Ross began passing the very, very thick booklets around. "There will be no more asking for permission. You will receive orders from above if and when we choose to deploy you, and those are the only times you will act. We will decide who goes on missions. The activities and locations of dangerous individuals will be monitored at all times, and we will maintain a registry of enhanced persons."

There was silence around the table as he finished his circle. Then Pietro muttered something in Sokovian that made Nat snort.

"Care to share with the class, Mr. Maximoff?" Ross asked.

Pietro gave him a sullen look that he did so well. Nat answered for him. "He said he remembers the last time a government started registering its minorities."
Here it is! Our Civil War adaption. Phew! Feels like it was a long time coming.

The chapters on this one tend to be on the short side, so I'll try to keep up a pretty steady posting schedule. I'm still editing, but have a decent buffer so you shouldn't see too many gaps. The story is finished, just needs to get edited/polished.

We use multiple POVs and change pretty quickly, so we've noted whose POV we're in at the beginning of each section. If you're confused, be sure to double check whose head you're in.

No "previously on" for this one. If you're new to the series I STRONGLY recommend going back and reading at least some of the others. Even just Heavy Boots of Lead onwards to have some sense of what's going on and who these new people are.

I suspect this story will have a lot of people asking questions about what's going to happen. We WILL NOT post spoilers in the comments. If you actually want to be spoiled message me on tumblr (I'm NyxEtoile there, too) or email me at nyxetoile at gmail.

Title is from Battle Hymn of the Republic, a fighting song from the American Civil War written by a woman.
Amanda

It was a warm, sunny spring day that would have been almost uncomfortably warm if not for the breeze coming off the lake. The weather was at odds with the air of tension and dread that seemed to hover over the compound.

Amanda had gone into the office in the morning, as if it were any other Monday morning. James had made faces, but she needed the distraction. Or at least the attempt at distraction. She didn't get much done, but it passed the time until FRIDAY informed her the Secretary of State had reached the main gates.

"Thanks, FRIDAY." She closed down her computer and stood up.

"Mr. Stark is not responding to my reminders," FRIDAY said when she was in the hallway.

She sighed. Of course he wasn't. "He's in his lair, I assume?"

"Yes, Doctor."

Amanda changed directions and went out the east door, heading down the path to the lab building where Tony had his private workshop. Despite the sprawling land and state of the art building, Tony really liked having his space in the basement. There was almost certainly some sort of psychological reason for that, but when she'd mentioned it to Lani, the psychologist had assured her there were many, many other things ahead of it on her list of things to work with Tony on.

His private lab was the size of an airplane hangar, littered with half finished projects, broken suits, and long tables full of plans and parts. She was pretty sure she's seen the engine of a '67 Charger in there at one point. He was an eclectic genius.

Currently, about a third of the place was devoted to The Machine, as Tony was calling it. She told him he needed to find a less ominous name for it, but she was afraid it was going to stick. The brainchild of Lani, Zev's father, and a little bit Amanda, the hope was to create a virtual reality device to allow people to relive traumatic memories and change them. Giving them closure and a way to process the trauma.

Tony had become a little obsessed.

She crossed the lab, skirting tables and following the sound of Pink Floyd to the back of the room. Tony was standing on a chair, surrounded by schematics, scowling.

"Floyd?" she asked. "Feeling trippy?"

"FRIDAY, did you tattle on me?" he asked the ceiling.

"In your weaker moments, you have told me to call the doctor when you were being childish."

"My desire to work on this instead of talking to Fuckface Ross is not childish."

"I got this, FRIDAY," Amanda told the AI. She stepped closer to Tony. "Meeting is mandatory. And I'd think you'd want to be there. Don't you gain your powers from snubbing authority figures?"

"Fine, fine." He looked down at the machine. "I'm just. . . making progress."
"That's good." She paused. "It'll still be here when we're done."

"You know I asked Pepper if she had any memories she'd like to redo. She said no. Past is past, better to face forward." He climbed down from the chair. "Her mom died when she was young, but she got to say goodbye. I didn't. Seems like that makes a difference."

They started walking back towards the entrance. "I got to say goodbye to my mother," Amanda said, shoving her hands in her pockets. "I was eight. They said Jessie was too young, but Dad brought me and Becca to the hospital." Her father had carried her sister in but she'd walked in alone. Eight years old and already building up her walls. She hadn't wanted anyone to see her cry.

Tony was watching her. "Did it help?"

"No. I don't think so. There's still this person shaped hole in your life. Sometimes it's small and you can ignore it and sometimes it's huge and gaping and you feel like you'll bleed out." She'd gone years without feeling it, then she'd met James and married him and had Edie and it had opened up again. "But you can't fill it with words."

They thought alike, her and Tony. So it didn't surprise her when he said, "I was okay, mostly, for like 20 years. And then sometimes Ruby turns her head and I see my mother's profile. Something about parenthood makes that hole feel like a crater."

"Yeah." He hit the button for the elevator and she turned to face him. "I think when you get it up and running, The Machine will give you closure. It will still be there. But you'll be able to live around it, skirt the edges. No one can change the past, but you can change how you interact with it."

"That's my hope," he said. "And not just for me."

The elevator arrived and they stepped inside in virtual unison. "It's a good thing, Tony," she told him. "It'll help a lot of people."

That made him smile. "Doctor's orders."

"Damn straight."

*

**Steve**

Ever since the incident in Geneva where someone, still unknown, had triggered The Winter Soldier, Sharon had been telling them about closed door meetings she wasn't invited to. When Secretary Ross had finally called to set up this meeting, it had been almost a relief. Whatever was going on, at least they'd get it out in the air.

Steve had wanted to curate the list of who attended this particular meeting, but Ross was adamant that every single Avenger be there. Which then required Steve to have a long conversation with Bruce about how this was likely to go down.

"A few years ago I'd have told you this was a recipe for disaster," Bruce admitted, cleaning his glasses on his shirt tail. "But I had a discussion with the Big Guy and he'll behave. I've promised him a visit to the quarry later."

"And I'm making cheesecake," Violet piped up from the other side of the room. He and Sharon had brought Joey over so she could watch him while they were both in the meeting.
"He had very strong opinions on food," Bruce said with a wry smile.

"I had Darcy double check there were no potato chips in the snack tray."

"That was very thoughtful, I appreciate that."

FRIDAY chimed above their heads. "Captain, Doctor Banner, Mrs. Rogers, the Secretary is at the main gate."

Bruce sighed and resettled his glasses on before going to kiss Violet goodbye. "Be good," she said firmly. Steve noticed the words were aimed at Bruce's forehead.

Sharon gave Joey kisses before joining them at the front door. "Into the lion's den."

"Sorry about the honeymoon," Steve said as they climbed into the campus car that was sitting outside. Bruce and Violet had gotten married that weekend.

"It's all right." Bruce paused. "Well, that might be too strong. But we understand. Hawaii isn't going anywhere. The wedding happened, that's the important part."

"Hopefully this will all get settled soon enough." Though God knew how that would actually play out.

"Hopefully," Bruce agreed, but he sounded about as sure as Steve was.

They pulled up in front of the admin building and filed in. FRIDAY directed them to the right meeting room. It had a long polished wood table big enough to hold all of them and then some. The Maximoffs, Darcy, and the Bartons were already there.

"Amanda's getting Stark," Darcy said before he could ask.

“Did you talk to Maria?” Sharon asked.

“Yep.” Maria Hill had chosen now to take her first vacation in God knew how long. She was currently in England, meeting the family of the guy she'd been seeing. She'd been in the air when the call about this meeting had come in. “She’s decided to hang out in England for now, but I’m to give her regular updates. Apparently, she and the boyfriend were going to go see the Crown Jewels today.”

Sharon smiled. "She doesn't like it when we call him that."

"You cross an ocean to meet someone's parents they're your boyfriend whether you have crippling commitmentphobia or not."

"Where's Ross?" Steve asked.

Darcy pointed. "Across the hall."

"I'll go make small talk," Sharon said, kissing Steve on the cheek.

Vision and Thor came together, as did Sam and Rhodey. Bucky wandered in after Amanda and Tony, like he'd been waiting. He'd been particularly cautious lately.

Last night, Steve and Wanda had had a very long conversation about her powers and the secrets she was keeping. None of them wanted to reveal what she was truly capable of, because that way almost certainly lay some sort of cage. But on the other hand, it would explain a lot of things. Why the Hulk
had torn up Johannesburg. Why that was no longer a threat. Why Bucky would never be triggered again and neither of them were a danger anymore. How she'd saved Steve's son's life and was now helping people make peace with their trauma.

Right now she was hovering right next to her brother, looking drawn and nervous. He imagined there was a lot of that going around right now. He went over to talk to her. "You okay?"

She nodded, probably lying. "Lani suggested I sit next to people I find calming. To help ground me." She glanced around the room, scanning it thoughtfully. "Usually Bruce is grounding, but not today."

"Anyone else? I will make them sit here."

After another moment of consideration she said, "Clint."

He nodded, and went to find him. "Wanda has requested you come fence her in with calm."

It clearly took him a moment to process that. Then he nodded and inclined his head at Nat. She nodded in return and he went to go sit next to Wanda. Nat looked up at Steve. "Any idea what's coming?" she asked.

He shook his head. "Sharon doesn't even know."

She blew out a breath and looked at the others. Wanda was sitting between her brother and Clint. Based on her arms Steve suspected she was holding both their hands. "You think this is the other shoe?"

With a sigh, he said, "I'm afraid it's the other boot."

She nodded and went to go sit on Clint's other side.

Darcy appeared at Steve's elbow. "Should I bring him in?"

"We're as ready as we'll ever be." She left and he gestured for the others to take their seats.

A moment later, the door opened to reveal Ross, Darcy and Sharon. He couldn't read anything on either of the women's faces and Ross was clearly in politician mode.

"Captain," he said with at least feigned respect, holding out a hand.

"Mr. Secretary." Steve gripped his hand a little too hard. It was a handshake that he hope reminded Ross of what happened to the last cabinet secretary who had fucked with him.

If it fazed him at all, he didn't let it show. Steve took his seat and Sharon sank next to him, resting a hand on his knee under the table. Darcy took a seat to the side, away from the table, to take notes.

Ross stood at the end of the table in front of a viewing screen and launched into some story about having a heart attack on the golf course and gaining perspective. "The world owes the Avengers an unpayable debt. You have fought for us, protected us, risked your lives. But while a great many people see you as heroes, there are some who would prefer the word 'vigilantes.'"

"What word would you use, Mr Secretary?" Nat asked, almost pleasantly.

"Dangerous," he said. He looked directly at Bruce when he said it and there was a moment of utter silence. Steve didn't know what Ross expected to happen. Maybe for Bruce to Hulk out right there. Instead Bruce just smiled and raised his brows expectantly. He looked past Bruce where Darcy was sitting in the back of the room, and you could almost hear her annoyed sigh before the screen behind
Ross lit up. "What would you call a group of US based, enhanced individuals who routinely cross sovereign borders and inflict their will wherever they choose and who, frankly, seem unconcerned with what they leave behind?" He began flicking through video clips, of seemingly every big fight they'd been in between New York and Sokovia. Then he pulled up a video from Lagos, of the explosion and the panic and screaming that followed.

Wanda sucked in a breath, closing her eyes and looking down. "Okay, that enough," Steve said. The screen went off immediately, because Darcy didn't need any more encouragement. Ross made a face at her.

"We had permission for Lagos," Sharon said. "From you."

"You had permission to apprehend a fugitive, not blow up a hospital."

"Rumlow set off a bomb," Nat said. "Wanda contained it as best she could. It would have killed people on the street had she not, possibly more than it did in the air. You can't lay that on her shoulders."

"People are afraid," Ross replied, unruffled. "That this incident happened on a sanctioned mission means that our current arrangements are no longer sufficient. You clearly cannot control your members." He looked from Wanda to Bruce and finally to Bucky. Who was no longer a concern, but they had no way to tell anyone that. "If I had a batch of warheads with faulty triggers, you think there wouldn't be complaints if I just left them laying around?" He opened the briefcase he'd brought with him and pulled out several stacks of paper, which he placed on the table.

Sharon sat upright. "You wrote up new accords without my input?" She sounded offended and horrified.

"You were busy," Ross said, in a tone that was just begging to get punched.

"You did it without any input from us," Steve said, mostly just to confirm out loud.

Ross began passing the very, very thick booklets around. "There will be no more asking for permission. You will receive orders from above if and when we choose to deploy you, and those are the only times you will act. We will decide who goes on missions. The activities and locations of dangerous individuals will be monitored at all times, and we will maintain a registry of enhanced persons."

There was silence around the table as he finished his circle. Then Pietro muttered something in Sokovian that made Nat snort.

"Care to share with the class, Mr. Maximoff?" Ross asked.

Pietro gave him a sullen look that he did so well. Nat answered for him. "He said he remembers the last time a government started registering its minorities."

Since he'd been outed, Pietro apparently decided to double down. "Will we be getting numbers? Or just badges?"

Ross smiled thinly. "Given the source of your powers, I wouldn't be tossing around the Nazi accusations too loudly, Mr. Maximoff." Pietro shifted like he might stand and Sam put a hand on his shoulder.

"Stucker being the second coming of Mengele isn't doing your argument a whole lot of favors there, Skippy," Tony said.
"This isn't an argument, Stark." Steve liked that the rest of them got honorifics but Tony was just Stark. "This is the way that it is. You've operated with unlimited power and minimal supervision for years. The rest of the world is no longer going to tolerate it."

"And if we don't agree?" Nat asked quietly.

Ross's gaze scanned the room. "You will be disbanded and required to live separately, with no contact. Or you will be prosecuted and imprisoned." He closed his briefcase with a snap. "You have twenty-four hours to decide."

Steve could see the looks of shock and horror spreading slowly around the room, mirroring the cold fear trickling down is spine. This was worse that even he had expected. He could feel the table start to shake, just a little, and knew that was Wanda.

From his left, Bruce ground out, "Steve." The word was quiet, but full of warning.

He stood, walking over to Ross so he could herd him out the door himself if he had to. "You'll have your answer tomorrow. Get out."

Ross met his gaze and for just a moment, he thought he might have to get physical. Then Darcy ducked between them. "Secretary Ross, I'm going to need to walk you out, turn your badge in, make sure you don't plant any listening devices. You know, standard procedure stuff." She crowded the other man and seemed to get him to move purely by force of personality. "Really nice slide show, by the way. Well crafted. Does the State department have a graphics department or is there just one really overworked assistant with Keynote and no soul?"

Steve watched her herd him until they were out of sight then turned back to his team.

Wanda had pushed away from the table and Clint was holding both of her hands, breathing with her as she tried to calm down. Bruce hadn't moved, but Thor and Vision were now flanking him. He had his eyes closed and was breathing slow, fingers tapping the table.

They probably needed Violet, but he wanted them to be able to discuss this before the families got involved. Violet would probably get upset, and that wouldn't help. He turned his head a little. "Sam, is Lani here?"

Before he could answer, Wanda turned, putting one hand one the table. The rippling red energy surged out, crawling across the table until it hit Bruce. For a moment there was utter silence as the two of them stared at each other. One smiled, and then the other.

The only thing Steve was sure about, right then, was that they were a family. And he'd fight God himself if he had to to keep them safe.
Chapter 2

Natasha

The first thing that happened, after the threat of the Hulk wrecking the building had passed was Tony leaping up, wheeling on a returning Darcy, and saying, "Call New York and get my General Counsel up here. Have him bring his staff. Actually I want literally every lawyer I employ on an airplane right fucking now."

It was all downhill from there.

"This is how contracts work, Rogers." Tony sounded halfway between desperate and infuriated. "This is an opening volley. We come back with our counter offer, they come back at us. I could tie this up in negotiations for months if we do it right."

"There is no negotiating, Tony-"

Nat tuned them out and picked up a pen from the cup on the table, flipping the packet open. Tony had a point, there might be room for negotiating, and if there was, someone needed to start finding those spots.

There was an entire section about having certain members of the team—it didn't specify who, but she could guess—coming down to DC for assessments. She put a big star on that one. She understood why they were asking, but there would need to be about fifty more safeguards.

"No, look, we are American citizens," Sam said. "They can't put us on probation and force us to live apart."

"We're not all American citizens," Wanda said.

"I told you you should get married," Pietro said.

"Green card is not the same as citizenship," she replied.

"This is private property," Bucky said. "They can't just kick us off it."

"With walls that can hold the Hulk," Vision said without looking up. He was speed flipping through it, Nat assumed reading. The two of them were the only one doing so. Steve was gesturing with his.

"Are you seriously suggesting we barricade in for a siege?" Rhodey asked. "That's ridiculous. And being a military unit isn't the end of the world. Millions manage to be part of one every day."

Military units didn't have to submit to undefined "assessments" but she was not getting involved in the dick swinging. She drew another asterisk next to a section about on-site supervision. Maybe they could get veto power on their babysitter.

She turned the next page and stopped cold. She turned back to re-read the end of the previous page, then went forward again. "Steve."

He and Tony both looked at her. Tony asked, "Are you on his side or mine?"

They didn't have time for this. She stood up crossing the room to hand him her booklet. "Read this."

He made a little annoyed noise but took it. "The following people subject to registration and
monitoring..." He mumbled through the list of all of the Avengers' names. "Yeah, he mentioned—"
She cut him off reaching up to turn the page for him. His whole face changed.

"What now?" Tony muttered.

Temporary monitoring issued for Pepper Potts and Ora Maximoff for the remainders of their
pregnancies until such time as the infants are registered. All future offspring of enhanced individuals
to be registered." Nat had never heard Steve's voice shake like that.

Just like that, everyone was silent. Tony lurched forward and snatched the booklet out of Steve's
hand, reading the page himself. He stared off in the middle distance, eyes dark and distant. Nat
glanced at Rhodey, who started to step forward.

Tony threw the booklet onto the table. "Fuck them. We're leaving. Tonight."

"Where are we going?" Nat asked.

"I don't care. The bunker. China. The moon."

"All right," Steve said. "We need to sit down and talk about this."

"Talk about what? You want your kid registered like a sex offender just for existing?"

"I need to throw up," Wanda whispered.

There was a blur of blue and she and Pietro were both gone. Nat hoped they made the bathroom.
"Hang on, hang on," she trying to keep this from becoming Dick-Swinging Part Two. "This is a
conversation for everyone, not just us."

"She's right." Bruce sounded growly, but mostly himself. "If we're uprooting everyone - again - we
need to involve spouses."

"Probably do a lot for the tension level in the room," Amanda pointed out.

"My house," Tony said. "Half an hour." He turned towards Darcy. "Get one of the back-up nannies
that used to travel with Pepper to come and watch the kids at Bruce and Violet's."

"On it." She pulled out a phone and walked out of the room.

Steve looked at the rest of the room. "Everyone go home and tell your spouses, prep them for what's
coming. I'll tell the twins."

"Bruce," Sharon said quietly. "You okay to head back home?"

He stood very slowly. "I think that's an excellent idea."

Slowly, everyone began to file out. Nat lingered, since she had no one to collect and no one to break
ews to. Her husband was standing silently at her six. When the room was empty she reached out
and took his hand. "London is going to be put out."

"We'll tell her it's a vacation. Every 18 months we get to visit the bunker."

"Bunker's not going to work. It's still on US soil and not a long term solution. You can't raise kids
underground. Even the Red Room had windows." She reached out with her free hand to pick up the
Accord packet again. The kids names were still listed there, black on white. "They should have
"known better than to involve children."

"Says a lot about what they think of us."

"Yeah." She tucked the packet under her arm as they walked out of the room, still holding hands. "I knew it would be bad. This is worse."

He squeezed her hand. "We'll be okay, Nat. However this plays out."

"I know." And she did. They two of them, alone, could survive just about anything. Hell, they could probably bug out tonight and no one would find them. Set up shop in some second-world non-extradition country and live under the radar. It was the rest of them she worried about.

Almost half of Tony's half hour was gone and they still needed to get over to Avengerville. "Come on. I want to get a good seat. I feel like I might need to be the voice of reason."

* 

Violet

There had been no universe in which a meeting with the Secretary of State that Bruce had personal, negative history with would end in a happy husband. But Violet had admittedly not been prepared for an emergency meeting at Tony and Pepper's house with literally every Avenger and their spouse, discussing where they were going to evacuate to. Because, apparently, the government was coming for their children.

She was skimming the incredibly thick booklet Bruce had given her. It was... horrid, in all manner of ways. She couldn't imagine sending Bruce down to DC for "assessment." Or poor Wanda. Or having some officious stranger on-site all the time, dictating exactly what the team would be doing and when and how. But clearly the registration and tracking of the children was a level of Orwellian dystopia none of them were going to accept.

"I don't understand why Ada is on the list," she said when there was a lull in the arguing. "She's not biologically related to anyone on the team." She looked up. "Is this the 'she's really Tony's kid' thing again?" That story had cycled through the tabloids several times when they were still in Manhattan.

"Sheer force of intellect?" Vision suggested. "Mr. Stark is not enhanced, and neither is Ruby. But someone has decided that those brains are dangerous, and she certainly has one. Can't have her building a rocket ship in her playhouse and all."

She frowned. "Well, then Neil should be on it. He could absolutely build a rocket ship. Or- or a murderbot or something."

Bruce reached over and rubbed her back. "Honey, I love you, but I think you're angry about the wrong thing right now."

Huffing, she put down the packet and stood. "I'm cutting into the cheesecake."

"All right," Tony was saying. "No bunker. It was intended to protect against things like the Chitauri. It didn't occur to me that I'd have to hide from the US government."

"Other countries?" Bucky asked.

Sharon was already shaking her head. "I've been taking the water temperature and it's not very warm in the first world. Though, the invasive nature of this would probably change that, certainly at least
for a place to put the families. But they blindsided me, and that's a long diplomatic negotiation we don't have time for."

"Okay," Steve said, "Countries not in the first world."

"No, we need modern medical facilities," Amanda said, pointing at Pepper. She was almost 38 weeks, which was practically overdue for twins. "This is not the scenario in which I want to perform my first c-section." Violet knew the bottom baby was transverse, laying on his back with literally no way to come out on his own.

Tony looked over at Pepper, who was propped on the couch with her legs over his lap. "You are one overly spicy nacho away from game day, aren't you?"

"More or less," she said dryly. Tony had one hand spread out over the middle of her belly, and when Violet looked she noticed Pietro and Cal were both doing the exact same thing to their wives. As if they could somehow protect their unborn children with their bare hands.

There was a moment of silence, then Sam asked, "Could you buy a country?"

Tony tipped his head back on the couch cushions. "There are some islands I could probably buy with a check. We'd need somewhere larger to house everyone, plus set up water and power and some sort of sustainable food." He tilted his head one way then the other, like he had a crick in it. "I have always wanted to be an enlightened despot ruling my own fiefdom."

Darcy raised a hand. "Dibs on evil vizier!"

"I feel the need to reiterate modern medical facilities," Amanda said dryly. "Also, I would totally be Tony's evil vizier."

"Catastrophe is happening and we're making jokes," Pietro said. "You are still the weirdest people I have ever met."

"There is the other option," Thor said.

They all looked at him. Steve said, "That was a last resort."

Thor leaned forward and braced his elbows on his knees. "You don't think we're there?" His voice indicated that clearly, he did.

"Taking everyone to another realm is drastic," Steve said.

"More so than settling in Argentina or something?" Nat asked. "I actually think the culture shock would be pretty similar."

Ada would certainly be thrilled. Last Violet had heard, however, Odin wasn't exactly pro-human. "Do we even know if your father would let us?"

"He told me he would consider the idea, but that I should not fret about things that might not come to pass. But here, now, they are. It might behoove me to go up and talk to him. Even if you have to temporarily evacuate elsewhere, this is could still be a longer term option."

Steve was quiet for a moment, then nodded. "Go talk to him. We won't wait for an answer, but you're right, having it as an option is good planning."

He nodded, leaned over to give Jane a kiss, and then stood. He walked past Violet, wheeled back
around and crouched down in front of her. "The promise I made a week ago still stands," he said quietly. "I will keep your children safe. By whatever means necessary."

"Thank you," she said, leaning in to kiss his cheek. "Let's all hope if doesn't come to that." He nodded and squeezed her hand, then stood again.

"I hope to see you all soon," he said. "With glad tidings." And with that, he left. A moment later a bright blaze of light flared outside.

"They come with tanks and we might regret that," Rhodey commented.

"We'll handle it," Bruce said darkly. Violet reached and squeezed his hand.

"I'm open to suggestions," Steve said.

"The lawyers are coming up," Pepper said. "Some of the provisions are probably illegal. I don't know how much time they could buy us with filing motions and things, but it'll be more than 24 hours. Maybe enough time to find somewhere to be."

"I'm concerned the stress of waiting for that that might be detrimental." Lani's voice was very quiet and calm. As far and Violet could recall it was the first time she'd spoken. "You're all already fraying."

FRIDAY chimed above them. "Doctor Newbury-Barnes, there's a phone call for you."

Amanda glanced up. "I know, I felt the buzzing. It can wait."

"I really think you want to take this."

She looked at Tony. "You have to make AIs with attitude, don't you?"

"Only way I get anything done."

The ceiling chimed impatiently and Amanda sighed, hauling herself to her feet. "Fine." She dug her phone out as she headed to the kitchen for privacy.

Sharon leaned over to look at Lani. "Do you have any contacts that might be able to help us out?"

She smiled wryly. "You all had a meeting with my current highest contact in the government this morning. It sounds like he wasn't particularly helpful."

Tony turned and looked at her. "Got any blackmail material?"

Lani's brows went up. "I don't discuss my previous clients. Not even when they're douchebags."

He frowned. "This is serious, everyone's safety is at risk."

"And my sharing his secrets with you will not change that in any measurable way."

"Leverage is useful."

She narrowed her eyes at him. "How would you like it if the next time Pepper was mad at you I started telling her all your secrets? Or told Steve the best strategies to get you to do what he wants? Confidentiality is 100% or not at all. I do not make exceptions because you asked nice."

He glared at her a moment. "I'm putting you higher on the Hold Up to Torture List."
Chapter 3

Amanda

They were still talking as she reached the kitchen. It was fine. She didn't think they'd figure this out in the space of a phone call.

She didn't recognize the number on the phone, but she did recognize the warm, accented voice on the other end. "Dr. Newbury-Barnes. I hope I'm not disturbing you."

"Your Highness." There had been a time in her life when having the king of Wakanda call her would be a major event. Now she was just trying to figure out how quickly she could politely get off the phone. "Actually, this isn't the best of times."

"Ah, then perhaps I'm too late."

She stopped next to Violet's kitchen table. "Too late?"

"Isolationist we are, blind we are not. It has been evident for some time that . . . consequences were coming for the Avengers. After the incident in Lagos it was all but inevitable your government or another would come at you." He paused. "How bad is it?"

"Very bad." She barely knew the king, probably had no reason to trust him. But he had been kind and even tempered when she spoke to him after James was triggered. It was clear from his reputation and her impressions of him that he valued knowledge and progress as well as tradition and family. Her gut told her he'd be as horrified at the sanctions as they were. "They want to monitor our children."

There was silence on the other end of the phone. Then he said, very solemnly, "As ruling monarch of Wakanda, I would like to formally offer sanctuary to you and your family."

For one awful, selfish moment she considered it. Packing up James and Edie and going somewhere safe, where Ross and his ilk could never touch them. She looked at the drawings covering Bruce and Violet's fridge and sighed. "I am touched and humbled by your offer, Your Highness. But I'm afraid I can't leave my team. Whatever we do, we do it together."

He chuckled warmly. "I'm not surprised, but you misunderstand. When I said your family, I meant all of it." He paused. "I suppose family was the wrong word? In my language it would be closer to clan or cult, but I'm told those words have unfortunate connotations in America."

Holy shit. "You mean all of the Avengers? And their families?"

"Yes."

Amanda gripped the edge of the chair and did some of James's sniper breathing. "Stay on the line, please." She forced herself to move, one foot in front of the other, back out to the living room.

They were still haggling amongst themselves, but stopped at Wanda's loud gasp as Amanda entered. She actually stood up to stare with her mouth open.

"Yeah," Amanda said softly. "Um. The king of Wakanda is on the phone. Your Highness, I'm putting you on speaker. FRIDAY?" There was a beep and she continued, "He's offering us asylum in his country."
"Is this a prank?" Tony, master of diplomacy, opened with.

T'Challa's voice came over the house speakers. "I assure, Mr. Stark, it is not. As ruling monarch of Wakanda, I offer you my hospitality and protection. For as long as you may need it."

"It's a very generous offer, your Highness," Steve said. "The kind that borders on too good to be true. What do you ask in return?" Sharon was glaring at him with intensity Amanda would have found funny in any other circumstances.

But the king chuckled again. "That Dr. Newbury teach our doctors how to heal the wounds of malnutrition and chronic illness. That Mr. Stark, Dr. Foster, and Dr. Banner join our scientists in their quests to better humanity. That you and Sergeant Wilson and Colonel Rhodes and Sergeant Barnes teach your tricks to our military. Your government sees you as a collection of weapons. Or perhaps one large one to hurl at their enemies. But I have spoken to you and watched you. I sent my own scientists to work among you. You are remarkable people, with remarkable minds. Wakanda respects both warriors and scholars."

Steve surveyed the room. "Show of hands?"

Amanda raised hers immediately. James shrugged and did the same. Wanda and Zev seemed to have a silent conversation, then lifted theirs in unison. Slowly, others did the same. Tony was still frowning at the phone, so Pepper picked up his arm for him.

Steve smiled. "We gratefully accept your offer. Can I put our coordinator on the phone with someone of yours? There will be a lot of details."

"Of course. I look forward to welcoming you all." Darcy got up and held her hand out for Amanda's phone, then took hers out and headed for the kitchen, already taking notes.

There was a moment of silence, then Jane said, "We're really leaving. Again." Sharon reached over and squeezed her hand.

"We'll have time to grieve later," Steve said gently, standing up. "There's a lot of work to do."

"I'm sure Darcy will send out itineraries once she knows anything," Sharon added. "For now, let's all go home, start packing. If you need help reach out. Support each other."

"How much can we bring?" Pepper asked. "And how long will we be gone?"

Amanda met James's gaze and saw the other team members exchanging glances as well. Funny that they were the ones who seemed to realize the truth more than the non-combatants. Well, she was pretty sure Darcy knew, she could recognize a worst case scenario in her sleep.

So it surprised her when Lani was the one who answered, "You need to be prepared for this to be indefinite."

Pepper stared at her. "The company is here. And all of us have...work, lives, extended families."

All things Amanda was trying not to think about. Her research, her labs, her staff. She'd have to let them all go. Her family she'd see so much less of. They could come to Wakanda, sure, but it wouldn't be the same. Grieve later, Steve had said.

"I know," Lani said. "And best case scenario is that this is a temporary thing that gets renegotiated and solved quickly. But the government just declared the Avengers and their children weapons to be tracked and monitored. That was not a position they came to quickly and it's not going to be changed.
quickly, either. Sending Ross was a threat, psychological manipulation. From what I've read of the accords, they are designed and worded to make the team and especially the enhanced members, seem like 'other.' Not people. Not citizens. Some of it is almost certainly unconstitutional. But I can tell you right now that their argument will be they didn't have Hulks or super soldiers or telekinetics when they wrote the bill of rights." She touched the booklet that was sitting in her lap. "This is an act of war. One we're not in a position to fight."

"As a side note to that," Sharon said. "I just got a message that we've received a subpoena for all of Doc's medical records."

Amanda's stomach lurched. "FRIDAY, delete all my server based records. Contain everything on a portable hard drive and sever it from the net." She looked over at Lani. "You should -"

"All of my notes are in the lap top hanging off the back of my chair," she told her. "I'm not new at this."

"FRIDAY, don't delete anything. You don't have to do that," Tony said. "Servers are in Switzerland and Norway, data's end-to-end encrypted and boobytrapped even if the government got in, which they won't."

"I kept out Ultron," Vision said. "I'm not worried about agencies that struggle to unlock mobile phones." He looked at Amanda. "Mr. Bennett and I will make sure all local records and caches are thoroughly destroyed on any system not coming with is."

"Thank you. I should never have doubted."

Darcy came out of the kitchen and handed Amanda's phone back. "Okay. I talked to T'Challa's household manager and gave her numbers. She said we'll be staying in his 'guest palace' - I didn't know that was a thing - so we don't need to worry about furnishings. She didn't give me a space or weight limit so basically pack everything you want. I need to talk to one of the pilots about capacity limits on the jets. She said they can send one of theirs over, apparently they have stealth technology that will make Tony drool, but it's probably faster if we can handle everything ourselves." She checked her phone, scrolling. "She's sending me blueprints so I can do room assignments. So if there's anyone in the group you don't want be neighbors with in a two hundred thousand square foot palace, now is the time to discretely tell me. Otherwise I'm going by wedding reception rules and you're being broken up by Tony and Steve minders cross referenced by Team Science and Team Muscle."

"Minders?" Steve asked.

Sam turned to stare at him. "Really, dude?"

Tony waved a hand. "Discuss that later. Rhodes, did you bring the Spruce Goose?"

"For the 85th time, we are not calling it that."

"Just give up," Amanda said.

"What is the Spruce Goose and how many suitcases can I put in it?" Darcy asked.

"Tony put repulsers on a C-5. It was on my property out in California because the air space is less crowded for testing and experimentation. I flew it up here when we came and parked it in that big field Barton uses for target practice. Surely somebody must have seen me land."

"No one pays attention to weird noises around here," Darcy said. "Size?"
"They carry tanks. Multiple tanks."

His wife rolled her eyes. "Jim, that doesn't mean anything to her. Darcy, about a small moving truck or large van per household, assuming containers can be found. Plus space for I assume a ton of Tony's equipment."

"Awesome. Stark, I got a budget for this?"

"Do what you gotta do, Bennet."

"I change my dibs to loyal advisor. I'll make some calls and get moving boxes and some of those storage container things up here ASAP. Anything else?"

"I do no have many possessions," Vision said. "And a great deal of strength. Please feel free to use me as a pack mule."

Darcy pointed at him. "I'm going to remember that because with Cal doing computers and me coordinating someone is going to need to pack my house." She turned to Steve, then Tony, then sort of split the difference. "What are we calling wheels up time?"

"They gave us 24 hours. But it would be good to be out of American air space by dawn," Steve said. She poked at her phone. "Dawn is at 5:10. So let's say everyone on board and buckled in at 4:30."

Amanda and the other parents all sagged a bit. This was going to be a hellish day.

*  

Wanda

"I feel awful about this." They should really be packing. She knew she should pack. Steve had said to mourn later. But guilt and fear were hard to shake. "You don't have to come. You could stay. Your work and your studies are here. Your family."

Zev raised his eyebrows at her. "If I showed my parents what was on that paper they would be shoving me onto that plane so fast your brother wouldn't be able to see it."

She sniffled and looked down. "Your dad was really excited about The Machine, too."

He wrapped his arms around her, and his thoughts snaked into her head. That's why God made the internet and airplanes.

This is my fault. She felt his protest before he could give it thought and she squeezed his leg with a hand. I know it would still be happening without me. They are as afraid of Bruce and Bucky and even Steve. But the bomb in Lagos set this off. And I know they see me as something to study. Ross thinks of us as nuclear bombs. And so I have a part of the blame.

Just because they have decided to blame you doesn't mean you actually are responsible.

His rock steady certainty was very soothing. She rested her head on his shoulder and smiled. You could indulge my martyr complex a little.

I don't know what it's going to be like, or how long we'll be gone. Things are going to be different and everyone is going to have grief and regret to deal with. But you are the love of my life, and I won't regret whatever it is I have to give up to be with you. And to keep you safe.
God she loved him. She could do anything, survive anything, as long as she had him with her. She lifted her head to kiss him. Thank you.

Now let's pack. The others are going to need your help.

*

Sam

"I understand. It is a huge change. But not all change is bad."

Sam listened with half an ear as he carefully rolled his shirts and lined them up in his suitcase. Lani was in the hallway, on her phone, taking a call from... someone. Maybe Pepper, maybe Ora. He'd lost track. No one was actively refusing to go, near as he could tell. But several of the non-combatants were balking at the abrupt move to a foreign country for an indeterminate amount of time. He sympathized. But it didn't get his shirts packed.

He heard the sigh that indicated she'd finally hung up. He paused in his packing to look up. He'd literally just unpacked. "Keeping the mutineers in line?"

"More or less." She hovered into the room. "I don't think anyone's actually considering staying, though I know of at least two couples who have had that conversation. But at the end of the day this is a remarkably strong family unit. We'll get through it."

He shoved his hands in his pockets. "If you don't want... I mean, you don't have to come. You weren't on the list and it's not like we're married. You are not obligated to flee the country just because I dragged you into this sideshow."

"Oh God, not you, too." She shook her head and went to her side of the bed, where her suitcase was flung open. "Have I given any indication I don't want to come?"

"No, but none of us were exactly asked. I don't want to go. But my name is on that list, so... here I am."

She paused and looked up at him. "Oh. Sam." She put down the shirt she was folding and hovered her chair up and over the bed. Her fingers curled around his hand. "I'm sorry. I was focusing on everyone else, I didn't see you were upset about this."

"Upset is too strong a word. It's not the first time I've had my posting changed with no notice. And I'd be lying if I said I didn't think the lot of them probably need you now and in the coming weeks even more than they did previously. But you signed up for a job, not a life in exile. I just want to make sure you consider all your options."

"Going to Wakanda isn't exactly exile. I'm not signing up for the Night's Watch." She took his hand, rubbing her thumb along his knuckles. "I knew this wasn't just a job when I came out here. It's a commitment, a lifestyle. It's family. And yes, unlike a lot of the rest of them, I have a biological family that I love. But I'd move heaven and hell for them, too. I care deeply about the people here, I can't abandon them when they need me most. And all of that isn't even taking into account what I have with you." Her fingers tightened. "There are no other options."

He turned his hand over in hers. "You know that was the answer I was hoping for."

"I do, 'cause I'm the best."

*
"Ada, open this door! We don't have time for this!"

Vision thought Violet Marsh was one of the most even tempered and understanding people in their little family, but it had been a brutal day. It was hours past bedtime and all three children were at the end of their ropes. Neil had mostly seemed game for the adventure and the novelty of packing his things, which likely meant he didn't understand what was really happening. His full meltdown would be later.

Ada understood. Ada had barricaded herself in her bedroom.

Violet was standing with her forehead against the door, and Vision touched her shoulder. "Let me go talk to her."

She took a deep breath and blew it out. "Yeah. Yeah, that's probably a good idea. I'm going to go pack up the play room."

He nodded and watched her walk back downstairs. Then he phased through Ada's door to find her sitting in the middle of her bed, red faced and teary. He sat next to her. "Hello, Miss Ada."

"I'm not going."

"Everyone else is going. Would you rather stay here by yourself?"

"Yes. There's plenty of food and FRIDAY can take care of me. Or I'll stay with Izzy's family. She has five brothers and sisters, they won't notice someone else." Izzy was her best friend at school. Bracelets and pictures had been exchanged confirming their status.

"But who will I eat cereal with?"

She scowled and didn't respond immediately. "We just got here. It's only been a year. And now we're supposed to go to some other country. The grown ups had some big meeting and decided it and I'm supposed to just be okay with it but I'm not."

"You don't have to be okay with it at all. You can scream and cry and kick the walls. It's very hard and it's very unfair. Everyone is upset, and I don't think anyone really wants to go."

"Then why are we going?" He knew Violet and Bruce had tried to explain it to her. That the government was trying to make very unfair rules and the only way to stop them was to move somewhere else. They hadn't mentioned the part about tracking and registering the children. Likely, he assumed, so that it wouldn't frighten her.

"Because we have reached the limit of what we can do here. They are limitations imposed by fear and ignorance, but they are limitations nonetheless. So we have to go somewhere that we can continue to grow, and to do good. Do you remember when we talked about how when JARVIS became me, some things were lost and some were gained? You told me you thought it worth the trade in the end."

She huffed out a shaky breath. "I won't know anyone. It's so hard to make friends. And I'll be in a totally different country."

"Wakanda is the most technologically advanced nation in the world. The king himself has asked us to come and specifically mentioned your father and his scientific accomplishments as a reason." She looked up at him. "I think that you will meet a great many people like you. Smart, and brave and a
little odd." He gave her a gentle smile, which she returned. "But good people."

The tears seemed to have dried up and now he could all but see her thinking. "Does the king have any children?"

Vision scoured his records. "He is unmarried. His younger sister, however, has a husband and two children. The son was born sixteen months before you."

Ada scrubbed a hand over her face and set her mouth in a determined line. "Maybe he'll be nice."

"I think you'll find lots of nice children." He reached to rub her back. "How about I help you pack? You can bring anything you want. I'll make it happen."

She leaned into his side and let out a shuddery little breath. "Okay."
Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

Just reiterating we will NOT post spoilers in the comments. If you have questions you desperately want answered PM me on Tumblr or email me at nyxetoile at gmail.

Clint

There was a time, not so long ago, that Clint and Nat's arsenal alone would have filled a small storage container. Now age, safety, and a team they trusted without question had allowed them to whittle it down just to essentials. It still took a not-insignificant portion of their allotted space however.

Metal shipping containers and several flats of moving boxes had been delivered mid-afternoon, courtesy of Darcy's ability to accomplish anything given motivation and a large enough budget. It was now midnight and Clint was trying to rearrange the boxes in their container to give them the most room. There was no way they were going to fill the whole thing - even with weapons, a couple pieces of furniture he and Barnes had made together, and Nat's considerable mug and t-shirt collections - so they were going to offer space to the families.

"Darcy sent emails out," Nat said, appearing in the doorway with her phone out. "I expect people to start showing up with boxes any moment." She scrolled down on the phone with one finger. "There's also a floor plan of the palace and our room assignments. She must like you, I think ours is literally a turret."

"I can bunk anywhere," he said, walking with her back outside. "I think we're good, I'm just waiting on the crate for London and we'll be buttoned up."

She nodded and tucked her phone away, before sliding her arms around him. "Should we go offer our mad packing skills to the others?"

"Yeah." He rubbed her back. "You and I are probably having the easiest time of this. Work wise, feeling wise. Fleeing an Op gone belly up is nothing new."

"As long as I have you and the cat I'm good," she confirmed. He noticed she still leaned on him, relaxing into the back rub. "I think Sam and Rhodey are processing it as a military bug-out. Steve, too, to a degree. But it's hard for the rest of them. This is home."

"The tower was home, too. I think home is all of us in one place. Location doesn't matter."

Nat smiled. "Like I said, you and the cat. And the rest of the circus." She kissed him gently. "Plus, we get to go to Wakanda. Puts us in very exclusive company."

He turned to look at their house. It was harder to leave someplace you'd put work in. Put yourself in. "You think we'll be back someday?"

Following his gaze, she seemed to give it serious thought. "I do, actually. That contract is insane and I think most people would be against it. But the political climate is what it is. When the time is right, we can make an argument for coming back."
"Okay," he said, leaning to kiss her temple. "Let's go be of use."

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Darcy

It was the guest room that got her.

She was exhausted. She was nauseous. She was busy and worried and...so busy. This had been the most hectic day of her life. Jane had overseen the packing of her and Cal's house while they worked. Wanda was loading the boxes into their container via her magic, and Darcy did a walk through to see if anything had been missed.

The guest room with the green paint and the view of the lake. Just yesterday, she and Cal had decided this would be the nursery. They'd sat in the middle of the room and discussed where the furniture would go. The spot on the closet trim where they'd mark his or her height. How likely it was the kid would climb out the window, and where he/she would sit to avoid doing homework. Whatever life they'd planned in this house—and they'd planned one—it was probably gone.

She blamed the hormones that she started to cry.

For the moment, nothing needed her attention, so she allotted herself five minutes to sit on the stairs and sob. That's what her life had come to, scheduled crying.

She had three and a half minutes left when footsteps tapped up the stairs and Cal plopped down next to her and wrapped his arms around her. "The guest room," she sniffled, as if that was anything resembling an explanation.

"I know," he said, rubbing her back. Neither of them had been on the list. They didn't have to go to Wakanda. They were support staff, just like all the people that worked in Amanda's lab or Hill's field team. But they would still have to leave here.

He let her cry a little more, which she appreciated, then she slumped on his shoulder and sighed. "Do you want...we didn't really talk about other options. I just sort of seemed assumed we'd go. If you want to talk about going somewhere else..."

"I don't. This train has so far brought us a lot of awesome. I'm willing to stay on it. Maybe the kid will have a Wakandan passport. Plus I really want a BabyPod, which means staying with Stark."

She smiled. "You make a good point." She looped an arm around his waist and squeezed him. "It would be a shame to plan this whole thing and not reap the rewards."

"Besides, if we stay, they'll probably arrest us for helping the Avengers escape."

That was an even better point. "It's fine. I don't want to live in a country who wants to tag and track my nieces and nephews. Fuck 'em."

"Good. 'Cause I'd go away much longer than you. I've been stealing equipment and destroying evidence all day. You'd be at preschool telling people how your BabyDaddy is in jail."

"That would be awkward. 2.0 would either be the coolest kid in school or the most picked on."

"I think that's probably the trajectory no matter where we are."

Her five minutes were almost certainly up, so she wiped at her eyes and sat up a little. "I would have
been a really good vizier."

*

**Pepper**

The house was packed. Pepper didn't have a lot of possessions she was emotionally attached to. Tony's propensity to get their home blown up in some way or other helped with that. They were just things. She was sure there were nice things in Wakanda.

Tony was preoccupied with getting all of his equipment and half finished projects loaded into containers. Amanda had talked Pepper into napping, so she laid down with Ruby in her bedroom and slept a couple of hours. She woke up sometime in the wee hours, to FRIDAY telling her Amanda had come to check on her.

"Tony get all his stuff packed?" She asked as Amanda hooked up the fetal monitors. Both heartbeats sounded, beating in time with each other.

"As far as I know. He and Rhodes put their suits on and are taking the containers over to the plane." She spread the gel on Pepper's stomach to check the position of the babies. They'd been hoping the one on the bottom had flipped into some sort of theoretically deliverable position in case Pepper should go into labor in transit.

"Any luck?"

She could tell from Amanda's face it wasn't good news. "Baby number one still thinks he's in a hammock." A little shifting got a different view. "You should name that one after Tony, he's clearly a problem."

"Answer me honestly. How dangerous is this?" It's was a 12-plus hour flight.

Removing the scanner, Amanda started wiping away the conductive gel and asked, "Are you having contractions?"

She shook her head. "Nothing more than Braxton Hicks."

Amanda nodded. "Mind if I check your cervix?" Pepper waved a hand. At this point in her pregnancy what was one more hand up there?

Amanda grabbed some fresh gloves and kneeled at the end of the bed, arranging Pepper's legs so she could do a pelvic exam. "I feel the need to reiterate that if I'd wanted to be an OB, I would have done so. Ah, there is it." She clucked her tongue. "I'm thinking you might be a centimeter. Which for 38 weeks with twins isn't surprising." She withdrew her hand and snapped the glove off. "There are a dozen ways it could be safer, but I don't think you're in immediate danger of going into labor. And even if you start in the air, I'm guessing Wakanda has facilities more advanced than anything we could get you to quickly up here."

Ruby woke up and crawled closer, laying her upper body over the bump. "Good morning babies."

Pepper reached to ruffle her daughters hair. "For toddler definitions of morning, little bit."

"Good morning Auntie Manda," Ruby said, ignoring her mother.

"Good morning, Ruby Tuesday." She started packing up her equipment. "Are you ready for our big trip?"
"I want a pet lion," she replied. Tony had promised her that. Because he spoke before thinking.

Ruby look up and clapped her hands. "Daddy!" Speak of the devil.

He was in the doorway, in the Iron Man suit without the helmet. "Hi, sweetheart. How's the patient?" he asked Amanda.

"Fit for travel, barring spicy nachos."

"We're ready to load up."

Ruby climbed off obediently, then Tony and Amanda helped Pepper into her hover chair. Thank God for it, or this whole mess would have been that much harder on her. Amanda then ran off to gather up her family and Tony scooped up Ruby and the last of their luggage as they headed outside.

The plane was on the other side of the lake, so they were ferrying everyone over in a helicopter. This run included her and Ruby, Amanda and her family, the Banners, and Zev and Wanda.

Tony had taken off the gloves of the suit to strap Ruby in, so Pepper asked him, "What did you imagine would go so wrong during this five minute trip that you needed to pack me in here with literally all the doctors?"

"I believe in redundant systems," he informed her, giving Ruby a kiss on the cheek. He looked up at Pepper. "Cross your knees and clench, I'll see you at the Goose."

Pepper leaned forward to give him a kiss, and he patted her belly. He tromped off, shut the door, and from the cockpit Clint called, "Doctor Express, now departing."

It was a short little hop that Ruby, Neil and Ada loved, Asima didn't notice and Edie hated. Wanda made a valiant attempt at distracting her with red fireworks and other little tricks, to little effect. When they landed Bucky unbuckled her and she wrapped herself around him like a koala. He braced her on the metal arm and held his other out for people to use as a brace.

Amanda settled Ruby in Pepper's lap, before holding Asima for the Banners. Evacuating with kids really did require all hands on deck.

The nose of the massive plane was raised for loading and all the containers were on. Darcy and Steve came down the ramp just as Tony landed off to the left. "Hi guys," Darcy said. "The passenger cabin has a handful of sleeping berth/pod things in addition to the seats. I have Ora in one and Sharon and Joey in another, but I have one for Pepper and Ruby, one for Amanda and Edie and a master bedroom that's like a double I'm hoping Violet can fit her kids into."

"There are six berths," Tony called.

"Yeah, the other one's mine, I'm pregnant and I've been on my feet for like 18 hours."

"Touche."

Darcy gestured towards the plane. "Everybody load up. You were the last group, as soon as everyone's settled, we're ready for take off." She checked her watch. "Eighteen minutes early. I'm the man."

Clint was leaning into the helicopter listening to the radio with one ear. Pepper didn't like the look on his face. "Steve, Tony, we have a problem."

The team members - including those carrying children - all went on alert. "What kind of problem?"
Steve asked.

"Sounds like someone noticed the bug out. We've got incoming."

"Glad you're the man, Bennett," Tony said. "Everybody on, right now." He touched his earpiece. "FRIDAY, what's going on?" He cycled through a number of faces before looking at them. "Jesus Christ. Ross is taking this as an—admittedly accurate—indicator that we won't be agreeing to his terms. They're sending a special team to 'secure' us. His message says we're not the only enhanced people on the payroll."

"What the hell does that mean?" Bucky asked.

"I vote we don't stick around and find out," Amanda said. "Civilians, plane, now."

"The big guy wants to know if he can come out and play," Bruce commented, managing to sound amused and threatening at the same time.

"No," Steve said. "Thank you, but no. We're getting on this plane and we're getting to safety."

Tony came and took Ruby from her, and helped Pepper get onto the plane. He got her all the way up the stairs to the passenger cabin before handing Ruby back to her. "Stay here, I'm going to go deal with Ross's minions."

"What?"

He turned and hit some button on the wall. "Rhodey, as soon as everyone's seated, take off." The helmet assembled itself over his head.

"Are you nuts?" Pepper called as he started down the stairs. "Get back here." Of course, it wasn't like she could chase him.

There was a lot of commotion in the hallway and she felt the hum of machinery that probably meant they were getting prepared for take off.

"FRIDAY, patch me through to Tony's helmet." She paused a moment. "Are you insane?" she said in what she thought was a remarkably calm tone.

"We gotta get out of American airspace. I'm just slowing them down. Shouldn't you be resting?"

"This is not very restful," she replied. She loved him, but he was such an idiot. "Come back."

"Soon as I'm done showing these guys what happens when you come at my family." There was a distant, tinny sound of him shooting. "Ha! Can't drive through that, can you?"

Ruby was wiggling desperately to get down, and was very hard to hold on around the bump. Tony had, of course, left her in the hallway. Then Ruby slid off her knees and she had no choice but to get out of the chair to catch her. One of the babies shifted and kicked her somewhere painful. Or maybe that was a contraction. She leaned against the wall to catch her breath while her daughter, trapped by Pepper's knee, began to throw a tantrum.

Meanwhile, Tony was merrily live-blogging his fight. "Holy shit. They really do have enhanced people."

Jane materialized from somewhere and mercifully took Ruby from her. Pepper waited until she was out of earshot. "Anthony Edward Stark, we are not reenacting the beginning of Star Trek. Get your
as back to this plane right fucking now."

There was a moment of silence and she started to panic. "I told you not to watch that while you were all hormonal, didn't I?"

"TONY"

"I'm coming, I'm coming."
Chapter 5

*Bucky*

It was a really long flight.

He helped Amanda get settled in her berth with Edie. He would have loved to try to cram in there with them, but there just wasn't room. So he spent the night in a chair that was more comfortable than the average plane seat, but still not an actual bed.

Wanda spent an amusing amount of time debating with Tony and Rhodey about using her powers to bend the seat horizontal. She assured them she could fix it later, but they were still against it.

He dozed on and off, jerking awake and noises with vague memories of nightmares clinging to him. Once when he woke Wanda was awake as well and smiled at him. "We're the only two not sleeping. Other than Rhodey in the cockpit."

"Bad dreams?" he asked her, stretching.

She shook her head. "Too many heads too close together. It's noisy."

"I expect there are a lot of messed up dreams."

"Dreams are always weird. Someone was chasing little miniature soldiers with a butterfly net. Someone else appeared to be living a rather exciting science fiction movie."

"Ten bucks says the butterfly net was Tony."

She giggled. "Probably." She glanced down the row. "People are processing."

"Could you see what I was dreaming about?"

The laughter dried up and she got a far away look in her eyes. "There was a dark room with stone walls and a crackle of electricity. Men were speaking in many languages. There was a file in your hand that you couldn't read, then it turned into a gun."

He sighed. "That doesn't surprise me. Some weird mish-mash of memories and fears."

"It's true of many of you. Right now Steve is dreaming of searching for something in the snow. He grabs handfuls of it and it melts away. His dreams are always cold."

He looked back at all of them sleeping in the seats. "Does anyone have happy dreams?"

She tipped her head back and closed her eyes. After a moment, she snorted. "Darcy is eating the largest ice cream sundae I have ever seen. There are fried bananas in it."

Bucky smiled, too. "She did good, making this all happen. She deserves a giant sundae."

"She's hungry most of the time, now. It's contagious." Wanda tilted her head. "Amanda is dreaming about . . . chemistry class. There are beakers and many colors of liquid. I'm not sure if it's a happy dream, but it's not a nightmare."

It was completely unsurprising that his girl dreamed about doing experiments. "Are any of the beakers blowing up?"
"No," she said cautiously.

"Give it time."

Wanda laughed a little, and sighed. "Do you think it will be nice there? In Wakanda?"

Bucky wasn't really good with comfort. But Wanda had done a lot for him, so he gave it his best shot. "I've never been there, but I think so. 'Manda says they're very advanced, and she really likes T'Challa. It'll be... different. But I think it will be nice."

"Do you think they'll be afraid of me? Of us?"

"I don't know," he said honestly. "I hope not. I like to think the king is a litmus of the rest of his people. And I don't think he's afraid of us. Even after I tried to kill him."

"There are legends about the Wakandans. About the colonial powers sending battalions of men with guns, and getting slaughtered by warriors a fraction of their numbers. Makes me wonder..."

"If they're a little different themselves?" She nodded. "Stranger things have happened, little sister."

"Well, that is certainly true."

It was clear neither of them were going to sleep, so he found a deck of cards and they entertained themselves. Slowly, the rest of them started to wake up. Some joined in the card game, others started talking. The kids woke up and Edie climbing in his lap to "help" him play.

A meal had been served (well, passed around) right after take-off. The plane was stocked with MREs, so that's all there was, and another round was handed out after everyone woke up, at what was mid-afternoon NY time and halfway through the flight. Eventually Edie got fussy and in need of a nap, and Amanda got him to go lay down with her.

When he woke up, the card game he'd left was still going on, though now Pietro was trying to teach some strange Sokovian card game nobody could follow.

They were nearing Wakanda, according to Clint, who had taken over for Rhodey a couple hours ago. T'Challa - or more likely his version of Darcy - had managed to get them flight clearance over some of his neighboring countries, which had shortened their flight time slightly. It was still brutally long as they tried to stay out of the way of commercial airline traffic. Nobody discussed it, but he knew that there was still some chance the US would try to shoot them down over international waters. It had been hours before Tony finally took off his suit. It was good to finally feel safe.

Darcy was currently walking to everyone and making a list of their families to give to said Wakandan counterpart. "To start the visa approval process," she explained when Ora asked.

Amanda wrote the names of her sisters and father before handing it down and leaned on his shoulder. "That made it feel very final."

"Packing the house didn't?"

"I don't know. It was fast and hectic and I didn't have time to think about it." She turned her head and kissed his shoulder through his shirt.

He rested his cheek on the top of her head. In his lap, Edie shifted, tucking her head under his chin. His girls. "This is all I need. I don't care where we go."
Amanda rested her hand on Edie's back, rubbing in circles. "Yeah."

Clint's voice came over the PA. "Buckle in everyone, we're going in."

"It'll be an adventure," he said, telling himself as much as her as they moved to buckle Edie into a seat.

His wife gave him a very knowing look. "God knows we don't have enough of those."

It was daylight outside, so he reached over and flipped up the shade on the window so they could watch the descent. Rumors were Wakanda was gorgeous. Outside the window they could see thick rainforest canopy, laced with mist and fog. The sun was just coming up outside, an entire day and night seemingly swallowed by transit and timezones.

The plane banked, changing directions to hit the runway properly. Off to the left, Bucky spotted an impressive waterfall and pointed out so Edie and the other kids could see it. They caught a glimpse of the capital city, sprawling out beyond. It looked modern, but not sort of sci-fi metropolis he'd sort of been picturing.

The giant plane touched down with a thump and a screech of tires, and then gradually slowed down. The intercom came on, and a fake "bong" noise sounded. Nat, apparently, was up in the cockpit. "Ladies and Gentlemen, welcome to sunny Wakanda," she said, in her best fake-perky stewardess voice. "Local time is 6:24 AM, and it's a mild 58 degrees. For your safety, please remain seated with your seat belt securely fastened until Captain Tightpants has turned off the Fasten Seat Belt sign, and it's safe for you to move about the cabin."

"I am wearing perfectly normal pants," Clint could be heard saying in the background.

"Sure, you are," she replied before the connection clicked off.

They taxied for a few minutes - Bucky was guessing it was hard finding somewhere to park this behemoth, then they stopped and there was another fake "bong" which presumably meant they could get up.

They were still valiantly attempting to mobilize when the grind of machinery indicated the nose was opening up.

When they made their way down the stairs and out the nose, there was a welcome wagon waiting for them. At the center was a woman in a long blue dress, with an afro and an abundance of gold jewelry. She was flanked by a dozen other women in all black, with shaved heads and big gold hoops. There was something vague menacing about them. The woman in the center was likely some sort of official, and the rest of them were clearly the muscle.

"Dr. Newbury-Barnes?" the woman in blue asked.

Amanda stepped forward and he trailed after her because no way in hell she was getting that close to a dozen trained guards without him at her back. She shifted Edie to her left hip and held out a hand. "That's me."

"Welcome to Wakanda," she said, clasping Amanda's hand in both of hers. "I am Shuri of the royal family. The King is my brother. He felt your arrival was important enough to get an official welcome, but not important enough to get up this early. Morning person, he is not. Don't take it personally."

Amanda smiled. "I enjoy sleeping in, so I understand perfectly. Thank you for meeting us. I'm afraid
we had a very rough day and night and may not be at our best. But we are very grateful to the king for his offer of asylum." And people said Amanda couldn't be diplomatic.

Edie was staring at Shuri and the woman - princess? - smiled. "Who is this?"

"This is my daughter, Edith. Edie, can you say hi?"

"Hi," she parroted obediently. "I like your earrings."

Shuri's smile widened to a grin. "Why thank you."

Amanda gestured behind her. "This is my husband, James Barnes."

He offered her a hand and noticed several of the guards shift cautiously. He liked these women more by the minute. She shook his hand, with a grip that implied she didn't need bodyguards. "The Winter Soldier, I believe they call you?"

"Only when I'm on the clock. I prefer Bucky, Your Highness."

"Noted. We have your lodgings all set up, I can have you taken there now, and you belongings will be delivered to you."

"Thank you," Amanda said. She glanced over her shoulder. "We're ready to go."

*

Sharon

Six months ago, Sharon's life had been turned upside down and inside out when Wanda sensed Joey was in trouble. She'd woken up from her emergency surgery feeling like the whole world had shifted.

It kind of felt like that today.

Their rooms in the Guest Palace were beautiful. Food had been laid out for them, and all their possessions were being delivered. Joey was sound asleep in his carrier, tucked against her chest. They were safe. But the world was still upside down.

Part of her was still angry and betrayed about the Accords. It felt like a personal slap in the face to have been locked out of those negotiations. When the first supervisory rules were established she'd been a part of it every step of the way. It had taken six months to perfect the wording and to make sure the team and the government was happy.

And in one meeting that had all been thrown out the window.

Carefully, she unhooked the carrier and set Joey in the center of the bed. He gave a big, four limbed stretch and resettled. Someday, far too soon, that kid was going to take up a whole bed all on his own.

She felt Steve come up behind her and leaned back on him as his arms came around her. "Well. Here we are."

He rocked her a little. "How are you holding up?"

Steve sighed. "That is an excellent summary."

She squeezed his arm where it lay across her stomach. "I think we probably ended up with the best case scenario. But it still hurts."

"I know. And you shouldn't discount what you did. If they'd come at us with this right after Sokovia. . . The year you bought us was a pretty big year for a lot of people."

She nodded. "I know." Of course, that meant there were that many people that had been dragged along when it all went to hell. But that wasn't her fault either. "I think it's just. . . I don't know what happens next. None of us do. And that's a little scary."

He nudged her to turn around. "It is. But we've been through scary before."

"I know." She ran her hands across his chest and down his arms. "And I'm glad we're all together and safe. T'Challa and Wakanda are good allies to have. But this. . . was bad."

"I think they knew it was bad. They didn't want to be reasonable. Or you wouldn't have been shut out."

She sighed. "That's probably worse." She rested her forehead on his shoulder and he rubbed her back. "They were gunning for us. They were waiting for an excuse. Those rules weren't written overnight."

He looked over at Joey. "Did they honestly think we were would register our children?"

"I don't know. Maybe Lani's right, maybe they have stopped seeing us as people. Maybe it was just a first volley and they overshot. Or maybe they thought we'd be cowed and cornered enough to just agree." She sighed again. "Or maybe they were trying to break us apart. Tony said they were fighting with enhanced people."

"I had no idea what was even going on. Who are they?"

Wasn't that the sixty five thousand dollar question. "I don't know. I've heard rumors here and there about programs to try to replicate Tony's tech or making a new serum but nothing ever comes of it. Hell, they tried to make another Hulk once and Bruce can tell you how well that went."

"Tony was flabbergasted, and fighting in the dark, so he doesn't have the best recollection. He said one of them was leaping around the roofs of moving cars spraying him with some sort of adhesive. Team Science scraped a bunch of it off his suit to analyze while you were sleeping."

That was. . . worrying. That meant tech and training. Which meant time and investment. Which meant none of this was spur of the moment because of the bombing. "When everyone has had a chance to settle, I think we need to have a team meeting."

"I think that's a good idea." From the bed, Joey cooed. "He agrees," Steve added.

"Well, he knows his Mama's very smart."

"That she is." He let her go so he could pick up the baby, who squealed with joy and patted his cheeks. Steve hefted him up and blew on his tummy, eliciting more squeals. Sharon smiled and felt something unclench. They were together and safe. It was enough.

"I know it's morning here," Steve said. "But I'm exhausted. What do you say we close the drapes and lay down in this ridiculously gigantic bed and get a little sleep?"
"That sounds like a fantastic idea."

Joey in one arm, he went over to close them while she pulled back the covers and tossed decorative pillows off the bed. When the room was dark they stripped down and climbed into bed. Steve put Joey between them, and he immediately rolled towards Sharon and started looking for a snack.

She laughed softly, and pulled him closer, shifting her breast so he could latch on. "I guess he doesn't care where we are."

"His needs are simple. Mommy. Daddy. A clean diaper and an available boob."

"We have that entire checklist in this bed. Joey's riding high."

He watched them a moment. "I just want to make sure you're okay. I know it's been hard and this can't be any kind of helpful."

She sighed, stroking Joey's hair. "It is hard. And 'okay' is probably too strong a word. But I'm hanging in there. I'm glad we got out. I'm glad everyone is with us. I'm trying to be hopeful we'll figure a way out of this."

"We have political asylum and access to a lot of money. They money is probably the bigger thing, really. I have no idea what, but we'll figure something out." He touched Joey's back. "I promise not to do anything stupid."

She loved him that he knew that was something she was worried about. "Thank you, I appreciate that."

"I have a family to take care of," he said quietly.

How far they had come. "We'll figure out the right path. Together." Joey unlatched and rolled over onto his stomach, tucking his legs under and sticking his butt up. It was his favorite way to sleep. He made a sound of utter contentment and closed his eyes.

Sharon smiled and rubbed his back as he drifted off. Just his presence, watching him sleep, could relax her and make her feel at peace. No matter what was going on he was the best thing in her life.
Chapter 6

Pietro

"This is really fascinating. There is an enormous amount of what sounds like Southern Bantu in this. Nguni maybe. But we're just way too far north. 'Course with the isolation, it could just be coincidence. I could write the most amazing paper about this."

Listening to his wife geek out about the Wakandan language, which she'd been absorbing via Wakandan television, made Pietro happy. She'd spent most of the morning helping others from their group make requests of the household staff, few of which spoke English, but most of which spoke some language Ora spoke. Swahili, he thought.

Now they were supposed to be napping. She was teaching herself Wakandan. He was trying very patiently to get his child to move in such a way that he could feel.

"It really is going to be a while before you can feel it from the outside," she told him.

"Bucky said he could feel Edie at four months," he grumped, shifting his hand over again.

"He has super senses. Also, there's a difference in the amount of abdominal fat that Amanda and I have."

He wasn't touching that comment with a ten foot pole. "I think the baby is being stubborn."

"I can't imagine where she'd get a trait like that."

"At this point I think it's being pumped through the air." He leaned over and kissed her temple. "You doing all right?"

"Surprisingly so." When he'd gone home to tell her about the meeting with Ross, as soon as he'd mention the registration issues, she'd said Fuck that, we'll leave the country first. Being monitored by the government wasn't really something Ora wanted to do. Again.

"Will you still be okay when you stop nerding out about their language?"

"I'm sure I'll have some feelings about being a refugee, but I've started over before. These are nicer digs." She turned to study his face. "Are you okay?"

He shrugged. Feelings he wasn't good at. And currently he was feeling a lot of them. "I'm angry and have no one to be angry at. I'm sad, for things I really don't have a name for. And I hate the feeling of not knowing what happens next."

"Sounds about right. Careful with carrying the anger. It's pretty corrosive."

"Yeah," he sighed. "Maybe Lani can squeeze me in."

She lifted a hand to run it through his hair. "We're safe. It's good to be safe. I really didn't want an ankle tracker or whatever the hell they were going to do to me."

"Yeah." He hadn't been eager to go down to DC to get poked and prodded. It was one thing when Doc did it. Strangers were quite another. "I think I'm just used to having a bad guy. When I was young it was Stark, then Ultron. Whoever we were fighting at the time. But other than Ross, who was a mouthpiece more than anything, I don't have an enemy to fight. Makes me antsy."
"You also haven't run in . . . longer than a day, I've kind of lost track of time. You get weird when you don't burn your energy."

That was an excellent point, and probably the first thing Lani would ask him if he were to talk to her. He kissed Ora, then her belly. "I'm going to go see who I have to check with to go run in the jungle."

She grinned at him. "If you don't exhaust yourself, we can fool around later."

He paused. No, running first. "I will save some energy. Just for you."

"I'll have a nap in preparation," she replied. Ora napped a lot lately.

"Yes. Good. You will need your strength."

The palace was enormous and he ended up sprinting all over it just looking for someone official. He managed to find one of the guards via their rather distinct appearance—were he not a married man, he would almost certainly have to hit on one (and then had the shit kicked out of him).

She looked at him like he'd grown a second head, and for a moment he thought he'd overestimated her English. "This isn't a prison. We do have a lot of very dangerous animals in our country, but I don't imagine there's anything you can't outrun."

That was almost certainly true. "I didn't know if there were any customs or sacred ground I might stumble on," he explained. "I'm probably at the top of the list of people to accidentally offend someone, figured I'd do what I could to prevent it."

"Well, you are very pale. People are probably going to stare. Your accent makes you hard to understand, so I wouldn't recommend you find a market and try to haggle for some jewelry. But everyone knows by now we invited a bunch of Americans, so expectations are probably low."

Instinct and foul mood made him want to argue. But he was a recent American and probably would have had the same opinion in her place. "You assessment is harsh, but fair. Thank you."

She inclined her head. "Enjoy your run."

"Always do." He grinned at her and sprinted off, heading for the main entrance.

*

Bruce

It was 6PM in Wakanda. Bruce was was too tired to figure out what that was in New York time, but he suspected the middle of the night. They'd all been told to take the day to rest and adjust, which was all well and good for those of them without three children off their routines and pumped with sugar. They rotated individually through climbing the walls, napping, and having meltdowns like some sort of demented round robin.

Mid afternoon, Pietro had come by after his run to inform them that the Guest Palace apparently had a playground, with a fence and everything. It was perhaps the most seriously he'd ever considered kissing another man.

Neil was standing on top of the monkey bars, hands on his hips, surveying the territory. This was almost certainly a prelude to testing the weaknesses of his confinement, but for now Bruce was content he was in sight and occupied.
He and Violet sat on a bench, passing a cup of really superior coffee back and forth, Asima fast asleep in his lap. Ada had declared herself too old for playgrounds, but seemed to have found entertainment in the corner, balancing rocks on top of each other.

"Maybe this isn't so bad," he said.

"I think fatigue has affected your short term memory," Violet told him, pressing the coffee mug back into his hand.

"Fleeing the country is not new to me." But he was tired, so she drank the coffee. "First time I got to take my loved ones along. So that's something."

"Ada was a near thing. But I see your point." She leaned on his arm. "They're resilient. They'll be okay."

"It's nice here. We could pretend it's a honeymoon."

"We could." She curled her hand around his. "I have always wanted to stay in a castle."

He watched Ada decide to creep over to the playground and check it out. "I got chatting with one of the guards while on the Food Ada Will Eat scavenger hunt earlier. Apparently Wakanda children go to school year round."

Violet perked up. "Really? I've been reading articles about that. It's a much more organic way of learning."

"I don't disagree. I can't decide if Ada is going to be thrilled or heartbroken."

"Probably depends on what they're teaching her. And what the other kids are like."

"She's going to need an interpreter."

"I'm sure we can make that happen."

The gate to the playground creaked open and the woman who had met their plane - Shuri, the king's sister - walked in, flanked by a little boy and girl. Bruce and Violet both heaved themselves to their feet to greet her.

"The first thing children ask when someone moves into your neighborhood is 'do they have kids?'" she said as they approached.

"We certainly have the most," Violet said. "And the oldest." She placed a hand on her son's shoulder. "This is Azari. And this is N'Yami." She gestured to the little girl, who was eyeing Bruce and Violet suspiciously. "I believe they are roughly the same ages and your oldest two."

Ada had noticed the newcomers and came dashing over. "Hi."

"This is Ada," Bruce said. "That's Neil over there climbing the outside of the tube slide. And this is Asima," he added about the baby sleeping on his shoulder.

"Very nice to meet you all." Shuri gave Azari a little nudge.

He stepped forward and stuck out his hand. "Nice to meet you."

Ada shook his hand. "How do you say that in Wakandan?" His brows went up and he repeated it in
his language. Ada mimicked it, making him grin.

"My children are third and fourth in line for the throne," Shuri said. "Those of us in the royal family are taught a variety of languages as children. Most Wakandan children won't speak English. . . so I thought, conversational company for yours, and practice for mine."

"We appreciate that," Bruce said. "I know Ada was very concerned about making friends."

"You should teach me more words," Ada declared.

Shuri patted her son's shoulder. "Azi, go play."

He looked vaguely skeptical - he was just about at the age Bruce remembered being torn between girls having cooties or being utterly fascinating - but he let Ada tug him over to her little rock pile.

Neil was clearly uninterested in friend making, but N'Yami had discovered the slide all on her own and was valiantly attempting to scale it like he had.

"I apologize for whatever trouble he gets her into," Violet said with a sigh.

"She could use someone to get her out of her shell."

"He is very good at that. Among other things."

"How are your children holding up?" she asked.

Bruce sighed and shifted Asima. "Adjusting to the time change mostly. I don't think Neil has realized this is anything more than a fun adventure. Ada knows it's a possibly permanent move for less than ideal reasons. She's having a hard time with the abruptness of it all."

"I can only imagine. I'd have trouble with it, and I'm not nine."

"I definitely think there's some adults handling it worse," Violet said with a smile, making Bruce and Shuri laugh.

"We can't ever thank you and your brother enough for the hospitality," Bruce added when they've calmed. "We were very short on options."

"Captain Rogers has been of interest to us for a long time, both because of his shield and because of his abilities. My brother and his chief science advisor are very interested in Dr. Newbury-Barnes's serum research, and how that interacts with the effects of the vibranium. We likely have a lot to learn from each other."

One phrase stood out there. "Effects of the vibranium?"

"Ah," she said quietly. "I am pleased that secret still remains safe. We don't guard the strongest metal on earth so carefully because we are greedy."

Bruce studied her a moment. "The Dora Milaje. The legends about what happened to white invaders searching for the vibranium. Vibranium causes enhancements in your people."

"Indeed. The more you have in close proximity to your body, the stronger you are. The shield has been helping Captain Rogers more than he knew, all these years. It is a bit like radiation in that it spreads. At this point it's in the environment here and there are certain plants that can provide specific enhancements. But I promise you are in no danger—we would have warned you."

"Has anyone told Steve?" Violet asked quietly. "Or Sharon? They just had a baby."
"We have a baby," Bruce said before she could answer. "And a vibranium android that spends a lot of time in our house."

"Our tests indicated his vibranium had been modified. It seems inert. As to the other, it was one of the topics my brother had planned to bring up before the...incident." The incident in which Bucky tried to kill him, Bruce assumed.

Violet let out a little breath and looked up at him. "I feel like that's not going to be a fun conversation."

"It wouldn't have done the baby harm."

"I believe you," Bruce said, rubbing Violet's back. "Clearly there aren't any long-term issues or your would have found them. But Steve doesn't have the healthiest relationship with what the serum did to him. I think he'll need time to process the knowledge his shield has been effecting him. And might be effecting his son."

She nodded. "I will make sure the conversation is handled delicately."

*

*Steve*

Steve took several deep breaths through his nose as T'Challa's science advisor, W'Kabi finished his explanation. Sharon reached over and wrapped a hand around his, holding tightly.

When T'Challa had requested a meeting after dinner, they had expected it to be about long-term logistics or political next steps. Not about the physical effects of exposure to vibranium. Turned out the shield he'd been lugging around his whole life was part of the reason he was around to lug it.

And now it had almost certainly done... something to his son.

"I want to reiterate," W'Kabi said. "We have never seen any harmful effects at any normal levels of exposure. We would need to run tests on your shield, but given its size and the amount of vibranium used, I would say the effects to your son would be well within what we consider normal."

"And what exactly do you consider normal?"

"Better strength and health. Particularly it seems to enhance bodily processes like the immune system. Malaria, and every other tropical disease endemic in this region—all unheard of in Wakanda."

Sharon cleared her throat. "Joey was premature due to cord issues. Could these effects-"

He was already nodding. "Our infant mortality rates are also extremely low, even for very early preemies. It would not necessarily have made his lungs function better, but it almost certainly protected him from any infections or illnesses that he was exposed to." He smiled and added gently, "I am a father myself, I understand how it must sound. Exposure in-utero, congenital effects. But our country is proof that those words aren't always negative. Your son, and any other children you have while in possession of the shield, will be healthy and strong, with exceptionally high immune systems."

Steve had to admit... that was not something he could complain about. Though there were a great deal of implications he needed to think about for bit. But he could worry about his personal business later. "Three pregnant women came with us," he said. "If we stay here..."
W'Kabi was already nodding. "Ms. Potts is too far along for any impact. Mrs. Maximoff was the second? I couldn't begin to tell you given Mr. Maximoff's preexisting enhancements." He tilted his head. "Whomever the third is is not showing yet, so in that case, yes."

Sharon put a hand over her mouth but he could tell by her eyes she was hiding a smile. "Oh my God, Darcy is going to be so excited to have a super-baby."

"I'm happy to speak to the other parent and answer any questions."

"It's the Bennets, Darcy and Cal," Steve said.

"Have you spoken to Amanda?" Sharon asked, apparently recovered.

"I am meeting with her when we're done here."

"Then I think we should have a conversation about the business at hand," T'Challa said. "But my sister spoke with Dr. Banner and discovered you did not know about the full capabilities of vibranium. It seemed wise to discuss this first."

"We appreciate it," Sharon said. "Thank you."

He and Sharon walked back to their rooms together, both quiet. "You know what I keep thinking about?" Steve asked.

"That time we had sex pretty much on top of the shield?"

He laughed. "No, but that's a wonderful memory. You think the vibranium made it better? You almost flipped me on your own."

"I like to think that's training and a good idea of center of gravity. But maybe. I've spent a lot of time with it in the last few years. When we were in DC you used to leave it in the bedroom or closet." She shrugged. "It's kind of a shock, but if you think about it . . . the shield protects us even when it's not there."

"That's a nice sentiment," he said. She was, as ever, good at changing the way he looked at things. She gave his hand a squeeze. "It's not the worst news we've ever gotten."

"Anyway. What I was thinking was . . . we spent the whole winter on house arrest for nothing."

Sharon laughed. "Yeah. I'm really annoyed now."
They collected their baby from Violet, Sharon nursed him and they took him through his bedtime routine. He was young enough the change of location didn't phase him at all. His BabyPod had come along—all of them had been packed—so his bed was the same. Joey was a happy camper.

T'Challa had requested a meeting with "Whichever one of you is in charge." He and Tony had debated it and decided to go together, since there were different definitions of "in charge". And over the years, he'd learned that when they argued the right answer was almost universally in the middle, like they were two poles pulling the compass to point in the right direction.

Tony was waiting for him in front of T'Challa's office, in a black business suit, of all things, though sans tie. He was tapping away at something on this phone but tucked it away when Steve approached. "They gave Pepper, Doc and I a tour of their birthing facilities. I have never actually seen Amanda giddy as a school girl but that did it. I have video, in case anyone doubts me."

"How is Pepper doing?"

"In the best mood I've seen in a while, she's been officially released from bed rest."

"Ready to be outnumbered?"

"Probably not, but ready to have them on the outside rather than in."

The door opened and one of T'Challa's assistants stepped out. "His Highness will see you now."

Tony gestured for Steve to go first and he followed right after. The King was at his window, looking out at the dark jungle that spread before them. He turned and registered a moment of surprise at seeing both of them. "Captain Rogers. Mr. Stark. Thank you for meeting with me."

"We're co-captains of the Rugby Team," Tony said.

T'Challa gave them an amused look. "That's a sport of some sort?"

"And I tried so hard to be non-America centric."

"Tony and I share leadership. What we do and the number of people we're responsible for is too much for one person."

"Admirable," he replied. The part about how they also sometimes squabbled about the details of things and probably wanted to gut-check what the other agreed to wasn't going to come up in this meeting. Family matters were just that. They presented a united front to strangers. They'd never discussed it, but somehow it always went that way. "Have a seat, please." He gestured to a couple of comfortable-looking leather couches. "Would either of you like a drink?"

"I always want a drink," Tony said, taking a seat at one of the couches. He patted the cushion next to him, giving Steve a cocky grin when the king's back was turned.

"I'll take one, too," Steve said, even though booze didn't work on him. It was social and polite.

T'Challa poured them both glasses of clear liquid on the rocks. "How is everyone settling in?"

"Well as can be expected," Tony said, taking his glass. "Amanda is in love with your medical facilities, Bruce's kid is making friends with your nephew, and our shrink is making the rounds."
"We have been receiving messages from your State Department all day. They are, shall we say, put out."

"They almost caught us as we were leaving," Steve said. "I'm not surprised they figured out where we went."

"They probably tracked the plane via satellite," Tony said. "It's like a container ship with wings, not exactly full of stealth."

"That too." Steve sipped his drink. "You courted a lot of trouble inviting us here."

"We have had trouble before," he said with a smile. "And we believe in doing the right thing."

"So it's entirely altruism?" Tony asked.

T'Challa swirled his glass, and the ice cubes clinked. "I am a very young king," he said. "By Wakandan standards. It's a position generally held by elders. My father himself hadn't been king very long. Then he was assassinated. He was on a safari on the edges of our territory. We have some of the most heavily guarded borders in the world. The shot came from some distance, perhaps from over the border in Kenya. The list of places where they train snipers of that caliber is reasonably short."

Steve was starting to wonder if this was all some sort of weird revenge thing. He noticed Tony hadn't so much as sipped his drink. "When was this?"

"Four years ago. After the alien invasion in your country, SHIELD approached us and asked for large quantity of vibranium to make weapons. We turned them down. We were planning on opening diplomatic relations however. Just because we didn't trust SHIELD didn't mean we might not be needed to help defend the planet from Bast-knows what. My father's death set political opinion back years. Decades maybe. Seal the borders and raise the walls, went the popular sentiment. Just, as it turned out, what they wanted."

Tony was fiddling with his watch, Steve was determinedly not looking at him. "Hydra wanted you off the chess board," Tony ventured. "If they couldn't get their hands on the metal, they didn't want anyone to have it."

"Precisely. I had my suspicions, at the time, but it took the vast trove of data dumped on the internet for us to have full confirmation."

"Off the books or on?" Steve asked, feeling his stomach clench. Hydra had plenty of hitmen. But the number of them who could single-shot kill over that kind of distance, with that kind of accuracy, in those kinds of conditions was very, very small.

"I'm sorry?"

"Was it an official SHIELD mission?" Steve asked. "Or a secret Hydra mission?"

Beside him, Mr. Subtlety clarified, "He's trying to figure out which of our highly skilled sniper friends we're going to need to defend from you avenging your dad. 'Cause it was almost certainly one of 'em."

He pinched his brow. "Jesus, Tony."

"If I wanted to kill either Mr. Barton or Mr. Barnes, I would have just come and killed them, and not invited all of you here to watch like a Roman Circus," T'Challa said.
"You can see how we'd be concerned. Our pleasant chat seemed to be veering into veiled threats territory and neither of is in the mood."

Fortunately, T'Challa mostly looked amused. "Ms. Potts does most of the negotiating for your company, doesn't she?"

Tony just gave him his fake PR grin.

"My wife does the negotiating with our government," Steve said. "I'd have brought her if I'd known this would be one."

"It isn't. In my culture we like to tell a full story, is all. It was a Hydra operation. They never named their assassins in their files. From everything else we learned about their methods, I simply don't think they had names. They weren't considered human."

Steve had to clear his throat before answering. "That matches what we know of them." He glanced at Tony. "We've both read some of the files."

"Doc's read them all," Tony commented. "And when she had one of the Hydra guys in front of her she almost tortured him. So yeah, nasty."

"Hydra, as it turned out, was being run by the US Secretary of Defense. I know your government has disavowed him and the elections changed the people in charge. But I am still left to wonder, how dirty is your government? How far did the tentacles stretch?"

Steve and Tony exchanged a look. "I don't think Ross is Hydra. . . ."

Tony snorted. "Maybe not, but he doesn't have the best track record with integrity. As an Abomination in Alaska would tell you, were he capable of speech."

"There was also the incident in which your vice president was part of a plot to assassinate your president," T'Challa commented, sipping his drink.

Steve looked over at him. "You think someone is trying to take us off the board."

"If they cannot control you—and they must know that they can't—there's only one other option."

"They had enhanced fighters," Tony said. "When they came after us. Their Plan B is already in place. They just need to get us out of the way." He shoved off the couch and started to pace away. "That's why the accords were over the top. That's why they left Sharon in the cold. We were never supposed to sign them."

Steve shook his head. "Did they really think we'd just disperse?"

"Well," Tony said, "They were also going to take the powerful ones for assessment and I assume lock them in a box."

"And you wanted to negotiate." Steve shouldn't have said it, but it just came out.

It got him an arch look in return. "I wanted to keep the family together. It seemed the best option until we got the invite to Fantasy Island here."

"Out of curiosity," T'Challa asked. "Am I Ricardo Montalban or Tattoo?"

"Montalban, all the way."

Yeah, T'Challa was gonna fit in just fine.
"It would be dishonest not to admit a small part of my offer was motivated by taking something your government had, and was about to ruin to boot."

"That's a motivation I can respect," Tony said, swigging some of his drink. "More than altruism anyway."

"Tony likes people to have dark sides," Steve said.

T'Challa inclined his head. "Balance is important. There is no shadow without the sun."

Tony gestured at him while looking at Steve. "He says it nicer."

"Our language uses a lot of metaphor as a matter of course. I've been told translated into English things sound poetic."

"I don't think that's entirely a bad thing." Tony wandered over to the bar to help himself. "Back on topic. What happens now? I mean, I guess we could just be a new wing of your army, but we wouldn't be particularly effective overseas."

"Right now, I think you just put your lives in order. Spend time with your families. Your wife is about to give birth, yes? I imagine that will keep you busy for a minute there."

"Eh, she and Doc do most of the work." It was said in the blasé tone that meant he was quietly freaking out about that. Steve made a mental note to ask Lani to touch base with him sooner rather than later.

"We are also going to need to speak with your government eventually. I expect you may wish to be part of the conversation about what to say."

"Absolutely," Steve said. "Though maybe we don't let Tony choose any of the actual language." He grinned and lifted his glass at Steve in a toast.

*  

**Lani**

The dream was nice. There were tropical breezes blowing. She might be in Hawaii.

"Lani."

She didn't know where Sam's voice was coming from. She couldn't see him. She wanted to tell him to come lay on the beach with her, but no sound came out.

"Honey, wake up."

She looked at her feet. She had a mermaid's tail instead of regular legs. But that was all right. It's not like her legs worked anyway.

"There is someone putting ketchup on their sushi."

Her eyes snapped open to find Sam leaning over the chaise lounge she'd been sunbathing on. Clearly, she'd nodded off. "That's gross, don't say that."

"I said it because I knew it would wake you up."

"That's not a good enough reason."
He sat on the end of her chaise, and picked up the book she'd dropped. She'd fallen asleep while reading it. She'd managed to grab a couple of minutes to herself, and thought a little fresh air, direct sunlight, and something to focus on might refresh her. Apparently, her body had decided she needed to nap instead. She was supposed to see Sharon any minute now, she was probably already late. "I rescheduled her," Sam said before she could even open her mouth.

She sighed. "Did I miss anyone else?"

"No, but Sharon and I had a nice conversation about loved ones failing at self-care."

"Oh, well, at least she got some sort of therapy." She closed her eyes. "You think I'm overdoing it?"

He reached out to rub her arm. "Lil' bit, yeah."

He was almost certainly correct. Hence trying to carve out a few minutes for herself and falling asleep. "People are very stressed out. It doesn't feel right turning them away if they come see me."

"I know. That's why I'm being the bouncer. You can't help anyone if you burn out. Anybody really can't handle their shit for one afternoon can go to Doc for a dose of Xanax to get them to tomorrow."

That made her chuckle. "I suppose they survived without me for years. They can wait a day or two."

"You are a person with needs, too," he told her.

"I know." She reached out and caught his hand, stroking her thumb along the back. "Speaking of, did you wake me up just to inform me you were taking on bodyguard duties?"

"I woke you up because we're an inch north of the equator, it's noon, and half of your genes are from a pasty northern-latitudes people."

"I put on sunscreen," she protested, but reached out for him to help her back to her hover chair.

"I asked if they had any umbrellas, and everyone looked at me like I was an idiot and said it's not raining."

Lani laughed, fiddling with her controls to follow him back inside. "Maybe we can have Tony invent one. One that hovers and can follow the paler members of the club around."

He sat on the end of their bed so he could look her in the eye. "How are you doing?"

"I'm tired," she said immediately, because it was the prevailing emotion. "I'm sad that all of this happened, and angry, for the same reason. I'm trying to find reason and look at the bigger picture, so I can help others do the same. And I'm shaken up that something like this could happen right under our noses and no one figured it out until too late." Steve and Tony had told the lot of them at breakfast what they suspected about the government trying to horrify them on purpose. It made a lot of sense.

"I find it strangely comforting, thinking about it."

Her brows went up. "That your government betrayed you and tried to get the team to disband?"

"That this was a mind fuck, and they knew it was over the top. As opposed to the US government sincerely wanting to tag and track children like pieces of merchandise."

There was, she supposed, merit to that. "Objectively, that is probably more evil, if less machiavellian."
"We'd become a tribe, and I expect that made them very nervous."

"Soldiers having more loyalty to each other than the government backing them has always made politicians nervous," she said. "It's a common theme, in brass and regular soldiers." She tilted her head as something clicked over in her head. "Huh."

One eyebrow went up. "Huh?"

"Sorry, I just had a thought. I'm not sure if it makes it better or worse." He hiked the brow higher and gestured expectantly so she continued, "Who triggered Bucky?"

He shook his head. "No idea. There were no cameras in that ballroom, and nobody remembers seeing anything. Dead end."

"Right. So, if the government had this plan, this horrific booklet with over the top demands designed to horrify the team into defying them, would they really just wait around for something terrible to happen so they could use it? Or is it more likely that it would put the wheels in motion for the Avengers to make some very public mistakes?"

"You think they triggered him?"

She frowned, second guessing herself a little. But Sam wasn't the type to mock her for a silly theory, so she pressed on, thinking out loud. "Someone had to trigger him. His phrases are series of unrelated words, in a variety of languages. Not something that happens accidentally. And if he'd actually attacked or killed T'Challa it would have caused an international incident we couldn't have protected him from. The perfect opportunity to come at the team with unreasonable demands."

"Instead we handled it." He frowned. "Then Lagos happened."

"Which was a situation with no good ending. Rumlow either gets away with a biological weapon or sets off a suicide vest or both. The fact that Wanda tried to contain it and failed only made blaming you all easier." She spread her hands. "Maybe I'm wrong. Maybe they're coincidences or unconnected. Or maybe they were responsible for one and not the other. There's a lot of options. But if Bucky is a dead end maybe Lagos isn't. Rumlow was a mercenary, wasn't he? Someone had to hire him."

Sam grinned at her. "Have I told you how hot I find you when you're being smart?"

As a modern, self actualized woman her self worth was not tied to how hot he found her. But damn, did she enjoy it when he smiled like that. "I'm told smart is sexy."

"However, since my role on this team is to be the voice of reason, at least one of us is going to have a nice nap before we get the rest of them all fired up."

She laughed and nodded. "We could nap together," she offered.

He sighed, and she realized how tired he looked. She been running ragged, and he'd stayed up however long she did. "That sounds like great idea."

Without another word, she cruised over to the bed and heaved herself into it. He didn't hesitate to join her, kicking off his shoes and laying down. She did her usual adjustments to get comfortable and he tucked an arm around her. "Thank you for taking care of me," she murmured.

"I take care of a lot of people," he replied. "You are the most worth it."
She sighed and nuzzled his shoulder. He rubbed her back in little circles and she closed her eyes relaxing into him. Maybe she'd get back to that mermaid dream.
Whatever the rest of them were talking about, it was so engrossing that even Wanda had forgotten to loop him in. Which he understood. She wasn't an interpreter. She was stressed and exhausted and as likely as not to be at the center of whatever was going on. Didn't make for the most enjoyable dinner, though. He really, really wished he'd learned to be better at lip reading.

His parents were wealthy, and he'd had an interpreter nearly all his life. Dragging Chuck to the ass end of the world hadn't seemed like a good idea, though the reply to his email about what had happened insisted that he totally would have packed up Matt and moved them to Africa.

Still, it had been a long time since Zev had felt this isolated. Most of the group had picked up some ASL, but he primarily relied on Chuck unless he was talking to a handful of people. Even the Wakandas who spoke English often didn't read or write it well enough to communicate via notepad. Trying to find the extra towels yesterday had been an exercise in frustration.

Not much to do but eat his dinner. The guest mansion/palace thing they were staying in came with a chef and kitchen staff that made delicious meals for them, but they had to eat in shifts. Darcy managed the schedule, which seemed to be loosely organized by orbit from what he'd seen of the list. Tony was supposed to be in the first dinner shift, but he'd crashed this one instead. Hence, Zev imagined, the intense topic.

A napkin landed in front of him and he looked up to see Lani, seated across from him and a couple seats down, waving at him. "Sorry, I noticed you look bored. Wanda's not broadcasting, is she?"

Lani knew ASL fluently, thanks to an information transfer from Wanda. It was the only way she could effectively be his therapist.

He glanced at Wanda, who was gesturing at Tony with both hands, then looked back at Lani. "What's going on?"

"We have a theory that the government caused Bucky's triggering and/or the bombing in Lagos. Setting up the team so that they could spring the new restrictions on them."

"I can see why that has her full attention."

"Yes. They're debating how likely it is, if they were really behind both, and how to prove it."

Wanda had been so heartbroken about what happened in Lagos. He had no idea if it would feel better or worse that it was a deliberate set up and not an accident. He reached over to squeeze her hand in support.

She stopped in what appeared to be mid-sentence and looked over at him. Oh my God, I'm sorry. I forgot.

Pay attention to the discussion. You can fill me in later.

He felt a little wave of guilt, but she squeezed his hand and turned back to the others. The most important thing he did was keep her calm, right now, and he didn't need to follow the conversation to do that. Might even be better if he didn't.

*
"There was no list," Amanda said. "Each handler had his own words programmed in from memory." She looked uncomfortable—at least, in her self-contained way—talking about how Hydra had built the triggers into her husband. Years ago she and Barnes had gone searching for his past and found one of the original doctors, Hans Hesse, alive and healthy thanks to having given himself a dose. The interrogation had provided pretty much all the information they had on the Winter Soldier project and history.

"Handlers are all dead," Bucky said. "I went on a . . . spree before Steve found me."

"All right," Steve said. "But clearly someone has trigger words. They got them from somewhere. Could Hesse have been lying to you?"

"Unlikely," Amanda replied grimly. "He was pretty well broken by then."

"And then you killed him and tossed him in the Pacific, I assume."

"No," Bucky said. "I left him for Coulson and the proto-SHIELD group he was running at the time."

"Last time I checked, he was in the RAFT." She paused and sucked her teeth and looked at Bucky. "Are you sure you got all the handlers? Your memory was still spotty at the time, and you had a lot of years worth."

Tony was only paying attention with one ear, because he'd gotten distracted jury-rigging his tablet into spitting out real-time subtitles. Zev had long insisted he preferred a person and not FRIDAY translating for him, but now he looked bored and annoyed enough he'd probably take it. But that caught his attention. "Wait, he's in the RAFT?"

She looked over. "I requested he go somewhere relatively accessible, in case I had other questions. Especially once I figured out why he was doing virology research."

"Also accessible to other government types who might want to get information from him. Like trigger phrases."

Rubbing her forehead she repeated, "He only knew the one and it wasn't a compliance trigger, it was a shut down. Only handlers had compliance triggers."

"Did he know anything about the handlers?"

The discomfort was clearly growing. Bucky reached over and rubbed her neck. "Um. They rotated them every few years so he didn't get attachments. Right after the war they were mostly German, during and immediately after the Cold War they were Russian. The last ten years had been American. Pierce had been trained as one, though preferred to keep a buffer between them. They usually invented their own trigger, a string of five to ten random words in their native language, except for the very early ones like Hesse's, which had to be in English so James would understand them. Compliance triggers were used as part of mission prep, usually immediately after he got out of stasis." She swallowed. "They were more effective when coupled with electroshock but for basic commands you could use them at anytime. Scientists and doctors were taught more basic shut-down commands in the event that the Asset went rogue and attacked them."

Bucky sighed. "I don't know, maybe I did miss one. But how the hell do I know what I'm forgetting?"

"Do you want me to look?" Wanda asked quietly.
He sighed again, shoulders slumping. Tony imagined there was a limit to how much poking around in his head he was willing to put up with and they were rapidly reaching that point.

"What about coming at this from the other end?" Nat asked. "Someone hired Rumlow. That's gotta be an easier to trail to follow then one that might be decades old."

"This is my problem with the The Government Did It theory," Sharon said. "That they don't have plenty of evil, but there were plenty of other ways to get us than risking starting another Ebola epidemic. Remember how the country freaked out last time?"

"Isn't freaking out what they want?" Steve asked.

From the other end of the table, Lani piped up, "Almost certainly. It needed to be high stakes, both for the consequences and to get a large number of you on the mission. I imagine choosing Rumlow was also a deliberate choice. Make it personal."

"As infections diseases go, Ebola is scary but containable," Amanda added. "There are at least half a dozen more infectious and harder to contain samples held at the Lagos center that would make far more effective bio weapons."

"That certainly makes it look less likely that getting a biological weapon was the goal," Steve said. "Maybe that's why they gave Rumlow that deal."

Tony knew Steve was mad Rumlow had been allowed to turn state's evidence against Hydra, which permitted him to be out on bail despite everything during the fall of SHIELD, and later coming back to try and kill Sharon. Predictably, he'd skipped town.

"Specifically to bait us two years later?" Sharon asked. "Sokovia hadn't even happened yet."

"No, I think you're right," Nat said. "Rumlow was probably just coincidental gravy."

"So it would have to be a third party."

Tony looked over at Clint, then the rest of the table. "If T'challa's people can get us a lead, Clint and I could chase it. We've the best chance of staying under the radar."

"I should go," Wanda said.

Half the table started to shake their heads. "I'd put you, Bruce, and Bucky at the top of their list," Nat said. "You've got good cover here, you should stay in it."

"I can read minds. I can get everything out of anyone you point me at."

A disturbingly naked admission of what she was capable of. Not that they didn't all know it. It just wasn't usually discussed. Desperate times and all. Tony pulled himself to his feet and went around the table to drop his tablet in front of Zev. "You'll want to be part of this discussion," he said, and the words appeared on the screen.

"There are a lot of ways to get people to tell us what we need," Nat said.

"I am a member of this team," Wanda protested. "If my powers are useful-"
"You are a member of this team and this team protects each other."

Tony had sort of expected Zev to be on team Wanda Stays Home, so was surprised when he computerized voice from the tablet said, "It's not likely anyone that spots her could hurt her even if they could catch her. Which they can't."

It was obvious by who jumped who hadn't noticed Tony setting Zev up with the tablet. "Wanda is very powerful," Amanda said. "But she'd not indestructible. Nor is she without weaknesses."

"That's true of anybody."

"Yes, it is. However, if most of us were captured we would be put in prison somewhere, interrogated, encouraged to turn in the rest of us. I'm concerned - more than concerned - that Wanda would be drugged and experimented on." Amanda spat out the words like they tasted bad. "Not everyone's worst case scenario is the same."

"Yeah, I'm in favor of you staying here," Pietro said, and Wanda glared at him.

"I know you want to help," Nat said quietly. "And if the water was slightly less hot, I'd have you come along, if only to learn there's more to being a spy than a baseball cap and hoodie. But the risk doesn't match the reward. Clint and I can do this. This is what we're good at and trained for. And if we need back up then we'll call for it. But I'm thinking this is a situation that requires a scalpel, not a chainsaw."

Tony looked over at Steve. One of them probably should render a verdict before this became a full fledged argument. Probably Steve, because he was better at being the bad guy. In that he somehow managed to not sound like the bad guy. Tony still had claim to any situation that required Full Asshole. But Steve was also prone to doing illogical, bull-headed things from time to time. He really hoped now wasn't one of those times.

Wanda twitched her fingers and the rice from her plate floated up, one grain at a time, setting themselves into a snowflake pattern in front of her. She moved her finger in a circle and they spun, then returned to her plate. She seemed to be having a silent conversation with Zev, though it was not obvious who was arguing what.

That display was, he had to admit, more scalpel than chainsaw. Maybe they were deploying Wanda wrong. They weren't really compelled to hide half her skills now, were they? Before he could open his mouth to be the good guy for once, Steve finally spoke. "Nobody's going anywhere."

Nat and Wanda's heads both swiveled to look at him, with matching looks of incredulity. "Nobody?"

"We're all famous. Nobody is safe out there. T'Challa has a very robust Intelligence Service he'd kindly allowed us to make use of. Anybody interesting we'll have them nabbed and brought here."

There was silence all around the table. Nat looked decidedly unhappy, which meant she wanted Steve, and everyone else, to know she wasn't happy. Nat had a control streak sometimes, and didn't handle idleness well. She must have really wanted to go break some thumbs.

She stood. "I met the head of the IS yesterday. I'll go touch base, tell him what we're looking for."

She didn't wait for a reply before leaving.

"We gonna hide here forever?" Tony asked.

"I'm just trying to be careful," Steve said.
"I feel like the fabric of reality might be ripping," Bucky muttered.

That got the briefest ghost of a smile from Steve. Sharon reached over and rubbed his back. "There's sense in not poking our head out until we have a compelling reason. Risk and reward applies to lots of things."

"Sitting around doing nothing doesn't sit right," Tony said. "Least not with everyone."

"Clearly," Bucky muttered, gesturing at Nat's now empty seat with his chin.

"We don't all have to be doing nothing," Steve said. "T'Challa has given us run of the palace grounds and their research and medical labs. Team Science should have plenty to do."

There was The Machine to work on.

"And everyone else twiddles their thumbs?" Bucky asked. It didn't sound like a jab.

"There's a big jungle to explore. The army, or warrior class, trains in the morning and afternoon. No matter what happens with this investigation, we're almost certainly here for the long haul. Never too early to start settling in."

Tony's phone beeped, with a message from Pepper. You done eating? It's time to start Bedtime.

The capital letter was totally intentional. "Sorry gang," he said, standing. "I gotta duck out."

His phone beeped again. And bring me a snack.

Yes, dear. He headed for the door. "Let me know if we start any international incidents."

Ruby traveled a lot, for a toddler. Pepper took her along on a lot of her business travel, and she always came wherever the both of them went. When he was a kid, he was left home with a nanny when his parents went anywhere, even for long trips. Ruby went with them, though he had no idea how that was going to work with three of them.

Her Bedtime Routine was designed to be portable, so she could have consistency in strange places. She had a little box that projected a hologram of her special sleep space that could go anywhere. It was one of the few kid products he hadn't shared with the others. This was just for Ruby.

Pepper munched her snack out in their suite's living room while he tucked his daughter in and read her final story. "Daddy?" she asked.

"Last I checked. What's up?"

She giggled at that. Two and a half year olds found a lot of things funny. Then she looked solemn again. "When we going home?"

He sighed and smoothed his hands over her blankets. "I don't know, Rubes. For now, this is home."

"Why?"

Tony didn't answer right away, looking around at the hologram floating around them. "You know how Daddy and his friends help people? Save the world?" She nodded. "There are some bad people who... didn't like how we were doing that. They thought they should be able to tell us what to do. Control how we do it. And they said that if we didn't do it their way then they'd make us live apart. We didn't want to do that, but in order to stay together, we had to come here."
She digested this, then said, because she was his kid, "You and Mommy tell me what to do."

"Yes, we do. Because you are very small and still learning."

"And you are old and know everything?"

He shrugged and bobbed his head. "More or less."

More considering, then, "You didn't know how much water was in the lake. You asked FRIDAY."

"Part of knowing everything is delegating."

Ruby yawned. "I miss FRIDAY."

What was it with little girls and AIs? "I will get you a tablet or something with her on it."

"Promise?"

"Cross my heart," he said sincerely.

"Okay." She sighed contentedly and closed her eyes. Life was so simple when you were that young, secure that someone would take care of you. "Goodnight, Daddy."

He leaned down and kissed her head. "Night, Princess."
"Seriously, this is the best thing I've ever eaten."

Cal looked over at Darcy. She was sitting on a divan chair crossed legged, holding half of some exotic fruit and eating the insides out of it with a spoon. It appeared to be a consistency somewhere between mango and vanilla pudding. "You say that about all the food here. And how many of those have you had?"

"This is my second." She paused. "Today."

"Is that one of the plants that gives special powers?"

"No, apparently all of those taste like ass. They bred them like that."

"I could see how they wouldn't want to accidentally fill the jungle with hordes of super-powered monkeys."

"I might try to choke one down," she said, scooping more out. "This kid is the product of two asthmatic nerds. Could use all the help it can get."

He looked over at her. "I hear we're going to get some of that just being here."

"If was stay as long as everyone says we're going to, yeah. Which is... weird, if I think about it too long."

"Staying here? Or having a Superbaby?"

"Yes," she said around a mouthful of fruit.

He sighed. "I feel like there's going to be a lot of adjusting once the shock wears off."

"Probably." After scraping the flesh a minute she sucked her spoon dry and put the remains of her snack down on a side table. "How are you holding up?"

"Not bad. My back feels better." The rushed packing and move had been brutal on him. But the time they got on the plane he had to lay down in bunk she'd set side for herself because sitting was painful. He'd felt really, really bad taking the bed from his exhausted, pregnant wife, but if he hadn't he probably wouldn't have even been able to walk off the plane.

"Steve has given orders or permission or whatever for us to start... integrating. If you want to go run barefoot through their tech labs I could tag along."

He grinned at her. "So you want to go push buttons?"

"You know how I like to push buttons. Maybe they'll have big red ones."

"I was just thinking... it was never made clear to me if we're supposed to get jobs, or do we still work for Stark? And god knows what's going on with that, anyway, with both Tony and Pepper here."

Darcy stretched her legs out. "Last I talked to Pepper she was exhausted and ready to pop like that"
guy in Alien. I don't think she wants to talk shop. Probably too early to be worried about it, but right now we're guests. No jobs needed."

"You seem to be working quite a bit," he pointed out gently.

"A den mother's job is never done." He let his silence speak for itself and she added, defensively, "Lani's working more."

"Yeah, well. Given what's happened Lani probably needs to clone herself."

Darcy nodded, then stood, moving to join him on the bed. "Someone needs to coordinate stuff. Everyone is scared and confused and shocked. They don't know what they need or what they forgot to pack. So if I can help that, by anticipating a need or two, then that's what I'm going to do."

"It wasn't a complaint. I'm happy you're useful. I wish I could be useful, too."

"Aww." She rubbed his back. "I'm sure Tony will set his lab back up."

"He did bring, like, everything. Making decisions was freaking him out so we just packed it all."

"I imagine helping him sort it out will entertain you for a while."

"You entertain me, too."

She grinned. "Even all hormonal and pregnant and constantly gorging?"

"I can't fathom what part of that you think would be boring."

Nudging him with her shoulder, she said in a conspiratorial whisper, "I'm told the sex hormones really kick in in the second trimester."

He laughed. "So you'll be requiring me to service you frequently?"

"Yep. In new and interesting positions. 'Cause baby bump."

That got her a skeptical eyebrow. "Are there really positions we haven't tried yet?"

Her mouth opened, then snapped shut. "That's a very good point."

Cal leaned over to kiss her cheek. "I adore you, you know that?"

"I do. But I like to hear it." She tucked her arms through his and leaned on him. "Feeling's mutual, you know that?"

"Hang on, I need to get my phone so I can record that."

She laughed softly. "Do I not say it enough?"

"You do. But when you are in the middle of pushing our baby out your hoo-ha and start yelling at me how you wish I was never born, or that you want to pull my balls out through my nose, I will have it to remind me, and possibly you."

"You make a good point, I'm almost certainly going to threaten your manhood."

"It'll be like a sex tape, only about love instead."

Smiling, she kissed him. "This is almost certainly the hormones, but I think that's kind of sweet."
"Honey, I will take what I can get."

"How would you feel about revving up some hormones?"

*

Ora

The Guest Palace had several pools. It was hot, Ora was pregnant, and her skin was dark enough she didn't have to spend most of the day hiding from the sun. So she did a lot of swimming and floating in various pools. One of them had a very nice tree-shaded area where Wanda—who was pretty pale—would float with her every morning while Zev did laps at the other end of the pool.

The other girls would join them in various combinations, and they yakked just like they did at home. It felt almost normal, and a little bit like vacation, if you squinted your eyes and forgot a bunch of things.

One afternoon, it was her, Wanda, Lani, Amanda, and Nat, a combination that somehow got them on the topic of brain function and Tony's Memory Machine.

"The Wakandan scientists see a ton of potential in it, should they ever get it to work," Amanda said. "For medical applications. It could be a new frontier in brain research and diagnostics."

"Until someone figures out how to turn it into a weapon," Nat said.

Based on her interactions with her, Ora didn't think Nat was enjoying her pseudo vacation.

Thoughtfully, Lani said, "It would be extremely effective psychological torture."

"Manipulating someone with their own memories?" Ora asked. "Yeah, I can see that."

"It is, essentially, what I did," Wanda said. "So really, the idea started out as a weapon and has been turned into a medical device."

One of the palace staff who worked at the pools came over to ask them if they wanted more drinks. She took the order from Ora because she'd learned Wakandan. When she left, Amanda asked, "So are you fluent now?"

"Pretty much."

"You sure you're not enhanced?" Nat asked.

Ora laughed and shrugged. "Who knows, maybe I am."

Amanda was peering at her legs, probably trying to determine if she was burning or not. "I don't think there's a real way to test for it. Polyglots are rare but not so unusual as to be exceptional. We don't really have a way to determine 'gifted' from 'enhanced'. Are Tony and Ada enhanced because of their IQs and way of thinking? No way to be sure."

"The Accords seemed to think so," Nat said.

"Their brains. . . sound different," Wanda said. "They move faster. It's almost like a hum. Reading them is a little hard. Though Ora's brain is pretty weird, too."

Wanda had told her about that more than once. "I tend to think in whatever language I'm speaking," Ora said. "Which apparently groups my memories into segments by that language. Which made my
head a maze."

"Not a maze," Wanda clarified. "Like 30 separate mazes all next to each other. Sometimes the hedges grow across and sometimes they don't."

"You have entertaining descriptions of things," she replied.

"There's no one else who experiences things the way I do. No roadmap or textbook I can point people to. So I try to describe it the way it feels. Everyone's head feels a little different. Bucky's was like a house of locked doors. Yours is mazes. Tony and Ada are more like . . . busy freeways." She paused. "If you all start asking what your heads are like we're no longer friends."

There was laughter. Amanda and Lani got into a nerdy conversation/explanation about how neural pathways are created and worn in and how that probably explained the different memory structures Wanda was perceiving. Ora drifted in the cool water for a few, before something occurred to her.

She sat up a little. "Amanda. Do I remember right you said Bucky's trigger phrases were done in the handler's native language?"

"Could there be other languages?"

Her mouth opened, then she paused and tilted her head. "He had dozens of handlers over the years. Not to mention the scientists who worked closely with him. I'd be surprised if there weren't more."

"I erased all the triggers," Wanda said.

"No, I know," Ora said. "But if the pathway—be it neural or garden or hallway—was built in a different language, that language might help him remember the attached handler. Who might still be alive."

There was a moment of silence, while they all pondered that. "So we have Wanda search for other languages and have you. . . speak to him in them?"

"If he's willing," Ora said. "It's probably safer for everyone involved if he remembers himself rather than Wanda going digging."

"I agree with that," Lani said. "Hopefully it won't pull up anything ugly he doesn't want to see."

"I've seen quite enough of that already," Wanda said quietly.

"The leaked files have a list of places he was held," Nat said. "You should start with those languages. Wouldn't require Wanda poking at all."

Amanda tipped her head back. "Other than those three I've heard him speak Chinese, French, Spanish, and at least two Eastern European languages I didn't recognize."

"I know the first three, as do a variety of us, actually. Plus I can do a selection from that region. Polish, Romanian, Czech, and little Hungarian. At least enough. And I can learn others if needs be."

"I can do Ukrainian and probably Lithuanian," Nat said. "Though it's been a while."

Reaching for a towel, Amanda stood, climbing out of the pool. "I'll go talk to him, see if he knows of any others. And if he's okay with the idea. We should do it somewhere we can contain him if the worst happens, safety precautions, that sort of thing. But it's the best lead we have right now."
"Just let me know. I'll be ready," Ora said.

"I'll swing back with you once I've spoken to him." She wrapped the towel around her waist, heading towards the Guest Palace.

"And the boys think all we talk about is shoes," Nat murmured.

*

**Bucky**

"I really don't think the straps are necessary."

The Wakandan techs who were helping them with the memory jogging experiment stopped buckling the cuffs on his wrists, more at the tone of Amanda's voice than knowing what she'd said. They looked uncertainly at each other, then at him.

Bucky looked over at his wife. "I know. But there's way too many civilians in this room for me to go without."

"We don't even know if they'll hold you," she said, watching the techs continue fastening them.

"They're woven with vibranium. If they don't stop me, they'll certainly slow me down enough to clear the room."

They had him cuffed at ankle and wrist, with a strap around his waist, in a heavy chair bolted to the floor. Everything was comfortable, as far as you could be when strapped to a chair. Bucky was the one who had insisted on the restraints. It was unlikely what they were doing would trigger the Soldier, especially given the clean out Wanda had done. But given the events of recent months, he wanted to cover all the bases.

His wife looked decidedly unhappy as the techs finished and retreated to the outer room. "I feel like being strapped down is more likely to trigger you than the languages."

"Are you saying bondage is totally off the table in the bedroom?"

He'd said it mostly to make her smile, and it worked, more or less. "Careful, honey, we have an audience."

"I'm fine. I'm volunteering for this. I'm doing this memory exploration with a pregnant woman. I need to know it will be safe."

Sighing heavily, she stepped closer to kiss him gently. "All right. I'll bring Ora in." Leaning closer, she added, "And we'll make sure to keep a couple of the cuffs."

He grinned at her as she went to the door and called for Ora, then tried to think of something unsexy before they had company.

"Hello," she said, plopping in the chair. Nat came in behind her. "She's here for extra languages."

He nodded. Amanda took a spot next to him and curled her fingers around his. "We'll start with Eastern Europe, that's where you spent most of the Cold War, be the guys most likely to still be alive." She looked at Ora. "Triggers are random words, so the odds of finding them are small. I'd stick to things that might sound like mission briefings or military orders."

They went through three languages, with Ora chatting with him about his favorite gear or foodstuffs
or roads he traveled on. It was conversational but familiar. The fourth one was Romanian.

"I almost forgot. Pietro wanted to ask if you'd teach him how to hot-wire a car."

He replied in Romanian. Amanda had said it would help activate neurons, or whatnot. "Why bother, he can run faster-" He broke off as some dim memory stirred in his head. He wiggled his fingers at Ora. "Keep going, that one did something."

"About my husband being dumb or about stealing cars?"

"The cars, probably. Though if you feel the need to bitch about your husband being dumb. . ." He cut off and looked at Amanda. "There was a guy. Maybe thirty years ago. Romanian. Only for a mission or two."

"Did you kill him?" Nat asked.

Ora repeated it in Romanian. "Don't think in English."

He chased his memories, asking himself the question in Romanian. "No. He was transferred. Or I was. One mission he was there, the next he wasn't. And it was Russian again."

"What was his name?" Ora asked.

They never told him their names. But he listened and they tended to treat him like he wasn't there. He closed his eyes and tried to listen again. Men yelling at each other across a room. "Petran. Anton Petran."

Ora looked over at Nat. "That enough to go on?"

"More than," she said, getting to her feet. "Hydra agent named Anton Petran active in the nineties. I've made hits with way less."

Amanda began unbuckling him. "You going to talk to Steve."

"Since Dad said don't leave, I was thinking I'd go ask Other Dad."

He could tell Amanda didn't approve, but she just shook her head.

Ora looked from one to the other. "Tony does strike me as the Cool Dad."

"Careful where you tread, Nat," Bucky said. "You know how Steve feels about end-runs."

"He'll forgive me when I get the info we need."

He rubbed his wrists. This could go so sideways. And yet. . . "I want him found. Feel free to kill him."

"I usually do." She paused. "I'll bring Clint with me. Two are safer than one."

Once she and Ora left, he turned to his wife. "I'll talk to Steve."

She blew out a breath. "Thank you. I don't like the idea of anyone sneaking behind his back. He's not completely unreasonable."

He hoped Nat was just going to get Tony to agree first, and then tell Steve. That would probably go over better than her and Clint just sneaking out. Still. Giving Steve a heads up was a good idea.
He and Amanda left the medical ward together, but parted ways at the Guest Palace. He and Steve worked better one-on-one for this kind of thing. When he got there, Sharon seemed to be out, and Steve had Joey. "Hey. How'd it go?"

"Good, actually." He reached out and rubbed Joey's head, fluffing up the fine blond hair. "I remembered a guy. Romanian. Hit me as soon as Ora and I started talking in it."

"Someone you missed?"

"Yeah. I'd forgotten about him until now. It was during the Cold War. I was in and out a lot them. Would have meant frequent wipes. Makes sense there's some gaps."

"Seems a likely candidate. I'll talk to T'Challa about having him found."

Bucky cleared his throat. "So Nat was in the room when we figured it out. . ."

Steve pinned him with a look, and sighed. "She already gone?"

"Said she was going to go talk to Other Dad, first. I'm guessing that's Tony. And that she'd take Clint." He shrugged. "I hope she's also going to come tell you and make her case, but. . . Thought you could use a head's up."

Steve ground his teeth. "Would you watch the baby for me?"

"Yes." He held his arms out while he passed Joey to him. "But first, take a deep breath and remember she feels helpless and Nat is very much not good with helpless." Steve's jaw twitched and Bucky decided to push a little more. "She's kind of like you that way."

"I just want everyone to stay safe. If anyone got caught—" he bit off the word and bent his head. "I know." And he did. Look at the lengths they were willing to go to stay together. "But Nat and Clint. . . they were the best SHIELD had. She kept you safe when half of DC was looking for you. If there's anyone in the world who can go find this guy and not get caught, it's them."

"You think I should let them go?"

Wondering if this was going to put him on the shit list, Bucky said, "I do. We gotta get ahead of this, Steve. This is the closest thing we have to a lead. And they're volunteering to go."

He sighed heavily and shoved his hands in his pockets. "Yeah."

"I know it isn't easy to be in charge. I know you hate sending your friends into what you think is dangerous. But we can't hide here. We can't just do nothing."

"No, you're right. We need to find out what this is all really about or we'll be under house arrest indefinitely."

"Trust your team," he told him. "It's their choice."

Steve turned and looked at him, an odd look on his face. "You know, Peggy said that to me when you died. And then I said it to her when I died."

He really hoped that wasn't an omen of some sort. "Peggy was a smart cookie. And you always liked a good callback."

"We did both survive our deaths."
"We did." He bounced Joey. "And look at us now."

There was knock on Steve's door, and when he called out to come in, it turned out to be Nat. She smirked at Bucky. "Are you tattling on me?"

"Yep," he said with a smile. "I'm the good kid."

"I asked Tony," she said still with a smirk. "He asked me if I'd asked Steve."

"It's in the parent manual," Steve replied, thankfully not looking annoyed.

"It's clear I would have been a runaway no matter who raised me." She crossed her arms and gestured at Bucky. "He get you up to speed?"

He nodded. "Take Clint, stay in contact with us, and keep me updated. If you can't get what you need out of him, bring him back here and we'll have Wanda dig around in his head."

Her brows went up, but it was the only sign she was surprised. "Got it. We'll be back in a couple of days."

"Be careful," he said quietly, more pleading than commanding.

"We'll have each other's backs," she promised him.

"Okay. Good luck."

"Thanks." She nodded to both of them and turned smartly, striding out of the room.
After all the politics and fouled up missions it was somehow comforting to do some good, old fashioned spying. Her and Clint in jeans and sunglasses, wandering an Eastern European country, looking for a bad guy to beat up.

"If I was retiring from my shadowy, evil organization, I would move somewhere warmer," she said, pausing to make a show of studying the map on her phone. "Just saying. Bucharest?"

"Some people like the comfort of the familiar. And some people like cold."

"Those people are clearly evil and should be cleansed. With fire." She squinted up at the street sign. "This way."

He followed her. "Some of those people are our friends, you know. I actually don't mind the cold myself."

"You can't feel the cold."

"Fair point."

"Also, Captain America doesn't like the cold, so that automatically makes me right."

"You weren't saying that when he was against us coming out here."

Nat pursed her lips and gave him a look over the top of her sunglasses. "He saw the error of his ways."

"I don't envy him his job, I'll say that."

She sighed, shoulders rising and slumping. "I know. He and Tony are both feeling it." Making the decision to move the whole group of them to Wakanda hadn't been easy. No one had fought them, as far as she knew, but that was a lot of people and families to uproot. A lot of eyes looking to them for guidance.

"We figure out why this happened, how it started. . . maybe that will help."

"I hope so." They reached the little bungalow that was the last known address of Anton Petran. The grass was un-mowed and full of litter and there was mail sticking out of the box. "This is the place." She kicked a glass bottle sticking out of the grass. "Not a good sign."

"Coulda skipped on short notice." Even Clint didn't sound very convinced of that.

They exchanged another glance, then headed up the walk to the front door. She lifted her hand to knock, then on impulse tried the knob. It turned easily in her hand and the door opened, creaking on bent hinges.

She reached for the gun tucked at the small of her back, sure Clint already had his bow in his hand. They stepped inside, him at her back, and closed the door behind them.

There was the scent of moldy, rotten food, coming at least partially from the pizza box on the coffee table. "Not good," she muttered.
Clint wrinkled his nose. "I'm pretty sure than smell is not just the food."

"I agree." Most of their experience was of course, with fresh bodies. But you weren't in their line of work very long without running across a corpse here and there. "Old, too," she noted, putting her gun away.

The smell got stronger the deeper they got into the house. The bedroom and bathroom were empty, but there was an open door that seemed to lead down to a basement. The smell was far worse there and flies buzzed around the ceiling.

Nat sighed and dug a scarf out of her pocket, wrapping it around the lower half of her face. "I don't wanna."

"I'll go look," Clint said. "Because I love you."

Pride warred with her intense desire to not see a decomposing body. Nausea won. "I love you. I'll keep looking up here for anything useful."

Upstairs in the bedroom, she found a dusty box that had been dumped out, papers in Russian and German strewn about everywhere. She crouched and started rummaging through them, scanning for anything important. She saw words for "soldier" and "asset" and sat, shuffling through more thoroughly.

There were pages that looked like they'd been ripped out of a note book. Random lists of words in various languages. Triggers, she presumed. Hesse had told Amanda they were never written down, but he could have lied. Or they could have changed protocols after he stopped working on Bucky.

Other papers were clearly mission notes. Things that went wrong. Wipes. She came across one that looked like an inter-office memo. "Package acquired. 5 viable doses. Candidates ready for treatment."

A vague sense of dread cooled her skin.

She heard feet on the stairs, but could tell it was Clint. He was irritated, but not worried. Funny she could tell that from he walk.

"Find him?" she called, gathering up the relevant papers.

"Partially mummified," he said, and she shuddered. "Been dead a while. Probably too long a while to have set Bucky off. Whatcha got?"

"He was definitely a handler of his. There's mission notes here, scattered. I'm guessing whoever killed him took the rest. Based on what is here-" She looked up at him. "We're gonna need the others."

Now he looked worried. "Why?"

"According to this in the early nineties Hydra got a hold of some serum." She stood. "You know how the Winter Soldier was so prolific no one thought he was real?" He nodded. "That's because there's more than one."

"Oh," he murmured. "Fuck."

"Yeah. I need to call Steve, but first let's get out of here. The charnel house vibe is getting to me."
"We'll take all this with us, so it can be analyzed."

He helped her scoop up the rest of the paperwork and they made their way out of the house. "Should we call in a tip to the cops? About the body?"

Clint was shaking his head. "Not worth the risk if they end up on this same trail. I want us to be able to chase it with anonymity if we need to."

She felt a little pang at leaving the guy there. He had clearly been an evil shit in life, but leaving him to rot in his basement didn't sit well. Shades of her old life, she supposed. There had been a long time when she didn't have anyone that would bury her. "Back to the hotel, then. Get in touch with base, figure out next steps."

He reached out to take her hand, a kind and familiar gesture. "When it's all over, we'll call."

Her fingers wove through his instinctively. It shouldn't surprise her he knew where her thoughts had gone. "All right."

There was nothing romantic about a run-down motel in Bucharest, but curling up next to him made her happy—even as they had knockoff ramen noodles and stale cookies for dinner while waiting for a response from Wakanda. "I've kind of missed spying," he told her. "It's been a while."

"You know, I was thinking the same thing? Oddly comforting. Like wearing a favorite shirt you'd lost for a while."

"We were world class at it."

"Yes, we were." She rubbed her hand along his arm, fingertips tracing the tendons in his forearm. "Wakanda has a really impressive intelligence agency."

She could feel him shift to look at her. "And yet here we are."

"Yeah." She sighed. "If we do get stuck there... might be a job option."

He looked surprised. "Famous as we are, going back to being spies?"

"You aren't visually famous and I'm a chameleon. We managed to do this." She gestured to the awful hotel. "And we're public enemy one."

"You always did like to live dangerously, didn't you?" he asked, chuckling a little.

"Certainly gets the blood pumping." She tucked a little closer to him. "Anyway, it was just a thought. I suppose we could do desk work."

"I miss clandestine mission sex," he told her. "I know, I know. Disaster and upheaval and I should get my mind out of the gutter. But clandestine mission sex was fun."

Nat chuckled. "Yes, it was. We should find a way to replicate it."

"We need danger, adrenaline, possibly costumes, and hotel room." He nuzzled her neck. "Not too tall of an order."

"I bet Bucky would be willing to shoot some blanks at us if we didn't tell him why."

"I think he'd figure it out."
"He'd probably still be okay with it."

Clint shifted to lean against the headboard. "I like it, though. The idea of doing intelligence work again. We should talk to the Wakandans. I want to be useful and not just a permanent guest."

Sometimes it was a nice reminder how good they were as partners. Despite their different styles they usually ended up at the same conclusion. "I'm sure they'll find something to do with us."

"T'Challa has said they want to make use of our talent. This... is a lot of ours."

"True. We'd be good trainers, or handlers, too. Though that doesn't solve the clandestine mission sex."

"Would it be wrong to point out we're kind of on a clandestine mission now."

She grinned. "I don't think it would be wrong. I'm not the one who saw a mummy today, though."

And now she had his undivided attention. And a wandering hand. "When has gross ever derailed my libido?"

"There was that one time," she murmured, stretching up to kiss him. "At the meat rendering plant."

He had his hands under her shirt. "That doesn't count. I couldn't get the smell out of my nose."

"Mmm." He tugged again and she lifted her arms so he could pull her shirt off.

He sighed contentedly, and the sound made her happy. "I adore you."

She kissed his jaw, rolling so she was on top of him. "I love you. Everyday."

*

*Sharon*

She really didn't think they could take any more bad news.

Steve and Bucky sat stone faced as Nat went over the paperwork they'd found in Romania. More Winter Soldiers. Five of them. Out in the world somewhere about to be woken up by someone who had gone through an awful lot of trouble to find them.

"The papers list three different holding sites," Nat said. "Two in Siberia and one in what is now Kazakhstan. Nothing indicate which is more likely to have them currently. If there was information on that, he took it with him."

"Could they be split up?" Tony asked. "Seems logical."

"It doesn't say," Nat replied with a sigh. "I don't disagree."

"I probably know," Bucky said. "It's probably in here." He tapped the side of his head.

"Maybe not," Amanda said. "They aren't mentioned in any of the files about you. Not once. I would have noticed. I'd lay odds they kept you separate from them."

"It would be useful to know who they are," Steve said. "Are they captives? Or volunteers?"

"The paperwork refers to them as Candidates," Nat said. "No names or details."
"That's pretty standard for Hydra and their assassins."

"We need to go find them," Sharon said. "Right? Five super soldiers trained like Bucky? That's a recipe for global disaster."

"We need to find them," Steve said. "I'm just wondering if we catch them or kill them."

"Kill them," Bucky said immediately. Steve looked over at him in surprise.

"You breaking my programming was a fluke," Bucky said before Steve could ask. "A product of how close we were for most of our lives. There's no guarantee these Soldiers will have anyone like that."

"If they were volunteers they probably never did," Amanda said.

"And if they were prisoners anyone who was close to them is likely dead," Nat added.

"If they are victims all we can do is save them from being used as a weapon," Clint said quietly.

Steve looked across the table at Sharon, like he was looking for opposition or agreement or encouragement. Sometimes it was hard to tell what he wanted, but she could always tell what he needed.

"If they're volunteers then they're enemy soldiers and need to be dealt with accordingly," she said. "If they're victims... I think Clint is right. The best thing to do is end it."

He nodded. "All right. Search and destroy it is."

"This is all super illegal," Tony commented. "Just, you know, to be clear. Not that I mind."

"Maybe, maybe not," T'Challa said from the spot over by the window where he'd been lurking. "You have at least been authorized by a government. I suppose Russia could consider it an act of war. So, try not to get caught."

"We're usually pretty good at that," Sharon said with a smile.

"We take the bases one at a time," Steve said, Cap voice in full effect. "If they're all together, and awake when we get there... we're going to want a full team."

"Any clues where to start?" Amanda asked, gesturing to the papers.

"One of the Siberia locations," Bucky said. "The cryo tanks need power and maintenance. Someone to look after that. Kazakhstan's been kind of unstable the last decade or two, infrastructure included. Hydra would have moved them."

"Narrows it down a little," Sharon muttered. "And out of the way locations will mean less civilian casualties."

"That is the best news I've heard all day," Tony said.

Bucky shifted in his seat. "How soon can we leave?"

"As soon as we can get gear together," Steve replied. He looked over at T'Challa. "Your Highness?"

"The morning," he said. "And I'm coming with you."

Steve, Tony, and several others all began to talk over each other in an attempt to hesitantly and
politely talk him out of that. Having had a detailed discussion with the doctors about what vibranium enhancements could be capable of, she wasn't at all surprised when he rolled his eyes, leaned over and braced his hand on the underside of his massive granite-topped desk and lifted it up one-handed. He put it back down smoothly and added, "I have a vibranium suit. Also, that wasn't a request."

There was a moment of silence, then Nat said, "Well, more the merrier."

That seemed to settle it and everyone started to get up, talking amongst themselves, to go cobble together suits and weapons.

Steve came around the table to Sharon. "It might be a good idea if you stayed," he said carefully.

"I was planning on it," she said. "I don't think bad guys allow for pump breaks."

"Probably not, no."

"I don't even know that I could do a roundhouse kick while engorged." He smiled a little. "I will hold down the fort. And please appreciate how much I love you that I didn't string you along about this."

"I always feel like a jackass when I ask. You're a great fighter and an asset."

"Someday I'll kick ass at your side again."

Bruce came up to them as they reached the hallway. "I can't go."

Steve turned to look at him in surprise. "What do you mean you can't go?"

"Hulk doesn't want to leave the kids. He refuses to go."

Steve rubbed his forehead and sighed. "Well, my lizard brain, were it driving the bus, would do the same, so I can't entirely blame him. I know keeping him contained through the encounter with Ross, and calmly on the plane instead of fighting out at the compound was a feat. So, we'll figure it out."

"I'm sorry," Bruce said, sounding honestly contrite.

"It's all right. Aren't you technically on your honeymoon?"

"For two more days, yes."

Steve smiled. "Don't worry about it, then. Go spend time with your wife."

"Thank you." Bruce clapped him on the arm. "If you think you can't do it without us, call. I'll try to talk him into it."

"I admit I'd feel better if Thor were here, but I think we'll be all right."

He nodded and walked off towards his room.

Sharon tucked her arm though Steve's. "I think the day is coming when he's going to retire. For good."

They started to walk back to their room. The King had kindly made a couple of Wakandan babysitters available to them, so everyone didn't have to leave all of the children with Violet. Which meant Joey could nap in their room and they didn't have to rush. "I have been expecting that for a while now. Barring Chitauri or Ultron sized disasters, we've got enough heavy hitters to do without
"And I suppose if aliens did rain out of the sky again he'd be willing to pull the Big Guy out of mothballs." She smiled. "Violet would be happy."

He looked over at her a moment. "Would you be happy? If I retired?"

The question stopped her, mostly because she'd never really considered it. Steve was one of those leave the company in a box types and she expected he would have been had he been a lawyer or a grave digger or a superhero. "I'd be happy if you were happy," she said finally. "If you had some other thing you wanted to do, some calling. But I don't want you to retire for the sake of retiring."

"I don't know. Sometimes a non-life-threatening career has some appeal."

"You liked staying home with Joey." Steve Rogers House Husband would probably burst some blood vessels. "I don't know that now is the best time to be shaking up careers."

He chuckled. "Yeah, no, probably not. Maybe someday."

"When this is all settled we'll sit down and talk about it. Figure something out."

"My life getting upended is getting, I don't know... old. So yeah. Let's talk about it after this is over."
I feel like this one might generate some questions so as a reminder: we're not posting spoilers in the comments. Messages me privately on tumblr or email me at gmail. Both use the nyxetoile user name.

Sam

They didn't have an armory, but Sam and Lani's suite was huge, so he had plenty of floor space to test his wings before they left for Siberia. Lani was watching him from the bed.

"It's funny," he said. "How much serum there turned out to be after all. For all we know, there's more somewhere."

"I imagine Amanda is quietly freaking out. All those years of study and she might get her hands on the real thing."

"My Dad used to tell me about how they were desperate to recreate the serum during WW2, and they tested their many, many failures on poor, illiterate black men in the south. Legend goes a couple of them actually survived, and my grandfather knew a guy who knew a guy who'd supposedly fought with one. Said he could lift a jeep. Used to think it was just a story. But then, everybody thought that about the Winter Soldier."

"Not sure how I feel about living in a world where urban legends can be assumed true." He refolded the wings and swore she looked a little disappointed. "Ready to kick super soldier ass?"

"Best I can be. You ready to handle the worried Wives Club while we're gone?"

"Best I can be," she said with a smile. "We're safe here, though. That counts for a lot."

"It's a lot nicer than the bunker."

"One of these days I'll need to visit that place. I've heard such stories."

"I've never been. I've just heard. Having the loved ones safe is helpful when you're in a fight, so I appreciate why it's there."

"Well, go to battle knowing I'm safe." She reached a hand out for him. "And that I'll miss you."

He took her hand and sat on the bed. "I won't be long," he said quietly.

"I know. And I have faith everything will turn out for the best. But I'll still miss you."

"I always miss you." He gave her a kiss. "See you soon."

She kissed him back a moment, then squeezed his hand, and gave him a nudge. "See you soon."

There was a tarmac on the grounds of the palace, with a jet waiting for them. Some of the families had come to say goodbye at the plane, others had done it privately like he had. Moving through the
crowd he passed someone dressed kind of like cat, and had to turn around and look again when he processed that. The man peeled off the helmet to reveal the King himself. That must be his suit. They did have a lot of panther statues around, didn't they?

"Guess you guys really like cats," he commented.

"Sam," Steve said behind him, sounding vaguely exasperated.

"Man dressed like a cat I'm not supposed to notice?"

T'Challa was grinning. "The Panther has been the protector of Wakanda for generations. I am only the most recent."

"Hey, no judgement, I'm dressed like a giant bird."

"Clearly we are natural enemies."

Pietro walked past them on his way to the jet. "No one here takes anything seriously. Not even life-threatening situations. Brace yourself for inappropriate jokes."

"There is something to be said for keeping your spirits in times of crises."

"Pietro has no sense of humor," Wanda called from up by the jet's ramp. "Ignore him."

"I have an excellent sense of humor," he protested before disappearing up the ramp.

Sam shook his head and extended his arm toward the jet. "After you, your highness."

They all filed into the very nice, very fancy jet. Sam could hear Clint and Rhodey arguing over who got to fly it. Since he was in no way involved in that, he found a seat and decided to wait it out.

Amanda sat down next to him. "I thought leaving a baby was hard. That was before I had a toddler crying, 'Mommy, don't go!' at me."

"That you both go probably doesn't help," he commented, though he obviously had no idea what it was like to leave your kid to charge into danger. Though, having someone to leave at all had sure changed how he felt about said charge.

"Yeah," she said softly. She glanced over to where Bucky was inspecting weapons with Nat and Steve. "One of these days that should probably change."

"Once this is all settled?"

"Hopefully, yes." Her gaze scanned the group. "I think there'll be a lot of conversations after this is all settled."

"Children seem to change the math." The dispute in the cockpit had apparently been settled, as the jet slowly lifted off.

"I don't think any one expected that particular wrinkle all those years back when they formed this little group."

"I think they expected a dysfunctional group of people who would barely get along. Not us forming a family of misfits, with bonds to each other stronger than any loyalty to them."

Amanda smiled a little, looking around the group again. "Go us."
"And now we're in exile together."

"There are worse things."

"We could be in the bunker," Steve said from across from them. "I don't think anyone would have enjoyed that."

Amanda pointed at him. "We could have ended up in a sketchy non-extradition country. Or a barren island Tony bought."

"It would have been a lush island," Tony protested. "With trees and beaches."

"All islands have beaches," she told him tartly. "By definition."

"Untrue. Volcanic islands can rise straight out of the sea. There's one in the Caribbean that was for sale the last time I was island shopping." Because apparently 'Island shopping' was a regular occurrence in Tony Starks's life. "But there was no beach."

"The definition of a beach is the area adjacent to the seashore or the part of the shore washed by tide or waves. So they would still have beaches. By definition."

"It's literally just cliffs," he replied stubbornly.

"Oh my God," Steve said. "Stop."

To the best of Sam's knowledge, Amanda had no brothers. And Tony certainly didn't have a sister. It was kind of nice they'd managed to find that relationship as adults.

Their usual joking and jabbing filled most of the flight, until Clint called, "We're about 30 minutes out."

"For those who haven't," Steve said. "Suit up."

The little flurry of activity that followed that was why Sam got in his wings on the ground. He did enjoy watching the hopping and thrown elbows the rest of them had to do. Currently, Tony was helping Amanda get into her suit and lecturing her on automating it.

"I have seen you get nut shot by a metal cup," she told him, sliding on an arm gauntlet. "You will never convince me to have this come flying at me."

"I worked that bug out," he muttered, tweaking something on the seam under her right arm.

Because Tony was incapable of making one version of something he found cool, Doc had several suits. Because Doc was excellent at channeling Tony's madness, all the suits had different purposes. From a giant unwieldily one that looked like some sort of mech from a video game. To her more standard portable hospital, which was more streamlined but with a large back piece and thick wrists to hold all her gear. The one she was putting on now looked all but identical to Tony's, only blue and silver. It even seemed to have a face mask.

"That's new," he commented.

"It's designed for battle," Amanda said.

At the same time Tony chirruped, "It's her Doctor Death suit!"

"Hey you finally got that super villain name," Bucky said from her other side.
"Can you still actually Doctor or is it all Death?" Steve asked.

"I can doctor. There's suture and bandage stuff in here and some pain killers and sedatives."

"It can also fly and lift as much as mine can," Tony added. "So she's a very efficient med evac."

"I brought the hospital," she said. "If you want me to change. But my vibe on this was more firepower was better."

"No," he said. "We're not expecting civilian casualties so I think we can keep the hospital on the jet."

"Doctor Death it is."

"These are about the most dangerous people we've ever faced," Steve said. "We outnumber them, but given the large numbers we have managed to defeat, we shouldn't let that make us cocky. They are as strong as Bucky and I, and probably a lot more dangerous. You get an opportunity for a kill shot, you take it."

The jet descended, landing on an abandoned airstrip pocked with pot holes and patches of snow. Clint opened the ramp to reveal a sprawling military base. Maybe a dozen buildings ringing the airstrip, all solid, square, Soviet construction.

"Charming," Wanda murmured as they filed out.

"FRIDAY?" Tony asked.

Her voice carried over the comms. "No heat signatures on the surface. There is an underground bunker of some sort."

"There always is." Bucky lifted his gun to his shoulder. "Which way?"

"Best entrance is under the third building to your left."

"How many entrances are there?" Nat asked.

"Three. One beneath the far left building and another in a manhole several yards behind us."

"This could be like blowing in an anthill," Steve said.

"They'll fight us head on," Bucky said grimly. "Trust me." He turned to say something more, and Wanda cut him off.

"If they are here, they're still frozen," Wanda said. "I hear nothing."

"They could be far underground," he countered. "Who's bulletproof? Vision, Your Highness—stay up here and watch the back door."

The two nodded and Vision took to the air to get a better view.

"Are we splitting up?" Nat asked. "I'm not saying we're in a horror movie, but I am urging caution."

"Oh, this is a horror movie," Sam told her as Steve pulled open the door and Tony went in first. "You're the hot chick, so you'll probably die."

Rhodey's voice came on the comm. "Says the black dude."
Tony sent out a couple little probes ahead of them, holding up a hand for them to wait as he waited for feedback. "I'm putting money on Wanda for Last Girl."

Amanda's voice sounded echoey from her helmet when she said, "Where does that leave me?"

"I got my money on you secretly being the accomplice."

"Power cuts out below this level," FRIDAY said. "There's nothing down there."

They all stopped, and Clint said, "Well, wasn't that anticlimactic."

"At least it was fast," Bucky said. "There's two more bases to check."

"Captain Rogers," Vision said over the comms. "We have a problem."

*

Wanda

She tried to block out the tension coming off the rest of them as they made their way back to the entrance. Fortunately the hallways were pretty wide and she was near the front of the pack, so claustrophobia wasn't an issue. Daylight was still a welcome relief.

The collection of military vehicles waiting on the tarmac, however, was not.

"Ah, fuck," Rhodey muttered. "I was really hoping not to do this." As he said it, people moved, the heavily shielded and heavily armed moving in front, others sinking back. They knew their formation.

"Maybe they're Russian," Bucky offered.

Wanda could hear her team's thoughts the loudest, and it took a moment to isolate them out, to focus on the minds in the vehicles. The thoughts that bounced around were in English. "No such luck."

There weren't many of them. Odd, you'd think they'd send a good wall of troops to try and stop the Avengers.

"I'd like to get out of this without killing people," Steve said. "I'm open to suggestions."

"Doc's got some non-lethal darts," Tony offered. "But there's a limited amount."

They were nervous, Wanda realized. The people in the vehicles. It was a strange combination of fear and excitement. Her brow furrowed and she tried to pick out one train of thought to follow.

"Wanda?" Steve asked. "Can you put them to bed?"

She closed her eyes, still focusing. "Not all at once," she said, distracted.

One of the trucks rolled its window down, and a megaphone was stuck out. A voice boomed, "This is your one chance to surrender."

The indignant wave that came off several team members was almost funny.

"What if we aim for non lethal spots?" Bucky muttered.

Doors opened and people got out. They weren't soldiers, no one was in a military uniform. Instead they were wearing costumes, much like the Avengers wore.
"So," Tony said conversationally. "Remember that whole thing about Ross having his own enhanced team? And I kind of fought them a little?"

"You neglected to mention the costumes," Steve muttered.

"It was dark."

"I don't think they've ever been in a fight before," Wanda said. "They're humming with nerves."

Amanda sighed audibly. "Look, they're not trying to destroy the world, just arrest us. We don't have to beat them to a pulp, we just need to get through them. There's like twice as many of us as there is them."

From the rear of the trucks one of the figures rose, in what looked very reminiscent of an Iron Man suit. Everyone else's thoughts and/or conversations over the comms were drowned out by Tony and Rhodey yelling at each other about what parts of the suit they may or may not have stolen and who may or may not know something. She actually put her hands over her ears, which made her miss the incoming missile Bootleg Iron Man fired at them. She had no time to make a bubble, as the next thing she knew there was an explosion, and she was pinned to the ground under a pile that included Bucky, T'Challa, and her brother.

Above her she could see Tony, Rhodey, Vision and Sam take off. Bootleg was shooting at them and they were still arguing over his provenance.

Amanda hauled Bucky and Pietro up to their feet and T'Challa very politely helped Wanda up. Clint and Nat had found cover and were taking pot shots at the three figures who were sprinting towards them. One of them was in an outfit that looked very much like Steve's.

Speaking of Steve, Wanda watched the shield whiz past, aimed at the runners.

It was plucked out of the air by something that resembled a white sticky rope. The rope sprang back and the shield landed in the hands of a man in a red and blue costume perched on top of one of the trucks.

"What the fuck?" Bucky said.

Wanda had to agree. Feeling oddly protective of the hunk of metal, she flicked her fingers and stole the shield back.

The man shot the webbing... stuff back at her. She tossed up an energy shield, which it bounced off of, shooting upwards and catching Sam's legs and yanking him right out of the sky. Wanda just barely flipped the energy to catch him before he hit the pavement. Pietro ran through to cut the line before Web Man could drag Sam, and ended up with it all over his legs.

Amanda muttered something under her breath the comms didn't catch, then flew up in the air. She strafed the spider guy, shooting off a series of blasts from her gauntlets. He dodged them, bouncing from truck to tree to building. She didn't hit him, and probably wasn't trying to, but it kept him busy.

Wanda lifted a hand and felt an arrow whiz past her head. "Clint!"

"What?" he asked. She couldn't see him, but that was par for the course.

"Jesus, Barton, watch where you're shooting!" That was Tony.

"I'm not shooting anything," he replied.
"They have an archer," Vision reported. "I see her sniping from one of the rooftops."

"That's it," Tony said. "When we get back I'm suing these jerks for copyright infringement."
Chapter 12

Chapter Notes

We're getting into the legit spoilers for Civil War the movie, so be warned.

It all gets very exciting for the next few chapters. I'm so tickled to finally be posting these scenes. We wrote them so long ago and I just love how it all worked out.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Clint

This was chaos.

There was a certain irony to it. They had never fought people like themselves, and it was disorienting. Particularly since some of them were clearly copies. Ross had tried to literally make replacement Avengers.

"I think I'm flattered," Clint told the rest of them, climbing the back of a building so he could get high enough to shoot better. "They thought I was important enough to have a version of."

"If any of them have a metal arm I'm beating them over the head with it." Bucky was clearly not seeing the humor in this.

"If they have a Hulk I'm leaving." Nat clearly was.

"Okay. So I'm distracting the spidery one, he's at least original." Doc also sounded amused. "There's Hawkeye 2.0. There's a patriotic guy who's giving Steve a run for his money. There's the intellectual property lawsuit Tony and the boys are chasing. What else we got?"

"There's another speedster," Pietro reported. "Not as fast as me. But close. And strong."

"There's someone who fucking shrinks," Sam said. "He/She/It got in my suit and now my wings aren't—God damn it."

Right about then there was a also a rattle of gunfire. Apparently they'd brought regular soldiers as well. Clint reached the roof, and crept forward for a better look. "Cap," he said. "They're trying to kill us. Can we kill them back?"

"Yes, but only because they started it." Steve didn't sound happy about it, but he also sounded like he was in the middle of a serious fight. "And someone come help me with this guy."

Clint got all the way to the edge, trying to aim at the man fighting Steve in an eerily similar costume. But they were moving around too much, it was more likely he'd hit Steve. Maybe if he hung over the edge a little more.

It was a dumb thing to do. He knew better. It was a miracle he didn't get his head shot off. But they didn't seem to have a sniper with a rifle, and the archer was nowhere near as good as he was.

So she shot him in the arm.
All he could do was fall back on his ass and stare at it. He got shot in the arm with an arrow. Nat was going to find this funny.

In the meantime it hurt like hell. "Uh. I need Doc."

Nat said, "What?"

At the same time Doc said, "If you're admitting that on the comms you must be missing a limb."

"No, I just know what arrows do to a person when haphazardly ripped out."

"You got hit with an arrow?" Nat's voice was utterly deadpan. He was never going to hear the end of this.

"I'm on my way," Doc said. "Someone take over chasing the arachnid."

"I will," Nat replied. "Then I'm gonna find the other archer and buy her a drink."

"Is it really a her?" Clint asked. He couldn't decide if that was better or worse.

"I see ponytail," Rhodey confirmed.

Doc landed on the roof next to him and crouched at his side to inspect the arm. "Doesn't look like she got any major blood vessels or tendons. So she's a great shot or a terrible one."

"Men can have ponytails," Bucky said, then added. "What is this stuff?" Clint assumed he was talking about the white stuff spider guy was hitting everyone with. He could see two of them down there trying to free Pietro from a mess around his legs. T'Challa's vibranium claws seemed to cut it, but little else did.

"I find when men start spurting mysterious white goo it's best not to ask questions," Nat drawled.

Finally free, Pietro got back to his feet, muttering, "I hate you people."

Amanda finished cutting off his sleeve, exposing his arm to the cold. Then she stuck a needle in his arm, and the whole thing went numb. "So I was thinking," he said on the comm, since that was pretty much all he had to do at the moment.

"At a time like this?" Tony asked.

"Doc is operating on my arm, I gotta do something. So—why are they here?"

"They tracked us," Steve said, sounding out of breath.

"Or they have the same intel," Nat added, her voice slow enough he knew she'd gotten his point.

"You think they sent people to the other site, too?" Sam asked.

"Probably," Clint said, watching Amanda finish with the scalpel and begin slowly removing the arrowhead. "More enhanced? Regular soldiers? It'll be a shit show either way."

"Fuck." That was Bucky. "We gotta get there. If the soldiers get in the wind we're toast."

"I have run the archer off the roof," T'Challa was saying into the comm as Bucky jogged towards where Nat and now Sam were chasing Spider Guy. "Do you want me to chase her, Captain?"

"She'll just find somewhere else to snipe if you don't," Clint said from where ever he was having his arm fixed. Bucky didn't disagree. A made sniper just found another perch.

"In pursuit," T'Challa replied and Bucky caught a glimpse of him running along the rooftops.

Spider Guy was trying to lose the others in the mess of trucks. Bucky ducked around two, cutting him off. He surprised him at the back of one of them and went for a knockout blow with his left arm.

Which the other guy caught.

"Whoah, you have a metal arm?" He turned it, to get a better look. "That's awesome."

Bucky froze. Not because he'd caught the arm or was easily moving it around. He wasn't the first enhanced to do something like that. He still had his right arm free if he wanted to cave a skull in.

No, he'd stopped because that was not an adult voice. That was a voice that hadn't finished changing.

A voice that reminded him of being fourteen and having his own voice crack every three words.

"Uh, guys?" he said to get everyone's attention. "The Spider one is like twelve."

He dropped Bucky's arm and put his hands on his hips. "I'm fifteen!"

"Oh, kid. Not helping."

"I wouldn't put the archer much older," T'Challa said.


"Jesus Christ," Rhodey said, sounding horrified. "They're children. They're all the same age as my children."

"Guns down," Steve said immediately.

"Yeah, we don't need to be told that," Tony replied.

Bucky stepped away from the SpiderKid. They eyed each other a minute.

Amanda's voice came over the comm. "We still need to get to the other site. And there's no way they're letting us take off."

"We split up," Steve said. "If you can fly, go, the rest of us will stay, and give you cover."

"No, you need to go," Tony said. "We need Supersoldier to fight Supersoldier. I can carry you, Doc can go get Barnes."

SpiderKid shot web at Bucky and he ducked. "Need distraction over here, then."

"On it," Pietro said, and appeared almost simultaneously. He circled the kid, too fast to be hit, but
slow enough the kid tried. Bucky took off at a run.

"The shrinker fried my wings," Sam said. "I'm stuck here."

"Vision, Rhoddy," Steve also sounded like he was running. "Distract the flyer while we get out, then follow if you can."

Amanda hit the ground in front of him. "Hey Soldier, need a ride?"

She put her back to him and he slung his gun back on its strap and wrapped his arms around her neck. "Can't decide if this is hot or humiliating."

His feet left the ground as she shot up, then banked north. "Probably gonna be pretty uncomfortable once wind shear gets you."

All Bucky could really do at this point was hold on and listen to the comms. "I'll stay," Vision was saying. "They'll be overrun without air support."

"We're going to be overrun anyway," Nat said grimly. "We know that."

"Your Highness, you want a lift?" Rhodey asked.

"I will stay. They can't kill me and I probably have some sort of diplomatic immunity."

A missile of some sort shot past them. IP Lawsuit wasn't taking the bait and was instead coming after them. "Well, never mind anyway," Rhodey said, turning to chase the kid down.

The wind was so bad Bucky had his eyes closed, so he didn't see what happen. He just heard Tony yell, "Rhodes!" and Bucky opened his eyes in time to see him fall out of the sky.

"Wanda!" Steve yelled as Tony tried to turn around without getting shot or dropping Steve.

Red light shot into the air, chasing the plummeting silver suit down. He went out of sight, and then there was an explosion of an impact. Amanda turned too, now. Vision shot a beam at the Iron Kid and sent him flying.

"She caught me!" Rhodey called. "Go!"

Bucky could feel Amanda hesitate, even as Tony and Steve started to arc towards them. "'Manda," he said softly.

"I got him, Doc," Sam said. "Get out of here."

She sighed, but turned and headed off, Tony and Steve at their back.

*

Steve

It was not quite the worst flight he'd ever been on, as he managed to land on ground and not crash into the arctic. But there was nothing about flying through bitter cold Russian airspace with no weather protection that was fun.

"We should have brought Wanda," Tony said as they waited for Amanda and Bucky to land.

"No," Steve said. "They needed all the help they could get back there." He rubbed his eyes.
Tony was quiet, scanning the sky. "It was a the right call," he said finally.

"I know. But I can't shake the feeling we didn't leave enough people behind for them to win, but didn't bring enough for us to."

"They weren't going to win," Tony said. "We can't fight kids. Best we can hope is we'll make it out of this mess and rescue them. Or Sharon will be able to pull off a negotiation miracle."

The Barneses appeared through the clouds and landed in front of them. Amanda wobbled a little and Bucky looked a little green when he let her go.

Steve looked at the three of them for a long moment, then said, "We may not get out of this alive." He looked at Amanda and Bucky. "If this goes sideways, and one of you can get out, promise me you'll go."

Amanda had retracted her face plate when they'd hit, so he could watch the full range of emotions play out when she and Bucky exchanged looks. They had one of those silent conversations married couples had so often, then Bucky said quietly, "For Edie."

Her jaw tightened and she nodded. "I promise."

Satisfied, Steve nodded. Beside him, Tony said, "Look, I'd like to meet my sons before I die, can we plan on kicking ass?"


He knocked his faceplate down. "Plan B is for suckers. But after you, Cap."

"Thanks," he said dryly.

He went first with the shield, Bucky tight as his back, gun up on his shoulder. This base wasn't as wide and expansive as the one they'd just left. Just a bunker built into the mountain, with a simple door.

There were no trucks outside, which he considered a good thing. No signs of life at all, really, save for a beat up red truck that looked about as old as Tony. But when they reached the door they found it ajar, with fresh foot prints being filled in with snow.

"Just one set," Bucky commented, hunkering down to look closer.

Tony tossed one of his little drones in and they huddled by the door to keep out of the snow.

"Lights are on," Tony reported. "Elevator's running. Someone's home."

"I think we're about to meet the man who triggered you," Steve said. "And his small army of evil."

He expected Bucky to say something wry and vaguely threatening. Instead he heard the whir of mechanics that meant Tony's shoulder mounted rockets had popped up. Except when he glanced over he saw it was Doc's that had deployed. Her helmet was as expressionless as Tony's but she tilted her head and said, "Can I go first?" in the wryly threatening tone he'd expected from her husband.

Steve stepped back and held his arm out. Tony said, "And now we've reached the All Doc No Amanda part of the show."

"I like that you can tell they're distinct," Bucky said as they moved forward.
"As distinct and Steve and Cap."

"You're the one who gave me shoulder cannons," she said.

The elevator came when she hit the button and they all hesitated a moment before stepping inside.

"So I'm not the only one who keeps hearing warning klaxons and the words 'It's a trap!' right?" Tony said. "You guys hear that too?"

"We can't wait them out," Steve said. "It's five degrees outside."

The elevator ground to a halt and he crouched to lift the gate. The hallway in front of them was long, with a short stair case a few dozen yards ahead. Exposed pipes and sickly yellow lights gave it a dreary factory feel.

It was wide enough to walk two abreast, and he let Tony and Doc lead the way, the light of their reactors helped a little. The four of them walked slow and cautiously, weapons up, till they came to the end of the hallway.

The huge room was unlit, the reactors illuminating only a foot or two. Steve glanced around for a switch or potential light source, but didn't see anything. Then there was a distant clunk and five orange lights flared to life, illuminating five cryo tanks.

Doc veered off to take a closer look at the nearest one and above their heads a PA system crackled to life.

"If it's any comfort," a tinny, accented voice said. "They died in their sleep."

A chill went up Steve's spine, a thread of fear caused by being caught completely flat footed. "Anybody see him?"

Head-shakes from Tony and Bucky. Doc was studying one of the tanks. "Now why wouldn't they make them bullet proof?" she muttered.

Now was not a good time for Amanda to take over for Doc.

"Did you really think I wanted more of you?" the voice continued.

"What the fuck?" Bucky muttered and the tension in his voice was enough to peel his wife away and rejoin them.

"I'm grateful to them, though." The accent was almost familiar, but the PA was so old and distorted he couldn't place it. "They brought you here." Another light lit, at the end of the chamber, revealing a face.

Steve turned, flinging his shield at it, only to have it bounce and come back.

"Please, Captain," the voice said patiently. "The Soviet's built this place to withstand the launch blast of UR100 rockets."

"I bet I could beat that," Tony said immediately.

"Oh, I'm sure you could Mr. Stark. Given time. But then you'd never know why you came."

"Pretty sure you put five bullets in the reasons we're here," Doc said.
Bucky had his rifle pointed squarely at that little window. "You triggered me in Vienna. Guessing you had something to do with Rumlow in Lagos, too."

The man in the window lifted a shoulder in an almost negligent shrug. Steve strode towards him. "You killed innocent people. Just to bring us here." Up close, he could see the man more clearly, but he didn't recognize him at all.

He stepped forward like he was seeing an old friend, though. "I've thought of nothing else for over a year. I've studied you. I've followed you. But now that you're standing here, I've just realized-" He tilted his head. "There's a bit of green in the blue of your eyes." He chuckled. "How nice to find a flaw."

There was a beat of silence, then in unison Doc and Tony whispered, "Creepy," in identical sing-songs.

The accent. It was the same as Wanda and Pietro. "You're Sokovian," Steve said. "That's what this is about?"

"Sokovia was a failed state long before you blew it to hell. No. I'm here because I made a promise."

"You lost someone," Steve said, the chill of fear worsening.

The man's answer hit him like punch in the gut. A familiar one at that. "I lost everyone."

Chapter End Notes

Due to certain things we've established in our canon and the different depth of relationships between the characters, we realized it didn't work to have T'Challa be in Siberia with the others, despite how much we both adore his scene with Zemo. Rest assured, we gave him his moment of quiet awesomeness in the next chapter.
Pietro

"She caught me!" Rhodey yelled into the comm after hitting the ground with a sickening thud. "Go!"

That didn't sound like a healthy landing, Wanda or not. Given that Amanda was flying away, getting the other medical type over there seemed like a good idea. Before anyone could ask, Pietro grabbed Sam and sprinted him over to where Rhodey had hit the ground, out in the barren field a ways from the main fight.

"I got him, Doc," Sam said as he was unceremoniously dropped in the snow. "Get out of here."

Pietro watched the four of them jet off. Sam pried of Rhodey's face plate. "FRIDAY, turn my comms off. Theirs too."

"Um--" Pietro started, thinking that a bizarre request.

Sam seemed to be ignoring him. "How much pain are you in?" he asked Rhodey.

"I didn't want Tony to hear. He'll turn around."

"That wasn't an answer."

"I don't have one," he replied. "I can't feel anything."

That sounded really bad, a suspicion that was confirmed by Sam cursing. "Where does the sensation end?"

Rhodey was silent a moment. "I can move my arms. It gets tingly somewhere in my stomach."

"I need a backboard," Sam said. "Turn. . . turn the comms back on, we're gonna have to surrender."

There was a bit of confusion as people tried to figure out exactly who was in charge. Pietro got the sense that no one had expected the Wannabe Avengers to win, including the kids on the team. And damn, if he was thinking of them as kids they really were young.

There were a couple medics tucked into one of the trucks as least, who came and helped Sam stabilize Rhodey. The rest of them got lined up, including Vision, who could probably phase out whenever he wanted, and Wanda, who looked torn between guilt at not helping Rhodey more and fury that she couldn't just blast the bad guys into ashes.

They weren't dumb, Pietro gave them credit for that. One of the first things they did was have Spider Kid wrap that webbing around Pietro's legs so he couldn't run. Then he tied the hands of the rest of them. Except for T'Challa, who peeled his mask of and said, "I am a King and have diplomatic immunity."

Pietro sent thoughts in Wanda's direction. When you see your moment, you go.

Shaking her head a little, she replied, I'm not leaving the rest of you.

He ground his teeth. You have any idea what they'll do to you? You need to go. The rest of them would tell you the same.

She looked up at him. They are. And I will tell you what I told them. I'm not leaving my family. We're
"I will not allow hard to come to her, Mr. Maximoff," Vision said, his British formality oddly comforting. "Or any of you. But right now cooperation is required."

Pietro wasn't sure how he thought he was going to manage that, but he shut up.

T'Challa was arguing with the guy who seemed to be in charge. "My brass tells me I can't hold you," the soldier said. "And to extend my apologies."

He didn't sound particularly apologetic, but T'Challa inclined his head as if accepting tea from the Queen. "I will be on my way, then," he said smoothly. "And I will be taking Colonel Rhodes with me for treatment in Wakanda."

"Colonel Rhodes is under arrest. He'll be treated at a military hospital before being moved to the RAFT with the rest of them."

"And yet," T'Challa said, "I insist he comes with me. Diplomatic immunity."

The soldier crossed his arms. "That only applies to members of the royal family."

"Indeed. And recently my genealogists have discovered that Colonel Rhodes is a distant cousin of mine. Which makes him royalty. Eighth or ninth in line to the throne." He waved a hand. "It gets a bit vague. I can send you the paperwork when I return home. In the meantime, my cousin, if you please."

"I'll have to call my CO."

"I suggest you do that, then. In the mean time, I'd like him transported onto my plane."

He pointed at T'Challa. "Don't try to tell me Wilson is your cousin, too. I'm not one of those people who think all black people look alike."

"I would never dream of it." He waited until the man walked out of earshot before saying, "I apologize, Mr. Barton. I know you're also injured but my bullshit skills only go so far."

"Doc already patched me up. It's not much more than a scratch. Take care of him," he added.

"Only the best for my new, adopted cousin," T'Challa assured them. "Once I'm home I will see what I can do to get the rest of you released."

After the King was allowed to leave, the rest of them were loaded into the trucks, and driven away. It was Siberia, so it was hard to tell how far they were driving. Eventually they came to a small airport, and a waiting transport plane. They got out of the trucks, and then Secretary Ross himself came out the back. "Where is everyone else?" he demanded.

"They're dead," Nat said, with such a straight face that it actually seemed to give Ross pause. Then he strode down, a toady of some sort jogging beside him. Both he and the toady pulled out collars of some sort and snapped them on Vision and Wanda.

"What—?" Vision started to ask, and the collar came alive with electricity, so much it actually sizzled. Vision seemed to freeze completely.

"Even you can be stopped by electricity," he said.

He knew Wanda had trouble controlling her powers without her hands, but she'd gotten better at it
since she did so much signing with Zev. Pietro felt the ground start to shake, but before anything
could happen there was a rifle crack, and a dart hit his sister in the arm. She looked down at it a
moment, then her eyelids fluttered and she crumpled.

Ross caught her, and then deftly dodged Pietro's attempt to headbutt him. "You think we'd have
threatened you all without first developing methods to contain you?"

He spat at the older man and got a rifle butt between shoulder blades for it.

Several of the others shifted and for an instant they were on the verge of a bloodbath, one way or
another. Then Nat said sharply, "Stand down."

Everyone on their side settled and the tension level on the other side eased. Ross looked at Nat,
clearly figuring out she was in charge. "Well done, Ms. Romanov."

"You're a sonofabitch," she told him pleasantly. "Get on with whatever you're doing with us."

He held out his arm. "We're going on a plane ride."

* 

Violet

They had a big communal living room in the guest palace where those left behind had gathered to
wait for news. People came and went, babies napped, TV blared, food was served. Mostly, they
waited.

Violet worried for her friends. She took care of Edie. And she was very quietly very glad her
husband hadn't gone with them.

Late in the afternoon, Shuri came in and closed the door behind her. "I have spoken with my
brother."

There was a moment of silence, then Sharon said quietly, "How bad?"

Shuri took a deep breath. "He is on his way back with Colonel Rhodes, who is severely injured.
They were met with resistance at the first base. Captain Rogers, Mr. Stark and the Barnses escaped
to continue the mission. The rest were captured."

Sharon put her hand over her mouth. Violet turned towards Darcy. "Go get Vanessa."

"Captured by who?" Bruce asked.

"I believe your government. My brother said there were enhanced fighters and I know you
encountered some when you left the States."

Violet put a calming hand on Bruce's knee.

Shuri shook her head. "I'm sorry, that's all I know. We have doctors on stand-by to meet the jet. I'm
sure T'Challa will come speak with you when he arrives."

"Thank you." Violet said, since she seemed the only one capable of speech.

The door opened as Darcy went out, and then again as Pepper came in—she'd been napping. She
stopped when everyone turned to look at her. "What?"
"Steve, Tony, Amanda, and Bucky are fighting the supersoldiers. The rest of them were arrested by the US."

She leaned against the door. "Jesus."

Sharon seemed to have shaken herself out of her shock. "I need to... I need to call someone. They can't just incarcerate them. They haven't been tried with anything."

"We have lawyers," Pepper said. "Lots of them. Lots of them working on this, actually." She inhaled slowly through her nose, and blew it out through her mouth.

"Okay," Bruce said. "We can go get them if we have to, the Big Guy's interested now."

"I kind of want to go guns a-blazing, too," Sharon said. "But I don't know if the two of us can break into a maximum security prison."

Violet didn't pay attention to Bruce's response, because she was watching Pepper. It was on the tip of her tongue to ask her if she was all right when the door opened again and Darcy reappeared with Vanessa and Lani. Then there was another round of explanation, and some tears.

Pepper made her way into the room, leaning one hand on the back of the couch. Breathing in through her nose and out through her mouth. Cal hopped up and offered her his seat, but she shook her head.

"Pepper," Violet slowly and apparently urgently enough to get everyone's attention. "Are you in labor?"

She cleared her throat. "In my defense, I waddled down here looking for Bruce."

"Shit." He jumped to his feet, jailbreaks forgotten. "How close are the contractions?"

"A few minutes."

"Right." He ducked around the couch. "I'll be taking you to the hospital, then."

"Ruby took 16 hours. Can we wait for Tony?" Her voice sounded shaky.

"Transverse breech? No." He held his hands out to pull her up.

She looked visibly upset and Violet felt a pang for her. "Why doesn't one of us come with you? We can record it with a phone and he can watch it later."

"That way you can curse at him in HD and surround sound," Darcy added.

"Thank you," she said, holding a hand out towards Violet, whom she'd apparently chosen.

"Someone watch the babies," Violet said, taking Pepper's hand.

"On it," Darcy said as they headed for the door. Between her and Cal and Sharon they could handle the group. Lani could probably pitch in once Vanessa was feeling better.

"I was thinking of having FRIDAY call Amanda. I don't want Tony distracted if they're in a fight, but she can triage."

"That's probably a good idea," Bruce said, in his calm doctor voice. "Once we're at the hospital I'll get on that."
"Stealing the spotlight," she muttered. "They're definitely Starks."
Chapter 14

Tony

The mystery man in the booth hit a button and a video screen behind Steve turned on, displaying Russian text, and then he went back to monologuing. "An empire toppled by its enemies can rise again. But one that crumbles from within? That's dead. Forever."

The video changed. A dirt road out on Long Island. He'd seen crash photos. Stared at them like they'd tell him something he didn't already know.

"I know that road," he ground out. "What is this?" he said to the guy in the window.

"Tony what is it?" Amanda asked softly.

Before he could answer, his parents car came into view and slammed into a tree. He flinched at the impact but couldn't take his eyes off the screen. A moment later a figure on a motorcycle drove up and stopped just behind the crashed car.

Bucky sucked in a quiet breath just before Tony recognized him.

They stood there in stunned horror, all four of them, and watched the video. Bucky was in full Winter Soldier gear. He dragged Howard out of the car, and his surprised, "Sgt. Barnes?" was audible right before he had his skull caved in with a metal fist.

Tony looked up long enough to glance at Bucky. He looked sick and met his eyes briefly before dropping his gaze.

On the screen the Soldier was dragging Tony's father back to the car while his mother called out for him. Tony swallowed hard, a little concerned he was going to vomit.

He felt Doc's hand curl around his upper arm as the Soldier made his way around the back of the car to the passenger side. "Tony, maybe you shouldn't-" she started gently, but he shook her off, barely stopping himself from shoving her.

The angle of the camera showed little more the silhouetted shadows, but it was enough to see his mother get strangled before the camera was shot out.

He glanced to his left, where Steve was standing. Steve, whose face looked...guilty.

Something clicked in Tony's head. Despite being shocked and sick and as angry as he'd ever been, something in the back of his mind was still working. All those years ago, when Steve had first come to the Tower, when they'd first started cobbled together a team. A family. Steve had been nervous and weird because he'd known something Tony didn't.

"You knew," he said roughly. "I knew it was Hydra but you knew it was him."

Steve was already shaking his head. "Not—not back then. I might have wondered, but I didn't know back then."

"But you knew before right now?" Bucky demanded from behind Tony. He sounded about the same level of angry.

Steve looked from one to the other, and Tony growled, "Don't bullshit me, Rogers."
He swallowed. "Yes."

Bucky cursed. Tony looked at the black screen a moment. It wasn't really a conscious thought. He didn't really think he was capable of conscious thought. But when Steve took a step forward, an apology clearly on his lips, Tony's smacked him away, faceplate slamming into place. Bucky stepped forward. Tony wasn't sure whose side he was on, but figured he owed him at least one punch for what he'd just witnessed. Bucky saw it coming and dodged, slamming his metal hand into the side of the suit.

And then it was on.

*

*Amanda*

This was a bit of a cluster, as her mother used to say. It wasn't until she was a teenager - long after her mother had died - that Amanda had heard the rest of the phrase. James was always amused when she used it, and had taught her several similar WWII isms.

She'd left him, Tony and Steve beating the crap out of each other when it became obvious that reasoning with them would fall on deaf ears. Tony had just watched his parents die, then found out Steve had known and kept it a secret. James had just watched himself kill two people and found out his best friend had known and kept it a secret. Amanda had sisters, she knew sometimes the only thing was to hammer on each other until the point had been made. She had no dog in the fight, really, so it was best to stay out of it.

Besides, the bad guy was getting away and he'd caused quite enough trouble for one day.

She found the door to the little back room he'd been in, then the hall that lead to the back door of the bunker. It was just as cold on this side of the mountain, though it had stopped actively snowing.

Mr. Chessmaster was sitting a few dozen yards away, near the cliff face. She approached slowly, slipping her helmet off and setting it in the snow. Her hair was sweaty and sticking to her face. She still wasn't used to wearing the full helmet.

He was fiddling with a cell phone when she reached him and didn't look up, though he had to know she was there. Stealthy, the suit was not. "For what it's worth," she said. "I'm sorry about your family."

"My father lived outside the city," he said. "I thought we would be safe there. My son was excited. He could see the Iron Man from the car window. I told my wife, 'Don't worry. They're fighting in the city. We're miles from harm.' And the dust cleared, and the screaming stopped. It took me two days until I found their bodies. My father still holding my wife and son in his arms... And you all? You just went home. I knew I couldn't kill the Avengers. More powerful men than me have tried. But perhaps if could get you to kill each other..." He finally looked at her. "Lagos was an accident. I didn't intend for those people to die."

She studied him a moment and wondered, in a very different world, if he would have been a good ally. "I believe you," she told him and he nodded. She looked out at the view. It was rather pretty, in a rugged, edge of the world sort of way. "They aren't going to kill each other."

"They certainly seem to be trying," he replied.

There was a crash from behind them and she sighed. The man smirked a little, as if his point had been proven.
"They'll try," she conceded. "They're gonna trash the place tossing each other around. I'll have to stitch some cuts and set a broken bone or two. But at the end of it all they'll forgive each other. Because they're family. And they're good men."

She crouched down and he watched her, a look of mild interest on his face. "I'm not a good person," she told him. "I'm more like you. If I lost my family I'd probably scorch the earth to pay them back." She met his gaze. "You hurt my husband. Tried to tear apart my friends. What do you think I'm going to do to you?"

The world seemed to stop a moment as they studied each other. Then he lifted the gun in his hand and put it under his chin. She reached out and put her hand over the muzzle, metal glove absorbing the bullet. Her other hand came up and she jammed a syringe full of sedative into his neck.

Leaning close, she talked to him as he lost consciousness. "I'm going to put you in a small cell. And every year at Christmas, I'm going to send you a card of my big, happy family. So you can remember exactly how badly you failed to tear us apart."

When he was totally out, she sighed. "FRIDAY, how are they doing in there?"

"Mr. Stark seems to think he can take Captain Rogers hand to hand. He can't, but Captain Rogers is letting him beat him up fairly willingly. Your husband keeps trying to intervene, and has been punched or tossed several times. If you're not currently engaged in combat, Mrs. Banner has been attempting to reach you."

That was almost certainly bad. She gathered up a fist full of the bad guy's shirt and started dragging him towards the bunker. She couldn't arrest him if he froze to death. "Yeah, go ahead. Put her through."

"Hi, Amanda," Violet said. "Edie's fine." Because she was a mother, she knew to lead with that. "They're about to start Pepper's c-section."

Well, it could be worse. "I'll tell Tony once he and the boys stop trying to beat each other up."

"What? Why are they-"

"It's a long story. How's Pepper?"

"Seems okay. She's having me record the birth so Tony can see it later."

Amanda reached the bunker and dragged her load inside and down the hall a few feet. The drugs would keep him out an hour or two at least. "FRIDAY, can you send me that video feed?"

"Of course."

"Great. Thanks for the update, Violet."

FRIDAY kept the line open for her. She could hear the sounds of doctors and nurses scrubbing in and doing equipment checks. They were speaking Wakandan, but the pattern of noise was familiar. She felt bad, she knew the foreign doctors made Pepper a little nervous, and Amanda had been given permission to scrub in just to keep her company. Now she was here, instead.

The boys weren't in the main room anymore, so she followed the sounds of battle and the path of broken masonry up a flight of stairs to a room open to the snow. Tony had Steve pinned to the ground and was beating the hell out of him. James was a couple feet away, holding his right arm and wincing.
"Tony," she said. He didn't even pause. "Tony. Tony. Hey!" She aimed and shot a repulser blast at the floor next to him.

He jerked and looked over at her, blinking as if he'd forgotten where he was.

When she was sure she had his attention she said, "I have another video for you to watch. Now, FRIDAY." She'd dug her Stark Phone out of her suit and the AI used it to project the Wakanda feed so they could all see it.

She'd managed to time it perfectly. There was just enough time to take in the gathered doctors and Pepper's hair and cloth draping when a baby's cry split the air.

Tony let go of Steve and stood up slowly, his eyes riveted on the video. The doctor held the baby up, covered in vernix and screaming his head off. A nurse passed him right over the drape to put him on Pepper's chest. "That's my son," Tony whispered.

"Here comes the next one," one of the doctors said in heavily accented English.

A minute later the second boy was also held over the drape, also screaming his head off. A man in scrubs that Amanda recognized as Bruce, reached out to hold him so Pepper could see him and touch him as well.

Tony sucked in a sharp breath. And started to cry.

Amanda, Steve, and James all froze a moment, exchanging glances. Then Amanda hit the latch to unhook her suit's chest piece and eased it off, letting it drop, peeling her gloves and gauntlets off as she headed over to him. "FRIDAY, open Tony's armor. Medical override, delta-oscarn-charlie."

The suit retracted as she reached him and despite the fact neither of them were big fans of being touched, she wrapped her arms around him and hugged him. His arms came around her and he pressed his face into her shoulder. "He killed my mom," he mumbled. "I don't know what to do with that."

"I know." She rocked him, rubbing his back. "You remember I told you I saw my mom before she died?" He nodded. "The last thing she said to me, before I left, was 'don't let this define you.'" At eight it hadn't made any sense. But her mother had known her well, maybe because they'd been similar. And while she couldn't argue that her mother's death hadn't shaped her life, she hoped it had been more inspiration than definition.

"I'm sorry your mother died," she told Tony. "I wish I'd met her. She must have been a hell of a woman, to put up with your dad and raise you." He snorted a little, arms tightening. "But I will tell you - as a mother - that I think she'd be very proud of the man you've become. And that she would not want you to define the rest of your life by the last few moments of hers."

She leaned back and he lifted his head to look at her. "Steve should have told you. And the three of you probably have a few more rounds to go before this is settled. But for now, what do you say we go meet your sons?"

He nodded. Then he turned and looked down at Steve, who was still sitting on the ground. "You okay?"

"I've been worse," he said. "And I'm sorry."

Tony reached down a hand to help him up. From behind them, James said, "I'm sorry, too." His voice was rough. "I don't. . . I don't remember any of that. Your father was my friend."
She saw Tony's throat work hard, but he nodded. "I know. It wasn't you. It was just a weapon that looked like you." He took a shuddery breath and gestured at Amanda. "Hug him for me, I'm not up for it."

James barely gave her enough time to turn before wrapping his metal arm around her waist.

"What's wrong with the other one?" she muttered into his neck.

"Dislocated," he said into her hair.

She sighed and hugged him tighter. She'd fix it in a minute.
Chapter 15

Darcy

Life was a funny thing.

A decade ago, she'd been a bored, underwhelmed PolySci major in need of an internship. Now she was pregnant, a fugitive from justice, and helping a bunch of superheroes plan a prison break.

Amanda, Tony, and the super soldiers had arrived last night, beat up and dragging along an unconscious guy that had apparently been the catalyst of all their woes. It was a little anticlimactic to learn the Secretary Ross wasn't actually the mastermind behind an intricate plot to disband the Avengers, but only taking advantage of another guy's evil schemes.

Superheroing was complicated.

After a good night's sleep and some baby bonding, everyone but Pepper and the Rhodeses had gathered in the guest palace living room to huddle around plans for the RAFT prison and try to figure out how to get the rest of the crew out.

Darcy was mostly eating melon and waiting to be told what to do.

"That still doesn't get us in the building," Sharon said, tossing her pen onto the table cluttered with schematics.

"It's not a building," Tony said. "It's a boat. Well, a submarine. You kick in the doors, you kill everyone."

"It needs a reason to surface," Bruce said. "And if their scanners pick up any of us—the heavy hitters being not exactly stealthy—it won't surface."

"What if we were the reason to surface?" Bucky said.

"Like bait?" Bruce shook his head. "Ross would see through that in a minute."

"No one is being bait." Steve was bordering into Cap voice. "That goes south and we're staging and even bigger rescue then we are now."

Darcy ducked in between Sharon and Bruce to peer at the table. There was a picture of Secretary Ross that someone - she was laying money on Bruce - had doodled devil horns on. "You need somebody who wouldn't get arrested on sight," she commented.

"We could try the King?" Amanda offered, sounding not even remotely convinced that was a good idea.

There was a moment of frustrated silence. Darcy picked up the picture of Ross. "You know, old white dudes tend to ignore people who aren't like them. Like women. And minorities. And disabled people." She looked up to find everyone looking at her. "And we happened to have someone who's all three. With military and government connections."

Most of the room then turned and looked at Lani, as she'd intended.
"No," Steve said immediately.

Lani managed to look amused and offended at the same time. "Why not?"

"Because I don't like sending non-combatants into danger."

"I'll have you know I have an excellent right hook."

Sharon looked thoughtful. "Hypothetically, do you think you could get in?"

"Yes," she said without hesitation. "I did not make it publicly known I was working with you, and Ross didn't see me at the compound when he visited. I could get permission to go with a phone call."

"You said Ross was your highest contact," Tony said. "Going straight to him the day after he arrested them might raise a couple flags."

"I said he was my highest current. People in high levels of politics do retire, on occasion. Especially after being kidnapped by terrorists and almost exploded."

He pointed at her. "I knew you treated Ellis."

"I don't comment on my past clients," she informed him with a saccharine smile.

Ignoring them, Sharon turned to her husband. "Maybe we should talk about this."

He looked stubborn in that way only Steve seemed to have. Then he sighed and said, "Hypothetically. How do the rest of us get in once it's surfaced."

"We don't," Tony said. "That's what I'm telling you. I helped design this stupid thing. Anything fishy anywhere nearby—and it's in the middle of nowhere so there's no creeping up on it—and it doesn't surface. Not even if Marine One is hovering over it with the President."

"The group there will have to fight their way out," Bruce confirmed.

"So I'll bring them weapons," Lani said. "I can tell you from experience that places like this don't know what to do with wheelchairs. You can hide whatever you want on it, no one will search it."

Sharon had walked over to look at the chair. "Better yet, rig up some sort of frame around it. Make it look like your old manual one. We can pack twice as much firepower into it. And it will make you look even more helpless." She glanced back at Steve. "Hypothetically."

"I need to get into the storage containers," Tony said. "But I can make that happen."

"We need some kind of intel, we can't send you in blind," Steve said.

"I'll go with her," the computerized voice Zev was using said.

Now everyone's head swiveled to look at him. This conversation was shaping up to be the most exciting game of tennis ever.

"I know you're worried about Wanda," Amanda said. "But I think you're even less of a combatant than Lani."

He typed rapidly a moment, then folded his arms over his chest. "When I was doing a shift at the hospital in Syracuse, and Wanda was home in Ithaca, we could talk." He tapped his temple. "It's about 50 miles."
There was a moment of silence, then Tony turned to him. "So how comfortable are you with firearms?"

"I've never shot one. But my hands are steady, my nerves are solid, and I'd kill someone for her without a second thought."

Bucky hopped up. "I can work with that."

Sharon rubbed her hands together. "Okay. You two fly out. As soon as Zev can get in touch with Wanda start compiling as much information as possible. They'll need something to take out cameras and audio and to take out the door locks."

"I helped build them," Tony said. "I can take 'em out."

"Once the others are free you make your way back out to the jet and get the hell out."

"And two disabled people stage the biggest jail break in history," Darcy finished brightly.

*

Lani

"Sorry about the rough flying," the pilot said from the front. "Usually we bring helicopters in, but President Ellis said you wouldn't fit." He paused, as if he'd just realized what he said. "I mean -"

Lani smiled. "It's fine. I appreciate you making accommodations for me."

He nodded, clearly nervous, and turned back to the controls, requesting permission to land. Lani glanced out the window. Zev had zoned out about twenty minutes ago, which she hoped meant he was getting a detailed layout of the prison base.

She watched the prison emerge from the rough Atlantic and tried not to let nerves get the best of her. She faced down some of the most powerful people in the world. She could do this.

They landed smoothly, and the deck was lowered into a dry hanger where Ross and a few armed guards were there to meet her. She reached over and tapped Zev to get his attention.

He looked at her, glanced back at others, and shifted his body so they couldn't see his hands. She'd told them he was her aide, and that he was deaf (for security reasons). At the moment he seemed to be banking on no one being able to sign. "They have her drugged. Her and Vision are in shock collars." His hands were shaky so it was a little hard to understand.

She gave his arm a little squeeze. They'd been counting on Wanda's help with the break out. Lani was suddenly very glad Tony had packed as much firepower as he had into her little fake chair. "We'll get her out," she signed, then plastered on her best polite smile as the jet's engines wound down and the ramp opened.

Zev helped her maneuver down, knuckles white on the chair's handles. Ross met them at the door to the prison. "Dr. Yee." The greeting was sincere, almost warm, and he bent a little to shake her hand. "I don't recall you needing an aide before."

Lani made an effort not to glance back at Zev. "On my home turf I do fine, but I've found while traveling it's useful to have help."

They took an elevator down, and then went out into an open area ringed with cells. This seemed to
be the men's area, as she could see Sam, Clint, and Pietro. Sam looked reasonably unharmed, just a
couple of scrapes and a black eye. His eyes widened when he saw her and Zev, and she could see
him fighting to suppress a confused smile. He probably thought Steve was about to come kicking
through the door. Clint was facing the other way and didn't see her. Pietro looked to be shackled.

Ross took them to the control room. Zev turned to her and signed. "Wanda has a crazy idea."

With glance at Ross, she replied, "Those are popular lately. Tell me."

Before he could, Ross opened the opposite door, to take them out the other side of the control room.
She saw Zev square his shoulders, and all he said was, "Sorry if I explode."

Lani frowned, and the he opened his hands and she could see a distortion in the air around them
which slowly tinted red. He met her gaze and she nodded. The red flared out, slamming into the men
manning the control panels knocking them out. Ross turned at the sound and Zev flicked a hand out.
Red light blasted the other man back into the hallway.

The control panels were well labeled, and Lani was able to find the locks for the Avenger cells
easily.

"Go find Wanda," she signed to Zev. "And Vision and Nat, I'm guessing they'll be near her. I'll arm
the men and meet up with you."

He gave her a salute and dashed off. She saw a flash of red in the hallway a moment later, and the
sound of a body hitting the floor. He'd be fine.

She cruised back into the men's area to find Sam and Clint cautiously stepping out of their cells.
"Gentlemen," she said. "I believe we're overdue for a group session." She undid latches on either
side of her chair and the fake sides fell, revealing the weapons Tony had strapped her with.

Clint whistled. Sam ignored them, bracing a hand on her chair so he could kiss her.

She cupped the back of his head, sagging in relief. She hadn't let herself worry about him, instead
focusing on the bigger task of breaking them all out. Now he was here and they were almost out and
she could acknowledge how afraid she'd been.

"You find me really hot right now, don't you?" she murmured when he lifted his head.

"I can't even describe how hot I find you right now."

"Stop necking and come cut me out of these damn things!" Pietro yelled.

"Where are the rest of them?" Clint asked, rifling through the guns.

Lani let Sam go and handed him bolt cutters so he could free Pietro. "Waiting for us in Wakanda, it's
just me and Zev."

Pietro appeared at her side and pecked her cheek. "I also find you hot, by the way."

"Thank you, Pietro. Zev went to go find Wanda, Nat and Vision. They're that way," she pointed
through the control room. "The hanger and our jet is that way."

"You and Zev came without back-up?" Clint asked.

"Kinda." She hit a button on her chair and it's own armaments popped out. They were just like the
ones on Tony and Rhodey's suits. She found it highly suspect that Tony had just whipped that up.
Sam gave a sigh that was pure sex.

"Get a room," Pietro muttered. He was fidgeting from one foot to the other. She knew he built up energy if he didn't run regularly.

It was on the tip of her tongue to suggest they go look for the others, when the base rumbled ominously. "I think Zev found Wanda."

"Yes." Pietro punched Sam's shoulder. "That's from her."

Sam laughed, and picked up a gun. "Let's go."

*

Zev

Zev had no idea where he was going, so he went on instinct, his connection to Wanda helping guide him. She helped him build a protective bubble, and he just blasted anyone he came across.

Finally, finally he found the room. There was a heavy bolted door he had to blast open. Inside, she was strapped to a bed, unconscious and wearing an electric shock collar. She'd warned him, but actually seeing it made him feel sick.

He moved to unfasten the wrist straps and her fingers twitched. *Hi.*

He touched the collar. *How do I get this off you?*

*The clasp is in the back. I think there's a button that un hooks it.* He lifted her a little and found the clasp. It released and he tossed it aside. Beneath it, her skin was red and irritated, but not burned.

*Don't suppose there's a big needle labeled stimulant you can wake me up with?*

He reached for the IV dangling from the wall and into her arm. He flipped the switch so the drip stopped. *It's ketamine and propofol, it'll wear off on its own. You'll be groggy.* He looked her over. *They don't even have a pulse ox on you.* Clearly no one was monitoring. They could have very easily killed her. He opened drawers in the little cabinet in there, very happy to find sterile gauze and tape. He went back to remove the IV.

*You're sexy when you get all doctory,* she told him as he taped her up. She stirred, trying to bend her arm to test the bandage. *How'd you like borrowing my powers?*

*It was both cool and terrifying.* He stroked her forehead. *I am very grateful they are too stupid to realize it would have taken an induced coma to turn you off completely.* It might have been a gamble and not stupidity. That would have required a ventilator to keep her alive, and they clearly didn't have the equipment. They certainly wouldn't have ever thought her power could be channeled through someone else.

*They're very afraid of me,* she told him. *Both under and overestimated me.* She took a deep breath and opened her eyes, smiling at him. *I've been looking forward to showing him what I can do.*

He shuddered out a breath and reached for her, gathering her up in his arms. She wrapped herself around him, burying her face in his neck a moment, before kissing him.

*Under his feet, the floor rumbled. That's my girl.*

She wasn't quite stable on her feet, so she just used her power to float. Her system dealt with
medications oddly and was fortunately processing the drugs quickly.

*I can hear Pietro,* she told Zev. *The men are free.* Tilting her head like she was listening to some far off sound, she headed for the door. *Vision is this way.*

He followed her out into the hallway, where they were met with a group of soldiers. Before they could do anything but shout, Wanda flicked a hand. Their guns disassembled and clattered to the ground. Then she pushed both hands towards them and they parted like the sea, pinned to the walls, frozen in place as he and Wanda passed them.

Vision was in his own cell, with vibranium walls laced with electrodes. Wanda ripped the door off in a shower of sparks.

He tested his collar gingerly, then pulled it off. "Unfortunately they discovered I can't phase through vibranium."

"They knew just enough to be dangerous," Wanda said. "Are you all right?"

Vision nodded. "Unharmed. And glad to see you both."

Wanda tilted her head. "They found Nat. We should go."

Zev nodded. "Back this way."

They retraced their steps but didn't meet any more resistance. Whether that meant the guards had given up or that no one wanted to mess with Wanda and Vision, he didn't know. They found the rest of them in the hall outside the men's holding area and paused for Wanda to hug Pietro.

"Clint went to secure the jet," Nat said. "Let's get the hell out of here."

They moved as a group. Wanda wove her fingers through his as they reached the hanger. The pilot had already been removed and Clint was puttering in the cockpit.

"I need someone to open the hatch," he said as they got on.

"I can do it," Wanda told him. "Tell me when you're ready."

After a moment he put his hand over the throttle and nodded. Wanda shot her power upwards and the hatch retracted. The jet slowly lifted off. Zev put his arm around her and she leaned into him. *You okay?*

*I am now,* she told him. *I knew it couldn't last.*

*Captivity?*

She nodded. *I could sense the others, even if I couldn't communicate. And I knew the rest of you wouldn't leave us there.*

*I assume you expected something more like Steve and Tony kicking doors down.*

*I didn't not anticipate you and Lani running the show, no.* She smiled and kissed his cheek. *My honorary Avenger.*

*I'm happy to go back to being a doctor. That was quite enough battle for one lifetime.*

Tucking her arms through his she resettled on his shoulder. *I think we're all owed some peace and*
quiet.

I imagine we'll be stuck in Wakanda for quite a while.

Seems to be the general sentiment, she agreed. I don't know that this will help our relations with the government.

No. And actually I figured whatever happened with everyone else—if the US forgave the Avengers or some other country wanted to employ them... you and I should still stay in Wakanda.

Lifting her head to look at him, she asked, Permanently?

At least for a while. I did some looking into finishing my schooling here. There are some really exciting research opportunities, too.

She considered a moment.

Their medical training programs come with completely sane hours.

Wanda stilled and looked over at him. You don't say.

He smiled. How's the clock doing?

Sounds like I'll finally get to stop hitting the snooze button.

He squeezed her a little. I think that sounds like fun.

Hugging him tightly, she cuddled closer. Yes, it does.

Chapter End Notes

I have a confession. This entire story exists so Lani and Zev could stage the jailbreak.
Chapter 16

Sharon

There was a lot of commotion when the team arrived after the greatest jail break in history. Those who'd been imprisoned took time to shower and get medical attention. Then T'Challa had a feast cooked and served and for the first time in days everyone was back together, telling stories and laughing and generally feeling safe.

It would take time to sort out what to do next. But for now, Sharon thought everyone needed a little levity and normal.

After hearing the third version of Lani's entrance at the prison, Sharon realized she hadn't seen her husband for a while. Steve had been... quiet since coming back from Siberia. He'd clearly been using the prison break as a distraction and now that it was done she was a little worried about where his head might be.

She eventually found him in Joey's room, sitting on the rocker that had been fished out of their storage container, watching the baby sleep. Barnabas was in his lap, and he was petting the cat's fur as he stared off into space.

"Hey," she said softly, coming over to stand next to the chair.

"It still amazes me how soundly he sleeps."

"I think he takes after his grandmother," she said. "Mom can sleep through a parade."

Barnabas climbed on the arm of the chair for pets, and Steve stood up. "It's certainly not from me."

No, he wasn't the most restful of sleepers. She scratched Barnabas's chin and watched Steve. "Do you want to talk?"

He looked at her for a moment, then sighed. He inclined his head towards the door. She took Barnabas with her out into their little sitting room. Steve wandered over to the window. "Tony's got the babies, Bucky is chasing after Edie, and Amanda is busy with Rhodey. So none of us have to talk much about what happened in Siberia."

Sharon knew the gist of it. They'd stayed up late when he got back. "Maybe it's better for everyone to have a little time to breathe."

"I should have told them," he said with a sigh.

 Agreeing with him too promptly was probably kind of unseemly. She sat on the couch and settled Barnabas on her lap. "You thought you were doing the right thing. I'm sure they understand that, too."

"I don't know." He came and sat next to her. "When I first learned, I wondered. But the SHIELD dump made it clear Hydra had numerous assassins and operatives. A faked car accident on a non-combatant target isn't worth thawing the Winter Soldier. Bucky agreed—we talked about it when I first brought him to the Tower."

"When did you find out otherwise?" she asked quietly.
"When Wanda went in to fix his triggers. She didn't mean to see it, but the memory was very.. .noticeable even though he wasn't conscious of it. I now realize that's because Zemo asked him about it, that was half the point of the triggering in Geneva."

"She came to ask you what to do?"

"Yes. I told her, for now, file it with all the other stuff she pretends not to know."

Sharon wasn't entirely sure that had been fair to Wanda, but given the chaos that had been happening around that time, adding more drama had probably been the right move. Wanda did keep a lot of secrets, good and bad. "There was a lot going on right then," she said. "Finding the right time to bring it up would have been impossible."

"I couldn't tell Bucky. Not right then. And I couldn't tell Tony and not tell Bucky. So I just put it out of my head. But I'm pretty sure Zev must know. And maybe Lani."

"Well, now I think everyone knows. For good or ill, it's done."

"Yeah." He rubbed his eyes. "To say they were pissed is the understatement of the century."

"I saw the bruises." She'd also pulled Amanda aside to get a relatively objective version of events. "Every family has their fights."

"I don't know," he said quietly. "It was pretty brutal."

Shooing Barnabas off her lap, she stood and walked over to him and rubbed his back. "Amanda seemed to think the worst was over. I'm not saying it will be easy. Or fun. But they both love you like a brother. You can get through this."

"We're probably all stuck here with each other for a while. I suppose we'll have to."

She hugged him from behind, resting her chin on his shoulder. "We won, Steve. Bad guy defeated, everyone safe. New babies in the world. It's a good day."

"I should start with Tony. He's probably in a better mood."

"Probably sleep deprived, too. That makes people malleable."

"Did I ever tell you he built all of Joey's furniture back in Ithaca? Made me take a nap, then got me to come hang out in the hotel with you."

"Tony is a very good friend. Which is why I think he'll forgive you this. The way you've forgiven him a lot of mistakes."

"Like almost causing armageddon?"

"That one was pretty bad," she said. "And all you did was do disappointed Cap voice."

"Intentions matter. He was trying to do something good." He looked down at her. "Was I? Or was I just trying to make my life easier?"

"I think you were trying not to add to their worries. It made your life easier, yes. But it made theirs easier as well."

"It was temporary and worse in the end, though." He inhaled slowly. "And God if I have any idea what to say to Bucky."
"I'm sorry, Steve," she said softly, heart aching for him.

He shrugged a little. "Sometimes I'm just wrong."

"You are only human." With a tug, she turned him enough to hug him properly. "You want to share a bath and go to bed?"

He pressed his face into her shoulder, and she felt him nod. She rubbed his back and started guiding him towards the bathroom. She'd take good care of him. And in the morning they could see about healing wounds.

*

Pepper

Wakanda was paradise.

Pepper remembered the miserable haze of Ruby's infancy. She'd felt isolated and exhausted, confused and in pain. She and Tony almost killed each other. They certainly almost accidentally killed the baby. She assumed her second would be easier, but then she'd never expected twins.

As it turned out, Wakandans were not fans of tossing new mothers into the water and seeing if they sunk. Women were sent home after delivery with a personal attendant/nurse who provided medical and home care. Having twins got them two kind, expert women who could swaddle like nobody's business and were very concerned that Pepper got enough rest. A nanny looked after Ruby during the day, too. It was blissful.

After Ruby's birth, Tony had been very opposed to hiring a night nurse or other helper as was common among pretty much every other family at their socioeconomic level. At the time, she conceded to his demons. The doctor who'd delivered the twins reacted to Tony's statement they didn't need help like he'd just said they wouldn't be feeding them. So help they got.

Wakanda was paradise, and Yilli and Sawye were saints.

It was late at night, after their helpers had retired for the night—just a phone call away—and both babies had fallen asleep while nursing. Feeding both at once was kind of an undertaking, so once they were out, Pepper was pretty much stuck. She sent Tony to go fix her a snack.

He returned with a tray of fruit and cheese with a variety of crackers and sliced bread. "I may have gotten carried away," he conceded when he set it down. "But you need your strength."

"No, I'm starving. You know how many calories feeding two of them requires?"

"Approximately three thousand calories a day," he said promptly. She gave him an incredulous look and he shrugged. "You're always surprised when I read about baby things."

He sat down next to her so he could help her eat, and she watched him. "Your face is looking better."

It probably took a great deal of self control not to touch the bruises. "Steve has been trying to talk to me and I've been dodging him."

"You probably can't avoid him forever."

"I don't know." He swiped a cracker through some hummus. "It's a big castle."
"We also can't live in the castle forever."

"I know." It sounded borderline petulant.

She reached out and squeezed his arm. "You beat him up. That wasn't enough?"

He didn't look up at her, glaring at the food plate. "He should have told me. And Bucky."

"He should have," she conceded. "But I bet he has a reason he did it, and it made sense to him. Doing something with good intentions and disastrous results is not exactly a foreign experience for you."

His expression was getting dangerously close to a pout, probably because she was right. "Maybe you could call Sharon and have her come visit the twins and he could tag along and we could grunt apologetically at each other."

That was pretty blatant, for Tony. "I could probably do that."

And so, once it was light out and the boys had had a morning nap and most civil people had had breakfast, Pepper texted Sharon to come visit the twins and to bring Steve along.

They came about twenty minutes later, Sharon carrying flowers and a plate of fruit. Everyone was in love with the fruit here.

The boys were a little more than 6lbs each, much smaller than Ruby had been (or Edie). Everyone who saw them commented on how tiny they were. Sharon, however, had delivered a baby that was small enough to fit entirely in Steve's hands. "I can't believe how big regular newborns are."

Joey was crawling around on the floor at their feet, something she was surprised he was doing. Ruby hadn't crawled until almost 8 months—Joey's age—and she hadn't been born eleven weeks premature. "I can't believe how big he's grown."

"That's what happens when you feed them," Sharon said with a smile. "And he eats like a champion."

Tony and Steve were making awkward small talk on the other side of the room. But they were at least talking. "How is he?" Pepper asked.

"I've gotten him to stop self-flagellating for the most part. But he feels guilty and responsible and nothing I say can fix it."

"They take their responsibility very seriously, don't they?"

"They do." She sat and reached out to help Joey stand up. "He didn't know for very long. Only found out after Bucky was triggered. Honestly, was there ever a good time since then to bring it up?"

"Probably not, no. I think he's just hurt about the whole thing and Steve is an easy target."

"Bucky, too," Sharon said. "According to Amanda, anyway. He's having to wrap his head around what he did, to someone he considered a friend. Most of the people responsible are dead. Just leaves Steve as a scape goat."

Pepper watched them. "They haven't started punching yet. It's a good sign." Junior squeaked and she shifted him against her shoulder. She'd feared she wouldn't be able to tell them apart since they were identical, but somehow she could. "The babies have done a lot for his mood."
"Babies cure a lot." Sharon craned her neck to peer at the other pod. "Anthony and George?"

"George was my grandfather's name. I thought Tony might want to flip them—he's middle name is Howard—but he said no. Said being mad about the murder didn't make his father look like a better father or anything. Junior isn't technically, actually a junior. His middle name isn't Edward, it's Newbury."

Sharon turned to look at her, clearly surprised. "You named him after Amanda?"

"He insisted. I wouldn't let him actually use 'Amanda'."

"That would probably get him teased, Stark or not." She reached over and tickled his toes. "Does she know?"

"I didn't mention it when she came by. I think it's Tony's thing to tell."

"It's very sweet."

The men had wandered over to the bar and were now toasting something. Pepper could see Sharon relax a little as they watched them. "One down."

Pepper sighed. "The other one might be harder. He doesn't have quite the track record of accidental catastrophes."

"True. Steve's a lot more sure of where he stands with Bucky, though. Their friendship has weathered a lot."

"We all have," Pepper said. "Haven't we?"

"We have." Sharon looked around at the palace, then down at Joey. "I think now that we can breathe again we're all going to have to figure out what our lives look like now." She shook her head. "I have to make some calls. See if we have anyone else on our side."

"If you could find out how the Swiss feel about us, I would appreciate that. A couple of months back we moved Stark Industries' incorporation to Switzerland because the US government and their asset seizure policies made Tony nervous. I'd like to know if I can go to the office in person."

"Swiss are generally pretty laissez faire about such things. But I'll put them at the top of the list for calls."

"Thank you. I am going to want to get back to work eventually."

"At least you can get a proper maternity leave in this time," Sharon said with a smile. "Novelty."

"Maybe with your next one," Pepper offered.

She nodded. "Maybe."

Steve and Tony came back towards them together. "Better?" Pepper asked.

Tony glanced up at the other man and nodded. "Better."

Steve smiled. "Now can I hold the babies?"

*
If one had to recover from being in a super-max prison in the middle of the ocean with no idea when or how you'll get out, there were worse places to do it than a castle in a secluded jungle kingdom.

The guest palace didn't have turrets, not being of European design, but due to the way the building was cut into and around the existing mountains, some rooms were definitely higher than others. When assigning rooms Darcy had made sure to give Clint and Nat one of those, with the best view of the jungle below and city in the distance.

Nat found Clint out on the balcony, watching the sun set and the Wakandan capital light up.

She handed him a smoothie and sank into the chaise lounge next to him. "How's the arm?"

"Healing up," he said. He looked over at her. "You know, it's strangely gratifying."

"Getting shot in the arm?"

"No. The fact that they had an archer. The considered me so necessary they had to find someone just like me. You know how rare I am?"

She couldn't resist. "You've always been one in a million to me, pumpkin." He gave her a look and she grinned and rubbed his back. "I know, I know what you mean. And she wasn't just a gimmick, she had some skills."

"She's probably fifteen like the rest of them." He propped his feet on the railing. "I know Bruce's history with Ross, and so I shouldn't be surprised...but kids? Really?"

"They wanted people to control. Like in the Red Room. Catch them young, mold them." She squinted up at the sky, looking for early stars. "They never liked that we had our own minds."

"The more cohesive we became, the more nervous we made them, too. Our loyalty was to each other."

"Makes me wonder how they're treating those kids. Hard to make a team out of people and not have them form bonds."

"Maybe they're copying how the Red Room did it. Keep them isolated, turn them against each other."

Exactly what she was afraid of. Not that there was anything she could do about it. Whoever had put together the new team clearly didn't want input for the people they were trying to replace. Still, it sat sour in her stomach, knowing it was happening.

"The spider kid had some moves," was all she said.

"Feeling empathy for your kin?" It was a joke about her name, and an acknowledgement of what he knew she was feeling. Clint was good at that, giving her something she could choose to take in whatever way fit her current frame of mind.

She lifted a shoulder. "I hate to see talent wasted."

"Do you think they made them, or just found them?"

"I don't know. Maybe both. The archer's been training a long time to be that good. The super soldier that went toe-to-toe with Steve and the speedster... Were there more experiments like the
Maximoffs?" She shook her head. "For all we know those six were the first class and there's dozens more in some training lab somewhere."

"That's... terrifying."

"Yes, it is." A superhero team with no leader, no moral compass. A team that didn't trust its own members. "There's nothing we can do, is there?"

"While in exile? No. I think it's probably going to—and maybe has to—blow up in Ross's face."

She nodded, looking out at the view. The sun was all but gone, sky a riot of red and gold. "I guess we'll wait and see."

"It's not a bad place to wait," he said, reaching for her hand. "The sightlines here are great."
Chapter 17

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Bucky

"Armando?"

Amanda sighed but she didn't look up from whatever she was reading. "I promise there is no way to masculinize my name. I think using Newbury was very sweet."

When she'd found out one of the Stark twins was named after her she'd teared up, blubbered, and hugged a rather flummoxed Tony for a full minute, so "sweet" was probably an understatement. He was a good husband, so he wouldn't mention that. "Maybe your influence will temper the Tony in him."

"Or he'll combine our worst traits and we'll finally have that villain in the family."

"Oh—what about Amadeus?"

Now she looked up. "Jamie, darling, moon of my life, I love you with all of my heart. Please go find something else to do."

He peered at her computer screen. "What are you doing?"

"I think I can tweak my serum enough that we can give it to Rhodey. It would stabilize him enough for the surgeons here to work on him." She lifted a shoulder. "Might not get him all the way, but even a little more sensation would improve his prognosis."

"That is a worthy task." He kissed her temple. "I'll leave you alone."

What he needed to do, really, was to talk to Steve. He was just still not entirely sure how.

Word through the grapevine was he'd made his amends with Tony, which was good. He'd certainly been more pissed. Wanda had come to talk to Bucky about it and had confirmed Steve hadn't known very long at all. She'd been apologetic and guilty for her part in it and he'd managed to assure her he held no ill will. He should really be able to do the same for his best friend.

He found Steve in the yard, hammering away at a heavy punching bag strung to a tree. They were going to start training with the Wakandan military next week, trading moves and information. It would be novel to be around a group of people with enhancements. From what he understood, Wakandans weren't at the level of strength and speed he and Steve were, but they were far from average human ability, too. It would be interesting.

He watched Steve a few moments, until he took a break. "You know, for most of our relationship I'm the one that protected you. It still grates a little when it's the other way around."

"That has grated you since WWII." He looked over at Bucky. "A trait you and your wife share is you both have wonderful 'evil villain' origin stories. Much like Zemo. Only you didn't."

"Villainy is a lot of work. Not that watching your ass is easy but..."

That made Steve smile. "I'm sorry I didn't tell you."
"I understand why you didn't. And I accept your apology. But don't do it again." He shoved his hands in his pockets. "I can't get over my past by pretending it didn't happen."

"Makes sense. I don't want you to have to fight your demons and you never wanted me to fight my bullies."

He smiled. "I'm hoping we've run out of landmines to come across. But if we do run into another one I'd rather have you backing me up than protecting me."

Steve took a deep breath. "I can do that."

"Thanks." They were quiet a moment. "I feel like I should buy you a beer or something."

"Wakandan liquor is very potent," Steve said. "It's not Asgardian Mead, but. . ."

"Well, my wife is busy for the foreseeable and Wanda is watching Edie so-" He waved an arm. "After you."

*

Ora

Ora was talking her usual afternoon nap out by the pool. Her suntan had gotten ridiculously dark here in the tropics, despite making attempts to lay in the shade. She was woken by the creak of the chair next to her, and opened her eyes to see her husband sitting in it.

"Wanda told me Zev's going to go to medical school here."

She sat up a little. "Sounds like they're settling in for the long haul."

"Yes. Apparently, Wakandan school is less arduous than American. They're going to try for a baby." He waved a hand. "I left before there were details."

"You? No!" She faked as much exaggerated shock as she could.

"I know I'm usually so interested in my sister's sex life." He tapped her belly. "But I'm glad this one will have a cousin sooner rather than later."

"I had a lovely conversation with the Minister of Education this morning. They're looking to develop more in-country language training, to support cultural exchange, and he wanted to discuss it with me. Apparently I speak more languages than anyone in Wakanda."

Pietro grinned at her. "You speak more languages than anyone in a lot of countries." He flattened his hand on her belly. "So you're getting a job lined up?"

"I am. I have four months to go yet, and I'm already bored laying around."

"Some people enjoy lounging in a tropical paradise."

"Says the man who went out into the savannah to race gazelles."

"Did I mention I beat most of them?"

Agata kicked her particularly hard, and she reached to move his hand. He frowned in confusion, then his face split into that little boy grin of his. "Is that-?"
Ora grinned back. "Did you feel that? That's her."

He looked positively delighted. Sliding off his chair, he kneeled so he could kiss her stomach. "Hello, little one."

The baby kicked back immediately. She reached out and ruffled his hair. "She has very energetic feet. Not that I'm surprised."

"She's her Daddy's girl," he said proudly.

"Feel real now?" she asked him.

"Yes." He leaned up and kissed her. Then he went back to making noises at her belly.

She left her hand in his hair. He'd been starting to let it grow out and in the humidity it was curling like crazy. "We'll clearly be here a while," she said. "Even if the government or whomever forgive Tony and Steve, I don't know that I'm comfortable going back to a society that thinks my daughter needs to be registered. And... I think it would be good for her to grow up around other children who are like her."

"The king has offered us jobs training his military. I don't know that my skills are transferable." He looked serious and scowly a moment, then smiled at her. "Maybe I stay home with the baby, yes? I took care of Wanda all those years."

"You will definitely be able to keep up with her," Ora replied. She'd actually been a little worried about that. A toddler bouncing around the house like a barely visible ping-pong ball.

He rubbed her belly one more time and climbed back into his chair. "You're happy here. Wanda is happy here. That's all I need. We'll figure the rest out."

* * *

Bruce

"And then we had recess again, and I played a game where I didn't have to use any English at all. Azi told the other kids they should play with me, and they listen to him because the King is his uncle. Then we had science, and Auntie Ora didn't think the teacher pronounced the Latin words right. But she didn't say so."

Ada continued dramatically recounting her day, which she'd spent shadowing at a Wakandan school. They didn't have private schools here, but the public schools in larger cities like the capitol had specializations and kids were placed in them based on assessments and lifestyle factors. Ada could go anywhere, but they chose the school where Shuri sent her kids. They'd upended Ada's life, and somehow she'd managed to make a friend. He'd be damn sure she got to go to school with that friend.

Today was the last step before admission to this school, though considering the referral had originated from the heir to the throne, it was mostly a formality. They had yet to hire an interpreter to attend with Ada as the instruction was in Wakandan, and Ora had volunteered to fill in. As fast as Ada was picking up the language, Bruce doubted she'd need help more than a year.

"And they do a science fair, like Laurel Crown used to do but since Uncle Tony isn't on the judging board I'll be able to actually participate and you can do teams so Azi was thinking we could be a team but he wasn't interested in any of the ideas I had so maybe I'll just do it myself."
Not that she wasn't capable of independence. "What were your ideas?"

"I want to build something."

He raised an eyebrow. "Like what?"

"I haven't decided yet. Something useful. Uncle Tony said to build a better mousetrap but he might have been kidding."

"What that means is to take something practical that lots of people use, and make a better one. It's not flashy, but it will be popular because it's so necessary."

"Hmm." She tapped her chin, which he found utterly adorable. "I'll give it some thought."

Asima coasted around the edge of the couch he was sitting on, until she got to his legs and stopped to hold up her arms. She'd been walking along the edges of furniture and walls for a while now, and would surely start walking any day. Violet was sad it was going to be in this temporary place and not their home. He imagined they'd never go back to that house again.

He scooped her up and set her on his lap. "Hello, Princess." She babbled excitedly as he tossed her in the air a few times.

Ada wandered off to her room and Violet came in a moment later with snacks. "So school was a hit."

"I heard all about it."

She settled next to him on the couch, putting the chips she was carrying down on the side table. Asima immediately wiggled to get down so she could forage. "I'm glad she's settling in," Violet said, leaning on his shoulder. "She's become very resilient."

"Neil seems to be settling in, too."

"Apparently there's a active rock climbing community. Several of the Dora are involved and have kids involved. We're going for a training camp on Saturday. He's learning all their lingo."

"That sounds like fun even to me." He rubbed her back. "How about you? You decided what you want to do with yourself?"

"I'm going to try my hand at writing. At least until I learn a little more Wakandan. Then maybe I'll try some classes at the university." She smiled. "Get exposed to Wakandan literature."

"That sounds like less fun to me. But I am happy to support you."

**STOP FIGHTING**

He frowned and glanced up. "We're not fighting."

The response was an exasperated. **WITH TEAM. NO MORE BATTLES**

"Ah." He looked back at Violet. "Hulk has been trying to convince me to retire from superheroing."

She chuckled. "And you can't even accuse me of colluding with him."

"It does require his cooperation."
"Maybe he's content to just be a voice in your head." Sliding her hand into his, she turned serious. "Do you want to retire?"

He looked down at their joined hands. "Some days I really do."

"I don't think anyone would judge you. Or be surprised. With the technology here there's still a lot you can do to help the world. Without putting your health in danger."

Changing was hard on his body, and it got harder the older he got. "It would be nice to just be a scientist again."

"I would be very happy to not be a superhero's wife anymore."

He searched her face a moment. "Okay."

FINALLY

"Hulk approves."

Violet grinned brightly and leaned up to kiss him, first on the mouth, then on the forehead. "Then we are all in agreement."

*

Cal

Doc's ultrasound machine back in New York had been cutting edge. Cal had been impressed by the clear outline of his tadpole-like child. Wakandan tech put that all to shame.

"Would you like to know the gender?" the tech asked politely.

Darcy sat up a little. "You can tell this early?"

"I can see the baby's entire genetic code. I can tell you anything you want."

She turned to give Cal a wide-eyed look. "We did talk about learning the gender."

He bent to kiss her forehead. "I'm cool with that. Go any other questions?"

For a moment she looked torn, as clearly she was tempted by getting the complete work up. Finally she said, "Gender, and if there's any scary diseases or syndromes we need to prepare for."

The tech nodded. "It's a girl. She is completely healthy. She is left-handed, I don't know if your culture considers that a disability."

Darcy was grinning. "No. A rarity and occasional inconvenience, but not a disability." She looked at Cal. "Girl."

He grinned back at her. He'd have of course been happy with anything. But he kind of wanted a girl. "God help us."

"She's gonna wrap you around her finger."

"I am surprisingly okay with that."

"Good." She looked back at the tech. "Thank you."
She paused, then said, "I suppose I should tell you, she has markers in her genes that are common to Wakandans. They are caused by the vibranium. So I would expect your child to be somewhat enhanced."

That wasn't unexpected, given what they'd been told. It was a relief, in a way, to know for sure. Darcy's fingers wove through his. "Our kid's gonna need all the help she can get overcoming her nerd genes."

"I wouldn't begrudge my kid a strong back," he replied.

"Would you be willing to speak to some of our scientists? We've never been able to ascertain when the enhancements begin to happen. Clearly it's not at conception. We might be able to learn something about how the vibranium works from you."

"Sure," Darcy said brightly. "You guys have save our asses six ways to Sunday. Anything we can do to return the favor."

"I find that neat," Cal said. He put his hand on Darcy's belly, which had a tiny bump honestly indistinguishable from a big steak dinner.

The tech smiled. "Thank you. I'll put you in touch with a few people. It would be non invasive and at your discretion."

They both agreed and she went back to her measuring and whatnot. A few minutes later they left with some very nice pictures of their little peanut.

"We need a name," Cal said.

"We do. A girl one." Darcy was staring at the picture. "Thoughts?"

"Elizabeth?" he suggested, and she made a face at him. "Too obvious?"

"A touch. Though I like the old fashioned vibe."

"We could mine other Austen characters. Keep with the theme."

"Our friends all have child naming themes." She considered a moment. "Not Jane, not Kitty, not Emma." She pulled her phone out, probably to google Austen character names.

"We'll find one." He tucked the pictures into his pocket. "Something else I was thinking about. I'd like to get a house."

"Guest palace getting cramped for you?"

He shrugged, trying articulate his feelings. "I want to pick a nursery and paint it green. Or maybe pink, in this case. And... sit in the middle of the floor and decide where the furniture will go."

She nodded, like she understood completely. "We'll probably need some sort of jobs to afford a house."

"Tony said everybody stays on the payroll until we sort out Wakandan employment. And they don't do purchases here. There's apparently no private ownership of land. Houses are a kind of lease."

"Huh." She gave up on her phone and tucked it away. "I gotta admit, the more utopic this place seems the more I keep expecting to find a suffering child in a shed somewhere." He gave her a skeptical look and she laughed a little. "Finally, a sci-fi reference too far."
"I love you," he told her. "You're the best wife."

"I know." She tucked her arm through his. "I can ask about finding a house."

Chapter End Notes

Because I know some of you will ask: Frances. They name the baby Frances.
Sam

Rhodey had escaped with his suit because he'd been strapped to a backboard when evacuated. Clint's bow, attached to it though he might have been, was easy to replace. Same with Nat's stingers and other toys. Sam's wings had been cheerfully confiscated by Ross's people, and he felt rather useless without them.

"I'm sure Tony will make you new ones as soon as he's a functional human being again." Lani rubbed sunscreen on his back. "You should enjoy some time off. You had a traumatic experience."

"I don't like being idle. That's why I bought a money-pit house that needed constant work."

"Maybe there's some handymanning to be done in Wakanda."

"Everything is either new, or meticulously maintained." He looked over his shoulder at her. "You think I need a vacation?"

"Have you ever had one?" she replied, sliding her arms around him from behind.

"They dumped me on leave after Riley died. And there was those couple months wandering sunny eastern Europe with Steve."

"It's my professional opinion that those don't count." She kissed his shoulder. "You are in a remote tropical paradise with your incredibly sexy, prison breaking girlfriend. You could try to unwind a bit."

"You've been pretty busy," he countered. The world turned upside down. People needed to talk.

"I have," she conceded. "But I sense the worst of it is over. The last shoe has dropped. Everyone is safe. Rhodey's prognosis is good, especially with Amanda tweaking her serum to use on him. People have accepted that this is where we're going to be for a while. They're planning for the future."

"So you're saying you might have time for a vacation, too?"

"I believe that's what I was getting at, yes."

"We are going to be here a while," he said. "You're as much a fugitive as me now." Nothing in his entire life had surprised him as much as her being the one to come rescue them.

"We should make the most of our exile. Shuri tells me there's lots to do. We could go on safari."

"That sounds like fun." He leaned over to kiss her mouth. "Maybe we should do some planning for the future, too."

"I like planning," she told him, somehow making it sound like the description of a sex act. "I'm very good at it."

It made him laugh, and whatever tension might have been in his body melted. "Have I ever told you you're the best thing that ever happened to me?"
"Not in those words, but I'm also very good at putting together implications." She kissed him tenderly. "I love you. Very much."

He sifted his fingers through her hair. "So I have a crazy idea."

"Crazy is my specialty."

"Not a vacation. Let's take a honeymoon."

Her brows arched. "You want to get married?"

He laughed. "Well, not if you're going to make skeptical face at me."

"Well, that was sort of a backasswards proposal."

"I told you it was a crazy idea," he retorted.

Now she laughed. "True, you did warn me." She cupped his face in her hands. "I'd love to go on a honeymoon with you."

He pulled her entirely into his lap. "I adore you. I do."

"The feeling is mutual. And I look forward to being a restless workaholic with you for the rest of our lives."

"You've got yourself a deal."

*   

Amanda

Four Weeks Later

"Now this is just the first pass. Gimme some feedback. Anything you think of."

Tony had annexed some of the lesser used labs in the Wakandan Royal Institute and was now building things at his old pace. Most of his stuff from Ithaca had been unpacked and with Wakandan technology he'd only added to it. From the door it was impossible to see anything but boxes and work tables.

Amanda followed the sound of his voice to a spot by the windows where Rhodey was trying out his prototype mechanical legs.

"Cupholders maybe?"

"How's my favorite patient?" Amanda asked as he reached the end of the parallel bars.

"Feeling very cyborg," Rhodey said, but he was grinning at being on his feet again.

"Lani and I started working on these back in New York," Tony was saying. "You're very fortunate I am overbearing and sometimes have boundary issues."

"When I write my tell-all book about you, that's going on the flyleaf."

Amanda went over to check out the legs. "How's the sensation?"

"Better everyday. Docs think with these my recovery will go twice as fast."
"That's what we like to hear."

Rhodey slapped a friendly hand on Tony's shoulder. "I'm going to take them off and hop in my hover chair to go meet my wife, though."

"I put a cupholder on that," Tony said, mostly to Amanda.

"Lani will be jealous," she said. They listened to Rhodey make his way out of the room before Tony wandered over to his work table. "Something I want to ask you," she said. "But it might be picking at some recent scabs."

"Well, the boys slept four consecutive and simultaneous hours last night, so I'm in a pretty good mood."

Miracles did happen. "I'd like to take a look at your dad's old work."

Sure enough, his shoulders hunched. "Why?"

"I went through the stuff the Bartons got from the Hydra guy. The entries about getting new serum samples and starting their Winter Soldier program are all dated December 1991." She paused for him to absorb that. "I think your dad had the serum on him. That's why they ran him off the road that particular night. And why it was important enough to send the Asset."

He turned to look at her. "You think that's why he was killed?"

"I do." She fiddled with a half built repulser glove sitting on the table. "I think Howard cobbled together a functional serum. Maybe he had some left after Project Rebirth. Maybe he spent forty years building it from scratch. Erskine's notes have massive holes in them. Stuff he didn't write down, by design or accident. It's why every attempt at recreating the project failed, until I came along with unfettered access to the only known successes." She tugged the glove on and flexed the fingers. "Howard's notes could have a lot of answers. To questions I don't even know yet."

"Originals went down with the Malibu house," he said. "There's an archive in the bunker under Stark Tower in New York."

Her mouth thinned. "I was afraid of that." She peeled the glove off and set it back down. "Ah well. Pipe dreams."

"Well... maybe not. Pepper's assistant, Jess, is still in the US. She could get them. Assuming she's willing to be stuck not being able to get back home. Maybe she wants to move to Switzerland with the company."

"I hear Switzerland's very nice. As is international information smuggling."

"I'll call her. She's got a girlfriend she'd probably need to clear this whole fugitive thing with."

It wasn't what she'd hoped. But it was a start. "Thanks, Tony."

"If I may ask, what else are you hoping to make it do? I thought yours was already successful."

She gestured to where Rhodey had gone. "Nerve regeneration. Small step from there to reversing brain damage. Halting dementia." She smiled. "Hell, maybe I'll cure cancer, make my eight year old self proud."

"There's some stuff in the archive about the extremis stuff, too. Pepper had the breast cancer gene,
and it apparently deleted it. Bruce and I futzed with it when we fixed Pepper, and I then I put it away because of that whole exploding thing. But you... you work like a scientist and not an engineer. Maybe you could make some use of that, too. Make something good out of substances used for war and murder."

Extremis had never occurred to her because of the aforementioned exploding, but it wasn't a bad idea. "I can think of worse legacies."

"I have every faith in you."

The best part was, she knew that was entirely true. "Well, hopefully Jess feels the same."

Amanda assumed it would take weeks, or longer, and was very surprised to receive a text from Tony four days later: *Your delivery from Howard's Basement of Junk will be landing in the courtyard in 20 minutes.*

She went out to meet him. "So I take it Jess decided the life of a fugitive was acceptable?"

"Apparently." They watched the jet set down. Clint had gone to pick them up in Kenya. "Pepper found the whole thing funny and said you'd understand when they got here."

Before she had much of a chance to think of what might be funny the jet ramp lowered and a very familiar blonde came barreling down. "Doc!"

"Tiff?" She caught her when she reached them. "What are you doing here?"

"You're stuck with me. I'm like a barnacle."

"Careful, sweetie, you know I get jealous." Jess strolled down the ramp on a pair of heels Amanda was pretty sure she'd break an ankle in.

"My love for Doc is purely professional," Tiff said over her shoulder.

"You're the girlfriend," Tony said. He looked at Amanda. "And see? I get it now. Though to be honest the fact that the assistants of what might be the two most important women in my life happen to be getting in on is a little weird to me."

Amanda shook her head. "Tony, you knew we were all conspiring against you. This new wrinkle doesn't change that."

"I'll send someone out to get this stuff." He turned on his heel. "Good to see you, Jess," he called. "Welcome to Wakanda, stop by and see the babies."

"Aye, aye, Cap," she called back.

Tiffani looked back at Amanda with a grin. "Hope you got a job for me."

"I will always have a job for you," she said sincerely. "I'm so happy to see you. I can't believe you came out here."

"I have always wanted to live in the tropics."

"Well, then you'll love this. Come on. I'll show you guys the guest palace, we have tons of room."

"Then I want to see your labs," she replied, apparently confident Amanda already had them set up.
"I can give you a fast tour, but work will have to wait. I have a date with my husband tonight."

"It can wait until tomorrow," Jess said, somehow both gently and sternly. It was the voice that was able to herd someone as unwavering as Pepper.

Tiffani turned to give her a pouty face, which was met with a gently stern look, that slowly edged more stern. Something in the way Jess dipped her eyebrows. Finally Tiff turned back to Amanda. "Tomorrow will be fine," she grumbled.

Her dinner with James was at a little bistro in the capital, outside the palace walls. Everyone had been slowly working on integrating into Wakanda, with the eventual aim of moving out of the guest palace. Darcy and Cal were actively house-hunting and she was sure Sam and Lani would be on their heels once they were married. James liked the palace and living down the hall from Steve and the others. Given she'd lived in Stark Tower for months because she was too lazy to look anywhere else, she didn't think they'd be moving out soon. Still, it was good to get out in the city and try new things.

"I really appreciate how much food they serve," he told her. "I'm never hungry."

"I get the sense this is a country of big appetites," she said, dragging half a roll through the sauce left on her plate. "Good husband points for not commenting on my cleaning my plate, by the way."

"A healthy appetite is healthy," he replied. "The food is tasty."

"Mmm. I may get dessert." She leaned back in her seat and sipped her iced tea, watching him. "How's training with the warriors going?"

"More fun than I expected."

She smiled. He and Steve had been working with the Wakandan army - usually referred to as the warriors - for almost a month now. Thanks to the vibranium in the environment, many of the men and women could give the supersoldiers a run for their money. "Nice to have some people who can beat you up?"

"Other than Steve and Thor? Yeah. It's good for us."

"Good." People were settling in. It was good. "So I have some news."

He was still chewing, but around his food he said, "I heard about Tiff."

"Seriously? Gossip travels faster here than it did in the Tower." He shrugged and she shook off the distraction. "Fine, that wasn't it." He arched a brow and she cleared her throat. "Edie is going to be a big sister."

James blinked a couple of times. "What?"

She lifted a shoulder suddenly feeling oddly shy. "I'm pregnant."

He stared a moment, then grinned. "Holy shit! It finally worked."

"Yes, it did," she said, chuckling. "A while ago, apparently."

He laughed. "Wait, so it's like last time? You just didn't notice?"

"Apparently, I am most fertile in the middle of stressful situations. Based on size, conception was a week or two before we bugged out. I'm eight weeks along."
He looked alarmed. "You—you fought. Flew in your suit. Is... is that okay?"

"Yes," she assured him. "He-or-she was very tiny and surrounded by amniotic fluid. I didn't take any major hits to the abdomen and clearly didn't miscarry. Everything is fine." To prove it, she dug out her phone and showed him the short video she'd gotten of the ultrasound. Their little tadpole was happily wiggling around.

"This is way better than the pictures of Edie at this age," he said, reaching out to touch the screen. "Hi there."

"Their prenatal testing and scanning is beyond anything we had back home. We'll know gender way earlier, too."

"I think it's a boy," he said. "Don't know why. I just do."

"That would be nice. One of each." She tucked her phone away. "This is going to need to be it. I am not superhuman, nor am I getting any younger."

"I'm happy with that." He grinned to himself again, and resumed eating. "The four of us."

She had known, obviously, that he'd be happy. Still, it was nice to see him smiling so widely. It had been a rough few months for them. They deserved some good news. "Cozy little family."

He pointed his fork at her. "Does explain some things, though."

"Is this a set up for a fat joke? Because I have a knife, right here."

"No. You've just been..." She could see him searching for the right word. "More touchy-feely, I guess."

She arched a brow. "Is this about hugging Tony in Siberia?"

"You have to admit that was a little out of character."

"The man was crying over his dead mother. I can make certain exceptions to the personal bubble."

"Okay, well, now you sound like you."

Amanda smiled and shook her head. "Finish your dinner before I finish it for you."

Chapter End Notes

It is a boy, they name him Roger.

That is that for Truth is Marching On. And, as some of you may have guessed or suspected, that is that for the Tales from the Tower series. I will post a more lengthy "State of the Fic" address on my Tumblr later today, but the short version is we don't have any plans to write more full length Tales stories. We will keep the Missing Floors scene collection open for any short works that come to us. And we have an epic-length Tony/Pepper story that covers most of the events of the series from their POV but we have no idea when/if that will get finished and it won't include any new information anyway.
However! As many of you also noticed, we have set up some new, younger characters that deserve some stories of their own. Tales will be getting a spin-off featuring the Young Avengers. It will have many of the old group in it, with occasional POVs from them so we're not saying goodbye entirely, just shifting focus. We're very excited about this new bunch of stories and hope you'll join us for the ride.

Info on when to expect the spin-off to start and posting of some non-Tales stories will be on the Tumblr update so check it out, same user name as here.

As always, thank you all for reading and have a great day.

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!