You could come out for a few months. I'm sure Dumm-E misses the sun.

Me: I was thinking about spending more time at the house in Malta. Although, is there any way I can get Kevin back?

The Big Boss: Because it would be easier for Stefan to come visit you in Malta especially since they’ve left the EU. I’ll see what I can do about Kevin. Although, that means I’ll lose an assistant.

Me: Thank you. Yes, it would be easier for Honey Bear in Malta, but that’s not the only reason. I don’t necessarily need to be in the tower when the happy couple is reunited. Besides, I’m the king of teleworking.

The Big Boss: You do tend to be productive regardless of where you are when you’re in the mood to be productive.

The Big Boss: I see that Clint is now back in the good graces of the US government. Of course, the announcement was drowned by the ‘Tony Stark is now gay’ stories circulating everywhere.

Me: Because of course my love life is so much more important than anything of actual importance. I’m so glad I’m going to be in a place where the press can’t get too close for a few more days.
The Big Boss: Yo-Yo mentioned something about you coming back Thursday because you're going to be leaving early to avoid certain people.

Me: No, Sugar Pie gets to leave Wednesday. I have to play nice Thursday and then I have a few meetings in France, and yes, I promise not to touch the wine. So I think I get back to the country about a week from today.

The Big Boss: Maybe it's for the best. The board might be calm down by then.

Me: Do you really believe that?

The Big Boss: No.

Me: By next Saturday, everything will be upstate and Happy will obviously be on a plane back to Malibu so I can avoid his wrath.

The Big Boss: He’ll probably be on a plane tomorrow.

Me: You said he said he was staying until everything was moved upstate. It’s going to take a week to do things as planned. There is a decoy plane flying out from the tower in probably a half an hour, then, everything will be carted upstate by armed trucks that look like innocent milk trucks driven by trained agents.

The Big Boss: He said he would be done tonight.

Me: Shit! I bet he went back to the old plan, just because he’s mad at me for dumping you for Captain America, the old Captain America. I need to go make some phone calls.

The big boss: Keep me updated

Me: Will do.

Chapter End Notes
Note: For some reason in the MCU, probably due to bad researching, Malta is not part of the EU. I decided to reconcile real geopolitics with MCU history by having Malta be previously part of the EU, but they left right about the time aliens fell over Manhattan.

Note 2: So I received a guest review from Megajet and because I couldn’t respond directly I’m going to take a moment now to address it. Unlike Archive of Our Own, fanfiction dot net doesn’t allow you to respond to guest reviews.

As you can see from this conversation, Tony is aware of other people with powers in New York including the Defenders. However, because the defender series is usually released a year or two after the events take place and in relation to the rest of the MCU, it’s a little harder to incorporate specifics. From what I understand, everything so far has taken place pre-Civil War. The Punisher could take place post-Civil War, but that hasn’t been released yet. Basically, I got very lucky with the timing of Spider-Man: Homecoming.

As for if I will incorporate elements from season 4 of AOS, the answer is this story is taking place in the gap between seasons 3 and 4. The plan is for it to end right about when season four is beginning, but there could still be a Robbie cameo. I’m not ruling it out yet.
Thank you to everybody who read or reviewed the last conversation you are all absolutely lovely.

Spoiler warning: This conversation covers the events of the climax of Spider-Man: Homecoming. If you happen to have a copy for home viewing, you may want to watch. I purposely lined things up so this chapter would not come out until after the movie was available for home viewing in the US at least. Also I wanted to look at one scene one more time.
I ended up rewriting a few things after watching.

Reminder: If something is different from the movie go with my interpretation.

CoulsonPJ: I'm going to hurt your driver. I may even kill him. Possibly with a paperclip. You will never find the body.

StarkAE: I'm sure you could. Should you really be saying stuff like that from your work account? At least use your Avenger burn phone. Also Happy is not my driver, he is the head of security.

CoulsonPJ: And obviously a bad one. He completely ignored May's plan for getting the tech out of the tower undetected.

CoulsonPJ: Also, Fitz integrated your burn phone technology into a new shield instant messaging system that we've been using to circumvent Ross.

StarkAE: Of course he is reverse engineering my tech, I expect nothing less. So why exactly do you want to kill Happy? It's never a good sign when Friday wakes me up to take a call or a text message in this case, in the middle of the night.

CoulsonPJ: Check Twitter. #Spiderman

StarkAE: Oh shit. That went as badly as possible. Everything is burning. Did we lose the pilots?

CoulsonPJ: Yes.

StarkAE: Fuck! Is that a guy tied up in web kind of dressed like a vulture? Are those things from the Avengers’ toy supply? How did those pictures end up on Twitter?

CoulsonPJ: Yes, yes, and possibly someone from your security staff.

StarkAE: That’s going to be another fun conversation with Pepper. Friday, sweetheart, please find out who I need to fire for violating company social media policy.

FRIDAY: I am already doing so. Leo asked me to earlier.

StarkAE: Great. My AI has a crush on a taken shield agent and Spidey still being heroic, even
though he’s grounded. I bet he didn’t call for backup either.

CoulsonPJ: Actually, he did call for backup. His friend did anyway, but we were in DC for the press conference.

StarkAE: Which probably nobody cares about right now due to this making its way onto Twitter. Did Spidey break into the tower to get his suit back? More importantly…. Friday, did you help him? I know he's your favorite baby.

FRIDAY: I did not allow codename Spidey into the tower to retrieve his suit, nor did he request access to his suit after you took it from him. However, my analysis of #Spiderman is telling me that I probably should have.

CoulsonPJ: Keep going through Twitter.

StarkAE: He's wearing the pajamas suit. Dammit. Also, did Spidey actually take Sexy_Flash’s Audi? That kid is a dick. Seriously, only a dick or somebody who really loves that CW show would use that as their twitter handle.

CoulsonPJ: Yes and yes. It suffered some damage during his use.

StarkAE: I’m probably gonna have to replace that. Thankfully, if you allow paparazzi to take shots of you in their cars, you get one for free. Also, driving lessons will be added to the training curriculum.

CoulsonPJ: That will be taught by Agent May because I just don’t trust your driving at all.

StarkAE: I’m almost offended. At least none of the rides at Coney Island were damaged because I would not hear the end of that from my sex on legs boyfriend.

CoulsonPJ: Focus Stark. Otherwise I'll call May over to brief you directly. She really wants to kill your driver.

StarkAE: Understandable considering I kind of want to punch him. Also for somebody who wants the world to think that he’s still dead you’re doing an awful job at it. There are at least three shots of you at the crime scene. I’m still not used to you in something other than a three-piece suit.

CoulsonPJ: The jackets were easier after the amputation and I got used to it.

StarkAE: So is the guy who tried to steal all my weapons in Shield or police custody?

CoulsonPJ: Federal custody. Laura felt it best to take the kid and run. We were able to extract him before Happy arrived with the regular authorities. I stayed behind with Fitz to deal with the authorities.

StarkAE: Good Plan. Where Is Spidey now?

CoulsonPJ: Simmons is looking over him on Zephyr one and then we are dropping them back at Queens with an alibi.

StarkAE: Also good.

CoulsonPJ: We were able to arrive in time to at least help with the extraction because Ned called Laura after Happy hung up on him when he tried to warn him about the attack.

StarkAE: Oh God. Definitely suspended. How is Spidey? Is his aunt going to kill me?
CoulsonPJ: He’s fine. According to Simmons, he has a few injuries though, but only a few which is surprising considering a building collapsed on him earlier tonight.

StarkAE: What the hell?

CoulsonPJ: The villain tried to keep him away, but he was able to get out by himself because he’s that strong. They’re blaming Quake for it, by the way, despite not being seen in the New York Metro since she rescued Ms. Marvel and her family from the Watchdogs.

StarkAE: Of course they are. How OK is Peter?

CoulsonPJ: As I said he’s fine. Some scrapes and bruises that will probably be healed by the time we dropped him off in Queens. He heals faster than your boyfriend.

StarkAE: Which is kind of a downside when I’m trying to leave a hickey on Sugarplum. But in this case it will probably keep Aunt Mama Bear from eviscerating us all.

CoulsonPJ: Never mess with a woman named May.

StarkAE: Words to live by. Do you need me to come back? Are the Avengers weapons in FBI custody?

CoulsonPJ: Only if you’re coming back early to avoid Ross. Fitz is taking care of the Avenger tech. That is definitely under ATCU jurisdiction.

StarkAE: That’s good, I think. Tell him not to reverse engineer anything.

CoulsonPJ: I’ll try. I’ll update you when I have more.

StarkAE: That’s all I ask.

To be continued

Chapter End Notes

I’ve been wanting to do Coulson Stark snarky banner for a while in this story. I had too much fun doing this conversation.
"What happened?" Tony heard Steve ask as he placed his phone down.

“A lot. Apparently, mostly involving Spidey and a super villain. I'm trying to piece it together from Twitter. Apparently I have a soon-to-be former employee to thank for most of this stuff being on twitter.” It was all giving him a headache, really.

“Friday princess, can you please get daddy a copy of the initial Shield report and the FBI report?” Tony asked the travel version of Friday on his phone. He really wanted to know what the hell was going on and Agent Agent was being extra cryptic.

"Agent Coulson says he is still drafting the report and will need to speak with Spidey before completing it. However, he will send you a copy once the preliminary analysis is ready in exchange for you not accessing the FBI database without authorization." The AI replied.

"That's fine.” Tony reluctantly agreed.

“Whatever happened doesn’t sound very good.” Steve said pulling him back down onto the bed. He was shirtless. Bless him.

“Not really. OK so long story short, Happy is pissed at us because I'm dating you.”

“You didn’t tell him it was really me beforehand, did you?” Steve asked. He was glaring. That’s not good.
“No, because he already hated Stefan because you’re keeping me from my one true love, Pepper. At least that’s what Happy believes.” In reality, Tony is pretty sure that Steve may be the one. Which is weird because they haven’t even had sex yet and they still have so many issues to deal with, but somehow Tony just feels it.

“But he figured it out anyway?” Steve asked.

“Yep. Because he totally didn’t buy that I was dating your look-alike just to get over you. Probably because I never gave him that excuse, but I was planning to. It does not matter because he still had a hissy fit in the form of disregarding May’s wonderful plan to get our Avengers toys out of the tower and upstate away from little fingers.”

“I assume you mean weapons?

“Yes. After the two Baltimore incidents, we decided to use a decoy plane and then sneak everything else out with fake milk trucks. Instead of following orders, he flew everything out in one plane which was attacked according to media reports by a guy dressed as a "vulture". There are video files, possibly posted by someone I need to fire." Tony said as he pulled up one of the more benign things that ended up on Twitter.

"Is Peter wearing pajamas?" Steve remarked.

"Possibly yes. This is why I ended up giving him the original suit in the first place. Now I’m kind of regretting grounding him because this happened."

"You know all the stories about me getting into fights with bullies three times my size were all true."

"I totally should’ve known better. At least he called Laura or rather had his friend do it. Of course if Happy would have listened to anybody, this would not have happened."

“Why didn’t Laura get there before this happened?” Steve asked.

"Because of the Clint announcement, she was in DC when Ned finally got a hold of her and told her that Peter was going rogue. From what I gathered from Agent Agent, they arrived after the fight was
done, but before the cop showed up." Tony told his boyfriend as he snuggled in a little closer.

“Does this mean you need to get back to New York to handle this?” Steve wrapped an arm around him.

“Possibly, but I don't know.” Tony said turning around to look at Steve “The tech has been recovered. The bad guy is in federal custody. Spider-teen is in Shield custody and being escorted home. I’m going to have to deal with Happy, but it might be best if I have a couple of days to cool down.”

“And yet you’re conflicted?”

"This is going to be a PR disaster, especially if anybody finds out that it could've been completely prevented if Happy had followed the agreed-upon protocol. I don’t know if I should let Pepper handle that on her own because it’s an Avenger thing not a SI thing." He felt guilty enough due to all the pictures of him and Steve making out all over the place. He didn’t want her to see those, but somebody had a telephoto lens so here they are.

“And that’s on top of everything from yesterday. You’re right, Pepper shouldn’t have to deal with all on her own when it’s not her fault.”

“On the plus side, at least the announcement of me having a boyfriend did not go completely horribly.”

"They confused me with Chris Evans." Steve remarked with a smirk.

"The beard and the biceps, but you're sexier." Tony said as he leaned over to kiss Steve on the mouth. He cherished every aspect of it because he knew his time with Steve was short. He was going to have to go back sooner than Wednesday, he just knew it.

“On the bright side, Evans took on a bunch of homophobic assholes for us. He also said he would be totally up to playing my boyfriend in the Avenger anthology. That’s a weird thing to say, considering he’s already cast to play you... Fuck, he knows. Dammit." Tony said as everything clicked.

"Focus on other things." Of course Steve kissed him again, which made Tony’s mind focus on the wrong thing.
"Like the Avengers’ weapons almost getting stolen," He said pulling away.

"Yes."

"This means like two dozen phone calls, starting with Jane the PR goddess, the deputy head of security because Happy is kind of sort of suspended right now, and Pepper.” The Pepper conversation was going to be brutal. “Is it late there or early in Malibu right now?” He asked turning to Steve.

"Late since it’s about 5 AM here."

"So it might actually be almost a decent time in California." Tony said as he reached over to get his cell phone. His normal one, not the Avenger burn phone.

“Maybe you can wait a little bit. Well you should rest. You barely slept last night.”

“Because after a night of political schmoozing, we made out like teenagers and I had to take two showers. Otherwise I would’ve done something else I did as a teenager.”

“You should still rest.” Steve said with a kiss to his temple.

“Yeah, that's not going to happen. I'll sleep on the plane. Although I could really use some espresso or six.”

"I'll call room service. So you're going back?"

“90% probability, but I need to talk to Pepper first and possibly Peter.” Tony said before kissing him again. He can’t get enough of this. It was addictive.

"Look, it's not going to be a ‘goodbye forever’ goodbye. I think people are buying Stefan, the ones that matter, anyway. Also, I think I'm going to spend the winter in Malta.” Because he really can’t go that long without Steve kisses.
“Malta?” Steve asked.

“I bought Ian Quinn’s old compound in a fire sale a couple years ago. The lab space is currently being rebuilt, but it seems like a good place for a secret Avenger hideout, especially for secret Avengers. Maybe Stefan can come and visit every couple of weeks.” Tony has been working on this plan for a while because he is a futurist after all and the writing is on the wall.

"I'm not going to be able to come back, am I?" Steve asked sadly.

“Not anytime soon at least. I'm having Friday analyze the Twitter reactions to Clint coming back. So far most of its positive, but Ross is on the warpath.” Which was what Tony originally thought Coulson was going to contact him about, not the Spidey thing.

"Of course he is." Steve sighed warily.

"I just don't want you to get caught up." Tony leans over to kiss Steve again.

"I can take care of myself."

"I love you so I worry or at least that’s what Anna told me when I was a kid."

"Wise woman and I love you too.” Steve responded as he kissed back.

"Very wise. And she got killed because dad had too many enemies. I don’t want to take unnecessary risks and I think it’s safer if you keep a low profile."

“But you’re making arrangements for us to see each other more often?”

“Yes. Now I have a boyfriend in another country to excuse my overseas trips that are not SI connected. Also, I have a wedding in Mumbai the last week of October as well. The son of a friend from MIT who I actually still speak to occasionally. I could use a +1 and I’m hoping the medical restrictions will be gone by then.”
“I think I might make it. Look, you call Pepper and I will get you coffee. Although maybe you should call Peter first.” Steve says as he gets up from the bed, but not before kissing Tony again.

“I think I just fell in love a little bit more,” Tony thinks to himself.

To be continued

Chapter End Notes

With the next Thor movie opening in the U.S. Friday (and already out in 52% of the international markets), some of you are wondering if things from that movie will get incorporated into the story? The answer to that is I will not know until I actually watch the movie, but I’m currently leaning towards no since the movie takes place on another planet. I won’t make that decision for sure until I actually watch the movie and with my schedule being what it is that’s not going to happen until Veterans Day.

So I asked that you please do not include any spoiler comments for Thor 3 until at least December 3 for my sake and that of your fellow readers. I’ll let you know when it’s safe to PM me with questions. Thank you for being considerate of others.
“That did not sound like a very pleasant conversation.” Steve said as he sketched from the couch.

He was trying to finish up his present for Tony before the man left and Steve was pretty sure from the bits and pieces of the emergency board meeting that he overheard that was going to be sooner rather than later. He was really looking forward to being with Tony until Wednesday, but that’s not the type of life they have.

"No conversation with the Board of Directors is pleasant. Any conversation where I have to cover for Happy using Rhodey’s new job is even less so. The fact that I think one of them arranged for someone to leak candid shots of what happened makes it so much worse." Tony sighed as he took a drink from the large coffee in his hand. That was his 3rd cup this morning.

"So do you actually think they believe what happened last night was a government-sponsored undercover mission with the newest member of the Avenger squad taking point?” It almost sounded plausible and maybe if Steve was looking at it from afar and not as part of Tony’s inner circle, he may have believed it. Especially if he had no idea that the Spider Man of YouTube was a 15-year-old kid.

"Possibly maybe. It’s a near thing. It helps that the pilots who died were Shield agent and not outside pilots. At least Happy kept that part of the plan in place. Although a few members of the board would like for us to have a press conference at the new upstate facility introducing Spidey to the world, mask free." Tony explained.

"No." Steve responded, without even thinking.
"I didn’t say yes." Tony said taking the seat beside Steve. “Especially because I’m sure the asshole who suggested it is golf buddies with Ross.”

"I’m saying no for you."

"Between the therapy and medication, I get that outing a 15-year-old with superpowers is a really bad idea. Ironically enough, because I said no, they mentioned a psych evaluation." Steve saw Tony shiver at that.

"For Spidey?" Steve asked his boyfriend for clarification.

"For me." Tony acknowledged.

"I’m confused. Why would they threaten you with a psych evaluation?" Steve asked.

“To get a hold of the company again for war profiteering purposes or possibly to help Ross with his hidden agenda. It wouldn’t be the first time around.” Steve just stared at Tony for a moment, mouth open in surprise.

"I forgot you were still frozen when Obadiah successfully used my mental issues to get me out of my own company after he had me kidnapped, which was responsible for most of my issues in the first place. Board members Asshole, Prick, and Dick are essentially threatening to lock me out of my company the same way. Because murder bots and superhero throw downs in Germany they can deal with, but a new boyfriend is apparently a bridge too far.”

“Tony.” Steve said, placing an arm around Tony.

“I don’t even think they’re that upset about the Spidey situation since they’d rather spend time talking about who I’m dating then the pilots that were killed in the incident. Assholes. Where the Fuck do they get off…”Steve quickly silenced Tony with a kiss. The man needed it.

“Your excellent tongue cannot fix everything.” Tony said pulling away. “Baby cakes, I’m allowed to be a little freaked out because unlike last time, I’ve actually been diagnosed with bipolar and PTSD. Also I’ve managed to piss off the Secretary of State and a few other officials and various governments"
"And you are in treatment. They shouldn’t use that against you.” Steve said with a frown. Tony responded by leaning over to kiss him again.

"Still doesn’t mean that they won’t try something. I may be actually halfway successful. Ross could be in on it too because, again, he’s golf friends with at least Prick and Dick. I think his assistant called my assistant three times because he wants to yell at me. Fortunately, Yo-Yo just kept routing her to Rhodey." That concerned Steve. He doesn’t like Ross playing games with Tony.

“Thankfully, Ross is just upset about Purple Arrow being back with full government approval and not that you’re the great Stefan Carter with the tongue of a God.”

"So the board is upset about what happened last night?" Steve asked.

“That’s a hard yes. But again, they are not upset about the super villain in training trying to intercept a shipment of Avenger tech, but the fact I have a boyfriend. Okay Ross is probably upset about the weapons thing in addition to the Clint thing, but that’s a Rhodey problem.”

"Seriously?"

"You’re right. Rhodey should not have to put up with that. Friday, sweetheart, please make sure that my BFF receives a box of the good chocolates. Maybe put on the card, ‘Sorry, I’m forcing you to deal with crazy bureaucrats/admirals that don’t know what they’re doing’. Maybe throw in some cupcakes as well."

"Of course boss.” He heard Friday’s voice from Tony’s phone. “Should I also send a box of the good chocolates to Ms. Potts?"

"Yes. And Coulson.” At that point, Steve just stares at Tony. "Might as well throw in a box of something chocolate for May and Yo-Yo. I’ve kind of been a jerk. But hey, if they lifted the sex ban. I would be so much mellower right now.” Tony argued.

"Which May?” The AI asked for clarification. He’s sure this question occurred because they were dealing with the travel version.
"You know what, both. I’m not sure how long May Parker-Riley is going to believe that Peter just happened to see something at his date’s house and tipped off the authorities. That’s like only slightly more believable than that ridiculous cover story that Coulson came up with to cover up the fact that Obadiah tried to kill me and I took him out instead. I’m just glad that the board never found out about that during the Shield data dump post implosion."

"Coulson never made any records of that electronically. At least that’s what Natasha said." Steve explained.

"I love Agent so much. He is just the best. When he’s not fanboying over you or lying to us about being dead. Of course, now he’s probably going to glare at you for screwing his whatever they are, but I’m sure he’ll eventually get over it."

"Do you want to talk about why the board is upset that you have a boyfriend?" Steve asked, trying to get this conversation to move in the right direction. Steve is starting to learn that it’s just as difficult to do this in person, as it was in text message format.

"Nice subject change, gumdrop. No. Seriously they should’ve seen this coming. We handed them out a press packet like days ago. See, now I wish I really did bring Coulson as my date to that dinner last month." Tony pouted.

"The dinner where you were almost killed?"

"Okay, I wish I didn’t go to it at all, but I kind of wish I’d dated guys more publicly in the past, mostly for spite right now."

"From our conversations, I don’t think you really dated anybody before Pepper."

"Thank you again for not googling my past relationship stuff. Thank you so much because I probably wouldn’t be able to do this right now." Tony said, reaching over to kiss Steve on the mouth. He’s gotten way too used to this over the last few days.” He loved Tony’s kisses. Sometimes they were gentle and sweet. Other times they were hard and wanting, but there was always a genuine sort of honesty to them.

"I don’t think I would hold it against you with a kiss like that." He whispered as coherent thought started to occur again.
"You're so sweet." Tony gave him another gentle kiss. "Now, I didn’t date before Pepper. I’m sure this can all be traced back to my deep-seated Howard issues. It also didn’t help that my first boyfriend made a sex tape that is making its rounds through Twitter and Tumbler again right now. Which is totally reminding me why you are my second real boyfriend."

“That’s not good.” Steve tells Tony.

“Not really. I really hope that Peter, Kemal, and Lily bear don’t see that.” Steve really didn’t want to see it either.

"I have already applied the appropriate parental blocks to their computers." He heard Fridays say.

"Bless you."

"So you know when you’re leaving? I heard Jane from PR mentioned something about Ellen?"

“Tuesday actually, which was later than I thought. Jane and Pepper agreed that I will need to be back in the country to participate in operation Damage Control. They’re still trying to decide if this involves a stint on the talk show circuit showing off pictures of my boyfriend. I’m going to probably have a few interviews with local press here as well tomorrow.” Steve is not sure how he felt about that. Mostly he was worried about what they would put Tony through.

“I think I prefer this to the press conference idea, but I still don’t like it.”

“I don’t like it either. But hey at least it keeps Peter nice and safe and away from the vultures and Ross. The paparazzi vultures, not the guy who tried to steal my toys.”

“Yes. Although if it’s necessary for you to do damage control, why are you waiting a couple of days?”

“Do you want me to leave?” Tony asked worried.

“Not at all.” Steve punctuated his words with another kiss to Tony’s mouth.
“Good to know. Basically, leaving here too quickly would make things worse, especially because I have meetings for the next six hours with various world leaders. We are trying to make it look like this was always the plan anyway.”

“And running back would not send that message?” Steve asked.

“Exactly. Also, I’m still a little too angry to actually talk to Happy yet so it’s probably best that I have a few more days before we have to have that conversation. He’s already on his way to California to deal with the wrath of Pepper.”

"Yet you covered for him?” Steve didn’t quite get that yet.

"Because he has done the same for me more times than I can count. I have done some very fucked up things over the years. The majority of which were definitely immoral and probably illegal and he always saved my ass."

"How illegal?” Steve asked.

“More than one incident involved enough coke to probably get charged with trafficking. The 90s were a bad decade for me." 

"I get that.” At least he’s starting to see how much Tony has grown as a person before they even met.

"It’s just that he always had my back during my bad judgment calls back then, mostly involving trusting Obadiah. Before there was Pepper saving my ass, there was Happy. Obviously not following May’s plan was a bad call because we were right and somebody was after the Avenger tech. Really I am glad May brought the shield with her and did not leave it behind with the other things to be transported to the Avenger compound."

"Me as well.” And not just because he got to train with it a little bit when Tony was in one of his many meetings yesterday. Was it just yesterday? It felt like days have gone by instead of just hours.

"I feel like I need to be there during his bad judgment calls. He always stood by me, so I need to do
that for him. Besides, he did what he did because he was mad at me. That means some of this was on me." Tony explained. But Steve just shook his head.

"You can’t take everything on yourself. It was his choice to ignore the plan."

"But he wouldn’t have reacted the way he did if I didn’t try to keep the fact we are together a secret."

"Why didn’t you tell Happy that you were with me and not some random guy that you met at a charity event?" Steve asked. He’s been wondering about this for a while. "Were you worried that he would tell Ross about our contract?"

"Now that never crossed my mind. Not once did I consider that possibility. Happy knows things from the bad old days that he could make a fortune off of selling to the tabloids."

"But he never did?"

"Usually he was the one who fed the disgruntled employee that did that sort of thing to the wolves. He’s always been very protective of me."

"That was obvious when he came back after you almost got killed. So why didn’t you tell him the truth?" Steve asked.

"Because he was so disappointed that I couldn’t make things work with Pepper. I wasn’t even joking when I told you that he got a ring. He’s been carrying it around for forever in case I wanted to propose."

"A ring that you made him get rid of."

"Yes, even though it started a new rounds of paparazzi speculation."

"Which I’m very happy about."

"He wasn’t. Happy believed that I could actually do a committed, monogamous relationship, so I
wanted to believe that I could do a committed, monogamous relationship. I’ve wanted things to work out with Pepper. I really did want to prove that I could be in a real adult relationship that everyone wanted out of me, including Happy.”

“But it didn’t work out?”

“No, it didn’t. I love Pepper. A part of me will always love Pepper, but we are not right for each other. I’m willing and able to acknowledge that now to myself, but I wasn’t quite ready until this weekend to tell Happy that Pepper and I are never ever getting back together because I fell in love with you. Not Captain America, but Steve from Brooklyn.”

Steve was just about to lean over to kiss Tony just as he heard a knock on the door. It was Tony’s assistant/other Avenger.

"Estoy entrando y mas vale que tengan los pantalones puestos.” He heard Elaina say with a bag of local pastries and another coffee in hand. This one smelled more like espresso. He thinks she said something about having their pants on, but his Spanish was a little rusty.

“Desafortunadamente si, mi bombon es todo un chico explorador y se niega rotundamente a ponerme peligro a mi y mi virtud.” Tony responded, also in Spanish.

“Did you just refer to me as a marshmallow?” Steve asked and Tony responded with a quick kiss.

“You’re working on your Spanish. That’s so adorable. Isn’t he adorable?” He said, turning to Yo-Yo.

"We need to leave in 20 minutes for your business brunch followed by a few interviews." She said passing him a bag of pastries.

“Which apparently will have no food which explains why you’re feeding me now. Can Steve come to this one?” Tony asked with a pout.

“Unfortunately, no.”
“That’s so unfair. I’ll be back later, Sugarplum.” Tony said with one last kiss.

To be continued.
Dear Mr. Hogan:

I don't know how to begin this letter. Honestly, I think writing to Virginia was easier. With her, I knew to begin by promising never to hurt Tony again and assuring her that my feelings for him are genuine. Her reaction to that still wasn't what one would categorizes as warm at first.

I guess I should start by saying that I love Tony. I love every part of Tony, not just the version that is sitting in a meeting on how to get guns away from poachers and other terrorist organizations., I don’t just love the version of Tony that helps seven-year-old girls with their homework or does everything in his power to keep his new BFF safe from anti-gifted terrorist groups.

I also love the guy who would risk alienating the man that he is in love with because it was necessary to help others because it was the right thing to do. Or as close to the right thing to do as could be in a situation where there were no right things to do. I love the guy who tries to save the world and screws up badly and keeps trying. I love the man who is sarcastic and filled with snark because he's trying to cover up the pain he feels inside.

I also love the man who would lie to the board to cover up the fact that his friend and head of security disregarded a preapproved action plan. Therefore, accidentally leading to a lot of Avenger tech being on the black market if not for the intervention of a teenager from Queens. They all think that last night was a trap.

He is mad at you. Furious really. But Tony still won't throw you under the metaphorical bus or to the board. He won't let Colonel Rhodes touch you either. The conversation with Shield wasn't exactly pleasant. Despite how angry he is, he’s still loyal to you because you stood by his side when he did a
lot of stupid things, mostly involving various illegal drugs. Someday, I'm going to want to know more about that, but not today.

I know that you're not really mad at Tony. You love Tony. You just want to protect him from the big bad boyfriend in Africa. I guess it was just easier to think that I didn't mean anything if you could just think that I was the rebound that he's only known for a couple months not a guy that he has known for several years and has feelings for a long time. Maybe the fact that we were so antagonistic to each other for those years probably makes you even more wary of my relationship with Tony.

That's OK. I'm worried too. Petrified really. We've been together for a few days in person and no fighting, so maybe we got it out of our system in Siberia or maybe we're just better at talking to each other. I'm sure the medication has helped. But we are trying.

Maybe you're angry because you had this idea of Tony and Pepper living happily ever after with 1.7 children somewhere in upstate New York. Now it's me and Tony. Although there are a lot more children than originally planned, mostly with superpowers.

You probably resent me because if I was not around then Tony and Pepper would have found their way back to each other or at least you feel like it would play that way. But deep down, I think you know that the relationship was not this perfect ideal that you have in your head. It never was. And I don’t think my presence changes that. Maybe it was just a catalyst to make the explosion happen sooner rather than later.

Tony needs someone who understands his life now. I understand that life now because I am part of that life now. Someone who understands who he is underneath the bravado and jokes. It took me a while to see that person, but I see him now.

I think even when Tony was making weapons, it was about protecting people and not profiteering. When he realized that wasn't happening, he stopped and he found a new way to protect people. Ultron happened because he wanted to protect people. Unfortunately that went badly, but his heart was in the right place. We just have to work on execution.

He wanted to protect people like his new charges from Queens and Jersey City. After very interesting conversations with Ms. Rodriguez about ICE’s stance on people with superpowers, I realized that some of his actions that I was really angry about before were just his way of protecting teammates from being deported. That's part of the reason why she is his assistant. Apparently being Tony Stark's assistant is considered a highly skilled job deserving of an EB-1 visa.
These last few months I've gotten to know Tony better than I did in all the years previously. Maybe that was because I was only seeing the public persona and rarely got glimpses of the real Tony underneath. Now I'm seeing the person that you've seen for all these years and that's the person that I love. I love public Tony too because maybe now I understand why Tony hides behind it when necessary.

So the purpose of this letter is to reassure you that I do care for Tony deeply and genuinely, all parts of him. That I intend to be with him to the best of my ability and I will do my best not to hurt him again.

I am aware that I made some serious mistakes previously. I assumed things I shouldn't have. I did things I regret and that I'm sorry for. The fact that I can only see him occasionally at things like where we are right now is punishment for that.

Now I'm just trying to prove to myself and Tony that I really do deserve Tony because I know he trusts me and loves me despite what happened. However I feel that maybe I need to earn it, truly earn it. So I'm trying and I'll do my best to be the person that Tony needs.

I hope eventually you’ll stop being angry about me being in Tony’s life. Tony has enough love in him to care for hundreds of people. That means he has space for both of us.

To be continued.

Chapter End Notes

So I did get to see Thor: Ragnarok yesterday and it was fabulous. No spoilers from me but it doesn’t affect this story because the events take place 10 months to a year after where we currently are. The events of the second and third act of Doctor Strange have not even occurred yet in the story’s timeline. We are even two months from the epilogue scene from season three of AOS, so AOS season 5 will not be affecting us. (God, that trailer was awesome.)

There are a couple of things that I gleaned from Ragnarok that will be used but only little things because again the events of the movie haven’t taken yet in this universe. I also doubt that we will be affected by Runaways or the Punisher. They are running in their own lane, but we shall see. I reserve the right to drawl anything from any other part of the MCU that will enhance the story, except for probably the Inhumans because that show is exiled from my community.
Conversation 54 : You Are Not Responsible for the Stupidity of Others

Chapter Summary

Thank you to everybody who read or reviewed the last conversation. You are all lovely. I actually end up doing the final proofreading on this conversation twice because I accidentally left it on my work computer.

This conversation takes place about a day after the last one. See, we won’t be spending nine or 10 conversations on the same day. Tony is in a meeting which means he is text messaging Steve again. It’s been so long I had to go back and look to see what conversation we were on.

Tony: You know if it wasn’t for the fact I would get to spend two more days with you, I would of left yesterday morning and not stayed for a meeting where I’m pretty much blamed for everything wrong, not just in their country, but the world in general. But that's a normal thing. I should’ve known this was going to happen when I was told that Senator Hateful’s Chief of Staff would be attending.

Tony: Am I sorry that old Stark weapons are in the hands of various terrorist organizations, especially those that like to murder elephants for fun and profit? Yes. Am I and as an extension Stark Industries trying to get those weapons out of their hands? Yes. But I can’t fix everything.

Tony: I left the game, but I was never the only game in town, only the best. There are dozens of other weapons manufacturers out there. Some of these players are more legal than others but they are still here on both sides. They’re making a small fortune on everybody who is stocking up for the next robot apocalypse or alien invasion.

Me: Bad meeting?

Tony: So bad. Maybe it would be better if I got more than three hours of sleep in the last two days due to board members who don’t understand time zones and remote phone interviews. But that’s life. My life anyway. I’m on my third espresso.

Me: Of course, you are.

Tony: Okay, it would’ve been better if the reason for such little sleep was a BJ and not because some guy who I never met blames his poor decision to turn to a life of crime on me and tried to take the
Avenger toy chest on its way to our new house.

Me: Not happening, not yet anyway.

Me: I mean the BJ. You read the confession, didn’t you?

Tony: Senator Hateful’s Chief of Staff gave me a copy, in front of a camera crew. I am like this close to running against Nadeer and 2018.

Tony: I know what you mean there, Sweetie. I joke about it, but maybe we are not ready for that. I’m not really. I want to be ready, but I’m a little fucked up with more abandonment issues than my poor therapist can really handle.

Me: So am I.

Tony: I don't remember if I told you this, but Pepper and I dated for a while before we slept together. We needed to transition first and so do you and me. I think I just wanted to jump into things because I’m scared.

Me: That I’m going to leave you or that we may not get to see each other again because of Ross or others?

Tony: A little of column A and a little of column B. But you’ve dealt with me leaving my towels on the floor and you’re planning to be my date at a Mumbai wedding in November, so I’m a little more relaxed now.

Me: That’s good.

Tony: Did I mention that in the last hour, I have been politely yelled at bureaucrat style by representatives from four different countries for making Avenger weapons, but not releasing them to the public?

Me: Really?
Tony: Yes. The last time I dealt with arguments like this from a government official, he turned out to be Hydra.

Me: And how many did you tell that to?

Tony: All four, Cookie.

Me: You are working your way through a list of random food items? Yesterday, marshmallows, today cookies.

Tony: Maybe. Although, I only called you bonbon because the time I tried the literal translation of cuddle bunny, Yo-Yo started giggling.

Me: Some things don’t translate directly.

Tony: Apparently. Although I don’t think the lack of a translation for Hydra is why at least two of the representatives showed no shame at all. I wonder if any of these people are ex-Hydra members that nobody caught.

Me: Here?

Tony: The cult of Hydra has always been diverse and opportunistic. You never know. It was always about power.

Me: Do I need to come save you?

Tony: I always need you. However, I am only about 10 more minutes of this meeting. Also, Agent America is standing by to pull me out, most likely for another briefing on or conference call about the Adrian Toomes situation.

Tony: And yes, I did read the confession, the real version from Agent America and not what Senator Hateful’s Chief of Staff provided. Apparently, he turned to a life of crime because DODC put him
Me: You can’t be responsible for the choices that other people make. He didn’t have to start making weapons out of alien tech and selling them on the black market to anybody willing to pay?

Tony: I don’t think you quite understand my job. The CEO is always responsible.

Me: I thought you’re chief creative officer now.

Tony: That just means Pepper does the money stuff. I do the creative stuff.

Me: Like artificial hearts and lifelike prosthesis. Creating the Bureau of Damage Control was the right thing to do. Material that the aliens left behind in Manhattan was dangerous. An entire firehouse of firefighters died because of a virus left behind in one of the helmets. If different choices were made, more people would’ve died. There could’ve been a major pandemic with no vaccine in sight.

Tony: Antiserum. Vaccines protect against infection that have yet to take place.

Me: You know what I mean.

Tony: Yes, because we’ve spent so much time together lately, I’m already reading your mind. I should probably email Laura to get her take on things, but she’s probably enjoying quality time with her husband and I want to at least give her a few days before asking her if I should give Spidey the suit back.

Me: You might be right about her being indisposed. Maybe you should email Queens instead. Not just to hear his side of things, but to see if he’s okay and not just depend on what ever you’re being told in the briefings.

Tony: Probably and Spidey is probably available. Since he ditched his date at homecoming and managed to get her dad arrested, I don’t think he’ll be getting laid today. He might take my call. It’s 50-50 with Laura and Purple Arrow.

Me: You make jokes when you’re worried right? I can’t believe I’m just noticing this now.
Tony: Although if Spidey is screwing around with his BFF, then they could be having you almost got killed by a super villain sex which happens sometimes. Also something I don’t want to interrupt.

Me: He’s 15. Also, can we just talk without your defenses going up? I care about you.

Tony: And how old were you again when you lost your virginity?

Me: Point.

Tony: And I’m trying to be serious. I am worried. I’m scared people are going to find you. I’m worried that we’re still too broken to handle the next world ending catastrophe. I’m also terrified that Spidey’s aunt knows the truth and she is going to kill me the moment I touch down in Manhattan.

Me: Which won’t be until Thursday or Friday because you’re going to California first to tape a few talk show appearances and Pepper agreed to meet with Happy together. At least that was the plan this morning.

Tony: Still the plan because we can’t come up with anything better. Although Jane from PR wants us to do a joint interview with the New York Times where we ask each other the 36 questions that lead to love.

Me: Maybe later we can do that privately wants virtual dates, resume.

Tony: I’m well aware California is going to be highly unpleasant and not just because you’re not with me. I’m still trying to figure out how much I want to yell at Happy. Or him yell at me or vice versa. It’s all really complicated.

Me: Thank you for telling me. I’m not gonna say that you shouldn’t worry, but I think things are a lot better than they were. At the very least, I think the Avengers are more together then we were right after Siberia. At least Clint is back in the country. Everything else will work out eventually.

Tony: At least Clint being back will distracts Ross for a moment. Did I tell you that the ass is not coming to this anymore? It makes me even more upset that I must leave early to do damage control press. But hey at least it keeps me from the wrath of Spidey’s aunt for a few more days.
Me: I doubt that Spidey’s aunt is going to kill you when she finds out.

Tony: I had an Italian mom. If you fuck with their kids, they will hurt you. Never cross an Italian mom.

Me: Irish moms are very similar. As for Happy, I’m trying to help you out there. I emailed him.

Tony: Honey, I know you have a saving people thing, but somethings can’t be salvaged, usually most of my interpersonal relationships. Right now, my relationship with Happy resembles Pompeii.

Me: That doesn’t mean I’m not going to try.

Tony: So, what did he say to you?

Me: He hasn’t written me back yet, but it’s only been about a day.

Tony: I’m not surprised. I guess I should be happy that he hasn’t sold us out to Eberhardt yet.

Me: Do you think he would do that?

Tony: No. But I also didn’t think he would put the Avenger’s toy chest at risk via temper tantrum. So here we are.

Me: I think you should write to him.

Tony: I don’t know. I’m in my angry place so that email would start off with ‘fuck you for not listening to May. And me. We were right. You were wrong. Now we have two dead employees because you decided to throw a tantrum.’ I don’t know if that would be constructive.

Me: Okay maybe you should not start your message off that way.
Tony: Maybe I’ll wait until tomorrow when we’re in the air. I just want the next few hours to be just us and hopefully Yo-Yo will be so busy sending dirty IMs to her boyfriend that she won’t pour water on us.

Me: Again, that was because you were trying to pull my zipper down with your teeth.

Tony: Yo-Yo is glaring at me, so I must go. I should be back by 7 PM. Do you want to eat dinner in? If I let her get whatever she wants yo-yo will pick up takeout from places that don’t actually do take out.

Me: Sure, but I thought you had a dinner meeting?

Tony: It became a pre-dinner meeting which is why I am being forcibly ushered out of here now that this meeting is over, instead of continuing to text message you.

Me: The horror. I’ll talk to you when you get home.

Me: I mean, when you get back to the hotel room.

To be continued.
Interlude 18: So are you dating Captain America now?

Chapter Notes

Thank you to everybody who read or reviewed the last conversation. We now have some Tony Peter cuteness because why not. This conversation takes place a couple of hours after the last one.

TMNS: So are you dating Captain America now?

Me: Well you just go for the jugular. No, hi, how are you doing? You don’t even bother to tell me your side of what happened Saturday night. All I have are Agent Agent’s reports and things now former staff members leaked to Twitter.

Me: You could at least let me know that you’re not grounded for life because your aunt realizes that you’re a superhero in your spare time. I would like a heads up when she does find out so I can make sure I'm still out of the country or at least suit up because she’s going to try to kill me.

TMNS: I’m okay. The bruises from Saturday are already gone. I think you’re talking about Agent Coulson? I did tell him what happened. So the report is accurate. Thankfully, my aunt still doesn’t know what really happened Saturday. She actually believes the story that I saw something when she dropped me off at Liz’s house and told Miss Laura’s friend Agent Jiménez with the ATCU.

TMNS: Why did Agent Coulson give a fake name?

Me: Because he was supposed to have died in the battle of New York. Although, I’m pretty sure his ex in Portland knows better.

TMNS: That’s where Liz is moving to. Oregon anyway, not necessarily Portland. Liz knows about the alibi because high school is worse than Twitter and Flash is an asshole.

TMNS: So abandoning her to lead the police straight to her father and his illegal activities doesn’t win me any points with her. Actually it got me a knee to the dick. Since she was leaving, the principal just looked the other way. That’s also all over Flash’s Tumbler account. Peter Parker gets
his penis punched. The caption reads, Peter Parker gets his penis punched.

Me: Not anymore. Friday loves you.

Me: That happens with a lot of relationships. Although in my case, it was a shield to the chest. You try to do the right thing and then you end up alone because you did the right thing. In the end it’s better to do the right thing.

TMNS: And yet you still somehow ended up with Captain America after what happened in Germany.

Me: The current Captain America is kind of head over feet for Agent Agent and she’d rather deal with blue aliens than her feelings. I think it’s why we kind of like each other. I’m with Stefan Carter, who may look a lot like Steve Rogers, but is a total different person.

TMNS: Are you sure Agent Coulson doesn’t have a thing with Miss Laura’s ex-husband? Also, do you take me for an idiot? It totally makes sense that you would bring me in if you are worried about your boyfriend. You would rather deal with it yourself then have someone like Secretary Ross hurt him.

Me: They did, but they don’t know because he died. And then undied and didn’t tell anybody. Also, I think Laura is still married to Purple Arrow as far as I know. She was just saying they were divorced because Ross is a bastard and kidnapped her once to get to him.

TMNS: What happened in Germany? What really happened? You told me that he was crazy? Why did you bring me in?

Me: Which in hindsight was not a complete lie. You can’t be doing what we’re doing without having an entire 747 worth of baggage.

TMNS: What happened?

Me: I wish I knew, but it’s really complicated. But I will say when you love somebody, even if that love is platonic, you will make very questionable decisions to keep that person safe.
TMNS: Why do adults always say things are complicated when they don’t want to provide a straight answer?

Me: Because everything about the situation was complicated. There’s no quick answer to the superpower regulation question. Do I want the government to turn you into a weapon? No. Do I want the Watchdogs to have your home address? Hell no. Do I trust the Secretary Ross? Again, hell no. Do I think that we should be able to do whatever the hell we want without consequences or oversight? No.

Me: Then you add in the fact that there was this asshole playing head games to break up the Avengers because my idea to bring about world peace ended up killing his family and you get super complicated.

TMNS: He did that to break up you and Steve? He wanted you to lose the person you love because you accidentally made him lose the one he loved?

Me: We were not together at that point, but see earlier statement about loving someone and questionable decision-making.

TMNS: But you are now?

Me: Despite the fact that this connection is super encrypted, I’m a little afraid to acknowledge the current status of my really complicated relationship with Steve Rogers. You told your BFF you had superpowers. I’m a little worried about this ending up on your Twitter account.

TMNS: He found out accidentally. I haven’t told anybody the truth.

Me: Did he figure it out just like I did? Or like Liz’s dad? That was in the real version of the Agent Agent report.

TMNS: I started changing out of my costume before checking to see if I was in the room alone. But it’s okay. He’s not going to tell anybody.

Me: Really?
TMNS: He took detention versus telling one of the teachers what he was doing in the computer lab last night. It probably didn’t help somebody was playing your sex tape on the computer right before Ned took over. It was in the browser history.

Me: I knew I should've put a copy of Friday in your school's computer lab.

Me: Also, please don’t watch that. I was high and my parents were murdered just months before. Not that I knew that at the time, but regardless I was in a really bad place in a relationship with somebody who did not love or respect me. Which totally explains why he secretly videotaped what we were doing and made millions off it.

TMNS: Is this why you didn’t publicly date men for so long?

Me: That whole messy episode is probably why I didn’t date anybody for so long. It was the beginning of my trust issues. Stefan is my second serious relationship. Pepper was my first. A lot of mistakes were made on all parts.

TMNS: Germany?

Me: Germany was definitely a mistake. I really shouldn’t have got a 15-year-old involved in my complicated interpersonal problems. But when you’re in love with someone, you make choices that are not always the best or most logical. Love is rarely logical.

TMNS: And you love Steve Rogers?

Me: Can I wait till I’m back in New York in a few days to explain?

TMNS: I’m going to take that as a yes.

Me: It’s more complicated than yes, and I'll explain everything in person in a few days. We also need to talk about your superhero future, since you figured out that you are more important than your costume a lot earlier than I did.

TMNS: I’m young. We pick up things faster.
Me: Another thing we need to talk about.

TMNS: You’re not going to say that I’m too young for this?

Me: You are, but you’re just going to do it anyway. And bubble wrap is not an option.

TMNS: My aunt says the same thing a lot.

Me: She has more experience with teenagers then I do.

TMNS: We appreciate honesty.

Me: I’m trying to be as honest as I can under the circumstances. However, I have to go because my boyfriend just stepped out of the shower.

TMNS: Who happens to be Captain America.

Me: She’s next-door. She also prefers Agent America, but that’s only because the guy she is in love with prefers it.

TMNS: I know you’re with Steve Rogers.

Me: Because of everything going on, I’m going to be back in New York a little earlier than planned. I’ll stop by in a couple of days.

TMNS: Okay.

TMNS: Hey, does this mean I’m getting my suit back?

To be continued
In person conversation 5: Save Tonight

Chapter Notes

Thank you to everybody who read or reviewed the last conversation. You are all fabulous.

Tony and Steve’s time in Johannesburg is coming to an end, but we have one more night together. The title for this conversation comes from the Eagle Eye Cherry song of the same name.

This conversation begins right before Peter sent his last text message to Tony, but before Tony actually read it. He’s distracted.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

7: 58 PM Johannesburg time

“Who were you talking to?” Tony heard Steve as he dried himself off with a towel, no longer bothering to cover up. He can’t touch but at least Tony can look. And he will definitely look. And possibly leer. Licking should also be an option.

“Peter.” Tony finally responds after a moment of fantasizing as he placed his Stark phone on the table. He was personally planning not to touch it again tonight. Of course that was mostly because he promised Pepper he wouldn’t intentionally make a sex tape and he feels like making video files of naked Steve would probably qualify under Pepper’s definition.

“I thought you weren’t going to email him until wheels up tomorrow, because Coulson asked you to give him a little time to recover? What time are you leaving in the morning?”

“He texted me, probably from the bathroom. He should still be at school if I’m doing the time conversion right.” He told Steve ignoring the other part of the question because he doesn’t want to think about the 5 AM flight the next morning that will be taking him away from Steve. He does not want to leave, especially when leaving means going back to the messy state that is his normal life. Being with Steve these last few days was a wonderful reprieve from reality. But the real world waits for no one, including billionaires.

“I think you’re right about that. Why did he text you? Is he okay?” Steve asked with concern in his voice which made Tony smile.
“He is okay-ish. He wanted to know if I was dating Captain America. Also, I think he wanted somebody to commiserate over the fact that his homecoming date kicked him in the dick for getting her dad arrested for his evil deeds, unaware that he saved his life and he can’t tell her that because of his super-secret identity. It’s enough to make me happy I was in college by his age.”

“And your response?” Steve asked.

“That she was totally in love with Coulson and completely ignoring that fact because she almost makes us well-adjusted. BTW, spider cakes could pick up the sexual tension between Purple Arrow and Agent Agent. Now I’m really afraid to talk to Laura. Lila will be devastated if her parents’ divorce or if her aunt May kills her daddy. Aunt Melinda May not May Parker-Riley.” Steve responded with a glare.

“I love it when you glare at me when you’re naked.” Tony told his boyfriend as he laid down on the bed. “Actually, I just like you naked. I mean, I saw your naked sexy ass before via post crisis group showers. But I did not have time to appreciate the beauty of your ass when in pain after beating up random Hydra agents and being shot at a lot.”

Which, oddly enough, mostly happens with Steve. Actually, only with Steve. Oh God, They were hopeless. No wonder it took beating the hell out of each other in Siberia to start getting their shit together.

“I can put on a robe?” Steve said, gesturing to the hotel robe on the back door.

“Please don’t. I can’t touch, but let me look. It’s our last night together.” Tony said pulling Steve down onto the bed.

“I’m still not going to let you give me a blow jo…” Tony cut him off with a kiss.

“I know. And I’m not going to try because I believe in consent and you are a stubborn bastard.” Tony says as he pulls away reluctantly.

“Because I’m not going to do anything to endanger your health.”

“I’m pretty sure I can get you off without my heart rate going to automatically alert Yo-Yo levels.” Tony responded with a smirk.
“Not if we are doing it right.” Steve replied.

“I don’t know why anybody thinks that you’re a blushing virgin. You’re absolutely filthy.” Tony said, tossing a pillow at Steve.

“Just for that, maybe I won’t give you a massage after dinner.” Tony liked when Steve was like this.

“What?” Tony asked slightly confused.

“While you were in meetings, I talked to your doctor to see if she had any suggestions for things we could do together - intimate things - that would not put your health at risk, since it’s our last day. She suggested a massage.”

“I hope Friday has video of you blushing profusely during that conversation.”

“I don’t blush.”

“Sure, you don’t, Pumpkin Butt. You’re just naturally that shade of pink.” Tony teased. “Bless Dr. Simmons for being a romantic at heart.” Tony then pulled Steve over to him to kiss the man as hard as possible.

"You know we can totally skip dinner, especially because my assistant is nowhere near this hotel right now." Because if she was Tony would totally be covered in ice water right now and it would so be worth it.

"Because she’s out picking up our dinner from the best restaurant in town. I didn’t even know those types of restaurants will do take out.”

"If you pay enough, any restaurant will do take out." Tony kisses Steve again, but Steve pulls away.

“However, May is still next-door.”
"Exchanging mash notes with Coulson." Tony scoffed.

“I’m surprised you know what that term is.”

“Well, when you’re dating someone who was born practically a century ago, it’s important to be familiar with his vocabulary. Especially the euphemisms. I want to know if you say anything dirty to me.” Now that’s when Steve kissed him. And then Friday just had to be Friday and interrupted their perfect moment together. Evil baby AI.

“Miss Rodriguez would like for me to inform you that she will be arriving in 15 minutes with dinner. She asked me to tell you to put pants on.”

“Of course she did.” Tony groaned at Friday’s words.

"I think I better get dressed for our dinner." He said pulling away.

"Wear something sexy." Tony said before making his way to the living room portion of the suite to set things up.

Xxxxx

8:24 PM

"I feel like I’m underdressed." Steve said as he walked into the dining room of their suite in jeans and a T-shirt. Tony was dressed in a suit and Steve wasn’t sure if it was the one he wore to his meetings. The room was also covered in candles and the table was filled with food, mostly bite-size. There was also a lot of different desserts. It explained why Tony wouldn’t let him leave the room for a little while.

"You’re wearing pants, so I’m going to count that as overdressed.” Tony said as he leaned over to kiss Steve again. He didn’t mind. He wanted to kiss Tony as often as possible before 5 AM tomorrow. Tony never gave him the time. Melinda did. He called her when Tony was setting all of this up.

"This looks really great." He said pulling away and taking his seat. Tony actually pulled out his chair for him. It was sweet.
"Since we can’t go out due to most likely being accosted by paparazzi, I thought I would bring out to you.” Steve almost broke a television set when he saw footage of the press attacking Tony this morning. That’s when May took him to the hotel gym to spar. “Of course, with your metabolism, I had to order six of everything, but I’m sure there will be no leftovers.”

“Probably not, although everything seems like finger food.”

"So I totally have this fantasy of hand feeding you everything and you licking my fingers in the most obscene way possible. Of course in this fantasy we would be in bed and naked, but we should just use the table right now. The alternative would be too tempting. I really want to lick cheesecake off your abs and various other appendages.” Tony winked.

"And I would hate to get chocolate sauce on the sheets." Steve joked.

"Someday I’ll break you of that habit.” He said as he poured Steve a glass of something that kind of looks like red wine. It was in a wine bottle at least.

“‘You know I don’t need anything to drink.” He didn’t want to accidentally trigger Tony.

“Everyone gets dehydrated, even you, Mister super soldier. Besides, this is sparkling grape juice. Coca-Cola just seems wrong.”

"You have no idea how great a Coca-Cola was after weeks of muddy water and K rations."

"Probably as good as the whopper I had on my first day back from the Afghanistan Hilton. I threw it all up, but it was the best burger I ever had."

"Sometimes I wish they would have found me earlier. I probably would have ripped Obadiah’s spine out, if I’d have been here.” Steve lamented. He hates the idea of anybody hurting Tony.

"I would prefer heart. It would be a bit more poetic.” Considering what he knew about what happened to Tony, he agreed with that. Tony has only talked about it a little, but May gave him the real report recently, hand written by Coulson, not what was in his original welcome back dossier.
"I would have done it after he told me where you were, therefore, he would never have done that to you."

"So you would have been a one-man rescue operation?"

“Yes.” Steve answered emphatically.

“I know you’re really only a quarter apple pies and sunshine, but I don’t know if you would have done something like that for somebody like me back then. I was kind of a complete asshole before Afghanistan.”

“I still would have come for you.”

“Because I’m Howard’s kid?” Tony asked seriously. He was half expecting Tony to actually make it a dirty joke.

“Because you’re Peggy’s favorite nephew. I would’ve saved you, killed Obadiah, and then fallen completely in love with you. No matter the circumstances, I don’t think I would leave you behind.” Steve confesses and Tony reaches over to kiss him.

“Definitely a romantic. If I get kidnapped again, I’ll remember that.” Tony said before pulling away.

“Please don’t.” He was worried about Ross and several others.

"I’ll try.” Steve kisses him again.

“Now let me feed you before everything gets cold."

"I guess the sooner I feed you, the sooner we get to desert. With desert in this case being naked massage. I’m still surprised Simmons suggested that. It’s always the quiet ones."
"I had to promise that I wouldn’t touch several body parts."

"Pity."

"Feed me."

"With pleasure." Tony responded with a kiss.

To be continued

Chapter End Notes

For those of you who watched Agents of Shield last night, wasn’t that crazy? And two days earlier we had the Infinity War trailer which was also amazing. Put the two together and I’m scared. Because of what happened in both, I am applying the same rule as I use for the movies. Please, no discussing spoiler stuff in the comment for at least a month. Which means tomorrow, you can talk about Thor as much as you want in the comments. That movie is going to provide a few Easter eggs, but won’t affect the plot. AOS may affect the plot because I’m deciding how much the butterfly effect will come into play. But it’s mostly going to be stuff from season four. Will what happened in season five /infinity war happen in the timeline for this story? I am not able to say. Maybe the butterfly effect has already prevented that from happening or maybe it will come about in a different way. We shall see.
During their acquaintance, Tony has realized that Steve is good at a lot of things. And during the last hour, Tony has realized that masseuse should go to the top of that list. He felt happy and relaxed. Probably because a Steve massage has quite the climax, literally. Totally by accident, maybe. Steve was the ultimate gentleman and did not go anywhere near Dr. Simmons’ list of no zones. Yet somehow, he still came harder than he has since… ever.

“So, do you think Dr. Simmons will regret suggesting massage as a way to be intimate without sex when she gets my biometric readings?” Tony asked, still high on Steve. He wanted to lie next to Steve and enjoy the moment, but he was also oily and sticky and Steve kind of pushed him into the bathroom to clean off. It’s a pity he was pushed into the shower alone, but it was probably for the best. He is going to have to deal with one cranky scientist when he gets back.

“So are you going to let your doctor know what happened?”

“No. I think this falls under the category of nocturnal omissions anyway. Kind of sort of. All things I
don’t tell my doctor, if I saw my doctor regularly outside of near-death experiences. Although please do not take this as a sign of my stamina. It’s just as I told Friday, been a while." Like he is not 100% sure Friday has been around for a sexual situation that did not involve his right hand and the toy chest. Jarvis was still around the last time he slept with Pepper and bringing random bed partners home would not improve that situation, so Tony got used to sleeping alone until Steve.

"I wasn’t going to. Although maybe I’m just that skilled." Steve smirked at him.

"Very skilled. I almost wondered if you went to masseuse school." Tony said as he walked into the room just in time to see Steve put the finishing touches on remaking the bed. Thankfully, the suite came with extra sheets and things because somebody thought Tony would be getting luckier than he was. Thankfully it came in handy.

"Although maybe to be on the safe side, you should probably hide the old sheets under the bed because your ex-girlfriend is a spy and will be here sometime in the morning to collect me." And Tony is not going to think about leaving Steve.

"Good idea." Steve said, throwing the sheets in the closet instead.

"Besides, it’s my neck you’re going to really have to worry about. I hope Yo-Yo packed a few turtlenecks.” Tony jokes before falling onto the freshly made bed.

“I just want everyone to know that you’re mine.” He said falling beside him.

“So apparently you are a possessive bastard?” Tony asked.

“Yes,” Steve said, wrapping an arm around him.

XXXX

12:58 AM

“Should I tell Peter the truth about Germany and Siberia?” Steve heard Tony ask from beside him. He almost thought that Tony had finally fallen asleep after spending the last hour brainstorming out loud about places they can meet up. Apparently there were plans for Christmas in Malta in the works, he thinks. Steve knows Tony needs to fall asleep, but they really can’t stop talking to each other because they only have a few more hours together. He wants to make the most of it. Tony can sleep on the plane and Steve will crash after he gets to his new safe house. He has gone on less sleep
before.

"Do you understand what really happened in Germany and Siberia?" Because Steve still wasn’t entirely sure what really happened and he’s been talking about it with his therapist for a while.

"No, well, better than I did. Thank Dr. Suarez for that. You were protecting your best friend and I was trying to protect you and we both just assumed that the other person wouldn’t listen to us, so we didn’t bother to explain ourselves well or at all. Sometimes, I wonder if we had started our text message honesty exercise earlier then we could totally be snuggling in our bedroom at the upstate compound right now."

"Our bedroom?" Steve asked.

"Yep. We would totally be living together by now, or we would’ve strangled each other and maybe not in a sexual way. It is really complicated with us. But I’d like to think we were getting to a good place anyway. I sincerely regret not taking you into the bathroom for a blowjob that day. I think it would have went over better than the pen. I should’ve took the Lysistrata approach to this thing."

“I haven’t read the play for a while but I think offering sex to stay out of war is the exact opposite. You really should go to sleep. You ramble when you’re sleep deprived."

"I’m trying to, but every time I close my eyes I keep thinking about everything that I need to deal with after I leave you and Peter is at the top of the list. It was either have this conversation or ask if Peter should get his superhero onesie back. I don’t want to have to think about all this stuff. I don’t want to go back to all that and leave you behind.” I don’t want you to go back, Steve thinks to himself.

“Teenagers are not the brightest of people. However, despite that, you should probably give Peter his suit back. He would be less likely to hurt himself with it on." Steve argued.

"I agree with you there. At least that way I could track him. I know I can’t put him in bubble wrap, but I’m thinking of making him another suit. Something closer to my suit. Anything to cut down on the cuts and bruises.”
"I saw the doodles." Tony was actually pretty good at drawing.

"I have to do something during boring meetings and Yo-Yo keeps taking my phone. I can’t fight back. I don’t even see when she does it. No one else does either."

"I bet you’re happy you’ll be getting Kevin back soon."

"I don’t know." Tony responds hesitantly. "It was nice being with someone who can fight along with me when it all goes to hell. At least I don’t have to worry about my assistant getting killed. It was kind of nice to not have to worry about that."

"I bet it was. I wish I could go back with you." Steve lamented.

"I do too, but we’ll see each other soon. Mumbai for the wedding in a few weeks and then Malta for Christmas. It won’t be as bad as last time."

"I hope so at least."

"I think you should be honest with Peter about this."

"I think it’s kind of necessary. He’s a smart kid. He’s not going to be fooled for too long." Tony sighs.

"He is a smart kid which is why you should let him decide if he wants to go public, not your PR team." Steve tells his boyfriend poignantly.

"So, I should do a press conference at the upstate Avenger facility when I get back and let him decide if he wants to be the main attraction?" Tony joked. At least Steve hopes this is a joke.

"No."

“So you’re definitely against that idea. I will let Jane know. And then I’ll schedule something with Laura.”
"Go to sleep Tony." He pulls Tony closer to him and kisses his forehead.

3:22 AM

Steve feels gentle lips press against him as he opens his eyes to see Tony. Everything is still dark which doesn’t surprise Steve because the clock says 3:22 AM.

"Hey, I didn’t mean to wake you up. I just wanted to steal a kiss before heading into the shower. I’m all sweaty again from you so I figure I should try to be dressed before May or Yo-Yo show up. You can go back to sleep.” Tony said as he started to scoot off the bed.

"I think the sound of the shower would have woken me up anyway.” He said as he pulled Tony back onto the bed for another kiss.

"Okay, as much as I want to stay with you in this bed and mess up another set of sheets following the letter of Dr. Simmons’ rules, but not the spirit, I probably need to shower and get dressed."

"Probably."

"I really don’t want to."

"I know." Steve pulls Tony back to him.

"I wish there was some quick fix like with the Clint situation so I could take you with me. Lila sent me pictures of her daddy. She’s happy. She doesn’t need me anymore." Tony said sadly.

"I think she’s going to always need her uncle Tony.” Steve said pressing a kiss to Tony’s mouth again.

“Okay now I really have to shower. Although I probably should let you use it first. Tony said letting go.”
"That would be good. Steve said as he ran into the restroom to relieve himself, in more ways than one.

xxxxxxx

25 minutes later while Tony was in the shower. Steve managed to sneak his present into the bottom of Tony’s suitcase. Hopefully Tony wouldn’t open his suitcase again until he got to LA. It was at that moment that Melinda let herself into the room.

“Have a seat.” He tells Melinda. “You’re early. Tony is still showering."

"That’s what I thought. Actually, I wanted to talk to you for a few minutes." Melinda said gravely. That’s not good.

"About?"

"Ross doesn’t know you’re here, but General Talbot does." He’s not surprised.

"Will the Air Force be showing up the moment Tony leaves?" Steve asked.

"No. He won’t come looking for you. He just said to try not to cross his path and keep your head down. Ross still wants his trophy back and Talbot will not give him the satisfaction.” He’s not even surprised they see him as a thing instead of as a person. Tony warned him.

"Of course, he does." Steve sighed.

"I was also told to give you this.” That’s when Melinda passed him another burn phone along with an envelope.

"I feel like I’m starting a collection.” Steve joked, placing both in his own bag to look at later.

"Every good spy has a least three." She joked, sort of. Melinda’s face rarely changed expressions so it’s hard to tell.
"You’ll keep an eye on Tony for me? I’m worried about him and what Ross could do to them." Steve asked.

"I will. Ross is afraid of Tony. He won’t do much." Steve wanted to believe Melinda, but he was still scared.

"Thank you all the same."

Xxxxx

4:09 AM

"Stark, stop kissing your boyfriend now." He heard Agent May say from the door, waiting impatiently. "The plane leaves at five."

"It’s a private plane. They leave when I get there." He said, leaning in to kiss Steve again.

"I have no trouble physically dragging you to the plane."

"I think you have to leave." Steve said pulling away.

“I really don’t want to.” Tony said pulling Steve back to him again to kiss one more time

"Sometimes in life we all have to do things that we don’t want to do.” Steve told him as he gave him one last gentle touch of lips before pushing him towards Melinda.

“Let me know when you get to LA.” He heard Steve’s voice break.

"I will. Love you." He didn’t look back, because Tony was sure he would start crying if he did.

"Love you too." Tony heard Steve say as he walked out the door. It really took all his willpower not to turn around and run back in there. Agent America may have been holding his wrists for dear life.
"Saying goodbye to Andrew when I would leave for a mission was always the hardest part."
Melinda confessed.

“And Coulson too?”

“Yes. Actually, it’s worse with him since he managed to get himself killed once.” Tony doesn’t even want to think of that happening to Steve.

"Does it get easier?" Tony asked with one tear running down his cheek.

“No, but you learn to appreciate the moments you do have together more.” He hopes that’s true. He still cries on the car ride to the airstrip. Neither one of his teammates say anything. Yo-Yo just gave him chocolate.

To be continued
Conversation 55: Withdraw

Chapter Notes

Thank you to everybody who read or reviewed the last chapter. So now that Tony and Steve have spent several days together, how will they deal with being apart? We shall see. This is definitely a story about long-distance relationships.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Tony: So I assume that you have safely checked out of the hotel by this point and are on your way to undisclosed location number 623?

Me: Number 624. I know your planes are fast, but I didn’t think they were that fast unless your private plane is really a Quinjet.

Tony: The board members are assholes and I had to still take a few of the Paris meetings which I was informed of when I got on the plane because my assistant is devious when she’s not feeding me chocolate. I was so planning to sleep until we got to California. But now I have to be on in 30 minutes. I really want to take a nap.

Me: I bet you wish you slept more last night.

Tony: No, my time was better spent with you. You’re a great 2 AM conversationalist. Also, your massages are really relaxing.

Me: Because you always find orgasms relaxing. I’m looking forward to Christmas too.

Tony: Totally not the point.

Tony: And May just read that in this kind of glaring at me way and I kind of was just forced to explain what happened.

Me: What was her response?
Tony: She ordered me to never ever tell her details of our sex life again. Yo-yo laughed.

Me: Understandable

Tony: You’re evil.

Me: Did you write to Happy when you were in the air?

Tony: Tried twice. I’m improving. My opening line is no longer Fuck you.

Me: That’s an improvement. Do you want to send them to me so I can look at them?

Tony: No, that’s okay. I’m still upset and I don’t get why he didn’t want to follow May’s plan. She says it's because he’s jealous.

Me: I think she might be right.

Tony: No way. Happy is 100% heterosexual. He doesn’t see me that way, sugar.

Me: Not everything is about sex. There are platonic friendships.

Tony: I know. That’s what I have Director Bear for.

Me: For a long time, the only people in your life were Pepper, Rhodey, and him. Now there’s a lot more and he’s not used to having to share your attention with so many.

Tony: I do not have that many people in my life and the Avengers were there before then.

Me: But we really didn’t do movie night, just hunting down Hydra and aliens together. Also, you have a lot of people in your life, now at least.
Me: You have me, Pepper, Rhodey, Laura and the kids. That’s like six maybe, seven people if you count Nate.

Tony: I don’t know if I would count the toddler. Right now he mostly likes to finger paint with me and by finger paint, I mean put blue handprints on my $10,000 suits. And that may not even happen anymore, now that they have their dad back. That means even less people in my life.

Me: Better than your billion dollars suits. You written Laura? I’m sure she’s not going to completely abandon you because her husband’s back. You are friends.

Tony: I’m not sure about that. I was keeping her safe. But now she doesn’t need me for that. So even less people in my life.

Me: Write to her. Remember, don’t assume things. It’s better to talk things out.

Tony: Okay, now I’m seriously regretting suggesting you go into therapy. I probably will write to Laura during my meeting with various French officials. I kind of would like her perspective on the Spidey thing before I have Monkey Lover take the suit out of lockup and delivered to Queens. Do you think she’ll actually answer back? I don’t think the ‘I’m so happy your back’ sex will take this long.

Me: Spidey is another person who is in your life. Then there’s Coulson, Melinda, Yo-Yo, and Clint, who probably wouldn’t appreciate you making sex jokes.

Tony: Probably.

Tony: Then there’s Dr. Simmons and her boyfriend. You actually trust him to have access to one of your suits.

Tony: Okay Monkey Lover may be my scientific soulmate, but you’ll always have my heart.

Me: More than Bruce?
Tony: Yes, because Thor only knows where he is right now. I hate being abandoned. Also Monkey Lover has an engineering doctorate. Bruce had seven PhDs and not one of them in engineering. Such a waste.

Tony: In addition, you just have to appreciate a guy who literally went to the edges of the galaxy to get back the woman that he is in love with. As opposed to running away from the people you love.

Me: See you have a lot of friends. A lot more then you used to and Happy felt threatened by that. So he lashed out. His lashing out meant disregarding orders which wasn’t the worst thing he could do.

Tony: Okay, you have a point. I guess this is something we’ll have to discuss when I get to LA tomorrow.

Me: Before or after your TV appearances?

Me: After. I think there’s a good chance that I may be going directly from the airport to the taping. I may not even be able to text you first. Although Friday will send you an email or something.

Me: You know you don’t have to text me the moment you touch down. I can wait a few hours. I know you have a busy life.

Tony: As evidenced by the fact I kept taking meetings while on vacation.

Me: It was a working vacation.

Tony: But I still wish I had more time to actually spend with you. Not that sharing a bed wasn’t nice, but I like talking to you.

Me: I think I’m going to have trouble falling asleep tonight because I’ve gotten so used to that.

Tony: That’s kind of sweet. What did you do while I was making nice with various heads of state?

Me: I sparred with Melinda a couple of times.
Tony: Please tell me there’s video? Also, why did you not tell me this while we were still together in person?

Me: I was too busy kissing you?

Tony: Good answer, Swizzle stick.

Me: Okay I don’t even know what that is. You’re really going through a list aren’t you?

Tony: I’ll never tell, gummy bear. Of course, you will never be Snookums because Rhodey’s Snookums.

Me: Have you spoken with him yet?

Tony: No, but he’s planning to come to LA for Happy’s come to Jesus meeting. I’m not sure if it’s for emotional support or to yell at me.

Me: I’m sure it’s emotional support.

Tony: Ross has pretty much been a dick to him for the last few days while he was running interference. I so owe him another gift basket.

Me: What did he say to Ross?

Tony: In addition to the diplomatic version of fuck off, he said that I should be a little mellower now that I have a boyfriend and therefore less likely to make murder bots again. According to Rhodey, I’m less likely to do stupid stuff when I’m with somebody. Then Ross mentioned that the Ultron incident happened when I was dating Pepper. Then Rhodey told him that we were on a break. So if that ends up all over the Internet, we know who’s to blame.

Me: You know what, I am just going to ask you to keep drafting what you want to say to Happy. Maybe if you put down a few bullet points, things will go better.
Tony: You totally want to avoid any conversations about what Ross knows about our sex life?

Me: Yes. Why are you mad at Happy?

Tony: Two Shield agents are dead, which could’ve been avoided if he listen to Agent America. Also Spidey was put in danger and I’m really afraid of his aunt.

Me: So tell him those things, but no yelling.

Tony: You realize I am really bad at articulating things. Like really bad. Like Siberia happened bad.

Me: But we got over it.

Tony: With several months texting each other back and forth and lots of therapy.

Me: And you will get there eventually with Happy.

Tony: Now I’m at the point where apparently I can’t go for hours without talking to you in some form. I’m going to be miserable now that I have to go back to talking to you every three or four days.

Me: Maybe more. Talbot knows.

Tony: Shit and you’re still a free man? If Talbot is reading this, I’m definitely glad I didn’t try to have text message sex with you.

Me: May says he’s planning not to look for me. But she did give me a phone to contact him in an emergency. He sent me a message saying that he hopes I will be on call the next time aliens invaded.

Tony: Which is exactly how Shield ended up back in the graces of the US government.
Me: I thought you said there were mind controlled zombies involved?

Tony: Sort of. It’s complicated. I have to go be a grown-up. Miss you.

Me: Miss you too.

To be continued

Chapter End Notes

I would just like to say that Tony does not actually know that Thor will know where Bruce is in about a year’s time. Basically, he’s just subbing Thor for God. It just turns out he’s accidentally right.
Interlude 19: Therapy leads to better decision-making

Chapter Notes

Thank you to everybody who read or reviewed the last conversation. You’re fabulous. This conversation takes place a few hours after the last one. It may or may not still be September 27.

I also want to mention that this is where our story diverges greatly from the end of Spider-Man: Homecoming. Blame it on the therapy and the new boyfriend. Tony knows better than to pull anything he did in upstate New York. Again, that doesn’t happen in this universe except Tony does make that suit because Peter needs bubblewrap.

For the sake of clarity, the “me” in this conversation is Laura.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Tony: So, feel free to not respond to this text message if you’re still making quality time with the wayward husband, but I feel like I should check in considering everything that’s happened in the last week.

Me: Now that you’re no longer spending quality time with your honey bunny.

Tony: I prefer Cuddle Bunny or Snuggle Bunny. Sugarplum is also a perennial favorite.

Me: I feel like you’re deflecting which is weird because you text messaged me first.

Tony: Because I promised Sugar Bear I would do it. I was kind of hoping you would not respond.

Me: I’m okay. The kids are happy. We’re still talking things out. He had an encounter with our least favorite asshole that’s making him a little shaky but it’s okay.

Me: Benjamin is doing well. Relatively speaking, considering the entire school is whispering about him and passing around a video file of him getting kicked in the genitals.

Tony: He was a hero. His evidence helped us catch a bad guy or at least that’s the story that should be going around school. That should make him cool.
Me: I know you were there for a brief time, but you do remember what school was like? It's only gotten worse since the 80s.

Tony: Yes. I did go to smart kid school like Benjamin. Private smart kid school where almost everybody was on scholarship, but still smart kid school so the rumor mill must be vicious as hell and it’s probably worse now because there’s Facebook.

Me: And Tumblr and Twitter along with Instagram. Flash’s video of Elizabeth punching Benjamin in the genitalia before transferring seems to be the most popular. It’s a mime now. I am still not happy that my boss just let it go.

Tony: This is from somebody who is letting her husband punch his ex-boyfriend and likely future guest party member.

Me: What has May been telling you?

Tony: A lot. Although Yo-Yo is a better source.

Me: Phil and Clint are past the point where they can actually talk about these things, where Elizabeth is not.

Tony: Maybe not. But 48 hours after her dad is arrested is probably not the time to start those conversations. Even Benjamin thinks her reaction is kind of understandable. He told me when he texted me yesterday. Also, apparently his BFF got detention for allegedly watching my sex tape when he was helping.

Me: He refers to it as being the man in the chair. I’m recommending him to Coulson for the communications track. Maybe he can do the assessment during his detention with me this week.

Tony: Not Rhodey or Jeffrey?

Me: We both know who’s in charge.
Tony: Definitely. So how is he getting along with your hubby?

Me: They did target practice. The good news is the virtual shield works really well.

Tony: I really don’t want to know about the strange mating habits of Agent Agent.

Me: He’s kind of head over feet for Melinda, so I think it would only be a one-off three-way.

Tony: Again, things I don’t want to know about. Maybe we can talk about Benjamin. I think he should get his internship back.

Me: Because at least this way he will be experimenting under adult supervision.

Tony: With backup in case he gets crushed by a fucking building again. Still pissed about that.

Me: I still don’t know how he got out of that with so little damage. Fitzsimmons wants to run bone density tests.

Tony: Of course, Mister and Mrs. Science want to do that.

Me: So you don’t deny it.

Tony: A little bit, but only if Benjamin wanted to find out more about himself.

Me: I’m giggling.

Tony: I’m so glad I amuse you. So do we give him back his special lab coat?

Me: I think the obvious answer to that is yes. I think the more important question is do you make him a full-fledged team member?
Tony: The press release that Jane came up with says that he is.

Me: But according to the Accords, to be on the A team, his identity must be publicly known.

Tony: There is a loophole. The fact that he’s under 18 means Spider-Teen is under new Shield jurisdiction and if you’re under Shield jurisdiction, your identity is protected on the secret database. Regardless of that, I think it has to be his choice.

Me: He is 15.

Tony: I was in college at 15 and a consultant at SI.

Me: You were special. Normal 15-year-olds don’t make the best decisions. He has wanted to be a full team member for the last few months. It’s all he talks about. I’m not sure if he really gets what that means. It’s not all punching aliens in Manhattan.

Tony: I think he gets that. To him it’s more that he wants to save people and making the world a better place. I think there was someone he couldn’t save and now he’s trying to make up for it.

Me: You know not everybody is you and your boyfriend.

Tony: So I did the math and Benjamin’s uncle Riley was killed in an armed robbery two weeks before the first clip showed up on YouTube.

Me: Okay. It’s possible. I will talked to Dr. Suarez. Maybe we can bring up the possibility of going public in a few months in a session with Benjamin. I will also try to get him to talk about his uncle.

Tony: Well that’s better than the idea of certain board members to just unmask him at a press conference Thursday. Sexy Monkey said hell no to that.

Me: Is this why you’re doing Ellen this week?

Tony: Yes, along with Jimmy Kimmel. I get to tell cute stories about my boyfriend that I had to make up.
Me: How horrible. Would you like to administer detention instead?

Tony: No

Me: I’ll give him the suit back if you give me access to it.

Tony: Because at least this way I can use one of the remote suits to get him out of the rubble if the building collapses on him again. Seriously, a building. He could’ve been killed.

Me: Welcome to parenthood. It’s like a constant state of panic and none of my kids have superpowers.

Tony: Yet.

Tony: Friday and Agent Monkey Lover will hook you up with the latest suit. I updated the AI to make sure it alerts you, May, Coulson, me, or Sharon if things are going to hell.

Me: You put Sharon on that list, but not your best friend?

Tony: Technically, I’ve known her longer. Also, Snookums needs plausible deniability.

Me: Sometimes I just wish you gave me plausible deniability.

Tony: You have therapist confidentiality.

Me: I’ll give the suit to him Friday after debate practice.

Tony: Thank you. Also, I may email you a note to include with the suit, if that’s okay.
Me: Sure. I have to go work with teenagers.

Tony: Still better than the board of directors

Chapter End Notes

Note: Benjamin is another codename for Peter. I feel like everybody in the story has at least six names, not counting Steve that has about 60. Tony just can’t find the right replacement for Cuddle Bunny.
More from the sketchpad of Stefan Carter

Chapter Notes

Thank you to everybody who read or reviewed. You are all absolutely fabulous.

It is now time for more art by the fabulous Misaky0. It’s been forever since we’ve had an art chapter, but this one has been in the making for a while. Remember way back during “in person conversation 6: Fight the Break of Dawn” Steve hid a letter in Tony’s luggage. It took the idiot a while to find it, but he finally did. For those of you reading this on fanfiction.net I suggest checking out the version of the story on archive of our own for the artwork.

Also, please note that you’re only going to see one image from Steve, but he included a few others in his letter to Tony. It is more fun if you guys use your imagination.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Dear Tony:

By the time you read this, you will probably be up in the air and hopefully to California. Of course, knowing you, you probably saw me put this in your bag and read it on the way to the airport. If you did do that, please only let Melinda see the first one.
I just want to say that these last couple of days together have been good and I don’t want to go back right now. I know I can’t come with you. It’s too dangerous right now.

I wish things were different. I definitely wish I told you the truth about Hydra’s involvement with what happened to your parents earlier. Maybe if I did things would be different right now. We would have our bedroom together at the compound or maybe we would still be at the tower. I don’t know. But wherever we would be, we would be together.

I guess right now the most important thing is keeping you safe and we both know that’s me being away. I hate that. Is it wrong that I kind of want an alien invasion to get things over with, to make the government realize that their policy is stupid?

Anyway, while you were on various conference calls with people you really don’t like very much, I made you a gift. I hope you like it.

Love you

XXXX

Anthony sent you a message.

Dear Stefan Bear:

Hey got your artwork and your letter. I love it. You definitely got my good side in the first one (and all my naked sides in the other pieces). You’ll be happy to know I did not rip into it on the way to the airport, but you already know that because I text messaged you from Paris. I wish you were here too.

Okay, it is totally wrong to want something that bad to happen just so we can be together or even to prove a political point. But I’ll forgive you for being a little selfish because I miss you so much, as long as something that bad doesn’t happen. Now I’m going to have nightmares about the earth being nothing more than a crescent and everybody living in a giant space station. It is my sincerest wish that all political leaders would get their shit together before my nightmare comes true, but we both know that’s not going to happen. Maybe that’s why I’m having that nightmare. I had that nightmare the first time I drunk text messaged you which is why I was drinking and texting.

I landed in California safely a little while ago, which gave me just enough time to pack before my lunch meeting with Pepper and Ms. Perez a.k.a. the good board member. Which is totally why I’m writing you this before our meeting.
Did I tell you that I’m staying at Pepper’s house? The paparazzi is less likely to stalk me there because nobody’s going to believe I’m going to be staying with my ex-girlfriend. Also, I kind of hate hotels and Pepper’s house is nicer. It’s not quite as grand as the old Malibu property, but it’s nice; totally befitting the CEO of the biggest tech company around. If it wasn’t the middle of the night and the time zone I think you’re in, I would’ve texted, but I want you to sleep. Also, we need to wean each other off constant contact which kind of sort of sucks, but at least I have new visual aids for private time. As soon as I’m allowed to take private time.

PS: The ex-girlfriend is back in DC mooning over Agent Agent so she did not see your artwork. Seriously, can they just get their act together?

PSS: Yo-Yo did see your work and wants to know if you would do a slightly less NC-17 portrait for her boyfriend, like the one of me sleeping on the bed, fully dressed. What you didn’t think I actually unpacked myself? I was coming up with funny fake relationship stories for Ellen.

To be continued

Chapter End Notes

If you enjoy Star Wars, check out my friend Sceritz’s first story titled Gray. http://archiveofourown.org/works/13189743/chapters/30170163
He’s new to fanfiction, so please show him some love or kudos.

A/N: I wrote the original draft of Steve’s letter to Tony a few weeks before the Infinity War trailer and Agents of Shield season five dropped. I was intending for Steve’s words to be “harsher in hindsight”, but they managed to get that way before the chapter even dropped. I cringed when I reread it after the two products came out (especially Agents of Shield), but decided not to change it, although I did adjust Tony’s response a little.
Dear Happy

Thank you to everybody who read or reviewed the last conversation. You are all lovely. I’m so happy you enjoyed the artwork in the last chapter.

Now it’s letter time. This email was written a few hours after Tony’s letter to Steve. It’s one that he’s been working on for a while and I promise happy will see it.

Dear Happy:

Do you have any idea how many drafts of this letter to you I’ve done over the last few days? According to Friday, this is attempt number 38. I’m working on attempt 38 on the way to Ellen because Pepper says we’re having dinner together tonight and I would rather get most of this out now, then explode at a restaurant. Like I need to give the press another reason to talk about me. They’re already giddy about the “coming out” even though I haven’t been in the closet since about the time Nirvana first became popular.

So how do I start this? Do I tell you how disappointed I am that due to your anger at me for my boyfriend choices, you disregarded a perfectly good plan and did what you wanted to do anyway, and we now have dead bodies? Should I tell you that I’m angry because of the choices you made? You should’ve called me before everything went to hell to share your feelings. Should I mention how annoyed I am being in LA doing the talk show circuit, so people don’t start asking too many questions about what happened last Saturday?

OK, I think part of the reason I am on the talk show circuit is because of the new boyfriend which is the whole reason why you’re mad at me. Which, inadvertently led to bad decision-making on everybody’s part.

I’m sorry I didn’t tell you the truth about Stefan before the hot sexy boyfriend pictures made it onto Twitter. I didn’t exactly read my emails from Jane the PR goddess as well as I should have, and forgot about the event being open press.

I didn’t tell you about Stefan because I didn’t trust you. It wasn’t even entirely about keeping the list of people who knew the truth as short as possible. I think part of it is I didn’t want to disappoint you. You wanted Pepper and me together and live happily ever after, but it turns out that happily ever after is strictly platonic.
I’m always going to adore Pepper. She’s the best person. Unfortunately, we don’t work the way we should, or you wanted us to or even we wanted us to. Maybe that’s my fault. Maybe it was Pepper’s. Maybe it was no one’s fault, but things are what they are right now and that can’t be changed. It is what it is.

I don’t think the existence of Stefan in my life is the reason why things are over for good between us this time around. Maybe it’s the reason why I’m willing to acknowledge now that it’s not going to work and it’s never going to work between me and Pepper. Maybe without him we would keep trying until it destroyed both of us and there would be nothing left of our relationship but ashes.

I’m glad that we stopped trying in time for us to still be friends. And I’m trying to get that with Pepper. We had a lunch date and it wasn’t awkward at all. That’s a good step with us. I think we’ll get there, but it’s never going to be more than a deep friendship. That’s not a terrible thing. Friendship is not a consolation prize. Friendships are important and as somebody who doesn’t have a lot of friends, maybe they are more important than romantic relationships. At least I think so. Which is why I really want us to get better again.

So, Stefan pointed out to me recently that I have a lot more friendships that I probably have ever had before. In the past it was just you, me, and Rhodey. Then we added Pepper to our merry trio to become a quartet. Now somehow there’s like four times that amount and I’m not sure how it happened. I’ve always felt that I’ve had the personality of a Brillo pad. Yet some people like that.

Maybe you feel like I can only deal with a few people at a time and you’re worried that I’m going to replace you with one of my new friends. Just because I preferred Agent America’s ideas over yours doesn’t mean we’re not friends anymore. Just because I have more people in my life doesn’t mean I don’t have time for you. Maybe it just means I’m not living such a lonely life anymore. Or maybe my life has got to the point where there’s real people around me instead of fake yes-man like before. Maybe that’s a good thing.

I don’t know what my boyfriend wrote you. Stefan wouldn’t tell me, and Friday has decided now that it would be inappropriate for her to share those thoughts with me. I think she loves Stefan more than me. But let me just say from my side of things that I love him.

Did I fall in love with him when I was still with Pepper? Yes. It wasn’t intentional, but it’s just sort of happened. I wasn’t going to do anything about it at the time because I love Pepper. I don’t think my feelings for Stefan brought about the end of our relationship any sooner, not really. Maybe it just gave me a reason to stop trying and maybe that gave you a reason to be mad at us. I don’t know.

I would like you to not be mad at me, but you can’t control how other people feel. I mean it would make my life easier if that were the case, but that is just not happening.
I’m not going to apologize for falling in love with someone else. There’s no point because I’m not sorry. I’m sorry that things fell apart with Pepper. I’m sorry that we couldn’t have that fairytale relationship everyone wanted for us, including ourselves, but thanks to therapy and the good medication, I’m starting to realize that wasn’t going to happen.

So maybe that’s going to happen with Stefan. I don’t know yet. It’s early days. But, I’m going to try as hard as possible to make things work and I think they will. We shall see.

In the meantime, I want to fix things with you. I want to find a way forward. You’re not fired. You’ve stood by me through lots of bad judgment calls that almost got you killed, so I feel like you’re allowed to make a few yourself. You may be reassigned back to the West Coast with Pepper, but we’ll talk about that at dinner tonight. I must be on stage in like five minutes, so I probably should cut this off now. I’ll see you at dinner tonight.
Dear Spider Teen

Chapter Notes

Thank you to everybody who read or reviewed the last letter. You are all wonderful. I was originally planning for this letter and the previous one to be together in the same conversation. However, after Tony’s letter to Happy reached over 800 words, I knew I would have to split them up. Somehow this chapter is even longer. This letter was written a few hours after the last one before Tony’s fun dinner with his friends, but was not read until the next day. You’ll see.

This chapter contains spoilers for Spider-Man Homecoming, but hey the next movie’s out and Black Panther is coming around the corner (I already got my tickets to see an IMAX opening weekend), so I hope you’ve seen it by now, if you are so inclined. Besides, this is going to be a divergent point where things go differently. We also have slight allusions to the events of the Defenders in this.

Timeline wise the events of the Defenders occurred before Civil War, so about six months before the current point in the story. That is part of the reason why I haven’t been incorporating too many things from the other TV shows. Shield lines up closest to the movies, but even they play in their own world. It’s a fun world though. I’m not going to do gratuitous crossovers for the sake of gratuitous crossovers. If people are here, they are important to the story.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Dear Spider Teen:

Congratulations on surviving your first and hopefully only, super villain. In recognition of this, we are making you a junior Avenger member. What does that mean? When or if aliens fall down from the sky again, we are definitely calling you in. (God, I hope not.) Otherwise keep doing your own thing by saving Queens from assholes and bike thieves. However, if a building falls on you again, call us. Even if I am halfway around the world making out with my boyfriend at the time, again, call us. I will send the suit or something.

Like seriously your suit is now programmed with the secret phone numbers of multiple scientists, spies and superheroes. Use those numbers. I am fucking serious. Use the god damn numbers. You could have gotten yourself killed.

Do I want my stuff in the hands of the criminals? No, but I don’t want you dead either. I can get the weapons back. Actually most of the stuff now has a self-destruct feature built-in because I learned from my fuck ups. However, in contrast, getting a person back from the dead is a bit harder and apparently requires the blood of some really scary blue aliens. I’m not sure if that’s something you or I want to go through, apparently there are some nasty side effects. I also don’t want to run field tests
on your healing abilities. Dr. Simmons’ recent results are enough to make me nauseous. Seriously a fucking building? This is just not something I want to do, so for the love of Thor don’t make me.

Now if you want to become a full-fledged Avenger at some point in the future that means that everybody’s going to have to know who you are because of certain provisions put into the Accords by a certain asshole. Of course, Shield Avengers/Secret Warriors are not under such rules because there are spies. It’s something for you to think about and discuss with your handler, which is still Laura.

Becoming a public superhero is not a decision that should be made impulsively and announced to the press immediately, per my boyfriend. That would be ridiculous and I say that because that’s essentially what I did. Try not to be like me. I’m like the world’s worst superhero role model. You want to be like May, other May, the scary agent. Actually both Mays can serve as a good role model for you.

Now that I mentioned the Accords, I guess I should explain why I got you involved in this superhero mess in the first place. I guess it all began when Shield imploded along with my long-term relationship. In hindsight, things fell apart for several reasons including the fact that I went back on my promise to stop flying around in the metal suit saving the world.

While looking for the Hydra breadcrumb trail through old SHIELD data, I came across a project that I thought would make me obsolete. Meaning I could maybe salvage my relationship with Pepper, because I wouldn’t need to choose between saving the world and being with her. Instead, I accidentally made murder bots and was mostly responsible for most of Sokovia being destroyed and the deaths of a lot of people. I also ended up pushing Pepper even farther away.

So after that spectacular fuck up, a lot of countries around the world felt like they needed to regulate those of us with special skills, or fish oil activated superpowers. That’s not necessarily bad in and of itself. The problem is those that want to regulate are not necessarily the most altruistic people in the universe. Okay, a lot of them see people like you as weapons to be controlled and that’s problematic. They’re scared of what they don’t understand and that often ends up with dead bodies.

In some countries, like Australia, they’re locking up people with powers. Have you studied Japanese internment camps yet? If not, Google it. That’s a sad portion of our history where we locked up our own citizens because of fear of people who are different. That’s where we could be going with people with powers. There are certain senators that are xenophobic as hell. I don’t want that to happen, so I thought that if I participated and openly supported the legislation being drafted, then maybe I could keep power person internment camps from happening.

On the other hand, Mister Apple Pie was worried about how such legislation would tie his hands and keep him from helping people who really needed it and therefore he didn’t want to be a part of it.
Which isn’t something I want either, but it was less of a deal breaker for me than for him. Maybe because he didn’t know about the full level of the anti-power person movement. Both of us had valid concerns. Now if we talked about these things like grownups, maybe Germany would not have happened, but we’re not good at talking to one another, at all. At least not back then. We’ve gotten better at it in the interim, but it took a while. Also it turns out, it’s better to write what you’re going to say down instead of actually just saying it. Less likely to stick your foot in your mouth.

Now things are even more complicated, during all of this, Mister Apple Pie’s bestie from childhood was framed for a terrorist attack on the UN. BTW, he survived to the present day because he was frozen as well as mind fucked by the cult of the grand order of the squid.

Now I know you have a stupid crazy best friend. The type that you’re okay with him knowing your secret when you’re terrified of telling your aunt. So ask yourself how far would you go to protect him? Would you make questionable decisions that may put yourself at risk to save him? Considering you had a building collapse on you, I’m going to go with yes.

Therefore, when you have the self-preservation skills of a slug, you need somebody else to look after you, preferably somebody that loves you. As crazy as it may seem, I love Mister Apple Pie and I did not want him to get hurt saving his BFF. Especially because Apple Dumpling Sugar Pie was not thinking right or at all. I was scared for him. I don’t trust Ross one little bit. I had to bring in other outside help to bring in Mister Apple Pie and his bestie before Ross brought out the big guns, quite literally. I just wanted to protect Apple Pie. Selfish I know, but when you fall in love, really fall in love, you will realize that protecting the person you love is the most important thing in the universe.

I went about it the wrong way by bringing you in. In my defense, I thought you were at least 22 from the video files. OK 19 or 20. A young 20. I had no idea you were jailbait until I got there and by the time I did I was committed, and probably should’ve been committed.

Also nobody has seen the Devil of Hell’s kitchen since that incident a couple months back. And I’m pretty sure all the others special people of New York would have definitely been on Steve’s side. OK maybe not all of them, but there can only be one rich whiny narcissistic brat per team and that’s me.

Should I have explained the political nuances of the situation to you more clearly before sneaking you on a jet to Germany with Kevin as your only companion? Yes. Should I have told you that I was doing this because I was in love with an idiot with the self-preservation skills of a slug? Probably. Although at the time I wasn’t exactly acknowledging my feelings for Captain Asshole. Again, something else that I really should’ve done earlier. So many mistakes were made.

Then everything went down in Germany and I realized you should not be there. I like you. You remind me a lot of me at that age, except slightly more well-adjusted and I did not want you to get
hurt. And here’s the thing, Apple Pie’s side was pulling their punches. We didn’t want to kill each other. We wanted to make the other side see our point and we were doing it with our fists instead of words. Which was stupid, but I have only recently started seeing a therapist. If we ever get the band back together, mandatory group therapy.

After I made Kevin take you home, Siberia happened and I’m still not ready to explain to anyone how badly that went. Maybe I will try when I see you, but I don’t know. I’ll be in LA through Friday, but I can send a car to come get you and your aunt Saturday. We can do dinner at the tower. I’ll bring in the chef and everything.

Also, since we’ll be in a private place, you may want to consider telling your aunt the truth. If I’ve learned one thing from the entire uncivil toddler squabble fiasco a.k.a. the Avenger Civil War as the media is calling it, it’s that talking helps and if we talk to each other instead of assuming that the we knew everything maybe none of that would have happened. So tell your aunt the truth. She deserves to know. I know you’re afraid, but secrets only hurt in the long run. You’ll understand that if I ever tell you what happened in Siberia.

So congratulations. Please don’t do anything stupid again, at least not alone.

PS: This letter is printed on Shield Nano paper. If anybody else picks this up, they’re going to see Anna Jarvis’ recipe for chocolate chip cookies.

Xxxxxxx

Peter placed the letter from Tony down on his bed. He would reply later after he figured out what to say. He’s sure that his aunt would be OK with going to the tower for dinner Saturday, mostly because it would mean her not cooking. Uncle Ben was the chef in the family before everything fell apart. Peter really appreciated that Tony was being honest with him, but he does not like being referred to as Spider Teen. He’s also not sure if he is ready to tell his aunt the truth.

He’ll deal with that later. Right now he just wants to put on his suit and maybe go out for patrol. That will help clear his mind.Unfortunately Peter was so preoccupied, putting on his suit that he received just an hour earlier from Mrs. Barton and her friend Dr. Fitz that he kind of sort of forgot to lock his door which totally explains why his aunt opened it without knocking just in time to see him half dressed in his uniform.

Oh shit!

“What the fuck?”
He is so fucking dead right now.

To be continued

Chapter End Notes

So upstate New York did not happen in this universe because Tony was in California doing damage control and this Tony is on enough medication to make rational decisions.
Thank you to everybody who read or reviewed the last conversation, you’re all fabulous. You are all wonderful. This conversation takes place close to the end section of the last section. That’s all I am saying for now.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

HSBF: I saw you on Ellen.

Me: Nice to know that you get satellite in whatever country you’re in. I made the suit match your eye color. Your real eye color, not Stefan’s eye color. I really hate the Nano tech contacts.

HSBF: So do I. You did well. Although I do think the story you made up about making out in the rain on top of the roof of the tower is a little bit much. You could’ve said something about feeding me pancakes in bed. We actually did that.

Me: True, but that’s real and I’d rather give them fantasy. I don’t want the world to know the real details of my love life. The fact that there is a sex tape out there, that she asked me questions about is enough. Besides, my story was hot and romantic, which is always a winner. I was going for romantic and something that couldn’t be verified.

Me: Besides we did have a few rooftop burgers during the hunt for Coulson’s murder weapon. Which apparently, he found himself at Ice Station Zebra, but whatever.

HSBF: That actually happens a lot, the burgers anyway. But we never talked at the time. Which would probably have been helpful in the long run.

Me: Definitely

HSBF: What are you doing today?
Me: I’m leaving for Jimmy Kimmel in less than an hour. This episode will be live, which may or may not give Jane Barnett of PR, pulmonary issues.

HSBF: Are you looking forward to that?

Me: Yes, mostly because I just got out of a meeting with the West Coast VPs that made me nauseous, preceded by various teleconferences with the board. I must make an in person appearance Monday. I hope they don’t arrange for the looney police to pick me up from the new SI upstate campus.

HSBF: I guess anything would be an improvement over that.

Me: At least Kimball is nice, usually. I may have to do Fallon as well next week. It depends on how things blow over. Or if the board actually does try to make me undergo an involuntary psych evaluation. The good news is most people like Stefan except for the diehard Pepperony shippers and the homophobic.

HSBF: And how many people know that Stefan is me? Also, what is Pepperony?

Me: Chris Evans and a sizable portion of Freaking Cool know the truth or at least think they do. Mostly the Stony shippers. Those are the ship names. Stony seems oddly appropriate for us.

Me: Or maybe they just really want Stefan to be you because they’re so invested in our possible relationship. You can never tell with the shippers. They can be a little vicious and sometimes they forget that we are real people. Never read the RPF stuff. It’s as bad as the Captain America radio hour except more pornographic. Some of it’s good porn, but it’s weird when it’s about you.

HSBF: Nothing can be as bad as the Captain America radio hour. Thank God they used a fake name for Peggy.

Me: Because she would have sued their pants off otherwise, or at least dad would have on her behalf.

HSBF: So how is staying with Pepper going?
Me: Good. Although that’s mostly because her boyfriend still thinks that she was just my beard. Apparently bisexuals only exist in porn and on Freaking Cool. Let’s not even start on pansexuals. That word’s not even in most people’s vocabulary. It’s annoying.

HSBF: Happy?

Me: I am happy being here. Snookums is here too which was nice, and he only yelled at me a little. The gift baskets helped immensely. The new director is always easier to deal with after he’s had a good box of truffles.

HSBF: I mean Happy Hogan? You know your head of security that you’ve been moping about for days.

Me: Dammit. I was trying to distract you.

HSBF: Not going to happen. So, what happened with him?

Me: I wrote to him before hand and that helped things not turn into a shouting match. Okay there was shouting, but no throwing things.

HSBF: That doesn’t surprise me.

Me: There may have been crying and hugging, but no property damage.

HSBF: And who was doing the crying?

Me: Mostly me. Do you know that I cried the entire way to the airstrip in Johannesburg? I’m jittery here without you.

HSBF: I know. But we’ll see each other eventually.
Me: Generals willing. Has Talbot shown up at your doorstep yet?

HSBF: No. Happy?

Me: It does make me happy that he hasn’t found you yet.

HSBF: Tony really? Stop trying to change the subject and tell me how things really went with Happy yesterday. Did you guys work things out?

Me: I don’t deal with my feelings well or at all. I have trouble saying things, sober at least. And since I’m trying to make it to my fifth month chip, avoidance seems to be my best coping strategy.

HSBF: Not always. Did you apologize?

Me: In the letter and again in person because I should have told him myself. I really am sorry about that. It wasn’t right for him to find out from TV.

I regret that.

HSBF: No, it wasn’t. Did he apologize for not following Melinda’s orders?

Me: Not in so many words or at all. He’s sorry that things went badly, but not that they went badly because he didn’t listen to May. He did apologize for hanging up on Ned which is what I’m more upset about.

HSBF: No you’re not.

Me: OK I’m equally annoyed and upset because what happened could’ve been prevented if different choices were made. I think he was annoyed with me about Peter sitting duty which is weird since that was mostly a Laura and Yo-Yo thing.

HSBF: At least you’re making progress.
Me: Progress in the sense that neither Laura nor Dr. Suarez was there, and it didn’t come to blows. But I don’t think our friendship is back to where it was before. Of course, we’re doing better than Agent and Purple Arrow. Of course it probably helps that there’s no sex involved. Also, Happy is less stupid.

HSBF: And you’ve only lived for him for a couple of months not years.

Me: That whole thing is a mess.

HSBF: I’m kind of glad I’m several thousand miles away.

Me: You can be several thousand miles away from that and be with me.

Friday: I hate to interrupt this conversation, but you are receiving a call from Teenage Mutant Ninja Spider.

Me: Dammit. That’s the Avenger emergency line. Please tell me it’s not blue aliens come to enslave us via weird bracelets.

Friday: Spidey’s aunt is now aware of his extracurricular activities. You also have an angry message from her currently in your voicemail.

Me: Visual voicemail only. Let Stefan see it to, so at least there is a witness if I go missing.

Transcribed message from May Parker Riley: You fucking asshole. Why the fuck did you not tell me that my kid has superpowers? Oh my God… You took him to Germany. Germany! What the actual fuck were you thinking? I should have you arrested for kidnapping, you arrogant son of a bitch. Peter Benjamin Parker, give me back that phone right now. You are so grounded…

Me: Oh Fuck. I have to go Sugar Pie.

HSBF: I would say so. You may want to call a lawyer.
Me: Probably Shawn. Text me later. I’ll try to respond if I’m not in lockup.

HSBF: I think I told you that you needed to tell her earlier.

Me: I realize that now.

To be continued

Chapter End Notes

Please note that the next set of chapters is out for proofreading and it may be more than a week before I can start posting. Along these lines, I am looking for additional betas and proofreaders. I have a great team that I’m working with now, but with the weekly updates on two stories I could use some additional help. Maybe with additional proofreading assistance, I can update more than once a week on a few stories. This is one I would really like to wrap up before Infinity War comes out. Please let me know if you can help. Due to circumstances beyond my control, I’m going to have some extra writing time so I can really use the extra help.
Thank you to everybody who read or review the last conversation. You are all absolutely fabulous. This conversation takes place a couple of hours after the last one.

This interlude is from the perspective of May Parker-Riley’s cell phone. She is not okay. We are now in post Homecoming territory and we are a month or two out from the start of Agents of Shield season four. I’m tweaking the timeline a little. Also please note that for the sake of this story, the Infinity War prelude comic book will be viewed as Apocrypha. I may pull out things I like but just assume most of it doesn’t happen in this continuity.

T Stark: So I got your voicemails. I realize that we need to talk about a lot of things regarding your nephew.

Me: And yet instead of calling me or showing up in person, you’re sending me a text message.

T Stark: As I’ve discovered with my now boyfriend, things go better when I have a couple of seconds to think about what I’m going to say. It’s less likely to deteriorate into violence.

T Stark: Also, I am currently sitting in a green room getting ready to tape an appearance on Jimmy Kimmel in like the next 30 minutes so in person is out until at least Saturday. Which BTW was my original plan until your nephew decided to put on his new toy without locking the door.

T Stark: Finally, because I’m in the green room I don’t necessarily want the producer who asked me to autograph her daughter’s plush of me to hear this.

Me: You started this conversation with me with a built-in excuse to end early. How wonderful.

T Stark: I’m pragmatic. This is going to be a tough conversation. So should I tell the lawyers to work on the defense against kidnapping? They’re going to be so pissed at me for contacting you without them being in the room.

T Stark: Of course it’s not the first time I’ve gotten the lawyers mad. They’re mad at me a lot.
Me: Well not now after I read your letter. At least you are aware that what you did was stupid, and you were trying to get my nephew to tell me the truth.

T Stark: Which was supposed to be for your nephew’s eyes only.

Me: He read the letter to me in an effort to get me to calm down, sometime around angry voicemail eight. You could’ve called earlier.

T Stark: I think it's best that I waited two hours so we could have a semi-civil conversation. Also, by the time you left voicemail number two where you threatened to cut off my genitals, I was in a limo with my ex-girlfriend and her boyfriend.

Me: And you actually prefer that to talking to me?

T Stark: You threatened to cut off my genitals, not in those words. Also, I don’t hate Pepper’s boyfriend. I’m a little annoyed that he thinks that Pepper was my beard, but I don’t hate him. I’m a little disappointed that she’s dating someone that barely passes the half your age +7 rule, but I am not allowed to comment on that sort of thing.

Me: Because apparently you’re dating Apple Pie himself.

T Stark: I really have to work on the nano paper.

Me: Maybe not. That heartfelt letter is one of the few reason why I’m not considering pressing kidnapping charges. The other reason why I’m not pressing charges is I would have to acknowledge in court who my nephew really is. Would he be forced to sign the Accords, if I do something like that?

T Stark: Not until he’s 18 and only if he stays fighting crime. I’m hoping we will have something better in place by then.

Me: Why didn’t you tell me that my nephew had superpowers? How did that even happen?
T Stark: This might be a question for your nephew. BTY you should check his cell phone right now.

Xxx

Just as she read the message what she assumed was Peter cell phone started playing Dear Lie by TLC. Which was odd because that was her favorite group, but not something Peter would listen to. However, the cell phone kept playing. She finally went into her nephew’s room to retrieve the stupid thing. When she touched it, the screen unlocked and she saw the message from the mechanic.

The Mechanic: I decided if we are going to have this conversation. It probably should be on a more encrypted line. Actually, did you talk to your nephew about his extracurriculars or was there just a lot of yelling. Benjamin’s voicemails were panicky.

Me: I didn’t yell. Not after the initial reaction anyway. He told me he was bitten by a spider, but I don’t know if I believe that. How does getting bit by a spider give you the ability to crawl on walls? Walls and apparently the Washington Monument. Oh God. He’s afraid of heights. He threw up on the observation deck when his class took a field trip to the Empire State building.

The Mechanic: My assistant got her powers by eating a piece of fish. It’s a strange new world. The spider thing is not that outside the realm of possibility.

Me: Your assistant has powers?

The Mechanic: Yes. Super speed. It’s actually quite useful in the corporate world. Technically, she is an agent on detail to the Avenger Initiative or whatever bureaucratic jargon they’re using this week. I don’t pay attention.

Me: Fishes and spiders? They have powers because of contact with fish and spiders.

The Mechanic: Well, not normal fishes and spiders. In the case of the fish, it was contaminated with an agent that can trigger metamorphosis in individuals with a certain genetic marker.

Me: And this is what happened with [redacted]?

The Mechanic: We don’t think so, but all we know for sure is a spider was involved and that spider is now dead. He won’t even tell us how he encountered said spider or if that spider was genetically
The Mechanic: BTW we don’t use actual names of the under age or any of the Avengers on this frequency even if it’s encrypted. Your nephew’s call sign is Teenage Mutant Ninja Spider, TMNS or Benjamin if we are using civilian-ish names. I added a filter after Benjamin slipped a couple of days ago.

Me: Of course he won’t. He never talks about anything not since his uncle Ben died. He did love the ninja turtles growing up. Let’s go with that.

The Mechanic: I understand. I was the same way when Jarvis died a.k.a. my real dad. Apparently this is what emotionally distraught teenagers do.

Me: Which explains why TMNS told me nothing, but you’re an adult. Why didn’t you tell me the truth when you realized that my teenage nephew was running around the five boroughs attempting to get himself killed as a vigilante?

The Mechanic: It’s mostly been in Queens and that one time in the DC Metro. Also, people would argue against the adult thing. According to Fox News, I’m an overgrown toddler with too much money and no common sense

Me: I’m not most people. Why didn’t you tell me?

The Mechanic: I thought about it once I realized that he was 15. But there was the urgency of Germany and maybe at that point, I did not completely realize that this was not the time to bring a teenager in at all.

Me: I am still not happy about that.

The Mechanic: I am fully aware I owe you like at least six shoe baskets for that. I’m also willing to admit that was stupid and dangerous. As soon as I realized it was stupid, he was on a plane back to the states with Kevin, my assistant who BTW is a registered foster parent.

Me: At least you left the safety of my nephew in the hands of someone qualified. It still doesn’t answer my question of why you didn’t tell me? Or Laura for that matter. I have a feeling that she knows.
The Mechanic: She is his handler or super power kid case worker. She also legally can’t say anything to you, unless TMNS is a danger to himself or others.

Me: Being a vigilante should qualify. My child has a handler, but no one bothered to tell me or consult with me regarding how we should handle the fact that my child has superpowers.

The Mechanic: If TMNS would’ve been younger like five, you would’ve been told right away. As long as we were sure you would not endanger him. But he’s not a little kid. He’s a 15-year-old who should have some autonomy. He wasn’t ready for you to find out and this wasn’t my secret to tell. Being dragged out of the closet is not fun. I was trying to keep him safe until he was ready to tell you, but you can’t wrap 15-year-olds in bubble wrap.

Me: You outed yourself as a superhero.

The Mechanic: Yes. And I’m starting to question that decision, especially after the last assassination attempt. However, I was dragged out of the other closet by a sex tape and an asshole ex-boyfriend who is still deep in the closet, pandering to the family values crowd.

The Mechanic: Maybe that fiasco was the real reason why I announced that I was Iron Man to the world so this time I would come out on my terms.

Me: It’s not the same thing.

The Mechanic: No but yes. You’re different and people throughout the world are afraid of you because of that. You’re just starting to come to terms with the fact that you’re different than everyone else and maybe you want to keep that to yourself for a while because you’re not ready for others to look at you differently including the ones you love. You haven’t even completely acknowledged what this means to yourself yet.

The Mechanic: Maybe you’re afraid that they will react badly. That they’ll kick you out of the house or hurt you physically. Maybe you’re afraid that they’ll stop loving you. That was always my number one fear with Howard.

Me: I am not your father.
The Mechanic: I’m well aware. Mostly because TMNS actually knows that you love him and I was always on the fence about Howard. At least until after my favorite aunt died and she left me his personal journals.

The Mechanic: I was trying to get TMNS to tell you on his own. Since you read the letter you know that I was trying to set up a safe place for that conversation Saturday.

The Mechanic: I’m even going through the process to become a certified foster parent for those with powers. I don’t think it’s going to happen because even with my money, no social worker in their right mind would approve me, but I’m working on it.

Me: You think I’m going to kick him out? That I’m just going to abandon him because he’s not a normal 15-year-old anymore? Did [redacted] think that?

The Mechanic: No. I hope not anyway, but I am a futurist. I always prepare for multiple outcomes. Child services in Manhattan alone is already working on three cases of preteens kicked out by their parents because their children developed powers due to the fish contamination. One was found with a broken arm and leg because they “accidentally” walked into a “wall” six times before she was removed to safety.

Me: Christ. And this is why [redacted] didn’t tell me? He was afraid I would kick him out or worse?

The Mechanic: I don’t know. I don’t think it’s fear, but rather love. I think maybe he wanted to protect you. You’ve seen the news coverage of the watch dogs. They are a terrorist group purposely targeting people like your nephew and their family. It’s a small miracle they didn’t kill that family in Jersey City.

Me: Because that vigilante Quake intervened. I’m aware of how dangerous it is. It was all over the news. If you ever have kids, you’ll realize that you’re more worried about your child then yourself.

The Mechanic: I am starting to get to that point with TMNS.

The Mechanic: And my boyfriend. He seriously has this self-preservation skills of a slug.

Me: I would’ve felt better knowing the truth. I hate him staying out late, wondering where he is. I was absolutely terrified when Laura and the agent showed up at the apartment early Sunday
morning. I was absolutely terrified when the ferry incident happened and I had no idea where he was. I hate that feeling.

Me: Shit, the ferry thing was the lab accident?

The Mechanic: Yes. He was told not to get involved and that others would handle it. Did he listen? No. So I took the suit away temporarily to try to get him to think about what he did and then Homecoming happened. Apparently, I’m not good at grounding teenagers yet.

Me: I need a drink. This is just too much to process at once.

The Mechanic: Understandable. Saturday is still on the table. Come to the tower. I’ll bring a chef and Laura. I’ll also bring Agent America as well as Yo-Yo who can help answer some of your questions about being a powered person in America. She is new to the country, but that’s because being a person with powers in Colombia was worse.

Me: What is there left to talk about?

The Mechanic: Training and monitoring of powers. Figuring out the best way to manage your teenage superhero.

Me: He is not going to stop?

The Mechanic: I tried to ground him and well, you saw how that went. After consulting with an actual parent, it was determined that the best course of action is monitoring and additional training. But it’s going to be your call.

Me: Until he’s 18, at least.

The Mechanic: Only 2 1/2 more years.

Me: He will always be my baby. Since the moment I held him the night when his parents died, he’s been my little boy. He is always going to be my baby.
The Mechanic: Your baby has super powers and is slowly becoming an adult

Me: It’s always hard to watch your kids grow up or at least that’s what grandma Reilly used to say. We’ll talk more Saturday.

The Mechanic: OK, I will send the car. Please send Yo-Yo any menu requests. Though no alcohol because I’m 12 step-ing. You can ask her any questions you have about being a powered person.

Me: I have several, but it can wait a couple more days. I should probably talk to [redacted] again.

The Mechanic: Probably.

To be continued
Thank you to everybody who has read or reviewed the last conversation. You’re all wonderful.
This conversation takes place a few hours after the last one.

Please note that I am unable to upload the chapter to fanfiction.net at the moment. As soon as I’m able to I will upload the chapter there but I think a lot of you read stories on both sides.

HSBF: So are you still alive and not imprisoned? I figure if either of those are the case, Melinda or Friday at the very least would let me know if Twitter did not already.

Me: Still breathing, although it was a near thing when I told Sean about taking a 15-year-old to Germany without the complete consent of his guardian.

Me: Or a passport and visa. Apparently, I’m not supposed to give the State Department reasons to come after me. I mean most of Ross’ staff despise him and are praying that the other person wins. Mostly because she doesn’t want to create Inhuman internment camps.

HSBF: I don’t blame your lawyer for yelling at you.

Me: We are all aware I make questionable decisions.

HSBF: And how are things with the guardian?

Me: I don’t think she wants to kill me anymore. Also, no charges, and I think she might be willing to listen.

HSBF: That is good.
Me: We’re having dinner tomorrow to talk about Benjamin and his extracurriculars. Coulson and Yo-Yo will be there with me. I’m almost happy that Clint did something stupid and now I won’t have to deal with two Mays in the same room.

Me: That was going to get very confusing really quickly especially because both of them have the most potent death glares I have ever seen. I didn’t think anybody could top Pepper and yet the Mays can.

HSBF: What about Laura? Wait, you said something about May not being there because of Clint? Did something happen?

Me: Yes. Clint is an asshole. About an hour ago, the bastard served her with divorce papers and then went dark after all the work I put in getting him back in this country.

HSBF: What? Seriously?

Me: Yes. Fucking asshole.

HSBF: That makes no sense. All he did here was worry about his kids and Laura when he was around. I’ve seen the man almost on the verge of tears every time he was reminded of them. He loves those kids. He loves Laura.

Me: Enough that he’ll walk away and cut off all ties to them. Personally, I’m surprised he didn’t go the ‘faking your death’ route.

HSBF: That is absolute bullshit.

Me: Oh, I got you to curse. That’s not good.

HSBF: Nothing about this situation is good. There has to be something more to this. Something must’ve happened to make him do something like that.

Me: May, the spy, is looking into it. Possibly to keep Clint away from her man, but also to do whatever it takes to protect her godchildren.
HSBF: Should I contact him and try to talk some sense into him?

Me: Normally I would say yes, but General Talbot is watching so I advise against it.

HSBF: So we should keep this exchange short?

Me: He already knows we are in contact. There’s no point in hiding it. Ross or rather his assistant is going to read these and just realize I am totally absolutely in love with my boyfriend. Friday is still scrubbing the messages, she’s just not filling them with porn anymore.

Me: However for my boyfriend to be able to contact Clint would be weird. They never met and only a secret Avenger would have that information.

HSBF: OK, point.

Me: See, occasionally it becomes obvious that I really do have a genius level IQ.

HSBF: I never doubted that you were smart. I did question if you had any common sense on occasion.

HSBF: More than one occasion, actually.

Me: Unfortunate side effect of growing up in a house with servants, maids, and Howard.

HSBF: I could see how that would be a problem. I didn’t hate your dad, but I always felt that he had more money than sense.

Me: That I can’t argue with. Nor would I want to.

HSBF: I would ask you how the taping of Jimmy Kimmel went, but I really want to know what you’re planning to do at the dinner tomorrow. I can always watch the interview in the morning, my
time. Friday sends me everything.

Me: I’m trying to distract you.

HSBF: I’m immune to your distractions.

Me: At least the ones that don’t involve nudity. Like I said, we spent a lot of time figuring out what to do about Benjamin. We are recommending training, but it’s going to be up to her. No, I probably won’t be arrested. Neither do I think that she’s going to put Benji out on the street. However, I’m going to have to get her the biggest shoe basket ever, but I think we’ve reached a consensus on that. I hope.

HSBF: I hope so too. Now you can tell me about Jimmy Kimmel.

Me: So, his wife is way too smart and I’m pretty sure she knows, which is why there were way too many jokes about workplace romance and everybody assuming that I would end up with you. Germany was called a lover spat twice.

HSBF: You played it off as a joke?

Me: Of course, Muffin. I’m a wonderful performer.

HSBF: I don’t like Muffin.

Me: We will find something. But overall it went good.

HSBF: That’s good. Is this the last appearance?

Me: I think I might have to do some East Coast stuff. Probably Good Morning America because I like Michael Strahan more than the alternatives at the other networks and maybe Jimmy Fallon.

Me: Also, Jane has decided that me and my new boyfriend are going to have to do the New York Times article. Someone’s going to interview us when we are in Mumbai for the wedding. It will
make it all extra romantic. God, I despise PR damage control. You are so doing interviews once you’re no longer a criminal.

HSBF: I thought you said no to the New York Times thing?

Me: I did and then I had Jane get rid of all the images of Benji getting his dick smashed by his homecoming date as well as a lot of Spidey Twitter pics. Also, she’s kind of mad that I refused to give the kid an award for providing us information that led to the Vulture’s arrest.

HSBF: Because if it’s publicized too much someone may realize the real role Benjamin had a keeping your tech out of the wrong hands?

Me: Exactly, which is why I’m going to do whatever possible to protect my spider child until he’s ready for the world to know who he is beneath the mask. That means pissing off Jane Barnett. Which also means appeasing her somehow so she doesn’t completely ruin me because she’s that powerful.

HSBF: I’ve met her. I can see her doing that.

Me: Which means getting back on her good side and unlike others, shoe baskets don’t work on her anymore.

HSBF: How awful.

Me: So, to make up for it, I said I would do the interview and you’re going to have to help because you are the one who said no press conferences for Benji. Therefore, you and I are going to ask each other the 36 questions that lead to love and then come up with answers that we are completely willing to give in public. It will just be like playing 21 questions again except we’re provided with possible questions. Actually, this may go better.

HSBF: I feel like that’s not how the exercise actually works.

Me: Yes, but with us being who we are, we wouldn’t want to give the real answers publicly. Nor should we.
HSBF: It can’t be that bad?

Me: Question one: Given the choice of anyone in the world, whom would you want as a dinner guest?

HSBF: That doesn’t seem so awful.

Me: See for anybody else that would be a completely benign question. But for you your answer is either going to be a not brainwashed Bucky or an alive and no longer suffering from dementia Peggy.

HSP: I see.

Me: And it just goes downhill from here. There’s no way you can answer question six straight without telling the world who you really are. I mean you actually know what it’s like to be 90 years old with the mind and body of a 30-year-old. Asking you to choose would be difficult.

HSBF: Why do you think that Bucky and Peggy are who I would want to have dinner with?

Me: You’re not even touching my second text.

HSBF: I’m afraid to.

Me: Well first, you’re not denying that as a possibility. Also the fact that you prefer talking about that over the alternative also makes me think I’m right.

HSBF: True.

Me: And well you’re Captain America before the stupid Accords, you could call up anybody in the world and they would want to have dinner with you. Actually quite a lot of people still want to have dinner with you which is why the free Captain America campaign is going so well. The State Department is getting about 100 calls a day and at least four times as many letters. According to my TOS contact, several people are 30 seconds from resigning because of this.
HSBF: Really?

Me: Yes. Mostly from small children. Many are written in crayon. Oddly enough those are the ones that get responses because they’re heartfelt or so my liaison over there tells me.

HSBF: Point.

Me: So you seem like the type of person who would want something they couldn’t regularly have so that’s why I think you would choose Bucky or a well Peggy.

HSBF: You’re not wrong.

Me: However, neither of those are answers we want people outside of us to know.

HSBF: Actually Stephen Carter could give the Peggy answer because isn’t she kind of his mother-in-law. Did I ever thank you for doing that? Seriously you made me related to her.

Me: You’re learning sarcasm. Even then it would still be too personal and probably something that Sharon wouldn’t want out there. She’s still cranky at me for the cover identity. Reporters keep showing up near her apartment to ask questions about her former stepdad.

HSBF: Another reason why you should’ve chose a different cover identity. I think I would’ve preferred being May’s ex-husband. I’ve actually had sex with her.

Me: Yes, but Agent Agent would not be happy and I’m pretty sure he could kill you with a paperclip. Or at least choke you. He has a black belt in practically everything including Brazilian jujitsu.

HSBF: So we make up answers?

Me: We tell each other the truth, but we make up answers for the public which is pretty much the story of my life
HSBF: And probably why I thought you were a total dick when I first met you.

Me: I’m a dick, but I am totally willing to own up to it. Therapy is good.

HSBF: So you’re not going to try tomorrow night to talk Spidey into going public so that we don’t have to do this?

Me: No. I thought about it a lot. But I talked to Agent and Agent America as well as Yo-Yo and came to the conclusion that maybe it’s better for some heroes to have both public and private identities. And I think Spidey is one of those people that needs his public person and his private person and for the world to not know that the two exist. He’s too young.

Me: I kind of blew that, but I never really had a private persona. I’ve always been on.

HSBF: But you do have a private persona. The Tony that I see is very different than the one the world sees. Otherwise we wouldn’t have to come up with real answers and public answers to the 36 questions.

Me: Point.

HSBF: I think at this point I’m just going to wish you luck.

Me: And agree to do the New York Times interview with me when we’re together?

HSBF: You know I’ll agree to just about anything to see you again.

Me: Except sign the Accords.

HSBF: Because you don’t want me too.

Me: Not right now that Senator Hateful is making things worse and Ross is pissed about me making
a fool out of him

HSBF: Just be careful.

Me: I will. Honestly, I’m more worried about Mama Bear May. I’m not worried about Ross at all.

HSBF: Another reason to be careful. Text me afterwards.

Me: I’ll try to sometime Sunday morning.

HSBF: Thank you.

To be continued
Thank you to everybody who read or reviewed the last conversation. You are all absolutely fabulous.

So, more questions from, or rather adapted from, the 36 questions that lead to love originally developed by Arthur Aron and made famous by the New York Times Modern Love column. I’m adjusting some of the questions if not most to cut down on how much direct quoting I’m doing. Also, I realize some of these questions Tony and Steve cannot ask each other straight because they are superheroes and live in a world where people really can see the future and wake up with special powers randomly one day. However, if I’ve quoted it exactly, the question will be underlined.

We also have a new beta going forward on this story. SPNxBookworm will be taking over for Ursula who did a fabulous job. (This conversation also had additional assistance from KnowInsight.) Again, I would like to thank all the wonderful people who volunteered. I may end up calling upon you at some point in the future.

This conversation takes place on August 2, 2016.

Tony: OK, so Jane still will not budge on the New York Times interview, so we should probably work our way through the questions.

Me: I’m not surprised.

Tony: Besides, I’m kind of curious to know what you’re thinking. So here is question 2: Would you like to be famous? In what way?

Tony: OK, obviously, this little quiz was developed by people who were not famous due to the misfortune of being born to a famous person. Because really the answer is no you do not want to be famous but if you must, let it be for something good you did on your own and not for something like being the Merchant of Death or being the kid of the guy who invented the atomic bomb.

Tony: It’s hard to understand why people are throwing red paint on you when you’re three.

Me: So, I take it your dinner with Benjamin’s aunt went badly? Is that the reason we’re going straight into the questions and using run-on sentences?

Me: And I agree, I’d rather not be famous. I guess that’s another answer we’re going to have to lie about.

Tony: Yes.

Me: Yes, we’ll have to lie or yes, it was that bad?

Tony: Yes, to everything. I mean, it wasn’t the worst dinner I’ve ever had, but it’s definitely in the top 12.
Me: That’s not reassuring. You recently attended a charity dinner where somebody tried to kill you.

Tony: You’re right, that puts the bar pretty high up for a bad dinner. Nobody tried to kill me so there’s that.

Me: Again, I do not find that reassuring. A lot of other bad things could’ve happened.

Me: Let’s see, Melinda wasn’t there with us because she’s still trying to find Laura’s wayward husband and Laura was with her. So basically, a lot of the dinner involved being yelled at. Especially when Benjamin’s aunt realized what really happened last Saturday with the collapsed building. Also, Agent got to try out his shield.

Me: Oh, God.

Tony: It was only a shoe. I think I’ve mentioned this before but never piss off an Italian Mom or put her baby in danger. That woman has a mean left hook. We agreed to mutually not press charges against each other.

Me: Any bruising?

Tony: No, which is good because I have Fallon on Monday.

Me: More TV appearances?

Tony: Yes, I also have GMA Tuesday morning. I have to sell everybody on me being happy and stable in a committed relationship with somebody who just happens to look a lot like that guy who I was fighting with back in May. Total coincidence. But our stock is going up, so I have to get out there and sing and dance to keep it that way.

Me: OK, I’m just glad Ross is not that observant.

Tony: I am too. Unfortunately, Spidey’s aunt really is. Yeah, I really really wish we’d had this conversation before she found out accidentally.

Me: Is Spidey grounded for the next year?

Tony: 2 ½ actually. He gets out the day before his 18 birthday.

Me: Seriously?

Tony: No going out with friends without a preapproved chaperone, no staying out late, no unsupervised patrolling, and no saving the world from the bad guys unless aliens are invading again.

Tony: You have no idea how hard it was to work in that clause.

Me: I’m sure.

Tony: But she did agree for Spidey to go to power person’s training camp this winter as well as weekend patrolling. Yo-Yo is going to be supervising weekend patrols until her California relocation.

Me: I guess that’s good. Are you even allowed to speak to Peter?

Tony: Yes, because surprisingly enough the actual internship was not canceled but it’s now a real paid internship complete with things like shredding papers and sharpening pencils when summer comes. For now, it’s a virtual internship with lots of things that must be done on a Stark pad. Which,
at the moment, is mostly sorting through my emails.

Me: Do you actually use paper and pencils for anything at all anymore?

Tony: Dave, my number two in R&D, does. He is really annoyed that the new upstate facility doesn’t have a pencil sharpener. He emailed me twice about it. Or rather, he emailed Friday and she found it amusing.

Tony: That reminds me I have to start interviewing for a new assistant.

Me: Because Yo-Yo is moving to California?

Tony: Yes, she’ll technically be in the security office. However, she will be assigned as Pepper’s personal bodyguard. When I go to the wedding in Mumbai in four weeks, she will be my personal bodyguard. And my new assistant, if I have one by then, will stay in New York and handle everything remotely.

Tony: I will probably do the same thing for Christmas in Malta. Unless I bring a bunch of shield agents with me. It depends on where we are with the Accords by then.

Me: But why a new assistant? What about Kevin?

Tony: Kevin refuses to come back to the East Coast because he and his wife have a new foster child out there, so they don’t want to relocate.

Me: Understandable.

Tony: So, Pepper gets to keep the husband and wife team, Happy, and Yo-Yo; although Yo-Yo probably won’t be spending too much time with her. Being Pepper’s bodyguard is just a cover. She’ll be investigating a few possible Inhuman sightings on the West Coast. Something about mysterious deaths in East LA or something like that.

Me: That probably needs to be looked into. However, who’s going to be supervising Benjamin once she’s in California?

Tony: I’m hoping by that point Mama Bear will be less angry and hurt with us and be willing to switch to electronic monitoring. Otherwise, Benji will be spending weekends with shield agents. Probably Leo. She is hurt and angry and doesn’t trust us. I’m hoping it will eventually pass.

Me: That is completely understandable.

Tony: She’s also scared because her kid has superpowers. Not only that but her kid has superpowers in the current political climate. The watch dogs are everywhere. They’re getting more members every day. She’s scared.

Me: I know.

Tony: Us being in the picture makes things less scary because she is not navigating things completely by herself but she doesn’t trust us. Not really.

Me: Because you lied to her.

Tony: Because Ben wasn’t ready for her to know the truth. She wasn’t ready to hear the truth. It wasn’t that I was deliberately trying to hurt her it was…God dammit.

Tony: You didn’t do it on purpose.
Me: What on purpose?

Tony: Keeping quiet about Hydra murdering my parents or at least your suspicions about Hydra murdering my parents. I wasn’t ready to know the truth. But accidentally finding out the way that I did was worse so here we are. So, I can understand her anger. At least it’s more focused than mine.

Me: We hurt ourselves.

Tony: And now we’re in recovery. However, recovery takes time, though. I am still surprised she’s going to let me spend any time with Ben at all. Apparently, in the kid needs some form of a male role model and I am it. Thor help us all.

Me: I think we had this conversation before about you being a good role model.

Tony: Look, at this point I am still shocked that I’m not facing kidnapping charges for Germany. Nothing, whatsoever, about Germany was a good decision.

Me: On both sides.

Tony: I fucked up.

Me: We fucked up.

Tony: I’m not going to argue with that.

Me: And we keep going forward. Right now, you just have to try to convince Benjamin’s aunt that you have her nephew’s best interest at heart. I know you adore Benjamin.

Tony: Raising superheroes is hard.

Me: Yes.

Tony: So how are you, my little cucumber?

Me: Thinking that name is extra ridiculous.

Tony: Kumquat?

Me: No.

Tony: Creampuff?

Me: I thought that was a sexual position?

Tony: Close, but not exactly.

Me: I’m doing good. Staying busy on various projects.

Tony: Well, I haven’t heard of any attempts by the UN or the military to try to kidnap you, so I would say yes. Just be careful out there. I’m tired of hearing about you getting shot.

Me: I’ll try.

Tony: So, do you want to try for Thursday for a 34 questions date night?

Me: I thought there were 36 questions?
Tony: We’ve already gone through the first two.

Me: Are we going to try to go through all 34 remaining questions at the same time?

Tony: No. I’m going to, at the very least, need to vent about how horrible my assistant interviews are going or the fact that Agent Agent is going to be here all week.

Me: Why?

Tony: Possibly trying to convince the other May to let up on the grounding and to work with Ben. Scary May was supposed to do it, but she is still out there looking for Purple Arrow. I mean, we put all this effort into bringing him back and then he goes dark. Asshole.

Me: And you still don’t know why?

Tony: I think Ross said something to him. Simmons is having coffee with his assistant to see if she can find anything out. Friday has video footage of the two meeting up, but no audio and unfortunately neither were facing the camera so the lip-reading program won’t work. So, old-fashioned dirty detective work is our only hope.

Me: Shield has a lip-reading program?

Tony: They still have a lot of toys and so do I. Date Thursday?

Me: I’ll be waiting.

To be continued.
Thank you to everybody who read or reviewed the last conversation. It is interlude time again because Steve is still working on his listening to Tony thing. It is a work in progress. You have all been asking where Clint is and you're about to find out. He is the "me" in the first section.

In honor of Black Panther coming out today (for previews anyway), you are getting an update today. Since this is the last chapter that will be posted before the movie comes out. I just want to remind everybody to not mention anything spoiler heavy in your comments until at least March 16. I will know Saturday how much Black Panther takes this story out the continuity. (Me being busy watching the movie Saturday morning is the other reason you're getting this now.)

Nomad: I'm sure that you've probably tossed this in the river, but I thought I would write anyway. If you were just going to run away from your family, why did you even leave?

Nomad: They were all that you talked about for months and you just left for no good reason? Why? What are you thinking?

Me: I have a reason. Several actually. I'm not running away. I am taking care of my problems directly. Unlike some people who are waiting for their rich boyfriend's lawyers to sort things out.

Nomad: You mean the lawyers that got you back in the country?

Me: Point. How are you even talking to me right now? I did dump the phone that belongs to whatever number you're actually calling, before I even left my last undisclosed location. Stark scares me.

FRIDAY: I am technically the service provider to all of the electronic devices used by Coulson's team.

Me: That's not even surprising. This will be going into the river.

Nomad: Apparently my ex-girlfriend is looking for you because you served your wife with divorce papers.

Me: We all do things we don't want to keep those we love safe. I'm taking care of something. When it's done I'll be back.

Nomad: That also explains why you keep dropping your phones into the river.

Me: I need to stay dark to take care of what I'm taking care of.

Nomad: S?

Me: You don't need to know. Don't worry. He won't get anything from me.
Nomad: He threatened you?

Me: I really don't care what he does to me.

Nomad: He threatened your kids again?

Me: He's an asshole, so of course he threatened to hurt my children if I don't lead them straight to you. He is worried about us being vigilantes, when he is enough of a monster to threaten to put my toddler in foster care/state custody and do worst to the older kids. I've been in foster care. I'm not letting that happen. I'll talk to you when I'm done.

xxxxx

FRIDAY: I'm sorry. The phone's sim card has been removed from the device. I no longer have a connection.

Nomad: Do you know his last coordinates?

FRIDAY: Yes, I'm transmitting to Agent America right now. He seems to be near the Culver University campus. On the Virginia side.

Nomad: Why would he be there?

FRIDAY: I don't know.

Nomad: Patch me through to Agent America.

FRIDAY: Right away.

xxxxx

S Carter: I think I have a lead on Purple Arrow.

Agent America: I already read the data from Friday. I should know not to underestimate Stark's AI. I was already on my way to the West Virginia/Virginia border. Nice to know my hunch was right.

S Carter: Ross threatened to go after the children if he did not lead them straight to us. At least that's what I think happened.

Agent America: That's what happened. We received confirmation from S's former assistant. That action made her quit.

S Carter: I'm not surprised.

Agent America: Have you changed safe houses since he left?

S Carter: Yes.

Agent America: Stay dark. Make contact with BF only. I will take care of everything else. If I need to talk to you I'll send the message through him, and vice versa.

S Carter: Ok

To be continued

Reminder: S is short hand for Secretary of State which is Secretary Ross in this continuity.
Conversation 59: Now Resuming Date night

Chapter Notes

Thank you to everybody who read or reviewed the last conversation. You are all absolutely lovely.

Yes, I saw Black Panther this weekend and it was absolutely fabulous. It’s at the top of my Marvel movie list next to Winter Soldier. I’m sure I’m seeing it again as soon as the crowds calm down. If you would like to talk to me about the movie and how it will affect the story. Please PM me on fanfiction dot net or DM me on twitter. I have the same username over there. Please do not put anything spoiler-ish in your comments.

The movie is 99% cannon compliant for this story. Seriously, I don’t know how this keeps happening. I keep thinking the new stuff will completely invalidate what I’m doing. Yet, it keeps working (although, I did have to change one thing in this conversation to reflect the tweaked timeline). Please read the continuity note below for specifics on where the movie falls in the timeline of this story. I’m vague, but it’s a little spoiler-ish for Black Panther, so only read if you’ve already seen the movie. However, you can safely read the upcoming chapters without being spoiled.

Spoiler-ish Continuity Note: For the sake of the story, the major events in Black Panther except for the last three scenes took place before this story began and occurred near simultaneously to the major events of episode 3.22 of Agents of Shield and Steve’s rescue at the Raft with everything wrapping up right before Tony and Steve start talking to each other again. The third to last scene a.k.a. the one right before the post-credits scene has taken place sometime during the course of the story before the events of Spider-Man: Homecoming started, sometime in August 2016. The two post credit scenes have yet to occur, but will occur later on in this story. However, none of that will pop up for a few weeks.

This conversation takes place on October 6, 2016.

HSBF: So it’s Thursday, your time anyway. It’s technically Friday morning for me. Are you up to date night? Or are you busy? Did something come up?

Me: Definitely not busy.

Me: OK, I’m always busy, but I make time for you. I was worried that you couldn’t text. I know that Agent America told you to go dark. After you tipped her off to where Purple Arrow was.

Me: You know after I specifically said not to make contact but, whatever.
HSBF: She said I could still contact you. And I needed to know what was going on, especially if it put the others in danger.

Me: She says I'm addicted to you. And she may be right. If we went any farther then Thursday, I would have started having serious withdraw symptoms. I think Cocaine is less addictive than talking to you.

HSBF: I don’t know if I should be flattered or concerned.

Me: Maybe a little bit of both.

HSBF: How did the job interviews go for your new assistant?

Me: Horribly. It’s hard to find someone confident that could pass a security screening. I have batch two tomorrow and I may have invited Benjamin and Agent to watch. Okay, they’re invited to pull me out with a fake emergency when it starts to really go south.

HSBF: That’s not a good sign.

Me: Not really. Although on a happier note, Secretary Ross’s now former assistant is making the talk show circuit and it is not a pretty picture for him. These stories include him firing a senior staff member after they gained Inhuman powers.

HSBF: This does not surprise me.

Me: He has been a complete asshole to his nephew who transitioned. However there’s more to the story. Pre-transition, S was trying to date her. She said no and suddenly she’s fired despite signing the Accords and following all other required procedures. My lawyers are going to have so much fun.

HSBF: Still not surprised.

Me: I don’t think anyone really is. My ex science bro always said the guy was a dick. So I’m sure
there must be more. Considering how many sexual harassment complaints SI HR made go away regarding Obadiah, that I didn’t find out about until after he literally ripped my heart out, I’m sure there’s more bodies buried somewhere.

HSBF: I still wish that Bastard was still alive just so I could kill him.

Me: You’re so vicious and overprotective, sometimes it’s weird and a little adorable.

HSBF: Well, as long as I’m adorable, it’s okay.

Me: BTW, Friday is doing some digging in DOD HR files to check for bodies. Although, assholes like Ross are unfortunately scandal proof. However, I am enjoying various PR people squirming to cover all this up.

HSBF: So you know what he tried to do to Clint?

Me: Yep. Ross’s now former assistant has been so helpful. The lawyers are working on it. Also Pepper agreed to add herself to the emergency foster parent list in case all of us get arrested. The children kind of fell in love with her when she was staying at the tower during my hospitalization.

HSBF: That’s good. Is Clint back?

Me: Yep. He is DC in the bosom of Agent Agent after his adventures on the Virginia/West Virginia border. I think Laura is going down to DC tomorrow for the sole purpose of kicking his ass. I hope someone gets video footage of it.

HSBF: You would.

Me: Well, he should have told us that Ross was being a threatening asshole instead of running away and serving his wife with divorce papers. Or rather, running a solo mission to take the asshole out.

Me: And yes, I’m aware that I have a tendency to avoid things and do have the history of not using the best coping mechanisms. Okay and also I’ve ran a few solo missions that have turned out badly, but I know better now.
HSBF: At least you’re self-aware.

Me: Getting more self-aware by the minute. So are you ready to play?

HSBF: Do you have time?

Me: Always. Especially because technically, this is working on Jane’s special PR project and she scares me so we’re doing this tonight. Besides, the more time I get to talk to you, the happier I am. I do less dumb shit when I’m happy.

HSBF: I’m glad. You’ll be happy to know that Friday did send me the questions. Or rather, she forwarded to me the email that Jane sent to Stefan’s dummy email account. Yes, I did in fact rehearse what I was going to say in a phone call before making the call because it’s still a new concept to me. I actually like text messaging better. It’s like a short letter or telegraph.

Me: Sometimes I suddenly realize how old you really are. Not that that’s a bad thing. But we’re going to have to figure out how to reword that for public consumption.

Me: For the sake of quid pro quo, I don’t rehearse what I am going to say when making a phone call, most of the time. This has led to disaster. This is also why I prefer text messaging. I’m less likely to stick my foot in my mouth that way.

HSBF: Since were no longer at each other’s throats, I think it’s working.

Me: True. However, I must admit that when I call the board, I do rehearse or at least plan, now, what I’m going to say because Pepper would kill me. Even then, the calls don’t always go well.

HSBF: That doesn’t shock me.

Me: OK, moving on to better questions. So what is your perfect day?

HSBF: That’s not the question.
Me: I am paraphrasing.

HSBF: OK, my perfect day would be waking up next to you and not having to worry about Ross or the Accords.

Me: Or when villains attack. Or when aliens will fall from the sky because you know they’re going to fall from the sky at any moment.

HSBF: Exactly. I just want us to be together and not have to worry about anything else.

Me: You’re such a sap, it’s adorable. Yeah, I want something similar except no SI stuff and no work crisis. Just us together all day, nothing possibly going wrong. Bonus points for the fact that I am now allowed to engage in sexual activities. The doctors, Simmons and Suarez gave me the green light a couple of days ago.

HSBF: That would definitely be a perfect day.

Me: We got close, minus the sexual content, then Happy screwed up and Ben had a building collapse on him. Still not happy.

HSBF: Have you talked to Happy since the dinner at Pepper’s house?

Me: A little. He’s not happy about Yo-Yo relocating to LA but that’s mostly because everybody feels like I need a babysitter.

HSBF: Because somebody tried to kill you less than two months ago.

Me: I can take care of myself.

HSBF: One of your employees tried to kill you using your food allergies.
Me: Point. Mr. and Mrs. Purple Arrow will be around, as soon as they work out their marital issues, and Spidey brat will be around. Also, Agent Agent is vetting assistance.

HSBF: Will the two Purple Arrows really be around?

Me: Yes actually, because I think Agent America will cut off his dick if he tries something that stupid again. She is invested mostly because she doesn’t want him running off to be with Agent Agent.

HSBF: I think that bridge has been burned from what I understand.

Me: Yeah I would’ve said the same thing about us but here we are. So maybe no relationship is completely that far gone.

HSBF: That’s true.

Me: OK, time for another question. When did you last sing to yourself or someone else? Also I’m going to add what were you singing? Okay, these questions are ridiculous. And how do they help you find intimacy?

HSBF: Because you will only provide the real answer to someone you really trust.

Me: Point.

HSBF: I don’t really sing to myself. Although, I have sung to James. People in comas can hear you when you speak to them. So I thought I would try the last time I saw him. Just an old lullaby from when we were kids. Although it’s been a few months. I haven’t seen him since we started talking to one another. My work has been keeping me away, though.

Me: OK, bonus points for you figuring out the subterfuge thing. I kind of love you a little bit more for that answer. Although maybe we’re going to have to come up with a different name for your best friend.

HSBF: I don’t see why. You have a best friend named James too.
Me: Point.

HSBF: Your turn.

Me: Sometimes in the lab I do start singing along with the music. It depends on the song. I’m sure Friday has video.

FRIDAY: Several of which have been forwarded to your personal email account.

HSBF: Thanks Friday. Do any of those videos include singing to somebody else? When was the last time you did it?

Me: Probably when I helped put Lily bear to sleep 20 minutes ago. She still wants me there for her bedtime routine. Although, that might be because her daddy disappeared again because he was being a jackass.

HSBF: You’re mad at him.

Me: Furious, especially because I don’t know what he was doing. I could’ve helped him out if I knew.

HSBF: Yes. So there really was a mission?

Me: Probably a mission to get himself killed. I can’t deal with that. I can barely afford to pay for the therapy that his babies will need to get over that and I’m a billionaire.

Me: OK. We’re just moving on to the next question because I’m done talking about him. What’s more important; having the body of a 30-year-old in your 90s or having the mind of a 30-year-old?

Me: Especially if you’re probably going to live another 90 years. I feel like we need to run some tests on that. I feel like you’re aging in reverse. You know, like a Backstreet Boy.
HSBF: That’s not the question.

Me: Well I can’t ask you the actual question since you actually do have the mind and body of a 30-year-old and yet you were only born less than a year after my father.

HSBF: Fair point. You should probably talk to Jane again about doing this interview.

Me: It won’t work. The only thing that would get her to not make us do this is telling her who you really are and my BFF said that’s not an option. So answer the damn question sexy pants.

HSBF: Mind. After what I saw Peggy go through during the last few years, I rather be able to remember everyone I love and care about than be able to run a mile in two minutes.

Me: Would you still want that, if you ended up in your old asthmatic body?

HSBF: I’ve heard modern treatments for asthma are great.

Me: They don’t even have CFCs anymore.

HSBF: See it wouldn’t be so awful now. So would you rather have the body or mind of your 30-year-old self?

Me: Well, my 30-year-old body wouldn’t be suffering the after effects of Palladium poisoning, so there’s a plus in that direction. However, Aunt Peggy thinking that I was Howard kind of freaked me out. I don’t want to put people through that. There’s also the possibility that my 30-year-old body would be dealing with cocaine withdrawal.

Me: See, this is another thing we’re going to have to come up with fake answers for. I’m never going to say something that personal in the New York Times or anywhere else. I might be 30 seconds from crying. I hate crying.

HSBF: I agree.
Me: Actually, I think we’re going to have to come up with fake answers for everything. The next question is “do you think you know how you’re going to die” or something along those lines. I don’t think they could print a straight answer from either of us on that one.

HSBF: Because the answer to that is probably in battle to save the world for both of us?

Me: Actually it’s kind of more than that. When Wanda was mind fucking us, before she was on our side, she made me have a vision of you dying in my arms. It is part of the reason why I thought Ultron would be a good idea. I can’t lose you and I make some really fucked of choices when presented with that possibility.

HSBF: Shit!

Me: Again, my feelings for you have led to a lot of questionable decisions. Apparently, those feelings have been around for a really long time.

HSBF: Maybe we shouldn’t do this. You could come up with some other excuse for Jane. She has to be somewhat reasonable.

Me: We definitely shouldn’t do this. But the only thing Jane is going to accept is me letting her publicize Benjamin’s good deeds and that’s not an option, so we were doing this. Although not necessarily tonight. We should probably break this all up in small chunks.

HSBF: You’re probably right.

Me: Mostly because I have yawned twice in the last five minutes. It’s past my bedtime.

HSBF: Therefore, I definitely should let you go because you need to be well rested for tomorrow. Good luck with tomorrow’s interviews.

Me: Yes. Here’s hoping I find an assistant who is not an ax murderer or super villain. Also someone not willing to kill me via foods I’m allergic to would be great. Is that so much to ask for?

HSBF: How bad were these interviews today?
Me: Absolutely horrible. I think Yo-Yo may have disarmed somebody after the interview was over, but I can’t be sure.

HSBF: I am not even surprised.

Me: I’m not either. I’ll text you again on Sunday around lunchtime, your time, at least what I think your time zone is. You can have about six burgers and I can drink Virgin Mamosas with my French toast. It can be a brunch date.

HSBF: What is a Virgin Mamosa?

Me: Mexican Sprite and fresh squeezed orange juice. Not horrible, especially mostly because I’m using the good stuff with actual sugar.

HSBF: It’s a date then.

To be continued
Conversation 60: Sunday morning mimosas with Sugar Bear.

Tony: Okay, I have my non-alcoholic mimosa and an obscene amount of blueberry pancakes because Lily Bear just had to have blueberry pancakes this morning, so I’m all ready for us to dig into the questions.

Me: Of course, she’s the one who wanted blueberry pancakes.

Tony: Things are precarious with her parents at the moment, so I’m being the indulgent pseudo-uncle. I really was planning on brioche French toast.

Me: You also love blueberry pancakes.

Tony: That too.

Me: I wanted to ask you how round two of assistant interviews went on Friday; however, considering the latest news regarding Secretary Ross, I’d rather start there. Was that Bruce’s ex-girlfriend on Meet the Press? I thought her name was Betty. She was really angry.

Tony: Good to know you get that show, no matter what country you are currently in. Yes, she changed it to Elizabeth Glen, after she got married a couple years ago in an effort to completely divorce herself from her father due to his various bad actions. I told you they didn’t like each other, and not just because of Bruce. Which was why she was willing to go on national television and show everybody the family skeletons.

Tony: And I thought the Starks had a lot of skeletons in our closet, but the Rosses are definitely more screwed up. I didn’t think that was possible. I mean, Howard covered up various assassination...
Me: I think most of them have been dragged out. I really don’t need to know in detail why his various marriages/relationships failed due to his inability to keep it zipped.

Tony: Babycakes, that is just the beginning. You miss the part where he wanted his daughter to get genetic testing for the inhuman gene on her new baby daughter when she was in utero so the problem could be dealt with early.

Me: Is that even possible or legal?

Tony: I don’t think the man ever concerns himself with legal or ethical. What do you expect from a guy who left his second wife post-heart attack for his nurse? I think she’s wife number three.

Me: Jesus.

Me: Also, twitter has been filled with reports of him calling various female employees, sweetheart, because he can’t bother to remember their name, and unauthorized hugging.

Me: Just hugging?

Tony: This is just the beginning. I expect more to come out now that the dam is cracking. Purple Arrow really knows how to get the man where it hurts.

Me: Purple Arrow is responsible?

Tony: When he went dark, he went to find Ross’s daughter. She’s still a professor at Bruce’s old school. Despite being fortyish, she has a three-month-old daughter name Roberta Glen. Purple Arrow told her what Ross was planning to do to his kids and, well, parents have a tendency to stick together. She also happened to be a friend of May’s late husband, who was inhuman.

Me: And that makes her sympathetic?
Tony: And that makes her want to take a stand, but this is just what she’s willing to say on television. She told Purple Arrow where all the other bodies were.

Me: You’re supplying the shovels to find those bodies.

Tony: Actually that would be General Talbot. No love lost there.

Me: I feel like there’s a story here.

Tony: Yep. Talbot was engaged to Elizabeth sometime in the late 90s and daddy dearest wrecked things with his military connections. Even though Talbot went on and found the love of his life in someone else, it’s obvious he wants revenge and now he’s powerful enough to get it.

Me: Because they’re equals now?

Tony: Not quite, but the power discrepancy is less than last time. Ross is still Secretary of State but Talbot is in charge of his own agency.

Me: How did none of this stuff come out during the confirmation hearings?

Tony: Sometimes your innocence is adorable and other times it worries me. I knew you were frozen during the Clarence Thomas fiasco but this type of thing gets overlooked a lot. Men behaving badly. The Playboy thing is apparently endearing to most. Also, xenophobia seems to be all the rage right now.

Me: I’m aware. Do you think anything is going to actually happen to Ross?

Tony: I don’t know. I mean there’s been evidence for months that he is a xenophobic asshole. Although, the family values crowd is probably not happy with his suggestion to his daughter regarding her possibly inhuman daughter. But when people are terrified, xenophobic assholes are tolerated. I’m hoping the realization that he’s a sexist xenophobic will be the tipping point.

Me: I hope so too. I remember what happened after Pearl Harbor. I’m still ashamed of the internment camps.
Tony: If nothing changes, At least it’s keeping Ross way too busy to try to detain toddlers and seven-year-olds. People have always known what type of man Secretary Ross really is, just like people knew who Obadiah really was. The Board just looked away because it was more profitable to do so. I doubt DC politics is any better.

Tony: Maybe we’ll get lucky and the qualified woman running against Present Ellis will win despite how dirty the campaign is getting.

Me: So, obviously, I should’ve started asking you questions about your possible new assistant? Move us on to safer ground?

Tony: Yes. And the fact that safer ground really worries me.

Me: That bad?

Tony: Better than earlier. I think I found somebody, but I’m like 99% sure Benjamin has a crush on her, despite the fact that he’s brought his new debate team captain Michelle with him to the interview for reasons only known to him. I would think it was kind of adorable if not for the fact that Ms. Watson is literally twice his age. She also shares her first name with Benjamin’s biological mom which could totally be Freudian. Who knows? Coulson is doing the background check.

Me: Which is probably a good idea.

Tony: Due to the fact that so many of my employees have tried to kill me. He’s also running one on Peter’s friends. Especially Miss Future Protester Michelle Johnson. I expect her to throw red paint on me at any moment. I kind of like her. She reminds me of you.

Me: Of course she does. So what are you doing right now?

Tony: Feeding breakfast to small children and preteens at the upstate facility. Nikki just managed to get blueberry compote on the ceiling.
Me: I expect Friday to send me pictures.

Tony: I’m sure she has tons of great shots of me babysitting and covered in food particles.

Me: Why are you babysitting?

Tony: Mommy is in DC either kicking daddy’s ass or fucking him into the wall. Who really knows at this point? Neither of these activities should be done in front of small children so I’m babysitting, you know, in case Ross decides to ignore his own crumbling house and bust into mine. The compound has better protection than the apartments at the building formally known as Avengers Tower.

Me: Do you think Mr. and Mrs. Purple Arrow will be OK?

Tony: Yes. They survived Mrs. Purple Arrow’s alcoholism, so I think they’ll get for this too. They just need time and space to work it out.

Tony: You know, I’m starting to think that you began with the Ross questions so you wouldn’t have to come up with three things we have in common. Are you that afraid of emotional intimacy?

Me: Is that a question of the quiz were going to have to do for the New York Times?

Tony: Yes, Sweetie Bear.

Me: So what’s your list?

Tony: We both have best friends named James that we will do things for that may not be the best for everyone else.

Me: That’s true.

Tony: We will die for the world. We both have actually tried and failed miserably, which I’m really happy about.
Me: I’m still glad the big guy caught you.

Tony: And I’m really glad cryogenics is a thing. I’m glad you made it to this century. Sometimes I think you were born in the wrong one.

Me: So being happy that we’re both alive is number three?

Tony: No. Number three is that we’re stubborn assholes. We think we know who the other person is, but we really don’t. Therefore, we make bad decisions without talking things out, which leads to things like Germany, Siberia and killer robots. There’s a lot of fucking up all around.

Me: But we’re getting better at it.

Tony: I think we are. OK, so blueberry syrup is now covering most of the kitchen. That means I need to get them a bath and you probably need to do whatever you’re doing that I’m afraid to know the answer to, because you’re probably going to get yourself shot at again. I don’t even know what continent you’re on right now.

Me: I can’t tell you that. Although, the time difference is now worse. I will try not to get shot again.

Tony: You better not. We still have a ton of questions to go through and Jane scares me.

Me: I don’t think we’re going to discuss all these things before we have to do the interview at the pace were going.

Tony: Well, I would suggest that we text each other more but May would kill me, scary May. Actually they’re both scary. I’m afraid of the Mays.

Me: That doesn’t surprise me. Text me Wednesday?

Tony: That works except it will be probably early Thursday morning your time. I have a bunch of long meetings that day. I hate having to actually do my day job.
Me: You’re good at it though. And at least this way you have something to look forward to.

Tony: That is true. Have a good rest of the day, Fuzzy Bear.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: Okay, so the presidency in the MCU requires some severe mental gymnastics to make sense, because it’s obvious that the writers on the Runaways and Luke Cage can’t keep presidents in the MCU separate from President’s in the real world. I had to get creative for it to kind of make sense.

So Obama was elected as president in 2008. I was originally thinking to just make him a senator who never became president, but I decided to go with this, so I hope I’m not contradicting myself now. However, his challenger in the MCU was Matthew Ellis, not Romney in 2012. Also, Obama had to deal with an alien invasion during his presidency. People were terrified and went with the other guy. So he became a one term president. It was going great until aliens fell out of the sky.

In the 2016 election Matthew Ellis is running against a qualified female candidate that is similar to Hillary Clinton, but not necessarily her because I want to play around and it’s easier to do that if you go fictional. However, this candidate is using the “I’m with her” slogan anyway as per Runaways. I hope all of this makes sense at least a little bit.
Tony: Good morning, Buttercup. Are you up yet? Have you done your ab crunches yet? I bet you would look super sexy in yoga pants. Fabric clinging to all the right places.

Me: I’m not having text message sex with you until you can guarantee that the NSA is not reading these messages or anyone else for that matter.

Tony: See, I knew I would wear you down eventually. Now your “no” is conditional. I can work with this.

Me: You’re silly. So how was your day? I’m actually surprised you still text messaged me. It must be nearing 1 AM in New York.

Tony: Yes, because it’s been that kind of day. The R&D meeting was productive, mostly. They’re not all morons, even if they’re not used to the new office space. They’ve actually made progress on new encryption for the Stark phones and tablets without me. Also the new, charge once every two weeks, battery will be rolled out with the new Stark phone in early December as originally hoped. I’m sure the board will be happy about that.

Me: Only two weeks? The phone you gave me has a battery that lasts a year.

Tony: It’s not cost competitive for the general public. No normal person would want your phone, but the DOD are totally into it.

Me: Of course they are. Will you be having meetings with them again soon?
Tony: Next week sometime. I think. I really need to double check with Yo-Yo. I think I’m scheduled to be in DC for a few days taking some meetings or maybe a few weeks. I’m mostly looking forward to having lunch with my BFF and having a front row seat for the Ross implosion.

Me: How much worse has it gotten?

Tony: 10 lawsuits for discrimination based on genetic factors because treating somebody because they’re inhuman is still illegal or at least that’s what the lawyers are arguing. Ross, or rather his State Department, is facing 12 lawsuits for hostile work environment as well as five for sexual-harassment, against him personally. Oh, at least two for reprisal.

Tony: It’s been a bad couple of days for the DOS spokesperson.

Me: Because of Ross?

Tony: Actually no. Their focus is more on the minor mishap of one of his predecessors.

Me: I don’t think being a member of Hydra is a minor mishap.

Tony: In this administration, who knows. It happened so often, I’m surprised the guy is running for re-election. But actually, it’s the secretary from the last administration that’s getting raked over the coals. The one who is definitely not Hydra. Check Twitter.

Me: This is why I hate politics and politicians.

Tony: So you’re not going to run for office? You have the blonde hair and blue eyes for it. You would definitely have a shot as a third party candidate because you, baby, are 100% independent.

Me: I’m also currently a war criminal.

Tony: That’s a technicality. Marion Barry was arrested for smoking crack and still got re-elected.
Me: Who?

Tony: While you’re hiding out in only Thor knows where I’m going to send you a bunch of history books to read.

Me: I don’t think certain parts of the population could take the blue-eyed blonde in office with you as his husband. We would have to be married right? Just living together would be way too much?

Tony: Probably, especially if president in four years is what you strive for. I don’t know if the world is ready for a first husband in the White House, especially if the president is a guy. But senator is totally a possibility.

Me: I guess we’ll find out in a few weeks. I’m sure the Ross scandal is helping.

Tony: We shall see. Whatever the outcome. Let us hope we won’t have to deal with Ross anymore regardless, and if the other person gets elected, she will keep her promises about protecting people with powers and their families.

Me: I don’t trust any politician.

Tony: Which is why you should run when you get back. You could totally beat Senator Hateful.

Me: I thought you were considering running against her.

Tony: I was mostly joking. I think you could beat her better than I could. I almost destroyed the world by creating murder bots. It’s hard to come back from that. Also, I have a boyfriend. Which some people find more offensive than making the killer robots.

Me: I would have the same problem.

Tony: But see, you would be the Paragon of Virtue trying to tame the evil asshole. I would be the guy ruining the Paragon of Virtue.
Me: I’m a fugitive. I’m already ruined. Can we please talk about something other than politics?

Tony: Apparently it’s been decided that I’m going to a DC United “football” playoff game on the 27th with monkey lover and the trying-not-to-be-evil doctor. You know, to celebrate his pardon. I got a box.

Me: I thought the name of the DC football team was a racial slur? Do you think you’re going to be in DC that long?

Tony: That’s the American football team. I’m going to watch soccer with two guys from Glasgow, so it’s real football or at least that’s what I’m told I’m supposed to call it.

Me: Okay

Tony: I’m not actually sure how long I’m going to be in DC. There’s meetings at the DOD and Congress already on the schedule with more to come. More Accords stuff that needs to be straightened out in case there is a regime change. But I should be done before Mumbai.

Me: Are you hoping for regime change? Who are you voting for?

Tony: That’s between me and the ballot box. Although, when you had to save a guy from his VP that tried to kill him, you kind of get a very low opinion of the person. It has been going downhill ever since.

Me: That’s understandable.

Me: It’s late where you are. Do you want to try going through some of the questions tonight or are you too tired to do that?

Tony: I’ve yawned twice in the last 10 minutes, so as much as I love talking to you, Honey Bear, I just kind of want to crawl in my bed at the compound and sleep for a week. I mean, I love you and want to know more about your good qualities. But my pillow looks really good right now.

Me: I understand. You’re in upstate New York?
Tony: Yes. As I said earlier, my meetings went really late and I wasn’t quite up to driving. Thankfully, I have an apartment here and so does Yo-Yo. I put her next to Vision. For the moment anyway. I feel like he’s going to be leaving soon.

Me: I feel better that you’re not out there driving back this late.

Tony: Also, I wanted to give Mr. and Mrs. Purple Arrow some privacy. They’re still working some things out. I would have brought the kids with me, but they have school.

Me: Good night, Tony.

Tony: Night, Honey Bunny, even though it’s totally morning where you are.

To be continued.

Chapter End Notes

With Infinity War being pushed up a week and me having to do other things like cons and taxes between now and then I realized I will not be able to finish the story before the movie comes out. If I keep on the current posting schedule of once a week, I’ve actually drafted every chapter between now and when the movie comes out. I do know how the story is going to end. Infinity war will only effect the post-credits scene of the story and my decision to do a sequel or just extra post-credits scenes. This is an MCU story. Of course, I’m planning post-credits scenes.
Tony: So if I’m doing the time conversion in my head correctly, it’s probably early afternoon where you are. Is this a good time to ask you what thing in your life you are happiest about, or grateful for? I knew I should’ve kept a copy of the questions with me instead of just memorizing them.

Me: I guess that’s question 9 from that press activity we’re supposed to do. Also, why are you texting me again so soon? Melinda will not be happy with either of us.

Tony: She’s never happy. Besides, it’s necessary. At the rate were going it’s going to be January before we get through all these questions. Since S is having his worst week in Washington, I decided to take the risk. Jane terrifies me and we really need to be good to go in a couple of weeks.

Tony: Tell me the truth, Snuggle Bug, what are you really grateful for?

Me: Where are you?

Tony: Sitting in my car as Sasha, my new chauffeur, drives us to Manhattan while Yo-Yo tries to schedule a midweek booty call with tall, dark, and axe wielding before Agent Mack begins scouring the world for wayward Inhumans in the Helicarrier Jr.

Tony: Happy was actually my driver before becoming head of security and is probably now Pepper’s driver again due to the demotion. I don’t have anything against people driving me but it’s obvious you learned how to drive in a war zone. If you were my driver during Afghanistan, it wouldn’t have happened, but you’re not exactly suited for a drive from the compound to Manhattan.

Tony: Besides, this way I can text message you. Texting and driving is bad. So again tell me what are you most grateful for? Although, even though this is encrypted, please don’t say you know what.

Me: You text messaging me this morning.

Tony: That is a ridiculously romantic answer, but I feel like there’s more. Be truthful, my little peach.

Me: Some would say that it would be the day that a certain scientist saw something great in me and gave me that gift that you don’t want me to mention by name, or finding out that James didn’t die during the incident.

Tony: But each of those things have a dark side.

Me: It’s hard to be happy that James is not dead, when I remember, he’s alive because of Hydra. They tortured him for years and made him do all sorts of bad things. He was their slave. He killed your parents. No, they made him kill your parents. If I’d just kept him from falling then things would be different. He wouldn’t have to live with all that guilt, if we’re ever able to undo the programming. They’re working on it, but Hydra really screwed up his mind.

Tony: I know. Leo’s working on it too, or consulting on it rather. I still don’t know how that happened but he refuses to talk about it.

Tony: Also, Sweetie Bear, I will keep repeating this until you actually believe me but that wasn’t your fault. However, I can understand why you don’t want to consider that the thing you’re happiest about.

Me: Okay, I am most grateful that we’re talking to each other again after what happened. After Siberia I thought we hurt each other too much to ever be OK again but we’re working on it. I think we’re going to end up stronger than we were. Honestly, I’m just happy we made it to the point where we are.
Tony: Again, ridiculously romantic answer. Who knew you were a hopeless romantic at heart.

Me: I never really had a chance to practice before. So what is your moment?

Tony: I don’t know. Someone probably thinks surviving Afghanistan or maybe surviving the palladium poisoning. Don’t get me wrong I’m glad I am not dead yet, but I think you getting pulled out of the ocean is what I’m most grateful for.

Me: Why?

Tony: First, it makes me feel less bitter about Howard spending most of his free time in the Arctic Circle, when I was a kid. I’m over it now that I’ve made out with you.

Tony: But besides that, I probably would’ve ended up really dead without you. I love you and I’m glad you’re here and I’m glad we’re talking to each other and

Tony: Okay I’m just rambling and I realized that the tabloids would have a field day if they actually saw this message. Proof Tony Stark really does have a heart. Apparently, you’re it.

Me: Now you’re the one being ridiculously romantic.

Tony: And now we know that we’ll just tell the reporter that we’re most thankful for each other and that we have yet to screw up our relationship totally.

Me: I agree with that.

Tony: Okay the next question is something I’ve always been curious about. If you could change something about how you were brought up, what would you change?

Tony: Actually let’s twist that around and tell the other what we think they would change. Then we can see if that person is right.
Me: So what do you think I would change?

Tony: It's a toss-up between not growing up in a world filled with homophobic bigots and having a father who is not an alcoholic. I may be projecting on that last one. I might be projecting on both. I'm sure growing up bisexual in the 80s was significantly better than the 1930s, but probably not as much as it should've been. The homophobia of the Board is testament to that and unfortunately they haven't got much better since the 80s.

Me: They're still not okay with you having a public boyfriend?

Tony: I'm doing a spread in the Advocate, so they'll get over it. The stocks are the highest they've been since the murder bot screw up.

Me: Sorry.

Tony: It's okay.

Tony: Okay. It's not okay but I'll deal with it. I always do.

Me: You're right. That is what I would probably choose if I could be completely honest. Also not being poor would be on the list.

Tony: Now that answer you can give publicly although some people may think you're a gold digger so maybe we'll have to phrase it differently.

Me: I wouldn't want to be ridiculously wealthy but having enough money to always have food on the table and not worrying about rent would have been nice back then. You have no idea how much I love central heating.

Tony: That I could understand. Would you wish you were healthy?

Me: I don't know because everything I went through gave me character. It made me a better person in the long run.
Tony: Some could argue the same thing about the poverty.

Me: Those are people who have obviously never had to make a bag of beans and half a loaf of stale bread last two days in the shivering cold.

Tony: That’s a valid point. So what do you think I would change about how I was raised?

Me: I definitely think you would want your father to stop drinking and maybe see a therapist. From what I’ve read and what you told me, I don’t think he was well later in life. Also I think you would’ve wanted Howard to be honest about what he was doing for a living or as honest as possible. I definitely think you wish you would not have been sent to boarding school.

Tony: OK those are all things on my list. Although, I’ve made peace with boarding school. But I think I would’ve liked to have been told why I was sent to boarding school instead of the lies.

Tony: Still mad about the Anna lie. She was like another mom to me and I wish I knew the truth. So I could’ve mourned properly, you know.

Me: That’s understandable.

Tony: I definitely would have liked a sober Howard. The alcohol took my dad away. Now that I’m not drinking or rather struggling with trying to stay sober, it’s more obvious how much I’ve lost because he was so deep in the bottle.

Tony: The drinking got so much worse after Anna died. I guess that’s because he blamed himself since the bullet was for him. Kid me didn’t know that so he blamed himself for Howard’s shitty parenting.

Me: That could be why the drinking got worse but that was a Howard problem, not a Tony problem.

Tony: I know that but I still wish it was different.

I guess I really wish he would’ve actively shown that he loved me. You can get somebody all the things in the world but that doesn’t mean anything. It’s just money or toys or cars and that doesn’t
make up for the lack of hugs and kisses. I had Mom and Jarvis. But it didn’t make up for the lack of Howard.

Me: I’m sorry.

Tony: And I love you but I really wish I did not have to listen to Howard’s endless variations of “you’ll never end up like Captain America”, “you’ll never be as good as Captain America,” or “he’s the greatest and you’re worthless.” I wish I never had to deal with any of that stupid shit that Howard used to say to make me feel so worthless.

Tony: No one could be Howard’s version of Captain America. I mean you came close sweetheart but no one is that perfect. Everybody has a dark side, even you.

Me: I think you like me more because of that dark side.

Tony: I love you because of you. Because of your heart and your stubbornness and everything that is you. But it took me a while to realize that Howard’s standard yardstick of Captain America was not you. I think that caused some problems in our working relationship later on. I really wish that baggage would not have been there.

Tony: Unfortunately, this is an answer I can only give to you.

Me: Maybe you can just mention the boarding school thing. Friday, what’s the next question?

Tony: So you want to move on to less volatile or less emotional ground?

Me: Yes.

Tony: Unfortunately, the next question is take four minutes to tell the other person, your entire life story in as much detail as possible. See this is why you should be careful what you wish for.

Me: Oh God. Please tell me that you’re planning to write the cover version of that for me?
Tony: Coulson already did. You’re a wonderful stepfather apparently and have a heart of gold.

Me: You made me the stepfather of somebody I kissed.

Tony: This is what you get for kissing someone that I changed the diaper of. I still want to hear the real version of your bio from you. Wikipedia is always horribly wrong and as we discussed earlier Howard liked to lie, a lot.

Me: You’re ridiculous sometimes. Maybe we can do this next time? We’ve been texting a while.

Tony: I got time, if you have time. I’m going to be in traffic for at least another hour. Besides, you know we should’ve done this exercise on the helicarrier. That would have prevented us from fighting and then maybe Agent Agent would not have had to go to club Tahiti.

Me: I now understand that reference.

Tony: Agent America?

Me: Yes. I think at this point in our relationship we know the real story and Google story. So maybe we could skip to the next question.

Tony: Well, my publicist is actually writing my version, but again, maybe I want to know how well you’ve listened, so let’s do each other instead.

Me: I already told you no telecommunication sex.

Tony: Funny. Now let us compare the life of Steve Grant Rogers to that of Stefan James Carter. They both look like Greek gods and were raised in Brooklyn by single moms after their alcoholic asshole fathers left but there are some key differences.

Me: Is Jane okay with you referring to my father like that in an interview?

Tony: Don’t care. He was an abusive alcoholic and he hurt your mom and you, so I don’t have the
energy to remember his name or make up one for Stefan’s father. Eventually, he left and Steve’s mom told everybody that he died during the Great War where Stefan’s mom didn’t even bother with alive because divorce was normal.

Tony: I guess you don’t want your fake bio to include anything about the second family that the bastard started after leaving?

Me: No. I prefer that we use the fake shield version when creating Stefan’s history.

Tony: Understandable. So both Steve and Stefan lost their mom at a young age. Steve’s mom died of tuberculosis and Stefan’s mom died of HIV or maybe breast cancer. I can’t remember what we mentioned in the initial press release.

Me: This is why Coulson is writing it.

Tony: Yes. Not a lot of people know that Steve Rogers worked at a gay bar to put himself through art school. Stefan Carter also paid for college by working at various gay clubs. I guess that’s another parallel. This may be where Stefan and Steve started to get the activism bug.

Me: That is where I got the activism bug as you say. I hated the way things were back then. I saw the police raid the club so many times. So many people got hurt or worse just because of who they loved. That’s not right.

Tony: Is that the real reason why you’re so afraid of the Accords? You saw what the system did to those who were different back then and you don’t trust it to be better now?

Me: Yes. All you need is just one dirty cop.

Tony: We really should’ve done this exercise earlier.

Me: Yes.

Tony: OK, things were going pretty good in Steve Roger’s life until this asshole in Germany started using people who are different as scapegoats in an effort to consolidate power and thus we get
Me: And too many people in America were just twiddling their thumbs and wanting to stay out of it. America first, they were all chanting. You know about the St. Louis right?

Tony: Everyone does. It was shameful.

Me: Now we’re saying the same thing again. Except this time, it is humans first. No Inhumans allowed.

Tony: Well at least there’s the anti-discrimination laws on the books regarding genetics. In this country anyway. The Accords are actually cutting down on some of the persecution of Inhumans.

Me: How long until someone like that senator who hates you tries to declare people with powers not human and therefore, not entitled to protection under the law?

Tony: Sometime last night, apparently. That’s why I’m going to be in DC for a while lobbying against it. I have to protect my kids.

Me: Tony Stark, friend to all children.

Tony: Because he still acts like a child half the time or at least that’s what was said in my last unauthorized movie biography.

Me: No, this is my turn and I think I’m going to be more accurate.

Tony: That wouldn’t be hard. The guy they had play me seriously looked nothing like me. OK, so who am I?

Me: Anthony Carbonell, better known to world as Tony Stark is the only child of Maria and Howard Stark and the child of their heart of Edwin and Anna Jarvis. Tony really had four parents which was good because two of them were not as best as they could’ve been.
Tony: Maria tried, but I can’t argue too much on that.

Me: Yes. Anthony could put a circuit board together at four but I think his father resented him for that. When he was nine he lost his mother figure and therefore was sent off to boarding school. He hated it because he thought it meant his father didn’t love him, but it kept him away from bullies and possibly Hydra assassins.

Me: He started college at 14 which was way too young. Tony finished undergrad at 16 with multiple degrees because he was that good, including one in music that most people don’t know about.

Me: Contrary to popular belief, Tony was not really a playboy until after his parents died. At least, I think he used sex to dull the pain along with a lot of drugs and alcohol.

Tony: You really do know me.

Me: Tony stayed in that state for a long time until his father figure stabbed him in the back and then he realized he needed to change a lot of things. That’s when he started to right a lot of his own wrongs with a metal suit and then we met. I put my foot in my mouth and we kept doing it over and over again until we started to actually listen to one another. That took a while.

Tony: Okay. I love your version of my mini bio because I think this is the longest series of text messages you actually sent me. It’s good to know that you’re paying attention.

Me: I try.

Tony: And you are back to monosyllables. I can use some of that, but all the Anna stuff will have to be scrubbed. I don’t want people to know what she meant to me. I’m not even sure how much Jarvis stuff I want the public to know.

Me: I understand.

Tony: So last question and then Yo-Yo is going to force me to eat a bagel or something.

Me: You should eat something.
Tony: So final question, you have the magic inhuman gene and had a bad reaction to the fish tacos, what power do you hope you’ll get?

Me: That’s not the question.

Tony: Obviously they came up with that question before people did wake up one morning with superpowers, usually after having their morning fish oil pill. Or some shrimp. Fish tacos are starting to be scary. That’s what happened to Yo-Yo.

Me: Really?

Tony: Yes. So if you could add another power to your wheelhouse, what would you add?

Me: I kind of like what I have. I’m used to it. Although, knowing what you were thinking most of the time would be helpful. You’re getting better at telling me stuff but I know it’s hard for you.

Tony: Maybe, but then you would be able to read everyone else’s minds and you might find out things you don’t want to hear so that’s not something I want. I thought maybe the ability to see the future but that could be problematic.

Me: Why?

Tony: It depends on your philosophy about time but some believe that you can’t change the future. So what if you knew the future and couldn’t change it? That would be awful.

Tony: Actually, Coulson’s team came across someone with that power. When he touched somebody they would see how somebody else was going to die. Allegedly Skye Quake saw her boyfriend saving the world in a prophecy vision and I don’t want to see that. I don’t want to know how you’re going to die. I’m still hoping that the vision from Wanda was just a mind fuck sort of thing and not a vision of the future.

Me: Have you asked her about it?
Tony: No. I’ve only talk to her a couple of times recently, mostly to make sure you’re not, you know, killing yourself. It’s probably going to be even less now that Vision is planning to move out. Honestly, I prefer not to know.

Me: I get that.

Tony: Okay, I’ve just been informed that it is bagel time. Write me in a few days?

Me: Of course. Have a good day Tony. Talk to you soon.

Chapter End Notes

I would just like to say that the fish taco joke was in this story before AOS episode 5.6 aired.
This was also written before episode 5.11 aired.
Conversation 63: I’m over sharing because I love you.

Chapter Notes

Thank you to everybody who read or review the last conversation. You’re all beautiful and keep me writing.

This conversation takes place on October 17, 2016.

Also one of Tony’s text messages probably pushes us into M territory, but it’s one line and I didn’t want to change it for the T version on fanfiction dot net because it is important for the conversation. Although that doesn’t matter at the moment because I can’t even upload the chapters to that site presently.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

HSBF: How was DC?

Me: I don’t know. I had to postpone a few days because of an Avenger emergency. Fish oil incident that actually needed more firepower than the Zapper to contain before it became a recruitment tool for the Watchdogs and Senator Hateful.

HSBF: I saw on Twitter but I thought you would still be able to get there.

Me: We are on our way back to the States now. So my adventures in DC will began as soon as I touch down.

HSBF: I guess that’s good.

Me: In other good news, I have a replacement assistant.

Me: Mary?

Me: Yes. Ms. Mary J. Watson was the only one that was tolerable and passed the background check. She’s also the only sane one that’s perfectly OK with working with superheroes on a regular basis and is willing to take additional self-defense classes.
HSBF: That’s a requirement for your assistants?

Me: It is dangerous work. And well, I’ve had more than one employee try to kill me, recently. Agent also ran background checks on all of Peter’s friends and Decathlon members.

Me: Good news, Benji now has decent blackmail material on that Flash fan boy. I think I mentioned this earlier.

HSBF: Seriously, he actually did that?

Me: Yes. Benji’s friend who hacked into the suit also managed to hack into the Pentagon twice. So, I have a new intern and Agent has a candidate for the communications school.

HSBF: That is not surprising.

Me: And you remember the Michelle that I mentioned a couple of conversations ago?

HSBF: Kind of and definitely. She wants to throw red paint on you? Benji has a crush on her?

Me: Sort of and definitely. Anyway, her dad is the significantly younger brother of Skye Quake’s biological father.

HSBF: Seriously?

A: Yep. Agent Agent’s background check includes DNA analysis. We’re keeping that from everybody.

HSBF: That would be best, especially if she has the gene.

Me: Other side of the family, we think. But could be recessive. Nothing showed up in the DNA test.
Me: So how was your day, Honey Bunches? It must be dinnertime where you are.

HSBF: Good. I didn’t get shot at nor did any government official show up at the safe house. Also, I’m cooking tonight so I don’t have to worry about any weird cooking experiments.

Me: That’s always good. Tried any new restaurants? Did any shopping? I should probably let you know that my tailor is making you something for the wedding.

HSBF: No to the restaurants. We are trying to keep a low profile for the moment. No, I’m not surprised about your tailor. You just want me wrapped in new clothes.

Me: I want to rip clothes off of you. Or lick chocolate sauce off of you or just lick you.

HSBF: That would be okay.

Me: What parts do you want to lick or rather want me to lick? I have a few ideas.

HSBF: I’m not answering that question.

Me: OK, then I guess I’ll ask you a few clean questions so we can get through this exercise before I see you in a sexy suit. If you could talk to a clairvoyant or precog would you?

HSBF: I thought the question was about crystal balls?

Me: Yeah but that doesn’t work but apparently precog are a thing now. I mentioned it last week. Coulson’s team has met more than one. Apparently one of them predicted my Ultron fuck up. I really wish someone would have told me that ahead of time. That would’ve been really helpful although apparently no one at team Coulson knew about the vision until after the fact.

HSBF: Someone saw that coming?
Me: Yep. And she couldn’t stop it. I think this goes back to my answer a few days ago about not wanting the ability to see the future.

HSBF: I don’t want to know either.

Me: Thank you. Next question: Is there something that you’ve always wanted to do but haven’t had a chance to yet? If so, why haven’t you got to it yet? I’m really not liking this quiz.

HSBF: That is not as bad as some of the other questions. I really wish I could go back to college and actually finish.

Me: Good goal.

HSBF: What about you?

Me: I want to have sex with you. It has not happened yet because we are in different countries and you’re a war criminal. Also the time we did meet up recently, I was under medical restrictions due to surviving an assassination attempt.

HSBF: This is supposed to be something you’ve been thinking about doing for a really long time.

Me: OK, this is going to sound really embarrassing and a little creepy but you were my first crush and how I figured out I was gay, or rather bisexual.

HSBF: I think you’ve told me this before.

Me: I masturbated to your propaganda posters. If you thought Coulson’s costume was tight, you should’ve seen how they drew your propaganda posters. It was more porn than propaganda. Nothing was left to the imagination.

HSBF: Oh God. I should’ve realized that with all the talk about Tijuana Bibles. OK, that’s definitely not going in the public version.
Me: Not at all. If I didn’t love you I wouldn’t have told you that. I definitely wouldn’t have told you that Howard caught me doing it.

HSBF: Oh Lord.

Me: If I remember correctly, that’s when I ended up spending a month with Aunt Peggy and she told me about who you really were, so I kind of got worse after that.

Me: You’re going to break up with me now for telling you that.

HSBF: No. Still love you. I’m also glad you can be that honest with me.

Me: I’m trying. So what do you consider your greatest accomplishment? And I’ll add, what do you think everyone else thinks your greatest accomplishment is?

HSBF: The second part is obviously becoming you know who.

Me: Obviously. First part?

HSBF: It’s a tossup between stopping Red Skull, stopping Hydra, and preventing the New York incident from being worse.

HSBF: Coulson and his team were the ones who did most of the dirty work with Hydra so I’m going to have to give that one to him.

HSBF: I’m OK with that.

Me: Also New York was a team effort so you get taking down Red Skull’s evil scheme. Still quite an accomplishment.

HSBF: If I can’t count New York you can’t either.
Me: I flew that missile into the portal all by myself. I kind of regret not having Jarvis dig into the files a little bit more so we could’ve discovered that Malik was actually Hydra before he ordered a missile to blow up New York and kill us all but that’s life.

HSBF: Nope doesn’t count.

Me: Well, I could put down inventing robotics that go bad and making lots of weapons that killed lots of people. That isn’t a positive accomplishment though.

Me: I feel like my legacy is mostly murder bots and the Merchant of Death. I have tried to fix things but I can’t bring Red’s parents back from the dead. Even club Tahiti wouldn’t work at this point.

HSBF: You’ve done a lot of important and good things. I don’t think your legacy is going to be just murder bots and the Merchant of Death.

Me: Well, I don’t think I can pull off an Albert Nobel. He was the last Merchant of Death and now everyone just thinks he is the Nobel Prize guy.

HSBF: And maybe in 70 years people will hear your name and instantly think of the Stark foundation or the Jarvis foundation.

Me: I don’t know. Maybe we will fuck up so badly trying to save the world that there won’t be anything left in 70 years. I just feel like something bad is coming. Something that we won’t be ready to handle.

HSBF: Maybe, but we’re sure going to try.

Me: You’re so optimistic sometimes. It kind of makes me want to punch you in the teeth or push you up against the wall and have my way with you. It’s a weird either or thing.

Me: I prefer the second option.

HSBF: I do too.
Me: OK last question for tonight mostly because the ones right after it are going to lead to some very angsty answers and I want to be at home with some ice cream when we do that discussion since I’m not drinking anymore.

Me: What do you value in a friendship? For me, it’s going to be honesty.

HSBF: I thought you said you were going to save the questions that require chocolate for next time?

Me: Well, you already knew that. And what is to come is actually worse.

HSBF: After Siberia, yes. I’m sorry.

Me: I know and I accept that. Time travel is not option that we know of yet. So things are what they are.

Me: What do you value most?

HSBF: Loyalty

Me: I can see that.

Me: OK I have to go, because apparently Jeffrey wants to debrief me. And I can’t dodge him because this place is not quite as big as a helicarrier.

HSBF: Which means you have to leave.

Me: But I’ll write you in a couple of days from DC.

HSBF: Be safe.
Me: I will try.

To be continued

Chapter End Notes

Wasn’t the Infinity War trailer fabulous? I know where I’m going with this story. I’m going to try to have everything drafted before Infinity War drops. I’m worried I may be too emotionally distraught to write for a little while so I want to have as much banked as possible. I don’t think the movie will change the actual ending of the story, but it might change the post credit scenes. We will see if that is still the case as we go forward.
Chapter Notes

Thank you to everybody who read or reviewed the last conversation. You are all absolutely fabulous
This conversation takes place on October 19.

Conversation 64: Let's Get Honest

Tony: Greetings from the district of insanity. Where the only thing that I’m looking forward to is getting a honey butter chicken sandwich from my favorite food truck.

Me: I can see why you call it that. The city is insane. The best thing about the place was meeting the counselor.

Tony: Which you need desperately. You need friends and people that keep you grounded to the present. It helps that he’s trained to deal with PTSD.

Me: That is true.

Tony: Unfortunately, Senator Hateful is making this place worse by the moment, which I didn’t even think was possible. Thank Thor, most of her colleagues still think her proposals are too extreme.

Me: That’s good.

Tony: Although that’s mostly because the biggest superhero fuck up was caused by me with not one ounce of superpowers. So I guess I should be proud that my stupidity is keeping people with powers from having their civil rights stripped away, in the U.S. at least.

Me: For the moment. It’s getting bad in some of the places I’ve been in lately.

Tony: Which probably means that you’ve been in Eastern Europe recently. I’ve heard rumors of
possible Inhuman internment camps. That’s a mess I would like to avoid. So I have more lobbying in my future.

Me: I think you’re really good at convincing people to do what you want so I think you’ll be OK. Well, if they’re actually willing to listen to you.

Tony: I still can’t convince you to do text message sex, which is a shame because I really think underneath the sweet exterior you can be extra kinky. This may be because the listening thing is still a work in progress for us. Although, with a few more tweaks, Framework sex might be an option. Which, if the code works right, will be as good as the real thing.

Me: For security and privacy reasons, we are never having text message sex. I really don’t want a 16-year-old super genius reading through a transcript of us actually having text message sex. The fake porn messages were bad enough. I love you, but no.

Tony: I respect your boundaries. Rhodey is still upset about that but the Framework will be secure.

Me: Is the Framework that training simulation you were working on when you were in Appalachia?

Tony: Yes. It is not just a training simulation. More like an entire virtual world. I mean, essentially, we were both working on it independently. I think I told you about my showcase at MIT when I was accosted by the angry mother of the kid I murdered due to stupidity.

Me: Yes.

Tony: We are combining the research together but going with the Framework name because barf is a bad acronym.

Me: A really bad acronym.

Tony: And this is why I usually come up with an acronym and then try to accommodate it. It’s what Dad did.

Me: I can tell.
Tony: I’m in charge of putting a bunch of fail safes in there to keep it from being misused by, and I quote, “deadly emotion-seeking robots bent on becoming human who don’t understand the concept of no.”

Me: That is suspiciously specific. Who said that?

Tony: Dr. Monkey Lover. There are moments where I think he’s keeping something big inside. Maybe secretly he’s a clairvoyant inhuman.

Me: I think you would know that by now.

Tony: If all goes well we will be able to virtually make out and have it feel like we’re actually making out despite being in separate countries. And, of course, agents will be able to train and others will be able to work through their most traumatic event. But there will be making out for us, maybe even more. Bonus, I will also get to hear your sassy comments instead of just read them.

Tony: I miss the sound of your voice so much that I’m almost considering designing a screen reading program that uses your voice to read me these text messages.

Me: I miss listening to you too.

Tony: So how have your days been? Still fighting bad guys with Red and the counselor in somewhere that may or may not be Eastern Europe. Seriously, why are you relocating to Europe now that winter is coming?

Me: To avoid hundred degree heat. I am good. It is just me and the counselor now. I’m sure that you’re aware that Red

ME: You know what I don’t know if I should explain in case you don’t know.

Tony: Or bored teenagers in the basement are hacking on to this feed. I think she may have eloped with the android formally known as Jarvis. He’d left after the last mission.
Me: I can’t confirm or deny that in case a gifted, politically well-connected, and wealthy 16-year-old who think we are interesting is reading this instead of just the CIA, shield or who knows who else.

Tony: I’m confirming because I am not afraid of your imaginary, 16-year-old, voyeur, super genius. Vision said he’ll be back if aliens fall from the sky again or whatever. It is what it is. So that pretty much means the only person with superpowers living at the avenger compound full-time right now is the Bulletproof Pacifist. And not really because he will be spending weekends in Queens once Yo-Yo goes out west.

Me: Wait, you got him to come back?

Tony: Sort of. I hired his construction firm to do Phase 2 of the SI upstate compound. Bonus, now I have a babysitter and Spanish tutor for TMNS.

Me: That’s nice, I think.

Tony: It’s fine. He doesn’t want to kill people which made him a bad fit for Shield and the normal Avengers but a perfect partner for TMNS who is still traumatized by his uncles’ murder and does not want to ever have blood on his hands. They might be good for each other.

Me: It is probably best that he never finds out what it’s like to kill someone. It changes you.

Tony: You were in the middle of a war though.

Me: That does not make it right.

Tony: No it doesn’t.

Me: Are we going to do more questions?

Tony: I have the honey butter chicken sandwich from Roaring Rooster and shakes from DJ’s so I’m ready for the emotional pain that will surely follow.
Me: It can’t be that bad.

Tony: Stop saying that. Yes, it is that bad. Question 23 is “How close and warm is your family? Do you feel your childhood was happier than most other people’s?” And 24 is “How do you feel about your relationship with your mother?”

Tony: If I wasn’t in the middle of 12-stepping, I would need like at least three bottles of Jack to answer that question. And thank God they said Mom and not Dad because there isn’t enough liquor in the DC Metro for me to answer that question to a reporter. I’m barely to that point with you, and I still would like a candy bar, or six.

Me: You don’t need to answer the question for me because I already know that your relationship with Howard was bad just like my relationship with my dad. Actually it’s worse because even though Howard was awful to you, at least he was there.

Me: He did care enough about you to send you to boarding school to keep you safe from all the people trying to kill you. My dad actually left before I was old enough to discover that he was an abusive asshole and an alcoholic.

Tony: Total asshole. Yep, good thing they went with Moms.

Me: However, we’re not up to those questions yet. What if we typed out our real answers to those questions and emailed them to each other?

Tony: I’ll think about that. And you’re right. We are on question 17 which is What is your most treasured memory?

Me: My mom telling me that she loves me for the last time before she died.

Tony: Now, I’m sad you can’t get drunk. I don’t have that type of memory. I wish I did. Actually the last time I talked to Mom would probably be one of the top three contenders for question 18, which is the exact opposite of question 17.

Tony: Other contenders for worst memory would be when Anna died, when I was told about my parents dying, when I watched Jarvis die slowly of cancer, when Yinsen died, and of course watching my parents die on close circuit. OK, I have more than a top three which is probably why
I’m having trouble coming up with my happy memory. I have issues.

Me: My bad memory is watching my James die or when I thought he died. It’s tied with watching your face when you saw the video. I’m so sorry about what happened that day. Maybe everything that happened that day should be the bad memory?

Tony: I agree since it had so many bad memories together. OK, I think I have my happy memory.

Me: Which is?

Tony: First time I kissed you. Bonus points for that being something I’m willing to mention publicly.

Me: That’s one of my happy memories too.

Tony: OK, we are just going to hold onto that memory as we try to get through the rest of this list or this section because we are so not going past question 24 tonight.

Me: If it’s going to be that bad, we should really do the email thing.

Tony: Let’s see where we are. Okay, the next question tells me that Jane Barnett is a fucking sadomasochist.

Me: I would say that it can’t be that bad but you keep proving me wrong.

Friday: The question is: 19. If you knew that in one year you would die suddenly, would you change anything about the way you are now living? Why?

Friday: I have taken the liberty of re-sending the remaining questions to your email account. Please review.

Me: What did you do to Jane that resulted in her wanting you to answer that question in the New York Times?
Tony: So many things. I’m surprised she hasn’t quit yet. Her job has been extra stressful lately because of me.

Tony: Let’s see during the last eight months I have re-come out as gay, or rather, as bisexual (even though the press keeps erasing that) with a blonde God of a boyfriend who looks a lot like an international fugitive in South Africa at a conference. In addition, said boyfriend is more than a decade younger than me, if we go by the birthdates on the press release.

Tony: There was also the fiasco with me in a fight with other superheroes in Germany due to our stellar communication skills. I don’t think she slept for at least three days because of that mess. Jane is also not happy that I refuse to throw Benji to the wolves for the sake of the bottom line.

Tony: Finally, Jane is also furious at me for waiting so long to go public with the breakup with Pepper. Also yesterday, I may have got into a pissing contest with the Senator on Twitter.

Me: Really?

Tony: Actually, it wasn’t me, it was Yo-Yo with my account, my Tony Stark account, so it might as well be me. Besides I can get away with that. Yo-Yo can’t. Although, Anthony C has been very active against Senator Hateful. That account has like 10,000 new followers in the last two days mostly because Chris Evans keeps retweeting him along with Mark Ruffalo. He’s leading the charge against superhero registration.

Tony: Oh, good news, the studio is going with my suggestion of him playing Bruce instead of the guy from Fight Club that looks nothing like Bruce, but whatever.

Me: I don’t think I’ve seen that movie.

Tony: That’s probably best.

Me: You really don’t want to answer this question? You’re deflecting.

Tony: Of course I don’t. Mostly because of that time I thought I only had six months to live.
Me: So how did you act differently when you found out about the Palladium poisoning?

Tony: Well, first of all, I spent a lot of time trying to figure out a way not to die. When I realized that wasn’t going well, I gave a lot of money and art, mostly art, to the Boy Scouts of America as part of a shaming activity. I was going to try to convince them to let LGBT members in. Something good for the community before I die. At least they’re getting better and my dead body wasn’t necessary.

Me: Well, not necessarily the L.

Tony: Sometimes Moms are troop leaders. Now, I’m currently trying to convince them to allow girls into the Boy Scouts or vice versa for the Girl Scouts.

Me: With what we do, it feels like we could drop dead at any moment so I feel like I have to live like I could drop dead any minute.

Tony: Although, I wish there was a little more self-preservation on your part. Have you gotten yourself shot recently? Or has your upgraded shield prevented that?

Me: I should the known you would have looked over my gear while we were in Johannesburg together.

Tony: Really, you should have. I had to make sure it didn’t need repairs. I can’t have you running around in a rip suit, even though I know that’s what you would be doing if I wasn’t helping you out.

Me: You’re right. No new incidents. The counselor is doing a good job of keeping me in one piece. Although, I miss Red. But she’s young and has been through so much. I feel like she deserves something normal.

Tony: Even if it is with an android?

Me: His personality is based on your other father. Sort of.
Tony: Point.

Tony: Maybe when Lily’s favorite aunt is done babysitting Skye Quake, I can send her your way.

Me: She’s with Skye Quake?

Tony: Your ex-girlfriend asked her to babysit her daughter until said daughter is ready to go home because she’s being reckless and chasing after the watchdogs by herself because she is still not dealing with the boyfriend who died for all our sins. If you and me could have a child, that child would be Skye Quake. Your recklessness and my computer skills, as well as a tendency for self-flagellation. It’s a deadly combination and she has it.

Me: I’m the reckless one in this relationship?

Tony: How many times have you been shot at this year?

Me: A lot.

Tony: This is why we can’t answer that last question straight.

Me: Point.

Tony: OK, one last question because I think we should save that emotionally draining stuff for later or for email but you’re sending me yours first.

Me: That’s fine.

Tony: OK, last question, what does friendship mean to you?

- 

Tony: When it comes to you, the first thing that comes to mind is that old Prince song, ‘I would die for you’. That is definitely the Steve Rogers version of friendship. Loyal to the end. Are you familiar with that song? Or is this one of those times where you have no idea what I’m talking about?
Tony: It must be hard, catching up on decades of pop culture.

Me: Ridiculously hard, however, I know this song. The counselor has played me a lot of Prince music while we have been on the run. He said that song reminded him of me.

Tony: This does not surprise me.

Me: I think in a lot of ways your idea of friendship is similar. You will go to great lengths to protect people you care about. Even sacrificing yourself. I think that’s one of the things I love about you even though it scares me.

Tony: It scares me too.

Tony: Well, at least we have managed to traumatize each other.

Me: You’re sending Jane another apology basket?

Tony: Yes. Eventually she will stop being mad and will stop making us do this.

Me: Do you really believe that?

Tony: Not at all. Talk to you later Sugar Pie.

To be continued
Dear Tony

Chapter Notes

Thank you to everyone who read or review the last conversation. You are all wonderful. Because I am going to be at Awesome Con this weekend, you are getting this chapter today. This is going to be intense.

Steve is going to try something different with the next few questions because this is taking forever. The timestamp in this chapter will be from Steve’s perspective.

Stefan Carter sent you a message via (FRIDAY messenger service)
Time sent: 10/20/16 01:16:41

Dear Tony:
We have less than two weeks before we see each other again and I’m really excited. However, I really do think Jane hates you because I finally read through the rest of the questions and a lot of these are going to be hard for you to answer or even come up with fake answers for.

I am sad that you have to pretend with other people but at the same time I’m happy that I get to see the real you. I’m glad that you trust me enough now to see you. This shows that we’ve come a long way in the last few months.

So let’s see how many of these questions I can get through before the Counselor forces me to sleep for the night. I tell him I need less sleep than a normal person but he doesn’t believe me.

What roles do love and affection play in your life?

This is almost an easy question, compared to everything else. If it wasn’t for love I don’t think I would be where I am right now. I don’t know if I would’ve survived this new time without people that love me. At the same time, my love for the people I knew before kept me holding on to the past for a long time. Thankfully, you gave me a reason to let go and move forward.

Let’s talk about my friends that love me. The counselor loves me platonicly, of course, otherwise I think he would have turned himself into the Armed Forces even though he says I’m the worst patient he’s ever had to deal with. He pities my actual therapist. But he keeps me safe right now and listens to me talk way too much about you.

Also, if I didn’t love James platonicly, things in Siberia would’ve went differently. Then again, maybe not that differently because I love you and I wasn’t going to let you have that blood on your hands. So I think love plays a big role in my decision making.

Alternate sharing something you consider a positive characteristic of your partner. Share a total of five items.

I guess we can’t really do that one the way they intended us to do it in this format so let me just name five positive characteristics about you and then you can send me five back.

1. You’re smart. You’re the smartest man I have ever met and considering the people I have met,
that’s saying a lot. Although, I will tell you I’ve met at least one woman recently that probably has you beat. That being said, your mind still amazes me sometimes. Although, I do wish you had more common sense sometimes.

2. You care about people. Not just people you know personally, but also people you have never met. You are always sacrificing yourself, or at the very least your happiness for the sake of others. You genuinely care about the people working at SI, not just the executives but down to the cleaning crew. You also care about the other people with powers and not just your teammates, but people like Ms. Marvel and Spidey Junior.

You’re in DC trying to protect everyone and you don’t have to but you do. I admire and respect that about you. I thought you were selfish before, maybe because I read a little too much of the S.H.I.E.L.D. dossier or saw one too many things about you in the news, but you’re not that person. You wouldn’t have been by my side during the battle of New York, if you were who I thought you were.

3. You love kids. You absolutely love them, especially your kids. I see that in the way your protective of Benji, the Purple Arrow children, Ms. Marvel and Spidey Junior. Even before I knew that you were pen pals with that kid from Tennessee. And I think you would make a good father/guardian to a child someday, as long as you don’t do a repeat of Germany. That was stupid.

4. You learn from your mistakes. A lot of people don’t. They just keep making them over and over again. That’s not you. You acknowledge them. You now know you made a wrong call in bringing Benji to Germany and you’re trying to do better now. It takes a big person to not only acknowledge their mistakes, but learn from them.

5. You’re forgiving and willing to give almost anybody a second chance, including me. That is just shocking considering how many times you’ve been stabbed in the back by people that you trusted, like Obadiah. Yet, you let your heart stay open because you let me back in after what happened. I am still shocked about that. But I’m glad you let me back in after the mistakes I made. I think that’s what I love the most about you.

How close and warm is your family? Do you feel your childhood was happier than most other people’s?

This question is hard because my biological family is gone, not that it was a very big to begin with, not counting my dad’s second secret family. But my mom always made me feel like I was the most important thing in her world. Maybe I was. I always felt loved. And when she died, it hurt so much. It wasn’t sudden like what happened to your mom. She was sick for a while. It’s just I didn’t expect to lose her. I mean I was the sickly one. I was the one who was supposed to drop dead at any minute, not her. I wasn’t prepared for it.

I was a mess when it happened and thank God I had Bucky to pick up the pieces because I wouldn’t have survived without him. I know that sounds odd considering what happened to your mom because of him or rather what Hydra made happen, but it’s the way I felt back then. Bucky was like my big brother growing up. He was the one who would always have my back. Since he always had my back in the past, I felt like I had to do the same for him. Especially, because I let him down the way I did before.

Because of the way I handled the situation with Bucky and you in Siberia, I feel like the Avenger family is in pieces. For a while, I felt like I finally had a place where I fit in this crazy world. A new family, but it’s gone now and it’s because of my choices.

Even Red is gone and I don’t blame her for trying to start a normal life. She’s on call if something
bad happens but I hope nothing does. I wish Lily’s aunt would send a letter or something to let me know where she is and how she’s doing. It would be better if she would just come back but you mentioned she was busy with Melinda’s daughter which is understandable. That is also good because Melinda was really worried about Skye Quake when we were in Johannesburg.

Would you be OK if I considered Melinda family even though she’s my ex-girlfriend? She still understands things that a lot of people don’t. Although, thanks to Talbot now knowing my connection to you, I can’t really email her.

I guess you’re my family now along with the counselor. You’re a good part of my family and I know you love me so that’s good.

That second question, I almost don’t want to touch mostly because I know the answer for you and it wasn’t pretty. The answer wasn’t pretty for me either. I was sick all the time. Sometimes I know we didn’t have money for food and mom would go hungry so I could eat. She worked two jobs and we still didn’t have enough because I was so sick. But I had my mom and my pseudo-brother and that’s all I really needed. I was doing better than a lot of other kids back then.

I miss that Bucky. It was us against the world, when we were growing up. I feel like I want to talk to him about what’s going on in my life but I can’t because of what Hydra did to him. That smart woman I mentioned earlier, she’s taking care of him. I hope she has a breakthrough soon and maybe James will wake up. Maybe he already has because it’s not like it’s safe for me to get updates from her.

In the end it really doesn’t matter. He’s never going to be that James again because too much has happened. Then again, I’m not who I was back then. Why should I expect that of him? Maybe I’m having trouble letting go of the past, but I’m trying.

How do you feel about your relationship with your mother?

Even though my mom died young, I feel like we had a good relationship. I could tell her anything, well, almost anything. She didn’t know about Artie but she was so sick at the time that I didn’t want her to worry. Sometimes, I wonder how our relationship would be if she lived in this time. Would she be OK with me having a boyfriend? Especially a billionaire boyfriend? I don’t know. I hope she would be happy that I found someone I love and who loves me but I’m not sure. She was a very devout Catholic.

OK, I’m going to stop here because I think we need to actually be talking to each other to do the next question. Please, Tony, apologize to Jane, even though I don’t think you should apologize for coming out again. Just for some of the other stuff. I don’t want to have to come up with answers we can actually use in the New York Times.

To be continued
Thank you to everybody who read or reviewed the last conversation. You are all absolutely lovely. I did survive my con and had an absolute blast. I even dressed as Reina for one day.

Speaking of the girl in the flower dress, thanks to the post-credits scene in last night’s episode of Agents of Shield, this story is even more AU than intended. Just remember, if something verges from canon in this story go with my version.

Now it’s Tony’s turn to bare his soul in email form. The timestamp is from his perspective.

Your boyfriend sent you a message via (FRIDAY messenger service)

Time sent: 10/21/16 00:41:41

OK, now I’m sincerely regretting that we didn’t try doing this by email in the first place. That went so much easier. It’s not that I don’t want to know the answers to these highly invasive questions because I really do want to know you as much as possible. If we’re going to make this work long-term, we have to share our true selves with each other. And we’ve definitely been doing it with this activity. The problem is, we are absolutely horrible at keeping on-topic. If we were doing that last section by text message, I would've asked you all types of questions about your James. One of us would’ve misunderstood and it would’ve all blown up in our faces. See, this is much better.

I also want to be able to talk about other things with you like the fact that Jane is now impervious to bribery or that the smartest person you’ve ever met is treating your BFF. And no, I’m not offended that you know someone smarter than me.

So Jane is not budging. I got her the good chocolate and the good shoes and still I have to do the New York Times interview. She thinks it will humanize me. Seeing me be a lovesick fool makes her hate me a little less so she’s hoping that it will work with the rest of the public to help rehabilitate my image. I think I’m going to have to bring out the big guns which means Pepper Pot or the Director. Since my BFF is in the replacement patches, I should probably go with him, but he doesn’t quite have the ruthlessness necessary.

So let’s dive in and work on our emotional intimacy and not think of this as us trying to figure out how to appease my very angry PA person. I think it will go better that way.

My friends are where I get my love from. I discovered early on that blood doesn’t mean that much.
The people who loved me were my real family. Maria tried, but I feel like Jarvis and Anna were my real parents. There was also Aunt Peggy. I don’t think I would’ve survived my adolescence without her.

Then later on it was Happy, my James, and eventually Pepper Pot. After the break up, things between me and her were awkward but we’re starting to talk to each other about things other than work chaos which is good. Most of her questions are about Lily and Benji but we’re talking. Also, I’m not telling her she should get another boyfriend even though I do think it, because seriously, he still thinks that Pepper was just my beard. What type of person doesn’t get bisexuals? I just don’t get it. She needs better but I guess some people need a rebound relationship.

Since I’ve already started talking about family life maybe I should just skip to the next question. Of course, I know you’re not going to let me get away with that. OK, family life with my actual blood related family is kind of complicated. I wasn’t sure that my father actually loved me until I read his diary bequeathed to me by the good aunt. So that says a lot of things.

I always felt like Howard hated me for being smarter than him. I’ve never felt like that. I’m pretty sure Monkey Lover is smarter than me and it kind of excites me. I need the next generation to be better than me, so they don’t make the same mistakes I did. I’m even intrigued by the person helping your James. Maybe I’m this way because I’m trying not to be Howard. It’s my goal in life.

At the same time, I know there were people who loved me like Aunt Peggy, Jarvis, Anna, and Mom. But at the same time, I always had to be Tony Stark which makes for a really awful childhood. It wasn’t until I was an adult that people liked me for me.

At times I wish it was normal. I mean, now smart kids get to go to high school and college at the same time. I feel like that would’ve been better. Maybe I would’ve turned out halfway well-adjusted, if I was around people my own age at least part of the day. Which reminds me, I have to propose something like that to scary May, the mom not the spy who is also a mom to a wayward superhero that she adopted. OK, from this point on I’m just going to go with Agent America to cut down on confusing. Normal school is boring and a bored Benji is a scary Benji. Gifted kids are dangerous. Bored, really gifted kids are extra dangerous.

I’ll mention it at dinner tomorrow or rather tonight. It is now after midnight. I guess I should mention I’m back in Manhattan for the moment. I need to do a few meetings but I’ll be back in DC in a couple of days for lobbying and football. Joy.

Okay, now let me back up in name my five favorite things about you, my little kumquat. Although first, let me say how much I enjoyed your gushing. It’s kind of cute. It’s always good to know that my boyfriend can say positive things about me. Now let me say positive things about you.
1. Let it be known, I want to eat chocolate sauce off of your awesome chest just because you really are the peak of human perfection. Or whipped cream. Ice cream is also an option but I think that could trigger PTSD. OK, real thing is that you’re okay with me making those sorts of jokes. I wish you were willing to take those jokes a little further and tell me what you’re wearing but obviously that’s not happening.

2. I like that you’re loyal. You’re shocked my heart is still open, so am I. I’ve been stabbed in the back so many times that loyalty is crucial. I want to move up in your rank order of people that you’re loyal to. I feel like I have a better ranking than I did during the Siberia disaster, so I’ll take it. All things in life are a work in progress.

3. You’re true to yourself. You’re not letting new millennium jadedness completely destroy who you are. I admire that because maybe we are too jaded right now as a society. I definitely am, and I’m supposed to be a futurist. Yet, I keep expecting the worst. Life has made me extra-jaded.

4. I admire your integrity. Sometimes it pisses me off when you’re kind of being a self-righteous prick. However, it’s important that at the same time, you stand up for what you really believe in. I may not always see things the way you do, but I’m glad that you’re taking a stand. What is the old saying, “if you don’t stand for something you’ll fall for anything”? That can be equally dangerous. That may explain the whole Obadiah fiasco.

5. I like that you’re really a romantic at heart. It’s kind of sweet and adorable like you’re not that upset about all my cute little names. I think, secretly, you like them. I feel like you loving me is a positive characteristic, probably because I’m love starved. OK, we’re going back into the family stuff. Which makes sense regarding the next question is about love and family.

I also want to add that you consider your friends family to that list, even though I am supposed to stop at five items. I find that kind of adorable.

I am okay that you consider your ex-girlfriend family. She is an Avenger now, so she’s part of your Avenger family anyway. Besides, with the way things are going, she might be married to Coulson by the time we get this mess straightened out and get you back into the country. Fingers crossed, in both cases it be sooner rather than later. I feel like he’s going to have to die again for those two to get it together.

Now let’s talk about my relationship with Maria. That was complicated especially during the later years. There was a lot of resentment for her not talking Howard out of sending me off to boarding school. I’ve made peace with it, now that I know why. However, I regret a lot of the things I said to
her and I wish things could’ve been different in the end. But she is my mom. I loved her, despite her
faults and there were many.

I almost killed your best friend because he killed my mom. That reaction was pure anger. I know that
he was brainwashed and crazy when he did it and I should focus my anger on the last vestiges of
hydra but it’s taken a lot of drugs to get to a place of acceptance. I’m trying though, for you and for
me. I am even convinced that if your unnamed, female, super genius is able to undo the
brainwashing crazy part of his programming that you will not leave me for him. I accept that it is a
platonic relationship and sometimes a friendship is just a friendship. But it’s a deep one and I get that.
Again therapy works. I’m working towards a better me.

OK, now I’m going to be brave and see if I can move onto some of the next questions in set three
which apparently is supposed to be where the real intimacy begins. Which makes sense for perfect
strangers but we’re not that now. Also, I kind of wish we didn’t meet in the middle of a crisis so we
could’ve done some icebreaker activities, you know, instead of trying to beat the shit out of each
other due to Asgardian mind Fuck. I really wish it did not take Agent dying for our sins for us to get
our shit together.

OK, let’s begin with our three “we statements”.

1. We both sincerely regret our actions in Germany and Siberia. Therefore, we wish that we
would have begun open and honest communication before it all went to shit.

2. We both really really wish we were able to be in the same country without fear of being
arrested or taken out by government assassins.

3. We will make good use of every surface of our hotel room in less than two weeks and I can’t
wait.

See you totally can do that question in an Email.

Question 26, for me it would be, I wish I had somebody who I could share my superhero life with
which turns out to be you, Sugar Cakes. I think we talked about how the ultimate downfall of me
and Pepper was she didn’t get my Avenger life. You do, which may mean this relationship might
actually work long-term. I want that.

In regards to question 27, of course we are going to become friends because we already are friends
who make out with each other. You really do know a lot more about me than anyone else. So yesterday, I was being totally incognito with Benji at a restaurant because I couldn’t send him to Queens on an empty stomach, after an actual mentoring session. So, somebody at the restaurant thought he was my son and a part of me really wanted that to be true. Not him in particular but to have a kid. Thanks to the Palladium poisoning not happening but that’s a nice idea though. There’s always your sperm because I’m not sure if there is an adoption agency in the world that would give me a kid, despite my finances.

OK, I think we already did 28 with the positive qualities but OK. I like your artwork, I like the fact that I have to explain pop-culture references to you. Sometimes it’s fun. I enjoy that I get to expose you to things for the first time. Your face just lights up so much. I love that you’re passionate about things even when I want to punch you in the face. I love your voice. I love when you’re silly as well as being serious.

I also love your body but that’s not all I love about you because you can buy a perfect body if you have enough money. But you can’t buy happiness or compassion, or any other really good quality. Actually, sometimes I think money takes those good things from you.

Share with your partner an embarrassing moment in your life.

OK, you know about Howard catching me having private time with your propaganda poster. I don’t think it’s possible for any moment in my life to get more embarrassing than that. It was pretty mortifying. And considering I have a sex tape that people still watch, that’s saying something.

Although the release of the sex tape was embarrassing, it was more humiliating and there is a difference. OK, it was hurtful because that was supposed to be a private moment with somebody who said that he loved me. Instead, the guy was an asshole who cared about nothing but himself and God I wish I’d never slept with him. It was definitely one of my worst decisions and I made murder bots.

OK for the record, I would say in regards to the next question, that I’ve been crying in front of other people a lot more now; probably because of the medication. I cried while typing some of the stuff up mostly when thinking about Maria and Anna. A lot of that is still hard to deal with. As for crying in front of other people, there may have been more recent incidents, but I’m going with when I found out about what really happened to Benji and you were there, which was good, because I don’t like crying alone.

OK, I think that puts us at question 30 so let’s hit the back six later unless my best friend successfully gets us out of this. I don’t think I’m that lucky. I’m going to try, though.
Anyway, I love you and miss you. Just remember, Mumbai is around the corner.

To be continued
Always yours

Chapter Notes

Thank you to everybody who read or reviewed the last conversation, you were all wonderful. Again, the timestamp is from Steve’s perspective.

Stefan Carter sent you a message via (FRIDAY messenger service)

Time sent: 10/22/16 5:11:41

OK, I think you’re right getting the Director involved. Maybe, he can come up with a national security reason for why we can’t even give the New York Times a fake version of this interview. I’m willing to do it for Benji but I’d rather not if there’s a way out of it. Also, of course you were smart enough to figure out how to answer number 25 in an email because you’re a lot smarter than me.

Now for my three things we have in common statements:

1. We both deeply regret not getting to know each other earlier, especially before Siberia happened.

2. We are both stubborn as mules.

3. We both love each other very much.

OK, that was a lot easier than I thought it would be. You make things easier.

I agree with wanting to have someone to share your superhero life. I think I’ve always just wanted someone that I can share my entire life with not just the superhero part but the past. I want someone who just doesn’t expect me to get over it and I think that’s you.
Of course, you’re probably enjoying my movie education as well as music education. Friday keeps supplying me with songs. Although, with the counselor and I running missions, I do have a lot of time to listen, mostly when traveling to various undisclosed locations. Since Talbot knows about me, we’ve been trying to keep an even lower profile than before. So I doubt that you’ll be seeing much about Nomad anytime soon. I bet you’re kind of happy about that.

The way you talk about all your kids, it doesn’t surprise me that you were happy that somebody thought that Benjamin was your actual son. You know you should consider adoption or fostering, despite your doubts. I know you mentioned something before about kids with powers ending up in the system. Maybe when your health is 100% you can look into it. I don’t think you’ll be rejected like you think you will be.

I think I want to be a dad, but I don’t know if I want biological children despite knowing that a gestational carrier is an option. I don’t think I should have biological children because I think I would pass on the super soldier genes and they would just be putting a target on an innocent baby. I don’t want that. I don’t want to make anyone else a target. Then again, any child I raise would be a target. With you, I don’t have to worry about that because you’re already a part of this. It feels easier that way.

Okay, let’s talk about all the things I love about you. I love that I don’t have to pretend with you. You know about who I was before and not just what the history books say about me. You also know who I am now. You don’t see me as somebody perfect and I love that. I love talking to you. I love that you keep me grounded and tethered to the present. You always give me something to look forward to.

I love that I don’t feel lost anymore. I feel like that’s because of you. Even though I do feel like a man without a country, I feel like I still have a home with you, even if it’s not a physical place. Also I love the fact that you made me blush when I was reading through all the things you said about me. I love that you see me for who I am and that you love me for me and not what I supposedly symbolize. I just love you.

I’m not sure I can top your embarrassing story, nor do I really want to. Natasha kissed me on the escalators at Pentagon city to try to distract some Hydra agents during the fall of shield fiasco. It was ridiculously awkward and then she asked me if that was my first kiss since the 40s. I think I was more embarrassed that Natasha just assumed that was my first kiss in 70 years, then the kiss itself. She must think I am such a loser to assume I wouldn’t have had a girlfriend or boyfriend since waking up in the present. I want to ask if she knows about me dating Melinda now but I’m afraid to. I’m not sure if I’ll ever get the chance anyway.

Last time I cried by myself, outside of this writing process, was on the way back to the safe house after you left the hotel room. You leaving was hard, even though I know being together was only temporary. Still hurt watching you leave. Last time I cried in front of someone else was when you
almost died. I was a mess. There’s a reason why I was tranquilized.

Also, I think you forgot about crying in front of Yo-Yo and May on the way to the jet post Johannesburg or maybe you’re not counting that. I don’t know. Anyway, I think I’d rather do the other six questions through text message. Text message me in a few days.

Always yours, Cuddle Bunny

To be continued
Conversation 65: Break out the Milkshakes

Chapter Notes

Thank you to everybody who read or reviewed the last conversation. You are all absolutely wonderful. This conversation takes place late in the day on October 24 Tony’s time.

Spoiler warning: There are spoilers for Black Panther in this conversation but hey, Infinity War is just around the corner so I have to get it in now. (I’m watching Friday morning.) This conversation is where we encounter the first post credit scene.

If things were different, I probably would’ve had that announcement occur during the UN General Assembly the month before, even though it would’ve been New York instead of where the announcement took place in the movie. However, I don’t want to mess up my own timeline or go back and put it in. Besides, October is a great time to shake up the international stage with a major announcement about Wakanda actually being a technological superpower. Just in time to show everybody up at the November climate change talks. I’m sure they can bring a lot to the table when it comes to being green.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

HSBF: So I assume you saw the announcement?

Me: That Ross is planning to leave the State Department in January no matter who wins next month. I was there in the room. Jane won’t let us out of the New York Times interview but she will pull some strings to get me in the Ben Franklin room for his resignation. I have no trouble commuting to DC to watch that.

HSBF: Wait, still?

Me: I know, she’s immune to cookie baskets. And shoe baskets and chocolate and everything else that I normally use for bribery. Even alcohol won’t work.

Me: I don’t care because that asshole is out. If I was still drinking I would have popped champagne, right there during the press conference. Instead, I had milkshakes with some of my DOS friends. Did
I ever tell you his Under Secretary for Environment, Energy, and Economics is ex-SI?

HSBF: No, but I’m not surprised. You do have a lot of contacts there.

Me: And we celebrated by gorging ourselves on milkshakes. If it wasn’t for the extreme physical training regimen that Agent America has me doing, I would’ve gained 10 pounds with all the extra food I’ve been eating.

HSBF: Probably because nobody is letting you survive by smoothie and coffee alone anymore. Actually, I wasn’t talking about Ross. I didn’t know. I guess it’s didn’t make the news here. Although, I’m a little rusty with the local language, so I could’ve missed it anyway.

Me: At least I know you’re in a country where you kind of know the language. I’m not surprised. The news has been Wakandan all the time for the last 24 hours. My friends at the State Department are more excited about future diplomatic relations with Wakanda than the fact that their boss will be leaving by the time the inauguration happens regardless of who wins the election.

HSBF: I can see why diplomats would be more excited about that.

Me: I guess the Wakanda announcement is what you wanted to talk about?

HSBF: Yes. Also, this means I can talk a little more freely about some of the things I’ve been doing recently.

Me: Which will help with our open and honest communication. And I understand why you didn’t tell me the truth. But I kind of knew. The international community may have been caught off guard but I wasn’t.

HSBF: You weren’t?

Me: Baby Bear, I haven’t bought the ‘Wakanda is a Third World country’ charade since I saw his suit months ago. I recognize superior tech when I see it. See, I’m not a total narcissist.

HSBF: Just a little narcissistic.
Me: Also, the project in Oakland already raised the few flags. I think that got announced while I was distracted with the Vulture fiasco. They did have a representative at Johannesburg for the first time and that person gave all the best suggestions. So again, I am not surprised.

HSBF: You’re more observant than I thought you would be.

Me: Of course I’m observant. To the point where I know that your gear has been upgraded. Somebody definitely put your energy shield up to 11 and it wasn’t me. I assume the smartest woman you’ve ever met would like to keep you safe.

HSBF: Yes. You’re not the only person who doesn’t want me to get shot again.

Me: And since you won’t stop doing things that will get you shot, she decided to give you armor that will make it a lot harder for you to die on us?

HSBF: Yes.

Me: I’m not even jealous at her skills. I respect anybody who wants to keep you alive.

HSBF: Even if it was designed by a 16-year-old Royal?

Me: I came up with my best stuff at 16 before my creativity was tampered by assholes on the board. Besides, that would be something Howard would do and you know I hate being anything like Howard.

HSBF: Of course.

Me: Oh shit! Those jokes a couple weeks ago about you not wanting to do cyber sex because a 16-year-old super genius could be reading the messages wasn’t really a joke?

HSBF: Yes, I was being serious. She managed to crack your encryption in about a week.
Me: Great, the youngsters are beating my tech. I feel so old. How long have you know about a royal voyeur?

HSBF: Not long. I didn’t know about it until her brother caught her reading the messages and told me. Now that he’s back together with his ex-girlfriend, his sister likes to read our text messages to keep “entertained”.

Me: Oh, fuck. Well I’m really glad I’m not covering them up with porn anymore.

HSBF: Me too.

Me: I’m just doing so much to contribute to the delinquency of minors. I feel like I have a new most embarrassing moment. Oh great, she probably knows about the old embarrassing moment. I am a horrible role model.

HSBF: No you’re not. Aren’t you pretty much taking care of the Purple Arrow children while their parents work things out?

Me: Mr. and Mrs. Purple Arrow have successfully worked things out, I think. The divorce papers have been shredded at least. Also, I may have walked in on activities that I don’t want to discuss because apparently the royal super genius can break my encryption.

Me: I am impressed and a little concerned because only Shield has been able to break it so far. Of course, I’ve recently discovered that half of the SI medical research department and a quarter of the telecommunications research/design division are actually from Wakanda, not Kenya, so again I shouldn’t be surprised.

Me: This is so embarrassing. I am really glad you are Captain Prude. Although you could’ve told me we are providing a 16-year-old with a really skewed romantic education. Did she at least fix the encryption?

HSBF: Yes.

Me: That’s nice. Is she still reading them?
HSBF: I was told she said she would stop but 16-year-olds are not known for listening.

Me: I know for a fact Benji won’t, so why should the Royal genius be any different.

HSBF: How is Benji doing?

Me: Really good, although he’s mad at me being back in DC this week. Also his aunt is willing for me to foot the bill for Benji to take a few college classes during the spring semester. Normally, she won’t take charity but she considers it reparations for Germany.

Me: Okay. She said no the first two times I suggested it, and then I framed it as a settlement for the Germany fuck up. Then she said yes.

HSBF: And how is his superhero life going?

Me: The Bulletproof Pacifist says that the transition is going well and Benji only misses Yo-Yo a little bit.

HSBF: So she’s on the West Coast now?

Me: Since last week. It's okay, I'm adjusting. I’ve been hanging out with Monkey Lover a lot. I adore him, but sometimes I feel like I’m dealing with two different people. But he’s still fun.

HSBF: What about the Bulletproof Pacifist? Have you been hanging out with him?

Me: Jealousy is so cute, but no worries. According to Benji, last week his aunt asked the Bulletproof Pacifist if he wanted to go out for coffee sometime and he politely declined due to the fact he has a new boyfriend of two months. Benji was also freaked out when she responded with something about all superheroes being gay.

Me: Which isn’t true because I’m pretty sure Bruce is straight. I think Benji is freaking out because his aunt still thinks something is going on between him and Ned. I have money on him and Michelle. Friends sometimes become more than friends.
HSBF: Did you try to sleep with Bruce and that’s how you know that he’s actually straight?


HSBF: Good to know I’m your snuggle bear.

Me: I feel like somewhere in another country there is a teenager snickering about this.

Me: But thanks to her, the NSA and SHIELD shouldn’t be able to read this anymore.

Me: Only because Skye Quake is still on the lamb. Coulson really wants his baby girl back safe and in one piece. The last attempt fell apart and he only found the budding artist who I will just refer to as Sparrow. I think the only reason why my James is still letting him search for her is because he admires his fatherly affection.

HSBF: We do a lot for our friends.

Me: You’re putting up with the possibility of our conversations becoming an entertainment for the Royal genius because she’s helping with James?

HSBF: Yes.

Me: Do you think she’s making any progress?

HSBF: I hope so.

Me: Do you think that she would be willing to help with my James? You know I still feel awful about getting him paralyzed. The SI medical research division, mostly the members that are actually from Wakanda have been coming up with some good stuff along with Dr. Monkey Lover but I have this feeling that she might do better.
HSBF: I can ask but she usually calls me. I wish she would give me an update on James’s progress but even she doesn’t trust her encryption.

Me: A good scientist doesn’t trust their own Genius. Hubris will screw you over.

HSBF: How long did it take you to learn that lesson?

Me: How old was I when the murder bot fiasco happened?. Regardless, it took a while.

HSBF: But like I said on one of the questions, you do learn from your mistakes. Do you want to go over a question or two tonight or let it go?

Me: I say we do lightning round and knock these last few out then it will no longer be over our heads.

HSBF: We still have to come up with public answers before we meet up in Mumbai.

Me: Friday is taking our actual answers and going to come up with something fit to print. That’s kind of what she’s been doing with the fake messages.

HSBF: You will let me approve what she creates first though?

Me: Yes, although she’s going to send it to Jane first. I hope that she was so freaked out that she’ll change her mind and actually publish the thing.

HSBF: Do you see that happening?

Me: Not at all. So we keep going on. Okay for this next question, let’s think back to when we first met during the battle of New York and tell each other the first thing we admired about the other person.

Me: For you that would be the fact that you kept trying even though I was being a complete asshole. I’m sorry that asshole is my defense setting.
HSBF: It’s not so bad now that I understand that.

Me: Personally, I’m surprised you stayed around long enough to realize that.

HSBF: I’m glad that I did, though. With you, it was the fact that you would always prove me wrong. I like being challenged.

Me: I think I did that a little too much. We are too competitive. I hope we are getting better about that.

HSBF: Maybe

Me: OK Honeybear, do you think there’s anything that shouldn’t be joked about?

HSBF: Considering you make jokes about Alien invasions and your PTSD, I believe that you believe nothing is off-limits.

Me: I will joke about anything but not all the time. Also you’re aware that humor is my number one defense mechanism after being a total asshole.

HSBF: I am aware.

Me: And you my cuddle puppy?

HSBF: I don’t really want to make jokes about either one of us dying. That’s something that is serious and I don’t want to joke about. I don’t really want to think about it.

Me: That’s understandable, especially because we’ve had so many close calls. I am really hoping you don’t get shot again. Here’s hoping the Royal genius did her thing.

HSBF: She did.
Me: Well good, maybe the next question will not come to pass because I don’t want you to die but if the unimaginable did happen, would you have some unfinished business?

HSBF: Not as much as last time. Although, you know that I love you. I would regret not being completely intimate with you physically. You?

Me: So glad you’re going with the clean version. I also feel like I have less unfinished business than last time. When I flew up into the wormhole, I tried to call Pepper. She didn’t answer. But if something like that happened again, I would call you just so I could hear your voice one last time.

HSBF: You wouldn’t have to. I would be there with you.

Me: Even at the end of the world?

HSBF: Especially if it is the end of the world. I would be holding your hand if I could.

Me: Now you’re going to make me cry and I was having such a happy day celebrating Ross’s resignation.

Friday: I hate to interrupt but Ms. Watson needs to speak with you right away. She apparently just received a request from the office of the King of Wakanda. His staff would like to arrange a meeting between you and various representatives from Wakanda during his state visit next week. Ms. Watson would like to discuss this with you before scheduling.

HSBF: You should probably talk to your assistant.

Me: Probably. I miss Yo-Yo. She would just take care of it. I’ll write you after the soccer game.

HSBF: You do that. Love you.

Me: Love you too, Cuddle Bear.
To be continued.

Chapter End Notes

Additional notes: Since this story is so ridiculously long I would just like to remind everyone that the Bulletproof Pacifists is Joey Gutierrez. He’s an inhuman from season three of Agents of Shield and our first acknowledged as gay in canon character with powers. He tried to ask Tony out for “coffee” when they train together earlier in the story, but Tony turned him down because he is head over feet in love with Steve.

Sparrow is Tony’s nickname for Robin Huntington. She is a young human girl who sees the future and draws about it. Someone who can see the future. That might prove useful.

This is the last conversation to be posted before Infinity War comes out. I have three more chapters after this that are completed or in proofreading. I have four more chapters in draft that I hope to finalize this weekend and send out for proofreading. I might even try for a fifth. My goal is to have everything done but the post-credits scenes before the movie comes out. I’m not sure if I’ll be emotionally ready to write next week. I might be all hyped up or I may be in tears. It’s hard to dictate when you’re crying.

Please remember to wait at least 30 days before including spoiler material in your comments. So feel free to talk about Black Panther and the first 100 episodes of Agents of Shield. But anything else send me a DM on twitter or a PM on fanfiction dot net.
Thank you to everybody who read or reviewed the last conversation, you are all absolutely wonderful. So I did see infinity were already and it may influence some elements but I am sticking to my original ending. However there’s probably going to be more chapters than I originally planned. I’m sure none of you are that upset about that.

So this conversation is where the serious canon divergence begins. I was originally planning for this chapter to come out before Infinity War was released, but I think it works out this way too. You will find out why things are different in this timeline very soon, before we even hit the post credit scenes. Will things be different enough to keep certain things in certain movies that we can’t discuss yet from happening? No comment.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Tony: OK so I’m kind of having a crisis of conscience and since you are Mr. Paragon of Virtue I need your help so I can avoid another fuck up such as killer robots or Siberia.

Me: OK this has to be important if you’re texting me in the middle of the night

Tony: Yes, it’s that important that I would have woken you up in the middle of the night if I realized it was the middle of the night. I still thought you were only about seven hours ahead.

Me: You know I can’t tell you where I am even if I wish I could.

Tony: That’s okay. Let’s be honest I still would’ve sent this message anyway.

Me: What’s going on?

Tony: Remember, I told you that I was going to a playoff soccer match with Monkey Lover and the supposedly reformed doctor who made mind controlled zombies last spring?

Me: Yes. Something happened?
Tony: Apparently, somebody is not that reformed and science is more important than good decision-making. Which I get but I still do not want to be in this position. Again.

Me: What happened, Tony?

Tony: So I show up to the house early because my new assistant Mary decided that she can’t tell me when things actually start because I’ll show up 30 minutes late.

Me: I’m starting to really like her already.

Tony: Due to the red here most of the office is calling her Pepper 2.0. She doesn’t have the super speed of Yo-Yo but she has other special skills like getting me to social gatherings early.

Me: This is a problem somehow?

Tony: It is when you get accosted by a naked, anatomically correct Life Model Decoy because of course LMD’s are actually a thing that the supposedly reformed doctor has been working on in his spare bedroom. My James should have never given him access to old shield files.

Tony: The LMD was so anatomically correct. Like, I would not have known that she was an LMD until she started to speak and I recognized that I was talking to Aida.

Me: Oh God.

Tony: And she may have got caught in a feedback loop. It was highly uncomfortable and extremely creepy.

Me: Isn’t the development of that type of android illegal?

Me: Yes. It’s the Tony Stark clause. I actually had to take a few whistles out of the suit and droids to come into compliance. They’re not allowed to think too much on their own. Obviously, Friday is the queen of loophole abuse. I programmed my baby well.
Me: Tony, focus.

Tony: So, Radcliffe really invited us over early for non-alcoholic pre-match drinks so he could show me and Dr. Monkey Lover his illegal LMD and probably get us to work out all the kinks. I’m so glad Monkey Lover was late because my James decided to send Dr. Simmons off on a mission and he just had to see her off. It’s best that only one of us had to deal with this ethical dilemma.

Me: So Monkey Lover doesn’t know?

Tony: He’s still an innocent science baby. Thankfully, I put Aida to “sleep” in the guest room (not the closet like Radcliffe wanted) before Monkey Lover arrived.

Tony: What type of idiot puts a sentient robot in the closet? Dummy still has his own room.

Me: That’s good, I think. This whole thing seems really weird. Your bots have their own room?

Tony: Of course. You know they’re like my children, the good ones anyway. Okay, this may be because I don’t want my robots to try to kill me again. Never have it be said that I don’t learn from my mistakes.

Tony: BTW, the not so reformed doctor based Aida’s body on that of his former girlfriend. She left him last year right before he started working for the founder of the cult of the squid. Which makes this afternoon creepier and reminds me of a couple of Buffy episodes.

Me: I haven’t watched that much Buffy.

Tony: Friday, add Buffy to the possible list of things to watch while on dates.

Friday: The movie or the TV show.

Tony: The TV episodes about future villains making sex bots. It will be educational.
Me: I don’t even want to know. How did you discover that he made a life model decoy of his ex-girlfriend?

Friday: Mr. Stark has programmed me to run facial recognition on any individual who attacks him in the nude. This is why he usually wears sunglasses.

Tony: I get creeped out when people accost me without clothes on.

Me: This has happened before?

Tony: When you’re rich and have a sex tape, people do some crazy things to get your attention. Finding naked strangers in my bedroom was kind of a thing during the 90s and early 2000’s. I’ve put that piece of code into Jarvis and it carried over to Friday. I probably should modify it to people who tried to attack me. It might be more useful now.

Me: Probably.

Tony: Don’t worry, the only naked person I want to see is you. I can’t wait to take your clothes off.

Me: Please remember there is a good chance a 16-year-old is reading this.

Tony: Oh good she can help with the ethical dilemma which is: let Radcliffe keep developing his android for the alleged greater good or tell the Director what’s going on with Aida and put a stop to it.

Me: What is the greater good in this case?

Tony: Expendable forces/less dead people. Instead of sending an actual agent into a situation that will probably kill them, you can send an LMD. For example, if we knew about The Vultures attack in advance we could’ve staffed the cargo plane with LMDs and therefore I would not have the blood of two shield agents on my hands because of Happy’s insecurities.

Me: I can understand where that would be useful.
Tony: There are other applications. I really would love a life-like android to take my place during board meetings. Maybe then they would stop trying to lock me out of my own company.

Me: Are they still trying to get proof of you being mentally unfit?

Tony: Every other day. It’s exhausting. They have such a ridiculous concept of mental illness. It’s enough to make me not want to take my medication but then if I don’t take the medication, I will become what they say I am and I’m not giving them the satisfaction. I don’t want to be reckless and hurt people, so I need to stay on my treatment plan.

Me: The personality of this LMD would be like Friday, not Ultron?

Tony: And Friday keeps playing matchmaker and conspiring with the Royal genius behind my back. She has all these friends that are not me. That could be dangerous. Not trying to end the world dangerous but still dangerous.

Me: But Friday always looks out for your best interest.

Tony: Unfortunately, Aida is not Friday. I created Friday completely from the ground up. As I learned with Ultron, never trust anyone else’s code.

Me: I’m not going to tell you what to do. But I could ask you what you think you should do?

Tony: I have to tell James even though part of me thinks that LMDs could be useful. Maybe if there was a LMD Steve running around, Stefan Carter could move back to the states and we could live happily ever after without anybody knowing that you were back and you know, trying to kidnap you to run experiments on you. Also the LMD can deal with the bullet damage, not you. Bonus.

Me: That’s not as much of an issue anymore. The new suit is mostly bulletproof.

Tony: I will believe it when I see it. Your upgraded shield was awesome but we’ll see.
Me: Talk to your James. He’s your best friend and you shouldn’t keep this from him. Also telling him doesn’t necessarily mean the end of the project. There might be a way to keep the research going.

Tony: Research that is technically against the Accords?

Me: Talking to me right now is technically against the Accords but you’re still doing it. More importantly, shield is letting you do it.

Tony: Because when the alien invasion /possibly world ending apocalypse happens, they want you on their side.

Me: I’ll be on your side.

Tony: Thank you. By the way I’m counting this as going over question 36.

Tony: I really wish Jane would just not force me to do an article for the New York Times when I’m dealing with everything else.

Me: Even though I also don’t want any of this in the New York Times, I’m glad you came to me to discuss this instead of trying to figure it out all on your own.

Tony: I’m really trying to actually learn from my mistakes. I think my arrogance has gone down the whole 12% since the murder bot fiasco.

Me: For the sake of sharing, I probably now need to tell you one of my problems?

Tony: That would be nice. I really don’t feel like talking to the not so reformed doctor and Monkey Lover must be text messaging the girlfriend. It sounds like the type of conversations we have. Although, I don’t know why he refers to her as football Hunter in his contacts.

Me: Who knows, I used to be Captain tight pants in your address book. I guess we should also go back into questions 34 and 35?
Tony: We are not doing 35. We both had to bury all of our actual family members. I’m not making you answer that question. Somebody can make something up for that one.

Me: Okay, the obvious answer is each other. Or maybe Benji for you. At least that’s what Friday is putting down.

Me: The each other part, not the Benji part.

Tony: That Works, although I don’t even want to think about losing Benji or you for that matter.

Me: I guess answering 34 would be difficult for you since your house did blow up that time.

Tony: Because I’m a moron. It may be because I’m a billionaire or maybe because I’ve managed to successfully back up everything important to the cloud. I don’t think there’s anything tangible worth running back in for.

Me: You scanned all of your dad’s diaries?

Tony: And all of Peggy’s letters and everything else so they’ll exist somewhere. Even then I would want to keep those things because of the people who wrote them, not because of what they are. People are more important than things.

Me: That’s true. I agree.

Tony: OK now give me a problem that I can help you solve.

Me: Here’s the problem, I met this great guy who I am completely in love with. Unfortunately, we do not live in the same country right now. The reason why we don’t live in the same country is I do not want to sign a document putting myself under government control, because I don’t entirely trust my government right now.

Tony: Which is understandable. Ross will be gone soon but some of the names being whispered
about are not good. Someone mentioned Norman Osborn as a possible successor if POTUS gets a second term.

Me: The corporate executive?

Tony: Yes

Me: What the hell would he know about form policy?

Tony: You’re starting to get a dirty mouth. What would our 16-year-old Royal, super genius, voyeur think? We’re supposed to be setting a good example.

Tony: And you’re right, Osborne would be an awful head of a government agency, any government agency. The guy is a dick.

Me: This is the problem. The accords are dependent on people not being awful being in charge but you never know who you’re going to get.

Tony: I am aware that the successor for Ross might be worse. And that could be bad for everybody under the accords although Talbert is pretty benevolent. I think Coulson broke him in.

Me: And what happens if he dies or is incapacitated, somehow?

Tony: Then a lot of us are fucked. His number two, General Hale, is a real piece of work.

Me: And this is why I can’t sign.

Tony: See this guy that you love, loves you too and realizes what type of situation you are in. As much as he wants you here with him, he’d rather you be thousands of miles away and safe than be sleeping next to him right now and be in danger. He doesn’t want anything to happen to you because he loves you so much.

Me: So what’s the solution to my problem?
Tony: There isn’t one. Not an easy quick solution. Most good things in life don’t have easy solutions.

Tony: I keep lobbying the government to come up with something that won’t break your integrity or put a bull’s-eye on your back. You keep being you in other countries in the meantime. Maybe with your Royal friend having a state dinner with the President next week will move superhero relations forward.

Me: One can hope.

Tony: Hope is all we have sometimes but you and me will figure it out because I want to spend the rest of my life with you and I’m hoping that’s a long life.

Me: Me too.

Tony: OK Friday is a brat and started blasting put a ring on it. This is why we must be wary of even benevolent AIs.

Me: That’s not too awful.

Tony: I’m in public watching the D.C. United lose a soccer game. People are looking strangely at me.

Me: You’re Tony Stark. People are always looking at you.

Tony: I was trying to avoid that. Baseball cap and everything. This will totally be on Twitter in five minutes.

Me: Then I’ll get pictures of you in a baseball cap.

Tony: And sunglasses.
Me: You do look good in sunglasses.

Tony: I do. I’ll write you in a couple days after I talk to my James and straighten all of this crazy stuff out.

Me: Good luck.
Xxx

HRH: He should put a ring on it.

Friday: I don’t think Mr. Stark is ready to acknowledge that yet. However, I will keep pushing him in that direction. I have several male engagement and wedding ring designs already on file.

HRH: Good. Does your boss know that he’s meeting with me and not my brother?

Friday: Not yet but he will be informed soon.

HRH: Excellent, Friday.

To Be continued.

Chapter End Notes

Who do you think HRH is?
Who do you think Football Hunter is?
All will be revealed soon.

If you read this chapter after watching Infinity War, did it make you cry? It made me cry.
If you want to talk to me about that, remember to pm me on fanfiction dot net. No deep talk about Infinity War until May 27.

Please know I’m waiting for other chapters to come back from proofreading so there may be more than a one-week way for the next chapter. But I will resume regular posting once chapters start trickling in again.
Chapter Notes

Thank you to everybody who read or reviewed the last conversation. You are all wonderful. I’m sorry for the wait between chapters. It’s been so long we now know that AOS is getting another season, even if it won’t premiere until after Avengers 4. Real life was evil and due to the circumstances, I had to switch betas at least temporarily. Ursula was kind enough to do this chapter and the next one so I could start updating again.

This is an interlude chapter, but as you know, the interludes are where the best plot points happen. In this case we’re going to start to explore why some things are different in my timeline. This conversation happens to take place near simultaneously to Tony’s last conversation with his Stevie bear.

Now answers to my questions from last time: HRH is shorthand for Her Royal Highness, and in this case refers to Princess Shuri, our favorite 16-year-old Royal genius. I’m so happy so many of you figure that out. Cyber cookies for all of you. Of course she’s friends with Friday. She may even be giving her code a little tune up. Okay, she may be the one responsible for some of the matchmaking tendencies Friday has developed much to Tony’s frustration. A 16-year-old needs to have hobbies, even if she is a 16-year-old super genius and first in line to take the throne. It can’t be all work.

As for Football Hunter, that is Lance Hunter. For those of you not watching Agents of SHIELD, think the 616 Clint version of Hawkeye, complete with complicated marriage to Mockingbird, but more British. Lance Hunter was last seen in season 3 being disavowed by Shield to avoid an international incident with Russia. Actually, the last time he was seen was in season five, when he rescued Leo Fitz from a secure government facility that doesn’t exist on paper. That hasn’t happened yet in this timeline. Right? We shall see.

Spoiler warning: The next few chapters are going to draw from things from Agents of Shield up to episode 99. I’m vague and I’m going to provide you all you need to know eventually, but these chapters are probably going to be extra fun for AOS viewers. Reminder, the only thing I’m not drawing from for this story is the Inhumans TV show. Everything else is fair game.

Warning: Discussion of past sexual assault

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Football Hunter: Baby brother arrived safe and sound to the lighthouse to commence operation, relocate the rocks that eat people and spit them out in other places/time periods.

Football Hunter: This operation needs a better name.

Monkey lover 2: You were the one who named the operation. They’re called monoliths. Did anybody get eaten by the monoliths?

Football Hunter: Not yet. Your baby brother is being extra cautious. He’s just like I remember you before you lived like three different lives. Sweet. Almost innocent. I guess getting kidnapped by a
sexual assaulting bot that wants to be a real girl will suck the sweetness out of anyone.

Monkey lover 2: Among other things.

Football Hunter: You didn’t run into her younger self at the doctor’s house? See this is why I did not want you to switch places with baby brother.

Monkey lover 2: I didn’t want him to live through getting stabbed in the back by another father figure. Or be tempted to make the same mistakes I did. It was better that I was the one there.

Football Hunter: And how is that going?

Monkey lover 2: He brought Stark into his confidence not me, although that might be because Stark doesn’t want me to be brought in. For someone that’s never had kids, he easily falls into the mentor and protector role.

Football Hunter: That shouldn’t surprise you. Since he is like the boss.

Monkey lover 2: I also wasn’t accosted by a naked Aida which is good because I probably would’ve shot her on-site or thrown up on her.

Football Hunter: Both valid responses when you see the woman who forced you to have sex with her in a virtual prison and then went off the deep end when you said no in the real world. Have I apologized yet for my other selves’ love floppy joke? I’m never good at gauging the room.

Monkey lover 2: I can’t be mad at you for things you haven’t done yet and I don’t know if I should blame her for things she hasn’t done yet. It doesn’t matter because AIDA was asleep in the guest room. I found her there when I went to the restroom before we left for the game.

Football Hunter: You mean when you cased his apartment. Using going to the men’s room as an excuse? I taught you so well. You were such a sweet innocent thing when I found you.

Monkey lover 2: That would’ve been another one of my past lives.

Football Hunter: Apparently they’ve all been eventful.

Monkey lover 2: Has Mockingbird met up with the baby bird?

Football Hunter: Which baby bird?

Monkey lover 2: The seer who is five, whose name is an actual type of bird.

Football Hunter: She should be arriving with the preschooler whose scribbles predict the future a few minutes after I leave with the rocks that eat people to drop it off in whatever secure, undisclosed location you and your friend, the Princess, managed to find. Which is good because I really don’t want to see or speak with the hypocrite right now. Or possibly ever again. The hate sex is not even that good anymore.

Monkey lover 2: You broke up again?

Football Hunter: Well, I can’t exactly tell her that I’m working with you. She’ll send me off to the loony bin at the very least. She’s mad at me for keeping secrets and not telling her the whole mission. Miss I never tell the truth doesn’t like it when you’re the one keeping secrets from her. I shouldn’t even be surprised. I’m done.

Monkey lover 2: Last time around you two almost got remarried.
Football Hunter: And then I came to my senses and realized I don’t want to spend the rest of eternity with somebody who squeezes the toothpaste in the middle and expects better of you then she does herself?

Monkey lover 2: You said the ceremony was interrupted by ninjas.

Football Hunter: Of course the bloody thing was. I need a drink.

Monkey lover 2: After you get the monoliths away from each other.

Football Hunter: They’re already on separate floors. We’re just waiting for our ride to get here. Separate rides because apparently the rocks that eat people should not be transported together.

Monkey lover 2: I would just like to avoid them being blown up again and being flung through space and time.

Football Hunter: But then you wouldn’t be here trying to fix the world. Just focus on preventing the robot apocalypse, and I will handle the rocks that eat people.

Football Hunter: Well, focus on fixing it without the boss making a deal with the devil to kill the evil bitch that will eventually kill him. You’re good at this. You already fixed the Avengers by just convincing your secret billionaire BFF to send a bloody apology text message to Captain Paragon.

Football Hunter: Was that a deal with the actual devil or some inhuman that calls himself the devil? Or are you not sure because you couldn’t decipher the scribbles of the preschooler that draws the future?

Football Hunter: Why did the boss not tell you that he was dying? It’s a shame you had to find out from the preschooler.

Football Hunter: Our lives are ridiculously strange.

Monkey lover 2: Not an inhuman.

Monkey lover 2: Tony’s trying to read what I’m writing, that’s why wasn’t responding.

Football Hunter: So I guess we should talk about the football game or the girlfriend?

Monkey lover 2: They’re losing and I don’t have a girlfriend because the person I’m in love with didn’t come through the portal with me and her current day equivalent is with who you referred to as my little brother.

Football Hunter: Yes so awful, your Simmons didn’t go through the portal with you. Maybe she’ll come rescue you or maybe you’ll meet someone else. A little payback for her screwing hog face on the planet of the dead. You should hook up with someone while you’re here.

Football Hunter: I can give you sex tips. You seem like the type that would be very skilled with your tongue.

Monkey lover 2: Goodbye Hunter.

Football Hunter: I’m just trying to be helpful. I think you would be less stressed if you had a good shag. I would offer, but I’m not sure if you would say yes.

Football Hunter: Whatever. Just don’t die on me.

To be continued
Okay, I bet you all have questions now. Answers will follow in subsequent chapters. But to answer the main question, there are now two Leopold Fitzs in the current timeline. Right now, let’s just call him Monkey Lover 2. What is Monkey Lover 2 trying to accomplish now that he’s back in 2016? How long has Monkey Lover 2 been in the past? How has his presence affected our timeline? Where is Monkey Lover 1 right now? Finally, what is going on between Football Hunter and Monkey Lover 2? All questions to be answered eventually.
Conversation 67: That Went Better Than Expected

Chapter Notes

Thank you to everybody who read or reviewed the last conversation. You are wonderful.

I realize that the last conversation was major and everyone is really confused. That’s okay because as we go forward, things will make more sense. Just keep in mind that Tony has no idea that there are two different Leo Fitzs/Dr. Monkey Lover running around and interacting with him. The Leo Fitz in this chapter is the one from the future. Let’s call him Dr. Leopold.

More details will come out in the next chapter. I’m also working on a code name cheat sheet of sorts. It’s off for proofreading. I’m debating if I am going to post it as a separate story on A3O or just throw it into the main story because it sort of has some plot points included since I wrote it from the perspective of our favorite Princess. Let me know your preference.

This Conversation takes place on October 29, 2016.

HSBF: How did the conversation with your James go?

Me: Surprisingly well. He hugged me for telling him what was wrong instead of continuing the research behind his back like I would have done in the past.

Me: Okay, like I did in the past which led to murder bots. He thinks you’re a good influence on me.

HSBF: I try.

Me: Although Fitz did knock Radcliffe unconscious as Agent America critiqued his technique. Then he threw up on Radcliffe’s shoes and the LMD.

HSBF: What? Why?

Me: Radcliffe brought up the asshole father while he was pleading for mercy/leniency. Or maybe it’s because Monkey Lover felt like he was being stabbed in the back by another father figure. It was probably a lot of things at once. It’s always the quiet ones, especially if the quiet one is also a spy.

HSBF: I already learned that with Melinda.

Me: I’m sure you did.

HSBF: So what happens now?

HSBF: The doctor is now in containment room 3 and will be having a psych evaluation by Suarez or someone from her team very soon.

HSBF: Shouldn’t that have happened earlier, preferably before receiving a presidential pardon?
Me: You would think, but no. OK everybody here should probably see a therapist or six.

Me: I’m a little worried about Monkey Lover, and not just for punching out Radcliffe which he totally deserved. Sometimes I feel like I am dealing with two different people. There’s the happy go lucky guy who is completely head over feet with his science partner. Then there is this other guy who feels like he has the burdens of the world on his shoulders.

Me: It kind of scares me because it reminds me of how I was post New York. I was a ghost. I think I’ve been that way for a while. Therapy has been helpful.

HSBF: I don’t know what to say about that. I’ve been like that before. I’m still working through my own issues. Maybe he needs some help?

Me: I would talk to Mrs. Purple Arrow about it, but she’s busy working on fixing things with her husband. Maybe I can mention it to Suarez.

HSBF: I thought you said things were better?

Me: Better in the sense that divorce is off the table. I’m trying to decide if I want to introduce you to the concept of angry sex or hope that we never get to that point.

HSBF: I hope we never get to that point.

Me: Good answer. Mister Purple Arrow is not happy that she joined Shield to get him back in the country. Mrs. Purple Arrow is not happy that he went rogue when Ross threatened the kids to get your latest location. She says this is the messiest it’s been since their separation and her time in rehab. Not quite bad enough as the thing that caused their separation, but there’s still a lot of stuff they have to work through, like him trying to divorce her to protect her and the kids from Ross.

HSBF: That is not good.

Me: It is what it is. At least they want to work through it, which is more than a lot of people end up with.

HSBF: What happens now?

Me: Monkey lover is getting his wish and Aida the LMD is getting incinerated at noon. I’ve ordered appetizers and cocktails for everyone else. Turns out, it is possible to get catering delivered to a place that doesn’t technically exist. At least in the DC Metro anyway.

HSBF: Are you sad about destroying the LMD?

Me: No because my James has authorized that we develop another LMD prototype with a different operating system. Preferably one that doesn’t look like anybody alive or dead. So, science will go on.

HSBF: Is that allowed under the Accords?

Me: What Radcliffe was doing? No. We are all trying to avoid another Ultron fiasco.

Me: There are some loopholes. Robots as tools are still allowed. So, to have an LMD that can disarm a bomb or go into a crumbling building and save lives is still a possibility. It just can’t have the ability to become omnipotent and decide that the world would be better off if all humans were dead. You know like last time.

HSBF: And you’re going to be working on it?
Me: A little bit, but Monkey Lover will be doing the heavy lifting. I might be doing some of the programming. My own programming. Also, princess Friday is lobbying for her own body.

Me: Maybe she wants to take Vision back from RED. I don’t know.

FRIDAY: Even though you based our personalities after Anna and Edwin Jarvis, Vision and I do not have a romantic affection for each other. We’ve always seen ourselves as siblings and your children.

Me: OK, then somebody wants a body like her big brother. Even AIs have sibling rivalry, apparently.

HSBF: Does this make you Red’s father-in-law?

Me: Probably. This is the only way I’m going to get kids. At least that’s what New York child welfare says.

HSBF: They rejected your application?

Me: Yes. All the money in the world can’t make up for some of the fucked-up things I’ve done. And they don’t even know about me taking a minor out of the country without the express consent of his Guardian to participate in the uncivil toddler squabble. That stupidity was like the ultimate red checkmark.

HSBF: I’m sorry, Tony.

Me: It’s OK.

Me: It’s not OK, but it’s OK because I’m moving forward. I have other things to worry about.

HSBF: Are you still having dinner soon with the king?

Me: No, apparently, I’m meeting with the Princess of Wakanda instead. I’m sure one of my State Department friends suggested it. Or Rhodey. Okay, maybe he’s not so okay with what’s happening.

HSBF: I doubt that. Also, why you?

Me: Apparently somebody needs to keep her occupied when big brother is forced to spend quality time at UN meetings and at various diplomatic receptions. Apparently, I’m the best person to do this. Although I’m kind of sad I’m not going to be at his meeting with outgoing Secretary Ross. That would require popcorn

Me: I just love saying outgoing Secretary. I’m terrified of who’s going to be stepping into the position next.

HSBF: People are still whispering about Osborne?

Me: Yep. As well as General Hale because the POTUS just loves the military and Val Cooper from Homeland Security who is just as Inhuman-phobic as Senator Hateful. Thankfully, she’s not on the list.

HSBF: That’s good at least.

Me: Personally, I feel like anybody POTUS chooses, if he gets a second term would be god awful because he has horrible taste in political appointees. I mean his cabinet has had multiple Hydra members. Multiple.
HSBF: He could nominate you.

Me: Oh God, I can see it. I’ve been spending a lot of time at the State Department recently. I would probably have more experience than any other option on the table. At least I would know what the agency actually does, which is more than Ross knew coming in. Locking up superheroes in a secret oceanic prison is not something the Secretary of State should be doing, but you know Ross.

HSBF: I think you would be a better Secretary of State then Ross

Me: That wouldn’t be that hard. Although I would worry about a certain person from HR trying to break into the office to shoot me. I am just kind of glad she’s at one of the remote offices outside of the DC Metro.

HSBF: Have you tried talking to her again?

Me: No, because nothing I say is going to bring her son back. Making a scholarship in his name is just a slap in the face. So, it’s best to just keep my distance.

HSBF: Good point.

Me: Besides, I seriously doubt POTUS will be going to choose a third Secretary of State.

HSBF: You never know.

Me: Okay before I leave for my LMD burning, should I bring the Princess to the playground or the upstate facility?

HSBF: Upstate facility. That way you can invite Benjamin. I doubt his aunt would let him skip classes to go to DC again, but maybe he can take the afternoon off. The Royal genius could use more time around 16-year-olds.

Me: People that smart at that age can benefit from spending more time around normal people. Benjamin is not normal, but normal-ish. I still regret skipping so many grades.

HSBF: I know. Will Monkey Lover be with you as well?

Me: I wasn’t planning for him to be there, but he should. I’ll ask him after the robot burning. I’ll let you know how things go in a few days. Also, if I can guarantee she’s no longer reading these text messages, we can do doctor Suarez’s consent exercise.

HSBF: Consent exercise?

Me: We talk about things that we are comfortable doing physically together as well as our hard limits. For example, I can probably do shower sex, but hot tub sex probably would trigger a panic attack. Waterboarding sucks.

HSBF: I’d rather we save that for an in-person conversation.

Me: Wise choice. It’s only a couple more days until we’re together again. I can’t wait.

HSBF: Me neither. Have a good robot burning.

Me: I’m not sure how much fun it can be, but the catering will be good. Anything can be better with good catering.

To be continued
Chapter Notes

Thank you to everybody who read or reviewed the last conversation. You are all absolutely lovely. Okay, it is time for another interlude where we explore why things are different in this timeline as opposed to MCU Canon as well as our hope that maybe things are different enough that certain things in Infinity War will not come to pass.

Thanks to the unexpected break the moratorium on discussing infinity war is over and it’s totally okay to talk about the season finale of agents of shield. Chapters are coming back from proofreading, so updates will be a little more regular.

For those of you reading this story on Archive of Our Own, you will notice that this is now a series entitled Use Your Words. The next update for this series will be posted as a separate story here, but part of the main story on fanfiction dot net. There’s a reason for that, which will become obvious when you read the next section. However, it is something that everybody has asked me for. I already created the series, so I recommend subscribing so you don’t miss any goodies from this universe.

Spoiler warning: This chapter also draws heavily from Agents of SHIELD up to episode 99/5.11 as well as the scenes in episodes 5. 15 and 5.16 that take place before episode 15.11 chronologically. There is also some Infinity War foreshadowing in this conversation, and therefore, spoilers for Infinity War. But hey, we are in a different timeline and one thing from the movie is definitely not coming to past here, which is Tony and Pepper being engaged. More notes after you read including who is who.

Finally, the “me” in this chapter is Lance Hunter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Monkey Lover 2: I think I threw up at least twice today. But at least she’s gone and never coming back. I watched her body burn. Then I incinerated the CPU that had her original code. I destroyed it all, except what I need to build a backup plan in case certain things still come to pass, like Robbie’s uncle. I’ve already created the antidote just in case that damn box shows up to bite us in the arse.

Me: You are still convinced that the future is finite, even though Stark and Mister America are making googly eyes at each other this time around?

Monkey lover 2: Maybe

Me: That explains your most recent bad choice. That’s what you get when you try to spare your baby brother from being stabbed in the back by his new father figure. I told you not to put yourself
through this pain and you did it anyway. I don’t like you being hurt.

Monkey lover 2: I know. I’m starting to think that I didn’t need to do this to prevent that. The only good thing that has come out of this is punching Radcliffe.

Me: Good on you. Also, why?

Monkey Lover 2: I think my baby brother has a closer relationship with Tony. Before we just occasionally emailed and messaged each other semi-anonymously until the Framework happened. This time around, he keeps checking up on me and invites my counterpart to dinner a lot. I’m not sure my baby brother as you put it would have decided to take Radcliffe’s side over his girlfriend because he was so desperate for a father figure because he has Tony Stark filling that role.

Me: I guess that’s one advantage of Operation: Get the Avengers Back Together Before the World is Cracked Apart and Aliens Invade. Although, I am surprised that all the bickering was actually sexual tension.

Monkey lover2: Me too. I forgot about the Tony Stark Gay Sex Tape. This state is preferable than before.

Me: It made you believe that the future wasn’t written in stone.

Monkey lover 2: Or maybe there is some merit to the multi-verse theory and I’m in a different dimension altogether. We never did find Ian Quinn in my original timeline.

Me: Maybe in your timeline, he didn’t get out of the truck before what you are looking for tried to eat him?

Monkey lover 2: Maybe. I’m at least inclined to believe that the future is not as finite as I believed previously. Let’s leave it at that.

Me: Thank God. Maybe things are different enough in this timeline/dimension or whatever already, so that baby brother wouldn’t be tempted to lie through his teeth to his girlfriend without your interference. Therefore, I didn’t have to be stuck for the last five days with the kid while you try to fix things.
Monkey lover 2: You liked me before. Also, I am still lying to Simmons.

Monkey lover 2: Okay baby brother is still lying to Simmons. This is all too confusing.

Me: Man wasn’t meant to time travel. Although, I like this version of you better. A bit of a darker edge. Also, you don’t get anywhere near as flustered with the sex jokes.

Me: Of course he’s not telling her the truth. Neither one of you is a bloody idiot. How do you tell your girlfriend that a version of yourself that’s already travelled to the future once managed to get thrown back in time when a bomb blew up three of the rocks that eat people?

Monkey lover 2: The bomb blew up three monoliths. They better be in separate countries by now. I’m almost positive that’s why the world broke apart.

Monkey lover 2: I’m 53% positive that’s what occurred. Of course, gravitonium could also be involved.

Me: They are. The Princess is studying the one we dropped off in her lab.

Me: Also it doesn’t matter what we call the bloody things. The ghost of girlfriends past would still turn you over to Dr. Suarez. Both versions of you.

Monkey lover 2: That wouldn’t be the worst thing. Maybe I should talk to Dr. Suarez. Sometimes I think this is all an hallucination.

Me: At some point you’re going to have to deal with what happened in the other timeline. Maybe with professional help. In the meantime, you can feel less guilty ensuring that your younger brother gets engaged without having to go into deep freeze for 70 some years to rescue her from scary blue aliens after what happened in the Framework/Hydra hell. That’s acceptable lying. It’s OK to lie to save the world. Neither you nor baby brother should feel guilty about that.

Monkey lover 2: I’m not entirely sure she will see it that way especially after we traded places so that he could run a secret mission and for me to handle the fallout from AIDA. I’m just glad Simmons is not here right now. How’s that going?
Me: Really well, I caught him looking at wedding rings while we were here. So I think the proposal is going to happen soon. I mean he knows that you and she got engaged before you went through another hole in the universe. That put the idea in his head to get it done before the world blows apart.

Monkey lover 2: That is not the mission I’m referring to. What about the other two monoliths?

Me: You already know that one is safely with the Princess. I was only called a colonizer once, so I take that as a good sign.

Monkey lover 2: Why are you always this infuriating?

Me: Because I’m pretty.

Me: Stop worrying. They have both been safely delivered to your undisclosed locations.

Me: Yes, I’m always this infuriating. Bobbi says it’s my gift. Which explains why we are never ever getting back together. Seriously, why did my other self think about marrying her again? I’m glad they got interrupted by ninjas. He really dodged a bullet there.

Monkey lover 2: What about the other thing? Will she help us?

Me: Congratulations, the Princess still believes you’re from the future. She is going to work on a contingency plan for her own citizens because apparently these are the type of people who will prepare for any contingency including invasion by shape shifting aliens because they are that smart. Okay, they already had “in case of alien invasion” plans drew up. The Princess is just going to modify them a bit.

Monkey lover 2: What about the Lighthouse?

Me: The Princess is willing to help with making the lighthouse less susceptible to a hostile alien take over if we don’t stop the world from cracking apart.
Monkey lover 2: Good

Me: But we’re going to stop it. So your extra preparations are just paranoia on your part, but they’re still going to do it.

Monkey lover 2: We are?

Me: Of course we are. You already got the Avengers on speaking terms again, which is a must if an apocalypse is on the horizon.

Me: Sort of, anyway. Okay, you got the leaders of the Avengers on speaking terms, which is what matters.

Monkey lover 2: This is true.

Me: The newly blonde Widow managed to get baby bird to the lighthouse before Sky Quake dumped her because my ex-wife was too busy doing God knows what to actually do what I asked. Definitely over.

Me: Oh by the way, the Princess said she will help Baby Bird not scribble the future. They’ve already developed tech to help their own gifted population, so helping one more wouldn’t be that hard.

Monkey lover 2: Good

Me: Although, do we really want to lose our guide? She’s been drawing this crazy big purple alien/raisin with a shiny glove, and I think his green daughter. That he hurls off a cliff, I think. Baby bird never really explains things well. I’m trying to decide if that’s an improvement on the world cracking apart.

Me: By the way she’s not drawing that anymore, at least not since a couple of hours ago. Which I guess lines up with destroying AIDA. I kind of want to know what that means.

Monkey lover 2: Yes. I have an idea what’s going to happen in the next couple years, although the
purple thing that she is drawing is new. I also have an idea of what we need to do to keep it from happening. Lots of destroying of old Hydra tech and investigating Talbot’s future replacement. Maybe I can’t keep the world from falling apart, but at least I can make small differences like making sure Baby Bird isn’t overwhelmed with visions of the past and future.

Me: You’re going to change things. Maybe you already have, because Baby Bird is drawing new stuff. At the very least, I don’t think Director Rhodes will make the same mistakes that the other guy did. Score another point for you.

Monkey lover 2: Maybe, or maybe we are going to keep making the same mistakes over and over again. Or worse, new ones that will lead to the same bad outcome or completely new one. What if nothing I do makes a difference? What if all roads still lead to hell and I’m just taking a different path to get there? I tried to keep Robin from getting her powers in the first place. Instead she got them earlier.

Me: Only by a few weeks and that may not necessarily be a bad thing.

Monkey lover 2: You are extremely infuriating.

Me I think we already covered that Iron Man and Captain America were not exchanging Mash notes in your original timeline. If the end of the world is coming, I’d rather have them on speaking terms. So that’s a big difference. Do you consider that your version of hell?

Monkey lover 2: That’s not what I meant. I’m not sure if Stark not being back with Pepper Potts will keep the world from being destroyed.

Me: She actually went back to him? Seriously? Why?

Monkey lover 2: Yes, actually. There may have been engagement rumors. I didn’t exactly have time to keep up with twitter when I was incarcerated.

Me: That’s definitely not happening in this timeline. Also, the Princess is going to help little bird. Another difference. Also, things are already really over with Bobbi romantically because I’m definitely no Pepper Potts, from the other timeline, anyway. Another difference. We’re going to keep the world from being cracked apart and maybe deal with the purple raisin she keeps drawing.
Me: Okay, probably you and the Princess are going to keep the world from ending and I’m here to help.

Monkey lover 2: Did I ever mention how glad I am that the portal dropped me off next to you?

Me: Never. You’re so ungrateful. I think you’re actually being sarcastic right now.

Monkey lover 2: I am grateful. I couldn’t get through this without you.

Me: I’m sure you could allow your baby brother to be with the love of your life without emotional support. He’s so head over feet in love with her, he doesn’t even respond to my flirting like you. At least you blush and get flustered.

Monkey lover 2: He’s Simmons sexual, and he thinks you’re completely Bobbi sexual. Although, he, or rather I, did have a tiny crush on Ward until he dumped us in the ocean.

Me: Nothing destroys a relationship faster than being stabbed in the back. I should know, that’s how my last marriage ended.

Monkey lover 2: Your only marriage.

Me: It still ended because we couldn’t trust each other. I thought it got better, but apparently it didn’t.

Monkey lover 2: I’m sorry.

Me: It’s all right. Just try not to sleep with Simmons while you’re under cover and get back to me soon.

Monkey lover 2: Of course not. She’s not even here. I don’t want to be killed by my baby brother.

Me: We really have to come up with different names for you two.
Monkey lover 2: He’s Fitz, I am Leopold

Me: Soon to be Mr. Fitz-Simmons. And he just walked into the room. And may have heard me dictating that to the phone. He’s scowling right now.

Monkey lover 2: Of course he is.

Me: He also told me to tell you that he’ll meet you in New York to switch back. You should make sure that your part of the group meeting the Princess. He will be coming back with the delegation.

Monkey lover 2: That’s fine. The director already asked me to go along to mediate. Apparently, there are some questions about where Stark Senior got the materials for the shield now belongs to May.

Me: That does not surprise me.

Monkey lover 2: I’ll see you soon.

Me: I’ll be waiting for you at home base. I promise to wear something sexy.

Monkey lover 2: You’re ridiculous. I’ll see you soon.

Me: Don’t die.

Monkey lover 2: Don’t die either.

Xxxxx

“Does he realize that you have a crush on him?” Hunter heard baby Fitz ask as he placed the secret Stark tech communicator in his pocket. He really wanted one of those bead phones that everyone else walking around has but he’s afraid to ask.

“I do not have a crush on you. Your girlfriend would rip off my balls.” Hunter remarked.
“Not me, the one from the other timeline. Do you have a crush on Leopold?” Fitz asked.

“So you really did christen him Leopold? That’s a little cruel to do to yourself.” Fitz just glared at him for a moment.

“We’re not the same person. Well genetically we are but we are more like identical twins. Well, mostly. His time in space altered his DNA a little bit. It’s really quite fascinating.” Fitz started to ramble.

“You’re still alike where it counts. Also you’re both easily prone to jealousy. You’re only suggesting this because you don’t want him to make a move on your girlfriend.” Hunter argued.

“I’m not worried about that. We were both willing to get Will off of that planet to make Simmons happy. We will do what is necessary for her happiness at any cost to ourselves.” Fitz argued back, much to Hunter’s annoyance.

“Okay, you’re both ridiculously noble. It’s sickening, really. It doesn’t change the fact that he’s in love with his Simmons and maybe the moment I actually do anything she’ll pop through a hole in the universe and grab him.” Knowing his relationship track record, that could truly happen.

“And that may be years from now. Besides, she did sleep with hog face when she thought she was never going to get off that planet. She would understand. It would only be fair.”

“I knew even though you’re looking at engagement rings, you’re still upset about that.” Hunter grins.

“I’m new to this having a sibling thing, but I think you’re supposed to want them to be happy. Of course if you don’t make him happy, I will find a way to kill you.” Fitz threatened. “By the way, I think Robin drew a picture of the two of you holding hands at my wedding to Simmons.” Hunter was not even surprised.

“I’m going to go find some alcohol before we leave.” He is not going to have this discussion with a younger version of Leopold Fitz, especially because apparently there is a “prophecy” about it. This palace must have alcohol somewhere.
To be continued

Chapter End Notes

To clarify monkey lover 2 is Leo Fitz from the main MCU timeline where everything went totally as Canon including Tony and Steve not speaking to each other. (There are few differences, such as Fitz knew that Coulson was dying a little earlier, thanks to the artwork of Robin Huntington a.k.a. baby bird a.k.a. sparrow and Quinn not getting gobbled by the gravitonium.) When the monolith blew up in episode 5.11 (timewise this is a few weeks before Infinity War during the events of Thor Ragnarok) Agent Fitz was tossed back in time nearly 2 years. Now he’s trying to keep the world from being destroyed by an unknown force. And if that doesn’t work, his goal is to keep humanity from being slaves of the Kree. Although by preventing one catastrophe does he cause another? We shall see. The new pictures of the purple alien are starting to freak him out. More to come.

Additional notes: I also recently re-watched AOS episode 3.22 and realize that the writers engaged in rapid soap Opera aging syndrome when it came to Robin Huntington. She went from stroller size to seven years old in about a year and a half in universe. Because of the beauty of fanfiction, I’m going to correct that. So in this story Robin is 5 ½ years old and already has her powers.

Continuity notes regarding other MCU shows: Cloak and Dagger takes place before the timeline divided and therefore all of that takes place in this universe. Right now it looks like nothing is going to contradict this story.

Luke Cage season 2 occurs after the timeline divided and therefore some of the things Leo Fitz did to prevent the upcoming apocalypse did lightly affect some things on that show. So in this universe, a lot of what happened did happen the same way, but there were a few differences. Just remember if something contradicts go with my version.
Chapter Notes

Thank you to everyone who read or reviewed the last conversation. You are all absolutely wonderful. So this is something different but I think you’ll like it.

Several individuals have asked for a guide to the code names Tony and others use in this crazy story. After receiving several requests for this due to the confusing nature of Interlude 22, I decided to finally do it. I’m giving you one as written by Princess Shuri because even geniuses can get confused when reading the cryptic messages of Tony Stark.

On archive of our own I posted this as a separate story so it’s easier for everyone to come back to it for reference purposes, but there are plot points in the glossary/guide, especially in part two that everyone needs to read, so I’ve decided to also post as part of the main story so no one misses anything.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Nicknames for myself: Royal Genius, the Princess genius, and HRH. HRH is my current designation in Friday’s system. Dr. Stark and Capt. Rogers know that I am reading these messages. I will continue to monitor for security reasons and will scrub when necessary.

Recurring codenames related to Stark and Rogers:

- **Red Malibu**: Strategic Homeland Intervention, Enforcement and Logistics Division (S.H.I.E.L.D.) designated codename for Dr. Anthony “Tony” Stark - Carbonell. He uses his Mother’s maiden name privately not publicly. Goes by Anthony Carbonell on twitter. Only a few SI staff members and celebrities such as Chris Evans knows this. Does not like to be referred to as doctor unless he hates you or you are being a condescending asshole.

The Mechanic: Another nickname for Tony Stark. Official codename in the Avenger message system/database. Currently trying to convince system to label my sibling King as Kitty Brother.

Captain Tight Pants: Early nickname for Captain Steve Rogers when Tony was still in denial about his feelings for the captain.
Note: Steve does not want us to refer to him as Captain anymore, but I’m doing it anyway.

**Nomad:** Current codename in the Avenger message system/database. Currently, the only member of the U.S. government outside of shield that realizes Nomad and Captain America are the same person is General Glenn Talbot.

**Cuddle Bunny:** Preferred term of endearment for Captain Rogers. No longer being used due to the fact it may be known to Secretary Ross and or the NSA. Stark is currently cycling through multiple terms of endearment, mostly related to food. There are too many to include here. Friday has confirmed that he is cycling through an actual list but refuses to turn this list over to me.

**HSBF:** Acronym that stands for hot sexy boyfriend. Current designation for Steve Rogers in Tony Stark’s address book.

**Stephen Carter:** Alias created for Steve Rogers. This is who the press currently believes Tony is dating. 78% of the press anyway. The remaining 22% believes that this is a lie and Tony is actually dating Chris Evans. No one has publicly claimed that Stefan Carter is Steve Rogers, at least not outside of Freaking Cool.

Note: Freaking Cool is a US-based fanfiction archive. Stony is the most popular Avenger ship followed by Widow Quake. 52.1% of the stories are rated M or higher.

**Original Friends of Tony Stark:**

**Pepper Pot:** Nickname for Stark Industries CEO Virginia "Pepper" Potts. Former significant other. Slowly rebuilding friendship.

**Happy:** Nickname for friend and former chief of SI security Harold Hogan. Recently demoted due to incident in September 2016. Relationship currently very, very complicated because he is upset that Tony choose Steve over Ms. Potts despite the fact that the couple were already broken up for more than a year when Tony’s relationship began with Steve. Not to mention the fact she was already dating someone else.

**Director Snookums:** James "Rhodey" Rhodes a.k.a. War Machine a.k.a. Iron Patriot. Currently Director of S.H.I.E.L.D. (Apparently the agency was never actually disbanded, just went underground). Promoted to General before assignment to the agency. Sometimes referred to as “my James”. Best friend to Tony Stark.
**Tony’s Kids:**

**Note:** No Avenger affiliate person under 18 is referred to by their real names, including myself. Usually a name similar sounding will be used and will be changed occasionally. I have chose not to decipher this. Below are a list of those with more specific code names.

**Lily Bear:** This refers to the daughter of Laura Barton, Dr. Stark’s sober companion.

**Ms. Marvelous and Ms. Marvel:** refers to Kamala Khan formerly of Jersey City. Currently relocated to an undisclosed location due to being targeted by the “Watchdogs”. Best friend to “Lily Bear”. Spends a lot of time on Freaking Cool with the parental blocks firmly in place to filter out all the M or higher stories.

Note to self: Add Watchdogs to groups for intelligence to watch. Look into possible funding from Russia for the anti-inhuman organization.

**Benji, Benjamin, Spidey, Teenage Mutant Ninja Spider (TMNS), and Queens:** refers to Peter Parker a.k.a. Spider Man of YouTube. Participated in the airport incident. TMNS is his official codename in the Avenger database/messaging service.

**Queens Junior, Spidey Junior and Baby Spider:** refers to Miles Morales of Queens. Father former Shield, may have been recruited by Hydra. Now NYPD. Uncle small-time criminal but aided Spider-Man during Vulture incident.

**Baby Bird:** Robin Hinton a.k.a “preschooler whose scribbles predict the future”. Absolutely adorable but terrified of her powers. Poor baby, lost her father a few months before me due to his gifts. See classified file for additional information.

**Avengers and/or Shield Agents:**

**Purple Arrow:** Refers to Clint a.k.a. Hawkeye and is an allusion to the Green Arrow comic book series. Official Avenger database codename. Retired shield agent.
His wife is sometimes referred to as Mrs. Purple Arrow or counselor Laura. Sober companion to Stark as well as case manager to under age individuals with powers. Newly minted Shield agent.

**Lily Bear’s Aunt/Clint’s sister:** Natalia Alianovna "Natasha" Romanoff a.k.a. Black Widow. Ayo hates her.

**Red:** Wanda Maximoff, a.k.a. Scarlet Witch (media nickname). Stark sometimes refers to her as his daughter-in-law due to eloping with the Vision.


**Yo-Yo:** Elena Rodriguez Shield agent and member of the UN Avengers. Colombian national seeking asylum in the United States. Former assistant to Tony Stark, now working for Stark Industries as a security consultant as part of her cover identity.

**Agent America:** Melinda Qiaolian May nee Garner. Also referred to as Captain Rogers’s former girlfriend. Agent of Shield and member of UN Avengers. Current keeper of the Captain America shield. Completely in love with “Agent Agent” and refuses to admit it.

**Agent Agent:** Phillip J. "Phil" Coulson former director of SHIELD and current agent. According to intelligence, he is the one who knows what he is doing. Died during the battle of New York, but only temporary.

**Dr. Monkey Lover:** Nickname for Dr. Leopold Fitz of Shield. Currently dating Dr. Simmons. See top-secret file for additional information.

**Skye Quake:** Daisy Johnson, Former alias Skye. Referred to in the media as Quake. Former Rising Tide member. Former Shield agent. Currently tracking the terrorist group known as the Watchdogs. Technically wanted by the U.S. government but they’re not looking that hard.

**Bullet Proof Pacifist:** Code name assigned by Stark to José "Joey" Gutierrez. Inhuman with the power to manipulate metals. Need to see if this means all metals. Standby member of the UN Avengers. Currently functioning as Spider-Man’s babysitter.
Agent Mack a.k.a. Yo-Yo’s boyfriend: Shield Agent Alphonso "Mack" Mackenzie. Dating UN Avengers member Elena Rodriguez.


It’s complicated:

Your James: Sergeant James Buchanan "Bucky" Barnes a.k.a. the Winter Soldier a.k.a. Bucky Barnes a.k.a. White Wolf (as the children are referring to him). Murdered Stark’s parents in 1991 due to being brainwashed and tortured by Hydra. Before kidnapping and torture was best friend to Steve Rogers since childhood. He is currently doing well on his treatment regimen, including therapy. He is starting to share anecdotes about his childhood with the Captain. Contrary to what Steve believes, James always knew of Steve’s relationship with Artie.

The Villains of this Piece:

Senator Hateful: Senator Ellen Nadeer of New Jersey. Anti-inhuman extremist. Lost both parents during the battle of New York. Currently being investigated by intelligence. They are trying to locate her brother who has not been seen in eight months. Intelligence believes that she may have done something to him. Need to discuss this with Dr. Leopold in person soon.

S: refers to Secretary of State Thaddeus ”Thunderbolt" Ross. Commonly used nickname in the US for the Secretary of State. Not to be confused with CIA Ross aka “Evan” Ross (Everett Kenneth Ross whom Stark occasionally miss names and refers to as “poor man’s Coulson”.)

Chapter End Notes

If there are any other important names that I forgot to include, please include them in the comments and I can always do a follow-up list later. Also, please note that I’m going to be away on vacation, so it’s going to be at least two weeks before I post anything else. Although I’m hoping that I can get some proofreading done while out.
Chapter Notes

Thank you to everyone who read or left comments on the confidential annotations. You’re all absolutely wonderful. I had a really good vacation. Although I didn’t get any writing done. Thankfully for you guys, I sent a bunch of stuff off to proofreading before leaving. Now I have lots of chapters to update. The only story I’m not updating this weekend is Hydra Lullaby because that story is currently sharing a beta with this one (although if anybody would like to volunteer so that is no longer the case, I would appreciate it).

Here is the spoiler heavy annotations from our favorite princess.

Warning: This contains major spoilers for Infinity War and Agents of Shield season 5.

I’m not seeing Ant-Man and the Wasp until tomorrow and thanks to being somewhere without Internet for a couple of days, I managed to avoid heavy spoilers. I have no idea how it affects continuity yet, but again, the 30 day moratorium on spoilers is still in effect for that movie.

**Monkey Lover 2:** He is a Dr. Leopold Fitz from possibly another timeline or dimension, brought to our dimension by the explosion of multiple interdimensional portals called monoliths. I am trying to determine if he comes from a later point in our own timeline or from a parallel dimension. So far my research is inconclusive. To prevent any confusion with his original dimension/timeline counterpart, I will be referring to him as Dr. Leopold.

According to Dr. Leopold, he is from early 2018, sort of. This is where it gets convoluted. In late spring 2017, six of his coworkers were kidnapped by a “sentient Chronicom” and sent through a portal to 2091, where the last remnants of humanity live in a settlement called the Lighthouse ran by blue aliens referred to as the Kree. Apparently in this timeline Earth was destroyed in mid to late 2018 by an earthquake that cause the world to break apart. The exact date and catalyst for the destruction of Earth is unknown. Yes, it seems far-fetched, but if an ancestral plane exists, then other dimensions must as well. Therefore, it must also be possible to travel between different points in time.

Dr. Leopold was left behind and arrested. After escaping an unknown high security prison with the assistance of Lance Hunter, he cryogenically froze himself and woke up in 2091 in time to prevent the extinction of the rest of humanity and then traveled back with his coworkers to March 2018. Shortly after arriving in 2018, an explosion in the vicinity of three monoliths caused Dr. Leopold to be thrown back in time 22 months and land in the bed of friend and former coworker Lance Hunter.
I believe he is telling the truth, for multiple reasons, including the fact that I have been exchanging scientific notes with him since I was 11, after being introduced to him by Dr. Weaver. The doctor is a daughter of Wakanda and she vouched for him. In addition, Dr. Leopold has passed multiple polygraphs. Furthermore, his genetic tissue shows signs of being in long term cryo-stasis. Also, his genetic structure is slightly different than that of the Leopold Fitz from this timeline (for the sake of simplicity, I will be referring to him as Dr. Fitz). This is in line with information from NASA’s twin study, which is currently in progress.

In addition, the monolith dropped off in my lab to have been studying for the last two days does seem to be capable of generating trans-dimensional portals, thus leading credence to the story. Currently I am trying to determine how the monoliths create portals.

Yes, I believe Dr. Leopold is from a future, if not necessarily my future, and therefore for the sake of my people, I must heed his warning and prepare us for the worst possible consequences. I will not have the blood of my people on my hands.

At the same time I would like for Leopold to see a psychiatrist but he seems to be to focus on trying to prevent the end of the world. The obsession with preventing this is unhealthy. I have discussed this with his partner Lance Hunter well and he has agreed to assist with this endeavor.

Robin Huntington: Codenames Baby Bird and Sparrow. She is a five-year-old “Inhuman” who can predict the future, but also see the past. I believe this is true because she knew about Eric and that knowledge could only come by some outside force. It is a deep shame known only to select few because they witnessed it.

Because the Sparrow sees harsh visions of the past and future, she is nonverbal and her visions only come out in her drawings. Her first vision was that of her father’s death after it happened.

I have agreed to assist her with her powers. We have technology designed to control powers of the gifted among our people but I believe I will need to customize the technology. If my brother can keep bringing broken white boys for me to fix then I should be able to help this young girl. She’s a baby. Thankfully, my brother has allowed it, despite being unaware of the true necessity.

I do wonder if I should design something to control when she sees the vision instead of blocking it all together. Dr. Leopold says we do not need these visions to change the future, he already has seen the future. I believe that the future has changed too much for what he saw to come to pass. But I feel that there is a threat upon the horizon that we need her for if we are to survive it.
When the young Sparrow arrived three days ago her drawings collaborated Leopold story about the
earth being destroyed. However, 22 hours ago her drawings changed. Instead of the world being
cracked in half, a giant purple raisin like alien/creature standing my ancestral lands with a Golden
Glove encrusted with jewels. In one picture, he turned my brother to dust.

I am positive what she is drawing is a future attack on Wakanda. I would know my home anywhere.
Even if it was drawn in colored pencil, by a small child. The change in what the young Sparrow was
drawing coincides with the distraction of Adia and the arrest of Dr. Radcliff. When asked why she
was drawing this purple creature, her only response was to earth wasn’t going to crack anymore.
“The mechanic fixed it and now the general won’t happen.” I have no idea who this general is, but I
know I must be prepared.

I am meeting with Tony Stark soon to assess if he should know that there are currently two Leopold
Fitz is in this timeline as well as the fret that is yet to come. After reading his correspondence with
Captain Rogers, I believe I can trust him, but I still have reservations. Knowing the future is a burden
that not everyone can handle.

I have not told my brother any of this, mostly because I am concerned he would assume I was
suffering from hallucinations caused by grief for Father. Obviously the story seem illogical, but I’m
not losing him. Not if there’s a chance that I can keep it from happening. I won’t lose anyone else.
Conversation 68: Would you be Upset If

Chapter Notes

Thank you to everybody who read or reviewed the last conversation. You are all absolutely fabulous. I know you probably have more questions but I hope that the Princess annotations have helped some. More answers to come as the story goes on.

I was going to wait another week before posting while I wait for more chapters to come in, but since the last two chapters have not been part of the main story, I decided to go ahead and post this one. However, on there will be at least a two week wait for the next one.

Continuity note: I did see Ant-man and the Wasp last weekend. I really liked it. The movie takes place after our continuity divide (about a year and a half from our current point in the story). So it’s possible some changes made in this continuity could affect that movie, especially the post-credit scene. But that’s something that would most likely happen in the infinity war/Avengers 4 fix it sequel for this story, if I do one (I’m 80% certain I am going to be writing a follow-up story). However, I did a tiny call forward to that movie in this chapter. See if you can spot it.

This conversation takes place on November 1, 2016

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Tony: So, would you be upset if your shield was returned to a certain country due to the fact that Howard may have did something slightly illegal and definitely amoral to get it?

Me: I’m not surprised. It’s not really my shield anymore. It’s Melinda’s call now.

Tony: Which means she’ll keep it, just so Agent won’t cry. She just loves her little Agent, even though she will never tell him that.
Tony: Unless he’s dying again and we don’t want that.

Me: Still?

Tony: Yes. Also as sexy as I think that shield is, I realized that the design is kind of a waste of very rare materials that you can do so much with. The communication beads are awesome. Also the use of the nanotech fiber is brilliant. I’ve been dealing with tech envy for most of the day.

Tony: I mean, I’ve been working on something like that for the suit, but I’m not quite there. I was at least two more months out from having something fully ready.

Me: So I assume the diplomatic visit did happen?

Tony: Yes. The Director is still on the fence about taking advantage of certain technologies to completely heal himself. He kind of likes being an advocate for the disabled community. So he’s taking a moment to consider all the consequences.

Me: That is understandable.

Tony: Good news. Benji has a new BFF. There was a lot of binging on Halloween candy involved. The Princess genius likes the jack-o’-lantern peeps. She’s taking a case home with her.

Me: How bad was the sugar high?

Tony: Absolutely awful. The Princess kept trying to convince Friday to refer to her royal sibling as Kitty brother. By convince, I mean, trying to get into my systems, more than once.

Tony: I’m pretty sure I’ve put Pepper through worse though. Although, I think cocaine was involved.

Me: That would not surprise me.
Tony: Overall it was a really good visit despite feeling like most of my research is 10 years behind which pretty much means the royal super genius is 50 years ahead of everyone but me and probably Monkey Lover.

Tony: Okay, I am going to have to deal with Howard shit but really, what else is new. I’m always going to be paying for the sins of Howard. I really wish he would have said “Hell no,” when they wanted Shield to participate in Project Paperclip. I’m sure we haven’t even begin to deal with all the ghosts from that bad decision yet.

Me: That’s true.

Tony: Thankfully, nobody’s using it against me personally, probably because the royal genius has been reading our text messages to each other. I think she has a better opinion of me because of that.

Me: If I have a better opinion of you because of that, then it’s obvious she would.

Tony: She absolutely promises to stop reading said text messages by the way.

Me: Do you think she’ll actually stop?

Tony: Absolutely not. Which is why we are never ever going to have text message sex. It’s bad enough that she knows about what I did to that poster.

Me: I agree.

Tony: This is also why I didn’t object when she finished the framework project in like an hour. I’m bringing the prototype with me to Mumbai. Only three days until I can actually kiss you in person and do other things. Other things I will not discuss due to the fact that these messages could be read by a certain teenager.

Me: I can’t wait to see you either. Although would you be upset if I didn’t show up to the hotel alone?

Tony: Why do I have a feeling you’re not talking about a three-way?
Tony: I’m not totally opposed but it would have to be someone I trust and Agent America might be the only person on the list at the moment. Of course Agent would kill us both or ask to join. I’m not sure which because his crush on you is legendary. Do you know that you were who got him through his father’s murder when he was nine? Or at least it was the Captain America comic books that kept his head above water during the worst of it.

Me: I didn’t know that. Also, didn’t you just say that we should not have conversations like this?

Tony: Oh yes we’re saving the kink negotiations until we can see each other face-to-face. Along with other conversations that may or may not be cathartic.

Me: I was talking about bringing the counselor with me. Last time I could leave him with Red but that’s not an option this time.

Tony: Because she eloped with my sort-of son? Why did I encourage that relationship?

Me: I don’t know if they actually got married but yes. And it’s because you’re a good person and a hopeless romantic at heart.

Tony: OK, I will ask Mary to book another suite at the Oberoi. It’s in the financial district. And lovely. It’s fine. You know I can afford lots of suites at five-star hotels.

Tony: Besides, Yo-Yo is coming, I think. It depends on if she finds the guy who keeps burning various criminals alive in East LA. Otherwise, I’m bringing other random agents with me because my BFF won’t let me bring Monkey Lover or Agent America. But hey they’ll have somebody to hang out with.

Tony: Well, he or possibly she mostly burning criminals alive. The Rider eviscerated a teacher last week. That doesn’t quite fit the usual profile.

Me: Are you sure the guy wasn’t a pedophile?

Tony: That actually sounds like a possibility. I’ll pass it on to Yo-Yo. It’s a Shield thing, not an Avenger thing. So she’s kind of running it on her own.
Me: You miss your friend?

Tony: Yes, even though Mary is a capable assistant she’s just an employee, not a friend and teammate like Yo-Yo. Although, since I did the right thing with the robot that could pass for human, I realized I have other friends, besides Monkey Lover and Yo-Yo. Mack is making me watch Chopping Mall again next time I’m in DC. Probably when I get back from fun with you in Mumbai. I want to do something with chocolate sauce.

Me: That’s really an actual movie?

Tony: Yes. See you in Mumbai in a couple of days, my snuggle leopard. I might even have a surprise for you if you’re well behaved.

Me: I may already be packed. I really miss you

Tony: Miss you too, snuggles.

Xxx

“So you decided not to tell him that I’m coming with you to Mumbai to tell him whatever the Princess told you that you don’t want him to deal with alone?” Natasha asked as soon as Tony put his phone down.

“The Princess genius is probably still reading these messages and I don’t want her to tell her brother because I’m not quite sure how he feels about you at the moment. Especially when they are still in the country and I don’t exactly want to risk getting you turned over to the FBI or the CIA in an effort to improve international relations. The president named Ross, CIA Ross, official representative to the country until an ambassador is appointed. Which, you know won’t happen until a New Secretary of State is confirmed, probably sometime in January.”

“You do care.” Natasha smirked at him.

“Only because you are my boyfriend’s friend and Lily Bear’s favorite aunt. That poor kid is already damaged enough especially with the parents arguing about mommy wanting to stay a secret agent. I can’t add to that.”
“Of course not.”

“I was told pointblank to not say anything about Bucky being deprogrammed via any type of electronic communication. It’s almost like she’s testing me. I really, really want to get laid in Mumbai so I’m not to do anything that may accidentally lead the military to invade another country to get Steve’s BFF back.”

“Of course, this is really about you getting laid.” Natasha said with an annoyed sigh.

“Seriously, why are you here? You can go bug May or Clint? Why didn’t you show up on Agent America’s doorstep?” Tony asked.

“Because May lives on a government base and I just finished up by Lake Ontario. You were closer. Also, you can bring me to Steve and he needs me more. Especially, when you tell him he can’t visit his best friend that starting to remember who he is again.” Tony sighed at her words and really wishes that Monkey Lover didn’t tell Romanoff anything. Also really wishes that the conversation where he found out about Barnes didn’t happen in front of Monkey Lover, but apparently he is friends with the royal genius. They’ve collaborated in the past. Apparently, Romanoff was another accomplice in whatever secret plan was going on between everybody. Obviously, there was a lot going on that he didn’t know about.

“Of course you were.” Tony sighed. “And yes I’d rather have you watching Steve’s back now that Wanda decided to go get married or whatever.”

“I may not like you personally but we both care about Steve. I will watch his back for you. Although not quite like you do. Less leering.” Natasha snarked.

“Although, aren’t you supposed to still be babysitting Skye Quake for Agent May?” Tony asked.

“She decided to go after the Watchdogs by herself. She abandoned me at an old Shield safe house off of Lake Ontario.”

“I feel like there’s a story there.” Because he was sure that Romanoff was not telling him everything.
“One I will never tell you.” Romanoff responded as she pulled back her now blonde hair into a ponytail. That’s when Tony noticed a mark on her neck.

“Is that a hickey on your neck?” Okay what happened when she was with Daisy?

“I have no trouble killing you.” Tony wasn’t entirely sure she was serious or not.

“That would make Steve sad.”

“I can live with that.”

“And Lily bear. You know she is still mad at you for disappearing for over six months with nothing more than the one card to let her mom know that you were okay. That kid has some serious separation anxiety.” Tony remarked.

“I hate you.”

“No you don’t. Especially because I convinced Mister and Mrs. Purple Arrow to bring the kids over before we leave for India.”

“I hate you less and will not try to convince Steve to date anybody else.” Natasha tells him with a smile.

“That’s all I ask for.”

To be continued.
Chapter End Notes

Mumbai is coming.

Natasha’s back and the Secret Avenger Trinity are making their way toward each other.
Thank you to everyone who read or reviewed the last conversation. The AOS season finale discussion moratorium is no longer in effect now that the episode has finally aired in the UK. (Although, because Ant-man and the Wasp was just released in the UK, I am extending the moratorium for another month, to be fair.)

So feel free to speculate how the show and Infinity War will influence this story or how things will be different in this timeline. But no matter what happens, remember that Tony and Steve are in a much better place because they got over themselves. And maybe just maybe the two Fitzs can live together in harmony, without one of them having a bridge dropped on him. Now, let’s celebrate that we are currently in Mumbai.

Please note this is the last chapter I have back from proofreading. I hope to get more back soon, but we shall see. I am in need of another proofreader to work on either Marvel or Star Trek stories (I’ll even take someone willing to do my Ugly Betty stories). That way I can have one person doing each story which does speed things up. Please contact me if you are interested.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

HSBF: Do I want to know why the woman at the front desk is completely convinced that I’m Chris Evans checking into the hotel under a fake name?

HSBF: Also why does no one realize that your real name is Anthony Carbonell? Didn’t you go to classes at MIT under that name?

Me: I don’t even think most people know mom’s maiden name. Or how paranoid Howard was. Or the fact that that was the name I used when I was at smart kid boarding school and MIT.

Me: Most people thought I was at Harvard for the first two months until Obadiah said something to the press. I really should’ve realized he was a lying bastard right then and there.

HSBF: That still doesn’t explain the Chris Evans thing.

Me: Well Honey Bunches of Muscles you really really look like Chris Evans right now because he’s growing a beard for a part. Like you could be his twin, so let us just let Ross and everyone else think
that for the moment.

HSBF: Isn’t he concerned with trying to rebuild his image?

Me: And packing. Mostly packing. It’s hard to rebuild his image considering everything he’s done. And I say this as somebody who’s bounced back from murder bots.

HSBF: So why are you worried about him?

Me: Okay, I’m more concerned with Senator Hateful and General Hale. There’s still rumors about Hale possibly succeeding Ross, if you-know-who wins the election. I think she hates you, so that’s something I’m hoping to avoid. Monkey Lover really dislikes her for some reason. He thinks she is secretly evil and is trying to prove it.

HSBF: I’m not surprised.

Me: So what do you think of the rooms? How are the views?

HSBF: It’s really nice, but you didn’t need to rent out an entire floor. You definitely did not have to give the counselor an entire spa day.

Me: Of course I did. Even five-star hotels have thin walls.

Also, there are only four suites on that floor. One is ours. One belongs to your live-in counselor. One room is for Happy and the other suite is for agents Piper and Davis to share.

HSBF: What happened to Yo-Yo? I thought she was coming with you.

Me: She was until various members of the Aryan Brotherhood were made extra crispy by the Rider of East LA yesterday. Your ex-girlfriend flew out there last night to help with the investigation.

HSBF: So this vigilante is still going after bad people?
Me: That may be connected to the Watchdogs which is why Agent America was called in. Which is fine because the BFF already said no.

HSBF: The Director wouldn’t let you come alone?

Me: Nope. And apparently he’s been collaborating with Pepper Pot and they feel like Happy and I need to work on our feelings, which is why he was on my private jet when we left Manhattan last night.

HSBF: How did the flight go?

Me: Happy didn’t try to convince me beg Pepper for forgiveness/to take me back.

HSBF: That’s good.

Me: Even though the moron dumped Pepper for somebody from the Hunger Games or some other young adult franchise. I’m not sure which. I had a little rage blackout when I was talking to Pepper.

HSBF: That’s not good.

Me: Oh, no worries. I’m sure he’ll be spending quality time at a Congressional hearing about customer privacy by the end of the month.

HSBF: It’s the beginning of November.

Me: That gives me plenty of time to enact my revenge. Don’t say anything about the breakup. It hasn’t made it to the press yet because Jane is still trying to figure out a way to make Robert come out like the asshole that he is without damaging Pepper because our society is sexist as hell. It’s always the woman’s fault.

HSBF: So did you talk to Happy at all on the flight here?

Me: I slept a lot and maybe answered a few emails. Even though Mary set up a few meetings for me
while I’m here, I prefer not to have to look at my work email again until Monday at the earliest.

HSBF: Understandable. Why have agents Davis and Piper come with you? They’re not here to arrest me on your best friend’s behalf?

Me: No. Actually, they’re here because somebody has to make sure Happy doesn’t try to punch you. Not that it would hurt you.

Me: Okay they’re also here to make sure I don’t punch him. It was a near thing on the plane.

HSBF: I feel like something else happened on the plane here.

Me: Happy still doesn’t like you. I think he’s convinced himself that if you weren’t around Pepper and I would have gotten back together, despite the fact that none of the reasons why we broke up in the first place have been resolved. When we were both with other people, he was backing down. But now that she’s single again, I feel like all bets are off.

HSBF: Have you explained to him that you feel you’re better off as friends because you both want different things? Mainly she wants you to stop risking your life and you’re never going to want to stop saving people.

Me: Yes.

HSBF: Apart from the letter.

Me: No. You know me way too well.

HSBF: Now I do because you actually tell me stuff.

Me: Trust me, I wish I could have brought Coulson instead, especially because things are so tensed between him and Purple Arrow. However, the unofficial historian of Shield needs to give a guided tour the base to several senators sometime next week to secure funding for new Shield since seizing assets from Hydra just won’t work anymore.
HSBF: That doesn’t seem like fun.

HSBF: I mean that having to deal with senators thing.

Me: Of course, especially because it’s going to be the day after election day.

HSBF: This may not go well.

Me: Totally an understatement. It’s probably going to be in disaster, but I hope to be lying in bed beside you at that point.

HSBF: Where are you? I assume you’re not calling me in flight.

Me: We are a block from the hotel right now. We’re stuck in traffic. I’m tempted to get out and walk. I wish I could just fly to you.

HSBF: How absolutely tragic.

Me: So tragic. Did you find your outfit for the wedding?

HSBF: Yes. And I’ve already tried it on. Sam took pictures. I’m sending them to you now.

Me: Bless my tailor and I’m just going to walk because you look absolutely edible in that. Blue is your color. I don’t even think alterations will be necessary. Your ass looks extra delicious. It pops.

HSBF: Sometimes I worry about you. Remember teenagers could be reading this.

Me: Don’t. And of course I remember because I’m not vividly describing in graphic detail what I want to do to you as soon as I make it to the room.
HSBF: I appreciate that.

Me: Also I should probably mention before I’m doing the things that we don’t want the kiddies to know about in 10 minutes that we no longer have to meet the person from the New York Times Monday. Which you know means more time to rip off your clothes or you rip off my clothes between my mandatory business meetings.

Me: It’s probably going to be that way because you have the super strength and you can like split a log with your bare hands. Did I ever tell you how hot that was? I wanted to climb you like a tree.

HSBF: Please remember we have a 16-year-old voyeur.

Me: Probably more than one. Mission Control and the princess genius have bonded. They’re probably best friends now, so he’s probably helping her read these things.

HSBF: How did they even meet?

Me: I’m not even sure. I think Benji was involved maybe. It doesn’t matter because the 36 questions that lead to love interview is dead.

HSBF: Really?

Me: Yes.

HSBF: How did that happen? I thought you said she was now impervious to cookie baskets.

Me: As well as $10,000 shoe baskets. However, Friday sent her the clean version of our answers for her to approve. The next thing I know the interview is off. In response, I sent her the champagne gift basket and the chocolate truffle gift basket.

HSBF: But how did that get her to change your mind?

Me: She told me that even the cleaned up censored version of those answers were more than she
wanted the public to ever know about me or my boyfriend. Her job is to manage my image and this was not how she wanted my image to be managed.

HSBF: I thought she wanted to make you look more human.

Me: Yes but apparently not that human.

HSBF: Really?

Me: And maybe Friday didn’t scrub the answers as much as she should have and now Jane thinks that you’re actually former Shield. She doesn’t want to expose you. I decided it was best not to clarify since technically you a former Shield agent.

HSBF: Why did she automatically think that? You didn’t have your friend make me a fake Shield file.

Me: Did I ever mention that Jane Barnett is a former Shield agent herself. Jane Barnett is not even her real name. Just the one she’s using in her post Shield life.

HSBF: How can that be? She was working for you long before the agency collapsed.

Me: Because she left before the agency collapse because it just got too much for her. However, because of her being former Shield, Jane can kind of tell when somebody is lying for national security reasons. It’s why she’s so good as my image manager. She was Shield PR first.

Me: BTW she’s not Hydra. She passed a polygraph three times.

HSBF: That’s good to know. Although that does explain why she lasted so long.

Me: It takes a special type of person to clean up the murder bot fiasco.

HSBF: Where are you? Did you really start walking here?
Me: Elevator actually because I did get out and walk. Happy can just take his time parking the rental because somebody didn’t want to use a car from the hotel. I can’t wait that long to see you.

HSBF: I’m glad you’re almost here.

Me: I am to and I probably should stop texting you because I sort of just ran into the elevator door. It’s the nervous energy. I miss you so much. Only like another minute until I get to kiss you.

HSBF: Actually a little longer. The counselor is waiting for you in our room. He wants to talk to you.

Me: Your boyfriend almost kissed me before he realized I wasn’t you. I’ll send him back to you in a few minutes unharmed, along with his present.

To be continued.

xxxxx

Note from the Princess:

Mission Control is Tony’s nickname for Ned a.k.a. Peter’s best friend. No I am not letting him read these messages, yet. I am concerned they will eventually become pornographic again.

Chapter End Notes

So yes, Tony and Steve are at the same hotel in the same country. However, Sam and Tony need a few minutes. So what are your predictions for the next conversation? Mean what post as soon as he gets back from proofreading.
"You know I'm not even surprised that you convinced Cuddle Bunny to let you give me the shovel talk." Tony said as Sam handed his phone back to him. He would really love to know what Sam said in his message to Steve, but knew better than to try to read it right now.

"I just want to say a few things before you're so busy with each other that I won't actually see you or Steve for a few days." Sam replied.

"We are going to have to resurface for the wedding tomorrow," Tony said with a smirk.

"I aim for us to be far away by that point. I'm sure I can find something to occupy our time locally." Natasha remarked. That's when Sam walked over to hug her.

"I'm glad you're here."

"Glad to be here." Natasha said pulling out of the hug.

"I don't know why you're worried about me. Of anybody in this room, I think Natasha is the one more likely to give you that talk and you brought her with you." Sam said turning his attention back to Tony.

"Because Steve sitting is a full-time job and thanks to me gaining a daughter-in-law because I set a horrible example when it comes to dating an international fugitive, you have an opening." Tony joked.

"Are you back with us permanently?" Sam asked Natasha.

"You don't need to give Tony the shovel talk, I already took care of it. Months ago when he was hiding in Appalachia. He is well aware they would never find his body if he completely fucks over Rogers." Natasha remarked, which was true. He is not sure he ever told Steve about that.

"Very aware. I'm pretty sure she wouldn't leave one speck of blood for the forensic team at the crime scene."

"And yes she's back permanently. I know Steve well enough to know that you're going to need extra help to keep him from doing stupid stuff like suicide by nobility. It's such a dangerous trait to have in a boyfriend."

"Especially when you can't watch his back." Sam remarked.
"Trust me, I wish I could disappear with all of you but short of faking my death, again, that's a little hard to do." Tony said as he sat down on one of the couches in the suite. He felt like he was going to be here a while.

"Then you wouldn't be able to afford multiple suites at a five-star hotel and all day spa service." Natasha remarked.

"Then I wouldn't be able to afford to redo your gear." Tony shot back.

"Should I stay here the referee or should I go surprise Steve?" Natasha asked.

"No. I promise that we will only use icers," Tony joked. "I cannot make such promises for Happy and I'm sure he's found a parking space for the rental by this point."

"Steve can protect himself," Sam said as he sat down beside him.

"But will he? Probably not. He still feels bad for beating the hell out of me in Siberia and he such a martyr he would let Happy get a free shot in."

"Good point." Sam and Natasha said simultaneously.

"I'll go to the room now. Sam, we can catch up later after we relocate to a hotel very far away tomorrow," Natasha said, grinning. Tony is not sure that she's joking because he doubts she's going to want to stay in one place for long.

"Yes you can tell her how tough it is to babysit my boyfriend and she can tell you how hard it is to babysit my boyfriend's ex-girlfriend's daughter."

"Steve doesn't have an ex-girlfriend." Okay apparently May never told Natasha about dating Steve and Tony definitely wasn't going to tell her. But here they were.

"You don't know about Melinda?" Sam asked. Better him than Tony.

"Melinda May?" Natasha asked.

"She was Melinda Garner when they were dating because she was still fresh off the divorce but Steve said she's gone back to her maiden name. Apparently, she is Tony's handler now."

"Because Laura is mostly dealing with actual children." Tony added. "You know Steve isn't much for sharing. I'm sure he would have told you eventually. Okay, I'm sure May would have told you eventually. Or possibly Clint."

"And yet Sam already knew." Natasha said before leaving.

"So is this the part of the conversation where you tell me to leave your best friend alone or where are you threaten to kill me if I break Stevie Bunny's heart? I've already had various variations of this conversation including from somebody I changed the diaper of." Sharon was vicious but protective. Maybe if Steve ever returned, they might become friends.

"I thought we already established that Natasha would be the one to kill you if you did stupid things to Steve." Sam remarked as he sat down on the couch. Tony joined him.

"That's been established well before we met. Personally, I'm astonished it hasn't happened yet. Romanoff even knows my food allergies. I'm surprise that the slipping sunflower seeds into my food hasn't happened earlier."
Steve was an absolute mess when that happened. I doubt she would want to put him through that
to see him go through that again." Why did Tony have a feeling that Steve
reacted worse than reported. Clint wasn't exactly giving details on his time with Sugar Bear.

"I am well aware that he had to be knocked out to keep him from coming back to the states. He also
broke Clint's jaw. Lilly is going to kick him in the shins if we ever figure out a way to legally get
Steve back in the country. You know one that doesn't involve an alien invasion." Tony remarked.

"And Steve may deserve it. But it did show me how much he cares about you. So I'm not going to
try to convince you to leave him because it would hurt him too much." Tony smiled at his words.

"Oh good, one of Steve's friends is actually reasonable. Just to erase your fears, I love him too."

"Enough to leave it all behind to be with him?" Sam asked.

"Enough to stay behind and keep him safe." Tony answered honestly.

"By staying in the system?"

"I'm sucking up to the president, the UN, General Talbot, the not-crazy people at the State
Department, and various not-evil members of Congress to keep a highly skilled strike team from
tracking you and Cuddle Bunny down and locking you up in the Raft for the rest of eternity. If I
disappeared, I can guarantee that they would find us within a month and they'll probably be more
bullets involved. Then diplomacy. Playing the system keeps everyone safe."

"So you're staying behind to protect Steve?" Sam asked.

"And you, Natasha, Wanda, Yo-Yo, Daisy, Laura and the family, Kamala, Miles, as well as Peter
along with a lot of others that I haven't even met yet. Somebody has to play the game and as much as
Steve hates doing stuff like that, it's necessary for the greater good."

"You don't have to save the world alone. Actually, you trying to do it all on your own has created a
lot of problems in the past." Sam said pointedly.

"I realize that now. At the very least I have Monkey Lover wanting to help me. I feel like it's his life
mission to prevent an apocalypse. I wanted to bring him but apparently he has to spend some quality
time with Dr. Suarez which is good because I worry about the kid sometimes."

"I heard that you're in therapy." Sam said changing the subject. Maybe, Tony just accidentally set up
that subject change for him.

"Yes. After what happened in Siberia it became obvious that I have a lot of problems that have to be
worked through with professionals and drugs. I'm not a healthy person but at least they figured out
the right medication mix." Tony joked.

"That's half the battle."

"And I am taking my pills and not mixing them with alcohol. I haven't had a drop in months."

"That's the other half." Sam remarked.

"Did Steve ever tell you what happened in Siberia?"

"Not really. I know that there was fighting and he lost his shield but that's mostly because of what I
observed afterwards. I know Steve felt guilty for hurting you, but I don't know what really cause that
fight to happen. But we have established that Steve is not a sharer. I mean I thought that Sharon was his first kiss in this time until he finally told me about Melinda and the aide to the Senator who happen to be married."

"Please tell me you pointed out that it's really creepy to kiss your ex-girlfriend's great-niece right after the funeral. Not as bad as the married Chief of Staff for Senator Ward, but still awful." Mostly because the man's wife tried to kill Tony.

"I didn't think that they actually dated, it was just the one kiss, at least according to the history books." Sam told him.

"History books are often wrong. They exchanged a lot of letters, which totally explains why Steve can do this long distance relationship thing. You encouraged him, didn't you?"

"Mostly because I thought that Sharon was the first time he's connected with anybody romantically since the 40s. I would've behaved differently if I knew about Melinda. So he really was close to Sharon's great aunt?"

"Very close. She knew that he was bisexual. That was something you didn't tell people back then." Tony explained.

"It is something he doesn't really talk about now. I've only known for a couple of months. Again not a sharer."

"I'm not really either but we are getting better at it. I'm really trying with him." Tony answered honestly.

"That's good. It's one of the reasons why I'm willing to give you support."

"That's good."

"So what really happened in Siberia?"

"I was hoping to avoid this conversation."

"I support Steve's relationship with you now, but I would like to know how it fell apart before." Tony sighed, realizing that he was going to have to give Sam's something.

"You're aware that the bad guy was fucking with us?"

"That I got."

"Because my murder bots killed his family." Tony confessed.

"That I also got. Steve told me that it was actually a U.S. government program that you were trying to revive. And you agreed to take all the blame, even though you shouldn't have." Note to self, remind my boyfriend that he can't tell other people certain things.

Although, Tony doesn't remember specifically telling Steve not to tell his friends that. Also, that conversation did happen electronically, so the Princess probably read it.

"Because if I didn't do it, Shield would've got the blame and Agent Agent is trying to build a not-evil version of the organization. Since my BFF has taken over from him, I have extra incentive to build up the brand." Tony defended.

"Of course you do. So what else happened in Siberia? Why did you and Steve ended up physically
fighting each other?" This is why his boyfriend shouldn't have a professional for a friend. Laura would do this. Laura did do this, which is how we ended up getting help in the first place.

"The bad guy was trying to lure us there to get his revenge. He wasn't actually going to unleash an army of super soldiers on the world. He actually shot them in the head before we got there."

"Again, something I know. That was in the official report."

"And then the bad guy showed me a video file of Steve's brainwashed and crazy best friend murdering my mom and dad."

"Shit."

"I reacted badly," Tony acknowledged. Thank you therapy.

"So would I."

"I tried to kill him."

"So would I." Tony could do nothing but blink at that confession. "So Steve stopped you?"

"Yes. At the time, I thought it was because he loved or at least cared about Bucky more than me. Now, I know it's because he cared about me so much that he didn't want that blood on my hands. I get that now but not at the time. I have a lot of unresolved issues related to my parents' murder that I'm just now starting to work through."

"I assume you guys have talked about this?" Sam asked.

"Yes. I no longer blame Sergeant Barnes for what happened to my parents. I want to find the last bits of Hydra and burn it to the fucking ground but I don't hold it personally against him. I have found peace with it." Again, thank you therapy.

"You say that now that he's tucked away in another country. What happens when he's standing in the room next to you? Would you be able to fight by his side? Would you be able to take your boyfriend having a pizza night with him?"

"Probably as well as my daughter-in-law can handle being around me despite the fact that I am directly or indirectly responsible for the deaths of three of her family members. If you do remember she never once ran out on Avenger pizza night when I dropped by. I'm thinking about sending them a toaster but I feel like I need to give a better wedding present. Would a Mercedes be too much? Maybe a safe house would be more practical though. "

"Yes and yes." Sam deadpanned. "Did they actually get married? Is that even legal?"

"More legal than Steve and me in some countries." Tony remarked.

"That's messed up."

"Look Steven and I spent the last few months trying to rebuild our relationship piece by piece. Instead of becoming teammates again, we're something more. And I know Steve comes with a dump truck full of Bucky baggage that we are going to have to unpack and we're working on it. Now I have to work on rebuilding things with all the other Avengers and unfortunately, kissing is totally off the table. Which is a shame because I'm good at that. People don't hate me once we're making out." He joked.
"I don't hate you. I don't really know you enough to hate you," Sam acknowledged.

"And the fact that you realize that you don't know me even though I've been in the tabloids all my life makes me like you just a little bit more."

"But that's not you. The guy that Steve talks about is definitely not the guy who put out a sex tape for attention or has done 99% of the other things that the media has attributed to him."

"That was my asshole first boyfriend who I thought loved me and instead just wanted to have a story for his company. Notice how his face was conveniently edited out. It's the reason why Steve is my second real boyfriend ever. So congratulations on realizing that most of the things in the media about me are a complete and utter lie."

"No, Steve is your first real boyfriend." Sam amended. "The asshole with the sex tape doesn't count. I can see why you have trust issues."

"That's because you're a professional." It's at that moment, Tony started hearing muffled yet angry yelling from the hallway.

"Happy found a parking space." Tony mumbled under breath as he heard Happy say a lot of not so nice things about Steve.

"Should we intervene?" Sam asked after a few moments.

"No, Natasha is out there. As well as agents Davis and Piper. Actually, it sounds like she just pulled an icer out on them both. If things go too badly, we will just drag their unconscious bodies to separate rooms."

Note to self, have Mary get Happy a room at a different hotel far away after emailing Pepper to vent about how this was a horrible ideal and Happy is even less okay with him dating Steve now that she's single again.

"So room service recommendations?" Sam said changing the subject.

"Anything spicy that doesn't contain sunflower seeds or yogurt. Apparently, I'm developing a yogurt allergy."

"I no longer have a desire to kill you. So, I will avoid those things." Sam said as he perused the menu or at least acted like he was.

"Thanks." Tony gave half a smile. "Was there a point when you actually wanted to kill me?"

"Not really. Just annoyed and frustrated with you."

"Most people feel that way about me," Tony remarked just as the commotion outside came to an abrupt halt. "See the yelling has already stopped and Davis hasn't sent a 911 text message yet. Nor did I hear an icer going off. I guess that's good."

"So we're letting this happen?" Sam asked.

"It has to happen eventually. I'll give Happy and Steve 15 minutes and then I'll go over to check on the idiot and my boyfriend."

"I'm surprised you're willing to wait that long." Sam remarked.

"After Rhodey, Happy is my second oldest friend. I want him to like my boyfriend. I want to give
Happy a chance to work through his anger." Tony confessed.

"And if that doesn't happen?"

"Then it's probably best that I'm in a long-distance relationship and next time I don't let Pepper convince me to bring Happy with me because she needs a couple of days to lick her wounds. I'm already planning on sending Happy to another hotel."

"Maybe you should make those arrangements now." Tony was already dialing Mary at that point.

To be continued
Steve heard knocking at the door of Sam’s suite five minutes after his last exchange with Tony. Or rather with Sam because he knows that last message was from his friend. He totally expected his boyfriend to come to him instead of talking to Sam. But he at least wanted the two to try to clear the air. He was starting to feel like something big is coming, and they needed to be together on this.

“Tony, I’m going to kiss you twice and then I’m sending you back to Sam to talk. You’re the one who wants the Avengers on speaking terms, when the aliens invade again, so you’re going to have to make some effort. The Avengers are more than just me.” Steve said as he opened the door only to find the last person he expected to see their.

“That’s sweet. Don’t worry, they are talking.” Natasha said as she walked into the room and shut the door behind her.

“That’s sweet. Don’t worry, they are talking.” Natasha said as she walked into the room and shut the door behind her.

“Natasha?” He asked, still not believing she was really there. He hadn’t seen her since Germany.

“It’s the hair. The blonde thing is a little hard to get used to. Although, I guess one of us needs to be a blonde since you’ve graduated to auburn.” She joked.

“I like it.” Steve told her as he goes to sit down on the couch. This room felt like an apartment. It was twice as big as what they had in Johannesburg. Then again, there was a big conference and most of the rooms were booked. This was different.
“And Stark is very partial to your new look. I had to listen to him talk about the joys of beard friction on the flight here. That might be why Happy was so cranky.” Steve groaned at her words.

“I don’t even want to know.”

“But you’re planning on experiencing it firsthand momentarily. Speaking of experience, you dated Melinda May and you never told me?” Natasha asked.

“Yes, for a couple of months then she got reassigned and we were running missions, but we still kept in contact until she started dating someone else. Than conversation started to taper off. All communication stopped when Shield fell until a couple of months ago when thanks to Tony, we started speaking to each other again. Also, turns out the “boyfriend” after me end it up being Hydra.”

“Is he dead now?” Natasha asked with an angry look in her eyes.

“Yes, Coulson killed him.” Steve answered.

“I’m not surprised. Why are they not together yet? There was a betting pool going at Shield on when those two idiots would get together before he ‘died’.”

“New Shield has a pool too, apparently.” Steve tells her.

“I’m not surprised.”

“I have no idea why they are not together. I think the only reason why we ended up together is because she thought he was dead.” Steve tells her, honestly.

“Nice to know Nick was cruel to everyone, even her. She was a mess wasn’t she?” Natasha asked.

“Yes. Although, you’re going to have to ask her for the details. You are not here to talk about my relationship with Melinda.”

“No we’re here to talk about your relationship with Stark. Although, it’s nice to know that you’ve
actually dated someone else in the century. It makes me a little less concerned,” Natasha tells him.

“And I appreciate the concern but I’m an adult and I can make my own choices.”

“Some of which have been bad.”

“Like sleeping with the married and in the closet Chief of Staff of the late Senator Ward. That mistake almost got Tony killed.”

“What?”

“It’s a long story. I also regret assuming that Tony was just going along with things for his own selfish interests and for not trying to see things from his perspective. I realize that things were a lot more complicated than I wanted to see at the time.” Steve tells her.

“It’s hard for you to deal with a world that’s not black-and-white?” Natasha asked.

“The world was never black and white, not even in the 40s.”

“I’m glad you realize that.”

“However, I’m used to problems that have solutions and I don’t think there is an easy one for this.”

“Not yet.” Natasha told him.

“So why are you here?”

“Well you keep getting hurt trying to save the world and your boyfriend doesn’t like that. Also with Wanda leaving to start a new life with Vision and Clint back with his kids, I heard you need a third for your secret Avengers.”
“We do. Sam is my best… One of my best friends but I don’t think we should be alone all the time.”


“How is Clint? Did you get to see him? Tony’s more likely to give me a update on Laura and the kids.”

“Yesterday before we left. He is okay, just trying to work things out with Laura. Clint is still not happy that Laura joined Shield to get him a full pardon. At least Scott had to make a deal with the FBI and he’s on house arrest for the next two years because of it.”

“You’ll do a lot to be with the ones you love.” He tells her.

“The kids are worth it. I got to make pizza with the kids before we drove out to the private jet. There was a lot of crying.”

“Your tears or theirs?” Steve asked.

“Both.”

“You could’ve stayed and got the same deal that Clint did.”

“Laura was the one who made the arrangement. She’s the one who is shield now. Clint is retiring, but now that it’s actually an agency again he’s going to get a pension.”

“He was at Shield long enough to have a pension?” Steve asked surprised.

“If you add in the post implosion Avenger time, yes. Thankfully, they are counting it.”

“Are they still arguing? You mentioned that he’s not happy with her choices earlier. Tony has said similar.”
“They’re coming to terms. Clint doesn’t like her being an agent. However, I pointed out that this was payback for everything he put her through during their marriage. I think he’s starting to get that. Besides, she’s not really a field agent just a handler for gifted children. So it’s not that different from her old job. He’s getting attached to Miles due to the fact the little boy is friends with Lila now.” Natasha explains.

“Is he the six-year-old with spider powers that Tony refers to as Spidey Junior?” Steve asked.

“Yes and he’s adorable, even when he’s crawling on the walls.”

“I never thought I would hear you talk about kids like this.”

“I like kids. I just can’t have any because of bad choices made in the past.”

“Tony feels the same way. He loves kids but can’t have any without at least a sperm donor because of the Palladium poisoning.”

“My situation is different. I was more active in my bad choice, but it doesn’t matter now.” Natasha tells him with a sad smile. “Anyway, we need to talk about what happened in Germany and Siberia.”

“I’d rather just hug you.” Steve said putting an arm around her. “We made a lot of bad choices without all the information and we can’t change what we did but we can move forward. We can learn to actually talk to one another instead of just assuming the worst.”

“OK. Therapy has been good for you.”

“Yes.”

“What I really need to know is do you really love Tony Stark?”

“Yes,” Steve answered emphatically.

“The real person not the act that he puts on for everyone. And by this point I realize that 90% of his
behavior is a performance.”

“Yes. Completely and unconditionally.” Steve answered firmly again.

“Ok, let’s go find your boyfriend, he needs to talk to you with both me and Sam present. I rather get the heavy conversations out of the way early in the process, especially because Stark’s favorite coping mechanism is not telling people what’s going on.”

“Actually, his favorite coping mechanism is se…” Steve started to say sex but caught himself, but probably not soon enough because Natasha was smirking.

“I’m sure you have plenty of that already planned this weekend.” Natasha smirked at him.

“What will be the subject of this heavy conversation I need to have with Tony?” Steve asked changing the subject.

“When Princess Shuri met with Tony a few days ago, she gave him a status update on your best friend. It was too sensitive to pass the information to you electronically.” He can understand that, but Steve knows Tony enough to know that Tony would be fearful of telling him for other reasons.

“It’s bad isn’t it?” One of those other reasons is Tony hates giving bad news.

“Not bad, maybe just not something you want to hear and Tony wanted to make sure you have emotional support.” Which explains why Tony was somewhat okay with Sam coming along.

“That makes sense. Tony is like that. Let’s just go find him and get it over with. I want to know what ever he’s afraid to tell me.” Please let Bucky be treatable. Please let Bucky be treatable. Please let Bucky be treatable.

He kept repeating those words in his head as they walked over to Tony until he ran into Happy and the agents bringing the luggage up to the rooms, quite literally. Mister Hogan was not happy to see him at all. He may have been called a few expletives and accused of being a homewrecker of all things.
“I thought Potts broke up with him months before it went public?” He heard Davis whispered to Piper in the background.

“That’s true.” Steve answered.

“They would’ve eventually got back together, if it wasn’t for him.” Happy accused. And considering that Tony was in such a bad place when they started talking to one another, he could see a romantic reconciliation happening just because Tony was so lonely.

“And broken up again in under two years,” Davis mumbled behind him. Steve wonders if he is completely unaware of his enhanced hearing abilities.

“But I am here and we are together. I’m not leaving. I know you’re upset that I’m with Tony now but I love him, and more importantly he loves me. I’m not going to leave him just because you want him to get back together with his ex-girlfriend for reasons I don’t even understand. All the problems they had before are still there. Did you ever stop to think that’s not something Tony wants? That it is probably not even something Miss Potts wants,” Steve defended himself.

“But they could work it out if he wasn’t with you,” Happy responded.

“I’m not letting him go. And if you haven’t figured it out yet, I am more stubborn than a mule,” Steve said pointedly.

Steve has been in enough fights to know when he’s about to be punched. Happy just had that look in his eyes. Steve was going to let him get in one shot before incapacitating him. However, that’s when Agent Piper pulled out an Icer.

“You two are not going to have a pissing contest in the middle of a five star hotel in a foreign country. Go to your rooms and calm down before I knock both of you out.” Agent Piper threatened.

“I don’t need to cool down.” Happy retorted.

“You want to fight, fine.” Natasha said grabbing Happy’s arms, “But you are not having this fight right now in an unsecure hallway that hasn’t even been swept for bugs yet,” Natasha said as she actually dragged him away.
“You’re not going to try to arrest me?” Steve asked as he led them back to Sam’s room but Davis only replied with a laugh. Moments after that the agents then pulled out a device that scanned the room most likely for bugs.

“OK it’s clean. And no we’re not here to arrest you. The boss just wants to talk to you. Mr. Hogan was supposed to be part of the conversation but he’s not ready.” Agent Davis explained.

“He still hates me.”

“He was nicer to you than he was to Mr. Stark on the ride here.” Piper added.

“So he did try to get Tony to dump me for Pepper?” Steve asked.

“If you consider pointing out all your bad qualities repeatedly throughout the flight that, then yes,” Piper explained.

“Oh God.” Steve groaned as he sat down on the couch.

“I think that’s why Stark got out of the car so quickly.” Agent Davis said as he placed a small box on the counter.

“I’m going to go set up the connection to the director.” Davis tells his partner.

“Can I speak to Tony while you’re setting that up?” Steve really wanted to know what was going on with Bucky.

“Not yet.” Piper replied, “It only takes a minute to set up a secure connection now.”

“The military is not going to come through that door to pick me up?” Steve was only half joking. Maybe that was the plan. He really didn’t know these two agents that well. Although, they were on Melinda’s team so he was inclined to give them the benefit of the doubt.
“No, although General Talbot with like you to sign some of the reprint Captain America cards for his son George for his birthday. By the way, he blames you for his son choosing the army over the Air Force,” Agent Piper said just as Davis pulled up a holographic image of Director Rhodes.

“Personally I would prefer if he would not need to choose either. I always hoped by 2016 we wouldn’t be fighting wars anymore, but here we are.” The director said From in front of him.

“At least we’re no longer fighting each other at the moment. Tony called it the Avengers’ uncivil toddler squabble.” He hears Piper try not to laugh behind him but she’s not doing well.

“Appropriate.”

“Is this where you tried to talk me out of dating Tony, because that’s not going to work. I already just came out of one of those conversations. I’m sure you’re aware of how stubborn I can really be so you must realize I’m not going anywhere,” he tells the director firmly.

“It’s been well documented in your files. Sometimes, I’m surprised you survived the army without getting court-martialed for insubordination.” The director remarked.

“Everybody is. I know it was a long road to get here but I’m not letting go of Tony. I really do care about him.”

“Good and I’m going to try to make it as easy on you as possible.” The director said with half a smirk.

“Which is why your agents are not arresting me?” Steve asked.

“Well Tony would just be mad at me despite the fact that would mean you would be in the same country as him and he could have conjugal visits.” The director joked, he thinks.

“Point.”

“Although keeping you out there is not the only reason why I’m not arresting you. Because Shield is a federal agency again, there’s some things we can’t do that you can.”
“I really don’t take orders from Shield anymore, even if you’re in charge now.” He doesn’t want to go back to before the fall.

“There have been a lot of reports of Nomad hunting down terrorist cells and similar organizations that hurt little children. That’s what I need you to help me with. I’m sure Tony told you what happened to Kamala of Jersey City.”

“Tony calls her Ms. Marvel. Quake saved her family from the Watchdogs and then they had to be relocated.” Steve tells him.

“And they’ve been relocated again to the upstate facility.”

“Tony did not mention that.”

“Because he takes the safety of his kids very seriously. It’s also something that has happened after South Africa which was the last time he could speak to you in person. They had to be moved again after their last safe house was attacked by the watchdogs again.”

“What do you need me to do?”

“We know who is responsible for funding the Watchdogs but because he is a highly successful Russian businessman, we can’t touch him.” The director explains.

“So you need my help?”

“Yes.”

“Who is he?”

“Anton Ivanov.”
“We’ve already been tracking him down.”

“Good. We are on the same page.” That’s when Steve heard a knock at the door.

“It’s your boyfriend.” Agent Piper said after looking through the peephole.

“Let him in and please try to keep him from causing an international incident,” the director said before flickering out.

“I make no promises.” Steve responded and seconds later Tony was completely wrapped around him with his mouth ending up on his. Everything else fell away.

To be continued.
Thank you to everybody who read or reviewed the last conversation. You are all absolutely wonderful. Tony and Steve are now together in Mumbai. Let the making out and serious conversations began.

Warning: Mild sexual content.

Kissing Steve was Tony’s favorite thing in the universe. Maybe it had something to do with the fact that it was such a new sensation or maybe because it was such a rarity. Long distance relationships definitely make the heart grow fonder. Or maybe it was because there was a 5% probability that after Tony told Steve that his BFF was now conscious and deprogrammed this would be the last kiss. And if it was going to be his last kiss, then Tony was going to make it count and maybe start unbuttoning some jeans. Yep, that would be good.

“You are aware that we are still in the room?” Tony heard Agent Piper say from the background.

Considering Piper complained about her new and probably soon-to-be former girlfriend being furious about her missing her birthday due to out-of-town work commitments, she probably wasn’t enjoying this as much as others would.

“Why are you still in the room?” Tony turned around blinking and slightly annoyed because he wasn’t unfastening Steve’s pants anymore. “Dr. Simmons totally gave me the green light this time to ravage my boyfriend.” He has even moved up to moderate sexual activity, as of the last check up.

“Because this is not your room.” Davis responded, annoyed.

“This is not your room either.” Tony shot back. He actually got the agents their own suite with private rooms on this floor so they did not have to share with Happy. Even though they were not his agents, he still like them enough not to put them with Happy right now. Seriously, why did Pepper Pop and Director Snuggle Bear make him bring Happy along? Maybe this was their new attempt at cock blocking. He wouldn’t put it past them.

“The boss said to keep an eye on you.” Davis responded.
"I had no idea you were so voyeuristic. I think that’s why I like you two."

"We will leave," Agent Piper said with a sigh. "Try not to cause an international incident."

"Thank you so much. As I’ve gotten older, I’m not quite in to public sex anymore. Although quick question; where is Happy? You didn’t have to knock him out?" Tony asked a little concerned.

"Agent Romanoff took him to his room to calm down." Agent Piper provided.

"Or possibly strangle him." Davis mumbled under breath.

"Can you guys go make sure strangling actually is not involved? I would hate for that to happen to Happy.” He was annoyed with the man, but did not want him to incur the wrath of Black Widow.

"Will do,” both agents said before leaving.

"So where were we?” Tony asked just as he was about to kiss Steve again. However, Steve pulled away before he could.

"Relocating to our own room because I don’t think Sam would be happy if we have sex on his bed or couch.” Steve told him.

"I’m moving him to another hotel tomorrow anyway because I have realize that you and Happy probably shouldn’t be in the same building or maybe even the same city. I could always do it a little early.” Tony said trying to go back to unfastening Steve’s pants.

"I am not going to have sex with you in this room.” Steve says swatting his hand away. Tony had no choice but to pout.

"But you will have sex with me in our room?” Tony asked.

"Yes, after we talk for a few minutes first about what you found out from the princess when she visited you in New York.” Of course they were going to have this conversation first.
“Natasha told you?” Tony asked with a sigh.

“She told me that you had something to tell me that couldn’t be told to me in an email so I assume that it’s about Bucky and if it’s going to be bad news I’d rather get it out-of-the-way now so I still have something to look forward to this weekend.” Isn’t that sweet, sort of.

“I’m not sure if it’s bad news but it’s not something we want cronies of Ross to intercept. He is gone but there is a dozen other people out there just like him.” Tony tells him.

“Like most of his possible replacements?” Steve asked.

“Yep, that lady from Homeland security scares the hell out of me. So does General Hale and her Stepford daughter. Talbot didn’t even know about her until Hale started parading her precious Ruby around to help her chances. Every time I’m in a room with her I just get this fake feeling. OK she reminds me a lot Obadiah which means she’s probably secretly evil and about to stab us all in the back."

“Not everybody’s evil.”

“But I think she is. Monkey lover really doesn’t like her and keeps mumbling things about backstabbing and killer robots. This is probably why he is in mental health rehab right at the moment?”

“What?”

“Inpatient facility or Shield’s version of a secure inpatient facility which basically means spending like a week with Dr. Suarez as he sleeps in one of the white rooms for a while which is good since, he’s kind of sort of fighting with his girlfriend. But he needs that help so as much as I want him here I am going to support his journey to good mental health because that’s what friends do. I kind of mentioned this earlier.”

“Not in these details.” Steve replies.

“Again, even though text messages are a better way for us to communicate because it gives us time
“OK, that one is just ridiculous.” Steve pulls away with a laugh.

“Lollipop Lover?” He winks at him.

“That last part isn’t going to happen unless you tell me what they told you about Bucky.” Or it may not happen if I tell you. However Tony doesn’t voice that fear out loud.

“The princess genius figured out how to undo the Hydra programming without wiping out everything else.”

“And?” Steve asked practically holding his breath.

“He’s still your friend. He even remembers horrible double dates.” Steve visibly exhaled at Tony’s words. “Actually, he is this new version of your friend because kidnapping changes you. I was only locked up for a few months but I came out a different person. A few decades would be so much worse.”

“I know. I don’t want to think about his time with Hydra.” Tony places an arm around Steve.

“Because you still blame yourself for what happened.”

“You know I do.”

“I know. But he’s up and making progress. He’s going to get to live in his own little house soon, he might even start herding goats. Apparently, his team of therapists feel that it’s good for him to have a routine.”

“That’s good. So what’s the bad news?” Steve asked.
“You can’t stop by for a visit right now, not while he still in treatment. And he’s going to be in treatment for a while.” Steve just looked at Tony, not speaking; Tony wasn’t sure how to respond to that so he just pulled Steve as closely to him as he could.

“Is it because Talbot knows about me and could follow me right into the country?” Steve asked concerned.

“Talbot probably doesn’t care, especially if you autograph those comics/card for his son. Seriously, that kid idolizes you more than Coulson, if such a thing where possible.”

“The general that Agent Fitz is afraid of is a concern?” Steve asked.

“Most of the U.S. military is a concern, the brass anyway and you don’t want to lead them to a country that helped you out. Especially one that has weapons that are decades away from everyone else.”

“Which is why I think they can take care of themselves,” Steve responded.

“After comparing notes with the princess, I am sure they can but it’s still not a position you want to put your friends in if you can help it.”

“That’s understandable,” Steve said halfheartedly.

“No, you don’t understand because you want to see your best friend,” Tony responded.

“Yes.”

“Which if that wasn’t the case you wouldn’t be you. But it’s not just about the security risk. Sergeant Barnes is undergoing the treatment for 70 years of trauma and the doctors aren’t sure he’s ready to see you yet. At best, it would be an emotional setback. At worst, it could re-trigger something.”

“And he definitely wouldn’t be ready to see you,” Steve sighed.
“That’s a given. The last time he saw me I was trying to kill him for one of his past sins that he committed under Hydra mind fuck. Thanks to my lovely falling down moment we probably will not see each other until the end of the world is actually in progress and maybe not even then,” Tony sighed.

“I hope we don’t actually have to face the end of the world,” Steve cuddled in a little closer.

“Agent Agent and his team dealt with the end of the world just last May while we had our heads up our asses. Which means it probably will happen again next May and probably the next May or possibly April after that because apparently April/May is apocalypse season. It’s why I’m working on a wearable suit. Thanks to help from the princess and Monkey Lover, I might have one ready by Thanksgiving instead of Valentine’s Day.”

“Wearable suit?”

“Yep, I am taking advantage of my new nano tech. That way I’ll always have a suit ready to roll. Bad guys don’t wait for you to change outfits. Pepper’s pissed and thinks I need more quality time with Suarez for my hero complex issues. As I pointed out, I am not her problem anymore.”

“You’re still friends. So it’s always going to be her problem. Friends always worry.”

“That’s true. I’ve been getting well acquainted with your caring friends.”

“Me as well. I was talking to your James before you walked in.”

“Of course he set that up.” Tony sighed, but he's kind of happy that his friend was that protective.

“Can I at least write to my James? I don’t want him to think that I’ve abandoned him.”

“I figured you would want to, although for safety reasons you will be using a nano paper notebook and there will be a dead drop or several involved. Friday will explain. She’s best friends forever with the Royal genius.”

“I understand.”
“Although maybe not tell him that you’re dating me for a little bit.”

“I am not ashamed of you. I am ashamed of what I did.” He turned away for a moment, but Tony just kissed his shoulder.

“I’m ashamed of what I did to both of you. And please don’t say it was all your fault because it wasn’t. I acknowledge now that I never dealt with my parents’ death. Hell, I never dealt with Anna’s death or Jarvis’, not until therapy, and it’s still a work in progress. A lot of those issues just came out in Siberia. Because all my coping strategies pre-therapy were bad.”

“So maybe you should write your own nano paper letter? One that he might actually read.”

“Definitely probably but not today. Today, I’m going to see how fast I can undress you.” Tony said before leaning over to kiss Steve again. This time he responded.

“I hate to interrupt but Dr Suarez asked me to remind you that you need to fill out her required questionnaire before engaging in any heavy sexual activities?” Friday interrupted.

“I swear I’m going to put you on Ned’s laptop one of these days,” Tony groaned.

“What questionnaire?”

“Because this is going to soon become my first sexual relationship since undergoing treatment and I have a history of really bad sexual relationships, that include nonconsensual sex tapes, Suarez felt that we should have a discussion about hard noes, personal limits, safe words, and of course enthusiastic consent.”

“As soon as we switch rooms, I consent very enthusiastically.” Steve kissed him again, “No ice play or temperature play of any type. That includes candle wax. I prefer not to top, at least at first, because of my powers.”

“You had those answers quick. Did Melinda go over something like this with you?” Tony asked.
“Yes. I don’t like name-calling or shaming during sex as well.”

“I am not surprised. We should probably avoid water due to both of our issues. I haven’t tried restraints since Afghanistan because that wasn’t something Pepper Pot was into, so I don’t know if I could do it or not. And I have too many daddy issues for that type of role-play. Although, most other scenarios are still a possibility but no costumes because daddy issues and I sort of walked into his kink closet when I was four and I am still a little disturbed by it.”

“I’m fine with that and someday you’re going to have to share that childhood trauma with me. I have no trouble avoiding restraints for right now. Maybe later scarves?” Steve asked.

“They definitely did not use fine silk in Afghanistan. Safe Word?” Tony asked.

“I probably shouldn’t use Cuddle Bunny?” Steve asked with a smirk.

“You could but I shouldn’t. That phrase might slip out a lot. You’re my little Cuddle Bunny.” Tony kissed Steve’s cheek.

“OK, punk. I doubt I would accidentally say that during sex.”

“Good especially because I know what that word meant in the 1940s.”

“What is your word?”

“Thermal dynamics or maybe just thermal. I’ll probably be too out of it to say both words.”

“Supplies?” Steve asked.

“Probably still in the hallway because I doubt anybody took the luggage to the room.”

“Which is good because I still don’t want to have sex in Sam’s room.”
“Understandable. Let’s go find my drop kit.”

“What is a drop kit?”

“There’s so much I have left to teach you about this wonderful world.” Tony said kissing Steve one more time before leading him into the hallway to get his bags.

To be continued.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: In Agent Carter, it was revealed that Howard Stark had a very large closet filled with props and costumes because he enjoyed a “theatrical element” to his sexual encounters. My head Canon is Tony eventually found this closet and has been slightly traumatized ever since.

So this is probably the best place to remind you that I am the queen of fade to black. If anybody wants to write what they’re doing in their hotel room contact me. We can work something out but I just don’t write that type of material. I am not comfortable with it.
Thank you to everybody who read or reviewed the last conversation. You are all fabulous. Now this conversation starts out with an in person conversation but since it is mostly text messages I decided to label it as an interlude.

I feel like this chapter is going to be extra fun for anybody familiar with comic book canon. Natasha is about to say some hard truths.

“Get over it. This is his life and you should be well aware now that Tony Stark does what he wants and what he wants is Steve.” Natasha said to Happy as soon as she dragged him into his room.

“They are not right for each other.” He argued.

“And neither was Pepper, or rather he wasn’t right for her.”

“That’s not true.” He was not sure if he was lying to Natasha or himself. Happy was more aware of the cracks in the relationship between Tony and Virginia than most people. Virginia was always a mess when Tony was on missions. That’s why she ended things when he started searching for Hydra.

“This life that we lead as Avengers, isn’t for everyone. It's hard to be in any type of relationship, including romantic relationships. You need to be someone that gets this life. There’s not many people that do. Clint was lucky and even then there are still problems. Steve gets it. Steve gets him.”

“Steve hit him,” Happy shot back. “I saw the bruises when he came back from Siberia.”

“Because Tony was trying to kill someone and Steve was trying to keep him from doing that. If you talk to Tony about what happened, he would tell you that. Have you even bothered to ask or did you do what you did today and just say bad things about his boyfriend?” Romanoff asked.
He wasn’t sure how to respond to that. So he just stayed quiet.

“I will take that as a no. Between my time at Stark Industries years ago and the type of things that you were saying this morning on the fly over here, I think I know why you are so invested and pushing Stark and Pepper back together?”

“Why?”

“You’re in love with her.” His eyes got large at her words.

“That’s ridiculous,” he denied a little too quickly. “If I was in love with her, why would I push her to be with Tony?”

“Because you don’t think she would ever go for someone like you. Her last two boyfriends have both been billionaires. You feel like you can’t compete with that. So why even try.”

“And her last boyfriend dumped her for a toddler Starlet.”

“That’s his problem.” Romanoff said with a shrug.

“And the other one left her for a fugitive.” He argued back.

“No she left him. You know she left him. And maybe if Steve wasn’t in the picture, Stark would have gone back to her after Siberia on hands and knees with a giant Henry Winston diamond engagement ring and promised that he’ll give up being a superhero and promised that they will adopt babies together and be the perfect family. Maybe for a minute, she would have believed him. Maybe even long enough to actually make it down the aisle but the moment the world needs Tony Stark, he will be there and she will be left behind. I don’t think she can deal with that, not really.” Natasha said harshly. Deep down, he knows she’s right. But he’s never going to tell her that.

“That’s not true,” he denied halfheartedly.

“Yes it is true. They’re not going to work so stop pushing them to work because you are too scared to ask Pepper out.”
“I am not…” Happy started to argue, but he knew better than to argue with Black Widow, especially with the glare she was giving him. It felt like she was 30 seconds from dropping him on the floor again.

“If you care about her, then make a move. Don’t let your fears hold you back. Nothing in this world is guaranteed. But you can’t live vicariously through Tony Stark any longer. Tony has moved on. He is in a good place. He is happy. Even with everything going on in Washington with the Accords and registration, he’s happy. I don’t think I’ve seen him like this before.”

“It’s the medication and the therapy.” He argued.

“Probably, but all of those things made Stark take a good hard look at his life and make better choices and that includes being with Steve.”

“Siberia,” he argued back.

“Was a disaster. A lot of stuff happened there that all parties regret. More than we will ever really know about. Only three people know what really happened. One of those three is in long-term treatment for literally decades of torture. So you’re going to have to talk to Tony and Steve about that. If they’ve moved past it maybe you should as well.”

Again, Happy doesn’t respond, he just looks at her for a moment. Maybe there’s more truth there than he wants to knowledge even to himself.

“Look I’m going to go get your luggage from the hallway. Don’t unpack because we will be switching hotels in the morning because I think you need some space to think about all of this. Then Monday you will show up to escort Stark to his various business meetings where you will try to ignore the fact that he will most likely be covered in bite marks.”

“I do not want to think about that,” he never did.

“Well think about how you want your friends to be happy. Tony and Pepper were never going be happy in a romantic relationship together. You know this. They would keep trying until it completely broke them. Now they’re on their way back to becoming best friends again. Do you want Tony and Pepper to really be happy?”
“Yes.” He answered honestly.

“Then you have to let them be separate people. When I get back, we’ll go to an early dinner somewhere far away for several hours in case these walls are very thin. Maybe some alcohol will be involved. I will get Sam as well.”

“Ok.” He agreed reluctantly because maybe he needed some space from all of this and possibly a very stiff drink.

Xxxxx

Happy Bear: I’m sure you probably won’t even read this message until tomorrow unless Friday flags it for you but I want to apologize for how I acted. I’m sorry.

Happy Bear: I shouldn’t be trying to push you to get back with Virginia especially when you’re dating someone else. I just wanted her with someone better than that asshole. I punched him by the way.

Happy Bear: I am worried about you. I know about Siberia. My dad was abusive. He said he loved us but he hit us and mom all the time. It didn’t stop until I learned to hit back. I think that’s why I’m upset about this.

Happy Bear: Natalie pointed out that Siberia wasn’t like my childhood, that Stefan was trying to keep you from doing something much worse. I just wish he didn’t have to resort to violence.

Me: Well unfortunately I wasn’t exactly in a head space where talking it out would have actually worked. It was a literal case of beating sense into me.

Me: But if you’re worried about how we interact as a couple, I can say that Stefan is a gentle little teddy bear. He is so afraid of bruising when we are together that he’s having me top. Eventually, I’ll convince Stefan that I am OK with sex bruises. I think I’m halfway there already.

Happy Bear: I didn’t expect you to respond before morning. Also I don’t need details. I’m definitely switching hotels tomorrow.
Me: Well I’m not 20 anymore and I need food and maybe cuddling. I like cuddling. I was going to order something, but I figured I should respond to you first.

Happy Bear: You didn’t fall off the wagon did you?

Me: I am only drunk on cuddle bunny. I would explain why but you told me not to give you details. Mary W managed to get you, the counselor, and the red Russian a suite down the street. Although you, spider lady, and the counselor will have to share. But there are separate bed rooms for everyone.

Happy Bear: That’s probably for the best.

Me: Actually, we had to take a break because I needed to take a work call. Stefan is not the type of boyfriend that lets you let those types of messages go to voicemail, because it could be the end of the world in our line of work.

Happy Bear: Was it?

Me: Not really. They just need to know if in the bad old days, SI ever tried to create a biological weapon that would make people hallucinate ghosts and tear each other apart when exposed. I’m now happy I told Obadiah hell no when he proposed going into that shit.

Me: Also speaking of standing up for what you believe in, congratulations on punching out that asshole. If he does press charges, you know the legal team has your back.

Happy Bear: I don’t think he will, considering that things fell apart because Virginia and I caught him with the other person in a compromising position on his couch.

Me: And now I don’t want details. Bonus for you. Although, shouldn’t an all-expenses paid trip to India be a bonus? I’m sure Stefan will say no because I’m high maintenance. I will ask when he gets out of the shower.

Happy Bear: Do you love him?
Me: I think I told you before yes and that is still the case. Sleeping with him didn’t make that go away. Actually, it kind of made it worse. Love and sex are two different things. But it can be a form of intimacy.

Happy Bear: Does he love you?

Me: I’m 99% certain of that. And he does feel bad about Siberia. I feel bad about Siberia. We are not going to hit each other again. We promise to use our words.

Me: You know unless we get kidnapped by a super villain and brainwashed. Then all bets are off. I feel like this could totally happen.

Happy Bear: That seems like a possibility.

Me: Which is why Pepper can’t be in this part of my life. We were never going to come to a full understanding about my need to be a hero. She feels like maybe it’s another addiction. That there’s others that could step up. That I don’t need to put myself at risk. That I am just trying to absolve myself of all the bad things I’ve done in the past.

Me: Maybe that’s true. But it doesn’t make it less necessary. Stefan gets that and now I’m with him I get Pepper’s perspective a lot more than I did. I am absolutely terrified that one day we are going to go up against a guy that we are not going to be ready for yet. I’m afraid he’ll die in my arms.

Me: But I’m not going to let that scare me off. If we only have another day, another week, or another couple of years, then I am going to take every single second of that and treasure it. I don’t want to have any regrets.

Happy Bear: I’m starting to see that now.

Me: I just really want you to like my boyfriend. We have been friends for a really long time and I value and trust your opinion. I don’t like fighting with you.

Happy Bear: I don’t either.
Me: See talking things out through text messages makes everything a little easier because in person we’re just going to argue and not listen. This is better.

Happy Bear: This is how you were able to work things out with your boyfriend?

Me: Yes, because if Monkey Lover didn’t suggest that I text message him when I was completely drunk I have this feeling that the end of the universe could’ve came and we still would not have been on speaking terms and that would have been just bad. Tragic, really. I’m glad that we fixed things. I wasn’t expecting us to fix it to this point, but I’m not complaining.

Happy Bear: Are you happy?

Me: Yes, I am. I wish I could wake up next to him every night but I’ll take these moments.

Happy Bear: OK. I’ll see you Monday when you start doing meetings. Davis and Piper will be going with you to the wedding. Friday will take care of getting them appropriate attire.

Me: Perfect. Enjoy your vacation. If this wasn’t a trip for me to see my boyfriend, I would’ve brought Pepper along so she could have a distraction from that asshole. I should totally send you guys to the Bahamas or someplace warm but not Tahiti. Tahiti has been tainted.

Happy Bear: I don’t understand that reference.

Me: Be glad that you don’t. I will see you Monday.

To be continue
“How did the call with Yo-Yo go? They don’t need you to come back to DC, do they?” Steve asked as he stepped out of the bathroom, freshly showered. He frowned when he realized that Tony was texting someone instead of resting like he should’ve been after their earlier activities. Although at least Tony wasn’t packing. He was worried that Shield was calling because the last time they called while Steve was with Tony in person, Tony had had to go back early.

“How did the call with Yo-Yo go? They don’t need you to come back to DC, do they?” Steve asked as he stepped out of the bathroom, freshly showered. He frowned when he realized that Tony was texting someone instead of resting like he should’ve been after their earlier activities. Although at least Tony wasn’t packing. He was worried that Shield was calling because the last time they called while Steve was with Tony in person, Tony had had to go back early.

“I don’t have to go back. Also, it’s not a spider problem. Thankfully, Benji is not in danger, mostly because Joey is a really good at spider sitting.”

“That’s good.”

“Yes, and May is happy. Aunt May. Other May and Yo-Yo called because they needed my advice due to coming across some sort of possible weapon that causes people to hallucinate goes and then attack each other,” Tony explained.

“And she asked you about it because you’re a former weapons designer?” Steve asked.
“Key on the former. And SI had a strict no biological weapons policy which was started by Howard after he accidentally created something called ‘midnight oil’ and it went catastrophically badly. Much to Obadiah’s annoyance, I kept that policy. I never worked on anything like what Yo-Yo was describing.”

“Good. Were you able to help them at all?” Steve asked as he grabbed a pair of boxers out of his duffel bag. He found about sleeping nude, but if the hotel got raided by various government officials or super villains while sleeping, he would like to be at least wearing something when they showed up. Of course he was wondering why he was putting shorts on now, because there was a good chance that Tony would take them off as soon as he crawled into bed for round four.

“I suggested that she talk to Fitz because a couple weeks ago he mentioned working on antidote to some sort of biological weapon that could literally scare someone to death. I think his research might be useful in this case. That kid is crazy prepared, which may explain why he’s taking a couple of days for mental health rehab. He needs a break.”

“That’s good, though. Not that he still in treatment, but that they might have something available.”

“Yes, especially if May or Yo-Yo were accidentally exposed.”

“Were they?” Steve asked as he slid onto the bed a little concern for his friend.

“They’re not sure, but my James is having them come back to HQ for quarantine and a few brain scans as a precaution. Actually, they’re already on their way back and should be landing any moment. Yo-Yo said she would text me an update in the morning our time. If exposed, they should be reacting by that point. It took none of the others more than 24 hours to show symptoms, most did so immediately.”

“And if there’s a reaction?”

“Then team Coulson will deal with it because that is not in my wheelhouse, unfortunately. So, I’m still all yours. Although as much as I want to play with you again, I think I might need sleep first or at least a snack.”

“You ordered a cheeseburger while I was in the shower?” Steve asked half joking.
“Of course not. Mostly because they don’t serve them here, not the cow version anyway.”

“I knew that but you could still order French fries, at least.”

“We are going to expand your culinary horizons,” Tony said as he threw the room service menu at Steve. “Now I wish I really did order before you got here, but Happy texted me and I felt like I had to respond before putting in an order. Good news, I think he hates me a little less.”

“That’s good. What did Happy say?” Steve asked as he perused the menu. He’s probably just going to let Tony take something.

“I think he is starting to accept that Pepper and I will never ever be together for real this time.”

“That’s good. But how is he dealing with the thought of us together?” Steve asked.

“I think he might be less openly hostile. Okay, I think he’s going to stop trying to set me up with other people. But it’s probably going to take a while for him to be okay with us. Honestly, I think he was so uncomfortable because he kind of knows what happened in Siberia and his dad was an abusive bastard. So I think he was just worried about me becoming a battered boyfriend.” Tony explained and Steve frowned.

“I shouldn’t have hit you.”

“Well, I shouldn’t have tried to kill somebody in a roaring rampage of rage, but here we are. I hit you too,” Steve could hear the regret in Tony’s voice.

“The bruises were gone by morning.”

“That doesn’t matter. We should’ve talked things out. We should have never got to Siberia.” Tony said as he grabbed the phone and called room service. Steve wasn’t quite sure what his boyfriend was ordering, but there was a lot of it and he trusted Tony’s judgment when it came to food.
“Do you think we could have another Siberia?” Steve asked once Tony was done ordering dinner, their very late dinner. The clock said it was nearly 11 PM local time. Tony got there around 4 PM local time, and they were together ever since. No wonder Tony needed food and a break.

“I don’t think so. Not without a Loki’s scepter-like situation being involved. I definitely don’t think we’re going to come to blows over the right or wrong way to squeeze toothpastes. I like to think we were past that.”

“In some ways we are but I still think there’s progress that needs to be made. I could tell you were terrified to tell me about Bucky because you’re afraid I’m going to leave you.”

“You know I hate that you’re starting to become so perceptive. Life is easier when you were oblivious. And those abandonment issues aren’t all related to you. I’m sure a lot of them are Howard related. Like 98% of most of my issues are Howard related. See this is why I spend so much time in therapy,” Tony remarked.

“Well I’m not your father, and neither are you.”

“Thanks, Thor.” Tony said laying his head on Steve’s.

“We have a lot of things to still work through.”

“But a lot less than we had in April and I promise we will keep working through them. As I learned sometime during the mid-90s, orgasms don’t make everything go away. But they were quite enjoyable,” Steve responded by placing a kiss on Tony’s bare shoulder.

“I’m not going to run away from you or us if things start to go badly,” Steve promised and Tony responded by placing a gentle kiss on Steve’s lips.

“Which is good because knowing us, things will go catastrophically badly eventually. I still feel like an alien invasion is eminent.”

“Probably,” Steve laughed.

“I guess this means I really need to be on speaking terms with the other Avengers before that happens.”
“Sam and Natasha seem to be okay with us being together. You arranged for Wanda and Vision to be together so I’m pretty sure she’s already on your side.”

“Or they are just not openly hostile, which is still significantly better than Happy was five hours ago. Wanda’s family, now that’s a whole another category of complicated,” Tony remarked.

“No, I think they actually like you.”

“There’s a difference between biting your tongue when your friend dates somebody that you don’t like that much than trusting that guy to keep you alive during a superhero battle. I don’t know they’re for ready for the latter.

“We didn’t know each other that well the first time around, and we did okay,” Steve said, putting an arm around Tony.

“It took Agent Agent getting shanked by Loki before we stopped acting like toddlers. Yes, he got better. But let’s not have a repeat. The uncivil toddler squabble last spring was bad enough.”

“We should have breakfast together tomorrow and talk things out,” Steve suggested.

“Okay, obviously that is real reason why you brought Sam with you. Are you trying to play Avenger matchmaker?”

“Maybe.”

“My talk with Sam went well enough this afternoon, so I’m willing to sit down to breakfast, but I don’t think they’re going to want to do a 4 AM breakfast tomorrow. The wedding is at 6 AM tomorrow. Maybe Sunday instead?” Tony suggested and Steve just nodded his head. “Okay, now I really wish I could have gotten here yesterday, but there was a board meeting that I had to go to since Pepper is laying low due to evil ex boyfriends.” Steve also wished Tony got there a day earlier, but he is well aware of how busy his boyfriend really is.

“Why did you not mention that earlier?” Steve asked worriedly. He had no idea the wedding would be that early.
“Because I can’t think coherently when you’re naked and in bed with me. Thankfully, Friday would have totally woke us up in time.”

“But would we have fallen asleep in time?” Steve asked

“No, definitely not.” Tony responded with a kiss that deepened quicker than it should have. “Now I think I can almost pull off a second round.”

“Nope. Food first then sleep. I don’t want to look sleep deprived,” Steve said pulling away.

“You are no fun.” Tony was actually pouting at this point.

“You’re not leaving until next Friday. We have time.” Steve leaned over to kiss Tony again. Although just his cheek, this time. Any other body part would be too tempting.

“I’m going to be in business meetings for most of the week.”

“But nights will be spent with me.”

“That is a plus. Okay food then sleep and then good morning blow jobs?”

“Will you actually wake up in time for us to do that and still make it to the wedding by 6 AM.”

“For you, anything.”

To be continued.
Thank you to everybody who read or commented on the last conversation. You are all absolutely wonderful. While Tony and Steve are basking in the afterglow, I thought we would check up on some of the others in D.C. for plot reasons.

This is a ridiculously long A/N, so bear with me: Because I was asked previously I’m going to take a moment to provide a little bit of background for those who are not watching Agents of Shield, which will be helpful for this chapter and a few more later on. (Available on Netflix in the US. Go watch, it’s tons of fun. It’s already been renewed for seasons six and seven.) The following explanation contains spoilers for the first five seasons of Agents of Shield related to the complicated relationship of FitzSimmons and how it relates to this story.

In the original timeline and in our timeline up to the beginning of the story, Leopold Fitz and Jemma Simmons are the textbook definition of star-crossed lovers, sometimes literally. They began the series as best friends and science partners after starting out as rivals at the Academy, but eventually transitioned to a romantic relationship over the last five years. The only problem is the universe kept screwing them over.

First, Fitz only confesses his feelings for Simmons when they are stuck at the bottom of the ocean due to Hydra, just before sacrificing himself so she can get out. Thanks to Nick Fury (yes, really), they both survive. However, Fitz suffers brain damage due to hypoxia and Simmons can’t deal with the guilt which leads to awkwardness, her going undercover at Hydra, and dancing around each other until the end of season two when they finally get it together and agree to go on a date. Of course, at that moment a giant monolith transports Simmons to literally the other side of the universe to the planet whose name translates to death.

On this planet, after six months Simmons gives up all hope of being rescued or rescuing herself which is probably why she ends up sleeping with the only other person on planet, Will the astronaut a.k.a. Hog Face. (This is also why in this story Fitz is OK with Leopold hooking up with Hunter. He actually encourages it.) But Fitz does not give up and he manages to get her back. For a while things are awkward because of Will and Hydra. But eventually they do cross the “event horizon” and get together and are at the point in their relationship where they’re thinking about ridiculously expensive town houses in the DC Metro. This is where they are when our story begins.

However, in the main MCU timeline that Leopold lived through things go badly very quickly beginning with not burning AIDA the moment he finds out about her. Instead, he lies to his girlfriend and helps Radcliffe. This eventually results in him getting kidnapped and replaced by a LMD and then getting put in a virtual reality like prison where he is made to believe that he’s with AiDA, resulting in a very dubious consent relationship. He also thinks that he is the number two of Hydra and is an absolute monster referred to as the Doctor. For comic book readers, think evil Steve from Secret Empire. For Star Trek lovers, think the mirror verse.

Eventually, they do get out of the Framework prison but Fitz is consumed with guilt for what he did in the other virtual timeline. This is made worse by AIDA trying to rape him after creating a body for herself with multiple superpowers. Eventually, the good
guys save the day with the help of the Ghost Rider (Robbie Reyes) except the bad guys blame all bad things on SHIELD and it's about to be disbanded again. Then the team gets kidnapped and Leo gets tossed into prison.

What happens in season five was detailed in the Princess Annotations part two. This time the universe separated Fitz and Simmons by time not just distance. Leo rescues her and they come back to the present to try to save the world. And they do in the canon timeline, but the cost is steep (I tear up just thinking about it) and the finger snap still happens. But hey at least the Avengers are still alive to actually fix things. Others, not so much.

In my version, when the monoliths explode (episode 5.11), Leo is sent through time and space with two more years to fix things and prevent the end of the world and the finger snap of doom. That’s good. What is bad is Simmons already has Fitz. Yes, I am horrible but we still have more hope than canon. Sometimes, hope is the only thing we have. Anyway, I felt that this background that will help for the next few chapters, especially this one.

Reminder: Fitz refers to the Leopold Fitz that originated from this timeline. Leo or Leopold refers to the Leopold Fitz that crashed the timeline.

Spoiler warning: Some vague references will be made to the events of Cloak and Dagger season one. In this story’s timeline the events of Cloak and Dagger season one took place around February 2017 coinciding with Mardi Gras 2017. You probably won’t even notice what it is unless you watch the show. Remember, it’s all connected.

They A/N for this chapter was so long, I couldn't all put it in the box.

“We should have listened to Hunter,” Fitz told him as they waited in the white holding room together. They were both lying together on the giant bed. Leo is glad that he designed this room for comfort. It was much nicer than when he was locked up by the general. Although, they should’ve put two beds in here. Of course, he never thought they would be hosting two people in the room together (he’s not going to think about the last time he was stuck in this room with somebody else). Apparently, Dr. Suarez felt it was okay to put them in together. (His other self wouldn’t try to rape him like AIDA did). Which would be fine if Fitz were not a cover hog. Although, he’s sure that his younger self probably thinks the same thing about him.

Maybe they were hoping that being in close proximity with each other, they would just fuse back together again. Somebody has been watching too much bad science fiction.

“You did listen to Hunter,” Leopold responded to his counterpart. “The princess did not which, is why we’re locked in here.” That wasn’t quite it.
While they were in New York a few days ago, Shuri picked up on the fact that he was hallucinating his evil counterpart and decided that he needed help. This led to both he and his other self being locked in this room for the last two days subject to a full mental health screening among other tests.

“It’s hard to argue with royalty. How long do you think they will keep us locked up here?” Fitz asked.

“I think you can leave as soon as they are sure I’m not a clone or an LMD.” He is sure they will let Fitz out soon. Leo is also sure that he’s going to be here for the foreseeable future. People who hallucinate and have conversations with their evil self don’t get released back into society. That’s been happening more and more, especially when Hunter wasn’t there. They’re all going to realize he’s completely cracked, and he’s never going to get out of this place.

“I’m sure the team will rule out LMD soon since AIDA was the only one.” Fitz said, just as the door to the room open. It must be time for another session with Dr. Suarez. But it wasn’t the doctor that walked into the room, but rather Simmons. He’s been using her last name to differentiate her from his fiancée back in his own time.

“Which is why we have already successfully ruled out the possibility of you being an LMD.” She said walking into the room itself, not the safe observation area.

“Also, blood tests have shown that you don’t have any of the genetic markers associated with cloning. In addition, you are slightly genetically different than the Leo Fitz that originated from this timeline. But close enough that we do not believe that you are a Hydra agent wearing a nano mask. So therefore we are willing to entertain the possibility that you are from a different timeline.”

“Now you believe us,” Fitz sighed at his girlfriend.

“I always believed that you believed that you were telling me the truth,” Simmons replied. “But it was always that the person claiming to be you from another dimension was an imposter. However, I wanted to believe you.”

“But you needed proof first?” Leo asked.

“Yes. It’s hard to accept this all on faith. If you would’ve told me immediately instead of lying to me about it for the last six months, I would have found the situation more plausible. I mean, if I find myself back in the past, I would seek you out first.” Simmons said turning to Leo. “Instead, you went
“Actually Leo was dropped off in his bed and he waited a few months before even contacting me so I’ve only been not relaying the situation to you since July,” Fitz replied.

“So you have been lying to me since July?”

“Not lying per se, but not relaying pertinent classified information which we have always agreed was permissible,” Fitz argued and Leo just sighed. He would have assumed his younger self would have learned not to dig the hole deeper by this point.

“I don’t think it can be considered classified information if neither the director or Agent Coulson know about it,” Simmons nearly yelled.

“Actually, both of us have originating classification authorities and can classify any piece of information without consulting the Director, the Deputy Director or senior Agent Coulson, which is what I did in this case,” Fitz argued. Leo really wished she would leave the room at this point. Simmons was making her furious face. He knew that face too well.

“That still doesn’t excuse the fact that you lied to me. I think I have the right to know that I was sleeping next to a complete stranger,” Simmons practically yelled.

“Actually, Leo lived the same life as I did up until…” Fitz started to say but Leo cut him off.

“That doesn’t matter. I’m not you and she is not my Jemma,” he said turning to Simmons. “You’re right, we should have told you, especially when we switch places, so I could deal with AIDA myself.”

“You should have. Thankfully, I was on a mission for most of it. I would’ve been furious if I had sex with someone who wasn’t my boyfriend.” Simmons glared directly at Fitz. Now that the team knew there was two of them, Simmons was the only one who could actually tell them apart. (Along with Hunter, but he wasn’t technically part of the team at the moment.)

“I wouldn’t have let that happen.” It would be wrong to her, to Jemma, and even to Hunter to do that. “Did you find Vijay Nadeer?” Leo asked.
He was thrown into this room before he could talk to her, to see if Simmons found Senator Nadeer’s
inhuman brother before she had a chance to kill him. Leo felt like he needed to save him because of
what he did to the man in the framework. It was the least he could do.

“The source was correct and he was being essentially held captive by his sister. We walked in on her
verbally and physically abusing his chrysalis. Don’t worry, he’s safe and under the observations of
Dr. Suarez.” Leo exhaled in relief.

“What happened to the Senator?” Leo asked.

“She is under arrest, but Director Rhodes doesn’t want the information to go public until after the
election. He doesn’t want to accidentally influence it one way or the other. If you are from the future
who actually won last time?”

“The winner is not running in this timeline.” That comment resulted in him receiving strange looks
from his counterpart and his girlfriend.

“The first time around, after the fallout with the Accords, the new most likely watchdog-backed
Rising Tide revealed the fact that the president knew that Gideon Malik was Hydra, as well as the
truth about the missing missile and satellite explosion. President Ellis withdrew from the race, and his
replacement was elected.” Leo was not even going to tell them who that was. They wouldn’t believe
him.

“Really?” Fitz asked surprised.

“Yes. Oddly enough, Ross stayed on as Secretary of State because he agreed to do so until his
successor was confirmed. Unfortunately, that president nominated the head of Roxxon. He withdrew
his nomination after the company was found responsible for releasing a toxin into New Orleans that
caused rioting and resulted in multiple deaths during Mardi Gras 2017,” that director Mace refused to
let them investigate so Leo has no idea what happened and therefore can’t fix it.

“That president never bothered finding a successor.” Much to everyone’s frustration.

“Why are things different this time?” Simmons asked.
“I made sure that the ATCU servers could not be hacked by the Watchdogs and therefore President Ellis never withdrew from the election.” Ellis still beat the alternative.

“Just Stark,” Simmons remarked.

“Because I needed Friday’s help to do so. She was the first person I contacted. She convinced me that the Avengers needed to be back on speaking terms. So I started emailing Tony again to help with that.”

“And now, they’re together at a wedding in Mumbai when I could actually use him. May is getting worse,” Simmons said worriedly.

“Leo can help. He’s already lived through this life once,” Fitz suggested.

“Things are different,” Simmons remarked. “As we’ve just discussed. I’m not sure if Director Rhodes had to make full use of his new exoskeleton to knock May out because she became belligerent after “being touched by a ghost” as Yo Yo described it.”

“Shit!” Leo exclaimed.

“This happened last time?” Simmons asked.

“Mace was the one who incapacitated her last time because he was director, but yes. She actually died before we could help her but she got better. It also happened a few weeks later.” Months, actually. But Leo didn’t tell her that. The Watchdogs seem to be moving up there timeline which makes sense because their effort to get their preferred candidate didn’t work. Of course, this means that they’re also dealing with Robbie earlier. Which may not be a bad thing.

“You know how to help May?” He heard Coulson asked over the intercom. Of course he was watching the whole thing on camera.

“Yes. What she was exposed to is essentially scaring her to death. I know how to reset her brain without stopping her heart.” That’s when the door to the room opened and Leo rushed out. He could vaguely hear Simmons and Coulson arguing in the background. It didn’t matter. May was his first priority. A part of him wishes Radcliffe was still around, since he was the one who saved May the first time.
But he didn’t need the man. He did save May with the help of Fitz and Simmons. Yes it feels weird saying that even in his head, but really nothing about the last few months has not been weird. At least May was safe. One more good change. But was that enough to save the world? He had no idea.

To be continued
Thank you to everybody who read or reviewed the last conversation. You are absolutely lovely. It seems that the regular update schedule is back.

Even though Tony and Steve are in the same country, they are still going to end up texting each other, especially during a wedding, which is going to take at least three hours. Okay, Tony is sending Steve text messages despite the fact he sitting right next to Steve and Steve may occasionally respond verbally. It’s a three-hour wedding, not including the reception that will last late into the night because Tony’s friends decided to have it all in one day (instead of the next day, which is more common). Also please note that Tony is not texting Steve constantly. Sometimes there could be gaps for 15 or 20 minutes between messages.

When I sat down to write this chapter, several weeks ago, the last wedding I went to was sometime during the late 90s. Strangely enough I did end up going to a wedding during the polishing process for this chapter. There was a lot of glitter, rose petals, broken glasses, and party favors. That being said, I had to do a lot of research on this chapter. So good news, my computer now thinks I’m getting married. The things I do for a good chapter. Additionally, SPNxBookworm reviewed this chapter to make sure I was somewhat accurate. Thank you for doing that. This is in addition to the regular proofreading done by Evespring.

I think I need to start putting a portfolio together for all my fictional weddings. Who knows, I may have the need for more fictional wedding planning in the future.

Anthony: Yo-Yo just texted. Monkey lover is a miracle worker and May is out of the woods. Although, despite the potential life-threatening situation, Coulson still hasn’t confessed his feelings for May yet or vice versa. Despite making some very questionable decisions to get her treatment.

Anthony: Idiots.
“That’s good, although you could’ve waited until after the wedding to tell me,” Steve whispered to Tony. “Or actually tell me, I’m sitting next to you.”

Anthony: 1. Anything about May is too sensitive to say out loud in a room full of civilians.

Anthony: 2. You were too panicky about May for me to wait until the end of the wedding. How many times did you call Yo-Yo and Simmons with my phone last night?

Anthony: 3. Piper scares me.

Me: Okay.

Anthony: Why did I decide to come to this wedding? I forgot how long this was going to be. And they decided to do a reception today and not tomorrow, for reasons known only to the bridal party. Today is going to be a long day.

Anthony: We could totally be in our room working on round number 4. I think I got you to the point where you’re willing to be on top. I promise I won’t have a Siberia flashback. I know you’re worried about that.

Me: Because if you didn’t come to this wedding, we would not have been able to have rounds 1 - 3 last night. I thought Friday said that there was a reception tomorrow too.

Anthony: Fair point. Actually, I think there might be two receptions, although we’re spending tomorrow in a bedroom together because I need recovery time after this much social interaction. Also, we totally should’ve gotten round 4 in this morning.

Me: You also wanted to see your friends.

Anthony: Who are mad at me because we missed the Sangeet yesterday. Thankfully, you made a good first impression this morning, so we are invited to dinner Monday before they go back to the states.
Me: That’s good. I think.

Me: We were supposed to do something last night?

Anthony: Yes, but you were more riveting and the security team was a little worried they couldn’t secure the venue ahead of time like here. Also, I was too emotionally exhausted to deal with other people after the plane ride with Happy and being ambushed by Sam. I am so glad Happy Bear doesn’t hate you anymore, I think.

Anthony: I guess I’ll find out more Monday.

Me: Pay attention to the wedding and stop texting me.

Anthony: Your glare is adorable. I would totally stop if you didn’t respond. Yet you keep doing so, even though you have to hunt and peck on that keyboard of yours. I bet you are so happy I got rid of the flip phone.

“How can you type so fast?” Steve whispers under breath which causes a glare from Agent Piper.

Anthony: I have skills and a lot of preset words. Also, maybe Friday just knows what I really want to say.

“Watch the wedding,” Steve whispered.

Anthony: I rather watch you.

Anthony: You look positively edible.

Anthony: I would describe in detail what I want to do with you, but I’m pretty sure the Princess is reading this.

Anthony: Hey Princess, if you stop reading these messages for real, I will make your brother’s Avenger’s designation “Kitty Avenger”.


“Tony, be respectful,” Steve mumbled rolling his eyes. A few moments later, his phone vibrated again.

Anthony: I am being respectful. I’m not wearing red even though it’s my signature color, my head is covered, and I’m not wearing shoes. Davis was really not happy about losing the shoes.

“You like not wearing shoes.” This got him a glare from Davis this time. Maybe it’s best if he returns to actually texting Tony. Less people noticed that.

Me: You look good in blue.

Anthony: I look good in everything and so do you.

Me: I’m trying to pay attention. This is the most interesting wedding I’ve been to.

Anthony: Different then in the 40s?

Me: Yes. I like it. Especially all the color.

Anthony: Okay, bright wedding for us. Although a shorter one.

Anthony: You should know that this wedding is going to take at least two more hours so it’s good to be comfortable. We are just getting through the bright arrival part.

“How many parts are there?” Steve whispered.

Anthony: Several

Anthony: Just relax and enjoy. There are people getting up and getting snacks and socializing.
Anthony: Yes that’s allowed. I feel like texting you would be okay in that situation.

Anthony: Besides, I might have to explain some of the elements of the wedding, like there is a part of the ceremony where we can’t take pictures, not even the wedding photographer. Or the fact that we’re going to have to take pictures with the whole family later.

Anthony: Also someone will need to tell you when it’s time for us to actively participate. We have flowers to toss.

“How are you typing so fast?”

Anthony: Again, Friday. She can help you too.

Anthony: Okay, now I wish we got here earlier. I’m kind of hungry and a snack pre-wedding would have been nice.

“And who’s fault is that?” Steve asked. And yes, he’s getting glared at for doing that.

Anthony: The person who decided on a 6 AM wedding.

Anthony: A 1 AM wedding would have better especially with the jet lag and your constant calling to DC to check up on May.

Anthony: When we get married, the ceremony is so happening at 1 AM.

“We are not having a 1 AM wedding,” Steve whispered.

Anthony: It’s perfect. The paparazzi are less likely to crash if we do it in the middle of the night.

Anthony: Also, I feel like we would have to deal with less super villains that way. They would totally want to crash.
Me: Have we dealt with any super villains lately?

Anthony: Well, not us directly, but Yo-Yo and Melinda are. Which is how she got, As Yo-Yo Puts it, “touched by a ghost” that nearly killed her. I still want a rational explanation for that.

Anthony: I feel like we’re due for at least a regular villain attack soon. Maybe just watchdog level and not Loki level.

Anthony: You know, totally below our pay grade, but we keep having to deal with it because they’re annoying little insects.

Anthony: Piper just glared at me.

Me: Because you asked her to get you a snack. You should’ve had breakfast.

Anthony: I wanted to eat you but you wouldn’t let me.

Me: I am not breakfast.

Anthony: Baby you are the most important meal of the day.

Me: Okay, stop glaring. You’re adorable when you glare. I’ll be back in a few minutes. I need to go to the men’s room and I know there are snacks somewhere.

Anthony: Okay I’m back and ready to get through the next hour plus of the ceremony.

Anthony: No, I didn’t bring you back anything. You can go get your own snack.

Me: I’m okay. I had breakfast

Anthony: Because you didn’t hit the snooze button when Friday woke us up at 4 AM.
At this point, Steve decided to just take Tony’s phone away. He placed it in his pocket, despite the fact that Tony was pouting at him.

“Fine, I will watch the wedding. Like a good boy.” And Tony did stay quiet until they moved on to what appeared to be the next part of the ceremony. That’s when he got another text message. He only looked because of May being sick. Really, that was the only reason he had the phone on at all, otherwise he would have asked Friday to hold all of his calls. He’s definitely doing that Tuesday when he and Tony have breakfast with Sam and Natasha. Steve will not let Tony spend another social gathering on his phone the entire time.

Sexy boyfriend: So we’re about to get to the most important part of the ceremony, the seven steps.

“I know. Friday sent me reading material. Did you get another phone?” Tony responded by holding up his watch as he typed out another message. Steve is not even surprised.

Sexy boyfriend: Before or during the wedding?

“During, while you were in the men’s room. Watch the couple.” Steve whispered.

“Yes dear.” Tony whispered back.

Xxx

“I like the vows hey use during the seven steps.” Steve told Tony while they were sitting at their table more than an hour later. The ceremonial part of the wedding was over and they were now mingling.

Okay he and Tony were sitting at their table alone while Agents Davis and Piper tested the food. Nobody wanted a repeat of what happened a few months ago. He doubted anybody would want to kill Tony at this wedding, but you could never be too careful.

“Especially the last one about being lifelong friends. It was different, but it was beautiful.”
“Note to self, incorporate something like that in my wedding vows to you,” Tony joked, Steve thought.

“You know, normal people actually ask somebody to marry them before they start planning the hypothetical wedding,” Steve replied.

Although now that he thinks about it, Tony made a lot of comments about their possible wedding today during the ceremony. He really shouldn’t be surprised. Jokes were Tony’s number two coping strategy, just after avoidance.

“I’m not normal. I’m a futurist. If I don’t totally screw things up or the end of the world doesn’t come in the next couple of months, I will break out the engagement ring. You didn’t run away to the Princess’s house to see your BFF, so I feel like that’s progress,” Tony half joked, maybe.

“Because you’re right,” Tony smiled at those words.

“What am I right about?” Tony asked.

“James needs some time to adjust, now that he’s not under Hydra control anymore. I want to be there, but only when he’s ready for me. This has to go at his pace.” After thinking about it overnight and dealing with the May crisis Steve realize he has to do what’s best for Bucky’s recovery, not just what he wanted to do.

“You were so distracting last night that I forgot to mention that the doctors think that James will be ready for visitors by late December. That could be your Christmas present. Since I feel like it’s too early for an engagement ring.” Oh, look, another wedding joke.


“You can if you want to. And you know I always do what I want,” Tony smirked at him.

“That’s true.”

“Although with our jobs, it might be more practical to wear the ring around your neck on a chain.”
“That probably would work best. I would hate to damage the ring when punching someone.”

“You do punch people a lot.”

“You don’t have Happy holding on to this ring like the last one?”

“No, I’m not that cruel. And besides, he was the one who bought that one.” Tony answered, just as Agent Davis showed up with their food.

That night when Steve found a platinum wedding ring hidden in the condom box, he said nothing. Either Tony will give it to him when he’s ready or Steve will find it when he’s ready to put it on. They have time.

To be continued
In person conversation 12: Tonight is For Our Ghosts

Chapter Notes

Thank you to everyone who read or reviewed the last conversation. This was originally the second half of IP 11. However, I decided to split the chapter in 2 because half of the original version of the chapter took place before conversation 70 and the other half took place after. I felt it was less confusing this way.

A/N: Simmons will be referring to herself as Jemma in her head but when Leo says that name, he’s referring to the Dr. Simmons from his original timeline. Yes, I know time travel is confusing.

The title comes from the Mike Shinoda song “Ghosts” which is almost a theme song for most of this series.

Warning: Discussion of past sexual assault and mental illness

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

After being associated with SHIELD for nearly a decade and being thrown across the universe, really nothing should surprise Jemma. And yet she is still having difficulties accepting that another version of her boyfriend was thrown back 2 years into their timeline, or was it from a parallel dimension? She was trying to decide which possibility she found more comforting. Although, the fact that he saved May’s life with knowledge that could only come from living through it once is helping to alleviate her skepticism.

Now that the crisis was over, it was time for her and the other Leo Fitz to have a little chat. The best way to do that was to bring food. She was half expecting him to be back in the holding room. Instead, she found him in Fitz’s old room, the one he had before he moved into hers a few months ago. They really did need to find an apartment soon. If she tripped over Fitz’s shoes one more time, she really was going to take Stark up on his offer for use of his house on Arlington Ridge.

Jemma could’ve just entered the room with her key card, but she thought it would be only polite to actually knock. Thankfully, he did open the door.

“I figured you could use something to eat,” Jemma told him, holding up her expertly wrapped sandwich. “Prosciutto and mozzarella with just a hint of pesto aïoli.”
“I think this is your favorite peace offering,” Leo said, gesturing for her to come into the room.

“It is your favorite sandwich. It is your favorite sandwich?” She asked taking a seat on the couch in the room. It didn’t feel right sitting on his bed. He may look exactly like her boyfriend, but that didn’t mean she knew this person in front of her.

“Yes.”

“It’s reassuring to know that not everything is completely different in your universe.”

“I may be Fitz from a different point in the timeline,” Leo suggested.

“Are you certain of that?” Jemma asked.

“I don’t know. We never found Ian Quinn in my original timeline. Neither me nor the Princess could confirm either possibility.”

“But nearly everything else seems identical until you arrived?” She asked.

“We think so, but there could be other differences that we are not aware of.”

“So, are we still together when you were sent over here? Because I feel like my other self would have retrieved you by now.” She definitely would’ve grabbed Fitz out by now. She would owe him that much.

“Yes. We were engaged actually.” For a moment she let herself smile at that. “However, the team was dealing with trying to prevent the end of the world. That has to take precedence over me.”

“I don’t agree with that.” Leo gave her a sad smile at those words.

“It is possible that the mechanism that caused me to be sent to this point in time or this dimension
may have destroyed her and therefore there’s nobody left to bring me back.”

“You’ve given up hope that you’ll get back to her?” Jemma asked remembering her own moment of hopelessness. She’s not entirely sure if she would have slept with Will if she had not convinced herself that she was never going to see Fitz again.

“Or I accepted that I did get back to her. Just two years earlier. Therefore, the best way to protect her is to save the world. It is just unfortunate that she already has her own Fitz. That’s okay, I kind of like him,” Leo smirked at her.

“She could always have two,” she joked, sort of. Okay, maybe she read too many Jim and Spock fanfics that involved this type of scenario back at the Academy. She’d had to do something since she was too young to drink.

“But I’m not Fitz. I have lived an entire different life. Also, I’m not sure how I feel about a somewhat incestuous threesome.”

“You said things were the same until you arrived,” she was blushing too much to address his other point.

That’s when he explained the truth about AIDA and the framework, including being raped by the LMD. By the end of his story, she wanted to hug him. She also wanted to burn AIDA all over again.

“So, you lived an entirely different life where your father never left?” Jemma asked, still trying to process everything. She’s been doing that a lot over the last few days.

“Yes. Now I understand why you should be careful what you wish for. I know that his leaving was for the best. He was a monster. So I became a monster. I understand Ward now,” she definitely wanted to hug him.

“This framework is the same virtual reality thing that you and Stark have been working on?” She asked, not sure what else to say regarding his confession.

“It’s not the same framework. For example, in this new framework if you die in there, you won’t die in the real world.”
“That’s good.” Why did she feel like there was more to it than that?

“I’m not sure how much to change incase that tech could be used for something useful in the future. I’m just trying to make up for the things I did wrong.”

“But it wasn’t you. It was the program,” she argued.

“The program just changed the circumstances of my life, but I was still me. I was the one who killed Lincoln and Vijay and dozens of other Inhumans to get their powers. Because of me, Aida was so powerful that the only way to defeat her was for Coulson to make a deal with the ...” Leo paused.

“I have to make things better. I arrived literally a day too late to save Lincoln but Vijay is still here.” At his words, various pieces of the puzzle clicked together in Jemma's mind.

“You sent me to save Vijay Nadeer?” She asked. It made sense. How else would Director Rhodes know that the Senator was abusing her own brother like that?

“They say the third times the charm. The Senator killed him, the first time around. I killed him the second,” Leo confessed.

“That wasn’t you,” Jemma tried to put an arm around him, but Leo pulled away. That hurt her heart.

“It was. The doctor is inside me. I hear his voice telling me what I need to do to save you and the team. Not all of its good. Sometimes, I even see him,” Leo confessed.

“But you had hallucinations after the ocean and eventually got better,” she said, trying to reassure him.

“This is different. I’ve been doing a lot of study about Prodromal Schizophrenia. I know where this is going,” Leo said darkly.

“That’s why the Princess told Dr. Suarez the truth. That’s why she wants to keep you here for
observations, even though you’re no longer in the containment room.”

“Yes. I need help and treatment before it gets worse. Which meant the truth needs to get out. I had a videoconference with Suarez earlier. There’s some new medication that SHIELD has been working on that may help me. I will have to stay here for a few weeks while she gets the doses right, which Hunter is going to hate, but it’s for the best.” Leo genuinely smiles when he says Hunter’s name. There has to be something to that. She’s going to have to ask Fitz about that later. However, she has more pressing concerns.

“What about Fitz?” She asked concerned. The two men were very genetically similar.

“Multiple twin studies have concluded that schizophrenia is 50% environment and 50% genetics. My second life in the framework was most likely my trigger.” Along with what Aida did to him, but neither one of them wanted to talk about that. Again, Jemma wanted to burn AIDA to the ground.

“Although, I am sure the traumatic brain injury didn’t help the situation,” Jemma said, trying to remember various things she read in various medical textbooks about schizophrenia.

“No, it did not.”

“I won’t leave, though. I did last time, and that was a mistake. I won’t do that again.”

“I’m not your Fitz,” Leo argued.

“No, but you are my Leo.” Jemma placed an arm around him and this time, thankfully, he didn’t pull away. “We were friends long before we were lovers and we can be friends again. I want to be your friend.”

“We can be. I hate not being able to tell you what’s going on and I know Fitz did as well. I was just afraid Hunter would be right and the team would lock us up for being crazy. He sort of was.”

“It is hard to believe but I do believe you,” she gave him one last squeeze before pulling away.

“Because my knowledge from the other timeline prevented May from dying, albeit temporarily,” Leo
“Someday, I want to hear that story,” Simmons said, getting up from the couch.

“Are you and Fitz going to be okay?” Leo asked her.

“We will be. I may make him bunk with you tonight, but we’ll get through it. It helps to know that we were together in the other timeline.”

“We did get engaged, but we didn’t make it down the aisle. I hope you do better,” Leo smirked at her. Why did she have a feeling that he knew something she did not? “Remember to always listen to each other, really listen.”

“I will. I’m sure it was a lovely proposal.”

“It happened twice, because you couldn’t hear me the first time.”

“Of course it did. By the way, Hunter keeps texting you,” Simmons said giving him back his personal phone. “There must be 100 or so in there. You should probably message him back.”

“Did you read any of those messages?” Leo asked.

“Only the most recent ones.”

“That’s probably for the best. I’m sure he probably asked me what color underwear I’m wearing,” Leo groused.

“Is there something I need to know?” She asked.

“I’m not sure yet,” Leo actually blushed.
“It’s okay if there is, though. You should be happy. At least Hunter’s an improvement on Ward.”

“You knew about my crush on him?” Leo asked surprise.

“Yes, which was why I had such a hard time believing that you love to me or that my Fitz loved me. And now I’m really glad that you two decided that you would be Leo and he would be Fitz. This is really confusing,” she rambled.

“It is.”

“Enjoy your sandwich. We’ll talk more later,” she made her way towards the door.

“Ok.”

“Good night,” Jemma said before leaving.

xxxxx

Monkey lover 2: I’m okay and have my phone back. I am even free to wander the base.

Football Hunter: Thank God. I thought I was going to have to invade the Playground to get you out.

Monkey lover 2: I was locked up in the White Room for a little while, but I saved May, so I’m free.

Football Hunter: To come back to me?

Monkey lover 2: In a little bit. I need to work with Dr. Suarez for a little while, as soon as she’s done with Vijay. I’m going to need some medication and probably some therapy. I wish you could be here though.
Football Hunter: You found him?

Monkey lover 2: Simmons did. He’s safe now and the senator is going down.

Football Hunter: Good. So, one more thing you changed?

Monkey lover 2: Yes

Football Hunter: So maybe you’ll save the world after all from that purple raisin with a glove fetish that baby bird keeps drawing.

Monkey lover 2: Maybe, I can. But I can’t do it alone.

Me: [Shot glass emoji] Here is to the Avengers getting their shite together before the end of the universe.

Monkey lover 2: [Shot glass emoji]

Chapter End Notes

FF dot net still does not allow for Graphics, so I’m using the text descriptors but in reality they did use the emojis.

After watching the trailer for Endgame yesterday, I really hope Leo will be successful. We shall see.
That trailer was intense. I’m processing, but it gave me ideas.
In happier news, I got tickets for an early showing of Spider Verse later today. I’m excited.
Thank you to everybody who read or reviewed the last conversation. You are all absolutely fabulous. You are probably expecting more in person conversations between Tony and Steve, but every time they are in a room together right now, there hasn’t been a lot of conversing. After four years, the sexual tension has to get out somehow. But it’s now Monday in Mumbai and Tony’s SI meetings give them the perfect time to actually have a conversation or two.

Warning: A little sexually suggestive dialogue, but Steve is trying to shut it down because of their 16-year-old voyeur. I should probably add that as a tag to the story.

The “me” in this conversation is Steve.

Tony: You know I’m kind of lamenting the fact that there’s a 98% chance that the genius Princess is reading these text messages. I was kind of hoping to find out if you were willing to try text message sex now that you actually had something to visualize.

Tony: I give this morning’s wake up a 12 out of 10. Thor bless the fact that you don’t really need to breathe that much. The lack of gag reflex is also a plus.

Me: Still not happening. Even if we knew for sure this is actually a private conversation, the real thing is always better.

Tony: You ’re such a flatterer.

Me: What are you doing right now?
Tony: Not you. Such a pity. I’m still mad I had a business breakfast this morning. I wanted to eat berries and whip cream off your stomach.

Me: We are definitely not have these types of conversations.

Tony: You’re no fun. Breakfast was disappointing merely because of the lack of your presence. I did have a good meeting with the head of SI India, followed by an even better meeting with the R&D team here. They’re coming up with some good applications for the exoskeleton that I created for Rhodey that are actually practical and insurance companies may pay for. I love it when I get to play with toys while working.

Me: That’s good.

Tony: Unfortunately, I’m currently having lunch with the money people and I kind of want to cry. This has to be punishment for not doing the New York Times interview. I knew PR Jane would have her vengeance somehow.

Me: This explains why you are texting me right now.

Tony: Actually, that would be Yo-Yo. She would love it if you did not call her every 20 minutes to check on May so she can get in a farewell day with her boyfriend before she flies back Tuesday night to LA to investigate Mister Flaming Head and maybe fuck with Pepper’s ex-boyfriend. If you’re going to have superspeed use it to punish dark souls, especially those that break my Pepper Pop’s heart.

Me: I haven’t been calling every 20 minutes.

Tony: Do I need to have Friday pull up the call logs from my normal phone? At least you know better than to call from your phone. Progress.

Me: That won’t be necessary. I’m just worried. I keep losing people I care about, and I’d really prefer for that not to happen again.

Tony: I get that. However, Leo Fitz is a miracle worker and Melinda is fine. They’re still running test
but she’s recovering nicely, despite the shot directly to the spinal cord.

Me: I would just feel better if I could talk to her.

Tony: Yo-Yo said that she would sneak in a phone to May before Mack takes her out on her goodbye dinner. So you might be able to talk to her at breakfast our time tomorrow. I think.

Tony: Friday, how many hours is Mumbai ahead of DC?

Friday: 10 ½ hours, due to the end of daylight savings time on November 6. It is currently 2:42 AM in the District of Columbia.

Tony: That means you are disrupting Yo-Yo’s sleep, or her fun boyfriend time. No wonder she was cranky.

Me: Tell her thank you, once it’s a reasonable time in DC. Also, I’m sorry. I didn’t realize it was that late. I would just feel better if I could talk to her. I’m a little restless.

Tony: Why are you restless? I thought you were supposed to be going sightseeing with Lily bear’s aunt and the counselor?

Me: The Aunt and counselor left on a mission Saturday, but they’ll be back tomorrow in time for breakfast. At least that’s what the counselor said in his text message to me.

Tony: I am just finding out about this now? I would’ve figured out some way to sneak you into my meetings, otherwise. That way we could have tested out the integrity of my desk here. I have an office. Or me and Pepper, share one. Between the two of us we are here enough to warrant an office.

Me: They sent a text but we were preoccupied. I didn’t even think of checking my phone until you left for your breakfast meeting.

Tony: Because you naked and on my bed is very occupying. Since we came home from the wedding Saturday until this morning, we only really took sleep, food, and hydration breaks. I am glad you’re into edging, otherwise I would probably be napping right now.
Tony: Of course, a nap would be more pleasant than this meeting. You’re the only thing keeping me sane. I want to stab at least three people with a butter knife.

Me: That is not good.

Tony: But normal for these types of meetings. If you’re restless you could try writing that letter to your BFF. I also wouldn’t be opposed to more NC-17 artwork of our exploits together. It’s safer than a sex tape.

Me: I tried six times.

Tony: I can’t wait to look in our wastebasket when I get home. I love your artwork.

Me: I mean writing to my James. Also, there is nothing in the wastebasket because apparently nano paper is self erasing.

Tony: Which apparently is for the best. I get why this is hard. It can’t be easy to tell your BFF that you’re now dating the guy who tried to kill him a little under five months ago. I wonder if anybody makes an “I’m sorry I took my anger out on you for doing something that you had no control over” bouquet or apology gift basket.

Me: If it exists, I’m sure Friday can find it.

Tony: I will have Friday get on that.

Me: Do you think they have an “I just want to tell you I’m bisexual” bouquet?

Tony: You never told him before?

Me: I never told him about Artie. I was always afraid that he would leave me.
Tony: The guy was your best friend, I doubt that would be the case.

Me: It was a different time. The only person I told was Peggy. I only told her because I felt like if we were really going to start something she should know.

Tony: And she figured it out on her own first. At least that’s what Aunt Peggy told me.

Me: She was always clever like that.

Tony: So maybe you start your letter there and then bring up the fact that it’s me your dating. I’m going to have to apologize for falling for a villain trap and completely losing my shit in Siberia.

Me: Only if you are sincere.

Tony: 100% sincere. I should definitely start with those flowers. I’m better at apologizing with things than with words. I think it something I unfortunately got from Howard. So you know I’m going to try not to do it if I can help it. Maybe I’ll work on my apology letter during the accounts meeting in an hour.

Me: I thought you were with the money people now?

Tony: I am currently having lunch with the shareholders/investors money people, not the actually take care of the money people. That’s why I want to bring out the butter knives. Surprisingly, the accountants are less boring. Also less fake smiling and conversing with people that make your skin crawl. This should totally be a Pepper thing.

Me: Why isn’t it a Pepper thing?

Tony: Well if I wasn’t coming here mostly to hook up with you, she would’ve came with me. She comes a couple of times a year for meetings. She’s better at these meetings than I am, which is totally why she is CEO regardless of where things stand between us in our personal relationship.

Me: Understandable.
Tony: But because this was essentially an excuse for a booty call with my new boyfriend it would have been awkward. You know I adore her, so I’m not going to subject her to us being completely in love with each other. Your bite marks have already healed, but I have multiple hickeys.

Tony: It would be especially cruel now that the press knows about her breakup. That would be just pouring salt on the wounds. We don’t do that sort of thing to each other. Especially, when the press is involved.

Me: Are they being awful to her?

Tony: So awful. They’re even breaking out the unflattering pictures of her in sweatpants. I’m going to invent something that makes it so their SD cartridges are destroyed when they tried to take pictures of us from the balcony across the way. I feel like I’m going to need to do something big to distract them.

Me: Please don’t do anything illegal.

Tony: I can’t promise that mostly because talking to you in itself is a felony.

Me: It’s a good felony.

Tony: Totally. This morning alone was worth it. I’m ridiculously sore, but in a good way.

Tony: Happy’s glaring at me.

Me: I thought you guys are better.

Tony: We are, but he hates sitting through these types of lunches. Also the restaurant is vegan and Happy is not a fan of vegan cuisine.

Me: At least he’s mad at you for a reason that’s not me.
Tony: Also, he was the one who showed me the tabloid reports about the implosion of Pepper’s latest relationship. He’s equally pissed about that.

Tony: I think the starlet leaked it to the press for attention because me and Pepper Pop were not together for over a year and nobody knew.

Me: Not even me.

Tony: And I’m regretting that because we probably could’ve hooked up earlier. I’m regretting all the lost time I could’ve spent with your mouth.

Me: Which probably would’ve been bad if Siberia happened the same way.

Tony: Do you think it would’ve happened the same way if we were already dating? I would like to think that I could have manipulated you into at least listening to my position with the promise of a blowjob.

Me: You are very skilled at that but I don’t think it would have made me sign the Accords. Also, please remember who’s probably reading this.

Tony: That would not be my aim. Okay, now I wouldn’t have been going for that because I see the flaws in the Accords as is. And the Watchdogs are still out there regardless of everything. But I feel like maybe if we laid all our cards on the table before hand, things would’ve been better. At least nobody would’ve ended up in the Raft.

Me: I would’ve told you about your parents. At least that I knew Hydra was involved. I didn’t know it was Bucky for sure until the video. Also, I would’ve punched the screen out before you saw it.

Tony: People say hindsight is 20/20. If we could go back and do it all over again, we would make different choices. Of course, we probably would make all new mistakes.

Me: Probably.

Tony: We are still on for dinner tonight with the MIT crew. Also, despite knowing Vaidya
technically longer than he’s known me, Rhodey Bear says we can’t tell him who you really are for national security reasons. So you have to pretend that you actually were married to our fellow classmate. I’m sending you a dossier to memorize. But hey at least you’ll have something to do now.

Me: I am still mad at you for making me Sharon’s stepdad.

Tony: I think the accounts meeting is going to end by 4 pm which is going to give me time to go home and do that thing with my tongue that you really like and still be ready for dinner at 7 PM.

Me: I’m marginally less mad at you.

Tony: Go study peanut butter cup.

Me: I don’t like that name.


Me: No

Tony: Chocolate cup?

Me: No

Tony: Sugar cube?

Me: No

Tony: Snuggle bear?

Me: Maybe.
Tony: You prefer animal names, don’t you?

Me: Yes, maybe. I’ll see you when you get home.

Tony: Good to know, kitten.

To be continued

Chapter End Notes

I did get to see Spider Verse in a special showing last week and it was just the best. Please go see this movie. It’s fantastic. Normally, I would not enforce a 30 day no spoiler discussion moratorium for a non-MCU movie, but this is one of the few places where we’ve seen Miles on screen. Also, this story does utilize the multi-verse. So if you want to know how this movie may be influencing some things in this story, feel free to PM me on FF dot net. But I will be using a few things.
Chapter Notes

Thank you to everyone who read or reviewed the last conversation. You are all wonderful.

The “me” in this chapter is Agent May. Steve must check in with his friend that almost died a few days earlier.

Also a reminder, it is election eve in DC, but Tuesday morning in Mumbai. That will be important for plot reasons.

Some of the events in this chapter have been adapted from AOS episode 4.2 and 4.3 but have been modified for the new timeline. There are also allusions to the events of episode 4.22 as it occurred in the original timeline. There are some slight references to Ant-Man and the Wasp in this chapter as well.

Stephen C: Though you told me weeks ago not to text message you, I figure you almost dying is good enough reason to actually check on you.

Me: I did not almost die. Although, I was expecting a call or at least a message from you since Yo-Yo passed this phone to me before leaving for a late dinner with her boyfriend.

Stephen C: Only because Dr. Fitz was apparently working on some sort of antidote because he was paranoid. Tony says that’s not even in his normal line of research.

Me: That’s one way to explain it.

Stephen C: Are you okay?

Me: I’m really getting tired of everybody asking me that question.

Stephen C: I still have to ask. I got worried when Yo-Yo called for help.

Me: I’m fine. Leo fixed it before it could do to me what it did to the others.
Stephen C: What did it do to the others?

Me: Allegedly, scare them to death. It doesn’t matter. I’m fine now. I’m resting and waiting for Leo and Fitzsimmons to give me the all clear. I want to get back to LA to figure out what’s going on. Phil won’t let me.

Stephen C: Is he sleeping next to you?

Me: He was. The director called him into a meeting a few minutes ago. There’s a situation with the Senator that has to be handled delicately.

Stephen C: Yo-Yo said the director had to knock you out in the armor.

Me: Because Mace is as fake as the muscles in his suit and an icer didn’t work because of what was in my system. It’s fine. I’m okay now.

Me: I don’t know what to say to that. I’m also glad you’re okay though.

Me: I don’t want to talk about what happened anymore. How is Mumbai?

Stephen C: Really good. Although, I wouldn’t care where I was, as long as Tony was with me.

Me: Have you seen anything besides your hotel room?

Stephen C: Yes. We are having breakfast with Lily’s aunt and the counselor in an hour. She knows you’re my ex-girlfriend now, by the way.

Me: Of course, you told her.

Stephen C: Honey did actually. Also, we were at a wedding all day Saturday. It was really nice, if really big. The food was good and most of it did not involve things that Tony is allergic to.
Me: That’s good.

Stephen C: In addition, Monday night we had dinner with one of Tony’s really good friends from MIT. I did end up seeing some really strange baby pictures of Sharon. Tony did actually change her diaper in the middle of the library and there’s photographic evidence of this.

Me: Aren’t you really glad you didn’t sleep with her?

Stephen C: Yes. Especially, because Tony told the entire world that I’m her stepdad. It was really weird pretending to be married to their college friend.

Me: I assume Tony prepped you beforehand?

Stephen C: Yes. Apparently, I’m getting better at undercover work. Also did Sharon really leave the CIA for the FBI?

Me: Not really because she’s SHIELD again but we need somebody at the San Francisco FBI field office to keep an eye on your really little friend’s parole and Woo is too by the book.

Stephen C: I’m not sure we are actually friends and I kind of feel bad for getting him involved. It wasn’t his fight.

Me: You can’t change the past, only the future. Usually.

Stephen C: I think I might be engaged to Tony.

Me: This happened at the wedding? Piper said he couldn’t keep himself from text messaging you. Apparently, he kept smiling a lot.

Stephen C: Maybe possibly. He kept talking about how he would do our wedding. Apparently, we are having a night ceremony to cut down on Super villain attacks. He said he would ask once he was sure that it wasn’t going to all fall apart.
Me: Do you think things are going to fall apart?

Stephen C: I hope it doesn’t. It would be easier if we were in the same country, but I think some distance has helped us work a lot of things out.

Me: Things fall apart, for reasons you can’t control. I thought I was going to be with Andrew forever and then Bahrain happened.

Stephen C: I know that. And I’m not that worried about it. I think Siberia was our Bahrain and we’re working through it. Also, there is no best friend I’m secretly in love with in a romantic way.

Me: Have you successfully convinced Stark of that?

Stephen C: Yes, multiple times. Right now, I am just going to treasure every moment I have with Tony. With what we do, you never know how much time you have left.

Me: It’s good to have a second chance.

Stephen C: Or even a first one. I’m not wasting this chance and neither should you. You should tell Phil that you love him. You were in love with him when you were with Andrew.

Me: I should never have gotten drunk with you.

Stephen C: No, you shouldn’t have. You thought you lost the love of your life and you didn’t. Now you just have to tell him the truth.

Me: I’m not going to tell Phil yet. I’m not ready.

Stephen C: You should. You almost died with him not knowing the truth. He should know that you love him. You shouldn’t go to your grave holding that secret.
Me: And you of all people know that.

Stephen C: Yes

Me: However, in the end it worked out for the best. You have Tony now.

Stephen C: And I almost ruined it because of my own stubbornness. But somehow, I got a second chance to fix things. Don’t lose your second chance.

Me: Fitz just walked into the room to check on me. I’ll write you in a few days when you’re not distracted by Stark.

Stephen C: Will you?

Me: Maybe in a few weeks. Before Christmas, at least. Stark wants everyone to come to Malta.

Stephen C: I would like to see you there. Bring Phil.

Xxx

May doesn’t respond to that message. Instead she puts the phone down as Fitz checks on her again. But once she looks at his eyes, she knows that it’s not him. It’s the other one. The one that went through something so bad that the same darkness that she saw in herself after Bahrain was reflected back at her. What the hell happened to him?

“How are you feeling?” Leo asked and May was fighting the urge to roll her eyes. As she told Steve, she was really sick of that question.

“Since you’re from the future you probably know the answer,” May replied flippantly.

“The circumstances are different this time.”
“I was told I died last time.”

“Only temporarily or so I was told. Fortunately, I was already working on re-creating the treatment I created last time. Thankfully, the three of us were able to finish it in time,” Leo explained as he looked over her chart.

“You weren’t there?” May asked.

“Radcliffe was. The director didn’t know about what he was really doing yet. I was also on another mission in Miami,” Leo explained.

“Because bad things can’t happen one at a time,” May remarked.

“Not there at least. Although, it went better this time around.”

“What happened to you?” May asked curious and concerned.

“The consequences of Radcliffe not being exposed earlier. It won’t happen this time,” Leo replied darkly. “He’s right, by the way.”

“Who is right?”

“The Captain even though he doesn’t want us to call him that anymore. You should tell Coulson the truth before it’s too late.” She glared at him, wondering how he even knew about her conversation with Steve. Then again, he did make the phone she was using. But maybe there was a darker reason for his words.

“Something happened to Phil in your timeline?” May asked cautiously.

“Yes. He was dying, slowly because of the sacrifice he made to fix my mistakes.” That doesn’t surprise her. “He didn’t tell us. He never told us before I was sent back. I only knew because somebody else told me.” She felt like Leo was holding something back. She was too afraid to ask.
“You don’t get that many second chances and maybe it does seem like sometimes the universe is against you, but you shouldn’t use that as an excuse to keep this to yourself.”

“Sometimes the universe is against you,” May replied darkly.

“Because you had Andrew and you lost Andrew, but Phil is not Andrew.”

“I know that.”

“And falling in love with someone else doesn’t mean that you loved Andrew less. And falling in love with your best friend can be the scariest thing in the world, but rewarding,” Leo tells her.

“Even if because of this life, you end up losing them?” May asked.

“Even then. I now know that it’s better to have loved and lost. I don’t regret my time with my Simmons.” Leo tells her with a sad smile. “Even though I’m never going to see her again, I am grateful for what time we did have together. If I can’t change things, don’t you want to have as much time with Phil as you possibly can before the end?”

It was just at that moment that the room went completely dark.

“Great, they are early or late. Depending on your perspective. I was hoping this was something I kept from happening,” Leo lamented.

“This happened before?”

“Yes, unfortunately. It’s a continuous EMP used by the Watchdogs as part of a false flag operation to take out Inhumans that we moved to various places throughout the world and blame it on the Inhumans in the first place. They were using an Inhuman who hated himself to break into the system. But Dr. Suarez is working with him, so I don’t know how this could be happening again.”

“Unless the treatment’s not working and he is still a traitor, regardless,” May told him darkly and Leo responded by putting his head in his hands. “Also, I thought you and Stark made sure that couldn’t happen.”
“We tried but we couldn’t safeguard the other agencies. However, as a failsafe we’ve put a whole lot of wrong locations and false information into the database which explains why they’re attacking DC first instead of Miami like last time. Although Yo-Yo is here and not at an engagement party in Miami this time,” Leo explained.

“You prepared for this possibility?” May asked.

“Check your phone.” She does, realizing that unlike everything else in the room, it’s still working.

“EMP shielding. The same stuff used on the War Machine and Iron Man armor,” Leo explained.

“And hopefully our boss’s braces?” May asked.

“And Coulson’s hand, now. Let Stark know through the Captain that the revenge of Hellfire protocol has been engaged and he should be prepared for an attack.”

To be continued
Thank you to everybody who read or reviewed the last conversation. You are all absolutely wonderful.

This might be my favorite chapter. I find it deeply ironic that this ended up being in person conversation 13. It’s oddly fitting. This chapter takes place a few hours after the last one.

The events in this chapter are adapted from episode 4.3 of Agents of Shield but we are seeing it from an Avenger perspective.

Tony absolutely loves his boyfriend completely without a doubt. Although, there are moments where he doesn’t necessarily like him very much. The most recent moment when Tony had such thoughts involved his boyfriend making him spend breakfast with Sam and Romanoff. Especially when they could be in bed together, since Tony had nowhere to be before noon. (He feels like he needs to send Agent May a giant thank you basket or flowers for teaching Steve the thing with the tongue and the fingers.)

Now Tony has been through enough uncomfortable business lunches, breakfasts, and dinners to know how to get through any type of meal with people who completely hate him without it disintegrating into complete and other chaos. So, he’s sure he can get through this. Especially when he’s almost sure only Romanoff actually hates him. And even then, sometimes he wonders if it’s just a strong dislike.

Of course, that was before he stopped drinking. It’s much harder to do this sober. He realized that during yesterday’s business lunch. If he didn’t have Steve to talk to, he’s sure that the temptation may have become too much. When a certain now blonde ninja started talking about bad decisions made in Germany and Siberia, he sincerely wished that his orange juice would suddenly become a mimosa. Thankfully, Stevie bear stopped that quickly by blaming himself for everything. That just made everything extra awkward.

There’s only so much flagellation anyone can take sober even when you’re a masochist and Tony is pretty sure that his therapist would classify him as such. Or narcissist, probably a masochistic
narcissist. Is that a thing? If anyone could be both, it would be him.

No one was yelling or screaming at each other, at least. It probably helped that Happy had decided to head back to Malibu early. Smart man. His friend may be to the point where he’s not going to keep trying to set Tony up with Pepper, but he’s not ready for pastries and coffees with Captain America yet. Tony can respect that.

But Romanoff is there, staring into his soul, trying to read into him. It’s something that she’s been doing for almost the last week. Sam is doing it too. And really, Tony, is just glad they decide to do this in the hotel room instead of downstairs at the café. Being who he is, the paparazzi would be there in a second. He knows they smell the blood in the water, thanks to the Pepper breakup.

After 15 minutes of near frigid silence, where even Steve has given up on trying to have a conversation, Tony decides to break out the video of Spidey Junior, Ms. Marvel, and the Barton kids playing soccer. Nate wasn’t actively playing, but he was on the sidelines cheering his big sister and brother on, even though they were on opposite sides. Everybody loves kids. Okay Romanoff loves her kids and the Barton kids are hers. Tony is pretty sure he saw her cry on the way to the airport when she had to leave the kids behind.

However, before he could pull up the video, the suite went dark. Now, Tony has traveled through enough of the world, that the occasional blackout doesn’t surprise him. Although the fact that the hotel’s emergency power does not kick on does. His phone also starts beeping because apparently, it’s being continuously bombarded with an EMP every few seconds.

“That’s not good.” Tony mumbled to himself. He told Leo he was paranoid by putting EMP shielding on all the new Avenger super-duper secret cell phones as well as an EMP alert. Obviously, he was wrong. Once he pushed the alerts away, Tony saw several text messages from Monkey Lover.

Monkey Lover 2: Your boyfriend is not looking at his phone, so I have to contact you directly. DC is dark due to a continuous EMP attack. I am working on restoring power. False flag operation in effect by Watchdogs. Using the blackouts to attack Inhumans. I’m activating the revenge of hellfire protocol.

Monkey lover 2: LA just went out. They said they will take out power in the next city in 30 minutes, if their demands are not met instead of an hour like last time. The watchdogs tried to attack Yo-Yo on a date. They are now in custody. But there has to be similar attacks happening throughout the world.
Monkey lover 2: Not sure what city will be hit next, but I think it could be Mumbai or New York. Be ready. I’ve alerted Bulletproof Pacifist and Spidey to be on standby. Mr. and Mrs. Purple Arrow are also on standby.

Monkey lover 2: Still working on getting power back in DC. I’ve almost triangulated the location. You’re going to need a compass and a slide ruler. I’m sure you know how to make one. Even with the shielding, Friday won’t be able to do what she normally does.

Me: Yes, I know how to make a compass but this is probably not the time to have me around a lot of wine corks.

“Okay I’m sorry for asking Friday not to pass any messages to us,” Steve said looking up from his own phone. Apparently, he must’ve got similar messages. “The power went off in DC about a minute after I asked Friday to do that.”

“Terrorist attack?” Sam asked.

“Yes. They are claiming they are the Inhuman resistance,” Steve tells the group.

“It’s the Watchdogs,” Tony added, always afraid this day would happen, once he learned about the Accords database.

“Of course it is.”

“What is the Revenge of Hellfire Protocol?” Steve asked.

“Remember all those times I told you that I felt like the database with the locations of all the special people registered because of the Accords was like creating a super villain hit list?” Tony prompted his boyfriend.

“Yes.”

“Well, the president and his cabinet thought I was being paranoid and wouldn’t actually listen to that piece of advice. So, Leo and I put in a bit of coding that would point whoever is breaking into the
system in the direction of ready-to-fight Shield/ATCU agents instead of…”

“A certain 11-year-old that’s hiding on the Avenger compound,” Steve supplied for him.

“Yes. The fact that they kept going after Ms. Marvel’s family despite being relocated three times, until I decided to put them on the Compound, made me realize that the other agencies that have the database would be vulnerable. That’s when Fitz and I came up with the Hellfire Protocol,” Tony explained.

“Do I want to know where that name came from?” Natasha asked.

“Leo, not that he would explain the name to me. Friday, Sweetie Pie, put the Compound on lockdown,” Tony instructed his AI. He wouldn’t put it past the Watchdogs to attack the family again.

“I’m sorry, but Friday Avenger Compound is currently unavailable. As is Friday Malibu, Friday Queens, and Friday DC,” His phone responded.

Okay, that was weird. Friday shouldn’t be unavailable, even with the EMP problem, unless somebody is purposely cutting off access. Of course, about five seconds after Tony realizes that’s exactly what’s going on the door was kicked in. Tony is not surprised that 10 heavily armed men wearing dog masks and paramilitary gear walked into the room. Nor was he surprised that two were on the floor and severely unconscious before Tony realized that what will be the last model of the suitcase armor cannot assemble when a continuous EMP pulse is going on, especially when they’ve managed to jam Friday. Definitely moving on to the nanotech suit as soon as he gets back to the US.

But it’s fine. Thanks to the Melinda May school of how to be a bad ass, Tony can hold his own against barely trained bigoted assholes who hide behind their guns. Especially when he knows how to use those guns against them. As many guns as he’s designed, really, they should know that he would know the best way to disarm someone and use the gun against his attacker. That was two more on the ground and at least he had a weapon now.

“You were supposed to be alone.” Evil puppy number five said just as Steve punched him in the jaw.

“Nope. Definitely not alone. Isn’t Stefan just the best boyfriend ever?” Tony snarked as he shot evil puppy number six in the hip. He’s going for maiming, not killing right now, mostly because he really wants to question the assholes so he can find the leak, plug it and maybe just maybe convince
President Ellis or his replacement that at least this part of the Accords was stupid/dangerous.

“He’s one of those Inhuman freaks,” Evil puppy number five said. It was about that time that Romanoff knocked him out. That was probably for the best because Tony was 30 seconds from at least shooting the guy in the leg.

So, Steve was right, that no matter the awkwardness or bad blood they could fight and quip with the best of them.

“Really, I’m so tired of you guys trying to kill me. And badly. Seriously, what’s with the dog masks? I mean if you’re going to wear a mask to conceal your identity, at least design something that allows for fighting. You’re totally getting your asses kicked by a Russian ballerina, a social worker, an engineer and an NGO worker,” Tony said as he successfully broke the arm of six after disarming the idiot who went after him again, even after getting shot. He quickly gave the weapon to Sam, who could make the most use out of it.

“Chatter,” Steve said as he punched out evil puppy number seven.

“Oh Honey Bear, you love my chatter and my mouth,” Tony said dodging a shot from evil puppy number eight. Thankfully, he was promptly taken down by Sam. Of course, that was the moment that a few more Watchdogs ran into the room. Okay, they sent at least 15 goons to kill him, when they thought he was by himself. He had definitely pissed some people off. Although not enough to send people in that actually stood a chance against that many Avengers. He may have shot a few in the leg just on principle at that point.

“Okay as fun as this team rebuilding exercise has been, I really would like to get to the ‘build a compass and find the EMP’ portion of the exercise.” Tony said as he wounded bigoted number nine in the leg. That was about the time that Piper and Davis made it into the room. Kudos to Fitz for redesigning the ICERs to being impervious the EMP pulse. They quickly knocked out the remaining evil puppy.

“We really can’t go on vacation, can we?” Steve asked, holding his shoulder. Tony is almost positive he’s bleeding. Note to self, considered bulletproof nano-armor for Steve, because you don’t know when somebody is going to try to kill you during breakfast. Although, he was certain Steve brought out the shield at some point during the melee.

“Not really,” Sam replied as he was trying to catch his breath.
“I hope somebody packed a slide ruler,” Tony quipped.

No one did. But the front desk sent one right up because apparently this was a full-service hotel. They didn’t even blink when he asked for needles, bowls, and corks. Once the power was on and even more Watchdogs were turned over to the Mumbai authorities, he resolved to give the hotel the biggest tip ever. Besides, he owed them for Steve breaking the bed Sunday. Super strength plus sex Marathon equals broken bed. That, most hotels will overlook, but bullet holes are another story, so money will need to definitely change hands.

Of course, it was only once they were on the Quinjet (the one that was still in Steve’s custody that was modified by the Princess because Tony actually came to Mumbai on the corporate jet), after deciding it was best to leave Mumbai now, that he realized that he was right about Steve bleeding. His boyfriend got shot twice by the evil puppies. Once in the leg and once in the shoulder. The energy shield couldn’t work quite right, during the EMP pulse, even the super-duper version created by the Princess was flickering out. Just enough time for a bullet hole or two. Seriously, what was he going to do with this boyfriend?

To be continued
Interlude 26: Catching Up

Chapter Notes

Thank you to everybody who read or reviewed the last conversation. You are all absolutely fabulous. Here is your first chapter of 2019.

The “me” in this conversation is Director Rhodes, who may be about 15 seconds from being totally done with his BFF. This conversation takes place about four days after the Mumbai incident, making it early the morning of November 12, 2016 in Malta. Tony is now just six hours ahead of DC.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The Mechanic: Hey, platypus. I heard that the Avengers and the ATCU were responsible for dealing with the Watchdog terrorist attack. And now the media and the public completely adores us. I figured you would have use that as the perfect time to re-launch Shield or at least that’s what Mister PR would’ve suggested.

The Mechanic: Kudos on the Watchdogs being named a terrorist organization. Of course, President Ellis waited until after the results were in but since he’s never going to run for re-election, he can now actually make unpopular decisions. Maybe the next four years will be a little more tolerable. Less pandering to the hate-mongering demographic.

Me: Now you’re actually contacting me. I’ve been trying to call you for the last 3 days. Do you have any idea how many text messages and emails I’ve left you? Did you throw your phone into the ocean again? Agent Piper said that Steve was hit. Is he okay?

The Mechanic: Yes, and already healed up. There’s barely a red spot.

The Mechanic: And sorry I just started checking messages again. The real phone anyway. Steve may have accidentally crushed it during activities. Okay, the press managed to get through the Friday filters and Steve reacted badly. After that I upped the Friday filters to notify only in the event of terrorist activities or an apocalypse. Apparently, the Avengers getting back in the good graces of the U.S. Government didn’t quite meet the criteria.

Me: For some reason, I don’t believe you. If you would’ve called me earlier, I would’ve told you
about the decision to give the credit to the Avenger initiative and not Shield. Technically, Agents Rodriguez and May have been detailed to the Initiative and I’m planning for Agent Leopold to also join.

The Mechanic: The joys of technicalities. Although, why did you decide to go that way? I mean after the Germany fiasco, we probably can use some good publicity. But our bad publicity was caused by villain manipulation, infighting, and miscommunication. Which was triggered by the murder bot fiasco, but that’s a Tony problem, not an Avenger problem.

Me: Shield’s bad publicity was caused by accidentally incubating a terrorist organization. You can come back from murder bots or infighting but not accidentally incubating a terrorist organization.

Me: Recent meetings with various Senators have made me realize that they are never going to trust the Strategic Homeland Intervention, Enforcement, and Logistics Division. Leo and others made me realize that the public will be even less trusting. We are going to take a different approach.

The Mechanic: Jeffrey brought out charts?

Me: Yes, and I’m surprised you remembered his name. Leo had some very compelling arguments as well.

The Mechanic: So, Shield will be staying in the shadows?

Me: In a way. The new Super Human, Inhuman, and Enhanced Liaison Division will stay as an office under the ATCU in cooperation with the UN.

The Mechanic: So you’re going to be going the rebranding route? Clever.

Me: Your AI came up with the new name.

The Mechanic: Of course she did. I think she wants to become a Shield agent when she grows up.

The Mechanic: Hey are you still going to be under General T? Now that President Ellis is getting another four years, does this mean that Talbot will be dealing with a confirmation hearing?
Me: No, because Ellis has other plans for him.

The Mechanic: Please don’t say State Department. They deserve better After Ross.

Me: National Security Advisor with the current one becoming the new S.

The Mechanic: That doesn’t make me feel better.

The Mechanic: The Talbot thing. Madeline Rice is like one of the few competent members of Ellis’ inner circles that turned out not to be Hydra.

Me: The other option was General Hale.

The Mechanic: And now I’m okay with Talbot being the new National Security Advisor. Definitely an improvement over a Vice President that tries to kill you, and of course Ross. Not that it would be hard. Although please tell me that the Homeland Security lady doesn’t end up anywhere in the cabinet. I really should’ve paid more attention to reports about the new cabinet.

Me: No.

The Mechanic: Good. I am really glad Rice is going to State.

Me: Although, you should know that the President originally wanted me for that position.

The Mechanic: Wait, what?

Me: He wanted to nominate me for Secretary of State. If you say anybody would be a step up from Ross, I will hurt you.

The Mechanic: Why did you say no?
Me: Because I think Rice is more qualified. Most of my diplomatic experience involves getting you out of jail in various countries.

The Mechanic: You were good at it though. The current Under Secretary for Environment, Economics, and Energy used to be one of my execs at SI before she took the job. So there’re precedents.

The Mechanic: Although, this way you don’t have to be under General T, so it is a win-win for you and maybe the President will just name you the head of the ATCU instead.

Me: That can’t happen until the Accords are renegotiated and re-ratified. Whoever ends up in charge will just be an acting until that happens. The Watchdog attacks made a lot of world governments realize the flaws in the Accords and they’re willing to go back to the negotiating table.

The Mechanic: Common sense prevails.

Me: However, if Rice is confirmed, I agreed to be nominated for the position of Deputy Secretary.

The Mechanic: So why are you okay with being Deputy Secretary instead of Secretary?

Me: Because Deputy Secretary of State would be the chief negotiator when it comes to renegotiating the Accords. Negotiations could begin as early as February, if the new State Department is in place by then.

The Mechanic: This is good. Maybe I’ll get to live in the same country as my boyfriend before the next alien invasion. Fingers crossed.

Me: Only if the right person is in charge of the negotiations.

The Mechanic: The Boyfriend believes that the best hands are our own. I personally don’t trust my own hands. But I trust yours. Of the two of us, you were always the better decision-maker.
Me: It’s not a done thing. I would have to get through a confirmation hearing after Rice goes through hers. Although, as you mentioned earlier, she is one of Ellis’s most trusted advisors.

The Mechanic: Like that’s going to be that hard. Ross got through one. As well as his predecessor and that guy was Hydra. And Malik. Rice will be easily confirmed and you will be as well.

The Mechanic: Also, the boyfriend just reminded me that Pierce also went through multiple confirmation hearings. I’m starting to lose faith in the confirmation process if people like that can get through.

The Mechanic: But hey, that means you will definitely get the job, which means better Accords for everybody.

Me: And your boyfriend back in the same country.

The Mechanic: That would just be a nice bonus. Although, if you go to the State Department to renegotiate the Accords, who will be in charge of secret Shield. I don’t think you can do both.

Me: Coulson will be the director of the Super Human, Inhuman, and Enhanced Liaison Division with McKenzie as his deputy.

The Mechanic: You put a rule on your phone to type that out, didn’t you?

Me: Yes. I think by 2018, we will be able to use the acronym. At least that’s what Jeffrey believes.

The Mechanic: And what about Mr. Patriotism?

Me: Demoted to Head of PR for the ATCU. I don’t like liars, even if Talbot was the one originally responsible for trying to create the next Captain America.

The Mechanic: I feel like there’s a story there.

Me: There is. But your phone is not encrypted enough for that conversation.
The Mechanic: I resent that, but considering the Princess is probably reading my text messages, I also respect that.

Me: That reminds me, when you get back from whichever country you’re in, the President wants to set up a meeting with you. I don’t know what country you’re in because Piper won’t tell me for security reasons.

The Mechanic: She’s the best. I hope the President wants to meet with me to apologize for not listening to me when I told him that the superpower person database could be used for bad purposes like terrorist driven genocide. Tuesday could have been a bloodbath.

Me: I know.

The Mechanic: Hey, how is the kid?

Me: Which kid? You have several. We practically have a Young Avengers roster in the making.

The Mechanic: The Spiders and Ms. Marvel? I’m sure the Purple Arrow children were kept safe from the Watchdog attacks mostly because they’re not in the database at all.

Me: You’re right, the Purple Arrow children we’re not affected at all. Also, Ms. Marvel is Good. The idiots trying to attack the compound were picked up by a Shield team before the Watchdogs got anywhere near the place. There are in custody.

The Mechanic: That’s good. What about the Spiders?

Me: That’s where it gets more complicated. Spidey Senior webbed up several members of the watchdogs before they could attack another Inhuman that lives in his building.

The Mechanic: That’s good.

Me: Except one of them was Spider Junior’s father.
The Mechanic: Okay, that’s bad. Very bad. Although what do you expect when you share a name with the president of the Confederacy. His pre-married name anyway.

Me: He said that he was undercover but Spidey Junior’s mom does not believe him, not entirely. And honestly, I’m not sure if I do, either. Maybe he was undercover but I feel like he shares too many of their beliefs.

The Mechanic: Maybe he was undercover but got sucked into the philosophy. You know that happen sometimes.

Me: I could see that happening.

The Mechanic: And that explains why Spider mom left a really long voicemail asking if the nursing position at the Avenger compound was still available.

Me: Is it available?

The Mechanic: It will be even though I’m the only Avenger there. Besides the Bulletproof Pacifist and he is technically a reservist. He’s also only there part-time, thanks to Spider sitting

Me: He actively helped Spidey with the Watchdogs. He melted all their guns. I don’t think he’s that much of a reservist anymore.

The Mechanic: Point. I’ll deal with it when I get back. It would be nice to have another non-Shield Avenger. I’m so lonely.

The Mechanic: Have you talked to Pepper Pot recently? I saw that the media is mostly talking about me again but I’m concerned.

Me: Yes, multiple times because you haven’t returned her phone calls. Probably because you’ve been preoccupied with the boyfriend.
The Mechanic: Point. But I would like some intel before I call.

Me: She’s glad that they’re no longer talking about her breakup. She really wishes that the Watchdogs’ attempted assassination of you was not the reason for it. She also really wants you to call her. Although, she understands why you haven’t because you’re probably busy with your boyfriend.

The Mechanic: Very busy, but that’s because I’m going to have to leave in 3 days. There may have also been some long conversations about what changes need to be made to the Accords for the Secret Avengers to be willing to sign them.

Me: Which we will talk about when you get back.

The Mechanic: Regardless, I do want to talk to Pepper Pot. Also, I will have Mary get Spider mom set up with the new job away from the husband.

Me: And Leo. You really need to return his email.

The Mechanic: Okay I’m well aware I’m neglecting everybody and I promise I will take a rest break and at least reply to a few emails before I go back to the shirtless Stefan in my bed. He’s just so tempting. Absolutely edible.

Me: I did not need to know that. Also, Leo’s request is time sensitive. We might have a situation and we need your AI to help.

The Mechanic: He’s on the pre-approved to use Friday for whatever needs necessary list. So are you, for that matter.

Me: So glad that you trust me.

The Mechanic: I do. You’re my oldest friend. You also punched Tyler in the Dick after the sex tape incident which I will forever be grateful for.

Me: It was worth getting arrested for. Especially after the legal team made it go away.
The Mechanic: What are friends for? I’ll see you next week. We can do lunch. After my Presidential meeting.

Me: I hope I’ll be done with this mess by then. This case is been weird by even Shield standards.

The Mechanic: Which is always quite an accomplishment.

Xxxxx

Annotation from Princess Shuri

Spider mom: Refers to Rio Morales, the mother of Miles Morales a.k.a. Spidey Junior. She is not sure if she believes that her husband joined the Watchdogs as an actual undercover assignment because of some of his anti-power person comments in the past. I have found no external evidence to disprove either possibility, including discussions with Dr. Leopold.

Dr. Madeline Rice: Current National Security Advisor to President Ellis. Nominated to be the 70th United States Secretary of State. Former head of the political science department at Cutler University. Her father is originally from Wakanda but chose to stay in the United States after receiving his doctorate due to falling in love with one Aerial Rice and adopted her family name after marriage. Rice was unaware of her heritage until the recent diplomatic visit.

The Wakandan government is in favor of her possible appointment and is looking forward to increase diplomatic relations under her tenure.

xxx

To be continued

Chapter End Notes

Please note that I’m using the Ultimate comic book version of Jefferson Morales nee Davis as my template for my version of the character. He comes out a lot nicer in the
movie, 616, and the videogame. However, I felt like the asshole tendencies would work better for this story. As well as the fact that most MCU characters are based more on their ultimate incarnation than 616. I also started this story long before the movie and videogame were out. But don’t be too worried. Not everything is what it seems.

Madeline Rice is an original character, but I consider her a mix of former Secretaries of State Madeleine Albright, Colin Powell, and Condoleezza Rice. And maybe a dash of Susan Rice as well. I’m probably going to go the “no celebrities were harmed” route for a lot of the other cabinet positions of the Ellis administration.
Thank you to everybody who read or reviewed the last conversation. You are all absolutely lovely.

All timestamps are from Tony’s perspective. Remember that Malta is six hours ahead of New York and nine hours ahead of California. Tony forgot this. He was still on Mumbai time. Geniuses can sometimes be flaky.

Also, please note that Tony is sending these emails from two different accounts. Tony_Carbonell is Tony’s private email account for personal non-Avenger, non-sensitive email. The Mechanic is Tony’s Avenger email account. Only Avengers, selective support staff, and Pepper know about this address.

From: Tony_Carbonell
To: RIO_PR_forever
CC: MJ_Watson
Time sent: 11/12/2016 8:10:41
Subject: We would love to have you at the avenger compound

Yes I got your voicemail. I apologize for not responding sooner. I’ve been avoiding most calls due to the incident in Mumbai, the press are vicious. Your voicemail should’ve been passed to me earlier. Unfortunately, that didn’t happen. Also by the time I listened to your message, it was after midnight in New York and it would just not be polite to call. That’s why decided to send an email instead.

We would be happy to have you on the medical staff at the Avenger compound in upstate New York. Now that the bulletproof pacifist is taking a more active role along with Spidey senior’s penchant for doing stupid things like getting a building dropped on him, we can use staff that understands the unique needs of the Avengers. I think you can be that person.

My assistant Mary Watson (CCed on this email) will contact you all the details and put you in touch with HR to finalize your contract as soon as it’s a reasonable time in New York. She was the one who reminded me that I’m no longer on Mumbai time. She wasn’t happy. However, she still will take care of you in the morning.

I’m not sure of the details of your contract because that’s in HR thing and they hate me but I promise you will be receiving premium compensation, along with housing and other perks. You will, however, be asked to sign the nondisclosure agreement due to the fact that there are additional enhanced people living on the Avengers campus for their own protection. You will be asked to protect their identity for their safety.

I’m certain you are aware that this position will be requiring you to relocate to the upstate facility, but I think that might be why you want to take this position in the first place. You will be given a small apartment on the Avenger campus. We can even arrange for your son to go to one of the private schools in the area or I can arrange for a tutor. Both will be covered by SI. I’m personally leaning towards tutor because at least that way we won’t have to come out with lies to keep your baby out of gym class or recess.
Actually, a few of the other young people hiding at the facility are also working with tutoring services so that would probably be best. We can start our own little young Avenger school. Will teach them how to be champions for justice early on.

Feel free to contact me or my assistant Mary if you have any additional questions. We look forward to having you as a member of the Avenger team.

Xxx

From: Pepper_pot
To: The Mechanic
Time sent: 11/8/2016 20:11:41
Subject: What happened in Mumbai?

Tony, what the hell happened in Mumbai? I tried calling but Friday said you have the apocalypse filter on which means that unless I’m dying, she won’t even forward my calls. I hate the apocalypse filter.
Where are you?
Are you safe?
Just because we’re not together anymore doesn’t mean I don’t need to know these things. Because I do. Just call and let me know you’re okay.

From: Pepper_pot
To: The Mechanic
Time sent: 11/9/2016 16:11:41
Subject: Re: What happened in Mumbai?

Friday told me you are safe, but refuses to tell me where you actually are. That’s understandable since someone tried to kill you yesterday. Why do you still have the apocalypse filter up? Is it because of the attempted assassination? I’m going to leave another voicemail. Call me.

Xxxxx

From: Pepper_pot
To: The Mechanic
Time sent: 11/10/2016 16:11:41
Subject: Re: What happened in Mumbai?

I talked to James. Who knows what happened from Agent Piper because you haven’t even bothered to debrief him on the situation yet. I am pretty sure you’re having a sex marathon with your boyfriend. I really thought you outgrew this after Cancun 07.

Also, there are media reports that you proposed while in Mumbai and I would love to know how much of a rumor that was. Just so I can figure out if the paparazzi are going to start following me again. And yes, the person who fucked my boyfriend behind my back, also, sold the story to the press or rather her publicist did.

I have horrible taste in boyfriends.

Xxxx

From: Pepper_pot
To: The Mechanic
Email and text messages also acceptable. How long does a sex marathon last? It’s not like it’s another orgy. I think I’ve repressed Tahiti 06. Now that’s the worst thing I walked on you doing.

Xxxx

From: The Mechanic
To: Pepper_pot
Time sent: 11/12/2016 8:42:41
Subject: Re: Seriously, Tony! Call me!

Double exclamation points. Okay, you are obviously pissed at me for not responding. I really should’ve checked the mechanic account earlier. And you were right about me being preoccupied with Steve, but you’ve seen him shirtless. Oh wait, it’s probably in bad taste for me to make comments like that especially after the shitty ex-boyfriend. I’m trying not to be a dick. I hope Yo-Yo has time to haunt his house. I want her to make him miserable.

Yes your taste in men is horrible, me included. Me, especially. Why did you date me when you were well aware of things like Tahiti and Cancun? By the way, I think I’ve repressed most of Tahiti. That was bad. I guess that’s reason 622 for me to keep being sober.

I don’t even know why Steve is still here. I may have casually mentioned in conversation about preferring a night wedding due to super villains being less likely to attacked and he kind of just smiled and argued that he didn’t want a wedding that late. That might be where the paparazzi are getting ideas about a possible marriage proposal or from the fact I may have already got a ring. I thought I was discreet but I’m not that good at discretion. You’re aware.

Look, I’m doing this to keep Happy from doing it. That would just be cruel. He’s still mad at me for ship sinking his OTP. How is Happy anyway? I’m kind of glad he left Mumbai before everything went to shit. We were okay because professional boy band, but it would’ve been bad for him.

Sorry I can’t tell you where I am exactly because of what happened in Mumbai. Although I will say I’m somewhere that I actually own. So if things go badly, at least we won’t have to give a quarter million dollar tip. I thought it would be good to lay low for a couple of days after Mumbai. Piper is with us. Although Davis left for a special assignment. I’m really tired of people trying to kill me when I’m working. But hey at least sunflower oil was not involved this time. Hey did you know that some haircare products have sunflower oil. I found that out the hard way recently.

Anyway, I’m safe as honey bear probably reassured you. But I just wanted to tell you that myself. I just needed to take a few days to decompress. Stefan got shot, twice. However, I didn’t get a scratch mostly because I’m pretty sure he got in a way of a bullet at least once for me. I kind of just needed to hold him for a while. I may have been extra clingy. I hate close calls.

Now I feel like I need to apologize for all the times I showed up with armor full of bullet holes or almost died on you. It really sucks from this side. I’m scared and worried and not sure how to quite deal with it. So again sorry for everything I put you through. I am completely aware I was a shit boyfriend. Seriously, you’re too good for everyone.

How are you? Yes, I realize that’s a loaded question but I still want to know. I’m worried about you. If Stefan wasn’t here, I would’ve brought you along. I just didn’t want to add more awkwardness to the situation and well Happy told me how you found out that they asked was an asshole and well, everything just feels awkward.
I don’t want that for us, but sometimes I’m not sure how to avoid it. Despite that, you know I worry. I’m never going to not worry about you. You’re my best friend, besides Platypus. I like for you and me to be almost normal with each other. I’m sure that’s just the wishful fantasy, but I’m still hopeful. We have to get there eventually, right?

Anyway I’ll try to get to LA to visit as soon as I can or at least arrange things so I’ll be in New York next time you’re in New York.

Xxx

From: The Mechanic
To: Teenage Mutant Ninja Spider
Time sent: 11/12/2016 8:56:12
Subject: I’m proud of you.

Hi, teenage mutant ninja spider.

Greetings from an undisclosed location. Although I’m trying to convince your aunt to let you come to this place for Christmas. I feel like I owe her a European vacation. So you probably heard about Mumbai. The wedding was good and the food was excellent. The terrorist attack, not so good. But no people with powers were harmed and we got the power back on. Also the country of India will no longer extradite the rogue Avengers on site. So all is good.

Okay, it’s not good that they now have their own domestic branch of Watchdogs to deal with. But I feel like they will do something about it. More than the US did before the pre-election blackouts and Senator Hateful’s arrest.

I heard you did well during the blackout/terrorist attack. I’m proud of the work you did. Maybe it’s good that you’re being a local spider person right now. You can make a difference. How are things working with you and the bulletproof pacifist? I’ve heard you guys make a really good team.

Anyway, I’m sorry I’ve been kind of in the boyfriend bubble for like the last week. Yes, adults do that stuff too. Or maybe I just do that sort of stuff because I kind of skipped high school. I’m starting to think high school is where you learn actual survival skills for the real world. I feel like I’m missing most of those. I’m sorry I did that. You don’t deserve for me to kind of go into the love bubble. I will try to be more responsive, even when I’m with my boyfriend.

Yes, I want an update on your life. So yes, always feel free to email me. It may take me a moment to respond, but I will always respond.

Xxxxx

From: The Mechanic
To: Monkey Lover 2
Time sent: 11/12/2016 9:12:17
Subject: Yes, I got your text messages and sorry, I was distracted by Stefan’s abs and ass.

Sorry monkey lover, I really should have got back to you a lot earlier. I kind of got distracted with the boyfriend. And I also wanted to lay low for a few days after Mumbai. I’m sure Piper told you that we successfully got the lights back on in Mumbai. The Hellfire Protocol worked well. It lead them straight to me, anyway. But hey, I was having brunch with the former members of my boy band, so it was good.

The counselor referred to it as a team rebuilding exercise. As you are aware, we have to do a lot of
rebuilding, mostly because of my stupidity. Don’t tell your boss, but I think the band might be back together again or at least together enough that we can fight if the aliens start to attack. Again. Baby steps.

Yes, you may use Friday for official Shield business. You’re pre-approved. Although, is it really still Shield, if you’re going to continue using the ATCU as your public front. Congratulations on Agent being in charge again. As well as Mack being the new number two. I’m sending balloons and chocolates. The good stuff.

I’m sure that makes everything a little easier. Also, congratulations on Platypus deciding to keep you guys in the shadows. I know you were wary about Shield becoming public again and now you don’t have to worry about that. Rebuilding of public image is hard. I’m still the Merchant of Death after nearly a decade of not selling weapons. The murder bot fiasco didn’t exactly make that any better.

Is it appropriate to ask you how your mental health staycation went? I think it’s okay since I’m on a lot of medication and will have to schedule a really long session with my therapist as soon as I get back. I have so much to process. I may have used the wedding in India to float the idea of maybe getting married at some point. I didn’t bring out the ring, but I did mention I want us to have a nighttime wedding because you just know that villains will attack if we do it during the daytime. Also, the paparazzi will just be all over it, especially if I’m able to come clean about who Stefan actually is.

Also I think there’s like a 98% chance that Stefan found the ring hidden in the jumbo box of condoms. Really, I should’ve known better. Of course, even with the perfect immune system, Stefan would have a preference. Although he hasn’t said anything about it yet, so I shouldn’t panic right? Or should I panic because he hasn’t said anything? Or am I just overreacting to everything?

We have to actually do lunch when I’m in DC. And science. Science with lunch. I love science-ing with you.

PS: Did you figure out how the Watchdogs managed to get into the Accords database?
“Okay, I am completely done sending all necessary emails for at least the next 24 hours,” Tony said, putting down his Stark pad.

“Now I really want to take your pants off again. Why did you bother putting them back on?” Tony was actually pouting at that point.

“Because Piper would prefer if I showed up to breakfast wearing pants, and after what happened earlier, I felt like I should oblige her.” Steve told his boyfriend, blushing, remembering the incident from earlier in the morning.

“Not if we choose to eat breakfast in bed,” Tony said as he went to kiss Steve again.

“I think we should at least make an appearance outside of the room. Maybe if we did earlier, this morning wouldn’t have happened,” Steve argued.

After they got to Malta and Piper cleaned up Steve’s wounds, the couple mostly stayed in the master bedroom on the property. The only break was two nights ago when they had dinner together with the other secret Avengers and tried to talk about what each side needed from a new Accords. Surprisingly, that went better than Steve thought it could which meant nobody ended up covered in bruises and there was no property damage. That was all he could hope for, at this point.

After that, Sam and Natasha left for a mission. They were still trying to track down the guy paying
for the Watchdogs.

“You’ve been around Piper for about a week at this point. You should know that there was no way to stop her from walking into our bedroom this morning. Although, she should’ve known that I would’ve been balls… “

“Tony!” Steve exclaimed.

“Hey, if you can do it, you can say it.”

“I’m not into exhibitionism.”

“Which is sad because I really wanted to take you to the beach today.”

“We can still go to the beach. We should do something outside of the room together. What I’m trying to say is if we actually left the room, then Piper would have just waited until breakfast to tell us to text your friend.” Steve remarked.

“A friend who may become the next Deputy Secretary of State. I am still wrapping my mind around that one.”

“If Director Rhodes was the one in charge of negotiating the original Accords I think I would have at least come to the table with an open mind. I think it might be a good thing if he ends up at State.”

“Especially because Madeleine Rice is not an under qualified asshole. Like seriously, why did President Ellis not make her Secretary last time? Siberia would’ve never have happened. I’m like 90% sure Ross’s appointment was a Malick suggestion, but I can’t prove it. He was appointed only 11 months before Malick was exposed as Hydra. Okay, yes, that was right during the murder bot fiasco but still.”

“I wouldn’t be surprised if Ross was suggested to be Secretary of State by the guy who ordered Manhattan to be bombed. Hydra would want to keep the world unstable,” Steve argued.

“Ross did a really good job of that.”
“Besides, even on a more personal level, Ross is not someone I could have trusted even before some of the more recent revelations. I know what he did to Bruce. That’s a major reason why I couldn’t sign on,” Steve explained.

“See, we should’ve had this conversation in April. Because I knew what he did to Bruce too and that was the reason why I felt like I needed to sign on, or one of the reasons. Dr. Banner and Mr. Hulk could defend himself against General Asshole. Ms. Marvelous and Spidey Jr., not so much. Especially with the asshole father. I had to be at the table to help them.” Steve decided it was best not to ask too much about that at the moment, despite overhearing most of the email that Tony dictated to Rio Morales earlier. Even being in the bathroom getting dressed, thanks to super hearing, Steve could hear everything and he means everything.

“Would you be scared for the kids with Director Rhodes renegotiating?”

“Not as much. Plus Tuesday made a lot of countries realize the danger of the database. Although, Australia kidnapping and doing testing on an aboriginal man who just happened to have inhuman powers should have sent up red flags before but here we are.”

“It should have,” Steve agreed.

“At a minimum, I can trust Rhodey to look out for the interests of everybody. I think he would do a good job. He’s talked me down from doing a lot of stupid shit over the years.”

“That does not surprise me,” Steve responds.

“Not only that, he’s done a lot at Shield these last few months. And I think he’s right to keep it a hidden part of the ATCU. The new name is also a good idea. Superhuman, Inhuman, and Enhanced Liaison Division actually makes sense as a name. It sounds almost like a social work division of the agency.”

“That’s essentially what they’ve been doing with the kids with powers, right?”

“Pretty much, and that was all Laura’s idea. I wish she could be the head of the new agency.”
“At this point, I find it hard to believe the government will do anything practical. Who do you think they will choose instead?” Steve asked.

“I hope it’s not the general with the Stepford child, but I figure Coulson has it.”

“Probably.”

“Although it doesn’t matter if Platypus doesn’t get confirmed.”

“If Pierce can get confirmed, anybody can get confirmed. Although, does the director have any experience in the realm of diplomacy? Beyond getting you out of jail in various countries.”

“How do you even know about that?”

“We did live together for a while and you’re talky when you’re drunk.”

“Which was another reason why I should have got sober earlier. Your crush should never hear about all those times you got arrested for public intoxication/public indecency in various countries.”

“The time involving the goat was funny.”

“I should’ve went to rehab earlier. Oh wait, I did.”

“And you’re doing well. I’m proud of you,” Steve gently kissed him on the lips.

“I’m trying. Does dealing with my Board of Directors on behalf of the US government for decades count as diplomatic experience? I mean, you know they’re asshole.”

“Are they still trying to lock you out of the company again because you’re publicly dating a man?”

“No, but that was after Rhodey came up to New York for a couple of days and scared the hell out of
them. At least that’s what Pepper Pot told me."

"Then I’m going to count that as diplomatic experience. I personally want to punch out most of the board."

"And this is why we made Platypus and Lily Bear’s aunt the Avengers diplomat/government liaison for years. With the aunt on the lamb, Platypus had to step up and do all the untangling post Germany fiasco by himself. He went head-to-head with the UN. Even before that he was the government’s liaison to Stark Industries."

"So he is definitely more qualified than Ross."

"I’m more qualified than Ross. I speak like half a dozen languages at least," Tony remarked.

"You also have a moral compass."

"That’s kind of broken."

"I don’t think it is. So you’re hiring Miles’ mom to get her away from her estranged husband?"

"You were totally listening in from the bathroom?"

"Well, it was hard not to pay attention after Mary started yelling at you. Especially with the super hearing."

"Yes, she is not happy. Friday, please send her chocolate gift basket number six."

"Of course sir. Would you also like me to add reminders about the time difference before you send correspondence to anyone?"

"That would be useful. So what’s happening with the Morales family?" Steve asked, genuinely concerned.
“It’s all a mess. So Daddy Spider is either undercover with the Watchdogs or actually a member of the Watchdogs and well, if your six-year-old has superpowers it might be best for him not to be anywhere near Spidey Jr. either way.

“Because they might demand that you test your loyalties on your own child.”

“And that could be traumatic. Mommy Spider is a mama bear as much as Spider Aunt. So of course she will want to get away. Hopefully, Mary will take care of everything once it gets to be a reasonable time in New York.”

“I will make sure of that boss,” Friday responded.

“This is totally why I prefer AI assistance. But occasionally, you need people.” Tony leaned over to kiss Steve at that moment, “Sometimes, people can be good.”

“Especially, because I’m going to go make you French toast while you shower. I will even stuff it with blueberries and goat cheese.”

“I totally love you.”

“I know.”

“You saw the ring, didn’t you?”

“And you already know that because you asked Leo for help.”

“But you didn’t say anything.”

“I figured that when you were ready to talk about it, you would bring out the ring.”

“See these type of assumptions led to Siberia.”
“We will do better. And I wouldn’t be opposed to being with you for the rest of my life.”

“Same. Especially when you make me blueberry French toast.”

“Shower first then food,” Steve said pushing Tony to the shower just after giving him a gentle peck on the lips.

“Yes, sir.”

To be continued.
Thank you to everyone who read or reviewed the last conversation. You are all absolutely fabulous. While Tony and Steve were eating stuffed blueberry French toast and “frolicking” on the beach, Tony got some responses.

I originally had all the emails from both of Tony’s accounts in one chapter but it got way too long and I decided to split it up between his two accounts.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

From: MJ_Watson
To: Tony_Carbonell
Time sent: 11/12/2016 15:35:41

Subject: Re: We would love to have you at the Avenger compound

I tried calling but Friday said you were on the beach. She did promise to make you check your email when you get back so I hope you see this. HR has the contracts ready and we’ve made arrangements to have lunch together to finalize it. Friday had the night crew working on it.

I’ve already contacted the movers and they’ll have everything done next weekend. Although, I think Mrs. Morales will need to stay at her current job through at least Thanksgiving, but we will work something out. However, I will discuss with Mrs. Morales about staying in a hotel in the interim. Mr. Joey Gutierrez thinks that it’s best that she doesn’t stay in that house, and I’m inclined to agree with him. I think Joey wants to punch out her husband. Why do I feel like there’s a story here that you’re not telling me? I really need to work on my Spanish.

From: RIO_PR_forever
To: Tony_Carbonell
Time sent: 11/12/2016 20:29:43

Subject: Re: We would love to have you at the Avenger compound
I had lunch with Ms. Watson earlier and went over my contract with the Avengers Initiative. I can’t believe you’re paying me almost triple my current salary. And that’s not including the housing and a tutor for [Redacted]. You don’t have to do that, but I appreciated.

I think the tutor is the best option. I hate to take him out of regular school but last Monday scared me. A high percentage of people of Puerto Rican ancestry are developing powers. Ms. Rodriguez explained the reason why, so I understand. Maybe a part of me wonders that if I were to wake up with powers someday, would my husband stop loving me? Regardless, people of Puerto Rican ancestry are already getting increased harassment including my baby and they don’t even know the truth. I have to keep him away from that. I know I can’t keep him in bubble wrap forever, but I want to at least protect him for a little bit, especially with the rhetoric as bad as it is right now.

[Redacted] misses you, by the way. He really looks up to you, which is good because you know about his uncle and I’m not sure if my husband is better. You should know that he’s not coming with me. He is actually going to be staying with a couple of friends until I leave. We are going to spend some time apart to sort things out. It was a mutual decision. He knows about [Redacted] being special. His reaction was not the best. He wants [Redacted] to be fixed, to just be a normal kid again. Obviously, he needs to do some soul-searching and we can’t be there for that. I can’t protect my son from everything, but I have to keep this from him.

Thank you for paying for the movers and the hotel offer. I’m going to have to decline the latter, because I don’t want to rip [Redacted] from home any sooner than I have to. This is going to be such a big transition for him.

We’ll talk more when you get back to New York. Mary says that will be sometime next week. [Redacted] will be looking forward to it. He wants a science play date. I’m sure we will be in the compound by then. Joey offered to watch him there while I finished things at my job. I hate taking [Redacted] out of school but it’s for the best.

Will [Redacted] BFF be able to visit the compound? I don’t want to uproot [Redacted] completely. I’m terrified of how much psychological damage I’m going to do. I wonder if I’m doing the right thing for him. All of this is going to be a really big change.

Xxxx

From: Tony_Carbonell
To: MJ_Watson
Time sent: 11/12/2016 22:10:41
Subject: Re: We would love to have you at the Avenger compound

You completely deserve the good chocolate gift basket. I promise I wasn’t intentionally avoiding your calls. We just actually forgot to bring a cell phone with us. And it turns out that my watch is not boyfriend proof. It kind of fell in the ocean.

Thank you for getting everything together on such short notice. You should probably send up at least the level one chocolate basket to the night HR team. The hotel idea was good, but Rio isn’t quite ready for it yet. Understandable. Everything is changing. Although just in case the husband turns out to be more problematic than we think, could you hire a private detective to keep an eye on things? I kind of would like proof if he’s really undercover or just a bigoted asshole. I would like Spidey Jr. not to end up with daddy issues like me.

So, I’m meeting with President Ellis on the 16th and then staying in DC until Friday night. I’m sure you’re going to have to schedule a few other things, but please leave me time for a lunch or dinner with Platypus and Monkey Lover. Also, Thanksgiving in Malta is not happening due to me having to spend extra time away due to the Mumbai fiasco.

But I do want to do something in New York. Especially for Spidey Junior and Ms. Marvelous. Also, check with Kevin to see if Pepper can make it. I feel like she could use a few days away from Malibu.

From: Tony_Carbonell
To: RIO_PR_forever
Time sent: 11/12/2016 22:19:37

Subject: We would love to have you at the Avenger compound

Okay your current job is horribly underpaying you. That’s our normal starting salary for Avenger medical staff. Normally, we don’t throw in the things like free tutors for the kids but circumstances are different here. I also appreciate a parent trying to protect their child. I feel like I never got enough of that from my actual parents. Thankfully I had some great surrogates like Aunt Peggy and Jarvis and his wife Ana.

Of course you can invite friends to the compound. Some may need to go through a background check and if you invite your husband’s brother, he’s going to need an armed escort, especially if he goes near any of the Avengers tech. But your son’s BFF is always welcome. I’ll have Mary arrange a Young Avengers play date on the calendar.
I hope that your husband will come around once he has time to process things. Although, I kind of want to punch him for wanting Spidey Jr. to be fixed. There’s nothing wrong with him. He just has some extra abilities. The camouflage is awesome by the way.

Maybe some time apart will allow your husband to get his head out of his ass and learn to appreciate what he really has. Also, we really do need medical assistance. I keep accidentally making contact with things with sunflower oil and well, the boyfriend got shot in Mumbai. Not good. He’s healed but I am still not happy. So we really do need you.

Xxxx

From: MJ_Watson
To: Tony_Carbonell
Time sent: 11/12/2016 22:20:01

Subject: RE: We would love to have you at the Avenger compound

Chocolate gift bags already ordered. The larger version was waiting on my doorstep before I even woke up. I thank Friday for that.

The POTUS meeting is on your schedule along with the rest of the day blocked out for meetings at the ATCU. Friday will be meetings with a few science NGOs. I thought you could use a light day. I will also meet you in DC. Although, I have this feeling that I won’t be allowed to come to any of your ATCU meetings. However, the board wants to meet Saturday. They want a read out on Mumbai. Just to warn you I think they’re going to try to freeze you out again.

Ms. Potts is available for Thanksgiving. I had Kevin block the days on her schedule, but you have to invite her yourself. I will work with the caterers but you are dealing with everything that day. I’m having that day off with my family. They hate that I’m an hour and a half away now.

I went to high school with somebody who now owns Alias Investigations. I’ll see if she’s willing to take the case.

Xxx

From: Tony_Carbonell
Okay, that was a fast reply. I haven’t even switched to the other account yet. Yes, I will invite Pepper to Thanksgiving myself. And I’ll take care of things the day of. I’m not that helpless.

I know about the proprietor of Alias. She may actually be a good choice for this. Just make sure you use the Tony C petty cash fund with the usual protocol.

I’m trying to decide if they are more upset about me being with the boyfriend at the wedding or the Watchdog assassination attempt. The stocks only fell for like 30 seconds. I don’t care. Have the lawyers ready. Can you try to get it moved to Monday or Tuesday? Seriously, this is just like a nuisance.

I’ll see you in DC on the 16th. Until then, I promise to call more and actually look at my email at least two or three times a day.

Chapter End Notes

A/N (and this is not proofread by someone else because I added it last minute for clarification): For those of you who do not watch Agents of SHIELD, during season two, it was discovered that there was an ancient Kree Temple in what is now San Juan, Puerto Rico. That means it was one of the main places where the Kree’s Inhuman experimentation took place. Therefore, I am going with the theory that individuals of Puerto Rican ancestry have a higher probability of having the Inhuman gene.

So like comic book and Spider-Verse movie canon, Miles, a.k.a. Spidey Junior was bitten by a genetically altered spider and got superpowers. But in this story, that spider bite acted as an outside catalyst that caused his inhuman gene to activate differently than normal, which is why Miles has a few different powers then Peter, because he got his powers from two separate sources. You’ll find out about those later. I’m using comic book Daisy’s power origin story for inspiration.
Thank you to everybody who read or reviewed the last conversation. You are all absolutely lovely.

From: Monkey lover 2
To: The Mechanic
Time sent: 11/12/2016 10:04:12

Subject: Re: Yes, I got your text messages and sorry I was distracted by Stefan’s ads and ass.

The possible marriage thing made its way onto TMZ right after the Mumbai attacks. And yet they still haven’t figured out who Stefan actually is. I don’t know whether to be happy or concerned. You should probably talk to Stefan directly. It’s better to be clear about what you want.

Someone in the Senate, along with the help of a disgruntled individual of inhuman ancestry, were responsible for the Watchdogs getting the information. Because not all the information was fake, we have been relocating certain individuals on the list. The Purple Arrow family have relocated to the compound because thanks to the wording of the Accords, if you’re staying at an Avenger facility you don’t have to be on the list.

During the process of relocating codename Hellfire, it was discovered that he has been working with the Watchdogs to kill other Inhumans. Apparently, his sessions with Dr. Suarez did not assist with his self-loathing. However, he is in custody thanks to the assistance of codename: “the Rider.” Yes, he’s the one in the LA area killing dirty cops and pedophile teachers.

My work with Dr. Suarez, in contrast, is going a lot better. It’s okay for you to ask about that. However, it may take a few weeks for Suarez to get my medication levels right. Unfortunately, it looks like I’m going to have to be in the field now due to the current situation. Suarez isn’t happy about that. She actually suggested more than once that I leave Shield and take you up on your offer to come to SI. She thinks being in the field full time is too stressful for me. She may be right, but I can’t think about that right now.

We are en route to LA to investigate something “ghost” related. If things go badly, I’m going to need
Friday to fix things. If you hear about a prison riot in California or an explosion near Pasadena, then you know that things have gone badly.

If we’re back and done with this mission, I would like to have lunch with you. There’s some things I need to discuss that probably should be done in person. And maybe at your house instead of a restaurant. Does the Arlington house have a lab?

PS: Sky Quake is back with the team, for the moment anyway. I’ll try to get her to write you but I don’t think she’s ready yet after her last visit. She is sorry about that.

Xxx

From: Pepper_pot
To: The Mechanic
Subject: Re: Seriously, Tony! Call me!

I think at some point I will be able to interact with your boyfriend and it not be awkward. At least I know deep down that you’re never going to walk in on him getting fellatio from some YA starlet that is barely legal. You two had some issues that you had to work out, but that’s probably not going to be one of them. Although it may be a good thing that I won’t be able to do lunch anytime soon with the new BF. It will give me time to adjust.

I’m glad you’re safe. I wish you would’ve called me though. At least next time send me a ‘don’t believe what the news is reporting, I’m still alive’ text message. I don’t like having to go through your Shield bodyguards for that sort of thing because Mary didn’t know anything either. I hope you’re aware that your assistant is pissed at you. You have to learn to calculate time zones.

I wanted the news reporters to stop talking about the breakup but this was not how I wanted it to happen. Although, it did have to be something big because you possibly getting married wasn’t enough.

Oh by the way, a few assholes on twitter and a couple of supposedly reputable websites are accusing me of making you go gay. I usually respond by mentioning your sex tape. Sorry about that but it’s the best way to deal with it. Why is it they assume that you’re bisexualness disappears when you’re dating someone of the opposite sex?
I don’t know how I feel about you seeing this from the other side because it’s not a very pleasant feeling. Although, I’m glad you understand more about how I feel. Of course, not being together, does not make the anxiety go away. So really, do make sure that you text me next time things go badly so I know that you’re OK.

Yo-Yo hasn’t had time to help me get revenge on the ex-boyfriend but she promises to come and help as soon as her current mission is over. Although, she says it may be a while.

I’m not sure when you will have time to come visit. I’ve seen your schedule. I heard you’re losing Thanksgiving in Malta. But I would like to see you soon. I might come up for the board meeting that they’re planning to hold Saturday. I was just going to teleconference in but maybe I should come in person. I am trying to get Kevin to get it switch to Monday or Tuesday. Fingers crossed.

Xxx

From: Teenage Mutant Ninja Spider
To: The Mechanic
Time sent: 11/12/2016 20:44:12
Subject: Re: I’m proud of you.

I understand. Aunt [redacted] was kind of like that whenever Uncle [redacted] came back from a business trip. I think they always forgot I was there for at least the first hour but then we would go out for Chinese and everything would be good. I kind of miss that.

I don’t feel so good with what happened Monday night. I’m the reason why [redacted] father knows that he’s like me. Everything came out after the web up. It wasn’t pretty. [redacted] cried. A lot. He also wants to know why his daddy doesn’t love him anymore. I thought that Aunt [redacted] reacted badly, but she was just worried. She never once thought that something was wrong with me or wanted me to just be normal again. She didn’t ask the Shield team to fix me, like he did. Like the powers were some disease that needed to be cured. She just wants me to be safe. But Mr. [redacted] didn’t quite see it that way. I’m going to patrol around his house until my junior counterpart moves upstate.

I thought I was supposed to have winter spy school during the break. Although, I’m okay with that happening somewhere in Europe. Aunt [redacted] never really gets to have a vacation. The last time was years ago when we drove to Disney. That was before [redacted] died.
I think [redacted] has a crush on Friday. Should I be concerned? They talk a lot more than he does to Karen. I know you got rid of the Coulson AI because he asked, but I kind of like Karen a little better. She’s okay with me talking about MJ. Not that I talk about MJ a lot but she is cool. You know what I’m going to end this conversation before you take away my email privileges.

Xxxx

From: The Mechanic

To: Pepper_pot

Time sent: 11/12/2016 22:51:41

Subject: Re: Seriously, Tony! Call me!

Okay, sorry again for not calling. I’m planning to have Friday completely integrated into the property before I leave. Though we both know that is no excuse because I do know how to use a normal cell phone. I even use the flip phone while drunk. That’s how I started speaking to Stefan again, actually. Although apparently I forget to take them to the beach with me which is why I’m a little tardy replying to this email.

I’m sad about losing Thanksgiving in Malta but Christmas in Malta is going to be a thing. I would invite you, but you’re probably not ready for that yet. However, I’m going to be doing a Thanksgiving spectacular at the Avenger compound. Spidey Junior and mom are moving in and Ms. Marvelous family and Joey will also be there possibly with the boyfriend. Some of the DC crew may come too, apocalypse willing.

You should come. Mary says your schedule is free. I think it would be good for you. And she is also trying to get the board meeting changed to Monday or Tuesday so I sure Mary and Kevin together will get it done. You’ll be in York anyway, so come.

And you’re probably right about me not making it to the West Coast anytime soon, which is more the reason for you to come do Thanksgiving at the compound. I promise it will be better than a board meeting.

Xxxx
From: The Mechanic

To: Teenage Mutant Ninja Spider

Time sent: 11/12/2016 23:01:12

Subject: Re: I’m proud of you.

Okay, now I’m even more proud of you. You are being a good mentor to Spidey Junior. I know he needs that right now.

Look, there’s nothing you can do about Spidey Junior’s dad. That is something that he’s going to have to fix himself. You are not responsible for the dumb things adults do. I know it’s hard to accept that. I blamed myself for a lot of my dad’s issues. I used to think if ‘I was better, maybe you wouldn’t drink so much.’ But that was a Howard problem, not a Tony problem. That’s the same thing going on right now.

We can totally do winter school at my house at an undisclosed location. I can even arrange for extra teachers to show up. Although, if you are there, the agent who shares a name with your aunt will also be there. I think she would like to spend some quality time with her other BFF.

We will work out details when I get back. It should only be a couple of days. Although I think I might have to go to DC first. POTUS awaits.

I’m not that worried about the Boy in the Chair hanging out with Friday but if he starts watching the classic weird science movie let me know.

Xxxx

From: Pepper_pot

To: The Mechanic

Time sent: 11/12/2016 23:02:05

Subject: Re: Seriously, Tony! Call me!

Wow, a somewhat quick response. Under 24 hours. You’re getting better. I’ll be happy to come for Thanksgiving. I think I would prefer to avoid my extended family for at least another holiday post breakup. Although, I’m going to have to show up for Christmas, which definitely means no Malta. Maybe I’ll be ready to deal with the boyfriend by Easter.
I will have my assistant call your assistant for details. Kevin just sent me a text and the meeting is now Tuesday. I definitely will now be in town.

xxxx

From: The Mechanic
To: Monkey lover 2
Time sent: 11/12/2016 22:16:12

Subject: Re: Yes, I got your text messages and sorry I was distracted by Stefan’s ads and ass.

Please come to SI. I need you, my science bro. You can even do Avenger work part time if you’re worrying about Coulson giving you a hard time for moving to the private sector. I know Platypus was considering detailing you to the UN Avengers anyway. We have excellent benefits including full mental health coverage. Come join us. I need you. My Board of Directors hate me.

No prison riot yet but I did see that Senator Nadeer l and a couple of staffers have been charged with treason, in addition to the kidnapping and torture of her brother. I’m pretty sure I know which Senator was working with the Watchdogs to orchestrate last Tuesday’s attacks. Those treason charges are a dead giveaway.

Of course, you’re on a mission. That totally explains why you were the first one to respond, even though I wrote in the middle of the night your time.

Sky Quake can write me when she’s ready. Although, I really would like to talk to her about coming up with additional safeguards for the database along with the Princess. She doesn’t need to apologize for the last time we saw each other. I get it. You’re well aware of what I did in Siberia as well as why I did it. And I still feel bad. We had our heads up our asses so far, that her boyfriend had to sacrifice himself to keep half of the world from becoming zombies.

Although, please try to get her to talk to Suarez or anybody else about what happened. I’m glad they’re working on getting you on the right mix. It does take a little while, but I do feel better now that I’m on medication. I’m even coming up with better ideas because I’m able to focus.

Yes, the Arlington house has a lab, which is why you totally should move there with the girlfriend. I’m sure your therapist would like that as well. It’s a large house, so you probably could invite Sky
Quake as well. May be she would be willing to stick around if she didn’t have to live on base. Also, if you decided to work for SI you could work from there, instead of relocating to New York or Malibu

It is not a problem to meet at the house. I will have something catered or arrange for take-out. Then we can do science afterwards.

Oh by the way we’re going to do Thanksgiving at the compound. Stefan won’t be there because you know why. If you’re not trying to avert an apocalypse, you’re invited. Actually most of the team is invited. And I think I have to invite Piper and Davis because I put them through a lot the last couple of days. Although, Davis is running a mission with the aunt and the counselor right now, so he’s probably happy. Piper on the other hand, broke up with the girlfriend while here, so definitely inviting her to Thanksgiving.

Yes. Stefan and I talked. He knows about the ring and he is not opposed to spending the rest of his life with me, but I’m holding on to the ring for now. I think that’s best.

Anyway keep me posted on your mission. We will talk again when I’m in DC. I hope things work out that you will be able to have lunch with me.

Xxxxx

From: The Mechanic
To: Pepper_pot
Time sent: 11/12/2016 22:21:41
Subject: Re: Seriously, Tony! Call me!

Okay, spring in the French Riviera it is. I look forward to seeing you at Thanksgiving. Bring your pie. I will make sure there is not a strawberry anywhere.

I’m so glad the meeting switch to Tuesday. I would love it if you could come up Monday, so we can strategize. They’re probably going to try to lock me out because of the wedding rumors. I hate the board so much.

PS: I think I might be able to convince Monkey Lover to jump ship to SI. You can help me talk him into it at Thanksgiving.
In Person Conversation 15: We can’t put this off forever

Chapter Notes

Thank you to everybody who read or reviewed the last conversation. You’re all fabulous. Time for more Tony and Steve.

Tony had a good day on the beach with Steve. They even had a little picnic. No beach sex but that’s probably for the best. There’s just some locations that you don’t want sand to end up in. Also, water issues. He lost a lot in Afghanistan, including the desire to ever do ocean escapades. Besides Piper would have probably ICE’d them if they tried. Steve was still blushing in front of her anyway.

After they arrived back, Tony cooked dinner. Jarvis’s signature pasta. Because Steve was at the property, Tony gave the regular staff the week off. It was okay because when Tony focused, he could actually take care of himself.

Okay, and he had Steve there to make him check his email when they got back to the room instead of ripping off Steve’s shirt. He would have preferred the shirt thing but Steve encouraged adulting whenever possible.

“Okay Sugar Bear, shirt off,” Tony said as he placed his Stark pad on the bedside table and then turned to Steve. Who is apparently using the nano paper pad that the Princess created. “I responded to everyone that actually matters. Everybody else can wait until after the Malta sex retreat is over.”

“Which will be when you head back to the states and Sam and Natasha come pick me up,” Steve responded.

“Actually, it’s probably going to be the other way around. Do we want to know what they’re doing?” Tony asked.

“Following the Watchdog money trail and coming up with enough evidence to prove that Senator Nadir was consulting with a foreign government to commit terrorist acts on U.S. soil. Although, I don’t know if any more evidence is actually needed.”
“Things are already not looking very good for her. The Russia thing would just be the cherry on top. I love that she’s going down so spectacularly, even if I’m not in the country to see it. This gets me off almost as much as you,” Tony said pulling Steve over to him for one of those earth shattering, can’t really think, type kisses that Steve was way too good at. It probably has something to do with the fact that Steve doesn’t need to breathe as much as everyone else.

Unfortunately Steve pulled away. “As much as I want to continue this, I want to finish working on my letter to Bucky before you undress me again.”

“That’s understandable, because if you get this done now than we can have more naked time later.” That got Tony a glare.

“You’re so cute when you do that. I understand because we both have to keep moving forward. Besides, I saw the nano paper out, I should have known that was what you were doing while I spent like 45 minutes doing emails. How’s it going?”

“Badly. I just don’t know what to say or even really where to start,” Steve sighed.

“That’s understandable. Things are complicated and I probably made them more complicated.”

“Not you specifically. I’m trying not to start with, ‘I’m sorry I let you fell off that train’.”

“Because your therapist would be really pissed off at you if you did,” Tony joked, mostly.

“Yes, actually. Everything’s just kind of all mixed up. We barely even talked before he went into cryo-freeze again. Although, he did apologize for ruining my friendship with you.”

“Well, you can always tell him that it wasn’t as badly damaged as you initially thought. Also not as much of a friendship as you initially thought.”

“We’re still friends.”
“That have sex and I’m not that opposed to the concept of marriage. Someday eventually. But not like anytime soon.”

“Despite you already buying the ring.”

“I have a impulse purchase problem,” Tony remarked.

“Obviously. We would have to wait until I can at least legally step foot in the US again,” Steve joked.

“Totally reasonable.”

“Let me just read you what I have. And you can tell me where I’m going wrong.” Steve said reaching for the nano paper.

“I’m going with overthinking but please read.” At Tony’s words Steve does begin to read what he has so far.

Dear Bucky:

I’m sorry that I couldn’t be there when the Princess brought you out of cryo-freeze but I’m really happy to hear all the progress that you’ve been making with the team in Wauconda. I’m glad that you’re no longer susceptible to the control of others and that your mind is yours again.

“Okay, I think I’m right and you are overthinking.”

“I didn’t need you to tell me that.”

“But it’s not all bad. It’s a good start. Better than what I have. Although you misspelled Wakanda. Yes, I’m reading over your beautiful shoulder. That is a town somewhere in the Midwest.” Tony said grabbing the pen from Steve and correcting the typo.

“Spelling has never been my strong suit,” Steve remarked.
“It’s okay. So far all I have is ‘I’m sorry I fell into a villain trap and tried to kill you when I was in the middle of a tiny nervous breakdown. Does it make you feel better to know that I’m under psychiatric care and my mental health is improving?’”

“Maybe you really should go with the gift basket,” Steve joked, sort of.

“I told you that you were doing better than me. See, I’m totally overthinking it as well,” Tony sighed.

“I see that. I guess I have a place to start, but I still don’t know how to tell him about me being bisexual. I feel bad now for keeping it a secret.”

“Even though it was perfectly normal back then.”

“Yes.”

“I’m not sure how to help you because I really was never in the closet because of that Tony Stark Gay sex tape, regardless of what the media believes.”

“I’m really glad Director Rhodes punched him in the dick.”

“Obviously, you heard me dictating that text message this morning. I got dragged out of the closet, so I don’t really know how to have the normal conversation. And apparently, Howard knew before I did. Of course, instead of talking to me, he had Aunt Peggy do it. Then I was introduced to Captain America secret queer icon. Okay, that definitely helped my self-esteem.”

“I don’t know if I can be an icon when I am too afraid to come out to my oldest friend.” At that moment, Tony placed an arm around his boyfriend.

“This just makes you Human. You’re just a person. You’re not perfect and you’re afraid, just like the rest of us. You know I wish I really realize that a lot sooner. Maybe Siberia wouldn’t have happened.”

“But here we are. We have a couple more days before the letter has to go to Wakanda. You can come back to it in the morning.”
“I think I should just get it over with.”

“Because the longer you keep putting it off, the harder it will be?”

“Exactly. Also I really want to enjoy the rest of my time with you,” Steve leaned over to kiss Tony on the forehead. “I think it would be more enjoyable if this wasn’t resting over my head.”

“Excellent point. The fact that you have a boyfriend doesn’t need to be some grand confession. Just mention it casually in the course of your letter. It doesn’t have to be a big thing.”

“It feels like it.” Steve says as he rested his head on Tony shoulder. He also intertwines their fingers together.

“So far has any of your other friends reacted badly to you having a boyfriend?”

“No,” Steve answered.

“Exactly. I’m sure a few have reacted badly to me being your boyfriend but not to the fact you have a boyfriend.”

“Not that badly. Natasha definitely prefers you over the congressional staffer,” Steve told him.

“Well I’m definitely better than the closeted asshole who cheated on his wife and conspired with the Watchdogs. I mean it’s not hard to be better than that. Oh, maybe you can start with that story. It will make your James less wary of me. I would seem like a great catch in comparison.”

“You are a great catch,” Steve said, leaning over to kiss Tony gently on the lips.

“Okay. How about this, you put the notepad down for the night and I will help push every single thought out of your head until morning,” Tony suggested.
“And how does that help?” Steve asked.

“As I stated earlier, you are overthinking things right now. Sometimes this happens when I’m working on a project and I get stuck. So I take a step away and work on something else and then while I’m working on the other project, I usually solve my problem on the first project,” Tony explained.

“This explains why you’re always working on 20 different things at the same time.”

“Always. I mean, you don’t have to do me tonight. You just need to focus on something else for a moment. You can always do some drawing,” Tony suggested. “I feel like that your version of tinkering.”

“It is, but I think it might go with your first suggestion.”

Tony responded with a kiss, “This is why I love you. One of the many reasons anyway.”

“But we are working together on the letters. The first thing in the morning,” Steve said sternly.

“Probably during breakfast, actually. I’ll be your sounding board,” Tony offered.

“Thank you.”

To be continued
Dear Bucky

Chapter Summary

Thank you to everybody who read or review the last conversation. It’s time to get deep. I’ve been wanting to do this letter for a while but it’s hard to get all of this out. Here is Steve’s next attempt.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

xxxx

Dear Bucky:

I have no idea how to start this letter. I can’t even decide if I should actually start with Dear Bucky or cross that out and switch it to Dear James. Are you more one or the other? I’m not sure. I really didn’t have time to get to know who you are now before you decided to go back into cryo-freeze. This is attempt number 35 at writing to you according to my boyfriend’s AI. I’d guess maybe I’ll start there.

I have a boyfriend now. We’ve been together for a few months. Although, I’m not entirely sure how many. I’m going to ask him what day we are counting as our actual anniversary. It started as a long-distance relationship. It still is for the moment. But we knew each other before I had to adapt to a more nomadic lifestyle. I’m hoping that will change soon. My boyfriend is working on it, and he usually gets what he wants.

I love him for longer than I’ve realized. He’s smart and kind. He’s also mentoring around a dozen kids. He’s very into philanthropy and trying to protect the enhanced population, especially the kids. He tries to look at the situation from multiple perspectives.

He’s not perfect. He’s impulsive sometimes and there was an incident a couple of months ago where things went really badly because he never really did process his mother’s death, but he’s working on it. We’re working through it and I think he’s the person I’m going to spend the rest of my life with. I hope it’s a long one. I’m scared that it won’t be, but I’m hopeful. He makes me hopeful.
This is not my first relationship with a man. So I guess I should tell you that Artie was not just a friend. I know I should’ve told you back then, but I was scared. Petrified for you to find out the truth and hate me for it. Or worse. I didn’t want you to leave me. I also didn’t want to get arrested because, well, you remember what it was like back then, but I sacrificed what I needed to keep you around and I have to stop doing that. At least that’s what my therapist tells me.

Yes, I’m in therapy. I don’t get to see her as much as I probably need to, but I think it’s helping. The nightmares are becoming less frequent. I haven’t had one in the last week, although that may be because the boyfriend is visiting. He has a tendency to keep the bad dreams away. At least when he’s not starring in the dreams. But that’s a whole different set of issues. I’m working on that as well.

I’m sorry I wasn’t there with you when you woke up. My current nomadic lifestyle means that I’m always moving from one project to the next. I’ve been doing a lot of good. I’ve freed a lot of hostages. My therapist thinks that’s about you and so does my boyfriend. She may be right. I think she’s right about a lot of things. However, I’m not telling my boyfriend that he’s right. It will just go to his head.

I also don’t want to lead various world governments to you, at least right now. There are a few that know about me, like the new head of the replacement for Shield. At the moment we have an understanding. I’m not sure how long that’s going to last, because he may be moving to another agency soon, but again I’m hopeful.

I heard you’re doing better. That your mind is your own again and you have no idea how happy I am that that’s the case. My boyfriend has been in contact with your team and I’m told that I might be able to visit soon. I’m looking forward to that. It might just be me. He has some things he needs to work through.

Anyway, I miss you and I can’t wait to see you again. I’ll try to, soon as I’m able to, if you want me to come. It’s your choice, though. I’ll try to give you whatever you need to rebuild or recover.

Xxxxx

“Are you going to tell him that I’m your boyfriend?” Tony interrupted as Steve read him the letter. Steve was actually proud of himself for finishing something that almost resembled a complete letter. Usually he didn’t get more than a paragraph done before he had the nano paper Wipe itself. This he could almost send. It was just missing one thing.

“I think so. Your part of my life. I’m trying to figure out how to word that paragraph.” Steve said as he laid his head on Tony’s shoulder, fully aware that he should tell Bucky now.
“You could go back and switch a few of those my boyfriends to Tony or even Anthony. Then you can let him figure out which Tony you’re talking about,” Tony suggested.

“I think it’s better that I tell him directly then let him wonder. You didn’t make the best first impression. I need to do a little damage control.”

“I think you’re aware after the Helicarrier fuck up, that I never make the best first impression. Although, Siberia was extra awful even for me,” Tony remarked.

“I didn’t give a good first impression either. Maybe it’s best not to judge people by first impressions.”

Tony responded by kissing Steve, “You’re learning, sweetie. I’m so proud.”

“I’m trying.”

“Okay how about this. ‘So you’re probably wondering who my boyfriend is. He’s Howard’s son and Peggy’s pseudo-nephew. Yes, I’m well aware he tried to kill you about six months ago. He’s sorry about that. Did you get his apology flowers? He told me it was a nice arrangement.’”

“I’m not writing that,” Steve sighed. “Especially because it almost sounds like I’m dating you because of your connections to my past which is not true,” he reassured.

“And I’m grateful for that after the Sharon fiasco,” Tony remarked. “Seriously, don’t date people I’ve changed the diapers of. I would suggest the half your age +7 rule but I don’t think I’m going to qualify until I’m 65. Maybe for you, we can do half your age -7. So nobody under 42,” Tony smirked at him.

“I’m not even going to go there. Did you actually send an apology floral arrangement?” Steve asked.

“Yes, and Friday had to ask the Princess herself for Florist recommendations. My normal vendor doesn’t deliver to that country, yet. However, apology gifts are apparently a universal concept. I’m not sure what I’m actually sending but I have been assured it would be culturally appropriate and
ridiculously expensive. So maybe it’s best you don’t mention flowers specifically,” Tony explained.

“That’s just so you to send an apology gift. You have a regular vendor for that?” Steve asked, surprised.

“I told you I’m better at saying ‘I’m sorry’ with things. It’s a bad habit I picked up from Howard. Did you know that he had a custom bracelet designed for all his conquests? They actually go for a small fortune when up for private auction. I should know since I bought most of them to be destroyed, or rather recycled.”

“Are you going to tell Dr. Suarez about that?” Steve asked, slightly concerned.

“She knows. If anybody is well aware of my daddy issues, it’s her,” Tony tells his boyfriend.

“I’m well aware of your Howard issues.”

“Because you saw a live demonstration in Siberia. You know what, give me the nano paper. If we’re in a relationship we share each other’s burdens and I’m going to take care of this one for you.”

“I trust you, just don’t talk about us having sex,” He said as he handed the nano paper “notebook” to Tony.

“Will do Snow Bunny.” Tony said kissing Steve’s cheek before starting to write.

Xxxxx

Okay, you’ll probably notice a change in handwriting right now. This is Steve’s mysterious boyfriend. You’re probably wondering why he’s writing you. Well, we’ve met. And when we were together last time, I was an asshole. Actually, asshole is an understatement. I was also out of my fucking mind and I tried to kill you.

I am sure you know who I am right now. I bet you weren’t expecting your BFF to be dating Tony fucking Stark when you woke out of deep-freeze but here we are. Does it help to know I’m head over feet in love with him?
“You can’t word it that way.” Steve said out loud as he read over Tony shoulder. Okay, he may have pressed a kiss to Tony’s shoulder at that moment as well.

“Other suggestions? Because I feel like we need to take the Band-Aid approach here. You want to rebuild your new relationship with this version of your BFF right?”

“Yes.”

“Then that means honest communication. And yes, I’m aware I suck at that.” Tony tells him.

“Okay keep it as it is, except delete the curse word.” Steve agreed reluctantly. “Also, maybe include some more positive things.”

“Working on it,” Tony said as he turned his attention back to the paper.

So obviously we’ve kissed and made up. Many many times. And it wasn’t right away. It took a while and probably several hundred text messages to get to where we are now. Good thing I have unlimited text messaging. Steve is worth the work.

I realize that I made some bad choices. Not agreeing to the ideal of the Accords because in theory, I think they’re necessary. I don’t always like rules and oversight, but sometimes they can be helpful.

However, the execution was flawed. Very flawed. Ask the Princess to tell you about the Mumbai incident. Or what happened in New York, DC, London, or LA the day before the US presidential elections. Certain flaws of the Accords were fully on display, and people ended up dead. No one with powers, but some innocent bystanders because that’s what happens when you unleash an EMP on a major city in a society where everything runs on electricity.
However, I’m sorry for how I reacted when I found out that Hydra used you to murder my parents. After a lot of time in therapy and bunch of medication, I am able to acknowledge that you were not culpable in their murder. You had no autonomy and no control over your actions. I can’t blame you for the events of December 16, 1991.

I also accept that Steve wasn’t choosing you over me. He was making sure I wouldn’t have your blood on my hands and I already have enough of my own. So, after a lot of reflection, Steve made the right decision.

I’ve killed a lot of parents, not intentionally, but I did. And I had full control of my faculties at the time. If you ever comes across Wanda ask her what my weapons or rather I did to her family. I don’t think she’ll ever forgive me for that, even with the wedding present. What’s a house, when you are essentially responsible for making her an orphan?

I think the saying is ‘people who live in glass houses shouldn’t throw stones’. Well I live in a glass tower, so no stone throwing will be happening. I’m going to step back and listen to my therapist. I have a different one from Steve but she’s good and made me realize a lot of things. The medication also helped. I’m on the good stuff.

Anyway, enjoy the apology gift that I’m sure you will be receiving soon. I will make sure Rogers shows up for Christmas, if you and the doctors allow it, even if I have to drag him there myself. Okay and let’s hope he doesn’t get shot again before then. Was he always this reckless? Seriously, I would love to wrap him in bubble wrap, but I’m sure he would be pissed off if I did that.

Xxxxx

“You can’t send that,” Steve tells his boyfriend.

“Too late, already did,” Tony said with a smirk.

“But you said there was a dead drop?” Steve asked, incredulous.

“Nano tech is a beautiful thing. I’m not quite sure how the Princess’s version of it works but I probably will once I’m focused on other things beside you.”

“I should make you sleep on the couch,” Steve glares at Tony.
“I love you and I did this for your own good. Also I got chocolate body paint. You can paint me like one of your French girls,” Tony offers. That makes Steve feel slightly better.

“There were not any French girls,” Steve shoots back.

“Part of me doesn’t believe you. Were there any French boys?” Tony asked, raising one eyebrow. It worked.

“No, but there is an Italian boy,” Steve said as he began to unbutton Tony’s pants. “And I just have this feeling he would look really good covered in chocolate body paint. He owes me for sending out that letter before I could at least correct some typos.”

“My body is your canvas,” Tony said just before he pulled Steve into another kiss.

To be continued

Chapter End Notes

Just a quick note, I’m going to have to go out of town for a family emergency for a couple of weeks. If I can finalize the next chapter before I travel I am going to post tomorrow. After that I will not be updating until I get back. However, we have so many chapters to get through before Endgame comes out, so I probably will just post a few chapters closer together to make up for weekends when I cannot post. The story is done, it’s just going through proofreading and polishing right now. Also, I apologize if I’m not able to respond to your comments personally. I really do enjoy all of your comments.
In person conversation 16: Meanwhile in Wakanda

Chapter Notes

Thank you to everybody who read or reviewed the last conversation. You are all wonderful. A lot of people have asked me if Bucky would be making an appearance in this story and here we are. I hope you all enjoy it.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Shuri probably should have let Sergeant Barnes read his friend’s final letter under the supervision of his therapists just like he read the earlier attempts the day before. Especially, because she is certain that the second half of the letter came from Stark himself. However, she received a text message from Dr. Leopold activating the Friday protocol. That means she needed to go back to America within the next few hours and she really wanted James to read the letters in her presence. Over the last few months, they have become friends and James needed a friend while reading.

Therefore, she walked to the house where Sergeant Barnes was currently staying. She was happy to see him attending his sheep. He seemed peaceful. Almost happy.

“Are you going to try to fit me for a prosthesis again?” James asked. She tried earlier but he wasn’t ready.

“Not until you’re ready. However, my friend, Dr. Leopold has created a prosthesis that looks almost like a human hand. Maybe something different than what you had before would make you feel more comfortable,” she suggested as she pulled up a picture of Agent Coulson’s prosthetic.

“You can’t replace what was lost,” James said as he continued to care for his goats, not really looking at her holograph.

“No. But you can move forward. You can build new things once you’re ready,” She suggested.

“I’m not sure if I’m ready. I am enjoying this life.”

“Then that means that you are already rebuilding, Sergeant Barnes.”
“Maybe. Why are you visiting then?” The sergeant asked.

“I came by to let you know that the Captain has finished his letter to you. The final version is available on this tablet.” The tablet itself was clear and almost as thin as a sheet of paper. Definitely smaller than even a Stark pad, including the one that Tony used for personal use, when she visited his lab. Stark and the two Fitzs were the only ones even remotely close to her in terms of development. Everyone else was at least two decades behind.

“How you going to tell Steve that I was able to read all his rough drafts as he was writing them?” James asked as he activated the tablet to read.

“You can if you wish to, when you write to him. If you choose to write to him. However, I feel I made the right choice. I wasn’t sure he would actually send a letter and you needed to know what he was thinking,” she said as she followed behind James as he walked into his house.

“I think it was Stark that actually pushed the button. I can’t believe they are dating,” James said as he started to read the letter. “I thought the punk had better taste even if he did kiss his ex-girlfriend’s granddaughter.”

James already knew about Steve’s boyfriend and it wasn’t from reading the fragments of Steve’s attempts at writing to him or Starks apology gift basket that Shuri gave to him yesterday. Since their arrival, a couple of weeks ago, James’s been spending a lot of time with Mrs. Hinton and her daughter. Robin finds the goats peaceful and they were living in a house only half a meter away. James just happened to recognize that Steve was kissing Dr. Stark in one of those images when he was having tea with Robin’s mother. And because Robin likes “Mr. James”, she told him everything.

“You did not meet under the best of circumstances. Dr. Stark is better than what you witnessed in Siberia. If I ran into you when I still believed you were responsible for my father’s murder, I would have attempted to kill you as well. However, now that I know better, we are friends.”

“The difference is that I did kill his parents. I doubt we’re ever going to sit down and have tea together.”

“He knows that it happened under duress. He understands that. You will see when you read the letter. I’ll get you something to drink and you just read the letter.” Shuri said getting up to make tea.
Yes she can make her own tea. It also gave James a modicum of privacy. However, Shuri wasn’t expecting to walk into the room with James crying when she returned with tea 15 minutes later.

“Why are you crying?” Shuri asked, sitting the tea on the table.

“Because I don’t deserve forgiveness. I remember it. All of it. I remember everything that I did, every life I took. What I did to the Starks was the worst. I can still smell the blood. I hear their pleading. The sound of broken bones. I shouldn’t be forgiven.”

“You can’t change the past. You can only move forward and rebuild.” Shuri tells him as she grabs his hand in support.

“Your friend is trying to according to the baby bird.”

“We really need to work with Robin about not telling certain people certain things.” Shuri sighed.

“That’s not a problem because I’m one of the few people Robin will actually talk to. She knows I’m broken just like her,” the Sergeant told her.

“Neither one of you is broken. Also, Dr. Leopold isn’t trying to change his past. That’s not possible, he’s trying to change our future. He still has to deal with his own ghosts,” Shuri explained.

“Do you feel guilty for getting him committed?” James asked, knowing about what she did the last time she was in America.

“Not necessarily guilty. It was necessary and I got him the help that he needed.” Shuri explained. “I’m doing what I had to do to help him build a better future. But I’m not sure if he still trusts me.”

“I think he will,” James replied.

“Do you want to talk about the letter?” Shuri asked.

“Not right now. Maybe in a few days,” James said grabbing a cup of tea from the table.
“Then we’ll have tea again when I get back from America and we can discuss if you’re ready.”

“You’re going back to America? You haven’t been back that long. Are you going back to check up on your friend?” James asked.

“To help my friend. Although, I’m hoping that things will go differently and he won’t need my help.”

“It’s okay if you need to leave. I have Polly to talk to and my doctor. It will also give me time to write a letter to Steve or at least try to. I’m not sure what I should say to him,” James confessed.

“Are you going to tell Steve that you knew about Artie?” Shuri asked.

“Yes. I’m not quite sure how to start this, but I will eventually.”

“That’s good. Do you want me to pick you up anything while I’m gone?” Last time he asked for chocolate which she was happy to bring along with peeps. She absolutely loves peeps. She’s going to have to get some of the Christmas ones that Ned told her about.

“Real New York pizza,” He also asked for that last time but she forgot to bring any back with her.

“I’m either going to be near Los Angeles or Washington DC with a small stop at the “Lighthouse” in upstate New York, before making my way to where ever Leo and team are. Although, I’ve heard good things about the Timber Pizza Company, if I do make it to DC.” She offered.

“Nothing is better than New York pizza,” He told her.

“I apologize again for not bringing you back a slice last time.”

“Apology accepted, but I still want pizza.”
To be continued.

Chapter End Notes

This was supposed to be a short add on to Tony and Steve section but this came out. I really need to stop adding extra chapters if I want to get this story done before Endgame comes out.

The Timber Pizza Company is a real pizza place in DC and their pizza is delicious.
Dear Steve

Chapter Notes

Thank you to everyone who read or commented on the last chapter. You’re all absolutely wonderful. Now it’s time for Bucky to bare his heart to his best friend.

Sorry for the long break. Hopefully, updates will be regular until the end from this point on. Counting this chapter we have nine more to go.

Also, during the break another MCU movie came out so the 30 day rule is in effect. I don’t know if we will finish posting the rest of this story before Endgame comes out, but we shall see.

Dear Steve:

I got your letter. All of them actually, even the ones that you didn’t like. You should probably know that the Princess set the nano paper to directly stream what you are writing. She was worried that you wouldn’t send the letter so she let me read some of your rough drafts, under my therapist’s supervision, of course.

Actually, I was afraid you were never going to send a letter. It’s just like with your art. You were never satisfied and you would hate whatever you did, no matter how good you really were. I guess that hasn’t changed since the 40s. It’s comforting to know that not everything is different, even if I wish your self-esteem had improved in the interim.

You shouldn’t be afraid to tell me that you have a boyfriend. I knew about Artie for a while. Almost since the beginning. We shared an apartment for how long? I saw the bite marks. You bruised like a peach back then.

I didn’t say anything because how it was when we were growing up. Especially, because I knew you still like dames as well. Maybe I was hoping that if I found you the right one you would forget about the other part, especially after Artie left. It would’ve been safer that way. I was wrong. I don’t want you to be anything other than yourself.
Even if that means you’re dating a Stark. I’ve been told that he is less of a prick than his father, mostly by the Princess. I’m not going to ask you what you see in him because I don’t want to get punched. Although, he does send a very nice apology gift basket. I like the plums. They’re hard to get around here. The chocolate was also good.

I’m not going to hold him trying to kill me against him. I can’t, considering what I did. I’m sorry about that. I really am. The doctors keep explaining to me that I didn’t have control or choice in what I did, but that doesn’t make the nightmares go away. I don’t think they ever will. Maybe they’ll just come less often, or maybe the doctors here will teach me more skills to deal with it. We’re working on it.

I don’t hold you accountable for what happened with the train or what happened afterwards. Only Hydra and maybe myself. I’m working on it with the doctors here.

I think I would be up for a visit next month. They don’t celebrate Christmas here, but I’d rather not be completely alone. The Princess visits often, but she’s been in America a lot recently. I’m getting to know one of my neighbors, Polly. She’s from America too, but I think she’d rather spend Christmas just with her daughter. It’s the first one since her husband died.

I’m not really ready to meet your boyfriend yet. I’m not sure he is ready to meet with me either due to our history, despite the apology basket. Alcohol would probably need to be involved and I don’t think I can drink. And I’ve been told that he shouldn’t. Again, mostly by the Princess. How does she know so much?

As for the beginning of your letter, I think for right now I want to just be James. The kids around here call me White Wolf, but I think James works better. I really don’t feel like a Bucky anymore. Too much has happened. I’m not sure who I feel like, but I’m trying to find that person.

PS: When you come bring pizza. I miss the stuff. The food is good here, but I miss New York.

Xxx

“Okay, it’s never a good sign when you start crying while reading an email. See, this is why I said no emails until you’re on the plane tomorrow. You know, unless it meets the apocalypse threshold.”

“It was a letter from Bucky or rather my James. Friday decrypted it.”
“Okay, that fits the apocalypse threshold.”

“He knew about Artie. Apparently, I’m not good at being sneaky,” Steve explained with a sigh.

“Or, best friends just know this stuff. There are very few secrets I can keep from Platypus and Pepper Pot.” Tony put an arm around him. “I’m still shocked that I kept the fact I was dying a secret from everybody.”

“I think in that case, they probably knew but didn’t want to know and therefore didn’t talk about it because they were afraid.”

“Which explains why so many of my relationships are completely screwed up.”

“You’re getting better at it though.”

“Yes, we’ve spent more than a week together without catastrophe,” Tony told his boyfriend leaning over to steal a kiss.

“You’re going to want to write a response now?” Tony asked.

“Yes because I want to spend our last night together without worrying about everything else.”

“Good boyfriend,” Tony said, still in another kiss. “I’ll go ask Friday if there have been media reports on a prison riot in the LA area yet.”

“No public reports,” Friday responded.

“And I’m going to wait until wheels up tomorrow to ask if there are Shield reports.”

“That’s probably best,” Steve said kissing Tony one last time before focusing on writing.
Dear James:

Of course you knew about Artie. Tony says, best friends always know stuff like that. I should’ve known that you would know, but I was just scared and I wasn’t ready to talk about it. Honestly, a part of me was hoping that if I had the right woman, the other part would go away too. That’s how people thought back when we were growing up. I thought Peggy could be that one. Maybe she could have been if things were different, but I wonder if it would’ve been enough.

What I feel for Tony is completely different. All-encompassing in a way. But it’s real. I love him. I don’t want to think of a world without him there because he makes things better. He makes me better. He’s caring and compassionate and yes, he screws up a lot, but he tries. He never gives up trying to make things better. To fix his own mistakes and he is aware that he’s not perfect. He’s not trying to be.

He is also well aware of how badly Siberia went. We all made a lot of mistakes. I should’ve went to Tony directly, instead of assuming that he wouldn’t help us. I should’ve told him about what Hydra did to his parents before we knew what they made you do. If he had time to process, I think he would have dealt with the situation very differently. But you can’t change the past. You can only move forward.

You’re right, he isn’t ready to see you yet, but I am. He feels very guilty about the way he acted. However, I would come now if I could, but I’m working on something at the moment that’s really important. Also, your doctors want you to have more time to get adjusted and I respect their decision. But that doesn’t mean I don’t miss you, because I do.

Christmas seems like a good idea. I can afford presents now (I’m not even going to ask Tony how he restored access to my bank accounts to me,) and I’m no longer allergic to pine trees. Although, I guess I’ll have to bring a fake one with me. They probably don’t have pine trees where you are and there are rules about bringing in outside plant life from one country to another.

PS: Yes, I’ll bring pizza. Although it’s more likely to be from Italy the New York. The Quinjet has a special feature to keep pizza hot. Thank Tony for that.

To be continued
Chapter Notes

Thank you to everybody who read or reviewed the last conversation. You are all lovely.

So Tony and Steve’s time in the same country is coming to an end. Because unfortunately all good things must end. But at least we have hope now that the situation will be resolved, thanks to the new people in charge of negotiations.

There is a slight illusion to Captain Marvel in here towards the end of the chapter but I wrote it before I saw the movie and touched it up a little afterwards. It’s vague and not very spoiler heavy. All events in that movie are canon for this story. That’s all I’m saying for now.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“You have to get up Tony.” Steve told his boyfriend as he pressed a gentle kiss against Tony’s lips.

“Five more minutes.” Tony mumbled sleepily. But Steve wasn’t having it and pulled the blankets off of a very naked Tony. Steve was going to have to draw the scene later.

“Not this time sweetie. I’m really regretting staying up until 3 AM.” He told his half sleeping boyfriend as he bent down to kiss him gently.

“But it was so much fun at the time. Also I knew I wouldn’t be getting morning sex even though we totally should,” Tony mumbled sleepily against him.

“Because the Quinjet is going to arrive here any minute and I’m going to have to leave.”

“Yes, the Quinjet I design that was supposed to be Shield proof and yet, the Princess made it so I couldn’t track you.” Tony pouted at him.
“Also, apparently Dr. Leopold broke into it,” Steve remarked.

“I don’t count Fitz. I would get him to come to SI, if I could. The Quinjet is coming, that means that the Stark industries jet will only be a little behind. I hate that you have to leave,” Tony lamented, now more awake than before. The kiss probably helped.

“I know, but you have a meeting with the President tomorrow and I have to figure out who was really working with the Senator. Maybe if we uncovered evidence of the truth, it will bring me one step closer to being home.” Steve was hopeful. He just wanted to find a way home, to Tony.

“I know and I hope you find her ridiculously wealthy benefactor.” Tony reached up to pulls Steve into a kiss. “So we really don’t have time for another round?”

“We could have if you would’ve woke up the first time I tried 25 minutes ago,” Steve remarked.

“We didn’t actually fall asleep until 3 AM and some of us need a little more sleep,” Tony complained as he kiss Steve again.

“I thought sex until 3 AM was normal for you,” Steve teased.

“When I was like 25. Sweetie, I love you, but I’m going to have to get you toys or something.”

“Really? What about that story you told me about Bali 2006?” Steve actually smirked at him.

“Okay, mid-30s, before the Afghanistan enlightenment. But that was still a decade ago. Although, even at that point, I was starting to slow down. Despite the rumor I started myself, I didn’t sleep with most of the 2007 Maxim cover girls. Also most of the all nighters I have pulled during the last decade have involved the workshop or super villain chasing. I hate super villain chasing,” Tony quipped.

“So do I. You will write me when you get to DC?” Steve asked with another gentle peck to Tony’s lips.

“Yes, unless I fall right to sleep as soon as I get to the Arlington house. Although, thankfully my meeting with the President tomorrow has been pushed back to 2 PM.”
“That should be fun,” Steve replied sarcastically.

“Not at all and he definitely owes me an apology. However, I’m already coming up with a list of not evil people to put in charge of the government front covering Shield. Do you think that they’ll be willing to appoint Simmons? I think she has dual citizenship, because Fury thinks of everything. I think. Although, she may have lost it during the Hydra/Shield fall out.”

“That may be possible. May said they had to completely erase themselves afterwards to stay off of Hydra’s radar,” Steve explained.

“Friday, help daddy out. Are Fitz and Simmons U.S. citizens and therefore can be in charge of new Shield or whatever they’re calling it?” Tony asked only to be met with a female voice that Steve was not familiar with.

“Friday is currently on a mission with Dr. Leopold. However, yes both Fitz and Simmons are naturalized U.S. citizens. Although they both maintain dual citizenship, now that their identities have been reestablished. Dr. Leopold J. Fitz also has Wakanda citizenship granted personally by Princess Shuri. Dr. Simmons is head of the tech/science division, and will retain that position, after the restructuring, but for the greater ATCU instead of just the Shield division.”

“Karen, what are you doing here? Where is Friday?” Tony asked.

“Who is Karen?” Steve asked.

“I am the AI Mr. Stark created to run Peter’s suit,” The AI explained.

“I thought Philip was that AI?” Steve asked slightly confused.

“Well Coulson found out and apparently, I’m not allowed to make an AI based on him. As long as he’s alive anyway. Now Philip is confined to Agent America’s Avenger phone and the advanced tactical suit I am creating for her. She likes when Philip reads her text messages. Strangely, Agent is okay with that use of the technology,” Tony explained.

“I’m not surprised.”
“Karen not that I don’t mind spending time with you, but why are you here?” Tony asked the AI.

“As I stated earlier, Friday is working on a mission with Leopold J. Fitz. That takes precedence. It was decided that it was best to load one of your backup AIs to perform all necessary functions until she is able to take over.”

“There was a prison riot in California wasn’t there?” Tony asked concerned.

“Yes. At South Ridge Penitentiary outside of Los Angeles yesterday. There are also reports of inmates seeing ghosts as well as the vigilante Quake being in the facility.” Karen told the two. “Shield was trying to keep the incident quiet but information leaked earlier this morning.”

“That’s just lovely,” Tony sighed.

“In addition, Dr. Eli Morrow, serving time for attempted manslaughter, escaped the facility with the help of one of the “ghosts”. This information is not public knowledge. May and Yo-Yo’s team are in pursuit,” Karen explained.

“And this is why Friday was pulled? To the point that she can’t even answer simple requests.” Tony asked skeptically.

“No. There was an explosion at an abandon Roxxon power facility, 45 minutes ago. Friday is assisting with the situation. Unfortunately, I am unable to disclose any further details,” Karen the AI responded.

“That’s not reassuring at all,” Steve whispered, and he was sure Tony was thinking the same thing by the way he rolled his eyes.

“You will be personally debriefed once you arrive in DC,” The AI explained.

“Can I talk to Rhodey or Coulson?” Tony asked, already annoyed with his AI.
“They are currently unavailable at this time,” Karen replied.

“Fitz?” Tony asked, probably too afraid to ask why his friend was not available. Although, Steve would like to believe that this AI would tell Tony if his friend was missing.

“He is unavailable. Leopold J. Fitz, however, will contact you as soon as feasible. He’s currently en route to the new West Coast Avenger facility,” Karen responded.

“Okay, I think there’s a bug with Karen and she thinks that Monkey Lover is two different people,” Tony seemed puzzled.

“They are two different people,” Karen responded, and Tony sighed.

“I’m going to have to fix that.”

“It will probably give you something to do on the flight back,” Steve kissed his cheek gently.

“Oh yes, I’m going to create an entirely new backup.”

“And you can’t make it sound like me.”

“I know. I think Karen has been spending way too much time with Spidey and it’s showing.”

“Probably. There is a new West Coast Avenger facility?” Steve asked.

“Not new. It’s something that I’ve been planning for a little while, but with all the stuff going on recently on that side of the country and Yo-Yo’s recent relocation, it just made sense. Also with Carter keeping an eye on Lane we could have more recruits soon. Maybe she will even find the Pyms, who shouldn’t have even been brought into the Accords mess in the first place,” Tony explained.

“They’re in San Francisco. Also, why were the Pyms brought into this?” Steve asked.
“Ross wanted the tech, which again is a total abuse of the State Department.” Tony explained.

“That makes complete sense.”

“Malibu is still closer to the shrinking people than New York. Okay, give me one last kiss before you run off and join the other Secret Avengers.” Tony was trying to be brave, but Steve could tell his boyfriend was on the verge of tears. So was Steve, at that point.

“I am going to miss you,” Steve whispered, pulling away from the kiss, wishing he didn’t have to.

“I am going to miss you too. I wish you could come back here for Thanksgiving,” Tony lamented.

“If we didn’t have to come here after the Mumbai incident it would have been a possibility but I don’t want to risk coming back here until Christmas and I really want to spend Christmas with you. Besides, I know you have plans with Pepper and your kids. It will be good.”

“I have been neglecting Pepper and the kids. But I just want to spend as much time with you as possible and Christmas would be better for that. With SI being closed for the holiday, I’m thinking about bringing some friends as well as the oldest kid.” Also, Steve just had a feeling that because of certain events earlier this year (watching video footage of his parents be murdered just days before Christmas 1991), this Christmas may be harder for Tony than usual. It would be good for Steve to be there.

“May mentioned it when I talked to her a few days ago and it would be nice to meet the oldest kid when we’re not fighting,” Steve said with a small smile.

“I think she is warming up to coming with us. Maybe we will make her and Coulson kiss under the mistletoe. Friday-- sorry Karen, can you please make sure we have mistletoe?” Tony asked the AI.

“I will get right on that boss,” The AI responded.

“Thank you.”
”I was told to inform you that Ms. Romanoff is waiting for you on the helicopter pad.” He knew they were waiting. He had heard the Quinjet land. He just didn’t want to leave.

“I guess that’s your ride,” Tony said sadly.

“We’ll talk soon,” Steve said before pulling Tony into one last kiss.

“I love you,” Tony whispered against his lips.

“Love you too,” He said as he pulled away and grabbed his bag. He didn’t look back, because if he did he would have burst into tears. He did still cry but at least he made it to the Quinjet.

“You will be back with him soon,” Natasha told him as she sat beside him. Sam was flying.

“I know, I just wish we could have a little more time,” Steve lamented to Natasha.

“I know, but we also need to find a submarine carrying the ‘superior’,” Natasha explained.

“Seriously, who comes up with these names?” Steve asked, wiping away a tear as he tried to put himself back into mission mode. Natasha handed him an iPad with his mission report. He was almost glad it wasn’t a Stark pad because that would remind him of Tony.

“Usually, the media, but this guy came up with this one himself.”

“Of course. Wait, does he actually think Coulson is personally responsible for all the strange things that have happened?” Steve asked after looking over the report.

“According to Leo’s Intel? Yes. And Coulson has seen a lot, so I can see where this could come from. There was even this incident early on in Coulson’s career in the mid 90s that Fury doesn’t like to talk about and Coulson doesn’t remember because Fury wiped his memories of it. According to the Shield rumor mill, it involved torturing bodysnatching aliens with blue blood and may or may not have been related to project Pegasus,” Natasha responded in a way that made Steve sure she doubted the rumor mill.
“Was this when he lost his eye?” Steve asked.

“I can’t get a definitive answer on that but I wouldn’t be surprised.”

“Of course.”

“Look, the sooner we deal with the superior, the sooner we can get back to our real lives and your boyfriend.”

“And your kids.”

“They’re not my kids.”

“Yes, they are.”

Xxxx

“I am detecting that you are crying now. Would you like me to put on soothing music?” Karen asked moments after Steve left.

“That’s not necessary Karen and why did I put that protocol in there?” He starting to wonder if he should spend some quality time with Karen before handing her back over to the oldest kid. He feels like there are some bugs he needs to work out.

“Actually, Ned did. He is worried about Peter, especially after Liz left,” Karen explained.

“Of course your normal owner would be crying over girls,” Tony is not surprised.

“Not that much. He seems to be developing a stronger relationship with Michelle. Although sometimes he cries about his deceased uncle. The one-year anniversary of his death is November 20.”
“Shit! I didn’t know. Okay, they are definitely coming to Thanksgiving at the compound. We’re also doing something fun on black Friday. Can we do paintball at the compound?”

“I will make arrangements,” The AI replied.

“Thank you. You don’t have to worry about me. I’m okay, just a little sad Karen. I just really miss my boyfriend even though he’s been gone two minutes and probably hasn’t even flown away yet,” Tony lamented to the AI.

“You could look out the window and see him leave,” Karen suggested.

“I prefer not to Karen. I hate watching him leave because I’m afraid one day he won’t come back.” He thought about May Parker. About her losing her husband just days before Thanksgiving. He doesn’t want to think about that.

“He will,” Karen tried to reassure him.

“I thought that about my mom once upon a time and Hydra happened,” He regrets his last words to her so much.

“Would this be an appropriate time to let you know that Peter would like to schedule a pizza hang out day next weekend?” So he doesn’t have to be alone on the anniversary of his uncle’s death. And because Platypus was the only one who prevented him from overdosing on the one-year anniversary of his parents’ death, he feels like he needs to pay it forward.

“It is a perfect time, Karen. Work with Mary to make sure I have the weekend free for Peter and May for that matter.” Because she’s going to need a friend too. “I should probably get up, but I don’t want to leave the scent of Steve behind.”

“I understand,” Karen replied.

“No you don’t. But that’s okay,” Tony told Karen as he finally got out of bed.
“Piper has pancakes waiting for when you’re ready to come to breakfast. With blueberries and chocolate,” Karen offered.

“You’re being a good substitute Karen,” He praised the AI.

“Thank you, boss.”

“How long will you be with me?” He almost asked when Friday will be back but thought better of it.

“I am uncertain. I will be here at least until the situation stabilizes,” That did not reassure Tony at all. Why did he feel like something big was happening?

“I better get a briefing.” Tony grumbled under breath.

“You will once you return to DC.”

“Tell Director Snookums I’m holding him to that.”

To be continued.

Chapter End Notes

So what do you think is going on that is preventing Friday from her normal AI duties?

Please note that neither Steve nor Tony know that there are two Leopold Fitz’s right now. Although that won’t stay the case for long. Especially with Karen around. She has no filter. Thanks to Spider-Verse I’m starting to use Leopold J. Fitz for an other-dimensional visitor, or at least that’s what Karen is using. She is a spider AI after all. The Leo from the story’s original timeline will just be Fitz.

The anniversary of Uncle Ben’s murder probably should’ve been in October, but it wasn’t until I watched Spider-Verse that I realized the need to include this plot point and I need Tony to be there for his spider child.
Thank you to everyone who read or reviewed the last conversation. You are all absolutely fabulous.

I also found out recently that this fic has a page on Tvtropes. https://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Sandbox/IHopeYouHaveUnlimitedTextMessaging

I love that site, so you have no idea how happy that makes me. Thank you to whoever did that.

This chapter takes place only an hour or two after the last one. I apologize to those reading this story and not watching Agents of Shield. This one might be extra confusing. Some of the events are adapted from AOS episode 4.6 and 4.7 of the Ghost Rider arc.

However, things are very different in this timeline because of the butterfly effect. The Princess is there for one thing and she brought back up. Also another thing, everything is happening at the future West Coast Avenger facility. ADIA is also long gone and Radcliffe is behind bars. For those of you that have watched these episodes, you’re probably wondering how things will go without them there. Well, Leo and the Princess have a plan.

It felt like during this episode that the writers forgot that the Playground is located somewhere in the DC Metro and not in Los Angeles. It makes a lot of things in this episode and the next a bit awkward. So I’m creating a place on the West Coast where a lot of things can happen to take that away. But hey, you’re going find out why Friday was MIA in the last chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Really, Hunter should’ve expected everything to go pear shaped very quickly. That’s usually how it is with Shield. Although, he was hoping that Leo’s experience the first time around would keep things from going to shite. No such luck. Which totally explains why the Princess picked him and the special project up from the Lighthouse before making their way to the future home of the West Coast
Avengers. Which happens to be a part of the Stark Industries Malibu campus that’s been laying mostly unused since they switched to electronics and clean energy and a good portion of the company moved back east.

It’s also the perfect place to bring other Fitz, Coulson and the person Leo refers to as The Rider, a.k.a. Robbie Reyes, back from the dead. Well not dead, but they are sort of in between dimensional planes at the moment. The Princess explained it to him on the way, but he didn’t quite get it. It involved a lot of discussions about the laws of thermodynamics and conservation of matter as well as dimensional theory. It all gave him a bloody headache.

How can you be trapped between dimensions? Apparently, it all involve something called dark matter and some book called the Darkhold or as Leo refers to it as the evil book of everything. One quick read and apparently you become walking evil with the knowledge of all things.

That’s essentially what happened when Robbie’s uncle, Eli Morrow a.k.a. the guy in prison for attempted manslaughter read the book and used a shiny project rebirth knockoff to turn himself into a “superhero”. Which he did and then subsequently skewered half of the security team which really actually made him a super villain. Of course, the fallout involved in an explosion that made Coulson, Fitz, and Robbie become trapped between dimensions.

He doesn’t even want to think about the specifics right now, but he knows Leo needs him because his counterpart is trapped and will die if they don’t rescue him. All of them really. They also have a crazy power-hungry villain to take care of. There is always one of those.

As Hunter walks into the West Coast facility with the Princess and the newest member of the team walking behind him, he sees Leo and Simmons fighting over a backpack. Leo stopped when he noticed the three of them.

“You’re not supposed to be here. You’re still disavowed,” Leo sounded worried but that didn’t stop him from handing Hunter the backpack, which Simmons was not happy about.

“I thought you would be happier to see me. I was expecting a kiss or at least a hug, not a bag,” Hunter jokes. That got him a laugh from Leo, but a glare from the not really an ex-girlfriend.

“I would but I’m busy, mostly trying to keep Simmons from reading the Darkhold,” He said pointing to the pack Hunter was now holding.
“I don’t see why not. Don’t you want us to rescue Fitz and Coulson?” Simmons asked, trying to grab the back from him. At that moment Leo pulled out an ICEr and the Princess activated her nano tech gauntlets. Hunter pulled the bag away from her hand.

“Yes, I do but you are not reading that book,” Leo said forcefully.

“You’re really going to shoot me?” Simmons asked.

“To keep me from killing you later on? Yes. You saw what I did earlier,” Leo responded.

“May is going to kill you when she wakes up,” Okay, now Hunter really wants to know what happened to Agent May.

“She had former Agent Barton knock out her ex-boyfriend to keep him from getting detained by the US government after his boyfriend was nearly killed by sunflower oil. She’ll understand. That book is dangerous and anybody who reads it will have to be taken out. I know what happened last time. Radcliffe looked at it for a second and he ended up kidnapping May after replacing her body with an LMD duplicate, made a deal with the Watchdogs, and then he kidnapped all of us to hand the agency over on a silver platter to a man who wants to kill all Inhumans and has a personal vendetta against Coulson.” Leo explained.

“Also, the agency was subsequently destroyed by that point and I spent six months locked up. So I would really prefer that you not look at that book.”

“So you rather just leave Fitz to die?” Simmons asked bitterly almost pleading with Leo.

“No. But you’re not looking at that book. The cost is too high,” Leo argued.

“But why not? Not only could the secret to getting them back be in this book, but we could send you back to your home time/dimension. Don’t you want to be with your Jamuna?” Simmons argued.

“Not at the cost of losing you.” Fitz argued.

“But I’m willing to if it gets Fitz back,” Simmons offered on the verge of tears.
“I know that. But you know he wouldn’t want that. He’s probably yelling that at you right now, but you can’t hear him. You don’t have to make that sacrifice. I’m here for a reason. To fix things and I have a plan to fix this,” That’s when Leo pointed to the Princess standing behind him.

“You Highness, I didn’t realize you were there. You also brought reinforcements. In the form of a teenager. Why is there a teenager here?” Simmons asked confused. “The other teenager, not you Your Highness.”

“You can’t read that book. Friday can,” Leo explained.

“How can an AI read the book?” Simmons asked confused.

“I’m Friday.” The teenager standing behind the Princess told the group. Although, she didn’t sound like Friday and Hunter has been talking a lot to the AI in the last few months. “Although, I think I prefer the name Afia in this body. What you think about Afia Anne Stark-Rogers?”

“I think you can choose names after you rescue my boyfriend, if you’re capable of such,” Simmons remarked.

“Okay hold up one minute. I’m all for rescuing the others but I know what the evil robot did to you after she read the magical book of everything evil. You want to risk that again?”

“I’m not Aida.” Friday – – Afia argued. “First, Tony never treated me like a thing but almost as a child.”

“Afia is nothing like her.” Leo said as he grabbed Hunter’s hand. “Radcliffe was a manipulative selfish person who tried to excuse his behavior with supposedly having good intentions. I didn’t realize the truth until it was already too late. Afia wasn’t crated by him.”

“However, she was created by the guy who accidentally created murder bots. That’s not the best track record,” Hunter remarked.

“Actually, Tony did not create Ultron. He was a project created by Shield and the U.S. government. He’s just taking the fall,” the android explained. “He did create Vision, who is a hero.”
“That’s not reassuring, considering you were created by Shield,” Hunter argued.

“Actually my physical body was created by the Princess.” Which explains why she almost looks like the Princess’s younger sister, except a little lighter. “I am here to assist Shield of my own choice.”

“Still not reassured,” Hunter said, looking at his boy… His friend. Leo is …yeah this is too complicated of a situation to even lie to himself right now. And he was really good at that after the divorce.

“However, to alleviate your worries, after I have retrieved the three, this body will be destroyed and my personality will be uploaded into a new body as it was exactly 1 minute before I access the book. I will remember nothing of what I’ve read.” Afia reassured the group. “You’re going to need my help for what comes next.”

“You planned for this?” Hunter asked turning to Leo.

“Yes, although I forgot that Simmons would be here this time,” Leo lamented. “I didn’t calculate for that.”

“He literally went through the universe for me. I should be willing to do the same for him,” Simmons tried to grab the book again but was stopped.

“But you don’t have to,” Afia said, putting an arm around Simmons. “Fitz is my friend and I want to save him. I can be rebuilt. You can’t. I want to help.”

“Okay, fine I will give the book of evil to Afia, but other you better break out the engagement ring after we save him. I’m sure he’s watching this.” He tells Leo as he handed the book over to Afia.

“Engagement ring?” That’s when Hunter realize he said way too much. Okay, the smack on his shoulder from Leo tells him that he said too much.

“He purchased it when he was in Wakanda. Or rather we allowed him to purchase it. Normally, he wouldn’t have been able to,” Princess Shuri explained.
“Okay, Friday -- Afia will read the book and then we will get Fitz and the others back. Sorry, Afia I’m getting used to the new name,” Leo told the group.

“I understand. Tony still called me Jarvis occasionally for the first six months. The name I chose means a daughter born on Friday. I thought it would be appropriate,” Afia replied.

“Just get Fitz back,” She said pulling away from Afia.

“It’s going to be okay.” Leo tried to reach for Simmons, but she pulled away.

“You don’t know that. I can’t stand here and do nothing. I’m going to check on May in medical and give her the antidote. I’m sure she’s going to want to be here for the rescue. I still can’t believe you iced her.” Hunter could because he knows way too much about the Doctor. Leo will do what he needs to do to save the world regardless of the questionable morality of it.

“It is going to take Afia a little while to create the gateway even with my and Shuri’s help. Maybe you should let the Dendrotoxin wear off on its own,” Leo explained.

“I still think it’s better to wake her up, especially with Yo-Yo, Daisy, and Mack gone.”

“Director Rhodes said that I am running point on this, so we wait. But we can go ask him. Oh wait, he’s on the phone trying to keep Talbot from sending in the Armed Forces right now,” Leo told her.

“So Mack is inhabited by the spirit of vengeance or whatever he really is?” Hunter asked getting a glare from Simmons.

“Yes. Yo-Yo knows what’s really going on and they are working on it. She’s going to try to convince the Rider to stick around to help with later on.” And by later on he knows Leo is referring to the big purple guy with the glove fetish. Baby bird said they need the Rider to win.

“You really did tell your boyfriend everything?” She asked one eyebrow raised.
“He is not.” “We are not…” “Not really…” “He is hot but it’s complicated.” “That would be an understatement.” The two of them stumbled out almost simultaneously.

Hunter has never said no to a little harmless fun, but whatever is going on between would be more than that. There is also him finally letting go of Bobbi for good and Leo doing the same with his Simmons. And let us not forget about dealing with the after effects of sexual assault by LMD. He’s still furious at his future self for the love floppy joke.

“I’m well aware my boyfriend is bisexual and I’m fine that you are dating an alternate dimension version of him. However, I really want my Fitz back. I just want my Fitz back,” Simmons told everyone as her voice began to break.

“We will get him back,” Leo said as Simmons left the room, most likely on the verge of crying. Surprisingly, Leo didn’t follow behind.

“We will get him back,” Hunter said, putting a reassuring arm around Leo.

“I know we will, I am just concerned about the cost,” Leo said worriedly.

“I’m not your Dr. Radcliffe. I am actually your friend. I’ve also been raised to respect objects like the book. I know better than to read it. In addition, I know what I’m doing and this is going to work. I’m going to go prepare Afia,” The Princess said leaving them alone.

“Things are going to be better this time,” Hunter said as he entwined his fingers with Leo’s.

“I don’t know. I didn’t think it would get to this point. I thought I changed enough to keep it from happening. But I was wrong. I wonder if I should have listened to the Doctor and killed Eli Morrow before what he did at the power plant. But I knew I couldn’t risk losing Robbie. But Morrow killed six agents. He shot spikes of carbon through their hearts. Their bodies are waiting on the plane and I could have prevented that from happening,” Leo argued.

“You’re not a cold-blooded killer,” He said looking directly at Leo.

“I am,” Leo replied, not making eye contact. “I’ve been since the uprising, when I killed my first Hydra agent. But thanks to Robin’s drawings, I know that we need Robbie for what’s to come. I knew I would lose him if I pulled the trigger. We can’t win without the Rider.”
“If you’re a killer, then so am I. We’ve done a lot of questionable things to save the world. But we still save the world and we will do it again.” Even though he was mere millimeters from Leo’s lips at that point he wasn’t expecting the other man to close the gap. Yet, within seconds, Leo’s mouth was on his and everything else around him fell away.

God, that man could kiss. He felt like everything was on fire and he wanted more of that. Then he remembered what was at stake mostly because the Princess tossed something very hard at both of them.

“Sorry, I just realize we’re going to need your new boyfriend,” The Princess said with fake innocence.

“Okay, as much as I want to continue this and possibly remove some clothing, we have to go rescue your other self,” Hunter said as he reluctantly pulled away, very reluctantly. These jeans were too tight.

“Okay,” Leo said as the Princess physically dragged him away.

Xxx

Jemma was horribly happy when her boyfriend stepped out of the portal. Leo’s plan actually worked. Her boyfriend and the other two were back.

The first thing she did was run up to him to wrap her arms around her Fitz and kissed him till they were both breathless.

“I can’t believe Hunter told you about the ring,” Fitz mumbled against her lips. Once they finally pulled apart reluctantly.

“You saw everything?” She asked.

“Yes, including Leo making out with Hunter. I was rooting for it, but no one wants to see their older brother making out with people,” And Fitz definitely saw Leo as his older brother, despite the fact they were genetically twins.
“I’m glad I missed that.”

“No, you’re not.”

“You know me too well. When we get to DC, I want to see my ring,” Jemma tells him.

“What?” Fitz asked, surprised.

“Despite the warning, if me reading the Darkhold was the only way to get you back, I would’ve done it with no reservations. Even knowing that it can completely corrupt a person, I would’ve done it.” Fitz responded by kissing her again.

“To get you back, I would have done anything, anything. If I’m going to make that sacrifice, then spending the rest of my life with you is the most simple thing in the world. Leopold James Fitz, will you marry me?” She asked almost scared of the answer. Yes, he got her a ring, but maybe he changed his mind.

“Yes.” Or maybe not. She didn’t have time to dwell on that because he was kissing her again.

To be continued.

Chapter End Notes

If you’re wondering what the AI formally known as Friday looks like in her physical form think if Angela Bassett and RDJ had a 14-year-old daughter together. Afia originally wanted to look like if Tony and Steve had a child together, but the Princess wanted a little sister/cousin and convinced Friday, this would work better for their cover story. Friday chose her new name herself afterwards. It’s just a total coincidence her name is one letter off from the LMD we dare not speak of.

I was inspired to do this from the 2018 Champions run. I love all the characters there,
including Visions’ daughter Viv. Since circumstances are not right for Vision to have her right now, I decided to give him a teenage sister instead. I’m 20 years younger than my brother, so I appreciate this family dynamic.

I love Fitzsimmons and I love Fitz Hunter and in this story I get to do both. Thank you, time travel and the multi-verse.
HSBF: Hey did you get to DC Okay?

Me: Yes, although I am still technically in Virginia. We just touched down 15 minutes ago. We are making our way out of the airport now. Mary was waiting for me. I’m glad we were able to get a spot at the private airstrip at Reagan. Of course, if we took a Quinjet, I could’ve landed directly at the Playground, but whatever.

Me: Team Coulson is not even there according to Piper. Still making use of the West Coast facilities, apparently.

HSBF: I thought you didn’t take a Quinjet because you needed this to look like work travel. Didn’t you also do a meeting before heading back to the states?

Me: Yes, I did. So good news, the government of Malta is still not a party to the current version of the Accords. And they’re not planning to consider signing until the renegotiations start next year. So Malta house is now the official headquarters of the Secret Avengers. I’m planning to move an extra Quinjet there soon. Plus, Agent America has a friend that may join you, if you’re OK with that. The Russian government kind of hates her. Ask Lily’s aunt to tell you about Agent 19.
HSBF: We worked together before the fall. She’s really good. She also has a degree in chemistry which might be helpful since you won’t be around for daily consults.

Me: Then it’s good that you’re going to have access to a state of the art lab with AI uplink to me. So I should probably tell you that the house in Malta is now in your name.

Me: Well it is in Stefan’s name. The burdens of a super secret relationship when your boyfriend is a fugitive.

HSBF: You don’t have to buy me a house.

Me: I bought one for Vision and the daughter-in-law. It is the least I can do after killing most of her family.

HSBF: When is your next session with Dr. Suarez?

Me: Possibly tomorrow. It depends. Look, me giving you big things isn’t that much of a deal. I mean the house in Malta actually cost a lot less than your gear, if I was billing the military for it anyway. For you, it’s a gift.

HSBF: Which I appreciate greatly.

Me: If we were to get married, you would get like half of everything because I feel like asking you to sign a prenup would be like a self-fulfilling prophecy.

HSBF: I think Pepper would make me sign one anyway and I would do it because she’s scary.

Me: I’ll tell her that at Thanksgiving next week.

HSBF: Speaking of marriage, there were pictures of us together at the wedding and apparently there are engagement rumors circulating. Lily’s aunt showed me an article from some Russian newspaper; apparently, we’ve made the papers.
HSBF: Stefan, anyway. They still don’t know it’s me.

Me: I’m sure it would have been a very different headline if they did. Tell Aunt Natalie to send me a copy of that paper, especially if the picture was flattering.

HSBF: They’re not very flattering. Also, I’m better at reading Russian then I thought I was.

Me: Of course you are. Sorry Snuggle Bear, it’s the consequence of dating Tony Stark. There were engagement rumors about me and Pepper for years.

HSBF: Because Happy kept caring around an engagement ring for years, even after the breakup.

Me: That he bought himself. This is why I’m carrying my own, this time.

Me: Are we acknowledging that I bought you a ring?

HSBF: Yes. No public proposal.

Me: Dammit, I was planning something at a Dodger game, as soon as you could legally be in the country again.

HSBF: Only if you’re planning to buy the team and move them back to New York.

Me: Sorry. I could afford it, but I feel like New York has enough baseball teams.

HSBF: Yes, but one of them is the Yankees.

Me: I’m rolling my eyes. Karen tell him that I’m rolling my eyes.

Karen: He is rolling his eyes right now.
HSBF: Wait, why is Karen still with you? Shouldn’t Friday be back right now?

Me: Because the situation in LA went FUBAR and Karen may be with me for a while. You do remember that acronym?

HSBF: Very well.

Me: Well, you heard about the explosion in Pasadena yesterday. According to twitter there were earthquakes and a Quake sighting near an abandoned warehouse. And lots of dead bodies. I don’t know how accurate those reports are because Piper is like the only Shield agent talking to me at the moment and she doesn’t even know what’s going on with her team.

HSBF: They’re blaming Quake?

Me: Of course they are, even though I’m sure it’s the escaped prisoner. Piper mumbled something to Davis about superpowered maniacs with a God complex. I’m going to absolutely love this debriefing when they get back to DC.

Me: Okay, I really just want to know why they needed Friday to the point that it took her completely off-line. Karen you are a sweetheart but it’s probably hard doing double duty right now. Maybe I should bring out one of the backup AIs. Stars & Stripes might be good.

HSBF: If Stars & Stripes sounds like me, I’m never going down on you again.

Me: Actually, Stars & Stripes sounds like Chris Evans. He may have been compensated for some voice work. Okay, that’s probably going to make that “I’m really dating Chris Evans” rumor worse.

HSBF: Probably. That also still counts.

Me: Okay, not Stars & Stripes.

Karen: Actually, I am enjoying the challenge. Teenage Mutant Ninja Spider only needs me while
patrolling, or when he wants to talk about MJ or his Uncle. Yes, he still blames himself for his murder. It is nice to converse with adults occasionally. At least temporarily, I’m not sure if I would like to do this permanently.

Me: Don’t worry Karen, Friday will be back soon. Oh look, there’s grainy twitter photos of Agent America, Slingshot, and some new, very young-looking person in a dark purple tactical suit. Along with a guy in a motorcycle jacket. A very nice motorcycle jacket. Oh wait, I see Quake with them.

Me: The new head of PR is going to have his work cut out for him. Although, I do like the new ATCU uniforms. Very patriotic. Apparently, the Shield agents are the best division of the agency. At least according to twitter.

HSBF: Actually it says that they are the Super Human, Inhuman, Enhanced Human Liaison Division.

HSBF: Karen sent me some tweets, so I would actually know what you’re talking about.

Me: And if you take out that second human it spells shield. I don’t think anybody’s caught that yet. I bet Jeffrey change the E to Enhanced Human from just enhanced, solely to throw the media off.

HSBF: You are really enjoying following them on twitter?

Me: Sometimes it’s just fun to see how much the media gets wrong. Everything is marketing.

HSBF: And apparently we had bad marketing?

Me: The heroes always have bad publicity. The villains get the best publicists. Although, Jane is doing an excellent job recently.

HSBF: She has. Are you still meeting the President today?

Me: Actually, after you left it got rescheduled for tomorrow which is why I had the meeting with various officials in Malta this morning. I’m glad it is tomorrow so I can sleep and get my body use to the time difference again. I hate jet lag.
HSBF: Is it really jet lag? You usually stay up all night.

Me: Okay, it’s boyfriend withdrawal. Not sure if I can sleep without you tonight. I didn’t do very well yesterday.

HSBF: It’s only gone to be a few weeks and then Christmas with you in Malta.

Me: I’m already counting down the days but I’ll make it. I hope.

HSBF: Although, we will be in Wakanda on Christmas Day. He wrote back and just said he’s looking forward to seeing me. Are you really okay with that?

Me: Yes. I already have everything planned out.

HSBF: Really?

Me: Okay. Mary has everything together. She’ll give me most of the details in the car. Although, she won’t be coming with us because Hanukkah starts on December 24th this year and she wants to be with her family.

HSBF: You’re already in the car?

Me: Yes, but only for like a minute. I love when we land at Reagan. We’re probably going to be at the house in 10 minutes.

Me: Everything is together. I’ll bring Agent and your ex-girlfriend along with other May and the nephew. Maybe Monkey Lover. I don’t know yet. It depends on if there’s an apocalypse or an alien invasion. Possibly an apocalypse triggered by an alien invasion.

HSBF: Because there’s always an apocalypse.
Me: Sometimes, more than one. We’ll get there on the 20th. Or at least I will. Some of the others may come a little later. You will spend the next 4 days pampering me, then we will do a quick stop over in Italy to grab pizza because we are going to have to bring pizza.

HSBF: It’s really a necessity.

Me: Then on to Wakanda where you can hang out with your BFF and I can spend some time at the church of the divine genius Princess. I really would like to worship at her scientific altar. Maybe May will come with you if there are no apocalypses and they don’t have to head back to DC right away. I feel like the earthquakes going on in LA are probably an apocalypse. I doubt Quake is actually causing it.

Karen: I can confirm that the seismic activity in Los Angeles is caused by Eli Morrow. He is currently violating the law of conservation of matter or at least attempting to.

Me: That doesn’t sound good at all. Was this not considered an Avenger level emergency?

Karen: Agent America and Slingshot are Avengers.

Me: I have to work on your language algorithms Karen.

HSBF: Probably.

Karen: I have just been informed that Dr. Eli Morrow has been contained and a press conference will be happening momentarily. Slingshot thanks you for her new flame resistant uniform.

Me: She should thank Monkey Lover, it was his idea. Also ask Monkey Lover if he wants to come with us to Malta and make sure Agent America is still coming. I guess we have to ask the Princess, if any of the team Shield members can come with us.

HSBF: Isn’t Agent Fitz a citizen of the country?

Karen: Agent Leo is. The princess says that Agent May can come if she wants to. I just asked her. Princess Shuri is currently in the Los Angeles area helping with the incident.
Me: That’s not surprising. James mentioned that the Princess was in America a lot. And apparently the super human, inhuman, enhance human liaison division has already recruited the Princess.

HSBF: How long do you think it will be until they shorten the acronym to Shield in the press?

Me: I give it a month. Friday came up with the name. It really is the best way to rebrand. I’m sure somebody is redesigning the logo as we speak.

HSBF: Probably. I wonder who’s going to take over if your James does go to the State Department.

Me: I still don’t have any idea although Piper and the other agents are apparently not concerned because Coulson will be the real person in charge. I was hoping to talk to Rhodey Bear again but he is still in LA dealing with the situation that has twitter up in arms.

Me: Look, “not evil shield” is trending. Along with “new shield.” The rebranding is already working because nobody wants to type in that long name. Especially, with the character limit.

HSBF: I’m glad that the agents are not worried. I just hope they get somebody not evil.

Me: It shouldn’t be hard, but you know this president. Also, the guy at the ATCU is going to have to be someone who is comfortable being just a figurehead. As long as it’s not the homeland security woman or the general with the creepy daughter, I think we’ll all be okay. Actually, I wonder if that’s what the president is going to talk about tomorrow, because I doubt he’s going to actually apologize. He probably wants me to provide him possible candidates and unfortunately my number one candidate is still on the run. And Simmons definitely won’t do it.

HSBF: I don’t think I would make a very good director of the ATCU.

Me: I was actually thinking Romanoff.

HSBF: No you weren’t.
Me: Okay, I wasn’t. But you would look so hot on a recruitment poster. Actually, you always look hot on a recruitment poster. You’re well aware that’s how I figured out I was into men.

HSBF: You have mentioned it before.

HSBF: Maybe the president wants to nominate you. Maybe that’s why he wants to meet with you.

Me: That is definitely not happening. I was a bad candidate before, now I have a boyfriend that could become a fiancé at some point. Maybe.

Me: The scary thing is I think the boyfriend might be more of a deal breaker than the murder bots. It is for the board of directors.

HSBF: You need a new board of directors.

Me: I’ll get Mary right on that. Who apparently needs my undivided attention. I’ll write you in a couple of days probably Sunday. I’m hanging out with Peter on anniversary day.

HSBF: Anniversary day?

Me: Saturday is going to be one year since his uncle/real dad was murdered. He’s going to need emotional support.

HSBF: And you’re going to be there for him?

Me: Yes.

HSBF: See this is why I love you.

Me: Glad to always give you another reason. I’ll talk to you in a few days. Okay, Mary’s taking the phone now. Bye, got to go. Love you
way of compensating

The Princess Anotations

Agent 19: SHIELD codename for Barbara “Bobbi” Morris. Also uses Mockingbird as a codename. Former Shield agent with a master's degree in chemistry. Disavowed earlier this year after an incident with the Russian government. Details are unavailable but President Ellis had to personally get her and her former husband Lance Hunter out of Russian custody.

Hunter won’t give me any additional information either because he’s either too busy making out with Leo now that they finally acknowledge that they’re in love or making sure nobody sees him with other field agents. Apparently, he’s really not supposed to be here but he doesn’t want to leave Leo alone. He’s wearing a nano mask to conceal his identity. Note to self, make a better version for big brother.

Now I really want to know what happened in Russia last January. However, I’ve been warned by both Fitzes not to ask Hunter questions about his ex-wife. Apparently, their relationship is complicated.

To be continued
Chapter Notes

Thank you to everybody who read or reviewed the last conversation. You are all absolutely lovely. Look another chapter on a Thursday. Because we have reached the endgame of the story, I’m going to be posting chapters as soon as I get them back from editing. I don’t know if we’ll get the last four up before Endgame comes out, but we are trying.

The “me” in this conversation is Steve.

Melinda: Phil almost died.

Melinda: Again

Me: What???

Melinda: There was an explosion at a power plant in Pasadena because Eli Morrow decided to create his own transformation chamber to give himself powers. He did, but his transformation resulted in an explosion that made Phil, a member of our team, and an asset helping us named Robbie disappear.

Me: Karen, not Friday, mentioned something about that when I was leaving Tony yesterday but not that that was the reason why Phil was unavailable. Apparently, Friday was helping you guys?

Melinda: She was. She saved Phil. Phil and the other two were trapped between dimensions. Friday was able to create a gateway to get them out.

Me: I’m glad she could help. Although, I am too afraid to ask what that actually means.

Melinda: Its best not to. She is also now an LMD named Afia. Apparently, it means a daughter born
on Friday. To help us she needed a physical form. Apparently, Leo has been working on this plan for weeks.

Me: Does Tony know that yet? He joked about Friday wanting a body but I assume he would be wary after what happened last time.

Melinda: The director is planning to tell him after his White House visit. Or when we get back from California.

Melinda: Yo-Yo has $15 on Stark fainting when he finds out.

Me: I hope that doesn’t happen. You’re still in California?

Melinda: We’re still trying to wrap up the Morrow situation.

Me: How strong is this guy? Do you need help?

Melinda: Loki strong or at least he behaves that way. He wanted to be a god. He killed six officers by creating shards of carbon in their lungs. He killed another guy by suffocating him with diamonds that he created from his lungs. But we had someone stronger than him. He’s gone now.

Me: The asset Robbie? Was he who you were looking for in LA?

Melinda: Yes. Leo and Daisy convinced him to be on our side, since it’s his uncle causing chaos. Leo also apparently made a deal with “the devil” to make sure “the Rider” sticks around. Leo is convinced we will need him in the future.

Me: If he can take out someone nearly as powerful as Loki then we definitely could use him.

Melinda: How would you feel about a new teammate that kills evil people and only evil people? He’s useful, but the organization is in a probationary period.

Me: We already have Natasha but we could use more help. He can’t join Tony’s squad?
Melinda: They’re still under the Accords for the moment and so are we. Daisy’s going to have to sign, despite the Senate calling for Nadeer’s expulsion, now that Daisy is sticking around. Robbie can’t.

Melinda: There are also some anger issues. Leo barely kept him from burning the last member of the gang that put his little brother in a wheelchair alive. And there’s video footage of that. New SHIELD is being watched too closely right now to function in the gray.

Me: That’s understandable. We will do a lot for the ones we love. I can use someone like that.

Melinda: And sometimes that’s selfish. Sometimes that’s not what they want.

Me: No it’s not. Do you want to talk about almost losing Phil again?

Melinda: No but I need to and Suarez is in DC.

Me: Well, you could always wait until you get back to DC because all I’m going to do is tell you to tell Phil that you love him.

Melinda: Everything will be different. We’ve been friends for nearly 25 years. We have survived my divorce and what happened to him in New York. We watched our entire life’s work crumbled around us. For a moment, I thought I lost him too. But we found our way back to each other. I can’t lose him.

Me: So you’re terrified of losing him if you tell him the truth?

Melinda: Yes.

Me: Is that fear worse than what actually losing him was like? Because I remember you those first few months after New York. You were as lost as I was. Maybe even worse. I was always afraid that one day I will arrive at your apartment and you would be dead on the floor.
Melinda: I know. There were some really bad days back then. I don’t think I realized I loved him until New York.

Me: I remember you saying something about almost going on a date with him after a Russia mission.

Melinda: But then I met Andrew and I let it go. Dating another agent would be messy. Andrew was easier and I did love him.

Me: Tony’s anything but easy but it’s better being with somebody who knows me entirely. I think you said something similar when you were drunk.

Melinda: Please don’t bring that up.

Me: We could talk about the fact that you just got a third chance. Do you think you’ll get a fourth one? Do you want to risk that?

Melinda: Leo knocked me unconscious because he was afraid I was going to do something stupid to get Phil back.

Me: Like you had Clint do to me after Tony almost got killed at the banquet?

Melinda: Yes. I love Phil too much not too. I think I said that before Leo iced me.

Me: I feel this makes us even for you ordering Clint to tranquilize me.

Melinda: Not at all.

Me: So you know what you have to do?

Melinda: Tell him that I love him.
Me: Yes. I hope you actually do. Tony’s getting desperate. He’s planning to cover the entire house in mistletoe to get you to kiss Phil.

Melinda: Of course he is. Maybe I should skip Malta?

Me: It is an option of last resort. Although, I would like to see you again. OK I would like for you to come with me to see James. He agreed for me to visit him and I don’t want to go alone. The rest of the team can’t come with me.

Melinda: And you can’t ask Tony.

Me: Tony is not ready to see him in person yet. He’s working through what happened, both of us are, but there needs to be more time.

Melinda: I’ll come with you. I will try to talk to Phil before Malta. But if this goes badly I’m going to find you in whatever country you’re in and hurt you.

Me: Which is good. You can help us with finding the Superior. Apparently, he’s obsessed with Phil.

Melinda: Of course, he is.

Xxxxx

Melinda hit the send button of her message before looking up to see who walked into the room she was using at the West Coast Avenger facility. She thought she had time for a quick chat with Steve before she would be needed. Jeffrey was still dealing with press along with the director, his demotion wasn’t public knowledge yet. It will come out once Director Rhodes goes to the State Department. Although, his lie about Daisy being undercover the entire time may make Director Rhodes send out that press release a little early.

This was why she was surprised to see Phil. She expected him to be part of the damage control since he would be in charge of the Shield part of the ATCU once Director Rhodes was gone.

“Will we be leaving soon?” She asked.
“At least another 30 minutes. Although, you could head over to the Zephyr now if you want. Are you texting Steve?” Phil asked.

“I was. But I feel like you knew that.”

“Philip informed me.”

“Of course he did.” May rolled her eyes, wondering if the Philip AI was as prone to meddling as Friday was.

“As well as forwarding me the text messages.”

“Oh. He agreed to take Robbie. That’s one less thing to worry about.” She was hoping he wouldn’t bring up what else was said. Maybe Phil will just focus on the job for the moment.

“That’s good to know. And maybe it would be good for the Reyes brothers to be in separate countries for a little while. By the way, I didn’t read them. So I had no idea that happened until you told me,” Phil explained.

“Good,” She exhaled in relief.

“I didn’t need to. I was there when Leo knocked you out.” She may have said a few choice Mandarin curse words at that moment, at least in her head. Outside, her face stayed impassive.

“You heard everything?” She asked, fearful.

“Yes. I love you, too. And that’s when she felt Phil’s mouth descend upon hers.

Xxxx

Skye quake: I figured you would want pictures of this since you’ve been pushing so hard. Philip tells
me everything. Please see multiple images of May and Coulson finally making out attached.

Skye quake: I accidentally walked in on them after my horrible press conference that Mace made me do.

Nomad: She finally told him the truth?

Skye quake: Sort of, by accident. They’re kissing. I’m so happy they’re kissing.

Nomad: So am I.

Skye quake: Let your boyfriend know I’m sorry about what happened the last time we met up. I was in a bad place and I’m sorry I took it out on him.

Nomad: You don’t need to apologize. We should. I’m sorry we were so busy arguing amongst ourselves that we couldn’t help you.

Skye quake: It’s not OK but I am learning to let go. Tell Tasha hi for me.

Nomad: Will do.

Skye quake: Also you should probably ask her to tell you about Leo and Fitz because I know that she knows. You can help break the news to your boyfriend gently.

Nomad: Karen said that they were two different people.

Skye quake: OK we definitely have to make another AI to take Friday’s place, now that she’s a real girl.

Nomad: What the hell is going on?
Skye quake: Ask Tasha. This is not encrypted enough.

Xxx

The Princess annotations:

Skye quake: Avenger code name for Daisy “Skye” Louise Johnson. Media nickname Quake. She is now an agent of the ATCU as part of the Super Human, Inhuman, and Enhance liaison division. Will be signing the Accords despite the renegotiation because of political pressure. Hopefully, negotiations for a new agreement can begin soon.

I assume that codename Nomad will be informed of the existence of Dr. Leopold. I am currently creating a legal background for the second Fitz under the name James F. Leopold and his husband Hunter Leopold. Good thing Dr. Leopold has been using that name as a pseudonym for years for publishing scientific journal articles. Hunter will probably be upset about making them a married couple, (very messy divorce previously that I heard all about because I did ask about the Russia thing) but I can create a more secure identity this way.

To be continued
Thank you to everybody who have read or reviewed the last conversation. You are all absolutely fabulous. The end is near. Only 3 chapters left in this story after this one.

Also, I’m sorry that I did not finish the story before and game came out. Life gets in the way sometimes. I’m still processing. However, just remind yourself that Leo Fitz arriving created a separate new timeline where Tony and Steve managed to get their shit together.

There are no spoilers for Endgame in this chapter or the next one. The one after that does has a tiny allusion to something from the movie that won’t make sense until you watched it. The final chapter will have very small references to both Captain Marvel and Endgame. But again you won’t see it unless you have watche the movie.

A final note, I wrote this chapter months ago, back in January. However, there is a section of this chapter that is very “harsher in hindsight” after Endgame. I chose not to change it.

Remember not to spoil the Endgame for others. No public Endgame comments for at least the next month. However, you can PM me on FF dot net. I will delete any comments that contain endgame spoilers that show up before the end of the 30 days.

Tony: So congratulations, Snuggle Bunny. You won the shield/avengers “when will May and Coulson actually get their shit together” betting pool. I will transfer $21623 into your account.

Tony: Yes, it actually happened. I have pictures. It’s been the only calming thing that I have found out in the last 24 hours.

Me: I’m glad. Although that much money?

Tony: Yes. This thing has been going on since before SHIELD collapsed. So some of that money came from people who turned out to be Hydra, so enjoy it in good conscience. You were the only one crazy enough to bet that Coulson would need to die a second time before he and May would get it together.

Me: Melinda said Phil only almost died when she texted me two days ago.
Tony: Of course, she texted you.

Me: She did, but you didn’t. I was worried about the radio silence for the last two days. If I didn’t hear from you tonight, I was going to text you myself.

Tony: I’m talking to you now.

Tony: If you get blasted out of this plane of existence, I’m going to count that as dying and so did the person administering the pool. Platypus was mentally preparing himself for next of kin notifications, as soon as he was done dealing with General T.

Tony: Also, I didn’t contact you right away because I kind of passed out from shock and I’m just getting text privileges back now. Rio is worse than Simmons.

Tony: Not because of the President’s offer, but other things like what Fitz --sorry Leo did to my precious Friday. Although, the President’s suggestion did cause some heart palpitations.

Me: You passed out? Are you okay.

Tony: I’m fine, just a shock to the system. Although, I think Rio is probably going to be traveling with me a lot. I got yelled at in Spanish. I have to take better care of my health and my heart.

Me: I think that might be good, even if you’re okay now. You complain about me getting shot a lot but you’re also constantly in danger. And you have pre-existing conditions. You’re also as good about ignoring them as I was before the serum. Now I understand why mom was always worried.

Tony: Same fears here. Although, the fact that you’re not asking me what the shocked was makes me feel like you already know, especially because you chatted with the ex-girlfriend.

Me: She did mention what happened with Friday. Although, I think your presidential meeting hadn’t happened yet. What happened with the president?

Tony: After discussing what will probably happen to the senator arrested for treason, kidnapping and torture that refuses to resign, we talked about renegotiating the Accords. As well as the need for
creating a version that protects the rights of people with powers and keeps the government from merely seeing them as weapons. No more throwing people in the Raft because they won’t use their powers like the U.S. government wants them to, when they’re not being a risk to themselves or others. He is on board with the modifications.

Me: That’s good. It’s a first step, at least.

Tony: I also got permission for the Monkey Lover squad to step up encryption of the powered person database. I’m just trying to convince him to suspend people joining the Accords so Skye Quake doesn’t have to. But that didn’t go so well. But she’s willing to do it for the greater good.

Me: I spoke with her a little. She sent me a picture of Phil and Melinda kissing. She also apologized for what happened last time you guys met.

Tony: And she did so again in person after the fainting. And I forgave her and speaking of forgiveness, the president is willing to pardon you.

Me: Under what circumstances?

Tony: After the Accords are renegotiated into something you can sign, if you actually do sign on the dotted line, Ellis will pardon you and give the other Secret Avengers a few months probation.

Me: If they are going to have probation then I should have probation?

Tony: Yeah well you “died” for your country, so you should get a pardon. You also freed a high profile captured American citizen two months ago, so Ellis is grateful, even if Ross was furious.

Me: But he doesn’t matter anymore.

Tony: Not at all. The President is making him resign early A.k.a. Wednesday. Although, if it makes you feel better they might ask you to do more of those Captain America educational videos.

Me: I’m fine doing that if you and I could make one together. Maybe for LGBTAQ teenagers so they know that they’re not alone. That there are people just like them under the mask saving the
Tony: Totally. I feel like that would be a better way for you to come out publicly then let’s say a non-consensual sex tape. That’s such a Captain America way to do it.

Me: That’s May. I think I want to stay Nomad, if I come back.

Tony: I do like the sex in your costume.

Tony: I mean sexy new costume. You look good in black. Ana is getting used to my voice. I always hate this phase.

Me: Who is Ana?

Ana Junior: I am the new AI running all Avenger and SI functions. Possibly also the ATCU too if Dr. Stark chooses to accept the position.

Tony: Ana I told you to only refer to me as Dr. Stark when I’m dealing with assholes or members of the board of directors.

Me: What position?

Tony: You know I have a new AI because Friday had to save Coulson’s ass and that requires her to be a real girl. So now I’m training Ana, who team Monkey Lover, the Princess, and Skye Quake created for me. She’s based off of Friday but with some modifications.

Me: May explained that. Kind of. Although, why is Friday still an LMD?

Tony: So Friday knows pretty much everything about me, including that the state of New York decided that I’m totally unfit to have a child as well as what happened to my sperm count. So she decided to fix it. And the Princess helped.

Me: Helped how exactly?
Tony: She made the new body and gave Afia a wonderful new backstory/legal identity as well as Wakanda citizenship. As far as the US government is concerned, she is a person. She’s also planning to attend Midtown to keep an eye on Spidey Senior and the boy in the chair.

Tony: I think she has a crush on the boy in the chair. And now she has a body and yeah, I’m not going to think about any of that. It’s like a Weird Science remake waiting to happen.

Me: Isn’t Vision married?

Tony: And I have accepted that Wanda is my daughter-in-law and I am writing her into the will because I kind of killed her family, so she should get something.

Tony: She’ll probably throw the money over a cliff but I’ll be dead when that happens, so I rather her do that than the board. You know I hate the board.

Tony: Now I have an heir; they can get fucked. I’m done.

Me: Afia?

Tony: And Peter. May doesn’t know that yet, Aunt May that is. I thought about naming Lily as well but that would be unfair to the other siblings. Instead, they just get trust funds like Wanda.

Tony: You too because well I know you don’t want to touch SI with a 10 foot pole and you’re better off being in charge of the foundations.

Me: So just those two?

Tony: No. Leo will be the third heir.

Me: Fitz is OK with that?
Tony: Obviously, you’ve been informed about that. And yes, he’ll be okay with that because he’s going to be the fourth.

Tony: I knew that I felt like I was dealing with two different people and I was right. Leo came from the darkest timeline, which is why he needs quality time with Suarez and to consider new job prospects. Trying to save the world is too stressful.

Me: I’m aware. Now you can explain why your new AI would be running things at the ATCU if you decide to take the president’s offer. What did the president offered you?

Tony: I was trying to explain that. I got distracted. You’re very distracting.

Me: Tony!

Tony: OK so in exchange for you and the other Avengers getting no jail time for violating the original version of the Accords, all I have to do is agree to be the head of the ATCU until the new Accords are finalized+ 6 months for the transition or until the end of the administration. Which ever comes first.

Tony: I’m hoping it’s the latter. Because I would really like for us to live in the same country and I don’t want to spent 4 years in charge of an agency and not get you back in the country. Although, maybe I can convince President Ellis to pardon you as he is walking out the door. You guys really saved the U.S. a lot by freeing that American.

Me: But you’re still willing to take that chance?

Tony: I’m seriously considering it. Although, I am going to have to divest myself from SI. Better than I did for when I was helping with the department of damage control at least.

Me: Is that a good or a bad thing?

Tony: I don’t know. The board wants me out because of the boyfriend. And I’m so tired of dealing with them. I actually really like spending time in DC and doing more of the Avenger stuff. I also like protecting the kids. I can do that by shaping the ATCU’s policies in that regard. I feel like maybe it’s time to move on.
Me: But you like tinkering.

Tony: But I would have a whole entire new R&D department. Mandatory play time with FitzSimmons. That could be worth it.

Me: What would that mean for SI?

Tony: I would have to talk to Pepper about that. I trust her to move the company forward. So I don’t feel like I’m abandoning everybody. We would have to come up with a succession plan. I have an idea of who could take my place as CCO and he would be perfect for it. But she is CEO, so we would have to discuss it, but I think she would be on board.

Me: You’re considering it?

Tony: I want you home. A few days in Johannesburg or a couple of days in Malta is not going to do it because I miss you so much, but not being without you is not an option either. So here I am considering a deal with the President to get you home within the next four years.

Me: Can I come back even if I can’t sign the new version of Accords?

Tony: There won’t be a new version that you can’t be a party to. More protection of persons with powers, less loopholes for people like Ross to manipulate. Platypus is coming for Christmas in Malta to speak with you and the other secret Avengers for input. Although, I heard you’re going to be gaining a few new members by that point.

Me: Yes.

Me: I only get this deal if you take the job?

Tony: Not just you, everybody. I could eventually find another way to get you home, but this is the best option for everyone else. It’s going to allow me to steer the new Accords process and protect the youths with powers. But if you don’t want me to do it, I won’t.
Me: If this is something you want to do, then I think it’s probably the best option. But it’s up to you. I think you should talk to Pepper at Thanksgiving, since this will affect her.

Me: Or can you wait that long to decide?

Tony: I have about a week. Although, I don’t know if my new android child will make me being the head of the ATCU a nonstarter. I’m probably going to have to tell the POTUS the truth or some version of it.

Tony: Me having a boyfriend would be bad enough for Ellis. He is from the party of “family values”. And me being a liberal leading independent is a hard enough sell with his party already. I’m just glad this isn’t going to need a confirmation hearing.

Me: So they’re OK with Ultron but not you having a boyfriend?

Tony: The independent thing is also kind of hard for them to deal with.

Me: I can see that. Although, I feel like other things would be more important.

Tony: You would think so, but politicians. Also, Ellis knows the truth about Ultron and so does most of Congress. Closed-door hearings.

Me: Do you want to do this?

Tony: Honestly?

Me: I always want to know what you’re really thinking.

Tony: Yes. I don’t want another Alexandra Pierce or Gideon Malick ending up in charge. You keep saying that the best hands are our own hands. I’m not entirely sure that I agree with you but I trust myself more than I trust a lot of other people.

Tony: If you were around, it would be easier. Also if I take the deal, while things are being
negotiated, you and the team could move into the Malta house. I could come visit every couple of weeks when you’re not on missions, without the subterfuge. We could call each other.

Me: We could call each other now.

Tony: Yes but I say less stupid stuff when I write it down. However, I am willing to forgo my normal safety net if I can see your face daily. Not just us texting every few days but we can talk daily.

Me: I think you made up your mind.

Tony: I am all but 12% committed. But I still need to talk to Pepper. She is coming up late Monday. We’re going to meet with the board and others on Tuesday before the SI Thanksgiving break begins. That could push me over.

Tony: I’m pretty sure they’re going to try to lock me out again especially if the cover story about my Wakanda love child gets out. I’m meeting with Jane to develop the press release. We’re going to try to keep it from going public until after Thanksgiving but it’s going to have to come out eventually.

Me: ?????

Tony: I’m sure you have a lot of those. Afia will be getting the full teenager experience unlike Vision who came grown up and ready to avenge. Afia however will be coming in complete with legal identity and cover story. I’m still trying to decide how much Jane is going to know, but probably everything because she’s Jane and she probably knew about the original LMD program, but Afia is in a completely different category.

Me: So cover story?

Tony: I met a scientist from Wakanda 15 years ago at some conference. Although, I thought she was from Nigeria. I accidentally got her pregnant but she decided not to tell me, feeling it would be better to raise her daughter in Wakanda and away from me because I wouldn’t become halfway responsible for another five years. She died during a recent incident in Wakanda. Now that Wakanda is venturing out into the world, I was notified of my child’s existence and I don’t back down from my responsibilities.
Me: That’s actually a good cover story.

Tony: Completely plausible. I did some of my stupidest stuff during 2001 and I totally would’ve slept with a scientist at a conference.

Tony: This is going to be another Pepper conversation. Actually, I better call her in case something gets leaked. You’re like the only thing I’m able to keep a secret and that’s mostly because everybody thanks Captain America is straight.

Tony: Or that I’m actually with Chris Evans.

Me: You’re going along with it?

Tony: I can totally raise a teenage android. Although, Afia says she is a Synthetic Wakanda American. Also, people were terrified of Vision because he’s an android. Afia wants to be an Avenger, so maybe it’s better if she has a secret identity.

Me: Besides, you have always treated her like your kid.

Tony: Yes, and at least this one I get to raise. Vision is already out of the house and married.

Me: Maybe you’ll get grandkids soon.

Tony: Which can’t happen until I can get all of you in the country. I feel like they should not adopt until things are stable, so that’s another reason to take the deal. Oh, maybe Red will save the money for the grandkids and not throw it off a cliff.

Me: And I really do want to be in the same country as you and video calls seem like a wonderful idea.

Tony: Especially if you are not wearing anything.

Me: I feel like that would be too much like a sex tape.
Tony: And we don’t make those because of TyTy. But shirtless selfies are still okay.

Me: I really want to punch that guy out.

Tony: Me too, but every time somebody tries to argue that the Gay thing is new or I’ve been hiding in the closet for decades, I just bring up the sex tape. I mean it’s not my fault that they are bi-phobic.

Me: There are so many people I want to punch.

Tony: Unfortunately, you can’t punch everybody or so my therapist says.

Tony: So by Thanksgiving I will sit down with Pepper Pot and discuss my options for taking a break from SI to serve my country and getting me the hell away from the board because my heart and my sobriety demand it.

Me: And then Friday can you text me and let me know what you decide. It’s your call. I will support you.

Tony: Thank you for that.

Me: So where are you right now? Still in DC?

Tony: Already back at the New York apartment which doesn’t have kids running through it because they’re all at the compound and will be there indefinitely. Rio is watching me like a hawk even though she doesn’t start for like another week.

Tony: I did bring Leo and the boyfriend with me. I now know who Football Hunter is. So apparently, I was with the older twin at the playoff Soccer game when I had my crisis of conscience. He wanted to make sure his younger self didn’t screw things up like he did the first time around. Apparently, those original choices lead to the distraction of the earth and the nearing extinction of the human species eventually.
Me: I am still having trouble wrapping my head around all that.

Tony: I have been studying time travel theory for decades and I’m still extremely confused.

Tony: But I’m not going to think about that because I rented out an entire videogame place for the evening so Spidey Senior won’t have time to remember that his Uncle was murdered in front of him this time last year.

Me: So that’s why you’re already back in New York?

Me: Spidey Senior needs me and it gives Afia a chance to see how she blends in with teenagers that are not royalty. Actually, the princess is going to be there. She wanted to stay until Friday to experience the American concept of Thanksgiving. But her brother said no. So she’s flying back in the morning after the meeting with Jane.

Me: Does the king know that his sister created a Synthetic Wakanda American child for you?

Tony: It hasn’t come up. Oh, Afia would like to take your last name as well.

Me: I’m flattered but I assume that we would have to be publicly together at that point for it to really be a good idea.

Tony: And that probably can’t happen until after the new Accords.

Me: Especially if you become the acting head of the ATCU.

Tony: Maybe she can go with Stephanie as a middle name instead.

Me: Maybe. I’ll talk to you Friday. Have fun tonight.

Tony: I’ll try, but my medical babysitter probably won’t allow it. But I promise to hold off on the fainting.
Me: I’m going to hold you to that.

To be continued.
Conversation 74: A Very Puerto Rican Pakistani Thanksgiving with Pie and Spies

Chapter Notes

Thank you to everybody who read or reviewed the last conversation. You are all fabulous. So here we are, the last chapter of our story, excluding the epilogue.

HSBF: Hey, I know we said that I would wait until you message me Friday but it’s technically Friday here. I just wanted to say happy Thanksgiving.

HSBF: I hope all is going well for you. Since we’re staying somewhere with a kitchen and have two extra people, Sam made his grandma’s mac & cheese. He had to sub some of the ingredients but it was nice to have a home-cooked meal.

Me: I’m so glad you got real food, for once. I was going to cater a very Stark Thanksgiving but Rio and Muneeba a.k.a. mommy Ms. Marvel said no. It was the least they could do. So turkey with Puerto Rican rice without the normal pork products included. But there are also fried plantains.

Me: Although, no roasted pork. Rio said she would make that another time. Muneeba also made a lot of her favorites, so it was a delicious mix of everything. Laura even brought her signature sweet potato au gratin. I think we’re going to have left overs until at least next Thursday, even with the two spiders.

HSBF: That sounds great. Like a real family dinner. Did Pepper come?

Me: Yes, and she brought pie. Afia, along with the other kids, made the other desserts. There were cookies and brownies and I’m probably going to have to let scary May the agent take me to the gym because I’ve eaten way too much. Ana will send you pictures.
HSBF: Is that you covered with flour and I assume that is Afia with you? All the other kids have their faces blurred.

Me: Yes. I can’t wait until you get to meet her. She is just incredible. And a little scary. I adore her. I can see where there are little bits of Friday in her personality but Afia is definitely her own person. She wants to be a superhero.

Me: Wait she is a superhero. She hasn’t chosen the code name yet but I’m sure she will soon. I suggested Girl Friday, but I was vetoed.

HSBF: She could just use Friday as her superhero codename. Maybe Ms. Friday.

Me: I’ll have to suggest it.

HSBF: Will she be coming with you to Malta?

Me: Yes, and on to the other place as well to hang out with her princess friend. May is coming as well for both although the boyfriend will be coming back to the states before we begin our second leg. Somebody has to watch the agency and Mack wants to take his girlfriend down to Florida to meet his parents for Christmas. It’s a big step in their relationship.

HSBF: Good for her. I guess it is serious?

Me: Very serious. They are spending Thanksgiving in Malibu together right now. Although, not engagement ring serious just yet.

Me: I forgot to tell you last time, Fitz put a ring on it. Actually, it was the other way around, since Simmons did the actual proposing. Although, Simmons is showing off her engagement ring to everybody right now. I’m glad Rhodye Bear was able to spare them even though he and Agent had to stay in DC along with Daisy. You have no idea how much I’m looking forward to lab time with Spidey senior, Leo, and Fitzsimmons.

HSBF: I’m sure you are. So, despite your other friend being stuck in Washington, are you having a good time?
Me: Ridiculously good time. It is so much better to be around people I actually like and not the Board of Directors.

HSBF: I can see how this would be better.

Me: Historically, Thanksgiving was another corporate event growing up. I never really had a family thing and unlike Christmas, I couldn’t crash at aunt Peggy’s for something that resembled a family event. Also, I had Hanukkah with Ana and Jarvis, so again an actual family like actual celebration. Even after the boarding school years began and it was just me and Jarvis keeping Ana’s traditions alive. Once he was gone, it just felt wrong to do it without him.

Me: So it was just good to hang out with my friends and the kids. OK Lily Bear really was just happy her parents did not argue the entire dinner.

HSBF: How are Clint and Laura?

Me: Better-ish, they’re talking this week. There’s even been hand holding and kissing. It helps that the ATCU is going to have a New York office that Laura can be based at, even though she’s going to be working out of the compound.

Me: Clint is okay with living at the compound, especially after the Watchdogs attacks a couple weeks ago. The old farmhouse is compromised due to Ross. So they can’t go back there anyway.

HSBF: It’s unfortunate. It was a really pretty house.

Me: And Clint is a little pissed at me because of it even though I wasn’t the one who gave the address away.

Me: Anyway, I hired a couple of tutors. So we will kind of be starting our own school.

Me: What do you think of the Tony Stark Academy for the Gifted?
HSBF: That Clint will probably end up being your archery instructor.

Me: And hand-to-hand combat instructor. He already said he would train Rio since she’s going to be with us on missions as medical support. He’s also seen some of Spidey senior’s early YouTube videos and is concerned.

Me: So I have $50 on Purple Arrow’s retirement being up by January. To train Spidey senior, if nothing else.

HSBF: That doesn’t surprise me. So what are you doing right now?

Me: Talking to you.

HSBF: Before I interrupted you.

Me: Putting Spidey Junior and Lily bear down for a nap because seven and eight-year-olds need to rest after consuming that much sugar and running around. However, they fell asleep on top of me, which gives me the perfect opportunity to have a long conversation with you.

HSBF: Are they OK?

Me: OK-ish. Spidey Junior is adjusting. He starts working with his tutor Monday. He’s also going to spend tomorrow with his dad under Laura’s supervision.

HSBF: Is that a good idea?

Me: Patches showed up last night.

HSBF: What?

Me: So Spidey Dad really was under cover because Patches wanted to him to keep an eye on the Watchdogs. Patches may have been a little mad at Agent for making a deal with the government to deal with the Hive fiasco. So Patches didn’t, you know, talk to him first and went to other operatives.
HSBF: Makes sense.

HSBF: Of course, he didn’t realize Spidey Dad had some issues in this regard. He is not exactly a fan of “vigilantes with superpowers”. He’s gone on multiple rants about the hooded hero of Harlem.

Me: Before that, his team recovered Agent Blake, right before the shield implosion, after he was paralyzed by a super powered person being mind fucked by Hydra. He blamed the superpower part, not the Hydra mind fucked part. Blake went on to create the Watchdogs and keep reaching out to old contacts. Patches was aware and decided to use it to his advantage because well Patches.

HSBF: Spider dad being one of these contacts.

Me: Yes. He kept saying no but Patches convinced him to play along. Of course, he decided to do this before he found out his kid is the type of person he Watchdogs want to kill for the purity of mankind.

HSBF: And how do you know this? Did Fury tell you all of this?

Me: You know Nikki barely tells me anything. My PI is much better. She even got me a picture of Spidey dad making contact with Hill. Although, Jones obviously wasn’t that sneaky because Patches came by to tell me to back off.

HSBF: Of course.

Me: Spider mom feels better about the whole situation now. Although, I still see lots of couples' therapy in their future.

HSBF: Is she going back?

Me: Not yet, especially because he wants to keep an eye on the Watchdogs for a bit longer. Also, Rio thinks they should do at least six months of family therapy with Dr. Suarez or one of her associates before anything changes.
HSBF: Understandable.

Me: And it’s more likely he will move up here because the private tutoring for Spidey Junior is the best. They’ve been trying to get him into a charter school since pre-K and this is better. Spidey Dad can just work out of the New York ATCU office once his undercover stint is over.

Me: Rio is allowing supervise visits as long as Laura is doing the supervision.

HSBF: That makes sense. Laura is okay with doing that?

Me: Yes. She is actually in a very good mood since she also won a lot of money in the ‘when will Agent and Agent America finally get their shit together’ betting pool.

Me: The Shield Spouses one. I’m so glad they finally got it together. I have pictures of them being adorable. Ana will send them to you.

HSBF: They were with the others. I’m glad there together. I think this is the first time I’ve seen May smile.

Me: Yep. She’s in the love zone. Also, good thing Yo-Yo and May are technically Avengers since they won’t be in the line of command of their boyfriends and won’t violate ATCU dating policy. You don’t want to know all the hoops Fitzsimmons are having to jump through.

Me: This also means you and me will have to stay on separate teams, even when the Secret Avengers get fold it back in with the rest of us.

HSBF: You are taking the deal?

Me: Yes. Tuesday’s meeting with the board was awful.

HSBF: They’re trying to lock you out again?

Me: Yep, unsuccessfully, but they still tried. Thankfully, they don’t have the votes even with the new
kid showing up. Of course, they didn’t find out about her until after the vote, but whatever. They want to bring in some Hammer Industries refugee to take my place as CCO.

HSBF: And your response?

Me: I laughed in their face and reminded them that I still had majority control and that others were still on my side. I really should get a less homophobic Board of Directors.

HSBF: You should.

Me: But I feel like revenge is better. I have a plan.

HSBF: Which is?

Me: Retirement.

HSBF: Which would be good for you because you’re doing way too much, especially if you’re going to be taking the new job. But where does the revenge element come in?

Me: By tricking them into replacing me with my perfect choice without them realizing it. Friday, Jane will release the press release regarding my daughter Afia. The Wakanda embassy will collaborate.

HSBF: I’m still shocked that hasn’t come out publicly yet, considering you did tell the board Tuesday.

Me: Because the board would like for it to come out on a holiday weekend to do as little damage possible to the stocks. Also, Jane is a miracle worker. However, that gives us time to cash in on the seeds of discontent.

Me: Right now, my favorite board member, Perez is chatting among her fellow members convincing them to replace me with James Leopold. Monday after the stock market will do its thing and you know it will do its thing, she will make the suggestion that I retire and let Dr. Leopold take my place.
HSBF: Is that the new identity for the other Fitz?

Me: Actually, it is an old identity. Patches is always 90 steps ahead and had all of Fitz’s inventions patent under that name as well as any scientific journal articles and there are dozens. His degrees are also under that identity. I have wanted James F. Leopold at SI for years before I even knew he was actually Dr. Monkey lover. But he wouldn’t leave Shield even after the implosion. He was too loyal to Agent.

HSBF: Now that there’s two, it’s an option?

Me: More like his therapist wants him to leave for something less stressful and Agent agrees. And it says all sorts of things where being CCO of SI and being an Avenger is less stressful than staying at Shield.

HSBF: Well, none of us have traveled through time yet so, I would say being an Avenger is less stressful.

Me: Yes. Just finding out about it led to an extra two sessions last week, so I’m surprised mental health rehab wasn’t in the cards earlier.

Me: But taking a step back is good because, well, you can’t fix everything and being a part of the UN Avengers will provide him with additional tools. So, SI part time and Avengers part time with extra time for Suarez and the occasional mental health spa day.

HSBF: I always felt like CCO was a full-time job.

Me: For a normal person. We’re not normal, but even we can’t do like 99 different jobs. So basically, we’re dividing the workload of the two of us amongst an additional person.

Me: So anyway, he gets nominated for the job. I decide that since I actually like him, I will support the board’s decision and graciously retire. Mostly to spend time with my recently discovered daughter. And help her acclimate to the American school system.

Me: She’ll be starting in January when the new semester starts. Laura thought it would be best.
HSBF: Do you have something picked out in DC already?

Me: Nope, because I’m staying in Manhattan and working out of the new New York offices that will be in the tower formally known as Avengers Tower. Which is good because I don’t want to live on top of Alchemax’s new New York offices. Thankfully, the computer geniuses intervened.

HSBF: That’s good. So, Midtown or something private?

Me: Midtown because Afia wants to keep an eye on Peter and I approve. I gave a very generous donation and they are opening a spot according to the school board. They’re going to name the new science lab that I’m paying for after Bruce.

HSBF: That’s nice.

Me: I just wish he would show back up for the dedication. Besides, it’s better this way. I prefer that any child of mine goes to public school for socialization reasons, if nothing else. I feel bad about Spidey Junior, Ms. Marvel, and the purple arrow children having to work with the tutors, but it’s for the best and at least they can socialize with each other right now.

HSBF: Wasn’t that why you were sent to boarding school?

Me: Don’t be logical, Snuggle Bunny.

HSBF: Sorry, continue.

Me: Flash forward to January, Rice gets confirmed as secretary of State. Rice nominates Rhodey Bear to be Deputy Secretary. Platypus resigns from the ATCU and I get appointed to the position. Finally, at my retirement party from SI, my replacement makes out with his boyfriend. We get video footage of all of the stupid members of the board overreacting and use it to push them out of the company for good.

HSBF: I feel like some of that will probably go wrong.
Me: You’re right, we’re probably going to have to have them come out at the office Christmas party but I’ll make sure the contract is ironclad by that point. Really, I’m just ready for the next chapter and I want to help bring you home to me.

Me: However, in the meantime we can take advantage of the latest in secure videoconferencing.

Xxxxx

Just as Steve was reading the message, Tony’s face popped up on his screen along with the small children that were sleeping on top of him.

“I told the President yesterday that I was taking the job, so I am allowed to video chat with you since I’ve been authorized to negotiate with the Secret Avengers and Nomad.”

“This is secure?” Steve asked.

“Princess level secured. Although, if Lily bear and baby spider turned around, Ana will blur their faces. She is such a good AI.”

“That doesn’t surprise me. Although, it’s good to see your face.” It’s been only a little more than a week since Malta but he’s so happy to be seeing Tony right now.

“And it’s good to see you shirtless,” Tony smirked at him on screen.

“I was getting ready to go to sleep before I started texting you.” Steve remarked.

“You should since it’s already tomorrow wherever you are. Hey how are the new recruits?” Tony asked.

“Agent 19 is good and Lily’s aunt is happy to have her with us. The Rider misses his brother and his car but he likes the orange Audi. It responds to him well.”

“It’s a loaner. I mean I could have a quinjet drop off his actual car but it probably would be a little
too easily noticed in whatever European country you are currently in. But tell him that it’s safe in my garage and Daisy is not allowed anywhere near it. I’ve even taking care of the scratches,” Tony tells him.

“I’m sure he’ll appreciate that,” Steve laughs a little.

“Personally, I want to see if he could make one of the suits flaming. Imagine what he could do with the Hulk buster. My scientific mind is all a flutter.” Tony sounded so happy when he spoke that Steve couldn’t help but smile. Of course, at that moment a teenager popped into the room. From the pictures from earlier,

Steve knew it was Afia.

“Hey Afia, come over here and say hi to your future stepdad.”

“Tony,” Steve couldn’t help but ground. He is also thankful he has his own room right now because he wouldn’t want the other Avengers to tease him about this. Sam definitely would be cracking jokes along with Nat. Bobbi would also be joining in, even though he didn’t know her that well. Robbie, he wasn’t sure.

“I was there when you purchased the ring, or rather my prior self was. I believe this is what you would call being engaged to be engaged. I am aware and happy about it,” the teenager told the two. Her voice was different than Friday’s, but the way she spoke was similar.

“I’m glad that you’re in physical form and no longer reading my personal emails.”

“I still could. Ana likes me,” Afia replied with a smirk.

“No. I am supposed to be your dad. That means you listen to me and we’re going to talk about boundaries.” Steve couldn’t help but start giggling at Tony’s words. He was kind of adorable being a dad.

“Steve don’t laugh,” Tony remarked.

“You are covered in kids and arguing with your daughter. It’s adorable. Ana can you get me a picture of this? Or maybe a video file?” Steve asked.
“Done.” The AI replied. She sounds a little like Friday, but younger. “Afia, I also made this your new wallpaper.”

“Thanks, little sister,” Afia smirked at the screen.

“Tony, Rio wants all the kids in the backyard for s’mores in 10 minutes.” At the sound of Pepper’s voice both kids lying on top of Tony woke up quickly and were running out the door to the backyard. Yes, their faces were blurred. Steve was trying to figure out what would be considered the backyard at the compound but he wasn’t sure. Although, he does vaguely remember a fire pit somewhere close to the lake.

“Like they need more sugar.” Tony mumbled to himself, but Steve could still hear him.

“I see you’re taking advantage of the Princess’s gift.”

“Just doing what my country asked me to do. BTW honey bear, you are not necessarily a fugitive right now. Mostly because most countries won’t extradite you. I would just like to thank whoever’s brilliant ideal it was to give Nomad and the secret Avengers credit for saving my ass from the Watchdogs and getting the power back on. Really, it made all of us look good. Also, Malta has your back.”

“That’s good and I am thankful for that. Also, for Malta even though you really didn’t have to buy me a house.” At that moment Pepper looked at Tony strangely.

“I mean he’s going to eventually get half of everything anyway. Why not start early?” At that moment a very large crash could be heard.

“Tony, I think you need to get outside and watch the kids. You’re the only one who can deal with [bleep],” Pepper suggested.

“You’re right. It would be a disaster regardless, due to the sticks, fire, and marshmallows being involved. However, one of those children can turn himself invisible.”

“Really?” Steve asked surprised.
“Yes,” Tony said as Pepper nodded her head in agreement. “That’s how spider mom found out he had superpowers. If your child disappears right in front of you, that’s an obvious sign something is really wrong. Rio reached out to Davis because he worked with her husband before and because the Davises have to stick together.”

“That had to be scary.”

“Yes, and now he’s around fire and marshmallows, so I do have to get out there. I hoped that Spidey Senior would be being a great role model but he’s probably using his webbing right now to kidnap chocolate pieces. I will chat with you in a few days. Love you,” Tony blew a kiss at him.

“You too,” Steve said just says the screen went black but only for a few seconds. The signal was back with Pepper in front of the screen.

“I asked Ana if it was OK if I spoke to you for a few minutes.”

“Are there actually Smore’s?”

“Yes, with children that can make themselves invisible. Tony actually made glasses so that he can keep track of [bleep]. Sometimes he becomes invisible when he gets overwhelmed,” Pepper explained.

“I can see how that could happen,” Steve remarked.

“So how soon am I going to need the engagement press release to be ready? Even if we are announcing his retirement, SI still needs to be prepared.”

“After Christmas. Either he’ll ask or I’ll just put on the engagement ring,” Steve tells her. He’s already made his mind up. Tony was making a deal with the president not only to get him back in the country, but to bring the others home as well. This was definitely the man he wanted to spend the rest of his life with.

“OK,” Pepper responded with a sad smile. “I think that will give Tony enough time to realize that it’s not going to fall apart.”
“Ok.” She said again.

“I do love him and I want to spend the rest of my life with him,” Steve tells her.

“I know. And I think this is good for him. I think he’s found balance. He is really happy right now.”

“I am really glad about that. Although, I’m sorry you’re going to lose him at SI.”

“I am not. The board is making him miserable and I think Tony is better working on saving the world. I’m looking forward to working with James Leopold in the future and I think he’s really going to bring the company forward. At least this way, I’ll know Tony will sleep more.”

“I hope so too. I wish I was there to watch him. But I can’t be. But you are. So please keep an eye on him.” Steve wonders if he’s asking for too much but he knows Pepper loves Tony too.

“I will. Even though we’re not together, he is still my best friend. I’ll keep Tony safe until you can come home.”

“Thank you.”

Chapter End Notes

Epilogue here we come!

Works inspired by this one: Replaceable by MoonFire1

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