Outback Retreat

by ibelieveinturtles

Summary

When the shit hits the fan you need to have A Plan. Steve's not the only one with A Plan, as he's about to find out when Nat tells him he and the team can't stay in Wakanda, and she has a friend who's happy to give them shelter.

When he meets Darcy Lewis and her secret Aussie cousin Clancy, they've got A Plan for him, A Plan for his team, and even A Plan for Bucky. So he's in the last place he'd ever expected to be, everything's too hot and too bright, and he's starting to forget what the colour green looks like. And he's really hoping that no one's going to throw any beer cans at him this time.

Notes

This fic wouldn't exist if it wasn't for Back In Black, by Pollydoodles and LaTessitrice Go read it.

See the end of the work for more notes
• Inspired by Back In Black by LaTessitrice, Pollydoodles
“Well, that went to shit pretty quickly, didn't it?” Darcy said as she watched the evening news bulletin. “What are we going to do now?”

Jane stared at the television in shock, “What about my research? And all my equipment? How am I going to get it all back?”

“Most of your equipment is still in the van from the last trip we took, and you know I back all your data up every day Jane. That's not the problem here. The problem is, you've probably just lost all your future funding, and we could be in danger now.”

“Shit.” Jane said. “I hadn't thought of that. So, what do we do?”

Darcy stared at the television as the news broadcast continued, her brain churning as she ran through options in her head.

“How long is Thor back on Asgard for?” she asked.

“Another couple of weeks.”

“Can we ask him to come back early?”

“No, it's some essential ambassadorial thing he can't get out of.” Jane moaned.

“Right, in that case, we get drunk.” Darcy declared.

“What?” Jane whipped her head around. “Are you crazy?”

“Hmm, possibly yes, but I really need a drink right now, and I might actually be able to think better if I get a few drinks inside me.”

“Okay, I see your point.” Jane agreed, “You get the bottle, I'll get the glasses.”
Natasha Romanoff walked into the apartment and surveyed the mess. “I don't think that would be wise right now,” she said. “I think at least one of us should be sober. I'm sure you're well aware that Shield has just collapsed, and we think it would be a good idea to move you two somewhere safer until Thor's back on the planet.”

“Thor's not here.” Jane slurred from her position on the floor. “All sorted Nat.” Darcy hiccuped, “Here, I made a Plan.” She swayed a little as she handed Natasha a piece of paper with ‘The Plan’ scrawled across the top of it, and “Operation Dwarf Mine” underneath it. Nat quickly read through ‘The Plan’, an eyebrow raising once or twice, and then handed it back to Darcy.

“It's a good plan.” she said, “When were you going to put it into action?”

“First thing tomorrow morning.” Darcy replied.

“Good. You know, this probably won't be the first time that everything goes to shit like this, so it would probably be a good idea if you worked out a couple more emergency plans, including stashes of money, spare identity papers, how to get out of the country at short notice, and the locations of at least two safe houses you can get to, one within an hour, and the other within two days.”

“I did that already.” Darcy handed her another piece of paper. “And,” she giggled, “I gave everyone new code names, so we can talk about you and no-one else will know who we're talking about.” she whispered loudly as she passed over a third piece of paper.

Natasha read through these ones a little more slowly and carefully, and then looked up at Darcy. “You know, in spite of the fact that I suspect you were already quite drunk when you did these, they're pretty good, and they should keep you safe if necessary. I do like the new code names, very... interesting. So you'll be using,” she looked at the first piece of paper again, “Operation Dwarf Mine first thing tomorrow morning. Once this is all over, I'll help you get Operations Grand Trunk and Broomstick organised properly so you have some solid backup plans.”

Natasha then handed Darcy a backpack that she had brought with her. “I've brought you a pair of burner phones, $5000 cash, and two extra sets of ID as well. I wasn't sure what you already had.” she explained. “I've programmed my number only into the phones for now, but please, only use it if it's a dire emergency. I've also bookmarked a couple of discussion forums where you can leave me messages, and two email addresses that I check regularly, but I won't reply from. I have my own business to take care of, but I can arrange help if you really need it.”

“Aww, thanks Nat.” Darcy flung her arms around the older woman and hugged her tightly. “You're the best.”

“You're very welcome Darcy.” Nat replied as she hugged Darcy back. “You should probably go to bed now though, don't start too early in the morning, remember, make it look as if you're sticking to your usual routine for as long as possible. I'll be in touch.”

Darcy let Natasha out, and then locked and bolted the door after her. She turned around and surveyed the mess, then decided she didn't care. “Come on Jane, lets get some shut eye before we make a break for it in the morning.”

She hauled Jane up off the floor, and dragged her to bed. Less than twelve hours later they were in the van, and Operation Dwarf Mine was in full swing.
Chapter One – It’s Not Our Fault Those Idiots Messed Up So We Have To Go Into Hiding.

Chapter Summary

Jane and Darcy have to go on the run... again. They're not happy about it.

Chapter Notes

I grew up in and out of the Australian Outback. There are places out there where you could hide half a city and no one would find it. What better place to hide a few Avengers?

Again, not beta'd, all mistakes are my own, let me know if you spot any errors :-)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Not again!” Darcy groaned as she read the headlines flashing on her favourite news website. She’d been keeping a close eye on things ever since the news had come out about the Sokovia Accords, and true to form, the whole shebang had just gone to shit. First an explosion, then an escape and now an all out brawl. And at an airport of all places! “I swear, these so-called damn superheroes just don't get subtlety, do they?”

Jane was quietly beating her forehead against her desk. “Why does Thor always manage to be off world and out of contact when this shit happens?” she moaned into the laminate. “Why do they do this to us? What do we do this time?"

Darcy sat up straight, a look of grim determination on her face. “It’s okay Janey, we've got a plan for this. I got it out in preparation like, just the other day. Gimme me a minute and I'll find it.”

She started rummaging around in the filing cabinet next to her desk, and after 20 minutes of dumping files everywhere, swearing like a sailor, and frequent comments of “I know it's here somewhere, where the hell did I put that bloody thing?” she cried out in triumph and brandished a small handful of paper in the air.

“Operation Broomstick is a go!” she yelled triumphantly.

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When Natasha finally reached her safe house and checked all of her emergency contacts, she was quietly pleased and satisfied to find a message for her on one of the contacts she'd given to Darcy and Jane so many years ago. The message read:
To Sergeant Angua,

Operation Broomstick has been implemented. We also have room for the Duke, Errol, Sergeant Colon and anyone else who may need a getaway vacation in the near future. All and sundry will be welcomed with open arms. Except that bastard Stronginthearm, there is no place for him here unless he's willing to apologise (which should also involve plenty of grovelling), buy us a whole case of good vodka, and fund Miss Eskarina for the rest of her life.

Regards,

Miss Sugarbean and Miss Eskarina.

PS. We're still working on code names for the Duke's newest and oldest friends, we'll pass them on when we've figured them out.

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Nat couldn't help laughing at the message, especially the bit about Stronginthearm, and after setting herself up to monitor all her usual sources, and leaving messages for some of her contacts, she took some time to clean up, eat and reassess her position, and prepare herself to be able to leave at a moment's notice. Then, knowing that it could be some time before she got any more news, she settled in to wait.

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Darcy and Jane stepped off the small plane into blistering heat. “Oh my god, why are we here again?” Jane complained.

“Because no one will look for us, or any of the others here. It's the best place I could think of.”

“But it's so hot Darcy, couldn't we have gone somewhere cooler? You know, where it's not like stepping into a blast furnace every time you open a door?”

“Not this time Janey. This time, we are pulling out the big guns.” Darcy considered this statement for a moment as they both reached the doors to the air-conditioned terminal. “Well, the isolated guns anyway. Oh look, there's my cousin.”

She waved frantically at a tall woman dressed in jeans, boots, and a long sleeved shirt. Long dark hair, similar to Darcy’s was pulled back into a ponytail.

“Why is she not sweating in that outfit?” Jane asked. “Hell, why is she wearing jeans and long sleeves in this heat anyway?”

“Sunburn Janey, it's a serious thing around here. I made you pack those hats for a reason you know.”

“Clancy!” she waved again, and then the two women were hugging each other with much joy and enthusiasm.

“Clancy, this is my boss, and best friend, Jane Foster.”
“Jane, I'd like you to meet my cousin, Clancy Lewis.”

Jane stuck her hand out, but instead she found herself enveloped in a hug that was just as enthusiastic as the one Darcy had participated in moments previously.

“Gidday Jane! It's so good to meet ya at last. I've heard so much about you. Now, have you girls got much luggage?”

Half an hour later they'd collected all of the bags from the beat up old trolley, and were packing them into the ancient Land Rover that Clancy had shown them too.

“Now unfortunately we don't have time to go grab a bite to eat before we get going, as it's a four hour drive back to the station, and I'd rather not stop for longer than a few minutes if we can avoid it.” Clancy said as she shut the back door with a loud clunk. “As it is, we'll probably end up doing the last 100 or so k's in the dark anyway.”

Darcy and Jane exchanged a glance as Clancy continued talking. “So, we'll drop by Kelly's house on the way out, and pick up an esky with some supplies for the trip. We can eat in the car.”

“How's Kelly?” Jane asked as they piled into the 4WD.

“Clancy's brother.” Darcy replied as she fiddled with the air-conditioning.

“Her brothers name is Kelly?” Jane sounded confused.

“Actually it's Edward, but everyone calls him Kelly cos of Ned Kelly.” Darcy explained.

“Okay.” Jane said. “That makes no sense to me, but okay.”

As they pulled out of the carpark, Clancy continued talking.

“Now, I know you girls wanna keep a low profile, but you've arrived in the middle of tourist season, so we'll have to be a little careful until we get out of town. I'll avoid the main drag, and we'll take the back roads to Kelly's house.”

Darcy snorted, “Clancy, the whole bloody town is back roads, and honestly, everyone here probably knows me already, and none of them will even care who Jane is.”

“Be that as it may Darcy, like I said, tourist season is in full swing still, and even though we've had an unusually hot spell for this time of year, it's still not that hot, so there's plenty of strange people around, and there's always a chance that someone might recognise you.”

Jane gaped at the cousins from her stifling back seat. “What do you mean it's not that hot yet?” she moaned, “I think I'm dehydrating faster than a snail dropped in a bag of salt right now.”

Darcy laughed as she turned up the air-conditioning and aimed one of the vents straight at Jane. “It's only like, 33 degrees at the moment, trust me, it's only going to get hotter.”

The drive was horrible. As the day wore on the temperature in the beat up old car soared as the air-conditioner struggled to cope. There was nothing but red dirt and spindly grey shrubs stretching from horizon to horizon, broken only occasionally by the tell-tale tree lines that marked infrequent dry river beds. The horizon shimmered and swam in front of them, and a plume of red dust lingered behind them. Sweat dripped down faces, necks, arms, legs and torsos. Sunset brought relief, and they turned off the almost useless air-conditioner and wound all the windows down as the
temperature plummeted surprisingly quickly.

When they finally arrived at their destination, the sun had been gone for well over an hour, and all they wanted was to shower, eat, and fall into bed after a long day of travel.

Jane sighed in relief as she lay on the soft clean bed she had fallen into after her shower. “Remind me again why we're doing this?” she asked Darcy.

“Because not only are you Thor's girlfriend, you're also the world's leading expert on the Bifrost and Einstein Rosen bridges etc. Which means that there are stupid clauses in those ridiculous Accords that could see both of us put in jail for so much as answering the wrong phone call or sneezing the wrong way.” Darcy said wearily.

“Oh yeah. That's right.” Jane sighed. “I knew it was a really good reason.”

Darcy looked over at her friend in sympathy. “Get some sleep, and in the morning I'll give you a guided tour. There's been a few changes since you were last here. Some of them I think you'll find quite exciting.”

Jane rolled over, and mumbled something incoherent into her pillow, and moments later she was asleep. Darcy smiled at the motionless form of her best friend, and then followed her into sleep.

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As soon as she heard about the prison break, Natasha pulled out her phone, and made a call. “You can't stay in Wakanda, I know a better place we can go, contact me as soon as you're able.”

After leaving the message she started making preparations to leave, knowing that she would have work to do once contact had been made.

She was dozing lightly when her phone finally rang. She picked it up quickly, relieved to hear the voice on the other end.

“Why can't we just stay here?”

“Because secrets don't stay secret. Someone will let something slip, and then it will all be over.”

“So where are we going?”

“I've left some information at a safe house of mine. It's a personal one, completely off the grid, but there's an old SHIELD one close by where you can leave the rest of the team whilst you collect the info I've got for you. I'll send the co-ordinates to your phone. Read the information at the safe house carefully, call the number I've left for you, and be prepared for a long trip. Do you have flight capability?”

“Yeah, we got transport.”

“How many of you are there?”
“Five. At the moment.”

“Only five? Who's missing?”

“Buck's gone back into cryo until we can figure out how to undo what Hydra did to him.”

“Hmm, drastic, but sensible. I'll add that to my list of things to do, and I'll let my friends know to expect you.”

“Okay then, we'll be ready.”

“I won't be joining you straight away, I have some things to take care of first. Oh, and if you get any phone calls from someone wanting to talk to the Duke, they mean you.”

There was a pause on the other end of the phone. “The Duke?”

“It’s all in the info packet. I’ll catch up with you soon.”

She hung up without further ado, and after leaving a message for Miss Sugarbean and Miss Eskarina on the message board, she swiftly finalised her own preparations before leaving as quickly, silently and carefully as she had arrived. She had things to do before joining her fellow exiles.

Chapter End Notes

33°C is about 91°F
Any other temperatures I'll let you convert yourselves. I think Jane would be very familiar with different temperature gages because of science.
The groans of relief as Steve's rescued team members collapsed onto any soft surface they could find were disproportionately loud.

“I'm never doing that again.” Clint declared. “Next time, you lot can all go to hell, and I'm going water-skiing with my kids.”

“That's the best plan anyone's had in days.” Sam agreed, “I'm gonna come with you.”

“Is there room for me on this trip?” Wanda asked plaintively, “I think I would like to try water-skiing.”

“Hell Wanda, you won't even need skis or a boat.” Sam pointed out.

“Water-skiing sounds good and all, but I think I'll just find a deck chair and sleep for a while.” Scott mumbled. “Is there a shower in this place? I could really use a shower.”

There was a chorus of murmured agreements to that statement, as all present momentarily got lost in dreams of hot water and soap, and then Wanda prised herself from her prone position on a couch.

“Ladies first.” she declared as she staggered off to find the bathroom.

“You’re all pathetic.” Steve shook his head at them as he propped himself in the doorway. “Now I know rescues usually go better than that but it’s not my fault the quinjet ran out of fuel okay? It’s been a busy week.”

“I guess it wasn’t your fault that you turned right instead of left when we left Wakanda either?”
Sam glowered at him.

“I’m a soldier, not a navigator.” Steve defended himself.

“Yeah well maybe next time I’ll buy you a map before I let you drive, and we won't have to walk the last 7 miles.” His friend grumbled.

“Well we can’t stay here too long anyway. Come on you lot, no time for lying around, we’ve got things to do. Sam, you and Clint find something for dinner. Scott, you go check the garage, see what kind of transport we’ve got, then see if you can get the jet refueled and bring it a bit closer. I’m gonna check my messages.”

An hour later they were all clean and fed, the jet had been collected, and there were no further messages from anyone.

“So where are we going?” Scott asked through a mouthful of pasta.

“I don’t know yet.” Steve said. “Sam and I will go and pick up the information from Nat’s safe house. Scott, you, Clint and Wanda prep for this long trip we’ll apparently be taking, and keep out of sight. If we're not back in 24 hours, scatter.”

“You got it Cap.”

“Not Cap anymore.” Steve replied quietly.

Steve looked at the contents of Nat’s package and frowned.

"What’s up?” Sam asked, “Is that the info package, you know where we’re going now?”

Steve looked up

“What? Oh yeah, well kind of, maybe…” he sighed. “Here, have a look. I have to make a phone call.”

Sam read through the information twice. It didn't make any more sense the second time than it had the first time, but he could see the underlying precautions, and knew that it was probably a good move... for now anyway. There were no place names, just a set of coordinates that he didn't recognise – which meant not part of their usual backup network – but at the moment he had no way of checking them. The new code names however, were another matter entirely. Sam knew there was probably a perfectly logical source for them, but then again... he tossed the envelope down on the table as Steve walked back into the room, phone to his ear. Sam watched with idle interest.

“Yeah, hi. This is, this is the ah, the Duke?” Steve said hesitantly, and then listened to whoever was on the other end of the line. “Sure, I can do that. Hang on.” Steve tapped a button on his phone before setting it down on the table. “Okay, you're on speaker now.”

“Awesome! Who else is there?” a tinny female asked.

Sam glanced at the envelope again as he said “You want the whole mouthful or just the bit at the end?”

“Just the bit at the end will do dude!” the voice laughed.
“Errol, apparently.” he informed her, in a slightly put upon voice.

“Dudes, that's awesome. So you got like, all the information and everything?”

“Yeah, we got it all.” Steve said as he looked at Sam. “So where exactly are we going? I don't recognise these coordinates.”

“Hey, you know I can't say over the phone, it's not safe. The individual now known as Sergeant Colon will know though, so don't worry.”

“Ma'am, all I do at the moment is worry.” Steve said.

“Yeah I understand. It's been a shit month.”
Sam snorted, “That's an understatement if I ever heard one.” he muttered.

“Hey, chill dude, it could have been a lot worse.” the woman on the other end of the phone said.
Steve shook his head, “She's right S... Errol.” Sam glowered again as Steve's mouth twitched as he said the name.

“Of course I'm right! You will learn in time that Miss Sugarbean is always right my lads!” Sam twitched an eyebrow at Steve, who shrugged.

“So what now?” Steve asked.

“Now, you guys hop a plane or whatever you've got, and get your asses down here ASAP.” The voice of Miss Sugarbean said chirpily. “There's six of you, right?”

“Ah, there's only five of us ma'am.” Steve corrected her.


“Ah, he's not on your list, there's no code name for...”

“Oh, so one of the new guys? Which one? The one...” there was a pause and they could hear vague whispering as she spoke to someone else for a moment. “... the one in black, or the one in red?”

“The one in black. How exactly do you know so much?” Steve demanded.

“Dude you were all over the news, well, at least until you got blacked out. Anyway, the hottie in the black outfit will now be known as Mister Nutt, that's with two t's by the way, and the fella in red will henceforth be known as Rob Anybody.”

“Rob Anybody? Mister Nutt? Where the hell are you getting these weird ass names from?” Sam asked.

There was more laughter on the other end, “I'll show you when you get here. Right now I wanna know what happened to Mister Nutt. Is he okay?”

“Yeah, mostly. He ah, had concerns about his health, and decided to ah, sleep on the problem.”

“With extreme air-conditioning.” Sam added.

There was silence for a minute.
“Miss Sugarbean? You still there?”
“What? Oh yeah, I'm still here. Sorry, was not expecting to hear that, but I spose it’s better than what I was thinking.”

“Yeah, well we weren't expecting it either,” Steve said wearily, “but it was the best option for now.”

“Right, well I really look forward to hearing the full story when you get here. So, I'm gotta go now, but we'll expect you by the end of the week, okay?”

“I look forward to meeting you Miss Sugarbean.” Steve said.

“Safe travels dudes!” and then there was a click, and she was gone.

They both just stared at the phone for a minute or five until Sam broke the silence.

“You know, if this contact wasn't coming from Natasha I'd be really, really worried. As it is, I'm worried.”

Steve shook his head and ran his hand over his head, “I guess we don't really have much choice Sam. I trust Nat, so let's do this.”

They arrived back at their safe house well within their self imposed deadline to find that their team mates were all prepped and ready to leave. Scott and Clint were taking the opportunity for naps whilst they could, and Wanda was reading a magazine that she'd found lying around somewhere.

Steve and Sam called everyone together and showed them the plan, including the new code names, and the coordinates of their final destination.

When Clint looked at the coordinates he couldn't help laughing.

“What's so funny Clint?” Steve asked.

“You remember that mission I joined you for late last year? The one where you managed to interrupt a very important sporting event, and destroyed a stadium in the process?”

Steve looked at him in puzzlement, and then paled slightly. “Oh no,” he said, “not there. They threw beer cans at me!”

“Oh yes,” grinned Clint, “we're going back to Australia.”

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As soon as she stepped into her apartment, Sharon Carter knew that she wasn't alone. She was about to draw her sidearm when she glimpsed the familiar silhouette in her kitchen, and relaxed. She kept her voice calm even as Natasha turned towards her, covertly displaying the jamming bug she held in her hand.

“You shouldn't be here.” she said, “If they find you...”
“They won't. As far as anyone's concerned, I'm in Buenos Aires. No one will be looking for me here. How are you?” Natasha said quietly.

“I think I've eased most suspicions for now, but I'm being extra careful. Just because they can't prove I took anything, doesn't mean they aren't still watching me.” Sharon replied, relaxing slightly.

“I need information.”
“I'll do what I can.”

“Do you know where all the gear is now?” Nat asked.

Sharon nodded as she moved past Nat over to the kettle. “Some of it. The AntMan suit disappeared from storage the day we brought it back, no idea how, and the Falcon's suit and wings were moved to a high level containment straight afterwards. There's no way I could get to it now. Tea?” she asked.

Nat nodded, “Please. What about the items recovered from Barnes' apartment and the contents of his backpack?”

Sharon shook her head this time, “I'm sorry, I don't know. The journals were originally given to the imposter psychiatrist, but they disappeared afterwards. He may have taken them with him.”

“Okay, well if you can tell me where the wings are I can sort it out.”

“I'll leave the details in the usual spot for you. Are you hungry?” Sharon opened the fridge door.

“A little. Do you know if anyone knows where Stark went?”

Sharon looked over at the other woman and shook her head. “He told them he'd been to an old Hydra facility that you hit about a year ago. I'm pretty sure they know he was lying, but they've got no proof, so they're pretending to believe him for now.”

She pulled a container of leftover spaghetti out of the fridge, and put it in the microwave to reheat before passing Nat her cup of tea.

Natasha sat down at the small table to drink it, closing her eyes and inhaling the sweet smelling scent as she sipped carefully. “Oh this is good.”

Sharon smiled, “You know I keep that one just for you.”

Natasha looked up and smiled back, “Of course.”

The two women sat in silence until the microwave sang it’s song of sustenance, and the silence continued as they ate.

“So what now?” Sharon asked after she’d tidied the kitchen and they were both sitting with another cup of tea each.

Nat passed her a small piece of paper. “Use a secure computer to access this message board. Use the login and password I’ve emailed to your personal account, then create a new one according to the thread titled Granny Weatherwax’s Guide to Headology.”

Sharon took the note and tucked it into her handbag.

“And what are you going to do next?” she asked quietly.
“What I do best.” Nat replied. “I have things to find and liberate.”

Chapter End Notes

I forgot to put this in, mainly because it was an older version of this chapter which I foolishly deleted before triple checking this version... ugh.

Why Steve is Vimes
Chapter 3 - When They Said That Whatever Doesn’t Kill You Makes You Stronger, They Forgot About Australia.

Chapter Summary

Steve and the gang arrive in Australia, and Darcy has a lot of questions for him...

Chapter Notes

I noticed a post on Tumblr a while back, which was a screen shot from Civil War, and it was basically saying, 'Look, The Avengers were in Adelaide! Why were they in Adelaide?.' So I don't know why they were there, but there was fallout ;-) 
Also, seriously, there isn't a lot of true green foliage in the Australian Outback. When I visited Europe, everything was so green that to my Aussie eyes, it all looked sick. Like algae and slime.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Darcy and Clancy watched the approach of the jet from the shade of a small tin roofed shelter that was next to the small dirt airstrip. It didn't provide much respite from the heat, but it was better than standing in the full sun. The old Land Rover was parked as close as physically possible to a stunted tree that barely provided enough shade to keep the car cool... ish.

“That's some pretty impressive looking technology they've got there Darce. I don't think I've ever seen anything quite like it before. How the hell are we going to hide it?”
As they continued watching, the jet carefully rotated in the air, before lowering itself to the ground. Darcy grinned. “You know, I reckon this thing could land behind the house – do you think the main shed would be big enough for it?”

Clancy smiled broadly, “I reckon it would Darce.”
As they talked, the rear hatch had opened, and the ramp lowered itself to the ground, and the new arrivals slowly made their way out into the sweltering heat.

Steve peered out of the back of the quinjet, straining to see clearly through the glare of ridiculously bright sunlight. It seemed to be reflecting off everything, and he had a sneaking suspicion that the minute he stepped off the jet he'd be blinded for life. He glanced over at Clint, who was hunting around in his bag. “I don't remember Adelaide being this bright.” he grumbled.

“That's cos it wasn't.” Clint replied as he finally found what he was looking for, and pulled it out with a flourish. Steve watched in disbelief as Clint carefully placed a very wide brimmed floppy...
hat on his head, before strolling down the ramp.

“C'mon Steve, adventure awaits!” he called back cheerfully. Steve sighed and followed him out into the heat, squinting in the glare and blinking furiously as he waited for his eyes to adjust to the change in light. He could hear voices in front of him, and then someone thrust a pair of sunglasses into his hands, and as soon as put them on he could see again. It was a miracle.

“Clint!” a familiar voice cried out, and Steve turned to see the other man caught in an enthusiastic hug from an attractive looking, dark haired young woman he didn't recognise.

“Darcy, I should have known you were behind this. Sergeant Colon though? Really?”

“We can change it if you want Clint, just let me think about it.” the girl replied as she squeezed him tight.

“Thanks Darce. Anyway, how have you been? Is Jane here? Have you seen Thor? Did you hear from Nat again yet? Do you think we could get Laura and the kids here as well?” Clint rattled off as he released the young woman but kept an arm slung over her shoulders.

“Jane's back at the house, we've both been great, you know, apart from the whole being on the run from the whole world thing. We haven't heard from Thor though, no idea what he's up to. I haven't heard from Nat again yet, and I've already contacted Laura, she says give it another week or two.” she replied just as effortlessly as she looked around the group happily as an almost identical looking young woman stepped up to stand next to her, “It's so good to see you, but you must be exhausted, shall we go back to the house?”

“You got food and cold beer?” Clint asked.

“Of course we have Clint, we're not heathens. Now are you gonna introduce us to the rest of your friends or do I have to guess?”

Clint pointed to each of his team mates in turn, “Okay, so this is Wanda, Scott, Sam and Steve. Everyone, this is Darcy, and her cousin Clancy,” he pointed a thumb at the other woman, “who have very kindly offered us this luxury get away retreat to stay at whilst the rest of the world gets its shit together.”

Steve hung back as the cousins greeted everyone individually, wondering what the hell he had gotten them all into, taking the opportunity to look around him at an environment completely different to anything he'd ever seen before.

“Hey Steve, c'mere.” Clint called him over to where he was talking to Clancy, as Darcy led the others over to the vehicle that was parked... in a bush?

“Clancy says she's got an empty tractor shed that's probably big enough to hide the jet in, so she and I are going to fly it over there and get it put away, while the rest of you drive over with Darcy.”

“You've got a shed big enough for the jet?” Steve asked disbelievingly.

“Sure,” Clancy assured him, “it usually houses a small 'copter for the mustering and a couple of tractors, but I had to sell them a while back, so it's just sitting there empty now. Your jet should fit no worries.”

“Okay.” he said, feeling a little bit lost as Clint gave him a small push to where Darcy and the rest of the team were climbing into the car. He climbed into the back next to Wanda and Scott, and a sweaty twenty minutes later they pulled up in front of a large single story house with a wide
verandah running all the way around it. There was a small grassed area out the front, and a large
garden out the back, and the whole area was surrounded by tall grey-green trees, and the air was
filled with an unfamiliar but pleasant scent. Further beyond the house was what looked like half a
dozen old train carriages, raised up on blocks and arranged in a horseshoe formation. They too
were shaded by the same big trees, and there was another garden area in the centre area, with what
looked like some sort of seating arranged carelessly around a central point.

He could see Clint and Clancy strolling down a tree lined dirt road, a pair of dogs running excitedly
beside them. He assumed they were coming from where the jet had been parked, as he could see a
small collection of buildings through the trees behind them.

“So I guess it fit?” he asked as they joined him.

“About half a foot either side.” Clint grinned. “Perfect.”

“Half a foot… I’d call that just barely.” Steve muttered, as the dogs greeted him enthusiastically.

“Nice dogs.” he said uncomfortably.

“Oh don’t mind them, they just want to be friends.” Clancy said before issuing a set of sharp
commands, and they raced off around the house.

“C’mon let’s go inside before everyone drinks all the beer.” Clint elbowed him in the ribs as he
pushed past and sauntered into the house.

A short time later everyone was settled with beer and nibbles, and Darcy had introduced everyone
to Jane. The idle conversation soon drew around to why they were now in the middle of nowhere,
Australia.

“Oh, well to try and cut a long story short,” Darcy started, and Clint groaned, “...Shut up Clint!... we
share a grandfather. Only we didn't know about each other, cos he died in the war, and Clancy's
Nanna never left Australia with the other war brides. My Grandma died before the war, so when
Grandpa got drafted he left his two kids with his parents. Fell in love with Nanna in Melbourne,
and they got married. She got pregnant, had Clancy's dad, but our family didn't know about her,
and so on. I found out when Shield did a background check on me, got in touch, and we've been
friends ever since.”

Clint blinked, “Okay, that actually is the shortest version of that I've ever heard.” Darcy stuck her
tongue out at him, and continued talking.

“Yes, because there's more important things to talk about Clint, like why did Barnes go back to
sleep? I mean, what actually did happen there? We saw some stuff on the news, but it got censored
a LOT after your little dust up at the airport. Are you able to shed a little bit of light on that for us?”
Everyone turned and looked at Steve, who had been sitting quietly in the background, lost in his
own head, and only half following the conversation. He looked up at the sudden silence.

"He's got these triggers in his head..." Steve said reluctantly after an expectant pause.
“What do you mean triggers?” Darcy asked bluntly. “Come on Your Lordship, I need to know
everything.”

Steve hesitated, and Clint leaned towards him.
“It's okay Steve, you can trust them. I trust them. They only want to help.” Clint said quietly. Darcy, Jane and Clancy all nodded sincerely.

“Hydra's conditioned him to respond to a series of trigger words. Someone says the words, he does whatever they tell him to do. That... that's what happened when he broke out at the UN, and that's why he went back into cryo. He doesn't trust himself.” Steve's voice was quiet, defeated, but Darcy pushed on.

“Okay, understandable. So what's happening then?”

Steve shrugged, “I guess somehow we've gotta figure out how to break the conditioning.”

“Well duh,” said Darcy, “but the question is, how?”

There was silence in the wake of the question. Steve shrugged despondently. "I don't know."

“How long does it last for?” Clancy asked curiously.

“What?” Steve said, confused.

“When he was triggered, how long did it last?” she clarified, looking at Darcy as she did so.

“Until he got knocked out, when he woke up he was fine again.”

“So you don't know how long it takes to wear off? Or even if it wears off. Does he need other words to cancel it?”

“I don't know.” Steve said.

“Does it matter who says the words?” Jane interjected.

“Um, I don't know that either.” Steve replied.

“So does it have to be a man, could it be a woman?” Darcy said.

“I don't know.” Steve said helplessly.

“Okay then, we'll leave that for now. so how else does it affect him?”

“He didn't recognise anyone, and when he woke up he didn't know what he'd done.” Steve answered, relieved to get a question that he knew an answer to.

“How many different triggers are there?”

“I don't know.”

“Do you know what the words are?”

Steve shook his head.

“How did that Zemo guy know the words?”

“Bucky said he had a book.”

“Where's the book now?”

“I don't know.”

“Well this isn't much good is it?” Darcy said with a sigh. She tapped her foot on the floor and flopped her head into her hands, then sat up again with a determined expression on her face.

“You'll have to go and get him.”
“What?!” Steve sat up straight. “Why?”

“Well how can we fix him if we can't answer any of those questions?” she asked him. "We need him here, awake and coherent, so we can get answers, so we can help him... would he be okay with Wanda looking in his head? Wanda, do you think this is something you might be able to help with?”

“Yes, but only if he would be comfortable with me looking at his memories. I will not help if he does not want it.” Wanda answered immediately.

“Well I'm glad someone else has been thinking about this. That's a start. Steve, if he knows we've got possible solutions, then maybe he won't be too cranky about being woken up again so soon. I have a couple of other ideas too.”

Steve was feeling quite nonplussed. “He was pretty clear about not wanting to hurt people Miss Lewis, I really don't know...”

“Call me Darcy, and didn't you say he went back under so someone could figure out how to fix him? Well, I think we can fix him, but we can't do it without him. Go and get him, bring him back here.” she paused for a moment, tapping a finger on her bottom lip thoughtfully. “You know what, maybe I'll come with you.”

“I really don't think...” Steve started, but he was cut off.

“Uh uh, no thinking. That's my job. From now on, you only think when I say you can Your Grace. You are officially on holiday now, so give yourself a rest.”

“Miss Lew...”

“Oh, UH.” She glared at him until he gave up all thought of trying to talk again, and simply nodded. The sound of Sam not even trying to stop laughing did not help. At all.

“And you call me Darcy. She's Clancy. There are no Misses Lewis here. Got it?”

Steve nodded, very carefully not saying a word. Sometimes you had to pick your battles, and he was all battled out for now. Honestly, he just couldn't be bothered.

“Good. Now that that's sorted out, you lot should go get cleaned up, dinner will be ready in about half an hour. Clint knows his way around, so he'll give you a quick tour while we finish organising the food. Then, it's the health and safety orientation.” Darcy beamed.

“What?” Sam asked.

“Health and safety mate. It's very important out here, especially if you don't want to die horribly. Or you know, suffer a little, even.” Clancy replied sedately.

“I thought we were supposed to be safe here?” Scott pointed out.

“Safe as houses.” Clancy assured him, “but it would be very wrong of me to let you run around without warning you about sun safety, the snakes, the spiders, mozzies, sandflies, spinifex, drop bears, cassowaries and emus, jellyfish, several trees, the importance of always having plenty of water with you, and never, EVER leaving your car if you break down or get lost.”

“Okay, there was a whole bunch of stuff in there that I did not understand at all.” Sam grumbled, eyeing off Clint, who was sniggering in the corner. “Don't forget the kangaroos and crocodiles.” Clint managed to squeeze out between breaths.

“Are you serious?” Scott asked in morbid fascination.

“Deadly.” Clancy replied. “I'll provide you with a comprehensive list after the PowerPoint
The newly arrived former Avengers exchanged wary glances with each other before following Clint out of the house.

“Are they out of earshot yet?” Jane asked casually from her seat on the recliner. Darcy peered out the window. “Depends on how good Steve's hearing really is, but I think so.”

All three women spent the next little while gasping for breath as they let the laughter out. “Oh my god, that was so good.” Jane gasped out. “Did you see their faces?”

Clancy nodded her head vehemently, “It's going to be even better when I actually do show them the PowerPoint.” she snorted.

Chapter End Notes

Footnotes

So after some more comments it came to my attention that some of the things that end up in this fic might need explaining for some readers. I aim to educate, so I’m going to start including footnotes, similar to what BairnSidhe does in her Bodies-Verse series (go read it, it’s fantastic!)

If I miss anything you’re curious about, please ask, and I’ll include it in the next chapters’ footnotes.

So to start with, the code names and probably a lot of other references come from Terry Pratchett’s Discworld. It’s one of the best fantasy series ever written, and if you like your fantasy with a very healthy dose of humour, satire, social commentary and an anthropomorphic personification of Death that TALKS LIKE THIS, loves cats and has the occasional existential crises, then this should be right up your alley.

Dwarf mines – traditionally dwarfs are miners in the mountains, so Operation Dwarf Mine would be to a mountain safe house.

The Grand Trunk – a semaphore messaging system, consisting of a series of towers placed close enough to receive and pass on messages. I haven’t actually defined Operation Grand Truck properly but it probably involves the internet and some travel across wide empty distances (Nevada??)

Broomsticks – witches use magically enhanced broomsticks to fly. They are draughty and sometimes difficult to handle, and a lightly loaded stick can achieve up to 70 mph. Operation Broomstick means they’re going to fly somewhere (Australia, they’re flying to Australia, but I think we all know that by now.)

The Code Names: (Some of these may be subject to change, especially if the code name recipient doesn’t like it, or someone suggests a better one in the comments.)

Steve – His Grace, His Excellency, The Duke of Ankh; Commander Sir Samuel Vimes, Ankh Morpork City Watch
Thor – Captain Carrot, Ankh Morpork City Watch
Bucky – Mister Nutt
Natasha – Sergeant Angua, Ankh Morpork City Watch
Wanda – Miss Tick, a witch
Sam – Goodboy Bindle Featherstone of Quirm (Errol)
Scott – Rob Anybody, a Nac Mac Feegle
Darcy – Miss Sugarbean, head cook, the night kitchen, Unseen University
Jane – Miss Eskarina, the only female wizard
Vision – Sergeant Dorfl, Ankh Morpork City Watch
Tony – Mister Stronginthearm, a dwarf weapons manufacturer
Clint – Sergeant Colon, Ankh Morpork City Watch
Bruce - Sergeant Detritus, Ankh Morpork City Watch

For more information you can go wander about in L-Space

Sunburn and skin cancer is a major concern, and waaaay back in the 80’s this lovely little campaign came into being. Everyone loves Sid. "Slip, Slop, Slap"

Edward ‘Ned’ Kelly and the Kelly Gang were bushrangers in Victoria during the 1870’s. He was captured and hung for his crimes in 1880.

Tourist season in northern parts of Australia is during the cooler months of the year, so from April/May through to about October. Even during these months though temperatures can soar into the high 30’s (ie 38°C = 100F) although this is rare. Night time temperatures in the desert can drop to freezing though.

0 °C 32.0 °F freezing/melting point of water
21 °C 69.8 °F room temperature
30 °C 86.0 °F
37 °C 98.6 °F average body temperature
40 °C 104.0 °F
50 °C 122.0 °F

Airstrips in the outback are usually graded dirt, with any taller trees cleared away. Kangaroos and/or emus straying onto the airstrips are a legitimate hazard.

Clancy IS named for ‘Clancy of The Overflow’, a famous poem about a drover written by AB ‘Banjo’ Patterson.

The health and safety talk that Clancy presents to our ragtag group of superheros is a take on the Workplace Health and Safety Orientations most new employees have to go through here in Australia, but with a twist – she’s telling them about all the things we have which could kill you, or at least, put you in a LOT of pain. I’m not going to be listing them all, cos really, there are hundreds. The bit about having plenty of water with you, and never leaving your car if you breakdown though, are very real and extremely important. Too many people have died because they didn’t carry enough water with them, or they thought walking for help was smarter than staying with their much more visible shiny vehicle. She’s gonna give them a printout as well though! I think that has us all caught up to Chapter 3 now. I’ve barely started chapter four sadly, it’s on the waiting list atm as I’ve got about 6 weeks to finish the certificate course I’m currently doing, and I need to knuckle down. Thanks for reading, let me know if you have any other questions!
Chapter Four – No Rest For The Wicked... and None For The Good Guys Either.

Chapter Summary

Steve can't sleep, can't think, and needs everyone else to tell him what to do next.

Chapter Notes

I had notes, I know I did, but now I can’t remember what they were... this chapter seems to have gone a bit angsty, feely... we’ll sort that out soon enough I hope! There's another lovely big bunch of footnotes though...

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Even though he was exhausted from everything that had happened in recent weeks, Steve's mind was churning, and he couldn't sleep. Eventually, after lying on the bed trying in vain to achieve a state of unconsciousness for way too long, he got up and went outside. It was unexpectedly chilly compared with earlier in the day, and he ducked back inside to grab a jacket from the small bag he'd brought with him. He stepped down off the veranda that was attached to the converted train car, and followed the dirt road away from the house. He wandered aimlessly for awhile, not really taking much notice of where he was going until he realised that he'd left the trees behind, and when he looked up, the view took his breath away. There was only a narrow sliver of moon on the horizon, and in the sky above him, he could see the entire universe. The last time he could remember seeing a sky like this was in war torn Europe, and that sky, in no way compared to this one. It was mesmerising.

"It's a pretty incredible sight, isn't it?"

He spun around, startled. Darcy stood behind him, a cardigan wrapped around her and the two dogs trailing behind her.

"Sorry, didn't mean to startle you." she said softly. One of the dogs sat down next to him and thumped its tail expectantly. He absentmindedly patted it on the head as he looked back up.

"No, it's fine. I was just..." he waved his hand at the sky. "It's been a long time since I've seen a sky like this one. It's... it's amazing. I've never seen a sky so clear, so vivid."

"Yeah, I remember the first time I saw it." she came and stood next to him. "There aren't many
places you get skies like this. Not even in New Mexico, and that was pretty amazing. It's a combination of the colder night-time temperatures, and the isolation.”

“Isolation?” Steve queried.

“We're so far away from anything, there's no smog or pollution of any kind to cloud the views. Jane really wants to set up an observatory here.”

She gazed up for a bit and then looked over at him. “I owe you an apology for earlier.” she said. “I shouldn't have put you on the spot like that.”

He sighed and looked back up at the blazing glory of the Milky Way streaming above them. “I appreciate that, but they were all questions that needed to be asked. Hell, I should have asked Bucky most of those questions before he went back into cryo.”

“You've had a rough month. Don't be so hard on yourself. Anyway, it's your choice if we go get him or not.”

“Thanks, again. And thank you for this.” he turned and indicated the station homestead behind them. “I think he'd like it here. So how come you're up and about in the middle of the night?” he asked curiously as they began to walk back.

“Not actually the middle of the night any more dude, but I'm out for the cooler temperatures. I walk Pond and Bradman here before sunrise,” she indicated the two dogs, who were sniffing around at Steve's feet, “then we get the chores done before it heats up too much. It's not so bad at the moment, but we did just come from late spring in New York, soo... Anyway, if we get as much as possible done before it gets too hot, then we can just stay inside during the heat of the day usually.” she pointed towards the east, and he realised that there was a soft glow starting to light up the edge of the world. “See? Come on, there's a really good view from the top of the water tanks.”

“Why is the dog named Pond?” he asked a minute later as they followed the road.

“Huh? Oh, yeah. Clancy gets asked that a lot. It's short for ‘Come Along Pond’.”

Steve considered this for a minute. “I don't understand that.” He admitted.

Darcy snorted, “It's a reference to a TV show, and probably easier to show than explain.”

“Fair enough.” Steve responded, “It's get that a lot actually. And the other dog? I'm guessing some similar obscure thing for its name?”

"No, actually he was Clancy's dad's dog he's named for Sir Donald Bradman. A famous cricketer.” Darcy continued as Steve looked at her blankly, and at the word cricket he shuddered.

“Please, don't mention cricket. It brings back bad memories.” he said, wincing slightly.

Darcy laughed openly this time. “That Ashes Test you guys destroyed last year was the most interesting thing that's happened to test cricket in a long time.”

“Dude, they'll use any excuse to throw beer cans. Don't take it personally. Anyway, Australia ended up winning the Series, so you've mostly been forgiven. Oh, here we are.”

They'd stopped in front of a large water tank, and Darcy started climbing the ladder on the side.
“Come on, we can sit up top and watch the sunrise. I promise you, those clouds on the horizon will make it a pretty good one.”

A short time later they were settled on top of the tank, facing the horizon. Several other tanks were nearby, and he could also see the tree shrouded homestead area and several sheds of varying sizes scattered around the area.

“There's a lot more to this place than I thought.” he said as he took in the view.

“It was set up as a station stay back in the 90’s but Clancy shut it down a couple of years ago when her dad died. She's planning on reopening as a luxury retreat for corporate getaways and stuff soon, plus she still has the occasional group in, but it's in dire need of a bit of maintenance before she can start running it properly again.”

“I imagine that it would take quite a bit of upkeep, a place like this.”

They lapsed into companionable silence as they watched the sun rise. As the light grew, so did the noise as a variety of birds and insects greeted the approaching dawn with a cacophony of sound. The wispy band of cloud caught the purple and orange rays as the sun slowly approached the horizon, and then it rose quickly into the sky, bright and hot, burning the cloud away.

“Come on, I'm ready for breakfast. Let's go see if anyone else is up yet.” Darcy said, and headed down the ladder. Steve stood up and turned a slow circle, taking in the view again now that it was lit by the sun. North of the homestead was a low range of strangely slanted and eroded hills that curved as far as he could see in both directions. South there was a flat plain of scrubby bush, and a line of tall trees that wandered across the otherwise empty landscape. West looked pretty much the same as south, but without the trees, and east was hard to look at due to the glare of the sun, but pretty much the same as west and south.

“You coming or are you gonna stay up there all day?” Darcy called out from the ground, and he shimmied down the ladder and they walked back to the house.

Clint and Wanda were in the kitchen with Clancy and Jane, helping to prepare breakfast for the ravening horde. Clint looked up as they came in, and immediately clamoured for Darcy's attention.

“Darcy! Darcy! I've been looking for you. Darce, I had a real hard think last night, and I think Cohen The Barbarian would be a much better code name for me.”

Darcy tipped her head to the side and narrowed her eyes at Clint whilst she considered the idea.

“Okay,” she said at last, “I like it. Cohen it is. I'll update the list later so that Nat and Laura both know.”

“Thanks Darce, you're the best, you know that?”

“Aw, thanks Clint, you're pretty awesome too, ya know?”

Steve was then momentarily distracted as Jane told him that Sam had been looking for him, and he didn't notice Darcy slipping out the back door as he excused himself, and went looking for Sam.
Natasha was sitting with intent in a small cafe near the beach, enjoying the afternoon breeze when her phone rang.

“Does the Duke admit that he's made mistakes very often?” the voice on the phone demanded.

“Well he doesn't usually make mistakes, so no. Why?” Nat asked as she sipped her coffee.

“Oh, I may have put him on the spot last night and exposed a couple. Nothing serious.”

“Miss Sugarbean, what did you do?” Natasha paused with her cup halfway to her mouth.

“Um, kind of bombarded him with questions about Mister Nutt.” the voice said, with only the tiniest hint of contriteness.

“Oh. I see.” she resumed sipping, whilst keeping one eye on the entrance of the building opposite the cafe.

“He couldn't answer very many of them for me. And then we gave them all the health and safety talk.” the voice continued chirpily.

There was silence for a beat, and then, “I hope you remembered to warn them about everything.”

“Of course we did, what do you take me for? We did it properly, ten slides, two minutes on each one, and we also gave them a handout with descriptions and photos of the most common local threats. We even included drop bears.” the voice continued proudly.

“So why are you calling then?” She watched the people coming and going across the street, waiting for her contact.

“Well, I just wanted to let you know that we're going to go and retrieve our lost puppy. Possibly after breakfast, but it's more likely to be after lunch.” Miss Sugarbean stated.

“I suppose that means you’ll be needing that new pair of glasses then?” Nat's attention was caught by a flash of colour at the entrance of the other building, and the corners of her mouth twitched.

“Well, I'm hoping I won't need them, but I'd rather have them and not need them, than need them and not have them.”

“Oh course. A sensible attitude. I'm actually waiting to collect them now, so I'll bring them to you soon.” Nat rose as the conversation continued, and carefully made her way to the back of the cafe.

“Awesome, that's great news. Well, I'll let you get on with it then, and I'll see you when you get here!”

“I'll see you soon, save some dessert for me.”

“I always do. Bye.”

Nat slipped her phone back into her handbag, spent a very productive five minutes in the ladies room before heading across the road, and following a gaggle of junior secretaries into the Stark Industries building.
Steve found Sam sitting in the garden near their accommodation.

“Hey, I wondered where you disappeared to.” Sam said as Steve sat down next to him.

“Couldn't sleep.” Steve admitted. “I'm exhausted, but I can't sleep. Went for a walk, ended up watching the sunrise with Darcy on top of one of those water tanks.”

Sam looked at him in surprise. “You watching sunrises with a girl you just met? Damn, there is something wrong with you. You're not usually that smooth.”

“It wasn't like that.” Steve said tiredly.

“Course not, it never is with you is it?” Sam shook his head in amusement. “So what's happening? Are you gonna go back and get him or what?”

“He's safe where he is Sam.” Steve said wearily, staring down at the ground where dozens of large ants were busily running around.

“Yeah, I thought you'd bring that argument up.” Sam turned his head to look Steve directly in the eye. “He's not safer there. Maybe we're safer with him there, but I think that he is actually more vulnerable. He's got no way of protecting himself, and I'm not saying that I don't trust T'Challa, because strangely enough, I do, but even he can't plan for or protect against everything.”

“So you think I should go get him too?” Steve didn't look up.

“Yeah, I do. Go get him, bring him back here, and let those women in there see what they can do.” Sam looked back up into the trees as something started making unearthly noises in the high branches.

“Alright then, I'll go get him.”

“Do it straight away.” Sam advised. “Don't sit around here waiting, and take that Darcy with you. I reckon he'll be happier about being woken up if you put a pretty girl like her in front of him.”

“Sam…”

“She's real smart that one. I dunno where Nat found her, or why she hasn't been brought in before, but I think she could be the best thing that's happened to the Avengers since me.”

Steve smiled and shook his head. At least Sam could be relied on to lighten the situation. “Okay, if you think I should do it, then I'll do it.

“Damn right you will.” Sam muttered. “Now, I can smell bacon, so let's go eat, and you can tell those smart, lovely cousins that you're taking them up on their offer.”

The two men stood up and strolled towards the house. “What the hell is that noise anyway?” Sam asked as the mad warbling above them, was drowned out by an even madder hooting and cackling.

“I have no idea.” Steve replied. “Let's just hope that it isn't anything off that list.”

Breakfast was in full swing when they reached the house. Everyone was up, and the kitchen area was full of people eating, drinking and talking. Jane caught sight of them as they entered the room,
and made her way towards them.

“I was just about to send a search party looking for you two, come and eat. There's cooked breakfast on the kitchen bench, or if you prefer cereal, there's a good choice on the table.”

The two men nodded their acknowledgement and joined the company at the table a short time later. Steve took the opportunity to take a good look at each of his people. Wanda was deep in conversation with the two cousins, and he couldn't help a slight feeling of trepidation at that combination. Scott was chatting with Jane, and Clint was too busy stuffing food into his mouth to talk to anyone.

Even though they'd been here less than a day he could already see signs of … well, probably not recovery, because that took time, but there was definitely a feeling of something he couldn't quite put a name to. He gave an internal shrug and ate until he couldn't eat any more.

After breakfast, everyone pitched in to clean up, and then Clancy took them all on a tour of the property, pausing here and there to point out an important feature, move some hoses, feed the chooks, and let the dogs take a quick swim in the dam. As they walked on, Steve watched as the little group as it ebbed and flowed through different formations as people pointed things out to each other, passed on titbits of information gleaned from the local women, lagged behind for a better look at something, or hurried to catch up again. They finished the tour at the water tanks, where Clancy insisted they all climb up and take in the view. As they walked slowly back to the house in the increasing heat, Wanda dropped back to where Steve was lagging behind.

“I like this place. It is so peaceful and quiet.” she said softly, and Steve was surprised to hear how calm her voice was.

“It is.” he replied, and they walked on in silence for a little bit.

“I know it's probably too soon to ask you this,” he ventured after a while, “but how are you?”

Wanda smiled a little. “It's never too soon to ask someone how they are Steve. And I am not okay yet, but I will be. Thank you, for getting us out, for bringing us here.”

“I couldn't leave you there Wanda. It wouldn't have been right.”

“And that is why you must go and get your friend. As soon as you can.” she said firmly, stopping to look at him.

Steve stopped and turned back towards her. “Are you all ganging up on me?” he asked with a smile.

“You are not happy, and you won't be until you have him back, and he is himself again.” she paused for a moment, and Steve waited while she gathered her thoughts.”Or as much of himself as he can be.” she said with a sigh, and Steve knew that she was thinking of herself as well now. “Darcy is right, I think I can help him, I have thought about it a lot.” she admitted.

Steve stepped back and wrapped his arms around Wanda in a reassuring hug. “You amaze me.” he told her. “And I am incredibly grateful and humbled that you can think of others… of him… after everything that I've put you through.” he rested his head in top.of Wanda's as she squeezed him. “He'll probably never be the old Bucky that I remember again, but he'll still be himself. Just a different version of himself, like we're different versions of ourselves now.” He looked down at the young woman. “Pretty awesome versions of ourselves if I'm allowed to say that.” He ventured carefully. He was relieved to see a small smile sneak back onto her face as she poked him in the
ribs.

“Yes, you are allowed to say that, but not in front of Sam. He will tell you all the ways you are not awesome.”

“Mmm, yes, I'll take note to remember that. Now, should we catch up to everyone else, because I'm sure I heard someone mention cake before.”

“Mmm, cake sounds very good. And then you will go find Darcy and tell her that you want her to go with you to get Bucky.”

Whilst everyone ate their morning tea, Darcy took the opportunity to introduce them all to the chores roster. As she informed them all bluntly, “You're guests, but you can still help out. Think of it as paying for your room and board.”

By the time Steve finished arguing with Scott and Sam about who got to do what, Darcy had disappeared. He wandered from room to room, finally finding her sitting at a computer in what looked like a good sized study next to the laundry at the rear of the house.

Darcy looked up at the gentle knock on the door, and was unsurprised to Steve hovering in her doorway.

“Well hello there your Grace, how can I help you?” she said with a smile.

“So how soon can we leave?”

Chapter End Notes

There are some excellent examples of station stays in this article. I'm so homesick for the bush after looking at this.

More stars are indeed visible with the unaided eye from the southern hemisphere, but not because more stars exist in that direction of the universe. The reason is that the South Pole is oriented toward the center of the Milky Way, our own galaxy.

Cricket - is a bat-and-ball game played between two teams of eleven players on a cricket field. And then it gets complicated. There are three main versions of cricket- Test cricket, and two versions of limited overs cricket - One Day cricket and Twenty20 cricket.

The Ashes - The Ashes is a Test cricket series played between England and Australia. An Ashes series is traditionally five matches, hosted in turn by England and Australia at least once every four years. The real 2015 series was actually held in England but this is an AU :-(

Sir Donald Bradman is our most famous cricketing son, and widely regarded as the best cricketer ever. The range I have in mind here is the Harts Range east of Alice Springs. Can’t really call it a mountain range but it's got some good climbing.
The birds - start with common ones, Magpies and kookaburas. I hear both of these frequently where I live, and although kookaburras wouldn't normally be found in this area, it's my story and I do what I want!

An excellent example of a Magpie song and a kookaburra

Chooks- chickens, but why call them chickens when chook is so much more fun to say?

The house that’s most like what I’ve envisioned, although there should be sliding door exits to the back yard from both the dining area, and the rumpus room.
Chapter Five - So How Long DOES it Take to Thaw Out a Supersoldier?

Chapter Summary

Steve’s made the decision to go and get Bucky, but is a little concerned where Darcy is concerned.. Can she really fly a quinjet? Is it wrong to compare Bucky to a frozen turkey? And should Sam be worried about a delicious concoction of sponge cake, chocolate and coconut?

Chapter Notes

Bucky!!!! That's about it really, although I had the whole chapter written and then I realised that there were bits that weren't going to work time wise, so I split it in half… and then I wrote more... and then I moved more into the next chapter... and then I wrote more...

Also, I watched the latest episode of Westworld whilst writing this and now I really want someone to write a Darcy/Bucky Westworld crossover… anyone?? I don't have the time for it right now :-(

Oh, the notes for things you may not understand are at the end as usual :-) And a huge thank you to ChrissiHR for her amazing beta work, and asking all the right questions regarding things I say. She helps me know what I need to include in the notes!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The first thing Darcy did was go and find Clint, and ask him to go get the jet out of the shed and make sure it was ready to leave as soon as they were. Then she whirled through the house as she gathered together the things she needed to take with her to Wakanda. She built a list in her head - food, music, books, oh, and clothes. She couldn't forget clothes. How much would she need? She had no idea how long the trip would take, or how long it would take to wake Mister Nutt up once they got there, or how long they'd have to stay afterwards. A week's worth should do she decided. King T’Challa was sure to have laundry facilities, right? Once she'd finished her packing, she headed for the rumpus room and the bookshelves. She dumped her bag on the lounge as she went past, then paused for a moment, and detoured to the kitchen where Clancy was packing the esky with food for the journey.

“Hey, do you think Steve will want to have lunch before we go? Or should we take it with us?” she asked.

“Did you see how much he ate at smoko?” Clancy asked, “I definitely think you should make him
eat before you leave, and I'm also packing a full lunch as well as snacks and nibbles,” her cousin continued as she put another container into the esky.

“Okay, sounds good, I'll be back in a bit then,” she said, and went straight to the rumpus room where she quickly picked out several books, and then went to see if Steve was ready or not.

On the way over she ran into Wanda, who was sitting on her own, in the middle of the horseshoe with her eyes closed and her head back.

Darcy watched for a moment, wondering if she should leave the younger woman alone or disturb her, when Wanda opened her eyes and smiled at her.

“He's not ready yet. He's been staring at his bag for the last twenty minutes wondering if this is really the right thing to do.”

“Actually, I was gonna make him come and eat before we leave,” Darcy said as she sat down beside her. “Do you hear us all the time?”

“Mmm, it varies. It is harder to control when I am tired, and some people are naturally louder thinkers than others. But, it's better than it was. And here, it is peaceful,” Wanda replied.

“Can you hear me? I mean like, right now?” Darcy asked curiously.

Wanda looked at her, “I can feel your emotions, and right now, yes, I can hear you because you are thinking very loudly, but usually it is mostly just vague impressions. I could feel you thinking about Steve. You also are worried, and…” She looked at Darcy curiously. “You don't mind that I can hear your thoughts?”

Darcy shrugged. “There's more important things to worry about at the moment, and I'm sure you've heard worse stuff than what's in my head.”

Wanda smiled, and her body shook slightly. “That is very true.”

Darcy shifted on the bench, “Look, I really don't know anything about your gifts, but if there's anything I can do to help… Well, you just let me know, okay?”

“Thank you. Most people would rather avoid me,” Wanda admitted.

"Can I hug you?" Darcy asked, and as soon as Wanda nodded her acceptance, she embraced the other woman tightly. “No one's gonna avoid you here. Not if they want to be fed properly anyway.”

They sat on the bench quietly together for what might have been an age as Wanda soaked up the sincere affection that was pouring out of Darcy, and if tears were shed, then neither of them cared.

After a while Wanda gave Darcy a strong squeeze, and a muffled "Thank you."

"Any time,” Darcy said softly. "Now speaking of being fed, do you wanna round up everyone else while I wrangle Steve?”

Steve was still staring at the pitiful collection of belongings he'd dumped on his bed when there was a loud thumping on the door of his room. He opened it to see Darcy standing there.
“Hey, how are you going? Wanna come have some lunch before we go?” Darcy asked as she tapped an impatient hand against the door frame.

He threw another glance at the bed, sighed and looked at the quietly excited young woman.

“Yeah, just give me a minute,” he said.

“Is that all you've got to wear?” she asked as she peered around the door frame. “Shit, Clancy would never let you go off with dirty clothes. Don't pack any of that,” she told him. “I'll let Clancy know, and she'll find you something to take with you, and she'll make sure all of that gets washed while you're away.” She took off before he could say anything.

Steve watched wordlessly as she jogged off towards the house, and then followed. He was hungry again.

Darcy was first back to the kitchen, where Clancy had just finished stuffing the esky with as much food as she could squeeze into it.

“You all ready then?” Clancy asked as she put the lid on securely.

“About as ready as I'll ever be,” Darcy said. “Shit, do you think we're doing the right thing?” she asked as she experienced a moment of doubt.

“Absolutely. If you don't go do this, then I reckon he's got two chances of not getting slaughtered in his deep frozen sleep sooner or later,” Clancy said seriously.

Darcy chuckled, “Buckley’s and none, right?”

“Exactly,” Clancy nodded. “Now, that's everything packed, plus I shoved a couple of packets of Tim Tams in as well, just in case you need bribes or comfort.”

“You think of everything. Which reminds me, Steve needs clothes, he's got hardly anything, and what I could see looks like it's been worn non-stop for at least a week.” Darcy said as she gave her cousin a big hug.

“Right. There's probably some of dad's old things that would fit him. Mostly,” she amended after a moment's thought. “Ooh, and I bet if he needs clothes, then they probably all need clothes. I'll get onto that straight after lunch.”

By the time he joined everyone else for lunch, Steve’s feelings of conflict just seemed to be growing. Part of him wanted to get in the jet and fly at top speed to Wakanda to get Bucky, whilst another part of him just wanted Bucky to stay right where he was, safe.

He ate quietly, deep in thought, and taking little notice of the conversation around him, so when lunch was done, he was surprised when Clancy told him she'd meet them at the jet, with clothes for him and Scott to take with them, in about ten minutes.

“What? Why is Scott coming?” He had no idea when this had happened.

Darcy laughed. “See, I told you he was zoned out. Scott's coming as technical support.”
“What kind of technical support?” Steve wanted to know.

“You do know he's a mechanical engineer right? I thought he might be able to help with Barnes’ new arm, if he wants one.”

Steve looked at Scott who gave him a huge grin and a big thumbs-up.

"Now, before we leave there's just one more thing I wanted to ask everyone whilst we're altogether," Darcy said.

Making sure she had everyone's attention, she continued. "Now I know you've all had a rough few weeks, and you barely know us, but, well, do any of you object to hugging people you don't really know yet?"

There was a general chorus of 'nope', 'not really', 'sounds good to me', and 'I'm fine with hugs', and many shaking heads from all present, and Darcy smiled. "Oh good, cos we're all enthusiastic huggers, and we'd love to be able to pass it on. Plus, hugs are kind of a big part of our rest and relaxation process around here, so yeah, that's good."

As he watched her smiling in obvious relief, Steve realised that in the short time they'd been here this was the first time he'd seen her not 100% certain about something.

“Alright then,” she clapped her hands together and everyone started moving. "Let's get this show on the road, huh? Come on Steve, everything else is at the jet already, let's go,” Darcy said as she headed out the back door.

“Everything else?” Steve asked as they crossed the back lawn and made their way towards the shed.

“Food, books, my clothes. How long is this going to take by the way?”

“How long is what going to take?” Steve asked.

“All of it. The flight, the defrosting. Anything else that needs doing whilst we're there. We're flying like, nearly halfway around the world, and I know that's a long trip by normal standards.”

Steve smiled, “Well luckily, quinjet speeds aren't built to normal standards. The model we have at the moment has a top speed of about 6000 miles per hour.”

“Holy cow… That's like, really, really fast,” Scott interjected. “I guess you need to be able to respond to any emergency, anywhere, as fast as possible, huh?”

“Yeah, every minute counts in most of the situations that require Avengers intervention,” Steve replied.

“So anyway,” Darcy took control of the conversation back, “Getting back to the original question, here to Wakanda, how long’s it gonna take?”

“Well, it depends on how fast we want to go,” Steve said. “We could probably be there in a little over an hour if we push it, or 4 to 5 hours if we just fly casual.”

“Okay, so how fast do you read?” was her next question.

“What?”

“How fast a reader are you? Like, are you a follow along with a finger reader, or whole page at a
glance?"

Steve smiled, “Probably somewhere in the middle,” he replied.

“Right, well let's do the casual fly then, cos I've got some in flight entertainment all lined up for you.”

“I don't see how that's possible when I'll be piloting the thing,” Steve objected as they reached the jet.

“Who said you'll be the pilot?” Darcy said innocently. “That's my job today.”

“You can fly a quinjet?” Steve asked disbelievingly.

“What, you don't think I can do it? It's not that hard you know,” she said as she opened the rear access and picked up one of the bags that was on the ground nearby. “Grab that for me will ya please?” She nodded at the other bag on the ground. “And Scott, can you bring the esky?”

“Flying a quinjet isn't like driving a car Darcy,” Steve said, picking the bag up.

“I know that. Clint taught me how to fly one a few years ago when… Well, take your pick, there were a few near earth ending events. He wanted to know that Jane and I could make a decent getaway if we needed to,” she threw over her shoulder as she walked up the ramp.

“You are a constant surprise, Miss Lewis,” Steve stated.

“Hey, what did I say about the Miss Lewis crap?” Darcy said as she turned around and walked back towards him. "Come here," she pointed at a spot next to the ramp.

"Why?" He asked warily.

"Ugh, cos I wanna hug you. Can I hug you? You look like you need a hug," she pouted.

He considered his options for a second and then decided to just go with it, ignoring Scott's snickering behind them. He was pretty sure he'd get his soon enough.

“Sorry. You are a constant surprise, Darcy,” he said as she flung her arms around him and squeezed. It was a surprisingly strong squeeze, considering her size, but he had to admit, he immediately felt better.

“Yeah, but you're enjoying it, aren't you?” she said, squeezing him harder.

Steve just shook his head as she released him, and he followed her up the ramp, intent on doing his own pre-flight check while she and Scott stowed their luggage. He was halfway through when Clint joined him.

“You nearly ready?”

Steve looked around. “Yeah, although what's this about you teaching her how to fly one of these things?”

Clint rubbed the back of his head. “It seemed like a good idea at the time?”

“That doesn't imbue me with confidence Clint.”

“She'll be right Steve. No worries,” Clint said cheerfully, and Steve had a feeling he was going to
dread those two phrases.

Ten minutes later, after Clancy had delivered two more bags with clothes for both him and Scott that she assured him would fit ‘well enough’, and Darcy had tossed books in both their directions, saying “Read this, it'll help you understand the code names a bit better,” they were on their way. She almost hit the shed on takeoff, as well as skimming the trees surrounding the house a little too close for comfort, and Steve had a vice like grip on the chair until they reached cruising altitude and the autopilot could be turned on. Yes, she could fly it, but there was little skill, and he was determined that she would not be the pilot for the return journey.

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Sam had watched the quinjet leave with not a small amount of alarm as it narrowly missed several objects during takeoff. Then he’d taken a long look around, and wondered what to do next. His first decision was to find Wanda, and see how she was doing. When he finally tracked her down, she was in the kitchen with Clint, Clancy and Jane, learning how to make...

“What the hell is that?” he asked as he stared at the sticky mass of chocolate and coconut in the centre of the counter top.

“We are making lamingtons,” Wanda announced happily as she licked her fingers. “Here, try one, they are delicious.”

Sam looked dubiously at the unevenly covered thing, and then shrugged. He didn’t remember seeing ‘lamington’ on the list of dangerous things to avoid, so he took a bite.

“Hey, that’s actually pretty good.”

“You want a cuppa to go with that?” Clancy asked as she flicked the switch on the kettle.

“A what?” Sam asked.

“A cuppa – cup of tea or coffee?” Clancy clarified for him.

“Yeah, sure, coffee sounds great,” Sam said as he took another one of the cakes. “So, what happens now?”

“Well, for now, you guys just relax,” Jane said from the other side of the bench. “You can take walks, explore the surrounding area, there’s plenty of books to read in the rumpus room, and there’s also a tv and a couple of gaming consoles in there, and a pool table. Plus we’ve got satellite internet and television as well.”

“I highly recommend you stay away from games and tv to start with,” Clint added. “How about I take you two out for a proper walk this afternoon, and I’ll show you around some more. Plus, Clancy’s found some extra clothes for everyone, so if you both want to go get your stuff out, she’ll be doing laundry later on.”

“Hey, how come you know so much about this place?” Sam asked, a question he’d been meaning to ask Clint ever since he’d been the one to show them their rooms, and the shower block, the first night they’d arrived.
“Oh, yeah, I forgot you guys don’t know that story, right? Well, when Darcy first found out about her Australian family, Fury sent me along for company...”

“You mean security detail,” Clancy interrupted.

“Yeah, that too,” Clint admitted. “And then, after about a week, she turned around and said to me, ‘You should bring your family out here for a holiday. The kids would love it.’”

Clancy laughed at that, “You should have seen his face, he was just, ‘How do you know about them?’ he was too shocked to even deny their existence.”

Clint shook his head, “She still hasn’t told me. So once I got over the shock, I contacted Fury, he said ‘Great idea, I’ll book them flights straight away,’ and we all ended up staying for about a month.”

“You all love keeping secrets from people, don’t you?” Sam grumbled quietly.

“Only when people’s lives are at stake,” Jane commented just as quietly.

“Okay, anyway, why don’t we go for a walk after we finish here,” Clint said, “and then we can watch the sunset from on top of the water tanks, before we come back here and help make dinner.”

Clancy looked over at him, “That sounds like a great idea. Just, wander around, enjoy the peace and quiet, and I’ll see you back here in a few hours.”

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When they arrived in Wakanda, it was hot and humid. Steve called ahead about an hour before he expected them to arrive, and also managed to convince Darcy to let him land the jet, as the area they were going to was hidden carefully along a narrow gorge in the jungle. King T’Challa was waiting for them on the landing deck, and after the customary welcome and greetings, they were shown to their rooms before going to see Bucky in his cryo chamber.

Steve just stood, hands in pockets, and looked on as Darcy and Scott both got very excited over the machinery, and the process. They were both asking lots of questions, and Steve only half listened as he stood in front of his friend, wondering yet again how Bucky was going to react to his reawakening. Darcy seemed to have charmed T’Challa already, so he wouldn’t be surprised if Bucky fell for her on the spot. He tuned back in as Darcy’s next question caught his attention.

“So, how long will it take to thaw him out? I did some research on those Alaskan wood frogs, and they can go from frozen solid to hopping off into the sunset in like, only ten hours.”

“I don’t know for certain, but the ladies in charge tell me it will be a similar time period. Perhaps a little longer, but not a lot longer.”

“Really? Cos he’s like, at least a million times their size. That doesn't make a difference? I mean, when I thaw a turkey for Christmas or Thanksgiving I have to put in the fridge for days before I actually want to cook it.”

Steve didn’t know whether to laugh or be horrified that she was comparing Bucky to a frozen Christmas turkey. Scott and T’Challa both seemed to have chosen the former option judging by
“I’m given to understand that size doesn’t make as much of a difference as may be expected. It is the serum in his body that controls the process.” T’Challa replied.

“That's awesome,” Darcy enthused, and then abruptly turned to Steve. “So when do we want to start the process. It's like, almost midday here now, but my body is saying dinnertime, and I'm probably gonna crash in about three hours cos of being up so early at home.”

Steve was pleasantly surprised at the quick response he was able to give.

“I say we eat, then go sleep for a while, and then start the process. The sooner we start the better.”

“Well, why don't we start it now?” Scott asked. “I mean, unless you were planning on sitting by his bedside for the whole ten hours, why not get it all started while we eat and sleep, then by the time we wake up again, it will be well underway.”

“Actually, I like that idea,” Darcy opined. “The sooner he's awake, the sooner we can make a start on other things.”

“Other things?” Steve asked pointedly, wondering what she was going to spring on him next.

“A new arm. If he wants one.”

“Wait, won't that take weeks to make?” he asked, a little frustrated at being so out of the loop.

“Nope. We can make it in just a few days. In fact, the arm itself can be done in just one day, it'll be the preparation, calibration and customisation that takes the most time.”

“Perhaps this would be best discussed over the meal?” T’Challa gently suggested as Darcy seemed about to launch into a detailed explanation of her plans. “I will arrange that the preparations for the re-animation process be made, and after we have eaten, we will come back and it can be started.”

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Natasha checked her appearance in the mirror one more time before leaving the bathroom and heading for the departure gate. As she approached the end of the line, she made a big show of juggling her carry on bag, her book, her phone and a Hello Kitty neck pillow. With the blonde dye in her hair, a pair of hot pink glasses with matching giant bow headband no one would even dream the infamous Black Widow was on this flight. As she settled into her seat a short time later, she sent off a couple of quick text messages before turning her phone off for take off. Twenty four hours or so of assorted peace and quiet - she was really looking forward to her trip.

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Steve looked on as T’Challa’s staff finished prepping Bucky for the next stage of the reanimation process. He still hadn’t been able to sleep, so he’d come down to watch. The other man now lay uncovered on a bed, and was hooked up to several monitors, as well as a saline drip. The process
was fascinating, and Steve wondered if this was how Shield had treated him when he’d first come out of the ice. It had only taken half an hour for the ice in Bucky’s skin to start melting, and slightly more than four hours after that, he had full brain function and his eyes had begun to move under his eyelids, just as if he were sleeping. Around about the six hour mark, his heart had begun to beat, and he’d started breathing. (When Steve had queried that order of function, he’d been told it was because the brain thawed first, and something, something, serum. He’d kind of stopped understanding once the language got too technical.)

It was at this stage that he’d been taken out of the temperature controlled cryo tube, and moved to the bed. The room was still being kept refrigerator cold, but Steve had been allowed to come in and keep him company, although it could still be up to several hours before he was fully ready to wake up.

He sat down in the chair closest to Bucky’s bed, and waited.

It had now been nearly ten hours since they’d pushed the button that started everything working, and Steve had been assured that he would probably start moving any minute now. They’d started slowly increasing the temperature of the room, so that in another hour or two the room would be at a more comfortable level, for when Bucky would wake up.

He didn’t look up as the door opened, but wasn’t completely surprised when an arm wrapped itself around his shoulder, and a head leaned against his for a moment.

“How’s he doing?” Darcy asked quietly, dropping a bag on the floor, yawning as she did so.

“Good,” Steve replied. “It’s taking longer than we estimated, but he’s doing really well.”

Darcy shivered, “Ugh, it’s so cold in here. I should have brought a blanket with me.”

“The rooms starting to warm up now, it’ll be back to normal soon,” he told her as he leaned into her, looking up just in time to see her yawn again, and he found himself copying her. She grinned.

“Looks like you’re finally ready to sleep,” she said.

He rubbed his eyes with the back of his hand, she was right. He suddenly found himself feeling extremely weary. “I can’t leave now, he’ll be awake soon.”

“Rubbish,” Darcy scoffed quietly, “I spoke to King T’Challa on my way in, he said it’s probably gonna be at least another 6 hours. A wood frog he is not, despite the serum.”

Steve couldn’t help laughing softly at that. No, Bucky definitely wasn’t a wood frog.

“Look, why don’t you go have your normal two and a half minutes sleep, and I’ll stay here and keep him company. If he wakes up earlier than expected, I promise to come and find you straight away.”

Steve got up and stretched the stiffness out of his back. “You know I do sleep more than two and a half minutes at a time.”

“Yeah, yeah. Still way less than all us normal people though,” she said, smiling at him.

“Okay, so the minute he wakes up, you come and get me,” he said as he paused at the door.
“Steve, just go! Oh, and ask someone to bring me a blanket or something, pretty please?”

After Steve left, and whilst she waited for someone to bring her a blanket, Darcy went and stood next to the bed, and studied the unconscious (sleeping?) Bucky Barnes for a little while. The wound on his face was already starting to heal as his body rebooted itself, and she could see the colour slowly starting to come back to him. At some stage during the process a lock of hair had fallen over his face, and she gently reached a hand out and smoothed it out of the way. As she idly wondered if they were going to give him any blankets, she took hold of his hand, rubbing over the back of it with her fingers, and running her other hand up and down his arm. As she did so, she realised that he felt a lot warmer than she’d expected.

“Almost there, Sleeping Beauty,” she said softly. “Almost there. And then we can really start helping you out.”

When the nurse came in several minutes later with blankets for both of them, she helped her cover Bucky, and then pulled a book out of her bag, arranged herself in the chair, looked over at him again, and settled down to wait.

Chapter End Notes

I actually researched quinjet speeds, distance between Alice Springs and Sudan as well as time differences for this chapter… among other things...

Rumpus room - general purpose recreation room. May contain a pool table, bar fridge, a bar, television and video game consoles, kids toys, bean bags, old couches, bookcases… etc. etc.

One theory behind the saying ‘Buckley’s and none’ Buckley’s Chance, for example someone asks you to do something you don't particularly want to do, you tell them ‘you got two chances mate.’ (‘Buckley’s and none’ can be added on or just left implied. If you're feeling particularly belligerent or nasty, it's ‘Buckley’s and sweet fuck all.’)

Tim Tams - One of our favourite chocolate biscuits, available in many different varieties. Mmm, Tim Tams...

Smoko is common vernacular for the morning break (also known as morning tea), especially in industries that involve long hours, shift work etc. It doesn't so much mean going for a smoke/cigarette anymore as taking a break from work for 10 or 15 minutes. It does involve a small meal, kind of like a Hobbits elevenses, and you can often have an afternoon smoko as well.

Esky - a portable cooler. The original portable cooler actually! Designed primarily to
hold beer, they are ubiquitous in Australian culture, and pretty much every Aussie family has at least one. They are mostly blue.

She'll be right, no worries mate - yeah, it probably won't be alright, and I would worry! Commonly used phrases when there are doubts about the end results, the manner being used to achieve something, or a slap dash approach is being taken. Beer may be involved.

**Lamingtons** - sponge cake dipped in thin chocolate icing and rolled in coconut. And now I want one.

Go on, I dare you to go and make some! (You can use a bought sponge if you want...)

Darcy researched **Wood Frogs** in her attempt to understand the Bucky Barnes defrosting process.

And a handy video

This might be the last update for a while, even though the next chapter is about 3/4 written already. This time in two weeks we'll be in the middle of our moving roadtrip, so I've got shitloads of stuff to do over the next 13 days. Ugh. Plus I want to get the next chapter of Captain Bucky up, and I've got my secret santa to write... so, yeeeh. Too much to do, something's gotta give!
Bucky gradually became aware that he was warm. That wasn't right. He'd never woken up warm before. He could hear voices talking quietly in another room nearby, and there was a tangy, unfamiliar perfume in the air. His head was vague and fuzzy, and when he experimented briefly with opening his eyes, it felt like they were made of lead. He lay there for a few more minutes, easily maintaining the illusion of sleep until his thoughts became clearer.

He could now discern the antiseptic odour of sterile surroundings behind the perfume, and a recently familiar, lingering scent of hot, humid jungle. So, he was most likely still in Wakanda, but why was he awake? And how long had he been asleep? It was hard not to jump to conclusions, but there was only one way to find out. His next attempt at opening his eyes was much more successful, and he swiftly took in the view without moving a muscle. He recognised the room as similar to where his and Steve's injuries had been treated after their showdown with Stark, but instead of a nurse, there was a casually dressed young woman sprawled in one of the comfortable looking chairs against the wall, reading a book. Medium build, with long dark hair and glasses, and although she looked completely harmless, his instincts were knocking at his brain screaming that there was more than met the eye here. Or maybe that was just his well developed sense of suspicion at work. Without hesitation, he closed his eyes again, faked a muted groan as he stirred slightly and then after several seconds, opened his eyes again. This time he found himself staring straight into an unfamiliar pair of sparkling blue eyes, and a wide cherry red smile.

“Well, hello there. Good morning, Sleeping Beauty, and I must say, you are a beauty. Definitely
exceeds expectations on that point dude,” the mouth said with a satisfied smirk.

Bucky blinked in startled confusion.

“What the hell?” he blurted out. “Where am I? Who are you?”

“I'm Darcy. We're still in Wakanda, but as soon as you're good to go, Steve and I are gonna take you to paradise,” she waggled her eyebrows suggestively and her smile widened.

“Steve's here? Why am I awake?” he realised he was struggling to sit up when she picked up the bed control and pressed the button to raise the bed head for him.

“I sent Steve for a rest, he spent about 24 hours awake - although from what I hear that's nothing for him,” she mused, sitting down in the edge of the bed as she kept talking.

“Anyway, he only woke up again about twenty minutes ago, he's just having a quick chat with King T'Challa, but he'll be back soon. He slept like, almost a whole six hours this time, so he must have really needed it. How are you feeling? Oh, hang on.”

She twisted around and pushed off the bed just far enough to pick something up off the tray table, and Bucky couldn’t help noticing the way her jeans stretched taut across her rear. She turned back and he lifted his eyes back to her face just in time.

“Here, have a drink. T'Challa said the whole defrosting process is very dehydrating, so even though we've got you on a drip, I think water straight from the cup is so much more satisfying. Don't you think?” She carefully took a large mouthful, and then held it out. He took it carefully, glad that he recovered quickly once awake, and took a sip. Damn if she wasn't right, and he took another big swallow. Her smile widened, and she stood up. “See, I told you didn't I? Now you stay right here, and I'll go find Steve, and then, with any luck, you can get out of here and into a proper room.”

He watched as she flounced out of the door, then he let his head drop back onto the pillow and closed his eyes again. What the hell was going on? And what did she mean, paradise?

It wasn't long before the young woman returned with Steve, a nurse, and a pile of soft looking clothes that she put in the small cupboard next to the bed.

“Here you go, one Steve Rogers, as promised. Now, please try not to break each other, and I'll see you both back in the suite for an early breakfast, okay?”

She then left again, giving them both a big smile and a little wave as she glided out of the door.

“So who's she?” Bucky asked Steve as the nurse checked over his vitals.

“That's Darcy, she's a friend of Natasha's and she thinks she can help with the stuff that Hydra left in your head,” Steve replied simply. “Among other things,” he added.

“She thinks she can get the programming out my head? Is she some kind of doctor or something?” Bucky asked dubiously.

“Nope, she's a… actually I'm not sure what she does,” Steve suddenly realised.

“How long have you known her Steve?” Bucky asked suspiciously.
Before Steve could answer the nurse finished his check up, informed him that he was good to go now, and then quietly left. Steve used the distraction to grab the clothes and shove them at him with instructions to “hurry up and just get dressed will ya. It may be just after five in the morning, but if we’re late for breakfast we’ll probably get a lecture,” before disappearing out the door. Bucky shook his head in doubt and investigated his new clothes. There was a pair of elastic waisted pants and a short sleeved shirt, both made of a soft stretchy fabric that was easy to pull on with only one hand; and a pair of pull on boots that felt more like slippers. When he walked out of the room a short while later, Steve was waiting in the corridor.

“So, are you gonna tell me what’s going on and who the girl is yet?” he asked. “Or are you gonna make me wait some more?”

“Patience Buck, all in good time,” Steve said as he led the way down to the elevator. “I think Darcy wants to reveal her grand plan to everyone at once.”

“Everyone?”

“You, me, T’Challa, and Scott came with us as well.”

“Scott? The AntMan right?” Bucky hadn't really had a chance to get know any of Steve's new friends, but there was no way he'd forget the man who could go from microscopic to gigantic in a matter of seconds.

“Yeah, that's the one,” Steve said as they stepped into the elevator.

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Darcy hummed quietly to herself as she checked up on her other charges. A few messages had arrived whilst she was holding her bedside vigil for Bucky, and she was pleased to see that everyone was still safe.

Nat was well on her way to joining the Outback crew, having just completed the second last leg of her trip. Clint’s family was finishing up the last few weeks of school, and wouldn't be following until that was done, as even though Laura was homeschooling, she still preferred to keep as close as possible to regular holiday periods. Darcy suspected that Cooper and Lila would work extra hard to finish early with the incentive of a return trip to the station.

When she heard Steve and his friend come in she stuck her head out long enough to say hello and let them know that they had time for showers if they wanted them. She then went back to her laptop to check the last email waiting for her.

It was from Clancy, who was asking if she could please stop somewhere on the way home for some extra supplies, as the usual road train wasn't due for another week, and she was already starting to plan for when Darcy brought the two super appetites soldiers home. Her cousin also mentioned that all their guests were settling in nicely, and taking full advantage of all the amenities.

Darcy smiled to herself as she shut down her laptop, extremely pleased with how well things were going so far. Real grouse, as Clancy would say.

She stepped quietly into the lounge room, right into the middle of a very interesting conversation
between Bucky and Steve, and decided that it was time to give them The Talk.

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The two men rode the lift to their floor in silence. As the doors opened, Bucky recognised it as where they'd stayed after the Siberian showdown, and where he'd made the decision to get frozen again. He followed Steve down the hall and into the suite, and Darcy came out of one of the bedrooms almost immediately.

“Hey guys, T’Challa and Scott will be like, another ten minutes, so you can take a seat,” she waved a hand towards the couch, “and catch up for a few, or go take a shower if you need it. I’m just doing some stuff right now, but I’ll be out soon.”

She disappeared again, and Bucky turned to Steve with a raised eyebrow, and a suspicious look in his eye.

“So you didn't answer my question before,” he said to Steve.

“Which question was that?” Steve replied innocently.

“How long have you known her?” he stared Steve straight in the eye until the other man looked away.

“Ah, about three, maybe four days. Time zones have messed me about a bit,” Steve said with a vaguely sheepish look, rubbing the back of his head with one hand.

“And you're going to trust her with my head?” Bucky asked incredulously.

“Nat trusts her, that's enough for me,” Steve said with sudden determination, and Bucky swore softly - they woke him up for this??

“You can't trust someone you've only known for three days, Steve.”

“Buck, she and her friends have taken me and the rest of the team in when everyone else either wants us locked up, or they don't even want to acknowledge that we still exist,” Steve said seriously. “How else do you expect me to repay that? She's putting her trust in me and mine, so I'm going to put my trust in her,” he folded his arms. Bucky knew that look, but he ploughed on regardless of his friends stubbornness.

“You know, I'd have thought that after everything that's happened to us, you'd be a bit more cautious in your dealings, Steve. Do you know anything about her? She could be Hydra, for all you know.”

“Okay Sleeping Beauty, I'm gonna stop you right there,” a voice cut in from the doorway.

Bucky looked up at the sound of the girl's voice, more startled that he hadn't heard her come back into the room, than that she'd been listening to the conversation.

“My name is Bucky,” he told her, but she ignored him and ploughed on, eyes blazing as she walked right up to him and stabbed a finger at his chest.
“Firstly, I was on the kill list from those flying murder ships of yours, I'm definitely not one of those Hydra bastards.”

“**My** murder ships?” Bucky said incredulously.

“-and secondly,” she glared at the interruption, ploughing on without pausing, both hands temporarily resting on her hips before she started waving them about.

“I'm gonna give you the same talk I gave Nat when she gave me the love is for children line. **Love is** for children, but it's not just for children, okay? Everyone needs love. It's a proven scientific fact that love provides essential hormones and endorphins and other stuff, and it's vital to mental and physical wellbeing.”

“What's that got to do with trust?” Bucky challenged her.

She waved her hands at him. “Shush, I'm getting to that. So, I will freely offer you my love, because you need it, and the same goes for His Grace over here, and it's not just because you're both pretty either. So if I'm gonna love you then I gotta trust you, so I'm gonna do that too. Now,” she paused to take a breath, “a lot of people say that trust should be earned, and they are absolutely correct, but you still need to offer a certain level of trust to start with, as it's a lot easier to give and earn trust with someone who's already offering it to you. So, Imma trust you not to murder me or mine in our sleep, or anything like that, and when you're ready, you can trust me to take care of you, cos that's what I do best.”

She gave a satisfied nod at the end of her speech, and folded her arms across her chest.

They both stared at her, as Bucky said quietly to Steve, “I realise you've only known her about ten minutes but is she always like this?” Steve just hushed him, and Darcy gave him an offended look.

“How'd that go down with Nat?” Steve asked, genuinely curious.

“Sorry Your Grace, I'm sworn to secrecy, but in case you hadn't noticed, we are BFF’s. That should tell you all you need to know. Anyway, just to recap and reinforce, I'm gonna trust both of you to do the right thing, and maybe, one day, you'll trust and love me back. I'm a patient woman, I can wait.”

She pinned the two men with a sharp gaze as they absorbed her little speech, and then Steve squirmed restlessly. She laughed then, and Bucky realised it was the nicest sound he'd heard in a very long time.

“Alright, I can see that you two still need to have some time together, I'm gonna go see what's keeping Scott and T'Challa, but first, bear with me.”

To Bucky’s surprise, she carefully stepped right up to him.

“May I?” she said, and he looked over at Steve, who just smiled and nodded once.

Wondering what he was agreeing to as he nodded to her, he just stood there as she reached up and beckoned to him, “Lean down a bit will ya please? I'm not that tall,” and then wrapped both her arms around him, pulled him tightly against her and squeezed. He was so surprised at the feeling of another warm body pressed up against his that he didn’t respond at all. He watched, half stunned as she then did the same thing to Steve, who he noticed did respond with a gentle squeeze in return, before yet again casually wandering out of the room.
“What the hell was that?” Bucky asked. Steve just dipped his head and smiled.

“What, you don't remember what a hug is Buck?”

“Yeah, but why?”

“Why not?” Steve was struggling not to laugh at him now.

Bucky waved his hand in surrender, and then flopped onto the couch.

“I give up,” he said, his impassive gaze landing on Steve, as a thought occurred to him.

“Hang on... why did she call you ‘Your Grace?’” Bucky asked.

“That's what you took from all that?” Steve asked incredulously. Bucky shrugged indifferently. “It was about the only bit I didn't understand.”

Steve considered this for a moment and then his forehead wrinkled. “But you got BFF’s though?”

“I was out in the world for more than two years Steve. I did pick a few things up,” Bucky said dryly.

Steve shook his head in wonderment and sat down next to him.

“So you take note of ‘Your Grace’, and you understand what BFF’s means, but you couldn’t return her hug?” he said with an innocent look on his face.

“I swear, it's almost like we were never separated.”

“Don’t worry Buck, I’m sure it’ll all come back to you sooner or later,” Steve said soothingly. “Should we go and see what she's up to now, or should we just wait for them all to come back?”

“Actually, I'm gonna take that shower she suggested earlier,” Bucky decided. “I need it.”

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By the time she boarded her final flight, Natasha was tired but satisfied. She was on the last, and longest, leg of her flight plan, and she'd had confirmation text messages that her misdirections were working. Apparently, interested parties were now looking for her in Berlin, Barbados, Boston and Brussels. And someone would be waiting to collect her at her final destination.

She’d also been very amused by a message from Darcy going on about how the turkey was well on its way to being defrosted, and it was lucky that no one was all that fond of wings, because for some reason, this turkey only had one, but at least she could replace it easily with a suitable alternative. Nat wasn't entirely sure what she meant by that, but she was curious to see the end results.

She settled into her seat, adjusted the Hello Kitty neck pillow, and dozed until the meal was served.
When Darcy finally returned with T’Challa and Scott, they were deep in discussion, and Steve caught the words ‘printer’, ‘quickly’ and ‘alternative’ but as soon as the trio caught sight of Steve they broke off their conversation, and T’Challa approached them with a smile on his regal face as Darcy and Scott disappeared into the kitchen.

“Captain - or should I call you Your Grace now? I am very pleased to see that you have fallen in with such fine company. Darcy is a fascinating young woman.”

“Just Steve is fine. She's different, that's for sure,” Steve agreed.

T’Challa then turned to Bucky, who had just exited the bathroom.

“I am glad to see you with us again Bucky Barnes, I hope the reanimation process was not too uncomfortable for you.”

Bucky shook his head, “Actually that was the best wake up I've ever had. I didn't think it could be that pleasant,” he replied ruefully.

“Dude. That is really sad.”

They all looked around as Scott came out of the kitchen with a tray of tea and coffee.

“I mean, I knew you'd had a rough time but that's just kinda tragic. It's good to see you again man, you're looking good,” he said as he put the tray down. “Everyone help yourselves, Darce’ll be out in a minute.”

“Thanks,” Bucky replied, not really knowing what else to say.

As they all helped themselves to tea, or coffee, there was a knock at the door, and a trolley laden with food was brought in at the same time that Darcy came out of the kitchen.

“Okay, so I talked to the doctors,” she announced, “and even though they said you should be okay to eat pretty much anything, I did ask that the kitchens not send us anything too rich. I'd hate for you to uh, suffer a rerun of breakfast,” she finished delicately.

As soon as the smells hit him, Bucky's mouth started watering, and his stomach growled loudly.

“That won't be a problem,” he said firmly.

The conversation stayed fairly casual while everyone ate, never once touching on the reason they were all here. Bucky found the whole experience slightly surreal, even though it was probably the most normal thing he'd done in his recent personal time line.

By the time they finished eating there was nothing left, and he was really starting to feel human again.
As they all pitched in to move the dirty dishes back onto the trolley, Steve bluntly brought the conversation back to why they were all there.

“Alright Darcy, Bucky's awake, we're all fed, everybody’s here - what's next in your grand plan?”

“Well, I have some ideas, but really, it's all up to Sleeping Beauty to decide,” she said casually.

“My name is Bucky,” Bucky said again, and she flashed him a huge grin.

“Of course it is,” she nodded. “Now, is there anything else you need before we start?”

He just stared at her for a moment while he gathered his thoughts.

“Yeah,” he said quietly. “I want to know who you are, why I'm awake, and what these plans of yours are.”

Chapter End Notes

Not a lot of notes for once! I hope everyone had a good Christmas and New Year, and here's to a MUCH better 2017!

Grouse - slang in some states/cities for good, excellent, fantastic, awesome etc.
Chapter Seven - No One Here But Us Cats.

Chapter Summary

Bucky gets an explanation.

Chapter Notes

Once again huge thanks to ChrissHR for her beta work, asking the picky questions and making me aware of things she either doesn't understand, or aren't working. And not letting me be lazy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter Seven - No One Here But Us Cats.

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There was a beat of silence after Bucky finished speaking as everyone turned to look at Darcy. She just smiled at him as he watched patiently, her head tilted to one side, arms loosely crossed over her (impressive) chest.

“ Asking all the important questions straight out of the gate - I like it.” She looked down and away for a moment, as if gathering her thoughts, and then turned to leave the kitchen.

“Come on - I don’t know about anyone else but I’d rather sit down than hang about in the kitchen.”

She took a seat on the couch, and waited patiently for the rest of them to arrange themselves around her, like a queen holding court.

“So, I don’t know if anything I’m going to tell you will actually mean anything, cos really, I’m nobody, but hey, if you’ve got questions I’m happy to answer them. So - I am Darcy Lewis - and I work with Doctor Jane Foster - she’s an astrophysicist, not a medical doctor by the way. I’m also good friends with Thor, Natasha Romanoff, Clint Barton and a few other people. You’re awake because I think I know a way to help you, and my grand plan - as His Grace so eloquently put it - is to do exactly that. Help you.”

“How are you gonna help me?” Bucky asked wearily. “HYDRA spent years messing with my brain, and it wasn’t pleasant. You haven’t given me any reason yet to make me think you can do anything about it.”

“You’ve known me for like, an hour dude. Gimme a chance,” she said seriously.
“Every moment I’m awake, I’m dangerous,” he told her just as seriously. “Get on with it. Convince me.”

The woman seated across from him sighed, reached down and picked up a folder from the table between them. She held it up and met his gaze fearlessly, something he isn't used to seeing from anyone normal who knows who he is. Except Steve - all he shows is worry. And he's not normal - not by a long shot.

“I have a quick and easy way to replace the arm you lost, and I’ve thought of about three different ways we can try and fix your head.” She gave the folder a little wiggle.

Bucky is taken aback. He hadn’t expected such a succinct answer from a woman who’s done nothing but babble at him since he woke up.

“Three?” he asked in surprise.

“Well, maybe four, possibly five,” she replied thoughtfully. “Look, the most important thing for you to know here, is that we're not going to do anything unless we have your explicit permission to proceed, okay? You gave Steve and T'Challa permission to wake you up only if something could be done for the shit HYDRA put in your brain, right? Which, by the way, I knew nothing about before Steve told us all about that asswipe, Zemo. The only plan I ever really had was just to have somewhere safe Jane and I could go if we needed to hide for some reason, but luckily it was really easy to tweak that plan so we could give you guys a safe place to stay out of the way while the Accords shit show gets sorted out.” She waves her hands around the whole time she’s talking, and Bucky’s keeping a close eye on the folder in case she loses her grip on it and it goes flying. He really wants to see what’s inside it.

He ducked his head and stole a quick glance at Steve, who was listening intently, and Scott, who was grinning maniacally at the young woman in front of them as she continued talking.

“Honestly, I’ve had like, three different run away and hide plans in place ever since the murder ship thing happened,” she continued.

“Darcy, you’re getting off track,” Steve gently gave her a verbal nudge to get back to the point.

“What? Oh, right - where was I? Oh yeah, getting the shit outta your head. Well I think I can do that. So we woke you up. You gave T'Challa and his team permission to build you a new arm to replace the one you lost, but that's gonna take a while, so I thought of a solution for that too. But only if you say yes. You're in charge Bucky, we're just here to make it happen.”

“So if I said no, I don't want any of it, you'd put me back to sleep? You'd let me go back into cryo again?” Bucky asked curiously, wanting to see what she’d say, but with absolutely no intention of ever going back into cryo again. Ever.

“Is that really what you want?” she asked perceptively, and then without waiting for an answer she continued, ignoring Steve's noise of protest. “Yes. We do what you say.”

“But-” Steve started and Darcy rounded on him without hesitation.

“Shut up Steve, this isn't about you, it's about him,” she said, pointing at Bucky as she glared at Steve.

Bucky looked from Steve to Darcy to Scott and T'Challa and back again. Steve was obviously holding something in, Scott was almost bouncing in excitement, T'Challa was his usual calm self and Darcy, well she was just as calm as T'Challa but in a more expectant sort of way.
“Okay then, tell me what you've got,” he replied, and the sudden burst of hope in his chest startled him more than anything else since he'd woken up, and when Darcy grinned at him he felt even lighter.

“This is plans and ideas for your new arm. Or arm s,” she said, stressing the ‘s’ as she passed the folder she’d been waving around over to him. “And, um, I put my file in it too - I thought it might be easier if you just read up on me and then ask questions later.”

He didn’t say anything, just balanced the folder on his knee so he could open it and look at the pictures on the top of the pile.

“It’s very… bright,” he said uncertainly.

“That one’s just an example. We can make it whatever colour you want. Hell, you could have one in every colour if you wanted.”

“Is that 3D printed prosthetics?” Scott asked as he moved closer to peer over Bucky’s shoulder.

“It is!” Darcy exclaimed. “And I’m kind of hoping that you can help out with refining the designs and making sure we can get it to mesh with Bucky's existing technology,” she continued with an enthusiastic bounce.

“That’s pretty good thinking,” Scott said. “It’s light, cheap, adaptable and quick. You know with the right printer, we could actually print one using titanium.”

“Really? I only had like, an hour or so to do any research on it - it was a bit sudden and unexpected.”

“Anything that prints titanium could be modified to print vibranium, although that could take a while,” T’Challa offered quietly. Scott and Darcy both turned to look at him with excited looks on their faces.

Bucky just listened as Darcy and Scott fell into a deeper discussion of his potential new arm, King T’Challa chiming in every so often.

Movement beside him caught his attention and he turned his head to see Steve looking at him.

“You okay there Buck?” he asked quietly.

Bucky took a moment to think about it - he was awake, well fed, and comfortable. There were three mostly still strangers currently discussing design options on a new arm for him, and one of them was a very vulnerable and soft looking young woman who, in spite of everything, he was finding just a little bit intimidating, with her fast talking and complete disregard of the danger that he posed.

“Yeah. Yeah I’m good.” He paused for a moment as Scott got loudly enthusiastic about an idea he was proposing, and then looked at Steve with a smile on his face. “Do you think they’d let me put a knife compartment and some x-ray glasses in it?”

Steve looked at him thoughtfully. “Actually, I have a better idea…although it may be more suited for the new metal arm.”
Within half an hour of his ‘Yes,’ Bucky was back downstairs in the medical wing having his shoulder inspected and scanned, ready for the 3D arm to be printed. Steve had spent several minutes in discussion with T’Challa about something, and then they’d both had another in-depth discussion with Scott and Darcy, which ended with King T’Challa leaving, saying that he’d be back soon.

Bucky had been more interested in the idea that modern technology could make a sturdy arm for him out of plastic OR titanium in roughly one day to take much notice. Despite everything he’d been through, it was a nice feeling to know that he could still be surprised with good things.

He hadn’t known before this that Scott was a mechanical engineer, and it gave him an extra sense of assurance knowing that a man who had come to their aid at a decent amount of personal risk was now helping create a new arm for him. More than one new arm - Darcy had suggested that they make a couple for everyday use, as well as what she was calling his ‘dress’ arm.

“You never know when you need to look your absolute best,” she’d declared firmly, and all three men had wisely agreed with her at once.

It was almost lunchtime by the time the printing of the arm started, and Bucky watched, fascinated as the machine began to lay down the special materials being used to create his new limb. He could have happily stayed to watch for hours, but Steve and Scott insisted that it was time to eat again, and as he was protesting that he wasn’t hungry his stomach betrayed him by growling loudly. It was starting to become a habit.

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After lunch, in spite of the urge to go and watch his new arm growing, Bucky decided to sit and read the file that Darcy had given him instead. He was sitting on his own at the kitchen table after insisting to Steve that the other man was welcome to go do other things for a while. He was surprised to find out how wholly unremarkable Darcy Lewis really was - in the grand scheme of things that is. As well as what looked an official SHIELD file she’d included a few personal items. He so was engrossed in his reading that he almost didn’t notice when a cup of tea and a plate with some kind of small chocolate bar were set down next to where his other elbow should have been.

“Well?” Darcy asked as she sat down opposite him. “How’s your reading going?”

“You are completely normal and ordinary,” he said bluntly. “Nothing special about you at all. On paper,” he added hastily when he realised how horrible that sounded. “How on earth did you end up involved with this bunch of reprobates?”

“Wrong time, wrong place? Right time, right place? Some other combination of those parameters?” She shrugged, and took a bite of one of the chocolate bars she’d pulled out of a packet in front of her. “Try one,” she said encouragingly, crumbs flying out of her mouth.

He picked up the bar from his plate, inspected it for a moment, and then took a bite. Not bad. Chocolate, cookie, more chocolate, more cookie.

“It’s good,” he said, shoving the rest in his mouth. “What is it?”
“Tim Tam biscuits,” Darcy said as she took another one. “They’re an Australian institution. Don’t ever call them cookies by the way - most Australians will have a fit if we call their biscuits cookies. I have more if you want another one. We’re just lucky Clint isn’t here, or he’d eat the whole packet.”

He took another one from the proffered packet. “Thanks.”

They sat quietly while he continued reading, and something occurred to him.

“Can I ask you something?” he said.

“Sure.”

“I noticed that there's nothing in here-” he pointed at the folder, “-about what's in here?” he pointed at his head.

“Oh, yeah. I haven't written any of that down,” she explained. “It's… I thought it was maybe too important to write down. I've talked to King T'Challa about it though, so if something were to happen to me he would know.”

“That's probably smart thinking,” he conceded.

“I really do want to talk to you about it,” she said earnestly, “except that I've been up for about 22 hours now and-”

“22 hours?”

“Yeah - don't tell Steve, please? He thinks I was sleeping while he was watching over your Arctic frog trick.”

“Arctic frog trick?” he raised an eyebrow at her. He was not going to let her strange comments get to him.

“Yeah, the whole freeze and thaw thing… you know what? Not important right now. Sorry. My brain to mouth filter gets confused when I'm this tired.” She gave him an apologetic smile and he relented.

“Get some sleep,” he said. “Steve will probably want to hear it all anyway.”

“Yeah,” Darcy stood up and stretched. “I think that's definitely a thing I should do. I will see you later.”

He watched as she wandered towards the door she’d appeared out of earlier, when she'd delivered her love and trust speech, and disappeared inside.

He looked back at the file and the packet of Tim Tams she'd left behind. He picked up the Tim Tams, and headed back down to watch his new arm as it grew right in front of his eyes.

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A few days later, Bucky sat on his bed, fascinated by the new titanium arm he was now wearing. It was light, more responsive than he’d expected, and it had a kind of grace, finesse and workmanship
that put his old arm to shame. He hadn't gotten his knife sheath or x-ray glasses though - apparently that was being considered for the next model.

T'Challa’s technicians had not only repaired and refitted his shoulder, but had somehow managed to shape the new arm to fit those remnants seamlessly. He had also been shown the progress on the other, stronger and more durable vibranium battle arm that was being made for him.

“Well?” Scott asked anxiously. “Will it do for now?”

Bucky looked up at his new friend. “Yeah, it’s great. Thanks.”

“Hey, I just helped with the construction. It was Darcy who sourced the design info and insisted that we could actually get it to merge with your existing tech. She must be one of the smartest women I’ve ever met,” he rambled on enthusiastically.

“Hey Buck, you ready to go?” Steve asked from the doorway.

Bucky stood up, still a bit off balance with the new limb but he was adjusting quickly.

“I dunno Steve, I was safe here. I don't like not knowing what's in store for me.”

“None of us do.” Darcy had once again appeared unexpectedly without warning. “But, you're only safer here until someone lets something slip, or they get a spy in or something, and then when they come, you're a target frozen in place - you're helpless. This way, when the undesirables come knocking on King T’Challa’s door in a week or a month or whenever, he'll be able to open his doors, show ‘em the dust bunnies in your chamber and say ‘no one here but us cats’, capiche?”

Both super soldiers glances went straight to T’Challa, who was… smiling.

“You're letting her get away with that?” Steve asked.

The king's smile broadened, and he shrugged. “What she says is true. There will be ‘no one here but us cats,’ as the lady says, and then they will have no reason to stay, and they will leave.” He stepped up to Bucky and offered his hand. “Please know, I would have gone to great lengths to keep you safe here, and at peace, but Miss Lewis has an excellent plan and I wish you all the best.”

Bucky nodded, and clasped the other man's hand firmly. Out of all the things to come out of the recent trials was the unexpected but wholehearted friendship of this man. A man who was more willing than anyone else he'd ever met, to admit to, and then try to rectify, his mistakes.

“Come back any time,” T’Challa finished. “You will always be welcome here.”

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Chapter End Notes
We're going back to Australia!!!!

An excellent article on 3d printed prosthetics

And check out all these different hands and armst!

I think this one would look good on Bucky

And there’s this one as well, and Bucky wouldn’t need the harness.

A recent comment on a previous chapter led me to this… it’s awesome! Come To Australia

And this Waltzing Matilda Eminem Style

End Notes

I started writing this about 2 months ago, as I've decided that there's a distinct lack of Avengers in Australia. This is my attempt to kind of, sorta, fix it, a little bit...
Tags will be updated as needed.

As always, un-betaed, and read too many times by myself.

My Tumblr, if you're interested, is ibelieveinturtles

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