Late Call for Bad Judgement

by juanafever

Summary

Darcy wanted simple things in life. To do her job well. Look after Jane. She didn't like complications. She didn't have time for them. Unfortunately, the complications didn't get that memo. Now she needed to decide if Tony (Beep) Stark was a complication or the source of them.

Basically a snark fest all the way.
Chapter 1

English is not my native language so there are spelling mistakes, I don't do those on purpose and try to weed out as much as I can spot, but there will be some that I miss, so if you find them point it out to me and I will correct it. The same goes to the wrong use of words, I am not doing the mistakes on purpose point it out, please. Many Thanks for your understanding =)

The chapters are being edited by Wino, who is amazing, so there should be less and less mistakes as time passes. Thank you for understanding

Late Call for Bad Judgement

Chapter 1

It wasn’t intentional. Honestly. Who would be that crazy to come up with shit like that anyway? It was a poor judgement, a bad a decision. Sleep deprivation was a terrible thing.

Darcy Lewis enjoyed her sleep. It was important. She also hadn’t been getting much of it since she started working for certain astrophysicist.

“No, Jane, you can’t have your phone back.”

“It’s my phone!”

“I just said that. You still aren’t getting it back. SI will be calling this phone, to bypass me, and discuss with you the terms of the contract and the adjustments that we want, and so help me Thor, you are not losing this phone again under the mountain of papers after putting it on silent!”

“It happened once.”

“I nearly had a stroke. Is that what you want? For your smart, beautiful, funny PA to just drop dead from stress?”

“Did I hire somebody else? That PA is question being funny…”
Darcy tossed a pencil at her boss lady and of course missed by a mile.

“Lame, Darcy… Ouch!” the second one bounced off of Jane’s head and Darcy stuck her tongue out at her friend.

“Keep talking and I will let them have you.”

“The big bad wolves from SI Legal Department… so scared. Please make sure the clause for non distribution without permission being at their discretion is gone.”

“Yeah, yeah. That’s funny, how I’m the one busting my ass for it?”

“You were the one that brought it up.” Jane was giving her PA a sidelong glance. “I don’t even have to sign it.”

“Ha ha, no. Thor-bro is there. The…”

“He can just as well be here. He can travel.”

“I am ok. OK?”

“But if we hold out…”

“Jane, it is not the first date with Thor where you want to hold out, before you put out, because you really don’t want to look easy. Stark Industries is the land of real funding. Real funds that can buy real equipment that you don’t have to build yourself or get me to build it. I know we pretend hat most of our stuff is held together by duck tape because it is unique but we both know the answer is, we are broke.” Darcy finally pocketed her boss’s phone and put on a kettle. “And we will get paid.” They were running low on tea again, and sugar… and dignity.

“We have the grant money.”

“That wouldn’t keep two hamsters alive, if we didn’t build majority of the equipment ourself. We live in your mum’s flat and she pays the bills. We are that broke. I know we play it cool when Thor-bro swings by between saving the world and sorting issues on other worlds. It is time to move on.”

“Stark can afford…”

“Until SHIELD will loosen up the vise on the rights to publish your work no one will touch it. He wants you there, because he knows you are brilliant and that you are on the right path to break physics. I’m not saying we shouldn’t get the most out of it, I’m just saying we should not take a piss.”

The argument was ongoing since the offer from the SI NYC came through two months ago. They wanted Jane there, but they also wanted her on a leash, to parade her like a prized poodle. There was always a compromise, but the legal department’s inflexibility was wearing them down.

All the while Thor lived in New York, because the Avengers resided there and he was often called, not being able to travel the vast distance if there was an emergency on either end fast enough even with the help of Mjolnir was taking a toll on his relationship with Jane. He was still gone off world most of the time so he was eager to have Jane move if only to have a peace of mind that she was safe and sound in the company of his new friends.

“I still think we should hold out.”
“I think you need to finally get a move on if you don’t want to miss your train.” Darcy was already rocking her bright green Hulk pjs, while Jane was ready to go catch the night train to Glasgow for the family reunion. “I need my phone.”

“No, you have my spare phone and a prepaid sim with all the numbers. Honestly, I got this under control. If the SI wants us they will have to finally crack and give us something.”

“Yes, just how much…”

“Foster, If you think that I will not toss you out head first through that door, you are in for a surprise. ”

Darcy was content in the knowledge that Jane knew that she was doing the best by both of them. With SHIELD breathing down their necks and tempting with their standing offer to join up and sign their lives away, and SI being jerks, life for the Poli Sci with a mountain of debt wasn’t easy.

Especially when the two of them lived on the grant money and did their best to do actual scientific research with the remaining funds.

Mrs Foster’s old 2 bed semidetached rental property, that she let her daughter occupy for the time being, was draughty and damp. Darcy was convinced that even the roaches moved out due to the conditions, but it was rent free so they made do.

She was a glorified intern now, also known as PA. No paycheck, though. Still. If SHIELD hadn’t Fucked Up, Darcy probably would have convinced Jane to sign up by now, but as it stood the two women lived under the crippling weight of NDA that didn’t allow Jane to advance her career and be able to finally pay said PA.

But Stark Industries were a totally different ball game, they could do stuff there, because funding, glorious unlimited funding, might finally enable Jane to replicate the data from New Mexico that they couldn’t recover after the Jack Booted Thug Brigade returned the machines.

While Darcy knew, that the difference between London and NYC was 5 hours she wasn’t even mildly surprised when the phone rang at 3am London time, because the SI Legal was a bag of dicks. The caller ID was flashing SI.

“Dr Foster’s phone.” She yawned as she rolled onto her back and stretched in the single creaking bed in the spare room. “Her PA, Darcy Lewis speaking.”

“Foster.”

“No, it’s Lewis, Darcy. The PA.”

“Put Foster on, Darlene.”

Darcy glared at the ceiling.

“Sure. Paragraph 17 clause 3. The matter of Dr Foster’s accommodation at the Stark Tower. Has it been updated?”
“What?” the person on the other end sounded quite taken aback.

“I’m asking you, anonymous caller from Stark Industries, New York, Legal Department, have the amendments kindly requested by me on behalf of Dr Foster, been done?”

“What? No? Yes? I don’t know? Put Foster on, Dahlia.” ‘Oh…yeah… now that is likely.’

“Moving on. Paragraph 19 clause 7. Equal pay and compensation events. Has that been expanded?”

“If you are done being cute. Put Foster. On.” There was an actual growl on the other side of the line and Darcy’s eyebrows shot up as she steam rolled ahead.

“I take that as a no. Seeing as none of our requests have been yet added, I suggest you email Dr Foster with your counter proposal, as we haven’t seen that either. Till then I bid you a goodnight.”

“You are not going to hang up on…’

‘Asshole.’ Darcy seethed as she indeed hung up with no little amount of satisfaction.

Unfortunately the screen didn't even go dark before the person was calling back. ‘Oh, come on.’

“You hung up on me!”

“Yes?”

“Do you know who I am?”

It was 3am in the land of the Big Ben, but it was 10pm in the land of Times Square. Darcy wasn’t in the mood to play the game of who the fuck are you with an asshole that called people on purpose at bumfuck o’clock with nothing to show for it.

“Yes. You are the dick, that thinks that a well respected scientist should take a 15% pay cut, because she is moving in with her boyfriend that lives in Stark Tower already, rent free, I might add. Not to mention the fact that you consider the fact that Dr Foster has to sit down as she takes a piss significant enough reason to dock her pay a further 10%. Last, but not the least, it’s 3AM! You do not call people at this hour, act like a chauvinistic cunt and expect them to fall all over themselves doing your biding. Dr Foster is not a dog on your beck and call. Goodnight!”

There wasn’t a call back, and she briefly wondered if their contract got pulled before pouring herself a shot of whisky and going back to bed.

Darcy didn’t fall asleep till the sun rose.

The next call came the following night at 3am. Again. Darcy groaned in frustration.

“Dr Foster’s phone. Her PA speaking.”

“It’s done.”

“Congratulations. Did it hurt?”

“Hurt what?” Sounded like the same person. Wasn’t Darcy a lucky girl? What happened to that old Mr Spools dude whose idea was to pay Jane peanuts in exchange for the privilege of living in the
“When you got neutered.”

“I got… are you drunk?”

“Sleep deprived. Some dick’s been calling at 3am.”

“I got your contract sorted. ” There was a pause like he was waiting for something and it took Darcy another minute to understand that she was expected to reply.

“My contract is directly with Dr Foster. Thank you very much, but no.”

“Well, Dr Foster’s contract has been finalized. Start packing.”

“Sure. Haven’t seen it in the inbox yet, funny enough.”

“Sent it to you, seeing as you are her mouthpiece. Darcy Lou. Very cute. Very southern. Texas, maybe? Louisiana? I would say…”

“I’m sure you would. That is my private email, please do not use it.” Darcy tried not to grind her teeth. She hadn’t used that since the Ian Incident. It was the embarrassing first email address that everyone got thinking they were the bees knees. “Give me a sec. I need to log in.”

“I said, I sent it.”

“Yeah, I heard you… just a sec…logging… looking… bloody spam…” Darcy put the phone on loudspeaker as she attempted to comb through pages of random shit.

“Your filters aren’t set correctly. Are they even set? When was the last time you adjusted them?”

It took another minute for the situation to dawn on Darcy as she watched in growing horror as her emails were being sorted without any help from her.

“Are… are you in my emails? You are in my email.”

“And done. Yes. Sorted. No need to thank …”

“I will fucking do you in for privacy breach.”

“You are welcome, Darcy Lou. Why so defensive? Got anything interesting in them? Is that it? Are there photos? I bet there are photos.” Darcy desperately tried finding the right emails before being forcibly kicked out.

“Listen, dude, just log out…”

“Oh… Wow… Are those real? They look real.”

Darcy wanted to scream really badly, but there was a lump in her throat that was chocking her.

“You … fucking thief.”

“I am offended. Just a sec… done. Much better. I think a canvas 1 on 2 to bring out the proportions? And first - you are implying that I intend to keep… these works of art without adequately compensating you. And second - a PA for Foster? Because it is a criminal offence not to let these see the light of day.”
“And this is why I am a PA for Dr Foster.” Now it was Darcy’s turn to growl as she tried repeatedly to get back into the emails. “These are personal photos, you pig…”

“My compliments to the artist. The shading is just right and the angle gives this impression of suppressed movement… They are real, though, right?”

“No…”

“You can’t lie worth shit, short stack. So how much?”

“They are not for sale, you douche canoe.”

“How much is Foster paying you anyway? It is an easy buck. No foul, no harm. Need to put those somewhere with good light…”

“NO! You… listen… I don’t care if you keep it in the spank bank, but I will murder you in your sleep if you show these to anyone!”

“Does that mean that I get a chance to get you in bed? Because I am game.” She could hear the smug bastard grin. She could hear it in his voice. She was so so mad. “Shortstack? Lewis? I can hear you breathing, babe, it is rather labored, should I assume you are imagining it now? Because I would rather you voiced it…”

“You will regret this. Mark my word.”

“I would rather mark you.”

“How can the legal department of a reputable company be a basket full of pigs?”

“Oh, I’m not from the Legal, Shortstack…” There were some kind of alarms blaring that made Darcy wince from the volume. “Damn it. Got to go. I will call you.”

“Screw you.”

“Deal.”

He hung up and Darcy continued staring blankly at the phone praying that he was joking.

It took another five minutes for her to be able to log back into the email.

The Photos were Gone. Gone. He didn’t copy them. He took them completely. It took Darcy three shots and a shower to distress sufficiently to look for the contract, because if that wasn’t there this nightmare didn’t have a silver lining.

The contract was there. The updates were there. All of them. Darcy felt the stress of the last month slowly ebb away. It was a relief. She got a place in the Tower. An actual apartment in the actual Stark Tower rent free. That was going to save her a ton of money and commute, the closest place she would have been able to afford was in Brooklyn, and she would be able to keep an eye on Jane when Thor wouldn’t be around. It was like the perfect outcome.

He could fucking keep the pictures, Darcy thought. It was time to let go anyway. They were her safety blanket way too long. Those were great pictures, though. But she could live without them.

It was time to move on.

There was giddiness that Darcy tried her best to control as she skimmed through the contact.
All there. All ready. Jane would just need to sign. Just right there, under the signature of …. Anthony E. Stark.

Anthony E. Stark...

She went back and forth a page.

The printed name of Mr Spools was crossed and in spidery handwriting replaced by Anthony E. Stark.

*Anthony Edward Stark*...

Tony fucking Stark had her photos.
Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Darcy was startled awake by the sudden feeling of falling. She choked on air as she jerked upright in panic, the flimsy sofa rocked and stomach lurched to her throat. It took a long minute for the fear to subside and remnants of the dream that was already fast fading release the mind.

The house was empty and Darcy thanked Thor for this small mercy. She couldn't tell if she woke up screaming or not. It had been years since she had such vivid dreams. The lack of proper rest and healing deep sleep had slowly crept up on her. The constant traffic of the motorway and voice of people walking by, it all calmed her down. The world kept turning. At least she wasn’t sleepwalking anymore; Jane would probably never leave her alone in the house at night ever again.

While Jane was her sister from another mister, working and sharing living space with the same person came with certain complications and Darcy was thankful for the small breaks of being alone that she got.

The muscles in her shoulders were tight from pent up tension of the last couple of days and Darcy had to actually swallow a painful yelp as she stretched on the sofa. The blasted thing while being lumpy and old like the house was still more comfy than the bed Darcy used to spend her nights in.

Should she tell Jane of the whole photos fiasco? Or not?

Telling about photos would also require the explanation about Ian and how she didn’t really catch him cheating, because when she said that she found him in bed with someone she kind of left out that bit that it was SHIELD. That was not a topic she wanted to visit until Jane was settled in the Tower.

Besides, she didn’t really know if it was Stark that had the photos anyway. What were the odds?

Some dude from SI turning out to be Tony Stark. It could be anyone with access to legal paperwork, knowledge how to hack an email account and snark. So much snark.

Darcy chewed on her bottom lip sleepily.

Yeah, what were the odds?

This time the phone didn't even ring first before there was an angry voice and sirens howling from under her pillow.

“Pick the fuck up, Lewis!”

Darcy debated briefly just taking the battery out permanently and changing her phone number, while at the same time trying to swallow her heart back, but it sounded like world’s biggest emergency alarm test was going on the other end of the line and it kind of compelled her to answer.

“The fuck you want? Do you have like a sixth sense that tells you ‘oh, her head has touched the pillow lest fuck it up for her?’”

“Oh, did I interrupt your beauty sleep, sweetheart? You know who else hasn’t gotten any since last night? Fucking everyone in my TOWER! I don’t know what you are playing at by putting it on the
lockdown, but you are not being cute here, Lewis…”

Darcy checked the caller ID again to make sure it still said SI and squinted hard to determine if it was one of her rare and exceptionally vivid dreams.

“Hold, your bleeding horses, dickwad. *First* – go me, for putting an entire tower in New York on lockdown from London, because an hour ago it took me *three fucking tries* to lock my front door.”

“Is it the payback? It is the payback, isn’t it? Because I totally offered compensation, you even have an apartment here …”

Sweat started to gather on the upper lip. Darcy’s living at the Tower was at Stark’s discretion as it was owned directly by him. It was what you called a very small print and now Stark was holding that over her.

“Is that what you do every time people tell you no? You throw money at them?” Pushing those words out was harder then she imagined. The knowledge that it was Tony Stark on the other end was weighing heavily on her mind. Tony Stark. The Iron Man. That very rich dude that could make her life very hard with few words to the right ear.

At the same time she had weird dissociation between Tony Stark, the man on the cover of every magazine that she had a look at this morning, and the rude dick on the line, who got his kicks from calling her at 3am.

“Trust me, Shortstack, it works wonders. Now I need you to give the deactivation code for the little surprise you send over with the photos before this escalates.”

Darcy pressed the palm to her forehead in an attempt to ward of the incoming headache.

“What escalates? What surprise? While I would love to surprise you with a knee to a groin region, *right about now*, how is this about my photos? Because I think that you need to stop calling random people. Namely *me*.” The sirens boomed in the background before fading slightly. “The fuck is that? Are you under attack? Because Thor is not here right now.”

“I don’t know what are you trying to pull here, apart from a little petty revenge, but Thor is the only reason that your door is not being kicked in right now by moi. Now stop being cute, Lewis. I get it. I should have asked first. Now stop fucking jamming my systems and Jarvis! I need the deactivation code for that worm!”

“Oh, wow… OK. *Back the fuck off.* I am not doing anything…”

“I know that! It is very self contained, I can’t get into it. It fucking latched itself to Jarvis and is fucking shit up!”

“No. It’s not, Stark. Honest to Thor. It can’t be my worm.”

“You put the Tower on the lockdown!”

“For the last time, Stark. I didn’t do it! It is not a virus, it is not a disruptive worm. Besides, it is fucking *idle* by default.”

“How the fuck do I know that?!”

“Because you are not a SHIELD butt-puppet that fucked me over! OK?!! Fucking SHIELD fucking fucked me over with their fucking Agent Boothby – probably not his real name even, to steal Jane’s
data … fucking shits…” Regret slammed into her like a freight train. “Do not tell Jane, I will fucking
end you, if you breathe a word, I swear to Thor. She doesn’t know, she doesn’t need to know… Do
not tell Thor either. He doesn’t even know I broke up with Agent Jackass yet… or that he is an
Agent… or a Jackass…”

Darcy half expected him to laugh, and when he didn't it felt a lot like a relief swelling in her chest.

“Well, Shortstack. Welcome to SHIELD fan club. I am having T-Shirt made for you as a welcome
gift. Yeah… Not to sound insensitive…” Another boom of sirens. “We are still on fucking
lockdown.”

“Not because of me! It doesn’t attack! I had it as a spare version, as a copy of the one I use to block
Agent Asshole from hacking my computer and sneaking away a copy of Jane’s work after I kicked
him out. It isn’t even sophisticated! It is like the basic of the basics… just you know… specifications
narrowed to weed out SHIELD malware, all of their viruses have a specific coding in them.”

“Specific coding? Would the worm scan the system to detect…”

“No. I couldn’t have them know I'm on to them. It is like a discreet big red button that the SHIELD
malware pushes as it tries to get in, like an additional firewall? It kind of shuts down the operating
system, restricts access and outflow of any data.”

“I knew I liked you for a fucking reason.”

Darcy chuckled dryly. “Yeah, all 7 of them. Pig.”

“I am hurt. So hurt.”

“I am not kissing it all better.”

“One imagines it would be quite hard to do over a phone. No worries. We'll soon be living very
close… shit… ok. I really need to fix this… what has the newer version of the Worm, your laptop or
the photos?”

“My laptop… Why?”

“I need the access now.”

“What? No. You know how long it took me to get that shit up and working? To isolate the coding?
Besides you have idle version….”

“It is not complete. I need the actual raw codes from our most favorite Asswipes Incorporated TM
and the deactivation code, please.”

“No. No. It is mine… why would you even…” It took a few more minutes for Darcy to connect the
dots. “They are hacking you…” She couldn’t get to her laptop fast enough.

“More or less. Your little surprise blocked the outflow of data from Jarvis main boards. No easy feat.
Kudos, Shortstack. Please hurry. Annnd… I’m in. Do not touch anything.” There was a slight
commotion at Stark’s end and the background noise finally subsided.

“Yeah, you’re welcome. The alarms, though. It adapted. It is idle by default! Sweet Thor… you
were already being hacked when you got it. It must have been early stages so it got scanned…
before… Wait. It got scanned. By SHIELD… Are you saying SHIELD got copies of my photos
now?”
This was turning from bad dream to a full blown nightmare real quick.

“In my defense… those are fantastic photos...”

Chapter End Notes

Please leave a review. Many Thanks =)
Chapter 3

At some point Darcy remembered hanging up while he was talking, saying something along the lines of needing to fix up the holes in the security. She wasn't listening. There was white noise in her head as she took out the battery and tossed it across the room.

Drink. She needed a drink.

*Jack Booted Thug Brigade had her photos.*

There was still that cheap whiskey that tasted like gasoline. Darcy gagged from the smell alone as she poured herself a shot. It burned as it went down. She poured another… and another… and another…and another… until the stomach revolted and she threw up in the kitchen sink.

*Jack Booted Thug Brigade had her photos.*

She should have deleted those blasted things years ago.

What a fucking fiasco.

Pretty. That’s why. She looked so pretty in them wearing that vintage dress, hugging her figure like a sin, hair all curled up, lips red like blood. The polka dot bikini, why didn’t they make those anymore? Like those saucy pin ups painted on the planes from WW2. She grew up wanting to be someone else and just once she looked better than anyone, better than she was told she was ever going to look. She lost count of how many times she had to stop herself from sending them to mother dearest.

Would Ian be seeing them?

Darcy felt dirty as she heaved into the sink. It was rather irrational. She knew that. That man had seen her without a stitch on now. But those photos were hers. They were her secret.

Fucking Stark. ‘Fuckity fuck fuck.’ Why hadn’t she been this mad when he had taken them? Was it because he had sounded so awed? Darcy’s stomach twisted. He had seen hundreds of women naked. Yet he thought those were amazing. It was flattering in a slightly disturbing way. She could lie and she totally would if anyone asked. She could live with that. At least he was honest.

Ian had seen her all primed up, all naked in his bed and he acted like he she was something that he had to deal with. Never quite good enough. Never quite matching up.

She was so excited when they dated. So eager, so looking forward to the good things to come. Because the things in bed were going to get better, right?

Except surprise Jack Booted Thug undercover.

If there was a time that Darcy Lewis was a split second away from murder was the day Ian Boothby quoted Jane’s work that Darcy knew for a fact, without a shadow of a doubt, he had never laid his eyes on. It just made sense all of a sudden. It was also very easy to check by adding a couple of sentences to Jane’s new paper and Lo and behold Ian was all over the topic the next day.
Stupid stupid Darcy.

_Fool her once, fool her twice…_

Darcy staggered across the room in search of the phone battery. Jane would kill her if she didn't pick up. She didn't get a crash course in IT and programming to let Jack Booted Thugs keep what was hers or Jane's. All she had done, the worm mainly, was luck coupled with sheer persistence. She didn't know much, but she knew enough. Just enough to get by.

How did they get past Stark's cyber security anyway? Wasn't that supposed to be best in the world? It could be an issue when they moved into the Tower. How much information did they steal from him?

Did he know that there still might be a way to recover it?

Darcy had done it once. But at the time she had an access to Ian's SHIELD issue laptop and his password. The laptop that she had now was old HP that was on its last leg, nowhere near strong enough for what she would need it for. It would overload and die on her in matter of seconds if she were to try anything beyond opening a Microsoft Word document. It might even not work. It wasn't like she ever planned to hack SHIELD, mainly because she had neither the skill nor the tools.

She didn't break SHIELD's front door down and steal the files back. No. Fun as that would have been, she didn't want to start a war with a spy organization. No, the trick was for them to think they had the research, while they actually had bogus files corrupted beyond repair. The work looked normal enough, but it was just a load of garbage. That was Darcy's parting shot.

At least Jane wasn't home, a slightly hysterical laugh escaped Darcy's lips as she went back for some more of the Dutch courage. Her sister from another mister, Jane. Telling the astrophysicist that SHIELD was out to fuck them over both in the literal and figurative way would do some serious damage to all and any future relations between Earth and Asgard.

There was some moonshine left, that Eric brewed and sent for them from Norway, somewhere.

Darcy wasn't touching that shitty whiskey ever again.

The moonshine tasted worse than the whiskey.

She was just going to have one more and she was going to call Stark. Yeah, she was going to call him, like in a minute. She stuffed a cold meatball into her mouth as she poured herself a double.

The room was spinning.

"Uh…"

Darcy was pretty certain she was dying from alcohol poisoning as she lay on the cool bathroom tiles. At least the overwhelming desire to puke her guts out was gone.

The soft knock on the door resonated inside her skull like a gun shot.

"Tits? You still breathing? Had a good nap? Can you stand up? Stark wants you back at the computer downstairs…” a shadow loomed over her.

"Tell him… to fuck off…” Darcy attempted to roll over, but her body wasn’t quite cooperating yet,
still heavily under the influence, and all she did was give an impression of somebody having a minor seizure.

Memory could be funny sometimes. All other times it was a god damn bastard. There were no fuzzy snippets to ease her into it, no, the flashback came at her like a runaway bus and slammed into her tender brain with just as much subtlety.

They were out of meatballs, Darcy noted first, and her eyes watered as memories skewered her brain.

‘Jane will be mad… I will have to go to IKEA to get more.’

She had called Stark. Called the man after getting wasted. Not after getting tipsy. No. Hard to walk, talk and think, type of wasted.

The initial memory was vague until it was crystal clear and tap-danced its specially act up and down Darcy’s dignity, or what was left of it. Darcy cringed at the replay going in her mind.

“Are you drunk, Lewis?”

“Duh. What did you expect? That I was going to call back sober?” the last word had been emphasized by a massive hiccup and she hadn't even bothered to cover it. “So… Casanova. Tell me, how much do you love me, right about now?” Darcy hadn't been sure about what was in the moonshine, but she had been sure that it had been illegal as any fucks she should be giving while talking to Stark, which meant none.

“Is this a trick question?” Stark was uncharacteristically hesitant and it made drunk Darcy grin like a lunatic.

“Yep.”

“To the moon and back, Shortstack. Why?”

“Nothing… I think, I am about to be awesome. So that is it? Moon and back? Lame, Stark. So lame. Well, never mind. Let’s call it classic and move on. You got Mr Pinky… the Worm, on your system, right?”

“What the fuck else does it do, Lewis? I do not need more surprises right now from you… Unless it involves you, me sans clothing. Just say the word.”

“Unfortunately, you aren’t making it worth my while so far, lover boy. So, I want my stuff back.”

“Me too, darling. Back to the Worm, DD, what does it do? I am looking at it right now. It must do something, I just can’t figure out what… traces of it were on most of your files… Why were there traces of it on most of your work files? It is idle by default, you said that yourself. It doesn’t scan files on the system. What aren’t you telling me?... Unless they went into direct contact. Is that it? The worm restricts access, it can’t completely stop it by itself. The files were pulled through your firewall, weren’t they? SHIELD got Foster’s research from under your pretty little nose. Please tell me you got it back.”

“I just told you I am awesome, didn’t I?”

“Short stack…”

This was where the memory got fuzzy and bled into the next one.
Agent Biceps of the Jack Booted Thug Brigade was on her doorstep with two laptop bags and a suitcase full of electronics. He grinned.

“Tits! Missed me?”

What Darcy remembered very well was the surprise on his face when she whipped out her taser and the prongs hit him square in the chest. Thankfully he had already stepped inside and all she needed to do was roll his slightly twitching body to the side to close the door.

It took another minute of drunkenly staring at the unconscious body to remember why what she had done was not a bright idea.

“You tased Barton? WHY?” Stark had an annoyingly high pitched voice when he was angry, Darcy decided.

“You didn’t tell me you were sending an Agent from Jack Booted Thugs United! I should get a medal for not cutting his balls off!”

“Do not cut his balls off, Lewis. I am pretty sure Romanov keeps them in a small jar next to the bed anyway. Fuck. I needed him to set it up for you, so I can get Jarvis set up.”

“He’ll be fine. He looks fit… he doesn’t have history of, like, seizures? Heart failures? He is still slightly twitching…”

“What? How strong is your Taser? It is a standard taser, right? Lewis? Lewis?”

“Well, when you say standard…”

“Clearly not what you have there if you need the clarification. How strong?”

“I’m not quite sure?”

“You are not sure… please tell me you did not DIY upgrade your taser, DD.”

“When you say DIY…”

“Please tell me he is not going into cardiac arrest, we need that shit set up.”

Agent Barton, formerly of SHIELD. Who would have guessed? Did not, thankfully, go into cardiac arrest. What he did was glare at Darcy the entire hour he was setting the equipment up in the sitting room. Or at least Darcy thought he did, she had couple more shots of the remaining moonshine.

“I can’t believe you tased me, Tits. Who the fuck was that stupid to give you a weapon?”

“Keep talking to me like that, Cupid, find out if there is a difference between the charge 1 and 2.”

“You don’t have the guts.”

For the rest of her days Darcy intended to swear that her finger slipped.

‘Whoops.’ Asshole.
Chapter 4

So Barton was still twitching on the bathroom floor as Darcy managed to sit up.

“Uh…” Thinking hurt. That was not how she planned it. Bloody moonshine. Did the former Agent, current Asshole, say Stark wanted to talk to her? What else could she do? Jarvis was running the program partially based on her laptop. It was just a matter of time and patience before it was all done.

Even whining inside her own head caused pain. She was never drinking again.

There was noise on the stairwell next to the bathroom and Darcy frowned. That wasn’t good. There was no way Jane was back already. Former Agent was still drooling into oblivion at her feet.

There was no way that SHIELD was here already! They were careful, so blinking careful not to trigger anything in *Thugs United TM* network. Darcy clutched her taser as she wedged herself between the toilet and the wall. There was still one charge left in it and she was aiming for the balls, so help her Thor.

“Agent Barton, Mr Stark asks what is the hold up. He is getting quite impatient. How is Ms Lewis, is she…” The voice was tearing Darcy’s head apart and she briefly considered firing the taser despite the fact that the person apparently knew Stark.

A wide set man appeared in the doorway and froze as he saw her.

“What the…”

“Do not move. I am at the level where it is going to get you in the crotch. ID.”

“What the hell happened?” The new comer pulled out the wallet and tossed the plastic card to her before going on his knees to check if Barton still had a pulse, while at the same time keeping a wary eye on the taser, as Darcy still had the business end of it pointed at the man.


“Actually, you can just call me Happy…” He was still watching the taser as he spoke. “I was on holiday in Geneva, but Tony, Mr Stark, that is, wanted me to drop into SI London headquarters and get something for Agent Barton.” Without much effort he shifted the agent in question into a recovery position. “What happened here?”

“Well, Happy,” Darcy lowered the taser finally. Her hand was sore and the ID looked the business. Besides it totally sounded like something Stark would do. Ruin somebody’s day. “He decided to lie down, being a chauvinistic pig is energy consuming work, you know, so I helped him out. He asked so nicely. You suffer from similar condition, Happy?”

“It is not a requirement when working for Tony, Mr Stark that is.”
“He doesn’t like the competition?”

“Yeah. I mean, no. Mr Stark is not generally a dick.”

“He’s paying you that well, huh? Good for you.” Where had she seen him before? Darcy mused. Defo seen him somewhere.

“What happened…”

“I tased him.” Why getting up was so hard?

“Yeah, but…”

“I had a bad day. My finger slipped. Accident.” It took couple of tries, but Darcy was now upright. Did she smell? Happy was giving her a funny look. Of course she smelled. She got drunk on a combination of the world’s most disgusting spirits that ever graced this earth. She was steaming.

“Right. Happy?”

“Yes?” God, was the dude big or was it just the fact that the three of them in the bathroom.

“Is there anyone else here? Did Cupid, here, install a revolving door while I was … resting?”

“No, Ms Lewis. It is only us, and Tony, Mr Stark, on the line downstairs.”

“Sweet, so can you try and bring Agent dude, sorry, former Agent dude, here, back to the land of the living, please? I want him out of here as soon as he can walk, or crawl.” The effect of her stern gaze was slightly diminished by the fact that she had to have a grip on the sink to stay upright.

“Yeah, sure, sure.” It was the face of a man that had to deal with drunk people, Stark mainly, Darcy imagined, on the regular. Happy just shrugged and gave her a look of a man that has seen it all.

“You know what, Happy Hogan? I make mean pancakes, want some?”

The Head of SI security flashed her a wide smile.

“Who says no to pancakes?”

Darcy swung past her room and got changed. She really needed a shower, but she'd rather not pass out while naked, so changing clothes and brushing her teeth would have to do.

Thankfully the path from the second floor to the kitchen didn't go through the room where everything was set up.

“LEWIS!? I can hear you!”

‘Seriously? I just stepped down.’ Darcy groaned as she abandoned the attempt of being quiet and started cracking the eggs and mixing flour for the pancakes.

“Does Mr Hogan like bacon?”

“Who? You mean Happy? He’s partial to beef, last I heard.” The voice drifted from the sitting room
through the open door.

“Yeah, well, it probably doesn’t go as well with pancakes.” Darcy started to consider the ability to cook under the influence her secret super power.

“Where is he? I asked him to get you 10 min ago. Where is Hawkniss? Is he slacking off again?” Darcy winced as she put the pan on the hob.

Happy chose the wrong minute to breeze into the kitchen.

“Agent Barton will be down soon. I don’t think any damage was done.”

“What damage? Lewis? What did you do?... Is that how people feel when they have to deal with me? Every time I turn you are pulling some shit.”

“I resent the accusation! I am not pulling shit; I wouldn’t have to do anything, if someone minded their own damn business.”

“I mind my own business; I am very engaged in the running of the SI.”

“You are unbelievable.” Darcy would roll her eyes, but her energy reserves were running low and she’d rather keep them for important stuff. “So. Happy, maple bacon and pancakes?”

“That sounds disgusting.” Stark had an annoying habit of participating in all conversations within his earshot regardless if he was invited or not. The sizzle of the bacon being put on the heated pan fleetingly drowned out all noise.

“That smells great, Ms Lewis.”

“Who has pancakes at this hour?”

As Darcy honestly lost the track of time she wasn’t particularly bothered. It was dark outside. But it was February so that didn’t say much.

“Mr Hogan and I. Can you please get the plates, Happy? We will have to eat by the equipment; it is the only table in the house. And it is just Darcy.” Where did she see Happy’s face? It was starting to annoy her. She usually had a good recollection for faces.

“I’m feeling ignored, short stack.”

“Poor you. We are coming over in a sec.” As Hogan went to talk to the whiny little bitch, Darcy finished cooking the food.

“I will have to apologize to Point Break after he comes back.” Darcy eyed the face on the SI laptop screen suspiciously as she gave Happy his plate.

“Why?” Talking to Stark was like navigating a mental minefield. You never knew what was going to blow up in your face.

“Because… Seriously, can you please remove whatever you stuck to the camera? This is getting ridiculous.” Darcy grinned. He was still annoyed that she blocked the camera whenever she sat in front of it. Meaning she could see Stark and he could not see her. “I know how you look. Happy! Get that shit off the camera!”

Happy Hogan gave her an apologetic look as he removed the sticky note from the laptop.
“Done, Boss.” A memory kicked a neuron in Darcy’s brain.

“*Oh my god…* Happy Hogan! Oh my god! How could I not recognize you… I saw you fight once. Matt smuggled me to see the fight and you were *awesome!*” How could she have forgotten? Her godfather had managed to sneak her to see the match, she had been a kid and they had had popcorn and soda and it had been *great*. Those had been cheap seats at the end, but it hadn’t mattered much to them. She had never been into boxing before or after, but seeing the fight in person had been something else. The atmosphere, the shouts, the fighters in the ring.

The adrenaline rushed to her head like a punch and she felt drunk all over again. How could she not recognize him, sure he changed, it had been, what, thirteen or fourteen years ago?

“I will have to tell Jane. There were some youtube videos I showed her just last month of you. Sorry, sorry, I am fangirling right now. I have never met anyone really famous before.” Happy had gone quite red in the face as Darcy nearly swooned, but he was taking it in good humor and she was thankful for it. Happy Hogan was in her house!

“You want to rephrase that, DD?” Stark’s voice was high pitched again and startled Darcy out of her swooning. It was so easy to tell when the man was annoyed. She spared the laptop a glance and sure enough the playboy millionaire philanthropist was glaring at her. She shouldn’t have let Happy take the sticky note off, she wasn’t comfortable with him looking at her.

“Thor-bro doesn’t really count, he is *like* … family. Jane’s going to be famous as soon as SHIELD gets the hell of our tits, so that is work in progress.” She made a show of thinking it over as she tapped her chin with a fork. “Oh, oh, I saw George Clooney once… but that probably doesn’t count.”

“The fuck am I then, your neighbors cat?” Barton was leaning heavily on the door frame, his face ashen. Darcy was honestly impressed at how quick he was on his feet after being electrocuted. “And you are a fucking bitch.” He growled as he reached for the plate laden with pancakes and bacon, but Darcy was faster and pulled it out of his reach.

“You are a mutt at best, Barton, and she just tased you. Might consider easing off on the insults.” Stark tossed his two cents in.

“Easing off, Stark?” Barton glared at Darcy, as she played casual and proceeded eating the pancakes. “You sold me this fucking mission as a walk in a park! *Oh, can you drop this off in London set it up, In and out, in and out!* This Harpy tased me twice and is withholding food! I have been in prisons with better treatment!”

“Honeybunny, did you tase Barton again?” Darcy wasn’t sure why Stark was bothering with this fake stern voice when she could see as his eyes went wide, as he leaned closer to wherever the camera was placed at his end; they were filled with undisguised glee.

“He was rude.” She didn't see the need to go into more detail explanation.

“I have seen you two speak, you crazy fucks, nothing I said was out of line more than that! I want my pancakes!” For a trained super spy or whatever his description was, Darcy thought, he acted a lot like a toddler throwing a tantrum. She relinquished her hold on the plate with a shrug. “Is that about New Mexico? It has been 5 years, Tits. We gave everything back. Move on. *God, this tastes good.*”

Darcy snorted into her coffee cup as she quickly glanced at Stark, a small move that didn't go unnoticed. She tried really really hard not to start cackling. Stark’s eyebrows slowly crept up. Damn, no man should have the brow game that strong, or look so ridiculously handsome after being awake.
for nearly two days.

Happy Hogan, she noted, was eating his food discreetly and keeping out of the argument while keeping an eye on it.

“Darcy Lou, sweetheart, what did you do?”

Darcy tried to keep her face passive, but she gave up fairly quickly. She was tired. Still drunk and annoyed.

“Nothing much.”

“So something pretty major then. Hawkniss here said it has been five years. Time to relieve yourself of whatever burden you carry, share with the class.” That man had honey on his tongue when it suited him, and Darcy seriously started considering confessing her sins. It had been five years.

Barton was also watching her now, as he shoveled the food into his mouth.

“No hard feelings, Cupid?”

“It was you and Foster that were out for blood, not us.”

“So, I imagine, you have no idea why my IPod never found its way back to me, or why the data from all the machines got wiped out?” Barton’s poker face was infinitely better than her own, Darcy gave him that. Bloody Jack Booted Thugs.

“No.”

“Oh, sure. Jane cried the entire night and Eric went out and got smashed. With Thor gone and missing, there was no one we could go and complain to. Do you like cake, Clint?” The use of his first name clearly startled him.

“Yes?”

“Short stack, stop stalling.”

“Patience is a virtue, Stark. Hush.” She gave him the widest, slyest smile she could manage as she continued. “So, funny thing happened back in Bumfuck Nowhere, New Mexico after Thor left. Jane was understandably upset, so I made her a cake.” Barton sat slightly straighter in his chair. “Spent half a night making it for her, because first half a night machines were being fixed after being manhandled by Jack Booted Thugs.”

“They were held together by duct tape.”

“Anyway. I spend half a night slaving over the cake, vanilla butter cream, chocolate ganache, fresh cream filling, the softest melt in the mouth sponge, the works. I wake Janey girl up in the morning with the promise of surprise. Guess what? It was gone. Gone with the fucking wind.”

“Cakenaping, really, Barton?” Stark managed a disapproving look at the fellow Avenger before focusing back on Darcy. “Go on. I can feel the good part coming.”

“Wasn’t us.” It was a rather weak denial.

“Sure it wasn’t. Because, what his name? Statue of liberty, dude, Broderick?”

“Brock Rumlow.”
“Yeah, him. Asked me if I am as sweet as my cake. Rude much? Anyway. Cake gone, Jane still upset. Science was happening till midnight. Again. I make sure Jane was in bed and back to baking. Another cake. The works. Hide in a cupboard this time. The next morning. Guess what?”

“Wasn’t us.”

“Ignore him, DD. Go on.”

“It’s gone and you fucking peacocks still strutting around. Ok. So this time, after science I get Jane to help me make a special cake. Seeing as other two cakes did a runner on us. We put a lot of effort into it. Especially Jane, I don’t think she realized I baked until that point, so she wanted to help. So we made a special cake and of course hid it on top of the cupboard. And. Guess what?”

“Wasn’t us.”

“Shut up, Hawkniss.”

“Spoiler alert. It was gone. Now, do you know what cake was it, Barton?”

“Wasn’t us.”

“Hold that thought. It was Black Forest Gateau, with special L ingredient.”

“Love?” Barton rolled his eyes.

“Laxatives. Max strength and probably a triple dose since Jane had the honor of putting it in.”

Stark doubled from laughter.

“That is fucking classic!”

Barton’s face was bright red and Darcy was gripping the taser in her cardigan’s pocket.

"Dick move, Lewis.”

“Maybe. We also might have, or might have not, superglued shut the doors to all of your port-a-potties.”

Chapter End Notes

Please leave a comment, I will not deny that it fuels my muse knowing that there are people that ship Darcy/Tony as much as I do!
Kind regards
Juanafever
While Darcy would have loved to watch as Tony Stark laughed so hard he cried, not having her neck snapped by Robin Hood of the Jack Booted Thug Brigade was just that tad bit more important.

“You superglued the toilet doors shut.”

Barton pushed the plate away from himself as he sat ram rod straight.

“May or may have not.” Darcy supplied conversationally. Her head was spinning again, yeah, not good, that was not good.

“Do you realize, you crazy little harpy, that half the STRIKE team was in transit when it hit? In a middle of the dessert, with closest rest stop hundreds of miles away. I think the junior agent that was with them went into counselling after and resigned. They barely managed out of the cars and had to shit right next to the road that had traffic.”

“And here I thought that it wasn’t you. And no, you had us moved to another state at ass crack of dawn the very same morning. We never knew how it worked out.” Jane and her had to pack after not sleeping most of the night. She didn’t remember the trip much, being out cold for most of it.

Very very slowly Barton put his face in his hand and stayed like that for a minute as Stark kept cackling in the background. Well, at least Darcy had made somebody’s day. The powerful muscles in Cupid’s arms tensed and Darcy tried to stay calm and focused.

“The cake. Brock nearly killed the guys at the burger joint, everyone thought it was them getting even after Rollins broke the dude’s arm there the day before. It was agreed, with an actual vote, that it couldn’t have been the fucking cake as everyone had it but only some got the shits!” The growl was deep and Darcy shifted in her seat.

“Well, it is called planning ahead. Not all of the cake had the magic L ingredient. It was the in the filling and only in some places. So if the odds weren’t with you and you got some, you got it bad… Uhh….Did you? Asking for a friend.” That will make Jane’s day, that will.

“No. I gave my piece to Coulson, he was last to the table. Damn it, it was a good cake.”

Darcy could feel a smile creeping onto her face and threatening to split it in two.

“Ohhhhh…. Please please please tell me we got him. Jane promised me some ridiculously outrageous things if we scored with him.” The look on Barton’s was morphing from unfriendly to hostile, but the alcohol in her bloodstream was still making feel invincible as only hard liquor could. The guffaws from Stark subsided also, but she ignored it. “I would have paid good money to have seen Agent Agent making a mad dash for it.”

“He is dead, you know.”
Darcy only rolled her eyes.

“That old chestnut. Sure.” She for a second relinquished the hold she had on the taser to make air quote marks with her fingers. “Dead.”

There was silence around her, thick with tension.

“Shortstack, Coulson went down in New York.” Stark was frowning at her on the monitor.

“No, he didn’t. He signed the…. Well, he signed paperwork 7 weeks ago. New York was two and a half years ago. So unless there is another Agent Coulson running around, he isn’t dead.” The statement was met with disbelief.

“He is dead. We were at his funeral. I saw his coffin lowered to the ground. I helped fold the flag, Tits…” The grief on Barton’s face and in his voice was instantly sobering and Darcy blinked at them in turn.

“Is there some super important mission going? Is that it? Stark? Because if you need me to say that he is dead I will. I am not picking a fight here.”

“Lewis, why you think that he is alive…”

“He isn’t, Stark. She is drunk and delusional, and she is lying.” Barton gave her a withering look, but the hurt in his voice was so raw that Darcy reined in her temper. While being many things, Darcy wasn’t a person to make fun of someone’s grief.

“He signed off Ian’s mission report.” It was good thing that she was drunk, talking about the lowest point of her adult life was not something she wanted to do sober.

“Who the fuck is Ian?”

“Listen, Barton, if she said…” Stark was trying to protect her from having to explain, but she wasn’t going to be called a liar just because she was too embarrassed to admit what happened. She wasn’t letting SHIELD get away with it.

“The Agent SHIELD sent to steal Jane’s work, with the added bonus of fucking me to ensure success.” It was surprising that her voice didn’t tremble. She felt like she just cut a finger off and couldn’t feel the pain, but it was coming, it always did. She could wait till she was alone to feel cheap and used.

Barton was looking at her like he was seeing her first time in his life.

“Yeah, so, long story short SHIELD doesn’t know that I know, and it is how I would like to keep it. Please? I had to get portions of Jane’s work from your system, as we are doing now.” She nodded at Stark. “How is it going? We there yet?”

“Jarvis?”

“I have integrated nearly 83% of Ms Lewis code into the SHIELD firewall, soon the breach will be sufficient to enable the bug to corrupt the data appropriated by SHIELD.”

“Sweetheart, have I told you today how amazing you are?” Stark was giving her that winning smile again.

“Why, no, sir. But thank you.” Darcy’s let out a choked laugh at Jarvis’s cheek.
“And that was the first and the last time you, Lewis, are allowed to spend time with Jarvis unsupervised.”

“There must be an explanation.” Hawkeye was pacing in front of the monitors again. “What if it wasn’t correctly dated?”

Darcy gave him a blank look. “There is only one thing that you people are more anal about, then screwing other people’s lives up, is the paperwork. As a person that signed a truck load of NDAs, I know. Listen, all I could get was the signed mission report as it was originally issued by Agent Douche and had traces of the bug on it. I can…” Darcy took a deep break. “I can get that... for you, and you can follow the paper trail back to the original source from the inside.”

“Can’t you just get look for it now? You are hacking SHIELD.”

“No, Barton, we are not hacking SHIELD, we will not be able to access new files. So, anyway, how long did you know, DD?”

“Seven weeks, give or take a day. I didn’t think it was a big deal, Thor wasn’t here, and it wasn’t like I could ask. I thought, you guys would know such a thing... Right? And sorry, but had my own problems lately.” Darcy was doing a remarkable job at keeping herself in check.

“Captain Rogers and the rest will want to know that.” Both Darcy and Clint jerked slightly as Happy spoke up.

“Roger’s is on the way up and so is Bruce. I can’t reach Romanov, you in contact with her, Barton?”

“She is off the grid till 2000 tomorrow. That is gonna be a fun conversation…” The marksman was pacing again, his right hand twitching for, what Darcy imagined, was a bow. He headed to the kitchen and she half expected the noise of things breaking, but it didn't come.

Stark disappeared from the screen before coming back with a glass of scotch on the rocks.

“Okay.” Darcy muttered under her breath as she tried to retrieve the report as quickly as possible. She was about to participate in an Avengers meeting. Yeah, thanks but no. “Stark?”

“Yes, Honeybuns?” Did she mention the fact that she hated that he could see her over the camera? He was staring at her again like he was stripping her right to her naked soul. Did he have to be so intense? Darcy cleared her throat and wrapped herself tighter into the cardigan barely suppressing the urge to pull it up to her rapidly heating ears. She adjusted the glasses before speaking.

“So, yeah. It will take few minutes, but I think Jarvis will be able to extract a copy of the mission report. And goodnight.”

“Thanks… What? Where are you going?”

“My bed, before I pass out.” Darcy watched the screen as Jarvis began downloading the mission report from Ian Boothby to the spare laptop. She would rather not be present when people she literally met hours ago and some people that she hadn’t even seen in person read it. The room was getting small and it was harder to breath. In and out. In and out. “So, Happy? It has been a pleasure.” She wanted to shake his hand, but hers were cold and clammy from anxiety welling up inside. “Stark, tell Cupid to get into a habit of knocking on the people’s front door instead of simply picking the lock.”

For legs that felt like they were made out of wood they carried her pretty quickly out of the room and
up the stairs.

The knocking was loud and persistent. She cracked one eye open.

‘Oh come on’.

Darcy was pretty sure she didn’t smell burning and fire was currently the only reason she would consider leaving the bed for. She reached for her phone, but remembered taking the battery out before effectively passing out from mixture of alcohol still in her system, lack of sleep and mental exhaustion.

“Tits?” The voice was inside her room and Darcy jerked upright and right back down on the bed as nausea hit her from the sudden movement.

“Jesus F. Christ… are you trying to fucking kill me, Cupid?…” She couldn't even raise her voice for fear that she might puke. The room was pitch black, but light and clarity was not something she needed right now, plus, from the pounding in her head, Darcy suspected it might actually kill her.

“Stark is about ready to mobilize the National Guard, or more likely call to Assemble, if you don't pick up in the next minute. He literally ordered Happy to break your door down.” There was no humour in his voice and Darcy groaned.

“Why? I am sleeping, for the love of Thor…” Barton sat down on the floor by her bed. “Did you pick the lock?”

“It was a shitty lock…”

“Hmmm….So… how did it go?” The words like living things slipped from her tongue and past her lips. “Was it fun? Did you laugh? I don’t want to know… Oh god, please tell me, I can’t stand this…”

“Hey… Hey… Hey…” She was choking. The air was thick in her lungs and she couldn’t breathe. “Here, squeeze my hand. Focus on that. Like that.” Barton found her in the darkness and made her sit up, propping her limp body against his chest before wrapping his arms around her in a steel hug. “I know you can feel me breathing, match it. In… out…In… out…”

Time twisted, turned and melted together as they sat like that in the dark.

“Nobody laughed. Nobody. You didn’t have to…” show the report.

Oh, yes, she did. She didn’t want to. She had to. It sat like a poisonous snake inside her head. Curling around the brain, breathing, living thing, killing her from inside. She couldn’t live like that, with constant knowledge of that dirty little secret. Being part of it, being exploited.

“What does it say? I never… never read it all the way through… just to the part… where he explained how bad I am in bed… in fine detail.”. She pushed the words out before she lost the nerve.

“He was unable to get much of the information they wanted… he lied, ok? All that. He is just an insecure dirty little fuck up. That is not what SHIELD is about… I swear to God, Lewis. It fucking
isn’t. There are plenty sins there, but not like this… It has rotted from inside somehow… Stark is trying to gather information, but it is gonna take some time… Oh, God please tell me he didn’t force you…” Barton was squeezing her so tight that this time she couldn't breath for real.

“No… No… I thought, I really thought, he liked me. Stupid… and will you stop breaking my ribs?” She squirmed.

“Sorry, sorry. Kind of forget…”

“Don’t forget, I haven’t got my taser with me.” He snickered into her ear, gently but firmly rubbing her shoulders now.

“Did you have to tase me, Lewis? You knew who I was. I fucking saw it on your face.”

“Oh, you saw it on my face?” Darcy untangled from his grip and none so gently shoved him to move from the bed. She was getting herself under control and being embraced by a dude she just met was not awkwarl only when she was freaking out. “You do realize I'm wearing glasses? I do not have perfect eyesight, like some. You just appeared in my hallway. I'm not sure if you noticed, I am not on super soldier super juice, I am not super powered, or a trained spy. I am a Political Science major that works as a PA for an astrophysicist. Living is a thing and I like it. I not taking chances, unless I have no other choice; bullets do not bounce off me, Hawkeye. All I have is Sparky. Just because you are bigger and stronger than me, it does not for a second mean I'll be putting up with your shit, Cupid.”

“Duly noted. So… Can you ple-” There was buzzing as soft light emanateed from his pocket. “It’s your boyfriend. Asshole extraordinaire.”

“I do not have a boyfriend, Hawkniss, and sure as hell it would not be Stark.”

“Why not?” Darcy cursed under her breath and she took the phone from Hawkeye. The asshole in question, as always, had hacked the phone. “I'd make a perfectly good boyfriend. I am very lovable. Is that the age thing? Because that is discrimination. I object!”

“No, that is not the age thing. You act like you just made it out of your teens, and you work out. And you already have a girlfriend!” Why was she defending herself?

“No, I don’t. We took a break, the break is now permanent. Back to the original question. So what is the problem? How come I am not good enough? I am plenty good. Everyone says that.”

“What about the fact we never met? Huh?” Darcy without much qualm punched Barton in the shoulder as he snickered.

“Long distance relationships are a thing. Besides, you are moving in. You are packing tomorrow, right? Actually, don’t worry about that. Jarvis! Do we have a vetted moving company in London? Find one that can pack, move and ship science lab full of duct taped equipment and some personal belongings. The jet will be ready for shall we say 2pm? Happy will drive you there. See? I make an excellent boyfriend. ”

“What… I … when… The fuck? What moving? Jane just signed the contract! She probably hasn’t even informed the University Board that she is leaving yet! And someone else pack her precious babies? Yeah, good luck with that.”

“Excellent point. Foster can inform whoever, pack it all up. Jarvis will book her a flight to New York whenever she is ready. The jet will be fuelled and ready for take-off in two hours, Honeybuns, pack up. Or don’t. I will have things ready for you, when you land.”
“What are you talking about? What jet?”

“Didn’t Barton tell you?”

“Tell me what?” Darcy’s eyes tried to make out Cupid’s face in the darkness of the room.

“There has been a complication.”

Chapter End Notes

Please leave a review? It is much appreciated by my muse =)
“A complication.” Darcy rolled the word on her tongue tasting it for flavour, as she lay down, and found that it tasted a lot like a problem, if problems had a flavour. “Not to sound like a whiny little bitch, or you, but pretty much everything since the first time I heard your voice has been a god damn complication. How could it be worse?”

“First, I do not whine, Honeybuns. Is Barton still there?”

“Barton, get out.” There was a noise of objection in the darkness. “I’ll leave the phone outside the door when I’m done.” She had to shelter her eyes when the light from the hallway flooded the room for a few moments. “He’s out. Hit me.”

“So, remember the photos?” Was it a trick question? It must be a trick question. She had thought about those damn photos every minute of every day since they were stolen from her.

“Vaguely.”

“Are you still upset about them?”

“Ask me when we meet in person.” Darcy had thought extensively about their first meeting and all of those scenarios, as of the last couple of days, involved her faithful companion Sparky.

“Did I mention that there is a strict no taser rule in the Tower? For safety, you understand? By the way, speaking of the Tower, you are going to love it here. I had it all set up, but you can modify it however you want it. Get it repainted, furniture changed, there is budget for the art…”

“Stark, you’re stalling. Out with it. It can’t be worse than the shit you already got me into.” Darcy honestly believed it as she said that. Her private photos had been stolen, and then stolen again. After all that she just had two page essay about her short fallings in bed read by an entire team of superheroes and a security chief that used to be her childhood hero.

“Their facial recognition software picked up your photos, and apparently SHIELD has surveillance on Happy. Fancy that?”

Darcy grit her teeth, she had been mentally preparing for the photos to be immediately spotted. Too late to corrupt those, she always had the shiftiest luck. Darcy let out a shaky breath.

“Great, that’s great. Did I say that it’s great? Because it will be, when I tase you in the balls.”

“Listen, it was a joke, ok? You were getting all worked up, very cute that, I was going to return them, not that they weren’t great.” Stark let out a low whistle. “Darcy, darling, you can lead a man to sin.” What with the voice? Darcy squirmed a little. If something could lead someone to sin, it was that voice of his.

“Yeah, because you’ve totally been a poster boy of exemplary good behaviour all your life.”

“More or less. Probably less. So much less. I will be happy to demonstrate that, should the occasion call for it. The occasion being you. For example over lunch? Dinner? Breakfast? All of the above?”
“And you are still stalling.” The man had no shame and no sense when he should give up. He read what was in the report, right?... Of course, he did. She was bad in bed. Officially.

“Clever girl. Did I mention that Happy has now been upgraded to a risk to national security, because he works for me? Got a pair of agents trailing him? Barton did some nosing around.”

“Their paranoia is clearly misplaced once again; there is nothing new there, Stark. Happy is a great guy, but that doesn’t really have anything to do with me….”

“They have followed him all the way to you.”

“He does errands for you, Jane Foster lives here. She will shortly be working for you, or the SI. Totally can be a Thor related too.” She did not like the direction this was going to.

“Except neither of them is home. Not to mention a member of Avengers Initiative just happened to dash to your side after we had an information leak scare. A newly hired lab assistant tried to copy some sensitive data. Without success, naturally, but a ruckus was made.” He was so matter of fact that Darcy felt her pulse race.

“Still not really seeing what…” She managed to stammer out.

“We are having an affair, according to SHIELD.”

“Come again?” Of the many things that Darcy expected to hear, that was not one of them.

“You and me, sitting in a tree kissing, first comes…” He’s actually singing that.

“I need to find a way to strangle you through the fucking phone.”

“I absolutely understand and approve of your desire to have your hands around me, but please, be patient, we shall meet shortly.” Oh, she would be throwing herself at him, alright. Fists first.

“This doesn’t make sense. We haven’t even met!”

“Actually we have.”

“What? When?” Darcy stared at the darkened ceiling and started doubting her own sanity. She would have remembered meeting Tony freaking Stark.

“I’ve been in London couple of months back, came to visit Point Break, he wasn’t home, met you, instant attraction, who can blame us? We have been keeping it on the low for obvious reasons.”

“Main one being that it never happened.” It was some sort of hallucination induced by the alcohol.

“Of course it did, Captain American Way of Life can swear to that.”

“No. No. No. Keep Captain America out of this. What are we talking about? What affair? Why every time I speak to you I need to question my common sense? Why, in the name of Thor, would SHIELD think that there is anything, and I mean anything, between us?”

“Is that me being not good enough again? Because we have established that I am a very considerate, caring boyfriend with a great sense of humor. You totally won the jackpot of awesome boyfriends.”

“And then there is you.”

“I forgive you this time, only because the hour is late, you are tired and I am not there to take you
over my knee.”

“How is this my life?” Darcy mused out loud in desperation.

“I shall say, because you have been a very good girl? No worries, though, from that absolutely delightful way you speak, short stack, I have high hopes for you.”

“Can I just record this and sue you for sexual harassment? I am sure the settlement would fund the rest of my life and Jane’s research indefinitely.”

“I think that would only work if we weren’t going steady.”

“We aren’t going steady! We aren’t going! This… sweet Thor… Why are we even having this conversation? SHIELD dreamed up that we are having a torrid affair, so what? Quite a few people there think that you and the Captain are playing hide the pickle on the regular. I am not…!”

“Hide the pickle? My mother used to say that and even then it was archaic, who even knows what it means these days? And also, I need mind bleach to forget what you just suggested. Besides, me and Rogers? If I were gay, which, for the record, I am not, I would do much better.”

“Like who?”

“Like you.”

“You smooth bastard. And news flash, I am not a dude.” Darcy groaned into the pillow and Stark laughed on the other end. In her mind’s eye she could see him grinning. “Tony, I am exhausted.” She confessed quietly while trying to purge his smile from her mind. “I am not getting why their delusions are of such grand importance; seriously, they have their noses in everyone’s affairs...”

“It is more complicated than that, Darcy.” The man’s voice grew just as quiet and serious as hers. It seemed oddly intimate, the use of her name, and Darcy got angry at herself for that. How starved for genuine attention was she, that the use of her given name made her happier?

“Tony.”

“Darcy?”

“Anthony.”

“Darcy Lou?”

“Oh god… really? You realize that it is not my name, right?”

“Right, Darcy Lou.”

“...”

“Darcy? Sweetheart?”

“Yeah…?” Darcy was really trying to keep her eyes open, but it was a struggle, and her tongue was getting heavier to turn in her mouth.

“What is the problem with us being a thing?”

“The fact that it is not true?”
“You know women would jump to the opportunity…”

“So call them up and stop bothering me, you slime-ball.”

“I am not... him.”

Darcy ground her teeth before answering. No. They were not having that conversation.

“Listen. I don’t do fake relationships, ok?... I never could. I have a condition known as *Feelings* along with the side complication of *Expectations*. I'm either in or not. Please don’t get me wrong, but the exchange rate for what I will give is not on par with what you will give me. Ok? Besides, to give it all up, just to have my life torn apart by every single paper on the planet, I need to get more than that… I would need to get… you.” She said it. I was out. An underpaid, overworked PA to a scientist, assuming world’s hottest man was propositioning her. She was stupid and it was official. “Gods, I don’t think I ever had more fun talking to anyone else…” Words poured out, just before he hung up and she was sure she'd never hear from him again. Her head was empty.

“So me, huh? That’s the deal?”

The eyes felt like they were glued shut, she was that drained.

“Yes… I want exclusive rights.” What were they bargaining about anyway?

“In exchange for the press picking your life apart? Because it is never going to be worth it.”

“Worth? No such animal in the wild, Tony… you will have to create that for me...” ‘So that is that...’ Darcy thought as she felt sleep pulling at her mind. It was over. At least now they could pretend that all of this never happened… Partly she was feeling relieved...

“Deal.”

“Huh? Sure...” She was gonna sleep and when she woke up all of this would be over, like a bad dream.

“No take backs.”

“HUH? Wha...?” Was she missing something? She was slipping in and out of sleep. “SHIELD what is the complication…”

“They want to use you to get to me.”

Darcy brought forth just enough energy to snort loudly.

“Idiots... If you ever... *ever*... roll for them... I don’t want to fucking know you…”

“Can’t have that, light of my eyes. We can’t have that...” Stark’s voice was once again light and matter of fact and something in the back of Darcy’s mind said that it was a bad thing, but she was warm and comfy. “You falling asleep?...”
Chapter 7

Monday was a terrible thing, even if it happened on Tuesday. Darcy lay on the bed, with the warm, fluffy covers over her head, refusing to acknowledge the continuously increasing volume of the alarm clock from her phone.

*Did she really need the job that much? Could she fake her death for a day?...* Those were the thoughts that floated inside her tender head, before the alarm was silenced on its fifth snooze. The things she did for her boss-lady. It was 9 am, though. Three hours later than usual, but only because Jane had officially approved it during excited chatter, after she had signed, scanned and forwarded their new contract to SI Legal, also known as Bag of Dicks.

The memories of the last few days weren’t as foggy and distant as she had hoped. No such luck for Darcy, she dreadfully clearly remembered all the most embarrassing parts. The last conversation with Stark had been weird to say the least and it bothered her to a certain extent, mostly because she couldn’t quite remember how it’d ended. Regardless, Jarvis must have accomplished the task at hand and her unexpected guests should have departed to parts unknown. It felt like an odd out of body experience. She met Hawkeye and Harold ‘Happy’ Hogan. It was surreal. If the circumstances of the meeting were different she would had been much more excited and hospitable.

The shower felt like heaven and she indulged herself for far longer then she should have, therefore after getting reasonably refreshed and drinking pint of water and a couple of pain kills, Darcy made her way downstairs to get herself a quick breakfast and be on the way to work.

The short trip to the kitchen was unexpectedly interrupted as Darcy lost her footing and nearly went head first down the stairs as she tripped over a suitcase laid out flat in front Jane’s room. Only flailing wildly and managing to get a hold on the railing prevented a very unfortunate ending.

“How many times have I told you not to put shit on the landing?! You nearly killed me!” the shriek left her throat before the brain computed the simple fact that Jane was home early. The fact in itself was no surprise as Jane went to the family reunion only because her mother quite literally threatened to kick them out. Pain bloomed in her ankle from awkward position that she put her foot in, instantly letting her know that she wasn’t as fortunate as she have hoped. “Ouch! Bloody… fucking…” she sat down on the stairs.

“Darcy?! Darcy, are you ok?” There were rushed steps from the kitchen.

“What do you think?!” Darcy rubbed the sore ankle. It was a bad start of the morning…

“Ms Lewis?!”… and it just got worse. For a moment she lost sensation in her limbs and was exceedingly happy that she was seated as a wild eyed Jane showed up at the bottom of the stairs with Happy Hogan in tow.

“Did you trip over my suitcase by accident?”

“No, I decided that I needed to throw myself down the stairs this morning.” Darcy felt as her voice went high pitched and panicked as she watched Happy following Jane up. ‘*Why? Why? Why?’

“What … is going on?…”They were supposed to be gone. Gone before Jane returned.
“Ms Lewis, can you stand up?” asked Happy gently, but firmly pushed past Jane to get to Darcy. He was wearing a suit. A goddamn suit. He wasn’t wearing a suit the last time she saw him. He had gone to change and come back…

“What did he tell Jane? Oh God… did he tell her about Ian and SHIELD? Does she know?...”

“Darcy, you’re all white. Did you bump your head? Oh, please tell me you didn’t bump your head. Can you tell me how many fingers I am showing?”

Happy deposited her on the sofa as gently as he could and Darcy struggled to hear what Jane was saying through the white noise that was filling her ears.

How was she going to explain? She didn’t want to explain. Would she have to show Jane the report? She didn’t want Jane to see that…. Fucking Ian still was fucking her over even after all this time.

‘Shit shit shit shit.’

“How was he going to try and commit suicide by diving down the stairs?”

Panic punched her in the gut and she could feel the colour leaving her face as the hands got cold and clammy. The ankle hurt and Happy had to half carry her rest of the way down. ‘What did he tell Jane? Oh God… did he tell her about Ian and SHIELD? Does she know?…’

“She didn’t want to explain. Would she have to show Jane the report? She didn’t want Jane to see that…. Fucking Ian still was fucking her over even after all this time.

‘Shit shit shit shit.’

“Do you need an ambulance…, Dr Foster, please stop shaking Ms Lewis.”

What should she say? Darcy looked helplessly at Happy.

“I don’t need an ambulance. I’m fine, Happy… Will you stop shaking me, Jane?” It took a second to realize that Jane wasn’t touching her anymore, but she was still shaking slightly. ‘Shitsticks…’ “Happy? What is going on?” She really needed a clue as to what she could say.

“Mr Stark found it best that I stay with your security details until you back in New York. He does insist on you boarding the jet today.” Happy’s voice was calm and apologetic. It was clear that it wasn’t the first time he had to deliver not so good news. Darcy swallowed thickly as she tried to process the new information, Jane once again got into her field of vision.

“That. When were you going to tell me about Stark? Darcy, gods, Stark? I know the whole thing with Ian was painful for you. But Stark? Why didn’t you just go gutter diving or something instead?”

In her peripheral vision she could see Happy tense up for a second as Jane mentioned Ian.

“I will tell him you said that.” She was so screwed. Explaining how she knew Stark would be as fun as explaining Ian.

“Please do. And he is old enough to be your father.”

“Oh, yeah? How old is your main squeeze again?” Darcy thought about that already, in the general sense of the thing, like one would think of getting it on with Prince William. Stark had a good decade and more on her and a world of experience in quite literally everything, behind his belt. She wasn’t planning to bloody marry the man, she thought angrily. They weren’t even dating!

“Please don’t start on that, Darcy. It just… Stark? Why? You don’t do one night stands!”

“He is hot and I am single. I don’t need a reason.”

“He is dating Pepper Potts!” Darcy gaped like a fish for a second before remembering, that according
to Stark, that was all over.

“Happy! Want to confirm how long Mr Stark been back on the market?”

The SI Head of Security considered it for a second as he watched them closely.

“Back On since last June and off since you … But I guess it depends, when you and Mr Stark will choose to make it official.” Darcy stared at him. The fuck? What officially? She was not Stark’s girlfriend; she wasn’t even his fling or a one night stand.

“Darcy, please tell me, just please tell me, this thing you have with Stark is not the reason I got the funding…” Darcy wanted to scream and say that she hadn’t seen the man once but Jane had this crestfallen expression that broke her heart.

“I swear to Thor, it has nothing, nothing to do with that. It was handled by SI Legal…”

“Signed personally by Stark, don’t think I haven’t noticed.”

‘Oh, for fucks sake…of all the days to be attentive…’ “Jane, this… whatever thing between me and Tony… It will never get in the way of Science.”

“Mr Hogan, here, spent the entire morning, after picking me up from the rail station, convincing me that I should send you to New York now. Right now, as in the plane is fuelled and ready. Why he is so worried, Darcy?… Are you in danger?”

“There has been another security violation early this morning.” Happy startled both women as he sat down opposite from them instead of hanging back. “We don’t know what they got. Tony, Mr Stark, spotted the breach early this time, so it is unlikely that they got anything, but we can’t take a risk. Mr Stark authorized a security detail for you too, Dr Foster, as a precaution. You are naturally welcome to join Ms Lewis and come to New York immediately…”

Was it SHIELD shits again or was it just a convenient excuse?

“I need to pack up. I can’t just leave. The University still needs to be informed, after all the equipment that was loaned to me needs to be returned and accounted for, I need to hand over the lab…”

“And I am not leaving you to pack on your own…” Darcy wasn’t running across the pond whenever Stark snapped his fingers. Who the hell he thought he was?

“And how you are gonna do that now? You can’t even walk.”

“I can walk perfectly fine, thank you very much!”

Regrettably, Darcy decided to prove her point and jumped to her feet, and nearly just as quickly she fell forward, as the ankle refused to support the weight put on it, and would have bashed her head on the side of the coffee table if Happy hadn't grabbed her hand and yanked her to the side. Ok, so she couldn’t walk. The dull throbbing turned to burning pain.

“Oh my god, Darcy… we need to get you to the hospital.”

“Shitsticks…” It hurt. It hurt a lot. “I am not going anywhere! I am not waiting for 4 bloody hours just to be told that I need to rest it! Or it will most likely get better in that time anyway.”

“There is a medical floor in the Tower, if we board now, by the time we reach New York we shall
“You are not being slick here, Happy. I see what you are trying to pull.”

“He has a point, plus if there is a security concern…” Jane looked wretched.

“I am not going anywhere.” Darcy was digging her heels in, and nothing short of wild horses was going to get her to move.

“You should have thought about that before you jumped into bed with Tony Stark. And if you need a reason to go, you can get the lab there set up and ready to receive us.”

“I did not jump into bed with Stark.” Fucking SHIELD. How was she ever going to explain Stark without having to involve the Jack Booted Thugs? Why did she have to explain anyway? What was Stark playing at, sending Happy to speak to Jane?

“Slipped and fell on his dick, same thing.” Jane rolled her eyes at Darcy.

“You two are ganging up on me. I feel bullied.”

“Ms Lewis, if you actually listened to us, both D Foster and I have your best interests in mind. Especially now as you are injured.”

“Bullied, Jane… I thought I left that in high school.”

Darcy’s complains were largely ignored as Jane packed her a suitcase as she couldn’t make it up the stairs. At least Happy made her bacon sandwich before her stomach revolted on her from having medication on empty.

Happy wasn’t joking about the security detail much to Darcy’s chagrin. A couple of very serious suited young men joined them shortly to help her move. There was also couple of black SUVs parked outside. All looked very Men in Black London edition and it all revolved around her. Darcy was less thrilled by the minute. By the time Jane made sure she was comfortable in the back seat of one of the cars, Darcy was ready to cry. It was quite unclear why. It could have been Jane’s anxiety getting to her, the solemn way Happy’s MIB team was acting, or the fact that the hangover was back with a vengeance.

“You have to call me when you land. Darcy? As soon as the plane lands, you are calling me, ok? Do you have your passport? Put it in the inside pocket of your jacket.”

“Gods, mum. Chill.”

“If someone always sounds like a mum, it is you, Darcy.”

“I do not sound like a mum.” She felt quite offended at that. She was not the mummy type.

“Oh, yeah? How does that sound ‘Jane, did you eat Breakfast? Lunch? Dinner? Have an apple. I put some carrot sticks next to the computer, have those instead of poptarts. Put the scarf on. Do not
forget your gloves again, put them in your bag now. I got you some iron supplement. It's in the kitchen cabinet. I am not letting you work so late, when did last time…”

“OK! OK, Foster. It is called concern. I get paid for that actually.” Darcy tried to ignore Happy’s smile as he walked pass them and sat at the wheel.

“Actually, you don’t.”

Gasp. “The monopoly money isn’t valid? Shocker. I am so shocked.”

Jane once again pulled her into a hug.

“Call me. Otherwise I might need to assume that Stark has done something to you, and killing the Iron Man will look bad on my CV.”

“I will. Promise.”

“We need to go Ms Lewis. The flight has been scheduled in half an hour.”

“Hey, at least you are getting a free ride to New York.” Jane was still not letting her go.

“Actually, he is paying for yours too. After you will be morally ready to unplug the machines for 24 hours.”

“That is not in the contract.”

“Yeah, well. Surprise. We need to go, Jane… New York is calling.”

While New York was calling her, one certain someone in New York wasn’t picking her calls as she rode to the London City Airport.

“Ok, Happy. What the actual fuck, dude?”

The MIB guys gave her startled looks as she snarled at their boss.

“I am under orders to get you to New York, Ms Lewis.”

“It’s Darcy. And thanks for the near cardiac arrest earlier, you twat! Ever heard about giving someone heads up? I actually thought you were a nice guy.”

“Tony thought it might spoil the effect.” Happy was using that even voice again.

“If your aim was to have me keen over, you have very nearly succeeded! Why the hell isn’t he picking up?”

“I believe there has been an Assemble call.”

“Excuses. He is flying around in the most high-tech tuna can on the planet. Don’t give me balls that he hasn’t got 2 minutes to speak to me.”

“I am certain Tony will call you as soon as he will be able.”
“I’m sure he will. Bloody Iron Condom.”

The MIB man sitting next to her couldn’t take it anymore and burst out laughing; Darcy gave him a look that could curd fresh milk.

“I am sorry, Ms Lewis. So sorry… Bloody Iron Condom… I think only a woman can give the man that saved New York a nickname like that.”

Happy snapped at his laughing subordinate before Darcy could open her mouth.

“Jacobs! You do not speak to Ms Lewis unless spoken to, or you have things to say regarding your job, that I am assuming you want to keep, because I don’t want to be the one that has to explain to Tony Stark why his girlfriend wants your ass fried. Understood?”

“Understood, sir.” The Jacobs dude’s face became as snowy white as his shirt.

“I am sorry, Darcy. I have a good team picked back in New York, but the notice was too short…”

“That’s ok. No sweat…” Darcy could feel her throat tightening in panic.

*Happy Hogan just called her Tony Stark’s girlfriend.*
Chapter 8

Happy Hogan just called her Tony Stark’s girlfriend.

Darcy had to remind herself to breathe as she stared out the window the short ride to the airport.

… Tony Stark’s girlfriend…

‘Let’s not panic.’ Was it too late to jump out and run crying to Jane? She was in serious need of some moral support. Because what the hell? But what was she going to tell Jane? That she got cold feet? That she had a fight with Stark? She would be moving shortly to the Tower anyway. Now that was a nice little hole she dug herself into.

What was up with Stark anyway? Sending Happy to ambush her in the morning like that…

She watched as they passed the main drive up to the airport and stopped at a side gate and security promptly came out to greet Happy. No more than a minute later they were pulling up to a private plane.

‘Ok… too late to run now…’

It was an actual private jet. An actual jet waiting for her.

A pilot stood by the gangway, uniform immaculate and the shirt starched to a cutting edge. The man stood straighter as Happy got out, nodded at him and opened the door for her. The cold gust of wind made her shiver.

Darcy looked down at her home knit chunky scarf in burgundy, oversized black winter coat, tights and beat up pair of Timberland boots that were warm and still fit on her rapidly swelling ankle. She felt severely underdressed. It wasn’t as obvious with Jane at her side, but here, with people looking the business, she felt out of place.

“Darcy? Ready? You’ll be able to lay down once we’re at the right altitude, it will help you to have your foot elevated a little.”

“Yeah…” She was abruptly and firmly pulled out of the back seat. Her foot never hit the ground, Happy simply picked her up princess style and carried up the gangway and into the plane. “I can manage, you know…” Darcy made a token protest. “Somebody is working out… damn, Happy. How much do you dead lift?... That is the right word, right? Never hung around people that actually did sports, except Thor, but he doesn’t count, you are, like, the strongest non-alien man I know.”

“I’m getting paid to protect people, mainly Tony, with my body; got to keep fit.” He got her arranged and strapped in the seat and Darcy finally had a chance to look around. She was hard pressed to hold back a low whistle.

The jet looked better than the ones she had seen in the movies. Opulent minimalism came to mind. That was how people that were blessed both with style and money decorated their jets, or money and enough sense to hire someone with said style, she imagined.

What was she doing here?
The jet had a Wi-Fi, big screen TV and an actual bedroom with a bed that Darcy shamelessly commandeered. Her foot hurt. The seven hours flight was more than half way through and Darcy had to lock herself away. Before she started crying, she fished out her last painkillers and gulped them down with a bit of lemonade.

The stewardesses slash super models looked disappointed that it wasn’t Tony Stark himself flying as apparently they were called for duty with very short notice. Darcy could not have cared less. Stuck up bitches. Usually Darcy made an effort to be nice to everyone, as good manners cost no money, but this time being in pain and being looked down upon didn’t sit well with her.

And Stark still wasn’t picking up. The bastard… Darcy needed to yell at someone. How dare he order her on a jet plane and fall off the bloody planet?

All kinds of scenarios were floating inside Darcy’s sleepy brain. It all felt like a dream.

Maybe she would shortly wake up in her own bed with a monster hangover and laugh with Jane at the stupid dream she had?

Or maybe it was only one of Tony Stark’s not so sane and/or sober moments and a week later she’d get a basket of fruit with a generic apology written by his secretary? In which case she was totally fine with that, as transatlantic private charter rides were stupid expensive and she was getting one free. Uhhhh…. Darcy could not even conjure a thought in her mind of travelling in economy for seven hours with a bad foot. Braving Heathrow, with said bad foot? Forget it.

Besides they were going to deliver her to the new sweet flat at the Stark/Avengers Tower. Door to door service. And Happy was sweet, even if he was under orders from Stark. She was totally going to make him a cake. He watched an entire hour of wildlife documentary with her on the StarkPad and a half an hour of random animal videos. And another half an hour of himself as Darcy gushed how she loved him as a kid. The man had nerves of steel. He totally deserved one of her cakes.

“Darcy? You need to wake up. We are approaching the airport and will be landing soon; you need to be back in your seat.”

The woman in question made a not committal sound loud enough to be heard through the closed door and with great effort pushed herself into the seated position. A bedroom in a plane was the most magnificent thing she had ever experienced.

The foot hurt unquestionably less, but on the down side she was no longer able to put the boot back on it.

“Darcy?” Happy was still waiting for her on the other side of the door.

“Can’t put the boots back on…”

She was wearing one shoe as the jet landed.

“What is the Tower like?” It was hitting her now that she was actually moving into the Tower, up to
that point it was more like a fancy idea. Now she was bundled into another black SUV with other even more serious looking MIB guys and they were on their way to said Tower. Happy sat next to her.

“It is a Tower. It has offices, the labs and flats. The HR takes up a few floors, R&D takes a lot of …”

“That is nice, and I can read on the internet about it. What is it like to live there?”

“It's great. The shower never runs out of hot water. Ever. It is also one of the most secure places on the planet. Or I would say the most secure place.” He looked pleased as punch and Darcy couldn't hold back the laugh.

“Well that is -”

The Thunderstruck ringtone interrupted her and Darcy cursed as she picked the phone up.

“Have you landed?”

“Hi, Jane. I just got packed into-”

“So you landed.”

“Well, yeah-”

“And you didn’t call me. Not even a beep. Or a text! I was worried.”

“Jane, I was asleep right to the very end of the flight and it is not like the commercial flight, once you land the car rolls up, you off.”

“Rub it in, will you? How is your foot?”

“Better, so much better.” Darcy lied without blinking. Happy was openly staring at her.

“Good, that is good. You have to call me when you are in the Tower, Darcy.”

“And maybe I should let you know when I will go to the toilet, you know, ask for permission beforehand? I am not reporting my every move to you. We have spoken about it. Once I am settled and have a good night sleep I will check out the labs…”

“Ohhh. I want to be there. Make sure they have adequate energy supply-”

“I have been assured by Happy, here, that it is any scientist’s wet dream, the labs there. So unplug the machines and pack up. Science! awaits us.”

“I miss you already.”

“I miss you too, Janey-girl. Hurry up and get your ass over the pond. Let’s freak some people out here.”
She missed Jane. It was probably the furthest they had been away from each other since New Mexico. Was that really five years ago? It felt like yesterday.

“Scientist’s wet dream?”

Darcy shrugged. “What? Got to motivate her or she will never actually get here. And isn’t it? It is supposed to be *zee best* according to the Internet.”

“One could say that. The labs are not a place I spend much time in, and Tony got his own workshop…”

“Speaking of the devil. Is he planning to show signs of life and return from whatever black hole he fell into?” Darcy was getting irritated again. Hour into the flight she gave up trying to reach him.

“I totally get that he is Iron Man.” She really, really didn’t get it. She couldn’t even picture it. Her brain was jamming whenever she tried to reconcile the person she’d been speaking to and the person she saw on TV. She kind of knew they were the same person, like one knew that the Sun is a star. “But I just flew half round the world and a word from him would have been nice…” She needed a clarification on the situation. His Head of Security called her his girlfriend, which was absurd at the very least. Did she sound as desperate as she felt? Darcy shifted again.

“I am sure he will get in touch soon, Darcy. He is a good man. Don’t believe everything you read…”

“Yeah, I kind of stopped reading junk after some trashy wannabe science tabloid declared me Jane’s lesbian lover.”

“What?”

“Yeah, Jane totally rolled with it too. The woman has no shame, you should have seen that evil little grin she would get whenever she was about to freak someone out with some lesbian PDA. The amount of homophobes in the academic circles is disgusting. Best times ever.”

New York was a busy place. Quite similar to London. What was most similar was that the traffic was horrendous. It took literally hours to get to the Tower. Her foot hurt again and Darcy felt all spaced out due to jet lag, so when they finally pulled into the underground parking lot she was ready to weep.

“I am going right to bed…”

Her phone started ringing and Darcy stared at the screen numbly before pocketing it.

“Dr Foster is sure worried.”

“It’s not Jane.”

At those words Happy’ phone came to life.

“Hogan. Hi, Tony-” His eyes snapped to Darcy. “Yes, she is right next to me… The c7 parking lot. Yes… No. Her phone? Yeah, she got it.” At that Darcy pushed the door open and got out just as Happy tried to hand his phone to her. “I think she is tired, her foot hurts… No, I… No… An accident, back in London… No… Yes, Tony. I know…. Do not call the med team down, Tony. I am handling it…. I will let her know.” Happy let out a heavy sigh as he exited the car and made his
Nor did she feel like visiting the good doctor Cho that Happy sang praises to all the way up. Nope. She wasn’t going to see anyone. No chance. No way. What she was going to do was have some early dinner and fall into bed, provided her new place came with sheets, pillows and the duvet. It had to come fully kitted out, right?

“Tony said that you should be in the Penthouse.” Happy was shifting on his feet as Darcy leaned on him inside the elevator.

“Yeah, sure, waiting on him hand and foot, maybe I should hold my breath too, while I do that? Jane’s contract got me my own place, and that is where I will be, if his highness will decide to grace moi with his presence at some point. Thank you very much.” Darcy slowly hobbled down the corridor after Happy in search of her place. “Jarvis?”

“Yes, Ms Lewis? And welcome to the Tower.” Darcy was testing it, but as she heard the AI she could not help but squeal. It was true, Jarvis was indeed wired around the Tower.

“So cool. You are so cool. Are you everywhere? Can you, like, direct us to my new apartment? It totally says in Janey’s contract that I get one here…”

“Once the signed contract has been returned an apartment was automatically allocated to you near Prince Thor’s quarters.” Listening to the build in AI butler was the coolest thing ever. “Which you have passed on your left. Your apartment is the last on the right hand side, Ms Lewis.”

“You are zee best, Jarvis. So Stark totally gushed about this apartment being the mutts nuts… Do I need a key?”

“Please place your thumb on the small glowing circle on the right of the door. It will code the door to your biometrics.”

“No need to carry a key? I am totally down with that.” Darcy took a deep breath and prepared herself to be amazed. The door slid soundlessly to a side and she whistled. *Sweet.*

It was a two bed apartment, everything in it brand spanking new and generic. Totally expensive and designer, but… yeah… she was a little bit disillusioned.

“Jarvis? Are you able to relay a short message to Mr Stark?”

“Certainly.”

“Great. Stark, you have no taste. Please look up what state of the art means, because, last I checked, it isn’t synonymous with underwhelmed… and you could have at least bought milk.” Darcy knew she was being a bitch, but she loved getting under his kin. Plus the fridge was empty, completely. What was she supposed to do now? Fucking Stark… You could not trust the man to do basic shit.

“Thor said there is a common kitchen always stocked with food stuffs.” It was a vague memory at the back of her mind.
Happy nodded at that.

“Yes, but it is unlikely there is anything cooked, do you want…”

“My good man, you look at the woman that cooked for herself since she was eight. If there are ingredients to cook with there will be food. Park my suitcase somewhere and lead the way.”

The common room /kitchen was packet with fresh produce. Vegetables, meat, poultry. You name it. The free range cooker was what Darcy would call the state of the art.

Biting her tongue she hopped around on one foot gathering everything for a rich, mixed veg and beef ribs soup. She could almost taste it.

“Happy, honestly, are you just gonna stand there and stare? Because that is creepy.”

“Tony said I should make sure you are ok.” It seemed like he was settling for the duration it was going to take Darcy to cook her food.

“And here I thought I was in the safest place on the planet. Funny that.”

“It is, just…”

“I will get Jarvis to call you if I need anything, at this rate it will take me a couple of hours to do everything I want, and then you can be a gentleman and carry it to my place.” She fully intended to cook enough to last her few days at the least. This way she could get some rest and not worry about going shopping. Since Stark didn’t have the decency to stock her up on things.

The kitchen was stocked like a Michelin chef’s wet dream when it came to gadgets so before long Darcy has a soup on slow cook, fresh bread and cherry pie in the oven. There was also an industrial type dishwasher. So that was how people on TV cook everything in record time, Darcy mussed as she made herself a coffee and sat down. She could get used to that. Even the coffee tasted like it was one out of those artisan places. Maybe living here wasn’t going to be such torture after all … Her glasses were dirty and Darcy took them off to rub her eyes. She was just going to rest them, just for a second…

Sudden laughter in her immediate vicinity brought Darcy roughly back from the impromptu nap she was having, while seated at the breakfast bar. Panic descended upon her like Thor’s hammer. The high stool didn’t facilitate smooth dismounting as she nearly fell of it as she jerked backwards. The fact that she didn’t have her glasses on and the vision was even more blurry from the nap and fear wasn’t helping her to calm down, only adding to the disorientation. There were people around her and someone laughed again.

The heart was hammering against her ribcage so hard it hurt. Planting both of the feet heavily on the ground was another mistake as she could actually feel something in the ankle go taut and snap. The resulting excruciating pain made white dots appear in her vision.

With a snarl, partly from fear but mostly from pain, Darcy reached into the cardigan’s pocket,
grabbed her taser and fired at the person that sat right opposite her.

“Laugh this up, asshole!”

Someone seized her from behind almost immediately attempting to get the taser of her.

A year ago when Thor had his warrior friends over when they were doing research in Sweden, Sif spent a good portion of a week showing a single move of self defence to Darcy. Not because it was hard, Darcy was simply that slow to pick it up. Now, running on pure adrenaline the muscle memory kicked in and twisting herself into a certain position Darcy kicking one foot to a side hoping to throw the person of balance and when she felt the body shifting grabbed and threw him over her shoulder. Before she even realized what was happening she was firing the second charge into that person as she her ankle gave out.

“Fuck! Tits! Stop! Shit!”

“Barton?!” She desperately searched the table for her glasses but it took a second as she had to get upright and with shaking hands put them on. “What the…”

Barton was kneeling on the floor checking for pulse on a redhead sprawled nearby. The prongs that hit her in the lower ribcage were still connected to the taser Darcy had in her hand. They both watched as it disconnected with a faint metallic ring.

“Jesus fucked a duck…” Very slowly she slid to the floor as the feeling slowly left her legs, which might have not been a great idea as it gave an excellent view of the dude she tased first. He lay on his side, and Darcy could clearly see the shield still hanging on his back. “Oh, for fuck’s sake…”

“Tits, the fuck, man? I just got some bread, had my back to you for a bleeding second…”

“Do not call me Tits, Barton. And I told you to never fucking sneak on me.”

“With a pair like your…” In for a penny in for a pound. He didn’t get a chance to finish his thought.

‘Whoops again, pig.’

There were steps and Darcy with her back to the cupboard door watched numbly as a pair of men appeared in the doorway.

“I told you to get her to Cho, what do you mean she doesn’t want…. The hell?”

Darcy swallowed and gave a little wave with the hand that was still clutching the taser. Before Tony Stark suited up she dropped the taser and raised both of her hands in surrender as a sob escaped her.

“They freaked me out, OK?…” But before she could finish Happy had his gun out and was scanning the room for the attackers, and Darcy had to admit that watching part of the wall shift and an Iron Man suit step out and fold itself around the other man was fascinating, but by the time it was finished she was bawling full blast.

“Darcy, stay down! Fuck ! Jarvis! What is the threat? How many…”

“I would not class Ms Lewis as a threat, Sir, she has fully discharged the taser and with her current injury is not likely to cause harm to others.”

“She discharged… Darcy?” The Iron Man, holy shit Iron Man, made his way to her in rapid strides as bewildered and twitchy looking Happy checked for signs of life on the fallen Captain America,
who thankfully chose to make a sound of someone waking up.

She was shaking again.

“Darcy? Sweetheart? What happened? Jarvis visual feed from the security cams… Wha…?” He froze for a couple of seconds before letting out a startled laugh and carefully stepped over Barton and the Black Widow to get to her.

*She tased Black Widow. She was going to die. She was so very dead.* Darcy tried not to look that way when Iron Man reached her and kneeled down to check her for any injuries. The faceplate disconnected and moved up to reveal the grinning face of Tony Stark.

“Honeybunny, I know Barton flips your Bitch Switch, but you cannot go round the Tower tasing the Avengers.”
Darcy hiccupped loudly and tried to wipe the tears from her face with the cardigan’s sleeves; also keeping them pressed to her face prevented her from punching Tony Stark right in his smug, grinning face. Not that she would do much damage, she was shaking like a leaf in the wind, not unless she got Sparky and slammed the handle full force to the nose bridge – instant panda eyes, that would wipe that stupid grin right off his face…

‘Bitch Switch?… I’m going to fucking show you what happens when someone flips my Bitch Switch…’

She wiped the nose noisily with her left hand as the right one dropped to her side in search of the discharged taser.

“Ah! Ah! Ah!” The little manoeuvre didn't get past Stark and the man's reflexes proved faster as he got the taser first and Darcy growled at him. But in her current state it came out like a wet whine of a kicked puppy and the hiccup that followed it only added to the impression. “Hey… Hey… sweetheart. You can have that back… later… When you are not likely to try and kill me with it.”

“So, like, never?”

Steven Rogers was tired. It had been a long long day that was spend scouting an Alaskan forest, on foot, in the freezing weather, with radio silence, as he was paired with Stark, which meant that the man was constantly complaining about everything as he couldn’t get in touch with anyone outside their team. It would have been worth it if they had found more than just abandoned base and couple of lookouts.

Director Fury had send them on a wild goose chase. Again.

Wasn’t that happening a lot lately?

When he closed his eyes Agent Coulson’s signature swam and twisted before his eyes. Anger slowly simmered in the pit of his stomach; it had replaced respect and grief that was there mere 24 hours ago. If he was still able to throw up he would be doing exactly that. Instead the taste of stomach acids and disappointment was at back of his throat. Part of him wished that he wasn’t in the Tower last night when an urgent call from Tony came to join the man in his personal workshop as apparent malfunction in the alarm system was making the sirens to go off constantly.

Tony Stark was standing by the multiple screens running what looked like computer system diagnostics. All except the central one all were busily running numbers and codes, making Steve
remember just how behind on technology he was.

It took couple of minutes to realize that it wasn’t just a screensaver of someone’s rather normal looking living room on the main screen as a woman stepped into view. He recognized her instantly as Thor’s Lighting Sister. The Argardian Prince had shown a picture to Steve on an occasion when one evening the conversation between them turned to the topic about the fairer side of humanity. Darcy Lewis was her name, if he remembered correctly. Curvy brunette with bright cherry lips in a wide smile and eyes sparkling with mischief stood next to another petite brunette that was Thor’s lady love, in some kind of lab, surrounded by mountains of equipment. Never before or after had Steve seen Thor looking so poignant. Those two women were the center of his life here, being part of the Avengers Initiative was all good and well, but those women were the reason it was worth the fight.

Steve watched from the side of the room as the woman on the screen fidgeted and tugged an errand hair strand behind her ear when she finally looked at the camera and exiled slowly. The lashes were long and dark framing the wide nervous eyes. The lips vibrant red against the pale cream of her skin. He remembered well when dames like her were painted on the side of the planes. He could also see that Stark was watching her just as closely, the man leaned slightly forward as if that would have make the woman in the screen closer to him.

“So, yeah. It will take few minutes, but I think Jarvis will be able to extract a copy of the mission report. And goodnight.” The sirens were up again, but are not as loud as it had been hours ago, and Steve hissed under his breath, those damn things were getting on his nerves and also killing his hearing.

“Thanks… What? Where are you going?” Stark straightened immediately, the smile gone.

“My bed, before I pass out. So, Happy? It has been a pleasure.” The nervousness from her posture was gone for a second and Stark scowled observing the exchange between Miss Lewis and Happy. Then she focused back on the screen, but this time those dark eyes were sharp and locked on the man she was speaking to. “Stark, tell Cupid to get into a habit of knocking on the people’s front door instead of the lock.” With that she simply turned around and all but ran out of the room.

“Lewis! Hey! Wait … Damn it…”

“Everything ok, Tony?” The billionaire turned to him and the disappointment was gone instantly, replaced with that ever present cocky grin.

“Ah! Cap. Did you see Bruce on the way here? Got some amazing news to share…” Something in Stark’s smile suggested that the amazing news weren’t of the good variety.

“You can say that again, Stark.” Steve was slightly startled when Clint’s face appeared on the screen. The archer’s face was twisted with what could only pure rage. Happy was hanging back observing them.

Bruce joined them shortly; his mood also dampened by the constant going off of the sirens.

“You sure you can’t get hold of Romanov? I would like the entire class to be present for the Show and Tell.”

“Tony, what is going on?” Bruce neither looked nor sounded amused by the summons.

“Not until tomorrow… Can you finally switch those blasting things off, Stark? Driving me fucking nuts. I thought you dealt with that.” Clint snarled at the screen.
“Jarvis? Did you integrate the bug into the main system yet?”

“3 more minutes and it will be done, Sir. Unfortunately I cannot override its primary function until then. The report that Miss Lewis been extracting has been downloaded to her laptop. Shall I open it, Sir?”

Stark tossed down the rest of the scotch he been drinking.

“Buckle up, kids. Jarvis, let’s do this.”

A standard looking SHIELD report form appeared on the side screen.

“Tony, what is this…”

“Just fucking read it, Rogers.” Stark was terse as he himself was going over the document.

He started reading. Standard report. Location. Objective… Contact established… The names popped up and he had to read them twice to make sure he was getting it right. Jane Foster and Darcy Lewis. Those were Thor’s girls. Suddenly it all seemed more personal. There was a long winded explanation about continued contact and information extraction attempts… and … a sexual encounter… described in detail… with Miss Lewis.

He jerked like he had been slapped and Bruce made a disgusted noise next to them and turned away from the screen. Stark on the other hand was stock still, Steve could see how the knuckles on his hands were going white where he gripped the sides of the work bench, lips pressed in a thin line, the eyes fixed on the screen ahead. Happy also turned his face away and disappears to the side of the camera.

Suddenly he remembered the nervous, wild eyes he saw on the screen mere minutes ago. The tense line of her shoulders. The women in the photograph that his friend carried close to his heart at all times.

SHIELD… Who on earth could authorize such a shambles of a mission? He couldn't make himself read more. What could possibly be the purpose?

“We should not be reading this…” Bruce was standing with his back to the screen sounding just as disgusted.

“Don’t want to see who signed it off?” Stark’s voice was so low and even that it made him go instantly on alert.

Steve forced himself to look at the screen. He felt like he was betraying Thor’s trust just by looking in that direction, not to mention what Miss Lewis would think…

Authorizing Senior Agent…Agent P. Coulson Level 6. Dated … seven weeks ago.

It felt like a punch in the guts. He couldn't speak.

“Fucking shit… If it was me in Lewis’ place I would have gutted the fuck.” Clint’s face was drained of color. “Fury had to know. To send someone… Thor is going to blow Triskelion right out the fucking sky… and Coulson… how the fuck?”

“Coulson isn’t dead…”

There was a light beeping from Bruce’s watch that monitors his heart rate as he tries to even it out by
taking deep even breaths. There was a tense minute until the beeping stopped.

“It’s a fucking miracle, holy resurrection. Why the fuck weren’t we told?” Stark finally straightened out. “On a separate topic. Agent I. Boothby anyone we know?”

“No, but I will check it out. I cannot believe Coulson would sign off something like that…” Clint trailed off.

“And I can’t believe he isn't fucking dead, Barton. Cap, you want to toss your two cents in? Happy to have your biggest fan back from the dead? Missed having someone watching you while you out cold? Need to sit down for a min maybe?” Steve had to remind himself that snark was Stark’s way of dealing with pretty much everything.

“Does Miss Lewis…” How will they tell Thor?

“She does.” Stark was picking and adjusting random equipment on the work bench next to the monitors. “Got her hands on it first. I still have to get her a T-Shirt with slogan When life doesn’t fuck you enough, there is always SHIELD. Think she gonna like it?” It was clear from the way his lip curled into a snarl, he wasn’t going to actually do it. “Oh, and by the way. The alarms? Not a malfunction. That is SHIELD hacking Jarvis. Well, trying to.”

“What?” Bruce was finally calm enough to rejoin the conversation. “When did that happen?”

“Gods, Stark. If it weren’t for Lewis, they would be going over your cybernetic mankinis collection since yesterday.”

“Yes, well, that’s my girl. Jarvis, is the extraction and/or corruption of the stolen files completed?”

“99% successful, Sir. Unfortunately, the pictures of Ms Lewis had been flagged internally by SHIELD’s facial recognition program.”

“The fuck that means?”

“I cannot say, Sir. The data is insufficient.”

“What photos, Tony? What photos of Miss Lewis’ do you have and why?”

After a long night came even longer day, after getting couple of hours of sleep a call come from Director Fury about a possible terrorist complex. In Alaska. And off they go. They also had to inform Romanov about the newest development as she joined them there. No one was happy to share the news.

So by the time they come back to the Tower the mood was shitty and everyone were tired.

“I need milk, I am swinging past the common room. Does anyone know if there any food there?” Clint was eyeing Steve and Natasha hopefully as they packed into the elevator once Stark went to the Penthouse.

“Did you cook?” The redhead glared at him. None of them really cooked. What was even the point of asking? Why Stark kept stocking up ingredients instead of loading the fridge with ready meals was beyond her.
“No?”

“So there is no ready food for you.”

“Oh man, last I ate proper was at Lewis’ place. She can cook something mean, I tell you…” Clint sounded wishful and Stave tied not to wince as he thought about the young woman. He still had a hard time coming to terms that she handed over the report to them knowing what was in it.

“I will leave you two-”

He didn't finish as the aroma of food being prepared hit his nose and his mouth was instantly flooded with saliva.

“The hell?” No one but Avengers and couple of selected SI staff had the access to the common area, and none of those people would be cooking there.

There was a woman seated at the breakfast bar. Long dark hair pulled in a messy bun at the top of her head as she rested on her folded hands. Pair of glasses and a half empty cup of coffee in front of her.

That was not exactly what they had expected until Clint hisses through clenched teeth.

“Fucking Stark. He got her to come over… I knew it. Leaving Happy behind just to make sure that she was fine in the morning, my ass.”

“Who?”

“Lewis. That’s her.” The three of them stared at the sleeping woman. “Trust me… Wait. Is she cooking? She is cooking, oh man, its my lucky day or what?” Without much of a thought Clint went straight to the slowly simmering pot.

“She looks… small.” Steve wasn’t sure what he expected. She looked taller in the photo.

Romanov approached her slowly like a cat did an unknown object.

“She tased you? Her?” Natasha whispered as she watched the woman sleep for a couple of minutes. Clint glared at his partner before lifting the lid and silently groaning in appreciation at the heavenly content that he found inside.

“Should we wake her?”

“No. Listen. If she wakes up, the likelihood of getting this,” Clint pointed to the bowl that he was rapidly filling, “will be zero. She isn’t in great mood, I bet. I wonder what Stark did to get to fly over?”

“I thought we were going to pretend they are having a thing until she moves here? To make sure she is safe…”

“And leave her there for undetermined length of time, till Foster wraps everything up. Right. Did you hear Stark talking about her? He got it bad for her. I would swear that… OK. I am not your maid, Steve. You want some of this, you got to come and get it.” Clint wasn't swayed by the hungry look that the Captain America was giving his bowl. They all were tired and hungry.

“I think she just finished baking some bread… and a pie.” Natasha was inspecting the content of the oven.
Steve was going to wake her up… after having some of the soup. Not to make things awkward, maybe Natasha would be able to wake her up after they finish? But then he tasted the soup. So apparently Clint didn’t lie about Miss Lewis being a great cook. It was rich and meaty and he couldn’t stop eating.

They sat and ate in silence around the sleeping girl. The weariness catching up with them.

“Did she really tase you? I know Stark said she did…” They kept their voices low.

“Just to make the record clear. She is a mongoose.”

Natasha gave him are you stupid look.

“Mongoose?”

“Yeah. Listen. She looks absolutely harmless, right? Would not hurt a fly, like. When I was deployed once, we had this little pack of those things near the camp; they look cute and harmless, just like her. So one of them always came near the camp, looked for scraps, they look like homeless puppies, so I fed it. I like dogs.” Clint mopped the remaining soup from the bottom of the bowl with a bit of bread. “So it is time to move on, I am a little worried. The little guy lives on scraps, right? Will it survive? It's small and harmless. I swear to god, it cried when we packed up.”

“They didn’t let you keep it.” Natasha raised one brow daring him to deny it, which he Clint ignored.

“Anyway. So I am in the back of a truck ready to move. That little guy is watching us go on a little hill. A snake appears not far, guess what happens?”

“The snake eats the little guy?” Steve whispered sympathetically as he stuffed the last of the bit of pie into his mouth. He was going apologize when Miss Lewis wakes up. He’ll pay for it. It was best pie he had in ages.

“Wrong. The little guy has the snake for lunch. That's what mongooses do, they all look cute, but kill cobras like it's no one's business.”

“I really don’t think…” Steve nodded to the sleeping person across from him. She didn't fit the imagine Clint was painting as the man got up to get some more bread.

“She will look you dead in the eye and tase you. You don’t believe it's happening until you are down, mongoose if I have ever seen one…”

“Is that because she tased you twice?” Natasha snickered and grinned at him.

The thought was ridiculous and a laugh escaped him.

In hindsight, Steve had to admit, it was a mistake.

Darcy Lewis was startled awake by the sudden noise. Eyes wide as she nearly fell of the stool, she been sleeping on. Steve didn't intent to be mean, but it looked rather comical and she had this confused look on her and creases on her cheeks from sleep. He laughed, again. She looked too sweet to have done something like taser someone.

He could see that she wasn't getting the joke and he would have to apologize. Which is fine. He can also see the business end of the taser pointed at him. He was still wearing the uniform, there was no way the taser would penetrate the Teflon plates it consisted of. She looked like an angry puppy as she snarled.
“Laugh this up, asshole!”

The prongs hit him in the base of the neck where he had removed the protective collar.

‘Bloody Mongoose…’ was the last thought before everything went black.

It is not as good as the last one. But you can only tase Black Widow once, peeps. And I had to get this plot bunny out of my head so I can move on. Still hope you enjoyed it! Please Please leave review! I love hearing what you think!
“So, like, never?”

What the hell was she doing, Darcy thought to herself. Stark barked out a laugh and very slowly lifted his hand to tuck the strands of hair that escaped the confinement of the bun, behind her ear. The metal of the armor encasing his fingers was cold when it touched the sensitive skin. He was giving her that look again, like he was picking her apart in his head.

Oh God, he is Iron Man. Darcy felt ashamed at how shocked she was. She knew he was Tony Stark, she knew Tony Stark was Iron Man. It just didn’t feel real up until the point the man inside the suit was crowding her on the kitchen floor.

"I tased Captain America... I feel like I committed treason..." Stark looked pleased as pleased he can be at that, and glanced at the groaning man on the floor on the other side of the table.

"He'll live. Shortstack, did Point Break showed some special moves, because you taking down the Black Widow is my number one favorite footage of all times. Wanna see?"

"Gods no..." Darcy stared at the woman still unconscious on the floor nearby. Fucking beginners luck, she needed to make sure that Thor never finds out about it, he would never let her live it down, in which case the Black Widow was going to kill her for sure...

“So how is the foot, Cinderella?”

“It is …ok… ouch! Watch that.” Unceremoniously Stark pulled the sock from the throbbing foot and the sight made Darcy nauseas. She had to turn away as her head started spinning. If the ankle wasn’t broken before, it sure looked like it was now. It was swollen as it was turning vibrant blue and red indicating fresh trauma, with the added tinge of yellow green from earlier this morning. It hurt so much more now that she saw it. “Oh Thor… Ok… Ok… That is not good…” This day just kept getting worse as it went along.

“Don’t look, Sweetheart. I got you; the good doctor will give you some good drugs for the pain…” Darcy shut her eyes as Stark carefully got one hand under her knees and the other around her waist. “Happy? Next time, when I say to go to Medical, you fucking get her there.” The Iron Man spoke evenly, but there was intensity in his words and Darcy cracked one eye as she felt Happy approach once Stark has her securely in his arms. Being held against a metal suit was not as comfortable she had expected.

“It wasn’t that bad, Tony, swear to god… She didn’t want…” Happy looked wretched at the sight of her foot and Darcy felt bad for him.

“Don’t be mad at him… I didn’t want to go.” Fucking hell it was hurting now. Darcy pressed her forehead into Stark’s suited neck as she whimpered.

“She is injured. She doesn’t get to decide, Happy. I left you in charge. Jarvis! Let Cho know I need her in Exam Room 3.” Stark doesn’t wait for the answer.
The hydraulic noises of the suit, as he carried her, were hypnotic and Darcy felt childish at her own refusal to see the doctor. Exhaustion and pain were making her irritated and irrational.

“Honeybuns?”

She pressed her forehead to his suited neck again. He smelled of expensive cologne, motor oil and metal. It... was unusual.

“Hm?”

“If you ever turn evil, you got to let me know first. I need to be there when you take Rogers and Romanov down. I can’t miss it twice. You can’t be that mean to me.”

“Not scared I am going to take you down?...” Her head was full of wool and stringing together words into sentences was getting harder than it was supposed to be. Darcy was having an adrenaline crash.

“I can go down for you anytime, Sweetheart, just say the word.” She can feel him grin as he gently kisses her forehead.

“You are such a horny dog, Stark.” She wanted to sound stern, in control, but the laugh that followed her words ruined all her intentions. “What is the point anyway?”

“What do you mean what is the point? Of me going down on you?” There was genuine confusion on his voice and Darcy immediately regretted opening her mouth. What did she know about sex anyway?

“Just forget I said anything…” Why did she keep digging herself deeper into the hole?

Being carried through the corridors of med floor by suited up Tony Stark was clearly not a common practice as various members of staff stopped to stare at them. She hated attention.

“We’ll talk about that later, Sweetheart.” He promised gently to her as they reached medical examination room.

Great. That was great. Tony Stark was totally the person that she had always wanted to discus oral sex with... NOT.

The ankle was broken. Of course it was broken. With her luck? There was no other way. She also got a lecture from Dr Cho as it could have been avoided. On top of that she not only broke it, but got a minor internal bleed that required the blood to be drained by a big ass needle. Darcy was only happy that SI Medical was stocked on good drugs and she was given some before the needle was jabbed into her swollen foot.

“So next time, can I trust you to go and see the good Doc?”

“I swear to Thor, Stark. Yes, my fucking bad, should have fucking went.” While there was no pain, she felt the needle being inserted and the blood drained relieving the pressure. “You keep pestering me, I will jab that needle someplace you not going to like!” The snarl escaped and Stark smiled at her. They both knew he was distracting her. “Get me something to drink, you flying dildo.” Even the good Doc stopped watching the screen for a second to blink at her in surprise.
'Damn. Did I say the last bit out loud?' Stark’s brows shoot up. ‘Yes, I did...’ What fucking drugs was she given?

“What? Oh, I’m sorry. Flying red dildo. Got to be accurate.” For love of Thor, what was wrong with her?! Darcy felt horror well up inside as she honestly couldn’t stop speaking.

“Flying. Red. Dildo?” Stark was leaning forward invading her personal space as Darcy pressed herself back to the hospital bed she was laying in. It was quite intimidating with him still suited up. She really needed to make a hasty retreat. Did she just make herself homeless?

“I’m sorry!” Darcy slapped a hand over her mouth. “Would you prefer Bloody Iron Condom?” She muttered through her fingers much to her growing horror.

‘Oh... My ... Thor... just kill me now...’

Stark was so close she could smell the mint on his breath. At least he was considerate in that regard. The Doctor was letting out some choking sounds behind the screen in an attempt to hold back the laughter.

“No, not really?” His eyes are brown and pupils blown wide. Why doesn’t he just put her under the bloody microscope while he was at it!?

“Oi! Back off, Tin Man, or... or I am getting myself a can opener.” In what loony world was that an actual threat, Darcy wondered as soon as it left her lips.

“And what you gonna do with it, Honeybunny?” Stark clearly was having too much fun. Yeah, good question, what Darcy Lewis was going to do with a can opener against Iron Man?

“What? You think that your tuna can is invincible just because you added some wiring to it?” For emphasis she knocked just above the glowing circle. “I am going to check if you got a heart, obviously.” Was the window behind them easy to open? She was strongly considering just throwing herself out of it. “Originally, I was gonna say your dick, but who knows where that has been? So unless you present me with a full health report I am not going near it.” Where the fuck was that coming from?

“Cho! I need a StarkPad!” He was out of Darcy’s face at that and she let out a sigh of relief. Maybe she will die from mortification before he comes back.

“Miss Lewis. Please don't move, I will shortly be back with the cast.” Just as the good Doctor left Stark was back.

“Here.” A StarkPad was pushed into her hands, Darcy looked at the device and then at the man in confusion. It was a nice little piece of technology … that she had no interest in at this moment.

“...Yeah?”

“My health check. Up to date as of last week. See? All clean.”

Darcy stared at him. Tony Stark's sex health check report... Her ears must have been bright red by now. Where was an alien invasion when she needed one?

“I’m... sorry?” the young woman thought that if Stark pulled out his Johnson she would have been less shocked.

“We might as well get this out of the way. Since we decided to go for it. I am clean as a whistle.”
Darcy propped herself back onto the pillow. This evening was getting more bizarre by the second.

“Go for it…?” That was ringing a bell in some dark corner of her mind, some half forgotten conversation… Seeing her struggle Stark decided to help her out with a hint.

“No take backs, Shortstack.”

Her jaw went lax for a long minute as sweat broke out all over her body.

“That was not…”

“It sure was.”

“I know we spoke about Thugs United getting delusions…” Darcy was vehemently trying to recall all of the conversation.

“And we agreed that I am an excellent boyfriend material. Like now for example, I will let it slide that you called this, vision of modern engineering,” he pointed at the armor he was wearing with both hands, “A tuna can.”

“No, you fucking won’t.”

“No, I won’t. But see? Instant mutual understanding.” He was petting her hair, once again invading her space. Did they make a wrong turn at the elevator and ended up in Twilight Zone?

“It will be a clusterfuck of epic proportions; we both know that, Stark.”

“Great, so it's settled. Finally. Not to rush but already told Happy to pick your security detail. Not that you will be leaving the Tower soon with your foot anyway, but it's one of those things. How is your foot?”

Doctor Helen Cho was back with the ankle cast just in time to bring the gaping woman back to her senses.

“Darcy? I will have to cut you out of your jeans, there's no way you can remove them without disturbing the injury, do you have something loose that you can change into? ” It was a good point. The ankle was swollen like a balloon.

The thoughts were jumbled inside her head. The drugs weren’t helping either. Darcy was tired, hungry, irritated and fairly soon she was going to be in excruciating pain again once the drugs wear off. She could not fly the flag for sanity at the same time. Well... he wanted to take care of her... didn’t he? Play house for a while? She liked him more and had shared more with the nervously grinning man than Ian. She's had more compliment from him than Ian... not that it said much but so far Stark was in the lead and was making her feel strangely attracted to him. He thought she was smart.... Huh... She had dated dudes she had even less in common with before.

“You know what, alleged excellent boyfriend material? Let’s do it. I declare it official, we are a Thing. First order of business, there is a pair of sweat pants and a fresh T-Shirt in my suitcase, I need them.”

Stark clearly wasn't used at being ordered around, so he just stared back at her.

“Are you sending me on an errand?” The concept seemed to be foreign to him.

“Instant understanding, indeed.” Gods, she was going to miss sassing him, once their little attempt
will go down in flames. “The suitcase is in the kitchen.”

Darcy was asleep by the time Stark returned. She had the cast on and was covering under a blanket after Dr Cho cut her out of the jeans. She had since let her hair loose and removed the cardigan.

“Is that a kick you have, where you hide things and send me on a wild goose chase? There is no suitcase in the kitchen, the bedroom…”

Darcy looked at him sleepily and stretched. She felt groggy from jetlag and was in no mood to amuse her freshly minted boyfriend. *What a joke.* There was no doubt in Darcy’s mind that he was going to backtrack soon.

“Totally in the kitchen... get glasses, Anthony.”

“Tony.”

Darcy’s eyes were closing again and head fell back to the pillow.

“Darcy?...” The voice was distant and she didn't want to listen to him. “I got you some of mine…” *Why wasn’t he letting her sleep?* “I will wrap you up in the blanket ok?”

“Ok…”

So how was it? Good ? Bad? Leave a review Please! As you can see my muse really appreciates them! =)
Happy Holidays, People! Hope you are having a good time!

In his mind Tony Stark had people figured out. People were dumb. People were greedy. And they always wanted things from him. He learned it early in life. That was it. That’s how the world worked.

Very convenient, he was a genius and he was rich, so he always got what he wanted. It was essentially very boring.

That was pretty much his life until things happened and now he had a magnet to prevent pieces of shrapnel from entering his heart, and he was flying around in a powered suit saving the world.

Fun times.

He even got himself an actual girlfriend. He even enjoyed being in a relationship. Shame he was the only one enjoying being in the said relationship… he really wished he had seen that one coming. It did not end pleasantly. He was informed of it by email. A fucking Dear John email. That for certain was a novelty experience he could have fucking done without.

He was also never really opposed to being in a relationship, whatever Pepper was saying to the contrary, he just didn't care for women that couldn’t keep up with him. Don’t get him wrong, sex was great, he enjoyed it plenty, but that was it. He didn’t bother remembering their names or faces. He wasn’t interested in a morning after conversation as they simply had nothing to say to him, nothing that would hold his interest. Besides always he kind of thought that relationships were overrated. If it didn’t work with a person that knew him that well, who would it work with?

It seemed like no one could match up, until he received a prompt kick in the teeth over the phone from Point Break’s Lady Love’s PA.

If a sin had a voice it would sound like Darcy Lewis. The woman chewed him out too. Just like that.

It took him the entire conversation to realize that it was Thor’s sweet little angel of Lighting Sister giving him the dressing down. Point Break had a serious pink glasses syndrome when it came to describing his adopted family members.

He was a little whiplashed from the defensive attack Lewis had mounted on him the previous night, without the slightest regard to who he was, unfortunately for him, she made valid points in between the insults she heaped on him. Foster’s contract was with the Legal Department for the last two months, yet with the actual scientist in question only for the last month, and he was told Foster refused to come aboard the SI. Hence the late call to demand explanation. He got his explanation. He
also got a massive boner just **listening** to the PA speak. That was the most peculiar attraction he ever had.

He called back the next night at 3am. Having her sleepy voice moan into the phone was well worth the ire that followed shortly after.

The photographs, being works of art in their own right, made his year, and so did listening to Shortstack getting worked up, *and was she stacked...* He had a most pleasurable vision of her getting all flustered. The few Facebook photos he had pulled the other night didn’t even remotely reflect the wicked beauty that she had, or the tongue she wielded like a whip, gods, she kept him on his toes.

It took him an entire sleepless night looking for the cause of the never ending alarm chaos to grasp that Darcy Lewis was also **brilliant**.

Getting her to yield him the original codes that she stripped from some SHIELD program was a bit like trying to get blood from the stone, she was giving exactly zero fucks that Tony *the Iron Man* Stark wanted something of her, until she realized that everyone’s favorite spy organization was trying to pull their old trick.

Knowing that he unintentionally shared her photos with SHIELD rattled him more then he wanted to admit. Darcy got distressed and angry. She actually hung up on him and disconnected for a good couple of hours just to call back of her tits drunk and with a **solution**, an actual way that would give him a chance to recover the stolen blueprints. Even *he* couldn’t find a back door to get into SHIELD without them knowing, and he really didn’t want them to detect that they had been caught with the hand up to the elbow in the cookie jar.

Point Break didn’t lie about his little, butter wouldn’t melt, Lighting Sister being attached to her taser. Clint Barton, being the person that liked taking chances, found out about it firsthand. Tony is nearly sorry for him. Nearly.

Darcy Lewis was quick as a whip to retort to him and just as efficient with the task of getting past the Thugs’ firewalls.

She also had no problem tasing Barton again.

He really tried to figure out what was attracting him to her, apart from the obvious. Was it the voice? It could have been the voice. It probably was the voice... she spoke about scrambling equations from Foster’s research and all he could think of was that breathless low voice from those full pink lips near his ear saying his name over and over again... or it could be the lips... or the rather obviously generous bosom that she unsuccessfullly tried to hide behind a cardigan... *Oh, yeah, could totally be that...* or her eyes when she focuses on him. That suspicious, slow look-over she gives him or that occasional naughty smile when her guard drops...

Or how she isn’t really bothered by the fact that she has electrocuted world’s best marksman **twice**.

Or when she speaks about the alien prince that can call forth one of the most destructive elements of nature at will, like he is a harmless puppy.

Or the excitement that lights up her face when he even remotely mentions Foster and the research they do together.

Or how she brought half STRIKE down with a cake...

Or when she shows her defensive side or the reason why she now hates SHIELD as she does.... As she just hands over the paper that had her encounter with an Agent written down in detail, because
Having the woman close to him didn’t work out quite as Tony expected it to.

He carefully adjusted his grip on the sleeping form in his arms as he elevator door opens and he steps out into the penthouse.

“Jarvis…” Stark hisses through his teeth.

“Yes, Sir?” the reply is just as soft.

“Please cancel my morning meeting with our Korean suppliers, and let Happy know that I will not need him until latter tomorrow, when he brings in the application for Darcy’s detail…” One of the things that Tony knew for certain was that there was no such thing as getting security set up too early.

“Certainly, Sir.”

The rooms are quiet again as he makes his way across the lounge area and towards the bedroom. He is tired. Darcy’s little episode in the common kitchen shortened his life by a decade. Seeing Rogers still out cold after realizing that it was his girl that took the super soldier down had relief wash over him like a wave. The security footage unfortunately didn’t have sound so he couldn’t hear if Rogers actually said anything to her to deserve the electroshock, apart from startling her. The angle of the camera meant that that the footage didn’t include Rogers face as he went down, but fortunately as Romanov got hit after landing on her back the undisguised shock is well documented as the metal prongs hit her and the taser is discharged. Barton on the other hand… he could see an exchange happen where Darcy looks him dead in the eye and tases him quite obviously on purpose.

They finally reach the destination and the massive bed dominating the room is a sight for sore eyes. He has her securely cocooned in the blanked from the Examination Room and she been drifting in and out of consciousness the entire trip.

“Hmmm…” Darcy groans as she opens her eyes and looks at him. “We… there yet?..”

“We are, Honeybunny… I need… Darcy, let go of the blanket, Sweetheart… I will get the covers over you…” She keeps watching him like she is contemplating the validity of his request, before finally complying as he slowly pulls the blanket from around her. “Do you want me to prop your foot up?...”

“No…” Her eyelids drop and he can tell is out cold again. What painkillers did Cho give her to have that strong of an effect?

He just stands and stares at her for a minute as he contemplates if he should put his pajama bottoms on her. She was in bed now. His bed.

There is an exited shudder that goes down his spine at the thought. He had thought of it. Numerous times in the space of these last few days. In all of the scenarios she was wearing less clothing, though, and definitely no ankle cast… and was awake… Down boy...

Tony lets out a heavy sigh as he finally pulls the covers carefully over the sleeping form making sure that the cast isn’t weighted down by too much of it.
When he is back after shedding the suit and changing into sweatpants and t-shirt, Darcy is once again awake and leaning against the headboard.

“Hi…”

“Hi, yourself…”

“You look taller in the photos…” Darcy cocks her head to the side as she looks him over again.

Tony lets out a dry chuckle and makes his way to sit next to her on the bed, his movements purposely slow as not to startle her. “Yeah, I get that a lot…” She doesn’t object. “How do you feel? They gave you something on the strong side…”

Darcy nods in agreement as he just as slowly and gently lays his left hand on her blanket covered knee.

“And thank Thor for that…”

“How do you feel, Darcy?” at the mention of her name Darcy’s eyes snap to his face from the hand gently squeezing her knee as even in the faint light he can make out the blush that blooms on her cheeks and she pulls the covers up to her neck.

“Yeah… well… Been better… Not that I am not grateful, but where am I?”

“The Stark Tower.” She glares at him and presses lips together as the brows go up in clear sign that she wasn’t being amused and he had to put an effort not to grin.

“I remember getting here, thank you… I also remember that you live with people that have no common sense… or does having one around here counts as a super power?”

“I don’t think anyone expected you to up and deck them, Sweetheart.”

“If I sneakad on any of them, they would have slapped my silly head clean off my shoulders. I dare you to argue that. Clean off. Anyway, did you get my stuff? I would rather not sit here in my underpants…”

“I don’t know where you hid it, but it isn’t here. I looked. Jarvis? Can you please confirm it?”

“Sir has came to the Penthouse half an hour ago an frantically looked for something, Ms Lewis.”

“I object to the use of term frantically, please replace it with attentively. See? I looked. It's not there. “

“You looked in the Penthouse… for my suitcase?”

“Where else was I supposed to look?”

“My apartment?”

“This is your apartment, well, more accurately it's our Penthouse.”

“It's not the same thing.”

“Of course it is.”

“I'm a PA to Jane Foster; I get an apartment next to her it's in the contract!”
“But now you're my girlfriend, it makes sense for you to live in the Penthouse with me. We're a thing now.”

So what you think? Good? Bad? I find it harder to write things from Tony's perspective. I hope you still enjoy it, though! Please Please Please leave a review! It is Much appreciated! =)
Darcy gaped at him in shock. Where did that came from? They were a thing but that was a big step!
“...Living with you?”
“What? That's how it works, doesn’t it?” He was crowding her again… dissecting her with those restless eyes of his.
“Maybe that's how it works in your head. I met you today.” Maybe she should use some kind of visual aid to get her point across? Like a timeline of how a normal relationship usually progresses, except that normal was not a tern usually applied to anyone present. What the fuck did she get herself into?
“Long distance relationship-”
“Is not a thing we have here, Stark. Yes. Hence my suitcase in the apartment next to Jane’s-”
“About that. I did expressively told Happy to get you to the Penthouse.” It was like Stark wasn’t quite sure what he meant himself at the time but now just ran with it too stubborn to back away.
“And I very expressively told him to tell you can shove it… in nicer words, obviously, I wouldn’t normally cuss at Happy. How can someone as nice as him work for you?”
“I pay really well, and he likes me.” A fat paycheque at the end of the month helped deal with a lot of things.
“You better be paying him well, he has been talking you up to me.”
“Really?”
“Don’t get exited, it didn’t really work.” Was Stark under the impression that she didn’t notice how he was gently nudging her to the center of the bed to make space for himself to settle in comfortably next to her? “You look like shit.”
“Thanks. It had been a long few days. So talking me up, huh?”
“Yeah, he said you're not as big a narcissistic megalomaniac as you tend to come across.”
“He knows me well. And I'm not megalomaniac as well as perfectly capable of appreciating beauty in all manner of things besides myself.” He attempted to discreetly pull one of the four pillows she was leaning on. Darcy leaned on them more. “Honeybunny…” He tugged harder.
“What? Oh, right. Ever thought of asking me what I thought of the idea?”
“Of me being alleged narcissistic megalomaniac?”
“Of me moving into the Penthouse with you?”

“Ah… **that.** At some point it crossed my mind, I shall not deny. But as we are officially dating the last couple of months, it seems like a natural progression.”

“We're not dating the last couple of months… Is that the SHIELD thing again?” Will they ever stop fucking her life up? When did it end?

“In a manner of speaking, but mostly no, that was just me. You're my girlfriend…”

“Of the last… what… hour? **And what are you doing?**” He was impossible to reason with. And now he was sitting next to her now, leaning on the headboard while his left hand was behind him slowly pulling on one of the pillows.

“Oh, come on, you don't need all four of those. What will you do, sleep sitting up?”

“None of your damn business how I sleep, Stark.” She didn’t need all of those, but that wasn’t the point. The foot was starting to ache. Darcy shut her eyes closed and clenched her teeth.

“In principle, yes, it is…. Is it the ankle?”

“A little… Listen, Tony….” They were both grown adults surely they could come to a reasonable solution.

“I'm listening.” He was making that innocent face again that was fooling absolutely no one.

“Can you stop being an annoying little shit just for a sec?”

“But that's why you like me.” He used the high school maneuver where he yawned and his right arm is draped around her shoulder as he did that. **Really?**

“Yes, and that's why we need to have an actual conversation, because I'm going to be around for a while, as Jane will live here with Thor-bro, and… and … and **sh*t**… I don't know why I am here, ok? I don’t ‘ get it. I'm an absolute crap with any sort relationships, always been. Congratulations, you got yourself… **are you laughing at me?**” He better not be, Darcy glared daggers at Stark.

“Sorry! Sorry… you're asking for guidance from the wrong person. My total count of relationships that can be measured in time units longer then hours stands at one.”

“Oh, wow… someone on a count lower than mine. I stand on a solid three right now.” How fucked up were they?

“Congratulations, Honeybunny. Wait, are you saying only three other managed to talk their way into your bed? What did you do in college?”

“Two. You are the number three. But I am not counting single dates or Ian. And I'll have you know that I studied and worked part time to make ends meet. I didn’t have time for that shit.”

“I find that hard to believe, not with the way you look, sweetheart.”

“Well, I had a reputation of being a snarky ass bitch, college guys, according to the grapevine, don’t find that a turn on.” And by Thor was that her saving grace…

“What do you know. I had exact same thing said about me.”

“Banged many college guys then?” He laughed and gently kissed her temple as he shifted them both
so they were laying down with her head on his shoulder. She was tired. The oddball of a man was making her both stressed and relaxed at the same time. Why was she letting him do it? It was kind of nice but kind of wrong.

“I was fifteen at the time and no. I don't ride stick. Let’s face it, being the way we are gets you places.”

Darcy hummed in agreement and part of her slowly give up making sense of their situation.

“Yeah, Tony Stark’s bed for example.” She could feel herself crashing again. The jetlag always been a tough thing to get over for Darcy. The extreme excitement of these last few hours wasn't helping either.

“I had in mind working at Stark Tower, but yes, that too. So... you're staying here?”

“I still don’t get why I can’t live in my own apartment and us still be a Thing….” She was so comfy right now... warm and uh... Stark rubbed her back slowly.

“Why would you live there when you can be here, with me?”

“Because I will probably end up killing you in a heat of a moment? Not that any court would ever convict me, but seriously, though, is that really a good idea?”

“What are you talking about? Of course it's good, it's my idea.”

“Modest, aren’t you?” Her head was spinning again, was that really the time to commit to any sort of important decisions? She already agreed to the colossal mistake of being his girlfriend. Seriously? It sounded like the mistake of a lifetime, and she was still trying to wrap her mind around it. Besides she was in bed with him. In his bed. Probably technically it was their bed now... and... oh... other implications that accompanied sharing of said bed finally managed to knock their way into her sleepy brain… Oh… Sharing a bed... Ah fucking hell, she kind of overlooked the fact that other things, besides platonic sharing of sleeping space, were usually done in bed… Like the bed they were in right now…

“You ok? You got a little hot all of a sudden.” Stark, who had been stroking her hair, pressed a palm to her forehead. “Are you running a fever? Did Cho ask you if you're allergic to any medications? You aren’t, right? Darcy? Shit…” he manhandled her onto her back swiftly and was now leaning over her. “Jarvis! Lights!”

“No Lights! Ah fuck…” Light that came wasn’t sharp but it still blinded her momentarily when she had her eyes opened when it flooded the room.

“You all red. Jarvis! Get Cho-!” He was cradling her rapidly heating cheek with one hand as he braced his weight on the other side of her head as he leaned close.

“Jarvis, don't get Cho! Stark, get your hand off of me or I will slap you so hard you will time travel!” With sluggish movements Darcy tried to push him away. Those few calm moments before hands made her power down.

“You're having some kind of a reaction to the painkillers, I swear if Cho!”

“I'm blushing!” After shouting that out Darcy slapped both hands over her face to hide the heated cheeks, that, no doubt, at this point could be seen glowing all the way from space, and rolled onto her side.
“Why are you blushing?” Stark sounded unconvinced and with jerky movements brushing the long brown locks that had fallen over her hands.

“Not your bleeding business!” The angry growl was severely muted by the palms.

“Right. I'm getting you to Cho.” He made a show of trying to get off the bed and Darcy straight away stopped attempting to suffocate herself and grabbed hold of his t-shirt.

“Don’t do that…” This was so awkward. She didn’t know where to put her eyes.

“So what’s up, Honeybuns?”

“I can never figure out if that's insult or a compliment…” Darcy grimaced when adjusting the ankle cast and flopped back onto the pillow to stare at the ceiling. Stark wasn’t having it and was in her field of vision again.

“Always a compliment. So what’s up with the blush?”

“I blush, I can’t help it, ok?” Just please please let it go. He was examining her again and Darcy pressed her lips tightly together praying to Thor for strength. She had a sneaking suspicion that she might be doing that a lot in the near future.

“I am going to guess-”

“Please don’t…”

“-that you were thinking-”

“Which is not a crime, last I checked.”

“About me?”

“No.”

“Us?”

“…No?” Fuck, even to her own ears that sounded more like confirmation than denial.

“Hmmm…” He was so close now the tips of their noses were touching. “I heard that it's considered rude to lie to your boyfriend, Honeybunny.”

“Yeah… Well…” her brain was turning to mush. This isn’t real, her mind supplied feverishly, Darcy Lewis wasn’t in reality in Tony Stark’s bed and the man wasn’t kissing her like he wanted to eat her soul. Things like that didn’t happen to girls like her. It just didn’t. So it was all just an amazingly realistic dream…

Peppermint… and something… scotch maybe? And the goatee tickled as he was laying open mouthed kisses down her neck before stopping and pressing his forehead to her shoulder. They both were breathing hard. And as he had one knee between hers, Darcy could confirm that it wasn’t the only thing hard at the moment. She swallowed thickly, with great effort unclenched her fists and released his t-shirt that she been holding onto for dear life.

“Did I guess right?” He was half laying on her.

“No. You weren’t dry humping me,” why did she keep saying things like that? Darcy wondered. Whenever she was under pressured the filter ceased to exist. “and I am not helping you with that,
besides I heard you are a DIY kind of man.” Stark groans, presses his body to hers, *holy cow the man was fit,* and bites on the exposed flesh of her shoulder, making her yelp in surprise.

“Cheek…”

And he was off of her, marching with determination to what Darcy guessed was the bathroom, before stopping just in front of the door.

“Can I convince you to join me for a shower?”

“Maybe next time…” Darcy did the colossal mistake of propping herself up to get a peak at him just as he turned to give her the most wicked grin she had ever seen. The loose bottoms were doing absolutely nothing to hide the tent in them and it also didn’t help Darcy’s peace of mind that he was already rubbing himself through them.

“I’m holding you to that, Honeybuns.”

Where could she get a brain to mouth filter? She needed to invest into one of those *ASAP.*
Chapter 13

I cackled all the time I was writing this. Darcy/Tony brings out something wicked inside of me. The more reviews you leave the faster the next chapter comes! Help me stay inspired by knowing that there are people enjoying this story! Do I hit the mark? Many thanks to those that review! You keep me going! xxx

Darcy once again dreams of falling. Just this time she isn’t scared. Or was she floating? One way or another she is weightless. The transition from the dream to waking world goes naturally. She eases into her senses as they drip information to her brain. The hearing comes first, someone’s gentle breathing, followed by smell, cologne and motor oil, and touch, her clutching something. So when she finally opens her eyes she isn’t all that surprised by the soft blue glow at her nose level.

“Huh…” she is on her side with the right cheek pressed to her bedfellow’s chest, his hand keeping her close. The throat feels dry like the Sahara desert as she tries to swallow. She lets go of the t-shirt she been clutching and rubs her chin, as despite the dryness in the throat, she is certain she been drooling.

Yep. A wet patch right under where her mouth been.

Stark snorts himself awake as Darcy tries wiggling out from his grip.

“Darce?... What? …” He sounds as sleepy as she feels.

“Need to pee…” invisible hand was squeezing her bladder and its call could no longer be ignored.

“Hmmm…Need help?” Stark sounded like it was a rhetorical question and Darcy just shrugged it off not even bothering to reply; besides the man started snoring again almost instantly. She roughly estimated the distance to the bathroom and decided she could hop it on one foot easily enough. She didn’t need Stark to hold her hand while she took a piss, thank you very much.

She was sure of it up until she made it half way. The bathroom was clearly further then it looked, the muscles in her good ankle were beginning to complain and at one point she had no other choice but to carefully go on her knees and then all fours before she fell over and injured herself more. To add insult to the injury she could no longer hear the light snoring from the bed and that indicated that the other occupant of the room must have been awake again. Darcy glanced over her shoulder. Yep. Stark was sitting on the edge of the bed watching her with an intrigued face.
“You gonna help me or what?” This was humiliating. She was on all fours in her underwear and a t-shirt with her back to him.

“You are full of piss and vinegar, you know that?”

“And you are full of shit, but I am not calling you out on that. Now help me up.”

“I was kind of wondering…” Stark was by her side and gently helped her up by wrapping his left arm round her midriff.

“Do you have to? I think I suffered enough for this day…”

“…Should I take it personally that your underwear has Happy’s face on them? Because I feel like I should take it personally.”

“Is that the one I’m wearing? Janey got them for me this Christmas. How wicked are they? They are officially my favorite present ever. Because how cool is Happy Hogan?” She couldn’t help but gush.

“Yes, very cool. I like the guy. Just not enough to have him looking back at me when my girl bends over.”

“So don’t look. But I kind of get what you are saying.” Darcy conceded after mulling it over as they slowly entered the bathroom. “I imagine when I bend over and it stretches over my backside it doesn’t look as good. Image gets deformed and all that. Don’t worry, I have a pair of thongs that got his face on the front, I’ll wear them next.”

“This stick and carrot game you are playing isn’t as fun as you think it is, Shortstack. On unrelated topic is that thing in your suitcase?”

“Of course. Janey knows they are my favorite, it must be there, she packed for me, and apart from that it is anyone’s guess what is inside. I have to wash it by hand so the pictures wouldn’t fade, you know. Just FYI, I am not sure who does the laundry around here. Not you, I imagine.” Stark snorts at that.

“Not me. No. What with you and Happy anyway? Here… careful the toilet is right behind you. Can you stand on your own? Do you need help?” Darcy carefully put a little weight on the bad ankle to keep her balance. Yep, she can manage as much right now.

“I am good.”

“You sure? Because I can…” His attempt at casual concern was admirable. Darcy slapped his hand as soon as it landed on the curve of her hip and index finger slipped under the waistband of her boxers.

“Out, Stark.”

“I am being helpful.” It would have been more convincing if he didn’t lick his lips as he said that and didn’t keep glancing at her chest. It was a major mistake to allow him to lay his paws on the goods earlier no matter how briefly.

“That is not how it is called. Get out and wait outside.”

“Why?”

“Because I will not have you watching me take a piss. That’s why.”
“I am not going to look.”

“Out, Tony.”

“Only because you insist…”

“I insist.”

Having a boyfriend was a bleeding hard work, Darcy concluded as the door closed after Tony. She lowered her boxers and sat down already imagining the abdominal muscles loosen and the relief coming…

“Son of a Bitch!” Darcy shrieked in surprise as instead of her bottom landing comfortably on the seat it went lower and was encased by the cold ceramic ring of the toilet. *She fell into the toilet.* Her bare bottom was in the toilet. Darcy screeched again, her hands and feet flailing, as she tried to get herself out and that was how a panicked Tony Stark found her as he burst into the bathroom after hearing her screams.

“Darcy?!... The fuck?”

“You! You left the toilet seat up! You fuck! Come here, so I can fucking kill you! *Help me!*”

“Didn’t you look? Why didn’t you look?!”

“Because I have a wanker of a boyfriend! That’s why! You said it was fucking behind me! I could feel it fucking behind me! The lights are fucking dimmed and I got no glasses on, you shit! *I am stuck!*... *Are you laughing?! You are laughing! You are so dead!*”

“I am not! I am not laughing at you… I’m not… *oh god…*” He was cracking up as he very carefully approached the raging woman. “Honeybunny, now… *You need to calm down.*”

Telling Darcy to calm down worked as well as an attempt to baptize a cat.

“Don’t you fucking *Honeybunny* me, Stark! Help me!” Darcy glared at the approaching man. She was going to kill him, he was so dead. She will toss his lifeless body out the window and call it an accident, he isn’t able activate the remote for calling the suit if he was unconscious, right? *Splat!* Splat on the sidewalk below! “Do not look!”

“How can I help you if don’t look? *Stop trying to hit me,* you won’t be able to stand on your own. Darcy, you will smash the cast! *Stop that. You will hurt yourself.*”

“It’s your fault!”

“In my defense…” The look she gave Stark was heated enough to burn him to ashes. “I shall not be leaving the toilet seat up again. Ever. Happy?”

“I bet Happy puts the toilet seat down…” She growled as Stark wrapped his arms around her and pulled. “Just hold me! I … I have no panties on.” Darcy couldn’t stand alone and as she stood pressed to Stark and her hands wrapped around his neck, it was quite clear that she will not be able to reach her boxers that were well below her knees now.

“Did you pee?”

“What? I… No. For fucks sake…” She felt Stark reach behind.

“The seat is down now.”
Darcy groaned into his neck. She really desperately needed to pee now…

“I swear to Thor, Tony, that hand lands on my bum and I will knee you.”

“That is unwarranted. You are sending mixed signals, I can’t be held responsible when you are half naked in my arms!” Both of his hands were pressed flat to the small of her back. “You have incredibly smooth skin, sweetheart.”

“Oh God… Right… I need to pee now. Close your eyes…” The dam was gonna burst on her any moment.

“I am totally not seeing the point in…”

“Close your damn eyes, Stark! Now slowly… yeah… like that… hold me… I’m good, let go…. Ohhh sweet Jesus on a cracker…” It felt so damn good that Darcy wanted to cry. Even Stark still standing right in front of her, watching, the wanker, couldn’t make her stop. Yanking the t-shirt as low as possible over her thighs Darcy sat there with her eyes closed until it stopped. The relief was immeasurable and she could just stay like this forever…

“Not that I am suggesting that we should do this again, but I think I just got a new kink.” Darcy’s eyes snapped open.

“Well, that makes one of us!” She was going to give him piece of her mind about privacy and just how much she valued it, but her eyes never made it to his face as she stared right in front of her. Just at her eye level was Stark’s bulging boxers. It was a rather sizable tent. “The hell are you, the energizer bunny?”

“I am a man with a very healthy appetite, speaking of which, it is technically the next time….”

“Don’t even think about it, count yourself fortunate that you copped a feel earlier, keep pushing and you will be sleeping on the sofa tonight.”

“You wouldn’t do that to me, Honeybunny.”

“Wanna bet?”

Xxx The Common Kitchen earlier in the day xxx

It was one of those times when having the super serum in your system was a good thing, thought Steve, as the healing had him conscious again no longer then after a couple of minutes. There was still unpleasant spasming in the muscles of his upper body.

‘Damn, that taser had some kick.’

“Are you able to stand up, Captain Rogers?” Stark’s security chief was at his side.

“I’m ok, Mr Hogan. ” Clint will never let him live it down. Where was the man by the way?

“Honeybunny, I know Barton flips your bitch switch, but you cannot go round the Tower tasing the Avengers.”

‘What?’ Steve sits up sharply to see Iron Man crouching next to a tearful Ms Lewis. What happened…?
Natasha is on her back on the floor not far from Stark and the girl and… Was that Clint? Steve felt his jaw go lax. Did she...? Did she take the three of them down..?

“Ah! Ah! Ah!” there is a wet hiccupsing sound and Steve’s attention snaps to the woman as Stark speaks to her. “Hey... Hey... sweetheart. You can have that back... later... When you are not likely to try and kill me with it.”

She can have that back later? She should not have it on her to begin with. Steve swallows a nervous laugh as he looks at Happy who just shrugs like it was no big deal.

“So, like, never?” She was a cheeky little thing he was going to give her that.

Mongoose... no other way about that... Was it the third time she tased Clint? How was that even possible? Captain America couldn’t shake off the disbelief as he watched Stark with the girl. She was small. Petite little thing... with ... well not petite everywhere. Happy Hogan rather pointedly cleared his throat and Steve felt his cheeks heat up at being caught so blatantly staring.

“So how is the foot, Cinderella?”

“It is ...ok... oh ouch! Watch that. Oh Thor... Ok... Ok... That is not good...” At that seeing the injury on the now looking rather pale and sick Ms Lewis, Happy left his side immediately like being propelled by an invisible force.

“Don’t look, Sweetheart. I got you; the good doctor will give you some good drugs for the pain...” Stark sounded uncharacteristically gentle. It was a rather startling to watch the tenderness on the other man’s face as he gathered her in his arms.

“Happy? Next time, when I say to go to Medical, you fucking get her there. ” Was Ms Lewis already injured when they found her sleeping?

“It wasn’t that bad, Tony, swear to god... She didn’t want...” Steve can’t see their faces anymore from where he sits and it didn’t look like the time to disturb the conversation.

“Don’t be mad at him... I didn’t want to go.” Was that really the woman that pulled the taser on him?

“She is injured. She doesn’t get to decide, Happy. I left you in charge. Jarvis! Let Cho know I need her in Exam Room 3.”

And with those words Stark swiftly exits the common kitchen leaving the two men behind.

“I should have bloody done that.” Happy is miserable as he looks at Steve who clears his throat.

“I have a feeling that Ms Lewis is not a person that is easily persuaded.” Or should be in a possession of any weapon.

“Gods, no, she isn’t. She really isn’t. Should we help these two onto the sofa? It usually takes Barton... around half an hour to come about? I imagine Agent Romanov will take less...” Happy is still looking in the direction where his boss went as he speaks.

It takes ten minutes for Natasha to wake up after Steve puts her on the sofa. He knows she is awake only because he saw when the redhead tensed and opened her eyes, before closing them again and remaining immobile.

“How did she take you down?” Steve says out loud, because when the prongs has hit him in the
neck, which he decide after watching his friends sleep, was a serious skill, both Barton and Romanov were till standing. “She tased Clint a third time by the way.”

At that the laugh finally bursts out from him. *They got tased.* Three Avengers. The Earth’s Mightiest Heroes taken down by a sleepy PA that looked like a small wet puppy with a *sprained ankle*. He has his face in his hands and he can’t stop laughing until he is grabbed by one wrist and gets a slap so hard that his ears ring.

“Cut that out, Rogers.” Natasha Romanov doesn’t look even remotely humored.

“You know what else? She has a sprained, or going by the color, a broken ankle.” This time Romanov looks like she is a very close to snapping his neck.

“What?”

*Broken ankle. She is what? 5ft 100lb soaking wet? Took the three of us down?”* Steve laughs so hard he wheezes he can’t even bring himself to care that Natasha is looking ready to lay him to rest where he sits.

“She tossed me…”

“She what? Over her shoulder? You?” Steve was making a great effort to speak between bursts of laughter.

“As I tried to protect an idiot that couldn’t keep his voice down! *Yes.*”

“If it makes you feel any better she tased Thor too, which up until now I honestly thought was a joke. Clint leads with three hits, though.” It was not making her feel any better. How something like that could have happened? *The girl looked harmless.* Out cold like that on the counter. Darcy Lewis was Thor’s Lighting Sister, the man always spoke about her like the woman farted unicorn dust and pissed kindness!

“Fuck the two of you, ok?” An angry voice joined the conversation from one of the sofa’s. The statement emphasized by a one finger salute that they could see rising over the back of the said sofa. “You could not keep your fucking mouth shut, could you Rogers? Enjoyed getting tased? Hope she got you in the bollocks.”

“The neck, actually.” He rubs the spot carefully, the marks left by the prongs already gone.

“Didn’t she realize who she was tasing?” Natasha was next to the archer in a flash.

“She didn’t have her glasses on. Didn’t properly recognize me until she put them on…”

“Are you saying that *she is half blind? Half blind Poli Scie PA with a broken ankle took us down?*” Natasha Romanov refused to believe her own ears. She could not have dropped her guard that bloody low.

“Yeah?... Sounds about right…”

She is pretty sure Steve’s laughter was heard by the entire Tower.
So what you think, peeps? Good? Bad? Let me know! leave a comment! Much appreciated in advance!:=)
Chapter 14

Thank you for all the comments that you peeps left! It was much appreciated =) . After cracking myself up writing the previous chapter I was taken hostage by a random more drama inclined plot bunny . So below is the result. No plot twists today, that will be coming in the following chapters. Not all chapters can be a laugh riot, but I hope you will enjoy anyway! Let me know what you think!

Chapter 14

Tony Stark was under the impression that he could get away with things just because he was Tony Stark. He had the guts to bet against her. Well, he was in for an unpleasant surprise, Darcy mused as she listened to the man talking on the other side of the bedroom door for the last hour. Physics mainly with a dash of… well a big dash of mechanics. Amateur. She been with Jane ‘never stops talking science’ Foster for the last five years. Trying to wear her down? Not bloody likely. Science was like a rash; even she picked it up due to the close proximity and long exposure. Did Jane pack her Engineering for Dummies? She really needed to finish that sometime soon to be able to move on with her research… Darcy yawned and snuggled into the warm cocoon. Whatever Stark paid for this bed it was well worth it.

Sometime around wee hours of the morning she woke up to the feeling of being spooned.

“Please don’t kick me out.” A kiss is pressed just behind her ear; Darcy hums in her sleepy state too tired to argue. “I have seen the errors of my ways… I am never betting against you again, Honeybuns.”

“Damn straight…”

“There are some major problems with the new StarkPhone parts manufactured in South Korea, the factory claims we supplied incorrect schematics… which is ridiculous. I personally designed the internal parts… we are not footing the bill… You know what? I bet they used the wrong leads. I just know it. They were supposed to manufacture those on site…” Darcy wasn’t really listening as she watched her boyfriend get ready with bleary eyes and made a mistake of sipping the coffee, he brought her to bed as an apology for waking her, as he explained why he was not going to be around for a couple of days, she chocked down one sip. That stuff was dynamite. You could spread it on bread. She carefully put the mug on the bedside table. Yeah, she wasn’t aiming to have heart palpitations first thing in the morning.
Tony Stark pulled his suit jacket on and fixed his hair in the mirror for the hundredth time. How can someone look this hot first thing in the morning? He looked like he was about to go for a cover photo shoot.

“How do I look?”

“Like a man that woke his girlfriend way too early because he needed an ear to bitch to. You look great, Tony.”

“You sure I don’t need to put more product? And it is 9am.” That man had way too much in already, but who was she to ruin his morning?

“On a day that I don’t have to work it is way too early. I am taking my mental health day off. Wait… I am on sick leave anyway… Jane would wholly… Oh God, Jane. Where is my phone?” Darcy felt the blood in her veins turn to ice. 9am plus 5 hours time difference… equaled to a very dead Darcy Lewis if she wasn’t going to call her boss-lady pronto.

“Call her later, Darce. Get some sleep… How is the ankle?”

“Hurting. Seriously, Tony, I need my mobile… Jane will kill me. I promised I will call in the morning.”

“It is morning.”

“Not in London it isn’t… I am not saying she that she called me, but she will sure remember the fact when I call up. Where did I have it last?” Was it that Med Room? No… The new apartment that she wasn’t going to live in? The Kitchen?

“Jarvis! Please analyze the available footage of Darcy in the Tower. Where she had last been spotted with her StarkPhone?”

“IPhone.”

“I’m sorry.”

“I don’t have a StarkPhone.” Stark gives her a puzzled look.

“That is not possible. I gave Point Break two to give to his ladies for Christmas. Ladies being you and Foster.”

“Oh, is that what it was?”

“What do you mean is that what it was? It was the newest StarkPhone prototypes that will be coming to the masses this spring, if the suppliers aren’t going to fuck something else up.”

“Yeah, that was sweet of you, if you actually used that brain of yours and mailed them to us instead of giving it to a man that flies MagicHammerAirTM, I am not sure if you noticed, but he likes to call forth lighting as he travels long distances, you know, to keep himself amused if he isn’t traveling with anyone in tow, and said lighting plus electronic devices don’t go hand in hand. We got two molded pieces of plastic that were still smoking upon landing. But I guess, that is the thought that counts…Not to look a gift horse in the mouth, but do you offer exchanges by any chance?”

“Jarvis! I need two latest StarkPhone prototypes to be sent from the R&D to the Penthouse immediately, via whoever is on security detail today. Why didn’t Thor tell me they got ruined? I would have sent the replacement!”
“He left for Asgard the next day. Urgent princely business and stuff. We donated the ton of food I had prepared for Christmas to the homeless shelter, so that wasn’t a total loss. For the shit I did to keep Jane’s mind of the fact that her plans of spending romantic holiday with her intergalactic squeeze went bust, I should get a payrise.”

“Out of curiosity how much is Foster paying you? Because there is an opening of a PA for a real nice guy in the R&D…”

“Well…” Darcy wasn’t all that keen on exploring this particular topic with him.

“The pay is real good and it comes with great benefits package. So how much is she paying you? Her research is funded by university, it can’t be much. You been living in London lately don’t need to convert, lay it on me in pounds.”

“Actually the currency doesn’t really matter… the answer will be the same.”

“*She is not paying you?*” Stark looked at her like she just said that Jane was paying her in sexual favors. “You are with her how long?”

“I started as an Intern, which is a not paid position, that was a year. There was a break when I finished the last semester and graduated then Jane offered …”

“It has been over 5 years since New Mexico, *are you saying Foster has never paid you?*”

“I divide the grant money to cover our expenses and it isn’t that b…”

“Why are you working for her?” Stark had a problem with grasping the concept of a person doing an unpaid work, which didn’t *really* apply to her…

“Because I like Jane and she treats me like I have a brain, and the other reason being that SHIELD likes to fuck my life, Coulson wanted me to work for them, Admin support or whatever, due to the NDAs guess who can’t get a job unless Thugs United approve it? *Me.* ” The positions that she could take, and Thugs would approve, were all dead end jobs. What was the point when with Jane she did actual science and she had things coming to her on the horizon?

“Does Point Break know about it?”

“He thinks Jane pays me. I mean, he knows we get money for Jane’s research and we live on it. He isn’t a fan of me living or working apart from Jane…”

“That can’t be right… You *refused* the money for the Photos.”

“Yes, I refused. I am out of money not dignity! The fuck you take me for?” Darcy snarled at him daring to say anything else on *that* topic.

“Sir, Ms Lewis, apologies for the interruption, but Mr Hogan would like to remind you that the flight is scheduled to leave shortly and you still need to reach it.” The smooth voice of the AI did nothing to break the tension that was now hanging in the air.

“Tell him to reschedule the flight in an hour.”

“Sir, the pilot…”

“Is working for me, and will fly when it suits me. Tell Happy it has been postponed.”

“Very well, Sir.”
“You don’t have to…” Darcy shifts uncomfortably under the covers. What she, an unpaid PA, doing here with one of world’s richest men?

“Stop that.”

“What?” Darcy startles at the sharp tone as Tony sits on the bed next to her. He looks angry.

“What the hell you are thinking right now. Stop it. I have seen this look on you, you are about to try and kick me to the curb. You get all shift and distant. I go now out that door without us finishing this and when I come back I will not find you here.”

He was not wrong there.

“I just…”

“You see, Sweetheart, you signed up for this, few times over, I might add, you in this for the long haul now. This whole Foster business? You were sorting everything for her and you weren’t getting paid. That’s fine. I’m not upset. You don’t care about money, which is great. You know what we are going to do? I am leaving you with my credit card and… Ah! Ah! Ah!.. Let me finish. And when I am back I want that walk in closet,” he nods to the other side of the room, “I want the space reserved for you be stuffed full upon my return. All and any of the electronics, naturally, are going to be supplied by moi. Maybe something, like art, for the Penthouse? You are living here now so that is only reasonable you add your mark to it, pending my approval, since I live here too.”

“I am not just going out and just splashing out money!” How the hell did the conversation turn to this? This was getting way out of hand.

“Why not?”

“It’s not mine.”

“Neither was Foster’s grant money that she had you to manage.”

“That was different.”

“How so? I get my income from the SI and various other investments. Which is far more then you can imagine. You were with Foster and you managed on the budget given, now you are with me and there is a new budget that you have no excuse not to adapt to. It comes with the territory, Darcy. Go wild. I expect a dent in this.”

Black Amex was pushed into her hand. A black unlimited spend card that had Tony Stark’s name on it, she would need to buy a jet, an entire fleet of them, to make a scratch on that.

“Tony, listen, Jane will be paying me now…”

“Will she? Marvelous. Since we both know how much she will be getting, your pay will be nowhere near the expenditure you will have now.”

“Can we rewind this conversation and I will pretend that am getting paid?”

“No.”
SO what you think? Good? Bad? Let me know! A comment will be much appreciated as always=) They keep me going on this snark fest that is Darcy/Tony
Chapter 15

So yeah, it was supposed to be a short chapter, but it didn't happen, hope it makes sense as it is late and I am way tired. My muse is leading me in circles lately. There will be plot twists at one point, but I get sidetracked on the way there. Thank you to all those lovely people that left their comments, I hope you will enjoy the new chapter!

Anthony Stark has left the building to go for an emergency meeting in Seoul leaving one Darcy Lewis to ponder her life and get ready what was going to be a busy day for her, if she were to follow the man’s instructions.

Darcy looked at the black card on the bedside table as she got a grip with walking on crutches, which Tony had brought up for her earlier from the good doctor.

The decision could wait. According to Jarvis her phone was in the kitchen.

‘Uhhh…’ Darcy sniffed her armpit. While she didn’t yet stink she felt yucky. A lot happened since her last shower, besides after travel she always felt like she needed a good soak and she didn’t yet have one since landing yesterday.

The suitcase was still in the other apartment and no one brought her spare clothes. Stark was useless if anyone asked her. She will have to bother Happy after he comes back from seeing Tony to the jet. Why did Happy have to go with him anyway? Happy Hogan was the Head of Security for SI not his chauffeur.

There was no way she could manage dragging her overfilled suitcase and walk with crutches at the same time. ‘What a pain.’ The day wasn’t shaping to be a good one so far.

“Good Morning, Ms Lewis. There is Ms Velasquez, from the security, at the door. She has brought the StarkPhones that Sir has requested; I believe those are for you.” Jarvis voice startles her a little, but Darcy is once again amazed at the AI’s smooth voice. While Jarvis was a cool dude Darcy wasn’t overly keen on seeing people before she takes a shower and has breakfast, or at the very least finds some clothes to put over what she was wearing right now, which was a t-shirt and boxers.

“Give me a minute, Jarvis. Please let Ms Velasquez know that I will be with her shortly?" “It is done, Ms Lewis.”
'There should be a law somewhere, making it illegal to bother someone before they had coffee.' she thought while pulling on Stark’s dressing gown in the bathroom and combing her hair with fingers before giving up and tying it up in a bun. Washing her face again didn’t help either. She looked like a right mess. Well, Stark had no problem kissing her on his way out; Darcy felt a blush rise to her cheeks at the memory. Yeah, he was all up for it, alright, not that he got anything else besides a rather modest kiss, but as it was with the man it didn’t stop him from asking about the possibility. Cheeky bastard. But *damn* he looked good in a suit. What the hell was she doing with him?

“Alright. Jarvis, *oh wow*…” Darcy knew she was in the Penthouse of the Stark Tower, but being not really awake at the time when Tony carried her to the bedroom she had no idea how it looked, the bedroom was great and the bathroom was awesome, but this… Darcy stopped and stared at the view. Yeah, that was the definition of a prime estate. The space alone could probably fit Jane mom’s house three times possibly more. This was a state of art apartment and no mistake.

“Ms Lewis? Should I let Ms Velasquez in?”

“Damn it… I mean, yeah, let her in.” Darcy was still staring at the view when someone cleared their throat and she snapped her out of her thoughts.

An amazon woman was standing not far from her. Darcy just started at her for a long minute, the woman might as well have been from Asgard, the land of people with ridiculous amount of muscles and blond hair, bleached in this case, though, and she was what? Six feet five? More? *Damn it,* was there some magic pill she didn’t take as a child? Everyone seemed to be taller than her.

“Mr Stark asked for these to be sent over?” The woman wasn’t sure what to make of Darcy either. The two sleek black boxes with SI logo in shining silver and gold on them were in her right hand.

“Oh, great, those are for me.”

“Mr Stark asked for them…” Darcy cocked her head to the side at the unsure tone of the woman, it clearly implied that it was not for her, but at the same time the amazon didn’t want to be rude and say it out loud.

“Jarvis, back me up.”

“Ms Velasquez, please be so kind and hand the devices over to Ms Lewis.” You could always count on Jarvis.

“Heard that? I’m cool. Can I please have those… how do you suggest I carry them and walk on crutches? Please put them on that little table, much appreciated. Ms Velasquez… Not to be rude, but what is your first name?”

“Rosie, Ms Lewis.”

‘*A bit of a hit and miss by the parents there*…’

“That is a lovely name,” the woman shrugged and kept watching her as if to figure out who the hell the little mess on crutches in front of her was? “At least they didn’t name you Darcy. Which is, FYI, a guy’s name.”

“At least no one has mistaken you for one when they see you in person.”

“No, but they all seem to think that being Handy McGrabby with me is ok, sole reason being that I got large tits, being short doesn’t help either. Not that anyone ever got away with it, but still. Don’t complain, I need to carry my taser to even the odds and it only has, like, three charges.”
“You ever actually tased anyone?” The disbelief wasn’t even hidden and Darcy scowled at the woman.

“Yes. Numerous times…”

“On purpose?”

“For the love of… Listen, Rosie, I haven’t yet had coffee, stuff that Tony brewed earlier is only fit to be used as jet fuel and a murder weapon. Jarvis? Where is the kitchen in this place, I need coffee and food… want a coffee, Rosie? As a thank you for taking the trouble and bringing the phones up to me.”

“No, I am good…” The hopeful look on the woman’s face went in direct contradiction to her words. “I mean, if that is not too much trouble… The coffee machine on our floor went bust last week, still waiting for it to be repaired, maintenance doesn’t prioritize us… We do regular runs to Starbucks, but…”

Darcy looked at her horror-struck. “Blasphemy. Starbucks is shit and expensive shit at that. No coffee at work for a week? The hell Stark doing? I mean you guys work nights too, right?”

“I don’t think that Mr Stark runs the repairs around here himself…”

“The kitchen will be on your right if you just keep walking straight, Ms Lewis.”

“Thanks a million, Jarvis. You are, so far, the highlight of my day.”

“You are most welcome, Ms Lewis.”

“Back to the coffee, Rosie, please tell me it is ok to call you Rosie, that all Ms business gets on my tits if I have to do it before I get coffee… And maybe it is a good thing, you don’t want to taste the stuff he calls coffee…”

“Do you have take away cup? I don’t want to be away for too long, my supervisor probably not gonna like it.”

“Rosie, you are on SI security you are doing your job by being here, if anyone complains send them my way.” And she will be sure to throw those head first at Stark and let him deal with that.

Darcy liked Rosie. The amazon woman helped her to find cling film and wrap it round her cast so it wouldn’t get wet in the shower. Waited outside the bathroom while she took the shower, as Darcy was a little unstable on her feet, as a precaution. Reached the items from the top shelf so she could cook breakfast.

If Rosie was around as her security detail she could deal with that. She was totally pitching Rosie to Happy.

After coffee, shower and breakfast in that order, Darcy was ready to face the day. It would have helped if she didn’t have to pinch Tony’s T-shirt and sweat pants, which legs she had to roll up and wear one of his slippers. No makeup. At least she had a selection of facial creams, ‘Really, Tony? No
one needs that many,’ in the bathroom to choose from. To say it plainly, Darcy was not a sight for sore eyes as she embarked on the quest to retrieve her mobile.

The common kitchen thankfully was empty.

“Oh… I can’t believe I forgot about the food.” Darcy spoke out to no one in particular. There was nothing on the hob or on the counters. Ok. Someone was considerate enough to put it in the fridge. ‘I bet it was Happy. I can give him the pie when he comes back…’ looks at the crutches. ‘Or I will leave it and he picks it up himself… yeah, I will do that. I am not killing myself over a pie… even for you, Happy… I’m sorry… it still hurts when I walk…’

The bread and pie probably was in one of the cupboards.

The soup was not in the fridge.

Darcy took a deep breath. Ok…

There was no fresh baked bread or a cherry pie on any of the shelves that she could reach.

Darcy continued breathing deeply. Alright…

There were still the upper shelves. That she probably should not attempt to reach as she would have to get on high stool to get on the counter. Not a bright idea having in mind she had a foot in a cast…

“Jarvis… where is my phone? I can’t see it anywhere…” It better be somewhere.

“Clint put it on the top shelf on the left.”

Darcy knows that she should be somewhat on guard as she turns around to find a redhead sitting across the counter watching her. But there is one problem, Darcy Lewis never did what she should do when she was angry.

“Oh? Did he now?...” Darcy looks at cupboards again, they were not designed with vertically challenged people in mind, and grinds her teeth. “Fucking Cupid…” Her foot hurts, the journey here from the Penthouse was long and painful. She slowly turns back to the woman. “Can you… please… get that for me? I am not in a fit state to do so myself…” Darcy motions to the crutches that were propped next to her.

The woman, Black Widow, the Black Widow that Darcy tased by pure chance last night, was watching her like one watches ants under the magnifying glass. They stared at each other for a while.

“I don’t know… Should I?”

Darcy clenches her jaw till it hurts. So many things on her tongue right now, so fucking many things to say to that… but she doesn’t. The face of a woman in front of her is mostly blank, like a passive mask waiting for the role it will be needed for to be announced. It was much more frightening than any face twisted in rage that Darcy had ever seen. She really should take heed and be careful, probably fall to her knees, cry and ask for forgiveness for the grave transgression committed… but she can’t, she is not at fault, there is thin film of anger, the righteous indignation that slowly covers her brain and Darcy’s fingers dig into the leather on the high stool she is leaning on as she takes another deep breath. She shifts on her feet so they are both planted firmly, pain shoots through the bad ankle immediately, but she ignores it as she braces, pulls and rolls the heavy stool closer to the counter. It takes couple of moves, but she gets it there. This feels awfully lot like a test, is a fleeting thought inside Darcy’s head before she shakes it off.
The Black Widow is watching her, Darcy doesn’t need to look, she can feel the weight of it on the back of her neck, like a tip of a blade before it strikes, it doesn’t touch you yet, but you can feel the cold deadly smoothness like a kiss of a cruel lover.

There is no rush, Darcy reminds herself, over and over again, she was already being recklessly stupid by doing what she was doing. She isn’t sure how long it takes for her to get on the counter, but she is there on all fours opening the door of the cupboard she needs and standing up, slowly, very slowly, balance was the key, there was no knowing if the build in shelves, or the doors would be able to support her weight if she were to slip or lose her balance, so she assumes that they wouldn’t.

The phone is there. On the shelf. Fucking Cupid… she will get him for this even if it will be the last thing she will do…

With the phone secured in her bra she takes on the challenge of getting back down, which everyone knows is harder than getting yourself up, with the same slow precision.

When she finally has her feet securely on the ground, Darcy curses herself as she rolls the stool back in place and sits down on it when she is done. The t-shirt is stuck to her sweaty skin, her foot is on fire, her common sense is on not speaking terms with her brain for allowing something like this to happen.

Darcy wipes the sweat from her upper lip with a back of her palm. The Black Widow is still watching her and still being creepy as fuck.

“Out of curiosity, did the soup get spoiled because it wasn’t put in the fridge?”

The redhead rests her chin on her linked fingers.

“No.”

“The pie? It was for someone, you know. Was it at least good? It was the first time I put port in the cherries.” Darcy can not stop herself now.

“I don’t know, there wasn’t any left by the time I got round to it. You should ask Steve.”

“Steve, huh? I thought people back in the day knew they should ask before eating someone’s food. Or at least not scare the living daylights out of the person whose food they shamelessly ate…”

“It wasn’t intentional.”

“Which part?” Darcy ignores the non blinking stare she keeps getting whenever she asks a question.

“Startling you.” That sounded like a most unapologetic near apology ever. Darcy ignored it.

“And eating everything? Because I assume it was before… or was it after?… because that would have been petty.”

“Before.” The answers are short and clipped, and the way the Widow insisted on keeping the eye contact was making Darcy want to run in fear, hide and cry for a week. So naturally she steam rolled ahead.

“Why no one asked? I have a thing about a bunch of strangers helping themselves to my food, while
“I sleep.”

“Captain America, Hawkeye and Black Widow.” And as if Darcy needed a reminder at the last bit the woman smiles, and wasn’t that the scariest thing ever.

“My point exactly, two strangers and Cupid.”

“Clint said you wouldn’t share.” That was a low blow and Darcy blinked in surprise.

“Clint got tased three times by yours truly, so maybe he isn’t exactly the leading expert on all things Darcy for you to listen to? And for the record, I always share, unless you are being a dick to me on purpose, in which case, screw you.”

“You tased us.”

“You know, Cupid being such an expert should have told you not to sneak on me. Do you think that just because I don’t wear a kick ass leather cat suit I am not entitled to having issues?”

“You… tased us.”

“I don’t know you from Adam. I know of you, I don’t know you. Given, Thor-bro thinks highly of you, I will not deny.”

“You have seen us on TV.”

“I have seen all bunch of SHIELD people on TV too, guess what? None of them invited to dinner either. Listen, the whole world saving business you do is great, I live in this world I am very much for it being saved. But that does not at any point excuse what you have done. You are not special to me. Thor-bro can eat whatever I cook and I will be fine with that, Jane too, but since I have to hover over her to make sure she eats, that is so unlikely. Well, and Eric, but he is excused indefinitely due to reasons… Stark got himself a trail run, I still cannot comprehend how that happened… Oh! And Happy, because he can do no wrong. By the way the pie was for him. You owe me a pie, Lady.” That was the craziest thing that had ever left her mouth.

“I never touched it.”

“You never stopped good old Captain America from eating it either…”

“He was going to pay for it.”

Darcy makes a show of looking over the counter, the breakfast bar, the room in general.

“Funny that, I am not seeing it. How is he going to do it? Bank transfer? And you? I imagine you had some soup?”

“You threw me and tased me…” Darcy was beginning to think that her absolute fail to be anything close to remorseful was rattling the redhead’s chain something bad.

“I know, right? I need to decide what to get Sif for teaching me that. I probably will never be able to repeat it, but… we have gotten awfully of topic here.” Darcy was getting tired of the dance they were doing. “You and your buddies, snuck up on me, ate my food, scared the shit out of me for no reason and now we sit here and you keep telling me that I tased you. Yes, I remember. I saw you on that floor and I had my entire life flash before my eyes. I have never been so fucking scared in my life. You can kill me with a paperclip probably and make it look like an accident … I got so lucky with my moves yesterday that it is fucking unreal… Is that what you wanted to hear?” Will the
Widow say something finally?

“Your family must be proud of you.” The tone of voice is cool.

“They wouldn’t spit on me if I were on fire, so if this is somehow a veiled threat, go ahead and knock yourself out, but let me tell you one thing, if you move a finger against Jane, Thor, Eric … or Tony, I can’t believe I’m including him… I have no super powers, no physical strength, no genius brain, no money and standing in society or incredible connections… I don’t care how fucking invincible you are, Black Widow, you make a move against me or mine and I will find a way to tear your fucking world down around you.”

Darcy sits back down after hissing the last bit out. She was about to die and she didn’t care. They sit there opposite one another until Darcy rises sharply and extends her hand across the bar.

“Darcy Lewis.” Her hand is cold, clammy and is shaking so badly it looks like she is waving it. But Darcy takes a couple of breaths and steadies herself. She stands there like a total idiot for far longer then would generally be acceptable until the other woman stands up and grasps her hand in a handshake that is bone crushing.

“Natasha Romanov. I do not appreciate being tased.”

“And I don’t appreciate when people assume shit about me.” The grip is just this side of painful and Darcy swallows a whimper.

“It was a good soup.” Natasha lets go of her hand and sits down.

“Glad to hear that, you still own me a pie.” The Black Widow smiles, this time it actually reaches her eyes. “No, Natasha. Seriously. I promised Happy a pie. And since I am partly disabled you are going to help me. Right… I just need to make a call and we shall start.”

Jane doesn’t pick up. Darcy sits by the bar with the nearly dead phone in hand watching Black Widow watch her. No answer.

“Hey, Janey. It’s me, the person that wasn’t there to drag you home from work as usual at a reasonable hour. I bet you are still at work, from yesterday. I hope you are packing it up because here is the dream lab waiting for you. There is actually space for everything. If you fail to pack I am having Tony, yes, I call him Tony, hire someone to pack it up for you. I want photos of stuff unplugged and packed as evidence. I will be changing phones so it will probably be offline for awhile. I will call you again. Go home and sleep. Kisses. Bye. ”

Natasha Romanov is still watching her.

“Clint said you hacked SHIELD.”

“I did not hack SHIELD, and Cupid being tased multiple times for being a dick should keep his trap shut.” Darcy couldn’t help but go instantly on defense at the mention of SHIELD and what it entitled.

“With an old laptop and no resources…” The implication is there and Darcy's eyes go round.

“Oh, no. I am not going to war with SHIELD, thank you very much, besides don’t you work for them? You can get into their system no problem… Can you please get me the large bowl and the sugar.” Romanov stares at her. “Because of you three schmucks my ankle is in the cast. Yes, you are helping me make a pie, I have promised people and by Thor I am going to deliver.”
They make three pies. Three beautiful cherry pies. By the end of it Darcy is so tired she is very much ready to lie down right then and there. She got the silent treatment during the whole affair of baking, yet Romanov doesn’t leave, silently listening to Darcy’s instruction, repeating her motions, the pies are packed into the oven getting nicely golden brown and Darcy pours them some tea. They sit like that for quite some time and that is how Happy finds them.

The SI Security Chief comes barreling into the Common Kitchen.

“Ms Lewis?!”

“Happy! Good Morning.”

“Afternoon, actually.” Romanov corrects her calmly and Darcy blinks at her.

“What? Already? Happy, did you walk Tony to the jet so he wouldn’t get lost?”

“There have been some delays, Iron Man was needed.”

“Last I checked you are not Iron Man, Happy, why were you needed? Not that I am implying that you are not needed, because you are very much needed, like for example here, by me as I can’t carry the bloody suitcase and walk on crutches.”

Happy keeps looking sideways at Romanov and the two women ignore it. “Mr Stark wanted me to pick couple of things for you from the shops. He said we will be going out shopping today?” There is uncertainty in his words as he looks Darcy over. Yeah, she knew she was a sight.

“The jury is still out on that one, if Mr Stark asks please remind him that his girlfriend is on crutches.” There is ding from the oven as it shut down. “Oh and the pies are done!” Darcy loved giving her baked goods to people. It was always made with love, except once when it was made with another ingredient also starting with L. “Can you please get them? One is for you.”

“Darcy, you shouldn’t have…” The wide smile on the man’s face said otherwise.

“Hey, Romanov! I do not recommend leaving your pie here unattended, I heard it gets eaten. ” Natasha Romanov was already in the doorway when Darcy calls her and she stops there. “What? If you don’t want it, we both know there will be takers.”

Please please please leave a comment! Many thanks in advance =)
Chapter 16

Basically the previous chapter from Black Widow's perspective. Hope you still like it! Let me know what you think, peeps! As always thank you for all the comments, much appreciated!

Chapter 16

Natasha Romanov was good at what she did. She wasn’t bragging, because people that weren’t good at their job in her line of work didn’t live long. Mistakes weren’t something that you could afford when your life was on the line. Hence, Natasha Romanov didn’t make mistakes.

Yet she classed Darcy Lewis as a non threat based on information from Thor and the outer appearance. An alarming lapse in judgement.

Darcy Lewis.

Natasha watched as the young woman in question was going thru the cupboards in search for something. There was no need to guess what that she was looking for or if was gonna find it. There was nothing threatening in the way Lewis moved. It wasn’t graceful or overly coordinated. It was natural. The cast up to her knee on the right foot that was immobilizing the ankle fracture was adding a delay and limitations to the movements. Obvious to the world around her, focused on the task at hand she doesn’t notice as Black Widow takes a seat right behind her.

“Jarvis… where is my phone? I can’t see it anywhere…” it is the first time Natasha hears her speak. The voice is low, smoky some would say.

“Clint put it on the top shelf on the left.” There is tension in Lewis’s shoulders as she turns around. She is cautious as they watch each other. Natasha knows how to make people talk, say what she wanted to know even when they didn’t know that they had the information in their heads; it was one of her special skills. It was all about the approach, all about the impressions, all the phantom promises that hang in the air and never get voiced, it always work better than any weapon. The fear has no equals in her field.

“Oh? Did he now?... Fucking Cupid… Can you… please… get that for me? I am not in a fit state to do so myself…” The woman motions to the crutches that were propped next to her.

Gutsy, Natasha has to admit that much so far.

“I don’t know… Should I?” Challenge the most basic of courtesies and people often flip. It was one of those things that always worked for her. Please and thank you were such foundations of
communication that you could throw anyone into tail spin if you played your cards right.

The reaction is instantaneous. There is no verbal reply, though. None is needed when the Widow could read the woman’s face like a book and she was eager to do just that. Natasha can almost hear Lewis’s backbone snap into place. Usually she hears the spines just snap from the pressure, fear, danger that was real or imagined. They all fall and wallow in the dirt and beg… Not this one. Not Darcy Lewis. That was an individual that saw the clear and present danger and dug her heels in.

‘Interesting.’

The pain in her features is poorly hidden. The freshly broken ankle is an obvious bother but the movements are careful and controlled as Lewis climbs up. The T-shirt is getting dark from the perspiration soaking into it from the effort and stress. Natasha knows trained agents that had snapped under less pressure.

Was the clothing that Lewis was wearing Stark’s? Clint did mention something about the billionaire having it bad for the woman. All signs indicated that it could very well be true. He moved her to his Penthouse and was setting her up with personal security detail. No one did that for a one night stand or a quick fling. Stark was not a man that gave his affection or shared personal space easily.

Was it really true that she was the one that discovered that Coulson wasn’t as dead as everyone thought?

Lewis wiped sweat of her face with the back of her palm before giving Natasha a look of a mild annoyance.

“Out of curiosity, did the soup get spoiled because it wasn’t put in the fridge?”

A push back. That was unexpected. Lewis called her out. Not only did the she not back down but she was setting boundaries. Drawing the line in the sand. Only those on equal ground could dare to pull such a move with the Black Widow. The redhead rests her chin on her linked fingers.

“No.” They are keeping eye contact. Lewis is studying her.

“The pie? It was for someone, you know. Was it at least good? It was the first time I put port in the cherries.”

The brunette is scared. It is evident in the way she sits. There is tension in her muscles, rigidity in the posture. Yet she doesn’t stop talking. Only very few people have accomplished the task of carrying on a conversation in similar circumstances.

“I don’t know, there wasn’t any left by the time I got round to it. You should ask Steve.”

“Steve, huh? I thought people back in the day knew they should ask before eating someone’s food. Or at least not scare the living daylights out of the person whose food they shamelessly ate…”

“It wasn’t intentional.”

An accusation. An outright offensive. And just like that Black Widow lost ground. That alone was unheard of. Natasha stared at the woman. How the hell did that happen? She was watching her every move, anticipating every word.

“And eating everything? Because I assume it was before… or was it after?... because that would have been petty.” Darcy Lewis was carrying on in a matter of fact voice.
“Before.” She was taking control of the conversation, Natasha was startled at the realization. Lewis was going against the fear, defying self preservation impulse of surrender to greater strength. She was forging ahead by sheer will.

“Why no one asked? I have a thing about a bunch of strangers helping themselves to my food, while I sleep.”

“Captain America, Hawkeye and Black Widow.” Romanov tried adding gravity to the conversation; the response was an eye-roll. And eye roll... At her. Black Widow. Mongoose… all cute and cuddly… kills cobras like no one’s business…

“My point exactly, two strangers and Cupid.” Lewis fixes her with a pointed look. How the hell this conversation turned on her?

“Clint said you wouldn’t share.” And that was the last time she ever listened to the flea bitten pigeon.

Lewis’s eyebrows shoot up like she was slapped. Natasha regrets bringing in Birdbrains opinion into the conversation instantly as she can feel the moral ground that she been occupying slipping.

“Clint got tased three times by yours truly, so maybe he isn’t exactly the leading expert on all things Darcy for you to listen to? And for the record, I always share, unless you are being a dick to me on purpose, in which case, screw you.”

“You tased us.” It wasn’t called for no matter the situation, Natasha tells herself.

“You know, Cupid being such an expert should have told you not to sneak on me. Do you think that just because I don’t wear a kick ass leather cat suit I am not entitled to having issues?” The brunette mimics Natasha’s pose and for the first time gives a look that is steely. Personal matters were put under question. Lewis just put her on notice that it was not appreciated. Put her on notice, very few people had the authority and even less had the guts to do that.

“You… tased us.” Natasha uses the calm I am indifferent to your fate voice reserved for people that were soon to be terminated but still had useful information. All she gets is a smirk.

“I don’t know you from Adam. I know of you, I don’t know you. Given, Thor-bro thinks highly of you, I will not deny…”

“You have seen us on TV.” Surely she knew what the Avengers looked like? The people that went around risking their lives?

“I have seen all bunch of SHIELD people on TV too, guess what? None of them invited to dinner either. Listen, the whole world saving business you do is great, I live in this world I am very much for it being saved. But that does not at any point excuse what you have done. You are not special to me. Thor-bro can eat whatever I cook and I will be fine with that, Jane too, but since I have to hover over her to make sure she eats, that is so unlikely. Well, and Eric, but he is excused indefinitely due to reasons… Stark got himself a trail run, I still cannot comprehend how that happened… Oh! And Happy, because he can do no wrong. By the way the pie was for him. You owe me a pie, Lady.”

“I never touched it.” Was she just made accountable for Rogers’ gluttony? какого черта?

“You never stopped good old Captain America from eating it either…”

“He was going to pay for it.” That was what he said as he stuffed one spoonful after the other into his mouth without sharing. And now she owed for it?
“Funny that, I am not seeing it. How is he going to do it? Bank transfer? And you? I imagine you had some soup?” The soup was good. Best she had in years, but it wasn’t worth being tased over.

“You threw me and tased me…”

“I know, right? I need to decide what to get Sif for teaching me that. I probably will never be able to repeat it, but… we have gotten awfully of topic here. You and your buddies, snuck up on me, ate my food, scared the shit out of me for no reason and now we sit here and you keep telling me that I tased you. Yes, I remember. I saw you on that floor and I had my entire life flash before my eyes. I have never been so fucking scared in my life. You can kill me with a paperclip probably and make it look like an accident … I got so lucky with my moves yesterday that it is fucking unreal… Is that what you wanted to hear?”

Lewis was giving zero fucks. That was what was happening. Darcy Lewis didn’t care, despite the fear of retaliation, despite knowing who Natasha was. She clearly was going to stand her ground for better or for worse.

“Your family must be proud of you.” It slips out. It was a petty shot, but the reaction was surprise. For a split moment she thought that Lewis was going to come at her.

“They wouldn’t spit on me if I were on fire, so if this is somehow a veiled threat, go ahead and knock yourself out, but let me tell you one thing, if you move a finger against Jane, Thor, Eric … or Tony, I can’t believe I’m including him… I have no super powers, no physical strength, no genius brain, no money and standing in society or incredible connections… I don’t care how fucking invincible you are, Black Widow, you make a move against me or mine and I will find a way to tear your fucking world down around you.”

Lewis was shaking like a leaf in the wind but there is ice in her voice. That was the tone of voice of people that followed through with their threats.

Natasha knows that the last bit was uncalled for, but it was the only thing that yielded a loss of control.

Darcy Lewis was no one’s puppet. There was exceptional will power behind that smile of hers. There was no doubt in Natasha’s mind that if the situation were to repeat itself all of them would be tased again and the brunette wouldn’t give a rat’s ass. That was what happened to people that messed with her.

Natasha nods once and Lewis visibly relaxes. The message was received. Without warning Lewis stands up and extends her hand.

“Darcy Lewis.” A peace offering. She is shaking so badly that Natasha thinks she might fall over, but the woman with visible mental exertion steadies herself and stands there.

“Natasha Romanov. I do not appreciate being tased.” If Lewis was going to be a fixture around the Tower from now on, it made sense to make peace.

“And I don’t appreciate when people assume shit about me.”

“It was a good soup.” Natasha extends an olive branch.

“Glad to hear that, you still owe me a pie.” Bloody Rogers.
Lewis actually holds her to the making of the pies. Taking no heed of the silence or the reluctance in her unwilling helper. It doesn’t stop the brunette from cracking jokes now and again until they settle into a rhythm. Lewis shakes of the earlier conversation almost immediately as she concentrates on the baking. Natasha does the same as she returns to the original evaluation of the woman.

Darcy Lewis was a non threat, provided she was not threatened. She wasn’t dangerous, but she wasn’t harmless… she was just that kind a person that you want watching your back when shit goes down. Looking all cute, letting the enemy to underestimate her and first chance given kicking the teeth in. It is handy little jack in a box to have when you are in a tight spot and no other help can reach you…

*Mongooses have develop partial immunity to the venom…* the commentators voice, from the documentary that Clint send over last night, is circling in her head as she stares at the last cherry pie in the oven once Darcy and a nervous Hogan leave.

A smile graces her lips, *yeah*, she wasn’t leaving it in the kitchen. She had plans for that pie.
Chapter 17

Hello Peepsters! Hope you are all well! As always thank you to all those that leave the comments! You keep me going and giving me ideas or correcting me if I get carried away too much. Please continue to do so! Much appreciated! Hope you enjoy the new chapter! =)

Chapter 17

Tony Stark changed into another outfit this time skipping the formal shoes; it was always a pain to have them on inside the armor. NYPD called him out for a minor incident while he was en route to the airport. The fuck they thought he was? The neighborhood watch? Or Captain America maybe? He buckled in as the engines of the jet started powering up. He had to wait for the takeoff. What was he paying the airport fees for if he couldn’t actually fly from there when he needed?

“Ms! A scotch, please.”

The stewardess gave him a wide smile as she sauntered over, all playful and overly casual.

"We are about to take off, Mr Stark." If she smiled any wider he was going to see all of her molars. It was not the line of work he was in.

"An excellent point, please make it a double." He was pretty sure he changed the requirements for jet staff sometime after Afghanistan. Even before he and Pepper were a thing. He did not need this type of distractions for the flights anymore... Was that what people called maturity?

"Anything else I can get you, Mr Stark?"

"A person that will actually get me the drink I have asked for twice already?" Tony’s voice wasn’t rude... much. He was paying good money to the skeleton Barbie to do her job and the description did not include having her exaggeratedly fake grapefruits in his face as if she was getting ready to breast feed him. The woman straightened as if he had slapped her. Someone clearly had misinformed the poor thing as to how easy it is to score with him and get famous. An unfortunate mistake. She wasn’t going to set foot on the same jet as him again.

Contrary to popular belief he was fully capable of turning down sexual advances, which happened more often than the tabloids were inclined to report.

Besides this morning he woke with his cheek blissfully pressed to a pair of breasts that were the aspiration of the women that willingly went under the knife while chasing the silicon dreams, except
those were genuine articles. He checked last night... Briefly. Too briefly. He let out a sigh. Bloody suppliers... he could still be in bed with Darcy. But the woman none too gently kicked him out once Jarvis informed them that there was uproar in the early meeting with their new suppliers from Seoul, which he was skipping in order to spend some with his injured girlfriend. Surely that was supposed to be a point in his favor with Darcy, right? Well, wrong. He had to bribe her with coffee so she wouldn’t go back to sleep.

Darcy wasn’t overly impressed with him having to fly to the other side of the world when he had promised to spend time with her. Their morning conversation wasn’t reassuring him either. She had that look again.

Who did work as a PA for years and didn’t get paid anyway? Darcy Lewis, the woman that took SI Legal to task for Foster’s equal pay and put his balls in a vise over a phone. She was with Foster, what, five years? How was that kind of shit even legal?

Feeling the irritation rising further Tony picked up the StarkPad and started going thru all the communication emails between the SI and Sun Global. Someone somewhere did a mistake and it was costing him more than just cash. Someone was going to pay.

It took him couple of hours to find the mistake after he got sidetracked by the schematics, that he ended up upgrading with next model of StarkPhone in mind. The Sun Global director and few senior staff failed to pass on the instruction about the leads and semiconductors that were supposed to be used. He will very much enjoy ripping them new ones when he arrives and then ripping new ones for the SI idiot on site that didn’t check if the adjustments were picked up. The penance of having your name on the company logo was that Tony occasionally had to handle absolutely avoidable disasters such as this.

“Jarvis?”

“Yes, Sir?” the smooth voice replied from the StarkPad.

“You see where I marked the miscommunication in the email?”

“Yes, Sir.”

“Go thru all the emails again looking for similar patterns and failures in communication. I have a feeling it is not the only one.” What a fucking waste of his time. He designed it and now he had to babysit the morons that manufactured everything too? What was he paying the people in SI office for? Clearly not for doing their job.

“Certainly, Sir.”

“Is Shortstack up?” Or was she still in bed with the sheets wrapped around the perfect hourglass of a body with the smoothest skin that he wanted to taste? ‘Down boy…’

“Ms Lewis has indeed risen and is currently in the Common Kitchen.”

“Returning to the scene of the crime already?” Fearless little thing. He could imagine her giving him the so what look and pursing those full lips of hers in annoyance. “What is she up to?”

“I’m afraid I cannot say, Sir.” Tony blinks at the answer.

“What? Why?”

“Privacy mode has been requested.”
“By Darce? Because I kind of hoped that…” He wasn’t planning to advertise that particular option to her as he wanted to know that she was safe at all times.

“By Agent Romanov, Sir.”

“What?”

“Agent Romanov has requested privacy mode…” Tony felt as the blood in his veins went cold. Black Widow held grudges. You did not get one over her, you just didn’t… except Darcy did just that. Shortstack did it so well that it left the highest level spy-assassin, spyssasin?, incapacitated. He could only imagine the blow to Romanov’s ego. He really kind of hoped that those two weren’t going to cross paths until later, when all the passions has calmed and he was present.

What the Hell was Darcy doing in the Common Kitchen in the first place?

“Is Romanov now with Darcy in the Kitchen?”

“Yes, Sir.”

“Get me the visual of the room, Jarvis.”

“I am unable to do so, until Agent Romanov has the privacy…”

“Call Darcy! Now.” He had the Iron Suit with him, how long would it take him to reach NYC? The glass of scotch went flying to the floor as he tried to unbuckle himself from the seat.

“There is no signal; I am unable to reach Ms Lewis, Sir.”

“Open direct link to the Common Kitchen!”

“Privacy settings active for an occupant in the room, I am very sorry, I am unable to open li…”

“How long will it take me to reach the Tower in the Suit?” He was already pulling the compact case version of it from under the seat.

“Approximately two hours, Sir.” At that rate he might as well walk there. Jesus Fuck, Darcy…

“Get me Hogan!”

There was tightness in the chest and his fingers were going numb as all he could think of was Darcy’s warm skin under his hands, the soft, sleepy look on her face and the lazy smile she gave him ‘Good morning, handsome…’ he should be there, he should be with her, he should keep her safe… ‘Fuck Fuck Fuck!’

“Tony?” Slightly puzzled voice of Happy Hogan brings him back to the present.

“Where the Hell are you?”

“I am almost at the Penthouse, I picked up the stuff for Darcy and…”

“Forget that. Get to the Common Kitchen now, right now! Jarvis, make Happy’s access to the elevator a priority!” He felt sick. She was fine; of course she was fine, Shortstack took down Captain Righteous, for goodness sake… Romanov wouldn’t do anything stupid… of course she wouldn’t… He was funding her… Those women were shortening his life by decades. He shouldn’t have taken Happy with him. Someone had to be with Darcy for his peace of mind.
“What happened?” There is more than just a hint of worry in Happy’s voice.

“Darcy is with Romanov.” He could hear his Security Chief break into a run.

“Alone? Why?”

“Because she wants to see me dead from stroke? The fuck I know?”

“Ms Lewis came looking to retrieve her phone, Sir.” Jarvis supplied helpfully.

“What in Hell is Romanov doing there, it is not like she cooks.” Stark paced inside the cabin, before pouring himself another scotch.

“I’m at the door! I’m coming in.” There is silence on the other end only disturbed by the fast paced footsteps. “Ms Lewis?!”

“Happy! Good Morning.” The relief that floods Tony upon hearing the cheerful voice is overwhelming. ‘She will be the death of me…’ She didn’t sound like she was in trouble; of course she wasn’t in trouble, why would she be?

“Afternoon, actually.” Romanov smooth voice cuts right in and he nearly chokes on his second drink in surprise.

“What? Already? Happy, did you walk Tony to the jet so he wouldn’t get lost?” Tony glared at the StarkPad, yeah, that sounded like his girl and no mistake. What were those two doing there together?

“There have been some delays, Iron Man was needed.” At least Hogan had his back.

“Last I checked you are not Iron Man, Happy, why were you needed? Not that I am implying that you are not needed, because you are very much needed, like for example here, by me as I can’t carry the bloody suitcase and walk on crutches.” Tony winces at that and reconsiders joining the conversation. Darcy sounds pissed and he wasn’t sure he was yet able to speak without ordering her to be locked in the Tower until his return.

“Mr Stark wanted me to pick couple of things for you from the shops. He said we will be going out shopping today?” There is uncertainty in Happy’s words.

“The jury is still out on that one, if Mr Stark asks please remind him that his girlfriend is on crutches.” There were women that would be going out of their minds with the chance to get anything they wanted, how did he manage to pick one that sounded like he suggested her teeth pulled? He will be back shortly and they were going to do it like it was meant to be done. Besides he had an amazing taste, just look at his girlfriend. “Oh and the pies are done! Can you please get them? One is for you.” Was she cooking again? She was his woman, how come everyone except him were benefiting from her culinary skills?

“Darcy, you shouldn’t have…” Tony finishes his drink and pops a peanut into his mouth, Happy really didn’t have to sound so pleased, he was beginning to take it personally, he was stuck on a flight to Seoul with premade food and his security was getting home baked pies… where was the fairness in that?

“Hey, Romanov! I do not recommend leaving your pie here unattended, I heard it gets eaten. What? If you don’t want it, we both know there will be takers.”

Tony inhales one of the peanuts and it takes him good couple of minutes of frantic coughing to have it out of his airways. Happy must have cut the connection when he started coughing as screen on the
StarkPad was dark. *The cheek in Darcy’s voice, directed to one of the most deadly people he had ever met…* he sits back into the chair. *And she wasn’t dead after saying that. She sounded as chipper as always with added touch of sass.*

Darcy somehow got Black Widow on her side, there was no other explanation.

“Gods, I knew I liked you for a reason, Honeybuns. How good am I?”

The rest of the flight goes relatively smoothly and Tony manages to relax after confirming that Darcy was safely in the Penthouse. His girl gave him plenty of excitement. He wasn’t wrong when he assumed that she was going to keep him on his toes.

His phone started ringing halfway thru his meal and Stark briefly considered not picking up the call as he saw Barton’s name on the screen.

“I’m busy, Barton. What do you want?”

“We need access to SHIELD’s data files.” *Who didn’t?*

“You work for them, you and Romanov. Go and access it.”

“Natasha says she can’t get access to what she needs.”

“What do you want me do? You know I don’t have access. Go bother Romanov.”

“If she will try something they will know, she thinks they are watching her pass codes.” That was a new development.

“Your point being?”

“Oh, come on, Stark. Get Lewis on it, we all know she can do it.”

“Is that about the last time? We didn’t hack SHIELD. Darcy…”

“Said she wasn’t going to go to war with SHIELD. She told the same thing to Nat too. Your golden girl knows, at least in theory, a way to do it.”

“What did she say to that?” There was no way they came to him first. Barton sounded like he was chewing on something bitter.

“That she will tase him, if he will bother her again.” Romanov’s accented voice cut in.

“Good evening. Natasha. How have you been this fine day?”

“Good, thank you.” Romanov matches Tony’s fake sweet tone of voice. *The Bitch.*

“Do you know what your crazy little harpy did today?” Barton clearly was struggling to keep in whatever indignation he was holding into. Tony smirked. If that was Shortstack, it was gonna be something extraordinary by default.

“Will you let it go, Clint?” Romanov sounded more amused than exasperated. *It had to be good.*

“Will I let it go? You, for the sake of all the people living in this Tower, need stop making buddies
with Lewis. You know what Lewis got Natasha do?”

“No, I don’t. But I feel like I need to.” Darcy got Natasha to do something against her will, if he listened to Barton. Highly unlikely. It promised to be a good story, so he was game for it regardless.

“They baked pies. Today. Together. Cherry pies with that nice crunchy crust, anyway... Natasha, here. Got one as a present. Got it to my apartment, since we were going to have a meeting today, which you skipped, Stark.”

“Oh, was that today?” He wasn’t particularly bothered. Barton’s team bonding meetings were a waste of time.

“Fuck you, Stark. You knew it was today. Anyway. So me and Rogers tuck in, leave a piece for Bruce on the side, since he was late. The traitor, here. Watches us eat most of it… looks us in the eyes and says. Darcy said that she made it with special ingredient.”

Stark feels his jaw drop as he struggled to keep the laughter in. “She did not…”

“Let me finish. So. Natasha, here. Makes the most innocent face and adds: I told Darcy that Steve was going to pay for the pie he ate yesterday, yet there was no payment left, she had me help her make the pies and added a very special ingredient… it starts with P.”

“Peaches? Peppermint? Parsley? Parmesan?” It was rather clear to Tony what conclusion two panicked minds came to and he was having fun. Magic ingredient starting with P? He grinned.

“We thought it was Piss, I am scarred for life, and so is Rogers!...”

“That is because you are both idiots, Clint.” Natasha sounds bored now.

“Last time it was L and it turned out to be laxatives! What the hell you thought we were going to think?!”

“What was the magic ingredient?” His girl was a piece of art of the highest caliber.

“Darcy added Port to the cherries for flavor, works very well.”

“Keep your Harpy away from Natasha, Stark…” Clint actually growled on the other end of the line and Tony laughed out loud.

“Sounds like it is too late for that already, Hawkniss.”

“Just get her to hack SHIELD, Stark.”

“Why are you under the impression that Darcy will do it if I ask?”

There is silence on the other end for a couple of minutes.

“I told you we should have gone straight to Foster, Nat.”

So? What you think? I couldn't resist including Tony's view a little. And finally there is plot on the horizon! Please leave a comment tell me what you think!
Chapter 18

English is not my native language so there are spelling mistakes, I don't do those on purpose and try to weed out as much as I can spot, but there will be some that I miss, so if you find them point it out to me and I will correct it. The same goes to the wrong use of words, I am not doing the mistakes on purpose point it out, please. Many Thanks for your understanding =)

Tony Stark was a sneaky little bitch, Darcy thought spitefully, as she went through her suitcase again. It was missing. Missing. How dare he? It was a present from Jane and it was her favorite pair of underwear! She wanted those back, and by Thor, she will get those back if Stark knew what was good for him.

There were several fancy bags full of clothing and few pairs of shoes on the bed that Stark had ordered for her. Some of the names Darcy have never heard before, but she never looked into designer wear that was astronomically out of her price range. She looked back at the content of her suitcase. Jane meant well, she always did, but Darcy needed more than just two t-shirts, four cardigans, one pair of leggings and her entire underwear/sock drawer. She didn’t even have PJs…

Well, she did have the lace and silk nightdress that Stark got her… That was one sexy little number, but the chances of him seeing her in that weren’t in his favor. Not until he gave back what he took at the very least and even then...

She was both grateful and angry at Stark. He clearly meant to look out for her by getting all that stuff as there wasn’t much in the suitcase, but he discovered the fact while thieving so it kind of put Darcy in two minds.

The prick. Why did he have to always complicate things?

He got all the essentials for her like a hairbrush, deodorant and everyday sanitary pads, make up and face moisturizers for all possible skin types and a bra in the right size and then BAM! stole her special undies. What was wrong with the man?

She couldn’t even storm back into the sitting room and complain to Happy about it, as she preferred him not to know that she had his face on her crotch some days… yeah… there was no need for him to know that.

And there were people coming to see them that were on the shortlist for her security detail that Stark was dead set on her having. MIB guys, she imagined. So the cardigan and leggings combo probably wasn’t going to work. She needed to look serious or whatever… Darcy glared at the bags and started emptying them on the bed to look for something to wear. There was a small mountain of clothing and Stark called them few basic things according to Happy… Yeah, three pairs of Louboutin flats were definitely what she always called basic… Oh, and look at that… a Dior dress… yeah, so basic… and pearl studs... how freaking basic...

Darcy sat on the bed next to all the clothing in resignation. She will have to pick something to wear
soon. *God damn it…* She wasn’t even sure that any of the stuff fit her to begin with… She picked a vintage looking pale blue sundress with a cowl neck, three quarter sleeves and delicate oriental embroidery around the hem that went to her knees… *Well, it will have to do*… at least she managed to shave her legs back in London before her life took a turn for the bizarre, so she was good without wearing tights. *What is the brand?* Darcy couldn’t stop herself from looking as she got ready to slip into it… *Chanel…* She needed to have a serious talk with Stark about the definition of *basic*…

She went for a simple vintage look with red lippy and black eyeliner. The hair Darcy just brushed and let it fall in waves down her back.

She felt irritated as she examined herself in the full length mirror of the walk in wardrobe. The white ankle cast, a blue sock with padded toe guard didn’t go that well with the velvet Louboutin ballerina flat, but there was nothing Darcy could do about that.

To add insult to the injury the dress fit like a glove. *The rat bastard actually could do something right.*

She will have to ask Happy to take a picture of her and send it to Jane, try out her brand new StarkPhone, maybe add a text saying something along the lines of… *all alone in this friendless Tower, Tony left me for Seoul and only God knows when he will be back*… maybe a crying emoji or two. Darcy was under no illusions that Jane was going to do any packing… or sleeping for the next few days being too engrossed in Science! as she always was whenever they had to move. It was like there was a magic switch inside her boss-lady’s head, as soon as Darcy said *we need to pack* there was a million and one thing that Jane suddenly needed the machines for. Like, seriously? *Every single time.* She was still trying to figure out if Jane did that on purpose, just to mess with her.

Darcy looked one last time in mirror, plastered on a smile usually reserved for grant committees and cops that pulled her over for speeding, but it was quickly replaced by a resting bitch face at the thought of Stark. She shook her head. That was not gonna work.

“Ok… I can do this. I will make a good impression and get a security detail.”

Why was she getting a security detail anyway?.. Darcy whined in her head as she unpacked a bottle of J’adore perfume.

On one hand she kind of understood that this whole spontaneous thing of being Stark’s girlfriend she got herself into came with a certain level of calculated risk, because Iron Man had enemies.

On the other hand Tony Stark was a notorious playboy, it was universally acknowledged truth. Why had he moved her into his Penthouse was any one’s guess, as according to Jarvis, the only woman to ever actually cohabit with the man on permanent basis was Pepper Potts. So the question that Darcy had was *how long were they going to last?* There was no way that she was going to bend over backwards for him more then she already have, enough was enough, and Stark being his charming asshole self was unlikely to endure sharing intimate space with total stranger for long. Plus they had like a zero things in common as far as she could tell. *Zero.*

What was the point in getting her a personal bodyguard if once Stark gets tired she will move back to the other flat and they both will pretend that it never happened and avoid each other for the foreseeable future.

What should she do? Really? Up until now all was like a bad joke, but now it was getting increasingly official. Should she be sensible and just live in denial until all was over? Keep her head down, like her mother always told her?... Or should she embrace it?
The thought about her mother made Darcy falter. *Her mother…* Yeah… was not a person the brunette took advice from since she was sixteen. She wasn’t about to break that particular habit.

She knew what Matt would have told her. “*Buckle the fuck up, little girl. Grab the steering wheel, press the gas pedal and Live. You ain’t getting a second chance at that…*” May he rest in peace.

Darcy felt her heart beat speed up. Should she do that? Pretend the bitter end isn’t round the corner? One way or another she was going to walk away with regrets… Right? It was up to her what those regrets were going to be…

Darcy tugged a strand of hair behind her ear, stood up as straight as she could on crutches.

“Ok… Thor, bless my judgement, let’s go make some grand mistakes….”

“So who does a girl needs to kill around here to get a drink, Mr Hogan?”

Darcy always wanted to use that line, there was just never been an occasion where she felt comfortable to casually suggest murder. Or maybe because she finally had the makeup on and clothing that didn’t make her look like a homeless person anymore. Also Happy was making a coffee, she was always down for a cup of that.

Happy Hogan laughed as he took his cup from under the professional coffee machine, turned around and froze.

“Do I look like a woman that has Tony Stark wrapped around her pinky?... *Well?*” Did she really look that much different with the proper cosmetics on? “Is that yes? Or a no?”

“Oh wow… Can I take a picture and send it to Tony?”

“Whatever for?”

“No reason… so can I?” He was already fumbling with his phone.

Darcy gave him a suspicious look. That was an odd request. Her eyes landed on the coffee cup on the counter between them.

“I guess… Do I get a coffee?”

“Yeah… sure.”

“Do you need a hand with phone, Happy?...” It was a rather obvious struggle there, even though Darcy didn’t yet know how do anything on her new StarkPhone besides calling…

“I’m not Stark, give me a sec, Darcy…”

“Ms Lewis, you have a visitor requesting an access to the Penthouse to see you…”

“Hey, Jarvis. Is that the Happy’s guys?”

“It is Agent Barton, Ms.” Darcy blinked slowly at Happy as the man gave her a questioning look.

“Ok… Am I forgetting something?... *Is he armed?*” she tased him three times to date, she rather not have him near her armed.
“Agent Barton does not seem to be armed, Ms Lewis.” Then there was no obvious reason for him to want to see her, unless he was there to apologize… “Do you wish to open a link so you can speak to him?”

“Sure, let’s do that… Ugh… Barton?”

“Lewis, you are not the queen, I should not be required to make an appointment to see you, or be interrogated by Jarvis.” Hawkeye’s indignant voice reached her without much delay.

“You are right, Cupid. You should not be forced to make an appointment; you should not want to see me period.”

“Can I please come up to the Penthouse?”

“No. What do you want?”

“To talk about SHIELD. I need a favor.”

Darcy froze for a moment. Those were not the words she expected to hear.

“Jarvis. Let Barton up to the Penthouse.”

Happy was always watching silently. Evaluating the situation.

“You want me to call Tony?”

“No, no, I am good. We don’t know what he wants really.” SHIELD was bad news. SHIELD was always bad news. Darcy thought about asking Happy for a stronger drink but she had quite a few painkillers so far and she was not inclined to mix the two. “Can I please get the coffee and follow me.”

Barton found Darcy Lewis casually lounging in an armchair and he had a reaction similar to Happy’s. “Damn, Lewis…”

Darcy knows that her usual attire of cardigans and jeans wasn’t the most flattering, but the reactions she was getting so far was making her think that she should have invested in an outrageously expensive dresses that fit her ages ago.

“What do you want, Barton?” And how did SHIELD fit into it…

“I need you to hack SHIELD.” Good thing that Darcy wasn’t drinking her coffee at that time because she nearly choked on air, actual liquid would have killed her.

“Anything else? Maybe the Moon and the stars, or maybe I should hold your balls while you take a piss too?”

“I think Stark called dibs on everything of the sort, unless you are offering…”

“You know, Cupid, as a person that came asking for a favor you really are not endearing yourself to me.”

“So are you gonna do it?” Darcy stared at the archer as he sat down opposite from her.

“Gods, No. Why would you even ask me? I am not… I got lucky once. That was it.”
“Finding and exploiting your opponent's weaknesses has nothing to do with luck, Lewis. We need access to their files.”

“You need it, you go and get it, leave me out of it.” Darcy sneers at him. *Oh, so he needed it? Did he think that she was going to fall all over herself making it happen? Right.*

“Oh, come on. Everyone knows you can do it.”

“Excuse me?” well that was a surprise for *her*. “I’m not…”

“…going to war with SHIELD? Yeah, I remember you saying that. Funny that. Not that you can’t do it, no. That you are not going to go war with them. Which very much implies that you are able to…”

“No dice, Barton, so you can stop sweating it.” She told herself that when she last time saw Ian, she wasn’t going to start something that would end with her dead. SHIELD had thugs like the STRIKE team working for them, they were the *ask no questions* type of crowd, her death would look like an accident. This thing with Stark was way too new for her to expect that he was going to protect her indefinitely. With all of that in mind there was no actual guarantee that her little idea would actually get past the SHIELD’s firewalls. None whatsoever.

“We need the access.”

“You need the access. That is an explanation that totally makes me want to put my cock on the block.”

“You don’t have a cock, Lewis.”

“And soon neither will you, if you continue trying to pull me down with you.”

“Now now, Lewis. You haven’t got your taser anymore. I know that for a fact. They will never know…”

“You are working under some misguided assumption that it was the *only* taser I got. Hate to break it to you, but Sparky got a sister. Now please see yourself out before I will see it fit to introduce you two.”

“We need…”

“Get out, Barton, before I tase the shit out of you. The fact that *you need it* is not a reason enough for me to commit suicide. I wasn’t born yesterday.”

“You are a fucking pain in the neck, Lewis.”

“I usually aim for the chest area, but occasionally I get the neck too. Ask Rogers.”

So what you think Peeps? Good? Bad? Not bad?

Please leave a comment! Much appreciated as always! That is what keeps me inspired! Like the regular updates? Comment! =)
Chapter 19

Thank you to all you lovely peeps that leave comments! You are what keeps me inspired and in doing so enables me to post new chapters on regular basis! Keep doing that and I will do my bets to keep updating! =)

Chapter 19

Darcy finished the cup of coffee as she watched Barton leave. ‘That was an interesting conversation for a lack of a better word.’

“So, Happy, this whole security detail thing. How does it work?” The brunette refocused to the matter at hand. She had other complications to worry about.

“What do you mean?”

“So is it like having a nanny with big muscles?”

Happy barks out a laugh.

“Nanny with big muscles? Is that what you think I am?”

Darcy looks him over. He was made of muscles. “Well, I have seen videos of Tony smashed and you practically carrying him… A whole lot of stuff comes up when you Google Tony… So, yeah?”

“It is a bit more then babysitting your drunk employer, but that is also included, a lot things can be included if you are up to pay for it. Anything you want to add to the list of duties?”

“I don’t know?... How does it work? Does the person shadow me when I travel? Go shopping? To lunch? What does he do when don’t need him or her?”

“First it will be them, plural. A team of three is what I recommend.”

“I am pretty sure I don’t need three people following me around…” that sounded a bit excessive.

Happy smiles at her as if he expected the objection. “They need to eat, sleep, work night shifts, travel with you, have days off. Some of them even manage to have a life. Sometimes they are sick. Only two of them will be with you at any given time. Security personnel are not hired off street. People need to be vetted. A team of three is already small.”

“Tony doesn’t have a team following him around.”

“He is Iron Man now, but he used to have, then he got rid of them, nearly got killed by overeager kidnappers while on the piss, hired me and I hired other people. Also there is Jarvis. Actually one of reasons Jarvis exists is that Tony wouldn’t have to put up with his own security. I like the guy but he does my nut in sometimes, I tell you that.”
“Sometimes… Some would say Tony Stark does their nut in all the time.” Happy chuckles at that and takes the cup from Darcy so she wouldn’t have to get up.

“And if I want someone specific on the team?”

Happy gives her a suspicious look. The man clearly spent too much time in the company of Tony Stark.

“Depends. I evaluate the people, but Tony gets the last vote, he is footing the bill. Not to be mean, but friends make the worst bodyguards…”

“It’s Rosie Velasquez from your security.”

Happy was taken by surprise at that.

“Velasquez? When did you meet her? She is on duty down in R&D… desk job.”

“She brought the phones Tony asked for from R&D?”

“To the Penthouse? Was there anyone else with her?”

“No? Why? She was exceptionally nice to me, I’ll have you know. She didn’t even want to stay for coffee because her supervisor was on her case or whatever…” Darcy didn’t like the way Happy went all business like and the man backpedaled a little.

“She is a good security woman, Darcy. I’m not saying anything about her…”

“So what is the problem?”

“She is a low level security guard. I know the team she worked with before. She is good, working her way up. It is not about her. But if the man who got his name on the side of the building asks for something, it is not a grunt that delivers it to the most secure apartment in the building.” That kind of made sense.

“Her supervisor sent her…”

“Jarvis, can you please confirm who is the security day shift supervisor on the R&D today? Is it Johnson?”

“It is, Mr Hogan.”

“Was he the one that ordered Velasquez to go to the Penthouse?”

“Looking for security footage… Security footage found. Yes. Mr Johnson has ordered Ms Velasquez to do the delivery. Do you wish to view the security footage?”

“Please send it to my email under title Johnson's disciplinary evidence.”

“It has been done, Mr Hogan.”

“Rosie isn’t in trouble is she? Because she was very professional.”

“Velasquez? She is not in trouble, she did what she was told. I bet Johnson was told that Tony left the building so he didn’t bother doing what he was supposed to do. I had him shortlisted.” Happy clearly isn’t a happy bunny.
“Can I have Rosie on the list instead? You said she was good. I won’t pretend that I know what a bodyguard should be like… but she was nice and professional. I bet she thought that I am one of Tony’s flings, but she still helped me out and was polite. Does she make the cut?”

“All security staff has thorough background checks done on them, but there are some additional one’s that will need to be done.”

“So is that a yes? We are one man down, right? And you know what they say? Best man for the job is a woman.”

“A definition not always used in reference to Rosie ‘Ballsbuster’ Velasquez.”

Darcy’s eyebrows went up.

“Sounds like my kind of girl. So? Can she be here today when Johnson will get the boot?”

“I will invite her over… but if anything and I mean anything will flag up in her further checks she is out.”

“Call her! Call her! Call her!”

“You will have to keep it down while I talk to her, everyone that is coming today had to sign a NDA and so will she.”

“Am I that much of a secret?”

“Secret? No. You are Tony Stark’s girlfriend, the press will cook up enough stories about you soon enough. The facts are kept under lock and key.”

“Or in Stark Tower.” Happy does not disagree.

Darcy digs her heels in and unless whatever checks they were feverishly running on Rosie yielded some shitty results she wanted that woman as her primary security person.

Happy had to leave the room to make the call to summon Velasquez for a meeting because Darcy couldn’t stop making exited noises.

‘Jane will love Rosie.’ Darcy was giggling to herself like a lunatic.

“She already finished the shift, but she is coming back. Jarvis, can you please have the NDA ready for her when she comes in?”

“Certainly, Mr Hogan.”

“Oh, and can you please let the other three know that the meeting has been postponed by an hour. If they are here already, tell them to go grab lunch.”

“Done as requested.”

“The other three, huh? Three candidates for me to choose from to fill three positions. Wow. What a range of choice.” Darcy couldn’t keep the sarcasm in.

“I have couple more in case you would be dead set against any of these three.”
“Like the guy that couldn’t be asked to do his job?”

“Like Johnson, yes.”

The hour passes quicker then she expects after she asks Happy to fetch her book with a notepad and settles in with it in the seating area after finally getting hold of Jane.

So when Happy clears his throat couple of times she pays him no attention too absorbed in the chapter on proper isolation of all live wiring and fuses. Her mind going over the basic blueprints she had cooked up during the last year and the skeleton of the prototype she was building. She will have to double check those… Most of them should be good… The main fuse… huh… will have to...

“Ms Lewis?”

“Just a sec…” She needs to make a note to test the main fuse before putting it into the prototype… she should call it something else… John? James? Albert… big and gangly… yeah, her baby sounded like an Albert. The fuse… Gods, she will have to go through every single one of Jane’s babies to make sure they haven’t got any time bombs on their hands… Jesus…

“Ms Lewis…”

“The maximum current needs to be calculated as not to exceed what can be handled by the main fuse as not to fry it… Testing prior to installation. Wiring still needs to be checked and…” She was scribbling furiously into the notepad. “… the magnets for the main part…. samarium cobalt? Or ferrite… and I’m done!” Darcy snaps the notepad shut and marks where she is in the book before lifting her head and finding four men staring at her.

“What? I need to make notes or I will forget.” She gives each of them a cool stare before plastering a smile on her face as Happy starts introducing them.

It was awkward. Was she supposed to be looking for some special signs that that they were going be good at their job? How did that work?

“John Johnson, Adam Smith, Daniel Otter, this is Ms Darcy Lewis, Tony Stark’s girlfriend…” That was the most out of body experience Darcy had ever had up to date. It was official. She was officially Tony Stark’s girlfriend. That was surreal. The trio thought so too as their eyes nearly popped out of their sockets.

“Currently a PA to Astrophysics Doctor Jane Foster, graduated Summa Cum Laude in Political Science from Culver University, Lighting Sister to the God of Thunder, and a woman of many talents, with baking and holding grudges being not the least of them.” Tony was neither the beginning nor the end of her worth. Being his girlfriend had never been the height of her ambitions. It never featured on the list. She wanted to make it sure they knew that. Darcy finished it with a smile that was reserved strictly for her encounters with SHIELD.

There was a rather uncomfortable silence that lasted until Happy coughed into his fist to try and hide a laugh.

“Right… Ms Lewis has just moved to New York from London and is still settling into the Penthouse.”

“Oh, can we go check out the labs later on? I have been singing praises to Jane about them. They
better be way awesome... and big. They got, like, blast doors, right? Because I rather have them between some of Jane’s babies and us when we are testing them... How big a blast can they absorb?” Why everyone was staring at her like that? She put aside the notepad and the book that she was still holding.

“Having in mind that you will be sharing with Dr Banner, I think it will be sufficient for your and Dr Foster’s needs.”

“We are sharing? Why are we sharing? Jane was to get her own lab, it is in the contract, you know.” What the fuck was with that? Sharing didn’t work for Jane. While Darcy loved having someone else around the lab, Jane didn’t. Main reason being that people liked to make fun of Jane, and to some extent of her too, because what was Poli Scie was doing in a science lab bullshit, which resulted in Darcy going on a war path and it was always so time consuming. She didn’t have time for that shit and working on Albert. It took couple of seconds for the name of Dr Banner to ring a bell. “Dr Bruce Banner?” The Hulk dude.

“Yes.”

“Thor thinks the world of him... and he is highly regarded in his field. I guess we can compromise… I will need to get Jane morally ready for sharing again, though. Last time I got a black eye trying to separate her and Dr Stevens. Jane would have totally won, but yeah... we had to wamoosh before the security got there... It happened outside the local pub and everyone involved were drunk at the time.” Darcy felt like an explanation was in order as the men’s eyebrows were climbing into the hairlines. “Jane packs a mean left hook... I usually just aim for the balls.” The last bit probably wasn’t needed as the men shifted uncomfortably. She didn’t have time for that shit and working on Albert. It took couple of seconds for the name of Dr Banner to ring a bell. “Dr Bruce Banner?” The Hulk dude.

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“Thor thinks the world of him... and he is highly regarded in his field. I guess we can compromise… I will need to get Jane morally ready for sharing again, though. Last time I got a black eye trying to separate her and Dr Stevens. Jane would have totally won, but yeah... we had to wamoosh before the security got there... It happened outside the local pub and everyone involved were drunk at the time.” Darcy felt like an explanation was in order as the men’s eyebrows were climbing into the hairlines. “Jane packs a mean left hook... I usually just aim for the balls.” The last bit probably wasn’t needed as the men shifted uncomfortably. She could never make a good impression. Ever. What was wrong with her? “Anyone wants to take a seat?” Should she offer them a drink? Two of them held water bottles... and the third one was Johnson... so Darcy imagined they were good.

Just at the time the elevator door opened and a nervous looking Rosie Velasquez stepped out. Darcy’s hand shot into the air.

“Rosie! Over here!” The woman just stood outside the elevator for a sec taking in the occupants of the room. “Want a drink? Wanna go grab one from the kitchen? Make yourself a coffee if you want. Can you grab me a water while you there?” Waving at Rosie probably wasn’t necessary as being the only other woman in a company of four suited men she could hardly be missed.

Rosie Velasquez started working at the Stark Tower also known as Avengers Tower soon after it was renovated after the alien invasion. It was a good job. The pay was very reasonable. They had a coffee machine on almost every floor and free meal and light lunch once a day in the cafeteria, unless it was a longer shift in which case they got two. It saved her money and a headache of cooking. Sometimes the people she worked with were jerks, but she could handle that. Also working, even indirectly, for Stark looked well on her CV so if she ever decided to move on it would work in her favor. Everyone knew Stark Tower. It was The Place to work in New York.

The call that Rosie received earlier made her think that the choice was about to be taken out of her hands.

“Ms Velasquez, if you will step into the elevator it will take you to the Penthouse.”

The Head of Security called her personally to request that she came back for an informal meeting with him in the Penthouse. During her time in the Tower they have spoken maybe, what, five times?
It had to be about the girl in the Penthouse this morning when she brought over the phones. Was that Stark’s one night stand? It was a public secret that Potts had moved out last summer, so it wasn’t like it was a shock that Stark had a woman over… Was she supposed to get rid of her earlier? Jarvis backed the Lewis girl up! How was she supposed to know? And she was on crutches. In those oversized clothes the girl looked like a beat-up homeless puppy… Rosie had to wait and make sure she was ok as she took the shower.

She just signed a NDA that pretty much implied that if she was to blab Stark, Tony Stark, would ensure she wouldn’t work in NYC, the states or on this planet ever again and that would be after he sued her for all she was worth.

Maybe she should have gone to the locker room and changed. Put the standard suit on to look professional. Maybe put some more makeup on. Not that it ever did anything for her.

She didn’t have the clearance for the Penthouse. That was it. Very few people had the clearance. Her supervisor was one of them. She should have insisted on following the protocol and refused… and she would have gotten even more grief from that fuck, Johnson, for that. He always made impression that he worked well, but the man’s only gift was that he always surrounded himself with hard working people. The prick never did shit and now she was summoned by Harold Hogan.

‘Fucking shit…’ The elevator door opened and she stepped out.

The sight that greeted her was not one that she expected.

“Rosie! Over here! Want a drink? Wanna go grab one from the kitchen? Make yourself a coffee if you want. Can you grab me a water while you there?”

Surrounded by her supervisors and the Head of Security in an elegant blue dress, like she was wrapped in cloudless sky, somehow oozing class and sass at same time, sat the girl from this morning. The young woman with a wide smile painted a vivid blood red looked like she owned the place. Who the hell was she?

A scenario worse than the Lewis girl being no one came to her mind. She clearly was someone. Someone important. Probably someone important to Stark.

“Sparkling?” Fuck, she could do with some water too. Rosie’s throat was so dry she barely managed to mumble the word out. She was so fired. Lewis probably spent the entire morning hanging her out to dry, while her behavior was friendly she could bet it wasn’t professional enough…and she wasn’t supposed to be there in the first place… Fucking Johnson probably was nailing her to the cross too, the shit, when it was all his fault.

“Still is fine. You remember where it is?”

“Yes… Ms Lewis.”

Darcy Lewis slides the glasses up the nose and laughs at her like Rosie just told the best joke.

“Well, meow. Grab the water and pop a squat, Ms Velasquez.” She adds a wink at the end that lets Rosie think that maybe the situation wasn’t as hopeless as she was imagining. The water is where they found it in the morning and she grabs two bottles before returning. It takes a real effort not to run back or at least walk at an increased pace. Everyone was watching her. Especially Johnson.

Harold Hogan stands up to greet her and shakes hand after Rosie gives the water to still grinning Lewis girl. Who was she?
“Good afternoon, Ms Velasquez. I do apologize for such a sudden request to join us here; I hope it didn’t inconvenience you too much?” Her boss was smiling.

“Not a problem.” Just don’t talk too much, Velasquez, just don’t fucking talk too much. It was the mantra that Rosie kept repeating in her head. Don’t get yourself fired. You need this job.

“Superb. I believe you have already met Ms Darcy Lewis?” Heavy, heavy emphasis on the Ms part. Yeah, she was getting the message loud and clear. No being overly familiar. She got that. “Mr Stark’s girlfriend that has just moved in from London?” Jesus, have mercy upon her soul… Lewis was all casual about Stark but she never ever mentioned being his significant other. Rosie looked at the woman and back at her boss.

“I had the pleasure this morning.”

“Please take a seat.”

Lewis shoves the pile of notes and a book… Engineering for Dummies?... further down the sofa and pats not too subtly the now free space next to her.

Red lips… chewing on the end of the pencil … the glasses sliding down her nose as she frowns in concentration at the book on her lap… the angle gives just the right view of the woman with the hourglass body, in a summer dress that has slid up her thighs just a little, curled up casually on the Penthouse’s sofa.

Tony took a deep breath. Bloody Hogan… He did not need to see Darcy dressed like one of the many fantasies he has of her, all sass and attitude and… God, that body… so casually lounging in their sitting room like she doesn’t have a care in the world. It was like she was wrapped in blue-grey smoke that a single movement could dissolve leaving her seated… was she wearing the matching underwear? Or is it the black one? The black lace would be such a harsh contrast to the pale creamy skin as he slowly slid it off her…

“Hello?” And he should not forget about the voice… He sat on the bed in the jet’s bedroom with the pants around his knees, wishing that he was in the Penthouse next to the woman on the other end of his call.

“Hey, Honeybuns.”

“Oh, hey! Mr The Awesome Boyfriend according to my brand new phone. When the hell did you manage to hack it?”

“It is Stark Tech, it is easier then you think…”

“I am mildly concerned by your statement. Are you saying your precious StarkPhone isn’t safe?”

“For me to hack it, you little witch.” Definitely the black lace.

“Well, somebody is touchy. What’s up?”

“Me.” Maybe he shouldn’t push his luck, but the blood in his veins is hot and going south leaving him lightheaded. It feels good.

“Are you?” There is a little uncertainty her voice, but Tony consoles himself that she hadn’t hung up
yet. “You poor thing. But I am sure the condition isn’t something a little DIY couldn’t cure.”

“Honeybunny, you are so cruel to me…”

Darcy’s sultry laugh washes over him and Tony grips himself a little harder as his hand starts pumping.

“I resent the accusation. You are not here, it is not like I can help you, darling.”

“And if I was there right now, in the bedroom, with you in my arms, what would you do?”

“Slap you and tell you to go take a shower, Tony.”

“You are the Devil, Shortstack.”

“But, like, classy, sassy, sexy Devil, right?” Now it is his turn to laugh, but it comes out as a breathless moan.

“Yes, the sassiest, classiest, sexiest Devil in the blue dress.”

“How did you… was it Happy? Did he sneak a picture of me? I told him not too!”

“You look good enough to eat, Darce…”

“Do I? Is that what you are thinking right now?”

“Yesss and… other things. Just please keep talking?” He hisses out the answer and pleads with her. This is the point where she either hangs up or…

“So my voice, huh? That is the weirdest turn on, I thought it was just me when I hear you speak. There is something in your voice… your overconfident, asshole voice. Did I tell you that I enjoyed listening to you speak through the door last night? Your voice can put ideas in a girl’s head… I really wished I wasn’t so tired last night so could listen and let your words to slowly wash over my skin… is that how it would feel if I were to take shower in sin? Over my toes and up my thighs… my backside…”

“Fucking hell, Darcy…”

“Actually it is just Darcy. But yes… I have sensitive skin so I imagined…”

“What? What? Please tell Tony…” Tony can see the she devil in a blue dress laying on his bed as he closes his eyes.

“That is a secret… and I got to go. Natasha is taking me out to dinner. But if it will make you feel any better maybe next time you can demonstrate how you DIY, you got me curious… speak to you later.” The line goes dead.

_Bloody Devil in a bloody blue dress!_
“Mr Stark has requested a security detail to be established for Ms Lewis.” Rosie sips the water and tries not to look too obviously confused at her own presence in this high level meeting and the Lewis girl kept grinning at her, it was unnerving. “I shall start with saying that from this day forward you shall be taken of any other duties until the evaluation and the probation period of two weeks is over and your permanent transfer is complete. I have selected you for this move on the basis that you have indicated willingness to be added to a personal security detail and your competence. The probation, as I have mentioned, will be two weeks, the offer can be retracted by Mr Stark at any moment during that time without further explanations, in which case you will immediately return to your present duties with a compensation for your time.”

Mr Hogan sounded like he was reading them the Riot Act. This was some serious business. Darcy Lewis was getting her own security. Stark wasn’t just getting someone to tag along with her from his staff. That was some serious money being spent. Rosie felt even more out of place in her torn jeans, t-shirt and a winter coat. She slowly pulled the scarf from around her neck. She was roasting. What was she doing here? She didn’t indicate no willingness to be added to personal detail, not because she didn’t want to, but because no one from her superiors ever asked her that, she was that low level.

“Since you all will be working as a team I saw it best to get you all notified of this change at the same time. We aim to have the team operational in a week’s time, once you will be put through your paces. When you are not on training you will be on call for Ms Lewis if she were to need you in the meantime. Any questions?”

Lewis looked like she was bursting but kept her mouth shut. Rosie looked around. She had questions, but she wasn’t going to be the first one to speak. Smith bit the bullet first.

“Mr Hogan, what about the job description?” The money, Rosie though resentfully. She could only imagine the paycheck increase they will get… The lucky bastards…

“It will officially change in two weeks provided you pass, and of course that will include the salary increase that will be discussed on individual basis…”

“What is Velasquez doing here?” Johnson couldn’t contain himself any longer. “With all due respect, but for a team of four…”

“The core team will consist of three people, Johnson.”

Rosie felt a lump form in her throat. She was getting fired. In front of everyone. Thanks, Johnson, you fucking fuck… Her supervisor shoots her a look like he knew that he was about to get away with murder.

“And Velasquez is here in case one of you doesn’t make the cut in the next five minutes.”

Rosie blinks and tries swallowing the lump so she can take breaths again as the Head of Security continues. The fuck?...
“So, Johnson. We have a scenario on our hands. This morning Tony Stark requested two newest StarkPhones to be delivered to the Penthouse for Ms Lewis. It is not unusual for items of interest to be requested by Mr Stark. We have protocols in place for such events in every department. Can you please tell me what they are, Johnson?” Hogan’s voice drips with casualness. Fake ass casualness. Otter and Smith clearly felt the threat in the air as they kind of leaned in their seats away from Johnson like suddenly he smelled bad.

“The items need to be delivered to Mr Stark as a priority…”

“And?…”

“By security personnel…” Johnson stammered out the words.

“We haven’t got time for this. I will simplify it for the benefit of everyone present. It needs to be delivered stat, by the authorized security staff. And this morning in the R&D team, who was that person? Because I tell you now, it wasn’t Velazquez, but for some reason she did the delivery. You want to explain that, Johnson?”

Ok. Heat under Johnson’s ass… Was she next? She rather not be next… but she did the delivery that she shouldn’t have done it… She was going because of Johnson of all people…

The silence stretched until Darcy couldn’t take it anymore.

“Seriously? It has been a long ass day already; I am not sitting here waiting for you to come up with a reasonable explanation…”

“We got the report that Mr Stark left…!”

“Do not ever raise your voice at Ms Lewis.” With a low growl Harold Hogan stood up in a way that promised nothing good for Johnson and everyone stiffened in their seats. “You decided that performance of your direct duties is beneath you, that’s what happened.”

“That was not how it happened! Velasquez insisted…”

Rosie’s eyes nearly popped out of the sockets and she was about defend herself when a hand landed on her thigh and short nails dug into the denim. Lewis looked at her and shook her head indicating Rosie to stay put.

“Insisted? Do you want me to play the record of how she insisted on being given the task? If your memory doesn’t go that far back, I will clue you in, she didn’t. ” There was silence in the room until Hogan spoke again. “Dereliction of duty, Johnson, falls under gross misconduct under the terms of your employment. You will report to a disciplinary hearing tomorrow morning at 9 am. You may go.”

“But, sir….”

“You may go, or you will be helped out.” The implication is clear and Johnson stands up and leaves not before giving her and Lewis one hard look like they were nothing more than dirt on his shoes.

“Don’t let the door hit ya where the good Lord split ya, Mr Johnson.” Lewis quips in response without a delay the smile gracing those red lips was all but friendly. Rosie takes a deep breath to hold in the hysterical giggles threatening to erupt at the absurdity of the situation. Everyone watches Johnson leave and as soon as the elevator doors shuts after the man Lewis speaks up again. “And that is how you make enemies, people. Do not follow my example. But anyway… that was fun.”
“And the purpose of this demonstration was that if you have a job to do I expect you to do it. It is not for you to decide the importance of the task. Your job is to do it professionally. Any objections?”

“No, sir!” The reply came as a chorus. A very enthusiastic chorus. No one present was that stupid, thank you very much.

“Excellent. On the topic of why Ms Velasquez is still here,” Rosie feels her hands and feet going cold, _that was it, she was next_. She should at least be able make a case at the disciplinary hearing to _be allowed to resign_… “Ms Lewis feels strongly that she is capable of being the primary security person on the team.”… _instead of being fired like_ …

“…what? I’m sorry _what_?” It was one of few times in her life that Rosie was sure someone could have knocked her over with a feather. Lewis covers her mouth with a hand, but it is quite clear from shaking of her shoulders she is barely holding in the laughter. Smith and Otter are just staring at her like she spontaneously grew a second head. Hogan looks less then amused.

“Primary security person on the team.”

“I mean… yes…?” _What was going on? How on earth? Her? When?! Why?! How?! Jesus, he was not asking her anything why the hell was she responding?_ Rosie’s mind was struggling to process the new information.

Lewis clearly can’t take it and starts cackling out loud. _Bloody woman_…

“You are being handed a promotion and you look like Happy just asked you to eat dirt… Your _face_… Oh, God… is just _precious_…”

How was she supposed to react? She was being promoted… _promoted_ to a position that only ever featured in her dreams under the label _Never Going To Happen But Fun To Think Of_. Should she say something? _Nothing_? She should probably start breathing again…

“Ms Lewis…” Hogan looks exasperated.

“What? This is the team, right? When am I supposed to introduce them to the crazy if not _now_? And stop glaring at me. Jane does it so much better and it doesn’t work either. I signed up to being Tony Stark’s girlfriend, let’s face it, _no one_ expects me to be normal. I passed that phase when I was sixteen, _totally_ overrated. Ok, people, question time. I go first.”

“Darcy…”

“What? I am not going to ask them if they are likely to steal and wear my underwear!... Because you won’t, right?” Rosie buries her face in her hands and tries to breathe evenly. _Does she really want this promotion?_ “Uhh… Rosie? I was just kidding, and in case I wasn’t the question would have been addressed to the guys, because you can always borrow it if you want, just wash it after and don’t tell Tony. _Especially_ don’t tell Tony.” _Jesus fucking Christ…_ She winks at Hogan and the man rolls his eyes.

Otter cracks first and finally Adam joins with a chuckle.

“You are something else, Ms Lewis.”

“Damn right, I’m a treat. And it is just…”

“Ms Lewis. Strictly Ms Lewis. By request of Mr Stark.” The name makes everyone instantly sober up and Rosie to sit up straight.
“When the Hell did that happen?” Lewis is not amused at the news.

“When it was decided that you need the security detail, Ms Lewis. I am just saying they should act professional. Calling you Ms Lewis falls under it. They work for you.”

“Let’s be real, they work for Tony, he will pay the bill. And thanks for ruining the mood, meanie.”

There is a silent stare off until Lewis shrugs and settles back with her lips pursed.

“Back to business. Ms Velasquez? Any objections?”

She can do this…

“No, sir.” …and Lewis seriously needs to stop winking at her.

“Excellent. The evaluation starts tomorrow at 8am. Report to the reception and you will be directed. Any questions? Please, not you, Ms Lewis.” Lewis who had her hand in the air drops it with a scowl.

“Rude much…”

Rosie can feel the denim of the jeans sticking to her thighs. She was jumping down the rabbit hole… and it looked like it was rather deep…

“So, Rosie… do you like pie? Because I got a pie with your name on it.”

“Um…” She was talking about a pie pie, right?

Well... I wasn't planning on it turning into a full chapter short it may be, but it did... So yeah... Something more relaxing for a change of pace. The next one will be a little more exiting and Tony will be back. But Anyway... SO? What you think? Good? Bad? Let me know. Help my muse feed the plot bunnies! They are hungry little beasts! Much appreciated in advance =)
Chapter 21

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Darcy fixed her hair in the reflection on the door of the elevator.

“Thank you for escorting me today. I know you had an early start this morning, Ms Velasquez.” Rosie gave her an unimpressed look as the woman stood next to her.

“Will you let it go? Please? I want to pass this probation.”

“You cannot be calling me Ms Lewis all the time.”

“For that kind of money? Watch me.”

“I am so talking to Tony about it. He was way out of order.”

“Oh, I though you just spoke with him, on the phone. I swear I heard…”

Rosie grins and Darcy feels her cheeks heat up as she once again fixes her hair.

“Discretion and not ribbing your boss about her poor judgement is in your contract. Don’t push it, Ms Velasquez… I cannot keep calling you that! It is wrong.”

“You can call me by my first name it is just us that has to stick to Ms Lewis.”

“It is pointless. Absolutely pointless.”

“No one from the team cares, trust me. They will sing Ms Lewis all the way to the bank from now on.”

“I am still talking to Tony about this. And thank you for…”

“Please stop thanking me for doing my job. I will just drive you and Ms Romanov to the restaurant. Sit somewhere with a good view of you, at some time Smith will join me and after we will drive you home. You make it sound like I am about to donate my kidneys, I’m not.”

Darcy sniffs.

“Good manners don’t cost and you should take my gratitude with a little more grace.”

“Mr Hogan just told me that if anything happens to you he will rip my spine out.”

“Nonsense. I will have you and Black Widow seated right next to me. I could not be safer.”

“You have your taser, don’t you?” Rosie is suddenly on alert as she gives her a once over.

“I don’t know what shit they told you in those two hours after you left me. But it is all slander and lies.”

“So you did not tase Black Widow?”

There is a gentle ding as the elevator door opens in the garage.

“Oh, look. Our floor. We better get going let’s not make Natasha wait.”
“Oh, God… You did, didn’t you?”

“She did what?” Black Widow was leaning on one of Stark’s black SUVs. All dolled up for the dinner in a dark grey overcoat and long black suede boots and smoky make up. Darcy smiles and ignores the question.

“Someone’s looking good.” The redhead cocks head to a side and gives Darcy a slow once over that she was sure other people would find intimidating. Rosie shifts nervously at her side. Romanov was a master of the art of making people feel out of their dept. Darcy narrows her eyes at the woman. Romanov knew it didn’t work on her… So the only reason…

“Back off.”

Two perfectly shaped eyebrows go up ever so slowly in question.

“Yeah, no, Romanov. I had to nearly arm wrestle Happy for it. You are not fucking this over for me. Unfair advantage and all that shit. Unless you got something to say? No? Then back the hell off.”

Natasha finally spares a glance at the security woman. This time the expression is very carefully neutral. Rosie steps slightly to a side nearly coming between her and Natasha, but the redhead just smirks before focusing back on Darcy.

“Italian?”

“Please tell me they have calamari. I love calamari.”

“They do.”

“Give the address to Ms Velasquez here and we can roll.”

The Italian restaurant is a small cozy place and by Romanov’s request they end up seated in a semi private corner.

After managing to shed her new winter coat Darcy runs her hand over the blue dress as she sits down she can feel Romanov’s approving gaze.

“Stark has a god’s gift at guessing the correct sizing in clothing.”

“Yeah, I know. I don’t think I ever owned so many dresses that fit at any point in time. So yeah…”

As soon as her butt is comfortably on the chair and crutches propped by the wall, the phone in her purse lets out a series of low beeps indicating a received text. Natasha frowns and pulls her own devise from the coat pocket.

Darcy squints to read words on the screen. The contacts were making her eyes dry and irritated.

_Do not put shit into Nat’s head you midget Harpy._ ~ Unknown number. For the love of Thor… really?

“Who texted you?” Natasha looks a little peeved after reading her own text.

“Cupid just asked to be fourth time lucky. Not in those exact words. But I got the general idea.”
Romanov leans over the table to glance at Darcy’s screen before sitting down with a sigh.

“You?”

_Please remember that I can do much more damage to you then you can do to me._ ~ Stark

Darcy gently massages her temples with fingertips. _What was wrong with men in their lives?_

“Good evening, Ladies.” The waitress smiles at the two women. “Did you have a chance to decide what you will be drinking tonight?”

“Depends. Is my boyfriend’s blood on a menu?”

“Darcy, please.” The waitress looks gratefully at Natasha for being saved from answering that question. “His blood is at the very least two thirds scotch at any given time. You shouldn’t have anything that strong with the painkillers for your ankle.”

“So wine? _Red_? I’ll make do.”

Romanov gives a glowing smile to the waitress.

“Make that a bottle. Do you have Riesling?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“We’ll have that. I imagine you only have one kind?” The poor girl gives an apologetic smile. “That’s ok. Oh, we will have two portions of calamari as a starter while we have a look at the menu. Thank you.”

Darcy kind of feels bad for the kid. She remembered waitressing back in the day and in the days that were not that far behind. It sucked.

“Oh, yeah. Before I forget. I am seeing the labs first thing tomorrow and after we can have lunch and I will listen to the list of very valid reasons, why I should be doing what you have invited me here to discuss.”

“So why not do it now?”

“Because I fully intend to have a drink and there are two things I don’t do on a first date, _girlfriend_, is _fuck_ and make promises while drunk. Also, strictly speaking you never told me why we were meeting. I assumed.”

“Why have you agreed to meet me then?” Romanov wasn’t too happy.

“Risking to sound pathetic, I will confess that I don’t get offers to hang out with girls. Well, there is always Jane and I kind of have hopes for Rosie…”

“She is your bodyguard.”

“The two are not mutually exclusive. So… anyway… Due to the nature of my job, that is being attached at the hip to Jane and _Science!_, and due to the nature of _me_, I do not have girl friends… Let’s face it, it is not likely that getting myself self-centered asshole genius for boyfriend will bring me any friends. Pardon me, but I took my chance. So you stuck with me this evening. Don’t give me that look. You know what? If I was you, and you were me, I would have a billion questions. You don’t know me. I bet you read my SHIELD file. I bet there are discrepancies.”
“You read your SHIELD file?”

“No. It wasn’t on Agent Jackass’ laptop. But I know my life. I have no grand secrets, I will tell you that now to avoid any disappointment.”

“Why are you telling me this?”

“Not because I want to. That is for certain. But I am on your turf now and our first meeting wasn’t the most successful. If I could, I would be going through the personal files of every single one of you, people, to make sure you are not a threat to me or Jane… or Thor-bro. Natasha…”

“Wine, ladies…” The waitress is back with a bottle and glasses.

“Thank you. Just leave it. I will open it. We will call you when we are ready to order.” Romanov’s voice is polite but cool. *They will have to leave a good tip at the end*, Darcy thinks as she watches Natasha quickly examine the cork before opening and pouring the wine.

“Not quite what you expected me to say?…” They taste the wine and Darcy approves.

“You are never quite what anyone expects.” Natasha tastes the vine like a pro.

“I can’t help it, honest to Thor…”

“Why didn’t Coulson recruit you?”

“Me?” Darcy blinks in surprise. “Why on earth would he? I mean he wanted me to work in admin…”

“So he did want to take you on.”

“No, he wanted me to do his bloody filing…”

“Same thing, you would still have had to go through the SHIELD basic training.”

“Agent Not-So-Dead wanted me working for… SHIELD? He never…”

“Would you have agreed?” The calamari arrive and Natasha once again dismisses the waitress.

“No. Never. You are joking, right?”

“You worked as a waitress for eight months shortly after the Battle of New York? Why?”

Darcy isn’t surprised at the questions, but rather at the rapid fire way they were going her way. Well, she did offer to answer about the discrepancies…

“Because SHIELD is a bag dicks.”

“That is not an answer.”

“Yes, is it. But I get what you are saying. Do you remember Eric Selvig? I am not sure if you two have met…”

“We have.” Natasha’s tone of voice is even.

“So you know what happened to him after the Battle of New York then?” Darcy smiles, but it isn’t a nice smile.
“Dr Selvig was unwell after Loki.”

“Unwell after Loki… Ok. So you have no idea what happened to him after? Just to put the record straight.” Darcy sips her wine and pops the calamari into her mouth. They were in for a long evening at this rate.

“I believe…”

“No. You either know or not. No guess work. It is not an examination. I already know the answer and I am not holding it against you. Do not over think it.”

“I am not aware what happened to Dr Selvig after. I know they tried getting some information, but he wasn’t in full control of his faculties.”

“Nice way of saying crazy. I like it. So you know what SHIELD did? What they did to man that nearly lost his life in their service, was enslaved and tortured? His mind picked apart against his will? They dropped him like a hot potato. Right into a mental asylum. Not even the good private kind, the state funded overcrowded and under-financed one. In London of all places. It took me and Jane a month of frantic calling to find him. A month. We probably called every morgue and hospital in the States just to find him because one of the staff moved from there and just knew the name. A month. We though he was dead. He has no family, little friends. SHIELD wouldn’t help. We were in Sacramento at the time doing research on an exchange program, so we packed up and moved to London. We had him released into our custody… You know what they do to people that they think are crazy there? They lock them up in a small room with padded walls, all wrapped up in a straight jacket. Let’s not forget the drugs… They were fixing all the parts that weren’t broken. He needed therapy. But SHIELD thought he was a lost cause, so they just…” Darcy needs to stop and take a breath and collect herself before continuing. “So we took him in. Two broke ass women. Thank god, Jane’s mum let us stay at her flat, but even then, private therapy isn’t cheap, you know? Jane got the grant in Uni and took up tutoring on the side, so basically we split the research for the Uni between us, she showed the face at work and tutored, and I did all calculations at home and looked after Eric, and I took up waitressing in the evening. Jane was in Uni from eight to five, home by six. Used to take over from me looking after Eric and I went to work from seven to two at night. All that because SHIELD is a bag of dicks. Eight months… It felt like forever.”

“Why didn’t you call Stark? He would have…”

“And said what? Jane wouldn’t even say Thor’s name out loud because he didn’t fucking call before he left again. We didn’t even know how deep Eric was in all that shit until he basically got better and told us and by the time it was a moot point. Eric went to stay with friends in Helsinki, he was back teaching shortly after.”

“We didn’t know.”

“And I am not holding it against you.” Darcy shrugged. Neither Jane nor she had any bad feeling towards the Avengers because of that. It was not reasonably possible for them to have known.

“Your family never came to your graduation? Why?”

“Can we order the food first? This girl needs sustenance.” Was she going to relent at one point?

Darcy got a pizza and Natasha got steak, medium rare with all the trimmings.

“So why didn’t they?”

“I take you know that my mother remarried? When I was eight?”
“Yes.”

“Does it say that she left me to live with my godfather until I was fourteen?”

“No, you were registered…”

“Yes, at school I was registered as living with my mother dearest, but everyone knew I wasn’t. I wish I could say that it was because we were poor and the man she married was poor, and money was an issue. Well, she married one of the wealthiest men in Louisiana. Good for her. The day before the wedding she left me on the doorstep of a man that up to that point I saw on three occasions. The first excuse was that she didn’t want to make it awkward, my daddy just died and she was remarrying and shit. I was eight. I wasn’t getting it. Long story short I lived with Matt until I was fourteen. By that time I got the message. She didn’t want to make it awkward for herself. She got a man with status, two step kids that in her eyes were the perfection personified.”

“Why the change at fourteen?”

“Matt died.”

“I’m sorry.”

It takes a sec for Darcy to realize that she was crying, big fat tears rolling down her cheeks.

“A fuck… I’m sorry… I just… Excuse me! Where is the restroom?” Darcy gets her crutches clumsily and gets her purse.

It has been years… All good things end. Everything ends. Matt’s life ended.

She isn’t gone long mainly because Rosie nearly breaks the door to her cubicle down a minute later.

“Jesus fuck! I know you want to pass the fucking probation Velasquez, but fuck that is not the way to do it!”

“I turned around and you were gone!”

“Well, I am not dead, calm your tits and get out!”

“But…”

“I am taking a piss!”

Rosie is waiting for her just outside the door of the ladies toilets.

“How do I look?”

“Like you just cried.”

“Something fell into my eye.”

“No, it is clear…”

“Something fell into my eye, are we clear?”

“…Yes.”

Romanov is calmly eating her steak by the time Darcy is back. The pizza is waiting for her.
“That looks yummy. How is the steak?”

“That is good.”

Darcy forces herself to eat couple of slices and drinks more wine before continuing.

“Matt died. Mother had no choice but to take me in now. Three and a half years. It wasn’t fun. You know how in the movies the step siblings always fight at the beginning and soon they find a common ground and all is sugar dipped almonds? Well, it didn’t happen for us. They were spiteful, spoiled, rotten monsters and my mother adored them. Ken and Kathrin. Keith, their father, didn’t like me much either, I was the stain on the portrait of perfection that was his life, that is, by the way, a quote from him. He was blond, his kids were blond, his wife was bleached to high heaven… and there was me. A troll… I was a late bloomer by the way. One day I woke up and bam! boobs. I didn’t help my case one bit. So yeah, by the time I was eighteen I have applied to every possible college and got accepted to quite a few, including Culver.”

“That is impressive.”

“Except they didn’t think that I should go. The thinking basically was that since I had big boobs the brain was small. They had my life planned for me. I was to go to a local Finishing School for ladies and marry a son of Keith’s friend, a scumbag in a suit. He is serving life for aggravated assault now, of his wife, believe it or not, which I totally can. I packed my bags and left the next day after the conversation. Guess what? My mother didn’t authorize the use of my trust fund to cover my education, because I was rude.”

“Is that where you got the PTSD?”

Darcy takes a moment to think it over.

“Saying that I have PTSD is a little harsh, but Ken and Kat liked to keep me on my toes. They thought it was hilarious. I disagreed. If I never meet them again it will be way too soon. Cunts. Oh, so the graduation. I called my mother, invited her over. Her answer was Kat just got engaged, I know you are still single, I don’t want to make you uncomfortable by flaunting her good fortune. I got a diploma with highest honors and she got a rock and I was treated like I was a terminal case because I wasn’t hanging on a man’s arm… I did not call her again, she didn’t come. I haven’t spoken to her since.”

So I had to split the chapter as it was way too big, so Tony will now be making an appearance in the next one. What do you think about the chapter? I had to get rid of some plot bunnies that insisted I add some of Darcy’s past before I moved on. SO? Good? Bad? It makes sense in my head, so i hope you will like it. Once again the author is sleep deprived... Leave a comment! Much appreciated as always! =)
“Saying that I have PTSD is a little harsh, but Ken and Kat liked to keep me on my toes. They thought it was hilarious. I disagreed. If I never meet them again it will be way too soon. Cunts... Oh, so the graduation. I called my mother, invited her over. Her answer was Kat just got engaged, I know you are still single, I don’t want to make you uncomfortable by flaunting her good fortune. I got a diploma with highest honors and she got a rock and I was treated like I was a terminal case because I wasn’t hanging on a man’s arm… I didn't call her again, she didn’t come. I haven’t spoken to her since.”

“Are they likely to come out of the woodwork when you will hit the first pages?”

Darcy stopped mid sip. She didn't actually think of that. The likelihood of her being with Stark long enough to be picked up by the press was small to none existent…

“No? I mean… me and Tony …” Her mind went back to the infamous article about her and Jane. No one expected that to happen either. But that was purely science magazine. No one in the Beckets household read that. “Yeah. They will come crawling out. Oh, Thor . I can hear her say it. I can see her Hollywood smile saying I always knew she was going to do well and then proceed talking about Tony like they were the best of friends.” She pushed the plate away from herself. Her appetite gone completely. “Ken and Kat... those are social vultures …” Darcy could feel her throat tighten to the point it was getting hard to take breaths.

“Darcy.” Natasha’s voice was sharp like a whip and she nearly jumped  out of her skin. “Focus. They cannot touch you anymore.”

“I know… I know. I need more wine. ” Darcy collected herself and Natasha ordered another bottle to their table. “Family isn't blood. I know everyone says it is, but it isn’t. Family is a choice. Since I was a kid I was told but sweetie she is your mother... So what?... ” She did her best not to be resentful. She forgave her mother for the lack of any maternal feelings towards her. She just had no intention of ever forgetting about how the woman just stood there and let those creeps push her around.

“Are you bisexual?”

Darcy nearly spilled the wine on herself after Natasha refilled their glasses.

“Jesus… No. Is that about me and Jane and the wannabe science tabloid? I was tying Jane’s scarf for her, it was cold and she didn’t have gloves on. They made it sound like we were having a lesbian orgy on a sidewalk. Not that it is anything wrong with being attracted to same sex, it just doesn’t work for me. I got my own pair of boobs and I rather my partner had a dick. Thanks… If you ask anyone back Greenwich if I am bi they will all say yes, solely based on the amount of times Jane has groped me in public, or I gave her a back rub, hand or head massage during working hours. Jane does it for kicks she isn’t bi either, take my advice, never dare Jane Foster to do anything, she will do it.”

“Why do you do it?”

“The massages? I don’t know… Matt had advanced arthritis. Massages used to help with the pain.
We used to spend hours talking as I rubbed his feet, hands, back. I guess, I am just used to touching people I am comfortable with in a non sexual way. For example… “Darcy slowly extended her hand and laid it gently over Natasha’s as the woman watched her closely. “I know and you know that it’s strictly platonic. Not that you aren’t great.” Darcy winked at her as she could feel tension mounting. After couple of minutes Darcy took Natasha’s hand with both of hers and started slowly rubbing the joints of the fingers.

“You're good at this.”

“Yeah. Well, got the basics back in the day and by a mistake gave Jane a back rub in New Mexico when all that shit with Thor went down… I honestly think I have seen Jane naked more times than it is good for my sanity.” She let go of the Widow’s hand and sat back straight.

“You didn’t have to stop.”

“I think I did. The waitress just gave us a scandalized look. And to make it weirder I do back rubs for Thor and had a go at least once at his warrior friends, Sif more than once, since I am more comfortable with her. I am honestly surprised I don’t have biceps like Cupid. Rubbing their backs is like kneading marble. By the way as a return favor Sif showed me that nifty move I used the other day… Has it really been the other day? Feels like I am here longer then that. ” Maybe it was the amount of things that have happened since she stepped foot into the Tower. The time was relative after all.

“Any other moves she showed you?”

“Yes.”

It was Natasha’s turn to freeze mid sip. The woman was good, but Darcy was unpredictable.

“... Such as?”

“She showed me a way to put a person into a temporary full body paralysis.” Darcy has to admit that it sounded much more serious when she said it loud. From the look Natasha give her the woman was unsure as what to say to that and looked mildly alarmed. “First, for the record, it's not a single move, I literally need to massage the back and neck for good ten minutes pressing in strict sequence the pressure points. If you get it wrong it just doesn’t work, it isn’t lethal and it is absolutely useless in a fight.”

“Does it work?”

“Oh, yes. We tried it on Thor-bro. He is the best big brother ever, or maybe Jane put his balls in a vise after I asked, one way or the other. Due to being of Asgard he only went down for three minutes. Still three minutes. It looked like he kind of fell asleep. Except they stay conscious. Useless, just like I said. How am I gonna use it? Some guy is attacking me and I like hey, want a back rub before you kill me? Because that would totally work.”

“Can’t it be done faster?”

“It cannot be done faster; certain number of heartbeats needs to pass between first point pressed and the last. Something to do with energy flows. I had to learn to estimate that too. Learning it wasn’t fun. Thor was relaxed. But… yeah… you know what? If the heart rate were to speed up significantly, it could do the trick. Still would take you no less than two minutes.”

“So you can teach me?”
“Sure. Find two suckers that would like to be paralyzed for a while, on normal people it last three to four hours.” That was likely to happen. Not.

“I will.”

“Great. Is the interrogation finished?”

“I was under the impression that it was a voluntary exchange of information.”

Darcy gives Natasha a long look.

“Like you wouldn’t have weaseled that out of me at some point.”

“Saved me the time.”

“Glad to hear that. Now tell me why Cupid keeps insisting on getting tased?”

“He likes you.”

“I got a boyfriend.”

“In a strictly sisterly kind of way.”

“I tased him. Three times because he is always a total dick to me. The text earlier for example.” Darcy wasn’t buying it.

“Clint is a good person. He is just… complicated. Just like the rest of us.”

“It is turning into a tragic back-story hour. Not that mine is tragic as such.”

“You are on the level with him. He is not used to that.”

“So he keeps poking me with a stick to see how hard I will keep hitting him? That is not a way to make friends.” Darcy falls silent. It did make sense in kind in a twisted way. There was also only one reason why Natasha was telling her this. “I’ll think about it. Talking about an exchange of information… Did we get Coulson with the special cake back in New Mexico?”

Darcy manages to convince Rosie and Smith not to follow her all the way up to the Penthouse after they are back at the Tower.

“Seriously. Natasha is with me. Jarvis is watching. I could not be safer. Technically I am back home. It is only an elevator ride and I am not even that drunk.”

“Will you make that she reaches her rooms safely, Ms Romanov?” Rosie just wouldn’t relent. They just spoke to Happy and it was ok to leave her at the reception of the Tower where there were plenty security at any given time, and they now all knew who she was. Great. So much for anonymity.

“I will, Ms Velasquez.” It looked like Rosie’s main concern was leaving Darcy with the Black Widow. “I promise.”

“Thank you, Ms Lewis, please, if there will be anything….”

“Jarvis will give a bell to the security on duty. Go home.”
Rosie doesn’t move until the elevator door closes.

“DO you have to antagonize her like that? Rosie is doing her job.”

“Well, she could do it better.” Natasha was clearly seeing some phantom faults in the way Rosie did her job. Bloody super spy.

“She will do it better when you will stop hanging over her. Is that a …”

The elevator door opened without a warning to reveal two men in a conversation. Darcy stood up straighter on the crutches.

“Would you look at what the cat dragged in? Captain Rogers, what a pleasure.” She was still irked about the food incident. At least Natasha made a token effort and helped her with the pies in the morning. Clint was a dick so that was that. Rogers on the other hand still owed her… a smile spread on her face. Darcy was about to collect.

Captain Rogers jerked at the voice startling his companion who was now looking at the women in the elevator too taking a rather defensive stance.

“Natasha, guess what? I found us two volunteers.”

“For... oh.” Darcy was sure from Rogers’ and his friend’s reactions that Natasha was smiling too. The Black Widow was beginning to grow on her. “Excellent. Jarvis, please hold the elevator.”

“Done, Agent Romanov.”

The best part with a Jarvis controlled private elevator, which went to the secure part of the Tower, was that you could request for it to be held indefinitely if required.

“Hi, Natasha. Uh… Steve?” The guy was getting nervous. Sweat, dude, sweat. You are so in for this ride.

Captain America seemed to recover and remember his manners.

“Sam, let me introduce you to Ms Darcy Lewis, Thor’s Lighting Sister. Ms Lewis, Sam Wilson also known as the Falcon.”

Darcy made no indication that she heard a word being said. She kept a steady eye contact with the good Captain, the smile on her red lips never faltering.

“So, Rogers. Natasha here is in need of two volunteers for a little training session.” She winked at the Sam dude who clearly could not decide what to make of her. “Sam, right? Mind If I call you Sam?” Darcy wasn’t sure where the confidence in her voice was coming from but she was willing to bet on the wine.

“Not at all, all my friends call me Sam.”

“Good for you. So, Sam, you and… good Captain Rogers, have any plans for the rest of the evening? Fancy taking your shirts off in the name of furthering Natasha’s education?” She was nearly purring. Sam turned to putty before her very eyes. Oh, Wow… Sucker.

What has gotten into her? From the corner of her eye Darcy could clearly see Natasha’s approving lift of eyebrows.

“I don’t think…”
“So, _don’t_, Rogers. It doesn’t seem to be working out for you lately.” She took a step back. “You owe me. I am collecting. _Hop on_, Soldier, and do a girl a solid.”

“Come on, Steve. We were going to go to the gym. Do the pretty lady a solid.”

The look that Rogers send his friend clearly implored him to shut his mouth, but it was too late.

“The gym? No plans ruined then. Jarvis, please take us to the Common Room.”

Captain America was tall and made of muscle, but Thor was taller and made of more muscles. He kept eye contact with her the entire ride up and Darcy kept her smile on. If he thought that he could somehow intimidate her he was delusional. All he had to do was apologize, but the manly pride was pricked somehow because his friend was there and he didn’t want to lose face. _Pride comes before the fall… quite literally this time around._

“What happened to your foot, Darcy? Can I call you Darcy?”

“That’s fine, Sam, and it was bad sprain that got turned into a broken ankle.”

“I’m sorry. One of those hurts like a bitch.”

“It did. Like a _bitch_. Natasha, darling. I will explain the best I can. The point of this exercise is basically to press the stress points in a sequence, it is very important or it will have no effect. They have a name for it on Asgard, but I can never remember, so anyway. Gentlemen please remove your shirts, t-shirts, we need clear view of your back muscles.”

“I thought you were joking…” Sam looked lost for a sec before grinning. “But I am game. Steve?”

Steve was not as much game as his friends. Darcy sighed. Natasha rolled her eyes.

“Darcy is good at massage. She is showing me a way to relax body muscles via pressure points in the back.”

“And neck.” Darcy quipped. _None_ of them were technically lying.

“And neck. Besides, you owe her. I don’t think you get to choose this time round.” The Black Widow added one of her more creepy smiles. She clearly wanted to learn that move.

“I don’t think…”

“Rogers, I suggest you not to try and pull that _virgin reputation_ shit on me. I am the only one that read the damn history books back at school? You were basically a show girl for how long? Looking as you do, travelling with, what, two dozen lonely young women in close quarters and no one offered to break you in? _Please_. I totally get that you have manners. I approve of them. After, you went to war. _War_. Tour ed around Europe saving lives. Very heroic. In all male company for long stretches of time. Are you going to tell me, that your hot blooded companions never once dragged to some dingy bar or brothel, for the matter, and did not set you up with a good time lady for a night or two?” Darcy raised her eyebrows in challenge.

“It wasn’t like _that_…” There was no blush marring those perfect cheeks.

“You didn’t need no one’s help to find a lady for a good time, did you?” Rogers coughs at that, shrugs and simply removes his way too tight t-shirt before tossing it at Darcy, who just turns and lets it fall to the ground.
“Happy?”

“Oh, overjoyed?” Darcy sits on one of the high stools by the breakfast table. “Come here, stand with your back to me…”

“The fuck?” A high pitched voice floats from the ceiling.

“Hey, Cuddle Cakes. How was the meeting?” Darcy hummed under her breath as she indicated Natasha where she was going to start.

“It was a shitstorm. We won. What in hell are you doing exactly?” The screen on the side of her come to life and Tony’s confused looking face came into view.

“Educating Natasha.”

“I think Natasha is fully capable of educating herself how to feel up Rogers.”

“Listen, Stark…”

“Tony, Darcy just…”

“Right!” Darcy raises her voice to cut through the noise. “Put a fucking cork in it, Tony, for five minutes or I will tell Jarvis to activate the privacy protocol. Now. Natasha. Were you watching what I did? It might have been a little fast.”

“I know the muscles you pointed at.”

“Hey! Fly boy, stay still.” Wilson was squirming under Natasha’s hands. Clearly losing his earlier confidence. Stark looking like he was a split moment from punching someone wasn’t helping anyone to calm down.

“I think…”

“Too fucking late. Stand still, will you? What is his pulse, Natasha?”

“Fast.”

“Darcy, sweetie, you really need to tell me something because…” Stark was grinding his teeth as he spoke.

“Let me feel that? Excellent. Rogers about the same. Ready? Guys, relax as much as you can, stand as still as you can.”

“Darcy, Honeybuns, I am very open minded but that doesn’t…”

“Press just enough to feel the texture but not to bruise the muscles and go…” The wine was hitting her heard pretty hard at this point and Tony was distracting her, but Darcy knew what she was doing and did it with the fine surgical precision Sif installed into her as she could feel Romanov watching and repeating the previously shown moves.

“I know it probably isn’t what it looks like… Rogers, can you please step the fuck away from my girlfriend?”

“And we are done.” That went fast. The question was did it work?

“I am very fucking happy, can someone finally…” Tony was raging on the screen.
“Wilson’s heart rate has slowed.” Natasha poked the man in the shoulder and he went down landing square on the face. Darcy did the same to Rogers and he also fell forward.

“High five!” It was rather cool to high five the Black Widow.

“… Hulk Almighty. The fuck?... How the?... I am taking you with me next time I am going anywhere. Actually, I am back tomorrow and we are going somewhere for a couple of days so you can relax before you decide to kill someone here... As a fucking demonstration. The hell did you do to Rogers and his fly boy? They are not dead, right?”

“Darcy showed me an asgardian relaxation technique.” Natasha looked rather pleased.

“To the point of loss of consciousness?”

“Oh, they are conscious just paralyzed.”

“…You paralyzed Captain America? And Falcon?”

“Just temporarily… I think…”

“Jesus fuck…Romanov, you are not allowed to go out with Darcy ever again.”

So... I had been besieged by plot bunnies resulting in the above. The next chapter will be all about our favorite snark pair. Promise! Even with a possible sighting of plot=) So? what you think? Good? Bad? Let me know, peeps! Much appreciated in advance! =)
“Jesus fuck…Romanov, you are not allowed to go out with Darcy ever again.”

“Who the fuck died and made you God?” Yeah, the wine was a bad idea and as soon as she will be able to give a fuck Darcy will regret all the things that were coming out of her mouth.

“You just dropped Rogers, again I might add, and now Wilson. What has he ever done to you?”

“He volunteered for the training session, thank you very much.” Darcy watched as Natasha rolled the men onto their backs. Oh, thank God, there were no bloody noses.

“Did he know he was going to be paralyzed when you pitched the idea to him?”

“We didn’t go into detail. Anyway, if you must know, I think he is champ and if he wasn’t friends with Captain Asshole, that is too much of a man to apologize for eating other people’s food, none of this would have had to take place. Sorry, Sam.”

Darcy tried standing up and swayed rather strongly.

“You are piss drunk.” She flipped a peeved looking Stark.

“Reasonably intoxicated…” And the room started moving around the edges of her vision. “Uhhhh… Natasha? I think I will need a hand to get back…”

“Good morning…” There was a low voice right next to her ear.

“Uh…” Morning already? Why?

Hot breath tickled her ear and Darcy giggled sleepily into the pillow. It moved.

“Huh?..” Darcy managed to crack one eye open. Right before her eyes was a soft blue glow filtering through a t-shirt. “‘ony?” Other senses slowly tuned in. Gods, she was thirsty…

“Morning, Honeybunny. How is my undefeated Champion of the Stark Tower?”

“… ‘irsty…”

“And that is what you get for getting drunk on wine…”

This was really not the time of the day to be messing with her. Darcy nuzzled her nose into Tony’s t-shirt covered chest until she located a small pebble, wrapped her lips around it and bit.

“Fuck! You little…” Darcy was pretty sure no damage was done… Yet… She could feel Tony’s hand that was previously petting her hair fist into it. The pull on her hair wasn’t strong. Yeah, he is fine… Just to make a point she gently nipped again before letting go and kissing it gently.
“Water…”

“I have travelled half way round the world to see you and this is how you treat me?”

“You live here… wuss.”

The wuss in question sits up to reach the bedside table, where from the new angle Darcy can see a bottle of water.

“Gimme…”

“No gratitude, I am appalled.” The kiss he plants on her forehead before pressing the now open bottle testifies that Tony wasn’t as offended as he tried to sound.

The water felt good. *Best thing ever*… She drank greedily until she was ready to burst.

After finishing drinking Darcy burps loudly.

“’xcuse me…” That felt great. Now that the tongue wasn't dried to the roof of her mouth she snuggles deeper under the covers and next to the warm solid body.

“Appalled.”

“You fart in your sleep…”

“I do not!” There was genuine outrage in Tony’s voice.

“Loudly and repeatedly. You know when you wake up sometimes from some sudden noise you think you half heard in your sleep? *Farts. You fart* yourself awake. But it is ok. I fart too…”

“Jarvis! I do not fart at night! Back me up!”

“Flatulence, Sir, or gas, is a natural and common byproduct of the digestive system…”

“Just fucking say that I do not do it!”

“Do you wish me to repeat your statement or draw a conclusion based on the observations…”

“Just… fucking forget it.” Tony growls under his breath clearly seeing that no help was incoming. Darcy couldn’t stop herself from giggling. He was adorable.

“Aww… Tony. It is ok… But if you *don’t* fart, it would kind of explain the shit that comes out of your mouth… The gas condenses and rises up severely compressing the brain, making…aaaa!”

Stark is strong, Darcy has to give him that, as he sits up on the edge of the bed dragging her along and manhandles her. Soon her ass is in the air as she is bent over his lap.

“What did I tell you about being a cheeky little wench, Shortstack?” Darcy is struggling to breathe as she laughs bracing one hand on the floor and the other on the bed trying to look over her shoulder. The entire situation is ridiculous and Stark laughs with her.

“That I shouldn’t be like you? *Ouch! You slapped my bum!* I can’t believe you did that!”

“And why are you wearing my boxers? And my T-shirt? I got you some nice lacy sexy things.” This time he is squeezing a handful of her round backside at the same time keeping his left hand on her back so Darcy wouldn’t get up.
“Who sleeps in those? They get all up in my lady business!”

“Lady business?”

“Yes, my lady business, dude. All up where it has no business being.” At this time she is also very aware that the already snug boxers that she got from Stark’s part of the walk in wardrobe were stretching and digging into the earlier mentioned lady business.

“We can’t have that, Honeybuns. We can’t have that.” The hand stops squeezing her bum and slowly drifts down the back of her thigh to the back of her knee and very slowly back up. The laughter dies off and Darcy isn’t sure what she should be doing. It was all a play. They were having fun… and Stark’s thumb ghosts over her boxers covered lady business. “Darcy…?”

What should she do? Their position while playful was rather on the kinkier side for the first order of serious business. The touch grows more solid by the second and Darcy braces with both hands.

“Help me up…”

“Darce? Babe..?” There is uncertainty in Stark’s voice. They were tiptoeing a fine line. A very fine line. If they were to cross it there will be no going back. No laughing it off. It would be real, this spontaneous Thing between them that he dragged her into.

Darcy wobbles to her feet. She isn’t that hung-over and her thoughts aren’t as muddled as she would like them to be to later to justify what she was doing. Stark is sitting on the edge of the bed. His reaction to their little interaction proudly tenting his boxers.

She was a stupid, stupid, stupid woman.

Darcy grabs Tony’s shoulders for balance as she shifts to stand between his knees. Someone once told her that the eyes were the windows to the soul. Stark’s were sharp and searching, always stripping her naked, dissecting down to the bone. They looked lost… but was that really bad? The quest? Was there something broken inside of her, somewhere deep deep inside, that she wanted to be lost with him? Not inside him. With him. She wanted to go on this wild delusional adventure with company not be a baggage.

Darcy’s thumbs trace the shape of his ears as she bends down and kisses the top of his head and two warm hands settle on her hips to keep her steady.

Stark shuffles backwards until he is pulling her onto the bed with him.

They keep moving until he is propped against the headboard, half lying on the pillows, with Darcy on his lap.

So here she is, on the bed in the Penthouse of Stark Tower straddling the man that named the Tower after himself.

This was somehow her life.

She wiggles until her cheeks burn with what is not quite shame and Stark’s very firm manhood is wedged between them, the soft material of the boxers the only thing separating him from her lady business that was starting to throb gently. This was the part that she never got to enjoy, because she was so eager to please. The foreplay up to date was her favorite part of any and all sexual encounters. Long ago Darcy came to terms that she wasn’t one of the women that lived for penetrative sex, not that she didn’t enjoy it, because she did… it was just that it was all that the guys ever seemed to want was to stick it in. She needed a little more maintenance then that. Did Stark, a
man that had women lining down the block and out the City for the chance to suck his balls, want her, a woman that needed to be petted and indulged before she let him have his wicked way with her every time?

Well, it was no time like the present to ruin the moment…

“Foreplay…” Maybe she shouldn’t move her hips and try to speak at the same time as Stark is giving this intense look once again. “…I like it… more than anything…”

“Darce…” His hands on her hips are slowly setting the pace to her movements and she closes her eyes. The friction between them is delicious and she tries very hard not to feel like a freak because she felt good simply dry humping him.

“Can I… can I… just have this today? Please…” and, well… just great… just fucking great… tears incoming.

“Anything you want, Darce…” Stark’ voice sounds full of gravel as he wraps his arms around her waist so Darcy has to lean forward and he is kissing her neck. Hot, wet, open mouthed kisses. They weren’t going to kiss on the mouth and inflict their morning breaths on each other. The thought makes her giggle and Darcy settles for kissing his forehead, the bridge of his nose, his closed eyes. Stark’s hands finally find their way under the t-shirt and he groans in appreciation as he palms the soft globes.

“Stark, Suit up! We are needed in San Francisco!”

Darcy squeals in fright at the booming voice that comes from the ceiling and instinctively presses herself closer Tony. Her heart threatening to jump out her throat for different reasons this time.

“Did they say you have a small penis again?! Because that is not a reason to fucking Assemble!”

Darcy presses her face into Tony’s neck and tries not to whimper too loudly as his hands move from fondling her breasts after lightly pinching her nipples or the last time to settle around her waist in a tight protective embrace.

“Stark. You fuck, get up and get ready!”

“Didn’t your mother never tell you not to cuss in a presence of a Lady?”

“Calling yourself a lady these days?” Rogers clearly wasn’t in the best of moods.

“Sweetheart, say good morning to Captain Cockblock…”

It smells like lemons, peeps. I am absolute crap at writing intimate moments, that but it felt like a little bit of action is due for those two. Not too much as you can see… and no plot in sight. I am working on it. The plot exists, believe it or not, I just seem to have a problem getting to it. Anyway… So? Good? Bad? Leave a comment and help feed the plot bunnies! Like the regular updates? Leave a comment! Much appreciated =)
Chapter 24

Fake science ahead, peeps! Fakest fake science ever=)  
And slight bit of lemony goodness =)  
Consider yourself warned!  
Enjoy!  
Let me know what you think!  
Many thanks =)

Chapter 24

“Sweetheart, say good morning to the Captain Cockblock…”

Darcy pressed herself closer to Tony and shook her head in reply. She wasn’t going to talk while having her boyfriend’s dick pressed firmly to her crotch.

Tony on his part was doing his best to keep his breathing and voice even as she rolled her hips. She didn’t want to stop. It has been exceedingly long since the last time she felt comfortable with a man…

Tony hissed through his teeth as Darcy moved again. Those sounds he made were slowly creeping under her skin setting it aflame.

“Rogers, give us 5 minutes…”

“Stark…” it sounded like the wind was partially taken out of Rogers’ sails yet the man wasn’t backing off.

“Fuck… Darce… Jarvis, end call! Honeybunny… I really need to go…”

‘Yeah, thanks, Captain A. Hole…’ Darcy straightens and tries to gather her thoughts, but her boyfriend takes the opportunity to press his face into her breasts as his hands were back on her hips speeding up the rhythm of their little dance.

It wasn’t enough. Darcy could tell from the way his fingers dug into her hips. They were on the clock now. It was an unpleasant development, but Darcy spent her life rolling with the punches life threw at her. Nothing was ever easy for her, but she learned that when she kept her head level she
got to choose what to do about it…

Going at the pace that they were going at would take them too long to finish, but in this situation Darcy had the luxury of staying in bed and taking care of it herself, Stark on the other hand will have to suit up in an unyielding armor and join his fellow Avengers for whatever mission they were summoned for.

Darcy took a breath.

“Tony …”

“Darce just a sec, please… Fucking Rogers, the fuck…” His hands were all over her squeezing, pinching, touching. The movements were hungry and growing increasingly possessive.

“I…” Darcy pushed herself away, making Tony stop kissing her neck impatiently and sliding down his lap. *He better appreciate what she was about to do. Not that she was going to do much but… yeah, he better be appreciating her efforts.*

She didn’t go far before an anxious looking Stark got her by the shoulders. Darcy cleared her throat and slid of his lap to sit next to him, pressing tightly into his side.

“So, time is short… **DIY** is a thing, I’ll watch.”

“You don’t have to, Darce, babe, you really don’t have to…” It was utterly unconvincing as while he looked her straight in the eyes, he swiftly got his boxers off and in a matter of seconds sat there in nothing but a t-shirt and a smile.

*Gods, the man is so full of shit.*

“Maybe I should listen to you, maybe I really shouldn’t…” Darcy trails of and Tony’s brows are nearly level with his hairline at the answer.

*Do not* listen to me. *What do I know? You should totally go with your initial idea, you are brilliant, Darce.*

“I said I’ll watch not that I was gonna do it for you, don’t get excited.” Darcy was running out of bravado and they were running out of time.

“Too late for that.” What do you know? Tony Stark was *not* overcompensating with the Stark Tower as many were saying. Not that Darcy had seen many dicks in flesh, but it looked a generous average at the very least. *And the man knows how to shave after all.* Most of the time when it came to men with facial hair Darcy just assumed that they could not be asked to shave other parts too. She giggles as her fingers gently brush the sack and Tony inhales sharply, the movements of his hand speeding up. Bonus point to Stark for being clean shaven.

It was fascinating to watch and Darcy does just that until Tony moves onto his side and plants his face into her cleavage growling and biting through the t-shirt making Darcy yelp and tug on his hair. That was going to leave a bruise… Something hot and wet hits her hip and Stark stills groaning. She just missed the grand finale, well… at least she enjoyed the overall performance.

Why was her heart beating so fast anyway? She just watched him touch himself until he came… It was kind of intoxicating, just watching at her leisure. Was that a kink? She never before had one before. Was that what having a man that you could relax and enjoy sex with felt like, even when it was of the most basic variety? Darcy kissed the top Tony’s head as he half lay on her catching his breath. Not being judged felt good.
Tony’s hand moved in a lazy circle down her hip…

“Are you… Oh my god… are you smearing it on me?”

While she was distracted contemplating their situation, Stark rubbed the pearly liquid that he just spilled onto her thigh and hip into her skin, leaving the area wet and shiny.

“Honeybunny, nothing looks as good on you as me…”

‘The nerve of him…’ Darcy grumbled under her breath as she stood under the hot stream in the shower. It was gross. To rub it all over her leg like that. Why? It was semen. What was with him leaving his bodily fluids all over her? The front of the t-shirt was nearly soaked with saliva where he sucked her breasts. Her neck had a wet trail where he kissed her not to mention he left a hickey. A hickey. He was a grown man and he was marking her like a horny teen. It was embarrassing. If he was gonna start pissing on the fences, Darcy was moving to her own flat.

And she didn’t even ask about the missing panties or the whole Ms Lewis business. ‘Drat.’

Darcy adjusted her crutches as she smiled at her other security detail person, Daniel Otter.

“So, I will get this of my chest now and save the embarrassment, how overused are Harry Potter jokes when it comes to you and are there still any that I can get away with without you quitting on me?”

The guy gives her an unimpressed look and runs a hand through his dark spiky hair.

“I rather you didn’t, Ms Lewis.”

“There will be three of you on the team so technically Rosie w…”

“Hermione? No. Way. She is the giantess from Beauxbaton with that height.”

“So you have given it a thought to it.” He was clearly a geek undercover and in denial at the level of geekiness he was at. How many people could remember the name? Not many. Yeah. She liked him. Happy made a good call there, picking Otter for her security. She examined the security pass now hanging on her neck. All areas. Sweet. She did not need that. Everyone openly stared at her when they went to have it done and it made Darcy seriously uncomfortable. It didn’t help that Tony had to call the very minute to check on her when she had it handed over. The Stark Tower Security Team knew who she was to Tony Stark. At least she wore something nice, one of Tony’s picks for her, and bothered with the makeup. She was beginning to miss the times where she only had to put something comfy and potter around Jane and her machines without the worry of other people seeing her. Jane never moved pass that stage, unless Thor-bro was around, in which case it was up to Darcy to make sure Jane wasn’t wearing the same things a week straight. Funny how that was never in any of the job descriptions she signed up for.

“I had a feeling it would be something you would pick up on, Ms Lewis.”

“I am getting sick of all this Ms Lewis crap, Otter.”
“It is just Daniel…”

“No. Or I am naming you the Other Potter aka Daniel Otter.”

“You wouldn’t be the first…”

“Why is it so empty?” Darcy looked around on the way to Jane’s lab. It was eerily quiet. “How many people are working on this floor?”

“According to Mr Hogan at the security briefing this morning, access to this floor is limited. There is the general assigned security, us three from your team, the cleaning team, Dr Banner, Dr Foster and yourself naturally, the Avengers have access to all floors, I imagine. Not sure if Dr Banner has a new assistant yet. I am pretty sure will be Dr Foster getting a new assistant.”

“According to her contract, yeah. They can take the weight of some of Jane’s crazy and make my life easier, but that is like weeks away after she moves in. So who is in the other labs?”

“Below us is…”

“No, this floor. Who else is on our floor?”

“There are no other labs on this floor.”

“I just made four dozen cupcakes, and don’t think that I am not seeing you picking the icing of the corner one, Otter. These are a gift to break the ice before Jane shows up and throws shade on anyone that looks her way, what do you mean there is no one else on this floor? There is space for a five more labs!”

“Uh… can I help you?”

A man in a lab coat was standing in one of the doorways watching them curiously.

“Oh, hi… Do you like cupcakes?… Otter, stop picking the icing you already had three back in the kitchen.”

“But those were other flavors. I haven’t tried the bacon one yet…”

“Bacon cupcake?” The guy with lab coat and fluffy hair frowns at them.

“Why is everyone so weirded out by the combination? It tastes great. Here, try.”

The man comes over and takes the cupcake from the tray Otter was holding with the same caution that someone would display in handling live explosives.

“Uh… thank you.” Dr Sweetie McFluff had manners. The man was way ahead of a number of people that Darcy could name.

“I don’t know if any of you can taste stuff through osmosis, but you will actually have to bite into it to know how it tastes.”

For a second Darcy thinks that he will reconsider as the expression he wears is one of deep thought but he finally bites into it and Darcy holds her breath for a sec waiting for the verdict.

“is is good.” He smiles with a mouth full.

“Oh, good. I hope you like the rest. I have miscalculated the number of people working on this
floor.” Darcy watches as the cupcake disappears and smiles. “And by the way I am Darcy Lewis, PA to Dr Jane Foster.”

“Dr Bruce Banner. It is a pleasure to finally meet you, Ms Lewis.” Darcy can see the man’s eyebrows going up and Otter stiffen at her side. “Thor speaks quite a lot about you when he is around, you and Dr Foster… and now Tony.”

“What Thor-bro says is truth on all counts, whatever comes out of Tony’s mouth, please take it with a pinch of sold and shot of tequila where possible.”

“He is a good man.”

Darcy feels her cheeks rapidly heating up at the imploring tone of voice. Dr Banner was a good bro.

“I wasn’t saying he isn’t. I’m just saying he’s Tony Stark.” Dr Banner takes a sec to think that over and nods in agreement. “So what is the deal with there not being other labs on this floor?”

Both Otter and Dr Banner look at her weirdly as if she was missing some obvious fact.

“Well, sharing working space with…”

The three of them jump slightly as Otter’s phone starts belting out Life of Brian tune Look on the Bright Side of Life and the man turns pink as he awkwardly picks it up.

“Yes, Mr Hogan?... No, I am with Ms Lewis showing the labs… No…. yes. I’m sorry, Ms Lewis, will you be needing me? It is my turn at the gym for evaluation shortly…” He is eyeing Dr Banner cautiously as he says that.

“I’m good. Hand over the cupcakes, though. They are staying. You can take the one that you been picking at.”

Darcy once again marveled at the insanity that her life has become. She was standing in a middle of the most prestigious working space in New York with a man that regularly turned into a green rage monster while he held a tray full of her homemade cupcakes.

“So why no one else here? It seems a like there is a lot of free space here.” Darcy didn’t want to think how much it was valued for per square meter. It seemed like it was a waste, but on the other hand it wasn’t like Tony couldn’t afford it.

“Well, there will be you and Dr Foster, and Tony likes to come and play around here, which probably going to happen more often…” He doesn’t finish it with because you are here but it is implied and Darcy clears her throat in an attempt to hide the embarrassment but her cheeks fill with color regardless. “…And people are not overly keen on meeting the Other Guy.” It was a legitimate concern when you thought about it and Darcy just shrugs not knowing what to say about it.

“Jane doesn’t care. I think when your squeeze is space Viking your concerns vary slightly from the norm.”

“And you? Because..”

“No, dude, please. I am not getting on the pity train here, I’m sorry but I’m not. I currently have too many people in my life that can snap my neck in a hot sec by accident to give you any special treatment. Having what you have must suck, but working with you is no more dangerous than accepting a cup of coffee from Tony in the morning.”
“He only makes coffee himself on special occasions.”

“I feel special alright. How does he make it? Because that is not coffee, I tell you. I am not sure that it can even be classed as a beverage of any description. Jet fuel is not classed as beverage, right?”

“Not usually… no.”

“Why no one told him that his concoction is lethal?”

“Why didn’t you?”

“Because I was scared he will make me drink it to prove it isn’t? That is not the way I want to go.”

“…He wouldn’t do that.”

“Maybe he would, maybe he wouldn’t, I still not gonna try my luck on that. So, show me around? Otter said you are getting a new assistant?”

Dr Banner just shrugged in reply to that as they moved along the corridor to the main lab space.

“Oh, wow… I need a picture of this awesomeness, Janey-girl will get an orgasm, she might even start packing.” The lab wasn’t a wet dream of a lab. It was the dream work space for a scientist. All that work surface, all those high tech gadgets that they didn’t have to build from scrap. That basically she will not have to build from scraps. Darcy took a deep breath as she aimed the camera. Is that what people called nerdgasm? She nearly wet herself at a sight scientific doodahs. What happened to Darcy Lewis that only needed six science credits? Now she actually needed science in her life. She knew what most of those things did even if she didn’t remember their names.

The equations written on one of the whiteboards caught her attention. It looked awfully like…

“Oh, Thor… You schmuck… when did Thor-bro shared Jane’s work with you, Dr Banner?”

It took a minute for Dr Banner to answer as his mouth was full of cupcake. Darcy decided that he looked adorable as he blushed; he clearly hoped to get one in before she noticed.

“Good aren’t they? Be nice to be and I will keep you supplied.”

“Uhu…” not to be deterred Banner finished the cupcake in two bites and grinned sheepishly. “They are great. The vanilla butter cream ones with strawberry filling are amazing, my compliments to the chef.”

“Why thank you, and they are all yours, my good Dr Banner. Tuck in, actually before you do, this…” Darcy nods to the whiteboard. “..needs to come off before my boss-lady gets here.”

“I’m sorry, Thor said she wouldn’t mind, it is a brilliant piece of physics…”

“If she gave it to Thor-bro so she intended for it to reach you, that’s not a problem. It is just the equations are wrong.”

“I beg your pardon? I copied it directly from the paper…”

“Water under the bridge, dude… As of today if Janey finally read my bit of work.”

Banner was watching her clearly not getting what she was talking about.

“I am not just a pretty face and big tits, Dr Banner. Given I am not a physicist, but I think that is my
advantage here. You lot, including Janey, on whose research I have based my conclusions, are so hung up on the Heinlein’s theory where time and mass travel through space and are not interconnected when Einstein clearly states that it is.”

“I think you are confusing two main concepts here…”

“No. I have been through this with Jane. What you lot, and I mean you lot hard science people, are so hung up on is that you are not taking into the account the possibility that an external force, based on the principle of the shielding effect between an electron and the nucleus atom might be at play. I called it Foster-Lewis theory of Shielded Space Travel… the name is work in progress…”

“While it sounds attractive, I don’t think it is viable especially since you in this case discard the effect of gravity on the traveling bodies…” That was Jane’s problem too with Darcy’s observation.

“I got math on my side, Dr Banner. I am not drawing my conclusions from theoretical standpoint, I adopt the needed theory adjustment to explain the already witnessed said travel in action. Have you ever flown with Thor?”

“I have but it doesn’t explain it, there is no external force, only the hammer that enables Thor to fly…”

“Yes, who says that the force contained in Mew Mew isn’t working as both external and internal force?”

“Because?”

“Old men in your school that taught you physics said it could not be done? We have all seen done. But for some reason we hold into the science that says why it should not be done. Why?”

“Ok, If we take into account the external shielding as a push…”

“No. That is an assumption that I do not agree to. It cannot be a push in conjunction with the shielding when the bridge between two points is opened.”

“Are you implying that when the bridge is opened the travel is based on a pull from the opposite side? But it wouldn’t…”

“Unless as the shielded bridge is created and it rejects the external gravitational pull it creates.. shall we say vacuum that suddenly needs to be filled with matter and the pull effect is created. Plus I worked the math out, all I need is Jane to have look at it, instead of ignoring it, and once we are good we can move on to practical part.”

Banner’s jaw went slack as he processed it. Missing pieces falling into place.

“You just proved Dr Foster’s theory. This was what was missing… if you take it all into account and if you can build an actual generator that would create the shielding…”

“Pointing errors in other people’s works is easier then building an actual prototype without actually killing oneself. It will have to contain and channel a shit load of energy and I literally discovered the miracle of isolation and fuses yesterday.”

“…yesterday?”

“Yep. Which makes me a step ahead of Jane already.”
Tony’s voice boomed from the ceiling as Darcy sat by computer trying to separate the Shield coding to determinate if she can actually breach their firewalls or if she needed another sample.

“FOSTER-Lewis theory?! Why the fuck do I always find out about all this shit last, Shortstack?!
You misspelled right? It should be Lewis – Foster, right?! It is your fucking theory! She doesn’t even pay you!”

_Fucking Banner._

So? What you peeps think? The science is fake so so fake. It is not meant to make any sense, i just added a bunch of words together that sounded nice and that is it. **SO? Good? bad? please leave a comment! Much appreciated as always as it keeps me going! =)**
Chapter 25

Tony’s voice boomed from the ceiling as Darcy sat by the computer trying to separate the Shield coding to determinate if she can actually breach their firewalls or if she needed another sample.

“FOSTER-Lewis theory?! Why the fuck do I always find out about all this shit last, Shortstack?! You misspelled right? It should be Lewis – Foster, right?! It’s your fucking theory! She doesn’t even pay you!”

_Fucking Banner. Really, dude? It has been what, couple of hours? Cannot trust anyone these days… Straight to bend Tony’s ear. Tattletale._

Darcy took another sip of her tea and marked a segment of code. This was going to take _days_… Natasha better be owing her a big one.

“Well?! I can _see_ you.”

Not taking her eyes from the screen Darcy raised her right hand above her head and gave one finger salute.

“Seeing this?”

“Darcy…” It was like listening to an angry animal trying to say her name. Tony sounded quite worked up. It was kind of hot, Darcy thought. The poor dear…

“Jarvis, please activate the privacy mode. ”

“Jarvis, please activate the privacy mode.” She purred the words out and the display went dark instantly when the connection was cut.

Tony felt an ineligible sound escaped his lips that was like a shriek as the tirade that was on the tip of his tongue became useless.

This was adding insult to the injury. All day Tony could feel his cock twitch at every thought of Darcy like it was trying to communicate with him in Morse code.

The little witch was driving him up the wall. He didn’t remember when he was last this horny and when he finally managed to get his raging libido under control Romanov shared some new facts and to top it off Bruce had to call up and throw a bombshell into his lap.

_He didn't smash Roger’s face in as he saw the man waiting next to quinjet. There should have been an award for the self restrain that he was displaying. Like a medal, but something sexier. Like Darcy wearing the medal and nothing else._

“Glad you could join us, Stark.”
“Me too. Wouldn't miss it for the world.” ‘Right in those fucking perfect teeth of his.’ Tony smiled as he boarded and sat down alongside his fellow Avengers. Surely they could have done without him this once.

“How’s Darcy?” Romanov was sitting right opposite him and Tony had to admit that his girl now being in cahoots with one of the most deadly people on the planet wasn’t striking him as a brilliant development for stability of his sanity if last night’s episode was anything to go by.

“Still in bed. Just where I would be if someone had shown a shred of consideration!” He makes sure to say the words loud enough for the man in the cockpit to hear. He had flown from Korea in the suit to crawl into bed at the early hours of the morning and wrap around the sleeping woman.

How quickly someone could become so indispensable in his life bewildered him.

Darcy was like a drug. He craved her. She was in his system like poison. He needed her. He needed her presence like a junkie needed his next fix. It was as frightening as it was exhilarating.

Why? It wasn’t just sex. Tony Stark had that on tap everywhere he turned. Getting his rocks off had never been a problem. Ever. It wasn’t just sex, it was sex with her.

Shortstack was something else. Sharp like the edge of a razor blade. She was like a flame. The bright flower blooming in the darkness of the forge. Illuminating and warming, keeping you alive in the coldness of the world, shaping it around itself, molding it, making it stronger. Delicate and deadly without knowing about it.

Tony caught himself wondering if the complexity of her was what attracted him … or the lack of fear when it came to him. He wasn’t something to be afraid of… for most people, it was just people tended to feel threatened by him, his intelligence, his snarky humor, his confidence, his money. People looked at him and saw all the things that they lacked and hated him for it. But not Darcy Lewis. She just didn’t care. It was liberating.

Cheeky little witch was making him want her beyond rhyme or reason.

“Stark, you with us?” ‘… or I could just shove Rogers out the quinjet. He wouldn’t even die. Yet everyone’s ride would be much easier…’ the temptation was great.

“Not by choice. What is it? Please don’t tell me its one more wild goose chase, the courtesy of our most beloved assholes at SHIELD.” Yeah, exactly what he wanted to do instead of being in bed with his luscious, soft, warm, cheeky, horny… Tony took a calming breath willing his growing erection to go down. He had already ordered his private jet to be fueled and ready for the trip to Malibu, where they both could work on their tans or just spend the time in bed uninterrupted. Darcy was a little wary and spending actual quality time together would put her at easy. It was understandable …

“Stark, are you listening to me?” Rogers was seriously testing his patience.

“Once again, not by choice of mine and yes, you have been yelling right in my face, Cap, and I suggest you start using mints before you do it, I do not need to know what you had for your second breakfast, and you might want to ease up on the onions. I take the main idea was SHIELD once again is fucking us over.”

“We don’t know…”

“That makes you one out of everyone present here, including your freshly minted home boy, here.”

Sam Wilson shifted uncomfortably in his seat and send an apologetic glace at Steve. This whose
situation stank.

“Sorry, Cap, but Stark is right…” It was clear that it was a torture for the man to admit that. “All this… I know I am not around here much, but this shit, these waste of time expeditions are too frequent now… just … we are being taken for a ride.” They were send on a scout mission to look for suspected biological weapon traffickers in suburbs of San Francisco as there had been a tip off.

Judging from the accuracy of the recent tips, SHIELD was getting them from the tea leaves.

There was silence and Tony ran a hand through his hair in irritation. They were not the local police.

“And if Stark was worth his salt and had put Lewis on it, we would know for a fact.” Barton put his two cents in from the cockpit.

“That reminds me, Hawkniss, Darcy sends her regards, something about you insisting to be fourth time lucky?”

“Fuck you, Stark…” Tony could see as Rogers’s ear went bright red at the mention of Darcy.

“You're not my type; hate to break it to you, Hawkniss. Besides, I am in committed relationship… Is something the matter, Rogers?”

“I thought you guys just…” Seeing the good Captain struggle was always entertaining but this time Tony didn’t like where it was going.

“Just what?”

Rogers coughed and looked past him.

“Were going to pretend.”

“Surprise. We-” Tony wasn’t seeing how it was anyone’s business but his and Darcy’s.

“Driving everyone nuts. We’re all very happy for you until you fuck up and Thor will have godly anger raining on us for years to come. Will she be hacking or not?” Despite the attempt at the end to sound casual Barton clearly wasn’t happy either.

“Wait. Why everyone is assuming I am going to fuck up?” that was a little presumptuous. Not that his history so far was any good but still…

Romanov give him a calculated look that made the hair at the back of his neck rise. “Your track record isn’t exactly spotless, you have to admit that.” Was he in for a lecture? Him? No one present could keep a relationship alive to save their lives and he wasn’t going to take it.

“I'm not seeing how that's any concern of yours, Romanov.” That might have been a mistake as Black Widow narrows her eyes.

“She deserves better.”

“No. She deserves the best. You think someone else would be able to do better by her? Maybe Captain Righteous here? Or maybe someone with less miles on them? Someone like a Dave from the Accounts? Sweet and dependable? Shortstack would have them six feet under before lunch.”

“Darcy is a good woman…”

“I'm not sure what are you trying to do here, Romanov, but you're preaching to the choir on the topic
of Darcy Lewis being second to no one.”

Honeybuns was one and only, not to mention…

“Did you know she was bullied so severely by her family that she developed PTSD?”

Every single conversation around them stopped as their eyes nearly pop out at the turn of the conversation.

He didn’t. All he knew was the basic report security compiled about her. Father dead, mother remarried back in Louisiana shortly after, two step siblings, stepfather well off... It didn’t say anywhere that she was abused. Tony felt bile rise up his throat and swallowed it down. Darcy’s wide laughing eyes from this morning were all he could think of. No… His Darcy deserved a happy home… The report didn’t say… it didn’t say…

“What?” It wasn’t truth. It was a sick joke. Caring, warm people like Shortstack came from loving families…

“People don’t grow a backbone like hers by being treated nicely.”

“Wait. Wait. SHIELD did their number on her, she…” Life wasn’t easy, but it didn’t mean that…

“Darcy’s mother left her in the care of her godfather the day before she remarried. Darcy wasn’t even invited to the wedding. She was eight... I don’t think she saw her new family until she turned fourteen and the man that raised her died.”

“Her godfather took Darcy to see one of Happy’s fights back in the day…” Darcy never spoke about her family, just that Matt guy on few occasions; he really should have found it odd… “Did she tell you?.. She did, didn’t she? Yesterday…”

“Couple of things in her SHIELD file didn’t add up. They never came to her graduation. She has the pictures on Facebook. Foster and Selvig were there when she got the diploma Summa Cum Laude. It usually an event that is attended by more than just the person you had internship with. ”

“What did they do?” The silence inside the returning quinjet was heavy.

“Her presence wasn’t desired in their house…”

“What the did they do?!” Tony could feel his temper flare up when what Romanov was saying sank in.

“She said it wasn’t out right abuse.”

“The fuck does that mean? Did they beat her? Did she have enough to eat? Did they…” The bile was hitting the back of his throat again and Tony needed to stop talking for a moment as his imagination started to conjure horrific images of neglected Darcy.

“They bullied her, that’s all I know. The stepfather and the kids. The mother wouldn’t take her side as I understand. Not in public. Darcy learned to look out for herself. That is why she doesn’t like people sneaking up on her or taking her things. I guess, this kind of habit dies hard.”

“What else?”

“They will likely be turning up when you and Darcy will hit the front pages. She doesn’t need those people in her life again.”
He needed a stiff drink as he sat back with his eyes closed. Something really strong to take his mind of this train of thoughts.

“Trust me, Romanov, they will not get near her.”

They made couple more absolutely unnecessary stops that were requested by SHIELD and the topic of Darcy’s family was carefully avoided by everyone. Tony was getting anxious. He needed to see her to make sure she was fine. He spoke to her shortly when she got her security pass. Jarvis was keeping tabs on her. She was fine, Tony kept telling himself. She was safe in the Tower. He just needed to calm down. They were going back finally and he flew ahead of the quinjet to clear his head a little.

“Sir, you have an incoming call from Dr Banner.”

“Thanks, Jarvis. Hey, Bruce. Missing me already?”

There was laughter on the line as the man answered

“Always, Tony. Who wouldn’t?”

“I knew deep down inside you loved me. So what’s up?”

“Just need a favor. Can you send me a copy of Miss Lewis’s work?”

Tony frowned in confusion. What the? “Sure... which one?”

“She got more than one? She didn’t say... but I guess we only spoke about the Shielding. She's great, Tony. Why didn’t you tell me? It's fantastic, I mean the very implications on the change in fundamental understanding of astrophysics... We probably shouldn’t discuss it before Dr Foster reads Miss Lewis’s final paper. That will likely change the course of her research and us talking of it... It seems rather unethical as it is the Foster-Lewis Theory. But, Tony. It's outstanding. Does she have a degree in physics? She kept referring to herself as the PA, it seemed rude to ask. What did you think of it? I imagine she gave you the completed version. I was trying to follow her math, but since she thinks that leaving some variables out and introducing the opposing vacuum effect... Tony?... Can you see the board behind me? Miss Lewis explained it in part, but...”

The display inside the helmet lit up and Tony could see whiteboard full of equations in a distinctive cursive handwriting. It took him good few minutes to make sense of it. But it did and it was beautiful.

“That's Shortstack’s?”

“What do you... Oh, no... she hasn’t told you yet... Tony, please don’t -” Bruce was pleading, but at this point it was falling on deaf ears as Tony could feel his pulse pick up and blood rush to his head.

“It's Shortstack’s. The hand drawn schematics in her notebook would be the early stages plan for a prototype. Why would I be upset? Bruce, really? My girlfriend just broke physics and is naming the entire thing FOSTER-Lewis theory of Shielded Bridge Travel according to the title on the board. Foster hasn’t even read the thing yet and her name goes first. Makes absolute sense. Anyone would do the same. If you excuse me I need to make a call.”
There were very few things in life that Tony Stark took seriously and Darcy Lewis just happened secure a spot among them. He was going to look out for her best interests even if she killed him.
Chapter 26

I have been taken hostage by a ferocious plot bunny and it forced me to switch two chapters. It was supposed to be chapter all about Darcy/Tony fluff, I am half way done with that chapter but the bunny just would not let me continue until I posted the below. Now I can go back on working on Tony and Darcy spending time together chapter =)

WARNING ! CRACK ahead! Consider yourself warned!

Oh, and don’t forget to let me know what you thought of it!

XXX

It was shaping up to be a good day. Darcy was in the Common Kitchen, in a process of making cookies. Decadently soft, sugar loaded cookies.

‘Macadamia nuts and milk chocolate all done, now cranberry and chocolate with…’

“So I was thinking, if I recalibrate it now-”

“Oh, my Thor, Jane. No, you are not recalibrating the weather pressure doodah-”

“I cannot believe you still call it a doodah-”

“Fine! The thingy then. You need to pack-”

“The Theory clearly states…” Jane was steam rolling ahead in her usual fashion and Darcy signed deeply before replying. Some things were just never going to change.

“Pack, you bloody woman! I am not discussing anything with you until you get your tits to New York!”

“Why are you so wound up? Is it Stark? I told you Stark was no good for you!”

Darcy closed her eyes and counted to five. Jane’s vendetta against Tony was getting on her nerves. It was a good morning after a very pleasant night. She wasn’t going let anyone ruin it. Jane should finally make peace with the fact that Tony was her significant other now. Darcy was giving him a chance. She just hoped that after the two were going to meet the Tower was going to be still standing. It was time to bring out the big guns.

“You know what, Jane?”

Tony Stark grinned at his friend as they walked out the workshop and made their way to the
“So, a girlfriend, huh?” Colonel James Rhodes was studying the man next to him. Main reason for his presence in Stark Tower was to have his suit upgraded, and to a lesser extent meet Tony’s girl... oh, who was he kidding?

He was there to see the woman that wrapped Tony Bloody Stark around her little finger in a matter of days. Tony gushed about her. Tony, in all the years that James knew him, spoke this happily only about one woman. Pepper. Their break up was a mess, and only a miracle and insane amount of money spend on lawsuits against few tabloids that managed to get a hold of the news, prevented it from being all over the front pages. It was astonishing what the Stark Industries Legal Department could achieve.

“What? It's not like it's the first time I want you to meet someone, I had girlfriends before.”

“Yes, one, and I knew her for years as your PA before that happened. So, it is the first time.” Tony merely blinked at the mention of his ex and James felt relief swell inside him. About bloody time. His mate was good man under all that pretentious personality. He wanted him to find someone that could put up with his level of crazy.

“Surely, I have introduced other women to you?”

“If we go by that, you have introduced a new one at every single party we been together, few at a time in several cases, Tony.”

“See?”

“You just spend two hours talking about her work on that Travel Theory and about her, while you checked my suit. That's already longer than any of those other women lasted with you.”

“Lewis- Foster Theory. She... she is something else. Don’t worry, she'll like you.” It took couple of more minutes of watching Tony talk about this Darcy Lewis to understand that he was nervous. Tony the Iron Man Stark was nervous. It would only mean one thing. It was important to him. Important that Darcy liked his oldest friend. The excitement was picking up as they neared the door leading to the Kitchen and the sweet sugary smell greeted them before they reached the door. “She's one of a kind...”

Well, according to Thor, his Lighting Sister was a woman of exceptional steadfastness and spirit, also an amazing cook... A female voice cut through the gap between door sharply and they both froze.

“You know what, Jane? At least my boyfriend knows what a condom is for.”

There was immediately sputtering from someone and indignant voice replied. “Well, so does Thor!”

“Oh, yeah? Wonder how that came about?”

“It's not my fault that their special tea makes me sick!”

“Asgard sucks. Advanced race and all they have in terms of birth control for women is tea. What about intergalactic STDs? Huh?”

“It's not a thing!... Thor said so.”

“Uhuh and if I hadn’t chewed on his ear about it, you would have never asked! Thank you, Darcy.”
“Yes, thank you Darcy.” The woman talking to Darcy Lewis sounded annoyed. But the mysterious new girlfriend of Tony Stark was having none of that.

“Oi! No rolling your eyes at me there, Boss-Lady.”

“I'm on the phone from London, you can’t see me.”

“I can feel it, Jane. You are rolling your eyes again.”

“Stop it. Please, you know it freaks me out when you know what I do when you are not even here!”

“Stop being this obvious then, and stop blaming Tony for everything. Occasionally he's not at fault.”

“Yes, well, he’s a man slut.”

“Your man's the God of Thunder and Fertility, you really want to talk about who shared their dick around more? Because that will not be Tony.”

“You should have him checked.”

“He's not a dog that needs to be taken to a vet. Besides, I am happy to inform you, Tony Stark is the poster man for safe sex, clean too. Like a whistle. The condom.”

“Yeah, about that… where do you keep them? You know, just in case?”

“I keep what?... Seriously, Jane? Condoms? Every single shop has them. You finished my last stash when Thor-bro was last in town. Buy some!”

“Yes, well… It's embarrassing.”

“Oh my Thor… I am not even. Embarrassing, Jane? Buying condoms is not embarrassing. You know what is embarrassing? Opening my bedroom door at 2 am and finding Thor-bro there with nothing but a small cushion covering his crotch and a raging hard-on.”

“Don't be melodramatic, it was no big deal…”

“It would have been no big deal, had he knocked on the wrong door. I will never forget his smiling, glowing face asking me what a condom is, and where can he find this beast for Lady Jane demands it! You send your boyfriend to me to give him sex-education, Jane. The Hell?”

“Which I am very grateful to you for.”

“Visual aids, Jane. I had to go get a banana and demonstrate how you roll a condom on. To a space Viking, that is like a brother to me, on a phallus shaped fruit. While he had his sweaty ass-crack and conkers parked on my freshly washed duvet covers!”

“Oh… I kind of wondered why you put a washer on at that hour.”

“Listen here, Jane. A piece of advice that is clearly way overdue. When you prepare a romantic evening for your man to finally do the deed, get the basics ready.”

“We just got carried away…”

“You wore lipstick, Jane. In the house. That is a special evening sign. You never wear lipstick.”

“I did not wear lipstick… Besides you didn’t even see me that evening, you came back late. Ha!”
“The cushion from Thor’s lap fell of when he stood up. Right at my eye level, Jane. Lipstick. You fucking wore it, biatch, don’t you dare lie to me. Because I am fairly certain Thor doesn’t wear lipstick and is not capable of bending over to suck his own dick. It was very much all over it. Nice color though, the lipstick, not the dick. Healthy looking, though.”

“I am so sorry…”

“Blond and hairy, Jane.”

“Oh, Jesus, Darcy…”

“Hey, at least, if it will ever come to that, I can now testify under oath that Thor is a natural blond.”

“Listen, Darcy…”

“Blond and very hairy, Jane. Might want discuss manscaping with him? I strongly recommend it. Does he brush it? Because I would think hair that long, in place like that, are likely to form dreadlocks. That is not a place you want your man to have dreadlocks, sister.”

“Actually, I kind of hoped that you could?” The voice was hopeful and there was silence for a second.

“Are you asking me to speak to Thor about shaving his balls?”

“If you wouldn’t mind? I will owe you one?”

“Jesus fucked a duck, Janey. What return favor would be on a level with that?”

“I don’t know? I could, like, speak to Stark? About something?” That sounded vaguely unhelpful.

“Hopefully not his balls, because he has those cleanly shaven, thank you very much.”

“That is great. Have him speak to Thor!”

“Right. The conversation would go something like this.” Darcy lowered her voice and injected just a little bit of insolence into it. “That was a mean swing, Goldilocks. Loving your hair today! What product do you use? While we are on the topic, when was the last time you shaved your balls, ass and crack? That will go down well. I don’t want Thor to think that my man is gay, thank you, but no.”

“Oh, come on. Its long. I had to brush it. Brush his balls…”

“Mary, have Mercy upon my soul… I did not need to know that!”

“And I did not need to know that Stark shaves his sack!”

“Don’t be jealous!”

“Oh, please, like I would ever… please, Darcy, help me! They are majority guys there, right, can’t someone speak to him about it? Like in a shower?”

“Janey, you need to lay off that corny gay porn, I am pretty sure that talking about each other’s family jewels is not what men do in a shower. Besides here, in the Stark Tower, designed by the man who has no desire to see other men’s sweaty ball sacks, they have separate showers. I think. Actually, they live here. They go home and shower. How can you not be able to speak to Thor about it? You have no shame when it comes to getting your freak on with me.”
“That is different. I am not sleeping with you. Please, Darcy. Pleeeassee!”

“Jane, I already broke physics for the sole purpose of getting you laid on the regular. What else you want of me?”

“You have a boyfriend now, make use of him.”

“I am not discussing another man’s scrotum with my boyfriend. Much less ask him to speak to Thor about it. Not happening, Jane. He is not on my shit list right now…. Actually…. talking of my shit list…”


“I have just the Star Spangled Man with a Plan that owes me one.”

“You are going ask Captain America if he shaves his balls?”

“Or vagina. Since he enjoys being a little bitch so much.”


SO, my lovely peepsters? Good? Bad? Let me know!
Chapter 27

Chapter 26

The quinjet after Iron Man decided to fly home first.

There was silence and the topic of Darcy’s family hung heavy in the air like smog, slowly filling everyone’s lungs, choking them until they couldn't take it anymore.

“Alright! We need a volunteer.” Barton’s voice, overly loud and animated, filled the small space.

“Clint, I really don’t think that it is our call to go after Ms Lewis family… unless…” Steven Rogers, always the voice of reason, spoke up, but this time there was an underlying anger.

“Not what I had in mind, but go on, I like where this is going.” The archer put quinjet on autopilot and come to join everyone.

“Let’s not be jumping ahead of ourselves.” Sam turned to Natasha. “I don’t think it was a good idea to just drop this on everyone, not without asking Miss Lewis if that is ok to share.” It was a good point, but from the way Natasha narrowed her eyes at man she wasn’t seeing it quite his way.

“She would have never agreed to share with everyone. Darcy Lewis doesn’t need people reading her wrong and you all will, without knowing the details.”

“She looked normal enough.” Steve went through all his encounters with the brunette. “A bit strong headed.”

“The day we met her, she dropped you, me and Clint.” Wilson’s eyes went wide. That bit of information was new to him. Steve wasn’t too eager to spread the fact that some half pint got two over him.

“What? She what? Lewis girl? Dropped the three of you?”

Steve’s cheeks went a nice beetroot red as he coughed and brushed imaginary dust of his shoulder.

“She dropped Clint thrice.”

“Seriously? Fuck you, Rogers. She dropped you twice by now. Super Soldier you. Twice.”

“She dropped Sam too and it wasn’t tasing so don’t think it really counts.”

“It does.” Natasha flashed the two men a smile.

“Wait. Wait. Dude, are you saying Stark’s girl, who by the way is too good for his sorry ass, has taken all of us down, at least one?” the loaded silence spoke for itself. “How?”

“Darcy has a conditioned response to a sudden thread, real or imagined. She reacts forcefully and without delay. She doesn’t double guess. It’s a reaction of a person that had to defend herself on regular basis. It’s so deeply-seated that I don’t think she understands that this kind of reaction is not normal in a general population. On every single occasion she chose to fight, where others would have chosen flight.”

“So she's a fighter.” Steve quickly drew a conclusion that made sense to him, but Sam looked at his friend and shook his head.
“I guess that explains why we didn’t see it. We all have similar conditioned responses and we take it as normal, not taking into account that Darcy isn’t one of us. She’s a civilian.”

“Does she count as civilian when Stark has his paws on her like that, and being this tight with Thor? Because I tell you this now, she goes super-villain and we are all stuffed.” Barton looked around daring anyone to contradict him. He was upset. He liked Darcy. He liked her in a schoolyard hair pulling kind of way. She never failed to turn right around and smack him. She was gutsy. She cooked like demon too. She was fun. He always imagined her growing up in a house with a white picket fence and maybe a dog and neighbours that always mowed the lawn.

“Clint…”

“No, seriously. Mongoose, remember? She got Stark by the balls in the literal sense of word, and man, he has it bad for her, Thor thinks she can do no wrong, Foster would shank us all with a butter knife for looking at her little PA wrong, not to mention she’s the only person on the planet that has taken all of us down. And that is not our main worry.”

Sam gaped at him. “Not our main worry? What could be worse?”

“Am I the only one realising that Stark and Lewis are doing the dirty?”

“No, you’re not. But we just think that their sex life is not our concern.” Steve was not going to discuss Stark’s bedroom situation.

“Am I the only one that knows that Stark had his snip undone a year ago?”

The statement is met with silence, it wasn’t what anyone present spend time wondering about Stark.

“Have you been prowling his vents again, Clint? Stark clearly said he’ll string you up by the balls for that. And I don’t think he was kidding.” Natasha was annoyed. It would serve Clint right.

“The point is, people. Someone needs to give him a refresher sex-ed course.”

“Stark could write books about that. He would be the man to go to for advice. The fuck you talking about?” Sam wasn’t seeing it.

“Really? I am the only one that thought of that. Great. Just great. The greatest threat this planet ever faced and none of you even thought of it.”

“Clint, clue us in then.” Steve wasn’t seeing how Stark getting laid was a threat to the planetary security.

“Fine. I will keep it simple for you, simple minded people. Stark is banging Lewis. The result, in some nine months, a Lewis-Stark hybrid running around. Of course Stark would bend backwards and get her to marry him, so it would a Stark, but the point is…”

“Lewis-Stark hybrid?” Natasha's the words echoed strangely in the small space.

“Yes. Smart asshole like Stark, sweet, but ferocious like Lewis.”

“Well, fuck…”
Watching Iron Man walk down from the landing pad and seeing how the suit was taken off of Tony was fascinating. Him looking like he was sucking on a lemon was kind of spoiling the effect, though.

Darcy saved the progress made on the coding and closed the brand new laptop. The man who at best had an advisory position when it came to her life choices was about to give her a ton of shit. Or attempt to. The chances of success, in what he no doubt thought was a noble endeavor, were slim.

Yeah, Tony was throwing some serious shade her way as he strolled to the bar and pulled a bottle of champagne. _Ok_. And two glasses. _Mixed signals_, Darcy thought. Should she say something? He was coming over. Two full glasses in hand. _Stay cool, Darcy. You can do it. Do not let him…_

“Honeybunny. A toast! To you and the _Lewis- Foster_ Theory that shall change how the intergalactic travel is viewed and done.” Tony gave her a gentle peck on the lips as he handed the glass and sat next to her on the sofa.

“Foster-Lewis.”

“Over my dead body.” The glasses make a melodic sound as they clinked them together looking each other dead in the eye. That was some seriously good champagne they were having. A girl could get used to the good stuff. Why did he have to look so ridiculously handsome when she was being mad at him?

“Don't tempt me. You have to understand-”

“That's your Theory, Darcy. I understand it very well. I understand it so well-”

“It's Jane's research. Like 93%. All hers. I know what I know only because I compiled it all into papers for her. I simply did additional research, which in comparison to her life’s work is miniscule, and drew my own conclusions from her and mine combined observations… I am not taking credit for something…”

“Bruce showed me the math. Your math. The mathematical expression of Vacuum Effect on the Bridge. Which in itself is a new Theory. I get it that Foster laid the ground works for you to reach your conclusions but the fact stands, she didn't contribute to the _active development of said Theories_! Hence her name comes second.”

“Banner should bloody mind his own business! For the sake of an argument Banner, the _busybody_, does this massive research, _you_ breeze in, have a look and spot a way to develop it further, you did no work, but you drew the conclusions, how would _you_ name it?”

“Stark- Banner.”

“You cannot do that! The research isn't _yours_.” Darcy finished the last of her drink and Tony poured her some more.

“I am not denying that what Foster has done so far will put astrophysics on its head. I am saying you deserve the credit for taking it that step further and improving on the work done.”

“Jane would have gotten there eventually.” Janey girl was brilliant.

“Foster was not even heading in that direction, Shortstack. I read the work Point Break passed to Bruce. She would have never gotten there on her own. _Lewis- Foster_.”

“ _Foster- Lewis_. Besides why are we even arguing about it? It's my Theory!”
“Exactly! *Your Theory!*

“Yes! And I'm naming it however the Hell I want. Last I checked, I get to do that.” Darcy didn’t want to argue, but she had decided on the name way before he dropped into her life and started calling shots. “If it will make you feel any better, Albert’s official name is Lewis Shielding Generator.”

“You named your prototype *Albert*? And no, it isn’t making me feel any better.”

Stark was all in her space. He obviously had a thing about it. Did he expect that gently running his fingers through her hair was going to somehow lull her resolve? She wasn't going to deny that those little signs of affection were sweet but they weren't going to help him win.

“Well, in that case, Tuna Can Man, you're shit out of luck.”

It was clear that Stark was chewing on the words. He was angry. He wasn't throwing a tantrum, he was actually upset.

“After we finish I am bending you over my knee for this ongoing Tuna Can joke, but now, do you even understand that by allowing Foster’s name to be put first, you are putting yourself second when it is your idea? You are giving the highest credit to a person that didn't contribute to it…”

“It doesn’t matter that much…” Stark looked genuinely aghast at the statement.

“In what crazy universe it doesn’t matter? You *deserve* your name to come first.”

“And it's great that you think that, but it will not go first. Not on this Theory. I might consider adding it to the Vacuum one, but that seems a bit of an overkill…” At this point Darcy remembered that she was speaking to the man that had his name printed on everything from missiles to medical scanners.

“Darcy, an overkill is the way you let Foster walk over you, that's a bloody overkill, who even does that? First she doesn’t pay-”

Yeah, that was a discussion that wasn’t going to happen.

“You weren’t there and risking to mortally wound your ego I am gonna say that you're no getting a say on that. Jane Foster was there for me since the day I met her. You, Tony Stark, been in my life for what, couple of days? I said Foster-Lewis so it will be Foster-Lewis, I am fully capable of…” oomph!

Tony was hugging her. Her face was pressed into his shoulder. She was pretty sure that she just spilled the content of the glass into the rug from the sudden movement.

“I am here for you, Darce. You know that, right?” He was hugging her tight like he thought that she was about to run away, and Darcy squirmed in the sudden embrace.

“iknw… can’t *breathe*…” The arms around her loosened marginally.

Tony was a strange man, Darcy concluded as they sat there staring at each other, both surprised at what just happened. To get so worked up over a small thing like that...

It also was their longest physical contact that didn’t include making out or being asleep. It was nice. Darcy could feel some of the tension that had gathered during their argument fade away as he manoeuvred them into their sides on the sofa. Her head was now pillowed on his arm and his lips pressed to her forehead as he wrapped around her.
“Why do you insist on driving me crazy, Shortstack?”

“Stop being a dick, it should help.” There was no laughter. Ok. Whatever issue Stark was having clearly wasn’t over yet.

“I'll wear you down, Honeybuns. You’ll yield.”

Darcy snorted at that. Life was already on that, and she was happy to report it wasn’t having any luck either.

“Sure you will, Cuddle Cakes. But I'll support you in all things crazy and impossible.”

“Cuddle Cakes?”

“What is better than cake and cuddles?” Tony shifted to have a look at her face and finally looked a little less wound up.

“Well…”

“Spoiler alert! Nothing is better than cake and cuddles.”

“Cake being?…” Yeah, the suggestive brow arch made Darcy gape at him like a fish for a second caught off guard. Trust Tony Stark make it about sex… and damn that man for being able to convey whole conversation by facial expression.

“Not that kind of cake, you sleazeball. Honestly…” With Tony grinning at her like it was clear that he wasn't persuaded about Cake and Cuddles being the best things on the face of the planet. Darcy giggled as his facial hair tickled her ear when he attempted to whisper something to her. “That reminds me. I am starved. Can we order in? I am not cooking today.” She squirmed again and Tony settled with kissing her temple before helping her to sit up.

“I have a chef on call. What do you fancy? Breaking physics is a celebration worthy event.”

“Can we have seafood, please? I love fresh seafood.” It was one of those things that were generally out of price range as she and Jane lived on a tight budget. The simple pleasures that the money could indeed buy.

“We should go out tonight…” Darcy grimaced and looked at the cast before shaking her head. “Or not. How’s the ankle? Did you see Cho today?”

“It usually hurts towards the end of the day. Dr Cho said it's the stress I put on it, will take six to eight weeks to heal... maybe longer. I would love to go out.” She has officially submitted her work to Jane and actually discussed it with other people. It felt liberating. It was hers. Her brain child. Her name attached to Jane’s, that might be printed in textbooks and be debated one day by people, that up until now thought that the best Darcy Lewis could do in her life was make them a cup of coffee. It was out of her control now. Until today the Theory was her dirty little secret and now it was a thing that other people could poke at, evaluate and criticise. What if it wasn’t as foolproof as she thought? What if there were some big ass mistakes that Dr Banner was just too polite to point out? She was working her way down from revolutionary ideas that Jane Foster created to basics how mass is calculated when under certain gravitational pull. It was hard work. She wasn’t a scientist…

“Honeybuns, you should keep it propped up instead of prancing about all day. Actually if we're speaking about fresh seafood and staying with your feet up, I got a house in Malibu and the lounger by the pool has your name written all over it.” Tony Stark had honey on his tongue as he grinned at her.
“I don’t remember last time I was by a pool…” Darcy had to admit that she was tempted, it was February and it was cold as balls in New York, while the views were great from the Stark Tower, warm and cozy inside, the greyness that seemed to color the outside world was making her depressed. Goosebumps broke all over her skin at the thought of the warm sun rays. “I don’t have a swimsuit…” She didn’t own one since she started following Jane like a faithful sidekick. It was fun, but holidays cost money and they had none, so…

“Malibu it is then. Sun, sea, you in a bikini… and don’t think a man can ask more of life.” Tony had the most handsome filthy smile on and Darcy felt her heart skip a beat. That man was sin on legs.

“I didn't say that I was going anywhere, you know.” Sun, sea and Tony… what the hell was she thinking? “I need to do some stuff on the computer…” She hadn’t yet told Natasha that she was going to try and create another worm for her. It wasn't prudent to wait long as SHIELD might change the coding and make the fragment that Darcy had obsolete.

“There are plenty computers in my workshop there. What you want to do? I can help.”

“Can I use one there?” Wait… she had Jarvis at her disposal now; it took her days before as she had no help. So if she picked the right algorithm sequence in code he could totally finish it, it was just running numbers… Darcy bit her lip. *That could work*. It would take her another day to finish and pass it to Jarvis and the AI could give Natasha the finished result and Darcy could get a tan first time in years. “No, I'm good. When can we go to Malibu?” She already couldn’t wait for it. Sun... she missed it.

“Now.” oh... Yeah, she really shouldn't forget that it was Tony Stark she was talking to. The man with a fleet of private jets.

“Let’s make it tomorrow. I got nothing to wear for temperatures above freezing, though.” The dresses were nice but none of them, except maybe the blue one, was something to be worn in Malibu.

“You got the stuff I got you the other day and I'm sure something can be arranged for when we get there. Plus *retail therapy*. We all had stressful couple of days. We both could do with a little bit of that. Agreed. Tomorrow after lunch?” Darcy stared at Tony and tried to work out how the things in the crazy head of his worked. It wasn't what she had in mind… it reminded her about the card… *Ah, shit...* and she could tell that Tony picked the change in her facial expression instantly. “We will have so much fun tomorrow, Honeybuns.”

“I have a broken ankle; you yourself said I shouldn’t prance about.” She so wasn’t going shopping with Tony Stark. It was inviting trouble that was.

“You won’t have to. Leave it to me.” She didn’t feel reassured. *At all.*
“What's on the floor below us? That takes a lot of energy…” The hologram was a cool thing. It turned and expanded displaying the building in 3D.

“That's my workshop.”

“Ohhh, Tony Stark’s man cave.”

“It's not a cave, man or otherwise, I have worked in a cave, this is not it. That's a fully equipped and fully functional state of the art-” Darcy giggled at Stark's serious tone.

“It’s a man cave. I bet it has man stuff there, since it's you it must be something ridiculous. Vintage cars? Motorcycles? You have to have at least one vintage Harley- Davidson there. Those babies are hot.”

“Wanna see?” Darcy rolls her eyes.

“Who says no to seeing a vintage Hog? Not me, Cuddle Cakes. Is your Tuna Can collection there also?”

She loved the look he gave her when she called his pride and joy a Tuna Can. “What did I tell you about being a cheeky little wench, Shortstack?”

“That I shouldn’t be like you?” Darcy had one of the crutches between them faster than Tony could reach her. “No getting excited here, Casanova. We are seeing your man cave.”

“You won't hit me with that.” He was circling her looking for an opening.

“You wanna bet?”

Surely having learned from previous experience he did not want to do that…

“You hit me! I can’t believe you hit me!”

Stark was rubbing his left knee in disbelieve.

“What did I tell you? Don’t bet against me. And what did you do? Exactly that. Sucker. Where did you learn about impressing women? That punk in fifth grade that told you to go pull the girl’s hair? The BDSM is a little early for us don’t you think? I have seen your dick more times than I have received flowers from you…” Darcy blinked after she says that. She was with a man that has never given her flowers, but she has seen his junk. She has never received chocolates either, but she was cohabitating with him. Wait... “Uh…”

“Honeybunny, I didn’t think you were into that kind of thing…”

“How the hell did we go from phone conversations to living together?” It just... happened. She came to the Tower and ... she let Tony make decisions for her. “If that were someone else I would say doing something like this was crazy.” … and dangerous and stupid to the tenth degree. They slept in the same bed, there was no sex and Tony backed off when ever she said no but...

“We are crazy, Shortstack. Normal doesn’t feature in our lives. Should we have waited? Maybe. But we didn't. it was a little sudden, I...” The situation was so crazy that even Tony Stark struggled with it. " "We can make this work, it might be crazy but its right. Why should we have waited? To dance around each other and watch the world go past us? That's not us, Honeybuns, and you know it."
“I don’t know. To know me better maybe?”

“I know you’re brilliant, beautiful and stubborn like an ox. I know I want you so much it’s borderline painful… I know you would slit my throat for Foster.”

“Oh, please. She wouldn’t want you dead. She needs SI to fund her work.” Darcy felt conflicted. They both were freaks. Tony was control freak; she was a freak for letting him get away with that.

“I can get off just listening to you speak, Honeybunny.” And there was this.

“Well, romance is dead.” Shame, Darcy would have loved to experience it at least once in her life.

“Are you saying that I’m not capable of being romantic?”

“I am not seeing you being romantic. Is that by choice? I truly cannot say.”

Tony was in her personal space immediately. He could move damn fast when he wanted to.

“That sounds a lot like a challenge, Darcy.”

Darcy was not one to back down. “Maybe it is, Tony. Maybe your girlfriend likes that bit that comes between meeting someone and moving in with them. Like the small… big… essential part that is dating. Going for dinner, arguing about decaf in the queue for coffee, holding hands, spending time together doing absolutely pointless things. Shit like that and I am missing out on it. I like it. Don’t get me wrong, I’m not the clingy bitch that needs attention 24/7. I am fully capable of keeping my own company. I just think that I deserve to be dated, wooed even…” Tony was watching her as if he was taking notes in his head, his eyes never leaving hers.

“Point taken.”

“Point taken?”

“Yes.”

“Ok…” That was a reaction that Darcy didn’t quite know how to take. It was very un-Stark like. Too muted. She didn’t like that. He had his arms around her again and Darcy breathed in the smell of him. The distinctive scent of metal and cologne. Why did she really trust him?

“Up for seeing my man cave?”

“And your Tuna Can collection, because there has to be one.” Tony bit her earlobe gently and Darcy let out a startled yelp.

“The cheek of you. You are very much due a spanking.” His goatee tickled Darcy’s ear as he whispered to her.

“I’ll think about it.”

“You will?” There was undisguised excitement in Tony’s voice as he straightened to look into her face.

“You know, after few Pina Coladas by sunny pool I might be more open minded.”

“Really?”

“No, Tony. But continue working on convincing me and I might actually consider it at one point.”
“You’ll be the death of me, Darce…”
“Lewis-Foster Theory.” Tony growled out the name and James refrained from asking his friend what his problem with it was. He had known Tony for years, sometimes not knowing was a good thing. “She… she is something else. Don’t worry, she will like you.” It took couple of more minutes of watching Tony talk about this Darcy Lewis to understand that he was nervous. Tony the Iron Man Stark was nervous. It could only mean one thing. It was important to him. Important that Darcy liked his oldest friend. The excitement was picking up as they neared the door leading to the Kitchen and the sweet sugary smell greeted them before they reached the door. “She is one of a kind…”

Well, according to Thor, his Lightning Sister was a woman of exceptional steadfastness and spirit, also an amazing cook… A female voice suddenly cut through the gap between door and they both froze.

“You know what, Jane? At least my boyfriend knows what a condom is for.”

Tony had his hand out ready to push the door open but the two of them just stood there, not sure if they had heard it quite right. But if they had, James was pretty sure that the conversation was about Tony. You could always depend on Tony to have a condom on his person. Always. The man could be found wandering the streets in skin tight Speedos just before dawn at the ass end of nowhere, but he still somehow would have the thing with him. Which was a good thing.

There was sputtering as an indignant voice replied. “Well, so does Thor!”

Was that Thor’s Lady Love there?

“Oh, yeah? Wonder how that came about?” James glanced at Tony, yeah, none of them really wanted to know. Thor was a good mate but…

“It is not my fault that their special tea makes me sick!” Neither did they want to know that. That was Thor’s problem.

James could see Tony’s wince as they caught each other’s eye. Ladies talk. Yeah. Never a good idea to interrupt that. Maybe they could come back later…

“Asgard sucks. Advanced race and all they have in terms of birth control for women is tea. What about intergalactic STDs? Huh?” … and the conversation took a turn for the bizarre real quick.
“It is not a thing!... Thor said so.” That was getting a little weird. Tony was grinning just about ready to open the door… as soon as the women started talking about less personal matters…

“Uh-uh and if I hadn’t chewed on his ear about it, you would have never asked! Thank you, Darcy.” So that was the Lewis woman. She sounded young. ‘Oh, Lord… How old is she?’

“Yes, thank you, Darcy.” The woman that was talking to Darcy Lewis sounded annoyed.

“Oh! No rolling your eyes at me there, boss-lady.” Darcy Lewis sounded more like the boss than the woman she was calling boss-lady. Tony always had a thing for strong willed women.

“I am on the phone from London, you can’t see me.”

“I can feel it, Jane. You are rolling your eyes again.” Tony’s grin was back again and James rolled his eyes. Strong, bossy women.

“Stop it. Please, you know it freaks me out when you know what I do when you are not even here!”

“Stop being this obvious then, and stop blaming Tony for everything. Occasionally he is not at fault.”

James was hard pressed to hold back a snort at the statement. Tony was not at fault one time out of twenty at best. Occasionally, that was too generous of an estimate.

“Yes, well, he’s a man slut.” Tony’s grin dropped and his jaw went tense as he mouthed ‘bitch’ to James. Yeah… There clearly was no love lost between Jane Foster and his friend.

“Your man is the God of Thunder and Fertility, you really want to talk about who shared their dick around more? Because that will not be Tony.” The retort from Lewis girl had Tony preening like a damn peacock. He was a goner… it was clear to see.

We going in? Tony was still grinning but it was turning a little shark like. James hoped that Thor’s lady was a good swimmer. He could see Tony was spoiling for a fight as he nodded towards the door.

“You should have him checked.”

“He is not a dog that needs to be taken to a vet. Besides, I am happy to inform you, Tony Stark is the poster man for safe sex, clean too. Like a whistle. The condom…” James half expected Tony to spontaneously sprout giant tail feathers from the way he was nearly bursting with glee, and to finally waltz in. ‘Maybe we should just get in while Tony is able to contain himself without jumping into the conversation to embarrass them both. The conversation probably ran its most awkward part already…’

“Yeah, about that… where do you keep them?” Huh?

“I keep what?… Seriously, Jane? Condoms? Every single shop has them. You finished my last stash when Thor-bro was last in town. Buy some!”

“Yes, well… It is embarrassing.”

“Oh my Thor… I am not even. Embarrassing, Jane? Buying condoms is not embarrassing. You know what is embarrassing? Opening my bedroom door at 2 am and finding Thor-bro there with nothing but a small cushion covering his crotch and a raging hard-on.” James felt his ears flame up as his usually not very creative imagination conjured the image of mostly naked, tall, blond
Asgardian grinning at a sleepy woman in a doorway. It was safe to say that he was never going to look at Thor the same way again. James also couldn’t stop watching Tony as he tried to stomach the new bit of information.

“Don’t be melodramatic, it was no big deal…”

“It would have been no big deal, had he knocked on the wrong door. I will never forget his smiling, glowing face asking me what a condom is, and where can he find this beast for Lady Jane demands it! You sent your boyfriend to me to give him sex-education, Jane. The Hell?”

James could bet that neither he nor Tony would ever get over that either. And my fucking imagination should bloody quit while it's ahead because I don't need that visual in his brain.

“Which I am very grateful to you for.” Rhodey rubbed his eyes to get rid of the unpleasant mental image as Tony instinctively did the same. This Darcy reminded him of someone...

“Visual aids, Jane. I had to go get a banana and demonstrate how you roll a condom on. To a space Viking, that is like a brother to me, on a phallus shaped fruit. While he had his sweaty ass-crack and conkers parked on my freshly washed duvet covers!”

'Phallus shaped fruit and sweaty conkers… Why in the name of all that is holy are we still listening to this? Who is this crazy woman, she sounds just like…' A shiver ran down James’s back as he stared at his equally uncomfortable friend and grinned suddenly. Karma came to town for one Tony Stark. And he better be paying for James’s therapy because he felt like he might need one by the time they finally entered the room.

“Oh… I kind of wondered why you put a washer on at that hour.” That woman had a pretty big pair of conkers on her ‘… damn it. Why am I using that word?’

“Listen here, Jane. A piece of advice that is clearly way overdue. When you prepare a romantic evening for your man to finally do the deed, get the basics ready.”

“We just got carried away…” No one believed that. Definitely not him or Tony, who was turning an interesting shade of red.

“You wore lipstick, Jane. In the house. That is a special evening sign. You never wear lipstick.”

'Make up’. It was winding down. 'Jesus, we should have just entered at the very start. At least now we would be able to compose ourselves and…'

“I did not wear lipstick… Besides you didn’t even see me that evening, you came back late. Ha!”

“The cushion from Thor’s lap fell of when he stood up. Right at my eye level, Jane. Lipstick. You fucking wore it, biatch, don’t you dare lie to me. Because I am fairly certain Thor doesn’t wear lipstick and is not capable of bending over to suck his own dick. It was very much all over it. Nice color though, the lipstick, not the dick. Healthy looking, though.”

'Healthy looking, though'. Just the thing James always wanted to know, how Thor’s dick looked like… ‘I’ll never be able to look the man in the eye again and…’

“I am so sorry…” Tone of voice implied a zero of remorse.

“Blond and hairy, Jane.” It was safe to say that the visual that followed that statement scared him for life. 'Forget therapy. Mind bleach is what I need'. 
“Oh, Jesus, Darcy…”

“Hey, at least, if it will ever come to that, I can now testify under oath that Thor is a *natural blond.*”

Tony next to him let out a half snicker half whimper. They got way too much information…

“Listen, Darcy…”

“Blond and *very* hairy, Jane.” *Joseph’s blue balls, will that woman ever stop talking?* “Might want to discuss *manscaping* with him? I *strongly* recommend it. Does he brush it?” ‘*Oh, God, please, Foster, don’t answer that!*’ “Because I would think hair that long, in place like that, are likely to form dreadlocks. That is *not* a place you want your man to have dreadlocks, sister.” James needed his imagination surgically removed because the bastard was putting images into his brain with a frightening amount of detail…

“Actually, I kind of hoped that you could?” The voice was hopeful and there was silence for a sec.

“Are you asking me to speak to Thor *about shaving his balls?*” Tony let out this funny hiss sound that forced James to cover his mouth at the other man’s horror stricken facial expression.

“If you wouldn’t mind? I will owe you one?” Was Foster trying to be blacklisted by the Iron Man? Because James was sure that she had succeeded.

“Jesus fucked a duck, Janey. What return favor would be on a level with *that*?” An excellent question. He *totally did not* want to know an answer to.

“I don’t know? I could, like, speak to Stark? About something?” That sounded vaguely unhelpful. Tony had his hand covering his mouth as he looked ready to blow.

“Hopefully not his balls, because he has those cleanly shaven, *thank you very much.*” James stopped watching Tony.

“That is *great.* Have him speak to Thor!” *Back to watching Tony*. This was more horrifying fascinating then watching a train going right at you, or in this case Tony. *Darcy, thy name is Karma*. After all these years being at the receiving end of Stark’s crazy James had finally reached a stage in life where he could sit back and watch exactly the same thing happen to Tony.

“*Right*. The conversation would go something like this.” Darcy lowered her voice and injected just a little bit of insolence into it. It sounded frighteningly accurate. “*That was a mean swing, Goldilocks. Loving your hair today! What product do you use?* While we are on the topic, *when was the last time you shaved your balls, ass and crack?* That will go down well. I don’t want Thor to think that my man is gay, thank you, but no.”

Neither did Tony, judging from the way he was trying to hold his opinion in.

“Oh, *come on*. Its *long*. I had to brush it. Brush his *balls*…” ‘*Oh, come on*…’ James could swear that his ears were bleeding. He did not need this…

“*Mary, have Mercy upon my soul…* I did not need to know that!” ‘*Shouldn’t have fucking started it then!*’

“And I did not need to know that Stark shaves his sack!” James was going to ignore it.

“Don’t be jealous!”
“Oh, please, like I would ever… please, Darcy, help me! They are majority guys there, right, can’t someone speak to him about it? Like in a shower?” What?

“Janey, you need to lay off that corny gay porn, I am pretty sure that talking about each other’s family jewels is not what men do in a shower. Besides here, in Stark Tower, designed by the man who has no desire to see other men’s sweaty ball sacks, they have separate showers. I think. Actually, they live here. They go home and shower. How can you not be able to speak to Thor about it? You have no shame when it comes to getting your freak on with me.”

“That is different. I am not sleeping with you. Please, Darcy. Pleeeaaasseeel!”

“Jane, I already broke physics for the sole purpose of getting you laid on the regular. What else you want from me?”

Tony looked like he was having an apoplectic episode as he was gesticulating and miming to James.

“You have a boyfriend now, make use of him.” Said boyfriend had to be held back from making a very stormy entry.

“I am not discussing another man’s scrotum with my boyfriend. Much less ask him to speak to Thor about it. Not happening, Jane. He is not on my shit list right now…. Actually…. talking of my shit list…”

The relief on Tony’s face was worth a thousand words to James. ‘Sucker is neck deep and going under…’


“I have just the Star Spangled Man with a Plan that owes me one.” Both James and Tony felt their jaws drop. ‘Surely she won’t…’ Tony had a grin on so big it threatened to split his face in two. ‘She totally will.’

“You are going ask Captain America if he shaves his balls?” James was leaving. He would send a note and a maybe flowers as a welcome gift…

“Or vagina. Since he enjoys being a little bitch so much.”

James leaned over to his friend and whispered. “Tell me, Tony. Truthfully. Did you try to clone yourself and it worked but the end result came out with a pair of tits?”

Not as good as the original. My muse got a little lazy on this one, but still. The next one will be an actual meeting, so at least the plot bunnies are still fed.

So? Good? Bad? Not bad? Let me know! Much appreciated as always =)
Wino! You are the best! Many Thanks for your help in weeding out my mistakes! =)

James leaned over to his friend and whispered. “Tell me, Tony. Truthfully. Did you try to clone yourself and it worked, but the end result came out with a pair of tits?”

“We are nothing alike.” Tony rolled his eyes at him at the suggestion.

“Jane, of course it will work. It’s my plan.”

“Yeah, Tony. Nothing alike. How could I have ever thought otherwise?”

“She’s the most gentle…”

“On the off chance that Cap dies or something and hence won’t be able to do it, I have a little turd just a shade under good old Rogers, and if Barton will want to continue having what to shave he’ll do as told.”

“… drill sergeant? Is she interested in joining the Air Force? We’re hiring.” James was only half joking. Darcy sounded like she had a brass pair on her.

“You never offered me to join.”

“I did.”

Tony blinked at him in surprise. “You did? When?”

“Years ago. You stopped listening after I mentioned that you can’t drink on duty.”

“Oh… Pass then. You sure the Air Force isn’t flexible on that?”

James laughed out loud, took a determinate step forward and opened the doors.

“And that was exactly what you replied. You’ll never change.”

Darcy Lewis didn’t look up as he expected her to look and he was right, she was young. Not too young, but… ‘Damn it, Tony. She looks like someone that has no idea of what she is getting into with the likes of you…” Long brown hair were tied in a messy bun at the top of her head that bobbed
when she turned sharply at the sound of their entry. The smile that bloomed on her face at the sight of Tony was sincerely sweet and for a second James was jealous. He also had to put a bit of effort in keeping his eyes on that smile. One of Tony’s t-shirts was stretched on a pair of generous sized breasts. He wasn’t a saint, after all. ‘Where the hell did he dig her out?’ She looked like the type of girl that married her high school sweetheart at nineteen and sang with her kids as she dropped them off to school.

“Jane, I’ll call you back later.”

“What? Why? Who’s there?” The phone was on the counter surrounded by trays of freshly baked cookies.

“Tony is here. Laters, Boss-Lady! Start packing!” She hung up before any objections were raised by the Boss-Lady on the other end. “Hey, Hot Stuff! Who’s your friend?”

It took couple of minutes for the actual introduction to take place as Tony was too busy kissing the living daylight out of his girlfriend as she halfheartedly tried to fight him off.

“Get off me, you beast.” Finally, Ms Lewis pushed Tony aside.

“Beast, huh? I like the sound of that.”

Darcy rolled her eyes, but the rosy blush that colored her cheeks betrayed the embarrassment. James smiled at her. ‘What is a girl like that, even if she has a brass pair on her, doing with a man like Tony?’

“Full of himself, isn’t he?”

“No ganging up on me, Shortstack. James! This is the Darcy Lewis, woman of many talents, starting with baking and up to and beyond Astrophysics, also the significant other of yours truly, one and only, Tony Stark. Honeybuns, James Rhodes.”

There was a pause. Tony grinned at James. ‘You’re a fucking asshole, Tony. Downplaying me, aren’t you, you dick. Thanks.’

“Also known as the Iron Patriot and the man that had to put up with your significant other for years and hadn’t tried to kill him.”

That got a laugh and a smile that was open and cheeky.

“Kind Sir, for that, you have my eternal admiration.” She pushed past Tony to shake his hand.

“Iron Patriot is lame. What was wrong with the War Machine? I liked War Machine… Gods, these are good, Short stack.” Darcy actually smacked Tony’s hand as he was about to get another chocolate cookie. The look of confused outrage on his face made James snicker. “What? You baked like a thousand of them.”

“You had yours, Tony.”

“One. I had one. Who has only one cookie?” The woman looked absolutely unimpressed as she pushed the trays out of his immediate reach. “It’s my kitchen!”

“It’s everyone’s kitchen, and you got a cookie for it. Would you like one, Mr Rhodes?”

“Actually, it’s Colonel. But please, call me Rhodey. Tony does.”
“Tony does a lot of things that no one else would even contemplate.” They both eyed the man for a second. ‘Those cookies smell like temptation... Chocolate or...’

“He took two cookies!”

James nearly jumped up as Tony squawked next to him.

“Tony. Are you for fucking real?” He was sure that even with his ebony skin Darcy was able to see his cheeks blush. There was a mountain of them, few mountains actually… He made a move to put the extra one back, under the watchful eye of Tony that just couldn’t stop grinning. ‘You little turd… Just you wait...’

“James, have it. That is fine. You can have more. Actually, want some tea? Or coffee?” Rhodey couldn’t help but smirk at Tony, who was no longer wearing the self satisfied grin.

“How come is he getting more cookies? I got one!”

“Rhodey isn’t being a little shit. Besides, those are for the HR. Natasha said there is, like, a charity bake sale there tomorrow.”

“We’ll be in Malibu tomorrow.” Tony’s voice went cautious all of a sudden.

“Yes. And that is why I am making them now, and will leave them in the safe hands of Natasha and she will deliver them for me tomorrow.”

It took James a minute to process that Natasha Romanov would be delivering baked goods for charity even when it was on behalf of someone else...

“You got Romanov on it? The Black Widow? On cookie delivery?”

“Who else was I supposed to get on it? Captain America? Barton, maybe? She lives in the Tower so it is easy for her and she is very nice for doing it. That reminds me. She wants more Widow Bites whatever that is.”

At the mention of Rogers, James nearly choked on the cookie as the earlier conversation came back to him. ‘I feel sorry for him....The man is about to get an introduction to the wonders of manscaping.’

“I am paying for the ingredients to make these cookies, my girlfriend makes them, I have to pay back for the delivery and all I get out of the deal is one cookie?” Tony looked affronted.

Darcy frowned at him as she slowly took out another loaded tray from the oven.

“Well, when you put it like that, it does sound a little unfair... You know what? You can have one more.”

James had to bite on his knuckle not to start laughing out loud.

“Are you mocking me?” Tony was leaning into her and James had to admire Darcy’s guts as she stood her ground barely raising an eyebrow at the growl.

“Fine. Two. That is my final offer.”

“Two cookies? After I paid for everything?”

“You have also very generously donated five thousand from your credit card.”
“I never donate under ten thousand, so please raise that up. All that and I get two cookies? How will the grunts at HR pay for them? With pieces of their souls? One third per cookie?”

“Cash, actually.” She suddenly pulled him to herself and planted as kiss on his cheek, but for Tony it wasn’t enough and he kissed her on the lips gently, instantly forgetting his indignation. “You can have all the cookies you want, Cuddle Cakes. Thank you for the flowers.” Darcy nodded to giant bouquet of red roses on the coffee table next to one of the sofas. “Had to tell them to have the rest brought up to the Penthouse. One hundred and one bouquets of flowers?”

“You said that you like flowers.” Tony looked pleased as he wrapped his hands around her and kissed her forehead gently. James turned to examine the flowers some more, clearly feeling rather out of place with the couple.

“I do. Very much so.”

“So I get more cookies?”

“You get more cookies.”

Tony once again flashed a triumphant grin at James. The woman had him wrapped around her pinky.

“What else have you been up to today, while I was slaving on the War Machine?”

He was on it again. James groaned out loud and earned a sympathetic look from Darcy.

“Tony. It’s Iron Patriot. Please… just accept it.”

Tony snorted as Darcy shrugged off his hands.

“Might as well just name it the Iron Stripes and Stars, or, my next favorite: Iron Wuss.”

“Don’t fight, guys. The public has spoken, Tony. I don’t think James had a say in it. You should stop taking it out on him. Or we will have a poll to rename you. I got a couple of suggestions that reflect the purpose of the suit much better than the Iron Man…”

“Blasphemy.”

At that Darcy smirked and turned to face James.

“Rhodey, what do you think…” Tony had a palm over her mouth and another hand wrapped around her midriff.

“Ignore it, Rhodey. Just ignore it.”

“I really don’t think…”

James smiled as Tony and Darcy continued to argue about the merits of renaming the Iron Man. He did like the sound of Tuna Can Man, right after Flaming Iron Condom. He was so ribbing Tony about that after.

It took another hour for Darcy to finish with the baking and use James and Tony as her personal delivery boys.
It was amazing how at the same time she was so similar and totally opposite to Tony.

James had to wonder; if Tony’s parents hadn’t died and Obadiah hadn’t gotten his hooks into him, would Tony have become like Darcy? More open? Not so guarded? Less lonely and isolated? Less scared of people?

Did Darcy see how she was affecting him? Did she know that Tony didn’t have that smile on when she wasn’t around? That he didn’t just let people touch him so casually? That it wasn’t normal for Tony Stark to be this relaxed around anyone? Tony had those walls around him build high over years. Very few people ever made into that fortress.

James watched as Tony complained to his girlfriend as he carried a massive loaded tray to Romanov’s apartment.

“We have people to do this, you know…”

“Yes, Tony, I imagine you have…”

The conversation stopped abruptly when Tony nearly walked into Steven Rogers that just rounded the corner. Darcy’s face lit up like Christmas had just come early.

“Ah, Captain Rogers! I am very happy to see you. Do you like cookies?”

Captain Rogers was in clear doubt if her seeing him was a happy occasion.

“Ms Lewis… I was just… I mean I… Is just…”

Tony was grinning so brightly it looked like a sun was shining inside the Tower. ‘She isn’t going to ask him right here, right now…’ James felt like he had his share of scarring mental images already. Tony on the other hand was ready to make the sacrifice in order to see Rogers suffer.

“Have a cookie, Rogers. Darcy made those. They are delish.” Darcy unwrapped the foil from a corner of the tray and the sweet scent of freshly baked goods flooded the corridor.

“Go on, Captain. Have a few. You can use the top sheet of foil to wrap them up…. Yes… careful. You sure you don’t want more?”

The Captain was watching her cautiously. It was a rather funny scene. Darcy Lewis didn’t reach his shoulder and he was all but cowering before her. What was that all about?

“Tony, why don’t you go ahead? Natasha is expecting the cookies. I will have a word with the good Captain here.” James needed to vacate the corridor. ASAP. Darcy Lewis looked like she was sizing him up. Steve looked like he thought she would win whatever fight was coming, from the defensive stance that he immediately took.

Tony simply kept popping cookies into his mouth as not to spoil the show by talking at the wrong time. For a man like him it was the height of restraint.

“Oh, Honeybuns. I’ll wait. Really. No rush. I will just stand right here and… watch. Rhodey?”

‘Ah, hell, no.’ James had no intention to join his friend. He had the image of a giant, veiny, Asgardian phallus surrounded by blond dreadlocks that had a crown of lipstick … and bananas with condoms on next to it. That was all his brain could take before it imploded from mortification.

“I am going. Natasha’s place is at the end of the corridor, right?” Darcy smiled gratefully at him.
“Tony, let’s go.”

“Rhodey, I’ll see you there.”

“Move it, or I will from now on be referring to you as the Tuna Can Man in all communications.”

“I knew it, you and Shortstack are ganging up on me. I am your oldest friend …”

“She has you delivering cookies, Tony. I don’t remember you delivering any for me.”

“And get done for attempted murder? I don’t think so. I ate your cooking.”

“And finished the lot!”

“I was hungover! Also, that was the longest in my life I had an indigestion.”

“You are an ungrateful shit, Tony. Maybe It was the drink? Ever thought of that?”

“Yes, I did, and…”

Darcy poked Rogers.

“Steven, let’s go to the Common Kitchen. These love birds can sort themselves out.”

James watched them go out of the corner of his eye as Tony listed all the good things he had ever done for him. Maybe he did want to know, just a little, how a half pint like Lewis was going to get Captain America bend to her will.

Steve watched Darcy Lewis as she walked on the crutches next to him. She was small. Not tiny, like he used to be, but there was something in her that reminded him of the skinny, little Stevie, that wouldn’t let anything stop him.

He thought back about the things that Natasha had told them about Ms Lewis… She was a lot like them. So much so that Steve honestly forgot that she wasn’t. She wasn’t in the line of work where she was called to handle explosive situations and be expected not to crumble under pressure. She was a Personal Assistant, but she had handled the lot of them plus Tony like it was nothing. Ms Lewis didn’t act like being an Avenger was a big deal. At least not to her. She held the lot of them to the exact same standard like everyone else…

Life had not been kind to her, if you listened to Natasha. And he always listened to Natasha.

Natasha Romanov cared about people around her in her own way. She was a good person, her reputation preceded her and there was like an invisible wall around her that people were afraid to cross. That was not a problem to Darcy Lewis who threw up on the Black Widow’s favorite boots as he and Sam lay on the floor and Stark was squeaking over a speaker.

Steve crammed the last of the chocolate oozing cookie into his mouth as they reached the elevator. He should have taken more.

“So, Steve. I feel like we got off to a bad start.”

Rogers took a deep breath.
“I do apologize for that.” Ms Lewis looked like she was surprised for a second. Did he really come across as such a bad guy? “My conduct has left much to be desired and I would kindly ask you to give me one more chance.”

“I was just thinking something along those lines. We had a bit of a rocky start. You came across like a mean pie stealing jerk.”

“I was going to pay for that, Ms Lewis.” He really did intend to do so.

“But you didn’t.”

“I forgot. I’m sorry. I understand that it is a weak excuse…” They were tired and she just dropped them and he had no cash on him at the time and later he got sidetracked and he got dropped, again, on his face alongside Sam …

“Want to do make up for it, my good Captain?”

“I do, Ms Lewis. Just name it.”

“Great! Just what I wanted to hear. I like you so much better already. I need you to talk to Thor. To clarify some general things.”

Steve felt a chill run down his spine at the look of undisguised glee on Ms Lewis’s face. He had been under fire and that had him feel less threatened.

“Certainly. Something in particular?” He should have asked before he put his head into the noose, Steve thought frantically.

“Manscaping.” The expression on her face was expectant and Steve tried to recall if he had ever heard the word. He was behind on so many things and it was putting him right now in a complicated position.

“Gardening?” Landscaping was the closest term that popped to the front of his brain.

“No, Steven. Wait actually, yes, in a manner of speaking it really is.” That didn’t sound too bad. Not that he knew anything about it. “You have no idea what I am talking about, don’t you?”

“I… no. I’m sorry.”

“That is why you should always clarify what people want from you before agreeing, not that it will help you in this case, but just FYI.”

“What have I agreed to?”

“A conversation for the good of womankind, my Boss-Lady namely. Nothing more. Don’t sweat it. So, I guess since you have no idea what that is, you aren’t doing it either. I shall take one for the team and explain the definition of manscaping to you; the rest is your problem. Ok. What do you think it is? Make a guess.”

“Something I will not like.”

“Not necessarily, it has a lot of benefits. Manscaping is a lot like gardening; basically, I need you to ask to Thor to trim his royal bush garden. It is in desperate need of some pruning, if you catch my drift?”

“What?”
“I need you to ask him to shave, basically.”

“He doesn’t shave…” ‘Please let it be facial hair…” Steve felt sweat droplets gather on his upper lip that he had just shaved clean.

“Yes, I have been told that.”

“The beard… right?” The larger than life Prince of Asgard was smiling in his mind. ‘Please, Lord, whatever sins I have committed…”

“No.”

“Armpits?”

“No.”

“The chest?” He was really hopeful on that one.

“Mmm … Still a no.”

“Legs?” It could be that, some ladies had weird taste and Doctor Foster could very well be…

“No.”

“Oh, God…”

“In your position I would be saying Oh, Thor, but whatever.”

Steve felt blood drain from his face as he wheezed out.

“You want me to… to speak about…”

“Rogers, listen, think about it as a learning opportunity. Trust me, even when you are a Grade A+ beefcake, the rose garden below the belt needs to be trimmed and maintained. No woman wants hair stuck between her teeth. Trust me.”

“Who puts a blade down there?” Not him, that was certain.

“Safety Razors. Wonderful invention. Try it. Or don’t try it. So not my problem. Point is, next time Thor-bro drops into town, you have a go. I would recommend being ready. Questions?”

“Did the Hell freeze over when you left?”

The words just spilled from his lips as Steve tried to come to terms with his newest mission. Darcy Lewis gave him a cheeky wink and a one finger salute as a reply.

“Should have thought of that before you crossed me, punk.” She left him standing in the elevator, gaping after her, as she exited into the Penthouse.
Many Thanks to those that leave comments! You keep me going! Hope you enjoyed the new chapter =)

SO? Good? Bad? Let me know, peepsters! Help me keep the plot bunnies fed! Much appreciated as always =)
Chapter 30

xXx

Wino, did I tell you how awesome you are yet? Well, if I haven’t, please be officially advised that you are very much awesome.

Thank you so much for all the editing you do!

xXx

Chapter 30

Darcy wished that her ankle wasn’t broken as she walked into the Penthouse, but on the other hand she was suddenly very glad for the extra support that the crutches provided.

Flowers. It was not just the hundred bouquets that she excitedly told the security to take to the Penthouse. No. Every single surface was covered in flowers. From the entrance to all over the seated area there were bunches of crimson roses, but mixed in between them and leading further into the apartment was a variety of other blossoms, in all shapes and colors imaginable. It wasn’t a tasteless mess, though. It was carefully orchestrated harmony that swirled and danced in intricate patterns. There were at least a thousand bouquets. Darcy was speechless. They were everywhere.

It took Darcy a moment to notice the second surprise as its cream colored artificial fur did not stand out as much as the bright flowers. Or maybe because it was just so big her mind had simply skipped over it. Staring back at her was one giant bunny.

“Thor damn it, Tony….”

It was massive. It had to be easily twice, if not more, her size. She stared at it for a good moment before making her way to it. It was so soft and cuddly and big. It had long ears and sweet button nose and… an Iron Man suit holding in from the back so it wouldn’t fold … That was not what people usually used to hold soft toys up.

“OK… I will guess, it's empty… Jarvis?”

“Good afternoon, Ms Lewis. You are, indeed, correct; the Mark 19 is not currently manned.”

“Good, because that freaked me out a little.”
Darcy couldn’t help herself but hug it. Or tried to. It was massive. She let out a delighted giggle as she kept petting it. Mr Bunny was ridiculously awesome.

Where had Tony even found one like that? Who in their right mind would buy something like this? Apart from Tony Stark, but that only made the point at hand…

“Mr Bunny…” Darcy knew that she shouldn’t feel this happy because of a gift as ridiculous as this, but, boy, was she excited.

“Darce?! Darcy! Where are you?” The phone came alive next to her head.

Darcy jerked awake at the yell. She was disoriented for a second before remembering where she was: in the warm cocoon she had created for herself by managing to get Mr Bunny on his back and curling up on his massive tummy and covering herself with those soft, fluffy ears like blankets. She was cozy.

“Tony?…”

The panicked voice on the phone let out a ragged breath.

“Where the hell are you? I am permanently disabling the Privacy Protocol for you. You cannot set it and disappear! Did you go outside on your own? How many times did I tell you to take the…”

“I’m in the penthouse… Sleeping…” Why did he have to be always so fucking loud? She was having the best nap ever.

“Sleeping where? Not the bed, I checked. Or the kitchen, or the dressing room, or the bathroom…”

“Mr Bunny…”

“Where? Wait… the toy? Are you?…”

There were rushed steps that came closer to her and one of the furry ears was roughly pulled from over her and sharp artificial light hit her eyes. It was getting dark outside. Darcy frowned and blinked trying to clear her sleepy vision

“Ugh…” One of Tony’s hands went into her hair as he got on the bunny next to her or more precisely on top of her, immobilizing Darcy under his weight. Having rolled onto her back as Tony crawled on top, Darcy awkwardly wrapped her hands around his torso. He still smelled like her cookies with the added aroma of motor oil from tinkering with War… Iron Patriot. That name was lame… Not that she was ever going to admit it to Tony…

Tony was tense. The man was rigid like he was wearing one of his suits. His back muscles were like iron and that wasn’t a pun. Darcy swallowed thickly. Tony’s goatee tickled her nose as he pressed his lips to her forehead. She gently slipped her hands under the hem of his long sleeved t-shirt and felt as his skin broke in goose bumps at the contact and he instinctively pressed himself into her firmer. Darcy rubbed soothing circles on the small of his back. While Tony had one of his knees between her legs it didn’t feel sexual. It felt desperate. Like he was making sure that she was really there. Like he was proving to himself that she was not an apparition.

“Tony… hey…. hey… What’s wrong?”
“You cannot just disappear on me like that… I came to find you and you weren’t here…”

Darcy wanted to laugh but it just got stuck somewhere in her throat as Tony’s grip on her hair was just this side of painful. “I’m here… I was here all the time… Tony…” They were such a fucked up pair of crazies.

“You are not allowed to activate the Privacy Mode again…” Tony hissed the words out through his teeth.

“I looked like a total dork trying to get Mr Bunny from Mark-what-its-number and I don’t need that immortalized on a video of some kind…”

“Dork away, Darce. I’m disabling it. Now. Rise and shine, Honeybuns. Rhodey has some interesting ideas. He’s waiting for us in the workshop.” Tony was off her in a hot second and left Darcy feeling somewhat whiplashed from his sudden mood swing. “Don’t leave your glasses on the floor, Darce. Hurry up. Rhodey is waiting.” Tony pulled Darcy into sitting position and gently slid the glasses he had nearly stepped on onto her nose as the young woman tried to make sense of his behavior.

“Thank you for the flowers and the Bunny…”

The smile Tony gave her barely reached his eyes as there were still echoes of lingering anxiety in them. He was once again picking her apart inside his mind.

“Welcome, Honeybuns.”

“Can we have them, like, spread throughout the Tower… it just… it kind of smells like a flower shop in here…” It killed Darcy to say that, but the combined scent of all the flowers was a little overwhelming. “Except the roses… ‘I, like, totally want those here… Please?’”. She didn’t want to sound ungrateful but it was little too much.

“Jarvis! Have the security team on that while we in the workshop.”

“Certainly, Sir, Ms Lewis.”

“Do I have to go to the workshop?”

Tony fixed Darcy with a meaningful look.

“Yes. Once we done there and Rhodey goes back to DC we are heading out.”

“I thought you had some plans for shopping…”

“Well, we are skipping that now.” At least something good came out of this little incident that Darcy still tried to comprehend.

“Are your little demons still there?” That at last got her a real smile and Tony kissed her temple before handing the crutch so she was able to walk.

“They love you.”

“They keep touching my bum.”

“They were told that if they do it again, I’m donating them to City College.”

“Tony, if your little monsters try to feel me up again I will donate you to City College.”
Last night Darcy had had to literally fend two of them off with a crutch. They were a lot like Tony, Darcy found, just small, metal and with only one hand that still somehow managed to find its way to her bum.

Tony Stark’s workshop was like a geek’s wet dream, but cooler and more functional, not to mention massive.

The man beside her was tense and it was making her uncomfortable. What were they doing together? Between them they had more issues than Vogue magazine. It was a disaster waiting to happen.

“What color is your favorite?”

“Blue. Why?” Darcy lied without blinking. It was red. But it didn’t suit her so she made do with blue.

“Bikini.”

“One piece.”

Tony blinked at her before he grinned.

“Just the bottom you mean? I like the way you think. Approved. I very much…”

‘What the..? Is everything in his brain hardwired to his dick?’

Thankfully, once the elevator door opened James was nearby and Tony switched topic without breaking the pace.

“Rhodey! I got Darce here. Hit us with your idea that I saw potential in.”

Darcy followed Tony into the workshop cautiously. She had no desire for a metal pincers near her backside. They freaked her out. If those were to pinch her it would hurt like hell and she was not into that stuff. Normally she would have asked where the hell those things had picked that habit, but Tony had one of his hands on her bum as he was showing her around last night.

“I’m sorry, Darcy. I was just talking to Tony about your theory and it just…” James looked like he was the good sort of guy. Even if he had been friends with Tony Stark for years…

“Right after the Vacuum Effect you are referring in more detail to the theoretical possibility of the generator creating an actual invisible force field as means of protection from external forces. Remember that? You have a lot of very interesting arguments on that possibility and…”

Darcy remembered very well. She also remembered that she had not discussed it with Dr ‘should mind his own fucking business’ Banner, so how the hell did Tony know?

“Did you hack my emails, again?”

Tony stopped mid sentence and regrouped after interruption in record time.

“You left your laptop open.”

“Did I not tell you to stop hacking my shit?” Did he ever listen, to anyone? Was that too much to ask?
“Technically, it wasn’t hacking. And neither it was the first time round. I was helping.” Honest to Thor, Stark looked like he believed what he was saying.

“You little… Jesus!” Darcy nearly jumped out of her skin as something patted her bum. As the only other people in the workshop stood a couple of meters in front of her, the surprise, despite the fact that the touch was gentle, propelled Darcy forward and only Tony’s reflexes saved her from landing face first on the floor. Darcy made an angry strangled sound and twisted in Tony tight embrace to look behind her. “You!” There were two of them.

“That’s Dum-E and Butterfingers, actually. U got hit with the crutch yesterday; I think it sat this one out. You ok, Honeybuns? The two of you! This is the last time. I will donate you…” Darcy tried to get her heartbeat under control as she watched Tony pick her crutch up and rant at the two robots.

“It will never happen, you are like the dad that tells the kids how he will leave them at the side of the road. It's never gonna happen, Tony. They're your little angels… they are coming near me! The fuck is wrong with them?! Tony!” Darcy grabbed the back of Tony’s shirt as she hid behind him and tugged on it making the man turn as the two robots were trying to reach her.

“Darcy, honey, sweetie, they are harmless.”

They made a full circle until Dum-E decided to approach Darcy from the other side effectively cutting her off. Tony took the opportunity to turn and wrap his arms around her.

“Tony, they are coming closer. Tony!”

“Back off!” The command that Stark barked out made that two robots freeze. “Darcy, Honeybunny. They just want to say hello.”

“No one’s says hello by touching bums!” Darcy felt like a right idiot at her own reaction but Tony had thrown her off kilter earlier.

“Honestly, they have never done that before…”

“I can hear them move!” Darcy twisted in Tony’s arms so now her back was pressed to his front. She hooked her thumbs into his pockets and pulled him as close to her as possible. “Make them stop.”

“Darce, I’m here, they won’t do anything.”

“They are freaking me out.” Tony’s hands settled on her t-shirt clad tummy as he helped her stay balanced.

“Don’t tase them. You will fry their circuits.”

Darcy strongly considered stepping on his foot with the cast before she noticed Rhodey that had taken a seat nearby and was watching the show that unfolded before him. Color rose to her cheeks.

“I don’t have it on me, you twat.” This situation was the height of embarrassment.

“That’s a first. Honeybuns, stay still. They aren’t going to do anything…”

“You owe me so much for this…”

They didn’t do anything. If you didn’t count a mild sexual harassment in a form of bum petting, that is. A pair of robots petted her backside as Tony gently kissed her cheek and murmured reassurances
into her ear. To top that Butterfingers and Dum-E made this odd sound like they were pleased with themselves. Darcy had no intention of dwelling on that fact. It was creepy and they followed her around.

“I actually think they like you, Darcy.” James was grinning as he took a sip of a freshly prepared pea colored smoothie. “I’m sorry, you want some? Tony made it before he went to get you.”

Darcy eyed first the drink and then Tony. She had some of that this morning. ‘Yeah, no.’

“Do I want something that looks like sick and tastes like sweaty balls? Hard pass, Rhodey.”

James Rhodes who had taken another good mouthful froze with it still in his mouth, looking like a greedy chipmunk with his eyes bulging.

“My smoothies don’t taste like balls, Short stack.” Tony gave her a challenging look as he took a swing himself and swallowed with loud noise of satisfaction at the same time as James managed to choke his own drink down.

“You are right, Tony. It tastes worse. You also might want to change the blender brand you are using. It leaves this weird grainy texture that gets stuck to your teeth… just like bits of pubic hair.”

“Vengeful little wench.” Tony tossed the drink along with the glass into the trash and James followed suit.

“Why is everyone always so surprised? I mean, you fuck with me and expect what? That I turn the other cheek? Fat chance. Now that we’re all equally scarred. So, where were we? Right, now that I have been approved by your minions… why are they just sitting there? Watching me?” She never liked being the sole focus of everyone’s attention in the room.

“They like you. And you, literally, got me off the only health kick I have.” Tony took the example from James and rinsed his mouth to get rid the lingering taste.

“Well, good. Maybe you will stop trying to manufacture industrial quantities of organic gas while you sleep.”

“For the last time, I do not fart while I sleep.” Tony held into that conviction like his life depended on it.

“Sure, Tony. It’s the neighbors’ dog.”

“Rhodey, tell her!” Tony just didn’t want to quit.

“Ask Jarvis to increase ventilation in the room at night, Darcy. That should help.” James had this very serious expression on his face that made Darcy crack up.

“Treason!”

While Tony was getting some doodah that he had invented and wanted her opinion in regards to the potential generation of a force field, James and her were left alone for a few brief moments.

“You know he likes you, right?”

“Huh?” Darcy who had a mouth full of leftover melon looked at James in confusion. “Yeah? Kind
of guessed that?”

“Please let him down gently now, if you don’t plan on sticking around.”

Darcy stared at Rhodey as the man held her gaze.

“What?”

“You look like a great girl… woman, I mean. I am not saying you are too young for him… just… He is serious with you, please don’t lead him on, if are just out for some good time. He had a bad break up with Pepper and he went hard for you, he doesn’t usually get enthralled like that, it took years with Pepper…”

Darcy was bright red at that point. “No.”

“Excuse me?”

“I’m not discussing Tony’s ex with you. I have seen the woman on TV. Listen, I get it, Tony downgraded with me…”

“No, Gods, that is not what I am saying…”

“The fuck are you saying then?”

“Please don’t hurt him.”

“What? You do realize we been together like few days?”

“Welcome to the world of Tony Stark, where extreme is the new normal. He likes you, and I mean likes you more that I have seen him like any other woman, possibly even Pepper. She was his manager more than she was his paramour. Do not discount the feelings he has for you, just because you two are a newly minted couple.”

“Are you giving me the shovel talk?” This was awkward.

“No! No…. Maybe… a little. You look like you are up for the challenge. Tony is… complex. Please give him a chance.”

“I will… I mean I am.” Darcy hadn’t felt this uncomfortable in years. Not since she went for the internship interview with Janey. Tony appeared in her field of vision dragging some sort of machine after him. “I promise.” It was a promise she intended to keep.

Many thanks to you all lovely Peeps that leave comments, you motivate me to continue with this story! It is not always easy to spend hours at the computer after I drag my tired ass home from work. So Much appreciated =)

SO, Peepsters? Good? Bad? Let me know! Those ferocious beasts that are the plot bunnies need feeding! Thank you in advance =)
Chapter 31

Dear Wino, you have once again done a splendid job

Many Thanks!

You are amazing =)

Chapter 31

The differences between Jane and Tony were, basically, two: funding and what held most of the equipment together. Janey was swearing her soul on duct tape and Tony welded everything together. That was it. Because underneath the duct tape and layers of welded metal those two were bat shit crazy on pretty much the same level… and why did they always had to do it when she had things planned?

“So what do you think, Darcy?”

“That I have been promised sun, a private pool and cocktails with tiny umbrellas in them and it has not yet materialized.” Tony Stark was one smart son of a bitch, but Darcy had Jane’s research and her own observations behind her belt and she wasn’t sharing some of very particular details until she got the ok from Jane. Foster- Lewis Theory was not all that Darcy had in her head. She was forced to pick up Astrophysics at a break neck speed. How her mind had not exploded yet from all the information crammed into it over such short period of time still amazed her.

Rhodey coughed somewhere behind her. At least someone was having fun.

They were looking at Tony’s attempt at force field generator. Force field generator. She was officially living in a science fiction dream. It was an excellent machine and Tony Stark was a brilliant man, but Darcy straight away saw the error in it. It was right there. In her face. Mistakes in the brainchild of Tony Stark.

‘Why am I doing this to myself?’ Why did she know that kind of stuff? It was like a rash that she picked up. It was all Jane’s fault. Yes. Dr Jane Foster put weird thoughts in her head. Darcy had admired science from afar before she went and got an internship with the crazy lady that had three PhD. And there the information that had finally taken root inside Darcy’s brain demanded more company over the years and occasionally she just had to invent stuff to entertain it; like a force shield being an actual possibility and then the brain had taken that idea and run away from the rational thought…. And Stark had it upside down… was he taking the piss?

Was that how Jane felt all the time? Darcy literally had equations floating behind her eyes, most which were of her creation. Also the list of long upheld and widely accepted theories that she rejected and Tony clearly just couldn’t shake off. She felt irrationally irritated at that. How had her
life become like this?

“Honeybunny, the jet is ready as soon as you tell what you think, your opinion on it was rather abstract in the paper, but let’s see how that translates into an actual prototype.” Why was the man so devilishly handsome? And why was she contemplating it so many times today? That Bunny was her undoing…

Darcy chewed on her lip. She could be wrong. She was probably wrong. All she had were half cooked theories and Tony was pushing her to share something that she wasn’t ready to share. Again. Maybe if she threw him a bone he would stop annoying her?...

“So if I give you a hint, we can go?” As soon as the words left her mouth Darcy regretted it. That was a faux pas on her part, admitting that she had a defined opinion on that. Because the undisguised shock on Tony’s face implied that he hadn’t really thought that she had an actual idea when he asked her.

‘You prick. You tricked me.’

“You think that there is an actual way to build a force field generator?” Darcy wanted to cram the fist into her mouth as Tony’s eyes nearly sparkled from excitement. No. There wasn’t, not yet at least. Darcy was too fucking busy with writing the bloody paper to go into detail about the secondary uses of the Lewis Generator. She should just deny it…

“Why shouldn’t there be? You built your suit, didn’t you? I bet people said that this kind of thing could not be done either. For example you clearly assume that there should only be one fused energy release pulse. Why? It will tear it apart. It would be like poking a balloon with a needle. But if we take your suit, as an example, and integrate the fusion so that the release …” ‘Oh, Thor. Why am I still talking?’

“Cold fusion cannot be achieved inside the suit as it would interfere with the core that powers it resulting…”

“Who says you have to use the cold fusion? Really? It's not the best thing since sliced bread. Why can’t you use the core as the primary energy source for both? It is not about the flow of the energy, but the distribution, in my opinion, the energy would go through a stabilizer filter before being…”

“That’s it!”

Darcy nearly fell of the chair as Tony kissed her suddenly. She made a noise of protest and bit his tongue as he got carried away forcing the man to rear back.

“Darcy, where have you been all my life?”

“Enjoying life with so much less crazy in it. So, Stark, are we going to that Malibu paradise or am going alone?” Darcy felt tired as the excitement of the last week was really catching up with her. Not to mention Stark’s expectation that she could keep up with him. His crazy, maybe yes. His science crazy, fuck no. That man was a genius and Darcy wasn’t. And it was ok. She had reached and done far more then she was told she was ever going to achieve in life. At his point everything was pure bonus.

“I need the rest of your equations, Honeybuns. The ones you did not put into the paper.”

Darcy felt as her jaw went slack. He needed what?

“I beg your pardon?” The nerve of the man…
“I have seen your paper. You left things out.”

That was it. Darcy felt her head swim for a sec.

“James, please, can you give us a minute?” Darcy tried to breathe evenly. She was about to ruin everything. But this conversation was so overdue it was embarrassing. Tony looked alarmed as his attention jumped from her to Rhody and back again.

James Rhodes left with barely a nod in their direction. Good man. Tony looked like he was trying to work out what her problem was.

“Honeybuns…”

“No. First, who do you think you are?” Darcy shrugged his hand off her shoulder as she poked Tony in the chest, gently, though.

“Your man.” The man was slicker than a bucket full of eels and no mistake.

“Nice. Which makes me your woman. And since that entitles you to all that I got, it should entitle me to all of yours. Right?” Darcy felt her cheeks heat up. This was gonna be messy.

“What of mine do you not yet have on tap?”

“Iron Man blueprints. The works.”

“What?” Bull’s-eye. Tony looked like she just asked for his bleeding heart on a little silver plate, with garnish on a side.

“Blueprints. And this.” Darcy traced her finger around the glowing circle in the middle of his chest as he stared at her.

“It’s not the same.”

“Oh, I gathered that. So my life’s work, hours, days, months and years I spend slaving over it, is not as significant as your invention. Because it is, well, yours. The Great Tony Stark’s. You have your name attached to, like, a million patents worldwide, so I am sure the term intellectual property is known to you.”

“Are you implying that I want to rip off your work? Are you serious? I would never…”

“What? No! That is not what I am saying, Tony, Jesus, will you listen for a sec? I am saying you cannot just assume that you have the right to something just because you want it. You need to ask.”

“But you’ll say no. What then?”

“Then you make do without.”

“What? Why?” Darcy took off her glasses for a second and rubbed the bridge of her nose. Pain was starting to slowly pulse in her temples.

“Because you can’t take other people’s toy without permission.” Did she really have to say this out loud? Really?

“I always give it back!... or pay for it. You know I always pay for it. Always. Darce, your work is different; it is beautiful, you can’t just tease me with a morsel of it and withhold the rest from a starving man! You cannot do this to me. I will not talk to anyone about it. We’ll compromise…”
“You are missing my point! Tony, you can’t make decisions for me all the time! You just assume that I will get along with whatever you have decided. I get a say. Do you understand? And If I say no, you have to back off!”

“I back off.”

“And where are my photos, you thief?” Darcy told herself that she was a big girl now and she did not need no safety blanket, but she wanted those back so badly.

“They would still be in your extremely unsecured inbox, if you weren’t so damn sexy over a phone.”

Darcy gaped at him as Tony shoved his hands into his pockets and winked at her. No traces of shame on his stupidly smug face.

“That is not an excuse!”

“They were sitting in your inbox. Gathering cyber dust. It was equivalent of keeping the Mona Lisa in the fucking basement under some rocks, forever. But fine. They’re yours, you want them? Jarvis? The Show, please!”

A second later Darcy was staring at herself. Or more precisely a freaking life size projection of the photos that kept changing in slow succession.

“Oh Thor, did James…”

“No. Strictly a private show. As we’re on the topic, you did say that it was ok to keep them if I kept them private. I did.” Tony sounded defensive.

“You stole them!” Damn it, she looked good in those. She needed to find a swimming suit like that…

“Borrowed. There’s a difference. I fully intended to return them.” He was standing behind her now. Hands on her hips to keep her steady as she hopped towards the flickering image of herself. They looked even more vintage. Had Tony applied a filter of some sort? He must have.

“Do I need to hit you with something heavy to make a point? Please, tell me you understand what I am saying, Tony… You cannot keep making all the decisions for me, it… it is toxic. I don’t want to start resenting you for it. You made me move in with you, that is one of the biggest steps in a relationship and you decided on it before we even met.”

“You stayed and we’re good, right? Honeybunny, I would never do anything against your will…”

His hands wrapped around her waists as they stood watching the hologram change from one photo to another. Darcy took a deep breath and turned around in the embrace. She was tired and wished that the headache would ease up a little. That promised sun and cocktail combination seemed so impossibly far away.

“You are missing the point, Tony…”

“Maybe. I have a solution we can… Darcy? You look pale… Darcy? That is not the color you came in here with.”

“Your solution is to distract me? What dick move is that?” What the hell was he playing at this time? Darcy felt irritation rise.
Tony was frowning at her, his lips set in a grim line.

“We're going to see a Doctor.”

Even through the pounding headache Darcy found the energy to glare at the man holding her and snarl.

“Hell, no.”

“Hell, yes.”

“I have a headache, the only place I am going to is either the bed, alone, I might add, or the promised land in Malibu.” Tony still had that look on his face like he was dead serious as he cupped her cheek gently. “What you gonna do? Drag me there in your suit? Because I warn you now, Casanova. I fight dirty.”

“Good to hear that, Short stack, because so do I.”

Tony watched as Dr Cho gave a booster shot to Darcy after she nearly keeled over after a row with him in the lab. He ended up suiting up to drag her to the Med Lab. Suiting up. Tony rubbed the back of his neck as he watched Darcy with Cho. His girlfriend was a ferocious little bunny. The things that woman made him do…

Low iron in her blood. That was something he didn’t see coming. But he knew who should have seen it coming. The good doctor. From the cagey behavior Cho knew that too. Tony gave her a smile full of teeth, as he fought to keep his protective side in check.

“Anything else we should know, Dr Cho?”

“Seriously, people. I am not anemic. I can’t be anemic. I, like, eat all my veggies and stuff. I cook! It was just too much coffee or something…” Darcy was distressed at the news, constantly shifting on the med room bed, avoiding looking at him.

“Have you been stressed lately, Ms Lewis?” Darcy looked at him before pursing her lips and took a second to think over Dr Cho’s question, as if the answer wasn’t obvious enough.

“In a manner of speaking, one could say that.” Tony leaned over and kissed Darcy on the temple and felt the young woman lean into him, seeking comfort. He wanted to wrap her up in that blanket, and hide her from the world somewhere safe, so nothing could ever harm her.

She had to be stressed. He should have seen it. Asshats from Shield were on her back for years. The Agent Boothby… incident. Having the likes of Foster as a boss… Moving to NYC and taking down the better part of the Avengers team, breaking the ankle. All that had taken its toll on her. He probably hadn’t helped either… he should have seen it coming, but she was just taking everything in stride, being so damn strong.

The door to the room was thrown open and hit the wall with a bang startling people inside. Tony turned sharply and stepped in from of Darcy instinctively.

Clint Barton nearly fell over his own feet in his haste to enter and came face to face with Tony, who looked less then amused at the intrusion.
“It was all Natasha’s idea, I swear.”

Tony could hear Darcy shift on the bed to look at what was going on as he relaxed his stance. Just what he needed. Someone stressing Darcy some more.

Natasha Romanov, slightly red in the face, entered the room a second later at speed while glaring daggers at the archer’s back, putting the man’s earlier statement under question.

“I told you not to come along. Darcy doesn’t need you fawning over her too.”

“Who voted you in charge, Tasha? Not me. Technically, the person in charge would be Rogers…” just at those words came out an uncomfortable looking Captain America appeared in the doorway. The room was getting crowded.

“I did tell you not to go and bother, Ms Lewis. I’m sorry…”

“That’s beside the point…” Barton merely shrugged at the rebuttal and tried stepping around Tony to get to the woman on the bed. “Hey, Lewis…” Before he could finish armor encased fingers closed around his throat effectively immobilizing the man.

“The fuck are you all doing here?” The dangerously low snarl that came out of Tony’s mouth made the room freeze.

“Tony, let go, you are choking him.” The calm and collected voice broke Tony out of the red haze that was slowly descending upon him.

“Bruce? The fuck is this? An Assemble call?” Tony shifted again still effectively blocking the view of Darcy as Barton staggered back, coughing.

“Tony, we are merely concerned for the well-being of Ms Lewis.”

“She is fine…” Darcy’s health was not a matter of public record and that was how he intended to keep it.

“Yeah, you totally dragged her to Cho because she's fine. Pull the other one, Stark, it got bells on it.” Barton was eyeing him, looking for the easiest way to bypass him.

“Tony, please just move aside…”

“Clint, I told you to keep out of the room…” Romanov, like the rest of them, looked on edge, her eyes seeking the woman laying behind Tony’s back.

“Oh my Thor… can you all please keep it down?” The voice resembled an irritated mewl. Gods, Darcy even sounded weak now. Before Tony could make a move the rest of the Avengers were at Darcy’s side. If he hadn’t been wearing the suit he would have been simply pushed away.

“Hey! Hey! Don’t fucking crowd her…”

“Jesus, you look bad, Lewis… did he get you preggo already? I mean that is fast…”

There was a pause that could only be described as pregnant and it lasted until the Black Widow hit Barton over the head so hard he nearly fell onto the bed and effectively Darcy’s feet.

“One year supply of baked goods to the person that will bring me my taser.”

Barton smirked as he watched Bruce try and prevent Tony from grabbing him by the throat again
and Natasha press the back of her palm to Darcy’s forehead while carefully brushing the hair back; it was officially the gentlest he had ever seen Natasha be with someone.

Barton chuckled, “We’re a team, Lewis, there is no way they would…”

Rogers, who stood now on the other side by Dr Cho, coughed couple of times.

“Baked goods include cakes?” Clint’s jaw dropped at the question as he looked at the Captain.

“Cakes, cookies, bread, pies, either savory or sweet…” Darcy knew how to bargain.

“Rogers, what the…? We’re a team.”

“We’re not on a mission… and she got cookies.” Steven Rogers gave Clint one of his innocent looks.

“Fuck you, Rogers. Rolling over for cookies, you disgust me… So are you preggo or not, Lewis?”

“Let go of me, Bruce!” Barton clearly had a death wish. Tony couldn’t even look at Darcy’s face as he felt his own heat up.

“Clint, leave her be.” Romanov was holding a glass of water as Darcy drank from it, her face still pale despite the obvious embarrassment.

“The only thing in here that I got, Cupid, apparently, is anemia.” Tony pushed past Romanov and Rogers to stand once again at Darcy’s side.

“Did you forget to swallow last night or something…”

This time the smack came from Rogers, who got to Clint before Romanov, resulting in the archer sprawling on the floor.

“That hurt! Oh, come on, people, she is banging Iron Man and is anemic, it was the joke that had to be told!”

“Ok, time for the circus to leave this room, everyone out!” Tony said, not being able to take it anymore pointed towards the door. No one in the room moved. “I did say that out loud, right?” Romanov looked him over coolly, clearly expressing what she thought of his command with a single raised eyebrow, and turned back to griming Darcy.

“милая, how are you feeling?”

“Tired, Dr Cho said that anemia been draining me for a while now…”

“That was you being drained all over Tower, and us? Is this a joke? Are you classed as a weapon of mass destruction when you're fully charged up?”

Barton had two stitches where the glass got him in the forehead just near the hairline. Courtesy of Darcy.

“Swear to Thor, Tony, I am going back to London if you will not take me to Malibu right the fuck now!”

Tony kicked everyone out, even rather anxious looking Bruce, as soon as Darcy started tossing things around and pulled her into a tight hug as she hiccuped. She was totally out of it.
“You will love it there, just you, me and the pool…”

I'm back! So, Peeps? What you think? Good? Bad? Let me know! The plot bunnies are starving! Much appreciated as always =)
Chapter 32

Wino,

Much appreciation for weeding out my mistakes is going your way

as usual,

you are amazing=)

xx Many thanks xx

Chapter 32

Rosie nervously tugged on her new tie as she waited in the underground garage. It was the first official trip that she was going to accompany Ms Lewis on.

“Velasquez, seriously, relax. You are making me nervous with all the shifting.” Daniel Otter loaded a couple of suitcases into one of the SUVs and shut the back door with a bang.

“Piss off, Otter.”

She could not screw this trip up in any way. Mr Hogan had been very explicit on that… and so had Mr Stark. A shudder ran down her back.

“… Hello?”

This morning she had been getting a flat white, from their newly fixed coffee machine on the R&D floor, when she turned and found no other than Tony Stark casually leaning on the doorway to the break room examining her. Rosie nearly spilled the drink all over herself in surprise.

“Velasquez, right?”

“… Yes?”

“Darce wants you on her team, wanna tell me why?”

Stark made no pretense that it was somehow an accident that he ran into her. No. The man had no problem with making others uncomfortable.
“You see the other day, Mr Stark, I was just… I mean…”

“Yeah, thanks for delivering the phones. Do I need to start repeating myself?”

Rosie didn’t usually feel intimidated and certainly not by a man smaller than herself, but there was something about Stark that put her on high alert.

“No, sir. I think Ms Lewis liked me…” Should she sell herself up, down? Run for help? Rugby tackle the man that paid her wage?

“Sounds like a great reason to trust you with her life. You want to try again? … Since Darce likes you.”

Whoever said that Tony Stark had a friendly smile never had him smiling at them like he was smiling at Rosie. That smile full of teeth was the furthest thing from comforting that she had ever seen. The shirt was glued to her back by sweat.

Darcy Lewis thought that she did a good job. Rosie took a deep breath and cleared her throat.

“With all due respect, sir. Ms Lewis didn’t choose me for the single reason that she feels comfortable around me, I have been vetted by Mr Hogan, I have had extensive training, receiving even more now, I know how to do my job.” And she probably should just pack her stuff and hand in her resignation before Iron Man tossed her out the window.

“So I take you are up to answering the call of duty and fly with us to Malibu?” Rosie could not get a read on Stark, the man was impossible to predict. Why was someone like Darcy with him?

“Yes, sir.”

“Do I need to make a point of how important is her safety?”

“No, sir.”

“And I think I do. You see, Velasquez, being Iron Man comes with certain complications, such as people closest to me ending up in the line of fire. While I would do anything to prevent her from getting hurt I cannot be there all the time, which is where you and the rest come in.” Stark paused to run a hand through his hair and look around the room, dragging out already loaded conversation. “Darcy must be safe. I don’t care what you will have to do to ensure that, I’ll pay for it. But if anything happens and I will find out that you pulled punches while she was in danger…. I will grind your bones to dust. I hope, I made my point?”

After watching Stark simply turn around and leave, Rosie decided that it was time to reduce her daily caffeine intake.

...I will grind your bones to dust...

Rosie took a sip from a bottle of water before dropping it back into the car. It was exactly the thing you wanted one of the world’s richest, most powerful, smartest, self appointed vigilante to tell you. That was no doubt the most motivating speech she had ever received. And if there was God, it would be the last one from Stark.

“Is this really necessary?” Darcy’s voice rang through the parking lot. Rosie straightened her tie one last time before rounding the car, ready to settle her charge in the SUV for the trip to the airport and stopped short. Darcy was on crutches, flanked by the entire Avengers Team. Well, they weren’t
suited up but Rosie knew who they were. There was some bickering going on between Captain Rogers and Mr Stark, while Black Widow carried what must have been Darcy’s little red cross body bag and Hawkeye skulked behind them like a child that had just been unfairly reprimanded, in company of a grinning Falcon. Was that Col. Rhodes trying to stay between Mr Stark and the Captain?

All that was missing was the God of Thunder with a barrel of ale, Rosie thought numbly. Was there anyone that Darcy didn’t know?

“Of course it is not necessary! We do not need an escort to the car.” Stark sounded as irritated as Darcy looked.

“Oh, I thought we were seeing you guys to the airport?” Hawkeye looked genuinely confused as they finally reached the cars. The alarm on Darcy’s face was rather comical.

“Tony, do something.”

“Honeybunny, they are not coming anywhere with us.”

Rosie felt like an imposter as she waited by the open car door and watched as Stark kissed a frowning Darcy on the temple. Maybe it would have been less awkward if there had been only them out there, but everyone else was watching the couple with various degrees of interest.

“Allright. Thank you for the company, please have some consideration and get lost.” Stark delivered the little speech with a smile as he took the crutches from Darcy and handed them to the waiting Rosie, so that she could put them in the boot of the car.

“Is this a good idea? She’s anemic; shouldn’t she be under close watch, if she has an episode or something?” Barton was eyeing Darcy with concern.

“Clint, we discussed this…” Natasha Romanov gave him a soft look as he shuffled his feet; despite his build, he gave the impression of an awkward teenager.

“Cupid, I am anemic not apoplectic, I do not get episodes. It is sweet that you are concerned…” Rosie watched as Darcy let go of Stark and pulled Clint Barton into a hug. The man stood still like statue before he awkwardly wrapped his arms around her in response and patted her back.

“You know me, Lewis, sweet is my middle name…”

“That’s a funny way to spell dickhead, but ok. How's the head?” The brunette gently patted the archer’s head.

“It hurts.” Barton let go of her with a final pat and stepped aside so the Black Widow could hug Darcy too.

All those people… those great heroes… they looked so domestic around Ms Lewis… So, relaxed…

“Serves you right.” Snickers and eye rolls were all around.

“You know what? You're right, you don't need help. Stark, who will be coming to your aid when she'll have you by the balls in that deserted house in the middle of nowhere?”

“Barton, I'm not sure how you do it, but if you're lucky enough to have the privilege of such a breathtaking example of magnificence have you by the nuts, the only person coming should be you, and if not, then just admit you ride stick and find someone else for the job. It’s a free country. No one
here will ever judge you.”

Barton gave Stark a filthy look as he watched Darcy hug Col. Rhodes.

“I bet she’ll bury your carcass under the cherry tree and keep your pickled nuts in a jam jar on bedside table, Tin Man.”

Stark, not to be outdone, winked at the Black Widow. “Is that what Natasha's done to yours?”

“What? You wanna check how real balls look like? Don’t be shy… owww! Lewis. What was that for?! Is that it? Am I right? I bet Stark got the smallest…”

“If you must know, Tony is perfectly equipped and you are the one hung up on his balls, so it poses a good question about who wants to see whose goods.” Lewis cut in with a sharp no nonsense voice, making Stark grin like a lunatic.

“Hear that, Hawkniss? Perfectly equipped. Moi. But if you insist…” Rosie felt her own saliva threatening to choke her. She did not need to know how her boss’s junk looked like; if she was ever interested she could just Google. Thankfully Col Rhodes came to everyone’s aid.

“Alright, Tony. No one here is insisting. No one. Now, before you go, will Iron Patriot be getting that swanky force shield upgrade you been bragging about?” Rosie could nearly hear the snap in the air as everyone’s attention got glued to him. Everyone, from the look of things, wanted a swanky upgrade.

“First…” “No…” Lewis and Stark spoke at the same time. The billionaire’s eyebrows went up at that as he gave his girlfriend a critical look while other Avengers tried to catch up what the conversation was about.

“Isn’t that a little premature? You didn’t even look inside, Darce. Which I offered.”

“I didn’t have to, and you promised we would not discuss science till I got some rest. Rest hasn’t been had.” Lewis shifted painfully on her feet before taking a seat with her feet still dangling outside the car. She looked tired. Was she well?

“Just a hint? I know you want to. It’s all over your face, Honeybuns. Don’t you want Rhodey to have the most up to date technology to protect our proud nation?”

“Tony, keep me the hell out of it…And you were the one who offered.” Rhodes was clearly regretting starting the conversation.

Darcy rolled her eyes and pointed at her slightly of color face.

“That, for your information, is me not believing a thing you say…”

“I swear, you give me a hint and I will shut up about till… we back to Tower?”

“You swear?”

“Scouts honor.”

“That is not how you do it… Now you're just making a gang sign… Live long and prosper to you too, Spock. Please just stop… I need your words on record… Natasha? Mind pulling my phone out and recording it? Much appreciated… And if you don't keep your word?”

“That will not happen.” Watching the two argue was fascinating. Clearly the others agreed as they
just stood there watching, looking intrigued. “Did you like it, by the way? It’s great, isn’t it? This is the next big thing after the suit…”

“It’s upside down.”

Rosie wasn’t into science, but even she knew a scientific slap down when she saw one. It sounded like a pretty big mistake… If she listened hard enough she swore she could hear tumbleweed rolling in the background despite them being thousands of miles from the nearest desert. No one spoke for a minute. It was hard to tell if they were shocked, or if they were savoring the view of Tony Stark’s dropped jaw. Could have been both. Rosie really hoped that her own glee wasn’t so obviously showing.

Finally Col Rhodes slapped the wide eyed Tony Stark on a shoulder strong enough to make the other man sway.

“Tony, it happens to the best of us. And fuck, that felt good, I waited years to be able to use this one. Next best thing, huh? Darcy? Whenever you get that next big thing ready, give me a call? We’ll discuss.”

“Tasha? Are you still recording? Can you forward me copy? Lewis? Please can I have a copy? I need it in my life.” Barton was all but begging, while Captain Rogers had his hand over his mouth.

Darcy smiled somewhat sheepishly at Stark, who finally managed to pick his jaw from the floor.

“Sorry, Tony…”

“Don’t be. You are the best thing that ever happened to me, just…”

“Not until we are back.”

“Damn it.”

Tony was only half joking when he’d asked Darcy where she had been all his life. He could have done with meeting her years ago. Maybe before Afghanistan… When he was just a little less fucked up… She would have been what? Nineteen? Twenty? Before she took up with Foster.

He brushed a stray lock from her cheek as he sat up in the bed next to her sleeping form. They were half way to their destination.

Why hadn't she taken hard sciences instead of that joke that was Poli Sci? Like physics or engineering or mechanics? Anything?

Tony imagined meeting her during one of his speeches in MIT as she studied there… Sitting in the first row, no doubt, all curves and wicked smile and mind like that…

She would have been wearing something casual… some ripped jeans and an oversized hoodie maybe… hair at the top of the head in a massive bun, escaped tendrils framing her face…

First he would have noticed the smile. Blood Red. Like desire and sin. It would have been distracting when she’d keep biting the bottom lip in concentration, taking notes. Darcy being Darcy would have taken his interest in stride and kept his gaze while he spoke, but not flirting.

Ever so slowly driving him wild, like they were the only people in the room even as he kept speaking to the full auditorium. He would have to ask if she had any questions way before he
finished, and of course she would, in that low sinful voice she would pull the ground from under him. They would have blazing debate until someone would request for him to continue with the speech, because Ms Lewis wasn’t the only student in there and he would ask her if she wanted to continue this after… Those red lips would be pursed as she would think about it before shrugging, showing her apparent indifference, except her eyes, those pretty eyes would be twinkling at him with mischief giving him all manner of thoughts…

Tony had to bite his knuckle from groaning out loud. He hadn’t felt like that since he was in his teens and maybe early twenties, when he was curious, when he could get aroused at a mere thought.

What was she doing to him? His very own, personal addiction, that what she was becoming… It was frightening to have everything you have ever desired so badly so close. So close to his filthy mind and broken body and his ruined soul, if God had seen it fit to burden him with one.

“Fuck...”

“Tony?...” Darcy rubbed her eyes and reached for him, smiling that lazy sleepy smile. He really shouldn’t lay next to her. Let her snuggle into him. He shouldn’t let that low contented sign that escaped her lips travel down his spine… “It’s ok, Tony… it was just a dream… I got you…”

“What?” His heart slammed into his throat so hard he nearly choked.

“It is ok to have bad dreams… I have bad dreams too. Sleep a little more… ” The short nails scratched the scruff on his cheek, before the hand settled on his chest. “You ok? Your heart is…”

“ Toilet...”

“Oh… ok. Please use air freshener after...”

He managed to bark out a laugh as he stumbled towards the bathroom hoping that his posture didn’t seem as rigid as he felt.

Maybe he indeed was the monster that people told him he was. But that didn’t stop him from dropping his boxers and getting the matter in hand as soon as the door shut.

‘Perfectly equipped... ’ The sultry voice was under his skin. He wanted… He wanted so bad… He wanted so bad the only thing he knew he was never going to deserve. Since when did he care about deserving? But he wanted to. He wanted to deserve that soft smile of the woman sleeping on the other side of the door. He wanted to protect her. She was this strong yet fragile wonder that stole his soul over a phone. He might not deserve her, ever, but he would try and try and try as long as she kept giving him that gentle vulnerable smile, like she saw inside his soul and still wanted to fall asleep and wake up next to him.

The soft rasp of the knuckles on the door didn't make him scramble to pull his boxers on, or rush to make himself presentable. No. He stood, in the low light, with his back to the door, gripping sides of the sink with both hands, only in his t-shirt. His erection bordering painful.

He was not in a good place...

“Tony?...” He watched her in the reflection of the mirror, examining him. What he wouldn’t give for a glimpse inside her mind… That brilliant mind...

The hands softly touching his shoulders was a relief. He knew that she could assess the situation. He wasn’t having his best moment… The Beauty and The Beast… there was no spell that could save him… Did she see that?
The small hands worked his knotted back muscles and Tony groaned.

“You are tense…” The hands kneaded the muscles down along his spine…

“It is not going to get easier with me, you know…”

“Nothing worth keeping is ever easy…” Those comforting hands were on his hips now. “You are still tense…” he could feel Darcy’s hot breath on his shoulder, seeping through the material of his t-shirt. She was standing close but not close enough, her warmth like a blanket encasing him.

The index finger of her right hand slowly circled his belly button, until she was kneading the muscles just around his navel with her fingers slowly inching down… both fanning and calming the tension inside him, so by the time those smart, torturous fingers wrapped themselves around the throbbing length of him, Tony was half delirious with need.

“Gods, Darcy… Please…”

He felt disoriented for a few moments when her right hand left, just to return smothered in warm moisture of her saliva to spread it over him…

“I… need one hand to keep steady… You’ll have to help…”

She didn’t need to elaborate more before his hand covered hers to set the pace and pressure that he needed.

The solid, warm pressure of Darcy at his back was both arousing and reassuring and he basked in it. Just the two of them. Abused and broken. Holding into each other. Protecting each other… Not by chance, but by choice…

_Gods, he would do anything for her…_

The soft noises she made as she clutched his left shoulder for balance, like listening to him pant and groan was turning her on, tipped him over and he came spilling himself into her hand.

“Gods, Darcy… I will go to hell for things I want to do with you…”

“It’s ok, as long as you hold my hand all the way down…”

______________________________

_The plot bunnies made me do it =)_

_So, peeps? Good? Bad? Let me know!_

_Help me keep the plot bunnies fed and new chapters coming!_

_Much appreciated and many thanks to those that leave comments =)
Chapter 33

Dearest Wino,

You are amazing, as always,

and I don't know what I would do without you=)

xx Many thanks xx

Chapter 33

Maybe she was not cut out for this personal security detail. Rosie stood at the private jet’s bedroom door contemplating her career choice. What if Stark and Lewis were still asleep? What if Stark and Lewis weren’t still asleep… but otherwise occupied? Would she be fired for interrupting? Could they land without her having to wake them? What was the worst that could happen? Would she be fired for that?

All questions she had never wanted to know the answers to. The rasp of her knuckles was as unobtrusive as she could manage while still making a sound.

“Come in!” At least Darcy was awake and hopefully dressed… Rosie felt some of the tension fade. It was ok. It was going to be fine…

Stark was on his knees before the bed… tying Darcy’s one shoe…

“Uh… That’s tight, Tony. Are you trying to get my second ankle in a cast?”

“How about now, your highness? And you know, this was not what I had in mind when you asked me if I could go on my knees for you…”

On the way back Otter was going to have the pleasure of knocking on the boss’s bedroom door. Even if she had to stand right behind him pressing a gun into his back.

“Hmm…” Lewis was clearly making it difficult on purpose, the corners of her mouth slowly inched up. “Oh! I nearly forgot! You want to see something really cool? The best thing ever? I can’t believe I forgot.”

“… Put me out of my misery, because it clearly will not be you… slowly…” Stark was being a little shit, Rosie could hear the grin in his voice as Darcy went bright red in the face as her eyes snapped to Rosie and back to Stark, still on his knees before her.
“Yeah! No. Check out my cast.” Darcy lifted her right foot for the man’s inspection.

“It’s still solid cast…?” Neither Rosie not Stark saw anything different about it.

“You want my glasses, Stark? Look on the side. The other side. See?” Darcy was clearly excited about something as she lifted the foot closer to Stark’s face.

“Scribbles?”

“That is Happy Hogan’s autograph! I cannot believe you. See? He even added a smiley face! How cute is that?” Darcy squealed. Rosie, so far, had only seen people squeal at Stark when they saw him. Clearly Stark had only seen people squeal at him too.

Stark didn’t reply. Instead, he started patting his pockets down like a man on a mission.

“Aha! Hold…”

“Hey! The Hell are you doing?” Darcy scrambled back as Stark reached for her cast again.

“I’m signing it. Wasn’t that the point of the demonstration?”

“No, and it is already signed. By Happy Hogan.”

“I am Iron Man.” Rosie didn’t want to judge, but it sounded like someone was jealous of the attention Mr Hogan was getting.

“And he is Happy Hogan. I’m sorry, Tony. I don’t want you to ruin it. I want to keep it…”

“Keep the cast? Because Hogan signed it?” The idea seemed incomprehensible to him.

“I am sure people keep stuff that you sign all the time.” It was a valid point.

“Yes, but I didn’t sign your cast, Happy did.” It probably would have yielded a better result had he sounded less like a spoiled brat.

“I know, right? How cool is that? Ow! Careful with the laces; you are cutting off my circulation. Hey! Keep that marker away from my cast, you hear?”

“I am on my knees before you…”

“Very sexy, I will not deny that, but Happy Hogan already signed my cast. End of.”

“Darcy…” That was one bedroom growl and no mistake. “We will discuss your cheek later.”

So, that massive pay rise that she got? Yeah, that started to look not nearly enough…

“Promises, promises…”

Rosie felt like she should leave despite Darcy making signs for her to stay, yeah, leaving sounded good, they were up anyway.

“You ok, Rosie? You look…”

“I’m fine… Ms Lewis” she watched as finally Stark stood up, kissed her charge on the forehead before he turned and gave her an unimpressed look. Yeah, so not remotely near enough.

“We’re about to land, I assume?”
“Yes, sir.”

“Thank you.” A curt smile one would usually reserve for people that they could barely tolerate. Rosie was going to take that as a massive improvement. Did he get lucky or something? “We’re coming, there is no need for you to wait to strap us in.” Well, it was still an improvement.

“Ignore him, he hasn’t had a refill of whiskey or coffee or jet fuel, well, whatever he is running on today. We’ll be right out, Rosie. Thank you.”

“Welcome, Ms Lewis.” Stark didn’t bother to say anything more to her as he pulled his leather jacket on.

It was dark outside. Darcy sniffed. She was in Malibu and it was dark. It was supposed to be sunny. She sniffed again as she made it down the ramp. It was still dark.

“You sniff one more time and the next stop will be the nearest private hospital.”

“It’s dark.” It was a rather obvious, but she wanted the sun.

“It’s night, Honeybunny.” Stark had his hand on her waist; he kept casually touching her since they had got up the second time. The suitcases were loaded into the cars and the vehicles themselves checked for safety as the security personnel exchanged a brief introduction.

“Yeah, but I was so hyped up for sun.” She honestly was. New York was cold and grey…

“I promise it will be back out first thing tomorrow morning. Actually, I am so confident that it will be so, that am prepared to make a wager. Let’s say…”

“Yeah, no, Casanova. No science, capiche?” Even under the sharp airport lights Darcy could see his eyes twinkle at her as he struggled not to grin. At least she wasn’t the only one more relaxed after this flight. He had slept like the dead the last couple of hours of the flight. Bedrooms on planes were great, especially because of the chance of privacy. Darcy liked privacy.

“It was worth a try. You know what they say: you don’t ask, you don’t get.”

“Like that was ever a problem for you.” Darcy flexed her shoulders as Tony opened the door for her. She felt better already. Maybe it was the booster shot or the change of scenery, or that Tony was looking straight at her like he wanted to eat her.

The weather was pleasantly fresh, even though Darcy was happy to be wearing a long sleeve jacket over her t-shirt and shorts. It was still a mayor improvement over NYC.

“I heard of it, does that count? Oh and… You! Potter, right?”

“It is Otter, actually…” Her personal security didn’t seem to be overly fond of Tony for some reason.

“That’s what I said, I will drive. So we will be right behind you there.”

“But, sir…” Daniel Otter looked around the security team for support. None was found. What could they say? Forbid Stark from doing what he wanted? “Of course, sir.”

Darcy couldn’t help but giggle as Tony gently squeezed her thigh just above the knee. The music
was playing in the background, some classic rock, as Darcy tried to take in as much of the breathtaking views as possible.

“You look better.”

“I feel better. Maybe because I don’t need to wrap myself in several layers before stepping out the door.” She felt calmer. Her mind going back to their little interaction in the jet’s bathroom…

“Who wraps themselves in several layers?”

“People that take public transport.” Tony gave her a look that brought a smile to her face.

“Which is not you.” His right hand settled on Darcy’s knee as his thumb made slow circles, giving her goosebumps and she had to wonder if he felt it.

“Which used to be me and I do not miss it even one bit.”

“Who in their right mind would? It’s disgusting.” Tony actually shuddered and Darcy couldn’t help but laugh.

“You have been on public transport? Why? And how old and drunk were you at that time to think that it would be a good idea?”

“Yes, young and I was very, very drunk at the time.” Tony made a face like he was in pain when he described that he was young at the time. Darcy covered his hand with hers. Tony had good hands. Strong, manly hands. Those hands were all over her a few hours ago.

They didn’t speak after Stark washed himself of her hand and he didn’t let go. They stumbled back until they fell into the bed, kissing, grounding each other in the moment. She could spend hours just kissing him, having those hands to gently caress every inch of her skin that wasn’t covered, and torturously slowly ghost over all that was covered from him, like he was fighting his own desire to sneak under the boundary of cloth to indulge them both, but knowing if was not yet time...

They had lost their escort some time ago and were driving along some breathtakingly beautiful coastal road with the full moon high in the sky. She dropped a text to Rosie so the woman wouldn’t worry as they took the long way.

“Why do you always make that face when age comes up?” And that was how you ripped a band aid. Tony glanced at her and thought for a moment before answering. It was an uncomfortable topic, but it needed to be cleared up.

“Because I remember that when whichever misdeeds of my youth I was committing you were at the time still in playing in the sandbox.” They had an age gap between them; it was pointless to pretend that on some level it didn’t hang in the air.

“And so what? Why does it bother you so much? You do realize, if you were younger you wouldn’t have stood a chance of pulling this protective move of getting me to move to New York or any other move, right?” Darcy had thought of that, Tony being older, or more worldly wise than her, had a certain appeal. Or maybe it was his charming asshole attitude that was backed by years of experience. With Ian she had always had to think what to say next as not too sound too harsh or sarcastic or smart… there was no such problem with Tony and she loved it. She could snark and sass all she wanted and he would lap it up. Up until she met Tony Stark she never knew being able to freely talk to someone like that could very nearly turn her on.

“So… daddy issues?”
“That sounds weird and I never got it… Is it when you like super hot older men? I thought that was smexy grandpa snatching?”

Tony barked out a laugh as his hand shifted that slightly bit higher.

“**Grandpa snatching?**”

“Yeah, and I am not ashamed. You, Mr Stark, when you were covered in motor oil and whatever other stuff that was on you when you came into the kitchen, smiling like you do and talking in that devil-should-have-put-a-patent-on-it voice…” Darcy was teasing, she really was, but the hand on her thigh shifted up and was a just a shade away from being where it had no business being, when his fingers flexed and a low moan escaped her.

“Jesus wept, Darce… are you trying to kill me?” He looked like he contemplated just stopping the car and having his wicked way with her.

“What? Why me? It is all your fault! Bad Tony.”

“Trust me, Honeybunny, when I …” While Tony Stark was a horny dog he was always on the ball. Both hands were instantly on the wheel as they passed the broken down car on the side of the road. As they weren’t driving fast they could see the people huddled inside and a man working under a bonnet of an old family car, he saw them drive past and away and tried to get their attention. “Those should not be on the road, they were a hazard when they were freshly manufactured…”

“Aren’t you going to stop?” Darcy shifted in her seat to look at the people they were driving away from. It was late and the road, according to Tony, was not used much.

“What? We’re in a middle of nowhere. I’m not taking any chances with you here. We’ll call someone for them.”

“It is sweet of you to think of me first, and I swear to Thor, I will never mention it again if you look me dead in the eye and say that you think that family with small kids is a danger of any kind to you or me or anyone.”

“This could be a set up.” Yes, it could be. Darcy wasn’t stupid. The world wasn’t a sunny meadow full of flowers and butterflies and she liked living. People did terrible things all the time.

“By who? No one knew you were going to ditch everyone and take this route, which is way better than I imagined on the way here, including you, Stark. Seriously, if your guts says it is trap, push that pedal to the metal and lets get the fuck out.”

“Just like that?”

“Tony, if you honestly think there is danger, I will take your word for it.”

“You will?” there was clear doubt there.

“I am more open-minded when it is dark and not a living soul for miles around. Now look me in the bloody eye and say that they deserve to be left on the side of this road on a freezing night…” Darcy didn’t have a chance to finish as Tony sharply turned the car around, his jaw set tight.

“First, I have a fold-able Mark 24 under my seat and I will have it ready. Second, you will stay in the car. Third, you will stay in the bloody car… Do you think that I am not seeing how you are trying to discreetly undo the seatbelt? You are staying in the car, Darcy… **I will drive past them if you don’t**
“Stay in the car, got it.”

“Stay in the car, Darcy.”

“I heard it.” Darcy nodded vigorously for emphasis which only made Tony glare at her as he pulled few meters in front of the broken down sedan keeping his headlights sharp. Before getting Mark 24 and leaving it on the driver’s seat. “The windows are bullet proof, stay inside. Just toss this out and I will get it. Stay inside.” Tony was in one of his serious moods.

“Oh. Ok! You make it sound like I don’t listen or something…”

Darcy watched as Tony got out and moved towards the other vehicle.

“Totally not like in every single horror movie ever… Shit.” She was having some serious second thoughts up until other people got out of the other car. One very pregnant looking lady, a kid around the age of ten and a teen, the awkwardness radiating off him reached Darcy all the way into the car. So, unless they were all psycho, Tony was going to be fine.

“I told you to stay in the car.”

“And I said that I heard you. Can you please get my crutches?” If Tony were a cat the fur on his back would be standing up as he hissed at her after marching back over as soon as she opened the car door. “They're watching, act nice.”

Tony pressed his lips together and clenched his jaw as he got her the crutches. The pregnant lady met them half way between the cars.

“Hi, thank you so much for stopping, we were beginning to think that no one would be taking this road anymore… My name is Doreen, this is my husband Jeff and Caleb and Jeremiah.” The teen bristled a little at being called Jeremiah, making Darcy smile.

Doreen looked tired and the thankful look she gave them made Darcy gently lean into Tony. Jeff looked relieved as he nodded in greeting before offering a handshake. Being stuck for the night in the middle of nowhere with kids and pregnant wife wasn’t something he wanted. Tony, surprisingly enough, shook the man’s hand before nodding politely at the wife.

“No one takes this road anymore. Were you going to the cliffs?”

“Is that where you're heading too? My pops took me there when I was a kid, wanted to show my kids before it all got turned into private property…”

“So what's the problem with the car?” Tony wasn’t up for a chit chat, Jeff didn’t look offended in the slightest.

“I am not quite sure… You any good with cars, sir?” There was a moment of silence. They didn’t recognize the most recognized face on the planet. Darcy could hardly hold back a giggle as she offered her hand to Doreen.

“One could say that. He’s not bad at it, he fixes his friends' stuff all the time, that he does.” Her Louisiana drawl took a wrong time to pop up. Doreen blinked at her.

“South Carolina?”
“Louisiana…”

“We live in New York now.”

“Ah, city folk. We live in Greenfields, Californian, that is further in land. I don’t expect that anyone apart from people that live there know about our little town. We don’t come here often…”

Darcy watched as Tony got busy under the bonnet with Jeff.

“This is awkward…” Doreen patted Darcy’s shoulder and winked.

“Wait till you have kids. They will redefine the word awkward… and that was incredibly prejudicial of me. You don’t have kids, right?”

“It is Darcy, Doreen. And no, I don’t.”

“Is he your Dad?” Darcy felt her jaw drop as the younger kid dropped the question on her. The teen along with the mom looked like they were about to explode from embarrassment.

“Caleb! Apologize, now. I am so sorry, Darcy… I think I have the worst behaved kids on the face of this planet…”

Jeremiah took offence at that as only an adolescent boy could.

“I didn’t say anything, mom. Why do I get the blame, too?” And the voice was high and whiny.

Darcy barely managed to refrain from wincing.

“You kept staring at Darcy’s chest since she got out of the car. Which is rude.” Caleb quipped to the embarrassment of everyone present, especially the mum.

“Caleb! Jerry! Both apologize to Darcy. Now! I am so sorry. Darcy and her husband stopped to help us, in need, is that how I have taught you to express your gratitude?”

“We’re not married.”

Doreen blinked at her, forgetting about her kids’ bad behavior for a moment.

“Oh, I just thought, the way he looked at you. I can usually tell…”

“Do you want to marry me? Mum said I will make a good husband one day and I should get a good girl, you help others and you have a very nice smile… and big boobs. Besides, you will want a man that can look after you.”

It was sweet up to the last part. Doreen had to sit down and Jerry was so red that his cheeks nearly glowed in the dark.

Darcy could see Tony’s head very slowly appearing from behind the bonnet half way through Caleb’s little proposal, both his eyebrows level with the hairline, adding to the hilariousness of the situation. Jeff could be heard apologizing in the background.

“Kid, you have some serious brass nuggets on you to be talking like that within my earshot.”

“Well, I would make a better boyfriend for her.” The conviction in Caleb’s voice had Darcy in stitches, even Doreen cracked a smile and shook her head.

“Darcy, no flirting with younger men while I am not looking.”
“Can’t help it, the kid got some mad game on, I swear to Thor…”

The little episode broke the ice. Doreen and Darcy sat in the back of the car as the kids settled in front seats. Caleb declared that he liked her couple a more times and sulked when he got a very polite refusal. Jerry just sulked, when he wasn’t very discreetly glancing at her chest.

It took some time to fix the car, so they just sat there and chatted.

“But… he’s old.” The kid was going to break some hearts in few years time and no mistake if the puppy dog look he was giving Darcy was anything to go by.

“Oh God, Caleb…”

“Pipsqueak, will you quit it finally, dad will have you grounded …”

“It's ok Doreen. He's older than me, yes, sure. He is a good man and he got a wicked sense of humor, and a beautiful mind. If I close my eyes and pretend that age took its toll on both of us, the things I like about him most wouldn’t change, or get saggy and go south. Because, trust me kid, everything will go saggy and go south, both mine and his, over time. On a cold morning, under a pile of blankets, years from now, he will still be a good man with a wicked sense of humor and beautiful mind…” Darcy couldn’t believe the words that were leaving her mouth. In what dreams did she come up with that? She hadn’t really, honestly thought about anything past few days in the sun…

“The car is all good. It is safe to turn it on now. It needs to be scrapped as soon as you get yourself home.”

Darcy nearly jumped out of her skin when Tony’s calm voice spoke right next to her. She had spoken quietly in hopes that her voice wouldn’t carry where the two men were working in the front. How long had he been standing next to her while she was waffling away?

‘Shit…”

“Anthony, I don’t know how to thank you enough.” Jeff kept thanking him. “I know you said you work on computers, but you could make a killing fixing cars. *A killing.*”

“Is it done? Oh, thank God. I am ready for the motel bed and a shower and sleep. Thank you so much for stopping. There weren’t any tow trucks willing to come out here to pick us up at this hour… Children, say thank you to Anthony and Darcy… I did hear Anthony, right? And apologize for all the silly things you said as they were helping us…”

Tony cleaned his oil stained hands on a rag that Jeff passed them and grinned at Caleb.

“Sorry kid, you are lifetime too early to be able to try and get Darcy from me. Right, Honeybunns?”

That filthy smile was on his face again as he helped her out the car and stole a kiss.

“Right.” The arm around her waist was warm and solid. The stubble on his cheeks gave Tony a rakish appearance and Darcy hugged him for a second, pressing her forehead to his neck and inhaling the lingering scent of his cologne mixed with sweat and motor oil.

“You ok, Darce?... Tired? Let’s get you to bed, sweetheart…” Tony rubbed her back as she grunted in agreement. The long day was catching up with her.

The Carters looked as tired as Darcy felt, but at least now everyone had smiles on their faces as their car was running again.
“Thank you again, Anthony, Darcy, travel safe. It is good to know that there are good people out there willing to lend a hand in need. See kids? This is what makes this country great. Simple, decent folks.”

“Actually that is just Tony.” Darcy closed her eyes. ‘Don’t do this, Tony. They don’t need to know.’

“If you cut your beard a little differently you will look like Tony Stark. But I am sure you get that all the time. You kind of look similar.” There were smiles from the Carters. Ignorance was a great thing. Who would expect to meet a billionaire on some dusty back road? “Not that I got anything against him, but he probably isn’t half a man that you are, Tony.” Jeff nodded like he meant it.

“Funny you should say that.” Tony had an inbred inability of letting things rest.

“Tony, don’t…”

“What? I wasn’t saying anything and it wasn’t me who brought that up.”

Tony’s phone rang just at the wrong moment.

“Stark. Speak… Hawkniss? What?.. No, we’re on the way. Well, she isn’t here to wait for your call… Well, clear that up with Romanov. What you want me to do?… She got Steve to bake? Rogers? Captain A? Please don’t burn the Tower down … You are fucking idiots, that’s why…” Darcy frowned as she caught Tony’s eye and he grinned covering his receiver. “Barton, Popsicle and the sidekick ate the cookies. The lot. Romanov is going spare… I need a video of that… Yeah, I’m still here, Barton… Well, suck it up and bake, I guess, and hope Romanov doesn’t gut you…. Do you have the recipe for the ones you made today, Darce?”

“Of course I don’t. I cook from memory. They better be donating a ton of money to charity. There were like a ton of cookies…” The conversation was over soon.

“Are you Iron Man?” Jerry caught on first.

“Yes, I am, Jeremiah.” Darcy hung her head for a second as silence descended after Tony brushed his hair back and gave his trademark grin.

“You can be such a self centered prick sometimes, Tony.”

“The nature of the beast, Honeybunns. Drive safe, folks. That car needs to be scrapped. Good night.”

Darcy gave an awkward wave to the stunned family as Tony helped her into the car and laughed.

“How you feeling, Tony? You just got described as simple and decent?”

“A novel experience, but I think I will live, Honeybunny.”

Darcy vaguely remembered getting to Tony’s Malibu House … She looked at the ringing phone on the bedside table. Thunderstuck was blasting on low this time. Darcy stretched before picking up.

“Boss-Lady… I’m on holiday, remember?…”

“I just wanted to be the first to congratulate.” Jane sounded pissed.

“I don’t like the sound of that…”
“Your face is on every single tabloid in London, and the world, I imagine… Poor quality, though, you kissing Stark in a car, looks late…”

“...Ah, shit… Tony!”

So, my lovely Peeps?

What you think about my newest offering?

Good? Bad? Let me know!

My plot bunnies are starving!

Your comments are always appreciated =)

They keep me going =)
Wino,

As always I am very grateful for you editing my work

and weeding out my numerous mistakes.

You are the best=)

Hope you feel better today

Many Thanks

Chapter 34

“...Ah, shit… Tony!” Darcy wasn’t sure why she needed to shout for Tony. It was not like he could magic the photo out of existence by suddenly appearing next to her… and she needed to pee, badly.

“Did you cut your hair? It looks different.” Jane was still on the phone as Darcy got out of bed.

“No, I had it partially tied back. Are you sure it's even us?” Clearly it was a day of bad news and her being stupid.

“Was Stark going around yesterday, the photo is dated, kissing women that look just like you?”

“….no.” What a shitty way to start what was supposed to be a good day. Darcy hobbled to the bathroom. The views out the massive windows were amazing. It was sunny too.

“In that case, yes, I am pretty sure it's you… what is that noise?”

“I'm peeing.” She was indeed sitting on the toilet. It was not a place that she usually chose to converse but Jane had no problem to breeze in when Darcy was taking a bath and pee, so she didn’t have a problem either. Shame; who needed it anyway?

“Oh… So, yeah, definitely you… how much did you drink yesterday? You have been pissing for the last five minutes.”

“I've been a good girl and drank my recommended dose of H2O.” Flipping photos… flipping stranded car and flipping people screwing her life over.

“Right before bed?”
“I was thirsty…” Maybe if she were to just sit on the toilet with her eyes closed this horrible news would somehow disappear. “Is my name in the paper?”

Before Jane could answer the question the phone was taken out of her hands and Darcy snapped her eyes open. Tony was standing right in front of her in a dressing gown looking a lot like younger version of Hugh Hefner; his hair still wet and combed back. Darcy gaped at him as he clenched his jaw and spoke into the phone. Did that man have any concept of privacy?

“Good morning, Dr Foster. This is Tony Stark speaking. Did you not get my voicemail and texts kindly asking not to call Darcy until later today?”

Whatever was the reply it didn’t leave Tony best pleased.

“Darcy is here to get some rest and recharge. You stressing her out before she got a foot out the bed is not conductive to any of those things…” His brown eyes went wide. “Foster, did you just accuse me of not taking care of her? I will have you know that she developed anemia under your watchful eye …” Darcy winced as she tried to discreetly wipe herself and pull the boxers up without flashing, crimson blush spread all over her. “Well, guess what? I don’t give a fuck; Darcy is dead tired after slaving to you for years… Oh, I’m the one taking advantage of her, now? You sure you aren’t mistaking me with yourself, Foster? … Listen …”

“Tony, give that back!” Darcy managed to put herself in order before standing up, demanding her phone back and nearly falling over, but luckily her boyfriend’s reflexes were top notch and he got her.

“… Darcy, Jesus, careful … Foster, been a pleasure.” Tony hung up and slipped the phone into his pocket.

“Thanks, Tony, do you have any idea how hard it will be for me to get her to like you now? Do you ever knock? I know we spoke about it already. Do I need to show you how? You know how the principle of privacy works, right? If the door is closed and you know someone is there, like I was, you extend your hand and knock!” Darcy tried to push Tony away as she fumed.

“And I am sure you remember why we came here, right? So shit like that wouldn’t stress you. I could have just blocked all calls, but I called the wench and asked, nicely, not to call harping, and guess what she did? She was fucking on it the first thing…”

“Do not speak about Jane like that, Tony…” He only growled as his hand went around her and her feet left the floor as he carried her to the bed. The man was strong. Like, seriously fit.

“Besides, the feeling between us is mutual and, trust me, I will not be losing sleep over that. What did she tell you?” Darcy wanted them to get along. They were important people in her life.

“That I am all over front pages… Can I have my phone back, please?” They arrived late yesterday, to a small private airport. The people that could have seen them and taken that photo weren’t that many… She felt good as she went to bed yesterday. Like they did a good deed by helping out. She knew how shitty it was to be stuck somewhere with no one to help you for miles around.

The phone was returned to her after a stare down and Tony fiddling with for a sec… with a lock on the screen…

“Unlock it, you twat.”

“I will, eventually. Do not throw that at me. You break it now and you will not get new one till we back to New York.”
“You wouldn’t …” The beautiful piece of equipment was useless.

“Oh, you think? *Try me, Darcy, see what happens. Besides … it wasn’t the Carters.*” It was like a stone fell off her chest at those words, the phone was forgotten for the time being.

“Oh, thank *Thor*… You are sure, right?” She didn’t want to regret helping. People should help others because it was the right thing to do. Tony put a tray loaded with food over her lap and divested himself of the dressing gown, letting it carelessly fall to the floor, all he was wearing was a pair of boxers, before getting under the covers next to her.

“Yeah, there is a partial reflection of a jet on the window. We were still in the airport. Is the tea ok? Cho said that you need to cut down on coffee…”

Darcy picked up a piece of toast and stared at it aimlessly. “Nice. So how bad is it? You dropped Jane a text and a call not to call me…”

Tony took the toast from her numb hand and buttered it before handing it back.

“It is not a bad photo. I definitely had worse and none of us is naked, which is always good…” The plate with scrambled eggs was uncovered and a fork pushed into her hand. “I am pretty sure I got all of the shell out, but if it tastes funny spit it out… Darcy?”

Anxiety was slowly clawing up her spine. The photo was on all the tabloids. Would people be able to recognize her on the street now? She should be ok, she had Rosie and the others to keep all the weirdos away. Right?

“So how bad? It probably is not that bad, the only person that called was Jane…” So maybe it wasn’t so bad. Picture was one thing, but if they had no name to go with it… It wasn’t like many people knew who she was.

“Jarvis is monitoring your calls for now, everything goes through him for the time being… for security. Your name hasn’t made it to the papers so that is more of a precaution. You should eat.” She probably should. Tony’s hand snaked around her waist as he kissed her temple and it made her feel better. They were getting comfortable with one another. The moustache tickled as he nibbled on her earlobe. She was dating a man that grew a goatee. It was his trademark look, but still… *facial hair.* Would he count as moustache maestro? Was that even a thing? Why was she thinking about it when she had much worse problems on her hands? Like that fact that the world press was out to get her?

“So what now?” It was matter of time until they dug out her name. It always was.

“Now we let people that get paid to handle this type of stuff handle it.”

Darcy froze mid chew. What?

“What do you mean *handle it*?”

Tony was digging into the scrambled eggs with gusto now. At least one of them had a good appetite.

“SI PR is handling it. They will be issuing a statement in… actually about now.” Tony made the mention like it was no big deal.

Darcy took a sip of tea to wash down the toast. Tony acted all casual, but it was clear it was a big thing.SI didn’t issue statements off the bat. It was not what companies like that did. And surely not for every time Tony Stark got papped with a woman… Except his breakup with Pepper Potts wasn’t
really officially announced, wild speculations been going about the two since they started dating years ago…

“The gold-digger that split up everyone’s favorite power couple. Well, that will make me popular…”

Darcy watched resentfully as Tony drank a full cup of coffee. Caffeine… and she wasn’t getting it. She probably should watch how SI was going to spin it and then Google the headlines. Just the headlines, though, she wasn’t that masochistic as to read the articles. Joy, a press conference given by the spokesperson of one of the biggest companies in the world just because there was a picture of her with their boss.

“Bet they are happy.”

“In fact, they probably are. I think that is the first time that they had all the info nearly a week before it hit the fan and had to wait for it. Usually they have to scramble something together after.” Had it really been only less than a week? Darcy actually counted the days in her head, but instead it all came down to the countless events that took place in the short span of those days. She could also see how someone like Stark was a PR nightmare for SI. Especially with an attitude like that, but at least…

“What do you mean they had all the information before hand?”

“Jarvis, please get the screen up.” A massive panel shifted and lowered from the ceiling to rotate and block the ocean views as the windows darkened to enable them to see what it was showing. “I do talk to our HR, occasionally, when it is important, let’s face it if not for the broken ankle we would have been in this situation days ago. I still had to spend nearly an hour speaking to PR this morning. They've been fending off calls from the entire globe, because us is a Breaking News event.”

“Why?”

Tony frowned at her as if she was being silly as Darcy finished the toast and the tea.

“The supplement pills are by the glass of water. Take it. Don’t look at me like that. You heard what Cho said. Bottoms up. Darcy.” Tony was persistent and the little pills were washed down with the large glass of water. “That’s my girl. And you know how it is, the Press loves a scandal, Darce.”

“We are not a scandal. Dating is not a crime.” That got her an almost bruising kiss on the lips after Tony removed the tray from her lap startling her into silence.

“No, it’s not, Honeybuns.” Tony was impossible to read when he didn’t want to be read. He acted all casual, but he was tense underneath that killer smile. It was clear for both of them what the headlines everywhere were going to be.

The press conference was long and not quite what Darcy was expecting. In principle she knew how it worked, just up to this point it had never been personally about her. The PR, that Neal McNorris dude, was worth every penny SI was paying him. He answered every single question without giving away much information about Tony Stark’s Significant Other. The man was well prepared, well spoken and could talk his way out of any question. The most common question being if the Mystery Woman had broken up the happy couple of Tony Stark and Pepper Potts, and all the variations of thereof… The split was officially confirmed to have taken place back in the summer causing a great uproar in the room, even though the speculations had been flying wild for months on the topic.

McNorris went with the two month timeline of their dating, describing the romance as whirlwind and sang her odes of how compatible they were, and giving nothing but the most general of facts away at
the same time.

“Mr McNorris, will Mr Stark and his SO be attending the annual Maria Stark Foundation Charity Gala in two months time?”

“At this point, I cannot confirm if they will be attending together…”

“Why is that?”

“Mr Stark’s SO has been involved in an accident and has sustained an injury to her ankle and is currently recovering…” Darcy watched in disbelief as people lapped it up and started with another barrage without missing a beat.

“Is that why they went to Malibu? So she can recover?”

“I believe that to be part of the reason, yes, and also, have you been outside today? It is cold as balls in NYC this time of year.” There was laughter immediately followed by another flurry of eager hands.

“You still haven’t shared the Mystery Woman’s name, or age, why is that such a secret?”

“Mr Stark and his partner would like to thank you for respecting their privacy as she recovers.”

Here it went. The age bias reared its ugly head. Tony’s fingers dug into her hip under the covers as they sat leaning on the pillows. Asking the press to respect Tony Stark’s privacy worked as well as trying to put out a fire by adding gasoline to it.

“How old is she, McNorris? She looks young in the photo. Is Mr Stark cradle robbing now because Ms Potts left him?”

“Firstly, the personal relationship between Mr Stark and Ms Potts was ended by mutual decision. Second, Mr Stark is not cradle robbing. His new partner, or the Mystery Woman as you keep referring to, is well beyond the age of consent and that is all we have to say on that topic.”

“Is it true that she moved to the Stark’s Tower Penthouse?” Darcy blinked in surprise. That was unexpected. While her living in the Tower wasn’t a state secret, not that many people knew that, but her living with Tony now was not that widely known, even in the Tower; she simply hadn’t been there long enough yet. Were they just fishing? How could they have possibly known?

The implication of a leak hung in the air and Darcy could tell from the way Tony pressed his thigh into hers, he was thinking of it too. The photo… it started to look less like an accident.

“Mr Stark’s and his partner’s living arrangements are private matters.”

“So it is true. There are living arrangements?”

“Everyone has living arrangements, Ms Bjork. You, me, everyone.” McNorris’ voice was clipped for the first time since the start. He also didn’t appreciate the question.

“What does Ms Potts think about this woman?”

“I believe that is a question to Ms Potts.”

“Will she be replaced as CEO? Seeing as-”

“Mr Stark and Ms Potts split months ago, it is safe to say that Stark Industries is in no danger of
losing its CEO.” McNorris was standing his ground.

“Is Mr Stark dating anyone else?”

“No, Mr Stark is in a committed monogamous relationship with his partner.”

“How do we know that? Stark is not the man that can commit to a woman. Is that really a woman in the picture?” Darcy laughed out loud at that. The facial expression both on Tony and his PR was priceless.

“I don’t see how that would matter, seeing as we have finally moved from the dark ages and same sex partnership is legal. But yes, his partner is indeed a woman.”

“I was referring to his inability to commit to a relationship and not run around like a cat in heat. What are the odds of this child crying her eyes out in a few days on live air because of his failure to keep it in his pants?” The neurotic looking skinny kid with a too big a suit wasn’t giving up. Did they invite people off the street now? Also, Darcy was certain she was older than him so him calling her a child was way out of order just like all the rest.

“Leave your name on the way out and I am sure Mr Stark will gladly return to you on that in person.” McNorris clearly had no intention of speculating on the topic of his boss’s imagined habits, he had enough of the ones that the man had. “Next?”

And so it went, question after question. “I’m sorry, Sir, Ms Lewis.” The noise from the TV dropped and Jarvis’s smooth voice cut in. “But you have guests.”

“What guests? I swear to god if that is anyone from press…”

“They have identified themselves as SHIELD agents, Sir.”

So peeps? Good? Bad?

Let me know! The plot bunnies are in need of feeding =)

Much appreciated =)
Chapter 35

Wino,

You are amazing, and you have no idea how much you are helping me out =)

Many thanks=)

Chapter 35

And so it went, question after question. “I’m sorry, Sir, Ms Lewis.” The noise from the TV dropped and Jarvis’s smooth voice cut in. “But you have guests.”

“What guests?” Tony rubbed his face with both hands and growled when he felt Darcy stiffen next to him. “I swear if that is anyone from the press…”

“They have identified themselves as SHIELD agents, Sir.”

Silence descended upon them as they could hardly believe the turn of events. It was like the universe conspired to make it the shittiest day ever.

“That’s a funny coincidence.” Tony bit it out as Darcy slid down the pillows and pulled the covers over her head.

“No.” The reply to an unspoken question was muffled by the covers and Tony was highly tempted to join her there. The covers were warm and smelled like both of them. But instead he had to get up and face the jolly agents at their door.

Was that how being the responsible adult felt like?

‘Well, this sucks…’

“No.” The reply to an unspoken question was muffled by the covers and Tony was highly tempted to join her there. The covers were warm and smelled like both of them. But instead he had to get up and face the jolly agents at their door.

Was that how being the responsible adult felt like?

‘Well, this sucks…’

“Shit… Jarvis, where are they?”

Coulson had used to have an annoying habit of simply showing up at his doorstep… Used to. Still had the habit, even if he was not indulging it, Tony reminded himself as he proceeded to gently peel the blankets from Darcy. This was not how this day was supposed to go. The woman didn’t put much of a struggle and he slowly pulled the covers from her pouting face. First appeared the messy long hair and furrowed eyebrows, followed by a pair of glaring green with a tinge of blue eyes and, of course, those sweet full lips. She was what sin looked like… So damn tempting.

“They're here to see you, right? You are the resident genius…” He wanted those lips and eyes to
smile at him.

“I apologize again, but there seem to be a problem at the gate, Sir, Ms Lewis.”

“What now?” His lips gently brushed Darcy forehead in an attempt to calm her.

“Ms Velasquez is not permitting the agents to enter until there is an explicit permission from you, Sir, or Ms Lewis.” Maybe that woman wasn’t such a waste of space after all…

“Do we have to let them in?” Darcy rubbed her nose against his chin and giggled quietly as it tickled.

“It will look suspicious if we just leave them like that, besides, they’re like roaches, they always find a way in. I think they somehow manage through the sewers, they probably feel right at home with all that shit floating around…”

As he spoke Tony could nearly see the quick march of thoughts taking place inside Darcy’s head. **Smart girl… But she should really work on her poker face.**

“Since when do you play nice with **SHIELD**? What aren’t you telling me, Tony?”

“We can’t let them know we’re onto them, Darce.”

The situation they were in with SHIELD was… complicated. There was always more to everyone’s favorite spy organization than met the eye. The problem with things out of view of almost everyone was how and who did you hold accountable for abuse of power? Who watched the watcher, so to speak?

From the dark look in her eyes and the way her pretty mouth snapped shut, Darcy knew that too. Of course she did. Fury and Co had been on her back **for years**, and she hadn’t had Stark Industries to back her up... It had to have been difficult.

Everyone could be petty and seek revenge. But it was not about revenge in the end, it was about getting away with it after the fact. Darcy could have blown her head screaming blue murder after finding out about Agent Asshat and Coulson… Instead she had put that mind of hers to work and fast. The end result of her hard work now fortified Jarvis’ coding and guarded Foster’s research. It was brilliant in its simplicity…

“I know that, Cuddle Cakes. No one wants them on their case less than I do. They hacked you, though. They could have just asked for most of the things from you, and you would have shared in the interest of national security and what not. They clearly have a hard on for you. Plus the Coulson situation… Unsupervised intelligence organization abusing power… I never heard of that ending well, ever… What's going on?”

“Something. We are not sure what. Something…” Tony trailed off but the implication was loud and clear and Darcy had no problem picking it up.

“Big?”

“We don’t know yet.” Romanov and Barton were digging around as discreetly as they could and what they were finding wasn’t encouraging.

“Are we guessing that SHIELD is unhappy that you have someone that isn’t fond of them at your side? Me, namely.”

SHIELD lately had been trying to get him more under their control, which totally failed, especially
after the split with Pepper. Pep was the one that liked Coulson … He should probably let her know about him not being dead at some point… And, regretfully, Darcy wasn’t the only person that they tried pulling sexspionage on. Unlike Darcy, though, he hadn’t gotten hooked. The woman they had sent was dumb and he wasn’t interested in bedding her either. He had seen her on Triskelion before that and Tony had a great memory for people he didn’t like, which meant the entire Shield personnel he had ever come in contact with.

“That is a possibility. Or they are concerned that I will somehow upset Big Blond and Godly by being with you.” It was a valid point and Tony had given it a thought or two. Point Break had a mean swing even when he was not swinging his hammer.

“Thor likes you.” Darcy clearly thought the Asgardian could do no wrong.

“You would be surprised how fast men stop liking me when they find out that I am sleeping with their sisters.” Darcy only rolled her eyes.

“Poor you. Such a hardship… That, I bet, never stopped you. Besides, I would be worried about Jane more than Thor. Especially after this morning.” Darcy tossed the covers off them. Tony, who was discreetly inching his hand under the t-shirt she was wearing groaned as she rolled out of bed.

“I am shaking in my Egyptian cotton boxers.” Tony managed a smile. Foster should be worried about what he thought of her exploiting his girlfriend.

“Alright. I am totally not rushing to see anyone from SHIELD, unless my life depends on it.”

Tony followed her out the bed to the large window that was flooding the room with light.

“Darce, baby, you don’t have to see them. Period. I got this.” He felt the relief in the long sigh that left her when his hands wrapped around her torso. They stood like that watching the waves.

There was no doubt that Assholes Incorporated TM wanted to see them both, but that, as far as Tony was concerned, was their problem. The damage they had inflicted on someone who was important to him was enough for Tony to want to tear them apart. But like many finer things in life, revenge was a dish best served cold…

“Please, Tony” she scoffed in the end, steeling herself “I’m getting into something different than pajamas, grabbing my taser and then tell these assho-“

“Jarvis, please let our dear Vella woman know that I will meet the agents at the door in five, no, fifteen minutes. Darce, the wardrobe update is in the next room.” There were more important things for him to attend to.

“Tony, you got me a couple of things before we went and I …” Darcy always seemed wary of gifts and he really tried not to take it personally.

“Bikini? I did not get you a bikini. But if you insist on not getting tan lines, I'm game. We can skinny dip to our hearts content…”

The glare wasn’t as convincing anymore when that delightful blush bloomed all over her skin. That was the Naughty Blush. It was different. Tony was getting good at telling. His lips twitched. Someone was thinking of skinny dipping in the pool, maybe in the evening when it was heated and the stars were out while enjoying a glass of fine champagne… it would go nicely with strawberries and the salty sweet taste of her…
“Sitwell. Is that how you start your week? Making sure other people don’t sleep in? Ever considered getting a hobby? Apart from ripping the wings off flies or whatever else you do to make you think that you are in control of anything? Oh, and Rosalie? Darce needs a hand upstairs.”

The security woman didn’t even blink at him calling her Rosalie. Instead, she gave one last stony look at Sitwell who shifted nervously and walked past him and his two agents.

“Certainly, Mr Stark.”

“Thanks. So Sitwell, is your hard on for me so bad that you couldn’t wait till, shall we say never, to come and see me?”

Jasper Sitwell looked down at his shoes, apparently silently praying for patience and guidance from whatever god he believed in, as he followed Tony inside after waiting at the door for twenty minutes.

He still couldn’t believe that it took him twenty minutes to convince Darcy to try on the bikini he liked just for her to kick him out. She had smiled so sweetly and asked to take a step back for a better view just to slam the door shut. Right in his face. That woman was going to drive him mad.

“We got the invoices, Stark…”

“Ah, yes. I assume those are the overdue cheques in that suitcase? I hope you are quoting the Invoice number on them; the accounts can be bitchy about it. Can you swing past New York and drop it off there? I am on holiday. Anything else?”

Tony hadn't been quite sure who was sponsoring Thugs of Big Ideas and even bigger Guns TM, up to last week that was, when he realized that partly it was him and Stark Industries that was providing, if not the guns, then the technology for them. Technology that was diligently fully or at least partly patented. He had an entire department for that. And guess who hadn't been paying for the use of said technology, lovingly crafted by one Anthony Edward Stark? SHIELD. Wasn’t that just too bad?

“Stark. Stark? Are you even listening to me? You are billing us! For what?” Sitwell looked like he was about to get a stroke from the way his face went red at the offhanded dismissal he had just received. Some people just couldn’t deal with it. Tony spared him a glance as he took a pineapple from the counter and started cutting it. A pina colada had been requested by a certain someone. With a tiny umbrella in it. Did they have any? Could he get away with folding a piece of paper and sticking a toothpick through it? Ah. False alarm. They had tiny umbrellas. Full bag. Excellent.

“Let’s see. Quinjets and everything inside them, you have what, fifty of them by now? That is for starters. The massive anti aviation guns that the Triskelion is equipped with. The missile guiding system. Medical equipment. The training of medical personnel to use that equipment. The operating system that is used in…”

“You are charging us nearly three hundred and thirteen million dollars!” Tony poured the coconut rum onto the pineapple chunks and tossed it all into the blender with ice. Only then he returned his attention on the agents of SHIELD.

“Are you sure?”

“Yes!” The outrage on Sitwell’s face was quite comical. His two agents parked themselves at the entrance to the room and looked uncomfortable. Why were they in his house, anyway? And were they running low on man power? The guy looked fresh out of college. And what was with agents and suits? You could always pick them by the way the suits never seemed to fit. Had they met
before? Tony mused as the kid glared at him. *That was… interesting.*

“Well, it seems that the accounts have not yet issued the historic invoices and repairs which would take the total closer to five hundred.”

*“Million Dollars?”*

“No. Peanuts and buttons. Provided they’re made out of gold. You have expensive taste.”

“This is some kind of mistake, Stark. We protect this country!”

“So do I. No one is footing my repair bills, funnily enough. Do I look like a charity? I donate to good causes. That does not include subsidizing intelligence militia.” The easiest way to shake something lose was to create a little panic on the enemy ship. And nothing created it like bills that turned up overdue.

“This is insane, Stark. You have voluntarily supplied us with your technology…”

“Actually, if you had read the fine print you would have noticed that a reasonable compensation was required when you first officially got stuff from me.”

“I would say that five hundred million is a little bit of an overreach, we could…”

“You could what? Go to the black market? Get it from the official government contractors? Do it. I can tell you now that you will not get anything under a billion…and a bit. Well, one and half realistically speaking. I am making a loss, Sitwell. I am not seeing why I should be making a loss.” Money made the world go round and round and round and eventually something somewhere was going to give.

“What loss? You are rolling in money!” Sitwell was shaking the twisted sheets of paper like it was going to bring the wrath of God upon Tony’s head.

“I do not roll in money. Have you got any idea how dirty dollar bills are? It would be like rolling in dog shit. *Just worse.* It would be like rubbing your face into someone’s sweaty ball-sack after vomiting in it… Unless you are into that kind of stuff? Because in that case please don’t touch anything on the way out, actually, don’t touch anything on the way out in any case…” The smooth creamy cocktail was ready, garnished with a slice of pineapple and a tiny red and yellow, not pink, because *someone* did not like pink, umbrella. Besides Iron Man red was a good color for a tiny umbrella or a bikini…

Sitwell sputtered in reply only making Tony grin wider. For an agent he was so easy to bait. His eyes once again drifted to the junior agent that was unsuccessfully trying to look casual, but the salty look on his baby face was indicating to contrary. It was like junior thug had had a candy taken from him … Tony felt irritated by the younger man. He usually didn’t care about little kids but something in the way that junior agent was looking at him…

“We are here to help you and this is the payback?…”

“Help me? With what? Hopefully seeing yourself out?”

“We heard about the unfortunate information leak regarding your newest flame.” How could someone like Sitwell have ever been promoted to a senior agent? The man couldn’t negotiate or hide his obvious gleeful eagerness, which in Tony’s eyes could only mean one thing.

“Well, that only makes you and the rest of the planet, Sitwell.”
“Yes, but are you aware that it was your own security that leaked?” There was a suspicion and it wasn’t looking well for Johnson. “Having that in mind we thought it best to get our agents in charge. We can’t have leaks springing all over.” Tony wasn’t sure what kind of reaction agent-reflective-head was expecting but a barely raised eyebrows and resting bitch face probably wasn’t it.

“Getting your agents in charge of what?” Sitwell wasn’t very observant either, and clearly didn’t notice the way Tony fidgeted with the bracelets he was wearing.

“The security, of course.”

“My security is fully staffers. Thank you.” Were they really going to play this?

“Your security, you being Iron Man, doesn’t need to be fully staffed. We are more concerned about Lewis’ situation.”

“What about my girlfriend’s situation?” Sitwell was walking on very thin ice. While Tony and the rest wanted to shake some information lose by billing SHIELD, them coming at Darcy would be a bad move to make.

“We would like our agents to be in charge of her security to prevent any unwanted information leaked. That woman herself will most likely not even realize the value of things that she might blab. It will be beneficial for all parties that she be looked after. Besides, she will enjoy having someone her own age around and …” Sitwell nodded at the two agents, ignoring the storm that was gathering around.

Before Sitwell could finish and make Tony snap his neck, or chew him, Darcy and her security woman stepped from the elevator.

“Seriously, Rosie, you can leave me at the pool while you fetch me a drink. I am not a kid, I can’t even swim right now…”

“That would be my main concern…”

Tony turned and for a second forgot about anyone else in the room. Darcy wore an Iron Man red bikini with a white crochet scarf wrapped around her hips, in a serious danger of just sliding off and seemingly being held on by a lose knot; the wet glistering skin that had droplets of water rolling down… The smile she gave him as her eyes landed on him was full of genuine happiness.

Gods, she is the sin…

The happy smile vanished and Tony tensed as she noticed the other people in the room.

“Ian?”

“Hi, Darcy…” The junior agent had the nerve to smile as Tony’s eyes snapped to him.

Plot on the horizon =) SO my lovely peeps? What did you think? Good? Bad? Many Thanks to those that leave comments, you keep me on this story and you are the reason that I update =)
Chapter 36

Wino,

Thank you for once again editing my ramblings to sound like the story I want it to be=)

You are the best =)

Bookkloverr,

I couldn’t get you your own Tony Stark, so I hope you will enjoy the new chapter

Happy Birthday=)

Chapter 36

‘Gods, she is the sin…’

The happy smile vanished and Tony tensed as she noticed the other people in the room.

“Ian?”

“Hi, Darcy…” The junior agent had the nerve to smile as Tony’s eyes snapped to him.

“The Boothby? What the Hell?’

As if to seek further confirmation that his ears had not deceived him, Tony looked back at Darcy who stood with her mouth slightly ajar. Well, at least he now knew that he was still in full control of his faculties. And had somehow tapped into the Cosmic Pool of Patience and Self Control, as no one was yet scraping Agent Boothby from the nearest flat surface. The bracelets on his wrists felt heavy. What was Shield trying to pull?

“Pina colada?” The frosty glass felt ice cold in his hand as Tony grabbed it and strolled over to the two women, snapping Darcy out of the staring contest she had going with Agent Asshat.

“Fuck, yeah.” There was defensiveness in Darcy’s posture that eased as he handed over the drink. He moved the tiny umbrella to one side so she could have a sip, as she had the other hand busy with the crutch. Darcy took couple of greedy gulps before rolling the shoulders in an attempt to relax her rigid posture. “Best boyfriend ever.”
Tony didn’t want to admit that the words delivered with a straight face, while looking him dead in the eye, went like a bullet to his chest and lodged with other lethal shards that one day were going to kill him. Were there not enough things already killing him?

“I could not agree more.” Who was he to argue an universal truth?

“Really? And here I thought I was going to have to convince you. What a shame.” The wink she gave him from behind those thick rimmed glasses was promisingly on the naughty side.

“Hold that thought, I feel a question coming, Darce.” They looked each other in the eye as they spoke desperately wishing for ability at least for a minute to be able to communicate telepathically.

They were in a situation that could potentially turn into a larger-than-life disaster, both hanging by the last thread of patience that was left in their bodies, due to all the loving attention that they had so far received from SHIELD.

“Ms Lewis, I believe we have not yet been introduced…” Sitwell fixed his tie as he stepped forward, looking every inch the sleazy lawyer that only worked for criminals. Ian, being the not so bright light-bulb, decided that it was safe to approach Tony Stark when he was quite literally emanating hostility. Where did SHIELD recruitment dig out kids like that?

“Agent Shitwelt, right?” Tony kissed Darcy on the temple. That tongue behind those gentle lips could be a lethal weapon; and Tony now had a new favorite nickname for Jasper Sitwell. Oh, yes, he did. And maybe if that other fuck didn't speak…

“You're being rude, Darcy…” Ian Boothby sounded like he was admonishing a child, and the almost bored tone implied that it wasn’t the first time that he had done so.

Tony was putting the last reserves of his restrain into not speaking for the moment. Darcy took a few more greedy gulps and she watched as Ian, the undercover SHIELD fuckboy, casually walked to them. Tony had to give it to the boy. The salty look was gone, replaced with an expression of adoration with a dash of kicked puppy and the kid was working it big time. Darcy shuddered as she finished the icy drink and burped loudly.

“Oh, pardon me. Um… brain freeze, dudes… not nice. And… um… Rosie? I feel… I think I feel a headache coming; can you do me a favor and get something from my bag? Actually, just get the bag, please. It is in the bedroom, can’t miss it, the only thing in red there apart from Tony’s Speedos, do not bring those…” Velasquez gave him a steady look. The security woman was clearly reluctant to leave, until Tony nodded curtly to confirm that they were going be fine.

“Are we skinny dipping?” He joked. Finally Tony felt in command of the clawing sense of rage to try and keep a steady eye contact with Agent Boothby. If Darcy weren’t at his side right now, he could let the caged beast out for a brief stroll… Just a few minutes… He wouldn’t even wear the suit. No… he wanted to feel bones crack when the punches landed.

“It is actually Agent Sitwell.”

“That’s what I said, Agent Shitwelt.”

Agent Shitwelt, also known as Agent Bold and Constipated, took a deep breath and smiled tightly. Tony had to admit that watching his girlfriend get under the agent’s skin was a wonderful entertainment.

“Agent Sit-well.”
“Yes! Shitwelt. Right, Tony? I am saying it right, am I not?”

“Of course you are, you can do no wrong.” Darcy’s eyes widened for a second, as if she was caught off guard by the complement, and a faint pink blush bloomed on her cheeks and rolled down her skin. She grinned back. He was going to bend backwards if he had to but he would convince her to skinny dip with him one night…

The proud representatives of SHIELD did not find that as amusing.

“It’s…! That’s… Never mind. Ms Lewis, I believe you remember Dr Foster’s intern?” Tony’s fingers gently traced down the column of Darcy’s spine and felt goose bumps rise and disappear.

“Ian Boothby? I’m a big fan…” The former intern looked startled as the billionaire took a step forward; incidentally partly blocking Darcy from the man’s view.

“You read my work?” For a moment the hurt baby expression was replaced by undisguised gloating.

“Was it the new look at the…”

“… of the way you fucked up so spectacularly that it had Darcy drop her expectations as low as to give me a chance. Much obliged.” Darcy snorted loudly and poked him in the back making Tony do a funny little twitch and drop Ian’s hand that he was half way to breaking.

“You told him about me?” Ian tried not to look like Tony’s handshake made an impression but failed and rubbed the abused hand discreetly.

“Well, yeah… It cropped up in a conversation…” Tony smiled so wide it threatened to split his face in two. And what a conversation that had been. One that he was not likely to forget. Ever. He remembered it every single time Darcy shied away from him in an intimate situation. “Last I saw you, you were going to do Masters…” Baby agent really needed to stop giving Darcy those gooey eyes before Tony knocked his lights out and tossed his lifeless body into the ocean... Maybe Bruce had a point when the man said that he had gotten territorial to an extreme with Darcy. ‘Maybe just a little.’ He liked to keep important things close to him… That was hardly a crime. Besides Darcy had had enough shit happen in her life…

“That is good. I didn’t realize that those two were already friends. ” Sitwell motioned between Darcy and Boothby. Tony nearly laughed out loud. ‘Sure you didn’t. Like there is no report with dirty details and a signature of Agent-Not-So-Dead.’

“Oh, we are not friends, it could not be further from that, Agent Shitwelt.” They needed to stay calm. SHIELD was baiting them.

“Really? Darcy, you really want to bring it up? Here? Now?” Tony caught the scarf as it came undone from around her hips and carefully pulled it up before crossing two edges over her heaving chest; he tied it neatly behind her neck, making it look like a dress. “Thank you, Tony…” She was shivering. He needed to stay calm…

Sitwell looked just too pleased as Darcy snarled at his agent. Was that the plan? Make his girlfriend angry? What was the point? Unless they thought that she jumped into bed with him while still being in a relationship with their covert agent… Wait. Was that it? Two months timeline… SHIELD fell for it.

Were they trying to break them up by throwing the ex into the mix?...

“I just don’t understand… What went wrong?” ‘Your mother did not drown you at birth?’ Tony felt like a simmering pot full of rage. He probably shouldn’t have found the way Darcy squared her
shoulders at Boothby’s words tantalizing. The way her head went up and chest out. Tony couldn’t help but wonder what angry sex with her was going to be like? The fire that burned inside Darcy was fierce and one day she wasn’t going to be scared to share it with him… Fucking Boothby…

“What went wrong? How about you cheating?” Tony could not keep it in any longer.

“I did not cheat. I even sent chocolates…” The expression on Sitwell’s and the other agent’s faces went from coldly polite to alarmed. They clearly were not told about the precise reason that Darcy gave for calling it quits.

“Yeah, thanks, Ian. I saw those in PoundLand. Clearly, you gave just so much thought to the present. Oh, that’s right. You didn’t. You were too busy banging that blond bitch I saw you with. The chocolates got donated to the hobo that slept near the station. The fuck are you doing here anyway? Since when are you with SHIELD?” Darcy wasn’t even looking at Tony. She didn’t have to. She knew he had her back.

“Agent Boothby joined in December and shows great promise…” The conversation in SHIELD’s expectation wasn’t supposed to turn this particular way and have Boothby questioned.

“Sitwell, that’s two months ago. You saying that you want a Probationary Agent, that hasn’t even finished basic training yet, which takes a year, has no prior combat experience, he is an astrophysicist, to be in charge of my girlfriend’s personal security?! Is this your idea of a joke? And you want me to forget about your debt for this?” A pin could be heard dropping in a room. Tony Stark snapped. The third agent stepped forward.

“Agent Boothby is training under me. I would be in charge, Mr Stark. Agent Da Silva.” The man extended his hand, just to let it drop after Tony failed to acknowledge him as he skewered Sitwell with his eyes.

“I thought Ms Lewis would be more comfortable with someone she knew, Stark. Da Silva would be technically in charge.” The brilliant plan was unraveling as they spoke.

“Ian shows great promise in being an agent? I had to kill the fucking spider we had under the coffee table while you hid in the bathroom! The only thing you did well, dickwad, was looking like you were due a Medal for Valor for going down on me once.”

“Is that why you left me? Because Stark went down on you?”

“I left you for cheating before that happened and fuck yeah, Tony goes down like he is on a mission and my orgasm would save this planet. You don’t even know what that is.”

“Now, Ms Lewis there is no need to be…” Sitwell was looking at Tony; his lack of reaction had clearly unsettled the senior agent that was trying to somehow salvage the situation, obviously regretting having Boothby as the kid sneered.

“He clearly never had his dick sucked by you…”

“Neither did you.”

Tony felt everything slow as the tension inside him snapped. His senses went into hyper focused mode much like it did during a battle.

Darcy’s crutch went up and hit Ian Boothby in the fork at the same time as Tony’s fist connected with the side of the agent’s face making the man twist and trapped the crutch between his legs as he went down. Darcy lost hold of her only support and desperately flailed her hands reaching for Tony;
but Agent Da Silva snarled and grabbed her by the upper arms and pushed her aside.

Tony watched helplessly as time slowed and Darcy landed flat on her back a few meters away, with such a force her head bounced as it hit the floor.

Then there was only the sound of breaking glass. Tony’s suit broke through the window and engulfed him.

So peeps? What you think? Good? Bad? Why the hell did another chapter end in cliffhanger?

In my defense... I totally shamelessly enjoy your reactions=)

Plot bunny feeding time! Please leave a comment and keep me going=)
Chapter 37

Hey Wino,

Thank you for editing and improving my work at all hours of the day=)

You, as always, are the best =)

Warning, peeps. Violence and blood ahead.

Skip the first two paragraphs if you would like to avoid that.

Otherwise you have been warned.

Chapter 37

Then there was only the sound of breaking glass. Tony’s suit broke through the window and engulfed him.

Agent Da Silva looked like he wanted to speak as he tried to get to Tony, like he did not just put Iron Man’s woman flat on her back with enough strength to knock her out. The man wasn’t given a chance as blasts from the suit’s repulsors sent him flying back across the room. The force hit him in the shoulders and tore the cloth, flesh and bones. The agent went down in a shower of his own blood.

There was white noise inside Tony’s head as it all took place. Before Agent-Soon-To-Be-Dead even hit the floor, there was movement to his side as Velasquez came barreling from the direction of the stairs to body slam Sitwell, who had by some mistake drawn a gun in panic. The force of the impact made him drop it as the security woman seized his wrist and the crunch of the bones breaking could be heard followed by a swift punch to the side of the head that rendered the man unconscious.

“Jarvis! Are there more of them here?” Tony with no qualms kicked Agent Boothby out of his way as he snarled and went to Darcy.

“Negative, Sir. There are no more SHIELD agents in the House or on the grounds.”

“Send the recording of this incident to the Captain and others. Now.”

“It is done, Sir.”

Darcy laid very still as he dropped to his knees next to her, his heart pounding to the point of pain.
“Darce, babe. Wake up. Open your pretty eyes for me…” The bun had come undone and he was brushing the hair from the pale face so he could see if she was awake.

Oh, God, please please please please…

There was noise of something shattering. Loud voices. Blasts. Screams. The fight was brief and the landing made numerous fireworks explode behind her eyes.

It hurts. Her head hurt. Her back hurt. Her ankle, spoiler alert? It hurt. Pain was shooting down her spine as she took short breaths. She could feel the room spinning even from the flat surface she was laid on. All that was not indicative of anything good.

The cool metal fingers of the Iron Man’s suit felt nice on her forehead and she forced herself to open her eyes at the sound of Tony’s tight voice.

“Stop ripping my hair out, you douche canoe…” Darcy grimaced. Some of the strands got stuck between the moving metal plates encasing his fingers, and he was ripping them out with the jerky movements.

“You’re awake, you’re awake…” Tony was leaning over her. All suited up. Her man had style, she was going to give him that. “How is your head? How many fingers am I showing?”

Darcy had lost her glasses but the bright red hand was close… all three of them, dancing in her visual…

“Huh…” That didn’t look good.

“Fuck, Darcy. I know you are not that blind without your glasses…” Tony supported her head and back as he helped her sit up, halfway through that nausea hit her and she slapped a hand over her mouth. It could have been her spinning head or it could have been the man laying in a pool of blood further in the room. Tony followed her line of vision and cursed. “Darce, don’t look. It's ok. He is mostly not dead.”

She really wanted to say that she wasn’t that bothered because SHIELD was a bag of dicks but her stomach convulsed and bile hit the back of her throat as she turned before she projectile vomited onto Rosie’s shoes. There seemed to be no strength left in her muscles as her hands fell down. She would have to apologize to Rosie… Black dots danced in her vision. Tony was speaking again, his voice loud and urgent.

Fucking SHIELD… today was supposed to be a good day for us…

There were other voices around, sounding vaguely familiar as Tony shook her couple of times, calling out her name. Darcy wanted to respond, to calm him down, she really did, she was fine, she really was, but the blackness covered her vision and the noise faded.

Tony watched the security feed from the main gate as the small convoy of SHIELD armored vehicles departed. He had his security drag Sitwell and their fuckboy out before he buried them in the garden. SHIELD wasn’t allowed on his properties anymore. Agent Da Silva didn’t die on the spot, to the relief of absolutely no one. The injuries were extensive, he had been informed as they
took him away on stretches, and people were busy scrubbing the blood of floors and walls.

“Mr Stark…”

“How is she?”

Dr Markwell smiled politely; he had long since gotten used to Tony’s brisk manner of dealing with health care professionals. Especially in recent years. The elderly man pulled the vinyl gloves off and once again surveyed the equipment in the med room of Tony Stark’s Malibu House.

“She has a concussion; but there is no swelling in the brain, no fractures, no internal bleeding, either. Ms Lewis has a tough head. The ankle break has been put under strain, but it seems to be healing well. I replaced the cast after inspection. The dizziness might last couple of days. My advice would be not to leave her alone at any point, as she has to rely on the crutches for balance and if she were to have an episode…”

“I get it. Anything else? She is anemic…”

“A fact that is disputed heavily by the woman in question, yes.” Tony had to crack as smile at that. “The blood samples do not show any other abnormalities. I believe she takes supplements now? Apart from that she just needs rest. When she sleeps make sure to wake her every hour for the next twenty or so hours, just in case. Plenty of rest.” The last bit was little stressed and Tony clamped his mouth shut as not to say anything terse to a man that had been his doctor for the last 20 years. It wasn’t rocket science to figure out what was implied.

“I will do my best not to throw myself at her as soon as you leave.” It was the time for the good doctor to go.

“Tony. All I am saying is that is that Ms Lewis had a nasty fall and might be a little disoriented for the next few hours, she shouldn’t do anything strenuous that might put her under pressure…”

“Mr Stark, Captain Rogers is on the phone for you.” Jarvis’ smooth voice descended from the ceiling.

“I will see myself out, Mr Stark.” Tony just nodded as he watched the man leave briskly and picked up the phone.

“Where the fuck have you been, Rogers?”

“DC, in a meeting with Director Fury.”

“What? When? There was no scheduled meeting for us…”

“Something came up. I am on the way from DC, shouldn’t take more than 5 hours. How is she?” There was something extremely not right in the way Rogers spoke. Was someone eavesdropping on their conversation? The line was supposed to be secure.

“Concussion. Other than that she’s good.”

“He tried calling you.”

“Fury?”

“Director Fury. Yes. Please pick up, unless you want him to show up at your doorstep. He would really like to clear up this misunderstanding.” It was implied rather loudly that Steve didn’t want Fury
showing up at Tony’s doorstep. Because Director Fury buried under a rose bush in Tony Stark’s garden would be hard to explain, Tony mused.

“Sure. I’ll pick up.”

“Tell Darcy I said hi. I will be there soon.”

“Can’t wait.” Rogers hung up at that.

Their secure line was compromised. Or at least, Captain Righteous thought so. The situation with Jack Booted Thugs, as Darcy liked to call them, was getting more complicated by the second.

Director-Thinks-He-is-God-Fury called right on cue. Tony picked up.

“Stark.”

“Fancy that, so am I. You think we were separated at birth? Because when you think about it…”

“You attacked my agent, Stark. The man is in critical condition …” The indignation in Fury’s voice was a ballsy thing to go for. There was no way the man in charge of the circus didn’t know what his handy men were up to. Sitwell was arrogant, and stupid as his recent actions showed, but even he wouldn’t have decided to show up at the door of Tony Stark on his own initiative.

“How long has Ian Boothby been an agent?”

“I do not see what that has to do with anything. You consider yourself beyond the law?…”

“That depends. So Boothby, you can twist it all you want, but that's not two months he's been an agent. Probation for a field agent is a year. And that is just probation. I haven’t looked into how long they need to be on the payroll to get solo missions and you wanted what? Him on my girlfriend’s security?” Fury kept making noises as he tried to get a word in but Tony just kept talking. “In charge none the less. Am I the only one that thinks that it doesn’t make sense? I will give you a second for that to sink in. I am not suggesting that you sent an agent to spy on Point Break and his lady love, but it sure looks like it. I am also not suggesting that you have instructed said agent to seduce one Darcy Lewis, but if you insist on calling it that, for some time. Which he ended by getting his jollies of elsewhere and getting caught. I am not sure if Blond and Godly is aware of that. He got this thing where he is very uncompromising about someone messing around with his little sister in this manner. Wonder what he will do? And if we speak of Darcy Lewis, you know, the woman that I am in a relationship with, she is in bed with a concussion puking her guts out because a certain agent, which funnily enough I heard was on the spare STRIKE team, whacked her to the floor with enough force for her to pass out. But I am sorry, Director Fury, you were saying?” The silence on the line lasted barely a heartbeat.

“I have no idea what you are talking about, Stark. Agent Da Silva is a seasoned …”

“But you don’t. That poor agent, such a tragedy, my repulsors just became active, can happen to anyone, I'm sure you will agree. Such an unfortunate accident. I will send flowers and maybe a fruit basket, what do you think, Fury? How is Probationary Agent Boothby? Still concerned about how I'm getting my dick sucked? And the amount of orgasms that I deliver to my significant other? It all happened so quickly. Was he offering to suck me off and insinuating that my prowess in bed is not up to scratch at the same time? Because that is generally contradictory and some might find it insulting when someone comes to their home and starts spewing accusations of infidelity when they were the ones that fucked up. All that aside, how is the success rate in sorting those overdue payments going? In light of your reluctance to cooperate, Sitwell, the fine example that he is, was
very adamant you were not going to pay, and the fact that we are under formal contract through the Ministry of Defense or what other place you channel your money through… "

“"I would think very carefully about that, Stark.”

“"You have been fleecing me for years, Fury. Ever since my father died, you should have started paying me, regardless of my age at the time.”

“"Where are you getting this shit from?” Fury sounded taken aback and Tony grinned.

“"The legal documents you can find when you really start looking boggle the mind. I would, according to people that really like counting someone else’s money, look at doubling my net worth if I were to...” Tony did not do things half way and now SHIELD had decided to mess with him on a very personal level. That was a very bad decision.

“"What do you want, Stark?”

“"First, pay up. You quite literally blew your chance to settle. Make it a bank transfer. Second, I catch anyone from SHIELD anywhere near Darcy, I will take it personally, there won’t be enough left of your precious agents to put on the head of a pin.”

“"You don’t know what you are getting yourself into, Stark.”

""I can’t wait to find out, Fury. Now if you excuse me, I have a sick girlfriend to check up on.”

He watched through the crack of the door to the adjacent room as a pale Darcy drank some water from the glass that was held firmly by a grim looking Velasquez. The bodyguard looked ready to wrap Darcy in cotton and never let her out of sight again.

“I just got a bump. That is all. You seen the other guy? I mean; it wasn’t me, but shit, that was a lot of blood to lose and not die... I mean, I didn't even know SHIELD people could bleed? I always assumed you would need to cut their heads off and they would crumble to dust. Or dissolve like the guy from the Indiana Jones movie… should totally watch it again… But that was still weird… Tony, you coming in or what? I got my glasses on, I can see you creeping.” He probably should plaster a smile on. Darcy was still wearing the scarf he tied for her. Instead of that inviting pink complexion, however, she sported sickly off white skin and a massive bruise on her upper arm that was starting to go vivid dark blue.

“How are you feeling?”

“I would feel much better if I were out in the sun, soaking in the pool…”

Tony’s fingers hovered just above the abused skin before settling on the naked shoulder. He shouldn't have allowed SHIELD to come within ten miles of her.

“How about some nice views while you relax in bed for the day. The doctor said to take it easy.”

Darcy closed her eyes for a second and laid back. The dizziness was coming and going from the looks of things.

“"Tony, do you remember that Natasha kind of asked for a favor?” She still had her eyes closed and spoke softly.
“The one you definitely were not going to do?” One eye cracked open for a second to glare at him.

“….Yeah, that one. So, well, I am kind of half way through it. Or more precisely, Jarvis is finishing it. Couple more days… It will take another week after that for it to actually get through and extract anything but the point is that they won’t know.” She didn’t look at him as she said that, preferring to fidget with the scarf. Like she was embarrassed. Embarrassed for being smart.

“Honeybunny, I would hate to get on your bad side.”

“That’s great. So... are we going to the pool, then?”

“No. We will get you wrapped up and comfy in bed so you can get better.”

“I am better.”

“If you get to that door without help or getting dizzy and I will carry you there myself.” They both knew it was no gonna happen but Darcy looked at him, at the door and him again, obviously contemplating her chances, before growling.

“Meanie.”
Dear Wino,

As always Many Thanks for the editing, you make my story sound so much better =)

Chapter 38

Darcy stared at the ceiling and listened as Tony gave some instructions to Rosie, who was still reluctant to leave. At one point, she thought that he might physically toss the bodyguard out.

At least the view was great. Shifting the head to the side to enjoy the entirety of it all without getting sea sick was a challenge, but was worth it. It was breathtaking. Her bruised back hurt a little but if she lay on her belly the urge to puke doubled. At least it wasn’t continuous anymore. She could do without having that taste in her mouth. Or having Rosie hover over her as she brushed her teeth every time. Tony even had a bucket on the floor by her side of the bed, in case the need arose.  

*Ian Fucking Boothby.*

The outrage of him showing up was hard to get over. Just like that. Looking like a fucking jilted lover. The nerve of the guy. Why had he been there? That Shitwelt dude looked like a professional ass kisser and that one guy in the office that always got overlooked for a promotion because no one liked him. It looked like he ran the show.

Her shoulder was still sore and the arm where the bruise was pulsed unpleasantly. That was going to be fun to explain to Jane. That and the cast, because Jane still hadn’t been told about that either.

The third goon that tossed her around like a rag doll had been built like a brick shithouse. That was pure lethal force; did she hear Tony say the man was STRIKE? Because that was SHIELD’s ‘special force’ or more precisely hit squad. A bodyguard material that was not…

The blueness of the sea and sky was hypnotizing even when life was throwing shit at you to see if it could get you in the face.

No one was speaking anymore. Maybe spending few hours in bed wasn’t a bad thing… The adrenaline rush had passed and a nap was beginning to look very appealing.

The mattress dipped at her feet from the extra weight put on it. A hand gently touched the toes one by one, giving a little squeeze until Darcy giggled with her eyes still closed. When he reached the big toes a warm palm lay on the instep of her left foot to gradually travel up her leg until a brush of Tony’s goatee, above her right knee, startled her and he stopped for a moment. Darcy braced on her elbows to peek at him.

Tony was still wearing the same t-shirt and jeans he had on when he received the guests earlier. Now he was on all fours on the bed planting feather light kisses up her thigh. It wasn’t rushed or greedy or
demanding. It was anxious. He was tense like a taut string ready to snap.

After easing back onto the pillows Darcy fixed her eyes on the ceiling again. She couldn’t watch him slowly travel up her body, kissing her skin with reverence people reserved for holy prayers. The edges of the scarf that was still wrapped around her were pushed aside so he could continue the journey up and up and up excruciatingly slow.

It was like he wanted to savor every inch and drink in the scent of her skin. A shudder ran down her body, sending mixed feelings to compete with her insecurities. The thoughts inside her head were still heavy and that old feeling of betrayal was back with a vengeance, but a part of her was pleased by Tony's caring attitude.

She lay underneath him, clad in that skimpy bikini that she had planned to tease him with earlier. The affection that Tony was putting into every single brush of his lips against her shivering skin had more genuine feelings than all of her past relationships put together. It was so raw in its quiet intensity that it was becoming hard to take breaths without trembling.

It was barely past noon and Darcy was ready to call it a night. This day needed to end...

His lips lingered when he kissed just below her belly button, his tongue snaked out to leave a wet trail around it before moving on and up. The hands settled on either side of her shoulders now, and facial hair tickled her skin when he planted a kiss in the valley between her breasts.

Tony wasn't getting any more relaxed. Darcy swallowed thickly as she touched his forearms, and her hands made way to his shoulders, up the back of his neck and into refreshingly product free hair as he kissed her neck.

The arm hurt and Darcy winced as she tried relocating her hands to Tony’s waist, so she could pull him down. He hovered over her, invading her space but till not being close enough. She couldn’t even see his face as he pressed his forehead into her neck. And then some of his walls crumbled around him. His breathing ragged as it ghosted over her skin.

“Tony… honey…” What should she say? That it was going to be ok? The chances of that on a day like today were slimmer than her bank balance and she was still up to the eyeballs in student loans. “I am ok. You did good, so good... That punch?… well good…” Why was her voice sounding so tight? Finally, Tony’s weight shifted down and started settling over her carefully. One of his knees went between hers and he braced on his left elbows to finally look into her face.

“You're crying…” He sounded surprised.

“I am not fucking crying!” The hand that she had combing Tony’s hair flew to her face. There was moisture running down her cheeks. “Shit… Something got into my eye, ok? Fuck…” it was because of the air conditioning, that was it, the air was too dry or something. It might have worked better had she not been trying to choke back the tears at the same time. It was the concussion. Her brain was scrambled eggs at the moment. She had a man that kissed her like she could save his soul and Fucking Ian had to show up to ruin the fucking day.

Tony could sense her distress and was doing it again. Covering her with his own body like he wanted to hide her from the world.

“Darce…”

“Fucking shit, Tony, do not go pity party on me. Don’t you fucking dare. I’m not… I’m not allowing you… Fucking SHIELD, I swear to Thor, I will taser them on sight next time…”
“Was that what was in your bag?” Darcy took a deep breath and tried not to squirm at the sensation, that was sure to be his goatee giving her a ‘tache rash on the neck, and snorted.

“…It’s a great headache prevention. OK? Zap and the pain goes down convulsing.”

Tony tried rolling them gently so she would be on top but Darcy made noises of protest at that and his head snapped up.

“You’re puking?”

“Not yet… But I need to lay on my back or side today, stud.”

There was a noise of complaint from Tony this time, faint and not entirely committed, like he kind of wanted to object but knew it was wrong; he was still incredibly close to her face, and her eyebrows rose at the staring contest, their noses nearly touching.

“So what now? SHIELD is sending their not so best neither so bright people to you. What did they even want? Apart from getting me to strangle Ian… I mean, it is easier ways to get that fucker off the payroll…”

“Unless you bed-hopped, in which case Alleged Probationary Agent Boothby was here to open my eyes to the unfortunate truth.” Darcy, who had her back to Tony for a second as she fished for a paper tissue in the bedside table, blew her nose before slowly laying back.

“I made a scene of epic proportions when I busted him, I think he was with his contact at the time, which was a stroke of luck. So am I on SHIELD records as the slut that debauched Tony Stark?”

Tony did not smile; he was tracing edges of the bruise on her arm.

“Worse. Got him in a commitment other than excessive drinking and bad decisions.”

“What do you know? We do have things in common, after all.”

“Having regrets?”

‘Fucking shit, Tony. I am trying to lighten up the graveyard spirit here…’

His eyes, dark and intense, moved over to her face. The restless fingers mapped the shape of her brows, nose, lips…

“Life too short for that.” Tony had incredibly soft lips, Darcy thought as he started kissing her face in the same fashion he had done before, until he reached her parted lips and stilled a hair's breadth away, sharing her breath, still faintly scented from the toothpaste. She could not keep looking him in the eye as he dissected her and closed the gap brushing her lips against his. She really wanted to push him back and give the same treatment. To show she cared too…

The nausea had another idea and Darcy rolled back to lay flat on her back taking small measured gulps. Tony’s hand, warm and solid slid under the scarf to gently rub her belly as they lay in silence until Darcy felt the pressure that had built up around her throat ease. Once again she wished she had a flat stomach, as opposed to the soft swell that Tony’s fingers were drumming against. He did that when he was settling for the time being.

“Captain A is coming.”

“Why?”
“He missed us.”

“Yeah, exactly the reason I thought of... not.” The sheets rustled as Tony pulled it over them and adjusted the pillow under her head. Yeah, they were settling for some time. Tony had this nesting habit, Darcy noted. He had to make sure she was comfy and close to him, before he powered down himself. “Did I imagine the fact that Wilson, Rogers and Cupid ate all the cookies?” Tony paused the process of tucking them in to finally let out a first amused sound much to Darcy’s relief.

“Nope. They had the lot.”

“That's not possible. There were two mountains of those cookies. You carried one of them. Mountains.”

“Have you ever seen Rogers eat?”

“He had some cookies when we met him on the way.” The blanket was pulled to her chin before Tony once again slipped his hand under the scarf and drummed his fingers against the soft flesh as he stretched.

“That was him being polite, Honeybuns. He is a human Hoover. Rogers inhales food. I am nearly certain he doesn’t even chew. I wish I had seen Romanov's face. She called by the way, I said you were resting. She said to drink plenty of water and tell on me if I misbehave, if you can believe that.”

It was nice of Natasha. But there was something else… Like there was subtext there. There was always one when Tony made statements. Darcy had accepted it.

“She didn’t say she'd call again or to call her back?”

There was a split second pause before he responded and Darcy groaned.

“No?”

“Tony. Please tell me they are not coming here....”

“They are not coming here, Honeybunny.” He repeated dutifully. “Besides, you like them… most of them… some of them. I am sure you missed Romanov.” The sleep that was slowly coming over her bruised body was gone.

“Not that much. I’m on holiday…”

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I felt like Tony needed to express himself somehow before he imploded.
My Dear Wino,

Let the plot bunnies be free! And many thanks for your hard work on my mistakes =)

Various people had told him what they thought of him over the years. Great many times. Everyone had an opinion on Anthony Edward Stark. It was expressed mostly with the addition of tears, anger or misguided admiration.

Darcy sat in the back seat of the run down car with the doors ajar as he rounded it. His hands were dirty from working under the bonnet. What the hell was he doing? It was late. He wanted to get home, get into the bed next to Darcy. Would she be up for a drink before they called it a night? … The soft voice carried further into the quiet night than she must have thought.

Tony could see Darcy’s profile illuminated by the overt door’s lights as she smiled. Her words were delivered gently as she looked at the annoying little kid. “On a cold morning, under a pile of blankets, years from now, he will still be a good man with a wicked sense of humor and beautiful mind…”

Beautiful mind… No one cared about his mind unless it was making them money. His intellect was highly valued and admired right until it became apparent that his was higher than the people judging him, in which case Tony Stark was arrogant and overrated.

Darcy shifted as the alarm on his StarkPad beeped.

“Darcy? Darce…” Fucking SHIELD… He rubbed her shoulder. The woman rolled onto her back and growled as she reached for the StarkPad he was working on to check the time.

“I just fell asleep… 20 minutes?! Are you being serious here? The doc said every hour or so. The or so is not 20 minutes.”

The nausea had subsided enough for her to catch some sleep, after telling just what she thought of leaving Stark Tower for the Tower to follow them to Malibu. And Tony was all for catching a bit of sleep. Just... When she slept sometimes she got very still, so still it was impossible to tell if she was breathing and with her condition being what it was he woke her up regularly.

“Or so is not specific in terms of time hence any time-frame can be assigned to it.”

Darcy put her glasses on and combed her hair with her fingers. “Bullshit. So, can we go to the pool now?”

Tony tried reaching for the StarkPad but had his hand swatted away.

“Well, at least you are looking better. Honeybunny, please don’t close the tabs. Jarvis, save
“I’m not closing anything, don’t whine. I’m just checking something… Iron Man’s Torrid Affair. You would think they would go with something more…. Forget I said that, Iron Balls Once Again in Hand… End of an Era Thanks to a Mystery Minx… Gold digger Splits Iron Couple… Oh, Wow, Tony.” Darcy turned her head to the side. He grabbed the StarkPad as she got distracted. “That is a nice photo of you. The flair jeans and that sequence shirt. Wow.”

“It was a fancy dress party, years ago.” It was even before Pepper, he noted dryly. “We agreed you’d be taking it easy, why are you googling this shit?” Today’s headlines were listed on the first page of her Tony Stark search.

“Information is key, Tony, even the one we don’t like. Plus, I want to see if my name’s popped up yet. It doesn’t look like it.” Darcy tried taking the device back by slipping her hand under his t-shirt and tickling him. Tony chuckled as it failed and yelped in surprise when she gently pinched his nipple instead.

“Careful. You're playing dirty, Darling…”

“You love it.” The smile was back and Tony closed what he was working on to put the device out of her reach.

“Undeniably, but since I cannot currently return the favor,” the skin on her midriff was butter soft as his fingers fanned over her lower rib cage and he slid closer to whisper into her ear, “you are being cruel.”

“I am not cruel, Casanova, I know what is cruel and I am not it. I want to go to the pool, Tony.”

“You can’t walk two meters without puking, Darcy. The pool will there tomorrow. You want to watch a movie? Any movie, you can pick and I might even not complain about the pick.”

“The pool will be there tomorrow, but so will Rogers. You, me and Steve. I think I heard a song along those lines… Just you and me by the pool, now that sounds much better…” Darcy trailed off as Tony blinked. Was that what she wanted? For them both to go to the pool? They hadn’t spent nearly any time alone, just the two of them… she was quite hyped up about cocktails, sun and the pool and it dawned on him only now that she envisioned all those things for the two of them to do together. It wasn’t about getting out of New York, it was them going somewhere together. Oh… “I still got my bikini on…” She added helpfully.

“You are not getting into that pool today, Darcy.”

“Let me finish, ok? I was going to say that I am ready to work on my tan.”

“Same condition, Darce. Make it to the door.” There was no way she could make it.

“With crutches, right?”

“Well, I don’t expect you to crawl.”

“So, what are you waiting for? Get me the crutches, Casanova.”

He should have set a time limit for the test because Darcy was a stubborn little thing. She took small measured steps, keeping herself stable, until she reached her goal as Tony watched, standing within arm’s reach all that time.
“Who’s the best?” Darcy looked miles better. The face had a healthy glow and her eyes weren’t red rimmed. *Fucking Ian Boothby.* What else had that man done to her? The condescending way the kid had spoken to Darcy was a good indication that it was how she was treated during their relationship.

“You’re the best, Honeybuns. At this rate, by the time you reach the pool it will be only tomorrow.” Her eyebrows went up as she adjusted her glasses.

“I was under the impression that I had a boyfriend to help me, some hot shot superhero, believe it or not. But if you think that a detail like that would stop me. Think again. Jarvis! Tell Rosie that I need her. You gonna change? Not that I mind this rugged look you sporting right now, but your fake bake looks like it needs a top up. And no showing off in the pool while I can’t join…”

Velasquez did not enter the room. She flew inside at the ready, one inch from drawing her gun. It was one of those moments where he would probably be concerned if she wasn’t working for him.

“Ms Lewis?!”

“Present and accounted for! Now. I am going to the pool. What is your opinion of piggy back rides, Rosie?” Darcy grinned in challenge and pulled him closer to give a peck on the cheek as his hand went around her.

“For an hour.”

“Haha.”

“I am being serious.”


“Chicken soup and crackers for your upset stomach.” He once again really, really tried not to take personally the brief look of surprise on her face whenever he did something like that. It always lasted but a moment and would be gone just as quick. He knew he wasn’t boyfriend of the century material, but was he capable of being considerate.

Maybe Romanov was right after all… no one grew a backbone like Darcy’s by being treated nicely.

“Chicken soup sounds good. You are not cooking, right?”

“I can cook, if you must know.” He could and it was… edible. He just chose not to. He’d rather pay people to stand by the stove for hours on end.

“If it’s on par with your morning coffee it’s in a league of its own. Under the label: *Alternative Fuel, Lethal, consume with Caution at your own risk.* Except the scrambled eggs, those were some good scrambled eggs, this morning.” Darcy’s hand drifted down his back to gently squeeze his backside. It had been a good call on his part to serve breakfast in bed.

“… And tea and toast. I also I was the one that cut the fruit.” The earned him a pinch.

“Well done you. Brownie point pending for the way you butchered the mango.”

“Ever tried cutting one of those? Massive bone right in the *middle.*”

They ate before going outside. Tony watched as Darcy grinned from the sun lounger as he approached with two water bottles in hand. Vella woman, who was seated in a shade a couple of
meters away, took her leave at his approaching.

His girlfriend had swapped her glasses for one of his shades and they kept sliding down her nose whenever she turned. The weather wasn’t hot, hardly even warm with the wind coming from the sea but that didn’t seem to bother her as she continued speaking on the phone.

“You will have to dismantle it, there is no other way around it, Boss-Lady… You can try it, but we both know it will break…” Foster woman needed to get her ass to NYC before he lost his shit. “Yes. I am in the sun getting a sun tan… No, it’s windy, but it is still quite warm. Do you even remember the last time you got a sun tan?… *New Mexico doesn’t count*…. Are you trying to distract me from the fact that you are making absolutely no progress on the packing?… Yes, that is exactly how it sounds…. You can consider it the last warning… Did I tell you that we got an entire floor?… Yes… You know human interaction is a good thing, right?” Tony dragged one of the loungers closer to the one Darcy was in, before stretching on it and pointedly starring at her. “Ok. Got to go. Tony is pouting.” There were some muffled unflattering exclamations on the other end as Darcy hung up. “Jane says hello.”

“Must have missed that part. So, enjoying the sun?” Truth be told Tony had never been as jealous of a piece of clothing as he was at that moment. He could still remember Darcy’s shivers when he kissed her all over, he still tried to decide what surprised him more: his own need to touch every inch of her to calm down or her emotional response to the point of tears as she picked up on it…

“You think I will get a tan?”

“It is a possibility. And I do not have fake bake whatever that is on. I tan quickly.”

“Not that funny orange shade you don’t. I mean not now. But I have seen photos.”

“I am not equipping the paparazzi with quality cameras just so my skin tone in their photos would match reality.” Darcy groaned when she put the scarf over her midriff as a cold breeze picked up from the water. “Want to go inside?” The look he received back was clearly one of disdain.

“No. *It took me half a day to get here*. So… want to tell me about yourself?”

“I thought I already got the job.” The bruise was even bigger now, marring the peach colored skin. There were expanding bruises on her shoulder blades from when she landed on her back too. The new cast looked just as heavy encasing the slim ankle.

“I know. How the hell did that happen? It is like one of those TV shows where you hire someone for a joke and they turn out to be qualified for the job. Color me surprised. So, tell me something about yourself. I have a feeling Jane’s been meditating over your Wikipedia page, making a nice little essay the size of Encyclopedia Britannica, all volumes, on the Topic of why we are incompatible. I need to know at least three things that are not on that page, apart the fact that you drink sweaty ballsack flavored smoothies, you have a thing for Captain’s arms, and make a great scrambled eggs, and *really* great Pina Colada.”

“I don’t have a thing for Rogers arms. Where did you even get that?”

Darcy tried hiding a smile as she drank the water he had given her.

“It was a wild shot. You never know. You clearly can’t be away from one another for too long.”

“You know, when you will get better, I will bend you over my knee and whip that round backside of yours so you will not be able to sit down properly for a week.” She was back at baiting him. He loved it.
“A week? You sound awfully full of yourself. I was under the impression you get somewhat distracted with my round bum in the air.” And here came the blush. Right down to her toes… There was a certain excitement in the air. Like she was allowed to do something she wasn’t before. Like playfully teasing her man was a novel thing for her.

_Jesus wept, Darcy…_

“I can be very dedicated, Honeybunny.”

“I have no doubt. Another thing. _What the hell is this?_” Darcy, while she hadn’t shed tears as her Happy Hogan signed cast was cut off and replaced as she had other things on her mind, looked like she was upset. So a new autograph found its way on it. It was on the outer side of the cast which meant it took her some time to spot it.

“Looks like a signature.”

“Whose?”

“Your _second_ favorite celebrity.” That still smarted. He was the one employing Hogan. He should not be ranked below another man.

“Morgan Freeman?”

“No. Why would he be here?”

“I don’t know, the man is mutts nuts, is all I am saying. So, Thor is not in town.”

“Out of curiosity, as your boyfriend, do I even make the top 100?” Darcy laughed at that as the scarf was pulled up to her chin.

“Tony, don’t be silly. You are definitely in my top 10.”

“I am your man, I am Iron Man, the most handsome billionaire according to everyone, one of the smartest people on the planet and all I make with you is top 10? I am lower then Morgan Freeman and my own head of security?”

“I know, you are totally right. From a person that I didn’t give a toss about to transition to a man I fall asleep with, that is one meteoric rise to fame. You should be well proud of yourself.” She patted his cheek as he gaped at her.

“I have been unjustly placed from, at the very least, top 3 to top 10. I made scrambled eggs and cut a mango _before I had my own coffee._” That smile on Darcy’s face spoke volumes and it was giving him all kind of ideas. It was like smashing Boothby’s nuts had taken some weight off her shoulders. The barter between them worked on Tony like aphrodisiac and he lapped it up.

… _wicked sense of humor and a beautiful mind_ …

“Those scrambled eggs are a good point, the mango was a little pulverized, but I guess it is the thought that counts on that one, but you didn’t first go to your man cave here, so I’ll take it. Well done. I will get you a mug.”

“That sounds like a consolation … I want my winning prize.”

“Well, what would you like?”

_What do I like? Where should I start? How about you? And You? And You? Every hour of every_
day? I am living with a half mast for the longest period of time since I hit puberty, it's like I blow one and see you and it is an automatic response… I want your hands on me again, I want your lips, your skin, your eyes on me when we will… ’ He didn’t remember being asked a more dangerous question in his whole life.

“How about a massage? After you’re better. I heard I am missing out. Not the one you gave Rogers, though.”

“Oh, I didn’t think you would want one.” When did he give that impression?

“When did I say no to you having your hands on me, Honeybunny?”

“My shoulder a little sore right now. I need to build up strength to do it. In couple of days?” The reaction was not what he expected. Right. They were taking it slowly. Was that it? Were they discussing home run? There was no way Darcy wasn’t getting what was implied in her having hands all over him…

“Darcy, take all the time you need.” If his dick could speak Tony was sure it would groan and curse because it was up for that attention now.

The phone in his pocket buzzed and Tony jerked as it touched his now raging hard on. The security was on the line.

“This better be important.” He had to turn away as he stood up to adjust himself in the shorts he was wearing so his excitement wasn’t as obvious.

“There is someone here to see you, Sir.”

“Is Rogers here already? That is early…”

“No, sir. Ms Potts is here.”

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Gasp! A Cliffhanger?! Again?! I wonder why...

Peepsters, I hope you enjoyed it, both the chapter and the ending *Evil Grin*.

Leave a comment. Help me stay on the roll!
There were days when you regretted not wearing makeup. Not bothering to properly comb your hair. Not taking a shower after dipping into the pool. Not wearing clothes that were presentable enough to receive guests in.

That was that day for Darcy Lewis as Tony Stark picked his phone up as said:

“No. That is fine; tell Pepper we will be there shortly.” Why did he have his back to her?

“Wait… Did you just say Pepper? As in Pepper Potts?”

“I indeed have. I bet Fury went crying to her as soon as the shit hit the fan.”

“Was that about me?” Was Pepper Freaking Perfect Potts here to tell Tony how unseemly his new woman was? The pressure around her throat was building up and saliva was unpleasantly flooding the mouth. Tony must have sensed her distress as he instantly turned around.

“What? No. Honeybunny, I honestly think that the half a billion they owe me is on their more urgent agenda.” Tony attempted to discreetly shift his fully erect member so he would be in less discomfort while looking her dead in the eye. She thought that she had imagined the growing tent earlier as they spoke, convinced that someone like Tony would need more than a promise of massage to get, well, excited.

“OK... So I am on their less urgent agenda. Probably titled the Bitch that wouldn’t quit. They seemed to want Ian to put a wedge between us pretty badly.” And he shifted again. “You are not going to greet her like this, are you?”

Tony grimaced as he looked down. It was rather obvious.

“Well…” She would honestly offer to help but right now it wouldn’t be the best move for any of them.

“Right. Ok… I got this. I’ll go meet her, see if she wants to have a drink, introduce myself and so on and so forth, you can go and… DIY.” Tony stared at her as Darcy managed to stand up and adjust the scarf around her, so it was once again like a dress.

“You sure?” Tony looked genuinely concerned and it would have been sweet if he at the same time
hadn't been rubbing his bulge.

“Am I sure if want to meet a pissed off ex of the man I am dating, who is incidentally the CEO of his company? Well, no. But no pressure. Why are you still standing here?” She looked a mess, not even hot mess, just a right mess and she was going to meet the woman that looked perfect on TV. She looked perfect even in all the paparazzi photos that Darcy had ever seen… That was just great… She made a noise of protest as Tony pulled her into his arms, the way he was embracing her was nice, but his erection was slightly pressing into her belly. Why was everything the man did somehow connected to sex? Why? “Seriously, hurry up.” The roll of his hips against her as he inhaled the scent of her hair sharply, was distracting. “Jesus, Tony. I really need you to hurry up…”

“She’s cool. Despite what happened between us. She’s ok. Don’t worry, Hunnybunny, I’ll be back before you know it.” And with a parting kiss, hard and hot, he jogged off, leaving a stressed Darcy facing her biggest challenge yet.

The trip back to the house was shorter than Darcy hoped it was going to be. She felt cheated.

Pepper Potts sat on one of the designer chairs and it was clear that Darcy should have let Tony suffer while she took a shower and put makeup on. Pepper Potts even sat like a lady as she tapped away at her phone. Looking all at home.

The woman’s eyes snapped up as she heard the noise.

“Tony!... Oh… I thought it was Tony.” Pepper Potts even stood up like a lady, all flawless grace and perfect manners as she smiled. “I’m sorry. Pepper Potts.” The smile faltered only for a second as she took in Darcy’s look. Crutches, the massive bruise, messy hair and once again pale face that was only accentuated by the white scarf. Yeah, she looked like a million dollars in monopoly money… Potts wore an elegant light grey two piece suit with a white shirt underneath. Not a hair out of place. She looked like she was about to be nominated as Forbes best dressed woman.

“Yeah, toilet. He went toilet. Oh! I’m Darcy Lewis.” The handshake was as awkward as anyone would have expected.

“Yes, I know. I was briefed by our PR some time back.” Ok. People were being briefed about Darcy Lewis. Right...

“That sounds like… fun. I would offer you a drink, but I imagine you know where everything is better than I do, because I don’t know where anything is… so, yeah…”

That was awkward. They stood smiling at each other before Potts moved to the bar.

“Would you like a drink? I am afraid I am not good at cocktails unless you drink spirits…”

“Just water, please, Ms Potts. Tony might get an actual apoplectic fit if I have any alcohol…” Potts frowned at that as her eyes once again went back to the bruises. “Concussion. Curtsy of SHIELD.” Darcy might as well put it out there. It was clearly SHIELD that was still fucking with them, calling Tony’s ex girlfriend to come over… Because… really? What else? They would have called his mum had she been still around?

“I’m sorry?”

“You know… SHIELD. Dudes with big ideas and broken moral compass. That lot. Rotten right to
the core. Assholes Incorporated TM. I could go on forever. Did the Furious One Eye Dominatrix called crying? By the way that is my Boss-Lady’s nickname for him. I never met the head honcho. Probably not high level enough. Jane said that when he screams in your face you can smell the bullshit on his breath… What?” Potts looked like she was revaluing her after the little outburst.

“You know Director Fury?”

“I am Thor’s lighting sister, that shit came with the territory. Besides who these days doesn’t know about Fury?” Darcy wanted to wince at her own tone of voice. If she sounded any bitchier she could take paint off the wall. Was there something in her genetic makeup that made her incapable of making a good first impression? There had to be.

“Does Thor know about you and Tony yet?” There was just a tad of concern in Potts's voice and Darcy frowned.

“Not yet. Thunder-bro hasn’t been back since that happened.” Darcy did not see what the problem was. Thor liked Tony. Her bro liked everyone. Jane was the one gearing up for a fight, big time, if anyone asked her. She totally needed him to wear a reinforced cod piece for the occasion. Just in case...

Pepper Potts had the most polite smile on the planet, Darcy concluded. It was disarming and it was a lot like big bro’s … People always underestimated the guy with the hammer. Dude was bred and schooled to be a king and his mum sounded well strict, so behind that wide honest smile were years, ages of diplomacy lessons, in Potts’ case years of dealing with one Tony Stark. Yeah… Darcy wasn’t falling for that smile.

The silence was loaded with possibilities. All of them potentially awkward.

“So Fury went crying to you, huh?”

“Director Fury expressed concern with Tony’s recent behavior…”

“Did he mention that one of those agents was sent to steal Dr Foster’s research… and fuck me?” Darcy may or may not have timed the last bit so Pepper Potts was drinking. It was official. No one looked composed and cool as they had a spray of very expensive flavored water coming out of their mouth and coughing. Darcy wasn’t proud of how petty she was but it made her feel immensely better.

“I’m sorry?”

“It's not official. All hush hush and stuff. SHIELD thinks they were being slick, they weren’t. We are totally onto them, but yeah… It seems to be a pattern though. They tried it with Tony which totally didn’t work, and me which totally did, and some people say that having your nudes leaked is the worst thing that can happen, they should try having a report about how crap you are in bed read by fucking everyone…” ‘WHY AM I TALKING??!’ Darcy steamrolled ahead and at the same she was internally screaming. What was wrong with her? Why did she go on the offensive like this? Surely Pepper Potts did not need to know all that? SHIELD, to Darcy, had become like a red flag to a bull...

“All lies! Darcy, you are fucking fantastic.” Tony breezed in looking fresh as a daisy. That man had a god’s gift on that. “Hi, Pep.”

Darcy took a second to regroup her thoughts.

“Couldn't you have picked any other word combination?”
“Why? It is true on all counts, Honeybuns.”

“Not all.” She was not going to specify with his ex standing right in front of her…

“I vote last night counts and you have also seen me naked.” Clearly Tony had no reservation, because why would he? It was not like she was dying from embarrassment already due to her earlier verbal diarrhea.

‘You fucking wanker…”

“I vote that seeing you naked does not constitute a sexual relationship because I bet everyone on the Avengers Team has seen your goods.”

“They haven’t.”

“Well, color me surprised.” Darcy rolled her eyes and she sat down on one of the chairs by the bar, as Tony pressed a kiss to her temple and took the crutch. The air in the room got thick with tension as Tony and Pepper regarded each other.

“They are couple of years late for that habit of Tony’s.” Pepper gave a smile that wasn’t all that polite anymore.

“I apologized for that.”

“You didn’t.”

“I’m sure I did.”

“My entire family was visiting. You did not apologize.”

“Ok, maybe I didn’t. They should have knocked.” There was silence for a second as both Darcy and Pepper stared at Tony.

“Potts, I bet you five bucks he doesn’t know the meaning of the word knocking.”

“I know what the word means, Darce.”

“I will be sure to remind you of that, next time you don’t do it.”

“I apologized.”

“No, you fucking didn’t.” Darcy could see Pepper giving Tony a look.

“I feel like I am being unjustly vilified. Anyway, Pep, you met Darcy. So… You here for a reason? And let me guess. Fury rang all the bells?”

Darcy envied the self control the willowy red head possessed as she didn’t flip he man off.

Tony sounded… defensive. Up to this point Darcy had really hoped that their break up hadn’t been messy, clearly she was wrong. Why did she volunteer to go and meet Pepper Potts again? That woman had seen Tony’s boners before... Darcy tucked a strand of hair behind her ear. Except now those boners were hers and not Potts to take care of… Was this jealousy?...

“Director Fury expressed concern about your recent behavior… An agent is in critical condition another with multiple fractions…” Potts’ eyes kept going to her and Darcy gave a tight smile. “You were not seriously suggesting…”
“Sexspionage? Totally am. Tony read the report. Right, Tony?” It was totally the must have conversation to have with your boyfriend’s ex.

“SHIELD has outdone themselves. Oh! There is a bonus level. Guess who signed it? This is going to make your year.”

Pepper stared at Darcy as Tony spoke clearly struggling to believe her own ears.

“SHIELD would have not authorized such a thing...” The genuine conviction in Pepper Potts voice sounded a lot like the one in Cupid’s, right up to the point where Darcy broke it to pieces. Seeing someone’s trust misplaced like that was a painful sight. Darcy rubbed the vivid bruise on her arm, a move that didn’t go unnoticed.

“You sure about that Pep? Because that is not…” Tony poured himself some water, his posture tense.

“I didn’t think they would have either…. up to few months back. They stick to what works for them. Mainly bullying, which worked pretty well, then Ian, FYI that would be the multiple fractions guy in question… So, anyway, they pulled one on me, tried it on Tony.” The man grimaced. “I guess, the big question is, met anyone new lately, Ms Potts?” Darcy was trying to joke, she really was, but Potts kind of froze as they locked eyes. “I mean… They tried to get you hooked at what time, Tony, August? So met anyone around that time?” Darcy’s tongue started drying out as Potts’ eyes went just a little wider. “You look like you would go for someone that is sensible and, organized…”

“Nice 9-5 guy…” If Potts wasn’t going to hit him Darcy was more than willing to do that.

“Tony, don’t… You know what should have tipped me off about Ian? How fast Thugs Corp signed off his application to work with Jane… Because to get them to do that was always a pain… and here pops Ian… I should have been suspicious how they never ran more checks…”

‘Fucking shit...’ Potts had blanched and now was white like the damn shirt… Darcy felt nausea rise and hit her in the head as she gripped the table. Tony was at her side in a flash as the room tilted.

“Darcy… You need to puke again?” Tony’s hands were on her waist, the grip firm and reassuring.

“Ms Potts…” This was not happening. This was not happening to someone else too.

“Just Pepper… please…” Pepper Potts looked like Darcy felt, about ready to keel over.

“Listen, your dude might as well be a legitimate nice guy… I was just talking shit, I swear to Thor…”

“Got his picture, Pep? Hawkniss can try and dig up if he’s SHIELD…” The question hung in the air. The woman just stood there for a minute. “You’re not stupid, Pepper… what got you suspicious?” Darcy jerked in his embrace as she tore her eyes away from the woman.

“Maybe he just got clearance, Tony? He probably is a nice guy, because nice normal guys exist and not everyone gets fucked over… like me. Fuck…” The room was spinning and Darcy to close her eyes for a second. Tony’s goatee tickled as he pressed his lips to her temple. She was joking. No one should have to experience what she did.

“Is it true about the report?...” Potts was handling this like a motherfucking boss and all Darcy wanted to do was crawl somewhere and cry.

“Yeah… Honeybuns got it off SHIELD system. I’m sorry, Pep…”
“Maybe he isn’t SHIELD!” Darcy lost the grasp on the volume control and everything that came out of her mouth sounded much harsher then she wanted it to. “Not every man on this planet is one of them! She got herself a...a good man, ok? Some... someone nice...” Words were getting stuck inside her throat as she tasted bile. “Tony... toilet...”

Tony had nice toilets and no mistake. She had been to hotels worse than that. That was the only positive in this situation. Darcy sat on the floor and watched Tony flushed the toilet for her and crouched in front with a bottle of water.

“Thanks...”

“You still need to puke?”

The water felt good as it went down. This was one awful day. She wanted to change. Put one of Tony’s t-shirts on and snuggle under the duvet...

“Is she ok?” Was there something she could do? This sort of revelation sucked.

“Yeah... She will be. You ready to get up? Need few more minutes? You look cold, let’s get you to bed...”

“We don’t really know...” They didn’t, Darcy insisted. It was a bad joke and nothing else.

“Actually, we do. Romanov recognized him... They probably didn’t think she noticed him. The woman sees everything.” Her stomach contracted painfully for a sec.

“Oh, Thor... did Pepper and that guy...?” was there another report floating inside SHIELD system?

“No. They just started seeing each other... apparently he was persuading her for a while to go out...”

“I bet he was... fucking wanker... Is she ok, though? What is she doing? She isn’t leaving yet, right?” No one should be on their own after receiving such news. Darcy should know, as she was all alone at the time.

“Oh, she been on the phone to the accounts for some time now.”

“Is that where he works?” Darcy inhaled deeply as she stood up and buried her nose in Tony’s neck.

“What? No. I would say she is digging out what SHIELD owes us, but at this point it is forensic excavation.”

And while the news sent a slight tinge of pleasure along Darcy's back, it wasn't nearly enough to placate her sadness.

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Hello my peepsters! I am back =) trying to get into the swing of the story.

So what you think of my newest offering? Good? Bad? Let me know!

The plot bunnies need feeding something bad after a long break!! =)
Chapter 41

Wino,

thank you for sticking with me,
your help, as always, is very much appreciated =)

Chapter 41

Apparently there were infinite levels of awkwardness after all. Somehow there was always another one. Whenever Darcy thought that it couldn’t get any worse, it did. She took a shower with Rosie standing there watching her. There had been a great debate with Tony on how she shouldn’t be left alone. At least it wasn’t Tony keeping guard. Took some time to talk him out of that.

This was awkward. Rosie did not need to see her bum or any other part for the matter. Not that she did really… Darcy kept the bikini on. It was the principle of the thing.

“Ms Lewis?”

“Yep! Still conscious…” Darcy shook her head as dizziness threatened to rear up its ugly head again.

“Mr Stark wants to know what you want for dinner?”

“Pizza!” Her stomach growled at the thought. Oh, yes, with plenty cheese and ham and olives and…

“I think the choice is soup or poached fish…”

“Really?…” The stomach growled at her. It didn’t care what it was getting in, as long as something went in.

………………

Virginia Potts was a very patient person by nature. SHIELD Director Fury had rang her while she was on the way to Montreal for a meeting on SI Canada expansion. It hadn’t been a fun conversation. Partly because she still expected to hear Phil Coulson’s voice…. Instead she’d had Fury raging on the other end about how he would have Tony committed and the tech taken away. And that was on top of the news that Tony had finally been spotted with Ms Lewis… Not that it was unexpected, but it put a strain on the PR department and all the chaos wasn’t making anyone's life easier.

Ms Darcy Lewis… Pepper wasn’t sure what she was supposed to think of the woman. McNorris showed up at her office few days back looking uncomfortable to brief her on the newest development. Tony Stark got himself a girlfriend that he was serious about… It took a good hour into their lunch meeting for her to believe that Tony was indeed serious about the girl… He was
pulling all possible stops. And when Tony pulled stops, stops got pulled. Starting with security…

Pepper wondered if Ms Lewis knew what show was in motion behind the scenes of such an event. She probably didn’t… It was only this much Pepper could get from the security file. So when she made it to Malibu House and waited for Tony to grace her with his presence the sight that greeted her wasn’t what she was ready for.

Darcy Lewis was on crutches. Pepper took a deep breath and composed herself. McNorris said that there had been an accident… ok, right. Was that a bruise? That was fresh and massive… An entire rainbow on her upper arm, with vivid blue and purple dominating… The woman wasn’t wearing makeup either. As soon as that thought formed inside her head Pepper felt ashamed at her own vanity. Darcy Lewis didn’t have to wear make up, she was home, it was just… it was not the type Tony used to go for. The young woman smiled nervously at her. She had a very nice smile and a set of breasts…

Gods, what was wrong with her? Pepper was appalled at her own judgmental thinking. But it was like the old habits from back when she was Tony’s PA kicked in. She could nearly always tell which one of the women he was going to bring to his hotel room. Tony Stark had a type and the woman nervously smiling at her wasn’t it. She looked genuine. Yes… not the type Tony ever went for if Pepper didn’t count herself…

SHIELD was screwing with them. Some more than others… and she was supposed to be next in line. Lucas had something romantic planned for them the upcoming weekend. Romantic… Wasn’t that wonderful?

Pepper poured another shot and tossed it down before grimacing and calling her assistant to postpone the meeting that she was supposed to be traveling to. She was not in the right state of mind to be meeting anyone right now.

“You need to slow down, Pep, you can’t handle straight spirits. I’ll make you something.”

Tony was back after taking Ms Lewis to get some rest. This was crazy. SHIELD was crazy and they were out to fuck them over. Pepper felt thrown off balance. She had trusted SHIELD… trusted them… Trust given by Virginia Potts didn’t come cheap and they simply discarded it like trash…

She watched Tony mix her drink between typing on the tablet. There were things to do, always things to do. She had to keep her mind busy.

“Those were some serious bruises on her back…” Pepper’s mind kept going back to the look of absolute horror on the other woman’s face as the realization dawned on all of them. Ms Lewis looked like Pepper felt at that very moment…

“The landing on her back, it was hard enough for her to get a concussion and pass out. Listen…” It was strange to watch Tony hesitate, to actually see him try and pick words before they left his mouth and surprised everyone present, including himself.

The drink, Cosmopolitan, was pushed towards her felt like a peace offering.

“Tony…” This was uncomfortable. They hadn't really spoken since the summer. Nothing beyond few public appearances and tense polite chats in presence of other people. Their parting was … difficult…
“Pep… I go first… Shit… Well, this fucking sucks. No. Just let me… let me finish, please. I’m sorry…” Pepper tried not to show just how much those words took her by surprise. Tony rarely if ever said that… “SHIELD trying to fuck us over, I’m sorry you have been dragged into it. You don’t deserve it.” At that he took a big swing from his glass of water… and that alone was a thing that she had never expected to see.

‘Darcy Lewis… what spell have you cast on this man?’

“Thank you… That is unfortunate…” Pepper was taking calming breaths between words. She needed to stay cool and composed. Anger and panic never accomplished anything. They didn’t need to panic. No. Not when SHIELD owed Tony Stark a fortune and not expected for it be collected. Ever. “So… is it true, about the report?” Tony winced as he finished his drink.

“Yeah. And I’d rather you didn’t bring it up to Darcy. Ever. Please…” That stung. The tone of voice, like Tony thought even if just for a split second that she would purposely mention such a degrading fact to Ms Lewis … He must have felt his own misstep as he blinked at her. “I’m not saying…”

“I would never do that. You know I would never do that…”

“I’m not saying you would…” They were speaking over each other now and it was too much like their last real conversation. Pepper did her best not to raise her voice. They never had a chance to really talk it out. To clear the air between them.

“That is exactly what you are saying, Tony…”

“I’m not saying you would hurt her. It just needs to be said…”

“No, it doesn’t. Just because of what happened between us…”

“Nothing happened between us, Pep. We were happy, one day you packed up and left…” Pepper wanted to grab the elegant glass containing her drink and toss it right at Tony’s head, watch it break, make a mess.

“We were not happy, Tony…”

“Yes, we were…” The conviction in Tony’s voice actually made her want to cry.

“No! We weren’t! You chose me because I was convenient…”

“There was no one I would have rather been with.” Tony was looking at her hard and Pepper wanted to punch him so badly. He didn’t see. After all this time he still didn’t see…

“Yes, I know that, Tony, but regardless, you chose me because I was convenient. I knew all your quirks, I knew how to handle you, I knew what you liked, what you didn’t. I knew you when you were scrapping the rock bottom and I did not put up with your shit. That’s why. I was your personal nanny slash secretary slash manager slash escort. I was simply there. I was never the woman you were crazy about. We didn’t match. I couldn’t be with you without managing you at the same time.”

“You always knew how I was. I wasn’t hiding anything. What went wrong?” This time Pepper didn’t fight the impulse and tossed the glass right at him, while Tony reflexes saved him from the glass, its content went all over his t-shirt.

“How about the fact that it was not what I wanted? How about that? You got what you wanted, right? That is all that ever matters…”
“No, it’s not…”

“You were a great boyfriend, when you felt like it, all the rest of the time I was back to being your PA. Managing you. Can you even imagine how that felt for me?” It felt awful and great at the same time to say it. To rip the band aid off and let all the bad blood that had been festering under it, feel it finally leave her system.

“Why haven’t you ever told me…”

“Oh, please, Tony. You are not stupid. You saw it coming…” Would Ms Lewis be upset if she opened the drinks fridge and started tossing the bottles at Tony? She would pay for cleaning. Gods, she would do it herself.

“No, I did not. You never told me! How the fuck could I have known how you felt?!”

“I couldn’t really tell you, Tony, because we never spoke!”

“We spoke all the time!”

“Not like that, we didn’t! I was always either a step below, the faithful PA or a step above, the strict CEO of your company. You and Ms Lewis is what we should have been!”

“Please, do not bring Darcy into this…” It was a little scary how Tony got very still and very calm as soon as Pepper said Ms Lewis.

“Tony,” She took a deep breath, “I am thanking my lucky stars that I met you, but also cursing them. We were never meant to last… Tell me honestly, do you think you wouldn’t have been attracted to her had you met her while we were still together?” They regarded each other for a second. Pepper knew that Tony knew that she was right. Him admitting it was another matter all together.

Seeing Tony today was like meeting a new person. Same but different. The way he behaved around Ms Lewis spoke volumes of how he felt about the woman. Antony Stark, despite all his faults, was a good man at heart. It was one of the reasons that made their break up so difficult. It had to be done. Tony wouldn’t have left her, he would have made her leave by behaving in a manner that would have hurt them both and she didn’t want to wait until she started to hate him. So in Pepper’s mind she saved them, if in a twisted way.

They had loved each other at some point. They truly had. It made pretending that they gave each other what they needed easier. It took a while for her to admit that she wanted a man that was… the cliché of all clichés … more like her father. Calm and dependable. Tony’s spontaneous genius nature was fun as it was frustrating and infuriating. He was a great sport, except it didn’t create the most stable environment to nurture a relationship in and she needed that. At the end of the day she needed that and Tony needed someone that could take his crazy without batting an eye and that someone wasn’t her.

“I would have never hurt you…” Pepper smiled at that. She believed him. Tony would have never intentionally caused her harm.

“I know.”

“Then can you explain what the fuck happened? You got up one day, packed up while I was in the lab and left.” It was Pepper’s turn to wince. She could have handled it better than just running and sending an email. It wasn’t fair. But when life ever was?

“I couldn’t do it, Tony. I laid in our bed that morning and couldn’t bear the thought of you putting
that suit on, doing insane things, and me going around my day like it was nothing.”

“You were managing just fine before…”

“I was your PA, Tony, for most of it. I liked my job and I cared about you. But it was a job. While I was with you it started wearing me down, I was going crazy never knowing what was coming next. It was not the life that I could handle. I swear, Tony, I tried…”

“I would have…” He gave her a steady look as he spoke.

“No, Tony. Do not say given up being Iron Man. You will never be able to really give it up and I would have never asked you to do it, because that would have been the fastest way for you to start hating me.” Tony Stark was Iron Man and Iron Man was Tony Stark. They were one and the same. It would have been like asking someone to cut off their own limb and she cared too much about him to do that.

“Was being with me that bad?”

“Not everything is about you.” Tony thought for a second before his brows went up.

“So it was you then?”

“No!” That man was going to be the death of her…

“So who was at fault?!”

“No one, Tony, we just didn’t work. Sometimes it happens and things end and I did send an email…” Pepper felt spent and slightly drunk. This day was a nightmare that just wouldn’t end.

“Yes. That was quite a read. Made no sense, but quite a read, I can tell you that.”

“Did you read it all?”

“Of course not. You were waffling about some nonsense…” Pepper closed her eyes for a brief moment. What exactly was she expecting again?

“I was trying to make it more relatable to you.”

“It sucked.”

“Thanks, Tony. It wasn’t like I put my heart into it.”

“You didn’t, Pep. Had that been the case you would have said all that to my face, which you chose not to do.” Tony gave a smile that was not at all friendly. They both knew it was a dick move on her part to choose the road of least resistance and scram, basically. But she would have never left him if the only way to do it had been to do in person. It was not her proudest move by far.

Tony’s phone rang just as she was about to reply and he reluctantly picked it up.

“Stark…. Cap? You landed? … There is a car for you there… The office is closed… what do you mean it is closed? … I get that no one is there. I am sending someone from security to pick you … I… Yeah…” Tony glanced at Pepper who watched him expectantly. There was no way he was leaving her out of whatever was going down with SHIELD. “Yeah… Uhu… That is to put it mildly. Darcy still concussed, Vella woman is with her… I’d rather not… Yes….and Pep is here… Yeah… Fine… I said fine.” Tony hung up and stared at the devise in his hand for a solid minute, before refocusing on her again. “So, I am going to the airport to pick my good pal the Popsicle man.”
“Are you trying to avoid talking to Captain Rogers in front of me and Ms Lewis?” Bull’s eye and Pepper wasn’t impressed.

“Totally Cap’s idea. You can grill him for it when we back. It will take roughly an hour. The security will be informed. Someone is in the house all the time, just in case. If there is any alarm, you know where the safe room is… Please, make sure Darcy gets there with you. Drag her by the hair if you have to…”

“I am sure I would be able to help walk…” Tony just nodded at that.

“That is if she wants to go… I am not saying she won’t, except that she won’t. You know what? Get Vella to carry her. Which is totally your idea and it never came from me…” Tony Stark kept running fingers through his hair in obvious irritation. “Bloody Rogers… OK. Now. Darcy needs to eat and take these - ” Tony rounded the counter and pulled a small bottle from one of the cupboards, “ - supplements, she is anemic. Do not listen to anything she says to the contrary. Her blood is severely low on iron. They are one a day, but she been puking all day so that is unlikely anything managed to get to her system. I ordered food, should be here shortly. Her stomach is upset; she should have only food easy to digest. No pizza, no Chinese, the doc said it could make it worse. Soup, poached fish, vegetables for tonight. Questions?”

“How long you two been together again?”

“Officially?”

“Actually.”

“A week. Huh… feels like it should be longer than that. Fancy that.” Tony frowned as got as he pulled his jacket on.

“A week? And you are wrapped around her pinky like that…”

“I am not wrapped around anyone’s pinky, Pep.” The man looked offended at the suggestion.

“Right. If it makes you sleep better.”

“Actually, I've been sleeping pretty well lately… So where were we? I will be away for maximum an hour, that is just enough time for the both of you to bond and murder me in my sleep… You think Rogers would be ok to run the distance?” Pepper laughed out loud at that.

“I think it would take just a bit longer than that for us to plot your untimely demise. Drive safe, Tony.”

The quicker Tony got back with Captain Rogers the sooner they were going to get some answers.

“Heads up, Pep. Darcy can be quite a handful.”

“I think I can handle it.”

“Good luck.”

Tony Stark and Steve Rogers tried to remember what life was like before Darcy Lewis as they stood frozen at the entrance of Tony’s workshop. The trip took slightly over an hour. He should have played it safe and taken Darcy with him.
“Is this?...”
“Yes.”
“… blanket fort? In you workshop?”
“Sure looks like it.”

In the middle of the workshop like some weird alien structure stood a blanket fort. Yes, a blanket fort. Tony kept staring at it. A thin metal sheet was propped next to what one could assume was the entrance with all too familiar handwriting on it proclaiming ‘NO BOYS ALLOWED’.

“So... Miss Potts and Miss Lewis are getting along well…”

“Yeah…”

“You are taking it rather well, Stark.”

“How do you suggest I take it?” They were whispering. Why were they whispering? Tony thought as he once again returned his gaze to the atrocity that somehow materialized in his sanctuary.

“Well, when you think about it, Ms Lewis got Natasha, Dr Foster, her security woman and now Ms Potts… I feel the need to tell you that you shall be missed just in case anything happens.” Tony flipped Rogers off as the blond cracked a smile at the end, any kind of concern missing from his voice.

“I am touched, Capsicle. Really am. Now…” He cleared his voice, loudly, to announce his presence.

“I’m sorry, Sir. Ms Lewis and Ms Potts have requested not to be disturbed for few hours.” JARVIS said promptly.

The silence that followed was interrupted only by the muffled sobbing that filtered through the blankets.

Tony swallowed thickly. He could not make out who was crying. Captain Rogers stiffened at his side and they shared a grim look. It was going to be a long evening but mark his words, Tony Stark would fix this.

So my lovely Peeps? How was it? Good? Bad? Let me know =) It's been a while, but I am back =)
Chapter 42

xx My dear Wino xx

Great job at an amazing speed =)

Much appreciated

as always =)

Chapter 42

“Left, Pepper. Your left. Yeah… Yeaaaah… Baby… Almost… No. Too far…”

In hindsight, Pepper Potts decided that she should have not been cocky. Being cocky, like any other bad habit, she had picked up from Tony. She also should have listened to Tony … Pepper actually felt a dull pressure around the chest area for a moment at the thought. The current situation came with a weird déjà vu feeling that brought her back to the first day on the job for Tony Stark, a man that had hired her before actually meeting her in person.

Yeah… Darcy Lewis gave a big smile and gestured to the security woman to put the Tupperware with their dinner on Tony’s workstation. The sense of being swept out to sea and discovering that there were sharks around, persisted.

“Ta-da!”

Yes… this was just like the first day working for Tony. Pepper gave a well practiced polite smile while frantically trying to come up with something to say. One would have thought that working for Tony for as long as she did would have prepared her better for any situation that could crop up in this crazy life. She was wrong…

“So what do you think?”

Childish, juvenile, immature, borderline insane…

“It’s very nice…” A safe thing to say about something you just spent half an hour putting together. Tony seriously needed to clear out that room where he kept his random leftover party decorations. Miss Lewis looked way too interested in its content… Another thought appeared right after the last one… Maybe she really shouldn’t tell Tony to clear it out and see what Darcy Lewis could do with a ton worth of junk. Uh… the choices she had to make…

“Whohoo! The fairy lights still got juice in them! How lucky are we? Help me to hang them up inside? Rosie? We’re good for now. Thanks for carrying everything.”

The bodyguard sent a pleading look to Pepper, who responded with one of her own. She was unable to render any sort of assistance. Not after she'd just build a blanket fort… A fort made of blankets…
*Her.* The CEO of Stark Industries. How on Earth did that happen?

Pepper remembered Miss Lewis coming back after Tony left, looking casual and sporting wet hair… the woman had looked her right in the eye and declared:

*“Potts, I know what you need.”*

Who would have thought that it was a blanket fort, not her that’s who… None the less, one was planned and built in record time and that in itself implied that it wasn’t Miss Lewis first or last blanket fort this year. She had easier time talking Tony out of buying a submarine. She was successful on talking Tony out of many crazy…

*“You wanna grab the food? We're eating inside. Oh, yeah, we are not taking that in…”* Miss Lewis carefully went down to her knees ready to crawl into the fort, one hand still clutching the fairy lights to her chest.

“I’m sorry?” Pepper frowned as she looked up from her phone again, those emails *bred* while she wasn’t looking.

“No phones, no tablets, no other devices. You can bring in a book if you like. Jane managed to convince me that a cassette player was ok, mainly by singing for an hour. How did that work? She can’t carry a tune to save her life. My hearing is still recovering. So if you have one, is ok to bring it in.”

*Oh, I think not…* Pepper had no plans to surrender her lifeline to sanity for the last couple of hours…

“So, I say we order pizza and see if a promise of a massive tip will get it here before Tony comes back with Captain A. ” The soup was bland, the fish was bland, the vegetables were bland and Pepper wished Darcy Lewis was bland too as the redhead neatly packed the Tupperware and put it outside, near the sign Ms Lewis had her make. *Tony will be spitting bullets.* He hated people messing in his workshop. No one was allowed to do that. Ever. There was something very gratifying about doing just that.

“It will take longer than that. I’m sorry…”

“JARVIS? Can you please tell Tony not to freak on us when he comes back, we be catching a break here for few hours.”

“Certainly, Miss Lewis.”

Pepper managed not to roll her eyes, she was not spending her evening in a blanket fort. There were things to be done. Those invoices were a mess…

*Hmm…* She had also said she wasn’t going to build one or have dinner in one either…

So they sat there looking at one another for some time as Pepper felt the need to get her phone grow. It would occupy her thoughts with *something.* There was nothing to do inside the softly illuminated and closed space. There were just them. Was she supposed to be this nervous? what was Darcy Lewis trying to achieve? The woman in question smiled at her tightly.

“So… did you do the water works yet?”

“I’m sorry I don’t quite…”
“Did you cry yet?”

The words hit her harder than Pepper expected. Darcy Lewis was ... odd. Everything just seemed simpler, more straightforward with her. Everything. Beginning with her smile and down to her actions. The brunette did not complicate things and that was exceptionally awkward as you were hit with questions like that and weren't given time to come up with a pretty lie.

“I did not find it nec-...”

“You need to do it. Come here. Sit closer. I do not bite. If Tony said otherwise it happened once and he is lying.” Unceremoniously Pepper was helped to shuffle closer as she tried to protest again.

“Nothing really happened…”

They sat next to one another now, their shoulders touching.

“Yes, good, great. So when I found out I was in the next room, Ian just a door apart. I could have picked a knife from the staff room and done the fucker. Instead I went to the toilet and puked and cried. Told Jane I got food poisoning... Thought about just walking into the traffic on the way home…” A shiver ran down Pepper’s spine at the matter of fact way it was said. “It wasn’t the sex, which was bad enough by itself. Him looking right in my eyes and lying wasn’t it either. It was me believing everything he said. The classic ‘lets blame myself’ move that had been ingrained into our brains since forever…” Darcy moved slightly and bumped the silent Pepper with her shoulder. “So... we have been had. By SHIELD. And it sucks.. Let it out. Trust me, it will feel better…”

This conversation was unnecessary and uncalled for. Pepper was fine. She was on top of it. She had it under control. A strangled noise clawed its way up her throat much to Pepper’s horror. What was wrong with her? Miss Lewis wasn’t looking at her, choosing to look straight ahead instead. It was the blanket fort... That was it. It was like she wasn’t in Malibu, in the middle of Tony’s workshop. There was no phone she could reach for a distraction. There were just the two of them. The soft light coming from the fairy lights that they managed to affix to the ceiling illuminated them. Somehow it was cozy inside their fort, like nothing could reach them. There were no people, no phones...there were no mistakes threatening to tear her mind apart. Pepper took a deep breath and then another, and another... Darcy once again shifted so that the woman’s left hand was rubbing Pepper’s back. Slow, firm, soothing circles.

Another whimper made past her lips and Pepper slapped a hand over her mouth. Why had this happened to her?

Oh God... She was shaking now.

“Yeah... Just like that... You're actually doing real good...” Darcy gave her a sidelong glance, voice low and even.

Pepper really wanted to get mad at the brunette, make the woman the focus of her anger, focus that pent up fury inside her. All of her failed attempts at happiness, the frustration from the daily struggle to prove the chauvinistic board of SI that she was worth her salt when she was twice as good as any of them. Everything just compressed into a small ball of rage and it was slowly creeping, clawing its way up her spine. She was tired, the strength she needed to keep herself level was fading with every gentle word that Miss Lewis said.

“I hate them so fucking much...”

‘This should be more awkward...or at least awkward.’ In theory, at least, Pepper knew that spending
the evening crying into your ex’s new girlfriend’s generous bosom wasn’t quite normal… they lay in
the blanket fort, Ms Lewis on her back with Pepper pressed to her side. It should have been
awkward, Big time awkward, but it wasn’t. Maybe because Ms Lewis wasn’t making it awkward.
The woman did not hesitate to wrap her arms around Pepper earlier, keep her close and just be there
for her.

Ms Lewis was a lot like Tony in great many ways it seemed. She was spontaneous and
unpredictable, yet somehow managed to be gentle in the private moments.

Thankfully Ms Lewis was unlike Tony in many other ways. One of them ways being that she didn’t
make everything about sex... Or their position --with Pepper’s cheek pressed firmly to the soft orbs--
would have been really compromising. One of the things that Pepper had picked up from Tony over
the years was the habit of avoiding casual physical contact, especially with people she just met. Like
Ms Lewis for example. Yet here they were.

It was another way that Ms Lewis was unlike Tony. The man was hurricane, a flurry of movement
and anarchy at all times when he wasn’t asleep. You had to be well centered not to be carried away
with the air currents, there was never a pause for him it seemed, even when he stood still. Ms Lewis
was also much like that, overwhelming in her tenacity.

But when Pepper thought that she was about to lose her footing and get slammed to the ground,
everything went quiet. The feeling was eerie and disorienting. It was the blanket fort. Pepper got
invited into what undoubtedly was the eye of storm. The one place of quiet and safety in the all
consuming chaos. Ms Lewis created it around herself. Around them. There was no better place to be
when your world seemed to crash around you.

Pepper jerked awake at the feeling of being poked in the forehead. Her neck hurt from the awkward
position she was in and her head was full of damp wool.

“Uhhh….” Opening her eyes hurt. Her vision was blurry and she had to blink twice to focus it. An
non-amused looking Tony Stark was staring at her. “No boys allowed…” her eyes drifted shut, she
could sleep for another hour… or a day… Her cheek was about to land on the soft thing it was
pressed to , but a poke, this time much stronger made her snap her eyes open and jerk back, nearly
rolling onto her back.

“Hey! That is reserved. Private property. No trespassing.” Tony had squeezed his body on the other
side of sleeping Ms Lewis. His lips pressed in a thin line as he gently rubbed the woman’s shoulder.

“Ms Lewis didn’t mind.” Pepper scowled and rubbed her swollen eyes. She felt sore.

“Darcy is concussed.” Pepper watched as Tony brushed his lips against Darcy’s forehead.
“Honeybuny… rise and shine, an hour is up…” the statement was met with a growl.

“’ony… I just… closed my eyes.”

“Yes, now open those eyes for your boyfriend and the only person that should be anywhere near any
part of you.” Tony Stark sounded … salty. Pepper couldn’t believe it. She grinned and planted her
cheek back onto the warm and soft chest of Ms Darcy Lewis, who in turn wrapped a hand around
the redhead.

“Tony, shut up. We’re napping, not having sex. Jesus… Potts, does he always whines like this?” Pepper watched her ex sputter in indignation. She was beginning to love all the ways Darcy Lewis was like Tony Stark… it meant that she got to enjoy watching as Tony got to deal with the same brand of crazy that she had had to put up with for ages. It was one of the most beautiful sights she had ever witnessed.

“Oh, yes…”

“I’m not!”

“Two to one, Tony. You whine.”

Some could say that Pepper Potts cackled at that, she would have preferred to say that she merely expressed her undisguised joy at Tony finding a person that he was so well suited to. She might replace her weekly therapy sessions with watching those two talk.

“I’m just saying…”

“Rejected.”

“You didn’t let me finish!”

“Can’t you read… Oh, my Thor, Pepper, he can read, right?” Darcy crawled out of the blanked fort and stood up, holding tightly into Tony and at the same time giving him a scandalized look.

“It would explain…” Pepper was totally on board with ribbing Tony. She had waited long enough for that.

“You said an hour was not enough for the two of you to bond. You are forbidden to gang up on me! Cap, back me up!”

Captain America that sat ram rod straight by Tony’s workbench had a sudden deer in the headlights expression as his eyes jumped from one woman to another.

“I…”

Ms Lewis gave a wide grin as her eyes set on the blond.

“Hi, Steven, how is it hanging? I heard you brought news. Let’s have it.” And that is how you hit the nail on the head. Pepper wanted to hug Ms Lewis. And she would have done it if Tony hadn’t quite pointedly stood between them.

“We are waiting for the others…” The pleading look good Captain sent Tony could not be missed and it wasn’t.

“So, like, you totally told Iron Balls, here, nothing during your ride?”

The denial came a split second too late.

“…No.”

“I call bull shit. Back me up, Pepper?”

“Here, here.” The redhead raised her hand for emphasis. She was very much invested into this topic.
“See, Rogers? That is how you back someone up when they ask. Not wait.” Tony whined again as he pointed at the women.

“So what did…” Darcy stopped with her mouth open at the sight that was on the workstation, accompanied by the holographic rendition of the object’s schematics. “You did not dissect Sparky.” The temperature in the room dropped by several degrees.

“Who is Sparky?” Pepper looked around not sure who were they speaking about.

“My best friend, my sidekick, my never failing aid in need!”

“It’s a taser. A DIY upgraded one at that.”

“Tuna Can Man, don’t you give me shit about improving stuff in home conditions.”

Tony took a few rapid strides towards the table so it was between them, pulled the taser, apparently still in one piece, closer to himself and after making sure everyone was watching what he was doing got the nail of his index finger under the panel of the taser’s handle. It fell off revealing a button.

“Oh…” Darcy sounded suddenly very subdued. Like a woman caught red handed doing something she wasn’t supposed to.

“So, Honeybuny, my gorgeous little spark of life, what is this?”

“Nothing…” No one believed that. Literally no one.

“So if I press it…” Tony made show of moving to do it.

“Don’t!... You prick... It’s a boost button.”

“Boost button?”

“Yes, a boost button. You know, a button that boosts shit. Hand it over. ” Darcy extended her hand. She wanted it back.

“Do not hand it over…” Rogers might have tried to voice his concern discreetly but it came out in a stage whisper. He was not a fan of Darcy Lewis being armed and unhappy at the same time. At least with him present.

“So, boost things, huh? It has a finite amount of charge stored…” Tony trailed off inviting an explanation.

“Three changes, that even upgraded couldn’t take someone like Rogers here down, you were down what, a minute? The fuck will I do with a minute? I am not dying just because someone on super juice decides that I need to go down. OK? It fuses what ever charges it has left together. Ruins the battery and has one hell of a kick. But hey, Hogun went down for an hour. Hasn’t volunteered to help me with anything ever since, though…”

“That is a lethal charge.” Tony nodded for emphasis as Darcy rolled her eyes.

“You can’t safely fuse changes…”

“That all depends…”
“Am I the only one concerned that unlicensed person is equipped with a lethal weapon?” Captain Rogers raised his voice.

“Rogers, are you still sore that I took you down the second time?”

Pepper was beginning to think that her eyebrows might get stuck to her hairline. When she looked at Tony for confirmation the man only shrugged.

“He was rude.”

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So? My lovely, lovely peepsters? Enjoying the weather?

How was the chapter? Good? Bad? Keep the plot bunnies going! =) You keep me going, many thanks

Please check out the cool fan art that was made for my fic =) It is well awesome, many thanks for araydre =)
Well, Wino, what can I say? You the best as always

Your help is much appreciated =)

Chapter 43

“You were rude to Darcy?”

You could tell things were not looking good for Captain Rogers from the way Tony Stark’s eyes filled with glee.

“He totally was!” Tony very wisely wasn’t standing within reach of the Captain’s itching hands as he said that.

Darcy had heard that Captain America’s trademark ‘America is disappointed in you’ look could make you repent for your sins on the spot, but it was clearly nothing in comparison to the ‘Pepper Potts is disappointed in you’ look. Plus, the red rimmed eyes were adding to the effect.

“It wasn’t intentional, Ms Potts…” Rogers was speaking in his best earnest Captain voice that wavered only slightly as Tony piped up again.

“They ate her food, the whole lot. Without asking.”

“… and I have since apologized for that. Tony. It was an unfortunate mistake. Ms Lewis got her point across, ok?” It was spoken through clenched teeth.

“Well, I hope so, since she had to do it twice.” Rogers actually looked like he was considering getting up and slapping Tony. He did not need to be reminded of that fact. He knew. It hurt... His pride, mainly.

“That is very unlike you, Captain Rogers…” Pepper looked like she was struggling with the concept of Captain America being mean to someone, and also sweet little Darcy taking that mountain of a man down… twice.

“Ms Potts, rest assured, Ms Lewis has already brought me too heel. I am paying dearly for my transgression.” A fact he sounded none too happy about… unlike Tony.

“You are? He is? Oh, Honeybuns, please tell he is. Not that I know what he speaks of, but is he? He is, right?”

“You were listening at the door!” Darcy tried swatting away the hands Tony wrapped around her in a halfhearted attempt. “You prick…”

“Rhodey told me about it.”
“Sure he did. You came together from your man cave.”

“Workshop and so we did. But moving past that.” He planted a noisy kiss on Darcy’s temple before letting go. “I shall repeat myself, which I do not do often, you are the one and only undefeated Champion of Stark Tower. So... Rogers’ gonna do, right?”

“Unless you are suggesting a trade, of course. I'm sure he will not mind you taking the task off his hands, Tony.” The man barked out a laugh at that.

“Sugar plum, there is nothing I want from Popsicle that much. Nothing. Cap? Good luck.”

For that Tony was treated to the rare appearance of the Captain’s resting bitch face. “Thanks, Stark. Your support enriched my life to previously unknown heights.”

“Would love to claim that title, but like many, many others it belongs to Honeybunny.”

At that Darcy got treated to the un-amused look from Rogers too and, since she wasn’t in the mood to entertain anyone, her eyebrows very slowly crept up in challenge. Both her and Pepper had ended up crying earlier. So now her head was heavy and painful, her eyes swollen and sore. They looked a right sight now. So... Yeah... she was not taking any shit from any man.

“Rogers, you want to say something?” There was just slight, fleeting panic in the man eyes, but once again, Captain Rogers was too much of a man to backtrack.

“This situation …”

“First, Rogers, do not give me that butter wouldn’t fucking melt on me look. Jane tries that on me all the time. Never worked. Never will. Second, the situation didn’t end as badly as it could have. They have laxatives in Asgard too, you know. Don’t think Thor would mind getting me some. But, pardon me, you were saying?”

“... is one of my greatest regrets.”

“Bitch, please. There is no need for drama. Let’s move on.” Darcy thought that her tone of voice indicated the closure of the topic.

“We had some soup and pie…” Rogers as a true soldier on a mission, persevered, albeit quietly, under his breath. That was a mistake. Darcy’s eyes narrowed behind the smudged glasses.

“I was sleeping right next to you lot. How hard was it to ask? You want a clue? Not hard.”

“Clint said…”

“Don’t be a little see you next Tuesday, Rogers. That is not an excuse.”

“Well, I'm glad to know we are alike in some ways, Ms Lewis.”

Tony, who was enjoying Rogers rinsing out from a side, slapped a hand over his mouth dramatically as his eyes went wide and so did Darcy’s.

“Tony! Calm yourself! We knew this day was coming.” The brunette did her best to hold in a smile as she rubbed her boyfriend’s shoulder in mock consolation. Rogers was rolling his eyes so hard, if not for the super serum he would have injured himself.

“No! I'm not ready! He grew up so fast… Jarvis! Put this day in the calendar! Where has the time gone?!” A noise from the doorway made everyone jump slightly. Clint Barton sneezed as he walked
inside.

“What the hell is see you next Tuesday? Are you calling him out for a morning duel, Lewis? Why are you people so weird? And do you have to do it? We kind of need him on missions.”

“Thank you, Barton. Glad to know I will be missed and could you not sound like Ms Lewis would wipe the floor with me, please?”

The rest of the Avengers team had come to the workshop while the heated debate was going on.

“Did anyone see you?” Tony was all business in no time. Darcy had to take a second to recover. Damn, the man was giving her a whiplash.

“We took the Quin Jet, so no.” Natasha Romanov nodded politely at Pepper and Darcy, treating them to a little smile. Dr Banner was hanging back, looking like he was taken out of his comfort zone. Barton, on the other hand, marched right into Darcy’s personal space and without warning enveloped her in a bone crushing hug before letting go just as suddenly, leaving everyone taken a back.

“Lewis, you look like shit.”

“Means I still look better than you, Robin Hood.” The man flipped her off as he sat down next to Rogers.

“I look like a million cash.”

“In monopoly money, sure.”

“Honeybunny, no teasing the less fortunate. Not everyone is as perfect as you are.” The man could sound so absolutely genuine in the most inappropriate moment.

“Oi! Spark and Stark, no sucking face, we do not need to see that. So what's the big deal with next Tuesday?”

“Spark and Stark?” Tony grinned after he stole one quick kiss from Darcy and helped her sit down next to a tired looking Pepper. Everyone gathered around the worktable.

“Yeah, so what with the…” a note was pushed into his hand by Dr Banner who, unlike anyone present, had a pen and paper always handy.

See (C). You (U). (N)ext. (T)uesday.

“Ohhh… Oh! Are we getting cake? People, there's got to be cake.”

Darcy ended up promising to bake a cake. Fine. Tomorrow was going to be a new day, and Tony would just get one delivered. There was a long night ahead with sleeping only in intervals of an hour.

There was also the other matter, which was SHIELD’s insistence on getting their noses in everyone’s business.

“So this doesn’t look good…” The tensions were running high. No one liked how it looked. A chorus of voices rose up to express their opinions all at the same time.

“Quiet! There are few of us here.” Rogers had quite a pair of lungs on him, Darcy winced as he
raised his voice to cut through the noise. “Wait for your turn.”

“It’s my house…” Tony thought he was making a valid point.

“And Tony will be going last.” Darcy didn’t. She might have spoken but it was Pepper that backed her up with an icy glare, daring him to argue. He didn’t. The women looked as they felt, angry and tired... He wasn't risking it. Not when he was sleeping with one and the other knew all his pass codes... *It might be the time to change those...*

“So, the new developments are as they stand. Ms Potts has an agent trying to… infiltrate her circle. In a similar way that they had attempted to do with Ms Lewis and Stark. I have just returned from Washington and I can say that there is something very wrong…”

“You don’t say, Cap? It’s not like they haven’t tried to fuck us all …” That was as long as he managed to stay quiet. He'd never liked SHIELD. But they seemed to do ok, Pepper liked Coulson… Tony closed his eyes for a second. They hadn't told her about the newly risen from the grave Agent Agent yet. *Shit...* This day could not get worse. He really didn’t want to be the one to break the news, not after finding out...

“I have bases to believe that a hostile power has infiltrated SHIELD….” The silence set like a heavy blanket weighting everyone down, smothering.

“There's been a coup in SHIELD?” Ok, so this day *could* get worse, fancy that? “How the fuck did that happen?”

“A hostile power? Like who? Al Qaeda? The Chinese?” There was unease.

“I am not sure. But the latest missions they sent us on were time wasters. Looks like they're trying to keep us occupied away from actual action. The structure is changing inside SHIELD. No critique within the ranks is accepted. They are replacing everyone they can, in all the positions of any importance, with new people. With people that do not question orders. They are cleansing the ranks... They bugged my apartment.”

“Fury…” Barton seemed to have a problem to comprehend the proposed theory.

“Is not in charge. He follows orders from someone. He let me understand that. Someone stands above him.”

“Surely this can’t be right…” Pepper buried face in her hands. “Phil wouldn't have let this happen…”

“For fucks sake, Stark…” Barton hissed through his teeth as everyone just avoided looking at the woman for a second.

“It is not really something that comes up in a conversation! *Shit...*”

“Agent Coulson has been confirmed as not as deceased as everyone has thought him to be.” Rogers bit the bullet and Tony found it hard to watch as the red head’s face fell once again.

The silences were multiplying at an alarming rate. Each one more uncomfortable than its predecessor.

“What?... Tony? *Did you know?’* Pepper turned her wide, shocked eyes to him and Tony felt like somebody punched him in the guts. He *wasn’t* hiding it. There simply hadn't been an opportunity.
“Tony didn’t know. Not until a week ago. Agent Coulson signed off the report from Ian.” Tony winced. He hated when it came up. He hated it with a passion reserved for few things in his life.

“Darcy… Are you sure? It could have been another…” Pepper was trying to explain it away, disbelieving.

Natasha cleared her throat at that and finally joined the conversation with her ever smooth and even voice.

“Agent Coulson was injured, severely, it seems. Yet urgent help was given and he survived. Officially he is dead. There is virtually no trail unless you know where to look for.”

“This doesn’t make sense. Someone would have noticed-” Barton sounded less convinced by the minute.

“Maybe somebody did? Where would they go? Fury? Somebody is holding his leash.” Tony ran a hand through his hair as he gently rubbed Darcy’s back with the other. The close proximity to the woman was helping him to calm down.

“But can he be trusted?” Pepper’s confidence in SHIELD nosedived. It wasn’t clear who could they turn to with their suspicions.

“Too early to tell. I say we trust no one until we know more.” They couldn’t take the risk. Not now at last.

Darcy kept biting her bottom lip trying to catch up on situation and make any kind of contribution. She mused out loud.

“This morning’s situation… is a major slip up if they are attempting a coup. Tony Stark is the golden goose… They've been milking SI for years. Who wants to lose that? Not SHIELD. Bringing in Ian was a cheap shot. All they had to do was double check his version of our break-up and they would have ditched him. His incompetence must have been obvious. But they didn’t. Instead they sent Shitwelt and Ian the Fuck to make me look like a slut. SHIELD is usually all cloak and dagger and a better plan. They are slick sons of bitches… Now they just went whatever let's see if it works!” The morning was a fiasco for SHIELD.

“Pride comes before the fall.” Rogers’ face was stony. The more they were thinking about it, the more likely the situation appeared. Romanov nodded.

“They are getting careless. They are overlooking the fine details. They are slipping up.”

“All their focus must be elsewhere.”

“You mean Pride comes before the Rise? Whoever they are, they feel like they are in a position where a risk of exposure isn’t that big of a threat.” Bruce finally put his two cents in and everyone had to agree. That sounded about right.

“They are armed up to their teeth, including modified alien tech.” Barton buried face in his hands for a second.

“What is the worst case scenario?” Darcy said what everyone in the room was thinking. “Lets say SHIELD goes rogue… Surely not all agents have turned hostile? How bad would be the damage?”

“STRIKE? Rogers, you play with them, right? Whose side they would prop?” Asked Tony.
“Not ours.” Rogers sounded grim. He clearly didn’t like playing with them.

“Are we really talking about the best armed, trained and influential intelligence agency being taken over? By who? Extremists? Religious fanatics? It must have taken years to get to the level where they are able to influence the Director of SHIELD and be in control…” Bruce like the rest was getting agitated.

“OK. All of that is guess work. We need actual evidence. Facts would help. Is Fury with us or against us?”

“I would say with us.” Cap bit it out. Not sounding entirely sure.

“He lied about Agent Lazarus the Second…” Tony wasn’t going to trust no one right now.

“Ok. Point Taken. We keep digging. We need more than just our suspicions.”

“We better be digging fast. It all sounds like it is getting ready to hit the fan.” There were nods of agreement all around. Things were not looking good.

So the evening was one big headache. The verdict was to trust no one. Limit communication inside the team. Use only secure channels. Keep their eyes open.

At least they had an excuse to keep the SHIELD agents at arm length. Tony poured himself another glass of water. Gods he wanted a drink so bad… He could nearly feel the sharp burn as the scotch went down his throat... and then he looked at the tired looking woman that was now his significant other… The night was going to be long, again.

Everyone was lounging around the bar, tired and aggravated. Rogers and Romanov were going to go back to DC in the morning, while Barton would take off to parts unknown to do some digging. Pepper wore Darcy’s sweatpants and one of his shirts after taking a shower. They were in a pathetic mood.

“Why are there two Olympics now?” Popsicle’s voice disturbed the brooding and everyone startled a little.

“What?” Tony twisted in his seat to see what the man was reading.

“It says here… The two Olympics could be taking place…” The blond pointed out the line in an article he was reading on the StarkPad. Darcy joined them as she read it too.

“Oh. Do you mean Paralympics and Olympics? …”

“I know there are Winter Olympics and Summer Olympics…” The Captain didn’t sound too certain.

“Rogers, you don’t know what Paralympics are?” The question much to the astonishment of everyone present hung in the air as the man went pink in the face.

“I spend few years out of the commission, Stark…”

“Surely…” Everyone knew what those were.

“No Spoilers! It’s a movie night!” Tony early jumped as Darcy squealed next to him, suddenly re-energized. “Rogers, you are gonna love it. Trust me.”

“Aww… Lewis. Not The Best of Men… Lets watch Star Trek or Stark Wars or…”
“We are watching The Best of Men, Cupid. Suck it up.”

“I am not into the modern movies, Ms Lewis…” Rogers was trying to get out of it, but Darcy wasn’t having it.

“There are good movies around. While this movie, Rogers, is not a blockbuster and will never win an Oscar… it… you know what? Watch it make up your own mind about it. And don’t play tired. No one here is in the mood to sleep. Now! I need help making enough popcorn to feed an army.”

Tony felt his spirit lift as the grinning woman turned to him. Maybe a movie wasn’t such a bad idea.

Steven Rogers wasn’t sure what he expected when Ms Lewis all but dragged them to watch the picture… Maybe he expected a visual masterpiece? The name alone sounded pretensions, ‘The Best of Men’. He was tired of everyone trying to be better than everyone else at impressing him. People seemed to forget that being better was not about besting others, it was about proving that you could be better for the sake of everyone around you.

The movie was nothing he expected.

Closing credits stopped rolling and he was still sitting in his chair as everyone rose up, discussing their impressions.

Some of the numbness that had crept over him slowly lifted; this was something worth looking forward to… would Stark help him to get a ticket? Paralympics sounds like something he could get behind.

A popcorn hit him in the cheek and Steve jumped up to his feet.

“Wha! Easy, my good Captain. It’s bedtime.” Ms Lewis smiled before turning and leaving him still standing there. He could hear Stark vocally complaining about something and Ms Potts laughing at Natasha’s reply. Bruce was explaining something about the spinal injuries and their treatment to Clint as they walked past.

Maybe it was what he needed… a reminder that good people still walked this earth…

For those that haven’t seen the movie - The Best of Men is a factually based 2012 television film which describes the pioneering work of Dr Ludwig Guttmann with paraplegic patients at Stoke Mandeville Hospital, which led to the foundation of the Paralympic Games.

So? What ya thinking my peepsters? Good? Bad? Let me know! Keep those plot bunnies fed =) Thank you for all those that leave comments =) you keep me coming back and updating =)
Chapter 44

Wino,

Thank you for the editing and making my story so much more enjoyable =)

much appreciated =)

Chapter 44

“Honeybuns… you asleep?” Darcy slowly opened her eyes to stare at the darkened ceiling. She had already been woken up at least twice and it wasn’t sitting well with her somewhat tender mental condition. It had been a long morning, day and evening. She was hurting, sore and sleep deprived. Tony meant well. She knew that. She was concussed. It was a serious physical trauma. But he had woken her just a few minutes ago and she hadn’t even managed to fall asleep yet again. Her nerves were fraying.

“… Yes.”

The man propped himself on an elbow to see her face in the semi darkness.

“How do you feel?” Darcy released her breath noisily to indicate that she wasn’t too eager to engage in a conversation past stupid o’clock.

“Tony… it's late.”

There was no reply and she could feel his eyes on her before he lay back down. Now she felt bad…

“What?”

“…Nothing.”

“Are you for…” Darcy had to swallow the next words before they rushed out of her mouth. Her temper was short. It had been a shitstorm of a day and she really needed that sleep… “Whatever it is. Just say it.”

“Yinsen.”

“…OK? Is that, like, a breakfast food? Because it's a little early…”

“The doctor that put a magnet in my chest.”

‘Oh… Ok… that… ok…’ There probably were a million of things to be said but none of it was
coming to Darcy’s mind. What should she say?

“… Good job?” Oh Thor…

“Yeah…”

And that was how Darcy wasn’t sleepy anymore. Everyone knew that Tony Stark had gotten kidnapped and held hostage few years back. Everyone knew that was what made him create Iron Man. Very few people knew what had actually been done to him during the ordeal. There were speculations of course. Great many of them. Some of them ridiculous, some of them gruesome… Darcy swallowed the lump that formed in her throat.

Tony never spoke about it and Darcy wasn’t going to poke her nose into it unless she was invited. Some things were personal. But now she was suddenly invited. How was she supposed to handle that?

“Did he…” Her hand gently found his under the blanket and Tony immediately laced their fingers squeezing just a shade too hard.

“He got shot when I escaped… He was great, I actually met him once before, but didn’t quite remember…” Tony shifted again as he spoke. His face now pressed to her chest as he draped one leg over her, weighing Darcy down.

She was learning that this was how Tony calmed down, apparently. Before, Darcy would have never guessed that someone like Tony Stark was affectionate in such a way. It was sweet… Like he needed her… Darcy cleared her throat again. She was getting carried away.

“I’m sorry… But I am glad you made it out, though…”

“Yeah… me too…”

The words hung in the air, filled with pain and just a touch of regret. Did he blame himself for surviving but not being able to save the man that saved him? Darcy gently kissed the top of his head as she wrapped her hands around the man best she could.

“You would have died there, at the end of the world, wasting his best efforts, Tony… I know you would have saved him if you had a chance…”

“I could have tried… what if he'd just lost consciousness…” It was so alien to hear doubt in Tony’s voice and Darcy hugged him tighter.

“Where did he get hit?”

“The chest… but…”

“The chances of surviving that are slim, especially him being the only doctor there. You would have stayed and died there too… Sometimes, we have to make choices. Back in New Mexico…”

Tony shifted impatiently as she fell silent.

“What happened in New Mexico? I read some reports, but they seemed to be inconsistent. It was where Point Break dropped, right? There was a mention of disturbance…”

“Yeah… Loki sent a kind of enormous robot to finish the job, not sure why… Thor was mortal at the time. So, anyway, it was a massive metal Cyclops that shot energy blasts from his one eye. It was
creepy.” Tony moved again this time to look at her face.

“That was not in the reports...” Darcy regretted starting the conversation as Tony’s voice turned alarmed.

“Really? Funny that…”

“So what happened?”

“Thor-bro became worthy again, obviously... but while that was happening fires picked up from the Cyclops’s blasts... A pet shop namely...” Darcy felt like a right idiot as she said that, what was she even thinking intending to draw parallels between a man’s tragic demise and a fire in a pet shop...

“Go on.”

“There was panic, understandably --you know aliens and men in black-- everyone busy... so, I broke the window when I saw smoke. I...” Darcy groaned and rubbed her face with both hands till Tony pried them away.

“What happened then?”

“The inside was already burning... I tried to get as many of them out as I could, but they were panicking and trashing in their cages...” She could still hear it. The crying of many voices... a sob escaped her. “I got the bigger dogs and cats out... it was the smaller animals... I wanted to go back in but... I know it is not the same, Tony. I know...”

“Darcy...” His lips were soft on her temple, solid and comforting and it only made her cry more.

“What if I had been faster? What if there had been a fire extinguisher inside? I should have looked better...”

“Is that where you got the scar?”

“What?” Darcy hiccuped and rubbed her eyes again.

“The patch of skin just below your right elbow. You can’t see the difference- ” Tony’s fingertips gently traced from the wrist to the elbow, “--unless you touch it...”

“Yeah... I forget sometimes... I-- I didn’t want them to die, Tony... I dream of it sometimes, the robot and the fire. The angry flames and crying...”

“You would have burned along with them...”

“I know... Pretty stupid to feel guilty for choosing not to die...”

“Yeah...”

They fall asleep holding each other, fearing the coming dreams just a little less.

“Steven, take the entire tub of butter and put it on top of the pancakes, why don’t you? Are you trying to drown them in it? No more butter goes onto them until the sea of it around them is mopped up... Natasha, honey, fruit salad implies that there is more than one type of fruit in it, stop picking out blueberries and putting the rest onto Clint’s plate... Barton, don’t you take one more pancake from Dr Banner’s plate... Pepper, here, have more before all it is all gone... Cupid, don’t make me come there... What did I tell you about the butter, Rogers? You are all but eating it by the spoon....
Natasha, yes, it is diced apple, I’m sorry fruit salad can’t be made entirely of blueberries, it's nice, try it… Dr Banner, I will make you sit here until you finish that plate, so help me Thor… Don’t you even think about it, Barton…”

Tony stood in the doorway, jerkily retying the belt of his dressing gown as he watched the commotion in motion that he assumed was breakfast. He woke up a few minutes ago and didn’t find Darcy next to him. She wasn’t in the bathroom that he sprinted to, assuming that she was once again being sick. She wasn’t. According to Jarvis she was in the kitchen feeding the strays—and Pepper—with Bruce.

His kitchen was slowly turning into a disaster area right before his eyes as six fully grown people were behaving like kids. Tony had shared meals with that lot before, generally it was a more subdued affair. Except, with Darcy it was different… His girlfriend had his sweatpants on along with a T-shirt he wore last evening as she was cooking up a storm by the stove.

“How come Natasha got a smiley face on her pancake?” Tony couldn’t see Barton’s face but the archer sounded honestly offended.

“Oh, come on, Hawkguy…. Really?” Darcy turned around to express her disbelief.

“That’s fine…” Barton was so obviously sulking that even Rogers rolled his eyes, while Romanov looked like she was enjoying eating the pancakes a bit too much. Who above the age of five had smiley pancakes? Or pancakes? Not that the aroma coming from them wasn’t tempting…

“You want a smiley pancake? Yes or no?”

“I said I’m fine without it.” Barton could at least make the effort of not sounding like a sulking brat, Tony felt the urge to go there and slap the man over the head.

“So that is a no?” Darcy raised her eyebrows.

“I didn’t say that.” Now Barton sounded hopeful. Tony rubbed his chin. Why was Darcy making them breakfast? She should be in bed. Resting. None of them had slept much.

“Ok… Smiley pancake coming up…” Before Darcy turned back to mix more batter she pointed her finger at the Black Widow, of all people. “Natasha, for the last time, stop picking on Steven, that’s not nice.”

“I wasn’t saying anything.”

“You didn’t have to, Natasha.”

Things could be said about the entire experience of watching the team of superheroes being handled like a bunch of rowdy kids. And it was weird how no one seemed to mind, on the other hand how often did they get treated like normal people? Tony was beginning to think that nothing phased his little Sugar Plum.

“The pancakes are delicious, Darcy. Thank you.” Pepper was smiling again and Tony felt relieved. Yesterday’s situation seemed to be under control now. Something of a plan was being set into motion. That and the fact that everyone clearly pretended the situation was not as serious as it was.

“Yeah, thank you, Lewis. ” Barton must have finally gotten his smiley pancake as the man’s voice notably perked up.

“Welcome. Dr Banner, would you like…”
“Is it true you put laxatives in a cake that got eaten by SHIELD agents back in New Mexico?”

Darcy froze with her back to the breakfast bar. Tony snickered under his breath. That joke was never gonna get old, it was hard to imagine that Bruce didn’t know about it yet.

“I do not randomly put *that* into food if you are wondering, Dr Banner… They'd snatched two of my cakes before it happened, juts to let you know. And on a completely unrelated topic.” Darcy cleared her throat as she put more pancakes into Pepper’s plate as the woman tried to protest and grinned suddenly. “Guess which senior SHIELD Agent got the runs *real bad*, Pepper?” The pancakes were instantly forgotten as the other woman’s jaw dropped.

“*No.*”

“Yes.”

“I would pay good money to see him dash.” Pepper Potts no longer held any sympathy for the man and it showed.

“Oh, me too… especially since all of the doors to the potable looses were suddenly stuck. The rumor has it that he didn’t make it.” Tony was hard pressed to hold in the laughter.

“Suddenly stuck?” Barton snorted loudly somehow managing not to inhale the food he was stuffing his face with. “You and Foster *super-glued the doors shut.*”

Pepper, who had made the mistake of taking a sip at the same time, spat the coffee out before it went up the wrong tube.

“You did *what*?”

“I said *might or might have not*, Barton.”

“Or might have not *my ass*. Lewis, you're sneakier than a bag full of weasels, I bet you disposed of all and any evidence. No one thought it was the bloody cake, you know why, people? Not all of it had that shit in it, so not all had the runs, hence it could not have been the cake. I still can’t believe we fell for that…”

“My heart bleeds, Barton. So I wanted to avoid that tragic accident that would have killed me right after, sue me. I have seen you people work. Thugs with a license.”

“Oh my God…” Pepper was gaping at her suddenly, eyes wide. “Oh… my…”

“Listen, it was just laxatives—” Darcy frowned at the reaction and so did Tony. Something didn’t sound right.

“Yesterday. When you told me about that thing that happened to your friend’s ex…”

“*Okay. Now.* For the record. *I had nothing to do with that.* I heard about it…” His little sweet bunny had a deer in headlights expression for a split second. *Aha.*

“You said he nearly made her quit Culver.” And everyone knew what Darcy Lewis opinion about education was.

“We deny all and any involvement and or knowledge, we resent the very idea that a person as gentle of soul and nature as Honey bunny, here, would even be *considered* to have taken any part in such a-” Tony strode, as spoke, right up to Darcy to kiss the woman on the cheek soundly. “- … what did
you do again, Sugar Plum?”

“Nothing. ” The glare that she skewered him with spoke volumes.

“So Darcy told me this funny story last night… about a thing that happened to an ex of a friend of hers.” Pepper was still wearing the look of shock on her face as if suddenly all made sense in her head.

“I had nothing to do with that.” Darcy pushed the pan from the fire with slightly more force than necessary.

“Of course. Do we need to lawyer up?”

“No, we do not.” Darcy’s voice was irritated, but there was something there, a brief look she shot him as he came over. Tony grinned.

“Don’t be daft, Stark. Evidence to tie her to anything? Please. Now, Potts, stop holding out…”

“It was years back. Years. And besides do you have any idea how many people are there on campus at any given time? Thousands.” Tony grinned wider. She was being so obvious it was adorable.

They would have to work on that later. But now…

“You know what, Honeynuns? Lets have a vote, but for that we will need to hear what happened, to have an impartial vote. Pepper, lay it on us just like Darcy told you!”

“From what I have been told it happened few years back. Some guy wasn’t being nice. Serial practical prankster who focused on the girl that rejected him. Making her nearly give up her scholarship just to get away. So, funny thing happened one day. Someone decided to get him back, get a point across about his behavior being not as funny as he thought it to be. ” Darcy pressed her lips together and crossed the hands defensively. It looked like she wasn’t planning to budge. “So one day, someone sneaked something a little extra into his shopping. Apparently the guy liked using hair removal cream on his … family jewels… the downside of the cream, while it is convenient, is that it leaves minor abrasions on the skin, leaving it more prone to damage of external forces. So someone swapped the newly bought cream before he got to use it, with one that had an improved formula. Mainly with added powdered Carolina Reaper’s paste. Homemade, for extra strength. The gentleman in question lathered up his lower region in the shower and waited for the cream to work as he washed his hair, mistaking the rapid heating up for a newly opened product’s improved strength. Also as someone didn’t want the opportunity to go to waste and added the excess hair removal cream to the shampoo…” There was silence in the room as Pepper took the opportunity to have a drink of her coffee before it went cold. “Long story short the guy ran out screaming out of the shower few minutes later, butt naked, second degree burns on the crotch and half hair missing like he spontaneously went bald. ”

“Or so I have been told.” Darcy sounded very insistent. Barton cleared his throat.

“Ok. I will say what everyone is thinking right now. Stark, how are you not dead yet?”

“Because he's a good boyfriend.” Darcy patted Tony’s hand gently, as he grinned, before pouring coffee into a mug. “When he is not being a dick.”

“And back to the vote. Who thinks…” His grin was back as the brunette pushed the now refilled mug into Tony’s hand before sticking her tongue at him.

Rogers snorted loudly at that. “Yes, Stark, who thinks that irritating a woman, who more than likely castrated a man by setting his genitals on fire chemically and got away with it, is a brilliant idea? I
vote no.”

“Wuss.”

“His dong was not actually on fire, you know…” Every single man in the room shifted at the thought as Darcy spoke, including Tony.

“Yeah, Lewis, we feel so much better about that….”

“Darcy… So, how long does it take for the cream to work?”

“Few minutes. Most people rinse twice so that would be plenty of time… The only thing… will you be able to get away with it?” Now it was Pepper’s turn to grin.

“He is SHIELD. What would he do? Go to the police and tell on me?”

“Good point.” Darcy nodded at that.

“Ms Potts, I am really sorry, but we can’t let them know we know about them….” The cool look Pepper Potts laid on Steve Rogers made the man shut right up.

“I won't be doing anything… for now. I’ll wait. I understand we have more urgent matters to deal with, Captain Rogers. The situation is as it stands…”

“Let’s not fight, kids…” Tony didn’t feel like saving Cap’s backside was his job but being on both Darcy’s and Pepper’s shit list was too much for any man. “So, I take we vote that Honeybuns did not do it?”

There, funnily enough, was a tie on the vote. Natasha and Pepper voted yes, Barton and Rogers stuck with no, because it looked like Darcy Lewis held grudges and she knew where they lived, while Bruce and Tony abstained.

Rogers laughed outright at the result as they dispersed.

“Right. Don’t let those horns confuse you, people, they are there to keep the halo on straight. Ms Lewis, it should be on your calling card.”

“…They must be missing you under that bridge real bad, Rogers.” Darcy sounded half impressed.

“Actually, from the looks of things, Towers are the new thing these days.”

“Funny, how you being a little shit wasn’t in any of the history books I read.”

“Surprise.” He mockingly chanted at that.

Tony’s only wish was that when Darcy was going to finally get Rogers back he was there to witness it.
The plot bunnies seem to be getting active once again=} So let me know what you think, peeps!
Wino,

Amazing job as per usual

Thank you for your hard work

much appreciated

=)

Chapter 45

Pepper Potts took another sip of her coffee. It was just the way she liked it. Strong, one brown sugar, a dash of cream and a large side of Tony Stark getting what was coming to him. Karma was a beautiful thing; in theory, it worked slightly slower than that, Pepper had always assumed, but who was she to complain when it turned up in flesh and blood for Tony? She should tape it and send it to James… They both deserved to witness it.

“What is the last thing you want to happen mid flight, Darce?”

“Explosive diarrhea.” Tony nearly spat his coffee out as his eyes widened. Pepper wasn’t drinking in anticipation for the answer to come. She had learnt from her mistakes. “Oh! You know what? Jarvis voicing in a ridiculously high pitched voice singing Mama Mia. That would do your head right in. But I guess you would be able to disable that one sooner or later… Itching Powder. If you soak a small cotton pad in a solution of water and the powder, it’s not effective until the water evaporates, shall we say from the body heat… hmmm… an ankle would be a good place to put it. Can’t scratch until landing. Fidgeting would make the flight a nightmare…”

“The loss of power.” Tony stared at her with wide eyes. Yeah, someone totally gave no thought to what she would do to him if he fucked up. ‘None at aaaall…” Pepper sighed with satisfaction. ‘So beautiful.’

“Oh… Well, yeah, I can see how that would be a bad thing.”

“Tony, she isn’t wrong, you know.” Tony turned to her very slowly and Pepper savored every moment.

“Pep, do not encourage her.” She had lost count how many times she had spoken those exact words.
as Tony’s PA.

“Aww, Tony, what? Don’t want a little itching powder in your Tuna Can?” Pepper couldn’t stop the snickers at that. The look on Tony’s face was priceless.

“Not really. This Tuna Can joke is getting old by the way.”

“Never.” Pepper spoke at the same time as Darcy, making a nice little duet. They grinned at each other. Annoying Tony was never going to get old.

The man wasn’t overly impressed at that. “Shouldn’t you be going?” He gestured to the door. The others had left already. Pepper snickered as she remembered the send off. Even Dr Banner had decided not to hang around, much to Tony’s disappointment. But people had decided that being around the newly minted couple wasn’t how you wanted to spend your time, which was fair enough. Her flight was rescheduled for later due to weather conditions in Canada, however, so she had to stick around.

Pepper watched as Tony slathered the last cold pancake with orange jam. Tony did not eat pancakes. They were kids’ food as far as he was concerned. It was endearing to watch him discover the breakfast tray Darcy had prepared for him before the woman got sucked into making breakfast for the entire team. Everyone was watching Darcy and Captain Rogers sass each other, which was great entertainment and a welcome change from the stress of the last 24 hours. Pepper caught him from the corner of her eye as he made the discovery, the surprise on his face when he inspected the content, a stack of pancakes, a cup of extra strong black coffee, fruit and his favorite veg smoothie, freshly made just for him… Once they saw the team off, he was back to have it, even if it was all cold…

“Tony, that’s rude.”

“Yes, honey…”

“You know, it will not kill you not to be a dick first thing in the morning.”

“There was no reason why they couldn’t see themselves out. They are big kids.”

Darcy smiled into her tea and Toy gave her a suspicious look.

“That what happens when your kids crash at your fortress of solitude.” Pepper wondered if there was any popcorn left. This was too good not to fully enjoy.

“I beg your pardon?”

“You know you should warn a girl when you start dating about the kids from your previous on an off relationship with SHIELD. I get that you got together, for a little mutual Fun and Science, and BOOM! You got left with four kids and bills to pay. But still, you can’t be mad if, when they drop in to visit, I’m nice to them. You shouldn’t be jealous, they are allowed to like other people. At least, if we had met through online dating your profile would have had all kids above 18.” Darcy gave a cheeky smile as Tony gaped before recovering.

“Best step mom ever.” This time it was Darcy’s jaw that dropped as she sputtered in indignation.

“What? I do not mommy people.” It was clear that Tony wasn’t the first to suggest such tendency in her behavior. He grinned wider.

“You made them packed lunch.” Pepper did her best to suppress a grin, she had also been offered that option but the food was provided on flight and she had to refuse.
“They got up early and will be traveling for next several hours!”

“You made Romanov put one of your sweaters on.” Pepper was honestly disappointed to have missed that.

“It is six in the morning. Have you been outside? It’s cold and all she had on was a t-shirt and jeans. A t-shirt, Tony. Besides, we all know she was humoring me. No one makes Natasha do anything.” She mumbled the last part.

“So did Rogers… But he didn’t get offered anything. Is that ’cause none of mine would have fitted him?” There was a lengthy pause from Darcy as she glared at Tony and the man laughed again as he got up.

“I don’t see how that is relevant. I am going to bed. Pep, I am …”

“Come here,” Tony pulled the protesting Darcy into his arms, ignoring Pepper’s presence and kissed her soundly on the lips, “you are great… The best actually. The kids are happy to have you now, you are handling them like a pro, Honeybuns.”

“Oh my Thor… You know what? Despite previous protests, that totally makes you the Dad, Tony. You pay the bills, run to help when they’re in trouble, embarrass them on every possible opportunity by making lame jokes…”

“I have a fantastic sense of humor. You love it. They are yet to reach the level that requires for understanding it…”

“Reach the level? So, like, lay down? I think they’re already digging to find your jokes… Hey!” Tony couldn’t stop to grinning when he scooped her up. There was a slight pang of jealousy, Pepper admitted, at that smile directed to someone else, but there was also the relief that comes right after. They were good. Finally. The bitterness that hung between them was slowly fading. It felt good not to have the nerve wracking tension and guilt at their every meeting…

“Let’s get some more sleep into you, my bright little spark. Pep…”

“I’m good. I will find my way out…” She smiled. It was charming to watch Tony go all soft on Darcy and the woman go all pink in the face.

“You can’t just leave a guest…”

“She is not a guest. She is part of this madness, also having in mind she had already slept on your …”

“She slept on my chest. Big deal. I decide who can do that, not you. Ugh… now I will have to make the cake after we get back, for Rogers memorable day. They should have stuck around longer today.”

“They stuck around yesterday. That is plenty…”

"Bye, Pepper! Call me when you get there!” She shouted over his shoulder.

Pepper had to laugh out loud as Tony carried the woman away. “I will!”

“See…” Pepper could hear the smile in Tony’s voice.

“I do not mother people…” The argument clearly carried on as they rounded a corner and
disappeared out of her view. Tony was so gone for that woman, it was astonishing to witness. But on the other hand, Pepper’s mind went back to the last night and the hours she spend sobbing in Darcy’s warm embrace, it felt good. Someone giving their affection without reservation, without judgment or delay. It felt like the simple genuine affection Darcy Lewis had for her clung and coated Pepper’s skin, her mind, even when the brunette was no longer in her presence, leaving this warm soft protective glow. Maybe in way she was gone for Darcy Lewis too…

Darcy watched the beeping machinery as Tony’s doctor checked her over again. She hated hospitals even when it was just a med room in Tony’s house. It made her skin crawl and it smelled funny.

“Have you slept well tonight, Ms Lewis?” The man looked like a kind of neighborly grandpa, who wasn’t at all fazed by the overprotective boyfriend hovering nearby.

“One could say that…” “No.” Tony replied at the same time as her; he looked tired. Darcy suspected that he hadn’t slept majority of the night between the times he was waking her up.

“You didn’t sleep much.”

“I will tonight. Right, doc?” Dr Markwell smiled at Tony.

“It seems that Ms Lewis is doing better, Mr Stark, and the results look good. How is your stomach, Ms Lewis? Any problems with keeping the food down? The stomach lining might be sensitive for a few days.”

“Skipped the coffee, felt OK after eating some pancakes, I say I am good.”

“Glad to hear that, dear.”

“Got anything to help an over-dramatic boyfriend to chill?” The doc coughed politely to cover the laughter as he glanced at Tony.

“Very funny, Shortstack.” He didn’t sound amused, but his lips twitched.

“I am rather certain Mr Stark will be able to procure something for himself.” Darcy’s eyebrows shot up.

“Scotch, Darce, he has in mind good scotch.”

“It is a passion that we share, by the way thank you for the last bottle, I didn’t know there were any still available from that year…”

“Well, there are. The contusions on her back look pretty bad. She had to lay on them because of nausea…”

“Tony, I’m fine. If you don’t believe me ask doc.”

“Ms Lewis is on her way to recovery.” He assured promptly.

“On the way to recovery?..”

“Oh, for the love of Thor, Tony, stop nit picking…” She was going to hit him with the medical pillow. It seemed to Darcy that Tony wanted her wrapped up in bubble wrap and then stored in some bunker and all she wanted to do was catch up on sleep.
Tony watched on one of the screens as Darcy sipped her juice and turned the page of her *Engineering for Dummies* as she sat nestled on his workshop sofa, he even saw himself from that angle... They just had a blazing row about that and he managed not to win. He really wasn’t getting why she needed it. First he assumed t was some private joke between her and Foster, but when Darcy settled and started reading it, *reading and taking notes*, he couldn’t take it.

“This is ludicrous…” There was no response to the statement as his girlfriend kept reading despite the fact that his voice must have carried across the room easily enough.

*Engineering for Dummies*… the fact alone that she owned it was incomprehensible to him. Darcy Lewis had broken physics. Her work was revolutionary in its field and she was reading *Engineering for Dummies*... *Okay,* it was a given she had a degree in Political Science and must had been missing some theoretical skills, but he was right here. Spark could ask him anything and the information that he were to supply would be...

“Tony, what’s a study of motion on bodies… kinematics?”

“It’s kinetics. So what are you on now?” Tony was out of his seat and over at the couch before Darcy finished the question.

“Covering the theory of Kinetics.”

“Why?”

“Because it is one of those things I need to know, but don’t.” She wasn’t even looking up from the damn thing.

“But you do…”

“I don’t, Tony, and I don’t want to argue about this again…”

“You should be on at the very least advanced mechanics instead of…”

“I am not as smart as you, Tony!” Darcy snapped as he dismissively pointed to the book in her lap. “I cannot keep winging it, ok? I cannot keep making vague references to the most basic stuff because I don’t know it, it will bitch slap me in the face and I don’t want that. I know you tried explaining it to me but I can’t keep up, ok? I picked up Astrophysics from Jane but I haven’t had much exposure to mechanics.”

“You picked up one of the most complicated sciences *as a side hobby.*”

“By accident!”

She just made his point as far as he was concerned. Tony didn’t get it. He could answer her every question. Put in a perspective, expand...

“Exactly .”

“I can’t keep up with you, Tony. I haven’t got the years of experience that you got. I can’t relate to most stuff you bring up. You make me confused, ok?”

“I’m trying to help you…” Tony was trying not to be offended. He wanted to help. Darcy had an extraordinary mind. The problem was that she kept selling herself short and it drove him mad.

“I know! Tony, *I know.* I really appreciate it but I need to start picking it up at my own pace. I am
learning how to walk and you hover over me upset that I am not flying yet. I need time.”

“Darce, I understand that expanding the field of your experience when all you had was Foster to work with is…”

“And Erik.”

“Erik?”

“Erik Selvig.”

“Selvig worked with Foster?” Tony felt his stomach drop. Loki could have gotten to them. Easily.

“Well, yeah… Tony, what's wrong now?” Shortstack seemed to be picking up on his mood lately and Tony grinned to cover the misstep.

“Nothing. He is a brilliant scientist, haven’t read any of his works lately…” SHIELD had never said anything… the fuckers…

“He is still recovering after Loki fucked him over. He teaches, but it will take some time for new papers to come out for him. He's loads better though.” Tony nodded. It was good to hear. After what the man had gone through Dr Selvig had been in a regrettable state when they handed him over to SHIELD. “I appreciate you trying to help me, Tony. I do. It's great.” Darcy closed the book and gave him a tired smile. They still hadn’t had decent sleep. She smiled wider and pushed him so that he lay back on the sofa as she settled next to him. “But some of the stuff goes over my head because I don’t know the most basic of Engineering. It annoys me…”

Tony kicked his shoes of as they lay on the sofa, and kissed her forehead. “I can explain it…”

“I know you can… we are gonna take a short break and I will go back to reading and you to improving your shining example of modern engineering…”

Tony readjusted the cushion under his head that Darcy gave him. They could do with a break and then he would talk her into letting him help.

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Tony was still out cold next to her, snoring lightly, as she woke up couple of hours later.

“Jarvis?” the room was darker than she remembered. The AI must have dimmed the lights when they fell asleep.

“Good afternoon, Ms Lewis. It is five minutes to four.” AI’s soft voice drifted to her helpfully as she stretched, trying not to wake the man that was spooning her. Those few hours were not enough, but she woke up on her own, which was a bonus and meant that Tony would have to let her sleep at night. She was already looking forward to that.

So she just lay there trying to comprehend all that had happened in a span of merely a week. It was truly surreal situation she was in, no matter how Darcy looked at it.

Mainly... Tony Stark happened. How did he happen to Darcy Lewis was another thing. It wasn’t like she was even looking for a boyfriend, because she wasn’t. She was still getting over Ian and …

Seriously, Tony Stark? It took a week but the situation was kind of sinking in. It all looked a little different when she was not in a rush and things weren’t happening around her. Anthony Edward Stark was her boyfriend. Like, seriously, she managed to hook up with the most eligible bachelor on
the planet. Right… And it wasn’t even a hook up, he wanted her to stick around… like, on permanent basis as his official significant other.

It was weird… the denial only could get her so far. Which was still pretty far having in mind that she’d been living with the man for a week now… in the Stark/Avengers Tower’ Penthouse… Darcy’s mind was slightly jamming as a little over a week ago she was buying discount pasta in bulk. That was some jump. Tony had given her his card too… Darcy blinked. She’d forgotten all about that.

Right. Back to the main issue… despite all her bravado, did she really want to get into all that? She was only a week in and it was kind of fun when it wasn’t crazy, but being with Tony Stark was more than just her being someone’s girl. First the whole billionaire, philanthropist business… and playboy history, extensive one at that. Avengers thrown in the mix just to complicate things up a little more…

Tony snorted and shifted behind her. The man was a walking, talking collection of issues and a grade A+ asshole…

“Why are you googling that shit again, Spark?” Darcy nearly dropped her phone as a sleepy voice murmured next to her ear.

“Jesus, Tony, warn a girl…”

“Warning... Your boyfriend is up, why are you googling that shit again, Spark? They haven’t got your name.” Hand that was resting on her hip gave a little squeeze and drifted up to settle just below her breasts.

“How do you know?”

“Jarvis! Do they know the Mystery Woman’s name yet?”

“I have not detected any mention of Ms Lewis so far, Sir.”

“See?... You smell nice… are you using my shampoo?”

“I didn’t pack mine…”

“You just tell Jarvis, he knows which one you use in the Tower --Not that I object you using mine...”

“Ok…” It was another thing that Darcy started to struggle with. The AI. It was all cool and fun as she moved in and he was still cool. But the comprehension that she was being watched, while not invasively, but constantly, took time to get used to now.

“How are you feeling?”

“Better, thanks… The sleep helped.”

“Good. Let’s go on a date.” He said instead.

“What? ” Darcy twisted around to see Tony’s face.

“A date. You and I. It has been brought to my attention that we haven’t had one yet. We should go. Sometime this week when you build up your strength.” Tony was rubbing his sleepy face before he leaned in and kissed her gently on the tip of the nose as Darcy gaped at him.

“But the paparazzi…” But she liked the idea. Yes, she wanted a date. The warm feeling spread
inside her. Darcy was beginning to suspect that she was starting to really like the man smiling at her.

“Leave that to me, Honeybuns.” The smile turned into a grin and Darcy was suddenly reminded that her boyfriend was Tony Stark. At least Darcy could be sure of one thing – it was going to be unforgettable. Tony Stark did nothing half way.

The plot bunnies were a little uncooperative due to heat so he chapter came out a little flat. But I hope you still enjoyed it =)

Let me know what you think! many thanks in advance =) you keep me going =)
Chapter 46

Wino,

Thank you for squeezing the editing of my work into your day =)

You are the best as always =)

Darcy sat in one of the fancy designer lounge chairs and watched the ocean. After a couple more arguments she had managed to convince Tony to leave her alone for a few hours here and there during the last couple of days. Being with Tony was fun, but also tiring… besides, she was never the girl that wanted to be attached to her man at the hip. Darcy needed her space. Tony needed to do other stuff too, she was sure of that. Being his sole focus wouldn’t work in the long run, and neither him being her only concern.

No. Darcy Lewis was not her mother, the well respected Mrs Beckett. That was how she got hooked on Ian, SHIELD’s Fuckboy. Getting too excited about someone’s attention. It seemed that all the insecurities that the 9woman had given her still lived in dark corners of her mind, ready to poison her thoughts. Like now for example. Tony was turning out to be a decent man, a bit of an asshole by nature, but a decent man. He was good to her and Darcy liked it. She could be herself and that was liberating. The upcoming date was something that she was looking forward to. Except, her mind for some reason kept repeatedly drifting to the few years before she left for college. She did not want to see those people again. If only she could avoid her name getting out… a headache was building up behind her eyes. Seeing that lot was not what she was looking forward to, but that wasn’t going to be a choice once Darcy Lewis was officially tagged next to Tony Stark in the papers.

‘Joy…’

“Hmmm…” There was a pleasant ache in his muscles as Tony worked out. It had been too long since the last time he put himself through the paces and the muscles complained at the strain.

Shortstack was studying again. And by studying, Tony meant that she was cramming. As a person that complained how much she liked sleep, the woman was up at seven, had breakfast and put her nose in the books till someone reminded her to eat. She studied in earnest; the only breaks were to get something to eat and go to the toilet and speak to Foster. The last one being the most frequent. Tony grimaced at that. Even he wasn’t allowed to interrupt… The notes were piling up on the table
in his workshop that she utilized to her needs and the number of books used for referencing increased with his help. Occasionally, Tony managed to draw her into a debate about the new field she was immersing herself in and he was impressed at the quality of progress that she was making every time. She was taking her time ensuring that she knew what she was talking about.

And didn’t that just make him want her more…

He switched to machine bench press and started pumping. Slowly but relentlessly. Was it her aim to drive him insane with need?

The attraction that their very first conversation had sparked had long since morphed into lust, which in turn had been slowly burning and turning into hunger. Raw and pure. It had set in the marrow of his bones. At one point Tony tried to control it, to dampen its spread. But that was an emotion that proved untamable. Darcy was taking her time with him and it was fair enough. The slow smoldering hunger in the pit of his stomach showed no sign of dwindling. Did she know how hard it was becoming to stop when they fooled around? When her soft eager hands touched his skin, did she feel the fire that she was stoking just underneath it? She was killing him in a most delicious way…

The hair on his strained, sweaty body suddenly rose without any apparent reason and Tony snapped his eyes open to find the woman his mind was so wrapped around sitting on a bench right in front of him, head cocked to the side, her hair in a messy bun, still in his sweats and t-shirt from the morning and glasses sliding down her nose as those clever eyes were glued to him. Tony slowly pulled the towel from around his neck and wiped the sweat from his face. Darcy wasn’t smiling. She was examining him like one of the equations in the textbook. It didn’t feel like time to be talking. Tony could hear her move closer to him as he twisted to reach the water bottle. His body felt electric suddenly, hungry. He felt like an animal feeling the approach in his bones. ‘Why are you doing this to me?’

He was going to say something witty to lighten up the obviously thickening air between them but she was already standing next to him, looking down. It was like he could sense it. He was up before she made the move to reach for him. Their lips met in a bruising kiss. Tony was sure he tasted blood as their mouths opened.

There was no doubt that Darcy had started picking up his mood. She clawed at him, pulling closer. The eyes were what undid him. When they broke their kiss for air, Tony watched those pretty eyes darken as the pupils dilated. The hunger inside him wasn’t smoldering anymore; it turned into an inferno in his blood.

The sound of tearing cloth startled them both. Tony made himself look down to see that he had torn the t-shirt Darcy was wearing from bottom up to the collar, right up the middle. The woman gave a nervous giggle after she cleared her throat.

“Will you look at that…”

Oh, Tony was looking alright. At the soft creamy skin, the ample breast covered by the black lacy bra. He was still holding the torn edges. He was an animal. Darcy stepped closer, closing the gap between them. The mental gymnastics required to control himself so not to bend her over that bench were making Tony stagger backwards but, as he still had a hold on what remained of the t-shirt, Darcy followed suit, nearly losing her footing and making Tony once again wrap his hands around her.

“Shit, Tony. A no would have been enough."
“A no?” It was his turn to laugh.

“Yeah…”

“Spark, I would fuck you right now on this floor till you begged me to stop.” The laugh that was meant to lighten up those words, but what somehow made past his newly installed and not yet fully functional filter came out rasping, just emphasizing what was said. Also, he was certain she could feel the hard on that was poking her in the belly now.

“Oh…” Her eyes widened and he forced himself to breathe deeply.

“I... Yeah, I will take a shower and we can have lunch. What do you think?” He should get a fucking medal for managing to let go of the woman and step aside.

“If you want…”

“Yes, I do want, but not this time.” Because there was no way he could keep his hands to himself if Darcy helped to wrestle his trouser snake. He was in a state. His blood was hot. Darcy deserved better for their first time than him losing control and just fucking her. He wasn’t kidding, she would have to beg him to stop in the state that he was in and even as hungry for her as Tony was right now, he knew it could ruin things between them and it was a chance he was not willing to take.

“I feel like I should ask if Tony was OK with us meeting?”

Darcy spared Pepper a glance from the menu.

“And him not liking it would be a reason for me not to meet you because?…” Pepper did not hide the smile at the reply. That was pretty much what she expected.

“Let’s pretend that I did not ask it. How is he by the way?”

“The window is open a little and he got fresh water. He’s being a good boy. Thor, Pepper, he is a grown ass man. He’ll live. I got security with me.” The threat of SHIELD was very much real, but just like herself, Darcy had decided that it was not going to rule her life.

“I am surprised he didn’t drive you here.”

“He wanted to, but we spoke about it.” Darcy cleared her throat a little after saying that. Oh, Pepper would have loved to have been a fly on the wall for that conversation. Tony was protective with her, but with Darcy it reached a new level.

“And?”

“He’ll pick me up.” That was very unlike Tony to go for a compromise. Darcy wasn’t meeting her eye.

“That’s nice of him. Who did you get to distract him?”

“As it happened, I will have you know, that Rodhey was passing by. He dropped in.”

“How nice of him. What is he getting for it?” The good thing about a conversation with Darcy was that Pepper didn’t have to take the long route ’round. It was very refreshing.
“He wanted heads up if I was ever gonna let Tony ‘have it.’”

“Please, make sure he records that, if that is not too much trouble...” She looked at her menu. “Can’t decide what to have?” Darcy hummed under the breath at that as her eyes were still scanning the list.

“Too much choice. I want them all. It all sounds so delicious... Uh... Tony tried talking me into drinking one of his concoctions, again.” The women grimaced at the same time.

“Yes. Unfortunately he is stubborn like that. How about a classic selection? There will be a bit of everything. I forgot to ask if you are well enough to indulge in some champagne...” Since something like a concussion never stopped Tony from drinking, she wasn’t all that great at judging normal person’s capacity to handle alcohol while injured.

“Had a drink with Tony yesterday. The most watered down Strawberry Margarita on the planet, but still... so that is a yes to the champagne.” Pepper could imagine Tony quite literally flavoring the drink with just a few drops. It must have pained him to add them to begin with from the way he was handling the entire situation.

“Bellini?”

“That is champagne with peach juice, right?” Pepper nodded as she indicated to the waiter that they were ready to order. “Fancy. I’ll have that. Jane would absolutely hate it. I need to bring her here.” Somehow Darcy Lewis was still not what Pepper expected. The woman’s capacity to surprise you seemed to never end. But, unlike Tony, it was in a good way. They were having afternoon tea. Pepper had managed to squeeze a couple of hours on her way back from Canada to swing past Malibu and see her. Their first meeting hadn’t been what one could call pleasant under the circumstances. Pepper wanted to show that she appreciated what Darcy had done for her and, having in mind that Dr Foster was still in London, thought some female company would do the brunette good and so would getting out of Tony’s smothering care.

“It’s very refreshing.”

“I bet. Nothing like getting plastered in style.” The woman winked at her as she once again looked around the lavish balcony they were sitting at. It looked like she was enjoying herself. Pepper once again had to admit that the woman looked beautiful in the soft pastel yellow colored dress and cardigan. Full smiling lips painted red. All other things aside, it was no wonder Tony fell for her...

“Darcy. If you have any questions please do not hesitate to ask me. I know being with Tony is a roller-coaster on a good day.”

“Does Tony always fart this much at night?” Right. No drinking when Darcy Lewis was speaking. Pepper tried wiping her chin discreetly. Strikingly good looks were not the only reason why Darcy had caught Tony’s attention and was now his SO.

“Try to make sure he doesn’t have any smoothies after lunch. He drinks them like they will make him live forever.”

“They taste like balls.” There was a single solemn nod at that from Pepper. “Anyway, how did you end up working for him? He gave me an ode of how good he is at picking people.” Darcy’s eyebrows rose as to indicate that she wasn’t buying it and Pepper smiled.

“Tony used to go through assistants like socks.”

“And then you showed up?”
“And then, the HR person that was tasked with finding people, got so pissed he chucked a bunch of CVs at Tony and told him to pick. I was applying for part time receptionist. He picked at random. Told HR to hire me.”

“Why? Even Tony needs a reason.”

“And he had one. Believe it nor not.”

“Hit me.” Darcy took a sip of her drink and put it down, indicating that she was ready to know what Tony’s reasoning was.

“The Birthday was required for the application. Mine was misprinted. He thought I was 41. I think it was his attempt at being responsible. They let him get away with it for the very same reason. When I showed in person it was too late to fire me.”

“That… is actually not a bad reason. All things considered.”

“Yes. He was very excited and then suddenly disappointed to say the least. HR regularly booked me a spa afternoon once a week after I didn’t quit after the first week.”

“I gave Jane half my sandwich. She took me on right then. Oh, and no one else wanted the job as it was unpaid too… Spa afternoons once a week, nice... When I didn’t quit after Thunder-bro landed and the shebang that followed I got a mug.” The soft smile on Darcy’s face told that the mug was a much more appreciated gift than she made it sound. “Hopefully she will haul her scrawny ass to NYC before I have to do it for her. I love her, but she is hard work sometimes. Oh. Is that our cakes coming? It is. Pepper, oh wow. It looks like sex, but better. Not Tony level better, but better.”

Once again not starting laughing out loud was a challenge, and from the grin Darcy gave her she knew the effect she was having. The ‘Tony topic’ wasn’t an awkward elephant in the room much to Pepper’s relief. It was one of those things that Darcy wasn’t making a problem out of. Pepper had slept with Tony. They had been in a relationship for quite a while. But a lot of women had slept with Tony Stark. It was a fact and Darcy Lewis seemed to be handling it well.

“Well, yes, nothing is quite like Tony.” Pepper helped herself to an éclair and she noted Darcy shift uncomfortably.

“Yeah, nothing quite like him. So, just out of curiosity… how high are his expectations for, you know, the dirty deed?”

Pepper froze mid bite. She knew it, she very well knew it. Tony had to fuck up somewhere, didn’t he? He just had to. Of course he had to. The self centered prick. The man always felt like sex was his special entitlement. Pepper’s saving grace was that she had known him for years before they got into bed. Darcy had no such advantage and with the woman’s recent history… There was a taste of bile at the back of her throat as Pepper wished for the delicate champagne flute turn into a tumbler with a much more potent content so she could drink it right now and smash the glass into the man’s face. As it wasn’t happening, Pepper finished her drink in one go.

“Darcy, Tony Stark despite his strong conviction is not the God’s gift to women.”

“I know he isn’t, Pepper. That title belongs to chocolate, hands down. Like Thor would gift him onto womankind, please. ” Pepper nodded politely and even managed a smile. What the fuck had Tony done? Was he trying to fix it? Did he even know there was something wrong? “I mean, I read stuff online, but that is not the best source of info, so…” Pepper saw no other way, she was going to take a page out of Darcy’s book and get the bull by the horns. The issue had to be dealt with now before
it ruined what could potentially be the relationship that would bring a resemblance of stability and happiness into Tony’s life.

“Darcy, whatever Tony did…”

“Oh, he didn’t do anything.” The admission was so brief and honest that it made Pepper sigh in relief. Tony was just being selfish. That was an issue that could be dealt with easily enough. Pepper would just drop him a hint that actually him getting off was not what made the woman reach their own satisfaction. Darcy probably was reluctant to bring it up with him due to her past experience. Useless man…

“Yes, unfortunately, he can be like that sometimes. I will speak to him, Darcy.” The woman blinked at her and frowned.

“Pepper, that is not necessary…”

“It is not a problem, Darcy. He should be showing some consideration. Tony always makes it about himself…”

“Potts, he is not being selfish. When I said he hasn’t done anything is that we haven’t done anything… We haven’t done the deed.”

“Huh?” Pepper leaned back in the chair. “I’m sorry. So you are saying you haven’t done much with Tony?” Was the man showing some consideration and not being a sex pest all the time? That would be a welcome change. Pepper could see how Darcy, after reading Tony’s performance reviews online, would have questions as to why…

“No, I am saying that we haven’t had sex yet.”

“You haven’t had sex yet…” Pepper could hear herself repeating the words and Darcy was giving her a slightly concerned look and nodded.

“That is correct.”

“Tony finally got the whiskey dick.” It finally happened and he had but himself to blame for it.

“What? No.” Darcy’s jaw dropped at the statement.

“You haven’t had sex.” Well, there was always Viagra, Pepper thought again, plus Tony was inventive and he was damn lucky he got someone who was as considerate as Darcy as the relationship seemed to be progressing steadily…

“Sweet Thor… There is nothing wrong with Tony’s dick. OK?” Darcy gave a nervous look around; the topic was getting out of hand.

“I’m sorry, Darcy, but seeing as no deed had been done…”

“Hands on inspection have been performed, a few times, I am happy to inform that his equipment is in perfect working order.”

“But you haven’t had sex?”

“I’ve known him a week, and we been together just as long. We make out… Why are you looking at me like I just told you that he grew a second dick?” Because news that Tony grew a second dick would have surprised her less.
Would Darcy think it weird if Pepper ordered some shots? Tony Stark was sitting on his blue balls while Darcy got comfortable with him… So, maybe not shots… Vodka Martini? Yes. That sounded good. Darcy stayed uncharacteristically quiet as Pepper waived the waiter over and ordered. How to explain to a person that Tony Stark did not do things like that? It was not the sex, per say. Tony was not an animal; he could do without. It was what it implied. Tony’s unwavering commitment that put his daily needs below someone else’s comfort. He had hardly ever done it with her. Tony could be committed. He was committed to the Avengers, the clean energy, growth and prosperity of Stark Industries. It was the simple everyday things that he struggled with, because he would get sidetracked or lose interest … But clearly when it came to Darcy Lewis different rules applied. The brunette was mercurial in nature. The same but changing. And Tony was making a substantial effort to make sure it worked between them.

“I’m sorry, Darcy. That surprised me a little.”

“Why?”

“Tony…” Fucks a lot? Wants it daily? Is an emotionally challenged porcupine that expresses his affection through sex? “He is not usually that considerate.”

“He isn’t?... I mean, like, I think I heard every sex pun that has ever been conceived during this week, but he cools it pretty quick when I indicate that I am not up for it. We still make out, though. Which is pretty hot, since he is hot. So… want to help a sister out and share some spoilers as to what I should expect?”

“Don’t believe a thing you read online.”

“What? You mean I haven’t secretly pulled Tony from under you by pretending to be pregnant from a one night stand with him?”

Pepper gave her a steady look.

“Do yourself a favor and stop reading those.”

“Can’t help it. Apparently I am some Arab princess and our love is forbidden. I also sense that no great advice is forthcoming. ” What could she say to that? Pepper would have loved to help, but the rules that she played by no longer applied from the looks of things, so she just shrugged.

“You have Tony at the palm of your hand. Keep doing whatever you are doing. If there is something you don’t like, just tell him.”

“I rather hoped you were going to be more helpful.”

“I am his ex not a mind reader, Darcy. How about more champagne?”

“Who am I to say no? So, tell me about the most embarrassing thing you have caught him doing?”

“I already promised I will not share that.”

“Aww. Boo. Fine. What is the second most embarrassing thing you have ever caught him doing?”

Pepper had to give it to Darcy. The woman was relentless. Also funnily enough, Tony hadn’t asked her not share that little fact.
Hey Peepsters! How is the holiday season going? Or are you guys working just like me? So how did I do? Good? Bad? Let me know! Many thanks to those that leave comments as you guys keep me going=}
Chapter 47

Wino

Thank you for taking the time out of your holidays to work on my story

much appreciated =)

Chapter 47

“So you unplugged the machines… No. No, Jane. … I want photos. … I trust you, Jane. There is no one I trust more… in all things that have nothing to do with disconnecting your precious babies from the power supply… No, I am not being harsh… It took you two weeks to tell your mum that you are going to NYC?... Of course I did not call her and tell her… Why? One of the reasons being that she's been trying to set me up with Ralph… Ralph? Your cousin Ralph, which still lives with his mum and collects dead stuffed animals? … Yes, him. So, if she asks about me I am still gay for you. OK? So you will get it all ready before going to your mum’s place… Jane? Jane. I taught you that move. Pack. Last warning… Oh, no you don’t-” The line went dead and Darcy glared at the screen that went dark. She had enough. Packing was happening soon whether Jane wanted it or not.

Darcy glared at the phone in frustration. The conversation had shattered her concentration and she closed the book on her lap with a loud thud. Maybe she could go sit by the pool for a bit? Air her head a bit. Once again that day Darcy looked around the room. Why were they all so freaking huge? The irrational irritation had been building up since morning. Darcy knew there was nothing wrong with the room. It was a magnificently designed house with the most spectacular views everywhere you turned. Simply, today she'd woken up to Tony humming under his breath as he dressed in the adjacent room. The sound was neither loud nor intrusive. It was familiar… and for some reason it freaked Darcy right out.

She was still here. Her. Darcy Lewis. She was still here with Tony Stark. Still waking up in the bed that smelled of expensive fabric softener and Tony’s hair wax. The Crazy Express that she’d gotten on by mistake either finally slowed down or she just got used to its break neck speed and finally was able to look where she actually was. Darcy was sure that by now it would have stopped at either ‘Sorry Darling it is not working out’ or ‘I was drunk and/or on drugs the entire time the security will see you out’ and she would have been thrown off it. Yet Tony Stark was low key singing in another room as Darcy pushed the sheets that he must have tucked around her off herself.

This… Thing was getting more real every day. At first, as she had it sprung on her, Darcy honestly thought it was crazy because Tony Stark, but days passed and she was still here. The Here being with Tony. Hours and days passed until it turned into a week and now turned into another one. She was still here, having her lips kissed gently before they fell asleep every night.

It was weird. The Tony Starks of this world did not date Darcy Lewis’s. It did not happen. Everyone knew that. It just didn’t. It stood to reason… it just did. Except she was here and they were a Thing.
What was worse, a Thing had somehow turned into a *The Thing*, or Their Thing. Either way, time was passing and they were getting on with their lives, except now they were in each other’s lives… Surely *the Thing* was not supposed to last long enough for her to know how sleepy Tony looked in the morning as he spoke around his toothbrush with the toothpaste dripping down his chin…

Darcy nearly jumped out of her skin as the phone came alive, dragging her out of her musings.

“What was worse, a Thing had somehow turned into a *The Thing*, or Their Thing. Either way, time was passing and they were getting on with their lives, except now they were in each other’s lives… Surely *the Thing* was not supposed to last long enough for her to know how sleepy Tony looked in the morning as he spoke around his toothbrush with the toothpaste dripping down his chin…”

“Hello?” She answered after a while.

“Hi Darcy. It is Pepper. I need a favor. Is Tony there?”

“No. He’s got a conference call or something…”

“Yes, he does, and the Board and I are eagerly awaiting him to join it.” There was a slight echo and Darcy closed her eyes, guessing that she was on a speaker phone.

“Give me 10 minutes, Pepper.”

“Thank you, Darcy.”

“… By the way, how is the search for a new PA going?” She asked airily.

“Not great.”

“…Sweet. Talk to you later.”

Tony was reliable as far as SI went, at least Darcy thought that so far. He actually did quite a bit. It became evident as he stopped being so… clingy. Also, Darcy was sure there were people that got paid for chasing Tony and making sure he wasn’t skipping board meetings and last she checked it wasn’t her.

“What are you doing?”

Tony nearly dropped that device he was working on as Darcy snapped at him from the doorway to his workshop.

“Darcy, Honey, Sweetie before you…”

“I got a call from Virginia, guess who isn’t on their conference call? Huh?”

“I am not late…” Despite the objection Darcy could clearly see him wince as he spotted the time.

“Tony, please hire someone finally.” She was really trying to catch up on engineering theory and Jane was coming to NYC soon, whether the woman wanted it or not, so between Jane and the studies there wasn’t going to be much time and Darcy would rather spend it being the girlfriend instead of a nanny.

“You applying? It comes with a *great* benefits package.”

“No. Tony, I am not working for you. End off.” Wouldn’t that be a colossal mistake? Them being together all the time last few weeks put a strain on their relationship that they only felt after taking a step to be apart for few hours. Trying to convince her to the opposite had become somewhat of a pet project for Tony.

“It is actually paid.” Darcy gave him a one finger salute. Somehow that was a sore topic for Tony.
Why? Only Thor knew… or maybe even he didn’t.

“Move it, Tin Man.”

They made their way to the other side of the house, where facilities for conferences and meeting rooms allowed Tony to work without leaving his man cave slash lab. It looked more office-like, if such a thing were possible. In one of the rooms Darcy could see a long table with a single chair at the end and a projected hologram of Pepper Potts lounging at the other, looking annoyed.

The closer they got to it the slower Tony walked. At one point Darcy started to think that she might have to pull him by the ear. She felt like a teacher taking a kid to the principal’s office.

“Finally. Thank you, Darcy.”

“Welcome, Pepper.” Darcy was a startled as the hologram walked to them and glared at Tony. They were probably also projected where Pepper was right now. Once again the woman was dressed impeccably and Darcy was glad she had put make-up on today and wore something that wasn’t Tony’s.

“In my defense I was working.” Tony made a vague gesture as if it somehow justified his tardiness.

“No, you weren’t, Tony. You were playing around with our yesterday’s gadget.” The man had managed to drag her into a little scientific experiment he was playing with at the time, which happened to be a shiny new StarkPhone prototype. They were talking and talking and it was so nice, when she got stuff wrong he didn’t make a big deal out of it, they just moved on and it was a bit like being on drugs. She wanted more of that excitement when she let her brain and imagination fuse and come up with seemingly outrageous things and Tony encouraged her to do that. It had been a fun evening.

“I had to transfer the changes we made to SP12H…”

“Tony. Are you making changes to the prototype again? You can’t keep doing that we need to start the mass production soon, you can’t keep springing them…” Pepper looked pissed and Darcy was happy it wasn’t at her.

“Remember how we couldn’t find a way to mass produce the power source stable enough to have the new display?”

“Yes, I do. That would put us ahead of any competition on the market not to mention the …” Darcy looked past the Shimmering Vision of Pepper Potts to see that there were plenty of other projected people seated all around the table watching them curiously. ‘Board meeting … right.’ That felt like her cue to go.

“Well, it got solved yesterday.”

“… secondary uses in.. what?” The redhead’s jaw actually dropped; it must have been big news. What was Tony doing before she joined in? They were messing with that display… Darcy closed her eyes and gritted her teeth. The display problem. That was it. She got tricked. The man had been stuck, he was not engaging her in what he was doing he was solving his own problems.

“You are such an asshole, Tony.”

“I’m offended, Darce. Yesterday…” He sounded taken aback but Darcy by now knew better.
“Wait wait. You solved it?” Pepper sounded like she just been told that Christmas came early.

“It is not solved. The technology to manufacture it doesn’t exist…” Darcy’s brain was catching on the situation and she didn’t like it.

“Actually... Pepper, we need a new factory build ASAP. Can you get that sorted, please?”

“You said that it doesn’t exist!”

“Yet. There was no point to invest into it if I couldn’t actually design the battery to last.” Here it was. Darcy had enough of Tony’s conviction that he was entitled to fucking everything she had.

“You designed it, Tony, but I designed it to last. What did you say about coming along and building on the work done? Hmm? I remember you having a very firm opinion on that.” There was a slight change in Tony’s eyes. He remembered and he also was seeing where this was going now. “I guess that makes it Lewis-StarkPhone Prototype.”

“Darcy…” Tony wasn’t smiling anymore. She knew he liked naming things after himself.

“Remind me again when we spoke about using my intellectual property in SI production?” Darcy snapped her fingers in front of Tony’s face as he opened his mouth to speak again. “That’s right, we didn’t. You didn’t even ask. You assumed I will be ok with it. What have a told you about assuming you can have my stuff ’cause you want it? ”

“You will be paid and adequately credited for the work… And it was exactly what I was trying to talk you about when you dropped me here...!” She had no doubt that SI would compensate her for her input. Handsomely. Tony would make sure of that. It was a fact. It wasn’t the problem. Darcy did a sharp intake of breath and let it out through her teeth with a hiss.

“Oh, for fucks sake… Right. No. I had enough. This is what we will do. Get the paperwork ready for me to look at and build a case on the subject why I should allow Stark Industries to use what I have created in their product. You, Tony, not being a factor in it in any way. I don’t think you realize that I do not work for you or for Stark Industries. I am here in a purely personal capacity and you need to stop pissing me off by not listening to what I tell you.” Darcy had enough. If that was how he wanted to play, that was how she was going to play it. There was no smile on Tony’s face and the look he was giving her was incredulous, as if she'd missed the point. That might have intimidated a lesser woman but Darcy only snorted.

“You were enjoying it yesterday. I know you did. You want this upgrade to happen. We will work this out. Can I please use it in the new prototype?” Really, Tony?

“Paperwork.” For emphasis Darcy extended her hand palm up between them and he regarded it for a second before gently taking it and bringing it to his lips all the while keeping their eyes locked, to lay a kiss on the inside of her wrist.

“Pepper?” Tony kept their eyes locked and Darcy raised a brow. He was so used to people letting him have his way all the time. It was time to teach this dog new tricks.

“Please give us till the end of the week, Darcy.” Pepper sighed half smiling.

“Till the end of the week it is.” Tony was still holding her hand as Darcy gave him toothy grin. She was going to go through with it hell or high water. “Enjoy the conference, Tony.” When he let go, she intended to turn around and leave, but Tony took a step forth to press his lips to hers before grinning himself.
“You will be the death of me.”

Darcy barked out a laugh and winked as she leaned in and kissed him again. “They’ll never prove it.”

Hello, my lovely Peepsters! So what is the verdict? Good? Bad? Let me know and keep me going =) Many thanks as always, hope you enjoyed my latest offering =)
Chapter 48

Wino,

As always

Thank you

What would I do without you =)

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‘How many times is it possible to underestimate the same person?’

Pepper Potts, along with the SI Board, had been treated to a presentation from Tony. The man did not wax poetics how wonderful Darcy was once the woman had left the room. No. He did it in a more convincing way. He spoke numbers. That little tweak, that one of directors outright called the Lewis Upgrade, was more than just a shiny new feature for the next StarkPhone. The implications of the possibility to be able to mass produce equipment with it at a reasonable cost meant that they were now ahead of any and all competition. Stark Tech was of high quality, but that always meant that the cost of production was also high to reflect that, leaving the profit margin suffering. But this was a thing that could up it more than significantly.

And it was on hold from happening because certain someone just had to be a prat. No one at the meeting was impressed at that. Even after Tony stated quite a few times that he fully intended Darcy to be recognized for her outstanding work.

“We need to file for a patent now before anyone gets a hold of it.” The heavily accented voice of the Spanish branch of SI Director finally stated what everyone thought. There was a noise of agreement around the room as their eyes drilled an unfazed looking Tony. The exclusive right to the innovation had to be protected. It was a small thing that was going to enable a great number of other projects currently on hold to go ahead. Darcy going up in arms for an unfair treatment was a problem.

Pepper wondered how many present hampers Darcy was going to receive individually from the Board members as gestures of good will and desperation… Huh… Maybe she could call up in a couple of days and check… Darcy was going to need to be advised on how to handle that kind of attentions, not that being a Poli-Sci major didn't give her a leg up. Being Tony’s girlfriend was one thing, but now the Board had a vested interest in ensuring that Darcy Lewis was tied to SI. Tony was, quite frankly, their golden goose but the addition of the potential that was Ms Lewis could make Stark Industries unstoppable, if Tony’s estimates were anything to go by.
‘Welcome to the mad house, Darcy.’ Maybe it would be a good idea to get Darcy a PA too?

The conference call dragged on and Pepper was just too happy when it finished. It naturally ended with more than polite inquiries about Ms Lewis’ health as the crutch and cast were hard to ignore. Pepper winced. At least they didn’t see the bruises on the woman. It would do no good to anyone if it was assumed that Tony was somehow mistreating Darcy. She wondered how many investment offers she would receive to get her own start up off the ground…

Pepper shook her head to focus. Somehow, everything that involved Darcy Lewis moved at an increased pace. There was certain gravity that the woman had and SI became just one of many objects that were now orbiting around her.

“Apologies, Ms Potts. There seems to be an issue in the reception.” Pepper frowned as Jarvis’ smooth voice drifted from the ceiling. That was not a place that usually required attention of the company’s CEO.

“What is the matter, Jarvis?”

“A call has come in three minutes ago, requesting to be put through to Ms Lewis.” That got Pepper’s attention.

“Is it the press?” She really had hoped that Darcy’s name wouldn't make the headlines just yet, giving the brunette more time to adjust to her new situation. It had been made abundantly clear to the SI personnel that anything related to Ms Lewis was to be handled with uttermost delicacy and caution.

“It doesn’t appear to be so. Do you wish me to put the conversation on, Ms Potts?” Who else would be calling Darcy at the reception? Everyone she knew had the woman’s personal contact or would go through Jarvis.

“Please, Jarvis.”

“… I said I want to speak to Darcy!” The shrill voice nearly made Pepper jump up.

“I am very sorry Ms, but in order for me to put you through, you will have to provide me with a name and purpose of the call, to ensure that I am putting you to a relevant person within Stark Industries.” Whoever from the reception team was handling the call they did an admirable job at staying cool and collected. They were getting a bonus this week.

“She is a secretary to an astrologer or something. Who would want to be put through… Ugh! Fine. Kathryn Beckett wishes to speak to her.” Pepper had no recollection of Darcy ever mentioning the name and from the tone … Her computer screen lit up and Darcy’s file appeared before her: the name was highlighted, and there were comments added by Jarvis. ‘… suspected physical and emotional abuse by the family members...’ Pepper’s eyes widened as she read it. That wasn’t in the original report.

“… and that will be regarding?” The receptionist wasn’t giving up and Pepper was pleased that they had set protocols in the Tower how to handle anything related to Darcy before they left for Malibu. Make it a nice bonus for Christmas, too.

“Jarvis, add me to the call and disconnect the receptionist with an apology from me.”

“I said -”
“Good afternoon, Ms Beckett…”

“Who is this?” That sounded like an insult and no mistake. That was how you would speak if you found something stuck to the sole of your shoe. Pepper closed her eyes for a second and the just read comments swirled behind her eyelids. She remembered well the time when women like this tried to get to Tony by brushing her off, because she was nothing more than his lowly PA and hence didn't have to be respected in any way.

“An associate of Ms Lewis. How may I help you?”

There was an overly dramatic sigh on the other end that would have made Pepper to dislike the woman even without reading Darcy’s file additions.

“Well, at least someone knows who I am.” The woman spoke like the name Beckett had to mean anything to Pepper for some odd reason. It really didn't and there was a level of satisfaction when she burst that little bubble.

“Yes, you introduced yourself. Can you please state the purpose of this call?”

“Is Darcy there?” Ms Beckett pronounced Darcy’s name like she was talking about a steaming pile of horse dung. How could anyone even manage to pack this much contempt into a single three word sentence?

“Ms Lewis is currently otherwise occupied and is unable to take your call. I will gladly take a message on her behalf.”

“Oh, of course she is. Does she even work there?” This conversation was bizarre and Pepper wondered if she should have let Jarvis handle it.

“Ms Beckett…. ”

“Well! I haven't got time for this. I have prior engagements to attend to… Darcy could never be trusted to be where she should be.” Pepper didn’t see how that was any of Darcy’s fault. No one sat around waiting for some deluded calls. “You can never rely on her, I can tell you that now. You will be disappointed if you expect anything from her.” Another dramatic sign. “I guess it cannot be helped. People like her…”

“Please state your business, Ms Beckett.” The sharp tome of voice must have made the other woman loose her train of thought as there was silence on the line for a few seconds.

“Mother is having health issues, she is in the hospital. If Darcy had any decency she would be here. But that would be too much to expect as we all know…”

“I will pass the message along to Ms Lewis. Thank you for your call!” Pepper wished that she was on the landline so she could slam it down. “Jarvis, get Tony on the line.”

“What is the deal with Darcy’s family?” Tony choked at Pepper's words; he was happy that Jarvis connected Pepper to his phone as the woman in question was seated further in the same room studying. Again.

“Hi, Pep. I'll call you back in five.”

“Tony -”
“We’re in the same room. I call you back.” Tony hissed through his teeth as he was already crossing the workshop. Darcy had to get a booster shot yesterday after she nearly caused him to have a stroke as she passed out in the shower. Well, that was the quickest shit he had ever taken as Jarvis alerted him to the situation. She came around before he got to her, sitting in a corner crying that she didn’t want him to see her like this. He wrapped her in a towel and called for Velasquez when Darcy just wouldn’t stop sobbing, pressing her things together as the inside of them stained crimson red.

“Oh.”

Anemia and that time of the month didn’t mix well, as Tony discovered, and Darcy was still sluggish and irritable. He never had to deal with that before, Pepper had an implant and it was a non issue, so he kind of forgot about it. After a tense few hours as he came to grips what he could/should and shouldn’t do at the time like that, Darcy spend the night curled up next to him, so Tony assumed that they had successfully made it past that bump in the road. For this month… Chocolate pudding, hot water bottle, reduced noise levels and double the intake of the iron supplements were already on reminded on Jarvis’ log. He was going to be ready.

“Why the sudden interest?” Pepper picked up instantly and Tony didn’t bother with a greeting.

“What with the suspected abuse notes on her file? It was not there when I read it.” He forgot Pepper still had the access to some of his files.

“That was a recent discovery.” The silence after the statement spoke for itself.

“No.”

“Yes.” Small words could carry a lot of weight.

“Darcy’s mother is in a hospital.” Pepper sounded like she wasn’t sure if she should be saying that.

“And?” There was another pause.

“How will she take it?”

“Take what?” There wasn’t a problem as far as he could see.

“Tony, we can’t withhold this information… ” The conviction wasn’t strong on the other end and Tony pressed on

“Sometimes she wakes at night.” He said slowly, clearly, “Jerks and sits up. Ready to defend herself. There was a thunderstorm one night, strong winds, bad thundering. She jumped out of bed like it was on fire from the noise. She never remembers that, just falls right asleep. I have seen others do it. Always ready.” It was happening less lately. But every time it did Tony remembered who was to be blamed for it.

“Tony… It is not for us to decide. I will call her, how about that? Make sure you are nearby.”

“Her anemia is acting up.” He said immediately.

“I think what you need to do is stop making the choices for her. It probably slipped your notice but she doesn’t like it.” Pepper sounded conflicted but pressed on. She was making a fair point Tony admitted with annoyance.

“Give me ten minutes.” Tony took a deep breath. Well, this will be fun.
The Plot Bunnies are running a riot demanding to be fed! Leave a comment, Peepsters, and let me know what you think about the prospect of Tony finally meeting Darcy’s family =)
Tony always knew he had a bit of a control problem. Just a tiny teeny one, not nearly as big as Bruce was implying. Many things through his life had been decided for him. Where he would go to school, what he would study, the company he would lead… and he’d gotten used to people hating him because he was just that bit smarter, richer and funnier than them. After his parent' deaths Tony wasn’t very proud of how his life had gone, how he'd wasted all that time… at least he'd had something to regret all those months when he was stuck in a cave at the end of the world. Coming back from there, he did not deny, had felt good. He still remembered the taste of the cheeseburger he had that day…

He tried his best. He did. It wasn’t like he changed much; he simply tried. Tried to do right by those around him, the results tended to be mixed but it was the thought that was supposed to count, right?

Then there was the thing with Pepper and the band of mismatched wandering strays that just stayed at his house after he fed them… and clothed them and equipped them with everything. At that point he thought that he had seen it all in life. He was wrong. Cue Darcy Lewis.

“Why the long face, Cuddle Cakes?” Darcy looked still slightly pale but the smile on her face was encouraging as he sat next to her. Nothing could compare to his little Spark. Nothing.

“How are you feeling?” at that the woman fidgeted with the pen in her hand.

“Yeah. Not bad. Listen… I’m sorry about -”

“Yeah, I know. Stark naked in the bathroom? Who does that? You should have worn a t-shirt, like I did.” The reference to their interaction on the plane was hard to miss and Darcy leaned into him pressing her forehead to Tony’s neck. How could someone rip him a new one in the presence of the entire Board of SI Directors and yet cozy up to him like a small helpless animal? He wanted to salute her and hide her from the world at the same time.

The phone went off just as Darcy gently bit him on the earlobe. Gods… everything that woman did was loaded with possibilities.
“Huh? It’s Pepper… Is this about the paperwork, Tony? I don’t really feel like speaking to anyone right now…” Tony grimaced. He could agree with her. He could disconnect the phone. He could…

“Pick it up, Darce. You never know, it might be important.” He said instead.

“Hey, Pepper… How is it going?” The tired smile soon turned tense as she sat straighter. “Yes, I know her. What… Yes… Yes…” There was a startled laugh that didn’t sound at all funny. “You would not be the first to have said that, Pepper. Trust me… Ok. Hit me. What did she want?… Oh…” She paled more than she had already, “well, I… No, I am ok. Really. Thank you for passing the message. I appreciate that. … yeah… Talk to you soon.” Darcy just sat there looking straight ahead. “Mrs Beckett is in a hospital.” There was something horribly wrong when a child, even adult one, called their mother by the second name.

“… Really?” The lack of any intonation made Darcy turn and look right at him. He could not have cared less if Mrs. Beckett was being burned at the stake unless they were being invited to watch. He would gladly provide the drinks.

“When did you find out?” The expression must have been less neutral than Tony was aiming for.

“Few minutes ago. Pep thought I should have heads up in case you don’t take the news well.” It wasn’t really a lie.

“Yeah. So…” It looked like Darcy wasn’t sure how to take the news, looking somewhat lost, but she didn’t break down and cry so Tony was taking that as a good sign. “I think… I think I need some fresh air.”

They sat by the pool for a good twenty minutes until they were forced to move by rain. Darcy didn’t speak and it was freaking Tony out. They obviously got soaked by the time they got inside and still Darcy moved like she was in a daze. Tony tried to remember what his reaction was when he heard the news about his parents and his mind kept pulling blank. That wasn’t a good sign.

“Do you think I should go?” She asked abruptly.

“No.” The word was out of his mouth before he could stop himself. The plan was to be supportive. Pepper suggested it. Tony just didn’t see how letting Darcy jump into a snake pit was supporting her.

“Want to follow that up with a reason?”

“The fact that you asked me if you should go, for starters. My opinion would count as much as a last year’s snow if you wanted to go.” They stood just one step inside the house, watching the rain fall through the open door.

“Good point. I… I haven’t spoken to her since the week before my graduation from Culver.” Tony wrapped his hands around her shoulders and they just stood there. It felt awkward, like none of them knew what to really do. “I’m going.”

“You don’t have to…” How, without insulting her, could Tony express that there was a choice and she was choosing wrong?

“I know. Tony, can I ask you something?”

“Shoot.”

“You didn’t ask what it will be about.”
“Oh, sorry, didn’t realize that we were pretending that something like that would stop you.”

“Yeah. True.”

“So shoot, Spark. Light it up like a firework...”

“Would you say goodbye? I mean, if you had known. I mean, of course you would have... What I am saying if things were bad. I am not implying they were, just saying... Thor, what if she says that she is sorry for... everything? What if... Tony, what if? What if there is a perfectly reasonable explanation and I am just not seeing it?” Darcy’s voice broke and she pressed her face into his shoulder.

Saying goodbye... Tony swallowed thickly. He never got to do that. He was too angry and young to part nicely at the time. The world was at his feet and he had all the time in world to say such things later... but time had run out.

“You never talk about her.” That was the problem. Tony could only get that much out of Romanov and digging revealed only this much. The woman hesitated before answering and that only reinforced Tony’s opinion that she shouldn’t go anywhere.

“Well, neither did you.”

“I did, actually. We spoke about the Maria Stark Foundation and the charities it supports, I am sure I mentioned that she would have liked you. You didn’t mention the woman once. You spoke about Foster’s family, Vella’s. I didn’t even know Happy had a brother.”

“Well... you never spoke about your dad.” It looked like they were both picking at each other’s scabs.

“I hated his guts as I was growing up. But I never called him Mr. Stark all the time, for one. Who does that?”

“...I do.”

“Why?”

“Because, Tony...” The irritation was simmering just underneath the calm tone of voice.

“Sounds like a valid reason, just funny how Ms Beckett called her mother.” Darcy stiffened in his arms.

“How the Hell?”

“Jarvis, keeps tabs on incoming calls where people want you just in case it is the press.”

“Did anyone-?” The speculations were flying wild around as to who could be the woman that enthralled Tony Stark.

“Not yet. Give it time, though. So. I think it should be said that you going sounds like a totally bad idea. And I handled nuclear warhead mounted missiles. I don’t want you to get hurt.” Tony was speaking against her temple; he felt Darcy’s shoulders sag a little and he held her tighter. He was learning to tell things from the way Darcy held herself. The warm hands found their way under his T-shirt and were now pressed to the small of his back.

“I got an offer to work in a Senator’s Office in Washington after I graduated. Being at the top of the
“Breeding doesn’t make someone a parent, Darce. I would know. I was raised by one. Well, I wasn’t. Nannies and Jarvis did the job, and private schools, and occasionally my mother. She did make an effort, though.” At least he knew that she cared about him.

“I haven’t seen her since Christmas of the year that I left for Culver.”

“Didn’t you just say—”

“I haven’t spoken to her since the Graduation. I used to call up, you know, for birthdays and mayor holidays. Ten years now. Nearly.” The fuck?

“Holidays? I remember schools having those. Big breaks during which kids go home and visit family.” Who didn’t see their only child for ten years?

“Tickets were stupid expensive and I liked to eat so… and I worked too. Kind of thought of going home during my break year, as there was a problem with my loan application. They went to Paris so… no. Couldn’t stretch my finances that far.”

“Mr. Beckett is not a man on a minimum wage.” Darcy shrugged in his embrace, her posture still tense. Tony was beginning to wonder if their embrace was just a way for her to hide her face from him as they spoke.

“And his children are benefiting from that greatly. Yes. I am not his child.” And Tony was thankful for that.

“His children call Mrs. Beckett mother.”

“Yes, I know, Tony. Trust me, I have noticed.”

“What does she call you? Ms Lewis?” That was beyond plain wrong.

“No. It is Darcy Lou. It is not my name, ok? It's just Darcy. I kind of left that behind when I went to Culver.”

“Do you honestly think that if we roll up she will spill her guts to you? Imminent death does funny things to people, I would know, but the way they reached out to you…”

“Did Kat say Mrs. Beckett was dying? Did she actually use the word?”

“Health problems, I believe…”

“Fucking bitch.” That wasn’t the reaction he was expecting.

“Wha-?” Tony got pushed away as Darcy snarled and straightened.

“Health problems. You know what? I bet there is nothing wrong with her. Like, nothing. Uh! She is fit like a Navy Seal. Always been.” That sounded a lot like denial and anger. Tony winced. It sounded a lot like him back in the day.

“How sure are you about that?” Darcy pressed the heels of her palms to rub her eyes furiously. Whether that was to disguise the tears or because they were tired he wasn’t going to judge.
“I… Every single time I have ever thought that she wanted me there I was… I don’t know, Tony. I honestly don’t. You know what? I’m not putting it past her to be just peachy, but somehow wanting just to make me feel shitty. To have something to say like ‘Darcy Lou did not even call, but Kathryn wouldn’t leave my side, oh, how fortunate I am…’ I bet she isn’t even in the hospital.”

“Let’s do it.”

She turned to him, taken aback. “What?” Yes, those were tears she was trying to hide… and fear. She looked frightened, trapped. The doubt was behind those pretty eyes. Seeing that was like a punch in the gut. That was what they did to her. They bred the uncertainty in her. Her not being worthy of their time, affection, love. Not measuring up to their idea of perfection. Was that why Darcy got hooked on Agent Douche? Because she didn’t think she was good enough to deserve better?

“Let’s go. Visit her at the hospital. Let’s surprise her. Jarvis! Get the jet ready. Wasn’t that what she wanted, sending the banshee to guilt trip you?”

Darcy just stared at him. Frozen still. The reaction was odd and something occurred to Tony. Something painfully obvious.

“It is not the first time she pulled this on you.” This Beckett family started to sound like a bunch of sadistic con artists.

“No… I… No… not the first. She is my mother, Tony.” Darcy tried to pack that sentence with things that could not be expressed in words. It was full of anguish and resentment. “I have spent most of my life being angry at her for all the things that she never gave me. I am so tired of wondering if every word that she tells me is a lie. It is, like, I understand that things didn’t seem to work out between us…”

“Not working out? Darcy, you are not a cheap date she got saddled with. You are her only child. Her flesh and blood. Wild animals care about their litters more than your mother does about you. Look at yourself. You are perfection personified.” Darcy tried to push his hands away as he cupped her face. “How can someone not see how wonderful and generous you are?”

“Mrs. Beckett doesn’t think that… You know, I hope she is ok and at the same time I hope she is suffering and is in pain. Is there is something wrong with me that I want her to be actually ill, to want me to come and see her, to need me by her side? To need me, Tony. I am tired of wondering. Is this another lie? Is this, maybe, where she wants to make amends? She does this thing where every time everything is not her fault and she just doesn’t do anything… she never does anything.” Which was worse, Tony concluded. The tears were big and rolled down the pale cheeks. “Will you come with me?”

“Try and stop me.”

“This is going to be a disaster.” She almost smiled. He could hardly deny it. They both knew it. If they were to go there, to visit allegedly severely ill Mrs. Beckett, it would be to find closure for Darcy. To cut the string the woman had her daughter dangling on by either saying goodbye at her deathbed or by showing Darcy that her regrets were misplaced and break completely the connection to that part of her past, so it stopped slowly eroding her from inside.

“Great things often begin with disasters. Us for example. Or an omelette.” That earned a smile. That was step in the right direction.

“That reminds me. You can’t go as Tony Stark.”
“I am Tony Stark. ” He thought that was obvious.

“So I noticed. I just don’t want them to know for as long as possible. At least when I am there.” The implication of conclusiveness of her visit hung in the air.

“What do you suggest I do?”

The house shook at the outraged response to the suggestion that followed.

“I am not going as my own impersonator!”

So it is coming Peepsters, soon. So let me know what you thought of this chapter in the meantime =)
Chapter 50

Wino,

I know I say it every time, but I do really appreciate your help on this Story =)

Many Thanks

xxx

Chapter 50

“No.”

“I demand a second opinion.”

Darcy glanced across the bed at the man standing in his underwear, holding out two suits for her approval. She was done packing. Tony wasn’t, mainly because they couldn’t agree on what he should take.

“Well, phone a friend then. And it better be someone you are not paying.” She was stressed and Tony being Tony wasn’t helping. The jet was ready and waiting for them. They needed to go before she lost her nerve.

“Jarvis! Put Pepper on the line!”

“Tony, don’t bother her-!” Darcy frowned as the man turned from her and kept standing, holding the suits as if for another inspection. This was getting ridiculous.

“Ms Potts’ calendar indicates that she is busy…” They really needed to get a move on.

“Override! This is important. Visual feed both ways!”

“Tony, I really don’t think…”

The massive TV screen lit up and a flawless Pepper Potts was on the screen. Well, her back was.

“Pepper! Say these are perfectly fine!” The woman startled rather badly from the sharp voice and Darcy winced in sympathy, then winced again in horror as heads like some weird version of totem pole started appearing on both sides of Pepper. The woman turned along with the chair and hissed and her eyes widened once she took in the view.

“Tony!”

“These suits are perfectly acceptable to wear on any occasion. Just say it!”
“Why aren’t you wearing anything?!” There was a moment of silence after that, and Darcy found the fact that even Pepper was still shocked by Tony’s brazen lack of any manners somewhat consoling.

“I am in pants, t-shirt and socks, Pepper. Does the screen your end needs fixing? Get IT on it. Besides, there are photos of me wearing less. Much less. So back to business. The suits. I have worn them before…” The view at Pepper’s end must have expanded as the redhead’s wide eyes finally moved from Tony and, Darcy assumed, to herself, she cleared her throat.

“I… do not know this man, me being here is purely accidental. Actually, I am not even here.” She said loyally, to Pepper. At that everyone was looking at her, including Tony who gave a sidelong glance looking less than impressed. “And those suits are not going.” At that Tony’s attention was fully back on her.

“They are custom measured, tailored, ideal fit articles of perfection!” He protested. Darcy rolled her eyes. She wasn’t arguing that. Those were very nice suits and they fit Tony.

“And they are not what we need. I’m sorry…” They needed to wrap this up.

“You are not sorry, if you were…”

“Wasn’t saying that to you, Casanova. Pepper, I am sorry you've been dragged into this.” Darcy was sorry about that. No one needed to see Tony in his drawers while at work. Pepper already did her time.

“Pepper, tell me. Do you see anything wrong with these suits?” Tony wasn’t giving up. Darcy wondered sometimes if he even knew what giving up was.

“Yes! You aren’t wearing either of them! I am in a meeting.” A fact that never meant much to Tony Stark and he was not about to change that habit. Being who he was, the man took it as an invitation.

“Good point. Gentlemen and gentle ladies, your opinion … ”

Darcy sat down at the edge of the bed and buried face in her hands.

“There is nothing wrong with the suits, Tony. They are just too much… you.”

“Correct me if I am wrong, but isn’t that the point?”

Darcy let out a frustrated sigh.

“A person that impersonates Tony Stark doesn’t dress in custom made suits. It's expensive.”

“What is going on here?” Pepper was looking at them like they were both mad.

“What is going on? Let me tell you what is going on. Me being me is not enough these days.” Tony acted like Darcy just put his manhood under question.

“Oh, for the love of Thor, Tony. We spoke about it!”


“Tony didn’t do anything.” No matter how much Darcy was tempted to get the man in trouble with Pepper, he wasn’t actually at fault.

“Thank you. Maybe you can stop torturing me now?” Or maybe being on Pepper’s shit list would do him good.
“Oh, suck it up, Tony. There is no problem. You are making a very simple thing sound like…”

“Darcy, does it have anything to do with our earlier conversation?” There was genuine concern in Pepper’s voice and Darcy’ shoulders sagged a little. She didn’t want to make people worry.

“No.” “Yes.” Tony and her both answered at the same time. “Yes.” “No.” The second attempt didn’t go any better. “Let’s go with maybe, shall we?” Darcy really wanted to flip him off.

“We are going to visit Mrs Beckett and I can’t have Tony being, well, _himself_ all over the place. Not until I have… things sorted there.” Darcy wanted her family being their lovely selves and that wouldn’t happen with Tony Stark around.

Pepper nodded slowly, still warily observing the man.

“That makes sense. Who is he going as? Your PA?” That would have been funny, but Tony would have had to actually to follow instructions. That wouldn’t work.

“Myself, actually.” Tony still had the suits in his hands.

“That doesn’t make sense.”

“Tony is not going as _himself_. Tony is going as a man that impersonates Tony Stark.”

“Tony is going to impersonate a man… that impersonates Tony Stark?”

“Yes.” Darcy thought that it was a clever idea.

“See, Darce? It is not…” Tony didn’t.

“This is brilliant.” Pepper’s voice was muted slightly by the hand that she had pressed over her mouth. Tony turned sharply to look at his ex again. He’d been trying to talk Darcy out of it since she voiced it and Pepper approving the idea wasn’t helping his case.

“There is no conceivable way that this would work! _None_. Who thinks this will work? You! Behind Pepper! Santa’s lost cousin. What you think?” Everyone refocused on the white haired man seated next to Virginia Potts. Before, everyone had a curious yet shocked expressions on their faces, like people watching a high speed train crash. Now the realization downed on them that they were aboard said train.

“It is George Spools, Mr Stark. I… feel that it is in the best interest of my department that I should decline to comment.” That was a nice answer. Darcy grinned. Very politically correct.

“You are from Legal. Right. Shortstack…” And back to her.

_Shortstack nothing_, Tony. I am giving you ten minutes to find something tacky to wear. I have seen your photos online. Not all your looks are hits.” Browsing those was her guilty pleasure and it was driving Tony barmy.

“Or what?” Oh, so he wanted to up the stakes? Did he now? Darcy got to her feet and gave him a sly smile.

“Ever been to a charity shop? ” Tony’s hands dropped just slightly as the words sunk in. He didn’t like where it was going.

“I donate—"
“Oh no, to shop there. No? I bet I could find you a wicket outfit, barely worn, for under ten bucks. Imagine blue baggy dad jeans, white New Balance sneakers and Captain America T-shirt. All that still having aroma of someone’s sweat clinging to them.” The silence was deafening as Tony regarded her for a few moments before shrugging as if their previous argument hadn’t happened.

“Ten minutes you said?”

“I did.”

“Pep, I will call you later. End Call.”

Pepper Potts politely excused herself for a moment and left the meeting room before she lost her cool and gave into the impulse to laugh until she lost the control of her bladder.

The call that came to her mobile few minutes later found her short of breath in the adjacent room to the one she was supposed to be in.

“Pepper?” Tony’s voice was perfectly normal but the vision of him in a charity shop was too much.

“Mwhahahaha! Oh… my God, Tony.” Pepper took few deep breaths. Her behavior was rather unbecoming, but the look on his face…

“…Glad you are having fun. At my expense. Again. Listen…” there was a slight commotion on the other end and Tony’s voice became muffled as he spoke to someone. “Yes! I’ve got a couple more like that, just need to find them. Why don’t you check what security will wear, Darce? I assume casual looks are in for this trip.” There was an inaudible reply and Tony sighed. “Right. She left the room. So. We are going to visit the Beckett’s.” That sobered Pepper right up.

“Is Darcy’s mum really that -”

“We think she is faking it. Well, I think she is faking it. Darcy kind of let me understand that it would not be the first time. Your meeting is with Legal, right? Darcy had a trust fund set up by her father to fund her further education.”

Pepper frowned. “Didn’t you cover her loan?”

“I did. That is beside the point. The Beckett’s denied her access to the money since they questioned her choice of school, or there was some other bullshit reason. Anyway last I checked Culver is not a community college. She graduated five years ago, still no access to that fund.”

“It can’t be lawful. She graduated at the top of the class… Are you saying they are trying to con her out of that money? They are well off…” Pepper knew that Tony paid Darcy’s student loan off, whether Darcy knew that was another question, but if the trust fund was just to cover Darcy’s college fees … the Beckett family, while they did not compare to Tony, was considered wealthy.

“It has something to do with the fact that Mrs Beckett considers herself entitled to all of Darcy’s dad’s money.” Would the woman try and con her own daughter? That was a particularly unpleasant thought.

“Tony…”

“Got to go. Look into it for me please?” Clearly Tony felt the same as his voice was rather flat.
“I will. We will be right on it. Just … make sure she is OK there.” Pepper began to doubt her decision to pass along the message. Darcy’s family sounded more unpleasant the more she learnt about them. At least Tony was going to be with her… and on the other hand Tony was going with her. “Oh, God, Tony please just keep yourself in check; she doesn’t need you to-”

“I’ll make sure she is ok. You can count on me.” Tony disconnected without a good bye and it left Pepper staring into space.

It was not about the money. It was about Darcy. Tony was angry and now so was she.

Darcy excused herself and went to lay down as soon as they took off and were at the right altitude. Tony was about to follow when his phone rang.

“Stark.”

“What is wrong with you?” The voice on the other end was angry and vaguely familiar.

“Foster?”

“Yes. What is wrong with you, Stark? I just got Darcy’s voicemail. Why are you taking her there?”

“Her mother is…” What did Darcy tell her?

“That bitch is not sick. She’s made of stone. I can bet my Nobel Nomination on that. Listen. I am trying to get a connected flight to Miami. I’ll be there tomorrow, maybe a little later. I just need to book a flight from NYC to get there. Just… Just keep her busy. I’m coming. I’m coming as fast as I can get it. Where is Thor when you need him?! Fucking useless!” The outburst took Tony by surprise.

“We’re already en-route, Foster. You’re not gonna make it.”

“What? You can’t be! Can you wait? Please! I’m booking! I’m booking now! I bet that woman isn’t even sick!” Foster’s voice broke and there was sobbing on the line. Tony grimaced as he once again sat down, his eyes glued to the door Darcy had disappeared behind a minute ago.

“We can’t wait for you, Foster. Not if we want to catch her out.” Darcy was acting all brave but Tony could tell she was crumbling on the inside. The years of mental abuse and whatever else she had thrown her way had left deep wounds that weren’t yet healed and he suspected wouldn’t even start healing until they separated Darcy from those people permanently.

“She can’t go alone. Do you even have any idea how they treat her? Like dirt. Like some unwanted obligation that was pushed onto them. Like they are doing her a favor by letting her be in their lives.” He’d guessed that by now, but hearing it being said by someone that would have gotten that info from Darcy directly was disturbing.

“She isn’t going alone, Foster. I am going with her. It is a good time as any to get this over with…”

“They see you, they will be sucking your balls before you make it to the front porch.” Tony rubbed his eyes. Foster meant well. She was looking out for Darcy and that made him rein in his temper.

“They don’t know it will be Tony Stark and that is why we got to go now. Before her name hits the papers.” Tony didn’t know how long they had. The story could break at any point cementing their
connection in public eye.

“What about after? They will want to get to you through her….”

Tony laughed at that. It was safe to say that was not gonna happen. They already had protocols in place regarding press reaching out to Tony Stark’s girlfriend. The new development added weight to the already serious issue of Darcy’s family. Now that Pepper was up to date on the situation there was no doubt that SI, on all levels, would take a hard-line approach to any threats to Darcy. Not only because the brunette was in a relationship with him and Pepper liked her, but also because she was being viewed as an investment that had a great potential to become permanent. The SI Board could as well rename itself as a Darcy Lewis Adoration Society. Tony wasn’t sure if they liked her personally, and that was hardly relevant in the grand scheme of things, but Darcy Lewis in combination with him sooner or later was going to make SI the dominant company in many markets and them even richer in the process. The funny thing was that Darcy had no idea what storm she was causing behind closed doors and very little of it had anything to do with him.

“We are ready to handle that, Foster. That is not an issue. I got it under control.”

“You think that? Wait till you meet them.” That sounded like a challenge.

“Have you met them?”

“I have spoken to Mrs. Beckett.”

“You have? I thought they weren’t overly keen on meeting anyone in Darcy’s circle.” He was honestly surprised.

“Oh, I called her up, after a no show for Darcy’s graduation.” That was news. Darcy didn’t mention it.

“Want to share the excuse that you got?”

“That education is wasted on Darcy since she made no effort to find a suitable husband while she was there. Since apparently the only reason a woman goes to college is to find a dick to hold onto.” Foster clearly took it personally, not only for Darcy but also herself. “And since Darcy has rejected a perfectly suitable match that they had selected for her there is not much else that Mrs. Beckett could do for her. My mum nearly disowned me when I thought of quitting my PhD at one point.” But that would be a parent that cared about the future of their child.

“Isn’t he in prison now?” Romanov mentioned something along the lines at one point. Thankfully his Darcy had a good head on her shoulders.

“I think that there was another one after. Just as Darcy started at Culver, I am not sure. Point was Darcy has a pair of tits and vagina. Those were her only advantages to get ahead in life and she wasn’t using them.” The vision of Darcy hunching over her notes learning, working hard on improving herself every single day, relentlessly, and not for the benefit of the likes of him, no, for herself swam in front of him. Because she was independent. Because life have thought her to rely on no one but herself.

“Let me guess, women in science is not a thing that she has ever heard about?” That comment about Darcy basically being a hole to fuck was going down bad with Tony. It was like a horror story. The further he got into it the more vile and revolting those people got.

“Oh, she did. Ugly women do science, ‘cause we can’t get a man. I hate her. How could anyone like that be Darcy’s mum?”
“Genetic miracle and the fact that someone else raised her where it counted.” Clearly Darcy got enough positive encouragement at one point.

“Darcy doesn’t know…”

“I am pretty sure Spark knows…”

“That I called and cussed her mother out for not showing up. She doesn’t know that… She was upset and I couldn’t help myself, ok?” Tony thought that she was going to start crying again, but Foster just continued talking. “Eric came from Norway specifically for that. People from the place she ‘waitress-ed’ at came with flowers to wish her good luck… Please? Can you wait till I get there?”

“We are already airborne. Foster… We can’t wait.” Tony was going to be there ensuring that no harm came to her. But it was up to Darcy to do it and it was going to be hard enough without Foster going hysterical.

“Please take care of her. Just… I wish Thor was here. I could…”

“I got her.”

“I know.” That wasn’t an overly pleased response and Tony decided that it was time to end the conversation. “You are still not good enough for her.” And that was his cue.

“Have a good day, Dr Foster.”

50 Chapters, Peepsters!

Already?! I swear I started posting not that long ago!

Hope you all enjoying the ride as much as I do =)

Feed the starving plot bunnies! Let me know what you think =)

it does keep me going as evident by it being chapter 50 =)

Many thanks for those that review ❤
Chapter 51

Wino,

Many thanks=)

Once again an amazing job

much appreciated =)

Chapter 51

Rosie kind of knew that being a primary bodyguard to Tony Stark’s girlfriend was going to be a challenge. It stood to reason. The man was a rich, powerful, self absorbed, philandering vigilante. So that was supposed to be the hard part. Upon reflection Rosie had to admit that it really wasn’t, and the name of the woman she was guarding wasn’t even in the papers yet. If Tony Stark was going to survive till the end of the year, though, he was one tough fuck.

“Oh, my, Thor… Tony.” The hiss was low and threatening. Rosie tried not to be distracted by the argument that she was witnessing.

“What? It wasn’t me! I didn’t know that they were going to show up dressed like that.” The last part was hissed out back with a disapproving look at the pair waiting for them at the bottom of the steps.

And if he didn’t … well, bless his soul, he had a good run.

Darcy Lewis was standing at the top of the steps glaring daggers at the man. She was finally convinced to leave the plane. “What the actual fuck, man?”

“You see, this is the kind of overreaction …” Should she or should she not make her way up and try to defuse the situation before Ms Lewis pushed Mr. Stark down the stairs? How fast could the man even suit up? Before or after serious damage was done? That was the question.

Security was already down, consisting of herself and Mr. Hogan. It was never a good sign when the man that paid you took the Head of Security on the trip. It really wasn’t. Rosie also tried not to stare at her superior who was wearing jeans and hoodie, just like her, watching the pair bicker.

“Should we…” She started, unsure.

“Nah. He’s good. Stark should stop asking for it.” Rosie glanced at the man standing next to the beat up pickup truck, few steps away from her and Mr. Hogan.

“Didn’t she taser you trice?”

The look Rosie got in reply implied that the remark was not appreciated and she cleared her throat to indicate that she was not picking a fight. Darcy Lewis was rubbing off on her. Why else would she be annoying Hawkeye? Sane people did not do that. She had seen the guy work out. He was much tougher than his casual attitude let on.
“Lewis, toss him down and let’s move!”

Tony Stark gave Barton a one finger salute as they descended the steps still bickering.

“I cannot believe this… The fudge happened to you?” Darcy was flailing her free hand at the pair by the truck. Rosie could see where the woman’s bewilderment was coming from. Black Widow was dressed… conservatively. To put it mildly. Very presentable skirt below the knee, sensible shoes, hair brushed back and tied, slightly big jacked over a turtle neck and a modest fake pearl necklace. Barton was dressed in slacks and white shirt that was starched to the cutting edge and a tie despite the crisp evening breeze. All that was missing was bible in hand. “When did you find Jesus?”

“Was he behind the curtains? Nothing good ever comes from behind those…” Stark quipped. He had to have his nose in everything it seemed.

“Tony, we can’t take them with us. How am I going to explain it?” Explain what? To whom?

“Who says you need to explain?” Tony Stark was not used to explaining himself and it showed, neither did he see why Darcy should do it.

“Because … is that Rogers in the back seat? Why are you doing this to me, people!?” Darcy actually swayed a little as she said that, her face pale. Whatever was going on for once her boss-lady wasn’t dealing well with it. Why were they here? Lewis didn’t look like she was quite fit to travel. “Shitsticks…”

“Darce… Darcy-” Rosie was busy observing their surroundings, scanning for threats, but Stark’s voice gave her shivers. You did not hear him speak like that on TV. Oh, no. He spoke to Darcy like she was the singular most important thing to him. He didn’t even say anything beside the name, but it was packed full of meaning. It worked to calm Darcy down.

“I am fine. Fine…” Stark brushed his lips against Darcy’s temple as she took few deep breaths.

Rosie frowned. Darcy Lewis was nervous and wound up and it showed. The woman was never like that. The trip was put together too quick in her opinion and there was air of uneasiness that surrounded it. What was going on?

“Honey, Sugar Plum, my bright little Spark…”

“Tony, I…”

“Have I told you how wonderful you are today? How breathtakingly beautiful, brilliant and sharp in the most arousing way possible?” Stark’s lips twitched and one eyebrow went up as he said that. Color bloomed on Darcy’s cheeks at the words and she mellowed slightly as her eyes softened behind the thick rimmed glasses.

“Horny dog…” There might have been a ghost of a smile to accompany the statement but Rosie wasn’t sure.

“Every moment of every day, Spark. Now. In my defense, the Wonder Twins weren’t supposed to be showing their faces at all. I have clearly been put under misguided impression that they were able to do things covertly.”

“So why are they here then?” Rosie hoped that her eavesdropping wasn’t too obvious. It was starting to look like an undercover operation and she was trying to guess the purpose of it.

“Because I can’t be at all the places all the time.” Stark made it sound so obvious yet he wasn’t
answering the question in any helpful way.

“Tony, we are not on a secret mission.”

“We’re not? My mistake. Can I change then?” While Mr. Stark was eccentric he usually dressed tastefully. Not this time though. Everything he had on was ok, but just somehow… off. It didn’t match somehow. The shirt was too dark for the jacket and the shoes were patent and so shiny it blinded you if you looked at them too long, the cut of the jeans looked ten years out of fashion. It all gave an impression of a washed up party boy that couldn’t move past his glory days.

“No.”

“Was worth checking.” Stark shrugged and smiled as if he wasn’t really expecting any other answer.

“Tony, I don’t need babysitting.”

“Of course you don’t. Honeybuns. We all know that.” The man nodded at his fellow Avengers that were so far standing few steps away looking somehow reserved.

Rosie swallowed nervously. It didn’t bode well.

Clint Barton was not a person that was easily impressed despite the impression he often gave. He could talk shit for hours; months upon months in deployment with same people made him develop that skill just to keep himself entertained. His skill set was rather limited, he had to admit that, if he compared himself to someone like Nat. But the things that he could do he did well. He wasn’t called Hawkeye for nothing. He kept things simple. His talent honed. The circle of his friends small. He was not one of those people that were jacks-of-all-trades-masters-of-none…

“Don’t make an ass of yourself as soon as they land.” Nat was tying her hair back as she glared at him from the front seat. They were parked just outside the security gate of a small airport awaiting clearance to enter.

“Why is she even coming?” Lewis was many things but being someone’s fool she was not.

“I don’t think it is our place to decide that.” Rogers looked like he was disagreeing with the words that were coming out of his own mouth. They all were.

The news of the call had spread like wildfire inside the Tower since they all had alerts set up with Jarvis to update them of any emergencies relating to the Team. While Lewis was not on the Team, her close association with Stark got her on the list and the AI classified Darcy’s mother being ill as an emergency, alerting everyone accordingly. Some adjustments might be needed in Jarvis’ definition of an emergency.

One of the things that all of Clint’s teammates were good at was being nose deep in each other's business while actively pretending not to care about anything. It was totally a team thing.

So when the news broke, after they were barely back from DC, Rogers gathered them, minus Bruce who joined via phone as he was in Europe for something, and made an entire speech about privacy and personal matters and how it was important to observe all those things. No one objected. All those were valid points. Lewis didn’t like people all up in her personal business. Who would?

So when Cap was done there was silence. No one was saying anything. No one wanted to point out the obvious. They were going to drag their asses there. They all knew it. The entire Lewis Situation was more complicated than they all wanted to admit.
Darcy Lewis smashed into their lives like a runaway bus with no regards to anything. She absolutely ignored their sky high defensive walls, hell deep pits full of issues and had the nerve to call them out on everything and anything as she saw fit. She took one good look at them and treated them like normal people basically, despite their nearly neurotic behavior.

It was quite a shock to the system. Clint wasn’t going to assume it for others, but it had been so long that he had forgotten what it felt like. Sure, they all went around and pretended to be normal in public and people that did not know any better treated them like they did everyone else. But Lewis did know better. She was a wicked little Mongoose and he was going to stand by that description till the day he died. She didn’t try and order their lives for them, or try and fix all the things that were broken inside them. No. It felt as if she was there to remind them that it was ok to be the way they were, it felt like she looked past the bright smiles and skin tight uniforms and just saw the dead beat world-weary you and it was… ok. It was ok because at the same time she showed her own imperfect self to you unashamedly. Just like that. Just because...

White picket fences and neighbors that always mowed the lawn… The thought sprung to Clint’s mind when their conversation turned to the topic of Darcy’s family. That was what he thought the first time they met, back in New Mexico. Darcy Lewis looked like the girl that grew up in suburbs with a mum that baked cookies waiting for her and a dad that fixed the tires on her bike and did family barbecues every Sunday. Stuff, he assumed, that people with smiles like hers had growing up. Guess he was wrong… No matter how hard Clint tried his thoughts kept wondering to dark, half forgotten places, places out of his own less than happy childhood. Life was a nasty fucker when you were small, alone and defenseless…

“Stark thinks they want to con her. We all heard the conversation. If they made Lewis sound any more inconsiderate to her own mother she would be Satan himself.”

“How did the woman even know where to look for Ms Lewis?” Rogers was eerily quiet for most of their trip, like the rest of them.

“Couldn’t have been hard. Let’s see... they must have known she worked for Foster. Foster worked for Culver before she moved to Greenwich. Lewis is good at her job, bet she made sure they had her details and forwarding address for the new workplace, SI. You heard Ms Beckett speak. All she needed to do was call the reception and make it sound important.”

“Handing over personal information is a crime.” Barton rolled his eyes at Steve's words.

“Good luck getting a conviction, Captain. They've been told Lewis’ mother is, allegedly, sick. Perfect defense. Lewis will probably freak out when she sees us.”

“I am sure she will appreciate our support.”

“Sure, sure. This situation is her dirty little secret. I am sure she will be over the moon for us showing to see that her own family trying to pull a fast one on her. Just kidding. No one wants to share that.”

None of them would have liked to share that. But the problem was that none of them had families really left to pull anything. They had no one. It was an unpleasant thought; the closest thing that they could relate to that had managed to magic herself into their closely guarded lives and it was Lewis. She was like this annoying younger sister that your parents decided to get after you left for college. You were not around while she grew up and suddenly she was an adult and had a boyfriend that you couldn’t stand. Stark better be treating her well…

“Well. How are we going to work this? Clint and I are born again Christian cousins on Anthony’s side, who makes a living impersonating Tony Stark. Steve? If you had another shirt…” Natasha was
sizing Steve up thoughtfully.

“I was thinking I could be Tony’s… Anthony’s stepchild.”

“Stepchild? Like... from previous relationship, right? Tony’s going to love that. Are you going to call him dad? You've got to call him dad, Rogers. Wait. Are you going to call Lewis mum?” Clint grinned. Now that was a thought.

“I haven’t decided yet.” At that there were smiles all around just as they got a go ahead to enter the airport territory.

“Sure you haven’t. Can you do me a favor? Can you, like, indicate when you are about to spring that bit of news on her? I need to see how you will go down.” That was going to be a sight and Clint had no doubts about that.

“She likes me.” It sounded like Rogers was trying to convince himself of that.

“Sure. Lest call it that. Take down by any other name is just as funny.” There was something about Darcy Lewis, Clint thought, as Captain America gave him a one finger salute, it brought their natural, untamed, sides out, and that was bad news for certain people.

_____________________________________

Ohhh, we are nearly there, Peeps! So what you think?
Chapter 52

My lovely Wino,

Top job as always =)

Much appreciated

Chapter 52

This was a nightmare. The kind of horror scenario where everything went wrong. Darcy bit her lip as she stared out the window.

How did she even get to this point? There was a time when she'd sworn on all that was holy upon this Earth that she was never going to come back. She had moved out and moved on. There was nothing, and Darcy could repeat it confidently, nothing left for her there. It wasn't even home. It had never been home. Home was what she had when Matt was around and he wasn't around anymore.

The part of college that she had really hated was all those other kids prattling about how they wanted to go back home for holiday. See their families. Or how they didn't want to go back, but their parents kept calling and annoying them into going. Darcy had no such problem. Mrs. Beckett was a busy woman, the social butterfly of the community and the faithful wife of one of its most influential members. The devout member of the local church’s ladies club. In other words, too busy to be calling Darcy with nonsense like wanting to see her again. Tickets being way too expensive was always a good explanation to give to curious roommates. After the first year she just stopped explaining.

“Darcy…”

The pressure on her knee was back and she could hardly ignore it this time.

“There is this place not far from the hospital that used to sell the best Buffalo Wings that I have ever had… ” It was dark outside and she strained her eyes to see anything beyond the truck lights. She had nearly forgotten how dark the nights were outside the big city. Nothing could quite compare to the ever present neon lights.

“Darce…” She wasn't even paying attention to who was speaking. Clint? Steve?

“No, seriously. It is wicked good. Always fresh too. I knew a girl that worked there. Used to slip couple of extra in for me. I wonder what happened to her? She had really nice nails. I know it is random thing to say but…”

“Darcy. We got you. Say it.” Tony’s fingers were digging into her skin and she winced before she looked at him.
“What?”

“I want you to say it.” Tony was in one of his serious moods and it seemed the rest of them followed his example. They were all focused on her.

“Tony, I know…”

“Out loud.” Moments like these were when Darcy didn’t appreciate Tony’s stubborn ox nature.

“Lewis, just say it. We got you.” Barton sounded bored, like he did most of the time but their eyes met through the mirror and she could tell he was just as tense.

“This is ridiculous. None of you has to come with me.” She was going where she spent the happiest and then shittiest years of her early life. The closer they got to the hospital the more she felt like all the years after her leaving faded. Like they weren’t real, as if she never left. Culver, Jane, Thunderbro… Tony, the lot of them. Except the man was right next to her and must have felt it. Darcy sometimes thought that he was reading her a little too well.

“It is only polite we come along to introduce ourselves, Darcy.” She actually twisted in her seat to look back where the trio was tightly packed.

“What for? I got this.” She was working on it…

“No, you don’t.” Rogers being the man that he was stated the fact. Darcy did not have it. She knew it. She never had it whenever it came to Mrs. Beckett. Because maybe this time things were going to be different even when she knew perfectly well they weren’t. But maybe… just maybe. She had seen gods falling from the sky, anything could happen… maybe her mother finally had some time for her.

“Rogers, why are you here again?” It appeared that Tony had invited Romanov for some back up and the rest just followed.

“To morally support you. Dad.” At the last word the car swerved making Darcy hit her forehead on the car door and hiss out in pain.

“Shit! Sorry! Sorry! Darcy, sit straight. Spark, you ok? Good, you’re good. Just keep the seat-belt on… The fuck, Rogers? What is wrong with you?” Tony took it as well as a man would take a grenade thrown at him. Barton snickered and Natasha smiled.

“Just getting our story straight…” Steve said innocently.

“I am not old enough to be your father!” Darcy had to join the snickers at this point at the outrage that filled Tony’s voice.

“You know, Tony, he doesn’t have to be your biological son. Fostering is a thing…” The look he gave her was one of challenge and Darcy suddenly had second thoughts.

“You know what? Why don’t we make them all our kids while we at it, Sweetheart?”

The smile from Darcy’s face disappeared as the reality check came knocking.

“That is actually not a bad idea.” The smile on Romanov’s face turned sharper and wider and Darcy didn’t like it.

“Natasha, you are supposed to be on my side.” Girls should be sticking together. That was the rule.

“Honeybunny, she is your girl. You dress her up in your sweaters, brush her hair. Stuff like that.
Like I said before best step mum ever.” Oh, is that how he wanted to play?

“Lewis, don’t taser him. We are still in a moving vehicle. Do not incapacitate the driver. Apart from that… Are we there yet?” The whine from Barton made both Darcy and Tony glare at him through the mirror.

“I will stop this car and you can walk, Birdbrain.”

“I’m hungry.” The archer just doubled the pitch as he complained again. “And Steve is picking on me.”

Darcy was about to answer when she noticed Rogers grinning after the little quip and had to laugh too. It usually was her go-to response to shock. They were all crazy. This situation was crazy. Tony was crazy and now so was she.

“You got me, alright. Mental mostly.”

“Honey, that credit is all Foster’s.”

The private Hospital’s reception was quiet and Darcy tried not to breathe too deeply as the scent of medicine and what they tried to cover it with was overpowering her senses. At least it wasn’t packed.

The receptionists gave them confused looks but smiled politely. Hospitals just like Sheriff’s office always had the oddest visitors, everyone knew that. The women must have seen it all.

“We are here to see Mrs. Beckett. I am Darcy Lewis, her daughter. She had been admitted recently, I had a call from Ms Beckett today kindly informing me of it.” The woman gave Darcy a suspicious look. The Beckett’s were a well known family in the area.

“I’m sorry, who are you again?”

“Lewis, Darcy. Her daughter.” Tony, who was trying to look as casual as possible standing next to her, was never one to stay silent for long … or ever.

“Do you know her physician’s name?”

“Dr Gray.” Last Darcy knew that was the man that was seeing to her mother’s non existing health issues.

“Give me a moment please, Ms Lewis. Please take a seat, it might take a minute.”

“Sure.” Darcy gladly took the weight of her foot, but Tony just frowned as he watched the woman get up and leave.

“What are we waiting for exactly? It’s not an Audience with the President. All we need is the room number.” The Hospital’s habit of calling their perceived important patients by different names had put a wrench in Tony’s attempt to simply look it up himself and it was annoying him. Plus Darcy guessed that he never had to wait for anything anywhere. What with being Tony Stark and all.

And they had to wait. No one was in a hurry to help them out and it was not sitting well with Tony who had vocally complained to the second receptionist a few times until Darcy made him stay seated next to her and away from the poor girl before they called security on him.

“This is ludicrous.”
“Ms Lewis?” And elderly man in a white coat appeared from behind one of the doors. He looked at her coolly and Darcy could tell that he didn’t remember her. She was not overly surprised seeing as she was hardly the number one discussion topic for Mrs. Beckett.

“Dr Gray? I am Mrs. Beckett’s daughter from her first marriage.” That must have rung a bell or the fact that the good doctor had a second look at her. Darcy wore clothes that Tony insisted to pick for her since she was making him wear what she thought was appropriate for his undercover persona. If Darcy had to choose one word to describe her attire it would have been expensive. Tony Stark had a luxurious taste and the money to afford it. She didn’t even recognize the names on the labels as she dressed from the never ending supply of clothing that Tony seemed to pulling out of thin air.

“Ah, yes. Ms Lewis, it has been a while.” His eyes lingered over the crutch and cast but Darcy ignored it.

“Yes, it has. I am here to see my mother.”

“Mrs. Beckett?” There was confusion on the doctor’s face and Darcy instantly knew what was up, her heart sank. She should have seen it coming. She should have…

“Yes Mrs. Beckett. Kat called me that mother was hospitalized today; we just flew in from another state and came straight here.”

“Umm…” Dr. Gray looked unsure how to answer to that.

“The woman isn’t here, is she?” Darcy jumped a little as Natasha spoke from behind her.

“Maybe she is in another hospital.” Barton tried to sound encouraging, because in this situation the woman being hospitalized elsewhere was much more desirable than her being hale and healthy.

“Mrs. Beckett is not in ill health best to my knowledge and I have all her medical records.” the doctor spoke carefully as he kept eyeing Tony like he couldn’t decide if he had seen the man somewhere before.

“Have we met before? You look familiar?”

“I impersonate Tony Stark. For charity events and such.” You could tell from Tony’s face how much he wanted that explanation not to fly, but it did.

“Yes! Charity Gala for Save the Children in New York last year.” Tony stared at the grinning man for a second before managing a smile.

“I was in Town that day. Yes.”

“Must have been it.” It would have been funnier if Darcy didn’t have massive ache in her chest, still it didn’t stop her from at least appreciating the less than pleased look on Tony’s face. “Have you considered wearing Cuban heels to make yourself look taller, son? That could be what is missing… and the nose could be longer I guess.”

“There is no need. We are exactly the same height.” Darcy couldn’t argue with that.

“No… he is taller, by, I would say half an inch? Also his grays are not that prominent.” But the doctor thought he could.

From the way Tony’s eyes went wide it was clear that he was about to say something highly uncomplimentary when Rogers decided that breaking up the fight before it began was a good idea.
“Dad, I think we have other things to worry about right now.” Tony refocused his angry glare onto the good Cap and the blond grinned.

“Right. Right. Darce, babe? Maybe she is in another hospital?” Tony had the uncanny ability to switch his complete focus in matter of seconds, or maybe his attention haven’t really strayed from her in the first place, it was hard to say.

“I would know if Mrs. Becket was hospitalized. She is in fine health.”

Darcy knew she was but hearing Dr Gray say it felt like a punch in the guts and she leaned into Tony whose hand went around her waist for support straight away.

“I… want to go home.”

“And we will, but first it would be very rude not to drop in on your family since we are already in town. Don’t you think so kids?”

“Oh, absolutely. Very rude.” Natasha spoke softly and with a smile for them all but there was steel under her polite words. “We must say hello.”

Generally, spiders were not, by nature, pack animals. They preferred solitude and were even quite aggressive to others of their kind. But there were a few families of the species that lived in colonies. It was rather an exception than the actual rule.

Natasha watched Darcy from the back seat of the car as they pulled up to security gate, massive iron monstrosity and the brunette spoke to the guard.

The main objective of this trip was not to show Darcy that her family did not care about her, Natasha could tell that she knew that full well, it was too show that now there were other people in her life that cared about her.

People often said that blood was thicker than water. It wasn’t. At least not in the sense that they meant it. Blood was nothing more than liquid in your veins and just because some of the genetic material floating in it was shared with someone, it didn’t mean anything much when the crunch came. She had seen people turn on one another despite the kinship bonds more often than one could imagine. Family, just like great many other things in life was a choice. A least for her.

She was going to give back the sweater Darcy gave her once she was back in the Tower. She folded it carefully after wearing. It was big, warm and shapeless. She didn’t need it. It wasn’t what she usually wore. It was one of those things that were always on sale in every department store because it only looked good on incredibly tall stick thin figures. When she had a minute she was going to bring it up to the Penthouse that Stark shared with Darcy. Just leave it there.

It was still in her apartment. Neatly folded on the dresser by her bed. She would give it back. She washed it even as it was only polite. You did not return borrowed items smelling of sweat. She had to do it by hand too as there were no labels to advise to the temperature that should be used. It took her some time to realize that it was because it was handmade. Small sticker near the collar simply stating Property of Darcy L.

Darcy didn’t have to give it to her. Or make the pancakes with smiles in them. She didn’t have to. Not while knowing who they were. Having no illusions of what they were capable of. What Natasha was capable of. Regardless, Darcy chose to care for them. Chose to show them what it was like to have someone accepting you…
Another fun fact about some of the spiders, that people kept forgetting, was that they could be extremely territorial.

“We don’t have to do it. Really. It’s not necessary. We came, she is not in hospital. We can go back.”

Tony felt his temper smoldering under his smile as he watched Darcy slowly fall apart. The woman that tasered the god of Thunder, the woman that took down the better part of the Avengers, the woman that had him all but bend the knee for her, being unable to ring a door bell as they all stood outside the front door until a butler opened them from the other side.

“Good evening, Ms Lewis…” The elderly gentleman with neatly shaved face and snow white hair that contrasted sharply with his dark ebony skin looked at them in bewilderment. “Is Mrs. Becket expecting you, Ms Lewis?” While the words were spoken kindly, as they just stood on the front porch it was making things rather uncomfortable.

“Surprise. We understand that it was a matter of some urgently that Darcy come right away, seeing as mother is so ill.” Tony had to step over himself to call the wench a mother, but it was going to serve a purpose so he would endure it for now.

“The dinner is about to be served…” It implied rather loudly that they weren’t invited for it.

“Excellent! We missed lunch on the way here. Please set up for extra five. Darcy, sweetheart, you want to sit down probably. Let’s go inside.” The thing about invitation was that if you acted snobbish and important enough you did not need it. Tony calmly marched in, with Darcy in tow, past the man as he tried to ask them to wait. Rogers and Wonder Twins were right behind him acting all polite and outwardly suitably awed by the grandness of the house. Tony was skipping that part. His focus was on Darcy who actually shivered as they stepped into the foyer.

It was hard to believe from the way Ms Lewis was behaving that she was the same outspoken, brazen even woman that took no shit from no one. Now she was quiet and withdrawn. It was disheartening, how a woman as vibrant as her could change so quickly. What had they done to her? They were, after all, made to wait in a reception room while the Master and Mistress were informed of their arrival.

Tony, Nat, Clint, himself, they were all smiles for Darcy but Steve knew better. They all were spoiling for a fight.

“Darcy, which way is the dining room?” Tony just like the rest of them weren’t in the mood to sit around for longer than it was necessary. Just being in this house seemed to stress Ms Lewis. There was no point prolonging the wrapping of this issue that was so clearly so painful for her.

“Darcy?” Steve was hard pressed not to wince at the voice as he watched a woman close to Darcy’s age walk into the room and look them over. She was dressed in a vibrant green jumpsuit and a cardigan of the same color paired with painfully high heels. They all rose in greeting.

“Hi, Kat. Where is mother?”

“Do you remember that letting people know of your arrival is important? I was sure we taught you that.” What else did they teach her? Fetch?

“We were under impression it was an emergency. What with extreme health issues Mrs. Beckett
allegedly has, according, that is right, to you.” The rebuke that came from Tony was swift and to the point and took Kathryn Beckett aback and Steve smiled. Someone wasn’t used to people standing up for Ms Lewis.

“I called this morning.” There was some confusion in Ms Beckett’s voice like she did not expect Darcy to drop everything and come over. Or more likely being able to do that. The same day flights were not cheap and there was no offer to reimburse them mentioned in the message that was passed to Ms Lewis.

“I believe dinner is being prepped. I feel peckish. Darce, you should eat something, I don’t think you had a bite since breakfast. The dining room is this way, right?”

One thing that Darcy learned about Tony during their time together was that when he wanted something he was unstoppable, and if it looked like he stopped he was just regrouping.

It was very satisfying to watch as he simply blew past Kat right in the direction of the dining room and the rest followed without hesitation, making Kat sputter as she was ignored. It seemed that every time Ms Beckett tried to get to her someone was in her way deflecting the attempt.

They didn’t quite burst into the room but Tony did open both doors for her before helping her enter.

Keith Beckett sat at the end of the table with her mother on his left side, looking as fake as Darcy had always remembered.

“Well, Mrs. Beckett, don’t you look well for someone in a critical condition.” Tony said that with no little amount of sarcasm.

Lets wrap this up.

I am getting there! Honest. It is those plot bunnies that are leading me in circles.

I think they might need feeding *hint hint nudge nudge*

Leaves a comment

’Cause I imagine you would like new chapter posted soon =)
Chapter 53

My lovely Wino,

Many Thanks

and I wish you rain on this hot day =)

your help is much appreciated as always

xxx

Chapter 53

“Well, Mrs. Beckett, don’t you look well for someone in a critical condition.” Tony said that with no little amount of sarcasm and Darcy could not have agreed more. Her mother looked well. Extremely well. Plastic and with make up that probably came off as a whole mask but well. How much work had she gotten done since I last saw her?

There were instances in the past where Darcy imagined something like his. Wasn’t it what she wanted? Coming back to rub their stuck up noses into her successful life, career? She could do it now. She totally could.

Except it didn’t seem so important anymore, somehow. She had done well for herself. She was proud of what she has achieved. She had worked very hard for it.


The thing with her mother was that Mrs. Beckett could twist and turn any situation until it suited her... and that smile. Something angry and ugly woke up inside Darcy. She rushed over at a drop of a hat and all she was getting ‘why didn’t you call?’ in the exasperated tone of voice that you’d ask a child why they didn’t wash their hands before dinner.

“There wasn’t time, mother. Kathryn was very adamant that I come immediately.” Darcy could feel the warm, solid pressure on the small of her back, where Tony’s hand was. It felt safe. It felt like home. Tony felt like home, standing right next to her dressed in the silliest outfit they could find in his wardrobe, pretending to be a person that pretended to be him, all that just to please her.

“And glad we did or we would have missed a miracle or a marvel of modern medicine. Either way. We can’t have that. Literally once in a lifetime opportunity. Right?” Tony looked at her as his fingers
flexed at her back. His smile was shark like. Uh... If it had been anyone else she would have been alarmed, but as it was the man that rubbed her tummy in the morning as she laid in bed next to him, Darcy barely blinked. Tony had single-handedly done more nice things for her to date than the Beckett's had since her mother became one of them.

“Darcy.” The voice that addressed her was sharp and far from friendly and her eyes snapped to the man seated at the end of the table. Right, the Master of the House. Keith Beckett. Years ago that tone would have meant that she was in trouble, now Darcy cocked her head to the side and regarded him for a second before allowing herself to smile. Strangely enough Kenneth Beckett was not present. Because you could always count on him being there; Keith’s pride and joy. Also, no one else’s pride and joy. If sucking up were a sport her stepbrother would be the greatest champion of all times. If he had an accomplishment that Keith didn’t pay someone else to do Darcy wasn’t aware of it.

Thor, bless Tony and his mostly good taste. Darcy was happy that she was dressed the way she was, not that it would have mattered if she was in her PJs... She was lying, of course it was important the way she was dressed. Her mother kept looking her up and down like she couldn’t quite believe the way her daughter looked. On the matter of the man that helped her pick her outfit...

She had her boyfriend, his buddies and the Becketts in one room. Huh...

All the way to this wretched place Darcy was too busy thinking about her past that she kind of forgot about her present that had somehow come along with her.

“Hi, Keith.” Darcy had always had to call the man Mr. Beckett. Well, things changed. She'd moved out and gotten herself a life that she was happy with. She also didn’t owe jack shit to him.

“Darcy Lou -” Her mother enforced the rule more than Keith did. Darcy just strolled in with a bunch of people after not seeing her for a decade and that was what the woman was focusing about? The fact that Darcy did not address Keith as she was supposed to. Really, mother?

“Isn’t that just Darcy? It is, isn’t it? Anyway. So we got this real urgent... Darcy? Baby, let’s get you seated so you can rest your foot.” Tony cut Mrs. Beckett off as if the woman hadn’t spoken at all and had Darcy seated before she could protest. Natasha was right beside her to help with the light coat she was wearing. It was still a little weird to see the redhead dressed like a frugal evangelist.

“Thank you, Nat.”

“Always welcome.”

There was a moment of silence as Becketts tried to get a handle on what was going on. It was all weird and tense.

To say that the Becketts were making Darcy feel unwelcome would have been an understatement, but since Darcy was the only person in their party that cared Natasha didn’t like it. It wasn’t even a subtle throwing of shade. The couple and Ms Beckett looked at Darcy like she was some homeless person that randomly invited herself to their dinner table. Slightly shocked and perplexed by the audacity, but rather inclined not to make a fuss and wait for the guest to get the hint that they weren’t welcomed to stay.

Was that what Darcy had to deal with on the regular basis? No wonder that she grew a spine. Pressure like this either breaks you or makes you stronger.

Mr. Keith Beckett was, without a doubt, the head of the household. The king of his castle. His entire body language screamed indignation at the sudden arrival as he coolly observed them. Natasha had
seen many men like him. Self centered little pricks acting big because they could order some people around. Oh, she loved watching them fall. The meaty wet crunch as they slammed into ground nose first was her favorite. There was something poetic in the way they always cried like babies. It worked just as well with pulling that pedestal they had put themselves on from under them. Whether it was made of money, reputation or character there was always a way to tip it over and down they went.

It was always the small things that gave people away, Natasha concluded when she gently pulled Darcy’s coat off and the young woman sat down. Her eyes went to Stark who was casually smiling at the Becketts. They had harmed someone that had become closer to him than anyone else been before. Stark looked genuinely happy to be here.

Natasha smiled. So was she.

“Darcy Lou, I believe you were going to introduce your… companions.” Darcy’s mother didn’t call them friends or guests and Tony smiled wider. She made it sound like Darcy was being a naughty little girl, bringing stray dogs into the house: dirty, wild mongrels into their lavish home.

They also kept staring at him and Cap. It was clear what was going through their heads. He looks just like Tony Stark? But… no. Can’t be. Not with those shoes and shirt. But… the way he speaks. That blond looks like… uh, no. What would Captain America be doing with her? Maybe this undercover idea wasn’t so bad after all. Their struggle was a beautiful thing to watch. We will have so much fun.

“I believe it is just Darcy, Mrs. Beckett. You have given us all quite a scare. Katie made it sound like you were about to leave us. For good.” There was this little wince by Mrs. Beckett that didn’t go unnoticed. Of course no one expected Darcy to rush in merely a few hours. That would have required some serious funds that they must have known that Shortstack didn’t have. Not with the student loans to pay and working for Foster.

“It’s Kathryn.” Not in my books you ain’t, bitch. Tony loved the look of annoyance on people’s faces when he said their names wrong. Most of the time he didn’t bother remembering them for this express purpose.

“We are greatly relieved that you are hale and healthy again.” The tone of voice that Romanov used would have been highly appropriate for gossiping in church. Tony could see Darcy wince as Mrs. Beckett laughed in a rather forced high pitched way.

“Oh, Kathryn was just worried about me. You know how she is, Darcy Lou, I -” Tony couldn’t stop the eye roll. Yes. Sure. That was totally the explanation they were going to fall for. You don’t call up a person you haven’t spoken to for a decade with empty concerns. Shit like that doesn’t happen.

“Just Darcy. Thank you. We -”

“Actually, mother-”

Rogers cleared his throat. The sound was loud enough to rise above noise as everyone seemed to want to speak at the same time.

“We are starting this all on the wrong side.” Tony loathed when Cap spoke in his most Earnest Good Captain America Voice and the smile. It was always so perfect, it was just asking for a brick. At least this time Tony knew that behind that smile was a man that was just pissed off as he was. He would let it slide this time. They had better things to do right now.
“You’re right. You’re right… Honey, do you want some water? Maybe a drink? A shot of something strong would pep you up. Anyone wants anything?”

Tony had a complicated personality on a good day. He was complex to say the least. Also a right asshole and that was when he was being nice.

Finally tearing her attention from Mrs. Beckett, Darcy was trying to gauge the level of upset he was on.

Tony didn’t care. “You! My good man, Can we please have a double scotch and single scotch, can the single be un-peated, Darcy doesn’t like it when it is, single malt if you have it.” Tony waived the butler in manner that commanded attention. “I would rather you eat first, though. So what’s for dinner? And guys, let’s not crowd Darcy, take a seat, I am sure our hosts were about to offer that.”

Keith could not take it and rose from his seat ready voice his opinion at Tony’s blatant lack of manners.

Steve was certain that no such offer was forthcoming from the Becketts, but had no problem to follow that instruction even as he saw Keith Beckett rise.

“I am so sorry, Mrs. Beckett. They can be so rude sometimes.” Natasha’s voice was soft and unimposing unlike Tony’s as she sighed, smiled and made her way to the head of the table looking all apologetic as she offered her hand to them. “I’m Natalia Rushman, this is our cousin Franklin.” Clint didn’t bat an eye as Natasha pulled a name for him out of thin air. “I am so sorry about the intrusion, Darcy’s friend passed on the message and she was just so upset.” That was slick. Natasha was setting it up to look like there was a division in their ranks. Giving the impression like she would be the weakest link and easiest to sway in a case of an argument, what with that god fearing image she was projecting. Steve always preferred an outright confrontation, but he was going to enjoy them going down either way.

“Well, I am sure Kathryn didn’t mean to excite her that much-”

“I am sure she didn’t, Mrs. Beckett. Oh, I haven’t introduced Steve and of course Anthony.” Nat motioned at him and Stark who was still standing behind Darcy’s chair at the other end of the table opposite Mr. Beckett. The place of honor. Stark could never do subtle. “Well, I am just glad we were visiting them when Darcy received the news. My heart went out to you at the news of your ill health. Your daughter has brought so much joy into our lives, I fret to think that we could have lost you without making your acquaintance. And Mr. Beckett, thank you for having us here you have a such a gorgeous house.” Give it to the Black Widow to spin a web of lies so appealing that it made you overlook all else. Like how could they have gotten here so quick, who really were they?

Mr. Beckett, who was clearly geared up to give a scolding, was thrown off balance for a second at the compliment and puffed his chest out like a peacock.

“It has been the Beckett’s family home for nearly two centuries now.” Steve glanced at Tony who at the same moment flashed a grin. “Please take a seat.” He motioned at them magnanimously.

“Don’t mind if we do.” Tony took a seat at the right hand side of Darcy as Nat took the left and Clint as always being glued next to her.

“Kat, sweetheart, can you please call Ken to make sure they are home?”

“Yes, but..” The young woman’s face was getting redder than it was already.
“Kathryn.”

“Of course, father.” What was that all about?

Tony always thought that one would have some questions to a relation if you hadn't seen them for a decade, especially if the relation in question was their child. Mrs. Beckett was out to prove him wrong. The woman sat there and smiled as they watched the table being set for them. They were allowed to stay for dinner, apparently. Did she not speak because the help was around? Surely she was interested who the people that came with her daughter were? Romanov did not mention what the connection of any of them was to Darcy. And she just sat there.

He took a sip of his drink that was brought to them and nearly spat it out. The fuck is that? Gasoline? Two bucks a gallon? Was that what they gave to guests? But then he had to remind himself, as he tried not to gag, that they were not guests.

“Ah! Ah… Spark, you know what? Lets skip the drink.” Darcy was about to reach for her own drink to try it as they waited for food but he pushed it away. He gave a little cough to clear the tubes. The drink was vile and he had had some vile drinks in his time. Shortstack merely frowned. She didn’t look surprised at his reaction.


Keith Beckett looked like a snake. Except fat. A fat snake. Not venomous, but the one that pretended to be. Unsuccessfully. Posturing like everyone in the room was beneath him.

“We like them strong here down south, Anthony.”

Tony cleared his throat again. Cheap too. Made in a shed out back. The man had money, but it seemed that he had no idea what to do with it.

And here was that look again. Is he? Is he not… Surely he is not… Oh, he could not wait to solve that little dilemma for them.

“Darcy Lou, Kat said she could not reach you at work.” Was she implying-? Was that woman implying that Darcy did not work at the Tower? Barton kept watching them as if it was the most fascinating thing on the planet. It was hard to say if he was faking or just waiting for the things to blow up right in the Becketts faces.

“I took few days off. Broken ankle and all.” It was astonishing how no one commented on that yet.

“Ah… yes. Hope that will not delay your return to work too much.” Tony had so many things to say as he watched Mrs. Beckett speak. No follow up question? Really? Your daughter has a broken ankle, don’t want to know how it happened? She took down Captain of American Happiness and Ms Super Assassin and Sniper Boy. He could hardly contain inside all the things he wanted to say.

“Darcy will be taking as much time off as she needs to recover. Perfect opportunity to catch up with the kids and all.” Tony could see as Darcy rolled her eyes at him. Oh, yes, he was going through with that little joke. Mrs. Beckett showed first signs of actual interest in the conversation at that.

“Kids?”

“Yes. From my previous relationship. They adore Darcy.” They did. Nearly all of them were present.
“So someone else is looking after them while you away?”

“Oh, no. They all above the age of eighteen. They look after themselves just fine.” Darcy offered as her mother clearly frowned in disapproval.

“Most of the time anyway. You let them loose and they run riot all over the place.” He added. The ‘kids’ were giving him unimpressed looks.

“Well, they are your kids.”

“I believe they are now ours and they totally take that after you. We can take a vote if you like, but we all know I am right. A herd of sweet little menaces they are.”

“How many children do you have, Anthony?”

“Oh, lets see. Four.” Technically the Falcon wasn’t yet a fully fledged team member. More a sidekick to Cap and he didn’t live in the Tower. Bruce was more like his science bro, but Darcy was finally warming up to him again after he ratted her out, so, yeah, he counted. Four sounded right.

Keith made a face at Tony’s reply looking them over like a king does to peasants that are there to serve him.

“That is quite a brood you have. We have settled for two.” It clearly implied that it was the perfect count and anything above it was excessive and unnecessary. Tony flashed him a grin. Two? That is your two. What about Spark? It took a second for the conclusion to materialize in his head that Darcy was not considered part of the family. Because only dirty mongrels had broods that big. What kind of mother let it happen to her child?

“Oh, yes. We wouldn’t have it any other way.” He could feel as Spark gently rubbed his thigh under the table to soothe his flaring temper and it only helped to fan it more. It was nearly a month of them being together and he thought that the 3am call he had made to Foster was the best decision of his life and here he was trying to convince them that Spark was worth to be considered a part of their family.

The others were quiet watching the exchange. They liked Darcy. Everyone liked his little Spark. She was the person that had your back and took no shit.

“Well, of course. We are very pro life, all is god’s will, if you don’t use protection…” Was he implying what Tony thought he was implying?

“Oh, I’m sorry. They are not ours, well, not my biological kids, got none of those, we have fostered the lot. After we split the kids just stayed with me. It was better for them.” Tony shrugged. It was. He was awesome.

“What shall you do when you do have children, Anthony? A man should raise his own children.” Was that it? It was, wasn’t it? Oh, he couldn’t wait till the polite conversation ended so he could rip them apart.

“And I shall, well, we shall, seeing as it is two to tango on that one.” Two to tango… His and Spark’s spawns… He hadn’t really thought of that. He knew he was going to do anything to have her stay around him. Tony’s eyes drifted down his girlfriend’s profile to settle briefly on her midriff. He could feel himself going into hyper focus as time slowed and he imagined a minuscule bundle of cells growing, warm, safe and snug just below her belly button, just under the soft skin he was touching this very morning as she hummed sleepily in appreciation… His and Spark’s…. Their spawn was going to rule this world.
So that control and possessiveness thing that Bruce advised him to keep a lid on? Well that lid just got blown into space, Tony thought as he turned to face Keith again.

“And how do you know who you have raised?”

“...People? Good people, hopefully? I hear the results tend to be mixed, but I believe that trying helps.” What did one raise kids as? Tony had no actual experience in that, but it felt like a good guess. Besides the spawn would have Spark and Pepper and Rhodey and the *fucking Avengers looking out for them* and him. His spawn was going to turn out fucking great.

“I don’t think that…” Darcy tried getting into the conversation as his hand gently covered hers. She didn’t like the turn that conversation was taking.

“*People like you* are the reason we no longer know who we *are.*” The sneer on Keith Beckett would have looked rather comical, if Tony wasn’t thinking that it was the type of shit his girlfriend had to deal with until she moved away. “If you meet a woman, you meet her family and you assume that you know who she *is.* And then she pops some mixed breed onto you.” That was not happening. If there was silence before as everyone curiously followed the conversation bidding their time, now everyone was speechless.

“What happens?” Tony couldn’t help but laugh at the man as he desperately tried not to snap. “You change the nappies, childproof the house, sing lullabies and teach him how to ride a bike, call the National Guard first time he comes back home late? I’m not sure. Our kids were all past those stages. Now they just don’t call or write, or let us know that they are not dead when they drop of the face of the planet. *Darcy gets worried you know!*” He threw Rogers a meaningful look.

“Sorry, dad.” Steve responded dutifully and there was only a heartbeat of hesitation as he added. “Sorry, mum.” The look on Darcy’s face was priceless.

“You should be. Anyway. We can move past that.” Tony’s mind was feverishly going over what Mr. Beckett had said. He both hated and loved where this was going.

“Well, in your case you have clearly chosen someone with good blood.” Did in this day and age people really still said shit like that? What were they called nowadays? White Supremacists? Alt-Right? Which was basically a fancy word for Neo-Nazis... right? Tony glanced at Rogers who was sitting straight, face impassive. This conversation must have been bringing up some unpleasant memories...

“Our country has become weak, entangled in the half cooked policies of others and is being harmed by it.” Captain Tight-pants and Justice recited then, “We should all come together and stay strong under one flag and one leader, that could purge us from the undesirables, the weak, the sub humans, protect us from the vile threat that is those that oppose us. So we once again be strong just as it was always meant to be. Masters of our fate.”

Keith all but saluted Rogers and Tony briefly toyed with the idea of suiting up. Rogers was speaking from memory. Before the Becketts had the chance to start a war with Captain America as the opposing side Darcy finally got a word in and she didn’t mince her them.

“*Well, one thing that Herr Hitler could do was write one hell of a speech. Sit down, Rogers!*” Darcy was harboring some serious resentment but Captain having a go at Mr. Beckett would only harm Rogers's reputation at the moment. The best way to deal with them was to keep a cool head. The minute you snapped you lost.
“Your name is Steve Rogers? Just like Captain America?” Darcy did her best to try and prevent the good old Captain from going ballistic. She knew them coming along was going to end badly. Did Keith have to bring up the fucking Nazis? It was already shitty enough having to talk to him.

“He is Captain America and I am Tony Stark.” There a pause as Tony flashed his trademark grin. “We do charity parties, christenings and other events provided there is an open bar.”

“Darcy Lou?” Her 'mother' was imitating a fish now. “They are impersonators?” That was the ‘Oh, that explains the likeness’ moment for the Becketts and it only seemed to confirm their opinion that they all were dirty impostors.

“Well, that would explain how you would not care who you bring up, having no financial responsibly to pass to them, Anthony.”

“I don’t see what that got anything to do with bringing kids up. Plus you would be surprised at the responsibility that I got.” Keith snorted at that. It seemed that putting down people was the man’s favorite pastime.

“How much do you earn, Anthony? Several hundred dollars per appearance? That is hardly a fortune. Darcy, is this the man you are involved with?” Darcy’s mother was looking at her when Keith spoke as if she let Jesus down along with the entire North American continent. They were asking that now? Tony made their relationship clear without actually speaking from the moment they stepped foot inside this house. It was as if they were giving her a way out by denying it.

What the-? Tony is sitting next to me. His friends are around us. What you want me to say? No?

“Yes, mother. He is the man that I am involved with.”

“We knew this was going to happen. Did I not tell you so, Margaret?” Keith spoke to no one in particular as he took as sip of his drink while he skewered Rogers with his eyes for the audacity to mock him with Hitler’s speech. Rogers to his credit was staying put. Too still and too quiet.

“Darcy Lou, pumpkin, you should not settle-”

“The day Lewis will settle for something less will be the day the Hell freezes over solid. Jesus, help us all if that happens.” Barton casually butted in on the conversation as he fidgeted with the knife. His pleasant bible thumping image was gone. Darcy felt a wave of dread wash over her. It could only mean one thing. They were stopping playing nice.

Barton’s change in demeanor took the Becketts by surprise and her mother instantly sputtered.

“Please do not use the name of our Lord in vain. Natalia, do you think this kind of thing is acceptable?” And of course her mother did not go for the man at fault, oh no, she went for the woman like she was the transgressor. Natasha dropped her disguise too and just shrugged in response.

“I would not know. I am not religious. We dress up for kicks.” The accent was back too. Purposely sharp and grating. Darcy swallowed thickly. Pissed off Black Widow was not good.

“Darcy, is this the company you keep now? Did you come here just to embarrass us? ” How she was embarrassing anyone by coming to see her ill mother was incomprehensible to Darcy at this point but she was sure Mrs. Beckett was going to enlighten her.

“Yes, that is the company I keep. Proudly so.” And that was the truth. They were good people. She liked them. They treated her well.
“This is what I was talking about. You bring them up and they have no gratitude. Do you even have any idea how that reflects on me?” Yeah, because the only thing that ever mattered was how everything reflected on Keith Beckett. There was silence around the room and Tony was squeezing her hand so hard it hurt. They were giving the man enough rope so he could hang himself. Keith probably thought that they felt properly scorned, because he was the ‘important person in the room’ hence his opinion was the only that should have been of any gravity.

“I have no doubt you are aware that I own one of the largest private investment companies in this State.” Steve watched the man speak and he finally understood the strong character of Ms Lewis. She was like him more than he had assumed before. To grow up in environment that like this must have made her so strong headed. How many times was she told that her appearance was inferior to those around her? Her dark eyes, dark hair? Her curious mind? That her strength of will was a disagreeable trait? That she should not desire to have more that what was given to her? That she should not want to become more, better, stronger?

Oh, God how he hated people like the Becketts… What was with misconception that there were no Nazi sympathizers in the States before the War? They were aplenty on every corner, greedy little men parroting the words of the Leader of National Socialist German Workers’ Party. Because it blamed all their problems on other people, the Jews, the communists. And of course the Eugenics… the weeding out of the undesirables, the weak, the disabled, the unfortunate from the genetic pool to make the nation stronger, healthier all for the greater good. So men spoke how they wanted strong children, healthy wives and proud nation. All so appealing sounding… unless you were the other guy, the weak little sod trying to do his best and not die from asthma attack after climbing the flight of stairs… It made you ask.. were you worthless? Was there nothing you could give to this world just because of the way you were born?

‘Was it the kids?’ Clint watched as a thinner, taller version of Keith Beckett walked in with another man. You could smell the arrogance wafting off him like bad cologne. Lewis’s parents looked as caring as a pair of snakes, but not violently abusive, if not psychologically so. The kids though… The guy, Ken was it, nearly stumbled as he saw Lewis seated next to what looked like Tony Stark and dressed like a model from the front cover of a fashion magazine.

So apparently the Becketts were rich. A point Mr. Beckett made only about a million times as he boasted about his investment company named after some rare plant or what not. What Clint wanted to know was what Stark was grinning about. It was not from happiness at how well the Becketts were doing. What was he up to? The thing with Stark was that he was loud and obnoxious all in your face type of guy, but he could be discreet too when it suited him. What was he pulling? He must be pulling something… He freaked pretty bad when Nat told him how Lewis was abused… They all freaked out. Lewis was this little piece of normal in their lives and it turned out that behind the bravado there were scars… just like theirs… and didn’t that made them all mad inside.

“Ah! Kenneth, my son.” Darcy barely spared a glance to the pair that came in, trailed closely by Kat. She had bigger problem on her hands. Namely a bunch of upset superheroes that she just called her kids. A bunch of angry superhero kids… Oh God it was catching, she’d just called them her kids in her mind!

“Darcy! Long time no see. You… look great.” The guy that came along with Ken leered and smiled widely at her. Damn straight she looked good. The stuff on her probably cost more than her yearly rent used to. She blinked at the man as Tony frowned at her in question while she shrugged. Must have been one of Keith associates for all she knew.
“Do I know you?” She needed to go to the toilet. It was getting urgent.

“Darcy Lou!”

Darcy was getting really fed up with her mother sounding scandalized at almost every thing that came out of her mouth. This was one of the reasons why they hadn’t spoken for as long as they did. Her mother making it sound like she did absolutely everything wrong and expecting her to roll over because she had no other choice. Well, after going to Culver against everyone’s wishes she just had enough of it. There was always a choice and Mrs. Beckett should have known by now that Darcy Lewis had no problem going through with those choices.

“If you will excuse me, this lady needs to refresh herself.”

“Want me to…” Tony stood up with her fully ready to help her get where she needed to go and it made her smile. He could be sweet in the most unexpected ways.

“Got it under control, but thank you.” Darcy couldn’t help herself and pulled him closer by the lapel of his atrocious jacket to plant a kiss on the tip of his nose. “Be back in a sec, hot stuff. Make sure the kids behave.”

Natasha would have gone with Darcy even if Stark hadn’t given her a pointed look to follow his girlfriend.

“You ok?” She asked kindly.

“I will be when all of this will be over. Holy shit, I hate this fucking house. No bin in the fucking toilet, what the… I will put my tampon on Keith’s plate, I swear to Thor. Is there a bin by the sink, Nat?”

“Yes.” Natasha stood outside the door as she waited for Darcy to freshen up. The small two cubicle toilet obviously meant for ‘guests’ was dark and felt claustrophobic.

“Well, thank fuck. Can we just go? I need to get the…”

“Darcy! Oh…” Natasha dropped into a crouch and nearly pulled her gun out as the door leading out was pushed open with a bang. Kathryn Beckett stormed through the long narrow corridor up to where Nat was standing again. “Is she here?”

“She is, Ms Beckett. The other toilet is empty, though.” Was the little brat trying to intimidate her? The woman was towering over her in the ridiculously high heels and glaring, the long blond hair doing to favors for the orange shade of skin, and Natasha smiled. They had stopped pretending as soon as Clint opened his big mouth. There was no use. She slowly let her hair fall free on her shoulders and rolled them to release some of the tension.

“Do you mind?” The blonde asked acerbically. Oh, she did. Very much so. So it was the step-kids after all, it seemed. They were the ones that took the resentment of having Darcy in their lives that little step further. Just at that the brunette finally got out looking just as peeved as she sounded earlier.

“I am not deaf, Kat. What you want?” There was no love lost between the two.

“Why do you always do this? Huh? You couldn’t come on your own? Mother is embarrassed because of you. ” Natasha had to give it to Darcy as she calmly washed her hands. She didn’t allow the woman intimidate her.
“Mother was supposed to be in the Hospital, in critical condition, according to your call…”

“I merely suggested you come and see her, I have never told you to bring the entire village along!” Oh, so they wanted her here all alone, Natasha raised her brows as she caught Darcy’s eye. They all suspected that there was an agenda to the call and apparently it required Darcy to be outnumbered. Well, that wasn’t happening.

“Dad wants to talk to you.”

“I will be right out.”

“Without that… clown at your side. Go to the office.” Natasha wondered what was going down in the dining room. Ms Beckett was spitting bullets. It must have been fun there.

“No.”

“What?” There was actual surprise on Ms Beckett’s face.

“I said, no, Kat. I will dry my hands, thank Nat for waiting on me and go back into the dining room that my boyfriend and... the kids are waiting for me in. If Keith has got anything to tell me, he. Can. Just. Spit. It. Out. There.” Darcy was looking for something in her bag as Kathryn Beckett did the mistake of reaching for her. Natasha wished that there was more space as she swiftly intercepted the hand grabbing it by the wrist, twisted it and at the same time kicked the woman sharply in one knee. Kathryn Beckett merely had the time to take a single breath as she found herself on the floor face down.

“Oh, wow. Nice one, Natasha.” Darcy stared at her open mouthed as she deftly passed Natasha her bag so she could quickly step over the temporary obstacle using her crutches.

“We should go back before Stark suits up and blows in here.”

Darcy could tell that shit was going to go down as soon as she left and was not overly surprised to hear raised voices as they returned. She was still enjoying that nice warm glow at the sight of Black Widow handling Kat. It was so beautiful she was close to tears. She would have done that herself years ago but the problem then was that she lived there and Keith would have had her on moldy bread and water for a months. But still, it was beautiful. Nat was getting all the cookies at home.

“I don’t care. If you think that I will leave her alone with any of you-! Oh, hey, Spark. All good? Dinner about to be served. You sure you ok?”

They were all standing now. Including her mother who looked a little shaken up.

“This man is trying to take advantage of you, Darcy Lou!” She cried.

“Did Kathryn not tell you to go to my office?” Keith must have tried to excuse himself to go and talk to her after sending Kat with the message. Darcy ignored him as she walked past them to pull Tony into her arms and kiss him soundly much to the outrage of her family.

“Oh, yes, he is taking advantage. In most delightful ways.” Tony gave her an absolutely filthy smile before he kissed her again.

“Couldn’t have said better myself. Well, I could have but that was a good way to put it. By the way, Honeynunny, did you know that you are apparently engaged to be married to the young man behind you?”
I really hope you liked it, Peepsters!

Let me know what you think of the longest chapter so far =) help keep the plot bunnies fed!

Much appreciated as always and many thanks to those that leave comments as you keep me going =)
Wino,

Many thanks and great work once again=

Much appreciated

xxx

Chapter 54

“Couldn’t have said better myself. Well, I could have but that was a good way to put it. By the way, Honeybunny, did you know that you are apparently engaged to be married to the young man behind you?” Darcy could see Tony’s lips move. Heard the words and, just as great many things in her life, they didn’t make any sense.

What? “The fuck?”

“So I take that as a no.” Tony gave her a little peck on the lips that made Darcy snap her mouth shut and smiled. It was not a good smile. Tony Stark had a lot of smiles. Several for every occasion. It was one of the talents that he had. His smiles told an entire story. “Well, good, because I was kind of expecting to have priority in that regard, since we together and all. Have I told you how fetching this color looks on you?”

“Tony, what are you talking about?” No one could throw her off balance quite like her family, Darcy had always known that. No matter how low she set the bar of her expectations they always managed to slither right under it. Right under. Engaged? They had already tried to get her engaged, if one chose to call it that. Right before Culver. To a violent arsehole. She was struggling to understand what was going on as Tony pulled her closer and rubbed her shoulders to disperse some of the pent up tension that had accumulated in her.

“Lewis, handsome there is under the impression…” Clint grinned at her and winked at Natasha.

“Darcy Lou-!” Thor… She did not have the time or strength for that.

“Hold it! What is going on? What engagement?” This day was a nightmare. The further it went the scarier it got. It felt like everything that was happening in this house was somehow disconnected from reality. Finally, Darcy turned to look at the man that had greeted her before she’d gone to the loo. He was average height, with a man bun, smiled like a total douche. What was the name now? Metrosexual? “Who the Hell are you?” She asked loudly. Naturally, her mother looked like she was about to pass out and leaned on Keith’s arm; it looked very dramatic but that was not what Darcy
was interested in at the moment. Oh, no. The guy that clearly shopped with Ken at the ‘My Daddy still pays all my bills’ department store smiled at her again, making Darcy blink rapidly as to not be blinded by the white teeth, and took few steps forth to stop right in front their little group.

Was it her imagination or had the kids around her shifted, slightly moving just a fraction closer to her? She wasn’t sure. I really need to stop calling them kids…

“Hi, Darcy.” Ok, riiiiight. How her own name was going to enlighten as to who he was, Darcy wasn’t sure. She waited a heartbeat before hissing at Tony, who was watching the guy carefully clearly not liking how close he now stood to them. His lips curved into a half smile, the one that Darcy called ‘I will let you dig that hole until it collapses on you’.

“It’s not funny. Clue me in. What did I miss?”

“You missed quite an interesting conversation, my sweet little honey pot.” Her boyfriend hissed back in a very dramatic voice, and Darcy couldn’t help herself from smiling. Trust Tony to casually throw in sexual innuendo as part of a normal conversation, in front of her parent no less. But she had to focus on the situation because this was a joke. It had to be.

“How dare you… Darcy, do you know what that …man said to Margaret?” Keith looked indignant, shooting glares at her.

“No, I don’t. But please tell me, I need to know how many cookies I need to bake him. Unless, of course, he would to like my gratitude expressed in some other ways.” Darcy said matter-of-factly; she could do those jokes too. Tony didn’t turn to face her fully, but his eyes moved very slowly to settle on her for a split second. He didn’t say anything, but the look was intense and charged. Yeah, so other ways it is. She cleared he throat. “I make a mean meat pie.”

“I remember those!” Exclaimed Legolas, delighted. “There were some in the freezer back in New Mexico. And those gravy packets you had alongside them? You poured some over the pies after heating and you believed in heaven. The bids went up to fifteen bucks a pop. Oh, man, it is making me hungry now.”

“I can’t believe this. You are such a pest, Birdie. Why were you even poking your nose into our freezer? You know what? Never mind.” They’d thought that it was Eric, so they never asked. It was Cupid dude all along, and did he say he sold them too?

“She is soooo gonna get you for that.” Rogers whistled under his breath and that purposely or accidentally interrupted Keith and the man couldn’t take it anymore.

“We knew this was going to happen. It was obvious. You tangling yourself up with… with this sort of people. Had been, so called performers, Darcy. Disgraceful. And you bring them into our house, we could have had guests! What would have people said?!” Keith waved at them with his hand as if making a point. From a side, Darcy imagined he probably thought he had.

“Dad, please. There is no need to be so harsh.” Ken sounded like he was trying to speak up for her, pacify the situation, but Darcy knew better: Kenneth Beckett would never be on her side for no reason. He wouldn’t do it even if there had been a reason. “I am sure that being a secretary, on sick leave none the less isn’t easy, managing finances doesn’t come naturally to everyone.” Darcy’s shoulders sagged a little as her mother nodded at that. Oh, no, he didn’t. Ken looked her up and down slowly, the eyes lingering on her breasts few seconds too long for it to be polite before he grinned at Tony, as if they were sharing a dirty joke. “We are very grateful to you for getting our Darcy here for us.” He did. Kenneth was implying that she was fucking Tony to get a free ride.
The implication of it was loud and clear. It hung in the air. Like one of those sticky fly traps, sickly sweet stench enticing poor, greedy victims to give it a try, to get entangled for the entertainment of the one that hung it there. Tony laughed out loud. Did they think they were being clever? Trying that bad cop/good cop approach to get him and the others to leave? First came the poorly obscured threats and now they were lauding him for the assistance rendered to Darcy? While at the same time implying that she quite literally sold herself for the ride, of course.

“You really shouldn’t.” Tony meant it. The Becketts shouldn’t be grateful to him, to them.

“No, no. We are more than happy to…” Tony watched as the boy reached for his wallet. Was he going to throw a couple of bills at them? Did they think it was going to work? Wasn’t that sweet?

“I suggest you put that away, sir. Ms Lewis... Mum didn’t come here for your benefit, nor did we assist her to be rewarded.” Rogers’ voice was calm. One of the few things that Tony had learned: Captain Freshly Defrosted was quite passionate and when he got this calm it never ended well for the opposing side.

It was truly astonishing that someone like Darcy could come out of such a snake pit, but on the other hand it wasn’t. Steel only got stronger after it was tempered.

“Darcy is a secretary.” Mr. Beckett found the idea hilarious. To prove his point he pulled out the cheque book. Tony merely blinked and noted that Kat Beckett had finally rejoined them, looking slightly worse for wear, eyeing Romanov warily.

“Yes, she is. For that… what is her name? Foster woman that works with stars? I know it, that was how I found her, because someone did not have the decency to let us know that she’d changed her phone number.” Ms Beckett snorted as if there was something she found funny and looked Darcy over. “You don’t need a degree for that.” As entertaining as it was to watch the Becketts dig themselves deeper, his patience had already worn thin and he could tell that the ‘kids’ were thinking the same thing. While his little Spark seemed to stand firm, he could tell that their opinion still wounded her. He couldn’t take it anymore. Tony gently squeezed her elbow to stop her before she tried again to reason with them. That was it.

“Darcy is working as Personal Assistant and Research Partner to a Doctor Jane Foster PhD, an astrophysicist, who had recently been nominated for a Nobel Prize for her revolutionary work in the field of Physics. Let me assure you that Darcy has put her knowledge, gained while studying at one of the best educational institutions of its kind in this country that she, by the way, had graduated with highest honors, not that you would know, to good use.”

There was a second of silence as the Becketts stared at him like he had just pulled all that from his ass. What was wrong with those people?

“That Foster woman nominated for a Nobel Prize? Don’t make me laugh. I wasn’t aware that they judged by the looks now-”

“Jane has been working in her field for most her life. Her study on-” Darcy nearly choked on the words in rage as she stood to her boss’s defense.

“Here we go again. Darcy wants to do science. Research Partner?” Kat Beckett tossed her hair over her shoulder as she spoke to his girlfriend in a condescending voice. “Making someone coffee is not you doing science. Just like you hooking up with a tired wash-up is not-”

Wait wait... “I knew it! You wanted to do science. What happened?” That was news; Spark had always made it sound like she wasn’t really into it until Foster came along.
“Life happened, Tony. It cost extra and I couldn’t get that big of a loan. So I did the next best thing. I committed to a degree that one day could help me improve the chances of others doing what they wanted. Education is a right. Everyone should have access to it, it is the only way to eventually eradicate bigots.”

“A female brain is not designed to cope with such complex knowledge. Even Kenneth found it challenging.” Before Tony could retort Darcy all but exploded.

“Ken had me do his fucking homework! He couldn’t add up properly, of course he found it challenging. I bet he failed. You didn’t you? I couldn’t do hard science because you wanted to do it and me besting you was not a thing that Keith could take. Since women can’t do science. I could have gone to fucking MIT, but you didn’t let me apply! I had enough of you fucking my life over. What is this shit about me being engaged? I have a boyfriend.”

“Darcy Lou, you are embarrassing us! I know you wanted to apply for Cambridge, but they would have rejected you.” Her mother snidely said. “They had rejected Kathryn the year before! We have saved you the disappointment. Had you gone to the local college as we had suggested and studied childcare, I wish I had such an advise years ago, you would have been able to live at home and gained valuable experience for when you married, instead of going off to into the blue! It was highly irresponsible of you. No wonder the best that you managed was this.” Tony gritted his teeth as the woman pointed at him. All that digging. They must have reached China by now. “But we know, you are just confused, Darcy, life can get complicated and you just need guidance.” Oh, they were laying it on thick.

“You were not this terse or opinionated growing up when you lived under this roof, it was this school that put those ideas in your head. You are a pretty girl.” Keith motioned at the young man at same time giving Tony and his ‘kids’ a spiteful look. “A woman must…”

“Do what the Hell she wants.” Romanov’s voice was low as she said that. “Schools don’t put funny notions in women’s heads, Mr. Beckett. All that the school does is teaching us that we have a right to have a choice in the matter of our own lives. Regardless of what we chose. You are right, Darcy, education is what one day will save the world. Eradicate the ignorance of people like you.” Tony tried to decide if he should interfere just in case Romanov was going to snap; she was right in the face of Keith Beckett.

The man sputtered.

“Will you allow this woman to speak to your father like that, Darcy Lou?!” Margaret Beckett nearly pushed Romanov away from her husband even thought it was him that was getting in the faces of Darcy’s party, but Tony half suspected that it was because the man was eyeing Romanov’s breasts while at the same time being offended.

“He is not my father. My father is dead, Thor bless his soul, and yes, I will, because I agree with everything she said. Now, let’s get back to the main topic, the engagement.”

“You must get yourself out of that company, Darcy Lou! They are poisoning your mind. You waste your time... you must realize that your prospects are diminishing. What will you do a few years from now? No man.” Mrs. Beckett pushed to stand right in front of Darcy, making them all tense up, not liking how close the people that had abused her were to his little Spark again.

“I hope that it will be something to do with mechanics… maybe robotics, but I do not think that I would be able to ever let go of astrophysics, because Dr Foster, so I say it will be a mix of the three. So while we’re at it, Kat? I forgot to wish you lots of love and happiness in your married like. My invitation probably got lost in the post.”
“I… I am not married, Darcy.” Kathryn Beckett flushed red with embarrassment. That was interesting.

“Wait. For real? Mother didn’t come to my graduation because she was too busy with your upcoming wedding.” Mrs. Beckett had no reply to that and Darcy took few deep breaths before she continued. “Ok, five years, I am over that. Not coming because… Fine. Whatever. So you are not a Mrs. But I am somehow magically engaged?” All signs showed how much she wasn’t over it yet. It must have hurt to find out there actually wasn’t even a reason for her mother’s no show.

“Don’t you remember me, Darcy?” The Barbie’s Ken-wannabe tried again. Whoever that man was he had a high opinion of himself.

“No.” His Sugar Plum did not mince words.

“We went to school together for a year?” No signs of recognition.

“Still no.”

“He is the Hammonds’ son.” Mr. Beckett said that like it was an obvious fact.

“Who are they?” Not obvious enough.

“Our friends. Darcy Lou, I am sure you remember the Hammonds.” Mrs. Beckett’s tone was so self assured that it nearly made him wonder if he had ever met those people.

“I wasn’t allowed to be in the way during the social events in this house. So, no, I don’t.” It looked like Darcy neither did, nor particularly cared about changing the current state of affairs in that regard.

“Well, this is Harley, you remember Harley. You were friends!”

“No, we weren’t since I don’t even remember him. But anyway. So how are we engaged?”

“Engaged is such a strong word.” Then maybe you shouldn’t have so casually thrown it at me?

“You said that Lewis is engaged to be married to the schmuck.” Barton was eyeing the man like the rest of them, deciding if he was being ballsy or just plain stupid standing right in front of them like that.

“I’m sorry? Who do you think you are calling schmuck?” Plain stupid it is. Delusional too as he tried to intimidate a seasoned field agent and a war veteran.

“You, schmuck.” Popsicle man piped up and Tony half expected young Mr. Hammond to try and square up on him, but it seemed there were still two brain cells to rub together. How disappointing.

“No wonder-” Keith no doubt wanted to once again berate her for the company that she kept but Darcy had no patience left for that.

“So, Harley. Help a girl out here. What with us being engaged?”

“Yeah, Harvey, help my girlfriend out here. What made you think that you are engaged to her?” Tony stood close to her all the time and it made this awful situation just about manageable. From the second they got here all she could think about was how much she wanted to get back to Malibu, or New York even. It was where her life was now, where she wanted to be. With her nose in a book or some machinery with Tony somewhere close, going about his day. Or them just curling up together after lunch, snarking and sassing at each other, or the feeling of Tony carefully getting into bed next
to her at night if he had been working late. She wanted to go home…

“Our parents thought that we would match.” Yeah, totally a good reason for her to drop everything and jump into his arms. Not.

“And you will. Don’t you think so, Darcy Lou? You have so much in common. He is so smart, Harley got a degree in Accounting just like Ken, and is working for his father’s company-”

“The BSGC.” Tony dropped the name as it was a no big deal before cracking up and pressing a kiss to her temple as he nearly cackled from glee. “This is too perfect to be true.” Everyone looked at him oddly. Darcy included.

“Yes, my father owns-” Harley preened while he looked Tony and Agent Arms over. It was clear that he thought it was an achievement and should be a source of envy for the other men. It wasn’t.

“No, he doesn’t. But we will get to that part soon enough, schmuck. Now back to the topic of you imagining that you got a chance with my girl. Which, just to make it clear, you don’t, but let’s hear it.”

“Do you know who I am?” There was silence around them and Darcy tried not to roll her eyes. The Becketts looked as if they were in the know and Darcy Lewis with her friends were some lowly peasants.

“Well, I know you are not on the Board of the BSGC.” That was one random fact. It sounded random only if you did not know Tony.

“Tony, what is going on?” The thing with Tony Stark was that he did not randomly drop names. He didn’t do that. He didn’t have to unless he was somehow involved.

“I love nature, don’t you, Spark?” Okay. This was weird even by Tony’s standards. “But of course you do. We talked about it on several occasions, about the natural wonders of the State Of Louisiana which I have come to admire thanks to you... Since you are the greatest of the wonders that has come out of it.” It was hard not to get sidetracked by that sinful voice. The things he so casually said could make any woman swoon, but she wasn’t any woman, so Darcy allowed herself a brief smile and what she had hoped was a sassy wink, to show her appreciation of Tony’s unwavering commitment in keeping her self esteem riding high. His methods occasionally still left much to be desired, but she was going to make do.

“What has nature got to do with me being engaged?”

“Oh, I could make a guess, but I’d rather your mother give a try at explaining. After all, we are due some laughs for this evening.” Tony radiated giddiness as he said that and it only made Darcy more nervous. She could not, for the love of Thor, see where this was going. What could possibly nature, her parents and Tony have in common? Because Tony was way too happy not to be personally involved. “You want to sit down, Spark? You look a little off.” He really needed to stop earning brownie points and being an asshole at the same time.

“Oh! Oh, man. Stark, dude, don’t tell me it is something to do-” The look that Tony gave Cupid was one of an open threat. “Aaaand I am shutting up. Lewis-, what Stark? Stop trying to kill me with your eyes, I am not going to spoil it! Nat, you are my witness, I guessed what was up first. Oh, this is going to be gooood.” Cupid looked as pleased as she had ever seen him and whatever was going on Natasha’s eyes widened just a fraction as she caught on on what ever Darcy was missing. At least Steve… Nope, the Super Soldier was all smiles now too. Ok, she was being left out. Fine. She was just fine about it and not at all offended at being left out. Nope.
“I am not even going to ask how you would know about any of it.” Tony wasn’t happy for some reason.

“We were merely exploring our options and besides, it wasn’t like you were being slick about it.” The Archer just shrugged, still smiling. What options were they talking about? Tony gave them all a look and nodded as if agreeing to some unspoken part of the statement. It was starting to drive her wild.

“Darcy Lou, are you hearing this?” Darcy was seriously asking herself if her mother had any other setting to the voice apart for the default ‘outraged/annoyed’ whenever they were in each other’s vicinity. Probably not.

“Yes?” You could not miss Tony speaking, he had this light but at the same time strangely deep baritone voice that always attracted attention. She should know. It was always a struggle to ignore him when he was being a dick, since regardless of what he was saying he still sounded good. Life was unfair, but she was determined to overcome it as long as he said things that she did want to hear after. ‘It reaaaally isn’t the time to be turned on by your man’s voice, Darcy. Focus.’

“Did I not tell you that he wants to take advantage of you? Us? He looked into your father’s company! They are trying to use you!” It sounded like Mrs. Beckett had just made a great revelation and Darcy only rolled her eyes, much to the chagrin of the woman. At this point Darcy wasn’t at all surprised that the Becketts thought that Tony was here for the money. They always thought that all people that were not obscenely wealthy were out to con them.

“Darcy.” What’s-his-face Harley sounded so full of concern on her behalf. Oh, hell, no. She watched in slow motion as the man extended his hand to ‘save’ her from those despicable people that she was with, that wanted to milk the noble Beckett family.

Harley Hammond never reached her because a hand landed on his shoulder and she could see the thumb digging into the jacket, making him yelp in surprise.

“That is close enough, son.” How could Rogers stay so damn calm was beyond her. Well, at least he sounded calm.

“Get your paws off of me you brute!” Well, that was one weak insult. But it got a reaction as the seemingly gentle push made her alleged fiancee fly backwards only to be stopped from a fall by Ken, who grabbed him by the arm creating a commotion between the Becketts.

“Upsy daisy. I’m so sorry. Please do not infringe on Mum’s personal space. She already has Dad for that.”

That joke better be dying soon... “Atta boy.” Darcy gaped at Tony who winked cheekily at her, but his eyes were sharp and dangerous. That wasn’t good.

“Darcy, come here immediately. How can you even stand next to those violent thugs? I want them out of my house, now. Thank the Lord we have seen them before they do more damage to your reputation, before people see you with them. They are manipulating you. Look at them, what decent people would do what they do? ” It looked like Mr. Beckett was ready to explode all over the place and it was all focused on her as per usual.

“Father, please.” Kenneth once again tried to make himself sound like the voice of reason. “This is an unfortunate situation. I am sure Darcy has nothing but the best intentions at heart, we can hardly blame her for ignoring her responsibilities when it comes to protecting the Company’s reputation or her own, she has been away for so long mixing with these kind of people. I am sure you can see, that
we are happy to have you back, Darcy, I can just imagine how you struggled having to constantly move and sometimes the desire for some sort of stability in a woman’s life wins over anything else. Well, you are home now. We will help you settle back into the life that you deserve.” So basically she was too naïve, home sick and shortsighted to see beyond her nose and their infinite generosity was going sort her life out for her.

“Oh, let me guess! Please. Was that your idea of getting Darcy settled? Her mother gets oh, so ill, Darcy obviously can’t just come, what after moving all the way from London to NYC, that is never cheap, maybe you would have eventually been so generous as to offer to pay the fare for her? Ah! Ah! Ah! I am not done yet, ladies and gentlemen.” Ken’s mouth snapped shut at Tony's words. “So Darcy comes here after being stressed and feeling guilty for weeks and you introduce her to Ken’s ‘adorable’ boyfriend here, we are not judging. Really. Yes, it is that obvious even if you ogle your stepsister’s frontal assets. Was that the bright idea? Keep it in the family? But you know what? I think there might still be a side plot going. You help out the Hammonds, pawn off their little 'deviant' onto Darcy? But why? I bet there is some scandal about to break about their precious little boy that needs a pretty girl to stand next to him. Because if it had been a good match as you are really desperately trying to pass it as, the apple of your eye and the woman impersonating the scarecrow in her spare time would have no doubt been your fist choice.” There was sputtering around for various reasons, it mostly being the insults and also, Darcy suspected, that Tony was dead on the Becketts agenda for her. It was an unpleasant truth to stomach.

“These accusations are outrageous! Well, I have never-!”

“Go out more then. So back to the side plot. What could that possibly be? Oh, right the BSGC. Honey do you know what the BSGC does?”

“Not a clue. Another investment company like Keith’s?” Darcy shrugged she had honestly never heard of them.

“No, it's a fracking company.”

“My father-” Tony laughed openly at Harley as he tried to butt in again, still rubbing his shoulder.

“Who do you think you are?” Kat’s voice trembled as she spoke, clearly still trying to stomach the insults from earlier. “Did everyone hear his son call him Stark what.. what a joke. I know Tony Stark.” It was Darcy’s turn to burst out laughing. Yeah, right.

“You don’t, Kat. Because this is Tony Stark.” They had stopped pretending a while back but she wanted to make it official.

The Becketts laughter resembled that of hyenas.

“Oh, Darcy Lou, this man is not Tony Stark. Kat has been on a date with him just the other week.” The fake sympathy in her mother’s voice only made Darcy laugh harder or maybe it was the look on Tony’s face.

“Never happened. My standards had never been that low. ” He sounded disgusted.

“Got to back Tony up on that, since he was with me when he wasn’t working or Avenging.”

“No one has seen Tony Stark for the last month. Not since that scam came up with his supposed girlfriend. He doesn’t have one. Not right now at least. He is just tired of all the publicity.” Kat made it sound like she knew what she was talking about.

“Kat, you know what? What the fuck ever, I don’t have time for this. Mr. Stark?” Tony instantly
pulled her closer their noses almost touching his entire focus on her.

“Yes, Ms Lewis?”

“So what has nature got to do with me and the sham engagement?” It had dragged on long enough and it was time to start wrapping it up so she could get the hell out of there. Besides she really wanted to know what Tony was up to.

“Right, right. I was going to wait, till it was all finalized before surprising you. But I guess there will be no hard to tell you now, since it's technically all done and agreed.”

“Tony, stop stalling.” She huffed.

“We have the Invitations for the Annual Gala for the Maria Stark -” Keith was trying to make it sound important and give some credibility to Kat’s claim.

“You and quite few other people do, we sell tickets for that.” The brisk manner that Tony replied indicated that it was a surprise for him, but as always he recovered instantly. “Regardless, now, Spark, what was the thing that you moan to me about the most?”

“Your tendency to cremate the bacon? When you put it on the pan it is already dead. No need to kill it twice.” Well, in principle charcoal was good for the stomach. Tony stared at her before groaning under his breath.

“You are killing me, Smalls.”

“Yeah, but what a way to go.” She smiled. That earned her a kiss. Fast and hard. It made her giggle for some reason. It felt great. Great to have someone on her side like that.

“The right answer was the Investment companies, not to mention any names here, buying out large plots of natural wetlands with the intention of exploiting it without the regards to the wildlife and without the any long lasting benefits to local communities.” Yeah, she remembered that.

“We talked about it once.”

“It made you upset, I was not going to bring it up again.” That was surprisingly gallant of Tony.

“Are you two talking about fracking? It is not exploitation. It is an investment. Not that you would know anything about it, Tony.” That must have struck a chord with Keith as the man sneered at them. “Darcy, I would have expected more from you than going around spreading rumors.”

“It has been proven that fracking can not be done safely in the wetlands. That it will more than likely end in contamination of the ground water, air pollution and the impact on the wildlife and local people, the industry is appallingly under regulated -” It was something she was always passionate about. She wasn’t a green warrior, not by any means, but she lived on this planet and its fate was a concern to her. Besides green energy was the way forward.

“Speculations. Nothing but speculations. It will benefit everyone. We have acquired the rights-”

“Actually, you haven’t. You see, your joint bid with BSGC fell through. A better proposal just happened to pop up at the eleventh hour and the Governor of Louisiana was just so inclined after a very convincing presentation to grant the right to buy the extensive wetlands, that used to belong to the State but now are up for grabs, to Stark Industries.” Darcy felt herself shiver.

“Tony, you didn’t. You said the board would never approve anything like and you can’t buy it
“Well that was before they were falling over themselves to keep you sweet. Blame Potts, she was the one that told them of your inclination to save those lands.”

Cupid could no longer contain himself started cackling and he leaned on Natasha. “Oh, man. Priceless. These are the moments worth living for. People telling Stark how he is not the Tony Stark, when he is at the same time making them bankrupt. That is just precious, Nat, come on. You got to admit that it is precious.”

“Nonsense, Stark Industries would not be interested in fossil fuel,” Keith didn’t sound so sure anymore as he was eyeing Tony with some degree of caution. It was happening. It was really happening.

“Of course not. But we are interested in building a manufacturing industry that would run sustainable energy sources. Plus, SI is committed to protecting the wetlands ecosystem. Spark, what do you say if we start moving?” He added as an afterthought.

“I might just about be able to forgive you for the bacon.” Why was she saying that?

“I forgot it was there, ok? Can you please let it go? There is nothing wrong will extra well done bacon.”

Darcy felt like she was in some kind of trance.

“Thank you, Tony.” She wanted to say more. To say how deeply she was touched by his gesture but it was like her tongue was suddenly tied in knots. She was vaguely aware as Nat helped her with the coat.

“Welcome, Darcy.”

“They will not technically go bankrupt as the deal falls through.” Nat wasn’t completely convinced as they were leaving the house. Tony just shrugged at her words.

“Not completely and by the way, sure I am Tony Stark. Before we go, for Darcy’s sake even when we all know that none of you gives a fuck about her. Kat, I would like to ask you and your family to refrain from advertising any association to Darcy Lewis in any way, forms or fashion.”

… So… them leaving peacefully? Just walking out the door and closing this chapter of her life? Yeah, that didn’t quite work out. Harley after all did not have two brain cells to rub together, and neither did Ken who followed them out.

“So that is it? Darcy, I am talking to you! Don’t know where that fucking loser - ” Wham!

“Tony! Shit!” She wasn’t fast enough to turn around before her boyfriend demonstrated exactly what he thought of her stepbrother. Kenneth went down like sack of potatoes. Darcy strongly suspected that he had never been in a fight before. Nothing physical one at least. Tony managed to deal couple good blows before Ken was flat on the gravel. The look of bewilderment in her stepbrother’s face was comical and Darcy had no pity as he spat blood out from his broken nose and split lip.

“Somebody call the Police! Security!” Mrs. Beckett hollered from the front step of the house.
Of course they weren’t going to stay still for that, too. They turned to leave.

She may or may have not flipped still stunned looking Becketts on her way out. Darcy was sure that she was going to hear from them again. She really needed to get herself a good lawyer.

So Peepsters? What did you think? Let me know! Plot bunny feeding time =) and I also started another Darcy/ Tony =) it was supposed to be a one-shot but it is not anymore =) hope you enjoy it Peeps! There is never enough IronShock!
Chapter 55

Wino,

Excellent work and I hope you will feel better soon

xxx

Chapter 55

Jack Cooper had been working for the Louisiana State Police for over twenty years and could confidently say that he had seen it all. He had seen horrific murders over the most ridiculous things. He had seen people dead and dying. He had drawn his weapon in defense of himself and others. He had seen tiny, motionless, rat bitten bodies being pulled from the gutter. He had seen the humanity at its lowest and nastiest. But he had also seen people trying to talk random strangers from jumping off bridges. He had seen acts of kindness that transformed lives that others had given up on. He had seen bystanders saving their fellow men because it was the right thing to do.

So, with the extensive experience under his belt, Jack did not usually do welfare checks, but his boss dropped the file on his desk with a sigh.

“Do me a favor, treat it as a standard missing case.”

“Who’s missing?” Someone rich or famous or both was his guess.

“Not technically missing. The family is concerned about her well-being; also they are bringing assault charges against the boyfriend. Get this. The man looks like Tony Stark. We just got their security surveillance records.” Grainy quality of the shots gave just enough detail to get a general view. They both had a good laugh. “Impersonator believe it or not and the others I am not sure, the girl’s family thinks that they might be his foster kids or something.”

“Who’s the family?” Clearly someone with enough influence to pull some strings, but not enough to make people care. His boss and longtime friend sighed again making it known that neither getting nor passing this case to Jack was his idea or that he liked it in any way.

“Keith Beckett.” Ah... Jack never had a professional or personal contact with the man, but he had heard plenty enough about his less than stellar views on several things, beginning from immigration and finishing with race relations. Theirs wasn’t the largest city and Mr. Beckett liked playing the big fish in this shallow pond. “His daughter is missing? I would have thought-”

His friend nodded. “I would have thought that too, but it's his stepdaughter that is MIA.”

“He got a stepdaughter? Since when?” He checked the grainy photos again. Interesting.
“Since he married the girl’s mother twenty years ago.”

“First time I am hearing that he got more than two kids.” It was a well known fact. Well, what do you know?

“Me too.” Dominic Rolf sat in the chair opposite to him. They had known each other for as long as they been in the force having joined the same year.

“Funny that, don’t you think?”

“I know. Just… Listen, don’t make too much of a fuss, check that the girl is OK and back home.”

“Is this a missing person’s case or is she avoiding them on purpose?” The question hung in the air and the reluctance with which it was answered implied the latter.

“It sounds like a boyfriend introduction gone wrong.”

“You don’t sound too eager to press charges. Can I ask why?”

“Laura, the girl from the reception, went to school with this kid. From what she told me the Lewis girl's got a good head on her shoulders, graduated from Culver at the top of her class, God only knows how she knows that. Hasn’t been back in town ten years since leaving.” Jack frowned. “Yeah, I know.” His boss sighed again, “According to the family she works for Stark Industries now, in New York, secretary to a scientist or something.” It sounded that the girl was doing well enough on her own.

“They tried calling?”

“It seems no one wants to put them through.”

“Wonder why?” He asked sarcastically.

“I know, Jack. It sounds like the kid had enough, but they are on my boss’s case. Just... Check it out for me. Expenses paid trip. Book the flight back for a couple of days later, see the sights. Your wife is visiting the kids back in Oregon, you said that yourself, the house feels cold and empty with her away. Buy some souvenirs.”

“On the expenses?”

“Don’t start taking the piss, Jack.”

“Just checking.”

“Besides you might actually meet Tony Stark. You never know.”

“I thought that was a given, the girl is dating a man that looks just like him.” They had a good laugh about that too. He might even meet Captain America. Who knew?

“Ah, come on, Cooper. It could be worse. We get to see NYC on the department’s dime.” His partner of the last five years was more than happy about the trip. Jack wished he was thirty two again. Their taxi pulled up a block from the imposing building. “Everyone says Stark's got a small dick. What you think?”

“That your fascination with the size of male genitals mildly concerns me. Besides, with all that money in the bank, all those women were probably just angry they didn’t get to stick around and
enjoy his wealth.”

“He got a girlfriend now. Or so they say.” The news of Tony Stark’s alleged new love was all over the papers, the TV, the water cooler at work. He was getting sick of it. So the man was getting laid. So was he. There was no need to talk about it like it could cure cancer.

“Did we really get an appointment with someone in Stark’s security? That is so cool. I bet they know Tony Stark.” No one wanted to pass them any information about Ms Lewis no matter how many times they called and offered verification of their legitimate request. They finally managed to get through to someone on the Security Team that agreed to meet them if they were to come to NYC. At least they were serious about protecting their employees and their personal information. Jack had to admit that he would rather have that than the opposite.

To say that the building lobby was grand was understatement. They had kept the original features of the building that they constructed their monstrosity on. It was lavish. The receptionist greeted them politely as they got past what must have been the first ring of security.

“Good afternoon, gentlemen. How may I help you?” The ladies behind the desk were all smiles.

“We got an appointment with Mr. Hogan? I think we might be a little -”

“Detectives Cooper and Mack of the Louisiana State Police?” Jack glanced at his partner as he nodded politely. Well, they were expected.

“Yes, Ms. We-”

“May I see your IDs please, Detectives?” The woman was polite but firm with the request and he wondered if she was one of the women that he’d spoken on the phone to for few days before trying to get any contact details for Ms Lewis.

“Certainly. It is a nice reception you have here.”

“Thank you, detective Cooper.” Their IDs were handed back after few moments and the woman smiled, apparently satisfied with the findings. “Mr. Hogan has been notified of your arrival. And yes it is. Would you like something to drink while you wait? I will show you to the waiting room.”

“A cup of tea would be nice, thank you.” It seemed that efficiency was the key word around the place as they were handed visitor passes with their names and photos already on them. If only any other place were that good.

‘Efficiency indeed.’ A stoic looking man in suit was making his way before they even took a seat in the waiting area. He looked like a bear dressed for an important meeting. Yeah, you would not get past him easily.

“Detectives Cooper and Mack? Welcome to Avengers Tower.” He said professionally.

“People actually call it that?” Sam acted and spoke like the classic tourist first time in the big city and Jack resisted the urge to apologize for his partner’s behavior. They were here on official business. Decorum was not something that Sam had practiced before coming here.

“No. Sometimes it seems that people didn’t even notice the name change. You have the passes, I see. Good. Follow me.” Efficiency and no nonsense attitude, Jack concluded.
“You're not gonna ask us for IDs?” Mr. Hogan hardly glanced at them as they entered the elevator.

“No. Your identities were verified when you introduced yourself at the reception.” Ok. Exceedingly efficient.

“Thank you for seeing us. It looks that you take your personnel’s security very seriously. We tried calling a few times—”

“Yes. We know. On seventeen separate occasions during two consecutive days. We tracked the number to your department. All calls are logged.” Jack cleared his throat to hide the surprise. That was more than just pure efficiency.

“Yes. We kind of hoped that we wouldn’t have to waste your time.” And our time. Their host must have gotten the idea as he half smiled.

“It is a bit problematic to verify identity over the phone and in essence it could have been coming from anywhere on the globe.”

Yes, problematic. No one went to that length just to get a number for a secretary. This entire situation suddenly started to feel a whole lot more complicated.

“What do you do here again, Mr. Hogan?” The elevator stopped and they exited.

“I am the SI Head of Security.” People did not just set up meetings with Head of Security for one of the largest companies in the world!! Not for verification of some personal details of a secretary. Sam looked just as taken aback. Suddenly Jack wished that he had done more than just the basic research on Ms Lewis.

“Well, thank you for—” It looked like they were on HR floor with people staring at them curiously as they walked past. They clearly did not get random visitors. This is not right. They walked past meeting rooms. Right to what could only have been the corner office and Jack was about to try again.

“Anna?” The girl at the reception desk nearly jumped out of her skin at the sharp address.

“Mr. Hogan, go right ahead. They are waiting for you.” She motioned to the large double doors.

“I hope we are not interrupting?” The Head of Security did not even indicate that he heard Jack, just walked determinedly, making both him and Sam hasten their pace just to keep up, before throwing both of the massive doors open for them.

“Ah, Detectives. Just on time. I hope you got here without a problem? The traffic today is horrific.”

This was without a doubt the corner office and Jack didn’t have to be a genius to realize that the smartly dressed woman that got up from the main desk in the room and was so casually approaching them was Virginia Potts. The CEO of Stark Industries.

“No. No. I think we just made it here before it got too bad.” There were other people in the room that he surveyed quickly trying not to show how momentarily thrown off balance he was. Those are lawyers, was the lighting quick thought in his head. Somebody lawyered up. And those were not some cheap ones either, it was the kind that serious people kept on retainer for when serious problems with badges came knocking on their door.

“That is good to hear. And how rude of me. Virginia Potts.” The smile Ms Potts greeted them with did not reach her eyes. They were sharp and cold. Oh yeah. They were greeted politely but she was
not there to play games or be played. Somehow it felt like he was in a situation where a single wrong move could ruin more than just his career.

“Pleasure, Ms Potts. Detective Cooper and-”

“Oh, wow. Pepper Potts. You dated Iron Man.” Jack gritted his teeth as he refrained from simply hitting his partner upside the head. The woman to her credit merely lifted her brows slightly and ignored the comment.

“-Mack. He is new on the force.” Please don’t sue us for his stupid mouth. There was a single nod as if Ms Potts heard what he not so subtly pleaded for.

“Pleasure is all mine. Now. Please take a seat.” Her smile took a sharper edge.

-----------------------------------------------

Oh, my... Is that a cliffhanger? Who does that? Oh, right... me =) Let me know what you think, Peeps!
Chapter 56

Wino,

Thank you for not giving up on me just yet

you are awesome

xxx

Chapter 56

“Pleasure is all mine. Now, Please take a seat.” Her smile took a sharper edge. It was probably what being ordered by the Queen felt like.

But should they take a seat? There had clearly been a mistake. There had to be. There was always an explanation. Did the security mistake the nature of their request for information? That it was for a single person and for a valid reason? They did not want the list of all the people working for SI or disclosure of any other personal information. Jack motioned for Sam to sit on the sofa opposite the two lawyers as Ms Potts took an armchair. But being rude was not a way to start anything.

“By the way, this is Mr. Spools, Head of our Legal Department and Mr. Lincoln, Mr. Stark’s personal lawyer.” He was right about the suits.

“Pleasure.” He stammered.

“Detectives.” That was a chilly welcome if he ever saw one and Jack gave them a cool look. He was in this line of work long enough to handle attitudes coming from people that thought too much about themselves.

“Thank you, Ms Potts. I-” He watched as Mr. Hogan took a seat opposite them. “I feel like there has been some miscommunication. We are very sorry to have imposed on your no doubt busy schedule, Ms Potts.”

“I do not see how. But let’s start from the beginning, Detectives. I was led to believe that you came here for a specific reason. Requesting personal information, if I’m not wrong? If you could please explain the reasoning for this request.” The red head sounded levelheaded, they were not being refused at least and Jack nodded slowly. It was all about the approach. Most employers in cases like this were just covering their own backsides, fearing lawsuits. It was understandable. He would too were he in their place. It could cost the company a pretty penny.

“We, as you know, hail from Sunny Louisiana.” Smiles always helped and he did his best to lighten the mood up. “There had been a missing person’s report filled with regards to one Ms Darcy Lewis. Her family is concerned for her safety.” Jack paused waiting for the obvious misunderstanding to clear itself up with that, only to see the polite smile slowly disappear from Ms Potts’ face.
“Are they now? How nice of them. Please, do go on.” That was not the reaction he was expecting. After clearing his throat Jack pulled the file with surveillance photos and handed them to Ms Potts. She merely glanced at them before passing the folder along to the suits, who had a closer look along with the Head of Security.

“These are the surveillance photos of the man we would like to speak to. You see him with Ms Lewis, that is the woman with long dark hair, he had an altercation with her siblings that resulted in hospitalization. Since Ms Lewis left with the man and his group, her parents are concerned for her. They were unable to reach her and since she works for SI, we would be grateful if you could help us contact her just to make sure she is safe and sound.”

Mr. Spools cleared his throat at that drawing everyone’s attention to him.

“Ms Lewis does not work, actually, for the Stark Industries: she is directly employed by Dr Foster, who recently signed a contract with Stark Industries, as a Personal Assistant and Research Partner.” They knew who Ms Lewis was. Very well from the looks of things, possibly in person. And Research Partner? That sounded like the girl was doing much more than making coffee all day as opposed to what her family told him. What else didn’t he know?

“We were unable to get in touch with her, as the University advised that Dr Foster is away visiting her family-” Thankfully Sam seemed to be catching on the changing situation as he spoke, this time more reservedly to Ms Potts.

“In London, yes. She should be arriving sometime this week. She is also giving a speech at the local University there, she has recently received a Nobel Prize nomination for her work, after all.” Nobel Prize… Jack had thought that it was a mistake when he’d looked it up. He really should have done a better job at getting ready for this trip case better. But it had all just seemed so straightforward at the time… Instead, this conversation was turning bizarre and no one seemed to be falling over to do the right thing and supply them with the information. Jack cleared his throat again and forged ahead as there was nothing much else he could do.

“How you recognize the man in the photos, Ms Potts? We have no information regarding him, maybe-” It was a long shot but if they got at least a name that would be an improvement and they could leave this place.

“Tony Stark.” Jack didn’t manage to stop the loud short laugh that escaped his mouth. No one looked amused and he raised his hands in mock surrender.

“Sorry, sorry. No, Ms Potts-”

“It is Tony Stark.” Mr. Lincoln had the photos in his hands as he said that, Mr. Spools nodded in agreement as the Head of Security just stared at them passively from his spot the whole time.

“No, he impersonates-” Jack had to admit that he also thought that the men looked incredibly similar.

“Did they actually fell for that?” There was a touch of curiosity in so the far distant tone.

“I’m sorry?”

“The Becketts.” What? He did not at any point mention that name.

The door was thrown open wide suddenly and everyone with exception of Ms Potts in the room jumped up.
“Captain Rogers! Please -”

“Anna, it’s ok. Please close the door.” Ms Potts motioned to the frightened girl and she didn’t have to be told twice as she made a beeline back out. The lawyers also took the seats again, looking only mildly annoyed at the intrusion... or maybe their faces were back to default expression, Jack couldn’t tell. Clearly dealing with superheroes was their daily bread in this Tower.

Captain America, in flesh, full on uniform and Shield, was looking like he was fresh from a battle. And Christ he looked pissed. It was like some alternative reality shit was going on. Mack naturally was awestruck. Again. Lord, his partner’s transfer to financial crime unit couldn’t come soon enough. He really needed someone that could have his back because the Good Captain didn’t look like he wanted to make friends at this moment.

“Is this for real? Do they really want to come for her?” Jack tried to remember if he ever checked what the protocol was on pulling the gun on Captain America and if he would likely to lose his pension over it. Just in case he ever needed to do it… possibly soon. His fingers twitched a little as he got the grip on himself. The odds were that he would be taken down faster than he would be able to get it out. Right. Rethink your position, Old Man. Keep level head. That is the key. Always the key and let him speak. Know the situation before you act. Jack had a habit of talking to himself under pressure. It helped to keep his head cool.

“Steve-” Ms Potts acted like the raging America’s Number One Hero in her office was no big deal.

“She couldn’t stop crying for an hour after we left. Did you know that? All the way to the Jet. Crying. So now they want to file charges on Stark? For what? Not letting those abominations abuse Darcy some more? Did he tell you the things they said to her?!” The phrase ‘His face was terrible to behold in the hour of his wrath’ came to Jack’s mind as he watched the exchange. Also something else occurred to him, right at that moment, as he watched the helmet come off. One of the men from the photos had looked like Captain America... and was Captain America if the other guy was indeed Iron Man. That was an entirely different can of very politically sensitive worms than the standard one he thought he was going to open. Christ, I knew I should have said no… This all expenses paid trip is already shaving years of my life every minute I stand here. Also, that was not how this was supposed to be going. There is no way that the boyfriend in question could have been Tony Stark... it couldn’t be... Shit... Who the fuck wouldn’t recognize him?

“I am handling this, Captain Rogers.” The look that Captain got from the CEO would have killed a lesser man.

“We should have handled it back -” But the Captain was a not a lesser man, the rebuke only seemed to spur him on.

“Captain! You seemed to be still riding the adrenaline high. May I suggest you make yourself slightly more presentable, and maybe take a moment to compose yourself, as not to give the visiting Law Enforcement the wrong idea?” Jack Cooper was not going to even guess what Spools was paid, but it must have been worth every damn penny. And again the Captain took the interruption in stride not caring about the suggestion.

“Presentable? I was presentable and collected when the fat ass, abusive, Nazi loving-”

“I am telling Darcy.” Virginia Potts barely raised her voice and Captain Rogers shut his mouth with a snap at the name. What in the Seven Hells? “She will be di-sa-ppoin-ted at your behavior.” The CEO used the word like a whip; Jack had seen snipers use guns with less efficiency. “Don’t you think so, Captain Rogers?”
“She does not deserve to be put through this again, Pepper.” It seemed that the rage had left the Captain. Watching Virginia Potts rise and go over to the Star Spangled Hero was fascinating. She was grace and power personified.

“I know, Steve. We are handling it.” She leaned in a little and scrunched her nose as she made a face. “Clean yourself up. Where are the others?”

“DC. They had to make a detour. It’s… never mind. Tony said he-” Well, the man was not giving up easily, Jack would give him that.

“That is for later and like I said we are handling this.” Just the thing Jack Cooper wanted to hear, that he was being handled like some kind of infesting rodent.

“I still think-”

“I’ll let Darcy know, she will be very proud of you. It was very sweet of you. But, do not come storming into my office again. I still get enough of that with Tony. Understood?”

“Yes, Ma’am. I still- ” The determination was coming back and the Captain threw them a cold look that made Jack shift uncomfortably and finally speak up. They were not there to pick a fight. All they needed was contact from Ms Lewis, who turned out to be having a much more colorful life than her clueless family knew about.

“Captain Rogers, it is-”

“Capsicle.” The voice that boomed from the ceiling was loud and annoyed. Only him and Mack were seemingly surprised by it, Jack noted. “Do I need to put a leash on you when someone is visiting? Because I am not into that. With men. But I will, if I have to. I am not sure which of the Wonder Twins blabbed but you are going to get your arse out of Pep’s office now. I am the only one allowed to make an entrance like that there.”

“No you are not, Tony.” Virginia Potts sounded exasperated.

“Yes, I am. But anyway, are you going to be there long? I think Spark just gave an inch on the Generator earlier, and I rather get this all out of the way before she reconsiders.”

“Because this will make her upset? Stark, you want to tell me why is this happening? This who-”

“Do not come crawling up my butt, Rogers. Go up Happy’s. He was the one that let Rosalie go straight to Shortstack about this before I got back. Regardless of the fact that she works for me. I think people forget that for some reason.” If angry protective grizzly bears could speak that was how they would have sounded. Extremely pissed off and yet weirdly amused by the absurdity of the situation. Jack couldn’t blame him. He fixed his tie as he sat down finally motioning Mack to do the same. He needed a drink. Large. Strong. “Nice tie, Detective Coop.”

“Uh… Yes, thank you… Mr. Stark? It is Detective Cooper actu-”

“Right. Now, Rogers, stop testing my patience, I do not have time to go there and pry you out so start walking and you better change before you come up, I can feel the stench coming all the way up to the Penthouse.”

Jack really needed to start being careful with what he was wishing for, because meeting Tony Stark when the man sounded like he wanted to eat his liver was not what Jack had in mind.

Yeah, no. It was time for a drink. Make it two.
Hmmm... Does this count as a cliffhanger? =)

Peepsters, let me know what you think!
Chapter 57

Wino,

You the best, as usual =)

many thanks for your continuous help

xxx

Chapter 57

Jack had seen great many things in his fifty eight years on this planet. ‘This is way above my pay grade. Way, way above it.’ It was probably above his boss’s pay grade. This would have been the occasion when the force sent someone from the Prosecutor’s office. Someone in an expensive suit and a Law degree. But no. He, Jack Cooper, got sent for his sins. How was he going to break it to Dominic? He’d do it right after coming back, even if just to ensure that he got to see the immediate horror on the man’s face. ‘Serves him right for tossing me to the sharks like this.’ Because both he and Mack were sitting facing a whole bunch of them. He sipped the still boiling tea and pretended like it did not burn as it went down, just to win a few seconds and collect his thoughts.

“So…” Diplomacy was never his strong point, Jack feverishly thought. He could appear threatening or gullible and he could interrogate people, but this was the next level communication. Mercifully, his partner was using his two brain cells and kept quiet, maybe the situation had finally dawned on him. Jack tried again. “So, in regards to Miss Lewis-”

“Yes?” His spine straightened immediately. Shit. The woman could have as well cocked the metaphorical gun while being all smiles for the two detectives. Miss Potts was not messing around. Dominic owed him more than approving some measly souvenirs that he was going to buy and expenses. The very name of Miss Lewis alone seemed to put everyone on instant alert. He could hardly blame them. Right now any news outlet on the planet would pay in gold for it, or diamonds or whatever fetched highest price. It was actually surprising that they managed to keep it secret for so long. The sudden lack of gossip on Stark and his laying low made now a lot of sense, especially after the big announcement. ‘Crap, this is all just a massive pile of steaming horseshit and they will bury me in it if I sneeze wrong here today.’ The more Jack thought about the worse this entire situation looked… for him.

“I believe it should be said that we were not made aware of Miss Lewis personal situation when we
interviewed her family.” The Becketts, to put it mildly, were not liked by everyone present, which Jack understood and could even relate to on some level. And if he listened to what Captain America had said earlier, *did it really happen or did he hallucinate it?* somehow was still debatable, Keith Beckett and his brood were in for a world of trouble. Jack was going to concede that for now it looked like the only silver lining of this entire experience.

“What were you told exactly, if we may ask?” Technically Jack Cooper was not supposed to spill the beans to the lawyer of the man he was about to question in regards to a suspected assault, but it was that or having his guts spilled later by his boss’s boss, so he was willing to bend the rules in name of justice. Or in the name of his pension, for now.

“They appeared very concerned by her… choice of company.” Keith Beckett had worded it a bit differently and had a certain opinion on said company, that Jack was not stupid enough to repeat it. *Also the assault.* It was safe to say that this particular charge was not going to happen, what it being against Iron Man with Captain America as a supporting witness. It was already dead in the water.

“There also seemed to have been a misunderstanding between Miss Lewis’s boyfriend and Kenneth Beckett.” And that cue was picked up immediately as a file was handed to him in a soft manila envelope by Mr. Stark’s personal shark.

“That is Mr. Stark’s statement in regards to the incident. Our client had been acting in defense of a third person, Ms Lewis in this case. There are also signed witness accounts verifying the legitimacy of Mr. Stark’s claim.”

“Do the Becketts’ intend to make an official complaint?” They did. For how long? Probably not long.

“They used the incident as a basis for their concern~”

“During Miss Lewis visit to her allegedly severely ill mother, the Becketts have alluded to verbal and physical abuse that has taken place against Miss Lewis while she lived with them, it has been one of the dominant factors in Mr. Stark’s strong reaction.” Jack paled. *Abuse. Right. Shit. That is not good.* He’d kind of guessed that there was some unpleasant history between the Becketts and Miss Lewis, but he’d just assumed that like the delightful Miss Beckett the woman was simply a spoiled ass brat and enjoyed making life difficult for everyone.

“I was not aware of any such allegations.” Miss Potts nodded at that, her face carefully blank.

“We did not expect you to. No official charges were ever filed in that regard. So Miss Lewis’s mother has reported her missing?” Mr. Lincoln sounded very pleasant. *Too pleasant.* It was clear that they knew that no official missing person’s report was filed for the girl.

“It is more of an unofficial welfare check. The circumstances being as they were, the family had a legitimate concern.” And friends in the high places.

“What do they want if I may ask? Mrs. Beckett hasn’t been in touch with her daughter for the last five years up to last week, when Miss Lewis was contacted in regards to the woman’s ill health. I do not imagine that the full account of Darcy’s visit was relied to you.” As he sat listening to the CEO of Stark Industries Jack could imagine that it wasn’t. “The Becketts seem to have certain expectations in connection to Miss Lewis that do not in any way align with her own plans, and they are under the impression that her having aspirations that go far beyond their plans for her is abysmal.” *Keith Beckett put it more along the lines that Miss Lewis was stupid and was being taken advantage of.* “Plus they are withholding the education trust fund that had been set up by the late Mr. Lewis from her.” That was added more like an afterthought and it was clear that it was barely a blip on their radar. But it *was* on their radar, Jack noted. He doubted that it was accidentally pointed
out to him. Keith Beckett was wealthy but he was also tightfisted as the rumor had it. But surely he was not fleecing his own stepdaughter? “I hope you can appreciate the sensitivity of this situation, Detective Cooper.”

“I do, trust me I do. Just to clarify-” It was the time to ask silly and obvious questions... just to get them out of the way. Jack felt like it needed to be done, since in this case going by guesswork hadn't worked out too well so far.

“Miss Darcy Lewis is in a mutually committed relationship with Mr. Anthony Edward Stark, also known as Iron Man.” Mr Spools droned coolly. “He is the man in the photos that you brought over. The other people in them are the Avengers. I presume you are aware of them. They have accompanied Miss Lewis to her childhood home and yes, in case of Mr. Stark and Captain Rogers, the Becketts at one point of the visit were made aware of whom the men were and in all honesty it is a marvel that it all ended with such a little argument. The safety and well-being of Miss Lewis are being taken very seriously here. Your very presence here indicates that Miss Lewis's family wishes to further exploit her for their own needs. Their ignorance as to who her partner is is very much astounding.”

Well, this sounds serious. Jack had no great gift of foresight but he was willing to bet his last dollar that there were some big troubles on the horizon for the Becketts. Big big troubles….

“What Mr. Spools is trying to say is that no one is buying the concerned family act they have no doubt played for you, Detective. What did they really want? For her to get back in touch maybe?” Virginia Potts, Jack decided, was by far the most dangerous person in the room. That smile was razor sharp just like Jack guessed was her mind. The woman also wasn’t wrong about the Becketts.

“Hmm… No. That would not be enough. Not for them. So maybe for Darcy to come back crawling on her hands and knees for the shame she had brought upon their heads by coming there with a boyfriend and rejecting the advances of a man they had attempted to sell her to? That would sound more like it. Did they ask you to try and persuade her to come back with you? Because she is such a lost little child in need of their guidance?” That was pretty much spot on. Jack was about to respond when, to his horror, Mack opened his mouth.

“This entire situation is just crazy. Wish I could be a fly on the wall when they find out about Iron Man. This is so cool. The photos we got of her are quite old, she must be something to score-” Jack had his life flash before his eyes as he face palmed if just not to see the look of icy disdain on Miss Potts face.

“Right!” He hastily exclaimed. “Yes, Miss Potts. We very much understand the sensitivity surrounding the issue of Miss Lewis being Mr. Stark’s girlfriend. I will not deny that it came as somewhat of a surprise.” He had retirement and pension planned. Mack better be getting that move to another department soon because going down for accidental manslaughter was not how Jack envisioned the end of his career. “And I imagine it will come as a surprise to Miss Lewis family.”

“It will, one assumes. Detectives, let’s say it as it is, this situation is...” the CEO made a vague hand gesture as she smiled at them again, “ explosive.” That sounded… comforting. Not. Jack stared at the woman as she continued. “The Becketts lit the fuse by going to you regarding Miss Lewis. We very much would have liked to keep it under wraps for a little bit longer, but alas... it is clearly not meant to be. You will shortly return to Louisiana and report to your superiors who will in turn will go and try to appease the Becketts. The news will spread.”

“I can assure you-”

“Detective Cooper, you can’t even keep your partner from running his mouth right in front of us. Besides, it is not you that we expect to spread the news. It is the Becketts. You have a reputation of a
straight arrow. Which is quite rare these days.” If Jack hadn't felt like he was being picked apart before he sure did now. His reputation was not that wide spread as to have reached the ears all the way in NYC. *Yeah, somebody got prepared for their visit.*

“I imagine they will want to share the happy news, it is not every day that your daughter hooks up—”

“For the record. Mr. Stark and Miss Lewis did not *hook up*, they are in a relationship.” The correction from the woman made Jack wince at his own misstep. It was like walking in a mine field. Stark Industries were holding this issue close to their hearts, or wallets. The news that Stark might be finally settling down would make everyone want to invest into SI or companies associated with it. Their stock prices had the biggest rise in *years* not that it wasn’t doing well before, it was, but investors liked stability and it showed. Even if Miss Lewis was a class A bitch the financial benefit that she was bringing was substantial. No wonder the CEO acted like they were ready to declare war if need be.

“Of course, of course.” Sweat was rolling down his back.

“As you can guess, Mr. Stark and Miss Lewis would like to break the news on their own terms. The charity gala for Maria Stark Foundation is *coming up*—”

“The Becketts plan to attend that.” It was like the temperature dropped few degrees every time the family was mentioned and this time was no exception.

“Yes.” Jack did not for a second imagine that Tony Stark was going to play nice with the allegedly abusive relatives of his lady love. “We are aware of that. It is unfortunate, but it can hardly be prevented now.”

“Hate to say that but I have met Keith Beckett and his darling nightmare of a wife. There is no way in Hell that they will not try and milk the situation.” *Mack was contagious. Oh God.*

“That was the impression Mr. Stark got too, Detective Cooper.” The meaningful glance Miss Potts gave the lawyers, that remained calm and stone-faced, had Jack thinking that they were more than ready to handle Keith Beckett and his aspirations of profiting from the fledgling relationship his stepdaughter had with one of the most famous men on the planet. *Well, that is going to be interesting.* Jack was going to be watching whatever channel was going to be broadcasting the event. Maybe Dominic and Ann would like to come? Maybe a little barbecue? He could break the news as they all sat in front of the telly. *Yeah… that would work nicely, assuming my heart doesn't give up from all the excitement here today.*

“There will be a scandal.” The conclusion came unbidden. That was not good news. So if the situation looked shit before now it looked worse. The nice lady and her lap sharks were not having a civilized conversation with him and Mack for the sake of it. *No.* They were prepping him for the shitstorm that was no doubt going to hit him because what they wanted Jack to do *was to keep his mouth shut* until the Grand Ball. The ball where the Cinderella was going to show up with Prince-of-Iron-Armor- and Stark-Industries for the world to behold and be jealous of. If the Becketts were going to try and make a scene, which they no doubt would as they looked like exactly that type of people, the ever ready press was going be there to witness it. How it would go afterwards it was anyone’s guess, but what Jack knew for a fact was that Keith Beckett would sooner or later know that it was *Jack Cooper* had not given him heads up when he came across the news.

“Yes.” Miss Potts smiled, it was a wide radiant smile full of teeth.

“Holy fuck…” *They had him where they wanted him.* He could run to Dominic and his boss would go who ever gave fuck about Keith Beckett so the man would be ready… but on the other hand
there was Iron Man, the Avengers and Stark Industries led by the ever charming Miss Potts that looked like she couldn’t wait to tear apart the people who dared to threaten Miss Lewis in any way. Jack Cooper was caught between the hammer and the hard place.

“No, no, Detective. There is no need for such words. Besides, you are here for that welfare check, aren’t you? Well, I think it is high time you met Miss Lewis.” Jack watched numbly as Virginia Potts stood up and winked at him. “I would hate you to think that we keep her here like a Princess in an Ivory Tower.”

The privilege of seeing the no doubt most expensive apartment in New York City went on par with the sight of a frustrated looking Tony Stark being ignored as he tried to raise some issue with an attractive brunette. Jack followed Miss Potts and the lawyers out of the elevator to be greeted by the memorable scene.

“I did not have time, Tony. Jane has sent the majority of her machines over, I have to set them up before she gets here.” The woman, Miss Lewis, Jack assumed as he once again fixed his tie, had stack of papers on the desk in front of her that she tried to sort not ever sparing a glance to the man next to her.

“Spark, Honey, we can’t get it into the design phase until you sign the contract. Did you at least take a look at it? The entire Board went apoplectic when I merely suggested reviewing the updated design.” They were now close enough to see Miss Lewis roll her eyes behind the thick rimmed glasses as she adjusted them.

“I told you I did not have the time, plus I need to find a lawyer for that, someone needs to look at it with me. Did you see the size of it?”

“We have an entire department just for that!” As the argument went on their little group just hovered around the seating area waiting for the couple to take a break and join them. It was safe to say that Miss Lewis did not look like a Princess held hostage. Jack watched as the woman gave Tony Stark a cool look. No. Not a Princess. That was how a Queen looked. The brunette might have been wearing a pretty dress but she was no damsel in distress.

“Are you for real? It is conflict of interests. They can’t critically review a document when it was them who compiled it! They will shaft me.” The lawyers twitched and Jack tried to decide if that was a reaction to an insult or if Miss Lewis was right.

“They... what? What are you talking about? I have the best, they are professional and are doing their job-“

“My point exactly! They are working for Stark Industries, if they are not shafting me somewhere between the small print they are not doing their job properly now, are they? They are looking out for the best interests of well, the Stark. Which is not me! So when -” Miss Lewis had her attention back to the papers and it seemed to irk the man.

“Well, maybe you should be then. To make things a whole lot less complicated.” From the corner of his eye Jack caught as the CEO’s jaw dropped as did the lawyers’.

“Yes, sure, I -“ Miss Lewis gave Tony Stark a distracted smile. The world slowed. He was sure he felt Mr Spools hold onto a chair.

“Done! No take backs. Pepper you’re my witness she said yes!” The jubilant exclamation was sudden and loud and made Darcy Lewis instantly abandon what she was doing to turn her wide eyes
and attention to the man that was frantically going through his pockets.

“The … fuck? Tony?”

“Aha!” Something was presented in triumph to still shocked Miss Lewis. “I will go on one knee if you promise not to whack me in the teeth with the crutch.”

...Was that a ring?

Oh God, he wasn't paid nearly enough for this!

Well, look at that! A new chapter, Peeps =) also plot bunnies' feeding time! Let me know what you think of the newest development and keep me going =) Much appreciated in advance =)
Wino

You are the greatest

Your help is much appreciated

xxx

Two weeks earlier, three days after the family reunion that Shall Not be Mentioned Again (Ever).

Soulmates.

Tony hated that word. Hated it with the passion he reserved for a very few things in life. Now more than ever, since he met his little Spark. Them being together was not some great divine intervention. Comparing the two offended him more than he was able to express and that alone was saying a lot. First it discounted all the effort both he and Spark were putting into this relationship to make it work and despite outwards appearance it was hard work. The attraction helped and so did the fact that Spark was bright and he was talking capture his attention bright. They'd met by chance. They were together by choice. There was no perfect match, because in essence none of them were perfect. Well... maybe Darce came close... They were not the perfect little pieces of a grand puzzle that just fell into place. No. They were more like tennis balls bouncing around, bouncing into each other, all over the place. Chaos in motion. They butted heads on everything, starting from the toilet seat and up to and including intergalactic relations and everything in between. It was frustrating and glorious.

They were not given to one another like a late Christmas gift. Tony did not for one moment assume that he was worthy of her. He wasn’t. Not with the way he was. Issues were the only thing that he had more than money. It was not fate that wrapped her hand around him at night when the nightmares came and waited till the tremors stopped and fear no longer choked him and he felt the shrapnel pulsing, impatient and eager to find its way into that lump of muscle Tony called his beating heart. It was not fate that made him put the blanket around her tired form in the morning if he woke first. It was not fate that made him kiss her when he could see the demons that haunted her still hiding behind the blood red smile.

Choices.

Everything boiled down to that. If you did not make them they were made for you, and very few things in life sucked as much as regretting somebody else’s mistakes. Choices, or lack of them, got you where you were today. It had nothing to do with fate. It was not fate that put the magnet in his chest. It was Yinsen and the man’s years of both medical and engineering experience. Tony did not survive because God chose to lend him a hand. He built the damn suit and got his ass out. Obadiah Stane made a choice to try and kill him. All those things helped him get where he was now. Not fate. Choices.
‘I should stop watching the damn TV.’

“Earth to Stark. Requesting confirmation of contact.” Tony jerked as the voice calmly drifted from behind startling him.

“Fuck, Spark. When did you come down?” There were hands on his back and Tony groaned as Darcy started kneading the muscles. “Just… Just there… oh, yeah… Honeybunny.” Gods those hands.

They had been back since a couple of days from Louisiana and his girlfriend was finally starting to come back to being herself. It had been an experience, meeting Darce’s family.

“You are tense, Mr. Stark.” She murmured. The shoulders were painful.

“Hmmm… Just there.”

“If I am not mistaken. I owe you—” The fingers went down along his spine. “— a massage.”

“You are absolutely …mmm… right.” he had been feeling a little stiff since they came back. It probably was the leftover rage that he had not fully released when he decked Darce’s stepbrother. It was an enjoyable moment, but only a moment none the less.

The woman snickered into his shoulder as those small, clever hands wrapped around his midriff. Her warmth was seeping into him. Some choices he had made in life were obviously better than the rest.

“Well, I think I should do something about that.”

“Oh, you should, Spark, you really should.” Just having her close to him like that helped, mainly because he did not need to explain that he was not OK. That trip was hard for him to get over. It had brought up some old and unpleasant memories of his own childhood and it made Tony cling to the ire he felt towards the Becketts. The trip back had been emotional. Tony did not do emotional so having Darcy a nervous wreck gave him quite a turn. Firstly, because he had no idea how to handle that and secondly, because he wanted to handle it for her, to share her burden like she had done for him. He still wasn’t sure which of the two hit him more. Tony was still trying to figure it out.

At least now, a few days after it, his head felt clearer, maybe the time did help or it was just that his Spark was seemingly over it.

It felt good to have Darcy close, especially in his workshop. There was something intimate about it. Or it could have been the promise of those clever hands roaming his skin. Mmmmm yes, it could have been that. Tony groaned under his breath as he finally opened his eyes, she was killing him. Softly, gently and he couldn’t think of a better way a man could go. He caught their reflection in a massive metal sheet propped just to their left. His heart that was steadily picking up rhythm due to his girlfriend’s proximity slammed into his throat in an attempt to leave his body, this new torture proving to test the limits of it’s endurance.

Spark was pressed to his back, her hands around him, dark flowing locks cascading down her back. Even in the dark reflection on the sleek metal surface he could make out features of her coyly smiling as she pressed herself just that bit closer. Their eyes locked in the reflection and she winked, as if unsure of what to do next. The soft, creamy skin was wrapped in a baby-doll of dark lace, navy, black? Maybe dark burgundy? He couldn’t quite tell… It fell just below the curve of the round backside and some very expressive promises that were not spoken.

Tony reminded himself that breathing was necessary as he suddenly gulped air into his protesting lungs and slowly shifted in a suddenly very seductive embrace.
Navy. Dark, deep navy lace and lips red. There was next to no space left between them.

“Darcy?” Tony wasn’t sure what he was asking or why.

She smiled. “I am seducing you.” The statement was issued with a serious expression.

“Oh, I am seduced.” Tony nodded, but his reassurance was met with a slight skepticism.

“I am pretty sure that should be a little harder.”

“Spark, it can’t get harder, trust me, if it did there would be an underlying medical issue.”

Her lips twitched upwards. “Prick.”

“Yes. Standing at your attention, Ma’am.”

They laughed out loud together at the absolute silliness of the situation and Tony pulled her closer, closing the remaining gap between them. He was in no way momentarily distracted as those navy lace encased breast pressed against him. It appeared as if they were trying escape the delicate prison by clawing their way up. ‘Jesus… give me strength.’ His laughter died off fairly quickly as he leaned in for a taste of those dark cherry lips without even realizing it.

Of all his sins Darcy Lewis had long since proved to be his favorite.

The kiss tasted like yearning, only sharper and more addictive. One of his hands found its way into the hair to cradle the back of her head, while the other drifted down her back until Tony was squeezing a handful of perky bottom.


“Neither have I, Tony.” His Spark did not miss a beat with the reply. “Besides, nothing wrong with a little buzz cut.” It was sinking in. He was being seduced. It was home run time. Why was he being so nervous all of a sudden? Why were those stupid things coming out of his mouth?

“I had a shower, this morning, but if you want I can clean up.” Tony was mentally running a check list as if it was his first time. He did not want small things to fuck it up.

“You still smell like the shower gel. We’re good.” Their kiss had smudged the lipstick all around Darcy’s mouth and the desire to continue where they left only intensified as he watched those full lips smile.

“I don’t want you to be disappointed.” He didn’t. It was stupid. Them having sex had been the number one thing on his mind since their first conversation and now with Spark in his arms, smiling nervously and excitedly all he could do was think of things that could go wrong.

“Tony, don’t start going sweet on me when I have your cock in my hand. You are ruining my plans.”

“Actually you are just palming me through …mmmm… yesss… Now, now you do. I am not gonna last long.” That was added through gritted teeth. It had been a while. A very long while for him. Longest that he could remember. That was how he felt when he returned from his captivity. He had been ready to kill for a cheeseburger. He intended to savor it. Enjoy it. Make it last. He went through them in couple of seconds, still it tasted fucking amazing.
The smile Darcy gave him got him right under the heart. “Marathons are overrated. Life is a series of sprints the way I see it. All joined together.” Not a bad analogy. He thrust into her hand and hissed. “The point of it is to enjoy it, isn’t it? There is nothing wrong in sex, I’ve been led to believe. Slow, clean or fast and filthy… Hmm… Interested?” There was just a hint of doubt as if he was not all in for this.

With great effort Tony pulled the wondering hand out of his sweats. He even managed not to whimper too loudly.

“What could show my interest more right now, Honey? What?”

“Dunno? My plan didn’t actually go past this stage.” This was the stage that most of his fantasies started at.

“Well, that is no very good planning.”

“No. Every time my mind would just go filthy, like you would not believe.” Darcy should ease off on the smiling and breathing and just looking like that.

“Oh, I would, if there is a way to have you I have thought of it at least twice already.”

“Flatterer.” Her faltering bravado was back.

“Stating a fact.”

“So... even on the table behind you?”

“Every single table in this house and the Tower.”

“Oh, well, impressive. I have just thought about every single one here so far.”

“Are you trying to kill me?” He knew she did. It was a purely hypothetical question.

“That would be counterproductive right now. A heartbeat is required for an ongoing erection. One of the reasons I never bought into the whole Vampire shebang.” Tony had to laugh at that and he did, apparently that was the right reaction as when threw his head back laughing Darcy kissed his neck.

“And while we go with random statements. I... just so you know-”

“Got a buzz cut too today? I am more than fine with that. As long as it doesn’t get too long. I am not into that. Neat is good.”

“You are getting a landing strip-”

“Excellent for navigation.”

“I get wet.” There was no follow up and Tony wasn’t quite sure how to take that. All his life he was under the impression that it was a good thing.

“Yes?” Was that a joke?

“Excessively.”

“It is not a thing.”

“It is-”
“It is not. Honey, trust me on this one it is not.”

“Don’t say I didn’t warn you. I’ve been thinking about it all day, trying not to be too excited.” Tony took it as an invitation. So far any heavy touching there was a no no and so he worked around it. Something was making her uncomfortable. Something must have happened to make her uncomfortable. Because that was basic biology. Girls got wet and boys got hard, unless there was medical issue for any of the sexes to stop that.

Tony’s hand very slowly moved from the bum to the front as they kept eye contact up to the point where he gently cupped her through the silky material that was soaked. His finger glided and when he put just a little pressure making Spark’s eyes close and her head fall to his shoulder. She was ready. For him. Ready and soaked and wanting and… he would be lucky not to come in his pants if she was going to keep moaning like that from a simple touch.

“See? I am wearing panties too.”

“That-” Tony finally managed to speak up. Steady voice, steady is key. So was self control. He was running low on both. “That is not enough.”

“Huh?” There was surprise in those wide eyes. Yeah, no. He was going to how her how good it was being this ready for him and just how much he appreciated.

“Oh Honey, this-” he grasped her little firmer once again making her moan. “- is how it should be. Skipped that biology lesson, didn’t you? But you know what they say. The wetter the better.”

“You are saying that on purpose.”

“Hard to speak without one, but as it stands you will not find me complaining.” His fingers were moving at a steady pace, rubbing, teasing. They breathed hard and regarded one another. Tony knew he was grinning, she was getting wetter. The warm, sticky moisture was soaking through the material, coating his fingers. That was stoking his ego something fierce.

“You… mmmm … Tony.”

“Yes, my sweetest? So, you never got past this stage? I wonder why… Did you say you used to get sidetracked? What is your favorite distraction?”

“Work. Funny … mmmm … it always works to… ah… take my mind of things.”

“Cheeky. Even thought I do partly agree.” He could not get enough of tasting her. That naughty little smile. All for him. It felt obsessive. He felt obsessed. The feeling of her trembling next to him… all his… The sensation of goosebumps breaking out on her skin as he whispered into her ear was making him drunk.

So. Darcy had a plan. A brilliant plan where she was going to be confident and in control and... It didn’t work. That is, it worked up to the point where she actually had to walk up to Tony and be this sassy minx that was going to seduce him. First he didn’t notice her come in, even with the crutch and all. Then he looked like he thought that she was going to assault him and then outright declaring that he was already seduced. The nerve. For a dude that was supposed to be good at that Tony didn’t know how to play ball. She was disappointed for a minute or two and then there was the kiss. All was forgiven.

Also the man did know how to play ball after all. Darcy wasn’t sure if it was the fact that she had gotten so comfortable with Tony or he was just that good. That hand between her legs definitely
knew what it was doing and no mistake. The grin on Tony’s face implied that he knew that too. Not to be outdone and on the principle that the pleasure should be mutual Darcy slipped her hand back into Tony’s sweats. Yes. It was much appreciated if the sound growling was anything to go by.

“My little, delicious, Cherry Pie, say you want us to stop now or I will not be held responsible for my actions.” Tony was tense and growly in a way that suggested that there was a loss of control incoming. Like it was round the corner, creeping up, so close it was already breathing down Tony’s neck. Her free hand cupped his cheek, the prickly stubble tickling her palm as he rubbed against it, those always watchful eyes fixed on her. The generous proposition was for decorum sake. Something hungry was lurking those dark, blown wide pupils.

“Pass.” She breathed.

He nodded at her after a few seconds. “Good. Bedroom?”

“Are you gonna carry me? Because I don’t think I can… mmmm… walk. Tony!” The crotch of her panties was pushed aside and finger slid inside.

“You're right, too far. Hmm…why are you so tempting, Darce? You are driving me insane.”

“I… I say… mmmm!.. I am too late! For that.” Making a coherent sentence was beyond her abilities at this point and Tony was not far behind.

Tony helped Darcy onto the table before he briskly walked to one of the cars and got a foil square from the glove compartment. A man can never have too many of those lying around.

“I feel like one of your projects on this table. Sexy, but …”

They were both still fully dressed. Well, he was fully dressed. Darcy just wore that little lacy number that was not purchased by him. He watched as the brunette slowly inched further onto the table, her eyes roaming freely on his approaching form. Thankfully his design table was both wide and sturdy enough to support both of their weight.

In a way... this was their project. Not her per say, but the thing they had. Their relationship. It was work in constant progress. Tony got on the table and slowly crawled up her body, the panties had come off before he returned but the nearly see-through hem of the baby-doll left just enough for his hungry imagination.

“So, Spark. How do you feel about receiving your daily dose of Iron slightly differently today?”

Ooohhh my my my! Peeps, it smells like lemony goodness and a cliffhanger...

Help me stay inspired in this dreary autumn weather and feed the plot bunnies

So bad? Good? Let me know =)

Many thanks to those that leave comments you do keep me me going =)
“So, Spark. How do you feel about receiving your daily dose of Iron slightly differently today?”

*What?*

Darcy would have face palmed but she was underneath him, leaning back on her elbows.

“You know what? *Forget it.*” It took her a lot of resolve to do this. She *had shaved* for this which was no easy feat. Her ankle was still in the cast, which meant performing some serious acrobatic maneuvers to get her lady parts looking presentable again, and she was getting Iron Man sex pun? *Now?* Riiiight.

“Darce?” Tony’s self assured smile vanished in a blink of an eye and he allowed to be pushed to a side so she could get off the table.

*Uhh…* The hard surface had made her bum numb. Not the best sensation.

“Oh, I admit the joke *might have been* in poor taste. We can call it something else. What do you think, Honeybuns? Spark? Honey? *Shit.*” Tony added the last bit under his breath as his hands hovered just a shade away from her skin. Darcy merely made a noncommittal noise as she reached the couch, with her boyfriend still doing the funny little dance around her. Yes. The couch was so much better. Darcy couldn’t help but cringe as she sat down and the cold leather came in contact with the overheated skin, making her shiver. “How about recharging? *Huh?* It would make sense. Or just charging? I am good with both. We can also-”

The nerves were coming back and Darcy bit the inside of her lip. All she could think of was how the bra of the little number was too small around the top and was digging into her, how she was more than likely leaving a wet patch on the super expensive one-of leather creation they were now seated on. Tony was rambling and making erratic hand gestures.

They had gotten awfully off track.
'Shitshitshitshitshitshit!' Of all the dumb things he could have done…

Tony was screaming at himself on the inside and at the same time trying to slip into the position they were before without appearing pushy.

They were on the sofa now. Which was good. Darcy did not just up and leave. The bad thing was the sideways look she was giving him as if she was contemplating if the cheese was past its Use By date. Why was he comparing himself to cheese?

“So, Tony. Let’s get something straight. What you think of sex?”

“I… what? Sex? Yes? All the yes there is?” That curve ball got him right in the teeth and Tony leaned back a little. What kind of question was that? What did he think of sex? Like, positions? How often he wanted it, wanted her? How bad he wanted it and was trying really hard not to show? What are you asking? Oh, god, please tell you are not asking some theoretical shit, Darce. I can’t deal with it right now. So he plastered his sincerest smile and hoped for the best.

The reply, even when in his mind Tony was ready for anything, surprised him. Darcy shifted sharply, pushed him back so he was leaning against the back of the sofa and straddled his lap, despite the cast, all before steadying herself by grabbing his shoulders and leaning to capture his lips in searing kiss once again.

Before he knew it, they were laying on sofa with Darcy underneath him again. He was shivering. It was some kind of involuntary reaction. He hadn’t felt that since he was a teen: the clawing tension, the sweet expectation and yearning was crawling underneath his skin making every hair on his body raise. He needed to take a moment before he lost it.

Breaking the kiss and pressing his forehead to his girlfriend’s shoulder didn’t work as well as he expected it to. Closing his eyes and trying to control his ragged breath only made him more focused on her. The brief darkness only emphasized the subtle citrus-y scent of her soft skin that he had his both hands full of, one having found its way between them where her wet, scorching core pulsed around his moving finger, the other cradling the back of her neck gently guiding her into their kiss.

Tony took no little amount of pleasure at feeling the effect it was having on her. The greedy gulps of air she took and the low breathless moan that escaped her parted lips when she arched into his hand as he kissed down the column of her neck.

This. This was worth the wait and Tony was only partly referring to the physical pleasure they were both enjoying.

“Darce, babe…” She was working on him. Slow, firm strokes. It was getting difficult to think. He needed to get naked. The cloth clinging to his skin was suffocating him. He needed to feel more, be closer. “Please…” Who ever thought that Tony Stark was above begging were very deeply wrong. He was hanging by the last thread of sanity, waiting was not something he was used to, and neither was asking for permission. Everything was always at the ready for him. He was Tony Stark, after all. “Hmm!” The small hand went down his throbbing length to cup his balls gently and roll them slowly but firmly.

“Buzz cut.” The giggles made him pause in his own ministrations making Darcy groan and roll her hips impatiently. The things the woman did to him.

“Witch.” He was looking down at her again. She was the Sin, the Temptation and the Salvation all wrapped up in one. All of it underneath him. Wet and wanting. Looking at him with those dark trusting eyes. Stripping him naked all down to his tainted, broken soul just to hold him closer and
kiss him harder.

“Mmm… Yes?” The fragile boldness in her voice was echoed in her eyes.

“You… will be the death of me, Spark.” The lace tore down the middle after Tony got frustrated with trying to move with either up or down to free those magnificent breasts.

“Ah! Mmm… Only if you ask nicely.” The laugh was lost in another kiss.

The condom took a few seconds to unpack and roll on, all the while Darcy watched him, the expression on her face excitedly expectant and just a tad bit shy biting the bottom lip. There was suddenly tightness in his chest followed by a wave of calmness. Nothing of that did anything to calm the fire in his loins. But it was a bizarre combination to experience. It reminded a little bit of those few eerily calm moments inside the alien portal when he made peace with himself. He made peace with himself in a way now too. He needed, wanted and desired Darcy Lewis. He always knew he was attracted to her, but now she made herself part of his chaotic life without even trying and he wanted her to remain part of it.

Tony couldn’t help but grin, the torn edge of the silver wrapper still between his teeth. She was his. All his.

“You ok?” She asked, huffing. “Not to judge but that smile looks a little creepy. Please tell me you are not thinking of calling it a daily iron injection.”

He grinned wider after discarding the wrapper in the general direction of the floor along with his top. “Only if you insist.”

“That is a no for me, hot stuff.” She had a hand across the chest again that he gently moved aside as he lay on top of her again. How could anyone pull off being a naughty yet shy minx? She had seduced him, months ago as a matter of fact yet managed to look as if she was surprised that her advances worked.

“One can imagine, I guess.”

“You are totally thinking about it.” Tony shrugged. He was thinking about a lot of things.

“I am now. Also, I need you to do something for me.”

“What?” Even in the intimate position they were in Darcy gave him a suspicious look.

“Relax, Honeybunny.”

“I am relaxed.” The swift defensive reply only emphasized his point.

“You nearly broke my fingers when I put the second one inside you. Take a deep breath and relax.”

“I had sex before, you know.” He knew that in theory, yet his practical examination was showing that her experience had very limited range.

“I am assuming they all had small dicks, because I needed to flex my fingers to get the feeling back into them.” It looked like Darcy still trying to decide if that was good or bad thing. “Meaning you are in for a treat.” That got a smile and she relaxed just a smidgen, he needed to proceed carefully but thinking straight with the condom on and Darcy wet, tight and ready was a challenge.

“Don’t you think highly about yourself?” She scoffed lightly.
“Well, somebody has to. Now. In the interest of not crippling me, tell me about your favorite fantasy. Involving me and sex, naturally.” Tony added hastily when the naughty little smile made an appearance on those lips of hers. While the teasing was something Tony thoroughly enjoyed, it was not the time for it. He braced himself on the elbows at both sides of her lower rib-cage and rested his chin on his intertwined fingers looking up at her. If it could, his cock would have disowned him right now, the long suffering was unprecedented, but as it was it only twitched impatiently, trapped between his body and the leather of the sofa. Tony had high hopes that the position would change pretty soon.

“Oh, well. It changes quite often.” That sounded like an honest answer and Tony nodded, it meant that she was thinking about then doing the dirty often enough. That was always good. “Mmm…” he gently kissed the left nipple and watched in satisfaction as goose bumps appeared on her skin at the contact. He loved touching her. She was so responsive, also her skin was so soft. Darcy’s head dropped back as he continued to play with the sensitive pebble. “I cannot pick one. It always depends…”

“On?” There was something very erotic making her skin wet and glistering with his saliva. Tony let it drip from his tongue onto the nipple and watched it make its way down the swell of the breast, before slowly tracing the path with his finger, spreading the wetness even more.

“Mmm, where I am, what I am doing at the time, the time of day, if you are in the room, the things you are doing… it all changes.”

He wanted to bite. To mark. To claim. How primitive. Tony had always thought he was above those things, being a modern man. Then Darcy Lewis came along and lo and behold, evolution hadn’t done its job as well as he had expected. He pressed his nose to the valley between the two mounts. So soft.

“Scenarios. I like where this is going. Right. Lets imagine we are back in the Tower. You are in my workshop, papers spread on the table…” Tony trailed off waiting for her to pick it up.

“And you?”

“Me? Oh, working on Mark 17?”

“Focused.” Darcy breathed out the word as he went back to playing with her breasts. “You are always focused when you work on your suits. Always. Mmm… So no talking. You always get dirty. Doesn’t matter what you wear. Your formal suit, sweats, jeans. Always get grease smudges. The other day you were wearing your suit as you tinkered with it. The jacket was off… mmm…” One of his hands drifted down her rib-cage, made a little lap around her belly button and settled between her legs making Darcy groan.

“Go on.”

“The tie was off, first two buttons undone, grease stains when you touched it… you look so good in a suit. Mmm!” Who was he to disagree? Still, he liked hearing it being said in that sultry voice. Their phone sex was going to be awesome. Tony bit the swell of the breast gently and Darcy stammered as she spoke. Yes, somebody was enjoying it along with him. “The vest still o-o-on. Tony.”

“Don’t mind me, Honey. So what happens?”

“Sex. Fast, mmm… ravenous and right there by the table littered with the spare parts. You kiss me, hungry and push my dress up… mmm!”
“I sound naughty.” He liked it. A lot. He half expected some overly awkward old days lovemaking. Which was ok. Except he should have known his little fluffy bunny would deliver. There was an entire range of things that could be done in the bedroom and honestly anywhere else.

“You are. Very much so.” He liked the sound of that even better. Because he was. And he couldn't wait to show her one day, possibly soon.

“So dress up, panties down. I bet I bend you over that table.” They were going to do it just like that.

“Yes…”

“Press myself against you. No talking? Hmm. My hand between your shoulder blades, keeping you down.” That was little bit of a gamble. There was no guarantee that Darcy would like that. Tony paused waiting for a reaction. She didn’t like having people where she couldn’t see them, but he had hoped that they had passed that stage between them and he wasn’t disappointed.

“Yes. I like your hands.” That was a good sign. It meant that she trusted him, trusted him enough to be in a vulnerable position and surrender control to him, at least in part.

“I noticed.” There was whimper in response as Tony removed his hand to lowly move up so their bodies were once again level and his hips cradled between her legs. He could not physically wait any longer, there was only one way to loosen that grip now.

“Tony…”

“Hm?” He could not un-clench his teeth to make a coherent word. So he settled for kissing Darcy gently on the lips as she watched him. It was hot. In more way than one. It literally felt like a furnace as Tony’s manhood found the entrance after rubbing itself against it to spread the juices over it to help it ease in.

She did not think Tony was actually that big. Darcy had never in her life been happier to be excessively wet. It was the girth, she concluded. It was stretching her to the point it was uncomfortable, not painful but she felt full to the brink. Tony had actually clenched his teeth as he tried to remain still for a little bit and let her adjust. Oh, this was nice.

She was not used to be this full. She had sex before. Well, this made it official. So far she was pulling only small dick losers. Tony started moving and Darcy clutched at him, her hands around his waist. It was getting better. Oh, thank Thor. Maybe it was just the pent up tension. Did it have to be in her vagina?

“Fuck… Darce.” Having the man talk to you like that was a turn on in a major way.

“Mmm… I… mmm!” Oh, it was definitely getting better. Tony was on top and inside of her, moving slowly. There was perspiration coating his back and tension under his skin as he made those weird nearly animal like sounds. That was a good sign, right? She honestly couldn't concentrate on that.

The skin was sweaty. Everywhere. She was now glued to the leather of the sofa.

‘Thor, sex is weird.’

Darcy tried breathing but the increasing pace of Tony movement was making her break the rhythm and match his groans instead. She needed to relax. Shut her mind down somehow.

There was the glow between them coming from the miniature arc reactor in his chest.
“Hmm. Ok?” Tony was looking down at her all serious, even when he continued pumping into her. They probably would have to professionally clean the couch. Yeah. She was laying in a puddle. All that Darcy could manage was a smile that was immediately ruined by another moan. “Got you.” The words didn’t make sense until Darcy realized that she was whimpering as she pressed her forehead to Tony’s shoulder. “Fuck, Darce.”

“Yeah… pre-precisely that. Hnn!” If she nodded any more she’d get whiplash. His breath tickled her neck as Tony laughed. She liked his laugh. Liked his hands. She liked how he treated her even when he was being a jerk sometimes or often. She liked him. She how he made her feel good about herself. She really liked him. Oh, Thor…

“Oh, yeah-”

“I l-like you!” Fucking fuckity fuck fuck!! My brain leaked out along with my slick. Fuck! She had a dick in her and was now spouting shit like no one’s business. Darcy was horrified. Never before had sex made her feel or say stuff like that before. Tony merely paused before slamming into her with force that Darcy yelped in surprise as air was pushed from her lungs. “To-ny!”

“Me too- o- like. Fuck!” Tony sounded raggedy at the least as he proceeded to fuck her into couch. “Like- - you-! - too! Fuck! Talk- Later!”

“Oh!” She gasped. Was this supposed to be like this? Like, intense? Didn’t he say he wasn’t going to last long? That was already long. She was going to be sore. So so sore. She could tell now. Why was she kissing him like that? One of his hands drifted between them to…

“Darce-”

“Tense- mmm- too tense!” Why was he kissing her face like that again? She was going to go all sappy again. It was just sex. He was not supposed to be caring or gently not when he had his cock inside her. That was not how it worked… was it?

Darcy could as well have applied a magic hammer to his head, Tony thought frantically as he desperately tried to control his pace. He had years of practice, years, and Darcy wiped it all away with a single scared teary eyed look and three words. The hit landed directly on his hind-brain that primitive, wild part of him and something inside him snapped.

He was not a very considerate lover, Tony knew that. He was selfish. Oh, he could be generous, but he liked getting his way. He swore he was going to double the effort with Spark. He did. He was going to. His balls were getting tight as tried to speak, tried to make sense of his own words. He was gone. His brain was gone too.

“Can’t – mmm!” he still had enough mind left to remember that he needed to help Darcy along as he was about to blow. She couldn’t what? She was clinging to him making those sexy noises that were pushing him over the edge. He was not going to last.

Tony tried again. “Darce-”

“Tense- mmm- too tense.” The small hand wrapped around his wrist and moved it to the hip as she gave him a small smile. “I–mmm- Okay.” The hairs were sticking to her forehead from sweat as she tried breathing evenly. He loved watching her. All his.

“I’m gonna – mmm!– blow, Darce.”

It was forceful, with a loud growl Tony pulled out abruptly got the condom off and spilled himself
on Darcy’s belly. The some of the pearly liquid shooting as far as her face startling the woman when it hit her in chin and nose.

“Thor, Tony… You long distance shooter or what?”

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So Peeps, here it is! What do you think? I am rubbish at writing this lemony stuff, so I hope you have enjoyed!

Was it good? Bad?

Let me know what you think and keep me inspired and going=

Feed the plot bunnies!
Every good and bad thing in Tony’s life wasn’t planned. It just kind of happened. At least that what he was telling himself. And he had in no way planned to bend the knee. For anyone. Ever. He had too much shit thrown at him and it would not be fair to take someone else down with him. Especially after Pepper. It was just never going to happen. That was what he thought. And then things changed.

Nearly a month earlier, just after the incident with SHIELD and Darcy in Malibu.

He had time to spare as he waited for Darcy to finish with Pep. They were taking tea, together, or so he was told. Tony did not trust those two being in each other’s company. It was suspicious. They were plotting something. He knew they were. Or maybe he was just being paranoid. Darcy had Rodhey drop in to keep him ‘entertained’, as she put it. He did not need to be entertained. He was a grown man. He was not going to sit in his workshop and think how frail Darcy was and how she really should still be taking things easy and how the security team he had her take was not nearly enough to keep his mind at peace… He was not going to do that.

Tony was not worried. He wasn’t. Iron Star and Stripes was wrong. He was merely... reasonably concerned for her well-being. That was it. In light of all that had so far transpired it was reasonable.

Darcy didn’t like being held back by anything. Ever. No matter what happened, she powered through it and kept moving. Always. It was one of the reasons that they were actually working. Spark didn’t get hung up on things and took them in stride. Things like him or an assault by SHIELD agent or meeting Pepper.

It hadn’t been long since they met yet here he was. Sitting in a car outside a bloody tea-house trying to come up with a plausible excuse about why he should march right in and make sure she was OK. He’d already sent three texts and got three word replies every single time. I am fine. He knew she was fine. Of course Darcy was fine. There were two security teams there. It was reputable
establishment.

...Crap. What was he doing? Why was he doing that? It took years with Pep to get to this level. Years and shrapnel in his heart.

Okay, no. It was time to pace himself. So he was going to do something else while the women had tea. To be fair, he was relieved that those two were getting along. It sucked that SHIELD tried to fuck Pep over and Darcy’s supportive attitude helped.

They were all just animals that dressed smartly, Tony mused as he pulled over at an exclusive boutique. From the first time he had spoken to the acerbic Miss. Lewis he had been intrigued and aroused. Then he'd become interested on top of that. By the time he made a decision to get her to come to NYC and send Happy to convince Foster that it was for the best, he was interested and extremely curious. She fascinated him. His idea to have her move to the Penthouse was borderline insane despite the girlfriend charade and even now Tony could not justify how he came up with it. It somehow just made sense at the time. And now? They were giving it a go. The relationship thing. So it just made sense that she was there, with him, and it worked. It was not really supposed to as now, in hindsight, he could tell that it was a somewhat controlling demand.

Another thing that was slightly pissing him off was that Darcy didn’t like getting things from him. It was insulting. Clothes were OK as it saved her the time of getting them herself. What woman didn’t like shopping? Anything else was a struggle. Like nice little knickknacks. She accepted and wore the first sets of earrings he got her and that was it. She dodged that topic like it was going to kill her and it made Tony wonder why presents made her so paranoid.

But maybe the problem was in his approach? He used the same tactic he used on other women. His Spark was not one of the others... He was learning.

The door to the shop opened as soon as he stepped out of the car. The security person at the door nodded at him when he strode inside without a care in the world. He was aware that people had to make reservations in order to get inside. But that was for people who were not Tony Stark, plus he liked the place and it meant that it benefited handsomely from him.

“Mr. Stark, what a pleasure-” The overeager manager was on him.

“I remember discussing it with you how I like it.” Tony liked the place, not the people in it. He was not in a mood to be dealing with the overzealous salesman trying to crawl up his butt right now. Not generally and especially not now.

“Yes, of course, Mr. Stark, it's just been a while-”

“I will see myself around.”

So... When you can get anything, how do you chose the perfect gift?

Tony did not think that his little Spark understood how he felt about her. He did not understood how he felt about her. Not completely. All he knew was that he wanted her, and that was not only that pretty face of hers, but also her sharp tongue and clever mind that she so casually used to drive him insane. The woman had the package that would have any man coming back for more. Except he wasn’t any man, he got a taste and didn’t feel like letting go, even for a second.

Gifts were invented to pacify and please women as far as he had always understood it. Women expected them. It was a sign of appreciation and gratitude or a way of getting them out of his hair... so far up to Pepper it had been the latter. Gold-digging was a popular profession in the circles that he
cruised in. Having all that in mind, it was getting rather painfully obvious how unprepared he was to deal with someone that wasn’t after his money, even being with Pepper didn’t prepare him, and it was frustrating.

He walked past the open displays of eye-catching sparkles.

The dress that Marilyn Monroe wore as she sung the famous Happy Birthday for JFK came to his mind. The simple yet decadent elegance of the design. The Gala was coming soon and he yet had to convince the true embodiment of stubbornness, the lovely Miss Lewis, to attend it with him. The dress was already being designed by the atelier since so far all they needed was the measurements. The accessories to go with that were going to be decided on when the dress was complete.

Why did Shortstack have to make everything complicated? Why? There were a lot of things here that would compliment that peachy complexion… so which one of those one-of jewelry design gems would less likely be thrown back at him? That was the question.

Tony circled the displays, picking up the pieces that caught his attention. There were some exceptional articles and he put them aside. There were going to be special occasions where they would have to attend together sooner or later, like SI functions and charity events. Earrings, surely a woman cannot wear the same pair every day? Necklaces, different clothing called for different type, right? Right. Couple of those. A bracelet. Hm. Maybe one of those. Not sure she likes wearing them.

The only assortment that in all the various selections that Tony avoided were the rings. Those were tricky. He had never gifted rings so far, even to Pepper. Women liked seeing things that weren’t there and Tony had never been inclined to entertain any notions of commitment even accidentally…

The rings in each of the themed displays ranged in size and complexity. Tony gingerly picked one up. Wide band with inlaid enamel leaves. Interesting. Too big for Spark’s small fingers, though. What else do they have? They had the place shut for him, he had time. He was going to pick something simple and casual, you know, not to encourage any silly and premature ideas.

When the phone in his pocket rang Tony dropped one of the rings he was holding as he pulled the device out.

“Stark.”

“Hot stuff, you picking me up or not?”

“I – Shit, what’s the time?”

“It couldn’t be that late…”

“An hour past the time – Hiccup – you are late, Tony.”

Wait, she sounded… “You sound drunk.”

“I was reasonably intoxicated an hour ago. And we are at the bar downstairs.” That sounded … plausible and he clenched his jaw as he heard Pepper laugh. He knew he should have not left those two together.

“I am just round the corner. Be there in ten. Drink some water. I-”

“Sure. See ya!”

He only took that ring because he ran out of time. It was an absolute accident that the design reminded of a certain type of jewelry. The rest was going to be delivered to his house as he shoved the ring in his pocket once he paid. It was not an engagement ring, because if it were he would have
picked something bigger, fancier, and more impressive, something that would have an impact when she saw it. Tony froze for a sec as he got into his car. The small band feeling much heavier in his pocket than it should have. Spark deserved something bigger, fancier, and more impressive, something that would have an impact when she saw it and it not necessarily had to be an engagement ring. Tony snorted at the thought. If he was going to get his fierce little Harpy a ring, it was because she deserved to have a nice ring. He'd come back tomorrow. Get something better.

*Engagement, what a joke.* He was not that type of man. Shortstack probably wouldn’t even want to have it.

The ring did not feel like it was burning hole in his thigh all the way back with Darcy excitedly chatting in the passenger’s seat. *It did not.* It didn’t mean anything. It was just a ring.

*He’d done it.* Tony thought half in a daze. *He’d actually done it.*

“I will go on one knee if you promise not to whack me in the teeth with the crutch.”

*That was not how he planned to do it!*

There were going to be… *Gods, everything.* Flowers and romantic dinner, somewhere far from the cold of NYC, maybe fireworks and *she one hundred percent would have said no.* He’d ran a large number of scenarios in his head. All of those ended the same way. *A negative answer.*

He was going to *wait.* It was a well known fact that you had to wait for the good things. Except he hated waiting. Especially when he had a design in his head. The design was probably premature too. But since the most important element of it was already in motion, the rest could wait. Like the actual Event. What was the standard? A year of engagement? That was probably how long it would take to plan the Wedding of the century, anyway. Well, they were going to hire people for that because of a certain Spark’s propensity to splashing a ton of money on a party for people they didn’t even like. On the other hand a *lot* of people would kill him if the two of them just eloped to Vegas and came back married.

*Married… Jesus.* What the fuck was he doing?

Darcy was struck dumb. Tony hand a ring. A motherfucking engagement ring with a massive rough diamond in red. Red. Of course it would be *red.* Bleeding Iron Condom Red…

*Holy… This is not happening!* He’d done it. Tony had gone on one knee with the ring in hand while eyeing her crutch that she was clutching to prevent herself from falling over. She was in *shock.*

“Thor, blow a guy once.” No shock ever was going to prevent her from running her mouth, though.

Tony stared at her before growling out. “While it was glorious, I already had the ring and you just said yes. Here let me-” The crutch made a loud noise as it fell down when Darcy pressed the balled hands to her chest much to the clear annoyance of the man on one knee.

“Lewis, you know he can afford the dental works, right? I- ouch! Nat, what was that for?! We were all thinking *that!”* All the attention went from the couple to a side of the room where Steve Rogers stood with the StarkPhone in hand, face timing the rest of the team. The sudden attention made the man go bright pink in the face as he stammered out.

“I… Miss Potts is doing it too!”
Pepper Potts was doing it too, just discreetly and looked none too please at being called out.

The voice of Colonel Rhodes from Pepper’s phone had an edge of excitement to it. “Well, I just nearly flew into the side of a destroyer, I feel like I deserve to witness it.”

“All we are missing is Bruce-”

“I – Sorry, Tony. Here.” Came the sheepish voice of the Good Doctor.

There was another pause from Tony as Darcy tried to process the situation. “Did I miss a call to Assemble? Do you people mind?”

“We don’t-” “Not at all-” “You go right ahead, Tony-” “Just pretend we’re not here-” “I am so making the joke about blowjob at the reception- ouch! Nat!” The reply came in a chorus and Darcy wanted to face palm but that would have meant unclenching the fists.

“Honeybuns, we need new friends.” She could not agree more.

“Natasha is clearly backing me up,” she still defended loyally, “the rest is totally your buddies.”

“Let’s elope. Would Thor kill me if we did?” Tony sounded almost serious. Almost.

“Jane would kill you. I have promised that if it ever happened she was going to be my maid of honor. Thor would be disappointed, in his Labrador way of his, mainly because Janey would never stop bringing it up. Like ever. Besides he doesn’t even know about us yet.” Yeah no, she was not facing Thor on this, if this ever became a thing. Which wasn’t a given. Nope.

“Just make sure he has some of that thick chocolate cake from Asgard-” As Rogers spoke Darcy felt her already wide eyes going round and threatening to pop out of her skull as she slowly turned to face the now not suited America’s favorite super hero.

“Brownies? Thor shared the brownies with you?” Could this day get any more surreal?

There was a cough from the blond and he shrugged adjusting the grip of the phone. “They were-“ another cough, “very… chocolaty.” Darcy vaguely felt Tony getting back on his feet as she continued to stare at Rogers. Silence had permeated the whole room.

And then Tony cackled. “Honey, sweetheart, light of my life, what was in those brownies?”

“Nothing!” Her eyes were still wide as he put his hand on her shoulder and made her look at him. “Those were Thunder-Bro’s brownies and I deny any involvement in the making of them!”

Natasha’s voice cut in before Tony could respond. “Was that the brownies that Thor had with him in DC and wasn’t inclined to share?”

“I thought that was weird. He is usually OK with sharing. They looked good too.” Cupid sounded wishful and Darcy sputtered a little.

“I thought that was weird. He is usually OK with sharing. They looked good too.” Cupid sounded wishful and Darcy sputtered a little.

“Right.” Tony was eyeing her suspiciously as he took hold on her hands. “It did not smell like -”

“Funnily enough it doesn’t if you mix the batter really carefully with Asgardian Mead, or so-” Did she have some neurological defect that prevented her from keeping her mouth shut?

“No way... did it have the magic ingredient? No way, Lewis, you did not-” Darcy wished that Pigeonman were present so she could slap him. He sounded on verge of hysterics.
“Spark, did you make Point Break some magically enhanced pot brownies? That he later, out of the kindness of his heart, shared with Popsicle Man, right before we went for a meeting with us, the President of the United States, the Director of SHIELD and the Defense Secretary?” Tony's glee was reaching the manic level, and her lips twitched a bit involuntarily.

“There is no way! Rogers, you looked aggravated the entire time looking out the damn window!” Cupid just couldn’t keep his trap shut and Darcy winced.

The good Captain only shrugged. “Well, yes. There were dragons outside.”

Peeps =) So how you like it so far? Please do not forget to let me know what you think=)

It is what keeps me going and feeds the plot bunnies =)

Many thanks to those that take the time to do it, I hope you enjoyed my newest offering=)
Hey Wino,

Your help is much appreciated as always,

Hope you will enjoy your trip =)

xxx

Chapter 61

Jack stood there with a slack jaw and watched Captain America shrug before replying “Well, yes. There were dragons outside.” He really wished he had some of those brownies, because that way he could justify what he was seeing. The brain refused to process it. Like it was happening but at the same time not happening. It felt like Jack was watching a show on TV, except he was in it.

“Dragons. That’s a first. Honey, you made Captain Righteous trip balls in a meeting with the President-”

“I resent the accusation! The brownies were supposed to go off the bloody planet. Besides, on Rogers the effects would last what? Five minutes? Seven? Pff. ”

Jack Cooper couldn’t resist a peek at the lawyers. The temptation was too great. Mr. Spools might have been having some sort of seizure and Mr. Lincoln was impersonating a statue, the man’s eyes were nearly popping out. Oh, good. He was not the only person staggering in the room.

“The President thinks that Rogers hates him.”

The statement made no great impression on the young woman. “Wussy. Who is bothered by that?”

“Everyone? Nearly everyone? Not you or me, of course, but the rest of them mere morals. So I think at this point it is in the interest of National Security that we-” Was he imagining it, or was the conversation going so off topic they lost the important bits?

“Tony, do not bring National Security into this!” Whoever was on Miss Potts phone objected passionately.

“She likes you, Rhodey.”

“Yes and I would like to keep it that way, thank you very much.” Was that Iron Patriot? Was there someone that wasn’t somehow present?
“Rogers, would you not feel safer knowing that our joint forces-” That sounded awfully like a sales pitch.

“Stark, keep me out of this.” That was a sentiment shared by everyone present. It looked like it might be dangerous. No one wanted to be drawn into it, but everyone wanted to watch and see how it was going to turn out.

“Thanks, Rogers.” The voice dripped with sarcasm and Jack winced even though it wasn’t addressed to him.

It was happening. He could hear his partner’s heart break. Captain America flipped a bird at Stark. The star spangled hero was like the rest of them when he was fed up. They didn’t teach you that in school.

“Real sign of maturity that, Rogers. Great. She got you high as a kite and you didn’t even blink to indicate to us that- ” Jack wanted to stick his fingers into his ears not to hear it. Captain America did not do pot, accidentally or otherwise. Not that he cared, but recreational use of the drug was illegal in his jurisdiction and he did not look forward to telling some poor kid off while knowing that Captain America didn’t mind doing some. Gods, that just sounded wrong.

“Tony, I saw dragons mate on the front lawn of the White House. It was actually pretty amazing -” And Captain America doing drugs was not the only thing that sounded wrong.

“Dragon porn. Even better.” Yeah… Did he fall asleep in the taxi on the way to the Tower? Would it be rude to just help himself to a stiff drink? “Sugar Plum, why did you even make those? They have drinks out there that can put a person in a coma after a few sips. Not that Dragon Porn isn’t great.” Yes, great. Double scotch would be great, too. Jack could already imagine the blissfully numbing effect of the drink.

“Look... Marijuana can ease some symptoms of depression. That's science talking. Thor-bro said his mum was having problems coping with the death of Loki and she's the Queen, I thought she couldn't very well be weak in public. Plus, I thought if it didn’t work at least she would get a chocolate fix and the Mead. I don’t even know if it worked. He didn’t see her after. He… Thunder-bro thinks the world of her and she sounds… She sounds like a good mum.” The point on good mothers wasn't lost to the officer, and yeah okay, that didn’t sound like a terrible reason to make that kind of product.

The young woman was looking away from the group and attempted to remove her hands from the grip Stark had them in but instead he just pulled her closer until she was once again forced to look at him. There was this strange look of dejection. The young woman with rosy cheeks and soft facial expression before them was a world apart from the cold, arrogant Mrs. Beckett. Little wonder they didn’t keep in touch.

“Marry me.” The little admission only seemed to fuel Mr. Stark’s determination.

Miss Lewis's eyes widened again. “You're an idiot. No, you’re insane. You -”

“Say yes. Well, you actually said yes already. It is merely a technicality.”

“Fuck off.” Certain someone didn’t see it the same way. What happens when unstoppable force meets an immovable object? Jack mussed as he watched, rooted to the spot like those around him.

“That is for the private celebration later, Honeybuns.” Another attempt to give her the ring went as well as it was expected.

“Why are you doing this?” The young woman was looking at the ring in Stark’s hand cautiously. “I
am not wearing it!"

“Why not?” Both Stark and Miss Lewis looked frustrated by the lack of progress and they tried to reason with one another.

“I – This – Listen. First. You have gone insane. Second. If my hand gets stuck in one of Jane’s machines I will be lucky if all that I were to lose would be a finger. I need all my fingers. Where did you get it anyway? Did you buy it by weight?”

“Carats. We both can agree that sanity is highly overrated. And it is a nice ring, exclusive design.” That was an impressive piece of blink, Jack could tell from afar.

“Listen, Scrooge McDuck, I get it, it’s expensive... it doesn't make it any less of a monstrosity.” Miss Lewis was deflecting. Not a bad move. Unlikely to work, but not a bad move.

“You don’t like the ring.” It was somewhat unsettling to hear Stark speak in a flat voice. Huh. That worked.

“I don’t like the ring.” There was a moment of silence and the couple regarded each other unwilling to back down before Stark suddenly pocketed the ring.

“Stay here.”

“Tony-”

“Just stay here. Ok? Right here.” Stark even indicated to the place she was standing to make a point. “Rogers! I- The fuck am I doing? She took you down twice. Forget it.” She what? Who? Her? The half pint? Should he wait and see if Spools was going keel over or could he also have a fit? Why did no one except them and the damn sharks look surprised?! It was a joke, wasn’t it?

“-Pepper! Make her stay here. Two minutes!” Stark gave a quick peck on the cheek to the confused looking Miss. Lewis and sped of deeper into the apartment. Everyone watched him go.

The CEO was at the woman’s side in a flash. “Darcy!” Miss Lewis already had the crutch in hand and was walking in the direction of the elevator in no time.

“I need some fresh air.” Everyone needed some fresh air. Jack would have loved to be enjoying it back in Louisiana.

“Jarvis, put the air on 20 percent higher! Darcy, just take a deep breath.” It appeared that Miss Potts was in need of those deep breaths too.

“The fuck is wrong with him? This is it, isn’t? The midlife crisis?”

“Darcy, no, he would have to finally make past the adolescence stage first.”

That got a laugh out of her. “So rude, but so true. He got me a ring, Pep. An actual ring.”

“Darcy, you could always him out of his misery, say yes. And worst case scenario, you'll be one rich widow.” A slick, velvety feminine voice said from the speaker phone.

Miss Potts made a long humming sound while she played along, as if considering it. “That would depend on how accidental the death would look.”

“Oh, very.” The woman replied promptly, making the brunette roll her eyes. Should he be taking notes? Just in case? Did he want to? Or more importantly how to move closer to that bar laden with
various spirits and not be too noticeable?

While the debate on the way Mr. Stark was going to meet his end was going on the lawyers regained the gift of speech. Mr. Spools discreetly cleared his throat as he stepped closer to the detectives.

“This is merely a hypothetical discussion-” Mr. Lincoln interrupted his colleague by patting the older man on a shoulder and shook his head.

“George. No. This entire conversation. All parts and statements of it, is not happening.” There was a silent stare off between the two men before Mr. Spools nodded. They were not going to justify anything. They were outright going to pretend that it never happened.

“But- Captain America said -” Trust his partner to put his foot in. Jack felt his heart skip a beat, all the thrill was getting to it as he discreetly tried to nudge Mack and hope he got the message. Mr. Lincoln gave them a wide, ice cold smile as he spoke quietly as not to disturb the other ongoing conversation.

“Yes, detective? What did Captain America, the embodiment of this fine country’s values and hopes, say? That he used, unknowingly and well in the past, some mind altering substance, that was offered to him baked in a brownie by the Crown Prince of Asgard, that is a planet with a highly advanced civilization that we hope to maintain friendly relations with, cooperation that would one day turn into mutual aide on various levels.” That was why the name sounded familiar. The big blond man with a hammer. Jack made some noise but the lawyer just continued.

“We-” They were almost distracted by Miss Potts doing her best to calm the increasingly restless Miss Lewis down and the annoyingly creative would-be Tony Stark murderers slash companions.

“The said enhanced patisserie has been made by Miss Lewis, a woman well respected and loved by all those that know her not the least Mr. Stark, as a good will gesture for the Queen of Asgard, the mother of His Royal Highness Prince Thor, whose help during the Alien Invasion had been well documented and on whose continued support we often rely. So, which one of you, Detectives, is going to sign the report stating that Miss Lewis baked brownies that might have contained recreational marijuana? You, Detective Cooper? Have few years till retirement still, don’t you? Fancy finishing your service for this country by putting in jeopardy an intergalactic diplomatic mission? No? Detective Mack, will you go on record as a man claiming that America’s favorite Hero does drugs before meeting the President?”

“No.” Was that the common sense finally kicking or the swift kick Jack gave him helped was hard to say.

“Good. See, George? We are all reasonable adults here. I guess we can all agree that not discussing details of this conversation is in the best interest of everyone present. Besides Mr. Stark got other matters on his mind right now.”

“Hey! People, in case you missed it. Tony is a good boyfriend.” For a woman that looked like she wanted to do a runner Miss Lewis was very protective of Mr. Stark. When had the boyfriend discussion started to involve them, too?

“Tony is a good man.” Someone said loyally. Whoever else that was sounded so honestly earnest.

“Dr. Banner-”

“He is.”

“Darcy, he worships the ground you walk on. Trust me, I would say he will always treat you right,
but I rather not die in the same accident when you two start hitting snags.” That was Colonel Rhodes. He was getting better at recognizing voices, he mentally patted himself on his back.


“I said snags, Tony. It happens to everyone!”

“You should be in my corner!” Tony Stark was back and he clearly noted the position of the women changed.

“I am in your corner! the road ahead is long and shit is going to happen! It is going to be tough!”

“I can handle it!”

“For her!”

“Well, I can handle that too.” Stark once again stood in front of the fidgeting woman and offered something on the palm of his outstretched hand. “Here.”

“What is that? Another ring? How many did you get?”

“I didn’t. It’s my mother’s ring.” Crap. What the hell was he witnessing. This was such a bad timing. Men did not just gift their mother’s ring.

“Tony…” Miss Lewis knew that too from the way her eyes went wide once again.

“Take it.” The tone of voice was less pressing and gentler yet even more imploring.

“Tony, there is no rush. Like, if you think that I am -”

“I don’t.”

“Then why?”

“Because I want you to have it. Will you have it? It’s an exclusive offer: you take the ring and get me absolutely for free.”

“Well,” pulling the much smaller, more sentimental value ring seemed to work better, “who says no to a deal like that?”

“Hopefully not you, Spark. Will you just say yes?”

“This is a little sudden, you have to admit.” It was sudden, everyone waited with a baited breath.

“Yes, you would have said no otherwise.” And it would have been a reasonable reaction.

“That’s a little pessimistic.”

“True none the less. Darce, if that is not too much to ask can you please stop killing me?”

“I’ve been told it that it is part of the fun.” Jack could name at least one person that disagreed.

“Yes, until you actually kill me. Say yes. I am not frog matching you down the isle here.” Good to know that, because that wasn’t legal.

“So what are you doing?”
“I don’t know.” It sounded like a surprisingly honest admission especially since the man looked quite lost for a second. “But let’s do it together. Not that a ring is needed for that, but why don’t you have it? I -”

“Yes.”

There was a sharp intake of breath from everyone.

“Yes? Is it a yes yes? For the avoidance of any-”

“Oh man, Stark, dude, are you trying to hang yourself by the balls? It is fucking painful to watch. Fun, though. Please carry –Naaat!” A sharp smack was heard. Whoever that was on Captain America’s phone received one evil look from Iron Man, even when the last painful exclamation indicated that the person was not faring well.

“Thank you for your input, peanut gallery.” It was a gift, Jack concluded as he watched Tony Stark regroup from the sudden distraction and focus on the brunette in a blink of an eye as if the rest of people weren’t there. The man was about to go on one knee again but Miss Lewis got him by the wrist and shook her head.

“I’d rather we be on the same level. You know, for -” There was a pause as the woman’s mouth opened and closed couple of times, as if she couldn’t find a word to describe it until settling for –“the adventure.”

Tony Stark smiled and his face lit up like a candle. “An adventure? I like it. I will also take a partnership where we be both prosper and be merry and married.”

At one point the ring found its way onto Miss Lewis finger and Stark gently kissed it before putting the small hand on his chest over the soft glow that filtered through the top he was wearing. The moment looked intimate. The couple regarded one another as if they had a private conversation until Miss Lewis nodded curtly. An offer had been made and accepted.

That was not how the proposals usually went. For now there was no instant happiness, even when the looks they gave each other had this soft edge to them. It was more than just mere flight of fancy, Jack could tell. All the jokes that he’d heard aside Tony Stark and Darcy Lewis were not making an easy decision, because it came with lifelong consequences for both of them.

“You know that everyone will think that I am pregnant.”

“Part of your job description will be disappointing a lot of people by doing your own thing. Besides, I think I deserve to have you all to myself first.” Well, that smile did not leave any room for guessing what it meant. Jack looked away as he cleared his throat. “I believe champagne is in order. Ah! Detectives! We haven’t forgotten about you, of course- What a pleasant surprise. Honey, look. The Police wants to arrest me doing the decent thing.”

Jack swallowed as the attention of the entire room turned to them.

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Hey, my lovely Peepsters!

Happy Halloween! Hope you all had fun and plenty candy.
Let me know what you think and keep me inspired =) as you can tell from the 60 + chapters is does help =)
Chapter 62

Wino,
as always you have done an amazing job
and your help is much appreciated

xxx

Chapter 62

It happened.

Tony tore his eyes from the ring that now adorned Darcy’s finger to shake hands with the Icicle Man. They were being congratulated.

It happened. She said yes. Darcy said yes… The big yes. She said yes … The word was still ringing in his ears even as all the people present lined up to offer their best wishes, temporarily pulling them apart. He could still feel it. The weight of that small hand on his chest. The weight of the commitment, from both of them, all in that small, understated piece of jewelry. A simple band of silver with embedded diamond. Brilliant, effortless design. So much like the woman now wearing it.

He wasn’t planning to do it. Not now, at least. Not like this. It just slipped from his tongue. It was just there, a thought at the back of his mind and suddenly it was on his tongue and he could not bring himself to just laugh it off. He could have. Shortstack wanted him to. His sanity wanted him to. Except he didn’t want to. Something inside him came undone. He had to admit, if only to himself, he has become insatiable when it came to the sassy little witch. Or maybe he was just plain old greedy. It was a rather unattractive flaw of in his character, not that he cared. Tony wanted her. All of her. All for himself.

The ring got changed three times until he selected the opulent article that by no means was supposed to be for an engagement. Even if it looked suitable for it. It wasn’t for that. It wasn’t, until it was, that is.

Naturally, Darcy didn’t like it. He could as well have held a snake out for her. He should have known that was how it was going to go down. Darce could be slippery as an eel when the inspiration struck her. Deflection was her secret weapon, but Tony was onto it. So he did the only thing that he could think of, that wouldn’t get him out right rejected and show that while it was sudden it wasn’t a thoughtless, empty gesture of which they both had too many of in their lives.
His mother’s ring. The look in those beautiful, bewitching eyes was worth the gamble.

“Stark, you ok?” Tony blinked and looked at the hand that he was still shaking to finally let it go, before his eyes instinctively searched for Darcy.

“Huh? Yeah, yeah. Haven’t been better.” He should have made it rain confetti. Why was Pepper standing so close to Darcy? Were they whispering? Why were they whispering?

“You made a big step.” They looked like they were whispering. That was never a good sign.

“One small -” he really should get himself over there.

“Don’t fuck it up. Because-” Tony’s brows went up for a second as he managed not to rise to the bait.

“Take a number, Cap. I can already feel Romanov’s disapproval.”

“She’s not even here.” A small and insignificant detail when it came to Natasha Romanov. Tony started moving in the direction of the women.

“My point exactly.” Why was Sparky walking off?

“Besides, Pepper… Hey, Pep. Didn’t see you there. Who is Darcy talking to now?” the brunette had left the group to pick a phone call and looked engrossed in it.

“Dr. Foster.”

“I am confident that she is overjoyed for us.” Point Break will too… Right. That was going to be an enlightening conversation.

There was a pause before Pepper Potts nodded. “Certainly, Tony. So just to check, how long can you survive in space with the suit again?”

“Not too long… Darcy!”

“Oh, it is not Dr. Foster that wants to know. It’s for me.” Is that what he was getting for being considerate? He should have never left the two of them together. The un-amused look on his face projected that thought.

“See, Rogers? You are way down that list.”

“I wonder what Thor will say.” Yes, it was an excellent question.

“He likes me.” Having the God of Thundering Voice around was like having a big golden retriever when he was in a mood. Everyone liked the man and the man liked everyone. And that was how Tony was going to think. He was not going to think of Apocalyptic level storms and such.

“Up to the point when he finds out-”

“Well, he shouldn’t have left then-” Rogers was having too much fun.

“Blond and hairy!” The spray of very expensive Champagne went all over Detective Cooper and Pepper making the two sputter in indignation. They wiped the mixture of alcohol and saliva off their faces with badly concealed glares. Tony coughed as he tried to clear his suddenly obstructed airways, a very unwelcome vision materializing in his mind.
“Sneak attacks like that are outlawed by Geneva Convention!” That just earned an even wider smile.

“You were talking smack about my Thunder-bro. That’s not cool, Tin Man. You know I don’t like it.” Yes, he knew that. Darce was not supposed to hear that.

“Point Break can -”

“Blond and very hairy, Tony.” Tony wiped the chin with the back of his hand as they had a stare off for a second and his fiance, good Lord, raised her brows daring to him continue. He wanted, the temptation was breathing down his neck, but the Image of bananas encased in thin latex was not what he wanted in his mind ever again. There was only one other image to follow and he was not going there. It was time to regroup. Tony smirked.

“And it is entirely Capsicle’s problem now. Education, Rogers! It is important. Spread it far and wide!” He even managed not to cackle too loud as the others watched on with confusion written all over their faces. Oh, how he wanted to enlighten them. There was no reason why he should be the only man present to have those mental scars.

“Stop picking on the man.” One pointed little finger poked him in the chest gently before he caught it in his hand.

“Yeah, stop picking on me, Tony.” Captain Righteous groaned under his breath, eyeing the woman at Tony’s side. “Miss Lewis got that covered.” Darcy didn’t look amused and kissed her teeth noisily.

“Didn’t quite catch that. Want to repeat it, Rogers?” Tony wanted Rogers to repeat that.

Captain America all but saluted at the sharp tone of voice. “No, ma’am. I think you heard that just fine.”

“I have this weird feeling as if you are trying to pick a fight with me, punk.”

“Ma’am, I would not dream of engaging in such an absolutely despicable behavior.”

“Honey, of course he wouldn’t. He’s got an important mission ahead. We would all hate for him to kick the bucket before that happened.” Oh, a glare. Tony was rather proud of himself at that.

“For a man that right now is the least popular being on at least two planets, you talk way too much, Stark. How does it work when you get struck with lightning at high altitude again?” Yeah… He probably should start incorporating those upgrades.

“I just keep flying. Now, we have gotten off track, thanks to Captain Irrelevant here. So, detective Cork.”

“Actually-” The Police Officers didn’t look all to happy to be remembered again.

“He knows your name, he does this on purpose. Tony -”

“Or not. Anyway. Where are more drinks?”

“In the bar waiting for you to serve them.” For a good measure Darcy made a sweeping motion with her hand towards the bar just in case he wasn’t getting her hint.

“I was always under the impression that this kind of behavior started after the wedding.” They should call the help and have the drinks served. That’s what he should do, but that would mean even more people present for the unpleasant topic that would soon have to be breached.
“Generally, I guess. And there are people that don’t do sex before that either. Weirdos. But let me tell you, I ain’t waiting five years for a chance to boss you about.”

“What? I’m sorry what? Five what? Shit.” Ton didn’t bother with minimizing the spillage from the foaming bottle in his hands before just pouring then into waiting glasses, making a mess as he did so. “Let’s just get back to that real quick. You said fifteen months, right?”

“Nope.” Shortstack was digging her heels in. He could tell. That was how it was between them. Tony winning a battle was never an indication of the chances to win the war.

“We’re not staying engaged for five years. What if-” Who stayed engaged for five years anyway? Why would you even get engaged to begin with?

“What if what?”

“You know.” Tony coughed. It was not like he thought about it much since coming back from the Becketts. No one else seemed to follow his line of thought; it was not at all surprising.

“I clearly don’t.” The honest confusion on Darcy’s face looked quite fetching.

“You know.” He coughed again and murmured under his breath. “Happy accidents.”

The silence that fell after those two words was heavier than the magic hammer. The lawyers in tandem walked past the champagne filled glasses right to the hard stuff.

“Happy… What?” Darce’s eyes were round like saucers as she stared.

“So remember when last night-”

“No one needs to know!”

“I disagree, it is essential knowledge. Why are you drinking, Cap? You can’t get drunk. Besides you might learn a thing or two. Fear not, I shall share my wealth of knowledge. So it all starts with birds and bees and hormones -”

“Oh, Thor. Tony, that’s a no from me.” Spark did not look inclined for the said sharing of his knowledge or any happy accidents.

“Why? I’m offended. They will be funny, intellectually superior and extraordinarily handsome, not to mention what your half of the genes will contribute. I could go on for hours. My point is that they will be a blessing upon this world. Like we are.”

“This discussion is closed.” Just as he opened his mouth to reply a glare made him reconsider. “You want to get laid again or not?”

“I understand perfectly. On hold due to pending terms and conditions.”

“You are the perfect example of the give an inch takes a mile. Can you not for once overdo it? Just once?”

“You know I am incapable of it. It’s genetic. I am preconditioned not to want to do that.”

“Potts! Can I please have a double of whatever you are having?” Virginia Potts didn’t need to be told twice.

“You don’t do straight spirits, Darce.” People were for some reason not taking the champagne, but
chose to crowd Potts next to the stronger drinks. He frowned. They sure were thirsty.

“Today is a day many of us seem to be doing things we do not usually do. Oh, thank you, Pepper.” It was a fair point, Tony might have to concede on that. He might. Hmmm no…

“Hey, I think we should have some champagne first. It is a tradition.”

“Since when?”

“Since now. Let go of that… Here. Have my glass.” Tony wanted to laugh at the glare he received when they locked eyes over the delicate flute glasses and he couldn’t stop from winking cheekily. “Mmm. See? Wasn’t that bad.”

“Speak for yourself, Stark.”

“Rogers, why are you even still here?” Tony didn’t wait for the answer and clearly chose to ignore the grim look Captain gave to the detectives before he once again turned to Darcy. “So I was thinking red-”

“No.”

“Just some ascents.”

“No.”

“– and I am prepared to compromise.”

“Tony, I will go out on the limb and guess that is something to do with the big event?”

“Naturally, the color scheme is very important.”

“Aha. I haven’t even had the ring on for an hour, Tony. Remember we discussed personal space? I can ask Jarvis to play it again if you don’t.” Oh, he remembered that.

“Of course I do. You duct taped my mouth shut. The stuff hurts when it comes off.” It reminded him why he didn’t wax anything.

“Is that a complaint? Oh, I dare you.”

“– which wasn’t too bad…” Tony ran both hands through his hair. “Lets get this straight. Honeybuns, you duct taped me to the chair. How do you even manage to make it sound like I am the bad guy here?”

“You were warned.” It was not the point.

“– To the chair-”

“So? And that took a while. I wasted time because of you on a busy day-”

“Are you waiting for me to apologize?”

“It is not gonna hurt you.”

“Yes, because it’s not gonna happen, Honeybuns. You duct taped me. Rogers, she floored you. Did you have to apologize?” There was silence as everyone watched Captain America finish his drink in one go. He said nothing; just shot a quick salty look at the brunette. “You did. So much for you being
the backbone of this country.”

“Up yours, Stark.”

“Actually, I’m up hers, but that is another conversation altogether. Now, right. Cork, was it?”

“Cooper, Mr. Stark.”

“That was what I said. So I heard you want to arrest me?”

“You heard wrong, Mr. Stark.”

“Did I? Oh, do tell.” Tony had been looking towards this particular conversation for a while.

The excitement of the engagement had distracted everyone from him and Mack. This was a nightmare. Tony Stark had gotten engaged right before their eyes. The man they were supposed to question and Keith Beckett was hell bent to have in the dock was Tony Iron Man Stark.

“Well,” Jack cleared his throat and said a little prayer, “we are just-” Who was he protecting again? They found no damsel in distress. No one in need of rescuing. Well, someone needed rescuing. His and Mack’s careers. Keith Beckett was going to decimate them both once the news broke. And it was going to break, sooner rather than later. The second Tony Stark showed up at that Gala with Darcy Lewis, the news outlets all over the globe were going to explode. And the Engagement? Easily the Event of the Decade and there was him, Jack Cooper, sitting like a common hen on a golden egg not being able to do anything, just waiting for his head to roll. “Keith Beckett didn’t take a shine to you, or the rumor has it so.” The name made the room temperature drop. Jack was well aware that he was neck deep and the sharks around him had just smelled blood.

“He didn’t? Honey, he didn’t take a shine to me. My heart is bleeding. Cap, tell them!”

“Good thing you are hiding it so well, Tony.” The animated voice that Miss Lewis had was replaced by a flat tone and Jack swallowed. He watched Tony Stark rub his fiance’s back for a moment.

“I do? What an immense relief. I was scared it showed for a second there… So I take you have questions?”

Jack indeed did. Currently only one - could they go now and pretend this day never happened? Oh wait, that was two. Mack looked at him helplessly. His partner wasn’t eager to accuse Iron Man of assault. The grim truth was sinking in and so was the fact that they were about to sink with it.

“I will not surprise anyone here by stating that the Becketts have not believed that you are indeed the Tony Stark.” The man flashed Jack a smile as he extended a glass of the freshly poured champagne.

“Told you it was going to work.” Miss Lewis quipped as she took a seat.

“And I told you that I can only process one trauma at a time, Spark. Ah! Ah! Ah! Cap! Wait your turn for questions.”

“I believe Miss Lewis is entitled to go first, Stark.”

Well there was a clear divergence of opinion.

“Excellent point, Steven. Thank you. Also-” The seated woman extended her hand in an invitation for a handshake and Jack moved closer so she didn’t have to get of the chair for it, “- Darcy Lewis, Detectives, it is pleasure to meet you two-“
“Yes, Detective Cork, we are very happy to have you here, which is a long way from the state of Louisiana. We’ve been there just recently. Charming place.” Jack smiled politely and nodded. Mr. Stark looked eager to get it over with but at the same time was constantly putting himself between Miss Lewis and the perceived danger. The lawyers looked on, nursing their drinks like a support team at the sidelines, ready to spring into action led by the ever sharp and watchful Miss Potts.

“It is a good town, Tony.” There was a warning in the gentle tone, Miss Lewis was taking no shit from the man she just agreed to marry and Tony Stark clearly felt the displeasure.

“And no surprise, that is where you have come from after all. Despite -”

“Despite. Right. So, Detectives, I guess most of us now know why you are here, but why don’t you inform us anyway.”

“Miss Lewis, I will start by saying that I am relieved that you are safe and sound.” There was a brief look of surprise on the young woman’s face, but Jack meant every word. On the job he had seen way too many instances of domestic abuse and often the victims were either too scared or resigned to their fate to seek help. For the shit storm this entire situation was turning out to be, Jack Cooper was at least glad that he didn’t find her beaten blue and black but instead surrounded by people that cared. Not everyone was that lucky.

“I… Thank you, Detective Cooper. So what does Keith wants?”

“Yes, do tell. We love a good chuckle. Our -”

“Honestly? Tony, please.”

“What? I merely- “

“Tony.”

“Fine. Go right ahead. I will not say a word, furthermore I will not even-” The woman pinched the bridge of her nose as she listened.

“Okay. Please ignore the background noise, Detectives. It is work in progress.”

“That was so rude, Spark.” The couple exchange challenging looks before Stark kissed her on the temple. “Lets get this over with.”

“Is Keith filing charges? Tony decked Kenneth on our way out. Is that what it is all about?” The support team was nearly bursting, ready for legal defense. Captain America looked ready for offensive though. Jack cleared his throat.

“I was under the impression that he is considering such course of action.” Jack was consoling himself that at least some justice still existed in this world and that nasty piece of work was going to have it served to him.

“I am almost sorry Tony will not rock into the courtroom there. Almost-”

The rumor was true Tony Stark could not keep his mouth shut for any period of time. “We are not missing much, the Gala is round the corner. It will be so much fun.”

“It will be a disaster.”

“Some fantastically good things have come out of those. Just look at us, and I now know how to dice
a mango.” Jack would have never thought that from all of the skills Tony Stark would so openly boast mango cutting would not be one.

“Well, keep working on it and maybe you will present me with one that is not turned to mush from your outstanding skills.”

“Pepper, I need a mango.”

“Do you intend to choke on it right now?”

“...No.”

“Well, you are not getting one.”

“I think that while the Police is here I should point out that I am being bullied.” There was silence. “You literally just met my Spark, at the very least you should be impartial.” Another brief silence. Jack was ready to sucker punch Mack if his partner opened his gob. They were not getting into an argument between Miss Lewis and Mr. Stark. At any cost. “Leave me out to the wolves, why don’t you.” Well, at least that solved the argument about who was the mature adult in that relationship.

“Miss Lewis, as I was saying. Our visit here was initiated by Mr. Beckett through my superiors.” Jack put extra emphasis on the last word. It did no harm to point out how much uninvolved they were in this whole charade. He could bet they won’t even have to make out a report for the trip, once the news hits the media and the whole circus takes to the road across the globe his boss will bury any department’s affiliation to Keith Beckett. Those connections that Mr. Beckett boasted about went both ways and the man was going to very unpopular very soon. Jack smiled; it was pointless to avoid the facts at this point. “The filing of assault charges is pending, as you can guess, all depending if you, Miss Lewis, would be willing to break off your relationship.”

“Smells a lot like blackmail, Detectives.” This time Captain America sounded as calm as Jack had always imagined the man to be and it didn’t sound reassuring in the slightest.

“To make it clear, neither me nor my department would have allowed any form of miscarriage of justice. The views of Mr. Beckett are in no way in line with those of State Troopers. Yet, I have indeed been asked to investigate the allegation of an assault along with the disappearance of Miss Lewis. So far, Mr. Beckett due to his status is a respected member of our community and his word has a certain sway.” Not for long, Jack assumed, if the look on Tony Stark’s face was anything to go by.

“So they want Darcy back under their caring wing... By getting her to leave me.” That wasn’t a bad plan if the boyfriend in question hadn’t turned out to be Fucking Iron Man. In light of the recent development the likelihood of those two splitting at the order of Mr. Beckett was slim.

“They are very eager for me to let them know the contact details for Miss Lewis; I believe they intend to pay a visit after the Gala.”

“Isn’t that sweet of them, Honey? So they can enlighten you about your poor life choices no doubt. It can be safely said that that will not be happening.” Miss Lewis covered her eyes for a moment as Mr. Stark spoke.

“Let’s all savor the moment and appreciate Keith’s unwavering dedication at exploiting every opportunity for his own benefit.”

“And that is why you must attend the Gala.” Miss Potts said briskly. There were murmurs of agreement as Miss Lewis scowled.
“To create a scandal?”

“To set the record straight from the beginning. Pepper is right. We know how it will go if we make a public announcement without actually showing up in person. I am not letting them take advantage of the situation in any way.” There was finality in those angry words. “There is no other way.”

“They will be all over us as soon as-”

“They will try. I will be there. Others will be there. The security will be there. If the Becketts have not gotten my point last time, I will make a statement to the press.”

“Of course they haven’t gotten your point, Tony. I don’t want-”

“This can only go two ways at the very start: we go public and deny any ongoing relationship to them as soon as they try anything or they go public and benefit from the fact until we scramble to mitigate the damage.”

“Mr. Stark is right. It will make quite a buzz, the news about the engagement; the momentum will solidify the two facts together and get them helping us to avoid the otherwise costly delay.” Nothing like a voice of a lawyer to calm the passions. The matter of Miss Lewis’ family was an issue that had been given a significant though. “The presence of the Detectives alone indicates that if not handled immediately the situation could play into Mr. Beckett’s hand.”

“It will be a nightmare. It -” Suddenly Miss Lewis stopped talking and took a deep breath before swearing. “Shit.”

“Spark? What? What-” The thunder that rippled over the city was strong enough to make the windows shake. “Shit. Is it-” Followed by couple of smaller ones in quick succession.

“Tony, it is better if you suit up.”

“You said he likes me.”

“Tony, just suit up. Please.” There was worry on Miss Lewis fair face and Jack glanced at his partner trying to gauge the situation. The weather looked like it was taking a turn for worse very quickly.

“He likes me.” Jack felt like he was about to volunteer to suit up. Stark wasn’t budging.

“Yes, but you heard the thunder, right? He’s pissed. I can tell, Tony-”

“Not at me! I did not do anything!” The rain outside picked up and it was hard to make out the nearest building.

“Stark, suit up.” Things never looked positive when Captain America was worried. Jack tried to suppress his instinct of reaching for the gun.

“I am not suitting up! That is that. Now, if you all excuse me. I believe we have a visitor that I should go and greet. Don’t make any plans without me. We shall join you shortly.” With a swift kiss on Miss Lewis lips Stark marched off to the elevator with determined steps.

I have been super busy so I hope you peeps are still staying tuned for the story =)
Didn't have much time so I hope that this chapter makes sense. It is all over the place, but I hope you will like it =)

Let me know what you think of it, Peepsters!

Help me get back on track!
Chapter 63

My lovely Wino,

just wanted to say thank you for all your help this year

and I hope that you will keep helping me out the coming year too =)

You are amazing =)

xxx

Chapter 63

‘I should have suited up.’ Tony did not like admitting he was wrong. It cramped his style. Also, he was never wrong, even when it happened.

The tiny, icy water droplets hit him in the face as soon he stepped onto the roof. The wind was howling around like an angry beast looking for its prey. *Charming weather.*

At least his guest didn’t look bothered, neither by the cold nor the rain. Point Break stood at the edge of the building surveying the grey city that was being battered by the unexpected storm.

“Greetings, Man of Iron.” Tony had to admit, very few people could wear their mother’s drapes and pull it off. The Future King of Asgard was one of those people. Tony plastered a smile on his face and stepped closer to the edge, feeling the rain soak him through.

“Hey, Point Break. Fancy seeing you again. Been a while.”

“I have spoken to the Lady Jane.” That sounded ominous.

“How is Dr Foster? Finally coming to the Tower I heard - ” Oh, how he was tempted to add some snarky comments... *just one... or two,* there was no lost love between himself and Foster, but Tony rather suspected that it would be somehow unwise in the current situation so he watered down his replies.

“She confirmed, as I have been told, that you have taken my sister into your home.”

“Good news travel fast, I guess.” Tony was more concerned about what else may have reached the ears of Blond and Godly. Also if there was any more severity added to ‘my sister’, the words would develop their own gravitational pull.

“Is it good news, Man of Iron-”

“It is just Tony actually, but of course if you insist -”
“- that you, one that does not treasure the sanctity of vows, nor do you ever intent to-”

“Risking to sound impolite, I shall say you don’t know me well enough to be making those assumptions, Point Break.” The rain was freezing. While the God of Thunder didn’t seem to have a drop land on him, Tony was already soaked to the bone and only his sheer stubbornness prevented him from shaking.

“I know you enough.” Okay… that stance did not indicate anything good, also wasn’t the hammer being gripped rather tight… Lightning illuminated them both as it cracked just above the building. Yeah… Tony was really feeling the love. The smile on his face turned tense.

“That is a rude thing to say about your future brother in Law. Uh… It just occurred to me that one day I will be related to … lovely Dr Foster, which of course will be an honour.” Metaphorically speaking, Tony added only in the safety of his mind.

“What?”

“Oh. Foster didn’t tell you? You might have been in transit at the time.” If the next half an hour was not going to go down in history as the most violent flash storm in NYC ever, Tony was going to be deeply surprised. Maybe he should have waited with the news until they were in doors.

“What news you speak of? Have you betrayed my trust in other ways?”

The anger that flared up inside Tony washed over him like a warm wave. He had kind of been working up to this meeting for some time. It had to happen sooner or later. Tony Stark was well aware of his somewhat chequered past in the relationship department but there was no need to involve other aspects of his character. Like his trustworthiness.

“Betray your trust? Don’t kid yourself, nothing between me and Darcy has anything to do with you-”

“You take my sister for yourself and expect me-”

“It is not the dark ages here. Women do not get ‘taken' anymore!” he air-quoted.

“You are not worthy of her!”

“I am inclined to agree on that statement.” That clearly threw Big and Blond a little. “Don’t get excited. I agree. Not that it will stop me-”

“My sister-”

“After lengthy negotiations she has agreed to accept my hand in marriage, followed hopefully by the rest of me shortly after. I am attached to my hands, you of course understand. But knowing her I am looking a long road there.”

“You proposed marriage to my Lighting Sister?” That clearly was not computing. It was a little odd hearing that. Especially since it was true. “She accepted?”

“Yes.” Tony was not at all offended at the surprise in the man’s voice. Not at all. He took a deep breath before speaking again. “We are having champagne in the Penthouse. Join us?” His underwear was soaked at this point. He was looking at hypothermia soon and having to shout every time in order to be heard over the winds was getting tedious. How hard was it to land on the landing pad? Why did it have to be the roof?
“What makes you think that I shall approve of it?”

“It is a scenario where only one opinion matters and it is not yours.”

“You intend to challenge me, Man of Iron?” *What was with the surprise?* Tony was passionate about quite few things in life. There was no need to act like him standing up for what he cared about was such a shock. He sniffed and shifted. The water was running down his ass crack. It was time to move.

“Sure, let’s fight it out and watch Darcy cry because we don’t get along. Wonder which one will make us feel *more shitty*? No, wait. She wouldn’t cry. She is more creative than that. Also, that would be us getting off easy. I saw this thing on youtube the other day. Darcy sent it to me after I argued with Cap. Parents put two kids in an oversized t-shirt. We both know that she would do that. If you twist my nipple I am punching you in the crotch. Agreed?”

“… I have no desire to be that close to you, Man of Iron.”

“Mutual. I say it would be best head inside.” Since it was looking that Point Break was waiting for him to drop from frost bite Tony simply turned and headed back to the warmth and relative safety. Gravity of the situation was not lost on him. A concentrated lightning strike at a high altitude could do a lot of damage to an armoured suit. "Besides *Cap* has been dying to catch up with you.”

“The Captain is an honourable man.” Tony concentrated on the unpleasant feeling of the shoes that were full of water now as he ran fingers through his wet hair combing them back.

“He has his moments. So, what have you been up to? Spark said you hammered out pretty suddenly-” and here it was, the hand on his shoulder that nearly made the knees give out. Usually Tony would have shrugged it off. He was not a fan of casual physical contact. This time, however, it was different. *Yeah…* the thick fingers dug into his shoulder making him stop in his tracks on the stairs. That was going to leave a mark.

“Give me a reason why I should not-”

“You like me. Obviously not right *now*. Which I am inclined to forgive you for-”

“Does your mouth stops running even for a moment?”

“Of course. I eat, I drink and I do other things with it… that probably is not the time to discuss.”

The hand swiftly relocated from the shoulder to the neck. The back of the neck thankfully. Steady, solid pressure. Tony put the smile on again. The pressure was a little on the strong side. The smile was as forced as Thor’s grip.

“Man of Iron, I fear you are of mind that I jest with you.”

“No. I do not think-” More pressure. *Yep. Will be a mark there too.* Unless Thunder-bro has decided to take my head off. The family reunions, who thought it was such a blast?

“Have I ever told the story of how I have met Lady Jane and my Lighting Sister?” There was the fall, the tasering of the fallen god, oh and giant one eyed monster that was not in anything he read after, *funny that*. In essence, not really. Not the full story, no, more like *convenient fragments*. The funny bits. Not the parts where everyone, and by everyone Tony had in mind Darcy, nearly died.

“You *might* have mentioned?”
“So you know of my arrogance and my disgrace. I have learned much after my banishment. What is truly of worth to you, Man of Iron?” Lights were flickering, the scent of ozone in the air. Tony took a deep breath and stood still. Point Break was not a back alley criminal, he comforted himself briefly. “Many of your words mean little, I have learned, you speak them carelessly and often. Much like Loki, you weave a web of half-truths, which are much more dangerous than lies could ever be…”

“I hope you are not implying that I am lying to her, Point Break.” The shuffle during which Tony shook off the hand from his neck was brief. The cold was not cooling down the temper. He was getting that Point Break was looking out for Darcy, it was sweet, but he was sick and tired of people assuming that he was leading her up the garden path. He was not. At this point Tony felt like he would be the one being led up. At this point he wouldn’t even care anymore…

“She is defenceless and gentle of soul.” The image of the three Avengers out cold in the common kitchen popped into Tony’s mind. Yeah… He probably should clarify what the defenceless bit meant as there were quite a few people that would like to argue about her being defenceless.

“Didn’t she take you down?”

“She got lucky.”

“Not what I heard.” And he heard quite a bit on the matter since Darcy thought that he deserved it at the time. Spark had a thing about men thinking that they could intimidate her.

“She perceived my confusion as a threat to herself, Lady Jane and Eric Selvig.” The smile on the blond man’s face was too wide for him not to have thought the move courageous. It was getting obvious that it was taking him quite a bit of restrain not to start gushing about the women in his life. Not that Tony could blame him.

“Lets face it, Point Break, helpless is not description that can be used to describe them.” Foster sounded like she would take her chances against him with a can opener.

“No one upon this world is-“

“OKAY. That is quite enough!” The already thin patience he’d been sporting until now had worn off five minutes ago. “I get it, Point Break. She is not someone I would ever deserve but news flash, thankfully, it is still her choice who she spends her time, or even her life, with. What I have to do, is try my damned best to make her happy.”

Blondie’s face was a stormy cloud. He frowned. Then his face broke into a serene smile. ”Stark, you are of a noble breed, true and tested…” What? ”Jane wished to make sure you are true at heart. And I agree. My sister needs the best of this world, or someone who would treasure her so.”

This was a test?! “A test?!”

“Indeed.”

“...So you wouldn’t mind me relating to Foster that you called her helpless then?” Yeah, Foster had the royal gonads in a firm grip as the God of Thunder had a deer in a headlights expression on him for a moment.

“I rather you didn’t.”

“Okay.” This conversation was fun, but Tony wanted to conclude it before someone came looking for them. “What with this Lighting Sister business?”
“Are you questioning me?”

“Point for being observant, Blondie. Ah! Indulge me. Please.” Tony was… curious. One thing was being friends another was calling someone their sister and contrary to popular belief the Blond Asgardian kept his personal circle tight even when he was the friendliest person you could imagine. After a moment of silence, the man sighed and offered him a weary smile as he spoke, carefully choosing the words.

“After I was banished… it took a while to come to terms with the changes. I shall not surprise you, Man of Iron, I am proud, even more so before. My pride was the reason for my downfall. I was foolhardy. A fault I had often considered my strength. I have not done a day’s work for a meagre wage nor have I have been required to account for my actions. I have learned much in the time I have walked your world as a mortal man.”

“You are mortal even -”

“Everything dies, Man of Iron. Yes. Even Gods and Stars turn to dust, yet it takes great many lifetimes of men for that to happen. My father, in his cruel wisdom, took the gift of long life from me. Confining me to but one lifetime of men. A gift, as I came to understand in days that followed. Much can be learned from weakness. Not the least ways to overcome it. Patience and gratitude for the aid that is rendered in your bleakest hour when there is nothing to gain… and…” That was where the piecing blue eyes lingered on the soft glow that filtered through the soaked material of the shirt making Tony instinctively cover it with his hand. “Lady Jane and Darcy have shown steadfastness of spirit that few of even the greatest warriors possess. I see much of myself in her. There were whispers… after my return, that my soul had called for aid from kindred spirits when I fell. It is an old wives’ tale… yet I cannot deny had we not met I might have never been able to lift Mjolnir again.”

“Are you saying Darcy is your soulmate? Because I might be having a problem there.” For a moment Tony thought that Thor was going to swing the hammer at him as the man’s eyes glowed. Yes. Literally glowed. It was not a good sign. What soles were on his shoes again?

“A soulmate is not the same a bed mate, Man of Iron. I have no desire to bed her. Yet I treasure her beyond the bounds of friendship. I owe her a great deal. A debt I shall never be able to repay.” Yet you had no idea that SHIELD was fucking her over. There was a lot of feeling in Point Break’s words and Tony felt the ugly green eyed monster rear the head inside him. It was irrational but having another man speak with such passion about Darcy rattled him a little. All manner of snide responses was on the tip if his tongue. He did not play well with others. Nor was he inclined to share, in any sense.

“Yes, she is something else. So why Boothby got to date her while I am get the third degree? Because I do not think he would have made through it.” For a man that claimed Darcy as his sister Point Break was not doing his job.

“Jane liked him.” The flat tone of voice implied that the Asgardian was not in agreement with his girlfriend on that.

“Oh, did she now?”

Happy Holidays, my Peepsters! Hope you are all spending it with people that mean most to
you and are all safe and sound.

Finally I got a new laptop as my old one decided that it was time for it to die on me. The bastard ... But now I am back in business, peeps =) what did you think of the new chapter? Let me know and help me get back into the swing of things! Plus the plot bunnies are in desperate need of some sustenance and maybe coffee=) Happy New Year!
Chapter 64

Dear Wino,

Fabulous work as always

I have no idea what would I do without you

Many thanks for your continues help =)

Chapter 64

“Jane liked him.” The flat tone of voice implied that the Asgardian was not in agreement with his girlfriend on that.

“Oh, did she now?” His personal opinion of Foster aside, he was sure that the outwardly meek looking, aspiring scientist had no doubt heaped praises on her, counting on her bruised ego to gain brownie points. Plus, SHIELD rubber stamped him, so Tony imagined that Foster thought him to be harmless, trusting the covert spy organization to do its job… Jack Booted Thugs United TM indeed, as Darcy affectionately called them. He eyed Big Blond. The situation with the suspected coup was dangerous, their grim hunch confirmed one piece of information at a time, and they could not justify keeping it from a member of their team… well, that was going to be one Hell of a conversation. Just not today.

“Yes, my Jane considered him to be a friend. I fear it clouded my judgement too, but it matters not now.” And who would have thought that Big Blond could lie through his teeth like that? Tony flashed a grin. Of course, it mattered. They both knew that. Holding grudges seemed to be a family tradition.

Point Break slapped a hand on his shoulders and clasped him in a manly embrace. “My Lighting Sister has chosen. A wedding! Man of Iron, it warms my heart that she has chosen to bestow her favour onto you! In all my travels to all of the realms I have never met a treasure such as her. Stars pale in comparison to her.” Yeah, Rhodey had hugged him once, when the man was in the suit and Tony wasn’t. That was precisely how that felt. Like his bones were being crushed. Finally Point Break let go. “My wrath shall have no equals if you ever mistreat her.” And naturally, the Shovel Talk. Tony couldn’t stop himself from chuckling even as the Argardian’s eyes narrowed.

“Take a number, Point Break. Darcy has a way of warming people up to her.” Using some unusual techniques. Like a taser. Also more traditional ones, like baked goods. Or a combination of the two. Tony imagined that would warm you right through. Left you lightly charcoaled on some occasions.
“She is kind-hearted.” The big, tough Norse God was a softy when it came to Darcy Lewis. Well, him and the rest of the team. *Wonder what kind of name she would pick if she decided to turn into an evil overlord? The Supreme Empress? Queen of the World? Is it too early to trademark that? Would be a nice birthday gift.*

“She is. Oh, how come you never mentioned her scientific inclination?” That was a question that had been bugging him quite a bit.

“Lady Jane holds her in very high esteem, surely I have mentioned it to you?” Why was he always the last to know? It was annoying.

“Which is not the same as being a brilliant scientist!”

“Ah, so she has finished her work then? She was loath for me to speak of it until it was done.”

Tony couldn’t help but glare at his companion as they descended and the wet clothing stuck to his skin. He would be happy with a change.

“Heads up would had been nice, Point Break.” They could have met months earlier. *Months.* Tony wasn’t happy about missing out. Maybe the Boothby Incident would have never happened…

“Stark, do you know what the Captain wished to speak to me about? Is the matter urgent? This is a joyous day.” Tony was pulled from the dark matters his thoughts ventured to.

“Urgent? No. Not at all. It is more of a private matter. You know, a garden variety one. Literally.” *I am sure you both will enjoy it immensely. I know I will.*

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Jack watched as a soaked Tony Stark returned along with a man wearing a cape. A big red cape. On TV it always looked a little different. The man was made of muscle. He was even bigger than Captain America and of course there was the hammer, hooked on the wrist, swinging as he walked.

“Friends!” Forget the muscles, the lungs were the biggest things on that guy. The voice boomed much like thunder inside the room. Once again only himself and Mack were surprised by that. Jack did not like that tendency.

They watched as the Viking hastened his pace as soon as he spotted Miss Lewis, making Tony Stark nearly jog to keep up.

“Sister, thou are hurt.”

“No worries, just a small accident.” That sounded tense and Jack noted as Captain America’s smile froze.

“Are thou well?”

The room went tense all of a sudden, like the air got thick. Miss Lewis sniffed and then sniffed again. Her eyes watering behind the glasses. Jack felt a shiver run down his back. That kind that predicted bad things were about to happen. Thor Odinson wrapped his massive hands around the petite woman making her seem even smaller, effectively dwarfing her with his frame at the same time throwing a look of pure anger towards the billionaire standing next to him.

“Where have you been? We missed you. I had no one to drag Jane’s backside across the Atlantic.
Do you know how long I've been trying to get her to come? Two months, that’s how long. And you are showing your face now? Dude, really?"

Jack watched with fascination as the young woman berated the mountain of a man as she continued to cry into his biceps, all the while Tony Stark was doing a funny little dance around them trying to get to her. It was proving to be harder than one assumed, the Viking had half his cape wrapped around her as well as the tree trunk like arms, securing her in an improvised cocoon. Jack rubbed his nose discreetly attempting to hide his smirk as Tony Stark, the world-famous playboy, was trying and nearly failing to control his jealousy at the emotional reunion. That wide shark like smile was not fooling anyone as the man was clearly eyeing the easiest way to get his fiancée out of the other man’s arms pronto.


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Darcy woke up disoriented, thirsty, being spooned and her forehead pressed to something. The position was uncomfortable, but the low, all too familiar now, continued snoring behind her prevented any panic. If Tony was asleep they were safe and sound and everything was ok. She wiggled a little. Scent of expensive leather tickled her nose and feet were hanging… Why? She gently lifted her head to look around. Yep, even without glasses she could tell.

They were on the back seat of a car. Uhhh… I though I skipped that part of my teens. This is not comfy…

“Darcy?” The sleepy voice murmured into her shoulder. At least they were both dressed. More or less. She more and Tony less. Bless him.

“Where are my glasses? Why are we sleeping in your car?” How did they even fit both on the back seat? Her shoulder and side were sore from the hard seat. Did they make the cars interiors bigger back in the day? Her man owned the building, yet they were on a back seat of his car at his workshop… why?

“Why are you always so full of questions first thing in …. I bet it is not even morning yet. Don’t!”

Darcy made the mistake of moving and it in turn pushed Tony back into the gap between the front and back seats. The snicker was an involuntary reaction at the undignified yelp and the glare that she got from him.

“Here, you little witch.” From his awkwardly wedged position Tony reached into the car door pocket and pulled out her glasses.

“My hero.” Well, Tony had his good moments after all… When did I get so damn cynical?

“You're just saying that because you nearly killed me last night.” The man extracted himself on the second try and sat down next to her. At least he had changed at some point after fetching her Thunder Bro and was no longer soggy.

“I call bullshit and I am thirsty.” Darcy, when ever in doubt, fell back to the trusted default of denying everything.

“You were sobbing as soon as Point Break was within one foot of you.” Tony liked complaining. Especially if he didn’t get his way or even if he did. The ring on her finger caught light and glinted, drawing her attention and the disbelief at what they have done flooded in once more.
“I missed him. It has been a while.” Darcy had no shoes on, just a pair of socks… that looked way too big on her and were slowly slipping off. Something was missing. “Wait… where is the cast?”

“Now you are noticing it gone?” Tony had bed hair and was resting his eyes until she spoke up. Pair of boxers and a t-shirt on and he still managed to look damn good. Darcy rubbed her eyes. It had been a while since she had gotten this drunk as to have holes in her memory.

“I had it on… till some point yesterday… or was that still today? I don’t remember going to Dr Cho…”

“Going to a doctor to remove a cast? Such a plebeian thing to do. No, you, my darling little spark, are several steps above such things.”

“You cut it off for me?” Darcy hazarded a guess and watched as Tony rubbed his rugged cheek against her palm, like a lazy cat, one hand on her shoulder the other on her lap, under the wrinkled dress, stroking the skin of her inner thigh just shy from her underwear and couldn’t help but smile a little. How did they manage to get so… comfy with one another?

“In all fairness, you did ask me. But you really should have done it out of the earshot of Point Break. Funny thing is you didn’t even look that drunk.”

“I was tired. It was a big day, you know… and why are we not in bed?” They always made it to bed. Tony could get smashed, but he would still be able to guide them both to it.

“Because we were getting cock blocked the entire evening until we managed to escape. And this is only because I got Romanov on the phone to distract Cap… Oh, and the good old Louisiana Police couple crashed in our bed.”

“What?”

“I'm kidding. We just didn't make it to the bed. Are you sure you don't remember anything?” That sentence has never indicated anything good.

“At this point I am not sure I want to, Tony…”

A few hours and drinks earlier...

Tony did his best not to snipe back at that, but that had been one close shave he would have rather avoided. He was not going to forget the look that his fiancée’s Thunder-Bro gave him. Heated, hateful, detesting looks had been what had followed him since he was old enough to understand what they were. No one liked the kid that had everything given to him, according to everyone. Last night on the other hand, that was personal, and just for a split-second Tony was afraid. The emotion was not alien to him as some might believe. Fear was a natural defensive mechanism. It either controlled you or was controlled by you.

It still felt strange how easily attached he had become. Tony had learned early that getting attached only meant one thing and it wasn’t good. So keeping everyone at arm’s length had been the way to go. People didn’t get the wrong idea and he didn’t get hurt. But here she was, the woman wearing his mother’s ring, just a shade out of his reach and some primitive part him couldn’t handle that she was upset and someone else had their hands around her. Well, not really upset… and neither was he.
No one was upset. Why did he have the cape around Darcy? She was dressed. This was ludicrous.

“How about a drink! What you think, Point Break? Honey? More champagne? I think we could do with one. Pep? Would you be so kind?” Tony was proud to say that he did not as much as blink from the withering look Point Break gave after he released Darcy from his embrace, before the Asgardian got a grip and had the sunny smile on again.

“The bubbles give me a horrid hangover. Oh, Pep. Add some coke to that please. You are *fabulous! Do you know that? And now I’m good.*” Why did it feel so much better when his hand was once again on the small of her back? Feeling the warmth of her skin underneath the silky material. She was indeed his drug of choice.

“Blasphemy-” And Spark’s attention was back on him. Yeah, this evening was going to turn out just fine.

“Tony, you drink the stuff by the bottle, don’t play the connoisseur card here.” At least he was not diluting it.

“I can tell when someone serves subpar alcohol.” Tony had an *exquisite* taste. He picked up the glass of champagne as everyone focused on them like a free show. But it was more then that, it was a test. Point Break might have been acting calm but those eyes watching their interaction with intense focus. Judging. Luckily, it was a well-known fact that Tony Stark performed best under pressure. He grinned, and Darcy snorted.

“Can’t be. I have tried your coffee. Your taste buds are also iron clad by now, or dead. Either way not much there.” He had a very delicate palate. Tony appreciated fine food.

“Really? So, I did not taste the last double caramel donut on your sharp little tongue this very morning?” Yep, here it was, the deer in the headlights look and straight for defensive.

“You should have not left it unattended, I resent the accusation! I mean, I have no idea what happened to it.” That poker face needed a lot of work. But it was adorable.

“You said those were too sweet for your tender tastes, if I recall correctly.”

“It was… is… Don’t hold your breath I am not confessing to *anything.* We could have been burgled.”

“Let’s just clarify. The Penthouse? *For a donut!”*

“I have seen weirder shit happen around this place,” He loved how she was able to put everything in perspective. Everything. When he least wanted it to. *Was Rogers inching towards the door?*

“OK, this is not the time to bring that up and *first* it was not that weird, second I explained, with diagrams-“

“Tony?” The billionaire winced as Pepper Potts spoke up.

“She was asleep, Pep. I didn’t expect her to barge in. Not that I minded, Spark-”

“Tony, you *promised.* Do you have any idea how traumatising walking on it is?” And everyone including Rogers were on alert. Tony almost rolled his eyes. Everyone assumed he fucked up. Nothing happened. There was no need to get any panties in a twist.

“It was-” His fiancée tried putting a word in not looking any worse for wear from that encounter.
“Darcy does not need a shrink-” They were just fine being a little crazy together.

“Tony, yes, because walking in on your boyfriend, I’m sorry, fiancé cleaning and fixing a massive hole in his chest is a thing that regularly happens to anyone?” That was beside the point.

“It was actually not the weirdest thing I have seen.”

“Well, you can talk to him about that too. Trust me Darcy, you will need a little help in the long run.”

Tony was inclined to somewhat agree with Pep there. But his idea was more along the lines of massages and relaxing holidays and him.

“I got that covered, thanks for the offer. Natasha said she’ll help me out anytime, so I’m good. Honest.” Well… they couldn’t agree on all things in life. Tony could feel his facial features along with nearly everyone present freeze and coughed before giving Darcy another peck on the cheek as the woman grimaced when his soggy clothing touched her arm.

“I feel like there are steps you can take before going to the deadliest woman on the planet.”

“Don’t be rude to Natasha, Tony, it is uncalled for.”

“You know anyone deadlier?” Tony should be informed if she did. Just in case.

“Not at the moment. I wasn’t disagreeing, it just... sounds rude. She’s nice.” He wasn’t arguing. She was very nice... and deadly.

“Agent Romanov is a worthy opponent.” Point Break was clearly a fan of strong willed women. Good for him.

“I bet. Listen -”

“She said you wouldn’t even feel anything.” The grin on his face didn’t falter. He intended to take that as a compliment. Also he was pretty sure that a copious amount of suffering would indeed be involved if Widow decided to take him out on Darcy’s behalf. Good thing he had a healthy appreciation for a twisted sense of humour.

“... I feel special. Now, Let’s move on from this topic, you are freaking out our guests.” Tony nodded in the direction of the Police who had one of their Lawyers quietly explaining something. Maybe how not pissing off Master Assassin was good for one’s health, he assumed. Also that smile on Point Break was a little too wide. Yes, Darcy was well looked after in the Asgardian’s absence.

“Indeed. Let’s talk not of such matters, friends. I have longed to return, and the day could have not be more well-chosen. Tonight, we shall drink and be merry!”

“Jarvis! Heard Point Break? Get food sorted. We shall be merry this evening.”

Not long after...

Jack had never eaten so much expensive food in his entire life. Or had drunk alcohol from bottles that costed more than his car. More people had joined them. Including the Head of Security and a
woman that was the same height as Captain America and he was guessing nearly as strong that glued herself to Miss Lewis side, much to the annoyance of Mr. Stark.

He could not wait to tell Dom all about it. His boss would have hard time digesting the explosive news. Jack was a firm believer that a shot of vodka helped bad news go down. This time they might need a bottle. His wife wasn't going to be happy when he got home afterwards. He should be looking after his liver. Jack also should be doing his job and doing Mr. Beckett’s bidding by the blessing of his boss but that wasn't happening either.

‘What comes in must come out…’

The toilets looked better than the best hotel’s back home. Jack nearly whistled under his breath as he strode in. Reasonable distance between the urinals too. He was not going to complain there. This was not the place he liked rubbing shoulders even with men he knew. Especially the men he knew.

That last Gin and Tonic was asking to be-

“No, Lauren… I… Let me explain…” Mack’s drunk voice floated from the cubicle. “I am not saying I am getting fired…” Jack froze up. They weren’t being fired. Not yet. Maybe not ever. It would look really bad for the department if they were to give into Beckett’s whims. On the other hand, they were in New York City supposedly hunting his estranged step-daughter.

So maybe he was not the right person to predict the future, this morning he didn’t think he was going to be the judge of an arm wrestling between Captain America and the God of Thunder. The verdict was issued by Miss Lewis that all three of them were idiots. No one argued. She was probably right. At least he had the excuse of being drunk. Captain been looking a little distracted… Jack wasn’t sure how long he was lost in thought hypnotised by the urinal instead of taking a leak. The sound of someone else using the urinal instead of taking a leak. The sound of someone else using the urinal as it was intended startled him. Tony Stark was looking stoically straight ahead. Following the bro code of ignoring the other people around. Or maybe he was just being Tony Stark.

“Lauren… Lauren… Please, listen… Please, baby.” Jesus… did he hear sobbing? Was Mack crying? Jack knew he should have cut his partner off a good hour ago.

While they didn’t always see eye to eye, his partner was a good man. Jack had seen him shot at and he didn’t sound as distressed. Mr. Stark was washing his hands apparently unbothered by what was going on. OK, he is leaving.… We’re good.

“Mack? Hey. You… ok there? Open the door.” It was his partner and it was Jack’s duty to make sure he was doing ok.

“I’m fine…” If he hadn’t heard the bit before Jack would have believed him.

“Open the door, or I will break it.” In his defence, he was drunk too.

“Jack, we don’t earn enough to cover the repair bill around this place.” That was probably correct. They earned barely enough to cover the repair bills in their own homes.

“Well, then open up… You decent, right?” One of the things Jack didn’t usually do was conduct heart to heart in men’s. Or anywhere… It was the drink… and the bleeding heart given to him by his God loving momma, may she rest in peace, that was not the best thing on a cop… At least the cubicle wasn’t tiny. This was already awkward. “What have you done?” Despite outward appearance his partner loved the woman he married, Lauren.

“What have I done? I took a flight to New York City and… and .. and ended up here. I am not
dumb, Jack. We are not being entertained for a good time, we- it’s like- I don’t know, hostage situation so we would not tell on Miss Lewis to that bloated pig.” That was also correct. They were the guests of honour, so to speak.

“Mack-”

“Mack what? What, Jack? You can retire tomorrow, you don’t care. You can walk into the room and stare people down till they crack, you've been on the force forever. You don’t care what happens when we go back. I, on the other hand-” Well, good thing was that his partner was not as clueless as he portrayed, that at the same time was also the bad thing.

“You are transferring, better money, less risk, it’s not gonna matter what-”

“Not gonna matter? Jack, I need that transfer-”

“You are young, you can-” Mack had his eyes on Financial Fraud. He was good with numbers.

“We're buying a house. They are not going to sign off for a mortgage if I become unemployed, there isn’t exactly big market for ex cops. Fucking… two months, Gods in Heaven-”

“Listen, Mack. Is it about the down payment?-”

“We got that-”

“I know no one is more careful with money than you, if you need a guarantor for the bank-”

“It’s not about the Bank or the deposit!”

“Then clue me in, partner, ‘cause I don’t see what is your fucking-”

“We are trying to adopt!” The words come out in a rush and Mack rubbed his face furiously for a second as Jack stood there struck dumb.

“Oh.”

“Yeah…”

“I thought you were just waiting to have-” That was not a topic was generally discussed as Mack always avoided it. Jack had just assumed that his partner didn’t particularly like kids, that was hardly a crime.

“Not waiting… we can’t. We just… Me, I can’t.” That explained it. Jack stared at his feet before shifting and softening his tone. He didn’t imagine his life without his three rascals. Mack never seemed bitter or resentful about the topic…

“I thought you didn’t want kids.”

“I do… we both do. Always did, but my swimmers… not great. Saved a fortune on condoms since finding out.”

“Adopting is good-”

“And not gonna happen.” That was that edge of desperation back.

“Why not? You and Lauren are for it. Together for what ten years? Loving, kind, dedicated-”
“Also a mixed race couple.” That was a one hot topic that never stopped being hot in God fearing State of Louisiana. Jack closed his eyes for a second. Lauren was tall like a willow, brilliant smile, great cook, a good person… but all some people saw was a black woman hand in hand with a white man.

“That doesn’t matter-” He really wished it didn’t.

“Jack, please. We might have a deposit, a good reputation, our neighbours might love us. But in our little red neck town I am white and my wife isn’t. Do you have any idea how many times we were asked if we really want adopt? What would happen to the children after breakup? Like us wanting to complete our family is not –” What Jack would say to that? He was lucky. Three grown kids that had already flown the nest. “We’ve been together for twelve years, married for 9. I love that woman more than life itself, Jack, and they act like-

“They're making obstacles-” It was an obvious conclusion. Maybe some silly tart thought she was doing everyone a favour, but that was all just bullshit.

“Entire course of them. Everything nearly ready, we will foster first, and the kids… They are great, Samuel is seven and Ronan is five, we go to see them when we can, Gods in Heaven, we promised them… We promised we will take them home with us soon.” Jack watched helplessly as his partner’s shoulders sagged. “But people like Beckett are in charge. No wonder Miss Lewis cut ties and ran. Jack, if I lose that job they will jerk us about for next three years.”

“You are not going lose your job.”

“Jack, I am barely one step on the ladder. It is not like they will sack you. This whole charade with Stark and Miss Lewis will be front news for months. Us warming our balls on said news and doing nothing about it will go down well with nobody back home.”

“I bet I can dig up someone I know in-”

“We tried that already. Lauren will kill me-”

“You need a good lawyer-” If they wanted to play hardball legal help was needed.

“And who is gonna pay for it? I am not Tony Stark. We saved every penny for that deposit. Talking of Tony Stark, lets go and enjoy some more of his hospitality. Hey, at least somebody is happy today. I remember the day I proposed. Lauren nearly said no. She was so beautiful.” Mack dragged himself to his feet and smiled tiredly.

“Didn’t you go on one knee in a middle of the supermarket?”

“The venue hardly matters, she said yes.” That was still a touchy subject for his partner. As he just broke down after carrying the ring for two months and just dropped to his knees.

“Right by the hot buns.”

The angry look was spoiled by the sway as they finally left the cubicle… just to come face to face with Tony Stark standing right in front of the door with hands in his pockets and head cocked to the side. With Captain America casually leaning on the sink just to the side. Shit...

“Umm… we… ah-” He vaguely pointed behind, not sure what he was explaining.

“That was not what it looked like!” Jack had to cover his face with both hands not to burst out laughing at Mack’s panicked statement.
“My bad, so you were not discussing how your adoption plans were going to take a hit because Keith Beckett holds a grudge? Well, Legal will have a field day with this.”

Life keeps insisting to get in the way of the regular updates recently but I will not give up, my Peeps!

So this chapter is me getting into the swing of things, again.

But guess what? Next Chapter is the Gala! Who is excited for that? =)

Many thanks to those that leave reviews, you keep me coming back and updating =)

Please continue to do that and help me be inspired for this crack fic of mine =)
Chapter 65

My dearest Wino, what would I do without you? You are fabulous!

The diner was small and cozy. Not quite the type you expected from Tony Stark to frequent. Darcy once again glanced at the unsuited superhero eating the poached eggs with gusto. This morning was the first time she had jumped his bones. Since they started having sex, it usually was Tony that initiated, and she followed. Today had been different.

Flashback……

She woke up before the alarm, lay under the covers warm from their body heat and watched his lightly glowing chest rise and fall as he breathed, face turned from her, and all Darcy could think of was that their bed, right now, was the best place to be. She still thought that as she slipped out of it and took a shower, and just as carefully slipped out to make them both coffee so they could enjoy it in bed.

The plan did not include to get caught up in a little guilty morning music fest. It was all Jarvis’ fault, or Tony’s, it was him that had set the AI to play some catchy tunes to get them going in the mornings. The voice of Sinatra crooned in tune with the notes and Darcy couldn’t help but sway a little to it. Balancing perfectly on the thin line between lazy and electric the music was hypnotic. The fresh sharp scent of coffee made her hum louder as she poured two mugs, illuminated by the gentle lights of the apartment not yet turned up to their full glaring glory.

That was how Tony found her. Dancing slowly, carefully to the tune with steaming mugs in hand. She didn’t stop when she noticed him leaning on the counter, grinning. The music picked up and continued swaying to the rhythm... Or to what she thought was the rhythm. It didn’t matter, really, the man in the dressing gown grinned wider as she made her way to him, aware how the movements made her full, free under the oversized t-shirt, breast move.

It was all that Jazz, honest, and maybe those couple sips of coffee… or maybe it was his good morning kiss tasting like spearmint toothpaste, his tongue as it tasted the coffee in her mouth. The contrast giving a refreshing tingle. Or maybe it was the question in those dark, always wandering eyes when she put the mugs on the counter instead of giving one to him. Maybe it was the grin she tasted again on his lips when she pushed him back until there was no where to step back and he sat down on that expensive designer sofa. Maybe it was his hands on her skin as she straddled him. Maybe it was just her, Darcy, wet and moaning and groaning and moving her hips as they fucked and she wanted to weep because she was burning up inside. Or maybe because they laughed like idiots at their unused creaky morning voices when they finally spoke as they held each other close, tired and sweaty from the exertion.

“Lets go out and get breakfast, Spark.” Maybe it was them, that morning, being simply happy together.
“My, someone’s hungry.” Her own meal arrived a minute after his and Darcy was barely started to make a dent into the pile of perfectly round blueberry pancakes. They had slipped out of the Tower, well not actually slipped out, Security was on their tails as soon as they left. Darcy suspected that Tony was behind it. Security, especially hers, had been a hot topic for him since the day they met.

“Good breakfast and exercise. A balanced start of the day, Spark.”

“You didn’t exercise.” Darcy felt herself blushing as soon as the words left her mouth. Tony paused to watch it and grinned. “Oh, shut up.” Damn, those eyebrows. How could anyone communicate so much with just an expression? “Never mind, Tony.”

“If you insist. So, when is the fitting again? You must not be late yet as I received no death threats from your Squad.”

“My… Squad?” It was just weird hearing Tony say it.

“Isn’t that the name these days? Squad? Your girl band? Bosom sisters. The Women that I would never face unsuited.” Which was his own fault. There was no need to antagonise Jane like that yesterday. It was her first day in the Tower.

“You dated one of them.”

“My point exactly. Pep can be vicious. I would know, Honeybuns.” He would. Poor, poor Pepper. If Darcy had been his PA she probably would have shot him by now.

“She’s amazing.” The woman had the patience of a Saint. All the Saints. Maybe some gods too.

“Oh, absolutely. Hands down. Now, when is the fitting?” Oh, yes. Tomorrow was the Gala. The grand introduction of one Darcy Lewis to the not so adoring masses. They probably shouldn’t be out, sitting here, chatting. They risked ruining the big event. But she just couldn’t care less. This Morning they were together, had been for a few months now, she wore his mother’s ring. She was simply tired of being scared of the press. Maybe that was why this morning was so good, because she stopped wasting the energy on fear for something that she had no way of changing.

“Not until later this afternoon.”

“Really? I thought Pep wanted-”

“She did. But I’ve got an appointment before that.” She had stuff to do. Not that it was anything new.

“With whom?” Maybe new for Tony if the frown was anything to go by. Maybe she had spoiled him a little, by always being round the Tower. Being there when ever he turned. That was clearly a mistake.

“A lawyer, if you must know.”

“In Stark Tower.” Yeah, no. Not to mention she had spent too much time in the Tower lately.

“Mmm no.” Time to wean Tony of that. He did not look happy. That place was not the centre of the universe.

“I still feel insulted on behalf of my Legal Defence Team. It is a clear-”
“Well, they can file a complaint with … oh wait, I don’t care. What is your problem? You’ve been hot on my case about the contract for weeks. It will get sorted now. If I hire them.” That was another thing. Plus her budget was a little tight.

“Please tell me you are not getting someone of the street? Lincoln was going to put together a list of recommendations.” That was very kind of Tony’s lawyer.

“He did.”

“And you are not using it because of some very important reason-”

“I saw a couple of guys on TV the other day. They look the type that fights for the underdog. Also aren’t too expensive.” The look of horror on Tony’s face implied that he was not agreeing. One would have thought that Darcy just said that they trafficked people between cases.

“I am coming with you.”

“You have a meeting with the Mayor and various comities today. You are busy.” A fact she knew because her calendar just happened to somehow now show all of Tony’s engagements. Thanks, Pep, you really shouldn’t have.

“I’ll reschedule.”

“I am taking Rosie and Otter with me. I’m good.” Plus they both knew that another car from the security tailed them wherever they went.

“Are they scam artists? Because that kind of people-”

“No. Natasha checked them out, if you need to know.”

“In depth?” Darcy rolled her eyes at that.

“No. I really don’t think so. Because that what she does, a crappy job at checking someone out. Natasha Romanov.”

“Your sarcasm is noted, Shortstack, it is in fine form today. I think-”

“Well, I think you should just shut up and enjoy the moment.”

“You know me. I aim to please, my Spark. I still think-”

“Can you, like, not? For ten minutes? It is a good morning.”

He was never going to get enough of the sass. Not when it came from Darcy at least. His little Spark wasn’t wrong, it was a good morning, more than good. Especially when it started with her climbing on top of him and riding until he couldn’t take it anymore. The eggs were gone and the empty plate was pushed aside. He was right when he had decided to wait and let them both get used to one another.

“One of many.” And here it was. The fair cheeks blooming with colour. Oh, yes, she enjoyed it just as much as him.

“Well, you are thinking highly of yourself again.” He did. Why should he not? He thought of her
even better. While they weren’t avoiding the topic of their unexpected engagement they weren’t really jumping into it either. It was just there.

“Why do you want to stay engaged for five years?” Tony wasn’t expert on it, but women usually wanted to take the next step. His Spark naturally was showing no such inclination. She seemed happy and content when they were together.

“Why not? Being engaged feels pretty good.”

“Maybe being married is better?”

“No.”

“A very categorical statement from a woman that has never been there.” Neither has he, but he wasn’t a woman. Also, he kind of wanted to know how it would feel when it came to Honeybunny.

“I have actually.”

“What? When?” To whom?

“Oh, I was eight.”

Tony felt his body go still and muscles tout. Breathe. Like he was suddenly submerged into ice-cold water. Breathe in and out. His systems nearly shut down in shock before survival instinct took over. It must have shown. Not too much he hoped. Darcy’s eyes went wide as the smile disappeared.

“Oh, Thor, no no no no no. Tony, no. Not like that. Mother of Mercy.”

“How then?” Even voice. He was not panicking or getting angry. She just said it wasn’t like that. She is fine. All was fine.

“We were both eight. Jesus, Tony. Nothing weird. Eww. Did you have to? I just ate.”

“Me too. And they don’t serve alcohol here.” Ok. He really needed to get a hang on this protective shit. He was reacting like an animal. He couldn’t help it. The reaction was there before he formed a rational thought. Spark had enough nasty things happen to her already. He couldn’t stand the thought of her being exposed to anything more.

“Well, before you think of anything else, gross. It was all fun and light hearted and PG rated. Strictly. OK?”

“Those type of things happen more often that you think.” The world was pot full of despicable people, but Darcy knew that already. Gods, he wanted a drink.

“Well, this was not one of those cases. Matt would have never let that happen. So, since I slipped up I better tell the whole story now before you freak out more.” At least they were in a corner booth, all private and secluded. The place benefited from him handsomely. He had funded some of the repairs around it. The owner, the man that always manned the grill and smelled of grease, knew that keeping Tony Stark sweet and unmolested by the other patrols was the way to success. “Well, like I said I was eight. I had to move schools after going to live with Matt.”

“The old one was too far?” She stayed in the same city, didn’t she?


“You hated school? You love learning.” Spark had an Opinion on Education. Everyone knew that.
“You would be surprised how little learning takes place at the actual school. But that is beside the point. I had to switch schools because of the new living arrangements. It is not an easy thing to do a couple months into the school year. I don’t think we ever spoke about it, but what is your opinion on Traditional Values?” Tony paused with the mug of coffee half way to his lips. Traditional Values…He could hear the capital letters. They have never spoken about it, mainly because none of them was what one could class as traditional.

“Last I checked it was under synonymous of outdated in conjunction with inflexible.” Darcy nodded as if it was in line with her own point of view.

“Well, the school was hot on that. Reality was creeping into our neck of the woods. Women getting funny ideas, you know, progress came to town. Anyway, at that time I neither cared nor knew what was going on. All I knew was that there was a lot of excitement going on during the Home Economics class I just joined. Around this strange thing called marriage.”

“Weren’t you eight?”

“I was. They made it into a pretend game. Sounded like fun at the time.” Many things sound like fun and then you discover they are not legal.

“Sounds like grooming.”

“It was supposed to get us thinking that it was how it was supposed to be. Or whatever. I wasn’t really getting it at first since according to my mother that was what big girls did. This kind of stuff wasn’t discussed at home. To be frank discussions did not take place while I still lived under the same roof as her. So, the nice teacher gave me a little bit of overview and the gist of it…. Like commitment, dedication, mutual respect etc. Literally the next day was the big day when everyone got engaged.”

“You didn’t like the guy that proposed?” Did she get paired up with someone by the teacher? Like group project? He hated those.

“Actually, I was the one that proposed.” Oh.

“Progressive. Bet that didn’t go down well. What did the guy say?”

“Actually, she said yes.” Well, what do you know? Trust Spark to do it her own way.

“She? How long did you get suspended?” Traditional Values School got introduced to Little Darcy Lewis.

“I didn’t get suspended for it. Believe it or not.” He didn’t. There was no way little version of his Spark didn’t make her point somehow. “But I was taken aside and told that I shouldn’t be the one asking and if I do, which is frowned upon, to be so forward for a lady, I cannot ask another girl.” Tony smiled finally.

“How well did that go down?”

“Not well.” To put it mildly, he could bet.

“You dug your heels in, didn’t you?”

“I did not dig my heels in. I just didn’t see why I couldn’t do it. Olivia was nice to me. She shared her cornbread with me when Matt forgot to pack my lunch on the first day. Being a bachelor all your life did not prepare him for me… She was kind and I thought that she had a very pretty smile. Also, I
was eight, and I liked her, Tony. I didn’t get it why we couldn’t play marry. The few boys we had in our class were rude to me and Olivia was nice. It looked like an obvious choice.” Obviously.

“But she didn’t have a second head hanging between her legs.”

“Yes. Basically. She wasn’t a boy. They ended up calling the principal. The principal ended up yelling at me. Matt had to be called to collect me.” There was the sad little smile on her when ever the topic of her godfather came up. Tony wished he had met the man.

“Did you get in trouble?”

“Who? Me? With Matt? Nope. To his credit he looked pretty upset until we left the school grounds and he could double over laughing. I got to explain why I did what I did, Matt always was cool like that. I just didn’t get why my affection for Ollie was somehow invalid. Just because she wasn’t a boy did it made her somehow less good? Why? I didn’t see how a penis would have made a difference to her sharing her lunch, helping me find my class or waiting together for Matt to pick me up to make sure I wasn’t lonely… I wish puberty never hit me and I continued thinking that all that was enough for a spouse.”

“I bet you were cute. So they broke you up.”

“Technically yes.”

“Of course, little Darcy did her own thing.”

“You know... when I sit here, now, with you. It…” There was that faraway look on her again.

“It looks different? ”

“Yeah, I mean… Thor, I convinced Matt to take me to Ollie’s home in the evening.”

“To apologise?”

“No. What for? To ask her hand in marriage. Again.” Of course, what was he thinking?

“How thrilled was her mother?”

“Thrilled enough to invite us for dinner and pour herself a glass of sherry. Funny how memory works, Tony. I do not remember much of anything but I remember very clearly bursting into tears as I sat on the old settee when she told me that I couldn’t do it. I remember Ollie coming to sit next to me. Have you ever looked at someone and felt like all would be ok, no matter what was going to happen, no matter what others were going to do?” Tony grinned despite himself. He had. Like now. “ She looked me dead in the eye and said she liked me too. Right there. On her God fearing mama’s settee. Because I punched the class bully right in the nose after he called her a bad name.”

He chortled. “That's so... you. So what happened?” Tony tried to imagine little Darcy sitting in someone’s sitting room, looking all prim and proper as people tried to get her to change her already stubborn mind.

“Ollie burst into tears. Her mama burst into tears. Don’t really remember why but there were a lot of tears. Well, I promised to be a good husband.”

“I would have expected nothing else.” This Traditional Values conversation was putting him on edge. Was she trying to tell him something? She was, wasn’t she?
“Her mama cracked. It was supposed to last a week. The girls were supposed to do different things, like learn how to bake and stuff and boys… I don’t remember to be honest.”

“How long did it last for you and Olive?”

“Olivia. Couple of months. The normal expectations in a young mind do look quite different. Way simpler. I did what I thought a good partner was supposed to do. I wasn’t allowed to say husband or wife, lest the teachers found out. I learned to cook basic things at that time. Matt worked, a lot. Having me put extra pressure on the slim finances. Ollie’s mama worked too. So I would finish school, walk Ollie to her brothers’ nursery. Pick them up and walk them home.” Darcy was looking right at him, but didn’t see him. No. Her mind was walking down what ever paths they took to get home. “I made my first sandwich standing on a little stool so I could reach the table. Ham and some cabbage. If you put your mind to it, you can do quite a lot with very little.” Tony could not agree more. Look at them. Their relationship started with a phone call.

“Not the combination a would have chosen.”

“You would have, had that been all that was in a fridge. There are times when you don’t get to be picky.”

“Am I your ham and cabbage sandwich?” The assumption jumped out of nowhere, like a bogeyman grabbing your foot from under the bed. Was he the choice she had to make because she had no better options?... The small, wet bits of chewed up pancake hit him on the cheek and specks he was wearing as Darcy laughed out right nearly choking in the process.

“Oh, my, Thor. Tony, you are precious. Did you miss that bit where I went against an entire school because I decided that I liked someone? I would have not changed that Ham and Cabbage sandwich for anything. Ever. Besides you are more … hmmm… Roast beef and Sauerkraut.”

“I tried that. I am not Sauerkraut.” He had that once and the hotel bill probably included replacement for the cracked toilet. If he ever needed to become airborne without his suit that would be the way to go. Or it could be used like a weapon provided you were willing to risk going round with no pants on.

“Well, it is an acquired taste, just like you. My point is, my SauerTony, no magic ring is needed for a committed relationship.”

“Was that the moral of the story? And are you calling me a little shit?” Yeah, he didn’t miss that bit.

“Sauerkraut is good for the digestive system.”

“Sure. It clears it all out like a grenade. ”

“Not my fault you have that kind of effect on people. Now, the moral of my story, apart from sharing it, is that commitment is not made by exchanging bling. I- ” Darcy stopped talking for a second to take another bite. “I have been thinking what happiness is since we met.”

“You took the ring.” It was a surreal moment when that happened. It pleased him more than he was willing to admit.

“Yes, because it was important to you. It belonged to your mother and I was very touched by that. So, now, tell me, imagine we are married, sitting here, what would be the actual difference?” Tony slowly finished cleaning the specs and put them on the table as he caught the reflection of Spark and himself in them.
What would the difference be? Except one more ring on the slim pale finger and his name attached to hers. It was the illusion of happiness, wasn’t it? He had been to enough stag dos to tell that people often expected things to change, the happiness to suddenly materialize out of thin air upon uttering the magic words. But for him… them… their relationship kept evolving, no grand delusions of magic revelations and happy endings… But maybe he wasn’t as free of his past experience he had fancied himself to be. He parents’ marriage left much to be desired… So he wanted his own to be different… until he had resigned that he was never going to meet someone right for him… Wasn’t that what he imagine happiness to be? Stable, committed relationship with a person that understood him… The stable part meant being married… Would a wedding make them more stable… more… just more? Tony took a sip the extra strong coffee, hot liquid chasing down the taste of the eggs and bacon.

“I would get to see you in white.”

“I love how you agree with me by trying to deflect. And I look fat in white.” She did not, she was voluptuous. Wait.

“Ah. No. I fell for it once, with Pepper, I am not commenting on this, whatever I will say it will be wrong.”

“So you agree I will look fat.” Yes, no. This was not happening.

“Stop that.”

“Spoilt sport. Wait. Was that your way of saying that you are happy? Now? Here?” That was tricky. Was he happy? Since the day she unapologetically smashed into his life and he just as brazenly insisted on remaining in hers, Tony felt this even, low buzz. Like a large sip of good scotch just going down. The quick and sharp burning sensation whenever he saw her.

“I could be, but we should check that to make sure before you are stolen from me-”

“We are not doing it in your car.”

“And you are calling me spoilt sport?”

“That happened once, in a car that was safely parked in your workshop.”

“So the workshop is ok? When will you be done with the fitting? I will pick you for late lunch or early dinner and you can tell me all about it.”

“Yeah, about that. Pepper booked us a table after.”

“Sounds good. Where?”

“Ah no. It's a girls’ night out. Well, evening out. Well, more like late lunch. Pepper is super busy afterwards.”


“And Jane and Natasha.”

“… How come I am only hearing about it now?” Dr Foster had arrived yesterday, meaning he had spend barely any time with his Spark even though they were in the same building. Preposterous.

“Because I didn’t want you to cause a scene? Again.” That was not a scene. He leaned back sharply.

“I did not-! I am-! She attached herself to your hip and -.” It was like someone flipped a switch inside
him. The Astrophysicists was literally all over Darcy. He was not going to get territorial. He wasn’t going to start pissing on fences because that did not in any way annoyed him.

“Oh Yeah?”

“And that is why we should get married. So Foster would not paw at you.”

“Oh, do tell how that would stop her. Besides, I don’t mind. She’s like a cat. It is kind of sweet.”

“You are aware of the strict no pet policy, right? Pepper is very hot on that.”

How the Hell had her life turned into this? Darcy breathed evenly as a professional makeup artist painted perfection on her pale skin. The hair was already done, falling effortlessly down her back in loose curls giving the impression of careless sophistication.

“I still think you should wear the headband.” Pepper had not so subtly kicked Tony out before the stylist arrived. So Darcy could get ready without him stressing her any more. Thank Thor for Pepper… The hair accessory was on the table: a delicate band of beads.

“It looks like a crown.”

“It completes the look, Darcy, and compliments the hairstyle.” It was a little unfair how the redhead had such an amazing taste. Of course it looked good. The woman nearly single handily picked her entire outfit, well picked few and Darcy got to pick a favourite, but still… The fitting was a blast. Tony was not happy with the state she was in when they came back to the Tower. They should do that again soon.

“Try it please. For me.”

It looked like crown. A delicate, barely there band did compliment the look.

“You missed your calling.” The un-lady like snort that followed the statement.

“Yes. I would have made an excellent psychiatric nurse I’ve been told.”

“Hey, look at it this way, now you get to do both. Is that Tony on the phone again?”

“Again? You mean still? He is a grown man how?” Pepper turned the volume down on her phone and put it back into her clutch. “Just ignore me. I am out of touch with this level of Tony crazy already. I told him we are meeting them in an hour by the car.” This was happening. Really, really happening. They were going to do that…

Darcy tried to bring up the same level of anxiousness at the fact that they were going to become ‘Official’ in the eyes of the world press, but now, after few months it felt like it was kind of time for it. Not that she was eager for it. It was the Press she was talking about. Their speculations about who she might be were as ridiculous as they often were offensive. Tony wasn’t really helping the matter, teasing the reporters with tiny morsels of useless information when ever they had him in their sights.

Besides it was not the press that she was worried about, it was the Becketts. Them lot was coming to the Gala. Maybe it was for the better having to deal with everything in one go. She could just imagine tomorrows headlines. Ugh… yeah, The Selfish Gold-digger and so forth and so on.

“Do I have to go?” The look Darcy got in reply was filled with sympathy.
“Yes. But don’t worry. Tony will kiss it all better.”

“Yay.”

Tony was ready. Everything was in place. As always Darcy had no idea just what kind of complex operation was going on behind the scenes for their big show at the impending Gala. The Security, the Members of the SI Board of Directors, The Avengers… everyone scrambling to take their place in this game of pawns and kings that was going to take place this evening.

Anyone that worked in the media sphere could tell you that there were news and then there were NEWS – BREAKING -THIS WILL MAKE ME A HOUSEHOLD NAME – NEWS, and everyone wanted to be the one to report to later. So there was no surprise that on the chilly Saturday evening quite a few of them were gathered outside the Natural History Museum, behind the barrier designed to keep them out of the guests’ way but at the same time well in view so they could tell the world who were attending the exclusive event.

Tony Stark naturally was the most anticipated guest. Rumour had it that he had gotten himself a girlfriend, there has even been a photo of them together, and a confirmation from the Stark Industries Spokesperson. But was that real? Did the woman exist? Or was that just some clever ploy? What about Miss Potts? Was there bad blood there? Something was coming. The press could always tell.

Oh, the drama!

The cars ferrying the guest kept coming and going, dropping off the attendees. Celebrities, politicians, business people. The crisp air of early spring was not deterring them, it was the lack of certain people that was dampening the mood. Captain America was expected to appear, but just like Miss Potts and Mr. Stark, he was still missing. There was doubt that the Mystery Woman, the woman that allegedly broke the Iron Couple, would be making an appearance. Not with the convenient excuse of an injury that was given to them… The speculations were rampant.

It was already getting late as the Gala and the Charity Auction were about to begin. All the people that were more or less important were in, had their photos taken and now mingled inside. Ready to show off their wealth. The crowd of press and paparazzi had thinned somehow, surely no one else was going to show up-

The Bentley showed up first and Captain America in a perfectly fitted tux stepped out, looking all bashful and embodying the best of the American Dream. The remaining press perked up. Along with him was the CEO of Stark Industries, the first woman to hold the post, Virginia Potts, looking stunning in a dark navy, fitted shimmering perfection of an evening dress paired with Valentino heels. The pair waived as they walked up stairs ignoring the calls for photos or a short interview. That created quite a buzz.

As soon as the pair disappeared inside another car pulled up sharply making anyone that was not paying attention to do so. An Audi R8 in the eye-catching Vegas yellow stopped, making everyone stare. That was a sleek statement car and people in attendance could tell why as Tony Stark, in person, got out from behind the wheel and rounded the car in an easy pace before smirking at the
waiting cameras. The flashes went off. Pictures of men with their expensive toys always looked good on the front page. And then he turned around to open the door for his passenger that up until now was concealed from view by the reflections of the camera flashes.

A hand with tastefully manicured nails spilled into the Iron Man’s outstretched one and a woman got out of the car holding a hand slightly to the chest. The black material of the floor length gown fell into place as she stood up adjusting the shawl that was nearly slipping off her naked shoulders. Her red lips curved into a smile for the man as she hooked her hand on his elbow.

“Thank you, Tony.”

“My pleasure.”

The press went wild.

______________________________

**So yeah... the author nervously peeks from behind a corner** It was the plot bunnies! The plot bunnies I tell you!

Somebody said that they want to know what happens before the Gala and those little beasts just ran with it! But there at the very end of the chapter finally is the start of quite a rollercoaster few chapters, peepsters! I know it is a slow pace so far but I love building the relationship between them. Can't help it.

I already started on the new chapter so keep me going, peeps, and let me know what you think! Many thanks in advance!

xxx
Chapter 66

Peeps, the story is nearly 200K word count! When did that happen?! Not to mention we are now 66 chapters in.

Wow, honestly never thought it was going to go on so long.

Just wanted to thank you all for helping me along with your comments, it motivates me to update as I know people read it. Please continue to do so!

Massive thank you to the lovely Wino who is weeding out my mistakes,

It is much appreciated =)

Chapter 66

A hand with tastefully manicured nails spilled into the Iron Man’s outstretched one and a woman got out of the car holding a hand slightly to the chest. The black material of the floor length gown fell into place as she stood up adjusting the shawl that was nearly slipping off her naked shoulders. Her red lips curved into a smile for the man as she hooked her hand on his elbow.

“Thank you, Tony.”

“My pleasure.”

The press went wild.

Tony couldn’t keep the smirk off his face. Not that he was trying, but if he had he wouldn’t have been able to, he was sure of it. The flashes of the cameras were nearly blinding, and he once again was glad to be wearing specs. It was one of the reasons why he did it.

“Mr. Stark! Is this her?!” “Mr. Stark, a moment please!” “Mr. Stark, please!” “Mr. Stark!” “Miss! What is your name?!” “Miss, are you Iron Man’s new woman?!” “Miss, please look this way!”

The chaos of voices slammed into them. It was hardly his first rodeo, so Tony just smiled as they posed for the cameras. Maybe it was not the worst thing on the face of the planet that Darcy was Political Science savvy. The woman at his side calmly took in the roaring attention without breaking her smile. Things could be said about that smile. First, it was perfect. It was a Mona Lisa smile, the corners of those red lips curved just slightly upwards. It always made him want to kiss her. He loved tasting champagne on her lips…

Focus, Tony. There was going to be plenty of time for that later.
They stood there for several seconds apparently deaf to the shouts of the eager reporters before they made their way up, under the unceasing attention of the cameras. The stage was set, the key players had arrived, and the game could now begin.

Virginia Potts was no stranger to orchestrating events for Tony at a short notice. This was different. It was more than just an event. The majority of the Board members were already there, because a Stark announcing his engagement was a thing that they weren’t willing to miss if they could help it. Captain Rogers was at her side, the other Avengers were somewhere inside mingling with other guests.

This evening was going to be the front-page news and thanks to the Becketts, Pepper suspected, not all of it was going to be good. But it had to be done. Much like an extraction of a rotten tooth. Just more public. And she hoped with less blood and no need for paramedics.

“Miss Potts?” Darcy’s security woman was at her side as soon they stepped inside. Happy not far behind.

“Are they here?” Pepper casually asked. Was it too much to ask for the Becketts to get stuck in some traffic jam across the city and unable to attend? Wouldn’t that have made her day?

“Yes. Mr. and Mrs. Beckett with the daughter have arrived over half an hour ago. I believe he tried engaging Ms. Folk in a conversation about some lands?” Ah, yes, the wetlands that SI swiped from under the Beckett’s greedy nose. The news must have reached them that Darcy’s mystery boyfriend had not, in fact, lied. So, were they actually trying to get to a Director? It was a predictable move. These kinds of transactions were a complicated matter and if SI were to withdraw, and pay a substantial fine, those lands by default would go to the second highest bidder. Pepper picked up a glass of champagne. That was not going to happen, everything was approved up the highest level, Darcy had finally began sorting her contract, Pepper wasn’t even speaking of the news of the engagement. The Board was probably having wet dreams of the bonuses that Darcy being part of the Stark Industries were going to generate. Money made the world go around.

“And?”

“Ms Falk declined it. I believe she pretended to have been called and is currently actively avoiding him. So are the other Board Members.” Oh, this will be fun. Those were not people that ran around avoiding some stuck up provincial would be business man. No, those men and women were here for their own benefit and by extension, SI. If Keith Beckett was looking for a sympathetic ear he was not going to find one this evening. He was a threat. It wasn’t said out loud, oh no, no one went out and said it, that was not how these things worked. It was by now a rather public secret in the Tower, Miss Lewis’ unfortunate family circumstances. There were enough problems to go round any given day in SI, no one wanted an additional one, and especially not such a sensitive one, so it had to be dealt with.

While Darcy was an incredibly lovely person for most of the Board she was a walking, talking pay-rise to annual income. One of the things that Pepper appreciated in Darcy was that when it came to business the woman had a no-nonsense approach. The contract, while from a side, might have looked like waste of time that only delayed the manufacturing but in reality, it was the best possible course of action. It was protection for both parties involved. It solved any future legal disputes before they began. There was no such thing as trust in business, that was what the contracts were for. It was nothing personal. Miss Lewis understood that perfectly. She was in favour of the prenup as well. Which made this whole situation so much easier to manage. What ever might happen between Darcy
and Tony in the future, the damage mitigation was being firmly set in place for the protection of the couple as well as SI.

“Miss Potts.” Natasha Romanov walked past, and Pepper barely had time to nod in acknowledgement as she hurried along.

Darcy held firmly onto Tony’s arm as they went up, mainly because she might have gone permanently blind and partially deaf from the reception that the waiting press gave them. These kinds of dramatic entrances always looked so much cooler on TV. It was also cold. It was probably not the thing that she should be concentrating on, though. Besides, Tony’s blazing ego could keep anyone within ten feet roasting.

In all of the time they’d been together Darcy never had the chance to observe Tony being, well, Tony Stark but a public persona. She always imagined that his massive ego was the same whatever he did and where ever he went. It certainly was big enough. She was wrong. Tony’s ego powered up and put anyone close to shade. The conceited, flamboyant personality all but exploded under all the attention. Tony seemed to become sharper, somehow louder, more intense and tempting. Like he was bad news wrapped in chocolate. He was the flame that drew the moths to it yet promised nothing but singed wings and fall from grace. Despite all that, the most unnerving thing was that his attention was on her. Like she was the focal point for him.

“You ok?” Tony pulled the shawl from her shoulders and handed it to the waiting attendant along with a tip.

“Yes, fine.” And breath in and breath out. “Is it wrong to be excited?” It was going to be one royal mess. The press, the Becketts… she wanted it over with. It had been too long coming. Those headlines tomorrow were going to be ugly regardless of what she was going to do. No one liked the woman that had snagged Tony Stark. That was how it worked. The Personality Cult.

“Wrong? Never.” The hands shifted from the small of her back to quickly cop a feel of her backside.

The quick squeeze made Darcy hiss. “Stop that, you horny beast.”

Tony was happy that he was an excellent multitasker. Because his mind right now was busy running a very realistic simulation in his head that involved a darkened room, Darcy’s pretty dress around her waist and him showing just how much of a horny- He took a deep breath as he flashed a smile, that he was sure conveyed the gist of his thoughts.

“Spark, what do you say if we -”

“Do you ever not think of it?” He always had a healthy appetite, and now that they were getting well into the swing of things, Tony found that it was far from diminishing. This whole relationship thing had something in it.

“Of course, I sleep. Regularly now. Which, I must say, has a bizarre effect on the body.” The eye roll was his only reply as they entered the main reception area reserved for the Gala. Few of the large rooms were being used for it, as he understood. The makeshift stage for the auction could be seen from their vantage point.
“Mr. Stark!” And here we go. The City’s Mayor was making a beeline for them. Tony spared a lukewarm smile. He had spent hours arguing with the man yesterday about matters that a janitor could handle. Tony Stark was not a janitor, but politics was a game that someone in his position had to play. Besides today was an Important evening.

Christine Everhart looked on with disdain as her date to the Gala made another lame joke. Ugh… The price she paid for attending this event. Getting in proved harder than she had anticipated. She had attended a couple of these in the past and it used to have decisively less security measures. Tony Stark was supposed to make an appearance, or so the rumour had it. The air was ripe with anticipation, for what it was hard to say.

Naturally, the speculations about the Mystery Woman were running rampant, they had been for few months, as Mr. Stark himself preferred to stay mum, when he wasn’t teasing the press with useless information, even when the spoke-person officially confirmed the relationship. Wasn’t it a joke? Christine took another glass of the expensive wine and continued to scan the crowd. Anyone that was anyone in the highest levels of Stark Industries seemed to be there. Odd… While it was a Gala for The Maria Stark Foundation it was unusual to see that many highest-level people at it at once. Something was definitely up. Did Stark mess up again? Was it damage control?

She was not being a cynic when she said that no one believed in this blissfully happy relationship Stark allegedly had going. Firstly because Tony Stark had his picture in the dictionary under Hit it and Quit it. And she was not at all bitter about it. That was what he did after all. The sex wasn’t even that good… and neither was the send-off. Christine had to confess that she took no little amount off pleasure at the news of the split of the Iron Couple. Look who has been taken out with the trash now, Potts. What were the odds that the little affair, if one chose to call it that, was already over and tonight Mr. Stark was going to be on the prowl for the next bedwarmer? Well, maybe a friendly face could cheer him up… One can wonder.

She noticed the woman first. The glowing red smile was captivating as it contrasted sharply with the pale complexion. The hair fell gracefully and effortlessly which meant that an expensive stylist spent time making it happen. Well… so did the plastic surgeon, because there was no way those breasts were real… even the most flattering dress did not do those kinds of wonders. The next thing that Christine noticed was the man’s hand on her waist, the manicure, the expensive watch. Her eyes snapped up just in time, as person engaging the couple in a conversation moved. “Damn it.” It just slipped out.

Tony Stark in his usual cocky and animated manner was explaining something as the brunette grinned and the Mayor laughed as he shook his head. They looked so … at ease with one another. Stark removed his hand for a moment to take drinks from passing waiter. The black three-piece suit, the cravat, the whole look, all down to the cufflinks seemed to have only one purpose…. to compliment the woman standing next to him. Typically, it was Tony that was the gravitational centre of a company, with his wit, easy manner, money. But not in this case. His attention was on her, the woman in the strapless black dress decorated in red roses. She looked elegant. Young. Well, that was hardly a surprise.

A bit... pudgier than Stark’s usual taste. Christine pursed her hips as she moved closer. Her imagination tried to conjure an image of the brunette as a helpless damsel. Airheaded, careless princess. Yet every time the pretty, vibrant colours faded. No ruffles and silly bows in the long silky hair. No… That was a queen, with her cool, calm smile. Their eyes locked for a moment as the
mayor hurried away for whatever reason.

“Well, this is a surprise, Mr. Stark. No one thought you were going to make it.” Christine intended to sound more professional, what came out was the exact opposite. Stark merely blinked and smiled at her in a way that suggested that he had no idea who she was. That was more insulting than anything else he could have said.

“We heard there will be an open bar, who says no to that?” ‘We’… wow. Tony Stark used that in an actual sentence. The off-hand manner still suggested that he didn’t have a clue who she was. Christine refrained from touching her hair for the millionth time this evening. She paid a small fortune to look this good tonight. Clearly Stark could afford more than her.

“I don’t think I had the pleasure. Christine Everhart.” The spark of recognition. Finally. Nervous, Tony? Since no introduction was forthcoming she extended her hand to the famous Mystery Woman and to her great surprise it was accepted.

“No, I don’t think you had. Darcy Lewis. I read your work by the way. ‘The Great Fallout’, was it? Published shortly after the New York Invasion.”

“Thank you-” Ok, so she didn’t expect that. The woman read.

“Welcome. If your hung up on Tony wasn’t as painfully obvious it had a potential to be a good piece. Your previous investigative work on the Leaks cover ups by North Atlantic Drilling Company? An example of excellence. Surely the sex wasn’t so bad as to knock you off your game?” It was said with casualness that made Christine’s jaw go lax for a second before both women jerked at the sound of Tony Stark inhaling his drink and coughing. “Tony, Thor. Careful. Bad sex happens, it is nothing to be ashamed of. Where were we again, Christine?”

“I am not hung up on Tony Stark-” “I do not do bad sex-” Both Stark and her sputtered at the same time and the woman, Darcy Lewis, only rolled her eyes.

“Sure, people. If you want to pretend it is fine with me. Well, since I have read your work, I do hope that shitty experiences were not what influenced the recent, temporary I hope, decline in your work.”

“Darcy, I did not do anything-”

“Tony, darling. the world of every woman you have ever slept with does not turn around your dick. I mean even if it is a nice one, as far as penises go. Right?” Darcy Lewis nodded to her as if seeking confirmation, in a manner one usually inquired about the quality of the popular house wine. Christine felt herself nodding. ‘What? I- What?’ that was not a conversation she had expected to have tonight. Usually it was about Tony Stark being a dick, not his actual member. Clearly neither did Stark as he took a deep breath before finishing his drink.

“Relax, Honeybunny-”

“I am relaxed. Christine, I look relaxed, right?” What should she say after being simultaneously professionally bitch slapped and having her ego stroked? It was like talking to Stark when they first met. Even if Darcy Lewis had a more open smile, it was still a roller-coaster of a conversation. And it did not get her hot. She wasn’t even attracted to women.

“You look swell.” ‘Swell?’ Did she really just say that word out loud? While staring at Stark date’s breasts? ‘Aren’t you a professional, Christine?’ The bitter, snarky voice quipped inside her. Maybe, this Lewis woman was right? She let her world revolve around some shitty, drunken one-night stand. The comment about the decline in the quality of her work hurt. It was also true, as much as Christine
wanted to deny it. Darcy Lewis had brought her up short, without outright saying that she expected Christine Everhart to do better. No excuses. “I mean, it is reasonably expected for the evening to be quite exciting since it is the first event you attend together, am I correct?” Of course, she was correct. This was the day that everyone had been waiting for. She looked the brunette over again. And it did not disappoint.

Tony all but dragged Darcy from a heated discussion with Christine Everhart, that followed their rather awkward introduction. Well, awkward for him. The two women butted heads and seemed to enjoy it immensely, forgetting or ignoring him completely. ‘Well, not tonight.’ This was meant to be their evening. Besides it was his turn to host the auction. They smiled politely at any attempts to engage them in a conversation by people that finally noticed that Tony Stark was indeed in attendance.

“Tony, I think this is the part where you release me into the wild to fend for myself for a bit as you get the last details from Pep, so you can be ready for the auction.” He did not want to do that. But it had been agreed. No matter how much he wanted to have her in his sights at all times, he could not do it. The rest of the team were around. Tony knew that. All was part of the plan. It was just he did not like the plan. While the Everhart incident showed that Darcy could stand her ground easily enough, her family was another matter completely.

As if on cue, and Tony could very well imagine that Pep gave the woman a cue, Natasha Romanov appeared at their side. Looking surprisingly demure but tasteful.

“I believe you are expected backstage.” Yes, she totally has been given a cue. If they-

Somebody shoved past him in a way that had he not possessed good reflexes it would have made him turn shove Darcy. With his adrenaline levels high already Tony found it hard not to snap as he turned. But Natasha beat him to it with a sunny smile that made sense when he saw who it was that showed past.

“Mr. Beckett, what a surprise.” Tony wiped the snarl from his face and once again had his best grin on. Darcy stiffened a little at his side, yet her own facial expression did not falter. Good.

It looked like it might have been a lucky coincidence as the rotund man in an ill-fitting pin stripe suit stopped dead in his tracks. Keith Beckett was very easy to read. First, they got a sneer of a man with too much self-importance, then it clicked, you could just see it in those beady little eyes. The recognition. Tony instinctively covered Darcy’s hand, that was hooked on the crook of his arm, with his own.

“Keith, love. Look who I just found- Oh.” Mrs. Keith Beckett, in something that Tony had seem women wear twenty years ago, with ruffles and folds, floated towards her husband nearly carried by sheer force of ignorance of the world around her. Until her eyes lay on the people that her husband was about to engage in a conversation with. His one-night stand had a better reaction to Darcy and that woman hated him, Tony had no doubt, with passion. Darcy’s mother, on the other hand, reacted as if the attractive, dolled up brunette, had been wearing a potato sack. “Darcy Lou.”
So nearly 200k words of crack and craziness, peeps.

What kept you coming back? Let me know!

Because reading 66 chapters must have taken some time =)
Chapter 67

Thank you for all the love, my Peepters!

You keep me going, you really do =)

You all are the reason why I keep going and the plot bunnies keep running around and are multiplying =)

I need that or my writing would come to a screeching halt. Please keep it up!

Wino, amazing usual. Your hard work makes my story so much better. Thank you.

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Chapter 67

“Darcy Lou.”

Insults don’t have to be ugly swear words. More often than not, the way one said the simple words would get the message across just fine. Darcy Lewis’s mother was clearly that kind of person. Tony admired Natasha’s ability to keep smiling. He wasn’t as good as hiding his disdain, but he managed after a moment’s struggle. It was not the time to lose one’s cool. It was time to make a statement for the public record.

“I am sure she said that it’s just Darcy, please. But what a surprise. I thought you would be too busy attempting to salvage your little boys club, I’m sorry, company. Looking a little green around the gills there, Kevin. Feeling ok? Need a drink?” Keith Beckett was indeed looking quite green in the face, barely managing to hold his rage in at the snide remark that hit the nail on the head. Beckett’s company was slowly but surely tanking. Somebody helped it along just a little. Maybe it was him. Barely a smidgen, really. They were at the point that it maybe, probably, could still be saved. Tony smiled wider. That was a very big maybe. He loved when his plans came together like this, right before his very eyes.

“It is clear that these days anyone can show their face around here-” Keith Beckett sneered and regarded them with an air of superiority. Darcy seemed to be locked in a stare off contest with Mrs. Beckett.

“It isn’t just what I was thinking? These days pretty much anybody can purchase tickets and contribute to the wonderful work of charities we support. Of course, first you would need to be able to afford them. I wasn’t aware we were doing a discounted batch.” Tony narrowed his eyes and looked the rapidly going red couple over, making a point that he found their appearance more than slightly lacking in what it took to attend the event. Mr. Beckett clearly thought he was a person to be reckoned with in this party. Welcome to the big City. The sharks were much bigger and hungrier in the big waters. “But I guess, this way we do make a saving on entertainment. These are tough times, you understand.” Oh, yes, I am not laughing with you, but at you. A sure sign of an insecure man was the inability to take a joke. And Tony loved a good joke.
“That would answer the question why you are here! They couldn’t afford Tony Stark this year?” Can anyone be really that stupid?

Darcy took couple of even measured breaths before a snicker finally escaped “Snap.” Tony pursed his lips as he glanced at his grinning companion.

Happy would probably be able to find someone making neon signs real quick so that Tony could have his own name done… didn’t he already have one? Few? Several hundred? Moving one from a building would take time…

“… He was busy and didn’t confirm his attendance in time. This kind of things happen. You know, busy saving the world, running and expanding multinational business empire, getting…” They were attracting a crowd. He usually did. Especially at this sort of events. Especially when he was about to tear somebody down. It was the High Society’s version of blood sport and the Starks had always excelled at it. There was, after all, a good reason why the expensive event carpet they now stood on was red. His little Spark already had the makings of a champion. Tony could feel the ring on her finger, it served as reminder that he should not lose his cool tonight, no matter what.

“What would you know of him?” The look on some of the patrons’ faces were quite comical as they tried to follow the conversation. Amongst the curious onlookers were a couple of stone-faced Board members who must have been unable to evade the woman in radioactive ruffle disaster of a dress that Darcy had the misfortune to call mother. They must have looked quite funny from a side. A real power couple facing off a cheap imitation of wealth.

“He is Tony Stark.” Darcy said it flatly in a way that Tony had since leaned meant that she was about to fall over laughing or freak out. Could go either way in this situation. Not that he would let that happen. The floor must be dirty. He was fully prepared to do his duty and hold her while she laughed it out. He would persevere no matter what! Oh, and he didn’t want Darcy close enough to those people for any form physical contact.

“You hardly even look like him. Where did your suit come from? Was it rejected by the Charity Shop? Did our absolutely useless Police-” He stopped just in time. The man was seething, attempting to keep his voice under control. But the lavishly dressed audience seemed to fan indignation to being as much as spoken to by some z-rate celebrity wannabe impersonator. The Horror! Tony kept on grinning, he was going to enjoy every moment of this evening.

“Keith, love. Please.” The woman reacted as if Beckett had spoken some obscene word that was beyond their status even to think when he was about to mention the Police. Tony was still convinced that Darcy was adopted. She had to be. “And I think Darcy Lou is -” ‘Wandered in from the cold? Is lost? Is held hostage by me? What?’ How was it possible that every single word out that woman’s mouth made Tony hate her more? Regardless of what she said. Well, maybe because she never said anything nice to Darcy. Ever.

“Honouring me with her company? Oh, absolutely. I am, undisputedly, the luckiest man here. Or on this the planet. Any planet, really.” Mrs. Beckett continued as if Tony hadn’t spoken as she gestured at her daughter. Whispers were spreading in the crowd. There was blood in the water and they could sense it.

“- taking the opportunity to attend here today. I am sure she just didn’t want to miss it.” Tony felt his left eye twitch. By now their pictures from barely fifty minutes ago must have been making circles round the media like crazy. Their happy smiles were flying around the globe bearing the headline ‘Breaking News’.

“Mother, you are not wrong, I would have not missed this evening for the world.” Only thanks to the
united efforts of quite a few people to convince her, Tony thought, but was not going to say that out loud. Mrs. Beckett grimaced as if Darcy was being improper. A disobedient child that she couldn’t wait to reprimand as soon as they were alone. Such obvious contempt.

“Darcy, has this man made you forget all the manners we, I, have taught you? It is hardly—” Here it comes. The gracious lesson in good behaviour. Tony was sure that Kevin gave plenty of those to Darcy when she was under their roof. Good kids are never heard, maybe? A vision of teenage Darcy moving around that colonial house like a shadow came to his mind. Was it how they wanted it to be? For Darcy to obediently slunk away? Not to tarnish their ‘perfect image’? Not to be seen, never to be heard, never in the way. Smile on command and disappear with a simple gesture. ‘Darcy Lou…’ It was tough growing up when you thought that nobody ever wanted you. Tony really wished they weren’t so much alike.

“Well, he did remind me that my calling my own mother Mrs. Beckett is senseless when your kids get to call her mum, Keith. I think I did that long enough.” It was a sign of rebellion. Darcy was doing it just to get back at them. Breaking all the rules she had been forced to follow.

“Your mother re-married.” Oh, how he wanted to jump on this. So many things that he could say. But it wasn’t his turn just yet. They weren’t going to meet like this again. It was Darcy’s chance to really tear their festering relationship apart. It was more public than they would have preferred, but it was going to serve its purpose.

“And I heard it was a lavish affair. Congratulations. Shame she forgot to invite her eight-year-old daughter. I am her child not the ex. Our relation didn’t change. I mean it wouldn’t have, if she hadn’t given me away and forgotten I existed for 6 years. Must have been quite hard having me around for a few years but she recovered, I imagine by not seeing me for another ten after I went away to study. But you know what? I stand corrected. You are right. Mothers don’t do that kind of things.” Even the Becketts were noticing the not quite positive attention they were getting from the onlookers that couldn’t get enough of the drama unfolding before them.

“This- this is all this thug! You have never spoken to us like that before.” Tony cocked his head to the side, he was having trouble keeping his mouth shut. Such a predictable move, trying to shift the blame onto Darcy.

“I did. When you froze my trust fund because I wanted to go to Culver-” What happened to it again? Pepper was on it.

“To waste money? Look at yourself! Thank goodness we have done that. And now you are hand in hand with that!” Tony watched as Darcy purposely slowly wiped imaginary lint from the dress as Mr. Beckett fumed.

“I’m looking. Graduated summa cum laude from a prestigious university, currently working for an Astrophysicist that is nominated for the Nobel Prize for her outstanding achievements in the field. I love my job. I study for my own enjoyment. I have people in my life that I care deeply about.” There was a pause and Tony cleared his throat pointedly. “And I have an awesome man that brings me breakfast to bed. So, yeah, I am looking pretty damn good, thank you for never enquiring.” Tony was sure he deserved sainthood for keeping quiet. They should have set a time limit beforehand. He had exceeded all possible limits.

“Well, at least you took a step from waiting tables, I guess that is an improvement.” Darcy laughed out loud. Even Tony had to roll his eyes at that. That was a cheap shot at something that happened years ago and wasn’t even something to be ashamed of.

“Yes, I waited tables, for years in fact, it paid my bills and put food on my table while I studied, and I
am thankful for that. Hats off to all those that do it to make ends meet, it's a hard job, Mrs. Beckett."

“And when this- this barbarian tires of you, you will be back.”

“Darcy, sweetheart let me have this one. Please?” He couldn’t take it anymore. He wasn’t pleading. Not too much. Darcy shrugged and he grinned sharply. He even managed to keep his voice even, if barely. “Which part of she got a degree, years of PA experience and a exceptional grasp on Astrophysics did you not get? Out of morbid curiosity, what did you think she was doing all these years? Waiting? Oh, let me guess! -”

“Who do you think you are?!”

“Superhero, playboy, billionaire, philanthropist. Former playboy. It has been a few years, but I like to include that. It is an image thing.”

“You are not Tony Stark!” There was actual round of laughter from the crowd. The Becketts were seriously uncomfortable now.

“Tony is not my real name-”

“Ha!”

“It’s Anthony Edward Stark. But I go by Tony. Unless, Honeybuns is upset in which case I am Anthony, or, more often, Damn it, Stark. But that one is kind of nearing the expiration date.” Could he give any bigger hint and not actually say it?

“This is outrageous, I am not sure who hired you to be here today, but they are demeaning the dignity of this Gala! I shall be speaking to who over was stupid enough to hand you an invitation.”

“I do not have an invitation; my face usually gets me places.”

“You are a disgrace! Where is the security? You should be locked up!” Mrs. Beckett looked appropriately uncomfortable the entire time, and sadly enough it wasn’t because her daughter had denounced her a mother, but because said daughter was not responding to the reprimanding.

“Mr. Stark, you have to get ready for the auction.” The ever-serene voice of Natasha Romanov cut off the response that was on Tony’s tongue. The Auction. They shouldn’t be late for that. Darcy nodded, agreeing with the unspoken question. They should get going.

“This is preposterous. If you think that you will get on that stage today you don’t know who you are dealing with, you cheap imitation!”

“Kevin, it had been lovely speaking to you, but we shall not be doing that again. Spark?”

“Well, Mrs. Beckett, Keith. I would rather not see you around today but you purchased the tickets so enjoy your evening.” For a second, he thought that Darcy was going to flip a bird at the parental unit, but she only gave him a big smile. “Let’s roll, Tin Man.”

“Stark, want to hear a horror story in one word?”

The man in question raised his eyes from the cue cards he was going over, that Pepper so graciously had prepared for him in an attempt to keep him on point for the auction, to stare flatly at Rogers.
“You? Because right now-”

“Stark, I would let you skip the presenting all together, if it meant that I did not have to hear you speak, but there are some women that will have me quartered, right in that Hall.”

“Foster?”

“… Among others. They are scary when they all together.” Tony was not going to argue. CEO of a Stark Industries, Master Assassin, Astrophysicist that has a God by the balls and his sweet little Bunny, adored by all.

“They do not need me for this. I can just go there-”

“Miss. Potts is with her. The others are nearby. Miss. Lewis is in safe hands. Stark, you're about to make a pretty big announcement. It makes sense to do it on a stage for full impact.”

“Are the Beckett’s still around?”

“Yes. Complaining left and right, demanding to have you fired.” The run in earlier proved that Becketts and their brood lived in some alternative reality, because at this point even the dumbest person would have recognized Tony Stark.

“Well, that might be a little hard to achieve. If they keep going at it…” They watched as the presenter, an elderly gentleman whose name Tony didn’t bother to remember waved for him to appear from behind the curtain as the patrons in the Hall cheered. It was time. “You said something about one word?” Steve Rogers grinned.

“Pockets.”

“How in the world is that- Pockets?!” Tony did not have to be pushed onto the stage. Far from it. He almost ran onto it, or at the very least walked fast. ‘Pockets?!’ he checked out Darcy’s clutch to make sure that in her usual style his fiancé wasn’t packing any electrically charged weapons. This evening was expected to be emotionally packed for various reasons and it was well known how Darcy Lewis dealt with being overwhelmed.

Pockets meant that his pretty little bunny, perfection of a woman, was totally packing a taser under that dress. Maybe strapped to her thigh. Bet Romanov totally sorted Darcy out with a holster. Tony felt pissed off and at the same… kinda turned on. Trust Spark to pull something like that. She looked so delicate and elegant when she stepped out of the elevator, waltzing towards him like a dream that had taken shape and all that time, underneath it all, she was armed and not to be messed with. All he hoped for was that his arousal was not too obvious, because right now that was the least of his problems.

Clint Barton shuffled along amongst nicely dressed people.

He had lost count of how many times he had been asked to serve drinks. It was the suit. He hated suits. They somehow never fitted him. So right now, he was not the happiest person prancing around this evening. This kind of events was everything he disliked. People with more money than sense flaunting their wealth and other people trying to get a chink of it. But Stark and Lewis were going to stir the proverbial shit-pot and there was no way in Hell he was going to miss that... And the Becketts. The Becketts. As far as Clint was concerned they should have dealt with it back in Louisiana. Set the record straight. But they hadn't. Instead they had those poor excuses of human
Beings walking around tonight.

He had just watched them having upper class fight with Stark in the middle of a crowd and still those people refused to believe that Lewis was with Iron Man now. Even in the face of all the evidence. Or basically money. Stark looked, walked and talked like he owned the place. How could anyone mistake him for somebody else? How was that even possible? The little masquerade they had when they went to good old Louisiana was one thing, but even then...

Clint watched as Kathryn Beckett pretended to laugh at something one of the guests said. The laugh was too loud, shrill and fake. The tension was showing. The thing with money and power is that there is always someone that has more than you. Flaunting wealth could be fun, but that was also a very risky game. The Becketts had someone from Stark Industries cornered and vocally complained about their tremendously poor choice of entertainers. To say the least no one had any idea what the clearly crazy couple was talking about: there was, as a rule, a live orchestra playing. It was a classic for professional fundraisers convincing rich patrons to part with some of their money.

Tony Stark was many things but stupid was not one of them. There was always an order to his chaos, even when you were unable to find it.

Clint could see the billionaire briskly walk out onto the stage flashing the wide smile to the raucous applause of the audience, before taking a deep bow next to the podium.

“So? What you all thinking, peeps? Let me know! =)
Chapter 68

Wino, hats off to you as always for the amazing help.

Chapter 68

Robert Byrne was a pragmatist. He had to be, being a member of Stark Industries’ Board of Directors during the time that the Genius rebranded them from main defence contractor to ‘trying what will keep us afloat long enough to pay all the court settlement with our supply chain’. A company did not go from designing missile systems to cell phones and medical equipment and clean energy. That was not how that worked. In principle it did not work, except they had Stark. To the great surprise of many, the man did care about the Company bearing his name.

They lost millions in revenue. They had to secure emergency loans right and left. They had contracts, they had obligations to pay people at that point, they had materials on order and being delivered, they had factories full of equipment and people manning them. It was a nightmare. One day they were arranging meetings with the Defence Secretary and the next were trying to work out how the mobile industry worked and what was the fastest way to become profitable. For years they haemorrhaged money and it was only very recently that they could say that SI was once again becoming a leading, pioneer Company once more. A household name. That whole Iron Man slash Avengers business wasn’t much help either. Everything cost, but at least Stark was dipping into his own coffers most of the time. The rest of the time, Robert was loath to report, it was SI’s problem. But that was the unpleasant truth, the man technically owned the company, even with their oversight it was still Stark Industries.

People kept forgetting that being a large company and being successful was not one and the same. Also having Stark throwing ideas at them was as useful as Mona Lisa given to a Stone Age man. They did not have technology to mass produce most of the things. No matter how brilliant was the design it mattered diddly squat if there was no way for it to be manufactured at a competitive price. They were lagging behind the competition.

Robert took another flute of champagne. Obadiah Stane was to thank for the nightmarish years that followed his sudden ‘disappearance’. Everyone that mattered knew about his untimely end and what led to it. Sometimes when the CEO was ambitious was not the best thing. But that was a past chapter and Robert was more focused on the future and more precisely the new StarkPhone. The design was nearly complete all that was needed was the permission from Miss Darcy Lewis to use her innovation. They had already filed for a patent so that side was covered. Stark Industries needed the contract, the new phone had to be a success, it had to be the new golden standard. SI had to be the leader again not the hanger on. The champagne was not cutting it and Robert moved onto the stronger selection, leaving a generous tip to the waiter.

This evening had to be a success. Not that there were any doubts that it wasn’t going to be. The relationship between Mr. Stark and Miss. Lewis was a surprise, no one thought that Stark was ever going to get into one again. Or more likely to treat one as seriously as he did. Then came the next big
surprise. The Engagement. Anthony Edward Stark was engaged to be married. Willingly. And, as far as Robert understood, Miss Lewis wasn’t even pregnant. Or keen to get married soon after engagement. It was as if their relationship was a gift to SI that just kept on giving. Their relationship announcement straightened their market value already, and as it continued to last added to it.

Miss Lewis’s personal contribution to SI was significant, it looked like it was going to be the missing step between Mr. Stark’s brilliant designs and mass production. Keeping that woman happy was a mission that the entire board was dedicated to. The contract was in the works, the happy couple was getting along and the longer they lasted the more on hold projects could finally go into production. Robert took a deep breath. Money. That was the bottom line. That was always the bottom line. He was only formally familiar with the woman and he honestly couldn’t care less about her, but she was like that golden goose and they had to have her, because if she wasn’t with SI she would eventually join their competitors. So yes, Robert Byrne was a big fan of the happy couple’s relationship working and prospering. Such a big fan. The biggest there was, and he was only being partly sarcastic.

He watched as the pair walked into the Hall, dressed in their finest. The press had been going wild uploading the photos of their entrance. They were photogenic. You could just tell they were wealth in the classic sense of the word. They looked so much like Howard and Maria. The easy, confident manner, just the touch of arrogance, and scent of affluence hanging in the air around them and they were making it look easy, being at the top. Just as it should be. Nothing could be allowed to get in the way of their happiness. Nothing.

“Mr. Byrne!” Robert nearly spat the Martini out as somebody shrieked into his ear. A woman in a dress, that he was glad went out of fashion twenty odd years ago, was laughing as if he has just said some sort of joke. She looked familiar… ‘Shit.’ It was that woman. Mrs. Beckett. Miss Lewis’s mother. He had suggested the Becketts’ tickets to be cancelled. Legal suggested otherwise. Getting the scandal out of the way now would make sense if the Becketts were to try to profit from Mr. Stark and the SI.

Robert felt his jaw lock. He did not spend those years working his ass off to get Stark Industries back onto the top of the game, and with their success in sight, for some small-town bumpkins to rock up and scam them.

“Yes?” The sharp tone did nothing to deter the woman.

“My husband and I were just talking about you! Isn’t that funny?” No, it wasn’t. It was the wetlands, wasn’t it? Robert felt satisfaction well up. Those belonged to SI now. All to keep Miss Lewis sweet. It was the nature of any business, you had to invest to get anything back. They cost a pretty penny but that was a drop in the ocean of the money that the new products were going to generate. Also, it made SI look good for minding the environment, investing into local infrastructure, being forward thinking. It was an investment that was going to eventually pay for itself in various ways. Those lands weren’t going to given up to anyone.

“Many things can be funny. If you excuse me-” This conversation could wait till later when they were going to be able be free to speak.

“Oh, my husband is just here.”

At one point Robert thought that Stark and Mr. Beckett were going to come to blows during their brief confrontation. It boggled his mind how could those people stand there, look Tony Stark right in
the face and still not acknowledge the truth. Their discomfort at suddenly being the centre of attention was so obvious, and that attention wasn’t of the good kind. Weren’t they wondering why all those people laughed at them?

“Miss Potts. How are you this evening? ” The CEO barely glanced in his direction as her eyes kept going towards the entrance. “Is something wrong?”

“Everything is ok. Darcy went to freshen herself up and Tony is about to make his entrance- Darcy!” Miss Lewis, in company of her bodyguard, was making her way towards the front where a number of small tables was situated. People parted as she approached. Openly curious and in many cases admiring stares followed her as she went. The bodyguard mixed into the crowd.

“Hey, Pep. Mr. Byrne-” They didn’t have the time exchange the greetings as Miss. Potts shook her head and gave him an apologetic look. They were out of time for politeness.

“Miss Lewis, Miss Potts, I shall be seeing you later.”

The brief smiles he received were thankful. He fully understood the situation. Plus he wasn’t going far. The tables that were set were there for a reason. The patrons of the Gala could choose to pay extra to be seated closer. Robert was in the second row, while Miss. Lewis was at the very front at a table set for two, the second chair remaining empty as he assumed it was meant to be filled by Mr. Stark, once his part of the Auction was finished. Miss. Potts took the next table and shared it with Ms. Folk. People were taking their seats. The social status clearly distinguishable by the seated arrangements. It was time to begin.

“Good evening, ladies and gentlemen! Welcome to the Annual Gala of the Maria Stark Foundation. I am, in case anyone was wondering, Tony Stark.” The guests clapped with barely concealed excitement. One thing that he had always provided was the entertainment and the people present knew that. Well, maybe not all. Tony forced himself not to seek out the Becketts as his eyes settled on his little Spark sitting in front row. The nervous smile made him focus.

“Thank you for being here today, Mr. Stark, and of course thank you for providing some of the items for the Auction. Most generous of you.”

“I was due a clear-out. Got to put those somewhere.” Another round of laughter at the announcer’s discomfort. Eye rolls from two ladies in the front that knew he wasn’t the one doing the clear out.

“Well, we're thankful anyway. We had some more items of interest, services and other interesting offers that will be auctioned here today. It reminds me-” It looked like there was a tale Tony had no patience for tonight incoming, so he took the matters into his own hands.

“Right! Thank you very much for the introduction. I shall be taking it from now, my good man.” Finally he was alone on the stage. The microphone was of an older version and Tony tapped couple of times. “Can everyone hear me?” This time, there were amused chuckles. “Excellent. Let’s get this show on the road. The first item to be auctioned tonight, quite a honourable place, is a customised guitar signed by the Pink Floyd. It comes with an authentication certificate, believe it or not. An excellent piece as seen held by an even lovelier auction clerk.” Tony flashed a cheeky grin. The woman holding the guitar went red. “We shall start the bidding at ten thousand. For the guitar not the clerk. She is invaluable and hence not featured. Also, I believe that kind of thing is generally frowned upon. So! Do I see more than ten thousand?” There was a flurry or eager hands holding the number signs that dropped off gradually as he raised the price until it was sold for a just under the
overly inflated price of eighty thousand. He had half expected Spark to bid, just to make things interesting, but a guitar was hardly a purchase she would consider.

It was followed by classical painting depicting a hunting scene in royal gardens, by a budding artist imitator of the renaissance period, and it got a lot of attention. Tony assumed it was going to look good at some stylish hunting retreat. It went for a solid sixty-nine thousand. Not a bad piece. Not his style, but rather pleasing to the eye.

“Next! Oh.” Instagram. Well... That brought down the general tone of the evening. Who oversaw selection this year? Who was Elisabeth Romano? Uh, the Romanos, them. Wasn’t it enough that I had to deal with them during the meetings with the Mayor? “A dinner, ladies and gentlemen, with an Instagram star, the ever exercising, Miss Elisabeth Romano! Let’s greet her!” He turned and the woman dressed in an impossibly tight, elasticated he imagined dress, sauntered over, eyes fixed on him and the flirtatious smile decorating her tanned to excess face. His own smile strained into that polite mask he was used to wearing. “Miss Romano! Let me thank you for joining us today and for your contribution tonight. One question before we start, will you be cooking? Because it doesn’t say.”

“Well, Tony. You might just have to win and find out.” She giggled coquettishly.

“Intriguing, but I will have to decline. I am spoken for.” With a grand gesture Tony pointed at the front table, where Darcy turned around as if looking for someone behind her and he had to purse his lips till she stopped and sat back down. Her expression sheepish.

“Oh, right. Yeah. That’s me. I forgot. My bad. So, Yes, he is spoken for and even to on regular basis.” The low laughter and muffled sounds of excitement swept the Hall and Tony felt his cheeks heat up. That was the lighting. He was baking under these spot lights. Surely that was it. Not at all because Darcy was yanking his chain. The smile was too innocent to have an ounce of sincerity. The little witch just sat there smiling. And she had pockets full of things that only her and probably Romanov and Pep knew about. Bet Pepper knows… How come he was always last to know about stuff? After Rogers even. That was a little insulting.

“A woman has been very passionately spoken for. I believe we may continue. So Miss?”

“Romano, Tony.” He glanced at Spark who just shrugged. Ok, so he might have expected a little bit of a reaction. Like, a tiny bit. “The winner will have the pleasure of my company for two hours where we can discuss a dietary plan if the winner is in need of it, or I can advise on the exercise regime that would benefit him, you. Well, there are many ways to a pleasant evening.”

Uhuh. That’s so not happening. Tony cleared his throat. Darcy was trying to hide her smirk behind a champagne flute. They had not yet had to deal with someone so obviously flirting with him when she was around. Flirting was just a form of banter and he did love that. That was tricky. He was suffering in a moment of uncertainty and what did his little Spark were doing? Enjoying it, naturally. That had to entitle him to a back rub… and a front rub and… and he really needed to concentrate.

“So many ways. So I take you don’t cook. Shame. Now. How much will be the pleasure?” He was not biting. The confident smile faltered as the woman stammered out.

“Eight hundred dollars.”

He almost groaned out loud and resisted the urge to respond with something sharper. “I think I can manage convince someone to part with that much spare change.” Today was not the day to be testing him. Tony Stark had no problem reminding people why the Starks were at top of the food chain. What caught his attention was the little nod from Darcy. The sharp look in those pretty eyes told him what he needed to know. She didn’t miss the woman trying to flirt with him. Far from it. She had no
intention to start fights with women that were hitting on him, she did not have that much spare time on her hands nor was she there every time. That’s why she trusted him to reject their moves. If he didn’t, there would be nothing she could do. Well, there would be plenty things she could do to him and then he would mysteriously disappear.

So it all boiled down to trust… His little Spark sure liked living dangerously. Most of the days he didn’t trust Tony Stark.

The little starlet in the meantime did her best to stomach the veiled insult and smile at the audience. Tony smiled, it was always worth remembering that the same people that applauded your coronation were going to cheer at your beheading.

“Well, you sure are popular, Mr. Stark.” Careful there, we are not in the same league here.

“Quality over quantity tends to do that. Now, let’s see how much can we get out of you. Let’s start at five hundred to create some interest?” And that what happened when you tried pissing off Tony Stark, you suddenly turned into the laughing stock, but it was a Charity Auction, so he did make it count. The Dinner went for nine hundred and fifty and not higher, much to the displeasure of the Insta-ambitious little nobody.

“The next Item on the list is, hmm, now this is good if I may say so myself. A custom made, tailored Italian suit, in sleet grey, that has once belonged to yours truly, Tony Stark, AKA me. I like it. Why am I getting rid of it?”

“Because you need to build a second Tower to store your junk in if you don’t. Also, this shade makes you look like you got jaundice.” His woman wasn’t holding back as she retorted sharply. She also had the gall to salute him with her glass. That earned burst of laughter all around.

“I got plenty of compliments when I wore it.”

“I bet. They were all most impressed you were still upright and lucid.”

“It looks good on me.” It was a very complimenting cut. Did wonders for his waist line.


“I got it last week.” It was not that bright. He was running low on lighter coloured suits.

“I know. That reminds me you have an eye check appointment tomorrow.”

“I have a perfect eye sight.”

“I thought that too but then the yellow suit happened. I think we need to make sure. For safety reasons. Also it will give me the chance to get rid of it while you’re out. Along with other crap that found its way into my side of the walk-in closet.”

“What? No. All there is a t-shirt, that I didn’t get a chance to wear because it is on you most of the time and couple of suits that I got for tonight. And maybe couple of pairs of shoes.” Darcy’s side just looked so damn empty. He couldn’t stand it.

“My point exactly, your stuff on my side. Move it or lose it. I asked you to move it days ago.”
“That is a little harsh. Considering your stuff is all over the place.”

“Yes, but that is our place. This is my closet.”

“It is our closet and this our stuff there. It is like the bed all over again.” Tony was not whining, and she didn’t have to roll her eyes.

“Tony, do yourself a favour and don’t.”

“You sleep in the middle. The bed.” Tony used both hands to roughly point out the sides of the bed before moving them towards the middle and leaving the gap where a centre would be. “You. In the middle. I don’t even know how you get there during the night. I don’t mind. Plenty space on both sides. Why can’t I get the right side, it is not like you sleeping there!”

“Your point?”

“There is enough space!”

“Let me rephrase. A point that I would care about? Because first - the reason I end up in the middle is you. You Human Boa. Second – you know where there is also plenty of space? On the floor. Feel free to utilise it any time you feel like it.”

Tony stood there for a moment with his hands still showing her sleeping habits before he cleared his throat and straightened.

“So…In other news. We are engaged now.” The people were enjoying the back and forth between the new couple, convinced it was part of the entertainment, and took the statement as another joke. It had been several minutes but Mr. Stark and his new girlfriend were getting people to laugh till they teared up as the rapidly fired statements by both parties were hitting home on what it was like to be in a relationship. The initial fit of laughter was punctuated by sudden applause from various people and the laughter died down as shocked gasps and silence filled the room.

Darcy stood frozen by her table. The attention of every single person in the room glued to them.

“It is my pleasure tonight to share the news that my proposal had been considered and accepted, even after I continue to annoy her about switching the sides. I am honoured announce that I am engaged to be married to one and only, Darcy Lewis, the Spark that lights up my world.”

Hello, Peeps! So? Good ? Bad? Let me know!

It is much appreciated =)
Chapter 69

“It is my pleasure tonight to share the news that my proposal had been considered and accepted, even after I continue to annoy her about switching the sides. I am honoured announce that I am engaged to be married to one and only, Darcy Lewis, the Spark that lights up my world.”

Stark could sure make a speech. Clint watched as people struggled to stomach the news. The world’s most eligible bachelor declared himself to be off the market. There was actual sobbing somewhere. Yes, you could hear the hearts break.

The silence lasted merely a few seconds before people remembered their good manners and started going over the shock. No one expected Tony Stark to drop this sort of bombshell, and not so casually. That was not the plan. *Bet Potts will have something to say about that. Or a kitten.* Yet, it was a very Stark sort of way to share the news. Just throwing something at people's faces all like ‘yes, so that’s how things are now, deal with it.’

Lewis was clearly tempted to express her current opinion of him through some one finger salutes but refrained. *Pity.* That would have been interesting to see in tomorrow’s papers. Clint watched as the charity patrons swamped the happy couple. The air was filled with excitement and disbelief in equal measures. The champagne was flowing freely so were the compliments and well wishes and other things that people of high society sprouted on such occasions. The archer felt misplaced. And that was only the beginning of the evening. Well, early middle.

“Lewis?” So, it was way too early for him to be standing in front a loo door at the part of the museum where guests had no business being. Privacy was good, but it stank strongly of industrial disinfectant and mould. The security woman was watching him from few meters away. Her charge had to be back soon or certain people might get worried and nobody wanted that.

“Wha- Hey! Don’t just jimmy the lock whenever you feel like it, pigeon boy. You are equipped to piss discreetly in a plant pot, so don’t even think of giving me shit for hogging it.” Lewis was seated on the toilet with its lid down. Not doing anything, just sitting there glaring at him as he squeezed into the small place.

“Just because we can doesn’t mean we do. If it is not urgent.” He added in afterthought. That happened *once* in his defence, and Natasha was spending *way* too much time with Lewis. “I say we got about four minutes before Stark realizes that you didn’t just go to take a leak.” Or Foster, or
Thor, or Rogers… Natasha probably watched him follow the brunette. “So… you ok?” Why did he follow her again? He had no idea what to do or say.

“Yeah.” The answer sounded very unconvincing.

“Okay… Let’s try this again. Pretend- pretend that I’m Natasha.” Clint pretended to tug a strand of hair behind his ear and pursed his lip making a pouty face. “Are you okay?” There was a long pause as they stared at each other. This was awkward. Toilets were not the best meeting places. Somehow in the small space, cramped with the two of them, the suit felt even more uncomfortably tight.

“Do you ever get this… sudden, panicky feeling in your gut when you realize that things are going well? I don’t know what came over me. Tony was talking to some people, being funny in his usual way, he turned at me and smiled and I just thought… wow… I am really happy…. And-” Clint watched as she rubbed her hands together to disguise the shaking. “And it hit me in the guts… I had - I had to get away for a second. You know? … I just-”

“Things going too well?” Panic attack. The irrational fear that those who had been beaten down by life too many times had. You trained yourself to not even thinking of happiness because as soon as you did things were going to go bad and you were going to end up in the dirt, beaten and bloody and helpless… and alone again. Life was a nasty fucker. People that made their way from the bottom knew that all too well… People like them. White picket fence and neighbours that always mowed the lawn… Ha! Instead Darcy Lewis had been tossed aside to live with a stranger in the poorest part of town. Life could be a circus in more way than one. The fear never truly goes away. You just learn to hide it better.

“Yeah. You know?” He did. All too well. That little drop of poison hanging in suspense, ready to drop. The inkling of a doubt in the back of your mind.

“First it would have to get past Stark, Thor, Foster, Nat, Rogers, your security and not to mention Pepper Potts and a whole lot of other people… and me.” A slow blink was his answer and then another, followed by a sniff. Large unshed tears clung to the painted eyelashes and the bottom lip trembled.

“I-”

Ah, shit. Clint Barton was not cut out for this reassuring business. It was his turn to panic. He was good at shooting people and stuff… Very awkwardly he crouched down, his backside nearly touching the wall, and cautiously patted the small hands fisted in the expensive ball gown, focusing on the contrast of their skins. His weather beaten and rough, hers fair and tender. “Shit happens, I- I know. Stark will tear this place down in about three minutes looking for you.” What could he offer that she did not have? What could she find comfort in right now? What did he have to give? His hands were all he had… “If that’s about Stark… Many things can happen but hey… when shit doesn’t happen? I have … I have this place, it still needs a lot of work. It’s an old farmhouse, because one day … anyway, it’s got heating and beds and some fresh linen… I think. If you ever need a place to stay, no questions asked. You just hit me up and…” What else could he say? He wasn’t super smart, or strong… but if she was going to need somebody to pick her up he was going to be there. It didn’t matter where both of them came from, they were heading in the right direction now and it was all that mattered.

“Is that what having a brother feels like? You annoy me and but make me care and you there… well, here, now.” Lewis kept fidgeting as she said that.

“I- maybe… anyway, you got Thor.” A brother… Clint swallowed thickly.
“Thor-bro is great, he's just… Thor. He likes making things grand and-” What left unsaid was that she thought that her fear was not one of those 'grand’ things she thought were important. “- he can’t lie worth shit to Jane, so… But he's a good egg. A little hairy but he’s ok. Hopefully Rogers can resolve that little problem.” Finally, a smile. Clint wasn’t sure what the joke was, but he wasn’t going to ruin the moment by asking. “Do you think I'm stupid? For.”

“No, I don’t, Lewis. Trust me. If anyone tells you that smack them right in the gob. So… is there any other reason? Because it's only Natasha that knows about the farmhouse…”

“I am pretty sure Tony would find it.” The vibration in his pocket alerted him of a text.

“I'm pretty sure he wouldn’t. But unless you're dumping him lets not try it. I suggest you make up your mind now because I just got a massage from Nat. Stark is showing signs of looking for you. Also I think I need to take a leak too. Get out.”

“I am not dumping Tony. Why would you even think that? Also, you are gross, Cupid. This must be what it feels to have a big brother.” Lewis finally squared her shoulders and got up making him rise too. They were shuffling past one another in the narrow space when suddenly the hands went around him in a hug that he instantly returned. “Thank you.”

“That’s what I am here for. What- was there just -what was just now digging into my thigh, Lewis?”

“A dick. You got me all hot, can’t help it.” As the brunet spoke his hand quickly went down the side seam before she could swat them away.

“Pockets? You got pockets. Are you armed?” Of course, she was armed. It was Lewis. Why was he even bothering to ask? Why was he annoying her when they were in a confined space alone and she was armed, his guess was, with a taser? But the words were just coming out of his mouth. “Why are you armed? You literally got a team backing you up.”

“Which should never be an excuse not to be ready.” The archer stared at the woman as the door got unlocked. They were too much alike. “Piss quick, Cupid, I’ll wait for you outside.” And that was what having a sister must have felt like. All he wanted was to make sure she was safe and happy and probably would get punched in the nuts for his efforts. He also should make sure there were fresh linens in the farmhouse, just in case. He didn’t want it to look like he lied…

———

After a break the Auction was due to resume. Steve was still a little reeling from the prices that the items fetched, and it looked like it was only going to increase if the excitement around was anything to go by. But… sixty-nine thousand for a painting? It wasn’t even by a known artist! Back in the day you could… gosh… buy an entire gallery for that sort of money, or an apartment building.

“Pockets?” Clint Barton quietly appeared at Steve’s side with an accusation he could hardly deny. He didn’t.

“…Pockets.” There was a touch of resignation in his voice. It was Miss Lewis they were talking about.

“Pockets!” The angry hiss was the response from the marksman.

“Pockets.” They should not have been as surprised as they were. There was always something up the woman’s sleeve. Always.
“Thanks for nothing, Rogers. I was mouthing off to her-”

“Even considered that maybe you shouldn’t do it?”

“Are you calling me black, _kettle_? And fuck off.” The last bit was mumbled under breath as people walked past them. “Anyway. Left Lewis with Potts for now.”

“I thought Stark went looking for her?”

“He did. He went to change.”

“Change? What? Why?” It was not exactly time for a change of attire. “He learned a lesson about why you never barge in on a person while he is taking a piss.” Steve could bet that his facial expression was a study of emotions as he processed it.

“… You are disgusting.”

“It was his own fault. Lewis thought it was hilarious. Also, I'm not handling anything made by Stark for the next few months. I'd rather not have it suddenly explode in my face.”

“It's still disgusting.”

“You should have seen his _face_. It will probably be the reason of my sudden death, but _man_, it was funny.” Did the Museum have internal CCTV? He should check it out… to make sure there weren't any security concerns.

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_Trust Tony to mess things up in most spectacular ways._ Darcy was back and he was nowhere in sight.

“Where is Tony?” The patrons were not so discreetly staring at them as Darcy giggled. Stark’s old flame with his fiancée, that must be getting the rumour mill into a frenzy. People kept coming to congratulate Darcy and Tony was _supposed_ to be present.

“Waiting for a new suit so he can change. I would have stayed with him and kept him company, but he wanted to save what was left of his dignity, apparently. Happy is with him.”

“What happened?” Pepper realized her mistake as soon as Darcy’s eyes got that glint in them that could only mean trouble.

“Tony learned a valuable life lesson of why you never force a toilet door open no matter how much in a hurry you are. I didn’t _see_ it, but the high pitched shriek was the funniest thing I have ever _heard_. I was just round the corner-”

“Please _do not_ give me details-”

“Ladies.” Pepper was in a middle of pleading when they were once again approached by one of the guests. “Miss Potts, Miss Lewis, I believe?”

“Yes?” The gentleman wore the compulsory tuxedo and a cheerful smile.

“Please accept my most sincere felicitations to you and Mr. Stark. I believe I just saw him-”
“Tony went to freshen up. Thank you on behalf of both of us.” Darcy was a real trooper when it came to making polite conversations. That Political Science degree was really paying for itself now. “I don’t believe we have met yet.” The man gave them both a wide smile.

“I’m so sorry. Where are my manners? Alexander Pierce at your service.” SHIELD. That was where Pepper had seen him. Dread crawled up her spine as she watched the man kiss Darcy’s hand. He was someone important. She didn’t quite remember how she knew. Did somebody tell her? The thoughts spun wildly inside her head. Coulson and she were meant to have a meeting with Fury… when that man stormed in and ordered them out. One thing that Pepper Potts knew was that he had not been on the final guest list this morning. “I must say you look breath-taking, Miss Lewis. It truly is a shame you did not take the job with us, having you around would have been a most pleasant experience. Alas.”

“I’m sorry. You must be mistaken me for someone else, Mr. Pierce, I have been with Dr Foster since-”

“Culver was it? I believe Phil mentioned that. Phil Coulson?” Darcy showed barely a mild surprise and an appropriate amount of respect as the late agent’s name was dropped into the conversation. Where in Hell is Tony?

“Ah… yes. Phil. I – I was very sorry to hear about what happened to him.”

“It was a great loss. He's missed by all that knew him.” It was all too easy to blame the suddenly sombre tone on the tightness in Darcy’s voice and her own tension.

“He used to be the go between. We owed great deal to him.” Pepper was not going to deny that at one point Phil Coulson had helped them out. She also was not going to deny that he started manipulating them at one point either.

“Yes. He is indeed. I believe he put great efforts in trying to get you on board, Miss. Lewis.” This time the surprise was not faked as Darcy glanced at her in confusion.

“Well, it's a little late for that sentiment, Mr. Pierce.” Darcy was not going to suddenly jump and join SHIELD. The man was a snake in the grass. The easy manner irked Pepper. He looked very likeable, but that was simply the appearance. At this point anyone but very few people inside the spy organisation was a threat. As much as Pepper would have liked to set off the alarms they had to play the waiting game until they were certain of who was the enemy.

“I- He must have forgotten to mention them to me.” The surprise on Mr. Pierce’s face was sudden and gone just as quick leaving Pepper wondering if she had seen it at all.

“I was under the impression you were offered a position with us.”

“I must say that at best it had been alluded to me that they might be interested in having me do their paperwork. I am sorry, but I did not get a degree to do filing.” It was not really a dismissal of their offer, it was more like upping the stakes. Not that it mattered now. Pierce knew it was impossible that Darcy was going to accept a position within SHIELD after getting engaged to Tony Stark. Setting the general of the conversation was a good call.

“That … was not what I have been told.”

“Well, I assume that there have been some crossed wires somewhere. Shame... Could have done with a solid job offer back then.” And that was how you put the ball back in the opponent’s court.

“Well, both you and Dr Foster seem to be doing quite well now.” Somebody looked slightly irked.
“Yes, thank you.”

“I read your thesis.” Pepper hadn’t, but they had spoken about it and she knew that Darcy hated it on a level. It had received excellent marks but as far as Pepper understood the woman was forced to tailor it to the opinions of the Professor that was marking it. Also, people that had reached positions of power within a secret intelligence organisation did not read works written by an unknown Political Science major. Darcy was on SHIELD’s radar.

“You have spun quite a few very interesting arguments—”

“Honey?” Tony chose the right moment to appear at their side. He looked over their company as his hand once again rested on Darcy’s lower back. It was at that point that Pepper realised that there was pain in her shoulders from the tension. Was that how Darcy felt all that time when she had to deal with SHIELD over the years, knowing what they were trying to fuck them over and having no means to deter it?

“Mr. Stark, let me express the sincerest congratulations on behalf of SHIELD. I was hoping to have a word with you, but I can see that you will be rather preoccupied for the rest of the evening.” Tony did not as much as blink as they shook hands. Their little group had been spotted and was being approached by another hoard of well-wishers.

“Thank you. Yes, this evening I am fully booked, I must say. But it’s very kind of you to drop in this evening.” Weren’t they all just good friends? The redhead kept smiling politely.

“Glad I did. Who would want to miss such an occasion? Miss Potts, it’s been a pleasure. Miss Lewis, maybe we can catch up over lunch someday? I must say a good political argument is not something I come across daily.” Darcy nodded curtly as if she considered the invitation.

“Politics is not the art of the possible. It’s the art of choosing between the disastrous and the unpalatable.” Alexander Pierce smiled in reply as he kissed Darcy’s hand again in farewell, to the obvious displeasure of her intended.

“John Kenneth Galbraith. An excellent point. Hope you both will have a wonderful evening.”

“Holly shit, people. I don’t think that was a good sign.” Honeybunny voiced all of their thoughts in two sentences as she finished her drink while trying to keep her composure as people walked around them.

“I’m sorry, Darcy. I need to talk to Happy. Who else is here that really shouldn’t be... ” They should let the others know... Tony wanted to take his little Spark and hide her. Somewhere safe and far away. “Tony, I got this. You have got other things to do.” Pepper hurried away and before Tony could open his mouth object a familiar voice made them all jump a little.

“Darcy Lou!”

“It’s just Darcy.” SHIELD higher-up showing up rattled everyone present and Tony snapped back before the thought even formed. The presence of the Becketts had been momentarily forgotten as other, more serious, problem reared its ugly head at the most inappropriate time. He had also been quite literally peed on earlier. Literally. So, quite frankly, it was not a good time to be getting in Tony Stark’s face.

“Well, it’s a silly nickname. But you can hardly blame the mother for getting attached to sentimental
names—” Mrs. Beckett’s laugh was like nails on a chalkboard, and there was no way that he was going to stand there and endure it. They had made their point earlier and now both Spark and him had other responsibilities to attend to. He cut in with no regards to the woman speaking.

“Honeybuns, Pep, the Auction is about to resume. I’d rather not be late.”

“Tony—”

“It’s Mr. Stark actually, Mrs. Beckett. Darcy, let’s go.” They must have split up to hunt him and Darcy down because it was only Mrs. Beckett that ambushed them. The woman still had the nerve to look surprised when Tony unceremoniously stepped between her and his fiancée. It was time the Becketts understood that Darcy Lewis wanted nothing to do with the people she once called her family.

The Auction was an unquestionable success. All the items fetched far above their most optimistic estimated price. Everyone wanted to have a piece of history just so they could tell a good story - *I got it on the day Tony Stark announced his engagement, it was such a shock.*

Tony smiled as they took more official photos of the Gala. A selfie with the Mayor naturally, so that his official Twitter Account was one of the firsts to announce the good news to the world with a picture attached.

The news would have filtered down by now to the wide and deep waters of the social media.

“Man of Iron, Sister—” Point Break could hardly be mistaken for anyone else as the blond walked up to them with the lovely Dr Foster in hand.

“Darcy, how do I turn off the notifications from my Facebook account?” Foster in her surprisingly stylish evening gown walked right to them and Tony forced himself not to make a face as Darcy took the device.

“Is it your Mum again? I thought I muted those already.” Spark sounded like she wasn't a big fan of Mrs. Foster.

Tony literally had to dig his heels in have a firm grip on Darcy’s elbow in order not to be simply pushed aside. That earned him an evil look from Point Break’s lady love.

“Dr Foster.”

“Stark.” They were not fans of each other even when they acknowledged their respective professional achievements, other than that, they both thought that the other shouldn’t be within five feet of Darcy Lewis. “Didn’t you wear another suit when you came in?”

“I changed, thanks for noticing.” Since when did Foster cared? Their conversation was a little bit too polite for his taste and that glint in the Astrophysicist's eyes weren't putting him at easy. There was no way-

“Don’t want you to think I am taking a piss—”

“You told her?!” Tony was pretty sure his blood pressure spiked. Foster sniggered under her breath
as she got StarkPhone back from Darcy. Spark had a decency to wince and tried looking as innocent as possible. That was the gratitude he received.

“It was Rogers. I had nothing to do with it. He brought it up… Also it's pretty funny.”

“Point Break— Oh, was that how they were playing this evening? The corners of his lips inched upwards in the same pace Darcy’s went downwards as Tony’s intentions dawned on her. There weren’t many people around as the buffet was now open, giving the couple a short reprieve. He grinned wider.

“Don’t you be a twat—”

“- we had this conversation about warrior spirits? You remember that?” Blond and Godly was eyeing them curiously especially when Darcy hissed under her breath and pinched him. Tony was not going to be deterred. There were good news to be shared.

“I indeed do.”

“Your fellow warriors. You know Romanov, Barton, Rogers, you have met Wilson, right?” Tony had to playfully seize Darcy’s hands so that she would stop pinching his side. “Takes quite a bit to take them lot down, don’t you think?”

“I have fought besides them. No foe could- ” Point Break had a penchant for telling stories and while Tony was certain those were highly entertaining he did not to wait to get his point across as he cut in.

“Darcy did.”

“- accomplish such feat- what?” The look of surprise was replaced by the one of pure pride. As it should have been.

“It was an accident! They freaked me out, ok?! Why are you making it sound like I did it in hand to hand combat? I can’t believe you did this to me, you -.”

The laughter boomed in the room so loud the windows shook, and people nearly ducked for cover in fright.

“Sister! Thou know no equals!”

“She doesn’t, she really doesn’t. She is an Undefeated Champion.”

“I will get you for this, mark my word.”

“Isn’t that treasonous? You know? Taking the Captain down?” Foster as always was missing the point. “And I had a better opinion of him… What did he do?” Ok, so Foster was not as oblivious as she appeared. Tony ignored the question.

“Twice.” The look in Blondie’s face was worth going deaf for. Well, not really, but it was somewhere close. Shortstack on the other hand was unimpressed.

“Seriously, Tony? Fuck off”

“Darcy Lou! Language, please. I am so sorry.” The nightmare in ruffles that was Darcy's mother was coming at them, with Mr. Beckett and the stepdaughter in tow. Not again. Those people were still around? How many times could he drop hints? Mrs. Beckett was clearly trying to mentally will Darcy to apologise. It appeared like they were expecting that social pressure was going to force Tony
Stark to be well behaved. The Becketts were a couple solid decades too late for that.

“Anthony-” Tony rolled his eyes so hard he saw the back of his skull. Mr. Beckett had tuned down his voice and now addressed him with an air of over-familiarity.

“It's Mr. Stark, actually.” Miss Beckett was staring at him like he had grown a second head. “What is the matter… Kim, was it?” Kathryn Beckett stood in between her parents with a phone in hand, Tony caught a glimpse of a picture of himself and Spark from their dramatic entrance earlier.

“I- you are Tony Stark…” Miss Beckett had denial written all over her orange face even as she confirmed an obvious fact and Tony smirked.

“Give Barbie a cookie! You look surprised. Since I've been busy working on my relationship and business. Who did you go out with? Because that was not me. Let me make a wild guess. Did he make you foot the bill? He did, didn’t he? Hope that was all you did for … oh, it wasn’t? You paid the Hotel Bill too? You did. Well, this is awkward.” Oh, this was brilliant, so the step sister was not delusional, she was just unbelievably stupid.

“Well, this is hardly the time to discuss such matters. ”

“Neither is talking to you, but here we are. You look lost, Mr. Beckett. I believe the exit is that way.” Tony was enjoying it. From the corner of his eye he could see Foster bristle like a wet cat, making Point Break put his hand around both his Lady Love and put a protective hand on Darcy’s shoulder, even with Tony standing right next to her.

“Man of Iron enjoys to jest with those around him. I dare say my sister’s sharp tongue is well matched with his wit.” The godly smile was calm and serene, betraying no discomfort at the tense interaction Point Break was witnessing. Tony took a deep breath as the Asgardian spoke. A faint scent of ozone, like a distant whisper of a storm to come, hung in the air. An audience had gathered once again, keen for any kind of gossip regarding the new couple. The Becketts collectively looked at Pepper as Point Break said sister. His ex-girlfriend stared right back adopting the stone-cold persona that the press had long since attributed to her.

“Darcy. He is talking about Darcy.”

“I would say pardon my French, but I don’t speak French and I am not sorry.” Darcy looked and sounded calmest out if the lot of them.

“Well, Darcy has always been a little opinionated.” Why the Becketts found Kathryn’s statement funny was beyond Tony. No one else laughed.

“Yes, strong of spirit and quick of mind. She is a blessing that has been bestowed upon us. ” Spark was clearly touched by his swift reply and praise. That was unfair, Tony said nice things too and never got that look. He fully intended to rectify the situation later on. “I second that. Well said. I’m sorry, Mrs. Beckett, are we in the way? I thought you were passing by, please don’t let us stop you.” He loved having the reputation of an acerbic motormouth because it gave him the excuse to say pretty much anything and he took it. The unceasingly persistent Mrs. Beckett wasn’t getting the hint.

“I was trying to get a moment with my Darcy, such news. Mr. Stark, we are so happy I wish you would have told us. Made us look quite inadequate, but that hardly matters now. We have so much to discuss, to plan and so little time!” It was official, the Becketts were delusional. “I bet you have not even put a thought into your bridal shower. That will not do. Luckily Kathryn is brilliant with all that sort of planning. Darcy Lou, come, lets leave the men to talk business -”
“You take one step towards Darcy, you old hag, I will-” Foster’s voice cut through the surrounding clatter like a hot knife through butter. That was a sentiment shared by many but hearing it said out loud was startling. Plus the astrophysicist sounded more threatening than her short posture suggested. “Let go, Thor!”

“Jane, my love-”

“No, I will not stand here and listen to this. Neither should Darcy. She had a lifetime of this shit. She just got engaged. She does not need this. Oh, let men talk business. Oh, yeah? Bitch. Your daughter has a contract in the works with Stark Industries. Yes, that's right. She has goals and aspirations that has nothing to do with him.” Foster shot Tony a glare as the Becketts sputtered and tried to get a word in. Jane Foster was having none of that. “The education that Darcy Lewis had put herself through, the same education you have tried to deprive her of, and I am not talking of only Culver! If I get the Nobel it will because of all the support that Darcy gave me... And in an all honesty, Stark, you are not good enough for her and I don’t care who knows it.”

“Your opinion is noted, Dr Foster.”

“Well, I never-! Darcy will you let some- some bitter old biddy speak in such a manner to your mother!” Keith Beckett was under the impression that what he thought still mattered around here.

“Enough!” God of Thunder had spoken and the ground shook. Foster froze with her mouth open. Tony imagined she had never heard Point Break get so angry and raise his voice. “Upon what right you raise your voice to my Sister and Lady Jane?”

Believe it or not an attempt was made not to finish this chapter on a cliff-hanger but at 5k words I understood that it wasn't going to happen...

The plot is crawling along... The plot bunnies are not in a hurry no matter how I try, but we will get there eventually. Promise =) 

So how was it? Good? Bad?
Chapter 70

Wino,

I teared up a little thinking of all the work you put in into editing my chapters and making them so much better, especially these last few as the plot bunnies been highly uncooperative.

What would I do without you? Like, seriously?

It is much appreciated and I can't overstate it

xXx

Chapter 70

“Enough!” God of Thunder spoke and the ground shook. Foster froze with her mouth open. “Upon what right you raise your voice to my Sister and Lady Jane?”

Natasha couldn’t help but move closer. She could almost smell it. The carnage. The scent of blood. The hushed whispers of wealthy patrons like deadly currents under the calm surface. The scandal, ripe for picking. She had to wonder how the Becketts did not feel it. The smiles all around them, eager to oh, so politely tear them apart.

She caught 'Rosie' the bodyguard's eyes and smirked at her subtle nod. The professionals had it, no reason to take out the big guns.

For now.

It might have not been her preferred choice of weapon to deal with the situation, but it didn’t mean that she wasn’t going to take pleasure in it.

Temper was one thing that Thor Odinson, the God of Thunder, had plenty. More often so when matters at hand turned to those he held dear.

His return had been joyous, even more so because of the handfast. The Man of Iron had received the favour of his Shield Sister.
He had learned that not all kindships came with blood, either that of birth or that spilled on the battlefield. He had learned that a true counsel often spoke harsh truth, for not all battles were won on those blood-soaked fields nor it was the place that all of them were lost. Thor had thought that such a warrior spirit had been wasted on Midgard, trapped in a frail body, as years took its tool. Upon his travel he had oft yearned for Lady Jane at his side. The passion, the hunger for knowledge, the wonder in her eyes. One day she would travel Bi-Frost with him and not return and now his Sister would not be coming with them. Wouldn't stand beside the Throne of the King and give counsel, make him see things he wished to ignore. Speak reason in mist of chaos. All those years he had spent detesting the advisors of his Father, how foolish he’d been, childish… But he was learning. Learning to speak, to listen, to measure and weight words instead of dealing them out like the blows of his hammer.

It was hard. Like now. Darcy didn’t speak of her family, at least with him. Lady Jane had gotten mightily upset when he enquired, sparing but few harsh words. He didn’t ask again. There were some matters that were not spoken of and he understood that. He had learned at least as much in his youth.

While discretion had always been practised in Court, Thor Odinson had learned that it did everyone good to lay some harsh truths bare for all to see once in a while, for it was to breed hostile gossips if not cleared up. Ill will could not be allowed to hide behind decency and good manners of others and make mockery of generous hearts.

Whatever the issue was between Darcy and those people, her opinion of them was clear, it wasn’t his place to question a decision that must have been made with a heavy heart.

Tony tried not to wince too obviously, the astonishment on the Becketts' faces was all he needed to keep himself in check even as his eardrums rang. Kevin wasn’t deterred and sized Blond and Godly up as if he could take the Asgardian on. It was hilarious to watch. ‘Maybe in your dreams there, Hamburger Helper Man.’

“Who are you? Darcy has a brother. My son. A man with status and reputation!” Next King of Asgard wasn’t a match to a failed accountant in the book of Keith Beckett. Right. “Darcy, there is much for you to learn and it will do you good to listen to your mother for once!” It had to be killing them to see Spark at his side, all dressed up, looking regal, being the centre of attention, being admired and not giving a toss about what they thought of her. The Becketts were trying desperately to get to Darcy. To get her under their control, just like when she was a kid. “What do you do? Some manual work, from looks of things!” And that was how one Keith Beckett reached all the way to China. Point Break was getting upset. Tony could tell without looking as the air felt static. Should they move aside? He would hate Spark’s dress to get blood on it, he was quite looking forward to ripping it off her later under much more pleasant circumstances.

“There is no shame in honest work, I wish my hands were gifted to create more than they have destroyed, but I fear I am not equal to those that rebuild after all turns to rubble and ash. I am Thor, son of Odin. Lady Darcy has chosen to call me her brother and I am humbled by such honour.” Even tone could still convey a lot of anger in it. Tony could bet money that it was raining outside. Strongly. Big Blond was keeping himself in check, trying not to say anything that could somehow reflect badly upon Darcy. It was after all her big evening and the Becketts were making a ruckus that wasn’t appreciated.

“Not as much as I am, Thunder-bro. Don’t get yourself worked up, none of them knows what working is. Besides, Keith, it seems that she stopped being my mother the day she married you.”
Darcy’s voice showed just a touch a trembling. Tony closed his eyes for a moment. That must have hurt... Admitting that for all those years Spark didn’t have a mother. There had only been Mrs. Beckett, the woman living a separate life, far away from her only child.

“Darcy Lou, how can you say that? You are my flesh and blood.” Mrs. Beckett couldn’t act to save her life, or public opinion for that matter, because surprised whispers spread around like wildfire. The attempt to sound hurt missed the target by a mile.

“When is my birthday?” Darcy watched the drink swirl in the glass as she said that.

“I- what?” That caught the woman of guard badly.

“My birthday? The day you pushed me from between your legs into this word? What day of the year was it?” He knew that. Surely the woman that was there for the event knew the day.

“This is silly-” Mrs. Beckett looked at her husband and stepdaughter as if looking for clues and Tony wanted to facepalm.

“It is. You want to plan my wedding, but you don’t even know when you birthed me? Thank you for the offer, but I will have to pass, since I wouldn’t trust you with watering a plastic plant that belongs to me-” Tony wouldn’t trust that woman either … Wait … No, way was it…

“It’s plastic? The fern is fake? You had me water it!” Tony intended to whisper, but as everyone was holding their breath it went quite far.

“At least you didn’t find out about it four years down the line, like some.” There was saltiness in Foster’s voice. It was meant to be mumbled to the side, but everybody heard it too.

“Shows how much attention you pay to things I ask you to do, Tony. Jane, I am not apologising for it. You didn’t actually expect me to gift you a real plant? You forget to water yourself on occasions.” Darcy Lewis must have been cackling at his attempts to keep the damn thing alive. The cheeky smile confirmed the suspicion just as Foster objected.

“Of course, I watered it! Regularly.”

“With coffee?”

“Only sometimes! Its 99 percent water anyway.” “It’s mostly water and It happened once!” The outrage in their voices made the crowd chuckle. People were trying to pretend not to watch what was unfolding but it was futile attempt at this point. Tony wasn’t amused.

“I am mostly, like, 99 percent sane, but then I have you two in my life.” Tony couldn’t help himself and muttered ‘Kids’ under his breath loud enough for Spark to hear and earn him a glare. “Besides, sometimes it is good to have something to break you two out of the Science! rut. Thor’s my witness, life can’t all be science.”

“It indeed cannot, Sister. Well said.”

Tony liked how this was going. The fake fern, though… that was a dirty move. He knew there was something wrong with that thing.

But then he looked, really looked, at her face.

It was hurting her. Tony could tell. The straight spine, the tension in her shoulders. Spark had done her part, she had declared the woman not to be her mother. The tie had been severed. The Becketts
were just throwing salt into the wound by refusing to back down and dragging it out for all to see, they had to take control of the situation instead of Spark just defending herself. Antagonising those that had the ability to bring the delusional provincials to their knees in more ways than one was their final mistake.

Thunder was heard outside and the building vibrated from its force. Darcy could stand her ground and defend herself, but she deserved a break, Spark deserved someone else defend her for once. Because she deserved it, deserved to other people to defend her corner. Also, he has lost his patience some time back where Becketts were concerned and didn't want a fight on his hands tonight because he wanted to protect her.

He stared at her meaningfully. The earnest look he was working must have done the trick because Spark laughed just as Mr. Beckett spoke up again, cutting the man of. “Fine, you tell them, Tony.” the rest was lost as he kissed her soundly on the lips doing his best not to get too much of her lipstick on himself.

“Allright! We’re in business. Or I am in business. So sorry guys. I got the priority pass here. Maybe next time?” Neither Foster nor Thunder-bro-to-be were impressed by this appointment, Pep and the Board handled it slightly better, but the glares implied that they expected the matter to be closed swiftly.

“This is quite unseemly, I think this matter should be discussed in a more private setting.” Kevin finally caught on that they were making spectacle of themselves and Tony grinned. He was aware that they had attracted the attention of anyone within earshot. It was all about how you twisted it and Tony Stark had a lifetime of practise.

“Kevin-”

“Keith!”

“That’s what I said. Now, privacy is good, it's just a little hard to come by these days, and these few months have been exhausting. I mean how can you hide this absolute perfection?” Tony pointed to Darcy with both hands and her cheeks went adorably pink. “I haven’t checked but it must be illegal at the very least. I've been trying to shout from the rooftop about it, but it's the height of the Tower you see, the sound doesn’t carry that well in NYC.”

“Tony-” Keith tried again, and Tony was just too happy to set him straight.

“No. Since you like being official I am Tony Stark so that's Mr. Stark as previously mentioned. Now-”

“Well, Mr. Stark, I hope this silly quarrel between the women won’t get in the way of common sense.” So now the entire situation was being showed as a silly little spat between the ladies now?

“Oh, no. Of course not.” Tony nodded good-naturedly.

“Excellent, I expected nothing less.”

“I don’t generally practice it. Gets really boring, you see. Darcy can testify to that, I am a bit of a pain when it comes to it. We make a good team in that way, or any other way. Don’t you just love intelligent women?” Tony made a face as if he just had a sip of bottom shelf scotch just by looking at the man’s wife and daughter. “Ugh. I nearly forgot. You wouldn't know. Well, you can take my word for it, it’s great. But I guess you just wanted a woman on your own level, which is a fair play. It also makes sense why Darcy never took the trip home after leaving. It mustn't have been a very
stimulating environment. Or was it because she wasn’t welcome?” Tony was throwing stones in their garden like it was an Olympic sport and it was just the beginning. After he was done even the sleazy tabloids won’t be making any positive associations between Darcy and them lot.

“Of course, she was welcome to visit! What nonsense. Darcy likes to exaggerate-” Keith Beckett was quite red in the face and Tony just shrugged, making it clear no one was buying the lame excuse. Yet, Mrs. Beckett looked all affronted about the suggestion.

“I was under the impression that it was the other way around. My mistake. So, you must be really proud of her then. Culver, huh? It’s no MIT, but still. I am trying to convince her to do her post-grad there, so there is still hope she will be attend where she should have gone. Loved the photos, though. You weren’t there, I note, Mrs. Beckett?” The woman shifted uncomfortably, struggling to keep her composure. The stepdaughter started getting red, seeing where the conversation was going. The Becketts wanted to make Darcy look bad? For that he was going hang their dirty laundry for everyone to see.

“Oh… Yes, that was a misunderstanding, you see-” Kathryn’s fake laugh was a dead give away as she protested.

“That’s right. I remember why. Kim was engaged and Darcy wasn’t and so you couldn’t make it to her graduation? And the wedding was called off shortly after. Shame that. So sorry, Kim, did you accidentally open your mouth and said something? I have heard you did that before and I can see that putting a man off. Not all women can be Darcy, I guess.”

“A woman doesn’t need to travel god knows where to get an education, and Kathryn is well bred-”

“No.” Oh, how he loved slamming them right down. The look of surprise followed by the anger. Fun, fun, fun. Nothing ever offended people more than the truth. “Oh, while we are on the topic of education. Which I believe was bypassed in any meaningful way by you or your kids, what happened to Darcy’s trust fund, Kelvin?” He checked up on that as he waited for a fresh, pigeon piss free suit. “You didn’t squander it on gambling and lavish purchases for other women, did you?”

“Darcy knew that we didn’t approve of going so far away. Going away like that. What for? There were plenty of good-” Mrs. Beckett was nearly all in his face hissing like a snake. Tony stepped forth and made her step back in surprise. The woman was coming too close to Darcy and he wasn’t going to allow it.

“Cheap you mean, or in some cases free public schools that give at best some home economy studies? Your husband spent Darcy’s entire inheritance on hookers and you say she didn’t deserve the money because she wanted to attend a good school in another state?” The words went right over the woman’s head, she didn’t even flinch. She knew… All that time when her daughter struggled to make ends meet, she knew, maybe even used some of that money… Tony clenched his jaw. It wasn’t about the money. The amount wasn’t even a drop in the ocean for him it was that that money was for Spark’s education, so she wouldn’t have had to work two shitty jobs and count pennies as not to starve.

“What nonsense! You have no idea what you are talking about, Mr. Stark. Darcy likes telling long tales-”

“Financial Fraud.”

“What?”

“The lawyers indicated that it isn’t quite legal, spending someone else’s money, you see.” And that
was how you lost any sort of credibility. It wasn’t the accusation. It was the panic on their faces. The
captured in the act look for just a moment before they got a grip, but it was too late already. Every
other person in the room heard and saw the reaction. The rumours were going to travel down the
grapewine faster than any credible news.

“What fraud? This is ridiculous. Father, you can’t let him talk to us like that?!” High pitch voice of
Miss Beckett that was trying to get over the humiliation of her failed engagement being public
knowledge among the New York City’s high society; society that she no doubt intended to join.

“Kathryn, be quiet. Mr. Stark, I hate to tell you that you have been misinformed. You’re a man that
should know not to listen to gossip. A man of your integrity should know how-”

“One would think, but Kevin, one can learn many interesting things from listening to them. For
example -”

“You are clearly not thinking straight to be repeating some vile rumours in a reputable company, Mr.
Stark! I won’t stand here and listen to it.” Finally. Tony pointed in the general direction of the exit.
The disappointment was clear on the Becketts’ faces. What did they expect? He was going to
beg them to reconsider? He was going to hold the door open to make sure it hit them on the way out.
That was the only thing he would consider the doing.

“Then don’t let us detain you any longer, in that case. I believe you will find the way out, Melvin.”

“Good riddance.” Foster couldn’t refrain from a parting shot and she dared the Becketts say
anything. They didn’t.

The Becketts left surrounded by the general air of righteous indignation and just a touch of fear that
they weren’t able to fully hide. Spark watched them go before breaking the silence.

“That was… not fun. Satisfying, sorta, but... I hope we won’t have to do it again.”

“We won’t, Spark, you won’t have to be this near to them again. Now! How about some drinks? I
was under impression we’re celebrating something special. Did you give a thought about the after
party? I have this place booked-”

The place was met most of his expectations, what did make it amazing was Spark as they tore that
dance floor apart.

“Ugh… Ugh… Ugh! Oh, Thor… Tony. Why in Hell did I let you talk me into this party thing?
We’re on You Tube… Oh, God… There’s more… This isn’t real… Jesus… It got a half a million
views… what the- Okay… how did we not get kicked out of the club for that?” A tablet was pushed
into his face and Tony groaned as he was forced to peel his cheek from the pillow to look at the too
bright screen. He remembered parts of that. They had all kind of fun last night. His body ached in
that pleasant way and Tony stretched snuggling closer.

“Because I pay well and technically that was a private event… Spark… please…. Can we sleep-” At
one point he might have tried outdrinking a certain Blond and Godly or Rogers, not on purpose
because he wasn’t suicidal, but there had been a lot of alcohol and copious amounts of it found their
way in him.

“Thor’s speech is on Twitter. Like somebody put it all out there… #ThunderBro is trending. So is
#DarcysIronBalls. That… is rather unoriginal. I wonder… Oh! Somebody tagged me in a picture
where we both volunteered at an animal shelter in London… Thor looks so much like a giant golden retriever… Jane looks like a wet cat. I guess some things just don’t change.”

“Uh.”

“Hey! Give that back. Tony, come on…” The tablet was swiftly taken and showed into drawer of the bedside table.

“We came back barely a couple of hours ago. The news will still be there when we wake up well rested. Please?” He tugged the blanket around Darcy before he laid next to her. The room was dark again blissfully free from the glare of the electronic device.

“Nesting…”

“Huh?” The eyelids felt like they were glued together as he groaned into her hair that as per usual somehow landed onto his face.

“Your nests are the best, Cuddle Cakes.”

“… okay.” He had no idea what she talking about or what she even meant with 'cuddle cakes' when it didn't involve a taser... but it sounded as a close to a compliment as it could so Tony took it as one when he drifted back to sleep.

As you can tell the plot bunnies been running in in circles but I managed to round them up and make something of a chapter!

Keep me going my lovely, Peeps! Been needing inspiration lately.

I just feel so drained after the winter. So let me know what you think, honestly, please help me keep this story going!
Interlude – Chapter 70.1

Jack Cooper had always prided himself on his even temper. People loved testing it in countless ways. Everywhere. At work and, more often than not, at home. The thirty years of marriage had their fair share of sharp turns, bends and hoops that they had jumped through. It was life. The highs and the lows. All part of the deal. He took a swing of the cold beer that his wife handed to him.

“This tension is too much. Did you catch him cheating and now making him confess? Because if you did, my faith in true love is gone.” He shouldn’t raise to the bait. He really shouldn’t.

“Gone? We’ve been married for nearly thirty years.”

“Yes, most of which I spend cleaning up children’s puke in odd places and washing your underwear, Jack Cooper. It lost the shine a little-”

“I get you flowers! Like today!”

“I know. I am still trying to figure out what you did.” Jack stared at his wife before turning to continue peeping at the couple in his back garden. Mack was breaking some news to Lauren and—yep, tears, his useless partner started with the shitty ones first. What for? That part didn’t matter! The good news was bigger and better and came with a far better benefits package. “Were you unfaithful?”

“When, woman? I had work to do and that to look after. Besides who would want me?”

“I do. You still got the nicest butt in the whole state, Mr. Cooper.” The pinch was hardly a surprise, but he still jerked a little as he tried to swat the hand away.
“Damn it, woman, keep those hands to your damn self-”

“What are you waiting for?” What was he waiting for? Maybe a sudden awakening from this feverish nightmare that he been stuck in for the last few days? Jack could do with that. They dragged their asses back from the big apple a few hours ago. Jack had to admit that it was hardly the end of problems for him and Mack.

“So, what happened in the big bad city to my nice southern boys? You've been all out of sorts since I picked the both of you from the airport.” Jack watched his partner try to explain the same thing to the Mrs and sighed. Where should he begin?

Flashback

Jack shook his head. What was he doing? Last night messed up his head and sense of reality. Some news could do that to a man.

“Hey, sleeping beauty. Wake up. We got a big day ahead.” Mack let out a pitiful groan and pulled the cover over his head. If only that would solve their problems. “Come on, Macky. Let’s go get some breakfast. Department's treat. Let’s squeeze it before they cancel our tickets and tell us to walk home.” At this point their options were limited. They could keep their mouth shut and incur the wrath of Keith Beckett and his goons or they could tattle and incur the wrath of people that Becketts looked like a school-yard bully against. It was safe to say they didn’t intend to do the latter because… mainly because they weren’t stupid.

“Jack… Jack… I’m dying…”

“Bet greasy fry-up with coffee strong enough to kill a horse would cure you right up.”

“This bed smells nice…”

“It is a sofa and I think that might be just the new furniture smell.”

It took shorter than Jack anticipated for his partner to bold upright with panic and nausea written all over his pale face as he stammered.

“The - the girl and Iron Man! The Iron Man! And- and – and- oh, god, the toilet…” Yeah, it was pretty much the reaction he had an hour ago, just quietly in another room.

“Just breathe, Mack. In and out. In and out… All good.” His last statement could be debated.

“I hugged Iron Man and that tall blond- Thor?” There was a lot of drunk hugging at the end.

“Technically you hugged Tony Stark. Don’t worry he looked just as surprised as you are now.”

“What is this place? It looks-”

“We are still at the Tower.”

“-Expensive… Why?”
“Because we got black out drunk and Captain America had to carry you to bed. Tucked you nicely in too.” Ok, so maybe he was taking slight pleasure at the shock. He was going to miss this annoying man once they parted ways.

“He seems very nice…”

“Or just good at following orders. It looks like all here listen to the Lady of the House. Or would that be of the Tower? Anyhow. I’m starving. Get your lazy ass up.” The water could only keep him going for that long.

“He did not tuck me in…” Mack looked conflicted. Captain America was sure cool, but tucking somebody in sounded a little… odd.

“Well, in that case we had a night time visitor that did that. Everything is different in the big City, don’t you think? Back home you would have lost everything that wasn’t nailed down. Here-”

“Oh, Lord, Jack, shut up. I am getting up. Alright!”

Mack’s phone rang just as they had their coffees refilled the second time. They were in a Diner in Brooklyn where Captain America swore the best breakfast in the city was served. The food didn’t disappoint nor was it as extortionately expensive as they had expected.

“Detective Mack speaking… Oh, hi, Boss, you want to speak to… No I… We have been very busy, yes. No, I haven’t listened to all my voicemails this morning, Sir. I…. Yes, naturally.”

“Was that Dominic?” Here it came. His bosses not so secret agenda. Mack had read all his voicemails. He always did. Diligently. His partner was a good man. Maybe not cut out for detective work but he was smart in other ways, and he meant well. Funny how impending separation put everything in perspective. Huh… When the crunch came some things turned out to be more important than others. Like his career as a detective. Jack did what he had believed in for twenty years… Just to have Dominic’s political ambitions try and undermine it. Political ambitions were a dangerous thing for small fries and his boss was just that. There had always been signs that he wanted to be more to be the man in front of the cameras. Run for office Unfortunately that required generous donations, knowing the right people… The right rich people. Like the Becketts for example, or some of their friends.

“Yes…”

“Let Lauren know that your phone is dying and tell her to call me if they need something and switch it off.” They weren’t going to tattle that much was clear. They didn’t really discuss it. They didn’t have to. Their boss called Mack up last night and requested Miss Lewis contact details to be passed to him so that the family could get in touch with her. Tony Stark’s stony face flashed before Jack’s eyes every time he thought of that. There was another voicemail today, angrier and more demanding.

“You sure?”

“Yes. Besides, he will be receiving your resignation later today.”

“You sound like one half of the previously happy couple that got told about imminent divorce. You know we can still be friends, right?”
“Shut up and eat your pancakes or your wife will accuse me of not looking out for you, you scrawny little shit.”

The food was greasy and in combination with some painkillers eased the pounding headaches. They spend the next few hours going 'round the City. Taking in the sights. Might as well make the most of it, why not? What else could they do? Their work had been cut out for them. They bought some knick-knacks, sampled some surprisingly good street food. Took painfully cheesy tourist photos. They weren’t held in the Stark Tower. A point was made to them about the seriousness of the situation, by several very serious people, and they took it.

Apart from that the was going just fine until a half way into the ‘informal’ meeting with the lawyers Jack’s phone rang. He was tempted not to answer, but that wasn’t going to make the problem go away so he leaned back in the expensive meeting chair as the room fell silent. He missed the old phones where he was able to aggressively press the buttons.

“Detective Cooper.”

“Hey, Coop. I was just trying to get hold of Mack-”

“His phone died. Those new issue work phones not worth a damn dime.”

Dominic sounded irritated. “You told me that already. Listen… You know why I am calling. Let the family get in touch. You have to understand they are concerned. Bet that boyfriend is milking her. You saw him, Coop. Men like that use women. He’s violent. What did she tell you? Not much, I bet. Defending him all the way? He is what? Fifty?” All things considered that wasn’t a bad sob story as sob stories went. Dominic knew he had a soft spot for domestic abuse victims. Everyone deserved to feel safe in their own homes in nowhere else. Yeah… Things weren’t looking good for his boss. Everyone had clustered around him and the phone.

“Actually he seemed like a decent sort of chap believe it or not.”

“You met the boyfriend? When did that happen?” Oh, boy, did he and Mack meet the boyfriend. They sure did. In all his arrogant, superior glory. The man was one of a kind. Thank God for that.

“They live together. Nice little place.” That generated some interest.

“Excellent. Where is that?” ‘U S of No, Not your business.’

“Manhattan. I think. Didn’t catch the address. We were driven there.” Stark’s lawyer was taking notes.

“A little snazzy for a secretary. And you always note the address, Jack. Always.” True, it was hard to miss that big shiny Tower.

“Would recognize the place, not really sure about the post code-”

“What are you playing at? Jack… The mother just wants to talk to the girl. They’re in Town for a Charity Gala. Kids these days -”

“Have the right to decline to share their whereabouts.”

“Ok. Ok. So, none of us are a fan of Keith Beckett. Give the man break-” Oh, well… That was entirely different song from the one Jack got before leaving. The man in question wasn’t going to get a break anytime soon, not with Tony Stark thinking that Becketts abused his wife-to-be. Miss Lewis had created a little family of her own and sometimes old and the new doesn’t mix well.
“Why don’t we talk about this when I come back?”

“I don’t think you understand the situation I am in-” Jack understood it just fine. His boss and long-time friend had sold out to have a shot at Mayor’s chair next year. The lawyers indicated for him to end the conversation. They needed to sort Mack’s situation first. The resignation letter had to go out.

Hmm… If they caught the first plane back tomorrow, and he asked Grace to do the shopping this evening barbeque still could happen. Oh, yes. They had things to celebrate and news to share after all.

End Flashback

“He’s quitting? Why? You are going to talk Mack out of it, right?”

“Trust me. He has better thing on the horizon-”

“They can’t afford it right now!” Grace was tearing up at his side as they watched the couple in the bck garden talk, they both looked very emotional.

“Was I the only one that didn’t know about the adoption?”

“No one knows about it. They like to keep things private. Well, that’s a shame. Is that why you came back with this black cloud hanging over you? It’s unlike you to throw a party when you’re in a mood like this.” Shit was going to go down, no choice for them there. But that didn’t mean they couldn’t enjoy the show.

“We got good news to share too. I’m not telling you, though. It’s pretty big.”

“Mr Cooper, I demand that you share-”

“It’s a surprise. Everyone will be surprised. Trust me. I will get the fire started once that idiot stops making his wife cry.”

Mack stopped making Lauren cry and they were finally able to get the fire going for the meat. They mood decidedly improved and they enjoyed the last cold sunrays of the day as their clothing got scented by the sizzling beef ribs as they did their best not talk about the trip.

By the time food was all done and Grace was ready to burst with all the questions she had to keep inside out of fear of upsetting Lauren, Dominic Rolf decided to show his face. His boss showed up fashionably late and ruined the last chance to make Jack believe that he hadn’t completely sold out to Keith Beckett. Well, these things happened. Dominic didn’t even bring the wife. Maybe they were too important for a casual little get together? Never mind that. Jack Cooper had enough friends.

The TV started playing in the background set on some Social News Channel none of them ever watched, except today that is.

“Dominic! I thought you weren’t going to come. Isn’t Annie with you?”

“I’m not staying long, Mrs Cooper. Just popped in and will be going shortly.” Mr Boss Man’s cool attitude took Grace aback a little, but his wife as always recovered swiftly, never losing her warm
charm. Jack assumed it was all to put him on notice how displeased Dominic about what happened.

“That’s a shame, Dominic. But take a seat anyway. We’ve got the food ready.”

“And watching TV? Not very sociable.” The airy phrase made Jack grit his teeth. It was cheap little shot. So they were a little too low class now for the mighty Mr Rolf? Mack didn’t even get a greeting while their guest sat down. We’ll see about who isn’t good enough for whose company.

“They are showing a program about New York City. A kind of documentary type program-” Grace tried defusing the situation.

“Mack, why don’t you show some of the pictures we took?” With account for time difference Jack assumed that all hell was about to break loose in the big City. His, now former partner didn’t as much a say a word as he separated from his equally silent partner and hooked the IPhone to their new fancy smart TV.

There was a folder prepared specially for this occasion consisting of their time there.

“Cooper, I’d rather have a word-” There had been ample opportunities for that. Dominic missed all of them. Jack smiled as he sat back with a beer in hand watching the slideshow start.

“I’d rather you woke up and smelled the roses, Dominic. But that's not likely to happen is it? I did tell you Miss Lewis works at Stark Tower, right? By the way, she’s a very nice young woman. I would usually say a credit to her family, but that doesn’t seem appropriate in this situation.”

“You can say she’s a catch, Coop. She’s a real nice girl.” Mack grinned at his wife, who thankfully was back in high spirits after the far better second news, as they shared a private joke and Jack tried to scowl disapprovingly.

The tacky classic tourist photos changed one another. Times Square. Central Park. Plates full of food at that nice Diner. Them looking like two dweebs in from of the Stark Tower. Captain America flashing his best smile as he stood in between them.

“Jack Cooper, you old fart, how dare you not to tell me you met Captain America!” Grace nearly fell over.

“Very nice fella.” Mack nodded as if that was no big deal.

“Well, that is hardly earth-shattering news-” The next photo popped up as Dominic sneered and voiced his indifference. Tony Stark’s wide smile pointed at the camera and he shook hands with Jack.

“Mr Stark is a bit of an acquired taste. Like strong cheese, the Italian sort Jack likes. You know, the one that smells like gym socks.” They got to try some exquisite food there. Jack didn’t have a taste for anything else but the strangely smelling cheese. He loved that.

“Mr Stark doesn’t smell, don’t confuse people-”

Jack glared at his wife as she spoke. “I could watch that man smile all day.”

The minimized TV channel, at the corner of the screen, chose the perfect moment start running bright red ‘Breaking News’ headline catching everyone’s eyes.

“Mrs Cooper, I wouldn’t get excited; Mr Stark is spoken for, last we heard-”
The News took up the whole screen again and camera showed man helping a woman get out of a sports car. She straightened and the man, Tony Stark, smiled adoringly at her. The news sure travelled fast. Jack held his breath as Mack piped up also hardly able to hold back his enthusiasm. It was happening. The big reveal.

“She’s nicer than him.”

“She is a pretty little thing.” Dominic spoke like a pompous ass, clearly having picked up the attitude from the new ‘friends’ he has been rubbing should with. “He gets them by the dozen probably.”

“Well, I think Miss Lewis would have a thing or two to say about it.”

The happy couple did their posing for the cameras. Jack’s boss frowned.

“I’m talking about Tony Stark.”

“Yeah, me too.” Jack nodded to the screen where camera flashes were illuminating the couple. “Tony Stark and his charming other half, Miss Darcy Lewis.”

Help me feed those phot bunnies =) Let me know what you think! Please? =)
Chapter 72

Wino,

I dread to think what would I do without you

as always, your help is much appreciated

xxx

Chapter 71

At first there was no reaction. The statement went over the heads of people not yet in the know. Maybe Jack was being petty, sitting there, cold beer in hand barely suppressing the hysterical laughter bubbling inside every time he shared a look with Mack, who was in the similar state. Yes, the barbecue had been a good idea.

“What?” Dominic looked from the screen to him and back. The cameras were flashing, the lavishly dressed couple kept smiling, ignoring the question being shouted at them. The thing with livestreams was that they always seemed so far away from your ordinary every day life. Like now.

“Remember, the famous Miss Lewis? The reason you had us go all the way to New York City? Keith Beckett’s stepdaughter? That’s her.” The TV screen split in two again, one side with the view from the front steps of the Natural History Museum, the other the same couple looking much more casual back in the Tower.

“I don’t know what joke you are pulling here, Jack. She is dating a Tony Stark impersonator. Is that him? Well, in that case no wonder they live in Manhattan, the likeness is uncanny. Also, you might want to check your eyes if you fell for that. You can see –” Dominic Rolf was a stubborn ass, Jack couldn’t help but laugh out loud. This was entertaining and no mistake.

“Likeness? Dominic. Look at them. So, who is Tony Stark with there? An impersonator of Darcy Lewis? A woman no one has heard of up until now.” The excited chatter of the presenter drowned their voices for a minute as Mack turned the volume up.

“Breaking News. We have just received this footage from our correspondent in New York City. They have just gone inside. Alice, can you tell us more about this? No one really expected for this to happen.” The correspondent Alice, a tall blond, smiled at the camera as she adjusted her ear piece.

“Good evening, Joan. Tony Stark has indeed showed up to the much-anticipated event of the year, the Annual Gala of Maria Stark Foundation. And he was not alone. If you have a look at the footage again. They looked spectacular. My goodness, the excitement here is overwhelming. That man
knows how to make an entrance, ladies and gentlemen. The mystery woman, I have no doubt you can see looked gorgeous! ...But if we are talking about looks that is quite a change in taste for Mr Stark. Do we have the picture of him and the Mystery Woman? From couple of months ago? I think I have seen it like a million times and it looks like the same person. The hair, the jawline, Tony Stark glued to her side. I mean we all have seen the press conference given by SI's spokesperson announcing that Mr Stark was in a relationship. Which, I think, came as quite a shock-“ The grainy photo had a much better likeness to the security footage they were given.

Mr Rolf was hanging into his obvious denial tight. “It can’t be…”

“Why not? I mean the odds are much lower than winning the lottery, but why not? The lady on TV is right: they make quite a couple. You should see them in person. Mack can confirm. Tony Stark went hook, line and sinker for Miss Lewis. You think he looks taken by her? Trust me, it is so much more than that. He seems very dedicated.” Dominic scrambled to his feet trying to get the phone out of his jeans’ pocket. Jack smirked. It was a just a shade too late, but he had to admire the keenness. “You should have heard what his opinion of the people that abused the woman he intends to marry is.”

Yes, it was petty. But that was payback. Dominic chose to put the authority he had for his personal gains. It was regretful. But so was Miss Lewis having to have endured years of abuse at the hands of people that were meant to protect her. If Jack was to be honest, he had a lot of admiration for Miss Lewis. For someone who suddenly winded up with a lot power wrapped around her ring finger she stayed remarkably grounded. Mr Stark was a lucky man.

The panic on Dom’s face froze into an ugly mask as he blinked owlishly at him and Mack.

“Abuse? Intends to marry?” And the penny dropped. Loudly. You could smell the fear in the air. Mack took a seat again after grabbing another cold one. Dominic had thrown him under the ongoing traffic when they were still in NYC. ‘Do as I say or I will get you fired.’ In nicer words, naturally. But that was the idea, wasn’t it? To throw the weight of Police Chief against a young officer. Who would pick Mack’s side in such situation? Very, very few people. It was abuse of power in its simplest form. Jack never expected his friend to take that road. Mack kept glancing at him, as if trying to gauge how to proceed. Jack shrugged and gave a discreet little nod as he popped a piece of meat into his mouth, indicating that Mack could take over now.

“Yes. But don’t tell anyone just yet. It happened two days ago. If you look carefully you can make out the ring. Good on them. They are sweet on one another. Quite rare in those circles, I imagine.” Mack was gloating. He came within a hair’s breadth of losing more than just the Police batch. “By the way, this is not the only piece of news. Jack, man, really, we nearly forgot!” Dominic still stood phone in hand, suddenly unsure what to do. It looked like he was struggling to accept that the woman on TV was the one he was supposed to get contact details for. Because, honestly, what were the odds? “My bad! Dominic, please sit down. Trust me you will want to hear this sitting down.” Jack casually pointed back at the seat that was a minute ago occupied by his boss.

“Sitting down?” The man stammered. “Jack, Goddamn it. Is it true? Is that really her? Do you two have any idea?!-“

“Oh, before I forget, you probably don’t want to bring those assault charges against Mr Stark. That would not end well, I been told. Because, you know, a man with billions to his name usually has good lawyers-”

“Why didn’t you tell me! Why didn’t you bloody call and told me-” There was few very good reasons. Jack shrugged.
“Because up to the point you started to threaten us, we could have passed that as a welfare visit. And it was interesting. It was, wasn’t it, Jack? It was interesting to meet the CEO of Stark Industries, their head lawyers... And guess what, Dominic? All of them were angry. You probably want to know why? Because Miss Lewis is well liked there. Oh! Did I mention we met a genuine alien, like from another planet? A crown prince no less. He is part of the Avengers. The tall, blond guy with a hammer? Thor? Can fly? So, he calls Miss Lewis his sister. As in ‘I will bring the wrath of Heaven and Hell upon you if you harm her’ sister. Nice bloke. Wasn’t he nice, Jack?”

“Very. I don’t think anyone told him about the fact that Becketts abused Miss Lewis. But, Macky, you are getting side-tracked. The good news?”

“Yes, yes, of course. I am sorry, I thought of Stark Industries dragging the entire Department through dirt for years because of what Mr Rolf asked us to do. They sure have resources and Mr Stark sure loves Miss Lewis enough to commit to a crusade on her behalf.”

“Mack!”

“Alright! Alright. Old man, keep your pantaloons on. So where were we? The good news. Right, right. So, what I am about to tell you is not yet widely known, but it has been confirmed. I think everyone has heard about the massive stretches of wetlands being sold by the State? Guess who is not getting their grubby hands on them because Stark Industries pulled their cheque book out and intends to invest tens of millions of dollars into the building of echo friendly, massive manufacturing complex? They estimate that around twelve hundred work places will be created in the first two years. And I am talking directly working there. So that will come with an addition of roughly another nine hundred intermediate places, such like cleaning, delivery, security and child care. They will be providing free childcare for their staff during working hours.”

“Which is very nice of them.” Lauren finally spoke up. The serene voice still a little tight.

“It is. Very. Ok. What did I miss? Oh, yes. The good news have been delivered to you by Stark Industries’ newest employee as of yesterday, the Finance Consultant, Robert Mack. They are really keen to review companies before contracting them for the massive coming works. A bit of a fraud prevention, always a good idea.” And that was how you stick it to the man. Jack gave a slow clap. He had half expected Mack to just yell into Dominic’s face that he already found a job, better pay, better benefits… just better. Jack turned to his wife and patted her knee as the woman just sat there open-mouthed, processing all the news.

“I am sorry, Honey, but you will have to get rid of that ‘No Fracking You Fucks’ sign,” he joked.

“No… no. Keith Beckett had the winning bid…” Was the boss becoming a tad green at the gills?

“I am not sure what happened, he could as well have had the advantage at some point. Who knows? Who cares? Also, if you for any reason wish to contact me please do so though SI’s legal department.” Mack pulled out a business card and handed it to his former boss with air of satisfaction.

Fame was a tricky thing. Darcy had since decided that it was like a balloon. The bendy one that was shaped like a poodle. The anticipation of it taking shape, seeing it grow, that high-pitched sound both grating your nerves and fanning the excitement. At one point it gets so big you know it will blow and most people expect things like massive fanfare and being suddenly showered with cotton candy, glitter, unicorns and wads of cash.
But that was expectations of most people. Darcy Lewis, on the other hand, was a political science major. Yeah, so when your name explodes all over the media of all descriptions, you don’t get unicorns and glitter. No. You get shit and shrapnel. That was how it worked. That was why Darcy never wanted to be famous. That ‘Thunder bro’ hashtag was cool but-

“Sugar Plum, it will take, at most, three _maybe_ four minutes.”

“You said that about the shower sex this morning. I start to believe you might be downplaying things a little bit.”

“You’re welcome, I was glad to be of service. Now, all they want us to do is go there and smile for the cameras.”

“No.”

“Three minutes tops?”

“Which part of no you don’t get? N or O?”

“Two and a half and we _skip_ the questions.”

“Tony, are we having the same conversation here? I am starting to have doubts.”

“Honeybunny, my little Spark…”

“...You already promised we were going to show up, didn’t you?”

“See? We have the next level communication. We should show it off.”

“We don’t have the next level communication. It seems you haven’t mastered listening yet. We took an official photo the other day, they can use that on a big screen.”

Darcy at least to herself had shown remarkable restraint and didn’t google herself or go check on the internet. To be fair they had just gotten out of the bedroom, but the temptation was great.

“Honeybuns.” If there was one thing that Darcy was sure she was never going to get used to was Tony’s high pitch whining. And he did that exceedingly well.

“This is your secret super power, isn’t it? You annoy people until they just cave?”

“Only in extreme situations. 99.9% of other problems get solved by money. What do you say, Spark? No rush? Breakfast? A quick stint in front of the cameras? All they have are yesterday’s photos and we naturally look fantastic in them, but it is starting to get boring seeing the same thing everywhere.”

“Maybe because we are on every single TV channel on the globe?”

Tony just shrugged as they reached the already laden breakfast bar. The help that worked here was so well-organized it was scary. Also, it was great. She enjoyed the solitude that came with the massive Penthouse. She worked hard so peace and quiet were appreciated and since she lived with Tony Stark it was a little hard to come by.

“Can’t blame them. We looked sensational.”

Sensational. _Right_. That was one way to put it. People were going _apoplectic_ on TV. Tony put it on in the bedroom as they had coffee, but he didn’t turn the sound on. They spent a good ten minutes
voicing various presenters trying to guess what they were saying. It made the situation somewhat
easier to handle for Darcy. Their relationship was being called ‘notoriously private’. Apparently not
having the woman’s account in the papers first thing after sleeping with Tony Stark was
incomprehensible to many. Darcy watched as her now fiancé retrieved the little bottle of her iron
supplements. She felt stupidly emotional. It was the alcohol still in her system. They had one of those
lazy mornings that included cuddles, clumsy shower sex, general silliness and their usual banter.

“Honeybuns, you ok?”

“Yeah, eyes just dry… Mmm.” Tony gently pulled her glasses off to slowly kiss the tip of her nose.
Darcy couldn’t help but lean into him as her eyes drifted shut. She was stupid. It was the hangover.
She was not anxious because they were now official and engaged, definitely not because it happened
so fast or anything… Tony had her in a firm embrace.

“Spark, hey…” He shifted a little to have a look into her face and Darcy scowled.

“Who said you could stop holding me? I think we need to have a conversation about priorities. Hugs
improve memory. Reduce risk of heart diseases and anxiety. Proven by science, that.” She had one
cheek pressed to his chest as Tony squeezed her tighter. Science was fucking right, hugs were
incredible.

“You know, you were amazing yesterday, right?”

“I know, you kept telling me that… just. I might be a little bit nervous. Just a tiny bit? Like, everyone
knows about us. Everyone, their dog and its fleas.’ That was what they had given up last night. The
anonymity. At least, she did. Tony had been famous since birth, so he probably didn’t know what
was it like to not have his face all over the place. Up to the Gala nobody would have known her
name had they broken up. Nobody would have cared, and she would have been back to her normal
life. Now it all changed. The bright headlines was that bridge burning. She had gotten comfy. Tony
turned her world around in less than thirty-six hours while acting like an excited dog, humping her
leg and growling at strangers. The weirdo. Or maybe because she had finally accepted that really
he liked her. In that crazy way of his that made her feel all nice and special inside.

“Lets get some breakfast into you, Honeybuns. Oh, you are going to love what I am going to read
you next. The press has gone far beyond their call of duty on this one.” Tony grinned as they settled
by the table. Darcy didn’t like the sound of that.
emerald thing hugging the top, all fluttery and playful from the waits down. The design was flattering in all the right places.

“Tony, you are so bad…” They managed to escape to one of the private rooms handily located just above the venue, that he had arranged to be available just in case they wanted a little private time. It took him a couple of hours to convince Spark that a quick break was needed. Tony hummed in agreement under his breath as his hands made their way under the dress. “We can’t be gone long… My, Mr Stark you in the mood this evening.”

Those red lips had him in the mood as soon as he saw that smile so casually walking to him in their secure parking lot. By now that red was smudged just a tiny bit, some of it no doubt on him too.

“So, we are not going to take long.” Probably. Maybe… His left hand travelled up the outside of… and yes, here it was, the holster. “And what do we have here?” Tony gentle pushed Darcy back so she was now sitting on the edge of the bathroom counter, with him between her legs, both still fully dressed. “Ms Lewis, are you armed?”

“I… am not sure. Maybe you should check?” Well, who says no to an offer like that? She was biting her lip again. Feisty little thing. Tony kissed her neck, the rising cleavage, as he slowly went to his knees.

“I think I should. To make sure it is secure. Can’t have you dancing circles around me when it…” Her skin was always so soft, Tony gave a cheeky grin as pushed the dress up. His eyes drifted down from the red smile he could still taste, down the pale mounds covered in dark shimmery material of the dress, the folds gathered around her waist to… Happy Hogan smiling at him. Tony felt his face freeze, the hand holding the dress up yanked it down in shock as a snicker made him snap up to see corners of those red, sinful lips inch up.

“Gotcha.”

“The fuck?” Tony yanked the dress up again to get a slightly distorted smile of Happy Hogan beaming back at him, stretched on the crotch his fiancée’s panties. That what had been under those dresses all the evening long…

“That’s for stealing my stuff, Casanova.”

“Where? What? Where did you- Oh, no, no, no! No!” That little witch! Here he was on his knees-

“Oh, yes, hot stuff. Thanks for the credit card-”

“No!”

“- Took me a few minutes-”

“You could have gotten anything! A fucking plane! So far there is a single charge of 23.44! It was for this?! I thought you got a coffee!”

“Where the Hell do you get your coffee 24 bucks per cup? This was a two pack plus postage. How good am I?”

Tony just sat there on his knees for a moment, with his mouth open, staring up at the sneakiest woman on the planet.

“You are not spending the night of our engagement with this on you.” If there was going to be a face between those soft creamy thighs it was going to be his and no one else’s.
“What are you going to do about it, Hot Stuff? Huh… Tony! You-!” No one could ever say that he had backed down from a challenge. The cheap cotton gave way quickly as Darcy squealed and laughed trying to prevent him from ripping the underwear from her. The sex that followed was hot, hard and quick. Just like he had promised, just better.

If anyone had gotten a peek under that pretty dress for the rest of the evening they would have found a pair of men’s boxers stretched over the tantalizing curves, while he himself went commando.

He was still looking for the other pair that Darcy had securely squirrelled somewhere in the Tower. That woman was going to be the death of him one day.

So peeps? What you think? Let me know!
Chapter 73

Hello, Peeps!

Please note that this chapter has not been edited so sorry for the mistakes =)

Lovely Wino is off and I am too impatient to wait so hope it isn't too bad

Chapter 73

Fame was a double-edged sword, Natasha Romanov mused as she watched Darcy and Stark make their way to the Podium where McNorris was waiting for them. Everyone was a little surprised that the happy couple showed up. Stark led the way like he was on a mission.

There was only one thing worse than being overexposed to the media and that was not being exposed enough. She adjusted the refreshments on a table at the far side of the room. No one ever paid attention to the help. The uniform always made her blend in. The SI spokesperson did his best to make an introduction but was overwhelmed by the eager questions of the reporters. Darcy Lewis looked appropriately reserved, for a person that chose to study Political Science that woman strangely enough disliked being the centre of attention.

Stark sure could make any crowd go wild by simply showing his face. The Press Conference might have seen as the rich asshats whim, but it was a strategic move. Such level of coverage ensured that every person on the planet knew the face and name of future Mrs Stark. The anonymity was gone now. Darcy Lewis was a public figure permanently attached to Iron Man. Being the other half of a superhero was a challenge. It was a risk. Every risk had to be moderated.

Media loved to hate and hated to love Tony Stark. It was an obsession. That man just had too much of everything, may it be money, women he had slept with, intelligence or attitude. He worked the media. Worked it exceedingly well. It didn’t matter if they loved him or hated him or both, as was the case, what mattered that by this point was that very few things could hurt his reputation because the press in its eternally divisive glory was his best defender. You thought twice before picking a fight with the Tony Stark. It was a known fact. Everyone knew that. It was an excellent deterrent. Like the bright colours of small exotic frogs. They looked pretty, such eye-catching vibrancy of their spots, but at the same time a simple wrong move could land you in shit load of trouble. That was what he was doing standing with Darcy before reporters. He was making statement. Leaving no room for doubt. He was serious.

Natasha watched as Tony Stark made a short speech and made a mental note to take Darcy out for dinner sometime soon. Were toads poisonous? Because Tony Stark was one big slimy toad… Rich slimy toad. Was he even good in bed? She Googled before the short stint as his PA and it looked average, but it was flaccid so maybe it was an ok-ish size. Like generous small going onto small medium. At best. Natasha smiled.
The headlines all over the world were declaring Darcy Lewis the whore and the saint. Many did both at the same time. Stark was a tabloid regular for various reasons. He had always been. It was a never-ending dance he hated doing. Loved to hate and hated to love. Fame. Such a disastrously beautiful thing. You either worked it and thrived or it smothered and killed you. So he was putting her before the flashing cameras, putting the world on notice that she was important to him, that cocky smile, those calculating eyes were speaking without words … would trying to hurt her be worth incurring his wrath? It really wouldn’t. He could have tried hiding her of course, but that would have never worked. They couldn’t afford the risk that would have come with leaving Darcy in the grey area.

There was almost always a method to the madness if one looked hard enough. Natasha Romanov watched from the side-lines as media circus unfolded, short it might have been.

“Miss Lewis! Miss Lewis, are you excited about the engagement?!”

“I’m ok. All good. It has been couple of days already.” Darcy smiled politely at the reporters.

“When is the wedding?!”

“It has only been couple of days.”

“You can’t have both.” Stark frowned at Darcy. He was a man with a plan to get married. The happy fiancée only shrugged as she had a sip of water. She was in no hurry anywhere.

“Watch me.”

“Miss Lewis! Miss Lewis! What it feels like to be a real-life Juliet?”

“You mean have a relationship that lasted four days and ended with six people dead? We are counting the time together in months already as far as I know no idiot killed himself. So I will say it is not applicable in our situation. Miss Everhart?”

“Miss Lewis, so what relationship model do you aspire to?”

The Stark’s had split second look on his face of ‘You are doing this on purpose, aren’t you?’

“Aspire to? Like there are successful models of dating Hot Mess Superhero in Flaming Red? Last I heard all the models that tried it with him didn’t last all that long, so I will pass on that one too. If we are to compare the us to fictional couples. I will make do with the Addams.” It took a moment for the name to make sense and Everhart grimaced.

“The Adams? The Adams Family?”

“Yes. The Addams. Morticia and Gomez, to be precise. Married for thirteen years, home, two kids, the husband still gets the freak on for her in a hot second. Plus, who doesn’t like a man in suit.” At the same time Darcy slowly traced a finger around her mouth.

Stark gave her a flat look. “We get it. It’s the facial hair. Let’s move on, shall we?” Darcy narrowed her eyes as she regarded the man as he fixed his tie. Natasha wasn’t sure what Darcy said but the next second Stark was kissing her like the world was going to end.

Hmmm… Darcy should have just said that it was the booze, explosives and bad facial hair and her looking good in black. Would have made more sense to the press. But still better than the mediaeval teenage romcom. Had those two were really in love they would have skipped town. Idiots, six deaths and nothing tow show for it. Because, really? Suicide? Stark would burn his family, her family, well everyone would burn Darcy’s family but that was besides the point, and the town if something were
to happen to the one and only Mrs Stark to be. With enough notice Natasha could probably manage
to make it look like an accident.

Darcy made her way to Tony’s lab contemplating, as she often did, their relationship. The
honeymoon period of a freshly minted relationship had worn off some time back. Did they even have
one? Work had been involved from day one. It has been few weeks from the announcement of their
engagement. The Press was still not over it. She had temporarily disabled her social media accounts.

“U! No! Do not touch the flowers. It isn’t rubbish. Yes, I know-” Why was she talking to the
massive pincers-face again? It was a robot. She had started treating them like some weird family pets.
Some people had cats or dogs… They had robots. Because… why not? “Butterfingers! I swear, if
Tony doesn’t donate you to City college I will! That’s not rubbish. Back off… I don’t care what
Tony says this is worse than having a dog.” She should hurry up Tony’s meeting was nearly over
and he no doubt would be making the trip to the lab right after.

The true test of a relationship was doing some questionable stuff in order to help your other half deal
with shit. Darcy Lewis took her responsibilities seriously. The roses lost their blooms one after
another as she hummed under her breath. She was almost done.

Tony was in foul mood. Had been for couple of days. It had been one of those weeks. Just bad. He
scratched his neck repeatedly. It was all in his head. He had washed off the dust and grime. He
washed both the suit and himself. Barely anything made past the air filters to him, but it seemed he
could still smell the damp mustiness of the cavern filled with death.

A mine shaft collapsed just as workers were finishing the evening shift. Only eight survived out of
seventeen. There could have been more. He could have saved more had the Company raised the
alarm instead of trying to cover up before realizing the severity of the situation. Thats what cutting
corners on safety cost. Human lives.

The mining company was denying any wrongdoing. Naturally. Accusing him of trying to profit from
the tragedy. All that after he went to help save the trapped workers in the dead of the night. It just
made him so angry… he nearly got in scuffle with the reporter that confronted him as Spark and he
had dinner last night at a restaurant, their first public outing since announcing the engagement.

“Jarvis, have we got a lighting problem? Its…”

The lights didn’t automatically switch on as he walked in, except few further in. Maybe there was
 glitch somewhere… ooooor not.

The few soft lights illuminated his design table that was littered with roses. Some of them, with the
heads removed, were put in a glass vase. His little Spark dressed all in a long, black, figure hugging
dress was working on the flowers. Her pale skin glowed, enchanted by the lights. The only dash of
colour were the lips and the rose buds.

As he came closer Tony could make out a violin playing in the background. Did he miss a memo
about a dress up? He never usually overlooked those.

“Darcy?”
His attempt at establishing communication was ignored. Tony took a moment to take it in. Darcy didn’t usually part her hair in that way it just… another rose lost its head and the long, thorny stem was pointed at him.

“Last night you were unhinged.”

“In my defence -” It had been a shitty day and Tony really wanted to relax, have a drink, maybe do some science, definitely do the woman frowning at him.

“You were like some desperate howling demon.”

“Ok, this is uncalled-”

“You frightened me.” A cold wave washed over him at those words.

“Darcy, Honey, I swear-” *Shit shit shit!* He really thought that she had taken it well. “- I just had a moment. It was nothing, absolutely nothing to do with you. I.” She let him hug her. Wrap the hands around her. That was good. It was a good sign. She shifted a little in his embrace one small hand cupping the back of his head. The breath hot as she whispered.

“Do it again.”

“- it had nothing – what? I’m sorry?”

“Do. It. Again.”

“… Why does this remind me of something?”

Darcy pushed him back instead of answering. Went back to the table, quickly finished her red wine and picked up a baseball bat from behind the pile of roses. Tony froze in place with his hands open as he was going in for reassuring hug again. Shortstack was big on hugs. He eyed the metal bat. Wielded right that could do some serious damage. To him for example.

“I’m … sorry?”

“Come here.” Darcy spoke softly.

*Ok…* He hesitated, being a massive fan of resolving conflicts in a non-violent way when he had limited options of defending himself. “Now!” The sharp command propelled him forth as Tony steadied himself. Spark would never go for a direct confrontation like that. She would more likely arrange for him to drown in the bath or for the suit to spontaneously combust mid-flight… Why was he doing this to himself? As he was one step from the woman, that had this out of place bored expression, she loosened the grip on the bat and handed it to him. Mixed signals.

“Honeybunny… I am currently slightly concerned-“

Lights further down in the lab lit up as Darcy snapped her fingers. Tony stared. How the did he not notice that?

“Pumpkins?”

“Some of them are technically squashes. I’m not good with veggies. So… How long will it take to smash them all?”

The tension of these few crappy days bubbled over and Tony laughed. Loudly and hysterically. He had been holding it all inside to long.
“This is your grand plan-”

The red painted lips quirked up again and snapped her fingers once again. The music filled the room replacing the mournful violin, and Darcy winked at him as she walked past. The room was filled with pumpkins. There must have been hundreds of them, on the cars, on the floor, hanging from the ceiling. Darcy picked a smallish one up as she started singing along to the music:

_Freak out_

_And give in_

_Doesn't matter what you believe in_

_Stay cool_

_And be somebody's fool this year_

_'Cause they know_

_Who is righteous, what is bold_

_So I'm told_

Smashing Pumpkins was it? … _How appropriate_. Tony tried remembering the name of the song.

“Not a bad choice- _Hey! The Hell?!_” The small orange orb narrowly missed his head and that only thanks to his reflexes. Darcy kept humming under her breath as she picked another one, blueish white tinted pumpkin... or was it technically a squash? Weren’t they all squashes?

“Ready?”

“What? No? _No!_” He managed to evade his one too. “Is this about yesterday? I said I’m- _Damn it!”_ He had to swing the bat this time. The impact resulted in a small explosion of seeds and wet bits of orange coloured pulp. It felt oddly satisfying. Some of it landed on his dark grey three-piece suit.

“Ready?”

“One moment, madam!” Tony quickly shed the jacket that was confining the moves a little. “I don’t like this.”

“Yes, I can _see_ that, Mr Stark. Nice pose, by the way.” Darcy pointed looked over his posture as she got ready to pitch.

“The swing is better if you bend the knees- (smash) - _yes_!” The debris went flying in all directions. “Are you going easy on me?”

“I’m going easy, so you can go hard.”

“I have a better idea.” Tony grinned. They might as well make it interesting.

“That _wasn’t_ a better idea.”
“It worked.”

“I blew up one of your cars and nearly smashed you with a massive pumpkin.”

“It should have been the pumpkin on the left.”

“It was the pumpkin on the left, Tony.”

“Your left, Honeybuns.”

“Oh… Right. That kind of makes sense. Well, you should have been clearer.”

They laid naked under the design table as their skin slowly cooled down from the vigorous sex that followed decimation of pumpkins. Darcy snuggled closer into his warmth and whimpered as Tony gently nudged her to sit up. His brilliant idea was to put Darcy in a suit. His Iron Man suit. With most systems safely disabled. They naturally weren’t disabled enough and one very expensive car was now a pile of junk. And thank Thor for Tony’s quick reflexes. It would have been a hard one to explain. She forgot he wasn’t suited up.

“I guess, this little exercise wasn’t the worst idea ever.”

“Tony Stark, you’re such a dick.”

“I am just that good, I can’t help it.”

“Unbelievable. That’s what you are. Un-fucking-believable.”

“You’re welcome. Do you speak foreign language?”

“I am fluent in sarcasm. I think I qualified for an advanced level in Bitchiness in the last few weeks.”

“You already had that one before we even met.”

Darcy paused in the process of pulling the dress on again to give him the finger.

“And that’s why you like me, asshole. By the way, your batting skills ave-mph!” The man’s kissing skills, on the other hand, were exceptional.

“My little sweet sugar plum, why do you make me want to bite that tongue of yours?”

“Because I am right? You’re still an asshat.”

“But I’m your asshat, sweetheart. Thank you.”

It was hard to tell if it worked or not. Her silly little plan left the world’s most coveted workshop looking like pumpkin genocide area. Decimated pumpkins and squashes littered the place from top to bottom. There was not a whole one left in sight. Tony did start smashing them in earnest at one point. But did it help?

Darcy wanted to help. There was another downside to dating a superhero. When he was away being heroic, all you could do was wait. And wait. And wait. And wonder, as you waited, is he ok? Will he still have all his limbs when he gets home? Will he get home? All that topped up with more waiting. And while you wait life goes on. You get up, take a shower, have breakfast, go to work and try not to think of all those awful things that could have happened to him. Up until this point he was with others, with Cap or Nat or Clint or Rhodey… This time it was just him. Out there saving lives, being the hero.
The next trail came when Tony did get home and she had to pretend that all she wanted wasn’t to just break down and cry and make him promise not to do it again. That was when Darcy felt that she was indeed committed to that man, when she swallowed her fear and smiled.

“...I knew you were dirty, Hot Stuff, but this is taking it a step too far...”

What do heroes do after the heroics? What happens then? Now Darcy knew what. They staggered home. Barely able to walk as the fatigue threatened to overtake them. The tarnished armour caked with dirt and blood. The stench of death soaked into their skin through layers of metal and cloth. The halo, haunted eyes looking at you. What do you do when your heart breaks at the sight of it? Nothing much. There is nothing much you can do. You help with the jammed breastplate that was somehow damaged, and you really don’t think how that happened because, *Thor*, that was some serious dent right over his heart and it so easily could have... *You try not to think.* You help with the shower. ‘It was just a rescue what with the bruises... fuck... just fuck... ’ You don’t ask about the bruises. You don’t.

All that just for some third-rate accountant from the sleaze-ball mining company accuse Tony of trying to milk them for his own benefit the very next morning.

That was the price you paid. Tony was short-tempered and prickly with tension.

Darcy could kind of see how that could adversely affect a long-term relationship. Was that what happened between Tony and Pep? How could she deal with it? In a way that would both help him somehow and save herself from feeling like a useless hanger on? Because that wasn’t healthy. Not healthy at all. For either of them.

And that’s why they stood in Tony’s mancave late in the evening half naked covered in pumpkin remains.

“Welcome and Thor bless the private lift we are going to take home.”

‘*Do it again.*’

Tony watched the fictional couple kiss passionately on the screen.

He was right it was from that movie. Last evening was different. They both had gone out of their comfort zones. When there was enough pent up tension in him, Tony could confess, he had a temper on him. Tony Stark was no Saint. He had never pretended to be. The lab had been cleaned overnight but it still smelt of the vegetable. Well, that and industrial cleaner.

It had been fun and enlightening. Swinging that bat felt good. Good to release some of the rage. Good to just fuck on that floor. Angry and dirty. Because it was ok to be angry and dirty and horny. Because Shortstack could take it. No, not take it, accept and still want more. Channel it out through the exercise both the sexual kind and not. He watched the Addams couple kiss again and smirked. Well, maybe being likened to those two wasn’t the worst thing that could have happened.

Jarvis voice startled him a little. “Sir, there is an urgent call from Mr Otter to you.” That was Darcy’s security guy.

“Put him-”

“SIR-?! Damn it! Run! RUN! Just keep running!” There were gunshots that sounded awfully close
and the line went silent.

_Oh Ssssnap! Is that a cliff-hanger? Who would do such a thing?!

Oh... that was me =)

So Peeps? What ya thinking? Let me know! Help me feed the hungry plot bunnies
Chapter 74

Wino,
You are the best

xxx

Chapter 74

“… shit.” Darcy grimaced and immediately regretted it. Her face felt as if she had run into a concrete wall. Then got up and did it again. Her glasses were missing. The light right overhead was blindingly sharp. Her shoulder hurt. The clothes she had on didn’t feel right. It felt as if she had woken up after some seriously outrageous party. Darcy would have honestly preferred that because it would have meant that she was home, that Tony was nearby, that all was going to be just fine. But it wasn’t. It wasn’t home.

“Miss Lewis, please do not panic.” The voiced startled Darcy and she did exactly what any reasonable person that had just woken up in unfamiliar surroundings would do. She panicked. Or tried to. A quick transition from horizontal to vertical position was not a brilliant idea when your sight was blurry, you had a splitting headache and a possible concussion. Darcy, very ungracefully, would have landed nose first on the floor if someone hadn’t caught her when her attempt to jump from the table or bed she was on failed and she went limp with sudden queasiness. Her body felt oddly insensitive. Drugs… Probably not even the good ones as her shoulder felt on fire from the awkward position she was grabbed in.

“Ugh…” She was unceremoniously deposited back onto the flat surface swiftly.

“Tsk Tsk Tsk. Miss Lewis. I asked you not to panic.” If Darcy hands hadn’t felt like they had been filled with lead, she would have gladly attempted to strangle whoever was speaking. That oh so very reasonable headteacher’s voice wasn’t helping her to calm down. Far from it. And at the same time, as panic and anger was threatening to overwhelm her, her rational mind told her that she could not afford to be stupid right now. Tony wasn’t there to save her ass.

Darcy swallowed thickly “I can’t see…”

“What-? Completely? What happened to your face?” The speaker was in her face. Darcy could tell from the shadow and breath that smelled like liquorice. Someone wasn’t happy from the sound of it. Darcy imagined that at the moment she was like goods that were going to be traded. Ransom maybe? Darcy really hoped it was ransom and not some asshole getting even with her man.
“I can see light…” She could see much more than that but not well and she wasn’t giving away the only advantage she had right now. Also the voice… it sounded familiar.

“Didn’t I tell you to be careful?!” Yeah, the assholes should have been more careful when they descended upon her and the security like an army of fucking mercenaries. Who that dude was kidding?

“There were circumstances- ”

“All you had to do was-! Get her a doctor. Check her vision. Why is her face bruised? We have just assured Stark that she was perfectly fine!”

_Fucking shits… Totally ransom. She was totally fine with that. Tony for all his faults wasn’t stingy so she was going to be just fine… Fine… Just fine…_

Except her memory was replaying how she got kidnapped, in stunning high definition. Darcy knew nothing of military but she could tell that was a military operation. There clearly had been a plan. The men that ambushed them knew what they were doing. It played out like a chess game, now that she thought about it, all precise and organized, ending with her being taken.

The conclusion came to her mind even as Darcy tried not to think about it. SHIELD. What ever they had planned was clearly coming to fruition soon. The only reason to capture her would have been to neutralize Tony. Keep him out of the way.

‘Don’t you dare, Tuna Can Man. Don’t you fucking dare roll for them…”

Being considered and seeing the bigger picture was all good and nice when your neck was not under the knife. Darcy struggled to hold back tears. Tony being Iron Man was the big picture. Now she understood Tony’s obsession with security. She really hoped hers wasn’t dead. They nearly got away. Nearly… ‘Thor, Rosie, I’m sorry… I hope you’re OK…”

“Miss Lewis. The doctor will administer you a shot that will help rid you of toxins and to stabilize your sight.”

“Geez, thanks.” If her common sense would suddenly turn into a person it would no doubt have karate chopped her ass for being a sassy bitch in such a situation. She was fucks knows where, with fucks knows who, that could do fucking anything to her and Darcy Lewis was doing what? Being an idiot, naturally.

A chuckle from her captor followed her statement and hiccup. “You’re most welcome. It wasn’t supposed to happen. It was meant for your team.” It sounded nearly like an apology but at the same time not. Darcy chewed on her tongue to make sure that the next remark hanging on the tip of her tongue didn’t drop and kill her. She didn’t know where she was, at this point they could have taken her anywhere on the planet she had no idea how long she was out cold for.

The shot worked nearly instantly.

“My glasses…?”

“Ah, yes, of course. That’s quite remiss of me. Here. Please let me help you.”

If Darcy hadn’t known better their conversation sounded like any other pleasant chatter by the water cooler.

It took another minute for the itching to stop and blurriness to subside.
"Well, shit. You again.” Darcy couldn’t stop herself. Mr Alexander Pierce, suited and booted in his finest, was standing next to her. Smiling. She got kidnapped by fucking Jack Booted Thugs Brigade. That wasn’t good. She had really hoped it was just random kidnapping for money.

"Such language for a lady, Miss Lewis.” Ok. The situation just got worse. A dude the age of Tony’s dad just leered at her as he tried to flirt. ‘Oh, man, no thanks, I like them older not geriatric. Seriously? Your grandkids probably got kids my age.’ Darcy threw up a little in her mouth but that also could have been the side effect of poison clearing from her system. The momentary grossness of the situation distracted Darcy from the fact that she was in some sort of lab. The kind that mad scientists experiment on people on in. Right. Serious looking people with serious looking guns. Alright.

“We have already met, Mr Pierce. I’m sure you were able to tell that I am far from a lady.” It was surprising what a motivation to be polite seeing armed thugs could be.

“You are quite right there. Well behaved ladies don’t get far.” Darcy blinked at the SHIELD higher power man and wished he wasn’t making this already horrible situation worse. She shifted to put a little more distance between them.

“Yes, well… isn’t that just too bad for them?” Were there things she was supposed to be saying? She was being held hostage and… Darcy couldn’t contain her shock when her brain registered another familiar face. ‘Natasha?’

“Ah. She was working with Stark, wasn’t she? I forgot you could already be acquaintance. Let me assure you she is quite alright. Merely unconscious, as you were few minutes ago.” Nothing in that statement made Darcy feel better.

Lights… Distant sounds… Disorientation… Natasha felt like she was underwater unable to find the way up. Unable to move against the invisible force that was trying to drag her even deeper into oblivion. Drugs… she must have been drugged. Thinking took a substantial effort. Natasha closed her eyes and tried to concentrate. This shouldn’t be happening. The bastardised serum that she had been given in the Red Room should have had taken care of any drugs by now.

SHIELD sacrificed two of their agents in order to trap her in a room that filled with some sort of obnoxious gas. What ever that was it must have been lethal dosage for ordinary human to neutralize her.

There was a dull pain at the back of her neck. That was where the drugs were being administered directly to her system to keep her placated… They were ready. It was all a set up.

The lights dimmed, and Natasha felt herself sinking into the darkness even as she tried desperately to will her body into staying awake.

It was hard to say how long she had been out again. Minutes? Hours? Days? Natasha tried listening to her body to establish the timeframe. Was she hungry? She had eaten before being taken. Days in captivity would now result in hunger pains. Did she need to relieve herself? Even her would be unable to hold it in longer than a certain amount of time before the body made the decision for her. Could she move her fingers? Could-
“Wahhhhhhh!” The wail sounded like something out of the cheesy horror flick and reminded Natasha of someone. ‘No…’

Her system must have received a sufficient shock from the adrenalin for her sight to focus sharply. She was in one of their labs. Securely strapped to an elevated chair. ‘Shit.’ Right before her, dressed in dark grey overalls stood Darcy Lewis. The young woman had her back to Natasha, but it was clear who she was.

‘They got her, they got Stark’s compliance.’ Her and the rest of the team had underestimated SHIELD… If she was still able to feel temperature changes her body would have gone cold. From the corner of her eye she could see another chair with various electrical devices attached to it. She also recognised the man sitting in it. The unmissable metal prosthesis with a red star… There had been a rumour that the Winter Soldier had been seen again… Well, that was one rumour she wished wasn’t true.

“Miss Lewis. I’m sorry…” Alexander Pierce.

‘He’s lying, Darcy! He-’

The wail intensified and Darcy Lewis, grief stricken from the sound of things, threw herself at the Winter Soldier taking everyone present by surprise. Including the Asset, who fell back into a seated position that he was raising from, when the brunette jumped him.

Natasha could only lay there and watch as the adrenaline kept her just lucid enough to keep her awake. Darcy was promptly dragged off the confused man. No one had expected the woman to do that. You could see it on their faces. The members of STRIKE just looked at each other after Darcy was subdued but continued crying. It was a heart wrenching sound. Pierce’s attempt to calm her down didn’t work.

“Miss Lewis, please…” Heavy sigh. “Get her to the cell. Let her cry it out.”

“Gutsy little thing. I thought she was going get his eyes out for a second there.” One of the scientists whistled under his breath as he spoke to Pierce when Darcy was carried out still struggling.

“Shame that energy is misplaced.” The men chuckled. ‘Dirty old perverts… At least they know Darcy would put up one Hell of a fight.’ But… it didn’t make sense. Even if Darcy was grieving… it was a stupid move. It was just so pointless and it would serve no purpose. While in Natasha’s mind there was no doubt that the brunette would fight nail and tooth when cornered it was not that situation.

‘Method to the madness… There is always a method to the madness… If you remove the obvious motive, reject it being an impulse move what are we left with?’ Darcy attacked the Winter Soldier. The Asset. The Phantom that only few believed existed. There was no way that Darcy even for a second would have assumed that she would have been able to overcome him or do any damage. So that was not the aim. What else?...

Natasha struggled to stay awake as the short incident replayed in her mind. Darcy jumped him… He fell back onto the chair… If she was not going for the man as it would have seemed at first all that was there was …. The machine.

That was why it wasn’t straight away obvious. She was setting a plan in motion. Miss Darcy Lewis had no immediate way of escape. So, she was making one.

The Asset was a tool. It was being programmed to obey. But what if the Machine failed somehow in
the programming? A short circuited somewhere for example? Maybe somewhere where clever little hands of a certain woman got into? It would not be enough to completely turn the tortured mind around but maybe it could possibly create and help retain enough of rational thoughts for him to go against his Masters?

‘Divide and Conquer.’ She was right after all. Darcy Lewis was the truly handy little Jack in the Box.
Darcy waved at the camera and gave a tense smile. The daily issue of the ‘Darcy isn’t dead yet’ update that was later sent to Tony via some untraceable link was on. She had to wear the pencil skirt again too. And the blouse. That clearly wasn’t for Tony’s benefit or hers. Mr Pierce thought that was an appropriate wear for a woman. He wasn’t wrong, yet he managed to make it creepy. The only good thing out of it was that she got to see Natasha again.

Darcy bit her lip.

The woman was strapped to a table, being pumped with something that kept her out cold. It had been nearly a week of Darcy enjoying SHIELD’s hospitality... Most of the time being confined in a small cell, the other enjoying the not so pleasant company of the man in charge.

Alexander Pierce was a very intelligent man. A very twisted yet very intelligent man. That was a very bad combination to have in an enemy. Darcy smiled as she came to stand next to him. She was in a situation that was as delicate as it was deadly.

“Mr Pierce.”

“Miss Lewis. May I say you look striking.” Please don’t. You creep.

“Why thank you, Mr Pierce. Will my good looks warrant a release from your tender care?” They both laughed. She so fucking hated his guts and if Tony ever said that her Poli Sci degree wasn’t worth her damn time she was going to sucker punch him.

“Nearly, Miss Lewis. As soon as we come to an understanding with Mr Stark, you will be free to go. He unfortunately has proven to be quite stubborn. But he does want you returned to him as soon as possible.” There wasn’t even a smallest doubt in that regard.

“But?” Darcy accepted a magazine as she maintained her professional smile. Tony… She was just collateral damage in this situation. It wasn’t personal. Or at least Pierce was doing his best to make it sound like that. They both kept smiling.
“He will have to learn that asking questions isn’t always the best way forward. Sometimes accepting the unavoidable is all there is.”

Darcy chose not to respond to that. It wasn’t a matter where her opinion was wanted anyway. Besides, things were unavoidable only when there were no people willing to take the risk and fight. Unfortunately, History was a teacher that people seldom took notice of. Those few occasions that Darcy had a real conversation with this man they had discussed some unsavoury topics. And Alexander Pierce could present his argument in an extremely convincing way.

“Ah, yes. Have you received the change of clothes, and some necessities? I dare say-”

She had finally gotten a toothbrush, right before she grew a permanent fuzz on her teeth. Somebody was trying to encourage her to develop a Stockholm Syndrome, because he was just so sorry she had to be in in this situation, it was all Tony’s fault, really, he was being just so unreasonable. “Yes, thank you, Mr Pierce. I do appreciate that.” She was drawing the line at the underwear. She wasn’t wearing that pink atrocity. Darcy wasn’t going to tell him that though.

The underground base was crawling with unrest. Clearly something was going down. Her being put in ‘the protective custody’ as Mr Pierce has so nicely put it, was only the tip of the iceberg. Darcy could catch snippets of conversations, but she had no idea what was really going on.

Maybe it was the fear getting to her but Darcy felt like she was running out of time to get out. It wasn’t like she would be able to help in any way when she got out but being safe she wouldn’t be getting in the way for Tony and the others. That what she was going to concentrate on. That and … Natasha. The dread laid heavy at the pit of her stomach as Alexander Pierce once again started on the discussion what it truly meant for a country to be a democracy and how the inability to choose the right leaders was crippling this country.

That man, the Winter Soldier, was like a perfect machine. Always obeying. Had her little tinkering with the damn chair even made a difference? What if they noticed and just fixed it? Put the cable back into place… She was giving herself stomach ulcers thinking like that. But it was just… she was sure that they planned Natasha to be next, made into the perfect weapon that would never turn on them. If only Tony… Darcy shook her head sharply to get rid of that thought. Tony wasn’t here.

She wasn’t allowed near computers. The word must have gotten to them about her being quite savvy with technology. That complicated things. It would probably help to know where she was being held. It looked like the basement level of some old building. Maybe a bank-

“Mr Pierce?”

Darcy was very politely handed over to a Jack Booted Thug when the attention of the creep in charge was demanded elsewhere. Not a moment too early. Darcy took a calming breath as Rumlow walked her back to the room. Pierce had been increasing pressure on her. He was slippery like an eel, always eager to get into the dark corners of your mind. She had to be careful. Power grabbing wasn’t the only problem that was festering in these corridors. Something else was lurking there, Darcy just couldn’t quite put a finger on it.

Trust was like poison, Brock Rumlow mused. Bearable and useful in small doses. Like he trusted the
elevator not to fall during as he was using it. He trusted that people that installed it knew what they were doing. There was always a chance of failure, but you played the odds. It was all about the balance, really. As long as it didn’t tip towards self-induced blindness it was all good. All good… All good until the problem was laid at your door instead of others’. Suddenly you found that trust wasn’t quite cutting it.

Brock had been following orders for most of his life. Few of those years were spend following said orders under the covert banner of SHIELD. Doing things that needed to be done. He wasn’t complaining. He was a making a difference while other pansies played the politically correct game.

‘Fuck this shit…’

But suddenly other people’s problem was laid at his door. It got personal. This wasn’t supposed to be happening. Brock watched as the camera turned from where he was about to walk. He hated having doubts. It was messing with his head.

Doubt was dangerous. He sneered as he stood in front of a cell door. Doubts got you killed. It made you hesitate. Made you pause. Made you do mistakes and those could cost you big time.

Out of habit he surveyed the corridor noting Rollings playing guard duty at his request. See? He was already doing stupid things. Dragging others of his team into it.

It was all her fault. The sneaky little bitch. His hands itched. He should just walk right in, wrap them around her neck and snap. Just snap. If only that could solve his other problems.

It all started few days ago after they took the Lewis girl in. He didn’t question orders. It wasn’t his job. He obeyed.

The girl was just as he remembered. Mouthy little thing. Nice tits. He glimpsed those briefly when they stripped her unconscious body of the outer clothing that might have contained any sort of tracking devise. Knowing Stark, it probably did. If he had a bird like that he sure as hell would have wanted to keep track of her.

Her literally jumping the Asset, was surreal. They weren’t even sure if the Head of Security was dead. It was a rather lame joke on their part, but damn she surprised them all.

He couldn’t help but think that she was waiting for him right now. Confined in the small cell. Waiting for the seed of doubt she had planted in the chink of his armour to start tearing him apart from inside. Growing with every single breath he took. Making things seem different. Personal.

He growled as the door panel flashed green indicating that he could now access the room.

………………Flashback ………………………

Lewis wiggled like an eel even as she cried while being carried. The only thing it did was delaying the journey to her designated cell. The fight eventually left her as he squeezed her hard a couple of times, reminding who was in charge.

“This is shit… Perfect weapon. No questions, no opinion. A tool. And Natasha… she is next.” The babbling was punctuated by wet hiccups. “Makes sense, doesn’t it? They are making their own super loyal death squad. They’re going public soon, aren’t they? There wouldn’t be people asking questions anymore. Picking the best, the strongest. I guess you will be next. Peak performance-”

“Shut up, Lewis.”
“Do they retain the technical knowledge after the brain wash? Could also be the muscle memory… Do you think you will miss having a free will?” He tossed her unceremoniously onto the narrow bunk. “Sorry, sorry, redundant question. You won’t be able to miss something you no longer know exists…”

……………………………….. End flashback

He liked his free will. Free will was good. The Asset didn’t have that.

“Fuck.”

The seed of doubt had grown. He knew little of the grand plans that were being cooked by his superiors. Changes were coming. Somebody had to put things straight. But when you personally got issued with the bill …

... you no longer know exists...

There was a brief look of surprise as Lewis put her glasses on and sat up. “Oh, you're on dirty dishes now.”

“Shut up.” What was he doing? Why was he even here?

“Someone’s in a bad mood.” She was just so infuriating…

He was just going to scare her a little. Just make her shut up for a moment so he could hear himself think. He needed to make sense of the poisonous thoughts running rampant inside his head.

“You-

The sharp little heel got him in the fork. He folded right there with a stunned gasp for a moment... Or two... Or five. Brock was back on his feet just as suddenly with an angry roar. Or tried to. The threatening stance didn’t work as well when he couldn’t stand straight yet.

“You fucking bitch!”

“That’s Queen Bitch to you, and don’t you forget it! Asshole.” The woman settled on the bunk snarled right back. There was an angry stare off for a minute. It ended when Lewis pushed her glasses up, using her middle finger, and now regarded him frostily. Waiting for him to state his case.

How... How the Hell??... He should be having an upper hand here. Him! She was a small helpless little thing. He staggered back to sit down on the bunk opposite hers. His junk disagreed vehemently with the last statement as it throbbed painfully in the wrong way.

“The Balls on you…”

“Fuck yeah! Biggest ones around, God had to put them on my chest to prevent chafing.” His gaze dropped her chest still covered in the dark grey overalls she was given to wear. “Oi! Oi! Watch where you planting your backside, I got to wear those tomorrow-”

“You know I can snap your neck-”

“Pfffl. Please. And the creep in charge will snap yours. I am a valuable bargaining chip- Like, seriously, dude? That shit is ugly already, don’t make it look like I pulled it out of my ass too. It is bad enough I will have to wear it again. Come on!” It seemed that Pierce had a tight skirt and pussy bow fetish, or so the word around the place was. Lewis was provided with a form fitting black skirt
going just past her knees and pristine white shirt with a bow. Brock had to give it to the man, it made the woman’s assets look even more spectacular.

Alexander Pierce was posing as a gracious host and trying to make Lewis see his point of view. Whether it was working or not was hard to say. All he knew was that the demonstration of Asset’s memory wipe after the last mission made her violently ill. As Brock held the steady eye contact with the small rabid animal in front of him, he concluded that it must have been the food.

“They don’t plan to make more Assets-”

“Oh, really? Great. And you sneaked in here, at this late hour, just to tell me about it? You really shouldn’t have.” Lewis smirked at him. She knew. And she knew that he knew that she knew. “And I am loving your poker face by the way, almost impossible to tell that you are shitting yourself about being next.” Lewis yawned lazily and pulled the blanket up to her chin seemingly losing interest in the conversation. “So, like, you here for a reason? Because it is kind of late.”

“Shouldn’t you be begging-”

“Yeah, sure, let me know when that will likely to work and I will be right on it.” Someone in the position she was in shouldn’t be so relaxed or cocky.

“Fuck, it’s like speaking to Stark, but with tits. Does he shove something in that mouth of yours to get a word edgeways? Bet he does.”

“Wouldn’t you like to know? Anyway, what brings you to my little prison cell?”

“Shit is going to hit the fan. Soon.”

“And you just realized that they will take you down with them?”

“Fifteen million each for me and my men-”

“Seven hundred and fifty thousand each. Cash.” The counter offer made his brows go up. That was damn low.

“Stark-”

“Isn’t here. If you haven’t noticed. It’s just little old me that can’t afford to pay more than that.”

“He asked you to marry him he will give anything to have you back-” The Billionaire could surely afford to part some of his immeasurable wealth.

“Oh! Sorry, sorry. I thought I was going to hire you to get me out. You were talking about Tony paying ransom. Got it. You do of course realize that as soon as I am safe and sound double that will be reward for your head. Dead or alive. Probably preferred more dead. In cash, I would imagine. So you think the people you associate with won’t sell you out for fat wad of cash? Well, aren’t you cute. I, personally, game either way.”

“A million-”

“That will be money for my contract with SI. I will have to ask for an advance. I don’t have more money to give. Tony might give a little bonus. But that’s up to him. I can only speak for my own money. You seem like a guy that would take it personal if I were to lie and not deliver.”

“I would. It will be a tough call to convince men to join up to a suicide mission for a pittance.”
“They are on one already. For free by the way. Try harder. Tell them there is a chance they won’t die.”

Brock continued to stare at the woman for a while. How come she wasn’t running the show? Pierce was right in pursuing her to join up. Bloody politicians… Twisted son of a bitches the lot of them.

“Money up front.”

“Only if you want me to draw them for you. Do I look like I have that kind of money on me?”

“Fuck. Your life is on the line and getting money out of you is like getting blood out of stone.”

“I can’t afford to lie right now. Let’s not pretend like you won’t shoot me dead if you catch me doing it. I don’t make promises I don’t intend to keep.”

The conversation ended abruptly as he stood up and left. Everything was pissing him off. Himself, her, this entire situation that was about to go south bad. He needed either screw his head right or start preparing for the colossal mistake. Lewis wasn’t making it easy either. Where were the damn tears? The fear? The sobs? Instead he got those calculating eyes staring at him. Knowing full well how complicated it all was. It wasn’t as simple as just getting out of the building. It was SHIELD. Or kind of. They were in every damn branch of the Government like damn cancer. Holding out until this shit was going to blow over is harder than it sounded. Where the Hell could they even hide out for that long?...

They were back in the room, again. This time, though, it was somewhat different.

A group of people piled into the room just she and Pierce locked the metaphorical horns over the Presidential powers. She couldn’t let him think she was too soft. The Winter Soldier walking in the middle with a dozen guns aimed at him.

“What happened?” Darcy stood too far to hear what the reply from the frantic mad scientist dude was. But it clearly unsettled Mr Always in Charge because as soon as the Asset was seated Pierce was in his face with the same question. When it wasn’t answered straight away a sharp slap followed. Darcy winced. She felt sorry for him. It was like watching a loyal dog being beaten… Not understanding what he has done wrong, only wanting to please his master. What cruel beast a man could easily become when he tasted power.

“I knew him… The man with a shield.” Wait. Shield? There weren’t many people carrying that around… Steve was in DC last she had heard it. Were they in DC? Wasn’t that where SHIELD headquarters was?

“You met him on another assignment earlier in the week.” It would make sense. Darcy wanted to move closer. To hear better. Rumlow gave her a warning glare and she froze in place.

“He…he knew me…Who’s Bucky?” The man… the Asset looked so lost. It only seemed to make Pierce angrier for some reason. Like it wasn’t allowed.

“It doesn’t matter. Your work had been a gift to mankind.” What gift, you sick fuck? Darcy wanted to scream as her eyes caught sight of Natasha in the other corner. The machines were beeping steadily.

“You shaped this century. I need you to do it one more time.” Thor, she hated Pierce. He was making it sound like the guy with a damn prostheses was just there to help out. Like he had a choice.
And who did Steve know by the name of Bucky?... It.. must have been way back in the day because the Asset been working for the likes of Pierce for years. So that would have been ... Dear Thor, during the War? Before he went into ice?

Darcy felt her stomach acids rise steadily with every passing moment. Back in the day... No... Oh, please no... Bucky... She had done all the assignments about the WW2 in earnest. The sacrifice of all those that lost their lives deserved for her to at least report the events accurately. Dates... Names... People that never came back home.

Bucky... James Buchanan 'Bucky' Barnes... The best pal of Captain America... Lost at War. Held as a brainwashed Soldier by monsters that did not perish when the War ended.

There was no way she was standing back, now. What the hell was she going to do?

Darcy stuck her tongue out to the camera. She wasn’t allowed to speak. She wasn’t sure why. It wasn’t like she was going to tip Tony off. She hated her life right now. Things needed to change.

So... negotiations were going swell. Rumlow was now her only chance. Oh God. That was an unpleasant thought... on the other hand who could have been better for a mission like that? Would it even work? How many men could he bring in on this for the money? There couldn’t be left even the smallest margin for misunderstanding.

It was a dangerous deal that Darcy was going to make. He could snipe from some building for misleading him. Men like that didn’t play games, he had to be fully in with all cards on the table or she was going to look into other options. It wasn’t just her. She had to get Natasha out... She had to make out to tell Steve that Bucky remembered, even just a little...

“Hey! What- where are you taking her?” Darcy nearly tripped over her own feet as she hurried to the gurney two armed guards and a man in a lab coat were about wheel Natasha on out.

“Don’t worry your pretty head about it, toots. You smile for that camera and we take care of -”

“You can’t have her!” Darcy unceremoniously shoved Lab Coat away from the unconscious woman. “Why don’t you go pick on someone who can fight back, you damn pig.” The fierce reaction resulted in a round of laughter from the men in the room. It only made Darcy madder. If they took Nat away there was no chance she would be able to find the woman again.

“Giving up? Never heard of it. Must be German.” That last bit was a swipe at the obvious German accent the Lab Coat had.

“I'll teach you-”
“Pick on someone your own size…” The gravely voice of the Asset surprised them… Bucky, Darcy reminded herself. His name was Bucky. The Lab Coat gaped at him and Darcy clutched Natasha’s hand as she pipped up, her mouth running before the brain as usual.

“Well, get your ass up and help a girl, you jerk.” The Winter Soldier stood sharply.

‘Shit… now what?’

Action incoming!

So what you thinking Peeps? Good? Bad? Let me know! =)
Chapter 76

Happy holiday season, Peeps!

Hope you all keeping hydrated in this heat

My spelling haven’t been checked, so apologies in advance =)

Enjoy and don't forget to let me know what you think!

Chapter 76

‘Shit… Now what?’ The wise choice would have been a flood of tears and an apology full of drama. In that room literally no one would have come to her aid against the angry Asset. Except Darcy was in situation where that wasn’t an option. They were taking Natasha away. There was no rescue in sight. SHIELD, or whatever that was controlling it from inside, had all the cards. She had to forge ahead and hope for the best.

The Lab Coat whistled under his breath. “Toots, you shouldn’t have done that.”

It had always been mystery to Darcy why her mouth would disconnect from the brain in high stress situations. Like, why? The Thugs had probably fixed the damn chair and here she was mouthing off. The Winter Soldier just stood there. Watching her as if he was surprised at his own reaction and was unsure how to proceed.

“Done what? Stood up to a shit like you? I can do that all day!” The punch came as no surprise, yet Darcy wasn’t nearly fast enough to avoid it connecting with her face. It hurt. So, did the fall backwards where she smashed into the side of a desk. Firework display that erupted behind her eyes was most impressive. She was up on her feet, riding the adrenaline high, so fast it made her sway sideways.

“I think you need to be shown your place-” Or that’s what she thought the Lab Coat said because a blur passed in front of her face and her attacker went flying across the floor to land in a bloody pile on the other end.

“I- I could have taken him.” Darcy exclaimed before her brain had a chance to go ‘Taken what? Another hit, stupid?’ She swayed and wiped her nose with the back of her hand. All that had taken merely several seconds all together and the unwitting spectators scrambled into action around them. Darcy hit the floor without thinking too much as chaos descended upon the secure room. The Asset-
Bucky… Bucky was no longer obeying the commands and the guards weren’t being quick enough.

“Lewis! We’re with Rumlowl! Tell-!”

“Bucky!” There was no reaction and Darcy shrieked again “Soldier!” as she struggled to get up from under the desk she had managed to crawl under. “We need them!” While having the Winter Soldier on her side was great he would have stood out as a sore thumb and they would have been apprehended in no time on their way out. What was the point in escaping in that case? They needed people that knew the layout of this lair, had a method of transportation, a hideout so they could wait it out while the likes of Cap and Tony handled all this shit.

Bucky had one by the throat with his metal arm as he glanced at her as if asking for further instructions. Ok… Ok, she could do this.

“He’s with us. Drop him!” Where the bravado was coming from Darcy wasn’t sure. Could have been the adrenaline or a mental defect. She could never tell. Right now, the most important bit was to make sure that her knees didn’t buckle. It was the illusion of power. She had to look like she knew what she was doing, because the formidable Winter Soldier sure as heck didn’t and seemed to count on her to direct him. Why? Darcy had no idea. She must have been successful in messing up the connections of that Hell Device he been strapped on.

James Buchanan Barnes wasn’t right in the head. It wasn’t his fault. He could turn on her now. Could kill her in a confused anger so easily. The guy he was choking could just as easily turn on them. It was dangerous. It was a colossal risk and Darcy was just about crazy enough to take it.

Brock Rumlow was leafing through the building’s blueprints in one of the unused offices when the call came.

“Rumlowl, come in. Over.” Brock rolled his eyes. His downtime started an hour ago. Fat chance. Christie could piss his pants for all he cared right now. There were others on duty that could help. “Rumlowl, come in. You need-” The call disconnected for a second and Brock frowned. That was unusual.

“Brock, we got a Weasel in the Nest situation.” Rollings’ voice came in cool if somewhat quiet over radio and Brock nearly dropped it in the haste to reply.

“Copy that. On the way.” What the fuck could have happened? What did Lewis do? Why was he assuming that it was Lewis that has done something? Something could have happened to her… Rumlow snorted as he briskly made way to the most secure lock up in the building. Bloody Weasel… Small, cute, rabid, will bite your fingers off if you try to play with it… Did she try to contact Stark somehow? They had moles in his security it would be safer to wait till they-

Rollings was at the door waiting for him and opened it just enough for them to get inside giving a small wave to the guards standing outside.

“What did that little-” the snarl died on his lips as the Asset pointed a semi-automatic at him.

“Lets not get side-tracked. I heard we haven’t got much time before someone comes looking.” Lewis piped up as the other STRIKE member, Christie, held a small mirror as she proceeded to wipe what looked like blood from her nose. “Just great. Its swelling now.”

The room was a carnage. Broken furniture. Blood. At least four dead bodies. Brock assumed they
were dead from the way Lewis avoided looking in that direction. Rollings gave him a look that begged to keep cool. It didn’t help.

“Lewis? What—”

“Manners.” Asset spoke quietly and Rumlow wanted to facepalm, instead he just shut his eyes for a second. The absurdity of the request making his already tense nerves fray a little more. If anyone were to come here, they were toast. The Asset could flip at any point. He couldn’t be trusted!

“I’m sorry…” How did she manage? When did she manage to get the Asset under her thumb?! She was locked up all the time! “Miss Lewis? Would you be so kind as to enlighten me to the status of the situation at hand?”

The wench spared him a glance and shrugged. Simply shrugged as she stood in the middle of the disaster area and Brock felt his blood pressure hit the ceiling. “They wanted to take Natasha, so we’re got to leave now.”

“You crazy bitch!”

“Fuck you! Ok?!” The angry reply came before the Winter Soldier got in his face making them both freeze. “They aren’t getting her. So you got a plan or are we shooting our way out? Which, as fun as it sounds, probably won’t work. In which case I am totally telling Pierce you are a double agent and it was all your idea.”

There was silence after the last statement as both Christie and Rollings joined him in shocked outrage.

“Ours?! It was your idea! I—” If the Winter Soldier wasn’t standing guard he would have slapped some sense into the woman.

“Please. Orchestrating a daring escape? Little helpless me? I am the victim of circumstances.” Orchestrating… she was mastermind behind said escape. Not that anyone would believe that. Definitely not Pierce… Not with Lewis’s teary eye look. The damsel in distress… They were going to be shot and their bodies disposed off. His mind was trying to recall the blueprints. “And the clock is ticking we need to move. The question is who will carry Natasha?”

The answer to that question, as it turned out, was Rollings. Also, they were running out of time to get the fuck out.

“They enabled the safety protocol.” Bucky said it so calm that Darcy didn’t even react at first as she tried getting Natasha disconnected from the tubes, Rumlow was on it straight away.

“What? What protocol- The fuck is wrong with your arm?” The Winter Soldier lifted his left wrist with the right hand and it fell limply to his side. “How will we-? Why now-? That bloody Chair. I forgot. Shit.”

It sounded like shitty news and Darcy paused to join the conversation. “Rumlow, if you have finished sending the damn bat signal to your buddies we need to get moving. Please tell me you are just standing weird, Buckster.” They were about walk past the numerous security guards they couldn’t afford to look anything but perfectly at ease.

“They put a jammer in.” Rumlow motioned to the unresponsive prosthesis as he finished cursing.
“To make sure there isn’t any episodes while he is in the chair. I haven’t seen it used before. We always just had guns at the ready. The Chair must have been damaged and it delayed it.” They needed every weapon they could get their hands on and every hand fully functioning. Darcy bit her lip as she pocked the metal just below the red star. How complicated was the devise inside the prosthesis anyway? At the end of the day it was just wires and conductors, right? “Lewis what are you doing?”

“Trying to get a fucking look. What does it looked like I am doing? Right... Ok, I need couple of minutes. We can do this people. First. I need a better light. Second. I need a screwdriver and a hammer. Third. The some of the panels shift and keep the parts inside ventilated is that correct?” Everything was connected to something. That was the basics of everything in mechanics… Bucky shifted so she could get a peak between the occasionally moving plates.

“Yes, or it overheats. I stop… I stop feeling it then.”

Darcy nodded. It made perfect sense. “Right. Yes. Now where’s my light?”

“What are you gonna do?” She tried not to snap at Rumlow as he was standing uncomfortable close holding a lamp for her.

“Find the problem and fix it. Listen, it might surprise you but I know a thing or two. Bucky… James? They would have still left some connections working it- the hand, is too complex for them to simply kill it. It generally able to withstand immense pressure, right? Mark 17 had a similar problem… Tony would not shut up about it… what did we do…?” Darcy pushed the glasses up her sweaty nose as she tried to concentrating on the task at hand. She felt cheated that there wasn’t enough time to appreciate the pun. But the exit was two levels up and they were running out of time. With the minimal light and the jumbled knowledge of mechanics she tried to predict where the jammer was placed without actually taking the thing apart as the four sets of eyes followed her every move. No pressure, she told herself. “Wrap the cloth around the bicep, tightly so no air would be getting in, it will cover the tiny vents going along it. It is the only part that has those. It must just above… it aha!”

The limp prosthesis started making noises as it attempted to cool itself. Rumlow was breathing down her neck and Darcy struggled to focus.

“What are you waiting for?”

“Patience is a virtue. Please give me some space. It has to overheat.” Darcy started to gently tap down the inside of the metal arm, just shy of where the metal joined the flesh. “It’s somewhere here. It has to be near the coupling and the power source to ensure-” the metal panels shifted slightly and Darcy tensed. She could be wrong. She could get the power source and that could easily electrocute them both. She got the hammer and the screwdriver ready. No pressure. No pressure at all. What she wouldn’t give for Tony’s tools right now…

Getting out was easier said than done. The others were waiting for them at the garage with the vehicles ready to move. They were lucky that some of men were still on site at this hour and Pierce wasn’t.

Rollings wiped the sweat from his brow as they got closer to the service elevator. He had the Black Widow casually slung over his shoulder along with a few guns. Within an easy reach if the woman were she to wake up… disorientated… thinking that he was on the opposing team… Why was he the
one doing it again? They had a man that would be able to recover easily from a bullet in the crotch right there. He eyed the Winter Soldier standing stoically next to them.

“What if-?”

“You put her down I will shoot you myself.” Miss Lewis was keeping an eye on him as if he was about to run off with the precious cargo. *Bloody little Weasel…*

“You don’t even have a gun.” Because there was no way in Hell Brock was going to give her one. Which was the best idea of this evening so far.

“I will do it for her.” The Asset on the other hand had his eyes on Lewis all the time as if she was the answer to all the important questions he had forgotten. The man was like a grenade with the pin pulled, waiting to explode at the worst possible moment. But for now, for what ever reason one of the world’s best assassins was taking orders from a small rabid animal with anger management issues. Rollings turned to his superior.

“Mm… *Brock*?”

“There isn’t much left to the cars.” No help was forthcoming either. *The wanker…* At this point there was only Christie left and he might as well not bother as the man had a slight limp from the earlier struggle with the Asset before Lewis had called him off.

The radio came alive and everyone tensed.

“*Rollings? There seems to an intruder alarm tripped on Level 2. I can’t see anything on the cameras. The sensors might need changing. Check it out.*”

“We’re fucked if they’ll reload the cameras.”

They had already left a trail of destruction having had neutralize some of their now former associates and get the surveillance cameras to go on loop. If Rollings was to be honest he was surprised they had gotten so far without firing a single shot. Before he could get the radio out there was another transmission.

“*Rollings? All good, false alarm. Remain in the position.*”

“That’s a different voice.” The Asset gave the verdict as soon as the transmission ended. They all agreed on that. It was also highly suspicious. If they weren’t currently sneaking out they would have been-

“Is it just me or was that *Cupid*?” Lewis wasn’t far off. That did sound suspiciously like Barton. Rollings hesitated a moment. “Its- *aaa-* no, I really don’t think-”

“It totally sounded like him, though. Give me the radio.” The muzzle of a pistol that the Asset pressed into his back helped in deciding if he should comply.

“We’re nearly-.” The alarms started blaring before he finished that sentence and the elevator came to a screeching halt. “*Shit!*”

“**Intruders on Level 2! Intruders on Level 2! All on duty security-**”

“Fucking *Barton.* Take the gun, Lewis. We’ll have to blast our way out now.”
“Are we going to help him?” Lewis looked him dead in the eye when she said that. The former STRIKE members gaped at her.

“Help him? Who is going to help us? Thought of that?! They can get out the same way they got in! We are stealing the prized Asset and the Key to Unlock Stark’s weapons arsenal! I think they will try to stop us slightly harder!”

“Bucky isn’t a Thing to steal.” Said the woman stealing the Asset. Brock gave her a flat look as he attempted to pry the elevator door open along with said Asset.

“There is literally a building full of people that would disagree.”

“Well, they can’t have him. Right, Bucky? I can call you Bucky, right?” Watching Lewis interact with the Winter Soldier was akin to observing a toddler petting a Bull Terrier. Was he seeing her a prey or as his own kin? Will he be ripped apart if he will come in between them? Not that he would ever do that.

“Is that my name?”

“James Buchanan Barnes. Bucky for short… I think-” Brock motioned for Lewis to come closer so he could boost her to reach the opening.

“How about we do that when we’re not- Hold tight, don’t fucking break your neck, Lewis. I don’t need Stark on my damn head.” The woman scrambled out after Christie and helped get Romanov out.

“Stark?” The name seemed to ring a bell for the Asset as he frowned.

“Yeah. They’re getting married believe it or not.” Everyone were surprised. Like, everyone.

“Her to… Stark?”

“I know. Talk about creepy, she’s like him, but prettier and with tits.” Jack Rollings only nodded in confirmation at the questioning look the man… Bucky … gave him. Darcy Lewis was of a special kind of breed. Well, her and Stark.

Pain shot through her neck like a bullet and Natasha made a small noise of complain. It was all she was capable of right now. Her body had been feeling the effect of fatigue on top of the cocktail of drugs being pumped into her.

“Careful! Thor, people, please. It isn’t a sack of potatoes.”

“It’s a dead weight! She’s holding us back!” The furious hissing continued as somebody tried shushing them just to be ignored.

“You know who else is about to be a dead weight?! -”

Natasha felt as feeling slowly returned to her toes. They were now full of pins and needles as if she had been sitting on them for far too long. She resisted the urge to open her eyes. He body was adjusting to the sudden lack of steady stream of tranquilizers or what ever she had been pumped full of. The argument raged on until the smaller voice got its way and Natasha was moved from the over the shoulder position to a stretcher of a sort.
What was that Clint said? Some quote about Darcy that seemed quite fitting right now.

‘Ah, yes…’

*And the trouble with small furry animals in a corner is that, just occasionally, one of them’s a mongoose. One should never push Darcy Lewis in a corner.* What ever book that came from she needed to read it. It contained some universal truths.

She rolled her eyes under the eyelids. Every single muscle in her body complained. The serum once again getting the upper hand and the ability to help her recover. The surrounding noises were now sharper. The muscles rippled and spasmed in haste to clear the toxins. It must have been some time since she stopped getting drugged. Carefully Natasha opened her eyes. It felt good to be gaining back control. Her head was still murky and full of damp wool, but she was no longer being dragged under. There were alarms blaring nearby.

“So, what now?”

“This will be the main security. They don’t leave their post and they are best armed. They will want to know why are not responding to the Alarm?”

“Escorting prisoners?”

“We haven’t got the authorisation from Pierce.”

Their procession came to screeching halt as Natasha made a noise of disgust at the name bringing everyone’s attention to her.

“Oh my Thor, you’re awake. Finally-”

Sudden commotion at the last stop that was barely couple of meters away behind the door made them all freeze up. People could be heard shouting.

“Hail Hydra!”

Well, didn’t *that* sound like a massive bad news?

__________________________________________________________________________

“You stupid son of a bitches, this house of cards is going down, what do you think will happen to you-!”

“You’re a traitor to the cause that’s what you are, McKenna! Filthy turncoat, and you’re taking your bitch with you.”

“Fuck you! I work for SHIELD, not fucking Hydra! There had been an entire War just so people wouldn’t have to work for them!” They could make out two groups with weapons raised at a stand-off. Clearly they weren’t the only ones that thought that it was the time to get out.

There was a moment of silence. People never liked to find out that they were repeating someone else’s mistakes. Also… Hydra? The name had floated about while she was in captivity, but Darcy always thought that it was more a comparison. She wished that it had been just that. All manner or horrible thoughts were coming to her mind at the name.
“Ok, gentlemen, it is your hour to shine.” Darcy motioned to the door.

“We can try going round-”

“Rumlow, you told me yourself that-” somebody ran past in the adjacent corridor into the direction of the alarms emphasising the urgency of their exit. They could be discovered anytime. Barton was a professional and Darcy wanted to believe that he was going to be just fine, unlike them.

“I know, but -” Rumlow wasn’t eager to engage with what could very well been his own men. That was not the way he wanted to go out.

“That is the Exit and we are taking it.” Darcy snapped. The pressure was getting to her. She had been locked up with nothing but four walls and occasionally her pervy, twisted, manipulator of a captor for company. Being on guard all the time. She wasn’t made to live on pins and needles and fear for that long. She needed to get out. Now. “Besides, no one is expecting us to just show up, now do they?”

Darcy fixed her bow, gave a wide smile and waltz towards the security check point before they could stop her.

Hmm... wonder how Tony is coping with this situation?

What you think, my Peeps?
Chapter 77

Dearest Wino,

I am keeping fingers crossed for you,

I hope you will get well soon

xxx

This chapter has not been proof read so apologies for the mistakes

hope you will enjoy it regardless =)

Chapter 77

Funny enough it wasn’t hard to just waltz in between two groups of very well armed people. The hard part was to squash the impulse to just keep waltzing right out that door while crying hysterically. In her defence she hadn’t had hugs since the morning she was ‘napped. She was in withdrawal or what ever name there was for it when you didn’t get your regular fix to keep you sane.

“A tricky thing that, isn’t it? The moral ambiguity of Victory.” Darcy really wished she had some make up on. She always had a bit of stage fright. Going ‘au naturelle’ with her pasty complexion wasn’t a thing she wanted to do in front of an audience. But she didn’t want to die more so here she was marching into an armed conflict. She was pretty sure there was a flaw in that logic somewhere, but it was all she had to cling to right now. That reminded of another thing she missed, another person making crazier life choices than her. Damn, I miss crazy-ass Tony… and his hugs. But at least she had some back up in a form of couple strong dudes.

“A tricky thing that, isn’t it? The moral ambiguity of Victory.” Brock was merely few steps behind, which made him only a step behind the Winter Soldier that followed Lewis like a lost puppy. Maybe that was a good thing. Because he was about ready to shoot the crazy bitch as she strolled in there and purred. ‘Well, if the thing with Stark doesn’t pan out she will make a killing on Phone Sex.’ Because he had no idea what she just said but he was going to agree with it. And he expected a big bonus from Stark to make it worth it.

Clearly the two opposing fractions had no idea who was the woman that looked like she starred in the rough secretary porn… which absolutely wasn’t what he was thinking of last night as he took care of business.

“Rumlow! They are deserting! We can corner them! The intrusion got all the men drawn away-!” What was the guys name again? Bloody Nancy Boy that couldn’t see past his nose, always thinking
that he knew better. Haven’t served in the armed forces, haven’t seen death staring him right in the
face. Lewis had more balls on her. But that wench was something else. As things were going hers
were probably bigger than his.

“Sir, we’re with you!” Ah, fuck. It was one of his guys… with other people. Why? It was supposed to
be a covert escape not a fucking mass evacuation. Why everyone he was working with were so
fucking dumb?!

“Now, now gentlemen. Why the panic in the enemy camp?” Lewis sounded so relax and looked so
out of place the guys blocking the door just stared at her. That little distraction was all that they
needed. Both him and the Asset used the confusion and went head first. The sheer speed and force of
their joined attack obliterated the resistance in a shower of blood and bullets.

Their merry little party grew in number. Some nitwit understood that he wanted to gather as many
loyal agents as they could. Fucking shit… They weren’t trying to salvage SHIELD, they were
merely getting their own asses out. Well, Lewis better be getting a fucking large advance because
this was looking to get expensive for her.

---

Natasha was able to stand now. She needed to eat. She needed to relieve herself. She needed to
make sure that Darcy didn’t bloody kill herself.

It worked. Darcy must have managed to mess up the Machine. The Asset was coming with them.
The further to the parking lot they got the more determined he become. Move focused. More deadly.
Never further than one step away from Darcy. Natasha wasn’t sure if the brunet saw the danger.
Well… Maybe she did… She had to remember that Darcy was smart if naïve sometimes. What were
her options up to this point? Natasha dragged her feet to keep up, her body was heavy as the muscles
spasmed sporadically. Even walking was a struggle. At the end of the day it wasn’t important how
the help was acquired. Her stomach rolled and hunger pains made themselves known. The body
required fuel for the urgent internal repairs it was undertaking.

Another fight greeted them at the garage where the heavily armoured escape vehicles were being
surrounded. It was another instance where Darcy’s gamble on STRIKE and the Winter Soldier paid
off. Good intentions in a gun fight had never gotten anyone anywhere. It was the pure brute force.
The perfect aim at the moving target. The single-minded determination to walk over corpses to
achieve the goal.

The confrontation was quick and bloody. Their number had given them the critical advantage. No
one had expected that that many of STRIKE/SHIELD agents were going to be willing to go rogue at
the drop of the hat. The new ideology being preached hadn’t been as universally taken to heart as Mr
Pierce had expected.

Natasha did what she could there in her weakened state, before she was unceremoniously tossed into
the back seat by the Asset, right next to Darcy who, naturally, was secured first. They tore out of
there like bats out of Hell.

“Who got a phone that I can use?” Natasha wanted to answer her but Rumlow got there first.

“Lewis, you stay the Hell put. You want us to be tracked?! Your precious Tower is under
surveillance. Everything that can be bugged is bugged. Trust me, even Stark ain’t that good. Sit tight.
We can work something out when get to the safehouse.”
It was only the first part of the escape. They had to change cars soon after, they split their forces, their cars later went into massive trucks that transported them into some underground facility, just for them to change the transport again. It took good few hours. For an operation that was organized on the fly it wasn’t too bad, Natasha had to admit, they weren’t dead after all. That always counted for something. The car was silent for whole of two minutes.

“So… I was just thinking-” Darcy tried being delicate.

“Jesus fuck, Lewis… You ever give it a break?” Rumlow was having none of it.

“… Why should I? I never get one. What I wanted to say is have you got food in that safe house?” Natasha put her head on Darcy’s shoulder and the hungry growl emphasized what an excellent question that was.

“How about we make it there first?” That seemed to be a detail that the great escape artists didn’t have time to think of.

They settled in and others started arriving shortly after. Small groups of physically and mentally exhausted people started joining them. Darcy wasn’t the only one that had lived in fear while stuck there. Those that had not taken the new ‘progressive’ ideas to heart had no way of leaving in fear of retribution. Who are you gonna complain to about one of the most respected intelligent agencies in the world ruling their flock like as if it was a pre-war Germany? You put a toe out of line and you were very quickly dealt with. Not necessarily violently and deadly, but there were many ways Mr Pierce and his flunkies could extort power over their agents. Great many it seemed.

It was an experience, watching Romanov and Lewis work on the computer trying to connect it to whatever frequency those super idiots were using -

“Shit, Steve. Is this Hell?” There was some static noise and suddenly Barton’s voice came over crystal clear.

“It’s hard to say… Is Miss Lewis in charge?” The seriousness in Rogers’ voice took everyone in the room by surprise. Lewis’ jaw dropped as the room fell silent and Barton snickered before adding.

“I would pay money to see her face when you say that to her. I can just imagine those eyebrows going up and her pretty face going blank as her eyes go sharp and you can almost hear her think ‘Steven, I will do you dirty for this. Not today, or tomorrow, but one day you will have your guard down and it will be painful.’ You know she’s creative. It will probably involve Sparky.”

The good old Captain laughed at that. “Provided it isn’t on charge after she had tased you again. Besides don’t you have it-“ Lewis tased Barton? That was news. Rumlow savoured that bit of information. Good news were rare these days.

“Ugh…” The bow man grunted, and everyone instantly tensed fearing that their potential reinforcement had been attacked. They needed all the men they could get and while Brock Rumlow wasn’t a fan of those two scout boys it would have been better to have them on their side when HYDRA under the banner of SHIELD were going to come knocking.

“What?” Rogers sounded concerned as well.

“I just had this weird feeling as if somebody walked over my grave.” That wasn’t too bad of an intuition for a birdbrain. Barton’s statement confirmed by the stony expression Lewis had.
Cap cleared his throat couple of times before replying. “… I had it once when I called Stark as those two were about to get down to… ahem… business.”

“Yeah, mum and dad getting the freak on would give me a bad turn too. Ugh! Again. I’m telling you, I’m picking up some weird vibes. It’s like…” There was a lengthy pause as something must have occurred to Barton. “Surely she wouldn’t -”

“You don’t think that a woman that impressed Stark with her scientific abilities somehow be able get on this frequency?” Captain sounded like he had no doubts in that regard.

The was another lengthy pause and Brock could nearly feel the rising panic being transmitted through the radio waves. He glanced at Lewis that had the previously described flat facial expression and sharp eyes skewering the receiver. ‘Oh, yessss BirdShmuck is so right. How unlucky for him.’

“So, you know, Steve, all things aside. She’s great.” Barton was first to try and save the situation and his skin. All the members of STRIKE present to hear the exchange suddenly had mass coughing fit.

“Oh, yes! The greatest. Hands down.” Like a real friend and true survivor Cap wasn’t far behind. After those clearly rushed statements even Romanov cracked a smile which earned a glare from Lewis. The Black Widow was fortunately made of stronger material and replied with a saucy wink.

“…. Lewis?” There was a touch of both fear and hope in that voice as the archer hazarded a guess.

“Hi, Clint.” Romanov finally switched on the transmitter.

“Nat? What? How? When? Finally! We thought they took you to Europe somewhere! Where are you? We’re coming-” “Natasha! We been waiting for you to get in touch-” the two started talking at the same making it nearly impossible to understand.

“I’m good. We were at the complex you tried infiltrating tonight. Thanks for the distraction.” Neither him or Rollings agreed with the Black Widow, that little distraction had nearly killed them.

“We? Are you with… please - please tell me she is ok, Nat. She is with you, right? Please-” The excitement and tension on the other end was picking up and Barton choked the words out. Lewis seemed to be well liked. The woman in question was still fuming from earlier as she cut in.

“Natasha, we don’t even know that it is them-” That was a fair point. They didn’t.

The relieve was clear in Barton’s voice. “Lewis? Hey! We-“

“MOOOOM tell them!” Steve Rogers cried as if he was spoiled little brat.

The pitch was so high it made his teeth ache, Brock was nearly surprised how the device didn’t catch fire from the intensity of the look it was receiving from mummy dearest. He leaned closer to whisper to the silently seething woman. He had no problem taking advantage of the situation.

“So… you want me to shoot him when he turns up?”

“That’s Captain America.” The woman said it in a very even voice. He grinned.

“You want me to shoot him with a rifle made in US of A when he turns up?”

“Hmm…”

“Well?” He was only offering it to be helpful. Brock liked being useful. Really.
Lewis pouted at him pretending to think it over. “I’m thinking.”

“Lewis, seriously, where you two are? Nat?! Come on, we can get there in a hot minute. I am surprised Stark haven’t come up with a way to teleport himself” The sniper was working himself into a frenzy like an excited puppy as Lewis rolled her eyes at Rumlow’s suggestion. An emotional smile creeping onto the deceptively stern face.

“Maybe next time. But thank you for the offer.” She rubbed her nose before speaking again trying to mask the tightness in her voice as she addressed Barton again. “We’re good, Cupid. Can you do me a favour, please? Can you – can you let Tony know I am ok?”

“And the coordinates are? Lewis, shit. Now- now is really not the time to play coy. Nat! Please, where the fuck are you? This is a safe line, Stark made sure-”

“Is he ok?” Lewis turned so others couldn’t see her face as she asked that.

“…I-” “We-” There was no great enthusiasm to confirm it and Lewis tensed up even more. That was interesting. The reports had it that Stark was taking the situation remarkably well. But then again, the reports said that Darcy Lewis was a helpless little damsel. Even as the woman pleaded gently she was far from being helpless.

“Please tell me he is ok…”

“He’s- Listen, he’ll be so much better when he sees you. Trust me. The world will be a safer place as soon as that happens-”

“Barton. For the love of-! Miss Lewis, Stark he - he missed you.”

Hawkeye snorted. “Yeah, he misssssed you, Lewis. You know what we missed? Apart from you that is, we did kind of missed you… Stark’s relative mental stability? Remember that? Well, it has been missed. Where are you? We can’t go back to him and not know where you are!”

Trying to make sense of the feelings inside him was like trying to catch smoke. It was right there… So close. He could reach and grab it. Maybe if he did… if he did… this pit inside him would close. No… not quite a pit. It was an abyss. And him in those dark waters, looking down until it was all that he could see. The darkness looking back at him. The fury, the anger, the darkness fuelled it inside him. Sometimes it felt like he wanted to run, yet he couldn’t say why.

He was an Asset. The Winter Soldier. They called him the Soldier. That was all he could remember, that was all that mattered. Being a soldier. Obeying orders. Completing the mission. It was all that there was… The Soldier didn’t know how long there has only been him and the darkness…

“Hey, tough guy. I got you something to eat. Boiled potatoes and spam. I know, I know, sounds unappetising but spam gets too much bad press. It’s quite tasty.” The Soldier watched the beat-up metal plate set on the table in front of him. A fork with one tooth missing was put next to it.

… and then suddenly there was Her. Why was She different? He had seen women before. All shapes and sizes. He remembered the red head… yet no one have left quite such an impression. The Asset felt a surge of something inside him. Swept away by a tidal wave when all he could see was darkness around him.

He was an Asset because he was good. They relied on him. His missions were important. It was…
He could assess the situation, act quickly and efficiently, reach the objective… but…

“Bucky?”

There was noise in his ears. The wave still had him in its grasp. It was like his unshakable core was given a turn and the world fractured. It was all her… He blinked slowly, wondering if his inner turmoil was showing. Was she? He had been trying to assess her since the moment he had laid eyes on her. Was a target? Was she an ally? His mind clung to different aspects of the woman for what ever reason unable to pull together all that it was seeing… all that she have suddenly made him feel.

She was… she was the hands. Small, balled and raised in front of her. The short frame shaking… Going against the odds… The hands that were slowly putting the sad looking fork into his, closing his fingers around it. Warm and comforting. The knuckles still bruised from the fight.

“You need to eat…”

She was the voice. Kind and gentle. It was… it was like there was an echo to it. The Soldier swallowed. An echo… like a ghost of voices in another room. The whisper you can never make out, falling from the end of her words. Calling to him. Disturbing the dark abyss…

“Hey, hey… its ok. Here… let me help you.”

She was the smile. Not the shape of the lips but the warmth gathered in between the tiny wrinkles around the eyes, the mouth. He didn’t see it, but he could feel it. He was still watching the hands. They were slowly mashing the root vegetable. Just occasionally stopping to scrape the thin layer of fat from the meagre slice of meat and add it to the veg in an attempt to give it some favour.

“Not so fast! Thor, you’ll choke… You can eat, Bucky. Sorry… I didn’t mean to shout. It looked like you forgot how to chew, that’s all… Remember to chew… Ok? Lets try this.” She took the fork from him again. Why did he feel so hungry? Why didn’t he feel threatened by her? The Asset struggled… She was waiting for him to show some sign that it was ok for her to try and help him eat. It was his choice. The palms of his hands got clammy as he nodded… She had good hands. The kind that made the world better. “Please don’t tell Steve… Well, here comes the airplane… I don’t… I don’t mother people… I don’t… you know? Rogers will never let me live this down…He’s such a little shit… I really hope he’s ok… he will be so happy to see you again.” Her whispers echoed inside his head like bullets until it found their phantom targets he hadn’t known were there and struck it with force that made him nearly reel back. The straight back as she helped him eat in the moment of his confusion. He was conditioned to obey. To be quick, efficient, a tool to be used and put aside… To spill blood on behalf of those that commanded him…

She was the tears that never fell from behind the glasses. The tiny droplets hanging on the lashes. Such a blatant refusal to be beaten… She was like the shimmer above the darkness. The play of light on the surface of the water. The warmth you felt inside when the world was cold.

She was like a puzzle. The box of odd things that every house had. Full of memories. She was small and fragile… but never surrendering… It felt like hearing the footsteps on the landing… gently coming closer… the scent of paint in the room… the soft scrape of pencil on paper… the bustle of city outside the open window… it felt like coming home.

The voice from behind startled him badly and the Soldier jumped to his feet. Gun at the ready. “Bucky?”

__________________________________________________________________________
So, my lovely Peeps! What you think? Let me know=} Help the plot bunnies breed and prosper!
Hello, Peeps!

How are you all doing in this heat? Staying hydrated, I hope =)

A short new chapter that I hope you will enjoy, just moved and finally was able to sit down for it

Wino, I'm glad you are better and as always thank you for helping me

Chapter 78

Intuition. Christine had learned long ago that it was important to learn to trust your guts. The handy internal warning system was often ignored because too many times people didn’t want to be right. Nobody wanted the bad news. Including her. But that was another thing Christine Everhart had learned: the bad news didn’t care what you wanted.

The cab parked a couple of blocks away from the Tower to let her out without being hit by the crazy rush hour traffic. She tipped well.

The famous or rather infamous Avengers Tower… did anyone still call it that? Everyone knew it was Stark’s. Christine walked into the lobby as if she was supposed to be there. Years of going to places to sniff out information prepared her just for such a day.

“Miss Everhart? What can we do for you?” Ah, addressed by name, how nice… Press in general, and her in particular, were always well received. The Receptionist was all smiles for her as soon as the journalist reached the front desk. Always polite and always on the alert as not to let people like her slip past them. She felt watched, it was a bit of a struggle not to start looking around. The feeling only got stronger as the time ticked away.

“Good evening. Yes, I am here to see Miss Lewis.”

“Do you have an appointment, Miss Everhart?”

“Yes, I do.”

The woman only blinked at her, the expression neutral.

“What time is Miss Lewis expecting you, Miss Everhart?”

Christine smiled before glancing at her watch. There was tension in the air, despite all the smiles of people going about their daily business. The air was charged, and everyone did a very good job at pretending that nothing was wrong.

“Six fifteen. It is nice to be early. Darcy appreciates people that don’t waste her time.” She didn’t expect the casual name drop to change anything and it didn’t. What also didn’t happen was that no
customary call was being made. Christine could be telling the truth. Darcy Lewis was a private person and not an employee of Stark Industries at the end of the day, she lived and worked in the Tower. The nice ladies should double check just in case the visit was genuine.

“Would you like to take a seat, Miss Everhart?” And of course, service with a smile and the polite way of saying no.

“Thank you.”

Christine took a seat, so she could see what was going on at the desk. There was no appointment. Well, that wasn’t technically true. There had been an appointment. Four days ago. Miss Darcy Lewis never showed up. Neither did she call and apologise or attempt to reschedule. The phone went to voicemail instantly every single time. None of Christine’s email were replied to.

She settled in for a long wait. The chairs weren’t overly comfortable, she noted. Why was she here? They weren’t even friends. They were never going to be as their personalities were completely different. But that was hardly the point here. The point was that Darcy Lewis was not the type of person to fall off the planet. Given, the woman could be somewhere tropical working on her tan and ignoring the world, she sure was rich enough now, being engaged to Stark. But that wouldn’t have been the Darcy Lewis that Christine met and had lunch with once before. They weren’t BFF’s, they didn’t fire texts at each other at all hours of the day. They preferred to email, discussing a range of topics. Those were intellectually refreshing conversations as Miss Lewis had a sharp mind and tongue to match. If Lewis had decided to cancel the woman would have done it outright. It was unlike the brunette to negate on a meeting without an explanation…

*It felt like bad news…* Christine grimaced as she shifted. The chairs were most definitely not comfy. All those years of experience sussing out stories had taught her to listen. There were… rumours and yes, she understood there were at least a million at any given time going on about Tony Stark, but there was one that along with the recent absence of Miss Lewis just felt disturbing.

Stark Industries was undergoing a very sudden restructuring. Everyone was under review. Christine been told that it included all staff working for SI, starting from the janitors to Board members. A review wasn’t unusual. Large corporations did those all the time. What was strange was the number of staff that got the sack or were suspended. It was a very large number. No one could tell for certain how many, but it started exactly four days ago and the heads just continued to roll.

Stark was purging his company. His security had always been diligent and for him to suddenly to do this something big must have happened. Christine really hoped that this time she was wrong.

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It only took two hours for the Head of Security to come and see her. Another thing that Christine honed apart from her hearing was her persistence.

“Mr Hogan, I-”

“Please follow with me, Miss Everhart.” And to Christine’s great surprise it wasn’t out but to the elevator instead. She was going up. Maybe Lewis was ill? She had considered that option a few times, but in that case, somebody would have cancelled on Lewis’ behalf. A person of Lewis calibre didn’t leave loose ends hanging in the wind. The woman’s estranged family was an excellent example. She cringed at the memory of the last run-in they had with Stark. It was a wonderful entertainment but so much cringe. Those people should just accept they weren’t going to get their way into Stark’s pocket.
She followed Hogan as they changed the elevator and continued going up. The stony facial expression of Stark’s main lackey discouraged communication. Which wasn’t unusual. The Security was there for a reason and it wasn’t to entertain her. Still… there was a lot of security present, even for a Stark Tower.

When the elevator stopped Hogan motioned for her to step out. It wasn’t the Penthouse Christine noted as the door closed soundlessly behind her.

“Um…” The place looked like a spare part warehouse in a process of relocating. It was an organised mess, but it was still a mess. She stood by the elevator for a minute thinking just how much she disliked a certain billionaire as an exceedingly polite voice drifted from the ceiling.

“Good evening, Miss Everhart. Welcome to the Tower. Please step forth, Sir is expecting you.”

“Thanks.” Her answer was a little terse but the memory of that voice from Malibu reminded of her poor judgement.

If Christine wasn’t absolutely sure she was under constant observation and her every move was closely scrutinized she would have loved to have closer look at the machines scattered around. Her professional curiosity was dying at the thought that such a chance was being missed. Stark guarded his work like a jealous dragon guards his treasure horde, but maybe that focus has now shifted.

‘Darcy Lewis what has happened to you?’

“Oh, hi. Debbie, right?”

Christine took a deep breath. Attitudes like Stark’s were the reason why some people snapped and murders happened. She smiled. Two could play that game.

“Right.”

That got her a look of mild amusement. He knew perfectly well who she was. The man tried to boycott her and Lewis’ lunch. Unsuccessfully, of course, because Darcy Lewis took no shit from no one.

“I hope you don’t mind if I have a drink? What was it that you had? Absinthe?”

“Martini, Mr Stark.”

“You sure?”

“Yes.” Christine rolled her eyes as she walked closer to the bar and the man standing next to it.

A shrug was her reply, as if he didn’t quite believe her, and Christine had to remind herself that she was there for a reason and beating Iron Man to death with a crystal carafe was not it. While he poured the drinks she once again looked around. The boxes, mechanisms and parts belonging to unknown or yet not completed devices were everywhere. One could almost say that the place was cluttered. It contrasted sharply with her memories of Malibu…

“Stirred not shaken, hope you don’t mind.”

She nearly jumped out of her skin as the smooth voice spoke right next to her. The elegant glass was given to her and she managed a smile.

Since Christine had set a foot into the building two hours ago something just felt off. Now with the man standing right in front she could tell that something had gone terribly wrong.
Nonchalantly smiling at her was the Merchant of Death.

“Thank you…” The steely, cold and ever calculating look could certainly take anyone’s breath away and not in a good way. Christine barely managed a reply.

Before his superhero days Tony Stark had a certain reputation and she wasn’t talking about his philandering one. No. He didn’t get a nickname like the Merchant of Death for nothing. People now had nearly forgotten where Starks got their vast fortune from. Being a defence contractor was great. It made loads of money for them. It was also viciously competitive sector and in order to stay at the top one had to be good at destroying the competition. Tony Stark was exceptionally good. He had no problem with removing obstructions from his path. Some even called him ruthless but it just very conveniently got lost among his other, more socially appealing, descriptions of his character. The adoring masses had forgotten that behind the smile, behind that outrageous flirting and flamboyant lifestyle was a man who made death his trade and was successful at it. It was an experience that no one would have liked to go against. Including her.

“Now. What brings you to my humble adobe, Debbie?” He was examining her. Christine felt sweat roll down her back. It was a look a man gave a piece of meat wondering what pressure he should apply for the flesh to give and the bone underneath to shatter. It was a cold calculating gaze. Nothing personal. Those dark eyes spoke volumes and all of them were hostile. She hadn’t seen this Tony Stark before, even when she had called him the Merchant of Death to his face. All she got that time was the showy billionaire playboy. Now on the other hand, there was no playfulness just a whole lot of darkness lurking inside those eyes.

“I have an appointment with Darcy.” Christine nearly stepped back from the sheer icy coldness that suddenly emanated from Stark.

“No, you don’t.” Something was wrong and they both knew it. There was no point to beat around the bush. Wasn’t this kind of confrontations what she lived for? She was a professional. Christine took a deep breath. The key was to stay calm and observe.

“Where is she?”

“Currently? Otherwise preoccupied.” Such a vague answer.

“I want to see her, Stark.”

“Get in line, Debbie, you’re pretty low on that list.”

“Did she dump you?”

Silence. A lot more coldness. Christine expected at least a laugh. Him looking down at her at the cheap shot. Maybe some taunting. His face didn’t as much as change expression. Except the eyes… Words like dark and intense came to mind, but in the current context it was bad sign.

“No.”

It stretched between them again. The heavy, smothering silence. She wasn’t scared … she just didn’t want to hear what he was telling her in between the sentences. Christine looked around trying to avoid those eyes. Boxes… useless machines… there was no way that Stark was working on all of them at the same time, it was as if he was hoarding them. Filling the space. Filling the emptiness … where something … someone else should be. The drink burned as it went down. The Security… the purge of the personnel… Darcy Lewis wasn’t in this Tower, Christine guessed that from the moment she was greeted in the reception and from the way Stark was reacting he didn’t have a clue either.
“... Is she ok?”

“I have been assured she is.” Oh… Been assured… Fuck… So, she wished it had been a bad breakup.

“What… what do they want?”

“Things I cannot give them.” Now she was scared. Was it for Darcy or was it for herself, Christine wasn’t sure, because Stark was like a dangerous animal that’s been domesticated but suddenly had a taste of blood again. Just standing there, watching her. So deceitfully calm and collected. All that pent-up anger, all that power and a mind sharper than a diamond. Waiting to be unleashed.

Somebody had made a terrible mistake.

Well, at least she knew the gut feeling was working.

“Mr Stark-”

“Oh, I read your latest article the other day. Refreshingly, no mention of me. Just the way I like to keep it.” It felt like a wrong time to annoy Stark, so Christine only nodded. Iron Man fiancé’s kidnapping would be Breaking News. It would be BIG. If it would turn out that something happened to Lewis because of that…

“Of course-”

“That’s great! I was hoping you were going to say that.” The playfulness covered the handsome face like a mask. Such a perfect disguise. “And for that I am going to give you heads up.”

“An exclusive once she’s back?”

“No. That will never make the papers, but I got a little treat for you, and naturally you will do me a favour when time comes.”

Christine rolled her eyes even as her mind kept feverishly guessing who could have gotten Lewis. Who was that stupid to make Stark angry? “Such as?”

“What do you know about Hydra?”

So, good? Bad?

Keep me going by letting me know what are your favourite bits in the story so far =)

x much appreciated in advance x
Chapter 79

Wino, you are a Star!

Thank you, your help is much appreciated =)

Chapter 79

Reunions were a tricky thing. They weren’t always a happy occasion. Some were violent, turbulent affairs. Those were the times when old wounds were ripped open once again. No one wanted to be in the middle of one that was about to turn bad.

But this rule, just like every other one, had an exception. Darcy Lewis, the source of Brock’s tension headache, planted herself right in the middle of it. Right in between two soldiers on super juice.

‘Why? Just… why? Why are you doing this to me, you crazy wench?’

Captain Squeaky Clean was easily recognisable even without the shield and, man, he was dumbest piece of shit that ever walked on this planet. Brock inched forward as the drama unfolded in the plain view of everyone present in their makeshift lunch room. The general mood, even before those idiots showed up, was one of barely suppressed fear and anxiety. Every single person in this crappy hideout had gone against orders of this SHIELD/Hydra mashup… Shieldra?... This kind of actions had only one conclusion in their line of work.

The next few days were going to determine the fate of many. ‘Project Insight’ was going ahead, last he heard. Brock gave the room another once over. Lewis’ little escape tore a hole in Shieldra’s ranks. Most of STRIKE escaped and they had enough ammunition to take on a small army. Then there were others that joined up starting with admin and communications specialists to active field agents. It was supposed to be a discreet trickle instead they broke a dam on their way out. Right now people were catching their breath, getting a bite, some much needed sleep, others trying to get to those they trusted to spread the word of what was going on. Soon, they’d want to know about the next step.

What was the Plan? Because surely there had to be one… Rollings came to stand next to him. There had been a plan. A plan to get the fuck out and stay the Hell away from all that mess. Since that plan was no longer feasible they were going to Plan B. Which meant having to work one out once the situation with Captain Small Dick was resolved.

Why wasn’t he told those two idiots showed up? He really thought he made it clear who was in charge and that it was him.

‘It better not be Webb trying to be top dog again…’ they were in a very small boat and Brock wouldn’t have any problems tossing his body overboard…

“Bucky? Bucky, it’s me. It’s Steve.”

“Steve, Steve… give him some space, please you’re crowding him…”

The Winter Soldier was shaking, head down, wide confused eyes jumping from the tall man in the
hood to the short woman that was attempting to hold him back. The very definition of a scared dog expecting a whipping. The thing with putting such people in a corner was that there was no way to predict how they would react. The only thing that was certain - it would be bloody.

“Darcy, it’s ok, just let me – let me talk to him. Bucky!” Rogers’s attempt to remove Lewis out of his path went as well as Brock expected it. He once again marvelled at the Golden Boy’s lack of foresight. While Rogers was talking with Lewis acting as filter, Soldat struggled with sudden overload of information. Having your brain scrambled on a regular basis and forgetting your own name was not an easy thing to come back from.

And what did Rogers do? Apart from yapping on repeat ‘Bucky, its Steve’... *He put a hand on Lewis*. Not in a violent way, of course, but the woman protested, and *boy did Bucky react fast*. The metal flashed, and the punch got Rogers right in the nose. The woman in her infinite determination to be in the middle of shit going down stayed just where she was. It was astonishing. ‘Astonishingly stupid...’

“No! Rogers, step back! NOW!” Couple of more impressionable agents literally walked backwards into walls, instantly obeying the forceful command. Others jumped out of their seats.

*Thunder underground* was the comparison that came to Brock’s mind. The sound was hardly heard, but it travelled like vibration that got under your skin, inside your bones and into your skull getting louder until it exploded in your ears. For someone so small Lewis sure managed to make her presence known and acknowledged. Maybe there was a grain of truth in her being related to the God of Thunder...

Captain America, like the good soldier that he was, took the step back, clutching his nose in hurt confusion. “Bucky…”

Why was Rogers surprised? Winter Soldier had been in Hydra’s hands since the War from the sound of things. Did he think that the man just waited for the rescue? That those people didn’t make sure to have him under complete control? It was nothing short of a miracle that the Asset listened to Lewis. It was like she was a sort of Whisperer of the Lethal and Mentally Disturbed … ‘Huh... That kind of makes sense…’

“Should we help?” Rollings hissed quietly as they kept watching the drama.

“Whom?”

“... Lewis? Maybe?”

Brock tore his eyes for a moment from the woman ordering the Winter Soldier to take a step back. “Her? Bitch’s safer than anyone else here.”

“So why are you getting closer?” That was a good question.

“Because if the Asset goes off no else will be.” Being in command came with obligations.

“So you gonna try and stop him? ” That suggestion sounded plain stupid. Like something Rogers would do.

“What? No. You know she isn’t paying that much.”

“She’s not gonna pay us. Period. If they take her head off by accident...”

“...” Brock didn’t imagine Stark honouring any obligations made by Lewis. Not if she were to die
while in his charge. Did it even count that she was still in his charge?

“So… I guess we’re going for Rogers if he tries being handsy?”

“Fuck it… Yes. Listen I’m sure-” Brock was going to say something along the lines of ‘he is not that stupid to do it again’ while thinking that the Captain Stars and Stripes was just that stupid just was Rogers went and did it again and got hit, again.

‘Lewis has be ok with me shooting that idiot by now’

“No! Rogers, step back! NOW!” That was not how the reunion between two long lost friends should have gone. It definitely didn’t go as Darcy imagined it to. “Bucky, I’m ok… No, I’m not moving. Bucky… Soldat! Step back!” She hated Hydra and their attempts to gain power. She hated herself right now too. Hated that she had to order Bucky around. Hated that he didn’t even blink an eye as he obeyed.

So… that was how tragedy felt like.

On one hand, a man attempting to talk to his oldest buddy, that’s been presumed dead years ago, and suddenly was back. Darcy was sure Steve would go to the ends of the world for his friend. The hope was pure and fragile as Steve tried to catch Bucky’s eye. The smile tugging at the corners of his mouth. If only he could have a moment, just a moment, everything in his life would be right again…

On the other hand, there was a confused, scared and tortured man that had an entire life worth of memories torn from his head. Repeatedly. Thor only knew what Hydra had made Bucky do… well, Darcy could make an educated guess… it would involve blood and death. He probably didn’t remember, like he didn’t remember meeting Steve just few weeks ago…

Whatever version of the super juice Bucky was given, it most likely was going to restore the memories overtime. The question was in what order? Would the oldest, most deeply seated ones resurface first? Or would it work backwards from most resent ones?... The blood, the horror on the faces of the many he terminated on Hydra’s orders?... Would it come back as a mix? Was he going to be able to distinguish one from another?

But that was yet to come. Now all that mattered was that Steve Rogers was too much to handle for his friend.

“Darcy?... If I can just- He’ll remember- He’s known me all his life! He has to- Bucky! Back in Brooklyn.”

“I’m sorry, Steve… He doesn’t owe the world anything. Even to you… I know- I know you mean well. He did remember you… In a way. But right now, the only thing that Bucky needs to do is remember, to learn again if needed, that first and foremost he is his own person.” Steve wasn’t wrong, and it was breaking Darcy’s heart, but just like in War she had to pick a side. Sometimes you had to pick a battle that you knew no one was going to win.

“He’s my friend-”

“He’s the longest serving prisoner of War. Be that friend you claim to be and let him breathe freely again. Let him take a moment without someone telling what he has to do or feel- ”
“The War finished!” But its horrors still lived. She knew that Steve had witnessed them first hand. The bloodshed, the death camps…

“Shame Hydra forgot to mention that to him. How did it feel when you came around, Rogers? Remember the fear? Disorientation? Inability to tell who’s your friend?” It must have felt like waking up from a nightmare unable to tell what was real.

“The … War?” The voice was so low that Darcy nearly missed what Bucky said.

“Yes! We won, Bucky! We won… It’s finished. Been finished for years now… Buck…” And all those years James Buchanan Barnes was held captive. The War doesn’t end when Victory is declared… Not for the men still bleeding from its wounds.

“I… I…” Bucky was still fighting it inside his head. He wasn’t free… Not yet… Not until he could remember how it all started and make the full circle. Find all those scattered fragments of himself that Hydra tried so hard to destroy.

“It’s… it’s ok. Don’t force it. It’s perfectly fine not to remember. Right, Steven? It’s ok to take small steps and not to rush, right?” The pain of realization that nothing was ever going to be the same, no matter how much he hoped for it, on Steve’s face was jarring.

“Yes, Miss Lewis… ” But Captain America wasn’t giving up that easily. They road ahead promised to be long and rough, but weren’t all those that led to things that were worth fight for?

“Stay where you are, Rogers.” They needed a break. “Natasha?!” The woman materialized immediately and if she wasn’t so tired Darcy would have jumped. “Natasha, please do me a favour, can you and Bucky, like, do a perimeter check? Take a stroll outside? I’m sure-” The metal hand encased her wrist as Bucky once again glued himself to her side. “I- so- ok… f-fudge…” The grip wasn’t painful but the attempt to casually shake it off didn’t work. It had been long week, a long day going onto a long night. Fatigue from chronic lack of sleep and constant fear had taken a toll on her body. One of two things was going to happen soon: she either was going to lay down or just pass out. Darcy took a moment to collect herself. “Ok. So we’ll take a look how are things outside, and could you, Natasha, stay here with Steven? Huh? Please?” what she really had in mind and hoped her facial expression conveyed was ‘Please make him stay put, he is upset, Bucky is upset, I am upset. Just make sure he doesn’t follow us.’

“Of course, Darcy.” The recovery rate of the Black Widow was enviable. While it wasn’t back to the heathy glow the redhead had before the whole kidnapping ordeal, she was far heathier looking than Darcy herself. Which meant that the woman was able to stand her ground again.

“Thank you.”

“You’re a fucking idiot, Rogers.” Brock Rumlow was in Steve’s face before Natasha could open her mouth. “Jack, you go with Lewis and the Asset.” Rollings hurried away without a backwards glance.

“He’s not an Asset, his name is-”

“Nobody gives a fuck right now, if you had a single braincell-”

“- James Buchanan Barnes!”
“- in that head of yours-” The passions had been running high this evening and the Black Widow, despite what she was personally feeling about the situation, couldn’t afford to pick sides. They didn’t have the luxury to go into who was right and who was wrong. If they didn’t pull together Hydra was going to hunt them down and pick them off one by one.

“Where’s Clint?” They were a man short.

“Go fuck yourself, Rumlow.” Steve snapped angrily at the STRIKE commander. Natasha wasn’t Darcy and she had no intention to be stepping in the line of fire between those two brainless muscle mountains. “Clint’s around. We split up before we got in.” Smart move. Always have something up the sleeve when you go into hostile territory.

“So he doesn’t know that the Winter Soldier is with us now?”

“His name is Bucky. It’s not like you broadcasted the news.” And for a very good reason.

Rumlow swore under his breath. “Shit. Just what we need. The Pigeon shitting from the rafters.” Natasha was more concerned about the exploding arrows, but she wasn’t going to deny that Clint swinging handfuls of fresh faeces would be entertaining to watch.

“Gentlemen, it’s in everyone’s best interest that we get along. Also, we need to find Clint before he spots her in a suspicious company.”

It was a shitty situation. Natasha gently patted Steve’s shoulder as the man got a grip on himself. Darcy was right. The Asset had to figure out who he was himself, and Steve with all the best intentions only confused him. Which made the already highly trained and dangerous Winter Soldier even more unstable.

“She’s pale… Did she have her iron?” The change of subject was welcome and Rumlow frowned. He hadn’t had to deal with Steve Rogers when he was in a state like that. Contemplating his mistakes. He knew Darcy was right. She wasn’t fighting him because she thought that he was wrong, she did it because somebody had to stay level-headed and rational and let Bucky have his moment of peace and quiet. Was there anyone on this planet that Darcy Lewis wouldn’t go against?

“What?”

Natasha shrugged. She hadn’t had a chance to think about it yet. It was important. Darcy had a condition, but in the grad scheme of this evening that was not a priority. “Iron supplements. Darcy is severely anaemic. No, Steve, I don’t think-”

“Severely anaemic? Her? Aren’t people weak when they have that?”

“Yes. You had to notice how pale and unsteady on her feet she is?” He clearly hadn’t. None of them really did before. Because Darcy Lewis was too much of a force of nature blowing straight ahead. Sometimes the small things just escaped everyone’s notice. Rumlow stared at them.

“Well, consuming still beating hearts of your conquered enemies doesn’t have the same nutritional value as it used to.”

Steve rubbed his neck. “Its liver. Liver has the highest concentration of iron in the human body.”

“…I’ll be sure to tell her she’s been doing it wrong all these years.”

Natasha felt like she had to say something. “Darcy is not a violent person.”
“Romanov, she jumped the Asset-”

“That was just to mess up the wiring.”

Steve gave her a questioning look and once again Nat shrugged. She had been doing it a lot regarding things Darcy Lewis had done.

“They had me sedated. Darcy had to get creative.” Without the Assets help they wouldn’t have ever been able to make it out. At least not her…

“I knew it. There was no way that Winter Soldier would have just flipped like that. Fucking sneaky little weasel.”

“… Mongoose.”

Rumblow snapped his fingers suddenly energised as if he had remembered something important.

“Yes! That’s the name! Small, cute, kills snakes? Possibly rabid? Looks like it would love some fresh liver?”

“… I never said anything and I know not what you speak of.”

“She got you by the balls, Rogers.”

“She got you on her payroll, Rumlow. Isn’t that a little late in life for a change in career? Getting a little tired-” The tension was close to snapping and the two men were spoiling for a fight.

“She got your boyfriend -”

“Hey! HEY! Break it up!” Natasha snarled. She was only separating those two because that was bad for the morale. They were people around watching their every move.

‘Mongoose is on the loose again, Stark. DC. Her and Red. They’re ok…’ Barton’s words were ringing in his ears as if somebody hit him with a hammer. ‘They’re ok…’

She was ok… Tony wanted to ask more questions, keep the channel open but Barton cut it short. It was the right move but… The journey to the Capital was short, after landing and shedding the suit Tony picked up a beat-up Chevy from Vella’s cousin in DC and was now traveling towards the coordinates Hawkniss gave him as he kept a low profile and avoided any major roads. An irritated voice answered his late call.

“Christine Everhart speaking.”

“Hey, Debbie. Have you been thinking about me again? You sounded just a little bit breathless.”

“I got to confess, the vision of you dying in a blazing fire is never far from my mind. ”

“Meow. So, just heads up. We’re at zero hours.”

“What? Already? Are you joking? You must be joking, Stark. We’re not ready go live now! We can’t just go to print!”

“Hurry up then. You got an entire night. DC’s about to get a very rude wake up call.”
“It’s going down in *Washington*?”

“Yes. Rhodey is evacuating the President as we speak.”

“So... we certain he got nothing to do with it?” Tony had to chuckle at the tone of voice that the reporter used. Christine Everhart had proven to be very sceptical of the current Head of State. To be honest he didn’t like they guy either, but they didn’t find anything leading back to the man. The mutual consensus he was too stupid to be recruited by Hydra.

“Looks like it. The Vice President though, you were right about that little piggy working for its own interest.”

“I knew it. Didn’t I tell you so, Stark? I need to get Garry up. There is so much to do. Damn it, I don’t even know where he is tonight! *Fuck.*”

Tony laughed. He felt giddy and still more than a little drunk from the relief and still drunk from alcohol that he been consuming to numb the feelings that were raging inside him since Spark been taken.

“Can’t help you there, Debbie. You got to get everything up yourself.”

“You sound odd. Wait... *Are you drunk*?”

“Maybe. Listen, its’ always charming to speak to you-”

“You sound happy... What happened? Did you find her?” Was he being that obvious? Tony had thought that he was handling it quite well. He coughed.

“That’s slightly above your clearance lever-“ The shriek from the other end pierced his eardrum like a knife.

“You did! Oh, my God! Is she *ok*?”

“You worry about running the story, Debbie. Got to *go*!”

“You son of-” Yeah, he loved getting under people’s skin.

It was a junkyard warehouse full of armed, twitchy ex-agents and Tony could hardly blame them. Last twenty-four hours had been filled with all sorts of action for them.

“So, let me get this straight, Romanov. Darcy poached most of STRIKE, a chunk of Shield agents and Hydra’s Special Snowflake? Just like that?”

“Yes.” Tony waited a heartbeat for the Black Widow to add something else. Trust Darcy to run a riot when you least expected it. He shouldn’t have been as surprised as he was by it. Their first face to face meeting had set the bar pretty high of what one could expect from his sweet fluffy little Honeybunny when the woman was pushed in a corner. Tony wasn’t sure if he should laugh or weep or both.

“That’s Spark for you. Just one question. *Where is she*?” He had been met and escorted inside by couple of STRIKE guys and yet there had not been a sign of the only person he was there to see. “Not that I’m not happy about you, Romanov, I’m glad you’re safe-” Romanov nodded to a door just further down the dingy corridor.
“She went to take a nap.”

“I could do with one, after I take her home.”

“About that—”

“I’m taking her home that isn’t negotiable.” These last several days had been a challenge for him.

“The Asset isn’t leaving her side.”

“Meaning?”

“Literally, he doesn’t leave her side for as much a minute. He’s little like a baby duck. He panics as soon as she’s out of his side.” That was a complication that Tony could have done without. The legs started carrying him towards the end of the corridor and he hissed through his teeth.

“I need to be on the West Coast by morning as Hydra operatives will try and cause a conflict with China because they expect Helicarriers to back them up, it will be up to you and Icicle to make sure it doesn’t happen. Rhodey will be busy in the Caribbean. What will happen is that Darcy is going to put my Suit on and I will see her home. Where she will be safe. Ducky can sort his issues how the fuck he wants after we gone. I hope you don’t expect me just sit by as a brainwashed, mentally unstable enemy assassin uses her as safety blanket?” The hands had started to shake and sweat was gathering on his skin as he got closer to the door that Romanov had indicated. He wasn’t nervous. Their plan was spinning in motion and Darcy was just behind that door. Just few more steps… just few more.

“You do it all the time.”

“We’re engaged. I’m allowed. Feel the difference? Now if you’ll excuse me.” And once he has her in his arms again, maybe then he will no longer feel like he had been torn apart.

So what you think, Peeps? Good? Bad? Let me know!
Chapter 80

The door… The tall, rectangular piece of beat up metal that had clearly been crowbarred open several times. It was just like any other door in this place he had walked through. There was nothing extraordinary about it. Nothing that should have made Tony freeze up with the hand on the handle.

This was the moment he had been waiting for. Darcy was safe behind this piece of metal… There was no reason to panic now. They were going to handle Hydra. They were going to fight and win.

It was just a matter of time until they, him, would have tracked Spark down, it was a lucky coincidence she had gotten out first. Tony tried swallowing the lump that was forming in his throat.

Well, of course she got out! She was brilliant and beautiful, and she could do anything that she put her mind to. Even under extreme circumstances Darcy Lewis had always found a way to solve the problem. That was one of the reasons she got his attentions and kept it.

Except… if it wasn’t for him, there wouldn’t have been no life-threatening circumstances. No abduction. No being held captive. No waking up every day wondering what is going to happen? No fear…

Did she think he was worth it? The tightness was crushing his chest. It was hard to breath, the thoughts were getting muddled all together. World was becoming a sea of white noise. All this time he had only one thing on his mind and that was to get Spark back. No matter what it took. No matter what he had to do. He had promised to keep her safe… and he failed.

“Let me, Stark. Its better if I go first.” It wasn’t indecision, Tony told himself, it was avoiding the unavoidable...

“Right… Right! Ducky is still with her, isn’t he?” Spark’s propensity to attract individuals on the highest end of the danger spectrum was now well established. Hydra’s secret weapon, Winter Soldier being the latest acquisition.

“Don’t make loud noises or any sudden moves.” That wasn’t what one wanted to hear when entering premises where his significant other half was resting.

“Can I breathe?”

“Can you?” The spy spared him a sidelong glance, unamused by the quip. It was showing, the incoming mental breakdown. Nothing lasts forever, after all.

“I… Just open the damn door, Romanov.”

Sugar Plum sure knew how to pick people to be around. It was a cursed gift. Also, once again, he should have stayed suited. The next few moments after door opened was a test of reactions in the sudden semi darkness. Maybe he shouldn’t have pushed Romanov out of the way, but his patience had run out somewhere on the way to this dump and really needed to have Spark within reach again, even if for a few moments. Not that he had much to begin with. What Tony was grateful for was that he still had one gauntlet on. The fight was brief and ended in a stand off when the Black Widow snarled something in Russian at the lanky haired guy that made him pause.
A shadow passed over Romanov’s face at whatever was thrown back at her before she switched to
back to English.

“I know she’s tired. Its him that Darcy is waiting for.” There was a pile of rags in a corner and Tony
assumed that Spark was burrowed under them as she usually did in their bed when she was not
feeling well. All he needed was to get past Cap’s pal.

“Hi-

“… Howard?” Shit… The situation would have been funny if he hadn’t known who the grim
looking man was. James Barnes knew Howard Stark.

“No. He was my dad-” The pile at the further corner finally moved and messy bun atop of a pale
face emerged from it.

“‘ony?”

“Yes, Honey?” The Winter Soldier showed no indication that he intended to move aside as Tony
called back and almost lurched forward.

“Tony?” There was an edge to Spark’s voice. He locked eyes with the man blocking his way. He
rather not have to suit up and engage in a full blown fight but he was going to if needed. Tony was
going to gain that ground that led to what he had been missing every single moment of these several
days… Romanov lowered her gun cautiously and took a step back indicating her non-aggressive
position. Hydra’s golden boy wasn’t deaf. It took another few seconds for him to lower the
semiautomatic and Tony in turn dropped his hand. They might have all lowered their weapons’, but
the tension was thick.

“I’m right here, Darcy.” Every move Tony made was closely watched and assessed. For someone
that was clearly mentally unstable the Soldier was very focussed. A single wrong move, Tony was
sure, was going to result in a swift punch to the side of the head from the bionic arm.

“I’m tired…” Spark wasn’t wearing her glasses and the eyes were unfocussed. Tony ever so slowly
went to his knees next to the sitting woman. Darcy was clutching the covers to her chest and the
bleary gaze went through him. She was still asleep…

He had seen this look before, when Spark would have one of her nightmares and jerk upright
suddenly, eyes wide and seeing something that had passed long time ago. The key on those
occasions was not to startle and let her settle back to sleep. Those episodes were always more
frequent if she was stressed or exhausted … He had never before heard her speak while having
one… Tony ran his gauntlet covered hand through his hair out of habit and hissed under his breath
when the hair caught between the metal plates. He had to keep his hands busy or they would go
around Darcy in no time. Which would result in him being hit and her getting scared.

“We’ll get you plenty of rest, Honeybuns…” His hands itched, even knowing that the Soldier was
standing over them barely half a step away. Tony had to fight the impulse to close the gap between
them. There were spasms in his muscles, small and unnoticeable to the naked eye. Sweat had started
to break out on his skin as he fought with himself for control. He wanted to drink that sleepy smile
again… He had allowed himself to become addicted to it since they had gotten together and he
hadn’t had a hit for far too long… The sudden and prolonged abstinence had manifested in several
ways and most of them were ugly and painful, testing the endurance of his mind and body to its very
limits.

“You sound like you need a shower.”
“With you, my sweetest, always.”

Darcy snickered as she snuggled back under what looked like a ratty horse blankets piled together. His skin itched just looking at it. Bed bugs and dust mites came to mind and whatever else bred in these unsanitary conditions.

“Can’t even tell the difference…” Those wide unseeing eyes were trained on him. He would just have to wait until she came ‘round again. He probably should stop talking and let her fall asleep but the sound of her voice had put a spell on him.

“Between what, Honey?”

“You and the little Tony?”

“I thought that we established it isn’t little and there is a clear difference.” His ego was feeling a little tender and the remark hurt. Maybe it was just the insecurity coming to the surface. He wasn’t used to having those. He wasn’t used to having someone whole opinion mattered to him as much as Spark’s did now either.

“The voice inside my head.”

“Huh?”

“I have a little voice living inside my head… helps me deal with bad situations. Sounds a lot like you… it’s basically you. I have you inside my head, Tony. So, he’s been around a lot lately… Mostly grills me on science stuff. Gets annoying…” He had Little Tony inside his head too, but he clearly wasn’t as fond of the little shit as Spark was if you judged by the tenderness in her voice.

“Sounds like a nice guy. You said mostly science, what else is he grilling you about?” He shouldn’t get his hopes up, when Spark wakes up she probably was going to tell him to take a hike, to get lost and leave her be, take his issues and enemies and stick it somewhere… that she had enough… that she didn’t want such burden on her shoulders…

“You know… stuff.”

“Such as?” So maybe he was prolonging their conversation on purpose, creating the illusion that nothing was wrong. Trying so desperately to hold onto these last moments between them.

“Filth, Tony. You know that… You have ruined me. The prudent part of me that sounded like my mother and should have balance Little Tony out have disappeared around the time I met you. He was heavily implicated in the disappearance but managed to charm his way out.” The laugh that escaped him was choppy and sudden. He couldn’t remember the last time he had genuinely laughed at something and it only made his chest more painful as he added it to the list of things he was going to miss. It was just the tissue around the arc reactor being tender… that was all…

“The guy is growing on me. How filthy are we talking?” He shouldn’t ask anything else. He should stop being such a sucker for punishment. Plus, there were other people in the room but now he couldn’t bring himself to care. He needed to keep hearing her voice…

“…Filthy. And I blame you.” Even in the poor light he could distinguish the bloom of colour on those cheeks. He very carefully shifted to be close to the laying woman without actually touching her.

“I shall take the blame, and I shall also like to deliver whatever Little me promised.”
“He promised a lot…”

“And it shall be delivered. What else is on your mind, Shortstack? What else can I-“ Shouldn’t he have some internal part that should be telling him to stop?

“If today was your last day on Earth, Tony, what would you do?” That was a loaded question that had nothing to do with the world’s hypothetical ending. It wasn’t her last day… He wouldn’t let it happen…

*What he would do?* Everything… Anything. All that he could and some more. Because if she just gave him another a chance he would keep her safe. There wouldn’t be a repeat. Nothing like this Hydra fiasco would ever happen again. He would try harder. Do better. Tony’s fingers twitched over the blanket covered shoulder. “We would have dinner at the most magnificent place on Earth and dance under the stars to the Jazz songs you like…” He would do all those sappy things that he had previously laughed at while watching other men do to make their women happy.

Darcy’s half-closed eyes blinked. There were bruises marring the pale skin, that Tony tried hard not to concentrate on, fresh and angry bright. She made it out. It was all that mattered. He was going to be calm and gentle. Spark deserved to catch a break and he would give it to her. He would give her anything she wanted and more, because she deserved it all.

“That’s nice…” A hand snaked out from under the covers and gently touched his cheek. The breath escaped his lungs in a painful rush.

“And you?” The small thumb slowly traced his bottom lip and Tony couldn’t help but push his luck. He really shouldn’t, just like many things he had done in life so far. Like he shouldn’t have so selfishly kept her next to him. Shouldn’t have insisted to build this thing between them. Shouldn’t have put the ring on her finger. A ring that was send back to him after she was captured.

“Oh… Me?” The smile was so open and once again Tony wanted things he knew he didn’t deserve. He didn’t want it to end. He knew he was selfish, broken man. He wasn’t going give up on them. He was going to make it worth it. Just like when they got together he was going to be annoying and be around and- *that little thumb on his lip was driving him insane. He was going to do anything for one more chance...*

“Yes, you.”

“I would bang you. I would bang you so hard, Tony. I would want your hands on my skin, your words underneath it, just sweat and sin in between us. I would want the scotch from your lips on my tongue and your breath in my lungs. I would want the feeling of near euphoria that you give me when you look at me as if I am the best thing that ever happened to you. You do it every in single time and, by Thor, it burns me inside. So, I would want you to feel as good, to feel as free as you have made me. Not a bad way to go out… If that was our last time together I would want you to know how happy I am. You *made* me like *myself*, you damn asshole.”

“Spark… ” Up until now Tony had been crouched over her, too scared to break the spell, but that was it. He couldn’t take it anymore. Even under the glaring eyes of Spark’s newest security addition, he wrapped his arms around the sleepy mumbling woman. “Please don’t leave me.”

______________________________________________________________

*So, Peeps? Good? Bad? Wondering what Darcy will be thinking once she wakes up?*
Chapter 81

Hello, my Peeps!

Hope you will all like the new installment, it's a little out of whack as I am really busy, so please bare with me =)

Thank you for all your lovely reviews, they really help me to continue with this story =)

xxx

Wino,

You, as always, are amazing

xxx

Chapter 81

Chapter 81

Nostalgia… Brock had never dreamed that he one day he was going to experience that feeling. The longing of days long past, mainly because he didn’t do that kind of bullshit. One looked ahead and ahead only. Past held nothing useful, only the ‘now and here’ mattered. If it was important you should have fought harder and if you didn’t, well, tough shit, you clearly didn’t want to keep it hard enough. The same went with measuring life in stages. Comparing one to another. Before the army, after the army, during SHIELD. Why the hell would you want to go back into nappies? Somebody else cleaning your shit?

Fucking bullshit… If you weren’t happy with the state of things you changed them instead of going all ‘oh, those were the days’.

But then Darcy Lewis happened, and Brock Rumlow discovered what a life changing event was with a side serving of nostalgia. How the fuck did that happen?

Christie didn’t just come into the room, as Brock tried reasoning with Captain Logic Doesn’t Apply to Me, she more like staggered in. The kind of unsure footing of a man that wasn’t certain whether he was coming or going. Being the one lumbered with responsibility to make sure people didn’t die Brock was instantly on alert.

“What is it?”

“I’mmm…” His subordinate didn’t even glance at Rogers as she vaguely pointed in the direction she had just come from and made more incoherent noises struggling to express herself.
“Did they find us?” Rogers didn’t have to be rushed to jump to conclusions. That would be bad news for everyone and his stomach dropped while the hand instinctively reached for the gun.

“No! No, sir... It was just…” More vague pointing. The confusion on Christie’s face didn’t help to put anyone at ease.

“Christie, spit it out.”

“It just happened so quick…” His men were trained professionals. The best at what they did. They were able to think on their feet under heavy fire what could possibly-

“Lewis…” The name dropped from his tongue on its own accord. The hand that gripped the handle moved to cover his eyes because he didn’t want to see Christie nod and he could just feel the woman nod. His head hurt. Lewis had brain fucked him so hard that he might have permanent damage now. He should probably ask what happened… Be up to date with the situation… They were on the fucking run from Shieldra. Wasn’t that enough for her?! What the fuck did she do now?!

‘Fuck my life…’ The scary part was that with Lewis it could be anything. Anyfuckingthing. He had shit to do, he refused to deal with what ever that was now… Besides wasn’t that what those Average Twats came here for? To take her off his hands? He was ready for that to happen. He would tie a nice ribbon round her… if he knew that he was going to get away with it.

The silence stretched. ‘Don’t rush all at once, people …’ Brock lowered his hand to glare at the blond.

“Clint!” Rogers snapped before the Strike leader opened his mouth. The archer nonchalantly loitered around the vehicles not far from them, waiting for Rogers to be done being the Dickless Wonder that he was. Brock frowned, what was that all about? It wasn’t like Barton oversaw Lewis. Soldat got agitated when the archer was near the woman.

Barton’s attempt to look casual was a major fail. “What?”

“Please, just please tell me you didn’t?”

“I’ll have you know it’s not my fault.” The statement given by every guilty man ever. Brock wasn’t going to judge but if someone looked and sounded guilty, it probably was Barton panicking. The Good old Captain looked like he was sorely tempted to rip the archer a new one.

“You did! Why?!” The despair in Rogers voice was not as satisfying as he had hoped it was going to be. Being stuck on the same sinking boat trying to cover all the holes at once dampened it somehow.

“Why? I tell you why. I made an exchange! Because some wise crack gave her a gun! A loaded gun, Steve!” Oh… that… He was there when it happened.

Rogers snapped back to Brock, the disbelief all over the annoying pretty face.

“Really?”

Strike commander turned private mercenary/security cleared his throat before replying. “First, screw you, Rogers. You nearly got us killed while on the way out, remember? What you suggest I have done? We were under fire!” At the time it sounded like a valid reason… Getting Lewis armed with a lethal weapon… He wanted to get out of that place alive. Yeah, now in hindsight he could say that was a mistake for few reasons.
“Ever thought of how you were going to get it back?” Rogers definitely was one of them.

“No. Didn’t expect to live that long.” Their way out was a close shave and it still amazed him that they made it. It shouldn’t have worked. Not in a normal world. But that was before Lewis… Normal didn’t stand a chance against the wench. The woman fought dirty even by his standards and that said something. “Anyway. Christie what the fuck happened?” Might as well get that over with.

……………… Flashback …………………

There were jokes making rounds about Miss Lewis in the hideout. Stressed people crammed in small quarters did certain things to deal with the fear and possible tragic end. They turned to one thing Shield agents had always been good at and that was gossiping. Most of the rumours were funny the rest was outrageous. None of them even close to the crazy that was Darcy Lewis.

In a crisis situation people had to develop a routine, some sort of normalcy to keep themselves grounded. That was exactly what was happening as Christie stood with hands full old electronics while a tired Miss Lewis disassembled a rusty toaster and put it back together on a look for something. She’d just gotten off her first watch shift when the woman enlisted her help. It wasn’t like she could tell her no… she was working for her now. Wasn’t she?… Technically STRIKE had gone private… She should know, she was there, that was one close encounter with the Winter Soldier she could have done without. The ankle was still sore.

Their fates hung in the air yet to be determined, but fixing small things helped gain an illusion of control.

“No. I need finer leads… Thanks for it, though.”

“There isn’t much stuff laying around and the other is being used, Miss Lewis. You should get some rest…”

The new Boss was… odd. To put it extremely mildly. Not in a bad way… just… she was that girl next door type… when she wasn’t recruiting assassins and pissing on Hydra… So, the last bit didn’t fit the sweet but tired smile she received at the gentle suggestion.

“Don’t I know it…” Captain America had made quite a scene when he arrived and Miss Lewis had none of it. Her man might have been Iron Man, but she was the one with iron balls on her. She was never forgetting her marching into a fight with a smile on her face… That was the scariest shit she had ever seen and she had seen scary shit in her line of duty. Christie glanced at the other occupant of the room that was staying in the shadows. The Winter Soldier whose arm Miss Lewis was intending to fix. I guess, everyone needs a hobby…

“Christie! Didn’t I tell you to report?!” Webb was in the doorway strutting his stuff like he was important around the place. Anne groaned under her breath. She still had to let Rumlow know the asshole was making waves… and the dark figure moved in the shadows just out of Webb’s sight. Uh… How bad in their situation it would be to be a man down? Senior Agent Webb had never been a popular person…

“Sorry, I borrowed your agent.” Miss Lewis merely glanced at the newcomer not overly impressed at the tone of voice. Not many things impressed her, Christie had noticed. Neither angry superheroes nor pissed off Black Ops veterans have so far made the list, so Webb didn’t stand a chance.

“Borrowed? Who the fuck are you?” The boiler suit the woman had on, the bruises on her face and messy hair was a far cry from the dolled up person on the cover of those glossy magazines. The hand gesture made by Miss Lewis might have been vague, but their hidden companion froze up three steps
away from the cocky senior field agent.

There was a reason why they all were here and it was her. Unlike Webb, Miss Lewis was well liked. The tough little thing was the definition of an underdog. Small, mouthy, standing up for those that didn’t have a voice, for those that couldn’t fight back… Because someone had to and this woman was more than a man for that job.

“The person that would appreciate you not raising your voice. I've got a headache.”

“You’re not SHIELD.” The statement resulted in an eye roll from brunette as she stretched purposely slow getting ready to move. Displaying just how much she cared about Agent Webb’s opinion.

“Oh, Pierce wished I was, but no. Both the positions of the crazy boss and a man in my life have already been filled. Plus, I’m not really a fan of SHIELD as such. Sorry.” There were rumours about that…

Webb sneered. “Who ever decided to keep his dick warmer around at this time-” The stillness that suddenly settled over Miss Lewis was like a wisp of cold wind.. She had seen Dr Banner change once, from a safe distance. A man suddenly going big and green was a good visual indication of a danger. A petite woman going quiet not so much. The eerie calmness didn’t stop the woman from issuing an even voiced retort.

“Well, somebody decided to keep the guy with an arse for a face around. The things people do, eh?”

“You think you’re hot shit, don’t you? You think I will stand for it?!?”

The response was so swift that neither him nor the Soldier were able to respond as Webb took a threatening step. The prongs hit him right in the chest that he had puffed out like some lame bird attempting to appear bigger than he really was. Agent Webb did the funny little dance of man having a high electric current going through him and fell over with a thud.

“Lay the fuck down then. Dick. I am sick and tired of assholes assuming that they can bully me. Buckster, I need get some shut eye, like, two weeks ago. Let’s go and find some place where I can go horizontal.”

“And they just left me there… With Webb out cold on the floor.” Silence descended after Christie finished her tale. What could they say, really? It was such a Lewis thing to have happened. Rogers shifted and cleared his throat.

“So, just to be clear, there are no casualties?”

“Not with evidence leading back to -” Hawkeye piped up and Brock’s hands itched. Why those two even here? They were just creating problems not solving any.

“Why don’t you shut the fuck up, Barton. Haven’t you done enough?”

“Or what, Rumlow? You gonna tell Furry to suspend my hazard pay? Oh, wait, he’s not in charge. Lewis loves me. I gave her taser back.” Yes, that was working out great.

“The same taser she tasered you thrice with?” Brock pieced some information together. Lewis got around.

The archer shrugged. “… So she gives some tough love occasionally.”
“You people are messed up in the head. Why are we even discussing this? Barton, she’s five foot-nothing little thing.”

“You know what they say, Rumlow. It only means that she’s closer to Satan.” The wink only made the STRIKE commander want to punch Barton in the teeth. Why was everyone testing him today?

“Clint, please that’s uncalled for. She’s been kidnapped and held against her will.” Captain’s voice of reason had no business in conversation about Lewis. Rules of others didn’t apply to that woman.

“Yeah, trust me, I noticed, but it’s not like being in a tight situation ever stopped her from getting back at people.” There clearly was a story there, because the wink from Birdshmuck was packed with glee.

“Lewis isn’t some infallible genius.” The wench was unlike anyone he had ever met, but those two were kissing ass way too much.

“She got you.” Now Rogers was grinning like a baboon too… what was he missing? Brock didn’t like not having all the information.

“She's got the money. Plus, not sure if you noticed we are having a bit of a situation?”

“Nah, Rumlow. She got you good. Remember New Mexico?”

New Mexico? Yeah, he remembered that nowhere little shithole. STRIKE was called after the place got trashed by some Cyclops from outer space. Babysat Lewis and what was her name? Foster, that’s it. Did some damage control. The only highlight was sneaking in and swiping those cakes during the long, uneventful night shifts. Lewis sure could bake, he liked her whole lot better when he thought that it was all she could do. Pity the town didn’t burn down, those assholes at the burger joint wouldn’t have been missed.

“What about it? We got in and got out.”

Captain Perfect flashed a toothy grin. Again, looking way too happy for the crappy situation they were all in. Brock didn’t like where this was going.

“And shit through the eye of a needle for two days straight. Or did you forget?”

Did he forget the Gate of Hell opening out of his arsehole? No, he did-fucking-not forget fucking lava coming out and flashing his goods for the whole world to see and barely making it at the side of the bleeding busy road-

“No. No. It was the -” The sweat dripped down his back at the memory. Now he was making an excellent impression of Christie from few moments ago, vaguely pointing in a random direction, assumingly where he had left his sane mind. This wasn’t happening. They had a vote! It was the burgers because for it to be the cake not all of it would have had whatever that it had, it would have had to be planned with diabolical precision not to have it leading back… A perfect, evil, opportunistic payback that they were all just too happy to play along to being too confident in their own untouchability. It sounded way too familiar… and now they were working for her. “The Fucking Bitch.”

Rogers actually kissed teeth at him and Brock couldn’t muster the energy to be angry at the man. He was too busy internally screaming at his own mind. Five years and he hadn’t, not even once, thought that the little Intern was the one that fucked them all over! How the fuck did she get away with it?! The vision of Lewis from five years back materialized, nursing her morning coffee after discovering the second cake was missing, watching them with that blank, calm face and sharp eyes… Brock
thought it was resignation, since what could she do? Go complain to Coulson about cake in midst of possible alien invasion? Nobody would have given her the time of day… So, in true Lewis fashion she planned well, aimed low and hit hard, and most importantly stayed mum about the whole thing for years.

“How the fuck did you find out?”

“The same way you get any information out of her. She was drunk and Stark asked nicely. I just happened to be there.” That also sounded like something Lewis would do.

Rollings, who up to that point was pretending to be getting some shut eye in one of the cars, spoke up interrupting Brock’s internal struggle between wanting to find Lewis to snap her neck and his desire to live.

“If we die now, does it mean that we will have to work for her forever?”

“… She’s not the Devil.” Brock replied in a calm tone. He could confidently say that he now held the record on going through all the stages of grief in one go. The loss being his dignity. He could still remember the days when he had that…

“Are we sure?”

There were no volunteers to answer that question. After all, the taser had three changes in it.

“Please don’t leave me.”

“Who’s leaving, stupid? They will have to crowbar me off you if we keep going like that…” Darcy both wanted this dream to never end and at the same time it was hard to hear Tony’s voice. She missed him. The musty blankets had gotten awfully tight… The all too familiar scent of expensive cologne invaded her nose and she groaned. The hot breath tickled her ear. “This… this feels real.” The laughter shook her along with the brush of warm lips against her temple.

“Wake up, Spark.” It took few seconds for Darcy to clumsily fish for her glasses. The sleep was clinging to her worn-out mind or maybe it was just her not wanting to wake up. It was the first time that it was safe to rest. Tony was somewhere out there, handling all the mess that Hydra was brewing… That was the priority… She knew that, she had seen it from inside. Hydra had to be stopped. Now that she and Natasha were out their clutches many more things had to be done. The glasses went on and the vision cleared to reveal a tense smile on a familiar face.

“Oh… Hey.” “Hey.” “Hey?” “Heyy…” Who ever said that you need a vocabulary to have a conversation? They had one with two words and it was packed. It contained all the usual questions like ‘Oh, my Thor, are you ok, Tony?’ ‘Spark, please tell me you’re not hurt, please tell me you forgive me…’ ‘We’re not ok, nothing is ok, we’re at war and it sucks and I’m scared and please lie to me, Tony, please tell me you’re ok, that it all gonna be ok… I can’t handle the thought of you hurting because of me…’ ‘I got you now… I got you…’ Words were tricky. It set things in stone. Made them real and hard to avoid and they didn’t have time.

“Ton-” Yeah, she might have missed those hungry kisses. Tony’s lips were all over her face, the lips, cheeks, forehead, even took off her glasses to kiss the eyes. It took couple of moments, but Darcy finally found who was making those strange hurt kitten mewing noises. It was her. The reality slammed into her like the heartless bitch that it was. “I couldn’t let them have her!” Her damn brain was going haywire. Thor, that man had the most peculiar effect on her.

“What?” The alarm wiped the smile from Tony’s face in an instance and that only made her more
distressed. Every single wall that she had built to keep herself level, to hide her fears behind was crumbling, turning to ash and dust, all those little *what ifs* came crawling at her. What if she hadn’t been lucky and gotten Bucky. It was such a dumb luck…

“They were going to take her away, Tony. I couldn’t… I just couldn’t…” The calloused palm cradled her cheek. Even after a pedicure it was still somehow rough. Tony was bag full of contradictions.

“What did you do, Shortstack? Took your favourite odds? You against the world? Or you against, what, 10 at the very least?” Darcy froze up with her mouth open for a moment. The Iron Man’s dark eyes widened and once again the smile dropped. He knew her too damn well by now.

“Tony-”

“You went 1 against 10?!?”

“It wasn’t! It wasn’t 1 to 10. Jeez… It was more like… to 2 against 8! Just Natasha was out cold, plus Bucky was kind of on my side, and! – and the two STRIKE guys! So that was technically, I- we had even odds, Tony.”

“Did you even know- why would you- what the hell were you- You were supposed to sit tight! Let me handle it! Romanov’s the Black Widow, she can take care of herself, she knows how to snap a man’s neck in five seconds. *Less if it's for you*!” She could see him trying to force his hyperventilation to still, hissing angrily. She had promised that she would not do stupid things, but things happened.

“I know! I know, Tony. Just… don’t tell her, she doesn’t know she was the reason I got into that fight. It happened, she doesn’t need to know why. By the time she came ‘round we were on the way out and-”

“*Sugar Plum*…”

“Just don’t tell her, OK? You know me, there doesn’t have to be a reason for things I do… and anyway you better not have been hogging my side of the bed while I was gone…”

---

*Their bed…* Tony laughed. He hadn’t been able to get into it since. *Spark was deflecting again.* Forcing his focus elsewhere from the fact that she had taken needless risks. The movement in the shadows caught his eye, Romanov was staying back out of Darcy’s field of vision. The perfect spy, a ruthless assassin and billionaire genius philanthropist all packed in a darkened room worrying over a woman that had somehow in different ways managed to save them all.

“If anyone tells her, it won’t be me, Spark.” He wouldn’t have to, Romanov heard it all already.

“Well, ok, good. Good… *Oh!* Did you meet Bucky?”

“Yes, speaking-”

“Can you make sure Steve doesn’t fawn over him? I know they’re friends but he’s too much right now. *Oh!* How did your appointment with cardiologist go? You did go, right? Jarvis for all the knowledge he’s got, isn’t a doctor.”

“Yes, I know and I did, happy to report no change. Can you please-” He was going to be patient. Spark was acting normal, worrying about everyone else.
“Oh, my Thor, Happy! How is he? I saw him hit, Tony, I saw him get it right in the chest and Clint said he’s ok, but that was—“

“How about Darcy? Know her? How is she?” He didn’t mean to snap but fuck everyone else. They were not the reason he was there. She was.

“Who?”

“You, Spark! Please, can you stop for a moment with the one-woman mission to save the world and tell me- tell me how are you? Does it hurt anywhere?” It was one way to point out the obvious. The bruises were angry bright and that was just the face… but was she hurt anywhere else? She wasn’t out camping with the scout girls… For all her bravado and luck, Darcy wasn’t strong physically, not enough to fight back if someone decided to really hurt her. The eyes behind the glasses blinked slowly at him, she knew what he was asking. He wanted to wrap himself around her like an armour, to stand between her and the world, but it was too late…

“Oh. I’ve got a few bruises on my side, I – I fell onto a desk when- on the way out. Yeah. That’s it. Got pretty lucky really.” Spark released her grip on his hoodie to put her hand over his that was still cradling the bruised cheek. “Sorry… I – I should ask if you are ok, but you probably not and- I for now I’m gonna pretend that you are, because we don’t have the time for me to get stupid and emotional and if I don’t ask- you don’t have to lie and we can both pretend that, you know, these couple of weeks hasn’t been hard as fuck.” No, it was actually harder. Darcy snuggled into his side with a sign and they both ignored the questions that were going to get messy once asked.

“Let’s get you home.”

“Oh!”

“No. No. No-”

“I jabbed screwdriver into Bucky’s arm to get something and I think I also got some of the wiring on the way, it gets a little twitchy… so we need to uncouple and fix it. Give a girl a hand? Thank you, much appreciated.” The pun was noted, so was the fact- Wait.

“Please tell me you knew where the power source was before deciding to play the Russian Roulette?” The angry hissing was back, he was making the effort, he wasn’t shouting. He was making progress.

“In theory. Look-”

“It could have exploded in your face!”

“Yeah, bit like you, but I still gonna take the risk. You’re helping or not, you asshole? … I missed you.” He wanted to howl, it was a stupid thing to do, the situation probably was desperate enough, but it could have so easily gone horribly wrong and Darcy was just like yeah, I did it, it worked, what’s your problem? It really shouldn’t be making him hard.

“Same. It’s not like you are leaving me much choice, Shortstack.”

“You can just say no, Tin Man.”

“Not really… Tell him to lower the gun.” So, his little hissy fit resulted in two things: a boner and the business end of gun pressed to the back of his head. Both had the potential to end explosively. Darcy’s mouth fell open when her eyes travelled up to see the Winter Soldier standing over them. The situation was very delicate. The Asset was clearly unhinged.
“The fuck are you doing? Put that thing away. Honestly. Why is everyone I know so much into guns?” The people she knew weren’t into guns, they were into any type of weaponry, also they were able to kill with their bare hands… The pressure disappeared, but not his exasperated amazement after watching Darcy growl like a wet cat. What was he going to do with this woman? “Help me get up, Tony. I bet you got places to be soon and I need to finish here before I go.”

“Honeybuns, you are one of a kind.”

So, Peeps? Good? Bad? Want more? Let me know! =)
Woohooo, Peeps, I must be doing something right, it got 100k hits!

Thank you so much for coming back time and again =)

I really hope you are enjoying it as much as I enjoy sharing it with you

Special thanks to all those that review my story, its much appreciated and it keeps me inspired

Wino,

You are simply the best =)

xxx

Chapter 82

“We’re not ready!”

“I know.”

“We’re not ready, Christine!”

“I know.”

Christine Everhart with great effort continued to hold the water bottle instead of hurling it at her Editor’s head. He was unfortunately right, they weren’t ready. At this point she doubted that they would ever be sufficiently prepared to go to print. The story, which they had affectionately code-named ‘Sue’, was complicated. The deeper they were digging the more skeletons they found in the closet... along with corpses in various states of decomposition. Gruesome, bloody secrets that some people were ready to kill to keep buried.

“We need to go back to the Office... who’s on duty today? When would you go on air? Did you call the others? Oh, god, is it safe to call? You used the phone that Stark provided, right? I’m taking my gun with me…”
Stark might have given Christine the story of a lifetime, but he had also given her all the danger that came with uncovering the vipers' nest. Up until the evening when Tony Stark, with a cocky smile on his stupid face, asked her what she knew about Hydra, Christine didn’t realise just how precious trust was and how little of it she had for people she was working with. Funnily enough this time around it had nothing to do with professional rivalry.

There could only be one Breaking Story on any topic and everyone wanted their own name under the Headline. Everyone wanted their own Watergate. Something so big that it would forever stay relevant. Well, she had that alright. A tale of corruption so deep it was running all the way to the foundation of their democracy. Naturally, it came with a price, just like everything in life. The fear, of course. And the danger. If you weren’t careful, it could easily result in your body washing somewhere down the Hudson river. Result of a mugging gone wrong, lovers quarrel turned violent, suicide, maybe? While the possibilities were endless the outcome would still be the same and that was her cold, lifeless remains in a black body bag.

Hydra, the bad memory of a gone era, was very much alive and thriving in the dark corners of an incredibly powerful organisation, prepared to unleash their sick master-plan unto the world. Then there was Christine Everhart, ready to unmask the people that actively and knowingly cooperated with the hostile power in plotting the new world order. SHIELD had been taken over, infiltrated and corrupted, people were murdered to ensure that Hydra’s second rise wouldn’t be uncovered before they were ready.

Christine could not overstate the paranoia and fear that she had lived in since that conversation with Stark, since the magnitude of what was going on dawned on her. All those things that they took for granted like basic freedom of speech, freedom of press, freedom of petition, just…freedom. All that could be gone come tomorrow morning. If Hydra were to succeed in establishing control over the military while the confusion and panic wreaked havoc, then from tomorrow forth the future of the world would be bleak. Their future would be bleak, Christine didn’t for a moment assume that free press wouldn’t be very quickly dealt with. She remembered well the history lessons on how the Nazi Germany handled their internal critics. The gravely voice of Professor Shultz, the kindly old man with a long grey beard, the man that encouraged her to take up journalism, to ask questions, to speak truths others didn’t want to see… ‘First they came for the Jews…’ her mind sang.

Tomorrow might very well be the day if they didn’t get their shit together and be ready to break some unpleasant truths as the shit hit the fan. They must be ready with the facts, ready with the names, ready to report the state of the world as it was, so that people that could would be able to galvanize their efforts and pull through, so that the rest of them, silly ignorant lambs, could continue taking the basic freedoms for granted.

“Ready or not, we are going live with what we have in less than eight hours. Stark’s men will have the studio secure. The printing will be done and being distributed."

“Ramona! Ramona! For the love of- Honey, please! Are the kids ready?!” Her Editor, Greg Norman, was a good man. Christine watched as he shoved his children’s bags into the boot of the waiting car.

“Greg, we’re here. The car –” Wide eyed Ramona Norman, heavily pregnant with their third child, waddled down the stairs dragging their frightened eight-year-old twins along.

“Great, great. I’m sorry, Sweet Peas, get in the car, just trust me-“

“Why- what is going on-“

“Just please get in the car, trust me. Things are going to happen and this man will take you – take
you somewhere- just in case – just in case-”

Just in case shit hit them too, because in eight hours’ time they were to interrupt their usual broadcast and let the world know what was going down. They all quite rightly assumed that certain people weren’t going to be happy about it. She had approached few Networks that refused to take her on with a vague description of a breaking story, which was fair enough, but she couldn’t go ‘round the town informing everyone how the Avengers were onto Hydra. That would have been a quick way to end up dead.

She watched Norman stand on the sidewalk as the car containing his family drove away.

‘So much to do, so little time...’

They had a problem. Rumlow scratched behind the ear and straightened again while the argument on the other side of the door carried on. Why couldn’t those two just had sex like normal people so he could walk onto something that wouldn’t traumatize him for life? He had an update for Stark and been standing at the damn door for the last ten minutes. He had no desire to be dragged into any argument where Lewis took part. That’s how you end up selling your soul... And anyway from the way those two were arguing it was a surprise the Soldat didn’t go onto a killing spree. It could drive a sane man mad.

“No.”

“Yes.”

“This is not the situation where flattery is going to help you, Spark.” They didn’t even argue like normal people. Brock considered just leaving. Maybe leaving the country, at this point if he could he would have left the damn planet.

“Wasn’t aiming for it. I can tell you’re flexing from the way you are standing, Tony, so unless you intend to do a sudden one eighty and let me enjoy the view it isn’t going to help you either.” Did Stark left his Viagra in another suit or something?

“You are doing this on purpose.”

“Wouldn’t you like to know. I mean, your ass-” There was a pause and Brock had to admit that ambassadors or politicians would probably do jack shit good against someone like Lewis. The woman used the classic fishing move where you gave that bit of slack to the line before-“Its, ok--i sh.” And it was beautifully executed. Instead of trying to regain ground Stark all but bit into the metaphorical fishing rod so hard you could nearly hear it snap.

“Okay... ish? You love my ass. I got paparazzi pictures of you ogling it!” Oh, God. The billionaire wasn’t on the line, he was already caught, landed, hot smoked and having no problem with the fact.

“Don’t flatter yourself, so it happened to be in the direction I was looking at, that doesn’t prove anything.”

“You bit me on it.” Not a common fetish. He would have never pegged as someone that would go for the ass. He just assumed she bit off the head right after sex, quick if the sex was good.

“The only thing that it proves is that I got serious impulse problem. Plus, I only did it because you bit my bum first.” He totally could see why her round rump would be bitten. There was just the right
amount of cushion for the pushing. Stark clearly agreed.

“So, I did. I’m a mere man, I can resist all but temptation! Which is, quite frankly, you, My Sweetest.”

“Pervert.” There was just that much coy in the voice to be an actual complain and Brock rolled his eyes. *Come on people, just finish it up.*

“And you love it.” He needed to work for someone that wasn’t a freak of some sort.

“You have your moments, but that wasn’t one of them. Listen-”

“No.”

“Why are we even having this conversation?!”

“Yes! Why *are* we having this conversation, Spark?! You don’t need to ask for an advance from Pep, I’ll pay!”

“I got it covered!”

“You don’t have to, Spark, *please*. You were pushed into a corner and you were forced to make financial commitment.”

“Nobody forced me to commit any money to anything. It was my choice. *Mine*, Tony, not yours, *mine*.”

“And you couldn’t have done better. You have no idea how proud I am of you.”

“Tony…”

“The money for the upgrade is yours to go and buy something ridiculously extravagant, or donate it to charity, or scatter it from the top of the Tower… not to pay for my lapses in judgement… You shouldn’t have had to make that choice, Spark.” *Stark, we both know she’s going to win. Just write us a damn cheque when she isn’t looking!* He could have gone there and objected, but Lewis was right, Tony Stark took her abduction seriously.

“We’re not going there, Tony. Shit happens when you party naked, we both chose this path. We both knew it was going to suck balls sometimes. That’s what life does - *suck balls*. Other times it bites you on them. Or does both at the same time.” Yes, balls were sensitive, did she have to be so descriptive, though? How did Stark have her mouth near his dick and not think about her saying stuff like that?

“And then it presents you with the bill, so let me-”

“No. It has nothing to do with you. They fucked with me. I deserve this, Tony. I deserve to be the contributor to their second fall.”

“Are you going on a Vendetta?” Man, Stark was thick sometimes. Of course she totally fucking was. With the way Lewis handled her grudges Vendetta sounded right up that woman’s street.

“… *What? Of course* not. Why would you even say that?”

“Because we’re still standing here instead of you being on the way home!” Yeah, why? They could be away by now so he could get on with finding ways to get himself killed along sides Captain Incompetent.
“I just want to see this super duper important meeting is about! Is Rogers giving pep talk to people?”
Ah, right. That was happening and he had to attend. He could hardly contain his joy.

“I’ll make sure somebody records it for - Hey! It hasn’t even started yet.” The door swung open, nearly hitting him right in the face, and Lewis marched out wearing a hoodie and a pair tight yoga pants that weren't there before. Yeah, Stark totally lost the argument.

“Oh good, I want the front seat- oh, hey. Weren’t you supposed to be doing something?” Stark, the little bitch, should have argued harder to be the one to pay them. Lewis was back on the conversation with The Iron Disgrace to Man Kind without waiting for Brock’s response. “How often you get to be there when the history is written?”

“You know perfectly well the History is written after the fact, mostly by people that never see it happen.”

“True that… Still want to hear what he says, though.”

Their new network spread like a crack in the ice, spidering out quickly and silently under Hydra. Fear could be an excellent motivator despite what Rogers said. Right now the man was giving one of his inspirational speeches that felt slightly out of place. The idea was there, the danger they all were facing was very much real it was just… lacking the focus. It was tricky when the people you were going against were your friends just a few days ago, when they were the enemy you had to get past in order to get to the core of Hydra.

“Excuse me. Can I ask a question?” A calm voice enquired, and Natasha closed her eyes, but didn’t do it fast enough to miss the moment of sheer panic on Steve’s face. Darcy Lewis had a question.
There was a token attempt by someone to discourage said question and the reply to that was a loud snort. The Black Widow herself wasn’t sure whether she was in favour of it. They needed a leader figure and that could be Captain America but… Darcy had a way of getting into people’s heads. She was the master of stating the obvious truths that everyone chose to ignore. They needed to pull people they had here together to make this work. They were declared outlaws, outnumbered and outgunned.

“Certainly, Miss Lewis. Shoot.”

“Brilliant.” Captain America nearly saluted at the sharp reply. Stark made another attempt to pacify the situation.

“Honey-”

“I'm funding this expedition, I think I deserve some answers.” Darcy made her way to the middle of the crowded room where Steve Rogers was, without sparing a glance to her fiancé. This was going to get interesting.

“So, Captain, I might not be following you correctly, in which case pardon me, but from the way you were speaking I got this really odd impression that you were suggesting that being hit by a friendly fire made you… I don’t know… somehow less dead? You want to comment on that? Like, correct me if I’m wrong since I’m not military or anything.” Natasha didn’t focus on Darcy and Steve. Their voices carried well even with all the ex-Shield crammed in the main hangar of their hideout. From her elevated position she observed the other occupants for signs of anything suspicious. Like the tension between the Winter Soldier and Stark, that was hard to miss... but that
wasn’t a priority right now.

“No, that wasn’t what I was implying-” Steve in his usual manner tried to appease and stay calm.

“Oh good, because as the situation stands right now those that are not with us are against us.”

“There are innocent people there-”

“Yes, Captain. And who will save them when everyone here ends up dead?” That was an excellent question. Going rogue had been a tough decision for Steve, even knowing that something had corrupted Shield from the inside. He still held that idealistic view of the chain of command, he still believed in the greater good and that everyone above him should want the same thing. Steve Rogers wasn’t stupid, he knew how the world worked, but he was stubborn, he wanted it to be better.

“We’re fighting the Good Fight-”

“Yes, but at the same time the fight is never good.”

“But we- it’s not- we’re not like them!” This time Darcy didn’t interrupt him. ‘We’re not like them.’ No one wanted to become the reflection of their enemy.

“No, we’re not. Look around. Every single person is here because they don’t want to become Hydra. The only way to ensure it won’t happen is to win.”

The Winter Soldier looked down sharply and fidgeted with the hunting knife strapped to his belt. He must have caught Steve’s eye. The agents were glancing at each other nervously. It was true, their lives had slowly turned into living nightmare until a chance to break free came around and they seized it with shaking hands.

“We won’t let that happen. They didn’t succeed then, they won’t succeed now.” Steve’s voice was sharper now. It was easier to come to terms with what had to happen when somebody laid it out before you plain and simple. That was what Darcy was doing. She might have sounded like a bitch with an ass full of snark, but every word she said had a purpose and that was for Steve Rogers to admit that he would have to fight dirty and tell the men and women that would follow him to do the same. It wasn’t an easy task.

“Really, Rogers? Colour me surprised. How are you going to do that? You see-” Natasha glanced at the brunette just to see her circling Captain America, regarding him with a suppressed sneer on her pale face, while he stood stock still looking straight ahead, prickliness marring the calm he was trying to project, “I love the Idea of this whole shebang. Saving the world, running a riot. Exciting. But the problem is-”

“Miss Lewis-”

“I’m not done. The problem is we are running a Riot. You know what running a riot is? Its taking part in a violent public disturbance. In other words its being violent assholes and disturbing the peace of all the law abiding citizens. That’s what everyone thinks we’re doing! And you know why is that? Because Hydra is in charge. Even when they move into action tomorrow, the majority of the world will assume it’s how it should be. Until we tell them that it isn’t.” Every word was like a bullet fired, hitting the target dead on, driving the point home hard. Now Darcy widened the circle she was making, her voice still sharp, walking between the people. “Hydra will order to open fire on us and they, none the wiser, will obey. Friendly Fire kills just like any other and we’ll fail-”

“We won’t fail. We can’t. I won’t let it happen!” The angry shout boomed, and people closest jumped up from the ferocity packed into those words. Captain America was getting angry.
“This is our D-Day, Captain Rogers. We must succeed so that others can follow.” Darcy kept walking still speaking. Weaving her words between those present there. Pulling them in, binding them with that common goal. They mustn’t fail. She wasn’t speaking only to the man in change, no, it was for all of them. “We are at War and this is the beaches we must fight on. No surrender no retreat, because there will be no mercy shown to us. We rebelled, we are the dead men walking.”

“Well, by the latest figures, it will be closer to forty-five million dead in five years after Hydra culls their opposition, I imagine by placing people in death camps, or torture. They were quite fond of that back in the day, and straight up executions for being the Enemy of the New World Order. But hey, at least they have their five-year plan ready and boy do they plan to be productive. Remember war torn streets littered with dead bodies? It’s coming again. But I don’t think anyone's feeling nostalgic for it.”

“They won’t get to Project Insight, Tony. We can stop them. We can do it. We can gain access and neutralize Pierce, smash their command. We will make do with what we have.” Rogers was reenergised with the new information. The fear of failure was a powerful motivational tool if the cost of it was that many lives lost. “Hydra will not Win. Not on my Watch.”

So what you think, Peeps? What makes you come back again? Do tell =)
Hello, my Peeps=

Hope you all had a wonderful Holidays

and are refreshed and ready to tackle the new year ahead =)

Wino,

You, as always, are my saving grace.

Thank you

xxx

“So… what was it like?” Jack Rollins stretched out on the floor next to Brock and he didn’t even twitch to acknowledge it. “I can’t imagine Stark being sappy…”

They were due to move out and he needed rest instead of discussing the fabulous reunion between Her and Tony Stark… Brock had enough of seeing Darcy Lewis let alone talking to her or of her. He was working for her. She was the reason he was on the freezing floor trying to get catch a snooze while Hydra was issuing a death warrant on his stupid ass.

“Like a Russian Roulette.”

“Huh?”

“I said it was like watching someone play Russian Roulette. Except the drum was fully loaded and Stark proceeded to shoot himself in the head without batting an eye, which she found charming, and the only one in pain and wishing to die was me. Also, the gun was metaphorical because if it wasn’t Soldat would have smeared Stark’s brain all over the damn wall with his not detached hand.”

“Huh. Think they’re in love?”


“You sound stressed, Chief.”

“Shut the fuck up and go to sleep!”
“I don’t like it.” Tony fidgeted with the screwdriver while Darcy carefully wiped the now fixed metal prosthesis. They did it. They managed to disconnect the metal arm and replace some of the fine wires inside it to enable it to function at least at 90% capacity, which was a win having in mind that they had virtually no resources.

“I know, and as previously stated I don’t like it either. So, hey, bonus! It’s another thing we agree on. It’s now like, what? Three?” Darcy did her best to ignore the grimace that appeared on Barnes face again. The man not only had his arm temporary removed but also had to witness her and Tony’s continuing ‘discussion’ throughout the entire process . At least she knew the former Hydra assassin had a better grip on impulse control, or… well, maybe he was just confused. Either way no one was dead yet, so she was going to take it as a sign of his improving mental state. Her mental state, after the short boost after seeing the Iron Ass, was on a sharp decline once again thanks to the same Iron Ass.

“Shortstack.” Tony Stark had something on his mind and he was pushing for it no matter what. Bucky watched their exchange like it was Ping-Pong match, his focused eyes darting between them.

The annoyance was seeping into her voice. “What? Tony, what? Don’t you dare talk to me like I’m not getting the risk. They ordered you shot down. Shieldra is gunning for you because you don’t yield and bent to their wishes, and they are now gunning for me too because- because they are a big bully.”

“Which is nothing to do with you robbing them blind while they weren’t looking.” Why was he making such a big deal out of it?

“I didn’t rob anyone, their personnel quit. Had I robbed them I would have more money than I do right now…” And they were back to the original topic. How many times were they going to discuss that?

“I still think I should be the one footing the bill for that-” Yeah, Iron Ass was definitely on a mission and that was to drive her mad.

“You can’t, you weren’t there when I hired them. It was purely my decision, hence it’s my responsibility.” The last few weeks had been tough. For both. Surprisingly the time apart didn’t make them any less set in their own ways.

“You kicked ass, Sugar Plum. No one could have done better and you seeing it through to the end is very noble. Unnecessary, but noble. I’m sure they are chuffed with whatever they’re going to get.” The sprinkle of compliments wasn’t helping his cause.

“… You’re such a little bitch sometimes, Tony. I’m aware that I’m not paying much.” Her pay for the StarkPhone upgrade fix was going into this. The entire thing. More, actually… when she really thought about it. The problem was, that divided between all those agents that defected, it wasn’t going to be a large sum… STRIKE was going to get 750k each as agreed, the rest were going to get whatever was left. Darcy was heavily banking on Pepper Potts sorting her out with an advance payment and a loan. A large loan… No one expected so many people to sign up. It was giving her a constant headache.

Tony wasn’t blind nor was he stupid. Darcy Lewis was going broke for the good of everyone. But he just went about this whole business like a total twat. Sometimes remembering that she actually really liked him was a struggle. “We can do it the modern way, you know… and split the bill.” The words were pushed out with a visible effort.
“It looks like the idea alone pains you, Tin Man.”

“It does. It sounds cheap. But it’s extraordinary circumstances, I’ll manage. We’ll split it. I’ll provide the funds and you’ll pay it.”

“And I pay too? Half of it?” Tony paying it would take the pressure off her. But it seemed like she was losing control of the situation, she would become a third wheel… unneeded, unnecessary and in the way. Darcy Lewis wasn’t a trained spy ready to spring into action. She didn’t have much to offer in terms of support. But she could do this, keep the mission going with the pay. It wasn’t in the original plan. She was going to bribe Rumlow and get out, get Natasha out, so others could handle the situation… Let Tony handle it… Now that she was out, and Tony was more than happy to take over the burden of the financing Darcy found herself somewhat unhappy with the situation.

“…Sure.”

“Tony.”

“Tony is trying to be helpful. You just agreed that their services are worth more. Ah! Ah! Ah! Before you say anything, I have reaped the benefits of it already, _they got you out_. Black Widow has some outstanding skills but even she’s still just one woman, plus she was physically impaired at the time too. _Yes_, you were the one that made them flip. _Yes_, you were the one that hired them. It was a colossal success and it’s _all_ yours. And _no_, you accepting a little help doesn’t in any way diminish that fact, Darcy. If wasn’t for you no one here would have had the guts to get out from under Hydra.”

“I got lucky-”

“Bullshit. Luck had nothing to do with it. Weren’t you the one always emphasising how we’re in this together? That you chose this? Chose me? You and I, Shortstack. You feel like you’re responsible for this contract, I get that. It was a gamble you asked them to make at the cost of their lives. People will die, there’s no way around it. Like you said, fire of any description kills. I wasn’t there when you had to make that choice, and I’m sorry. But there’s at least one thing that I can do and it’s _paying people! Please_… Just let me do something.”

“I have enough money to pay.” Or would have. She'd make it happen.

“I know. And I have enough for you not to worry about it. You did the hard part, let me wrap this deal up for you. Honeybunny, you know I’ll wear you down.” It was already happening. She was tired, stressed and worried about people she cared about. Darcy had discovered that she had acquired a lot of then in last few months…

“You have some really weird fixations. I got it covered.”

“It’s a well-established fact that no one’s more capable than you, but I got this part.” The brunette tidied up the crooked table they had all the instruments laid out and she mulled it over. It was always the small things, wasn’t it? The fine details. Tony did an admirable job pretending that he was checking Bucky’s arm again. They would have to part again soon. The danger outside these walls was real, there was no guarantee of success. Was this the way she wanted to end their meeting today?

“I’ll… I’ll pay the bonus. OK? They deserve it, this way the total will-” That will even it out.

Tony’s eyes lit up. Someone loved getting their way. “They’ll be more than adequately-”

“Or I can just cover the lot-”
“Bonus sounds great!” Darcy smiled at the exclamation. He was so transparent sometimes.

“I really appreciate your donation.” No time like now to burst the bubble.

“I - what?”

“The Donation? You know, the money. You donate it to me, since its for a noble cause, and I pay it out. You know, this splitting bill thing’s got something to it. By the way, I’m in charge of it. So, if you were thinking of ordering Strike to put me under lock and key because you’re paying them, it’s not gonna work, Casanova.” And Bingo. Tony’s mouth formed an O for a second before it snapped shut. She was never going to get tired of calling him out on shit he thought she wasn’t picking up. Darcy Lewis wasn’t just a pretty face, Tony Stark should have known that by now. Sucker.

“I will be technically paying them-” Awww… was he still trying, wasn’t that cute? Even when the Winter Soldier snickered loudly, earning a glare from her fiancé.

“No, you won’t, but I will. Don’t you just love when everything works out?”

“Yay… Shit.” Tony Stark straightened up. His master plan just fell through and he wasn’t at all happy about it. “I should have seen this coming, didn’t I, Spark?”

This time it was Darcy that snickered. “Yep! It was a good effort that.” She couldn’t help herself and leaned over Bucky’s chair to pat a sour faced Iron Man on the shoulder. “You were being a tad bit obvious, Hot Stuff, but not a bad plan altogether.”

“I just want you safe while this shitstorm goes down.”

“I know, Tony, and I will be. I’m not throwing myself out there. Now, what were we talking about again? Hydra put you on the naughty list of people not letting then get away with shit. Also wearing your Iron Suit for me is no longer an option, not with Hydra having their tentacles on anti-aircraft missiles. I trust Jarvis, but I don’t think my reaction is fast enough if things will go bad.”

“If I go with you-”

“Rhodey is waiting for you already, you should have left hours ago. I got Bucky and the renegade agents. We’ll hole up somewhere and you’ll come and get me once it’s safe.”

“I don’t like it.”

“Yeah, heard it the first time around…”

Time could be your ally but it could also be your worst enemy. It depended on how you managed it. You made it work for you or it caught you out.

A flurry of activity was going on inside the makeshift base. Today was the day. It was going to happen. Natasha was on team Alpha and they were going to move after Darcy’s security team departed. The woman was already in the back seat of one of the repurposed, which meant recently stolen, jeeps with Stark leaning on the door, projecting his general unhappiness with this situation. Soldat was loitering around the couple, which ensured that people weren’t getting too close to those two. Steve was shouting orders not too far either, getting the teams prepared and ready to move out. Anticipation and determination were hanging in the air.
“Again, I’m fine.” Natasha turned. This was going to take too long for comfort.

“I know. Me too. We’re all fine. Including Ducky here. Standing extremely close. Not even pretending that he’s not eavesdropping. Loving the war paint by the way. So very you. Have you ever considered adding glitter to liven it up?” Soldat was not a fan of Tony Stark.

“I will crush- my hand-”

“Thanks to me and Honeybunny. You could express gratitude and move a little. It’s just a suggestion.” It was hard to say if Stark was expecting the Winter Soldier to move or if he was just being his usual annoying self. There was a pause, but the Soldier did move. Closer. Pointedly crossing his arms and leaning on the driver’s door. “What’s your name again? Cockblock? I’m sorry but we got a Captain by that name already.”

Darcy Lewis up until now silent, nodded slowly into the direction of said Captain.

“You've been watching him for the last hour, go talk to him. You don’t have to say more than you are comfortable with saying or for the contact to last longer than you want. If he gets too much, again, punch him in the nose and come here. Go. Just do everything like we practised. All real quick, just few words and back.”

The fear was masked by the stony facial expression with the added layer of the black paint, it could only be distinguished if you knew where to look. Behind the anger, the bravado… it was there, lurking in those wide eyes. Not fear of injury, torture or death… no. It was the genuine human contact. Lewis was protecting, arguably, the strongest man here. The petite woman, with tired eyes and still healing bruises doing what she could to shelter the confused soldier. All up to a point. Natasha had seen the practise … she still hasn’t decided if she approved of the idea. Letting Soldat talk however briefly with Steve was an unmeasurable risk. It could help but it could do some serious damage.

While those thoughts were flying inside Natasha’s head the Winter Soldier seemed to take Darcy’s suggestion like an order and marched straight off to the suited-up Captain America.

The Captain in turn froze and watched the now fully armed and armoured friend approach. The struggle not to step forth to meet the Soldier was admirable. He probably would have if Natasha hadn’t warned him, on Darcy’s orders. It was paramount to allow the Winter Soldier to do things on his terms. This meeting might have been prepared by Darcy Lewis, but it wasn’t entire the woman’s idea. There was a lot of pent up energy inside a very dangerous man that was trying to sort the mess inside his own head. Bucky Barnes, or more precisely the Winter Soldier that Hydra reshaped him into, knew that there was a connection between the Captain America and himself. Maybe there were flashes of memories resurfacing from days of War or maybe those of their resent more violent encounters… It must have been scaring him. The not knowing what it all meant to him… Yes, this tall blond man was his ally but was he a friend in the true sense of the word? Could he be trusted when the Soldat didn’t even trust himself?

Their brief encounter was meant to put them at ease. Both of them. To show Steve that Bucky was doing better, if only just slightly. That there was hope. For the Soldat it was meant to allow to let go of some of the fear of being overwhelmed again. The Winter Soldier was able to keep himself level better. There was no magic cure for his condition was now. James Barnes, even with the chaos inside his brain, was more himself than ever that could remember being. The confidence was a powerful thing.

The effect Darcy Lewis had on people…
Brock had everything loaded and ready to move. The logistics of their transit were being worked out. He was on team Alpha that was going to intercept the Councilwoman to make a swap for the Black Widow. It was a risk but their best chance of getting someone of theirs inside quick. If they acted efficiently there still had a chance to-

The shitty coffee he was drinking shot out of his mouth like fountain at the sight of the Winter Soldier going towards Rogers. Funny enough his first reaction was not to pull out his gun, no, it was to throw Lewis between those two and let her sort that shit out. So, when his frantic gaze located the wench just calmly watching he managed to squash the impulse to aim the gun he had just drawn.

The Birdbrain standing nearby hissed at him. “Relax.”

“I’ll do that when I’m dead. What’s going on?”

Barton didn’t have a chance to response Soldat clapped his hand on Rogers shoulder all the time looking pissed off. Captain Arsehole did the same. So they stood there grabbing each other by the shoulders and looking intently like they were about to start fighting. The unstable idiots that they were.

All activity in near vicinity ceased. The situation was intense. Everyone wanted to know what was going to happen in case they needed to duck and cover quickly. No one could guess how this was going to play out.

“Chicken titties.” That was not the words anyone expected the Winter Soldier to say while looking deeply into Captain America’s eyes.

“H…uh?” Neither did Rogers. Brock did the only reasonable thing that one could do in a mental situation such a this, he looked at Lewis that hissed at the exchange, being the vision of regret. Even Stark appeared taken aback.

“Nooooo. Good luck! ‘Good luck, Captain.’ Just take a breath, its ok… You're doing great!” Lewis flailed her arms around after the men shuffled to enable the Winter Soldier to have Lewis in line of sight the stance defensive again.

“… Good luck.” Soldat once again focused on the shell-shocked Rogers and the second attempt went down much better, even as the words were grumbled out. That was most verbal that Brock had seen the man since they had escaped.

“Thank you-“ The limit of Soldier’s willingness to interact with anyone that wasn’t Lewis was reached and exceeded. He didn’t let Captain Righteous finish, pushed the hand on his shoulder away and just as sharply marched back stiffly.

Stark, over the surprise, piped up and his sharp voice made people move again. “Entertainment is over! Let’s get this show on the road!”

‘Chicken Titties… Thor…” Tony had bundled her into the car securely next to Bucky, who did his best at innocent facial expression. Darcy stared at it for a moment and shook her head waiting for Tony to come back after a quick chat with Rogers so they could get the green light to move.

“Well, that was interesting…” Having in mind how many people witnessed the chicken breast joke, it
wasn’t going to die anytime soon.

“Sorry…”

“No. Don’t be, you didn’t do anything wrong. Yes, that was not what I had in mind- I was being pushy, I’m the one that should be sorry.” Darcy had nearly fallen over at the exchange, just like others that heard it. It was so easy to forget how delicate the situation was. She should have known better. “You know what? You did well. I’m not the best at this, but I know you did good. How do you feel?” The nerves were getting to her. Next few days were going to extra long and she will unlikely to know if everyone were unharmed until the dust were going to set and then the joy that was the media circus was going to descent upon them. Bucky simply nodded his eyes darting around to spot any signs of danger. The agents that were going to accompany them where already in the front seats sweating profusely at the glares the Winter Soldier was giving them.

“You got the gun, Spark?” Tony was back. The massive front door was slowly being opened. They were ready. Darcy was determined not be a sap and think positive thoughts.

“And the taser, yes.”

“Lay low. Lay down if you need to.” It was good to know that they both weren’t cut out to handle the sort of situation in a responsible manner. Tony was grasping her hand like he intended to never let go. It was sweet until she remembered that Bucky was sitting next to her and was likely to break Tony’s hand if he still insisted to hold into her once the engine was started.

“I’ll be ok, Tony. I will see you in no time.”

“Yeah, so just in case you get home before you see me-”

“What? Why? You said everything is ok back home….” Oh, that wasn’t what she needed to find out. He was supposed to have handled her absence well.

“Oh, it is, it is. It’s all good. Nothing to worry about.” The soft rumble of the engines threatened to end their conversation. Bucky shifted next to her, it was time to go. Whatever it was she just wished he spit it out already, Darcy Lewis was one to handle suspense well. “Just when you’ll be speaking to Pep, remember that I love you, ok?” The casualness it was said with contrasted sharply with the intensity of Tony’s gaze before he stuck his head inside the car to steal a kiss from her and walk off just as suddenly.

“Whaaat…? What-? The -? You do this to me now? Tony, don’t you just fucking walk away, you damn arsehole! Oh, please, like you can’t hear me since you’re suiting up, right? Dick. Wait! Tony… I meant to say, it’s same. Saaaame…” She was sure it wasn’t meant to be so hard to breath all of a sudden. The tinted window rolled up and they moved, leaving behind the chaos and certain armoured superhero in hot rod red.

So good, bad? Let me know, Peeps! =)
Chapter 84

Hello, my Peeps

So my plot bunnies seemed to have temporarily abandoned me due to the lack of attention from my side.

Still I hope you enjoy my attempt getting back on track with the story.

This chapter is not edited so beware of mistakes.

xxx

Wino,

Just wanted to thank you again and say that I really appreciate all the time you have spent helping me.

You are the best.

xxx

Truth was a concept and it was going out of fashion. The morning radio host rambled about the gas prices. His words were bouncing inside Darcy’s head. It was an idea that everyone approved off but in practice wanted none off, because truth more often than not it was inconvenient. People didn’t want the truth in all its unvarnished, unyielding glory, they wanted their version of it. Fitting their narrow worldview, conflicting with none of their preconceived opinions.

Anticipation was ripe and hanging in the air like spoiled fruit, its phantom sickly sweet yet acidic aroma was slowly making everyone nauseas. The ex-Shield did their best to act like nothing was on but you could tell by the way their eyes kept seeking sources of information. They have made their beds, for better or worse, now they wanted to know if it was shaped like a coffin.

There was nothing wrong with ignoring the truth now and again, Thor knows she had done it enough times. What ever reason you had for playing blind in the face of facts you had to know one thing and one thing only, one day it was going to come back in some roundabout way and bite you on the ass and no amount of ignorance was going to help you then.

“You have a lovely home.” Darcy gave her best smile to their host. The man face-down on the floor of his own hallway gave an ineligible reply while Bucky cleared the small detached building belonging to Rosie’s cousin. It was a slightly awkward moment. The ex-Shield guys already secured the place by unnecessarily violently ransacking it, but bless Buck’s metal bicep and his Hannibal Lecter mask, he wanted to double check. “Oh! By the way, thanks for the car. Major help there.” Her words would probably sound sincerer if Amos and his son weren’t being held at multiple gun points.
“Clear.” The simple statement resulted in a collective sign of relief. Everyone wanted to keep the Winter Soldier happy, but also if the most paranoid member of the group declared the place safe it had to be fucking safe.

“Now we’re talking! Help them up, gents! I am so sorry about this. It’s really not- not-” Darcy paused for a moment to take in the situation, a group of extremely well-armed men build like shit brick houses and her covered in bruises and Bucky with his mask and war paint. All that was missing were massive explosions in the background. By Darcy’s calculations that wasn’t for at least few more hours, give or take and not anywhere close to them. “Its dangerous times, Mr de Lugo. Can I call you Amos? I’m not sure what I can say apart from we’re in a bit of trouble with- with-” how to explain it and not scare those two shitless or sound insane?

The Agent Davidson that played her driver morning supplied helpfully. “The Government.” It sounded more like a guess.

“Not technically- no – fuck it, yes. The Government. We’re a little on the run. It won’t be for long though.” Not for long, because shit was hitting the fan somewhere some time now.

“You with that guy from yesterday?” Amos wasn’t buying the apologies. Rosie couldn’t have known about Darcy’s impending visit and in combination with all the firepower they had, he had full right to be suspicious.

“Yes, Amos. I am- we are. He’s a nice guy.” Darcy really wanted to put the man at ease. How much did Rosie tell her cousin? Her security woman wouldn’t have contacted the de Lugos if she didn’t trust them. Tony wouldn’t have risked it if there were any suspicions. There were some complicated family ties between Rosie and Amos, in fact Darcy was pretty sure that no one outside her security woman’s immediate circle knew that those two were blood relations, something to do with an aunt or a cousin that got pregnant out of wedlock, at least that’s the impression she had. Hence no one could make a connection and come looking for Darcy Lewis hiding out in a dodgy end of the city.

Amos gave them all once over again. His teenage son still shaking slightly from the experience. He was still on edge. “Borrowed my car had the balls to complain that the AC isn’t working.”

“Yep, definitely sounds like the guy I’m with. Please don’t take it personally he’s a dick to everyone.” Trust Tony to be a twat at times like this.

“How much trouble-” Amos had a right to know what kind of shit storm just hit his life, but it was hard to explain, and Darcy wished they hadn’t forced their way in as they did. It didn’t facilitate good first impression. The last thing she wanted was for Amos to try and call the cops on them.

“A fair bit of that kind of trouble that you sleep better knowing less about.” The ex-Agent Douche-in-Charge whose name Darcy couldn’t remember, was not endearing himself to anyone present with the snide remark, also he was right. Maintaining the polite smile in a face of honest confusion was harder than in face of crazy arrogance. The silence that followed was breached when Amos sighed deeply and ran his calloused hands through the greying locks.

“The things you do for your family, eh?” Bless Rosie. It was a huge risk to take. It must have been nice to have a family that loved you growing up… Brief pang of jealousy at that thought was an unpleasant reminder of her own situation.

“And it’s greatly appreciated, really. Might not look like it now,” Darcy nodded towards her entourage and offered a sheepish smile in the attempt to soften the tension, “but we’re all deeply grateful.” Her companions made neither a sound nor a movement to support the statement electing to grimly stare at Amos. Darcy felt her face grow hot. “Isn’t that right, gents?” She wasn’t in the right
frame of mind for this.

“Yes, ma’am!” All the prompt reply was missing was the military salute. Bucky merely blinked from his spot at the entrance to the kitchen. Darcy gave the men a dirty look. She wasn’t sure what annoyed her. It might have been the situation in general. She didn’t want to do this. Bring their poisonous problems to people that lived their lives in blissful ignorance of all the shit that the likes of Darcy Lewis and Tony Stark were involved in to date.

But the place was safe, and they were desperate for it. Their base of operations moved at the same time that Darcy left the compound. Tony was adamant that her staying separately from the main command was safer. He was most likely right... He was right. Not that it made her feel any better about not knowing what was going down.

Making sure Hydra didn’t win was the top priority, so here she was, in Rosie’s second cousin’s, hallway surrounded by personal hit squad trying to reassure Amos that they weren’t a bunch of murderers on the run from justice. What could she say? The truth? To share the fact that Hydra was trying to take over the world, again? Because that wasn’t going to sound plausible until its announced-on TV...

“So... You’re staying long?” That was a good question. She really wished she knew the answer.

“A day. Maybe two. Not sure yet. Sorry...”

“Its not that. Got some eggs, toast and not much else. Wife’s away and we been busy, it’s easier to pop to the diner across the road from my work. My kid needs to get to school on time, and since your guy got my car-” Amos motioned to the front door still blocked by one of Shield guys.

Darcy winced. “Yeah, about that. Its best if you skip work today.”

Amos stared at her for a moment thinking over his response. “Lady, I don’t know who you are, but that job pays my mortgage and puts food on our table. I’m not there, I don’t get paid.” Darcy remembered when she was in that kind of situation. They have moved, albeit slowly, into the main living area. It somewhat reminded of the time she spend sharing an RV with Jane. Small space, simple, sparse furnishing, but what’s there was well used and functional. The large knitted throw in multi-coloured pattern draped over sofa that had seen better days. Family photos. Large potted plant in the corner. You could tell the house was loved, it was a home.

Darcy swallowed thickly. Home. She left hers standing in that warehouse barely an hour ago, all decked out for a fight, ready to save the world yet again. Bloody Iron Condom...

“Don’t worry about the money.” There was at least one thing she could do when all this was over.

“Everyone worries about the money, lady.”

The laugh that came out in response was sudden and slightly manic. It effectively put the end to the discussion. No one was going anywhere. Darcy allowed herself to sink into the sofa. She was cracking under the pressure. To be fair she had lasted longer than she had ever given herself credit for. Darcy would have loved for money to be her main problem. They used to be, up to very recently and then a late-night call happened and everything changed.

The room smelled like fresh toast, old furniture and the fresh linen scent coming from the overalls and multiple socks drying over the radiator. Shield guys were making themselves at home too. Helping themselves to the buttered toast and coffee that Amos no doubt had prepared for his own and his son’s breakfast.
Darcy had always hated waiting. Sitting in one place doing nothing. She was never one for that, she could always make the impression of idleness but usually there was something she could do when no one was watching. The minutes ticked past annoyingly slowly only emphasising importance of today.

The freshly brewed coffee was strong and burning hot. She wasn’t sure if she preferred this quiet house to the bustle of active base of operations. Maybe because everything inside this house was so… normal and her life was suddenly felt so far from this kind of existence. She no longer had the comfort of ignorance. The thought shouldn’t have scared her as much as it did. She wanted to go home, like normal person, like anyone else on this planet, but that fancy NYC penthouse was just an empty shell, a meaningless place right now, he wasn’t there, he was elsewhere fighting the good fight so normal could continue to exist, so people could wake up and make toast and coffee and their biggest worry would be not getting stuck in the morning traffic.

*Drip... drip... drip...* the red droplets against the red metal…. Blending with the red hair… clouding the blue eyes… down the bowstring… *Drip... drip... drip...*

The panic attack came and went leaving her kneeling in front of the toilet. The coffee wasn’t so nice coming up the same way it went down and since Darcy hadn’t had anything solid to eat for a while, that and the stomach acid made an unattractive combination when it hit the blue porcelain.

“The bathroom came this way...” Amos and the agents were outside the door. Soon the world was going to be at war with people she cared about caught up in the thick of it and Darcy tried to keep breathing.

“You didn’t eat...”

She was no longer retching, just sitting on her knees watching the water flush. She hadn’t eaten the Asset was sure of it. Not a crumb of those potatoes had made past those lips. He could still taste the meat, the grainy greasy texture mixed with the mash. Feel the warmth of her hand on his.

She neither denies nor confirms. She doesn’t have to. The ridged posture and pale, clammy skin tell it all. She merely continues going through the motions.

“I don’t think I will be drinking coffee for some time...”

The room was small with only one exit and staying in it had a strategical disadvantage. The Asset crouched down. The skin on the forehead was cool to the touch. No fever. Just lack of food, lack of rest, lack of strength in that small body to deal with challenges others don’t even notice for long time. But not lack of will to overcome it. The odd thing was that for some reason it associated with soft rustle of paper and laughter, on occasions it felt like someone was just behind him, waiting patiently. In those spilt moments there were words on his lips that he had long since forgotten. He wanted to bite, taste them again. Let them rush through him like fire. He was unaccustomed to feel this restless, to wait aimlessly.

“We’re not telling anyone about my little moment, right?” Her words were loud and carried through the carboard door into the hallway where hasty retrying footsteps were heard right after. A futile attempt to disguise the blatant eavesdropping. “I really got to ask... were you going for the smoky eye look, but it went sideways? With some cotton swabs and mascara, we could still save it, you know.”
“It wasn’t Howard…”

“No, it wasn’t. His name is Tony. Do you- do you remember who was Howard?”

The Winter Soldier opened his mouth to respond. Of course, he knew who Howard was. The name fell from his lips with familiar ease. He knew the man. Somewhere at the back of his mind vague images floated. Fancy cars, women smiling and expensive drinks and people wanting his attention…

“A bartender?”

“… Close. That’s close. If he were consuming alcohol like Tony, bartender could as well be his second vocation. I’m so telling Tony that.”

Trying to bring all those fragments together was like assembling a puzzle with pieces missing. Gaping black holes threatened to swallow those tiny bits that emerged.

“… Gigolo?”

“… probably close, but it was him paying I would assume. Not gonna tell Tony you think his dad was a slut though. These days the term is sexually liberated, which is a good thing, just so you know.”

He had half expected her to push for more, but she didn’t. The conversation was left there for when he was ready to continue. Allowing to process his own statements.

The Asset knew Howard Stark. The conviction didn’t lay in the random images or fragments of conversations that didn’t make sense. The person that existed before the Asset was shaped into being knew Howard Stark. There was this certainty inside him. He just… knew and that was all he needed for now.

“Ugh… Let’s get out before the panic outside peaks and they kick the door in.”

The sight that greeted them once they finally exited the small bathroom that Bucky had barricaded them in was one of immense relieve, with large side serving of toast and sweet tea.

Amos de Lugo was a good man if rough around the edges. He didn’t hide his dislike about the situation he was stuck with now. Darcy suspected that they would have been asked to leave by now, but her current company was not the sort of people anyone would have felt encouraged to argue with.

“You pregnant?” Amos was lucky that she liked Rosie otherwise her security woman would have found herself with one less relative. Darcy stared at him for a long moment before replying curtly.

“Yes. Don’t make me be rude to you, Amos, because the next thing will be that I look pregnant, which is basically saying I look fat and trust me it’s not a good time to say that to me.” Darcy had never considered herself emotionally stable and even less so now.

“I thought maybe you on the run from a bad husband.” There was another moment of silence. The Agent furthest from her chuckled, not too loud though, there was a fine line between funny and offensive. “You said on the hunt funny there, amigo. Plus that would a party of fifty strong. Not to
mention the spectators. A lot of people would die to get a piece of that action.” Darcy flipped him a bird.

“Well, aren’t you a comedian? Anyone watching the TV? Or am I the main entertainment here?” Would have been shame to miss the Breaking News.

The TV was on in the sitting room. The main news channel still running nonstop. They were waiting. Waiting sucked even when people insisted on feeding her. So, Darcy did the thing she was best at and that was overthinking the situation.

“Have you ever heard of Schrodinger’s cat?”

“Are you going to mind fuck us?” Agent Runs-his-hole-at-the-wrong-person piped up with mouth full of toast.

“Excuse me?” That took her aback a little. The thoughts scattered inside her mind like frightened mice.

“I been told you do that.” The way others not too subtly avoided her eyes made it clear that it was a general opinion.

“What? No.” Darcy was honestly offended at that. It clearly implied she enjoyed messing people up. She didn’t. “Who said that?”

“No one.” She could see the regret on the Agent’s face. It only spurred her on.

“Was it Rumlow?”

“No.” He was nearly convincing. Darcy felt her temper flare up. Hasn’t she been perfectly civil with that tramp?

“And I bet it was. Fucking arsehole. What’s his problem? That is incredibly offensive. Who he thinks he is?!” Darcy stood up sharply from the sofa. Shouting was an excellent stress relieve. Where was Tony when you needed him? Also there was a downside to having a sudden fit of rage. It came in a shape of a certain Super Soldier with uncertain mental stability that took her sudden outburst as sign of danger and pulled his big ass hunting knife ready to launch himself at the nearest unfortunate soul. “Fuck my life! Bucky!” At least those were the words she tried to say. What came out was more along the lines of blood curdling battle cry. Darcy did her favourite manoeuvre and flung herself head first at the problem. Before her head connected with what appeared to be a very solid wall of muscle, out of the corner of her eye Darcy could see ex-Shield ducking for cover like the finest examples of self-preservation. ‘Those rat bastards...

To her great relief no one was dead when she finally came around. Her effectively knocking herself unconscious seemed to have cooled Bucky’s temper right down. Darcy groaned. Her forehead felt like it had been split open. It very well could have been because the common sense had made a run for it to parts unknown judging by what came from her mouth next.

“Fuck this. People, I got a plan.”

Christine Everhart had long since learned to deal with sexism in her chosen line of work. It came with the territory. She had dared to set foot into the Old Boys Club that was journalism. Her. Slim and good looking, daring to do investigative journalism. There had been no shortage of sceptics even
to this day. It seemed that having a vagina put others under the impression that her capacity to do professional high standard work was somehow not on par with a person’s that happened to have an appendage dangling between their legs.

You could choose to bash your head against the invisible wall and shout *injustice* towards the heavens. She chose another path. She worked more, harder, better. She was picking that wall apart one article at time. They could ignore her at parties, pretend that she was nothing more than a pretty face, but they could not ignore her work.

It was important not to make yourself the focus of your work. Christine had leaned it the hard way.

“Chrissy! *Darling*, what brings you here today? I didn’t know were hiring! I always said you would make an excellent weather girl here! *Hahaha.*” The fake laugh echoed in the half empty hallway.

The morning news presenter flashed her Hollywood smile at Christine. The overly conservative outfit put you in mind of an elderly Aunt that was late to her Sunday church service. The plastic surgery and diamond earing on the other hand reminded Christine that sometimes selling out everything that journalism stood for paid well. Diane Woods peddled everything from immigration scaremongering to advocating for women’s intended place in the order of life, which seemed to be in the kitchen. Also, the woman had a face that was just asking for a brick, or maybe that was just Christine’s personal opinion on those matters. Diane was one of the reasons that whole generations of women had to work themselves to death to prove they were good at something else than making cookies, smiling and flattering men for their mediocre accomplishments.

“I’ll be presenting today.” Christine glanced at the bodyguards scattered around the studio, watching the exchange. Today was the day. *No time to be distracted now.*

“Presenting? *Here*?” The laughter was shrill and mocking. “*Oh, Honey*, I think you got the wrong network. We’re-” The Director of the network reached them just when Diane was about to heap more condescending jibes. “*Oh, Arthur!* I was just saying to Chrissy-”

Arthur Mackinlay didn’t acknowledge his employee focusing solely on Christine who nodded curtly when he approached. From the pale face and bloodshed eyes the man hasn’t had much sleep last night. Deep and peaceful slumber seemed like a nostalgic dream at this point in time.

“Everything ready, Miss Everhart. We’re ready to roll.”

“Mr Mackinlay, I would like to thank you for your taking us on board with so little information. I know the situation was less than ideal.”

“Sometimes you just have to take a risk. The studio is this way, let me walk you there.” The gesture was grand. Christine suppressed a snide remark. Few moths ago he had mistaken her for the weather girl calling her *Sweetcheeks*. Today she was Miss Everhart. A smile came unbidden to her lips. It must have been *killing* him that a woman was going to break such monumental news and Christine was going to take it as a win. *Plus*, they had left Diane Woods standing in a hallway shell shocked at the fact that she was just so blatantly ignored. That was a pure bonus.

The scene had been set. It was time to start. A skeleton crew was assembled. Her editor was currently at printers overseeing the distribution of their latest edition. *The World On The Brink of War!* The headline was catchy and ominous, the content of the text under it even more so. How many people were going to be lost in the mist this chaos? A blood red smile of certain acquaintance once again came her mind… It had been happening a lot lately. Christine shook her head. Darcy was *fine*. She had to be…
“We interrupt our usual broadcast with Breaking News.” The TV presenter of the *Early Early Show* smiled apologetically hardly able to conceal his own surprise when he was asked to vacate the seat and Christine Everhart strolled in like it was no big deal.

“We face a challenge that had been presented but few times in the history of our great Country. To prevent the subversion of Liberty. To preserve and uphold our fundamental rights, the bedrock, the very foundation of our Society. Not only for us in the United States of America, but for billions of people around the globe. We face a threat that had long since been relegated to the annals of history and thus overlooked in the chaos of what is today’s political clime. *Today* that has changed. *Today* we must put aside the petty differences of political parties and internal squabbles, to stand together for the right to be free.”

The spotlights were much brighter than Christine ever remembered them being, she took a deep breath. They were all a part of this bloody show now. Maybe her view of the world was too warped. Distorted by cynicism and chasing her own personal gains. She might not have been out there marching with a bulletproof vest, but she could do her part. She didn’t smile this time, looking at the camera long and hard. “For those living and working in Washington City today, *stay indoors*, do not travel unless it is absolutely necessary. Various levels of our Government and Military had been infiltrated by a hostile force known as Hydra and as we speak they are attempting to take control of highly advanced military aircrafts that would be able to wreak havoc and destruction on cities from miles again. It can not be allowed to happen-”

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So? How bad was it? Going through a bit of a writer's block so some feedback will be appreciated =)
Wino,

What can I say? You're the best =)

Chapter 85

The thing with anger was that it had a tendency to build up. Like steam in the boiling pot. Human psyche was wonderfully complicated. It was motivated by indefinite number of goals. Everyone had their own driving force inside. It could be anything… so many things could make you simmer, slowly boil on the inside, until it all exploded inside your mind. The quick Snap that obliterated reason. Just like that.

Darcy couldn’t take it. The scent of toast. The tea. People having conversations in the background of the chaos that was slowly tearing up her mind. The snap happened to coincide with the remarkably successful attempt to calm Bucky down. The short spell of unconsciousness that followed did nothing to calm her down.

Darcy Lewis wasn’t a fighter. Her reaction was shit so was her physical strength. It left much, much to be desired. Darcy had no plans of getting into shape, because she never planned to fight, also it included running and Darcy simply didn’t run. That was what she told Natasha a few times already.

What Darcy Lewis did do was know things. Information was key. There was no such thing as useless intel, there were only people that didn’t know how to use it. It was all about strategy. Life wasn’t a race; it was a game of chess. It wasn’t about excess of strength, it was about how you used what you had. It was maximizing the resources.

Everything was a resource. You learned that pretty quick when you were desperate.

And right now, her only weapon had started working properly.

The same thought ran circles in Darcy’s head. Over and over again. The problem was that at one point you had to do something about it, or that same thought would drive you barking mad. Darcy was not down for that to happen.

“Fuck this. People, I have a plan.” It wasn’t much but it had to be better than sit and wait.

“You’re crazy…” Amos count take it anymore. The last stunt took the cake for the man. Darcy had to admit that he was being braver than she had expected him to. “Is - is Rosie involved? Does she know anything? She’s got a good job now! An Important job. She wants to save up money and go back to school… If her boss finds out they’ll fire her! She’s too good to everyone. I told her that…” Amos was visibly upset. Not for himself but for his cousin and the possibility of them fucking up Rosie’s job. Darcy stared at him. She had to tell Tony that he didn’t get recognised again.
“Amos, you’re a good man. Trust me, we’re not gonna get Rosie fired. That’s one thing I can guarantee you. Now. How good is your internet connection?”

Brock finished checking in with Beta Team 3 after successfully securing the communication Tower. They had the element of surprise. It was still going for them. Four assault teams had infiltrated the massive launch pad of the Helicarriers. Provided that Romanov and Captain A-Hole manage to neutralize Pierce, this suicide mission could yet turn out a success.

‘Well, colour me fucking surprised.’

At first, he didn’t even notice gentle buzz of the mobile wedged in his inner pocket. Maybe he noticed but ignored it, because it shouldn’t be ringing. That was the emergency line. The simple burner phone had one single number on it. Brock still wasn’t sure why was he was the one stuck with the direct line to the Devil. Surely, he had been punished enough by now… The buzz continued. Jack gave him a sidewise glance. He ignored that too.

“You… going to pick that up?” Jack Rollins, for someone that was supposed to be his right-hand man, he talked way too much.

“She’s fine.” They were on a mission already and not even half way through.

“We have four of our guys with her.”

“Sucks to be them right now.” All volunteers. Serves them right. Brock wasn’t going to go crying for people that chose their own end. He had his own fate to worry about.

“Pick up. You want her to call Stark and bitch you’re not available?”

Brock gave his friend a flat look. Had he met the woman? “She wouldn’t do that. Not her style. The bitch solves her own problems.” Jack nodded in agreement.

“Precisely. Would hate to see you go. Who’ll be my wingman when we go bar hopping once this shit settles?”

Brock just sent him a weary look. “The bartender, like always. Throw some sob story in, maybe you’ll score a pity fuck.”

The phone continued to buzz, and the STRIKE commander clenched his teeth before reluctantly picking it up. She was in a hole somewhere. What was the worst that could happen?

“Speak and its better be important.”

The recipient hesitated for a moment. “Sir?” It was one of the volunteers. No great urgency in the low voice, Brock noted. Somehow he would have felt better had there been commotion and gun fire.

“Davidson? What you want? This line’s strictly for - ” There was a slight rustle on the line, an indication that the device changed hands. It was astonishing how his gut still managed to sink even after deciding that it was his last day.

“Yeah, speaking about that, you busy?” Not even a hello. The cheerful voice immediately ambushed him. With great effort Brock kept in the tirade of curses that was making circles in his head.

“Yes.” This whole Shieldra business was getting into full swing. He didn’t have time for this.
"I need a hand." The statement was brief. Did she practise this matter of fact voice to get it to the point of perfection? She must have. One single precise cut with that sharp tongue of hers and it took no time for the gangrene to start. The atrophy tended to begin in the part of the brain that dealt with reason.

Brock waited a moment just in case she was going to elaborate for a change. “No.”

“That’s a little harsh.” *Harsh*? Harsh was shooting men he had previously fought on the same side with. That was fucking harsh. Friendly fire. He loved that term. Not so much when it was directed at him, but still.

“As a rule I don’t sign up to more than *one* suicide mission at a time.” Even his insanity had its limits. Admittedly, those were highly blurred and barely there but they still existed.

“Rule? *What rules-*?" Sharp and sudden echo of combat drowned her words for a moment and Lewis was instantly on alert. “What was that?” The action was coming to the Tower they had just secured. Brock indicated his men to take positions, ready for the defence.

“The will to live leaving my body.”

The quip made no impression on his conversation buddy. “I thought I heard a gun-shot.”

“It resisted.” He deadpanned.

Lewis didn’t even pause before replying. “When you think about it, do you really need it in your line of work?”

“You bored already, Lucy? Must be a new record. You just left.” The parting this morning was quick and Brock couldn’t say he was missing her. The little moniker got a reaction. The mood on the line dipped just slightly.

“It’s Lewis, actually. I kind of expected you to remember.”

“Oh, I do. Trust me. That’s… just a little nickname.”

“Lucy? That’s… random.” Darcy Lewis was nobody’s fool. Brock grinned. He took his pleasure when the opportunity presented itself. Those were few and far between of late.

“Well, *you know*, easy to remember. Short, robust. Feels very fitting.” Even he couldn’t go around calling her Lucifer, regardless if everyone agreed with him or not. It just felt like bad taste. Not because she was small and sweet. The wench was vicious. You simply didn’t bad mouth your Boss. It wasn’t done.

Lewis was good at sensing sass going her way. “… I wish I was there right now.”

“I don’t. So, from the lack of panic I take you haven’t been discovered. Sit tight.”

“Listen, I have a plan-” *Uh, yeah, sure.* Just what he needed right now. Sign him right the fuck up for that fancy tomb stone with nothing but ‘Sucker’ written on it. The cheap plastic phone complained when Brock involuntarily squeezed it.

“Oh, I have no doubt! Sit on it, sweetheart.” He wasn’t even going to entertain the idea. A round of fire went off not far from them. Another fool’s errand was the last thing he needed. One thing that Miss Darcy Lewis wasn’t and that was a quitter. Brock could feel his eyes roll to the back of his head in frustration.
“I can help—”

The hiss was low and angry, attempting to convey his opinion of this conversation. “By keeping yourself out of the way. Yes. I don’t need for something to happen to you, you crazy wench. There’s a reason why you’re there!”

“I really wouldn’t worry, Tony always overreacts.” Yeah, because Stark was the only unstable fuckwit that hung around her. Brock felt his left eye twitch.

“A hair falls from that mental head of yours and the word gets out that I was involved, I will be jumped by a Master Assassin, Robin Hood, two super-steroid wonders and a talking Iron Asshole. Take up knitting for all I care and lay fucking low. They’re looking for you. Do you understand that?!”

“...Right, but still—.”

“That’s it. I’m hanging up. You’re not in danger, Lucy, fuck off—”

“Oh, stop your bitching. I’m not planning to be heroic here. Now, tell me what never gets recovered once the dust clears?”

“Most of the bodies.”

He could feel her eye roll. “No, dumbass. The money. Not that you aren’t right. It’s the foundation of any operation, as we all know it.”

“You’re rich, bitch. And last I heard he’s footing the bill.”

“Oh, fuck this. You know what? Tony’s not single handily responsible for funding World Peace. Yeah, he got money. So do plenty of other people! None of them are expected to put out! He’s not the national Treasury. He pays his taxes—”

The laughter bubbled and erupted like a hysterical volcano. Judging from the silence on the other end it wasn’t appreciated. “I fucking love it. Nearly fell for it. You don’t care about the money, Lucy. It’s not about bills yours or Stark’s. What you do care about is getting even. That’s your Thing. They put your neck in a noose. You’re doing the same. You’re right about money disappearing. If a miracle happens and we win this, those that will slip away will drain the bank accounts first and be off to fund some guerrilla warfare in some god forgotten jungle. Bet you’ll do something epically bitchy like make it look like they got the money, they hire mercenaries and boom! Nothing to pay them with. Those are professionals that take it very seriously when they not getting paid.—” It was a bitching good plan.

“Let’s not get carried away here—”

“I’m so right. Oh boy, you’re not even denying it. Vengeful little... Out for blood, are we? I approve.
The motto of the day is Good Hydra is Dead Hydra. One more thing. Does Stark knows? That was the important part. He couldn’t stand the guy, but Stark wasn’t someone he intended to purposely piss off right now. He needed that pay cheque.

“I’ll tell him, don’t you fucking worry about it. He’s busy right now. The question is you’re in or you’re in?"

“You’ll be the death of me, Lucy.”

“I won’t. You’re not that special. Ok, we’re running out of time. All you’ll need to do once you on the Helicarrier is—”

The instructions were short and to the point. Yeah, another thing that their little Lucy wasn’t it was forgiving. He sure was glad that they were on the same side.

Rosie Velazquez was having a crisis of faith, or a mental breakdown. One or the other or maybe both for good measure. Possibly. Hell, she liked covering all the basis. All she knew was that things were bad and going towards worse at an accelerating pace these past few weeks. It was funny how you would just underestimate certain things even when all the facts looked you straight in your face.

It happened.

Miss Lewis got kidnapped. Right from under Rosie’s nose. The team was unprepared. At least not for a professional ambush. The attackers were nothing short of a hit squad. The sheer precision of that entire operation showed how well planned it was. Or that was what Mr Hogan told her once the doctors released him. He and Otter got shot, the rest including her were sprayed with some noxious substance that neutralized them. Quick and effective. Just like that everything changed.

Mr Stark was unimpressed to say the least at the fact that his fiancée was taken. The security at the Tower got upgraded swiftly. Brutally some could say. The man didn’t play about.

If Rosie was honest she was rather surprised that she still had a head on her shoulders. He did come to see her the next day. Tired but looking all calm and collected. A conversation she had chosen not to dwell on, it got scarier and more ominous every time she did. If Death could pick a smile it would choose the one belonging to Tony Stark at that moment, it was all in the eyes... the shadows dancing to the precise tune of a calculating mind engulfed in rage. A cold shudder ran down her spine at the memory. Everyone had some darkness in them. Some made it work for them.

Yet, here she was, going against orders. Thousands of miles away from where she should be... Mr Stark was very brief when he contacted her. Asking to do him a favour. Rosie didn’t ask why. She didn’t have to.

Amos’s car wasn’t in the driveway. That was good. Mr Stark must have picked it up. Rosie wasn’t sure what she had expected to achieve by coming here. She had been kept out of the loop of what was going on, but it beat sitting home since she was still officially on indefinite suspension. Worst case she was going catch up with family which wasn’t a bad thing.

“Amos? Anyone home?” It turned out someone was home. The door opened, a metal hand shot out and the next moment Rosie was flying down the corridor. Which wasn’t too bad, the only problem it was a fairly short one and the wall she went head first into pretty solid.

“-Literally went for a three second piss! Bucky, put her down now! Rosie! Rosie, are you OK?”
Darcy Lewis stood in the door of her cousin’s toilet looking slightly worse for wear. Men armed to their teeth had guns of various descriptions aimed at her and facial expressions that strongly suggested not to do any sudden moves.

It was a moment that Rosie was stuck for words. It wasn’t what she what had expected, but on the other hand it was Miss Lewis, the woman hardly ever took notice of such details like expectations of others.

“Do not move!” The command was barked at her by various people.

“Guns down! We’re good! She’s my security woman. Seriously, people. Calm down. Amos?! Get a glass of water, will you?”

So they all stood there while her cousin hurried to get refreshments.

Rosie gaped. “What-? When-? I- so sorry. We tried- we all did- we couldn’t find you…” Her mind was going into overdrive. The woman was fine if slightly bruised and battered. She had to tell her, tell her that she tried…

“I know. I know, Rosie… I’m glad you’re ok.” Rosie Velasquez wanted to cry. She hadn’t had that urge in years. The relief washed her over and for a moment her vision blurred. Miss Lewis was alive, all the rest could be fixed. The caution finally kicked.

“What about the kidnappers? Are –“ Mr Stark was probably after them right now since he wasn’t present.

“We’re working for her now.” One of the armed guys who passed the water quipped under his breath. Rosie started. Up to this point, she had assumed it was Darcy’s new security. All armed and mercenary looking. Her jaw dropped for a moment.

“What?”

“He’s just joking, Velasquez. They weren’t there that day.”

“You hired the people that kidnapped you?”

“Which is better than being kidnapped. And for the last time they didn’t kidnap me. They were just working for the same guy that gave the order. Massive difference.” Difference? Where was that?

“...So where are those that kidnapped you?”

“Busy working for her.” The guy that spoke earlier shrugged lowering his serious looking assault rifle. It sounded crazy… but right up Miss Lewis’ alley. Rosie clung to the shred of hope that maybe there was a reasonable explanation.

“He’s joking, right?” The question hung in air between them.

“Rosie, I you need you to be a little flexible today. A lot has happened-” That was an understatement. A lifetime happened since the last time they were in a room together.

“Yes, you were kidnapped.” But it was more than that. Much more… Rosie knew something was going on that had the Tower go into frenzy.

Darcy sent her a pitiful stare. “You have no idea what’s going on, do you? Ok… shit. We can talk in the car.” Rosie looked them over again. The dude that had her airborne without much effort stood
casually next to her Boss, the war paint was unnerving. Large canvas bags had guns and munition sticking out, or that what she thought she glimpsed before it was zipped closed.

“Where are you going? Where’s Mr Stark?”

“On the other side of the country being very busy. Rosie, it’s great to see you but we need to get moving. Like, right now. You look tired. It seems to be a theme these days. How’s the Tower? Is everything ok there?” How could anyone sound so calm and unbothered after being violently snatched… Rosie swallowed the hysterical giggle that wanted to escape her lips. *Yeah, the Tower…*

“… It’s still standing.”

“Fine. Tell me later. I need to be ready before I speak to Pepper. Tony was vague and that’s never a good sign.”

The burner phone was ringing.

“Ah shit…” She inwardly sighed. “Hey Tony-”

“Darling, sunshine, my source of light upon this miserable world, I have been suddenly overwhelmed by the need to hear that sweet voice of yours. Want to tell me what you’re up to?” The cheerful voice had a slightly manic undertone and Darcy winced.

“Oh, you know! Sooo much happening, just trying to keep myself busy-”

“Oh, really, Spark? Does that mean you’re not on a self-styled mission trying to get one over Hydra? Because word on the street is that you are. Care to comment?”

“*Word on the Street?*” Darcy made sure that her voice stayed calm. “I thought that the word on the street was *snitches get stitches…*” Silence followed her statement. Not complete silence, there was some very measured breathing. Tony couldn’t speak. It took a lot to get that man speechless. She swallowed nervously. They had a very serious conversation before they parted. “Listen-”

“I’m listening and what I’m hearing isn’t what you promised. Remember this morning? Remember you swearing how you weren’t going to endanger yourself *for any reason?!* Because I remember it as if it happened mere hours ago. *Which it did!*”

“I’m not endangering myself. Whatever that little bird snitched.”

“Rumours travel fast, Spark. You’re surrounded by a bunch of loyal idiots.”

Something occurred to her at that moment. “Wait. Impossible. Not that fast- *Did you tag me?*”

“Of course, I tagged you. You’ve been kidnapped, *remember?* I should be-”

“If the world was perfect you would be, Tony. We would hold hands and ride into the sunset on sparkly unicorns propelled by magic farts. But the world sucks so you’re away because the cost of you staying is too high.” Tony didn’t want to go and leave her. The greater good came at a cost and they both were paying.

“Please, Spark. I need to know you’re safe… Speaking of safe. What the fuck is Ducky doing?”

The Winter Soldier had an exceptionally good hearing. And quick reflexes. “Currently giving you
“Glad to hear that something on him works.”

Bucky raised his other hand and Darcy snorted. “Now he’s giving you two fingers.”

“Makes me so happy I entrusted you to the Emo-Rambo. Now tell me, what is the grand plan that makes it worth leaving the only safe place- You stopped. Why did you stop? It’s a residential area of a rough kind. Which describes the entire neighbourhood you’re staying in. Can’t your plan take you into the part of the city that doesn’t boast the highest crime rate in the state? In all the neighbouring states… Jarvis, why wasn’t I seeing this yesterday? Did they calculate the murder rate per square meter? Darcy, do not get out of that car!”

“I have to go, Tony. Just remember that it’s same for, you know, the Thing.”

“Don’t try to distract me from the fact that- Shit! Fuck! They launched missiles, I need to go too, Spark. Keep Ducky close. Promise you’ll do everything to- shit- Everything it takes, you hear me?!”

“As long as you promise to come back to me-” The line disconnected. Her heart was in her throat. Tony was busy now. Like, important job kind of busy and she wasn’t going to worry because it was going to be fine. He better be fine, that asshole of a man. Rage surged inside her again. He shouldn’t have to be fixing everyone’s mistakes. “Alright… Alright! Is this the place?!”

“Amos said that this is it.” Rosie nodded towards the run down shop, Amos would probably have said it himself, but he was in another car. Their little convoy was packed.

The neighbourhood being rough as fuck had its advantages, such as no one calling the police at a well-armed group when they exited the vehicles.

The plan she had was half cooked at best, not that she was going to tell anyone that. Darcy refused to go back and sit on her hands, she couldn’t bear thinking of another minute spent being the helpless damsel while everyone she knew were out there. Also, there was Bucky… He had been quiet since her little freak out earlier. She couldn’t help him if Hydra won.

One thing at a time. There were a million small decisions to ensure victory in the end. A chain of collective effort. She could add a link to it. Make it stronger.

“Bucky? You ready to have a look at what dirty money looks on computer screen?”

The chaos that hit Washington was unlike anything Rosie had seen. She watched Christine Everhart present morning news and her heart sank.

So how’s it going, Peeps? Yeah, I know, the chapter was slow, but Darcy needed to do some reflection so… The action is coming! Promise =)

Works inspired by this one: Art for Late Call for Bad Judgement by araydre

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