Snapshots

by ChronicOlicity

Summary

A "what if" and a missing scene for Steve and Diana in Veld, because they both think they’ll have time.

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For all they don’t know about each other, Steve feels like she understands him, and that maybe, just maybe, he understands her too. The essence of each other, what makes them tick, what makes them hurt, and what makes them fall.

Steve is falling in love with Diana’s smile, that look, that feeling — her.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes

Veld, 1918

It’s still night.

Steve checks to make sure, because it’s been one hell of a night. A hell of a day too, but for different reasons. In fact, the only thing they have in common, day and night, is the person — woman, warrior, demigoddess, angel, he’s not quite sure what — asleep in the room.
In the bed, to be exact. It’s near the fireplace, underneath the pair of shuttered windows so whoever sleeps in it can choose how much daylight they want to wake them up (all of it, Steve can sleep with the sun on his face but it’s still the only thing that will wake him up). Most of what came with the bed is still on the floor, along with the bulk of their clothes, but Steve is a firm believer in the bare essentials, and it’s fine the way it is.

He’s checked the impulse to cover Diana with something more than just a sheet, reminding himself that among other things, cold is not something that bothers her. Generals and cabinet members in a war room, the harsh realities of war, and injustice, yes. But cold, shivers and harsh weather, no.

It really does make her more. More than average, more than human, because what unsettles her is never petty, or small, or mundane. Morality — or the lack of it — and big ideals, things Steve wants to believe in, unwaveringly, to fight for, and above all, to change. One American-pilot-turned-British-spy believing in his duty to end the war, that doesn’t mean so much, in the scheme of things.

But Diana?

Diana believes, and Steve has seen what Diana believing in a higher ideal can accomplish. He’s sitting here because of what she’s accomplished, and people in the next room, in the café across the street, all across the small, war-torn village of Veld, they all sleep in their beds because Diana refused to accept the limitation of the impossible. Crossing No Man’s Land, being outgunned, outnumbered fifty to one…none of it.

The generals and ministers that Diana shouted at, they are all men in power, important men, men that Steve is meant to listen to (in theory). They control battalions, legions of men. Where they go, who they fight, and more often, how and when they die.

But what Diana did with her own two hands today, her own blood and sweat, her own life put at risk for others…that is what the bearded and uniformed men in their safe, map-adorned council rooms will never know.

That is strength.

That is power.

Steve is in awe of it, and of her.

But for now, he has a job to do. He’s danced and he’s whispered and he’s made love during the last few hours, but he has to have a plan ready by morning. His friends are depending on him, Etta and Sir Patrick, and the thousands, tens of thousands of lives that might be saved if he manages to pull it off.

The watch around his wrist is the only thing he’s wearing apart from his trousers, and he makes sure he’s sitting close enough to the fire so he can see what he’s doing. That, and to avoid getting frostbite in his toes, because even after spending a few hours in bed with a demigoddess, he’s definitely still human enough to feel the cold.

The map is spread out in front of his hands, and Steve leans close while he works with a chipped pencil, making marks in the stained paper. It’s been folded and refolded so many times that the creases are nearly white, blurring territory lines and the densely printed names of towns, cities, rivers and forests. The watch ticks comfortingly, reminding him that he’s going forward, that he’s working towards something. It doesn’t worry him, time passing, not the same way it does for other soldiers, who hear lost seconds and lives ending in the ticking of a watch.
Time is how he knows that he has to make a difference, to get up, to do something — anything. Time is how he remembers that he’s only human, and that his life won’t mean a goddamn thing if he doesn’t choose to make it count.

And he has. He does. He will.

Steve’s hair is falling into his eyes because he’s bending towards the paper. The front is still damp from the quick wash he had out of the freezing basin by the window. It’s not the first time he’s washed since the big battle, but only now has he managed to wash out the last stubborn specks of leaf and grit — an expected result from running through No Man’s Land while shells explode into the ground around him. That part is nice, being clean, but he’s also smoothed out the places where Diana’s fingers curled into his hair and pulled, loosened, and gripped tight again.

He finds himself scratching absently at one such place now, and quickly shakes it off. Work. Not remembering the exact places he’d kissed and gentled — maybe bitten, just a little — to get the aforementioned reaction.

Though to be entirely fair, Diana gave as good as she got. In every sense of the phrase.

Steve rubs away the smile with his thumb and forces himself to concentrate. What had the barman said about forest paths? And the schoolteacher about patrols? As a spy, he works in guesses, probabilities and rumors, taking other people’s versions of the truth and using it the best he can. For flag and country. Mission and outcome. All of the above.

The only light comes from the embers in the low-burning fireplace and the candle on the small, scarred table beside the bed. Steve glances out the window occasionally as he thinks, and the sky is still a starless, inky black flecked with glimmering snowflakes when he notices that he’s being watched.

Diana is awake, and she watches him from the tousled bed, her hair curled messily around her face, candlelight on her skin. He smiles at her, not because she looks wordlessly beautiful the way she is, but because it already seems natural to greet her with a smile.

“Go back to sleep,” he whispers to her. “It’s early.”

Never the type to do as she’s told, Diana sits up anyway. Despite the cold she doesn’t feel, she uncurls easily from the general dishevelment of the bed, showing very little self-consciousness — or really any consciousness at all — about the fact that her armor is on the floorboards and the sheets have settled around her hips. She sits forward instead, arms around her knees, lifting her chin slightly like she wants to see what he’s working on, so late at night.

The maps must mean nothing to her, with all the unfamiliar geography, either that or she trusts him to keep up his end of the bargain and bring her to Ares. Supposedly in the guise of a German general, at a gala she’s adamant on going to, and a diplomatic crisis she has no interest in avoiding.

Steve hasn’t quite decided what to do about that yet, or whether what they’ve just done will complicate things, or betray some kind of trust when he asks her to stay behind.

“In Themyscira,” she says, her voice just a little huskier than usual, “we’re up as soon as the sun is.”

Steve puts away all thoughts of the gala, and General Ludendorff, and concentrates on what Diana’s just told him. It results in him making a face. “That must be nice in winter. Long nights, short days. Not so nice in summer, though. I didn’t sleep my first week in London because the sun was still up at nine PM.”
Diana looks pleasantly intrigued. “What do you mean? In my home, the days and nights stay the same, regardless of the season. There are no seasons.”

Steve had more or less gathered that, from the way she’d looked at the sudden snowfall out in the village square. No seasons on the mysterious, impossible-to-find paradise island. Which seemed about right.

“Noted,” he says. “No seasons on Themyscira.”

*Or men, children, radio, baseball games…*

Diana stretches, all bronzed skin and lean muscle. “No wonder I’m so tired these days,” she says, looking out the window at the silently falling snow. “I’m still following the sun.”


Diana’s gaze finds his again, and there’s the beginning of a coy smile around her mouth. “No. But I thought it might make you more comfortable, if I sound more like you.”

Steve’s being teased. By an immortal Amazon who likes ice cream and kissing babies, when she’s not taking out enemy machine guns and conquering unconquerable trenches. “Oh,” he says, playing along. “*Human,* you mean.”

Diana cocks her head slightly, which is Steve’s cue to explain. “We use it sometimes as a compliment. Saying someone’s not human isn’t always a bad thing, like —”

“— saying someone is above average,” she suggests, ever the quick study.

Steve clears his throat and sticks the scuffed pencil behind his ear, well aware of the possibility that they are both thinking of the first time she saw him naked. A very private memory, and one that bothers him a lot less than it should because Diana didn’t treat it as something that needed to be bothered with. At the time, anyway. If it weren’t for the initial curiosity in her stare, Steve might assume naked men emerge out of baths in front of her all the time.

They don’t.

He’s asked.

“Well, sure,” he says, because Diana still wants the explanation. “Except compliments usually come from other people. Calling yourself something complimentary makes you…well, it makes you sound like a jackass.”

“Ah.” Diana is clearly considering it, another convention she’s learned. “But doesn’t the same logic apply to insulting yourself? Because I believe you just said you are — as you say — a jackass.”

Steve points at her with the pencil. “That’s called being self-deprecating,” he says. “And that — people like.”

“Do they?”

They smile at each other, and not for the first time, Steve knows that Diana’s smile doesn’t just grow, it blooms. Something beautiful to watch, nearly a life of its own. Her eyes move constantly when she looks at him, they move slowly around his face like there’s something to be studied and taken in
about him. It’s a breathless feeling, being watched by someone like her — not just being watched, but understood.

For all they don’t know about each other, Steve feels like she understands him, and that maybe, just maybe, he understands her too. The essence of each other, what makes them tick, what makes them hurt, and what makes them fall.

Steve is falling in love with Diana’s smile, that look, that feeling — \textit{her}.

He isn’t sure whether Diana knows it, whether she reciprocates, or if it’s the same way as marriage and the Amazons. \textit{Different}.

But she holds out her hand, a request. “Come here,” she tells him, and Steve does as he’s told.

The floorboards creak as he gets off the ground, folding the map carefully and leaving it on the table along with his gear. One knee on the mattress, Diana’s hands running over his chest and shoulders like a greeting…he slides underneath the covers, still being touched, and pushes the pillows into a more comfortable shape underneath his neck.

It’s not the first time for Diana, that he knows for sure. Someone else has lifted her hair to get at the spot near the base of her neck. Someone else has curled their body around hers and fallen asleep there, and vice versa.

Steve doesn’t mind, not that it’s his business to mind anyway. He likes the thought of other people not feeling lonely, and the unreachable island in the middle of the ocean is a lonely thought.

They don’t talk much, being this close. Steve follows the smooth line of her arm, trailing the back of his fingers up her wrist, elbow to shoulder (she doesn’t have scars, for someone who fights the way she does, ferocious and fearless). Diana’s back is against his chest, and she runs her fingers over the clock face of his watch, which he always keeps around his wrist.

It’s a curious gesture, continuing her fascination with the outside world’s treatment of time and clocks. Steve reaches his other arm around Diana to undo the watchstrap from its scuffed buckle, and transfers it from his wrist to hers. The look she gives him — over her naked shoulder, through her hair — asks if he’s sure, since his father gave him that watch and she knows what gifts from the departed mean. Hers is the diadem — the metal one she wore to fight — from the woman he’d never met on Themyscira, only seen on the beach as a furious, armored blur, and later lying in the sand, unmoving, her blood mingling with the salt air. Sun-streaked blonde hair and vivid blue eyes like the woman Diana called her mother, others the queen.

Antiope. Her fierce war cry is Diana’s, and the fire inside her too.

At least, that’s what Steve thinks. He reads people, he can’t help it, and that is what he remembers of those moments.

Steve secures the strap around Diana’s slimmer wrist, where it sits against the sheets, ticking, ticking away. It looks a little strange on her arm, even without the bracers she always wears. Maybe it’s the bulkiness of it — or the fact that Diana has clearly never worn a watch — or that she simply doesn’t need it.

Diana frowns at the small moving hand counting out the seconds. “Doesn’t suit me,” she decides.

Steve agrees, but maybe not for the same reasons. “I think that’s because you’re the kind of woman time would make an exception for.”
“Chronos?” Diana says, the same way someone would say, oh, Fred who lives just down the road? “It is his duty not to make an exception. Amazons are not invulnerable, but to us, the peaceful passing of time does not need to be guarded the same way you men choose to.”

So many questions, and Steve had to settle on just one for now. “So your mother, the other women on the island…they won’t die. What about you?”

“The same, I imagine. Even if I may never return to Themyscira, I am still the daughter of Hippolyta, brought to life —

“— by the king of the gods,” Steve finishes for her, because a part of him still can’t wrap his head around it, even after all he’s seen. “That’s…quite an introduction.”

Diana laughs, a light sound of genuine pleasure (here Steve thinks to himself, not for the first time, that Cleo should have written books about that). “What about you?” she asks. “What do you say when you introduce yourself, Captain Steve Trevor, the Above Average Man?”

Steve heaves a sigh and props one arm behind his head while he goes over the obvious truth that in comparison, his credentials hardly stack up against hers. “Considerably less impressive, for starters,” he says. “American citizen, pilot-turned-spy, only son of William and Elizabeth Trevor of Los Angeles, California. Friends called him Bill, everyone called her Libby, and they liked having backyard barbecues and sailing on the weekends.”

Diana sees the fond smile on his face and turns over, her expression aglow with curiosity. “Where are they now?”

“Mom got sick — caught tuberculosis working in the hospital wards, and dad had a heart attack. Both of them gone now,” he adds, for no particular reason except that he wishes they weren’t.

Diana reaches up, her knuckles and thumb brushing across his stubbled cheek. It’s her version of an apology, a better one, because this is a comfort too. “You must miss them.”

“Of course I do, they’re my parents,” he says before he thinks it through, and instantly a shadow crosses her face.

Steve kicks himself for being stupid. She’s left behind her mother, the armored queen with the stern, regal face. Hippolyta, as golden and blue-eyed as the woman called Antiope, and nothing like her daughter in looks, but somehow Diana has her eyes — the kindness in them — and carries herself in the same way.

Still the princess of Themyscira.

“Before I left the island, my mother told me I was her greatest love, and now her greatest sorrow,” Diana confesses, her hand still on his cheek. “But she let me go. She must have wanted to stop me, but she didn’t.”

There’s conflict there, a point of confusion that Diana wants to share with him, without the expectation of an answer. Steve doesn’t know much apart from it sounding like a mother being protective of her daughter, a literal gift from a higher power, and even if the story doesn’t turn out to be quite the truth, Diana is still her mother’s creation of pride and joy. He also doesn’t know the validity of his two cents on the matter, but there’s something about talking to Diana that makes him want to try anyway.

“Loving someone doesn’t mean you can stop them from doing something,” he says. “Even if you don’t agree. Sometimes what we want — who we love — it’s not as important as what we have to
do, and what we believe is right. Your mother must have known that you were leaving for a greater purpose, I bet she still does.”

“I’m not sure she’d agree with what I’m doing right now,” Diana says dryly, but he can tell that she’s taken some comfort in the notion, the all-encompassing belief that she’s meant to stop the war.

“This is ‘want’,” Steve says, his fingertips tracing slow circles against her spine. “That’s not the same thing.”

“What about ‘love’?” Diana wonders, more thinking aloud than anything else. “Or do average men separate love and pleasure too?”

Steve thinks about his answer. “They do,” he says, wondering if she can sense how his pulse has picked up. “Not always.”

Diana smiles again and lets the question hang, choosing instead to shift a little higher, sliding one leg over his, signaling her intentions with a kiss that leaves him short on breath. “Diana,” he says, and for a moment, he wonders if he should tell her.

That he hasn’t split the two, that love and want are all tangled up together, along with reason and belief, faith and hope. That she’s spurred all these contradictions in a world he’s used to seeing in murky gray. That he feels more tied to her — this strange, impossible woman — than he has anyone else in his entire life.

That he doesn’t want to say goodbye. Because he doesn’t remember much from books and the stories they tell, but he remembers that gods are always the ones who leave mortals — the humans — behind. Vanishing without a trace, vanishing without a promise of ever appearing again.

Steve doesn’t want Diana to vanish.

Like him, Diana reads people, but unlike him, she unabashedly refuses to keep anything of her own hidden from view, so he sees it all there. She’s curious about him still, tender (her hands, callused and strong, tracking invisible pathways across his skin), and kind, for someone with as much power as she holds just by being. “Steve,” she answers, her eyes warm with something she isn’t saying.

It’s not a promise she won’t disappear, but Steve feels something in his bones about her, about them. There’s an eternity in her eyes, years — centuries maybe — that don’t show, and to him, it seems like a promise of time.

That they’ll have it.

He knows the thought is dangerous, but this one feels less dangerous because of what he knows to be true, glowing lasso of Hestia or not. The war is ending, the Armistice will be signed, and he believes that, he really does. After the war, he’ll take her dancing. For real, this time. The best club in London, the one with the most swaying. He’ll teach her to dance (under protest, he suspects, because she really doesn’t think of what they do as dancing), and she’ll teach him more about her miraculous world that should exist only in myth, but impossibly — inexplicably — doesn’t. They’ll learn from each other, talk, laugh, maybe kiss…but more importantly, they’ll have all the time to be together, if that’s what she wants.

It’s what he wants.

Steve slides his hand into her dark hair, cupping her face just as she holds his, the two of them drawing closer to each other, then closer still. The shadows deepen around them, until all he can see is the faint smudges of firelight through her hair, and he feels her breath on his parted lips, her cheek
drawing level with his own.

His watch is still around her wrist, and Steve counts the number of metallic heartbeats before he kisses her, or she kisses him. They slip lower in the bed, and the time gets a little blurred after that. Diana’s eternity, his present, and anything can happen after that.

*Anything.*

End Notes

*Ugly crying* I'll never get over this. I love Steve and Diana, I love their dynamic and their chemistry, and just...GAHHHHHHHH. Not fair. Blond Steves just shouldn't be allowed anywhere near bomb-strapped planes. Ever.

That being said, I will rewatch Wonder Woman when it comes out on DVD until I break the disk. Because it's a goddamn comic book masterpiece and Patty Jenkins, you're so good at this, but that's just too much HURT.

Also, if you're looking for something else to read, "World and Time Enough" by Della19 is the actual best thing I've read so far about Diana and Steve and it will make you feel things (happy ending, btw).

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