The Weak Link

by ejdvdsn

Summary

Darcy Lewis is an all or nothing kind of girl. When you are one of hers, she will give you everything. But not everyone is deserving and it takes a toll on the girl with the big mouth and the bigger heart.

Ever since the Accords came into play, the world has been a dangerous place for Darcy. With the help of everyone’s favourite spy-sassins, all she has to do is survive the next year until the target can be removed from her back without getting herself or anyone else hurt.

This fic will be hitting all of your favourite tropes, rating and tags will be updated as we go along.
Settle in, this is going to be one wicked, slow burn.

Notes

This is my first foray into writing for this fandom, but I have been an avid reader for a long time.
This is also my first multi-chapter fanfic, so please be gentle.
I have the entire story mapped out but boy is it a monster! Updates should be pretty regular as
I have the first seven or eight chapters in rough draft form.

There's no beta so any and all mistakes are my own, please let me know if there's anything I
need to fix.

See the end of the work for more notes.
“Hey Em! I know we said we’d get drinks on the 4th but the 22nd suits me better. Stuck doing work stuff until then. Miss your face (: x)”

Her thumb hovered over the send button, heart hammering in her chest. She triple checked the wording, ensuring that the code that Agent 19 had drilled into her was accurate. She took a deep breath and tapped the button. A single tick appeared next to the message. It was rather anticlimactic. Darcy wasn’t sure if she was expecting her former SHIELD buddy to suddenly rappel down the side of the London block of flats and burst through to her rescue, or if she’d just spent too much time working up the courage to send the request for evac.

Ever since Thor had returned to take his lady love off to the safety of Asgard ten days ago, leaving Darcy alone, she had catalogued the increase in surveillance activity on the flat. She rolled her shoulders back, tipping her head from side to side as she loosened the muscles in her neck. Stooping to put her Stark Phone back on to its constant charge. She flicked her eyes to the side, out of the window, to count the undercover goons on the street below. Six. Agent 19 had said that goons were like vermin. For each one you can see, there’s at least three more you can’t. She supressed a shiver and laid her phone back on the cheap pine side table next to the sofa.

The flat was fairly small, on a quiet street in North London. Once it had been declared that Jane’s theories weren’t as cracked-out as was once assumed by the academic community at large, they had been on a world tour of sorts. Universities and research labs across the world had clamoured for Jane’s unique insight on the Einstein-Rosen Bridges, and where Jane went, so did Darcy and her Intern.

Darcy had always been the loyal type. Once she had decided that you were one of her people, she would put her everything into the friendship. She was a ride or die kind of gal. Shallow attachments just weren’t her style. If you earned her affection, you had it. All of it. Regardless of if you proved yourself worthy of it. She was not Mjolnir. She wasn’t able to discern between those who were worthy and those who most definitely were not. She had the scars to prove it.

Darcy moved into the kitchen, reaching on top of the fridge to pull down a cleaning cloth and some cleanser. She busied herself pretending to clean every surface, casually checking all of her home-made booby traps. (They were a little bit Home Alone-esque but had proved to be effective so far.) Since the accords had been ratified, the world had become a more dangerous place for people like her and Jane. Those associated with the Avengers, as loosely as she was, were targets for all sorts of whack jobs. She had written a fairly simple programme to filter the crazy out of their inbox, but every now and again they would receive death threats and the like from pro-accord extremist. But it wasn’t just the crazies that they had to watch out for, it was the alphabet agencies too.

As the public sentiment grew more fearful and nasty towards the supers and inhumans, the invites to go science in shiny labs and facilities had dwindled in number. Soon, Jane was forced to accept the temporary teaching position she’d been offered at a London university and they’d settled back to a more sedentary life. No more whirlwind tours, drinks receptions in historic buildings or sciencing on every continent.

Not that Darcy really did much sciencing. She kept Jane’s itinerary organised and made sure that she ate and slept regularly. But now that Jane had been largely accepted by the scientific community, it
was no longer them against the world. Jane had had peers to discuss her theories with. Peers who listened with equal amounts amazement and understanding. Darcy had faded into the background, content to just be there, tagging along for the ride.

Happy that her fortress of solitude was secure, she tidied away her cleaning supplies and started to think about dinner. The sun was starting to fade and one by one, the street lights began to flicker into life. The goons would be swapping out with the night shift shortly. Non-descript sedans, pulling away, only to be replaced by identical vehicles containing new goons, moments later. She preferred to describe them as goons in her head rather than Agents. Since the fall of SHIELD, Hydra, Real SHIELD, SHIELD Lite, etc, etc, she had no idea who the numerous people watching and waiting were, or who they were affiliated with and she knew now from bitter experience and severe consequence, that she could not trust appearances. So she did what she had been told to do if the shit hit the fan. The second the attack at the UN building in Vienna had occurred, Darcy and Jane had gone into lockdown.

Darcy felt a vicious tightening in her stomach as she thought back to her tear soaked goodbyes to Jane and Thor. Thor had arrived with his usual flash and bang show, on the roof of their building. He hadn’t had much time to explain, apparently. There were goings-on in space too. He had announced in a surprisingly meek voice, that he was there to take Jane back to Asgard for safety but he would not be taking Darcy. Odin had decided to formally recognise Jane as Thor’s intended (Darcy could feel the strings attached to that one) but not Darcy as his Lightning Sister. She had, embarrassingly, sobbed and begged them not to leave her behind. Thor had been intractable but apologetic. He had encouraged Darcy to reach out to SHIELD for assistance and promised that he would be back for her the second he could convince Odin. And then they were gone and she was alone.

Since then, Darcy had rattled around their- her little flat oscillating from all-encompassing anger at being abandoned and a dull sadness that settled deep into her bones. She whiled away the days, pretending to watch TV, work on her laptop and eating her way through the tinned food in the cupboards. Luckily, her favourite spies had imparted paranoid little habits that she had picked up, over the years. (One of the benefits of having a SHIELD security detail and tonnes of downtime.) And so the cupboards were full of long-life food stuffs, spare flashlights, batteries and bottles of water.

"Never drink the tap water. It's too easy to tamper with. Stick to the bottled kind. Do you still have those testing strips I gave you last time?"

"Yes. I wouldn't drink the water down here anyways. I like having being in control of when and where I evacuate my bowels."

"Good. Stick to the beer and the tequila. Way less damage to your internal organs that way. Speaking of, it's your round. I'll go and secure us the dart board."

"I am not playing darts with you dude. Not after last time!"

Darcy spent another five days ghosting through her daily routine. The sadness had settled back down
around her. Had her message been received? She had tried to focus on the news pouring out about the Avengers showdown in Germany. Darcy felt sick as she heard about the incarceration of the Supers in the Raft and their subsequent escape the day before. That hadn’t made the evening news, but she had ways and means of getting the information she needed. To the outside observer, she was a bored twenty-something, scrolling through tumblr on her phone while waiting on yet another non-nutritious instant meal to heat up for lunch. In actual fact, she was reinforcing her firewalls, refining her numerous identities and searching out any and all information about the Accords, while waiting on another non-nutritious instant meal to heat up.

She was examining the heating instructions on the back of, what claimed to be, a packet of macaroni and cheese when she heard her laptop ping softly from the other room. She threw the packet down on the counter and tried to control her movements as she strolled past the window on her way to the sofa where her laptop lay.

"No sudden bursts of motion, it attracts the eye."

She maximised the alert in the bottom left-hand corner of her screen. It was a BOLO for the Black Widow, distributed by Interpol. They had reason to believe that she was travelling through Europe, headed towards Wakanda. That was an interesting development. Darcy knew that something had happened during the battle in Germany to make the Black Widow switch sides and that Wakanda was unofficially providing sanctuary to the Secret Avengers post-accords. She scanned through the details of the BOLO and then clicked back to the main feed. As she returned to her dinner, she revisited the idea of getting herself to Wakanda.

She had started to concoct a vague plan as to how to get herself there after it became apparent that there was not going to be a daring rescue. She had even come up with a speech to give King T’Challa, should she actually get there. Then a voice in the back of her head piped up, cutting through every other thought… They aren’t your friends. They tolerated you as a favour to Thor and Jane. Why would you go to Wakanda? You think you’re an Avenger now?

She had had to work for over a week to silence that voice long enough to send that distress message. And it had taken back over with a vengeance since she had received nothing in response. She had resigned herself to the fact that no-one was coming. That they had better things to do, and that she was going to have to get herself out of London and on to… somewhere else. Hence, the shoring up of her online resources.

She relaxed into the sagging cushions of the old sofa, tucking one legging-clad leg under her. As she took the first bite of what was claiming to be mac and cheese, she heard a soft cough to her right. She choked as she quickly swallowed on the molten ‘cheese’. Throwing her bowl to the floor and seizing the icer that was stashed under her in the sofa cushion in one movement, swinging her arm around to her right, aiming squarely at the intruder’s centre mass.

“Good. But next time, don’t hesitate. Pull the trigger immediately.”

Darcy was still frozen in shock, staring at the figure leaning casually against the hall door frame. It was one of the few blind spots in the flat, that couldn’t been seen through the window. Which was exactly why the Black Widow had chosen the spot to stand in, while trying to give Darcy a coronary.

“What are you doing here? How did you get in? I thought you were on your way to Wakanda?
Don’t know how your geography is, but England isn’t exactly on the way to West Africa. How did you get in? My defences have held off everyone else so far. But of course you got in…” Darcy trailed off, gun still trained on the Avenger, breathing still rapid, but slowing as the initial shock wore off. Her mind was still racing at a hundred miles an hour though, flicking through everything she had been taught. Nothing had covered this.

“I’m here for the evac, voron.” The Black Widow pushed herself off from the door frame, a set of car keys dangling from one finger. She was wearing a simple black leather jacket, skinny jeans and boots, hair loosely curled and with minimal but precise make up. If you passed her on the street, you wouldn’t give her a second thought. But Darcy recognised that every inch of her was displayed with conscious choice and effort.

Darcy slowly lowered her icer after hearing the safe word, “Not that I’m not grateful for the assist, but why are you here? I sent Agent 19 that message, expecting some SHIELD grunt to be sent for babysitting duty. Not the Black Widow. Not that you aren’t awesome and all. And don’t tell Barton, but you’re definitely my favourite Avenger. Former Avenger? Are the Avengers still technically a thing now? Secret Avenger? Is that a thing? Anyway. I’m rambling. You gave me a heart attack. You shouldn’t have been able to get in here. Well obviously you did. Because you’re standing there. And of course you got in, you’re you.” Darcy bowed her head deferentially, chewing her bottom lip, eyes skittering around the room looking for something that made sense. Finding nothing, she dragged her gaze back up to meet the Widow. The Russian assassin had an eyebrow arched and a hand on one popped hip.

“How do you expect someone to give you the answers you seek when you don’t stop to allow them to answer? People hate silence. They will seek to fill it.” There was an amused lilt to her voice that slid away, and suddenly it was all business. “We need to get out of here and get you to the safe house. I have a car a block away and we need to move before those idiots across the street finish eating their lunch. Grab what you need. You won’t be coming back.”

Spurred into action by the no-nonsense tone from the Widow, she reached under to sofa for the black canvas backpack that she had stashed there. She grabbed her phone and laptop and their respective charging cables, stuffing them into the bag and zipping it closed. She slung the bag over her shoulder and stuffed her feet into her already tied Doc Martens. Retrieving her jacket that she’d lain over the back of the sofa, she straightened her posture and nodded to the other woman. “I’m ready. Let’s go.”
Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

Darcy and The Black Widow are driving up to a safe house in Scotland. Interactions are suitably awkward. Both are preoccupied and Darcy gets a case, or five, of verbal diarrhea. We discover what "Good" means and that cheap sandwiches always have too many tomatoes in them.

Chapter Notes

I was going to wait until tomorrow to get this chapter up. But the next few chapters are begging to be redrafted and posted, so here's another one to make my brain shut up.

There is no beta, only my over caffeinated brain. Any and all mistakes are my own. Let me know if you find any and I'll fix them and feedback on anything at all is always welcome.

Darcy sat with her hands in her lap, one curled protectively around the top handle of her backpack, trying desperately not to fidget. She still had plenty of nervous energy zipping through her system despite the fact that they had been on the road for almost two hours. Two very long, silent hours. They hadn’t spoken since The Black Widow had given Darcy the brief rundown as to where they were going. They didn’t even have the radio on. Darcy hated sitting still and being quiet. She hated awkward silences. No one had ever accused her of being shy and retiring before, but being in the presence of The Black Widow had made her want to behave.

The woman in question was driving in what the casual observer may have assumed as to be a relaxed manner. But Darcy knew better. You didn’t spend a lot of time with super spies without picking up the odd thing. She knew that she was minutely aware of every passing car, landmark, hell she was probably aware of every piece of trash that littered the motorway they were on. They were headed north. Apparently there was an off-the-books safe house of Dread Pirate Fury’s in Perthshire, Scotland. An estate owned by the Stark family that Stark himself had never visited. The safe house was to be one of the old hunting lodges on the property that had been repurposed by SHIELD during the nineties. Two hours down, seven to go.

Darcy had just been considering going for a nap when The Black Widow spoke.

“Why do you call me The Black Widow? I can hear the capitalisation you know.” Her words were tinged with a teasing rhythm but her tone was soft.

“Um. That’s your name isn’t it? Like, your codename or call sign or whatever.” Darcy answered carefully. She continued to stare out of the window straight ahead, too nervous to sneak a glance.

The assassin chuckled softly without any sign of amusement, “I guess that was true. But I think you
can call me Natasha. Nat, even.” She paused and Darcy looked over to see a strange micro-expression flit across her face before it was gone. She didn’t wait for Darcy to respond when she continued, “We’ll stop to get some dinner soon, now that we’ve cleared London. We’ll wait for it to get dark and then we’ll continue overnight.”

Darcy nodded her understanding. Trusting that Natasha would be aware of her comprehension, but not quite trusting herself to speak sensibly. Darcy had spent time with Norse gods, genius astrophysicists, super soldiers (briefly) and a large number of competent as hell S.H.I.E.L.D. agents. But the woman sat next to her was one of Darcy’s personal heroes. She may or may not have a secret Pinterest board dedicated to the highly capable woman.

Darcy knew that she was intelligent. She’d been tested as a child and rated in the top percentile of the country in intelligence. She had no patience though. She could never stick to anything and was awful at following through with ideas once she had bored of them. As such, she was pretty good at a great number of things, but not exceptional at anything. She could never put in the time and effort required to become truly great. Her parents sighed and muttered about her wasted potential and she dreaded questions about her future or her career. Academically, she knew that if she could find something that enraptured her enough, she could become great. But therein lies opportunity to fail. So Darcy slides backwards into mediocre safety. Well, as much as there could be in this world of superheroes, aliens and the like.

Darcy knew that the discipline held by The Black Widow was forced upon her by the Red Room but she envied the woman’s ability to hold mastery over herself. Natasha was a badass. Everything she did was deliberate and calculated and handled with frightening efficiency. There was no faltering, no second-guessing, just deadly accuracy. Darcy wished she could even harness a tiny piece of that for herself. Darcy craved control over her life and circumstances. Most crucially, she craved control over her emotions. They had a tendency to sneak up on her. She could compartmentalise fairly efficiently but there would be times when a shadow flitting the wrong way across her sightline would cause her to lose all sense of reality. Fear would crawl up her neck and curl itself around the back of her mind, creeping into every corner. It was happy bedfellows with her self-doubt. The pair of them would tag-team her on hard days.

One would taunt her with flashes of terrifying memories and just when the ice cold fear would begin to recede, the other would pounce. Ridiculing her actions and reactions. They could go for days like that. Normally, she could pull herself out of the downward spiral by spending time with others and staying out of her own head. But lately she had spent so much time alone and the voices had gotten so loud and clear that she couldn’t help but yearn for the cool detachment of the woman sat next to her, eyes staring straight ahead with crystal clear conviction.

About an hour and a half later, they hadn’t spoken any further. Darcy had started to call Natasha, Natasha in her head. She wasn’t at the stage where she felt she could call her Nat yet. She wasn’t sure she ever would be. They were just south of the city of Manchester when Natasha indicated and they pulled off the motorway and into a rest stop. They parked at the front of a complex of restaurants and souvenir shops.

Darcy sat patiently and waited for her travel buddy to make a move to get out of the car first. It had only taken eight or nine car trips with Agent 19 to learn that twitchy super spies like to sweep the
immediate area first, before oblivious civilians stride off into trouble. Natasha turned bodily to give Darcy a thorough once over and tilted her head to one side. Darcy began to sweat despite the rapidly cooling evening.

“Good.” That abrupt verbal response was accompanied by a tight nod of the head and before Darcy could catch up, Natasha was out of the car and making her way across the parking lot.

“Good. Good? The fuck does that mean? Good. Super spies, man.” Darcy muttered to herself as she hauled her backpack into her lap and threw herself out of the SUV and after The Bl-Natasha.

The pair walked up to the counter and ordered coffees and sandwiches. While they waited for their hot drinks, Darcy reached slowly behind her to the bottom of her backpack. There was a small hidden zipped pocket that contained some of her cash. She palmed some of the English notes and surreptitiously put the cash in her jacket pocket. As the barista handed over their tray of food and drink, Darcy allowed Natasha to take it with both hands while she paid and waited for her change.

Darcy followed as Natasha chose the table that would give her the best sightlines around the open plan food court and through the plate glass windows to the parking lot where their vehicle sat. At the sight of their SUV, Darcy piped up before she had a chance to think, “How come we’re still in the same car? I figured we’d be onto our fourth or something right now. You’re not trying to get us caught are you?” Darcy’s mind whirred as her thoughts spiralled away from her. She had a horrible habit of thinking as she spoke and getting carried away.

“No I’m not voron. It’s a modified Stark tech vehicle. It’s invisible to cameras and has some other helpful tech in it.” Natasha stopped briefly to inspect her sandwich and remove the tomatoes from the salad before reassembling it. “There’s nothing connecting it back to Stark though. I had it thoroughly checked by our mutual friend before I came to get you. It can’t be traced, which I am glad for. Grand theft auto gets boring after a while.” She shot Darcy a conspiratorial smirk and leaned forwards, across the table towards Darcy, both elbows on the table. “Don’t you think, Darcy?”

Darcy found herself mirroring the stance and was about to launch into a story about that time she was arrested for car theft as a teenager when she caught herself. Super spies, man. She corrected her posture and took a defiant bite of her food, trying not to wince when she discovered the sheer volume of tomatoes sliding around her club sandwich.

Natasha grinned at this and leant back in her seat, coffee in hand. She gave Darcy another appraising look for an excruciatingly long period of time before nodding and, “Good.”

Three is the magic number. Darcy swallows her not quite fully chewed bite of food and chases it with a large gulp of scalding coffee. “Alright, The Black Widow. Enough of the ‘good’ nonsense. What exactly is it that is ‘good’? And no cryptic bullshit, I’m so not even close to being able to deal with cryptic bullshit. I have had the week, no the month, no the year from hell and so I will bite. What in the name of Thor, woman, is ‘good’?” She slumped back in her seat, arms folded and her chin jutting out defiantly. That may have come across slightly more cracked than she intended, but she’ll do as the nice spy lady advised her to, and keep her mouth shut and allow the silence to spread between them and fill every gap in the air.

She counts up to two hundred and forty six in her head before The Widow wipes her hand on a napkin, sandwich neatly eaten. “You are, Darcy. I know Clint and Bobbi have spoken highly of you, not to mention Thor, but I was interested to see how you have adapted. You are ‘good’ Darcy.” Darcy’s eyes are bugging out of her head, she’s sure of it but doesn’t have the presence of mind to school her features. Natasha continues, “You are, by all means still very much a civilian. But you have responded well to teaching. Your reactions are good, but need work. You have adapted to your circumstances with ease and have picked up skills which will keep both yourself and others alive
should the situation require it. I have read your files, all of them. You were not what I was expecting.” Natasha arches an eyebrow and takes a mouthful of coffee.

Darcy is about to respond, with what she’s not entirely sure, when Natasha saves her the trouble and nods towards the restroom. “Come on, let’s use the facilities and then start moving. It’s almost dark now.” The women clear their table, Darcy wrapping the remainder of her sandwich in a napkin and tucking it in the front pocket of her backpack before following Natasha into the bathrooms.

“Again.”

“Oh come on, I totally had it that time! No way was that more than sixty seconds!”

“Again. I need to know you can do this Darce. I’m leaving for Russia in two days and I’m not sure when I’ll be back.”

“You mean if you’ll be back…”

“Darcy, I will always come back for you. If you need me, you use the code and the number I gave you, and I will come get you, you know that. I just need to know that you can handle things until I get there okay?”

“Fine. I will become a reluctant badass just to make you happy Birdie. But don’t drop everything to come and rescue me okay? Not if there’s Michael-Bay-Level dramatic explosions going on. Save the world first, little old me, second. I’ll get this right and get my shit handled.”

“Thank you Voron. Now, again.”

It’s entirely dark now. Darcy has slept for the last hour or two and they’re only about a half hour from the safe house now. Despite having her eyes closed for so long, she can’t seem to get used to the almost complete lack of light. Beyond the sweep of the headlights and the reflections on the cat eyes in the road, there is nothing but flat darkness. She tries in vain to pick out any details in the countryside around her. Eventually she gives up and Darcy looks over at her companion while she pulls herself up in her seat. Natasha touches lightly on the breaks as they go around a tight corner in the one-track country road. The red of the brake lights casting across them both briefly.

“Are you okay?” Darcy’s startled to realise that it’s she that has spoken. She clears her throat of sleep and takes two bottles of water from her backpack. She places one in the cup holder in reach of Natasha and takes a swig from her own.

“Yes Darcy, I’m fine. Why do you ask?” is the carefully measured response.
“It’s just, what with, well, everything that’s happened lately. Just, has anyone checked that you’re okay? I know you’re not closely affiliated with SHIELD anymore and the Avengers are all, y’know…” she lost momentum. Not sure what she was really asking or why but the thought had struck her and she had verbalised it as she went along. Awesome. Good job her will was up to date.

“I’m fine. But thank you for asking.” Was the clipped response, and for a super spy she sounded like nothing approaching fine.

“You don’t seem fine.” Oh good, she’s poking the superspy-sassin. Great.

“Fallaces sunt rerum species…” She almost whispered to herself, eyes hardening a fraction.

Darcy sunk back down into her seat, hugging her bottle of water, “That they are, Nat.”

Chapter End Notes

I know that things are moving at a somewhat glacial place but its important for what's to come that we all get a feel for where Darcy and Nat's heads are before we get to the safe house and other people show up. 
It's going to be a little angsty for a while, but soon some old favourites from SHIELD will show up as some brief relief before the Manchurian Candidate appears and angst will once again reign supreme.

Please feed the author. I make squealy happy noises when you guys comment and leave kudos and stuff.
Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

The Accords are discussed, buttons are pushed and Marvel's Most Wanted arrive.

Chapter Notes

I don’t have a beta and so all mistakes are mine.
Please let me know if you find any so that I can fix them.
The set-up is almost all done now.
Reckon we’re maybe two chapters away from the Winter Soldier now.
Here, have a lengthy chapter, it’s a Sunday after all.

Darcy was suddenly awake. She reached for her phone and checked the time, it was 6.24am. She rolled on to her back and stretched out her stiff muscles after the long car ride. She hadn’t rested much, waking what seemed like every twenty minutes or so. She always found it hard to sleep properly when she was in a new place. She rubbed her eyes and wrinkled her nose slightly. She could smell musty wood and something clean and outdoorsy. The lodge had obviously been unoccupied for a long time and so the dust lay thick on every surface. She had sneezed when she had pulled the covers back on the bed before falling in the night before.

Darcy had taken the smallest of the three bedrooms, two twin beds lined the walls and there was a skylight between them that allowed the soft morning light to fill the room. She reluctantly swung her legs out of the bed, shrugged on her jacket and pushed her feet into her shoes.

“What are you doing?”

“I’m taking my shoes off, what does it look like I’m doing?”

“Never take your shoes off somewhere unfamiliar! And even at home, keep them close. You don’t want to be caught out in your, albeit charming, striped socks. You can’t run for your life in socks.”

“But my Mom would kick my ass if she saw me visiting someone’s home and I kept my shoes on Birdie.”

“Well I’ll kick your ass if I ever see you running from Hydra in your socks. Who you more concerned about?”

“It’s a toss up to be honest.”

“Morning Darcy. Coffee?”
“Hmm yes please.” Darcy wandered into the tiny kitchen. Most of the space was taken up with an oversized dining table and eight chairs. She shuffled around it to stand next to Nat at the small black range. The heat coming from it was fierce. That explained why it was so warm in the lodge, but when had Nat gotten the wood and lit the fire?

Nat handed her a chipped floral mug of black coffee. Once upon a time Darcy would have turned her nose up at the acidic brew, but after last year or two she came to appreciate the wide availability of honest to goodness black coffee. Contrary to public opinion, there was not a Starbucks on every street corner around the world. Instant coffee and hot water was a regular constant however.

She made her way to the opposite side of the kitchen and leaned against the counter, only shuffling slightly to the side when she realised she had her back open to the window. She took a sip of coffee. It was scalding hot and tasted a bit stale, but she could feel the grogginess lifting from her eyes as she swallowed it down. She was pulled from her thoughts when Nat drew a heavy pine chair out from the table, the leg scraping noisily on the flagstone floor. The redhead was in the same outfit as the night before but had lost the jacket to show a simple V-neck black t-shirt. Nat raised her coffee cup in a semblance of a toast and swallowed back half of it in one go. Silence settled over the kitchen. All Darcy could hear was the clock in the hall ticking and the sound of the wind whistling through the courtyard, buffeting against the windows.

“Interpol had it right, I am headed to Wakanda. I’ll be leaving tomorrow.” Nat tilted her head to one side, looking up at Darcy. “You’re perfectly secure here but I’d like to put you through your paces a little before I go.”

“Yeah, yeah everyone always does. Don’t want the civilian to get herself killed on your watch. Let me just get my laptop set up on Fury’s network and you can soundly put me on my ass ‘kay?” Darcy placed her coffee mug in the sink and left the room to get her laptop set up, entirely unaware of the thoughtful expression on Nat’s face.

“This will be as far as you can go on the property. The force field runs along the edges of these stone walls. You can pass through them in either direction but you will be visible the second that you do, so don’t. If the alarm is triggered, the force field will lock and you won’t be able to pass through it in either direction until one of us comes and resets the system.”

Darcy just nodded her understanding. She was struggling to breathe as Nat led her in a jog around the edges of the grounds surrounding the lodge. She hadn’t been running in weeks. She’d been stuck in the London flat and so her cardio game had weakened. At least she wasn’t going to be confined to the lodge while she was here. She could get outside and admire the view across the Cairngorm Mountains and move around a little. The force fields that shielded her were modified Stark and SHIELD tech. Similar to the cloaking tech that hid quinnjets but with some sort of disruption field that made anyone who looked at the lodge, carry on past it. The lodge could be seen but unfamiliar eyes would just skip over it and staring for any period of time would make the observer uneasy and want to move on.

As they made their way back to the front of the property, Darcy’s heartbeat raced. It was nothing to do with the jog they’d just been on. She was about to be put through her paces by The Black Widow. Darcy was no slouch. She had listened to everything she’d been told and put it into practice.
She was no SHIELD Agent but she wanted to be able to handle herself well enough that she wouldn’t make things worse. She couldn’t make things worse. Not again.

Darcy straightened her spine and squared her shoulders. Ready to accept whatever heinous drills Nat was about to put her through. Nat’s head ticked to the side again, in what Darcy was beginning to recognise as her way of indicating that she was taking a mental measuring tape to the civilian in front of her. It made Darcy’s skin itch but she fought to remain steady. Nat placed one foot back behind her and raised her arms until they were in some sort of martial arts pose. Fear shot through Darcy’s bloodstream. She snapped into an approximation of Nat’s stance and waited for the sparring to begin.

Nat simply quirked the corner of her mouth up into a smirk and began sweeping her arms around in long fluid movements, taking deep measured breaths.

Fucking Tai Chi. The tension receded from Darcy’s bones as she relaxed her stance and began to copy Nat’s graceful movements.

“How much do you know about the actual content of the Accords?”

“I’ve read them in their entirety.” Darcy took another slow breath and followed Nat’s movements, tamping down the anger that threatened to rise at the mention of the document, before continuing. “I read them about a hundred times.”

“So you know about the summit next year?” Nat asked while still looking entirely serene.

“Yep.”

“So you’ve probably surmised that we all need to keep our heads down until then.”

“Yes, and that you guys also have a lot of work to do in order to get enough support for the amendments that you will want to put in place.” Darcy knew very well that the Accords contained a provision that no amendments could be made within the first year. Changes would need to be agreed upon by all the nations that had signed the Accords. A majority would not suffice. All parties had to be in agreement. There was to be a summit after one year where amendments could be put forward for a vote.

“That political science degree of yours was obviously worth every penny. Not that you’ll have had any real chance to use it of late.” Nat looked like she was rolling her next sentence around in her mouth a few times before asking, “You’ve not been able to do much of anything lately have you?”

Darcy’s hackles began to rise. The Black Widow was pushing her buttons. She hated the fact that she had been on the back burner for so long. She hadn’t been much use in terms of science, political or otherwise ever since the fall of SHIELD and the rise of the anti-super groups. She had just been stumbling through each day. Getting up, going through her day and going to bed. Rinse and repeat. She had no plans for the future. Nothing that made her reach forwards. She wasn’t suicidal. She didn’t want to die. She just didn’t have anything that made her want to live her life for either. So Darcy didn’t answer her. Natasha had read her files. The field reports from Bobbi and Mack and the medical reports and probably her confidential psych-evals too. Super spies never asked questions they didn’t already know the answers to.

“No-one blames you, you know. It was expected that you’d have told them everything that you did. You were taken by surprise and subjected to your deepest fears by someone you thought you could trust implicitly. No-one presumed that you would have held up under that. The fact that you’re still standing is a bonus.”
The soft tone employed by The Widow was probably supposed to be comforting. Instead her words were jagged and cut razor sharp through every part of Darcy. They had anticipated her failure. It had been expected that she would betray her friends. That was why she was kept on the periphery. She was a liability. Darcy felt the shame constrict her throat and the scars that littered the backs of her legs and arms itched and pulled on her skin.

The Black Widow looked like she had recognised her mis-step and was about to pull a verbal 180 when Darcy sniffed and pulled herself up to stand straight.

“Thanks for the Tai Chi session Nat. I’m going to go check my laptop.” Without even so much as looking at the other woman, Darcy turned tail and fled. She wouldn’t let the Widow see her cry. She already thought Darcy was weak. They all did.

“How many?”

“Darcy, don’t do this.”

“How many?”

“Thirty eight.”

“In total, Sir.”

“They don’t have a total confirmed figure yet, they’re still processing the-“

“Thank you Sir.”

Darcy worked on her laptop for the rest of the morning and into the afternoon. She had no idea where Natasha was or what she was doing and that suited her just fine. Darcy was just reviewing one of her many self-created cover identities when Nat knocked on the wooden door frame. She had an ugly cream serving tray balanced in one hand, holding two bowls of soup. Darcy nodded her invitation to come in and finished inserting this identity into the DMV databases.

Nat handed her one of the bowls of soup before elegantly sitting on the opposite bed, back against the wall. They ate in silence for a while. Darcy had almost forgot that she was there when she spoke. “You did a pretty thorough job erasing every scrap of yourself you know. Impressive. Although it poses somewhat of a problem now.”

After the incident following the fall of SHIELD, Darcy had help from Skye to erase her entire existence. Not a single scrap of Darcy Lewis existed in any official or unofficial capacity. It was like she had never existed. Irreversibly gone. She couldn’t undo what she’d done but she could pretend that Darcy Lewis had never been. She had thought that it would protect her from interested parties. She had been wrong.

“What problem would that be?”

“I can travel fairly freely between Wakanda and the rest of the world under the protection of King
T’Challa. That’s why Interpol and the like only have me under surveillance and aren’t arresting me.” Nat tapped her spoon on her top lip thoughtfully. “Your lack of official identity means that I cannot place you under the same protection. So you will need to stay hidden until the summit next year and we can put the right provisions in place. Do you understand?”

“Yes. I’m under house arrest. I do not exist and must stay hidden until it is safe to exist again and I no longer pose a threat to security. Got it.”

Natasha got her mental tape measure out again, head tilting as she appraised Darcy. There was no nod of approval this time. “What do you know of the Winter Soldier?”

Darcy could never get used to the mental gymnastics that was conversing with spies. “I’ve read the SHIELD files and I pulled the CIA taskforce files last week. Read the incident reports. He’s in Wakanda with Captain Rogers now right?” Darcy had been almost obsessed with the files on the Winter Soldier and James Buchanan Barnes. She had read everything. Saying that, she took that approach to all the intel she came across. Half of her brain told her to stay in the dark and that if she was ignorant, then she couldn’t be a liability again. The other half told her to find out everything. That the more she knew, the less likely she was to be blindsided. That she would never be taken for a fool again.

“There are verbal triggers still embedded in his programming. I found the file containing the handler’s manual that will allow us to remove them all. He’s in cryo-stasis at the moment, until we can ensure he’s not a danger to anyone.”

Darcy briefly wondered if maybe she could be put in cryo-stasis for a while. That way she wouldn’t pose a threat either.

“Not an option. He has a variation of the super soldier serum which allows him to survive the process. You do not. You think very loudly.”Nat placed her now empty soup bowl back on the tray. “Once he has had all the triggers removed, we’ll be bringing him here. We’re low on secure resources right now and Wakanda’s relationship with the UN is tenuous at the moment and”

“They won’t want to encourage too much scrutiny.”Darcy finished. “And housing the Winter Soldier for the best part of a year would encourage all of the scrutiny. I get it. Scotland has always been staunchly anti-accord and they really don’t give a damn what the UN or anyone else has to say about it. Makes sense for him to come here. Just let me know when I’ll be moving on. I’ll be ready.”

Natasha blinked slowly. Her head snapped to a tilt so quickly that Darcy almost winced. “You will not be going anywhere Voron. You will both be staying here until the Accords can be amended. We all need to regroup and heal where we can. Agents will arrive this afternoon to accompany you while I am in Wakanda and I will return with Barnes.” With that, Natasha left the room, Darcy staring blankly through the open doorway after her.

Darcy had been lying on her back scrolling through the alerts that her search algorithm had been throwing up from the various intelligence agency communications and definitely not thinking about Nat’s strange comments. When she heard voices filtering up the stairs. Curious, she got up to investigate.
She gripped her icer with both hands and cautiously sidled up to the half-closed kitchen door.

“… and he just had to make things worse.”

“Hey! I’m sure their insurance covers fire damage. Hardly anything was on fire when we left.”

“That’s because there was nothing left after the explosion to actually be on fire. And so that was Johannesburg literally burned for us. So it was as good a time as any to-“

The conversation suddenly stopped in the kitchen as Darcy slowly pushed the door open with the end of her icer. The door creaked open to reveal Agent 19 standing with her back to the door, hands on her hips, looking over her shoulder at Darcy. Next to her stood a man with a scar in his left eyebrow and dark hair that was maybe once cut into a military buzz-cut but had grown untidily. His eyes had also flicked to Darcy and her raised icer. Natasha was leaning against the counter with her arms folded, apparently waiting for someone else to make a move.

“Darcy.” Agent 19, Bobbi, was the first to speak. She didn’t make any attempt to move or alter her stance.

The man at her side raised a hand in a slight aborted wave, “Alright? You must be Darcy. Care to put the gun down love?”

Darcy took a deep breath and lowered her weapon, tucking it back into the waistband of her jeans. She really needed to get a holster. As she stepped into the room, the tall blonde woman turned fully to face her and smiled tentatively, keeping her hands where Darcy could see them. This was one of the reasons Darcy didn’t mind spending so much time with spies since SHIELD fell. Everyone had their neuroses and most had an aversion to unexpected sudden movements. So her ‘episodes’ as her therapist had called them, happened less frequently around them.

Darcy considered holding herself in restraint for a brief moment but couldn’t help but feel her shoulders grow lighter at the sight of her friend. “Hey Bobbi. Long-time, no see.” She opened up her posture and Bobbi took it as the invitation it was and hugged Darcy tight. Darcy felt hands run down the backs of her arms gently skipping over the locations of her scars, ending in a quick light squeeze of her wrists before Bobbi stepped back to give her some personal space.

“You’re looking skinnier kid.”

“Living on nothing but packet and tinned food for weeks will do that to a girl, Birdie.”

“Well that won’t do. Romanov and I will just have to make you something tasty and nutritious for dinner tonight to make up for it alright? I’m thinking burgers.” Bobbi threw a look over her shoulder to Nat, which received a nod in agreement.

“Hah. You’re going to cook Bob? Thought we were supposed to be keeping the kid alive?”

“Shut up Hunter. Darcy, this is Hunter. Hunter, this is Darcy.”

Darcy took a moment to run her eyes over the man, Hunter. She spotted a faint scar running along the left side of his jaw, partially obscured by stubble. A lightbulb clicked on in her brain. She leant a forearm up on Bobbi’s shoulder and tried to emulate Nat’s mental measuring tape face.

“Oh Birdie, you never mentioned how cute he was! He’s so compact.” Hunter let out an indignant squeak and tried, in vain, to pull himself up to his full height and then a little bit. “Don’t strain yourself there Hufflepuff.”
“Hufflepuff! Now wait a minute, kid. She’s mentioned me?” Hunter now had his hands on his hips, mirroring Bobbi’s own pose. It was easy to see the connection between the once married pair. They were polar opposites but mirror images of the other. Two sides of the same coin.

“Oh yeah. She told me all about Barbados. Although technically, I was briefed on Barbados as a part of a ‘Do Not Do Stupid Shit Like This Under Any Circumstances’ seminar at SHIELD. There’s a whole section in the ‘International Incidents and How to Avoid Them’ Handbook.” Darcy tried to contain the grin that was threatening to split her face. She really needed to work on her poker face.

“Yes, I believe it’s right after the Chapter detailing some of Barton’s more idiotic escapades. The ones that weren’t classified as Level 10 disasters anyways.” Natasha had come to stand on Darcy’s other side, arms still folded and face not betraying any of her amusement.

Hunter threw himself bodily into a chair at the dining table. “Great, there’s three of them. Can’t believe I’m actually looking forward to Barton getting here now.” He grumbled into his own chest sulkily.

Darcy eyes lit up, “Barton’s coming too?” She swivelled her head between Bobbi and Nat.

“Yes, he’s coming to take me to Wakanda. ETA is another hour or two, but we’ll stay for dinner.”

Darcy finally let that grin split her face. All her favourite spy-sassins under one roof, however briefly, was enough to hold the fear and doubt back from the gates.

Darcy had gotten to know Barton in New Mexico after the Destroyer had done what it said on the tin. They’d become sort-of friends and after the Battle of New York a few years later, Barton had appeared periodically while she and Jane had been on their world science tour. One night at a bar, after one too many tequilas, he’d confided in her about what had happened with Loki. He’d told her with such a blank face and no inflection to his voice, that it had chilled her to the bone. Not the content of the story, although that was awful enough, but the delivery. It was as if he had gone into auto-pilot. The level of disassociation required just for him to spit out the salient points was so immense that Darcy would have done anything to take away the pain and put a smile on his face. And so that’s what she did. She made it her mission to make Barton smile. He was away more often than not, on missions or just off the grid on his farm and she would go months without so much as a text message. But when he did make an appearance, Darcy spent every moment trying to lessen his pain.

Darcy hadn’t seen Barton since she had been in recovery in a SHIELD facility just after The Fall. She’d refused to let him visit. She was too scared to see the pity on his face and terrified to see the disappointment and betrayal. It was all too much. She had caught sight of him in the hallway outside of her room as she lay on her stomach in her hospital bed. She felt too vulnerable. She couldn’t flee, she couldn’t so much as get up to close her door. She was trapped and weak. The pressure on her chest had built and dry sobs stuck in her throat. The machines around her set off alarms and medical staff came running in with a sedative for her. She hadn’t seen any sign of Barton since. It wasn’t long after that, that she met Bobbi properly.

“Hey sport, a little bird tells me that you’ve punched your physio-therapist in the face.”

“He’s a dick. You here to send me into time out?”

“No. Rehab is a bitch. I’m here to teach you how to throw a real punch so that next time you’ll break his nose.”
Does anyone have any theories as to what happened to Darcy during the fall of SHIELD?
Hawkeye's arrival is imminent.
Reckon he's going to enjoy having dinner with his ex-wife, his ex-wife's ex-husband, his former partner and former surrogate little sister?
On a scale of 1 to 10, how awkward should I make it?

Please feed the author. She responds well to approval from others, hence the three chapters up in less than 24 hours.
Thank you so much for all the kudos and comments so far.
Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, we see a little of what actually happened to Darcy when SHIELD fell, fences are mended, many many beers are drunk and there is a heart-to-heart that really hits home.

Chapter Notes

TRIGGER WARNING. This chapter contains descriptions of violence and intimidation, though not explicitly sexual in nature, there is an undercurrent.

If you want to skip this, start reading where the italics end.

This is the first time in a very long time that I have written anything violent or that was meant to feel frightening, but it will get better, promise. Or worse, mostly worse for Darcy.

I have no beta so all mistakes are my own, if you spot any let me know so I can fix it.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Her vision was beginning to blacken around the edges. She hadn’t put her glasses on yet that morning as they hadn’t even gotten out of bed. Everything was blurred and she wasn’t sure if she was grateful that she couldn’t see what was being done to her, what he was doing to her, or if it was just adding to the confusion.

As far as she could tell he was sat on a dining chair that he had pulled into the bathroom. Her laptop was resting on his knees and he was looking up at her. She couldn’t quite make out the evil sneer that was stretching the lips she had been kissing only hours before, but she could feel it.

Her hands were bound to the curtain rod that hung above their bathroom. The irony being that Darcy had reinforced it when they’d first moved in so that they could make the shower sex that little bit more athletic. Now, it held her in place. Naked, spread-eagled as blood ran down the backs of her legs.

Every time she’d refused to give him the access code to get into her laptop, he’d run a wickedly sharp blade across the backs of her legs. She had earned seventeen, deep long cuts through muscle before she had given in and told him.

Her legs no longer held her upright. Her arms and shoulders scorched from the strain. The sharp hot pain that had been dragged across her skin had merged with the others and become a sickening, dizzying burn. The physical pain was mingling with the heartache that gripped her, squeezing the very breath from her lungs.

She had spent the last year falling steadily in love with him. What had started as an adrenalin fuelled
passion, had built into an all-consuming love. They had only been together two months, when they moved in together. It was mostly for the sake of money, but she enjoyed the domesticity of it. They cooked for each other, read books together on Sundays and had great sex on every surface. Some would think that working and living together would put too much strain on a relationship, but she enjoyed being able to come home and talk about her day to someone who entirely understood what she was talking about.

They travelled together, on the science world tour. They watched the aurora borealis in the Arctic Circle hands held through thick mittens, danced and laughed uncontrollably while String Quartets played in Switzerland and made love on the balcony while the sun set in Hawaii. Everything that was good in this world was tied to him. Jane had become increasingly involved in her work and her new collaborators and so Darcy had clung to him like a life line. She built her entire castle on the sands of his shore.

And all it took was one text message and he was on top of her, pinning her to their bed, with a knife to her throat.

“One last chance Darcy girl.” He was whispering from his seat. His fingers poised over the keys, she could barely hear him over the sound of her blood rushing in her ears. Everything sounded so close and yet so far away at the same time. Like she had her head under water. What had he been asking her for now? “What is the encryption code for your backdoor into SHIELD?”

Fuck. Darcy had liked to practice her hacking skills by periodically breaking her way into SHIELD. Mostly innocuous things like changing the commissary menu plans at the Triskellion or messing with the spell checker software that Agents used to write reports. She never did anything that would actually endanger anyone, or access anything classified. Although she could. Her backdoor access gave her carte blanche into everything. She’d made the mistake of bragging about it to him a few months back after a few too many glasses of wine with dinner. She just wanted him to tell her how clever she was and drag her back to their bedroom to show his appreciation. And now he was going to use it against her and potentially endanger SHIELD Agents. Agents like Barton.

She grit her teeth and tried to push out all thoughts of pain or fear, squeezing her eyes shut. She tried to control her breathing and ignore the sound of her blood dripping on to the floor of their ceramic bath. Trying to think of nothing and anything else all at once as she heard him move into her space...

“Darcy! Darcy? Come on Darce, wake up! It’s just a dream. You’re safe. I’m here.”

Darcy forces her eyes open, fighting against the overwhelming fear and panic that had a vice-like grip on her heart. Bobbi is sat on the floor next to her bed, eyes wide and hands resting on the bed next to where she had been lying.

“It’s okay Darce. You’re not there anymore. He can’t hurt you anymore remember? We got you out and you’re safe here. Do you remember that?” Bobbi’s smooth calming voice washes over her and she feels the panic’s grip lessen. Bobbi rests a hand on top of hers very lightly. A grounding touch but nothing constricting.

“I remember Birdie.” Darcy breathed out, trying to remember how to do the circular breathing her therapist had taught her and used the long sleeve of her shirt to mop the sweat from her forehead.

“Barton arrived while you were sleeping, I was just coming to wake you sport. Do you want to grab a quick shower and then come down and see him?”
Hair still wet from her shower, Darcy descended the stairs and wandered into the kitchen. Bobbi and Nat were stood over the range flipping the burgers. Hunter was sat at the kitchen table sipping on a beer and looking very much like he had been put into time-out. At the far side of the room with his back to the door was Barton, slicing cheese with a steady precise hand. Darcy swallowed down the fear as it crept up her throat at the sight of the knife and tried to focus on the fact that it was being used to cut cheese and would not be used to hurt her.

No-one was talking in the kitchen. In fact, there was a strange tension permeating the air. So Darcy did what she does best, she straightened her spine, plastered her best smirk on to her face and strolled into the room. In one smooth movement she swiped Hunter’s beer out of his hand and jumped up on to the kitchen counter. “Who died?”

“Oh! That’s my beer! Get your own.”

“No-one, this time. The boys are just having a little bit of quiet time to think about what they’ve done.” Bobbi continued checking the burgers while Natasha moved around the table to unwrap the buns from their plastic packaging next to Darcy’s hip.

“Are you alright Voron?” Nat spoke so quietly that it took Darcy a second to register that she had spoken at all.

“Yeah I’m just peachy. Bit spaced after my nap. Didn’t mean to sleep for so long.” Darcy tried to hold her face in some approximation of a sleepy smile. Nat wasn’t swallowing a bar of it.

“We’ll talk before I go.” Well shit, wasn’t that ominous. The Black Widow put the buns on a plate and placed them in the middle of the table, accidentally on purpose clipping Hunter on the back of the head while she did so.

“Ow, fuck sake woman. What did I do now?” Nat drew a look from Hunter to Barton who had studiously held his back turned this entire time. Hunter sighed petulantly. “Fine. Barton, I’m sorry for making insensitive and lewd suggestions in reference to your time in incarceration and the availability of soap on a rope. I hope you accept my sincerest apologies.”

The three women looked expectantly at the back of Barton’s head. Darcy knew that he was a highly trained sniper and could hold himself in awkward positions for days at a time waiting to take a shot. But in the field, he didn’t have his ex-wife, his ex-partner and his ex-surrogate baby sister waiting for him to act like a grownup.

“S’alright hunternowworries.”

“Speak up Barton.” Bobbi and Nat chorused in a terrifyingly identical tone.
Barton cleared his throat and shifted his weight from one foot to the other. “It’s alright Hunter. No worries.” He barely spoke at a volume humans would here, but it had satisfied his audience and the tension dissipated somewhat.

Darcy took this as her cue to be a grown up too and shuffled herself along the counter until she came to the corner section next to where the archer was studiously cutting more cheese than they would ever need. She drained the remainder of Hunter's beer for courage, “Hey Birdbrain. It’s good to see you.” She nudged his left arm with her knee to get him to look up at her. A soft look flitted across his face as he took her appearance in. Apparently satisfied that she had been measured and found acceptable, he nudged her knee with the back of his hand,

“Hey kid. How’s my fifth favourite lady doing?”

“Fifth? Who got bumped down the list?”

“Hill. She told T’Challa that it was me that had been climbing up on this huge panther statue that he has out the front of his castle. It’s apparently ‘A Thing’ and Hill is apparently ‘A Giant Tattletale’.” Barton tilted his head to give her a wink where the other women couldn’t see and returned to his slicing. “I’m glad you’re okay kid. I’ve missed you.” He muttered it under his breath so that no-one else would hear it. She was grateful that he wasn’t making a big deal out of things and she squeezed his shoulder in silent thanks.

Now that she had broken the tension with her surrogate big brother, she just had to find a way to break the tension completely in the rest of their rag tag group of pals. All they had to do was get through dinner. An idea struck her.

“Hey Hufflepuff! Bobbi ever tell you about the time she had to rescue a pants-less Barton from the bottom of the Mariana Trench?”

“Aw, Darcy, no.”

“That mission was supposed to be classified!”

“Was it more or less ridiculous than the time I had to rescue him from that Sorority house in Michigan?”

“The Sorority was a fuckin' front and those women were highly trained assassins, Nat.”

“Shut it Barton and go get some more beers out of the fridge.”

They made it through dinner while everyone tried to out-do the others with tales of each other’s borderline lethal stupidity in the field, while systematically reminding them all of how many times they’ve had each other’s backs. Point to Darcy. She couldn’t chip in with any stories of her own but that was fine. She wasn’t much in the mood for talking anyways. So she settled back and tried not to get pulled into going drink-for-drink with Hunter.

“Look here mate, I’m just saying. We need to stick together. These bloody women—“
“Stop right there Hunter.”

“What? What did I say? I’m being serious, we need to put up a united front against those devious hel-”

“It’s Darcy, not Barton. Barton went to go sleep the booze off twenty minutes ago so that he’s sober when he flies himself and Natasha out of here.”

Hunter took Darcy’s face in both hands, squinting furiously. “Fuck, so it is. Sorry about that darling. Don’t tell Bob or Itsy-Bitsy okay? And definitely don’t tell her that I called her Itsy-Bitsy. Capiche?”

Darcy laughed and prised Hunter’s hands from her face. “No offence taken Hunter but considering the fact you’ve been calling Nat that for the last hour, that ship has sailed my friend.”

Hunter’s face paled almost comically and he looked around the kitchen to see Nat sitting on the counter next to Bobbi, heads bent together talking in hushed tones. He seemed to mentally calculate the odds of him getting through the rest of the night unscathed and thought better of it. He bid the women goodnight and stumbled off to the bedroom he and Bobbi would be sharing.

Darcy stayed seated at the table, basking in the heat from the range and sank the last of her beer. She toyed with grabbing another, but she was teetering towards becoming a melancholy drunk.

Bobbi dropped a kiss to the top of Darcy’s head and headed upstairs to find the reason for the crash and muffled swearing that had emanated from her room. Darcy was about to follow suit when Natasha rapped her knuckles on the counter next to her. Darcy looked up obediently.

“I don’t know about you, but burgers and beer make me crave a smoke. You coming?” Nat asked as she gracefully slid off the counter. Darcy was impressed because she was fairly sure that Nat had finished off one of the cases of beer on her own merit. She nodded, grabbing her coat and following her outside.

The pair took a seat on the backdoor step. The stone was cold and seeped through the fabric of Darcy’s jeans, and even managed to permeate the beer warmth. Nat lit a cigarette that she had rustled up from somewhere and handed it to Darcy and then lit one for herself.

They sat in the deafening silence of the countryside and darkness, the only light spilling from under the doorframe and from the ends of their cigarettes.

“Some days the memories knock the wind right out of me.” It came so quickly out of nowhere, Darcy wasn’t even sure that Nat had said those actual words in that actual order. She turned it over in her mind, and took a drag of her cigarette before responding with her own thoughts.

“Sometimes they’re straight memories. Other times they’re versions that my brain has twisted to make even worse. Didn’t even think that was possible.”

“The mind is a strange thing… What do you think caused this one?” Natasha looked straight ahead. Darcy liked having conversations with her like this. It was almost like confession when her mom used to drag her to church as a kid.

“Just a dream I think.”

“You think? I sense you have a theory that holds more weight than ‘just a dream you think’.”

Darcy flicked her cigarette end away down the path, making a mental note to find the butt in the morning to put in the trash. She tucked her hands inside her coat sleeves and stared in vain into the
darkness. “The dreams or flashbacks or whatever tend to get worse whenever I relax. When I’m with people I care about and stuff.”

“Why do you think that is?”

“Shit, did you get your Psych degree while you were in Europe?”

“You’re deflecting Voron.”

Super spies, man. She fiddled with her sleeve for a moment until Nat handed her another lit cigarette. She rolled it between her fingers, watching the smoke rise in the light from the lit tip. “I think they get worse whenever I have people to care about because…” she faltered and took a fortifying pull from the cigarette. She hadn’t actually spoken her theories aloud before. Not even to the therapist SHIELD made her see twice a week until she realised that no-one from SHIELD was actually checking that she was going. “… I’m scared that it’ll happen again. That I’ll let everyone down. That… I’ll be the reason that people don’t get to go home to their families again.”

“Families are over-rated.”

That was… not the response she was expecting. She chanced a glance at Nat. She seemed to be studying intently something far off in the distance. Darcy looked out towards where she assumed she was looking and could see nothing.

“Family units are nothing but social constructs that humans have developed over the centuries in an attempt to increase their likelihood of survival.”

Damn. The woman made a valid point. It sounded like a line from a textbook. Darcy was about to voice her agreement when Nat continued, “The world we live in… Being part of a family unit does not increase the likelihood of survival. It lessens it. Strategic alliances may be fruitful, but emotional attachments for the sake of banishing the loneliness will bring you nothing but pain Voron. People leave, people fight and grow apart and some may even try, and succeed in causing you pain. Pain which will be greater in magnitude because you let them have access to the most vulnerable parts of yourself. You tell them secrets, you confess your sins and expect them to understand and absolve you in some way. Build your walls up tall and strong little one. Neither of us chose this life but it is the one we lead.”

“But what about the Avengers Nat?”

The Black Widow chuckled, “What about them? Once we were heroes. But everything has changed since then. Fractures have grown and trust has been irreparably broken. As was pointed out not that long ago, we even managed to misplace a couple of Avengers. So Darcy, what about the Avengers?”

This was the longest Darcy had ever heard Nat speak before. She could never be 100% sure with the spy-sassins, but she seemed to be speaking from an honest place. Talking into the darkness like this, staring blankly ahead really had begun to feel like confession, and apparently not just for Darcy.

“I don’t know Nat. I just don’t want to be a liability anymore.” Darcy sniffled a little as she felt tears gather around her eyes. Sharp fingers grabbed the tip of her chin a little too roughly and pulled her to face the redhead. Her eyes were flashing dangerously and Darcy could have sworn that they were almost glowing in the dark.

“Then don’t be a liability anymore. Do you understand?”

“Yes, Nat.” Darcy said as clearly as she could, with Nat’s fingers gripping her chin so fiercely.
“Good. Time for bed little one. Barton and I will wake you to say goodbye before we go.”

Darcy lay on her bed for a little while staring through the skylight in the ceiling. Nat’s words rolled around her head. They felt like a call to arms. She wouldn’t be a liability anymore. She would form ‘strategic alliances’ and stop trying to build herself a patchwork family. She would stand on her own two feet. She would no longer rely on others to save her and she would never give anyone the opportunity to let her down or leave her behind again. She would build her walls tall and strong and Darcy Lewis would not be a liability anymore.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you all so so much for your wonderful comments. Like I've said before, I have the entire story mapped out but only the first seven or eight chapters in any detail. But Darcy is being awfully demanding that I get her story posted for you all. And that's how we end up with four chapters in 24 hours. In all honesty, I'm dying to get the pace picked up a bit too.

Please feed the author. I'll reply to every comment as I see them.

Next chapter moves on a little in time, Darcy spends a few weeks with Bobbi and Hunter, training and trying out the advice from her life coach and we see the return of Nat and one or more Avengers.

PS. That flashback is NOT everything that happened to Darcy during the fall of SHIELD. There will be more to come. Thank you to everyone who offered an opinion. Please leave all the feedback, this fic is for you, after all, dear reader.
Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

The morning after the night before, training begins, Hunter has feelings and everyone cheats at Monopoly.

Chapter Notes

Wow, I cannot get over the lovely comments that you have all left so far. I'm so pleased that so many of you are enjoying this story. This is officially the last chapter before The Winter Soldier arrives, so thank you all for being so patient.

TRIGGER WARNING: There's more of Darcy's experience during the fall of SHIELD in this chapter and there's more of an overt sexual tone to the abuse and trauma. You have been warned. The flashback is at the end of the chapter and in italics, so feel free to skip over it.

I don't have a beta and so any mistakes are mine, and mine alone.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Morning Darce! You want some eggs? It's pretty nice out, you wanna come for a run afterwards?”

“Mfing.” Darcy threw herself down into a chair at the kitchen table and lay her head face-down on the cool wooden table top. Her head was pounding and it felt like something had crawled into her mouth and died.

“Bobbi, love. Tone down the chirpy would you? Some of us mere mortals actually suffer from hangovers. Here you go Darce, get that back your neck.”

Darcy looked up, face still firmly planted on the table, to see Hunter holding out a coffee mug in one hand and a strip of pain killers in the other. She carefully took the life-saving items from him and gently lifted her head. The room spun a little with the motion but she resisted the urge to be sick.

“Thanks Hunter. Forgot that Birdie was such a morning person.” She popped two pills from the pack and swallowed them down with a large slurp of coffee.

“Better get used to it mate, you’re going to be stuck with us for a while.” Hunter quickly poured himself his own cup of coffee and sat down at the table opposite Darcy.

“Because of Johannesburg?” Darcy asked, feigning innocence.

“What?” Hunter choked on his coffee mid-swallow. “Bob, have you been telling everyone about Jo’burg? It was only a small fire for Christ’s sake!”

Darcy tried to stifle her giggles and by the set of Bobbi’s shoulders, so was she. She reached out and
patted the back of his hands that were clenched in fists on the table. “Birdie didn’t tell me a thing.”

“Oh. Well good then… Wait, then what are you talking about?”

“I read the report that the Johannesburg fire department sent to that crime lord’s insurers. There’s no way his insurance is going to cover it. Probably for the best if you avoid South Africa for a while…” Darcy was impressed with herself for keeping such a straight face while Hunter spluttered and tried to settle on a defence for his actions.

Bobbi set out plates of eggs on toast for both of them, Hunters was accompanied by a very expressive eyebrow raise which earned a contritely muttered, “Thanks for breakfast Bob.” before she took a seat at the table to eat her own breakfast.

They ate in silence for a while. Darcy’s painkillers had kicked in and she was starting to feel the effects of the caffeine. Hunter had said that she was going to be stuck with them for a while and Darcy was curious as to what that actually meant in terms of her having company while she was in exile. ‘They’ll be gone as soon as they’re able. They won’t want to be stuck in a safe house with their kid-sister for any period of time. They’ll be off as soon as it’s safe to do so. Don’t get any ideas.’

“So what’s the plan then guys? Hide out until things settle down in South Africa and then head on to the next adventure?” Darcy tried to look nonchalant as she scooped eggs on to her fork.

“You trying to get rid of us love?” Hunter and Bobbi shared a glance over their coffee mugs.

“Nah, just wondering is all.”

Bobbi leaned back in her chair stretching her shoulder muscles, “Actually, we could use your ability to gain access to information you shouldn’t have access to Darce. We don’t have the resources of SHIELD anymore and we need to start gathering intel on the groups and individuals who might want to come after Hunter and I now that we’re on our own.”

“I suggested that we just get a phonebook and start at the letter A, but apparently that’s not ‘helpful’.” Hunter ducked his ex-wife’s left hand as it swung for the back of his head, entirely missing the fact that she stole a piece of toast from his plate at the same time with her right.

“I’ll write up an algorithm after breakfast and see what pops up.” Darcy brightened at the idea of being helpful. ‘It’s just so they can get out of here faster.’

“Great. You can do it when we get back from our run.”

“You can’t be serious Birdie.” Darcy groaned and scrubbed a hand over her face. The pain killers were doing their best but she’d had more than her fair share to drink last night. The thought of last night brought up a flash of Nat’s face in the dark.

“Ha!”

“Shut up Hunter. Deadly serious Darce. We’ll be here for a few weeks at least, and we need to get back into your training programme.”

“Oh Birdie, please no. Anything but that. Don’t you just want to relax while you’re lying low? You know, a little less 5am cardio, a little more 3pm naps?” ‘Bobbi shouldn’t waste her time. Won’t make a blind bit of difference.’

“Training is relaxing. If it sweetens the deal any, I brought some spare staffs with me…” Bobbi took
another drink from her mug and pretended not to see the glee on Darcy's face.

“Really? You’ll teach me how to use them properly?” Well this was another story entirely.

“Yup. But we need to work on everything, cardio, firearms and field craft. The world is a more dangerous place than ever before. You’re safe here but it’ll make me feel better if I know that when I leave you can handle yourself if anything goes wrong. That you’ll be able to hold on until someone can come and get you okay?” ‘Oh there we go. Bob’s just making sure she doesn’t have to worry about a civilian getting herself killed before the cavalry can go swoop in.’

“I haven’t got any workout gear. I’ve only got pyjamas and what I came here in.”

“We brought plenty of gear with us and I’m pretty sure Nat left you some stuff too. Check her room and see what you can find while we clear up in here.”

Darcy stepped into the room that Nat had been sleeping in. Everything looked exactly like it had when they’d first arrived, except for a black duffle bag under the window. Inside were some changes of clothes, a few sets of work out gear, a silver necklace with an arrow and a small green stone on it, a thumb drive, a packet of Russian cigarettes and a lighter.

“Again. Widen your grip. That’s it. Good. Remember to keep your elbows in.”

“Hah, you almost got her that time Darce!”

“Almost isn’t good enough. Again.”

“Birdie, we both know I’m never actually going to beat you. Can’t we chalk this one up as a win? Hunter said he was going to show me how to fish-hook someone without being caught by a ref this afternoon.”

“Is Darcy up yet? Going to teach her how to count cards today, although judging by how swiftly she beat the pair of us at Go Fish last night, I wouldn’t be surprised if the little minx already knew how.”

“Nah not seen her, but the kettle was warm when I first came down so I assume she’s around here somewhere.”

“Morning guys. Officially beat Hunter’s lap time. Yes! Suck it, mate.”

“ Lies and slander.”

“Better believe it boy. The civilian crushed your lap time. I’m going to go and grab a shower and then we can go through the latest alerts that my software threw up. Any bets as to how much your
bounties are up to now?"

"2 million. Standard bet amount."

"Double that, on $3.8 million."

"Double? You know something I don’t Bob?"

"I know plenty things that you don’t Hunter, but I lack the crayons and sock puppets to start explaining it all to you now."

"Rude."

"Pay up Hunter."

"I was set up! This game is rigged. Ganging up on me, the pair of you. Out-numbered, out-gunned. Never stood a bloody chance."

"You knew the risks that were involved before you started."

"But this is cruel and unusual, Bob. Sweet, kind Darcy, show some compassion?"

"Fork it over Hufflepuff."

"She-devils, all of them."

"How’s the search coming along Darce?" Hunter leaned on her bedroom door frame, two open beers dangling from his fingers.

"Hmm? Oh pretty well so far. I’ve managed to trace the money back to Malta so far... still working on who it was that actually took this particularly inventive hit out on you guys... But I’ve narrowed it down to one of these three." Darcy brought up three CIA surveillance photos on to her laptop screen. Hunter crossed into the room and sat on the bed opposite her.

He looked up through the skylight for a moment and then handed her one of the beers. "My life wasn’t supposed to turn out like this you know."

"Hmm? Oh, cheers." Darcy looked up from the screen and clinked the top of her beer with his before taking a matching drink.

"All this spy stuff. I was a soldier. I followed orders, marched where they told me to, pointed my gun at whoever they told me to. All for Queen and Country." Hunter stretched out on to his side on the other bed as he spoke.
“What changed?” Darcy continued to work on her laptop.

“I did I guess. Or well, the world did and so I had to adapt to survive. The world doesn’t fight wars on battlefields to protect the people anymore. It’s all secret squirrel handshakes and bloody aliens.”

“You seem to be adapting pretty well though.”

“Nah that’s all Bob. She’s dragging me through it all by the scruff of my neck. I’d have been dead a hundred times over if it wasn’t for her. Don’t tell her I said that though.” Hunter lowered his voice to a conspiratorial tone. “She’ll be insufferable.”

Darcy laid her laptop on the floor and flopped on to her back, one arm tucked behind her head on the pillow, the other resting the bottom of the beer bottle on her stomach. “Not from what I’ve heard. You were an exceptional STRIKE and SHIELD Agent from what I’ve read and the stories I’ve been told. If you discount Barbados, Guangzhou, Alexandria, that thing in Kolkata with the goats—“

“Alright, point made. I was never meant to be a SHIELD Agent. I’m not made of the right stuff. I just did what I had to, to get the job done and now…” He took a deep breath and huffed it out, “…I’m dodging bounties on mine and Bob’s heads in almost every corner of the world, all so that SHIELD could continue to fight the good fight.”

Bobbi had told Darcy what had happened in Siberia a few nights ago. About how she and Hunter had to be disavowed from SHIELD and leave their lives behind so that SHIELD could remain functioning and absolved of responsibility. “Regretting it now? Taking the hit for the others?”

“Nah. Wouldn’t have it any other way sweetheart. The team needed us to do it. All for one and one for all or whatever.” He leaned over with his beer bottle, touching the top to her’s.

“Okay D’Artagnan.” She clinked his bottle back with a small smile. “You must miss being a part of a team like that though right? Do you not miss the other Musketeers?”

“I’m still part of a team kid. So are you. We just don’t have a catchy name yet.” Hunter sat up and swung his legs off the bed. “Bob’s setting up Monopoly in the sitting room. If you hurry, you can shotgun that spot on the sofa with the 500s wedged under the cushion.” With that, Hunter sprung off of the bed and darted out the door and down the hallway.

“How do you know about that!? HUNTER!”

Later that night, Darcy tried in vain to fall asleep. They’d abandoned Monopoly when it became apparent that there was no money left in the bank because all three of them were horrible cheats. Super spies, man. They’d briefly discussed the imminent arrival of a large contingent of the Secret Avengers and it made Darcy’s chest clench.

She’d had just over three weeks of training and laughs with Bobbi and Hunter. They were considerate and didn’t flaunt their relationship around her. They never made her feel excluded or like the odd-man out. Although, in fairness, Bobbi’s idea of PDA was resisting the urge to smack Hunter on the back of the head, so consideration may not have too much to do with it. Darcy always made sure to take herself off for runs or go to bed early in the evenings so that the pair could have some
time together. She didn’t want them to resent her presence or be secretly wishing she would go away. But they had fallen into a comfortable routine and she was anxious about the new additions to the safe house and the fact that it ultimately meant that Bobbi and Hunter were leaving again, for goodness knows how long and if they would ever make it back at all.

At least whenever she was left to her own devices with The Winter Soldier, she wouldn’t have to worry too much about whether she was annoying him or getting under his feet. It was a stick-on certainty.

Another hour or so ticked by as she battled against that doubting voice, and then finally sleep claimed her…

The next thing she knew, his face pressed against hers, lips pressed into her left ear. “You’re going to tell me how to get into SHIELD’s systems and you’re going to tell me now. You think you’ve felt pain so far? That’s nothing. I’m going to slice into your arms next. With every cut you’re going to be closer and closer to death but not quite there. Do you know how long it takes for a person to die from blood loss? It takes a hell of a long time Darcy girl. You will tell me what I need to know or you are going to die a slow and painful death. Things will only get worse from here on out Darcy girl.”

Tears filled her eyes and bile climbed up her throat as he breathed into her ear. She shivered involuntarily as he whispered “Darcy girl” into her ear. He called her that when he was telling her all the reasons he loved her or how good it felt when she did things to him when they were in bed. It made her stomach turn inside out to have him whispering that as he threatened – no, promised – to hurt her so badly.

“B-but I d-don’t understand-d Ian.” She choked out, eyes still clenched shut.

“What’s not to get? Your pathetic need to worm your way into the lives of these people has meant that you have information which is of use to us. You cling to others to validate your pitiful existence. You show-off and curtsey to them in the hopes that they’ll see how clever little Darcy girl is and include you in their games. But they never did Darcy girl. So you had to force your way in through your little backdoor. And now you’re going to give the code to me, so that Hydra can create its perfect order.” He gripped the base of her neck, flashing the blood covered knife in front of her eyes. “What’s the code Darcy girl?”

“No.” she whispered. It was barely more than an exhale. In a flash he had lanced the knife through the skin and tissue a few inches above her armpit on her left side. She cried out as the blood began to run down the side of her breast and down her torso to join the blood steadily pouring from her legs.

“What’s the code Darcy girl?”

“No.”

More screams, more cuts until she couldn’t distinguish which pain came from where. Every inch of her body screamed in white hot agony. Her bones, her muscles, her skin. Everything. Ian was relentless. He never paused or let up. Cut after cut as she refused him access. And then he stopped.

The hand holding the knife cupped her lower back gently. He used his other hand to raise her chin from where her head slumped forwards. He exposed her neck gently. Tears ran across her cheekbones and into her hair as she waited for him to begin again. Instead, he kissed her neck lightly. In that little secret place that only he knew of. He’d discovered it their first night together. If he kissed it just-so, it would send a jolt of desire through her body and make goose bumps appear on
every inch of her skin. It was such a base, instinctual reaction. Her body felt the kiss and the electricity zipped through her and her skin tightened. The pull against all of the incisions and the revulsion at her body’s betrayal made her cry out.

Chapter End Notes

So Darcy receives another heart-to-heart, slightly more emotionally healthy this time? From Hunter of all people. The next chapter will see the arrival of The Winter Soldier. I'll try to get it up tonight, still working on the dialogue a bit so that I can find Bucky's voice.

Please feed the author. I do love hearing all your feedback, and although I have the story mapped out, there's always room for any suggestions you guys may have. I live to serve, dear reader.
Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

Nat and Barton come back with Captain America and The Winter Soldier, something happened on more than one occasion in Chihuahua, family dinner is a disaster, and then there were two.

Chapter Notes

Okay, so full disclosure. This chapter was a pig. My brain kept skipping ahead to the next part and refused to co-operate with tying up these loose ends. So I'm not a hundred percent happy with it, but I'm as desparate as you all are to get this Bucky/Darcy show on the road. This is the final part of the set-up and the pacing ramps up from here. As before, there is no beta so any and all mistakes are mine.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Darcy stripped out of her sweat-soaked pyjamas and threw them on to the foot of the bed. She straightened up the bed sheets and retrieved her pillows from where they’d fallen to the floor in her struggling. She pulled the bag Nat had left out from under the bed and pulled out a set of work out gear. If she wasn’t going to get to go back to sleep, she could go for a run and pretend that her pounding heart and shortness of breath was from a circuit of the perimeter.

It was still mostly dark but the horizon had a red tinge to it. She ran her way around the perimeter, pushing any and all thoughts of her nightmares from her mind. Channelling her inner-Nat she focused on the thud of her boots into the ground and the slight burn in her muscles. She was so concerned with keeping her mind clear that she almost missed the displacement of air as something flew overhead. Throwing herself flat to the ground, she winced as her ribs and hipbones hit the deck. The grass and heather was long enough that she would be mostly obscured from view. She heard a slight hum in the air followed by the sudden materialising of an aircraft that closely resembled a quinn jet. It had parked in the open ground just south of the lodge, but blocked Darcy’s path. Before panic could entirely set in, the jet’s rear doors opened and a familiar flash of red hair came into view.

Nat strolled out of the jet, followed by Captain America. Darcy had met him once previously at a fundraiser for a charity that helps young girls get into STEM programmes. It had been a brief introduction, shake of hands and then the broad shoulders of justice had moved on to circulate around the rest of the room. ‘He probably won’t even remember that we’ve met before. Although Barton once said that he had perfect recall, so he probably does remember and can perfectly recall the fact that the rented dress hadn’t fit properly.’

Darcy was about to push herself up off the ground, the morning dew had started to soak through her leggings and shirt, when two more figures left the jet. The shorter man was Barton, he had his arm
slung around the shoulder of his companion. Darcy raised herself up a little bit to get a better look at him, when the morning light reflected off a silver metal arm. Huh. So that was The Winter Soldier. The man in question shrugged Barton’s arm off his shoulder and gave him a shove forwards towards the lodge. Darcy wasn’t sure what surprised her more, The Winter Soldier engaging in good natured rough-housing with Barton, or the fact that he had managed to shove the archer several feet with minimal effort. Darcy had tried to shove Barton off a bar stool when he had reached the bottom of a bottle of tequila by himself and she hadn’t so much as made him wobble. Super spies, man.

Once the group had all made their way into the lodge, Darcy pulled herself up on to her feet and made her way up the remainder of the slope. When she got into the hall, she was about to go straight up the stairs to shower and change, but the kitchen door was open. Through the gap, she could see that the new arrivals had convened there and the kettle was whistling on the boil. Employing the panther walk that Barton had taught her, she softly padded over to get a better look into the kitchen.

Nat stood by the range, apparently on caffeine duty. Bobbi stood next to her in her pyjamas, apparently nonplussed about having half of the Avengers in the house. ‘That’s because Bobbi actually owns some self-confidence and couldn’t give a fuck what anyone thinks.’ Hunter was also in his sleep pants and was perched on the counter passing mugs off of the shelf and on to the table. Barton was sat next to him decidedly not being helpful by juggling four of the eight mugs that they had in the lodge. But what drew Darcy’s attention the most was the sight of The Winter Soldier and Captain America. The Winter Soldier was sat at the head of the table, his back to the door, watching Barton juggling and Captain America was stood at his right shoulder with his back to the door also. Darcy took another step forwards, dodging the squeaky floorboard and keeping herself flush with the shadow cast by old grandfather clock. She held her breath and listened.

"Steve, you and I both know that I ain’t good for PR right now. I’ll be fine here. Even saw what looks like a shooting range over in the far field. I’m better off here keeping out of trouble. Think you can manage the same, punk?"

"'Course I can, jerk.” He nudged the dark haired man’s shoulder with his hip. “Just, are you sure you’re okay spending so much time in close quarters with a civilian?” Darcy’s blood ran cold at the mention of her. “Romanov and Barton vouch for her but I’d rather you were just taking care of yourself you know?”

“Steve-” The Winter Soldier began to reply but Darcy had heard enough and was frankly surprised that the room of super spies and soldiers couldn’t hear her heart hammering in her chest.

She stepped through the door, “Yeah, it’s a shooting range. Bobbi and I set it up a couple of weeks ago. We’ve only used icers on it so far so I don’t know how it’ll fare under live rounds but feel free to use it whenever. I’m not allowed to use it unsupervised anyways. Hey guys. Captain Rogers,”

She nodded to the Captain and he looked like he was about to reply when Hunter piped up,

“Too bloody right you aren’t Darcy. I was unconscious for four hours last time. I missed out on fajita night. Bobbi makes brilliant fajitas. Hey Bob, do you remember that time in Chihuahua when- ow!”

A packet of teabags sailed through the air and hit Hunter squarely in the face and with no small amount of force.

“That’s enough about Chihuahua, Hunter.” Bobbi’s threat of retribution was clear.

Still juggling mugs Barton tilted his head in thought, “There’s a real place called Chihuahua? I thought it was just a type of small dog?”

“Barton, you’ve actually been on mission in Chihuahua before. How can you seriously be asking
that question?” Nat asked, hands held out for the mugs he was juggling. Barton obediently handed them over.

“Wait, weren’t you on that mission too Bobbi?”

“Um…” Bobbi’s eyes looked uncharacteristically wide.

A memory seemed to strike the archer, “Oh yeah, wasn’t that the night when-“

Before he could complete his sentence, Bobbi had a baton held to his throat. “Not another damn word Barton.”

“No ma’am.”

Nat finally turned to face the remainder of the room, “Okay, now that that’s out of the way…”

Darcy saw an opportunity to move everyone on before Barton could commit Hari kuru “Breakfast?”

“Yes, everyone except for Darcy, out of the kitchen!”

Captain ‘just call me Steve ma’am’ Rogers, Barton and Nat would be giving Bobbi and Hunter a lift to their next destination and so they would all be leaving that evening. Darcy spent the day putting all the data she had collected for Hunter and Bobbi on to an encrypted drive that Nat had brought her. She was just putting the finishing touches to the dirty limerick she was including for Hunter’s benefit, when there was a knock on her door.

“It’s open!” Darcy called out while she worked on a rhyme for ‘icer’.

Natasha stepped into the room, closing the door softly behind her. “Did you check the thumb drive that I left you?”

“Huh?”

“The drive I left in the bag for you, have you gone through it?”

“Nope. Don’t worry, haven’t so much as peeked. Want me to grab it for you?” Darcy leaned forwards to pull the bag back out from under the bed with one hand, the other balancing her laptop.

“Oh voron, will we ever make a spy of you? I left it for you to see.” Natasha sat on the bed next to her shaking her head.

‘Great. The Black Widow is disappointed in you. Nice move jackass.’

“Sorry Nat.” Darcy picked at the edges of her space bar.

“Don’t be sorry. Just make sure you look through it. And do it soon.”

“Cryptic much?” Darcy raised one eyebrow in a pale imitation of Natasha’s own trademark facial expression.
“Oh good, you’ve been practicing. Come help me make dinner. It’s going to take both of us to keep the boys under control.” Darcy flushed. There’s no way Nat knew how long she’d actually spent practicing in front of the mirror right? Nat curled her arm around her shoulders in an uncharacteristic show of physical affection, doing nothing to ease Darcy’s unsettled mind. If anything it made things worse.

“Okay Nat, let me just finish up with this and I’ll be right down.”

They managed to get everyone sat down and eating a passable dinner without any major injuries. Barton may disagree with the assessment of his injury as not being major, but Natasha assured him that if she had intended for him to suffer a major injury, she would have caused one. Darcy felt sorry for him and snuck him a slice of cheese when Nat wasn’t looking.

Steve had tried to make them all say grace at the beginning of the meal but gave up when he opened one eye to see everyone including The Winter Soldier sneaking bites of their lasagne. They had fallen into comfortable conversation for the last ten minutes or so while everyone ate. Bobbi and Hunter were explaining which route they were going to take round the Mediterranean while they investigated the man who had placed the largest bounty on their heads. Barton and Nat piped in with alternatives every now and again. Captain Rogers offered them tactical advice when they’d started discussing their plan to storm an honest to god castle in Italy. Super spies, man. The Winter Soldier just sat and efficiently worked his way through three helpings of lasagne and four bread rolls without saying a word. Darcy was content to also keep quiet and just listen to some of most incredibly competent people she knew talking shop. ‘Just like a kid at the adults’ table. Only speak when spoken to.’

It was all going fine until,

“So how did you get the intel in the first place? Can’t have been easy to get that much detail, and for it to be so recent?” Darcy wasn’t paying attention to Captain Rogers as she was trying to choose which section of lasagne to take next. That piece had more crispy edges but this one had more filling.

“Darcy got all the intel for us. She can hack her way into anything, quick as you like. In and out before anyone is the wiser. Ain’t a system been invented that our Darce can’t get into. Ain’t that right love?”

Darcy’s head snapped up at Hunter’s emphatic declaration. She realised that the entire table was now looking at her intently. “Um.” She cleared her throat and took a drink of water. “Yeah I guess so.” ‘Eloquently put, idiot.’

“Wait. The girl who kept hacking into SHIELD. That was you wasn’t it? They said the system was impossible to gain access to. But someone kept getting in and out without a trace.” Captain Rogers gestured towards her with his fork. Before she could work out a way to deflect his attentions, he continued. “Fury cancelled the entire cyber-division’s summer vacations. Unless they could find out how you kept getting into the system that is. Just harmless pranks, though...” He paused to chew and swallow a mouth of lasagne around a chuckle, not noticing that Darcy had gone sheet white and her hands were gripping the edge of the table. “...God, what was it that you did to the spell checker? Oh yeah, that was it. Every time the agents typed in the term ‘Agent’ it replaced it with ‘Princess’. But
only once they’d submitted their final draft. That was clever. I’ve never seen Fury look so pissed.”

Captain Rogers finally looked up to see four sets of eyes silently telling him to shut up, the set immediately to his right were telling him he was an idiot and he wasn’t sure why. “What, because I’m Captain America I’m not allowed to find practical jokes funny?”

The table stayed silent and Darcy willed the anxiety that was threatening to overwhelm her to just wait until she could be alone. She flinched slightly when Bobbi’s hand landed lightly on her right knee, providing her with a grounding touch. Hunter gestured towards her glass silently with the bottle of wine in his hand. She nodded minutely and he topped her glass up. When Barton placed his hand on her left knee, mirroring Bobbi’s and squeezing gently, she took a steadying breath and reached for her now very full wine glass. She raised it in Captain Rogers’ direction, tilted her head and pasted on a smile, “Classic prank.”

As soon as Darcy could get away from the table, she darted up to her room, sat on the bed and pushed her head in between her knees. She had a whole seven minutes to herself before half of SHIELD’s former field staff were sat on the floor around her.

She kept her eyes squeezed shut, with her head between her knees and so her voice was rather muffled, “Guys, I’m fine. Don’t worry.”

She could hear the sceptical looks, but thankfully they kept their opinions to themselves. She felt three hands stroke her back, one after the other and heard three sets of footsteps go down the hall and down the stairs. As soon as she felt her heart rate return to somewhere approaching normal and she didn’t feel like everything was spinning, she slowly raised her head. She kept her eyes closed and let herself fall backwards on to the bed. Her legs still dangling over the edge. She had to get a hold of it all and go back down the stairs. Her favourite super spies would be leaving soon and she needed to make sure Captain Rogers didn’t think she was a complete idiot. ‘Too late.’ She should also really introduce herself properly to The Winter Soldier. They were going to be sharing the house after all, and if he was going to be-

“Nat’s right, you do think really loudly.”

Darcy leapt to the floor, landing in a crouch and pulling her icer out from its hiding place in one smooth movement. “FUCK, Barton.” She huffed out when she realised who was still in her room. ‘Three sets of footsteps, four super spies. Good counting there genius.’

In fairness, Barton looked appropriately sorry for frightening her. He even held his hands up for good measure. She slumped out of her defensive stance and sat with her back against the leg of the bed. “The fuck are you doing up here still Barton?”

“I hate when you say my name repeatedly. You sound like Bobbi.”

“Sorry, Barton.” She tried and failed to keep the smirk off her face.

“Little shit. You aren’t sorry at all. Aw, well. There are worse people you could sound like, other than my ex-wife.” He shuffled across the floor and came to sit next to her, legs stretched out parallel to hers. His legs weren’t much longer than hers so he could bump his right boot off of her left. “That
was a strong response there kid. Not knocking the technique or nothin’, but what’s got your fight or flight mode all kicked up like that? Was it what Steve said?”

Darcy fiddled with her icer between her fingers. She picked at the casing around the muzzle. Barton flicked the back of her hand to stop her. Darcy sighed, “Just bad memories Barton.” She brought her head down to rest on his shoulder. “Be honest, how much of an idiot did I make of myself at dinner? The Winter Soldier about ready to run the gauntlet with the UN instead of stay here another minute with the basket case?”

“Do you really think he’s in a position to judge you on the basis of mental stability?”

Darcy sucked in a sharp breath and slapped his thigh, “Clint Francis Barton! That is not funny.”

“Wasn’t really kidding kid. Look, I’m sorry for what Cap said. He’s not exactly known for being subtle. You seen his outfit?”

“You seen yours Barton? I’ve been meaning to ask, where on earth did you get that last one? The purple smock get-up. I know you can’t exactly wear your SHIELD tac suit anymore, but what were you thinking?”

“Okay, okay I get it. You’re done with the serious chat. Just be careful with Barnes okay. He’s as safe as he can be now that all the programming is gone, but he’s still seen some shit.”

“Don’t worry Barton, I promise not to break The Winter Soldier.”

“I’m more concerned with him breaking you, little one.” He took such a deep sigh that Darcy’s head rose and fell with his shoulder, “But I remember how good you were with me after… everything and so—”

Darcy patted his thigh, “It’s alright Barton. You bring me any tequila back?”

“Yeah there’s a couple bottles in the crates of equipment that we brought in from the jet. Wait, why you asking about the tequila?” Barton extricated Darcy from his shoulder and held her at arm’s length with both hands.

Darcy quirked her head to one side “Well, you remember what happened exactly prior to the first smile you cracked when you came to visit me after New York?”

A slow smile curled across Barton’s face as he thought of the memory and then his face fell immediately as he pieced together what Darcy was suggesting, “Aw, Darcy, no. You cannot do that to Barnes.”

“Aw, Darcy, yes.” Darcy dissolved into giggles, all previous tension falling away.

“I can’t get out of here fast enough.”

“I’m going to miss you too Birdbrain.”

And then there were two.
So that's it. It's just Bucky and Darcy now. 
Tomorrow they will actually interact!!
Thank you all so much for all of your comments and suggestions as to how Ian will meet his maker.

Please feed the author.
I will respond to everyone as soon as I get the notifications.
A bead of cold water dripped down her spine, making her shiver. “Just make a choice Darce.” She whispered to herself. She held up the two black long sleeved shirts. One had a V-neck, the other a crew neck. Beyond that, they were identical. “This is ridiculous.” She dropped the V-neck back into the bag and kicked it under the bed. She pulled on the shirt and tucked it into her pants. She pulled her wet hair into a ponytail, high on her head, squeezing any excess water onto the floor and accidentally soaking her socks at the same time. “Awesome.” She sat on the bed and stuffed her damp feet into her boots. She reached for her compact and took a look at her face.

She poked at the thin skin under her eyes. She had permanent bags now where the skin clung to her eye sockets. She dragged her finger along the sunken grooves under her cheekbones. Make-up wouldn’t cut it. Why try to polish a turd? The Winter Soldier wasn’t going to give a shit if she put her eyeliner on or not.

Not that she cared what The Winter Soldier thought. ‘Liar.’ She’d gone over this in her head, at length last night when she couldn’t sleep. Darcy had said her goodbyes to her favourite spies only a few hours earlier. She had felt her lip trembling when Bobbi and Hunter had both crowded around her for a hug in front of the jet. One look at a positively bored looking Nat, casually leaning against the opening in the aircraft had forced the tears back. Nat nodded her goodbye and Darcy’s resolve had grown. She shook hands with Captain Rogers, making sure that she gave him the firmest shake she could manage. He’d then gone off to have an intense bromantic goodbye with The Winter Soldier. Darcy hadn’t been sure if the good Captain was going to break down into sobs or if they were going to make out a little bit. It ended when they did the whole ‘bro-hug' thing and The Winter Soldier had punched him pretty solidly in the arm. Boys. As she was watching this all unfold, she hadn’t clocked Barton finishing his pre-flight checks and come out to say goodbye. So of course he’d taken the opportunity to sweep her off her feet and into a hug, spinning her around in circles as she shrieked. She wasn’t sure what was funnier, the chorus of “BARTON” from Captain Rogers, Bobbi, Hunter and Nat or the bemused look on The Winter Soldier’s face.

She’d stood next to The Winter Soldier as they watched the jet fly through the force field and then...
engage its cloaking technology and disappear. Its engines were pretty much silent so Darcy had no idea when they were actually out of sight. So she stayed standing staring at the sky until she began to shiver uncontrollably in the cold of the night. She took that as her cue to go to bed. She’d been so transfixed on trying to see anything in the night’s sky that she hadn’t noticed that The Winter Soldier was still stood next to her. It startled her a little, and she’d bid him a flustered goodnight and practically ran to her room. ‘Pathetic’.

The self-same man was currently asleep in the bedroom across the hall from hers.

“There enough water in there for another cup?”

“FUCK!” Darcy winced internally and prayed that it didn’t show on her face. She’d given herself a pep-talk before coming down the stairs. She couldn’t keep being so dependent on the super spies. She’d cried for about an hour after she’d gone to bed. They had important lives to go and lead and as much as she loved hanging and training with them, they were not her family.

“Sorry. I, uh, didn’t mean to scare you there.” Darcy took a discrete breath and turned away from the range to greet her new housemate. Her eyes rose to meet his and she had to fight to keep a neutral expression. The night before, The Winter Soldier had been dressed in his one-sleeved tactical jacket and combat pants. All black, head to toe and looking every inch the super spy-sassin. But the man stood in-front of her now was wearing a light grey long-sleeved t-shirt and some pretty regular looking jeans. Looking nothing at all like a super spy-sassin, if you discounted the fact that she could definitely see the outline of a throwing knife on the inside of his right forearm. He’d leant on the back of one of the dining chairs, pulling the sleeve of his shirt taught or she never would have seen it. ‘Oh good, he’s armed and your icer is still upstairs. Idiot.’

“It’s alright. Pass me your mug over will you?” She offered him a tight smile. “We never really got properly introduced last night. You’ve probably already been briefed, but I’m Darcy. Darcy Lewis.” She poured the water from the kettle into his mug, giving it a quick stir before holding it out for him.

“Right, uh. James, Sergeant James Buchanan Barnes miss.” She heard him shift his weight from one foot to the other as the floorboard underneath him creaked. He sounded, nervous? ‘He probably just doesn’t know what to make of you after last night. Pull it together.’

She poured the water from the kettle into his mug, giving it a quick stir before holding it out for him. “Oh please don’t with the ‘miss’ thing. Darcy is just fine. We’re going to be sharing a roof for a while. First names will do.” She tried to keep her voice level and straightened her spine for good measure. He kept himself propped up against the back of the chair with his right arm and reached out for the mug with his left, metal, arm. It was the first time Darcy had really looked at any part of it. She had read that his arm had been recovered from Siberia by the CIA. It had been full of nasty KGB bombs and some really quite cool tech. It had taken Darcy an entire night to read up on enough just to understand how the sensors in the fingers had worked. The photos had shown that the arm was made up of thousands of shifting plates and interlocking joints. The hand in front of her now seemed smoother, she could see the places where there were articulated joints, but it gave the impression that it was far more organic. Said hand quickly grasped the mug and took it from her, and its owner suddenly had quite a sheepish look on his face. ‘You’ve been staring at his bionic hand you idiot.’
“Look, uh. I don’t know how much Romanov or Barton has told you about who you’re bunkin’ in with. But, uh.” He trailed off and his eyes skittered around the room, clearly unsure as to how to proceed. Darcy decided to just nip this in the bud now. She could deal with traumatised super spies like nobody’s business, but this? This was fast approaching kicked puppy and it was all her fault. She had to detach herself and get control of this dynamic before she did something stupid like try to give him a hug, just to make that awful perplexed look leave his face.

“James?” She paused for him to look her in the eye. “Don’t worry about it. I’ve done all the requisite reading. You don’t need to give me your life story. I studied half of it in 8th grade and the rest? Well I’ve read the reports and it’s ancient history. Anything I need to know about Sergeant James Buchanan Barnes as he stands before me?”

James appeared to consider what she had said a few times, before standing up straighter and running his hand back through his hair. “Bucky.”

“Huh?” he’d spoken so quickly, Darcy hadn’t quite made out that he had in fact uttered a word that belonged to the English language.

He tried again with a little more conviction. “M’name’s Bucky.” ‘Oh hell. You are in no way, shape or form, adequately equipped to have a face to face conversation about this. You’re screwed.’

Darcy scrubbed her hand over her face and looked to the ceiling for a moment. “Okay. Back in a minute.” She didn’t wait for a response, and darted up the stairs to her room.

She reappeared in the kitchen a few moments later, two cigarettes in one hand, the lighter in the other. It seemed to work with other former-soviet ex-assassins.

“I’m going to have a smoke and finish my coffee at the back door. You want to join?” Bucky nods but doesn’t say anything. “Okay grab my coffee mug for me then?”

Darcy lit her own cigarette first and then handed the other and the lighter to Bucky. She took a deep inhale and stared straight ahead. Just like in confession.

“You’re not scared of me?”

“Not particularly. Except when you do that stealth appearing out of nowhere shit. But the rest of them scare the crap out of me with that too.” Her situational awareness was leagues better than it used to be and she was getting better at being stealthy herself, but one of them would occasionally get the drop on her. The first few times it had happened, it’d triggered episodes. Barton soon learned to announce his presence but being stealthy was second nature to super spies and so Darcy had learned to breathe through it and not go into a full panic.

Bucky seemed to get with the programme fairly quickly and stood staring straight ahead too, taking lazy draws from his cigarette. “So you just trust that you’ll be safe here with me.”

“About as much as I would with anyone I met less than 24 hours ago. So, suitably wary considering my massive pile of trust issues…” Darcy tried to inject some levity into her voice but it wavered towards the end. She snuck a glance sideways. A piece of hair had fallen forwards and was
skimming his cheekbone as his jaw worked back and forth. He was apparently thinking hard about something. Darcy was about at capacity with this conversation. She was teetering dangerously close to trying to adopt a fifth super spy. ‘No. No more trying to build yourself a family. These people are competent, highly trained operatives. He’s here for his safety, not to be your buddy.’ ‘Look, just treat me like you would Nat or Barton. No sneaking up behind me or shit like that okay? I made Barton wear a cat bell for a whole long weekend once. We on the same page?’

At her question, he turned to face her and looked her dead in the eyes. “Yes.”

It was the most sure she’d heard him sound so far. ‘He probably didn’t know what to make of being stuck in this house with some civilian girl. At least now he knows you’re not going freak out on him again.’

“Good. Now I have a date with my laptop. Come find me when you want to do something about lunch.”

Several hours of working through everything on Nat’s drive and Darcy was still no closer to understanding what it was she was looking at. There were hundreds of maps with strange sets of symbols on them. She’d tried cross referencing the locations but there was no pattern to them. ‘Nothing is random. There is always a pattern. Why aren’t you getting this?’ There were small unique files attached to each symbol but nothing Darcy was doing was allowing her to read them. Her decryption programmes weren’t producing anything other than meaningless strings of numbers and letters. ‘Ain’t no system you can’t get into huh?’

“What the hell is all this Nat?” Darcy stretched her legs out on the bed and let her head thump against the wall. She closed her eyes and tried to focus.

Loud footsteps made their way up the stairs, followed by more in the hall and a knock on her bedroom doorframe. Darcy opened one eye and saw Bucky standing with that ugly cream serving tray with two steaming bowls. Darcy’s mind flickered back to a startlingly familiar scenario with another ex-soviet assassin not all that long ago. She opened both eyes and sat up straight, gesturing him to enter the room. He complied and lowered the tray so that she could take a bowl of… soup? Was that supposed to be soup? It may have been at some point. Right now it appeared to be lumps of half frozen, half charred vegetables in a greasy liquid.

She obediently took a bowl and spoon and set her laptop open on the bed next to her. Bucky looked like he was about to leave her in peace when he caught sight of her laptop display.

His hands were still full so he gestured with his elbow, “They're maps.”

“Yes…” Darcy tried to swallow a spoonful of soup and instantly regretted it. “… yes they are. I’d gotten about as far as that with them myself but that's about it.”

“T ook you five hours for all that?” Darcy searched his face for some sign of condescension but the left side of his mouth was ticked up in a smirk, so she took it for the teasing it apparently was.

“I get that they are maps. I just don’t understand what these symbols are.” She enlarged a section of a map of the Eastern Seaboard and gestured for him to take a look. “There’s no key and I’ve never
seen anything like them before. And these same symbols show up on every map, there's thousands of them.”

Bucky placed the tray down on the other bed and stooped to look more closely at the screen and then pointed casually, “Those ones are stash boxes… these are dead drop points… and those ones are safe houses.”

“What?” She grabbed the hand closest to her and pulled him down to sit next to her on the bed, looking up at him expectantly.

“It’s an old Leviathan code. It ain’t been used in decades though.”

“Huh…” A thought struck Darcy and she tilted her head, eyes taking Bucky in, her own mental measuring tape coming out.

Bucky shifted uncomfortably. “What?”

“Ssh, I’m strategizing.” She held a finger up. ‘Change of plan. We can be friendly, don’t have to be friends. It’s a strategic alliance. Who doesn’t want to learn from the greatest assassin in the world? He has an impressive skill-set, even once you take out those directly related to assassination.'

“What?” Bucky stared back at her, concern starting to edge over his features.

“Okay Bucky, here’s how this is going to work.” She crossed her legs and tucked them underneath her, turning to face him fully. “You’re going to teach me your Cold War spy ways, and how to throw knives properly...” She tapped a finger on the concealed blade she had noticed in the kitchen, earning her a raised eyebrow. She continued undeterred, "...and I’m going to teach you how to prevent soup from turning into... that.” Darcy waited for Bucky to catch up with her train of thought. It took a while. She was almost ready to rescind the offer.

“You ain’t like regular dames are ya?”

Darcy couldn’t help the grin that spread across her face. “No I ain’t.”

Bucky’s eyes travelled over her and he leant back on his hands before asking, “You cook?”

Darcy snorted, “No, but I can make that range in the kitchen co-operate. We got an alliance Bucky?”

Darcy just rolled her eyes and pushed herself off of the bed, “Let’s go make something edible for lunch.”

Chapter End Notes
So what do we think? I was really nervous about posting this chapter as I don't want to disappoint.
Please give me any feedback you have, I'm always looking to improve.

Next up: we see how the strategic alliance works out.
Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

We find out why Bucky was the only Howling Commando who didn't wear a hat, the Scottish Porridge Oats guy will no longer be able to have children, Nat may have a heart after all, Bucky gets stabbed and Safe-House-Confession is a thing.

Chapter Notes

Okay so the events of this chapter were formed in my brain maybe a month ago? So I'm both excited and apprehensive for you all to read it. After a few comments, I've altered the formatting. Italics are Darcy's internal monologue and flashbacks are in bold. Hope this clears things up and makes this chapter a bit easier to read.

As always, there is no beta so any and all mistakes are mine. Enjoy.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

After three days they’d made some pretty solid headway on Nat’s drive. So far Bucky had helped her identify all of the symbols that Nat used for her map. Darcy had managed to incorporate them into a decryption programme that was slowly revealing the files attached to each location. It was slow going though, due to the sheer volume of locations, each with a uniquely coded file attached. The Black Widow didn’t do things by half. She’d finally caught a break when she discovered that the locations were actually categorised into five groups. Darcy had been stunned into silence when she realised that the locations were grouped by owner. Nat, Barton, Hunter, Bobbi and the real coup de grace, Fury. She’d had to go make herself a drink when she’d figured that one out. The largest and most evenly distributed network was Nat’s. The others’ had no pattern to them and had large gaps on the map so Darcy supposed they were incomplete lists.

There was a knock on her doorframe, “Coffee’s up.”

“Thanks Bucky. Grab a seat, I’m almost done. Is it still raining?” it had been raining almost non-stop for the last two days and they’d been stuck in the lodge. Darcy was glad she had so much work to do on the drive or she’d have been driven to distraction. She had no idea what Bucky did with his time, but he seemed content enough.

“Yeah but it’ll be off in the next half hour. Give it another half hour to dry off and we’ll be able to go do some practice at the shooting range.” Bucky handed her a mug and settled down with one of his own on the other bed. “Any luck with the pre-processing?” As they’d been working Darcy had explained what she was doing. Verbalising each step helped her think but Bucky had picked up a good grasp of most of it without much difficulty. Super spies, man.

“Great actually, just finishing up this section of code and then I just need to let it do its thing.” She took a drink from her mug and the rich dark liquid seemed to warm every part of her. “Mmm how do
“Coffee always tastes better when someone else makes it.” Bucky pushed his hair back from his face in what Darcy was quickly noticing was some sort of nervous tick. “So I’ve been meaning to ask you about a few things…”

“One sec.” Darcy quickly closed the loop she was typing and saved her progress. “Okay shoot.”

“Good one. Did you honestly just say ‘shoot’ to an assassin? Idiot.”

“You said the other day you had ‘cyber resources for days’? How you managing all that? Stash boxes, I get. All that?” He gestured to her laptop with his coffee mug. “It’s all still science fiction.”

They’d gotten onto the topic while they were working on the drive. Darcy had only mentioned her off-shore bank accounts and myriad of identities in passing. She hadn’t mentioned the dubious methods she employed to achieve them. She wasn’t sure how the best friend of Captain America would take it. Former Hydra assassin or not. “That’s awfully personal there Barnes. You make a habit of asking to look up a girl’s skirt?”

He leaned back on his left hand and sighed, “Not in the last fifty years I ain’t. If it’s too personal you don’t hafta answer…” His face gained what she had privately referred to as his ‘kicked-puppy-face’. She hated that face. And she hated causing it more.

“No it’s not that, it’s just. All this? It’s all I’ve got, that’s all I can list on my CV under Special Skills and I can’t even put it on my CV. Not that it’s even a marketable skill at all and-“

Bucky shifted himself forward, cradling his coffee cup in both hands between his knees. “How bout if we make it a secret for a secret?”

Darcy’s interest was piqued, “Only if I can ask the question. You got to pick yours after all.”

“You got an accord. Ladies first.” He gestured for her to go ahead.

Darcy tipped her head from side to side, mulling it over. Don’t ask about JFK. Don’t ask about JFK. For the love of god, don’t ask about JFK. “So this has been bothering me for a while, and I completely understand if you don’t want to answer, and if it’s a bit close to the bone but…” Bucky swallowed, his grip on his mug tightening. “How come you were the only Howling Commando that didn’t wear a hat?” A slight whoosh was all the warning she got before a pillow thumped into the side of her head. “Oi! It’s a serious concern! Like, did you have a hat but lose it? Or was it because of your hair. Please don’t tell me it was a hair thing.” Darcy’s giggles soon turned into full on laughter.

“You know what Lewis?” Bucky mock glared at her.

Darcy raised her eyebrow challengingly “What?”

“It was a hair thing.” Bucky sank backwards to lie on his back, staring up to the skylight. “Alright, yuk it up. Come on, your turn to spill your guts. How you managing to pull all this cyber-voodoo then?”

Suck it up. Just tell him. What’s the worst he could do? Tattle on you Captain America. The good Captain already thinks you’re an idiot after dinner. “One? It’s not voodoo. Voodoo is a very real thing, and you shouldn’t mock it. Two? It’s a very illegal and morally ambiguous combination of identity theft and fraud, interception of electronic communications and extortion. Oh and quite a lot of hacking. Lots of hacking.” While she spoke, Bucky had turned onto his side to face her and she couldn’t read the expression on his face. “What?”
“It’s just. Sometimes I can’t quite believe the things I’m hearing y’know? You look like such a sweet dame and here you are committing international felonies from your bedroom. Numerous international felonies.” *Here it comes. He’s about to give you the ‘Captain America would be disappointed in you’ speech. You had to show off didn’t you? Because mouthing off about your exploits has always worked so well for you in the past.*

“Hey, it’s not like I’m hurting anyone! I would never intentionally harm someone, doing what I do. I just gain shady information about shady people and leverage it to create a favourable outcome. More often than not, that means I get a bump in one of my offshore accounts.” Darcy held her breath waiting for Bucky’s verdict.

“You saying you’re loaded doll?” The playful glint that suddenly appeared in his eyes made her previous anxiety melt away. She hadn’t realised how tense her shoulders were until she finally let them drop.

“Like you wouldn’t believe. I could buy an island if I wanted to.” Darcy couldn’t really buy an island. But if she pooled all her resources she could buy a pretty big chunk of one.

“This shady information and leveraging that you do. Reckon it’s something you could use to help Stevie out? Find out what’s going on out there and give them the advantage?” Bucky looked a bit apprehensive about asking for her help. His face was fast approaching kicked-puppy.

“Of course. My specialty is intercepting communications. I could see about creating some software to mine for anything that might help… like, if I modify this array… and set parameters to… and if I calibrate this…” Darcy opened up another command window and started working away.

Sensing that he’d lost Darcy to her laptop for the next few hours at least, Bucky stretched out on to his back to watch the rain bounce off the skylight. “You are something else, doll.”

Nine days later…

Darcy was bouncing around the hallway outside Bucky’s room. “Okay Bucky, you promised me knife throwing lessons. Today is the day. No more stalling.” She called through his closed door. She hadn’t been in the room since it became ‘Bucky’s room’. It felt too personal. They were building a strategic alliance, not a friendship. This seemed like a good line to draw.

She finally heard his resigned voice carry through the door, “Yeah I know I did. Just... after seeing you on the shooting range, the idea sorta lost its appeal.”

_Time to bring out the big guns._ “Bucky, are you welching on a promise? Are you a welcher?”

Bucky immediately opened his bedroom door and scowled at her. “Go get the training knives from the trunk under the stairs.” To his credit, Bucky took the high road and chose to ignore the triumphant grin on Darcy’s face as she turned on her heel and bolted down the stairs. Instead he settled with just muttering to himself, “Can’t believe Romanov thought to pack training knives. I’ve been set up.”

“Bucky stop complaining, it’s going to be fun!” Darcy called back up the stairs.
“Alright, we’ll start off with the balanced knives. They’re double bladed, so keep your fingers off of ‘em.” Bucky pulled some all-matte black knives out of their case. After judging their weighting, he handed one gingerly to Darcy. He walked around to her back and tapped her right hip lightly. “Bring your right leg back and rest your weight on it. Good, now left foot in front.”

“Like this?”

He walked back around and placed himself between Darcy and the make-shift targets (cereal boxes) he had set up on the picnic table, about 50 foot away from where they were standing. “Yeah. Now hold your thumb across this flat side here. Now put your fingers on the other side like this, and hold it in a pinch.” Darcy followed his instructions and copied the way in which he was holding the knife. “Good.”

Next he came to stand to her right, placing his feet in the same stance. “Now, uh. Bring your right arm up like this, parallel to your body. Keep it straight. No, like this.”

When Darcy didn’t quite get her elbow at the right angle, he dropped his own arm and stood at her back, hands moving her arm into the right position. “Like this. Good.” His left hand was still splayed across her shoulder and his right hand was still moulded around hers. He was standing almost flush against her back. Darcy would have put good money on there being exactly one inch between their bodies. He was close enough that she could feel his body heat through her workout gear.

“As nice as this is Bucky, I’d like to throw the knife now.” She tucked her chin to her right shoulder, chin almost resting on the hand he still had placed there.

Bucky leapt backwards like he’d been scalded. He quickly schooled his features, straightened the hem of his t-shirt and pushed his hair back from his face. “Oh uh yeah, so we’re going for a mid-range throw. Aim for the middle cereal box. Bring your hand back to level with your ear.” He came to stand parallel to her again, motioning for her to copy him. “Slightly bend your wrist towards your arm. That’s it. Now don’t release the knife until your arm is fully extended. Don’t bend your wrist too much, or the knife will spin more than you want it to.”

Darcy took a deep measured breath in.

“On the count of three okay?”

Darcy nodded in understanding.

Bucky stepped backwards, “Don’t worry if it goes wide or doesn’t stick into the box alright? It’s just a practice. One… Two… Three.”

Darcy flicks her right arm forwards, releasing the knife. This was immediately followed by her left arm completing the same motion. Both actions were performed on an exhale. She used the momentum of her left arm throw to spin on the spot, bending her knees to reach a third knife from her boot with her right hand, completing the revolution of 360 degrees with a final throw.

Darcy surveyed her targets. Tony the Tiger had been hit squarely between the eyes, the Scottish Porridge Oats guy had been hit in the sporran and the Cockerel on the Kellog’s box would never crow again, a perfect hit to the jugular. All three boxes remained standing, not even so much as wobbling.
Happy with the results, she turned to give Bucky the most innocent look she could muster.

“You just— you just hit. All three. When did you take those knives?”

Darcy gave her best ‘The Black Widow is bored with you’ face, “What like it’s hard?” The stoic facial expression failed miserably when it was up against a thoroughly perplexed looking Bucky. “Oh Bucky I’m sorry, but your face! Look, I’ve been trained by Hawkeye and Mockingbird. They both get hard-ons for unusual weaponry. Do you really think I wouldn’t know how to throw a knife?”

“But you asked.” Shit, the kicked puppy look. You just had to show off didn’t you? He was doing you a favour and you took the piss. Fix it.

“I know. Look, I have a bit of a thing where I don’t really feel comfortable around knives.” Darcy panicked as she tried to find a way to explain herself without going into excruciating detail. “I can throw a knife from a standstill, with a stationary target, no issues. But I need to know how to use a knife accurately during a fight. I don’t want to be able to kill anyone, quite the opposite actually. I want to be able to incapacitate, maim and dismember, but that’s it. I need to be in complete control of what I’m doing.” Darcy’s heart felt like it was in her throat. He’s going to ask questions. You’re going to have to tell him what you did. What you caused.

“Hey, hey. It’s fine. Gimme a couple days to come up with somethin’. You just pulled the rug out from under me. You got a habit of doin’ that kid.” Bucky threw his right arm around her shoulders and turned her to walk back to the lodge.

“Sorry Bucky.” Darcy ducked her head, wriggling out from under his shoulder.

“Ain’t nothin’ to apologise for. We can work on something else in the meantime. What can I do you for?”

Darcy stopped to think for a moment. When she lighted on the idea, she sprinted to catch up with Bucky’s far larger strides, “When you first arrived, you managed to shove Barton, like, eight foot. How’d you manage to get him off balance like that? The guy was in the fucking circus.”

Bucky stopped in the doorway, and turned to face Darcy who hadn’t quite caught up yet. He braced himself against the frame and gestured to his left, “Bionic arm.”

“Damnit.”

“All else fails, hit him with that icer of yours. He’ll go down like a sack of shit.”

Two Weeks Later...

It was another cold drizzly afternoon. Not quite cold enough to snow. Just wet and miserable. Darcy was taking the opportunity to replenish the stocks in her bug-out bag. It was a familiar routine. She’d already swapped out all the food stuffs and bottled water. She had just started testing all her batteries when Bucky had come into the living room to clean his rifle. Darcy shuffled further back on the floor, clearing space for Bucky to work.
Darcy could have sworn that she had more flashlight batteries than the ones currently piled in front of her, when she spotted a couple peeking out from under the coffee table by Bucky’s leg. “Bucky can you pass me the-?” Bucky handed her the batteries in question without looking up from the rag he was oiling. “Thanks.”

When Darcy was happy that the contents of her bag were all functioning, she started packing them all in. She was unaware that Bucky had stopped what he was doing and was watching her, “Think you got enough there?”

She coiled the length of nylon rope around her forearm and attached it to a clip on the outside of her bag. “Doesn’t hurt to be prepared Bucky.”

“For what, nuclear holocaust?” Bucky had apparently given up on cleaning his rifle and had decided that teasing her was going to be far more fun.

“Take it you were never a boy scout?” Course he wasn’t. He was too busy working any job he could to take care of him and Captain Rogers. Well done genius.

“Do I look like a boy scout?” You’re lucky he’s tolerating your awful sense of humour.

“Point made.” She gave the bag a jerk, making sure everything inside it was settled into place. “Barton gave me this kit back in New Mexico. I’ve kept it with me ever since. You never know what’s going to go down. So I keep everything I’d ever need in here.”

Bucky picked his rifle back up again and began reassembling it. “But what if you can’t grab it? What then?”

Darcy blinked a few times. She had always had her bag with her. Ever since Barton gave her it. “What do you mean?”

“Things go fubar. You can’t grab the bag. Then what? You got a back-up?” Bucky thumped the sights on his rifle back into place with the heel of his hand. It clicked loudly, metal on metal.

“No. But-“ Darcy’s heart jumped in her chest. She didn’t have an answer for him.

“I get Romanov’s point then.” He continued when he realised Darcy wasn’t following his train of thought. “With the drive. She’s giving you back-up. Helluva back up plan.” He placed his now reassembled rifle in its bag, softly shaking his head.

“You’re telling me. How do you spies have time between all the action sequences and espionage to set up a network like that? I mean, that’s some serious admin. It’s so extensive! And imagine what all of it looks like, if that’s what she’s showing me!?” Darcy’s software had only just finished decrypting everything the day before.

“Darcy. That is all of it. And then some.” Bucky tilted his head to the side and looked Darcy over. “She must really trust you.”

Darcy felt the colour rise in her cheeks at both his comment and his appraising look. “She barely knows me.”

Bucky stood up, slinging his rifle bag over his shoulder. “She’s handed you the keys to her entire network. That ain’t just a back-up plan. That’s all of her back up plans. That right there? That’s plans B through Z. That’s the sum of her whole life, and parts of the others’ lives too.”

Darcy stayed in her position on the floor. She heard Bucky put his rifle bag under the stairs and then
move into the kitchen to start on dinner. Fridays were his day to make dinner. She pulled Nat’s flash drive out of the pocket in her bag. She ran her finger over the plastic casing, her fingernail catching on the slot in the side. The actual memory on the stick was a SHIELD-style nano-memory disc. It was about 5mm in diameter, wafer thin and semi-transparent. They could hold terabytes of data though. The rest of the drive was just plastic to make it look like a regular flash drive.

She popped the disc out and held it between her thumb and forefinger, squinting at the light shining through the dark red plastic. A thought suddenly struck her. She’d seen something similar before. She rummaged around the front pocket of her bag and pulled out the necklace Nat had left behind. The delicate silver chain was pretty tangled but her attention was on the pendant with the green stone. She pulled the knife out of her boot and, using the tip, she pried the green stone out of it. She dropped the stone into the pocket with the drive casing and slid the memory disc into the setting. It was a perfect fit.

She untangled the chain and put the necklace on. She fiddled with the arrow and the pendant, that now held the disc, until they faced the right way. Darcy then tucked the necklace into her shirt and went to help Bucky with dinner.

Four days later…

Bucky spun and his hand snapped up to catch the knife that had been very close to embedding itself in the back of his shoulder. “Good. You almost had me that time. Aim a few inches higher. Avoid the shoulder blade. You won’t throw it hard enough to go through the bone.”

Darcy grit her teeth and blinked sweat out of her eyes. She and Bucky were pacing around each other in circles. She feigned left and then dove right, tucking into a roll, coming up behind Bucky again, throwing another knife behind her. This time she aimed higher and if Bucky hadn’t snapped it out of the air in time, it would have entered into the join between metal and skin. Darcy’s triumph was short lived as Bucky started circling again, and she only had one knife left on the brace inside her sleeve. She fell into step with him, keeping equidistant from him at all times.

“Better. Keep your footing lighter, you need to be able to react quickly. For example, you ain’t ready to react to me doing—” Bucky suddenly lunged towards her and held a knife to her lower back. She could feel the cold steel against her skin. Her brain stuttered and suddenly everything was silent. She couldn’t even hear the sound of her own heaving breaths. Bucky pulled her flush against him and whispered in her ear “—this.”

Suddenly all the sound came rushing back and every sense seemed dialled up to eleven. In what seemed like a split second and an eternity all at once, she ragdolled, and slid to the floor, out of Bucky’s grasp, leant back on her hands and swept his legs out from underneath him. The second he hit the floor, she sprung to her feet and threw her last remaining knife into the join between his neck and shoulder. It slid in like a knife through hot butter, almost to the hilt.

Reality came rushing back at the first sight of the blood seeping into Bucky’s t-shirt. “Fuck! Bucky! Oh my god are you okay?” She fell to her knees head in her hands.

“Doll. Doll! I’ll be fine.” Bucky pulled her hands away from her face. At the residual fear in her
eyes, he pulled his hands back and held them up in surrender for her.

Darcy’s eyes zeroed in on the blood now leaking out at a faster pace, “No you won’t oh my god look at you. Let me just-“ she reached to pull the knife out.

Bucky batted her hand away and sat up. “Stop! Don’t pull it out yet.” He waved her away and pointed towards the back door. “Come on, get into the house. I’m fine. Go get the med kit from under the stairs.”

Darcy hesitated. “Bucky, are you sure?”

“I’ve suffered worse. Just go get the med kit and bring it to the kitchen.”

Darcy hauled the giant green box on to the kitchen table, and sprung the catches open. “Here.”

Bucky was sat on the counter next to the sink. Darcy had no clue how he’d gotten up there and zero inclination to ask right now. “Hand me that silver packet there.” He gestured into the med kit.

Darcy followed where he pointed and pulled out one of many silver packets that contained a sealed hypodermic needle. She handed it to him and he set to opening it. He threw her an incredulous look when she tried to hand him an alcohol wipe before he inserted the needle into the skin next to the wound.

“It’s some compound the Wakandans gave us. It speeds up healing. Even quicker than super-soldier serum.” He tensed his neck muscles and jaw and slowly pulled the knife out. Darcy couldn’t look away but she felt like she might be sick. Incredibly there was no more blood, and the edges were already starting to knit back together. “Stop looking so worried kid. This old soldier has survived worse than being stuck with a training knife.”

Darcy’s knees finally gave and she slid to the floor. “I’m so sorry, I just-“

“You reacted to an unexpected attack. You did good. If I was anyone else, you’d have been able to get a clean get away.” He slid down to the floor with her. Shoulder to shoulder. A sudden thought seemed to occur to him and he tipped his head back against the kitchen cabinet door. “God, Stevie’d never let me live this down.” A fond look flashed across his face. Darcy had seen it any time Steve was mentioned. Because he wishes Steve was here rather than an absolute moron who stabs him.

“You miss him?” Darcy tilted her head back to rest on the cabinet, all her muscles were screaming at her as the adrenaline dissipated.

“You miss him?” Darcy tilted her head back to rest on the cabinet, all her muscles were screaming at her as the adrenaline dissipated.

“Who, that punk? Nah. Wish I knew what he was gettin’ into though. Gets into all sorts when I’m not there to pull him out of it.” Bucky bumped her shoulder and gave her a small smile, but the kicked puppy look was back with a vengeance. Fix it.

“Yeah, I’ve been thinking about that. I might have something to help. I’ll be right back.” Darcy hopped up to her feet, a little unsteady at first, but she made it up to her bedroom and back unscathed.

She handed it over to Bucky. “What’s this?”

“It’s my old Stark phone.” Bucky’s face blanched at the name Stark. You’re making it worse. “Don’t
worry, it has been cleansed of all traces of Stark. All custom Darcy-Tech. I was saving this for your birthday next week. But I figure I can give it to you early, what with me stabbing you in the neck and all.” *Smooth.*

Bucky started flicking through the menus Darcy had put on it and then looked up at her from his seat on the floor. “You pull my birthday from my file?”

“Nah, 8th grade history textbook.” She threw him a wink, willing things to be okay.

Bucky flipped the phone round and held it out to show her the screen. “What’s this do?”

“It’s a smaller scale version of that programme I created for the Secret Avengers. It’ll allow you to pick up any and all traces of one Steven Grant Rogers.” Bucky stood up and opened his arms, carefully asking permission to hug her. She acquiesced, and he swept her up into a hug and spun her around just like Barton had over a month ago. She tried to reign in her delighted giggles, “Bucky!! Put me down! Bucky! You’ve just been stabbed.”

Bucky let her down to stand in front of him and he tapped a finger under her chin.

“You’re somethin’ else.”

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The pull against all of the incisions and the revulsion at her body’s betrayal made her cry out.

Ian pressed his lips into the shell of her ear again and whispered “What’s the code Darcy girl?” and the fight left her.

“0F63P25677C…”

After she had given him access, Ian pulled out a phone she had never seen before and spoke briefly. “I’m in Sir. This will allow me to stop any attempts to override the launch of the helicarriers. Yes Sir.”

Darcy’s mind whizzed as she tried to fight through the fog of the pain and the hurt to work out what Ian was doing. Suddenly Ian was crowding her again, the hand with the knife was spread across her lower belly while the other stroked her cheek.

“You did such a good job Darcy girl. You gave me exactly what we needed. No-one can stop us now. And it’s all thanks to you.” He trailed one finger down her neck, across her sensitive spot and breathed gently into her ear. “One more thing Darcy girl. One for the road if you will…”

Her breathing quickened to a staccato rhythm as his hand traced down her stomach, the flat edge of the knife dragging downwards until…
“Damnit.”

Darcy was exhausted. She couldn’t have gone to bed more than an hour ago. After accidentally stabbing Bucky during training, she’d been pretty withdrawn. After not speaking and staring into space for the entirety of dinner, Bucky had sent her to bed. She hadn’t expected sleep to come, but no sooner had her head hit the pillow had she been out. That was, until the nightmare had crept in.

She curled onto her side and willed her breathing to level. She tried her circular breathing but it kept catching in her throat. *Fuck it.* Darcy pulled herself out of bed, tripping on the sheets and stumbling across the floor. She clutched the door frame to steady herself. She waited a second and strained over the sound of her heart throbbing in her ears for any sound of Bucky moving around downstairs. Hearing nothing, she tucked her icer into the back of her leggings. She familiar weight grounded her slightly. With that, she crept down the stairs and into the kitchen.

Bucky was sat nursing a cup of tea. At her arrival into the kitchen he looked up, “I didn’t wake you did I?”

She shook her head and opened one of the bottom cabinets. “No, you didn’t d-don’t w-worry Bucky.” She found one of the bottles of tequila and set it on the counter. She leant over to the sink, and picked up a glass that had been left to dry after dinner. She tried to take another steadying breath and poured herself two fingers of amber liquid.

She leant against the counter and knocked back her drink.

“Hey Darce, you alright? Your hands are shaking.” Bucky stood and stepped towards her but stopped when she flinched. “Shit doll, what happened?”

Darcy shook her head and poured another drink. “S’just a nightmare.” She knocked this one back too. Relishing the burn and trying to focus on the sensation of the alcohol hitting her stomach.

Bucky clenched and unclenched his fists by his sides, “Must have been one helluva nightmare kid. Want to talk about it?”

“Nope.” She popped the p and considered pouring another drink until she decided to cut out the middle-man and took a swig straight from the bottle.

Bucky pulled his hair back from his face. “Can’t believe I’m saying this but, you sure? Sometimes helps put some perspective on it. Remind ya that it’s just a dream.”

“Hah. If only that was the case.” She cocked an eyebrow at him and took another swallow. Her heartbeat had stopped deafening her and the alcohol was staving off her shivering. She tipped her head back and squeezed her eyes shut, willing all remnants of her nightmare to go away.

But it’s not a nightmare. It’s a memory and it will never go away.

“Darcy?” Bucky had that kicked puppy face on again and Darcy was in no state to deal with it. Only one thing she could think to do.

“I’m going to sit at the backdoor and have a smoke. There’s only a couple left, but fuck it. I’m sure Nat’ll bring more when they check in next week.” She set the bottle of tequila back down on the
counter and tried to relax her jaw and loosen the tension that was still gripping her.

“Whatever you want doll, you got it.” Bucky looked like he was going to try to take another step towards her.

“Give me a minute and I’ll go get them.” Darcy took the stairs two at a time. She saw the grey striped hoodie that Nat had left. For the first time, it clicked that it belonged to Barton. He’d loaned it to Darcy the first night after the Destroyer attack. She pulled it over her head. She picked up the pack of cigarettes from the bedside table. She flipped the packet open and saw that there were only four left. She stuffed it in the pocket of the hoodie with the lighter and went back downstairs.

She found Bucky already sat on the backdoor step. She sat down next to him and pulled out the contents of her pocket. Bucky tugged a little on the sleeve that was bunched up around her wrist.

“Think that sweater is big enough for ya?”

Darcy smiled as she realised it still smelt a little like the Archer, the scent grounding her a little more.

“It’s Barton’s.”

“Course it is.” Bucky accepted a cigarette from her, but took the lighter from her. He lit the cigarette and passed it to her before taking one and lighting it for himself. Darcy pocketed the lighter and the packet and took a large draw. She held it for a count of five and then blew the smoke out into the night air, praying that her anxiety would float off with it. “You want to tell me about your nightmare yet?”

“They aren’t nightmares.” Might as well be honest now that he’s seen you go full on crazy. “They’re flashbacks. Some form of PTSD.”

Bucky nodded and took a pull from his cigarette. “Used to be called shell shock. You could spot the fellas with it a mile off. That hundred yard stare. You got a bit of that same look about you.”

Darcy leaned back against the closed door. “You’ve got me all figured out Barnes.”

“Doll I ain’t got the faintest idea of what to make of you. And I’ve met a whole lotta dames in my time.”

Darcy could feel his eyes on her but she kept staring straight ahead. That was how Safe-House-Confession worked. “Smooth.”

She felt his arm move next to her and she smiled slightly to herself as she realised he was pushing his hair back from his face. “Nah you’re picking me up all wrong. Um… you don’t react the way I expect you to.”

“Like when I flip out during family dinners or stab you in the neck?” She rolled her eyes. “You ain’t scared of me. Of what I’ve done.”

She flicked her cigarette end away and turned to look at him, “What do you want me to say, Bucky?”

“Nothin’. It just don’t make sense. I can’t be triggered anymore, but I ain’t exactly a hundred percent safe to be around. With my track record, I wouldn’t blame you if you’d have told them all to put me somewhere else. It’d have been the smart thing to do kid. You ain’t smart with me. If you’re dealing with something that’s hurtin’ ya… This could have been a million times worse kid.” He dropped his head into his hands, so his voice was a little bit muffled, “This is coming out all wrong. Tell me you get what I’m tryin’ to tell you here?”
She could hear his kicked puppy face. She tapped him lightly on the shoulder so that he’d look at her. She needed to make sure that he heard and understood this. “Bucky, were you aware of who everyone was that was in this house when you arrived?”

Bucky sat up but still looked confused. “Yes…”

“Then you know that all my friends are highly skilled killers. Two of them were forced or coerced to kill people against their will and all of them have killed people by choice. It would take an entire fleet of psychiatrists a lifetime to work their way through that mob’s laundry list of issues.” And mine.

“I’m not saying this to trivialise it or belittle anyone’s personal trauma, trust me.” Seriously, you have no idea. “But no, Bucky, you don’t scare me. Not what you were made to do, and not you.”

Bucky’s eyes seemed to brighten a little, “You’re not scared of me.”

“Keep saying it and maybe one day you’ll believe it.” For the first time she realised how blue his eyes were, not as grey as she’d thought they’d been.

Bucky gave her a soft smile, “Every day if I hafta.”

Darcy poked him in the chest, but didn’t pull her hand away. “Careful Sergeant, your Brooklyn is showing.”

Bucky’s hand covered hers and he turned it so that their palms were facing. “It’s been doing that a whole bunch lately.”

“Hmm, yeah I’ve noticed.” Darcy was so distracted by his cool metal fingers slotting in between hers and warming to the touch, that she didn’t notice how close his face was getting to hers. Her eyes blurred as they tried to focus on his as he leaned in.

“That all you’ve been noticing Darcy girl?”

Darcy’s blood turned to ice and every muscle in her body stiffened. “What did you just say?”

“I said…” Bucky didn’t notice her change in demeanor and leaned across to tuck her hair behind her ear and whisper, “That all you’ve been noticing Darcy girl?”

Darcy jerked backwards and stumbled to her feet whispering, “No.”

Bucky leapt to his feet after her but her hands shot out to push him away. “Darcy, what’s wrong?”

“Stay the fuck away from me.” Her head was swimming and she couldn’t stop her thoughts from skittering around her head. What’s happening? Why is this happening? Oh God no.

Darcy turned tail and fled into the darkness away from the house.

She only made it a couple of paces before Bucky caught up and grabbed a tight hold of both her arms, pinning them to her body. He tried to search out her eyes but she was struggling against him and looking anywhere but at him. “Darcy, what is it? Talk to me?”

“LET ME GO. LET ME GO. LET. ME. GO.”

At the abject fear in her voice, Bucky faltered and let go.

Darcy ran as fast as she could down the slope to the edge of the perimeter. She glanced back up the hill and saw that Bucky was still standing there, arms hanging by his sides.
Fuck. I just need a minute. Just a minute to shake this off. Fuck.

She had come to a stop right at the edge of the perimeter. It ran along the top of an almost sheer drop of craggy rocks. A little way down the hill from the rocks was a cluster of tall fir trees, the river curled its way around the far side of them. It was a clear night and so the moon was reflecting off of the fast flowing water.

She watched the water for a moment, before pulling out the packet of cigarettes. She managed to pull one out but as she tried to light it, her shaking hands made her fumble the lighter and it bounced off the rocks, through the barrier and down to the bottom of the rocks.

Fuck’s sake.

She stuffed the unlit cigarette back into her pocket. All she had to do was clamber down these rocks, it was 20 feet at the most, retrieve her lighter and then clamber back up. No harm no foul. The force field would allow her biometrics to pass through the with no problems and would only go into lock down if it was for more than a few minutes or someone other than her, or Bucky, tried to enter while she was outside of it. She cast a glance up the hill. Bucky hadn’t moved.

This will only take a minute.

As she stepped through the force field, she heard Bucky call out after her. She turned to see him speeding down the hill after her. With everything that had happened, her fight or flight instinct was still kicked into high gear and the sight of a man in the dark running at superhuman speeds towards her made her react. She leapt down the rocks, tumbled into a roll and ran flat out for the cover of the trees.

Within seconds, Bucky had followed her into the cluster of trees. Her breathing was harsh and ragged as she crouched behind a fallen log. She could hear Bucky calling her, “Darcy, what the fuck are you doing?” His eyes searched for her through the dark. Panic making them flash wide. “Look, I’m sorry. Whatever I did I’m sorry okay?” Darcy could hear his voice breaking but she couldn’t bring herself to go to him. “I swear I’ll stay clear of ya if that’s what you want. Just come back to the house okay? It’s not safe out here.”

She squeezed her eyes shut, willing all of this to just stop. Her eyes snapped open when she heard the sound of a twig snapping under foot from the other side of the trees. The opposite side to both her and Bucky. It was then that she saw the moonlight glint off of the barrel of a rifle.

“Darcy!”

Chapter End Notes

Ooooooooooh, I'm a big old meanie huh?
Feel free to express yourself in the comments.

Thank you so so much to everyone who has left kudos and comments so far. You're all so lovely and wonderful and I make giddy squeals everytime I read them. So thank you for keeping the author so well fed.

Next up: pssht, not telling ;P
Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

We find out the what happens next, that there are benefits to shaving your legs over waxing them and that there are certain things you can say to a woman to crawl right under her skin, no matter who she is.

Chapter Notes

Researching for this chapter has seriously screwed with my Google suggestions, so I hope you appreciate it. And I may actually be on several government watchlists.

There is no beta, so any and all mistakes are mine. Please let me know if you come across any.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Darcy froze. She was hidden from Bucky but in a moment she was going to be in full view of the four soldiers advancing on her position. The sudden shift in the source of danger had Darcy springing into action. She threw herself back over the log, and began darting through the trees towards Bucky. They had to get back across the force field to safety.

The moment she reached Bucky’s position, he grabbed her left hand and they began running back towards the rocks. Darcy could hear the soldiers crashing through the trees behind them. They broke out into the open and she pulled out her icer. She half turned back, still running full tilt, firing shots at the soldiers that were gaining on them. Anything to slow their attack. Two went down, as another three teams appeared from the tree line.

As they reached the bottom of the rocks, the first two soldiers caught up to them. Bucky grabbed the first to arrive by the front of his tactical vest and tossed him up the rock-face. He used his left arm to swing himself up after him. Darcy drops into a crouch and thrusts the knife from her boot up into the second soldier’s thigh, pushing as hard as she could. The soldier stumbled backwards and she took the tiny advantage to begin to scramble up the rock face after Bucky. The icer in her hand made it hard for her to get a good hand-hold to haul herself up.

A vice-like grip closes around her ankle. Darcy turned around trying to loosen it, only serving to twist her ankle. A sharp pain lanced through the back of her head as it collided with the rocks. The soldier dragging her to the ground.

Darcy was sprawled on her back. The soldier gained on her again. She drove her heel into the hilt of the knife in his thigh. He went tumbling backwards as the blade dug into bone. From her position she could see Bucky twist the first soldier’s neck and toss him to the ground. Suddenly the usually invisible force field began to vibrate and hum. The lockdown. The soldier’s leg had landed across the barrier. They had three seconds before they were locked out. Darcy could hear the twelve sets of boots gaining on them, fast. Bucky’s face a mask of anger as he zeroed in on the soldier lunging towards Darcy.
She did the only thing she could. She raised her arm and pulled the trigger. The blast from the icer knocked Bucky backwards, through the force field as it locked. In the same moment, the soldier slammed the butt of his rifle into her temple and she blacked out.

When Darcy comes-to she’s no longer on the cold ground. She’s lying on a thin mattress. The cold from a concrete wall is seeping into her left arm. She slowly opens one eye a sliver but there’s nothing but darkness. There’s no air or sound so she assumes she’s in a cell of some kind.

“If you ever find yourself held captive, don’t give away anything. Find out as much as you can about your situation and surroundings without letting on.”

Darcy shifts her legs slightly. Her right ankle aches but the sharp pain isn’t there from before she blacked out. She must have been given pain killers. And god knows what else. She slowly tilts her head to try to make out any details of her room. Pain blossoms at the shift in pressure on the back of her head. She clenches her jaw and more pain radiates from her right temple. Right. That bastard slammed his gun into my face. Now she had to figure out how long she’d been out-cold.

“I woke up in the back of a moving truck. I had no idea how long it had been since they had grabbed me and stuck me with a tranquiliser, outside of the hotel in Bahrain. But I knew I’d shaved my legs that morning, so I felt for any stubble on my legs. Helped me figure out that it had been a couple of days judging by the hair-growth.”

“Birdie, how does that brain of yours come up with these things?”

“Experience.”

Darcy curled in on herself and felt her shin under her leggings. It couldn’t have been more than a day or so. Nat or Barton should have reached the safe house by now.

Without warning, the lights came on in her cell. Everything was a stark white and Darcy clenched her eyes closed, wincing. After a couple of attempts, she managed to get her eyes open. She was lying on a cot that took up half of what was definitely a cell. The door was behind her head and in the far corner was what looked like a metal toilet bowl. Yup. Definitely a cell.

She took inventory of herself next. She was still wearing her leggings and long-sleeved pyjama top. They had taken Barton’s hoodie, her boots and her necklace though. Damnit. No knife, no necklace. Fuck. Darcy was just about to try and work out where in the world she could be, given how long she had been out, when her cell door slid open, disappearing into the wall.

She crouched on the bed, back against the wall when two armed guards stepped into the room. They grabbed an arm each and roughly dragged her backwards out into the corridor. She tried in vain to catalogue any distinguishing features of her surroundings, but there was nothing. Plain white walls, plain white polished floor. Her socked feet skidded as she tried to gain purchase. The force of being dragged backwards stopping her from getting her legs back underneath her.

When the guards suddenly stopped, she tried to rag doll out of their grip but they held on fast. She heard a whoosh of a door like the one to her cell opening. The guards pulled her into what was
painfully clearly an interrogation room. The room was plain white like everywhere else had been so far. In the middle of the room was a metal table and a matching chair on either side. They forced her into one of the chairs and clasped handcuffs around her wrists. The chain of the handcuffs was then attached to a loop on the table. Once she was sat and restrained, the guards silently left the room, the door closing automatically behind them.

Darcy gave it a second and then pulled experimentally on the handcuffs. The chain pulled taut and the metal bit into her wrists. She froze as she felt the restriction. The harsh reality of her situation finally sunk in. She felt her heartbeat tick up. You’re in an interrogation room. You’re bound to a table. Someone’s going to come soon looking for answers. They’re going to force you to give them what they want again. You’re not going to be able to hold out. You’re going to cave. You’re not strong enough. You don’t even know who’s holding you right now. Darcy’s breathing became laboured but before her thoughts could spiral any further, the door opened again.

In stepped a tall blonde woman. She was dressed in a sharp charcoal pantsuit. Pointed stilettos clicking on the polished floor as she walked over to take the seat opposite Darcy. She lay several manila folders down on the table between them. Darcy spotted the UN logo embossed in the top right hand corner.

“Good afternoon Miss Lewis.” Shit. The woman looked Darcy dead in the eyes. Her face was carefully blank of any expression. “My name is Agent Lucy Kennedy.” Shit. “I’m with the UN Enhanced Being Control Taskforce.” Shit.

The woman opened the first folder and began to read from it, “Two days ago, you were apprehended in Perthshire, after you assaulted three Green Berets…” If she wasn’t so terrified Darcy would have smirked at the fact that she had taken down three of the British Army’s elite. “…with an unregistered, untested, illegal firearm…” Shit. “…Aided and abetted an internationally wanted fugitive in evading arrest…” Shit. “…And we have evidence that you have been engaging in the illegal obtaining of classified intelligence, in order to assist the individuals who have flouted the UN’s Sokovia Accords, the group formerly known as the Avengers…” Shit!

Darcy had stopped listening. They know everything. How do they know everything? Wait. They can’t know everything. You wouldn’t be in an interrogation room if they knew everything. Fuck. “…You are currently in the custody of the EBC Taskforce. Due to the nature and severity of your crimes and the dangers you pose to international security, you will be held here until you are handed over to the CIA. You will be extradited back to the United States for sentencing. I think it would be suffice to say that at that point you would be lucky to see the light of day again.”

Darcy was numb. She could barely form a coherent thought. She wasn’t in some super-villain’s secret base. She was being held by the UN and she was going to be handed over to the CIA. Then why are you in interrogation? Focus. Stop letting her scare you. She wants something. They always want something. “But I don’t work for the CIA Miss Lewis. I work for the United Nations. I’m here to make sure that international law is upheld and justice is served. That includes justice for you Miss Lewis.” Huh?

Agent Kennedy opened another folder. “In 2014 you were hung by your wrists, subjected to torture by one… Ian Boothby. An Agent of Hydra and your boyfriend at the time. Your prescribed course of psychotherapy was never completed and you never fulfilled your prescription for anti-anxiety medication. The files obtained from SHIELD are incomplete, but it can be assumed that you suffer from Post Traumatic Distress Disorder and several stress induced anxiety disorders?”

Darcy daren’t move a muscle. How does she have parts of my SHIELD files? Barton had those buried. She shouldn’t be able to have those. Agent Kennedy closed the folder and folded her hands.
together on top of it. Her eyes softened and if Darcy hadn’t been exposed to so many super spies, she might have thought it was genuine concern colouring her expression.

“Well I certainly think that given your mental state, certain dispensation could be given. It wouldn’t be too much of a stretch to suggest that given your instability, you could easily have been manipulated and coerced into assisting these dangerous individuals. There’s definitely a case for reducing the penalties you would face, given the extenuating circumstances. Wouldn’t you agree Miss Lewis?”

Again, Darcy stayed frozen. Any semblance of agreement may as well be a confession of guilt. The Sokovia Accords followed along the lines of international anti-terrorism legislation. She would have no legal rights. She was entirely at their mercy.

Agent Kennedy picked up the third folder and held it up. “There’s no point in denying your guilt Miss Lewis. We have all the irrefutable evidence right here.” She opened the folder and removed a large photograph and a sheet of paper, placing them on the table in front of Darcy. Darcy flicked her eyes to the photograph. It was of her in the London flat, using her Stark Phone. “While your apartment in London was under surveillance we tracked these data packet transfers.” The agent gestured to the top half of the read-outs on the paper. And imagine our surprise when these read-outs suddenly started appearing, originating from where you were apprehended?” Fuck. Agent Kennedy gathered up the items and placed them back in the folder. “And that’s just for starters.”

Darcy began to shake. Tears welled up in her eyes. She jutted her jaw to prevent her lips from trembling and clenched her fists on the table. Agent Kennedy placed the folder back on the table, a small smile of triumph spread across her pink perfectly painted lips.

“Despite the dire situation you find yourself in. You have a few options.” The final folder was opened and two sheets of paper were placed facing Darcy. “The document on the left is an agreement to co-operate with our investigation, and release to us the software you used to aid the fugitives formerly known as the Avengers. In return, you will be tried by the International Criminal Court, and fulfil your prison sentence in the United States.” Agent Kennedy paused to give Darcy time to consider the implications. “The document on the right is an agreement to comply with the contents of the first document, but in addition you will work for the EBC in the efforts to bring the vigilantes to justice. In exchange for this, you will receive a commuted sentence and may actually get to walk away from all this before your 60th birthday.”

Darcy slowly raised her eyes from the contracts on the table. With a plaintive look on her face, Darcy finally spoke. “Agent Kennedy?”

“Yes Miss Lewis?” To say that the agent looked like the cat that caught the canary would have been under-selling it.

“You have lipstick on your teeth.”

Chapter End Notes

Ooooh lordy!
The response to the last chapter was incredible. Thank you all so much.

I’m still writing away, this just felt like I good place to stop. The rest will go up later on today.
Bucky will be back, don't worry.
Any guesses as to what happens next?
They fell into somewhat of a routine. The lights would come on in her cell and she would have a few minutes to adjust before a guard would come in with her breakfast. Sometimes it would be fruit, other times it would be a buttered bread roll. Every meal was accompanied by a cup of water and two painkillers. As soon as she was finished eating, a guard would reappear to take away her tray. Darcy couldn’t see where the cameras were though. She had run her hand over every inch of the cell that she could reach. Nothing.

Darcy would then spend the next few hours coding in her head, doing some tai chi or practicing her Black Widow faces, but without a mirror she couldn’t be sure if she was improving. Eventually lunch would arrive. When she was finished with her lunch, the guards would come and take her to the interrogation room.

Agent Kennedy would sit there and repeat their first conversation almost verbatim. The only difference to proceedings was that Agent Kennedy hadn’t worn lipstick again. Darcy would sit in silence until the agent had enough and summoned the guards to take her back to her cell.

Darcy didn’t struggle with the guards anymore. She didn’t cower when they entered her room. She behaved when they took her to the showers every other day, and generally did as she was told. She was the perfect prisoner. That was except for the fact that she was not cooperating in interrogation.

After the eighth night, Darcy noticed that her lunch had started arriving slightly earlier than previously. Just a fraction each day, until one day her lunch arrived and she was still full from breakfast. That day she cried in the shower silently, her face under the stream of water so that they wouldn’t see. She wouldn’t let them see.

She was a blank slate. She kept her face impassive and didn’t utter a single word. The guard would take away her dinner tray and then she would be in pitch darkness. Then and only then, she allowed her facade to relax a fraction. She allowed herself to think about the situation she found herself in. She ran escape plans in her head but none of them would work. She had no resources, no idea where she was, no idea what she was up against and no idea what she would do should she actually escape.

She didn’t cry again until, what she assumed was, the twenty-second night. A small part of Darcy had been waiting on The Big Rescue. But it had been over three weeks and she was still being interrogated daily and subjected to what she was pretty sure was psychological torture.
They’re trying to break you. They’re going to succeed. The others probably haven’t come to save you because they’ve been rounded up by the UN too. Because you lead them to the Avengers. You almost got Bucky captured. You probably did get Bucky captured. Even if they’re still out there? Why would they come save you? You almost cost them their freedom. You almost cost Bucky his freedom.

“Okay, got it Birdie. But what if I get kidnapped and they hold me for longer than a week? What do I do then?”

“Darcy, you will never need to know. There’s no way it’d take longer than a week for me to come find you. I would never let that happen.”

She had sobbed silently into her pillow for what felt like hours. Crying for all the mistakes she had made, for all the people she missed, for all the people she’d disappointed and hurt and for herself and the sorry state she was in. That was the last time that she allowed herself to cry.

Darcy waited patiently for the psychological torture to start taking its toll. You weren’t the poster child for mental health to begin with. Or for them to step-up the interrogations. They know what Ian did to you, how long before they start taking tips?

Slowly, day-after-day the anticipation stopped being rooted in fear. She wasn’t frightened at the prospect of them kicking things up a gear. She almost wished for it. You’re a sick individual.

Everything became muted and numb. She stopped coding in her head, and doing her Black Widow faces. She still did tai chi every day though. Her ankle had felt the benefit of it while it healed. They still brought her the pain killers, even long after her ankle and head injuries were but a distant memory. So every day when they walked her to the interrogation room, she waited for them to take her to a different room or for something else to happen, for anything to happen.

After her twenty seventh night, she awoke and stretched. She sat on her bed waiting for breakfast to come. But it didn’t. After a while, she figured it was just them messing with her so she started doing her tai chi. She was half way through her routine when the door opened. There was no tray of food and there were two guards.

Oh look, your wish has come true. They’re going off-book for the interrogations. Happy now? Sadist.

She walked with them to interrogation. This time when she entered the room, Agent Kennedy was already sat there and there were no files. Oh no.

“Please come in Miss Lewis.” Agent Kennedy gestured as if she had invited her to join her for coffee, and not that she was being pushed into a chair and handcuffed to the table. “We have tried to be reasonable. You have been well looked after and we have tried to give you a way to atone for your crimes and be co-operative. But, you have resisted. You have shown no remorse for your actions and have refused to help the United Nations protect the people of this world, from dangerous men and women. Dangerous men and women who are still out there, evading arrest because of you.”

At this, Agent Kennedy stood up from her seat, and leaned over the table, towering over Darcy. “The CIA will be handling your interrogations from now on. And you can forget going back to the United States. They’re going to be putting you in a very dark hole in the ground, and if you don’t co-operate? The best case scenario is that they just leave you in that dark hole for the rest of your life.”

They are still out there.
Getting nothing from Darcy, she pinched the bridge of her nose and gestured for the door to be opened. “Your CIA escort will be here shortly.” The door whooshed shut behind her and Darcy was left alone in the interrogation room.

*They’re all okay.*

*Then why haven’t they come to get you?*

Before the tears could begin to prickle the corners of Darcy’s eyes, the door opened again. And there stood the last person she’d expected to see.

“Miss Lewis.”

Super spies, man.

Chapter End Notes

Oh I’m so not even a little bit sorry.
So poor little Darcy is officially broken. But it totally can't get any worse than this right?

Guesses as to who is in the doorway on a postcard. Or, you know. In the comments :)

Chapter 11

Chapter Summary

We find out who's in the doorway, that caffeine deprived students do not pay attention and that alphabet agencies may be the least of Darcy's worries.

Chapter Notes

I was really impressed with the deduction going on in the comments after the last chapter.
And some of you? I swear you've been peeking at my notes!

As always, I have no beta and so any and all errors are mine. Please let me know if you find anything.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Agent Phil Fuckin’ Coulson. Standing there all alive in his standard issue G-man suit. No tie though. Before Darcy could react, Coulson spoke again.

“I’m CIA Special Agent Roger Barnes and this is Brigadier General Glenn Talbot, Head of the ATCU. We’re here to escort you to the airport. It is in your best interests to come quietly. Do you understand?”

Darcy nodded tentatively. Coulson then stepped into the room and unhooked her handcuffs from the table. Darcy stood and he gestured for her to follow the General into the corridor. With Coulson at her back she fell into step. They turned down several non-descript corridors without encountering anyone else. By the time they reached a set of double doors leading to an elevator Darcy was thoroughly disorientated but Talbot seemed to know where he was going.

The three of them stepped into the elevator, Darcy sandwiched shoulder to shoulder with the two men. Is Coulson CIA now? Talbot is with the ATCU. Is this a rescue? Why would Coulson come help me? Could he still be with SHIELD? Nah Bobbi and Hunter would have told me. Shit, Barton or Nat would have told me. There’s no way Coulson is running with SHIELD and none of them know. So is he pro or anti-accords? Fuck, this could be some real trouble. Darcy stared straight ahead but she could feel the looks passing between Coulson and General Talbot.

The elevator pinged and the doors slid open. They stepped out into the reception area of what appeared to be an insurance office. The only light came from emergency lighting and streetlights outside. The building was closed for the night apparently. Darcy looked out of the huge plate glass windows to darkness. Oh my god. They really fucked with your body clock. How long has it been? Were the days longer or shorter? What the fuck?

Coulson strode ahead and nodded to a security camera above the door. Something clicked and Coulson opened the door to allow her to step through with the General. The parking lot was empty except for a giant black SUV with tinted windows. The lights flashed on the vehicle as it was
unlocked. Coulson opened the backdoor for her and with difficulty, her hands still cuffed, she hoisted herself up and into the back seats. The door was shut behind her. General Talbot got into the driver’s seat, Coulson the passenger’s.

Darcy sat there, still in shock. Talbot threw another look at Coulson and started the engine. He then turned in his seat to look back at her. “Buckle up Miss.” His tone was kind, but the pristine Air Force uniform and haircut made her comply in silence.

The car smoothly pulled away, they turned out of the parking lot and on to the road. Darcy went to speak a couple of times but thought better of it. Instead she fidgeted in her seat and looked out of the window. Street lights passed overhead as they drove in silence. There were a few other cars on the road and Darcy thought about trying the door and throwing herself from the vehicle. Then she remembered that time Barton had visited and had asphalt burns up his side and he did nothing but bitch about it for three days. Plus she had a morbid curiosity about what on earth was happening.

Darcy studied the men in the front seat. They seemed to be having some sort of telepathic conversation back and forth. From what Darcy could make out, General Talbot was very nervous about something and Coulson was as impassive as ever. But Darcy had spent a bit of time around Agent Coulson and there was something in the set of his shoulders that told her he was enjoying himself. Just a little bit. So Darcy relaxed minutely.

Darcy began seeing road signs for Edinburgh Airport and her chest tightened. *Still in Scotland then, but so much for a rescue. They’re taking you to the CIA after all. Looks like Coulson picked his side.* Talbot slowed the SUV and pulled off into the slip road that would bring them to the service entrance to the airport. *This is it. They’re disappearing you.* Darcy looked around for some sign of the CIA goons who would be taking her from here. The airport was eerily deserted.

They drove through an open set of chain link gates and along the side of a hangar. Two of the giant floodlights that hung from the side of the hangar shut off, plunging the SUV into darkness. Talbot slammed on the brakes and shut off the engine. Coulson threw his seatbelt off and turned to face Darcy.

“We have approximately two minutes. Do everything I tell you, exactly as I tell you and you’ll be fine. Do you understand?”

Darcy tried to speak but she hadn’t used her voice in weeks, so it was more of a croak. Coulson caught her meaning though.

“Allright, reach under my seat. You’ll find a bag with everything they took from you. You got it?” Darcy reached out and wrapped her fingers around a black backpack and pulled it onto her lap. She looked up into Coulson’s face, ready for the next instruction. “You’re doing great Darcy. For the next bit, you’re going to just have to trust me. Do you trust me Darcy?” Darcy nodded with as much conviction as she could manage. *You’re either going to be fine or entirely fucked within the next 90 seconds.*

Talbot and Coulson got out of the car. Talbot marched around the back and opened the trunk. Coulson opened Darcy’s door and gave her hand to jump out. Her socks hit wet tarmac but she couldn’t bring herself to care. The wind was stinging her face and there were tiny spots of rain. But again, she couldn’t bring herself to care. Coulson lead her around to the back of the SUV and gave Talbot a grin.

“Right. This is where it’s going to get a little bit weird Darcy. I can’t take your cuffs off without setting off an alarm. So you’ll have to do it yourself once we’re done.” Talbot was running his hands over his face. He rubbed his bristly moustache and started limbering up on the spot.
Darcy looked at Coulson expectantly. “What you’re going to do is take this icer.” He handed her a new icer. It was lighter and smaller than her old one. “You’re going to take this…” He handed her a heavy metal ball, a little larger than a golf ball with ridges and grooves all over it. “…and stand over here.” He bodily moved her about thirty foot back from the car. “We’re going to break into a run towards the hangar. You’re going to count to five, throw that ball into the back of the SUV, it’s going to explode and then shoot us both in the back with the icer.” Talbot groaned from his place next to the car.

Darcy’s eyes widened when she finally started to understand what Coulson was asking of her. “But Coulson, I-“

“I’m sorry Darcy, but this is all the help SHIELD can give you. You’re on your own from here. Once we go down, you run and you don’t look back.” Coulson’s hands were still on her shoulders. He rubbed them gently. “You can do this.” He checked his watch. “If I hadn’t run the tests myself I’d have sworn you were Barton and Morse’s lovechild.” He smiled at her until she returned it weakly. “Alright, it’s show-time!” He turned and jogged back to where Talbot was standing. “You ready Glenn?”

“I swear to God Coulson you-“

“Go!”

The explosion had left a ringing in her ears and when that added to the blood pounding from running flat out for just over half an hour, Darcy had to stop. Her fitness levels weren’t the same as they had been. She swept her eyes around the car lot she’d come across. It was some kind of shopping mall or outlet. It was late enough at night that everything was closed and there were very few people around. There was a group of kids waiting at a bus stop but they hadn’t even looked up from their phones when she had run past a minute ago.

It had been awkward running with the backpack clutched in her hands. It was the only way she could hide her handcuffs until she could get them off. At the far side of the parking lot there were large industrial recycling containers against the wall of the mall and there were no windows or cars parked nearby. That would have to do.

Darcy sat on the ground in between the containers. It stank of stale alcohol and that generic trash smell, but her feet were killing her. Bobbi had been right. Bobbi’s always right. Darcy was never taking her shoes off again. She zipped open the backpack and started pulling out the contents, spreading them out on the ground in front of her.

The first thing she noticed was an exact replica of the leather mini survival kit that Barton had given her for her 24th birthday. This one had loose threads in a perfect circle where there had once been a SHIELD logo. She picked at them softly and then set it aside. Next she pulled out Barton’s hoodie. She’d been wearing it when they’d taken her. She couldn’t put it on until she got the cuffs off though. In the meantime she draped it over her shoulders for a little warmth. It’s March in Scotland after all. Or is it April? Fuck this is disorientating.

At the bottom of the large section were her combat boots, but Coulson had tucked a pair of men’s
black socks into one of them. *Can’t believe Coulson came.* Darcy changed her socks and pulled her boots on. The soles of her feet winced at the pressure but the comfort and heat from the clean socks was almost euphoric. She turned the bag around and zipped open all of the side pockets. Most were empty but one of them had a few items inside. The first thing she pulled out made her heart clench with affection. An iPod, complete with earphones. She clutched it to her chest. It was a little piece of normality that she hadn’t had in such a long time. She carefully wound the earphone cable around it and set it on her leg, careful to keep it off the damp ground. Next she pulled out a beaten up looking zippo lighter and an unopened packet of cigarettes. There was a small sticky note attached to it.

**This better be the only bad habit you picked up from Romanov – P.C.**

She smiled at the note, read it a few more times to commit it to memory and then used the lighter to burn it. She couldn’t leave any hint of Coulson or Nat. The last thing at the bottom of the pocket was a soft drawstring pouch. She pulled it open and tipped out the contents. There was a roll of notes, a mix of pounds, euros and dollars and… Darcy gasped. The necklace! She checked the pendant and the nano disc was still there. It had crossed her mind a few dozen times that if the UN had gotten a hold of that, her spies’ networks would have been ruined. *And Nat would have been wrong to have trusted you.*

Darcy heard a police siren far off in the distance. There was no way that regular police would be sent after her, but she still had to move. She piled everything back into the bag and pulled the necklace over her head. She stood, rolled her neck around and tried to loosen up her shoulders. Darcy paused momentarily while a sudden wave of nausea rolled through her. *When did I last eat? Time to get these cuffs off.*

Darcy had lucked out in that the cuffs they put her in every day, were the exact same pair. The actual cuffs weren’t going to be broken or picked and they were too tight to squeeze through. But the cuffs were joined by six metal links. The links were steel but did have joins in them. This meant there was a weakness. Every day, Darcy had sat in that interrogation room and had pretended to be fidgeting, when in fact she was curling the chain around on itself and pulling, putting pressure on the tiny weakness in the metal links. She had had to be careful not to break them prematurely, but now was the moment of truth. She looked around to make sure there was nobody nearby. She put her wrists together and wrapped the chain around on itself until it was as tight as it could go. Then she leant forwards against the metal container so she could put the full force of her weight behind it, and snapped the middle link in the chain.

Coulson had said there was an alarm. She half expected a sound to come from the cuffs themselves but there was nothing but the wind whistling and the bus pulling up to the bus stop across the parking lot. She undid the chain, separating her hands. She pulled Barton’s hoodie over her head and put the hood up. She tucked the actual cuffs up her wrists. She’d work on those tomorrow. Right now, she had to find somewhere warm to hide out and figure her next move.

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Darcy pushed open the door and stepped inside. The wall of warmth hit her and she let out a sigh. She’d been plagued by showers of rain all day and had fought to keep the shivering at bay. According to her new iPod, it was in fact mid-April. She’d spent the night walking. She’d wanted to curl up somewhere and sleep but was very aware of the need to keep moving. She’d walked around the industrial area of the city, keeping to the shadows but after a few hours she’d slipped an earphone
in to check out the songs Coulson had put on it. There was a good mix, but the majority was old swing music. So she put on an album and let the music wash over her.

When she’d almost reached the edge of the sprawling industrial area, she’d come across a university campus and came up with a plan. She remembered from working at the University in London that students usually got given a large number of assignments to complete over their Spring break and so the library was likely to be full of kids studying. Naïve students would leave their belongings unattended in order to keep their tables saved while they went to the restroom or to use the vending machine. Ripe pickings.

She stood across the street from the library, under a tree. The doors were opened by NFC chips in the students’ matriculation cards. They swiped a panel and walked in. She waited until there was a group of students going back in from a cigarette break and took her chance. She picked up an empty coffee cup from a trash can nearby and held her backpack in her other hand and as they approached the door she called out after them, “Hey! Hold the door will you?!” They obediently held the door for her, and she passed through, nodding her thanks.

Once inside, Darcy had avoided the CCTV cameras and looked for her mark. She spotted a group of girls with designer handbags and gym bags, dump their belongings on a cluster of seats in a corner and then walk off to the vending machines. She walked past the table, swiped one of the gym bags and walked straight into a bathroom. She had looted the bag for a few items of clothing and toiletries and quickly returned the bag to its place before anyone even knew it had been missing. Darcy had then quickly left.

Once it was light out, she’d gone to a street cart and bought a bacon roll and a cup of coffee. She then headed to a park and settled under a tree to eat her breakfast. Darcy kept struggling with bouts of nausea, but she kept down her breakfast. The coffee tasted awful and it reminded her of mornings in the safe house. Those quiet days with Bucky seemed like a hundred years ago. Bucky. Darcy’s hands began to shake and she quickly shoved down all thoughts of Bucky and the safe house. Her head began to thud. That’s what happens when you haven’t had caffeine in a month.

She visited the public restrooms in the park and cleaned up a bit. She changed her shirt and leggings. She winced when the metal cuffs around her wrist clanged off the wash basin. Digging into her backpack, she opened the mini survival kit. Darcy pulled out one of the flaps and found what she was looking for. A miniature acetylene torch. SHIELD really did think of everything. She set to work on the cuffs as quickly and carefully as she could but her hands wouldn’t stop shaking, so it took a great deal of concentration. Eventually they were off. She flexed her wrists and rubbed at the skin. After the existing scars and the amount of twisting she’d done on the chain, her wrists were in one hell of a mess. More permanent evidence as to how fucked up your life is. She tidied away her belongings and carried on.

So she had ended up walking towards the shore area of the city when she’d spotted the cute little hipster bar that promised good drink, food and free wifi. Their seats looked comfortable and so she’d gone in search of dinner.

She took a seat near the back, close to the kitchen door and with good sightlines to the front door. The whole of the front of the bar was sheet glass so she had a good view of the street too. She ordered some food and a pint of beer and asked for the wifi password. When her food arrived, she ate slowly and savoured her beer. It was some Scottish craft lager that the waitress had recommended. After her plates had been cleared away she’d ordered another beer and pulled out the iPod. As she flicked through the tracks she noticed that the home button felt a bit loose. God, Coulson did you actually buy the only poorly built Apple product in the world? She ran her thumb over it and she felt it lift slightly with the condensation from her beer. Darcy inspected it further, and
the glass lifted straight out. Now that she thought about it, the button was roughly 5mm in diameter. Her hand went to the necklace. *The nano disc.*

Darcy’s lightbulb moment was interrupted when the television on the wall across from her started showing footage of the Avengers. She asked the waitress to turn the sound on. It was a news station’s opinion piece about the Avengers and the inhumans. Like most mass media, it was heavily slanted against them. Going on and on about how they were a danger to the public and about all the fallout from their battles. There were interviews with members of the public, all calling for more to be done to bring in the vigilantes and for the ATCU to be given more powers globally to stop the ‘pandemic’ of inhumans.

There’s no way that the tide was going to change in time for the summit. What was left of the Avengers in their current form were too high profile to get any real change made. The second they became visible, and the taskforces would come down on them like a ton of bricks. SHIELD were too deep in the shadows to do anything either. They couldn’t do anything meaningful without drawing too much attention. *Just look what happened to Bobbi and Hunter.*

Before she really realised it, Darcy had come up with a plan. She could be the bridge between the Avengers and SHIELD. She could get the information that the Avengers were too visible to retrieve themselves and she could do the things that SHIELD were too hidden to do. She could help and then they could all go home. She didn’t have to be the one needing rescued or protected. She could play her part. *You aren’t an Avenger or a SHIELD Agent. You don’t know what you’re doing. If you aren’t careful you’re going to get yourself or someone else killed. Numerous someone elses killed. Again.* The nausea and shivering came back at a punishing level. Darcy decided to settle her bill and keep on heading down to the shore. It was almost dark now and the sea air might help.

Darcy strode out into the street, trying to keep her body under control. She tried to focus on what her next move would be. She walked quickly down the street, dodging the puddles in the uneven paving stones. She stopped at a crossing on a side street and when she turned to check for cars, she spotted them.

Three men. They didn’t look like soldiers or agents. They didn’t look that much older than kids really. Teenagers. But as they drew closer, she could see the mean looks on their faces as they eyed her clothing and her backpack. *You had to go for the rich kid’s bag didn’t you? Had to draw attention to yourself.*

Darcy took a deep breath to keep her heartrate steady, but another bout of nausea hit and her hands were trembling. The icer was inside her backpack. With the fact that guns were entirely banned in Scotland, she couldn’t risk anyone seeing it. She didn’t have a holster to keep it concealed.

She crossed the road, trying to look casual and like she hadn’t noticed them. The side street up ahead was darker and quiet. If she could run ahead, get her icer out and wait for them, she could incapacitate them and move on without anyone seeing her. The three men also sped up to match her pace and spread out trying to pen her in. *Fuck.*

Darcy decided to just make a run for the side street and try to take them out as quietly as she could. As soon as she set off running, she heard the three sets of footsteps give chase after her. Just as she reached the side street, the nausea and the trembling and the headache hit her all at once. Her knees threatened to give out and her vision swam.

The first thug threw her backwards against the wall, her head snapping back and hitting the brick. *Shit that hurt.* Darcy began throwing blows out at him. Her fist connected with his jaw. It clearly wasn’t his first street brawl. He barely reacted. Another one appeared and they both rushed her and pinned her against the wall. She slid down to the right, and rolled away from them. She managed to
get a few feet away. The motion made her nausea kick back up again. She staggered to her feet and considered her options.

As she dropped into a defensive stance as the two rounded on her again, something was nagging at the back of her mind. She tried to split her attention between the advancing thugs and trying to clear her thoughts. Then she saw a dark shape swing into her eye line and the next thing she was sprawled on the ground. A piercing pain shot along her jaw and into her ear. There was fucking three of them. You really are shit at counting. Darcy resisted the overwhelming urge to pass out. She blinked and tried to clear her vision, only to see what was apparently a piece of piping come crashing down into her abdomen.

The air rushed out of her and she couldn’t fight the instinct to curl in on herself. Suddenly there were thudding blows hitting every part of her body. Each strike was so vicious and rapid that she barely had time to register one before another three had connected. The nausea and pain in her head was screaming at her now and she threw up. Her lager from before, mixed with blood spilled on to the street. The thugs jeered at her. One of them thrust his face into hers, signalling the other two to stop the assault for a moment. His face was pale and littered with freckles and spots. His eyes were a little too close together and his sparse light coloured eyebrows were knitted together in a scowl. He spit in her face and just as he took a breath to laugh, he snapped his head around to look down the street.

Darcy never had a chance to find out what was happening as everything overwhelmed her. All the pain rushed her at once and she felt a cold pressure at the nape of her neck. And then nothing.

Chapter End Notes

Okay, so I swear I hadn't planned to leave another cliffhanger but they're just good points to finish the chapters on. I'm not purposefully being awful haha.

I may or may not be able to get updates posted until Saturday. Real life wants me to go be a functioning adult instead of researching how to break out of handcuffs or pharmacological torture.

Fun Fact: the bar Darcy visits is a real bar and I used to live around the corner from it. It's a great place and they do have free wifi. (bonus fact: all of the locations I have described in Edinburgh are 100% real. Except for the secret base, that was made up.... or was it? ;) )

Please share your feedback and theories in the comments, it gives me so much joy and makes me want to get the chapters posted.
Chapter 12

Chapter Summary

We find out that ScotRail decor is hideous, and well... not much else.
Mini-Chapter.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Darcy awoke lying on her back on a firm thin mattress, covered with an overly starched sheet. Dread shot through her. You’re back in your cell. It was all for nothing. What happened? She felt with her fingers for the cold concrete wall but they disappeared off the mattress. Huh, wrong side. Next she splayed the fingers of her other hand. Scratchy carpet met her finger tips. Okay this is different. Everything then seemed to lurch to one side and then back again and she realised that it was actually rhythmic and she was in fact on something that was moving.

She surreptitiously opened one eye. The wall on her right was covered in blue carpeting with some hideous geometric print that made her eyes hurt. Speaking of hurting. Weren’t you getting the shit kicked out of you last time you checked? Experimentally, she tensed each limb in turn. A dull ache but nothing like what she should have been feeling. She allowed a slight relief to filter into her system when she felt the weight of her boots on her feet and her necklace shifted around her neck. Lifting her eyes to her surroundings, Darcy took in the plastic walls. They were a textured off-white/grey and seemed to have sliding compartments. There was a door made of the same material that looked like a cheap knock-off of the access hatches on the quinn jet. Her eyes fell to the floor. It was covered with the same carpet as the wall. But leaning against the opposite wall was her backpack. A rustling of paper being overturned interrupted Darcy’s examination.

Right away, Darcy looked for the source. Taking up the space between the end of her bed and the opposite wall was a storage locker with an extendable table top fitted. Sitting on top of the locker in the lotus position, studying a manila file was Bucky. He was in his tactical pants and boots but a soft looking crew neck sweater clung to his frame. His posture was relaxed and Darcy felt the unease uncurl itself. It was still there, ready to ratchet its way back up though.

“Bucky, where are we?” Darcy tried to sit up but a violent stab of pain from her abdomen made her abort the movement and stole her breath.

Bucky looked up from the folder. He seemed to want to go to her but he held himself back. “We’re on an overnight train to London.” His voice held no inflection. “You shot me Lewis.” He closed the folder and rested it on his knee. His face stayed impassive but Darcy could see the beginnings of the kicked puppy face.

“If it makes you feel any better, I feel like I’ve been shot.” She tried to sit up against the wall but another twist of pain made that an impossibility. “Fuck!”

“Not shot, just badly beaten.” Bucky corrected and unfolded himself. He slid to the floor and made his way to the door. Despite all the evidence screaming that she was not able to move, Darcy tried to get up to follow him. “You stay put. I need to go tell Barton that you’re awake.” His tone brooked
no argument so she stopped trying to move.

_Barton is here too._ “I couldn’t let them take you Bucky,” Darcy whispered softly, closing her eyes.

She heard him sigh and his tone dropped to match hers. “But they got you instead… Promise me that… Don’t ever do that again.” He faltered as he found the words.

“I promise to never shoot you through a force field again.” Darcy opened her eyes and tried to fix him with a teasing smirk. The joke came automatically to her. Bucky was hurting and she wanted to make it go away. _Please stop looking at me like that._

Bucky turned to face the closed door and pinched the bridge of his nose. He muttered under his breath, “Fuckin’ idiots. I’m surrounded by fuckin’ idiots.”

“Barnes?”

“Yes Lewis?” He didn’t move to look at her but that was probably just as well.

“I’m really glad you’re okay.”

“I’m real glad you’re okay too doll. Sit tight.” And with that he went through the door and clicked it shut behind him.

Chapter End Notes

Just a little something to keep you going.  
And look at that! No cliffhanger!  
I’ll try to get the next little bit up tonight.

Thank you again to all the wonderful people who have left kudos and comments.  
I love hearing your theories and thoughts.  
It makes this little writer super happy.
Chapter 13

Chapter Summary

Besmirching of good characters and a quiet moment.

Chapter Notes

Another mini update for you all.
I'm super tired and have no beta so when you find all the horrible mistakes, post a comment and I'll fix it as soon as I pack in a couple hours sleep and *all* the coffee.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“We talked about this Darce. We talked about this *at length*. On multiple occasions. We spit-shook on it. You promised me.” Barton reached down and tilted Darcy’s head to face him. She had tried to hide her face in her pillow but with limited success. “What did you promise me Darcy?”

Darcy mumbled under her breath, “Promised I wouldn’t join a fight club.”

“Exactly. And what did you do?”

Before Darcy could respond Bucky interjected, “Got herself detained by the United Nations, held captive for a month and then almost beaten to death by three punk thugs in a fuckin’ alleyway.”

Darcy flinched like she’d been slapped, which set off a series of sharp pains in her torso. Barton rolled his eyes and helped Darcy sit up against the wall next to him. He curled his arm protectively round her shoulders as she leant her weight against him.

“Ignore him. He’s just pissed that you shot him and landed him on his ass.” Despite his joke, he levelled a look at Bucky which clearly told him to back off. Barton then turned to Darcy, “How are you feeling? As bad we as we felt that Monday after you graduated from college?”

“Not feeling like I’m going to throw up anymore but my stomach is killing me.” Darcy blinked hard, forcing tears back. “What happened to me?” She looked between the pair, Barton by her side and Bucky standing over her. Bucky gestured that Barton had the floor and took up his earlier position on top of the storage locker.

“Don’t know the specifics. Far as we can tell, they were dosing you with anti-psychotics and sedatives. Combined with the disorientation, they were hoping you’d become docile enough to break.” Barton scratched the back of his thumb of his free hand across his forehead as he struggled to continue.

*The painkillers. They were drugging you.*

“The UN shouldn’t be pulling shit like that. There’s more going on than we know right now.” Barton pulled Darcy closer and kissed the top of her head. “But you did good Darce. You played it
right.”

The drugs were supposed to make you subdued enough that you couldn’t fight them. Instead it just made you so subdued that you did nothing. You sat back and waited to be saved. You didn’t play it right. You didn’t play anything. You sat on your ass and waited.

Darcy stared at a loose thread on the bedcovers. She focused on it for so long that it began to blur. It was only when Barton’s finger wiped across her cheekbone, that she realised she was crying.

“Hey, kid. What’s wrong? You hurtin’?”

Like you wouldn’t believe. “Yeah.”

Barton unhooked his arm from around her shoulders, careful to not jostle her too much. He unzipped a pocket in his combat pants and pulled out a silver packet.

“Roll your sleeve up kid. This right here, is some Grade-A Wakandan magic.” He opened the packet and pulled out a hypodermic needle.

Darcy recognised the packaging and the liquid, “Yeah Bucky used that at our lodge.” She rolled the sleeve of her shirt up and felt Bucky’s eyes run up from her chewed up wrists to the criss-crossing raised white lines up the back of her forearm. She quickly flipped her arm so that the inside of her elbow was facing up.

“Yeah he mentioned you stabbed him. Stabbed and shot him. Surprised he came to rescue you at all kid.” So am I. The archer carefully removed the safety cap from the needle and flicked the barrel.

“You won’t heal as fast as Barnes did. You aren’t jacked up with soviet super juice. So far it’s cleared that crap the UN gave you and the bruises and flesh wounds from the fight.” He readied her arm for the injection and looked to her for permission. Darcy nodded. “Far as we can tell your insides got pretty messed up so it’s taking longer. You’ll need to keep getting doses until it’s gone. Each time you take it, it’s going to knock you out for about an hour. Kind of like one of Cap’s speeches or spiked hot cocoa. T’Challa gave us a shit load of this stuff though so don’t worry.” He nudged her shoulder once he’d withdrawn the needle. “Almost like he assumed we were going to be injured a whole bunch…”

Darcy managed a weak smile. “Thanks Birdbrain. Barely felt it. It’s concerning how good you are at injecting women with hypodermics. You had practice?”

Barton gave a rueful smile, “Plenty.” At the matching raised eyebrows from both Bucky and Darcy he stammered and backtracked. “Not like that. I’ve had to give Nat anti-toxins and immunisations. And pain shots. And… and…. Fuck you guys.” As Darcy sleepily giggled he shoved her on to her side and lifted her legs over his. “I’m going to remember this. You and your insinuations. The besmirching of my good character. You’re going to wake up in an hour fucking starving and begging me to share my snack stash with you. And you know I always have the best snack stashes. Can kiss goodbye to that plan Darcy Lewis. Not sharing. Not with people who suggest such utter slanderous lies and-“

“Barton she’s asleep. Shut the fuck up.”

“Oh, already? Just as well. What with the-“

“I swear to- If you wake her, the besmirchin’ of your good character will be the least of yer fuckin’ worries. We copacetic?”

“You ever going to talk to her about that?”
“She ain’t ready to talk ‘bout nothin’.”

“I keep waking up to your serious face.”

“Hmm.” Bucky kept reading through the page in front of him like it was the Sunday paper. His back was to the corner of the wall, one leg dangling off the edge of the locker and on to her bed, and the other bent at the knee propping up the files.

Darcy sat up rubbing her eyes. She opened and closed her mouth, gave it a second thought and then it all came spilling out. “I’m so sorry. For all of it. For running off like that, for going outside of the force field, for putting you in danger, for putting all of you in danger. I ever meant for-“

“I didn’t know. I would never- I didn’t know.” Bucky spoke gently but it stopped her in her tracks. Did you know? That means that…

“But you do now?”

Bucky picked up one of the files and tossed it at Darcy. As she caught it, she felt the embossed logo in the top right hand corner. “Romanov swiped these a couple weeks ago. They filled in a few gaps.”

So he knows most of it then. He knows what you did. Darcy’s voice grew tight and strained and frantic. “I’m sorry that I couldn’t-“

“Can I see?” Darcy stopped dead in her tracks as he gestured at her arm. She nodded and pulled her right sleeve up. Crossing her legs underneath her, she twisted her arm to show the marks that she so studiously pretended weren’t there. Bucky slid off the locker and on to the bed next to her. He looked to her for assent and then ran the tip of his left forefinger along the first scar below her elbow. Darcy dared not breathe as she watched him. He traced every line until he reached her wrist. His other fingers joined the first, smoothing around the razed area and slid his metal hand into her trembling one. “I’m sorry we took so long.”

Darcy tipped her head back against the carpeted wall and sighed. “I’m sorry you had to.”

Bucky gave her hand a tentative squeeze. “I’m not.”

Squeezing back, she dropped her eyes to her feet. She needed to know, “What happened while I was… there?”

The door swung open and banged off of the wall with a snap. “Aw, story time, yes. I’ve got the snacks.” Barton strolled into the room with two armfuls of evidently every snack food on the train. He opened his arms and dumped them all on the bed. While perusing his haul, he raised his free hand, palm facing out, to his forehead and then swung his arm in a loop to point at the storage locker. Bucky seemed to know what he was on about and let go of Darcy’s hand. He picked up the file and pulled himself back up on to the storage locker. Darcy looked at him in askance and Bucky merely shrugged.

“Awesome. I’m starved. Pass me those chips and start at the beginning.” Barton handed them to her
and settled in to sit next to her.

He folded his hands in his lap and began in sincerity, “Once upon a time-“

Bucky’s hand slapped to his forehead. “I swear to fuckin’ God Barton.”

Chapter End Notes

And so we inch closer towards finding out what happened while Darcy was incarcerated and how she ended up on the train and what happens next. I'm working through finding ways to get the information across without just listing it all and it boring the crap out of you. Thank you all so so much for the wonderful comments. Please bear with me as I try to balance functioning as a human being and keeping this show on the road.
Chapter 14

Chapter Summary

We find out a bit of what went on while Darcy was held captive, that Barton drinks light beer and Bucky had the wrong end of the stick.

Chapter Notes

So here's the first attempt at Bucky's POV.

This is my first multi-chapter fic (second fic ever), my first time writing from a male POV and loads of other things. So please please send me any feedback that you have so I can make it better going forwards.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“I swear to fuckin’ God Barton…” Bucky took in the farm house in front of him and let out a low whistle.

“What? Did you think I lived on a hellicarrier?” Barton slid back one of the wooden panels on the wall by the door to reveal a keypad. He typed something in and lined up his right eye with the retina scanner just above it. He put the panel back in place and stepped into the house. “Kick loose any dirt on your boots before you come in. Laura lost her shit last time I brought team-mates home that tracked mud through the house.”

Bucky followed him in, kicking his boots against the top step before taking a glance around. It looked like your average country family farm house. It was cosy and lived in and nothing like what he’d expected. Photos of family days out and birthdays were framed on the wall. “There ain’t no team this time around.”

Barton dropped his bag on the sofa and carried on into the kitchen. “Eh. We just don’t have a catchy name yet.” Bucky heard the fridge opening and walked through the open-plan living space. There were clear sight lines everywhere and easily defendable positions at every turn. The house had been obviously laid out by someone who expected to have to defend their home. The breakfast bar wasn’t just a strategically placed source of cover though, it was somewhere for his kids to do their homework and for his wife to drink her morning coffee.

When Bucky came fully into the kitchen he found Barton with his head in the fridge. “Laura and the kids are off at my brother-in-law’s for the foreseeable. So we can curse, stay up late and drink all the beer. No ragers though. Learnt my lesson on that one.” He retrieved two beers, opened them with his teeth and handed one to Bucky. They clinked the tops of the bottles together and Barton turned back to the fridge.

Bucky leaned back against the breakfast bar and took a drink of his beer. He tried not to gag at the watery light beer taste as it hit his tongue. “Thought you said this place was off the books?”
“It is…” Barton scrubbed a hand through his hair, still surveying the contents of the fridge with his back to Bucky. “Johnny’s a SEAL. They’re staying with him on base. Safest place I could think for them to be.” He gestured towards the stairs. “Go put your shit upstairs in the second bedroom on the left.”

Bucky pushed himself off the counter, placing his beer down and headed upstairs. As he reached the door to the bedroom he heard the archer call up the stairs, “How do you feel about homemade chicken pie and corn on the cob?”

Apparently, today, Barton was being full of surprises, “You making it?” Bucky called back down.

“Fuck no. But I’ll reheat it from frozen. Hurry up, your beer’s getting warm.”

―

“It’s been twelve days. There should be some sign of her stateside by now. Romanov sure her CIA intel is good?” Bucky kicked a decorative pebble forty yards down the garden in frustration.

Barton poked at the burgers and took a swig of beer. “Nope. We can’t be sure of any of our sources anymore. Not since everything went to hell.”

They’d been relying on reports from Romanov that Darcy had been deported from Scotland back to the US. She was apparently in the custody of the CIA and being held at one of any number of black sites. Bucky felt something pulling at the back of his mind that told him they were being led on a wild goose chase. His infuriation levels had been steadily climbing as they had spent day after day waiting to find out about the next dead end.

“Then we should be out there looking.” Bucky was not sulking. Sergeant James Buchanan Barnes does not sulk.

“196,960,000.”

Barton’s ability to derail a conversation was second only to Darcy’s. He’d learned to roll with it but it still threw him for a loop every once in a while. Plus he was too busy focusing on all the awful things that could be happening to Darcy right now while he was knocking back shitty American beer in Barton’s backyard. “What?”

“196,960,000. There’s 196,960,000 square miles of area to cover out there.”

He didn’t need reminded of their complete lack of solid intel and that Darcy could literally be anywhere. Well, not anywhere. “If you’re going to be a smart ass about it, it’s technically 196,959,934 square miles. We know she’s not here or at any of the compounds Romanov raided.”

Barton set to flipping all the burgers over with elaborate flicks and twists. Apparently unconcerned with the severity of their situation. “We’ll find her.”

Something inside Bucky snapped. “How the fuck do you know? How can you just stand there flippin’ goddamn burgers!? You not itchin’ to get out there and make this right?” Bucky growled and leapt to his feet. He spun the archer and grabbed him by the collar of his t-shirt. He held them almost nose to nose, Barton’s feet dangling several inches from the decking.
“What are you, an idiot? Course I am. But we’d be scooped up in days. We have to trust them to find her and bring her home.” Barton rolled his eyes and made no move to loosen Bucky’s grip.

Bucky’s arm began to shake. Not from the exertion. It was his metal arm. He could hold Barton like this for days and think nothing of it. It was shaking because his entire body was trembling from anger and unused energy. “Don’t know if you remember but I managed to avoid being ‘scooped up’ for a good coupl’a years there. I’m no use sitting here eatin’ all yer wife’s cookin’ and shootin’ holes in your barn.”

“It’s not a barn, it’s The Hawk-Cave. And stop shooting holes in it. If there’s a leak, you’re going up on that roof to fix it.” Barton laid a hand on Bucky’s left shoulder and looked into his eyes searchingly. “This is different and you know it. I trust Nat. I trust Hunter. Hell, I even trust Bobbi. Bobbi loves that kid almost as much as I do.”

Bucky dropped him and took a step back, confused. “You love her?”

“Aw, Bucky, no. That’s disgusting. I’m closer to her father’s age than hers.” Barton rubbed his neck where the fabric had been biting in a moment earlier and tipped the remainder of his beer down his throat, as if he was washing away a bad taste.

“So what is it then?” Bucky knew that the archer held a great deal of affection for Darcy. Affection which Darcy clearly returned. She wore his damn sweater all the time and spoke of him often with a soft smile on her face. Bucky had assumed they had something between them. This assumption had been somewhat derailed by the revelation of Barton’s secret family but that just made him conclude that it was only in the past, not that it hadn’t occurred at all.

“Cap’s filled you in on what happened during Loki’s visit to New York right?” Barton asked nervously. None of the Avengers enjoyed talking about Loki. “Darcy watched my six while I worked through all that stuff. She’s a special kid. Knows how to pull you outta your head, and your head outta your ass. And she’s a spectacular drinking buddy. She can sink tequila like it’s her job. Fuckin’ impressive.”

Bucky’s mind travelled back to the image of their last night in the safe house. Her shaking hand clutching the neck of the tequila bottle. “She said she had some kinda shell shock…”

“Yup. She went through some shit a while back. The worst kinda shit. When you live this life, you get kinda numb to it all. When Bobbi told me what had happened… I wanted to throw up and set fire to everything.”

Bucky had spent hours lying on his bed trying to figure out what had happened to make Darcy bolt like that. He went over every conversation they’d had. Tried to remember and read micro-expressions that he could have missed the first time around. “What happened?”

“I don’t know everything that went down. Her boyfriend was Hydra. A mole trying to get to Thor and Doc Foster.” He reached into the cooler and pulled out another beer. Opening it, he launched the cap into a tree next to the house and a bird took flight squawking in protest. “I even met the bastard. Bought him a drink and gave him the shovel talk and everything. She was with him when you got defrosted and pointed at DC.” His voice dropped to a lower register. “I don’t know the gory details of what he did to her. But when I saw her lying in that SHIELD med-bay bed… Nat offered to get me the official incident investigation but I couldn’t face reading it. If I read everything that that animal had done to her I’d have… Well take any of the plans you have in your head right now and make it ten times more violent and add several arrows pinning his unmentionables to a wall.”

_Hydra._ “You take care of her after?”
Barton shook his head and looked away from Bucky. “She wouldn’t see me. When we turned up at the safe house that was the first time I’d seen her since.”

“What the fuck Barton? She had your six and then you just fuckin’ left her?” Bucky started advancing on the other man, rotating his left arm in its shoulder joint.

Barton’s arms shot into the air. “Whoa man! Cool it. I had Bobbi stay on her. Tried to get her to go to therapy. But she took to that about as well as I did. So Bobbi started training her. I’d shown her a few things but Bobbi taught her to defend herself. Tried to keep her safe. The kid’s as good as family to both of us.” Bucky had read the personnel reports on Agent Bobbi Morse. She was one of their highest attaining Agents. She had even infiltrated Hydra and rescued one of their own. She was a formidable woman and he could see why Darcy would have benefited from her tutelage and where she had picked up her skills.

A rough smile crossed his face at the memory of their training sessions. “Yeah I’ve seen those self-defence skills in action.”

Happy that Bucky wasn’t about to rip him limb from limb, Barton returned is attention to the burgers. “Yeah not gonna lie, I’m so very proud of that shot she made. On her back, shooting over-head from down-hill with a head wound? Wish I could take all the credit for her marksmanship skills but Bobbi spent the most time on the range with her.” He was positively beaming with pride.

Shaking his head, smile still in place, “Nah I’m talkin’ bout when she stuck me in the neck with a double-bladed training knife. To the hilt.”

In shock, Barton dropped one of the burgers on the floor. “You’re kidding?! You need to-“ The sound of his phone vibrating stopped him in his tracks. He checked the display, “That’s Hunter calling inside on the sat phone.” He started heading for the back door jogging backwards. “You. Stay there. Watch the burgers and when I get back you’re telling me everything about how Darcy Lewis managed to stab the Winter fucking Soldier.”

Chapter End Notes

*hides behind notebook*

Well? Was it okay?

The next chapter will have more of what has been going on so that when we return to Darcy you should be all caught up.

I'm continuously blown away by the support for this fic, so thank you to all of you who have left kudos and commented.

And even those of you who haven't but are reading along. Hello lurkers! Yeah, you! I see you lurking over there all awesome and what-not. Thank you for reading too :)

Special mentions to RogueWitch who helped me get my ass into gear and get on with writing despite real life trying to get in the way. You should go read her work. I’ve read every word and it's all just incredible. I bow down to her amazing, intense writing skills. Also to CinnaAtHeart who gave me a heartattack when she commented on my little fic. I've read everything of hers too like the little lurker that I am so I had a little squee to myself.

Like I said, I've been lurking for a long time and this is just my first toe into the fic-
writing world, so I'm so unbelievably grateful to everyone who has made me feel so 
welcome and is enjoying this story. 
Much love and happy thoughts to you all.
Chapter 15

Chapter Summary

The one where we find out what Bobbi and Hunter have been up to.

Chapter Notes

So to clarify, this chapter is set during Darcy's captivity and is from Bobbi's POV. There are a couple of points which should set the scenes in context with the rest of the story. If it doesn't make any sense or it's not clear, hit me up in the comments and I'll answer any questions.

As per usual, there is no beta and I relied heavily on Google and what I can remember from the year of Spanish that I took in 2003, for the translations. Any corrections which should be made, let me know.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Bobbi smoothed out a wrinkle in the skirt of her dress with one hand, the other cradling her glass. Condensation was running down the tumbler and leaving a ring on the bar top. She took another cooling sip and glanced around the bar. The tables were filled with a well-heeled after work crowd. She and Hunter looked like they belonged among the attractive elite of Mexico City, but drew no unnecessary glances. She turned towards her companion as he shifted on his barstool for the eighth time in the last ninety seconds.

“Feel like I’m dressed for a bloody interview at the job centre.”

Bobbi gave him a thorough look over. His pale blue linen shirt sleeves were rolled up to his elbows and the suit pants fit him well. He’d even shaved and styled his hair. “I think you clean up rather well. Stop fidgeting.”

“Can’t help it. Polyester makes me itch and it’s too bloody hot. Thought a swanky place like this would have had air-conditioning.” Hunter pulled at his collar and shifted in his seat for the ninth time.

“It does. Now stop complaining and keep an eye on Miguel.” Bobbi shifted her chastising glare from Hunter to flick over to their target.

Miguel Jesus Cartalonia was sat at his table, in his corner of the most exclusive bar in Mexico City. With his dark hair pulled artfully back from his face, his deep chocolate eyes framed with long eyelashes and a bone structure that most women would kill for, it would be easy to underestimate him. However, underneath his Tom Ford two piece suit were two Sig Sauers and the equally well-dressed men on either side of him were packing serious heat too. He looked like a man who was enjoying a few drinks and a few laughs with his co-workers after a long day working in the city. In reality, he was the most successful, and therefore the most dangerous, drug lord in Mexico.
Miguel’s network spanned the entire border between Mexico and the US. No-one so much as thought about crossing without paying the toll to one of his men. Not even law enforcement were exempt. In addition to controlling the movement of drugs throughout the region, he was also one of the most clued-in men in Central America. Nothing happened without his knowledge.

Bobbi and Hunter knew that the UN and CIA communications had shown that Darcy was to be transported to the US. With the fact that the CIA cannot operate within the States, they were to bring her to a black site outside of Mexico City for questioning before releasing her to the FBI. Bobbi had a horrible feeling that the paper trail had been far too easy to find and they needed confirmation. And so they found themselves in their current lavish surroundings, knocking back cocktails among the beautiful and wealthy of Mexico, waiting for their chance to approach the current king of Mexico.

“Una mas Palomas y una cerveza ligera, para el, por favor.” Bobbi let her feelings about Hunter drinking light beer show clearly in both her tone and on her face. The bartender smirked lightly but kept up his professional demeanour. Classy joint. He returned a moment later with their drinks and took away their empty glasses.

Hunter turned his nose up at Bobbi’s glass and took a swallow of his pale drink. “I don’t know how you can drink that tequila nonsense.” He shuddered for added emphasis.

“Darcy got me hooked. We reached the bottom of enough bottles during her recovery. I’m immune now. And this is the good stuff.” She swirled her drink around in the glass and thought back to all the times that she and Darcy had pounded back shot after shot of cheap tequila. Usually after Darcy had had a particularly challenging day with her PTSD or physio-therapy. Or you know, it was a Friday.

Hunter read the concern in his ex-wife’s face and he placed a supportive hand on her knee. “I know you’re worried Bob. It’s only been four days. We’ll get her back.”

Bobbi shot Hunter an appreciative look but crossed her legs, displacing his hand. “I know we’ll get her back. I let her down last time. Didn’t make sure she went to her therapy sessions. Didn’t make time for her. We were busy with Coulson and-“

“She’s a tough kid.” Hunter cut across her self-flagellation.

Bobbi sighed, resigned. “I know. She holds herself accountable though. She thinks that she’s responsible for what went down at the Triskelion.”

Hunter shook his head, “She’s gotta know that what happened in DC was all thanks to the Calamari gang and not because of what that arsehole got from her. They’d have found another way.”

“I don’t think she does. Coulson told me that she went digging. Even managed to get face-time with Gonzalez. She asked him for the body count. Wanted to know how many agents died fighting to get control of the hellicarriers.” Bobbi’s tipped her head forwards, blonde curls falling in front of her eyes. She roughly pushed her hair back out of the way in frustration.

“Bob-“

“If they interrogate her again. If they break her. I don’t know if she can come back from that.” Bobbi leant on her forearms on the bar. Her eyes downcast.

Hunter straightened his posture. “We’ll get her back before it comes to that. Speaking of.” He nodded towards Miguel and his entourage who were readying themselves to leave the bar. “Let’s go meet our new employer.”
The office’s walls were clad in ornate dark wood panels. There were dozens of books on the wall they faced. All the spines were pristine. They had never been opened. Bobbi stood with her hands clasped behind her back at an approximation of parade rest. Her eyes raked over Hunter who was lounging leisurely in one of the leather arm chairs that faced the desk in the centre of the room. They were waiting for Miguel to meet them.

Bobbi itched to have a snoop around. She was almost certain there was a safe behind the giant self-portrait that hung behind the equally oversized mahogany desk. Over compensating much? She was, however, also certain that the room would be equipped with surveillance cameras.

They had posed as private military contractors who were looking for work. It wasn’t an uncommon occurrence and they knew that Miguel had PMCs on his staff already. They may also have incapacitated two of his current security team. So they knew he was hiring. However it had taken them over a week to get through his ‘interview process’. In exchange for their services, the pair had agreed upon a significant reduction in their usual fees for information on Darcy. They hadn’t gone into specifics, just enough so that they would know if Darcy had been anywhere near the CIA black site and if she’d been taken across the border like their paper trail had suggested.

The door suddenly burst open and in-swept Miguel. He was dressed in a cream linen suit, complete with matching fedora. Bobbi had to fight to keep her eyes from rolling in her head at the cliché. Hunter didn’t have as much control. Luckily, Miguel was too busy fixing himself an espresso from the machine on the side table to notice. Miguel took his cup over to sit at his desk. He tapped a couple of keys on his computer and drained his cup before he addressed them.

“Cojelo suave girl. Your partner has the right idea. Come, sit. Take a load off.” Miguel gestured for Bobbi to sit in the seat next to Hunter. She submitted but sat straight backed. “Ah, better no? Now, I have received confirmation that the shipment was delivered with no problems. My customers were very pleased that they were delivered to with such speed and discretion. So you receive my heartfelt thanks.”

“That’s great and all mate. But we’d rather receive your heartfelt information and pesos.” Hunter stayed in his relaxed position, only lifting his hand to rub his right thumb along the tips of his fingers. Bobbi’s eyes widened. They knew all about Miguel’s reputation for responding unpredictably to some imagined slight.

“So of course Hunter is poking him.

Miguel laughed and leaned back in his chair, mirroring Hunter’s posture. “I like your style lobo. Yes, we agreed that if you ensured my merchandise arrived safely that you would be rewarded. I am nothing but a man of integrity.” After this wildly inaccurate statement, the drug lord reached for the inside pocket of his suit jacket. Bobbi had to fight to not visibly stiffen at the gesture. He merely produced his gold plated iPhone. Apparently Stark Tech isn’t flashy enough for drug lords down here.

Miguel scrolled through his phone until he found what he was looking for, “Yes, there has been no-one through the border who matches your friend’s description. And the CIA ‘settlement’ outside of town has been a ciudad muerta. No-one has come or gone in almost a month.” I knew that paper-trail was bullshit. Miguel then placed his phone on the desk and clapped his hands together. “Well I think this has all worked out well. I will be in touch if I am in need of your services again.” He then
turned to begin working on his laptop.

“Eh, ’scuse me mate. Think you’re forgetting the minor detail of payment. We don’t work for free.” Hunter’s relaxed pose from before was gone. He was feigning indignation at the lack of payment but Bobbi knew that he was actually coiled for a fight, waiting for the other shoe to drop.

“You have received your payment. I provided you with the information you asked for.” Miguel barely looked away from his computer screen, apparently he was done with the conversation.

Hunter stood and made to advance on the desk until Bobbi also stood and put a hand on his shoulder. She then pasted on a smile and tightened her grip on Hunter, “Fair’s fair. I have another arrangement I’d like to discuss with you that my partner need not be privy to, jefe.” She raised a coquettish eyebrow and positioned her body in the way that had been working for her since she was 17 years old.

Miguel finally looked up from his laptop and a shit-eating grin spread across his face. “Whatever you say carina.” He practically purred, looking her up and down.

Bobbi tilted her head and murmured in Hunter’s ear, “Go call Barton on the sat phone. Give him a sit rep. I’ll be right out.” She punctuated her sentence with the sound of a baton unclicking from its holster hidden in her sleeve. Hunter didn’t look happy but he complied and left the room without another word.

Just as Hunter finished up his call to Barton, the office door swung open. Bobbi strode out, a duffle bag of cash in-hand one hand and a baton slung over her shoulder like a baseball bat. Just before the door swung shut again, the prone body of Miguel Jesus Cartalonia, infamous drug king of Mexico, could been seen hog-tied on his desk with his gold plated iPhone stuffed in his mouth.

*Fucking knew there was a safe back there.*

Bobbi groaned and tried again in vain to pull against the restraints around both ankles and both wrists. This was no amateur hour, she wasn’t going to get out of her confinement without assistance. Unfortunately the only other sympathetic person in the vicinity was in a similar predicament several feet away.

Ever since their meeting with Miguel the week before, they’d been dodging the drug lord’s men. Apparently the self-appointed king of Mexico hadn’t taken too kindly to being trussed up like a Thanksgiving turkey by a blonde American woman, hired gun or not. They’d actually been leaving for the exfiltration point, when they’d been attacked and brought in. Barton was flying down with Barnes as evac so that they could regroup and work on their plan to rescue Darcy. They’d driven right into a trap in the middle of the desert. They had been outmanned and outgunned and brought to a warehouse where they’d been summarily beaten and left in their current situation.

Hunter tipped his head back as far as he could and rolled it from side to side. “I officially hate Mexico.”

Bobbi tilted her head to face Hunter as much as she could, “We’d have been free and clear if you’d listened to my instructions to evade them. If you’d-”
“If I’d- If I’d what? If I’d somehow managed to rent Bumblebee from the car hire? Because there weren’t any yellow Camaros on the bloody forecourt, I checked. That road block was solid. They were ready for us.” Hunter’s voice steadily rose in both volume and pitch.

Bobbi rolled her eyes. “If you’d let me drive we’d be on that jet right now.”

Hunter pretended to choke on a cough, “Oh no, I’ve seen you drive. With your driving we’d be dead right now. Instead of tied up in this knock-off horror movie set.”

Bobbi turned to look around the warehouse that they had been in for the last few hours. There wasn’t much in the way of light. The windows were covered in grime that blocked out the light from the setting sun. There were a few fluorescent lights hanging from the rafters but the cabling was badly frayed, so only one or two were actually lit. The air conditioning units were also redundant and she felt sweat beading down the back of her neck, seeping into the neck of her tank top. Although that could be blood. That asshole cold cocked me pretty hard. The warehouse looked like your stereotypical abandoned storage facility, wall-to-wall grey concrete, with an extra sprinkling of dirt and mould everywhere. “It kind of looks likes your apartment when we first met.”

Hunter actually choked on a cough this time, “Excuse me? My apartment had a carpet. I’ve never been so insulted in all my life!”

“You don’t pay much attention then do you?”

Before Hunter could fire back, the side door to the warehouse opened and in-stepped Miguel. He gestured for his hired goons to wait outside. He closed the door behind him and strode over to stand in front of them. “My apologies for interrupting, please continue. Is very entertaining.” He had a smug shit-eating grin across his face, showing his all-too-perfect white teeth.

Hunter barked out, “What do you want dick’ead?”

“Hunter.” Again, with the poking.

Miguel chuckled and crossed his arms, “Listen to the lady, guapo. Although I’m not so sure I’d call her a lady after our last meeting.” The grin dropped from his face and he glared at Bobbi.

“What do you want Cartalonia? Your money is still in the bag in the trunk of the car. Well, most of the money. A girl’s gotta eat.” Bobbi nonchalantly shrugged as much as she could in her restraints.

Hunter joined in, “It’s true. You should see her plough through a bargain bucket. It’s hard to decide if it’s impressive or repulsive.”

Bobbi scoffed, “You’re just jealous because if you so-much-as look at a chicken nugget, you put on five pounds.”

“Excuse me? I’ll have you know that all of this is muscle darlin’.” Hunter tried to gesture at his body but was stopped by the fact he was bound to the chair. He still managed to throw a decent leer her way though.

Having apparently hit the limit of his patience, Miguel raised a hand to silence the pair. “Enough. Save your words. You’re going to need them.”

“For what mate? You needing a bedtime story before you get tucked in at night? I do a dynamite dramatic reading of The Goblet of Fire. Been working on my Dumbledore. You’d think Sir Ian McKellan was in the room! My Hermione needs a little work but-“
Bobbi interrupted Hunter helpfully, “I can do a passable Hermione. My English accent is a little rusty but I can give it a try.”

“Que chingados!” Miguel’s suntanned face began to redden but he struggled and held his composure. “You will sit here and not utter another word until the CIA gets here.”

Bobbi and Hunter both halted and zoned in on the drug lord, “You what mate? I don’t think I quite heard you right. I thought I just heard you say that the CIA are on their way here.”

Miguel’s forehead smoothed and a sliver of his previous grin crept into his features. “You heard correctly.”

"Christ, you know the world's really fucked when you can't even trust a Mexican drug lord to be a proper bad guy."

Bobbi would have slapped her hand to her forehead, had she had the mobility to do so. “God, you really are an idiot aren’t you? What makes you think we wouldn’t just tell them everything we learned about your operations?”

Miguel prowled over to Bobbi and bent until his face was inches from her. He kept his distance though, clearly having learnt his lesson. He was close enough that she could feel his breath on her face though and could feel his overpowering aftershave permeate her own clothing. “Because the CIA are more than aware of my business practices. The federales and I have an agreement, if you will. They are unconcerned with me. What they are concerned with, are former Agents of SHIELD who have been working with vigilantes and are wanted by the United Nations.”

He stepped back, out of her space and buttoned his suit jacket. “Ah, not so talkative now are you? Not so quick with the smart comments. Good. I suggest you keep your mouths closed until the CIA get here. Then? Well, I guess it is no longer my concern. Plata o plomo cabrons? ”

Chapter End Notes

So we're all up to date with Darcy, Bucky, Barton, Bobbi and Hunter. There will be one more catch-up chapter before we get this show back on the road.

Any guesses on who's up next?

Thank you to everyone for all the support for this fic. It means the world.

If you have any comments, questions, queries, corrections, feedback or general observations please fire them into the comments and I'll get back to you asap.

All the love <3

PS. It's been brought to my attention, and I've been giving it some thought anyway, that my fic summary is horse-shit. I have zero idea what to make it though. As you can tell from the chapter summaries and the fact that the chapters have no titles, I kinda suck at that. So if anyone has any suggestions please suggest away. :)

Chapter 16

Chapter Summary

The one where Coulson doesn't get to have his mid-morning cappuccino in peace but does get the intel on Darcy's location.

Chapter Notes

This little chapter is the last of the jumps back for now.
The next update will resume the main storyline.

There's no beta and I've had three coffees so far this morning, so any mistakes are mine and probably the result of caffeine jitters. Let me know if you spot any and I'll fix them.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

She shuffled the folders in her arms and tried to open the door to the coffee shop. “Oh please miss, allow me.” She stepped aside, allowing the senator’s aide to open the door and as she shimmied past him in the tight space, chest to chest, she dropped the listening device into his suit jacket pocket.

“Thanks so much honey. Have a nice day.” She tossed him a wink and flicked her shoulder length red hair over her shoulder. She then sashayed up to the barista to place her order, feeling his attention on her back and not on the slight additional weight in his pocket. As she waited for her coffee, she glanced around the people seated in the busy coffee shop. Her eyes lighted on a man in a navy blue suit, shirt open at the collar and no tie in sight.

“Oh my God, is it really? Yes, it is you.” She threw herself into the chair opposite him, eyes relieved and a warm smile gracing her lips. The stack of files landing on the table with a heavy thud. “It’s so good to see you. Everyone from the office thought you were still on that extended vacation.”

Coulson took a sip of his coffee before returning his coffee cup to its saucer. His eyes touched on the files and then on to the woman in front of him. “Yeah well, even Tahiti can become a little much after so long.”

Natasha leaned back in her chair and crossed her legs. “Tahiti huh? I bet.”

“What brings you to DC?” he gestured to the wide legged pant suit trousers and blouse she was wearing and the stack of files on the desk.

“Business and a favour for my little sister.” She picked at the corner of a cardboard file absently.

Coulson nodded and took another drink from his cup. “I heard she was in a spot of trouble.”

“I’m sure you did. There’s only so much I can do for her though. The entire family has been worried sick. Our brother and his army buddies are about ready to start kicking down doors.” Natasha rolled
her eyes as she thought of the increasingly incessant and frustrated messages from Barnes and Barton.

“That wouldn’t help things, I’m sure.”

“No they wouldn’t. Kicking the door down and carrying her out is not the best idea right now. It would cause more damage than good.” She glanced out the windows to the busy city street and sighed. “She’s a big girl though, all she needs is a little assistance from someone who definitely owes us and then maybe she can walk out the door herself. Although I doubt our darling brother would allow her to roam alone for long.”

“True on all counts.” Coulson conceded.

Her eyes narrowed and turned their full intensity on to the man taking another measured sip of his cappuccino. “Unfortunately work has been running me ragged. You know what it’s like. Well, you would if you’d been around lately.” She didn’t bother to keep the bite out of her words.

Coulson lifted his hand and looped a finger in the air. “I’ve been around. Just a different office.”

Natasha looked over his hand, the scar Coulson once had on the inside of his index finger was gone. As was the slightly misshapen second knuckle on his pinkie. “Apparently so. A lot of new employees over there?”

“Not enough.”

“Maybe if you’d told us you were back from vacation, we could have helped.” Natasha challenged.

Coulson shrugged and fiddled with the empty sugar packet on his saucer. “They were mostly small projects, no need for the big guns.”

“So you say. We still would have helped. You were practically family, you know that.”

Coulson dropped his eyes to the table, uncomfortable with the piercing stare he was being fixed with. “I do.”

She took the empty sugar packet out of his hand and screwed it into a ball, clenching her fist around it. Despite her sharp actions, she kept her voice light and even. “Being family means very little nowadays though. Take mine, we haven’t all been together in months. We call and text occasionally, but hardly anyone is really speaking. Barely even a family at all anymore. It’s for the best though. When we get together people have a tendency to get hurt.”

Finally looking up at her again he said gently, “But they’re still family.”

“So you say.” She pushed her chair back from the table, giving Coulson one last thorough evaluation. “Anyway, I need to get back. There’s a huge meeting coming up and we’re nowhere near prepared enough.” She huffed out an exasperated sigh as she stood.

Coulson allowed his apprehension to bleed into his features. “Will you tell the rest of them that I’m back from vacation?”

“Do you want me to?”

“I’m not sure how they’ll take it.”

Natasha chuckled dryly and picked up her stack of files. “Not well, I’m sure.”
“But they are family.” Coulson leaned back in his chair so that he could look up at her, ensuring that his message was received loud and clear.

“If you say so.” With that, Natasha strolled up to the collection point, grabbed her iced Americano and disappeared into the street sipping delicately from the straw. Coulson waited a minute or two, before he too departed with the file she had left on the table.

Chapter End Notes

So I think that's most of the main questions about how Darcy got out and rescued. Hopefully you can piece together everything else. If there's anything you're not 100% on, fire me a comment and I'll fill any gaps.

Special mention goes to BadWolf81 who has been an absolute peach throughout this story so far. It gives me such genuine joy to read that people are enjoying this fic and are completely buying what I'm selling. They've been my cheerleader all along and their comments give me a kick up the arse when I'm sitting floundering about whether my story is working or not.

And thanks to everyone else who has commented, left kudos or just read this fic. You are all wonderful.

All my love and endless gratitude, EJ <3
Chapter 17

Chapter Summary

Where we find out what everyone is up to now, and where they’re going next and Darcy overhears something she definitely wasn't supposed to hear.

Chapter Notes

And so we're back on the train guys and the story is back on track... sorry, I'm the worst.
As always there is no beta and so all mistakes are mine.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Fiddling with the hem of her shirt, Darcy resolutely looked anywhere but at Barton and Bucky as they finished their tale. She was struggling to reconcile with what they were telling her.

“… then we smuggled you on to the train and here we are.” Barton looked like he was trying to remember if he’d included everything. Happy that he had, he smiled and looked expectantly at Darcy. What he saw was not what he had anticipated. He poked her in the thigh with a chocolate bar. “What’s wrong kid? You usually love hearing about my daring dos.”

“You were all looking for me this whole time?” Darcy voice was quiet and small so she cleared her throat and corrected, “Where is everyone now?”

“Nat is going to be meeting us in London to tag in. She'll get the Eurostar with you and Barnes to France.” Barton then hesitated.

“Where’s Bobbi and Hunter?”

“They’ll be fine.” Bucky piped up from his corner. He was being conspicuously quiet about the whole thing. He hadn’t contributed much to their story and he looked like he was having difficulty controlling his actions. His fingers had kept flexing and then clenching into fists, followed by a roll of his shoulders and the shifting of both legs. Then he’d begin the cycle over and over again throughout the conversation.

Darcy’s voice grew stronger through concern. “Where are they?”

“You know that I won’t let anything happen to Hunter, or Bobbi. Just, we need to get you into Europe before we can do anything.” Barton tried to reassure her but she felt like the weights that had slowly begun to lift, had been slammed back down on her shoulders.

“Something bad happened didn’t it?” Darcy asked tentatively but almost didn’t want to know the answer. *If something happened, it was because they were looking for you.*

“We don’t know the ins-and-outs. We haven’t heard from them since they missed the evac.” Bucky
spoke up, filling in when Barton hesitated again.

The archer pulled Darcy close with an arm around her shoulder and tried to be as reassuring as possible. “I put some feelers out and I think it’s just a disgruntled drug baron.”

Darcy sprung back, extricating herself from his grasp. “Just a disgruntled drug baro—“

Barton held his hands up in fealty. “Hey, hey! They’re highly competent field agents, well Bobbi is. And Hunter is scrappy. They’ll be okay. You are our priority right now. We’ll get you to Wakanda and you’ll be safe.”

This new piece of information made Darcy pause before her brain could spiral any further. “Wakanda?”

“Yeah. Um. We were kinda hoping that we’d have everything sown up with your ID and have you legitimised but with everything... So we’re going to have old school this and get you through Europe, on a boat to Africa and then across to Wakanda. We’ll get you pair tucked out of sight until the Accords are amended.”

Bucky growled under his breath from his corner. Darcy seconded that sentiment.

“No fucking way.” Darcy set her shoulders straight and clenched her fists in her lap. She continued before either of them men could interrupt. “You guys have made zero headway and the summit is just over seven months away. You guys can’t take the better part of a week taking me to Wakanda and then waste resources on keeping me hidden. You need to be out there looking for Bobbi and Hunter. And I’m sure Barnes would literally rather do anything else other than go back there and sit tight.”

Barnes nodded his agreement but then aborted the movement as the rest of her impassioned statements landed. “You’re right about me doll, but I’ll be going with to keep you safe and so’s Barton.”

Darcy shook her head and pushed the hair from her face. “Look, before everything went sideways in Edinburgh, I’d started coming up with a plan. I can help you guys.” She held her hands up, palms out as the boys geared up to argue back. “Hear me out. You know I can get in and out of just about everything. And I am particularly adept at leveraging unscrupulous individuals. None of you know the global political scene like I do. Let me help you guys. The sooner we get these Accords fixed, the sooner we can all go home. Myself included.”

Barton looked sceptical but could obviously see the merit in her claim. “And you can’t do this from Wakanda?”

“It’s not like I can just Google this shit Barton. A lot of the time I need physical access to either a system or a person. And it’s surprisingly difficult to blackmail people successfully via email.” Her frustration was starting to colour her words.

Barton settled back against the wall, folding his arms across his chest. No mean feat considering the size of his arms and chest. “You can do what you can from Wakanda. But I’m not putting you at risk like that.” He tipped his head back to look down at her as much as he could considering they were quite close in height. “No, I mean it Darcy. I won’t have something like that happen to you again. Got it?”

Darcy sensed the tone. Barton was not going to be moved at this point. The tone had nothing but gotten more effective as his kids had gotten older. She tried looking imploringly at Bucky but he was
starting to show signs of the kicked puppy face. So she decided to make a tactical retreat and try again after she’d cleaned up. “Don’t suppose this train has a shower on it?”

“Nah, going to have to do what you can with a basin. Brought you some stuff though. It’s all in my bunk. I’ll go get it.” Barton, relieved that their impasse had apparently blown over for now, sprung from the bed and darted next door to get her the bag.

When he returned, both he and Bucky headed to the dining car to get something more substantial than snacks to eat. Barnes had the super serum to fuel after all. And Barton was a human trash compactor. Darcy pulled together some toiletries and a change of clothing and went out in search of the bathroom. She was to meet them there once once she had made herself feel more human.

She waited for the previous occupant to leave and then locked the door behind her. She pulled the toilet seat down and placed her belongings on it. She stripped off and started washing herself with a washcloth in the sink. She ran the damp soapy cloth up and over her scarred arms and legs. She catalogued the new scars around her wrists from her work on the handcuffs. She was relieved that there were no other scars from the fight in the street. The Wakandan medicine had done its job. After she decided her body was as clean as it was going to get, she pulled on a pair of jeans and a tank top. She had no idea who put together her bag, but they’d chosen jeans that fit her better than any other pair she’d ever bought and paid for herself. As she tucked the tank top into the waistband, she felt a strange extra section of fabric at the small of her back. A few moments of investigation and she found it was an L-shaped pocket and there was a scrap of paper pinned inside.

NR x

That makes sense. The Black Widow gave you perfectly fitting jeans with a concealed holster.

After the last care package she had received from Nat, she went through everything with a fine toothed comb. Nothing else unexpected but she’d have to double check the rest of the bag. She pulled a sweatshirt over her head and tied her hair up into a ponytail. It badly needed washing, but she wasn’t about to try to wash it in the sink. She’d already spent an inordinate amount of time in the bathroom.

Darcy exited the bathroom and gave an apologetic smile to the young woman waiting to go in after her. She made her way back to her little cabin. There was no sign of Barton or Bucky. She packed away her things and shoved both bags into the storage locker at the foot of her bed.

Her mind wandered back to the sight of Bucky sat there. He’d been a strange mix of concerned, pissed and subdued. Darcy couldn’t work out what his deal was. He’s probably just fed up with having to drag your ass out of the gutter and listen to your damn sob story. You know what he’s been through. Do you think your sad little problems even register?

Before her mind could grab a hold of that train of thought and run with it, she shook herself. She pulled her spine straight, pulled on her ‘I-am-The-Black-Widow-and-You-Will-Do-Exactly-As-I-Say’ face. Now that she had cleaned up a bit, she felt that she could have another run at Barton. You just need to convince him that you won’t be a liability. You won’t be the reason that anyone else gets into any danger. That they can leave her unattended for five Goddamned minutes to go and get Bobbi and Hunter. Bobbi and Hunter. Fuck. That’s your fault. If anything happens to them- She practically fled the room, trying to out run the dark thoughts.

She slowed as she began to come across other passengers leaving the dining car. The guys had managed to get them put up in first class so she was headed to the first class lounge to go find them. The train listed slightly to the side but she shifted her weight and countered it without wobbling. Much. Fuck you’ve really gotten out of shape with all this. No wonder they had to jump in and- She
was about to push the button to open the door to the dining coach when she caught sight of Bucky talking to Natasha. They looked like they were having a fairly heated argument and were making no attempts to hide it in the almost empty car. Barton was nowhere in sight.

A pair of business men, the only other occupants, chose that moment to exit the dining coach and Darcy slipped in and took a seat at the first booth. She had been told to come meet them here, but they were obviously having an important conversation. Darcy was about to consider leaving again and going to look for Barton when Bucky suddenly got right into Nat’s face and raised his voice.

“… fucking hell ‘Talia! She’s a civilian kid.” He pulled his hair back from his face forcefully and began counting off on the fingers of his metal hand. “She’s fortunate that we were able to get that intel off Morse and Hunter before they were captured. She’s lucky that Coulson was able to get her out like he did. And then she was damn lucky that we could come scrape her off that sidewalk. Of course she’s going to run headlong into traffic and get herself killed carrying around an attitude like that. She’s not like us…”

Darcy’s mind stopped paying any attention to the conversation she was overhearing. Everything became white noise. Instead her attention focused inwards. For the first time in what felt like forever, the voice in Darcy’s head wasn’t mocking her. It wasn’t lamenting her awful situation. It wasn’t ready to call her an idiot for messing up again. That mean little voice wasn’t directing its disdain at her. She didn’t feel wretched and worthless.

She was furious.

As soon as the fury had come, it settled into the back of her mind, still burning bright but in its place came a calm. A deep, dark calm that allowed her to eventually stand, press the button to open the door and stride down the carriage back to her bunk. That same calm allowed her to ignore the shout that came from Bucky when he realised what she had overheard. The same calm that allowed her to ignore the argument and commotion between Nat and Bucky erupting behind her as she turned into her cabin. It gave her the presence of mind to formulate a plan and put it into action.

“I will always come back for you.”

Chapter End Notes

This chapter was a pain in the arse to write. It took a couple of gin and grapefruits to get this to a point where I’d consider posting it.
But it is what it is.
I have another free day tomorrow and so there should be another couple of updates.
Any questions, queries, etc, please feel free to stick them in the comments. I will get back to everyone asap.
Much love, <3
Chapter 18

Chapter Summary

Where we find out what just happened from Bucky's POV.

Chapter Notes

There's no beta and I've got a wicked hangover, so any mistakes are mine and let me know and I'll fix them.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“Now that one of the kids are safe, I’m gonna go call and check in with my other kids. I’ll catch up. Go snag me some of that shortbread?”

“Yeah, yeah. Go call your wife.” Bucky waved him off and headed for the dining cart.

Bucky surveys the coach before opening the door. There are two business men nursing a couple of whiskeys. It was late at night but first class refreshments were available 24 hours. He then sees the top of a head of red hair, back to the door.

Bucky stood next to the booth she was sitting in. He leaned on the back of the bench opposite her. His posture open and casual but his tone was dripping with disdain. “Nice of you to join us. To what do we owe this pleasure?”

Natasha raised an eyebrow and took a sip of coffee. “Quite the attitude you’ve got there Barnes. Would’ve thought you’d be happy that the little voron is back in the fold.”

He nodded tightly and scrubbed his hand over his face, rubbing the stubble that was growing across his jaw. “I am. But she’s got some crazy idea that she’s gonna be out in the field helping.”

Nat’s other eyebrow joined the other but the rest of her face remained impassive. “And that’s so crazy, why? She has skills we can use.”

“Because if the world’s too dangerous a place for me to be out in, then it sure-as-shit is too dangerous for her.” Bucky straightened up and folded his arms across his chest.

“I’m sensing some animosity there.” She gestured at his defensive body language with her coffee cup.

“If I can help keep Darcy safe until this is all fixed, then I’m happy to go along with it.” They had to keep their voices low to avoid being overheard by the other occupants of the carriage but it was proving difficult for Bucky.

The Widow was pushing his buttons. The truth was, he was being driven to distraction by staying dark. He wanted to be out there with Steve, doing something. Academically, he knew that he didn’t have a chance in hell of changing public perception towards the Avengers et al, but it didn’t stop it
from being frustrating.

“Bullshit. You’re itching to be out in the field.”

“That’s got nothin’ do with anythin’. Anyway, you dodged my question Widow. What are you doin’ here?” He deflected, sick of being under the Widow’s scrutiny.

“I’m here to talk to Barton about Coulson.” Her blank façade threatened to crack slightly but held strong.

“You couldn’t have just called?” he asked flippantly.

“It’s not exactly the type of conversation you can have over the phone.” She replied dispassionately.

“Yeah it’s fucked up. Your handler fakes his death and then doesn’t even come clean that’s he back on his feet with a new team. That’s gotta smart.” He was taking cheap shots now, and he knew it.

Natasha sighed and leaned back in her seat. “Hardly. Given our line of work, it was to be expected.”

“Wow.” Bucky was tired of being put through the emotional ringer. Now that he could freely have them, he struggled to keep a lid on them. His doctors had tried to explain that outbursts were to be expected with PTSD but that made it no easier to handle. “It must be exhausting fakin’ that level of ambivalence.”

“I’m not ‘faking’ anything Barnes.”

“Sure you ain’t. I’d be pretty steamed in your position.” He motioned at her overly relaxed position.

Natasha tilted her head, a condescending smile and widening of her eyes accompanied it. “Coulson was our handler at SHIELD. Fury and Coulson made a choice that was for the greater good, and I stand by it.”

“Sure you do.” Bucky rolled his eyes. “You stickin’ around?”

Natasha imperceptibly shook her head. “I work better alone.”

“Not that long ago you worked best as part of a team.”

She gestured around her. “And look how that turned out. I’m not really built to be a team-player. You should understand that more than anyone.”

“There’s benefits.” Bucky shrugged his left shoulder, drawing attention to his new Wakandan arm that was free of all of the KGB tech and the now absent red star.

“Even when they stick you on babysitting duty?”

“It’s not babysitting. I’m protecting one of our own.” Bucky puffed his chest defensively. His anger had settled down to a simmer but her poking was beginning to raise it again.

“One of our own what? We aren’t a big happy family anymore because we all tried to take care of our own.”

The jab landed, hard. Bucky was well aware that Steve’s loyalty to him was one of the main reasons that the Avengers were no more. He wasn’t conceited enough to think it was the only reason, but without him, they may have stood a chance. Steve was his brother in all but blood, and he really would be with him until the end of the line. They were men out of time and were lucky to be
stranded here together. But lately he had begun to consider the others to be part of his family. Real fucked up family. But family.

“Darcy is one of ours. Unlike some people I could mention, she actually wants to be a part of the team and help. We’ll get her safe and then we’ll get to fixin’ this mess.”

Natasha picked up her cup and sauntered over to the coffee pot, she brushed past Barnes purposefully. “I’d have thought Darcy’s self-preservation skills would have improved after our talk.”

Bucky was in her face in a flash. “Your what now?”

“At the safe house. It was just a spot of girl talk. Nothing to concern yourself with Barnes.” She condescendingly patted his chest with her free hand.

Bucky grabbed her wrist. To the casual observer they would not be able to see the vice like grip he had her in. “Girl talk, my ass. Spit it out.”

Natasha employed a soothing tone. “Calm down Barnes. All I did was point out a few anthropological truths about survival and the benefits of strategic alliances over emotional attachments.”

“You retrofitted that bile the Red Room used to spout and told it to Darcy? Are you fuckin’ kiddin’ me right now?” Bucky struggled to contain his rage as the two oblivious business men left the carriage. He registered their departure but he was too busy focusing on the object of his anger.

Natasha coolly kept her eye contact with him. “She doesn’t want to be a liability anymore. I merely suggested a method which would help.”

Bucky stared her down. “All you did was make her feel like a burden and take unnecessary risks to prove her worth.” He dropped her wrist before he crushed it. He was losing control. “Fucking hell ‘Talia! She’s a civilian kid. She’s fortunate that we were able to get that intel off Morse and Hunter before they were captured. She’s lucky that Coulson was able to get her out like he did. And then she was damn lucky that we could come scrape her off that sidewalk. Of course she’s going to run headlong into traffic and get herself killed carrying around an attitude like that. She’s not like us.” He took a steadying breath, he wasn’t angry at Darcy and he had to reign it in. “She’s been dented a bit but she ain’t broken. She ain’t done anything she can’t come back from. She’s got a family and she’s stronger than she realises.”

Natasha’s eyes flicked away from his, towards the door. It was sliding closed and he saw a flick of brunette curls striding away from them. Shit.

“Darcy!” He dashed after her, only pausing impatiently to allow the door to slide open again.

Natasha took the moment to shove him bodily against the wall and used her body weight to hold him in place.

“Barnes. Barnes!” She fought to get eye contact with him. “You take that forties chivalry and you cram it back in its box.”

Bucky growled. “Get the fuck off me Widow.”

“You and I both know that if you wanted me to, you’d make me.” She paused to allow him to argue but he didn’t. “How many times have you exacerbated things for that girl now? Take a breath. If you go swooping in right now things will become infinitely worse. She doesn’t want to be rescued. She wants to fight back. Let her.”
He knew she was vaguely right but the thought of her sitting alone thinking the worst of him made his chest constrict and his hands twitch. “She’s hurtin’. She needs to know that she ain’t alone. I know a thing or two about rebuilding yourself after a hard knock. She needs to be kept safe while she does that. You guys did that for me, or have you conveniently forgotten about that?”

Natasha pulled herself up until she was face-to-face with him and studied him intently. “You went off grid for two years and refused to come in until it suited you. And even then, it was only because of everything else. Or have you conveniently forgotten about that?”

“But she ain’t as far gone. She needs folks around her who can show her how strong she is. And right now, she thinks we doubt her. She thinks I doubt her.” He was practically pleading now but made no attempt to push the woman off of him.

“She doubts herself. Let her learn to stand on her own two feet. She won’t thank you for coddling her.”

The thought of Darcy standing alone, thinking that she has to be alone burned through the last of his reservations. “Back the fuck off Natalia. I’m not letting you encourage her to become a monster like you were made to be. Like I helped make you into.” He brushed her away and ignored the crack her head made as she hit the opposite side of the carriage and the thud as she flopped to the floor.

Bucky darted down the corridors, becoming increasingly frustrated as he had to stop for each set of sliding doors between carriages. Eventually he reached the first class berths and forced Darcy’s door open. His eyes scanned the room, she was gone and so were her bags. He took a deep breath and tried to calm his erratic heartbeat and clear his mind.

Barton then walked straight into the back of him. Without thinking, Bucky’s hand shot out and he pinned the archer to the wall.

“Hey man! Friendly, remember?” Bucky let go of him and ran both hands through his hair. “Dude, it’s fine. Where’s Darcy? You get my shortbread?”

“Darcy’s gone.” Bucky braced himself against the wall, hearing the plastic creak under the pressure.

“What?”

“She overheard me arguing with the Widow about her and she bolted.” Bucky admitted, refusing to look at the Archer.

Barton’s face brightened slightly, “Nat’s here? Where is she now? Darcy might be with her.”

“Pretty sure she’s unconscious on the floor outside the dining car.”

“Fuck, come on let’s check our cabins. She might just be raiding my snack stash.” Barton’s voice held hope, but it was dwindling fast.

The men checked their cabins. There was no sign of Darcy, but someone had rifled through their belongings. They left their rooms and convened in the hallway.

“She’s been through the snack stash.”

“She’s been through my ammo bag and med kit.”

Barton put his hands on his hips and stared down Bucky. “Dude, I leave you for 5 minutes to go check in with my wife and kids and everything goes to shit. You lose Darcy and knock out Nat.
Nat’s going to be real pissed. You know that right?”

Bucky shrugged at the implication. “Yes. But it ain’t the worse thing I’ve ever done to her. She’ll get over it and live.”

“True, but if you’ve lost Darcy then you might not.”

Bucky swallowed hard, ice and fire pumping through his veins.

Chapter End Notes

Pretty sure we're past the halfway point now.
We might even be on the home stretch now, I have two plans set out for the remainder of the story.
I'll be taking the next few days to plot it all out. So if you have any people, places, ideas or things you'd like to see in the story, stick them in the comments and it might make it in :)

Constantly blown away by the support for this fic. You are all wonderful. <3
Chapter 19

Chapter Summary

Where we find out that Darcy is very particular about her coffee order, that having a good wash is important, that there are fictional cabs that go from North to South London during rush hour and that Darcy Lewis has enough self control to not shoot someone even when she really really wants to.

Chapter Notes

Well, this was supposed to be a quick little update to get the next section of the story going. But it sort of grew arms and legs. Oops.
Better get a cuppa before you start this one.

No beta as per usual, so any and all mistakes are mine.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Large Americano please.”

“Would you like any milk?”

“No thanks.” I asked for a fucking Americano. If I wanted milk in it, I’d have asked for a white coffee. Darcy tried to shake off the irritation. She was still fuming. She paid for the coffee with a PayPal account she had set up under another identity. Praise the hipsters and their insistence on doing everything via an app. She pulled a few coins from her pocket though and dropped them in the tips jar.

“Your drink will be ready at the end of the bar in just a minute.” The barista was cute. If you liked blond skinny English boys. Darcy decidedly did not. She picked up her coffee and a sachet of brown sugar and took a seat at a table against the wall. She faced the front of the narrow café and there was a staircase behind her to her left that led to the bathrooms and the fire escape.

She sat with her iPod that Coulson had given her. She removed the glass on top of the home button and slid the nano disc from her necklace in its place. The screen immediately lit up and showed a loading bar. As it loaded, Darcy stirred the sugar into her coffee, leaving the spoon in to take the edge off the heat. Fucking milk in an Americano. Darcy struggled to reign in her anger.

She’d thrown herself from a moving train, on to a (thankfully deserted) platform and ran for almost a straight hour. Her anger had fuelled her onwards but eventually that had dissipated and she had wandered aimlessly until she had come across the small café with free Wi-Fi and that was open at 5am. She had scraped the skin on her forearm and shin as she’d tucked and rolled and her bags had slammed into her ribs pretty hard. And Barton complained about throwing himself out of a car. The pain in her torso was starting to creep back in also. She couldn’t risk taking any of the Wakandan medication yet though. She had to get somewhere safe before she could sleep.
When the disc had loaded, she checked the maps for ideas as to what to do next. She was currently in a quiet area just north of Central London. It felt like the last time she’d been in London had been years ago. In reality it was only five months. So much had happened, yet at the same time so little had changed. They still think you’re a liability.

Darcy scrolled around the map until she found what she was looking for. There was a safe house nearby with a stash inside. According to her key, it was one of Nat’s. She drained her scalding coffee, checked the attached file for the security code to the safe house and switched off the iPod, stuffing it into the pocket of her backpack. She rooted around in the other holdall she’d swiped and found a hoodie. Springtime in England was decidedly not warm. Especially this early in the morning.

She nodded to the barista as she left and headed out into the cold street. There was a heavy mist hanging in the air and it soon made her clothes feel damp. She quickened her pace, trying to urge some warmth into her bones, but her muscles screamed in protest. You can curl up in pain once you’ve reached the safe house.

Just over an hour later, she reached the safe house. Darcy had been expecting some kind of crack den but it was in fact a terraced townhouse that had been converted into apartments. It was identical to every other building on the street. She forced her legs to carry her up the last few steps to the front door. She carefully checked the street, it was empty. Dumping her bags on the floor, she pulled her knife from her boot. She prised the facia off the buzzers to all the apartments. She found the connection that allowed the door to be unlocked and tripped it. She heard the buzzing as the door was unlocked, grabbed her bags and slipped inside. The heavy old door clicked locked behind her. She scanned the lobby for an elevator but only found a stone staircase. Perfect.

Darcy ascended the stairs. Luckily the apartment was only on the second floor. She punched the passcode into the keypad that was hidden behind the sign on the door that showed the apartment number. The second Darcy got inside, she flopped down on to the sofa. She knew that she should do a sweep of the apartment but she was exhausted. She gave herself to a count of ten before she made herself check the perimeter.

Happy that everything was as it should be, Darcy found the medical kit she’d swiped. She located the Wakandan medicine and administered it. She barely had enough time to tuck her legs up on to the sofa before sleep claimed her.

She awoke to the sound of the trash being collected out on the street below. She’d slept for about two hours. Darcy stretched experimentally and was pleased to find that there was no pain. Wakandan magic. Smiling to herself, she headed for the kitchen. Her stomach growled at her and she patted at it absentmindedly as she perused the cupboards. Eventually she landed on a box of ramen. That would do nicely. She fixed herself some food and settled back on the sofa to eat.

After she’d eaten and washed up her dishes, Darcy decided that the next thing she had to clean was herself. She wandered into what seemed to be the master bedroom and poked around. There were some clothes in the wardrobe but little else. She wandered over to the vanity and sat on the little stool in front of it. She pulled each drawer out, only to find them all empty. She was about to give up and go shower when the last drawer she pulled out felt heavier than the others. It was empty too, but it took quite a bit of effort to pull it out. She felt around the edges of the bottom and the back corner
gave a little with the pressure. She pushed down harder and the painted wood popped up. She removed the false bottom and peered inside. She found a laptop, a burner phone and a pistol with a matching magazine. She took out the laptop and phone but resolutely left the gun where it was. She took her new treasures out to the living room and placed them on the sofa. They would have to wait. She had a date with the shower.

A blissful hour later, Darcy had soaped, scrubbed and shaved every inch of herself. Her skin was pink from the heat and scouring but she felt infinitely more human than she had in weeks. Her mind briefly flitted back to the train and how she thought she had felt better then. She tamped it down though and locked it away. She dried herself and pulled on her new jeans from Nat and a sweater. She brushed her teeth and sighed when she was done. She’d never felt fresher or cleaner.

*Right, you’ve sorted yourself out. Now it’s time to start working on the plan. Bobbi and Hunter could be in serious danger and you’ve been dicking about for hours.*

Darcy shook herself and settled down with her iPod and laptop. She flexed her fingers and got to work.

The next morning, Darcy packed up her belongings and locked the safe house back up behind her. She had spent the entire day, and most of the night, working on finding Bobbi and Hunter. She had finally had a break through when she’d found an email chain between two CIA clerks. They were discussing the delivery of ‘magnetised metal batons’ from their black site outside of New Mexico to an R&D facility in the US. Darcy had grinned. *Found you.* From there she’d formulated a plan.

She lugged her bags down the street. It was still pretty early but she managed to hail a cab. The driver rolled down his window, “Where to love?”

“You go as far south as Bromley?”

“Depends where to.”

“Biggin Hill Air Field?” Darcy had discovered that the former air force base was now a private air field in South London and according to the disc, Hunter had a stash box there that could be of some help. So she’d dressed the part. Her jeans, an expensive looking blazer and some high heels. She was nervous about not having anywhere to put her knife but her icer was tucked securely in its holster.

“It’ll cost you a bob or two.”

“I can cover it.” The cab driver looked her over and must have decided that she was good for it.

“Hop in then love. You need a hand with the bags?”

“Nah, I’m good.”

Darcy climbed into the cab and steeled herself for the next part.
Darcy was an awful liar. Her face betrayed her every time and the nerves made her want to throw up. Barton had almost wet himself laughing the first time they played poker and she’d tried to bluff.

“Kid, you’re betting like you’ve got a flush there but your face is telling me you’ve got a hand like a foot. All-in. Calling it.”

“Fuck.”

Apparently the trick was to keep the lies as close to the truth as possible. Darcy tried to keep this in mind as she almost dropped the briefcase she was clutching in her sweaty hand as she approached the reception. She’d liberated the briefcase and its contents from the trunk of a car in the car lot outside the airport that served as Hunter’s stash box.

“Good afternoon Miss. Welcome to Biggin Hill. How can I help you?”

“Hi there.” Darcy tried not to fumble as she produced the Stark Industries ID she’d fabricated the night before. “My name is Debbie Brown. I’m here to inspect one of Mr Stark’s planes.” It was true, she was there to take a look at one of the planes.

The receptionist checked her screen, “I’m afraid we don’t have anything on the books from Mr Stark.”

Darcy feigned polite irritation and leaned on the desk, “When does he ever?” Darcy prayed that the stories she’d heard about Stark’s indifference towards other people’s expectations were true.

The receptionist shared a conspiratorial look with Darcy before clearing her throat, “I need to place a quick call to my manager if that’s alright?” Darcy nodded but her throat was constricting. The receptionist gestured towards the seating area to her right and Darcy took a seat. She tried to look casual but the receptionist kept giving her furtive looks as she spoke on the phone. You need to get to that plane or you’ll never get to Bobbi and Hunter in time.

Darcy pulled the burner phone out of her pocket and put it to her ear, tucked underneath her hair, and began to speak loudly.

“Yes Mr Stark, I understand Mr Stark… But Mr Stark I’m at the air field right now… I’ll have the plane checked as soon as I can Mr Stark… Apparently it wasn’t on their books Mr Stark… I know that they’re Ms Potts’ favourite earrings Mr Stark… Yes Mr Stark… Yes, I know that this is my final chance Mr Stark…” Darcy had made her voice more frantic as her fake one-sided conversation had gone on. She’d begun pacing to draw attention to herself but had held back from looking over to the reception desk until now. She took a breath and threw the receptionist a plaintive look and made her lip wobble for good measure. In fairness, her lip was trembling along with the rest of her anyways. Please, please, please.

The receptionist took a moment but then must have taken pity on her as she returned to her own phone conversation. Darcy turned her back and pretended to conclude the call. Just as she slid the phone back into her pocket, the receptionist called her back over. She approached the desk, letting some of her nerves show.

The receptionist pulled out a swipe card and ran it through the top of her keyboard. She handed it to Darcy. “You have twenty minutes. The flight crew and pilot are already out at the plane just now...
doing maintenance. Use this to get out to the hangar. Try to get someone from SI to alert us next time though please? My boss gets quite upset when procedure isn’t followed.”

Darcy gave her the most earnest smile in thanks that she could muster. “I know *all* about that sister.”

The receptionist grinned back at her and pointed her in the direction of the doors that would lead to the hangar. Darcy felt bad that she was probably about to get the girl into a whole pile of trouble. She pushed it to the back of her mind and swiped the card to open the doors.

Once through, she followed the corridor past the door to the hangars and instead walked up to the fire exit. She quickly unhooked the door from the alarm system and shoved it open. She held her breath for a second but when no alarms sounded, she stepped outside. She ducked behind a dumpster and grabbed her backpack and holdall. She shouldered them both and stepped back inside, closing the door behind her.

She jogged back up to the hangar doors, with difficulty in her heels and with all her bags. She wiped her card through and the doors swung open for her. She pocketed the key card and rested her hand on the grip of her icer under her jacket. As she approached the small plane that had a Stark Industries logo plastered over three quarters of it, she spotted the crew. *At least there’s no danger that it’s the wrong plane.*

She strode up confidently and dropped her bags on to a work bench without breaking her pace. There were four men working on the plane, but she couldn’t see the pilot. The plane was facing the open hangar doors to her far right and sunshine filled the space. Two of the crew were working together, crouched under the main body of the plane. The third was on the far side, and Darcy could only see his legs. The fourth was standing on top of the aircraft, but was beginning to descend a ladder to come over and speak to her.

Darcy took a deep breath and waved cheerily at the fourth man. He wiped his hand on his overalls and went to return the wave. She pulled the icer from its holster and fired the first shot at him. He fell face first on to the ladder with a clatter that echoed noisily. This caught the attention of the two men working underneath. As they scrambled out to see what the commotion was, Darcy broke out into a run and tried to keep her arm level as she squeezed off two more shots. Both men hit the ground one after the other. The man on the far side had pulled out a radio. Darcy sped up and propelled herself into a slide under the plane firing off a final shot. The man collapsed in a heap and his radio went skittering across the concrete.

Darcy pulled herself to her feet and dusted herself down. Her leather on her heels was now all scuffed but she was otherwise unscathed. She held her icer out in front with both hands and slowly paced towards the front of the plane. She kept her head on a swivel, looking out for the pilot.

She jumped and spun on the spot when the radio on the floor crackled and the air field security were asking for a repeat of the last message. Her heart thudded in her ears as she frantically tried to work out what to do about it. She then heard a clang and a thud behind her. She whirled back around into a crouch to find the pilot lying in a heap on the floor, blood seeping from a cut on his temple and a large wrench resting in his outstretched hand. Darcy then looked up to see where he had come from.

“You have go to be fucking kidding me.”

“Hey, doll. Going somewhere?” Bucky smirked and leapt gracefully to the ground, landing right in front of her.

Darcy pointed her icer squarely at his chest, took a deep breath, held it for a moment and then dropped her arms. Icer still in hand, she bodily shoved past him and retrieved her bags from the work
bench. Bucky jogged after her and put a hand on her shoulder when she refused to turn around. At the touch, Darcy turned. She clenched her jaw and narrowed her eyes at him. Bucky took a slight step back and removed his hand.

Bucky sounded offended, “Hey, what’s the deal?”

“What’s the-? What’s the deal?! I’ll tell you what the deal is. You have just spectacularly ruined everything is what the fucking deal is.” She hoisted her bags further on to her shoulder and rearranged her grip on the briefcase and the icer. She resisted the urge to point the gun at him again.

Bucky raised his hands defensively. “Look, I’m just here to come get you okay. Just come with me and-“

“Nope. No chance. I didn’t ask for a rescue. I wasn’t even in a situation that I needed rescued from. So you can just fuck away back to where you came from and I can go start back at square one.” Darcy flashed her eyes at him, daring him to insist.

Bucky never could resist a dare, “Look, kid. Just-“

Darcy screamed in the back of her throat in frustration. She was about to launch into a thorough attack on his character when the radio on the floor crackled again and a rapid voice came through.

“Fuck! Just nothing Bucky. I need to get out of here now that I’m apparently not leaving the way I’d intended. All thanks to your daring ‘rescue’.”

Bucky’s shoulders squared and he jutted his jaw, “That guy was going to get the drop on you. You were goddamn lucky I was here to knock him out when I did.”

“LUCKY!? I needed him to fly the fucking plane you moron! And I swear to God, if you ever refer to me being lucky one more fucking time-“

Darcy was cut off by lights flashing and an alarm blaring through the hangar. She froze, her fight or flight instincts seizing as her senses became overwhelmed. Bucky grabbed her by the wrist and dragged her back towards the plane. She barely had time to think as he threw her up the steps and she stumbled into the cockpit. Bucky darted around the outside of the plane, unhooking the fuel hose and slamming shut the maintenance hatches. A few seconds later he joined her in the cockpit and started to flick switches all around him.

Darcy’s brain finally kicked back into gear and she tossed her bags behind her onto the spare seat. “You know how to fly this thing?” She asked while clipping her harness into place.

Bucky nodded while he started to manoeuvre the plane out of the hanger. Darcy pushed herself back into the seat and closed her eyes tight for a second. Change of plan. She opened them and fixed her eyes on Bucky. He looked back at her. “Guess you’re coming to Mexico then.”

Chapter End Notes

So. What do we think?
Darcy is officially out in the wild. She’s pissed off & on a mission. Oh, and Bucky has invited himself along.
How do we think this is all going to pan out?
Please leave all the comments with any questions, queries, theories, corrections, etc.
All my love,
Your humble author
EJ <3
Chapter 20

Chapter Summary

Where we find out what happened when they got to Mexico.

Chapter Notes

Just a teeny tiny update. Typed this on my phone in Starbucks before work so please let me know about any mistakes and I'll fix them asap.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Darcy looked up from the screen of her ipod and squinted through the blinding sun at the street signs. According to her map, one of Fury's safe houses should be on the next corner. She resolutely did not look behind her at the pouting super assassin trailing after her.

Their flight had been awkward to say the least. Darcy had seethed in silence, only breaking it once to give him their destination coordinates. He'd tried to talk to her on numerous occasions but one calculating look from her icer to him and then to her parachute hanging behind them had shut him up.

*Screw him and his kicked puppy face.*

They walked the last block in the afternoon heat. Sweat had her clothing sticking to her back and her grip on her bags kept slipping. She checked the notes on this location and followed the instructions to gain access. Once they had entered the apartment, Bucky had strode ahead to give the place a once over. Darcy dumped her bags on the creaking wooden floor and looked around for herself.

The apartment was small. Barely more than a studio. There looked to be a separate bedroom and bathroom but the rest was open plan. There was a sliding glass door leading to a small paved garden. She flicked a switch on the wall next to her and two ceiling fans started to slowly move the stifling air around. It was just enough to cool her face.

She had just slumped down on to the sofa, that someone had placed a colourful patchwork throw over to disguise it's disrepair, when Bucky walked back in to the room. She narrowed her eyes at him and his face dissolved into kicked puppy.

"Fine, you can stay until you get your extraction details but then you're gone." She kept her voice flat and gave him a count of three to try to argue. When he just stood there looking conflicted, she grabbed her bags and headed for the shower.
When Darcy came out of the shower, it had taken some coaxing and no small amount of force to get it to work, Bucky was in the kitchen working over two saucepans on the hob.

"What, you cook now?" she tossed the question, heavily laden with disdain, over her shoulder as she dug out her laptop and ipod and began to work.

"Had to learn a little bit or Barton and I would have had nothing but grilled meats and frozen dinners." he was aiming for an amiable tone but Darcy could hear his apprehension. She staunchly ignored it and tried to get her laptop to connect to the wireless printer that she'd found in a cupboard in the bedroom.

She printed the plans of the CIA base that Bobbi and Hunter were being held in. She pieced the separate sheets of paper together to form the whole layout. She'd found them by hacking the home computer of the original architect. *Workaholics should really pay more attention to their security.*

Darcy was studying the layout of their maintenance access when Bucky brought over a bowl of rice and some sort of tinned vegetables in a tomato sauce. She was about to tell him she wasn't hungry when her stomach growled. *Traitor.* So she nodded her thanks but didn't look up at him.

"If you cut the power from there, they'll have to manually go in to switch to the generator and it'll reduce the amount of men who can approach down that corridor. Should buy more time to get to there." Bucky pointed at the various parts of the plans and tried to keep his voice casual. She looked up and blinked a few times.

He was about to turn back to the kitchen when she conceded, "That was actually quite helpful." She was not pouting about it.

Bucky nodded and offered a tentative smile. "How do you know they're definitely there? The CIA threw us for a loop when we were trying to find you."

Darcy took a forkful of rice and vegetables. It wasn't bad. "Their chief interrogator has been googling Harry Potter references. It's their preferred method of deflection. Nerds." Darcy huffed a small laugh as she thought of her friends.

"You really care about them, huh kid?"

Darcy's smile disappeared in an instant and her indignation took over. "Will you stop calling me kid!? I am not a child. It's patronising. I am a fully capable adult woman. Or do you not agree?"

Bucky pushed his hair back from his face, "The others call you kid?"

"Because they earned it. It's affectionate. They weren't espousing my monumental failures and inadequacies to other people! Well, they might. But they at least have the decency to do it behind my back." Darcy stood and folded her arms. She pulled her shoulders back and raised her chin. "I don't know what you think you're doing here Barnes, but I'm not going back with you. Go scurry back and Secretly Avenge or whatever. I'm going to get my friends out of the hole I got them landed in and then I'm going to do whatever I can so that I can go home and never have to so much as think about you people again. We clear?"

"Crystal."

Chapter End Notes
So how do we think this is going to pan out for them both?

I'm still working on the rest of the story so please throw out any suggestions or requests you have :)

Much love <3
As per usual there is no beta, so all mistakes are mine, and feel free to let me know in the comments if I have corrections to make :) & so we continue from exactly where we left off....

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"Crystal."

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“… okay maybe not crystal. But,” Darcy took a deep breath but Bucky raised his hands pleadingly. “There was more to that conversation than what I think you heard. I know you’re angry and you’ve every right to be. I was outta line. No disagreements here.” He continued, gesturing towards the plans laid out in front of them. “But, you’re planning on breaking into a CIA black site. On your own, with an icer and a few knives.” Bucky took a seat next to her on the sofa, putting himself physically on her level but maintaining a sizeable distance between them. “You and I both know what you’re capable of.” He absentmindedly rubbed the skin where she had stuck him with the training knife. “But these guys won’t be kiddin’ around. They’ll be authorised to use lethal force. I know how you feel about…I know you only incapacitate but…” He faltered and pushed his hair back from his face and fixed his eyes on hers. “You’ll need someone to watch your six on this one. Let this soldier do the things you won’t and shouldn’t hafta. It’s nothin’ personal ‘gainst you. Let me have your back.”

The kicked puppy face that he had been sporting had dissolved into one of such sincere earnestness that it gave her pause. On one hand she wanted to distance herself from him and the circumstances that kept making her life spiral out of her control. On the other, she had to prioritise getting to Bobbi and Hunter. Bobbi had always promised to come back for her and now she had to return the favour, especially considering she was the reason they were in their current predicament. You’re in way over your head. Despite everything, she wouldn’t look this gift horse in the mouth. They had had a strategic alliance before, no reason why they shouldn’t again. She could suppress her own feelings and get the job done. Get the mission done.

“Fine. But we do this my way and after this is done, I’m gone. No arguments.”

“No arguments from me. I promise.”
Darcy looked doubtfully at his outstretched hand, “A promise from a super-spy-sassin. How reassuring.”

Bucky withdrew his hand, gave her an understanding smile and a tight salute. “Nope. This is a promise from Sergeant James Buchanan Barnes, ma’am.”

Darcy couldn’t help but return the smile and salute. She quickly schooled her features, locking away the rush of emotions as she realised she really wouldn’t have to go into this alone. Clearing her throat, she mentally reminded herself of his status as a strategic ally. “Go get your food and I’ll go over what I’ve got so far.”

They worked for the remainder of the afternoon and into the evening. The sun had dipped behind the buildings opposite and the stifling heat had finally started to recede. They had worked efficiently. Darcy shared her plans and Bucky pointed out areas where he could assist or improve upon it. Darcy even had to admit to herself that her plan was vastly enriched, and far more likely to succeed, due to the involvement of one Sergeant James Buchanan Barnes.

Darcy rubbed her eyes and stretched, falling against the back of the sofa. “I think that’s everything then.”

“Just need to wait until tomorrow afternoon now.” Bucky finished trimming the edges of the plastic around their newly formed IDs and swept the excess into his hand. He walked to the kitchen to put them in the trash. “You hungry? I think there’s more canned food in here but nothin’ in the fridge.”

Darcy dramatically swooned and threw herself face first across the sofa, “Oh God, no more canned food please! I think I’ve officially hit my limit where canned food is concerned.” She lifted her head slightly to see Bucky leaning against the far wall, arms folded across his chest looking at her dramatics with fond exasperation. “Are you sure we can’t just go in tonight?”

Bucky shook his head lightly, “You know we need to wait until the weekend. You’re the one who wants as many admin staff clear as possible.”

Darcy dropped her face back down and muffled, “I know. I just don’t think I can just sit here and wait to go.”

“I know how important they are to you. We only get one shot to do this right.” He crossed the room and knelt down next to the sofa. “We could always go eat out?”

Darcy’s head snapped up at the offering. “Like actual outside food?”

Bucky smirked and leant forwards to whisper in her ear, “Like actual outside bar food.”

Darcy knew he was just trying to keep her occupied and stop her whining, but she didn’t care. There was the prospect of real food and some semblance of normality. There was one thing holding her back from sprinting out of the door right then and there. She sat up, “But can we just go out like that?” She hunched her shoulders in on herself. “Not sure if you’ve been keeping count, but between us we’re wanted by pretty much every alphabet agency in the world, and well… now that I really think about it… most of the planet and actually, maybe other planets too…” Darcy felt like the air
around her became heavier and was pressing in on every inch of skin, fixing her in place. Her chin dropped to her chest as the oppression settled into every bone. Her mind began to whirl and pile up every thought it could find related to how totally and utterly messed up her life had become. That was, until she felt cool metal touch lightly on the tip of her chin.

Bucky was still knelt on the floor next to her and he forced her to make eye contact. “Doll, I’ve had most of everyone after me for most of my life. Even had to dodge Steve Rogers for a coupla years there. Do you have any idea how relentless he is?” He trialled a smile but when he didn’t get one back he tried again. “Ain’t nothin’ gonna happen to you while I’m around okay. This soldier’s got your six.”

*Right. Strategic alliance. Mission. Everything is going to be fine as long as you can pull your shit together and hold it there.*

Darcy pasted a smirk on her face, “Did you say *bar food*?”

Bucky searched her eyes for a moment or two, a flash of disappointment clouded his features and then he brushed it away. He curled the finger that was still touching under her chin and chucked it lightly. “Sure did doll.” He stood and offered his arm to her. “You comin’?”

Darcy stood but ducked around his arm. “Sure am Barnes.”

A decent meal and a couple of drinks had left Darcy feeling more relaxed. She had even taken Bucky’s proffered arm for the walk back. She let her mind still as they walked, his keen eyes sweeping over every shadow and movement in the dark. She had surprised herself when they had gotten back to the apartment and realised that she’d felt the first semblance of security since the safe house in Scotland.

They’d bickered briefly over the sleeping arrangements. Bucky had insisted that he would take the sofa despite it being far too small for him. Darcy hadn’t needed to press her argument much further when Bucky had arrogantly swung both feet up on to the arm and the entire left side had collapsed into a heap on the floor. She’d carry the image of a startled and slightly embarrassed Sergeant James Buchanan Barnes sprawled on the remains of the couch with her for the rest of her life.

“You can explain that one to Fury next time you see him.” Darcy had folded her arms across her chest and stifled a giggle as he had struggled to clamber out of the collapsed couch.

“The fact that I bust up his sofa ain’t gonna be the first topic that springs to his mind, the next time Fury sees me.” Bucky dusted himself down and started to pull out the cushions to fashion a makeshift mattress.

Darcy snatched the uneven lumpy cushion from him and tossed it out of his reach. She swallowed around the apprehension creeping up, “Come on and just sleep through there with me. We both need to be well rested and sleeping on the vestiges of that isn’t going to leave you well rested. I’m sure you’ve slept rougher but you don’t have to. I don’t bite and I don’t snore. And from what I’ve read, I’m sure you’re not worried about your reputation. Not that you have a reputation as such. Well, who am I kidding, yeah you do. But it’s fine because we’re partners right?”
Darcy’s mouth ran away from her as she tried to stamp down on the thought that kept flashing across her brain. *You haven’t slept in the same bed as anyone else since Ian.* Even Bobbi had slept on her couch whenever she’d helped her through a nightmare induced panic attack. Barton had always slept wherever he’d fallen or had left in the middle of the night for a mission.

Bucky seemed to pick up on her apprehension, “Don’t worry about me doll. I really have slept rougher. Go get some shut eye.” He bent to reach for the cushion she’d tossed aside. Darcy darted forwards and threw herself on top of it. She situated herself cross legged on top of it and issued him with a challenging look.

Darcy held her breath. Their faces were inches from each other. His eyes flickered over every part of her face before resting on her eyes. She couldn’t read his expression. It wasn’t blank like she’d seen before but she couldn’t put her finger on it. He apparently came to a decision and turned about face and headed for the bedroom. Darcy was left sitting alone on the floor of the living space.

“You better have been telling the truth about the snoring doll.” Bucky called from the bedroom and Darcy let out the breath she’d been holding. She scrabbled to her feet and followed after him, flicking the light switch on the wall, plunging the apartment into darkness behind her.

Chapter End Notes

The next chapter will be **The Rescue** so it may take me a little while to post while I work out the finer details of how exactly they're going to bust into a CIA black site. (I sure like to make things difficult for myself huh?)

Please leave all the comments with your questions, queries, theories, feedback, etc. I love reading them all!

Much love, EJ <3
Chapter 22

Chapter Summary

The Rescue

Chapter Notes

Okay, go grab a hot drink and comfortable chair, because hoo-wee is this a long one. I couldn’t find anywhere to split this that wouldn't be heinous. So here it is, in it's entirety.

No beta, so any and all mistakes are mine. I'm up again in 5 hours for work, so chuck in a comment and I'll fix it when I'm up.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

There was something pulling just at the edge of Darcy’s consciousness. Something she should be paying attention to, but she couldn’t quite bring herself to address it yet. She felt a heat down the length of her entire body. Mexico. It’s hot in Mexico. Her sleep heavy brain worked through the idea of it being hot and being in Mexico, but stumbled slightly on the fact that it was probably still really early. Darcy cracked one eye open and when she wasn’t suddenly blinded by sunlight, she opened them both. It was dark. Very dark in fact, only a slight warm glow coming from the sunrise beyond the window.

She was lying on her back, one arm tucked behind her head under the pillow. She flexed her right hand and felt it brush the cool polymer of her icer. She then realised that at some point in the night she’d kicked the covers down until they only covered her feet. She squinted through the dark and a glint near her hip caught her eye.

Her left arm lay close to her body but was curled around Bucky’s metal arm. Her hand lay splayed out on top of his as it rested on her hip. The wide span of his fingers meant that his thumb and forefinger actually lay closer to her waist and had dipped under her shirt to lie on her skin. She subconsciously flexed her fingers, stroking lightly.

At her gentle movement, Bucky’s eyes snapped open and she felt them on the side of her face. She looked over at him, lying on his side facing her. The second their eyes met, the reality of their current arrangement rushed through her and slammed straight into her chest. She snatched her hand back at the same instant the Bucky withdrew his, plates whirring sharply.

Darcy swung her legs off of the bed and sat up. She couldn’t dare look back at him. “I’m going to go shower first. We need to get a move on if we’re going to hit all the stash boxes that we need to.” She successfully kept her voice level, hiding the fact that her heart was pounding. Her stomach was clenching and her mind struggled to piece together what it was that she was feeling. As she stood and made her way to the bathroom, she grabbed a hold of that undetermined feeling and stuffed it down out of sight. She had a mission to complete.
Darcy hoisted the strap on the large case she was carrying further up onto her shoulder. It bunched in the silk of her blouse. As she fiddled with it, trying to get the weight to balance properly so it wasn’t repeatedly bumping off her hip, Bucky strode farther on ahead. They’d spent the morning hitting several stash boxes in the city. They’d collected all the equipment they’d need and thanks to one of Barton’s stashes hidden in a gym locker, they were both dressed in smart business wear.

She watched as Bucky strode down the street in his dark navy blue suit. When he’d walked out of the men’s room at the gym, Darcy’s heart had started hammering again and that feeling she was stamping down threatened to reappear. He is an objectively attractive guy in a well fitted suit. Calm down woman. While Darcy had been struggling internally with the memory, Bucky had come to a stop in front of a rusted out Renault that looked like it had, very briefly, seen better days. He’d dropped his bags to the floor and had pulled out a metal rod. Recognition as to what he was about to do, shook Darcy from her reverie.

“Wait!” Darcy hissed, rushing to catch up with him. She grabbed the wrist that held the rod, stopping his movements. “Not this one. Next block over.” Darcy nodded down the street and started walking. She heard footsteps behind her as Bucky followed. She shook her head affectionately and whispered to herself, knowing full well that the super-soldier would hear it, “Amateur.”

They crossed to the next block and took a right. Halfway along there was large black, almost new SUV. Darcy took a look around, and seeing no-one, she pulled out her iPod. She fired up the app she needed and pointed the camera at the license plate. When the program was done, she jerked her head at the SUV and beckoned Bucky to follow. Walking straight up to the car, she opened the trunk and threw her bags in and then stood aside for Bucky to do the same. He came to stand at the rear of the car but made no move to put his bags in. Instead he just raised an eyebrow at her.

“I hacked the central locking system. Now come on. Bags in the trunk, you’re driving.” She turned and got into the front passenger seat. She touched a few keys on the iPod and smiled when the on board computer sprang to life. A few seconds later Bucky got into the driver’s seat and folded his arms, clearly expecting an explanation. “This model doesn’t require you to actually insert a key. It’s a near-field communicator signal that I’ve replicated on the iPod. It’ll just drive. Which is really what we should be doing. You know? Driving?” Darcy mimed turning a steering wheel and gestured for Bucky to move.

Bucky made no such movements. “A fancy car like this, it’s going to be missed and reported stolen in minutes Darcy.”

“Which is why you’re driving and I’m going to register us as the owners. Well not us, but our ID’s will match. Now come on soldier, you drive and leave the finer points of modern grand theft auto to me okay?” She threw him a wink and waved again for him to get moving.

Bucky finally pushed the start button, put the car in drive and pulled away. As she waited on her hack into the DMV to complete, she thought back to her misspent youth and the ridiculous joy rides she’d been on before she was caught. She was about to open her mouth to tell Bucky about a particularly memorable occasion, when she remembered the last time she was going to talk to someone about how she almost ended up in juvie. The Black Widow. Then she remembered why they had stolen this car in the first place and she narrowed her focus. You’re here to complete a mission, to go get Bobbi and Hunter and fix things. Darcy straightened in her seat and got to work.
A couple of hours later, and they pulled up to the gates of the CIA black site. From the outside it looked like some sort of military research complex, with its high barbed wire fences and armed guards. Darcy zeroed in on the reasons why they were doing this and calmed her breathing. An armed guard approached Bucky’s car door and he rolled down the tinted window.

Bucky briefly spoke to the guard and Darcy watched as another guard started walking around the back of the vehicle and ran a mirror on a pole around the bottom of the car. When prompted Darcy handed over their forged IDs and waited with baited breath as they were checked electronically. If she hadn’t done this part right, they were finished right now.

The reader in the guard’s hands beeped and he handed back their IDs. He waved for the gates to be opened and then pointed to the car lot on the far right. That was far too fucking easy. Darcy smiled at the guard as Bucky rolled the window back up. They parked up, retrieved their cases from the trunk and walked through the front doors.

Darcy lengthened her strides to over-take Bucky and approached the front desk. “Hi there, I’m Agent Garceau and this is Agent Scott and we’re with the UN Enhanced Beings Control Taskforce. We have an appointment at 1400 with Special Agent Moye.” She presented her ID and Bucky did the same.

The receptionist seemed slightly taken aback. “One moment please, I wasn’t aware that there were any appointments being held today.” This is what happens when you plan a rescue for a Saturday dumbass. You arouse suspicion. The receptionist pulled out his tablet and tapped out a few keystrokes, furrowing his brow. Bucky was checking out the rest of the open plan lobby and the exits while feigning boredom. The receptionist then looked up “My apologies Agents Garceau and Scott, I see the appointment right here on the books. You will be in Conference Room B. If you take the elevator to the right here to the fifth floor, the conference room is the third on your right, the corner room. Would you like me to have someone help with your cases?”

Bucky picked up both sets of cases easily on to one shoulder and replied “Nah we’re fine. Thanks.” They both strode over to the elevator and pressed the call button. The doors opened immediately and they stepped inside. Darcy pressed the button for the fifth floor and muttered under her breath while pretending to re-tuck her blouse into her pants. “Show-off.”

“Sorry what was that Agent Garceau?” Bucky asked, doing a terrible job of feigning innocent enquiry as a grin stretched across his face.

Darcy was about to match his grin and reply when the elevator doors opened and her face dropped into her ‘I’m-The-Black-Widow-Don’t-Fuck-With-Me’ Face. She strolled out into the corridors and headed for Conference Room B. They’d chosen this room as one of the walls backed on to the maintenance access to the power circuits for the building. As they approached the door, Darcy reached into her pocket and pressed the home button twice. There was no outward signal, but the cameras in the room had just been put on a loop.

They’d ensured that they arrived early and that the Special Agent they were pretending to meet was currently on a conference call that was likely to run late. They closed the conference door behind them. Bucky placed their cases on the large dark wooden table in the middle of the room. Darcy
pulled one closer to her and unlatched the lid. She then kicked off the heels she was wearing and pulled off her suit pants. She was wearing Kevlar infused leggings underneath that had all sorts of handy pockets and knife sheaths and a holster for her icer. *Thank you Black Widow.* She then unbuttoned the top few buttons on her blouse and pulled it over her head. She readjusted the tank top she was wearing underneath and tucked it into the leggings. She pulled out her boots and dropped them to the floor, she bent over to loosen the laces when she caught sight of Bucky looking her over. *Shit.* Darcy had forgotten that the scars on her arms were on show. She momentarily forgot about her boots and pulled on her tactical jacket and zipped it up. It fit snugly like a leather jacket, and importantly it had full length sleeves. Bucky must have noticed her discomfort and returned to getting himself into his own tactical gear.

Once they were fully geared up, Darcy found the right place on the wall and took out the tool kit from the case and started work on getting through the wall. Bucky took up his position at the door, keeping an ear out for anyone coming. Darcy had removed the portion of the wall covering she had cut and was affixing her device to the cabling when Bucky signalled that someone was coming. Darcy froze and put a hand to her icer. Bucky raised his hand to stop her and took up his position just behind the door.

The door swung open and in walked Special Agent Moye. His conference call had obviously gone well and so he wasn’t really paying attention to his surroundings as he strolled in whistling and swung the door closed behind him. He never saw Bucky’s left fist coming before he hit the ground. Hard. Darcy blinked at the sudden violence and then returned to her work. Once the device was in place she turned back to Bucky.

“Once I set this off, we’ll have twelve minutes until they can get to the back-up generator in the next building and get it fired up. All the cameras will be cut and all the doors will unlock. This building blocks all comms purely due its construction so there’s nothing I can do about that.” Darcy rattled all of this off while she double checked the magazines for her icer and that all her knives were in place. She tightened her ponytail and tucked a few errant wisps of hair behind her ears.

Bucky nodded his understanding. “Right. We go straight to the cells in the sub-basement, get Bobbi and Hunter, climb up through the secondary elevator shaft and then out to the SUV. Sounds simple enough. Are you ready?”

“Ready.”

Bucky stepped forward and put his hand around her bicep. “I’ve got your six Darcy.”

Darcy shrugged out of his grip and squared her shoulders. “And I’ve got yours Sergeant.” She went over to her device, double checked the thick bundle of cables it was connected to and then took several steps back. She pressed the key on her iPod and put her fingers in her ears. A split second later, there was a bang as the cable was severed and the fluorescent lights overhead went out. They were replaced by a dull blue from the emergency lighting. “Go!”

Darcy stepped out into the corridor, she checked both ways and then began a crouched jog. She didn’t need to look to know that Bucky was right on her back. They stopped at the T-junction into the main corridor, again they saw no-one. This was an administration level and so was unsurprisingly empty on a Saturday afternoon. Darcy held herself flush to the wall. Bucky stepped forwards with his rifle held out and checked in both directions. When he signalled that the coast was clear they moved on to the right and up to the double doors that led to the staircase.

Bucky slowly pushed through the now unlocked door and eased forwards. Darcy followed closely at his back. Now that her eyes had adjusted to the dimmed light, the sound of blood pumping in her ears lessened. She could feel the adrenalin surging as they began their descent. They made it down
five flights before the door at the landing below flew open.

Six armed guards came marching through. Bucky’s arm flew out and pushed Darcy back against the wall. Darcy strained to hear where the guards were going but the sounds of boots just echoed in every direction. Bucky signalled for Darcy to stay put and in one fluid movement, he pivoted himself over the railings with one arm and landed on the set of stairs below. A staccato of shots rang out. Darcy’s heart raced as she willed herself to do as instructed and stay back against the wall. After a few seconds the firing stopped. Bucky whistled for her to follow. She huffed out a relieved breath and ran down the stairs to meet him.

They moved more quickly down the last two sets of stairs until they reached the cell level. The security pad next to the door still showed green. Darcy began to feel her chest tighten and she sucked in a deep breath to stop herself from panicking. They were so close now. She strengthened her grip on her icer and shook out her shoulders. Bucky stepped forwards and checked through the window in the door. He eyed the large group of agents surrounding the cell doors, around 300 feet down the corridor.

“Fuck.”

Darcy’s heart leapt. “What is it?”

“They’ve convened on the cells. They must have figured this is where we were headed.” Bucky looked her over with concern and ran a hand through his hair.

“Bucky?”

“Yeah doll?”

“You’ve got my six right?”

“Course I do.”

“Then let’s get in there and get our friends away from those sons of bitches.” As she spoke, she felt the fire in the pit of her belly ignite and her anger that these people were holding her friends took over. She no longer felt the guilt with such acuity. Right now, all that mattered was getting them out. She checked her iPod. “We’ve got seven and a half minutes.”

Bucky nodded and stepped back from the door, and got into position. Darcy crept forwards and crouched in front of him. Darcy signalled a count down from three and then they burst into action. They kicked the double doors open. Bucky started laying down cover fire. Darcy darted forwards, crouched below Bucky’s spray of bullets. She ignored the sounds crashing around her and as she ran she pulled the stun grenade from her pocket she pulled the safety pin out, counted to two and then threw it towards the group of agents. She used the momentum of her throw to tuck her body into a roll and shielded her eyes from the blast. She continued her roll and landed in a crouch. Flicking her head up, she surveyed the pile of men in front of her. Every single one of them was on the ground. Most were just out-cold but some had obvious bullet wounds. She forced her eyes away from them.

Bucky ran past her, rifle held steady as he checked they were all in fact down. When he signalled it was safe to approach, Darcy sprinted after him and tried to open the cell doors. They were heavy steel sliding access hatches, connected to the central security system. Only they weren’t opening.

The sounds from another wave of boots descending the staircase they’d just come from made her heart rate spike. She rushed to the security panel only to find the lights red. There was no time to hack into the system. She checked her iPod, “Six minutes and twenty.”
Bucky stepped up to the doors and tried to prise them open. Darcy tugged on the back of his tactical jacket. “There’s no use. They’re held by electro magnets. They must have them running on the emergency generator that powers the lights. We need to shut that down too.”

Bucky looked towards the doorway they’d come from and then down the corridor to the corner at the end. “I remember where the generator is on the map. Up one level right?”

“Right.”

“Then let’s go.”

“There’s no time for us both to go. You stay here and I’ll go kill the generator.” Bucky looked like he was about to protest. “I’m serious. There’s no way I can manually shift those doors. I’ll get them unlocked and meet you all outside.”

“Darcy, there’s no comms. If you get in trouble-“

“I know. But tell me there’s another way to do this in…” She checked the iPod. “…five minutes and forty seconds?”

Bucky gritted his teeth and sucked in a sharp breath. “I don’t like this Darcy.”

She checked her icer and knives and started jogging backwards down the corridor towards the corner. “I don’t either Bucky but I trust you to get them out of here.” She turned around and shot around the corner, icer held out in front.

She bolted down the corridor, pausing only as she came to the door to the stairwell. She peered through and saw no-one. She pushed through the door and sprinted up the flight of stairs as quickly as she could. She was almost at the landing when the door slowly opened and she saw the barrel of a gun. She dropped to a crouch and as the agent came through the door, she squeezed off an icer shot. It hit him squarely in the chest and he dropped. As he hit the floor, his partner came into view. Darcy launched herself forwards and fired off another shot but missed. She swore and drove her left shoulder forwards and into his chest, pushing him back into the corridor.

Darcy felt the air rush out of her lungs as three bullets thudded into the agent slowing her pace as his dead weight fell against her. With her right hand, she raised her icer and unloaded the rest of her magazine into the three agents who had just opened fire. She dropped the dead agent to the ground and leapt over the unconscious men. Darcy broke out into a run.

She slowed as she reached the corner where the generator room was. At this point her system was so full of adrenalin that her muscles were vibrating. Slowly, Darcy peered around the corner. There were another four agents at the door to the generator room. She turned back and slumped against the wall briefly, the sounds of her breathing magnified. This is too fucking much. But then a flash of bright blonde hair and a dry English chuckle swept across her mind and she steeled herself. She checked her icer. Two more rounds. Then her iPod. Three minutes and ten. Here goes nothing.

Darcy took a steadying breath and shoved off from the wall. She barrelled down the corridor and spent her last two rounds, taking down two of the guards. Anticipating their shots, she tucked into a roll. Bullets flew overhead. As she pulled out of the somersault, she threw her knife into the soft shoulder joint of an agent and his gun clattered from his hand. She hadn’t been quick enough. He’d managed to pull the trigger. Pain blazed through her side. She gasped but continued on.

The pain only fuelled her adrenalin. Rushing towards the final agent, she spun and grabbed his gun with her left hand. Their arms were parallel and she forced his arm downwards and squeezed the
trigger so that he shot himself in the knee. His leg buckled and she stamped down with all her force. With the leg broken, she then flicked out another knife and sliced through the underside of his arm. The loss of musculature made him drop the gun. As he struggled to counter-attack she drove the heel of her boot into the underside of his chin and his head snapped back. He fell to the ground unconscious.

Darcy felt pain lance through her side as she landed from the kick. *Two minutes and thirty.* With the coast now clear she sprinted into the generator room. The generator had a whole series of complex levers and slots for key cards. *Aw, generator, no.* She pulled two packets from her tactical jacket and ignored the shattering pain in her side. She opened the plastic and wedged the putty into two of the largest bundles of cables coming in and out of the generator. From another pocket, she placed the detonators. She holstered her icer and winced when her hand came away slick with blood.

As she left the room, she pulled out her iPod and set the charges. She swung the heavy metal door shut behind her and pushed herself to run. Once she cleared the blast radius, she blew the explosives. The detonation flashed white and blew one of her ear drums. The entire corridor dropped into complete darkness. Darcy kept running in the direction of the farthest away staircase as she fumbled for her flashlight. She held her flashlight and one of her knives out in front of her as she drew closer to the doors. She tried in vain to listen out for anyone else but the ringing in her ears was too loud.

Unable to see or hear much and with the pain in her side increasing, Darcy pushed on. She used her hip to prise the door open and she pointed her flashlight up the stairs. The light skittered over each step but found nothing else. Darcy’s muscles screamed in protest as she propelled herself upwards. Each thudding footnote sent a piercing sting up her side.

When she reached the final set of doors there was no window and so she had to advance blind. She tilted her flashlight to the ground and eased the door silently open. She chanced a look to her left and saw no-one. She took a breath and then looked to the right. She could see the fire doors that led to the final stretch of corridor out of the building. With all the strength Darcy could muster, she pushed herself into a flat-out run. She dared not check how much time she had before the security system would kick back in and the doors would lock.

Darcy reached the fire exit doors and slammed her weight into the bar to push them open. Just as she did so she heard bullets ricochet off the door frame around her. Fear sprang up and clawed at her heart but her determination kept pushing her onwards. She could see the outside doors ahead of her and hear at least a dozen boots slamming into the ground as they gained on her. More shots rang out. One clipped the outside of her thigh. Another caught the top of her shoulder. She kept running.

The outer doors rapidly appeared in front of her and she threw herself through them just as she heard the power coming back on. The blinding light from the sun disorientated her but she pushed on across the concrete. More bullets buried themselves in the ground around her feet. Suddenly a black SUV barrelled into her path. The back door swung open and a volley of suppression fire followed a shout of “DARCY!”

Spurred on, Darcy crouched below the spray and ran for the open door. As she reached the door, the firing stopped and two firm hands lifted her and pulled her close. She was then turned and bodily lifted into the back seat. She fell backwards and was quickly followed by a wall of solid leather landing on top of her and the door slamming shut.

“All! All!”

Darcy’s vision swam as the adrenalin began to seep from her system and the pain sharply rose everywhere. The pressure of the weight on top of her lifted slightly and as her vision cleared she saw Bucky’s face, a vision of concern. He placed a hand on her cheek and ran his other hand over her,
checking her for injuries. She winced every time his hand caught a wound and she had to turn her
head to the side to keep from crying out.

That’s when she saw a very tired and grubby looking Hunter in the passenger seat, frantically
checking the side view mirror. She tried to strain herself to see more of Bobbi than just the back of
her matted blonde head but couldn’t from her position on her back.

“Darcy. Doll. Are you okay?” Bucky’s voice drew her attention back to him. He’d pulled himself up
from covering her and was now perched on the edge of the seat, weight resting on his left hand that
was tucked under her thigh.

Everything was starting to sound like she was under water and every movement of the car felt so
exaggerated. The pain had started to recede and the lights seemed to be brighter. The corners of her
vision were beginning to darken though. She tried to grasp the front of Bucky’s tactical jacket
weakly but missed. He leaned down carefully, “What is it doll?”

She grabbed the back of his head and pulled him close with all the strength she had. “Who the fuck
let Bobbi drive?”

Chapter End Notes

Ta dah! They only gone and done it didn't they?! Please leave feedback on the action stuffs. This is my first time writing with actual action and I'm still getting a feel for it so any and all feedback is most welcome. Also, how are we feeling about the progression of Darcy & Bucky? I did warn you that it's a slow burn.

Thank you to everyone who reads, leaves kudos, bookmarks, subscribes and comments. You are all wonderful.
Lots of love, EJ <3
Chapter 23

Chapter Summary

The one where we find out that Hunter's Nan warned him about Bobbi, that Hunter and Bucky are insufferable when playing CoD, that Hunter really doesn't think he's a Hufflepuff, that Darcy had a plan all along and that Senators are always into kinky shit.

Chapter Notes

This chapter was a bitch to try and break. Minimal sleep and my absolute hell demon delight of a niece does not create an ideal writing atmosphere.

NB: My already vast amount of respect to writers on here who have actual facts real lives that they attend to while writing has reached astronomical levels. You are all amazing and kick serious ass.

My eternal gratitude and wonder and amazement goes out to esorrevils who so graciously beta read this chapter for me. So prepare to be astonished and amazed at the increased legibility of this chapter. It is all thanks to her.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The morning sunlight was only just beginning to shine through the open window. The expected soreness in her limbs was also noticeably absent. This, along with the grumbling acid in her stomach, let Darcy piece together that she’d been dosed with the Wakandan medication and had slept through the night. She blinked a few more times and fought back the last vestiges of drug-induced sleep.

She was wrapped in a soft white comforter and air conditioning hummed in the background. Darcy didn’t have to strain her ears too much to hear the conversation happening through the wall.

“Hunter, you can’t be serious?”

“Oh, deadly serious love.”

“I’m not adding getting in a car with me to the list of situations where we tell each other to not die. That’s just ridiculous and unnecessary.”

“Not every time. Just when you’re driving. And it’s bloody necessary. I could hear choirs of angels and my Nan’s voice every time you took a corner like a drunk stunt driver with a death wish.”

“You’re an atheist and your grandma isn’t dead.”

“I’m agnostic. And I know that. I could hear her warning me to steer clear of you… Wish I’d damn well listened to her.”

At the sound of her friends safe and sound and squabbling only a few feet away, Darcy smiled and stretched lazily.
“Welcome back, doll.” The soft Brooklyn drawl pulled her attention to the end of her bed. Bucky was sitting on top of the antique wooden chest of drawers against the wall.

Darcy yawned and rolled on to her back. “Hey. What’s up?”

“Just waiting for you to wake up.” He rolled his shoulders as he shifted position and ran his hand back through his hair. He was still dressed in his tactical gear, and Darcy’s eyes roved over him looking for any injuries. He dipped his head to catch her eye, “I’m fine. Not a scratch. How you feelin’? Any pain?”

Darcy sat up in bed and checked her body for injuries. She was now wearing only her sports bra and leggings, the rest of her gear was piled in the corner of the room on top of her backpack. Running her hands over her shoulder, side and thigh, she found half-healed wounds where the bullets had nicked the skin. They were still pink and looked fairly angry but there was no bleeding or obvious pain. She stretched out her arms, palms open and fingers splayed. “All present and accounted for, Sergeant.” She then threw in an untidy salute and sank back onto the pillows. “Where are we anyway?”

“Ciudad Victoria. It’s a safe house of theirs.” Bucky jerked his thumb towards the next room where Bobbi and Hunter were still bickering. “Got here last night. It’s secure.”

“The SUV and all our gear?”

“SUV’s been ditched and our gear is here.”

Darcy pushed herself up to rest and leaned back on her elbows. “What’s the next move?”

Whatever Bucky was about to say was interrupted by Darcy’s stomach loudly protesting its emptiness. She flushed lightly and Bucky tilted his head and smirked teasingly. “Breakfast, apparently.” He dropped from his position on top of the drawers and led the way through to the living area.

Darcy finished the files she was working on and added them to the compressed attachment. As she stretched back in the chair, the wicker creaked. She took a draw from her cigarette and flicked the ash into the ceramic bowl on the table next to her. The slight breeze that kept her from getting too hot on the covered balcony scattered little pieces of ash. She picked up her coffee cup and drained the last of it before the ash settled in there too.

She closed the laptop and placed it on the seat next to her and stared out past the white painted metal railings that enclosed the balcony. On the street below, she could hear shutters being pulled down on the small stores across the street. The traffic noise started to pick up as people made their way home after a day at work. The sky was clear and impossibly blue as the sun began to descend for the evening.

To her left one of the double doors clicked as it opened and she turned to look up at Bobbi. Her long
blonde hair was still damp from her shower and the bruises on her neck and knuckles were now more pronounced against her clean pale skin. Bobbi had insisted that Darcy get first dibs on the shower, followed by Hunter, who she asserted smelled like a sewer. Bucky had tried to go last but Bobbi had never lost an argument in her life, so he’d been in next.

Bobbi closed the door behind her and the old locking mechanism clacked metal against wood. She strolled over to the railings and leaned her forearms on them for a moment or two before turning to address Darcy. “They’re still playing Call of Duty.” She nodded through the wall towards the couches where Bucky and Hunter were currently on round nineteen of their Xbox marathon. The increasing volume of their threats to each other and Hunter’s complaints about Bucky’s prowess had driven Darcy out to the balcony with her laptop in the first place.

Darcy stubbed her cigarette out. “You’d think that the technical inaccuracies would put them off… apparently not.”

“Serves me right for putting an Xbox in here in the first place.” Bobbi huffed and rolled her eyes.

Darcy gestured around her to the apartment, “Nice set up you’ve got here Birdie. Much nicer than Fury’s place. There’s actual air conditioning and plenty of space. Even for four people. How long do you reckon we’ll be here?”

“I’m not sure. With the CIA and Cartalonia on our case, leaving Mexico is going to be rough. Could be a while.”

Darcy gestured towards her closed laptop. “I’ve collated all the evidence of Cartalonia’s collaborations with the CIA and a list of all his favorite people and a few choice rivals. Say the word and I can hit send. Should create a big enough power vacuum that we should be able to sneak out without too much trouble. Oh, and I’ve got a press-pack made up to send to all the major news outlets stateside about how the CIA have been facilitating the activities of a drug lord for their own ends. That should put the heat on them for long enough to keep them off our backs here too.” As she spoke, Darcy lit up another cigarette and lamented her empty coffee cup. She was just considering going back inside to make another cup when she realised that Bobbi hadn’t spoken for quite some time. Bobbi was looking Darcy over with her own version of Natasha’s mental measuring tape. “What? Not a good plan?”

Bobbi shook her head and smiled softly. “Not at all Darce. Complete opposite actually. That’s brilliant.” She leaned back on the railing to allow the sun to fall on the tops of her shoulders and chest, exposed by her tank top. Bucky pulled on the front of her long-sleeved shirt, trying to dry some of the sweat gathered there. “Did you know that you were on the consideration list for recruitment to SHIELD?” Darcy shook her head. “Yeah, Coulson had you placed on it after everything. I told him to go fuck himself. That you were far too blessedly normal for that life.”

Bobbi approached her and stole the last drag of her cigarette and put it out. “Plus, with habits like this, you never would have passed the cardio exam.” She returned to her position against the railings. “But then you go and prove me wrong kid. You handled yourself like a real SHIELD Agent.” She turned to look out across the view of the city, a cupped hand shielding her eyes from the sun, and took a deep breath before looking Darcy in the eye. “You know I’m not any good at this kind of thing. But I need you to know that despite the fact that it terrified me to my very core that you went out determined to do this alone, I’m so very grateful that you came for us. Thank you Darcy.”

It was my fault that you were there in the first place. “We always come back for each other, right Bob?”

“Yes we do. But I always have back-up. You need that too.” Darcy shifted uncomfortably at the
narrowed focus of Agent 19. Her friend was gone briefly, and now staring at her was one of the highest-achieving agents in the history of the agency.

“I had back-up.” She winced at how meek she sounded.

“Back-up that you tried to refuse. You’re highly capable Darcy, but you can’t save the world on your own. Barnes says that Barton wants you brought to Wakanda for safe-keeping?”

Darcy bristled at the direction of the conversation. “No fucking way Bobbi. I’m not sitting on my ass in Wakanda while everyone else is fighting to get our lives back.”

Before she could get a full head of steam up, Bobbi cut across her. “I know kid. So I have an alternative option. Why don’t you come with Hunter and me? The bounties on our heads pale in significance compared to the fact that every agency in the world now wants us too. The intel you gave us back in Scotland was invaluable and I’m willing to bet that together we can put a real dent in the Accords. What do you say?”

“I don’t know Bob…”

“If it sweetens the deal, Barnes is going to stick around. He’s not too hot on the idea of being stuck in Wakanda either, despite the company he’d have.” Bobbi raised an eyebrow and the same side of her mouth ticked up with it. Darcy rolled her eyes but smiled in return. The blonde walked over and pulled Darcy out of her chair. “Come on, let’s go and ruin Call of Duty by kicking their asses and making them cook dinner as a forfeit.”

Bobbi walked through the door first and Darcy ran her hand down the edge of the wood before closing it silently behind her.

Deftly slicing through limes on the counter in front of her, she almost forgot that they were in hiding. Bucky and Bobbi were at the dining table setting up the chips and cards for a game of poker. They’d cleared up from dinner not long ago and she and Hunter were on drinks duty. She set the sliced limes to the side and flipped the blade in her hand a few times.

“Hey Hufflepuff, hand me the grapefruit soda while you’re in there getting beers, would you?”

Hunter pulled his head out of the fridge and shot her a hurt look. “That name is not going to stick, kid. I’m quite clearly a Gryffindor. I’m brave of heart and chivalrous as they come.”

“Sure you are Hufflepuff. Hand me the soda then, Mr. Chivalrous.”

Hunter reluctantly turned to retrieve the soda and handed it to her. She curtseyed and returned to making their drinks. Hunter pulled out two beers and pulled the drawer next to her open to grab the bottle opener.

“Bob says that now you’re a paid-up member of the arse-kicking squad, you might be joining us?”

“She said that huh?” Darcy continued adding the soda to the ice in the glasses.

“Yeah well, I get final say on it obviously.”
Darcy raised an eyebrow in disbelief as Hunter settled himself across from her on one of the stools. “Much as I’m enjoying this little vacation we’re currently on, you sure you want me cock-blocking you for the next six months?”

Hunter opened his own beer and took a swig. He fiddled with the label a little before responding. “We could use your skills, and if it keeps our rescuer safe at the same time? Bonus.” He took another drink before leaning back in his stool, looking her over with a leer. “Plus, you needn’t be a cock-block. We could always make room for a third. Bobbi isn’t so good with the sharing but I’m sure I could talk her around—” He was cut off as a wedge of lime bounced off his Adam’s apple and he started choking, winded.

Darcy continued nonchalantly adding fresh-squeezed lime juice to their drinks while Hunter choked and spluttered out profanities. She turned her head to stifle a giggle and caught the edge of Bucky’s appraising glance over at her. He nodded in appreciation at her accurate shot and Darcy sent him a shy smile in thanks before returning to her task.

Hunter exaggeratedly did a double take between Darcy and Bucky and then stage whispered across the counter, “Ohhhh. You should have said, could always make it a foursome. I’m man enough to—” He was cut off again as Darcy held the tip of the knife she’d been cutting the limes with to the underside of his chin. She raised her eyebrow and he carefully cleared his throat. “Or not?”

“While the thought has crossed my mind a fair few times sport, I haven’t had the flooring in here waxed and the blood would be a pain in the ass to clean up.”

“And I want to separate him from his wallet after all his braggin’ durin’ dinner doll.”

Darcy turned to face the pair at the table, keeping the tip steady at Hunter’s chin. She looked back at Hunter, making a show of weighing her options. “You’re lucky I want us to have a nice evening Hufflepuff. Go take Bucky his beer, it’s getting warm.” She withdrew the knife and used it to gesture between the men.

Hunter slid off his stool and shuffled over to the table, making a show of kissing Bobbi’s bare shoulder on the way past and getting a slap on the back of the head in response. Darcy chuckled at their antics and retrieved the tequila from the freezer. She poured out a double measure and added it to one of the glasses before replacing it. She grabbed a pinch of salt and sprinkled it over both drinks.

She placed one of the glasses in front of Bobbi before wedging herself behind Bucky’s chair, balancing with one hand on his shoulder. He shuffled his chair in slightly and squeezed her hand as she took the final empty seat at the table.

She took a sip of her drink as Bobbi started dealing out the cards. She giggled as Bobbi slapped Hunter’s hand without looking as he tried to sneak a couple of her chips. She took her cards and sunk back into the wooden dining chair, appreciating the warmth of both the evening and the company. She was pulled from her contemplation when Bucky clinked the top of his beer bottle with her glass. Darcy sent him a sly grin as she turned to her other companions. “Okay suckers. Who’s ready to contribute handsomely to my Tropical Island Retirement Fund?”

She silently lifted the backpack and slung it over her shoulder. She stepped over the threshold into
the main living area and scanned for movement in the dark. Bucky’s chest was rising and falling evenly, indicating that he was fast asleep. She crept past the couch he was lying on and moved lightly over to the double doors to the balcony. Bobbi and Hunter’s bedroom door was closed and she couldn’t hear anything to signal that they were awake either. Her eyes skated over the, now empty, dining table where they’d spent the rest of the night playing poker. She’d watched her friends become loose and relaxed with the alcohol while she stayed resolutely sober. She’d doctored her own drinks to ensure she’d be clear-headed for this. She stole a final look back at Bucky’s sleeping form and felt a pang of regret. She swallowed it down and reached for the door handle. The door opened without a sound thanks to the tape she had placed over the door jamb earlier.

Stepping out into the cool night air, she made her way over to the railing. She settled the other strap over her shoulder and tightened the buckles. She was peering over into the street below when she heard a sound behind her. She sighed and turned.

“Where you goin’, doll?”

“I’m leaving, Bucky.” She squared her shoulders but struggled to meet his eyes.

Bucky stepped out into the light from the street. He was shirtless and his metal arm glinted slightly. Darcy’s eyes briefly skipped over the raised scarring where it joined his chest and followed the lines of muscles to the sweatpants slung low over his hips. She swallowed dryly and forced herself to look up at his face. Only to discover the kicked puppy face in full force.

“Where you goin’, doll?” He repeated, more firmly this time.

“I told you before that I was going to be leaving.”

“That was when you thought you’d be going to Wakanda. Bobbi and Hunter are giving you another option. They’re giving both of us another option.”

“I can’t stay with them. I can’t know what you’re all doing.”

“What are you talkin’ ‘bout? Course you can.”

“I can’t, Bucky.” She pleaded, desperately wishing he would just understand without her having to spell it out. “I can’t know things that could put you in danger.”

Bucky reached out to touch her but she shrank back against the railings. “You ain’t makin’ much sense. Just come back inside.”

“No. I need to go and do my part alone. If I don’t know the details of what you guys are up to, then I can’t tell anyone.”

“But we know you won’t tell anyone, Darcy.”

“Why do you think Hydra got as far as they did in DC?” At the sudden mention of Hydra, Bucky hesitated. “You think they got so far because you were keeping Captain Rogers occupied? Why do you think SHIELD couldn’t kick them out of their systems and stop everything? Why do you think the hellicarriers were able to get off the ground at all? Because of me, Bucky. I stuck my nose in where it wasn’t wanted, because I wanted to be involved in what everyone else was doing. I wanted to be a part of everything. And because of that pathetic need to be part of that family, they came for me and I gave them the damn key. If it wasn’t for the fact that I was so weak…” Darcy swiped at the hot tears tracking down her face, sniffed and straightened her spine. “I won’t be weak anymore, Bucky. I can’t. When I’m weak, I get other people hurt. I can’t and I won’t.”
Bucky looked as though he wanted to approach her again but instead he held himself still and steady. “Nobody blames you for that but yourself, Darcy. After everything you’ve been through, a lesser person would have curled up into a ball and told the world to go to hell. But you’re so strong and good, that you kept on goin’. You can’t hold on to guilt that isn’t yours. I should know. I’ve got enough things that I’ve done to feel guilty about in my life. Stay with us. Stay with me. There’s no weakness in havin’ someone to watch your six.”

“I can’t risk it. I know too much. I have access to all you guys’ networks, I know your plans going forwards… I’m the weak link, Bucky. They know that and they’ll exploit it. Look at everything that’s happened so far.”

“But you knew all this when they held you in Edinburgh. And you didn’t tell them a damn thing!” Bucky struggled not to raise his voice as his frustration with her resignation rose.

Darcy shook her head sadly. “Because they drugged me until I was almost comatose. Until I couldn’t feel anything. They just hadn’t tried hard enough yet.”

Bucky stepped into her space now and tilted her head up to face him. “Please don’t go Darcy. I don’t want you to go.” His eyes flicked between hers, pleading with her to stay.

Darcy placed both hands on his shoulders and his arms curled around her waist and held her close. “You made a promise to me, Sergeant James Buchanan Barnes.”

Bucky pressed his forehead to hers, strands of his hair tickling her cheekbones. He whispered, “Please don’t make me hafta keep it.”

She closed her eyes to hide from the hurt that was radiating from his. Then she tipped her head up to press her lips against his. He clenched her tighter to him and she wrapped her arms around the back of his neck. She took a moment to enjoy the feeling of his soft lips caressing hers and the warmth of his hands as they stroked up and down her back. She tried to pour every feeling that she couldn’t name or express in words into it. She dragged her hands down to rest against his bare chest as his tongue swiped across her lips, trying to deepen the kiss. She pushed him back gently and his arms dropped to his sides. She strode to the railing and swung herself over it without a second look back.

As she descended down the two floors to the street, she tried to ignore the cold stinging of the wind against the tears in her eyes and the ghost of Bucky’s kiss on her lips.

Three Weeks Later…

Bucky strode up to the newspaper bin and dropped the coin in. He grabbed a paper and took a seat on a nearby bench.

“You sure this is the right one, mate?” Hunter’s voice crackled through the comm unit in his ear. Bucky ignored it and took in the front page of the paper.

CIA TASK FORCE HEAD FORCED TO RESIGN OVER MEXICAN DRUG LORD SCANDAL
He smiled and opened the paper to the middle pages. Inside he found a white envelope and tucked it into the inside pocket of his leather jacket. He folded up the paper and headed back down the street to the surveillance van that Bobbi and Hunter waited in.

Hauling himself into the back, he took a seat on the bench opposite Hunter.

“You know, the whole point of two-way comms is that there is actual two way communication.” Hunter pouted as Bucky took his ear piece out and put it down on the bench on top of the folded newspaper.

“Ignore him. What did she leave us?” Bobbi called over her shoulder from the front passenger seat.

Bucky pulled out the envelope and opened it slowly. Inside were a few pages of an un-redacted report. It appeared to be from an incomplete file they’d found the week before. He passed it to Bobbi. “Pages from that briefing Senator Floyd requested. The un-redacted version.” Hunter huffed as Bucky bypassed him.

Bucky then pulled out some candid surveillance shots of the aforementioned Senator, enjoying some pretty kinky alone time with a couple of call girls and handed those to Hunter. “Oo-hoo-hoo! Someone’s been a naughty boy then.” He settled back in his chair to scrutinise the photos more closely when he was smacked in the face with the van keys.

“Hunter, get up here and drive.”

Hunter scrambled out of the backdoor of the van. “Yes, ma’am.”

Bucky shook his head at his companions’ actions and pulled the last thing from the envelope. It was a postcard from Ciudad Victoria and on the back in Darcy’s cursive it simply said. “Stop looking for me.”

Chapter End Notes

*ducks for cover*

So... that was a thing.

Please leave comments and tell me your feelings about all of this.

*ducks for cover again*
Chapter 24

Chapter Summary

Where we find out that fancy Venetian hotels do not keep tequila in crystal decanters, that super spies, man, that Bucky can do a mean waltz and that nano masks don't hide everything but distance can obscure the truth.

Chapter Notes

This chapter was beta'd again by the wonderful esorrevis.

This one is pretty lengthy again so please ensure you have enough snacks to get you through it. Oh, and please ensure you are well hydrated.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Darcy’s heels clicked sharply on the marble flooring as she paced back and forth. She stopped and placed a hand on the back of one of the heavily embroidered arm chairs. Fuck. Her eyes roved over the man tied to the opposite chair. His head lolled forwards and a thin line of drool threatened to drip from his chin onto his very expensive silk shirt. He was a member of the Chinese diplomatic service, accompanying various ministers during their visit to the Venice Film Festival.

Their firewalls had proven to be far too complex for Darcy to get through in the small window that had presented itself and so she’d had to improvise. Hence the currently unconscious man tied to the chair in one of the most opulent hotel suites she had ever seen. When the man continued to show no sign of regaining consciousness, Darcy sighed and strode over to the bar cart in the corner of the room.

She poured herself a glass of whatever dark liquid was in the crystal decanter and carried it over to the window. She glanced back over at her charge who was still woefully down for the count and opened the latch to allow the window to swing wide open. The chilly late-August air whipped a few loose tendrils of hair around her face. The canal below her glittered under the street lamps and people strolled along the edge arm in arm, enjoying the evening. It was risky being out in the open like this, but Venice was beautiful.

Darcy’s ventures over the previous three months had been distinctly unglamorous. So when she’d learned that a documentary about The Accords would be shown at the Venice Film Festival, and that all sorts of influential figures would be attending, it was too good an opportunity to miss. She’d had to raid one of her off-shore accounts to pay for an appropriate wardrobe and lodgings, but it was worth it.

Once upon a time, Darcy would have been snapping photos for her Instagram or begging Jane to take a little break from Science! so that they could go and check out museums and art galleries. Instead, she was waiting on this high-ranking pro-Accord Chinese government official to come back around after she’d interrogated him a touch too vigorously.
The man in question began to groan and stir behind her, the sound cutting through the delicate piano from the restaurant below. Darcy pulled back to close the window. As she ran her eyes over the buildings on the other side of the canal, she thought she saw a glint of silver. *Your mind’s playing tricks on you again. Same as it has in almost every other damn place you’ve been.*

Darcy shook her head and flicked the latch shut. She looked at her reflection and smoothed down the dark green silk of her dress and tucked the wind-blown strands of hair behind her ears. She dabbed away the water that had gathered around her eyes from the wind, careful not to smudge her make-up. Throwing the dark liquid back, she winced at the aftertaste and her eyes watered anew. *Whatever that was, it sure as shit wasn’t tequila.*

The man behind her had apparently roused enough to start cursing her in clipped Mandarin. Darcy cleared her throat and placed her now empty glass back on the bar cart. The sharp ring of crystal on metal caused the man to falter in his tirade.

Darcy turned slowly and began her approach. “Now that you’re back with me, we can return to our little chat.” She reached delicately under the fluted sleeve of her dress and withdrew a thin knife from its sheath. She waved it theatrically so that the light from the chandeliers above them caught on the razor thin edges. As she neared him, Darcy reached out and held the knife millimetres away from the man’s cheekbone. “Mr Chen, you will answer my questions.” Mr Chen’s eyes widened. *Ah, so the profile was correct after all. Mr Chen is a vain son of a bitch.*

Twenty minutes later, Darcy had wiped down the suite and left Mr Chen sprawled out unconscious on his bed, surrounded by damning surveillance photos and with the depressing knowledge that he had spilled his guts. She cut through the empty halls of the hotel and down the housekeeping staircase, then through the double doors that swung into the main kitchen.

As she passed through, the sous chef held out a paper bag, “*Sei troppo magro! Eat all of this, bella.*” The greying man gave her a stern look and refused to let go of the bag until she acquiesced.

“I promise, Gennaro. Every last crumb.” He relinquished the bag and she blew him a kiss, then continued through the kitchens and out in to the back alley. The wind was just as cold at street level as it had been up in the penthouse suite of the hotel. Darcy relished the feeling though, allowing it to blow away all her tension as she zig-zagged through back streets. On more than one occasion, she felt the prickle of eyes on her from the shadows, but a thorough investigation and very elaborate detour later, there was no-one to be seen. *You’re officially paranoid.*

Darcy skipped up the stone steps to the apartment she had rented for the duration of the festival and unlocked the door. She scanned her surroundings one last time for anything untoward and found nothing. She closed the door behind her, bolted the lock, and was about to reach for the light switch when she realized that the air felt different. She spun on the spot and threw her knife across the room. A hand snatched it from the air and examined it.

“I haven’t seen this knife in a long time. I thought I left it in Ankara?”

Darcy huffed out a breath, all her coiled energy dissipating quickly. “You did. I’m borrowing it.” She flicked the light switch on to reveal Natasha sitting leisurely in her arm chair. The older woman
looked tired. “Drink?” Darcy walked past the woman and through the archway into her kitchen. Without waiting for an answer, she pulled a bottle of wine from the fridge, swapping it for the bag from Gennaro. Grabbing a pair of glasses off of the shelf, she returned to the sitting area.

She placed the glasses on the low coffee table and unscrewed the cap from the bottle of wine, pouring for each of them. When Natasha raised an eyebrow, Darcy scoffed. “Italian Pinot Grigio is good no matter the price tag. Don’t be a snob.” Both women raised their glasses and nodded a toast before taking a sip.

“It’s not bad,” Natasha admitted.

Darcy crossed her legs and dangled her glass from her fingertips. “So what brings you to bella Venezia?”

“What else? A mission.” Natasha took another drink and settled back into the arm chair. Her hair was longer and the curls a little looser.

“Okay, maybe I should be a little more specific. What brings you to my apartment in bella Venezia at one o’clock in the morning?” Darcy sighed. She’d been looking forward to changing into her sleep clothes and tucking into her kitchen scraps in bed. She settled for starting to take the pins out of her hair.

“We’re here to intercept a few big players that are here for the documentary screening tomorrow night.”

Darcy tried to steady her breathing and stay calm. “We?”

“Rogers, Barnes, Wanda and myself.” Natasha sipped her wine casually.

Darcy tried to mirror her, but her teeth clacked on the rim. Cringing inwardly she reiterated, “Still doesn’t explain what you’re doing here,” Darcy waved around her apartment. It was small but beautifully decorated. Traditional architecture, low ceilings and exposed woodwork, juxtaposed with modern furniture and soft fabrics. It had cost her a small fortune but large wads of cash still open doors. Even those belonging to well-appointed apartments near the festival, days before it begins.

“We’re all going to the premiere to get close to key targets and clone their phones. This is the only opportunity we will have to get close to all of them at once. They’re all high profile pro-Accord supporters and we need to know what they’re up to.”

“Speaking of high-profile, half the Avengers showing up might draw a bit too much attention, wouldn’t it?” Half the Avengers and a certain ex-assassin. She busied her trembling hands by shaking out her curls.

“We’ll all be wearing photo-static veils.”

Darcy had read about the technology. The nano-masks were undetectable programmable meshes that could give the wearer another person’s face and voice. “Cool. Still waiting for the part that explains why you’re sitting here right now.” Darcy was growing impatient. The wine sat uncomfortably in her empty stomach, swirling and burning. Images of the last time she had seen Bucky bubbled to the surface and she had to stomp down on them firmly to send them back to where she’d sent them months ago.

“Barton needs a date.”

Super spies, man. “Barton needs a what-now?”
“Date. We’re all going in pairs to keep unwanted attention away. Barton doesn’t have a partner. This is where you come in.”

“Why can’t you do it?” Darcy replied far too shrilly for her own liking.

Natasha seemed unaffected by her sudden change in pitch. “I’m accompanying the Captain.”

Darcy scrambled, “What about the new one? Wanda?”

“She’s going with Barnes.”

That news hit her like a kick in the chest. “Sounds like you’ve already got a full team there, Natasha. Don’t think you need an incompetent civilian tagging along, getting in the way.” Darcy swallowed down the last of her wine and poured another large glass. “Plus, you’ve been working solo for the past few months. Why the sudden team effort?” Deflect. Deflect. Deflect.

“I’d hardly describe you as a civilian anymore, Voron. Your recent activities in Seoul, Yokohama, Jeddah, and Alexandria were decidedly not carried out by a civilian.”

Darcy drained her entire glass and topped it up before asking carefully, “You’ve been keeping tabs?”

“I’m not the only one.”

“Yeah, you and every alphabet agency around the world I bet.” Darcy snorted into her glass indelicately.

“Them too. Look, we need you to accompany Barton so that he doesn’t look out of place at the premiere so that he can get to his target.” Nat swirled her barely-touched wine in its glass. “You are clearly able to dress the part.” She jerked her chin at Darcy’s floor-length dress and heels. “All you have to do is be on his arm for an hour or two and then you can be on the next flight out of here.”

“Who says I’m done here?” Darcy challenged. Nat raised a solitary eyebrow, and her bravado collapsed. “Fine. But it’ll just be me and Barton, right?” You can’t be in the middle of things. “And there’ll be no issues with me leaving again?” There’s no way you can make Bucky keep his promise a second time. The last thing Darcy wanted was to be dragged kicking and screaming into protective custody.

“None at all. Each pair will be working in complete isolation. You have my word.” Darcy was the one to raise an eyebrow this time. Natasha smirked fondly, tucking one leg underneath herself comfortably. “You’re learning, Voron.”

Darcy downed the last of her wine and headed for the bedroom. “Get out of my apartment, Nat. I’m going to bed.”

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Wanda tossed her long dark hair over her shoulder, giggled and rested her forehead against Bucky’s shoulder. The bright lights from the chandeliers hanging from the ballroom ceiling caught the bend of each curl as it fell down her back and across her shoulders. He ducked his head towards hers in a shared laugh and squeezed his hand on her hip, the loose silver fabric ruching between his fingers.
“She will walk past us in a moment.” Wanda whispered into his shoulder as Bucky led them in a slow waltz. Bucky turned them and as the Vice President of WHIH Newsfront walked past them with her husband, Wanda twirled outwards delicately. Bucky pulled her back into his chest and they continued to dance for a few more bars.

“Did you get it?” He murmured into her ear as they stepped in time to the music.

“Yes. The scan is complete.” She gestured to the bracelet around her wrist and the once bright blue stone at its center was now a dull navy.

“Well done.” He spun her again, a broad grin on his face, then pulled her tightly back into his arms. “What d’ya say to getting outta here?”

She looked up at him with bright kohl-rimmed eyes, returning his grin. “I thought you’d never ask.” She held his hand as he led her off of the dance floor and into the atrium of the theatre.

An hour or so later they congregated in a hotel bar Natasha had chosen, a few streets away from the theatre. Bucky sat next to Wanda, with Steve and Natasha across from them. They had managed to snag a corner booth after Natasha had a few words with the maître d’. She might have been wearing someone else’s face, but she was still The Black Widow.

Bucky allowed himself to revel slightly in sitting across from his best friend, despite the current circumstances and the fact that they were wearing masks. They would sit and have a few drinks and a few laughs together before going their separate ways again. Being in a group like this was an unusual occurrence. They normally kept to their partnerships and only communicated when necessary. It was too risky otherwise.

He allowed his thoughts to turn to Darcy. He had stopped looking for her over two months ago. Every now and again, one of his dead drops would be activated and they’d find some crucial piece of intel. On several occasions, barriers to the completion of a mission would suddenly evaporate and Bucky knew that Darcy had had a hand in it. The thought of her out there alone still pained him, but he couldn’t help the swell of pride every time she succeeded. He had been true to her request and not gone looking, but he had ensured that their paths crossed occasionally. She’ll come in from the cold when she’s ready. And not a damn minute before, no doubt.

Bucky sighed and loosened his tie. His suit jacket was already slung over the back of his seat, his shirt sleeves rolled to his elbows. The nano mask had disguised his face and voice, and they’d modified the technology to hide his arm as well. For the first time in decades, he felt like a regular Joe, in a bar with friends. Well, he could pretend. Just for a moment.

A stocky, dark-haired man in a suit approached the table with a rough grin on his face.

“Barton.” Bucky, Steve and Nat nodded at the newcomer and Wanda smiled.

“Aw, how did you know it was me?” Barton pouted.

All four occupants of the table raised a synchronised eyebrow. Barton rolled his eyes and raised his hands in defeat. “My round, I take it?”

""
“Yes,” came the response from Natasha.

Bucky slid out of the booth, “I’ll come give you a hand.”

The pair approached the bar. Barton flagged down a bartender and gestured back to the booth, “Another round and a bottle of whatever light beer you guys have here.”

Bucky rolled his eyes and Shouldered Barton for his terrible choice in drink. “What are you doing here, Barton? Didn’t take you as one to show up to a party stag.”

A guilty look flashed across Barton’s face and it piqued Bucky’s interest. “Um. Didn’t actually show up stag.” At Bucky’s gesture for more, Barton continued. “Scored a date last minute and managed to hit the final target.” He looked uncharacteristically nervous and leaned forwards to see where the bartender was.

Bucky gripped his shoulder and turned Barton to face him. “Spit it out, Barton. What’s got you all twisted up?”

The archer scratched at his forehead with the back of his thumbnail and creased his face. “Um. Well? Uh.”

“Barton.” Barton mumbled something under his breath so quietly that even Bucky’s super-serum enhanced hearing couldn’t pick it up. “I don’t speak mumble, Barton.” He was losing his patience and there was a horrible clawing feeling rising in his gut.

“Darcy.” Barton whispered it almost as an apology.

Bucky had to struggle to stop himself from grabbing the archer by the collar. Instead he fisted his hands and laid them as gently as he could on the bar. He took a few steadying breaths. “She’s here?”

“Was.”

Bucky turned and strode out of the bar, through the lobby and out into the street. He marched over to the stone wall that lined the canal and leaned against it, facing the water. The wind whipped through his now-shorter hair. Wanda had suggested he cut it into a tidier style to blend in better. She’d been right. He ran his hands through it and then pulled out a pack of cigarettes, took one out and lit it. He inhaled deeply and tipped his head back, exhaling the smoke up and into the night sky. Below him, a gondola floated past, the gondolier singing to the patrons tucked under a blanket.

Darcy stood at her window, removing her earrings. She watched a gondola meandering along the canal. The couple inside were tucked under a blanket, their heads resting against each other while the gondolier sang. She looked up from the canal as a figure approached the wall opposite. His face was different, but she’d have recognised that gait anywhere. She watched him light a cigarette and stare up at the night sky. She wanted to look up too, see the same stars as he was, but she couldn’t look away.

The sleeves of his dress shirt were rolled up, his metal arm disguised. His shoulders were as broad as ever though, pulling the fabric of his shirt taught as he leaned against the wall. His hair was shorter.
Not 1940’s short, but a little neater and pulled back from his face. She watched him repeatedly run his hands through it and smiled. The recognition of the movement pulled her back to all the times she’d witnessed it at much closer quarters.

Her smile was short lived as she remembered everything else. She had left for a reason. For a good reason. As her resolve began to falter at the sight of him standing alone, just on the other side of the canal, she saw further movement. A young woman exited the hotel and approached Bucky. Her long, dark, curly hair blew out in the breeze parallel to the skirt of her silver dress. Bucky turned to face the new arrival. They spoke briefly and the woman placed her hand on his shoulder.

Darcy turned back into her bedroom and unfastened her dress, pale blue fabric pooling on the floor as she stepped out of it. If she’d taken a second to turn and look back out the window, she’d have seen a pair of matching blue eyes searching for her.

Chapter End Notes

We're getting closer to the Accords summit and the end of this story.
Hope you're all still enjoying it.
Please feel free to leave a comment with your feelings and/or any questions, queries, theories, feedback, etc :)
& a huge thank you to everyone who reads, leaves kudos and comments. You are all the peachiest of peaches and make this little writer very happy. EJ <3
Chapter 25

Chapter Summary

Where we find out that The Winter Soldier was briefed on Bobby Fischer, that a message is sent through a third party and a certain Director is a fan boy with an office full of really cool stuff.

Chapter Notes

Okay so we're almost into the final act of the story now. There's about a dozen scenes left to go after this.
A massive thank you to my wonderful beta esorrevlis who is a grammar machine and fixes all my clumsy wording.
Also, for clarity and because there was no real way to put this into the story without it being really lame, this chapter is set six weeks after the previous one.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

He kept expecting the acrid taste of rubber, the crackle of electricity, and the seemingly endless suffering. The bite of the restraints never came and there were no screams followed by numb nothingness and the will to comply.

The machine to his left was designed to be as unobtrusive as possible. His metal arm was suspended in a warm thick fluid inside a Plexiglass barrel. Bucky was fascinated by the Wakandan technology but didn’t have a clue as to how it all worked. For all that they were doing to help them, they still kept many secrets well-guarded. Bucky wouldn’t begrudge them that.

The technicians worked on the other side of the lab, the machine sending them all the readouts that they needed. Bucky was left sitting on his own, staring at the floor in front of the stool he was perched on. Despite the lack of threats to his person, he couldn’t shake the ingrained compulsion to sit resolutely still while they worked. His mind wandered freely though. With almost a hundred years of memories locked up there, his thoughts would often skip and jump around. It felt like an impossibly full glass, spilling over.

He was pulled from his ruminations when the door to the lab opened and Steve walked in. “Hey Buck.” The blond man walked into the room and popped a hip against the chrome workbench where the barrel containing his arm was resting.


Steve shrugged one shoulder and stuffed his hands in his jean pockets. “Wanda said you had an appointment.” He looked around the room and then back at Bucky. “Figured you’d want a bit of company.”

Bucky raised a skeptical eyebrow. “You flew eight hours to come keep me company?”
“S’not eight hours when Nat is flying.” Steve shuffled his position against the bench uncertainly.

Bucky gritted his teeth. “How is the Widow?”

“Nat is fine. She’s good.” He replied a little too defensively.

“She’s not here with you? She gone rogue on you again?”

Steve had never been good at feigning indifference. “She’s got a couple of things to go do while we’re here.”

“Oh, I bet she does.” Bucky rolled his eyes derisively.

“Buck.”

_Oh, this warrants the Captain America tone does it?_ Bucky mimicked his friend’s serious tone mockingly, “Steve.”

Steve pulled his hands from his pockets and crossed his arms across his chest. “She’s… She’s trying.”

“Trying my damn patience, more like.” Bucky growled under his breath.

Steve continued as though Bucky had never spoken. “With everything… It’s a lot. For anyone. She’s learning to trust people again. She’s learning to trust herself again.”

“The Black Widow trusts no-one Steve, least of all herself.” Bucky willed his best friend to listen to reason. Steve sometimes forgot that Bucky had known Natalia for a lot longer than he had.

Steve ducked his chin into his chest. “Natasha does. Or she will. She trusts me.”

“She tell you that?” Bucky almost strained his eyes, he was now rolling them so hard.

“No. But I can tell.”

Bucky could identify that particular Steve Rogers tone a mile off. He’d heard it a thousand times, over half a century before. Little Steve Rogers had a dame on a pedestal. “You can tell? Or you’re wishin’ so hard that you think you can tell?”

“You don’t know her like I do, Buck. She made the right call when it came down to it. If it wasn’t for her-”

Bucky cut him off, not really in the mood to hear about the supposed virtues of the Black Widow. “Yeah, yeah. She’s a chess master though, Steve. A regular old Bobby Fischer.”

Steve’s eyebrows shot up to his hairline. “You know who Bobby Fischer is?”

“I was under the control of the KGB during the seventies. Of course I know who Bobby Fischer is. You kiddin’?” Bucky pinched the bridge of his nose in faux exasperation.

Steve shoved his hands back into his pockets, dropping the defensive stance a little. “Can we not talk about Nat? Feels outta line to be talking about her like this.”

“Fine. But just remember that I warned ya. Don’t come cryin’ to me like you did when sweet little Vivian Denton broke your heart. I told you she was the type to step out on a fella, and what happened?”
Choking on a splutter, Steve blurted out, “Buck, you were the one she was kissin’ at the pictures!”

Bucky shrugged his one free shoulder, unrepentant. “That’s beside the point. I was still right.”

Steve cleared his throat. “So the others are okay. Sam is still working with Maria flat-out to make their way through the intel we’re getting and put the wheels in motion. They’re coordinating all our efforts. I really think we’re making headway.”

Bucky chuckled at his unsubtle change of subject. “Surprised Wilson hasn’t gotten himself shot yet.”

“Maria is a consummate professional.”

“But Wilson is an ass.” Bucky raised an eyebrow, challenging him to disagree.

Steve didn’t disagree with him. “Barton and Lang are visiting their families. They won’t be able to make it home for Thanksgiving, so I figured they should visit while they can.” Steve paused as a thought struck him. “Speaking of the others, where’s Wanda?”

*This is going to be good.* Buck replied, carefully casual, “She’s down in the staff quarters.”

“What’s she doing in the staff quarters?” Steve’s face was scrunched up in confusion and Bucky almost had to call up The Winter Soldier to hold back the smirk that threatened to break across his face.

“Around about now? Probably rounding second base with that Junior Foreign Service Officer…” He leaned forward and waggled his eyebrows before stage whispering, “…the one with all the tattoos.”

“What!?” Steve pulled his hands from his pockets and almost took up a fighting stance, his left arm reaching for his absent shield.

Bucky bit his bottom lip and fought back a snigger at the ridiculous sight of his best friend having a conniption. “Take a breath, Rogers.”

“But I mean, is she okay?” Steve’s face was now pained and he palmed the back of his neck in concern.

Finally letting the smirk break through, Bucky replied, his tone laden with innuendo. “I’d imagine she’s more than okay right about now…”

All the remaining colour drained from Steve’s face. “But she’s-“

“Young enough to enjoy herself and powerful enough to blast him into the center of the Earth, should it be required?” Bucky finished helpfully.

Steve shrugged and gestured at Bucky, “I just thought you’d be taking better care of her, is all.”

Bucky huffed out an exasperated sigh from somewhere far deeper than he’d expected. “Not every dame needs to be saved, Steve. Plenty of them are able to stand on their own two feet and fight back. Even if that means putting themselves in damn reckless situations and leaving the rest of us to stand on the sidelines and pray every night. Even if the sight of her putting the world to rights is breathtaking, and you’re pretty sure that God’s washed his hands of her and the Devil’d run in fear of her…” He trailed off, realising how off-topic he’d gotten. *Where’d that come from?*

Steve looked equally puzzled. “Buck?”

“Look, Wanda is fine.” Bucky tried to shake it off as best he could with his left shoulder and arm in
the machine. As he scrambled to come up with an explanation for his frankly unsettling outburst, the lab door opened and one of the Wakandan diplomatic staff entered.

“Excuse me, Captain Rogers? Sergeant Barnes? There’s a video call for you both in the conference room.”

He tapped his metal fingers on the glass table-top. Soft leather creaked slightly as he shifted in his seat. Steve sat bolt upright, hands firmly clasped on the table. Suddenly, the large screen on the wall of the conference room burst into life and a head and shoulders came into view.

“Captain Rogers. Sergeant Barnes.”

Steve nodded curtly, “Agent Coulson.”

“Actually, it’s Director now.” Despite the distance and the method of communication, Coulson shrank slightly under the righteous glare of Captain America. Steve had spoken fondly of the fallen Agent and the part his death had played in the forming of the Avengers. The knowledge that it had been fabricated had done nothing but compound Steve’s mistrust of the powers that be.

“My apologies, Director. We weren’t informed.” Steve’s tone was polite but devoid of emotion—and yet it conveyed plenty.

Bucky whispered at a volume only Steve’s super soldier hearing would pick up. “Ease up there, pal.”

Coulson looked appropriately contrite. “I guess not. My apologies, Captain.”

“What can we do for you, Director?” Bucky rolled his eyes discreetly at his best friend’s ability to cling to a grudge like his life depended on it.

Agent Coulson straightened his shoulders and pressed a few keys off-screen. “I’m sending you over the profiles of the Middle Eastern Accord Summit delegates that you still need.” Bucky eyed the corner of the display as the files began popping up. “In addition to that, I’m now sending the communications between the main delegates about the summit, as well as a summary of their psych profiles.” Hot damn.

Steve leaned forward on his forearms, narrowing his eyes in mistrust. “How did you get that? Agent Romanov couldn’t even get that data. We tried.” Bucky found himself leaning forward in curiosity. The leaders from the Middle Eastern countries were proving to be a hard bunch to crack. They would undoubtedly vote as a block, and so were an important source of influence.

“A mutual friend sent a raven.”

Bucky didn’t know whether he wanted to tense or relax. His shoulders loosened, but his heart rate kicked up. On the one hand, they’d almost scrapped the entire idea of trying to turn those delegates and just hope for the best instead. Darcy had gone in and done the impossible and gotten the information they needed and then some. On the other hand, the thought of Darcy alone in the desert, in close proximity to places that the Black Widow and Captain America had had trouble safely
getting in and out of covertly? That made him want to run to her side and sweep her up in his arms. He simultaneously wanted to burst with pride at her strength and tenacity while vibrating with frustration that she wouldn’t let him help.

Steve unclasped his hands, using one to cup his jaw, propping it on a bent elbow. “So why are we hearing this from you? I thought you and your team were only handling the inhuman side of things?”

“We are. This is just passing along a message.” Coulson made it sound like it was nothing. Like it wasn’t a message from his Darcy who was out there risking her neck for them all. She ain’t your nothin’, he reminded himself.

Bucky cleared his throat. “Are you able to relay a message from us?”

Coulson’s eyes shifted minutely. “Sadly not, Sergeant Barnes. She didn’t leave a contact number or forwarding address.”

Bucky muttered, “sounds about right,” to himself.

Coulson hung up the call and the holographic display shut down. He leaned back in his desk chair and folded his arms. “I just lied to Captain America.”

Darcy pushed herself off the brick wall she’d been leaning against to stay out of frame. She’d strained to stay hidden when she’d heard Bucky’s voice, more so when he’d asked about contacting her. A silent threat of bodily harm had ensured that Coulson hadn’t given her away. Although she was pretty sure that Coulson would have kept her secret regardless. She unzipped her combat jacket and started perusing the shelves of antique spy-gear. She picked up a worn, tan leather pouch and untied the front. It opened to show a well-cared for lock picking set. She ran a finger over the embossed M.C. in the corner. “No, you lied to Sergeant James Buchanan Barnes, aka The Winter Soldier,” she corrected.

Coulson pulled his brows together and narrowed his eyes. “How is that any better?”

“Didn’t say it was better.” She refastened the lock picking kit and put it carefully back in its place. “It’s more accurate though.” She began running her fingers up and down the spines of a cluster of books, her newly formed callouses catching on the lettering.

The Director stood from his chair and rounded the desk to perch on the front of it informally. Darcy, who was still getting used to the undead G-man not wearing a tie, found it unsettling. “You could have passed that message along yourself, you know. You didn’t have to break into my base and upset all my agents.”

Darcy turned her head, pinching her lips together and forcing down a giggle. “Call it a training exercise.” She waved her hands in loose circles in the air before continuing her perusal of the shelves.

Leaning back slightly, Coulson folded his arms. “You know, I’d really appreciate it if you told me how you managed that in the first place.”
Darcy could hear the undercurrent of amusement in the man’s voice, so he wasn’t too angry that she’d appeared uninvited in the middle of their commissary, a lunch tray in hand. “Why ruin the mystery?”

“I kept up my end of the bargain, Miss Lewis…” He unfolded his arms and held out a hand.

She put down the dusty, beaten up bowler hat she’d been studying and pulled a thumb drive from a pocket. “I think you can call me Darcy. You’ve helped me escape from the United Nations, let me blow up your SUV and shoot you in the back with an Icer, and I’ve broken into your secret base and ‘ruined’ taco Tuesday.” She walked over and handed him the drive. “And you’ve run DNA tests on me without my consent.”

“I’m starting to doubt the validity of those test results,” Coulson pocketed the drive and held his hand out to her again.

Darcy smiled to herself and pulled out the envelope with the hard copies of the intel inside, handing it over too. So old school. “Everything you want is in there, Director. Recent sightings, current alias, and surveillance footage.” She gestured to the photographs as Coulson pulled them out. “I like her hair longer like that, the color is a bit much though.”

Coulson put the photographs back in the envelope and tapped it against his chest. “Thank you Darcy. Really.” Darcy zeroed in on the hint of hurt that pulled at the corners of his eyes. “She’s not just another agent. She’s family.”

Darcy stomped down on the loneliness that threatened to overwhelm her at the mention of family. “Don’t sweat it. We had a deal, that’s all.”

Coulson must have noticed her struggle and pressed the point. “How is your family? Are they good?”

Darcy shrugged. “Haven’t spoken to them in almost three years. I couldn’t, after everything. Plus, Darcy Lewis doesn’t actually exist anymore… so, y’know…”

Coulson pointed at her with the envelope. “Not the family I was talking about. But you knew that. If you’re not willing to work with them directly, you could always work with us here. Apparently we have significant issues with our security system and we’ve got plenty of vacancies.”

She forced out a dry chuckle. “Not a chance, Director. Bobbi told me all about your little files on me and my reaction to that was roughly the same as the one she had. I’ll swing by to talk to Agent May and give her a few pointers on shoring up security. But only because I like you Director Coulson, and you saved my life or whatever.” She walked past him confidently, heading for the door. She paused with a hand on the doorknob. “And I’m raiding your toy cabinet on my way out.” She grinned at him and opened the door.

As she strolled out of the office and towards the base gym she heard Coulson call after her, “You can call me Phil.”

Chapter End Notes

Okay I know I say this a lot, but I really do mean it. You guys are all the best!
I love talking to you all in the comments and you’re just the sweetest bunch and I can’t
get over it.
I'm just a girl sat in my bedroom with a laptop and a lot of really specific feelings about
Darcy Lewis and Bucky Barnes and the fact that my little fic has elicited such a
response is just... !!
So do me a favor?
1. Take a seat, close your eyes and think of as many positive adjectives as you can.
Once you've thought of them all, open your eyes again and go to stage 2.
2. Apply *all of them* to yourself.
EJ <3

PS. bonus points to anyone who can identify the objects in Coulson's office :D
Chapter 26

Chapter Summary

Where we find out that, it's almost Christmas, that Darcy is not a super spy and Daisy is not a hero, that Russian agents eat a lot of carrots and that Hunter reckons he could take Thor, sort of.

Chapter Notes

Phew, sorry for the absence guys!
Life and stuff happened and I had a real crisis of confidence with this fic.
I'm determined to finish it though.

Thanks again to the wonderful esorrevlis for giving this Frankenstein's monster of a chapter a thorough once over and helping me to fix it.

Another PA announcement echoed through the terminal but barely made it over the general noise. A family rushed past Darcy with a squeaky luggage cart, all chattering loudly. She sat at a plastic table, cupping her coffee with both hands. Although the airport was heated, a blast of chilly December air rushed through every time the automatic doors opened. She tucked an errant blonde hair behind her ear and tried to maintain her relaxed demeanor. She spotted her target as she entered the airport but pretended to still be looking around as she approached.

A mass of plaid and black denim sat down across from her while she pretended to admire the giant Christmas tree. Oversized metallic baubles and tinsel in red, white and blue were wrapped around a towering white plastic tree. She ignored the feeling of over-lined eyes boring into the side of her face and took another casual sip of coffee.

“I’m never going to get used to the nano-veil. It’s creepy.” Daisy tilted her head and furrowed her brow for a moment before snapping her fingers and pointing emphatically at Darcy. “You kinda look like a bad-ass version of Jennifer Lawrence! Thank God I worked that out. That was going to bug the crap out of me.”

Darcy turned to look at her companion and raised a solitary eyebrow while maintaining a bored expression. “They’re very handy when you’re on the run, though.”

“Yeah, I guess. So, uh, thanks for getting Coulson off my trail. He’d never have believed it if I’d just faked it myself.” Daisy fiddled with the napkin dispenser on the table.

Darcy handed her the remainder of her coffee. “This just makes us square for Bakersfield.”

She’d been running surveillance on a group of anti-enhanced extremists and had been caught by them. Daisy had been tracking them too and helped her escape, using her powers. When Darcy revealed that she knew exactly who the former SHIELD Agent/inhuman was, they’d struck a deal.
They’d have formed a pretty great partnership if it weren’t for the fact that, although for different reasons, they were both working solo to avoid being a danger to others.

She stifled a snigger when Daisy took a swig of coffee, balked, and then added two packets of sugar and the entire contents of the creamer jug. “It won’t last long though.”

“It doesn’t need to. Just long enough that I can get out of the States.”

Darcy affected a nasal, overly perky voice. “Business or pleasure?”

Daisy snorted and retorted sarcastically, “Because either of us is likely to get a vacation any time soon. Or even take time off for the holidays, for that matter.”

Darcy turned to watch the people wrapped in knitted hats and scarves, standing at the foot of the Christmas tree, all craning their necks to spot people coming out of the arrival gates. An older couple lit up with joy as their grown-up daughter came running up to them in an NYU sweatshirt and was quickly enveloped in a hug.

A cold finger with a black painted nail tapped Darcy’s hand on the table, pulling her back. “You going to be anywhere near home for the holidays?”

_A Home? Where even is that? With Mom and Dad back in Boston? You haven’t talked to them in years. The longest you’ve stayed in one place in years was London, but that wasn’t home either. That was a two-bedroom apartment with one occupant. Since then it’s been safe houses or a cell. Hah! Home. A brief memory of waking up in Ciudad Victoria flitted through Darcy’s mind, but she brushed it away to stop her heart from constricting too much._

When she failed to respond, Daisy smiled gently. “Loaded question, I guess.”

Darcy straightened in her seat and tried not to wince at the strain the movement put on her still-healing ribs. “What about you? You not going home for the holidays? I’d be tempted just for Taco Tuesdays, let alone the fact that Coulson is good people.”

Daisy hunched in on herself for a moment. She blinked slowly before looking back up at Darcy. “They’re all good people. Great people. But death follows me wherever I go. I won’t be the reason more good…”

“great” people die.” Her voice trailed off into a choked whisper.

Darcy looked away to give her a moment of privacy, watching more people reuniting. An enlisted marine walked past in his perfectly pressed navy slacks and pale blue shirt. He dropped his bag to the floor with a thud a few feet from them and held his arms open. A petite woman darted through the throngs of people and threw herself at him. The Petty Officer picked her up and spun her around, her delighted squeals filling the air. The feeling of two strong arms lifting her in a similar manner, one holding her tighter than the other, in a small kitchen a million years ago, rose up and Darcy struggled to banish it. Darcy’s fingers itched and she wished she’d kept her coffee, if only for something to fiddle with.

Daisy cleared her throat, having apparently steadied herself again. Nodding at the marine and his girl, who were now clinging to each other and grinning widely, she asked, “What about your soldier? You’re not tempted to go find him for some more dramatic balcony smooches?”

Darcy sighed and folded her arms. “I’m pretty sure it’s against the Geneva Conventions to use SHIELD interrogation techniques on a drunk person.”

“Puh-lease. You’re an awfully chatty drunk for a super-spy-slash-Avenger.”
“I’m neither a super spy nor an Avenger.”

“What are you then?”


Daisy raised her hands in surrender. “Point taken.”

A large group of friends shouted and whooped past their table, briefly interrupting their conversation. Two of the guys were good-naturedly shoving each other ahead of the rest while two of the women at the back shared a look of long suffering exasperation and fist bumped each other. Darcy’s fingers itched again. She folded her hands in her lap, squeezing them tightly.

Daisy leaned forward on the table. “So, what’s your plan once this is all over?”

“A private tropical beach and a lifetime supply of tequila and ice.” Darcy folded her arms and sat back in her seat. Her eyes slid to the side and tracked the Russian Aeroflot airhostesses as they strolled through the terminal.

“Solo?”

“Solo.”

Daisy looked puzzled. “But, once the Accords are fixed, you can go back to your Avenger buddies though, right? No more skulking around in the shadows. You can go be a real team. A family.” Jealousy tinged her voice.

Darcy scoffed. “I won’t ever be going back. The world has changed now, and being a part of a family unit does not increase the likelihood of survival. It lowers it. Emotional attachments for no strategic reason or benefit, only to banish some feeling of loneliness? Brings nothing but pain, Daisy. I never chose to live this life, in this world. But it’s the one I have.” Darcy sighed. “We have what we have, when we have it.”

“Fuck, that’s depressing.” Daisy sank back in the plastic chair.

Darcy shrugged. “Life often is.”

Darcy stood and lifted the straps of her bags onto her good shoulder, swallowing around the burst of pain from her ribs and ankle. She could feel the wrap she’d tied around her ankle coming loose in her boot, and the swelling was getting worse. She had to take the Wakandan medication once she was secure on this flight.

Daisy stood with her. She lifted her arms as if she were going to try to hug Darcy goodbye but thought better of it. Instead, she shrugged and put her hands on her hips, a poor facsimile of casualness. “So, where are you off to?”

Darcy chuckled dryly, turning to follow the path that the Russian airhostesses had just taken. “That’s classified.”

Daisy laughed genuinely and then teased, “Ooh, how very super spy of you.”

Turning and walking towards the departure gates, Darcy called back over her shoulder, “Whatever. See you around, hero.”

“Later, Avenger.”
Three Days Later...

“Net nikakogo spaseniya!”

“Sdat’ya!”

Darcy ducked farther behind the bank of servers as shots embedded themselves in the concrete wall behind her, dust flying. Really? She checked the timer on her iPod. Thirty seconds. She ejected the spent magazine from her Icer and slammed another in its place. She took a deep breath and held her night vision goggles ready. She mentally ran through the layout of her escape route.

Control room, computer lab four, computer lab three, corridor, escape hatch, half a mile sprint to the truck.

Three, two, one.

As an explosion shook the underground facility building, the room was plunged into darkness. The shots ceased for a moment as the Russian agents firing on her were taken by surprise and Darcy sprang into action. She leapt over the server she’d been hiding behind and fired off two shots. She strode past the prone bodies of the two agents she’d hit and out into the control room behind them.

She crouched and moved around the first bank of computer desks, her eyes scanning the room through the green haze. She eyed the open door on the opposite wall that she needed to get to. As she moved farther into the room, agents flooded in. The first agent tried to run down the central walkway and rush her. Darcy turned and hooked a leg into the back of an agent’s leg, forcing him to the ground. His head hit the concrete with a sickening crack. She turned back and rolled behind a computer desk, then flicked a shot behind her to hit the man creeping up in the darkness. She popped up and squeezed off two more rounds at the men advancing from the other side of the room, then ducked back down again. The now familiar adrenaline rush coursed through her veins.

Darting out of her hiding place, she fired another round into the agent in her path. She advanced even farther into the room. Darcy’s eyes were still adjusting to the eerie green display of the night vision goggles as she scanned the room. Happy to find it now empty, she reloaded her Icer. She didn’t have long to get above ground before they realised what she had taken.

Darcy crept forward through the desks to the doorway she needed, her back flush against the wall. She forced her breathing to slow so that she could listen through the darkness. There was blessedly little background noise in the base now that the explosion had shut down its power. It was a minor Russian intelligence outpost, so her mission hadn’t been particularly difficult. Her main problem was all the agents that stood between her and the vehicle she had running outside the former KGB facility.

She held her breath when she heard voices from the next room. “Razdelit’.” They were moving easily through the dark computer lab, barely making a sound. Darcy glanced up at the ceiling through the open door. Decision made, she waited. A few seconds later, she popped out and fired a shot at the pipes above them. Chemical coolant gushed out, stunning the first agent just as he reached her. She darted around him and into the room. She fired a shot at the next agent but it only grazed his shoulder as he charged at her. She dove to the side, fired a second shot squarely into his back, then
burst and used her momentum to roll forwards.

Bursting through the closed door into the next room, she vaulted over a metal table and slammed bodily into an agent. He stumbled backwards but pulled her with him, flipping her over his head and onto another table. The breath was knocked out of her as she slammed into the metal. The agent loomed over her, a vicious sneer on his face. Darcy kicked both legs out and into the bottom of his rib cage. She heard the expected crack as she righted herself. He came back at her swinging. She launched herself into him, twisting his arm behind his back as she turned to shoot an agent entering the room behind her.

As the agent fought to escape her grip, she spun him out, sweeping a leg under him. The momentum of his fall pulled her down with him, and she bent her knees to land on his already fractured ribs. She punched him out and pulled herself to her feet. Her breathing was still labored from being slammed into the table.

The agent she had stunned with the chemical coolant flew into the room, a spray of shots preceding him. Pain flashed on the left side of her neck and she felt a spray of blood against the underside of her jaw. *Motherfucker.*

Darcy took great pleasure in firing a shot right between his eyes. He was close enough that the muzzle flash lit up his face for a moment before he, too, hit the ground. Darcy could feel the numbness settling into her collarbone and crawling down her left arm. *Got to get the fuck out of here, now.* The rest of her body began to scream at her as she stood still, lactic acid building up and muscles stiffening. A clatter from the outer corridor brought her back to the present and she threw herself into action, ignoring the blood soaking into the collar of her tactical jacket.

She ran down the corridor towards the ladder to the access hatch. She holstered her Icer, needing both hands to hoist herself up to her escape. She leapt up and grabbed hold of the ladder, cracked paint slicing into her fingers. She ignored the pain radiating from her neck and pulled herself up. Just as she reached the hatch, a large hand grabbed her ankle and yanked, hard. Her chin collided with several rungs, splitting it wide as she clattered face first to the ground. Her goggles fell from her eyes and hung uselessly around her neck.

She felt the agent looming over her. She heard the sound of him pulling his gun from its holster while another pair of boots thundered down the corridor. She felt lightheaded from her injuries, and the burn of bile rising in her throat. The memory of lying on cold concrete, needing to be saved flickered across her mind as she closed her eyes.

*Fuck this.*

Darcy released the catch on the knife sheath at her wrist, rolled to the side and swung her arm in a wide arc. Hot blood spattered across her face as the blade sliced through something. She kicked out blindly and felt her boot connect with the agent’s chest. She threw the now slick knife down the corridor at the advancing agent. She was slammed backwards into the ladder by the falling body of the first agent, but she tilted herself to the side and the man’s weight carried him past her. She pulled herself up and swung both boots into his back, forcing him to collide face first into the back wall.

Darcy dropped back to the ground, pulled her Icer from its holster, and fired blindly up the pitch black corridor. The flash of blue light reflected briefly off of the advancing agent and she threw herself at him. She shoved him into the wall and drove an elbow into the underside of his chin. He grabbed her and threw her down. As she fell, he pounced on her. She grabbed the shoulders of his vest and pulled him over her head. She tumbled with him, and as she did she drove her knee up into his groin. Darcy used his sharp intake of breath to locate his face in the dark and slammed the butt of her gun into his nose. He stopped struggling and slumped to the ground.
Darcy breathed heavily. She tried to pull the night vision goggles back up to her eyes, but they were now coated in blood and useless. Fortunately, her eyes had managed to adjust enough to make out the outline of the ladder. She forced herself up on shaking legs and reloaded her Icer with trembling hands. The adrenaline was starting to ebb, and she needed all the energy she could muster to pull herself up the ladder. More agents would come flooding in at any second.

As she threw the hatch open, bitterly cold wind stung her split-open chin and the bullet wound in her neck. She squinted through the moonlight and, seeing nothing, hauled herself up and onto the snow covered grass. A shout went up from the above-ground-level building at the far side of the compound. She pulled herself to her feet and ran as fast as she could through the deep snow, out to the trees where she had hidden her vehicle.

As she reached the truck, she heard the pounding of boots gaining on her and bullets whizzing through the air. She wrenched the door open and vaulted up into the driver’s seat of the already running truck. Darcy threw the engine into first and slammed her foot on the gas, tearing away from the facility.

Once the sound of bullets pinging into the truck stopped, she reached for her iPod and tapped a few keys. She spared a glance in the rear view mirror and watched as a burst of light erupted from the facility, rendering all electronics irreparably useless. She returned her eyes to the narrow, snow covered road in front of her and grinned. “Merry Christmas, fellas.”

Her eyes snapped open at some noise in the safehouse, one hand reaching for her Icer, the other for the knife under the edge of the mattress. Down the hall, the fridge door closed. Darcy silently put on her boots and tiptoed down the hall. Light from the kitchen spilled under the closed door. Darcy ignored the tightness of her injuries and zeroed in on the sounds in the other room. Two people. One standing, one sitting at the table. She could hear cutlery being laid out on the wooden table and the slight creak of the floorboard in front of the stove.

She slammed the door open and raised her Icer. She found two Icers pointed back at her huffed out a breath. “Fucking hell, guys!”

“Alright, Darcy, m’love?” Hunter holstered his gun and gave her a jaunty wave.

Darcy slumped against the door frame. “The hell are you guys doing here?”

Bobbi holstered her own gun and began setting a third place at the table. “We just got in. Went straight from the airport to do a spot of recon on our next target. And what do you know? It’s a ghost town and all their electronics are fried.”

“And so we decide to come back here to grab a bite and crash and lo and behold, Goldilocks is sleeping in our bed.” Hunter gestured dramatically at Darcy’s blonde hair.

Darcy reached into her bra, glaring at Hunter as he smiled lecherously. She pulled out the drive containing all the data she’d stolen from the base and threw it on the table. “There you go. Saves me the postage.”

Bobbi leaned against the counter and motioned towards the drive. “Thanks Darce. Not that we don’t
appreciate it, but this isn’t the first time we’ve turned up somewhere to find you’ve already raided it.”

Darcy shrugged. “Sorry?”

Bobbi shook her head. “Don’t be. But it’d be easier if we could communicate and co-ordinate our efforts. Do you want something to eat?”

“Nah, I’m fine. Look, Nat has a safe house on the other side of town, I’ll go there and get out of your hair.” Darcy turned to grab her jacket and bag.

“Not a fucking chance, love.” Hunter slammed his fist into the table in an uncharacteristic show of frustration.

Bobbi held out a hand to calm Hunter. “What he means is, you’re welcome to stay. There’s a pull-out sofa bed. We’ll bunk there tonight.”

“Birdie, really, it’s fine. I probably won’t sleep now anyway. I’ll just go.”

“Darcy. Please darlin’? At least stay for a cuppa?” Hunter had relaxed his posture and pasted a smile on his face. “Let Bob check over your injuries a bit while we trade war stories, eh?” He patted the seat next to him.

Truth be told, Darcy was still exhausted from the fight out of the base and the Wakandan miracle medication. She only had a few syringes left, so she’d had to use a lower dose than usual. “Fine. But you go first. Once I’ve told you mine, you’ll be too embarrassed to tell me yours.” She stuck her tongue out at him and pulled up a seat.

They talked for a while. Bobbi and Hunter filled her in on their missions. Darcy already knew about or had worked out most of them, but it was still nice to hear them tell it. She sipped at her tea while Bobbi grabbed the medkit and checked over her injuries, pulling faces while Darcy described her own adventures.

“To be honest kid, I’m glad you hit Johannesburg for us. We’re still very much persona non grata there. I’d rather fancy our chances strolling up to Stark’s place than Jo’burg right now.”

Darcy swirled the dregs of her tea in her cup. “Things still no better between Stark and the rest of them, then? It’s been almost a year now.”

Bobbi dried her hands on a dish towel and came back to join them. “Not really, no. He’s kind of gone AWOL. He’ll have to show up to the Accord Summit with the rest of them, though.”

Darcy’s eyebrows shot up to her hairline. “You’ve got to be kidding me.”

Hunter chimed in, “Nope. Apparently it was originally Stark’s idea. Lord knows he’s overdue for a good one.”

“And so everyone is just going to go? Seriously?” Darcy asked incredulously.

Bobbi shrugged. “It’s being considered. They’ve even gotten word to Thor.”

Darcy’s blood ran cold at the mention of Thor. She hadn’t so much as given Thor and Jane a passing
thought lately. “He’s coming back?”

“No-one knows. There’s been no response. Have, uh, you heard from them?” Hunter asked the question carefully, knowing it had been a misstep the second the words left his mouth.

Darcy leaned back in her chair, tilting her head to the ceiling and rubbing her hands over her face, wincing slightly when they brushed over her split chin. “You’ve got to be fucking joking.”

Hunter looked appropriately contrite. “I thought I’d ask.”

“Nope, I haven’t heard from either of them since they ditched me in London.” She tried to bite back the dejection in her voice.

Bobbi put her hand palm up on the table. “Darce…”

Darcy ignored it and shook her head, folding her arms across her chest defensively. “No, it’s fine. I’ve made my peace with it. Thor has a responsibility to Asgard and whatever. He took Jane with him off to space because they’re soul mates and I get it. It’s just… If he’s fine to pop back to attend some earthly political summit… I just…” Disappointed tears welled up in her eyes.

Hunter slung an arm around her shoulder and gently pulled her in close. “If I see him, you want me to deck him for you, sweetheart? Just say the word. I mean, he’d kick my arse. But if I sucker punch him, I’ll at least get one in first.”

Darcy shook her head and straightened her shoulders. She dislodged Hunter’s arm and threw an attempt at an exasperated look Bobbi’s way. “Thanks, Hufflepuff. If Thor ever bothers to show up again, I’ll bring the popcorn and get the betting pool started.” Bobbi’s face clouded with concern at Darcy’s sudden change in demeanor. Like she could see the walls slamming up in to place. “I’m going to try to get in a little shuteye. I’ve got an early flight.”

Hunter and Bobbi shared a look as Darcy stood and walked towards the door. “Darce?” Bobbi called tentatively. Darcy turned around. “The offer still stands, you know? We still want you to come and work with us.”

Darcy shook her head and headed back to her bedroom. As she took her boots off, she glanced through the gap in the curtains. For a split second she thought she saw a glint of silver on the roof of the building opposite, but when she looked again it was gone. Darcy tucked herself back into bed, sliding her Icer and knife back into their usual positions. She curled on her side and waited for sleep to claim her.

Chapter End Notes

So what do we all think?
Darcy & Daisy? Do we like?
BAMF!Darcy doing her BAMF thing? How's she coming along?
& what do we think about the latest Accord Summit development?

Please leave all questions, queries, feedback and theories in the comments.
I promise I won't leave it so long to update again.
I'm getting back into my groove.
Chapter 27

Chapter Summary

Where we find out that Darcy has a type, that fallaces sunt rerum species and that regardless of the dire scenario there will always be an opportunity to quote The Great Escape.

Chapter Notes

Aaaand we're back!
Sorry that the updates have slowed significantly. Life stuff is going on, but also the story takes a bit more planning now that I'm trying to tie everything up. (Well, not everything. There might end up being a sequel.)

Thank you one again to the incredible esorrevlis for beta-ing this chapter. She's a total trooper!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“Two Vespers please, extra wet, straight up, with a twist.”

“Not a fan of olives either, then?” Darcy leaned one arm on the polished, dark wood bar top. Her eyes raked over the man next to her. His dark hair was parted on the side and styled with more product than anyone should reasonably use. His deep navy suit looked almost black in the dim lighting of the hotel bar.

She’d arrived in Vienna three days ago. After a run of successful missions to secure support for the Avengers over the last few months, she had taken a few days to get comfortable. Despite the fact that winter was barely over, all the hotels in Vienna were booked up. The Summit was due to begin tomorrow, and the world’s press had taken up residency. After securing a suite and updating her wardrobe, she’d positioned herself as one of the hundreds of journalists covering the four-day event.

The bartender set their martinis on the bar in front of them. “Can’t stand them.” Her companion raised his glass, and she mirrored his actions. “To an enjoyable evening?”

Darcy smiled, and leaned forward slightly to clink their glasses together. “To an enjoyable evening.” She took a drink and placed her glass back on the bar, moving slowly and deliberately. Her shoulder had almost fully healed from Canberra. She had used the last of the Wakandan medicine on the flight to Vienna, but it was working overtime on the back catalog of partially healed injuries she’d been accumulating. Despite the numerous hits she’d taken, Darcy was confident that her efforts had been worthwhile and there was now significant support for sensible amendments to the Accords.

The hotel bar was beginning to quiet down. For most of the evening, it had been buzzing with excitement. But one by one, or two by two in some cases, everyone had turned in for the night. The velvet upholstered chairs sat empty and waiters cleared the tables. Tomorrow was going to be a big day, after all. Darcy crossed her legs, the hem of her dress hitching up her leg slightly, and fought a
satisfied smirk as the action attracted the attention of the man to her right.

After seeing the way the others had altered the nano-mask to disguise Bucky’s arm, she’d done some research and had altered hers to cover the scarring on her arms and legs. She’d had to use make-up to cover the new scars around her neck and shoulder, though. She’d even used some on the scarring on her abdomen and back. Just in case. Her company for the evening was an attractive journalist from New York. He’d gone on at length about his successful career but Darcy had barely listened. The information wasn’t necessary intel and she was happy to just enjoy the warmth of human company while she sipped martinis in this beautiful hotel.

The warm body had sharp cheekbones and a jawline that could cut glass. His three-piece suit fit impeccably and he obviously did well for himself because Darcy was pretty sure it was a Tom Ford. His flashy watch reinforced that conclusion. He was confident, suave and charming. She let him buy her drinks, and she pretended to listen to his outrageous stories of daring journalism. Hah! So you spent a month in Iraq at some base camp with a security detail? That’s cute.

Darcy sipped her drink while the sounds of his New York accent mingled with the piano filtering through the bar. The music changed as the pianist started playing a slow-tempo version of ‘Walking My Baby Back Home’. She nodded politely and feigned interest as her companion continued their one-sided conversation. She contemplated the end to the evening that he was clearly hoping for. She thought about what it might be like to permit herself to just go with this attractive man for one night. She could go back to her room to sleep, her scars were covered, and there was nothing she needed to do before the morning. She was wearing a literal mask and he had no idea who she really was. But the sleepy memory of a large hand spanning from her hip to her waist, and the feeling of warm ease that had accompanied it, bubbled up in her mind.

Darcy knocked back the last of her drink. She bid her company goodnight, straightened her dress and climbed the marble staircase to her room, alone.

Sleep had not come easily or stayed for long. Darcy had always struggled to sleep somewhere new, but the hope that in a few short days her life could start over again had her tossing and turning. Eventually she had given up and had grabbed the box of hair dye from her bag. Her now-dry brunette curls were piled on her head in a professional looking bun and she was grateful that the nano-mask meant that she didn’t need to bother with makeup.

The sun was finally starting to rise over the Vienna skyline and Darcy’s stomach growled at her. She hadn’t eaten much at dinner and had knocked back a few too many martinis the night before. Darcy checked her watch; she had another hour before she had to cross the square for the opening press conference. A large coffee and a breakfast pastry would be just the ticket.

She made sure that her white blouse was tucked into her suit pants, but that she still had access to her Icer. She adjusted her knife sheaths around her forearms, then rolled down her shirt sleeves to cover them. After double-checking her purse and slipping on her heels, she grabbed her trench coat and press pass, and headed down to breakfast.

Darcy stepped out of the elevator and into the lobby. Sunlight poured in through the huge windows at the front of the building, reflecting off of the white marble and the mirrors on the walls. She looked
around, expecting to see a hubbub of journalists, drinking coffee and doing their final prep. But there was no one. No hint of the frisson of energy that had begun to take hold the night before. Just a few hotel staff. Where the hell is everyone?

Darcy was about to step through the archway into the main dining room when she heard a commotion behind her on the staircase. Her muscles tensed and she fought against the instinct to fall into her now ingrained defensive stance. Her fingers gripped the carved stonework to ground herself.

“Shit. Shit. Shit. Shit!”

“Come on, come on! I swear to God, if I get fired because of you and your…”

The conversation trailed off as the man she’d sat beside in the bar last night scurried past with a harried-looking female journalist. They were both still struggling with their coats and he was wearing the same suit as the night before as they passed her and headed out the front door. Darcy pulled her coat on and slung her press pass around her neck, following them out into the cold morning.

Darcy worked her way through the crowd of journalists to find a good vantage point, settling on a spot behind a television crew. The press conference was starting early and a sense of unease sat heavily in her stomach. Something’s changed. There was a podium in front of the UN building with several large screens set up behind it. Darcy’s spot was to the far side of it all, with open lines of sight and an unobstructed exit route. The place was crawling with security but that wasn’t what was unnerving Darcy.

The media circus around her was vibrating with excitement. Apparently a call had gone out to all the networks and papers that the conference had been moved up, but no-one knew why. She spotted a few familiar faces in the crowd but her mask would keep her identity secret. She was only here to observe and get the news first hand.

Darcy fidgeted with the press pass around her neck. She was so close to being free. Suddenly flashes started going off around her and the cameras swivelled to track the men and women filing out the front door of the UN building. A severe-looking bald man led the pack to the podium. He cleared his throat and began to speak.

“Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you for coming. My name is William Frampton, Under Secretary General for Political Affairs…” Oh no, “…and Executive Director of the United Nations Enhanced Beings Control Taskforce.”

Darcy’s blood ran cold. She thought she’d covered every angle on the delegates who would be attending the summit. She’d drawn on every scrap of knowledge and intel she could get her hands on to ensure that all the attending nations would be sympathetic. She’d travelled the world and used every trick in her book to remove the corrupt and damaging forces in each delegate’s camp. The playing field was had been set up so that each nation would listen to the proposed amendments with a fair ear. But she hadn’t accounted for the United Nations itself. She had forgotten to account for the taskforce that had held her captive and tortured her for weeks. Barton had been right, “The UN shouldn’t be pulling shit like that. There’s more going on than we know right now.”

Darcy fought to control her breathing and stop her heart from beating its way right out of her chest.
Frampton was gesturing to the screens behind him. A hush fell over the crowd. Darcy swallowed dryly and clenched her fists at her sides, trying to pay attention to the press conference and not the feeling of everything spiralling away from her.

“…thanks to the co-operation of numerous intelligence agencies, we successfully arrested a great number of dangerous vigilantes earlier this morning.” The first screen showed a large black Chinook helicopter surrounded by heavily armed black-ops soldiers. Darcy watched in horror as Agent May, Fitz, Simmons, Mack, and another man and woman wearing metal collars around their necks were frog marched out with their wrists bound in huge metal cuffs. As they were pushed on to the helicopter, the next screen sprang to life.

Another Chinook was in a clearing of trees and King T’Challa and a group of Wakandans were being dragged unceremoniously on board. The next screen showed footage of an unconscious Peter Parker being hauled into the back of a truck by more black-ops soldiers. Darcy’s heart leaped into her throat as her eyes rounded on the final screen. The camera panned from the rear of a military jet to the tarmac. Dozens of armed guards were marching in procession around a single file of chain-bound people. Darcy strained her eyes to see and had to lock her knees to keep from falling to the ground when she made them out. Captain Rogers, Sam Wilson, Scott Lang, Wanda, Barton… Bucky… Thor!?

“We would like to apologise for the deception required as part of this operation. The Summit will indeed go ahead as planned, next month. I would like to personally thank the entire staff of the EBC Taskforce for their commendable work in making this operation a success. Thanks to their tireless efforts, we have ensured that the people of this world can sleep soundly at night, knowing that in one fell swoop, all of these dangers to our way of life will no longer be loose on the streets…”

Darcy tried to steady herself as panic rose in her chest. They’re all… All of them… Fuck. She straightened her spine and tried to take in a shaky breath. Just then, her eyes caught on the final screen. The jet ramp had been closed, and the camera pulled in on a group of black-ops soldiers being given orders by a blonde woman in a charcoal pantsuit. They marched away from her and she turned to face the camera. Darcy would have recognised those sharp features and that slick of pink lipstick anywhere.

“…and despite the great victory today, we will not rest until all of their co-conspirators and accomplices are also brought to justice…”

Frampton continued talking to the rabid media while Darcy slipped away, trembling, into the cold streets of Vienna.

Darcy strode down the hotel corridor, the sound of her footsteps muffled by the thick carpet. She reached into her coat pocket for the room key card and removed the Do Not Disturb sign from the handle. She made her way into the room, heart pounding. Then she noticed the writing on the sign, just under the hotel logo.

Drink after work?
Em (>: x
Darcy huffed out a small laugh, folding the sign and pocketing it. She grabbed her bags and headed back out into the hallway.

She spent the day milling around Vienna. She kept to the back streets until she found the most likely bar, close to the business quarter of the city. Darcy checked her watch. 4.30pm. She checked her reflection in a store front. The photo-static veil was still intact but she could do with a change of clothes. She headed into the bar, bypassing the tables and going straight to the restrooms.

Darcy closed the stall door behind her and put the toilet lid down, then placed her bag on top and rifled through it. She briefly pulled out the sundress she’d been hoping to change into in a few days. A wave of regret crashed over her before she stuffed it back in. *Stupid. Stupid. Stupid.* Instead she pulled out a light grey fitted dress and a black blazer. She changed quickly and repacked her bag.

The bar was still fairly quiet, the surrounding offices still full of people working away and no doubt gossiping about the arrest of the Avengers et al. Images of them all in shackles flashed through Darcy’s mind as she ascended the stairs to the rooftop bar. She chose a corner table between the bar and the balcony railing, where she could keep one eye on the street below and scan the bar as it began to fill.

A few moments later a waiter approached her. She pasted on a tired smile and ordered a martini; keep them coming until her friends arrived. *God, I hope it’s friends, plural.* She pulled her coat a little tighter around herself. There were space heaters dotted around the rooftop bar but the wind was still chilly. Her first martini arrived, and she lifted out the twist of lemon and knocked it back, handing the waiter the empty glass before he’d even had a chance to retreat. She quirked an eyebrow at him and he smiled politely before going to fetch her another.

She sat back in her seat and sighed. She’d watched the others, Bobbi, Barton and Natasha, downing drink after drink, mostly straight liquor. She had privately thought that that was what strong people did. They swallowed down the pain, chased it with a shot of liquor and carried on with the fight. It wasn’t until the waiter returned with her second drink that she realised that they all held their drinks to hide their shaking hands. Darcy only understood that now: Now that she was sitting, clutching her glass to steady her own trembling fingers. Trying to swallow down the pain and carry on with the fight, liquor burning next to fear in the pit of her stomach.

She reached into her pocket and pulled out a pack of cigarettes and her lighter. She lit a cigarette and fiddled with the lid of the Zippo, flicking it open and closed. The rhythmic clicking of metal on metal settled her as smoke curled around her. She eyed the street below, trying to find a familiar face.

The waiter had just handed her a fourth martini and she’d just lit her sixth cigarette, when two figures made their way through the crush of people that now filled the bar. The sun had set not that long ago and the terrace was now lit with hundreds of tiny Christmas lights and the soft glow of the heaters.

A rush of relief flooded Darcy’s system as she patted the white leather seat next to her. She kept her face neutral as Bobbi and Hunter sat down next to her. She calmly smiled and gestured to a passing waiter.

Hunter slung an arm along the back of the seat behind Bobbi. “We’ll have another martini, and two
bottles of lager please, mate.”

Bobbi leaned forward, placing a hand on the arm of the waiter who was clearing Darcy’s last drink away. “Better make one of those beers a light one.” She nodded towards Hunter. “He’s watching his figure.”

Hunter swatted at her thigh with the back of his hand. “Oi! I’m in prime condition, thank you very much.” Bobbi raised an eyebrow at him and Hunter cleared his throat. “Yeah, uh. One light, one regular beer will be grand. Thanks.” He smiled awkwardly at the waiter, who nodded and retreated from their table.

A bubble of laughter worked its way into Darcy’s throat, her tight muscles relaxing a fraction at the familiar sight. She had spent the day on edge and their presence gave her a slight reprieve from the feeling that the rug had well and truly been pulled out from underneath her.

Darcy took a drag of her cigarette. She reached forward to tap the ash into the chrome ashtray. “So…” She sat back and waited on Bobbi or Hunter to start filling her in on why they had asked her to meet them.

Bobbi went first. “The UN faked the Summit and the temporary lift of the Accords.” She stopped speaking while the waiter placed their drinks down for them. Once he had departed, Bobbi cleared her throat and fiddled with the cuff of her blouse. They’d both dressed in business wear to fit in. “They conducted all of the arrests simultaneously, no-one stood a chance.”

Hunter took a swig of his beer before contributing, “They’ve got these collars that they’ve slapped on all the powered ones. Dunno how it works, but not even the witchy one could fend them off. It’s not bloody right. Any of it. They even got the drop on May and Mack…” He started picking at the label on his bottle in apparent frustration.

Bobbi placed a soothing hand on his shoulder. “They’ve got a list of people that they’re after now. They’re hoping that we’ll all be thrown too much by the clean sweep and they’ll be able to pick us all off.”

Darcy fiddled with the stem of her glass. “So where are they taking them all?”

“The Raft.” Bobbi and Hunter replied in unison.

Darcy almost dropped her cigarette, ash falling into her lap. She brushed it away a little too roughly. “You mean that under-the-sea super-max prison? I thought Captain Rogers busted that place up last year.”

“They’ve been doing upgrades…” Bobbi scanned the rest of the terrace. “… With help from Stark Industries.”

“You’re fucking kidding me!”

“Fucking prick.”

Darcy and Hunter responded at the same time, and when they realised that they shared the same sentiment and similar vocabulary choices, they toasted each other. Bobbi rolled her beer between her hands. “I think there’s more to it than that, but yeah.”

“What do you mean, Birdie?” Darcy drained the last of her drink and was about to summon a waiter for another when Bobbi signalled under the table for her to pause. Darcy’s eyes flicked up and spotted the six rather built-looking guys in suits a few tables away who were not so covertly
watching them. “So…?”

Hunter and Bobbi both finished their drinks. Hunter stood, and gestured for both women to stand and leave their corner table. “Looks like we’ll be skipping out on yet another bar tab, Bob. Just as well, this place looks bloody expensive.”

Darcy tightened the belt on her coat and reached for the handles of her bags. She spoke under her breath, “You guys head for the stairs first. When you get downstairs take a left and go through the reception. There’s a fire exit on the far wall. I’ll create a distraction and slip away. It was nice seeing you both.” She huffed a sigh and gave them a sad smile, pulling her bags on to her shoulder, bracing herself to run.

Hunter and Bobbi reached out and grabbed a shoulder each. They shared a grin and then Hunter smirked. “Oh no, kiddo. You’re coming with us. We’re all on that shit list and we’ve got a ‘Great Escape’ to plan.” He waggled his eyebrows, seeming thoroughly amused by the fact that they were about to try to escape a bunch of UN special-ops soldiers on a busy rooftop.

Darcy took a deep breath and shoved her duffle bag into Hunter’s chest. “Fine. But follow my lead.” Darcy reached into her backpack and pulled out what looked like a flare gun and a Swiss army knife. She ignored Bobbi and Hunter’s confused looks and began assembling their escape. “I was hoping that I wouldn’t have to use this. Barton’s going to be pissed.”

She closed her backpack, then detached carabiners with loops of leather on them and handed them to Bobbi and Hunter. She turned and clambered up on to the back of the leather booth, her back to the bar. She heard the men at the other table getting up. She took a deep breath and, on the exhale, she fired the grappling hook into the concrete brickwork of the office building opposite.

At the sound of the shot the special-ops men started trying to shove their way through the crowd. Darcy attached her end of the zip line to the balcony and clipped her carabiner onto the line. She chanced a glance at Hunter and winked at him. “Up the Rebels.” She threw herself over the balcony, bracing herself as the line grew taught and yanked her arm, stopping her fall. As the wind whipped through her hair, she felt the line pull as Bobbi and Hunter both joined her. She pulled her legs up, ready to kick the glass of the window that was rapidly approaching.

Chapter End Notes

So, the next chapter is going to be a doozy. I’ve not quite worked out all of the particulars yet so I’m not sure if it’s going to be one monster chapter or split over a couple of chapters.

But in the mean time, what did we all think of this update? Please put all comments, questions, queries, feedback and theories, in the comment box below. I love chatting to all you guys and hearing what you think.

Now, if you’ll excuse me, I have a Great Escape to plan ;)

(PS. Bonus points to anyone who can comment with the reply to Darcy’s line before she jumps off the balcony.)
Chapter 28

Chapter Summary

Where we find out that Darcy knows how to commandeer and fly a quinjet, that Raft duty is probably the worst assignment ever and that Hunter is not only a Hufflepuff but also Bosley in this scenario.

Chapter Notes

Eternal thanks to the wonderful erosreylis for beta-ing this chapter and making sure it all makes sense and what not. She's the best!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Clicking the final magazine into place on her belt and tightening the holsters around her thighs, Darcy stood up. Bracing herself against the side of the quinjet, she took a deep breath. For the millionth time, she ran through her mental checklist. After triple-checking all of her gear, she shut the door of the gear locker she’d commandeered for herself and headed for the co-pilot’s seat.

The leather creaked lightly as she dropped into the chair. She reached forward and brought up the GPS display. She flicked through a variety of screens until she heard a stifled chuckle next to her.

“You know, love, you can take over driving any time you fancy.” Hunter threw her an easy smile, knowing full well that his offer was going to be shot down.

Darcy slumped back into her chair, ignoring the way the buckles of the safety harness were digging into her shoulder blades. “How many times have we had this discussion over the last three weeks, Hufflepuff?”

“I’m just saying. Technically this is your jet. I’d be happy to swap. You can keep the engine running while I go in with the rest of them.” He gestured to the others in the back of the jet.

Darcy spun in her chair and watched Nat attaching a seemingly endless number of weapons to her person. Sensing eyes on her, the redhead looked up and gave Darcy a nod. Darcy returned the gesture. The last few weeks had been difficult for both of them.

Nat finished gearing up and crossed the floor of the jet to where Bobbi and Daisy sat side by side, talking. The pair had been deep in conversation for most of the journey. Darcy smiled softly as she watched Bobbi soothe Daisy in the big-sisterly manner that she, herself, had been on the receiving end of countless times.

She turned back to face the front of the quinjet, and looked out the panoramic window. Not that there was much to see: it was almost pitch black, only a slight hint of light along the horizon as the sun disappeared into the ocean. There was no land anywhere around to signify where they were, but the display showed that they were right on course. She scrubbed a hand over her face and tightened her ponytail.
“It’s not technically my jet. I’m just borrowing it from SHIELD,” Darcy justified.

“Hell of a lot of upgrades you’ve had put into a rented ride, kid,” Hunter teased.

Darcy pulled up another screen and double checked the data against her iPod display, before tucking it back into the pocket of her tactical jacket. “Considering the fact that we’re currently on our way to break 17 individuals out of the most secure facility that’s ever been built and there’s currently, oh…” Darcy turned and performed an overdramatic headcount before continuing, “… five of us? I’m not currently too concerned with arguing over technicalities like ownership of the jet.”

Hunter placed a hand on her leather-and-Kevlar-clad knee, squeezing lightly. “We’re going to get them out, you know. Every last one of them.” He removed his hand and continued to pilot the jet.

Darcy didn’t respond. She couldn’t find the words. They had spent weeks on this plan, trying to account for every variable. At the end of the day, this mission was going to require every single one of them to be at the top of their game, and for a hell of a lot of things to swing in their favor. She swallowed thickly, trying to find something to break the silence in the cockpit.

Hunter piped up before she could come up with a single word. “Personally, I’m just looking forward to the presence of some testosterone. Much longer and you’ll all have synced up and then I’ll really be in--“

“Shut up, Hunter.”

Hunter cringed in his seat as four voices barked back at him in identical tones. Before he could (predictably) mutter under his breath about how outnumbered he was, the quinjet dipped suddenly and there was an accompanying metallic thud on the roof.

Darcy stood and moved to the back of the jet, looping her arm around a brace, waiting for the others to buckle in before she opened the rear doors. “Well, Hufflepuff, you asked for testosterone…”

He watched out the side window of his jet as the roof of The Raft opened up to show the landing pad. FRIDAY brought the jet in to land. He’d only managed to get one foot out onto solid ground before a suit came barreling up to him, clipboard in hand.

“Mr. Stark, we weren’t expecting you until next week.” The kid almost dropped his clipboard as he stuck out a hand. Deftly avoiding the outstretched limb, Tony strode out on to the ramp, one hand casually tucked in his pants pocket.

The government kid’s cheap shoes thudded dully on the ramp up to the security desk as he chased after him. “Mr. Stark, sir, I have your biometric security badge here.”

Tony turned on the spot and the kid almost ran straight into him, his sweaty hand holding out a laminated card. “You’re new here.”

“Yes, sir. Just transferred in from the Pentagon,” He managed to stammer out.

“Well shit kid, how badly did you fuck up to get sent out here?” Tony waved off any attempt at a
response. “I don’t like being handed things.” He continued his trek up the ramp to the security station. The special ops soldiers were paying close attention to the situation unfolding in front of them but made no attempt to intervene. “Don’t need one of those anyways.”

“Mr. Stark?”

Tony spun on the spot again, a hand going out to stop the kid from careening into the gate at the top of the ramp. “Who do you think designed all this?” He gestured around grandly at the updated facility.

Ross had caused all sorts of trouble after Rogers had broken in last time and Tony had had to offer to work on the upgrades to assure him that he was still cooperating. He swiped through the menu on his Stark watch until he found the app he was looking for and tapped in the appropriate sequence. The metal gate standing between the ramp and the rest of the circular platform beeped softly and swung open. At this, a few of the soldiers shifted in place, not doing anything overtly aggressive, but clearly cautious.

“Um, Mr. Stark?” The kid gaped openly at the open gate, clearly having no idea how to proceed. Apparently the training manual didn’t have a Tony Stark section. That would be changing soon.

Tony leaned on the metal railing that encircled the landing pad. He took a moment to smooth a hand down the front of his t-shirt, then fixed the kid with an apologetic smile. The hideously harsh floodlights overhead managed to make the government suit look even more pale and sweaty. “Sorry about this, kid. Don’t know what you did to get stuck with Raft duty...” He lazily flicked through the screen on his watch again. “But don’t worry… you’ll be transferred out of here again in no time.”

He turned to fix the, now very nervous, special ops guys with his best shit-eating grin and raised his voice so they would hear him too. “Let’s get this party started, shall we?”

He tapped the watch and the entire facility plunged into emergency lighting. With another touch to the display, his suit quickly telescoped into place from the various starting points hidden on his person. The kid showed the first sign of any sense by diving into a roll towards the security desk as the faceplate clicked into place and the HUD flared into life.

He propelled himself into the air a few feet as the soldiers formed a circle around him, guns raised. He did a quick headcount and laughed. “Seriously boys? All this attention for little old me? I’m just Charlie. It’s my Angels that you need to worry about…” With a flourish from Tony, the rear of the StarkJet opened and out charged Darcy, the Black Widow, Mockingbird and Quake.

Darcy grabbed on to the soldier’s wrist, forcing the barrel of his gun upwards and away from her chest, ignoring the jerk as he fired into the air over her shoulder. She slammed the heel of her left hand into his gut and he careened backwards. She took advantage of his imbalance and ducked, forcing her shoulder into his rib cage. She tumbled after him into the ground, but rolled over his outstretched arm and twisted to drive the butt of her gun into his temple, knocking him out cold. She swung to her feet and surveyed the scene around her, adrenaline thumping through her.

Bobbi had just taken out two soldiers with her batons. Nat had tossed one into the air for Quake to drive into the concrete wall with her powers. All three other women joined her in checking for
movement in the now clear landing pad. The brief silence was interrupted by a metallic slow clap from above.

Iron Man dropped from his elevated position to land in a clearing among the soldiers that littered the floor. His faceplate snapped open and he raised an eyebrow. “Nicely done. Don’t know why you invited me along… Oh wait, yes I do. FRIDAY, kick things off for me.”

The Irish-accented response filtered out into the air, “You got it, boss.”

The doors on either side of the security station beeped softly as they disengaged, as did one of the doors on the far left behind the StarkJet. “FRIDAY will keep an eye on things and open the doors as you need them. I’ll be up top making sure there’s no party crashers.” Tony took a beat to look at the four impassive women staring back at him. “What? No ‘Thanks Charlie’?”

Darcy pulled out her iPod and brought up the map of the facility. Without looking up at Stark she answered him, “Just get up there and watch out for Hunter, okay? He’s our ride out of here.”

Stark jerked a thumb her way. “Who put this one in charge again?”

“Tony!” Natasha’s tone brooked no argument. Stark’s faceplate closed and he flew up into the night sky. The sound of his repulsors faded into the sounds of the ocean waves crashing against the Raft.

Darcy put away her iPod and gestured over to Nat and then to the farthest door. “The stairs you need are through there. Level 8, cells 3 through 9. Comm check?” Darcy tapped her earpiece. Nat nodded, pulling a gun from its holster as she jogged around the landing pad and up to the metal door, which slid open as she approached. Darcy had to bite back from wishing her luck.

Next she turned to Daisy. “The SHIELD guys are down there to the left. Level 2, cells 19 through 24. Get in, get them out and get back up here.” She put a hand on the younger girl’s shoulder. “Comm check.”

Daisy nodded, squaring her shoulders and bouncing on the balls of her feet. “Comm check confirmed.” The nervous girl full of fear and regret from the jet was gone. Instead, a powerful inhuman stood in front of her, ready to go rescue her people. Then she took off down the left corridor.

Finally, Darcy turned to Bobbi. The blonde twirled her batons in her hands before catching them confidently. “You ready for this, Darce?”

Darcy inhaled deeply, acutely aware of the smell of the sea air. The towering walls around her suddenly seemed so much taller and more imposing. She tapped her ear piece and Bobbi did the same. Unable to verbalize her feelings, Darcy just nodded.

Bobbi took point, and they darted through the right hand door into a dimly lit corridor, the sounds of crashing waves muted by the door closing behind them.

Chapter End Notes

Okay, so it's go time!
I'm still working on the blocking of all of the action sequences, but the next chapter shouldn't be too far off the heels of this one.
Thank you all so much for your continued support of this fic. It warms my stone cold heart <3
Also, hello to all the new readers who have popped up recently!!

If you have any comments, questions, queries, feedback or theories- please put them in a comment and I will get a reply back to you ASAP. I felt awful that it took me almost four days to reply on the last one but I was sick, so my apologies. But I'm back in the game and will be writing all day for the next chapter so feedback or suggestions are much appreciated.
Chapter 29

Chapter Summary

Where the rescue begins...

Chapter Notes

Thanks again to esorrevlis for beta reading this chapter. Without her, this chapter would be a grammatical nightmare.

Better go grab a snack, this chapter is a long one.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Darcy fought down the churning in her stomach as she repelled down the elevator shaft. Every time her feet hit the wall, her insides lurched. She steadied herself as she squinted through the dim lighting for the painted number five that would mark their destination. The trip down seven floors felt like it passed in an instant and took far too long all at once. All she could hear were the sounds of her and Bobbi’s boots hitting the wall at regular intervals and the nylon rope running through the abseiling gear.

When they reached their floor, Darcy swung out to the side and waited for Bobbi to join her. She started undoing the rigging and hooked an arm around the metal beam that skirted the wall. Once they were both ready, FRIDAY opened the elevator doors.

They both dropped out and on to the floor, as they’d planned. They rolled out behind four soldiers and sprang into action. Darcy leapt forward and hooked an arm around the first soldier to come at her. She used his momentum to swing him around and slam his head into the concrete wall, then threw in a knee to the face for good measure and he was out for the count. She twisted and held herself flush against the wall. As the next soldier tried to pin her, she feinted down and to the side and drove a shoulder into his ribcage. When he only moved back an inch or two, she changed tactics and withdrew a knife from her forearm holster. She sliced the blade through his hamstring, making him falter back a few more steps, then swung a leg around his to force him to the ground. Bobbi’s boot slammed home and he too was out. Darcy looked up, panting, to see Bobbi grinning and twirling her batons. The other two men lay sprawled out on the floor behind her.

“Thanks, Birdie.”

“No problem. Let’s go get our boys, shall we?” Bobbi offered her a hand and pulled Darcy to her feet.

They jogged around the circular hallway to the opposite side. Each floor surrounded the central cell block. The cells were in a circle and guarded by nine special ops soldiers at any time. They’d already taken care of the guards in the outer hallway. Darcy pulled out her Icers (SHIELD had hooked her up with a couple of spares). They rounded on the doorway to the cell block and paused.
Darcy strained to hear over the blood pumping in her ears. The guards inside were trying to pry the doors open. She threw Bobbi a grin.

Bobbi tilted her head. “Men. So predictable. Ready?”

Darcy nodded and took up position next to Bobbi, a few feet back from the door. They both raised their Icers. FRIDAY opened the doors and the soldiers tried to force their way through the bottleneck. Immediately, Bobbi and Darcy opened fire on them. As the soldiers dropped, the ones behind them struggled to make their way forward and over their fallen comrades. In less than a minute, all nine soldiers were slumped in the doorway.

Darcy straightened up and reloaded her Icers. “They look heavy, Birdie.”

Bobbi grimaced. “Yeah they do.”

The women pulled the soldiers into the cell block so that FRIDAY could close the doors behind them. They dragged them into the central section of the platform and dumped them in a haphazard pile. Just as they hauled the last two into place a slow clap began behind them, followed by a wolf whistle.

“Man! That was entertaining! I’m sure as shit glad you’re on our side. You’re on our side, right?” Darcy looked up to see Sam Wilson standing at the glass door to his cell.

Bobbi called out, “It’s your lucky day, boys!”

Relief swelled up in Darcy’s throat as she turned to the cell next to Wilson and spotted Barton with a shit-eating grin on his face. She started pulling out the devices Stark had given them to open the cell doors. She threw two to Bobbi and pulled out three for herself. She stepped over the booted leg of a soldier and jogged up to Barton’s cell, putting the device in place. The door beeped and then slid open. When no crazy alarms or klaxons sounded she allowed the relief to well up further. She gave Barton a quick fist bump and then turned to Wilson’s cell, repeating the process. He also offered a fist bump.

“The name’s Sam, Sam Wilson. Or Falcon. Whichever pleases the lady more.” He threw in an elaborate bow and Darcy had to stifle an inappropriate giggle.

She rolled her eyes. “Darcy Lewis. No secret code name, I’m afraid. And that over there is Mockingbird, aka Barton’s ex-wife.” She turned to see Bobbi letting a wide-eyed Scott Lang out of his cell. She stiffened when Thor stepped out of his cell but continued to look around. Something twisted viciously in her stomach when she realized they were down one person. She looked down at the device still in her hand.

“Where the hell is Bucky?”

Barton stepped forward and slung an arm around her. “He got moved into solitary. One floor down. He kept wrecking the place with that arm of his. He wasn’t best pleased at being locked up while ‘his girl’ was out wreaking havoc without backup.”

Dread filled her for a moment and a hundred images flashed through her mind. Every muscle in her body turned to lead. The overhead emergency lights seemed to grow unbearably bright. Darcy’s thoughts all muddled together and she couldn’t grasp onto anything.

Suddenly a booming voice forced her attention back. “Lady Darcy! It is most pleasing to see you once again. I am truly impressed with your courage in battle and your prowess as a warrior.” He held his arm out to clasp hers. She hadn’t even noticed that he’d walked over to her. She had to get her
head back in the mission. Now was not the time to freeze up. She ignored the proffered arm.

“What kind of fighting condition are we all in, here?” Darcy looked around at the guys milling around awkwardly. She swallowed through the constricting force gripping her throat.

Sam nodded and put his hands on his hips. *Falcon? Check.* Barton eyed the Icers in Bobbi’s holsters. The blonde rolled her eyes but relinquished them anyway. *Barton, check.*

“I can throw a pretty good right hook, but without the suit…” Scott trailed off sheepishly.

“Alas, I am also disadvantaged,” Thor contributed.

Darcy’s head snapped around to face him again. “Are you injured?” She asked worriedly.

“Not as such. They have implanted something into my spine. It has reduced my strength.” He turned to show Darcy the wires and tubes that were woven through the back of his prison jumpsuit and gathered at the base of his spine.

“Can’t we just take it out?” Darcy suggested tentatively, narrowing her eyes at the mess of wires.

Sam answered her, “He tried that on day one. It wasn’t pretty.”

Barton shook his head. “We need to get our gear back.”

Darcy scrubbed her hands over her face. “And I need to get Bucky back…” She paced back and forth a few steps and calmed her breathing. “Right. Bobbi, you take the boys up to the next floor and get the gear. I’ll go down and bring Bucky back up with me.”

Bobbi nodded and began to move towards the doorway. Barton squeezed Darcy’s shoulder and trailed after his ex-wife. Sam looked her over carefully, but he too followed Bobbi. Thor stood where he was.

“Lady Darcy, although I am weakened I wish to accompany you. It would be an honor to—”

Darcy raised a hand to silence him. She tapped her comm unit and gave the others a quick update on the change in plan, keeping her voice level and devoid of emotion. After the others acknowledged the message, she called out after Bobbi, “Nat’s picking up the others. They’re going to meet you at the weapon lock-up. The guard station is right across from it, so you’ll need all the help you can get. I’ll meet you all back up at the landing pad with Bucky.” Bobbi nodded and looked warily at Thor who showed no sign of moving. He just kept looking at Darcy.

A war of emotions was taking place on his face while she ignored him, though it was nothing compared to the tempest brewing inside of her. But there was a mission to complete. “Thor, you’re going with them.” Thor looked ready to argue, but she continued, strengthening conviction pouring into every word. “No. You are going with them. I’m more than capable of extracting Bucky by myself. A lot has changed in the last year. Go with Bobbi.”

Thor dropped to one knee. Despite the prison jumpsuit, he still held the air of a Prince of Asgard. “Please—”

Darcy saw a soldier stirring out of the corner of her eye. He crept a hand out towards his rifle. In a flash, she threw a knife out, pinning his hand to the ground. The cry of pain caught Barton’s attention and he fired an Icer into the man’s chest.

Thor watched as Darcy walked over, retrieved her knife, wiped it down on her combat leggings and
thrust it back in its sheath. “I have this handled, Thor. You need to get Mjolnir. No-one else can do that.” She stalked straight past him and up to the doorway directly opposite the one everyone else was standing at. She looked back over her shoulder at him. “It’s not like there’s any danger of me being worthy, is there? Go!”

Nat tucked her hair behind an ear so she could press the comm farther in to hear properly. Darcy’s voice carried through the device with the update. She tapped her receipt of the message and fired off three successive shots into the soldiers advancing on her position from around the curve in the hall. There was only one more doorway between her and the room with the cells. She ditched the spent pistol and reached for two more. With a Sig Sauer in each hand and calm washing over her, Nat crouched a few feet from the door.

*Nine.* FRIDAY released the locking mechanism and the first three soldiers crashed through. She picked them off easily. *Six.* There would be another two either side of the door frame. In anticipation, she rolled to her right, squeezing off a shot into the soldier on the left. As he slumped to the floor she tumbled forward diagonally and shot a round into the other door guard. Before he could finish falling backwards, she leapt up and grabbed his body to use as a shield. Several rounds slammed into his back as she made her way into the circular walkway. *Four.*

Out of the corner of her eye, she saw Wanda crouched on the floor in some sort of straightjacket. Pushing the concern from her mind, she allowed the anesthetized persona of The Black Widow to reassert itself. She roughly threw the soldier to the ground and paced counter clockwise, laying down covering fire. She reached the walkway to the center as her bullets ran out. Slamming her guns into their holsters, she sprinted forward.

Nat slid forward on her knees, tossing out a widow’s bite at the first soldier. It connected with the sliver of skin showing at his neck. He tumbled backward off the walkway and down to the sunken portion of the floor, stunned. *Three.* Simultaneously, she spun through the throw and continued sliding toward the next man. Using the railing to push herself up, she vaulted up and wrapped her legs around his head. She twisted into the fall and slammed him face first into the ground. *Two.* The soldier behind him lunged forward, rifle held out. Pouncing upward, Nat flicked out her garrotte and twisted it around the barrel of his gun. Wresting it from his hands, she spun with it and slammed a foot into his chest. He too fell backwards and down onto the lower platform.

Vaulting after him, she crouched down and wrapped her garrotte around his ankle, using it to yank him towards her. She slammed a fist into his temple. *One.* She followed through with her punch and somersaulted toward the last soldier. She swept a leg out wide, taking his out from underneath him. He quickly grabbed for his rifle and she pulled the 9mm from her back and buried a bullet between his eyes. *Clear.*

In one fluid movement Nat pulled herself back up on to the walkway that led around the front of the cells. She glanced around at the cells and performed a quick headcount. Steve stood pressed up against the glass in the farthest away cell. She pulled Stark’s devices from her pocket and started affixing them to the cell doors.

The first cell beeped open and Peter Parker spilled out. “Um, hey. Thanks! Um.” She spared him a cursory once-over for injuries and continued to the next cell.
“Your Majesty.” She tipped her head deferentially.

“Ms. Romanoff.” T’Challa stepped out with all the poise of a King, despite the standard prison garb he was wearing.

She continued to the next two cells, freeing T’Challa’s personal guards. Shuri and Ramonda eyed her warily as they stepped to their King’s side. Nat fought an eye roll as she came to Wanda’s cell. She was still hunkered against the wall on the floor, her eyes staring straight ahead, unfocussed. When the door slid open, Nat stepped into the cell carefully, telegraphing her movements as she slowly bent down to Wanda’s level.

She pulled a knife from her wristlet and slowly cut open the straps on the straightjacket. She kept her eyes on the younger woman’s face, watching for any sign of alarm. Once she’d cut all of the straps, she placed her knife back in its sheath.

“Wanda. I’m going to have to stand you up to get this thing off of you.” She spoke steadily and clearly. Wanda’s eyes darted to meet Nat’s, a flicker of recognition appearing. She began to move to stand, so Nat carefully helped her and turned her to face the door of the cell, being mindful not to crowd her.

When Wanda’s back came into view, she saw the network of cables running down the back of the straightjacket to the base of her spine. She placed a hand lightly on Wanda’s shoulder. “Just stand here for me for a second. I need to get Steve.”

Nat walked around the practically comatose girl and placed the last device on Steve’s cell door. He stepped back as the door opened but went straight into action mode the second she stepped aside.

“Nat. Sitrep.”

“Cap.” Nat nodded, but steered him towards Wanda’s cell. “First, I need to know what they’ve done to her.”

Captain America faltered slightly and Steve turned to face Nat. “Biological inhibitor. Some kind of electrical charge paired with a chemical implant. It prevents her from using her powers. She’s been like this since they put it on her.”

Nat’s eyes ran over the girl, who hadn’t moved an inch since she’d told her to stay put. Her blood boiled at the sight of Wanda reduced to this. It was all so familiar. She gritted her teeth and tried to control the venom that was creeping up in her system, the itch to slice through anyone and everyone. She flinched as a large, warm hand fell on her upper arm. She fought the urge to wrench it away when she realised it had been Steve.

He narrowed his eyes at her and squeezed his hand lightly. She took a deep breath and forced her hostility back a few notches. She needed control. She needed to get her people out as a priority. Swift and brutal retribution could come later. Or as an added bonus as they went along. Family out first.

“Who can fight?” Nat turned to the rest of the group, who were all standing and waiting on the next move.

T’Challa stepped forward, head held high. “We are willing and able to fight.”

Peter Parker poked his head around the three Wakandans. “Hi. Yeah, I can fight. Sort of. I’d be more useful with my suit and web shooters, though.”
Nat turned to Steve. “Your gear is being held two floors down.” She put her finger to the comm in her ear. “Darcy. Free and clear on eight. Five more able, one requiring assistance. We’ll rendezvous with Mockingbird on six and then move to extraction. Copy?”

Darcy’s confirmation came through and she tapped her receipt again. “We need to move. Mockingbird has extracted the boys on five and Quake is on her way up from two with the SHIELD guys. We’ll go meet them and then get out to the quinjet. Darcy is going to get Bucky. We’ll then go out to the SHIELD base and get that shit out of Wanda.”

Steve visibly recoiled and looked more perplexed with every mention of SHIELD. Natasha steeled herself. Steve’s mistrust of SHIELD hadn’t lessened any in the last year. They’d run mostly separate ops but Steve was going to have to just go with this one.

She forced her Black Widow mask to drop. “Steve. Be honest with me. Do you trust me to do this?”

He rubbed his hand over the beard growth on his jaw. “I trust you, Nat. And I’m always honest.” A slow smile began to spread on his face.

“In the spirit of trust. I need to tell you that Tony is here too. He’s providing air support.”

“He is?”

“He is.”

Steve slumped back against the wall between the cells. His eyes bored into the floor for a moment before he looked up at the expectant faces, waiting for Captain America to make the call.

He straightened up and Captain America was back in play. “Nat, take point. You know what the plan is. Peter, help me get Wanda moving. T’Challa, can you and your people cover our backs?” A chorus of affirmatives sounded out.

Nat turned toward Wanda’s cell. “Great. Let’s get moving. I’ll never hear the end of it if we’re the last ones back.” She swiftly reloaded her guns and tossed one to Steve.

Daisy was momentarily distracted by her comm unit coming to life. Black Widow and Darcy talked briefly. The momentary thrill of being back in the field with a team was over quickly as the last two soldiers tried to bum rush her. She sent a wave of vibrations at them, sending them careening through the opposite door. FRIDAY slammed the doors closed after them and the room was clear. The soldiers would be trying to get in again in a moment, but for now she had a moment to breathe. Her lungs strained a little to pull in oxygen and she leaned against a railing for a second to catch her breath. A rapping on a cell door behind her caught her attention. She turned to see Simmons waving excitedly.

Daisy huffed out a laugh and started setting the door opening devices, then stopped suddenly as she caught sight of Joey and Yo-Yo in their cells, sitting and staring blankly at the opposite wall. Before she could reach out to them, the air she’d managed to pull into her chest was forced out again as arms wrapped around her and pulled her backward.
The adrenaline in her system still had her keyed up, so it took a second to realize that she was in a four-way group hug. She turned and looked up to see Mack grinning down at her. A much skinnier Simmons had her head buried in Daisy’s neck and Fitz was clinging on for dear life. Daisy craned her neck to see May watching them with her hands on her hips. She raised an eyebrow, requesting help.

“Alright you guys. Knock it off. There’ll be plenty of time for group hugs when we get out of here. Daisy, I’m assuming we’re getting out of here?” May asked in her standard-issue SHIELD Agent tone.

The others stepped back in embarrassment and there was an awkward pause. Mack looked her over from her boots up to the top of her head. He reached out and flicked the ends of her darkened hair. “Aren’t you a bit old for a phase like this, Tremors?”

Daisy bit back a grin and punched him in the unfairly firm bicep. “Ass.” Movement in the corner of her eye sobered her though. “What happened to them?” She jerked a thumb back towards Joey and Yo-Yo, who hadn’t moved from their cells. The inhumans didn’t even seem to register anything that was going on.

Fitz wrung his hands together. “They’ve had inhibitors implanted in their spines. It’s a particularly nasty combination of chemicals and an electrical catalyst which slows their inhuman cells so that-“

“- meaning that they can’t use their powers. They’ve been almost comatose for weeks. It’s just awful.” Simmons continued. “From what I’ve observed, the suits they’ve been put in are self-contained, and we should be able to move them. I just don’t know how we can-“

“- get them to move. We’ve tried talking to them but nothing. I don’t think it would be very clever to try and remove the systems here. They’d be better off back at SHIELD. We are going back to SHIELD aren’t we?” Fitz looked at her hopefully.

“Yeah, we’re going back to SHIELD, Fitz. Once the Avengers have rounded up their people, we can all get on the jet and go,” Daisy replied, feeling a little pride at the eyes that lit up at the mention of the Avengers.

“The Avengers?” Simmons asked, eyes full of awe.

Daisy shook her head slightly, before their current situation caught up with her and slammed itself back into the forefront. “Yeah, those ones. But let’s pull these beds apart and get some stretchers made up so that we can all go home.”

Bucky stayed absolutely still. It had been seventeen minutes since the Raft had been switched to emergency lighting. A brief moment of hope that a rescue had been mounted had occurred around the three minute mark. It had been replaced with a forced calm and sense of heightened awareness. Something was happening.

For the first 36 hours he’d relentlessly trashed his cell, pounding over and over again on the glass. Eventually a crack had appeared and the soldiers had dragged him into solitary. The remaining 468 hours, he had spent in silence. He ate his food when they brought it to him and he slept when he
allowed himself. It had taken a few days to get used to the dead weight of his left arm. His new cell had some sort of EMP that rendered it useless.

He eyed his dim reflection in the glass. A tired and resigned face that bore some similarity to his own stared back at him. He’d had time to think on his sins. For so many years he’d been a caged animal. Was this not where he belonged? He’d ruminated on this most days. For the first two weeks, his mind had offered memories of the past year. He’d contributed and made a difference. He’d been a part of a team again. He had not only allies, but friends. He thought of the adrenaline-fueled missions, and the quiet times in safe houses. He thought of Scotland. Of how he’d been the cause of so much pain for Darcy. He thought of Mexico, where he’d been unable to convince her to stay. He thought of all the dead drops, of the reports of her ferocious strength and courage. He thought of the distance she’d placed between them, of her resolve to stay alone in the cold. He thought of everything and anything he might have said or done to make things turn out differently.

As the days wore on, his thoughts turned darker. He thought of all of the hurt and pain he had caused. The brutality of it all ate away at the edges of his mind. It hadn’t been long enough yet that he couldn’t hold the demons at bay. Just.

Bucky sat in perfect stillness as he heard a fight break out in the hall outside his cell. He struggled to hear what was happening through his door and the set of doors beyond. Then there was only one set of boots and the outer doors opened.

In stepped Darcy, face flushed from the fight and in full combat gear. Bucky eyed the scarring that peeked out from around the collar of her jacket. As she walked up to the door and affixed some sort of device to it, he took note of the increased muscle tone and her fighter’s stance. He chanced a look into her eyes and saw nothing but fire and steel, where once there had just been blue.

The door beeped and slid open and James Buchanan Barnes resolved that for every piece of darkness he had caused, he was going to create something good and be a better man. If not for himself? Then for her.

The isolation cell door opened and Bucky looked up at her. He was sitting cross-legged on the floor, his left arm lying limp at his side, knuckles resting on the concrete. Her eyes roved over the rest of him. There were no obvious signs of injury, although with his healing rate, that meant nothing. She looked up and locked eyes with him, realizing that he’d been giving her the same assessment.

Despite herself, Darcy couldn’t help an easy smile from stretching her lips. She popped a hip against the door of his cell. “I hear you’ve been causing trouble?”

Bucky cocked his head to the side and raised an eyebrow. He gestured outside the cell toward where he assumed there was a pile of Special Forces soldiers. “And you haven’t?”

Darcy shrugged. “Touché. So, what are we working with here?” She nodded at his arm.

“Touché. So, what are we working with here?” She nodded at his arm.

“It’s shot to hell. EMP field. Won’t work until I can get it serviced by the Wakandans.” He eyed the still-empty room behind her and what little color was in his face drained. “Tell me you ain’t here by yourself!”

“Don’t worry, soldier. I have back-up. It’s a long story and we can cover it once we get to the jet. The rest are getting busted out of here as we speak.” She reached a hand out to help him up. He didn’t need it, but he took it anyway. Darcy tried to ignore the way she missed the feeling of his hand in hers when he withdrew it. She cleared her throat. “Speaking of, we need to go catch back up with
them. This detour wasn’t exactly in the game plan.” Darcy turned to head out of the cell when Bucky’s hand grabbed her bicep and turned her around.

“You tellin’ me that you came for me on a spur of the moment thing? That in the middle of all of whatever is going on, you decided to come and get me alone!? Darcy, you should have just gone ahead with the rest of them—“

“Whoa there soldier! We came here to get everyone. Every last one of you. Now while I would just love to run through my entire decision making process with you, there are a shit load of soldiers between us and the jet.” She unholstered her last Icer and held it out to Bucky. “Think we can continue this conversation some other time?”

Bucky sullenly took the Icer and checked it over. She shook her head and headed to the door. Bucky walked up behind her and took up position on her left. Darcy looked him over once and walked around him to stand on the opposite side, just in front of his left arm.

Right before FRIDAY opened the door she felt his eyes on her. She turned to look up at him and was taken aback at the expression on his face. She couldn’t quite tell what all the emotions were, but she was pretty sure one of them was respect. I’ll take that.

As they fought their way back up to the landing pad, Darcy felt a change in Bucky. When they’d first begun, he was cold and detached. He was overcompensating for the lack of his left arm and the fact that he had to work with Darcy. By the time they’d worked their way up two floors, The Winter Soldier had receded and Sergeant Barnes had stepped up. They moved fluidly around each other and before long they reached the door to the landing pad.

Darcy snuck a look out through the open door. The guards from before were all still out of the game. The noise from the ocean seemed so much louder after the sealed halls of the prison. In between the fights, the silence had been oppressive. She signalled that the coast was clear and they stepped out on to the top of the ramp.

Bucky stuck at Darcy’s back as she looked around, but he stopped to look up at the night sky above them, smiling to himself. When he realized Darcy was still moving forward without him, he caught up with her and tugged on her wrist. Confused by the motion, Darcy went with it and ended up pulled tight against his chest. Bucky’s face was haloed in light from the stars up above them and he tucked an errant wisp of hair behind her ear. “I’m not going to lie, doll. For a little while there, I didn’t think I’d ever get to see the stars again. Let alone be standing here under the stars with a dame like you.” Darcy sighed and leaned further into him. “I mean, technically, we’re the only people in this room right now. But when it’s me and you? Feels like everything and everyone else is just gone…” he trailed off as he leaned in towards her.

Like everything and everyone else is just gone.

Darcy pulled away sharply and placed a finger on Bucky’s lips, which were now only an inch from her own. “Where is everyone? There’s no way we should have been back first. I mean, we’re good. But we’re not that good…” Darcy took a step back, turned away from him and activated the comm. “Sitrep, Black Widow.”
After a moment, the reply came through. “They’ve flooded the lower levels and short-circuited the other access doors. We can’t get to the fourth floor from here.”

Darcy’s heart began to hammer in her chest. “Copy. Can you get up to the landing pad?”

“Affirmative. But we’ll be coming in hot. ETA: six minutes.”

“Copy. Quake, sitrep.”

“Darcy, we’re on our way. Had to make a detour and we’ve got two on stretchers. ETA: two minutes.”

“Copy. Mockingbird, sitrep.”

There was a long pause and Darcy was about to repeat herself when a sharp burst of gunfire came through on the comm. “Darcy. Under heavy fire. I’ve been hit. Repeat. Agent down.”

“Bobbi!” Hunter’s voice was next through the comm.

All of Darcy’s molten panic pooled in her gut and solidified. She had to get everyone out. You have to get everyone home. Her breathing evened out and she stuffed the rising panic as far down as she could.

“Hunter, get yourself down here. Pick up Black Widow, Quake and their charges and get the hell out of here.”

“But Darcy, it’s Bob. I need to get in there—“ The sheer terror in Hunter’s voice gave away that he needed to be absolutely nowhere near this right now.

“Hunter, I will not let anything happen to Birdie. Do you understand?” She willed Hunter to just do as he was damn well told for once.

“Copy. Don’t die out there, Darce.”

“I promise I won’t, Hunter.” The reassurance from Hunter was enough to keep her going. “Stark? You been following all this?” At the mention of Stark, Bucky flinched and Darcy wrapped a hand lightly around his flesh wrist.

“Yeah, yeah got all that. Little bit busy up here. Got several air forces up my ass. Really, you’d think they’d at least offer to buy me dinner first. I’ll keep it clear for Hunter. Let me know when you need a lift out of here.” There was a sharp whine of a repulsor blast and then Tony silenced his comm.

“Mockingbird. Hold on. I’m on my way.” Darcy turned to face Bucky, hand still wrapped around his wrist. She looked up at him, left arm still hanging limply at his side. She took a steadying breath and slid her hand down from his wrist into his hand, interlocking their fingers. “I’m going to go and get Bobbi and the others. Stay here and wait for Hunter. Nat says she’s coming in hot and Quake has wounded. They need the help.”

She tried to let go of his hand and turn to leave, when he tightened his grip and pulled her close to him again. On instinct, Darcy tried to pull away. Bucky seemed to sense the tirade that was coming but he didn’t let go. “Darcy. They’ll handle it. I’m coming with you. You ain’t going in there alone. End of story. And before you start, it ain’t because I don’t think you can handle it on your own. It’s because you don’t have.” He let go of her hand, giving her the chance to bolt but she stayed rooted to the spot. “I’ve got your six.”
Darcy gave herself a split second to let his declaration warm her, then she shoved the emotion in the box with everything else that wasn’t saving Bobbi and the others. “Okay then, soldier. We’ve got to move. Bobbi’s hurt.”

As they both turned and ran back down the corridor they’d just fought their way through, they seamlessly moved so that Darcy was running directly in front of Bucky’s metal arm and he stayed tight on her six.

Chapter End Notes

This chapter was an absolute bitch to write. The logistics of it all were insane, they still are. But I hope it all reads okay.

Top tip: on your first multi chapter fic, don't include over twenty characters in your finale.

Thank you to everyone who has read, commented, left kudos and bookmarked this fic. You are all wonderful and I can't believe that we're almost at the end!!

Please feel free to leave any comments, questions, queries, feedback or theories in the comments. I absolutely love reading them and try to reply to them all the first opportunity I have.
Chapter 30

Chapter Summary

Where we find out if Bobbi is okay, that you can handle just about anything when the Black Widow has your back and that it's easier to speak your mind when the other person can't hear you.

Chapter Notes

First things first... I am so so so so sorry that it has taken me forever to update. I always swore I'd never do that, and I'm sorry.
This is the final chapter of this fic. There will be an epilogue however.
*cough* and a one-shot *cough* and a mini-fic *cough* ... andmaybeasequel *cough*
:)
This chapter is unbeta'd so any and all mistakes are mine, please let me know in the comments if you find any and I'll fix them.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Darcy’s eyes were constantly moving. She and Bucky moved silently together across the floor, watching for any sign of movement. They stepped carefully but surely over the soldiers still sprawled out, unconscious in some cases, dead in others. Darcy almost hoped that one would waken, her muscles tense and itching to take action. She swept her icer out around them while Bucky did the same on his side, all the time moving forwards towards the staircase down to the level where Bobbi was. Injured, bleeding out. Darcy’s heart rate kicked up another notch while she tried to keep her mind focussed.

FRIDAY opened the doorway to the staircase and Bucky stepped forwards to check the landing. Finding it clear, he motioned for Darcy to start the descent as he kept close behind her. She flicked her tongue out across her lip and still tasted copper. The air stung the split in her bottom lip and she experimentally poked at it with her tongue. Yup, that still hurts. A soldier had gotten a blow in and she had been lucky to still have all her teeth in her head. She had been rushing to get to Bobbi and the others and had left herself open to the punch. The pain throbbed in time with her heartbeat.

As they reached the landing halfway down the stairs Darcy felt Bucky stiffen at her back. She stepped aside to allow him to peer around her. He shifted his grip on the icer she’d given him and she copied the movement on the knife in her hand. Trouble incoming then. Darcy held her breath.

A loud thud hit the doors and Darcy flinched. Bucky tapped the back of his hand on her shoulder and she continued down the steps, one at a time. She stopped at the bottom, facing the closed door that was rattling in its frame from each blow on the other side, the sound echoing up the otherwise empty stairwell. Bucky stopped a few steps short of the bottom and raised his icer. Darcy crouched as FRIDAY opened the door.

Four soldiers appeared. Two were swinging a battering ram, the other two positioned at their back.
Bucky squeezed off two rounds into the rear soldiers, as Darcy leapt forwards. She swivelled to the side, avoiding the swing of the battering ram. Spinning, she slammed a foot into the shoulder of one man, forcing him to drop his handle. The unexpected shift in weight, caused the other man to pitch towards her. His body slammed into hers, careening them backwards. She pulled one of her knives in the struggle and forced it into the join between his shoulder and neck. She used the stuck knife to drag him sideways and off of her. Once clear, she shot him and he went down. She used the battering ram on the floor to pitch herself up, kicking the other soldier with both feet. Now that he was clear of Darcy, Bucky took him out, silence falling once again.

Bucky took his position at her back and they moved forwards towards the door that would lead them to Bobbi and the others. FRIDAY opened the door and the silence from before was gone. The air was filled with deafening crashes and shouts. Darcy moved to run heedlessly down the corridor to the right, where the sound was coming from. Bucky hooked his one good arm around her middle to stop her. She took a breath and allowed him to take point.

They moved steadily forwards around the curved corridor. They couldn’t see ahead farther than a few feet at a time but the sounds of gunfire echoed around the space. As they turned around the corner, they came across Bobbi and Scott. Bobbi was lying on the ground, Scott leaning over her applying pressure to a rapidly bleeding wound in her stomach. At their approach, Scott raised an icer and pointed it at them. Seeing that they were friendly, he dropped it and continued tending to Bobbi.

Darcy quickened her pace and dropped to her knees at Bobbi’s side. She pushed a blonde strand of hair away from her face and her hand slid easily across her clammy brow. Bobbi was pale and her eyes were glassing over. Darcy looked at the icer laying on the floor next to Scott.

“It’s empty.” Scott answered her silent question. His voice was strained from the pressure he was placing on Bobbi’s abdomen. The sleeves of his jumpsuit had been torn off to supplement the bandages from the field med kit. “I’ve packed it as much as I can, but she needs to get out of here fast.”

Darcy kept her hand on the side of Bobbi’s head and tried to ignore the trepidation in Scott’s eyes. She started stroking her hand through her friend’s hair. Staunchly ignoring the masses of blood pooling by her knees, she pulled on her best SHIELD Agent voice. “Agent 19. Sit-rep.” She had to speak loudly to be heard over the din of the fight going on farther down the corridor.

Bobbi’s eyes blinked slowly while she tried to focus on the source of the voice. “Been shot… in the stomach Darce.”

“I can see that Birdie.” She tried to smile but had a funny feeling that it wasn’t very convincing. “Scott here is taking great care of you. Just stay with us a little longer and we’ll get you out of here. We’ll never hear the end of it from Hunter otherwise okay?” Bobbi tried to shift herself up a little. Darcy placed a hand on her shoulder to keep her still. “Don’t even think about it.”

Bucky spoke up from his position at Darcy’s back without looking at them. His gun was trained on the bend of the corridor. “What are we looking at Lang?”

Scott looked up at the determined face of The Winter Soldier and swallowed. “So uh, Hawkeye and Falcon are just up ahead. They’re covering Thor. The storage room is just off the hall junction to the left. There’s too many soldiers though. It’s like a fuckin’ clown car or something. They just keep coming.”

“So they haven’t gotten to the gear yet?” Bucky kept his eyes straight ahead.

“Nah. Stark’s lady friend can’t get the door open. Same deal as the cells.”
Darcy looked up from Bobbi to Bucky. He turned to look at her, quirking an eyebrow. She pulled a final device from her pocket and turned it over in her fingers. She looked back down at Bobbi who was fading. Giving her friend a quick squeeze on the shoulder she stood. Her legs had cramped a little and she shook them out. Scott looked up at her. She handed him her icer. “They’re generally more effective when they’re loaded.” Lang smiled at her slightly before returning to Bobbi.

She was about to turn with Bucky to head forwards when she felt a tap against her boot. Bobbi had both batons clenched in one hand. She opened her fingers to allow Darcy to pick them up. Darcy spun them around her hand. Nodding once at Bobbi and then again at Bucky, she made her way towards the source of all of the noise.

They came across Barton and Sam laying down cover fire. Thor was in the middle of the junction of the hallways, brawling with soldiers. As they approached, a helmet that had just been punched clean off ricocheted off the wall next to them. Darcy and Bucky took up position on the opposite wall. Barton turned and grinned at her quickly.

*Have to get that door open.* She turned to look at Bucky. His blue eyes flickered across her face. He huffed out a puff of air and then nodded. He took up position next to Barton and Wilson and clued them in on the plan that they’d just agreed upon. Darcy rolled her head around to loosen it and then crouched, ready. She couldn’t see around the corner and so waited on the signal from Bucky. Then she darted forwards as the others burst into the fray behind her.

She stayed low to the ground. She swung the batons out, sweeping soldiers’ legs out from underneath them as she went. Shots were firing overhead and she had to move quickly to avoid the soldiers that were dropping around her. There were at least a dozen around her, too many for her to count. She kept all of her limbs moving. Creeping closer towards the storage room on quick steps, batons twirling around her, keeping any soldiers from getting too close.

She had almost reached the door when her right arm was grabbed and twisted up behind her. She felt her shoulder joint pop and howled out from the pain. She choked on the cry when she was forced up against the wall. The baton fell from her hand and clattered to the floor. Her forehead collided roughly and she felt a trickle of blood run down the side of her eye. She struggled to draw breath with her chest held so firmly against the wall.

Like Bobbi had taught her, she twisted the opposite way and struck out with her free arm. The soldier let go of her now dislocated arm. Before she could strike again, he pulled a knife and held it against her throat. She could feel the cold steel resting against her skin. She held her chin high and tried to keep her breathing steady.

She looked at the soldier. His tinted visor was down and she could see her face in the reflection. Her eyes were wide and feral. Blood was pouring down the side of her face from a cut on her forehead. Her cut lip had swollen impressively. She could see the blade of the knife held tight against her jugular, a thin line of red beginning to show along the edge.

Her thoughts stuttered. She chased them in vain, trying to remember what to do. Trying to think. Trying to find a way out. She couldn’t tear her eyes away from the glinting metal and the blood seeping down its edge. Behind the soldier she could feel blurred shapes fighting. The sounds all merged into one, just a horrifying blend of thuds and crashes, cries of pain and rage. She couldn’t tell who was winning. Beyond that lay Bobbi, bleeding and fading. Above, Hunter would be waiting for news and Stark, fighting off the entire world who threatened to crash in and end them all in an instant. She had one job to do. She didn’t know how to do it, how to fix it, how to save them, how to save herself.

Before her mind could scatter further, a huge explosion was set off behind her. She was knocked
forwards and into the soldier with the blast. She lay face down on the floor, ears ringing and struggling to breathe. Powdered concrete filled the air around her, choking her. A rush of air kicked more dust up into her face. She turned to see what was happening and saw the edge of a red and gold boot.

She slowly turned her head to the other side and saw an opening between the soldiers, who were now converging on Iron Man. Darcy pulled herself on to all fours, lungs full of dust. Her lip was split open again and she spat out blood on to the floor. In her periphery vision, she could see movement but she couldn’t hear a damn thing except the incessant ringing. She struggled to her feet and stumbled towards the door. Each time her foot hit the floor, it felt like her lungs were growing tighter and letting in less air. She leant against the wall for support and fumbled to pull the device from her tac-jacket pocket. She winced and tried to inhale sharply against the pressure on her ribs. Her dislocated shoulder preventing her from using both hands. Once she had successfully removed it, she slammed it into place on the door.

She didn’t hear the beep, but as the door slid open, she pulled herself through the opening and around to the other side. Darcy tried to call out, but her throat felt like it was full of fibreglass. She swallowed feebly and took as big an inhale as she could. “Thor! Mjolnir!” Luckily Thor heard her through the fight that was going on in the hall. She began to hear the whine of repulsors and the pops of bullets. Mjolnir came flying out of the storage room and into Thor’s outstretched hand. Her breathing became more and more laboured and the edges of her vision were blurring slightly as her hearing returned. She slid to the floor, back to the wall as a static charge filled the room. She was out of sight for now and so Darcy tipped her head back and focused on breathing and not the sharp pain every time she inflated her lungs and that seemed to be radiating from everywhere all at once.

Breathing seems to be important.

In seconds and a lifetime, the fight in the hall came to a close. The dull thud and clank of metal boots on concrete drew her attention. She lifted her head to look up. Stark’s faceplate pulled back and he put a hand out to help her up. Behind him she could see Thor looking at her, eyes full of concern. Stark gestured that he was waiting on her taking his hand. He put on an approximation of Shakespearean accent. “Do not fear, fair maiden! It is I, your humble hero.” When Darcy made no moves to stand and maintained her blank expression, he continued in his usual tone. “Seriously? I save the damsel in distress and she’d rather sit on the floor blinking at me?”

Darcy’s heart clenched further, kicking up the adrenalin that had been crashing out of her system. Damsel in distress? Before she could respond, a prison-jumpsuit-clad shoulder thumped roughly past Thor, sending the weakened Asgardian sideways slightly. Metal hit metal as an unresponsive metal limb carelessly and purposefully thumped against the Iron Man suit. Dark hair and blue eyes swung into view. She ran her eyes over him in an instant. One cheekbone was split open and there were several scorch marks on his vest and pants where he’d been shot at close range.

She choked on a sharp inhale as Bucky pulled her good arm over his shoulder to lift her. “Easy, doll. Just take it easy. I got ya.” Darcy blinked to clear her vision and tried to steady herself. Once she found her footing, she and Bucky walked out into the hall carefully. Soldiers were piled haphazardly on the floor, the once pristine concrete wall had a huge hole in it and scorch marks marred the paint. The air was thick with smoke and carbonite, small crackles of electricity zipping between exposed pieces of metal, making breathing all the harder.

Barton stepped forwards with Bobbi’s batons in hand. “Don’t you dare lose them Birdbrain.” She turned to Iron Man who was still trying to garner support against her less than warm welcome from the others. “Stark. Go get Bobbi out of here. She needs to get to medical ASAP.” To his credit, Tony read the tone in her voice and decided not to argue. As he turned to head back down the hall, Darcy
called after him. “Oh, and a word of advice? Don’t call her a fuckin’ damsel while you’re at it.” Bucky squeezed her shoulder slightly in solidarity. She took the one remaining icer from his holster and allowed him to take a little more of her weight. One-by-one they all began to file out and head for the StarkJet.

Darcy tried to shift her weight slightly on the stretcher in the back of the StarkJet. Her ass was starting to go numb while Barton tended to her injuries. She looked to her left, at Bobbi who was unconscious on the stretcher next to her. She seemed to look so much younger and more fragile. Tubes and monitors were hooked up all over her.

Darcy’s attention was brought back to herself as Barton jostled her arm into a sling. “Sorry Darce. You’re holding up pretty well though. Last time someone had to reset one of my shoulders, I cried. Ask Nat. She loves telling that story.” He looked up at her, trying to find a hint of a smile. When none were forthcoming he finished setting her arm in place and turned to root through the drawers in the medical bay. Darcy tried to shift her arm into a comfortable position and relieve the pained pressure in her shoulder while not increasing it on her ribs, with no luck.

Barton turned back to her and produced a silver packet containing a needle. Darcy placed her good hand on his and shook her head gently wincing at the pain from all of her wounds at the motion. “Just the regular old pain meds please.” The older man eyed her carefully before acquiescing.

She threw back the pills and swallowed them down. Her throat scratched and tightened. Seeing her struggle, Barton handed her a bottle of water, which she gratefully took from him and took a swig from. She lay back against the stretcher and stared blankly at the ceiling. She felt a light pat on her thigh and Barton left the room. Right before the door to the StarkJet medical room swished closed, she heard Barton say “Not now, man.”

Perched sideways on a gurney in SHIELD medical, Darcy stared at her feet while Fitz puttered around her. His fingers frantically tapping away on screens and a tablet clenched tightly in his hand.

Fitz cleared his throat a few times. “So um, thanks for saving us all. It was really quite… Just uh… Well… That’s to say… Thank you…” He trailed off, clutching the tablet to his chest while his eyes landed on everything in the room but her. He shuffled slightly in place before putting the tablet on to a table at the side of the room, by the door. Before he left, he turned and looked back at her. Darcy kept her face tipped downwards. “And thanks for bringing Daisy home.”

Home.

Darcy wasn’t sure how much time passed between Fitz leaving and the door sliding open again. Nat strolled in and casually looked over the monitors that were showing Darcy’s x-rays of her shoulder and ribs. She picked up the tablet that Fitz had left on the side. “How long has it been since you had
any pain medication?"

Darcy tilted her head towards the other woman without lifting it. She watched as the Black Widow pulled out her mental measuring tape. There was no rise of indignation, only resignation. Natasha pulled a hipflask from her jacket pocket and offered it to Darcy. She accepted it and unscrewed the cap. The smell of the alcohol cut through the antiseptic scent that clung to her clothing and hair. She raised the flask with her good arm in a toast and knocked back a large mouthful.

Nat had popped a hip against the end of her bed and had an unexpected contrite look on her face, in addition to a black eye brewing and a sizeable cut on her cheek. Darcy was suddenly very thankful for the vodka in her system.

The redhead cleared her throat, tried on a warm smile and then dropped it just as quickly. “I came to apologise.” Darcy’s surprise must have shown on her face. “I’ve been known to do it, on occasion, when it’s required. And in this case it is. Back in Scotland… that little speech I gave you at the safe house…” Nat came to sit on the bed next to her but stared forwards at the monitors on the far wall. Darcy took another swig of vodka and passed it to Nat before picking a point on the far wall to stare at. She felt the other woman shift her weight carefully.

“The things I said to you. They were a version of things that were said to me a long time ago. Things that allowed me to do what was needed of me. Darcy?”

Darcy turned to look into Nat’s eyes.

“I’m sorry for what I said. You are not alone. You weren’t then, you aren’t now and you will never be. Do you understand?”

Darcy nodded carefully. Her attention was taken from the blank spot on the wall, by the door sliding open again. Captain Rogers strolled in and stood at the foot of her bed. His hair was still perfect and his chinos and shirt were wrinkle-free. Darcy watched as his eyes rolled over Nat and they exchanged a silent conversation before he turned his attention to her.

“Ms Lewis. Good to see you healing nicely. We’ve just had confirmation that the SHIELD plane will be ready for our flight to the Avengers Compound within the hour.” Darcy wasn’t sure why Captain Rogers had made a point of coming to inform her of this himself but her energy levels were flagging. “I uh, also came to thank you. For getting Bucky out.” He stretched his hand out to shake hers, and she gingerly accepted the handshake, while trying not to wince as it jostled her shoulder and ribs. He must have noticed her discomfort as he dropped her hand suddenly and rubbed his hand across the back of his neck sheepishly. Nat rolled her eyes and flicked the back of her hand against his chest.

At his momentary distraction, Darcy summoned up the courage to speak. “How is Bucky?”

Captain Rogers crossed and uncrossed his arms across his chest before setting his hands on his hips. “He’s at the shooting range.”

“Captain Rogers, that’s not what I asked.” Tension began to creep up Darcy’s spine. The good Captain was a terrible liar.

Before he could stammer out an answer, the door to the medical rom slid open again and in-strolled Thor. She felt her blood run cold and pool in her feet. He had changed into his full battle armour and
looked every inch the warrior prince. He stood in the doorway.

Nat stood up, tucking the flask into Darcy’s hand and made to leave with Captain Rogers. Without her consent, tears began to well in her eyes and panic ratcheted up in her system. Nat must have sensed the change in her. She conducted another silent conversation with Captain Rogers, who then left the room with a nod to Thor. Thor then waited for Nat to leave too, but instead she moved to the wall behind Darcy and leant against it, arms folded across her chest. The woman may be wearing a hooded sweatshirt and jeans, but she may as well have been wearing armour like Sif’s.

Darcy looked between Nat and Thor as they had a silent stand-off and then gingerly cleared her throat. “Is Jane okay?” She winced at the meekness and desperation in her voice.

“Lady Jane is safe and well for now on Asgard.” Thor placed Mjolnir on the end of the bed and visibly loosened his posture and reduced his size. “Heimdall has kept watch over you, Lady Darcy. He has informed me of your heroics in the face of adversity.” Darcy bristled slightly. “However, I am here to request an opportunity to earn your forgiveness. I understand that my actions put you in harm’s way. There is much happening across the nine realms and danger grows nearer with every passing moment that threatens all. But I am truly sorry to have lost your friendship and respect, Lady Darcy.” Thor swept his cape behind him and dropped to one knee on the ground. The theatrics were enough to snap Darcy into the present.

She turned towards him, sucking in a breath as her ribs protested the movement. “I understand your logic Thor. I won’t pretend to understand everything that goes along with being an Asgardian Prince and what that means in terms of your duties… But you left me behind.” Darcy stopped to take in a shaky breath and swipe away at a tear rolling down her cheek. She could hear the increasing speed of the beeps coming from her heart monitor and so she pulled off the wrist band that was measuring it. The last thing she needed was the whole room to be able to hear how hard her heart was hammering in her chest. She’d imagined this conversation in her head, a few dozen times. But now that Thor was standing in front of her, she was struggling to keep it together.

She began again. “You left. I’m reluctantly grateful that it gave me the push to stop being so reliant on a rescue. So thanks for that I guess. But, shit, it hurts. I needed – Earth needed you and you were gone. We will always be connected in some way because of everything that’s happened… Something like that. We’ve been through some shit together. But after this? It doesn’t… A lot has happened. I’m not your Lightning Sister anymore, Thor. And I don’t know if I ever will be again. And to be honest, after everything? I don’t know if I’d want to be. I know I don’t need to be. Do you understand?”

Thor rose to his feet. “It grieves me deeply but I respect your decision. I will endeavour to earn the privilege to call you kin once more. Do you permit this?”

Darcy swallowed thickly. “I’m real tired. Do you mind if…” She gestured towards the pillows behind her and forced a yawn, ignoring the further pricking behind her eyes and the sting of her lip re-opening.

Thor nodded graciously while Nat pushed herself off of the wall. She strode around the bed and linked arms with the Prince. “Come on big guy. Let’s go say goodbye to the others.”

“Farewell Lady Darcy.” Thor bowed his head and then let Nat guide him from the room.
Bucky stood perfectly still while he watched all of the SHIELD Agents bustling around the hangar. Steve and Nat stood just to his right, talking in hushed tones. He tensed his left arm and enjoyed the sensation of the various parts calibrating. The SHIELD team had worked from data from the Wakandans to get his arm back up and running and it was a relief to not be carrying the dead weight. His laser sharp focus trained onto the group coming into the hangar from the far side.

Hunter was wheeling Bobbi on a stretcher towards the foot of the ramp to the enormous SHIELD jet. The Agents had called it the Bus. His eyes then lighted on Darcy, followed closely by Barton. They joined Hunter, standing around Bobbi’s stretcher.

He took in Darcy. Her face was a mess of cuts and deep bruises were beginning to blossom. Her lip was still swollen and the cut on her forehead was bandaged. Her right arm was in a sling. Dislocation. She was holding herself carefully, not putting much weight on her left side and her breathing was shallow. Fractured ribs. He watched her say goodbye to Hunter and Bobbi. He watched her gently chastise Bobbi for insisting on seeing them off. Hunter had his back to him, but he could guess at the comment he made that had Darcy slapping him on the back of the head.

Despite himself, Bucky chuckled.

“What’s so funny Buck?” Steve had his head cocked and a hand on his hip. Natasha just smirked at his side.

“Huh? Nothin’.” He turned back to watch Darcy. She was dressed like a civilian, a plaid shirt, jeans and boots. But Bucky’s trained eye caught the rest. Her icer was in a concealed holster at her back, her muscle tone was greatly increased and all her edges seemed far sharper. Her face was lit up with laughter at something Barton had said but her eyes were disconnected. She was holding herself carefully to both minimise the pain from her injuries and conceal their severity. He watched as she and Barton walked up the ramp and on to the Bus.

Steve cut across him again. “You coming?”

Bucky shouldered his go bag and followed a bemused Steve and an amused Romanov.

He swung his bag on to his bunk and turned to look around the SHIELD Airborne Mobile Command Base. Just beyond the bunks, was a large seating area, but this was nothing like any agency jet that he’d been on before. The floors were carpeted, the walls were smooth and clad in wood in places and the seats were white leather and looked remarkably comfortable. The place was teeming with subtle tech and almost every point of the room was defensible… and was that a bar? He was impressed.

As he catalogued the various aspects of the room, Romanov stalked in and stretched out on the largest sofa in the centre of the room. She never looked over at him but he knew she was aware of him. This was confirmed when she spoke up. “We’ll be taking off in a few minutes. Steve is just finishing up his call with Coulson. Saying thanks for the use of the Bus and making Coulson feel guilty in that way that only Captain America can.” She spoke lazily and absently picked at some of the stitching on the edge of the sofa.
Bucky considered challenging her façade for a moment but then thought better of it. “Where are the others?” He rounded the bar and stood in the centre of the seats, arms folded.

Romanov looked him over and smirked at his stance. He almost altered his posture in response, but caught himself. He found himself surprised at her skill. His assessments had found that the longer that she’d been in from the cold, the more time that she had spent as part of the Avengers, her past become just a shadow. But it seemed that the Black Widow of the Red Room was back. She had fallen back on her default settings, and he hardly blamed her.

She bent one arm behind her head and gestured with the other over the back of the sofa to the stairs that led up to the kitchens. “Where do you think they are? Food.” Then she pulled out her phone and began scrolling through it like he wasn’t there.

At his apparent dismissal, Bucky carried on with his inspection of the room. As he finished and was about to progress to the next, the jet began to take off. Despite his serum-enhanced hearing, he only barely heard the uptick in the engines through the sound-proofing, and hardly felt the motion. He was further impressed.

His ruminations were interrupted as Barton strolled into the room carrying a plate piled high with sandwiches and a pot of coffee. No mug, just the pot. He threw himself on to the couch next to Romanov with reckless abandon without dropping any of his food. Bucky chuckled internally at the archer as he purposefully encroached on Romanov’s personal space and noisily slurped at the coffee pot. His entertainment was cut short as another thought sprung to the forefront.

“Barton, I thought you were flying?” Confusion spread across his face.

The archer spoke through several mouthfuls of sandwich, “Nah, Darce has got it.”

“What?!”

Barton swallowed his food and attempted to keep his casual demeanour as Bucky’s concern rose. “Yeah, she gave me the flight off. Said I looked like shit and should go eat.”

Bucky pinched the bridge of his nose and scrunched his face. “She’s injured. Badly.”

“She can still fly though.” Barton shrugged his shoulders and took another huge bite of sandwich. “It’s not like she’s got to flap the wings herself.”

Romanov looked up at them both and then went back to her phone. Bucky shook his head in frustration. “I’m goin’ to make sure she’s alright.”

“You sure that’s a good idea?” Barton asked carefully.

Bucky shot him his coldest look and left the room. Just before he was out of ear shot, he overheard Barton telling an uninterested Romanov, “I see now why they called him the Winter Soldier. Icy!”

Bucky strode through the galley and up to the large steel door to the cockpit. He hit the button to open the door impatiently but nothing happened. He hit it another few times, but still nothing. He
looked around for another way to open them but found nothing. His concern ratcheted up a little further as he used the small touchscreen display to activate the intercom.

“Darcy?”

Nothing. He turned the intercom back off.

He turned his back to the door and slid to the ground. His thigh protested the movement a little as the worst of the bullet wounds were still healing. Ignoring that, he ran his fingers through his hair and then tipped his head back resignedly. Images of sitting on a step at the back of the hunting lodge in Scotland popped into his head.

“Could do with a smoke right now doll… Don’t think Coulson would be too happy if I stunk his fancy jet up though…” He folded his arms across his chest and then uncrossed them again, letting them fall in his lap, palms up. Flesh and metal.

He took in a deep breath and continued. “My ma raised me to take good care of a dame. As history has liked to remember, I weren’t always as nice as I shoulda been. In fact, I was downright unkind in some cases, most of ‘em actually. And since then? Well, you know all of that.” He clenched his metal hand into a fist, sending the plates whirring under his shirt. After a moment he released it.

“I know it wasn’t me choosing to do those things, but it was my hands all the same. I keep waiting on it all catching up to me. I ain’t worth the chances I’ve been given. Shouldn’t be here. I keep waitin’ for the day that I break this, the day I break them. I almost did already. When Stevie said I’d be bunkin’ in with you in Scotland, I thought he was out of his damn mind… trusting me with you…” He bit his lip lightly. “I was raised to be a good and God fearin’ and the like. Not that I put much stock in him upstairs anymore… I don’t really know what I’m gettin’ at here Darce… I guess, just that… The universe has dealt you a bad hand. A really shitty hand. And that’s coming from someone who’s well versed in what a shitty hand looks like.”

Bucky closed his eyes and a smile tugged at the corners of his mouth. “But seeing you get up, dust yourself down and keepin’ on fighting? Not just for yourself but for your people? Goddamn inspirin’… Hell, you don’t even consider not doing it do ya? It’s just a part of ya. You’re a force of nature Darcy Lewis.” He tucked his knees up to his chest and wrapped his arms around them before clearing his throat.

“I used to be good at this, a lifetime ago. But tricks and flattery were all you needed then. You? I don’t even know where to start. I’m tripping over my words and I can’t get my thoughts to co-operate. Stevie’s ma said that one day I’d meet a dame who’d make me want to be a good man. Didn’t think I’d ever meet her.”

Bucky pulled himself to his feet and stuffed his hands in his pockets. He rocked back on his heels a few times before turning to look at the door. “It’s been a privilege and a pleasure Darcy Lewis.” He took a few steps towards the galley before turning back a last time. He spoke softly and with resolve, “I hope you know that wherever your fight takes you… this old soldier’s got your six.”

Darcy watched him walk away through the surveillance camera. When she heard the door click shut at the far end of the galley through the speakers, she switched off the feed.
Chapter End Notes

So... yeah....
Don't hate me.
The epilogue is going straight up after this.
Please leave any and all comments, questions, queries or theories in the comments :)
If you've stuck with me thus far, I hope I haven't disappointed.
Bucky re-checked the co-ordinates on the screen yet again needlessly. He’d had them memorised since the first time he read them 6 months ago. He ran his eyes over the neatly handwritten note one more time and then tucked it carefully into his jeans pocket. He continued with the rest of the pre-flight checks and studiously ignored a shifty-looking Captain America in the co-pilot’s chair.

After a couple of minutes, all of the checks were completed and he couldn’t ignore the aborted intakes of breath and the awkward shuffling anymore.

Bucky scrubbed his hands over his face before looking over at his best friend, who happened to own the worst poker face in all of history. While rolling his white shirt sleeves to the elbows he called over, “What is it Stevie? I can feel your head about to explode from here. Spit it out.”

Steve studiously looked out the front window of the quinjet and fiddled with the cuffs of his perfectly starched and pressed shirt. “It’s none of my business.”

Bucky looked out of the window too and watched the SHIELD personnel readying to open the doors. He would have to pull this out of Steve sooner rather than later if he had any hope of getting him out of the jet and making it to his rendezvous on time. So he extended his leg out and nudged Steve’s chair with his foot, making him turn around to face him. He shot him a faux exasperated look, “Since when has that stopped you before?” He followed it up with a wink, but to no avail.

Steve was still desperately looking anywhere but at him.

Steve opened his mouth to speak, but immediately closed it again and started working his jaw. A few beats later, he finally looked him in the eyes. “Do you love her Buck?”

Bucky sighed and tipped his head back against the pilot’s seat. “Don’t be an idiot. I hardly know her. This ain’t one of your Disney flicks.”

Bucky could feel Steve’s cogs whirring without even looking at him. Bucky kept staring at the switches on the roof of the jet to give his friend time to get his words out. When Steve spoke again, he spoke softly and with care. “Then why? I mean, with everything you’ve been through and she’s been through… She left…”

And there it was, little Stevie Rogers was trying to protect him. The punk had always had such a black and white view of the world, even when they were kids. You were good or you were bad, rich
or poor, good news or trouble.

Bucky thought to himself for a moment about ‘why’ and then a slow smile stretched across his face, lighting up the corners of his eyes and quickening the pace of his heartbeat. Then, he looked Steve straight in the eye, and without a shadow of a doubt or a wavering in his surety, “Because I know I can’t break her.”

Darcy stepped out of the house and slid the screen-door closed behind her one-handed, trying not to spill her coffee. She padded down the winding path through the trees to the beach. The wind blew her hair back from her face and her skirt around her ankles as she made her way to her usual breakfast spot to watch the sunrise. This morning wasn’t to be as relaxing as usual, plus Bobbi was making her weekly check-in. Darcy cradled the phone between her ear and shoulder as she made herself comfortable.

“Yes Birdie, I spoke to him yesterday and I’ve kept all my video call appointments. Doctor Brown says that I’m making good progress.” Darcy stretched her legs out in front of her on the warm sand and felt the warmth seep up through the thin fabric of her skirt and into her limbs. She stretched her toes and wiggled them a little while she listened to Bobbi fuss.

When she sensed a lull in Bobbi’s tirade, she interjected, “How have the committee hearings been going? Coulson’s due to go to Brussels tomorrow right?” Darcy had spent the last few months helping SHIELD and various world governments try to figure out how to handle the fallout from the accords. It turned out that Barton was right, and she could get decent results via her laptop while sitting on her ass somewhere warm. Not that she’d ever admit that to him.

“Oh, and speaking of Stark, tell him thanks for the WiFi upgrades but if I find him in my systems again, I’ll sic FRIDAY on him. She likes me better.” As Bobbi’s laugh rang out through the speaker of her phone, Darcy watched a couple of birds swoop over the sea. She checked the time on her watch and furrowed her brow a little.

“What time is it with you Bob? ... No, never mind... Have FitzSimmons had any luck with the deep space readings that the Asgardians sent them?” Darcy drained the last of her coffee, setting it down in the sand next to her. She resisted the urge to walk back to her house to get her cigarettes. She’d been cutting down since she moved to the island but her nerves were ratcheting up right now, little by little.

Her eyes skirted the horizon. Her corner of the Caribbean was entirely isolated, no sign of land in any direction. Frustrated, she lay on her back and slid her sunglasses down from the top of her head. She watched a few solitary wisps of cloud drift across the sky while Bobbi filled her in on the exploits of the SHIELD scientists. After a few minutes she’d zoned out entirely and was listening to the waves rolling along the beach and the wind whistling through the trees that surrounded her house, when a low rumble came from the distance.

She bolted upright and fumbled her phone. She squinted into the distance and saw a small, dark coloured aircraft speeding towards the island. It was moving far too quickly to be her supply plane. The pit of her stomach coiled tightly. “Much as I’d love to continue to discuss the impending doom to the realms, I’ve got to go, I’ve got company.” She scrambled to her feet and watched the aircraft as
it drew closer. “Oh shut up Birdie, love you too. Bye.”

Darcy hung up the phone and looked around a little helplessly. She considered going back to the house, or walking along to the make-shift runway farther along the beach. In the end she decided against either option and dropped back down onto the sand. She lay back down and shuffled a few times to get comfortable. She tried crossing her legs, crossing her arms and most other possible limb configurations.

She huffed out a breath and closed her eyes behind her sunglasses. She tried to ignore the approaching sound of jet engines and her thudding heartbeat and focus on the sounds of the island, her island, and slow her breathing. After a minute or two, this seemed to be working, until she heard a pair of boots coming down the path through the trees. Her heart was hammering and she was struggling to control the rise and fall of her chest. She kept her eyes closed and tried to feign a laid-back demeanour. She was so preoccupied with her own self, that she almost forgot that she had company until a shadow fell across her face.

Darcy raised her sunglasses slightly and squinted upwards. Crystal blue eyes peered down at her from a face ringed in sunlight. “Well ain’t you a sight for sore eyes, doll.” Bucky smirked down at her, a duffle bag slung over one shoulder. Darcy looked up at him nervously, unsure as to what words would come out of her mouth if she could make it co-operate and open. Her brain entirely stuttered at the sight of him after so long. His smirk faded slightly and was replaced with an earnest smile. A warm, rich, Brooklyn drawl tried again, “Hey.”

Darcy’s heart swooped and she couldn’t help but smile back. “Hey yourself, soldier.”

They both took a moment, just taking each other in. A bird squawked overhead and broke the moment. Darcy swallowed thickly, unsure as to how to proceed. She’d had 6 months to think about this moment.

Bucky took the initiative and stuck out his left hand to help her up. She looked at it for a moment, bright sunlight glinting off metal. She hesitated slightly. She could easily get up and stand by herself. She knew it, and he knew it. But she took his hand anyway.

Chapter End Notes

Phewf. Well we got there in the end. (We very nearly didn't.)
I hope it lived up to your expectations.
I'd like to thank every single one of you, for your patience, support and kindness.
I've thought a lot about how to adequately express my gratitude towards you all, and words fail me.
So, from the bottom of my heart, thank you. Thank you for every little thing. You are amazing.

You may have noticed that this is now part of a series. I've mentioned along the way that I would be writing one-shots. I have a list that I'd like to tackle, but if there's anything you'd like to read, please fire a suggestion in the comments :)
On the run up to Christmas, I will be writing a Christmas mini-fic that is a continuation of this 'verse.
This mini-fic will potentially bridge over to a sequel.

Thank you.
All my love, EJ <3

PS. Don't forget to feed the author. She'd needy and enjoys validation x

End Notes

Please feed the author in comments and kudos.
In all seriousness, please leave all the comments, it makes me supremely happy to hear from you all.
Also, I warned you it was a slow burn

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